

ASSOCIATES NEWS



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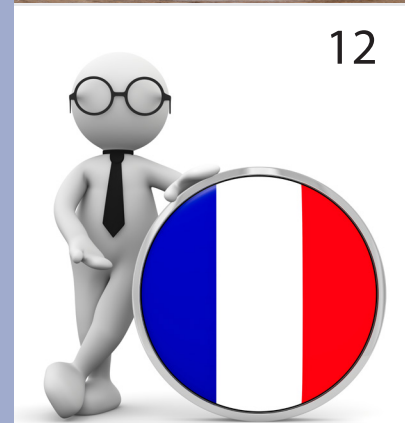
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CELEBRATE THE JOY

In these challenging times, the ASCL inbox and calls to the seven-day-a-week Hotline are generally filled with gloomy insights and anxious questions. But that's far from the whole story, says Geoff Barton

"With mirth and laughter, let old wrinkles come," says Shakespeare.

I suspect we're all conscious of being ambushed by our mirrors and noticing more and more encroaching wrinkles. I'm guessing also we don't think the cause of most of them is mirth and laughter. If only it was.

These continue to be tough times for ASCL members working in leadership teams across the UK's schools and colleges.

These people led their communities through the anxiety-fuelled days of Covid and now find themselves navigating eye-watering energy costs, unfunded pay increases, an on-going teacher recruitment crisis and looming threats of industrial action.

There's not much mirth and laughter in any of that but it's not the whole story.



I'm writing this on a train taking me to London beneath the vast skies of East Anglia. Next week I'll be in Manchester, then Leeds. Then as the weeks unfurl, the ASCL team and I will be heading to Durham, Birmingham, Nottingham, Cardiff, Belfast, St Andrews, and Guernsey.

This isn't me modelling myself on some ageing member of a once-famous rock group trying to recreate the magic of old gigs. This is the ASCL team on tour.

It's where we meet our members in person, give them an update on the issues that matter to them now and which we think may be issues for them in the coming weeks and months.

And it's where – most crucially – we can listen to our members and hear what

they are saying, what they are worrying about and what they are pleased with.

And that's the most striking thing. When we meet our members in person, their conversations are definitely not all doom and gloom. Indeed they go out of their way to talk about the joyful elements in their school, college or trust.

And, more often than not, it's all about the pupils and students in their schools and colleges.

While our accountability measures – the way our education system is neurotically measured – often reduce such complex places as schools to simplistically-measurable metrics, this isn't the way our members want to think.

On every visit I do, every conversation I have, I tend to get told about the young people who don't always fit in but who enrich their school or college community through their dance, their sporting success, their comic timing, their community and charity work.

And, in truth, that's what I remember from my own days as a leader in various schools in Leeds and York and Suffolk.

In my first week as a deputy head, I was brought an Eccles cake by members of the history department who had been out on a field trip with students in a wonderful medieval Suffolk village with a legendary bakery.

They clambered back onto the school coach and duly delivered it to me in my office – an understated act of welcome to my new school.

I spent all my early days on break and lunch duty, so I took the Eccles cake with me, found a furtive lunchtime corner, ripped open the paper bag and tucked in.

"Hey, Mr Barton," I suddenly heard a voice say. It was one of my new Year 11 PSHE group. "What's that? It looks like you're eating a cowpat in pastry."

Suddenly the cake seemed less appetising but my welcome to Suffolk from the locals rather more heartfelt.

I use the anecdote as a silly reminder that in our schools and colleges – unlike, I imagine, in solicitors' offices or dental surgeries – we are doing jobs which bring about unexpected humour, plus that regular reminder of the deep humanity of our classrooms, playgrounds and staffrooms.

We need to hold on to this; we see from our membership statistics that while we are currently gaining more new members than ever, we are also seeing veteran leaders resigning in bigger numbers. They have been made weary by Covid and wish to reclaim their lives. And who can blame them?

But all the more reason that, as a proudly 21st-century trade union, we should aim to help celebrate the joy and laughter in our schools. That's not to turn our backs on the difficult stuff – the funding crisis, the challenges over recruitment and retention.

But at the end of today's train ride to London, then meeting so many ASCL members from across the east of England and London, what struck me was their burning appetite for optimism.

So, amid the gloom, let's make sure we cling onto the joy of young people's hopes and dreams and optimism.

Yes, William S: "With mirth and laughter, let old wrinkles come".

Bring them on.

NEWS ROUND-UP

Associates survey results revealed

Initial results of a research project exploring how Associate members use ASCL services and what they would like to see in the future have been unveiled.

More opportunities to network, regional social activities, and support for retirees who had worked on the business rather than the teaching and learning side of leadership were among the issues raised in responses to the survey of current Associate and Professional Associate members.

Key messages to emerge included:

- Associate members value the support that they receive from ASCL
- Many have roles as governors, trustees or other volunteers in schools and other educational organisations and find the information that ASCL provides very useful in that role
- Members would value more information on lifestyle-related topics as well as education
- Email updates from ASCL are particularly useful
- A mix of electronic and physical communications is welcome but the majority who responded would like more electronic than physical, citing environmental and convenience reasons.
- Members would welcome further enhancements to provision of pre-retirement support
- Members would like more support for those who were not from a teaching and learning background, such as former business and operational leaders
- Members would welcome more opportunities to network
- Social activities and events would be more accessible if they were offered regionally



Opinion and perception interviews have also been carried out with former ASCL Associate members and retired ASCL members who chose not to take up Associate membership.

Annette Wade-Clarke, ASCL's Director of Marketing and Membership, thanked

people who had participated in the research and said more updates would be published in the coming months.

"We received an excellent response with feedback from hundreds of Associates that will help us shape the future of our services," she added. "We

will be undertaking further research via focus groups and working with the Associates Committee and ASCL Executive to explore priorities. We will also be taking a specific look at the needs of Professional Associate members." For more on the research, see autumn committee report, below.

Research sets out key issues to help drive recruitment

The autumn meeting of the Associates Committee welcomed newly-elected colleagues Alan Brady and Theo Nickson to the team of nine.

Annette Wade-Clarke, ASCL's Director of Marketing and Membership, gave a presentation on research into associate member needs which will help to shape recruitment to the associates community in future.

The survey included questions on topics such as why people might choose to engage with post-career association activities, their current activities, preferred methods of communication and frequency of communications, areas where they would you like to see greater levels of information/support, help with 'lifestyle guidance', suggestions for how ASCL could more effectively support the retirement process, and ideas for further networking opportunities.

The answers were varied, with many colleagues citing extremely positive reasons for continuing to stay in touch including keeping up-to-date with developments in the education sector, maintaining ASCL contacts,

helping to ensure an ongoing sense of purpose and self-worth, remaining part of a leadership community.

Members also outlined the wide range of activities in which they were already involved post-retirement life, including school governance, trusteeships, district and county councillor work, consultancy work, board membership and volunteering.

In school governance it was felt there is a pressing need for greater clarity and congruence between ASCL associate advice and National Governance Association advice. The point was also made that in many parts of the country there are serious school governor shortages and ASCL associate members, along with all ASCL retirees have so much to offer.

There was also general feeling in the research that the Association could do more to support colleagues with pensions and retirement possibilities and that national conference would provide a golden opportunity to do that, especially for a generation of colleagues finishing in the wake of the pandemic that has put such

an enormous stress and strain on school leaders. Traditionally this has been a really strong area for ASCL, but in recent times it has been more difficult to reach those members who need such help and advice at this crucial 'change point' in their lives.

Some colleagues, the research showed, had severed all links with the educational world after such a difficult time in recent years with a feeling that they just wanted to simply "leave all that behind them" and start a fresh chapter.

The response is totally understandable, the committee agreed, but it is important to note that colleagues who sever ties and perhaps when they have had time to 'reflect and recharge their batteries', find their interest in education work rekindled, find it extremely difficult to re-establish contact. It is also hard for the association (for GDPR reasons) to subsequently reach out to these people

In such circumstances it would be up to recently retired colleagues, if so inclined, to make the first move.

Report by Peter Crowe

Tributes and thanks to retiring committee members

Tribute was paid to the retiring members of the Associates Committee at the spring meeting at ASCL headquarters.

ASCL General Secretary Geoff Barton led the farewells to Christine Shellard, Paul Baker, Tony Richardson and Philip Johnson.

Christine, who had been involved with Associates since 2003, but joined the main body in 1986, was well prepared and read Happy Everyday by Benjamin Zephaniah.

Paul, who joined ASCL predecessor the Secondary Heads Association (SHA) in 1995 and Associates in 2010, said he felt that education had fundamentally shifted from a provider for the student body, to a much more business-oriented system.

Tony Richardson, who joined in 1978, thanked Philip Johnson, who joined via the Headmasters' Association (HMA) in 1970 for being "more unique", knowing that the phrase would irritate all round (unique being an absolute)! Philip had been fundamental in bringing in the pension fund from HMA into the ASCL Benevolent Fund (ABF).

Tony, himself, was rightly recognised for his work on Associates' Committee and, in particular, for steering the ABF to its successful position today.

"Geoff had clearly been well briefed as he was able to cite every role and responsibility that the retirees had held, at branch, regional and national level, including some, I suspect, that they may have forgotten!" added Paul. "These collective contributions amounted to 159 years. I felt privileged to have been associated with colleagues who have wit and erudition and who never lost the educational sense of purpose."

The committee also discussed the 150th anniversary of the ASCL founding body in 2024. Warwick University is digitising archive material that has been acquired. It is intended to look at themes and trends over that time span, to recognise those that gave their lives for their country and to chart the development of education to the present day. Conference in 2024 will be in Liverpool where it is hoped that the "voices" of the past 150 years will be heard via the website and other interactive platforms.

Other issues raised were:

Membership is declining and a push was needed now as many serving colleagues are retiring or resigning. Geoff would include this point in his regular communication. The need to be more proactive with regards to Associates and ABF was raised, although the online "Meet the Associates" had 100

people signed up. The ASCL App will include Associates information on it.

A survey of Associate members needs is being undertaken by ASCL's Marketing and Membership team, including an assessment of current communications and to "drill down" into what people need. (See story p8).

There had been a successful meeting of the Editorial Board for the Associates' magazine. Discussion around the relationship between writers of articles and the Editor had taken place. The overall consensus was that the magazine was now a much better "product" with high quality design and style, not least in the photographs. A further Zoom meeting was scheduled for November. It was agreed that Pauline Thomas would be a permanent member of the committee as a replacement for Christine Shellard who is retiring. Christine had chaired the Editorial Board with "calm and cheerfulness" during a very difficult time.

Tony Richardson gave his last report on the Associates' Benevolent Fund. He has led the ABF through significant changes including the amalgamation of a number of funds. Trustees are now better recruited and informed while better communication between the ABF and field officers had been established.

Report by Paul Baker





Podcasts round-up

In the latest ASCL Leadership podcast, Geoff Barton talks to ASCL past President, Pepe Di'lasio, new President, Evelyn Forde, and Vice President, John Camp, about issues members are dealing with and their hopes for the year ahead.

Pepe discusses his involvement with the media during the pandemic and being given the chance to give an insight into how schools were coping through his regular appearances on the Radio 4 today programme.

He also highlights the challenges facing schools now around funding.

Evelyn Forde highlights her position as ASCL's first female

black President as significant in reflecting the work ASCL is doing on equality, diversity and inclusion and striving to be outward-facing

Her theme for the year is Empowering Leadership and she talks about her journey into headship. Having left school with no qualifications and being "failed by the system", education became important later on, she says.

"I realised I needed to get a good education to find my rightful place in society, which is really important to me as head of a girls' school as well – that young women find their rightful place."

John Camp, ASCL Vice President, discusses his motivation to join ASCL

after learning of its work on the Blueprint for a fairer education system. "I felt it was really ambitious, shaping the agenda and communicated to me that ASCL was an organisation in touch with leaders in schools and which wanted to have an impact on government policy."

Other ASCL podcast topics include business, primary, SEND plus trusts and chats with ASCL experts including pensions specialist Jacques Szemalikowski

Listen to all of the discussions at www.ascl.org.uk/Podcasts.

O COME ALL YE FOODIES

Tickle your Christmas tastebuds by sampling artisanal ales and asparagus tarts at festive food and drink festivals around the country

A rare highlight in last year's otherwise rather dismal festive TV schedules was Christmas at Holkham, a pine-scented, mince-pie flavoured look at how the magnificent Norfolk estate prepared for the Yuletide festivities.

From the end of November, you'll be able to see this year's efforts for yourself when Holkham opens for its Champagne, Candlelight and Creators of Christmas tours of the hall where each room has its own theme and is festooned with fairy lights and sparkling decorations.

And the privately-owned 25,000 acre estate will be offering plenty of chances for visitors to over-indulge at the Holkham Festive Food Drink and Gift Market on Saturday December 10 and Sunday December 11. www.holkham.co.uk

The fair showcases the best of local and regional food and drink, and a live cookery theatre will feature demonstrations from renowned local chefs. The Holkham Christmas Food fair also features numerous stalls with great gift ideas from local producers.

All your favourite TV chefs – including the likes of James Martin, Nadiya Hussain, Michel Roux, Ainsley Harriott, John Torode and Lisa Faulkner – will be there to create masterpieces on the Festive Kitchen and Get Baking stages.

Hundreds of big brands and artisan producers will also be on hand to allow visitors to taste, try and buy.

This year, the theme is alternatives to traditional Christmas meats so carnivores might want to smuggle in a Stilton-topped pork pie to keep spirits raised.

Bringing the Christmas spirit a little closer to where it all began are some of our great churches and cathedrals who are hosting their own events over the next few weeks, allowing visitors to try some very contemporary vol-au-vent ideas while soaking up some of the greatest architecture in the country.

Ely Cathedral holds its Christmas Gift & Food Fair 2022 November 16-19. The event is one of the most popular fairs in the UK; around 17,000



And if you need a little fresh air away from all that, don't forget that one of the best beaches in Britain is just a mile away.

Talking of television, festive foodies will be in their element at the BBC Good Food Show Winter which runs from November 24-27 at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. www.bbcgoodfoodshow.com/winter/





► visitors flocked to stalls in the building and its grounds last year.

Discover perfect presents for friends and family from more than 100 boutique stalls and designers and marvel at the magnificent nave and the famous medieval Octagon tower which appears to hover in mid-air (particularly after you've tried a tippie or two).

In Yorkshire, Ripon Cathedral will also boast around 100 traders selling gifts, homewares and food with craft activities, chocolate tombola, and live music on November 25 and 26.



The café will be serving light lunches, mince pies, cakes, drinks and mulled wine. Architecture fans should also seek out the crypt, the oldest part of any cathedral in England, which dates back to 672.

Oenophiles should be looking forward to the Christmas Wine Festival which is back after a two-year hiatus at the Pittville Pump Room in Cheltenham on November 25. www.visitcheltenham.com/whats-on/the-cheltenham-christmas-wine-festival-p3163573

You'll be able to taste more than 150 still and sparkling

wines, plus a selection of spirits at this very special Gloucestershire wassail.

Tickets for the festival are £35 (plus booking fee), though Early Bird Tickets are available at £30 for the first 75 wine lovers that book. Entry includes all tasting samples, a printed wine guide, and the opportunity to place wine orders on the night.

You may be asked to show ID on the door if you are lucky enough to look under 25. Bottoms up!



FOND FAREWELL

Saying goodbye to a much-loved head he had appointed caused John Rowland to recall interviewing candidates for senior roles . . . not least the aspirant head of department who didn't care for children

I dropped into the school office today to see if I could make an appointment to spend a few minutes with Becky. After a few moments came the response: 'No need, John, she'll see you now'.

Becky is the head of our local primary school and she is leaving at the end of term to move to another headship closer to home.

'A fresh challenge for a 50-year-old' is how she described it and I wanted to wish her every success in this new venture.

In my retirement, I enjoyed a 10-year stint as chair of governors in the school and Becky was a candidate for deputy head in one of the first appointment interviews I chaired.

Although she was the youngest of those being interviewed she stood out ahead of all the others – by a substantial margin, in my view. (After making a success of her role as deputy, she moved to another school as head and then returned to our school with a great deal of experience under her belt.)

Read between the lines

As with so many of us retired heads, I thought that interviewing for a senior post was important but, nevertheless, pretty routine. I had waded through applications and references, read between the lines, created shortlists, greeted candidates and made a few mistakes in the process. Surely, I was on home territory; what could be different?

I guess I learned more about my primary school colleagues and

their values in one hectic day than I could ever have imagined.

There was something else on the agenda that, perhaps, I should have taken more seriously in my secondary school interviews and, as I discovered, it mattered profoundly to the incumbent head: just what did 'In loco parentis' mean to my primary colleagues and how might I recognise a sensitive answer?

In another interview discussion, which involved colleagues from the county staff, we were discussing the qualities and skills required for a senior post.

I heard a great deal from them about financial, organisational and relationship skills but there was a stunned silence when I interjected that the candidates should actually love children, too.

Surely, I added, parents love their children and if teachers were 'In loco parentis' that quality should also be apparent in them.

I looked back on the many interviews and appointments I had conducted and recalled the mistakes I had made.

One head of department who didn't even seem to like children was 'sold' to me by a glowing reference from a head I knew well. The candidate came across as bright, intelligent, and hard-working. I just didn't pick up on the fact that loving, or even liking, children was not one of her strengths. Happily, she moved on fairly quickly.

That fundamental quality was of the utmost importance to the primary school staff and I

had to review my interviewing skills to try and pick up on it.

Eventually, it became a focal point in interviews – even for office and other support staff. A secretary shouting grumpily at children through the office window hardly reflected the values which I appreciated.

Genuinely happy people

So when I met Becky, I passed through the office – a team of genuinely happy people (many of whom I had helped to appoint over the years) – and was greeted by a smiling and unhassled head.

She had always made time for people and, in spite of the educational world changing around her, still viewed the pupils as 'her' children.

She managed the box-ticking, management aspect of the work with great skill but, being a parent herself, she understood 'In loco parentis', and imparted that ethos to all her colleagues in the school.

No wonder she will leave the school as a place of learning valued by the parents.

I didn't take up too much of her time that morning but long enough to say we shall miss her and how we had valued her contribution to the school and local community.

If you, reader, want to make a useful contribution to your community in your retirement, becoming a school governor will be much appreciated – but be prepared to do some learning too!

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE

Chairing a town twinning group, Dennis Richards is disappointed with his fruitless search for fluent French speakers – plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose, as they say in Yorkshire

Jean-Marie Bressand. The name probably means as little to you as it did to me. French Resistance hero, Croix de Guerre, Legion d’honneur and several more awards besides.

After the war, he came up with an idea which he believed would put an end to war once and for all: bi-lingualism, a kind of reverse Tower of Babel.

His Monde Bi-lingue was founded in 1951. While saluting his optimism, you could argue that it was a “pigs flying past the window” idea from the start.

Or, to get into the spirit of Bressand’s way of thinking, “Quand les poules auront les dents. . .”. Although why French hens developing teeth is particularly newsworthy, I’m not sure.

Bressand would be bitterly disappointed to discover that, in 2022, not only is there war in Europe again but also that the learning of other languages is in dire straits, especially in the UK.

However, I have the most meagre of meagre consolations for Jean-Marie – he found me something to do in retirement. Bressand took his ideas on to another level when he created La Fédération Mondiale des Villes Jumelées – a world federation of Twin Towns – in 1957.

Bressand’s ideas may not have stopped a war but they have borne fruit. Twinning became a “thing.” Edinburgh and Nice. Birmingham and Frankfurt. Coventry and Dresden and many more.

Organising enthusiasts

They tend to work well for a few years, then fade as the small

group of organising enthusiasts fade away in their turn.

Whitwell, a tiny village in Rutland with 41 residents, pursued the dream ticket of being twinned with Paris.

In 1980, pub regulars wrote to the then-Mayor of Paris Jacques Chirac, stipulating that they would address three letters at intervals with their twinning request. They would take no reply as an indication that the proposal was acceptable.

Jacques didn’t get the joke. Or, perhaps he did. It’s on the village sign and Paris is, therefore, twinned with Rome and Whitwell.

As head of St Aidan’s CE High School in Harrogate, I had been dimly aware that the town has a longstanding twinning with Bagnères de Luchon, a thermal spa town in the southern French Pyrenees, 90 miles south-west of Toulouse.

Twinned since 1953 – one of Bressand’s first successes – Harrogate and Luchon will mark 70 years of twinning in 2023. You could argue

‘We are the typical group of marginally bonkers individuals’

that Luchon is too small (pop. 3,000) and too difficult to access.

On the other hand, its stunning geographical location in the foothills of the Pyrenees can more than hold its own with Betty’s Tea Rooms and the rhubarb triangle of West Yorkshire towns. Fountains Abbey, a world heritage site, is just up the road here in North Yorkshire.

Luchon’s riposte is the beautiful village of St Bertrand de Comminges, also Unesco, on the route of the majestic St Jacques de Compostelle path which meanders its way towards the Atlantic coast and its final destination at Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Within weeks of retirement, I had been appointed chair of the twinning group. You will recognise the process; in the same way as the most recently-appointed head naively becomes chair of the local headteachers’ group soon after appointment and, even more naively, feels honoured.

We are the typical group of marginally bonkers individuals, well used to flogging horses which are constantly on the point of expiring, if not quite yet dead.

Generous sponsorship

Summer 2022 brought Jean-Marie Bressand’s vision back to earth. Harrogate Twinning group looked out for linguists, leaving school and going on to university to study MFL. Generous sponsorship was made available for a visit to Luchon. The theme is “Patrimoine.”

A regular stage start and finish in the Tour De France, Luchon also



sits at the foot of one of the most historic mountain passes in Europe. Spanish refugees fleeing Franco crossed the Hospice de France above the town and flooded into Luchon in 1939. Four short years later, Jews and stranded Allied aircrew were fleeing into neutral Spain in the opposite direction.

There were only seven takers for our trip and one of them is French. The 2022 A Level MFL statistics were dire. Media studies attracted

more entries than Spanish, French and German put together.

German had a risible 2,675 entries, as opposed to 76,265 in Psychology. We’re pretty much back to the position where we were when I first started teaching MFL half a century ago.

The English abroad. You know the drill. Give it a go along the famous PG Wodehouse lines. “Into the face of the young man, who sat on the terrace of the Hotel Magnifique at

Cannes, there had crept a look of furtive shame, the shifty hangdog look which announces that an Englishman is about to speak French.”

Alternatively, just shout, speak English slowly, as you might to a five-year-old and, if all else fails, model yourself on Officer Crabtree in *Allo Allo*, convincing yourself that you are actually speaking French. Perhaps in retirement I can make a difference. When the hens have grown teeth that is.

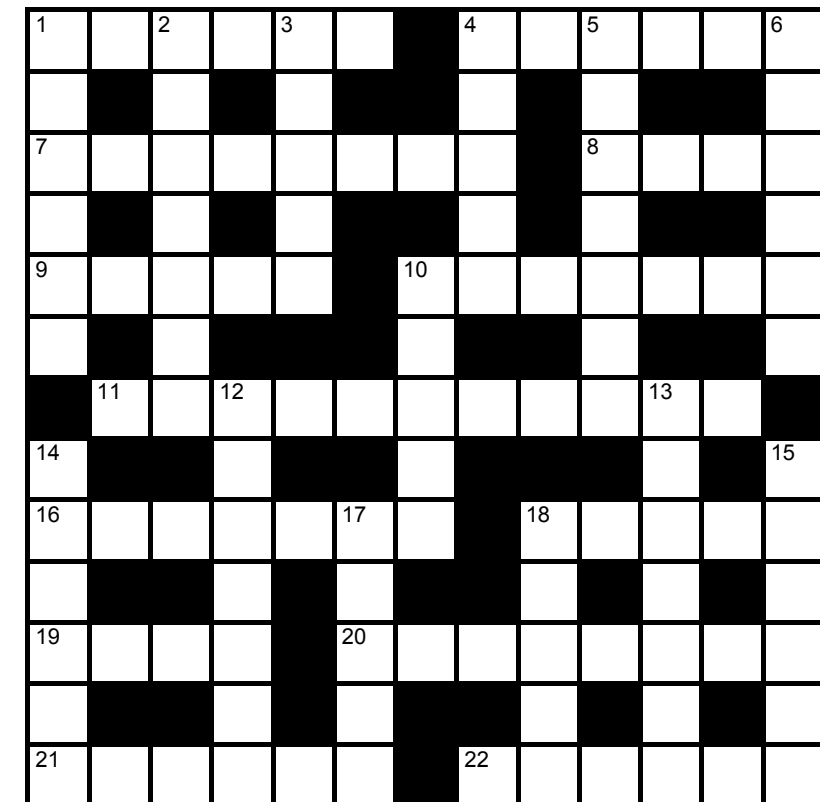
TEATIME CROSSWORD

Across

- 1 Israeli monetary unit (6)
- 4 “Open ____”, magic words used by Ali Baba (6)
- 7 Clapping (8)
- 8 At a great distance (4)
- 9 Nest of a bird of prey (5)
- 10 Overhead surface of a room (7)
- 11 Smooth-textured sausage often served in a bread roll (11)
- 16 Strategy (7)
- 18 Well done! (5)
- 19 Fruiting spikes of cereal plants (4)
- 20 Murder of a king (8)
- 21 Only, just (6)
- 22 Conquer (6)

Down

- 1 Very frightened (6)
- 2 Male ruler of a group of countries (7)
- 3 Remove by rubbing (5)
- 4 Root vegetable (5)
- 5 Small mild-flavoured onion (7)
- 6 Infuriate (6)
- 10 Turned-back hems at the ends of sleeves (5)
- 12 Professional entertainer (7)
- 13 Consider in detail (7)
- 14 Small river (6)
- 15 Self-effacing (6)
- 17 Having waves or ringlets (5)
- 18 Pale brown colour (5)



Puzzle supplied by Puzzle Press Ltd (www.puzzlepress.co.uk)



TOUR DE SUFFOLK

Exotic and exciting doesn't necessarily have to mean foreign climes, says Tony Richardson who describes his group's cycling adventures in eastern England

Our local U3A, based in Lancashire, has a flourishing cycling group with some 30 members, offering a choice of two rides each Friday, one moderate – less than 30 miles and not overly hilly – and one of a more challenging nature. We also have two or three extended tours each year.

In June this year, 11 of us, including two ASCL associates, embarked on a five-day circuit of Suffolk.

Our ages ranged from 59 to 87, four couples, two unattached ladies and one man. Five rode bikes with battery-powered assistance with the rest entirely dependent on their own unaided efforts.

Suffolk is ideal cycling country – beautiful scenery on quite an intimate scale, stunning villages, houses and particularly churches, nothing

too demanding in the way of hills but certainly not flat – undulating enough to be interesting!

Self-sufficient

We booked our accommodation in advance with an eye to comfort and good food, but were self-sufficient in the sense of carrying on our bikes all that we needed for the week. Cycling for softies it was not!

We started by riding through Lavenham, perhaps the finest example of an unspoilt medieval town in England, with some 340 listed buildings – one of the most beautiful towns in the country, according to Betjeman.

On then by undulating lanes, through small villages, past moated houses, to our first night's stop in Bury St Edmunds – county town with its abbey, cathedral and Regency streets.

The following morning, we left Bury on National Cycle Route 51, first on traffic-free paths and then by lanes to Woolpit with its rather genteel streets and church noted for its splendid porch and over-abundance of angels.

Lunch after 20 miles or so in Ixworth, then on to Coney Weston to follow first the infant Little Ouse as it flowed west then the Waveney as it flowed east, pausing to note the rather underwhelming watershed that is the start of both.

Briefly crossing into Norfolk, our next stop was Diss, a pleasant town ranged round its large mere, having travelled 42 miles in the day.

The next morning we rode through Eye, once the smallest borough in the UK, pausing to admire the stunning flint flushwork on the

church tower – one of the most magnificent in a county of fine towers, according to Simon Jenkins, author of England's Thousand Best Churches.

Lunch, after 20 miles again, at Mendham in the Sir Alfred Munnings pub, named after the artist, born locally and noted as one of the finest painters of horses ever.

We then rode on through at least five small villages or hamlets with "Saint" in their name within five miles of each other – though the map suggested that there were probably some 12 in total.

Pressing on through quite heavy rain, we bypassed Beccles and reached our day's destination, Southwold, with its

'Prices of small cottages in estate agents' windows were a shock to us from the North'

sandy beaches, elegant houses and classy prom, having travelled 46 miles.

Prices of small cottages in estate agents' windows were a shock to us from the North!

The following morning, we crossed the River Blythe to ride through the very pretty village of Walberswick and then on past Saxmundham for lunch at

Framlingham, with its splendid castle and lake.

Tea at Helmingham Hall, famous for its gardens, and finally to a rather anonymous stop in Claydon, on the outskirts of Ipswich after another 40 miles.

The last day featured a short ride to Kersey with its iconic ford and stunning streetscape, before returning to Lavenham and a delightful

lunch in the garden of Number 10, a bar and restaurant in a 15th-Century house, believed to have one of the oldest shop fronts in England.

Some 160 miles in total and only one puncture!

Pic credits: members of the Mawdesley and District U3A Cycling Group.



JUST THE TICKET

If you're worried that travel abroad is just endless Passenger Locator Forms and Covid tests, take a stress-free trip on a rail journey across the southern states of the USA with your guide, Pauline Thomas

The Amtrak long-distance rail routes are extensive and we have travelled the entire length of several in the past. This time we took shorter journeys, stopping for a few days at cities we were interested to see. The views from the train windows are amazing, showing the enormous scale of the orchards and farmland which stretch out of sight.

Although the main stations are in cities, there are also stops in tiny towns and some right out in the country, showing the nation as it is for the majority of Americans.

We travelled between Atlanta and Phoenix, an unusual journey in the USA as flights are fairly cheap and much faster. Most of the Uber drivers who delivered us to the stations had no idea there was a railway nearby and, in many cases, they were in remote parts of town.

In Atlanta we stayed at the American Hotel, now restored to its original 1960s decor and famous for being the only one in the town that was never segregated.



It hosted Frank Sinatra, John F Kennedy and many other civil rights supporters at that time. We had four nights in the city to acclimatise and made a point of visiting Margaret Mitchell's old apartment, now a museum.

She wrote *Gone with the Wind* having listened to her relatives discussing the Civil War, only realising when she was 10 that the Confederates had lost!

Ebenezer Chapel

Other highlights are the Ebenezer Chapel where Martin Luther King Junior was a pastor, the historical centre nearby, as well as the remains of the 1996 Olympic site.

Modern Atlanta is full of luxury hotels and conference delegates – a youth conference for 10,000 was being held while we were there.

We caught our first train from Atlanta to New Orleans, the Crescent, in the morning, arriving 12 hours later the same day. The current fare for this journey is from \$39 and we booked with Amtrak online.

New Orleans is as noisy and colourful as you imagine and the Creole food and jazz are a must. The Garden District of antebellum homes is a really interesting reminder of the past and definitely worth seeing.

We also went on a visit to a restored plantation which was both fascinating and disturbing at the same time. There is even a Streetcar named Desire to be seen. The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina is still uppermost in the minds of those who live in New Orleans and we saw many levees which are part of the new flood defence systems.

We then took the Sunset Limited train early in the morning to that famous oil city, Houston, just over a nine-hour day journey. We bought baseball tickets in advance to see the home team, the Astros, play the New York Yankees, so we stayed in a hotel within walking distance of the ball park.

Going to a ball game is a real family outing and the atmosphere is infectious. From the salute to armed forces members at the start to the



'Seventh innings Stretch' where everyone stands up to sing 'Take me Down to the Ball Game', there is always something happening.

It isn't necessary to understand all the rules; there is a good scoreboard as well as an organist to entertain you. At the Houston ball park there is a model train which runs above the scoreboard when a home run is scored.

We took an over-ground tour of the city, as it was relatively cool. The weather for most of the year is far too hot to comfortably walk outside and there is a complex underground system of tunnels, with most of the shops and supermarkets sheltered from the intense sun.

A short ride away we visited NASA, not to be missed. The Mission Control Room where the moon landing was coordinated has been preserved and is part of the visit. The computers used are still there, with a total data capacity about the same as in a simple digital camera in current times.

Rothko Chapel

The Rothko Chapel, with paintings all round the walls, and the Menil Collection art gallery are also worth a visit.

We left in the evening, on the Sunset Limited again, to Phoenix, Arizona, using an overnight sleeper, a real treat.



'Main Street reminded me of the roads in Westerns although now full of small shops and restaurants rather than bars'

All meals were included in the fare, with dinner on joining the train and three meals before we left the following evening. Passengers choose a time slot then are seated by the host on tables of four, which led to some really interesting conversations with fellow travellers.

The cabin we used had bunk beds which fold up in the day to form seating, but larger rooms with individual showers and beds are available.

One of the highlights of this leg was the stop at El Paso, where the line runs right along the fenced Mexican border. Immediately on the other side is one of the most violent drug smuggling centres of the world, Juarez.

As with most of the stops, there was sufficient time while the train was serviced for passengers to get out and stretch their legs. From the platform, looking through the border fence with Juarez on the other side, there is a view of a totally different world, with ramshackle buildings packed tightly together.

After this we went back to the train and crossed the spectacular Rio Grande River, continuing to Maricopa where we left the train.





We stayed in the small town of Scottsdale, a wealthy suburb well connected to Phoenix, for five nights. Main Street reminded me of the roads in Westerns although now full of small shops and restaurants rather than bars.

Phoenix is the capital of Arizona with modern buildings on a grid system and an excellent city art gallery. For us, highlights were outside the city with a visit to Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright's Architecture School and to the Desert Garden, a magical place with a butterfly house and exotic cacti we visited in the early evening.

We had a rest during this leg of the trip as we had seen so much already and were ready to stop travelling for a few days.

Generous tip

The train continued on via Palm Springs to Los Angeles but we did not rejoin it as the times of arrival were in the middle of the night. Instead, we finished our holiday by flying to Las Vegas for two nights to take a trip to the Hoover Dam and Grand Canyon. We then flew on to Los Angeles for five nights.



Careful planning was needed as the wonderful long-distance Amtrak trains only run on certain days of the week and arrived at odd times.

We used Uber extensively as public transport did not generally serve

our destinations. The fares are cheap but a generous tip is expected.

The trains run on lines used essentially for freight and often have to move onto sidings to let these trains pass, so progress can be slow at times and there are often delays of several hours. However, on this trip things largely ran to time and there were no issues. We will never forget seeing the USA this way and hope this piece might inspire you to try it when finally travel becomes easier again.



OBITUARY: PAMELA JANE JERVIS MBE

"Pam was great fun and a risk-taker where she felt it would make a difference to young people's lives," says former ASCL president Dame Joan McVittie.

Pam was a pupil at Calder Girls' High School in Liverpool (now Calderstones) where, as well as shining academically, she was keen on sports. She went on to Leicester University, obtaining a degree in geography.

After Leicester, Pam decided to follow her father and go into teaching. She went back to Liverpool and started at St Hilda's, Sefton Park in 1975. On October 25 that year she married Dave, who she had known since school. On their honeymoon in Keswick a joint love of hill-walking was born.

In 1978, Pam moved to teach geography at Queen Mary Fazakerley, where she also became head of the sixth form. She moved to become deputy head at Brookfield School and it was here that she developed her interest in sport within the community.

In 1993 she became the head and although she achieved many successes, she always attributed them to the brilliant staff. She was always keen to encourage students, parents and staff to participate in some form of sport, even if it was just whirling a hula hoop.

Pam became heavily involved with Sport England and other organisations, receiving her MBE from the Queen for services to sport education and sport in the community in 2008.

She was a member of the team in the background for the Manchester Commonwealth Games in 2002 and when London was awarded the 2012 Olympics she became a member of some of the committees for the games, representing northern concerns. Pam was also heavily involved in the 2012 Paralympics, "managing to get us both into the Olympic Village to rub shoulders with the athletes," Joan recalls.

Brookfield and Ruffwood schools amalgamated under Pam's leadership to become Knowsley Sports College.

Soon after she decided it was time to retire but was still involved with Sport England and became part of the Future Leaders programme, using her coaching skills to help new heads and deputies.

On November 27 2014 Pam was invited to have lunch at Buckingham Palace with the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh, nominated for her work behind the scenes for the 2012 Paralympics. She watched the Queen feeding the Corgis under the table.

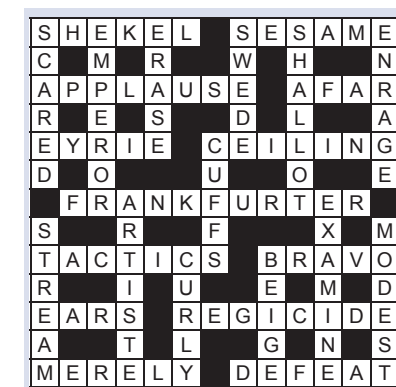
In retirement, Dave and Pam enjoyed many holidays and short breaks together and Dave even began to like going on cruises!

Pam was diagnosed with a brain tumour in early 2021 and died on July 14 2022.

Pam was a lifelong supporter of ASCL, attending all of the national conferences as well as being a driving force in her own region.

Joan says, "I will always remember Pam for her friendship and loyalty", a sentiment echoed by all who knew her.

Ann Mullins



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