

The **Redbridge Newsletter**

*Edited, designed and produced by retired members in
Redbridge to share with colleagues across London*

SPRING 2023

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Tina Jacobs took this picture of spring blossom at Angelsey Abbey near Newmarket. See her photo-essay on Snowdrops and Springtime inside this issue

EDITORIAL REFLECTIONS

Looking out of the window as I write, with spring growth slowly spreading, I reflect on how lucky I am to live on the fringe of Epping Forest and to have London with its parks and green spaces on my doorstep. I grew up in Sheffield, another city well-endowed with parks and woodland, and the roadside trees (some of them planted as war memorials) shaded my walk home from school.

A landscape takes many years to mature, whether naturally or as a consequence of visionary design, so the wanton destruction of mature trees in Sheffield and Plymouth, both of which have made national headlines and have been vigorously condemned, is not just a deprivation for now, but for decades to come. Regeneration doesn't always compensate.

In this issue of the Newsletter Edward Milner explains the importance of trees, not simply as an enhancement of the urban environment but as vital to the continuing existence of a habitable planet.

In the news also is the plight, so shamefully mismanaged, of refugee children coming to our shores. Caring for the young people in our charge is a major component of the daily work of all educators; we become temporarily surrogate parents. Jo Buchanan writes movingly about the failure of our global society to extend that care into the world-wide protection and nurture of the children who are our future.

Elsewhere we continue our series on volunteering – an eclectic mix of good causes. The social groupings and networks that are part of our working lives need adjusting once we are retired. Volunteering is one way in which we can both contribute to society, gain a sense of community and forge new friendships. Bob Archer inaugurates a new regular column on books, comple-

mented by a very personal approach to reading from Peter Bianchi. We'd welcome contributions from other readers.

At the forefront of our professional minds must be the current Pay Campaign and what the end result might mean for the future of education. Ben Morris gives an update on the campaign from a Redbridge perspective, noting the crucial contribution of retired members for ballot success; it would be good to hear experiences from other London boroughs.

One major concern is the not so gradual destruction of the local authority control of schools. Maureen McCarthy writes about academies, an ongoing blight.

Some of the nastiness of the political scene is featured in Henry Tiller's thought-provoking article – again a very personal view but one that is probably shared by many.

Social events continue to be part of our Redbridge approach. In November we held a tea-party for retired members and invited older educators who might be thinking of retirement to join us. Both those who attended and those who wrote to excuse themselves were enthusiastic about the idea. In February, we held the first post-pandemic coffee morning, a regular engagement and always an enjoyable opportunity to natter and sample the cakes and pastries in Belgique.

Later, in March, an intrepid few took part in a guided walk in Wanstead Park, once the site of one of the grandest Tudor mansions in London and still an outpost of Epping Forest (account with pictures in the Summer edition).

Monthly meetings in Wanstead enable us to plot and plan ... Enjoy the result!

Liz Dolan



Wanstead Flats is just one of London's local 'parks and green spaces'

News from NEU

Redbridge retired teachers and the pay campaign

The last year has been a turning point for the NEU and the wider trade union movement. After a decade of austerity, continuous real pay erosion, underfunding of the public sector and trade union passivity, we have seen a real change. Much of this is down to the sharp increase in inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. Some is down to growing awareness of a crisis in our public services. However, a great deal is also owed to active trade unionists and the hard organizing work that has taken place.

In January 2022, the NEU undertook an indicative survey on pay, in a year when inflation was around 3% and teacher pay was frozen. The result was a 29% turnout, some way short of the 50% threshold imposed by the Government in 2016. However, Redbridge achieved 55%, the highest turnout in the country. This proved what was possible with hard work and close attention to organizing detail. We knew that breaking the threshold would not just happen, but we took the attitude that it could be possible given the right approach. We saw the task as neither easy nor impossible, and left nothing to fate.

This was an approach that Redbridge NEU had been building on since 2018 with the election of a new leadership focused strongly on improving organization in schools. This proved very important during the Covid period when the Branch supported and developed many new activists and drew unprecedented numbers to Zoom branch meetings.

The role of retired teachers

The Redbridge result was a surprise to many, as we surpassed some Inner London branches with a much longer tradition of stronger rep organization. Much of this was down to close support for our reps and the incredible work they put in. But another important factor was the support we were able to give schools without reps. This was done partly through phone banking, and largely through many hours of work put in by several of our retired members.

At a large number of schools without reps, our retired teachers achieved turnouts close to or equal to schools with active reps. In some schools, new activists were identified, and new reps stepped forward as a result.

As inflation took off in the course of 2022 and other unions began taking national action for the first time in years, we knew that we could improve on the January



1000s of teachers joined other trade unionists on the national demonstration on 15 March 2023

turnout. Another 20% was needed everywhere if we were to come close enough to the 50% needed in a formal postal ballot. The Redbridge machine swung into action once more and for a second time we achieved the highest turnout in the country – with an incredible 82% turnout – and a Yes vote to strikes of 93% for teachers and 88% for support staff.

This prepared us for the formal ballot, in which both teachers and support staff in Redbridge achieved a 75% turnout. It did prove harder, with a postal ballot, to rely on phone calls rather than on personal contact, and the gap between schools with and without reps was slightly larger.

The result of the national action is yet to be determined. We have seen an unprecedented level of picketing in Redbridge and across the country. The London demonstration on 15th March was truly inspiring. With negotiations currently ongoing we both hope for the best and prepare for the worst. If no concessions are made regarding pay and funding, we will have to discuss how to continue or step up the action. I hope also that the NEU does not follow some unions in settling for a 'least bad' offer, which still constitute real cuts to pay and funding. Out of this struggle, we can build a stronger union and challenge the concerns about Ofsted and workload, which also lie at the heart of the teacher recruitment and retention crisis.

Ben Morris

We would love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article. Email your thoughts in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

Amazing Wetlands

(and volunteering at one)

Reading the last newsletter, I was doubly disappointed to see the picture of rubbish piled up in a local waterway. Disappointed to see it and disappointed not to be surprised by it.

As the current joint health and safety officer for Hounslow NEU, I attended our annual briefing last November in Bristol. During the plenary on climate change/ climate education that concentrated mainly on greening the planet, I felt, as a volunteer at the London Wetland Centre in Barnes, that I needed to speak up for wetlands - the ones that we see around us every day.

All about Wetlands

Wetlands are the Earth's most diverse eco systems, coming in all shapes and sizes from garden ponds, bogs and fens to the Pantanal of South America - the largest in the world. (Bigger than England, Wales and Northern Ireland combined and a recognised UNESCO World Heritage biosphere). They are home to the most amazing plants and animals, more than any other habitat on earth. However, although the earth is 70% water, less than 0.23% is fresh, unfrozen and accessible - yet 40% of all species, including us, depend on it for life.

What have wetlands ever done for us? Wetlands can store twice as much carbon as rainforests but, thanks to us, are being lost three times faster. They help clean our water and they can help buffer us from floods and drought by storing water and releasing it slowly.

Volunteering at the London Wetland Centre

So, welcome to the urban oasis that is the London Wetland Centre, part of The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, in Barnes. Formerly the site of four Victorian holding reservoirs, it was developed into an urban wetland centre in the late 1990s and opened to the public in May 2000. I have been a volunteer with the Visitor Engagement Team since then, with such roles as providing guided tours, welcoming school groups, giving spotlight talks and offering meet, greet and roam services.

What We Offer

The talks include: Urban Oasis – what a wetland/oasis is and how the centre came to be; Mission Possible – how wetlands can help mitigate the



The picture that caused Janet Clarke 'double disappointment' in our Winter 2022 issue.

Credit: Acacia Productions

effects of climate change and how we can help; or it might be Bird of The Day. This talk focuses on the living collection and on the bird that helps tell the story of our work in monitoring and managing threats to wetlands, wetland species and the people who depend on wetlands for their livelihoods. The Great Crane Project tells the story of the Eurasian Crane, a once common bird that was driven to breeding extinction in Britain by the end of the 16th century.

Meet, greet and roam is exactly what it says - meeting and greeting visitors when they arrive, telling them what there is to see and do and, most importantly, where the facilities are. Volunteers also chat with birders (many of them regulars) about the latest sightings and walk different areas of the site, finding out what other teams are doing or simply take advantage of the quiet places, such as the wild-side or sheltered lagoon.

The pandemic has made us more aware that being around nature contributes to our physical and mental health and that the wetlands are great places to visit for that reason. Even taking time to look around your local canal can show you all manner of wildlife – dragonflies, the odd heron or two, even a kingfisher if you are lucky.

Volunteering at a wetland/wetland centre can be cold, wet and tiring but it's always rewarding. So visit a



Oh the irony! As this issue of the Newsletter was being prepared, a furious fellow trade-unionist shared this picture of overflowing sewage polluting the ornamental lake in South Park, Ilford. Local schools send pupils to this location for nature study. Photo: Dan Ingreji

wetland near you soon – or become a volunteer at one and spread the word about their importance for wildlife and people.

Activities available

Generation Wild: this is a free programme aimed at providing children in disadvantaged areas the opportunity to connect with nature. Research has shown that nature connection has huge positive benefits to children's mental and physical wellbeing, concentration, behaviour and attainment, and through an engaging narrative and a specially designed activity trail, children will be able to explore the natural world around them wherever they live. Generation Wild is offered FREE at London Wetland Centre to all schools with 25% or more pupils registered for free school meals, and we are also able to offer subsidised coach travel to the Centre (currently up to £9 per pupil). All participating children also receive a free family ticket to the Centre, so they can return with their families, and access to a special website full of activities that can be done in their own local area. Here's the link for the website:
<https://generationwild.wwt.org.uk/>

Bat walks: the London Wetland Centre is one of the best places to watch bats in London. Our bat walks give you the chance not only to see these amazing, flying mammals and their astonishing aerial acrobatics but also learn more about them with a talk by one of our bat experts in our theatre, before heading out to the Reserve. www.wwt.org.uk/London (I can vouch for these walks, having helped out on several).

Blue Prescribing: feeling overwhelmed? Our Blue Prescribing Project is an innovative wetland-based health programme for people experiencing poor mental health, designed to enhance their connection with nature and improve their wellbeing. To learn more and to book your FREE place on one of our workshops email: blueprescriptions@wwt.org.uk or call 07901 620230

Janet Clarke, Hounslow

We would love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article. Maybe tell us about your volunteering experiences. Email your thoughts in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

Volunteering in retirement

Caring for cats

I have always been a volunteer. As a child my father was in a cycling club and I would go with him to marshal at time-trial races. As an adult I began running and would always try to volunteer as a marshal at local races a few times a year, as these races could not happen without an army of volunteers.

Local Cat Charity

When I made the decision to take early retirement, I was looking forward to taking on more volunteering commitments and I got in touch with the local cat rescue - Waltham Forest Cats Protection. We had been involved with them before the pandemic when we adopted a stray cat from them who was found wandering the streets. We still had one cat at home from a group of three that we adopted from Celia Hammond Rescue in 2004 but they managed to rub along with each other until the older cat sadly died.

Capella

Natalie from Waltham Forest Cats Protection asked if we could foster cats for her and I agreed, envisioning mother cats and kittens or kittens I would be hand feeding. Our first foster could not be more different from that! Her name was Capella. Her owner had brought her to the rescue centre and asked them to put her to sleep as she was too ill and the owner could not, or would not, look after her. She had eaten some poisonous substances which had damaged her mouth and she was also arthritic, so was a funny looking little creature. But when we visited her she seemed quite happy to come to us. We agreed to long term foster her as she was unlikely to get a home as an adopted cat, due to her age.

Natalie delivered her one evening shortly after and she emerged from the cat basket complaining very loudly, hissing at us. We decided to feed her and she promptly started eating but did not stop hissing, so cat food was sprayed around the room. Eventually she settled down. We kept her in the foster room for a few days and she appeared to be ok and would come and sit on my lap. However, when we let her out to see the rest of the house, she took an instant dislike to my partner and my other cat was terrified of her! This meant that at night she had to stay in the foster room but she was desperately unhappy and would cry out in the night. Sadly, she had to go to another foster home. I delivered her and she was instantly happier in a home with no other cats or men and she is still there doing well.



Rachel with Bobby

Bobby

Our next foster was a boy called Bobby. He had been brought in with a group of other cats from a feral colony near me. They were all neutered and returned, but staff noticed he was being bullied and thought he probably was not a feral but had just been dumped there. He settled in immediately and was obviously a pet at some point, as he was so friendly and just wanted strokes, cuddles and food. In fact, he is by my side now - he was what we call a foster fail as I have adopted him.

Volunteering

I will not take any fosters for a while now as my house is full, but I continue to help the Charity by collecting food that people give away and delivering it to Natalie to distribute to the Centre and foster carers. I am always on standby to take foster cats to vet appointments. I also raise money by doing sponsored running challenges as well as checking on social media to ensure cats are not being given away or sold and try to constantly promote the message that cats should be neutered not bred.

Adopt don't shop!

Rachel Brittle

We would love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article or to tell us about your volunteering experiences. Email your contributions in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

Redbridge Citizens Advice

what we do and how you can help

The citizens of Redbridge are experiencing poverty, hardship and the severe weakening of basic essential support services due to cutbacks and austerity in the current cost-of-living crisis.

Media attention is often fixed on inner city areas, but agencies such as Citizens Advice Redbridge (CAR) know all too well about the need on our own doorstep. Redbridge is often forgotten when it comes to funding, with the perception of Redbridge being an affluent area taking centre stage, rather than the harsh reality that we have wards experiencing extreme poverty and deprivation. These pockets of poverty and deprivation are on the rise and now more than ever our residents need us to advocate on their behalf so that Redbridge does not continue to be forgotten.

The Cost of Living Crisis and Benefit Issues

Universal credit and other benefits are increasing by 10.1 per cent in April. But they will be lower than their pre-pandemic levels in real terms until 2025, according to research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies. Universal credit claimants will be £140 short of the money needed to afford the essentials each month even after benefits increase, according to new analysis from the Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). It comes after stark research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) showed benefits have not kept up with soaring inflation – and April's increase won't make up for the shortfall. Benefits claimants will be six per cent worse off in real terms than they were in 2019. That's because rises are based on inflation figures from months before the increase actually comes in.

Advice and Support Services

The Greater London Authority is funding the London Citizens Advice network and London Legal Support Trust Centres of Excellence to work in partnership. The funding aims to increase advisor capacity across the network of London LCAs and the wider London advice sector. This is to deliver an advice model that responds to the needs of Londoners struggling with the cost of living and to extend the sector's reach to support more Londoners, including through partnerships with community organisations and 'Advice First Aid' training.

Crisis Prevention Advice

The role of the Crisis Prevention Adviser is two pronged - to be both on the front line as an adviser and to also provide training to volunteers to connect people experiencing hardship with the support they need to

improve their circumstances. The crisis prevention adviser will carry out an initial assessment and benefits checks and complete a debt assessment if required.

The Crisis Prevention Adviser is also delivering 'Advice First Aid (AFA)' training, which involves working with community and voluntary sector partners, training them on how to connect people experiencing hardship with the support they need to improve their circumstances.

The cost of living has affected everyone and the hardships that people are facing are unimaginable. Now more than ever we have an increased demand for advice, yet we do not have the capacity or funding to be able to fulfil this demand. That is why we need volunteers. Citizens Advice Redbridge relies on volunteers to provide advice and run different aspects of the Citizens Advice service. In a typical week of 2021/22, 25 volunteers provided 156 hours of service. We calculate that all our volunteers together, over the year, provided £186,274.56 in public value.

Volunteering with Citizens Advice

A volunteer might be able to help with admin, form-filling, helping a client to navigate online accounts, letter writing, including, for example, requesting a mandatory consideration, assistance in accessing such different types of support as disability benefits, local authority housing support, charitable grants and the Fuel Bank Foundation scheme to provide fuel vouchers to clients.

Ruthba Amin

For more information about the project or if you would like to help, please email -

ruthba.amin@citizensadviceredbridge.org.uk.

Ruthba Amin

Crisis Prevention Adviser

Citizens Advice Redbridge

1st Floor, Redbridge Central Library

Clements Road, Iford,

IGI IEA

(Hours: Monday-Friday 9am-5pm)

Redbridge Retired Educators would also love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article or wish to tell us about your volunteering experiences. Email your contributions in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

How did I ever have time for a job?

Reflections on 10 years of retirement

I retired at 61, despite still enjoying many aspects of my job. For some time, I had become frustrated that education was progressively directed by factors which had more to do with declining finances and 'ticking boxes' than the holistic needs of young people within society. Then my son's emigration to Australia meant I needed the flexibility to travel for a few months every year to visit him and his family, while seeing something of the world on the way.

I relished the freedom to do as I pleased with my time, apart from the sudden demands of grandchildren. How did their parents ever manage when I was working? I redecorated my whole house, including tiling two bathrooms. I discovered the delights of walking my dogs for an hour or two every morning and made good use of my free swimming and travel passes, but before long I found myself drawn into all sorts of volunteering opportunities. My two favourites are very different, but both give me similar enjoyment and fulfilment.

Maypole Dancing

The first is very active and offers a whole range of physical and mental health benefits. I really enjoyed country dancing at school and when Higham's Park

Community bought a maypole as part of a successful lottery funding bid, I was very keen to become involved. It's a portable maypole and the cost of participation included an initial lesson in which we were taught how to put the pole and ribbons together and to do some basic dances. At the end of this session someone said what a shame it was that we could only afford one taught lesson.

Infant school

I vividly remember maypole dancing at infant school and I flippantly commented, "I'm sure it can't be that hard to teach ourselves." This was enough to have me declared the official Higham's Park maypole dance teacher and leader. After pulling a team together and a steep learning-curve for all of us, we managed to put on a credible display a few weeks later at the Higham's Park May festival.

Maypole dancing can be enjoyed at almost any age and level of fitness. The main requirements are that you can walk, hold a ribbon and smile. The young and fit can make it into aerobic exercise, and so long as everyone moves around the circle at the same speed, it works. The patterns exercise your brain enough to



Maypole dancing can be enjoyed at almost any age and level of fitness. The main requirements are that you can walk, hold a ribbon and smile.

ward-off the extremes of dementia and it is, judging by the constant laughter, an up-lifting social experience. We still meet in Higham's Park most Saturday mornings when it is not too wet. Why not come and join us?

Breast Feeding Volnteering

When my daughter told me about a poster she had seen in a baby clinic a few years ago, asking for volunteers to train as breast-feeding Peer Supporters, I knew it was something I wanted to do. I thought I would be considered too old, but I applied and was accepted onto a training course with an organisation called 'Henry' that provides infant feeding advice within several local authorities, including Waltham Forest. Most people are aware that breast-feeding is the best way of providing the correct nutrition for young babies but there are also huge emotional benefits for the mother and baby too.

Some mothers decide that breast-feeding is not for them even before their baby is born. Many start and give up within days or weeks and, for some, the feelings of 'failure' can exacerbate normal 'baby-blues' into deeper depression and longer-term difficulties in establishing a mother-child bond. Unfortunately, despite being a very natural process, there are a variety of reasons why some mothers and babies find it difficult in the beginning.

Peer supporters

Peer-Supporters are volunteers who have breast-fed one or more of their own children. They support the professional breast-feeding consultant at the sessions by making initial contact with the mother, and sometimes the father too, listening to concerns, and giving some calm reassurance, always based on sound research evidence. Breast-milk supply is stimulated by the baby sucking the whole nipple, often and strongly. Some simple advice on feeding position and/or frequency can be all that is needed, particularly if the new parents don't have extended family nearby and are exhausted and overwhelmed. Mothers are often in hospital for no more than 24 hours after birth, and the midwives are often too busy to spend much time helping with establishing feeding. Sometimes the baby has a tongue-tie that needs a simple surgical procedure to help the baby to latch-on to the breast efficiently. The professional worker can make a direct referral to a tongue-tie clinic, which can offer treatment if necessary.

Weaning

We can also advise on mixed-feeding and weaning onto solid food for older babies and help mothers, who are considering stopping breast-feeding, to make a rational decision for themselves and their families without feeling guilty.



The patterns exercise your brain enough to ward off the extremes of dementia and it is, judging by the constant laughter, an uplifting social experience

The world would certainly be a better place if there were more dancing and breast-feeding, and so I like to think that I'm still making my contribution to establishing good relationships between people, which has always been the most important job of any teacher.

Betty Hales

We would love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article or wish to tell us about your volunteering or other retirement activities. Email your contributions in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

Snowdrops and spring!

A selection of photographs by Tina Jacobs



Above and right: Chippenham Park in March

Snowdrops are a lovely sight - a signal that winter is coming to an end and that spring is on its way. This is particularly true when there are masses of them. Two excellent places to see them are at Chippenham Park Gardens and Anglesey Abbey, which are both near Newmarket. It would be about an hour or so drive, but it is well worth the effort.

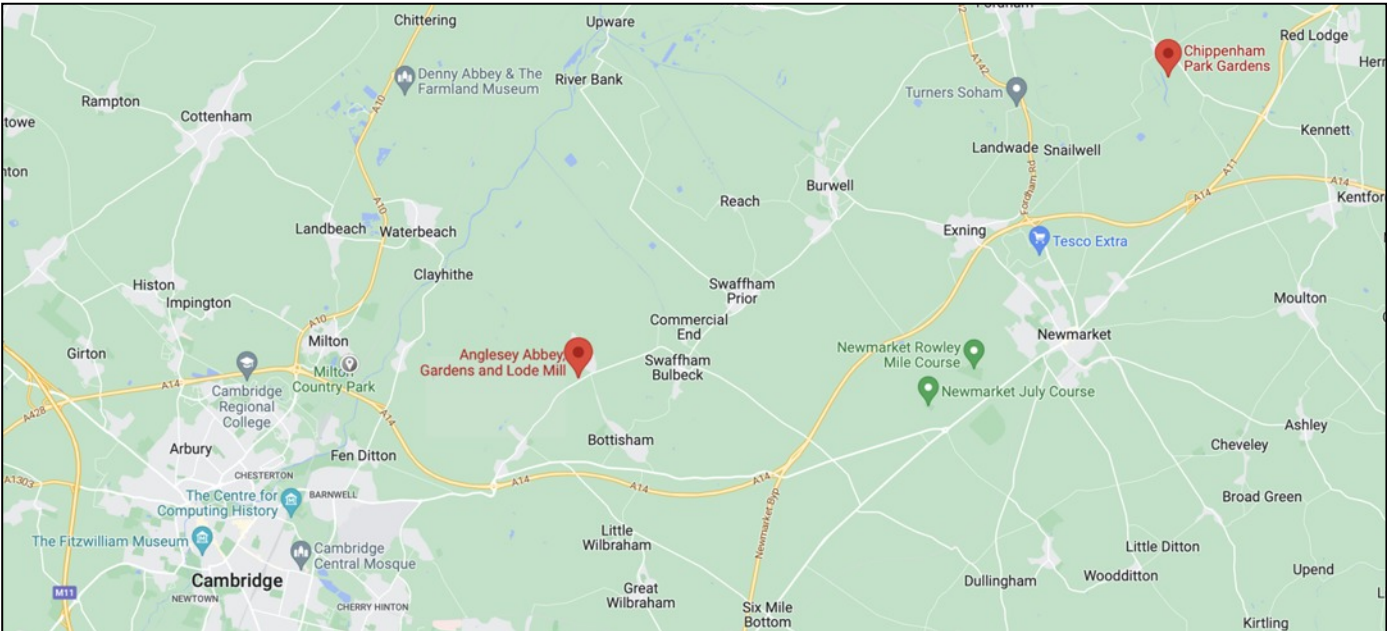


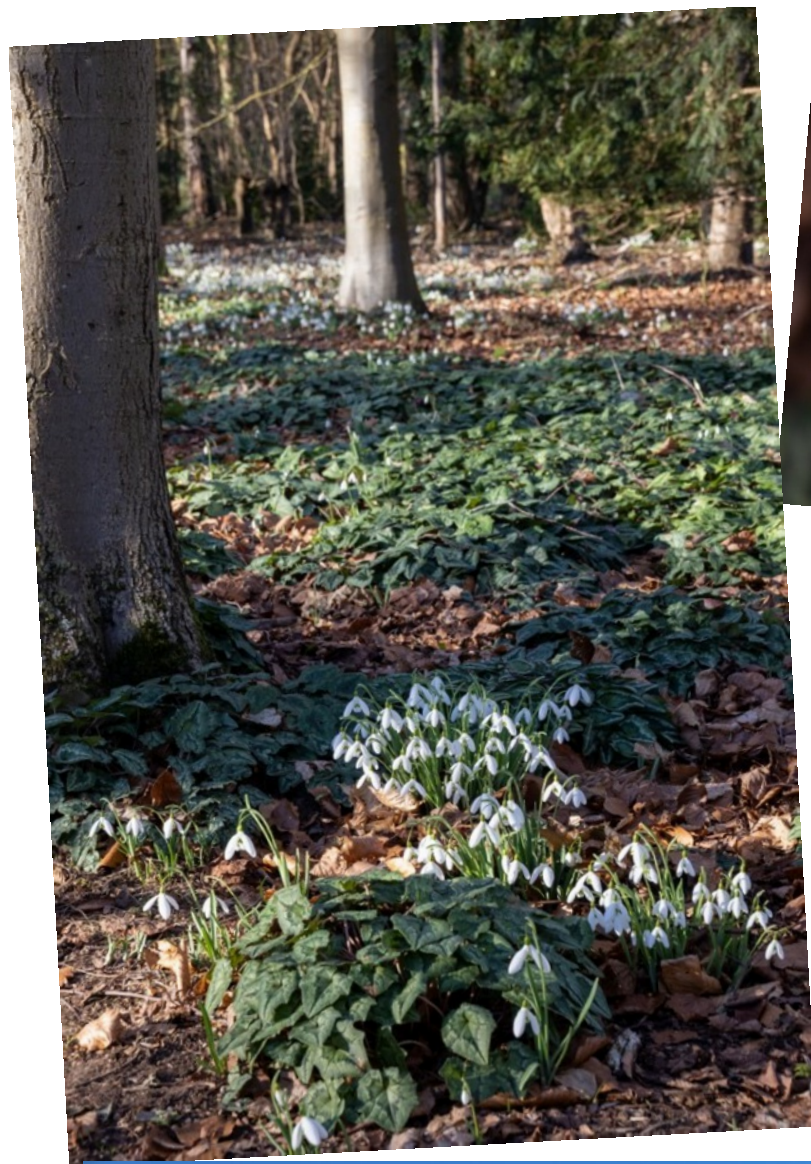


Chippenham Park is more informal



The snowdrops and other spring flowers are spread among the trees of the parkland





Anglesey Abbey has a winter garden that is well set out with lots of other winter interest, but it comes into its own when the snowdrops are out





Both have excellent cafes with nice cakes if that is your thing. It is mine!

These are a few photos from my visits to both places in February this year

Tina Jacobs



We would love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article or to tell us about one of your favourite places. Email your contributions in any form you chose to the Editorial team at mike321peters@gmail.com

What are YOU reading?

In each issue of our Newsletter, Bob Archer will talk about books he has enjoyed (or maybe not!) over the last three months

***Lessons*, Ian McEwan**

Two well-established authors have produced blockbuster accounts of their (our!) entire generation. Ian McEwan's *Lessons* is the story of a talented baby-boomer whose life is impacted in surprising ways by world-events – the Suez Crisis, the Cuba Missile Crisis, the Fall of the Berlin Wall. As a talented pianist, he might have made it on the concert stage, but he doesn't. Instead, he makes a fairly comfortable living in upmarket hotel bars, living in bohemian comfort in a south London slum as the terraces around him gentrify.

All along the way, *Lessons* deals with love, sex and relationships in surprising ways. Women in this story do things in the pursuit of fulfilment that they are perhaps not traditionally expected to have, leaving carnage in their wake. So, in various ways, this novel presents how lives have changed in the last 75 years. It is also packed with incident and fun to read.

***Bournville*, Jonathan Coe**

Most British cities have had brilliant fiction written about them. Think of Manchester and *Fame is the Spur*, or The Potteries in the hands of Arnold Bennet. I used to wonder, when visiting Birmingham in the 1960s, whether Brum had ever been celebrated in that way. But then along came Jonathan Coe, who has single-handedly sorted that one out. His latest - *Bournville* - is more of a family-saga, and shares characters and plot with some of Coe's other Birmingham novels. It is based in the model Birmingham suburb built by the Cadbury family to be a sort of paradise for the firm's employees. The story opens with the celebrations at the end of World War II.

Like McEwan, Coe sets his tale within the context of national and world events. Moments of national change are captured. Shifts in social class and outlook are registered. Against the background of the 1953 Coronation, the 1966 World Cup, Charles and Diana's wedding, her death, migration, the arrival of television in people's homes and the fortunes of the chocolate industry, generations clash and differ over hostility to say Germans or commonwealth immigrants, and ideas about where to live or how to decorate one's home. Life emerges as a recurrence of patterns in a web of change.



Coe's pianist character is a woman, and she chooses marriage to a bigoted, grumpy husband rather than either a career as a professional pianist or a relationship with the very nice journalist she meets up in London in the crowds celebrating the 1953 Coronation. What is it with pianists?

***The Romantic*, William Boyd**

This is another "whole life" novel, but this one starts in the early part of the nineteenth Century. I don't want to give away too much of the story, because it unfolds in a fair number of surprising ways, at the edges of several quite well-known places and events, and others we are probably less familiar with. Full of adventure, love, loss, disappointment, and sheer survival. A lovely read.

***A Small Town in Ukraine*, Bernard Wasserstein**

This is the most moving book. Wasserstein and his brother decided to find out what they could about their family origins in Krakowiec in Galicia. This result from years of research provides a factual history of the area and this little town, with its Jewish inhabitants over several centuries. It also reports the details they have carefully teased out about what happened to their grandparents and how their own father survived against the odds.

The book is a window into this part of Eastern Europe with its many lines of cleavage between Ukrainians, Poles, Russians, Jews and Austrian and German invaders. But above all it is an elegy to a Jewish population and culture which was callously and systematically wiped out.

We would love to hear from you, so please get in touch if you have any book recommendations and/or reviews. Email your contributions in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

Plots, books, and deadlines

My granddaughter is keeping me up to date with her progress through *The Humans* by Matt Haig, thirty pages at a time. She has to complete it to a deadline and is enjoying it, but like me is not a natural reader nor watcher of TV - we both much prefer physical activities.

School reading

I struggled to read literature at school, following languages and science, for which I had to read plenty. It was usually theories, rules and instructions on how to solve problems, which was the bit I liked. I am a slow-reader, and I can't remember how many times I got to page forty-five or fifty-three of my 'library' choice only to have to start again, because I had forgotten the plot. I still don't remember plots, so I'll make a fresh start now.

Reading today

I have never had so much to read. Magazines from university and college alumni organisations, from the Union, from the Institute of Physics, from the U3A and from any of the causes I have chosen to support. The reading comes either on paper or electronically. The paper builds up and the online stuff gets forgotten. The one newsletter I always read promptly is this one. The articles are always good and after nearly fifty years teaching locally, I often find links to events and people which chime with my experiences. Articles on the Stanstead deportation protest and about Hackney Downs School, for example, linked me to colleagues and acquaintances from our Scout Group in Stoke Newington, so add to insights I already had into issues.

Writing and deadlines

Mike Peters and his team do an excellent job and after Bob Archer had circulated the flyer for the New Redbridge Wind Orchestra (NRWO), in which I am an amateur player, I agreed to write something about the Orchestra and community activities. But this is not it!

Organising Scouting activities teaches you a bit about getting people involved and I have to work to many deadlines, so I don't want to miss Mike's. The NRWO piece, although started, will have to wait for another issue, so back to the 'plot'.

Back to school

I never managed to be inspired by my English teachers; pupils today get a much better deal I believe. I can only remember one book I read at school before O Level. I think it was called *The Master* and was leant to me by Mr Burden in the last year at Newington Green Primary. Maybe it involved Rockall which was in the news yesterday, but I am not sure - and as for the plot?

For O Level *Huckleberry Finn* was a good read and *Pride and Prejudice* a total surprise and revelation but I still just scraped a pass at Eng. Lit., being allowed to enter by the HM as my other grades were ok.

Science A Levels have always been a slog, but the school still required minority studies, so I chose French, Russian and the English Novel, leaving about three free periods out of fifty-three. The English teacher was the exception to the rule, a young, fair haired, north country man with glasses and I am saddened not to remember his name. In thirty-five minutes, he introduced one novelist each week and one recommendation. I read these promptly and looked forward to the next week. While working in the gap year, I read all I could find from this list of authors and many others - around six books a week from Islington Public library. Once involved in a book I could read it through, but sitting reading for so long was not good for me physically, even at 18.

Time to read

The Physics degree was tough and reading went by the board again, as it did for my working life as a teacher. One or two books a year if I was lucky, particularly on holiday, enjoying my time while others were enjoying theirs in the pool. Now in retirement, like so many, I find myself, if it is possible, busier than when working.

Being trapped by Covid in Madrid was also tough. Most, including children were locked in for six weeks but I was one of the lucky ones. I could walk at my leisure to the shops for food, and as I had few other deadlines, I had time and place to read.

I was talking about this with Mike and Henry at the last coffee morning and mentioned two of the books I had enjoyed reading, which I felt related to aspects of the world in the past that illuminated our present situation. I was a bit surprised to find how few people had heard of or had read them.

The books were *Persian Letters* by Montesquieu in the Penguin Classics edition (it may well be the first epistolary novel) and *A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian* by Marina Lewycka, again in Penguin. You might enjoy them.

Peter Bianchi

Are you the same sort of reader as Peter? What were the obstacles you found to becoming a reader? How do you help your own children (or grandchildren) to overcome difficulties and enjoy a good book?

The Corbyn years (2015-20)

"He who controls the media, controls the minds of the public" Noam Chomsky

Trashing a reputation

In 2015, stopping just short of declaring that the end of the world was nigh, David Cameron, who had launched a decade of austerity to ensure that ordinary people paid for the financial crisis of 2008, heralded Jeremy Corbyn's arrival as the new leader of the Labour Party with these tweeted words: "The Labour Party is now a threat to our national security, our economic security and your family's security."

And this pretty much set the tone for the next five years, with Cameron's remarks being followed by: the Sun's claims that Jeremy Corbyn (JC) wanted to abolish the army on the basis of a casual remark made three years previously in relation to Costa Rica; by the same newspaper falsely accusing JC of failing to bow his head in memory of Britain's fallen at the Cenotaph; by Ben Bradley, a Conservative MP, accusing JC of having 'sold British secrets to communist spies' back in the 1980s, which he later admitted to being 'untrue and false'; and all this and much, much more

in addition to a sizeable group of Labour MPs and employees at Labour Party HQ actively trying to undermine him. Such was the incessant tirade of abuse against the man that even random events, such as the 179 bus from Woodford Green to Ilford turning up 20 minutes late, could get you thinking, without quite knowing why, 'it's all Jeremy Corbyn's fault!'

The Reality of Jeremy Corbyn

So, it must have been something pretty horrendous that JC was planning to unleash on the British public to evoke such a stream of invective. Well actually, not really! JC's planned political and economic agenda was radical, not revolutionary, certainly well within the realms of social democracy and was in operation in several countries in Europe and beyond. His flagship policies included: free university education for all; re-nationalization of the public utilities and the railways; a fairer tax system, with only the top 5% of tax payers and larger companies paying more, and top rates being lower than during most of the period when Margaret Thatcher was in



Corbyn's Lenin-style hat provided further proof for some that he was a Communist spy



Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn together: character assassination goes with returning Labour to its socialist roots

power; all current spending being paid for out of taxation; a sustainable energy policy, involving, amongst other things, the insulation of 4 million homes; and a reversal of austerity cuts to welfare and public services. Polls consistently showed such policies to be popular with the electorate, with only a small minority citing them as reasons not to vote for the party in 2019.

The Perceived `Problem` with Corbyn

So, what's not to like? Well, as a good friend of mine (since my first day at secondary school) loves to tell me, "the Labour Party is as integral a part of the establishment as the Conservative Party itself." And, generally, the establishment tolerates the Labour Party so long as it operates, as has usually been the case, within the parameters set by, and acceptable to, the establishment. The `problem` with JC and his agenda was that, although clearly social democratic in nature, it moved *slightly* outside what was deemed acceptable to the billionaire owners of the right-wing press and the sizeable Blairite wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Keir Starmer's current agenda, despite him disingenuously harvesting in votes in his bid for the leadership of the Labour Party by promising to continue with JC's manifesto, is to move the party sharply back inside those establishment-set boundaries. And the solution, then, to the question of `how do you solve a problem like JC?' was the tried and tested one, which has historically been successfully deployed against all those on the left, such as Tony

Benn, Arthur Scargill and Bob Crowe, who were credible and challenged the ruling ideology - namely that of demonisation.

Corbyn's Threat

The Labour Party's polling success in the 2017 election, which came as a considerable surprise to many, clearly worried the establishment and made the demonisation of JC all the more necessary for them. In fact, despite the given narrative relating to the failures of JC and the impossibility of getting the British electorate to accept a left-wing agenda, the 2017 election result completely flew in the face of this analysis. Although Labour again finished as the second largest party in Parliament, their share of the popular vote increased to 40%, the largest since 2001, with a net gain of 30 seats and with a 9.6% increase in vote share - the largest since the 1945 general election. (This and the football-style chant of "Oh, Jeremy Corbyn", bellowed out wherever he appeared by hordes of young, enthusiastic, well-educated supporters, was particularly worrying for JC's multitude of detractors.)

Demonising Corbyn

With the alarm bells now ringing loudly about the distinct possibility of a too-leftish, social democratic Labour Party coming to power next time around, something clearly had to be done, the ante had to be upped and mud had to be made to stick. Thus, JC, a politician with a strong vision of a fairer world, who had his own allotment and made his own jam, had

to be portrayed in terms of the purest evil, in effect turning the truth on its head, lest the British electorate should be so foolhardy as to elect a government which actually did operate in the 'interests of the many, not the few'.

But what type of evil could be made to fit the bill? Terrorist sympathiser, communist spy, threat to national, economic and family security and misogynist were all tried, but the evil which, in the event, seemed to stick the best and to be the most effective was that of Antisemitism.

Corbyn and Antisemitism

So, to what extent is it true that JC, someone regarded as a thoroughly decent human being by most who know him personally, is an antisemite? Well, being Jewish myself and having experienced antisemitism first-hand, I do believe that I have something of a personal feel for the issue. And on the basis of this experience and knowledge, I've always found it nothing less than preposterous to cast JC in this light.

Yes, he is someone who supports the rights of the Palestinian people, as any reasonable person would do, but there is no record whatsoever of him ever making an explicitly antisemitic statement, nor of him having anything whatsoever in common with the real antisemites of the far-right. On the contrary, he's a person who's spent most of his life campaigning for social justice and against racism.

Labour and Antisemitism

And what of the claim that the Labour Party was an institutionally antisemitic party during his reign and represented an existential threat to the safety of Jews living in the UK? Well, surveys suggested that a common perception was that one in three Labour Party members were being investigated for antisemitism. This turned out to be about 500 times above the actual figure - a figure which ran into several hundreds, certainly several hundred too many, but estimated to be only approximately 0.1% of the total membership. (Under JC this membership had surged to become the largest in Europe, increasing from 190K in 2015 to 515K in 2016).

So, it was very much a case of the media being riddled with reports of antisemitism in the Labour Party rather than the Party itself being riddled with it. And as a very active member of the Labour Party myself during this period, I attended dozens of meetings, both at ward and constituency level, without ever detecting the slightest trace of antisemitism - an experience which was at complete odds with the national narrative of the time.

Certainly, there were some lively discussions around this narrative presented by the media, but I never heard any Jewish members, and there were many in the Chingford and Woodford Green Constituency, say anything at all about how the Labour Party had become an unwelcoming, threatening place for them, as the media would have it.

On the contrary, most of the Jewish members, like me, broadly supported JC and his agenda. It may well be, of course, that Chingford and Woodford Green is atypical of the rest of the country, but I very much doubt it.

So, despite the Labour Party's remarkable Corbyn-led success in the 2017 election, come the 2019 election, Project Demonisation had proved to be highly successful, and electoral catastrophe followed. For certain, JC made numerous mistakes during his tenure as party leader, not least the way in which the antisemitism issue was managed, but the uniformity of views about the man and the party across a wide social spectrum, was a frightening example of the shaping of opinions, attitudes and perceptions - a process termed the 'engineering of consent' by Edward Bernays, one of the founders of the modern public relations industry.

Out campaigning for the Labour Party before this election and also speaking to all sorts of people, I lost count of those who said to me that they 'couldn't vote Labour because of JC' and who, in all probability, then went on to vote for a Tory Party led by a serial liar with no moral compass and who had made several explicitly racist remarks. In effect, 'good' had been cast as 'bad' and 'bad' as 'good'..... a vivid illustration of Karl Marx's famous assertion that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas."

Disillusion

And me? Deep nausea induced by Starmer's wretched, unjust treatment of JC, his 'brave as a lion' stance in ridding the party of socialists and socialism, his 'meek as a lamb' approach to effectively challenging the Tories and what they stand for - all led to me being one of the many thousands to cancel my membership.....of a Labour Party which, once again, now appears to be (I can hear my friend's voice ringing in my ears) "as integral a part of the establishment as the Conservative Party itself".

Henry Tiller

We like a bit of controversy, so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article. Email your thoughts in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

How trees can save our cities

In midwinter the prospect of a long hot summer may look inviting, but I advise caution; be careful what you wish for. While the thrust of international gatherings like recent COP meetings and headline writers of the popular press are all focussed on far distant dates like 2030 or even 2050, there seems to be little discussion of what needs doing right now, in 2023. Too many ominous trends are already evident upon us; there is no time to waste. Take London for example, our home city. What measures need putting in place, starting today?

London's future

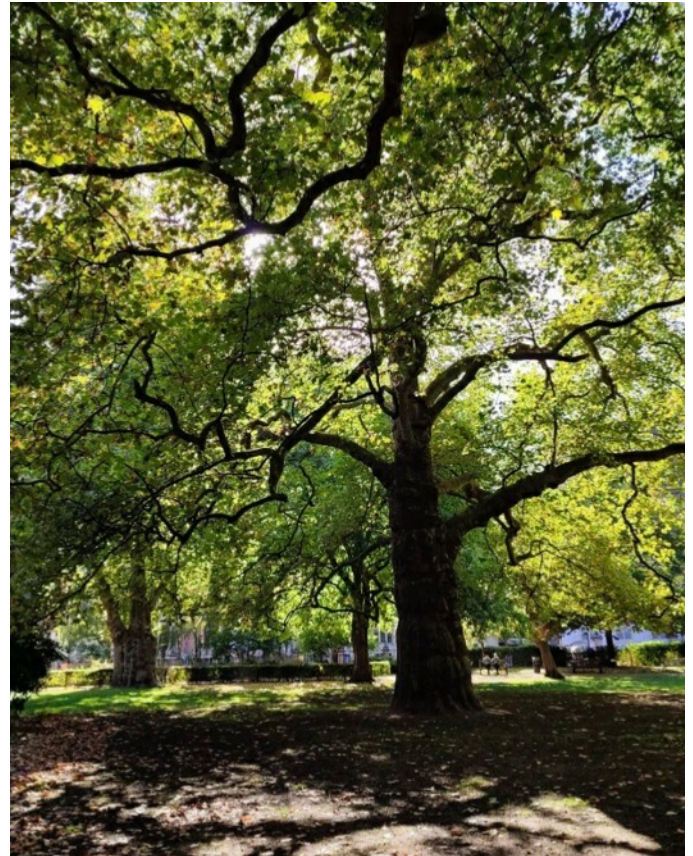
Climate change will clearly have a big impact, but perhaps there are ways in which we could consider 'future-proofing' the metropolis – with implications for all urban areas. Inevitably we must expect not only heatwaves and prolonged periods of drought, but also increasing turbulence; more storms producing heavier and more irregular rainfall, causing local flooding, transport disruption and even threats to life and limb. And that's on top of some existing problems like urban pollution and rocketing energy use, which are both set to worsen.

Impacts of pollution

In too many cities air pollution reduces the life expectancy of large numbers of citizens - even killing some of them directly. Two years ago, when Ella Kissah-Debra (8 years old) of Lewisham, South London, died of an asthma attack, air pollution was recognised as a direct cause of her demise. New studies by Kings College, London and the University of British Columbia have shown links between levels of air pollution and the prevalence of long-term illness, even 'impairment' of brain function. Ella's family lived close to a major road where air quality had been far below legal minimum standard for years. City authorities frequently express their (overdue) concern about the quality of city air, but at present action seems to be restricted to the wringing of hands and easy measures like penalising users of road vehicles and planning a highly controversial ULEZ (Ultra Low Emission Zone) scheme. Like other highly polluted places, the centre of Lewisham is virtually bereft of trees or other greenery, but so far urban tree-planting and hedge installation are not part of the single-track anti-pollution drive.

How trees can help

Deciduous trees in particular can have an enormous ameliorating effect on air pollution; in London we are fortunate in having large numbers of mature London



A London plane tree

Plane trees (*Platanus x acerifolia*) which are well adapted to the urban setting, being robust and resistant to soil compaction, drought and air pollution as well as growing into magnificent and beautiful specimens. Most were planted in the last century when they were one of the few large trees that could thrive in the heavily polluted air. Before the Clean Air Acts in the 1950s, coal-burning caused London's air to be really foul, with days of appalling smog well-captured by some of Monet's famous London paintings. That the plane trees survived at all is remarkable; without them conditions would have been even worse. But actual planting of London planes seems to have stopped a long time ago, as if the problem of air pollution would now go away.

In future, as summer temperatures rise, a second benefit from London's plane trees may become even more important – providing shade and helping cool the city from the 'heat island' effect that increasingly blights urban areas everywhere. In particularly hot conditions the temperature difference between shade and sun may be 10 -15 degrees Fahrenheit; maximising the urban tree-canopy is likely to become more important year by year.



Giant dipterocarp trees, originally planted by French colonists, enhance major streets and turn public parks into airy and cool cathedral-like spaces in today's Ho Chi Minh City

What not to do

In Darwin, northern Australia the streets were laid out on a north-west/south-east axis to take advantage of prevailing winds both in the dry and wet seasons, and many streets were lined with fine *saman* trees, providing shade across the city. Then, astonishingly, they were mostly cut down; I understand Darwin is now dangerously torrid for much of the time. As in many other cities, misguided municipal programmes have resulted in large trees being removed, often in the teeth of local opposition. While it is true that tree roots can damage existing buildings, far too often local authorities seem ready to remove trees rather than find ways to accommodate them. Even now, several local authorities in London (including Lewisham) are engaged in battles over tree removal with residents who object to the loss of much-loved local specimens and appreciate their importance.

In fact, the tide is turning and public authorities in cities around the world are starting to shift from tree-

cutting to tree planting. In Darwin the local government has had a rethink and has now identified 542 vacant sites where it believes trees should be planted, while Bangkok's new Governor, Chadchart Sittipunt, has invited city-dwellers to improve their own city by planting a million new trees to replace the ones that were lost during anti-tree drives in past decades.

Natural ways of cooling cities

Increasingly, city authorities recognise the need to find natural ways of cooling urban environments while cutting the effects of pollution; some, such as Belfast and Paris plan ambitious tree-planting schemes. In Vietnam, Vo Trong Nghia Architects, have pioneered the use of elevated tree-based gardens, and forest trees planted in tall boxes, to bring the cooling advantage of forest tree shade, even in the centre of urban areas. In French Colonial times, Saigon (as it then was) benefitted from the inspirational planting of giant dipterocarp trees in the city, which now, eighty to a hundred years later, enhance major streets and turn



In Vietnam, Vo Trong Nghia Architects, have pioneered the use of elevated tree-based gardens, and forest trees planted in tall boxes

public parks into airy and cool cathedral-like spaces. So how much new tree-planting is taking place in London? Last July the Mayor unveiled a £3.1m plan 'to plant thousands of new trees over the next two years'.

Tree-planting in London

There has in the past been a tendency in certain parts of London to plant small non-native trees, while it is larger trees offering more shade that will increasingly be needed. Retro-fitting existing cities where greenery has long been discouraged is now a major challenge, not least because the involvement of local communities is essential if the new ideas are to be accepted. Mini- community forests, first developed in the 1970s by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, and 'bursting with biodiversity', are now taking root in some cities around the world, with plots as small as a single tennis court contributing to a new green approach based on local citizen participation. So far just a single

Miyawaki forest has been planted in London, but it should become a priority, together with the possibility of local seed collection for community tree-nurseries, as well as both tree-planting, protection and aftercare for young saplings. Associated with these initiatives must be a better effort at retaining existing trees, especially large mature ones.

Which trees?

The choice of appropriate tree species also needs new thinking; London planes may offer little in terms of biodiversity but so far they have been largely free of disease. However, since the millennium a fungal infection known as *Massaria* has been recorded, which can cause large branches to die and fall, with obvious danger to the public. As with Dutch Elm Disease, this vulnerability to disease arises from the limited genetic variability, in this case because it is a single hybrid species. New pests such as the Emerald Ash-borer may be more difficult to counter (although many ash trees are wild sown and therefore genetically diverse) but in principle a diversity of tree species and of seed provenance both for single sites and urban forests should be encouraged. Some species not generally used could also become more important if taller and shade-producing trees are to be encouraged. Native lime, hornbeam, goat willow, wild cherry, alder and wild service are all trees that offer significant shade and could make a valuable contribution to cities like London – boosting urban biodiversity at the same time.

Make Our Cities Greener

The benefits of trees for psychological as well as climate-related benefits are well known, and direct involvement in what might be termed arboricultural care and maintenance is increasingly popular, especially among younger citizens. Can I urge everyone to put pressure on local politicians to support urban tree-planting and community involvement? Many politicians may still be behind the curve, but the multiplicity of tree welfare and tree-appreciation organisations, from tree huggers to seed collectors, tree-planters to tree growers suggests there is enormous public support for making cities greener and healthier right now, and not just as targets for arbitrary dates like 2030 and 2050. It's never too soon to start planting.

Edward Milner

Blog #11 Urban Tree-planting

We would love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article. Email your thoughts in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

Have we given up the fight against privatisation?

In July 2019, speakers from both the Labour Party and NEU shared the platform in a public meeting to discuss the future of education in Redbridge - among them, Angela Rayner and Mary Bousted, together with Councillor Jas Atwal, Leader of Redbridge Council. It was an excellent meeting, the focus being: 'No to cuts, no to academisation'.

The Rush to academisation

However, post-Covid, there seems to have been an unreported change. Has the issue of academisation been put on the back burner? Have we accepted defeat? Disappointingly, the word 'academisation' did not appear in either statement from the two candidates for NEU General Secretary. In addition, Redbridge Council appears to be accepting that its schools are joining MATs (Multi-academy Trusts) outside the Borough. Why, when Redbridge - and notably Councillor Atwal - opposed the breaking up of what he called 'the Redbridge family of schools' in his speech at that meeting in July 2019? Government plans for the academisation of all schools by 2030 have now been shelved, and so why the rush to join MATs?

The Labour Party currently holds 57 of the 63 seats on Redbridge Council, so why is it being so passive? One would have thought that the well-documented failures of a number of MATs would ensure that the Council fulfils its duty of care to its constituents and those who work in its schools. This should be done by carrying out due diligence and highlighting any potential pitfalls, especially since unions are excluded and parents often only receive a 'positive power-point presentation' before voting on such an important issue.

On 1st January, Downshall Primary School joined the existing Newham-based New Vision Trust. Did Redbridge provide stakeholders with information? Did they carry out due diligence regarding the Trust and its financial viability, especially since everything belonging to the School, including any reserves, would be handed over automatically? This wasn't a failing school being forced to join a MAT, so Redbridge could have been pro-active.

Bloated salaries

A visit to the Companies House website would have informed the Education Committee about the Trust's



The panel of speakers at Redbridge Town Hall, speaking on school cuts and academisation. Picture: Imogen Braddick (Image: Archant)



A well-organised campaign by parents held off academisation at Snaresbrook Primary for several years

expenditure, notably the salary payments made to the CEO: £190,000-£195,000, (up £10,000 on the previous year), plus a pension contribution of £55,000 – £60,000. Two other SLT members had salaries of £100,000+, while total benefits, including pension and NI contributions, received by 'key management personnel', rose from £320,552 in 2018 to £769,986 in 2021.

Where does this money come from? How does this equate with the dramatic real-terms decline in salaries of classroom teachers and support staff? Most importantly, how can this expenditure possibly be sustainable at a time of rising costs and falling rolls?

Financial problems

The 1st January date is a significant one since the latest data, including the annual financial statements, were not publicly available until after this merger. The issue of falling rolls is to be addressed by a decrease in the number of classes and, therefore, teachers. The acknowledgement that expenditure exceeded income in the year to August 2022 means that reserves will be vital to avoid a deficit – and the MAT takes over the reserves of its member schools!

One wonders just how bad the situation will be for the New Vision Trust, and its new member, in the next report, following another year of high inflation. What was the CEO's response to these financial problems? He did not receive a pay increase, maintaining his income of £190,000+ which, according to my Maths, is approximately £60 for every child in the MAT.

A further source of information is 'School Cuts', which shows potential swingeing reductions to Newham schools for 2023/4. The four schools are predicted to lose about £688,000, compared with Downshall, which is one of only three of Redbridge's 71 schools not expected to have cuts to its budget. What a welcome addition to the Trust, Downshall will be!

Cynicism runs through this article. However, this cynicism is based on experience of academies, the

financial difficulties that can befall them and the results for those who had no part in the politics of academisation.

Lack of foresight

Did parents, governors and councillors discuss the potential problems that could arise? They have enough examples in Redbridge to draw on, notably the 'too big to fail MAT' that had to be bailed out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) when Trustees said it would not be able to continue as a going concern after April 2017. Impact: cuts to the curriculum, increased class sizes, redundancies, massively increased workload, haemorrhaging of staff.

Here lies Catch-22. MPs and LEAs can't investigate MATs once their schools have joined, a fact that makes it imperative for stringent checks to be carried out *before* parents and governors make that final decision.

Resisting academisation

Now another Redbridge school is moving towards academisation, the proposal being to join four Waltham Forest schools in a MAT. The school would be joining a very small trust, with currently only 1,500 pupils, which brings inevitable questions as to financial viability. However, on a positive note, NEU members have collectivised and balloted for strike action, as have their colleagues at the other schools. Can this be a tipping point? Can we return to the unity shown at that meeting and return to the 'no to academisation' mantra that linked the NEU and Labour Party? Or will political passivity continue to be the norm as we sleepwalk into the privatisation of all our schools?

Maureen McCarthy

We would love to hear from you, and so please get in touch if you have any reactions to this article. Email your thoughts in any form you choose to the Editorial team at – mike321peters@gmail.com

Suffer the little children

We do not look after the world's children. We let them suffer. The political establishment, the capitalists, the corporations, the wealthy few who hold sway over our lives allow this. Yet parents, even those struggling desperately, almost always put their children first, try to ensure that they are fed, clothed and loved, often making sacrifices themselves in order for their children to thrive or at least survive.

Child poverty in the UK

One in four children in the UK, 3.6 million, were living in poverty in July last year, and numbers have increased because of the cost-of-living crisis. Many children will believe that feeling hungry and cold and using a food bank regularly is the normal way to live. Work does not provide any guarantee against poverty. 75% of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one person works. In some school classrooms eight or more children in a class of 30 will be living in poverty. Children from Black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be poor: 46% lived in poverty in 2020, compared to 26 % of children in white British families.

The global situation

A 2022 UNICEF report has a heading: “Nearly 37 million children displaced worldwide – highest number ever recorded”. Numerous crises have led to the displacement of children. There are 13.7 million refugees and asylum-seeking children and almost 22.8 million who are internally displaced due to conflict and violence, and then there are those displaced by climate and environmental shocks or disasters.

Many countries, including the UK, are complicit in ensuring that the suffering of displaced families and the terror and trauma of children continues. Some children cross continents unaccompanied, their parents opting for this risk in the hope that their children will find a better life. We do not take steps to prevent children drowning in the English Channel. We deny them safe passage and, if they arrive safely, we often confine them in bleak inhospitable buildings.

There are many long-term conflicts - in Afghanistan, Palestine, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere. We choose to profit from selling weapons of war, which slaughter many innocent people - adults and children alike. The numbers are staggering. Almost 426 million children live in a conflict zone and 200 million in the most lethal war zones.

The rights of these children are repeatedly violated. They are killed, injured, attacked in schools and hospitals, recruited by armed groups, abducted, denied basic



Millions of children are affected by war, like this victim of burn wounds

health care, subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence and may be captured, trafficked and forced to become slaves or sex workers.

A recent article by Mohammed Aziz, who was part of an NEU delegation to Palestine last year, describes the difficulty of teaching children in classes of 50 and with a shortage of teachers. He witnessed children stopped and searched and questioned at checkpoints by Israeli soldiers with automatic weapons. Children have been attacked and killed in Palestine, taken from their homes at night in handcuffs, blind-folded and kept in military detention.

Enough is enough

The suffering of children in rich countries such as ours, from hunger, homelessness, abuse, poor medical or educational facilities, failures by social services, the police, and from disasters elsewhere in the world must stop. We consider ourselves civilized but a decent civilization would not countenance this entirely preventable suffering. Those of us who have enough for our needs, and live lives of relative stability, would never accept such suffering for our children. We should not accept it for any child on our planet. We must repeatedly raise our voices and demand change to end this blight on children's lives.

Jo Buchanan