Trains on film

Brief Encounter
From Russia with Love
The Lady Vanishes
North by Northwest
The Railway Children
Murder on the Orient Express
Night Mail
and many more movies with scenes on the permanent way
Membership available now!

Membership is open to all rail and transport industry staff either active or retired and including immediate family and brings you over 125 years of experience and wide ranging members' discounts and benefits.

Benefits:

1. We have full details on our website www.repta.co.uk and in our comprehensive Yearbook. They include competitive insurance via our broker Alan Boswell Group. Obtain a quote before accepting your existing deal - Direct REPTA Telephone 01603 649737.

2. FREE Love2shop Card offering 7% discount at high street stores and once Love2shop registered an opportunity for 4% at Tesco or Sainsburys.

New for 2019:


Join today!

Individual membership, please send £5.85 inc. postage & packaging for Yearbook. Family Membership:

2 adults & all children under 18 - £8.50 + £1.75 p&p = £10.25. Please also see our website www.repta.co.uk.

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
News

- EC riders in St John Street; ABS in Croydon
- Twitter warning from a Tube driving ninja plus Off the Rails: Justin Cartwright, David Steel, Damon Albarn, and Brian Clough
- Picture this – a sky full of HST thunder
- Time for Theresa May to fall on her sword
- Only a bird brain would risk death or injury to do the Netflix Bird Box challenge

Features

- Colin Hicks reports on our weekend forum for Districts 5, 6 and 8 with Alex Norris, Rachael Maskell and Steve Murphy
- Chris Proctor imagines how the RDG set about promoting their latest disaster
- Conrad Landin snaffles the Butterkist and settles down to enjoy trains on film
- Bill Dale reports on the RMS weekend forum at Low Hall, Scalby, in Yorkshire

Regulars

- Branch News, Upcoming Events and 100 Years of Union
- Obituaries
- Letters and Classified Advertisements
- Last Word: Jonathan Coe and Martin Rowson on the state of our nation
- On Track: Railways and colonialism in JG Farrell’s Singapore Grip; Crossword; Legal Services; and Change of Address

GS Mick Whelan

UK’s a laughing stock

W ARE the laughing stock of the international railway community. After inventing the railway, and selling our expertise abroad, we now introduce trains with windscreens not suitable to observe signals; trains that cannot operate with technology we were assured was fit for purpose; and trains where the software impacts on the signalling system. And surely no one would dream of putting hydrogen technology on 20 year old trains and claiming they were new, would they?

It would be even odder if, having bought new trains that do not fit the platforms, anyone would, in degraded working, think it a good idea to have a driver leaping on and off the train, along the ballast, and up the platform slope, to check the doors; and then running back to clamber onto the train! Quite sure no company or stakeholder would recommend that because of the domino effect on safety on our congested multi-user railway. The simple solution is the trains must come out of service or run on conventional working.

After the sharp rise in sexual assaults on the main line we have an increase in violent crime on the Tube. This is not the result of better reporting but of a sea change in society. We still have one of the safest transport systems in the world but it’s time to reassess all working for the safety of both passengers and staff. It is also necessary to reassure those who go to the assistance of other staff that they will be respected and protected from repercussions when it is patently obvious their actions are justified. It is time for the employers to take action against those who behave inappropriately then make up allegations against staff.

The driver’s train licence is causing problems in its application. We are seeking to address and clarify all the concerns; this is, of course, outside the normal CDP/CMC or discipline process.

Whatever view you hold on Brexit the whole country it seems is united in thinking that Theresa May’s deal is not fit for purpose and that a no deal scenario is filled with risk because of a government which has failed to prepare properly. Meanwhile we see the fourth railway package being introduced in France against the wishes of the unions and the populace.

It was with great pleasure that I attended, along with DO3 Andy Hourigan and EC3 John Metcalfe, the inaugural meeting of Blackburn branch and we wish them all the best and echo their thanks to Preston and their reps for all their support and assistance.

On a more disturbing note, you will see on page 6 that long-term driver, friend, and union activist Andy Derrett disappeared whilst at work before Christmas. His family and friends just want to know if he is ok. If anyone has any knowledge, please respond to the family’s plea?

Yours fraternally

Mick Whelan, general secretary
ASLEF’s EC riders

SLEF’s new-look executive committee sat for the first time last month with three different faces – compared with this time last year – round the big table in the EC room in the basement of our building in St John Street in London.

John Metcalfe was elected as EC member for District 3 in June last year after Andy Hourigan resigned following his election as Executive 3 Organiser. Hugh Bradley (District 2) and Tosh McDonald (District 4) both stepped down at the end of last year.

So when the executive committee met for the first time this year on Monday 14 January it looked like this: EC1 Marz Colombini; EC2 Jim Baxter; EC3 John Metcalfe; EC4 Mark Wakenshaw; EC5 Howard Kaye; EC6 Dave Calfe; EC7 Andy Hudd; and EC8 Terry Wilkinson.

Dave Calfe, who joined the executive committee in 2006, and who has served as vice-president for the last four years, was elected EC president unopposed. Two candidates – Marz Colombini and Andy Hudd – were nominated for vice-president and Andy was elected.

‘I’m very proud to have been elected as president of the ASLEF executive committee,’ said Dave. ‘When I started nearly 34 years ago I never imagined holding – or even knew about – this position! I want to thank everyone who’s encouraged, helped, and influenced me over the years.’

ABS in Croydon

Croydon trams are to be fitted with a new automatic braking system in response to safety recommendations made after the fatal crash at Sandilands in November 2016. ‘It’s good news that Tramlink is finally to get an automated braking system,’ said DO8 Finn Brennan. ‘But this should be across the network, not just at “high risk” locations. Cutting corners on cost grounds could lead to another tragic accident in the future.’

THE KING’S CROSS STORY

You can support the Camden Railway Heritage Trust by buying The King’s Cross Story by Peter Darley (The History Press, £20) which was featured on the centre pages of the January Journal, directly from the trust at a discounted price of £15 inc p&p; email Darleyp@aol.com or phone 020 7586 6632 for details. ‘All income from sales goes to the trust,’ says Peter, ‘and helps recover the cost of buying the images.’

A KICK IN THE WALLET

‘After a terrible year of timetable chaos, passengers are being rewarded with yet another kick in the wallet,’ said Bruce Williamson of the campaign group Railfuture when the privatised train companies put fares up again last month. ‘Since 2004, rail fares have raced ahead of people’s incomes whilst petrol is now cheaper than it was in 2011. Are they trying to drive us off the railways?’

VIOLENT CRIME UP ON TUBE

Violent crime on London Underground has increased by 43% in the last three years, according to new figures released by the British Transport Police. There were 2,838 incidents reported between November 2017 and September 2018 compared with 1,980 between November 2015 and October 2016.

Happy birthday, IER

GS Mick Whelan recorded a ‘happy birthday’ video for the Institute of Employment Rights on Wednesday 23 January. ‘We’re delighted to wish the IER a happy 30th birthday and thank it for all the good work it has done, in particular the research it carried out for us in relation to improving equality and diversity among rail staff.

‘The IER has been at the forefront in support of equal workplaces and has consistently delivered high quality reports to keep trade unionists up to date with developments in the law. Its Manifesto for Labour Law, which John Hendy QC spoke about at AAD in Liverpool last year, has support at Westminster and across the labour movement. It’s a blueprint for a progressive labour law to change Britain for the better and, together, we can create a brighter future.’
Not cool, not funny

Sunny Neuroshima – who describes himself on his Twitter feed as a ‘Tube driving ninja, board game geek and curry lover’ – is known for his sunny disposition.

But on Saturday 5 January @Tube_driver poignantly tweeted: ‘Man pretended to hurl himself in front of my approaching train. This is not remotely amusing or impressive. It is idiotic and potentially dangerous, and only serves to prove to all witnesses that you are a cretin of the highest order.

‘I have been in the unfortunate position of experiencing what it is like to have a person under my train. It was the most traumatic event of my life and the lives of my loved ones in ways you cannot begin to understand.

‘So next time you feel like pretending to jump in front of a train, just don’t. It’s not as cool or as funny as you seem to think. Try and be more considerate.

‘Sunny’s tweet prompted lots of sympathetic replies, including this one from Peter @downthetunnel: ‘Sunny, well said mate. Affects station staff as well, dealing with the aftermath.’

The grit parade

Cumbria county council asked residents to name its new 11-strong gritting fleet. The winning names include Gritty Gritty Bang Bang; Usain Salt; Gritty Spears; Spready Mercury; David Ploughie; Gritty McVitie; Nicole Saltslinger; True Grit; Whinlatter Scatter; Gritter Garbo; and Ready Spready Go. Sadly, Bay Gritty Roller, Freddie Salted, Frosty the Snow Van and Brad Grit didn’t quite make the cut.

CONFERENCES & RALLIES

The Scottish Labour Party conference is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Friday 8 to Sunday 10 March. The Welsh Labour Party conference is at the Venue Cymru in Llandudno from Friday 12 to Sunday 14 April. The Scottish Trades Union Congress is at the Caird Hall, Dundee, from Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 April. Workers’ Memorial Day is Sunday 28 April. ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates is at the Marriott Hotel, Leeds, from Monday 13 to Thursday 16 May. The STUC LGBT+ workers’ conference is at the Golden Jubilee Hotel, Glasgow, from Saturday 25 to Sunday 26 May. The STUC youth conference is at the Golden Jubilee 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 Saturday 21 to Wednesday 25 September.

500 CLUB: S Pease, with number 121, won the January draw, scooping the RMS prize money jackpot of £442.

Off the Rails

Justin Cartwright, the South African-born author who died at the end of last year, was a man of many parts. He was an award-winning copywriter of pet food commercials (the premise of his campaign for Pal was that it was too good for dogs); director of several television documentaries and a soft porn film (Rosie Dixon Night Nurse starring Arthur Askey, John Le Mesurier, Beryl Reid and Patricia Hodge); as well as the author of novels such as Leading the Cheers, White Lightning and Other People’s Money. He also made party political broadcasts for the Liberals, and then the SDP-Liberal Alliance, and was close to David Steel, working as his spin doctor. Cartwright was made an MBE and recalled, in 2015, that the Queen had asked him how he had earned the honour. ‘For trying to help David Steel, ma’am,’ he replied. The Queen, he said, paused, looked rather thoughtful, and then said: ‘Well done, anyway.’

Damien Albarn, whose latest album, Merrie Land, is not unlike Parklife, the Blur record whose wit, poetry and pomp helped to define Britpop in the 1990s, tackles Brexit, and the state of this disunited kingdom, noting now how ‘We’re a shocking wreck where nothing grows’ and observing ‘Outbreaks of optimism in the care homes of England.’ I’ve been to a lot of old people’s homes, because of relatives, and they’re watching programmes about the 1950s. If you can show me it was split 50/50 between people who voted remain and leave in care homes, I will have to say the lyric is about something else…’

Heather Nauret is the former Fox news anchor appointed by Donald Trump as his ambassador to the United Nations despite her somewhat slender grasp of foreign policy. To wit, she said, in June: ‘When you talk about Germany, we have a very strong relationship with Germany. Tomorrow is the anniversary of the D-Day invasion. Which drew gasps. And prompted David Gergen, a foreign policy adviser to four US presidents (Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton), to murmur: ‘In terms of what we normally look for at the United Nations, her résumé is very thin…”

Denis Norden, who died last year, was a writer and presenter who always had a rather wry take on events. In his memoir Clips From a Life (Harper Perennial, £10.99) he recalls: ‘From the very first It’ll Be Alright On The Night, we paid a fee to every performer seen in an outtake. Outside of running a railway, or managing a pension fund, it is hard to think of another activity where those who make a mistake can get paid extra for it.’

Brian Clough once revealed his approach to democracy in the dressing room, which has been taken up by many a politician, as well as many a football manager, over the years: ‘We talk about it for 20 minutes and then we decide I was right.’

Our new ASLEF mug has images from the Mick Jones triptych in reception at head office. There are four versions – three have an image on one side and the ASLEF logo on the other; the fourth has all three images. £6 each (inc p&p) or £15 for a set of three; email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
Picture this – a 125 sky full of thunder

After 43 years, the InterCity 125 high-speed train is about to be withdrawn from service on the Great Western Railway. It will soon be gone, but not forgotten, if Chris Windsor, of Worcester branch, who serves on the LDC, has his way.

He’s working with Nick Wilty, a stand-up comic and artist who lives in Whistable, Kent, on a triptych to celebrate what is still the fastest diesel passenger train in the world.

‘The HST is iconic,’ said Chris. ‘It’s stood the test of time. When BR’s advanced passenger train project went over budget – it was never finished – they brought in the HST to replace the old diesel locos. I grew up in Bristol and remember how exciting it was to see them running into Temple Meads.’

The eight-coach trains, introduced in 1976, will be withdrawn in March.

One of Nick’s pictures depicts an HST, in GWR livery, crossing the River Tamar watched, in the foreground, by the silhouette of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, standing in a small boat.

Another shows a 125, in FGW ‘big purple’ livery, crashing through the waves at Dawlish in Devon on one of the most picturesque stretches of railway line in the country.

The first picture – on which work has not yet started – will show either a loco departing from platform 1 at Paddington or a row of HSTs at the station waiting to leave for the

Have you seen Andy?

Andy Derrett, a long-time railwayman, union stalwart, and go-to man for badges, is well-known to many ASLEF members. But Andy – who appeared healthy, happy, and well – disappeared without trace two weeks before Christmas. Now his wife, and Suffolk Police, have issued an urgent appeal for information.

Beverley Derrett told the Journal: ‘On Tuesday 11 December my husband Andrew, whilst on duty at the Freighter mess room at Stonebridge Park, suddenly, and without any warning, disappeared.

‘My family and I had to endure a Christmas without him; me without my husband, my children without their father, and now, as we progress into the new year, there is still no news of his whereabouts.

‘He has, over the years, fostered extensive contacts throughout the UK through his various union posts, his underlying interest in the trade union movement as a whole, and through his involvement with the design and manufacture of union badges.

HS2 WARS TRAINS MAY GO SLOWER

HS2 boss Mark Thurston, with no discernible trace of irony, or apparent recognition that his project’s USP is, er, ‘high speed’, has told the All-Party Parliamentary Rail Group that its trains may have to run slower, and less frequently, to stay in budget. He suggested reducing services from 18 to 14 each hour, changing from slab to ballast track, and running 30mph slower, which means trains would fail to break the 200mph barrier.

Southern comfort

Three Southern Rail drivers based at Brighton rowed the 214 mile distance from London to Paris on Friday 11 and Saturday 12 January to raise £2,000 for Cancer Research UK. The three took it in turns in a 24-hour non-stop rowathon at Brighton station.

Stagecoach urged to mothball rail

Invesco, one of Stagecoach’s biggest investors, has called for its rail operations to be ‘mothballed’. The company pledged to concentrate on UK bus and rail operations after selling its North American coach arm. But Martin Walker, a fund manager at Invesco, said: ‘The East Coast rail renationalisation was a scarring experience for Stagecoach and we understand that the three current franchise bids have been made on commercial terms. I would be happy to see the UK rail business mothballed.’ Analysts say the firm has ‘lowballed’ its bids for East Midlands, Southeastern and the West Coast main line (its joint venture with Virgin) causing concern at the DTfT.

QUOTE...

‘I have a car, but I barely use it, apart from going to B&Q and Ikea. The Tube is the best invention in the world.’
– fashion designer Henry Holland

…UNQUOTE

Carry all your stuff – papers, sandwiches, keys – in style with our smart new sturdy black ASLEF bag. Price £17.50 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk

Quote of the week

‘I have a car, but I barely use it, apart from going to B&Q and Ikea. The Tube is the best invention in the world.’
– fashion designer Henry Holland

…UNQUOTE
Time for Theresa to go, says Mick

Mick Whelan called on Prime Minister Theresa May to go ahead of the vote of no confidence in the government tabled by Jeremy Corbyn on Wednesday 16 January following her humiliating defeat in the previous night’s meaningful vote on her Brexit deal.

‘It’s not just the defeat; it’s the scale of the defeat. Because this was her deal; and it is her defeat. She has spent two-and-a-half years working hard to get to this point. The point at which Parliament, by 432 votes to 202, has said it’s a bad deal for Britain.

‘No one likes it – neither hard-line Brexiteers nor those who want to remain in the EU. It is quite remarkable that the Prime Minister has managed to persuade so many different politicians, from so many different parties, with so many different points of view, to go into the lobby and vote against her. If you take out the payroll vote there really is very little support for her, even on her own side!

‘But Theresa May is, at least, assured of her place in the history books. Because last night’s vote was the biggest Parliamentary defeat for a sitting government in history!’

Mick added: ‘Some people say she displays fortitude, others that she is merely stubborn. Many, on her own side, think she is being stupid and simply “doesn’t get it”. That she can come back with a Plan B that is, essentially, Plan A, and it will be voted through. It won’t.

‘And that is why MPs tonight should do the right thing and follow the logic of the vote last night and say they have no confidence in the government of Theresa May. Then we can have a general election which will allow the people to have a meaningful vote on the future of this country.

‘I hope that will see the return of a Labour government. But even Tory voters, like Tory MPs, can see that a Prime Minister who is humiliated in the House of Commons, and in whom MPs have no confidence, and who cannot get her Brexit deal through, has to go.’

Deutsche Bahn, the German state-owned rail operator, is said to be set to sell both Arriva and DB Schenker, according to reports from Berlin. DB, which has been struggling with falling domestic passenger numbers, needs to fund a 4 billion euro funding gap.

When DB bought Arriva in 2010 it picked up three franchises – Arriva Trains Wales, Chiltern Railways and CrossCountry – as well as Tyne & Wear Metro, the open access operator Wrexham & Shropshire, and a chain of bus companies in Britain. In 2011 Arriva acquired the open access operator Grand Central but wound up Wrexham & Shropshire.

In 2016 Arriva extended London Overground, which it had been running since 2007 in partnership with MTR, as a sole operator.

‘COME ON THEN, LET’S HAVE IT’
A factory worker suffering from paranoid schizophrenia shouted ‘Come on then, let’s have it’ as he stepped in front of a 75 ton Wrexham-bound train near Gwersyllt station on 23 May 2018. The coroner, John Gittins, gave a narrative conclusion, saying that, on the balance of probability, Liam Bateman did not have the mental ability to decide to commit suicide.

TAXI TOOK WRONG TURN TO LEVEL CROSSING
A taxi was hit by a Northern train after the driver took a wrong turn and drove onto the tracks at Warden level crossing between Hexham and Haydon Bridge on Tuesday 8 January. The driver and passenger had a miraculous escape; but the back of the vehicle was completely crushed.

BRANCH LINES
Two new ASLEF branches have been established: Blackburn 278 which will have members from Preston (see page 17) and LU Test Trains 279 which will have members from West Brompton.

DB set to sell Arriva

The water of life tastes better in an ASLEF crystal whisky tumbler! Price £8 (inc p&p); email info@aslef.org.uk or visit our online shop at www.aslef.org.uk
Only a bird brain does the *Bird Box* challenge

ICK Whelan spoke out after footage was posted online of a young man walking along a railway line while wearing a blindfold in a ‘challenge’ inspired by the Netflix film *Bird Box*. Video of Elliot Giles, uploaded to his YouTube channel on Sunday 13 January, has been viewed more than 250,000 times.

‘I would urge anyone who is thinking, for whatever reason, of trying the *Bird Box* challenge not to be so bloody stupid. It is reckless – and it is a crime – to trespass on the railway track. It is not only irresponsible, and highly dangerous, but you run the risk of prosecution, and a criminal conviction, even if you are not seriously injured or killed.

‘There is also the danger to everyone else who uses the railway – staff as well as passengers – and this job is difficult enough as it is without people walking along the railway track without being able to see where they are going.

‘I’m not a killjoy; but this is no one’s idea of fun. Our members – the men and women who drive Britain’s trains – do not want to come across a bird brain doing the *Bird Box* challenge. And the emergency services do not want to have to pick up the pieces.’

● *Bird Box* stars Sandra Bullock as a mother who wears a blindfold while trying to avoid seeing mysterious forces that encourage people to commit suicide. Netflix has urged fans not to take part in an online challenge which involves attempting everyday tasks while wearing a blindfold – a challenge which has resulted in people crashing cars and running into walls.

Just Williams

We Own It, the lobby group which campaigns for the return of Britain’s public utilities to public ownership, has collected more than 120,000 signatures on its petition to present to the Department for Transport to try and persuade the Williams rail review to keep nationalisation on the table.

‘Keith Williams has made some positive-sounding comments in this area, but we want to encourage him, and to make the argument that public ownership is overwhelmingly popular,’ said campaigns officer Ellen Lees.

‘Privatisation has failed. Fares are rising, trains are overcrowded, delays and cancellations are now the norm. We have an unprecedented chance to rethink the railways – the biggest opportunity since privatisation in 1994. We want to show the strength of public feeling for public ownership.’

£10,000 TICKET SHOCK

Lucy Watson was only trying to get from London to Gatwick on Wednesday 2 January. But the ticket machine at London Bridge quoted her not the usual £11 fare but an astronomical £10,000.

‘Might go for Thameslink, then, cheers’ was Lucy’s response to GTR @shesgonestella on Twitter. GTR said the price was a mistake (obvs!) and blamed a ‘technical glitch’. But that didn’t stop Lucy’s followers piling in on the unpopular TOC. ‘Rail fare rises were on the news today’ wrote @Mmelulu. ‘Hadn’t realised just how bad they are…’

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

AUTOMATIC BREAKS

Pity the poor sub on the BBC home page whose head on a piece ran: ‘London trams to get automatic breaks.’ Robert Scott dryly observes: ‘While some are still debating whether robots have rights, here is an indication that trams are seeking parity with their drivers…’

I COULDN’T LIVE WITHOUT TRAINS

Rosalie Craig, who starred as Rosalind in *As You Like It* and as Polly Peachum in *The Threepenny Opera* at the National Theatre, and is now playing Bobbi in *Company* at the Gielgud Theatre in the West End, was asked by the *Evening Standard* whether she prefers bus, taxi, or Tube? ‘All of them. I love the Tube. Trains I simply couldn’t live without. Taxis equal extravagance for me.’

RUPERT’S A REAL WILDE CHILD

Rupert Everett, asked if it was difficult directing himself through the intimate and emotional scenes of *The Happy Prince*, the Oscar Wilde biopic which he wrote, directed, and starred in, replied: ‘No. I liked it. I enjoyed working with me.’

MORE CHAPLAINS FOR RAIL STAFF

Five new full-time chaplains from the Railway Mission have been appointed to counsel workers following the abuse heaped by angry passengers on staff after timetable disruption last year. ‘The employees that commuters see are frontline staff on the gate line, or dispatching trains, and they’re the ones getting the brunt of their anger and frustration,’ said Liam Johnston, executive director of the Christian charity.

QUOTE...

‘Voters are accustomed to Theresa May rattling out the same old lines like an unstoppable teleprinter – as in her fractious appearance on the Today programme – entrenching her reputation as the Maybot.’ – Mark Wallace, executive editor of ConservativeHome

…UNQUOTE
Join a rail operator like no other.

Direct Rail Services is a rail operator with a unique mandate. One of only three publicly owned rail companies in the United Kingdom, it was created in 1995 to handle Britain's nuclear material. Since then, it has diversified into other freight operations and on occasion provides haulage to passenger services, giving its drivers an exceptionally varied workload.

However, that’s by no means the only thing that sets Direct Rail Services apart. With nearly 500 people on its payroll, the company invests heavily in developing talent, and it is renowned for the quality of its apprentice schemes, graduate programme, and development initiatives involving extensive hands-on mentoring from business leaders and senior managers.

In particular, DRS is deeply committed to equality and diversity, and is one of the most prominent supporters of Women in Rail, whose numerous events offer support and networking opportunities to women across the rail industry. “In recent years, gender equality in the workplace has received a huge positive push,” says Business Services Director Natasha Hanson. “We’re passionate about making rail an attractive career choice for young people of all genders, and we’ll always go the extra mile to help our employees overcome any barriers to success.”

The company’s commitment to improving society doesn’t stop there: it takes corporate social responsibility extremely seriously, and organises an annual open day fundraiser, which in 2018 attracted more than 4,000 visitors and generated over £37,000. Direct Rail Services also maintains an active sponsorship and donations committee that channels significant funds into worthy causes.

The business’s many achievements have not gone unrecognised: in 2018, it won the Golden Whistle award for the fifth year in a row and was voted Rail Freight Group’s Business of the Year, among many other accolades for its customer care and environmental performance.

“We’re a company that really makes a difference,” concludes Natasha Hanson. “When the ‘Beast from the East’ shut down the road and rail networks in the spring, it was our snow ploughs that reopened the line and one of our services that got food back onto shelves in Scotland. This is an incredible place to work, and we want to attract the best, which is why we offer great benefits like a pension scheme, healthcare scheme, employee assistance programme and 34 days’ leave. But the real reason to join is the unique challenges you’ll face – and the huge difference your contribution will make. We’re a rail operator like no other.”

Qualified Train Drivers

Vacancies at our Rugby and London depots
£53,172 + Comprehensive Benefits

Drive trains with a difference – and with a long-term career that could take you anywhere.

Operating nationwide, we employ nearly 500 highly trained, dedicated people who enjoy stable long-term careers and some of the best benefits in the business. You can join them.

As one of our professional drivers, you will carry out a varied range of train movements, as well as conducting brake tests and completing detailed documentation.

It’s time to drive trains with a difference.
It’s time to download an application form from www.directrailservices.com/careers and return it by email to recruitment@drs1.co.uk

Naturally, you should be a qualified and experienced driver with an exemplary safety record and meticulous attention to detail, and you will be happy to work varying shifts, including some nights.

In return, we offer outstanding conditions of employment, including links that average to a 35-hour working week. Under current arrangements there is the potential to work overtime, plus an unrivalled package including 34 days’ leave, a generous pension scheme, healthcare scheme, employee assistance programme, salary sacrifice schemes and even relocation assistance if appropriate.

What’s more, we offer a number of professional training courses to our team members – so we’ll work with you to take your career anywhere you want to go.

DRS is a strong promoter of gender, orientation and racial diversity in rail and particularly welcomes applications from members of minority groups. The Company is also happy to consider applications from candidates who would like to work flexibly.
Rachael dedicated to getting our industry back on track

COLIN HICKS, local rep, High Barnet depot, reports from the ASLEF weekend forum for Districts 5, 6 and 8 on Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 November at the Jury’s Inn hotel in Nottingham

The weekend before bonfire night saw a mixed bag of reps and activists from Districts 5, 6 and 8 get together in Nottingham for an ASLEF forum. Considering everyone had to be there in their own time, the number of delegates who managed to attend was hugely encouraging.

The first session was opened by the GS who gave us an update on ‘the state of the nation’ for the rail industry. As usual, it was delivered in Mick’s absorbing and informative style.

We were then addressed by Alex Norris, Labour MP for Nottingham North. It was extremely refreshing to hear an MP speak so frankly about the state of the party at present, and to make clear his unswerving support for trade unions like ours.

MUCH NEEDED NUTRITION
After a short break for some much needed nutrition, we heard from Rachael Maskell, the Shadow Rail Minister. Readers of the Journal will have read all about Rachael in the January edition of our magazine, and there isn’t much I can add to that piece. Other than to say that I was very impressed by her and found her to be someone who is obviously totally dedicated to getting our industry ‘back on track’.

FUTURE IN GOOD HANDS
Far too often we have seen Labour MPs take the podium at AAD and say all the right things, yet when it comes to delivering, their actions fall way short of their words. After hearing about the trade union backgrounds of each of these MPs, I believe ASLEF has a true friend in both of them.

Next on the agenda were two members of the Young Members’ Representatives’ Committee, Bro Tony Holdsworth (D6) and Bro Matt France (D8) to talk about organising and getting active in ASLEF.

Now most delegates present in the room haven’t been eligible for the YMRC for some years, so when it came to question time, there was an assumption by many of us that they are probably finding things fairly difficult. We couldn’t have been more wrong! The positivity that emanated from the answers of both of these guys was impressive, and left me feeling that if all our young ASLEF activists are half as confident and capable as these two, then the future of our trade union is in good hands.

Day two saw a surprising name on the agenda. The MD of MTR Crossrail, Steve Murphy, who had been asked to speak about the difference between the concession and the franchise systems. What we actually got was a mixture of funny anecdotes from his 30 years of working in the rail industry, candid opinions of the way our rail system worked under BR and how it works today, and, something I never thought I would hear from a senior manager of a TOC, an endorsement of co-operation between ASLEF and management in order to deliver a better railway for both staff and passengers. There are plenty of TOCs out there who could do with an MD like Steve.

REWARDING AND EDIFYING
Finally we heard from Julie Rutter, an ASLEF union learning project worker. Julie has worked for ASLEF for the last 12 years, organising the many excellent training opportunities to which we get access as ASLEF members. Julie spoke about the ongoing work within the industry to provide train drivers with a valued qualification, and the potential for apprenticeships.

All in all, a rewarding and edifying weekend. I would like to thank DO8 Finn Brennan, DOS Nigel Gibson, DO6 Dicky Fisher and Julie Rutter for organising the weekend. I would also like to thank Mark Daniels, Clifffy Holloway and Debbie Reay for their excellent work chairing the three sessions. I look forward to the next one.
Chants of ‘RDG! RDG!’ rang out across the land

‘Dealing with complaints is more our area of expertise than improving railways.’ Well, yes, perhaps. But what an admission! CHRISS PROCTOR, a journalist for more than 40 years, and who handled press and PR for ASLEF for eight years, examines – well, imagines – the way the Rail Delivery Group, its chief executive Paul Plummer, director of communications Andy Bagnall, and former BBC News and Sky News hack Robert Nisbet, together with their four strong in-house media team, might have handled recent announcements on behalf of the TOCs.

AM still agog with admiration for the police spokesperson who faced questions about the closure of Gatwick airport at the end of last year. All flights were cancelled owing to clouds of drones hovering over the runway.

The police first employed their traditional response, and scurried to a local semi to arrest a window fitter. When, despite this activity, criticism continued, they had to come up with something ingenious; and they did. They sent out one of their number to tell the world that ‘there may not have been any drone activity in the first place’.

So there we are! No problema! All solved. Clearly, if there was no reason for an airport closure, it wouldn’t have been shut and so all difficulties were removed. Interfering busy-bodies might still point at troupes of snoozers and hordes of queuers but the press relations job was done. The crisis had been sorted out even if it was still going on.

BEYOND THE GATWICK GAMBIT
Whoever came up with the magnificent strategy of simply denying that a problem exists is a genius. It is a PR masterstroke. But even these efforts have been eclipsed by the subtleties of the word-spinners at the Rail Delivery Group.

The RDG found itself being criticised because of late running trains. I imagine they first considered the ‘Gatwick gambit’ of denying everything; they could have argued that no train was late and any inconvenience was caused by the train behind running early. But, no, they went for an even more imaginative response. They joined in with the complainers.

‘Ten per cent of trains are delayed,’ moan the customer groups. ‘Wrong!’ replies the RDG. ‘It’s a hell of a lot more than that!’ We’re really annoyed, say passengers. The RDG sneers: ‘Only annoyed! We are livid and outraged:’ We should be compensated, grumble travellers. The RDG trumpets this with a further complaint: that it is difficult to complain. And it points its finger at this outrage: ‘That’s what needs fixing! The complaints procedure!’

The entire organisation dropped its vague plans to revise routes and timetables; binned any outline proposals for smooth integrated transport links for lines and journeys; and pushed aside any thoughts about serious investment to boost the freight sector. Instead, it began work on how to process complaints.

‘Dealing with complaints is more our area of expertise than improving railways,’ a spokesperson for the Rail Delivery Group pointed out. Thus towards the end of the year a bold new moaning device was unveiled. Standing at a dais before an assembly of motionless railway carriages, the RDG proudly presented the ‘UK rail ombudsman service’.

HEARTWARMING SIGHT OF GLEEFUL FOLK SINGING AND DANCING
The RDG reported that the innovation was met by the heartwarming sight of gleeful folk singing and dancing on railway platforms across Britain.

‘This is great news,’ said Mrs Olive Smithers, 84, as she was taken by ambulance to Stoke Mandeville Hospital after contracting hypothermia at Tring station. ‘My delayed train compensation claim will be so much easier to activate thanks to the ombudsman,’ she croaked. ‘I’m so fortunate the service is awful.’

The late Henry Whitstable remarked how pleased he was ‘to live in a land with such high standards in its complaints processes’. Sadly, he no longer lives in this, or any other, land owing to breathing difficulties as he awaited the delayed 23.20 to Paddington.

Standing in front of a large board at Hull Trains, each arrival with its individualised ‘delayed by’ figure, RDG customer experience managing director Jacqueline Starr announced that the rejigged complaints service would ‘Certainly build confidence in our services’. She explained that it was the company’s way of ‘improving the customer experience’.

‘I can’t remember the last time I enjoyed filling in a complaint form so much,’ confided Ms KC Jones (no relation). ‘It has made such a difference to the journey I’ve not had.’

The company says chants of ‘RDG! RDG!’ rang out over the land as the news of the coming ombudsman spread. ‘Just in time for Christmas,’ said derivatives banker Mr Kliers of Oxford. ‘It has confirmed my confidence that the RDG will provide services and support to enable its members to succeed in transforming and delivering a successful railway, benefiting customers, taxpayers and the economy’. Pocketing the proffered brown envelope from an associate of Ms Starr, he listed his interests as ‘waiting and complaining’.

SOMETHING TO MOAN ABOUT
The effects of the ombudsman are already evident. Complaints have never been more popular, thanks to a combination of poor rail services and an up-to-date moaning mechanism. ‘The average passenger prefers complaining to travelling,’ insisted Mr R Starr (no relation) of Roehampton.

Sources within the RDG suggest that it may now cease to concern itself with difficult issues like leadership and strategic direction in favour of concentrating on its complaints procedure. A new spokesperson, recruited from Gatwick, revealed: ‘Now we are world-leaders in grievance apparatus provision, it would be counter-productive not to give customers something to moan about. We are examining ways to manufacture additional delays so we can ensure the new facility is working to maximum efficiency.’
The rumble of the railway is the thunder of the rollers

CONRAD LANDIN, Scotland editor of the Morning Star, is a movie buff. Here he settles down with a packet of popcorn and looks again at trains on film. From thrillers like Murder on the Orient Express to romantic tales such as Brief Encounter and from Cold War killers in From Russia with Love to zombies and the apocalypse in Train to Busan. Conrad reckons that the claustrophobia of a railway carriage – together with the opportunity for a chance encounter en route – makes trains irresistible to movie makers.

MUST have gotten into the wrong compartment,’ mutters the police detective played by Charles McGraw in the 1952 B-movie The Narrow Margin, after dodging his nemesis in the corridor by ducking through the nearest door. ‘Mine must be in the car ahead. ‘Hey, the next car doesn’t have compartments,’ a young boy retorts to his nurse after McGraw has ducked out again. ‘It’s a day car ahead. ’

Not for the first time, it’s the kid who’s clued up on the train’s composition. But, perhaps more importantly, the claustrophobic confines of the train setting have both dictated the protagonist’s escape mechanism and thwarted his excuse.

Ever since the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis, terrified viewers in 1896 with their film of a mail train pulling into La Ciotat, in southern France, the railways have proved irresistible to filmmakers.

In Brief Encounter (1945), David Lean’s film of Noel Coward’s play Still Life, the railway station at Milford Junction offers a safe haven for the forbidden excitement of adulterous love. In Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s I Know Where I’m Going, which came out the same year, a sleeper journey from Manchester to Scotland represents an exciting and dangerous journey into the erotic unknown – ahead of Wendy Hiller’s protagonist being forced to face reality when stranded on the Isle of Mull.

And when the siblings in The Railway Children (1970) move away from their comfortable life in London, the railway offers an alternative community that does not depend on material wealth.

In Murder She Said (1961), loosely adapted from the Agatha Christie novel 4.50 from Paddington, Miss Marple (played by Margaret Rutherford) witnesses a murder thanks to the alignment of trains running on parallel tracks. In The Taking of Pelham One Two Three (1974) a hijacked New York subway train poses a problem for police and audience alike: how can the assailants, who are demanding $1 million for the release of the passengers, hope to escape from a vehicle on fixed tracks under the ground?

These films, like Night Mail (1936) and the classic documentaries produced by the British Transport Films unit, capture the romance and excitement of the railway world. Other examples see cinema’s love affair with the iron road pushed a step further – putting almost all the action into the carriage interiors. But just what is it that makes a train an ideal setting for a two-hour feature?

Two of Alfred Hitchcock’s best known films, Strangers on a Train (1951) and North by Northwest (1959), involve key sequences in plush carriages. But the British master’s most serious venture into the railway genre came before his move to Hollywood, with The Lady Vanishes (1938). May Whitty plays Miss Froy, an elderly woman who helps an English tourist (Margaret Lockwood) onto a train in central Europe after she is hit on the head by a falling planter. When Miss Froy disappears, all the passengers bar a musician called Gilbert (Michael Redgrave) deny, for the sake of personal convenience, that she was ever on board. Naunton Wayne and Basil Radford play cricket obsessives – roles they would reprise in many other films to the end of the 1940s – concerned that delays will stop them catching the last days of a Test match. Who says English! Lawyer Todhunter (Cecil Parker) is travelling with his mistress and terrified of being caught in a scandal. He is later shot attempting to surrender to the rather fascistic-looking
Stuck in an (artificial) snow drift. Kenneth Branagh's *Murder on the Orient Express* was filmed at Longcross Studios, between Virginia Water, Chertsey and Cobham in Surrey. Istanbul station – with two tracks and a platform on either side – was recreated on one of the studio's enormous sound stages, as was the train itself, a majestic 30 tonne locomotive with four carriages running along a mile of track, plus a second version with moveable walls for interior shots. A rig of hydraulics and air bellows beneath the carriages, as well as virtual scenery, shot in New Zealand, moving on LED screens, helped convince the cast they were riding on a real train. The special effects teams also built a viaduct, and a 35ft high mountainside stretching for several hundred metres.

Yeon Sang-ho’s Korean zombie apocalypse action thriller *Train to Busan* stars Gong Yoo, Jung Yu-mi, and Ma Dong-seok

refusing entry to other survivors of the zombie attack. Unlike the unifying message of British patriotism in *The Lady Vanishes*, however, *Train to Busan* is highly class-conscious. As Yon-suk flouts his willingness to sacrifice everyone and everything for his own survival, his actions only exacerbate Korea’s zombie epidemic. Without solidarity, the film suggests, we’re all doomed.

Thrillers based around other forms of transport rarely offer as much potential. Cars are too small for a normal-size cast, and even Jean-Luc Godard’s quintessential art house picture *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) struggles to maintain momentum in its extensive driving scenes. Ferries and cruise ships are so big the interiors are so popular in films.

Soldiers who attempt to take control of the train. This saga neatly illustrates a theme which characterises railway films to this day. Train journeys, especially long ones, disrupted by dramatic events, enforce intimate interaction between people who, to this point, have been strangers. And, in times of crisis, passengers can either join forces, or continue to insist on looking out for number one.

In many ways, *Train to Busan* (2016) stands in sharp contrast to Hitchcock’s classic. A South Korean zombie apocalypse film, the action takes place on a modern Eastern bullet train, whose passengers are so obsessed with their work and hi-tech devices they don’t have the time, or patience, for fine dining even if it were on offer. But wealthy company boss Yon-suk, in a remarkable performance by Kim Eui-sung, plays a similar role to Hitchcock’s quisling lawyer –

under strain. Trains are enclosed and confined: directors throughout the decades have made hay out of showing passengers forced to squeeze past one another in tight corridors. But they can still have multiple locations – which explains why the long-distance variety, with a mixture of sleeper, seated and dining carriages, are so popular in films.

Trains also run on self-contained networks, their operation remaining a mystery to most passengers – and yet they are surrounded on all sides by the real world. This is explored in *The Cassandra Crossing* (1976), a disaster movie unfairly panned by critics and audiences alike. An all-star cast including Richard Harris, Sophia Loren, Martin Sheen, Ava Gardner and OJ Simpson find themselves enclosed at gunpoint on a trans-Europe express. A terrorist who raided a US chemical weapons supply in Switzerland has stowed aboard and infected passengers with a deadly disease. The train is diverted across a perilous arch bridge on a disused Nazi railway line – prompting a race against time for survival.

Civilisation is right outside – yet it couldn’t be further away. In occasional scenes off the train, Burt Lancaster plays a twisted military intelligence colonel who would rather send passengers to their deaths than allow secrets of the US germ warfare programme to be revealed. On board, meanwhile, a Holocaust survivor (Lee Strasberg) brings a taste of the outside world, and the helplessness of passengers, as he recounts his journey on the route before – heading to a concentration camp.

Snowpiercer (2014), another South Korean flick, turns this on its head – with the passengers on board a continuously-running global train the only survivors of a new ice age. They may be privileged to be alive, but the train has a class system more stark than anything seen on earth – with the vast majority living a serf existence in the rear carriages. While they live in filth and chew protein blocks, those in first class sup on sushi and steak up front. Again, the only hope is collective action – but the truth of the revolution reveals a cynicism to rival George Orwell’s.

The trope of strangers on a train – true as it may be – can sometimes seem rather jaded. But it’s an old story that offers the best twist. Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express* reveals that the suspects share a secret, a tragic connection to one another. The 1974 screen adaptation captures well the feigned tension between these characters, as they navigate the corridors of the world’s most luxurious train – which still can’t help being rather cramped. The 2017 re-make, starring and directed by Kenneth Branagh, undermines this mood by taking characters off the train for bizarre interviews in the snow.

Perhaps in pursuit of a US audience or a desire to imitate Wes Anderson’s Grand Budapest Hotel, Branagh chose to emphasise the spectacular scenery and external shots of the train. He should have stuck with the corridors and the claustrophobia that passengers – and audiences – understand and love. Because the best railway films have always kept us on board.

What’s your favourite railway film? Let us know by emailing us at journal@aslef.org.uk
Don’t let it cost you your job!
Driver Standards Manager

Circa £63,500 on achieving competency
Paddington, Reading & Oxford

Join our team of Great Westerners and you’ll help to provide a great service to 100 million customers every year. You’ll also help us make history as we transform one of the world’s most prestigious rail networks and create a 21st century service to be proud of.

Working as a Driver Standards Manager you will become a key part of our diverse Driver team. It’s an exciting time at GWR as we transition to one of the UK’s most modern traction fleets. You will be a role model and lead your Drivers through this major transformation whilst simultaneously ensuring that we operate a safe and reliable railway.

We are looking for adaptable and dynamic individuals with the ability to prioritise in a fast moving and changeable environment. Whilst you will have a minimum of 3 years mainline driving experience for this technical role, the rest is down to your personal skills and passion for the job.

You’ll be rewarded with all kinds of benefits, including a final salary pension scheme, free rail travel across the GWR network for you and your family, a company-sponsored health care plan and childcare vouchers.

We’re unable to accept paper applications or applications via email. Please complete the online application.

To apply please visit GWRcareers.co.uk

---

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:________________________ Date:________________________

Please return this half of the form to: Andrea Weston in the Admin Dept, ASLEF, 77 St John Street, London, EC1M 4NN and hand the other half, the standing order mandate, to your bank (or via your internet bank)
True gents retire from Freightliner

NDY GIBBS started on the railway as a traction trainee at Ipswich on 16 June 1980, at the age of 16, five days after leaving school. He passed out as a relief driver in March 1987 and got his driver’s check at Ipswich in December. Andy progressed through the links and in 1993 joined the regional railways link.

When Ipswich depot was split in 1994, in the lead-up to privatisation, Andy chose to join the freight side, which was RfD, and became Freightliner in 1995 under privatisation. He served as an acting TCS, until the role was abolished in 1996. Andy stayed with Freightliner at Ipswich for the rest of his career, in the East Coast link until 2013, then in the non-lodge and West Coast links until his retirement on 20 October 2018.

He is enjoying his retirement – and jokes that he doesn’t know how he found time to come to work! – and hopes things have improved at Freightliner since he left.

Lee Barber, branch secretary

Darryl Seaman started as a shunter with RfD at Parkeston in December 1990. He got promotion to the footplate at Norwich in October 1992. In May 1994 he moved back to Parkeston, due to being surplus at Norwich under privatisation. He then moved back to Norwich and Anglia Railways. Darryl was made redundant in December 2007, started with Freightliner in January 2008 until he retired in October 2018. Darryl was LDC rep at Ipswich and helped with a lot of business at Ipswich Freightliner. Thank you, Darryl, for all your help and being a loyal member of this trade union.

Lee Barber, branch secretary

High road to Edinburgh

Dave Court and I made our annual visit to Edinburgh No 2 on Friday 7 December. Sadly, our numbers were down due to illness, and prior commitments, among the RMS committee but we left the District 4 dinner at Doncaster in mid-afternoon and arrived in the Athens of the North at 6.20pm.

We joined the officer, branch reps, active and retired members at a social evening and meal with retiring EC member Hugh Bradley. District 2 Officer Kevin Lindsay, who is renowned for his charming manner when presenting service awards, made sure each recipient was subjected to in-depth historic analysis with a great deal of humour.

Hugh Bradley, a good friend of the RMS, made a short contribution, along with an even shorter one on my part. Hugh and I were then presented with honorary membership of the branch by Rab Wicksted, Stuart Williamson, and Kevin Lindsay. I wish to thank the branch as it did lift my spirits!

Ray Jackson, RMS chair

Upcoming events

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

- **CRICKLEWOOD – FRIDAY 29 MARCH**
  From 12.00 at Bedford RAF Club, Ashburnham Road, Bedford (opposite the railway station).

- **GATESHEAD & NEWCASTLE – FRIDAY 29 MARCH**
  Reunion from 13.30 at the Bowling Green Club in Gateshead. All welcome.

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

- **DIDCOT – SATURDAY 27 APRIL**
  Annual reunion from 12.00 at the GWRSA Club. Buffet provided.

- **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).

- **HITHER GREEN – WEDNESDAY 8 MAY**
  The next Hither Green old farts’ reunion will be held from 11.00 at the Richmal Crompton (a Wetherspoons pub) near Bromley South station. All welcome (well, nearly everyone). See you there, Ray Cooper RMS.

- **ASHFORD – THURSDAY 4 JULY**
  From 11.00 at Ashford Railway Club, Beaver Lane, Ashford.

- **RAINHAM – THURSDAY 4 OCTOBER**
  From 11.00 at Rainham Social Club, 86 Station Road, Rainham.

BADGE OF HONOUR

No hiding place – and no euphemisms, such as ‘silver surfers’ or ‘senior citizens’ – in Ray Cooper’s railway lexicon. He tells it like it is. Which is why, in the Upcoming Events, you can see he likes to announce that the annual Hither Green bash at the Richmal Crompton is the Old Farts’ Reunion. He even, as you might imagine, has the badge to prove it...

ROCK’N’ME BABY

Colleagues, on my last day as an ASLEF EC member and EC president can I thank you all for the help and support you have given me over the last 14 years. Keep rockin’ in the new year. Solidarity!

Tosh McDonald, Doncaster
Blackburn branch opens for business

The birth of the new year witnessed the creation of a new branch to add to the ASLEF family. For the first time in decades, District 3 has opened a new branch and, on Monday 7 January, the inaugural branch meeting of Blackburn was well attended by its new members. Also in attendance was the general secretary; various members of the Arriva Rail Northern company council; John Metcalfe, executive committee member for District 3; Preston branch secretary Graham Fazackerley; and me.

Blackburn branch will be populated by Arriva Rail Northern drivers who had sought their own identity and requested a branch as soon as the new Blackburn depot was formulated in 2017. Previously, Blackburn depot was administered by the very capable hands of the Preston branch and a huge thank you must be given to the way that Preston branch has welcomed the Blackburn depot and, in particular, thanks to Bro Graham Fazackerley who personally looked after the Blackburn drivers.

Many thanks to the GS who braved the weather and gave a rousingly memorable speech which the branch attendees, many first time attenders at an ASLEF branch, will remember and recite for years to come.

Blackburn branch will now find its own feet and identity and I would like to proudly welcome them into our ASLEF family. Thank you to everyone who attended this historic occasion and to those who helped to found the branch. I wish the branch all the best of luck and look forward to working closely with them. Andy Hourigan, District 3 Organiser

GS Mick Whelan joins the celebrations of the first new branch in District 3 for decades

Spa – small but perfectly formed

Leamington Spa branch was pleased to welcome EC6 Dave Caife, Bob Earlam from West Midlands Trains company council, and Vic Waite, Roy Woodward, Phil Spice and Richard Hopkins from our ‘Good Old Boys’ Retired Section, to our December AGM.

Dave went first and told us about national ASLEF issues including LU problems relating to cab access, training on Freightliner and DB Cargo, the industry trespass group, Medigold medicals, the sounding of two-tones at whistle boards, Class 230 rolling stock, and CDP plans.

Bob was next, with more local issues, including WM Trains rest day working until the end of May, the new gain share scheme, job share arrangements, changes to the May 2019 timetable, the new Class 196 DMU units, and problems with rostering and cross-covering diagrams. He also thanked the branch for his continuing work on the company council.

Vic told us all about the Retired Members’ Section’s year, trips and meals they have enjoyed, and the sad passing of George Rooke, Pete Cleaver, Brian Whitehead and David Watts. Our thoughts and condolences to their families.

The chair and secretary would like to thank all our visitors to Leamington Spa over the past year. We are only a very small branch of 18, so the time taken out by people to come and see us on a Sunday morning is very, very much appreciated!

Nick Walker, branch chair

FOR AULD LANG SYNE

Colleagues, before I’m deleted from the ASLEF email account I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your efforts on our behalf over the years, for your professionalism, and for making all those EC decisions happen! I would also like to thank you for the leaving gift and the card with all those nice messages; it was very much appreciated. Thanks again and all the best for 2019 and beyond.

Hugh Bradley, Motherwell

Lloyd George, the election, and an 8 hour working day were all hot topics in the Journal 100 years ago.

MICK HOLDER turns back the pages (and time) to February 1919

ENTRONEMENT OF TORYISM

JRR on the result of the general election: ‘We have discussed many great hopes and aspirations together, and the result of it all is not represented by this election, and the enthronement of Toryism. Some prominent members of the Labour Party have gone down, notably the left-wing section, and many promising candidates, including the three in our own Society, have been unable to stem the flowing tide. I was not surprised at the failure of the left-wing for, although we always shall and must have a left-wing, the public have a distaste for left-wingers. The elections have put Lloyd George into an extraordinary position. Here is a man cradled in Liberalism, and pledged to Liberalism, bringing in rampant Toryism, and acting as its leader.’

WORKING AN EIGHT HOUR DAY

On achieving an eight hour working day, ‘One For Advancement’ writes: ‘I am hoping our Society will press for the speedy release of our fraternity who are at the present time serving in the Army or Navy. This of itself would greatly facilitate the working of an eight hour day, and no more. Then I advocate for the confining of our working week to one of 48 hours. I can plainly see that if we do not take a determined stand on these points the railway companies will rather let the men work more overtime, to the exclusion of more labour, thereby retarding promotion.’

WHILE RUNNING TENDER FIRST

The Sheffield branch secretary writes: ‘Another matter is the question of “storm sheets” which had been provided for the footplate in the case of air raids, etc. These sheets are now withdrawn, much to the indignation and discomfort of the men concerned. During the discussion it was shown that these sheets act in no way as a deterrent to safety; whilst on the other hand they had proved a boon to the men whilst running tender first, and standing about in rough weather.’

GET THE JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

‘I am sure that all readers of the Journal will be pleased to hear that Stourbridge branch secretary Bro C Broughton, and Slough branch secretary Bro WG Mills, have both been made a Justice of the Peace.’
IAN WESTWATER
MEMORY MARCHES ON

On behalf of the members of Edinburgh No1 branch I write with great sadness following the passing of Ian Westwater at the age of 48. Westy passed away suddenly, but peacefully, after a short illness just before Christmas.

In common with our colleagues at Edinburgh No 2 branch, where he was a driver with CrossCountry, we will all miss Ian; one of the nicest people you could ever wish to meet. He started on the railway, initially as a YTS trainee, before coming onto the footplate, and getting his driving appointment at Millerhill, where he had a spell as LLC rep.

It’s hard to believe it is now the best part of 20 years since he then moved over from freight to the passenger side at Edinburgh Waverley; in our eyes he always remained one of us. Even though we would only see him all too infrequently in the intervening years, he never changed a bit. Of course, with his big smile, gift for getting on with people, and lovely disposition, often putting others before himself, he was equally appreciated and at home in his ‘new’ depot and branch.

Everyone has anecdotes to recount and to fondly remember him by; personally, I became friends with Westy over a shared passion for Hibernian FC. In our early 20s we travelled by train and ferry to see Hilbs playing Anderlecht in Brussels, a journey part of which Ian spent in the overhead luggage compartment, for some reason. Another time, following a late equaliser at Celtic Park, I injured myself in overzealous celebrations. Eventually being strapped to a trolley to be wheeled around the track to the treatment room, it was Westy who spotted me getting carted away and arranged to bring his car to the front entrance to transport me home, post-match. I hadn’t gone to the game with him that day, but it was entirely typical of the man; Westy was the one stepping forward to help.

A poignant and emotional service to celebrate a life cut cruelly short was held at Warriston crematorium on 28 December. The chapel was literally full to overflowing with many not getting beyond the steps outside. The loss and sorrow of his friends is great, but it is his wife, who has displayed such fortitude throughout his illness, I feel for most. Tracy, you are in the thoughts of us all. Westy, your memory marches on.

Hussein Ezzedine, branch secretary, Edinburgh No1

WESTY’ A TRUE GENTLEMAN

Westy, a CrossCountry driver and health & safety rep, started on the railway at 16, as a YTS, in the summer of 1986, before gaining a position as a traction trainee in December at Millerhill depot. He was appointed to driver in 1991 before moving to Edinburgh CrossCountry in May 1999. He had a keen interest in ASLEF and was elected as h&s rep, a position he held with distinction for more than 10 years, until his passing on 15 December.

Westy had a well-deserved reputation as a true railway gentleman and much-respected colleague, which was borne out with the great numbers who visited Ian at home and hospital during his short 13 weeks between being diagnosed with brain tumours and his death.

Tribute must also be paid to Westy’s beloved wife and soul partner Tracy, who was kind enough to share his short time with so many of his colleagues and friends. Westy bore his illness with dignity and strength and was never heard once complaining about his lot. Instead, he retained his legendary sense of humour until the end.

Westy’s kindness and selfless attitude shone through until the very end, asking that a collection be taken at his funeral in aid of Fighting Against Cancer Edinburgh which, along with a workplace collection, raised over £2,500 for this worthy cause. You will be greatly missed mate. RIP.

John Hay, Edinburgh No2

DISTRICT 3 & DISTRICT 7
WEEKEND SCHOOL
23-24 MARCH 2019

Venue
Royal Hotel Weston
1 South Parade, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1JP
www.royalhotelwestern.com

Applications
● Rooms are allocated on a first come, first served basis.
● Applications should be sent to hourigana@aslef.org.uk
● All applications are to be received by 1 March 2019 (no exceptions).
● Please state your name, branch and contact details when making your application.
● There will be no refunds or cancellations after 1 March 2019.
● Please state how many and which type of rooms you require and for which days.

Payments
● Cheques should be made payable to ‘ASLEF’.
● Cheques and cash payments will be taken on the day.

What to expect
Registration begins at 10am on Saturday morning with tea/coffee and will be officially opened by the General Secretary Mick Whelan at 11.00.

A buffet lunch will be provided and a hog roast will kick off the social event in the evening. The event ends at midday Sunday. There will be industry and political speakers providing an update on developments on our railway as well as educational elements suitable for reps and lay members alike.

Delegate fees and room rates
Delegate fee
Single room £10 pp* 
(6 available)
Double/Twin £42.50 p/room, p/night
Additional rooms are available on the Friday night (at the same rate) if required. Branches are encouraged to subsidise or pay for delegates to attend.
* Mandatory

DON TAPP

Don Tapp, a well-liked member of staff, and always good for a laugh, has died. The crematorium was full which says everything. Our memories will stay with us, and our thoughts are with his family at this time.

Dave Weddle, Tonbridge RMS
KEVIN CHOWN
HEART OF GOLD
Kevin Chown started working for London Transport in 1980 as a guard at High Barnet, and went on to become a driver at East Finchley and High Barnet. Kevin was a local health & safety rep for many years and known to be both thorough and tenacious. He was a keen cyclist and squash player and used to take part in the annual charity walk, when a group of drivers would carry a sleeper from High Barnet to Morden. Many thought he was quite dour and Kevin played on this. When we decided to put up pictures of all the local reps in the mess room, he insisted on having a picture of Skeletor for his! Kevin will be sorely missed by his friends and colleagues; underneath that gruff exterior was a fantastically dry sense of humour and a real heart of gold.
Deborah Reay, Northern Line North

FRED BRISTOW
SINGING SINATRA
Fred Bristow joined London Transport as a guard in 1996 and became a driver at East Finchley in 2000. Fred was a truly lovely man, who was always cheery and chatty and the mess room was always a happier place when he was around. Fred left to become a part time customer station assistant at Waterloo, where he used to dispatch the trains. If he knew a driver, he would mention them in his PA, much to the amusement of the passengers on the platform. Fred would travel down to Waterloo from East Finchley with the driver and I have many fond memories of him and I singing Frank Sinatra songs and giggling as we drove down to Waterloo. It was always a good start to your day if you had Freddy on your train.
Deborah Reay, Northern Line North

JOHN COLE
GREAT CELEBRATION
John Cole sadly died from complications caused by cancer on 22 November 2018 at the age of 56. He joined the railway in 1990 as a trainee guard for South West Trains, moving to Southeastern where he qualified as a driver. In November 1998 he moved to Midland Mainline, based at St Pancras, from where he retired on 16 November last year, six days before he died.
John’s funeral on 13 December was attended by 300 people and one dog. It was a wonderful celebration of his life and I would like to thank everyone who came along; I’m sorry I didn’t get to speak to you all. The cancer research fund in John’s name now stands at more than £3,500 and I am so grateful for all your very generous donations and lovely messages. In particular, I would like to thank Rose and Jason at St Pancras for their constant support and friendship to John over the years, and particularly during his illness.
Jill Cole, Orpington

JACK KNELL
A WELL-LIKED COMRADE
Brother JR Knell of Sheffield Midland branch passed away recently at the age of 82 after a long battle with cancer. Jack served for many years on the branch committee and eventually took up the very important role of organising the annual reunion which is still functioning and carried on by the next generation of driver members. He served on the LDC during the upheaval during the late 1990s, retired to Spain, but returned to Sheffield after his soul mate Dot passed away. Jack could party and was a proud, and well-liked, comrade.
Ray Jackson, Retired Members’ Section chair

CLIFFORD BROWNING
Proud to serve the union
My father Clifford Raymond Browning was an active member of ASLEF. He passed away on 22 November and his last request was that his obituary should be posted in the Journal.
Cliff started at Llanelli in April 1946 as a cleaner, did his national service in Malaya from 1947 to 1949, and then returned to Llanelli as a fireman. He transferred to Tyseley, remained there until 1950, when he returned to Llanelli before a mutual change with a man at Old Oak Common in 1951 where he stayed, working his way through all the goods double home links, and finally through the passenger links, becoming a pass fireman, and then a driver.
He was elected onto the LDC in 1963, of which he became secretary in 1965, while working the top passenger link as a put back driver until 1969. He moved to Stewarts Lane on a point of principle – ‘a certain well-known individual not carrying out branch decisions re training on new diesels’, as he put it – and during his time on the South Eastern at Victoria became chair of Battersea branch, went back on the LDC, and went to his first AAD at Buxton.
Cliff was a delegate at AAD on a further five occasions, as well as a delegate at the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party conference. He was proud to be the first chair of the ‘new structure’ at AAD. He returned to Old Oak Common in 1989 where, in 1993, at the age of 65, he finished his railway career.

BILL NEGUS
We have lost another of the 184.
Bill Negus, who started at 9A Longsight in July 1948, and who retired on 5 January 1993, died on 12 December at the age of 90.
Mel Thorley, Longsight RMS

JM MORGAN
It is with great sorrow that I have to inform you that TransPennine Express driver JM Morgan died on Friday 11 January.
Colin Holmes, Immingham
No unicorns, but a promise of Paradise Regained

It is ironic that while the main letter in the Journal (December) discussed religious beliefs, we were greeted elsewhere on the page by the Brexit evangelism of Tom Burns. No mention of unicorns for everyone, but the promise of Paradise Regained. An article of faith and, as such, devoid of substance. It’s a fairy tale that left Brexiteers lap up, even though they normally scoff at anyone being naive enough to believe in God.

Mr Burns seems to have misread – or failed to read at all – my letter (Journal, November). The bottom line was that being anti-Brexit isn’t anti-train driver. I know who my enemies are: they are the right-wing press supporting a ‘gold-plated’ pension. They want a ‘race to the bottom’ and to stir up gullible readers to demand I’m replaced with a robot. It certainly isn’t the EU. The pair of Sparts that initiated this debate don’t speak for me. And, frankly, Mr Burns sticking his foot in the door as I’m closing it on the subject, is making himself look little better than a pathetic double glazing salesman on commission.

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, meets his new best friend Adolf Hitler in Berlin on 28 November 1941

I wouldn’t normally respond to puerile conjecture, exaggerations and fabrications, something I could describe in a single word of eight letters, but that Mr Burns would find too ‘foul-mouthed’ for me to stomach. He seems to think I should be compelled to know why he voted Brexit. With respect, I couldn’t care less why anyone would consciously want to make their country poorer. I’ll leave that to the psychoanalysts.

True, some of his ‘facts’ need correcting – his example of 70% of laws is laughable and long debunked. Just search the laws passed in Westminster, or the divergence between member states’ legal systems, to conclude there is little evidence of a systematic alignment of legislation passed down from Brussels. Or see that EU legislation is limited to trade, agriculture, environment, etc. Not taxation, education, drug liberalisation, or the right to wage war, amongst other things.

But then why bother being wise where ignorance is bliss? Many Brexiteers actually believe they are ‘ruled’ by Führer Merkel and her Fourth Reich from her bunker in Brussels. An overdose of war films as kids, I suspect. Others tell me it’s George Soros and his chemtrail-emitting lizards.

However, there is one thing that irks: ‘the wealth gap has been widening and social mobility narrowing for over 40 years – roughly the time we’ve been in the EEC/EC/EU’. The working-class has, roughly since 1979, been losing ground, and an unwavering belief amongst the left, built on solid facts, is that this has been solely down to an assault by Thatcher, her spawn in New Labour, the re-election of the Tories and nobody else.

However, according to the likes of Mr Burns, the destruction of heavy industry, the attacks on trades unions, the lack of new social housing being built, culminating in the demonisation of those at the bottom as workshy ‘benefit scroungers’ through cartoon characters like Wayne and Waynetta Slob, isn’t their fault now. It’s Brussels.

Nothing displays the moral, political, and intellectual bankruptcy of people like Mr Burns more than this laughable Orwellian revisionism. It’s up there with Benazir Bhutto’s 2015 declaration that Hitler didn’t fancy the Holocaust until he was convinced of it by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Frankly, I prefer people who blame immigration for voting leave. I might not agree that immigration has been detrimental to Britain, but I can’t argue there hasn’t been any large-scale immigration at all.

It’s saddening to see the likes of Mr Burns succumb to such a corrosive cult. The cult of Brexit has become the place where the truth becomes lies and lies are peddled as truth, and where its brainwashed followers happily risk mass suicide for this ‘undiscovered country’ most of the British left know as dystopia.

Patrick Redmond, train operator, Rickmansworth, London Underground

Pen pushers in Brussels

As working drivers we are all in fear of causing a mishap, possibly a SPAD. When this happens there is always the fear of losing our job. Your driver manager compiles a report of the incident and a copy is sent to the Office of Rail and Road where its impact and consequences are assessed. Did you know that a copy of your incident is also sent to the European Railway Agency in Brussels?

Formerly the safety of Britain’s railways was managed by British institutions, currently the ORR, which is now merely the British arm of the ERA and subservient to it. On duty you must carry your European Train Drivers’ Licence and, without one, you cannot drive. However, nobody has told you that this licence can be withdrawn by the ERA. An anonymous, faceless pen pusher in Brussels can destroy your career and there is nothing you can do about it.

At home ASLEF has negotiating rights with your TOC or FOC but ASLEF has no right to go to Brussels, argue your case, and get your job back. Your friendly staff or company council rep has no power in Brussels. Regardless of your views on the EU are you happy that a stranger in Brussels can destroy your livelihood?

Arno Brooks, York

AGS Simon Weller says: ‘It doesn’t go to Europe. The ORR and the DFT have the authority on these licences.’

Surely our father has duty to protect his children?

Denis Lewis (Journal, November) stated that religion, in his opinion, is ‘the root of all evil.’ It
is his right to have that opinion. In my opinion no one item causes the misery and bloodletting the world now experiences and, yes, money, greed, and religion have played, and will always play, their part in the turmoil and suffering we cannot control, even in this world of great technical advancement.

Marek Lasek (Journal, December) took Brother Lewis to task for his opinion. The introduction of instant filmed news can show the disgraceful way in which our fellow human beings are being treated. We now experience whole villages being destroyed, rape, murder, pillage, and yet Brother Lasek grants absolution to his God who, we are told, is all-seeing and powerful and before whom we must stand in the next world to receive judgment. ‘If a man does someone harm in the name of religion, it’s not God’s fault, or religion’s fault. If a Spurs fan attacks an Arsenal fan is that Harry Kane’s fault? Of course not.’ In all of my 76 years, never have I observed such a crass statement about such a heart-rending subject.

I was brought up a Catholic and can still vividly remember the indoctrination re the catechism. I would remind Brother Lasek that he believes God made him in his own image, and is on earth to serve him in this world and be happy with him forever in the next. But, wait, until that euphoric time comes with God, you’re on your own, because he gave the perpetrators who are causing mayhem and destruction free will to do so.

If we are children of God does not our father have a responsibility to protect his children, saving us from the evil regimes which are there before our eyes, or are religious beings such as Brother Lasek just pedlars of afterlife illusion?

Mark Dowd OBE, RMS, Kirkdale

SNP – no friends of unions

It is unfortunate that the debate around Scottish politics and the independence movement is polarised around the SNP. On the one hand Brother Simpson (Journal, January) uses marginal SNP election wins as a stick with which to beat them for not accepting the Scottish referendum result. I’ve heard similar arguments over the past few years and they are clearly ridiculous. I’m sure the Labour, Liberal and Tory parties will all come back at the next election and contest those seats. The idea that one vote precludes people from continuing to campaign for their political views is the antithesis of democracy. Imagine if that logic had been applied after the 1979 general election!

Before I get tarred with the SNP brush, those of us on the left of the independence movement have to be clear about the SNP. They are no friends of the trade union movement. Recently, John Swinney wrote directly to EIS members in dispute circumventing collective bargaining. At no point during recent railway disputes has the SNP come out, unequivocally, on the side of workers and trade unionists. The SNP has failed to use the positive policies it has pursued to highlight a transitional view of an independent Scotland. We must recognise the positives of the SNP government, such as free prescriptions, but we cannot be uncritical as they don’t represent a socialist vision of Scotland. The great Scottish/Irish socialist, James Connolly, warned of the dangers of lowering the socialist banner in favour of a nationalist one and this warning rings true today.

Just for political balance: I nearly choked on my turkey when I read that the Labour Party was criticising the lack of train services on Boxing Day. It’s unbelievable to see the party that claims to stand for working people argue publicly for rail workers to get less time off with their families. We already work across a seven day week, cover a 24 hour day, and work extreme shifts, making work/life balance difficult. Andy McDonald, Labour’s Shadow Transport Secretary, wants to take away one of the only guaranteed days off many of us have. A true Labour Party would be fighting for more people to get Boxing Day off, not just in the railway but across other sectors.

Steven Nimmo, Edinburgh No2

Forced to return her pass

Slade Green branch is concerned at the continuing battle regarding non-safeguarded employees. This has never been more evident than when one of our non-safeguarded members passed away recently while in service. His widow was forced to hand back her travel pass to the company and advised that she has no further entitlement to travel facilities.

With more non-safeguarded staff every week on the railway this is something that will affect more staff over the coming years. We hope to raise this issue at AAD and hope we will have the support of other delegates and branches.

Richard White, Slade Green branch sec

Lighted flame still burns brightly in our hearts

Through the pages of the Locomotive Journal, I’d very much like to thank those that organised the recent Retired Members’ Section weekend forum at Sculby, Yorkshire. The event mimics the tried and tested ASLEF tradition: top class inspirational speakers and educational enlightenment; alongside sociability of the highest order!

The lighted flame burns just as brightly in the hearts of our retired members as it did during our various railway careers. Thank you, ASLEF, for giving retired members the platform to continue to be progressive!

Mick Barker, Retired Members’ Section

CLASS 308 NSERS badge to raise funds for the preservation of the last complete Phase One 3 CIG train 1753. £6 inc p&p from NSERS, 41 Highfield Road, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 6DD. Cheques payable to Network South East Railway Society.

AIRDRIE has produced a badge to commemorate its reopening as a separate branch. £6.50 inc p&p. Please contact branch chair Ivan Wilson (07949 862393) for details.

PERTH branch badge to commemorate 110 years (1908-2018). £6 plus £1 p&p. Cheques payable to Perth branch ASLEF No 134 General. Please contact branch secretary Grant Murchie for details on 07412 453454 or grantmu32@btinternet.com

KIRKDALE 121 limited edition centenary badge 1917-2017 price £7.50 inc p&p from branch secretary Keith Devling. Call 07933 144768 or email kdevling@aol.com

HANDMADE miniature driver’s keys to wear as a charm or round the neck. Solid silver and solid 9ct gold weighing approximately 7 grams. Just over 2cm in length and just under 2cm width. Gold £300, silver £100 + £7 p&p recorded delivery.

Contact Brad McCarthy on 07929 350146.

CLASS 15 locomotive (D8233) enamel badge on sale to raise funds for restoration of the sole surviving Class 15 loco by the Class 15 Preservation Society. £5 + £1 p&p from Ipswich driver Clive Whiting. Payment can be sent via PayPal to treasurer@d8233.org.uk

PROFESSIONAL ENGRAVING at sensible prices. I can engrave anything you wish, such as the ASLEF logo on the pint tankard. Contact Paul Potts by email at ppotts1969@hotmail.co.uk

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

To place an advertisement in the ASLEF Journal please phone 020 7324 2400 or send an email to journal@aslef.org.uk
I met murder on the way – he had a mask like Castlereagh

‘Books do furnish a room,’ says Lindsay Bagshaw, dryly, in Anthony Powell’s A Dance to the Music of Time. KEITH RICHMOND opens Jonathan Coe’s new state of the nation novel and Martin Rowson’s scabrous new volume of verse

TATE of the nation novels have become fashionable again in recent years, on both sides of the Atlantic. If few of them have the range, depth and ambition of, say, George Eliot’s Middlemarch, William Makepeace Thackeray’s Vanity Fair or Anthony Trollope’s The Way We Live Now, there have still been plenty of authors prepared to sit down in front of their MacBook Pro and tackle the dark side of the neoliberal dream.

Jonathan Coe, who savagely set about the Thatcher government’s obsessional, ill-conceived, and badly brought in privatisation policies in What a Carve Up!, returns in Middle England (Viking, £16.99) to the characters we first met in The Rotters’ Club, when they were at school in Birmingham, and then The Closed Circle, when they were making their way in this world in the first four years of this new millennium.

‘Once I could eat of good bread / Good bread that was made of good wheat’

This book – the publishers have slapped the words ‘A novel’ on the cover just in case – covers the period from April 2010 to September 2018, from the (fictional) funeral of Benjamin Trotter’s mum and Gordon Brown’s ‘bigoted woman’ remark to a new life for some of them on the banks of the Sorgue near Avignon as it tries to explain why Britain voted for Brexit.

Or why, more accurately, on Thursday 23 June 2016, 17,410,742 (51.9%) men and women in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland voted to leave the European Union while 16,141,241 (48.1%) voted to remain on a turnout of 72% of the electorate.

‘Now I am glad with a hard mouldy crust / And glad that I’ve got it to eat’

The canvas is broad, as deep, taking in Grete, a young Lithuanian woman who cleans for the bigoted mother of Benjamin’s niece’s new boyfriend, as well as Nigel, David Cameron’s spin doctor in Downing Street, who at a meeting in a café next to Temple Underground station seamlessly moves from telling journalist Doug Anderton that ‘Dave is a moderniser. A man of vision. A man of great personal and moral courage. A man of principle. Who keeps his promises’ and describing Theresa May as ‘very ambitious, but rather cautious. She knows her own mind, but relies heavily on her advisers. She believes in strong leadership, but also in following the will of the people’ to, a little later, admitting ‘We’re F*****’. ‘Excuse me?’ ‘We’re utterly and irredeemably F*****. It’s chaos. Everyone’s running around like headless chickens. Nobody has the faintest idea what they’re doing. We’re so, so F*****’. In one poignant scene Benjamin takes his father back to what was once the Longbridge plant, where his dad used to work, and he struggles to comprehend what has happened to the West Midlands, and this country, and its manufacturing base. And the whole thing is bookended by Benjamin listening wistfully to Shirley Collins singing Adieu to Old England…

‘Boris Johnson, Truth-free Tory tosser twat’

Martin Rowson is best known for his satirical political cartoons which – in the tradition of Hogarth and Gillray, Gerald Scarfe and Ralph Steadman – are visceral, offensive, savage and funny, and appear regularly in The Guardian, Daily Mirror, Morning Star, and Chartist. But he writes as well as he draws – an elegant monthly column for Tribune, for many years, and a poignant memoir in Stuff – as well as thoughtful graphic novels reworking Gulliver’s Travels by Jonathan Swift, Tristram Shandy by Laurence Sterne, The Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and The Waste Land by TS Eliot. He cheerfully admits, metrical rants better, I suspect, on the stage than read; they would work better, I suspect, on the stage than on the page. Because they are, in the main, and as Rowson cheerfully admits, metrical rants against Hugo from Stowe ‘enriching the rich by investing their dough / In a hedge hegemonic portfolio / In faraway countries about which we know / F*** all’ and ‘racists with faces / Of a hue that’s as red as / Pastram i’.

But if you can’t listen to Rowson declaim them in person, pick up this paperback and enjoy lots of laugh out loud moments as he rips into the people and the attitudes – and there are lots of them – he loathes.

‘A-brim with Tunnocks without end / And copies of The People’s Friend’

Best, though, is Rowson’s, ahem, ‘mash-up’ with Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Masque of Anarchy, written after Peterloo in 1819, with its famous exhortation to the people to ‘Rise, like lions after slumber’ as ‘Ye are many – they are few’: ‘I met murder on the way / Looking like Esther McVey’; ‘Behind her shuffled, vast & wailing, / The Troll F*** Up, aka Grayling’; ‘He yelped, as down the money rains / On Stagecoach and on Virgin Trains / Til F*** Up’s puking up his brains’; ‘He yawns, then passes both his socks / To Madness, known as Liam Fox / Who sniffs them with excited squeals / Fantasising new Trade Deals’.

Most of the poems in Pastrami Faced Racist and Other Verses (Smokeystack Books, £8.99) demand to be performed rather than read; they would work better, I suspect, on the stage than on the page. Because they are, in the main, and as Rowson cheerfully admits, metrical rants against Hugo from Stowe ‘enriching the rich by investing their dough / In a hedge hegemonic portfolio / In faraway countries about which we know / F*** all’ and ‘racists with faces / Of a hue that’s as red as / Pastram i’.

But if you can’t listen to Rowson declaim them in person, pick up this paperback and enjoy lots of laugh out loud moments as he rips into the people and the attitudes – and there are lots of them – he loathes.

‘A-brim with Tunnocks without end / And copies of The People’s Friend’

Best, though, is Rowson’s, ahem, ‘mash-up’ with Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Masque of Anarchy, written after Peterloo in 1819, with its famous exhortation to the people to ‘Rise, like lions after slumber’ as ‘Ye are many – they are few’: ‘I met murder on the way / Looking like Esther McVey’; ‘Behind her shuffled, vast & wailing, / The Troll F*** Up, aka Grayling’; ‘He yelped, as down the money rains / On Stagecoach and on Virgin Trains / Til F*** Up’s puking up his brains’; ‘He yawns, then passes both his socks / To Madness, known as Liam Fox / Who sniffs them with excited squeals / Fantasising new Trade Deals’.

Most of the poems in Pastrami Faced Racist and Other Verses (Smokeystack Books, £8.99) demand to be performed rather than read; they would work better, I suspect, on the stage than on the page. Because they are, in the main, and as Rowson cheerfully admits, metrical rants against Hugo from Stowe ‘enriching the rich by investing their dough / In a hedge hegemonic portfolio / In faraway countries about which we know / F*** all’ and ‘racists with faces / Of a hue that’s as red as / Pastram i’.

But if you can’t listen to Rowson declaim them in person, pick up this paperback and enjoy lots of laugh out loud moments as he rips into the people and the attitudes – and there are lots of them – he loathes.

‘A-brim with Tunnocks without end / And copies of The People’s Friend’

Best, though, is Rowson’s, ahem, ‘mash-up’ with Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Masque of Anarchy, written after Peterloo in 1819, with its famous exhortation to the people to ‘Rise, like lions after slumber’ as ‘Ye are many – they are few’: ‘I met murder on the way / Looking like Esther McVey’; ‘Behind her shuffled, vast & wailing, / The Troll F*** Up, aka Grayling’; ‘He yelped, as down the money rains / On Stagecoach and on Virgin Trains / Til F*** Up’s puking up his brains’; ‘He yawns, then passes both his socks / To Madness, known as Liam Fox / Who sniffs them with excited squeals / Fantasising new Trade Deals’.

Most of the poems in Pastrami Faced Racist and Other Verses (Smokeystack Books, £8.99) demand to be performed rather than read; they would work better, I suspect, on the stage than on the page. Because they are, in the main, and as Rowson cheerfully admits, metrical rants against Hugo from Stowe ‘enriching the rich by investing their dough / In a hedge hegemonic portfolio / In faraway countries about which we know / F*** all’ and ‘racists with faces / Of a hue that’s as red as / Pastram i’.

But if you can’t listen to Rowson declaim them in person, pick up this paperback and enjoy lots of laugh out loud moments as he rips into the people and the attitudes – and there are lots of them – he loathes.

‘A-brim with Tunnocks without end / And copies of The People’s Friend’

Best, though, is Rowson’s, ahem, ‘mash-up’ with Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Masque of Anarchy, written after Peterloo in 1819, with its famous exhortation to the people to ‘Rise, like lions after slumber’ as ‘Ye are many – they are few’: ‘I met murder on the way / Looking like Esther McVey’; ‘Behind her shuffled, vast & wailing, / The Troll F*** Up, aka Grayling’; ‘He yelped, as down the money rains / On Stagecoach and on Virgin Trains / Til F*** Up’s puking up his brains’; ‘He yawns, then passes both his socks / To Madness, known as Liam Fox / Who sniffs them with excited squeals / Fantasising new Trade Deals’.

Most of the poems in Pastrami Faced Racist and Other Verses (Smokeystack Books, £8.99) demand to be performed rather than read; they would work better, I suspect, on the stage than on the page. Because they are, in the main, and as Rowson cheerfully admits, metrical rants against Hugo from Stowe ‘enriching the rich by investing their dough / In a hedge hegemonic portfolio / In faraway countries about which we know / F*** all’ and ‘racists with faces / Of a hue that’s as red as / Pastram i’.

But if you can’t listen to Rowson declaim them in person, pick up this paperback and enjoy lots of laugh out loud moments as he rips into the people and the attitudes – and there are lots of them – he loathes.
LIKE RAILWAYS

AST year I picked up a first edition of The Singapore Grip by JG Farrell (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978) for a fiver at Kernaghan Books in Liverpool during the Labour Party conference. This critically-acclaimed novel, about the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in 1942, has been adapted by Christopher Hampton for a six-part drama series to be shown on ITV later this year.

At one point Matthew Webb, heir to a rubber empire, is haggling over ‘colonial policy’ with an American soldier, Jim Ehrendorf. If by “progress” you mean the increasing welfare of the native then I’m afraid you’re going to have a job proving the beneficial effects of these public works you make such a song and dance about...’ Matthew was saying. ‘I suppose you’re talking about railways... In our African colonies something like three-quarters of all loans raised by the colonial government are for railways. True, they’re useful for administration... but what they’re mainly useful for is opening up great tracts of land to be developed as plantations by Europeans. In other words, it’s done not for the natives’ benefit but for ours! To which you will reply, Jim, that what benefits us, benefits them... To which I reply... Not necessarily so!

‘What we are doing is subsidising the white man’s business operations at the expense of native welfare... Now, I agree with you, this would not matter if the profits stayed where they were produced, but they don’t... they’re whipped off back to Britain, or France, or Belgium or Holland or wherever...’

‘Let us not forget that railways act as an instrument of civilisation,’ said Ehrendorf vaguely, his eyes roving the darkness for some sign of hope, ‘bringing people into contact with the modern world.’

‘Slavery used to be defended in those very words! Besides, in Africa, natives died by the hundreds of thousands just in building the damn things. Look at the Belgian Congo under Leopold!

‘You see, what I’m trying to explain is how everything in a colony, even beneficial-sounding things like railways, and experimental rice-growing stations, are set up in one way or another to the commercial advantage of the Europeans or Americans with money invested in the country...’

Keith Richmond

ASLEF’s legal services

Have you been sacked, or are in trouble at work, and cannot get hold of your branch secretary, local representative or District Organiser in an emergency? Call our industrial relations department on 020 7324 2400 (9am to 5pm Monday to Thursday or 9am to 4pm on Friday) or leave a message on the answer service, or email info@aslef.org.uk with a subject heading of ‘For the attention of the industrial relations dept’.

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

Name.............................................................................................................................................
Address...........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
Postcode........................................................Telephone.................................................................
Branch................................................................................................Membership No..............................

Please return coupon to: ASLEF, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN

Solution to Crossword 153
Across: 1 Banker 4 Rifle 7 Cloudburst 8 Lion 9 Neddy 11 Nursery 13 Bouncer 15 Spell 17 Hoot 18 Peninsular 20 Rowan 21 Tarzan Down: 1 Berlin 2 Kiln 3 Rhubarb 4 Robin 5 Fir 6 Entry 7 Course 10 Doctor 12 Yoghurt 14 Rotten 15 Super 16 Linen 17 Hair 19 New

Congratulations to Mrs Alesbury, of Whitehill Bordon, Hampshire, 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 153rd prize crossword in the January 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 February

On Track

Prize Crossword

Crossword 154 by Tom Williams

ACROSS
1 Unwanted current of air?
2 A clenching hand
3 Quantity of money
4 The outside surface
5 Greenfly
6 Censor
7 Pigpen
8 Fall in droplets
9 Lurch and spin
10 Large storage box
11 Fiesta or fête
12 Round mark
13 Above some letters
14 Where the sun sets
15 A substitute kept in readiness

DOWN
1 Gets rid of as useless
2 Upholstered seat
3 Having an excessive appetite
4 Sway and stagger
5 Command not to
6 Retail store
7 Bullfighter
8 Group of six singers
9 Monkey nut
10 Lucky plant?
11 Weighing machine
12 Appointment with a sweetheart

Name.............................................................................................................................................
Address...........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
Postcode........................................................Telephone.................................................................
Branch................................................................................................Membership No..............................

Please return coupon to: ASLEF, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN
Qualified Train Drivers

£49,819-£50,977 rising to circa £62,000 by 2020
Reading, Oxford, Bristol, Gloucester, Westbury, Fratton, Plymouth, Exeter & Penzance

At GWR, we’re looking for Qualified Train Drivers who want to deliver a different kind of rail service. Where rewards are first class, and where salaries will rise to around £62k by 2020. Where the fleet is being modernised. And where you’ll get the chance to drive through some of the UK’s most beautiful countryside, across the South West of England and Wales.

We’re setting a new standard for rail in the 21st Century – for our passengers and for our people. And we’re focused on creating a relaxing, fast, efficient, friendly, fun and special experience.

Join us and you’ll use your drive, commitment, passion for customer service, and exemplary safety record to help over 100 million passengers travel between more than 275 stations, safely and on time, every year.

It means you’ll need to work a variety of shifts and live within an hour’s travel of the depot you apply to. But in return, we offer a Defined Benefit Railway Pension Scheme, free rail travel across the GWR network for you and your family, a Health cash plan and much more.

GWR celebrates diversity and is committed to creating an inclusive environment for all our employees.

Join our team of Great Westerners and help us make history.

We’re unable to accept paper applications or applications via email. Please complete the online application.

To apply please visit GWRcareers.co.uk