

# ASLEF

**JOURNAL**

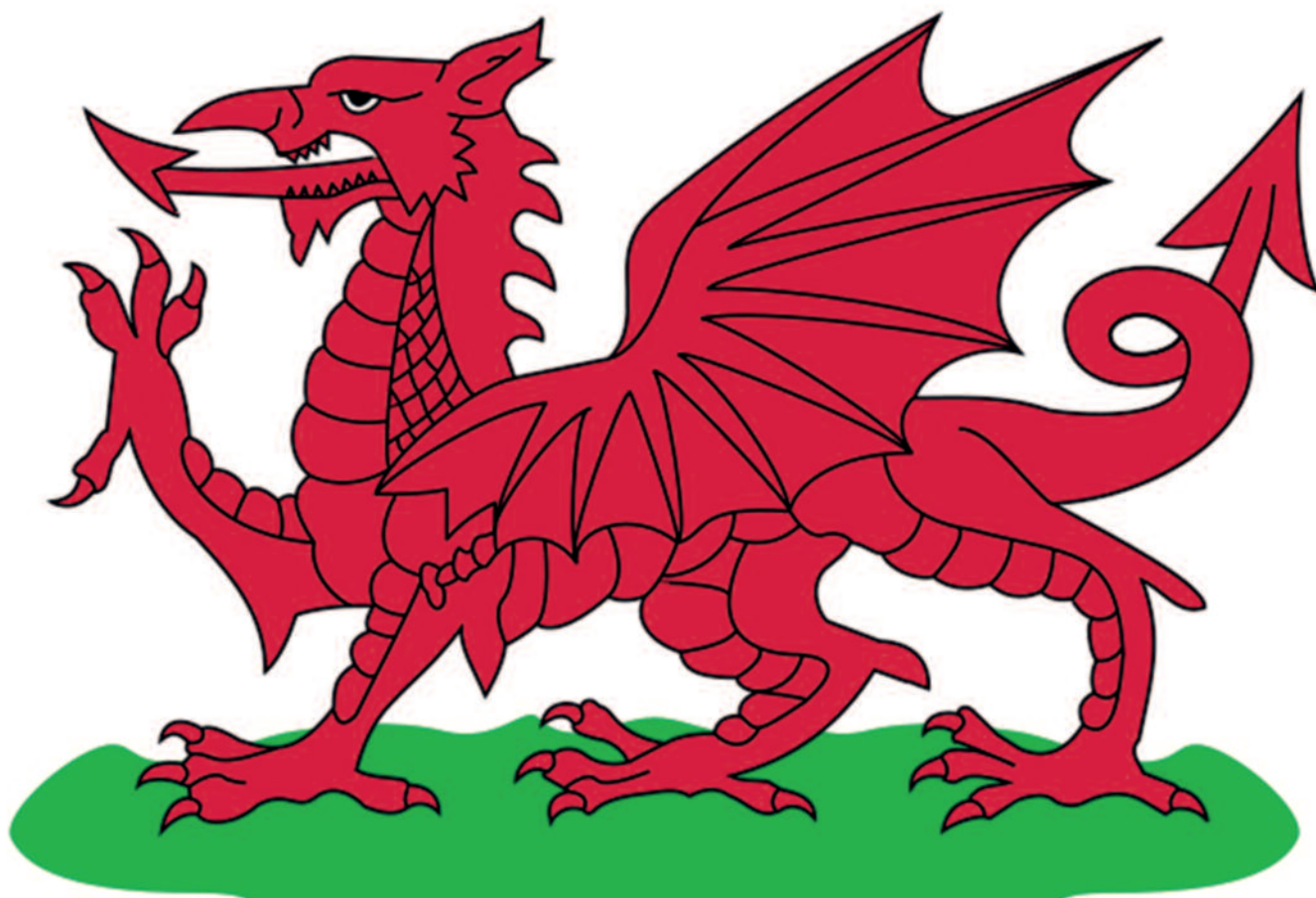
The magazine of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers & Firemen



MARCH 2021

Free to members

# Hen wlad fy nhadau



**Special report** on the railway in the **Land of our Fathers**.  
**Death of a train: Chris Proctor** marks but doesn't mourn the passing of the **Pacer**. And the latest advice about **covid-19**

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**union** since 1880

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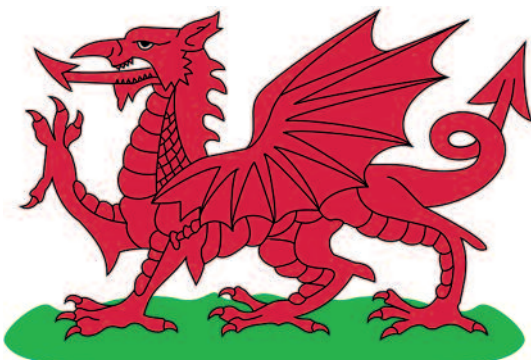


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Men and women of Harlech: our special Wales report

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## GS Mick Whelan

# Now is the time to plan to regenerate Britain's railways



'The NHS, the military, and the volunteers all deserve our gratitude'

**F**OLLOWING on from last month, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the government on the swift roll out of the vaccination programme, for the initial injection, to, at the point of writing, some 15 million people. The National Health Service, the military, the volunteers, and all those involved who have made this possible deserve all our thanks and gratitude.

**Obviously, there is still a long way to go,** and everyone will have the second dose, and we cannot get complacent or rush back to normalcy only to end up in lockdown again. There is talk of boosters in the autumn, and testing just to attend theatres or cinemas in the future, so social distancing and other measures are with us for a long time to come.

**Now is the time to plan to regenerate our railways,** to encourage footfall, and to rebuild confidence, not just in the train operating companies, but in all the open access companies, such as Hull Trains, Grand Central, and Eurostar, and those concession-based undertakings such as Merseyrail.

**We have been majorly supported** to the tune of £800 million a month – some £10 billion by June – which we welcome and for which we are grateful. But let's not be naïve; we, along with other sectors, are going to become political economic footballs. The austerity of the last ten years may well pale into insignificance; the posturing of the government over TfL (see page 6) is a good example of politics against need or common sense. There is a greater propensity for long-term impact on rail as demand – footfall – could be years before returning to pre-pandemic levels, and the easy option will be to reduce timetables.

**I believe capacity makes travel attractive,** and will ease Britain's return to normality, but the Treasury and the DfT are unlikely to agree. This was demonstrated by their edict of no pay rise for 2020 and 2021. As with all key workers, why should we be surprised at this treatment from the government?

**We are in a unique position** of being employed by privateers, on emergency measures agreements, and who we bargain with, but who are dominated by the Treasury, and who do not know their futures, or the shape of the industry, or what will happen under Williams. One of the unanswered questions is whether any or all of the companies will stay?

**Surely now is the time to integrate under one GB rail scheme,** one overarching secure pension scheme, an all-line PT&R, with the end to duplication and uncertainty as, at the moment, we seem to have all the disbenefits of the whims of government without any of the upsides and protections.

**It is safe to say we are not in Kansas anymore** and must be prepared, post-covid, to do what is necessary to protect jobs and conditions. Please be safe.

Yours fraternally,

Mick Whelan, general secretary, ASLEF



# ASLEF: of course covid is serious workplace risk

**A** SLEF has backed a call by Andy McDonald, the Shadow Employment Secretary, and former Shadow Transport Secretary, for covid-19 to be classed as a 'serious risk' in the workplace to secure the safety of people at work in Britain.

GS Mick Whelan said: 'The Tory government is trying to play down the dangers of the



**Mick Whelan: 'Andy is right to call on the Prime Minister to protect people in the workplace'**

coronavirus, as it has done throughout this crisis. The UK has the highest covid death toll in the world, with



more than 112,000 British citizens dead, and tens of thousands still suffering the effects of long covid.

'Andy is absolutely right to call on the government to do the right thing to protect people in the workplace. The weasel words of the Business Minister, Paul Scully, in trying to explain why the government won't categorise covid properly, reveals how morally and politically bankrupt – as well as inept – this government is.

'The only way to get Britain back to work is if people feel safe. Not by turning a Nelsonian blind eye to the real problems of the pandemic that the rest of us can see.'

## Coroner calls for charges over killer motorways

A coroner has ruled that Highways England could be charged with manslaughter after a woman's death on a smart motorway. Nargis Begum, 62, from Sheffield, was killed after her car broke down on a stretch of the M1 without a hard shoulder. Her vehicle was hit, and ploughed into her, and the time the crash went undetected was highlighted by South Yorkshire coroner Nicola Mundy.

So-called 'smart motorways' – ironically, there is nothing smart about them – have been trumpeted by the advocates of autonomous vehicles, self-driving lorries, and driverless trains – but condemned by transport experts as sure-fire AI killers.

Ms Mundy, sitting at Doncaster coroner's court, said Highways England – which denies wrongdoing – should be referred to the Crown Prosecution Service to consider if manslaughter charges are appropriate.

Nicholas Chapman, for HE, said footage from a CCTV camera covering the scene of the crash was sent to a 'busy' and remote regional control centre where 'seven or eight' people – he wasn't sure – were receiving images from 450 other cameras. He admitted there was 'no constant or routine monitoring' of smart motorways which would explain the high fatality figures.

# Save the British pub

Britain's brewers have slammed Boris Johnson for ignoring the evidence and destroying their businesses by keeping pubs closed. Pub companies have withdrawn from a business forum with the government and slammed Business Minister Paul Scully for his 'obvious lack of interest'.

Patrick Yardis, chief executive of Young's, speaking for the industry, said: 'We are calling on the government to save our great British pubs and pull the country back from the brink of economic misery. Hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake in the hospitality industry, which has been disproportionately hit by the pandemic while investing millions of pounds to create covid-secure environments for our customers.'

The evidence reveals that shops – especially supermarkets – schools and hospitals are the three most dangerous places for transmission of the coronavirus. Very few people have contracted covid-19 in a pub.



**Brewers say Boris Johnson is wrong about pubs**

'It is abundantly clear that the government is playing politics under the guise of consulting,' added Mr Yardis. 'We are shocked and appalled that the government is basing its decisions to keep the great British pub closed on unfounded and unproven statistics.'

'Pubs are a huge part of our culture and a significant part of every community. They are the only places where alcohol is consumed in a controlled and supervised manner. The government's approach has forced friends and families to resort to meeting in each other's houses. Its refusal to acknowledge this fact is wilfully and dangerously ignorant. There is absolutely no evidence to support the messaging suggesting pubs are a significant factor in spreading the virus.'

### QUOTE...

'Visibly shaken, his thesaurus of misery exhausted... this was Boris Johnson's darkest hour' – Henry Deedes, *Daily Mail*

### ...UNQUOTE

## THE NEXT TRAIN TO STOP AT BOW STREET IS THE FIRST FOR 56 YEARS

When the 09.12 service from Machynlleth to Aberystwyth on the Cambrian line stopped at Bow Street on Sunday 14 February it was the first train in 56 years to stop at the Ceredigion village. The new single-track halt, encouraging park-and-ride, is south of the old station, which was closed after 101 years by the notorious Beeching cuts of the 1960s.

## ROYAL ASSENT FOR PHASE 2A

The HS2 Phase 2A: High Speed Rail (West Midlands to Crewe) Bill was given royal assent on Thursday 11 February.

## TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Two Union flags behind him tonight. Must be serious. @ShowMeASign

100,000 dead. Boris Johnson says 'We did everything we could.' No, he didn't. Led By Donkeys @ByDonkeys

#clapforheroes has been given a massive thumbs down by the public. Instead of this cringing, patronising, virtue signalling, let's protect them, vaccinate them, and pay them properly. @RoperCarl

Where does daughter of immigrants Priti Patel get all her hatred of foreigners from? Mr Ethical @nw\_nicholas

Breaking: Boris Johnson's hair has mutated again and it is possible that this variant will become the dominant strain. @davemacladd

# Raab backs down over CIA's 'Killer' Sacoolas

**F**OREIGN Secretary Dominic Raab is coming under increasing criticism – from Tories as well as from the Opposition – for his craven refusal to challenge the US over its outrageous decision not to extradite Anne 'Killer' Sacoolas to the UK.

Sacoolas, 43, a CIA agent, fled back to the States after killing 19-year-old Harry Dunn outside the US Air Force base at Croughton in Oxfordshire. She was driving her Volvo XC90 on the wrong side of the road when it smashed head-on into Harry. His body crumpled across her windscreen, his bike burst into flames, and the road remains scarred by the scorch marks.

Sacoolas disingenuously claims not to understand 'what all the fuss is about', telling friends: 'He's dead – and prosecuting, or persecuting, me isn't going to bring the kid back.'

Like her husband, she was spying on UK citizens and did not have diplomatic immunity. But it is said that she was tipped off by the



**Dominic Raab (left) has been condemned as a 'US muppet' for not challenging the State Department over its refusal to extradite Anne Sacoolas (above) for killing Harry Dunn (top)**

Foreign Office which told her to leave this country – fast – before she was charged with causing death by dangerous driving while under the influence of drink and/or drugs.

Thames Valley Police are known to be furious at 'interference' in the case by the Foreign Office. The US State Department says she will not return to face justice in the UK – and that decision is 'final'.

Raab has lost the confidence of backbench Tory MPs, unhappy that an American spy can kill with impunity a British citizen, possibly after too much 'wacky baccy', and describe the Foreign Secretary in derogatory terms as 'a US puppet' and 'muppet' for going AWOL. It is said he will be sacked in the next government reshuffle.

Harry's parents, meanwhile, have urged the US 'to do the right thing' but, without pressure from the UK, it is unlikely that anything will happen and that Harry's parents will get the justice they deserve.

## QUOTE...

*'Pundits have only one talent: telling a compelling story with conviction' – Superforecasting by psychologist Philip Tetlock*

...UNQUOTE

**500 CLUB:** Debbie Whitfield, with number 118, won the February draw, scooping the Retired Members' Section jackpot of £498.

## Off the Rails



**BORIS JOHNSON** is prone, say Downing Street aides, to taking 'power naps' in the afternoon. In other words, he falls asleep. Officially, everything is all fine and dandy. But those close to the Prime Minister confess, privately, that he has not recovered from covid-19, is struggling to cope with the demands of the job, and his judgement is impaired. He's slow, they say, to make decisions. 'The PM's indecision is final,' one notes dryly.



**ED BALLS**, and his precipitate fall from grace, was the subject of an arresting piece by Christopher Stevens in the *Daily Mail*. 'Funny how life turns out,' he mused. 'If Labour had won the general election in 2015, he would have been Chancellor – and might, conceivably, be Prime Minister now. Instead, he's making lasagne on *Celebrity Best Home Cook*. If politics is a greasy pole, Ed's gone down to the depths of hell. He's tried his hand, for television, as a trawlerman in the North Sea and a wrestler in the Deep South, not to mention that eye-popping display on *Strictly Come Dancing*. As he scrapes a living in the land of the Z-listers, he seems relaxed about the indignity of it all – not visibly thrilled, but quietly resigned to his fate. You have to wonder, though, whether at 3am he has to stuff a pillow over his face to muffle his howls of anguish...'



**JOE BIDEN** lost no time in replacing the bust of Winston Churchill – a brute who, in 1910, as Home Secretary, to break a miners' strike sent troops onto the streets of Tonypandy and who, a year later, put a gunboat on the Mersey and ordered soldiers to open fire on workers during a transport strike in Liverpool – with a bronze of César Chávez in the Oval Office. Chávez rose from humble origins in Yuma, Arizona, to co-found the National Farm Workers' Association and lead them against their bullying corporate masters. They began a strike in 1965, sustained it for five years, and won. 'Isn't there something to like about the new President's admiration for this brave champion of the underdog?' asks former Conservative MP Matthew Parris in his column in *The Times*.



**JEREMY PAXMAN** has revealed a subtle ploy used by politicians to unsettle interviewers before a punch-up on the telly. As they sat down to talk, Peter Mandelson, New Labour's prince of darkness, purred, 'Interesting suit, Jeremy. Did you *really* buy it yourself?' Paxman admits he spent the first part of the interview wondering what was wrong with what he was wearing.



**FACEBOOK** has proved the old adage that Britain and America are two nations divided by a common language. It has apologised to the residents of Devon for forcing them to change the spelling of Plymouth Hoe to avoid being banned for breaching its rules. Hoe – from the Old English *hoh* for heel-shaped hill – does not, m'lud, mean whore.



# Renew our mandate to protect your jobs

**T**HE next round of negotiations between Transport for London and the government on funding for the capital's transport system begins soon – and ASLEF is determined to protect the pay, the pensions, and the working conditions of our members.

Current funding runs until the end of March; TfL says it needs around £3 billion in support for the financial year 2021/22 and a long-term funding agreement to replace fare revenue which has plummeted during the pandemic.

'So far, the Tory government has engaged in brinkmanship and political games,' says Finn Brennan, ASLEF's organiser on London Underground. 'They seem much more interested in seeking political advantage



**Finn: 'Support your union. Protect your future. Vote yes'**

by blaming the Mayor of London and the unions for TfL's problems, rather than acknowledging that the current funding model doesn't work anymore and a new solution is needed.

'Government ministers have been open about their intentions. They want "workforce modernization" and "pension reform" in return for funding TfL. That means cutting wages, worse working conditions, and reduced pensions for staff.

'Last year, ASLEF asked management for a commitment that any changes to current working arrangements would only come about by agreement. When they refused to give us that commitment, we balloted our members across LU and got huge a "yes" vote. That made management step back and forced them to keep working through the agreed machinery of negotiation.'

We now have to ballot members again as the law says our mandate is only valid for six months. Members began to receive ballot papers from Monday 15 February and have to return them by Monday 15 March.

'It is more important than ever that we get another huge "yes" vote,' says Finn. 'The threat we faced last year has not gone away; it is

greater than ever. Without a mandate to take action, it will be impossible to make management negotiate on any possible changes. They can simply ram through cuts to wages, working conditions, and pensions just as other large employers like British Gas and the airline industry are doing.

'The reasonable living standards our families enjoy cannot be taken for granted. They can only be protected if we show we are prepared to fight for them. ASLEF is not seeking confrontation; but we need to show we have the support of our members to defend them.

'So please vote "yes". Problems with the post mean it is essential not to delay. Any vote not returned effectively counts as a "no" and a negative result, or poor return, will give management and government a green light to do what they want. Don't let them get away with it.'

## Public transport post-pandemic

Professor Corinne Mulley and Professor John Nelson, of the Institute of Transport & Logistic Studies at Sydney University Business School, in a joint blog on the *Transport Times* website, called on governments worldwide to acknowledge that public transport must have a future after the pandemic.

'The role of transport has always been to bring people together. From early days, transport underpinned urban creation through people coming together to exchange/market goods. Today transport underpins much of what we regard as fundamental to civilised society – the way to include citizens in society through accessing essential goods and services as well strengthening agglomeration economies. The pandemic has sharpened our view of public transport as a critical public service, used by essential workers without alternative options for accessing work.'

## Lisa's on board ASLEF campaign

Lisa Nandy, Labour MP for Wigan, has written to Transport Secretary Grant Shapps saying she is 'gobsmacked' by plans to axe the direct train service between Wigan and Manchester Piccadilly. Lisa, DO3 Andy Hourigan, and EC3 John Metcalfe all attended the Wigan branch meeting (by Zoom) on Sunday 28



**Lisa: 'gobsmacked'**

February to discuss the chaos over the Castlefield corridor (see page 11).

## Silly farmers, stupid Beeb

Watching *The Farmers' Country Showdown* on BBC1, five minutes in, they show an interview on what appears to be a farmer's gated crossing on the Exeter to Barnstaple line. Whilst the service is infrequent, it's an open line, and sends out the wrong signals to the public.

**Gavin Wrigley, driver, Euston**



**Silly Farmer Giles sends the wrong signal**

### TRAINLINE RUNS OUT OF STEAM

Trainline, the online ticketing service, is expected to make a loss of £38 million this year, according to analysts at JP Morgan, the investment bank that floated the company in 2019. Passenger numbers in January were just 10-14% of what they were a year before, 'and we are also getting more cautious about the speed of recovery going into 2022.' Shares have plummeted.

### QUOTE...

*'It took the Housing Secretary less than 24 hours to intervene and get approval for a Tory donor's £1 billion development. Almost four years after Grenfell, there are 56,000 people still living in homes with dangerous cladding' – Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Labour MP for Streatham*

**...UNQUOTE**

## Get the vote out



GS Mick Whelan, who is chair of LabourUnions, which used to be TULO, and which represents the 12 trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party, joined Labour's deputy leader Angela Rayner for a special canvassing briefing by Zoom on Thursday 18 February ahead of the local elections in May. 'Every vote will be crucial,' said Angela. 'We want to make sure people get out and vote Labour to help rebuild Britain after the pandemic.'

# Metro moves into the 21st century

**T**HE first female drivers have started work on the Moscow Metro, one of the longest underground railways in the world, after reforms of Russian laws prohibiting women from many jobs. TASS, the state news agency, reported, 'The first female electric train drivers in modern history have started working for the Moscow Metro.'

Built in the Soviet era, as a communist showpiece, Moscow Metro trains were historically operated by men because the work was listed on the government's register of jobs deemed harmful to a woman's health. The ban on women working in many professions was widely criticised and a Labour Ministry decree in September cut the number of exclusively male professions from 456 to 100.

The justification that driving Metro trains



Female drivers at the maintenance depot of the Moscow Metro's Filyovskaya line and (below) at the controls. Photo: Vyacheslav Prokofyev/TASS

was dangerous because it meant being underground for long periods came under fire because the network employs women as cleaners, cashiers, and escalator monitors.

The Moscow Metro says automation of mechanical processes means operating underground trains is no longer 'associated with heavy physical exertion'.

Russian Railways, the country's state-owned network, says it will also begin employing female train drivers this year.



# Keeping ScotRail trains running for key workers

ASLEF has agreed to move the end of the current rest day working agreement with ScotRail to help trains keep running in Scotland.

'The coronavirus crisis has affected everyone, everywhere,' said Jim Baxter, EC member for Scotland. 'The pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives, including, and perhaps especially, the way we work. In the wake of the problems caused by the pandemic we agreed to move the end date of the current RDW agreement from 30 January to 30 October.'

'ASLEF has a long-standing agreement with ScotRail, going back many years, that allows drivers to work their days off, if they choose. This agreement helps



**Jim: 'Train drivers play a vital role in making sure key workers can get to work'**

facilitate the recruitment of drivers; the training of new drivers; and the training of experienced drivers on new routes and tractions. We need to make sure that the railway in Scotland is properly equipped and ready to get all training up and running as soon as it is safe to do so.

'Our members play a vital role in making sure key workers can get to and from work. By making sure this current agreement continues, we can help make that happen.'

# All aboard the sci-fi Algorithm Express

Paul Routledge, in his *Daily Mirror* column on Friday 29 January, let Boris Johnson and Andrew Gilligan have both barrels for commissioning a new report from the RSSB about driverless trains, as reported in the *Journal* in February.

'Driverless cars, airborne drone taxis – and now trains without drivers, if loony-right Tory policymakers get their way,' he wrote.

'They want to introduce totally automated trains within seven years, under secret plans leaked to the drivers' union ASLEF. Given the age and complexity of our rail system, the idea is as unworkable as it is unappealing.'

'All aboard the sci-fi Algorithm Express please! If there are no feet on the footplate, this railwayman's son will stop at 'ome.'



Paul, as ever, on the right track

## RETIRED MEMBERS' SECTION

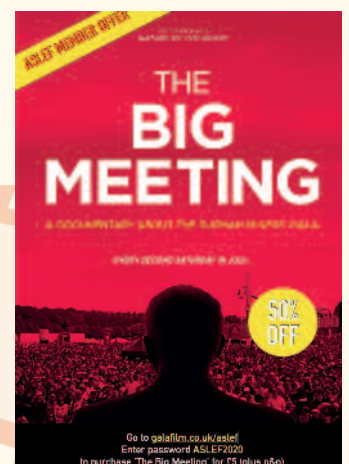
The ongoing crisis over the coronavirus means that head office is unable, at the moment, to send out letters reminding members in our Retired Members' Section, who pay annually by cheque, that your membership is up for renewal. So, please, if you know your membership is due for renewal, post a cheque, made payable to ASLEF, to head office in St John Street. An annual RMS subscription is just £15. Thanks!

# Watch **The Big Meeting** half-price



I'm the producer of **The Big Meeting** film, about the Durham Miners' Gala. Many ASLEF branches were very generous and donated money to help get the film made – so much so we have the ASLEF logo in the final credits of the film. As a thank you, we'd like to offer your readers 50% off the film on DVD. The DVD is normally £10 but we are offering it to ASLEF members for £5 (plus 75p p&p). Just go to [www.galafilm.co.uk/aslef](http://www.galafilm.co.uk/aslef) and enter the password ASLEF2020 to buy the DVD.

**Christie Allanson**





# Eurostar on the brink

**T**HE French government has called on Boris Johnson to join it in bailing out Eurostar after the high-speed operator – which runs services between London, Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam – revealed that passenger numbers have plummeted to less than 1% of normal during the coronavirus pandemic.

'The [French] state will be at Eurostar's side to maintain this strategic link between our two countries,' said Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, the French Transport Minister. 'We are working with the English on mechanisms for aid so we can financially sustain its business model.' He told French MPs he has been talking to Grant Shapps after the company

admitted it is on the verge of running out of cash.

David Cameron's Conservative government sold Britain's 40% stake in Eurostar in 2015. It is now controlled by the French government through the 55% stake in the company held by the state railway SNCF.

ASLEF has called on the government to intervene to prevent Eurostar going to the wall. GS Mick Whelan said: 'Boris Johnson and Grant Shapps must act now to save this service – for passengers, for those who work on Eurostar, and for Britain in a post-Brexit world.'

'Train drivers, and our colleagues in the train crew, together with all the men and women – key workers – who keep



**Mick Whelan: 'The government needs to act now to save the service'**

our railways running, have been instrumental in moving passengers and freight around this country during the pandemic.

'The cross-Channel link has never been more important and the government must not turn its back on us now. Eurostar is a

strong company with a strong future. But it is suffering, as all train companies are suffering, not because of anything it has done wrong, but because of covid-19. The government needs to act – now – to save the jobs and to save the service.'

## Loonies on the line

A woman has been caught on camera lying on a level crossing to pose for a photo taken by a friend. Network Rail said it was the 17th incident recorded on the crossing, at Tidemills in East Sussex, in the last

nine months. Fifteen of those involved near misses with trains.

'We cannot stress enough the danger that people are placing themselves in when they don't use a crossing safely,' said NR level crossing

manager Tracy Partridge. 'A silly split-second decision can have life-changing consequences, not only for those involved, but also for their family and friends, train drivers, and other railway workers.'

British Transport Police Inspector Jonathan Pine said:



**Dumb and dumber: BTP describe the women as 'unbelievably stupid'**

'This is unthinkable stupid behaviour. Trains pass through this line at speeds of

up to 70mph, so they could quite easily have been moments away from a

catastrophic incident. No photo opportunity is worth risking your life for.'

## SHOPPERS PAY ANOTHER ONE-THIRD MORE AFTER BREXIT

**Hundreds of thousands of UK customers have been hit by extra charges – to cover customs, VAT and delivery – after Brexit. Internet shoppers are being forced to cough up 33% extra to release goods coming into this country from the European Union from bonded warehouses. The problem has been caused by rules introduced after the transition period ended on 31 December requiring VAT purchases from countries in the EU costing more than £135 to be collected at the point of delivery. 'The new model ensures that UK businesses are not disadvantaged by competition from VAT-free imports from abroad,' said a government spokesman. 'It's the price of British sovereignty.'**

## THOUSANDS PAY THE PRICE FOR NOT WEARING MASKS

**More than 1,700 fines have been handed out to people who refuse to wear face coverings on public transport in London. Fines of up to £660 have been issued since face coverings became mandatory, with repeat offenders being fined as much as £1,170. TfL says 128,000 people have been stopped from boarding services until they put on a face covering, and more than 2,000 people have been ejected from services for refusing.**

## WREXHAM MAN JAILED FOR SPITTING AT RAILWAY STAFF

**Christopher Jones, 52, of Victoria Road, Wrexham, who spat at rail staff at Holyhead station on Monday 11 January was found guilty of common assault at Llandudno magistrates' court two days later and jailed for six months.**

## No, Prime Minister

A twenty second clip from *Yes, Minister* – the hugely popular and savagely satirical 1980s television comedy written by Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn – has gone viral on social media in the light of the Prime Minister's hapless performances over Brexit and covid-19. 'We follow the four stage strategy,' says Sir

Humphrey (played by Nigel Hawthorne). 'What's that?' asks Jim Hacker (Paul Eddington). 'In stage one we say that nothing is going to happen. Stage two we say something may be going to happen, but we should do nothing about it. Stage three we say maybe we should do something about it, but there is



***Yes, Minister*, remains an 'unrivalled guide to British politics', according to the *Financial Times***

nothing we can do. And in stage four we say maybe there was something we could have done, but it's too late now!'

### QUOTE...

*'With a clomp-clomp of boots and a pair of cheekbones freshly sharpened, Priti Patel, the Home Secretary, entered the No 10 briefing. Time to give the disobedient electorate another few slaps. Close the interrogation room door, Lewis, and turn off the tape for a moment'* – **Quentin Letts, *The Times***

**...UNQUOTE**



# The ASLEF RMS 500 Club

## Colleagues

The 500 Club is a fundraising venture for ASLEF's Retired Members' Section.

**Conditions of Membership:** Only retired and working members of ASLEF, including district councils and branches, plus permanent staff employed by ASLEF, can make an application to join the RMS 500 Club. The application form and standing order form can only be completed and submitted by the ASLEF member, or staff member.

Numbers in the draw cost £4 each per month. 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 Peter J Smith, Treasurer, RMS 500 Club, 6 Devonia Gardens, London, N18 1AF.**

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

**Yours fraternally, Peter J Smith, treasurer, ASLEF Retired Members' Section 500 Club**

### ASLEF RMS 500 Club application form

Name.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

Telephone.....

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).

Delete (A) or (B) accordingly.

Signed.....

Date.....

Please return this coupon to:  
**Peter Smith, Treasurer, RMS 500 Club,  
6 Devonia Gardens, London, N18 1AF  
and the standing order mandate  
(right) to your bank (or via your  
internet bank)**

### STANDING ORDER MANDATE

To \_\_\_\_\_ Bank

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please pay

BANK	BRANCH TITLE (NOT ADDRESS)	SORTING CODE NO.
Unity Trust Bank	Birmingham	60-83-01

For the credit of

BENEFICIARY'S NAME	ACCOUNT NUMBER
ASLEF RMS 500 CLUB ACCOUNT	2 0 2 0 1 1 9 3

The sum of

AMOUNT IN FIGURES	AMOUNT IN WORDS
£	

Commencing

DATE AND AMOUNT OF FIRST PAYMENT	DUE DATE AND FREQUENCY
£ and thereafter every	1 <sup>ST</sup> OF EVERY MONTH

\*Until  
Quoting the  
reference

DATE AND AMOUNT OF LAST PAYMENT
£

\*Until you receive further notice from me/us in writing and debit my/our account accordingly

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

#### SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

ACCOUNT TO BE DEBITED	ACCOUNT NUMBER

Signature(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Note: The Bank will not undertake to:

- (i) make any reference to Value Added Tax or other indeterminate element
- (ii) advise payer's address to beneficiary
- (iii) advise beneficiary of inability to pay
- (iv) request beneficiary's banker to advise beneficiary of receipt

\* Delete if not applicable

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

# Death of a train



**CHRIS PROCTOR**, who has written for *The Guardian*, *The Times*, the *Morning Star*, *New Statesman* and *Tribune* as well as spending eight years at ASLEF, where he helped

the GS to put together the *Journal* each month, marks – but does not mourn – the passing of the Pacer rail bus

**T**HE final Pacer crept away from rail service on Friday 27 November last year, unheralded and uncelebrated. It completed its journey from Kirkby to Manchester Victoria and disappeared like a thief in the night.

No announcement had been made about the train's final journey for fear of attracting a gathering of nostalgic spotters during the pandemic. Instead four solitary station staff stood with a bedraggled company banner to wish the Pacer well in its retirement.

## HORRIBLE FRANKENSTEIN MACHINES

It marked a sad end to a unit that had never been popular. Alan Moss drove them for eight years from Manchester to Sheffield twenty years ago and says they were uncomfortable and caused back problems for drivers. 'The seats were screwed into the bulkhead with the back fixed into the wall,' he recalls. 'You could raise or lower them but that was the only adjustment. And they had very thin seats.'

But some drivers didn't mind them; perhaps it depended on your size. James Sutherland from Newton Heath says they were 'functional'. 'They always got you home and you could open the windows in the summer. I could reach everything without stretching – and at least they didn't have computers leaving nasty messages!' He concedes, though, that they 'didn't have much in the way of passenger comforts.'

And, in fact, even arch-critic Alan Moss has a few happy memories. 'I used to take a Pacer over the Pennines in the '90s,' he recalls. 'On Thursday evenings it was filled with folk singers. It was a community thing, and they'd all sing and play ukuleles and guitars as we went to Sheffield, where they'd have a couple of jars, and then sing louder on the way back! There was no soundproofing on the "folk trains", so they really did have to bellow. But I enjoyed it. It was a bit of entertainment.'

Andy Hourigan, who now serves as our District 3 Organiser, drove them for decades and remembers them with no fondness.



Alan Moss, now Avanti West Coast company council, in the driver's cab of a Pacer and (below) a gathering of the few who ever had a good time on a Pacer – the people of the Pennines 'folk train'



'Horrible,' he calls them. 'Frankenstein machines.' 'You kept getting bits bolted on to keep them going. The fixed seats, and lack of suspension, meant you kept getting a shot of pain up your back and the brake cables expanded so that braking pressure changed throughout the day. And they were so draughty that drivers had to keep filling in holes. They were more newspaper than fibreglass towards the end!'

## SPANDEX, LEG WARMERS & MULLET

There's no denying, the train was basic. There were no frills and no comforts: the Pacer was bottom end cheap. And, in the 1980s, when Britain was beset with Margaret Thatcher's Tory austerity programme, that was all that mattered for public services in this country.

**Its main drawback, as far as train people are concerned, was that it wasn't a train. It was a bus stuck on a chassis and scraped along railway lines**

The Pacer ran on UK lines for the first time in 1985. It was, we were assured, a temporary measure, a stop-gap; a fill-in. Once proper units turned up, Pacers would be out of the door. Honest.

It didn't turn out that way.

The 'temporary measure' began its working

life when big hair, spandex, leg warmers and mullets were in fashion. Ronald Reagan was US President and Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister. And, as if things weren't bad enough, along came the Pacer: a unit whose 102 strong fleet would run more than 300 million miles.

Its main drawback, as far as train people are concerned, was that it wasn't a train. It was a bus stuck on a chassis and scraped along railway lines. And it wasn't even a nice bus. The National was OK, but it's a measure of its popularity that, in the 13 years up to 1985, only 7,000 were built. The National Bus Company had planned to make 2,000 a year. Even as a bus, no one wanted them.

So, hey! Let's turn them into trains! And so began the process of bolting them onto a railway underframe – in this case, a four-wheel, two-axle freight wagon chassis.

The plan was flawed because the long wheelbase, added to a two-axle chassis, found sharp curves impossible to navigate without making a deafening and painful screeching noise. Any chance of it being liked by passengers disappeared, literally, at every turn.

Also, four-wheeled passenger vehicles had disappeared everywhere – not just in the UK – half a century before. Even before the Second World War, six wheels were considered a minimum. Alas, poor Pacer! With its bus seats and layout, its squealing wheels and its total lack of suspension, it was never going to be a favourite with travellers.

## RUMOURS ABOUND IN MESS ROOMS

In years to come they will enter the array of traction memorabilia we've grown used to over the years, and bad memories will fade. One is already ensconced at the National Railway Museum's Shildon site, one is bound for the Wensleydale Heritage Railway and one is being transformed into a home for the Slatcher family from Durham!

Rumours abound in mess rooms that others are destined to be shipped to Argentina. There are wicked suggestions that this is a delayed revenge for the invasion of the Falklands – but there is consensus that 'off the UK network' is timely for a 'temporary measure' that is over three decades old.



# The Castlefield corridor: please help us campaign



**The Manchester recovery task force public consultation has huge implications for passengers – and ASLEF members – alike. JOHN METCALFE, executive committee member for District 3, explains the difficulties and dangers and analyses the problems for the railway in the Castlefield corridor**

**T**HE launch of a consultation exercise jointly by the Department for Transport, Network Rail, and Transport for the North over the ongoing rail chaos in the Castlefield corridor of the Manchester network will have huge implications for both the travelling public and complex knock-ons to our members.

Back in 2019, the Castlefield corridor was officially deemed to be congested or, in other words, unable to deliver all the train service frequency demands, which in turn compels the train operators and Network Rail to come up with timetable improvements to tackle the issues. Hence the task force.

Several TOCs and FOCs travel through Manchester here and trains from Scotland, Wales, Lancashire, the east and north-east of England all struggle to run services through this part of the network.

## THE BUCK STOPS WITH GRANT SHAPPS

So who is to blame for the chaos? Well, despite some improvements with the construction of the Ordsall Chord line, and some electrification, the blunt answer is that, in common with much of the north, successive governments have starved the area of investment on the scale to deal with the real problems. The buck stops with Grant Shapps. Ambitious plans for increased timetables have been let down by infrastructure improvements done on the cheap.

So much for the government's 'levelling up' con trick. And now, on top of all that, we are acutely aware of the impact of covid on our industry in terms of usership.

When Phil Spencer, Wigan branch secretary, sent me details of the consultation document and all its timetabling change options, one thing was immediately obvious. Any of the options would result in huge turmoil for drivers' route knowledge, possibly traction too, and all the complex diagramming/link changes that would be needed. And, as the changes will affect many depots of many operators, its impact cannot be

## QUOTE...

*'The real strength of ASLEF lies at branch level'*

...UNQUOTE



**DO3 Andy Hourigan is working hard to solve problems on the Castlefield corridor (in blue) used by this DB freight train into and out of Manchester Piccadilly**

underestimated.

To find out more District 3 Organiser Andy Hourigan and I attended a Wigan branch meeting, by Zoom, recently where the consultation was discussed. The real strength of ASLEF lies at the branch level, and it was great to see Phil and his Wigan branch colleagues setting up a plan to invite local MPs to a future branch meeting to lobby for action and to write to the local council leader. And Andy Hourigan is taking up the issue with Andy Burnham, the Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester.

## THE PEOPLE WITH REAL KNOWLEDGE ARE THE DRIVERS – ASLEF MEMBERS

Perhaps the most bizarre example of the chaos around Greater Manchester is hearing Transport for the North heralding the funding to open a new station at Golborne (closed by Beeching) in one breath, whilst in another breath proposing, through

Department for Transport Network Rail Transport for the North

### Manchester Recovery Task Force Public Consultation Summary

1. This consultation is seeking views from the public and stakeholders on rail timetable work that has been undertaken during 2020 to address the poor performance of the rail network in the Manchester area which has been the source of much train delay on rail services across the whole north of



consultations, that all the trains that are supposed to make the station financially viable are now being routed via Bolton and won't call at Golborne!

So, what is next? In the best ASLEF tradition, led by the branch, the membership will lobby, campaign, and seek support, not only on behalf of our drivers, but in the best interests of the travelling public.

Andy Hourigan and I will continue to support them in any way we can. There's little doubt that there is a need to sort out the trains in and around Manchester; the timetable does need reviewing but, left to the DfT alone, it will be chaotic and unstructured.

The people with the real knowledge are our members and it is vital that our voice is heard by the right people to achieve a satisfactory outcome for all concerned. Phil and his colleagues at Wigan are making sure that is happening and I would urge other affected branches to do likewise.

## GOLBORNE STATION AND CONSULTATION ON TIMETABLE OPTIONS TO IMPROVE RAIL PERFORMANCE IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND

**This is the response from Councillor David T Molyneux, Labour leader of Wigan Council, to Wigan 107 branch secretary Phil Spencer**

Dear Phil

Thank you for contacting me. We, too, are confused. We were absolutely delighted about the news of funding for a station at Golborne, and then we, too, found out about the public consultation which suggests that the diversion of the hourly fast train from Cumbria to Manchester airport via Wigan North Western, to run instead via Bolton, is a foregone conclusion. As you note, this would undermine the case for the new station at Golborne, as the proposition is that it would be served by that service.

As you also note, there are a range of service frequency reductions proposed between Wigan and Manchester via Atherton. We are very much aware that services operating along this route are often at, or over, capacity during peak times. If services are to be reduced 'to allow additional carriages to be added to other services to maintain peak capacity', there must be a guarantee that capacity will be maintained. In addition, further information is required to understand whether service frequencies at any of the stations on that route would be disproportionately affected as a result of the proposed changes.

We will be taking these matters up directly with the task force, and with a number of the component organisations, notably the DfT, Network Rail, Transport for the North, and TfGM, as well as the GMCA and the GM Mayor. I will also get in touch with Lisa Nandy, MP for Wigan, and others to discuss how we might work together on this. We will need a broad-based campaign and it would be good to have your support.

Yours sincerely, David T Molyneux

# Rails in Wales



**STEVE AUSTIN, who started work as District 7 Organiser on Monday 1 February, looks ahead at the challenges facing train drivers in Wales in the coming months and years**

**I**T IS never easy replacing someone, but when you realise you are replacing someone who has just overseen the re-nationalisation of rail services in Wales – well, thanks, Brian!

So, what next? Hopefully, the company councils will continue their good work and continue to work closely with both the rail operator and the Welsh governing body. These are challenging times and it will be interesting to see what lies ahead in the coming months and years for our drivers, local reps, and company council reps.

ASLEF has a good working relationship with both parties, thanks to all the hard work put in by the previous district organiser, and this is something we need to carry on, given the issues we are facing caused by the current pandemic.

The drivers' council has challenges ahead and is continuing to work hard, taking part in discussions for plans to see a transition of Cardiff Valley Lines to more of a metro-style railway. But we must remember that the rails in Wales are not just in South Wales; North Wales has its own issues and

improvements that need to be pushed for and introduced just as urgently.

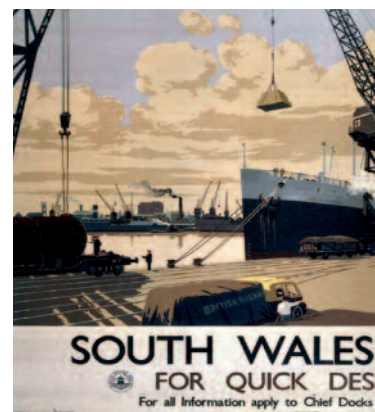
ASLEF has its own challenges regarding legacy stock; the introduction of new traction (including ongoing problems with the 769s); and continuing work to try and achieve a DRI3 acceptable to drivers.

Freight in Wales has had, and will continue to have, its own challenges. We all recognise the effect that other industries, locally and nationally, can have on services, and we need to ensure that freight drivers continue to be represented as strongly as possible.

Although passenger services are currently reduced because of the vastly reduced footfall during the pandemic, TfW and GWR are continuing with plans to open new depots in Wales.

Hopefully, in the very near future, we can begin work to reinstate a full train service/timetable and move back to a full training programme for drivers and trainee drivers in both the freight and passenger sectors.

We must ensure that we never allow Welsh railways to return to the level of chronic underfunding we have seen in the past. We need to identify where investment is needed and ensure that Welsh railways flourish going forward. To help to do this, we are looking to build on the good working relationship ASLEF has developed with First Minister Mark Drakeford, Transport Minister Ken Skates, and James Price at TfW – the foundations of which were dug by the hard work of Brian Corbett.



## We need



**ANDY HUDD, executive committee member for District 7, and EC vice-president, makes a passionate case for proper – and fair – investment in the four countries of the United Kingdom**

**F**OR too long now London and the south-east of England have seen more investment per capita than the rest of the UK and this is especially so in relation to Wales. We have argued that the

## If it's not safe, don't do it



**BRIAN CORBETT, who stepped down as DO7 when he retired on Sunday 31 January, reflects on his last twelve months in position – and the state of the nation**

**I**T'S A year since the last Welsh edition of the *Journal*, and how things have changed! Covid-19 has affected so many lives. Many of us know people who have caught the virus, and some of us have lost work colleagues, friends, and family.

The railway industry has, generally, pulled together during the coronavirus crisis, but we must remain vigilant. If it's not safe, don't do it. Whether this is refusing to get into an unsafe taxi, or refusing to have a PNB in a mess room, when there are more in the facility than has been agreed.

Freight is still managing to keep its head

above water, but this side of our industry must always be at the forefront in debates with politicians as we continue to push a green agenda for the 21st century.

Transport for Wales Rail Services has now been moved over, under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations to Transport for Wales Ltd. Basically, I am pleased to say, this organisation is a nationalised railway.

TfW Ltd is under Transport for Wales which will have, long-term, many forms of transport in its jurisdiction with the Welsh government at the helm.

The drivers' council and I pushed hard for a new restructuring package for drivers on TfWRS. Unfortunately, this has been held back due to covid. We still pressed the need and, I am pleased to say, are committed to continuing this process. There will be many disagreements, but that is the way of negotiations. At the end of the day, whatever is agreed will go to a ballot of our members.

One point I have made clear is that this is a drivers' restructuring package. Not for others to saddle up, on our backs, to get additional pay and conditions. Other grades must do their own form of restructuring and monies should not come out of our pot for the payment of differentials.

The burger vans – Pacers – have, at long last, started to go; 769s have started to come onto the rails, at last, albeit with teething problems. The drivers' council has been working hard (with EC support) to get driving cabs up to standard, and not accept how they came. As for 230 trains (old LUL stock), who knows when they will arrive?

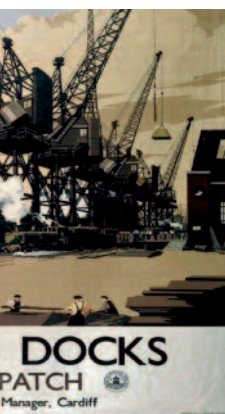
On the positive, new stations are being planned and built and new trains are due to come onto the network at the end of next year, along with new and refurbished depots.

Regular meetings are taking place, not only with management, but with TfW, and Transport Minister Ken Skates, and these meetings really help us in putting over the drivers' case.

Finally, I want to wish all members, and those who sent kind messages on my retirement, all the very best for the future, and I hope to catch up with you when it is safe to do so.

During these difficult times your reps, officers, and EC need your support. Our union is fortunate to have a fantastic united leadership at all levels, exemplified by Mick Whelan, our general secretary, a true leader who has, in my opinion, excelled in making ASLEF the strongest trade union in Britain.





# the economic power of our railways

only way we can re-industrialise areas that have been left behind is to heavily invest in railway infrastructure projects that will create and support industry and connect communities.

We welcomed the Welsh government's moves to bring the railway ever closer to public ownership. We believe this will bring about sustained investment and an holistic approach to planning that will help deliver a vertically-integrated railway run for the people of Wales – not foreign corporations – but this relies on proper investment from the UK government.

On 30 June last year the Prime Minister announced a 'union connectivity review' headed by Sir Peter Hendy which will make recommendations on how the UK government can level up transport infrastructure and improve connectivity between Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and England. The review will publish its recommendations this summer.

In response Ken Skates, Minister for the Economy, Transport & North Wales, published a statement critical of the UK government's approach thus far. He estimates that between 2019 and 2029 there will be a funding shortfall of £5.1 billion. The UK government has committed just £60 million to investment in Wales over the next 10 years; if Wales were to receive a fair share this would be more like £3 billion!

The previous government's promise of electrification of the main line in North and South Wales by 2030 looks severely compromised and, despite some benefits in North Wales, HS2 is set to damage the Welsh economy to

the tune of £150 million per year.

There are fundamental flaws in the investment models used by the UK government and this needs to change. Whilst I hope that Peter Hendy's review, and his published recommendations, are fair and far reaching, I'm not going to hold my breath.

The Conservative Party's election pledge of 'levelling up' is empty rhetoric and we shouldn't be fooled. The Tory economic model is opposed to re-industrialisation, especially in areas where Labour is in charge.

We should continue to make the case for an investment

strategy that delivers for all areas of the UK. One that will bring balance to our economy so we are no longer reliant on our finance and service sectors. We need the economic power of the railways to breathe life into communities left behind by decades of underinvestment.

## Emasculation of a nation



**IAN THOMPSON, who is from Treherbert at the head of the Rhondda Fawr valley, is TfW company council secretary, and sits on the general council of the Wales TUC**

**T**HE Tories believe a working man should know his place, bend the knee, doff his cap, tug the forelock, and be grateful for a few crumbs from the master's table. Ergo, the Tories hate the Labour Party and all it stands for, especially the working man and woman.

Wales has long been a hotbed of Labour Party radicalism and trade unionism, as far back as the Merthyr Rising of 1831 by coal and steel workers who, for the first time, marched under the red flag of revolution, which has since been adopted by workers right around the world.

The movement of steel and coal was long the backbone of our railway; brothers in industry. Rail freight was born from Richard Trevithick's steam locomotive in Merthyr Tydfil in 1804. But freight is now almost just a memory for coal and steel. The Tories, via the Milk Snatcher, devastated the mines and the steel industry in Wales, and, thereby, our rail freight industry. Take away their employment and you take away their unions so you take away their power, or so they thought.

The Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales were established in 1999 with their funding decided by the Barnett

formula, which was and is a fundamentally flawed method of calculating the financial needs of the devolved nations.

So to modern days. The Welsh government took Welsh Water under its umbrella with the slogan 'not for profit'. It has taken Wales' main airport, near Cardiff, under its wing (Rishi Sunak subsidises English airports but not those in Wales) and in February it returned the railways in Wales (and a bit of England) to the public sector. All now – in that word that struck terror into the heart of Margaret Thatcher – nationalised. But done by underfunding Wales by £3 to £4.5 billion over ten years.

Imagine what we could do with that! Or imagine what central government could do with that if only they used it as well as the Welsh government has and is. Because the Welsh government's use of its financial resources is directed to benefit the people it represents, not big business, or to line pockets already stuffed full. After all, Wales has the only Labour government in the UK.

There's more to come. An electrified metro for the Valleys. Plans to integrate the whole transport system of Wales. Buses and trains working together, what a radical idea! To make it greener, and as self-sustainable as possible. Even the parts that privatised foreign companies run.

But the Tories hate the Labour Party, and the labour movement, so sing the *Red Flag* loud and proud all you fellow train drivers, because, if it can happen in Wales, it can happen elsewhere...

# Never again should you have to choose between your health and your job



**SHAVANAH TAJ, general secretary of the Wales Trades Union Congress, argues that government can make a difference, that the renationalisation of rail in Wales will underline the benefits of public ownership, and that proper investment is needed to rebuild the country after the pandemic**

**W**E ARE almost a year into a pandemic which took us all completely by surprise, and it feels like a good time to take stock (I think, and hope, this is an accidental rail pun).

The social partnership model (which defines trade union and employer relationships with government here in Wales) has held up well. Unions, employers, and government have worked together to address issues like PPE supply, locking down, and reopening parts of the economy, and provision for those slipping through gaps in the support schemes.

The Welsh government has had power over the workplace like never before. And it has responded by making it safer – mandating risk assessments and two metre social distancing. And I must mention the very welcome decision to renationalise the Transport for Wales service. It's a step we hope to see in other areas when privatisation fails.

But we can't escape some of the brutal, unfair, realities which the pandemic has laid bare. We

know that so much more needs to be done to tackle labour market inequalities, which have inevitably led to some being in a far more vulnerable position over the last year.

And yet, somehow, in a few years' time I fear I'll be writing the same thing as we approach another election, or another recession, or another bad set of stats which show, yet again, that those in the worst jobs tend to have the poorest health, that their children are more likely to leave school without formal qualifications, and that they will end up in lower pay jobs than children with better-off parents.

The crisis has, inevitably, resulted in a lot of the plans that were in place to address inequalities being put aside, for the time being, a fair and correct response to a national health emergency. But we can't ignore the fact that many people who have lost their lives, or suffered serious illness, because of the coronavirus, did so because they weren't able to do their job from home when the pandemic hit, because their employer put



profits above the safety of the workforce, or because they couldn't afford to self-isolate. And, so often, these were the lowest paid workers who were unable to access their right to a collective voice at work.

Wales TUC's biennial congress will take place in May. It's a chance to set out what workers in Wales need from the recovery. We embraced the build back better message as we know that far too many workers have been failed by an unfair labour market – long before the pandemic hit. We embraced the idea because we know that government *can* make it a difference. By using its powers to invest in our economy it can make work better for many of us, and avoid the growth in precarious work which defined the last recovery. We hope that the renationalisation of rail will demonstrate the best possible example of this.



But, most of all, we need to build back better in case another crisis hits. Never again should people have to choose between their health and their job, get sacked because it's cheaper than being furloughed, or rely on homemade PPE to try to protect themselves from a deadly virus.

Building back better means building collective worker voice and power; it means the right measures are put in place without a battle; and it means that each and every key worker is recognised and properly rewarded for keeping our essential services going throughout the crisis.

**Shavanah Taj was born and brought up in Cardiff and worked in shops, call centres, and the third sector before joining the Public and Commercial Services Union as a full-time organiser in 2002. She is passionate about equality, social justice, and human rights and is a patron of Show Racism the Red Card Wales; a trustee of the Henna Foundation, which supports victims of domestic abuse; and a trustee of Fio, the grassroots theatre group that encourages young working-class men and women to engage with arts and culture.**

## Leap of faith can be scary



**Exeter branch 076 has young members in position as branch chair, branch secretary, and assistant branch secretary – a first for ASLEF. ROB KITLEY, Young Members' Representatives' Committee member for District 7, reflects on a difficult year**

**I**T HAS been a disappointing 12 months for the Young Members' committee with most of our reports reading as a list of cancelled events, such as the TUC Young Workers'

Conference and the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival. But we are lucky that, thanks to modern technology, some of these events could be held virtually and we were able to run our own webinar in November, in conjunction with the ITF, which was well attended.

As young workers we will be affected by the fallout from covid-19 for many years to come. So far we haven't seen as much impact on our industry as other sectors, such as hospitality and retail, which has had a disproportionate effect on young workers.

But we must remain diligent in

protecting the terms, conditions, and safe working practices which have been hard fought for over many years.

Activism is key, and I am proud to have recently been elected branch chairman at Exeter, along with fellow young members Joshua Tucker, as branch secretary, and James Martin as assistant secretary. It's very exciting to be part of the new breed of active union members and we are very grateful for the help, advice, and support of those around us.

We hope this trend continues and other young workers across the country will take up active roles in their branches and the union as a whole.

The leap of faith can be scary, but it's our future and we must grab it with both hands!

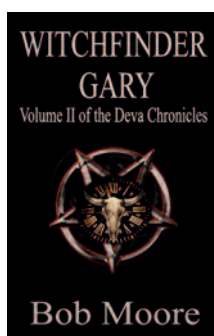


# Chester's darkest days since Roman legions turned up

**B**OB Moore, a train driver based at Basingstoke depot in Hampshire, blames a mess room colleague for his decision to pick up a pen – well, set his fingers flying across the computer keyboard – and knock out a couple of novels. Sixteen years ago, back in 2005, Bob read a book so bad – he discreetly draws a veil over both the title and the author – that, when he finished, he was prompted to say, 'Well, that wasn't very good!' His mate's response was, 'Well, could you do any better?'

'This set my thought train into motion,' says Bob, who lives with his wife in the village of Saughall near Chester in Cheshire. 'I thought, yes, I reckon I could, and so, with absolutely no qualifications or literary training, other than writing Christmas thank you letters up to the age of ten, I set to work, rather excitedly, on what I thought wouldn't be too difficult a task. But writing a book is, or rather was, for me, a long process.'

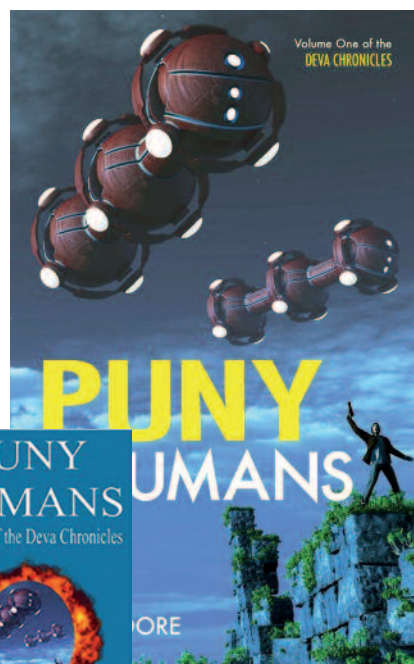
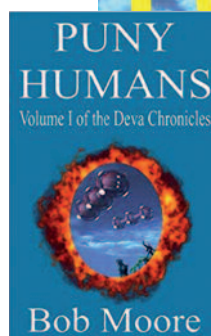
Finally, after 13 years of toil, 20 drafts, and four complete rewrites, *Puny Humans* was published on the Amazon paperback publishing platform KDP (Kindle Direct Publishing). It's comic science-fiction, a tale of alien invasion, in which we witness the Desirions, 'our planet's aggressors, suffer setback and disaster, largely due to their own incompetence, despite bringing a



frightening array of weaponry and tech with the intention of subjecting humanity to a state of eternal subservience.'

The hero – if that's the right word – of the novel is Gary Spam, a sci-fi fan and – like Bob – *Star Trek* obsessive 'who comes across as a total buffoon and complete idiot'. Gary's unlikely ally in his adventures to save the world is Woods, 'a former soldier who can confidently be described as psychotic'.

Together with various cohorts, companions, and colleagues, Gary and Woods get caught up in fantastical and sometimes calamitous events ranging from an alien invasion and time travel to high magic and paranormal spectacle in the beautiful and historic setting of Chester and its outlying areas.



The first two volumes of the *Deva Chronicles* – named after Deva Victrix, the fortress built by the Second Legion, and the town which grew up around it, on the site of what is now Chester – by Driver Moore

'Volume two of what I'm calling the *Deva Chronicles* – Deva being the Roman name for Chester – is another humorous tale which charts the chaotic and sometimes ludicrous adventures of Gary and Woods. *Witchfinder Gary* is a story containing – yes, you've guessed it – witches and sorcery, this time centred in my home village of Saughall and introduces some characters from the past, one of whom revelled in rather infamous notoriety.'

'With the first two books out there, I can now concentrate on volume three, *The Blacon Awakening*, which will undoubtedly include the now trademark lunacy which only our protagonists could create...'

● *Puny Humans* and *Witchfinder Gary* can be purchased from [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk) in paperback for £7.99 and £8.99 respectively or on Kindle at 99p each.

## Mind the gap

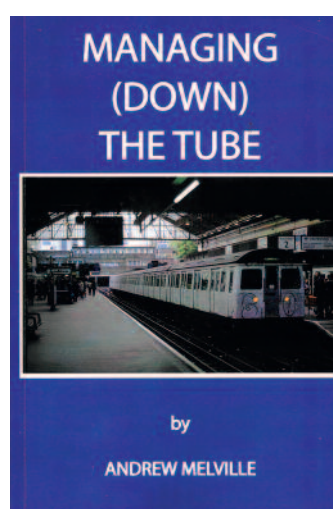
**I**N chapter one of *Managing (Down) the Tube* by Andrew Melville (£10.99) the author, suddenly finding himself in need of a new career, answered an advert at the Job Centre and joined London Underground as a guard, with the intention of staying for around 18 months. This turned into a career lasting 25 years, through driving Tube trains and then into management. He worked all the lines, with the exception of the Waterloo & City and East London.

And this is no rule book, requiring the reader to reach for any stimulants to stay awake.

With the gap minded and the doors closed, we accelerate into chapter two, staffing structure, which lists the various grades, and at 15 pages long, is not merely a list, but explains the roles, and how members of other grades could make the job easy or a nightmare for you.

Health issues, some 22 pages, covers fitness criteria, the dreaded shift system we all know, and time off, agreed and not agreed, ('The 'ammers drawn away to Man U, can't miss that!') Incidents, suicides, and drunken trespass are there, warts and all.

Gender and race issues are



condensed into just twelve (!) pages, yet nothing is avoided. Management attitudes, and the disciplinary minefield, are well covered, not forgetting the

involvement of the trade unions. PPP, the attempt to privatise the whole system, and its subsequent rejection is riveting stuff.

And a 24 page glossary, which explains every abbreviation a layperson may need, opens the book up to 'normals' looking to expand their knowledge of a 'national institution'.

The book – originally published in 2010 – is dedicated to all the devoted staff of London Underground who, each day, try to keep the system running. Read this and you would nail the specialised subject section of *Mastermind*. Whether you're a worker on the Underground or Overground, or just a humble commuter, *Managing (Down) the Tube* is not to be missed.

**Mel Thorley**

# Meeting virtually around the world

**O**N Wednesday 27 January two of ASLEF's Young Members' Representatives' Committee – James Sutherland and Matt France – attended the International Transport Workers' Federation's young railway workers' meeting. An extremely well-attended online event with more than 180 young reps from 37 countries. The main scope of the meeting was to outline priorities faced by young railway workers now and in the future.

There were contributions from around the globe about ITF demands for restaffing ticket offices; the use of hydrogen and battery

powered locos; and digital railways. Some interesting points from the Argentinian representative about how the union provides driver training, and moving towards app-based comms.

The ITF young workers' section is focusing on increasing youth employment, adoption of technology, and digitalisation, as well as the dangers posed by subcontracting and the gig economy. Its main campaign is for safe and sustainable rail worldwide. Rail has the potential to be one of the most powerful tools to reverse global inequality, and climate change, whilst keeping the global economy moving. Rail infrastructure can be the bedrock of sustainable supply chains with a new economic model based on public goods and public needs, rather than private profit and private interest.

There are many high speed rail projects in

development, especially in Asia, and we also discussed new technology, safety, and a common demand to control the use of AI to avoid generations of unemployment. Much of the meeting inevitably centred on how young railway workers have been affected by covid-19, the main point being that many felt they need more support from their governments.

With regards to young workers organising, the general feeling seems to be that many know what the issues are but don't know how to act collectively to resolve them. There is, it is felt, a lack of inclusion of youth in decision-making and a lack of engagement with young workers. Interesting to note that, in Italy, there was an agreement to pay off senior drivers to free up positions for new recruits.

**Matt France, D8 rep on the YMRC**

## Zooming in?

Due to the inability to conduct beer & badges nights, and other events, at the moment, our members have not been able to discuss relevant matters with the EC at a local level. Would the EC (or GS, AGS, and each DO) please consider having a virtual members' forum, using video conferencing software, at each TOC or FOC, every three to six months, so that individual members get to speak to EC reps about local matters.

**Chris Whelan, Grove Park branch 092**

**Note:** The GS, AGS, EC, and officers are, when invited, still attending branches and district councils (by Zoom) to update members on all issues, as are company council reps.

## You never know what's in another person's locker!

Well, I never! A chap I've been emailing for ages, since his appeal in the *Journal* for information about the old pull & push BR trains, is Eric Stuart who, at 40, started on the Tube as a guard. He became a driver, then manager. I've only just found out that he wrote a book (see page 15) whilst working as an LU area manager (hence the pen name). One never knows what is in a person's locker.

**Mel Thorley, Retired Members' Section**

### DEAR OH DEER

The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, visiting Magdalen College, Oxford, were served venison at lunch. Afterwards, while being shown around the college's famous deer park, Philip quipped: 'How many of those buggers did you have to kill for lunch?' On being told that the meat was from Kent, he joked: 'Well, don't tell Charles. Because he likes to buy local.'

● Please send your branch news, reports, articles, features, presentations, and photographs to [journal@aslef.org.uk](mailto:journal@aslef.org.uk)

## DAVID DOBIE AN ASOLUTE GENTLEMAN



Hibeas in the Heart of Midlothian: Hugh Bradley, Chris Barrie, Rab, Jambo Davy, and DO2 Kevin

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of RMS member Brother Davy Dobie – 91 years old, and 75 years in ASLEF, which is some achievement. We did a special presentation in 2016 (see picture) to mark Davy's 70 years of membership. What an absolute gentleman, respected by everyone, and a brilliant guy, who became and remained a very good mentor and friend to young and old.

Davy was a Jambo, a great supporter of his team, Hearts, his whole life, and the banter we all shared, being Hibeas and Jambos, was great, loathing and loving each other before and after the great local derby at Easter Road and Tynecastle. The branch presented Davy with a green ASLEF tie from the three Hibs fans in the picture and Davy, being the guy he was, from that day onwards always wore his green tie every year to the annual Auld Mans' Do (retired drivers' night) which was a great touch from a great guy. He will be sadly missed by all. Thank you for being you, Davy, you were truly one o' the good guys.

**Rab Wicksted, branch secretary, from all the members of Edinburgh No 2**

## RON BRIDLE SERVED AS A LOCAL ASLEF REP

It is with sadness that we learn of the death of retired driver Ron Bridle aged 94. Ron began his railway career in 1948, starting as a cleaner at Exmouth Junction, following four years' service in the Royal Navy. He progressed through the grades at Exmouth Junction until its closure in 1965. He moved to the Southern Region, becoming a driver at Wallington until its closure in 1969, when he moved to Coulsdon North until it closed in 1983 when he moved to Selhurst and, finally, Three Bridges where he finished in 1990. Ron was a loyal member of ASLEF, serving as a local rep and holding branch offices. Our sympathy to his wife Grace and family.

**Roy Luxford, RMS, Three Bridges branch 213**



# Driverless trains – a political project



**CHRISTIAN WOLMAR** is a journalist, broadcaster and author who has written about transport – for *The Independent*, *The Times*, and *The Guardian*, amongst others – since 1992. He has also written a column in *Rail* since 1994 – a must-read for the railway industry – and in the issue dated 10-23 February he reflected on the Downing Street drive for driverless trains

**T**HE revelation that Boris Johnson is behind a bid to hit the headlines, this time over his long-standing, ideologically-driven – and utterly impractical – obsession with driverless trains disappointed, but did not surprise, many of those in the railway industry.

We revealed in the *Journal* last month that a report, called *Automate*, ostensibly commissioned from the RSSB by the DfT in August, on the 'benefits and challenges' and timescales of four different levels of automation on Britain's railways, in fact got the green light from Andrew Gilligan, a 'sci-fi geek', and one of the Prime Minister's policy advisers, at a meeting in Downing Street in July.

Gilligan – effectively branded a liar by Lord Hutton during his inquiry into the death of Dr David Kelly – has what friends describe as 'a weird science-fiction obsession' with the idea. He wrote a piece in the *Evening Standard* in 2009 arguing that 'Paris is heading towards a driverless, strike-free, and punctual Metro. So why isn't London interested?' and another on the *Conservative Home* website in 2011 claiming that 'Boris looks to driverless trains to end Tube strikes'.

## LOONY RIGHT POLICYMAKERS

The problem is that the idea is risible because, as GS Mick Whelan has pointed out, 'Driverless trains are simply not viable on the Victorian infrastructure of Britain's railway network'.

Commentators agree. Paul Routledge had a pop at 'loony-right Tory policymakers' in the *Daily Mirror* (see page 7) and Christian Wolmar took Gilligan the geek to task in *Rail* magazine. Wolmar has written about transport – for papers such as *The Independent*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and the *New Statesman* – since 1992. He is the author of twenty books about trains, trams, and driverless cars, and has written a column, read by everyone in the industry, in *Rail* since 1994. Wolmar knows his stuff. And this is part of what he wrote:

'In the midst of all the chaos and



Wolmar channels his inner Betjeman before hitting Gilligan the geek for six



uncertainty on the railways, caused by the pandemic, it is surprising that considerable sums of money, and much time and energy, is being devoted to the concept of driverlessness.

'The idea that you can get rid of drivers is a regular theme of speeches at fringe meetings at Conservative Party conferences and in the output of like-minded think tanks. Ministers tend to pop up on media interviews suggesting drivers are as old-fashioned as horses and carts.

## IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT TRAINS

'It is, of course, not just about trains. There are frequent references in the press to the notion of driverless cars and even pilotless planes. Getting rid of pesky drivers and pilots is seen as a great way to save money and, among the more fanatical, a way of weakening trade unions. I don't want to get too Marxist about this but we have been here before. There is always the notion among Tory politicians that driving down the costs of labour will ensure that there is a better rate of return for capital.'

Wolmar examined the problems of automation for planes and automobiles and then returned to his favourite subject – besides QPR – of trains.

'Last November, when Transport for London was bailed out by the government, it had to promise to "work with a government-led expert review on the possible implementation of driverless trains". In fact, TfL had just commissioned a study which suggested that it would cost £7 billion for the new trains and signalling equipment required to turn the network into a fully automatic network. Several Tube lines are already computer-driven, with the driver merely opening the doors and intervening in an emergency. However, retrofitting the network was reckoned not to offer value for money and would, in any case, take decades.

'What about the national rail network? Every time there is an industrial dispute, the notion of driverless trains is mentioned by ministers or press reports. The government has



commissioned the RSSB to look into the feasibility of the concept. Its findings are due to be published soon but, as with any serious research into the concept, will demonstrate the difficulties of creating a genuine driverless railway.

## IT IS A POLITICAL PROJECT

'The explanation for this interest in driverlessness is that it is a political project, and neither a technical one, nor one rooted in a desire to improve the lot of passengers. Interestingly, the latest copy of the *ASLEF Journal*, always a good read, reveals the fascinating background behind the ministerial obsession of getting rid of drivers. The RSSB report was apparently commissioned by the DfT by Andrew Gilligan, who was cycling commissioner during Boris Johnson's time as London Mayor, which ended in 2012, and now works as his transport adviser in Number 10.

'Sadly, the driverless issue is like a game of Whack-a-Mole and will keep on popping up on slow news days or when there is the threat of industrial action. Vast amounts of money will consequently be wasted on R&D but nothing will come of it because of the cost, sunk technology, and the difficulties of retrofitting equipment. This is not, I stress, to be Luddite, but rather to be realistic and to be aware of the ideological basis behind this type of development.'

# Join the Trade Union Badge Collectors Society for **FREE**



## TRADE UNION BADGE COLLECTORS SOCIETY

Trade union badges form a central part of the rich visual culture of the labour movement that also encompasses trade union banners, emblems and membership cards and other ephemera.

Often taking their design from aspects of the larger and more intricate union emblems of the 19th century, or illustrating the tools of the union member's trade, badges were first produced by trade unions as far back as the 1870s, and by the 1890s were routinely being issued by some unions to new members.

Probably the first trade union badge collector was Walter Southgate, who started collecting union ephemera as early as 1905, and would later become one of the founders of the National Museum of Labour History.

The collecting tradition is kept alive today by the Trade Union Badge Collectors Society, a UK-based group set up by like-minded enthusiasts to promote a wider appreciation of trade union badges and ephemera, and to create a friendly environment for sharing information and research about trade union badges and ephemera.



## ABOUT US

The Trade Union Badge Collectors Society was formed in the early 1980s by a group of union activists and officials.

The first issue of Trade Union Badge Collectors News was produced in 1984 and has recently been relaunched.

A website has also been set up at [www.tubcs.wordpress.com](http://www.tubcs.wordpress.com)

The aims of the newsletter and society are collecting, cataloguing and researching trade union badges and related items.

As our late editor John Hammond put it:

"I believe that this hobby of ours is one of the most fascinating ones. When I pick up a new badge or artefact, I enjoy the research in to its history and each book I look up gives me more and more interesting information. And I know that I am helping to preserve the past. There is a great difficulty with the historical memorabilia of this great movement disappearing as more and more unions merge and disappear. Many trade union leaders have little or no time to be concerned with the history of the movement and many interesting artefacts and memorabilia are thrown in the dustbin rather than being kept for posterity. The badge collecting fraternity has helped salvage some of the best items and ensure that important items are available for the next generations"

TUBCS members have also produced two booklets: *A Guide to British Trade Union Badges* and *A Guide to Irish Trade Union Badges*

The society and newsletter have been mentioned in a number of publications including:

*ASLEF Journal* March 2007, K Myers, What's behind union badges

Paul Martin (2002) *The Trade Union Badge - Material Culture In Action*, Aldershot, Ashgate

*Land Worker* Feb 1991, I. Monkton, Worn with Pride – The badge of nobility

*Labour Research* Feb 1987, N. Clark, Worn with Pride – Union Badges

TUC 2006 Congress Guide, K Myers, Badges of Honour

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

TELEPHONE.....

EMAIL.....

UNION.....

## INTERESTS (PLEASE TICK ALL INTERESTS)

- ☐ GENERAL TRADE UNION BADGES
- ☐ SPECIFIC UNION/INDUSTRY, WHICH.....
- ☐ INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION BADGES
- ☐ MEMBERSHIP CARDS
- ☐ CERAMICS
- ☐ OTHER PRINTED MATERIAL

OTHER.....

Please email your completed application form as a photo attachment to [stevewbaguley@gmail.com](mailto:stevewbaguley@gmail.com)



## MICK KERRY

### AN INSPECTOR CALLS: 'JUST GO SANKY DOODLING ALONG AT 45MPH, SHUT OFF, BRAKE ON, WHAT'S SO HARD ABOUT THAT?'

**L** LEAMINGTON Spa branch is devastated to report the passing of our former instructor, Mick Kerry, who has succumbed after a two year battle with cancer. I am indebted to his mate at Nuneaton, Marc Jones, for information about Mick's career, which is, basically, a list of most of the Midlands depots!

Mick started at Nottingham before a move to Nuneaton in 1984 where he met his wife-to-be, Jen, the time clerk there. His response after successfully asking her out was, 'I've won the lottery!' He spent two years on Nuneaton LDC, working hard to try to prevent the depot's closure in 1986, unsuccessfully as it turned out.

His next move was to Northampton until that, too, closed down, before coming up to the 'big school' at Birmingham New Street. After a good few years at New Street, he finally arrived with us at Leamington Spa. Mick was a natural instructor, making the most difficult rule or traction knowledge understandable,



**Mick Kerry: his trademark remark to drivers was 'Piece of piss, innit?'**

normally followed by his trademark remark, 'Piece of piss, innit?' Which would be followed by a story of when 'that' had happened to him. All of his instructing, either one-to-one, or in the classroom, was delivered with his trademark humour. Often, after making you laugh, with his explanations, he'd go,

'But now you won't forget it, though, will ya?'

One of his favourite quotes was, 'You can ask me anything...you might not get an answer though!' There were other, more eloquent, phrases if you got a question wrong, though! And we all got used to those on his Q&A sessions!

I was fortunate enough to be the first of his trainees to achieve 100% on one of his end-of-the-week rules tests on our course, and the look of pride on his face will remain with me forever. See, Mick, a bit sunk in!

And, when out road learning, how many of us remember his instructions for the Stratford-upon-Avon line? 'Just go sanky doodling along at 45mph, shut off, put the brake on, what's hard about that? Nothing!' (Thanks to Richard Beech for that memory).

Mick was an extremely knowledgeable and experienced driver, but he was more than that. He was a role model in how to do the job, someone to whom I very much looked up. When you are young and inexperienced, you listen to the people who have been there and done it, thousands of times over, and Mick was in that class.

He was a gentleman, always willing to help others, and pass on his knowledge, and his colleagues have taken his passing particularly hard. We would all like to pass on our sincere condolences to Jen and his family and friends. Rest in Peace, Mister.

**Nick Walker, Leamington Spa 115 branch chair**

## RAY MacDONALD THE DOODLEBUG

Sadly, we have to announce the untimely death of retired Staines driver Ray (the Doodlebug) MacDonald, aged 66. Born in Inverness, he started his railway career as a second man up there. He then transferred to Staines as a driver. Although a quiet and private man, he was an active member of ASLEF, holding positions in Feltham Electric branch, and for many years was an LDC rep for Staines. He was renowned for his acumen in roster building (all done with a pencil and eraser!) which dovetailed nicely with his creative skills in spotting changeovers, and his three- and four-way fiddles were legendary. After DRI in 1997, Ray went on to serve the members of SWT as a company councillor. With over 30 years' service, Ray retired to the IoW and pursued new ventures. The mighty Clachnacuddin FC will enjoy your support from on high with a wee dram in hand. Rest in Peace, Ray.

**Steve Kihuth, Feltham Electric 078 branch secretary**



**Ray MacDonald: renowned for his creative skills and roster building**

## LEN LEWIS FIRE FOR FAIRNESS & EQUITY



**We'll keep on driving and fighting for fairness and equity, Lenny Lewis**

Retired Staines driver Leonard (aka Lenny and Leopard Lenny) Lewis has passed away aged 84. He began his railway career after leaving the Army, becoming a fireman at Feltham loco, then a driver at Feltham and, after the closure of Feltham, at Chertsey. Unfortunately, Chertsey then shut as well, and Len transferred to Staines where he remained until his retirement after more than 40 years' railway service. Len was a devoted family man and leaves behind three daughters – Emma, Jane, and Sally, who cared for him in the final months of his life. A natural socialist and Labour man, he was a loyal ASLEF member who held various branch positions and had a spell as an LDC rep. An avid golfer, he enjoyed a round or two in the British Rail Golf Society. A caring person, still contributing in retirement, he helped manage a local youth football team. Even in his 80s, the fire for fairness and equity through socialist values was completely undiminished. He is now back in the arms of his beloved wife, Cath. We will keep fighting, Len!

**Steve Kihuth, Feltham Electric 078 branch secretary**

Join the conversation! Send your letters by email to [journal@aslef.org.uk](mailto:journal@aslef.org.uk) or by Royal Mail to the **ASLEF Journal** at 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN



## Is ASLEF going to make a face covering for drivers?

I'm a driver at Peak Forest for DB Cargo and a health & safety rep. I've been asked by some drivers if ASLEF is thinking of making any face masks, as it seems the RMT has done some. If ASLEF does maybe, after the cost has been met, profits could go into the hardship fund.  
**Ian Jordan, Peak Forest**

**Mick Whelan** says: 'ASLEF has been working with the Rail Industry Coronavirus Forum, the ORR, and companies, on the requirements for and provision of face coverings and relevant policies and procedures to support this. ASLEF has an agreement with most companies that drivers wear the agreed risk-assessed face covering provided by the company.'

## No LGBT+ History month

People know they are welcome and valued when they see themselves represented positively within the structures they form and support. This is as true for people from BAME backgrounds as it is for LGBT+ people. I am very disappointed, then, to receive my February edition of the *Journal* which has no reference to LGBT+ History month, nor to the contributions of LGBT+ people to transport, ASLEF, or the labour movement in general.  
**Gavin Bowtell, train operator, LU**

**Mick** says: 'I'm sorry we didn't manage to cover LGBT+ History month, but we did celebrate 20 years of ASLEF's equalities committees – with contributions from Susan Greenwell and David Jones from our LGBT+ committee – in our December edition. And, in June last year, we published a special equalities edition of the *Journal*, with articles by David Jones and Peter Tatchell, who reflected on 30 years of activism and achievement.'

## The passing of the Pacers

I, too, have unhappy memories of the Pacer. Its passing should be marked but not lamented. I think they used to run on some of the (few) local lines round here. The new (2020) rolling stock proved incompatible with the track systems, with the level crossing gates failing to close as the trains approached. Apparently this

## Is it time for a windfall tax on companies – like Amazon – which have benefited from covid-19?

Not specifically an ASLEF matter although, as you are my union, it's probably best passed on to you, as you will know who to suggest it to if it is worth consideration. I think this is something potentially cross-party in scope, but is possibly best raised initially by the union movement in conjunction with certain employers' organisations and others (eg faith groups) with whom you could find common cause.

Given all the covid-19

shutdowns, the ensuing cost to the economy, and with certain sectors much worse hit than others, along with the impact on individuals through the loss of jobs, etc, and given that certain companies are benefitting from current events – Amazon, of course, but there are others – would some form of windfall tax levied upon companies, such as Amazon, that have benefited disproportionately from current events make sense – especially if it

were hypothecated towards stimulating the hardest hit areas of the economy?

This would benefit businesses and workers and the wider public, by helping retain, or open new, local shops, and cafes, etc.

As I say, not really ASLEF's bag, per se, but potentially something that much of the country could unite behind if there were a non-partisan push for it.  
**Richard Mansfield, Eastbourne, Sussex**

## Climbing the trade union leadership ladder to the top

A piece on page 14 of February's *Journal* tells the tale of trailblazing women in different roles that were traditionally occupied by men.

*Ladies Can't Climb Ladders* celebrates women such as Hannah Dadds, the first female Underground driver, and Karen Harrison, the first main line driver. I wonder if any women could climb to the dizzying heights of ASLEF's all-male executive committee smiling contentedly from the opposite page of the same edition of the *Journal* (photo below)?  
**Michael Reeve, Watford branch 223**



The GS with ASLEF's EC: the men backing the committees trying to change the face of this union

is not recommended. Good piece by Chris Proctor, though (see page 10)!

**Jim Ring, Burnham Overy Staithe, Norfolk**

## Has the diary had its day?

In these modern times of electronic this and that, I would hazard a guess that a large proportion of diaries sent out by the union every year are unused. This, if I'm correct, is a vast waste of trees and money. Would it be

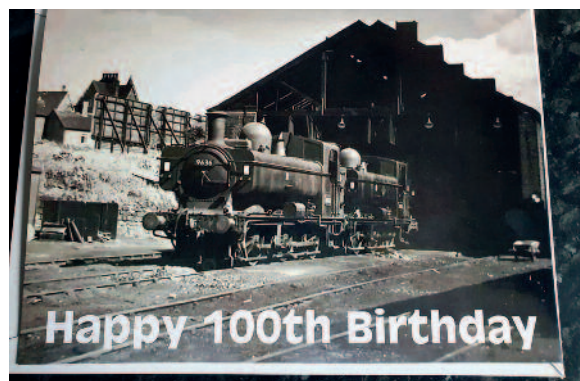
possible for the union to ask every member whether they wish to keep receiving a diary? I would guess that more members would say no than yes. Prospective members could have a tick box on their application form, too. The saving to the union would then benefit us all, as the presumably ever-rising cost of producing them would be significantly reduced and increases in monthly subscriptions would reflect the saving made.  
**Gary Warburton, Battersea branch 019**



## Stafford Road centenarian

**O**n Thursday 4 February one of our retired members reached a milestone – his 100th birthday. Stanley Burgess retired in 1986 after 48 years on the railway, first as an engineman at Stafford Road, and then at Wolverhampton High Level when the local steam depots closed.

Stan served during the Second World War with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, the South Staffordshires, and the Coldstream Guards, notably meeting General Montgomery on the eve of the Battle of El Alamein in 1942. He also fought in Italy, at the brutal Battles for Monte Cassino, in 1944. Back on the footplate he was



nicknamed 'The Old Soldier', which has stuck to this day, and he attended our reunions until four years ago. The branch sent a card to his care home for his milestone, told him about our article for the *Journal*, and asked if he would pose with the card, but he just wanted to be cheeky and poke his tongue out! Congratulations, Stan!

**Nigel Harkness**  
Wolverhampton 236 branch secretary



**Cheeky boy! Stan's now 100 not out**

## Honouring Joe

Joe Duddington was the driver of the *Mallard*, the A4 Pacific Class steam locomotive, when it broke the world speed record for steam locos on 3 July 1938, reaching 126.4mph, a record that still stands today. He was hand-picked by Sir Nigel Gresley for the job as Joe had a reputation for running trains hard when required. Man and machine were both built in Doncaster; Joe came from the Hyde Park area of the town and worked for LNER until he retired in 1944. But when Joe died in 1953 he was buried in an unmarked grave.

The Friends of Hyde Park Cemetery have launched an appeal to raise £2,000 to mark Joe's grave properly, remember an important figure in railway history, and give him the headstone he deserves. They usually raise funds with guided walks and talks, but had to cancel all events because of the pandemic.

Doncaster branch is supporting the appeal to honour Joe, and the FoHPC would be



**The train crew at Peterborough after breaking the record: fireman Tommy Bray, driver Joe Duddington, Sam Jenkins, and HM Hoather**

grateful for donations, large or small, to help remember Joe. Cheques made payable to the Friends of Hyde Park Cemetery, marked 'Duddington Project', can be sent to FoHPC, 36 Farnival Road, Balby, Doncaster, DN4 0PJ, or you can donate via PayPal by visiting [www.fohpc.org.uk/duddington](http://www.fohpc.org.uk/duddington)

**Neil Castle Doncaster 061 branch secretary**



**Jason Hickling, Lionel Deeley, and Chris Peake**

for all those passing by to see. When not travelling the world following his teams he could be found tending his allotments. Rest in Peace in the top link, Lionel.

**Jason Hickling Saltley 023 branch reporter and Mick Naughton former LLC rep**

## LIONEL DEELEY

### HOW YOU GOING, HORACE?

It is my sad duty to report the passing of driver Lionel Deeley of Saltley. Like a lot of drivers at the depot, Lionel started his career at Tyseley before making the move across Birmingham to Saltley. Lionel, with his standard greeting of 'How you going, Horace?' was a larger than life character. One of the highlights during our days as a Railfreight Distribution depot was when Lionel worked the shunt engine in Mossend Yard, Scotland! Hotel, beer, and newspapers provided! 'Can't be bad, Horace!' Lionel was an avid football fan, following his beloved Aston Villa, and England, everywhere and he was more than happy to fly the flag from his house next to the railway at Lapworth



**RAILWAY SERVICE** Throughout the pandemic railway workers have played their part in keeping this country moving. Retired Barnham driver Bob Dorkings and Par driver Paul Edwards have produced a covid service badge in nine versions: BR red; BR blue; BR black; Eastern Region blue; Midland Region maroon; North-Eastern Region orange; Southern Region green; Scottish Region light blue; and Western Region brown. Each badge costs £5 (plus £2.50 p&p) from [rdorkings@yahoo.com](mailto:rdorkings@yahoo.com) or [paul.edwards1962@sky.com](mailto:paul.edwards1962@sky.com)



**KEYWORKER** badge to recognise the hard work of all railway and other keyworkers this year. £5 plus £1 p&p from Fiona Lumsden (MTR Elizabeth line and Paddington branch). Please email [georgi44@hotmail.com](mailto:georgi44@hotmail.com)



**DARLINGTON** 125th anniversary badge 1895-2020. All badges individually numbered. £6.50 inc p&p. Please contact branch secretary John Clark by email at [johnclark162@gmail.com](mailto:johnclark162@gmail.com)



**NORWOOD** depot special pin badges including Cowden 25th anniversary. £3 each or £5 the pair (inc p&p). Proceeds to Norwood Drivers' Social Club. Email Stuart Boxall at [stboxall@gmail.com](mailto:stboxall@gmail.com)



**THE KING'S CROSS STORY** by Peter Darley (The History Press, £20) as featured on the centre pages of the January *Journal*. Buy it direct from the Camden Railway Heritage Trust at a discounted price of £15 inc p&p; email [Darleyp@aol.com](mailto:Darleyp@aol.com) or phone 020 7586 6632 for details. 'All income from sales goes to the trust,' says Peter.



**GROVE PARK** branch 50th anniversary badge. £6.50 inc p&p. Contact branch secretary Ray Garland 07931 612615 or [rgarland1@sky.com](mailto:rgarland1@sky.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.



**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.



**CASH** paid for original pre 90s railway photographic slides or negatives. Please contact GBRf Tonbridge driver (and railwayana collector) John Waddington at [johnwaddo@yahoo.com](mailto:johnwaddo@yahoo.com)



**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](mailto:grantmu32@btinternet.com)

To place an advertisement please phone 020 7324 2400 or send an email to [journal@aslef.org.uk](mailto:journal@aslef.org.uk)

# The new chumocracy



**Are you a friend of Boris?**  
**GREGOR GALL**, an affiliate research associate at the University of Glasgow, and editor of the *Scottish Left Review*, says it's not what you know but who you know if you want to get a fat contract from Number 10

**T**HE Tories are the traditional standard bearers for the meaning of meritocracy in Britain. The message is: 'If you study hard and work hard, you'll get on in life – there are no barriers to moving up and on.' The Tories are saying that social mobility is up to the individual and there are no class barriers any more as the 'old school tie' and 'old boys' network' no longer matter.

Quite how this has been expressed has varied over the years. After attending Eton and Balliol College, Oxford, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan – 'Super Mac' – told the working-class in 1957 that, with unemployment low and living standards rising, we had 'never had it so good'. This was slightly easier to swallow than remarks by Norman Tebbit and David Cameron.

Tebbit, Employment Secretary in 1981, said: 'I grew up in the 1930s with an unemployed father. He didn't riot. He got on his bike and looked for work, and he kept looking till he found it.' This was a great example of the Tory mantra: 'get on yer bike' if you want to get on.

The Tories traditionally wage war on 'welfare scroungers' – by which they mean those at the bottom of the heap, receiving benefits – as a 'compare and contrast' exercise with 'hard-working families' who they say are the backbone of Britain. If you don't have a job, or are struggling to keep a roof above your head, clothes on your back, and cannot afford to feed your children, it's your own fault.

## MY MISSION IS TO BUILD A COUNTRY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

After 2010, David Cameron – Eton and Brasenose College, Oxford – and George Osborne – St Paul's School and Magdalen College, Oxford – during their Age of Austerity talked of 'strivers' versus 'skivers' to justify their cuts.

Cameron's successor Theresa May – St Juliana's Convent School and St Hugh's College, Oxford – was a leading exponent, at least rhetorically, of meritocracy. 'My mission [is] to build a country that works for everyone... a truly meritocratic Britain that puts the interests of ordinary, working-class people first'. Britain, she said, would be a country where 'everything we do will be driven, not by the interests of the privileged



few [and] not by those with the loudest voices, the special interests, the greatest wealth or the access to influence.'

New Labour played its part, too. At the 1996 Labour Party conference Tony Blair – Fettes and St John's College, Oxford – said his three top priorities as Prime Minister would be 'education, education, and education' en route to a classless society. And John Prescott, when Deputy PM, claimed: 'We are all middle-class now'.

## MERITOCRACY OR CHUMOCRACY?

Where does BoJo stand? His credentials as a meritocratic man aren't great. His full name is Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson and he attended Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. But while he's just as privileged as Super Mac and Cameron he carries himself rather differently – as a 'can do' man of populist bluster rather than a posh patrician.

But it should come as no great surprise that he is in fact a leading exponent not of meritocracy but of chumocracy. Allowing Health Secretary Matt Hancock to award a contract for covid-19 testing equipment to his former neighbour, who had no experience of producing medical supplies, is not the half of it.

A recent investigation by *The Guardian* showed that having friends in high places really does pay big dividends. Among the beneficiaries of BoJo's largesse are:

Kate Bingham, appointed chair of the vaccine taskforce, an investment banker with no relevant experience, except being married to Tory MP Jesse Norman who was at Eton with Johnson (and she went to private school with BoJo's sister).

Dido Harding, appointed head of NHS test and trace, having worked at various non-health private companies, and married to Tory MP John Penrose.

Public First, a policy consultancy owned by James Frayne (a long-term chum of Dominic Cummings) and his wife Rachel Wolf (a former adviser to Michael Gove) has been awarded a string of research contracts.



Getting their snouts in the public trough: lots of lucrative government contracts will soon fatten up these private porkers

## QUOTE...

*'This Tory Party is rife with conflicts of interest. It's all cheques and no balances'* – **Rachel Reeves**, Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, on Boris Johnson's culture of contracts for cronies

## ...UNQUOTE

Hanbury Strategy, a lobbying firm co-founded by Paul Stephenson, director of communications for the Vote Leave campaign and another Cummings chum, has also picked up lots of lucrative work.

Ditto media consultants Topham Guerin, run by Sean Topham and Ben Guerin, and Faculty Science, a data analytics company, which also worked with the man who broke lockdown on Vote Leave.

## PROCEDURES SUSPENDED – MAKING CHOOSING YOUR CHUMS EVEN EASIER

The list goes on and on. Johnson pays only lip service to proper vetting and public tendering. In the early days of the pandemic, even these procedures were suspended, making choosing your chums even easier. And though neither Bingham nor Harding are paid for their roles, it does allow them to award government contracts to those with whom they are already very well-connected without due process or diligence. Ker-ching!

And, interestingly, the UK's official anti-corruption champion is none other than, er, John Penrose, a Tory MP and the hubby of Harding.

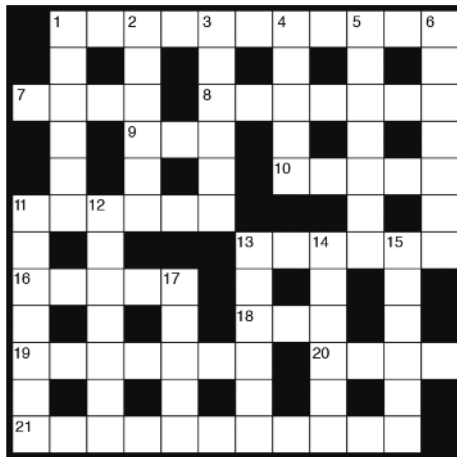
Some say the Johnson chumocracy is just another name for old-style cronyism. They're right. But it's no less wrong because it's been going on so long. And it does rather jar with BoJo's bluff and bluster about Britain being a 'get ahead' nation when only those who are already ahead can get ahead.

What makes this even more reprehensible is that, as a result of the coronavirus crisis, those who are rich are becoming even richer as a result of all those nice public contracts while the poor are becoming poorer.



## Prize Crossword

Prize crossword 179 by Tom Williams



### Solution to Prize Crossword 178

**Across:** 1 Mongrel 5 Tame 7 Nag 8 Doghouse  
9 Paths 10 Chew 13 Lace 14 Lean 18 Pick  
19 Ideal 21 Sunburnt 22 Wad 23 Fade  
24 Strayed **Down:** 1 Monopoly 2 Nightcap  
3 Radish 4 Legacy 5 Trowel 6 Mist 11 Waterway  
12 Secluded 15 Nimble 16 Skirts 17 Bitter  
20 Puma

Congratulations to **Chris Carpenter, of Newport**, 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](http://wordgames.co.uk)

### Across

- 1 To go separate ways (4,7)
- 7 Crocus or daffodil
- 8 Stew vegetables, neeps
- 9 Cricket club?
- 10 A throng of bees
- 11 Replace with another
- 13 A fry-up, bubble-and-xxxxxx
- 16 Gate fastening
- 18 Fresh and modern
- 19 Without any definite flavour
- 20 Ferrous metal
- 21 The good luck arachnid? (5,6)

### Down

- 1 A pot-belly
- 2 Inked typewriter strip
- 3 Bulls and cows
- 4 Scores or grades
- 5 Stir up public feeling
- 6 Muslim women's veil
- 11 Essential for bones and teeth
- 12 Skilled workman
- 13 Make fun of (4,2)
- 14 Become less tense
- 15 Chain mail
- 17 Pleased and content

## On Track

# That claim's rather fishy



**Penny Mordaunt's floundering in the wrong place as her post-Brexit sunny uplands fishing story doesn't add up**

**P**ENNY Mordaunt, the Conservative MP for Portsmouth North, and ardent Brexiteer, claimed on *Any Questions* that 'UK quotas for fish are going to increase two-thirds over the next five years'. Which struck most listeners as unlikely, especially as Leavers have tended to wildly exaggerate the benefits of Brexit.

Every coastal country has an exclusive economic zone which gives it the right to fish up to 200 nautical miles or to a maritime point half-way to a neighbouring country. Now the UK has left the EU it has its own EEZ again; and, as part of the trade negotiations last year, the EU agreed to hand over one-quarter of its fishing rights in this area over the next five years.

Tim Harford, who presents *More or Less* on Radio 4, the podcast *Cautionary Tales*, and writes *The Undercover Economist* column for the *Financial Times*, is a conscientious fact-checker and he ran the numbers.

'Now the United Kingdom had half the fishing rights in UK waters – more than £800 million worth – and the rest of the EU had one-third, a bit under £600 million. You can only get the UK's quota increasing by two-thirds, as Penny Mordaunt claims, if the EU handed over all its rights, which isn't what was agreed.

'The UK actually gets one-quarter of one-third which means the UK's share of quota in UK waters rises from 50% to 58.3%. That is, by 8.3 percentage points, which is nowhere near the two-thirds increase Penny Mordaunt claimed. She could do better with the numbers. And Michael Gove, in an article in *The Scotsman*, is as slippery as an eel. He's floundering with the fishery figures, too.'

**Keith Richmond**

If you successfully complete this month's Prize Crossword please send the solution by post to the Editor, ASLEF Journal, 77 St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, EC1M 4NN (or take a photo on your mobile phone of the grid and send the image to [journal@aslef.org.uk](mailto:journal@aslef.org.uk)) by Friday 12 March

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