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# Labour Heritage

Bulletin Winter 2003

Councillor George Haley of Brentford

*I came across George Haley in copies of the 'Chiswick Times' and 'Middlesex Chronicle'. In 1983 I wrote an account of his election campaigns and lodged copies with Labour Heritage and Hounslow Borough Library. The rest of the data covering his activities as a Brentford Councillor stayed in folders on a shelf for twenty years until his great grand daughter, Wendy Martin, as part of her family history research contacted the library. They sent her my 1983 account and she got in touch with me through the Brentford & Chiswick History Society. Both of us now have a fuller picture of George Haley.*

In 1899 George Haley stood for the first time as a Labour candidate for Brentford District Council. He was a working class Roman Catholic born in 1860, probably in Dublin, who organised charity work for the poor and was secretary of the local Gas Workers Union. He lost but stood again every year until 1905 when he finally won at the 8<sup>th</sup> attempt in a by-election. The 1901 census shows him living at 68, Lateward Road, Brentford with his wife Hannah and daughter Lizzie aged 15. Several other addresses appear on the ballot paper during the seven years he stood for the Council and his description on the ballot paper was either 'labourer' or 'navvy'. He worked in the building trade and presumably was employed at the Gas Works at some stage. At one time he set up business as a

greengrocer selling wares from a horse and cart, and, after having too much to drink in the evenings, would be placed in the cart and the horse would take him home.

Brentford was a busy town with the Brentford docks where the Grand Union Canal joined the Thames, the gas works, the fruit and vegetable market, the soap works and several other factories. Housing conditions for the working people were appalling and the workhouse (now West Middlesex hospital) was full. The town had a District Council of 12 members, a third of whom retired each year. The district was not divided into wards and the whole of the area elected 4 councillors annually.

In 1899 George Haley, 'Labourer', campaigned for the Council to adopt the Housing of the Working Classes Act. The Middlesex Chronicle reported that it was a very quiet election. He came 7<sup>th</sup> with 377 votes - 125 short of gaining a place on the council.

For the 1900 election he asked the Council for permission to hold a meeting in St Pauls recreation ground and when this was refused he held it near the fire station instead. A procession led by a brass band marched to the meeting where members of the London Trade Society spoke. Despite this, his vote was down on the previous year.

In 1901 only 5 candidates stood for the 4 places and although he polled his highest vote yet - 467, he was still a long way behind the winning candidates. But he was becoming well known in the town as a constant critic of the Council. He was shouted down

after the count and could not make a speech.

Throughout these years he was the only working-class candidate. Party labels were not allowed on the ballot paper so the candidates were described by their occupation and all George's opponents were shopkeepers, businessmen or professional men. Several were prominent local Liberals or Conservatives and some were backed by the Brentford Tradesmen and Ratepayers' Association.

In 1902 he came 6<sup>th</sup> out of 8 candidates and in 1903, when he lost by only 15 votes, his campaign called for the appointment of a sanitary inspector in Brentford. He had become a thorn in the flesh of Brentford Council and wrote so many letters on housing and health matters that one councillor suggested they needed an extra clerk to deal with the Haley correspondence.

At the 1904 election he held a big meeting in front of the Magistrates Court but his vote was down again. Reports in the 'Chiswick Times' indicate he had a disturbing way of addressing public meetings and he attacked his opponents loudly and vigorously, frequently accusing councillors of corruption and jobbery. On the Sunday before the 1905 election he was the sole speaker at a meeting in the morning and in the evening he held another meeting addressed by Mr Piggot of the Ealing Independent Labour Party, Mr J. Osborn from the National Democratic League and Mr F. Kennedy of the National Builders' Labourers Union. The Countess of Warwick sent her good wishes.

He had recently been prominent in the South Ealing Relief Committee which gave shoes and other essentials to the area's poor. Institutions such as these were the final barrier between the unemployed and the workhouse.

George knew that if he lost the election in April there would be another opportunity within a month at a by-election to fill a vacancy caused by the death of a sitting councillor.

He concentrated his attacks on the weakest of the five other candidates, a Mr Hughes who was an engineer at the Beldam factory. It is not known if Mr. Hughes treated his workers badly - but George said that he did. When the votes were counted and recounted George had failed by one vote and he had beaten Hughes into 6th place. He had a lot of support outside the Town Hall and his speech was effectively his first in the imminent by-election campaign.

*"In a month's time there will be another election and I shall be there. If I fail at that attempt I shall be here again next year. I am prepared to fight as long as there is breath in my body and I will win! (prolonged cheers). I believe the public have sufficient confidence in me. I have fed hundreds of children. I have found shoes for 200 children and stopped several people from starving. Until you get a Labour representative on your Council you will always live like dogs!"* This was greeted with applause, uproar and the sound of barking dogs. *"Let me tell you I am proud to think I have stopped the sweater from the Beldam Foundry from getting in. That to me is a victory."*

That last remark ensured that Mr. Hughes was greeted with boos and hisses when he tried to speak. He saw it would be hopeless to attempt to get a hearing and retired from the platform - and from local politics for ever.

The by-election was held on Monday May 15 1905. George campaigned for jobs for the unemployed, for workmen's houses, and against the Tramway Company for neglecting

tram-line maintenance. The only other candidate was Dr. Deane who had not been in the town for long. The doctor had declined to be adopted by the Brentford Tradesmen and Ratepayers Association, preferring to run as an independent.

George won by 617 votes to 586. In his victory speech he said that he was more than pleased that he had been made to fight for seven years in order to test his courage. After dealing with a suggestion from the crowd that a drop of whiskey was an equally effective way of gaining courage, he said that he represented the working class to which he belonged. *"A navy was a man even if he was no bigger than a bottle."* Did this remark from George refer to his height? Or to his drinking habits?

The balding Dr. Deane was fairly well received although there were suggestions from the crowd that he should use some hair-restorer.

The crowd quickly dispersed though for sometime afterwards little gatherings were to be observed in various parts of the town excitedly discussing the merits of the newly elected councillor.

At his first Council meeting in May 1905 the council clerk seemed determined to show George up as an ignorant new-comer. The Council discussed a complaint against a landlord who had deprived some of his tenants of light by erecting advertisement hoardings. George said the rateable values should be reduced. 'Oh no,' said the Clerk. 'That is a matter for the overseers.' When George said the council should carry out repairs to the tramway and charge the company the clerk intervened to say that the council had no power to do that. (This was incorrect advice and eighteen months later George successfully moved that the council carry out and charge for the repairs).

The officers, uncomfortable with a working class councillor, tried cautiously to put him in his place but as time went by, and George's belligerent approach alienated the other councillors, their disapproval became more obvious.

At the second meeting in June there was another exchange with the clerk over a newspaper report, supported by Haley, that council workers engaged on the council's refuse destructor were at health risk. The Council Surveyor denied there was a risk and the Clerk asked why such matters were aired in the press rather than complained to the Council.

"Because," said George, "it is not safe for the men to complain to their masters."

George always took the side of the council's workmen whose welfare was a matter of indifference to the other councillors and the senior officers.

#### The Brentford Isolation Hospital.

At the July 1905 meeting the Medical Officer, Dr Bott, reported that Cllr Haley had visited the Isolation Hospital. Councillors, he said, were always welcome but this was the first time one had climbed the fence or come at 9 o'clock at night and visiting in such a manner was liable to spread disease. Why did the doctor raise this at a council meeting instead of dealing with it privately? This was the first of many clashes with Dr Bott.

George explained that he knocked on the door for twenty minutes and received no response. At the next meeting, stung by the suggestion that he might spread disease, he pointed out that chickens, which he believed were owned by the doctor, were kept at the hospital. The eggs were sold in the town and were more likely to spread disease than he was by climbing over a fence. The council agreed to have the

poultry farm removed but it took twelve months persistent pressure from George before this was achieved.

George believed the hospital was appallingly run and although he had support from Cllr Dr Walter and Cllr Harvey he horrified other councillors when he called it a 'public slaughter-house.' His criticism was justified. Several parents complained and a Local Government Board enquiry established that Mr Inman's son of Pottery Road died 'from an accidental blow to the head from a companion' although the entry in the hospital book gave scarlet fever as the cause of death. Mr Schubert of Distillery Road stated that his daughter had been discharged, supposedly cured of scarlet fever, with her head 'full of vermin'. Subsequently she passed the disease onto her sister and to her younger brother who died in the hospital, not from scarlet fever, but from an outbreak of measles in the ward. In both cases Dr Bott's competence was questioned. The matter was raised in the House of Commons and it became a national scandal. The Council sacked all the staff, except Dr Bott, and a tightening of accounting procedures suggests there were financial irregularities. Haley said that the ultimate responsibility lay with the Medical Officer and repeatedly moved that he be replaced. The other Councillors closed ranks to protect Dr Bott who had been the Medical Officer for twenty years.

#### Health Issues.

A Sanitary Inspector was in post when George was elected to the Council, something he had campaigned for in 1903. The Inspector identified terrible housing conditions – overcrowding and insanitary dwellings. The River Thames frequently overflowed into houses. In June 1905 sewage from the

South Ealing Sewage Works was diverted into a storm sewer during heavy rain and flooded the lower lying area in Brentford with what George described as 'filth from Ealing.'

The infant mortality rate in Brentford was appalling. The Medical Officer gave regular reports and sometimes half of the deaths were of children under 5 years of age. In the summer of 1906 there was a scarlet fever epidemic and 13 of the 21 deaths in the August were of infants under 1 year.

The Council had power to close insanitary houses but this made the tenants homeless. It also had power to build council houses under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, but to do so at affordable rents would have meant providing a subsidy from the rates, which was unacceptable in those days. Landlords regarded subsidised rents as unfair competition – particularly if they themselves were contributing towards the subsidy through the rates. Property owners had great influence and often sat as councillors.

George supported a proposal from two other councillors to build municipal dwellings. The matter was referred to the Housing Committee which embarked upon a fruitless search for a financially viable housing scheme.

In September 1905 George moved that 'owing to the high death rate amongst children of the working classes, this council employ a lady health worker.' Acton Council, he said, had such a post to help educate mothers on how to care for their children. The other councillors supported this but the proposal fell by the wayside when the Clerk reported that Brentford had no power to make such an appointment. 'What about Acton?' said George. 'Acton', said the Clerk, 'has promoted a Parliamentary Bill enabling them to make such an appointment.'

In May 1906 George failed to persuade the Council to send a representative to a conference on infant mortality at the Caxton Hall in London. Members were concerned at the cost of one guinea and Dr Bott said he did not have the time to go and they knew enough about the subject. He then reported the deaths of five infants under the age of one year in April – 3 from weakness and debility at birth – something, he said, which the Council were as competent to deal with as the conference.

### Unemployment.

George constantly urged the council to embark upon public works to help the unemployed. He complained when the council employed men from outside Brentford, wanted an overtime ban, insisted that Trade Union rates should be paid by all council contractors and tried to get a Distress Committee formed. He had some success on the TU rates issue and £200 was put aside for essential works (such as replacing the fence at the Isolation Hospital with a wall). They also agreed that Brentford men would be employed whenever possible.

He arranged for a deputation of the unemployed, led by James Casey, to address the council. One discomfited councillor complained that socialistic principles were being propagated and another said he was not going to be coerced by a man like Casey. Casey's reply was inaudible. The deputation withdrew and joined about thirty men outside who booed and jeered at the Council.

### The Campaign against George Haley

Having a working class man on the Council was unacceptable to many respectable people in the town – particularly one as outspoken as

George Haley – and he attracted regular hostility. He was a rough diamond who rarely tempered his passionate outspokenness with tact and diplomacy.

In October 1905 Mr Morgan of 32, Ealing Road wrote to the council stating that Mr Haley should be disqualified because he had given that address at the election but had never slept there or occupied the premises. Furthermore he had paid not a penny in rent. George said he had a permanent address in Brentford elsewhere and he used 32, Ealing Road as an office where he transacted business and paid out money to the unemployed. The Council decided to take no action that might involve them in legal costs.

In March 1906 he and James Casey, who was employed by George at the time, were charged with stealing a scaffold pole from a building site in Castle Road, Isleworth where George was working - either as a night watchman according to the owner of the site or as a building contractor according to George. The evidence presented was confusing and the police court's task in finding out who owned the pole was abandoned when George asked for an adjournment to call more witnesses, employ counsel and go for trial before a jury at quarter sessions. The case was dismissed. George and Casey then claimed damages for false imprisonment and malicious prosecution at the Sheriff of London Court. The jury awarded Casey £20 but gave George only 20/-.

At a public meeting to discuss a bypass road he and other Councillors were on the platform. The chairman said it was a meeting of owners and occupiers only and any who were not should withdraw. A voice called out "There is one on the platform – Haley."

In January 1907 George arrived late at the Council meeting and was clearly

drunk. It is tempting to read the exchanges reported in the 'Chiswick Times' as highly entertaining but George's words show the frustration that had built up during the 21 months he had been a councillor. Cllr Gomm twice rose to put a point of order and George shouted him down saying 'You are a slum owner'. He accused the Council and officers of underhand work and covering up the Isolation Hospital scandal. Who are the masters of this Council he asked. The Officers or the Councillors? He continued to talk freely on most matters that came up. He refused to leave or even sit down and several councillors walked out. Eventually a policeman arrived but was not called into the Council chamber. Haley's final assault was an attack on Dr Bott and he said it would take forty Dr Botts to shut him up.

All these occurrences were reported in the local press and would have been the subject of gossip at a time when much more interest was taken in local affairs. He stood for re-election in March 1907. The 'Chiswick Times' reported "that the most notable feature of the District Council elections has been the decisive defeat of Mr Haley who purported to be a Labour candidate. He obtained a seat about two years ago in a small poll at a by-election. Mr Haley talked a lot but talking is easy, and during the time he was a councillor it cannot be said his efforts made him more popular. As a public man and an administrator he was not a success. So thought the ratepayers and he obtained about 200 votes less on Monday than when he was elected. He was also a candidate for one of the three seats allotted to Old Brentford on the Board of Guardians. But he also failed to convince the public that he would make a good poor law administrator, and the bottom of the poll was his position in that contest."

The results were announced from a platform in front of Clifden House and George made a speech saying he was defeated but not disgraced. 'I have not been a coward in endeavouring to come forward. I have endeavoured during the last two years to do something. I am not the least discouraged.' The crowd dispersed quickly and in the High Street and the Half Acre there were two or three warm arguments and a fight.

So was this outspoken determined man the failure reported in the 'Chiswick Times'? He achieved a number of things on health and employment issues. He persuaded the Council to allow the public into its meetings. Without his persistence improvements at the Isolation Hospital might not have occurred. His charity work helped the poor of Brentford. Would he have achieved more if he had been less strident? Or would he have been politely ignored? It has often been said that nothing is achieved by the working class without struggle and George Haley certainly struggled to help the working classes of Brentford.

He did not stand for the Council again but wrote letters to the Council including several demanding that the Council supply him with a small-holding under a recent Act of Parliament.

He left his wife at some point and set up home, or married, a younger woman by whom he had at least two more children. A grandson of George and his first wife recalls helping his father at some kind of soup kitchen when he was a boy. George was blinded by an explosion at the Woolwich Arsenal munitions factory where he worked during World War 1 and he died in Eltham, South East London, during World War 2.

Written by John Grigg

## List of local Labour Party histories already published

Existing Histories list compiled by Stephen Bird

Chichester CLP	Dorothy Howell Thomas	Socialism in West Sussex: A History of Chichester Constituency Labour Party. Chichester CLP 1983
Bassetlaw LP	John Shepherd	For the Common Good. A History of Bassetlaw Labour Party 1918-1998. Bassetlaw Labour Party. 2000
Derby LP	John Beadle	A Glorious Century... One Hundred Years of the Derby Labour Party. Derby Labour Party. 2000
Hatfield LP	Peter Kingsford	The Labour Movement in Hatfield 1918 – 1970. Peter Kingsford. 1988
Ipswich LP	John Mowles Ed	Ipswich Labour Party Jubilee Year Book 1923 – 1983. Ipswich Labour Party. 1983
Yorkshire Regional Council LP	John Grayson	Solid Labour. A Short History of the Yorkshire Regional Council of the Labour Party. Yorkshire RCLP. 1991
Windsor LP	Raymond South	Heights & Depths. Labour in Windsor. Raymond South. 1985
Woolwich LP	RB Stucke (ed)	Fifty Year of the Woolwich Labour Party 1903-53. Woolwich LP. 1953
Maldon CLP	Maldon Constituency Labour Party	Maldon Constituency Labour Party. The First Fifty Years 1918 – 1968. Maldon CLP. 1968.
Lowestoft CLP	Don Mathew	From Two Boys & a Dog to Political Power. The Labour Party in the Lowestoft Constituency Labour Party 1918 – 1945. Lowestoft CLP. 1979
Belper / Mid – Derbyshire CLPs	CH Bishop.	The Rise & Progress of the Labour Party in the Mid – Derbyshire & Belper Parliamentary Constituencies C.H Bishop. 1979.
Norwich LP	David Pullman Ed	Norwich Labour Party 25. Silver Jubilee Issue. Norwich Labour Party. 1993.
Norwich LP	Steve Cherry	The Norwich Labour Movement in the Early Years. Norwich Trades Union Council. 1986.
Orpington CLP	Rosalie Huzzard	Half a Century of Orpington Labour Party 1943 – 1993. Orpington CLP. 1993
Colne Valley CLP	Cyril Pearce Ed	Colne Valley Labour Party 1891 – 1991. Souvenir Centenary History. Colne Valley CLP. 1991
Manchester Withington CLP	Rhys J. Davies MP	Socialism in Suburbia. A Story of the Withington (Manchester) Labour Party. National Co-operative Publishing Society. 1930
Edmonton Labour Party	Edmonton Labour Party	Edmonton Labour Party 60 Years 1918 – 1978.
Barnsley District Labour Party	Judith Watts & Donald Nannestad	The First 50 Years. Half a Century of Labour Rule in Barnsley.
Battersea Labour Party	Sean Creighton	'Not for Me, Not for You, but for Us'. (Eighty Years of Battersea Labour Party) BLP. 1986

### Labour in Essex conference

Labour Heritage and the Essex County Labour Party organized a very successful conference for the second year, held in the Witham Labour Hall on Saturday October 25<sup>th</sup>. The conference was chaired by John Kotz of the Essex Labour Party and included contributions on trades unions and farmworkers in Essex, Co-operation, the Workers Educational Association and Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement.

The first speaker was **Ted Woodgate** who spoke on **“The struggle of farmworkers and the impact on the labour movement in Essex up to the outbreak of the First World War.”**

Ted gave a summary of the struggles of farmworkers in Essex from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and labour shortages following the Napoleonic wars to the 1914 strike in Saffron Walden, which had first attracted his interest in the subject. When conditions for farmworkers were overshadowed with unemployment and starvation, destruction of farm machinery was rife throughout the county. Farmers feared the burning of threshing machinery would put many labourers out of work. In the 1830s the Captain Swing riots took hold, with farmers receiving threatening letters from a mythical “Captain Swing”. As result of this over 100 Essex men were arrested, 23 were transported to Australia and many more were imprisoned. Industrial action was difficult to sustain in the countryside, the time to strike was during the harvest, but this would hit the farmworker who relied on his harvest bonus to survive the winter. Strike funds often ran out. The 1840s were a ‘hungry decade’ but conditions for agriculture in Britain

improved in the 1850s and 1860s. This provided a basis for agricultural trades unions and the first new agricultural workers union was founded and led by the Methodist lay preacher, Joseph Arch, from Barford, Warwickshire. This was called the National Agricultural Labourers Union and by 1872 its support had spread to Essex. The first meeting was at Castle Hedingham where they were refused a room at the Bell Inn and met outdoors. Later Charles Jay of Codham Hall became its leader in this locality. Another branch was formed in 1872 at South Ockendon. Arthur Challis, a shopkeeper formed a South Cambridge Union based at Great Chesterfield. At its height the union had 3,000 members in Essex, but the union struggled to survive the agricultural depression of the 1890s. Ted gave a good idea of the life of the farm worker – life was hard, wages were low, there were no days off. Many lived in tied houses which meant homelessness if you lost your job. Homes were often hovels. In retirement farm workers had only the workhouse to look forward to. If they tried to supplement their families’ diets they faced tough anti-poaching game laws. Farm workers were looked down as ‘country bumpkins’. They faced the hostility of the local Tory squires, many of who denounced agricultural unions as “communist”. This aroused local fears of the Paris Commune of 1870. In fact the farm workers were not militants. They respectfully asked for wage rises! The Tory squires in the countryside had social control and treated ‘troublemakers’ with vindictiveness. The union was often unable to rent rooms in pubs due to the Tory influence and had to organize open-air meetings. Union officials were sometimes not from the land, they had held other jobs, like being



an engineer. This led the local press, for example the 'Essex Weekly News' to accuse them of being outside agitators.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Essex as in other parts of rural England the political opposition were the Liberals, and some farm workers' leaders such as Joseph Arch were supporters of the Liberal Party. NALU was often behind the Liberal victories which occurred in Saffron Walden and Maldon. However many Liberal candidates would not acknowledge the support that they had from the union.

NALU went out of existence in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A new union was formed in 1906. It now had support from the labour movement nationally, and picked up considerable support. During the 1914 strike in Saffron Waldon money was sent from London and speakers such as Ben Tillett, Christabel Pankhurst and George Lansbury went to speak at meetings of the union. The strike ended with victory for the union on August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1914, the day before World War 1 broke out. Development was held up until peace returned.

**Malcolm Wallace** spoke on the "**The origins and growth of the Co-operative movement in Essex.**" Following the foundation of the Co-operative movement by the Rochdale pioneers in 1844, co-ops were set up all over the country, including Essex. Often set up by groups of workers, such as silk weavers in Halstead, the early co-ops were set up to sell single products, such as coal, milk or meat. Societies were formed at Braintree, Colchester, Chelmsford, Grays, Terling, Beckton, Waltham Abbey and Chingford. The idea was to cut out the middle man and give all the members a share in the

surplus. In Stratford the railway workers set up a co-operative bakery, and in 1861 a society which became very prosperous. Many of these early co-ops however failed financially, but others succeeded. Often participants were not politically motivated, they were practical people. They participated in meetings set up to organize the co-operatives. However private shopkeepers were predictably hostile to the co-ops, as they were seen as a threat. The Co-operative Wholesale Society was able to give backing to a movement of co-ops in their early days. Malcolm also spoke about the Co-operative Women's Guild and its support in Essex. By 1890 there were branches in Colchester and Harwich and other towns soon followed suit. They concentrated on the women's suffrage issue and trained women to play a role within the Co-operative Movement. During World War 1 they campaigned against profiteering and in the 1920s and 1930s unemployment and malnutrition were issues. The CWG had a strong peace commitment and invented the 'white poppy'. The Co-operative Movement launched itself as a political party in 1917, as like the trades union movement it had to fend off political attacks from the government of the day. Co-op shops could be found throughout the country and the Co-op was the first to pioneer the concept of the self service shop just after World War 2. This was first introduced by the Romford and Barking London Co-operative Society and spread to 90% of co-op shops. There were many amalgamations in the 1960s and the Co-op is still widespread in Essex.

In the afternoon **Stan Newens** spoke on "**Conrad Noel and the Thaxted Movement**". Conrad Noel, a Christian

socialist was appointed to the parish of Thaxted by the Countess of Warwick, the famous red countess of Essex, who had been converted to socialism by Robert Blatchford, the editor of the 'Clarion'. Joining the Social Democratic Federation in 1904 she used her position to campaign for socialism by speaking at meetings and appointing socialist vicars in Tory parishes. Noel himself was a rebel. Bullied at school he was anti-establishment and he received private tuition in Latin and Greek from a Marxist, Herman Joynes, brother of the socialist activist James Joynes. He even distributed anarchist literature. He proclaimed that the land belonged to all men. In the church he had his own interpretation of heaven and earth and argued with other colleagues. He was active in the Church Socialist League which he helped to form and of which he became secretary. He gave full support to the 1914 agricultural workers strike in Saffron Waldon. Within the Church he was an advocate of the High Church ritual. He formed the Catholic Crusade to campaign for socialism and left wing causes but differentiated himself from both Roman and Anglo Catholicism.

The Thaxted Movement as it came to be called, gained support within Essex – Braintree and Saffron Walden and elsewhere and sent its disciples to other parts of the country such as Stoke on Trent and London, where its supporters made considerable impact. At Thaxted there were great struggles particularly around the 'battle of the flags' arising from Noel's decision to put up the red flag in his church.

The final speaker, **Sean Creighton**, spoke on "**One hundred years of the Workers' Educational Association**". This was founded by a couple from

Battersea, Albert and Frances Mansbridge in 1903. A committee was set up consisting of representatives from trades unions, the co-operative movement and the university extension movement. Its aim was to provide higher education for the working class. It grew and by 1907 there were over 4,000 members and 600 affiliations, by 1919 it had 219 branches, 2,000 plus affiliations and 17,000 members. Albert Mansbridge himself had started work at 14 as a clerk, he went on to work for the Co-operative Wholesale Society and he attended university extension classes at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel. He taught industrial history to his colleagues at the CWS. He later managed to secure access to the Toynbee Hall library for WEA students. The WEA had its first office in the home of Albert and Frances in Battersea before moving to the Strand.

Sean gave examples of how the WEA had taken root in Essex, with branches in Ilford and Grays. The branches held lectures, reading circles and visits. Lectures were on political issues such as the Commonwealth and freedom for India, economics and the environment. There were socials, evening rambles and visits to museums. Most of the students however were not involved as members. But there was an internal life to the WEA with a regular journal called 'The Highway'. The Chelmsford Branch adopted the Chartist slogan "for the education of the people by the people".

The 1930s saw a period of growth for the WEA and there was great interest in international affairs. But in the 1940s decline set in. Arthur Brown an organizer was sent from Wales to attempt to build new branches in Essex. In 1953 the Southend branch celebrated 50 years of the WEA. Today the WEA has survived but changed as the state has

become involved. Liberal education has been replaced by an emphasis on skills – information and communications technology and parenting skills. Many of the students are young and are on income support. Students are not in control. This has bred apathy and cynicism. Success rather than a fuller life has become the goal, with government approval. The founders of the WEA may not have recognized it.

The speakers were thanked for their contributions as were members of the Braintree CLP who provided us with lunch. It was agreed to set up a branch of Labour Heritage in Essex, following two successful conferences.

Barbara Humphries

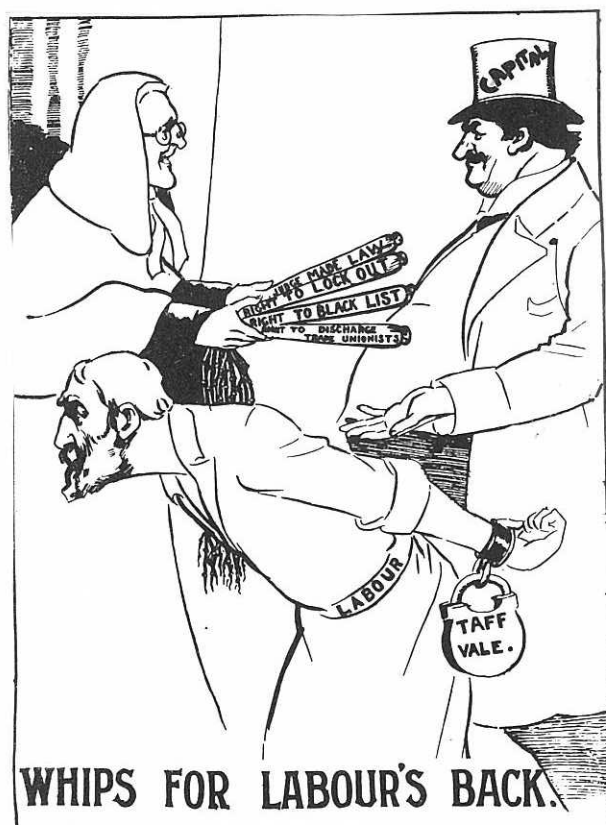
## PREPARING TO CELEBRATE THE 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE RENAMING OF THE LABOUR PARTY (1906)

### Introduction

The growing debate among some trade unions about their future relationship between the Labour Party and the trades unions, reminds me that the issue was debated during the period of change to 'One Member, One Vote'. Much reference then was made to the fact that the trade unions formed the Labour Party. Founded as the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, it was renamed the Labour Party in 1906. It is just over two years to the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of that event. Last year Diane Hayter, the Socialist Societies representative on the National Executive, suggested when she chaired the 'Great Personalities in the Labour Party' Socialist Societies event at the Blackpool

Conference supported by Labour Heritage, that CLPs should be encouraged to write about their histories. The Labour Heritage Committee has decided to encourage CLPs to work on celebrating their histories as part of the Anniversary. It is important to understand that whatever the overall history of the Labour Party as a national organisation, its roots lie in the localities, and each area and therefore each local Labour Party has its own unique history and contribution both into the National Party and in their local community.

### Establishment of the Labour Representation Committee 1900



It was the railwayworkers' union, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (later National Union of Railwaymen) which proposed at the 1899 Trades Union Congress that a special

conference of trade unions, co-operative societies, and Socialist bodies should be held in order to make plans for labour representation in Parliament. This Conference, held on in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Rd on 27 and 28 February 1900, formed the Labour Representation Committee.

Out of 129 delegates most were from 64 different trade unions. A small number represented the political groups: the Independent Labour Party (ILP) led by Keir Hardie, the Fabians, and the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF). The membership was based on the affiliation of organisations. There were no individual members. Individual membership was not added into the Labour Party Constitution until 1918.

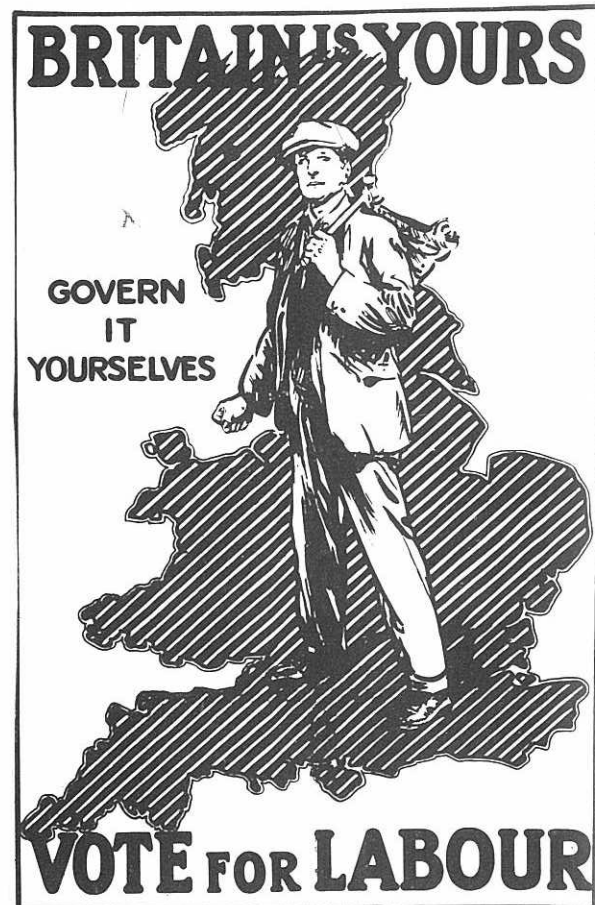
The aim was to have 'a distinct Labour Group in Parliament who shall have their own Whips and agree upon their policy.' Ramsay MacDonald, who later became Labour Prime Minister, was elected as unpaid Secretary.

The Labour Representation Committee fielded 15 candidates in the 1900 General Election, but only had two elected: Richard Bell of the Railway Servants, and Keir Hardie of the Independent Labour Party. A controversial House of Lords judgement against the railway union (Taff Vale) in 1901 resulted in more big unions affiliating. Affiliated membership rose from 376,000 in 1901 to 861,000 in 1903, and included the Textile Workers and the Engineers.

The Committee won three by-elections, taking David Shackleton of the Cotton Workers into the House for Clitheroe, Will Crook for Woolwich, and Arthur Henderson of the Ironfounders for Barnard Castle. These successes frightened the Liberals, and an electoral agreement allowed the Committee to have

a clear run in some seats in return for supporting the Liberals in others.

### The 1906 General Election



The Committee fielded 50 candidates in the January 1906 General Election. Forty were sponsored by individual trade unions, by trade councils or local Labour Representation Committees, and a further ten by the ILP. All, but one, the American ethical socialist Dr Stanton Coit, were of working-class origin, and several were secretaries of unions, like the Gasworkers, the Steel Smelters, the Shipwrights and the Engineers. Many had been active as elected representatives in local Vestries/Councils and the Boards of Guardians which were in charge of the Poor Law. 29 were elected, including 12

in Lancashire. On 12 February Hardie was elected as their first Chairman and MacDonald as Secretary. Three days later the annual conference of the Committee changed its name to 'The Labour Party'. A series of postcards of the MPs collectively and individually was produced.

### Area Differences

Labour Heritage member Dan Weinbren argues in his article 'Building Communities, Constructing Identities: The Rise of the Labour Party in London' (London Journal 23 (1), 1998, p. 41-60), that the experience of local Labour Parties in London the story differs from area to area. This applies elsewhere in the country as well. John Burns and Battersea provide an example of the differences in approach that were taken.

Missing from the picture postcard of the group of Labour MPs in 1906 was an MP of even greater stature than Keir Hardie, and who could have been Leader of the Labour Party: John Burns. Having come to national prominence as an activist in the SDF, especially for his role as a leader of the successful Dock Strike of 1889 and the growth of new union organisation, Burns had first been elected as an independent labour MP in 1892 for Battersea on the basis of a trade union/socialist/radical/liberal Progressive Alliance, which went on to take control of the Vestry in 1894. When the LRC was formed Britain had been at the height of Boer War jingoism, there was a national Stop-the-War campaign. In Battersea Burns and the organisations of the Progressive Alliance actively campaigned against the War. The Alliance was elected to take control of the newly formed Battersea Metropolitan Council in 1900. As a protest against the War it named one street on its first municipal housing

scheme, the Latchmere (Burns) Estate, Burns, and another after Joubert, the Boer War General.

Burns had attended the 1900 Conference setting up the LRC as delegate for his Union, the Amalgamated Engineers. He did not associate himself with the LRC, preferring the political flexibility that the partnership with the Liberals and Radicals in Battersea allowed. Despite this the informal group of MPs who regarded themselves as labour, irrespective of whether they were backed by the LRC or not, elected him as their chair.

In November 1905 he was invited to join the Liberal Cabinet to be in charge of local government affairs, shortly before the Prime Minister called a General Election. While his appointment was not welcomed by all sections of the labour movement, he was congratulated by the TUC, and by some LRC candidates (including Will Crooks and C.W.Bowerman), as removing the last barrier to British working men having full responsibility for national affairs. A postcard of the time depicts the new Government, including Burns. He remained a member of the Government until his resignation in 1914 in protest at the declaration of War. He remained Battersea's MP until 1918. At first he accepted Battersea Labour Party & Trades Council's nomination to be its Parliamentary candidate in the Khaki General Election of 1918, when Lloyd George's Liberal Party went into Coalition with the Conservatives. He subsequently refused the nomination, unable to accept the Party Whip system.

Among the Labour candidates in 1906 who were not elected was William Stephen Sanders. He had joined the SDF in Battersea in his late teens, and worked closely with Burns, becoming a key figure in the formation of the Progressive

Alliance and the highly influential Battersea Trades and Labour Council, whose 100th Anniversary is being celebrated this year. Later he became an activist in the Ethical Socialist movement led by the American Stanton Coit, in the Fabian Society and the ILP, and becoming an expert on German politics. He survived the Battle of the Somme during the First World War. After the War he worked for the International Labour Office, returning to active politics in Battersea (North) becoming its Labour MP from 1929 to 1931, being a short time the Financial Secretary to the War Office in the MacDonald Labour Government. He remained loyal to the Labour Party, losing his seat in the General Election that followed the formation by Ramsay MacDonald of the National Government. Re-elected as Battersea's Labour MP in 1935, he resigned due to ill-health in April 1940, and died in February 1941.

During the period from 1900 Battersea Trades & Labour Council, a key organisation in the Progressive Alliance, was briefly affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee, but was disaffiliated because of its link with the Liberals. A Battersea Labour Party was established in 1908. As a result of the Liberals resigning the Progressive Alliance during the First World War, the Trades & Labour Council was free to reconsider its political allegiance. In 1918 it reformed as the Battersea Labour Party & Trades Council and affiliated to the national Party. It had a very strong left wing which ensured the adoption of Shapurji Saklatvala as Parliamentary candidate, elected as MP in 1922 and 1924. It opposed the bans and proscriptions on individuals being members of the Labour Party. In February 1926 it was expelled from the Party for the second time. After the defeat of the

General Strike new Party organisations were created, alongside those of the disaffiliated Party, and the resultant political strife culminated in Stephen Sanders defeating Saklatvala in 1929.

### **Preparing Local Histories for 2006**

The 1906 Anniversary will enable local Labour Parties to research and assess their histories, reconfirm their own local identity and achievements to the development of their local area. Mistakes should also be acknowledged. For some it will be a question of updating histories that have already been written (see page 7), for others it may be drawing on what has been written on the local wide labour movement and politics in their area, and for others it may necessitate starting from scratch.

Sean Creighton  
Labour Heritage Secretary  
October 2003

### **The Robert Tressell Festival - Dublin, September 2003**

The first Robert Tressell Festival to be held in his home city of Dublin, took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> September 2003, in the Connolly Room at Liberty Hall, Dublin, headquarters of the SIPTU (Services Industrial Professional Technical Union) which includes the Irish National Painters Decorators Trade Group).

The event was opened by Jim O'Connor, vice-president of SIPTU. Stan Newens and Charles Callan both contributed interesting talks on the first evening followed by a session of Irish music.

At the Friday event Francis Devine and Joan Nettleton were the speakers. At the conclusion Ron Bill, on behalf of the UK contingent, thanked Paddy Coughlan and the INPDTG for organizing and financing the festival and presented the union with a copy of a new book by Dave Harker – “Tressell: the real story of the ragged trousered philanthropists” as a commemoration of the event.

It was noted with interest and appreciation that the TUC Collections at London Metropolitan University (where the original manuscript is held) were now able, for the first time, to offer the book online. Just what would Robert have made of his story being on the world wide web? The Robert Tressell Committee at Hastings is already discussing proposals for a 2004 event in the town. A second Dublin event will hopefully take place in 2005.

The visitors from Britain including Stan Newens and Ron Bill took time out to visit the birthplace plaque in Wexford Street and to view the framed picture and citation at the Dublin Writers’ Museum in Parnell Square. Also visited were the Smithfield Observation Tower, Kilmanham Prison and the Guinness Storehouse, the latter providing a panoramic 7<sup>th</sup> floor view of Dublin from the gravity bar, with a complimentary pint of the product!

Nearly a century on from its origin the Ragged Trousered Philanthropist book continues to attract interest, dedication, debate and enquiry. The work itself and how it came to be written is an interesting story – but the survival of the manuscript and its long journey to the TUC Library is totally remarkable. In recent years there has been a renewal of interest in the author and his work. In 1977 a new gravestone was installed in Walton Park cemetery, Liverpool. In

1980 the Robert Tressell workshop opened in Hastings with the aim of promoting interest in research into his life and times and work. In 1999 the first of three successful annual festivals was organized in the town.

In Dublin in 1991 the Trades Council and others raised money for a birthplace plaque to be placed on 37 Wexford Street in April 2002. Robert Tressell joined the company of many renowned Irish authors when a framed picture and citation was placed in the Dublin Writers’ Museum in Parnell Square. Now 2003 has been a successful two day festival celebrating his work and influence.

This event has contributed to the process and advance of seeking deserved recognition of his literary skills in his home city of Dublin. Robert Tressell has come home.

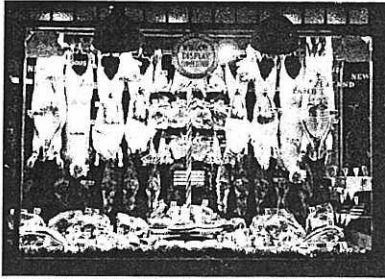
Today the continuing world-wide struggle for trades union recognition, fair wages and working conditions remains. Tressell cannot have imagined the influence and longevity of his work, nor perhaps would he have believed that nearly a century on and we would still be working to achieve the glorious fabric of the co-operative commonwealth that Owen (Tressell!) so eloquently pleaded for through his ragged trousered hero.

Ron Bill

**Review of “Signs of co-operation in Brent and Harrow” by Len Snow.  
Reviewed by Stan Newens**

Len Snow, a former long-serving Labour councilor (1963-1990) and Mayor of Brent (1976/7) has already established his reputation as a local historian. Having previously produced Willesden

Past (Phillimore 1994) and the Labour Party in Brent, he has now turned his attention to the origins of the Co-operative Movement in his area.



Co-op butchers' shop, 84-6 Wembley High Road with window laid out for window display competition, c.1937. © Brent Archive



963: View of section of High Road, Willesden Green, looking towards Dudden Hill Lane. London Co-operative Society store to right of picture. This store closed in the 1970s and was taken over by Brent Council as a Community Centre and Offices and renamed 'Robert Owen House' – for the most appropriate reasons. Later sold and demolished to make way for housing. © Brent Archive

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The result is an interesting booklet which charts the history of co-operative activity in Willesden, Harrow and neighbouring areas from the 1890s to the present day. At the outset, local pioneers, working independently of each other, established several small societies based on the model of the Rochdale Pioneers. Through growth, mergers and some setbacks, these eventually laid the foundations for the London Co-operative Society's operations in the area, until it transferred its engagements to Co-operative Retail Services in 1980. CRS has now however, merged into the Co-operative Group, which today represents co-operation in Brent.

Len Snow does not restrict himself to trading history. He recounts the story of the Co-operative Women's Guild

branches in Willesden, Wembley, Harrow and Cricklewood, the Co-operative Party in Brent and Harrow, and other expressions of co-operative activity, including housing co-operatives and the Woodcraft Folk.

The minutes of East Willesden Co-operative Party from 1950 have enabled the author to recall the members' support for democracy in Greece, CND, the abolition of capital punishment and 'Victory for socialism'. Subsequently, members participated in election campaigns, supported the Grunwick strikes and affiliated to the National Museum of Labour History.

Unfortunately a few slips have crept in – eg, the Rochdale pioneers began in 1844, not 1843. This is nonetheless a highly commendable venture. Labour Heritage exists to encourage the study and writing up of the history of all wings of the labour movement and it is to be hoped that others will follow Len Snow's good example and do research on co-operative activity in their localities.



Cricklewood Co-op Guild 50th anniversary 1955. © Brent Archive

**Available from Len Snow, 84 Norton Rd, Wembley, HAO 4RF (price £1 plus postage)**



**Correction on Leah Manning (report on talk by Stan Newens at the Labour Heritage AGM )**

It was not true that Leah Manning was not selected as a parliamentary candidate before 1945. Having given up the Bristol East nomination to allow Stafford Cripps to stand, she was subsequently selected for Islington East which she won in the by-election of February 1931. She was to lose this seat in October 1931 in the general election which followed the formation of the National Government, led by former Labour prime minister Ramsay Mcdonald. She was not to return to Parliament until 1945 when she won the Epping constituency.

**The Union makes us strong – TUC history online – an update**

The TUC Library collections at London Metropolitan University launched the third and final phase of its lottery funded website during the week of the TUC Congress this year. Two more resources have been made available – the unique and fascinating archive relating to the General Strike of 1926 and the TUC Congress reports of 1868-1968.

The General Strike collection comprises material collected by the library staff in 1926, including TUC documents and bulletins, printed publications and newspapers from Britain and overseas. It also includes bulletins produced by local trades councils and strike committees which had been donated to the library.

<http://www.unionhistory.info>

**Review of “Chris Morris: a landworkers’ struggle:an Epping autobiography 1913-1990”**

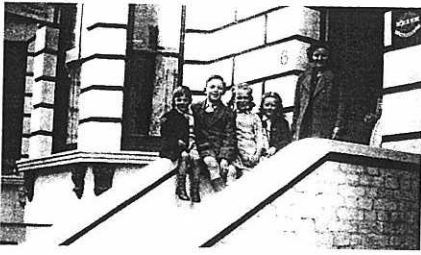
Reviewed by Barbara Humphries

Chris Morris was an activist in Essex and Suffolk labour movement for most of his adult life. He was active in the National Union of Agricultural Workers, the Labour Party and the local trades council. This pamphlet is based on the transcript of tapes which he left to members of his family, together with an introduction and postscript written by Stan Newens. The pamphlet is published by Labour Heritage.

The tapes recount the early years of Chris Morris’s life in which he encountered severe hardship. He received very little schooling as he had to work to earn money to keep his family together. This gives a picture of the lives of agricultural labourers of low wages, insecurity, and poor housing conditions. The tied cottage whereby the farm worker and his family lost his home when he lost his job gave the farmers extensive powers over their lives. Chris himself was later to be evicted from his cottage on the Copped Hall Estate when he was dismissed from his job for his trades union activities.



*Copped Hall: the derelict mansion.*



Children of Chris and Ruby Morris, left to right: Paul, Christopher, Mary and Julie; in Margate with Ruby

The most interesting part of the pamphlet is how Chris became involved in the union. Having a reputation for standing up for his fellow workers on the Copped Hall Estate he was invited to the local branch of the National Union of Agricultural Workers where he was immediately asked to take the chair, at his first meeting! This was more of a commitment than he had expected as he found himself going out with the secretary to collect union subs on a regular basis. He later went on to become branch secretary and a representative on the District Committee of the Union.

Chris was a founder member of the Labour Party in Epping, together with five members of his local church. (bell-ringing was his other interest). Within two years they had 150 members and had assisted in the setting up of branches in Epping, Harlow, Waltham Abbey and Nazeing. He was also a founder member of the Epping and District Trades Council. Chris was the Labour Party election agent in 1945 when the Epping constituency was won for Labour by Leah Manning. This was described in the report of the Labour Heritage AGM in Stan Newen's contribution on Leah Manning. It was Chris who rang the church bells in Epping when the election results were known.

This pamphlet is an inspiration to all activists as it shows the dedication and commitment of those who built the labour movement, who were motivated by their desire to improve the living conditions of working people.

PARLIAMENTARY DIVISION OF EPPING  
IN THE COUNTY OF ESSEX  
General Election, 1945  
POLLING DAY . . . THURSDAY, JULY 5th

MAKE  
POLLING  
DAY,  
**LABOUR**  
DAY



LEAH MANNING, I.P.  
THE LABOUR CANDIDATE

Central Committee Rooms: 107, Hall Lane, Chingford, E.1

### Hear Labour's Case at the Following Public Meetings

**Thursday, June 28th, at 8.0 p.m.**  
BRITISH RESTAURANT, SOUTH CHINGFORD,  
ST. JOHN'S HALL, EPPING.

**Tuesday, July 3rd, at 8.0 p.m.**  
TOWN HALL, WALTHAM ABBEY,  
BRITISH RESTAURANT, NORTH CHINGFORD

**Wednesday, July 4th, at 8.0 p.m.**  
COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL, NEW'S DRIVE, CHINGFORD,  
BRITISH RESTAURANT, EPPING,  
VILLAGE HALL, ROYDON.

Extracts from the 1945 Labour Election Address in Epping

~~Copies are available from Labour  
Hearings, at The Lodge, 18 Park Hill,  
Harlow, Essex, CM17 0AE (price  
£4.50)~~

~~Articles for the next bulletin to~~

~~Barbara Humphries, 1177 Uxbridge Rd,  
Hanwell, W.7 3ST  
(e-mail  
michandbarbara@btopenworld.com)~~