

EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the summer edition of Backnumber. When we say summer, this may be stretching a point given the unsettled weather we have been experiencing but at least we can give thanks that we aren't in Greece, Italy, Turkey or Western Canada or California where the land is on fire and people are trying to cope with unprecedented high temperatures. Or in Germany, where whole villages have been swept away by floods of a kind never seen before.



We hope that everyone is well and that you have avoided Covid 19. The vaccine roll out has been successful so far and with things beginning to open up again we hope you are managing to get out and about a bit more and to sample some of the many delights that Norfolk has to offer. For those of a sporting nature there has been much to keep you entertained given England's success in the Euros and various medal attainments in the Olympics along with the annual events such as Wimbledon, Motor Sports and (a favourite of your editor's) The Tour de France. Another "sporting" event has been the unedifying sight of Dominic Cummings giving his own insights into the inner workings of the Johnson Government. This has been described in some quarters as a revenge mission, given Cummings's own fall from grace back in December of last year. Whatever the motive, Cummings is nonetheless giving an insight into the inner workings of Government and its adoption of chaos theory as being the way to go.

Under the cover of this chaos, the English success in the Euros and the announcement of "Freedom Day", the Government has taken the opportunity to introduce some of the most regressive legislation of our lifetimes. In early

July, first and second readings were given to The Elections Bill and the Nationality and Borders Bill and a third reading to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. If enacted, they will all contribute to a democratic and community relations disaster. In addition, proposed changes to the Official Secrets Act could see journalists jailed for up to 14 years for handling leaked material. How happy Mr Hancock would have been had that been in place a few weeks ago.

The Elections Bill will require photo ID to be shown at the Polling Station. According to David Davis, this could disenfranchise up to 2 million electors although the Government claims that free ID Cards will be available to all. This is supposed to stop electoral fraud at polling stations but there is scant evidence that this problem actually exists. Although there is some reference to controlling digital output, there is very little to deal with the real fraud of transparency around the sources of funding. The Nationality and Borders Bill could see potential refugees jailed for up to 4 years for "illegal entry to the UK". The Refugee Council thinks this is in conflict with International Agreements on seeking refuge but the Government claims that the Bill's proposals are "fair". The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, amongst other things proposes draconian sentences for people protesting, with one test being that the protest is "annoying". Very little time is given for scrutiny and we begin to see that the Brexit mantra of "Take back control" has simply given almost total control to the Executive, with the C19 pandemic acting as cover for this turn of events all with the minimum of scrutiny in Parliament. No doubt we will return to this in the coming months. In the meantime, enjoy the rest of summer and we look forward to the possibility that soon we can resume our activities in a Covid safe environment.

As ever, comments to porterjames172@gmail.com

NHS AND SOCIAL CARE BILL UPDATE

As reported in the last Backnumber there is a Joint Norfolk Branches group which has been set up to scrutinise this Bill and to set out a strategy to inform members and develop a campaign to oppose those parts of it with which we do not agree. The Retired Members Section has 2 representatives on this group, James Porter and Bidy Rawlence. So far, only one meeting has taken place, attended by Bidy. The most recent one was cancelled just 30 minutes or so before it was due to begin as Peter Passingham, the Regional full time official dealing with the issue had only returned from leave that morning.

At the meeting attended by Bidy, in June, Peter Passingham had outlined the general structures which will come into place. The principal one of these is the Integrated Care System (ICS) which will have 2 functioning bodies, one for the NHS and one for Social Care. Within the structures is capacity for Trade Union representation but there is concern that the ICS Boards are "NHS heavy" that is that there will be a minor say for Social Care and, to some extent, Primary Care there will be too much involvement of the Private Sector and a tendency to slice off Local Authority services to the Voluntary Sector.

We still are waiting for some further documents from Peter Passingham but these meetings will continue, the next one being scheduled for the end of August. Remember, as well, that although the words "Social Care" appear in the legislation, there is still no sign at all of the Government's Social Care proposals even though they were said to be in Mr Johnson's back pocket on the day he became Prime Minister. Really quite hard to believe that he was telling the truth!

Bidy Rawlence
James Porter

THOUGHTS ON OFFERING RETIRED MEMBER TALKS VIA ZOOM

We have not been overwhelmed with suggestions about our request for feedback around the possibility of activities being offered on-line, but if you have any views at all about activities for retired members, do get in touch. We very much welcome your thoughts.

PENSION TRIPLE LOCK.

In the light of reports that the government is considering reneging on its promise to keep the pension triple lock, a draft letter has been produced which members might consider sending to him. The letter can be e mailed to rishi.sunak.mp@parliament.uk or sent to Rishi Sunak MP, UK Parliament, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA.

"Dear Mr Sunak

I am appalled by the suggestion that the afore promised triple lock to state pensions which was promised at the last election by your party is under threat.

The whole basis of the triple lock was to ensure that pensioners would be treated fairly according to a formula arrived at by your government. It is appalling that when the calculations don't favour yourselves you consider it justified to suggest that it should not be applied when the formula doesn't suit you.

I am very disappointed and not a little alarmed at the apparent Government disregard for pensioners and it seems, particularly those over 80!

We all have a vote and if you continue to pursue this suggestion there will be an enormous outcry and the resultant voting pattern will be reflected by your imminent actions.

Be fair to your taxpayers and uphold your pledge to protect your taxpaying pensioners"

WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS

The campaign organisation, Silver Voices, which has been amongst those campaigning to retain the free TV Licence for Over 75s, is also making moves about Winter Fuel Payments. The current basic payment of £100 per person, introduced by George Osborne in 2011 (itself a reduction on the previous payment) has never been updated for inflation. This would now be worth £132 at today's prices. Ofgem has recently decreed that energy prices can raise by up to £139 pa and this will increase the number of those forced into fuel poverty. Already, according to Government figures, this includes over 1 million pensioners. Add in to this equation rising food prices and the loss of the free TV licence for Over 75s and we can see that trouble lies ahead.

The Silver Voices view is that Winter Fuel Payments (WFP) could be abolished if incorporated into a Living State Pension but until that time are calling for a rise in the WFP in line with energy price rises. *Back-number* endorses this position.

BURSTON SCHOOL STRIKE RALLY 2021

It has been announced that this seminal rally will not go ahead this year. The reason: “*due to the current uncertainty around Covid and having consulted with the local community, the Burston Strike School committee has decided that there will be no Burston Rally for a second year in 2021.*”

The history of the Burston rally is a heart-warming story of a village standing behind their school teachers, Annie (also called Kitty) & Tom Higdon. They were unceremoniously sacked by their local school’s management group for expressing concern that the use of child labour by local farmers meant children missed their education. Many of these farmers were also school managers, so the Higdon’s views created tensions as a child’s education came 2nd to putting their workers’ children to work on the farm.



In January 1913, the management committee raised charges against Kitty. She was accused of lighting a fire at school. She had done so to dry clothes of children who had walked to school in the rain, also that she had been “*discourteous to the management committee.*” The latter charge led to the Higdon’s dismissal on 1 April 1914. Many children and their parents supported their teachers and led to one child, Violet Potter, leading the children out on strike and by refusing to attend the ‘council-run’ school.

The Higdon’s set up an alternative school, for 66 of their 72 former pupils. They taught on the village green, then in local workshops. The strike drew national attention and an appeal was made for funds to build a new school.

By 1917 the appeal had raised £1,250 with donations from miners’ and railway workers’ unions, among others. The new school was officially opened on 13 May 1917, with Violet Potter, declaring, “*With joy and thankfulness I declare this school open to be forever a School of Freedom.*” Burston Strike School educated local children until shortly after Tom’s death in 1939, when Kitty’s retired, then in her 70s.



Burston Strike School stands on the village green, now a museum to the strike. The annual rally, held on the green is attended by trade unionists and supporters from across the country. Notably, it is still well-attended by coach parties of mining and ex-mining families. A focal point of the rally is the parade round the village boundary with attendees walking behind embroidered trades union and Labour Party banners (above right). This year there will be a small invited gathering at the Higdon’s graves but there will be no stage, music, speakers, stalls or parking. One most memorable speaker was Tony Benn MP.

The strike committee has asked that, unless you are invited, please do not travel to Burston this year. They want to maintain their good relationship with the community of Burston who are crucial in enabling this historic event to be held. They hope to hold the full event in 2022.

Jackie Mitchell



WHAT THEY REALLY THINK OF US

Those of us who had the “pleasure” of hearing the revelations from Dominic Cummings on Mr Johnson’s views of older people and his declaration that it was only those aged 80+ who were dying of Covid, “so let it happen”, will have formed the view that maybe we’re not altogether important to Mr Johnson. Cummings may well have a revenge motive in making these revelations but he did work at the heart of Government following the General election of 2019 and it is significant that none of the gory details have been denied by Downing Street.

Even more disquieting are the reports revealed by the Daily Telegraph that NHS England seriously gave some thought to the idea that, in a pandemic, hospital treatment should not be offered to over 70s in Nursing and Care Homes. This was part of the Cygnus Influenza Pandemic exercise of 2016 and suggested that people in that position should be offered “dignified end of life pathways”. An example is given of a “72 year old with a broken femur” not being given any priority for hospital treatment even although, according to the example, such a person might expect to have a life span of around 10 years. Of course, in a pandemic of the kind we are now witnessing, there will be huge pressure on hospital beds because they are needed to deal with those suffering from the disease. However, simply to dismiss the rights of a “72 year old female with a broken femur” suggests a policy (NHS England denies that this ever became a policy) of discriminatory practice against older people.

The Telegraph article then turns to events of last year when people were discharged from hospital to Care and Nursing Home settings even if they had, or had come into contact with, the disease. This was to follow the Government mantra of “Protect the NHS”. This was done by overloading the Care Sector. It was even suggested that Covid 19 was unlikely to spread in Care Homes, advice that was not changed until March 2020. The article also confirms that DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) notices were the norm for older and vulnerable people, without any consultation with those affected or their families. This has since changed but it becomes clear that older people are simply dispensable whatever their assumed life span might be.

The article also reveals that Care and Nursing Homes became “dumping grounds” with staff so overstretched that even basic hygiene needs

were not met and this accords with the scenarios set out in the “secret documents” concerning the Cygnus exercise, where it was suggested that residents should be kept in bed all day with commodes being offered for basic toilet needs.

What is really depressing about all of this is that there was a need to keep all this planning secret. We have the right to be told what is being planned and to challenge those plans when they are clearly not in our interests. We obviously understand that in a pandemic there will be a need to establish priorities but this needs a public debate and we might think that such a debate happens before any pandemic strikes, rather than having things revealed as we go along. It seems to me that this Government is only interested in older people as potential voting fodder but when it comes to protecting and developing our rights we come pretty much at the bottom of the pile - oddly enough, alongside younger people who do not even have the advantage of being seen as voting fodder.

Clare Marshall.

Activities

In the last edition of Backnumber we were hopeful that we could bring you news of the reopening of the Sports and Social club at County Hall at which most of our activities are based. Here is that news as of August 9th.

From August 12th the club will re-open on **Thursday** [5pm], **Friday** [4.30 pm] and **Saturday** [7 pm] **evenings only**.

The club will also open for Norwich City home football matches.

There will be NO functions, events or private parties until further notice and, for reasons mainly to do with security and cleaning, the premises are not available at other times.

Use of the County Hall car park remains unclear, especially while the main parking area remains a building site.

The club management committee will review the situation monthly and we will endeavour to bring you news of re-starting our activities as soon as we can.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the last edition of *Backnumber* I made a massive error in proof reading so that the first two paragraphs of Rita's article appeared twice and the last two not at all. My apologies to Rita and also to the readers. I am therefore reprinting the piece as it should be with an update at the end from Rita which tells us that, sadly, the funding for the project will end in September. She promises us that there will be more, from the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust, to which we look forward with great interest.

GRESSENHALL VOICES



The former House of Industry at Gressenhall was enlarged in 1836 to become the Mitford and Launditch Poor Law Union Workhouse. From 1930 it was run by Norfolk County Council as Gressenhall Poor Assistance Institution, 'Beech House' and between 1948 and 1975, after the National Assistance Act had finally closed workhouses, it was a County Home for the Elderly.

The casual wards of the 'Unions' continued to provide overnight accommodation for itinerants into the twentieth century. George Orwell and Laurie Lee wrote about unemployed men hopelessly tramping the highways between the world wars, but a local farmer recalled the regular procession in the late afternoons of whole families, with prams and children, walking from Docking Union to Gressenhall.

Interviews with former staff members shed some interesting light on this overlooked period of the building's history. One man who went there in 1947 as a male attendant said it looked like a prison, housing a maternity ward, nursery (no mothers evident), elderly patients and mental health patients. Pre-war conditions prevailed, with a Master and Matron. The old Board of Guardians was now the Committee, but retained the same attitudes. Food was 'basic' – porridge, bread and marge for breakfast; mince, potatoes, cabbage and semolina for dinner; bread, marge and jam for tea. He called it 'workhouse food', but actually it was worse than the Victorian workhouse dietary, which was a carefully worked out weekly menu. There were still pint mugs for men and half-pint mugs for women. The advent of the Welfare State did not immediately improve conditions. A man who worked there in 1950 explained that much depended on the individual Master and Matron. At Gayton, for instance, the Matron insisted on tablecloths and proper china. Gressenhall was still in transition, but it was satisfying work because "you were trying to do your best to make it more comfortable for them".

The superintendent in post between 1957 and 1966 found it necessary to make changes to staffing rotas immediately he arrived at Beech House, to ensure adequate day and night cover. There were one hundred residents, mainly elderly 'agricultural people', but he described this 'County Home for the Elderly' as a dumping place, halfway between hospital and home, for younger 'mental defectives' (including epileptics). One old man, who had been a workhouse resident in his youth, told him about 'reusable' coffins for paupers, constructed with a hinged base which opened as they were lifted out of the grave. He thought it might be true, because when the Committee had the older part of the burial ground dug over for cultivation, cloth and evidence of human remains were found, but no wood or metal. Small wonder that old people endured any privations rather than go into 'the House'.

It was that kind of detail, which I had never seen anywhere else, which made the hours spent listening to these tapes so rewarding. Unfortunately, during the months of lockdown it was not possible for the volunteers to continue to work at the Record Office, and funding for the national UOSH project will end in September, putting paid to my hopes of working on interviews from the old fishing community in King's Lynn. However, I have been busy listening to and cataloguing tapes for the East Anglian Traditional Music Trust (based in Stowmarket) and we have found some treasures there too, so I have more tales to tell. Expect dancing bears and wrongful transportation to Van Dieman's Land!

Rita Gallard

NCC STAFF SPORTS AND SOCIAL CLUB

After 50 years of continued service, the social club at county hall closed on Tuesday 17th March 2020 following guidance from government of the imminent Covid outbreak. What we initially thought would be a short closure as all will know has continued, leaving the hospitality sector struggling. Over this period of closure, the management committee have worked in the background to keep the premises safe and secure waiting for the time when we can reopen. We have still had running costs such as heating fuel, insurance, asset depreciation and other statutory requirements for safety testing. Thanks to our strong membership support, we have had few resignations and with strong financial reserves and Furlough payments to staff laid off, we have only made a small loss over this time. In October we took the decision to reduce membership fees by 50% and will keep this level of subscription until March 2022 to show members our appreciation.

With the easing of distancing measures and the opening up of clubs, bars and restaurants to larger numbers, we have considered our approach for the club. Situated where it is, the club relies on a strong footfall from staff working at county hall, sports teams and home football matches at Carrow Road. Taking all this into account we have decided to take a cautious approach so from Thursday August 12th 2021 we will open evenings only at this stage, as follows: Thursdays 5pm-11pm, Fridays 4.30pm-11pm and Saturdays 7pm-11pm. If NCFC are at home we will open on those days, with times on our website. The first home game V Liverpool on Saturday 14th August we will open at 3pm. As and when other sports team leagues commence, we will review our opening days and times and once more staff return to county hall we will look at lunchtimes. At this time we are reviewing events and activities but have temporarily stopped taking any group bookings to hire the premises.

When we open, we will follow government guidelines and subject any new arrangements, continue to ask members to observe peoples personal space in the club, use the sanitising gels provided and not stand at the bar after being served. Whether face masks are worn and the use of the NHS QR tracking code will be left to the choice of individuals.

During our closure, we are pleased to have been able to retain most of our staff and committee members, but sorry to say that John and Angela Harries will stand down from the committee and Rita Gorman and Rod Horne who have both been long standing bar staff have also decided not to return to duties. The committee would like to thank them all for devoted service to the club.

Paul Bonham
NCCSS&SC Secretary
Social Club and Retired Members Group

REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONY.



This will be on Thursday 11 November at 11.00am. At the time of writing we do not know where this will take place but as there will not be another edition of *Backnumber* before then it is worth noting that it will take place and that the best we can do will be to e mail all those of you whose e mail addresses we have to let you know of the arrangements.



WHERE TO FIND US

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

Jim Porter at 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