



# THE BACKNUMBER

Norfolk UNISON Retired Members' Newsletter  
The Covid AGM Edition

Number 193 – February 2021

## EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the first Backnumber of 2021 and a belated Happy New Year to all our members. At the time of writing we are still in lockdown but the vaccine programme is being rolled out at speed and hopefully we will see an improvement in our ability to move around and do things in the coming months. As we said in the last Backnumber, we recommend all of our members to have the vaccine when it is offered. Despite some misgivings on the part of some regulatory authorities, we are confident that the vaccines are safe and effective and this seems to be borne out by the continuing programme of research which accompanies the roll out.



In the last Backnumber, we published a letter from Di Wilson which suggested that we are “too political” and should be more balanced in our approach. We asked for comments and are grateful to Di for raising the issue and stimulating some response. It would not be true to say that we have had a bulging post bag or a full inbox but we have had some response, rather more than we usually get when we seek out views on issues. We do not intend to publish all the responses but, in summary, they range from “I agree with Di” to “You’re not political enough”. Most have been generally supportive of our approach and one, in particular, felt a little uncomfortable from time to time with the politics but praised the work and effort that it takes to produce each issue and wants it to continue in its work.

Our editorial position is that we do want to have balance in each copy and hopefully you will agree that this one achieves that, with pieces on, for example, Digital Disenfranchisement and our new series on Gressenhall Voices written by a new contributor, Rita Gallard. However, we are the voice of the Trade Union and many

retired members continue to have a keen interest in the activities of UNISON, particularly in key areas such as Social Care and issues like pensions which directly affect them. The views we espouse are pretty much directly in line with official UNISON Policy (except where we think they need to change!) and almost axiomatically are in opposition to the position taken by this government. Which does not mean that they are always in line with Labour Party policy. On Social Care, for example, we agree that there should be a National Care Service but may not be so much in agreement on how it should be delivered.

It is also the case that we are prepared to print views which are opposed to those that we publish but, of course, that relies on people writing to us to allow us to do so. This is also true of other subjects. We are always willing to publish pieces written by members as long as we have the room and as long as they are of general interest. If we had such a thing as a “Mission Statement” it would be that we intend to stimulate, entertain and occasionally outrage our readers!

Turning to current events, there is plenty going on that affects us all, some of which is very positive, given the vaccine roll out. We note with some satisfaction that this is being undertaken by a combination of the NHS, Local Authorities and the Armed Forces with not a glimpse of Dido Harding in sight. We are also keeping an eye on the somewhat sketchy proposals to reform the NHS which we will comment on more in the next edition.

In the meantime, stay safe, take the vaccine and let's look forward to better times later in the year.

*“This pandemic has magnified every existing inequality in our society – like systemic racism, gender inequality, and poverty,”*  
Melinda Gates, September 2020

## AGENDA FOR 'VIRTUAL' A.G.M. MARCH 2021.

### 1 Opening remarks.

Because of the impact on all of us from the coronavirus pandemic we are obliged to conduct the necessary business of our annual meeting in this extraordinary way. Regrettably, there will be no speeches, no raffle, no lunch and no meeting together in person. There will, however, be an opportunity to comment on any items on this agenda, or, indeed, any other matters concerning Retired Members. It goes against our better judgement to rely on electronic communication as we know this excludes many of our members, but through the pages of Backnumber we hope to reach just about all of you.

### 2 Minutes of the AGM held on Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> 2020. [attached]

Please let us know via the contact routes at the bottom of this agenda if you have any concerns about the accuracy of the content of these minutes, or wish to bring to the attention of the committee any relevant matters.

### 3 Annual Report. [attached]

This has been agreed by the RMs committee and we must assume it is similarly received by the membership. We shall be happy to consider any comments concerning the Annual Report.

### 4 Financial Report [attached]

Most of our transactions are now dealt with in the branch accounts, but those finances over which the section has control are reported here. Again, we shall be happy to answer any queries, and if appropriate, publish the replies in Backnumber.

### 5 Election of Officers and Committee.

The committee for 2020/21 comprises:

Chair	James Porter	Secretary	David Button
Vice Chair	Jackie Mitchell	Assistant Secretary	Verity Gibson
Treasurer	Tricia Arnup		

Committee members: Biddy Rawlence, Clare Marshall

David Beard, Alan Cabbage, Jimmy Fisk,

Paul Tyrrell [representing Norfolk Police branch]

All of the above have indicated their willingness to stand for re-election.

There are vacancies for two new female members and one male within the terms of our constitution.

We welcome nominations for these positions via the contact details at the bottom of this agenda.

Following custom and practice we are proposing the existing committee stands for re-election *en bloc*.

Unless we receive any indications to the contrary, we shall assume their re-election *nem con*.

Our Winter Wednesday Talks were at their most successful when Barbara Selby and Tony Olley took on the arranging of speakers. We would love to hear from anyone who might like to take on this role.

### 6 Election of Representatives to Other Organisations

James Porter has represented us at Norfolk Council on Aging,

David Button has represented us at NCC Staff Sports and Social Club

Peter Cotterill has represented us at North Norfolk Trades Council.

All are prepared to continue in these roles unless there are nominations from anyone else will to take on these roles.

### 7 Any other business

Please notify us of any other matters which will be considered as urgent business for the new committee.

**NB. Minutes, Annual Report and Financial Statement are attached if you are reading this on line. If you need a hard copy, please phone James or David at the numbers directly below and we will do our best to post a copy to you..**

**Get in touch with us via:**

**James Porter, tel. 01603 715529, email [porterjames172@gmail.com](mailto:porterjames172@gmail.com)**

or

**David Button, tel. 01603 627924, email [d.w.button@btinternet.com](mailto:d.w.button@btinternet.com)**

**We would be grateful if you could keep comments concise and to a necessary minimum as, during the pandemic, we are working from home with no office facilities.**

## MOMENTS TO LIFT OUR SPIRITS

As Lockdown continues and our lives continue to be constrained to our homes and local area it has been important to find moments each day that make us smile, to raise our spirits.

I have enjoyed 2 programmes that have broadcast news snippets about ways people around the country have found to lighten these gloomy times. Radio 4 which has had 'Moments of Life', sound recordings sent in by listeners from their home or area; sounds of bird song, pieces of music even a coffee machine that the listener has found calming or uplifting. Look East have shown 'My Lockdown Life', viewers' videos to raise a smile. Some images have been of creative others, just silliness like a boy encouraging his piglets to jump hurdles. One video was of vases a viewer had inherited from a relative which brought him comfort at this time. Others have been moments of contemplative quiet; views from the countryside, a flower, stream or farm animals.

It has been about allowing myself to sit and watch or listen to these small clips, to take pleasure in them without further thought, a moment of joy. These evocative sounds and images from people's homes & locality can broaden our outlook for that short time as our own horizons have shrunk. My early morning 'exercise' walks have been taken on a new meaning. Before lockdown, I would walk briskly to enjoy the fresh air before the day's activities begin. Since March, I have become more considered about my walks and been delighted by many a stunning sunrise, cloud formations and stillness in usually busy streets and parks - more time to contemplate, less need to be ever vigilant of traffic and my 'to do' list. I am an early riser but even so, dawn doesn't fully break now until around 8.00am.

Sometimes I have taken photos of objects that previously I may have missed. I hope your daily exercise walks have shown familiar scenes in new ways. With our usual busy lives suspended, we can allow ourselves time to observe what we normally hurriedly pass-by. We need these quiet moments in the world around us just now. For that moment, to let the mind shift away



from the latest set of statistics or reminder to ' s t a y i n d o o r s ' . I would love to know what have been your moments of joy. Whether you have looked differently at familiar places or objects or found pleasure in the silliness of others. Please do e mail using the address on Backnumber, so we can spread your smile to others whilst we wait for our call-up for that vaccine.

Jackie Mitchell

### REGIONAL RETIRED MEMBERS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND COMMITTEE ELECTIONS 2021/2022

The virtual A.G.M. (open to all Retired Members in the Eastern Region) will take place on Monday 22nd March 2021 via GoToMeeting between 10.00am – 12.00pm.

Please join the meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone. <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/710763085> You can also dial in using your phone. United Kingdom (Toll Free): 0 800 169 0432 United Kingdom: +44 20 3713 5028 Access Code: 710-763-085 New to GoToMeeting? Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/install/710763085> Anyone wishing to attend must register by 15th March to [t.tansley@unison.co.uk](mailto:t.tansley@unison.co.uk) with an e-mail address, so that we can ensure that minutes of the previous A.G.M., the Annual Report and committee nominations can be sent to attendees in advance of the meeting.

## WORKHOUSE CHILDHOOD VOICES FROM GRESSENHALL

'Unlocking our Sound Heritage' ('UOSH') is a national project, led by the British Library, which aims to save, digitise and make available online some of the thousands of archive sound recordings held in collections across the UK. Norfolk Record Office is the project hub for the East of England. Tapes etc. are digitised at the Archive Centre then volunteers listen to each sound file and enter details in a spreadsheet, to enable cataloguing.



Tapes from the Norfolk Rural Life Museum at Gressenhall yielded fascinating testimonies, from people who had been workhouse children in the years around the First World War to the superintendent of Beech House in 1955. Their memories were both more and less grim than the accepted narrative.

The oldest interviewee was the daughter of the workhouse Master and Matron in 1910. She recalled Christmas Day in the workhouse and still used her mother's pudding recipe! There were concerts in the dining hall at Christmas and Easter and a Bonfire Night party. Sir Ralph and Lady Hare, on the Board of Guardians, took a particular interest in seeing that the girls went out into 'better' jobs. Girls went into domestic service and boys to farms, working for board and lodging and two shillings a week.

Much is made of the cruelty of the workhouse regime in separating families, but families presented relatively rarely, unless they were itinerant labourers seeking accommodation over the winter. For children from impoverished or chaotic homes, the workhouse provided a safe space in which to grow up. Boys attended Gressenhall school and the girls, Beetley. One man remembered how lucky he was always having cake as well as bread in his dinner bag. The workhouse was not a prison; children went out to play in the gravel pits, adults went for Sunday walks. He remembered being in the infirmary during a diphtheria outbreak and hearing the chapel bell ringing for funerals. There were always funerals, because old people came into the workhouse infirmary to die.

A Mr. Johnson was brought to the workhouse aged 9, with his sister (10) and brother (12). Their mother had died when he was born, after which they had 'existed', being 'brought up rough, with no discipline'. He went to the children's home at The Hollies, East Dereham, and credited the matron with instilling self-respect and lifelong honesty.

Workhouse discipline could be harsh; boys were flogged and the porter devised a punishment of very hot baths and scrubbing with carbolic soap so their skin would sting. A Mr. Farrow admitted he did try to run away, climbing over the wall and walking to Norwich, but he was brought back. He was one of the boys who carved their initials into the red brick walls. Look out for them in one of the former exercise yards next time you visit Gressenhall!

*Rita Gallard*

*(Part II - Working at Beech House in the 1940s and 1950s)*

### DOWN MEMORY LANE

Our member Chris Payne, now living in the depths of the West Midlands, was turning out his loft and came across this picture of a motley crew from the Sports and Social Club on an outing to the Greene King Brewery circa 1977.



Do you recognise anybody, or indeed, do you recognise yourself? Your editor is to be seen on the left of the picture doing up his coat rather than looking at the camera. There will be those who recognise Robin Whetung, so tragically taken from us in 1990. So, let's hear from you if you're in the picture and even more interesting would be if you could send us pictures of old colleagues and events so we might turn this into a regular feature.

## LEFT BEHIND BY IT?

If you are reading this edition of Backnumber online then you are already one of the increasing number of our generation who are familiar in varying degrees with the digital world in which we live. I would guess that this is a means of communication that does not come easily or naturally to many of us loosely described as 'older people'. 'Why did the computer do that?' is a familiar noise of frustration in our household.

But what of the people who are not online? It maybe because you don't see the need, don't have access to the equipment, are not confident in using unfamiliar technology, worry about the costs or simply can't get a signal.

Research in 2019 indicated that 45% of people over the age of 65 did not have a smart phone which gives you access to the internet on the go. The figures for younger people increase to 98% for people aged 25-34. There is a similar differential with figures for access to the internet with all devices so this a difference that will disappear as the youngsters become us.

Why does it matter?

Because the widely held assumption that everyone has access to the internet means that older people are missing out on the public and social information and entertainment it provides. Health and Social Care and others are making increasing use of Digital technology in arms length advice and support. If you are not online it makes daily life much more difficult in applying for such items as benefits, TV license, bus pass, prescriptions, shopping delivery, even to pay bills.

If older people are not to be overlooked and feel the world is passing them by we need to challenge communication providers to continue to offer a variety of formats.

This is not to say that you can't get by without the internet. You can use the telephone if you are prepared to work your way through music while you wait, the list of services on offer and the sequence of numbers to press before you might get to a human voice to deal with your enquiry. You can have a telephone consultation with your GP instead of online, although perhaps a worry here is the decline in the use of landlines in the home and proposals to turn of the analogue system in 2024.

Mobile phones are not the easiest to use if you have limited dexterity. Cheques are still valid to pay bills although some organisations no longer accept them and some banks charge. Government departments and local authorities still publish limited information as printed leaflets. If you do need to go online then you can always ask a friend and outside of lockdown, libraries have computers you can hire hourly for a nominal sum to get on the World Wide Web. The staff are on hand to help.

I am grateful that what expertise I have gained using the internet is due to the early training we received at work when records went digital. Without that initial training I am not sure I would be so confident in writing this online today.

I would guess that one of the good things to come out of the pandemic lockdown is older people embracing the benefits of the digital world-keeping in touch with family and friends by Zoom, What's App or Skype, browsing for information, watching streamed films and getting creative with help of programmes like Clip art. The World Wide Web is just that- a world of opportunity to try anything from learning Chinese to advice on how to mend the leaking tap.

Verity Gibson

### EDDIE COSTELLO

We are sad to announce the death of Eddie Costello.

Eddie will be well known to many members from Social Services having been a lecturer in Social Care at City College before working as a manager in the Department. On retirement, Eddie was involved in various Retired Members activities such as the Monday Morning Group and the monthly whist drives and was a regular attender at the Wednesday talks. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

### NCC BRANCH AGM A date for your diary

The AGM of the main County branch will be on Thursday 18 March from 12.30 to 1.30pm and will be on ZOOM. A link to the ZOOM meeting is due to be sent to members on E-Mail.

## CARE STAFF WIN LEGAL BATTLE

Last autumn ten homecare workers in north London won their employment tribunal and were awarded an average of £10,000 each. Unison had supported the group, mostly women, in their claim to be paid the minimum wage. The claim centred on being paid for waiting and travel time between scheduled visits to vulnerable people.. The battle lasted for four years. The claim was against three separate employers commissioned by a Labour controlled local authority. The contracts had been “inherited” under TUPE arrangements from a fourth company which chose not to fulfil the contract. There may be many more claims around the country now this precedent has been created.

The case raises several issue:

Staff could nor have afforded to bring the case without the support of Unison,

It took four years to resolve the case,

All of the employers involved are still trading

Neither the commissioning local authority nor Care Quality Commission oversight prevented the exploitation of staff

The commissioning authority had signed Unison’s Ethical Care Charter.

Applauding the dedication of staff like this, as many of us, including the prime minister, have done, is meaningless if employers, commissioners and ultimately government funding prevent carers earning even the minimum wage.

### Activities, none !

The NCC Staff Sports and Social Club remains closed until further notice The club is not likely to re-open until the majority of staff are able to return to work at County Hall and Carrow Road is able to welcome back Canaries supporters in significant numbers.

This means there will be no Monday Morning Activities and no Wednesday Talks for the time being. It will also mean our AGM will be a “virtual” event.

Your committee will let you know as soon as there is any likelihood of resuming our activities, and, if there is an appetite, we could catch up with some of our popular Winter Wednesday Talks as soon as it is safe to do so, regardless of season.

Do get in touch if there are speakers or topics you would like us to arrange for the future, or any new activities we might organise for you. In the meantime, keep active and stay safe.

## ODD ONE OUT 2020 QUIZ

*This short quiz is for fun and to test memories. The answers are “the odd ones out” from ten random news stories from last year. As always, remembering Teddy Edwards*

1. a. Cornwall, b. Gloucester, c. Kent, d. Sussex.
2. a. Aidan, b. Brendan, c. Flynn, d. Francis.
3. a. Marieke Lucas Rijneveldm, b. Roger Penrose, c. World Food Programme, d. . Louise Elisabeth Glück
4. a. Orang-utan, b. Giant Panda, c. Hawksbill Turtle, d. Black Rhino.
5. a. Christina McAnea b. Katerina Sakellaropoulou, c. Andrzej Duda, d. Joe Biden.
6. a. Tim Brooke-Taylor, b. Leslie Phillips, c. Honor Blackman, d. Stirling Moss.
7. a. Honeyeater, b. Hoopoe, c. Rufous Bush Robin, d. Bearded Vulture.
8. a. Tony Pulis, b. Eddie Howe, c. Paul Lambert, d. !an Holloway
9. a. Sajid Javid, b. Esther McVey, c. Andrea Leadsom, d. Theresa Villiers.
10. a. King Leopold II, b. Robert Milligan, c. Mary Wollstonecraft, d. Edward Colston.

### 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)