

ISSUE 64 | SPRING 2023

# ASSOCIATES NEWS



**ASCL**  
Association  
of School and  
College Leaders

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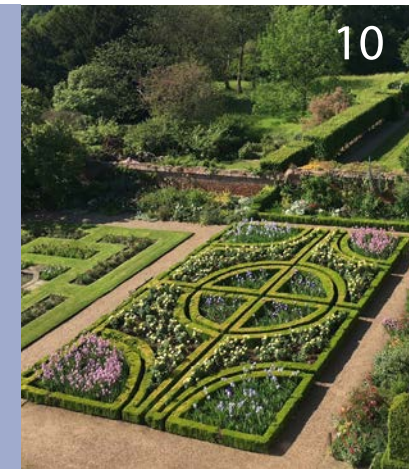
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Cover image credit:  
Doddington Hall and Gardens, Lincolnshire.

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# MAKE EDUCATION MATTER AGAIN



## It's time to accentuate the positive to tackle the ages-old problem of teaching being sneered at and denigrated, says Geoff Barton

Teachers haven't often enjoyed a good press.

Take English literature. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is a reluctant governess who longs to escape teaching drudgery. Dickens' *Wackford Squeers* is a semi-literate bully and Roald Dahl's *Miss Trunchbull* is cut from similarly cruel cloth.

We encounter demon headmasters, blackboard-hurling sadists and a whole population of teachers treated with contempt by their pupils or disdain by society in general.

There are exceptions, of course. Muriel Spark's *Miss Jean Brodie* – for all her disturbing personal values – is a teacher who inspires her girls and raises their aspirations. Barry Hines' *Mr Farthing* sees the talent in kestrel-training Billy Casper and provides him with the brief hope of a better life.

But so often in books – let alone in the Grange Hills and Waterloo Roads of

the TV world – teachers are depicted negatively.

As we can tell from my initial references to those 19th-century classics, none of this is new. The world we see from working inside education often isn't the world that people see from the outside.

### 'The world we see from working inside education often isn't the one that people see from the outside'

#### Media pot-shots

I've been thinking about this a lot recently for reasons you might predict. I'm writing this article on the day before strike action by some teachers is destined to take place. Certain flanks of the media are already lining up on the sidelines to take almighty pot-shots at striking teachers and the people who run our schools and colleges.

Inevitably, therefore, I've been wheeled out for myriad radio and television interviews to explain why we find ourselves where we find ourselves – on the brink of more education unions flirting with industrial action as a way of getting the government to value education.

Because, at its heart, that's what this grim crisis is about.

A while ago, I was part of a panel discussion at the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham during the short-lived Liz Truss premiership.

Further down the panel from me was Rachel Wolf, the architect of the last Conservative manifesto which

delivered their 80-seat majority in 2019. Towards the end of the discussion, Ms Wolf turned to me and said: "Your job is to make education matter again".

#### An arresting phrase

It was an arresting phrase. Her point was that the public felt the government cared about the National Health Service, about supporting the war in Ukraine, about fixing potholes. But the public didn't think education was high on the agenda.

And there's good evidence for this. Here's what James Kirkup of the Social Market Foundation wrote last year in the *Sunday Times*:

'As a country we do not give enough resources or attention to education. Twenty years ago, Britain devoted the same share of national wealth to education as to healthcare. Today, total health spending is roughly double the education budget. Voters don't seem to mind, or notice. The Ipsos Issues Index, a polling barometer of public concerns, recently found that just eight per cent of the public considered education a high priority. That's the lowest since 1984.' (October 30 2022)

A looming General Election will perhaps enable us to begin to tell a better story about education – why it's not just about cost but about the government investing in the nation's children and young people.

This is a time of risk for teaching. If it looks like self-interest is the motivator, we'll lose the support of parents. Teaching, as we've seen, has often had to fight off sneers and denigration. If we're to recruit more great graduates to join the ranks of the profession, all that will need to change.

As James Kirkup's article suggests, there is also a chance to frame a better narrative – and for teachers, support staff and the leaders whom ASCL represents to say to parents: "If we're not campaigning for a well-paid, qualified teacher in every classroom, then who is?"

It's time to make education matter again.

# NEWS ROUND-UP

## Committee report: More online updates plus fresh focus on recruitment

Whatever a 'normal meeting' is – and that seems to be changing all the time – our February one didn't feel as if it quite met the criteria, writes John Caperon.

Instead of being gathered around a conference table or stuck in front of our laptop screens across the country we were distinctly 'hybrid': just five members in Leicester and the majority – including the chair – dispersed.

Chair Ann Mullins switched between in-person and virtual contributions with ease, despite the limitations of the video technology and the extraneous soundscape to the meeting provided by building alterations at HQ!

General Secretary Geoff Barton's recent online update for Associates, attended by around 70 members either live or subsequently, was an excellent overview of the key strategic issues of the day, it was agreed. From now on there will be online events each term – from the General Secretary in January and at the year-end, and from the new President in autumn – to provide Associates with privileged, real-time understanding and involvement in ASCL activity.

A revised committee structure and terms of reference are coming in with the new school year, meaning that several committee members are bowing out after long service (see story, P7).

A key task for the slimmed-down committee will be to focus on recruitment and how to encourage more leaders to continue their link with ASCL as Associate members after retirement. Keeping passionate educationalists on board was the priority, it was agreed.



## All aboard for Bristol

Bristol, a city rich in maritime history and home to the *SS Great Britain*, is the location for this year's annual Associates reunion on Wednesday October 4.

Brunel's celebrated steam ship, salvaged as a near-wreck and restored to Victorian splendour in the 1970s, is at the heart of an award-winning visitor attraction sited in the ship's original dockyard and including two museums.

Other attractions in the city include its gothic cathedral, the country's only digital planetarium at We The Curious, the Arnolfini Centre for contemporary art on the waterfront, a Banksy-themed city trail and a heritage pub crawl.

Full details about the day's activities and booking form will be published in the summer's edition of *Associates' News*.

For more on Bristol attractions, entertainments and places to stay, go to <https://visitbristol.co.uk/>



Bristol, home to Brunel's *SS Great Britain*, is the location for this year's Associates reunion

## Editorial committee: Newsletter design changes welcomed

The committee reviewed the summer edition of *Associates News* which featured John Caperon's interview with ASCL President-elect Evelyn Forde and Richard Atterton's feature investigating the origins of the association. Editor Julie Nightingale reported that Richard has further follow-up articles planned with one focusing on the 150th anniversary of the association in 2024 (see p14-15).

The group agreed the use of bigger headlines and images to illustrate articles enhances the overall look of the newsletter. The editorial process for checking articles with the writer or subject before publication was discussed. Permission to use personal photographs should be provided in writing via email.

Future content ideas include an anonymised case study article to highlight the work of the ASCL Benevolent Fund.

Ideas are also needed to replace the Time of my Life feature and suggestions given were book reviews (not necessarily on new releases), volunteering projects in retirement and signposting pieces.

More lifestyle content on food, travel, cultural activity and similar topics is to be included, reflecting feedback in audience research carried out by ASCL.

## Podcasts round-up

In the latest ASCL Leadership podcast, Geoff Barton talks to the CEO of the Independent Schools Council, Julie Robinson, about the landscape of independent education and the implications of Labour's tax proposals.

Labour's major plan to add 20 per cent VAT on school fees would, she says, drive children of parents facing financial hardship into state schools that might not have the capacity to take them.

She suggests a better approach might be to encourage independent schools to double their efforts

to share teaching and university preparation across the board.

Elsewhere, ASCL's Primary Specialist Tiffnie Harris talks to colleagues from GL Assessment about what 2023 might have in store, covering everything from getting the most from your data to the complexities of learning to read and supporting children with SEND.

Tiffnie chats to Helen Robinson (Head of Customer Experience), Georgina Cook (Assessment Owner for the New Group Reading Test and Progress Test Series) and Emma Dibden

(Assessment Owner for CAT4 and Pupil Attitudes to Self and School).

Meanwhile, in the latest episode of *Leaders Are Readers*, Geoff talks to PiXL CEO Rachel Johnson about her love of reading – why she reads, what she reads, how and when she finds time to read and why she regards a good book as 'a space to be myself'.

Other ASCL podcasts topics include business, SEND plus trusts and chats with other ASCL experts

Listen to all of the discussions at [www.ascl.org.uk/Podcasts](http://www.ascl.org.uk/Podcasts)

## All changes to Associates' Committee

The number of members on the Associates' Committee is changing from 12 to 9 and the composition of the committee will also alter, chair Ann Mullins has confirmed.

The changes have been agreed following a review of all ASCL's committees.

Until now, 12 elected members have served a three-year term with annual elections for four places each year in rotation. A member of the Presidential Trio (President, vice President or past President) and ASCL's pensions specialist have also served on the committee.

Ann said: "The number of elected members will now gradually reduce to seven and two additional two members will be nominated by ASCL Council. As before, a member of the Presidential Trio and the pensions specialist will be ex officio."

There will be no election this year to enable the changes to come into place. The next one will be in 2024.

Ann added: "Three long serving members, John Caperon, Philip Johnston and Robert Godber, are retiring and I would heartily thank them for all they have done on associate members' behalf. They will be greatly missed."



## ASCL anniversary – share your stories

ASCL celebrates 150 years old in its various iterations next year and to mark it we'd like to share associates' recollections and experiences as members and supporters. Send your memories or ideas for stories to [associatesnews@ascl.org.uk](mailto:associatesnews@ascl.org.uk)

# HOLDING PATTERN

Extra money for schools was welcome but government education policy is still largely stuck in a rut, says Julie McCulloch



The world of education policy has felt oddly stagnant over the last few months, mainly due to yet another 'refresh' at the DfE but some changes, positive and negative, have made it through this inertia.

## Funding

First among the highs has to be the announcement in the government's autumn statement of an additional £4.6bn for schools over the next two years. The sector campaigning and lobbying on this issue, in which ASCL played a strong part, undoubtedly contributed to the Treasury's decision to stump up this extra money. It's not enough – and the DfE is now spending it several times over as they claim it as the solution to all schools' financial woes – but it's a great deal better than the alternative.

## Schools Bill

Few people have mourned the Schools Bill's demise as it was a rushed, poorly written piece of legislation. Its most problematic aspect was its open-ended and somewhat random list of 'matters' about which the Secretary of State might set standards in relation to academies.

However, its withdrawal has left some of the real issues unresolved. While the academy standards clause was

badly designed, the intention behind it was the sensible one of trying to rationalise all the requirements and expectations under which academies operate. The government has now tasked the members of its 'academies regulation and commissioning review' with solving this problem.

The Bill would also have brought in some changes which ASCL strongly welcomed, including the introduction of a register of home-educated children and increased powers for Ofsted to inspect illegal schools. The DfE now hopes to find a way to introduce legislation in these areas before the end of this Parliament. We will continue to lobby for these changes.

## Schools White Paper

While the Schools Bill may be dead, the Schools White Paper which preceded it limps on. The government's ambition for all schools to be part of strong trusts remains, though there appears to be a shift towards ensuring we build a robust system of highly effective trusts over time, rather than rushing towards an arbitrary deadline.

Ministers seem keen to pursue their woolly 'expectation' that all schools should have at least a 32.5 hour week. But guidance, promised for Summer 2022, has still not materialised. ASCL has

made clear to ministers that expecting schools to be able to introduce changes to the length of their day or week for September 2023 is now ridiculous.

## What's next?

The wild card of the last few weeks was the Prime Minister's announcement that he would like to see all young people studying maths to age 18. ASCL is unconvinced that this should be the highest current priority, that this ambition is possible or sensible without a wider rethinking of post-16 education or that it is remotely achievable given the current dearth of maths teachers.

Finally, we're taking every opportunity to focus the government's mind on what we think should be its highest priority: the spiralling recruitment and retention crisis. Every time a minister or civil servant talks to us about new idea, our first question is 'What assessment have you done on the likely impact of this on recruitment and retention?'

We can all come up with ideas for making education better. But without enough teachers, leaders and support staff, they ain't going to happen. That's one constant which isn't going to change.

**Julie McCulloch is ASCL  
Director of Policy**

# SAFE HAVEN

No cause for concern – teachers' pensions are protected from the worst of the recent economic turbulence, Jacques Szemalikowski confirms



Last autumn, following the 'mini-budget', much was written about the Bank of England acting rapidly to buy up government debt, (bonds known as gilts). This stabilised turbulence affecting a number of defined benefit pension (DB) schemes. Some ASCL members may have been concerned, knowing that their own pensions are DB schemes.

There is no need to worry, however, because the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) is essentially unfunded. Whereas most pension schemes rely on the investment performance of purchased fund, the TPS does not depend on the stock market performance of any fund. Instead, it pays Associates a guaranteed income for life (annuity) that depends on individual career service and salary. It is not buffeted by the winds that caused such storms last autumn which involved gilt values, gilt yields, collateral or margin calls.

So, unlike invested schemes, the

TPS is one of only eight pension schemes secured by the government in which benefits are not based on the performance of a pension fund.

Associates who draw benefits from the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) will also be reassured that, while this is an invested fund (mainly via master trusts), it was not exposed to the factors that caused problems last autumn.

The long-term impact of the turbulence may be yet to shake out but it may result in a deterioration in the funds available to the providers of affected schemes to pay pensions in the future.

## Cost of living crisis

While Associates are relatively protected they will not be immune to the ongoing cost of living crisis. Consequently, it is reassuring to know that the annuity is at least resilient to inflation. This year's public sector pension index-linking has been set by the Treasury. It has

not been issued at time of writing, but precedent would suggest 10.1%. This is based on the (lower) consumer price index (CPI) measure of inflation leading up to September 2022. Consequently, assuming this is the case, your annuity will be increased by 10.1% from April. If you retired after April 2022, it will be pro-rata.

Nevertheless, Associates will be aware of the corrosive affects of inflation on any tax-free lump sum that was crystallised upon retirement. It is unlikely that any investment strategy will match the current level of inflation which is the highest for four decades.

Even so, Associates who speak to those with private pensions know how much many envy what must still be one of the best, and most secure, pension schemes around.

**Jacques Szemalikowski is  
ASCL Pensions Specialist.**



# BACK TO NATURE

## Historic homes boast some of our finest gardens as well as attractions from farm shops to art exhibitions and sculpture parks - and Spring's a fine time to visit

After a thoroughly miserable winter, it's time to put a spring in your step by visiting a magnificent country garden.

Don't worry – it's not all herbaceous borders, scissor-cut lawns and flower beds that bring tears to the eyes of hay fever sufferers.

Some of our finest gardens are attached to historic homes and estates that boast a wide variety of events and attractions from farm shops, restaurants and retail outlets to sculpture and art exhibitions and practical displays of conservation and animal husbandry.

So check websites and local media for information about opening times and entrance prices, don some sensible shoes and get out and about.

Here are some horticultural highlights to get your juices flowing.

### Doddington Hall

Doddington Hall, near Lincoln, is an extremely picturesque Elizabethan mansion with extensive gardens that remain faithful to the original layout of the estate and acres of countryside for reviving walks.

The West Garden is noted for its naturalised crown imperials while the Wild Garden is a riot of heritage daffodils, aconites and snake head fritillaries.

Produce from the Kitchen Garden provides an abundance of fruit, vegetables, salads and herbs.

Like all the gardens noted here, Doddington has extensive facilities for green-fingered and non-gardener visitors alike including two restaurants – pumpkin and sage gnocchi a

speciality – shops selling fancy rural gifts and clothing, and a top-of-the-range cycle emporium that attracts Lycra-clad riders from far and wide.

Look out for: the four topiary unicorns representing the owners' family crest.

[www.doddingtonhall.com](http://www.doddingtonhall.com)

### Goodnestone Park

Drive through a quaint village in Kent, pass the school, church and the FitzWalter Arms pub – named after the family who own the 18th-century manor house – and you'll arrive at Goodnestone Park.

A stone walkway and pristine avenues of yew hedges lead visitors from the house, with its marvellous Queen Anne façade, to a lime avenue and adjoining arboretum.

## Glorious gardens - (l to r) Goodnestone Park, Doddington Hall and St Andrews Botanic Garden

Image credits: Doddington Hall and Gardens, Lincolnshire; Goodnestone Park; St Andrews Botanic Garden



The walled garden consists of three enclosures connected by a central lawn, with panoramic views of the estate and the Garden of England beyond.

Stone steps descend to a lower terrace and a box parterre planted to celebrate the Millennium.

The estate hosts regular garden tours, wedding fairs and events plus heritage hikes around the mansion.

Look out for: the Old Dairy Café in one of the original estate dairies which offers top-notch teas and cakes.

<https://goodnestonepark.co.uk>

### Houghton Hall

Houghton Hall in Norfolk is the Palladian home of the first British Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole – whose hunting parties were reckoned to have lasted for weeks – and now the home of his descendant, the art-loving David Cholmondeley, 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley, who packs his parkland with his amazing collection and exhibitions of contemporary sculpture.

The five-acre Walled Garden is divided into themed areas while the Kitchen Garden features a fruit cage with espaliers of apples and pears. A formal rose parterre has a

fountain and classical statues while a Mediterranean garden holds French lavender and box tree hedging.

There are also standard laburnums, peony borders, vegetable and herb gardens, beds of irises, a magnolia corner, a glasshouse and a cherry tree walkway.

Look out for: the world's most comprehensive model soldier museum in the stable block.

[www.houghtonhall.com](http://www.houghtonhall.com)

### Ness Botanic Gardens

Ness Botanic Gardens on the Wirral peninsula is the result of one man's passion for plants. Liverpool cotton merchant Arthur Kilpin Bulley created the gardens more than 100 years ago and they are now maintained by the University of Liverpool.

The 64-acre site with views of the River Dee and North Wales features a diverse variety of plants and planting areas.

Look out for: the largest facility in Europe for investigating the effects of warming on ponds and shallow lakes along with a solar farm and meteorological station.

[www.liverpool.ac.uk/ness-gardens](http://www.liverpool.ac.uk/ness-gardens)

### St Andrews Botanic Garden

On a similar theme, the St Andrews Botanic Garden Trust in Fife is a living research and development programme.

Across the 18-acre garden, experiments are being carried out to investigate how plants compete, invade and support each other; it's a garden in transition, testing new ways of managing and monitoring populations of plants with an increased focus on research and conservation of Scottish native species. Ways in which botanic gardens can address the biodiversity and climate crises is a key theme.

Alongside garden features such as species-rich woodlands, herbaceous borders and a rock garden, the three-acre Tangled Bank is home to threatened habitats laid out with meadows, woodlands and dramatic sand dunes.

The garden has a wide range of plants available for sale, all of which are grown in the garden, while the gift shop boasts unique botanical art and crafts.

Look out for: red squirrels among the trees.

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

# HE HAS DONE THE MATHS...

Using his own calculations, Andrew MacTavish reckons Government plans to have all students learn the subject until the age of 18 simply don't add up

It's a long time ago now, but my memory is still clear. I blame young Aristotle's parents because they pushed the lad from day one; he probably had Rubik's cubes to play with in his cradle.

They coached him, encouraged him, bought him educational toys and had him accelerated one year at his junior school. He arrived at our boys' grammar school – a Year 6 boy in Year 7 – rather small and owlish but he did startlingly well in his own little isolated world.

Come GCSE, he passed 10 subjects at high grades, a full year earlier than all those of his own age only for Mr and Mrs Aristotle to withdraw him as they wanted him to take brain surgery or something we didn't offer at A-level.

We were a little hurt, unsurprisingly, but we smiled bravely as we said goodbye, thinking that that was the end, little knowing the shadow he had left behind.

### 'Five good grades'

At that time, the then-Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) was making a fuss about 'five good GCSE grades', producing the percentage of candidates in each school who achieved five or more with league tables published in all the papers.

It took the number of students in the GCSE year from the form 7 we produced in the January and the number of candidates who had

five or more passes from the results sheets in August, put one against the other and – bingo! – a percentage.

It was the next year that the shadow of young Aristotle came back. Every single boy gained the five-grade minimum and the 100% was confirmed by the DfEE's letter 'Provisional Results' in September.

It was provisional because it had to check the previous year's results in case anyone had been entered and passed 12 months early; that student might have gained one then and four in the current year, making the magic five.

You may have already worked out what happened.

The DfEE found we had (let's say) "X" boys with five plus passes on the exam results files. They checked the previous year's exam files and found Aristotle had five plus passes, and so they added him in. That was "X + 1" boys.

### Pompous explanations

It then checked our January form 7 and found we had "X" boys in the year group. Nobody noticed that we had more boys with top results than we had in the year group. Nobody had written the machine code to throw out any result that was plain stupid.

So what was the result? The final, corrected 'Results' letter told me I had a percentage pass of '101.1%'.

It was a well-printed letter, nice letter-head, with lots of pompous explanations – and this nonsensical figure displayed clearly! In heavy type!

This was from the DfEE, the Holy of Holies, and no one had noticed.

I framed the letter and put it on the wall in my study. It was pointed out to anyone who spoke of the DfEE in hushed tones.

A week later I received my 'School Target' letter from my own LEA. I expected it to point out the nonsense from the DfEE with a bit of a jokey remark from the chief education officer.

### Nonsensical result

Instead, it confirmed the '101.1%' and, to my utter amazement, gave me a target for the next GCSEs of 102.5%! Once again, people far wiser than mere schoolteachers had done the maths, produced a nonsensical result, and blithely sent it out.

When I read that wise people in London are thinking that all students should study maths to A level, I am unmoved. Like my target, it doesn't make sense. They have no idea about real schools. They need to go back to their Cuisenaire rods.

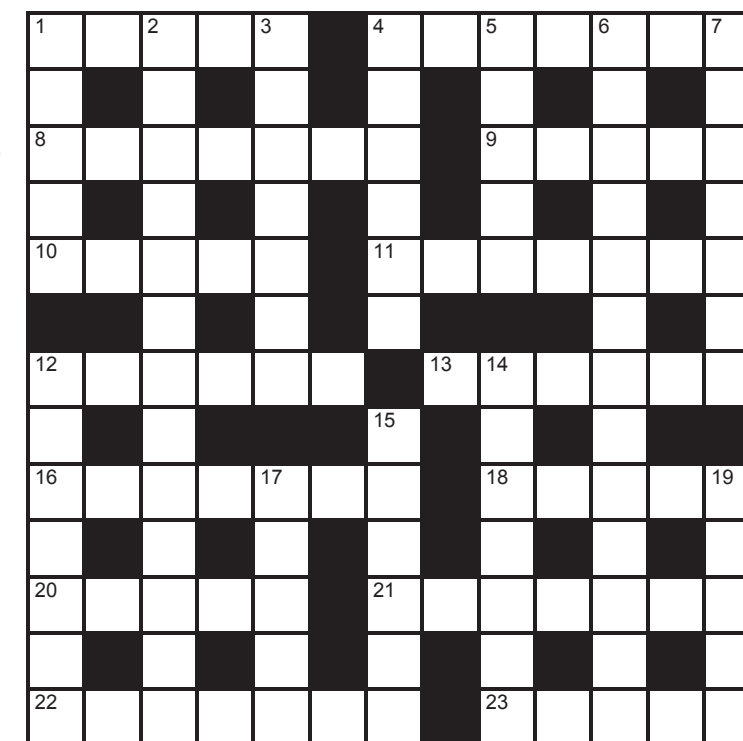
At a guess, they probably can't even count up the number of maths teachers in the country needed to teach all those students up to the age of 18.

### Across

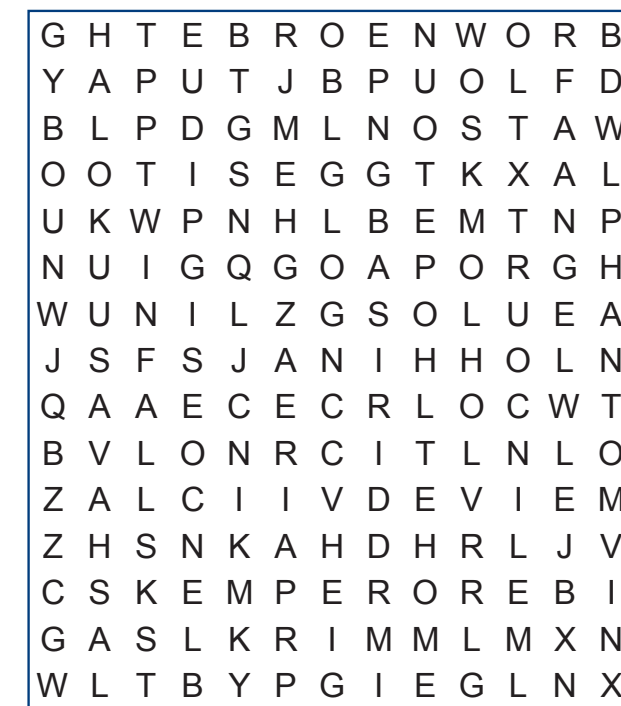
- 1 Very fast (5)
- 4 Vehicle framework (7)
- 8 Shoemaker (7)
- 9 River that flows through Paris (5)
- 10 Metalworker (5)
- 11 Voter (7)
- 12 Gambling place (6)
- 13 Sealed in a tin (6)
- 16 Angles (7)
- 18 Not affected by alcohol (5)
- 20 Transmitting live from a studio (2,3)
- 21 Mediocre (7)
- 22 Hold spell-bound (7)
- 23 Outer surfaces of an object (5)

### Down

- 1 Boulders (5)
- 2 Person employed by the government (6,7)
- 3 Intelligent sea animal (7)
- 4 Floor covering (6)
- 5 Long, narrow passageway (5)
- 6 Timber strip running along the base of a wall (8,5)
- 7 Soiled by smudging (7)
- 12 Violent rotating windstorm (7)
- 14 Localised ulcer or sore (7)
- 15 Jewish republic (6)
- 17 Mistake (5)
- 19 Staggers (5)



- ◇ ANGEL
- ◇ BLENCOE
- ◇ BOW GLACIER
- ◇ BROWNE
- ◇ EMPEROR
- ◇ GAPING GILL
- ◇ HALOKU
- ◇ HAVASU
- ◇ HOPETOUN
- ◇ KRIMML
- ◇ MELINCOURT
- ◇ PHANTOM
- ◇ RHINE
- ◇ RINKA
- ◇ SHOSHONE
- ◇ TUGELA
- ◇ TWIN FALLS
- ◇ WATSON





# RADICAL ROOTS

**Richard Atterton continues his trawl through the ASCL archives to highlight the courage of school heads amid the turbulence of the early 20th Century.**

In 1974, three years prior to the merger between the Headmasters' Association and Association of Headmistresses to become the Secondary Heads Association (SHA), the Headmistresses celebrated their 100th birthday.

To mark this occasion, a book was commissioned on the history of the Association of Headmistresses and it was called *Reluctant Revolutionaries*.

It is my contention that while many headmistresses did not want to see themselves as revolutionaries, as violent revolution swept across Europe, many – particularly the earliest heads – understood the radical nature of their work and the revolution they had begun, not just for girls' education but for the wider women's movement.

## Votes for Women

Alongside the suffragist credentials of its founder, Frances Buss, in 1911 the AHM voted unanimously in support of women's suffrage. This resolution came as a direct result of the failed attempt to enfranchise women the previous year.

As well as pushing 'Votes for Women' and greater parity between boys' and

girls' education up to university level, the association often commented on other areas of equal rights.

In 1915 the executive signed a letter in support of a royal commission's recommendation that women be admitted to the senior ranks of the civil service.

Like many headmistresses at the time, Sara Burstall – president in 1909-10 and headmistress of Manchester High School for Girls – had initially been reluctant to 'do anything of public character' despite being 'born a suffragist'.

By 1913 she was prepared to throw caution to the wind and attended a 'Votes for Women Pilgrimage March' from Manchester to Stockport, weathering a small showering of stones from some onlookers.

When the 1918 bill finally received the royal ascent, she spoke at the Manchester society meeting celebrating its passing.

Space precludes me from mentioning even a fraction of the pioneering educators who were

instrumental in changing both the law and societal views.

The Death of Sophie Bryant in 1922 received a front-page obituary in the suffragist publication *The Vote*, recognising her role as both an educator and pioneer.

Bryant, handpicked by Frances Buss to take on the job of headmistress at North London Collegiate School for Girls, was one of the first woman to earn a BSc and the first woman to earn a Doctor of Science.

President of the Association from 1903, she is also reputed to have been the first woman to own a bicycle.

She died at the age of 73 in a mountaineering accident, a pursuit she loved, having scaled the Matterhorn twice. She is remembered for taking part in nearly every progressive movement of her time.

## Rallies and marches

Bryant, like many of her fellow headmistresses, stopped short of endorsing the suffragette cause, instead opting to speak at suffragist rallies and marches.

The headmistress closest to a suffragette was Dorinda Neligan, vice-president of the AHM in 1883. Neligan's activism grew more militant after she retired after nearly 30 years of headship of Croydon Girls school.

As well as becoming a tax resistor, which ended in the confiscation of her silver tea pot, Neligan was no stranger to danger having served as a Red Cross Nurse in the Franco-Prussian War.

She was arrested alongside the Pankhursts in 1909. The following year, known in Suffragette history as Black Friday, Neligan accompanied the Pankhursts et al to present a petition to the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, at Parliament.

Violence ensued and Neligan is alleged to have struck a policeman, although no formal charges were brought.

Neligan wrote about her change of heart and mind:

"For years I was an indifferent, if not antagonistic, spectator of the efforts made to procure the extension of the franchise to women. When I became a householder, I felt for the first time that the existing disqualification is an unjust one; and I now support the movement not merely from the desire to see justice done to a class, but in the firm belief that it will do much to raise the aims and widen the thoughts of women, a result which must benefit the whole human race."

## What about the men?

Any assumption that Victorian/Edwardian headmasters would steer

well clear of the suffrage cause are wholly unfounded. A number of notable headmasters took up the cause by speaking at events but more commonly by lending their names to petitions for the cause.

In 1910 the headmaster of Eton, Edward Lyttelton, signed a petition in favour of the bill before Parliament. He was joined by John Haden Badley, a strong supporter of women's suffrage and cousin of Millicent Fawcett and founder of Bedales School.

There was a particularly strong connection to several in the Headmasters' Association. Robert Cholmeley, headmaster of Owen's School, Islington, had been a significant part of the association for decades, and thus far the only person to serve two non-consecutive terms as President in 1923 and 1927.

His commitment to the suffragist cause was unimpeachable; a regular contributor to *Common Cause*, author of the pamphlets *Women's Suffrage: The Demand and its Meaning* and *Women's Anti Suffrage Movement*, as well as a frequent speaker at suffragist rallies.

Thomas Fry, Head of Berkhamsted School and HMA president in 1903, was an ardent supporter of Votes for Women.

In 1918, prior to the bill's passing, he wrote an extraordinary note to Millicent Fawcett.

"Dear Mrs Fawcett. This is grand. Here is the social chance for women. We have been stuffed up with 'political' reforms long enough. For this I have

longed for women's votes. Men organisers are eager to sweep women into men's exploded carcasses. Now here is a question that can rally them. *The Times* for some reason favours me but has barred all other letters there is a press union against women 'having their heads' on this and similar questions. I implore you to get to public meetings – it will frighten MPs ... the country can now be roused."

## A broad church

The Association is, and always has been, a broad church with the general perception being of an organisation with 'small c' conservative tendencies, slow and cautious to change. Despite this, its roots are firmly radical and progressive.

ASCL in its various incarnations has always been an organisation that put both its members and the interests of young people first. There has always been room for dissent, be it Buss and Beale disagreeing over the role of public exams for girls, the evolving debate over grammar schools in the 60s or, more recently, the varying opinions over industrial action.

There has perhaps never been a more important time for school leaders to consider their radical roots as we re-evaluate the future for our schools and their role in society.

Richard Atterton will be writing more on his research into the history of ASCL and its predecessors in future issues of *Associates News*.





# A FRIEND, INDEED

## Now in her fourth year as an Anna Chaplain, Eileen Simmons (below) finds her work providing spiritual support to older people more rewarding than ever

The Bible Reading Fellowship's Anna Chaplaincy network promotes the spiritual welfare of older people of strong, little or no faith at all. We support them and their carers wherever they may be – in residential care, in their own homes and in the community.

Just yesterday, I had a lovely session as a personal befriender, visiting my wonderful 92-year-old who lives in a ground floor flat of a retirement complex.

She makes me so welcome with homemade shortbread; her friends are pleased when I make my monthly calls as they share the rest of the shortbread in the afternoon.

I have grown so fond of my friend B, and I was touched when she asked me if I would take her funeral service as I am also a local preacher.

Like many Anna Chaplains, I was already involved in the field before I joined.

### One-to-one interactions

I spent one morning a week in a local care home with individual residents, most of whom had advanced dementia. My one-to-one interactions were very much appreciated by the individuals in most cases.

I wore a large badge with simply EILEEN on it in red felt tip. One lady called Kitty always chose to be alone and in the early days was more likely to swear at me when I said hello but later used to say, 'My sister is called Eileen. I'd better go and find her'.

As in their earlier lives, every resident is an individual, unique and precious.

Every week I would sit and chat with Peter who never recognised me but when I reminded him that he used to service Lancaster bombers in the war, he would be so pleased to tell me his story again.

Each week he became more lucid and happy to talk about how proud his father was when he signed up.

The staff at the home were wonderful, but did not have the time that I had to listen to his stories. I never tired of similar discussions as he himself loved our conversations.

Unfortunately, during Covid the home was sold to a different care home group and although I hoped to return the new management wanted individuals who could act as voluntary carers who were

trained in lifting, using a hoist and feeding rather than concentrating on one-to-one interactions. I do so much miss my work there, but had to accept that it had come to an end.

One door closed, but another opened: I am now well in to my second



year of volunteering with the HOPE group at a local Methodist church.

This group comprises individuals with dementia and their spouses who have become carers. There are also carers whose loved ones have needed to go into residential care but want to stay with the group as the carers are so supportive of each other.

I joined the group as a listener and it is such a privilege that individual carers want to talk to me. I also interact with those having dementia, who chat and tell me their stories.

Our HOPE group is fully integrated with other groups meeting at the same time, such as card-makers, creative crochet and knitting. During the morning we usually do keep-fit and a varied range of other activities is laid on.

We lunch together and usually in the afternoon we have a sing-along session with old favourites. Our group is close-knit and our leader decided to meet for the TV coverage of our late Queen's funeral, which was such a wise decision.

### Telephone befriending

During the Covid lockdown, I learned of the need for volunteers to carry out telephone befriending for Southend Age Concern, an independent charity.

One morning a week I call individuals and it has surprised me just how meaningful and valuable this service is.

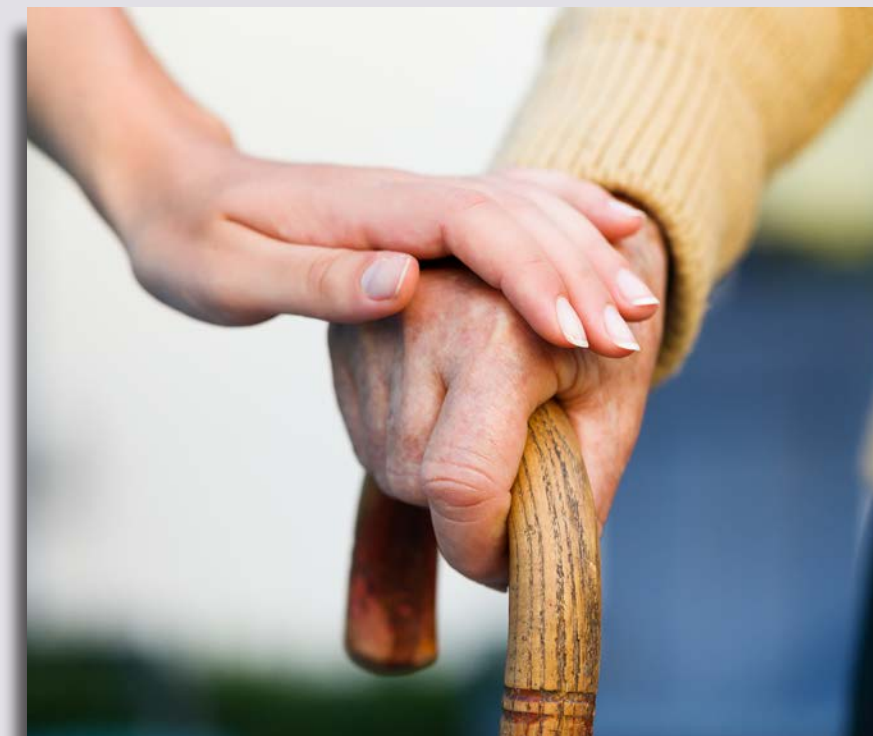
I have been told that my calls are 'the highlight of my week'; some of the people I phoned had to shield because of their medical conditions and they felt isolated.

I see the need personally to continue telephone befriending for the very elderly, who may be housebound. I report back monthly to Age Concern on my calls and more frequently if I feel the co-ordinator needs to know about an issue. I am into my third year of this commitment and really love it.

Other Anna Chaplains cover a vast range of

activity but all serve elderly individuals. In our regular training sessions I learn so much from colleagues and the central team at the BRF.

Find out more about the work of Anna Chaplains at [www.annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk)



# EVERYDAY STORIES OF COUNTRY FOLK

**Tony Richardson says rural raconteur Ronald Blythe's final book, *Next to Nature: A Lifetime in the English Countryside*, is pure delight**

I have been a long-time, though somewhat intermittent, admirer of Ronald Blythe's writing though I suspect he may not be well known to the general reader.

My interest began with *Akenfield*, a picture of a Suffolk village through the lives of its residents published as long ago as 1969, followed 10 years later by *The View in Winter: Reflections on Old Age*.

*Next to Nature* was published in November 2022 to coincide with Blythe's 100th birthday. He died a few weeks later in January 2023.

The book is a selection of highlights from his weekly contributions to the *Church Times* over 25 years between 1993 and 2017.

Despite what might not seem the most obviously promising basis for a book, I do want to recommend it to readers, including those for whom the *Church Times* might be an

unlikely source of reading matter.

Blythe spent all his life living within 50 miles of where he was born and was a prolific and greatly-respected writer.

### Coterie of artists

The eldest of six children of a farm labourer and a nurse, he was born in Suffolk in 1922. He left school at 14 but became a librarian in Colchester and in the 1940s and 50s was the friend of a coterie of artists and writers in the area including Benjamin Britten and EM Forster.

He was particularly close to the painter John Nash whose ancient farmhouse in the Stour valley he finally inherited and in which he lived alone for the rest of his life.

*Next to Nature* features reflections on ordinary, everyday life in Suffolk recorded with his rare powers of observation and his deep humanity. He was an entertaining writer with a wry humour and wit.

Though he was sometimes described as a nature writer – a lot of what he records is the changing scene in his garden and in the surrounding countryside – he also writes about friends, local farmers, acquaintances through church and about events, meetings and outings.

There is something about his ability to experience and then to communicate the essence of an ordinary life that imbues it with a degree of transcendence. His ability, in the modern phrase to "live in the moment", makes him, for me, a model of how to live.

The book is organised in monthly chapters each with an introduction by a friend and admirer of his work including the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and nature writers such as Robert Macfarlane, Richard Mabey and Mark Cocker.

It is a huge delight, particularly for anyone who loves English rural life.



# SIX OF THE BEST

**Pauline Thomas reveals half a dozen good – though often unusual – recommended reads from Booker Prize shortlists over the years that may not have won the top award itself but are still worthy of a place on your bookshelf**

I've chosen these titles from years when the Booker winner was rumoured to be something of a compromise . . . and frequently not popular with the public! The books below are much better, I believe.

### 2004: *J* by Howard Jacobson

A catastrophe has taken place but it is not talked about; the reader gradually works out what has happened. The two main characters fall in love but aren't even sure this is their own choice because brutality is endemic in their society and questions cannot be asked. Very gradually, the shocking truth becomes apparent.

### 2012: *The Garden of Evening Mists* by Tan Twan Eng

A fascinating novel about a lone survivor of a brutal Japanese camp during World War 2 and how she makes a life afterwards as a judge. She continues to be affected by the horrors she experienced but begins to overcome them as she later learns about garden design from an expert. The expert is Japanese and the novel concerns how she develops a relationship with him, despite his past.

### 2013: *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki

Two characters alternate in this story. Nao is a young Japanese girl whose life is fundamentally destroyed when her father leaves his job in the US and moves back to Japan, while Ruth lives on the other side of the Pacific on an island off the west coast of Canada. After the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, Nao's journal and other papers are washed up on the other side of the Pacific. Ruth finds them and becomes involved in a search which ends in a very interesting time-space interaction.

### 2013: *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo

This shocking novel, based on the author's personal experience, deals with the realities of life in Zimbabwe during the Mugabe era for a young woman and her friends. She eventually succeeds in getting to the US but then faces the difficulties of life in a Western country. The early part creates a vivid picture of a life which is very difficult to imagine and the later part is not the relief that is expected.

### 2016: *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* by Madeleine Thien

This novel is fundamentally about the brutal events of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The author is writing after she has left China for Canada, where she gradually reveals her past. The story is based on the struggles of three young musicians as they try to cope with their circumstances when life becomes increasingly difficult. This is the most detailed and harrowing description of the events during this terrible period that I have come across but although it is upsetting to read about the realities of life for them, it is completely enthralling.

### 2019: *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* by Elif Shafak

Elif Shafak is an author who writes in Turkish and English and is well known for her political views, particularly on women's rights. This story describes the sad life of a young woman growing up and dying in Istanbul. The title refers to the idea that the brain continues to function for a short time after death when the character reflects on her life. It is a compelling read and thought-provoking, emphasising the complete lack of control the woman really had over her life.

**SOLUTIONS**

**CROSSWORD**

R	A	P	I	D	C	H	A	S	S	I	S
O	U	O	A	I	K	M					
G	O	B	B	L	E	R	S	E	I	N	E
K	L	P	P	L	R	A					
S	M	I	T	H	E	L	E	C	T	O	R
C	A	S	I	N	O	C	A	N	N	E	D
Y	E										
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O	N	A	I	R	A	V	E	R	A	G	E
N	N	O	E	S	R	L					
E	N	T	H	R	A	L	S	I	D	E	S

**WORDSEARCH**

G	H	T	E	B	R	O	E	N	W	O	R	D
Y	A	P	U	T	J	B	P	U	O	L	F	D
B	P	O	G	M	L	N	O	S	T	A	W	
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U	K	W	P	N	H	L	B	E	M	T	N	P
N	U	I	G	O	G	O	A	P	O	R	G	H
W	U	N	L	L	G	S	O	L	U	E	A	
J	S	F	S	J	A	N	H	H	O	L	N	
Q	A	A	E	C	E	C	R	L	O	C	W	T
B	V	L	O	N	R	C	I	T	N	L	O	
Z	A	L	C	H	I	V	D	E	V	I	E	M
Z	H	S	N	K	A	H	D	H	R	L	J	V
C	S	K	E	M	P	E	R	O	R	E	B	I
G	A	S	L	K	R	I	M	M	L	M	X	N
W	L	T	B	Y	P	G	I	E	G	L	N	X

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