



# THE BACKNUMBER

Norfolk UNISON Retired Members' Newsletter  
The 2nd anti-virus E-Mail only Edition

Number 191 – August 2020

## EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the summer edition of Backnumber. Unfortunately, given the prevailing situation on Covid 19 we are again forced to be digital only. We will continue to urge members to provide e mail addresses so that they can be in receipt of Backnumber and will attempt to do a membership-wide mailing of the autumn edition, assuming conditions allow. We will be under pressure to move to a digital only distribution because of the cost of print and distribution.



This will have been a very difficult time for many because of feelings of isolation and helplessness. Being estranged from family, particularly grandchildren, will have been very hard to take but at least now, with restrictions gradually easing, contacts are being re-established and life is slowly returning to something like normal. Backnumber's view is that staying safe is the number one priority but coming out of isolation is imperative to the recovery of mental health and wellbeing so follow government guidelines and do your best to achieve a more normal life.

Following government guidelines, of course, is not an easy task. It would be churlish not to acknowledge that for any government this would be a major challenge and inevitably mistakes and wrong calls would be made. It is our misfortune that at such a time the government we have is about as incompetent as it is possible to be. The mixed messaging, the slowness to act and the speed of the lifting of lockdown have all contributed to the UK's large death toll, in comparison with other countries. Even within the UK, the Scottish, Northern Irish and Welsh governments have been more successful in minimising the risk

than has the Westminster government. We could see, from the experiences of Italy, France and Spain, particularly New Zealand and not forgetting China, that faster lockdown was necessary but we insisted on sitting behind the curve when more decisive action was clearly needed.

Mr Sunak has been bold in some of his actions and has praised partners in the TUC and Trade Union movement generally as well as other sectors for their co-operation in producing his plans. That atmosphere of co-operation has been sadly lacking in other branches of government and the reluctance to involve Public Health Departments in, for instance, Track and Trace, has been bordering on the negligent. The alacrity in which the blame game has been introduced, particularly in Education (it's all the fault of the teachers) and in Social Care (people didn't understand what to do) is breathtaking.

It's true that people didn't understand what to do and this was because the government didn't know what to do, or if they did, how to communicate it. The farce of the Dominic Cummings affair was a particular low point and to imagine that this unelected anarchist is now directing affairs in Brexit and in the funding of the Armed Forces is beyond any cogent belief. Parallels have been drawn with the Romanovs and their reliance on, or was it obsession with, Rasputin but they are easy to draw. Johnson and Co should perhaps have in mind the fate that awaited the Romanovs and take action to ensure no such thing happens here.

### WE WELCOME COLLEAGUES WHO HAVE RECENTLY RETIRED

We wish you all a long, happy, healthy and rewarding retirement. Do come along and join in the Section's activities, you will find a warm welcome.

## HEMBLINGTON WALK WALKING VIRUS FREE

The Covid 19 virus has been no fun for many of our retired members but it has encouraged some to walk and/or cycle in an effort safely to get out of the house and get some much needed fresh air and exercise. A walk that might be of interest to those who can easily get into East Norfolk is from Hemblington Church through Adam's Wood and Jary's Wood and on to Burlingham Woods and back to Hemblington Church.



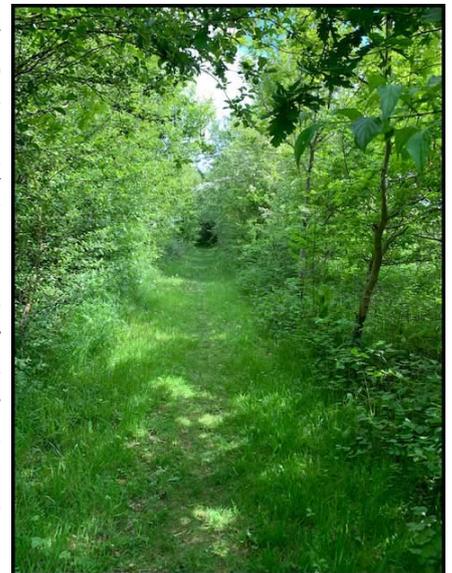
Hemblington Church has appeared on these pages before (it being on a mile from where the editor lives) and it is famous for its Round Tower and its wall paintings. The medieval Churchyard is also a haven for wild life and plants and is as fine an example of an English Country Churchyard as is likely to be found. You can park just opposite the Church and spend some time exploring the Churchyard before setting off on the walk. In normal times the church is always open and it has a reputation for friendliness and hospitality. These not being normal times, the church is open at restricted hours but without the hospitality.

On leaving the churchyard turn right and head down the hill, turning left at the bottom. Passing a footpath to the right which leads to Panxworth (see Hemblington Church website for details of a circular walk via Panxworth, Ranworth and South Walsham) as the road bears round to the left you can see the beautiful Wood Farm alpacas. Continue up the hill and turn left, passing Hemblington Hall a Grade II listed house. About 400 yards from Hemblington Hall you will see a footpath sign on the right taking you to Adams Wood. If you are lucky you might see a barn owl working the fields here. On entering Adams Wood you are suddenly in a haven of wildlife.

You continue along the pathway and follow the signs for "Jary's Wood". Soon you will come upon a beautiful wildflower meadow and you can sit and take in the scene. Continue along the path and you will eventually come to the road to Burlingham Green. Usually, in early June of each year, the village has a brilliant open garden event but, of course, this year it didn't happen. We must hope that in 2021, it will. Carry along the road and you will come to a private road but by turning left or right at that point you will be in Burlingham Woods. A map at the entrance to the wood on the left helps you.

If you turn left you will enter the Millennium Wood which you can walk round in about 10-15 minutes passing the wooden, brightly painted "Burlingham Henge". You can turn left at the end, walk up the track between fields turning right to walk parallel to the South Walsham Road. This will lead you back in to the further extension of Burlingham Woods and you can then make your way back to Burlingham Green and then follow the road back to Hemblington Church. If you're feeling really energetic you could follow the signs that end up at Acle but, remember, you have to get back again by foot as no buses lead to Hemblington Church.

If you turn right you can, by following the paths and the signs, do a circle by heading to North Burlingham Church and then back again. The woods seem to change in character almost every day and obviously they change by the season and are an absolute delight.



Be aware that they are favourite haunts for dog walkers and can also become very muddy although some of the terrain is accessible for wheelchairs. This does not apply to Adam's and Jary's woods but by driving to North Burlingham Church, just off the A47 most of Burlingham woods are reasonably accessible from there.

## OVER 75s TV LICENCE

As everyone will know the free TV Licence for over 75s will disappear after 1 August except for those on pension credits. The BBC's handling of this debacle has been less than satisfactory with indications being given that the free licence might continue at least until October only for the announcement to be made on 9 July that the new date of 1st August was confirmed. Much fury has been aimed at the BBC for this but the seat of the blame lies firmly with the Government. The crocodile tears from Johnson and Secretary of State Dowden are false. The Government likes to tell us that the BBC has been funded to do this by the most recent licence settlement but this hides the fact that the only way for the BBC to be able to fund this is to slash programmes. This was a benefit introduced by the Labour Government of 2000 and was always understood to be a benefit provided by government. Shifting responsibility to the BBC was always a hostile act from a government which loathes public broadcasting. Mr Johnson should perhaps reflect that much of his "popularity" springs from his appearances on shows such as Have I Got News For You, brought to us by the publicly funded BBC, not that his sense of entitlement is likely to allow such reflection.

There are 2 things at least which you can do if you wish to protest about this. First, you can get involved in the National Pensioners Convention campaign "Call to Arms". This campaign will be going on until 31 July and clicking on the link [www.npcuk.org](http://www.npcuk.org) will get you all the information you need to take part. Information is in the news section.

Silver Voices, an organisation dedicated to campaigning for older people, intends to run a "gum up the works" campaign which will involve all over 60s but is directed at the decision to remove free licences for over 75s. This will involve insisting on all transactions being dealt with by cash or cheque and removing direct debits. Silver Voices will be giving out further information about this in due course and can be contacted at [www.silvervoices.co.uk](http://www.silvervoices.co.uk). For £8 per year you can even become a member. The organisation is run by Denis Reed, a former National Officer with Nalگو and Unison and latterly Director of the Local Government Information Unit.

## JOE STIRLING

Many of you will remember Joe Stirling, who died in March aged 95. Joe was one of our speakers at the winter talks about a couple of years ago and gave a very moving talk about his life, having managed to escape from Nazi Germany, at the age of 14, in 1939 by means of the Kindertransport. He had tried previously that year and made it as far as Holland where he was smuggled back to Germany by a Police Officer who was concerned at what would happen to him if he failed to get a visa. He never saw his parents again as they were "resettled" to Poland in 1943.

Joe chose to volunteer to join the Army and it was there that he met his wife, Jean, in 1946 and came to live in Norfolk. It was in the Army that he changed his name. He was originally Gunther Stern but decided he should have a British sounding name and chose Joe Sterling. An Army Officer misheard this and recorded him as Joe Stirling and so the name remained. He was very active in the Labour Party being agent in both Central Norfolk and Norwich and also being a City Councillor and Sheriff of Norwich. He is probably best known for his travel agency, Stirling Travel, which he set up in 1957 after having organised a trip to Germany, a country he continued to love despite the unimaginable experiences he had there as a young person.

Those who came to Joe's talk will remember it as a very moving and compassionate experience. He was accompanied by Phyllida Scrivens who he met whilst giving a talk at the UEA and who has told Joe's story in her book "Escape from Hitler: A Jewish Boy's Quest For Freedom And His Future".

Alan Cubbage

## UNISON WELFARE FUND

At times like these it is always worth remembering that Unison's Welfare Fund "There for you" is available and will consider applications from Retired Members. If you feel that this could be helpful to you, you should contact the Branch Office for guidance on how to make an application. The Welfare Officer is Frances Crum and the phone number is 01603 222384. It is also possible to contribute to the Fund if you are in a position to do so.

## ZOOM MEETING

The London, East & South East Pensioners' Network held a 'Zoom' meeting in May where the guest speaker talked about Independent Age, a charity formed 150 years ago to support vulnerable and older people to maintain their independence. The focus was how elderly people were coping with the Covid 19 restrictions which, 2 months ago, were still requiring most of us to remain indoors except for a short daily walk for exercise and essential trips to the shops. That is, unless you were one of those who had received a letter to say you fell into the 'shielded' category, where you were asked to remain at home until further notice.

The guest speaker was Eddy Graham, a help-line manager with Independent Age. He outlined the work done by the charity in giving advice by phone, email, or letter and they have a network of befrienders. The help-line had received its first Coronavirus related call on 10 March 2020 and, following a spike in Coronavirus calls received mid-March to early April, had gradually tapered-off as voluntary food distributors and neighbourhood networks developed to fill-in some gaps.

The help-line's key issues up to mid-May were around food/basic shopping needs and financial worries plus the need for companionship. Loneliness and social isolation were often highlighted. Several of the elderly callers had either cancelled regular visits from home care workers including home cleaners, due to their fear of contagion or visits from family members had shrunk as people adhered to the advice to 'stay at home'. Independent Age publishes a set of free leaflets and factsheets which they were able to offer to people, particularly pointing out one covering rogue callers and scam calls. These leaflets are free and can be obtained on-line at [www.independentage.org/get-advice/advice-guides-factsheets-leaflets](http://www.independentage.org/get-advice/advice-guides-factsheets-leaflets). Many elderly people are still without internet access but some callers were able to ask family or friends for help in seeing what might be helpful advice. Perhaps some of you might find these useful too.

A question & answer session followed the talk. One issue raised by several people was the difficulty accessing non-urgent health care during March to May, especially the lack of dental treatment and foot care as chiropody services were limited due to physical contact restrictions. As social distancing issues have eased in the last 2 months to July, hopefully, you have found life has eased a little for you as shops are just about fully stocked and queues have eased. Also, access to some services has resumed and public transport is running once again, albeit with limited seating.

Please do get in touch with your stories of how you managed over the past 5 months, how did you get by; what help did you receive, any difficulties in obtaining your basic services and groceries, how you kept your spirits up or what would have been helpful. We will print them in our next issue, under your first name only. These will not only be of interest to others, but also, may prove useful tips to pass-on, especially if there are further restrictions imposed over the winter months. You can contact Backnumber by e mailing our editor at: <[porterjames172@gmail.com](mailto:porterjames172@gmail.com)>.

Jackie Mitchell

### **'ART NOUVEAU: THE NATURE OF DREAMS'**

In my article for April's Backnumber I reported my visit to this joyful exhibition at Sainsbury's Centre, but that it had closed prematurely due to the Covid 19 pandemic. I am pleased to let you know that, since re-opening The Sainsbury's Centre, it has been decided to extend this exhibition until 20 September 2020.

For those able to get a ticket, which must be pre-booked, you will be able to see a double bill of delights as 'Art Nouveau: The Nature of Dreams' has started with its run being extended until 03 January 2021. However, the website notes restrictions for wheelchair users to the Mezzanine Gallery where this exhibition is sited. It states: "short film will be available to view in the Centre and online for those unable to visit the exhibition in person". A free glimpse of the exhibits from home.

Jackie Mitchell



## COVID 19 AND THE NHS

During the peak of the Covid-19 emergency many of us went outside to applaud the work of the NHS and, later, other front-line key workers. The plight of care homes became headline news. This is just one reason among many for a serious debate about the future of social services for adults, including older people.

David Button, chair of the Norfolk Older People's Strategic Partnership believes that the timing is important. The focus of the Covid-19 debate is already moving on to the economy and there are no clear explanations of what happened in the care home sector. If we do not start a debate now, the opportunity will be lost.

Many of us choose to think – or worry – about social care only when we need help. We generally understand health care as treating an illness or injury. The concept of social care is rather less well understood - supporting people in their daily lives, helping them to maintain or recover their independence, helping them to move on into sheltered housing or care homes, maximising potential and enabling these things to happen. There are growing problems in these parts of the social care sector in terms of finance and staffing.



The figures speak for themselves. There are about 380 care and nursing homes in Norfolk alone. Every year, 43 out of every hundred home care staff leave their job.

The total number of staff employed in UK adult social care is about 1.5 million, roughly the same as the entire NHS workforce, but there the similarities end. Total expenditure in the NHS last year was about £133 billion, while total local authority spending on adult social care was £22.2 billion, £440 million less than in 2010. The average hourly pay for a care worker in 2018, the last year for which figures are available, was £7.89. The national minimum wage for adults was £7.83 and the average earnings for all employment was £14.21.

Dementia is currently the biggest cause of death in the UK [after covid-19], twice the number for deaths caused by all cancers. People with dementia are generally cared for by their families. If they need more help, social services assess them to decide whether they should pay for their care. Cancer patients receive free care from the NHS.

Across the country, the number of hours of care provided in people's homes has fallen by three million between 2015 and 2018..Covid-19 has cast a shadow of doubt over how the future may look. Almost all of us will grow old. Whether we have reached that stage, are trying to avoid thinking and planning for it or are wondering how paying into a pension fund is relevant at the beginning of working life, now is the time to consider what kind of services we expect, how we will pay for them, who we trust to provide them and whether or not we will value them. Now is the time to debunk some of the myths and face reality.

Norfolk Older People's Strategic Partnership is starting a debate on social care. It will be open, appreciating all points of view, with the aim of finding a consensus to give confidence to older people, inspire people of all ages to contribute, create worthwhile careers and give family carers the help they need so they too can have a good life. If you would like to join us and share your knowledge and opinions about this vital subject, please contact us at [nopsps@aol.com](mailto:nopsps@aol.com)

## DAVE PRENTIS RETIREMENT

The news was announced on 13 July that Dave Prentis, Unison's General Secretary since 2001, is to retire on 31 December. Dave Prentis has been a member of staff at Unison (originally with NALGO) since 1973 and at 72, must be one of the oldest General Secretaries within the movement. In the year 2000 he was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus and stomach and also got MRSA when in hospital.

I got to know Dave when I was an activist in Nalگو's Eastern District Council and he was Head of Electricity. Those were the days of a nationalised Electricity Industry and Nalگو was a prominent Trade Union in that sector. He moved on in Nalگو to become Assistant General Secretary and then Deputy before becoming one of 3 Deputy General Secretaries in Unison when it was formed in 1993.



Dave has not always been the most popular of figures, particularly in the Norfolk Branch which preferred (any) other candidates when he came up for re-election and there was more than a hint of, let us say, unprofessional practice when he was re-elected in 2015. Given that he was then 67 I was very surprised that he was standing at all but his view was that it was the wrong time to "walk away".

Dave was at the forefront of Unison's position on Brexit, which was to Remain. This was supported, according to polling, by 68% of the membership. He was also prominent in trying to shift Labour's position to support a second referendum. What irony that he failed to succeed in this endeavour, at least in part, because the Chair of the Conference, herself a Unison member, failed to impose herself on the decision making process. According to polling, about 80% of Labour Party membership at the time supported the Unison position.

Back in the '80s and early '90s I came across Dave quite frequently and found him to be a competent administrator, a good negotiator and an orator with a wry sense of humour. Not being a working member during any of his time as

General Secretary I have no experience of his impact at that level but am aware of the many criticisms that came his way. My personal opinion is that, of the candidates on offer, he was always the one to vote for but having said that I was always surprised that he made it to the top. The fact is that he did and that he stayed there.

On the news of his retirement there were contributions from 2 prominent politicians. The first, from Keir Starmer was, as would be expected from someone who received Unison's nomination as Leader, extremely glowing. The second was equally glowing in which he was described as "an exemplary Trade Union Leader" and came from Michael Gove. That will stick forever in what is left of Dave's crew.

### **Activities, none !**

In view of the Covid 19 restrictions and the decision of NCC to delay staff returning to work at County Hall until 2021, the Sports and Social Club Management Committee has decided reluctantly there will be no daytime access to the club until the new year. Evening and Saturday opening will be considered when rules are suitably relaxed and supporters are back at Carrow Road. Given this we are unable to proceed with our programme of talks for the coming season. The talks already planned for 28 October and 25 November will be postponed until further notice.

Please note that the Regional Retired Members seminar & conferences due to have taken place in autumn 2020 are also cancelled.

**Have you discovered any new activities since March? Let us know of any novel activities others might enjoy.**

### **WHERE TO FIND US DURING THE CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN**

If you wish to make any comments or raise issues about **Backnumber**, please e-mail the Editor

Jim Porter at [porterjames172@gmail.com](mailto:porterjames172@gmail.com)

The Unison Branch Office at County Hall is closed until further notice and not able to respond to phone calls or post. The retired members e-mail address at County Hall is

[Retiredmembers.norfolkcounty@btconnect.com](mailto:Retiredmembers.norfolkcounty@btconnect.com)