

# Labour Heritage

## Labour Heritage bulletin autumn 2002

### Barbara Castle

Barbara Castle, who died on 3<sup>rd</sup> May this year, aged 90, was one of three children of Frank Betts, a tax inspector, and his wife, Annie Rebecca. Her father was a great book collector, who taught himself Latin, Greek and Spanish, and encouraged his children to value and pursue learning. As a stalwart member of the Independent Labour Party in Bradford, and editor of their paper, the Bradford Pioneer, he also influenced Barbara's development as a socialist.

After attending and becoming Head Girl at Bradford Girls' Grammar School, Barbara won a scholarship to St. Hugh's College, Oxford, where she obtained a third class honours degree in Philosophy, Political and Economics.

When she left Oxford, having been active in the Labour Club, she wrote for a local newspaper and became a sales demonstrator in Manchester. Coming to London, she formed an association with the socialist journalist, William Mellor, with whom she had a long lasting love affair until his death in 1942. Through him, she was associated with the group that founded Tribune, including Michael Foot.

Elected to St. Pancras Borough Council in 1937 and a member of the London Metropolitan Water Board (1940-43) she became the Editor of Town and County Councillor (1936-40). Thereafter she worked as an employee of the Ministry of Food and a journalist. In 1944 she married Ted Castle who, as night editor of the Daily Mirror, had used her articles.

Selected as Labour candidate for Blackburn, she entered Parliament in 1945 and remained a member until 1979. She was a very active campaigner on many issues, but particularly against colonialism. Elected to the NEC of the Labour Party as a Bevanite in 1950, she served until 1979, taking her turn to chair the Party. She took office successively as Minister for Overseas Development (1964/5), of Transport (1965/8) and of Employment (1968/70). In the last mentioned post she introduced 'In Place of Strife' for trade union reform, which she was eventually forced to drop.

When Labour returned to office in 1974, she was Secretary of State for Health and Social Security (1974/6), in which capacity she introduced SERPS to give workers a second pension and sought to abolish paybeds in the NHS.

After being dropped by Jim Callaghan when he became Prime Minister in 1979, Barbara left the House of Commons and entered the European Parliament, where she led the British Labour Group until 1985. Leaving in 1989, she became a Life Peer and continued to campaign, above all, for pensioners – up to her death. She never diluted her socialist convictions.

### A labour historian

Barbara's recreations were walking and poetry, and she was deeply conscious of our heritage in Britain and the Labour Party. She helped restore canals and inland waterways in her 1968 Transport Act. The 'Castle Diaries' which she published constitute an important source for the history of Labour in government (1964/70) and (1974/76). She also wrote 'Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst', for

which I was able to provide material, and we had discussions on Labour's history. In 1994 I shared a platform at Hammersmith with her and Bill Morris of the Transport and General Workers' Union, to celebrate the centenary of William Morris. She was to have been a speaker at a Labour Heritage event to mark the Labour Party's centenary, which had unfortunately to be cancelled. Barbara will rightly be remembered for her outstanding contributions to Labour's achievements in government and for her untiring campaigns against apartheid and imperialism, for pensioners and the NHS. Among other ways in which she made her mark, she should also be remembered as a writer and a historian who played her part in recording and encouraging research into Labour's past.

Stan Newens June 2002

**FOOTNOTE FOR BARBARA CASTLE OBITUARY**



In an obituary appreciation of Barbara Castle in the July-August issue of *Chartist*, Labour Heritage member Larry Iles, highlighted that in her last years she 'was an outspoken fighter against 'ageist' poor social security benefits on every occasion she could seize a microphone (despite deafness and several physical collapses) almost till the end of her days.'

'She was an irrepressible leftist, and a modernising feminist.'

'Castle is now being mourned by many to whom her life was a shining example – not so much because of her earlier activities but because she never took a graceful exit!'

'She was one of the earliest western white 'radicals' on the global race relations issues, and in realising the poverty issue was still unaddressed she showed enormous anti-neo-colonialist guts.'

Larry works in the United States, and is heavily engaged in writing to a variety of journals and newspapers on historical subjects and current affairs

Larry is hoping to give a talk on Mary Agnes Hamilton, Labour MP for Blackburn 1929-31, at a Conference in March 2003 in the United States. Hamilton was a socialist, novelist, biographer, broadcaster, diplomat and Governor of the BBC. She died in the 1960s.

Dic Penderyn Memorial Service 2002

Over recent years a tradition has been established in Aberavon, South Wales, to organize an annual meeting, on or about 13<sup>th</sup> August, at the graveside of Richard Lewis, alias Dic Penderyn, who was hanged on that day in 1831 for his

part in the Methyr Tydfil riots of that year.

A locally born man, who had moved with his family to work in the Methyr coal -mines, he had lost his job after standing up for the rights of working people. Subsequent to participating in an upsurge of radical activity to demand reforms, he was accused of stabbing a soldier, Donald Black, and found guilty – despite the fact that the soldier was unable to say whether he was his assailant or not and others denied his guilt. He was sentenced to death and the sentence was carried out in spite of a petition of 11,000 signatures calling for mercy. It appears that the Government and in particular Lord Melbourne, the Home Secretary, were determined to make an example of him as a deterrent to others. (Lord Melbourne was the home secretary who colluded with the Tolpuddle magistrates in 1834 in the trial of the six Dorchester labourers).

Councillor Malcolm Jones, whose idea it was to organize the event originally, was unable to be present this year, owing to illness, and the meeting was chaired by Peter Davies. Councillor Noel Crowley, Leader of the Neath and Port Talbot Council, made a stirring address in which he praised the stand made by Dic Penderyn and others against low pay and appalling living conditions of early nineteenth century industrial areas.

“He was twenty-three years of age when he died – and even today he has much to teach us about unity and justice” , he declared.

“As members of the labour movement and as trades unionists we have reason to be proud of his achievements and his memory. Long may we remember Dic Penderyn and all those who sacrificed much, even their lives, so that we may

enjoy justice for the working man today.”

Prayers were said by the local Minister, a Welsh male voice choir sang; and a good crowd participated. Hywel Francis MP, David Morris, a former MEP, and other stalwarts of the labour movement in South Wales, were present.

As a guest, along with my wife and son, I was thrilled. The event was a model of the way in which Labour’s past should be remembered and an inspiration for the movement today.

Stan Newens

### **LABOUR PARTY PUBLICATIONS IN THE TUC LIBRARY COLLECTIONS**

A joint library for the TUC and the Labour Party was established in 1922. When the TUC left Transport House in the 1950s, and the Library was divided, a complete set of Labour Party publications was retained. The TUC continued to add LP material to its Library up to its transfer to the University of North London, now the London Metropolitan University, in 1996. The collection includes conference documents, books, pamphlets and periodicals and amounts to around 2000 items. There are also a number of cuttings files relating to the LP 1915-1970, which you can search using the online index at the TUC Library Collections webpages at [www.unl.ac.uk/library/tuc](http://www.unl.ac.uk/library/tuc).

Material acquired from the LP since 1996 is less complete, but includes key sources such as Conference reports.

Following a Heritage Lottery Funded project to recatalogue British trade union publications, many LP publications can

now be found on our online catalogue at <http://opac.unl.ac.uk> , but this is mainly where the LP is a joint author with a union body, or is a partner in an umbrella organisation with a trade union body, eg the National Council of Labour, a local trades and labour council or the TUC-Labour Party Liaison Committee. The majority of LP publications are only accessible via a card catalogue in the Library. The University is urgently seeking funds to provide online records for LP and other collections in the Library.

The main LP Archive is at the Labour History Archives & Study Centre at the John Rylands Library in Manchester. However, the TUC Collections are an important resource for the study of Labour Party history, especially for researchers based in London and the South East.

*For further information contact Christine Coates, TUC Library Collections, London Metropolitan University Learning Centre, 236 Holloway Road, London N7 6PP [tel 020 7133 2260 / Email [tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:tuclib@londonmet.ac.uk)]*

### **William Miller, the Labour Party and the postwar reconstruction of Plymouth**

William Alexander Miller was Plymouth's first black councillor and Chair of Plymouth Council's Housing Committee during the city's post-war reconstruction. In this great and demanding task, he was inspired by the belief that the new housing estates would not only provide accommodation but bring social transformations. In an interview with the writer Lawrence Thompson in the early 1950s, he

declared "Don't you see we're not just building houses, we're making homes, ...it means that they must go without some things-they can't go greyhound racing or do the pools, or smoke twenty cigarettes a day or buy monster comics....we're building a new race of people who won't want to do these things.. They won't want amusements made for them. They'll make their own amusement in the community centres, in the schools with their children,"

Chairmanship of the Housing Committee was the high point of a long and remarkable career in Plymouth's local politics. William Miller's grandfather was an African slave who had been granted his freedom. His father had been born in Sierra Leone and sailed to Britain, where he had married an English woman and settled in Plymouth. After leaving school, he worked first in the building industry, then in Plymouth's largest workplace, Devonport Dockyard. During the First World War, he served in the Royal Flying Corps.

### **William Miller and the Plymouth Labour Party in the interwar years**

After the war, Miller returned to Devonport Dockyard, where he worked as an electrician. He was very active in his union, the Electrical Trades Union and eventually became President of the Devon and Cornwall area. He was also a member of the Labour Party and was soon playing a notable role in the Plymouth Labour politics. He became secretary of the Plymouth Drake Divisional Labour Party and was closely associated with several prominent dockyard trade unionists who later became leading figures in Plymouth Labour Party. These men were Harry Mason, a close personal friend, James

Moses, the leader of the Shipwrights' Union in the dockyard and Bert Medland, leader of the engineers' union. James Moses stood as Labour's parliamentary candidate in the Plymouth Drake constituency in the general elections of 1923 and 1924 and Miller was his election agent. Miller was elected as a Labour councillor in 1925 and became an alderman in 1927.

Support for the Labour Party in Plymouth grew during the 1920s. In 1926, Jimmy Moses became Plymouth's first Labour mayor. Miller acted as Moses' agent in his election campaign in the Drake parliamentary constituency during the 1929 general election. Moses won, defeating the Conservative candidate by over 2000 votes and became the first Labour MP in Plymouth and in the west country as a whole.

However, after his victory, Moses faced a legal challenge. His political opponents presented a parliamentary election petition which called for his election to be declared null and void on the grounds that his supporters had broke the election laws and had used corrupt electoral practices to secure his victory. In particular, they alleged that a wealthy philanthropist, A.C. Ballard, had used bribery to help Moses. Miller prepared Moses' defense with great care and thoroughness. The case was heard before a specially constituted court in Plymouth's Guildhall in October 1929 and as Moses' election agent, Miller had to give evidence. Stafford Cripps, a distinguished lawyer and member of the Labour Party defended Moses and the judges dismissed the petition. Jimmy Moses remained MP until his defeat in the 1931 General Election.

Miller was a dedicated councillor. People would queue outside his house in

East Street, Stonehouse to see him and in the 1930s he became known as the 'Poor Man's lawyer'. He was also an energetic and successful chairman of council committees. He chaired the Electricity Committee and was responsible for introducing the first full free wiring service and Plymouth's first electrical showroom. He also chaired several other council committees. His achievements included introducing the first council cremation and opening the first major indoor bathing space in Central Park.

#### William Miller and wartime Plymouth

In January 1938, Miller had raised the question of organising the evacuation of Plymouth's civilian population in wartime. His warnings about Plymouth's civilian vulnerability to attack proved prophetic. The city suffered devastating bombing in the Second World War. Miller had joined the air raid warden's service in Plymouth in 1938 and became head warden of his area, Stonehouse, during the Second World War. He held this post until August 1941. His own house in East Street was bombed in 1941. He suffered temporary hearing loss and his sister-in-law was seriously injured.

His determination to protect local people brought him into conflict with the authorities. Acting on his own initiative without authorisation from government officials, he organised the evacuation of people from Stonehouse and commandeered buses, lorries and other large vehicles to take women and children outside the city boundaries. Because this had been done without official permission, Miller was prosecuted for acting without proper authority and was put on trial in the Guildhall. When asked why he had

decided to order a total evacuation, he replied that as a councillor and as a head air raid warden he had promised the men who had gone away to fight that he would do his best to ensure the safety of their women and children and thus he had decided to take the law into his own hands. The court found him guilty and severely reprimanded him but Miller's actions were subsequently vindicated when three days later the authorities ordered a total evacuation of the city.

The wartime bombing destroyed the city centre and thousands of houses in Plymouth. A plan for the rebuilding of Plymouth was produced and in 1944 Plymouth City Council established a Reconstruction Committee to consider this plan. Miller became one of the members of the Reconstruction Committee.

#### William Miller and the postwar reconstruction of Plymouth

In the 1945 General Election, Miller was the election agent for Bert Medland, the Labour candidate for the Drake constituency. In 1945 Labour triumphed in Plymouth as it did nationally and won all three of the city's parliamentary constituencies.

Labour won its first ever majority on Plymouth Council in November 1945 and Miller was appointed chairman of the Housing Committee. He faced a mammoth task. The serious housing problems which had existed in Plymouth before the war had been made far worse by the massive devastation caused by wartime bombing. The city required an estimated 20,000 homes. The ambitious housing programme which Miller organised as chairman of the Housing Committee marked the high point of his political career. So urgent was the need

for accommodation after the war that prefabricated buildings were used and by November 1946 a thousand prefabs were built and occupied.

The construction of new housing estates on the city's perimeter was a key element in the proposals for new housing made by the 'Plan for Plymouth'. The first of the new estates to be built was the Efford estate in December 1945. Miller was an advocate of a comprehensive housing programme. During his chairmanship of the Housing Committee, several major housing estates were built or planned and almost six thousand new houses were built. In proportion to the size of Plymouth's population, this was more than in any other English town or city.

Miller's aim was not merely to put roofs over peoples' heads but to create genuine homes and communities. He said in a speech in Efford in October 1946 "We do not only want to build houses but to create homes in which our future citizens will be moulded". The new estates built during his chairmanship were intended to be self-contained neighbourhoods with a clearly defined geographical identity. In an interview with Lawrence Thompson, Miller stated "...we built all our houses on the neighbourhood principle."

Miller was so dedicated to the house-building programme that in 1947 he decided not to accept the Lord Mayoralty of Plymouth because it would have meant that he would have been compelled to give up the chairmanship of the Housing Committee. He was awarded the B.E.M. in the New Year's honours list of 1946 and received the C.B.E in 1947. He became a close friend of Aneurin Bevan, the famous health minister and knew Harold Wilson and Clement Atlee well.

He lost his council seat in the local elections of 1950 but returned to the council the following year. When Labour regained control of the City Council in 1953, he again became chair of the Housing Committee. In 1959, he was elected to the chairmanship of the National Housing and Town Planning Council.

#### The final years of William Miller's political life

In 1962, Miller became Deputy Lord Mayor during the Lord Mayoralty of his old friend and political ally, Harry Mason. In the 1960s, he ceased to be chair of the Housing Committee and became chair of the Parks and Recreations Committee. He remained a councillor until May 1970. Only a few months later, on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1970, William Miller died at the age of 80.

A striking feature of his long political career was the intensity of his commitment to serving the community. His work for the Labour Party and the trades union movement entailed considerable personal sacrifice. He was a visionary who possessed the organisational skills and drive which enabled him to turn his dreams into reality. His belief in the creation of new communities was an important element in the postwar rebuilding of Plymouth.

I would like to express my thanks to Councillor Claude Miller, William Miller's son for the help and information which he has given me.

*Jonathan Wood*

#### Labour Heritage events

##### Labour Heritage Day School on the history of the labour movement in West London

A Labour Heritage day school held at Ruskin Hall, Acton on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October was attended by 30 people. The theme of the day was the history of labour movement in west London.

Sean Creighton, Labour Heritage's Secretary explained why the history of the labour movement and the Labour Party is important today.

“There is a fundamental contradiction at the heart of New Labour.

- On the one hand it wants citizens to be actively involved in the decisions that affect them in the neighbourhoods, local authorities and regions in which they live. This is central to the Urban White Paper, Neighbourhood Renewal, regeneration and social inclusion strategies.
- On the other hand it has disempowered its own members, and belittled the historic achievements of labour movement and Party activists – Old Labour as it calls them.

The legacy of the labour movement in its widest sense from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was the creation of collective organisations through which the social injustices of capitalism could be challenged and through which support services could be provided when workers and their families needed it. These included the benefits and medical services provided by the friendly societies and trade unions, unadulterated food and other goods at fair prices through the retail co-

operatives, home ownership along with which increasingly went the vote through building societies, social and leisure activities through the working men's and miners' welfare clubs and education activities through the co-operative societies, trade unions and then through the Workers' Educational Association which celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in January.

At the political level a range of organisations fought for the extension of the vote to include men and later women. The organised labour movement broke through into Parliament in 1892 and then in local government, and campaigned and when in power developed public services. And while there were disagreements over strategy and tactics, there was a vision to achieve social justice and equal opportunities as a minimum and the overthrow or transformation of capitalism into socialism as a maximum.

Without this legacy there would have been no Labour Government in 1945 with its breakthrough in the development of public services, especially the Health Service. While public services were never perfect, they began to be damaged when Labour took a wrong turn in 1976 with the deal with the International Monetary Fund, culminating in the *Winter of Discontent*, and laying the foundations for the Thatcherite attack on the organised labour movement and its legacy and its attempt to destroy support for socialism in the UK. When New Labour gained power in 1997 it inherited a legacy of tremendous damage not just to services and employment, but to thousands of communities, and more importantly to millions of people who had been thrown by Thatcherism onto the scrap heap with public services crumbling around them.

The Government recognises that it will take 15-20 years to reverse the damage. It wants to mobilise people, but it continues to marginalise the very organisations that gave it birth, the trade unions, and to hamstring its members.

The labour movement from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Labour Party political support in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were built from below. It is precisely why remembering and celebrating that past history, warts and all, is important. It is the clear message coming out of Barbara's review of Ealing Labour Party which is on sale on the bookstall. ("The roots of Labour in a West London Suburb-Ealing in the 1930s" by Barbara Humphries)

If we want the fundamental changes needed now we need to re-build the faith of ordinary people that their collective voice and action can have an affect. The history of the Labour movement and Party shows that this was done in the past. New forms of collective organisation are coming into being: especially the diverse range of community organisations. Instead of seeing them as a threat Labour Councillors should see them as allies, moulded in the same tradition out of which the labour movement and the Party itself grew: collective action to address poverty and what we now call social exclusion, to obtain social and economic justice and create a fairer society."

### **Early days of labour in Brentford**

The first speaker was John Grigg of Acton and Shepherds Bush CLP who has researched the early days of Labour in Brentford,( now part of the London

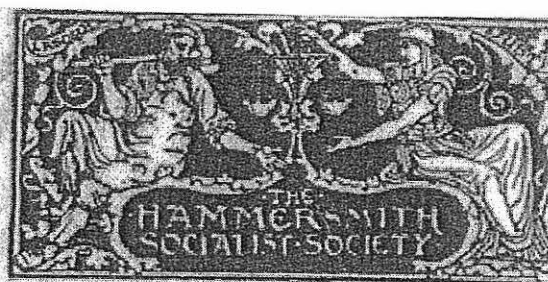


borough of Hounslow) from local newspaper records and minute books. One of the earliest stories was of a meeting addressed by John Burns, at Princes Hall, Kew Bridge. It was called in support of the Society of Watermen and Lightermen, who marched with a brass band through Brentford before the meeting. Music hall entertainment was also provided before the speaker came on to attack the scandalous long hours worked by waterman, the abuse of apprentices as cheap labour and the use of unsafe river vessels. The Thames Conservancy Board was criticized for its lack of concern about the condition of the river and watermen who worked on the Thames barges were urged to join the union.

One of the oldest industries in Brentford was the gasworks (now demolished) and George Hailey, secretary of the local gasworkers union branch attempted several times to become an independent labour representative on the local council. He first stood in 1899, and gained 433 votes. Persistence prevailed and when he lost for the sixth time in 1906 it was only by one vote. He told an audience of his supporters – “until you get a Labour council you will live like dogs”. This was followed by a round of barking amongst the audience. Such was Mr Hailey’s diligence in taking up issues like the maintenance of safety in local tramways to avoid accidents that allegedly an extra clerk had to be taken on by the council to answer his correspondence. Other early labour activities were centered around a Brentford Liberal and Labour Association which campaigned on housing. In 1908 a Right to Work movement organized marches to the parish council to call for an outdoor relief scheme. As a result of this thirty

unemployed labourers were taken on in the parish of Heston. John went on to mention the 1909 tram strike in Brentford which led to riots involving wives of tram-drivers, trying to prevent blackleg drivers from taking out the trams. Local newspaper reports gave details of a local branch of the Independent Labour Party which met every Wednesday at a private address.

#### Hammersmith Socialist Society



MONOPOLY  
OR  
HOW LABOUR IS ROBBED  
BY  
WILLIAM MORRIS

Price One Penny

The second speaker was Tristan Bunnell who has done research on the Hammersmith Socialist Society. He is currently chair of Chiswick Labour Party (Hounslow).

Tristan had produced an excellent handout for the audience with pictures of the members of the Society and its aims. It extended beyond Hammersmith, in fact socialist societies in Acton, Fulham and North Kensington were all off-shoots. As a society which organized

lectures it had members throughout the country. William Morris dominated the Society – grooming a whole generation of socialist lecturers who would be invited to supper at his house. Some even came to adopt his style and mannerisms. The Society included people like W.B. Yeats and was described by other socialists as that “damned bourgeois bunch”.

However the Society held public meetings of over 400 people on a Sunday morning near Hammersmith Bridge, beginning when the Salvation Army had gone home and ending when the pubs opened. Many lecturers would give four or five talks on a Sunday before retiring for a grueling session with William Morris. They did not have loud speakers in those days. As well as public lectures there were reading and discussion classes every Wednesday evening illustrating the tremendous thirst for political education at the time. The Society contained a broad section of socialist opinion – Carruthers who was described as a “market socialist” and who later on went on to finance much of New Zealand’s railway network, some anarchists who turned out to be double agents for the police and George Bernard Shaw. Tristan posed the question why William Morris did not attend the foundation of the Independent Labour Party. In 1892 the Society had attempted to form a “unified socialist party” – its “Manifesto of English Socialists” which was published was part of this campaign. However both the Fabian Society and the Social Democratic Federation withdrew from this and events were overtaken by the formation of the Independent Labour Party.

**PAMPHLETS DEALING WITH SOCIALISM**  
Published by the Hammersmith Socialist Society.

Statement of Principles of the Hammersmith Socialist Society ..	13.
Political Economy of Socialism (John Carruthers) ..	14.
What's to be done? (Andrew Robson) ..	15.
Reward of Labour (William Morris) ..	24.
True and False Socialism ..	25.
Social Work v. Socialism (William Morris) ..	26.
Monopoly (William Morris) ..	27.

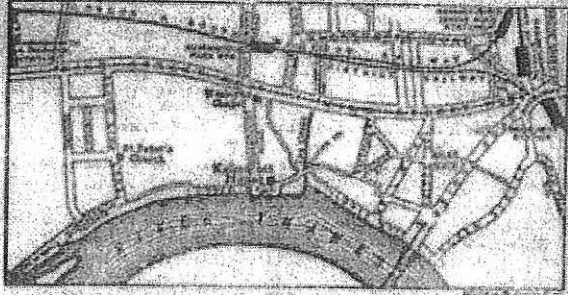
To be shortly issued—

Communism (William Morris) ..	28.
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 Abel Heywood, 8, Cross St and 22, Old Street, Manchester.  
 The Labour Literature Society Limited, 103 Tottenham St., Glasgow.  
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Or, the Liberator's Secretary,  
**Hammersmith Socialist Society,**  
 KELMSCOTT HOUSE,  
 UPPER MALL, HAMMERSMITH, W.



The asterisk \* indicates spot at foot of Hammersmith Bridge where Sunday Evening Meetings are held.

Lectures every Sunday Evening at Kelmscott House at 8 o'clock.

LABOUR LITERATURE SOCIETY, LTD., PRINCIPALS, 103 TOTTENHAM ST., GLASGOW.

### Reminiscences of an Ealing Councillor

In the afternoon Mike Elliott, a Labour councillor for the London Borough of Ealing since 1958 and a former MEP for the London West constituency gave some of his personal reminiscences of the history of the local Labour Party in the 1950s onwards. He recalls the first Labour MP for Ealing, who was elected in 1945. His name was James Hudson and he was also national secretary of the Temperance League. As a result of this the ‘Ealing Citizen’, a monthly Labour Party magazine contained a tirade against alcohol. Mike remembers very high turnouts in elections in the 1950s – over 80% in Ealing North. Mike dealt with the changes in boundaries within the Ealing constituencies and the emergence of one Ealing Borough Council in 1964. (an amalgamation of the Ealing, Acton and Southall boroughs). It was this that gave Ealing its first

majority Labour Council. In 1968 however mass abstentions caused by the unpopularity of the Wilson Labour Government led to a wipe out of councilors in the local elections and Mike himself lost what was supposed to have been Labour's second safest seat. As deputy leader of the council in the 1970s Mike's proudest achievement was the introduction of comprehensive education in the borough. Accounts were given of splits in the Labour Group, in the 1980s some left to join the Social Democrats. In the 1960s a group of Southall councilors had supported giving white families priority for council housing. They were expelled from the Labour Party, subsequently stood as independents and were finally defeated. The first Asian councilor, Sardul Gill was elected in 1968 for one of the Southall wards. Mike dealt with the Labour Party's policy of supporting "bussing" for Asian children from Southall in the 1970s and the controversy that this caused on all sides. He concluded with a few issues from his time as an MEP and how the system of proportional representation selected by the Labour Government has removed all direct links between MEPs and their constituents.

### **A former mayor of Brent**

The second speaker in the afternoon was Len Snow, former mayor and councilor for the London Borough of Brent. Len's talk was about the early days of Labour in Willesden, a subject on which he has written a pamphlet. (*"A short history of the Labour Party in Brent 1900-2000"*). Willesden was a long-standing working class community but Wembley was very much a village until after World War 1. There was early

evidence of branches of the ILP, the Social Democratic Federation, a Co-Op store, a Clarion cycling club, a Progressive Club (made up of Liberal and Labour supporters) and a branch of the Women's Cooperative Guild. He spoke of some of the early labour representatives in Willesden, such as Dave Barrett who stood for the council in 1904. He was also the agent for Irish representation in the UK, active in the Bricklayers Labourers Union and the National Democratic League. (set up as an alternative to the Labour Representation Committee). His activities on the council included getting workshops set up for the able bodied on the Central Middlesex hospital site, obtaining grants for the local Socialist Sunday school and gaining a 40% wage increase for street sweepers. He was known for carrying his lunch utensils to council meetings, wrapped up in a red handkerchief. Willesden Labour Party published the 'Willesden Citizen'. Parts of the borough became known as "Red Kilburn". Wembley did not have a Labour council until after 1945. Willesden had a Labour Council first in 1933. Len then spoke about the industrialization in Park Royal after World War 1, which was to change the population of the borough of Brent, as workers moved into the area.

Two speakers from the Labour Heritage committee concluded the day. Barbara Humphries gave an overview of the origins of the labour movement in Ealing, and Heidi Topman on labour halls in west London.

The day had been successful in attracting new members to Labour Heritage, and also in maintaining the legacy of active

commitment of the membership in building the labour movement.

**Labour Heritage conference on the history of the labour movement in Essex**

*Labour Heritage and the Essex County Labour Party organized a conference on the origins of the labour movement in Essex, at Witham Labour Hall on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October. This was attended by 45 people from throughout the county.*

The first speaker was the chair of Labour Heritage and former MP and MEP, Stan Newens. He spoke on the origins and growth of the labour movement in Essex, going back to the peasants' revolt over the 1381 poll tax. Essex continued its tradition as a revolutionary county into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when during the English Civil War, an Agitators Council elected from the rank and file of Cromwell's army met and debated the political issues of the day in Saffron Walden. In the 1830s when the voters in the county consisted only of landowners, the Chartist Movement which campaigned for universal suffrage held rallies in Colchester, Braintree, Coggeshall and Witham. In the Epping area the Chartist movement was led by five of the Tolpuddle Martyrs who had been released and returned from Australia. Local landowners complained that Chartist newspapers had been placed in beer halls in Greenstead, where the Martyrs were based and even read "during the hours of divine service."<sup>1</sup>

In 1874 all ten parliamentary seats in Essex were held by the Conservatives. The County Council remained Conservative controlled until 1945.

Trades unionism was concentrated in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century amongst a handful of skilled men such as engineers. Agriculture was the largest industry and Essex farm workers were inspired by Joseph Arch and supported his attempts to form an agricultural workers' union, but Essex was not in the forefront of this movement. Charles Jay was one local agricultural worker, who was impressed by Arch. By 1894 205 villages in Essex had branches of the agricultural workers union. Local landowners complained that "Joseph Arch was more popular than the Queen". Local union leaders tended to be Liberals and Methodists and teetotalers, who opposed the Tory squires. However the agricultural depression of the 1890s had a negative effect on trades unionism as more and more labourers left the land.

Those who left the land sought work in the growing industrialized areas of Essex – West and East Ham. Employment was generated by the docks and related industries and it was in this area that the labour movement sunk roots at an early stage. From 1883 there was a branch of the Social Democratic Federation in West Ham. Will Thorn was active as a leader of the gasworkers' union. The dockers' strike took place in 1889 and a branch of the Independent Labour Party was set up. Keir Hardie was the first independent labour MP in West Ham and the council was the first in the country to have a labour majority. In 1906 Will Thorn was elected for the area on behalf of the Labour Party. West Ham also had branches of the Socialist Sunday School and Clarion Cycling Clubs.

Apart from the industrial areas of south-east Essex, now thought of as East London, there were branches of the ILP, Labour League and Social Democratic

Federation in the towns of Colchester, Chelmsford, Braintree and Witham by the 1890s. In 1897 there were two socialist councilors in Southend. In Epping the local branch of the ILP organized action to keep public footpaths open.

Stan described two unusual recruits to socialism in Essex – the Countess of Warwick who was personally recruited by Robert Blatchford and who gave socialist lectures to her staff, and Revenend Noel, of Thaxted who flew the red flag in his church.

By the 1920s most towns in Essex had constituency Labour Parties and by 1945 Labour gained a majority of parliamentary seats in the county. Stan paid a tribute to the memory of those who had built this movement, from whom we had all benefited. It was our duty to preserve the records of their commitment.

Andrew Philips of the Essex Archaeological Association was the second speaker. He pointed out the problems of sources, with newspapers generally being anti-labour movement. Nevertheless it had been the labour movement which had brought about the most political changes in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain. However only 17% of the workforce were organized in trades unions by 1918. These tended to be some of the best paid members of the working class, the skilled workers. Most of Essex was dominated by agriculture which was a dying industry – by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the average age in an Essex village was fifty eight. There were also small industries which were difficult to organize, for instance firms in the clothing trade. Nevertheless the workforces in these small firms had their moments of rebellion, when they

took action against “speed-ups” in the 1920s and nearly threw the “speediator” into a pond. The impact of national pay bargaining had an impact on wages in Essex, which was a county of low paid workers.

### Tom Driberg and the 1942 bye-election

In the afternoon, after a lunch laid on by Braintree CLP, visitors listened to a fascinating talk by John Gyford, former leader of the Labour Group on Braintree Council on Tom Driberg and the Maldon bye-election of 1942. During World War 2 the Labour Party had entered into a war time coalition with the other main political parties, as a result of which bye-elections caused by the death of a sitting MP were not to be contested. The vacancy would be filled by the party which held the seat. By 1942 however there was interest in what sort of society would be built at the end of the war and growing opposition to this war time political truce. As a result of this Tom Driberg, a journalist who had recently bought a house in Bradwell on Sea in the Maldon constituency and who had been involved in a campaign against the banning of the Daily Worker, was approached, when the sitting MP for Maldon, Ruggles-Brice died, to stand as an independent candidate. To run this he set up an organization called the Maldon Constituency Association which came to have more members in the constituency than the Labour Party (over 400). He received support from eminent figures such as J.B.Priestley, George Bernard Shaw, Dorothy Sayers and Sir Richard Acland of the Common Wealth Party, which itself had come out against the war time electoral truce. In spite of opposition from the local Labour Party

which called on people to vote for the Conservative candidate, Tom Driburg won the seat with a majority of 6,000 votes. The membership of the Maldon Constituency Association was largely middle class, but left-wing. They were people who had never been members of the Labour Party. Before the 1945 election Driburg was adopted as the Labour candidate for Maldon and his agent also became the Labour Party agent. But this was not without some opposition from some of the constituency officers who claimed that Driburg had stolen the seat and there were resignations. The Malden Constituency Association continued to exist into the 1940s. When it was wound up, its funds went to the Workers' Educational Association and the Fabian Society.

some stories of how records had been lost when family members did not share the political activities of a deceased Labour Party activist and irreplaceable material lost to the dustman or the bonfire! There were excellent local records offices in Essex and some national collections such as at Warwick University collected trades union material. It was also important to tape interviews with long standing members of the movement as well as keeping minute books, pamphlets and leaflets. Stan had brought along a collection of rare Labour Party newspapers and pamphlets as examples.

The day had been enjoyable and it was agreed that it could be repeated on an annual basis. The day's events have been recorded on tape for the local archives.

*Don't throw this away—pass it on!*

**MALDON BY-ELECTION**

**3 REASONS  
for voting for  
TOM DRIBERG**

1. He lives in the Division. He is not a busy industrial boss. He is not a busy farmer. If he is elected to Parliament, he undertakes to cut down his newspaper work to a minimum, and devote his whole energies to his Parliamentary duties; he will be in the constituency, and available to all constituents, whenever he is not at Westminster.
2. He is nationally famous as "the most outspoken and independent columnist of the daily Press." His writings under the pen-name of William Hickey are read by millions. His campaigns have cleared up many abuses and muddles: in Parliament he can carry the good work further, unhampered by the libel laws which sometimes make it impossible for newspapers to print the whole truth. He has travelled widely, and knows personally the men who lead the world to-day. His word will carry weight in Parliament.
3. He is 37 years old—old enough to take a sensible, balanced view of world affairs, young enough to tackle with vigour the difficult years that will come after the war as well as the immediate task of winning the war as quickly as possible.

*† Tom Driberg's ancestors came from Holland more than 200 years ago—staunch Dutch Protestants of the type that brought so much prosperity to East Anglia. Driberg is a resident (and church-warden) of Bradwell, near Southminster. He has always been*

**Labour Party fringe meeting,  
Blackpool, 2002**

The Socialist Societies fringe meeting, supported by Labour Heritage and the Webbs Foundation, on Great Labour Party Personalities at Party Conference on Monday 30 September was well attended and the excellent talks on key figures in the history of the Labour Party were well received.

**Beatrice and Sidney Webb**

Before talking about the Webbs, Tony Wright, MP, said that while there were many admirable things about New Labour, it lacked interest in the Party's history. 1997 was its Year Zero. This was foolish because there are lasting lessons of importance. He hoped that the tide was turning.

Finally Stan Newens addressed the meeting on the importance of preserving labour records and archives. He gave

The picture drawn was of the Webbs, warts and all. It was easy to pick fun at them.

- Beatrice was not good on women: ‘the screeching sisterhood’.
- They like to call themselves ‘The Firm’.
- Their relationship was ‘A Union of Work’.
- They divided people into As and Bs. The As were the anarchists – people with no idea of organisation. The Bs were bureaucrats – organisers.

On the other hand the Webbs had monumental achievements in an age when there were no think tanks, in education and welfare reform and through their vast research projects on the trade union movement, industrial democracy, and local government.

Wright recommended that people read Beatrice’s Diaries and their published collected letters.

Many of what they argued for is at the centre of current debates. Beatrice’s driving passion was to improve the lot of the bottom 30% of society.

### **Jenny Lee**

Patricia Hollis, a Government speaker in the House of Lords, spoke about Jenny Lee, about whom she had written a biography.

Jenny came from a Scottish Independent Labour Party (ILP) family. Her grandfather was a close friend of Keir Hardie. Her father was a Scottish miner. She saw the labour movement through the period of the General Strike and the 1930s. She came out of the powerful ILP tradition – sectarian, leading from the heart and in the tradition of class hatred.

She was a direct, sectarian, oppositionist, and rigorous intellectual.

She was prospective Parliamentary candidate for North Lanark in 1929 – she was gifted, and arrogant, and the best platform speaker in Scotland. She could win and hold a platform audience. There were two other formidable women at the time Ellen Wilkinson and Barbara Castle.

She was MP from 1929 to 1931 – a member of the ILP group led by Jimmy Maxton, increasingly at odds with the Macdonald/Snowden Government. She thought that they were trying to restore rather than destroy capitalism. In the 1930s the ILP rejected the Parliamentary Labour Party Whip and went into the wilderness. The ILP did not rejoin the Labour Party until 1945.

Jenny’s lover, Frank Wise, died. On the rebound she married Aneurin Bevan. She was not in love with him, but supported his dissent and oppositionism.

The goals she wanted were pursued by Nye. She thought she could best serve the cause by helping him become leader. She was at his side at the creation of the NHS, and in the bid for leadership against Gaitskell. Whenever Nye seemed to be reaching an accommodation, Jenny and Michael Foot pressured him to oppose and resign so he lost confidence of his colleagues when he came to the leadership context. Contemporaries saw her as Nye’s ‘Dark Angel’.

She became an MP again in 1945. When Nye died in 1960 she went into deep depression. Wilson rescued her and offered her Minister of Health which she refused, and became Minister of Arts and of the University of the Air (Open University). Her disciplined personality took on the civil service. She mainstreamed arts. She achieved a three fold increase in the arts budget. She

improved access without diluting excellence. She was applauded by the theatrical audience. She instituted that the Open University should offer degrees from the start. She had a steely will, she was indifferent to the views of others about her. This enabled her to cut through the civil service and the Labour Government to get what she wanted.

Hers was one of the lasting achievements of the Harold Wilson period.

Jenny Lee lost her own seat in 1970 with the biggest swing against an individual in the country. Ill health set in the early 1980s and she died in 1988.

#### Peter Shore

Gwenneth Dunwoody praised Peter Shore for his high intellect and his steely commitment. When he came out of the RAF at the end of the War her father, who was Party General Secretary, appointed Shore to run the Research Department. He prepared the 1945 Manifesto. He had enormous clarity of view.

He was very courteous, charming and polite. He had a clear view that if the Labour Party was to change society it had to re-think. At the time there was an influx of members into the Party of people from the forces. They had debates about the future – how it should meet their needs and use their talents. He was clear about the need to bring them into the Party.

He was a remarkable Minister at the Department of Economic Affairs. This was a major and powerful Department able to argue with the Treasury. His clarity of view was matched by his humanity.

#### Ernest Bevin

Robin Cook spoke about the Labour personality he admired most- Ernest Bevin. Born in poverty, his mother died when he was eight and he left school at age of eleven to work 10 hours a day on a Somerset farm. Later he campaigned for a school leaving age of sixteen. Bevin is an example of the Labour Party and movement empowering working class people. He was a giant of the trade union movement, the founding father of the Transport & General Workers Union. He had a passionate feeling for the poor – which was why he gave up lay preaching. He collected and used evidence to counter the dock employers' attempt argue that dockers' food was adequate.

He negotiated the first ever union agreement for the carters in Bristol setting out hours and rates and maximum loads per horse and cart. As a union negotiator he was single minded in his ability to take on tough employers. There were casualties on the way. A Somerset farmer had to lock himself in a cupboard to get away from Bevin.

He warned against appeasement to Hitler and the need to rearm because of the brutal suppression by the Nazis of trade unions.

When he was asked to join the War Cabinet he laid down three conditions: the General Council of the TUC, the Labour Party National Executive Committee and the TGWU had to agree. Without Bevin Churchill's success in defeating Hitler would not have been possible. He masterminded four million into uniform. It was striking test of the strength of democracy and collective decision making, that he achieved higher mobilisation than Nazi Germany.



When he was in charge of labour in the War Cabinet he vetoed a proposal to stop horse racing as it would lower morale and detract from the war effort.

Bevin became a builder of the peace. He had a single-minded commitment to the creation of the United Nations – a principle as valid today as in 1948.

He wanted the Soviet Union to be covered by the Marshall Plan, and if he had succeeded the Cold War might have been avoided. His contribution as Foreign Secretary was immense.

Sean Creighton  
October 2002

### **Anne Lubin from Swindon continues her correspondence with Labour Ministers**

Did I mention the reply I had from Martin Salter to whom I wrote, thanking him for objecting to the sale of National Air Traffic Services? His letter of January tells me that the Bill had received Royal Assent but the Government had agreed to a three month delay and report back before implementation. That's history now and the results are known. Shortage of staff, length of training, near-misses of aircraft, pressure on staff where lack of concentration for a single moment could cause a major tragedy. And the taxpayer is funding it.

On April 17<sup>th</sup> 2001 I wrote to Julia Drown about the London tube privatisation. It seems that everything is up for it (privatisation). Each school is a 'private' business. Colleges too. Even MOD airfield services are out for tender. In reply from Julia I had a copy of the 'Offer to Londoners: a 21<sup>st</sup> century Underground for London'. This promises faster and more frequent

services. The private sector will carry out maintenance and upgrades. This follows the 'success' of public-private partnerships in schools, and hospitals. It will be wonderful. Our local PFI hospital (in Swindon) is almost finished and already an appeal has gone out for equipment for the childrens' wards. Julia's letter claims an average PPP efficiency saving of 17% compared with the public sector alternative. I'm not sure if this takes into account the £100 million consultancy fees to lawyers and accountants. By the way, the figures in the 'Offer to Londoners' were supplied by the Price Waterhouse accountants.

In the local elections I stuck a note to my polling card protesting against PFI. It got back to Julia who wrote of her visit to the new Swindon hospital site with Alan Milburn. She praised the constructors for double insulation of the roof saving heating bills over the contract period of 30 years. "We should weigh the advantages against the disadvantages over time". I think that 30 years is a long time to wait for the comparison, particularly when we already know of the disasters of North Durham (another PFI hospital). But the project is on time so far.

In reply to my suggestion that tax could be raised by one penny in the pound Julia said that since we were elected on a promise not to raise taxes we could not break faith with the electorate. There then followed a list of achievements under Labour.

In July 2001 I again wrote to Julia, having read an account of the North Durham hospital fiasco in the Guardian. Much of the detail applied to all the PFI projects.

Professor Pollock wrote an article in the British Medical Journal in 1999 "PFI in the NHS – is there an economic case?"

warning against such ventures. A leading surgeon at the hospital claimed that “ in essence the bed model is based entirely on numbers dreamed up to fit the budget.”

### Asylum seekers

Later in July I wrote protesting at a new crackdown on asylum seekers announced while Parliament was not sitting. This was a proposal to remove support for asylum seekers if they refused to be dispersed. Julia’s reply was that she had written to the Minister concerned. She did not reveal her opinion on the matter, but in September forwarded the reply from the Home Office. The reply was on notepaper with the caption “Building a just and tolerant society”. The minister assured us that research had been carried out as to the best places and arrangements with local authorities. In reply I asked Julia if the letter had been written before or after the murder of an asylum seeker in Sighthill, Glasgow, where a number of asylum seekers had been sent without preparation of the local population. In the same letter I drew attention to a report that a woman telephoning her ten year old son from a PFI Cumberland hospital discovered that ten good night calls cost £55. The bedside phones are on premium rate. Will the phones in the Swindon hospital be the same? Julia’s reply was that better management of dispersal, not its abandonment was required. The matter of the high phone bill was being raised with the local hospital and the minister.

### Labour Party branches overseas – what are they? by Harry Shindler, Honorary Secretary of the Rome Branch of the Labour Party

There is an understandable ignorance about the Labour Party’s overseas branches. Who make up the membership? What do they do in countries where they operate? These are some of the questions that your readers may like answers to.

Of course I cannot speak for all overseas branches. What I can do is to explain the activities of the Rome branch of which I am honorary secretary, and have been since it was founded, fifteen years ago.

So, how do we recruit? There are no ‘Labour areas’, no council estates that we can canvass. We first seek to find the British ex-pats, then check out whether they are ‘for’ or ‘against’.

In Rome we have a possible membership of about 5,000 people. So, how do we first find the ex-pat, then the Labour supporter? In Rome we have an English fortnightly journal which now carries our secretary’s telephone number. Then of course, there is the important function of personal contacts. The British community in Rome have many and varied organisations, from the Commonwealth Club of Rome to drama and singing groups. All good areas for personal contact. In fact our own Party contacts now number almost 200.

What is the composition of our membership? Well, we have a few pensioners, most of these worked in Rome and stayed on. But unlike Spain, where many Brits went out becoming pensioners, that didn’t happen in Rome. But most of our members work here. The majority work in English schools or universities. Our membership then is

mixed, which makes for progress, which of course we are continuing to make.

### Activities

We meet once a month to discuss what's happening on the political scene in the UK and what is taking place in Italy. At all these meetings our speakers are either our own on UK politics, and for Italian politics we invite a speaker from a political party over here.

Our attendance at these meetings goes from 10 to 25 (as I remind our members here, its more than we used to get to a ward meeting in the UK). Our events are varied but the main event of the year is the annual dinner held in November of each year.

Our first Guest of Honour to our first dinner was Lord Healey and at each dinner we have a leading figure from the Italian Parliament as well as leading figures in the PLP, for example, Peter Hain or a member of the European Parliament.

It is an event that our members enjoy and look forward to. In fact it is the main 'money raiser' that allows us to continue our work.

We have very close contacts with our sister parties in the Socialist International and at a recent election of the Rome Council we had our Branch Chairman as a candidate. Our contact with the Labour Party at home is good and we are able to send a representative to conference each year, keeping us very closely in touch with thing taking place in the UK and the Party.

I started by explaining the problem of recruitment and 'finding' our ex-pats. But we have yet one further problem, in holding our membership. For many of the members are not 'here to stay', so

from time to time we say goodbye to an active member.

I set out to give the readers some idea of what we do here. There is no 'sitting under a tree in the sun enjoying wine.' It is just the hard day to day tasks of keeping our small branch going and trying to make it grow.

You see, we are Labour men and women. We built the British Labour Party with our activity and it is natural that we should continue building our Party here in another part of the Europe.

### ROYDEN HARRISON

Royden Harrison, a key figure in labour history, died on 30 June 2002 aged 75. He was taught philosophy, politics and economics by G H D Cole at Oxford. He then became a lecturer and then senior lecturer at Sheffield University's extramural department. He helped set up day release classes for miners. He was a member of the Communist Party up to 1956, and then in the Labour Party. His first book was 'Before the Socialists' (1964). He was a founder of the Society for the Study of Labour History. In the 1960s he represented NUPE on Sheffield Trades Council. In 1965 he became a lecturer in politics at the University, and then became Director and then Professor of the Centre for the Study of Social History at Warwick University. He helped create the Warwick Modern Records Centre. He retired in 1980 to finish his biography of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, started in 1964, the first volume appearing in 1999 (The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb. 1858-1905).

- A full appreciation was published by Michael Barratt Brown and

John Halstead in the *Guardian*, 3 July 2002.

## GREENWICH & WOOLWICH AT WORK

A trio of Labour Heritage members, Mary Mills, Paul Tyler and Dan Weinbren, have all been adding to our knowledge and understanding of working class life and labour politics in the Woolwich area. Mary's particular interest is from an industrial history perspective. Her latest book 'Greenwich & Woolwich at Work' shows some of the industries and the men and women who worked in them: working on the river, gas and power, transport, the Royal Arsenal, communications, engineering, and the changes in recent decades. Published in the Britain in Old Photographs series by Sutton Publishing. ISBN: 0750930004.

## ARMY AGITATORS 1944-46

'Without A Shot in Anger' Army Agitators 1944-46' is the latest book by Labour Heritage member Peter Kingsford.

The role of education and debate in the Army was one of the factors that led substantial numbers of armed forces personnel to vote for Labour in 1945. This book explains how education in the British Army was carried out in India and Malaya during and after the Second World War.

Peter was OC of the British Wing of the Army School of Education (India) in 1944-5 and Education Officer, with a half a dozen staff, of the British Second Infantry Division in Malaya in 1945-6. His duty was to promote the discussion

of current affairs among soldiers, not an easy task but approved by Montgomery for reasons of morale. The role of the Army Education Corps resembled that of the Agitators among Cromwell's Ironsides and it acquired an unenviable reputation in helping Labour to victory in 1945. In beautiful Pachamarhi, where the school was located, the British Raj still endured. In troubled Malaya, before the Emergency, the Corp's work was vocational. In that post-war 'release period' it was important, as Mountbatten wrote, 'to keep men happy at this time'.

Peter's previous books were on the Hunger Marchers in Britain and on Victorian Railwaymen.

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