



The  
**Redbridge Newsletter**

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

**Spring 2026**



*Retired educators in Hackney meet to share experiences and plan events (p.16)*



*Janet Clarke brings this and other haunting images back from Devon (p. 5)*

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# Editorial Spring 2026

I am writing this at a time when, as far as world events are concerned, it feels as if the first part of any sentence is out of date before the second half is written. The succession of wars without end in sight heaps global misery on destruction and suffering of unimaginable dimensions.

It can be difficult to lift oneself out of the pervasive gloom and despondency of a world consumed by conflict: Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and now Iran. Those conflicts are too vast and complex for me to write about. In spite of the immensity of war, however, the normal small details of daily life continue to provide a balance and enable us not to be totally overwhelmed by fear of what might happen.

There is a “vast” and a “small” to many topics and in the context of our everyday existence we can focus on the smallness, even as we touch on wider issues. Climate and the environment are global issues and yet also have an impact at a more local level.

As spring at last brings the joy of blossom and new growth, we can take stock of the damage caused by an unusually wet winter and consider the implications of a long hot dry summer. Trees with shallow root systems weakened by flooding lose contact with ground water in dry seasons; they sicken and die.

Sometimes with careful pruning – pollarding and coppicing for example – what’s left regenerates. My own garden exemplifies this: we have already lost a mature willow, and the seventy-year-old sycamore succumbed this winter, but the wild damson shoots from trees cut back four years ago are now a cloud of white against the fence.

Edward writes about the wider inevitability of the effects of a changing climate on the global environment and the risks and indeed pointlessness of denying that it is happening.

Henry and Margaret write about different aspects of the realities of immigration - another

issue which has both vast and small repercussions. Refugees are an inevitable offshoot of wars, but people also flee the depredations of climate change, looking for a more sustainable existence and others look for better opportunities, and yet here too, there is denial leading to ever harsher measures against migration.

We can see migrants as vast hordes swamping the country or we can recognise them as individuals just like us, contributing to vital services, enriching our cultural life, engaging in scientific research, earning money and paying taxes. Wouldn't it be good if people were able to live and be welcomed wherever they wanted to establish themselves?

There is plenty more to read: contributions are as usual both varied and engaging. We hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter and we'd welcome your feedback.

Liz Dolan

**Do you have a comment or experience to share which might interest other colleagues? It could be about a book or a film or a play you have enjoyed (or found wanting).**

**It could be about professional interests in education, teaching techniques and materials - or memories of the classroom or staffroom back in the day. Or about an issues that you think needs an airing - political, social, aesthetic, philosophical or whatever.**

**And have we published something controversial that you need to challenge? Please go for it ... Our Newsletter would also benefit from your photos (and photo essays).**

**Please send all submissions to our editor Mike Peters at [mike321peters@gmail.com](mailto:mike321peters@gmail.com)**

# NEU news March 2026

## Maureen McCarthy updates us on what is happening in Redbridge schools.

### 1. Update on previous issues:

Automatic pay progression continued to be a problem. Several academies finally agreed to implement the policy which was seen as real progress. Unfortunately, others haven't, which reinforces the problem of a lack of consistency throughout the education sector, referred to in the last bulletin.

The attempts by headteachers to undermine agreed conditions of service has continued, notably regarding demanding that part-time teachers attend Parents' Evenings or Inset Days on non-working days or trying to reclaim PPA time without justification. One can only wonder at the impact of these policies on relations within the schools involved. Yes, headteachers are under pressure, but why react by imposing divisive policies?

Finally, a couple of quick questions, what is a lesson observation and how many should there be in an academic year? NEU guidelines say three a year, totalling a maximum of 3 hours, except for ECTs or teachers on support plans. Drop-ins/learning walks are being classed as observations. The range in Redbridge schools again speaks to the lack of consistency in the sector. Comments from reps range from those on schools which are following the guidelines to comments on schools that are imposing three per half-term or even ones that highlight the view of one headteacher, who has recently stated, "a daily drop-in" can be classed as a lesson observation!

I don't remember discussing issues such as a climate of fear in the schools in which I worked. Now, as a caseworker, I regularly hear the phrase, together with "walking on eggshells", among other comments. The wish for complete control and the use of capability procedures seem to have become the norm.

### 2. Teacher absence

A new focus of attention seems to have been imposed by Redbridge on its schools – teacher absence. The number of meetings held at the end of last term and early this term has skyrocketed, to the extent that the District Secretary sent out an appeal to retired teachers for help. The meetings I have attended have largely involved non-teaching colleagues. Receiving a letter inviting you to a meeting, ending with the state-

ment that you could potentially be sacked, obviously has an impact on stress levels. Being told "we have to say that" really isn't helpful, neither is the template sentence regarding sources of help if you are struggling!

The fear created by such letters and the meetings that follow have meant colleagues going into school when they are not fit to do so, with the potential consequences for both them, their colleagues and the children in their care. That these letters and meetings can only be a short-term solution doesn't seem to register: SLT can claim success and (temporarily) save money on cover.

The other potential impact of this absence policy is that colleagues are resigning rather than going through the process of attending formal meetings and possible OH referrals etc. This is a "brilliant" way of shepherding staff out without any comeback or financial penalties, in other words restructuring by other means. As an example, a teacher in her first full year of teaching will be leaving her school at Easter, without a job to go to, because she is so worried about the possible impact of a Stage 2 absence meeting on her career. What a waste!

### 3. Pay, Conditions and Funding Ballot.

This has been the focus of attention this term, for obvious reasons. The voting period opened on 28<sup>th</sup> February. Reps' meetings were held to prepare for the voting period, with the focus on two key issues. The first was the rejection of the proposed **unfunded** 6.5% pay-rise over 3 years, with its obvious impact on dwindling school budgets and inevitable job losses. The second issue was the proposed removal of the 1265 hours limit which is an obvious threat since it would legitimise attempts to increase workload.

By the end of March, many Redbridge schools had achieved 100% ballot turnouts due to the effectiveness of reps. The issue, as stated on numerous occasions, is the situation in schools without reps. Several phone-banking sessions have sought to improve voting numbers in those schools. Pressure to achieve an 80%+ turnout is ever present since London districts such as Redbridge are vital if the national threshold is to be met. The result of the ballot will be announced after the deadline for this article, so let's hope it's a positive outcome.

# The NEU 'Save Education' campaign

**The NEU is currently running an indicative ballot against this year's government proposals for teachers pay and conditions**

In Redbridge, at the time of writing this, we entered the 4<sup>th</sup> week of voting in a 6-week ballot period and have already seen over 60% of teachers and support staff casting their votes. The executive will consider the outcome of the ballot after it closes on 17<sup>th</sup> April and move to a formal ballot if there is a strong enough mandate. We need to give a big thank you to all our reps who have been central to getting the ballot out, and to our retired ex-reps who have supported us with the benefit of their time and experience.

## **16 years of declining real pay**

The Government has tabled proposals for a 6.5% pay increase over the next three years. This year's teachers' pay rise will therefore be just a little over 2%, with our scandalously low-paid support staff getting just 3.2%.

**Current inflation forecasts are now predicting increases of 4-5% over the year. So, this amounts to another fall in living standards, coming after 15 years of decline that leaves us all more than 20% poorer. And now we are being told that our utility bills are set to rise by a further 20% this year. We desperately need restorative pay rises above inflation to take us back to where we were.**

## **Schools to be starved of funds**

This pay cut on its own would be bad enough. But it gets worse: the Government is intending to force schools with already strapped budgets to find 'efficiencies' to fund the pay rise. In a poll by the NEU, 72% of teachers say their class sizes are too large. 81% say that they see support staff leaving without being replaced. Many schools will be facing 'restructures', meaning possible redundancies, and we are beginning to experience this in Redbridge.

## **Striking works**

The sad truth is that it has only been when teachers resort to strike action that we can ever get Governments to improve on their original proposals. In 2023, teachers took 8 days of strike action, raising a part-funded 3% offer to a 6.5% fully funded increase. Unfortunately, as inflation then peaked at 11%, this was still significant real terms pay cut. Scottish teachers received a pay rise of 4.25% from 1<sup>st</sup> April, with a further 3.25% on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, **and** a significant reduction in workload as a result of a successful industrial action ballot.



***Redbridge NEU were out in force in London against racism on 28 March 2026***

## **Support staff**

The real terms cut to support staff pay has been much in line with the decline in teachers' pay. This year, support staff got just over 3% - still a real pay cut. The main support staff unions campaigned for 10%, but in the end accepted the 3% offer. The NEU believes support staff also deserve much better. However, the main threat that they now face is seeing their numbers reduced and the distress of seeing SEND children lose their support.

## **SEND concerns**

Concerns for SEND pupils are rising steadily. The funding gap between the aspirations of the EHCP legislation and the reality that SEND students experience is growing. Special schools for pupils with severe needs are seeing class sizes doubled, and their students being placed in environments which become impossible for them, and for their educators. With school funding being reduced, there are real fears that whatever the SEND review brings, the support for SEND students can only deteriorate if funding is not restored.

***Ben Morris***

***Membership Secretary, Redbridge NEU***

# A birding trip to Devon

**Janet Clarke, from Hounslow NEU district, tells us about a recent journey she took in pursuit of one of her interests**



## **Starting out**

On 18<sup>th</sup> January, I drove down to Dawlish Warren in Devon for a trip with my local RSPB group. It was extremely foggy, not to say drizzly, the whole way down but at least I had the company of another member. We stayed at the Langstone Cliff Hotel, which looks out onto the sea (with the mainline to Paddington running past).

## **The birding begins**

After settling in, there was a welcome drink, followed by a three-course meal in the restaurant.

Next morning, in the rain, we set off for Topsham and Bowling Green Marsh. It was quite misty as well to start with, but we managed to see a variety of birds, including a black-tailed godwit and a marsh harrier.

We carried on around Goat Walk (so called because when the promised new road was built, it was declared





only fit for goats!) along the Exe Estuary, with sightings of avocet (lots), curlews and a black swan.

#### **Cruising the estuary**

We left Topsham for Exmouth, where we had a river trip booked with Stuart Line along the Exe Estuary. Most of us had ordered pasties for lunch which are kept hot on the boat. It was still cold, but the rain disappeared and the sun came out, and so we had a wonderful trip. There are peregrine on the church tower, and we had sightings of golden plover, lapwing, dunlin, knot, and





my highlight, a huge flock of Brent geese which took off from the fields around Powderham Castle and swarmed around - a murmuration.

### **Stormy weather**

Tuesday was altogether a different day. It was raining again and extremely windy. The footpath from the bottom of the hotel garden is a footpath to Dawlish Warren and the nature reserve. Most of us crossed the railway bridge, which was the scariest thing, going into the fierce wind before coming down onto the sea wall.

The waves were crashing into the wall, showering us with spray. At the reserve, I eventually gave up (as did others) and went back to the hotel, seeing a beautiful stonechat on the way. Unfortunately, my camera was in my pocket! In the afternoon I decided to stay in the hotel, watching the sea and the gulls from the lounge as it was pouring with rain.

We left for home on Wednesday. We were lucky, as just a couple of days later, the area was hit by Storm Ingrid.

## Tributes to

# Gary Kenneth Watt



*Gary Watt (holding banner pole on right) campaigning against the franchising of the Baker Street Post Office in 1996. Photo from a private collection.*

### **From Henry Tiller, member of the *Newsletter* editorial team**

On 7 March 2026, I received the very sad news that Gary Watt had passed away after bravely battling Parkinson's Disease for several years. He died in the care home to which he had only recently moved. Since his first article, *The Battle of Cable Street* in the Spring 2024 edition, Gary had become one of the *Newsletter's* most prolific and impressive contributors. Thereafter, he produced two articles for every edition, including two in this current issue, with one more to come in the Summer edition. His pieces were always an eclectic mix - well researched, original and consistently engaging.

I only knew Gary for a relatively short period of time, brought together initially by our shared love of Leyton Orient. We soon discovered other striking parallels in our lives: Gary attended Ilford County High for Boys, where I later taught for nine years, while I attended Leyton County High for Boys.

We were both socialists and active trade unionists, with Gary having served as a fulltime official for the Communication Workers Union (CWU); and we both enjoyed writing articles. It was this last interest that brought us closest together.

Our routine became a joyful one: Gary would float an idea for an article past me, and I would do the same with him. We would then exchange drafts, offering feedback that often led to lively backandforth discussions, revisions and rewrites. Gary was never precious about his work - he welcomed suggestions with genuine openness.

He was also the inspiration behind the creation of my alter ego, Timothy UpshottCroakley, and he was always a willing accomplice in helping me push Croakley's pronouncements to ever more outrageous heights! We had loads of fun, and I'll miss you enormously, Gary. RIP mate, and thanks for your great contributions to our *Newsletter*.

### **From Jeff Lustig, first cousin**

Gary was born in Hackney on 27 October 1951, where the family lived for the first few years of his life before moving to Chadwell Heath. After the move, Gary attended Barley Lane Primary School and then Ilford County High School for Boys. Gary was particularly gifted academically. He took and passed the 11 plus examination a year early and, although a year younger than his classmates, he continued to excel with his studies.

In addition, Gary was a talented sportsman, particularly as a footballer. He not only played with distinction for his school and district football teams but also for London Schools and Essex Schools representative sides. And he was on the books of West Ham United as a youth player. As such, Gary played alongside and against several boys who went on to become professional players, some at the highest level. Gary, however, was always characteristically modest about his own abilities and achievements.

Gary's motivation in life was to help make life better for others. This was demonstrated both in his chosen career-path at the Post Office and in retirement when, instead of putting his feet up, he became a volunteer English teacher to refugees. Whether helping the public or his fellow workers, Gary's thoughts and instincts were always for others rather than himself.

Gary was the same with family and friends. For Gary, they came first, not him. This was equally true in his early life. I remember so fondly staying with Gary's family during school holidays when the two of us were inseparable, even though I was two years younger than him. We had so much fun playing football, cricket and tennis together as well as endless games of Subbuteo. It is hard to believe Gary has gone. I miss him.

**From John Kelly, loyal friend and former work colleague**

Gary and I worked together for more than 25 years at the Baker Street Post Office and, as our union

representative, you could not have asked for anyone more dedicated. He gave his time freely and tirelessly to support colleagues in need, and more often than not achieved a positive outcome for them. He also led from the front when collective action was required, most notably during the campaign and strike action against the franchising of the Baker Street Post Office in 1996.

Gary's commitment and ability were recognised in 2010 when he was appointed as a fulltime CWU official, a role he carried out with great dedication and considerable success. People who met him invariably remarked on his politeness, his integrity and his determination to fight tooth and nail for the members he represented.

Gary's sense of justice also extended well beyond his formal union duties. Two examples spring to mind. Next door to the Baker Street branch was a burger restaurant whose management suddenly announced that staff would only be paid while actively serving customers. Outraged, Gary spent two lunchtimes outside the restaurant with a placard informing potential customers of the company's foul play - after which the management backed down! On another occasion, when he heard that a friend of a colleague had been unfairly dismissed from a posh London club, Gary volunteered to represent him at his appeal. After meticulous preparation, he secured a substantial compensation payout.

Gary was a fine union official and an even finer human being and friend.



**Gary (back row far left) in retirement became a volunteer English teacher for refugees. Photo StreetSpeak**

**We print here two of the last articles which Gary Watt submitted to the Retired Educators' Newsletter, with one more to come**

# **Leningrad and the Orchestra that Defied Hitler**

**why Shostakovich's 7th Symphony has become one of the most important musical compositions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.**

On 21st June 1941, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Joseph Stalin was totally unprepared for this onslaught, refusing to believe accurate intelligence reports of unprecedented Nazi military forces massing on the former Polish frontier.

Hitler had gambled on the Panzer tank-led lightning war (*Blitzkrieg*) that had hitherto proved so stunningly successful in the West. So, the invaders initially advanced rapidly, deep into Soviet territory, reaching the very gates of Moscow, in sight of the Kremlin dome, within weeks.

However, the Soviet military and civilian resistance, together with the vastly superior reserves of Soviet manpower, halted the Nazis' progress. In the words of an ancient Russian proverb: '*When God wills it, even a broom can shoot*'. As Bonaparte had experienced a hundred and thirty years previously, 'General Winter' destroyed the German army, with supply lines stretched and troops lacking winter clothing,

## **The Siege**

The city of Leningrad was surrounded by the Nazis from 8th Sept 1941 until 27th Jan 1944, a siege lasting almost two and a half years. Hitler categorically refused to accept the surrender of the city, intending to starve the populace into submission. The Soviets had to wait until the ice, formed on Lake Ladoga, was thick enough to bear the weight of the supply lorries bringing emergency food into the city. Meanwhile, to stave off hunger, citizens ate their pets as well as all the animals in the zoo, some individuals even resorting to cannibalism. During the coldest winter for a century, the populace was forced to burn their furniture and books to stay warm. It is estimated that over one million civilians perished.

## **Composition of a symphony**

It was in this epic context that Dmitri Shostakovich composed his monumental 7th Symphony, known as

*The Leningrad*. Aged ten years old, he had witnessed Lenin's return to the Finland Station to lead the October 1917 Revolution. Shostakovich served as a firefighter during WW2. He wrote the opening two movements of the symphony in the beleaguered city. The authorities then evacuated him to the safety of Moscow, where he completed the final two movements. At the head of the musical score, he wrote:

*"I dedicate this symphony to the love of my country, the struggle against Fascism, our coming victory, and the people of Leningrad."*

## **First performances**

The symphony was first performed in Samara (then known as Kuybyshev) and smuggled out to the West on microfilm, where it was performed by Sir Henry Wood and Arturo Toscanini. It received its premiere in Leningrad, under siege, on 9th August 1942. Tickets, in great demand, sold out immediately, and so the authorities rigged up loudspeakers to broadcast the concert outside the hall. Some 100 musicians are required by the score, but with most young men serving in the ranks, initially only 25 players were assembled. The conductor of the Leningrad Radio Symphony Orchestra, Niklaus Eliasberg, scoured the city for any musician he could find. With rations so scarce, the orchestra members were like 'walking skeletons'. Such was the intense cold that they could barely finger or blow into their instruments. However, the concert was an epochal event, an unforgettable experience, subsequently recalled by veterans present in the audience. Seventy years on, Olga Kvade vividly recalls:

*"On the one hand I wanted to cry but at the same time there was a sense of pride. The only thing we feared was that the Germans would start bombing us. I was thinking, "God, let us listen to it to the end. They were shelling us but there was this feeling of superiority ..."*

*"Damn you, we have an orchestra! We're at the Philharmonic Hall so you Germans stay where you are!"*



# Manchester United and the Munich disaster

Gary Kenneth Watt writes movingly about the tragedy and reviews David Peace's novel about the event

*One cold and bitter Thursday in Munich,  
Germany/Eight great football stalwarts conceded  
victory/Eight men will never play again who met  
destruction there/The flowers of English football the  
flowers of Manchester [Eric Winter]*

## Breaking news

On Thursday, 6th February 1958, the BBC evening News bulletin led on the crash of Manchester United's return BEA flight 609 in Munich. The previous afternoon, they had reached the semi-finals of the European Cup on aggregate, after drawing 3-3 against Red Star Belgrade, on a wintry, sodden pitch. The lugubrious RP (Received Pronunciation) tones of Kenneth Kendall, newsreader, tolled the list of the 22 dead amongst 44 passengers, comprising seven players, three MUFC staff, eight journalists, two BEA crew and two passengers.

## Disaster

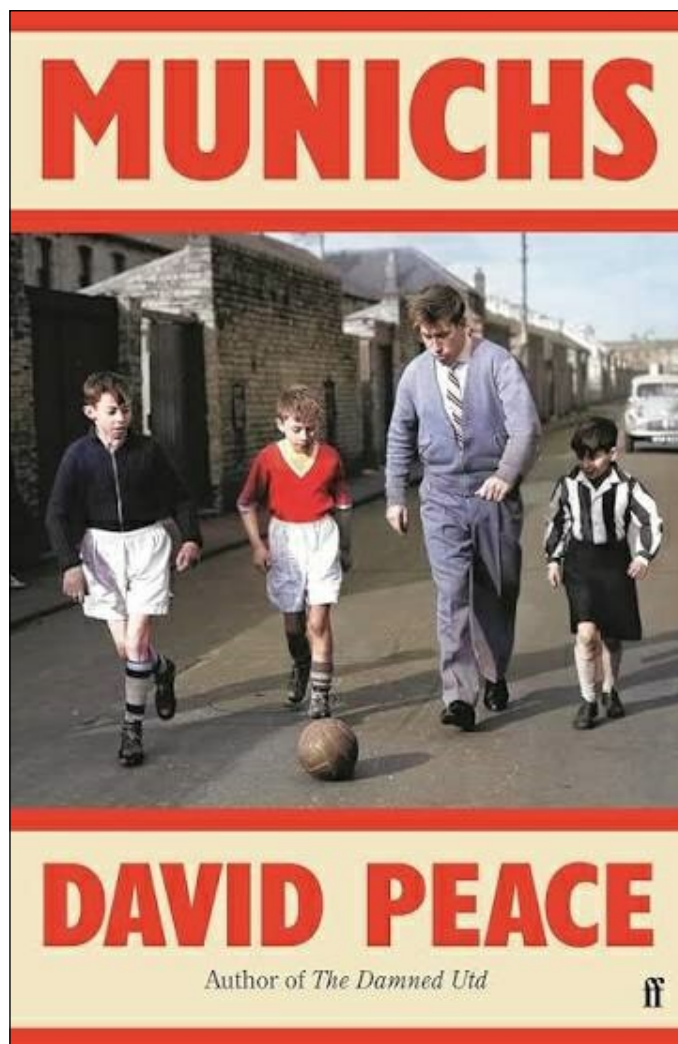
After a refuelling stop at Munich, the plane failed to take off twice. When Captain James Thain, the pilot, made a third attempt, in falling snow, most passengers were apprehensive, though unwilling to protest. The Elizabethan aircraft failed to clear a house beyond the runway, crashed, broke in half and burst into flames. Thrown clear of the wreckage, Harry Gregg, the MU goalie, later refused all accolades for heroism after bravely going back into the burning wreck to drag fellow passengers to safety, including a young baby.

## Recovery

Subsequently, Johnny Berry and Jackie Blanchflower recovered, although they never played again. The young Bobby Charlton had suffered only relatively minor concussion, cuts and bruises. The wonderful medical team at the *Rechts der Isar* Hospital in Munich worked selflessly round the clock to care for the victims and their families. The news was kept from Matt Busby and Johnny Berry, whilst they were recovering. After an agonising three-week struggle, Busby, the manager who had built the great team and was now burdened with guilt, miraculously survived, despite receiving the last rites twice.

## Duncan Edwards

The tragedy was compounded when Duncan finally lost his heroic struggle to survive his grievous injuries. At only 14, he had represented England Schoolboys Under 15s, made his MU debut aged only 17 and had



won his first full England cap at 19 - a future England Captain, if ever there was one. Unlike today's 'celebrity culture', Duncan was the unassuming football hero, the boy next door, who would sit beside you on the bus going to Old Trafford on match-days.

## Stop all the clocks

The novel is entitled *Munichs* [plural] because it describes the different perspectives of all those who experienced the tragedy - the scars left by the crash on the survivors and the impact on the fans and citizens of Manchester, queuing to buy the latest newspapers, gathering together under street lamps, meeting in pubs, or making the pilgrimage to Old Trafford to stand outside the ground, where flags stood at half-mast.

## A phoenix rises

Jimmy Murphy, Busby's Assistant, who managed the Welsh team on the day of the fateful crash, took up the reins, having to field a team for the F.A. Cup 5th round tie, postponed from Saturday to the following Wednesday. Murphy assembled reserve and youth team players, plus a couple of new signings. Harry Gregg played in goal and Bill Foulks, at right back, was

captain. The gates were closed, at a packed Old Trafford, fully two hours before kick-off. Carried on a tide of noise and emotion, MU miraculously won 3-0 against Sheffield Wednesday. This miracle continued into Round 6, when MU drew 2-2 at West Bromwich Albion, then won the replay 1-0 at Old Trafford. Again, into the Semi-Final, MU beat Fulham 5-3 in a replay at Highbury, after a 2-2 draw at Villa Park. However, there was no fairy tale ending, as the young, makeshift MU team lost 0-2 to Bolton Wanderers in the Wembley final.

### **The Devil`s waltz**

On his emotional return to Old Trafford to thank the staff, Busby said United would go on, that the great days were not behind them no matter how long and hard was the road back. And true to his word, he rebuilt the team – a team which eventually won the European Cup, their Holy Grail, beating Eusebio's Benfica 4-1 in 1968 at Wembley. Fittingly, it was Bobby Charlton who, as Captain, received the trophy.

As with both of Peace`s previous books, *Munichs* is painstakingly researched, as attested by the four-page bibliography at the end. Here he tells the story in three

parts and twelve chapters. It was short-listed for the 2024 William Hill Sports' Book of the Year. Peace`s style can be irritating, with long sentences and considerable repetition for emphasis, but I unhesitatingly recommend this novel as one of the finest books about football I've read. I unashamedly admit to shedding tears on many of its engrossing 457 pages.

### **Before you forget ...**

Peace tells the heart-rending story of Don, a fan who queued up all night for a Sheffield Wednesday cup-tie ticket. Leaving the stadium, he encounters a young boy, crying on the kerbside. A spiv had stolen his precious ticket. Don gives the boy his own cherished ticket instead. The boy leads him by the hand on an unknown journey until they reach the grave of little Eddie Colman.

"I just don't understand why some of the boys died and some of them didn't, do you, mister?" "I'm sorry", said Don, "but I don't ... but that's why, when we can, while we can, we must be kind". "Well, I know you're kind mister... You're the kindest man I ever met."

**Shalom/RIP: Geoff Bent, Roger Byrne, Eddie Colman, Duncan Edwards, Mark Jones, David Pegg, Tommy Taylor, Billy Whelan.**

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# **BEFORE BECOMING A PARENT (B4BP)**

*Charity number 1180821, [roskaneb4bp@gmail.com](mailto:roskaneb4bp@gmail.com),*

[www.beforebecomingaparent.org](http://www.beforebecomingaparent.org)

15, Matcham Road, London E11 3LE

*Patrons: Sir Richard Bowlby, Dr Christopher Clulow, Sue Gerhardt, Professor Brett Kahr, Dr Penelope Leach CBE, Dr Rowan Williams*

Do you agree that there is nothing more important than preparing young people to become good parents?

If so, you might consider giving a little time to B4BP - the only organisation (worldwide, as far as we know) to actively press for thorough, well-taught preparation for parenthood for every child and young person in every type of school. (They enjoy it! So do the teachers.)

We advocate teaching in experiential, imaginative, memorable ways, known to attract truants to school just for these

lessons! - we found this to be true when we have worked in schools in NE London. And one teenage girl said, after a parenting drama lesson, "I don't usually like working much do I, Miss? But I could have worked on that forever!" We also want to introduce this work into Youth Offender Institutions. To learn more about all the ways in which we are going about this, and how you might take part – even two hours a week could be very significant - do contact us. More information on our website: [www.beforebecomingaparent.org](http://www.beforebecomingaparent.org).

# Immigration: a multiple-choice test (Part 2)

Henry Tiller once again tests our readers' knowledge of anti-immigration rhetoric and pens a few thoughts of his own

*Ooh-bi-doo, I wan'na be like you,  
I want to walk like you, talk like you too*  
(From the 'Jungle Book', King Louie to Mowgli/  
Starmer to Farage.)

## Background

In the last edition of the *Newsletter*, I presented readers with a multiple-choice test, focusing on historical anti-immigration rhetoric and, in particular, the theme of 'same old song' over nearly 200 years. Since then, the Labour Party has increasingly engaged in a 'we-can-deport-more-foreigners-and-be-more beastly-to-them' race to the bottom with the Tories and Reform. So, I thought that this could usefully give rise to another readers' multiple-choice test, this time on the theme of which of the 3 aforementioned parties is responsible for the anti-immigration quote, given that the quotes, to the ever-lasting shame of the Labour Party, have become almost indistinguishable?

### Question 1

**Quote:** "We will end indefinite leave to remain for many non-EU migrants — their settled status must be re-assessed under tougher rules."

Who said this?

- A) Reform: Nigel Farage, as part of their 2025 immigration plan.
- B) Tory: Kemi Badenoch, outlining what would be her government's policy on immigration
- C) Labour: Shabana Mahmood on the government's asylum & immigration White Paper.

### Question 2

**Quote:** "Migrants pose a greater danger to women and girls."

Who said this?

- A) Reform: Richard Tice, making the case for forced repatriation.
- B) Tory: Kemi Badenoch, arguing that teaching boys about misogyny should not be the priority
- C) Labour: Yvette Cooper, highlighting one of the perceived dangers of high immigration.

### Question 3

**Quote:** "Illegal migration is tearing our country apart."

Who said this?

- A) Reform: Nigel Farage, talking about small-boat arrivals.

B) Tory: Robert Jenryk during a speech on illegal immigration (before his sacking).

C) Labour: Shabana Mahmood, Home Secretary, justifying the need for asylum system reform.

### Question 4

**Quote:** The number of people entering this country is causing 'incalculable damage' to our society

Who said this?

- A) Reform: Richard Tice, warning about community cohesion.
- B) Tory: Priti Patel calling for stricter border controls.
- C) Labour: Keir Starmer, as part of an immigration crackdown announcement.

### Question 5

**Quote:** "Whole areas of UK towns and cities are becoming unrecognisable as being English."

Who said this?

- A) Reform: Nigel Farage, regretting the cultural change that has taken place in the UK.
- B) Tory: Robert Jenryk (before his sacking) speaking after his visit to Birmingham.

**C) Labour: Stephen Kinnock emphasising the need for asylum reform.**

### Question 6

**Quote:** "Legally residing immigrants should not assume their stay here, or path to settlement, are guaranteed ...."

Who said this

- A) Reform: Nigel Farage arguing for abolition of automatic settlement rights.
- B) Tory: Suella Braverman echoing Reform's stance (before her defection)
- C) Labour: Shabana Mahmood outlining her new immigration reforms.

**Key:** Q1=A, Q2=B, Q3=C, Q4=C, Q5=A, Q6=C.

**So how did you get on? Were you able to discern which party said what?**

The sad thing about Labour's capitulation to the simplistic and erroneous analysis of the far-right, and the adoption of its toxic language, is that it is not only morally repugnant but also, if getting votes is the name of the game, likely to be stunningly self-defeating. Trying to out-Farage Farage by pandering to Reform's hideous agenda is only likely to smooth his path to

Downing Street. Why settle for second best when you can have the real thing?

There is an alternative, voter-friendly narrative to be told on immigration if only Sir Keir and co had the courage to tell it.

**Myth 1: They take our jobs/lower wage levels/sponge off welfare benefits.**

The alternative narrative begins with a simple empirical fact: society at large is sustained, not drained, by immigrants. Migrants have long filled critical skills shortages, nowhere more visibly than in the NHS and social care, which are entirely dependent on immigrants at all levels. Moreover, because they are disproportionately of working age, immigrants tend to contribute more in the way of output and taxation than they take out in benefits – a consistent finding of mainstream economic research. And this reality will only grow more important over time. Like much of Europe, the UK has an ageing population and a shrinking domestic workforce. Without immigration, the proportion of working-age adults would fall, as would output and tax revenues, and public services would become harder, not easier, to fund. And several academic studies and official reviews have found that immigration has little to no meaningful effect on average wages for UK-born workers when looking at broad labour market data.

**Myth 2: They're a bunch of violent criminals.**

Academic research in the UK and internationally tends to show little or no causal link between higher immigration levels and crime. So, there is no clear evidence overall that immigrants commit more crime than the indigenous population. Generalisations made on a few high-profile cases are thoroughly misleading.

**Myth 3. We're being swamped by 'illegal' immigrants in small boats.**

Small-boat crossings, while clearly an issue to be humanely addressed, account for only around four per cent of total immigration. And in absolute terms, the UK receives fewer asylum seekers than the major EU states such as Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. Treating small boat arrivals as the defining feature of the immigration system distorts public debate and drives draconian responses. Moreover, equating 'migrants' with 'bad people' when most of those forced to arrive in small boats are actually refugees – the largest national group in recent months being refugees from Afghanistan, with a sizeable proportion being children – is a distortion, disgracefully promoted by politicians and the right-wing press.

Moreover, there is an important moral dimension here. Asylum seekers are not abstractions but human beings, just like us, seeking safety and dignity for

themselves and their families. Many are 'pushed' from their homes by war, political repression, persecution, human rights abuses, poverty and climate change - forces in which richer countries, not least the UK, have played no small historical role. Britain has a long tradition of offering refuge to people in need, including to my own grandparents. As the sixth richest country in the world (by total nominal GDP), are we to now abandon this tradition?

**Immigrants aren't the cause of our problems**

It would also be useful for Labour to be prepared to face the wrath of the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* et al by explaining plainly that the root cause of Britain's economic and social crises is not immigration.

The cost-of-living crisis, insecure and poorly paid work, chronic shortages of council housing and exorbitant private rents, the strain on the NHS and social care, the power of unaccountable private monopolies supplying our gas, electricity and water, grotesque inequalities of income and wealth, widespread poverty, the impact of global warming and the hollowing-out of the public sector - all share a common origin: they are the cumulative result of nearly 50 years of neoliberal, 'free market' economic policies, sustained by Tory austerity. These policies include privatisation, deregulation, tax cuts and loopholes for the wealthy, the shrinking of local and central government provision and a sustained assault on organised labour.

The negative impact of these policies was further compounded by the global financial crisis of 2008–09, caused not by migration but by the reckless greed of international bankers. And the impact of Brexit, another flagship policy of Farage, is not to be underestimated. Apart from making co-operation on asylum policy with other EU countries more difficult, recent research suggests the following: by 2025, compared to a scenario in which the UK would have remained in the EU, the Brexit process had reduced UK GDP by about 6-8%, had caused business investment to be 12-18% below what it would have been and GDP per head to be in the range of £2700 to £3700 lower, with a loss of up to £90 billion per year in tax receipts.

So, immigration did not create these problems and courting electoral popularity by targeting it will not solve them; rather, it will simply cause a dramatic rise in overt racism and social conflict and cause self-harm through the wilful shrinking of the labour force. But to explain all this might just be a step too far for an establishment-appealing, Starmer-led Labour Government ... it's so very much easier to just go along with the Nigel-narrative and put the blame for all our problems on immigrants!

# A new NEU retired group in Hackney

Louise Whittles and Sandra Hall describe the start of the journey



On 5 February 2026, retired members of the NEU gathered in Hackney for the formative planning meeting of a retired teachers' group. Over a shared meal at a local Vietnamese restaurant, colleagues came together to plan, reflect and enjoy each other's company. From the outset, it was clear that this promises to be an energetic and purposeful group, with many members already active in community engagement and local campaigns.

The discussion ranged widely and set an ambitious agenda for the months ahead. Members spoke about the pressures facing teachers at every stage of their careers: the increasing numbers of younger teachers leaving the profession, the insecurity experienced by those working through agencies, and the difficulties older teachers encounter when trying to remain in permanent classroom roles.

Concerns about pensions were also central. Participants agreed that information and advice must reflect the changing nature of recruitment, pay and conditions across the profession, and that regular, accessible guidance should be available for members from early career through to retirement. Members also shared

concerns about behaviour, workload and the impact of cuts to school funding, particularly where support for children has been reduced.

There was strong support for developing campaigns that reflect local issues in Hackney, while also encouraging members to bring ideas and contribute to Hackney NEU branch meetings.

### Future activities

Food and fellowship were recognised as an important part of building the group. It was agreed that meetings should combine discussion with shared meals, taking into account such dietary requirements as low-salt and low-cholesterol options.

The group plans to meet monthly at a café in Dalston, with additional social and cultural events throughout the year. Early ideas include a visit to a local museum and a summer picnic in a nearby park with an arboretum.

Overall, this planning meeting was a great success. Attendees left with a sense of enthusiasm and purpose, keen to stay in touch via a new WhatsApp group and to build a strong, supportive network. It seemed to us like an extremely promising start!

# Voices from the past

## A journey into the Wiener Library archives: Margaret Drummond writes powerfully about an important historical resource in London and her own volunteering role

**“Say not in grief 'he is no more' but in thankfulness that he was.” (A Hebrew prayer.)**

Most people are familiar with the work of the Anne Frank Foundation in Amsterdam, but fewer know of the work undertaken by the Wiener Institute, based since 1938 in Russell Square in London, an establishment which, like its sister organisation in the Netherlands, endeavours to educate the public and to combat anti-Semitism and prejudice of all kinds.

### Background

In the 1920s Dr Alfred Wiener, a German Jew who had fought for Germany in World War 1, began collecting materials charting the rise of the far right in his homeland. He fled to Amsterdam when Hitler came to power in 1933, taking his archive with him. In 1938, after Kristallnacht, he and his family fled once again, this time to London, and again Dr Wiener transported his library.

In the post-war period library staff assisted prosecutors at the Nuremberg trials, documenting the experiences of thousands of camp survivors. Today these testimonies are available to read, not just in the archives but now also online in a digital collection, and these documents have formed the focus of many exhibitions organised by the Institute. Internationally, the Wiener Library is widely acknowledged as a pioneer in the emerging academic study of the Holocaust.

### Exhibitions

Like the Anne Frank Foundation, the Institute has widened its remit to highlight other instances of genocide and persecution around the world. Forthcoming events in 2026 include a photography exhibition about displacement in Cambodia during the reign of the Khmer Rouge. In previous years, there have been exhibitions on the plight of children in present day Tehran and the mass murder of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984. These events run alongside the Institute's main work, which is to educate and promote research into the experiences of ordinary Jewish families in Europe in the twentieth century. There are also a number of online exhibitions available ([Exhibitions Archive - The Wiener Holocaust Library](#).) The Institute often invites scholars and authors to give talks about its work and the education department loans out travelling exhibitions to schools and colleges.



***Staff on the balcony of the Wiener Library in Manchester Square, London, during WW 2***

### Translating the records

I feel very privileged to be a member of the volunteer translation team at the Wiener Institute. Linguists from all over the world have collaborated in a project which allows the experiences of those who lived through the horrific events of World War II to be read and studied, not just by visitors to the London archive, but also by academics who wish to access the accounts digitally and who wish to do this in English. Nearly all the materials that I translate date from the late 40s and early 50s and are usually the testimonies of survivors who were interviewed in their native language (in my case German) by volunteers in England and abroad. Other linguists translate legal and technical pieces, which require more specific specialist knowledge. However, even these everyday accounts require a degree of research and are subject to strict requirements. The Institute issues translators with a long list of preferred terms, so that academic researchers can accurately identify individual army and police units or specific splinters and factions of the Communist resistance movement.

### Translating issues

However, all kinds of puzzles do arise from time to time for the ordinary translator. An account by a survivor from Berlin, whose husband had been an active member of a Jewish Masonic Guild, necessitated a fair amount of research to identify the various abbreviations for the committees and groups she had once belonged to when she described how she and her

friends were transported to camps in the East and were supported in Poland by members of her husband's lodge. Another time, I came across a strange word for 'shoe' and eventually realised it referred to the slip-on shoes ultra-Orthodox men wear with stockings on Sabbath day. At a time when borders changed frequently, even place names need to be translated carefully - the use of the German, Yiddish, Polish or Czech name for a town denotes not just the historical context of the narrative but also the speaker's religious, political and cultural allegiance.

### **Dealing with the horror of the times**

Of course there is also the emotional impact of the translation. Even choosing just the right word to accurately reproduce the tone and mood of the narrator, neither diminishing nor sensationalising the events, but accurately portraying what happened to these witnesses, their families, their friends and neighbours is a big responsibility. Many of the pieces are harrowing, like that of the mother who gets pushed into a line on arrival at a camp and sees her young son bundled off into another group. She tells of how he turns to her, gives her one last wave and then disappears forever. In another account, the journalist Hermann Samter, who worked for a Jewish publication in Berlin, writes on receiving his transportation papers: 'Who would have thought that we would still be here in 1942? ... this is just about bearable if we do not give up hope that one day after some terrible years out in the East we will return to another Germany'. Today I am still haunted by the thought that Hermann may have believed this possible. (Tragically his letters to friends safely outside Germany stop early in 1943 when Hermann and his wife are deported to Auschwitz and murdered there.)

### **Records of famous events and ordinary people**

Some accounts are of significant historical events – for example, a report of how Herbert Baum and his group led an arson attack on a propaganda exhibition in Berlin showing the evils of the 'Soviet paradise'. This document has been used by academics researching the activists who are still well-known and were featured in one of the Institute's exhibitions. Other accounts may lay undiscovered in the archives for many years and perhaps no one will ever read them. I once translated the experiences of a woman who had been hidden by a network of members from a Christian church. (Reading between the lines she was not the easiest



***Early days of the Wiener Library***

house guest and was thus moved numerous times during the War.) She lost everyone but survived and escaped to Sweden. In the document, she says that the only living person from her 'old' life who will remember her is an elderly neighbour in Switzerland - and that account dates from the 1950s.

### **The importance of remembrance**

When I have completed the translation, I sometimes look online to search for any more information about the transportations, the towns mentioned or about the ordinary people whose words I have just translated. At first, I worried that this was too intrusive, but now I believe that, as these survivors have gone out of their way to leave us their stories, it is important to read them and remember. Some, like those in the Baum group, have streets and schools named after them. Others have a personal 'Stolperstein'- one of those metal cobble stones that are now set in streets all over Germany and beyond, documenting the last addresses of those who were murdered or fled in the Holocaust. Some of the Wiener contributors went on to have families and resumed their careers and many of their descendants, like those of Dr Wiener, still live in London, close to the Library.

The Institute is open to the public five days a week.

**Find out more on their website <https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/About-Us>. If you want to read the stories and documents that have been translated by the team you can find them here. [Search the Catalogue - The Wiener Holocaust Library](#).**

# Morning Star memories

**Mike Wood recalls his days working for the Communist national daily newspaper**

I left what I considered to be a fairly violent, all-boys, secondary modern school in Hackney in 1968 with little in the way of academic achievement at the age of sixteen. I was already in my first rock group though - but that's another story.

My memory is hazy, but I presume it was through my local labour exchange that I found myself standing at the small, rather untidy entrance to William Rust House at 75 Farringdon Road - the home of the *Morning Star*.

## Starting work

At that time, student riots and anti-Vietnam demonstrations were becoming more difficult to ignore, and it was fast becoming fashionable to be anti-establishment and left-wing. So, I must have been quite keen to work there because somehow I got the job of 'copyboy'.

Back then, newspapers subscribed to news agencies like Reuters or Associated Press or TASS for reports to be teletyped in. It was much cheaper than sending a

correspondent. My job was to collect these reports as they emerged from the teleprinter and distribute them to the correct editorial desk. In addition, I moved documents around the building and kept the teletype machines from running out of paper or printing ribbon.

## Chinese connections

The real benefit to this job though, was that twice, or maybe three times a week, I had to walk from Farringdon Street up to the Chinese Legation at the top of Chancery Lane. At that time, developments in Maoist China were becoming newsworthy, and I collected regular reports, usually in large brown envelopes. From there, I made my way to the Communist Party headquarters in King Street, near Covent Garden, to deliver and collect documents, and then back to Farringdon Street.

## Enjoying London's late sixties cultural life

There seemed to be no real time limit (as long as you didn't take liberties) and, for me, at that age, with 'hippydom' just starting, it couldn't have been better. I



**The original William Rust House in Farringdon Road wedged between the City of Westminster and the City of London**

would wander in and out of music shops, book shops and record shops, and although I don't think I earned much, as the *Star* was always struggling for money, it was often a voyage of discovery, allowing me to buy lots of books and records. I used to visit the Indica Bookstore in Southampton Row and buy fantastic psychedelic, silk-screen print posters that would carry the pungent smell of the ink for ages when stuck on my bedroom wall.

### **A Communist environment**

I worked with another young man, whose name escapes me now, but I do recall that he was a keen Maoist and had a seemingly endless supply of 'little red badges' and 'little red books' that he distributed widely. We were 'managed' by Pat Devine, a staunch, old, Irish Socialist who was, I think, on the board of the People's Press Printing Society, which ran the paper. He gave us copyboys a bit of leeway, but you didn't take liberties. Although not compulsory, it was suggested that I join the Young Communist League, which I did and stayed a member for the couple of years I worked there.

### **A room for every purpose**

The building, it turned out, was named after the first editor of *The Daily Worker*, as the *Morning Star* was called when it started in 1930. The copy room, where I worked, was the little window on the second floor to the right on the picture (on page 19). The Sub-editors' room took up most of that floor apart from Eccles' office, the paper's cartoonist, and the Woman's Page editor's office, which were next to ours. I was quite friendly with the Cartoonist who, I remember, designed labels for Waitrose as a second income.

On the floor above were the editorial and legal offices, as well as the Editor, George Mathew's office. At the very top floor were the PPPS offices and that of the treasurer, which I don't think I ever visited.

The first floor housed a library holding a large number of old copies of the paper and other resources. The ground floor was focused on taking delivery of large rolls of paper to be printed on, which became neatly tied bundles of newspapers to be distributed.

In the basement, was a massive printing machine and several linotype machines, where written copy was typed in. There was also a machine that turned black-and-white photographs into metal blocks, which could be included in the frame. These half-roller-shaped frames would be copied onto a card-former and then loaded into the huge printing machine.

### **A last check**

After a couple of first runs, a few copies were made, which I would take up to the editorial office for last-minute editing, should it be needed. The timing of this

was strict because the first editions had to catch trains to arrive 'up north'. This gave the editorial staff one last look at the paper before it was finally 'put to bed' and the huge machine in the basement cranked out about twenty thousand copies, delivered by a special newspaper escalator to the ground floor, where they would be bundled up and put into vans to go to the distributors. By that time, usually, I had gone home.

### **An embarrassing moment**

It was in the Editorial office where I learned the power of active feminism. As an eighteen or nineteen-year-old boy, trying to be fashionable, I was wearing a 'Make Love Not War' badge on my shirt. As I walked past one of the typists, she suddenly got up, walked around the front of the desk and leaned back over it, legs slightly apart. She pointed at my badge and said with a grin, 'Go on then.' I walked out very quickly with a red face and to the sound of laughter.

### **Moving on**

Newspapers are a seven-day-a-week business, which meant that our hours could sometimes be 'flexible' and we took turns working on weekends. I suspect that this was the reason that I left after a couple of years. I wanted fewer hours and a bit more money. It was time to move on to something new.

My time at the 'Morning Star' was memorable and cemented my lifelong, left-wing political stance. I still consider myself to be a Socialist and have voted Labour all my life, as well as supporting union membership. 'For the many, not the few' sounds right to me.

**AND YOU?**

**What was YOUR pathway into teaching? Did you have an interesting, boring or frankly weird first job?**

**Do let us know, and email your article and photographs to  
[mike321peters@gmail.com](mailto:mike321peters@gmail.com)**

# TUC agreement regarding support staff

**A report by Linda Cleary and Sue Penna on a special conference**

On Saturday 28th February, the NEU organised a special conference to discuss withdrawing from the 2017 TUC agreement that it made nine years ago not to actively recruit support staff members. When this agreement was drawn up there were only approximately 20,000 support staff members, and support staff now number 300,000.

Most school support staff are not in a trade union, and the NEU believe this is one of the reasons for their poor pay and conditions. Over 1200 delegates from around the country attended the special conference, eleven from Redbridge.

After careful deliberation and passionate speeches, the conference voted overwhelmingly to withdraw from this agreement in full. As we move forward, one principle remains unchanged - UNITY with our sister unions. We will not poach support staff from other unions (GMB, Unite and Unison), but will continue to encourage our NEU reps to work alongside their reps.

We must, however, engage and encourage support staff members who are not in a union to join the NEU.



**Linda and Sue with NEU General Secretary Daniel Kebede**



**Linda and Sue joined fellow support staff members onstage to big-up preparations for the March 28 national demonstration to combat hatred and division**

# An age of ignorance

**Edward Milner writes powerfully about the consequences of closing our eyes to what is happening to our planet.**

## The price of ignorance

King Canute, an Eleventh Century King of England, famously failed to turn back the tide, as you may recall from your schooldays. Nothing he could do or say influenced a natural daily phenomenon. His orders were ignored by Nature. Whether he already knew his omnipotence was suspect, or the event was designed to show his advisers that there were limits to his power, history does not relate, but his orders were definitely ignored. The tide came in as normal.

Nearly a thousand years later, the inevitability of natural processes seems to be once again in question. Regarding climate change, the hubristic determination of the political right - led by the modern incarnation of Canute - to discount scientific evidence and understanding will, in the long run, prove to be an enormous mistake. Precisely how costly this promotion of ignorance will prove, is not yet known, but I predict that cursing Nature for being irremediably left-wing and even 'woke' won't have the slightest effect.

In George Orwell's novel, *1984*, Big Brother declares 'Ignorance is Strength!' as a key Newspeak slogan of the nightmare ruling regime. In the short term such a principle may work. Arbitrary decision-making may look successful for a time but one of the weaknesses of this approach (and there are several) is that it takes no account of timescale. Many natural processes – the rising of the tide, the change in the seasons, the melting

of glaciers - all take place at what, on the surface, looks like a very slow speed. So slow, in fact, that it can take scientific observations over months, years, even decades to be detected, and later understood. But even a rising tide is inexorable – as Canute and his supporters came to realise.

## The role of science

Climate change may be very slow and some of its manifestations erratic but to mistake this for its absence, or a fabrication by scientists, is an existential mistake. *When ignorance is bliss tis folly to be wise* (Thomas Gray, 1742) has now become a political statement with real world effects of incompetent governance, job losses, bad public health advice and unanticipated disasters from storms and floods. The full effects may not become evident until it is too late, and many situations may become irrecoverable.

One of the principal results of scientific research is the improved ability to understand cause and effect, and thus anticipate future events, in effect to overcome ignorance. 'Don't look now' as a policy for crossing main roads might work for a time but clearly it is a recipe for disaster, and sooner rather than later. Building a house on land that regularly floods may look sensible in the dry season, but consideration of past water levels might be worth the effort. Other natural phenomena, such as hurricanes, may be infrequent but knowledge of the signs, for example dangerously low air pressure,



***King Canute: His orders were definitely ignored. The tide came in as usual***

enables precautions to be taken. Tides can be predicted, traffic can be calmed and land suitable for building can be identified, but science has taken the business of predicting future problems much further – with obvious benefits all round.

Clean water, adequate sewage systems, adequate food production, vaccines, modern medicine and surgery, together with productive ways to manage and conserve the natural world, are all the result of extensive, painstaking scientific research over the last few centuries. Even as many populations suffer from the effects of past and current conflicts, the general health and standard of living in most societies have improved enormously as a result of a better understanding of causes and effects on planet Earth. Life expectancy has increased in nearly every society, even if this progress has stalled or gone backwards for some, particularly in zones of armed conflict. However, the future doesn't look so good.

### **Political failure and its consequences**

The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change was adopted by 195 countries as a legally binding international treaty. It was based on the scientific understanding that carbon dioxide levels in Earth's atmosphere were dangerously heightened, likely to grow and would have increasingly serious, and both predictable and unpredictable outcomes. The sterile arguments about assigning human culpability have proved to be irrelevant – the overriding problem facing humanity now is how to slow, halt and eventually reverse this increase in carbon dioxide levels. Target dates for reduction in excess carbon dioxide emissions down to net zero were agreed. However, it is now abundantly clear that these targets will not be met, especially those for 2030. The present American government disagrees with the basic premise of climate change, denying the scientific evidence and even reneging on their international commitment of ten years ago. But they go even further by promoting ignorance – measurements of carbon dioxide emissions by industry are discouraged, databases are withdrawn, funds for monitoring of actual atmospheric carbon dioxide levels [are in the process of being suspended](#), and all references to climate change have been removed from US government websites and publications. In the face of this anti-science posture, banks and many other corporations have quite willingly abandoned sensible climate change precautions. One field, though, that is unlikely to follow is the insurance industry.

New data published in the journal *Urban Sustainability* reveals that as ice-caps melt, sea levels will rise, meaning that [vast numbers of buildings in coastal areas](#)

will be regularly flooded in coming decades even if carbon dioxide emissions are stabilized at any particular target level. The process will continue long into the future with a rise of five metres predicted by the end of this century, with many small island nations likely to disappear completely. No wonder it is already becoming impossible to insure seafront properties anywhere around the world.

The real danger of the Big Brother slogan 'Ignorance is Strength' is that as a short-term principle it looks attractive to potential autocrats. In George Orwell's novel, it was part of the system that promoted total obedience to the leader – the more irrational the slogan the more convincing the subservience. Mao Zedong adopted the same principle when he unleashed the Cultural Revolution – people were expected to deny common realities under the threat of political ridicule and harassment. It took China half a generation to recover. It is also surely the purpose of the 'War on Woke' to prevent a more sophisticated understanding of a complex world that allows and acknowledges diversity instead of signaling allegiance to an increasingly untethered leader. Dictatorships do not tend towards enlightened policies on the environment - or anything else. People are told what to think and independent thought is outlawed.

### **Can humanity prevent disaster?**

Ecology shows that diversity is a natural strength of ecosystems which gradually increase in complexity under improving conditions; it's called evolution. The Tree of Life suggests that this is a natural process and understanding this takes the most complex entity evolution has so far produced – human intelligence. But this appears to have limits. Technology and hubris have already led modern humanity to impose itself dangerously on the planet in ways that were unimaginable just a few generations ago. We have exploited the natural world with little concern for the damage caused, we have polluted the entire planet with plastic waste, corrupted the air we breathe and altered the climate. Promoting ignorance has proved to be highly profitable. But this pose of ignorant unconcern is starting to raise doubts. Are these just teething problems or does human endeavour have a fundamental flaw? We may have transformed much of the planet – but apparently without gaining a deeper understanding of our existential situation or regaining any sense of respect for nature. I suspect that promoting ignorance may bring temporary popularity, but longer term will prove to be a short cut towards the total disaster of an uninhabitable planet. Is that the ghostly laugh of the long-deceased King Canute I can hear?

# Defection:

**why one former Tory MP made the switch.**

**Henry Tiller in discussion with Timothy Upshott-Croakley, former Conservative MP for Snobish South, about his defection to Reform, following his farewell speech and post-election interviews in previous editions of the Newsletter**

**HT:** Tim, thanks for joining us once again, brought about this time by your shock announcement of your defection from Tory to Reform.

**U-C:** Well, although we certainly do have our political differences, it's always a pleasure to talk with you. Knowing that many of your newsletter readers are retired teachers and members of the ultra-militant, communist-led NEU, I suspect that you're all Marxist-Leninists and Trots, and so I always relish the prospect of setting your thinking straight.

**HT:** Ok, let's start with the background to your defection. Most of your fellow Tory defectors seem to have left under some sort of cloud and/or had a history of impropriety. Does that also apply to you?

**U-C:** Certainly not. How impudent of you. My motives for this tactical switch are honourable and straightforward: although Kemi's heart is in the right place, I believe that the Conservative Party is currently too dominated by bleeding-heart centrists. Reform is now best placed to carry forward Margaret's wonderful vision of a better world, and I want to be part of it.

**HT:** Let's move on then to Reform's members, new and old. While your motives and record may be sound, this doesn't appear to be the case with all of your fellow defectors. In fact, they've been popularly characterised as "rats deserting a sinking ship". Do you feel that's fair?

**U-C:** Well, that's typical of the objectionable language of the far left. Of course I don't think it's fair. The Conservative ship is clearly in choppy waters but certainly won't sink, and the reference to rats is frankly insulting and unacceptable. Those choosing to make the move across to Reform are fine, upstanding, sincere, honest, British people with the best interests of our country at heart.

**HT:** I'm not too sure that's a standpoint that would be universally held, and so let's consider some of the 'stars' of your new party, and where better to start than with Mr Reform himself, Nigel Farage ... a man who no less than 34 former pupils from Dulwich College have alleged that he regularly engaged in racist and antisemitic behaviour during his school years, including such remarks as 'Hitler was right' – remarks that he's never actually said were wrong. One former pupil is

quoted as remembering Farage in the following pithy way: 'He was just a shit.'

**U-C:** Well, I'm sure that these people making the allegations are a bunch of left-wing troublemakers and liars.

**HT:** Ah, 34 left-wingers, liars one and all, from Dulwich College of all places? Well, well!

**U-C:** Look, at worst this was just innocent, playground banter. Nigel is an outstanding leader, a brilliant communicator and the most influential politician of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**HT:** And Suella (Cruella) Braverman? ... a woman who has the unrivalled distinction of being fired as home secretary on two separate occasions for misconduct by two different Tory PMs, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak.

**U-C:** Now look here, Suella is prepared to call a spade a spade and stick to her guns on immigration and law and order. That's a quality to be admired.

**HT:** Robert Jenrick? ... who, as Immigration Minister, ordered the removal of cartoon murals at a reception centre for unaccompanied child migrants as he deemed them to be 'too welcoming'; who showed his 'compassion' for asylum seekers by campaigning to remove the protection afforded them by the European Convention of Human Rights; and, as Housing Secretary, unlawfully enabled property tycoon, Richard Desmond, to avoid paying Tower Hamlets Council around £45 million in tax.

**U-C:** **Well, I thoroughly agree with Robert's first two actions and the third was an unfortunate, confidential commercial matter which only a communist rag like *The Guardian* would have publicised. We can all make mistakes, you know.**

**HT:** Nadhim Zahawi ... who as Chancellor was sacked for somehow 'forgetting' to pay millions of pounds owed to the taxman and for failing to declare that he was the subject of an HMRC investigation?

**UC:** Just a minor oversight on his part. A real asset to any political party, with his successful business background, he is a competent administrator and a measured, pragmatic communicator.

**HT:** Mathew Goodwin ... who was Reform's unsuccessful candidate in the recent Gorton and

Denton by-election and has been endorsed by Tommy Robinson, the far-right convicted criminal and thug? Goodwin is of the view that there should be 'an immediate ban on all immigration from predominantly Islamic nations' and that "Trump is right" on immigration. Actually, Tim, it seems to me that you've joined up with a right dodgy bunch of chancers, has-beens, bigots and crooks. I certainly wouldn't want to buy a second-hand car off any of this lot, let alone give them my vote!

**U-C:** I'm sure the feeling would be mutual.

**HT:** So, let's now move on to the politics of your new mates. While Reform does currently operate within democratic norms and regularly contests elections, it seems to me that you're something of a 'one-trick pony', being focused primarily on hate - hatred for immigrants, asylum seekers and workers' rights, and hateful Trumpian policies, such as mass deportations - all basic ingredients for an easy flip into authoritarianism and fascism.

**U-C:** As usual, you couldn't be more wrong. Reform is focussed on love, not hate - love for our country and everything British. And the Trumpian policies that you refer to are all about making America great again. We aim to make Britain great again.

**HT:** Well, I'm sure that Nigel would appreciate such an interpretation!

**So, finally, should teachers and the NEU fear the election of a Reform government?**

**U-C:** Yes, most definitely, and rightly so. It's high time to put an end to all this 'multi-cultural' claptrap that is eroding our proud traditions. Nigel has wisely pointed out that 'teachers are poisoning our kids. They are telling them to be ashamed of their country... they are dividing us, not uniting us'. Indeed, a celebration of the great achievements of the British Empire must be central to the curriculum. I can't help but admire Nigel for his no-nonsense stance on this and I will once again quote him directly: 'When we're in a position of power, we will go to war with these left-wing teaching unions and make sure our kids are taught properly'. Make no mistake - Reform will be coming for you!

**HT:** Ok, thanks for the heads-up, Tim. It's clear that the NEU now has to place itself on a war footing in readiness for possible battle against a ragbag, reactionary foe. Hopefully, that won't be necessary if the British electorate see sense and consign you and your fellow hate-mongers to the dustbin of history, where you all belong. I think that this interview has now run its course.

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# Sante Refugee Mental Health Access Project

## Edward Milner introduces us to an important charity and volunteering role

I am currently Vice-chair of Sante Refugee Mental Health Access Project ([www.santeproject.org.uk](http://www.santeproject.org.uk)) which matches individual volunteers with individual asylum seekers to 'befriend' and support them through the process (increasingly long-drawn out) of obtaining Leave to Remain.

Many asylum seekers are under considerable psychological stress, and we offer a hand of friendship. We help them with whatever they need, acting essentially as a friend would, being there for them and

helping them when they are having problems with officialdom - immigration, health, housing, social services, etc.

We start with regular meet-ups, say fortnightly, but then every pairing works differently - just as different friendships function differently.

Sante is always looking for new volunteers who we ask to first complete the application form on the website. Each applicant is then interviewed before being paired with an asylum seeker ('service-user').

# Desert Island Discs

## Tina Jacobs shares the music she would take to a remote desert island

### Growing up in Norfolk

I grew up in the sixties and seventies, a very orange and brown time in my memories. I lived in Norfolk, originally in a tied cottage on a farm and then we moved to a council house in a small market town.

My dad was a long-distance lorry driver, and my mum did more casual work, such as in a factory or fruit picking. I remember long summers where we were playing out all day.

Opposite our house was the recreation ground. There were football games as well cricket matches in the summer, a tennis club and a bowls club as well. The best bit was the playground with an unfeasibly high slide, which was made of metal that burned your legs in the hot, summer sun, and the American swing which took about seven people. To get the swing going, a couple of you stood up and rocked backwards and forwards. You had to be firm on your feet though, as if you fell off, presuming you weren't brained by the swing, there was a good chance you would break something as you landed onto the concrete. I remember using candles during the energy blackouts and cars queuing for petrol during the oil crisis. All in, lots of good fun if you were young but probably a real worry for my parents.

### Listening with mum

The soundtrack of my childhood is my mum's music. When they first married, my dad said mum could have a reel-to-reel tape machine or a washing machine as they couldn't afford both. My mum picked the tape machine. I grew up listening to the Beatles and the Mersey Sound. Whilst other friends' parents liked country music, my mum liked Isaac Hayes and Barry White.

Goodness knows where she heard them originally, but she loved them. You would be surprised how many albums they released! It is also a good demonstration of how times have changed, as my town, with only around five thousand people when I was a teenager, had a record shop. Now we shop online, whereas then we shopped locally. Online shopping is good because of the greater variety of things you can buy, but it was nice to be able to go into a local shop to browse things in real life.



*'I grew up listening to The Beatles, the Mersey Sound ... Isaac Hayes and Barry White'*

### 1) Isaac Hayes – The Theme from Shaft

There is so much to love about this piece – for example, the percussive backing track and then the horn section breaking through. It has peak seventies lyrics: "Who's the cat that won't cop out when there's danger all about, Shaft, can you dig it?" It's a soundtrack to a film that I have never seen but I still love this song. There was something about the visuals of an LP. The artwork could be stunning. Isaac Hayes had an LP called Black Moses that came as a huge gatefold which, when unfolded, formed a cross with Isaac Hayes standing with his arms outstretched.

### 2) The Beatles – Anna (go to him)

This is one of many Beatles songs that I love, as well as being one of my mum's particular favourites. It is an early track with John Lennon on lead vocals. I really like his voice, and the earlier tracks seem to have closer harmonies which I enjoy.

### 3) The Kinks – Waterloo Sunset

Another group from the sixties that I love. So many songs to choose from but, in the end, I picked this one as it honours London. I moved to London from Norfolk when I was a student and never left. It has brought me my husband and an enjoyable life. Wandering around central London is great fun and this song makes me think of that. The Kinks also have a link to Ilford as the video for their song `Come Dancing` was filmed at Ilford Palais. I pass there every time I drive to swimming.

### 4) The Jam – Going Underground

Having grown up listening to a lot of sixties music, by the time the mod revival happened in the late seventies and early eighties, I was a huge fan. I wore the clothes and had the make-up. Unfortunately, I did not have a scooter. Having had a long conversation with my dad about buying a vespa scooter, it was clearly not a goer. Once he realised that I was serious about it, a muttered “bloody deathtraps” put an end to the discussion.

My parents helped me learn to drive when I hit seventeen, so it was not much of a sacrifice. One of the joys of moving to London from somewhere rural is the frequency and quality of public transport in the capital. I was used to a bus every hour at busy times, with longer gaps at other times, and so the idea of buses every ten minutes or so was mind blowing. I am still very appreciative of public transport today.

### 5) Madness – My Girl

Here is another band I liked from my eighties mod phase. There were loads of tracks I could have picked but I settled for this one because it was one you could dance to - and I also liked the words. Madness and the Specials were bands which talked about a multicultural city world, which was outside of my rural, more mono-cultural life – something which I found fascinating. I liked the beat of the music as well as the sudden stops and starts.

### 6) Billy Bragg – New England

This one is from my time at university in London. I am a big fan of lyrics and Billy Bragg is an amazing lyricist. I could have picked loads of songs from Billy (nicknamed the Bard of Barking) but went with this one because of the line: “I saw two shooting stars last night, I wished on them, but they were only satellites, is it wrong to wish on space hardware, I wish, I wish you’d care”. It’s fair to say that his voice is not the most melodious, but I just love it. That with the words and the guitar-work make him one of my favourite artists. He does a song to the tune of Bob Dylan’s `Route 66` called `The A13 to Shoeburyness` and thanks to that I

can name a lot of places along the A13 to Southend - a questionable skill but one I like!

### 7) Depeche Mode – Just Can’t Get Enough

A favourite from the dance floor. It has a pounding beat and a repetitive chorus. I do an arm swinging, jumping around dance to this, which is very reminiscent of the eighties. I still dance to it now if it comes on the radio with the same energy, but with a little less flexibility! It reminds me of sweaty dance floors and being young, drinking beer and being with my mates. Good times.

### 8) Wet, Wet, Wet – Love is all Around

I really like this song and this version rather than the version by The Troggs. I liked it so much that it was the first dance for my husband and I at our wedding. As with most songs I like, it is the lyrics I enjoyed. Top tip when picking your dance as a wedding dance - think about how long it is. We seemed to be out there forever!

#### Book and luxury choices

For my book I am going to pick the collected works of Sherlock Holmes, i.e. all of them. Hopefully this will give me lots to read in my sojourn on the island. My luxury is going to be lots of moisturiser. I am concerned about sunburn (hopefully it will be warm!) and about my hands having cracked skin because of all the manual work I will be doing.

This has been an interesting exercise. If I did it again, I maybe would pick different songs, but the artists would be similar. Music for me is powerful. It brings back people and times that I have loved.

**Why not compile  
your own Desert  
Island discs?**

**We would love to publish  
your selection in a future  
Newsletter. Just send your  
top eight choices to the  
editorial team at**

**mike321peters@gmail.com**

# The NEU London Retired Members Meeting

**January 2026 Lynda Graham took notes at the first meeting of the year at Hamilton House**

Guest speakers were Peter Apps, who spoke on London housing, and Bernard Regan, who talked about Venezuela. The Chair-person was Bob Archer.

*Peter Apps is an award-winning journalist and deputy editor of Inside Housing. His book, 'Show me the Bodies', which deals with the causes of the Grenfell Tower fire, won the Orwell Prize in 2023.*

## Key Points

- In the 1980s, families and school staff could afford to live in London, whether they rented or bought a house.
- However, due to government cuts to benefits and to the supply of council housing, rents and property prices increased through the 1990s to unaffordable levels for families, teachers and support staff.
- Many schools in London are closing due to a lack of pupils because of the housing crisis.
- Councils are moving people out of the city to completely new communities, leading to serious disruptions to their lives.
- The NEU needs to see housing as a 'core issue' and campaign for the 'human right to secure housing' for all.



**Author Peter Apps**



**Bernard Regan speaks on international events**

**Our second speaker was London retired member, Bernard Regan, on the unfolding events in Venezuela.**

*Bernard Regan served for twenty-five years on the National Executive of the National Union of Teachers. He has been publicly campaigning in support of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination since 1982, for much of that time as an executive member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.*

## Key Points

- Venezuela has the greatest reserves of oil of any country in the world.
- The real reason for the US attack on Venezuela was not to stop drug trafficking but to gain access to the country's oil.
- The attack on ships off the coast of Venezuela was presented as a clinical strike but a number of those killed were from Cuba.
- Cuba operates a free school of medicine, even training US students who are unable to afford the fees in their own country.
- The UK is assisting the US in its attack on Venezuela despite the benefits that President Maduro has brought to the country.

**Both Peter and Bernard answered several questions from members of the audience and were warmly thanked for their talks.**

# One thousand points of light across the world

Jo Buchanan writes movingly

"I keep some slender hope", said Ian McEwan in a recent interview discussing his latest novel, *What we can know*, that "there is a possibility that there are 1,000 points of light across the world in which all kinds of people are working on all kinds of projects, and we have not joined them up yet."

## Revival

McEwan is discussing environmental projects and emphasising the resilience of nature. He describes a section of the sea off the coast of Scotland where fishing and boats are no longer allowed. "Marine biologists are absolutely astonished at the resurgence of biological life" - fish, scallops, marine plants, seaweed. And, remarkably, in the no-go area around Chernobyl, there now lies one of Ukraine's most biodiverse regions.

So, there is progress. For the first time since 1927, the Chicago River has become safe enough for swimming. After decades of cleaning up sewage and industrial waste, local people were able to take part in the Chicago River Swim, 97 years since the last one. Then, despite the disappointment and sense of betrayal at COP30, there were 24 nations that backed breakaway plans to devise a roadmap to exit fossil fuels. Let us hope they follow their roadmap. In the last 25 years since the first UK offshore wind turbines went up, our offshore capacity has risen from 4MW to 16,000MW and can provide power to 16m homes.

## Making a difference together

There are many encouraging stories all over the world. We rarely hear of them unless we search. Each one may be just one point of light, but wherever one of these lights shines there is hope. In Syria, schools have shattered and crumbled after years of conflict. And official reconstruction is likely to take many more years. But in Talbiseh, a city in rural Horns, the community stopped waiting for officials and started rebuilding from the ground up. They raised funds and found carpenters, metalworkers and construction workers. Carpenter Ahmed Issa Al Juma commented, "I felt responsibility towards the children of my town", and he set to. He has now repaired nine schools. Other members of the workforce have done similar things.

There are now 13 schools with blackboards, bathrooms and proper chairs and desks - important evidence of the power of a community working together.

## Resistance

Approximately 286 miles from Talbiseh, in the West Bank, the land is scarred by the brutal incursions of settlers, backed by the Israeli military, which has led to death and destruction and, since 1967, to the uprooting of one million olive trees as part of the continuous seizure of the lands of the West Bank. This has led to around 25,000 Palestinian families losing their livelihood as olive farmers. Zaytoun, a social enterprise charity, has been involved in reviving the landscape and has provided more than 300,000 saplings. The trees take 15 years to mature but bear fruit about five years after the saplings are planted. Olive planting has become a strong symbol of resistance, an assertion of ownership of the land and defiance towards the Israelis. Taysir Arbasin of Zaytoun stressed the hope and optimism the new trees can bring: "We are planting for the next generation. We are planting for hope."

## Media bias

Our mainstream media rarely provides us with news to give us hope and hides from us the dire truths about our planet and the effects of greedy and acquisitive capitalists on our world. It regularly fails to report on, or glosses over, details of the curtailment of our rights, the corruption of our justice system and our involvement in wars and armed conflict. And the 'left' media can tend to focus only on problems and crises while exposing the truth to us. However, hearing about the opposition to increasingly authoritarian leaders and the laws they impose on us in so many countries gives us hope and encouragement - hope that one day society will change for the better and encouragement to continue to stand up and protest, in whatever way we can, at the injustice and greed all around us.

## So many points of light

Each protest and each environmental project is valuable and is one of the 1,000 points of light across the world that Ian McEwan referred to. Much of what we do may not seem to reap results, but we continue in hope. Everything we do is incremental and makes a difference. Each of our actions in our own corner of the world, each point of light, can contribute to long-term change. And these actions are growing in strength and number the world over. Even though we may at times feel we are acting in isolation, we are increasingly realising that we have power, that we are strong, especially when we act together. **There is a global community standing up to injustice and determined to create a better world.**

# Book Review

## Janet Clarke (Hounslow NEU) reviews two novels

I have chosen two books this time that in a way complement each other. They are *A Murder in Paris* by Matthew Blake and *Freebourne*, a first novel, by Salman Shaheen.

Both books contain a murder mystery and deal with the past and the possibility of mind and memory manipulation.

### **A Murder in Paris**

We start in the past, in 1945, and the liberation of Paris, where two women are checked into the Hotel Lutetia, a reception centre for those returning from the camps, but only one checks out. She is the grandmother of present-day Olivia, a renowned memory therapist living in London, who is called suddenly to the French capital where her grandmother has confessed to a murder committed at the hotel in 1945.

Her grandmother, who is suffering from dementia, is subsequently murdered. Why? Who did it or ordered it to be done? Olivia must uncover the truth about her family's wartime past.

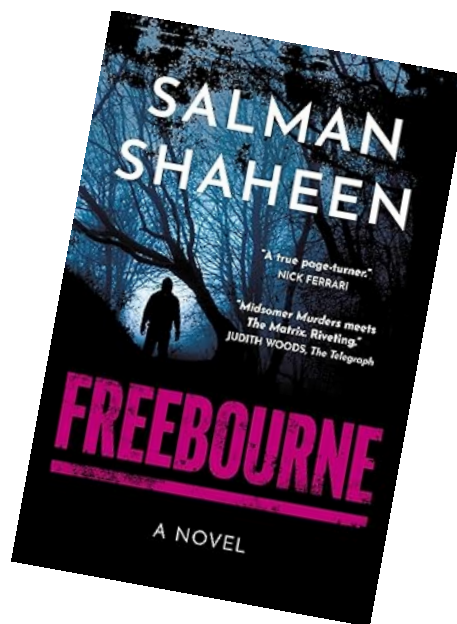
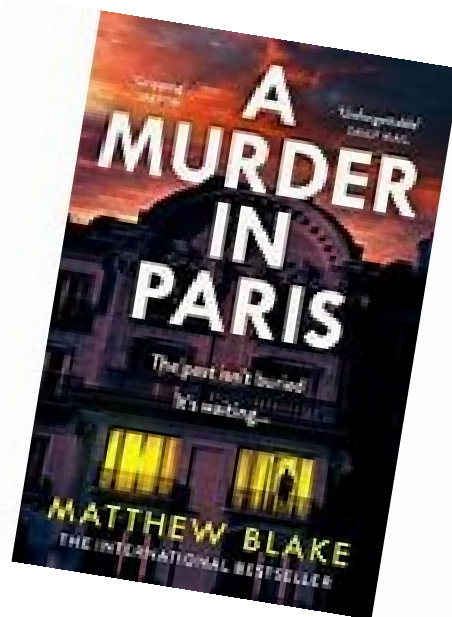
Throughout the story we see how memory has been manipulated and managed by a very clever therapist.

I enjoyed this book, which I found to be a page-turner. It ranged from the liberation of Paris in 1945 to the present day. It gripped from the beginning and, even when you realised who the perpetrator was, you still wanted to know the ending. A must for those who like psychological thrillers.

### **Freebourne**

I had read this novel by Salman Shaheen first and wondered how I was going to review it, as I feel the author tried to smuggle too much current politics into his story. After reading *A Murder in Paris* I realised, however, that essentially both stories are exploring the same themes of memory and memory-manipulation - the first by a clever therapist with a past to hide and the second, set in the near future, by a main character who uses technology to control the mind and bury the past.

*Freebourne* explores current themes in power politics, religion and the use or misuse of technology. Dr. Harry Coulson hopes to start a new life and a new company - Mindtech - which aims to help people come to terms with their traumas. He finds a scene of murder, and murder follows him throughout. He is the obvious suspect, but who is causing mayhem in *Freebourne*? Is



Harry really Harry? Has his own past been cleverly manipulated and by whom? And for what purpose?

The novel examines the boundaries between freedom and conformity. Is the novel's title a reference to Jean - Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract*? It's a good read, though not necessarily a must read. I would recommend **not** reading the introductory comments first and, afterwards, if you have access, listen to an episode from 'The Infinite Monkey-Cage' - *Mindreading* (BBC Sounds Radio 4, series 34. episode 2)