

# The Redbridge Newsletter

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

**Autumn 2023**



*Tina Jacobs once again captures the mood of the season for our front cover*

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One of the pleasures of writing this column is the opportunity to weave the preoccupations of our contributors into a tapestry interlaced with my own thoughts. Sometimes this flows easily, but on other occasions the welter of competing concerns fighting for priority can be overshadowed by events in the political and international spheres, as is the case at present. The local issues can seem parochial by contrast, but they reflect what is going on in our own lives.

Perennial topics of concern are the environment and climate change, and education: Edward Milner continues to prod our consciences while outlining the problems associated with plastic use and disposal as these impact on the environment, and Henry Tiller in an Ofsted-style report condemns successive governments' record on school initiatives and implicitly raises the question of whether any of these have been of lasting benefit to education. Maureen McCarthy lifts the lid on yet another scandal in the educational world.

Tina Jacobs writes about decluttering paperwork (oh that she had a solution for cluttered minds!) and after a career spent accumulating boxes of records and planning notes, it is refreshing to think of it all reduced to a handful of thumb drives. She does stress the need to secure personal and identity documents in their original form, and as the interview with Andrew Emery reminds us, the piecing together of unconsidered bits of paper is what helps historians to reconstruct the past. Stan Kaye, writing about the 1917 bombing of a school in the east end of London, demonstrates this further in his account of tracing and contacting descendants of the children and staff who died as well as of those who survived, in order to commemorate the tragedy and provide a lasting memorial.

It is always distressing when precious records are lost, whether they represent centuries of culture and research, or are the accumulated evidence of individual lives and their communities. One of the tragedies of war and displacement is the loss of all that went before, through hundreds of years of a particular way of life, its rituals and customs.

The rapidity of the unfolding crisis in Gaza, echoing so many of the conflicts around the world that have formed a background to our lives, induces a sense of powerless anxiety, that can escalate to an immobilising fear in some, leading others to active demonstrations of their frustration and solidarity with one side or the other. Those working in our schools are contending with bewildered youngsters who need explanations, as well as with an inevitable increase in aggressive incidents, expressing hate and racial or religious abuse both within school and in the wider community. Reconciling the conflicting viewpoints, allegiances and loyalties must often seem an insurmountable task, with little in the way of hope for a more peaceful future.

With great restraint and sensitivity, Jo Buchanan writes about an earlier initiative in the West Bank, which perhaps sheds a ray of light in all the gloom, suggesting the possibility of creative co-existence and collaboration, giving validity to the skills and knowledge of those who feel forgotten and abandoned.

Elsewhere, there are the regular reports of events, including a talk given by Kevin Courtney and a walk round historic east London, and book reviews, for you to enjoy and maybe consider offering your own contributions for future issues.

**Liz Dolan**

**The Redbridge Newsletter Editorial team consists of Editor Mike Peters, proof-readers Liz Dolan and Henry Tiller and print production Bob Archer. You can access all issues of the Newsletter online at <https://redbridgeretiredneu.org>**

# SEND provision in Redbridge



***Above and below: some parents have raised concerns about the suitability of the former Park School for Girls site for children with special needs***



There are reports that Redbridge borough is proposing to expand the SEND provision in Redbridge by using the old Park School site for Year 6, Year 7 and Year 8 students. The photos above and left were taken in November 2023.

The proposal from the Borough is at this link: <https://engage.redbridge.gov.uk/hatton-and-little-heath-schools>

Some parents have raised concerns about the suitability of the site, as detailed in the following article in the *Yellow Advertiser*.

<https://www.yellowad.co.uk/concerns-over-plans-for-a-new-special-school-in-ilford/?fbclid=IwAR0q4jMyJZZASeTPZ8s5IRkCxG9EI-ogP8-GfY-NdekaU0zp0k-8AwrtBng>

**June 2023 guided walk with David Rosenberg:**

# **1970s: East End battleground**



***Brick Lane Bonus! At the end of the guided walk and in the middle of Brick Lane, we very appropriately bumped into Two-Tone singer and musician Rhoda Dakar (The Bodysnatchers, The Specials ...)***

On a drizzly June morning a small group of us went on David Rosenberg's walking tour - Battleground Brick Lane 1970s in the East End - primarily the Whitechapel area. We started our walk in Altab Ali Park, which is on the corner of Alder Street, White Church Lane and Whitechapel Road.

The Park was originally known as St. Mary's Park, named after a chapel on the site. The church was bombed in the Blitz and there are a few remains.

#### **Story of a murder**

The Park was renamed Altab Ali Park in 1998 in memory of Altab Ali, a Bangladeshi textile worker who was murdered on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1978 in Adler Street by three teenage boys. David explained how the East End, especially the area around Brick Lane, had been targeted by the National Front and Bangladeshis had been subject to many racist attacks.

Altab Ali was on his way home from work and intended to go and vote in the local elections when he was murdered. Ten days after he was murdered, 7000 Bengalis marched to Downing Street with a petition calling for police protection. The murder of Altab Ali resulted in the Bangladeshi community mobilising to resist the National Front and the Bangladeshi Youth Movement was created.

There is a memorial in the park to Altab Ali and other victims of racist attacks, created by David Petersen.

#### **Community life**

David walked us from the park along the Whitechapel Road, pointing out places where the Bengali community worked as textile workers.

We then walked down towards Brick Lane through a small housing estate. This estate was inhabited by many Bengalis, but statistics show that in other, more attractive estates, Bengalis were only 2% of the residents. The Bengali Housing Action group was formed to campaign for better housing. However, the GLC proposed having some Bengali-only estates: after much protesting this proposal was dropped.

We finished the walk close to Brick Lane. David showed us a flat where Altab Ali's friend, Shamsuddin Shams, used to live. Shams was the last person to speak to Altab Ali, as he bumped into him on his way home from voting. They would meet every Saturday afternoon to watch wrestling in a nearby cafe.

Just as David finished his talk a friend of his, Rhoda Dakar, a singer and founder member of the two-tone movement, walked by. It seemed a fitting end to our walk!

**Rachel Brittle**

## **Education:**

# **A report on 13 years of Conservative government**

***'What a wise parent would wish for their children, so the state must wish for all its children.'* R.H. Tawney**

Writing reports and assessing the work of pupils and students is central to the life of all teachers and so, in this article, I intend to apply my experience in this area to evaluating the performance of the present Conservative government against 4 specific categories in relation to education - academisation, higher education, school buildings and funding. And being scrupulously objective, I shall give a brief written assessment of each of the chosen categories followed by a rating based on the OFSTED system of 'Outstanding', 'Good', 'Requires Improvement' and 'Inadequate'. Under this system an 'Inadequate' rating means that the school has serious weaknesses or requires special measures and will usually be the trigger for a change of management or leadership.

### **Setting the context**

The neo-liberal agenda of privatization and marketisation has provided the ideological underpinning and the guiding principle for education policy during the 13 years of this government. Prior to this, in 1993, Further Education (FE) colleges were removed from local authority control, given their own budgets to manage and set in competition with rival providers, the aim being to bring about greater efficiency. The result was eye-watering pay increases and perks for the new CEOs and their ever-expanding army of assorted managers, the equivalent of a nuclear explosion in cases of financial mismanagement and corporate corruption and a full-scale assault on the conditions of service of lecturers. This is the hideous model upon which the rest of the education system was to be based.

### **Academisation**

With a plethora of empirical evidence from the FE sector of what would be likely to happen if schools were removed from the democratic control of local authorities and had the wonders of the market unleashed upon them, since 2010, the government has pursued the aim of making every school in England part of a multi-academy trust (MAT). Inevitably, there have been



***Henry Tiller***

conflicting opinions about the success of academisation, but certain things are for certain. The pay and perks of academy CEOs and their coterie of fellow 'fat cats' have skyrocketed. While the average headteacher pay in a secondary school is £80,000 to £120,000, figures show many academy CEOs to be earning £200,000 or more, with the top earner on more than £500,000. And just like their counterparts in further education, even these lucrative remunerations have proved insufficient to prevent several of the recipients attempting to further enrich themselves through widespread fraud and corruption – presumably a 'price worth paying' for creating a 'free market of competing



**University staff picket the Loughborough University campus on the Olympic Park in East London**

schools'. And, unfortunately but predictably, this CEO largesse towards themselves hasn't been extended towards the front-line troops, with DfE data for 2021/22 showing that, on average, classroom teachers in both primary and secondary academies earned more than £1,300 less than their maintained school counterparts.

Moreover, reports, such as those from University College London and the Education Policy Institute, have found the following: there is no positive impact on the attainment and progress scores of pupils in MATs when compared to equivalent non-MAT schools; academy chains are disproportionately represented among the worst performing groups of primary schools, with 12 making it into the bottom 20; academies are more likely than other schools to employ teachers who are unqualified.

**Thus, it is not unreasonable to conclude that academisation is more about an ideologically driven government imposing its dogma on education rather than seriously trying to improve it; and that academisation is primarily a backdoor means of achieving the long-term, cherished goal of privatised state edu-**

**tion, along with a privatised NHS. Henry's OFSTED rating: Inadequate.**

#### **Higher Education**

What's good for the goose is good for the gander. If FE, academies and free schools have had the 'benefits' of the 'free market' bestowed upon them, then why not higher education? So, the sector which represents the pinnacle of the education system has also been given the same fatal dose of market medicine, theoretically turning universities into competing businesses and students into fee paying customers. And, as with FE, the academies and free schools, the most notable beneficiaries have been the people running the show. So, for example, in 2021/22 the average salary for vice-chancellors of Russell Group universities was £413,000, with the reality being that many VCs are earning considerably more than this average. The VC of Imperial College London, for example, trousered a ludicrous £714,000 per year.

**And, of course, there is the inevitable 'other side of the coin'. While VCs and their assorted band of senior managers enjoy the security and comfort of a completely inflexible labour market, this certainly**

**doesn't apply to university lecturers and researchers. For many of the latter, their casualised conditions of service are not markedly different from those typically found across the building industry, with 46% of universities using zero hours contracts to deliver teaching and 44% of teaching only academics and 68% of research staff on fixed term contracts, with many more dependent on short-term funding for continued employment. And a report by the University and College Union (UCU) reveals that many staff on insecure contracts suffer from mental and physical ill-health while they have to hold down multiple jobs to be able to pay their bills. The report warns that the widespread practice of casualisation is damaging the quality of research and the education students receive. On top of this, there's been consistent outrage in universities across the UK over the past year surrounding the level of student debt, the lack of student accommodation available, unfair and drastic rent increases and overcrowding in lectures.**

**Henry's OFSTED rating: Inadequate.**

#### **School buildings**

True to its neo-liberal policy of hollowing out the public sector, in June 2023 the Government managed to elicit a report from the National Audit Office which concluded that years of underfunding had meant that around 700,000 children are being taught in unsafe or ageing buildings in England that need major repairs, with the risk of injury or death from a school building collapse as being "very likely and critical". The report said that the deteriorating condition of school buildings was damaging pupil attainment and teacher retention and found that more than a third of all English school buildings had passed their estimated initial design life. 572 schools were identified where reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (raac) might be present. This is a lightweight form of concrete, especially prone to collapse, which was widely used between the 1950s and mid-1960s. The report also said that a safety risk from asbestos was more severe in poorly maintained school buildings, of which there are many.

So, having slashed the funding for Labour's 'Building Schools for the Future' programme on taking office in 2010, prioritised the creation of expensive and largely unnecessary free schools over maintenance of existing school buildings and having long been fully aware of the consequences of years of planned under-investment in educational infrastructure, just days before the start of the new term at the end of August 2023, the

government ordered more than 100 schools to shut buildings at risk of collapse. And, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, with capital spending on schools at half its 2010 peak, without so much as a hint of irony or, indeed, shame, Gillian Keegan, the delusional Education Secretary, not only felt able to declare that "Nothing is more important than making sure children and staff are safe in schools and colleges", but also famously congratulated herself on doing a "f\*cking good job"! **Henry's OFSTED rating: Inadequate.**

#### **School funding**

Persistent underfunding has led to deep and lasting effects on the whole education sector. Class sizes are at record levels - primary class sizes are the highest in Europe and secondary class sizes are the highest since records began more than 40 years ago. The Department of Education has boasted that education funding will finally match 2009-2010 levels by 2024-25. And, as the NEU notes, 'their expectations must be very low indeed if they consider this progress, or in any way acceptable. It is evidence of profound failure at the heart of government that education funding will not have increased in real terms over 15 years' and it ignores the "significant comparable decline in the pay of teachers (20% in real terms since 2010) compared with other professions and the associated problems in recruitment and retention". And the inevitable result has been that a staffing crisis in English schools, which has been building for a decade, is getting considerably worse, with the number of vacant posts increasing by 44% between 2021-22, and one in four new teachers leaving the profession within three years. Last year, more teachers than ever before left their job – 40,000+, a staggering 9% of the total number of teachers. **Henry's OFSTED rating: Inadequate.**

#### **Overall**

A government of 13 years, packed full of privately educated disciples of the 'free market', has clearly done its very best, just like any loyal cult followers, to bring the hallowed principles of the founding fathers of their faith to the educational arena. What's less clear is that it has taken any lasting, meaningful measures to provide excellent, well-funded, adequately resourced state education for all those in the UK, young and old, who require it. **Henry's OFSTED rating: (yes, you've guessed it!) Inadequate.**

**Henry Tiller**

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<https://redbridgeretiredneu.org>**

**A talk by Kevin Courtney, former Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union**

# **The Crisis in Our School System**

**The Vi Gostling Memorial Lecture at the News from Nowhere Club  
St. John's Church Hall, Leytonstone, Saturday 8th July 2023**

**Thanks to Glenn Rikowski (with additions from Will Podmore) for this account of Kevin's talk**

The News from Nowhere Club has held monthly talks in Leytonstone since 1996. We were delighted that Kevin Courtney agreed to be our speaker in July, with Bob Archer in the chair. They were both very pleased with the meeting, citing an "engaged, impressive audience representing a wide, deep and thoughtful experience of education." The Newham Bookshop attended with a stall of relevant books. Audience members said the talk was "fantastic" and "brilliant!" To get our programme and join the mailing list, just send your name to [roskane@btinternet.com](mailto:roskane@btinternet.com).

## **Career**

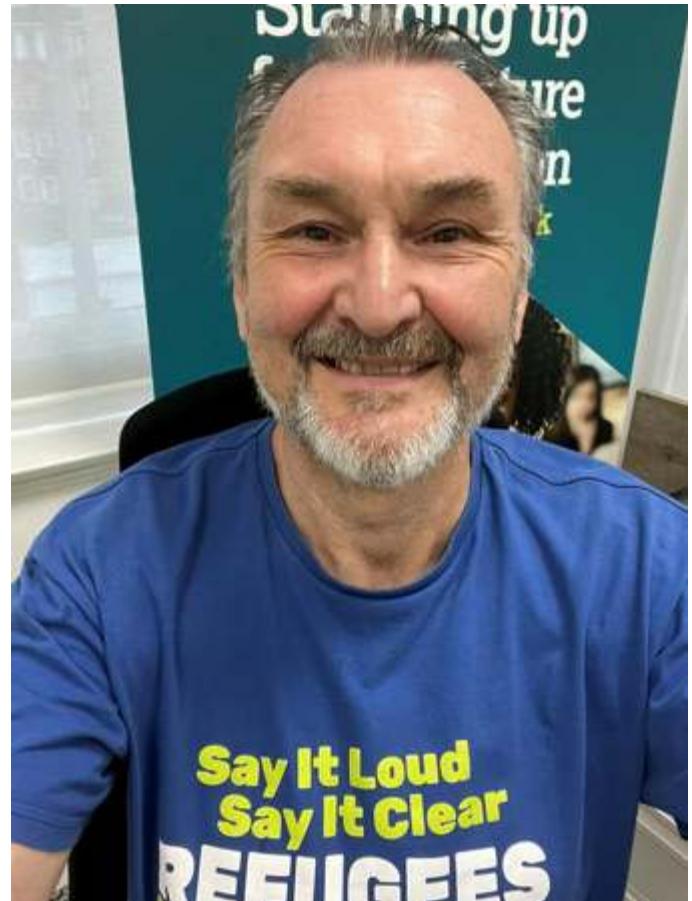
Kevin Courtney studied Physics at Imperial College London and became a teacher at the Camden School for Girls. He was a former Secretary of Camden National Union of Teachers (NUT), and then General Secretary of the NUT from July 2016. In 2017, the NUT merged with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) and, with Mary Bousted (former General Secretary of the ATL), Kevin was Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union.

## **Views on the 'crisis'**

For Kevin, 'the long- run crisis in our schools' goes back to 1988 and the Tories' Education Reform Act. He argued that 'there is a crisis in our schools', and we can see this crisis in all kinds of 'symptoms'.

These symptoms take a number of forms. For example, 9% of all teachers left their jobs last year; 8% of serving head teachers left their posts last year before retirement; the Department for Education will miss its recruitment target by 50% next year. Taking these and other national education statistics into account, then: 'This is a crisis!'

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), there are only four countries in the OECD (out of 38) below the UK with lower pupil/teacher ratios. In fact, we have a worse pupil/teacher ratio than almost any country except Chile, Mexico and Brazil. For Kevin, the increase in class sizes is 'another symptom of crisis.' But to get a deeper



**Kevin Courtney**

explanation of this crisis in our English schools, we have to go back to the 1988 Education Reform Act.

Kevin noted: 'If you have any connection with education now, you know the crisis' is with us. It manifests itself in teacher workload, schools as exam factories, children as the 'unhappiest' in the world (as surveys by the Children's Society have shown), and serious issues regarding mental health and 'school anxiety' amongst children.'

The 1988 Act is at the foundation of these and other worrying trends. With the 1988 Act's SATS tests, schools league tables, local management of schools, the National Curriculum, funding 'following the pupil', and an oppressive school inspection regime (Ofsted), we have arrived at a marketised and dysfunctional educational system. He lamented the poor current prospects

for young people – with jobs, apprenticeships, and colleges, sports centres, playing fields, swimming pools, and youth centres, all under attack.

#### **Some of the origins of the current crisis**

The crisis in our schools has been thirty-four years in the making (via the 1988 Education Reform Act), but this is part and parcel of what Kevin called the GERM: the Global Education Reform Movement - a world-wide phenomenon whereby education has become hinged to regressive, neoliberal education policies.

Tony Blair's New Labour Government missed the opportunity to abolish the 1988 Education Reform Act and its crisis-generating elements. Indeed, New Labour made the situation worse in key respects, with the policy on academies that created schools beyond local authority, and hence democratic control, and performance-related pay.

There is a 'fundamental lack of trust driving people out of education' today, Kevin argued. He contrasted the situation in schools in England with that in Finland, noting how there, in so many ways, teachers are trusted to do the best for their pupils. International education data indicate that this is a sound policy.

Industrial capitalism needed educated, healthy workers; finance capitalism doesn't. And the ruling class has washed its hands of education and the NHS, treating them both as cash cows.

#### **The measures required**

How do we repair our school system? Dismantle the 1988 Education Reform Act and later Tory 'reforms'; abolish the SATS and Ofsted; scrap GCSEs (with no examinations before age 18); end and reverse academisation by putting schools back under local democratic control; abolish Michael Gove's so-called Free Schools; end the current schools funding system; abolish contracts with private enterprises which are only interested in maximising profit; and end zero-hours contracts for people working in schools.

There is also an urgent need to tackle child poverty. Free school meals for all children (thereby ending the stigma for those currently receiving them) would be a significant first step toward this goal.

**If this article has provoked any thoughts of your own, please share with Newsletter readers by sending them to the Editorial team – mike321peters@gmail.com.**

## **Forest Gate 'Freedom Walk' a big hit**



*In November, a group of retired Redbridge and Newham teachers, led by local historian Peter Ashan (centre), thoroughly enjoyed a 'Freedom Walk' down Woodgrange Road to the Clapton Community Football Club and the Red House Catholic Club on Upton Lane. It was a learning experience for everyone as participants brought their own experiences and memories into play. Above: a lively discussion about the now-demolished Upper Cut Club and its Blue Plaque commemorating the night Jimi Hendrix composed 'Purple Haze' during a break in performance there.*

# A lucrative pathway?

While researching material for an article on academisation, I found a table published in Schools Week (March 2022) which named the top 20 best-paid CEOs. Interestingly, (for me at least), was the fact that three of them had links with Redbridge schools.

I then added two more names to my list of Redbridge alumni. Although not in the current top 20, they have made national headlines, not necessarily positive ones, as will be seen, for achieving financial success via school leadership.

I think a disclaimer should be added at this point. My aim is not to portray all Redbridge headteachers or former headteachers as villains. Readers, especially former Redbridge teachers, will, I am sure, have their own opinions. However, the Redbridge connection is present, due I am sure to the success of all our schools, even if - solely for the purposes of this article - one uses Ofsted grades. Perhaps my cynicism is generational, having entered teaching long before the rise of excessively-paid headteachers and schools viewed as 'edu-businesses'. It is what it is.

## Top of the league

Topping the 2021 league table is Sir Dan Moynihan, CEO of the Harris Federation of 50+ schools, coming in at a mere £455,000 and gallantly not accepting a pay-rise for the year in question. He will be familiar to Redbridge members as the former head of Valentine's High School. His salary is 13 times higher than Harris staff's average earnings, the highest differential of the CEOs in the league table. Numbers 11 and 12 represent Loxford High School, old and new.

At 11, Roger Leighton, former deputy headteacher, is now CEO of Partnership Learning, which comprises schools in Barking and Dagenham, while Anita Johnson of Loxford School Trust is, at number 12, the highest paid female CEO.

## Men earning more

One of the "interesting" features is, yet again, male dominance of an increasingly female profession. While two thirds of all headteachers are female, two-thirds of the 300 best-paid CEOs of trusts in 2021 were male.

In this context, that Ms Johnson is one of only two female CEOs in this top 20 leads to a dilemma. Should one congratulate her for breaking into this boys' club, or despair at the collateral damage caused on her journey?

## Murphy's law

Turning to even more contentious issues, one person who doesn't appear on the 2021 list, but who made the headlines 20 years ago, is Michael Murphy. He wasn't a headteacher in Redbridge, but had been an education officer in the LEA.

Following the 1988 ERA, the writing was clearly on the wall and a number of officers and advisers fled Redbridge. Mr Murphy became headteacher of Hurlingham and Chelsea School, then moved to Greenwich, becoming "Britain's best-paid state school principal" (*Guardian*, September 2000).

The appointment hit the headlines because it was part of the debate that gained traction about "football-manager salaries" and bonus payments for so-called super-heads. Then along came academisation and its licence to generate huge salaries. Mr Murphy's comment that schools were businesses had become a given.

He became (in)famous for his policy of streaming which, as he said, was a deliberate attempt to encourage middle-class parents to send their children to a "failing school": Mrs Thatcher said that "you can't ignore the market, you have to respond to it". So, on arrival in Year 7, children were streamed into three mini-schools, in separate buildings, with different uniforms, staff, and play areas. It made the headlines as the "colour-coded school", but Mr Murphy claimed that these policies turned the school around.

## Mayfield High School goes lilac

Last, but certainly not least, is Trevor Averre-Beeson who became the youngest secondary headteacher in the country when he arrived at Mayfield High School in the 1990s. He moved on to Islington Green and wrote a book about the difficulties he faced "turning round a failing school".

Then he moved on, taking advantage of the new opportunities which presented themselves post 2010, forming the Lilac Sky Schools Academies Trust. (More colour coding? During his time at Mayfield, the school was redecorated - in lilac).

Phrases such as "scandal-hit" have been used to comment on what happened next, but the trust was finally closed down by the government in 2016 and its nine schools were re-brokered.



### ***Redbridge parents ran a well-organised and effective campaign against the academisation of Highlands Primary School***

Investigations pointed to financial mismanagement. Indeed, the complaints seem to conform to a checklist of things that can happen in academies where there is no scrutiny or accountability. The criticisms of the Trust included appointing family members as trustees, giving senior staff settlement payments and then rehiring them the next day as highly-paid consultants, mis-spending government money on alcohol - and depositing £200,000 of school income in a private bank account.

Following the enforced closure of the Lilac Sky Trust, Mr Averre-Beeson took over the Henrietta le Forestier prep school, which soon went bust, owing creditors more than £900,000. This included £231,000 owed to former members of staff and awards from an employment tribunal for unfair dismissal, together with unauthorised deductions from salaries. These teachers had to fall back on the government redundancy scheme, which has a 20 year cap - not helpful for the deputy head who had 30 years' service at the school.

The liquidator's report stated that a settlement agreement had been reached: Mr Averre-Beeson would be paying £30,000 of the money owed. "He was unable to pay the whole amount due to his personal circumstances".

The ESFA promised to publish the results of the investigation into the Lilac Sky Trust in 2019, but failed to do so then, or since. In fact, it is one of three trusts that were stripped of their schools between 2016 and 2019 and where investigations were held but not published. Why not?

Finally, on February 10<sup>th</sup> this year, Gov UK published a decision stating that Mr Averre-Beeson was barred from the management of independent schools, including an academy or free school. Too little – no explanation, just the statement. Too late - for the staff at Henrietta le Forestier and all the other creditors.

I believe he is only the second ex-CEO to have received this judgement, so he has been denied another "first" on his academic record. However, as an example of how government money can be mis-spent with very few consequences (£30,000 v £500,000 written off by the DFE, for example, plus the impact on the schools and individuals concerned) it is quite stunning.

#### **The key issue**

To return to my earlier disclaimer, I do not see all headteachers, or even CEOs, as villains. However, if even the government is urging restraint regarding their salaries, the situation must be serious! Why do we need this additional layer of CEOs syphoning off huge salaries that should be in school budgets? Even more important, where is the level of scrutiny and accountability the education sector deserves?

**Maureen McCarthy**

**Please let us know if you have any reactions to this article or any true stories about questionable financial practices in the educational sector. Please send contributions to the Editorial team –**

**mike321peters@gmail.com**

# the roots of Forest Radio

The roots of Forest Radio go back a long way and are very twisted.

I became a licensed radio amateur in the late 1960s when I was 14 and attending a grammar school in Belfast. I loved electronics and practical radio technology. It was the era of the offshore pirate radio stations that operated from small ships anchored outside the twelve *nautical mile* limit from the coast, and hence in international waters, and as such not subject to licensing laws, free to broadcast whatever they liked.

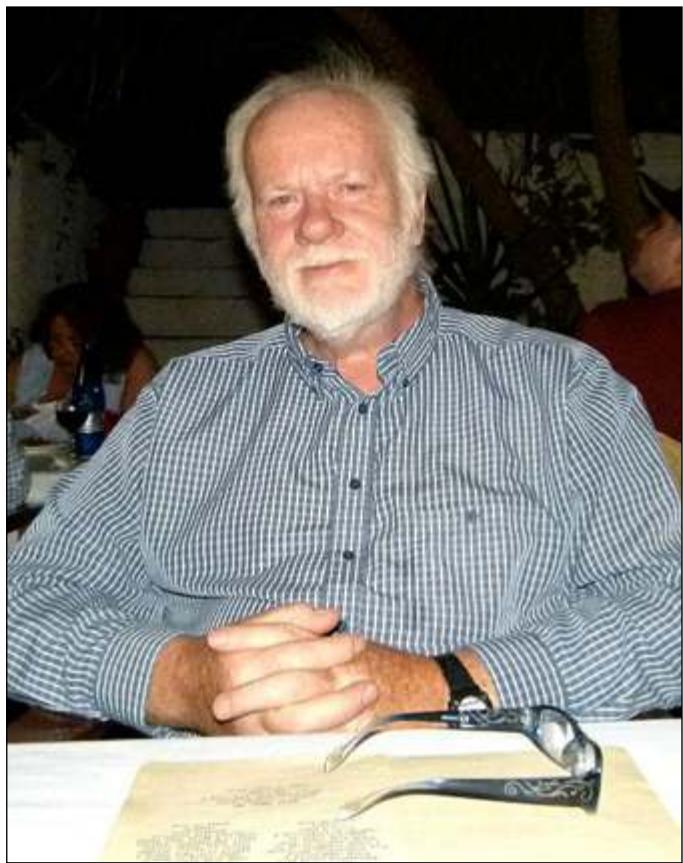
### Early years broadcasting

I was greatly attracted to the idea of joining one of these “pirate” operations, not because of any great interest in music but because radio technology fascinated me and I wanted to play with these new toys.

What I actually did though was build a transmitter and start broadcasting every Sunday from the garden shed of the family house a one-hour programme of pop and independent music that had been recorded by a school friend and stirred up a mild interest among the youth of Belfast. Being totally ‘inshore’ and technically very easy for the authorities to trace, this was in some ways a riskier venture. However, in reality, nobody paid very much attention and we were able to continue throughout my teenage and young adult years, the station gradually evolving into a home for political satire (there was a lot to be satirical about in 1960s/70s Belfast!) and eventually a spoof ‘Information Service’ for the Queens University Students Union. We called it ‘Students Representative Council Information Service’ radio, or “SRCIS” (pronounced “Circus”) radio for short. You can imagine the kind of stuff we were broadcasting.

### Belfast Voices

But this being Belfast, inevitably things became both more serious and more comical. Inside colleges, universities and workplaces, seemingly idealistic organisations were springing up claiming to ‘defend the basic freedoms and human rights of all citizens’, and with impressive names like ‘The Campaign for Social Justice’, ‘The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association’ and ‘The People’s Democracy’, all of them screaming that they, and they alone, represented the true voice of the oppressed people of Northern Ireland, and all the others were imposters. As naïve young students, how were we to know, in *Life of Brian* terms, which was the true People’s Front of Judea?



**David Gardiner**

The first of these organisations to ask us for help in disseminating its version of reality was ‘The People’s Democracy’. We had nothing against them. They said very nice things about freedom and equality and letting everyone speak for themselves regardless of who they were or which religious tradition they came from. Well, that was what community radio was for, wasn’t it?

We were very easily convinced during a pleasant meeting in a room above a local pub with a charismatic and soft-spoken middle-aged man named Cathal Goulding and some of his younger friends that the PD could be trusted to employ our radio equipment in advancing the cause of world socialism. John Lennon imagined all the people sharing all the world and so did we. We happily handed over the transmitter and waited to hear their politically balanced coverage of the developing situation. I also personally made what was undoubtedly a helpful contribution to their campaign by designing for them a simple basic transmitter that anyone with a little electrical knowledge could assemble quickly and use to create additional local radio



***The team at Forest Radio: Left to right, Wayne, Gudrun, David, Jean and Adele***

stations. Radio Free Belfast, (my old transmitter from the garden shed), was rapidly joined by Radio Free Derry, Radio Free Newry and Radio free Armagh.

#### **IRA connections and Special Branch**

Some time later we learned that becoming involved with the PD might not have been an outstandingly wise decision on our part, as the very personable and soft-spoken Mr. Cathal Goulding, who we had met, was in fact the serving Chief of Staff of the Official IRA.

Even then I felt: Well, it's only radio, it doesn't hurt anybody, what's the harm in listening to the IRA's point of view? But the officers of the British Special Branch posted to Belfast seemed to disagree. Along with others, I was invited to come and have a little talk with them, and transport was thoughtfully provided.

We didn't communicate as a group after that as we all coincidentally decided that the time had come to migrate to England and start our lives anew over here. What followed for me were several decades of higher

study accompanied by a little bit of science teaching in a London Comprehensive and a string of short-term electronics-related jobs, and lots of other things not relevant to this narrative.

#### **Community radio in Walthamstow**

However, I never fully succeeded in getting community radio out of my system, and decades later, in 2013 to be exact, as a result of overheard conversations in The Mill Community Centre in Coppermill Lane, Walthamstow, E17 7HA, I found myself joining an Age UK project to get a number of older people trained-up in radio presenting, so that they could create a weekly hour-long programme for their website aimed at older listeners and peppered with what seemed to me rather patronising advice about topics like keeping warm in the winter and not signing your money away to online or telephone fraudsters. We needn't have worried though, because Age UK seemed to rapidly lose interest in the radio project and after a single pilot recording,



we heard no more about it. There was now a core group of four, much the same size as the long-ago Belfast group, with a few very basic presenting skills but no platform on which to display them.

However, we were now in the age of the website, a legal, dirt-cheap and, for all practical purposes, completely unregulated medium of mass communication available to anyone who wanted to use it. I thought of calling the group 'Provisional Age UK' in memory of my earlier venture but was very wisely steered away from the idea by the others in the group, and we became instead 'Mill Radio', holding our (open) recording sessions in a room rented from the Mill and very kindly subsidised by the charity Big Local, which benefited both us and the Mill.

#### **Audio Activism: from Mill Radio to Forest Radio**

At this point we worked in sound only, recording what is conventionally called 'oral history' and editing each programme into a reasonably professional sounding form, before uploading it to our website, where we left it permanently available to visitors in our rapidly growing online archive. That is still the basic pattern of how we work - once recorded and uploaded, everything remains permanently available. However, in the years since then we have opened out our activities and interests in every imaginable direction.

The first thing that shook us out of our complacency was being told by the Mill that if we wanted to use their rooms, we must not discuss either politics or religion. I can't remember ever discussing religion (what is there to say about it if you don't have one?) but the great bulk

of the topics we covered would come within the broad category of politics. We had taken up issues of social unfairness in the way that I had expected the PD to do in those dim and distant days and recorded reports on homelessness, consisting of interviews with homeless people and those who were trying to feed and shelter them. We also initiated the campaign to keep the public open space of Walthamstow town square and not give it away to commercial developers to build more shops - a campaign which was later sadly lost.

In addition, we challenged the so-called Labour council every inch of the way as it attempted to 'gentrify' Walthamstow by building luxury flats for the well-heeled and banishing the ordinary traditional communities, their own electorate, to other cities or who-cares-where, exactly like in the Highland Clearances of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. We invented the term 'London Clearances' and opposed them eviction-by-eviction. I think John Lennon might be proud of us now. The name 'Mill Radio' was now too small to describe what we wanted to do and so we became 'Forest Radio' - a podcast station for all of Waltham Forest and anybody beyond who was interested.

On the practical side we bought some video cameras and most of our programmes in recent years have included vision as well as sound. We have also gone out into the community more and included recordings of local singers, musicians, climate pressure groups such Extinction Rebellion, youth and adult bands and theatre groups, as well as festivals like Pride Day. Currently, we now host Action4Whipps, the alliance of NHS workers, patients and others, trying to ensure that the opportunity to rebuild Whipps Cross Hospital and make it fully fit for purpose is not lost.

#### **Want to Become Involved?**

The Covid Lockdown put a stop to a lot of our usual activities, although it also encouraged some of the people on our mailing list to create items themselves and send them in to be added to our programme list. But overall, we have become a lot less active post-lockdown, and I would be delighted if we could recruit some new members with ideas for programmes and the time to create them with whatever help we are able to give. We would be delighted to polish and edit any video or sound-only recordings that people send in and find a place for them on our programme list.

**David Gardiner**

**If you have a life-long and passionate interest, we would like to hear about it. Please send a short or long article to the Editorial team – mike321peters@gmail.com**

# The big interview

## Henry Tiller in conversation with ANDREW EMINY, history teacher and local historian

**H.** Thanks, Andy, for agreeing to this interview. I want to talk to you about the history of Ilford County High School (ICHS) that you've recently written. I've put the link below for our many readers who are likely to be interested in this history:

<https://ichs.org.uk/22/the-history-of-ichs>

But first, I'd like to ask you a few background questions about yourself:

**So, Andy, can you tell us what originally got you motivated to study history and teach it, and what still 'turns you on' about the subject?**

A. As is often the case, it was an inspirational teacher that hooked my interest in history. Mr Newcombe was a somewhat maverick history teacher who re-enacted legging through canal tunnels on his desk and told great stories.

My parents also took me to abbeys, castles and museums from an early age and always had a great collection of books at home. I love the mystery of history and the detective work that it requires to get a step closer to finding out what may have actually happened in the past.

**H. Can you briefly outline your history teaching background?**

A. After a year of supply teaching across South-East Essex, I joined the staff of Ilford County High School (ICHS) in 1998. I spent 24 years at the school. In more recent years, I worked part-time to allow me to undertake various research projects.

I left ICHS in 2022, to complete an article about the Training Ship Cornwall (a reformatory for boys that was moored in the Thames from 1859-1940). Since February 2023, I have been teaching history at The Fitzwimarc School, in Rayleigh (maternity cover).

**H. Apart from your ICHS history, I understand that you've written about a number of other aspects of local history. Could you tell us something about these?**

A. My first attempt at writing was a novel based around an Anglo-Saxon boy's experiences in the run up to 1066. This, alas is still unfinished and gathering dust. However, I have been more successful with my research into juvenile crime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.



**Andrew Emery**

In 2018, I received a national award from the British Association of Local History for my article on the rise of juvenile crime in Southend during the Great War. I have also written articles for the Picture Postcard Collecting Magazine covering topics such as juvenile crime, Empire Day and Southend Pier.

**H. That's very impressive. What would you say is the main appeal of historical research for you?**

I love the moment that you come across the missing piece in a history puzzle or uncover an interesting story or character. For example, whilst at ICHS, I led two student projects in which we researched and wrote biographies for the boys named on the school war memorial (240 in total).

Whilst researching one former student who died during the Battle of the Somme, I corresponded with the grandson of a captain who had written a letter to his wife. Although, he had a copy of a letter from the soldier's wife, he had never seen the original letter from his grandfather. I found the said letter, printed in one of the school's magazines and was able to share it with him. He was overwhelmed and it felt amazing to help to add something to his family's archive.

**H. Ok, thanks for that background, Andy, and now on to ICHS. What motivated you to write this history of the school?**

**A.** When I left ICHS in 2022, after a very happy and fulfilling career at the school, I wanted to leave a record of my time at the school-a legacy perhaps. I had noticed that the History of the school page on the new website had been left empty for some time and so I offered to write something.

**H. I've read right through your history, Andy, and I was very impressed by the degree of detail that you've included, particularly on the early years and the war years. So how did you go about researching the topic and putting all this material together?**

**A.** I was able to combine various research projects and previous finds in the school archives and magazines to create the history. Many years ago, I found the Headteacher's log book from the first school (1901-4) at the Ilford History Centre and this along with newspapers gave me the early days material.

I also stumbled across the first school inspection (1905) and a biography of the art teacher and sculptor, Nehemiah Vinall, who designed the school's war memorial whilst at the Essex Record Office. Most of the other research was based on the complete collection of school magazines that the school library holds (dated

from 1911 to the early 2000s) and some records that I found under 50+ years of dust in the Headteacher's cupboard. Most of the records dated from 1901 to the early 1960s, thus the focus on the early years and war years.

**H. Finally, I'd like to think that your efforts will inspire other teachers, active or retired, to write a history of their school or engage in other historical research. Could you give any useful tips?**

**A.** First of all, find out what records the school holds. Magazines and photographs are very useful and often fascinating. ICHS had student registers, teacher records and society minutes going back over 100 years. Headteachers were required by law to keep a daily log book until the 1980s. If these exist in the school or local record office, they are a wealth of information and insight.

Alas the ICHS logbooks post 1904 have either been destroyed or gone missing! The next stop should be the local record office and newspapers. The Ilford History Centre in Ilford Library has a lot of archives and helpful, knowledgeable staff.

**Maybe you have undertaken some research. Please share your interest and experience by writing a short article for the Newsletter. Send to the Editorial team**

**- mike321peters@gmail.com**



**(Above) ICHS on its first site as Park Higher Elementary School and (right) the War Memorial created by Nehemiah Vinall.**

*Pictures from ICHS website*

# Remembering the 1917 school bombing

In July 2013 I visited Mayflower Primary School to plant some poppy seeds with the children. The event was part of a campaign to help the pupils remember all those who have died in war.

### Starting the Campaign

Having been born in the area, and also being a WW1 researcher, I did know something of the history of the School and of course the bombing. The headteacher, Dee Bleach, showed me the plaque on the wall remembering the eighteen children who died, and I asked her what was being done for the centenary anniversary of the School being bombed. She just said, 'as we normally do, visit the Angel Statue'.

I said I would be happy to help arrange a ceremony, so had a chat and devised a plan. We then formed a planning committee. At our first meeting we decided on roles.

Mine was to try and find not only descendants of the children who had lost their lives but also descendants of those who had survived, including the teaching staff from that day. I also had to put together a list of who we should invite and contact companies to ask if they would like to donate toward the ceremony.

At this first meeting I suggested that as many others were killed in the same air-raid from many religions, we should make this a multi faith service and invite all the religious ministers to the Ceremony. This was agreed and we discussed holding the service at All Saints Church Poplar, the same church that had held fifteen of the children's funerals a hundred years previously. Three friends - Alan Clarke, Colin Butcher and Sue O'shea (who were all researchers /genealogists) also offered to help.

### Using the Internet

I started a face-book group where we could collate all the information we found and of course any descendants could join. I then started to post details on many other social media sites, including those of local groups in the East End. Many people started responding, some saying they had family that had gone to the school and had survived and, of course, some said they had lost a family member in the bombing. In addition, Andrew Hyde, who had not only lost a family member in the bombing but had also written a book



***The Angel memorial in Poplar Recreation Ground to the victims of the bombing***

called *First Blitz* about the bombing raid on London, joined the planning team.

### Final Preparations

Within twelve months we had an outline of how the ceremony would proceed. We started fund raising and received emails from companies willing to help with a donation. Some offered cash, others offered products such as tea bags, sugar, bottles of water, fresh fruit, flowers for the Church, helpers on the day, gift vouchers and the like.

Myself, and Andrew Hyde, then researched the various archives for newspaper articles about the



*Pupils at Upper North Street School photographed in 1916 during World War I. The school was rebuilt and renamed Mayflower Primary School in the 1950s. Photo Sandra Lake*

bombing, including those in the Royal London Archives (I had worked there for several years). We found articles and photos that had not been seen for nearly a hundred years. Most importantly, I found out who had helped at the time the bomb hit the school. Will Crooks, MP, was at the end of the road when the bomb struck, so after checking on his own family, he went to assist at the school. We located his family, and they attended the memorial.

Some passing sailors helped get the blocked gates open and carried some of the children out of the school. Police officers, medics and fire brigade personnel also assisted in the aftermath of the bombing. All these organisations were invited to send representatives to attend the church service led by the present Bishop of Stepney, as had the Bishop of Stepney a century ago. In addition, just as the scouts had lined the stairs at the original service, they did again.

#### **Tracking down the descendants**

As we moved on, more and more descendants were found and contacted and given my contact details. Once I had made contact with them, I explained the school's plan. Some of the descendants did not know they had any connection to the school, whereas others did. I spoke with every descendant who we found in many countries across the world.

One family member phoned and thanked me for contacting them as he and his dad had drifted apart, and since I had been in touch they have reconnected again. Mary Cunningham OBE was a teacher at the school on the day it was bombed and was awarded the OBE by the King. We located her family who did not know about the award or where she was buried. We located her grave and five descendants attended the ceremony, two travelling from Ireland.

Gertrude Middleton OBE, another teacher in the School on that awful day, had also been awarded an

OBE by the King. We understand most of the children killed were in her class. Her citation reads: 'displayed conspicuous courage and the presence of mind on the occasion when the school in which she was teaching was struck by a bomb'. Tragically, she felt so responsible for the children's deaths that she took her own life.

#### **A commemorative bell and two plaques**

The date picked for the commemoration was the hundred-year anniversary at 10.30 am on 13th June 2017. I had the idea to have a special brass school bell, with all the eighteen children's names engraved on it. A donation of £1500 was offered by a local housing estate group, which paid for the bell and a brass plaque with the names of the victims engraved on it. This was erected in All Saints Church Poplar. Another plaque was erected at Mayflower School. Both were unveiled by HM The Queen. As she could only attend on the 15th, there was a scramble to re-arrange the date. Others who came to the ceremony included Karen Bradley, MP, and the German Ambassador.

#### **The Queen meets the descendants.**

I not only had the great honour of being in the official line-up but also the honour of introducing the Queen to forty of the descendants. On leaving the church I asked Her Majesty if she would kindly unveil the new plaque with all the children's names on it. I then presented her with a commemorative coin that we had made for the occasion.

**Stan Kaye**

**Has this article sparked any school-related memories? If so, please share with Newsletter readers by sending your recollections to the Editorial team –**  
**mike321peters@gmail.com**

*Photographs courtesy of*  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/Uppernorthstreetschool1917>

# Decluttering paper

During the pandemic, I started sorting through my paperwork to see what I could get rid of. Over the years, I have kept lots of paperwork because I thought I needed it. This is what I am doing with my paperwork to declutter it.

I sorted it into three piles:

1. I do not need it at all
2. I want it and need to keep the original i.e. my birth certificate.
3. I want it but don't need to keep the original.

**Pile 1:** Straight in the bin. I shred anything that has my personal details in them.

**Pile 2:** Placed in a fire cabinet and put in a safe place. I have scanned a lot of these documents.

**Pile 3:** Things like my old P60s, old letters, old photos. Documents that I want to keep but not necessarily in their current form. My solution is to scan these items. I save them as a pdf (or as a jpeg if it is an old photo) and store them on my computer. Currently inkjet printers that include a scanner can be bought for about £40. A flatbed scanner can be bought for about £55. Depending on what you are scanning, you can spend a lot more. I use a flatbed scanner to scan paperwork, photos and film negatives. Most of the scanners will come with the software that you will need.

## Scanning

When you scan, think about what you are going to use the scan for. This will mean thinking about the output type of file i.e. pdf or jpeg (photos) and the quality of the output. If you are going to print out photos for instance, you will need to scan to at least 600 dpi or better. If you are not going to print something out, then you will not need such a high quality.

Once you have scanned something and saved it as a file, it means you can share it with others easily. I scanned old family photos and used Photoshop to repair them. I then assembled them into a photobook and had it commercially printed. I had more than one copy made and gave them to family members. Below,

you can see the before and after photos from my parents' wedding. My process is as follows:

1. Scan the document. I usually use an A4 cutting board to weigh the paper down so that the paper stays flat.
2. Choose the output. I generally scan to jpeg as I am going to photoshop the scan to make it as good as possible. I usually scan to a dpi of 800 but you may not need that much. Settings like these can be chosen within the software settings.

If you are not going to use photoshop and just want the paperwork saved, then most scanners will scan straight to pdf. The scanner software will allow you to save several scans back to the same pdf for a multipage document.

3. Process the files as much or as little as you wish.
4. Save the documents on your computer. Make sure the filing system on your computer makes sense, so that you can find the file in the future.

As an aside, ensure that you back up your computer files regularly. This is too big a topic to cover here but at a minimum, copy your important files onto a hard drive or USB memory pen and store it in a fire safe and/or with someone else who lives elsewhere. Computers can be replaced but lost data is much more difficult to replace.

## Should I use a professional?

Also consider what you can do and what it is worth paying someone else to do. The cost is pretty high for scanning negatives and photos, but it may be worth it for precious photos that cannot be replaced. I paid a professional to turn family camcorder video tapes, which had footage of my deceased nephew, into video files. They have been shared and are now in two different places. In the case of a fire or lack of camcorder, they can still be watched. The professional had the knowledge and equipment to do a fantastic job. It cost money to do but the results are priceless.

**Tina Jacobs**

**Please share your experiences of de-cluttering (digital or otherwise) by writing a short article for the Newsletter. Send to the Editorial team- [mike321peters@gamail.com](mailto:mike321peters@gamail.com)**



# **From Hanwell to Sabastiya:**

Friendship is enduring; it involves mutual affection and trust. Palestinians, including those who live in the village of Sabastiya in the West Bank, have faced and overcome so much adversity. The villagers, who number just over 3,000, have endured hardship from the military occupation and have felt isolated, but they have always hoped for a better life and have worked consistently towards achieving this.

### **Developing links**

Hanwell Friends of Sabastiya ([HAFSA](#)), which is based in West London, was established in 2009, and those who are involved with HAFSA have offered and have received lasting friendship. The organisation has developed strong links with Sabastiya and has supported the villagers at a grassroots level. Sabastiya has a remarkable cultural heritage, which includes a beautiful Roman amphitheatre, a colonnade, an ancient church and a mosque.

### **Projects and tourism**

Much of HAFSA's support has been in response to requests from the village, and this has included providing internet access for one of the local girls' schools and sending a football coach to work with children in the village. Another early project was to support the women's union to open a guest house to encourage tourism, a great boost to the local economy. The guest house was visited by tourists from overseas, Israeli

Palestinians and local groups. In 2016, it was given an award - the TripAdvisor award for guesthouse of the year. Tourists are drawn to the village to see the archaeological sites and they enjoy experiencing the village's traditional character and rich cultural life and learning about its history. Some valuable income has come from tourism, although now this source of funds and contact with the outside world is at an end, and of course bookings have been cancelled for now.

Another project was to buy hens for the village, a source of eggs both for the families and to sell in local shops. Five hundred olive trees were planted in Sabastiya and are now bearing fruit, and help was provided for the women who chose to manufacture their own olive oil soap. Various other local projects were supported. First aid training has been given and this has included providing hundreds of gas masks. These are sadly essential because of the frequent military incursions into the village and the dangers of teargas, which can suffocate and is particularly damaging to the elderly and vulnerable.

### **Women's work**

The women in Sabastiya have always been pillars of the community, like others across Palestine, especially during the long years of occupation. Some work tirelessly in their homes and others pursue careers or higher education. Girls have enjoyed full access to



*In November, Redbridge educators joined this lobby urging Redbridge Council to support a cease-fire in Gaza. On right with microphone, local resident Diana Neslen addresses the lobby*



*London NEU has a growing and active International Solidarity Network with reps in many areas of the capital*

education and the majority are studying, with subjects ranging from humanities to engineering. They may be teaching or managing local schools, becoming active in politics and society. The women work together in various ways and have been called 'the glue which holds Palestinian society together'.

#### **Friendship and support**

It is impossible not to be aware of the political situation in this part of the world, but HAFSA has stressed that their friendship is not about politics and that it is not a charitable enterprise. The focus has always been on 'building bonds of friendship and support'. A young visitor from the UK who stayed in Sabastiya commented that 'it was a privilege to live in the Palestinian community and to spend so much time together sharing our cultures, beliefs, languages, humour, opinions, hopes and fears... Hafsa has helped us create mutual friendship, support and understanding.'

There are many tales which tell of the value of the friendship between these two communities. One local woman, Samah, has described the setting up of a baking project, which HAFSA has supported, where women would make healthy food for sale in local schools. Twenty-two women are benefitting from the project and have been receiving small salaries, which helps them to support their families and benefits the community. This has led to new friendships among the women involved and has had a positive effect in the village. This is another project which has received awards and Samah says: 'This project was very good for me because

I wanted to work but couldn't travel far from home because of my children's needs. This work is on my doorstep and has boosted my confidence by getting me out of the house, giving me skills and responsibilities and helping me to make friends with other women in the village.'

#### **Since 7<sup>th</sup> October**

Although some of the villagers have managed to stay in contact with HAFSA since the 7th October attack, their current situation is perilous. The people of Sabastiya cannot leave their village easily, although they are dependent on Nablus for supplies, employment and to collect money which HAFSA is sending. The settlers in the West Bank have become aggressive and threatening and the villagers are terrified. The settlers are destroying crops and burning lands where fruit and olive trees grow. This will have a major effect on this year's harvests. The villagers did not have an easy life before but were moving forward in a positive and purposeful way, making the best of a difficult situation, enjoying the good things in Sabastiya and doing everything they could to ensure their children have a better life. Now they face violent threats and fear that they will be driven out of their land and be forced to take refuge in Jordan. There is an urgent need for peace and justice, more than ever before, or Sabastiya and other communities risk being destroyed forever.

**Jo Buchanan**

**Are you involved in any similar projects? If so, please share your experience with Newsletter readers by writing and submitting a short article**

## Environment

# The Plughole Problem

As you may have noticed there's been a good deal of hullabaloo about plastics in the environment recently, with various meetings and conferences aiming to produce 'a binding international plastics treaty'. All very laudable and, at the least, attracting attention to the worldwide problem of plastic waste that affects virtually all living things, killing and debilitating many of them.

### Failing to plug the plughole

Reading some of the resulting news and comment what strikes me is that the whole subject is hexed by the contemporary obsession of inventing revolutionary new schemes while ignoring the damage being done by the old ones.

Concentrating on symptoms while never confronting the causes is a malaise that seems to affect all climate and biodiversity issues. Building solar farms while continuing to run coal-fired power stations, planting millions of new trees while continuing to destroy natural forests, especially old-growth.

I call this the Plughole Problem - finding beautiful new taps to turn on, while failing to block the plughole. It's a problem that is exacerbated by the media; new ideas look good on TV – a critique of bad old ideas turns viewers off and doesn't sell newspapers. For politicians with only a superficial knowledge of the issues, the plug-hole mindset comes naturally.

The plastic waste problem is becoming increasingly serious inexorably and is scheduled to get worse; various authorities expect the mountain of waste to double by 2040 or sooner. At this rate, soon you won't be able to walk out of the door before encountering

heaps of discarded Amazon packaging. It's treated as if the whole process was inevitable. Unlike volcanic eruptions, the proximate cause of the problem is not too much plastic waste but too much plastic, especially single-use plastic that is unrecyclable. Big corporations find their current processes so profitable that they will do anything to make sure they don't have to change, instead encouraging this focus on symptoms, not the cause. And the cause, much of the time, as David Whyte (*Ecocide*, 2020, Manchester University Press) so convincingly argues, is the overbearing and unrelenting influence of big corporations.

### Impact of corporations

The whole plastics industry is currently based on a business model unhindered by a 'polluter pays' principle. According to a [very recent London School of Economics \(LSE\) report](#) just 20 petrochemical companies are responsible for more than half the world's single-use plastic. The reason single-use plastic packaging is so widely used is because it is cheap – and very useful - and extremely profitable to manufacture *because the true cost is never paid*. The corporations involved resist any attempt to rein them in, while shedding crocodile tears over the problems caused. ExxonMobil claims to 'share society's concerns' about plastic waste – but still plans to increase production by 30% in the next five years, according to this new LSE report.

As Prof Sam Frankhauser, one of the LSE authors says: 'our reliance on oil and gas is not only fuelling climate change, but as primary material used in the production of throwaway plastics (it) is also devastating our oceans'. The costs of our use of plastic have effectively been externalised by the petrochemical industry by shifting responsibility for clearing up the resultant pollution onto virtually everyone else: governments, local communities and all of us concerned individuals. Bright ideas abound for recycling small amounts of this waste, or clearing it from limited environments. But it's a drop in the ocean. Without some more fundamental change the plastic waste issue will continue to be dogged by the Plughole Problem.

Edward Milner

Any thoughts about the subject of Edward's article?

Please send them in letter or short-article form to  
the Editorial team - [mike321peters@gmail.com](mailto:mike321peters@gmail.com)



For politicians with only a superficial knowledge of the issues, the plug-hole mindset comes naturally.

# Key scientific ideas presented simply

***Why Don't Things Fall Up: and Six Other Science Lessons You Missed at School, by Alom Shaha***

Are you one of the people who think you don't get science? Or say, "I never understood science at school"?

Then this book is for you. It is very well written and explains some of the key ideas in science in a simple and very easy to understand way, without using complicated words. The book consists of seven chapters, each with a question which is commonly asked. Alom Shaha uses these questions to explain some key concepts. He talks to the reader as if having a conversation over a cup of coffee. Alom Shaha's love of science and teaching come over very clearly. The book also outlines the contributions made by the likes of Newton, Einstein, Darwin and many others.

The first chapter, 'Why is the sky blue?', explains the nature of light and how our ideas have developed over time. Common terms like refraction are explained without complication, so we are helped to understand how rainbows are formed. Next question is 'Why don't things fall up?' Most people would reply, 'gravity'. But what causes gravity? This chapter also discusses Newton's Laws of Motion. Don't worry - instead of giving flashbacks to school, the laws are discussed in a way which is easy to understand. They are then used to explain phenomena and misconceptions. The chapter 'Why does Ice Cream Melt?' explains the idea of atoms, molecules and the concept of temperature?

The book continues with more questions. 'What is the smallest thing?' goes into what atoms are made of and how we know this. 'What Are Stars?' answers



**Alom Shaha**

exactly that question with many interesting facts. 'Are Fish Animals?' uses the question to explain how we classify living things (taxonomy). Lastly, 'What am I made up of?' discusses how we differentiate between living and non-living things and the nature of DNA..

The book also gives a couple of experiments you can do at home. It is very useful to understand and appreciate some of the concepts of science. If you have children or grandchildren who are at school, this book will help you to help them understand science and maybe also help with their homework.

One thing mentioned in the book is that most scientists have been (and still are) rich white males. Just imagine if everyone was in a position to study the subject - what other discoveries would have been made?

The book does give some examples of how other cultures have also had the same ideas but most credit is given to Europeans. Many more examples could have been given but perhaps this is for the future. The book could also benefit from illustrations and photographs. A glossary for reference would be desirable.

**Bhasker Bhadresha**

If you have recently read a book that you think others will enjoy, please write a short review for the Newsletter and send it to the Editorial team -



**Alom Shaha speaking about this book at Manor Park Library in a South Asia Heritage Month event**

**Danny Dorling:**

# Radical Geographer

Bob Archer has read *Shattered Nation: Inequality and the geography of a failing state*,  
by Danny Dorling.

Nobody is surprised when historians engage in social critique. It sort of goes with the territory, explaining the underlying tensions and movements which give rise to world events. But a geographer? What tools of social criticism can one of them offer?

Quite a lot, it turns out! Danny Dorling's theme is that the United Kingdom is falling apart: the social glue which holds us together is weakening. The three "golden" decades (the 1940s, 50s and 60s) saw consensus about who we are and how we could live. Government policy strengthened this by working against inequality. Those less able to make a good living received many kinds of support. Free universal secondary (and even tertiary) education, subsidised council housing, health provision for all free at the point of delivery, generous state funding of local authority services – all this reduced the worst penury. These practises of social solidarity provided a firm basis for a feeling of belonging.

### Impact of greed

Contrast this, Dorling says, with the last forty years. Greed has become a public virtue. As the old industrial Britain has closed down, our present society encourages the very rich to aim at super-rich status, while the moderately well-off have to serve them body and soul, and the poor are mired in a poverty from which there is no escape.

As a result, the centrifugal tendencies grow overwhelming. The United Kingdom lurches towards the separation of the constituent nations. All of us are thrown more and more onto our own resources to get by, and more and more simply cannot get by. Social solidarity has atrophied. All this against a background of the loss of major industrial plant and millions of reasonably secure jobs.

### Beveridge today

Danny Dorling recalls the five giant evils identified by William Beveridge in the 1940s, when there was a high degree of political agreement between all the major parties: **disease, squalor, want, ignorance and idleness**. Dorling delves deeper into various other aspects of each of these today. He adds critical comments on areas such as **nostalgia** (as a sedative), **growing divides, decline, break-up, deception, hunger**,

**precarity, waste, exploitation, fear, benefits, fairness, potential, housing, utilities, inequality, waste, productivity (stagnating), finance, flowering (ironically), privilege, disorder, fear, care, exhausted, failing state, media, and politicians.** (These are just a few of the sub-headings in the text).

### Disappearing safety-nets

Drawing on statistics, he tells us: "Poverty is worse in those parts of Europe where inequality is highest" (p. 54). He points to examples where the numbers show that some form of the welfare state has been maintained and supported by government, and he shows the outcomes.

Danny Dorling goes into the nitty-gritty, describing how situations work out for people and communities when safety-nets are withdrawn; how break-down in one sphere of life impacts on misery in another. His considerations on housing are lambent (sale of council housing by Thatcher was her biggest privatisation, he points out), his dissection of the fate of higher education in a privatised system is both infuriating and magisterial.

(By the way, all the statistics and views cited are logged very carefully in the notes. Where this or that piece of information comes via Wikipedia, social media or other online voices, Dorling simply says so.)

He describes a society that is stagnating by placing it alongside its peers: "In *all* other European countries for which there is comparable data, social mobility by age forty is higher than in the UK, and income is less dependent on how well-off your parents were when you were a child".

### Dorling's perspective

Danny Dorling is a follower of the established British politics of Fabianism. He is not trying to build an organised movement, still less to change everything in one "rapturous" moment. He is seeking to "permeate" society gradually with fair and right-minded ideas. This is what happened, after all, from 1942 onwards in Britain; it happened once, it can happen again.

The problem is that the context today is very different from the context in the 1940s.

But these ideas are still worth studying, sharing, and putting forward in the teeth of official support for greed and indifference to the plight of humanity as a whole. If the current government is the very embodiment of greed and indifference, they certainly provide many good reasons why we should seek a different way.

If you have read this book or a similar one, please send your thoughts to the Newsletter's Editorial team - mike321peters@gmail.com