

## EDITOR'S NOTES

### HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN

Just as Backnumber was preparing to go to press, so came the news of the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II. At 96 she had led a long and productive life and was revered throughout the world.

Unison is a diverse body and within its membership there will be those who have strong Royalist views and those of the completely opposite opinion. What is not in doubt, however, is the fact that the Queen was a person of knowledge and wisdom whose skills in diplomacy were recognised by international leaders across the Globe. She was a symbol of stability and someone whose opinions were sought by domestic and international politicians of all persuasions. Her known admirers include Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama, Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron amongst many, many others. In a time of great strife and difficulty for the world, her calm authority will be very sorely missed, both at home and in the rest of the world.



It is worth noting the tributes to her that have come from abroad are warm and sincere and from some unlikely sources. Paul Keating, the former Prime Minister of Australia and a committed republican, was particularly effusive. "In the 20th Century, the self became privatised, while the public realm, the realm of the public good, was broadly neglected. Queen Elizabeth understood this and instinctively attached herself to the public good....and she did this for a lifetime, never deviating". And this. "With her passing her example of public service remains with us as a lesson in dedication to what she saw as the value of what is enduringly good and right".

Then this, from Emmanuel Macron. "She who stood with the giants of the 20th century on the path of history has gone to join them. The French Republic and the people of France extend their long standing friendship and deep sorrow to His Majesty the King, to the Royal Family, to His Majesty's Government and to the British people". Friend or foe? You decide.

Finally, Michael D Higgins, President of Ireland, a country with whom the United Kingdom has often had a difficult relationship. Talking of the Queen's visit to Ireland in 2011, an extraordinary event given the past history, he said "During those memorable few days eleven years ago she did not shy away from shadows of the past. Her moving words were deeply appreciated by the people of Ireland and set out a new, forward relationship between our nations - one of respect, close partnership and sincere friendship".

These comments are all from republicans and from countries with whom we have experienced some tension. They convey the affection in which she was held, admiration of her wisdom and commitment to diplomacy and public service. May she rest in peace.

## THE MYTH OF THE AFFLUENT ELDERLY

It is becoming clear that, not only is the class-divide widening under this Conservative government but there is an age-divide emerging, being driven by the Media, which has been trying to carve a wedge between the young and the older members of our society. Young people and their families are suffering because of the huge rise in inflation and energy prices. This is shown by their increased use of food banks whilst struggling on low incomes, thanks to restraints on benefits and wage increases; little wonder Industrial Action is being taken in an attempt to gain pay increases in-line with inflation, gaining much media attention.

There has been however, very little coverage in the media about how millions of Pensioners are struggling to cope and pay their way. We are not a social class of wealthy individuals.

The media coverage of Pensioners tends to portray us all as living well with over-generous Occupational work pensions as we rush to buy retirement homes and take 'Saga' holidays. Whilst this picture no doubt reflects life for some Pensioners, it ignores the 10% or more who rely solely on a state pension sometimes, boosted by a small works pension, earned through years of labour in low-paid and often, unskilled jobs. However, our works pensions are not 'gifts' given by former employers. A pension is money taken from our wages during our working lives and returned to us when we retire. It is fairly and squarely earned.

The views we are expressing here were highlighted recently in a letter of complaint sent by the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) to the BBC concerning an interview with Lord Clark, a self-confessed well-off pensioner. He casually stated that he had no need of the current rise in the state pension. No challenge was made to Lord Clark as to his understanding of pensioners who live on either, the pre-2016 weekly state pension of £141.85 or the post-2016 weekly state pension of £185.15. The proposed 10% rise in pensions will still leave these Pensioners well below the £322.50 a week take-home pay of a worker earning the National Living Wage of £9.50 an hour.

Both pensioners and low-wage earners are in the same boat. The wage earner may be keeping a family on his or her wage. They, and many Pensioners, are facing a winter of extreme

difficulty. Inflation is forecast to peak at 14% by January 2023; electricity and gas bills are set to go through the roof and food prices to soar way above what these incomes are able to purchase.

The Government's recent response to Pensioners suffering from heat exhaustion was to go and sit in the local library to keep cool, (if your local library remains open) or go to a supermarket with air conditioning! The fear is that a similarly insulting suggestion will be made this winter as many struggle to stay warm. Government ministers are far removed from the problems faced by ordinary people. Their advice to low paid workers is to work more hours or get a better paid job. However facile these suggestions may be, they are not applicable to Pensioners, many of whom are years out of the labour market and may be in ill-health. Poorer Pensioners are ignored by our politicians. Promises were made at the last election to improve Social Care by funding Local Authorities properly so that they could assist those unable to buy expensive private care provision. Three years down the line and the long awaited Social Care Act remains, .....pending!

Whatever our incomes, it is beholden on us to promote the welfare of all Pensioners. Unison Retired Members are fully behind the NPC and AgeUK Campaigns for the State Pension to be set at a rate where we are all enabled to live with dignity and with the requisite access to food and warmth throughout this economic crisis and beyond.

Recent analysis has revealed that due to the UK Government's suspension of the Triple Lock, Pensioners are missing out on nearly £500 a year. Our Pension, paid as a percentage of average earnings, is the lowest in Europe. Some countries, such as France, are tackling the impending rise in energy prices by capping their energy increase to 4%. There is no such plan in place here. The candidate most likely to become Prime Minister, Liz Truss, plans to cut taxes to increase people's incomes to assist with energy price rises. This will benefit only those who pay tax, with the higher wage earners set to benefit the most. It will not assist those subsisting on the state pension or those whose work's pensions fall below the tax threshold. Nor will Rhishi Sunak's proposals meet the inflationary increase in prices.

Pensioners on an average state pension will shortly see 43% of their Pension consumed by their energy bills.



The Triple-lock protection has been a cornerstone of the State pension since it was introduced by the Coalition Government in 2010, in recognition that the real value of the basic State Pension had fallen over many years. It has been honoured by successive administrations until now.

The link between poverty and ill-health is well established. More than 2 million Pensioners live in poverty. Nearly a quarter (23%), rely on means-tested benefits to top up their income although many who are eligible, do not apply for them. A long-term, realistic Social Care policy is needed to meet the needs of our aging population. Maintenance and care to promote good health and independence should be a right for all. The Welfare State needs to be fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, available at the point of need.

We must press for equality in old age through campaigns and whatever political pressure we can bring to bear. The least we can do is to use our vote at the next General Election and support the Party we most trust to deliver on their promises.

Jackie Mitchell and Clare Marshall  
Unison Retired Members, committee members.

### **EDITOR'S NOTES**

**(pushed off the front page by Her Majesty)**

Welcome to Edition 199 and to let you know we intend to do a "Special" to mark our 200th edition of which, more later.

It has been a long, hot, dry summer and, as we enter autumn it looks as though we might expect somewhat cooler and, hopefully wetter weather as we look to replenish our reservoirs, rivers and water courses. Much has been written about how the effect of climate change has been responsible for what we have experienced and it is beyond doubt that much of this is "human made". There are going to have to be changes in the way we live in future and we have to be ready to embrace the change in

order to save the planet. It is not the intention, in this editorial, to be a rallying call for the Green Party but it is clearly not possible to ignore the evidence of our own experience over the last few months with record temperatures and virtually no rainfall without coming to the conclusion that "something must be done". We have, of course, had long hot summers before but this one comes accompanied by appalling floods in Pakistan, record heat all over Europe and follows the boiling temperatures experienced in Canada last year and the wildfires and then extensive floods in Australia over the last two or three years. There will be countless other examples. It is comforting to note that our own County Council, on being given the opportunity to declare a climate emergency, decided that this would be "virtue signalling" and refused to do so. This, of course, is the work of the ruling Tory group, as all opposition parties supported the move. In a sense, of course, it would be virtue signalling but it would also be acknowledgement that the emergency exists and that, within its powers, the Council would develop policies to help deal with it.

In this edition we feature a piece by Jackie Mitchell and Clare Marshall on the myth of the affluent pensioner as well a piece by the editor on the cost of living crisis. We lighten the mood a bit with David Button's regular column, this time on Hunstanton and David Beard muses about the lost pubs of Norfolk. We carry a reminder, too, about the Remembrance Day Ceremony as well as our regular update on activities. We very much hope that we can resume our winter talks series and the committee will consider this further at its next meeting in November.

These editorial notes also focus on our next edition which will be our 200th. We reckon the first would have been sometime around the setting up of the new County Council as a result of the 1974 Local Government re-organisation and we are keen to hear stories from readers of their experiences at that time, not just in work but also in the process of just living. There was, if you recall, an energy crisis, a cost of living crisis and massive cuts to public expenditure being brought about by a (Labour) Government. How times change! We look forward to hearing from you and will publish as many stories as we can. As ever, comments and ideas to [porter-james172@gmail.com](mailto:porter-james172@gmail.com) or to Branch Office at County Hall from where communications will be passed on to us.

## HUNSTANTON

“Sunny Hunny” is an interesting town facing westwards over the Wash. As well as glorious sunsets, the cliffs stretching to the north are spectacular, made of carrstone with a chalky layer above. The red sandstone, getting its colour from a high content of iron, can be seen in many local buildings, including Sandringham church.



At the highest point of the cliffs is the former lighthouse, now used as holiday accommodation. Charles II gave consent to a John Knight to build a light “upon the Hunstanton-cliffe or chappel lands” to guide ships safely into the Wash to Kings Lynn. The “chappel” refers to St Edmund’s Priory, probably built by the monks of Bury St Edmunds in medieval times, centuries after the legend of St Edmund had taken root.

One story is that the teenage Edmund, heir to the throne of East Anglia had planned to sail up the river Waveney to Thetford to be crowned king but was blown off course around the coast of Norfolk to land at St Edmund’s Point, just beneath the site of the lighthouse.

Some 15 years later he was killed by Viking invaders and became a martyr and the first patron saint of England.

Hunstanton has been the home of the LeStrange family since before the Domesday Book and they have left their mark on the town. In fact Henry L’Estrange Styleman LeStrange decided to develop the land south of Old Hunstanton as a seaside bathing resort, complete with a pier, much loved by the Victorians. He also invested in a railway line from Kings Lynn and, continued by his son Hamon, the town grew quickly.

The family has lived at Hunstanton Hall for centuries. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Dame Armine LeStrange was Lady of the Manor. She was particularly fond of a beautiful Persian carpet. Before she died she threatened her ne’er-do-well son that if he ever disposed of the carpet she would return to haunt him. The son took the threat seriously and had the carpet nailed into a box and stored in the attic.



A couple of generations later, Hamon LeStrange’s wife Emeline discovered the carpet and charitably decided to cut it into pieces to give to the poor. Hamon remembered the curse and collected up all the pieces, but Armine was not appeased and now this ghostly grey lady walks the hall at night.



In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, literary figures including P.G. Wodehouse and L.P. Hartley were frequent visitors and used it as a model for several settings in their novels. It was Anchorstone Hall for Hartley and for Wodehouse, Aunt Agatha’s country seat Woollam Chersey.

## NORFOLK PUBLIC HOUSES

Arriving in Norwich in 1976 I remember hearing from a few sources that Norwich boasted 365 Public Houses, one for each day of the year and 52 churches, one for each Sunday, so you could repent at leisure. I am sure many of you are aware of that statistic. So I was surprised to discover that in August 1859 the Collector of Excise informed the Magistrates 735 Public Houses and 43 Beer Shops existed in Norwich (more than in any town or city with the same population in the UK)

Being ex-Trading Standards Officer I was interested to read that on 27th June 1780 a Public House Keeper was convicted for selling beer in a quart (2 pint) measure which had a false bottom and only held one and a half pints. For such a dastardly crime he was fined 40 shillings (about £300 today).

The principal hotels and Inns for the accommodation of families and commercial men in 1842 were The Norfolk Hotel, in St Giles, The Royal Hotel, Market Place, The Rampant Horse Inn, St Stephen's, The Bowling Green Tavern, Chapelfield and The Maids Head Inn, St Simon and Jude.

But there were problems and it is reported that in 1848 a letter in The Norfolk Chronicle asked "if the custom peculiar to Norwich of emptying privies into the streets, where their contents remain for hours until collected in farmer's trailers; where their effluvia remains for days until dried out by the winds, could be abolished. On Friday 23rd of April 1848, nobody could pass from the town to The Close, nor from the precincts to Queen Street, without feeling sick .

In 1852 it was reported that there were 567 Public Houses. Roughly with about 70,000 inhabitants this meant that there was one outlet selling beer for every 43 adults. Over the years numbers dropped dramatically and in contrast in 2018 only 152 Public Houses still existed in Norwich and I fear many more will disappear due to covid and the current financial situation .

Let us also not forget that habits have changed. Look how many restaurants, coffee bars and the like frequent towns and cities. The younger generation no longer use pubs like we did. Pubs still serve a very valuable purpose as places where people meet whether it be cities or rural villages. Long may they remain.

David Beard



Norwich Haymarket circa 1890 with the White Horse Pub in foreground and St Peter Mancroft at the back.

### REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY

As we go to press, we understand that the Ceremony will be held at County Hall on Friday 11 November at 11.00am. As ever, we have been invited to submit a reading and our intention is to have a poem from a woman war poet. Alan Cabbage has suggested a choice of two and we have not yet decided which one to submit.



My favoured option is by Margaret Postgate Cole "The Falling Leaves".

"We came upon him sitting in the sun  
Blinded by war, and left. And past the fence  
There came young soldiers from the Hand and Flower  
Asking advice of his experience  
And he said this and that and told them tales  
And all the nightmares of each empty head  
Blew into air; then hearing us beside,  
"Poor chaps how'd they know what it's like?" he said,  
And we stood there and watched him as he sat  
Turning his sockets where they went away,  
Until it came to one of us to ask, "and you're -  
how old?"  
"Nineteen the third of May".



This probably means that the other poem, by Ada Harrison, "New Year 1916" is the one we'll choose.

James Porter

## COST OF LIVING CRISIS

That we currently face a cost of living crisis is beyond doubt and we need an answer to the question of what should be done to alleviate it. Government over the last 2 months or so has been moribund with key players absorbed in the Tory Party leadership campaign and the Prime Minister, having resigned in disgrace following the departure of 60 ministers and having told us he needed to stay on to see us through this period, seemingly spending the time cavorting around the Mediterranean or being given little boys presents of joyrides in fighter jets.

The crisis clearly centres around energy prices and how to keep them in check but it is also exacerbated by our Brexit position as well as recovering from the pandemic and experiencing the effects of the war in Ukraine. In fairness to the government, there was a concerted effort, through the furlough scheme and other measures, to help the country through the pandemic but also a complete denial that Brexit, with its added bureaucracy and disjointed supply chains, has anything to do with it. It's interesting that even Mr Sunak acknowledged this in the recent leadership campaign but this fell on the deaf ears of the Tory membership.

Which brings us neatly to the news, just announced as we put *Backnumber* to bed, that Elizabeth Truss, a legend in her own vacuity, is to be our next Prime Minister. Elected from a small (160,000) group of people whose group profile is essentially elderly, white and southern, she has succeeded only by pandering to the prejudices of this group and not by seriously addressing the issues we face as a country and as a planet. She claims that she will govern for the whole country but judging by her new cabinet, it's doubtful that she will even govern for the whole of the Tory Party. She says there will be tax cuts and no windfall taxes on energy companies, more oil and gas drilling in the North Sea and we'll frack like mad where a local community allows it. Only, every community that has ever been faced with fracking has opposed it with vigour. It must be remembered that 42% of her party voted for Mr Sunak whose economic approach was very different to hers but she has found no place for those views to be expressed in cabinet. Having said that, his views on issues such as fracking were no better than hers.

It's clear that a grip must be taken of the crisis

in energy prices and we are told (and you will know by the time you read this) that Ms Truss has a grand plan. As with everything, the devil will be in the detail. The question we pose is this. Why pay the energy companies (who are making vast profits without any effort) from taxpayers money to retain those ill gotten gains when they can pay through a windfall tax or can be brought back into public ownership? It has not gone unnoticed that M Macron, in France, has taken a 100% stake in EDF and limited price rises to 4% at least until April. The delicious irony being that those of you using EDF as your supplier are helping France to keep its prices down!

We must hope that Ms Truss's plan will work. If it doesn't there will be widespread anxiety and many businesses and families will go to the wall. It will require a change of course and of attitude and the portents do not inspire confidence.

## Activities

On **Mondays** from 9.30 am at NCC Sports & Social Club at County Hall we continue to offer **table tennis** and a mid-morning natter over a cuppa. Other activities [short mat bowls, snooker, pool, and darts] are available if there is sufficient interest.

Every month on the **third Thursday** of each month at 2pm there is a friendly afternoon of **whist**, also at the Sports & Social club.

These activities are free of charge to our members and their guests. We should love to welcome more people to these activities so why not give it a try and join in?

## 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](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)