Going Underground

Inside this issue: Meet me by the entrance of the Tube – District 8 special report plus ASLEF in action at the TUC march; the STUC; Tracy Aarons; Welsh Labour; Ebro; and the Canterbury Tales
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WE CAN, and always will, strive to do, and be, better and a number of events I have attended recently have brought home that we do not thank our officers and representatives enough. The constant barrage of phone and email communication that impacts on their personal lives shows their dedication should not be underestimated and the comparative levels of success, when you hear what is happening elsewhere, is stunning. So, on behalf of all of us, may I take this opportunity to thank you.

You will see from reading the Journal that we have been busy at the STUC, Welsh Labour Party, May Day, and TUC rally. At the Scottish TUC our motions were successful; this was also the case at the WLP and it is our intention to continue to campaign and lobby to make our case for the industrial and other issues that affect our members everywhere.

I was glad to see people turn out for May Day – International Workers’ Day – particularly from Salisbury, a city reliant on tourism, that hasn’t had the support from central government it needs to help it recover from the Novichok incident, as I learned when attending their CLP recently. It does no harm to remind ourselves that no one has ever given us anything. We have had to fight for rights, recognition, terms and conditions, and those who did the job before us have given us the platform, and the voice, we seek to maintain today.

On a wet Saturday tens of thousands of trade unionists and members of civil society came together to challenge austerity and the damage it is doing; it is great to be part of a wider movement but even better to be there with a large contingent of ASLEF members and their families with banners held high, even in the rain. Thank you!

Finally, two big announcements. First, the digital railway. From the way it was trumpeted you would think it was happening tomorrow. Of five pronouncements four were to do with HS2 and the other the south end of the East Coast. Mark Carne was more realistic when, interviewed on BBC, he said it will take 10-15 years. No wonder he is moving on!

Second, the consultation on the £55 million rail fares in this country, something we have highlighted for the best part of two decades, but it is only a consultation and apparently has to be revenue neutral. So let’s not get too excited!

Yours fraternally

Mick Whelan, general secretary
Marching to Mars

SLEF members and retired members from England, Scotland and Wales – the three nations of the United Kingdom in which this trade union organises – joined thousands of other activists in central London on Saturday 12 May to march from Victoria Embankment to a rally in Hyde Park.

The TUC, which represents 5.5 million workers in 49 trade unions, organised the day of action to demand a new deal for working people.

‘We’re marching because real wages are still lower than before the financial collapse in 2008,’ said AGS Simon Weller, who sits on the general council of the TUC. ‘Because three million workers are stuck on zero hour contracts, in agency work, and in low paid, and artificial, self-employment. Because hardworking public servants haven’t had a proper pay rise for eight years. Because our NHS is at breaking point. And because years of Tory cuts have led to poverty, homelessness and despair.’

‘I am proud that members of my trade union, who work for the train and freight operating companies, now have decent terms and conditions,’ said GS Mick Whelan. ‘But the money we earn – and the t&cs we have won – weren’t granted by God or beneficent employers. They were fought for, very hard, by our officers, reps, and members. Members of our union – and 96% of the train drivers in Britain belong to ASLEF – know the value of belonging to a strong trade union and the value of solidarity in struggle. And that’s why we are marching today. To show solidarity with other workers.’

Speakers in Hyde Park included Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn; Unite GS Len McCluskey; Unison GS Dave Prentis; CWU GS Dave Ward; PCS GS Mark Serwotka; and TSSA GS Manuel Cortes.

ALL ABOARD
Cliff Blackwell, Ripple Lane RMS, who trades as Frightliner, sent the Journal this pic with the dry observation: ‘Even the road train in Llandudno last bank holiday weekend had a conductor guard on board.’

FAILING GRAYLING PROMISES DIGITAL RAILWAY FOR BRITAIN
Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has pledged that all new trains and signalling will be made digital in a bid ‘to reduce overcrowding, cut delays, and upgrade the UK’s Victorian era railway network.’ GS Mick Whelan said: ‘We welcome all investment in Britain’s railways, but I note that Chris Grayling, and the DfT, have always over-promised and under-delivered so I’ll believe it when I see it.’

WATCHDOG SLAMS TRAIN COMPANIES
Transport Focus, the independent watchdog, has criticised the privatised train companies – and Network Rail – for not giving passengers sufficient warning of engineering works. ‘The timetable on some parts of the railway just can’t be relied on,’ says TF chief Anthony Smith.

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QUOTE…
‘The rail network is the most reliable it has ever been, with fewer delays caused by infrastructure failures.’ – Mark Carne, chief executive, Network Rail

…UNQUOTE

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Issues with rail companies’ fares shake-up are DfT regulates peak fares not rail companies. It’s a consultation. These problems have been evident for years. Feels like a lobbying exercise to govt & travellers.
Tom Edwards

I also tweet this standing on a packed train leaning on a bin – it also won’t address capacity!
Tom Edwards

The referendum campaign was asymmetric warfare, in which Remain had to defend 40+ years of EU membership, while Leave was able to mount constant attacks and defend nothing. They couldn’t get away with that in a 2nd referendum – hence their desire to avoid one.
Robert Harris

Amber Rudd must have the worst memory in politics if she can’t recall her signed letter to Theresa May raising a deportation target.
Kevin Maguire

Rudd-erless. She’s quit.
Kevin Maguire
Oh, you don’t get me
I’m part of the union

SLEF activists from around the country joined GS Mick Whelan, AGS Simon Weller, executive committee members Marz Colombini and Howard Kaye, and district organisers Finn Brennan, Dicky Fisher and Graham Morris on the traditional May Day march in central London.

Members met at 11am on Tuesday 1 May at Clerkenwell Green, hard by ASLEF’s head office in St John Street, an area with strong historical radical roots. Wat Tyler camped here during the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381 and George Loveless, the first of the Tolpuddle Martyrs to return to these shores after transportation to Australia for having the temerity to form a trade union, came back to a heroes’ welcome on Clerkenwell Green in 1838.

ASLEF marchers, together with activists from other UK trade unions, workers from other countries, students, pensioners, and anti-austerity campaigners, moved off at 1pm, making their way via Clerkenwell Road, Kingsway, Aldwych and the Strand to a rally in Trafalgar Square where speakers included Louise Regan of the NEU; Zita Holbourne of the PCS; Sean McGovern of Unite; Kelly Rogers of RECTU; and Mick Cash of the RMT.

QUOTE…
‘David Miliband is Davos Man incarnate.’
– Bagehot in The Economist
…UNQUOTE

WIELDER OF WORDS
Southeastern announced the new timetable, from 20 May, with the relentlessly upbeat – and risible – claim that this offered, er, ‘new journey opportunities from many stations’. Cue laughter from commuters and mutters of ‘Who signs off this sh*t?’

CONFERENCES & RALLIES
The Durham Miners’ Gala is on Saturday 14 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near Dorchester, is from Friday 20 to Sunday 22 July. The 150th Trades Union Congress is at the Manchester Central convention complex from Sunday 9 to Wednesday 12 September. The Labour Party conference is at the Arena & Convention Centre in Liverpool from Sunday 23 to Wednesday 26 September. The STUC women’s conference is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Monday 29 to Tuesday 30 October.

500 CLUB: D Turner, with number 58, won the May draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £390.

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Off the Rails

ROBIN LAURANCE recalls an encounter with John Price, editor of Thomas Cook’s European Rail Timetable. ‘Someone wanted to know how to get by train from Oslo to Palermo and Price had the most extraordinary memory. “Well,” he said, the concentration etched on his forehead. “You leave Oslo at 22.40, arrive in Copenhagen for breakfast. Take the 10.15 to Hamburg, have lunch on the train, be in Hanover in time for tea, and in Frankfurt for a quick bite, before catching the 21.19 Italia Express to Rome. You will be in Rome at 14.05 the next day which gives you time to see some sights before hopping on the 17.00 for Palermo”. There was a pause and, for the first time, Price referred to his timetable. “My mistake. That Italia Express at 21.19, it leaves at 21.18”.

MARK CARNEY believes ‘Marx and Engels may again become relevant’. Speaking at a conference on economic growth in Canada, the Governor of the Bank of England said new technology, artificial intelligence and automation are forcing down wages and encouraging firms to make workers redundant. ‘If you substitute platforms for textile mills, machine learning for steam engines, Twitter for the telegraph, you have exactly the same dynamics as existed 150 years ago when Karl Marx was scribbling the Communist Manifesto.’

THEATER KONSTANZ on Lake Constance in southern Germany, near the border with Switzerland, controversially offered free tickets to its new drama Mein Kampf, based on the life of Adolf Hitler, which opened on 20 April, the führer’s birthday, to anyone wearing a Nazi swastika armband. Those who paid for a ticket got to wear a Star of David instead. The playhouse said the wheeze was designed to show how easily people can be corrupted. Left-wing and Jewish groups deemed it ‘tasteless’, ‘unacceptable’, and ‘moronic’.

IAN MARTIN, the Emmy-award winning comedy writer who worked on The Death of Stalin, Veep, and The Thick of It – he was hired by Armando Iannucci as ‘swearing consultant’ – reflects wistfully, in the New Statesman, about a time ‘when local authorities had money and power and scope’. Adding, darkly, ‘It was in 1979, just before Margo from The Good Life swept to power to crush the unions, hobble the councils, and hold a fire sale of everything publicly owned.

BARRY GARDINER, Labour MP for Brent North, is still in the sticky stuff for describing Keir Starmer’s six-point Brexit plan as ‘bollocks’. Perhaps he should listen to his wife, the poet Caroline Smith, who muses, ‘Poets and artists can harness the power of words to change public opinion in a positive way.’

DAVID MILIBAND, putative leader of a new centre party described by John McDonnell as ‘of the rich, by the rich and for the rich – for the few, not the many’ was dubbed Brains by Alastair Campbell. Not, as Tony Blair supposed, because of Miliband’s intelligence, but because Alastair thought he looked like the Thunderbirds puppet.
My heart’s in the Highlands

GEORGE MITCHELL, h&s rep, Glasgow branch, reports from the STUC

WOULD like to thank my brothers and sisters in Glasgow branch for nominating me to attend the 121st Scottish Trades Union Congress at the Macdonald Highlands Hotel in Aviemore from Monday 16 to Wednesday 18 April. I attended with Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland, and Yoker branch member Derek Lowrie. Also present, as visitors, were GS Mick Whelan and EC member Hugh Bradley.

It was, as always, both educational and informing to hear of other issues from the delegates of other trade unions. We had three motions to move. Kevin delivered a speech regarding no extension of driver only operation in Scotland and, after some late alterations, I spoke on the collapse of rail freight in Scotland while Derek spoke on the issue of affordable social housing. All motions were well received in the hall and were carried. Richard Leonard, Labour Party leader in Scotland, received a standing ovation for his speech about his future plans for the party.

It was a great forum and a great pleasure to be mixing with the wide range of ages present, from youngsters just starting out on their working lives to retired members with a lifetime of trade unionism behind them.

Hearts and heads

EC president Tosh McDonald made a moving valedictory address to MPs and members at ASLEF’s parliamentary reception in the Terrace Pavilion at the House of Commons on Tuesday 15 May.

Tosh will step down from the executive committee, to which he was elected in November 2004, at the end of this year, shortly before he retires from the railway. GS Mick Whelan, in a warm tribute, which brought a tear to the eyes of both men, praised his enormous contribution to this trade union. Shadow Transport Secretary Andy McDonald thanked us for our help and looked forward to the day when Britain has a publicly, rather than privately, run railway.

Our annual reception, hosted by Jo Stevens, Labour MP for Cardiff Central, and chair of the ASLEF parliamentary group, is a chance for EC members, DOs, reps and activists to put our views directly to MPs, peers, and other opinion formers at Westminster.

Failing Grayling pulls the plug

GS Mick Whelan has condemned the failure of rail privatisation – and the Tories’ flawed franchise model – after Transport Secretary Chris Grayling announced he had pulled the plug on the East Coast rail franchise. It is the third time in ten years that a private company has hiked up the east coast main line. In contrast, when it was run in the public sector, East Coast returned £1 billion to the Treasury.

‘This shows what we have been saying all along – that Britain’s railways should be run, successfully, as a public service, not for private profit. Because they can’t do it. Virgin and Stagecoach have managed reverse alchemy – by turning gold into base metal, and profits into losses on the east coast.

‘This is just the latest of a long line of failures by the Transport Secretary, Failing Grayling, as he is known throughout the rail industry, who has to resign after yet another disaster in his watch.’

NETWORK RAIL TARGETS 10 MILLION TREES TO FELL

Network Rail has used drones to identify ‘hotspots’ where trees could cause problems – either by branches falling onto the track or the much ridiculed, but dangerous, ‘leaves on the line’. NR is removing the trees in a felling programme condemned as ‘excessive’ by environmental groups.

Uber’s self-drive shame fatality

A United States National Transportation Safety Board investigation into a self-drive fatality in Arizona has found that Uber’s modified Volvo XC90 SUV detected a pedestrian crossing the street but did not react. Elaine Herzberg, 49, was killed when the vehicle hit her at 40mph. Although the car’s sensors detected the woman, it decided ‘to ignore objects in its path which might prove to be false positives’.

STEAM RAILWAY FINE D £40,000

The South Devon Railway Trust, a heritage rail operator, has been fined £40,000 after a three-year-old boy almost fell through a hole in the floor of a toilet cubicle. Ian Prosser, chief inspector of railways, said the company took ‘an exceptionally casual approach to ensuring the safety of its passengers’.

ETF USES ASLEF GUIDE

The European Transport Workers’ Federation has adopted ASLEF’s policy guide for cab design and ergonomics drawn up by EC7 Andy Hudd and Mick Holder of ASLEF’s health & safety department.

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Quote...

‘Rail passengers have struggled for far too long with a confusing ticketing system that can make it hard to pay the right fare, so passenger focused reform of the fare system is long overdue.’ – Alex Hayman of Which? ...UNQUOTE
Men of Harlech
IAN THOMPSON reports from the Welsh Labour Party conference in Llandudno

SLEF delegates to the Welsh Labour Party conference at the Venue Cymru in Llandudno from Friday 20 to Sunday 22 April were District 7 Organiser Brian Corbett and Ian Thompson, ATW company council secretary, accompanied by general secretary Mick Whelan.

The ASLEF motion to conference, on rail freight in Wales, was presented by Brian Corbett and gratefully seconded by Cheryl O’Brien of our sister trade union the TSSA. He thanked those who have listened to our fears and championed the freight cause, including First Minister Carwyn Jones; Geraint Davies, Labour MP for Swansea West; Julie James, Assembly Member for Swansea West, Leader of the House and Chief Whip; and Jo Stevens, Labour MP for Cardiff Central and chair of our Parliamentary group.

He highlighted the ‘off the cliff edge’ collapse in coal freight, the fall in steel freight tonnage, along with government ignorance, perhaps wilful, that rail freight transportation delivers 76% less CO2 emissions than equivalent journeys by HGVs on Britain’s roads.

Brian also highlighted one of the problems with the light rail/metro that Transport for Wales and the Welsh government is considering, which is that it doesn’t carry freight. Once the opportunity to reinvestigate the Welsh freight industry is gone, it’s gone, so we should embrace this opportunity to replace the lost tonnage with new and more innovative freight opportunities presented by Welsh government procurement initiatives.

The railway has long been a supporter of Labour, not only in Wales. The railway now needs the support of Labour.

Both Brian and our motion were roundly applauded by delegates and it is pleasing to report that the resulting vote was declared as ‘clearly carried’.

QUOTE...
‘Living with Theresa May is like never being treated as a grown-up.’ - Anne McElvoy, senior editor at The Economist

…UNQUOTE

Typical Mick
It was a pleasure to attend the April Jubilee East branch meeting, with a number of retired members in attendance (thanks to Bob Wilkins). The meeting heard many reports, including one from Micky Beck on the work of trades councils. In typical Mick Beck style he convinced the branch about the benefits of affiliating, which naturally happened.

A few drinks and stories were shared into the evening after the ending of the branch. It was great to catch up with old friends, and I look forward to future meetings of this kind.

Railwaymen at the Railway Tavern

‘NUMPTY’ SUMPTER
Northern Rail boss Liam Sumpter has been slammed for sending ‘aggressive’ tweets to customers, and blocking and belittling them on social media, after months of complaints about delays and overcrowding on trains.

GWR GHOST TRAINS
GWR has been slammed by passenger groups for running ‘ghost trains’ after it was revealed that new Hitachi intercity express trains are travelling long distances on services between London and South Wales with half their carriages locked, and empty, while the other half are packed, and overcrowded, with passengers. Bosses blamed ‘staffing problems’.

MYSTIC MARK
Mark Carne, the soon-to-depart chief executive of Network Rail, says 24 hours a day trains could be the future – but neglected to say when engineering work, repairs and infrastructure improvements would be carried out on the system.

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Transport Benevolent Fund CIO, known as TBF, is a registered charity in England and Wales, 1160901, and Scotland, SC047016.
Racism doing exactly that – day in the capital it was also reports from the Stand up to Racism demo in London

ORE than 20,000 people joined protest marches in London, Glasgow and Cardiff on Saturday 17 March organised by Stand up to Racism.

We were protesting against all forms of racism and discrimination including Islamophobia, far right groups, the Grenfell Tower fire, and leaders of countries, like President Trump, who has made immigration his number one priority, affecting many law-abiding citizens.

We heard powerful and passionate speeches from David Lammy, the Labour MP for Tottenham: Moysa Samuels of Justice4Grenfell, who spoke about the discrimination faced by families in the aftermath of that devastating fire; and Irish historian Geoff Bell, who talked about the shadow of fear created by the ‘gains for far right parties in Europe.’

We set off from BBC Broadcasting House and wound our way through central London to Parliament Square. Along the way, with music, it was a friendly carnival atmosphere. ASLEF had a presence with Dave Calfe, executive committee member for District 6 and EC vice-president; DO6 Dicky Fisher; Peter Acheampong, a Heathrow Express driver, and District 7 BEM committee rep; Mick Byrne of Bletchley branch; and me.

While it was definitely a cold day in the capital it was also warming to know there are organisations like Stand up to Racism doing exactly that – standing up to racism.

Franchise system is bust say MPs

GS Mick Whelan welcomed a cross-party committee report into franchising published on 27 April.

MPs slammed the Department for Transport and described Britain’s privatised railway as ‘broken’. ‘The franchising model is broken,’ said Meg Hillier, chair of the cross-party committee, ‘and passengers are paying the price.’

Mick said: ‘There are times when we do not want to be proved right – as we want our industry, the rail industry, to be at the heart of the economic regeneration of this country – but this report, which is a devastating indictment of the failed franchising system, shows that we were right all along.

‘This report recognises what we have been saying for years – that this flawed, dogma-driven, model is not fit for purpose and is, indeed, on the verge of collapse.

‘It is now time that those responsible should not only be highlighted, but held to account. As we stagger towards another period of mismanaged decline, we believe that taxpayers, passengers, and those of us who work on the railway, and who loyally support the industry they love, deserve so much better.

‘It’s time for a fully-staffed and fully-funded railway system that works for everyone in Britain.’

FIRST IN, FIRST OUT

Three firms are in the running for the East Midlands rail franchise from August 2019 after FirstGroup-Trenitalia pulled out. The joint venture – 70% First, 30% Trenitalia – threw in the towel to concentrate on the West Coast partnership. That leaves Abellio, Arriva, and Stagecoach, the incumbent, which has run the route since 2007.

Unison AGS Roger McKenzie and Ed d’Bell fly the ASLEF flag while one young woman reminds us that ‘Laundry is the only thing that should be separated by colour’

What Brexit means for freight

The House of Commons Transport Select Committee has launched an inquiry into the effect of Brexit on freight. Lilian Greenwood, Labour MP for Nottingham South, and committee chair, said: ‘We’ve heard a lot about customs arrangements, border controls, tariffs and trade deals. But we haven’t heard enough about transport infrastructure, policy and regulatory implications affecting freight operators and their customers.

‘But from day one after Brexit, we will all expect our goods to turn up and for life to continue as normal. While agreement for a transitional period to December 2020 is welcome, there remains a great deal of uncertainty for UK freight operators and their customers.

‘The implications of Brexit will vary across freight modes and types of freight. We want the sector to tell us what’s worrying them, and what is required to make this work to prepare for both the challenges and opportunities of Brexit.

LAST OF THE LINE

Longsight legend Mel Thorley dug out this old copy of the Locomotive Journal, from December 1957, with a picture of the last steam loco built in Donny – a BR Standard Class 4 2-6-0 mixed traffic locomotive No 76114. ‘Now we get our locos from anywhere,’ mutters Mel, ‘so long as it’s not Doncaster.’

QUOTE...

‘After the catastrophic experience in Iraq, there was no appetite in the West in 2013 for intervention in Syria.’

– Jeremy Bowen, Middle East editor at the BBC
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Spinning yarns at Stone, Staffs

BILL DALE of the Retired Members’ Section committee, and Chingford branch, reports on the RMS spring forum

The RMS spring forum – the first of our biannual events – was held at Yarnfield Park near Stone in Staffordshire from 6 to 8 April.

Ray Jackson, chair, welcomed us and hoped everyone would participate in the discussions and debate. Apologies were received from the G5, who was in Australia, and we observed a minute’s silence in memory of Ron Kennedy, a well-known figure in many areas, and stalwart of this union.

Our first speaker was District 3 Organiser Colin Smith who, ahead of his retirement in May, reflected on the past, present, and future of the railway. He said he was proud to be the first officer of the union to take Employer Justified Retirement Age. EJRA is progressing very well in the districts, but we have some drivers up to 68 years old still driving trains on the main line. RMS members have left a legacy for younger drivers, who have benefited from our struggle to reduce working hours from 48 to 35 and increase wages from £11,700 in 1997 to up to £60,000 now. He hoped members would continue the fight for better terms and conditions.

Colin stayed on to contribute to the debate on social care. Members gave their experiences, which created a really good discussion, and thanked Colin for not only his passion but also remaining for the rest of the afternoon session. We all wish him a long and happy retirement and hope to welcome him into the RMS.

Our first speaker on Saturday was Katrina Rowan, personal injuries officer at Thompsons solicitors in Nottingham, who spoke about the dangers of asbestos. She said the success of any claim depends on the evidence, so speed and detail are essential. Claims are dealt with at the Royal Courts of Justice and home or hospital visits can be arranged.

We had an open session dealing with the RMS, outlining aims and objectives, plus the constitution. A good debate was had and a number of suggestions offered as food for future thought. We discussed whether the RMS membership fee is too low and decided to leave it as it is. We also debated whether we should make the charge higher than £20 for members attending our forums, but again it was felt that there is no need currently.

Our first speaker on Sunday was Mark Hopper of the CWU who gave us the history of his union’s battles with the Royal Mail, first, to stop it being privatised and, second, to secure the best deal for members. The union, which wanted no sell off, outsourcing or franchising, no more zero hours contracts or redundancies, campaigned on the four pillars of pensions, wages, structure, and a shorter working week. When it went to ballot Royal Mail wanted members to say no, but they voted yes by 81%. The pay deal reached was 9% over three years, with a shorter working week, new pension structure, and safeguards for new and current members. On the question of merging with another union, he smiled and said without doubt it would be ASLEF, and members thanked him for his time.

Our last speaker was William Walker, a young man (the youngest speaker we have ever had) who is secretary of East Staffordshire Trades Council, of which his dad Paul (an RMT member) is chair. William is passionate about rekindling the trades council to become more involved and proactive on both local and national issues. He feels there needs to be a closer working relationship between trades councils and the TUC. He concluded by referring to the Merseyside dispute to keep guards on the train and the fantastic 100% support given by ASLEF members.

On track with apprentices

SHIRLEY HANDSLEY, ASLEF Education co-ordinator, on our charter for apprentices

ASLEF joined MTR Crossrail on Wednesday 7 February to celebrate the milestone of the 200th trainee joining the train driver apprenticeship programme. The company signed ASLEF’s charter for apprentices, which aims to support high quality schemes across the industry, at the event. It is the first train operator to do so.

The 18 month apprenticeship, introduced in February 2016, runs alongside the TOC’s normal train driver programme and offers additional skills and a qualification to those who opt in. The programme has been delivered through a partnership with the training provider Train’d Up which provides assessors and functional skills tutors and ensures the programme delivers candidates taught to a high industry standard.

District 5 Organiser Nigel Gibson and ASLEF Education co-ordinator Shirley Handsley joined MTR Crossrail managing director Steve Murphy and some of the first candidates to receive their qualifications.

Nigel applauded the company’s commitment to learning and working collaboratively. ‘We are very pleased to have had the opportunity to work with MTR Crossrail in delivering driver apprenticeships and believe that the ASLEF charter for apprentices provides a platform from which all train operators can move forward. The fact that MTR Crossrail is the first in the industry to sign up is an indication that working collaboratively can have positive benefits and deliver for our members and company employees alike!’

Steve Murphy said: ‘In a project where there are so many exciting developments, it’s really important to recognise the fantastic achievements of our people and the training and development that goes into successfully running a railway. The trainee train driver apprenticeship has been a great success and celebrating the 200th driver is special. There really are so many talented individuals joining the railway for the future. The support of our friends at Train’d Up, ESFA and ASLEF has been fantastic and much appreciated and we look forward to continuing our relationships moving forward.’
Protect your future – get down to the branch meeting

District 8 Organiser FINN BRENNAN reflects on how TFL managers are selling passengers and staff short – and letting down the London Mayor

HEN Sadiq Khan was elected Mayor of London, I argued that there was a unique opportunity to reset industrial relations on London Underground and move to a culture of solving problems by dialogue rather than disputes. Sadly, it was an opportunity that senior management at TFL chose not to take.

Of course, it is good that, after eight years of the arrogant and inept stewardship of Boris Johnson, frittering away farepayers’ money on celebrity driven vanity projects, we have a Labour administration that says it is committed to the values of trade unionism.

On May Day an email was sent from the London Mayor to all employees of Greater London Authority companies, including TFL, praising the achievements of trade unions, and there are regular high-level meetings to discuss transport strategy and other issues.

But, despite the nice words from City Hall, senior management at London Underground have a very different approach. They seem to relish confrontation and have little or no interest in sitting down with your reps to look for practical solutions to everyday industrial relations problems.

The reality for our members and reps, on the ground, is that every day the battle to protect our agreements gets harder. Largely, of course, this is driven by money; before he became a paid employee of the Russian oligarchs who now own the Evening Standard, George Osborne, as Chancellor of the Exchequer in David Cameron’s governments, removed TFL’s operating subsidy – making London the only major city in Europe without a subsidised transport system. Income has also been less than expected although passenger numbers have fallen less than on main line rail, perhaps due to the fares freeze.

Total savings of £4.3 billion are to be made over five years, a huge amount of money that cannot be found without affecting the safety and efficiency of the system.

The result is huge pressure on managers to drive down costs. They have been told to deliver their targets or expect to be replaced ‘by someone who will’. Hundreds of jobs have gone through the transformation programme, on top of those already lost through Fit For The Future, and virtually every role, apart from that of train operator, has seen conditions radically changed.

It would be naïve to think that train drivers will not be affected by this squeeze. Every day we get reports from members of managers trying to cut corners, ignore agreements, and unfairly pressure staff who are unwel. It seems this is just the start of a concerted campaign to undermine our conditions and agreements.

ASLEF reps do an excellent job of defending our members and we will never hesitate to support industrial action when it is needed. But we know that we can only do so if we have the firm support of our members. Reps at any level do not have a magic wand that can sort out problems. Branch resolutions and appeals to justice, or common sense, unless backed up by members ready and willing to take action to back up their words, will achieve little.

We have hard fights coming and difficult decisions to make. Nothing is ever achieved by sitting around the mess room moaning or having a whinge on social media. But an active and engaged membership, supporting your elected reps, will mean we have the strength to protect, and improve, our conditions for the future.

District and Jubilee disputes

I was proud to join members at Acton Town on the picket line when they took action in April. Despite the management and media spin, this is a continuing fight to ensure policies and procedures are applied fairly to every driver. Our reps at Acton, Matt Bright and Paul Julian, deserve congratulations for the strong stance they have taken, and the support shown from members.

This is a classic example of a dispute that could have been easily resolved if management were prepared to take a common sense approach and work with us to find a resolution. But, just as they have on the Jubilee line, in our dispute over the imposition of new rosters, management have chosen to pick a fight rather than to sit down and negotiate a way forward. Well done to all our members who were ready to face the challenge!

Light rail vehicles – not buses on rails

ASLEF has consistently argued that the root cause of the tragic derailment at Sandilands was a management and regulatory culture that saw trams as ‘buses on rails’ rather than light rail vehicles. It is a position proved right by the RAIB investigation. If tram windows were constructed to the same standard as passenger rail vehicles, most if not all the lives lost would have been saved. A previous report from the RAIB to the DfT on this issue was ignored; again, it is almost certain that nothing will be done to address this issue this time.

The RAIB report did recommend steps toward an automatic tram protection system, but it is unclear when this will happen, and the current proposal is to introduce this at ‘high risk’ locations only. Instead, huge pressure is put on drivers who operate on a line of sight system.

We have now agreed a new non-disciplinary approach to incidents that will encourage reporting and create a stronger safety culture. Drivers should receive support, and additional training, rather than threats and warnings if they are unlucky enough to be involved in an incident. But, while this is a welcome step forward, there is a long way to go until our members feel properly recognised and rewarded for their role. Val Shawcross, Deputy Mayor for Transport at City Hall, attended a Tramlink branch meeting in March. Val has been a long-term friend of ASLEF, and we wish her well as she has recently announced that she is retiring from the post.

Val Shawcross at the Tramlink branch in March...
Looking to improve life at the front of the train

MAEVE HANLEY, trains functional council, reports on a shift in the way the company treats drivers

I HAVE been on the TFC for five years now; the role has so many facets to it, from supporting local reps to dealing with members’ concerns, both in the workplace and in their private lives which, in turn, has an effect on their ability to perform their role as a driver. I am continually looking at ways to improve life at the front of the train.

There has been a major shift in the way the company treats its train operators. Any procedural errors made by drivers were usually dealt with at the lowest level; these days almost every case is pushed to a company disciplinary interview where drivers are facing the worrying possibility of being dismissed.

The number of company disciplinary interviews I have done in the last year has tripled since 2013. So far I have managed to keep the train operators both on the front of a train and within the company. Although this is not the case across the combine as there are a record number of drivers losing their driving grade.

Last year most of my time on the TFC was dedicated to resolving the finer points of the pay deal, in particular the option for drivers to work a four day week pro rata. This has resulted in 90 drivers across the combine being able to work one day less each week pro rata.

Probably the most frustrating part of life on the TFC has to be securing and maintaining flexible working patterns for drivers with management citing new timetables and more trains running per hour as one of the reasons for the removal of flexible working requests which have detrimental effects on drivers. Usually these requests are for child care reasons and, very often, requested by single parents.

I am constantly attending meetings for reviews that actually turn out to be meetings about removing the working patterns which, effectively, means that drivers are unable to find alternative child care solutions. This always results in an appeal meeting where I have managed to secure the requests; for now at least.

A big part of the TFC role involves supporting local reps. There is a current drive from management to persecute drivers who have had health problems. Drivers are being sent to occupational health for a review even though they are back on the front of a train and driving without any issues. This is being done under the guise of our attendance at work policy. Local representatives feel this is the first step in getting drivers removed from the train grade and I have been inundated with such meetings. So far these meetings have not had real outcomes.

Rather than firefighting these problems we are currently looking at ways to improve the work-life balance for drivers in order to alleviate some of the stress on the driving grade. Whilst there are constant challenges within the role of the TFC I am enjoying these and the varied and interesting workload which involves local reps and members.

When I get older, losing my hair, many years from now

GRAHAM DEAN, trains council, and an ASLEF nominated trustee of the TfL pension fund, reports on the state of pensions

EMBERS in District 8 may have been bemused recently when they received a text message from ASLEF head office advising them of issues around the 2016 actuarial valuation. This confusion was caused because this text was in relation to the Network Rail pension scheme and not the TfL pension fund of which the majority of members in our district are members.

However, as the issue is now out there I thought it may be a good time to advise members where we are. Growth in the scheme has been strong in recent years, with the value of the fund now standing at £10.4 billion. When you consider that in 2016 it was £8.2 billion then this is a fairly impressive performance.

The downside is that whilst the assets have grown so, too, have the liabilities, despite this we have still made good progress in reducing the deficit with the fund now 98.5% fully funded on the technical provision. Every three years we have to do a triennial valuation and this is due this year. This is a more thorough and detailed analysis of the financial position of the fund than we do on an ongoing basis. Work on this has already started and is planned to be completed by June 2019. At that time I should be able to give a much better informed view on the overall position of our fund.

AVCs

We have recently seen an increase in the take up of Additional Voluntary Contributions. This is an arrangement whereby members can put additional money towards their retirement, up to 10% of salary, in addition to their normal 5% pension contributions, into a defined contribution arrangement.

The main benefits are that when you come to taking your pension any money you have in AVC can be used as part of the 25% lump sum members are eligible to take, thus reducing the impact on the amount of pension you have to offset.

The other big benefit is that it is tax deductible so with pay on London Underground specifically just having gone up by 3.85% it is a good way that full time drivers can avoid (note I didn’t say evade) paying 40% tax on it.

Given the above, is it any surprise that interest in AVCs has increased? Though, as with any financial decision, it may depend on personal circumstances as to whether it’s right for you.

Death in service

As a trustee of the TfL pension fund I sit on the committee that takes the decision as to where money should be paid where members, who are still in service, pass away without...
having left an expression of wish form. This form advises the trustees to whom the member would like their death in service payment to be paid.

Whilst we spend considerable time and effort trying to decide how the member would have wanted it paid, it is clear, especially with the complicated lives that some people lead, that without an up to date instruction of where they would want it to go, we cannot always be confident that it will always be paid in accordance with what they would have wanted.

So I plead, yet again, that if you haven’t got an up to date expression of wish form, get one from the fund office and return it. If the worst should happen then you will know that those you love will be paid out promptly and in accordance with your wishes.

Management obsessed by service over safety

MARK McMULLEN of trains health and safety council reveals how LU managers have tied themselves up in knots over its much-vaunted but ill-fated hot package security process

For the last year or two ASLEF has been consulting on the LU hot package process and how an item left behind is deemed as a suspect package. LU management has consistently insisted that staff delve inside open bags to investigate further before deeming a package as suspect, mainly to avoid service delays.

Your union ASLEF has repeatedly insisted, and informed LU directors and management, that our members do not and will not be looking into packages to determine if a package is suspect – ie, a bomb – or not.

LU security heads have in the last year referred to a letter from the DfT which, they have said, instructs staff to look inside to determine if a package is suspect or not.

After many months of wrangling and discussions we have finally got to see this letter and its contents. How comical it was!

Reading through the contents, the letter clearly states that after – and only after – a package has been deemed safe should you look inside. Well, you can imagine the hysteria that broke out when this was pointed out to management who, then, insisted that they had never asked staff to look inside as part of the hot package process.

Even John Leach of our sister union the RMT was flabbergasted and asked why, then, had we been wasting the last year attending high level meetings with LU directors if this was not the case?

What’s more funny is that senior security heads informed us that, under the current process, if staff didn’t feel comfortable or confident in using the ‘hot’ process then they should ask for another member of staff to carry out the process! Well, you can imagine where this went…

Straightaway ASLEF trains health & safety council pointed out that, clearly, LU heads of security and management have been wasting everyone’s time over this as they did not understand their own process. The main aim of these instructions was to avoid service delays yet, if you as a driver are made aware of a package, and you don’t feel confident (and most of us won’t), then get someone else who is. That will most certainly cause a service delay, and that’s their own process. ASLEF trains health and safety council has always insisted that our members should have the choice to say get someone else, which is what we have been insisting all along for the last two years.

Management were unable to inform who they thought was and is the confident and qualified person who, under the process, would look inside. They even went on to show some of the training material they propose to use which had instructions about how to open a package to see its contents, with pictures of wires and batteries and notes to see if they are connected.

It is just beyond belief that LU heads of security and management seriously expect staff to do this. We don’t think even the security forces would expect any normal member of their unit to inspect that far without specialist training and equipment.

This all just goes to show how ridiculous our railway management and directors have become in order to put ‘service over safety’ and especially the safety of their own staff.

Still there is no clear or agreed way forward on the use of the LU hot package process apart from our union’s clear and concise instruction not only to its members but also to LU directors and management. ASLEF members ‘do not and will not be looking inside packages’.

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Remember the Ebro

**COLIN SMITH, District 3**
Organiser for 20 years until he retired last month, reports on a poignant visit by the North West Trade Union International Committee to the site of the Battle of Ebro

**S**

PAIN, between 1936 and 1939, was wracked by civil war. The far-right Falangist rebellion against the democratically-elected left-wing Republican government was backed by men, guns, tanks and aircraft supplied by Nazi Germany, Benito Mussolini's Italy and the fascist dictatorship of António Salazar in Portugal. General Francisco Franco began a brutal war of extermination against workers and peasants who had risen up against their oppressors. Spain was abandoned by the democracies, principally Britain and France, who feared the threat of socialism more than fascism and used a bogus 'non-intervention' ploy to disguise their duplicity. Non-intervention ensured the republic remained poorly armed, half-starved, and reliant on support from Mexico and the USSR.

**WATCHED IN HORROR**

Militarily the odds were always stacked against the Popular Front government. Across the world workers watched in horror as the fascists reached the gates of Madrid. But the working-class did more than send solidarity and aid. They formed the International Brigades. Men and women from working-class communities all over the world made their way to Spain to join the fight against fascism – with thousands making the ultimate sacrifice in a bid to stop Franco's onslaught.

In February last year a group of trade unionists and International Brigade Memorial Trust supporters in the north-west of England organised an 80th anniversary commemoration tour to Jarama near Madrid. The Battle of Jarama was crucial in saving Madrid from falling to Franco in 1937 and many International Brigade volunteers saw their first action during this epic encounter. The tour was a success, with 120 people taking part, and the organisers formed the North West Trade Union International Committee. The result was a tour to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Ebro. Between Thursday 19 and Sunday 22 April 86 activists visited the sites of the Spanish Republic’s last great offensive against the fascists.

The tour began with a visit to the Pau Casals museum on the coast, home of the world-renowned cellist, who vowed never to play his music in Spain until democracy was restored. Followed by an insightful, dramatic and moving presentation by Anna Marti on the retreat and regrouping of the US Lincoln Brigade before the battle.

On 20 April two coaches twisted their way through mountain passes to reach the famous Cave Hospital in Bisbal de Falset. Under a huge overhang of rock, set into a mountain, the wounded from the battle were treated by medical volunteers. Working under terrible conditions, with only gas lamps to light the cave, they worked tirelessly to save as many of those injured in the fighting as possible.

**PEACE AND FREEDOM**

At Gandesa, a town at the epicentre of the battle, the mayor organised a reception for our party. Tosh McDonald, ASLEF’s EC president, addressed the reception and read out a message from Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn: ‘My greetings and solidarity with everyone at the commemoration of the Battle of the Ebro. Those who suffered and died did so to ensure the people of Spain would be able to live in peace and freedom, not under the yoke of fascism. The Nazis supported Franco and his regime ruled Spain for 40 years. The Nazis went on to kill millions of Jews and others and cause over 30 million deaths in the war. They were defeated with immense sacrifice and 1945 brought liberation. Racism and fascism is raising its head again. We can never compromise with racism in any form. Unity of people gives us peace and hope. I thank the generation that fought against fascism in Spain. Their sacrifice gave us our freedoms, which we must cherish and defend. My greetings and solidarity.’

The reception was followed by a wreath laying ceremony at the memorial to the battle in the centre of Gandesa. On Saturday 21 April, with the help of informative local guides, we visited the main sites of the battlefield. We saw Hill 705 which changed hands eight times during the battle and on which so many British battalion volunteers were killed or wounded, including former TGWU leader Jack Jones. We saw the last position occupied by the British volunteers before their withdrawal in October 1938. And we paid our respects to the fallen at the Field of Memories.

Recalling the sacrifice of so many young people led us to pause, remember, and reflect. We took inspiration from the enormous effort made by those young people to halt the rise of fascism. And that breeds a spirit of solidarity and internationalism that truly lifted the spirit of the whole delegation.

At a fiesta in the village of Corbera the municipal restaurant rang out with songs and poems of resistance. Bobby Morton of Unite and Andrea Woods from Unison spoke of their determination to spread the lessons of Spain to a new generation of young activists, while Steve Farley of the PCS and Colin Smith of ASLEF pledged that the NWTUIC would build on the success of this trip to ensure more unions and more activists are drawn to its work. Jim Knotts performed a song about the inspirational struggle of the International Brigades and the fiesta ended with an uplifting rendition of the Internationale and chants of ‘No Pasaran!’

**A SOMBRE REMINDER**

On our last day we went to the old village of Corbera. The new village lies down the hill from the old because the old village has been preserved as a memorial to those who died in the battle. It was destroyed by a horrendous fascist bombardment and its ruins are a sombre reminder of the suffering of those who fought in the battle.

We paid tribute at the British battalion memorial next to the church and to the plaque honouring those Republican prisoners who were shipped to the Nazi concentration camp at Belsen. Karl and Victoria Booth, grandchildren of Sid Booth, who was wounded at Ebro, laid a wreath in a moving ceremony that fittingly closed our tour.

We learnt of the heroism of those – from Spain and beyond – who gave their all to stop the fascists. We learnt of the suffering of the Spanish people as a result of Franco’s victory. And we also learnt of the duplicity of the British and French capitalists who sold the Spanish Republic down the river. We understood the callous inhumanity of the fascists who irrigated Spain and beyond – who gave their all to stop the fascists. We learnt of the suffering of the Spanish people as a result of Franco’s victory.

Above all, everyone on the trip learnt the value of solidarity; of a commitment to stand resolutely against the bosses to ensure that fascism and reaction are stopped in their tracks today.
Trudy Aarons joined British Rail as a guard in 1989, becoming a trainee driver, and joining ASLEF, ‘because it’s a good union; a year later. KEITH RICHMOND listens as Trudy reflects on the highs and lows of 29 years on the permanent way.

Trudy with her goodbye and good luck card from Waterloo Nine Elms and long service certificate from South West Trains

It don’t matter if you’re black or white

Trudy Aarons, one of Britain’s first black women train drivers, has retired after nearly 30 years on the iron road. Trudy, 57, who worked out of Waterloo, has taken early retirement, on ill-health, from South Western Railway. ‘I never thought about becoming a train driver when I was a kid but I’d say to any young black girl, go for it, you’ll enjoy it! I have…’

Trudy was born in 1961 at Haggatt Hall, a village in the parish of St Michael, not far from the capital Bridgetown, on the sunshine island of Barbados in the Caribbean. Her parents separated and, at 16, when she finished school, she left Barbados to come to Britain and join her mother Muriel in Clapham.

A GUARD – WHAT’S THAT?
‘It was so cold!’ laughs Trudy at her home in Thornton Heath, south London. ‘Freezing! And so much rain, too. But I got used to it…’ She went to college in Vauxhall for a couple of years and then worked at the NAAFI – the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes – in Kennington for three years.

‘I left to have kids’ – Jermaine in 1981, Marvin in 1982, and Aishah in 1986; her fourth child, Shoshauna was born later, in 1998 – and then, when they were in primary school, and she wanted to go back to work, a friend said the railway was recruiting guards.

‘And I said, what’s that? At school, back in Barbados, I was good at Maths and History and thought of nursing. Never about driving trains. But then there are no trains on Barbados! It’s an island, 21 miles by 14 miles, and people use buses or cars. Not trains. But I applied for it – I thought I’d give it a go – and was taken on by Jim Turner, the manager at Waterloo.’

She joined British Rail – she was Trudy Thorne then – as a guard on 3 January 1989. Times were different then and it wasn’t easy to be a woman in what, traditionally, had been a male-dominated industry. It wasn’t easy to be black in Britain; Enoch Powell’s infamous ‘rivers of blood’ speech cast a long shadow and the far-right, in the form of the National Front, were on the march. And it isn’t always easy to deal with passengers who can be abusive, especially when drink has been taken.

‘I might have been lucky, but I can remember only one incident of racism when I was a guard – and that was from a driver. I’d done a turn to Guildford and the driver accused me of leaving the door open from his cab into the carriage – which I hadn’t, I’d walked down outside, not inside, the train. He buzzed me and said, “Come and close the f***ing door” and I said, “Are you talking to me?” I walked down the train, and he said, “You left the f***ing open. You’re all the f***ing same. Why don’t you go back where you came from and swing through the trees?” I walked off the train, told the supervisor, and said I wasn’t going to work the train back to Waterloo with him. There was a meeting, with the driver, and he was reprimanded for making racist remarks.

STAND UP FOR MYSELF
‘Some of the other stuff was about women working. Some men seemed to think, back then, that women should be chained to the kitchen sink. But times have changed and most men now accept women in the workplace, as equals, doing the job.

‘I’ve always been able to get along with people, but have never been afraid to stand up for myself – I’ll give as good as I get! – but I’ve found that my race, and gender, have rarely been a problem on the railway where it’s not difficult to be a woman of colour.’

After a year as a guard Trudy started training to become a driver. ‘They were talking about DOO and I could see that the guard’s job I’d been doing, which I’d enjoyed, was going to go. I passed at the second attempt – I failed the first time, over paddling up, when I lifted the shoes off the rails – but was really excited when I got my key.’

She worked suburban services out of Waterloo – to stations like Hampton Court – on Class 63s, 57s, 50s, 45s, 450s, 456s and 444s and candidly confesses: ‘I preferred the older stock – like the 63 – the old slam door trains, because the braking system was a lot better, to the new trains.’

IT’S A COLOURED LADY
As a driver, at the pointy end of the train, Trudy didn’t have much contact with the public. ‘But there were times when passengers would pass by the cab, or see me getting in or out, and say “Oh, look, it’s a coloured lady.” I’d just smile because it wasn’t racist, people were just a little surprised.

‘Because, back then, I think I was British Rail’s first black woman train driver, so I blazed a trail, in a way. Now there are more women driving trains, and more black faces, too.’

Trudy retired on 14 April after 29 years on the railway working for British Rail, South West Trains, and South Western. ‘I’ve had a good run, but I’ve had some medical problems – tennis elbow meant I was taken off 450s and 444s – I didn’t want redeployment and was offered medical retirement.’

She won’t be bored. Trudy has four children and six grandchildren – pictures of whom feature prominently in her sitting room – and with a golden reputation at Waterloo for her fabulous Caribbean cooking – specialities include fried chicken, jerk chicken, curried goat, steamed fish, and pepper prawns – hopes to expand her catering business.

‘I’ve already done a wedding for 500 people and Jermaine’s getting married next year and is inviting 400! Will he get a mate’s rate? He might do…’

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**Pint or few at the Railway Tavern**

The annual Stratford Tavern reunion took place at the Railway Tavern in Stratford on 21 April, expertly organised by Chris Daughters. Many attendees gathered to reminisce and catch up with former colleagues and friends.

While most had already joined the retired link, there were plenty of active members travelling from far and wide to congregate over a pint or few, and exchange a yarn with comrades. The Tavern, as always, gave us a warm welcome, laid on a handsome buffet, and Chris’ infamous raffle (thanks to those who donated prizes).

We were joined by DOS Nigel Gibson and ECS Howard Kaye who made presentations to members for their long and loyal service to the union. Dennis Saville, who turns 90 in August, and is currently Stratford’s oldest member, took early retirement from the railway in 1983, but rejoined ASLEF (the RMS) in 2003, was presented with a badge. Other members receiving badges on the night were: R Allwood (35 years); C Nelson (40); A Hill (45); M Cargill and P Webb (50); and D Brennand who retired from Southend Victoria, but spent the early part of his career at Stratford, so we were pleased to present him with his 45 year badge.

Other branch members attaining membership badges (and who will receive theirs locally, at their respective depots, or through the post) include S Floyd, M Graves, K Haddon, D Hawley, J Thorne (5 years); D Dawson (10); A Luckin, T Stedman (15); I Drake (25); N Bunt (40); S Chaudhri (45); M Ashworth (50).

**Branch News**

**Educate, agitate, organize**

The 21st annual STUC black workers’ conference – with the theme ‘educate, agitate, organize’ – was held at the Golden Jubilee Hotel in Clydebank. Conference was opened by Michael Anderson of the Union of Shop, Distributive & Allied Workers. Guest speaker was Grahame Smith, general secretary of the STUC, who spoke about the public sector pay gap, Brexit, public services, the Prime Minister; and thanked the black workers’ committee for all their hard work. Satnam Ner of Intermodal side of the company, thanked the black workers’ committee for all their hard work. Satnam Ner of ASLEF thought with the current situation regarding matters and the issues we have being generic, it would be of benefit to meet with the business councils and all reps from both companies in Manchester on 9 March. EC6 Dave Calfe chaired the meeting and EC3 Andy Hourigan spoke about his role in the dispute regarding CDP. Andy explained that he had made it clear to the company that the situation, as it was, would have to end and fall in line with what ASLEF proposed. Andy and Nigel explained how the new CDP would be rolled out, with training for all our local reps to follow. Nigel gave an update on MFA, pensions, talks regarding a new driver grade, and t&cs, too.

Two presentations were made to members. The first was to Bro Daren Morgan, BC rep for Heavy Haul; this was Daren’s last meeting before moving to the Intermodal side of the business. Nigel thanked Daren for all his hard work in the past and I am sure his experience will be of use in the future. The second was to Bro Paul Greensmith, a driver at Guide Bridge for Heavy Haul, unfortunately, due to ill health, Paul is retiring from driving and we wish him all the best for the future. I have known Paul for 20 years and it has been a pleasure to know and work with him. On behalf of Nigel and both business councils, I thank all reps for attending, Dave for chairing the meeting and Andy for his speech.

**Upcoming events**

- **WILLESDEN – THURSDAY 7 JUNE**
  - The 1A summer reunion is at the Watford Ex-Services & Social Club, 12-14 St Albans Road, Watford (five minutes from Watford Junction) from 14.00 to 18.00.

- **DERBY – FRIDAY 8 JUNE**
  - Four shed reunion from 15.00 to 21.00 at the Diamond Jubilee Hall, Nunsfield House Community Association, 33 Boulton Lane, Alvaston, Derby, DE24 0FD. Hot food and raffle.

- **LEICESTER – SATURDAY 9 JUNE**
  - Annual reunion from 12.00 at the Marquis of Wellington, 139 London Road, Leicester, LE2 1EF. All welcome.

- **OLD OAK COMMON – TUESDAY 12 JUNE**
  - From 13.00 at the AGV CLUB, Ponderosa, Alwyn Gardens, Acton, London, W3 OJH. Anyone with OOC history welcome.

- **LONDSIGHT – THURSDAY 18 OCTOBER**
  - Reunion at the Navigation Railway BRSA club, next to Navigation Road station, from 13.00. Always a great event.

- **Please send all your branch news, reports, features and photographs to journal@aslef.org.uk**

**Let’s work together**

Nigel Gibbon and EC5 Howard Kaye set up a joint Freightliner Intermodal and Heavy Haul business council meeting in Manchester.
**THE MIGHTY SEVEN**

I dug out this picture of seven footplatemen taken in the yard at Stockport Edgeley MPD. Eddie Rowbotham, born 28.7.1927, started 27.7.1943, remembers a V1 flying bomb missing the shed and falling in the back garden of a house less than a mile away on Christmas Eve 1944. As kids, we used to play in the crater! Eddie reckons the photo of the Magnificent Seven, or mutual improvement class, was taken in the summer of 1956.

*Mel Thorley, Longsight*

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**WHISPERS OF OPPOSITION**

JR Redman of Mexborough branch writes regarding a new Education Bill: ‘If we as workers are to improve our position, as we hope to do, it is up to us to seize every opportunity for better education, not only for ourselves, but for our children. The chief feature of Mr Fisher’s Bill is better education for the workers. In the House of Commons he estimated the cost at the price of 36 hours of war. Surely a nation that will spend such fabulous amounts of money on war, as ours is doing at the present time, will not hesitate when the nation’s education is under consideration. Still, one hears whispers of opposition.’

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**KILLED INSTANTLY IN ACTION**

Wigan branch records the loss of cleaner member Bro Jas Henshaw, RFA, killed in action; Stoke-on-Trent the death of Bro T Evans ‘killed on duty whilst finishing work in the early hours of the morning’; and Mold Junction the death of Bro OC Edwards, attached to the 8th battalion the Royal Berkshires. After five months service on the Western Front, he was wounded, and returned to England. After being convalescent, he was again sent out to France, when after another five months he was killed instantly in action, at the age of 23’. Maidstone branch, recording the death of Bro Charles Stuart Barnes of the ADC, reflects: ‘It seems such a big shame that the young men of the nation should be wiped out as they are now.’

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**INCREDIBLE WAR WAGES**

The editor writes: ‘The recent movement for increased war wages ended with an improvement of 4s per week to all over 18, with half that amount to boys under that age. This was the amount on which the EC had fixed before negotiations commenced as being somewhat equivalent to 12½% to those over 21, and no settlement would have been arrived at for any less figure. Our members will notice that the last clause in the agreement gives us power to re-open negotiations at any time.’

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**WHEN I AM OLD I SHALL WEAR PURPLE**

The Retired Members’ Section paid a visit to Chingford branch on 17 April to report on the RMS and the wider retired community. It was without doubt one of the highlights of the evening, with Les Muir, Bill Dale, PJ Smith and Tony West explaining the history of the section and how the RMS now contains 2,537 members and is growing. The dedication shown by these individuals is abundantly clear with the work and campaigning they do on a daily basis, bringing to the forefront the struggles that pensioners and future generations endure.

They explained that there are 11.5 million pensioners now, with many suffering from malnutrition, how Meals on Wheels, on which many elderly people rely, has been reduced, and how the shortfall in social care funding because of government cuts has an impact on the NHS as people are unable to leave hospital as there is no care in place for when they are well enough to go. But, if you’re lucky enough to have savings, don’t worry, as they will be used to pay for your care, through private health care, at a cost to you of £30,000 each year.

They said there is now a two-tier pensions system based on the date of your retirement with 1.8 million pensioners living below the poverty line and a further 1 million living in fuel poverty. The state pension is one of the worst in the developed world, despite Britain being the world’s fifth biggest economy. Pensioners contribute enormously to the UK economy, not just in tax, but employment, informal caring and volunteering, with some people relying on their parents to look after their children whilst they go to work. A labour of love, we might say, but without these people more families would be worse off.

We have a big RMS presence on the National Pensioners’ Convention, nationally and in the London region, which promotes the welfare of present and future pensioners, as a way of securing dignity, respect, and financial security in retirement.

The RMS has just increased its weekend schools from one to two each year with the help of money from the 500 Club. This is a fantastic achievement for all those involved and, if your branch or district has not yet joined, I would urge you to do so. You can also join as an individual and, who knows, you may even win!

We at Chingford would like to place on record our thanks and appreciation for the four RMS members who took time out of their day to attend our branch to give their report and would recommend every branch to put in a request to hear about the RMS and the work it does.

*Paul Cutmore, branch secretary*
The 500 Club

The 500 Club is a fundraising venture for ASLEF’s Retired Members’ Section. Numbers in the draw cost £4 each and, to begin making payments into club funds, all you have to do is complete the standing order form and return it to your bank. Alternatively, you can pay by cheque a year in advance; the cheque should be made payable to ASLEF RMS 500 Club.

Payments need to reach the club account by 1st of every month and the draw takes place on 12th of every month – with the winning number, name, and prize printed on page 5 of the ASLEF Journal.

Once you have arranged your method of payment just complete the form and return it to the Admin Department at head office.

The Retired Members’ Section committee would like to thank you for your support and wish you luck in the draw!

Yours fraternally, Mick Whelan, general secretary

ASLEF RMS 500 Club application form

Name...........................................................................................................................................
Address.......................................................................................................................................

Telephone N o................................................. email............................................................................................................................................

Each number costs £4. You can purchase as many numbers as you like.
I confirm that I wish to purchase ____ numbers as part of the 500 Club.
A) I have set up my standing order (£48 per annum or £4 per month)
B) I enclose a cheque for advance payment (£48 per annum)

Signed.......................................................... Date............................................

Please return this half of the form to: Andrea Weston in the Admin Dept, ASLEF, 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN and hand the other half, the standing order mandate, to your bank (or via your internet bank).
LESLEY GEE ROYAL TRAIN HONOUR
It is with sadness that I report the death of my dad, Leslie Gee, who died on 26 March at the age of 88. Leslie served on the railways for more than 49 years, working on both steam and diesel locomotives. He started with GWR at Tyseley on 18 October 1943, at the age of 14, as a lad porter. He progressed to loco cleaner in 1945, fireman in 1947, and became a driver on 1 August 1960. He remained at Tyseley until 1971, when he moved to Saltley. In 1989 he was ferrying to Tyseley and finished his working life with the railway on 30 January 1993.

He was honoured to drive the royal train on two occasions, once for Queen Elizabeth II, and once for Prince Charles. He was always very proud to be a part of the Great Western Railway and British Rail. He enjoyed his job and the colleagues he worked with. He recently saw in his railway magazine that there was a Facebook page for Saltley and asked me to look at it. These are some of the replies I got back: ‘I knew Les; a good bloke’; ‘Good old boy, always immaculately dressed, a proper railwayman, he used to make me put my ciggy out before I got on the engine’; ‘A real nice man and his old booked mate has recently retired at Worcester’; ‘Les – Tyseley top man’; ‘I remember Les, he was a gentleman and I enjoyed being his occasional second man’; ‘I knew Les, lovely bloke, always nice to have a chat with.’

Tina Ambrose

BRIAN RILEY MERSEYRAIL’S FINEST
I am sad to announce the passing of one of Merseyrail’s finest. Brian Riley started his career on the railway as a telegraph lad in 1961. He transferred to the S&T soon after but, in 1962, moved to Southport loco shed as a cleaner. When the shed shut in 1964 he went to Edge Hill and then, in the early 1970s, to Birkenhead for his driving job. This was where he swapped for early turns, so he could work part-time delivering cars! Brian moved depots to Kirkdale in the early 1980s where he worked until he retired on 28 January 2011, just short of 50 years’ service. Brian was a loyal member of ASLEF, a very popular colleague, and a great animal lover; especially with the depot cats, whom he was often seen feeding! Brian leaves his wife, Sheila, family and many friends. Hundreds turned up for his service at Southport crematorium on 29 March.

Keith Devling, Kirkdale

GRAHAM SPARK MUCH-RESPECTED AND MISSED
It is with great sadness that Gateshead & Newcastle branch reports the sudden death of our friend Graham Spark on 12 February. Graham was a much-respected driver having joined British Rail (and ASLEF) in 1975 at Gateshead shed. Graham loved to socialise and enjoyed trips away playing golf or race trips and a few pints with railway friends. What he loved even more was his family time with his wife Susan, three children and two grandchildren. Sparky will be sadly missed but always remembered by the hundreds who turned out for his funeral.

Gary Arrowsmith, Gateshead & Newcastle

CLIFF GORMAN IT EXPERT
It is with sadness that Newton Heath branch must relay the passing of driver Cliff Gorman, just a few days after his 60th birthday, in December 2017. Cliff joined British Rail in 1985, starting out at Walsden booking office. He qualified as a driver in 1996, working nearly 20 years on the footplate at Manchester Victoria, before taking early retirement in 2016. He is fondly remembered as a family man, an avid conspiracy theorist and a bit of an IT expert – the advent of the internet changed his world and fed his inquisitive nature. The mess room could turn to Cliff for any manner of information and he would delight in researching to find the answer. Cliff will be much missed by family, friends and colleagues.

Dave Vaughan, Newton Heath

FINAL JOURNEYS
Derby branch is saddened by the passing of two of our finest members – GRAHAM COX and ROGER (BUNNY) WARREN. Graham and Bunny both started as engine cleaners before promotion through the grades to driver. Graham retired under Virgin Trains. Bunny eventually became an instructor and traction inspector and retired under Midland main line. Our deepest condolences go to their families at this very sad time.

Eamonn Tague, Derby

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Join the conversation! Send letters by email to journal@aslef.org.uk or by Royal Mail to the ASLEF Journal at 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN

**ASHLEF – so much more than an ‘expensive diary’**

Having just returned from a successful outcome of a safety performance review hearing, I thought I would just remind members of the importance of being in our fantastic trade union, because otherwise today’s outcome could have been far different. When some members refer to ASLEF as an ‘expensive diary’ it does sometimes pay to think about other colleagues who have also seen successful outcomes to their various plights where ASLEF has played an instrumental role in saving their jobs. Our member is now back driving after his temporary removal several weeks ago, after a successful outcome negotiated by our reps today. Locally, as his LDC rep, coupled with the huge support from Steve Wright from the Greater Angloia company council, a great result for our member has been achieved and, without question, the support our member and colleague received was a key factor in that result. Thanks to the support of ASLEF as a whole, that ‘expensive diary’ turned out, in the end, not to be so expensive after all!

**John Thorpe, Stratford**

**Time for a modern carer’s leave policy on the railway**

There are many benefits of working in the railway. We are relatively well paid, have access to free/reduced rate travel, and have a fairly good pension. But there is one area, in particular, that I feel could be greatly improved and that is around supporting people who need to care for others.

I’m sure many of us will have been in circumstances, or know someone who has been, where a family member has become suddenly ill or childcare has failed and we need time to deal with the situation. As it stands there don’t seem to be any good options available to us in these circumstances; maybe take lieu leave, go sick, or unpaid leave, none of which are ideal and all have their drawbacks.

There is another option that I would like to see ASLEF fight to have introduced across TOCs and FOCs. A modern carer’s leave policy that recognises that short term emergencies do occur and that our employers can help us through them would be beneficial to us all.

Many large organisations already have these policies in place.

Examples I have worked with in the past include minimum paid leave of 1-2 weeks with discretionary increases depending on circumstances. This allows for emergency short term care without worrying about losing leave, pay, or ending up falling foul of draconian sickness policies.

I know this kind of thing won’t be handed to us on a plate. Indeed we would have to fight for any and every concession but I think this would be worth fighting for.

**Steven Nimmo, Edinburgh**

**Remember our history for Jesus Christ’s sake**

Following Eric Stuart (Journal, April) I would like to ask why it is that the name of Jesus Christ is considered acceptable to be published and printed as a curse? Most people who use it do not do so maliciously, necessarily; it is often inherited language, but why is it that it would never be considered ok to use ‘Buddha!’ or ‘Dalai Lama!’ or ‘Mohammed’ as a curse, but ‘Jesus!’ is fair game?

Especially when most of the core values of ASLEF were originally advocated by Jesus Christ in his teachings and actions, ie speaking out against profiteering, treating workers well, fair wages, treatment of fellow human beings, treatment of women, treatment of children, caring for the sick, value of the family unit, the list goes on. And let’s remember it was God who introduced the rest day!

In fact, throughout British history, it has been the influence of Jesus Christ that has spurred people on to do great things to benefit humanity (apart from the eternal benefits he offers!) Here are just a few of many examples:

- Abolition of slavery – William Wilberforce; helping the homeless and destitute – William Booth and the Salvation Army; the Red Cross – founded by Henry Dunant; Alcoholics Anonymous – started by Christians;
- Samaritans – started by the Rev Chad Varah; hospice movement – who doesn’t know someone who has been cared for by these excellent people? – started by Cicely Saunders,
- Abolition of the slave trade – William Wilberforce; helping the homeless and destitute – William Booth and the Salvation Army; the Red Cross – founded by Henry Dunant; Alcoholics Anonymous – started by Christians; Samaritans – started by the Rev Chad Varah; hospice movement – who doesn’t know someone who has been cared for by these excellent people? – started by Cicely Saunders,
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Remember our history for Jesus Christ’s sake.

**Phil Stodart, Penzance**

**Windrush generation have made a big contribution while the Immigration Act 2016 smacks of the Nazis**

The debate, in Parliament and the media, regarding the workers who arrived from the West Indies on the Empire Windrush in 1948 appears to have been very selective. What is apparent is how low we have allowed society to sink. The words from the 2016 Immigration Act ‘deport first, appeal later’ could have come straight from the Nazi Party but, no, it’s the UK government, our government!

In October 2014, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, made orders for their deportation to their home countries and rejected their claims that deportation would breach their right to a private and family life. The Supreme Court ruled that deporting the men before appeal would breach their human rights as it is likely to significantly weaken their case.

The ‘deport first, appeal later’ policy was introduced as part of the Immigration Act 2014. Predominantly aimed at criminals, but somehow incorporated into the 2016 Act for everybody who does not have proof of identity. If anyone is in any doubt on how to vote at the next general election this extract from that Act should help them make up their minds. It’s take from the Immigration Act 2016, factsheet appeals sections 63-65:

‘How are we going to do it? Extend our existing “deport first appeal later” power to enable it to be applied in all human rights cases if removal pending appeal would not cause serious irreversible harm, or otherwise breach human rights.’

**Phil Stodart, Penzance**

**RMS**
**Banging the drum for non-league football**

District 1 paid a visit to the coast on 21 April in support of non-league football again. After sponsoring the Hope Not Hate campaign at Dulwich Hamlet in 2017, ASLEF returned to sponsor the match ball for the game between Folkestone Invicta and Dulwich Hamlet in the Bostik Isthmian League Premier Division (the seventh tier of English football).

DO1 Graham Morris and EC1 Marz Colombini joined members from Ashford and Dover branches as well as retired members to watch and enjoy a game played in glorious sunshine. It was a crucial match for both teams who were vying for the play-offs and promotion to National League South.

It was a tense match, with allegiances on both sides, but the visitors eventually showed their class, beating Folkestone 3-0, with all three goals scored in a six-minute spell late in the first half.

The locals drowned their sorrows, and Marz left with a spring in his step. It was a brilliant day, with a match attendance of 921 and the local Noyz Boyz banging the drum, keeping the stands singing and lifting the Invictas’ spirits from behind the goal.

Iain Scrace, Ashford

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**Brexit will hit the poorest in Britain the hardest**

Thank you for your text message about the local elections on 3 May. Most certainly I will be voting tomorrow but, sadly, even as a long time Labour supporter and member, I will not be voting for a Labour candidate. Labour’s unwillingness to oppose the Tories on Brexit, coupled with the Remain campaign they received at the general election being manipulated as support for a damaging hard Brexit, means I will be voting for pro-EU parties. Brexit is not a local issue, people say, and they could not be more wrong – the impact will strike hardest at local levels, with funding cut from local services. The working-class and poor will be impacted hardest of all.

We must send a message both to Westminster and to the increasingly nasty right-wing media that not only is it correct to oppose Brexit, but it is essential for the wellbeing of the vast majority of the country.

Ian Aberdein

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**The price of freedom**

Bro Morris (Journal, April) is correct when he says, and I paraphrase, ‘The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.’ Wonder who said that? Yep, Winston Churchill. When Bro Morris grows up he might realise that his freedom to pontificate his bile is due to that man and those who died supporting his cause.

Rob McMillan, Wolverhampton

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**Thanks Colin, Daz, Paul and Nigel at Freightliner**

I would like to use the pages of the Journal to thank Freightliner Heavy Haul business council members for the help and support I received on my early retirement in March. Thank you Colin Thornhill, Daz Morgan and Paul Barber for all you did for me. Thanks also to lead officer Nigel Gibson.

Paul Greensmith, Prestwich, Manchester

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**Eat your heart out, Tosh, with that tractor of yours**

This Triumph Thunderbird T120 motorcycle combination was in a state of rebuild when I bought it in 1979 and it took me three years to finish the rebuild. I rode it for four years, and in 1985 rode it to where we live now, then it stood covered over for a year, and then I put it in our garage until 2017, ASLEF returned to sponsor the match ball for the game between Folkestone Invicta and Dulwich Hamlet in the Bostik Isthmian League Premier Division (the seventh tier of English football).

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Iain Scrace, Ashford

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Christ; ragged schools for poverty stricken East End kids run by the London City Mission – founded by Christian David Naismith; and the RSPCA – started by the Rev Arthur Broome out of Christian compassion for animals.

These people contributed to and brought benefit to fellow human beings motivated by believing in and following Jesus Christ as the son of God and our saviour – surely his name should be honoured?

Brian Ayrton, London Victoria

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**BREITISH RAIL**

Suburban 707 limited edition 35x50mm enamel badge £5 + £1 p&p from Martin Thompson (Wimbledon Park) email wdrrailbadge@live.co.uk

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**CLASS 15 locomotive (DR233)**

Enamel badge on sale to raise funds for restoration of the sole surviving Class 15 loco by the Class 15 Preservation Society. £5 + £1 p&p from Ipswich driver Clive Whiting. Payment can be sent via PayPal to treasurer@d8233.org.uk

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**ASLEF BRANCH 111**

ASLEF branch 111 is 111 years old and has a limited edition numbered badge to celebrate the introduction of the Class 387 on KL services. £7.50 inc p&p from Mark Steele, 1 Rosecroft, South Wootton, King’s Lynn, Norfolk, PE30 3XW.

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**THREE BRIDGES**

Branch strike badge 2016/17. £5 inc p&p (proceeds to charity) from Paul Eden (branch secretary) email paul@homerdaz.com.

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**PROFESSIONAL ENGRAVING**

At sensible prices. I can engrave anything you wish, such as the ASLEF logo on the pint tankard. Contact Paul Potts by email at ppolts1969@hotmail.co.uk

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**KIRKDALE 121**

Limited edition centenary badge 1917-2017 price £7.50 inc p&p from branch secretary Keith Devling. Call 07933 144768 or email kdevling@aol.com

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**BESPOKE CUSHIONS**

Hand made 40cm square cushions of railway engines and carriages. £50. Call Abi on 07954 659849 or email me at admin.uk.me@btinternet.com

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**CLASS 40 Preservation Society**

High quality enamel badges £5.50 each or £10 for both (50p p&p for one badge or £1 for both) email sales@cfps.co.uk or text 07788 240088.

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With empty hand
men may no
hawks lure

Would you like to step back
in time and experience the
sights, the sounds and, er,
the smells of Medieval
England? SOPHIE RICHMOND closed her
copy of The Canterbury Tales by
Geoffrey Chaucer and made her own
pilgrimage to a visitor attraction in the
heart of the old cathedral city in Kent

ROM novels to non-fiction, fables to
fantasy – stories stream through our
lives. They pass the time, teach
valuable lessons, and bring back memories.
Whether you’re reading a powerful political
polemic such as George Orwell’s Nineteen
Eighty-Four or Animal Farm, or the ‘rhythmic
grumbles’ of TS Eliot’s The Waste Land,
literature – in all its forms – is an integral part
of life and leisure. A tool for relaxation,
revelation, and even revolution.

Geoffrey Chaucer, often referred to as the
father of English literature, and the first writer
to be buried in Poets’ Corner in Westminster
Abbey, composed The Canterbury Tales, one of
the earliest, and most famous, collections of
stories in the Western world. Between 1387
and 1400 he wrote the Prologue – introducing
us to his cast of characters, and a set text for
many a child’s GCSE exam – and 24 tales,
runtime to 17,000 lines of Middle English
verse.

‘He was a verray, parfit, gentil knyght’

Chaucer never finished The Canterbury Tales.
The plan was to write more than 100 stories –
he introduces us to 29 pilgrims in the Prologue,
at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, who will each
tell two tales on the way to Canterbury, and
two on the way back – but it was a literary
triumph at a time when the court and nobility
spoken in French, the language of the Normans
who had conquered this country in 1066, and
the Roman Catholic clergy used Latin, and
legitimised the use of the vernacular tongue.

Under his ingenious frame narrative of a
pilgrimage from London to the tomb of
Thomas à Becket in Canterbury, old Geofirs
introduces us to all walks of Medieval life, from
the honourable Knight to the pompous
Prioress, from the bawdy Wife of Bath to the
fraudulent Pardoner, and from the
blasphemous Miller to the devout Parson,
shunning the exclusively upper-class narrators
of Boccaccio’s Decameron.

‘If gold rust, what shall iron do?’

The Canterbury Tales visitor attraction,
celebrating its 30th anniversary in the heart of
the historic cathedral city, brings Chaucer’s
work to life. You get the opportunity to
immerse yourself in the life of the 14th
century. Beginning with an authentic
introduction by Roger, your costumed guide,
you embark on your own pilgrimage whilst
surrounded by the suffocating stench of the
Tabard Inn and the raucous laughter of your
fellow punters.

Soon you get used to the stench, and the
dusty darkness, as you are immersed in the
story-telling contest as the pilgrims attempt, at
innkeeper Harry Bailly’s suggestion, to win a
meal paid for by the others upon their return.
The enchanting experience lasts for 40
minutes, and you enjoy interaction with
various hosts, an audio guide description,
narrated by Robert Powell and Prunella Scales,
and holograms.

The five most entertaining tales include the
Knight’s romance about Palamon and Arcite;

You’ll meet the pilgrims, including the Wife
of Bath and the Miller, and see the tomb of
Thomas à Becket, at the Canterbury Tales,
written 600 years ago by Geoffrey Chaucer

the saucy scheming of Alison in the Miller’s
Tale; the spine-chilling trickery and hypocrisy
of the Pardoner’s Tale; the inspirational early
feminist ideas in the Wife of Bath’s Tale; and the
brilliant beast fable told by the Nun’s Priest.

The final leg of your pilgrimage ends with
an informative history lesson on that ‘turbulent
priest’ Thomas à Becket and his brutal murder
in the cathedral nearby, with insightful facts
and the rather ghoulishe ringing of the
cathedral bells as the knights carry out Henry
II’s famous request.

As you leave you pass through the
‘marketplace’ – or, rather, the gift shop – where
there is a range of souvenirs and gifts for all
ages. Whether you want to familiarise yourself
with more of Chaucer’s works – such as his
dream visions, or his great poem Troilus and
Criseyde – or purchase a pint of top quality,
local mead, there really is something for
everyone.

“You may outrun the old, but not outwit”

No visit to Canterbury would be complete
without a trip to the famous cathedral – its vast
stone walls, intricate vaulting, and sprawling
presence are staggering. Walk through the
doorway where four knights – Reginald
FitzUrse, Hugh de Morville, William de Tracy
and Richard le Breton – entered on 29
December 1170 to murder Becket, and stand
on the spot where the archbishop was
slaughtered in front of that splendidly
monikered monk Edward Grim.

A peculiarly intimate, and eery, atmosphere
here, a reminder that in coming to this ancient
city, you follow in the footsteps of not one
fabled journey, but two. First, of those four
knight, and then, 200 years later, of Chaucer’s
pilgrims, bound for Becket’s shrine, taking it in
turns to entertain the companions with their
tales. And take a look at the Chapter House –
where TS Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral was first
performed on 15 June 1935.

The Canterbury Tales, St Margaret
Street, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 2TG, is
open from 10am to 5pm seven days a
week until the end of August; and from
10am to 4pm each day in September
and October. Adults £10.95; children
(5-17) £8.95; senior citizens and
students £9.95; family tickets £32.50.
STANDARDS SLIP AT TORYGRAPH

TANDARDS are falling – well, plummeting – at the Daily Telegraph after the paper continues to cut staff. Ben Lawrence, an arts journalist, in what was clearly a badly written, and carelessly subbed, feature casually referred to William Shakespeare’s famous problem play Measure to Measure. Or, as the groundlings at the Globe used to call it, Measure for Measure. Perhaps the Telegraph thought it was the Bard’s version of Are You Being Served? Or an early Elizabethan take on the ‘Suits you, sir’ sketch from The Fast Show.

The more prosaic reality is that morale is so low – and numbers so few – at Buckingham Palace Road these days that such mistakes appear every edition in both the Daily and Sunday Telegraph. ‘Because once they’ve paid Boris Johnson’s salary there’s not much left over for the galley slaves,’ says a source at the paper.

Much Ado About Shakespeare as the Telegraph fails to measure up

Managers for the secretive Barclay brothers – who according to the Sunday Times Rich List are worth £7.2 billion – seem content to run the group into the ground. Their only short-term tactic is to sack staff and make cuts to shore up the bottom line of the balance sheet; the result is a poorer paper that readers are deserting in droves.

They’re not the only ones with problems. Paul Oakley, general secretary of UKIP, likened his party to the Black Death. In a good way. ‘Think of the Black Death in the Middle Ages,’ he said after the local elections last month when the über-Brexiteers were wiped off the map. ‘It comes along and causes disruption and then goes dormant, and that’s exactly what we are going to do.’ The Black Death – or plague – claimed an estimated 25 million lives, one-third of Europe’s population, between 1347 and 1351.

Keith Richmond

Prize Crossword

Crossword 146 by Tom Williams

Solution to Crossword 145

Across: 1 Cabbage white 7 Plait 8 Slow 10 Rates 11 Noise 13 Rascal 15 August 17 Grain 18 Dirge 19 Nose 21 Bleat 22 Market garden

Down: 1 Copenhagen 2 Bearings 3 Actress 4 Easter 5 Hiss 6 Two 9 Wellington 12 Scrab end 14 Algebra 16 Target 18 Deck 20 Ova

Congratulations to Peter Griffiths, of Southend, Essex, who was last month’s winner. The winner of this month’s Prize Crossword will receive Marks & Spencer vouchers to the value of £25

You can see more of Tom Williams’s crosswords, word games and puzzles at wordgames.co.uk

Thanks for all your responses to the 145th prize crossword in the May edition of the ASLEF Journal. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN by 14 June

ASLEF’s legal services

If you are being harassed at work, bullied or discriminated against, and if your local, branch or district rep is unavailable, call the industrial relations department at union headquarters (020 7324 2400) or email info@aslef.org.uk. If you are arrested or interviewed by police and need legal assistance – day or night – call the members’ emergency hotline on 0800 587 7530. ASLEF also provides first class legal advice free for members and dependents.

Changed your address? Please let us know! Just fill in this form

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The 134th Durham Miners’ Gala will be held on Saturday 14 July 2018

Please support the Big Meeting by joining the Friends of Durham Miners’ Gala

www.friendsofdurhamminersgala.org

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2018

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18TH JULY 2018 @ 1PM – 5PM

6 A SIDE (SQUAD OF 10) - £50.00 PER TEAM

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