King’s Cross
a railway story
railway enginemen’s tax free saver plans

tax free savings plans for
Resource Managers, Roster Clerks, Driver Assessors, Driver Team Managers, Customer Service Assistants, Driver Instructors, Drivers, Customer Service Managers, Train Managers, Conductors, Retail Sales Managers, First Class Hosts, On Board Cleaners, Controllers, Guards, Revenue Protection Inspectors & Senior Conductors and anyone we’ve missed out who works on the railways or for train operating companies!

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News

- Another year, another fare rise for passengers
- Tory Prince blames Sadiq instead of Boris; conferences & rallies; 500 Club; plus Off the Rails: Clement Attlee and Jonathan Coe
- Last departure for Bill Ronksley in Sheffield
- TOCs promise railway recruitment drive
- Marking 40 years of women on the footplate

Features

- Ashleigh Smart on the STUC women’s conference in Dundee; and Bill Dale on the Retired Members’ Section AGM
- Mick Holder on railway workers’ role in suicide prevention; and Paul Patmore on the STUC black workers’ conference
- Peter Darley tells the fascinating history of King’s Cross station in north London
- Small if beautiful: Gregor Gall analyses the success of ASLEF, BALPA and the FBU
- Debbie Reay reports from the ITF congress
- Peter Mason on our freight forum in Brum and Julian Vaughan on step-free access

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- Last Word: While away the long winter nights with a good book or three
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- ASLEF’s Legal Services; Change of Address
- Cover: Brian Morrison

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January 2019 | The ASLEF Journal 3
What a way to run a railway!

Either for passengers – or for voters at the next election. Commuters complain about persistent delays and cancellations, the consumer group Which? says the privatised train operators are one of this country’s least-trusted groups – beaten to bottom place only by second-hand car dealers – wages aren’t keeping up with inflation and yet the train companies, and their chum at the DIT, Chris Grayling, are pushing up prices yet again! What a way to run the railway!

Failing Grayling – as he’s known to cabinet colleagues – has tried to suggest there should be a link between wages and delays and passengers last year. The report was particularly scathing about the part played by Chris Grayling. Lilian Greenwood, committee chair, said: ’It is extraordinary, and totally unacceptable, that no one took charge of the situation and acted to avert the May timetabling crisis. Instead of experiencing the benefits of much-needed investment in our railways, one in five passengers experienced intensely inconvenient and costly disruption to their daily lives.’

Mick Whelan said: ‘The Secretary of State for Transport, if he had any sense of embarrassment, or responsibility, would do the decent thing and resign. He won’t, of course. Everything is always someone else’s fault, as far as he’s concerned.

‘The truth is we don’t want, or need, reform. We need a radical solution to a structural problem. We need to bring our railways back into public ownership – a promise Labour has made to the electorate – and run our railway in this country as a proper public service, not a vehicle for private profit.’

MPs call for root and branch reform of rail

A damning report by the House of Commons Transport Select Committee, published on Tuesday 4 December, called for root and branch reform of Britain’s railways after the chaos suffered by passengers last year.

The report was particularly scathing about the part played by Chris Grayling. Lilian Greenwood, committee chair, said: ’It is extraordinary, and totally unacceptable, that no one took charge of the situation and acted to avert the May timetabling crisis. Instead of experiencing the benefits of much-needed investment in our railways, one in five passengers experienced intensely inconvenient and costly disruption to their daily lives.’

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WOMAN KILLED LEANING OUT OF WINDOW

A passenger who died from serious head injuries sustained between Bath and Keynsham, on a Bristol Temple Meads-bound service, on Saturday 1 December, may have been leaning out of the window, according to British Transport Police.

SAVE THE DATE FOR WEEKEND SCHOOL

DO7 Brian Corbett and DO3 Andy Hourigan are organising a weekend school for Districts 3 and 7 at Weston-super-Mare in Somerset on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 March.

HAINES MANUAL SAYS SORRY

Andrew Haines, chief executive of Network Rail, has apologised for letting passengers down after he was rapped by the ORR, the rail regulator, for NR’s poor performance last year.

Making his Mark

Mark Drakeford, who was backed by ASLEF, is the new leader of the Welsh Labour Party. He secured 53.9% of the vote on the second round, beating Vaughan Gething and Eluned Morgan, and pledged to make Wales ‘a beacon of hope in a darkening world.’

Mark: radical tradition

GS Mick Whelan said: ‘Mark shares our values which is why we were proud to support his campaign to be the next leader of the Labour Party in Wales. He’s a strong proponent of trade unions – and the union link with the party – and we believe he will ensure the Welsh Labour Party, and the Labour Party nationally, remains a radical, democratic, socialist party that will deliver the change that is needed for the people of Wales.’

Mark, 64, has been Assembly Member for Cardiff West since 2011 and cabinet secretary for finance in the Welsh government since 2016. He is a strong supporter of Jeremy Corbyn; an active trade unionist; and a member of Unison and Unite.

Brian Corbett, ASLEF’s organiser for Wales, said: ‘Mark is committed to the regeneration of the Valleys and to the public ownership of Britain’s railways. He’s part of that great radical tradition in Wales and has the backing of Assembly Members.’

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Kids told this Christmas that Santa doesn’t exist will know how Brexterrrists feel after discovering there’s no quick, easy, prosperous future for Britain outside Europe.

@Kevin_Maguire

To whoever drew Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour Party secret santa, I’d suggest a nice new key ring. The keys to No 10 should be coming our way soon. Bring it on.

@MarzC

14 million people are in poverty in the UK. That’s one in five people. Wake up Theresa May.

@RachaelMaskell

Forever young

ASLEF’s striking new Young Members’ badge – driving the future – is available now for £3. You can email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk

QUOTE...


UNQUOTE

Top Marz

EC1 Marz Colombini has been elected to the national constitutional committee, the Labour Party’s top disciplinary body, in the trade union section.

Our woolly hat will keep you warm this winter. Price £5 (including p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
Blame Boris, then

K EITH Prince isn’t the first Tory to make an ass of himself. And he won’t be the last. But the London Assembly member for Havering & Redbridge did it in style – big time – when he spoke out after learning that Tube staff received a 3.85% pay rise last year.

‘A Tube train driver will get £2,000 more, taking their annual salary to £53,791,’ fulminated Prince, the Tories’ Greater London Authority transport spokesman. ‘And pay for a senior instructor driver is up £2,501 to £67,451. Londoners will be shocked to learn that the mayor has wasted millions on a massive pay rise for Tube staff. The mayor should focus on the needs of Londoners rather than the demands of his union paymasters.’

Prince – well-known at City Hall for shooting from the lip without first

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. ASLÉF’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.

BANKERS’ BASH: David Baddiel fondly recalls performing a private gig at a bankers’ Christmas bash ten years ago after the financial crash of 2008. The organisers had provided him with details of some of the people in the room so he could personalise his stand-up routine. ‘I’ve got a bit of paper here that tells me what you people are,’ he said on stage. But, he told Elizabeth Day on her

500 CLUB: G Miller, with number 146, won the December draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £442.

Off the Rails

K EithN ROSE, who wrote the Albany at Large gossip column in the Sunday Telegraph for 36 years, from 1961 to 1997, was an inveterate snob, but picked up and published many a juicy morsel in his time, as we are reminded in Who’s In, Who’s Out? The Journals of Kenneth Rose Volume 1 1944-1979 edited by DR Thorpe (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £30). Such as this one about Clement Attlee and Winston Churchill during the Second World War. The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister were sharing a reserved train carriage when a serving sailor, rather the worse for wear from drink, tried to join them. A policeman prevented the rating from entering the carriage, but Churchill said, ‘Oh, let him sit down, the train is very crowded’ and encouraged Jack Tar to talk about the war. After half an hour the PM disappeared down the corridor. ‘That’s Winston Churchill, isn’t it?’ the sailor asked Attlee. ‘Fancy him talking so friendly like to a couple of twerps like you and me...’

J ONATHAN COE, the left-leaning author who brilliantly sent up the relentless ideological idiocy of privatisation in What a Carve Up! in 1994 and the problems of the political elite and 21st century capitalism in Number 11 in 2015, returns in his new novel Middle England (Viking, £16.99) to the Brummies he wrote about in The Rotters’ Club in 2001 and The Closed Circle in 2004. Benjamin Trotter’s niece Sophie flies back from Paris to Luton in the pouring rain. ‘The sky was slate grey and heavy with clouds. The train to Birmingham was disrupted due to planned engineering works and buses would be providing a rail replacement service between Kettering and Nuneaton. Rail replacement service, Kettering, Nuneaton. Were there five more dispiriting words in the English (or any other) language?’

G EORDIE GREIG, before he climbed the greasy pole and became editor of the Daily Mail last year, had stints on the South East London Mercury, Today, Tatler, Evening Standard and Mail on Sunday. During his time as editor of the Standard, he was notorious for refusing to run negative stories about London Underground. Whenever the newsdesk put up a piece that showed TFL in a less than wonderful light, Greig would always run it past Peter Hendy who would invariably tell him, ‘The story is bollocks.’ Even when it was true. How do we know? Because the hapless Greig liked to leave his mobile phone on the backbench where his less than loyal hacks would always scroll through all his text messages to see what the slippery one was up to...

C LIVE ANDERSON, barrister turned comedian turned radio and television host, recalls the moment billionaire businessman Richard Branson poured water over him during an interview on his TV chat show. Clive, dripping, hit back dryly: ‘I’m used to that. I’ve flown Virgin.’ He can’t remember what provoked Branson to drench him, but observes: ‘Oddly, he’s poured a glass of water over other people since. It’s a bit of a thing he does. At the time I thought the water was funny, because the interview certainly wasn’t memorable otherwise.’ Ouch...

Our new ASLÉF 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 ASLÉF 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

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Then raise the scarlet standard high beneath its folds we’ll live and die though cowards flinch and traitors sneer we’ll keep the red flag flying here

A S THE curtains closed around the coffin, which was covered with blood red roses, and 150 mourners stood to sing The Red Flag, a couple of dozen people around the room raised their right arms aloft in a clenched fist communist salute in tribute to their old comrade.

Bill Ronksley would have liked that. Because Bill, a legend in the labour movement, lived and died a communist. He joined the party as a young man and, unlike many others, never left. He was always a true believer. He never drove a car, but relied on public transport; he lived in a council house; and he would listen to – and record and then transcribe – broadcasts from Radio Moscow every night.

Bill was an idealist – he had a vision of a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few – a better, fairer, and more just country run by, everyone, not just the favoured few.

He was a member of this union for 76 years and held lots of branch positions, was District Secretary – what we now call District Organiser – and then executive committee member for District 4, and was elected EC president, the longest-serving president in our 138 year history.

Grenoside crematorium on the outskirts of Sheffield was packed – it was standing room only along the back of the room – to hear the celebrant, James Greely; RMS chair Ray Jackson; GS Mick Whelan; and former NUM president Arthur Scargill pay tribute to Bill at a humanist service on Wednesday 5 December.

Bill never married and had no children. But he had two siblings, and his nephew, who had flown in from South Africa, chose four songs for the service – You Raise Me Up by Josh Groban; Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye by Vera Lynn; Part of the Union by The Strawbs; and The Red Flag which was sung by everyone in the room.

State of the art high speed hub

The West Yorkshire Combined Authority is to create a new £26 million high speed rail hub institute in Leeds, the city where ASLEF was founded. It will include two facilities near Temple Newsam – one to test tracks, the other to test trains – to be completed by December 2020.

‘It will, for the first time, put advanced, world-leading test facilities at the heart – not only of the industry – but of enterprise,’ said Professor Peter Walker of Leeds University. ‘And act as an economic regeneration catalyst for most of the region.

‘It is the biggest test facility in the world in terms of laboratory infrastructure. It will have programmable track geometry. That means I can put in the full track geometry and alignment from, say, King’s Cross to Edinburgh, and run through the full duty cycle of the train.’

POKEMON GO MAN LOSES LEG

Surgeons at Salisbury Hospital have amputated the right leg above the knee of a man who fell onto the railway track while playing Pokemon Go on his mobile phone. He suffered high voltage electrical burns after falling face down onto the line.

Angry notes on back of seats

Passengers fed up with coughing up more and more money for an ever-poorer service just so Northern Rail can pay bigger dividends to their shareholders are striking back. After the company said it was driving up fares by 3.1% on 2 January notes started appearing on Northern services saying: ‘Overcrowded, delayed and cancelled’; ‘You’re not worth it’; ‘Trains not worth the price’; and ‘Lower your fares’.

Warren Rigby, 23, a civil engineer who works in London but travels back to Manchester at weekends, said: ‘Northern Rail never fail to let me down.’

QUOTE...

‘America first,
America first,
America first.’

– Donald Trump

WORLD CLASS TERRY WALKS

Sir Terry Morgan, who was described as ‘world class’ when he was appointed by Transport Secretary Chris Grayling, has resigned after four months as chair of HS2 Ltd. He also stepped down from Crossrail. Although, officially, he ‘resigned’ the rail boss had gone public saying he was about to be fired and made a scapegoat for problems with the projects, to keep the heat off ‘Failing Grayling’.

The Red Flag
TOCs promise a recruitment drive

SLEF is backing East Midlands Trains’ new three train driver apprenticeship programme designed, the company says, to support the industry’s commitment to grow its skills base and further professionalise the train driver role.

The programme, developed in partnership with ASLEF, the RSSB, RDG, Institute of Railway Operators, and National Skills Academy for Rail, is now underway at EMT’s academy in Derby, with nine new drivers under training. The apprenticeship offers successful trainees a formal certification.

TOCs – which have consistently refused, since privatisation in the 1990s, to train and employ enough drivers to deliver the services they promise in their franchise application to provide, which is why they depend on rest day working – are planning to train more than 1,000 drivers this year.

ASLEF has worked with EMT, which plans to train 30-40 drivers in 2019, to encourage more women to join the industry.

Danielle Brown, from Sheffield, one of the apprentices, decided to become a train driver at the age of 10 ‘when I stood on the platform with my mum and saw a high speed train whizz past’.

GS Mick Whelan said: ‘ASLEF welcomes the development of the level 3 apprenticeship standard – which recognises the skills, knowledge and responsibility that a train driver holds – and building on them in future as they are adopted across the industry as part of our agreed training programmes.

‘ASLEF has worked tirelessly for 10 years to see the introduction of apprenticeships for train drivers at level 3. We look forward to all train and freight operators making this standard available to new employees training to be train drivers, and involving our reps in the process.’

Boris draws line at Churchill

Plans to name Crossrail after Winston Churchill were dropped because Boris Johnson preferred to pay tribute to the Queen. That’s the claim of a new book, The Story of Crossrail (Head of Zeus, £20), by transport expert Christian Wolmar. He says Transport Secretary Andrew Adonis wanted to call it the Churchill line but the London Mayor, who later wrote a biography of the man he calls his hero, opted for the Elizabeth line instead. Churchill, though respected for his role as Britain’s wartime Prime Minister, is still loathed in Wales for deploying troops on the streets of Tonypandy to break a miners’ strike in 1910 and on Merseyside for putting a gunboat, the cruiser HMS Antrim, on the Mersey and ordering soldiers to shoot workers during the Liverpool transport strike of 1911.

No publicity for Mark Carne CBE

Mark Carne, forced to retire early from his £820,000 a year job at Network Rail, demanded ‘no photos’ when he was honoured with a CBE from Prince William at Buckingham Palace on Thursday 29 November. He picked up his gong on the same day that the ORR condemned NR for ‘systemic’ failings and issued an order for it to ‘urgently’ improve. ‘It’s no wonder Mr Carne is so embarrassed,’ said John Mann, Labour MP for Bassetlaw.

‘Commuters will be shaking their heads, as will staff in the rail industry. They are fed up of the chaos and bad management.’

EX-TUBE CHIEF FACES FURY IN NEW YORK

Andy Byford, the former London Underground manager hired to fix the New York transit system, has incurred the wrath of angry commuters at a stormy public meeting over filthy subway trains, cancellations, and soaring fares.

CAPITAL OFFENCE – DISABLED CAN’T TRAVEL

A lack of step-free access is preventing physically disabled people from travelling from 55% of London’s stations, according to a new report by the Leonard Cheshire Disability charity.

QUOTE...

‘The free trade agreement that we’ll have to come to with the European Union should be one of the easiest in human history.’

– Liam Fox, 20 July 2017

…UNQUOTE
Sisters are doin’ it

As we step into the driver’s cab at the start of another year DEBORAH REAY, of Northern Line North, and the Women’s Representatives Committee, reflects on 40 years of women joining men on the footplate in Britain

T IS now 40 years since the first women stepped onto the hallowed footplate. Hannah Dadds, the first female Tube driver, passed out on 5 October 1978 and began driving on the District Line. In an interview with the Going Underground blog, Hannah recalled her training and how she was asked far more questions than all of the men in her class put together. Even when the question wasn’t directed at her, the trainer would come back with ‘And do you agree with that, Mrs Dadds?’

Throughout her railway career, Hannah was a member of the National Union of Railwaymen. ‘The day you join London Transport, you go and pick up your uniform, then sit in the canteen. Then you’ll have the union reps come round. If it was ASLEF, they used to walk past you. When my sister joined, ASLEF said, “Oh, you’re the wrong sex” and “Don’t want you, you’re a woman”. But it all changed when women’s lib came in. You had them coming round canvassing and wanting you.’ Hannah died in 2011.

Karen Harrison, the first woman to pass out as a train driver’s assistant – although Annie Winter was the first – and, to date, only – woman to actually drive a train – has described her railway career as ‘Ten years of hell, ten years of heaven. It’s a bit tough when you’re only a teenager and you’re hit by this gigantic tidal wave of hate. To a lot of the men, I was the proverbial turd in the swimming pool. Every day I walked into the mess room I’d be shitting myself, but strutting about pretending not to be. I couldn’t let them create no-go areas for me; that would’ve established a precedent and we couldn’t have that, could we? It would’ve been the beginning of the end.’

Karen held various positions in ASLEF and was the first – and, to date, only – woman to chair AAD. She retired from train driving and became a full-time officer for Unison. Karen died in 2011.

Although conditions for women and, consequently, everyone on the railway have improved dramatically since Hannah and Karen started – and women on the

LEVEL CROSSING CRASH DRIVER JAILED
Shane Hughes, 41, from Halifax, the driver of a decommissioned ambulance which smashed through a railway barrier at Kildwick, North Yorkshire, and nearly hit a passing 70mph train has been jailed for 22 months at Bradford crown court.

CO2e EMISSIONS DOWN
Carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e) emissions from passenger trains reduced by 6.6% in 2017/18, according to the Office of Rail and Road. The improvement is attributable to changes in electricity generation, with more use of renewable sources.

JUNK FOOD ADS BANNED
Adverts for junk food high in fat, salt, and sugar are to be banned at Tube stations and bus stops as Transport for London ‘does its bit’ to tackle soaring rates of obesity in children.
The 500 Club

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

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

Once you have arranged your method of payment just complete the form and return it to the Admin Department at head office. The Retired Members’ Section committee would like to thank you for your support and wish you luck in the draw!

Yours fraternally, Mick Whelan, general secretary

ASLEF RMS 500 Club application form

Name.............................................................................................................................................
Address...........................................................................................................................................
Telephone 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...........................................................................................................................................

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 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.

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STANDING ORDER MANDATE

To Bank
Address

Please pay
Unity Trust Bank
Birmingham
08-60-01

For the credit of
ASLEF RMS 500 CLUB ACCOUNT

The sum of
£

Please cancel any previous standing order or direct debit in favour of the beneficiary named above

ACCOUNT TO BE DEBITED
ACCOUNT NUMBER

Signature(s)

Date

Note: The Bank will not undertake to:
(i) make any reference to Value Added Tax or other indeterminate element
(ii) advise payer’s address to beneficiary
(iii) advise beneficiary of inability to pay
(iv) request beneficiary’s banker to advise beneficiary of receipt

*Delete if not applicable

If the amounts of the periodic payments vary, they should be incorporated in a schedule overleaf!

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Quote name/s, address, D.O.B, telephone & email address to REPTA. 4 Brackmills Close, Forest Town, Mansfield, NG19 0PB Telephone: 01623 646789. Please quote Code ASLEF
YOU MAY ALSO JOIN AND PAY ONLINE AT - www.repta.co.uk

BRINGING THE INDUSTRY CLOSER TOGETHER

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ASHLEIGH SMART reports from the Scottish Trades Union Congress women’s conference in Dundee

The 2018 STUC women’s conference was held in Dundee – a city famous for its jute, jam, and journalism – on the north bank of the Firth of Tay from Monday 29 to Tuesday 30 October. The ASLEF delegation comprised Alison Miller, secretary of the Women’s Representatives Committee, and Ashleigh Smart of Polmadie branch. This was the 91st STUC women’s conference, but my first time attending what I found to be a very inspiring event at which I learned a lot. The conference addressed and highlighted issues women in Scotland are facing today, such as sexual harassment and equal pay. On this topic we had an opportunity to hear from some of the women from GMB and Unison who had very recently taken part in the equal pay strikes in Glasgow, the largest industrial action of its kind since the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970.

ASLEF submitted a motion to conference on the Gender Recognition Act reform and the rights of trans women. This is a controversial topic which has caused a bitter debate across social media. The STUC women’s committee approached the ASLEF delegation with a request for the motion to be remitted; they said the topics raised needed a broader discussion than could be held on the floor at conference and also claimed that the subject matter could be deemed offensive and therefore be voted down which was not something they said they wanted to see happen.

After several meetings the ASLEF delegation agreed to the remittance of the motion providing a statement could be made as to why the motion was submitted in the first place and in exchange for very strong assurances that the STUC women’s committee would hold discussions with the STUC LGBT+ committee to form a policy position which supports trans members. ASLEF was also part of a small group of unions who spoke against an FBU motion on the ‘commodification of sex’ as the motion called for support for the Nordic model approach to sex work which criminalises the purchase of sex. ASLEF has a firm policy position in favour of full decriminalisation.

It was inspiring to hear from so many strong women in the trade union movement over the two days of conference, debating and fighting for these issues.

Thorn in my side

Alison and Ashleigh outside the Caird Hall in Dundee on Tayside

Building bridges

BILL DALE, RMS committee member, and Chingford branch, reports on the Retired Members’ Section AGM at the International Transport Workers’ Federation in London on Wednesday 3 October

The RMS was fortunate to have Mick Whelan, ASLEF’s general secretary, and Jan Shortt, general secretary of the National Pensioners’ Convention, address its annual general meeting at the end of last year.

Mick opened by saying he had made visits to branches up and down the country. Seven years ago, when he was elected GS in 2011, he realised he had to rebuild bridges in our Society, and said he has had good support from the executive committee which works as a team.

He outlined problems with the freight companies, legal battles and government involvement. There need to be more sidings, loops and passing points which are all achievable in 20 years. The fight for a second person on GTR services was a triumph and the TOCs fear ASLEF for its campaigns and the outstanding support of our members in fighting for the cause. It was a mistake to take the view that joining the union is just an insurance, because clearly it is not.

Turning to Transport Secretary Chris Grayling, Mick said his track record was appalling and for him to agree fare increases for those who can least afford them was simply unjust, and will result in fewer people using the railway.

He outlined the current situation on the East Coast main line; the problems envisaged if the British Transport Police in Scotland merge with Police Scotland; and pointed out the guards’ dispute on ScotRail had been won. Finally, he was proud that ASLEF’s EC works as a team, and expressed his sincere thanks to Tosh McDonald as being the best president to work with.

Tosh was not down to speak but asked to address AGM saying austerity was the cause of most of Britain’s problems; although ASLEF backed Brexit, there are problems with implementation, and the best we can hope for is a general election soon; and ended by saying he will shortly become a member of the RMS and will attend forums in the future. We wished him a happy retirement.

Jan said the NPC now has 1.5 million members and campaigns not only for the older generation but also for inter-generation as the Tories’ austerity measures affect everyone. ‘We are a rich country and have no need for austerity. Care in this country needs to be from cradle to grave.’

Treasurer Alan Taylor gave his report on the financial position of the RMS. He said the 500 Club has allowed a second forum for the RMS and hoped that more members would join the club.

Chair Ray Jackson outlined all the hard work RMS committee members had undertaken during the course of the year. Both Ray and Les Muir (secretary) were re-elected unopposed.

Dave Press stood down from the committee on health grounds – the committee placed on record our thanks for his service and contributions – and it was proposed and seconded that Bro Mick Barker be elected to the committee in his place.
2,000 lives saved

MICKEY HOLDER, of ASLEF’s health and safety department, reports on recognition for our role in helping prevent suicides on Britain’s railways

STATISTICS on suicides on the railway in the latest annual report of the British Transport Police deserve closer scrutiny. The report states: ‘In the last 12 months, 2017-18, officers and rail staff made around 2,000 life-saving interventions on the rail network, an increase of 648 on the previous year.’

Behind this remarkable number lies the fact that, in recent years, very many people who work on Britain’s railways have volunteered individually to take up training courses run by the Samaritans, and others, in recognition that work on Britain’s railways have volunteered that, in recent years, very many people who work on the rail network, an increase of 648 on the previous year.

How many cases of people committed to taking their own lives were dissuaded from doing so then that means 200 lives were saved by volunteer workers. This is likely to be a gross under-estimate but illustrates just how significant their actions as volunteers are.

These volunteer workers have clearly made an enormous impact on suicide prevention

However, if the bare BTP stat of 2,000 cases is taken and it is presumed that just 10% of those were cases of people committed to taking their own lives who were dissuaded from doing so then that means 200 lives were saved by volunteer workers. This is likely to be a gross under-estimate but illustrates just how significant their actions as volunteers are.

And it’s not just lives that have been saved. Every attempt to use the railway to take a life affects the train driver immediately involved, those drivers not immediately involved who witness the incident, police and emergency services who attend the situation, rail workers on stations and the permanent way who see or have to deal with such an incident, and members of the public who witness the event. Not to forget the disruption to rail services and the effect on the individual’s own family and friends.

‘Every train driver who experiences a suicide whilst driving a train will be affected for life,’ says GS Mick Whelan. ‘Some have to give up their career. ASLEF is proud our members have taken up the training available, which was roundly supported by this union, and made their contribution towards this significant statistic of suicide prevention on the railways.

‘It is a shame that negative stories about trade unions make the headlines but positive ones such as this do not. Everyone who works on the railways who has contributed towards this life-saving statistic deserves recognition as does the fact that a great number of them are trade union members.’

Hey ho, let’s go

PAUL PATMORE, Edinburgh No 2 branch, and District 2 rep on ASLEF’s Black & Minority Ethnic Committee, reports from the STUC black workers’ conference in Glasgow

The 22nd annual Scottish Trades Union Congress black workers’ conference was held at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel, Glasgow, on Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 October. The theme for this year’s conference – and you’ve seen the words on ASLEF’s Ramones tribute tee-shirts – was ‘educate, agitate, organise’.

Suki Sangha of Unite was conference chair and I was vice-chair. Bro Hussein Ezzedine of Edinburgh No 1 was attending conference for the first time.

STUC president Lynn Henderson, who spoke about low income people living in poverty in Scotland, and deputy general secretary Dave Moxham, who spoke about the far right and keeping Scotland free from racism, were two guest speakers.

Hussein moved ASLEF’s motion ‘No to Israeli nation state law’. Last year, 2018, marked the 70th anniversary of the nakba, or catastrophe, when 750,000 Palestinian men, women and children were driven from their homes, and their land, and 800 villages were destroyed, with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Palestinians face discrimination every day. This was an important motion, delivered passionately by Ezzy.

I moved an emergency motion for the STUC black workers’ committee on justice for Sheku Bayoh, a young black man killed in police custody in Kirkaldy on 3 May 2015. No police officers involved in his death will face charges. The family was forced to wait more than two years for the Lord Advocate to make a decision. Their campaign for justice will continue.

I have been elected to serve on the STUC black workers’ committee for another year. One final point; there was an increase in the number of smaller unions attending this year’s conference which was great to see.

The family was forced to wait more than two years for the Lord Advocate to make a decision. Their campaign for justice will continue
I met my love by the gas works wall dreamed a dream by the old canal

PETER DARLEY, whose new book tells the fascinating 200 year story of the railway lands at King’s Cross in London, gives KEITH RICHMOND a history lesson

ING’S Cross – originally the village of Battle Bridge, an ancient crossing of the River Fleet – has been settled since the Roman occupation of Britain. It became known as King’s Cross after a monument to the spectacularly unpopular monarch George IV was erected in 1835 at the ‘king’s crossroads’ where New Road (now Euston Road), Gray’s Inn Road and Pentonville Road all met. The station at King’s Cross – now one of the busiest in Britain – was built from 1851-52 as the London terminus of the Great Northern Railway, connecting country to capital, and bringing people as well as goods to the smoke.

Peter Darley, a civil engineer and economist, who founded the Camden Railway Heritage Trust in 2007, is the author of a sparkling new book about the immediate area around the station, what he calls the railway lands.

‘King’s Cross has witnessed a dramatic transformation, with a new city rising above, alongside, and within some of this country’s most compelling railway heritage,’ says Peter. ‘The former railway lands remain extraordinarily rich in historical features, yet those who now reside, work, study, dine or play in this new world will find their origins hard to decipher.’

Not if they read this book. The fortunes of the Great Northern Railway, the London & North Eastern Railway, and British Railways, with their platforms, goods depots, coal yards and loco sheds at King’s Cross, reflect the ebb and flow of the British economy in the 19th and 20th centuries.

‘For nearly 200 years King’s Cross has served the needs of an ever-growing metropolis, experiencing growth in the 19th century, competition for trade, weakness between the two world wars in the 20th century, the high age of steam and, after the demise of steam, a decaying industrial landscape that was colonised by new enterprises, invaded by clubbers, contested by developers and the community, and captured by artists and photographers.’

‘The strength and simplicity of Lewis Cubitt’s design for the main passenger station can be seen in this illustration of the arrival of Queen Victoria at King’s Cross in 1853. It was constructed of yellow stock brick. Two lunette windows reveal the ribs of the arrival and departure shed roofs behind, separated by the central projecting clock tower and projecting sections at the margins. An arched arcade at the front provided a concourse, while the eastern side featured an arched opening to a cab road. The Great Northern Hotel is on the left beyond the western offices.’

‘New faces at King’s Cross in the 1950s; Bob Lunniss of ASLEF, who served on the LDC for 25 years as assistant secretary, secretary, and chairman, and a new recruit’ (Photo: Frank McKenna)

Sir Nigel Gresley’s A4 Pacific No 60017 Silver Fox Copenhagen Tunnel on the climb away from King’s Cross, 1953 with the northbound Elizabethan express for Waverley. (Photo: Brian Morrison)
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The ASLEF Journal

Images

‘By 1861, the original engine stables were becoming inadequate for accommodating the number of locomotives allocated. Construction of a new engine shed, the main line running shed, was combined with moving the carriage repair facilities from the passenger station. The new shed was built immediately in front of the 1850 engine stables. This picture, by HC Casserley, shows the front or eastern end of the running shed, with water tank, in 1913. The curved front of the erecting shed can be seen behind on the left.’

Peter, who gives guided heritage walks over the railway lands – which he defines as ‘from the Euston Road in the south to beyond the North London Railway, and from Pancras Road in the west to York Way’ – is fascinated by the ‘passenger stations, goods yards, coal yards, locomotive sheds, potato markets, stables, and other infrastructure, as well as the associated rolling stock, attracting industry and commerce to the area.’

The story starts in the inns around High Holborn, Gray’s Inn and Coldbath Fields in the early 1820s as engineers and entrepreneurs scrambled to build railways to replace the horse and cart (and canal) as the main means of transport in Britain. A total of 224 railway bills were placed before Parliament in the 1844 session; the years between 1844 and 1846 were years of railway mania.

Peter describes the construction of the station, including the famous clock, made by E Dent & Co, in the 120ft high clock tower, the Great Northern Hotel, and Die Turnhalle (the German Gymnasium), as well as the role of railway horses, the goods business, competition for passenger traffic, management of operations, and connections with the Metropolitan Railway.

There are lots of pictures, from paintings of the grand meeting of the Metropolitan Trades’ Unions at Copenhagen Fields in 1834 to black and white photos of running shed staff with Sturrock and Stirling tank engines, cross-sections of architect’s plans, bird’s eye diagrams of the track and terminus, and large scale Ordnance Survey maps of the King’s Cross urban landscape.

It’s not just an exercise in nostalgia; Peter ends his story with a Sunday stroll up King’s Boulevard in 2018 and admits: ‘I particularly like Dishoom. Over three floors, including the basement, this restaurant respects and celebrates the industrial fabric of the Western Transit Shed, exposing the ironwork beams and columns, and transforming it into a Bombay “go-down” by clever use of artifacts.

‘The loos in the basement alone merit a visit! The basement retains features of the 75 horses that were once stabled there, in less than ideal conditions, and is a great watering hole where you can hang out, if dining, until called to your table. And the Indian food served in the restaurant is quite delicious…’

‘King’s Cross, 21 September 1991. From left to right: 91018 heads the 08.00 for Edinburgh; 90023 will power the 08.05 special to the same destination; 43050 leads the 8.30, also for the Scottish capital; and a Mk4 DVT leads the 08.10 for Leeds.’ (Photo: Brian Morrison)

‘This pen and wash image of the milk depot north platform, by Käthe Strenitz in 1977, shows the railway siding that was formerly for unloading milk churns from trains, viewed from the south-west. Culross Buildings are on the left; and the external wooden staircase to Culross Mission Hall was used by railwaymen as a shortcut to Battle Bridge Road and thus to the goods yard or top shed.’

‘A railway clearance auction at King’s Cross station, 1875; engraving by WB Murray published in The Graphic’

‘A coal merchant’s cart in the yard of AJ Salter & Co on Cambridge (Camley) Street, with a railway wagon on the traverser above, and gas holders, 1945-50’ (Photo: John Gay)

‘Blasts out of King’s Cross on 11 July or Edinburgh’

‘King’s Cross/St Pancras, with its international, main line, suburban, and six Underground railway lines, is the most connected transport hub in Europe. The cluster of buildings in front of the station have all been removed, exposing the original façade in this view of the passenger station from across King’s Cross Square. Light now pours in through the glazed roofs into the twin sheds, brilliantly revealed from the square.’

‘A railway clearance auction at King’s Cross station, 1875; engraving by WB Murray published in The Graphic’

‘By 1861, the original engine stables were becoming inadequate for accommodating the number of locomotives allocated. Construction of a new engine shed, the main line running shed, was combined with moving the carriage repair facilities from the passenger station. The new shed was built immediately in front of the 1850 engine stables. This picture, by HC Casserley, shows the front or eastern end of the running shed, with water tank, in 1913. The curved front of the erecting shed can be seen behind on the left.’

A railway clearance auction at King’s Cross station, 1875; engraving by WB Murray published in The Graphic
Small is beautiful

GREGOR GALL, an affiliate research associate at the University of Glasgow, and editor of the Scottish Left Review, examines what size means to members of the labour movement

According to figures provided to the government’s certification officer, over the last 15 years (from 2003 to 2017) ASLEF’s membership has steadily grown from just under 17,500 members to just over 22,000 members. That’s getting on for over a 25% increase in members, with the greatest growth taking place in the 2010s.

Taking the title of a once well-known critique of post-war capitalist economics by the German-born British economist, Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, it would be easy to conclude from this one example that ‘small is beautiful’. The phrase was coined to stand against the rationale that ‘big’ is always better. EF Schumacher argued that ‘big’ was not only unsustainable but also, ultimately, destructive.

Applied to the trade union world, this does not mean that Unite, Unison and the GMB, with over 55% of TUC-affiliated members between them, are on a mission to self-destruct or torpedo the whole labour movement. But it does mean that the collection of a far larger number of much, much smaller unions has something significant to tell us in terms of organisational sustainability.

SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THEM

There are another 40-plus unions affiliated to the TUC (and many more outside it). Of these TUC affiliates, the vast majority have memberships under 50,000 and, in many cases, well under 50,000. These include unions for airline pilots (BALPA); prison officers (POA); actors (Equity); musicians (MU); firefighters (FBU); journalists (NUJ); and probation officers (NAPO). Over the last 20-odd years, the number of TUC affiliates has fallen from around 70 to just under 50. Those that have ceased to exist have largely been smaller unions, either general unions or for trades that pretty much no longer exist.

The likes of ASLEF, BALPA and the FBU have carried on regardless because they have something special about them. This is that they represent and organise a single well-defined occupation – train drivers, airline pilots and firefighters – and are really occupational, rather than trade, unions. They are not general unions organising many trades or occupations.

And, for the vital purpose of union organising, the benefits of being an occupational union are several-fold.

First, there is a closer relationship between the occupation and the union. This means that the degree of identity and association between member and union is greater (all other things being equal).

Second, with the union concentrating on just one occupation, it is easier for it to become the professional voice of that occupation. Being the professional voice allows a union to more easily seek to regulate the profession in terms of entry qualifications and behaviour within it.

Third, occupations inhabit strategic positions within operating systems so they are potentially power groups as long as they choose to deploy the leverage they have for bargaining purposes.

Fourth, high union identity means high union density so the potential power can be made manifest.

If a union organises more than one occupation, it begins to lose all of these advantages. Unions for teachers highlight this point. Over the last decade, the former NUT and current NAS/UWT unions recorded significant growth, making them rivals to the shop workers’ union, USDAW, for fourth spot as largest union.

IT WOULD BE CRAZY TO MERGE

On this basis, it would be crazy for ASLEF, BALPA, or the FBU, etcetera, to merge into larger, more general unions. It would mean giving up what is precious about them. Even to raise the issue of merger (or amalgamation) contradicts the thrust of the argument presented here.

Yet occupations do not remain static. Some rise and fall so that a union that organises just one occupation cannot necessarily rest on its laurels. Often new technology provides the impetus to major changes in terms of the birth and death of new occupations. The case of the compositors, members of the National Graphical Association, who set the ‘hot metal’ needed to produce the plates for the printing of newspapers, is an example of death. While an example of birth are the changes in medical technology which allowed the creation of paramedics (who used to be, essentially, ambulance drivers that did some first aid).

It is inconceivable that any advanced economy or society could function efficiently or effectively without a full, modern railway system – hopefully, one that is integrated with other modes of existing transport. Rail is cheaper and less environmentally damaging than road, whether for freight or passengers. And there is no prospect of short haul flying with drones or any other devices replacing what rail can do. The same cannot be said of road, especially with individual parcel delivery.

EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO ASLEF

But the future prospect of driverless trains could pose an existential threat to ASLEF.

Human intervention is always needed to control technology and correct its inevitable mistakes and ASLEF could seek to organise those who operate the system and, as part of a transition, use its present strategic position to bargain for higher wages and fewer hours for these future roles. ASLEF might have a smaller membership but as much, if not more, power and would not need to amalgamate with any other union.

And, as was said in an article on ERTMS (Journal, November) even with increased automation, many passengers will still want, and need, a driver at the pointy end of the train. Most aeroplanes are now fly-by-wire but airlines and, especially, passengers still want a pilot, and co-pilot, in the cockpit in case there’s a problem, or when the technology breaks down. Which, in the end, it always does.

Higher membership is necessary to provide unions with sufficient financial and human resources to organise and bargain. However, as the case of USDAW shows, if a union does not have a high density, and does not have strategic leverage, then having lots of members is not worth quite what it seems.

In these circumstances, small would still be beautiful.
HE International Transport Workers’ Federation congress took place in Singapore between Sunday 14 and Saturday 20 October, bringing together 436 trade unions from 178 countries, representing more than 20 million workers. With 838 delegates, plus 1,018 advisers, the venue needed to be big and the Suntec convention centre was only just big enough.

From baggage handlers from Nairobi, seafarers from Japan, and railway booking clerks from the UK, to school bus drivers from the USA, and all posts in between, transport workers were represented there.

**EUROVISION STYLE VOTING**

The ASLEF delegation comprised GS Mick Whelan; AGS Simon Wellar; EC8 Terry Wilkinson; Gary Comfort, Jubilee East; Cliff Holloway, Euston; and Deborah Reay, WRC.

The opening ceremony was spectacular and set the scene for an interesting and thought-provoking week.

ITF president Paddy Crumlin welcomed everybody, then gave a passionate speech about the role, the power, and the freedom trade unions give working people.

There was a presentation commemorating 20 years since the Patrick Corporation/ Maritime Union dispute in Australia, which was about the restructuring of operations for the purpose of dismissing the workforce. The dispute lasted a year and ended in the federal court, which eventually ruled in favour of the MUA and the restructuring was deemed illegal. The company and the union negotiated a new work agreement which was finally adopted in June 2018.

The election of officers returned Steve Cotton as general secretary and Paddy Crumlin as president. Our own Simon Weller stood for chair of the ITF rail section, but was unfortunately defeated by the political Eurovision Song Contest style of voting. It would have been nice if certain British multi-grade unions could have voted with the home team, but they went for the French delegate.

What became apparent over the week was how similar our problems and issues are. The effects of new technology on jobs, creeping privatisation, and outsourcing, are causing massive problems whether you work in a first or third world country. The ITF highlights and collates information but the ITF isn’t just about comparisons, it’s an international community which has learnt its weight to countries to get things done.

A report given by the Teamsters in the US concerning school yellow bus drivers said the nature of the job (a bit like lollipop men and women) makes the job unique. The school bus contract has been outsourced to a new private company, our very own National Express, who swiftly began tearing up contracts, dismissing staff, and cutting services. Industrial action and litigation soon followed but to no avail and things continued to deteriorate for the bus drivers.

Exasperated, the Teamsters turned to the ITF, who liaised with the GS of Unite and the three rail unions who had dealt with National Express. A meeting was arranged with the directors of NEX UK, finally concluding an acceptable agreement framework, but it took a delegation from the Teamsters, including Jimmy Hoffa Jnr, to come to the UK to get that agreement.

**OUTSOURCE EVERYTHING**

Letters and emails were sent to the ITF and groups around the world calling for her release. The Libyan government was inundated with petitions and letters of condemnation and eventually backed down and asked her to call off the international community. She was released and given her passport back.

Nermin spoke strongly about women not restricting themselves to women’s committees and asked why one of the vice-chairs of the ITF isn’t a woman? She said women across the Arab world are being threatened by men who don’t want women in leadership positions.

The ITF, in a global workplace, is more relevant now than it was when it was founded back in 1896. New technology and privatisation are resulting in workers’ rights being eroded instead of being enhanced. The poor are getting poorer, the rich are getting richer, the inequality gap worldwide is increasing, heads are buried in the sand regarding the environment and the craving of international bean counters to outsource and privatise anything and everything.

The only thing that stands in the way of this is working together in solidarity, in trade unions, within the mechanism of organisations like the ITF.
Dartford crossing

LADE Green held its badges presentation on Tuesday 15 November at the Royal Victoria & Bull Hotel in Dartford, Kent, where our branch was formed more than 100 years ago. EC1 Marz Colombini, DO1 Graham Morris and all three DCC members (Steve Burgess, Martin Brookes and Ray Garland) joined us. Unfortunately, EC president Tosh McDonald had to cancel at the last minute due to Doncaster council business. After an open (and lively) Q+A session badges were presented to Keir Friday (35 years), Kevin Morris (25), John Brace (10), Andy Britton, Shaun Cordrey and Sean Kavanagh (5) and then a light buffet was served.

Richard White, branch secretary

Marz and Graham with Keir, Kevin, John, Andy, Shaun and Sean

Reading festival

Reading held its annual ASLEF long service presentation, Badge & Binge, on Wednesday 7 November with GS Mick Whelan, DO1 Brian Corbett and EC7 Andy Hudd attending. A very good turnout saw long service awards presented by the GS to members ranging from five to 30 years with two retirees receiving certificates.

Paul Sedgeber, branch secretary

Brian Corbett, Dave Bowden (30 years), Dilip Dudakia (retirement), Iain Mackenzie (25), branch chair Vicky Brentnall, Graham Bourne (30), Mick Whelan, Andrew Taylor (10), Nails Syed (5), Rob Koumparos (10), Kevin Salter (15), Nigel Houston (20), Ian Davies (10), Mark Busby and James Illot (both 5) and Andy Hudd. Mick with Dilip (Jack) Dudakia and Charlie (Chas) Selmes

Hoy! Where Eagles dare

Graham Hoy has retired after 49 years’ service. Hoytie started his railway career at 15 in April 1969 and passed out as driver in 1980. He spent his driving career at Victoria Central Battersea branch, went on to become LSR secretary for 20 years, h&s rep for 10, branch secretary from 1999 to 2013 and procedures dating back to the early ’80s along with existing local agreements, rostering, diagramming scrutiny and representing drivers at disciplinary meetings and mediation, the list goes on. There are many drivers who owe their careers to Graham. Thank you, Hoytie, and have a long and happy retirement.

Pas Luongo, branch secretary

Hoytie takes the Battersea branch 019 shirt off Mick’s back branch chair from 2014 to 2017. Graham will be truly missed with his fountain of knowledge and experience in collective bargaining

Paul Miles, Duane Curtis, Richard Higgins and Ian Trimble end of 2018.

Paul Miles, DBC safety committee secretary, and Westbury assistant branch secretary

Safety in numbers

At the DB Cargo health & safety staff side meeting at head office on Thursday 18 October two of our longest standing reps, Ian Trimble and Duane Curtis, attended their final quarterly meeting. Duane, a driver and h&s rep at Margam, has been on the footplate since 1980. Ian, a driver and h&s rep at Warrington, was awarded his 30-year badge by company council chair Nigel Roebuck. Both stood down at the

GOOD TO SEE OLD FACES

We had a great turnout at our reunion on Friday 2 November. It was really good to see all the old faces again as well as some new ones who had not been able to attend in previous years. True solidarity from retired members!

Gary White, Fratton train crew

Upcoming events

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.

BRIGHTON – TUESDAY 7 MAY
Informal open afternoon for all retired and working members of Brighton or any of our Sussex branches from 14.00 at the Brighton Railway Club, Belmont, off Dyke Road. Details from Paul Edwards (07402 478278) or Paul Horan (07868 757492).

ASHFORD – THURSDAY 4 JULY
From 11.00 at Ashford Railway Club, Beaver Lane, Ashford.
Nooit Meer Auschwitz

STEVE RICHARDSON, D1 council secretary, reports on District 1’s recent trip to Amsterdam

Following our educational tour of Barcelona, where we paid Homage to Catalonia, the council’s next stop was Amsterdam. The first place of learning was the Anne Frank House, a building that was opened as a museum to the public in 1960. The room at the house still portrays the atmosphere of the period that Anne spent in hiding. Historical documents, photos, film images and original objects (including Anne’s original diary) are on display. We saw the hinged bookcase that concealed the secret annexe where Anne wrote about the persecution of Jews during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

Later that afternoon, we met three train drivers and three full-time officials from the Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions, at the Cafe de Walvis, where we discussed a variety of industrial and political issues; sharing our thoughts on the Dutch and the British rail industries.

The next day, we met a representative from a sister organisation of the International Brigade Memorial Trust, Stichting Spanje 1936-39, where we spoke about the worrying rise of Fascism in the 21st century. Denise accompanied us on a visit to the Verzetsmuseum, which is dedicated to the Dutch Resistance who played their part in defeating Nazi oppression in Europe.

The Auschwitz monument can be found just a stone’s throw away. The monument features six broken mirrors with the words, ‘Never Again Auschwitz’ inscribed. Sensing our curiosity about the significance of the broken mirrors, an elderly resident, who herself was paying her respects, explained the history of the monument and the urns of ashes that were interred beneath it. With Fascism clawing its way to the surface again, she wondered what the persecuted of the 1940s would think of today’s worrying vein towards right-wing extremism. Within hours of our conversation, news broke of the terrible atrocity at a Pittsburgh synagogue where 11 people were murdered by a gunman shouting, ‘All Jews must die!’

Neoliberalism, globalisation, the refugee crisis and austerity have resulted in many of the disenfranchised seeking an alternative from mainstream political parties, whilst far-right racist street movements, such as the Democratic Football Lads’ Alliance, supported by the likes of Tommy Robinson, seek to exploit the hardships of working-class communities, using fans and to push an anti-Muslim agenda. Whilst anti-Semitism was the central driver of Nazism, today it is Islamophobia that is being used to divide our communities. Fascism is gaining momentum in Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Germany and France, resulting in a steep rise in racism.

In these austere times, the sensibilities of race and religion are as raw as they were during the 1930s and the ‘40s.

Paint it black

Morden branch celebrated Black History Month on Tuesday 30 October with plenty of food and rum, thanks to the organising skills of Sherelle. Trevor Robinson, the Black & Minority Ethnic Committee member from District 8, was the guest speaker, and gave an inspired speech, which was well received.

Terry Wilkinson, EC8

Peace, New Year, and an 8 hour day were hot topics in the Loco Journal. MICK HOLDER turns back time (and our pages) to January 1919

PEACE TO THE NATIONS

‘Happy New Year. May it bring in its train an abiding peace to the nations, based upon justice, and may it bring to the industrial army a period of progress and happiness without the necessity of having to fight bitterly against the forces of monopoly and privilege. During 1919 we shall be gathering up the threads of action that were broken in 1914, and endeavouring to go forward to that contented state that war can never win.’

SYSTEMS RUN TO EXHAUSTION

‘The nationalisation of railways has stepped into the forefront of questions of practical politics. The contrary course, that of reversion to old private control, has become unthinkable. Our railways admittedly need transformation with a strong hand, for there is inefficiency and paltry plant everywhere. The systems have been run to exhaustion without repairs, and there is great leeway to make up before we get to those after-war developments which the general public has the right to expect.’

TOLL OF THE DREAD SICKLE

‘Scores of victims to influenza and pneumonia have been under 33, whilst the senior ranks have had to contribute their quota also to the toll of the dread sickle. Casualties in war, too, have depleted our young members, and the question arises as to what manner the Society may best perpetuate the memory of the fallen amongst our members in this terrible and prolonged war.’

SCALED THE RAMPARTS

‘The solid determination of our members has scaled the ramparts of the eight hours day, a notable victory which was half won in August of 1917, and effectively completed in the closing month of 1918. It means more leisure, more recreation, more vigour, a greater freedom from accidents, and the opening of an altogether happier era for the men in the cab.’

MEMBERSHIP UP TO 42,000

‘Whilst 1918 has left a vacant chair in so many homes… it has seen our membership constantly rising to close upon 42,000, and it has extended the helping hand of the Society to many children of departed members.’
Taking steps

**JULIAN VAUGHAN**, Northern Line North, and NE Bedfordshire CLP, says equal access is a right

INCE the Access for All funding scheme was first introduced by the Labour government in 2006, the progress of step-free access improvements on UK railways has made somewhat stuttering progress. The Equality 2025 target was quietly dropped and replaced by the goal of achieving equal access for disabled people across the transport system by 2030 which, at the current rate of progress, appears highly unlikely. Indeed, the Inclusive Transport Strategy which contains the 2030 goal already has a get out clause. By 2030, we envisage equal access for disabled people using the transport system, with assistance if physical infrastructure remains a barrier. This is not equal access.

While the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 means all train carriages will be fully accessible by 1 January 2020, it's ironic, or a disgrace, depending on your viewpoint, that thousands of platforms across the UK will remain no-go areas for disabled people.

While the £300 million allocated to Access for All for Control Period Six (2019-2024) initially seems generous, £50 million is actually deferred funding removed from CP5 (2014-2019) following the Hendy Review of 2016. Approximately only a quarter of the UK’s railway stations are step-free and the prospect of disabled people being able to ‘turn up and go’ remains distant. This, along with the Tory government’s treatment of disabled people, described by the United Nations in 2017 as a ‘human catastrophe’, has effectively resulted in a hostile environment for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

The lack of step-free access affects not only disabled people, but those with impaired mobility such as the elderly and those with young children. So people travel by less environmentally friendly means, such as by car, or they don’t travel at all. Which can lead to isolation, loneliness, potential mental health issues and a reduction in quality of life. As the UN said, the current government has ‘failed to recognise living independently and being included in the community as a human right’.

Equal access must be seen as a right, not a favour, and therefore should be at the core of transport policy, not an add-on. I joined the Labour Party, and campaign for equal access for disabled people, because I believe we should always strive for a fairer, more equal, society and that we should judge our progress on how the most disadvantaged in our society are treated. It’s clear that this government is woefully failing in its duty of care, I know we can do so much better. As Labour’s 2017 manifesto stated ‘It is society which disables people, and it is our job to remove those barriers.’

Freight train, freight train, run so fast

**PETER MASON**, business council secretary, Freightliner Intermodal, reports on ASLEF’s latest open freight forum in Birmingham on Wednesday 31 October

NUMEROUS members from all the rail freight companies were in attendance, as well as DO5 Nigel Gibson, who opened the day’s proceedings, DO6 Dicky Fisher, EC2 Hugh Bradley and EC7 Andy Hudd.

The morning started with Philippa Edmonds who, as lead on Freight on Rail, does much work to push forward the campaign for more freight to be carried on our rail network. Philippa gave us updates on possible new freight hubs, the position with grants from government, and the constant battle against longer and heavier goods vehicles on our roads, together with the added worry of the well-funded lobby for lorry platooning, something which we on the railway will tell you we already have in the UK – they’re called freight trains!

Moving on, and in a different direction, we had Lee James, ASLEF’s equalities adviser, who spoke about how the union is working with companies to address diversity within our sector. Lee spoke of how she had met with representatives from DB, Freightliner, and GBRF, to discuss taking this matter forward.

With a big push to attract more women to the freight sector, we had two guest speakers on this subject – Amy Pressland from DB, and Corinne Dean from Freightliner, who both spoke of their companies’ willingness to work with ASLEF in this area.

After lunch, we had verbal reports from Barry Hare, GBRF; James Glew, DB; Colin Thornhill, Freightliner Heavy Haul; and Peter Mason, Freightliner IIM; with numerous questions from the floor.

We also spoke about the critical situation all the FOCs now find themselves in, having in the past two years seen so many jobs lost, the now mad scramble to recruit drivers to our industry, when drivers have little trust going forward.

This was Hugh Bradley’s final freight forum as Scotland’s EC member. I am sure Hugh will attend in the future as a driver and I know all our freight members want to thank him for his tireless work in his time on the EC. On a personal note, I began my time on business council with Hugh and would like to thank him for assisting in my move into the role, always only a phone call away if I need any advice.

Must say, though, the healthy smoothies and shakes provided were undone by the supply of very tasty cookies…

We need to take steps to make sure everyone can access our railway
STEVIE NAIRN SOUNDBRACK OF LAUGHTER

It is my sad duty to advise members of the death, on 3 November, of Bro Stevie Nairn of Perth branch, aged just 54. Stevie started on the railway in 1984 as a traction trainee and moved to Perth in a promotional move in October 1991, where he spent the remainder of his career.

The tragedy of Stevie’s story resembles something out of a novel. His beloved wife Gill was diagnosed with cancer in the early spring of 2017 and, sadly, died that September, leaving Stevie with their two children, Lewis and Rachael, who were 15 and 13 at the time. With the help of family, Stevie was able to get back to work in the early part of 2018.

However, a stumble whilst on a visit to family in Inverness in April necessitated a visit to A&E where an X-ray showed a shadow on his lung which concerned the doctors. Subsequent tests revealed an inoperable and incurable tumour. Stevie vowed to tackle his cancer head on and was determined to survive for the sake of his children. Sadly, despite gruelling chemotherapy, he was declared terminal in early September last year and decided to stop further treatment.

Stevie treated his death the way he lived his life – by sticking two fingers up to those in authority who were telling him what should be happening to him. When his consultants told him that, 100%, he would die that weekend, Stevie proved them wrong by living a further six weeks! I witnessed doctors shake their heads and tell him he was defying science because of the state of his blood results – he just laughed and had another sip of wine!

Visiting Stevie was like sitting in the bothy with him, laughing and joking, and often he ended up dispensing advice and counselling to the nurses and domestic staff who worked in the cancer hospice. Unfortunately, there was only ever going to be one winner, and Stevie passed away peacefully on 3 November. His defiance of cancer, and his insistence that his final months would be lived with a soundtrack of laughter, was truly inspirational. It is true to say there will never be anyone like Stevie Nairn again, and Perth will never be quite the same.

A large turnout gathered at Perth crematorium for Stevie’s service, and his parting shot was to choose the Hearts song for his funeral as he knew there would be more than a few Hibernian fans in the crematorium, and he couldn’t resist one final wind-up.

Perth branch would like to thank ASLEF’s admin dept for arranging to have a retirement certificate sent out for Stevie before his retirement had been properly completed, which he was proud to receive, along with a bottle of Ardbeg malt whisky from Islay from the branch.

Grant Murchie, Perth

BOB HAMILTON TOP MAN

I report the loss of Bob Hamilton, a retired driver who started his footplate career at his local depot, Newton Heath shed, in November 1943 at the age of 14. Bob was the all-round top man, thought well of by all staff. He did his national service in Kenya, returning to Dean Lane shed and Manchester Victoria. Our thoughts go to Bob’s wife and family at their sad loss.

Sam Black, Newton Heath

DON MELLINSON

Don Mellinson, a Stockport man, died on 9 April 2018. Don started on the footplate on 31 July 1950 at Heaton Mersey shed until closure, then a PRT move to Newton Heath and Manchester Victoria. He was a man with a dry sense of humour and a wicked wit and a regular attendee at the branch. RIP Don.

San Black, Newton Heath

ALAN LETTINGTON

Retired driver Alan Harold Lettington has passed away shortly after his 90th birthday. Before joining the railway, Alan was in the Merchant Navy. He started his railway career at Bricklayers Arms, moving to Beckenham Junction (E) after which he moved to Victoria (E) and, shortly before retirement, he moved across the lobby to Victoria (C) to finish his career road learning. Alan was a widower and leaves a son and a daughter.

Jeff Veale, Battersea

00 not out

Former Worcester engine driver Tommy Done celebrated his 100th birthday with friends at the Crow Hotel in Tenbury Wells near the home where he now lives.

Thomas Clarence Done was born at Gloucester on 21 November 1918 and, while a young lad, his engineer father moved the family to Barry where, he hoped, work would be easier to find. When Tommy left school he worked at the Asbestos & Cement Works at Rhoose. Thinking it was not a very healthy place, and he wouldn’t live long if he stayed there, Tommy left to join the railway, starting as an engine cleaner at Barry in 1935.

In 1937 he transferred to Rogerstone as a fireman, staying there for two years before getting back to Barry. Moving up the links he became a passenger fireman with regular driver

Bill East and engine 361, a former Taff Vale A class engine.

Tommy moved to Worcester in 1949 as a driver earning 124 shillings a week. Living first at the Malvern hostel in Blackpole, then buying a house so his wife and children could join him. When the opportunity came to move back to Barry it was declined as the family were settled and happy at Worcester.

Tommy became a top link driver working to London with Castles and even a Black Five on one occasion. He was chairman of the LDC at Worcester. As a driver, and as LDC chair, Tommy was held in high esteem. He said he would never treat his firemen like he had been treated – and was true to his word. At his birthday celebration he said the men he worked with were not just colleagues, but friends. The fact that so many made the journey to Tenbury to see Tommy said it all.

Ian Tipper
Letters

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

SNP and Tories have been bed buddies for long time

I write in response to the letter from Liam Tansy (Journal, December) re the future of Scotland. I note that Liam is happy to remind our members about the failures of previous Labour governments, and I agree that this Labour Party is not the party I have supported all my working life.

Liam goes on to state that he is an SNP member who hates the Tories with every fibre of his body – but not enough to say about the way the SNP jumped into bed with the Tories to defeat the Abellio ScotRail franchise break clause, proposed by Labour’s Colin Smyth, by 85-34. But that’s nothing new as the SNP have been bed buddies with the Tories for a long time. From 2007 to 2011 they were in cahoots on issues like raising council tax and taxing workers who earned over £24k; they simply appeased the Tories when it suited or benefited them.

Liam goes on to state that Gregor Gall (Journal, November) failed to mention what the SNP has introduced to Scotland, like free education – all very well if you’re from the middle to upper classes, or from the EU, but not so good if you’re from a poorer background in Scotland trying to get into university. And the SNP ignored the ‘curriculum for excellence’ which has led to falling education standards in Scotland – but this is all covered up by removing the education benchmark tests.

Liam also forgot to mention that the SNP has constantly centralised the power of the Scottish Parliament at the expense of other services – such as forming Police Scotland by joining up our regional police forces, which has been a disaster, and has led to public safety being at risk. They have also reduced the powers of local councils.

It seems they take amnesia when it suits them. Take, for instance, the election results from 2011 when Bill Kidd (SNP) defeated Bill Butler (Labour) by 0.0339% to win Anniesland, or the two from 2017 when Stephen Gethins (SNP) defeated Liz Riches (Liberal) by 0.00727% to win North East Fife and the Perth-North Perth election when the SNP defeated the Tories by 0.0482%. These results were all celebrated as wins because it was on a ‘democratic’ vote with a simple majority being the threshold.

Now skip to the indyref vote when the Scottish people voted 55% to 45% to remain in the UK; or the Brexit vote which was 52% to 48% to leave the EU. Then they don’t want the ‘democratic’ vote to stand. Strange indeed...

One thing that the SNP and their supporters need to grasp is that Scotland is part of the United Kingdom. Scotland is not part of the EU and the UK voted to leave the EU. Would someone tell Ian Blackford these facts, please? The moral here is stones, glass houses, and all that stuff.

Wullie Simpson, Ayr branch

SNP aren’t Tartan Tories

As predictable as the summer rain, a revisionary ‘SNP bad’ story is put forward by Gregor Gall of the Jimmy Reid Foundation (Journal, November). In now all too familiar pattern, he tries to hide what Labour has done in the past, obscure what is currently going on in Scotland, and simply scream ‘SNP bad’ while losing sectarian votes to the Tories and left-wing votes to the SNP, Greens and Scottish Socialist Party.

Quite rightly, the article speaks about the possibility of a public sector bid for the ScotRail franchise and, hopefully, that will come to pass, but it gleefully ignores the fact that at the Smith commission Labour sided with the Tories and Lib Dems, as usual, to block the ability of Scotland to properly renationalise the railways. Done under the leadership of Johann Lamont, famously proving herself right, that some Scots weren’t programmed to make political decisions.

It talks of heading south for social democracy – my mistake, I thought Labour was socialist – with the reasoning that Corbyn has left policies such as: supporting free tuition at uni, done in Scotland; he supports free prescriptions, done in Scotland; abolishing parking charges at hospital car parks, done in Scotland; with the exception of those hospitals Labour tied into ludicrous, astronomically expensive PFI rip offs! It goes on to happily ignore the abolition of all road and bridge tolls; road equivalent pricing for ferries; the extension of concessionary travel to apprentices; the increase in university participation from more deprived areas of Scotland; an NHS out-performing the NHS in the other three nations; increases in tax for the well-off to improve services; the list goes on and on, though from this article only Scottish residents would be aware of it.

He also forgets to mention that the sole reason the Tories are currently in UK government is because of the call by another in the long line of stiffs to head up the branch office, Kezia Dugdale, before the 2016 election happily telling her voters to vote Tory in the Borders and Aberdeenshire to stop the SNP. They duly did, electing 13 Tory MPs and presenting us with the three-ring circus that is the current Westminster government. Perhaps this is the motivation for Labour dumping her like a sack of spuds in her defamation case against a pro-indy blogger she accused of making homophobic comments.

Labour in Scotland needs to wake its ideas up. The SNP might not be ideal, but this childish, nonsensical, transparent knocking of the SNP and being prepared to go into coalition with the Tories (in Aberdeen), have ‘arrangements’ to elect a Tory Provost (Falkirk), and ‘doing deals’ with the Tories to take power (North Lanarkshire) might appeal to party apparatchiks but, as a former Labour voter, this Tory love-in which started in 2014 with Alistair Darling getting a standing ovation at the Tory conference leaves me – and a tremendous number of other voters – very cold indeed.

One thing I do know about the SNP is they will never stand shoulder to shoulder with the Tories – unlike Labour in Scotland who have been doing it since 2014 and continue in councils around Scotland to do it to this day!

Hugh Cumming, Edinburgh No 2 branch, and District 2 LGBT+ rep

Is that firefighter’s axe we presented to Bill Ronksley mounted upside down in the ASLEF room at Wortley?

We were saddened to hear the news of Bill Ronksley’s passing. John Gilliver and I, as delegates to Sheffield trades council, always valued the contribution, experience and wisdom that Bill brought to our meetings and we will, as will many others, miss his inspiring presence.

We always found Bill to be warm hearted and friendly and it was always a real privilege to meet with him at labour movement protests and events.

We were talking only the other day about the ceremonial firefighter’s axe that the Fire Brigades’ Union presented to him and had mounted in the ASLEF room at Wortley Hall (debating whether it was mounted upside down, actually)! But, nonetheless, the gift had meaning and was in recognition of the enormous contribution he made.

Neil Carbutt, South Yorkshire Brigade Secretary, FBU, Sheffield

ASLEF Journal
Brexit should mean Brexit

Wikipedia defines globalisation as the process of interaction and integration between people, companies and governments worldwide. As long as I can remember we have been forced fed with the neoliberal idea that we live in a globalised world and a globalised market place. Globalisation is unavoidable. There is no alternative.

I am of a different opinion. I have seen big multinational corporations move their operations around the world seeking the best deal from poor countries, exploiting the poor, paying a few dollars a day to workers while they make a fortune.

Millions of people across the world feel left behind by globalisation. Brexit, Trump and the rise of the far-right are signs something is wrong. The banking crisis of 2008 was a disaster. Many lost their jobs and even their homes while the bankers and brokers licked their wounds. It is only a matter of time before the next financial crisis with some experts predicting it could happen within the next three years.

Since 2008 the richest 1% have got richer and now own half the world’s wealth. Global wealth inequality is getting worse. The poor are getting poorer and, surprisingly, it has even hit the middle classes. The mega-rich sit on islands offshore paying as little tax as possible.

Tony Benn once said: ‘The EU has the only constitution in the world committed to capitalism. It destroys the prospects of socialism anywhere in Europe, making capitalism a constitutional requirement of the set up.’ Capitalism is where trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.

In June 2015 the British people voted in a referendum to leave the EU. As a son of Irish immigrants, I voted to leave. I was not misinformed or tricked by false promises. I am insulted by some in the media portraying leave voters as uneducated racists. I voted to leave a club dominated by one country with its twisted vision of the future direction of Europe. I was and am fully aware of what I was voting for. The neoliberalists always believe they know what’s best for the minions and have been trying to overturn the people’s democratic vote since the referendum. Theresa May and her husband are globalists who care first about big business.

There is increasing talk of a second referendum or people’s vote. If this happens it will seriously undermine democracy in the UK. The millions left behind by globalisation will become disenfranchised and may turn their backs on democracy. It will open Pandora’s box. The will of the people must be respected. If ignored or overruled it could have disastrous consequences and may open our doors to the populists. The Labour Party must not allow this to happen. There is an alternative to capitalism and populism. It’s called socialism.

Andy Sheehan, health & safety rep, CrossCountry, Bournemouth

The undiscovered country is a pretty grim place, Tom

When Hamlet speaks of ‘the undiscovered country’ the only future he is talking about is death and the afterlife. If Tom Burns (Journal, December) thinks that is an exciting destination then post-Brexit Britain will be pretty grim.

Max Beard, Leytonstone branch

I loved the fact that things were done on trust

Please pass my thanks to the organisers of the forum held at the Yorkshire miners’ welfare and convalescent home, Scalby, Scarborough, in November.

Mick Whelan gave a comprehensive account of the union’s work during the year. Thompsons solicitors presented a detailed summary of things to be considered at this stage of life and there was a thorough contribution from the Yorkshire Ambulance Service giving a somewhat harrowing insight into the problems this section of the NHS is facing. Finally, Tosh McDonald gave a typically colourful speech, tinged with considerable reflection, this being his last forum as EC president, to close the event.

The building is magnificent and the food was simple and plentiful; I loved the fact that room keys are not normal, everything is on trust, what a great way to be with colleagues!

This was my first forum and I feel privileged to have been offered a place. We are fortunate that ASLEF continues the link to its retired drivers by means of the RNS and I urge all those who retire to join the section and take part in its activities.

Rob McMillan, Retired Members’ Section

Expensive diary? No! It’s money very well spent

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you to Pete Mason and Andy Bullock (Freightliner Intermodal business council reps) and Daren Billings (Freightliner Eastleigh LCE rep) for their help and advice regarding a recent dispute.

We’ve all heard the comments, over the years, about ASLEF and paying your subs for an ‘expensive diary’, but in this case it was money very well spent and helped me out at a time of need.

Kevin Drake, Eastleigh

Tough? They don’t know the meaning of tough

The failing pathetic politicians who are complaining about the ‘tough’ negotiations with the EU over Brexit should have tried negotiating with Ray Buckton.

David McKeever
Ballad of Robert Kett’s Rebellion

KEITH RICHMOND suggests some good ways to spend those book tokens – or money – you were given at Christmas

IT IS Chris Sansom’s misfortune that Hilary Mantel, Wolf Hall and Bring up the Bodies cast a long shadow over Tudor history on the bookshelves of every Waterstone’s. Because the left-leaning solicitor-turned-novelist behind the Shardlake series writes beautifully and thoughtfully about the Tudor period.

We were introduced to Matthew Shardlake, the crookback lawyer of Lincoln’s Inn, and his assistants Jack Barak and Nicholas Overton, in Dissolution in 1537 (well, 2003, but you know what I mean) as Henry VIII proclaimed himself supreme head of the Church in England and Thomas Cromwell set about dissolving the monasteries. Now, in Tombland (Mantle, £25), the seventh book in the series, it is 1549, the king of the field of the cloth of gold is dead, Edward VI (Henry’s son by Jane Seymour) is 11, and his uncle, Edward Seymour, the Duke of Somerset, is Protector as the country collapses into political, religious, and economic chaos.

Sansom evokes the sights, smells, tastes and fears of rich and poor, in London and Norwich, at the time brilliantly. There are plenty of parallels to be drawn but Sansom is subtle enough to let the reader draw an inference. The first 370 pages are a Tudor detective story; the next 430 tell the story of the Kett Rebellion; and the last 50 are an impressive historical essay on the real-life events.

‘I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in.’ – ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

It’s fiction, but a splendid antidote to the traditional kings and queens version of history you learned at school; it sheds light on a little taught corner of English history; and it’s a rattling good read to while away the long, dark winter nights.

For five halcyon years, from 1969 to 1974, Ian Hunter was the main man – singer, rhythm guitarist, pianist and principal songwriter – of Mott the Hoople when the band had hits with singles such as Honoloochie Boogie, All the Way from Memphis, Roll Away the Stone, The Golden Age of Rock’n’Roll and the anthem that David Bowie gave them, All the Young Dudes.

‘I never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity’ – IAN HUNTER, TOO MUCH, ON THE ARTFUL DODGER

Hunter’s had an afterlife since his five years of fame; 14 studio albums, with dozens of songs that, though they might not have been hits, are as good as anything he wrote in his heyday, and hundreds of concerts over the last 45 years. I caught him with the Rant Band at Student Central in London in 2017 and, even though he will be 80 in June this year, he still knows how to rock.

Hunter wrote Diary of a Rock’n’Roll Star (Omnibus Press, £18.99) during a five week American tour in 1972, before the band broke big, and it’s this, along with Hunter’s honesty about life on the road, and his writer’s eye for the telling detail, that makes it such a riveting read. It is, as is trumpeted on the cover of the new edition, with a fan’s foreword by Johnny Depp, a contextual introduction by Campbell Devine, and an epigraph by Hunter, probably the best book about rock by a rock’n’roll star.

It’s the time of year – cold, wet, dark – which lends itself to tales of the supernatural. The perfect moment, then, to dive between the covers of Horror Stories (Oxford World’s Classics, £8.99) edited by Darryl Jones, Professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin, a collection of 29 stories by 29 authors – including Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Bram Stoker, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling – from the golden age of 19th century horror. No 1 Branch Line: The Signal-Man, a ghost story written by Charles Dickens for Rugby Junction, a series of interconnected narratives published in the Christmas 1866 edition of All the Year Round, will resonate with anyone who works on the railway.

‘And, as for her mother’s heart, that might have been a railway terminus, so many shining threads ran up into it out of sight.’ – ALL PASSION SPENT BY VITA SACKVILLE-WEST

For 100 years Aerofilms, a firm founded in 1919 by Claude Graham White, an observer in the Royal Naval Air Service during the Great War, has recorded the changing landscape of England. Peter Waller has plundered the company’s archives for 150 images of stations; bridges, tunnels, and viaducts; loco works, sheds, depots and goods yards for England’s Railway Heritage from the Air (Historic England, £35).

‘People can lose their lives in libraries. They ought to be warned.’ – SAUL BELLOW

Leo Amery was a director of the Southern Railway, Liberal Unionist then Conservative MP for Birmingham South, Colonial Secretary under Baldwin, Secretary of State for India under Churchill, and the man who quoted Oliver Cromwell in his famous denunciation of Neville Chamberlain in the House of Commons. Gilbert Szlumper was general manager of the Southern Railway, and then, during the Second World War, director general of transportation and movements at the War Office, railway control officer at the Ministry of Transport, and director-general of supply at the Ministry of Supply. Both kept diaries which John King has edited for Gilbert Szlumper and Leo Amery of the Southern Railway (Pen & Sword, £25) which ‘challenges the belief that the Southern was a very happy family.’ Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose…
THE AGE OF AUSTERITY

HILIP Alston does not look like a man capable of shaking the British establishment to its foundations. A 68-year-old Australian lawyer, who specializes in human rights, he studied at Melbourne University, taught at Tufts, Harvard, and the Australian National University in Canberra, and is now a professor at New York University School of Law.

But it’s in his role as UN Special Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, and the report he published on Friday 16 November, that placed a metaphorical bomb under the British government with its withering indictment of the baleful effects of the savage public spending cuts ordered by David Cameron, George Osborne and Nick Clegg during the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, cuts continued by Theresa May and Philip Hammond since 2015.

‘British compassion for those who are suffering has been replaced by a punitive, mean-spirited and callous approach’

Alston, who saw the result of 10 years of the Conservative Age of Austerity in the depressing queues at food banks on the streets of Britain, dryly described the UK’s new two child benefit limit as ‘a real perfect way to punish families’ and condemned government policy as ‘social re-engineering’ that has resulted in ‘great misery’.

He called elements of Universal Credit ‘harsh,’ ‘problematic,’ and ‘unnecessary’ and reported that government ministers are ‘in a state of denial’ over the impact of spending cuts and welfare reforms which he deemed ‘ideological’. Poverty now afflicts one-fifth of the UK population but the government doesn’t get it.

And he dismissed ministers’ emphasis on high levels of employment as missing the point. ‘Low wages, insecure jobs, and zero hours contracts mean there are still 14 million people living in poverty. Because being in employment does not magically overcome being in poverty.’

Alston’s report rocked the British establishment because neither the government, nor the civil service, is used to the UN turning up on the Albert Embankment and condemning the policy – and the underlying ideology – in such strident terms. Terms usually reserved for a banana republic.

He wasn’t wearing a V for Vendetta anti-austerity mask while ducking water cannon at an Occupy protest, but the effect of the blue-eyed Aussie’s special report was just as devastating.

Keith Richmond

Prize Crossword

Crossword 153 by Tom Williams

Across 1 Money trader 4 Firearm 7 Heavy downpour 8 Leo 9 Name for a donkey 11 Room for young children 13 Nightclub guard 15 Magic formula 17 Sound a horn 18 Projecting land mass 20 The mountain ash 21 Fictional hero brought up by apes

Down 1 Capital of Germany 2 Pottery oven

Solution to Crossword 152

Across: 3 Sable 6 General 7 Orange 8 Alien 9 Crackers 12 Spice 14 Paper 15 Sunshade 18 Scold 19 Stream 20 Oatmeal 21 Resin

Down: 1 Incision 2 France 3 Slogan 4 Black 5 Eager 6 Glasses 10 Employer 11 Strudel 13 Gammon 14 Peseta 16 Utter 17 Sheds

Congratulations to James Fisher of Glasgow, 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 152nd prize crossword in the December edition of the ASLEF Journal. If you successfully complete this month’s crossword please send the solution to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN by 14 January

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

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