



THE BACKNUMBER

Norfolk UNISON Retired Members' Newsletter

Number 205– April 2024

EDITOR'S NOTES

Welcome to Edition 205 of Backnumber.



We hope that winter has not taken too much toll and look forward to the coming spring and summer and the opportunities afforded to get out and about again. As ever, we know that many of our members will be dealing with health and caring issues and we hope that everyone gets the support and help they need.

In this edition we remember, not necessarily fondly (!), the Local Government Reorganisation of 1974 and take a sharp intake of breath in the realisation that it was 50 years ago. It does not seem possible. We will be happy to hear any stories of that time from our members whether funny, sad or downright appalling. We revisit Jackie Mitchell's piece on the 1953 floods and are happy to give a big push to our AGM guests, The Common Lot. We also remind you of Voter ID rules as Local Government, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and, probably, the General Election hove into view. There is so much happening in the political world at the moment that it is extremely difficult to keep up and what may be true today will turn out to be ancient history tomorrow.

What we do know is that there is talk of abolishing National Insurance contributions and merging them into income tax. The talk is that this does not matter because NI contributions are treated as general taxation anyway. But this is not strictly true. The contributions find their way into the National Insurance Fund which is there to pay for, amongst other things, the universal State Pension. It's true that large amounts have been siphoned off to pay down debt but as of 31 March 2023 there was still over £72 billion in the fund. If it didn't exist it would be the perfect excuse to means test the state pension and call it a benefit rather than an entitlement. Remember as well that as pensioners we do not pay NI. Those of us who are taxpayers (an increasing number due to the freeze on personal tax allowances) would find ourselves paying tax at a higher rate without the guarantee of a universal state pension protected by the triple lock.

A General Election must happen by January 2025. Backnumber urges all of our readers and members to lobby candidates of all parties to ascertain their position on this vital issue and ensure that they do not vote for any candidate unable to guarantee the status quo in relation to National Insurance. Whilst we're at it, we can also quiz them on their support or otherwise for Unison's Campaign for the introduction of a National Care Service, also a vitally important matter for our members and their families.

As ever, views and comments to the editor porterjames172@gmail.com or to Unison Branch Office at County Hall, Martineau Lane, NR1 2DH.

**DON'T LOSE YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE. –
ACT NOW.**

Have your voter ID or your postal vote ready.

With the general election likely to be called at short notice this year, be prepared. The need to show voter ID was introduced to the electorate at the local elections last May. It needs to be shown if you intend to vote in person in the local elections in May and the General Election whenever that may be called.

Whilst the evidence of electoral fraud is slight, the requirement to show ID ahead of voting in person is here to stay. All voters have to show ID inside a Polling Station. Whilst no official figures were recorded, an estimated 1% of would-be voters were turned away due to incorrect or no ID. When some people were questioned later about why they had not voted, 7% cited lack of ID. A high proportion of those citing no ID were elderly, the least likely to hold a photo driving licence or current passport; both are valid as ID to vote and most commonly used. However, a local authority issued elderly person's bus pass with photo is on the government's list as being valid ID. So too is a disabled person's bus pass, a blue badge with a photo and other ID options are listed on-line or by your local election office. It does not have to be an up-to-date photo, so long as it looks like you.

If you intend to go and vote in the elections this year and you have none of the documents which can be used as ID, there are 2 other methods by which you can vote. Both will need to be obtained in advance of an election:

1. If you want to vote at a Polling Station and have no valid ID you can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. You apply by filling out the form on-line, where you need to send a recent digital photo of yourself and your National Insurance number or proof of identity with a birth certificate, bank statement, utility bill or one of the other documents listed on the form. If you are not on-line, you can ask for a paper form to be sent to you from your local council. The form will require you to still submit a small, recent photo and other proof of identity.

City Council or your local area election office by post, informing you of the May election and options for voting. If so, you should find a postal voting application form included, for you to complete and return by the deadline of 17th April 2024.

The information in this article is correct to the best of my knowledge but do check with your local council if in any doubt.

Jackie Mitchell

**LETTER TO EDITOR FROM
JANE MACKIE**

Dear Jim,
Thanks for the latest 'Backnumber' received recently. I am always pleased to hear our Norfolk News.

However, I was surprised to see the rhyme on P.4 labelled as a 'Nursery' Rhyme. This it most certainly was not. As I am sure most of your readers will know, it was a bitter comment on the injustices of the Enclosure Acts, which led to the fencing off and sale to richer landowners, of the local commons, thus depriving poorer country people of one of their main sources of income, e.g. the opportunity of keeping a goose, collecting furze etc.

It occurs to me that the best known reaction to the enclosures locally is the Kett rebellion in 1549 when a prosperous Wymondham farmer sided with the dispossessed tenants. They had been pulling down enclosure fences and hedges which had been erected to create grazing for sheep to supply wool for the Norwich cloth trade. Eventually the uprising was put down and the ringleaders, including Kett, were executed. Until recently, Kett's oak stood on the Wymondham to Norwich road.

It would be good if we could find someone to write a piece about the Enclosures for a future Edition. I would be very interested to read it.

Best wishes, Jane Mackie

RESPONSES TO JACKIE MITCHELL'S PIECE ABOUT 1953 FLOODS

Editor's Note

John Long responded to this article quickly and recommended that I contact Rupert Wilson (now living in Spain but a colleague of both John and I) as he thought he might have more to contribute. It is only because of the editor's laxity these responses appear now. Reading Rupert's contribution reminds us that the danger of flooding and coastal erosion is always with us and the experts tell us that it is only a matter of time before we see a repeat of the tragedy of the 1953 floods.

John Long writes:

"My Father PC D.Long was stationed at Burnham Market at that time and part of his beat was Burnham Overy. He played his part in rescuing people from their homes.

One of the characters at that time was the Warden at Blakeney Point - he lived there. I believe his name was Ted Eales. He is reputed to have said "I woke up one morning and all was quiet - the birds had gone so I am going to leave as well. A few hours later the tidal wave washed over his house at Blakeney Point. He was safe in a coastal village.

Rupert Wilson (last heard of in France) a Contract Officer with Social Services at County Hall said that his Father played a part in obtaining/transporting carstone for the gaps in the breaches of the bank at Wells".

Rupert Wilson writes:

"As far as the 1953 flood is concerned, I'm sorry, but I don't have any further information to add. Somewhere, filed away in a box, I have cine film footage of the '53 floods at Hunstanton, taken by my parents. I had the original film reels transferred to CD's.

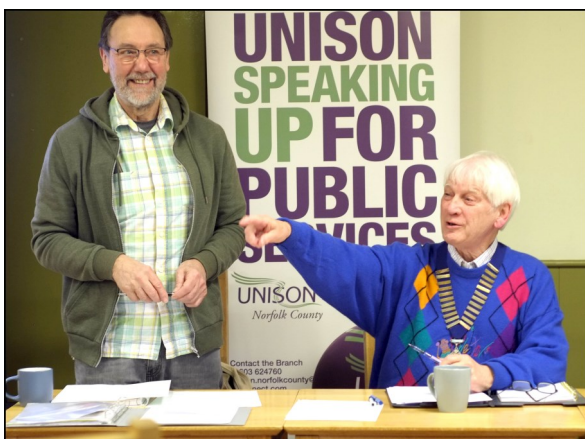
The flooding was dreadful by all accounts. The sister of my aunt (by marriage) was swept away with her baby at Heacham. After the waters receded, their drowned bodies were found up in a tree.

At the time, my father was farming his farm, at Church Farm, Bawsey. You may remember that the ruined Saxon church on the farm was the subject of one of Tony Robinson's 'Time Team' television investigations.

I might well have mentioned to Jackie that my father shipped Carrstone and other aggregates to help repair the breached sea wall at Wells, but this was during the 1978 incident.

I remember it quite well. We had stone quarries in various locations in Norfolk and were asked if we could urgently supply as much aggregate as possible. We had a continuous stream of lorries arriving to be loaded. Sometimes as many as twenty at a time in a long queue. Lorries had been commandeered from various companies to meet the demand. Speed was of the essence. We worked around the clock, with the aid of gas powered, outside lighting. By the time we finished, thousands of tons had been shifted.

I keep up to date with the sad news about the cliff houses falling into the sea at Hemsby. It's dreadful, poor people".



At the AGM
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LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION APRIL 1974

This is the 50th anniversary of the biggest reorganisation of the Local Government structure since the 19th century.

Seen from the perspective of the County Borough of Great Yarmouth the 1st April 1974 was a sad day, the council lost its "County Borough" status. As a "County Borough Council" the town was the equivalent of what today would be a Unitary Authority.

On that day Education, Highways, Trading Standards, Social Services, Fire and Health all disappeared. A few bits of the health service remained to become Environmental Health but nurses, midwives and home helps went, some to NCC and some to the NHS. The Police Force had gone a few years earlier and Civil Defence had melted away despite the Cold War. Later the motor licensing function disappeared to a new national service in Swansea.

It was a period of worry for many staff as jobs were carved up between the county and district councils and no one knew if they would have a job or be moved to Norwich. Some felt that the best jobs has been given to existing staff at County Hall and that the district staff were "slotted in" to the lesser valued jobs.

A few services were transferred into the new shrunken Yarmouth Borough Council, the refuse collection service was taken over from Lothingland and Blofield & Flegg Rural District Councils.

But the shrinkage of services provided by Yarmouth Council had started and it has been downhill all the way since.

This photograph, taken in 1977, shows council workmen clearing the two large trees that stood at the entrance to the East Anglian School for the Deaf and Blind, known to everyone as "The Blind School". The trees were blown down in a gale. One of the many schools previously managed by Gt Yarmouth CBC. Note the lack of protective clothing, no gloves or helmets and the men (no women) wore their own old clothes.



WINTER TALKS

As many of you are aware, we reintroduced our series of winter talks in October 2023 having had a three year break because of Covid. This has proved popular, with each talk having a better attendance than the one before and we are now up to averaging around 30 people at each talk. Talks have ranged from Little Snoring Airfield in war-time, to Workhouses, St Andrew's Hospital, churches and pubs of Norwich and culminating, as spring approaches, in a talk about garden bugs.

We are now actively looking to the programme for the coming year and will start with a talk about the RNLI in this their 200th year. This will be on Wednesday 23 October and will be followed in the series with talks on Carnival Costumes and the Wherry Albion amongst other things still being worked on. Watch out in future editions for the full programme.

MELTON CONSTABLE

This north Norfolk town appears in the Domesday Book as “Maeltuna” without the “Constable. This was acquired at the end of the 12th century when the land was held by the Constable of the Bishop of Norwich.

The river Bure, the longest river of the Norfolk Broads, rises here to flow through Aylsham, Coltishall, Wroxham, Horning and Acle to join the river Yare at Gt Yarmouth and then out to sea. The rural setting was changed by the development of the network of railways from the mid-19th century.



The Midland & Gt. Northern Railway, fondly known as the “muddle and go nowhere railway” carried freight and the growing crowds of holidaymakers from the Midlands. Melton Constable provided connections to Cromer and Sheringham in the north, Wroxham and Great Yarmouth in the east, Norwich and Thetford to the south and Kings Lynn and Ely to the west.

As well as the station, there was a manufacturing and engineering works which built 19 new steam locomotives and repaired many more. Marriott’s Way is a 26 mile footpath following the old railway line from Norwich to Aylsham. It is named after the MGN’s Manager.

The station finally closed in 1964 leaving only a few converted industrial buildings; railway based street names and fond memories of the rise and fall of the age of steam. The population halved between 1911 and 2011 as it ceased to be a railway town.



Melton Constable Hall was built for the Astley family around 1670 in the style of Christopher Wren. The grounds and park were designed by Capability Brown. The hall was used as the setting for the 1971 film of L P Hartley’s *The Go-Between* starring Julie Christie and Alan Bates. The story is about a young boy discovering the adult world when he carries messages between a young man from the agricultural class and a privileged young woman in late Victorian society.



PLEA FOR E MAIL ADDRESSES

In each edition we make a plea for members to provide us with their e mail addresses, if they have one, so that we can minimise the cost of production and distribution. As you will all be aware, the cost of postage continues to rocket upwards and so the more e mail addresses we can use, the better it will be for our costs. We have no intention of going “on line only” but if you can let us have your e mail address we will be very grateful.

RETIRED MEMBERS SECTION AGM 2024.

The AGM took place at the Sports and Social Club at County Hall on 21 February, attended by 26 people. All officers and committee members were re-elected with the addition of Steph Ross-Wagenknecht who is a most welcome addition. There are still 2 vacancies, at least one of which must be filled by a woman. We are happy to consider self nominations, so, if you are interested please contact us (details below). Thanks are due to Verity Gibson and David Button for refreshments and to Bidy Rawlence for organising lunch from The Feed.

The highlight of the AGM was a presentation by the street theatre group Common Lot which was given by Sam Floyd and our former member Maggie Wheeler. They were extremely entertaining and informative. Maggie talked about the work she had been doing with alternative blue plaques, (Rosie's Plaques, named after Rosie the Riveter) which were being affixed to various buildings to commemorate the work of women who had not otherwise been acknowledged. As many of those buildings are listed, the plaques are temporary in nature and able to be removed but it means a lot of publicity and recognition for the work of women in and around Norfolk. They have also been working with other groups around the country doing similar work. They also have some allotments, wonderfully names The Common Plot and have a skills and sharing shop at 185, Drayton Road, Norwich. Sam and Maggie also talked about the work of the group: how all performances are in the open air and free to attend and how they celebrate local working class history particularly around Mile Cross in Norwich where they are based. Apparently the best place to perform in Norwich is in Anglia Square, which is a natural amphitheatre and perfect for the work of the Group. Maggie and Sam were hugely enthusiastic about the group and they welcome volunteers to do all sorts of things.

If you are interested in their work they have a website thecommonlot.org and can be contacted at The Phoenix Centre, Mile Cross Road, Norwich, NR3 2LD. Email hello@thecommonlot.org and telephone 07896 781574. They are very well worth following.

SHORT MAT BOWLS



Interest has been expressed in re-starting short mat bowl on Monday mornings. We need a few more players to make this viable so if you are interested please get in touch with us at

porterjames172@gmail.com

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.

We have a vacancy on the Committee for someone to represent us on the Sports and Social Committee. If you are interested, please contact the editor.

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

The Branch Office will not be reopening, but post and telephones are being monitored.

The retired members e-mail address at County Hall is Retiredmembers.norfolkcounty@btconnect.com