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Rail industry’s in flux

Mick: ‘We have to pass on the lighted flame’

News
- Tube strike, MSPs vote on nationalisation, women drivers, and AGS election
- Kylie does the Loco-Motion as a station announcer and it’s ashes to ashes for Alan Pegler. Plus Off the Rails: Melvyn Bragg
- Germany launches first hydrogen train
- Thomas the Tank Engine gets a reboot
- We told you so – TOCs’ profits plummet

Features
- Paul Barber on a trip to Toton to see an ERTMS driver’s cab; and Mick Holder on ASLEF’s new mental health policy
- Hugh Bradley and Tosh McDonald step down from the EC after 29 years’ service
- Every picture tells a story: Colin Boocock reflects on 70 years of rail photography
- Chris Proctor examines a slave new world
- Key Worker: Mark Wheeler remembers how his great-grandfather Jim Bradley helped set up the Fire Brigades’ Union

Regulars
- Branch News, Upcoming Events and 100 Years of Union
- Obituaries
- Letters and Classified Advertisements
- Last Word: Edward Burne-Jones, Medieval master of the PRB, at the Tate Gallery
- On Track: A Christmas Carol; our Prize Crossword; ASLEF’s Legal Services; and Change of Address
- Cover: Andy Bunday

Uncertainty over Brexit, and the strength of the euro against the pound, make bidding uncertain. The collapse of the funding model and the lack of leadership by the Transport Secretary, compounded by the loss of his number two, Jo Johnson, who had no grasp of the brief, anyway, hardly inspires confidence. How many franchises are on hold? Who can remember the last time a franchise was awarded? We must now be in double figures for the number of direct awards. I have been attacked for suggesting future direct awards should be challenged – legally, industrially, and, possibly, politically. What are they afraid of? What are they hiding? And, more importantly, what are they offering to keep the facade going? Holyrood had a debate on nationalisation and the SNP and Tories showed their true colours, against public opinion, by voting for the status quo.

This year we produced, at members’ request, both red and white poppies, with all the monies going to charity. This union respects – and will always respect – those who did their duty for our country even if, on occasion, we disagreed with the rationale for some conflicts. But those who have seen the horrors of war have said we should campaign for peace and recognise the victims of conflict. In a civilised society, we can do both.

It is with great sadness we heard about the passing of former president and officer Bill Ronksley, 76 years a member, an inspiration to generations, and admired and respected across the movement by anyone who had dealings with him, bosses and workers alike.

Two other major figures are retiring this month. I first came across Hugh Bradley when we were local level reps in the early ’90s in preparation for the Freightliner split. His determination to do the best for others, based on a true moral compass, with common sense and intelligence, often in the most trying circumstances, has made him someone whose opinion has always been listened to; loyal and honourable personify Shug, who is universally respected. Tosh McDonald is equally deservedly respected, with a similar social conscience, dedicated to the needs of others. No one has done more to raise the profile of ASLEF; politically and industrially, than Tosh. The legacy they leave is one of unstinting duty to and for others; but true friends and comrades never really go away. Thank you seems inadequate! Big shoes to step into but we welcome Jim Baxter and Mark Wakenshaw, confident they are up to the task.

To and for others; but true friends and comrades never really go away. Thank you seems inadequate! Big shoes to step into but we welcome Jim Baxter and Mark Wakenshaw, confident they are up to the task.

Yours fraternally
Mick Whelan, general secretary

GS Mick Whelan

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Cancer Research UK.
to Shelter and £500 to
thing. We are calling
public ownership.
Scotland back into
in 2022, and bringing
held by Abellio early,
ending the franchise
Scottish government
on a Labour motion
said: ‘It’s a crucial vote
organiser in Scotland,
up for Scottish taxpayers
Kevin tells MSPs to stand
up for Scottish taxpayers
ASLEF called on
Members of the
Scottish Parliament at
Holyrood to back a
motion on
Wednesday 14
November to bring
ScotRail back into
public ownership.
Kevin Lindsay, our
organiser on London
when they went on strike in their
fight for fair treatment at work.
Finn Brennan, our organiser on London
Underground, said: ‘In the four weeks since our
solid strike on 5 October management have
made no new proposals and no further talks
have been arranged. ASLEF kept in contact with
ACAS and we made it clear that we are
ready to discuss the issues in dispute at any
time, but senior management seem to hope
that our members will simply give up if they
refuse to budge. On Wednesday they found
out just how wrong they are!
‘Unless there is a rapid change of approach
from management, working inside existing
agreements, instead of trying to circumvent or
“reinterpret” them, then the likelihood is there
will be a combine wide shutdown in the run
up to Christmas’.

We will remember them
A group of retired railway staff from Garston,
representing the North West & Northern
Ireland branch of the British Transport
Pensioners’ Federation, led by ex-EWS driver
Alan Jordan, visited the National Memorial
Arboretum near Lichfield, Staffordshire, to pay
our respects to all those who lost their lives in
war and fought for our freedom.
Chris Todd, driver, Virgin Trains, Liverpool

Finn: ‘We will not
back down in the face
of a management
that refuses to deal
with the issues our
members raise and
treats staff as if they
were pieces of
machinery.’

Women drivers
Julie Clegg, a driver with Northern, and
District 3 rep on the Women’s
Representatives Committee, was
interviewed by Anna Foster, sitting in for
Emma Barnett, on BBC Radio 5 Live on
Tuesday 13 November about a push by
TOCs – especially Southeastern and
Greater Anglia – to recruit more women
drivers. ASLEF has actively pushed, for
many years, to diversify the driving grade.
‘We want the rail industry to reflect the
society it serves,’ said GS Mick Whelan, ‘a
society comprised of men and women,
regardless of ethnicity, age, or sexual
orientation, who each day perform a
vital job moving passengers and freight
around Britain.’

MEA MAXIMA CULPA
Tony West was inadvertently omitted from the
list of RMS committee members in the 2019
ASLEF diary. Tony’s e-mail address is
westwall@btinternet.com and his mobile
phone number is 07763 468284. Ian Sutton
was included by mistake.

BILL RONKSLY
Bill Ronksley’s funeral will take place on
Wednesday 5 December. The cortege will leave
Wortley Hall, Wortley, Sheffield, at 11.30 for a
service at 12.00 at Grenoside crematorium,
Skew Hill Lane, Sheffield. There is a wake, from
14.00, back at Wortley Hall.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH
Who’s really running the Tory
Party????@Jacob_Rees_Mogg
launches leadership strike against Theresa
May....@BBCNormanS
Grayling couldn’t even resign on
time.@Kevin_Maguire
It has been a while since I have got a
@Southern_Trains but tonight you
have really surpassed yourself.
Cancellations, delays, standing room only.
You are a shining example of why
our railways need renationalising.@elliereees
SNP and Tory MSPs teamed up to
block Scottish Labour’s plans to end
the privatisation of Scotland’s railways.
@scottishlabour

QUOTE...
‘Of 92 hereditary
Lords, many are on
the basis of who
Charles I slept with.’ –
John McDonnell
...UNQUOTE

SO HERE IT IS, MERRY
CHRISTMAS
The EC decided, in lieu of
sending Christmas
cards, to donate £500
to Shelter and £500 to
Cancer Research UK.

CONFERENCES & RALLIES
The Scottish Labour Party conference is at the Caird Hall,
Dundee, from Friday 8 to Sunday 10 March. The Welsh Labour
Party conference is at the Venue Cymru in Llandudno from
Friday 12 to Sunday 14 April. The Scottish Trades Union
Congress is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Monday 15 to
Wednesday 17 April. Workers’ Memorial Day is Sunday 28 April.
ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Marriott Hotel,
Leeds, from Monday 13 to Thursday 16 May. The STUC LGBT+
workers’ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel,
Glasgow, from Saturday 25 to Sunday 26 May. The STUC youth
conference is at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow,
from Saturday 29 to Sunday 30 June. The Durham Miners’ Gala is
on Saturday 13 July. The Tolpuddle Martyrs’ festival, near
Dorchester, is from Friday 19 to Sunday 21 July. The Trades Union
Congress is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 8 to Wednesday
11 September. The Labour Party conference is at the Brighton Centre from Sunday 22 to Wednesday 25 September.
Ashes to ashes

Alan Pegler, the flamboyant businessman who saved The Flying Scotsman when it was destined for the scrapyard in 1963 – he bought the locomotive for £3,000 and restored it to its former glory – went out the way he wanted. On Saturday 13 October his ashes were placed on a shovel and lowered into the searing glow of the engine’s firebox on the stretch of line in Lincolnshire where the Scotsman became the first locomotive to break the 100mph barrier on 30 November 1934.

Our new ASLEF mug has images from the Mick Jones triptych in reception at head office. There are four versions – three have an image on one side and the ASLEF logo on the other; the fourth has all three images. £6 each (inc p&p) or £15 for a set of three; email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk

quote...

‘Labour has a Brexit policy. And another one. And another one.’ – John Crace, Digested Week in The Guardian

…unquote

...off the rails

MELVYN BRAGG, who presents In Our Time on Radio 4, when asked to name his heroes, picked a footballer, a writer, and a Scottish trade unionist who became an MP, first for West Ham and then for Merthyr Tydfil: ‘In childhood, Johnny Connor, an Irishman who played for Carlisle United. All the boys round me were besotted by football. We played in the streets of Wigton, in Cumbria, we played in the school playground, we played in the dark. Occasionally, we got to see a real football match at Carlisle. Now, it’s George Orwell; his consistent clarity and purity of vision grow stronger by the day, and his genius is now being slowly revealed. And Keir Hardie, illiterate until he was 17, he drew more from Methodism than Marxism to form a remarkable new party.’

JIM ARMITAGE, city editor of the Evening Standard, is not known as a radical red. But in a recent comment column he cheerfully admitted: ‘While you’d have thought voters would be shocked by Corbyn & Co’s retro passion for nationalising utilities, it’s actually rather popular. People even like the Venezuela-lite plan to confiscate 10% stakes in Britain’s big companies and hand them over to the state. Polls suggest 54% of the population approve, including 34% of Tory voters. You can’t blame the public. Living standards have been going nowhere for years and there’s a feeling afoot of any change must be better than this. Little wonder that the leaders of private enterprise are worried.’

MATT HANCOCK, who replaced Jeremy Hunt as Secretary of State for Health, with a brief to ‘incentivise and marketise’ the NHS, has been forced to deny that, post-Brexit, Britain’s hospitals will throw their doors open to the Americans. Speaking on Radio 5 Live, he insisted that although Britain is desperate to do a trans-Atlantic trade deal with the Donald, we will not ‘supinely’ agree to President Trump’s demands to allow US firms to move in and take over whole chunks of our National Health Service. ‘The NHS is not for sale,’ he insisted. Well, not yet.

JAMES DYSON, who claims Brexit could create more jobs in the UK, is to make his company’s new electric car in Singapore rather than in Britain. Dyson is developing the vehicle at its research facility in Wiltshire, but will manufacture the car abroad, where the company says it will create more than 1,500 new jobs. In Asia. ‘Because Singapore has a deal with the European Union,’ muttered our man with the bagless vacuum cleaner. ‘Which is more than Britain does at the moment.’

RICHARD BRANSON, the man sometimes referred to as a Tosh McDonald lookalike, tweeted his way into trouble when he told his followers on Twitter: ‘There’s very little that annoys me in life, but people turning up late really does.’ Oops! Cue a twitter storm from disgruntled passengers on Virgin Trains. Typical was this from Rebecca Reid: ‘About 30% of the times I’ve been late it’s been because of one of your trains, mate.’

Kylie Minogue made platform announcements on train stations around the UK to mark BBC Music Day. The singer, who launched her career with a cover of The Loco-Motion in 1988, recorded a series of messages encouraging commuters to share their love of music on our railway.

‘Please let passengers sing and dance their way off the train first before trying to get on board,’ she said in one announcement heard at stations in Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Manchester and Reading.

‘I believe in the power of music to bring joy and lift the soul. Hopefully, my little messages for train passengers were a nice surprise and a reminder of the power of music,’ explained Kylie, who wasn’t the only star making tracks.

Lisa Stansfield, who performed on a Manchester Metrolink tram, and recorded her own announcement for the city’s light rail system: ‘I’ve been around the world, but I-I-I could always find my ticket. ‘I believe in the power of music to bring joy and lift the soul. Hopefully, my little messages for train passengers were a nice surprise and a reminder of the power of music,’ explained Kylie, who wasn’t the only star making tracks.

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500 CLUB: I Black, with number 9, won the November draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £432.

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So come on, come on do the loco-motion

Pop star turned station announcer Kylie

with All Around the World in 1989, performed on a Manchester Metrolink tram, and recorded her own announcement for the city’s light rail system: ‘I’ve been around the world, but I-I-I could always find my ticket. So make sure you’ve got yours before you get on board.’

The Loco-Motion was written by Gerry Goffin and Carole King for Dee Dee Sharpe, but she turned it down. The song became a top 10 hit for Little Eva in 1962, for Grand Funk Railroad in 1974, and for Kylie in 1988.
Germany launches first hydrogen train

Two H-trains are now in service in Germany

Two H-trains are now in service in Germany. ‘The world’s first hydrogen train is now in commercial service and ready for serial production,’ Alstom CEO Henri Poupart-Lafarge said at a ceremony in Bremervorde, the station where the trains will be refuelled with hydrogen. The company plans to deliver another 14 of the zero-emission locos to Lower Saxony by 2021. Hydrogen trains are equipped with fuel cells that produce electricity through a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, a process in which steam and water are the only emissions. Excess energy is stored in on board lithium batteries. The trains can run for 600 miles (1,000km) on a single tank of hydrogen, similar to the range of diesel trains.

Take the H-train to Brum

Porterbrook, the RoSCo which owns 30% of UK rolling stock, has signed a memorandum of understanding with Birmingham University to build Britain’s first H-train. Porterbrook will provide a Class 319 electric unit for the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education to convert into a HydroFlex vehicle ready to test run next summer. ‘Hydrogen powered trains offer a cleaner alternative to current diesel trains,’ said Stuart Hillm ansen, senior lecturer in railway systems at Birmingham, ‘and this project demonstrates the opportunities and value of innovation in the rail industry.’

Cutting fares will make carriages more crowded

CrossCountry provoked a social media storm by telling customers it won’t cut fares for fear of making services even more crowded. One angry passenger, who had been forced to stand, was provoked by the company’s ‘facetious’ response. Writing on Twitter, Ceri said: ‘Ok, @CrossCountryUK, if you intend for travellers to stand the whole journey between Birmingham and Stoke, please can you adjust your fares accordingly?’ CrossCountry responded: ‘Making fares cheaper will only encourage more passengers to travel – thus making your train even more busy.’

Who shot the sheriff?

Greater Anglia is hiring more land sheriffs to try and improve safety and security for passengers travelling by train. The TOC’s sheriffs patrol trains and stations ‘to provide a reassuring presence and additional support to railway staff and the British Transport Police in keeping travellers safe’. They will deal with anti-social behaviour, fare evaders and enforce railway bylaws.

Stobies spot train names too

Where’s Thomas? Eddie the Engine and James the Engine

Fans of Eddie Stobart lorries – known as Stobies – can turn to traditional train spotters for tips as the haulage company – which moved into rail in 2006 – expands its freight on rail operations. Stobart’s new service, hauled by Direct Rail Services, connects the Tilbury to Tesco in Daventry and then Mossend in Scotland, with a capacity of between 30 and 36 containers.

No magic bullet

Japanese rail company JR West has axed its controversial training exercise – revealed in the Journal in October – which required rail staff to crouch in a 1 metre by 1 metre trench between the tracks as three shinkansen bullet trains thundered past at 200mph. After pressure from the West Japan Railway Workers’ Union the company, which introduced the exercise in 2016 to ‘raise safety awareness’ among carriage inspectors, will now make employees watch the trains pass from behind a trackside fence. About 240 employees took part in the exercise. One said: ‘The wind pressure was enormous. I felt I had been pressed down from above. It was scary, and I wondered what the point of it was.’

Merger to cost UK millions

Network Rail has asked the European Commission to intervene to prevent the proposed merger of Siemens and Alstom, saying the deal ‘stands to do great harm to the railways in Great Britain’. Siemens says it wants to create a European train manufacturer which can compete with Chinese companies. But NR CEO Andrew Haines described the deal as ‘one of the most significant threats to our operations’. The Office of Rail and Road, which backs NR’s opposition to the plan, has warned that the deal will cost NR – and the UK taxpayer – ‘tens of millions of pounds’ because of reduced competition.

Twitter troll calls woman selfish after she’s hit and killed by train

A vile Twitter troll called a woman ‘selfish c***’ after she was hit and killed by a Greater Anglia train between Chadwell Heath and Goodmayes in East London. Another said staff should leave her body where it was and just ‘run the trains’. Other social media users urged them to ‘show some respect’. One wrote: ‘Nothing about suicide is a laughing matter.’

QUOTE...

‘Brexit has shown us one thing – and I fully respect British sovereignty in saying this – it has demonstrated that those who said you can easily do without Europe, that it will all go very well, that it is easy and there will be lots of money, are liars.’ – Emmanuel Macron

...UNQUOTE
Thomas gets a reboot for the modern world

As we reported in the Journal in November last year, the popular children’s TV series based on the books by the Rev W Awdry – and condemned by critics for being out of touch, sexist, and stuck in the past – has been brought bang up to date with two new female locos.

The new series features Nia, an orange engine from Africa, a migrant and refugee, and Rebecca, a bright yellow engine, in place of Henry (the green engine) and Edward (the blue engine) and half of the 26 new episodes are set abroad. ‘We’ve listened to parents, carers, and children’ said series producer Ian McCue. ‘They said trains can go places but Thomas never goes anywhere except the Island of Sodor.’

The Fat Controller, Sir Topham Hatt, is still in charge, but has become ‘less gruff and more endearing’. There’s a lesson, there, for Chris Grayling, the DfT, and Britain’s privatised train operating companies...

Nia is based on the KUR ED1, a class of 2-6-2 tank engine built by Vulcan in the 1920s for the Kenya-Uganda Railway, primarily for shunting duties, but also to haul branch line trains, and later operated by East African Railways.

The ten worst stations for delays have been named and shamed by the consumer magazine Which? using data from the performance tracking site On Time Trains. They are: Manchester Oxford Road; York; Gatwick Airport; Birmingham New Street; Bristol Temple Meads; Manchester Piccadilly; Clapham Junction; Sheffield; Manchester Victoria; and Woking.

DB Cargo has been convicted after a four week trial under the Health & Safety at Work Act after a teenage boy suffered life-changing injuries when he got an electric shock from 25,000 volt overhead line equipment at Tyne Yard in Gateshead.

The Office of Rail and Road has called on the rail industry to improve ‘competition, value and innovation’ at its automatic ticket gates and ticket vending machines.

Out of Africa – Nia, one of the new locos, is ‘an adventurous and fun engine from Kenya who teaches Thomas a lesson in the meaning of friendship’

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We don’t want a bus on rails in Somerset

A plan by the West of England Combined Authority for a tram service, similar to systems used in major British cities, to link Portishead with Bristol, has been savaged by critics. ‘A tram or light rail system would be a poor substitute for proper rail,’ said North Somerset councillor David Pasley. ‘It’s a bus on rails, but we should not have to settle for second best.’

Northern Rail has begun testing its first Class 195 locomotive. The company has ordered 98 Class 195 and Class 331 trains – to be built by CAF, and leased from Eversholt – as part of a £500 million rolling stock improvement package designed to head off criticism from passengers about its ageing fleet of Pacers.

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Steam in the snow

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NCB 49, built in 1943 by Robert Stephenson & Hawthorns in Newcastle, bought by the National Coal Board in 1959 and run out of Backworth loco sheds in Northumberland, under steam on the Tanfield Railway in County Durham as wintry weather swept in from the Arctic at the end of October.
Rail profits have fallen off a cliff

ICK Whelan dryly reflected, after it was revealed that train operating company profits have fallen off a cliff, plummeting 80% as operators grapple with the realities of running a rail service, ‘I know it’s never a good look to say, “I told you so,” but we did! We said privatisation wouldn’t work, and it doesn’t, and we said the privatised TOCs would get into trouble, and they have.’

Mick was speaking after it was revealed that Britain’s train companies made an aggregate profit of just £66 million – on revenues of £11 billion – in their most recent accounts filed at Companies House although they still managed to wish away £213 million in dividends for shareholders, much-needed cash that haemorrhages from our industry under the much-criticised privatised model. The slump in profits has hit the public purse, too, with aggregate corporation tax payments down from £82 million to just £10 million.

‘The Tories privatised our railway because, they said, they wanted to introduce the rigours of free market competition into the industry. But the railway is a natural monopoly and the only competition is trying to win a franchise. So companies overbid, to win a contract, then hand back the keys and walk away when they realise – which many of them privately admit they knew all along – that the numbers simply don’t add up.

‘Privatisation hasn’t worked, doesn’t work, and will not work. The franchise model is broken, whether Chris Grayling can see it or not, and is selling Britain – passengers, taxpayers, and those of who work on the railway – woefully short. In the 20-odd years since John Major privatised our industry in the 1990s – a privatisation, incidentally, which even that arch-privateer Margaret Thatcher described as “a privatisation too far” – we have seen our rolling stock get older, our trains get more crowded, and our fares go right through the roof.

‘Yet the privateers cannot make enough money! So they will, inevitably, ask the government for a bailout, or try to push up fares. Chris Grayling wants passengers to pay more, and staff to take less, to protect the pay of his mates, the directors in the boardroom, who are running these companies into the ground, and to make sure there are still fat dividends for shareholders!’

‘The answer is to bring our railway back into public ownership and run it as a public service for passengers and for businesses. That’s the best deal for British taxpayers.’

Hull Trains, one of Britain’s smallest TOCs, made more money – a profit of £6.7 million on revenues of £31 million – than GTR, Britain’s biggest, which made just £4.9 million on revenues of £1.3 billion.

Passengers are paying Premiership prices for League 2 performance

Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF’s organiser in Scotland, has condemned the poor performance of ScotRail and called for the service to be brought back into public ownership. He said: ‘It is, frankly, no surprise that ScotRail has been fined £2.2 million in the first half of this year for its spectacular failure to meet its targets. Those of us on the front line – ScotRail train drivers and other railway staff – see every day how the company comes up short.

‘The truth is that the privatised franchise model is a broken business model. Everyone on the railway understands that. That’s why we are calling on the SNP government to bring ScotRail back into public ownership.

Kevin Lindsay: ‘We all deserve better’

‘So it works for the people of Scotland – for passengers, for taxpayers and for staff – rather than to allow a private company to charge Premiership prices for League Two performance. Frankly, we all deserve better.’

Our new topical tee-shirt, designed by those Hoxton hipsters at Philosophy Football, features Rik Mayall as the obnoxious anarchist Rick in The Young Ones, and this classic exchange: ‘He threw us off the train because you said ASLEF was an anagram for “total and complete bastard”’. And apart from everything else… it isn’t, even. £10 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk

Blunt speaking rocks Grayling

Crispin Blunt, Conservative MP for Reigate, is getting under the skin of Transport Secretary Chris Grayling and Rail Minister Jo Johnson by speaking up for his constituents about the appalling service to Reigate and Redhill provided by Southern, Thameslink, and Great Western. ‘Along with thousands of local rail users, led by the Redhill & Reigate District Rail Users’ Association, I am now at the end of my tether at the repeated and long-standing refusal by the Department for Transport to listen to our genuine concerns and address the ongoing problems facing our local rail service.’

You know you’re in trouble when, as a minister, you’re taken to task by one of your own MPs, and a former whip to boot, as well as commuters – and voters – in the true blue Tory stockbroker belt.

RECORD RISE IN RAIL CRIME

Crime on Britain’s railways has soared, according to new figures from the British Transport Police. The force recorded 11,711 violent crimes, up 26% year on year, and 2,472 sexual offences, up 16%. The rise has been blamed on TOCs cutting staff and the number of guards on trains.

HIGHLAND FLING FOR WANDERLUST

The West Highland line, which featured in the Harry Potter films, has been rated Britain’s best rail journey for the second consecutive year by Wanderlust magazine. The 164 mile long line runs from Glasgow to Mallaig by Loch Long, Loch Lomond, Loch Etive, and Loch Eil, and crosses the world’s first concrete viaduct at Glenfinnan.

RECO DIS IN  RAIL CRIME

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The 135th Durham Miners’ Gala will be held on Saturday 13 July 2019

Please support the Big Meeting by joining the Friends of Durham Miners’ Gala
www.friendsofdurhamminersgala.org

Changing the world of work for good
Get your kicks on a Class 66

Paul Barber

Paul Barber follows up last month’s article by EC7 Andy Hudd with a report on a visit by our European Rail Traffic Management System group to Toton to see what a system fitted cab will look like.

The ASLEF ERTMS group meets a minimum of every six months to discuss the plan by Network Rail to introduce in-cab signalling and train control on a national basis. We look at how this will affect the role of the driver, changes to rules, training, and fitment and sighting of equipment within existing traction.

As the visit to Toton depot shows there is real involvement with ASLEF reps from the rail industry. This allows ASLEF to make a positive contribution to the future role of the driver. It also highlights the problems the industry faces trying to retrofit elderly engines and units, some over 50 years old.

Paul Barber (Freightliner Heavy Haul), Barry Hare (GB Railfreight) and John Stagg (DB Cargo) attended DBC Toton for an initial inspection of a Class 66 locomotive to view possible sighting and changes to cab positioning of various dials and indicators and the DMI screen for first in class fitment.

The first problem, from an engineering point of view, was that we were told there are ongoing problems when trying to retrofit older types of locos and diesel multiple units and something Siemens has not taken into account.

We also visited cab 2 on the Class 66, the smaller of the two cabs. There were various bits of cardboard to represent refitted equipment plus the DMI screen. Initially the screen was fitted in the centre of the cab console; we pointed out to the engineering team that most line side signage and signalling is actually on the left and the DMI screen could be moved slightly to the left. The current Class 66 speedo is on the right of the driver’s console; this fact, plus most signage bearing on the left seems to have passed the team by. Moving the DMI to the left allows for greater ease of access in the driver’s seat.

There were two speakers proposed to amplify the various warning tones from the DMI as there are noise issues in a Class 66 cab. There is a chance to resight some of the air gauges in a more logical way, and to move some of the other controls to make the cab more user-friendly. We pointed out that the equipment needs to be robust because the nature of freight work means it’s not always a clean cab.

We also asked if the DMI screen could be made larger because, at the moment, the screen is smaller than the various gauges on a Class 66. Answer ‘No!’ This could be a real problem as the screen and indications are smaller than currently in use, and two of our reps were having to use glasses to look at the screen. Class 66 locos, like many older units, have large side windows which may cause an issue when trying to view the screen in bright sunlight.

ASLEF reps have subsequently been involved in first in class visits to Class 67 and 92 traction units, too.

Action on mental health at work

Mick Holder

Mick Holder, of ASLEF’s health and safety department, reports on our new policy on mental health at work.

Historically, when union reps and members were asked about their main concerns at work, pay used to be the primary concern. Then, in the late ’70s and early ’80s, that changed and stress caused by work was consistently reported as being in the top three main concerns of workers and reps as the pressures of staying in work, the pressures of work, from bad managers and employers, grew.

The trade union movement has been at the forefront of calling for action to prevent the harm caused by work but this has been denied, ignored or sidelined by government and the authorities. Until now. Because 2017-18 would appear to be the year that government and employers woke up to the issue and are calling for action on mental health (albeit not necessarily the right action).

The issue of mental health at work has been debated and acted on at ASLEF’s AADs over the years; for example, getting proper measures in place for drivers who might suffer post-traumatic stress following a suicide or incident, and in 2016 there was agreement on the need for the union to adopt a policy which reps and members could use. The project had to take into account the changing debate on the issue and the EC adopted the new policy in October.

As reported in the Journal last month, in this year’s biennial TUC safety rep survey, 78% of responding ASLEF reps have raised concerns regarding stress; 64% long hours of work; 59% bullying or harassment; 47% violence and threats; and 41% overwork.

GS Mick Whelan said: ‘This new policy underlines the need for reps to ensure employers act to prevent their employees’ mental health being damaged by their work. While it is vital to have support systems in place for those experiencing mental health difficulties, prevention is equally important. In the same way that work should not harm people physically, we say work should also not harm people’s mental health. ‘The EC has adopted a resolution requiring the issue to be raised in the machinery of all TOCs and FOCS. This new policy will help guide our reps to secure healthier work for our members. It also points some of the traps to avoid, which can lead to someone being further victimised, such as the resilience argument put forward by some employers.’

The ASLEF Guide to Mental Health at Work is available to download from the members’ area of ASLEF’s website in the library under resources.
It’s so hard to say goodbye to yesterday

Two long-standing members of ASLEF’s executive committee – Hugh Bradley and Tosh McDonald – step down at the end of this month. Both were elected to the EC in 2004. KEITH RICHMOND listens as Hugh and Tosh reflect on life around the EC table first at Arkwright Road in Hampstead and now in St John Street on the edge of Smithfield Market

EC4 Tosh McDonald, GS Mick Whelan and EC2 Hugh Bradley at ASLEF head office last month

OSH McDonald, ASLEF’s president, began his working life on the railway as a freight guard at Doncaster in 1979, joining the National Union of Railwaymen – ‘Obviously, because I was a freight guard. It’s the right thing to be in the right trade union for the job that you do’ – and becoming an NUR rep. When, in 1988, he became a train man D, in line of promotion to driver, he joined ASLEF. ‘Because the right trade union for train drivers is, as it has been since 1880, and as it always will be, ASLEF.’

He became chair of Leeds branch, AAD delegate, part of a potent Arriva Trains North company council comprising Harry Cowling, Mick Rix, Nick Whitehead and Tosh, and then, when he moved to Doncaster in 1998, chair of his home town branch.

DARK DAYS OF BARBIE BRAWL
He was elected to the EC as member for District 4 after a three-way battle with Dave Dobson and Colin Thornhill in 2004.

‘In the dark days of the barbecue brawl, Martin Samways stepped down. I was pressing for him to fight for his position but he came to my branch and proposed that I stand.’ He joined the EC in November and has been re-elected unopposed ever since.

Now ‘union barons’ is a common media trope but the reality is that ASLEF, like most trade unions, is democratic and transparent. All our reps are elected and the EC – with one member from each of our eight districts – are all train drivers who, along with our annual assembly of delegates, make the policy of our trade union.

HIGHLIGHTS AND THE LOW POINT
Asked to point to a couple of achievements, Tosh points to a retention package negotiated with ATN which was haemorrhaging drivers to East Coast and Virgin – a substantial pay rise and improved t&cs did the trick – and the first competency plan after drivers from Sheffield and Gateshead & Newcastle had been removed from driving following safety of the line incidents. ‘No driver goes to work intending to pass a signal at danger. They were being punished – and punished twice – for making a mistake by being moved to the lowest rate of pay, and the most unsocial shifts, shunting in yards.’

If the retention package and the competency plan were highlights, the low point ‘was discovering when I got on the EC that we were 15 months away from merging or folding. We had some very difficult decisions to make – like stopping training – but we are now financially sound, we’ve made a surplus for the last six or seven years, and we restored the cuts as quickly as we could.’

‘He’s quick to stress the importance of collective responsibility. ‘You wouldn’t be able to tell whether I’d voted for or against because once we have, collectively, decided on our policy then that’s what we go out and fight for. That’s democracy.’

Tosh first sat around the EC table in November 2004 but Hugh Bradley joined in January that year. ‘I soon learned that while Shug doesn’t always talk on every issue’, said Tosh, ‘I should listen to him when he did have something to say. He has often been the quiet voice of reason and the one to get us back to where we needed to be.’

Hugh, who will have completed 15 years’ service when he steps down at the end of December, joined the union when he joined the railway as a second man at Motherwell in May 1978.

LAY MEMBER LED ORGANISATION
‘I was a traction trainee’, he recalls, ‘and we were told that at some point the ASLEF guy would come in. In fact the guy doing the training said, “Look, when the NUR comes in you’re polite, but nobody takes the form, and then when ASLEF comes in, you sign up” and he came in, and gave us a wee bit of history, and every boy joined up! It was a closed shop, of course, back in the day…”

Hugh, who worked everything out of Motherwell – intercity trains, sleepers, and suburban – held a series of union posts before he was elected to the EC. He was a health & safety rep, branch secretary at Motherwell, and LDC back in the days of British Rail, as well as district council secretary and chair.

He succeeded Joe McGilvray, who served one three year term, as EC member for District 2. ‘People were pushing for me to stand, I understood the role the EC plays in our trade union, and I’m proud that we’re a lay member led organisation.

‘The executive committee is made up of eight train drivers, one from each of our eight districts. It’s democratic, and representative, and means we’re in touch with our members, no getting away from it.’

Earlier this year – first at AAD in Liverpool, and then at ASLEF’s Parliamentary reception at Westminster – people asked Shug what he would do when he stepped down from the EC. ‘Drive trains,’ he told them. ‘Because that’s what I do. I’m a train driver.’

Some people – one or two of them on full-time release – looked at him as if he was ‘bloody mad’ but Hugh, who turned 60 in November, and works for Freightliner Intermodal, is looking forward to it. That’s what makes train drivers – and ASLEF, the train drivers’ union – rather special.
A new book by Colin Boocock brings together 300 of his favourite railway images from seven decades behind the lens

Colin Boocock has two passions in life (apart from his wife Mary). Photography and the railway. He likes to combine the two, and has spent 70 years taking photographs of trains.

‘When I was a small boy, I was fascinated by the four coach green suburban electric trains passing over the level crossing at Addlestone in Surrey. I spent my pocket money on sweets and railway booklets, including Ian Allan’s pocket size series My Best Railway Photographs. In the summer of 1947, when I was nine, I persuaded my father to take me to Bournemouth Central with his Nagel folding camera and took three photos. For Christmas 1949, I received a Brownie box camera, and spent two days on the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway station at Colne, where my grandparents lived.’

His first published photo appeared in 1955 in Railway Magazine which ‘did not pay reproduction fees, relying on the fact that people liked to see their pictures in print… rather like the internet today!’

A year later, and ‘earning a moderate wage’ as an engineering apprentice at Eastleigh loco works, he bought his first ‘proper’ camera – a second-hand Zeiss Super-Ikonta – and began his second, parallel, career as a snapper.

Colin worked for British Railways as a traction and rolling stock engineer on the London Midland Region, retiring in 1996 as head of trains and train systems in the Safety & Standards Directorate of Railtrack in Derby, taking pictures all the time, many of which have appeared in books and magazines.

Now, in a new book, Seventy Years of Railway Photography (Pen & Sword, £30) he brings together some of his favourite images, and writes knowledgeably about traction, as well as offering pertinent tips on taking pix. Here are some of the best shots from the book…

**Bakerloo line Tube train** at Waterloo in 2012.

**A Yugoslav Railways’ General Motors diesel electric A1A-A1A carrying Kosovo Railways fleet number 001 at Peja station in 2014 with the mountains on the border with Albania in the background.**

**Two Class 19D 4-8-2s (2749 and 3324) headed the Union Limited train of pre-war sleeping cars across the Knysna causeway bridge in South Africa in August 2000.**

**An InterCity 225** on the East Coast main line at Leeds in 1989. ‘This shows 91004 in profile, bringing out its rakish lines. The slope of the cab front is repeated exactly by the angle of the white stripe behind the cab and countered by the italic slope of the InterCity motif. From an engineering viewpoint, these locomotives were innovative in the way the body-hung traction motors reduced unsprung weight, yet occupy much of the space they would if bogie mounted. They drive the wheels through telescopic cardan shafts and bevel gearboxes. Clever.’

Colin was stood by the clock, similar to this one, but in rev…

Colin went to the Birkenau camp at Auschwitz in 2007. ‘After we walked past the destroyed gas chambers, we reached the end of the railway line that brought one and a half million people to their deaths. There I saw a wreath someone had placed between the rails. It bore, on a red ribbon, the motif, in German, “Never forget”. I felt that printing the picture as monochrome, with just the wreath in colour, would fit the atmosphere of mourning that still pervades that appalling place.’

Colin, a career railwayman, and passionate photographer, and the cover of his new book...
I saw this very relaxed dog watching the frantic rushing about of station staff at Sargan Vitesi in Serbia in 2010 as they tried to cajole passengers to rejoin their 760mm gauge train. The Class 83 0-8-2 is out of sight behind a post, but it does not matter – the subject is the event, not the train as such. The picture is framed by the tree above and the furniture on the right. The dog and the frame lead the eye to the anxious railway staff.

Southern Railway’s 4-6-0 850 Lord Nelson, built in 1926, standing inside the loco shed at the preservation centre at Carnforth in 1995.

LMS Stanier Class 5 4-6-0 44871 on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway in 2013. ‘Strong back lighting emphasises the steam blowing off from the engine’s safety valves and cylinder drain cocks. The picture would be better with some human interest in it, but it was not to be.’

0-6-0 Pannier Tank 7754, one of many steam locos sold off by British Rail to the National Coal Board, approaching Blaenserchan after the steep climb from Talywain. ‘This was an artistic experiment, using the siding-end buffer stops as a frame for the train.’

A4 Pacific 60009 Union of South Africa leaving Leuchars for Dundee and Aberdeen in the mid-1970s.

‘As two Eurostar trains on the London run await departure from Gare du Nord in Paris in 2003 a TGV arrives from Lille. The success of high speed rail in Europe is challenging air as the preferred means of travel between major cities, as in Japan.’

‘I only took the picture because there was no phone with me, and this is the result.’
Slave new world

Think slavery, and the trade in slaves, ended a couple of centuries ago after a long campaign led by William Wilberforce, who sat as an independent MP for Kingston-upon-Hull, then Yorkshire, and finally the rotten borough of Bramber? Think again. CHRISS PROCTOR lifts the lid on a scandal to which many politicians and businessmen are happy to turn a blind eye and reveals, now as then, that money talks louder than morality.

A BIT OF A SHAM

Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act of 2015 says large companies (18,000 of them with a turnover of £36 million) have to place on record ‘transparency in their supply chains’: That is, they have to make it clear that their suppliers don’t use slave labour.

So how is this enforced? Well, confidentially, it isn’t. The Home Office doesn’t have a list of companies required to make a declaration; it doesn’t have a list of those who have declared; and it doesn’t maintain the database.

Some non-government organisations monitor the feverish inactivity, but they can’t insist that firms comply with the law. Also, the public sector is excused from making any declarations at all. So the whole thing’s a bit of a sham.

TOUCHED BY SLAVERY

The MSA created an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, a job that went to former policeman Kevin Hyland. After four years, he cracked. He said government had a strange notion of ‘independence’ and he was rude enough as to accuse the Home Office of apathy. He pointed to the paltry 151 convictions for slavery-related offences in his first year; said police forces need to move slavery up their priority lists; and demanded measures to make it easier for victims to escape abusive employers. The post was still vacant six months after he had been thanked for his efforts and shown the door.

So is slavery a major issue in the UK? The Home Office concedes that at least 13,000 people in this country are being held in forced servitude or compulsory labour. The Walk Free Foundation says this number is more likely to be in excess of 136,000. Whichever is right, the answer is ‘too many’.

Then there’s the issue of using goods made by slave labour overseas. Every year £14 billion worth of goods are imported into the UK. How many of those have been touched by slavery? Gareth Snell, Labour and Co-operative Party MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, believes every one of us has ‘something in the home, wardrobe or car’ that has been made by a slave.

It is easier to turn a blind eye to slaves used abroad than at home. We can pretend it’s nothing to do with us. This isn’t a new attitude. The British did not stop importing cotton and other commodities from the Deep South of the United States following the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, even though we knew the cotton was picked by slave labour.

Money talks louder than morality: the mills of the UK’s Victorian northern powerhouse demanded cotton, and the British economy insisted upon it. Besides, no one actually saw slaves being used…

UNDERGROUND EVIL

The law still treats the crime of slavery in a perfunctory way. Admittedly, it is difficult to obtain hard evidence from victims. But it is revealing how we treat those who do manage to escape.

Any decision in their favour has no legal status; once an investigation is over they are almost as helpless as before: they are offered support for 14 days. A fortnight to shrug off a life of trauma, organise benefit payments or get permission to remain in the UK and prepare yourself for a satisfying and productive life. 14 days?

Happily, there are glimmers of light. Last April the Co-op set up its Bright Future initiative to offer paid work placement and a job in its food business to people rescued from modern slavery. And Northern College in Barnsley has helped 14 survivors through a free thinking course it hopes to continue to develop.

There are moves in the House of Commons to give teeth to the Modern Slavery Act: Gareth Snell is calling on MPs to support expanding the scope of section 54 of the MSA; guaranteeing independence for the Anti-Slavery Commissioner; implementing an interim minimum 45 day support for victims; and supporting Lord McColl’s Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill.

It is a stain on our world that, globally, 27 million people are victims of human trafficking or slavery; and it pollutes our country that, in 2018, Swansea MP Carolyn Harris still needs to tell us, ‘Human beings are not a commodity to be bought, sold and traded!’ It should be an issue we only read about in the Journal’s historical 100 Years of Union column.

185 years after slavery’s abolition, we don’t see victims dragging chains or being auctioned in market places. Yet isn’t gone away. It is an underground evil, hidden and protected by fear. And one huge difficulty is that people do not believe it is happening. They think it’s old-fashioned. That it ended in 1833. It didn’t.
London’s burning

MARK WHEELER, a driver on London Underground, Leytonstone branch chair and industrial rep, is not the only one in his family who is (or was) a trade union activist. His great-grandfather helped found the FBU – like ASLEF, a small but powerful craft union – 100 years ago

My great-grandfather, Jim Bradley, who was the son of a fireman, helped found the Firemen’s Trade Union – it didn’t become the Fire Brigades’ Union for another 12 years – in 1918. Working conditions for firemen were appalling. Fire stations were run on military lines – hence the term fire brigade. Men were recruited from the Royal Navy, as it was thought that only they would tolerate the strict discipline, drudgery of drilling and spit and polish which constituted the daily routine.

Firemen had to live at the fire station. Single men occupied dormitories; married men had flats. They were on duty, day and night, for 14 consecutive days, followed by one day off. They were not allowed to leave the site. Only when they were called to an incident did they have any contact with the outside world.

The most hated rule of all was that their children, on reaching the age of 18, were forced to leave the family home and find other accommodation. Their remuneration for doing one of the most dangerous jobs known to man was the wage of a labourer.

PROPER PAY TOO EXPENSIVE
There was no statutory obligation for any authority to provide a fire service. Some ran a skeleton service and called in police (untrained and unequipped) to assist when necessary. This was a good bargaining point to claim parity of pay – and the three shift system – enjoyed by the police. It was repeatedly rejected as ‘too expensive’.

Several times in its history the union has negotiated a fair living wage only to be told by the government of the day that there was a pay freeze. (History often repeats itself!) It was not until the Second World War, when a national fire service was formed, that conditions of pay, promotion and compatibility of equipment was established.

The NFS and the Auxiliary Fire Service admitted women for the first time and people from all walks of life who brought a diversity of skills and experiences. FBU membership soared.

The FBU has worked tirelessly to improve its members’ lives as they have adapted to a changing role and now respond to a wide variety of emergencies. It was a hard and often bitter struggle to secure the recognition that firefighting is a profession for highly skilled and dedicated men and women who, daily, put their lives on the line to save the lives of others. Since its inception more than 2,000 FBU members have died in the course of their work but, thanks to the FBU, no one has lost their life since 2013.

GRAND DISPLAY OF SOLIDARITY
Much of the early work of building the trade union was done by my great-grandfather, Jim Bradley, who was assistant general secretary from 1918 to 1922, and then general secretary from 1922 to 1929.

The setting up of the FTU, and building the union in its first ten years, were a great achievement, fighting the entrenched resistance to trade unionism from within the fire service.

Jim, a former London park keeper, trade union official, and political activist, had never been a firefighter. But he was born above Great Portland Street fire station – because his dad was a fireman in the London Fire Brigade – and, as secretary of the National Union of Corporation Workers in the capital, recruited the first firefighters into the union after its launch in 1907.

In a speech to the NUCW conference in 1912, Jim, its president, said: ‘There runs a grand display of solidarity, that new-born spirit and cohesion among the different grades of workers that few of us thought possible.’

Accepting volunteer and retained firefighters into the union in 1927 was an historic decision, because, over time, retained membership in some areas has equalled or surpassed full-timers, especially at fire stations in rural areas.

Their membership of the union was felt to be warranted given their similar role, and it enabled them to join the fight for better pay and conditions while raising causes and campaigns that specifically effected them. FBU membership rose from 2,279 in 1934 to 2,800 in 1938 and more than 3,000 at the outbreak of war.

SECRETLY BALLOTED
When Jim initially wrote to the Ministry of Labour asking for recognition of a firefighters’ union (and secretly balloted members for strike action if his request was ignored) the government resisted but negotiation led to a representative board for London firefighters.

What sounds like a small concession from the government proved to be crucial in the setting up of the Firemen’s Trade Union. The rule book published the following year records the foundation date as being 1 October 1918 when they broke away from the NUCW as a union in its own right. George Gamble was elected its first general secretary; Jim followed as GS from 1922 until his death in 1929 and I am enormously proud of what he achieved for firefighters in this country.

Mark with a portrait of his great-grandfather; Jim Bradley; the revised rules of the Firemen’s Trade Union, forerunner of the FBU; and James Charles Bradley’s union card
The EC president (and member for District 4) with the Skipton crew

Rioja and roll, Tosh

At the meeting of Skipton 189 branch, EC4 president Tosh McDonald and DO4 Nick Whitehead gave out service badges to members. Tosh was presented with several bottles of Rioja and a retirement certificate for his future. Adrian Lunn, branch secretary

Terry’s all gold

At Hammersmith & City’s November branch meeting, our extremely hard working EC member Terry Wilkinson had the pleasure of presenting membership badges to Harvey Mitchell (35 years), Simon Blakesley (25) and Alec Bishop (15). A great bunch of members and a great night was had by all.

Kevin signs up

DO2 Kevin Lindsay with Dannielle Rowley, Labour MP for Midlothian, CLP activists and councillors after signing a constituency party agreement with Musselburgh & Midlothian CLP.

LONSGIGHT GATHERS MOSS Bro Alan Moss picks up his 30 year badge from DO3 Andy Hourigan (right) who joined Les Muir and Tony West of the RMS at our September branch meeting (left). Jim Hopkins, branch secretary

Milk Tray man

A very good attendance to mark the retirement after nearly 47 years’ service of Paul Pearson. The branch was also pleased to welcome DO1 Graham Morris to King’s Lynn for his first visit as well as regular attendees and good friends DO5 Nigel Gibson, ECS Howard Kaye and GN company council rep Peter Emmington at a new venue, the Liquor & Loaded bar and restaurant. Paul began his railway career at March which, back in the early 1970s, was a busy railway town with extensive marshalling yards. He moved to Cambridge in 1989 and then, in 1999, King’s Lynn, where he spent many happy years. Graham presented Paul with a large cheque from his colleagues (towards a forthcoming holiday) and his ASLEF retirement certificate which the branch had framed. Paul’s wife was presented with flowers and chocolates by our Milk Tray man Howard. We received reports from

Upcoming events

- **CATERHAM – SATURDAY 1 DECEMBER**
  To celebrate 90 years of a drivers’ depot at Caterham, and Christmas, we will be having drinks at the Surrey Hounds pub in Caterham Valley (now called the William Garland) from 19.00. Contact Dean Anderson (07930 911619) for details.

- **NORWOOD JUNCTION – SUNDAY 2 DECEMBER**
  AGM from 12.45 and buffet from 14.00 at Selhurst Railway Club. ‘All RMS members are welcome,’ says Daniel Bound.

- **WILLESDEN – THURSDAY 6 DECEMBER**
  The 1A Christmas reunion is at Watford Ex-Services & Social Club, 12-14 St Albans Road, Watford (5 mins walk from Watford Junction) from 14:00 to 18:00.

- **RIPPLE LANE – FRIDAY 7 DECEMBER**
  Annual Christmas quaff and jollity will commence at 13.00 at the Windmill near Upminster Bridge tube station. Fancy dress optional, but please note the January gathering is “caped”, says Cliff Blackwell. Normal service will resume in February…

- **ASHFORD – THURSDAY 10 JANUARY**
  From 11.00 at Ashford Railway Club, Beaver Lane, Ashford, Kent. Dig deep when the raffle comes round as that’s what pays the bill! Remember this is your reunion; use it or lose it…

- **EASTLEIGH – SATURDAY 9 MARCH**
  From 12.00 until 18.00 at the BRSA Club, Romsey Road, Eastleigh. All welcome, buffet provided.

- **RAMSGATE – THURSDAY 4 APRIL**
  From 11.00 at the Red Arrow Club in Ramsgate, Kent.

- Please send branch news, reports, features and photos to journal@aslef.org.uk
100 Years of Union

Grove Park hits half century

Grove Park branch turned 50 years young on 1 April (someone had a sense of humour!) and, to celebrate the milestone, a badge was commissioned. I would like to thank branch member Joseph Holmes for his idea about the design, branch officials and members for help in choosing colours, etc, and recently retired Ipswich member Andy Derrett (and daughter) for assistance in creating the finished article.

Ray Garland, Grove Park

Beer & badges

A packed branch welcomed the GS, AGS, EC1, DO1 and DCC to our annual beer & badges presentation in early October. Mick gave an ASLEF rundown on things industrial and political before further contributions from Simon, Marz and Graham and questions from the floor. Mick also kindly presented retirement certificates to Ali Hussein and Michael Taylor and branch gifts in recognition of their contribution at company level to Ali and local level to Simon Hill (RMS) as well as long service badges to Stephen Dunne (25 years), Sam Wallis and Martin Morris (20), Greg Whitmore (15) and Kerry Waters (5). A great evening.

Ray Garland, Grove Park

50 up

Retired member Bro Mick Symes was presented with his 50 years long service medallion by the GS at the meeting of Portsmouth & Isle of Wight branch 164 on 7 September.

Deb Butt, branch secretary

867 years on the line

Battersea branch held its annual beer & badges night on Tuesday 6 November attended by GS Mick Whelan, EC1 Marz Colombini, DO1 Graham Morris and Southern company council; 28 presentations were made totalling 867 years’ service including Phillip Brand (40 years) and Steve Harding (45) plus 10 overdue medallions for 50+ years to Derrick Fendick, John Howcroft, Sid Rumbold, Peter Rood, Colin Deslandes, Colin Taylor, Graham Richards, Vic Raskin and Doug Crosby (who has 73 years membership of ASLEF!) and retirement certificates to Trevor Finch, Phillip Brand, Brad Mist and Graham Hoy.

Pas Luongo, branch secretary

Happy Christmas (War is Over) but drivers were dying not in Flanders but from the flu. MICK HOLDER turns back time to December 1918

THE WAR LORDS HAVE FALLEN
‘The war has come to a dramatic end during the month, and its effects have been to plant democracy securely in many parts of Europe. The war lords have fallen by it, and even the Kaiser is in exile, with the red flag flying over Potsdam. The terms of the armistice are such as to leave no question about Germany being vanquished, and those terms are of particular interest to locomotive workers.

Next to warships and submarines, what was the thing of great value that Germany had to surrender to the Allies? It was the locomotive engine – 5,000 such engines, with 150,000 wagons. Doubtless our members will be represented amongst those to receive this huge consignment, and to make use of some of them for Allied purposes.’

MANY LOSSES FROM INFLUENZA
‘I regret to announce the death of Bro A Olby, who succumbed to pneumonia following influenza. He was a most ardent worker in our branch, and at the time of his decease was holding the position of check steward. Branch secretary, Norwich.’

LEAVES A WIDOW AND ONE SON
‘It is with deep regret that I have to record the death of Bro H Buckle from pneumonia. He was 44, and leaves a widow and one son, who is also a member of our Society. Branch secretary, Tondu.’

A WREATH FROM THE DEPOT
‘On 3 October Bro AJ Smith (fireman) passed away after a short illness, being a victim of influenza, which has been raging in this town. Our brother leaves a widow and four children, the youngest only a few days old. One sad feature is that our brother was not a member of the orphan fund. A wreath was sent from the depot, and a few of his mates from work attended the funeral. Branch secretary, Portsmouth.’

MEMBERS HOME AND ABROAD
‘To every member at sea and ashore, at home or abroad, on duty or at leisure, we extend fellowship and the best of wishes for glad reunions and a truly Happy Christmas.’
BILL RONKSLEY A LEGEND OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Bill Ronksley, a legend of the labour movement, long-serving president of ASLEF’s executive committee, and a member of this union for 76 years, died at the age of 94 on 6 November.

I met Bill when I joined the railway in 1979. I was a freight guard, and a local rep for the National Union of Railwaymen, but the NUR full-time officer couldn’t stand my long hair, chopper, and grease under my fingernails – not much has changed, really – but Bill, who was the full-time officer in District 4, took me under his wing. He was a giant of ASLEF and did so much for this trade union as a member, as an officer, and as president, as well as a giant of the labour movement.

Last year, to celebrate his 93rd birthday, Ray Jackson, Dave Court and I, with many other friends and comrades, took him to the Peacock, a pub at Stannington, near Sheffield, which had a special place in Bill’s heart. Because when his parents, who were tenant farmers, with a young family, lost their jobs, and tied cottage, on a local estate, it was the village blacksmith – because the pub was then a forge, with a cottage attached – who offered them a room at what became an inn. Bill, whose political views were forged on the anvil of such adversity, never forgot their kindness. He was a quietly spoken man who always thought before speaking. He had a way of putting the most complex problems into a very simple analysis that people could understand easily.

Bill was born on 7 May 1924 and, when he left school, became a messenger lad in Sheffield. The day after the city was bombed he was off with his satchel to deliver mail to the railway office and, passing city hall, saw a large crowd on the steps and, ‘for the first time in my life, saw a man with make-up on’. He was gawping when a woman clipped him round the ear and told him, ‘Take your hat off in the presence of the king!’

I went with Bill to the Soviet Union in 1988 – we were both members of the Communist Party – and he lived his life until his death according to communist principles. He never drove a car, he always relied on public transport, and he lived in a council house. He joined the party as a very young man and would listen to – and record – Radio Moscow every night and then type up what he had heard.

I think it was the way his family was split up, and had very little, that helped forge his political beliefs. He got involved in the union – he always believed the workers would win out in the end – and was politically and industrially active all his life. I remember him telling me, though, ‘Never forget how malleable these buggers are when it comes to holding on to power!’

Bill was an idealist – he had a vision of a better, fairer, more just society run by, and for, everyone, not just a favoured few – but he was pragmatic, too, especially when it came to negotiating pay and t&cs for train drivers. He held lots of branch positions, was District Secretary – what we now call District Organiser – then EC member for District 4, and was elected EC president, the longest-serving president, l

O ur dear friend and comrade Bill Ronksley held trade union office all his life, starting as a shop steward as a young man, rising to be national president of his union, and following that with nearly three decades as secretary of Sheffield Trade Union Council. He was still a serving member of the executive committee when he died. Bill was a lifelong trade unionist, communist, and internationalist, who had such an incisive mind, incredible knowledge, and the highest moral values of peace and humanity. We learnt so much from his invaluable contributions to our many debates over the years. He will be sadly missed.

Sheffield Trades Council

PAUL BARNES CLOUGHIE’S LOSS OF WEST NORFOLK’S ARFUR DALEY WAS LINNETS’ GAIN

We have lost Paul Barnes following a long and brave struggle against pancreatic cancer.

Paul was a King’s Lynn boy, often sliding away from school to spend time at the railway station. It was no surprise that, when the opportunity presented itself, he took a job on the railway. Paul started as a second man at Cambridge in 1985 and, after getting his driver’s check, when the chance came moved back to his home town depot at King’s Lynn.

A likeable rogue, Paul had many interests over the years, but life was nearly very different. He liked to tell the tale of how Brian Clough ‘had a look at him’ when he was manager at Nottingham Forest. Having seen Paul turn out for the very part time King’s Lynn railway team back then, I don’t think Cloughie had any sleepless nights about not havingsigned a footie star. LOL!

Paul also liked tennis, shooting, and golf, but probably his favourite hobby was his cars. He carved out a reputation for being the Arthur Daley of West Norfolk with his wheeling and dealing in the used car trade.

Thanks to all the branches who contributed to our branch appeal for Paul; finally we reached agreement with GTR GN for a train to carry a name plate in Paul’s memory.

RIP Paul, and drive on!

Mark Steele, King’s Lynn
ALAN GRENFELL  FAREWELL ALAN MY OLD FRIEND

It is with deep regret that I have to announce the passing away of my old schoolmate and, for many years, work colleague Alan Grenfell. We first got to know each other in the playground of Annfield Plain secondary modern school in 1956 when we found out we both had the love of steam locos. I used to cycle from Dunston to Leases, where Alan lived, and Friday nights were special as at Lintz Green they ran pigeon specials hauled by a passenger loco (on the Blaydon to Consett line via Shotley Bridge).

In 1957, with the introduction of the new DMUs, a promotional deal was put on by the NER of British Rail and you could travel anywhere on the region for 7s 6d. At 12 years old we travelled to Carlisle from Newcastle, visited Carlisle Canal ex-NBR MPD (Alan took a great photo of us on a D30 4-4-0) and then travelled to Penrith behind a Stanier Duchess piloted by a Black 5. From Penrith to Darlington via Stanmore summit, then Darlington to Newcastle via the coast (Sunderland) behind an A4, a very happy time.

We both started work in the operations dept of BR at 15 (the minimum age to join the footplate line of promotion on the NER was 16). We both transferred to the footplate at Blaydon in 1961. Later that year we both transferred to Percy Main MPD for promotion to fireman; at 16 we were the youngest firemen on the NER. Percy Main closed in 1965 and, after a six week spell at Heaton MPD we moved to Didcot WR. In 1969 we were both made surplus to requirements and moved to King’s Cross, where we passed our driver’s exam, and this is where we parted company as I moved to Waterloo for promotion in 1973. Alan moved to Stonebridge Park, but bought a house in Bletchley, where I lived. He then transferred to Newcastle, and that is when we lost touch. RIP Alan my old friend.

Alan Honeyball

ROY BELL  THE BEST RAILWAYMAN I HAVE EVER Known

Roy Bell was not just a railwayman but a signal engineer totally trusted by operators, totally trusted by drivers, with unparalleled knowledge that he used for the railway, never for personal gain.

I knew and trusted Roy for many years. He was a signal engineer who was honest, straight, unworldly, and, as such, an innocent walking safely in a much more devious and duplicitous world than he ever understood it to be.

His detailed route knowledge, understanding of train driving, and ability to explain complicated signalling and operating issues simply, was legend and many, many professionals sought his guidance when faced with difficulties. Those were qualities I have never found in such abundance in any other man or woman I have met in the 65 plus years I have been actively involved in this industry. He brought that fairness and balanced knowledge to many, many legal cases, including at public inquiries and as a witness at criminal proceedings. He defended Peter Afford over Watford, Larry Harrison over Southall, and protected the professionalism of Driver Hodder who, so easily, could have been blamed for Paddington, and many more besides. The industry owes a debt to him like no other.

I was privileged to be with Roy in the nursing home shortly before he died on 18 October and we chatted alone together for a while. Unsurprisingly, we spoke about his personal ‘baby’ – London Bridge signal box and its signalling, the recent removal of the closing-up signals (call them ‘inner homes’ if you like) and how London Bridge capacity has been reduced rather than improved by the latest Thameslink project.

He was charitable, as always, and when I said, ‘They don’t know, Roy’ he smiled and said ‘No, but, in fairness, they don’t know they don’t know, it’s not their fault.’ I described him once in print as the best railwayman I have ever known and that remains his epitaph.

Peter Rayner, Vernham Dean

JEFF LEMAR

Jeff was a lovely man, always willing to help with any problems you might have. He spent many years on the pension panel for drivers. I first met him in the late ‘60s after Beckenham Junction closed, he came to Orpington, then on to Dover where he stayed until retirement. RIP Jeff, we are thinking of your family at this time, and we cherish our memories.

Dave Weddle, Tonbridge RMS

JOHN DAVID GREENWOOD

I have to announce the passing of David at the early age of 62. He spent practically 40 years on the railway at Knottingley Ferrybridge, working for British Rail, Yorkshire Freight, Wisconsin Central, EWSR and, finally, Freightliner Heavy Haul, and in retirement heading the operations team at the Elsecar Heritage Railway.

The service at St Cuthbert’s Church, Ackworth, was attended by many of his ex-colleagues from Freightliner, DS Cargo and GBRf and current colleagues from EHR. Our thoughts are with his wife Judith and their family. Keep them boats sailing, Dave.

David Court, RMS

Bill celebrates his 93rd birthday at the Peacock pub in Stannington, near Sheffield, last year (above); Bill with Mick Rix, a partially obscured Davy Court, Tosh McDonald, Martin Samways and David Douglass on a march during the bitter miners’ strike of 1984-85 (top left); and with comrade-in-arms Ray Jackson at a fundraiser for Andy Botham in Matlock in 2015 (left)

One of ASLEF’s greatest presidents, a great trade unionist, and an inspiration to so many of us in the labour movement.

GS Mick Whelan

Bill was a great man whose death leaves an enormous hole in our lives.

DO4 Nick Whitehead

David was buried at Ackworth cemetery

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Is Robbie the Robot the train driver of the future?
The European Rail Traffic Management System (Journal, November) sounds rather upmarket and futuristic and, if it wasn’t for the word ‘European’, might even sound like a good advance. ‘ASLEF will always manage technological advancement’ – EC7 Andy Hudd – is the kind of slogan to make you think that all will be well.

Perhaps it will, but many people fear differently. From the early 1800s until the present time trains have run with a driver in control and, as systems advanced, and the railways speeded up, everything was taken in its stride. If a loose-coupled coal train was to move at 20mph, then 20mph was the speed it moved at and was braked by the driver’s experience accordingly. When an express was braked by vacuum, it was braked by the driver’s experience and when those expresses advanced to 125 with air brakes they were driven at 125 and braked accordingly.

The point is that drivers were needed, generation after generation, to fulfil the role and, as signalling and locomotive technology advanced, the driver’s experience did, too.

I can imagine a future where trains run automatically at high speeds with only a braking curve between them and no signals. Dispensing with signals dispenses with signalers, and the engineers to place and maintain them, and the workforce making them, and increases the profit of running a railway. Running trains automatically, controlled by computer and satellite, dispenses with drivers and all the baggage (driver managers included) and increases profit for the operating company.

When the ruling elite decided to get rid of the major threat to them in 1984, they were prepared to destroy not only the lives of the miners, but all those associated with mining, as well as the mining industry itself.

Don’t think for one minute they would not invest in robotising the railways, because they like to invest profit to make even more profit. That is the essence of capitalism, of business. And, when the railway is run by automation, and warehouses are run by robotics, and supermarket checkouts, libraries, banks and everything else, where will the money come from to keep all the redundant workers?

Complete automation is a threat to our way of life and should be fought. No drivers, no ASLEF, no protection, and no job. You may finish your railway career sweeping the platform to have the privilege of watching your train pass through – without you on it.

Chris Dodd, retired member, Derby branch

If a Tottenham fan hits an Arsenal fan, is that the fault of Son Heung-min or Harry Kane? Of course not!
I disagree with Denis Lewis (Journal, November) who believes that religion is the root of all evil. If a man does someone harm in the name of religion, it’s not God’s fault, or religion’s fault; it’s the man’s fault for ignoring or wrongly interpreting the true essence of religion which is to love one another and show compassion and mercy to all – especially the vulnerable and needy. If a Spurs fan attacks an Arsenal fan is that Harry Kane’s fault? Of course not. Jesus’s teachings give absolutely no warrant for violence. Any believer behaving that way is disobeying the one they claim to be following.

Islamist terrorism is evil. But it is not the religion that is making people commit acts of terror. Every chapter in the Quran starts: ‘In the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate.’

It is totally false that all the major wars in history were caused by religion. The conquests of the Roman Empire weren’t caused by religion. Neither were the two world wars. Wars are the result of greed, passion and the desire for power and wealth, or waged for territory or tribal supremacy.

Religion often moderates forces of evil: religious conviction often provides the sole compelling reason for refusing to kill, for seeking peace; the truth is that religion and religion are cultural variables, but killing is a human constant.

Martin Luther King Jr knew the answer to racism and violence was a deep and true Christianity. He gained his inspiration from Jesus who said that those who follow him must turn the other cheek, love their enemies, and pray for those who persecuted them. His leadership of the civil rights struggle remains a fine example of love triumphing over hate; of costly and courageous resistance of evil and of religiously-inspired social action that made the kind of difference that everyone can appreciate and made the world a better place.

As a Catholic, I believe that God’s relationship with us is straightforward. He gave mankind free will; otherwise there would be no point, would there? He sent his son, Jesus Christ, to instruct us in how we should lead our lives; Jesus taught us to love one another, and take care of the needy and poor; to be humble, not materialistic; to put others before yourself, and be forgiving. Jesus even forgave those who put him to death. If everyone lived according to the word of Jesus, the world would be perfect, a truly wonderful place: there would be no hunger, no poverty, no divide between rich and poor which, at the moment, is becoming greater. The Tories wouldn’t exist; a socialist government would ensure equality of opportunity for everyone in education and employment; essential services for everyone’s good health would be well funded; there would be decent housing and schools for everyone; we would not have Brexit; there would be no private schools or other elite institutions maintaining the establishment’s hold on power and influence; Philip Green would not be sunning himself on his boat while his ex-employees go wanting without a pension; the Royal Family wouldn’t live in wealth in property with hundreds of vacant rooms while, within yards, there are homeless people; property tycoons would not be allowed to keep premises vacant as investments; industries would not be nationalised, profits would be re-invested and workers paid more; and we wouldn’t have to endure greedy, wicked landlords charging extortionate rents for wholly inadequate property.

The root of all evil is man’s choosing to ignore or misinterpret God’s holy word which is, essentially, to love one another. Marek Lasek, Wimbledon Park, South Western Railway

The undiscovered country is an exciting destination
I want to explain to Bro Redmond, LUL, (Journal, November) why I voted to leave the EU. Why I campaigned for Leave and why I would do so again, with pride. Amid his rather foul-mouthed insults towards those with the temerity to disagree with his world view, he reveals his total acceptance of a Remain narrative fed to him by Alastair Campbell, Chukka Ummunna and the rest of the establishment. I find his cringing acceptance of a manifestly unjust system both baffling and depressing. His supine deference to a political class who collectively shrug their shoulders and claim impotence in the fight against rapacious global business. His placid
acceptance of a life of hopeless grinding struggle for the working-class.

Despite what he has been brainwashed into believing, I am not naive enough to believe the Leave vote will, in and of itself, transform our great country for the better. But I do believe that restoring the power to act to our own elected Parliament has to stand a better chance of delivering meaningful change to the lives of ordinary people than continuing with a situation where more than 70% of primary legislation is handed down by an unelected Commission acting on its own agenda.

I believe a situation where the wealth gap has been widening and social mobility narrowing for over 40 years – roughly the time we have been in the EEC/EC/EU – is unsustainable. The European project can only end in one place – a United States of Europe – where I do not want to go.

I believe in the British people. I believe in the people who created the trade union movement, who pioneered workers' rights (long before we joined the EEC), who banned slavery, whose women fought successfully for the vote.

I believe the EU is desperate to punish the British people. Because when we are seen to survive and prosper outside the EU – which we will – they know others will follow. And when that happens the gravy train that is Brussels is finished.

So I hope Bro Redmond understands that the vote to leave was the greatest act of popular democracy in recent times. It would be better for everyone if he, and those who voted Remain in good faith, put their efforts into building our collective future. And he might consider this: Shakespeare called the future, 'The undiscovered country' and the difference between us is that I think that is an exciting destination.

Tom Burns, Perth

Where do we go from here

What has happened to democracy? A vote for Brexit, it appears, can be overturned – ignoring 17.4 million British people who voted to leave the EU – as the referendum result does not reflect the world vision of the liberal left in the United Kingdom!

We are a free, democratic, capitalistic country and should remain so! I have been a member of a railway trade union for 28 years – initially the RMT and, for the last 15 years, ASLEF – voting Labour since being of age yet now I have no political party I can affiliate with as it feels if I am not on the Corbyn bus I am now the enemy when talking to his more ardent supporters!

The last straw was Diane Abbott calling people like me basically racists and bigots for voting for Brexit and Emily Thornberry demanding another vote under the guise of giving the people a say.

Well, we had one, and we voted to leave the EU!

Steve Hill, Manchester Piccadilly No 1

Opening up the dialogue on the future of Scotland

I write in response to Gregor Gall’s article (Journal, November) which starts off investigating the Scottish government’s plans to allow public sector bids for ScotRail but descends into a typical unionist-sounding ‘SNP bad’ story. As an SNP member and founder of Railworkers for an Independent Scotland I found Gregor’s Labour love-in quite amusing. Richard Leonard is a man who doesn’t even know what a devolved issue is in Scotland, and who makes Kezia Dugdale look a Mastermind champion.

Whilst I was not a lover of the Growth Commission report I saw it for what it was (a means to open up dialogue on Scotland’s future; not policy). Then we are pointed toward vote for Jeremy ('I oppose nuclear weapons unless they are stored in Scotland’). Corbyn. Labour were in charge in Scotland for decades and did close to nothing whilst in charge, (indeed the last time they held power in Scotland they oversaw the catastrophe that is PFI and built a grand total of six affordable homes; as of April 2018 the SNP had delivered something in the region of 72,500 and are building homes at a faster rate than any other country in the UK).

The Labour Party I grew up with no longer exists and has instead become a party with no idea of where it is going. Gregor gets stuck into the SNP’s handling of the ScotRail franchise (maybe with good cause) but fails to mention that whilst Labour were in government they did nothing to bring the rail network back into public ownership despite the pledges of people like John (sorry, Lord) Prescott nor did they reverse the anti-trade union legislation.

Gregor mentions zero hours contracts but fails to mention Labour’s inactivity on that issue either (you can go back over 20 years to hear Blair talking about how bad they were), If I lived in England would I vote Labour? Yes, because there is no alternative. I hate the Tories with every fibre of my body, but let’s not promote the idea that Labour are the left saviours, a party still accepting peerages in the unelected House of Lords is far from left-wing.

Gregor also fails to mention the other things happening in Scotland under the SNP government – free education; free prescriptions; a baby box for every new born to give an equal start in life; the campaign against Amazon paying slave wages: mitigating the bedroom tax; bowel cancer screening at 50 instead of 60; free school meals for primary school years 1-3; a publicly-owned not for profit energy company by the Royal British Legion.

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A new exhibition at the Tate celebrates the work of Edward Burne-Jones, friend of William Morris and Medieval master of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

KEITH RICHMOND takes a passport to Pimlico to look at pictures that launched a thousand Athena posters and tapestries owned by Jimmy Page.

Pictures at an exhibition (clockwise from top left) Perseus: The Doom Fulfilled; The Tree of Forgiveness; The Beguiling of Merlin; and Love and the Pilgrim

IS star may have fallen a little in recent years – Arthurian legends, flame-haired Pre-Raphaelite temptresses and PRB paintings not being as much in vogue as they were in the days when Athena prints were pinned with Blu Tack on the walls of every student bedsit in Britain – but Edward Burne-Jones is still one of the most significant figures of High Victorian art.

A major new exhibition at the Tate – the first since a show at the Hayward Gallery in 1975 – celebrates Burne-Jones as, in the words of curator Alison Smith, ‘a great artist; a visionary in the tradition of William Blake; one of the great draughtsmen of British art; and a pioneer of the Arts & Crafts movement in breaking down barriers between media in seeking to beautify the world.’

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know’
– John Keats

He rejected materialism – capitalism, red in tooth and claw, and the horrors that industrialisation had brought in its wake – embraced Christian socialism, immersed himself in the works of Chaucer and Malory and Tennyson and the myths and legends of King Arthur, and began to paint those beguiling and exquisite pictures for which he is famous.

In 1860 Burne-Jones married Georgie MacDonald, the well-connected daughter of a Methodist minister (a friend of George Eliot and aunt to both Rudyard Kipling and Stanley Baldwin) but in 1866 he met a strikingly beautiful Greek divorcee, Mario Zambaco, who became his model, his muse and his lover.

She was immortalised in such paintings as Cupid Delivering Psyche; The Wine of Circe; Phyllis and Demophoon (in which he used her fine facial features for both androgynous lovers); and The Beguiling of Merlin.

When Maria desperately pleaded with him to leave his wife and their two children, and he declined, she threatened to kill herself with laudanum, and the couple had a mortifyingly public scuffle when he forcibly restrained her from throwing herself into the Regent’s Canal.

Georgie became close to, and found solace with, William Morris, whose wife Jane was enjoying a passionate, and rather public, affair with Rossetti.

All of which helps to explain the tangled web of beauty, honour, desire and deceit we see etched on the faces of the characters in his paintings.

‘Only this is true, that beauty is very beautiful, and softens, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails.’
– Edward Burne-Jones

This exhibition features small preparatory drawings and early pictures of knights in shining armour, which reveal not only his attention to detail but his extraordinary technical skill as a draughtsman, as well as large tapestries (a couple lent by Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, very Stairway to Heaven), stained glass windows, and an unusual gilded and painted grand piano, as well as some stunningly modern portraits and, of course, the major PRB paintings – such as The Tree of Forgiveness; The Beguiling of Merlin; Love and the Pilgrim – and the Perseus canvases commissioned by Arthur Balfour before he became Prime Minister and the Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty) story cycle.

Popular discontent with (21st century rather than 19th century) capitalism, together with a desire to escape into fantasy (think Game of Thrones) and the on-trend gender-fluid signs of recent months means the time may be right for a Burne-Jones revival.

And there is no better place to start than this exhibition, which has every important picture he ever painted.
BAH! HUMBUG

EOPLE who have never read any other book by Charles Dickens have read A Christmas Carol (because, as much as anything, it’s a slim volume and, at 28,912 words, a long short story rather than a novel). Even people who haven’t read the book are familiar with one or more of the many films, stage plays, television and radio adaptations of the yarn. Because it’s very popular. A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas has never been out of print since it was first published in 1843.

The characters of Ebenezer Scrooge, Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim, the ghost of Jacob Marley, and the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future have become fixtures in the popular imagination. As Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, Professor of English at Magdalen College, Oxford, points out in his introduction to A Christmas Carol & Other Stories (Oxford University Press, £14.99), ‘Originally written as a tract for the times, this cautionary tale about the ongoing tussle between greed and goodness has been thought of as timely whenever it has been read.’

Because it’s a timeless morality tale and, now, as much a part of our annual Christmas festivities as Carols from King’s, the DFS sale, and Paddy Holder’s dulcet Black Country tones inquiring, ‘Are you hanging up a stocking on your wall?’

This handsome new edition, bound in festive red cloth, has five of his Christmas stories – A Christmas Carol, which he knocked out in six weeks, finishing in early December; and the four he wrote to capitalise on its success, including The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang on Old Year Out and a New Year In; The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home; The Battle of Life: A Love Story; and The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time.

Walter Bagehot famously described Dickens as ‘a sentimental radical’ but Lenin walked out of a production of The Cricket on the Hearth at the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1922 because, according to his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, ‘Dickens’s middle-class sentimentality began to get on his nerves.’ Hey ho. As Scrooge says, ‘If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with “Merry Christmas” on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart…’

Keith Richmond

Prize Crossword

Crossword 152 by Tom Williams

Across
1 Blackcurrant 7 Ruche 8 Surf 10 Enemy 11 Lists 13 Thrill 15 Groups 17 Maize 18 Darts 19 Dame 21 Thing 22 Monkey-wrench

Down
1 Bare-legged 2 Ancestor 3 Knees-up 4 Urgent 5 Rosy 6 Nor 9 Full-length 12 Division 14 hamster 16 Surrey 18 Desk 20 Ago

Solution to Crossword 151

Across: 1 Blackcurrant 7 Ruche 8 Surf 10 Enemy 11 Lists 13 Thrill 15 Groups 17 Maize 18 Darts 19 Dame 21 Thing 22 Monkey-wrench

Down: 1 Bare-legged 2 Ancestor 3 Knees-up 4 Urgent 5 Rosy 6 Nor 9 Full-length 12 Division 14 hamster 16 Surrey 18 Desk 20 Ago

Congratulations to Jim Taylor, of Great Yarmouth, 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 151st prize crossword in the November 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, EC 1M 4NN by 14 December.

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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

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Address........................................................................................................................................
..........................................................................Telephone No..................................................
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)