



THE BACKNUMBER

Norfolk UNISON Retired Members' Newsletter

200th edition

Number 200 – December 2022

EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to Backnumber 200. We have some reflections on our history and may have some more pieces in further editions.



We hope you have all had a good Christmas and New Year and are looking forward to life in 2023. As ever, we are more than aware that the festive season can be very difficult for many of us and we hope that all has gone as well as possible.

This edition has a variety of items including some reflections on this our 200th edition, a piece from Jackie Mitchell on Séamus Heaney following her recent trip to N Ireland, Clare Marshall's visit to the 1917 Battlefield of Cambrai and an expression of our concern about the Remembrance Ceremony at County Hall 2022.

At the time of writing (mid December 2022) we are just learning of the intention that Norfolk should have an elected Leader (or Mayor as some would have it). Already there appears to be some dissent in Tory ranks about this move. Mr Proctor, the Tory County

Council Leader, appears to be in favour, whilst Mr Fuller, Leader of S Norfolk DC, and seen to be a local "Tory giant" has called for the proposal to be rejected. This issue will either have fizzled out by the time you receive this or will be the subject of urgent debate. The proposal will be accompanied by £600 million over 30 years (£20 million per annum). This money cannot be spent on issues such as Social Care but can be used as collateral against loans to, for example, complete the Western link of the Northern Distributor Route. It was intended that Mr Gove would be present to sign this "historic agreement". Sadly, at least for him, he was too busy having his ears boxed by Mr Speaker over the decision to develop a coal mine in Cumbria, so sent a housing Minister, Mr Rowley, to sign it. We will try to keep abreast of this development as it happens.

Meanwhile, it can never have happened before that there have been three Prime Ministers between editions of Backnumber but so it has proved with the hapless Liz Truss, elected by the Tory members to follow Johnson, being replaced by the merchant banker, Mr Sunak. We can only imagine that Mr Sunak will still be in place when we next go to press but we will not be placing even a small wager on it.

As ever, comments, letters etc to porterjames172@gmail.com

AGM NOTICE.

The AGM of Unison Retired Members, Norfolk County Branch, will take place on Wednesday 15 February 2023, at The Sports and Social Club, County Hall, Norwich, at 10am for 10.30am.

All papers will be available on the day of the meeting. Nominations for Officers and Committee Members can be received up until the day of the meeting. The Committee consists of 8 members directly elected, of which at least 4 must be women, plus the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer. Backnumber Editor is also directly elected and we also wish to appoint a Winter Talks Organiser. In addition, we are looking for a representative to the Sports and Social Club Committee to represent the Branch. Tea and Coffee will be available and it is hoped that lunch will also be provided but this is subject to the availability of the kitchen. We look forward to seeing you on 15 February.

Peter Cotterill Secretary.

CLARE MARSHALL TRACES THE BATTLE OF CAMBRAI 1917.

In October this year we decided that a return to the WW1 Battlefields was long overdue. Our trusty ancient camper van took us to Curlu, a small village just off the main road between Peronne and Albert.

Having 'done' much of the Battle of the Somme on previous visits we decided to move forward to 1917 and follow the Battle of Cambrai which resulted in a terrible loss of life for all troops involved to equal The Somme and Paschendale. 'Battle Ground Europe' books are a must on these trips so that you can read about and follow the Battle as it happened.

We started at Bourslon Wood just off the Ba-paume road which was defended on one side by the Canal Du Nord. This Battle began on the 20th November and ended on the 7th December. Both sides by then were exhausted and suffered almost equal casualties. Munitions may still be found in the wood and the fighting was ferocious. It is hard to imagine how men could ever have fought or even maintained contact in such awful conditions. Over 7,000 bodies were left in the wood and are still in there. Bourslon Village was almost completely destroyed and today contains Military Cemeteries and a Canadian Memorial from 1918. Cambrai itself remained in German hands until September 1918 when the 1917 battle had to be fought all over again by the Canadians. We also visited the main Memorial at Louveral constructed to honour the men who died at the Battle of Cambrai but who have no known grave, a very poignant and sobering experience.

Next we returned our attention to the Somme concentrating on a village called Combles which was near to the French sector. It is far less visited than the main Somme Battlefields and those who fought there were mainly from the many London Divisions.

Along the route we found a memorial to Cedric Charles Dickens, grandson to the famous Author, who has no known grave and is remembered on the Thiepval memorial. He was killed near to Leuze wood and his mother bought the land around the spot and continued to help the nearby village of Ginchy for some time after the war had ended. His Batman had been convinced he knew where the body was but when he went back to look, it was not to be found. There are many Cemeteries and Memorials to visit in this area and we do try to visit as many

as we can. Nearby, the village of Maricourt contains a very large German cemetery. The Somme battles took many lives. We also visited Delville Wood where the South African Memorial stands proudly and there is a new visitor centre to see. Lines of trenches run through the wood here.

On the only rainy day, we went into Albert to revisit the museum of the Somme and called en route at the Devonshire Trench Cemetery. This Cemetery is a must for me to visit whenever I am in the area. A Memorial at the gate reads "The Devonshires held this trench". The Devonshires hold it still' These brave men left the trench on the first day of the Battle of the



Somme knowing that most of them would die because of the nearby presence of a German machine gun post. That night the survivors collected the bodies and took them back to the trench where they are buried. Albert itself is a lovely little town and many Allied troops passed through it during the war. It has a wonderful Municipal camp site which sadly for us closes at the end of September so was not an option this trip.

On our last day in France we drove up to Vimy Ridge. We stopped in Neuville St Vaast to visit a truly massive German cemetery where we chatted to a school Chaplain who was supervising a visit from a school in Kent. This was his third 'Pilgrimage' in 2021 having been unable to bring trips during the Pandemic. There are 44,833 German graves on this site brought in from several battlefields over the duration of the war.

We went on to the French Memorial up on a spur and almost opposite the Canadian Memorial. Two veterans from the French Army did a meet and greet as we arrived. The site contains a Memorial an Ossary and a Basilica which was very beautiful There were also 140,000 French graves 'Mort pour la France'. We also went round a newish semi circle bronze coloured Memorial commemorating all the troops who fought and died in the Pas de Calais and including the Salient in Belgium Names were listed in alphabetical order whatever the nationality so that a German soldier could be next to a British soldier. Very impressive.



And finally we drove up to Vimy Memorial park constructed on land bought by the Canadians at the end of the war. The main Memorial is stunning and stands out against the sky. We were able to go on a trench and underground passage tour and learnt how the Canadians did what no other Allied troops had managed to doto dislodge the Germans from the high ground which they had held since the start of the war....at great loss of life as evidenced by the nearby cemeteries. The land immediately around the Memorial Park is fenced off and there are warning signs to stay out due to the amount of unexploded munitions inside still although they do graze sheep there and there have been no fatalities to date.

This trip ended an interesting and often emotional week. The next day we headed back to Calais up a very quiet motorway since France and most other European countries only allow refrigerated and live stock trucks to travel on a Sunday . It took 8 hours to get home from the Somme which included the Ferry crossing The abiding memory as always is the terrible loss of life.

*At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them*

REMEMBRANCE DAY CEREMONY 11 NOVEMBER 2022

We are sorry to report that for the second year running we were failed by the County Council's system of communication and were unable to give you reasonable notice that the ceremony would be broadcast on the County Council's Youtube Channel. We had thought that it would be an "in person" event but apparently it was always intended that it would be virtual. It was actually recorded on 4 November and I read a poem and laid the wreath on behalf of the staff. We were assured that all Retired Members would receive notice and a link to the ceremony but this did not happen, one reason being that the County Council website went down at about 9.30am on the day.



A further point of contention was that the poem we had intended to read, which was published in the last Backnumber, was rejected by the Chair of the Council as being "too sad". To say that we were disappointed by this does no justice to our view but it is no place in which to have an argument so I read a poem, previously read by David Button and written by Arthur Clough. We had wanted to champion women WWI poets and we will continue in this endeavour next year.

Our views have been made known and we are assured that next year it is expected that the ceremony will return to being "in person" and that adequate forward planning will be put in place to ensure that we all know about it and that our reading will be accepted. We shall see.

James Porter
Chair.



Village War Memorial at Repps with Bastwick.

HOME PLACE – SEAMUS HEANEY

Seamus Heaney was born in Castledawson, Northern Ireland on 13 April 1939, a writer and poet but most of all a devoted Irishman. His family had a farm near the small town of Ballaghy, roughly mid-way along the LondonDerry to Belfast road that runs down the middle of Northern Ireland. The town has honoured their most famous citizen with a museum to his life called Home Place: Life, Literature & Inspiration. It opened in September 2016.

Seamus Heaney: man & boy. (Portraits from the museum)

I visited the museum earlier this year whilst on holiday on the west coast. The drive to Ballaghy took me away from the coast which is very much geared towards tourists and walkers along the Giant's Causeway trails. The journey allowed a glimpse of the life of residents in the rural heart of the country.



The Heaney's are a Catholic family and the museum has photos and accounts of a happy family life on the farm and in Ballaghy where Seamus first went to school. His life took a major turn when he passed a scholarship at the age of 12 to go to St. Columb's College in Derry. It was a boarding school. One exhibit was his brown leather satchel, a little scuffed round the edges from his years at school. Whilst there are many photos and information boards, the real impact comes from the voice recordings of Seamus Heaney reading poems and reflections of his life. A hand-set is given out with the admittance fee.

St. Columb's College was both a cultural and academic leap for Seamus; his turning point away from an agricultural life but he went with the blessing of his parents. He writes about this shift away from his family farming tradition in an early poem called Digging. It ends:

*But I've no spade to follow men like them.
Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.*

Seamus Heaney didn't return home after school but moved to Belfast to study English. He became a teacher and later, Head of English at Carysfort College in Dublin. However, he wrote throughout this time. He married his wife, Marie in 1965, and they went on to have 2 sons and a daughter. His first collection of poems, *Death of a Naturalist*, was published a year later in 1966. Writing won over a teaching career and Seamus gave up teaching in 1972 to become a freelance writer and poet; the rest, as they say, is history. He won a succession of literary awards, most notable the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995 and latterly, he was awarded the Forward Prize for Best Collection in 2010, for his last volume of poems called *Human Chain*.

Photo of an exhibit at HomePlace museum.



Although written in 2010 it suggests that Seamus Heaney's roots remained in the countryside.

Seamus Heaney died in hospital in Dublin on 30 August 2013 from where he sent his wife a text message just before he died, "Noli Timere". A Latin phrase meaning, 'Don't be afraid'. He had learnt Latin at St Columb's College and loved the language throughout his life.

He is buried, in accordance with his wishes, in the cemetery of Mary's Church, Bellaghy. He returned home.

Jackie Mitchell.

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CELEBRATING THE 200TH EDITION OF BACKNUMBER

As we said in our last edition, this is the 200th Backnumber. We asked if anyone had any old copies but none have been forthcoming other than David Button's archive which goes back to Edition 127. Unfortunately, there are no copies available in the Branch Archive either, so we must rely on our memories and some contemporary stories about the production.

We think the first Edition would have been some time in 1974. Many of you will remember that we had a minority Labour Government dealing with considerable industrial unrest against a background of high inflation and falling living standards. Sound familiar? It was an interesting time for the new Norfolk County Council to come into being following Local Government Reorganisation and thus was formed the new Norfolk County Branch of NALGO and a very active Retired Members Section led at that time by Bernard Day, who was the Secretary. Bernard was only just retired at that time and was still working part time to help the Council through the transformation stage, which, as many of us may remember, was not easy. I'm sure many people will remember him and he lived to a very great age, well into his nineties.

Many people, who later became active Retired Members, were still working at the time of reorganisation and were later to become prominent in the Section. People like George Lowe, Freddie Lamb and Sid Bolton and then, much later, Jean Guest, Eric Proctor, Teddy Edwards, Hugh Burton and later still, Joan Fowler, Clare Reeves and David St Quintin made significant contributions and many of them were involved with the production of Backnumber. If memory serves, and it could be quite wrong (!), George Lowe retired somewhere around the late '70s and was the Secretary and Editor for a long period.

Amanda Rudd, now the Branch Office Manager, began working in the office in 1996 and one of her early tasks was to proof read copies of Backnumber. She recalls what she describes as the "gentle mayhem" when George and his band of volunteers came to stuff envelopes with the latest offering. She recalls that it was one page, with a blue background and dense Times New Roman Script and contained detailed news of all Bowls Club matches, a welcome to every new member (which we can't do now because of GDPR and a lack of information) and news of talks. Amanda recalls that one talk involved a dog trainer whose dog apparently created mayhem in the Sports and Social Club, which would have been worth seeing!

The major change to the format came in around 2003 when David St Quintin took on the role of sub editor and he created the format that we continue to use today. We are lucky that the Branch is prepared to fund the production and as those of you who receive it by post know it is shiny, colourful and looks professional. We don't have to stuff envelopes now, either, as all this is done for us by UNISON Print, which has made an enormous difference to us. Now, many of you receive it by e mail which saves the Branch lots of money and is something we continue to encourage. We have tried to introduce what we hoped would be regular features such as "Favourite Watering Holes", "In Praise of" and various other ideas which become occasional rather than regular. We do seem to have hit on at least one regular feature, David Button's pieces on towns and villages of Norfolk, featuring, in this edition, Wroxham.

We have been criticised by some for being too political and by others of not being political enough but we hope to continue to strike a balance and to give readers something to think about and something to enjoy. We are always open to ideas and opinions and we hope you will tell us what you think. We look forward to edition 201 and beyond.

James Porter. Editor.

WROXHAM

Sometimes described as the capital of the Norfolk Broads, Wroxham is a holiday centre with a focus on boating. The river Bure provides a location for boatyards building, selling and hiring pleasure boats of all kinds. As well as traditional timber, Wroxham yards have made boats from aluminium, concrete and fibreglass and it is home to a world famous sailmaker.

Perhaps less verifiably, Diss Express on 25th September 1874 reported that a huge snake had been seen in Wroxham by a yachtsman.

First noticed at Herringfleet two weeks previously, it had *“evidently made its way thither by way of the North River via Yarmouth.”* The yachtsman *“fired a double shot at it and it raised its horrible head out of the water, higher than his topmast, hissing and roaring fearfully, while its tail lashed the water into foam for several fathoms. He computed the length to be about 80 feet or a little more, judging from the length of the yacht. The colour was a dull yellow, spotted with black, the eyes were small but fiery... the back of the neck was covered in a shaggy substance like seaweed and its sides armour plated with watery, hideous looking scales”*

The snake was last seen in *“deadly encounter with a huge pike which it swallowed and then disappeared.”*

This report shows that it is not just today's media publishing myths.



Roy's of Wroxham is still considered the Largest Village Store in the World.. Founded in 1895 by Alfred and Arnold Roy, their first general store was in Coltishall and soon after expanded to Dereham and then in 1899, opened a new store in Hoveton. Most of their stock arrived by rail, addressed to “Roy Brothers, LNER Station, Wroxham”

and from that the name Roys of Wroxham has stuck. Boating for pleasure expanded during the early 20th century and Roys store was on hand to supply holidaymakers and day trippers with every provision. As the business grew after WW1, horse drawn delivery vehicles became too slow so the company bought a fleet of former Royal Mail vans, changing only the sign-writing and keeping the bright red livery for their corporate colour.

The original Coltishall store and bakery closed in 1975, but this independent family business continues to thrive with branches across Norfolk and Suffolk.

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

It seems that the Branch Office will not be re-opening so we will try to find out what to do about letters through the post.

The retired members e-mail address at County Hall is

Retiredmembers.norfolkcounty@btconnect.com