



NEU Redbridge Retired Teachers' Newsletter Summer 2019

Rebellion in Bow



On 29th May, 13 NEU members from various London districts, were treated to a social history lesson from an expert - David Rosenberg, who has written extensively about radicalism in London. Since we all have different backgrounds and interests, I'm sure each of us discovered something to take on board since the talk was so informative, with fascinating details.

Local Knowledge

Personally, as someone who has taught history, I found the walk/ talk illuminating since it covered areas marginalised in the school curriculum, notably issues of gender and working-class politics. Within such a small geographical area (the walk itself was not at all taxing), there was much evidence of the suffragettes, new trade unions of unskilled workers and local Labour Party organisation. Did I know that Poplar's first Labour council, including five women, was sent to prison for six weeks for refusing to charge full rates to the poorest residents – and that they still held council meetings while incarcerated? No. I know about George Lansbury, but not about his daughter-in law, Minnie, a leading Suffragette, one of those who were imprisoned, and who died of pneumonia soon after her release. We saw the memorial clock dedicated to her on Bow Road. Road names also provided fascinating information regarding land ownership. We walked along numerous roads with Welsh roots and, as several of us noticed, our home towns were represented (in my case, Wrexham Road!).

The new unions, many dominated by Irish immigrants, fought for recognition and improved conditions and the strikes of the gasworkers and dockers were covered. However, the greatest irony was when we reached the former Bryant and May factory, the site of the Match Girls' Strike. Whilst we were able to stand outside and look at the plaque, we couldn't go in. Why? Because the building has been transformed into a gated housing community! What would Annie Besant and the strike organisers think about that?

It was a very pleasant and informative two hours, with the added bonus of meeting colleagues from other areas. Hopefully, it can become a "tradition" for RRTA.

Maureen McCarthy

VOLUNTEERING AT THE FOREST FARM PEACE GARDEN



Often, I cannot take in that between 1972 and 2007 I spent so many days in the classroom. Did I want to be there? Yes, but with the changing educational world I had to duck and weave to continue to sustain that wish. However, substitute a garden- in-the making for a classroom, include in the garden people of all ages and with contrasting needs and backgrounds - and you want to be in the garden to make it thrive.

Volunteering for the Forest Farm Peace Garden benefits volunteers like myself. We learn in detail about the natural world - from growing herbs such as rosemary and lemon balm and healthy food such as tomatoes and runner beans, from creating our own healthy soil through composting, from nurturing and harvesting a wide variety of fruit trees and from taking part in a workshop about the making of winter tonics.

Volunteer Activities

The Garden is there to be a welcoming and comfortable space for all kinds of volunteers, including those with mild mental health issues, and their guests. Perhaps the skills and insights we have hopefully gained in the classroom can be productively applied. And getting to know the needs and routines of the Garden and the needs, motivations and capabilities of the volunteers and matching them successfully can be very rewarding. Maybe Steve wants to get stuck in building a deep hole for a liquorice plant, maybe Gemma wants to draw an ox-eye daisy, maybe Safraz is happier using a small hoe, maybe Farah is happiest sitting on a bench taking in the scene, or maybe Usman is content to sit on the ground and weed the path by himself or work with others and learn a new skill by pruning blackcurrant bushes.

Celebrating our achievements through harvesting, sharing communal lunches, photos and two annual Open Days are all part of the experience. Added to this is the variety of settings and tasks that make for a rewarding and flexible experience for all volunteers.

The Forest Farm Peace Garden has evolved over the last 14 years to provide an ecotherapy environment for people with mild mental health issues. Adults are referred to the Garden through various health providers and are normally with the Garden for one year. They are supported by three staff: a project officer, a head garden and an ecotherapy worker. The staff have the assistance of volunteer buddies, who support the adults at risk and have undergone a two day training course. The Garden is currently supported by a National Lottery Grant, plus a Postcode Lottery Grant. More information can be found at www.forestfarmpeacegarden.org

Jeremy O`Callaghan

A Night Out at Wilton's Music Hall

On 17th April several of us enjoyed a night out at Wilton's Music Hall, just off Cable Street.

Instead of popular songs and risque jokes, we were treated to a cornucopia of delights from five progressive experts in Education.

Owen Jones topped the bill with a rousing call to radical action but the most popular contributions came from Melissa Benn on the future of comprehensive education and Kate Clanchy on creativity.

Melissa drew on her own experiences at one of the earliest comprehensive schools, Holland Park. The diverse intake came from Notting Hill, in those days a tough area dominated by slum housing, as well as from the exquisite crescents of Kensington and Chelsea.

In spite of hostile press coverage, the School produced highly confident students and had a skilled and inspirational staff. Educationally speaking, Holland Park achieved considerable success, especially for the hundreds of children branded as failures by the old 11 plus.

Kate Clanchy is a poet, as well as a teacher, and showed some wonderful poems written by young people who had arrived as asylum seekers. Under her inspirational guidance they had written beautiful poems reflecting on memories of the homes they had fled.

Priya Lakhani talked about the future of education and how learning can be enhanced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) - a positive message compared to the scare stories that one hears from some places.

David Kynaston, whose social histories of the postwar years I have always admired, tackled the thorny problem of the damage inflicted by private schools on the state sector and society in general. His analysis of the problem was spot on: his proposed solutions rather disappointing.

The well-attended event was certainly worthwhile and offered a generally optimistic view of the future of education rather than dwelling on the dire problems we are all familiar with.

Bill Harrison

10 THINGS THAT YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT KARL MARX

1. His grandfather was a rabbi but the family converted to the Lutheran faith to make it easier for his father to pursue his career in law.
2. At the age of 17, he went to Bonn University to study law but his father, Heinrich, transferred him to the University of Berlin to stop his 'wild rampaging'.
3. His swarthy appearance earned him the lifelong nickname of 'Moor'.
4. His handwriting was indecipherable to the untrained eye.
5. He joked grimly that "I don't suppose anyone has ever written about 'money' when so short of the stuff."
6. During his 34 years in London, there were only 2 occasions when he sought gainful employment, one of which was an unsuccessful application to become a railway clerk.
7. In terms of wealth creation, he considered capitalism to be the greatest system ever.
8. He was a devoted family man who impregnated his housemaid.
9. He was an economist, an historian, a philosopher, a sociologist, a linguist, a literary critic, as well as a revolutionary.
10. There were only 11 mourners at his funeral on 17 March 1883, and he died a stateless person and an atheist.

Henry Tiller

RRTA welcomes all retired teachers to our meetings and social activities. Please contact Bob Archer for details at bobarcher46@btinternet.com.

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What make a good crime novel? What makes a good novel? The answer is surely the same in each case.

People, period, place and plot - these are what I expect from a good novel.

A new writer, to me, is Isabelle Gray, who has a long list of credits for TV writing. Her recent novel "Wrong Way Home" (2018) caught my attention because it is set in Southend. The detective is D.I. Grace Fisher, a detective known as "the ice maiden" because she puts her professional life ahead of her personal life.

Her investigation is a "cold case" of rape and murder that took place the night of a fire that destroyed Marineland, a derelict entertainment complex. This is not real but is credible for Southend. At times the descriptions of the crimes may make the sensitive reader's flesh creep, but the plot moves along at a fair pace and provides a reasonable read for a plane journey.

Having completed Isobelle Gray's book I moved on to a 1996 novel by my favourite English crime writer, Ruth Rendell that I had somehow missed. It is called "The Key to the Street". This is in a different class. Located in Regent's Park, where London's "wealthiest, poorest, kindest and most dangerous citizens all cross paths", the setting is very real, the characters are multi-dimensional, and several plot lines are skilfully woven together.

The two main plot lines focus on a young woman, Mary Jago, who is fleeing her abusive lover, and Roman Ashton, who has ended up sleeping on the street after his wife and children have been killed in a road accident. But the interest of the novel is due to a cast of characters as rich and extravagant as in any Dickens novel. Ruth Rendell is a writer of quality in any genre. Her books are more significant and insightful than the profusion of light crime writers. Whereas Isobelle Gray's novel is decent enough for a quick holiday read, she lies somewhere in Division Two, whereas Ruth Rendell is truly in the Premier League.

Bill Harrison

The First Annual Conference of the NEU



I would like to share with you some highlights of the NEU Conference in Liverpool, as an observer for the RRTA.

The last time I attended the NUT Conference as a delegate was some thirteen years ago in Torquay in 2006 and am pleased to say that not much has changed - it was just as interesting, if not better than I remember.

The outstanding highlight was hearing Jeremy Corbyn. He was greeted with cheers and a standing ovation and gave an excellent speech entirely on education. He said that if he became the next Prime minister the Labour Party would pledge to abolish SAT's, baseline assessment for early years, along with student fees. At this announcement a huge roar went up from the delegates and observers. Knowing he wants our votes, I was very sceptical when I heard this promise. Let us hope that if he does become PM he will keep his promise and I am wrong.

Layla Moran, a Lib Dem MP and ex teacher, also gave an excellent speech. I certainly agreed with her vision for the future of schools, which incidentally was similar to Corbyn's. I was also very proud to see some of our own Redbridge delegates take to the rostrum and give some very powerful speeches.

Another highlight of the Conference was the vote on balloting members on a potential SATs boycott next year. Initially, delegates voted against an amendment from the executive, which argued that a ballot was not the most appropriate tactic. This followed a heated debate in which different union factions clashed over whether a 2019-20 ballot is achievable within the time available. Eventually, the motion for a boycott was won by 56%, which meant lots of hard work lay ahead.

It was a fantastic conference for Redbridge NEU. There was a great atmosphere and I met many people, had some very stimulating conversations and made new friends along the way. I look forward to attending next year if possible.

Sandra Hardman