

ASLEF

JOURNAL

The magazine of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers & Firemen



OCTOBER 2021

Free to members

On the slow train from Midsomer Norton and Mumby Road – no churns, no porter, no cat on a seat



Chris Proctor: the railway taking visitors to the Crystal Palace in 1854; **Henry Russell** has a chance encounter at a siding in Siberia; and **Vicky Badham-May** on diversity on the railway

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Remnants of an Army by Elizabeth Thompson shows Dr William Brydon, one of the few to survive the retreat from Kabul, at the gates of Jalalabad in 1842

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- Cover: Norman Wilkinson

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GS Mick Whelan



'We need to grow our economy, and invest, not make people poorer'

Let's do the right thing – for future generations

I KEEP hearing that the post-summer school holiday figures for those travelling for work or leisure will be key to the shape of future services and we have already seen the scrapping of the proposed East Coast timetable for next year. I'm not sure this is the right process, given the end of furlough in October, which will determine how many people may be returning to work or, more sadly, not returning when this scheme ends. The other detriment to travel growth, and minimum necessary spending, will be the ending of the £20 uplift in universal credit.

I don't care what your politics are – putting 400,000 children into poverty is wrong and the impact on the economy will be demonstrable. At the same time, the proposal to end the triple lock on the poorest pensions in Europe – on a temporary or other basis – is also counterintuitive. When we add the scam on social care – which unions and employers have universally condemned – and an uplift in National Insurance that impacts on the young and the in-work poor, and may restrict employment, we have a problem. Dressing it up as money for the NHS, so it will not go to social care, when the NHS should have been funded better and directly anyway, doesn't help, either.

The rich will not be impacted and will, proportionately, pay less but ordinary people will still be losing their homes and their savings after having paid their taxes for this protection all their working lives. This will only exacerbate the existing generational inequality debate. There needs to be a greater debate on whether National Insurance is the right vehicle, going forward, and structural considerations on other income streams should be considered, along with all those companies that do not pay their fair share of tax but still get all the benefits of the workers who are being penalised.

It is time to grow the economy and invest in skills, infrastructure, housing, and construction. Not, as we have seen recently, existing rail projects being announced again and again and pre-existing upgrades of hospital wards being announced as new hospitals. The future of HS2 into Yorkshire is also under debate – so much for committing to the levelling up agenda.

We are in the middle of conference season. At the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party conference we have been campaigning hard for no cuts in rail and for further investment and we will be challenging the government over COP 26 on whether we, as a nation, are truly committed to doing the right thing, not just now but for future generations.

Changes in government guidance and advice have led the rail industry to seek to move away from training and other processes as they are now. We have not agreed a unilateral return to pre-covid working. In line with the ORR guidance everything has to be re-risk assessed and consulted or negotiated in the forums where it was originally dealt with in the various machineries. As always, we will see who the good and bad actors are in this process, which has to be better than ALARP – as low as reasonably practicable – which companies traditionally apply. We are still in the midst of a worldwide pandemic and, finally, have the standard for cleaning cabs and trains that we should have always enjoyed. There is no reason to alter this now – passengers and staff deserve to be able to travel, and work, in a good, clean, and safe environment.

We are, ourselves, beginning to open up and meet in person, with head office open once more and I look forward to getting back around the country. I have been to Leeds, Shrewsbury, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Aberdeen in recent weeks, with my diary filling up. I know the officers, executive committee, and I want to get back to seeing you all in the traditional manner that breeds the unity and solidarity that comes from the open dialogue of which this union can be proud.

Last month I wished my good friend and comrade Nick Whitehead a healthy and happy retirement. He reminded me that his dad was a driver, and his son is a train driver, so the tradition continues. And may I wish **Nigel Roebuck** well as he took over, officially, as DO4 on Monday 20 September. I also want to offer my personal congratulations to DO6 **Dicky Fisher** and DO5 **Nigel Gibson** on their re-election as district organisers and to AGS **Simon Weller** on his re-election to the general council of the Trades Union Congress, for the tenth year, and to the executive of the TUC as well. Please be safe colleagues....

**Yours fraternally,
Mick Whelan, general secretary, ASLEF**

Rumble in Brighton

A SLEF sent four delegates – GS Mick Whelan; EC president Dave Calfe; Kerry Cassidy, Plymouth branch; and Mark Prenter, Waterloo Nine Elms – to the Labour Party conference at the Brighton Centre from Saturday 25 to Wednesday 29 September, the first to be held, in person, and not online, since Keir Starmer was elected Labour Party leader in April last year.

Our GS became chair of TULO, the Trade Union & Labour Party Liaison Organisation, which now trades as Labour Unions, in 2016, and was elected to the Labour Party's NEC in 2017. He was much in demand during conference.

ASLEF is one of the smallest of the 12 trade unions which affiliate to the Labour Party. While Unison has 1,300,000 members; Unite 1,200,000; and the GMB 550,000, we have 21,218 (as well as 2,638 in our Retired Members' Section). But, in boxing parlance, we punch well above our weight, both industrially, where ASLEF has more muscle, and much more influence, than the other rail unions, and politically.



Mick Whelan chairs a session the last time conference was held, for real, not by Zoom, in 2019

Since Mick Whelan became general secretary, he and assistant general secretary Simon Weller have worked extremely hard within the Labour Party, and the Trades Union Congress, to re-establish the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers & Firemen as a voice to which people should listen.

At conference ASLEF argued for a new industrial strategy for a post-covid recovery. 'For decades we've heard politicians talk about the need for an industrial strategy,' said Mick. 'And for decades we have not had actions to follow these words. As we emerge from the covid-



19 pandemic, we must focus on two key issues: how we recover from the financial implications of the pandemic, and how that recovery supports our fight against climate change. We need a new strategy that deals with both.

'And the financial cost of this pandemic should be met not with more failed austerity measures, but by growing our economy in a way that not only doesn't exacerbate the climate crisis, but reduces carbon emissions. And rail transport is the key to that.'

Nigel re-elected unopposed in District 5 ...



Nigel Gibson has been re-elected unopposed as District 5 Organiser. He has spent his life in the railway industry, first as a train driver, and then as a trade union rep. Nigel was a local rep, branch chair, and served on company council, before being elected to ASLEF's eight-strong executive committee. He was first elected DO5 nine years ago, and is our lead officer for negotiations with c2c, MTR Crossrail, Freightliner Heavy Haul, Freightliner Intermodal, GB Railfreight, and Greater Anglia.

Nigel's making plans

'I am genuinely overwhelmed by the proportion of branch nominations I received and, with no other candidate putting themselves forward, proud to have been elected for a further term of office,' said Nigel. 'The role of DO can be very challenging but, nevertheless, is one I have enjoyed since first being elected in 2012. I look forward to working with everyone in the years ahead and would like to place on record my thanks to all the members, representatives, and branch officials for their continued support.'

... Dicky, too

Dicky Fisher has been re-elected unopposed as District 6 Organiser. Dicky, who was first elected to this position in 2011, when his predecessor, Mick Whelan, was elected general secretary, is the lead officer for the East Midlands Railway, West Midlands Railway, Eurostar, Arriva Rail London which runs London Overground, and Colas. He said: 'I would like to thank ASLEF members for their continued faith in me. We have always stood together, as members of this trade union, and that is going to be even more important as we face the challenges, from government and employers, coming down the track.'



Dicky: 'It's important we stand together'

Commuter's lament

"I don't want to go back to sitting on a train for hours every day..."



Wicked cartoon by Wilbur Dawbarn – 'tree hugger, idler, dharma bum' – who draws for *Private Eye*, *The Spectator*, and *Bog Eyed Books* – and who also drew the popular *Billy Whizz* strip for *The Beano* for a couple of years.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

Vaccine passports were on. Then off. Now they may be on again. One day. Delaying their introduction does have one interesting consequence. Large events in October with 1000s attending won't need them. Events like, say, the Tory Party conference. @bbcnickrobinson

Raab leaving the Foreign Office to spend more time on his sun lounger? @Kevin_Maguire

Boris Johnson has a really good reason not to fire Priti Patel. If he stands next to her, he looks better. @fleetstreetfox

GB News no longer seems to aspire to Andrew Neil's vision but, if a culture warring it must go, it could at least try to match the slick production values, desk-thumping talent, and appalling panache of Fox News. @spectator

Refused offer of a knighthood: Stephen Hawking, David Bowie, Danny Boyle, David Hockney. Accepted offer of a knighthood: Philip Green, John Redwood, Jimmy Savile, Robert Mugabe. @davemacladd

QUOTE...

'Having the vaccine is better than having the virus' – Professor Calum Semple Alder Hey Children's Hospital
...UNQUOTE

And I would ride 300 miles



DAVE Tyson – a former ASLEF president described by GS Mick Whelan as ‘a man who has spent a lifetime looking after other people’ – is cycling 300 miles in a bid to raise money for cancer research.

He says: ‘After having several brushes with that old devil cancer over the past five years and (hopefully) being on the road to full recovery, I have decided to raise funds for Cancer Research UK by taking on their Cycle 300 challenge (not all in one go).

‘I will be pedalling harder than ever because I want to raise money for life-saving research to help bring forward the day when all cancers can be cured. Every penny makes a huge difference so please show your support with a donation to my Just Giving page.’

Dave joined the railway industry in 1980, became a local rep at Norwich in 1987, and, later, was elected president of ASLEF’s executive committee. He was



Mick praised Dave’s ‘strength, integrity, and honesty’ at AAD this year; and our former president rewrites The Proclaimers’ greatest hit

also a trustee director of the Railways Pension Scheme for 20 years, stepping down earlier this year.

Cancer Research UK launched Cycle 300 in September to raise funds to fight the killer disease. ‘Half of us will get some form of cancer in our lifetime. You can play your part to help beat

cancer by cycling 300 miles this September.’ To make it easier, the charity adds: ‘You can cycle 300 miles – roughly the distance from London to Paris – in a way that suits you – indoors, outdoors, as a team, or solo. Over a weekend, throughout the month, or ten miles every day.’

QUOTE...

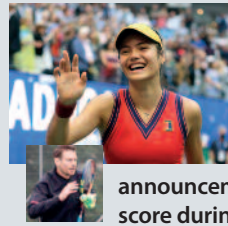
‘During a gold rush, don’t dig for gold, sell shovels’ – Mark Twain

...UNQUOTE

CONFERENCES & RALLIES

International Women’s Day is Tuesday 8 March 2022. **ASLEF’s annual assembly of delegates** will be held at the Highcliff Marriott Hotel in Bournemouth from Monday 16 to Friday 20 May. The **Trades Union Congress** from Sunday 4 to Wednesday 7 September. The **Labour Party conference** will be held from Saturday 17 to Tuesday 20 September.

Off the Rails



SIMON DAHDI, a Thameslink driver, and member of our Orpington branch, cheerfully admits that he was so keen to know how Britain’s teenage tennis sensation Emma Raducanu was doing that he made an

announcement asking passengers to tell him the score during her nail-biting third round match against Sorana Cirstea at Wimbledon in July. ‘I got to Blackfriars station, and she was winning 6-3, but I couldn’t drive with my phone switched on. I was like, “Wow! She’s got a real chance to get to the fourth round!” I couldn’t believe it! I switched off my phone again and then, after a few stops, I thought, “I need to know what’s going on,” so I made an announcement. I said, “If anyone is watching a bit of Wimbledon, there’s a girl called Emma Raducanu, who’s a great player from Bromley, and if you can tell me what the score is, that would be great.’ And so, at different stops, people were coming up to the front of the train and telling me the score.’ And, as he drove into Bickley, one passenger told him Emma had won. ‘I was so happy.’ Emma lost her next match, but her potential has always been clear to Simon, 41, who is a part-time talent scout for the Lawn Tennis Association. He first spotted her ability ten years ago, at the Parklangley Club in Beckenham, Kent, when he tipped her as a star of the future. ‘It was obvious how talented she was.’



CHARLIE WATTS, in private, preferred jazz to rock’n’roll but he played a blinder with the Glimmer Twins, Mick’n’Keef, for more than fifty years. As Chris Longley reminded us in the September edition of the *Journal*,

Charlie dryly summed up – on *Desert Island Discs* – his lengthy career playing drums with the Rolling Stones as ‘five years of playing, 40 years of hanging around.’ Michael Cronin, who designs this *Journal*, adds, ‘Yeah, he was happier playing in Ronnie Scott’s. Mick phoned Charlie in the middle of the night, way back in 1984, when they were staying at an hotel in Amsterdam, after he’d had a few, and said, petulantly, “Where are you? You’re my drummer.” Twenty minutes later Charlie appeared at his door, immaculately attired in a Savile Row suit, clean shaven, and wearing cologne. “Never call me your drummer again,” he said. “You’re my singer,” and promptly decked him. He lived a few roads from me in Neasden.’



CAITLIN MORAN was on sparkling form in her column in *The Times*: ‘It’s nice to have one thing you can be 100% cynical about, safe in the knowledge you will never, ever, be “pleasantly surprised”. Virgin has just announced plans for its Virgin Hyperloop.

Apparently its innovative “passenger pods” will travel at 670mph, using “levitation engines” ten times more efficient than the fastest maglev trains, and travel will be, like, instantly “revolutionised”. Now I can’t be the only person who is, let’s say, “doubting” of Virgin as a transport provider. How is it going to shoot people along in levitation engines at 670mph when Virgin Trains couldn’t go above 20mph without the lavatory doors jamming?’

500 CLUB: Anthony Shelley, with number 187, won the September draw, scooping the Retired Members’ Section jackpot of £512.

The train slid towards the station showing no sign of stopping. Ever

TONY WOOD, a train driver for 25 years, and a member of ASLEF for all that time, is also an author and passionate skateboarder. 'I've been writing short pieces about a semi-fictional character simply called Driver and wondered if there was space in the *Journal* for a little light relief?' There is...

DRIVER stared in horror as the metal beast's speedometer fluctuated wildly before his wide eyes. 100mph, 30mph, 47mph. It bounced around like a fat man on a bungee before settling at zero. The beast roared on into the damp night but its mind thought it to be still. Driver felt his toes curl and the nails, like eagle's talons, tear through his socks and into the very soles of his, predictably uncomfortable, brogues. 'Shit', he muttered as he pondered his next step. Should he risk the wrath of control and plunge the crazed metal tube into emergency?

He knew it would make no real difference but the onboard spy capsule would demand it be done. He eased back the control lever and watched the speedo flounce menacingly back to 97mph. 'Fuck', he screamed internally. He made a snap decision and, risking certain

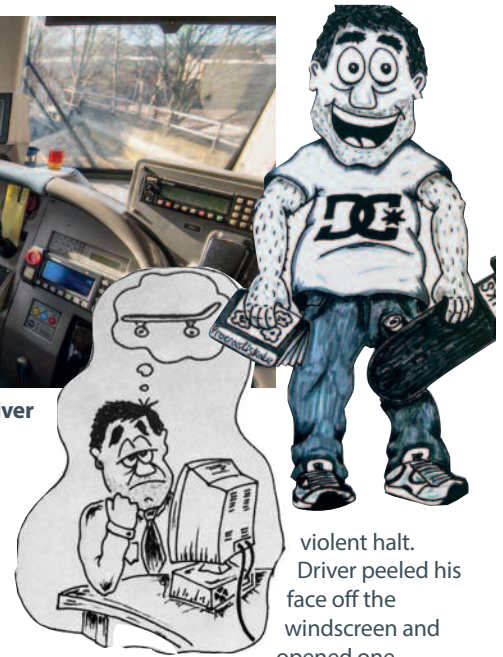


Tony Wood dreams up another adventure for Driver

flattening of the wheels, but just not caring, he hammered the brake into emergency. The speedo plunged to zero and the ominous silence of confused train filled the night.

Suddenly the cab exploded with light as the onboard computer woke Sandy up and her beautiful, angelic white light shone out. The sander spat a dribble of useless sandy-type crap on to the rails as the wheels thundered over it. 'Please stop, you evil metallic bastard', wished Driver. Which came out as 'Oh God oh God oh God I'm already on a plan'. For what seemed like hours the train slid silently towards the station showing no sign of stopping. Ever.

Suddenly the big metal git shuddered. Driver lurched forwards, his claws now out of the bottom of his shoes and ripping into the cab's dirty floor and his knuckles white with the effort of gripping the controller. The train shuddered into the station and jerked to a



violent halt. Driver peeled his face off the windscreen and opened one

fearful eye. He was at the mirror! 'Thank Christ for that' he exhaled as Punter tapped his watch just outside the cab door. Driver slid the window open and, before he could speak, Punter was on him. 'Why are these trains always so late?' he whined. Driver glanced at his co-pilot. Sheila confirmed that they were 1 minute 10 seconds late. Driver stared into Punter's eyes and slowly slid the window shut.

● *Procrastiskate* by Tony Wood (Stour Valley Publishing, £7.99) is available from www.shookbop.com

Farewell to George, John and the Sporty

Perth branch resumed live branch meetings again in September, after our covid-enforced break. It was good to be back in the branch room, even though it has become considerably more dilapidated since we were last there, necessitating a debate on where we should hold branch meetings in future. We're sad to be leaving the Sporty after so many years, but it's no longer a viable option.

District 2 Organiser Kevin Lindsay was invited along and gave us a doom-laden report on the current state of industrial relations, which really shouldn't have come as a surprise to anyone who has been paying attention recently. Kevin fielded questions on a variety of topics and then presented some long-service badges.

The meeting doubled up as a farewell drink for branch members George Pitcaithly and John Biscoe who are both transferring to Nottingham, for different reasons. We wish



Kevin's in town – St John's Toun in Perthshire

George and John all the best for the future. Attendance was definitely impacted by the ongoing ScotRail conductors' strike, which meant a lot of out-of-town members were unable to attend, although a good evening was had by all who managed to make it along.


Grant Murchie Perth 134 branch secretary




35 UP: Nick Ainley receives his 35 year badge from Knottingley 113 branch secretary Tony Kahler. Congratulations Nick!



SIMON RE-ELECTED: ASLEF's assistant general secretary Simon Weller (left) was re-elected to the general council of the TUC – for the tenth consecutive year – at this year's virtual congress on Monday 13 September. 'I'm very proud to have been re-elected,' said Simon. 'It's good for a small craft union like ASLEF to have a seat – and a voice – at the table on behalf of our members.'



ASLEF BAME Fundraiser Quiz Night



Date: Wednesday 13th October
Time: 18:00
Location: Prince of Wales Pub, Elephant & Castle

Come along and join us for an evening of fun and laughter, £5 per player, 5 players per team max. £100 prize for the winner. To register your teams please contact Trevor on 07802437670

All proceeds will go to the POWAA.

ASLEF calls on Sturgeon to reject ScotRail plans to axe 300 services each day

ASLEF, the train drivers' union, and three other trade unions which represent other workers on Scotland's rail network – the RMT, TSSA, and Unite – have called on First Minister Nicola Sturgeon and her SNP government to step up to the plate and put the people of Scotland – passengers as well as staff – first and ensure that train services are not slashed.

We wrote to Nicola Sturgeon on Monday 13 September asking her to meet us at Bute House on Wednesday 22 September when we would be demonstrating, outside, on World Car-Free Day, to discuss the future of rail services in Scotland.

Kevin Lindsay, ASLEF's organiser in Scotland, said: 'We want to see a modern, clean, green, affordable, and reliable train service that meets the needs of the people, the communities, and the businesses we serve.'

'We fear that Abellio ScotRail is set to slash services – which will affect passengers and



DO2 Kevin Lindsay wants Nicola Sturgeon to do the right thing for passengers, businesses, and staff



businesses throughout this country – and cut jobs, which will affect our members.

'Abellio ScotRail appears, perversely, to want the railway to contract and decline rather than to expand and grow. Conversely, ASLEF and the other rail unions want the railway to thrive to help our economy succeed.'

Kevin added: 'Rail is the clean, green transport solution of the future. It would be ironic if, in the year that this country hosts COP26, in November, Abellio ScotRail is allowed to drive people – and freight – off our

railway and back onto the roads.'

The letter, signed by Kevin, Michael Hogg of the RMT, Gary Kelly of the TSSA, and Pat McIlvogue of Unite, called on the First Minister to reject ScotRail's plans to cut 300 services a day; commit to investing in an affordable, clean, green, reliable and modern railway that is publicly-owned, accountable, and with trade union reps on the board of any new organisation running Scotland's railway; ensure jobs are retained, services improved, and outsourcing ended; and to 'intervene to end the appalling attitude of Abellio ScotRail to industrial relations'.

QUOTE...

'The present legal system lets bosses shirk responsibilities to staff by downgrading their status. A new bill from John Hendy QC fights that injustice by creating a single 'worker' category – with proper rights for all' –
Andy McDonald Shadow Secretary of State for Employment Rights

...UNQUOTE

Crossrail to start next year

Crossrail's chief executive says the project is now 'on target' to open next year. Mark Wild hopes the central section will start running in 'the first half of next year, with full completion by May 2023'. Work began on the mammoth infrastructure project in May 2009 – it was meant to be finished by the spring of 2019 – but that date has been put back several times.

'We commenced trial running and knew this phase would take several months as we shake down this immense digital, electrical, and mechanical system. To get all the bugs out of it, the operators and maintainers familiar with their policies, and get used to

operating the system.

'It is going well, we are running up to 12 trains an hour, and will drop the customer quality software for the train control system that will support trial operations – the dress rehearsal before we enter revenue service – this autumn. The aim is to be in trial operations by the end of the year and we are very much on target to open this railway in the first half of 2022.'

He added: 'When we open the Elizabeth line between Paddington and Abbey Wood it is very much just the start of the operational journey. We have a new plan to combine trains from



The much-delayed Elizabeth line is (almost and at last) ready to rock

the west and east into the central section – from Heathrow and Reading in the west and from Shenfield in the east – to combine them in a single section which will follow the opening of the Elizabeth line.

'The earliest we can do that is autumn next year. We hope to complete the railway by May 2023 with the final tweaking of the timetable service. At that point the Elizabeth line will be delivered.'

In Flanders fields the poppies blow between the crosses, row on row

Our 2021 poppy badge, honouring those who lost their lives on active service, is available in two versions: a traditional red poppy, worn since 1921 to commemorate those who died in the Great War, and a white pacifist poppy, first made by the Co-operative Women's Guild in 1933 and then by the Peace Pledge Union. £6 each (inc p&p) with all proceeds from the red badges going to the Royal British Legion and from the white badges to Veterans for Peace.

Order through our online shop, or email info@aslef.org.uk specifying which poppy (and how many) you want. Badges will be sent once payment is made.



This year's badges

The RMS forum and AGM

We want to thank all those who applied to attend the Retired Members' Section autumn forum at Scalby from 5 to 7 November. We regret that in the light of the increase in covid infection rates, the RMS committee has taken the difficult decision not to go ahead with the forum this year. And the RMS AGM scheduled for 6 October in Sheffield will no longer take place as a physical meeting but will, instead, be held online via Zoom. If you would like to take part in our virtual meeting you will need to re-register by emailing your interest to equalities@aslef.org.uk before 1 October. An email, with a link to join the meeting, will be sent to all attendees on 3 October.

As a former freight driver I know how efficiently rail moves goods around the UK

A SLEF took two motions to the 153rd annual Trades Union Congress which was held, virtually and online last month, from Sunday 12 to Tuesday 14 September. One was on rail, climate, and the post-pandemic recovery; the other about using public procurement to create, and protect, high quality jobs here in Britain.

Our delegates were GS Mick Whelan, AGS Simon Weller, EC vice-president Andy Hudd, Bristol branch secretary Bernard Kennedy, and Lesley Atkins-Smith.

Bernard spoke on Monday: 'Congress, we all know the climate emergency is the biggest crisis facing us for a generation. If we don't act now, the consequences will be far reaching, and irreversible. A crisis this size requires big, and varied, solutions. This composite motion covers several of the different elements of a "just transition" to ensure that we approach the climate problem from many angles to have maximum impact. It's vital that we take a broad approach and include a genuine industrial strategy with workers and trade unionists at its heart.'

'One of the best levers governments have at their disposal is public procurement. Organisations from the NHS to local councils buy goods and services every day. We should be pursuing a procurement policy, at every level, which values British manufacturing, high environmental standards, and shorter supply chains.'

'Rail freight is a vital part of an integrated network'

'As a former freight train driver – I now drive passenger trains – I know how efficiently rail can move goods around this country. We saw, in the pandemic, the importance of our freight network. Operators, industry and drivers – my colleagues – stepped up. Timetables were increased, trains were lengthened, and we made sure that medical supplies, food, and other important goods



got where they were needed.

'Rail freight has very low carbon emissions and, if the government invests in full electrification of the railway, it will be close to zero. Rail freight is a vital part of an integrated network to deliver goods right across the UK, to construction sites, and to the centre of urban areas.'

'A just transition, though, means more than just using the right kind of transport and procurement. People must be at the heart. A government genuinely committed to tackling climate change would value the contribution of every worker, in every community, across our country. It would be working to ensure that high quality jobs are created right across the UK.'

'Whether that's in sustainable transport, new energy industries, UK based manufacturing, or any of the other growth areas we need to fight the climate crisis, a true industrial strategy would be prioritising these opportunities.'

'Congress, it's time for workers and trade unionists to take the lead, from fighting for sustainability in our workplaces to lobbying governments to take action, the time is now. Please, join the fight for a just transition.'

On Monday afternoon Lesley spoke about cuts in services, climate change, and a post-pandemic recovery: 'Over the last 18 months, the world has had to deal with a once in a century event. A pandemic that led to more than four and a half million deaths, worldwide, and caused a health and financial crisis for hundreds of millions of people.'

'We all hope, though we must

never take it for granted, that we are through the worst of the covid-19 pandemic. But we are still in an urgent and deadly climate crisis. Lots of things stopped due to covid-19; climate change is, sadly, not one of them.'

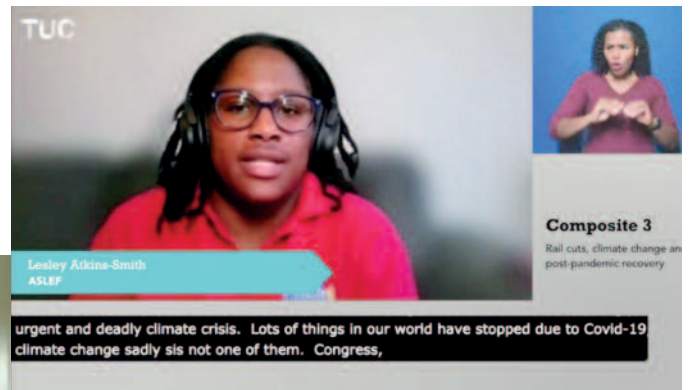
'The pandemic has huge financial implications for working people, and the UK as a whole. The cost to the UK will be hundreds of billions of pounds. But, as we learned the hard way following the 2008 financial crisis, you cannot cut your way out of national debt. We need to invest. To grow our economy. Austerity is a political decision. And one that fails by all measures.'

'Two of the biggest questions of our times'

'So we face two of the biggest questions of our times: how do we recover from the pandemic and cut carbon emissions? The answer is quite clear. Invest in green infrastructure. Because now is not the time to make cuts. It is the time to rebuild.'

'Our railway has been affected hugely by the pandemic. Many people who, normally, commuted were asked to work from home. Lockdown killed leisure travel. Our railway became a tool for transporting key workers and essential goods around the country. I am proud that, as ASLEF members, we did our bit to make sure the country could get through difficult times. But, following the support our industry got over the past 18 months from government, they are now looking to claw back the cost.'

'They want to cut £2 billion



Bernard and Lesley (admittedly, not the most flattering of photographs) Zoom into Congress: 'It's time for workers and trade unionists to take the lead'

from our industry with job losses of up to 20,000. Services will be cut and reliability compromised. Whilst the future of how we work remains up in the air, before the pandemic our railway was already over capacity. Over time, and we hope it's sooner rather than later, numbers will return.

'People will always want to travel. And, when they do, we have to be able to offer them the greenest form of public transport to achieve our country's carbon emissions targets. If the train is not available, people will use their cars or take aeroplanes. We cannot allow them to be forced into that decision.'

'And it's not just passengers. We must invest and support our rail freight industry which results in 76% fewer emissions than the equivalent road journey.'

'It's very quick – and very easy – to cut rail capacity. But it's extremely difficult – and extremely expensive – to rebuild. We cannot mothball parts of our network which will play an important role in our future recovery and be an essential tool in our continuing fight against climate change.'

'And it makes no economic sense. Rail infrastructure has one of the biggest multipliers of any investment. So, congress, as the government tries to mask huge cuts under its restructuring of the railway we must remain vocal. We must grow our economy out of debt. We must build our railway up, not contract it down. And we must campaign to get people and goods onto our railway to support our efforts to cut harmful carbon emissions.'

Rail freight has a key role to play in a just transition



Sharon Graham
Unite

UNIONS BUILDING
DIGNITY AT WORK

TUC CONGRESS 2021

BERNARD KENNEDY, Bristol branch secretary, offers a delegate's view of this year's TUC conference



IT WAS an honour and a pleasure to represent ASLEF at the 153rd Trades Union Congress which was held on the Zoom platform. Other members of the delegation included Lesley Atkins-Smith, of King's Cross branch, along with the general secretary, the assistant general secretary, and the EC vice-president.

The conference was opened at 14.00 on Sunday 12 September by the TUC president Gail Cartmail, assistant general secretary of Unite, who chaired throughout.

I was asked to speak on a just transition, composite 02, the climate emergency, defending jobs and the role rail freight has to play in moving more goods efficiently around the country.

‘Opposed but then adopted’

The composite motion covered several different elements of what we can call a ‘just transition’. It’s all about ensuring that we approach the climate emergency crisis from many angles at once to have the maximum impact. I used my experience as a freight train driver and company council rep with EWS and DB to illustrate how, not only efficiently, but with low carbon emissions, rail freight can move goods around the country.

The composite was opposed but was then adopted following a card vote.

My fellow delegate, Sister Lesley Atkins-Smith, proposed composite 13 on rail cuts, climate change, and a post-pandemic recovery. Lesley spoke convincingly on the government’s intended cuts, the climate change crisis, and the financial cost of the pandemic. She called for more rail investment, not cuts, and asked for attention to be drawn to government inconsistencies on rail



transportation and climate change.

She argued for investment in low carbon transport, to ensure a future green economy, and a campaign for a safe return of passengers to public transport. The composite was adopted unopposed.

‘Fire and rehire is one of the scandals of our age’

The most impressive speech at this year’s TUC conference was delivered by Sharon Graham, the newly-elected general secretary of Unite. She moved composite 07. End fire and rehire; redundancy rights now! She said: ‘Fire and rehire is an abhorrence. It is a legal mechanism used by bad bosses to slash labour costs under cover of the global pandemic. It is one of the scandals of our age.’

Sharon went on to give examples of her members’ experiences at BA, Go North West, Synergy LMS, and British Gas. Unite has had much success in beating or getting these companies to back down from these archaic, and Victorian, practices. It was refreshing to hear a new general secretary leading from the front and being bold in opposing these draconian working practices.

Frances O’Grady, the TUC general secretary, addressed conference on Monday 13 September. She covered a wide variety of topics including low paid workers, taxing wealth to fund social care, how union membership is on the increase, and Uber

CONGRESS 2021

Sharon Graham of Unite and Frances O’Grady of the TUC Zoom into Congress 21

union recognition. She also noted how Britain’s two largest trade unions – Unison and Unite – are now both led by women. Furlough, she said, which has saved so many jobs, and the pay packets of so many workers, was forged in the engine room of the trade union movement. Now it was time to give key workers the pay rise they deserve. And time, she added, to ban zero hour contracts and outlaw fire and rehire.

Our assistant general secretary, Simon Weller, spoke on the last morning, Tuesday 14 September. He gave an eloquent contribution when seconding the emergency motion 1 on National Insurance – fair funding for frontline services. He stated clearly that the proposed hike in National Insurance contributions was regressive, cynical, and unfair!

‘Well done Khalid!’

I would like to congratulate Brother Khalid Rana of Gidea Park branch who, in the congress awards, received a special commendation for health & safety work during the pandemic. Well done Khalid!

Finally, I want to say how very much I enjoyed attending the TUC 2021 conference and representing ASLEF. It was, indeed, an honour and a privilege. My only regret was that it was online, on the Zoom platform, and not live – because it is clear now, if it wasn’t before, that meetings and conferences held in person, face to face, are so much better than conferences and meetings held online – as this will be my last chance to attend a Trades Union Congress before I retire next year. I would like to thank the other members of the ASLEF delegation, especially Dave Gould from ASLEF head office, for all the help and support they gave me both before and during conference.

If you believe it then you can achieve it...

MTR Elizabeth line drivers VICKY BADHAM-MAY and JUANITA GEORGE, who are both members of Paddington branch, and work out of Old Oak Common depot, reflect on diversity in the driving grade

ON MONDAY 9 August, Juanita and I were fortunate enough to meet Rachel Reeves, Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Marsha de Cordova, Shadow Secretary of State for Women & Equalities, who have both made efforts to promote diversity and inclusion for all. We also met Heidi Alexander, who is Deputy Mayor of London for Transport.

This was a wonderful opportunity to discuss not only the differences in driving our state of the art trains on conventionally signalled track against our automated tunnel section, but also our experiences within the industry and the rigorous recruitment process in which we were successful.

ASLEF has done a lot in this area to assist, finding ways to recruit people from all backgrounds and areas of society. Juanita and I are both train drivers in what was once considered a predominantly male role.

The MTR Elizabeth line operates services between Reading and Shenfield, which covers a very diverse area. We believe it is essential that the operators and customer service



Mick, Vicky, Rachel, Marsha, and Juanita at Woolwich station (top); Juanita, Marsha, Rachel, Heidi, and Vicky (above); Juanita and Vicky make their points to Rachel (above right); Vicky, Marsha, and Juanita

agents employed represent this diversity. I've always believed that we are all equal and can benefit from such diversity in both the workplace and society. I have always been encouraged to try things. As the saying goes, 'If you can believe it, you can achieve it.'

When I was inducted as a driver, the statistics showed that for every 250 applicants, only one person was successful. Juanita and I feel both fortunate and proud to be train drivers. It allows us the opportunity to show our children that you can be successful with hard work, and that we can provide a future for them knowing that our jobs are secure. My son left junior school this year and, when I finally read his yearbook, it brought a tear to my eye. The section on 'What I want to be when I grow up' showed him holding up a sign saying 'train driver', something he had never told me before. I make my son proud doing my job, and that's a feeling that's better than

anything else in my world.

I am probably an idealist, but I would love to see more diversity within my role, within society. We



are all capable of change and of achieving the impossible if only we try. I would encourage anyone to apply for that dream job; that's the first step to a better future.

A more inclusive workforce

RACHEL Reeves and Marsha de Cordova praised the work being done to create a more diverse, representative, and inclusive workforce – and working environment – after meeting Vicky and Juanita.

ASLEF has been working with Transport for London and MTR to negotiate a new form of management contract to recruit train drivers from all backgrounds for the new Elizabeth line – and the result is one of the most diverse workforces in the UK transport sector.

'As we look towards our economic recovery, we must pool all the talents and drive of everyone in our workforce – and that means ensuring those workforces are representative and that quality jobs are available for all,' said Rachel. 'Labour has a plan to buy, make, and sell more in Britain, helping us to get our economy firing on all cylinders and providing the secure and good jobs all deserve.'

Marsha said: 'It is brilliant to see MTR and TfL taking steps to improve representation and leadership of women and black, Asian, and ethnic minority people, who have suffered the worst economic consequences of the crisis. We have seen how the pandemic has supercharged some of the worst inequalities in our country and, as we cautiously emerge from restrictions this summer, it's time for action to make Britain the best place to work for everyone, where equality is front and centre.'

Train driving – a very good skilled job that should be open to everyone

GSMICK Whelan said: 'ASLEF is proud to be a union that works hard on equality and diversity. We've organised over many years to put in place policies that mean the workplace is a welcoming space to both recruit and retain a diverse group of drivers.'

'Throughout the pandemic, train drivers, as

key workers, have been at work – enabling other key workers to travel, and moving freight supplies such as medical equipment and food – and, as we recover from the pandemic, public transport will continue to play a vital role in both the economic recovery and tackling the climate crisis.

'Train driving is a high

quality job and, as a union, we will be continuing our work with the MTR Elizabeth line, and across the industry, to ensure that it's a job accessible to everyone in our community, regardless of background, gender or any other characteristic.'

Claire Metcalfe, deputy people and culture director at MTR, added: 'The MTR

Elizabeth line is a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion. As a contemporary entrant into the rail industry, we have been proud to champion diversity from an early stage, with our initial operations seeing double the number of female drivers compared with the industry average.

'From the outset, we

have recruited colleagues using an inclusivity mindset. Having this mindset ensures we employ people who reflect the make-up of the city in which we operate.

'We are proud to work with our stakeholders, including MPs from all sides, to see a better connected London, and to promote diversity within our workforce.'

And the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls



JEN THORNTON, policy researcher and digital communications adviser at head office, takes a Hidden London tour on the Kingsway Tramway Subway

THE London Transport Museum, which moved from Syon Park to Covent Garden in 1980, has been running its Hidden London tours for several years. The chance to rediscover the disused Underground stations at Aldwych and Charing Cross – as well as going behind the scenes at working stations – and the Down Street tunnels, between Hyde Park Corner and Green Park, where Winston Churchill took refuge during the Blitz, have proved extremely popular.

The museum's newest tour is the Kingsway Tramway Subway, launched this summer, which takes visitors through the unusual Grade II listed tram tunnel via its remaining entrance in Holborn.

‘A tram link north and south of the Thames’

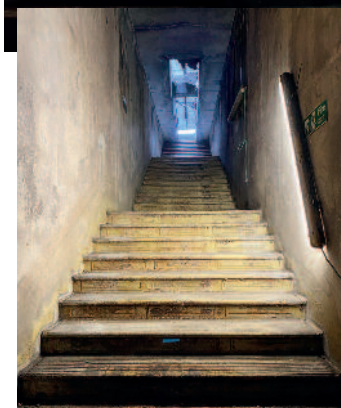
Trams began operating in London in the 1860s, with routes both north and south of the river. The Kingsway Tramway Subway was constructed as part of a slum clearance project between 1902 and 1905, providing a tram link between the north and south of the Thames, and changing what is now Southampton Row into a wide tree-lined boulevard.

After running for two decades, it was decided, in the late 1920s, that, in order to remain viable, the tunnel should be expanded to accommodate double-decker trams. So in 1930 the subway was closed, a new entrance constructed near the south side of Waterloo Bridge, and, a year later, reopened with routes running between Hackney and Wandsworth, Highbury to Waterloo, and Archway to Kennington.

The tour is hosted by enthusiastic and informative guides, and follows a route through the tunnel with pauses to point out and observe particular features. These include the platforms of the former (underground) Holborn tram station and the original steel roof, complete with a maker's mark (Braithwaite & Kirk of West Bromwich).

While the tracks themselves are now gone the track beds remain, along with the bed for the electrical conduit which provided power to the trams.

The tour takes visitors to part of the tunnel immediately underneath Southampton Row and into the section that formed the underground Holborn tram station. The platforms remain, along with stairs to the surface, which are grilled at street level, but still



Hello darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk to you again: rediscovering the tramway under Kingsway

allow daylight light in.

During the subway's operational years there was a second underground station at Aldwych but that part of the tunnel is no longer accessible as the Strand underpass, a road tunnel built in the 1960s between Waterloo Bridge and Kingsway, now sits within the former tramway. A solid wall separating the two now forms the end of the tour route.

‘The floor was dropped and the roof was raised’

Throughout the tunnel there is evidence of the changes made over the years, including sections where the floor was dropped, and where the roof was raised, to allow for taller trams in the 1930-31 refurbishment. There are plenty of surviving elements to see, including a set of points, advertising sites along the station platform, and original brickwork features.

The tour guides are well prepared with stories of life on the trams, from leaves clogging up the conduit, to flooding and serious bomb damage during the Second World War. They also explained that tram drivers had good health and safety protocols, better terms and conditions, and higher wages than lots of comparable workers at the time. It will be no surprise to readers of the *Journal* that this high-quality employment was due to drivers being fully unionised through the T&G.

The days of the subway, though, drew to a close after the war. Between 1946 and 1952 trams were gradually withdrawn from service in the capital in favour of diesel buses. The last trams ran through the subway in April 1952 after which the tracks were taken up and removed.

After its closure the tunnel had a number of

uses, from giant storage unit to film set to site-specific artwork. Remnants of its film appearances are still in the tunnel, including the roundel sign for an imaginary Union Street station. The tunnel also played the role of a secret bunker under the Thames in the 1998 film *The Avengers*.

The London Borough of Camden (the tunnel's current owner) continues to store masonry and street furniture in the tunnel so through the tour modern bins and street signs can be seen sitting in alcoves alongside original 1900s features.

‘The tunnel became a film set’

In 2012, during the construction of Crossrail, engineers dug a large shaft to stabilise the ground for tunnel-boring equipment, but due to its listed status there is barely any trace as Crossrail was required to restore the tunnel floor to its former condition.

Being able to access closed underground locations like the Kingsway Tramway Subway is a wonderful opportunity to find out more about the history of transport in London, and it's no surprise that these tours are so popular. Transport is a vital part of social history and we can learn a lot from hearing stories of how people travelled a hundred years ago.

The London Transport Museum's Hidden London tours continue in person. During the pandemic, the museum launched online versions of its tours. Information about both in-person and online tours is available at www.ltmuseum.co.uk/hidden-london

Cathedral in the dark



BERNARD RICHARDS, who was born and brought up at Dudley in the heart of the Black Country, is an emeritus fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, where he was, for many years, a tutorial fellow in English Language & Literature. In the August edition of the *Journal* he reminded us how the railway – which ushered in a new industrial age of iron and steam – was treated in Victorian poetry and prose. Here he takes us on a literary journey into the 20th century...



THERE is an evocative and mysterious painting from 1890: *The Passing Train* by Marianne Stokes (1855-1927). A countrywoman holds a bundle of reeds and responds, thoughtfully, to the smoke of an unseen locomotive. The 20th century is just around the corner and, with it, for a decade or two, the dominance of the railway.

The old agricultural world would become increasingly marginalised. By 1900 the railways were firmly established with 22,000 miles of track, ten times more than there had been in 1844 when JMW Turner painted *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, and Bradshaw was by now a hefty volume. The railways were not only impressive phenomena to move people and goods around the country but were interwoven into the collective psychology. As time went on that collective psychology was seduced by the convenience and glamour of the motor car, and the railways became less dominant, but the railways continued to hold a place in the collective psyche.

‘Murder on the Orient Express represents British society in microcosmic form’

This manifested itself in our literature, so that railway station and railway carriage became the settings for all kinds of dramas and all kinds of poetic reflections. The most famous of these is Agatha Christie’s whodunnit *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) – which does not actually take place in Britain, but which represents British society in microcosmic form. Another novel celebrating this line is Graham Greene’s thriller *Stamboul Train* (1932). Even a novelist as abstract and effete as Henry James cannot avoid train travel and, in the most effete novel of all, *The Golden Bowl*, Charlotte Verver takes charge of the timetable to facilitate an affair, because she doesn’t trust the Italian Prince to manage it: ‘Ah my dear, I’ve seen you with Bradshaw! It takes Anglo-Saxon blood.’

‘Tristram and Iseult were not a more suitable theme for poetry than Paddington railway station’

As for poets, while the railways held a fascination, there was a feeling that they belonged to the modern – and unpoetic – world, and it was slightly shocking for poetry to deal with the railways as a subject. In 1936 WB Yeats gave a BBC lecture on modern poetry and referred, somewhat ruefully, to TS Eliot:

‘In the third year of the war came the most



revolutionary man in poetry during my lifetime, though his revolution was stylistic alone – TS Eliot published his first book. No romantic word or sound, nothing reminiscent, nothing in the least like the painting of Ricketts could be permitted henceforth. Poetry must resemble prose, and both must accept the vocabulary of their time; nor must there be any special subject matter. Tristram and Iseult were not a more suitable theme than Paddington railway station. The past had deceived us: let us accept the worthless present.’

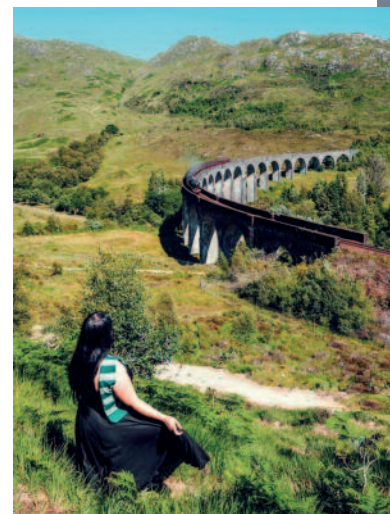
The most famous 20th century poetic embodiment of the train is WH Auden’s *Night Mail*, made into a superb documentary in 1936, and in which, for the most part, the images match the words – although I should like to have seen the jug in the cottage shaken by the vibration of the passing train.

Incidentally, it’s very sad that John Grierson was urged to drop the line, ‘Ever on the alert, this worker lubricates his tool with soap.’ It’s a lost world, of course: no one is writing letters any more or sending postal orders.

You can get a sense of the dominance of the train in the collective imagination by the fact that even such a nature lover as DH Lawrence finds the many train journeys he made, sometimes in the company of a lover, inspirational. This is *Kisses in the Train*:

*I saw the Midlands
Revolve through her hair;
The field of autumn
Stretching bare,
And sheep on the pasture
Tossed back in a scare.*

A more mysterious poem is *Excursion Train* in which lovers travelling on ‘the shot arrow’ of the train see ‘red sparks whirl and flee’ past the window. A different experience is *Tommies in the*



Train which imagines soldiers being hurled like a thunderbolt into the Great War. This probably builds on memories of his train journey from Penzance to Bodmin to be conscripted, written up in thinly disguised autobiography in the Nightmare chapter of *Kangaroo* where, in one carriage, ‘the men sang all the time, or howled like dogs in the night’:

*I’ll be your sweetheart, if you will be mine,
All my life I’ll be you-o-o-ur Valentine.
Bluebells I’ll gather, take them and be true,
When I’m a man, my plan will be to marry you.*

Wailing down the lost corridors of hell, surely, those ghastly, melancholy, notes, ‘All my li-i-i-ife, I’ll be you-o-o-ur Valentine.’

There is a memorable anti-image in chapter 9 of *Women in Love*, when Gerald Crich forces his recalcitrant mare to face up to a locomotive at a level crossing, dramatizing the battle between the mechanical and the organic world. It’s witnessed by Gudrun and Ursula Brangwen. It is a long and powerful passage, and needs to be read in its entirety. Here is a taste of it:

‘Gudrun was looking at him with black-dilated, spellbound eyes. But he sat glistening and obstinate, forcing the wheeling mare, which spun and swerved like a wind, and yet could not get out of the grasp of his will, nor escape from the mad clamour of terror that resounded through her, as the trucks thumped slowly, heavily, horrifying, one after the other, one pursuing the other, over the rails of the crossing.

‘The locomotive, as if wanting to see what could be done, put on the brakes, and back came the trucks rebounding on the iron buffers, striking like horrible cymbals, clashing nearer and nearer in frightful strident concussions. The mare opened her mouth and rose slowly, as if



The Passing Train by Marianne Stokes; Nigel Gresley's magnificent Mallard at the National Railway Museum in York; the Evening Star; Night Mail inspired by the celebrated poem by WH Auden; a Harry Potter fan at the Glenfinnan viaduct

IGHT MAIL

lifted upon a wind of terror. Then suddenly her fore feet struck out, as she convulsed herself utterly away from the horror. Back she went, and the two girls clung to each other, feeling she must fall backwards on top of him.

'But he leaned forward, his face shining with fixed amusement, and at last he brought her down, sank her down, and was bearing her back to the mark. But as strong as the pressure of his compulsion was the repulsion of her utter terror, throwing her back away from the railway, so that she spun round and round, on two legs, as if she were in the centre of some whirlwind. It made Gudrun faint with poignant dizziness, which seemed to penetrate to her heart.'

‘There is a tremendous boob in one of the film versions of the novel’

In addition to representing a horrid collision between the natural world and the mechanical, it represents the male drive towards sexual mastery. Incidentally, there is a tremendous boob in one of the film versions of the novel when the level crossing is an automated one!

The most famous and evocative poem is Edward Thomas's *Adlestrop* – you have to remember, though, that this depends on the train being stationary. This was sufficiently far back in time as to be pre-diesel, and pre-electric, so that:

*The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop – only the name*

The train in the first half of the 20th century was dominated by steam, and steam locomotives were being built even after the Second World War. The last (not counting replicas) was the *Evening Star*, built at Swindon

in March 1960.

These locomotives were impressive and beautiful objects, and segued from Victorian engineering into streamlining in the 1930s when Sir Nigel Gresley got his hands on the design for the A4 class. In the retrospective dreaming of people now the *Mallard imaginaire* is part of their internal fantasy life.

The great thing about steam locomotives was that they came with a powerful sense of rhythm – which insinuates itself into Auden's *Night Mail*. One of the really sad features about the rewrite, in 1988, with Tom Courtenay's voice-over, is that in the diesel and electric that pounding rhythm is no longer possible with a Class 442 Wessex Electrics:

*Passing the shunter intent on its toil,
Moving the coke and the coal and the oil.
Girders for bridges, plastic for fridges.
Bricks for the site are required by tonight.
Grimy and grey is the engine's reflection,
Down to the docks for the metal collection.
Passenger trains full of commuters,
Bound for the office to work in computers.
The teacher, the doctor, the actor in farce,
The typist, the banker, the judge in first class.
Reading The Times with the crossword to do,
Returning at night on the six forty-two.*

Perilously close to doggerel and not quite on track. Trains feature in Philip Larkin's work. *Dockery and Son* contains a beautiful, mysterious and symbolic image when the poet 'walked along / The platform [Sheffield] to its end to see the ranged / Joining and parting lines reflect a strong / Unhindered moon.' What are those lines? The lines that conduct our lives to 'age, and then the only end of age'?

It's not all romance, though. Larkin cheerfully confesses that he eats 'an awful pie'. The classic train journey is, of course, *Whitsun Weddings*,

when wedding couples join the train from Lincolnshire at each stop, the women wearing 'nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes' and the uncles 'shouting smut'. It's all there, down to the way the heat gets into the buttoned upholstery. It catches the way in which details impress as one gazes through the carriage window – 'an Odeon went past, a cooling tower, / And someone running up to bowl.' The end is mysterious and magical and somehow sacramental: 'And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled / A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower / Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.'

There is almost no greater pleasure available in English literature than re-reading that poem. Another Larkin poem involving trains is *I remember, I remember*. At Coventry station (where he is some way poetically from the bridge where Tennyson stood to think about Lady Godiva) he is reminded that this is where he had departed for 'those family hols'.

Incidentally, when I was a don I could never find an undergraduate able to tell me what those men 'with number-plates' were doing sprinting down the platform. The answer is that they had been delivering new cars, made in Coventry, to the docks or to the dealers, using detachable trade plates with red letters and numbers, held on with elastic-bands, and now returning, by train, from their missions.

There is a difference in kind between car travel and train travel. The classic analysis is made by Marcel Proust in *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*. The train deposits you in the centre of the town, summed up by its name, so that it produces the magical equivalent of meeting Emma Bovary in 'the closed atmosphere of a novel' rather than as an ordinary person.

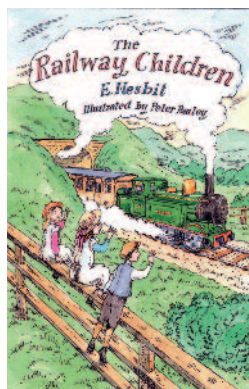
In the car, on the other hand, you reach the centre of a town through backstreets, without enjoying the 'mystery' of arrival by 'express trains' (*Cities of the Plain*). The only plus element for car journeys is that the traveller does gain a more delicately precise sense of 'the true geometry' of a town's locale.

‘The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there’

The dominance of the car spelt death for much of the railway system, and Beeching's report consigned many services to oblivion. The loss of all those lines, though, only intensified our romantic longing for a bygone age, and all kinds of preservation societies sprang up to restore old locomotives and reinstate abandoned branch lines. One of the most attractive is the Severn Valley Railway, which runs through very attractive countryside. LP Hartley observed that 'the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there', but when you get on the train at Bridgnorth the past suddenly becomes the present, and they do things exactly the same as they did.

In the vast accumulating theatre of nostalgia almost nothing is as prevalent as the steam locomotive. The poet laureate of nostalgia ...

(continued on next page)



Nostalgia ain't what it used to be: the book and the film of *The Railway Children*; the Euston arch; and Mark Williams, as Arthur Weasley, in the *Harry Potter* films



(continued from previous page)

... is John Betjeman. Typical is *A Mind's Journey to Diss*:

Dear Mary,
Yes, it will be bliss
To go with you by train to Diss,
Your walking shoes upon your feet;
We'll meet, my sweet, at Liverpool Street.
That levellers we may be reckoned
Perhaps we'd better travel second;
Or, lest reporters on us burst,
Perhaps we'd better travel first.
Above the chimney-pots we'll go
Through Stepney, Stratford-atte-Bow
And out to where the Essex marsh
Is filled with houses new and harsh
Till, Witham pass'd, the landscape yields
On left and right to widening fields,
Flint church-towers sparkling in the light,
Black beams and weather-boarding white,
Cricket-bat willows silvery green
And elmy hills with brooks between,
Maltings and saltings, stack and quay
And, somewhere near, the grey North Sea;
Then further gentle undulations
With lonelier and less frequent stations,
Till in the dimmest place of all
The train slows down into a crawl
And stops in silence....Where is this?
Dear Mary Wilson, this is Diss.

(Although I'm not keen on that twee inversion of 'Or, lest reporters on us burst').

Another classic, drawing on the romance of place names, is *Slow Train* by Flanders and Swann:

Miller's Dale for Tideswell...
Kirby Muxloe...
Mow Cop and Scholar Green...
No more will I go to Blandford Forum and
Mortehoe
On the slow train from Midsomer Norton and
Mumby Road

No churns, no porter, no cat on a seat
At Chorlton-cum-Hardy or Chester-le-Street
We won't be meeting again
On the slow train.

I'll travel no more from Littleton Badsey to
Openshaw
At Long Stanton I'll stand well clear of the
doors no more
No whitewashed pebbles, no up and no down
From Formby Four Crosses to Dunstable Town
I won't be going again
On the slow train.

On the main line and the goods' siding
The grass grows high
At Dog Dyke, Tumby Woodside
And Trouble House Halt.
The sleepers sleep at Audlem and Ambergate.

No passenger waits on Chittingen platform or
Cheslyn Hay
No one departs, no one arrives
From Selby to Goole, from St Erth to St Ives
They've all passed out of our lives
On the slow train, on the slow train.

The nostalgia industry really got underway with the film version of Edith Nesbit's 1906 novel *The Railway Children* (1970). Jenny Agutter featured in a re-make in 2000, by which time she was old enough to play the mother. The original film was shot on the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway, an early heritage enterprise, not long after steam locos had been consigned to the scrap heap. The children save the train from a landslide, and it features at the end when the returned father emerges on the platform from swirling smoke. Another re-make is in progress for 2022 and, doubtless, there will be many more as nostalgia is recycled and exploited and commodified.

‘A vortex of snow-flakes around a vivid yellow diesel locomotive’

From time to time in recent literature the old magic is rediscovered. A favourite example of mine is Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987). Stephen Lewis is on a journey to find his wife, and hitches a night ride in the cab of a 'vivid yellow' diesel locomotive. Not a steam train, but it presents all kinds of unknowns and is authentically romantic, with 'a vortex of snow-flakes' rotating about them. The train driver drops him off near an automatic level

crossing. On the journey the driver waxes lyrical about a tunnel which is 'a cathedral in the dark', but whose days are numbered.

There was a time when writers spoke about the romance of the open road, but now that car travel has become so fraught, and managed disillusion has set in, and advertisers fear they are fighting a losing battle to sell that form of transport as attractive, there will be opportunities for the romance of rail travel again. Children who have never experienced bona fide journeys by steam train already have their mental repertoire pieced out with fantasy images – such as the steam train in *Harry Potter*, which departs from Platform 9¾ at King's Cross. The train for the *Hogwarts Express* in the films was the *Jacobite Express* – a name taken from the major lost cause in history, even more lost than steam travel. There is a poignant photograph of a fan watching the real train, but wearing the merchandised green and silver Slytherin House scarf, at Glenfinnan viaduct – within sight of the Glenfinnan monument, commemorating the arrival of Bonny Prince Charlie in 1745 for his ill-fated rising.

The actual locomotive in the film was *Olton Hall* built in 1937 for the Great Western Railway. Nowadays fans crowd the platform for the money-making tourist spot, rather as other tourists go to find Dracula's grave in Whitby. Have they no sense? Railway anoraks will object that *Hogwarts Castle* is not a Castle Class locomotive. The Severn Valley Railway runs a restored Hall class: *Hagley Hall*, built at Swindon in 1929. Wouldn't George Lyttleton (1709-1773), discussed by Dr Johnson in *Lives of the Poets*, be surprised to hear that his house gave its name to a locomotive?

There will continue to be magic in train journeys, especially for young people who have no memory of the authentic steam age, but much of the magnificence of that earlier age has, sadly, been lost, symbolised by the demolition in 1962 of Philip Hardwick's Doric Euston Arch. There is talk now, though, of rescuing the stones from some river and rebuilding it.

Further reading: *Train Songs* (Faber) an anthology of poems and lyrics by Don Paterson and Sean O'Brien reviewed by Keith Richmond in the *Journal* (November 2013)



The Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851; the High Level station that tried to match the Palace

As though 'twere by a wizard's rod

CHRIS PROCTOR, who has written for *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *the Morning Star*, *the New Statesman* and *Tribune*, as well as spending eight years at ASLEF, remembers the Crystal Palace, moved across the capital, and the railway line built to bring travellers to see it

HYDE Park in London has never been so busy as it was from May to October 1851 when it hosted the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. An estimated 6 million people (one in three of the entire UK population at the time) visited, including Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Queen Victoria, who went 34 times. The Great Exhibition was housed inside the Great Shalimar, a massive greenhouse that was 1,848 feet long and 454 feet wide. The structure, designed by Joseph Paxton, was satirically dubbed the Crystal Palace by *Punch* magazine. Made of a cast iron frame and glass, it took just nine months to conceive, organize, and construct.

‘It is a wonderful place – vast, strange, new – whatever human industry has created you find there, from the great compartments filled with railway engines and boilers to the glass-covered and velvet-spread stands loaded with the most gorgeous work of the goldsmith and silversmith’ – Charlotte Bronte

When the Hyde Park show was over, Paxton wanted to leave the building in place, but the government would not underwrite the building's maintenance. This led to the formation of the Crystal Palace Company with the objective of moving the whole structure, as a commercial venture, to a site nine-and-a-half miles across the city and over the river. Its new home was Penge Place, set in 349 acres, in Sydenham.

The CPC, encouraged by Paxton, a director of Midland Rail, decided it needed a railway to transport Londoners to the new attraction. In typical Victorian style, they built not just one, but three. Well, two-and-a-half...

The first Crystal Palace rail station, largely



the work of the Brighton Railway company, is the one which stands today, a terminus of the East London line of the London Overground. It dates from 1854, shortly after the opening of the new site on 10 June.

Arriving passengers would gape at the 72ft two-span roof which still looms over the platform area before they mounted a vast staircase, left the station through a ticket office, and turned into the glass-walled but unroofed Crystal Colonnade which led to the top of the hill, and the exhibition.

The station was magnificent, with its intricate wooden arches, but it soon became obvious that the Crystal Palace (Low Level), as it became known, couldn't cope with the crowds. For each of the next 30 years, two million people would arrive at Sydenham, mostly by train. Apart from overcrowding, most complaints concerned the ten minute walk, and being exposed to inclement weather en route.

In 1865 the Chatham & Dover Railway proposed a solution to the Crystal Palace Company. This was the construction of another station at the top of Sydenham Hill that would terminate next to the west side of the glass building. This answered the distance complaints. And weather conditions were avoided by the building of a magnificent pedestrian subway linking the Palace and the station. Resembling a Byzantine crypt, it was designed and constructed by cathedral masons and craftsmen fetched over from Italy. It hasn't been open to the public for decades but, happily, it is currently being renovated.

The rest of the Upper Station didn't enjoy so kind a fate, being demolished entirely in 1957, the land being used mainly for housing as London's demands expanded. The station was an impressive two-towered construction with brick sides and a roof of glass and iron to match the Palace next to which the four tracks of the route terminated.

(inset); a magnificent pedestrian subway resembling a Byzantine crypt linked the Upper Station to the Palace; and dinosaurs now lurk in the Park, their fate a timely warning of the dangers of climate change

When the last train left the station on 18 September 1954 it marked another significant day in the history of our industry: the first time an electrified line was closed.

Ten years later the 'half a railway' began to operate. It would be an exaggeration to give it a full point. It was a pneumatic experiment that ran 600 yards up the hill to the Palace from the Sydenham and Penge gates. A carriage with a collar of bristles sucked the 35-seat carriage along a 10x9ft tunnel. The journey took less than a minute and the train didn't last much longer: it was abandoned after two months in October 1864.

When the Crystal Palace moved to South London it became less instructive if more diverting; but numbers gradually declined and, on 30 November 1936, the Palace offered Londoners its final magnificent spectacle – when it burned to the ground. It is a tribute to the capital's endless desire for entertainment that 400 firefighters were required to contain the blaze; while 750 policemen were needed to contain the watching crowds.

‘As though 'twere by a wizard's rod | As blazing arch of lucid glass | Leaps like a fountain from the grass | To meet the sun’ – William Makepeace Thackeray

The Crystal Palace Park retains the atmosphere of those Victorian leisure and pleasure gardens. One of the UK's five National Sports Centres, it boasts an athletics stadium capable of holding 24,000, and it hosted the FA Cup final from 1895 until 1914. The open air Bowl features classical and rock music concerts. And there are dinosaurs.

More than 30 life-size models of these creatures fill a section of the Park. They're not strictly accurate, being made in 1854, only 30 years after dinosaurs were first identified, and before Darwin had written his *Origins of Species*.

But it seemed strange to be in South London looking at an extinct species that used to rule the world; while in Hyde Park, where this story began, Extinction Rebellion was demonstrating against climate change.

Euston drivers turned out in droves

E USTON branch held its 63rd (and somewhat covid-belayed) annual reunion do on Saturday 4 September at the Prince Arthur pub on Eversholt Street, lovingly recalled by many of those present as the 'wet' mess room!

Drivers past and present turned out in droves, filling the pub and spilling out into the street to celebrate over 450 collected years of loyal membership, just amongst the recipients of this year's long service awards.

Euston Drivers' Social & Welfare Club provided the



Lots of happy faces outside the 'wet' mess room on Eversholt Street

beer tokens and a buffet as well as gifts for the retirees.

With thanks to general secretary Mick Whelan who was on hand to make the presentations for

long service and to our recently retired Euston drivers.

Also, special congratulations to Cliff Holloway, Pat Baxter, Robert Matthews and Peter Buonacorsihow on

their retirement from the grade over the last couple of years and to all of the long service badge recipients.

Joe McNally
Euston 075 branch secretary

Double diamonds

At the end of August we had two drivers retire at Liverpool. The first was Dennis Tobin and the second was Geoff Connerty. Geoff and Dennis started their railway careers together, and have been good friends throughout their years on the permanent way, and have now retired from the railway together. We all wish both of them a long and happy



Geoff Connerty (left) and Dennis Tobin (right)

retirement; we all miss you both and the depot will not be the same without you both.

Chris Todd Avanti West Coast Liverpool



The second 40 year badge in the family

Like his father before him – and despite looking so young – Yoker branch stalwart and all round good guy Colin MacLennan (centre) receives his 40 year badge from branch officials Barry Hamilton and Ed Kelly.

Two 40 year service badges in



Colin, Barry and Ed stay covid secure

one family – father and son – is quite some

family feat. **Ed Kelly** Yoker 259 branch

Cheers, Paul!

I recently had the pleasure of attending Leytonstone branch to make a presentation that included a retirement certificate and gift to my long-time friend and ASLEF rep Paul Mason, and the branch joined with me in wishing Paul a long and happy retirement.

EC8 Terry Wilkinson



Terry checks to see if Paul's tankard is full

Upcoming Events

■ GILLINGHAM: THURSDAY 7 OCTOBER

Railway reunion from 11.00 at the Rainham Social Club, Station Road, Rainham, Kent. 'Please note this is not just a retirement do and active staff are very welcome,' says Steve 'Grudd' Gurdler. 'Past, present, and future railwaymen and women, all mixing and moaning together. Come along and say hello! A small raffle is held and that's what pays for the buffet. And remember, this is your reunion; use it or lose it!'

■ FRATTON: FRIDAY 8 OCTOBER

Fratton train crew reunion is at the BRSA Club next to Fratton Station from 12.00 to 18.00. All welcome – it would be great to see everyone this year now we are back! Free buffet and raffle. Gary White, driver, Fratton depot.

■ TOTON: FRIDAY 29 OCTOBER

The 2021 Toton old boys' reunion will be held at the Sportsman, Derby Road, Long Eaton, Derbyshire, NG10 4HA, from 19.30. All welcome! email reginald.sargeant@gmail.com

■ ASHFORD: WEDNESDAY 3 NOVEMBER

Ashford Old Guard reunion (open to all rail workers and their partners) from 11.00 at Ashford Railway Club, Beaver Road, Ashford, Kent.

■ GATESHEAD & NEWCASTLE: FRIDAY 26 NOVEMBER

Gateshead & Newcastle branch has a 52A reunion on from 13.00 at the Bowling Green Club, Gateshead. All present and retired members welcome, buffet will be provided. Gary Arrowsmith, branch secretary.

■ ASHFORD: THURSDAY 6 JANUARY

'Confirmed date for next year!' says Grudd. From 11.00 at Ashford Railway Club, Ashford, Kent.

■ TONBRIDGE: THURSDAY 7 JULY

Railway reunion from 11.00 at the New Telegraph Club, Priory Road, Tonbridge, Kent.

● Please send your branch news, reports, articles, features, presentations, and photographs to journal@aslef.org.uk

Was the pandemic the tip of an ever mutating iceberg?



AMY NICHOLSON, a driver with East Midlands Railway, and member of Derby branch, as well as the District 6 rep on our Disabled Members' Committee, offers practical advice for any member who suspects he or she is suffering from long covid

Committee, offers practical advice for any member who suspects he or she is suffering from long covid

THE title suggests nothing new, unless you have been on another planet over the last 18 months or so. We regularly see news articles and discussions on covid-19, variants of the virus, an overwhelmed National Health Service, the number of new deaths recorded, and the vaccination debate.

But how much is being done for those that have, or are experiencing, long covid?

At the very beginning, there was a mixture of panic and denial. The numbers were low; we had been here before with ebola, swine flu, bird flu and the like. It was originally seen as a nasty type of flu that may just add slightly more to the seasonal number of elderly and vulnerable casualties.

The numbers then rocketed to a point where very few people haven't been affected, in some way or another, by this pandemic. But again, for many, the impact is small. Even if you are struck down, the prognosis isn't much of a concern and you will be back on your feet very soon. However, for some, it is not so simple.

As the pandemic progressed, it became apparent that there were many long-term complications. This then was quickly recognised by ACAS and the TUC and they quickly went to work on protecting those who were struggling to return to work.

'The usual rules for sickness apply'

ACAS has offered some advice on its website. Recognising that the symptoms may continue for weeks or even months. The usual rules for sickness absence and sick pay apply when a person is off work because of long covid. The employer has a duty of care and should support those workers affected and discuss ways on how they may return to work, where and when possible. This may include an occupational health assessment, making reasonable adjustments, phasing the return, or how they wish their illness to be discussed by colleagues. Employers should make sure they have done everything they can before even considering a capability procedure.

In June 2020, the TUC called for long covid to be urgently recognised as a disability so that those affected may be able to access legal



Cheers! Amy was glad to see the back of the worst of the pandemic, but fears we are not taking the effects of long covid seriously

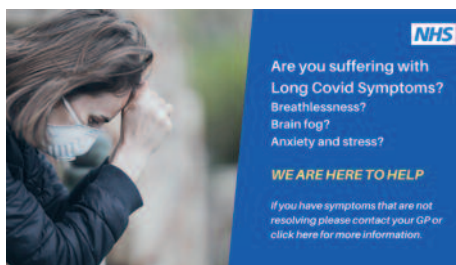
fatigue. When I am fatigued my stump gets phantom pains inside and I have been prescribed amitriptyline for the pain and, if it doesn't soothe the pain, it will knock me out. Due to the extra fatigue, I was put on reduced hours due to the long effects of covid-19'

'The DRM told me to fk off'**

After a stressful day finalising domestic arrangements for a house move: 'I went to bed that evening hoping I would be okay in the morning but, due to the fatigue, I was very restless during the night and decided to call in sick but, after several attempts to call the DRM, I fell asleep due to the nature of the medication. I was awoken the next morning by the telephone ringing asking where I was, and when I told the DRM what had happened I was told to f**k off and had the phone put down on me.'

We know this is not an isolated incident with our members and that others are seeking help. The current advice we are giving is to talk to your line manager and, perhaps, obtain a referral to occupational health. It may be that you seek alternative, non-safety critical duties.

The Disabled Members' Committee has been formed to assist with any concerns you have, regardless of how big or small it may be. As the campaign is ongoing to recognise long covid as a disability, it is worth getting in touch with your district representative for support.



protection via the Equality Act. There was a large response to the TUC's survey on the impact of long covid to workers' daily working lives which highlighted how frontline workers have been disproportionately affected by long covid.

'The role of a driver is complex'

As ASLEF members will comprehend, the role of a driver is complex. We cannot just go into work and 'see how we feel'. We cannot just switch off the computer when we have had enough. There needs to be reasonable adjustments and phased returns.

The physical side is brutal, if you have a disability, but you also need to protect your mental health which, undoubtedly, is compromised when you are struggling physically each day. Here's an insight from one of our representatives who has, sadly, experienced long covid first hand, an above-the-knee amputee who has been placed on double prompt sickness by his employer:

'I contracted covid-19 at the end of January and it lasted into February and the after-effects made me feel tired all the time, affecting my

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“No amount of money could ever make up for losing the best job I ever had, but at least I don't have to worry about my family's finances while my ability to work is limited.”

ASLEF member, Mark Saunders, pictured at his home.



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FRED JONES A SHROPSHIRE LAD

IT IS with great regret that I have to inform you of the death of retired Euston driver Frederick Albert Richard Jones on 21 May 2021 at the age of 91.

Fred was born on 27 September 1929 in Shropshire and moved to Sheffield where his first job was as an apprentice jockey. Not enjoying the very early starts and constant diets – not to mention being kicked by a horse – Fred changed career path and followed his father into the steel works. After serving in the Royal Engineers during his national service Fred, now married, moved south to London for another career move which saw him starting as a fireman at Kentish Town (where he fired for my grandfather). He moved to Willesden for his driver's job and, when Willesden shut, to Stonebridge Park and then, finally, to Euston.



Fred musing over 'Victory in the hop gardens of Kent' while enjoying a pint of Shepherd Neame's happily hoppy Spitfire ale

It was as a young second man that I first met Fred and my generation have all, bar none, remarked what an absolute gentleman he was to have a driver. Always cheerful, and an extremely knowledgeable person and

railwayman, Fred was always happy to impart knowledge. I can also recall that Fred did not suffer fools, or take any nonsense, so you knew that when he was your driver you would not be messed around.

Fred was a very keen fisherman – he loved fly fishing – and, during his later years, Fred enjoyed the social aspect, meeting at the local pubs, even when unable to attend the fishing trips themselves! Here he was given the nickname 'Uncle Albert'.

Fred was a regular attendee at the yearly Euston 'old man's dos', again putting the world to rights with his former work mates and, whenever he could, he attended the 1A monthly meetings and twice yearly reunions. He is, and will be, much missed at both.

Our thoughts and condolences are with Fred's son Brian, daughter Beryl, and his grandchildren.

Driver assessor Mick Humphrys Euston branch chair

TOM CARPENTER DRY SENSE OF HUMOUR

It is with great sadness that we have to report the passing of Tom Carpenter, one of our Epsom depot family. Tom had a relatively short battle with cancer that finally defeated him, passing away on the morning of Monday 9 August at just 56 years old. Having had a bad reaction to earlier treatment he chose to refrain from further treatment and, in his words, 'Make the most of the time I have left'.

Tom joined the railway in 1999, originally at Selhurst depot, where he passed out as a driver. In 2003 he opted to leave Selhurst and join one of the smallest depots, at Epsom. He progressed to become a driver instructor, passing on his

knowledge and assisting trainee drivers qualify.

Tom was quite a quiet guy who had a dry sense of humour. He would sit listening and then question the conversation or inject a cutting or humorous quip. The number of comments of disbelief, and fond memories from so many drivers, and other staff, on social media show just how highly regarded Tom was.

As a small depot the loss of one of our own drivers cuts deeply. Tom will be missed by Epsom drivers present and recently retired, as well as several other colleagues he worked with.

Epsom drivers offer Tom's wife Beverley and her family our deepest condolences. As



Tom rejected further treatment, determined to 'make the most of my time left'

part of the railway family he will not be forgotten.

Dave MacLennan and Epsom drivers

REX BRYAN INFECTIOUS SMILE

It is with great sadness that I inform our members of the passing of Brother Rex Bryan. Rex was a train driver who worked for DB Cargo and a member of Knottingley branch. Rex had previously worked for Northern Rail at Manchester Victoria as a driver instructor. He was a lovely man with an infectious smile. When Rex wasn't driving trains he spent his time on his other pride and joy, his motorbikes, and loved spending time with his grandchildren. He will be greatly missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him. Rest in Peace, Rex.

Tony Kahler Knottingley 113 branch secretary

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Nothing fazed Graham – my Good Samaritan



Graham Walker, former EC member for District 1, who died in July at the age of 64

I just want to say how sad I was to learn of the death of Graham Walker in the September edition of the *Journal*. Graham's passing was horribly premature and seems so unfair for a colleague who did so much to help other drivers.

Some years ago I suffered a train accident and, subsequently, faced the additional trauma of some very nasty bullying from South Eastern management. Graham was my Good Samaritan who guided me through one of the worst situations in my life. Nothing fazed him and, even when management threw additional difficulties in our way, Graham always had an answer and knew what to do. I will always be grateful for everything he did as my ASLEF representative.

My deep condolences go out to his family and friends. He will be sorely missed by me and many others.

Andrew Canneaux retired Ramsgate driver

The system needs mending

On Wednesday 8 September, Sajid Javid spelt out on *Good Morning Britain* that the tax/NI increases are only what a responsible government would do. Traditionally, funding for the care of the elderly has been paid for by the state. Unfortunately, all governments since the end of the Thatcher era have been, and still are, saddled with the consequences of her decisions. That is, the only way any government can fund anything (including the NHS, and care for the elderly, etc) is by raising taxes and/or national insurance contributions.

Previous governments had the option of using the surpluses from our state owned industries. The Office for National Statistics has

listed the gross trading surplus of public corporations from 1974 to 1996, and I have added the years together, and the sum total for those years is £241,605 million! Yes, two hundred and forty-one thousand, six hundred and five million pounds!

I do not know what that equates to in today's money but, as this is a gross surplus, it would have gone a long way to improving the state of the UK's failing services, etc.

Instead, a large proportion of this will be in private shareholders' pockets. Add to this the £43 billion NI contribution surplus identified in 2011 by Steve Webb, Liberal Democrat MP for Thornbury & Yate, and Minister of State for Pensions in David Cameron's coalition government, then add the possible billions that have been taken from the public purse by Matt Hancock's corrupt PPE and track & trace contracts, as identified by the Good Law Project, and we have a very tidy sum indeed.

The state has the money but, unfortunately, we now have 'state capitalism' whereby the capitalists (Conservatives) take from the state to line their own pockets – and the pockets of their friends and sponsors – with our money. The system needs mending.

Phil Stodart RMS Penzance

Five years in Westminster? It should be Wandsworth!

A well written letter by brother Jeff Morgan in the September edition of the *Journal* regarding the winners and losers during the covid pandemic. Wasn't it lucky Matt Hancock was caught with his pants down and forced to resign? It avoided the far more serious questions about his private emails to friends and family regarding PPE contracts. Who would have thought anyone knew someone in the PPE trade before covid? Many Tory donors became rich overnight with the old boys' network. Frankly, if Slipper of the Yard had access to MPs' accounts, many would be serving five years in Wandsworth, not Westminster.

T/Op Terry Baxter Neasden Metropolitan

The short-sighted railway companies are shooting themselves in the foot

The new railway timetables are a recipe for disaster because fewer trains and slimmer timetables will only deter passengers from travelling, leading to a downward spiral. These proposals should be sending alarm bells to rail users and taxpayers.

There is no evidence that leisure travel won't bounce back after covid, and indeed we're already hearing stories of trains crowded

with leisure travellers, yet there will be significant cuts to trains both at off-peak and peak times on many routes, compared to the pre-covid timetable. In many cases half the trains are being slashed from the timetable. Many more journeys will now involve a change of train, which will lengthen journey times and make rail rather less attractive.

These proposals display a lack of basic understanding of railway economics. Fixed costs on the railways are high. The marginal cost of running more trains is relatively low. Experience tells us that greater frequency and through journey opportunities generates revenue in excess of the costs of operation.

The rail industry needs to control its cost base to deal with the realities of the pandemic, but cutting train services will only lead to lower rail usage and declining revenue. Railways have to offer a package of travel that melds convenience, price, quality, etc in an offering that will get more people to use trains and not their cars.

Rail industry finances will only be stabilised and restored by growing the revenue line, not by lowering quality to cut costs. Have we learned nothing from the spiral of decline of Britain's railways in the 1960s and 1970s? This is not just about rail users, vital as they are. Taxpayers will end up footing the bill for a railway where declining patronage is propped up by greater and greater subsidies.

Two major train operators in Britain, South Western Railway and ScotRail, have already published their timetable proposals for 2022, with others to follow. The government has made much of its commitment to carbon reduction and arresting climate change. Transport accounts for about 33% of all emissions in the country. A key part of reducing this is to encourage modal shift to lower carbon forms of transport.

Railways are much more carbon efficient for both passenger and freight operation. We simply cannot understand how the Department for Transport, which is clearly instructing train operators to reduce costs, can reconcile the government's commitment to carbon reduction with proposals to make our railways less attractive to passengers. Build back better? We don't think so.

Chris Page chair of Railfuture



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Those who fail to learn from history



The chaotic withdrawal of British and American troops from Afghanistan – and the immediate collapse of a corrupt regime propped up not by a popular mandate but by Western money, soldiers, and blood – prompts KEITH RICHMOND to reflect on a remark by Tam Dalyell about imperial designs on the north-west frontier

WINSTON Churchill, speaking in the House of Commons as Leader of the Opposition in 1948, paraphrased an observation first attributed to both the Irish politician Edmund Burke and the Spanish philosopher Jorge Santayana: ‘Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it.’ The humiliating withdrawal of British and American troops from Afghanistan at the end of August – after much ‘blood and treasure’ was spilt and spent in twenty years of fighting – has only underlined the wisdom of that observation.

Britain invaded Afghanistan twice in the 19th century and once in the 20th, shortly after the Great War of 1914-18. The first two Afghan wars were both disasters, leading, on each occasion, to a humiliating retreat, although the third has been claimed by some British historians as a short-term tactical, and strategic, victory.

So you would think we would have learned, wouldn't you?

Especially as, more recently, the Russians spent ten years, during the 1980s, trying – and failing – to conquer the country.

But ignorance of history – or an ability to draw the correct conclusion – runs very deep right at the very top.

When Tony Blair tripped over his own shoelaces in his rush to join President George W Bush's US-led invasion in 2001 he had to be told by aides that using the word ‘crusade’ was not such a good idea given the history of Christian campaigns against Muslims dating back to the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries. TB, edging ever closer to the Church of Rome, was keen to declare that Western ‘liberal



intervention’ would bring Christian civilisation to this landlocked country bordered by Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Whether the Afghans wanted it or not.

And they didn't. Which was not a surprise to Tam Dalyell, Labour MP for Linlithgow, who realised from bitter personal experience that the Bush/Blair adventure was an utter folly doomed to fail. ‘I know my history,’ Tam told me. ‘Because my ancestors left their bones on the north-west frontier.’

In 1839 an army of 20,000 British and East India Company troops invaded Afghanistan. Three years later, as they retreated through the passes, they were picked off, one by one, by Afghan marksmen firing long-barreled jezails. There were only a handful of survivors and it was, according to William Dalrymple, author of *Return of the King: The Battle for Afghanistan 1839-42*, ‘arguably the greatest military humiliation suffered by the West in the East: an entire army of what was then the most powerful military nation in the world utterly routed and destroyed by poorly-equipped tribesmen.’

The Raj made two further attempts to subjugate this fiercely independent nation, fighting a second Afghan War (1878-1880), which went the way of the first, for the British, and a third, in 1919, which achieved its more limited objectives.

But if memories of these overseas military adventures had dimmed in Downing Street, and in the corridors of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, there was really no excuse for refusing to learn a more recent lesson. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 and was forced to pull out, roundly defeated, nine years later.

Refusing to learn the lessons of history the US and its allies – Bush and his British poodle Blair – invaded in 2001. Despite spurious attempts by a few politicians, on both sides of the Atlantic, to put a gloss on events, it has

Afghanistan – the graveyard of empires: Encampment of the Kandahar army, under General Nott, outside the Walls of Kabul, on the Evacuation of Afghanistan by the British, coloured lithograph after Lt James Rattray, 2nd Bengal Native Infantry, 1842; Mahsud tribesman, photograph by Randolph Bezzant Holmes, North-West Frontier, Waziristan, 1919-1920; Britain's latest war in Afghanistan began in the wake of 9/11 and lasted until the end of August this year; it cost £25 billion and the lives of 453 UK service personnel

been a bitter shambles; a fruitless war lasting 21 years and costing over \$2.3 trillion and more than 240,000 lives, 71,000 of them Afghan civilians.

Tom Tugendhat, Conservative MP for Tonbridge & Malling, and Johnny Mercer, Conservative MP for Plymouth Moor View, who served in Afghanistan, have both criticised Boris Johnson and his government for their ‘betrayal’ of the people they have left behind. And Dan Jarvis, Labour MP for Barnsley Central, who served with the Parachute Regiment in Afghanistan, said: ‘It feels as if it has all been for nothing.’

QUOTE...

‘We're here to help and protect the Afghan people to reconstruct their economy and democracy. We would be perfectly happy to leave in three years' time without firing a shot’ – John Reid, Secretary of State for Defence, on the British deployment in Helmand, April 2006

...UNQUOTE

If only the politicians – and their advisers – had read and understood the history of Afghanistan and its invading armies.

In 1843, shortly after his return from the first Afghan War, the Rev GH Gleig, army chaplain in Jalalabad, wrote a memoir about the disastrous British expedition of which he was one of the few survivors.

It was, he wrote, ‘A war begun for no wise purpose, carried on with a strange mixture of rashness and timidity, brought to a close after suffering and disaster, without much glory attached either to the government which directed, or the great body of troops which waged, it. Not one benefit, political or military, has been acquired with this war. Our eventual evacuation of the country resembled the retreat of an army defeated.’

Putin, oil, the rouble and the partwork they played in my downfall



At the end of his article in the August *Journal* about (quite literally) putting together a 125 edition partwork on the *Flying Scotsman*, each issue of which came with a piece of kit that enabled you

to build, over two-and-a-half years, an O gauge metal model of the famous locomotive, HENRY RUSSELL tantalisingly mentioned that 'as soon it was over I spent a week in Russia, where a chance encounter at a siding in Novosibirsk led to my next railway partwork'. Many of you said your curiosity had been piqued, so here's what happened next...



AFTER finishing the *Flying Scotsman* partwork, I flew to visit my Russianist daughter on her year abroad in Siberia. She arranged for the 'aged parent' an action-packed itinerary that featured two nights in Novosibirsk.

The Museum for Railway Technology on the outskirts of that city may sound grand but is, in reality, a spray of sidings, perhaps once a goods yard, now with decommissioned locomotives, carriages, and some wagons in static ranks.

The setting may be mundane and the visitor facilities all but non-existent (no gift shop!) but the collection is magnificent: beautifully preserved items of every era, from Tsarist Russia through the Soviet Union to the late 20th century.

'A man slid from the shadows of the immense driving wheels'

The child was translating for her dad the legend on a plaque next to a P36 class 4-8-4, resplendent in green livery, when a man slid from the shadows of the immense driving wheels and asked if we were English.

Having identified a fellow buff, he revealed himself as a London publisher developing a railway partwork primarily, but not exclusively, for the then-burgeoning Russian market.

Magazines of this kind depend on subscribers rather than casual pick-up purchases in newsagents; to test the market, viability tests are carried out during the development stage in small target areas. Only if such experiments are successful do the publications go country-wide.

National launches get pushed very hard – witness the host of TV adverts for new partworks every winter between Christmas and New Year – and from the sales of issue No 1 (always attractively cheap) the publishers extrapolate the number of people who are likely to sign up for the whole run of (rather

more expensive) subsequent issues. Not everyone who buys No 1 will subscribe, but if No 1 sells (say) 500,000 copies and the predicted uptake is (again, say) between 5% and 7%, you may have a goer. But if only 5,000 buy it, the cause is hopeless; the whole project will be quietly ditched, and the planned following issues will never see the light of day.

Some people think that publishing is a gentlemanly profession, but in the partwork sector there are various practices that may be described as healthy competition if you're doing them to rivals but as skullduggery if your rivals are doing them to you.

The big weapon is spoilers: if one company gets wind of another's plans, it will quickly produce something on the same subject in the hope of dividing the market and thus making the original idea unworkable.

'Espionage-thriller level of secrecy'

Hence the espionage-thriller level of secrecy that committed me to a non-disclosure agreement before we set about planning the collection: 100 fortnightly issues, in each of which would be one article under the following headings: great railway stations; great railway journeys; engineering feats; nation by nation; locomotives; rolling stock; and history.

The cover-mounted collectible (CMC) was never revealed to me, and there was even some doubt that there would be one, as it was felt, at the time, that the Russian appetite for such publications was big enough to render giveaways unnecessary.

I started on stations. I wasn't going to visit every one on the list – I really wanted to see Gustave Eiffel's work on La Alameda in Santiago, Chile, but budgets are tight, so I started closer to home. First, arbitrarily, St



Henry and his Russianist daughter, the Museum for Railway Technology, and a wicked car sticker celebrating the Communist Russian victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-45

Pancras, that triumph of restoration and repurposing. I took copious notes and several photographs for reference later when I came to write it up.

No one bothered me there or at any other terminus, but at main line through stations – Reading, Cambridge North, and Clapham Junction – it was a different story. The sight of a scruffy fellow hanging about on platforms alongside which express trains were passing at high speed was, understandably, a cause for concern, and more than once members of staff asked me if everything was okay.

'Almost at once they made to back away'

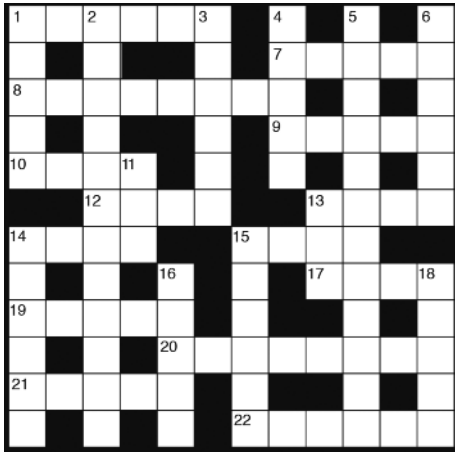
I'd tell them I was fine, but they always followed up with 'Are you travelling by train today?' At which point I decided it was best to level with them, so I explained that I was a writer and began a résumé of some of my previous... it seemed to me that almost at once they made to back away, possibly because they were now satisfied that I wasn't a danger to myself or others but possibly (I couldn't help feeling) lest I bore them senseless with excessive detail.

For months, progress was steady: a station one day, an article about it the next, together with some work on the other sections. The publisher set others to find suitable illustrations. But, meanwhile, a bigger and less attractive picture was emerging: as the magazine took shape, the price of oil fell and the West imposed sanctions on Russia after its annexation of the Crimea. The rouble, of which there had been about 35 to the pound in the middle of 2014, was worth only half as much by the end of the year, thus making the whole project economically impractical, at least for the British entrepreneur.

Somewhere on my laptop still lie nearly 50 sadly deserted stations...

Prize Crossword

Prize crossword 186 by Tom Williams



Across

- 1 Toil
- 7 Controlling strength
- 8 Crisp cake of egg whites and sugar
- 9 Token film role
- 10 Corrosion
- 12 Comfort and relaxation
- 13 Very small
- 14 Marbled quartz
- 15 Shortly
- 17 Easter gifts
- 19 A high-temperature disease
- 20 Gazelle
- 21 Plaid or gingham fabric
- 22 Small village

Down

- 1 Huge-eyed Madagascan monkey
- 2 High-flyer's field of sight (4'1-3,4)
- 3 West Indian rock music
- 4 Slang for glasses
- 5 The baths (8,4)
- 6 'With it' in '60s parlance
- 11 Government levy
- 13 Foot digit
- 14 Business room
- 15 Whisky
- 16 Male duck
- 18 Mingled rain and snow

Solution to Prize Crossword 185

Across: 1 Second class 7 Gene 8 Geordie 9 Doh 10 Tempt 11 Bastes 13 Cognac 16 Queen 18 Mrs 19 Episode 20 Ship 21 Toffee apple **Down:** 1 Siesta 2 Credit 3 Nights 4 Croft 5 Abdomen 6 Sceptic 11 Bequest 12 Sheriff 13 Camera 14 Gossip 15 Advice 17 Noose



MARKS & SPENCER

Congratulations to **Tony Dickens of Ipswich, Suffolk**, 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

Name.....

Address.....

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Postcode.....

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) by Friday 15 October

ASLEF's legal services

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



NOTICE TO MEMBERS: TRADE UNION AND LABOUR RELATIONS (CONSOLIDATION) ACT 1992 (AS AMENDED)

A resolution approving the furtherance of political objects within the meaning of the above Act as an object of the union has been adopted by ballot under the Act. Any payments in furtherance of those objects will be made out of a separate fund, the political fund of the union.

Any member, who joined the Union on or after 1 March 2018, who has given notice of their willingness to contribute to the union's political fund (an 'opt-in' notice), has a right to withdraw that notice by giving notice to the union (a 'withdrawal notice').

On Track

The shine's rubbed off BoJo's brogues



'This year, CPC is a hybrid event – you can visit us in Manchester or from the comfort of your own home using our virtual platform. Tickets still available'

AS THE Conservative Party conference meets in Manchester, from Sunday 3 to Wednesday 6 October, members fear the government – if not their party – is beset with problems. The shine has come off Boris Johnson's shoes. He always played well to the party, and not just the blue-rinsed ladies from the shires who had the hots for Michael Heseltine. As a backbencher, London Mayor, and even as a government minister, he was a card. They loved him! Those who knew him liked him less but swallowed their doubts and voted for him on the basis that he was a winner. But while Johnson delivered the 2019 election, everything since has been a disaster. He has, as a former senior cabinet minister muttered, the reverse of the Midas touch. 'Everything he touches turns to shit.'

He's a hopeless Prime Minister. A famous procrastinator, he cannot make up his mind, and dithers until deadline. He's idle, hates hard work, and will not master a brief. He thinks charisma, and an ability to come up with a good soundbite, will carry the day. 'Bullshit baffles brains' is a frequent pearl that drops from his lips.

It's not just the PM, of course. He prefers to surround himself with second-raters, because he wants to dominate cabinet, and cannot abide to work with anyone he thinks is brighter and better than he is. So we had Matt Hancock, who Johnson admits was 'totally f*cking hopeless', handing out PPE contracts to his family and friends. Ker-ching! Oh, and cheating on his wife as he cheated on the country. Robert Jenrick getting up close and personal – and lining Tory Party coffers – with porn king Dicky Desmond. And Carrie Symonds – Princess Nut Nut – splashing out £53,000, provided by a Tory donor looking for 'special favours', to refurbish their Downing Street flat. Oh dear. None of this plays well with the Tory faithful.

Which is why his conference speech needs to be something special. The pressure is on, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel...

Keith Richmond



There has never been a more important time to join a trade union.

When a group of workers act and speak together, their employer has to listen. That's how unions make things better at work.

Nearly 5.5 million people are in a union. Many have been on the frontline during the pandemic, from our brilliant NHS workers to retail staff and care workers.

Unions protect jobs, stop people being treated unfairly and make workplaces safer. During the pandemic that's been more important than ever.

“My trade union stands between me and an uncertain future.”

Key worker, Liverpool



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 **UNIONS**