

## **RRTA OUT and ABOUT**



A warm sunny morning in August saw a small group enjoying coffee and cake in the peaceful walled garden café in Valentine's Park – lavender and bees out in full force! We then strolled through the park from the Mansion end towards Ilford and the boating lake, reflecting on what a wonderful and extensive outside resource has been provided for local residents.

September brought a trip to Rainham Hall, situated in the heart of the old village. The Hall is a modest red brick merchant's house, built in 1729 by Captain John Harle, who from humble beginnings, developed a thriving trade with far-flung parts of the globe. The House is owned by the National Trust, and has been recently renovated and opened to the public. It provides a good historical perspective on Rainham's proximity to the Thames and its importance to shipping, and gives an insight into a vanished way of life.

Standing up for Education is a book written by a group of people associated with education and Union affairs and was the focus for a meeting held in Wanstead Library on November 10<sup>th</sup>. It proved an excellent evening of talks and discussion from contributors to the book and others associated with educational matters, and despite the cold and damp outside was well attended. The book itself is well worth reading.

**Liz Dolan**

## **Film Review: Every Cook Can Govern**

When I attended a twilight seminar led by CLR James in 1975 at Dalston Library, I was struck by how humble he was and how sound and sober his judgement. Produced by the WORLDwrite group in Hackney, *Every Cook Can Govern*, a filmed documentary biography, deals with the different stages of the Caribbean writer and political leader's life, covering, for example, his travels in the USA, where he participated in the struggles and campaigns of workers in the Deep South cotton trades of Missouri, his work as a journalist and his time in London and Lancashire.

CLR's British connections will ensure that the film will resonate with British students of black history and British born people of Caribbean extraction. His engagement in the lives of ordinary people, his interest in cricket and sports journalism, make him an important and significant character from the twentieth century history book.

What particularly struck me at the screening that I attended at London University this year was the range of subjects that he touched on during his life, including education, racism, work and trade unionism, Marxist theory and politics, the Commonwealth, issues of empire, independence struggles, Caribbean federation, sports and journalism.

As this review cannot do the film justice, I feel it is an entertaining 'must' for anyone with an interest in Black History.

**Barbara Roymacauley**



## **How to Become A Local History Researcher**

Last year, I took a break from teaching and entered the realm of the historical researcher - a realm filled with an assortment of artefacts and official records that reveal fascinating stories about our ancestors and the world in which they lived.

Once I had decided upon a topic worthy of research (the impact of the Great War upon children in my local area), I began reading secondary sources on the general topic. From these books, I gained an understanding of the national picture. In addition, their bibliographies helped me to identify what further sources and types of record were available.

### **Starting the Research**

Next, I visited libraries, record offices and the British Library, armed with a list of books and records that were unavailable on the Internet. Consequently, I was able to find everything I needed, including early editions of the TES (dating back to 1914). In order to access archives, a reader's card was required for most establishments. These were usually free but required several forms of identification and proof of address.

Although libraries and record offices are places of silent independent study, fellow researchers often provide encouragement and become genuinely interested in your progress. Staff are knowledgeable, professional and non-obtrusive when you want to immerse yourself for hours in a document and extremely helpful when you experience a brick wall in your research.

### **The Pains and Pleasures of Research**

As anyone who has undertaken family history research can attest, some days will be spent fruitlessly searching archives for a non-existent reference. However, such days are reduced in significance by the euphoric sense of achievement felt when a missing link in one's research is uncovered. I was buzzing with excitement for days after I came across a 1916 crime report, written by the Chief Constable of Southend's Police, as it fully supported my theory of a wartime juvenile crime wave in Southend. In terms of the sources available, these are as fascinating as they are diverse. For example, log books kept by headteachers from the 1870s until the 1980s, contain extraordinary details of school experiences in the form of uncensored daily accounts. During my study, I discovered headteachers' comments on the impact of Zeppelin raids on children's concentration alongside reflections upon the wisdom of inviting former students to speak during assemblies. It appears that some were rather too graphic when describing their time at the front!

Newspapers are invaluable to local and family historians alike. They contain topical stories as well as accounts of court cases, accidents and social events. The letters pages highlight hotly contested local issues whilst adverts provide an interesting insight into past fashions. However, there is a requirement for the reader to recognise the difference between rhetoric and fact when using local newspapers!

I would recommend historical research and a visit to a local record office to anyone who enjoys discovering the hidden stories within their local community. Personally, it has helped to replace the two aspects of teaching that I missed the most; the intellectual challenge and sense of achievement.

**Andrew Emeny**

## Profile of an Activist: Bob Archer at 70



Anyone who has known Bob for any length of time will appreciate his absolute commitment to social justice and human rights, and the sheer energy and determination of his political campaigning. Many of us may only scratch our heads and wonder at just how he finds the time to be involved in so many campaigns and political and union groups.

I first knew Bob when he appeared at Ilford County High School in 1995 as a teacher of German. He immediately impressed me as someone of great intelligence and humour, an effective and respected teacher, and always supportive of fellow staff. When the previous NUT Rep retired, Bob – of course – took over the position. This immediately gave the NUT group new direction.

Bob puts down his political beliefs to the influence of his parents, who were ‘active and radical socialists’. From an early age, he was stuffing envelopes, delivering leaflets, and, on one occasion in an election, following a ‘town-crier’ with a large bell, giving out leaflets with other children.

### Education and Employment

His education started in Blackpool, before he moved to Leeds. The family then moved to London, and Bob attended Battersea Grammar in Streatham, where a key influence was “Toff” Mackenzie, the Head of Classics. Bob then succeeded in gaining a place at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.

Apart from family and educational influences, Bob states that his heroes include Spartacus, Oliver Cromwell, Robespierre, Feargus O’Connor, and George Julian Harney, since they were, “All great freedom fighters and revolutionaries”.

Early employment whilst in education included a Saturday job in the local grocers, packing the sweetcorn harvest, and working out recalculations of insurance premiums. In education, Bob has been a part-time lecturer, a full-time language teacher, a translator involved in the printing and publishing industry. It was whilst working in the latter that Bob met Viv (Mrs Archer). He then returned to education, becoming a language teacher from 1990.

Of course, union membership and activism were part of Bob’s life from early on. He was a member of the NUT at 18 as an ‘uncertificated supply teacher’ (obviously, the membership criteria were less strict then!), then of the ASTMS, the National Graphical Association, and the NUT again from 1990. More recently, he has been President of the Redbridge Teachers’ Association for a good while before relinquishing that role in 2015. I had the honour of following him in both positions – indeed, a tough act to follow!

### Thinking Ahead

When asked for his views on the current and future political situation, Bob sees further big changes and struggles for the education sector, and believes that trades unionists generally will face even more serious challenges. Thus, they must be very aware of what is happening and why, ensure that they are well-organised as well as flexible and adaptable. Bob sees the way forward as an international socialist movement built from the grassroots upwards.

When asked as to what he considers his greatest achievement, his answer is three words, “Rachel Mary Archer”. You may be sure that Bob and Viv’s daughter will carry forward into the future the family tradition of activism and fighting for peace and justice.

**Nigel May**

## CARE CRISIS, CASH CRISIS, PENSIONS CRISIS?



On Tuesday 11th October RRTA members attended the Annual Retired Teachers Convention. Each of the three main speakers dealt with a crisis.

Dot Gibson, General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention, gave a stark report on Care. The mainly privatised Care "Industry" is totally inadequate and increasingly iniquitous. There are too few carers and inspectors to maintain standards. Social Care is poorly funded, so local councils can only cater for 'critical' needs.

Older people without adequate home care rely increasingly on A&E Services, which are even more expensive to Government. The neglect of Social Care would thus seem to be a false economy.

What we need is a universal National Care Service paid for by taxation.

In the absence of NUT General Secretary, Kevin Courtney, because of illness, Philippa Harvey, past President of the NUT, reported on the funding crisis in schools. The Government's claim to be maintaining funding in schools is misleading. By 2020 there will be a real cut of 8% due to increases in National Insurance and Pension Contributions as well as inflation. Only 6% of schools will see any increase and schools in the most deprived areas are bearing the greatest burden. This is causing larger class sizes and even greater workload for teachers. Recruitment and retention of staff is becoming increasingly difficult. Last year more than 50,000 quit, mainly over workload and the Government has missed its teacher training recruitment target for the last four years. The mental health of both teachers and students is affected. Yet, the new Tory government's greatest priority now seems to be to bring back Grammar Schools.

Dr Nick Kirby reported on the recent changes to State pensions. Many of us, already receiving our pension as teachers, are among the winners. Repeated changes to ages for retirement have adversely affect women. The teachers pension was frozen last year and any increase in April is likely to be less than inflation.

**Bill Harrison**

## NUT/ATL Amalgamation: Special Conference – 5<sup>th</sup> November

Special Conferences were called by both NUT and ATL and held separately on the same day to vote on the decision taken by the respective negotiating parties to ballot the membership on whether to go forward towards amalgamation of the two unions – a moment of historic significance that stimulated lively and at times controversial debate.

An excellent speech from Kevin Courtney set out the context for the negotiations and outlined the advantages for both unions and for teachers and the education service in general. He summarised the changes, including concessions made by both sides (fewer needed by the NUT). I felt privileged to be there as a representative of Redbridge retired teachers.

The feeling of the NUT conference was overwhelmingly in favour of amalgamation – thought there were dissenting voices and also those who felt additional safeguards should be written into the draft regulations of what would be the new union – the National Education Union.

As you may have heard, the vote in favour of amalgamation was 97% and ATL also ratified the decision. The day was notable for the first use by the NUT of "digi-voting" – we were issued with handsets a bit like mobile phones with buttons to press to register our votes – a rather quicker result was obtained than the old system of counting cards!

**Liz Dolan**

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### Final Note

**We are encouraging everyone to opt for an email, rather than a paper copy, of the RRTA Newsletter. If we don't already have your email address, please send it to us asap.**

**If you are keen to retain the paper version, please contact us in the next few weeks.**

**All correspondence and contributions should be sent to either [mikepeters1@ntlworld.com](mailto:mikepeters1@ntlworld.com) or 76 Rous Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex, IG9 6BT**