

THE MIDLAND PENSIONER



HANDS OFF THE PENSIONS TRIPLE LOCK

WINTER2023/24



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THIS IS THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE WEST MIDLAND PENSIONERS CONVENTION



ABOUT US

The West Midlands Pensioners Convention is the Regional Organisation of the National Pensioners Convention.

Our main objective is to promote the welfare and interests of pensioners, both now and in the future; securing dignity, respect, and financial security in retirement.

We have several very active committees, including a Transport Group which holds regular quarterly meetings with Transport for the Midlands (formerly CENTRO).

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dnhumphreys@gmail.com

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OUR ORGANISATION

We have local and Trade Union branches across our Region. Each Branch is entitled to send delegates to the Regional Council, which meets on the second Thursday of each month (except in January and August, when there are no meetings).

Although our Regional Council meetings are delegate based, visitors, friends and guests are very much welcome to attend. We also welcome applications for membership from non-party political organisations of pensioners and retired people from across our Region. Pensioners can also become individual members.

LOCAL BRANCHES OF THE PENSIONERS CONVENTION

Walsall: Dave Lawrence: 07895979537

Halesowen: Tony Whitehouse: 07715314608

North Staffs: Owen Sloss 07582115742
David Hampton 01782 201724

East Birmingham: Stan Simpson: 0121 783 0734

Solihull: Alan Thomas: 0121 705 3342

Sandwell & West Birmingham:

Brian Allbutt: 07342264482

Coventry and Warwickshire BTUAA:

Sandra Durkin :07860576701

email: covbptuaa@gmail.com

Individual Members: Brian Allbutt 07342264482
email: brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk

Visit the WMPC website for up to date information on the issues facing pensioners including: the latest "Midland Pensioner" activities and campaigns across our Region.

National Pensioners Convention:

Press Releases/ Bulletins/Newsletters and more

Go to: <https://wmpc.org.uk>

WMPC Facebook Group

Saving The Triple Lock for Future Generations



You can see from the above graph; in April 1981 the basic state pension was just above the 25% level as a percentage of earnings; with state pension increases based on the higher of prices or average earnings (the measure of prices was the Retail Price Index); introduced by the Labour Governments in 1974 in response to the acknowledgement that the UK state pension was one of the lowest across western industrialised countries.

It was the 1979 Conservative Government that introduced legislation removing the “earnings link” to the basic state pension with the state pension only going up in line with prices. As we can see from the graph, over the following three decades, including the Blair Labour Government, the UK state pension as a percentage of earnings fell as low as just 15%. It as to be acknowledged that Gordon Brown did introduce a number Universal Benefits to off-set the impact of inadequate state pensions, including the English Concessionary Bus Pass, Free Prescriptions, Winter Fuel Payments.

The 2010 Coalition Government introduced a New State Pension, applicable to men born on or after April 6th 1951 and women born on or after April 6th 1953. And a new Triple Lock mechanism for determining both the basic state pension (currently £156.20) and the New State Pension (currently £203.85). As you can see from the graph, the introduction of the Triple Lock as resulted in a marginal increase in the basic state pension to around 19% of earnings with a greater up lift for those on the new state pension to 25% of earnings.

As we move into what is almost certainly going to be a general election year, the Centre for Aging Better has issued a stark warning about pensioner poverty in the UK in 2024. ” Pensioner poverty is at one of its highest levels at 18% and is more than four percentage points higher than a decade ago; with the income of 2.1 million pensioners in the UK less than 60% of the Average National Wage.

The fight to retain the Pension Triple Lock is Intergenerational, says the Trades Union Council:

“Young workers would infact be the biggest losers from any attempt to water down the Triple Lock, because the increase it delivers accumulates over time. TUC research has found that switching from the Triple Lock to an earnings link would cut about £700 a year from the value of the State Pension by 2050. It would push another 700,000 pensioners into poverty.

AS WE MOVE INTO THIS 2024 GENERAL ELECTION YEAR: THIS INTERGENERATIONAL BATTLE TO SAVE THE TRIPLE LOCK ALONG WITH THE CAMPAIGN FOR A REDUCTION IN THE STATE PENSION AGE IS CRUCIAL.



'The latest disastrous policy proposal from this shambolic Government is to prevent migrant care workers from bringing dependents to the UK. Why are they putting this forward?

Over their 13 years in office the Conservatives have failed to take the action needed to bolster the care sector. Today, social care work is characterised by a lack of training, low wages, and little opportunity for career development. As a result, there is a growing recruitment and retention crisis in social care. Care providers turn to workers from abroad to fill the gaps. Migrant care workers deserve our respect for keeping social care afloat. According to John Pattison, chief executive of the Independent Care Group, there are already 152,000 vacancies in the sector: "Around 70,000 international workers joined the workforce over the last year, and quite simply many care providers would not be able to deliver their services without the support of international recruits."

The policy to stop care workers from moving here with their families will cut numbers - but at what cost? It will, of course, serve to deter future care workers from coming to Britain. Also, the plan will create uncertainty for those already here because they could find that their families would need to leave when they come to renew their visas or change employers. Perhaps some of those people will decide to find work in more stable and welcoming countries. If workers cannot bring their families with them, those who do come will see care work as a way of bringing in short term cash, not as a stable career, which will further damage the quality of care.

This half-baked Government plan threatens to deliver a devastating blow to the care sector which is already on its knees. The consequences for those needing care at home or in a care home will be grave.

Unison general secretary Christina McAnea said the care sector would 'grind to a halt' without staff from overseas: "The social care sector simply could not function without overseas staff. Its workforce has always contained a sizeable proportion of people from beyond the UK. Ministers must rethink this cruel visa plan before permanent damage is done."

Councillor David Fothergill, chairman of the Local Government

Association's Community Wellbeing Board said: "International recruits have helped care providers manage workforce capacity and make a valued contribution to the sector. The LGA agrees that a long-term solution must seek to grow the domestic workforce. To do this the issue of low care worker pay has to be addressed, career pathways must be developed and training and development offers need to be improved to raise the status of people working in these vital roles. In the meantime, international recruits are vital to the sustainability of many providers and if new measures lead to a significant reduction this will exacerbate pressure on the sector."

Professor Vic Rayner, chief executive of the National Care Forum, which represents care and support services, added: "Singling out care workers for restrictions on bringing dependents into the UK... is counterintuitive in a climate where workforce shortage is recognised as the primary stumbling block to the delivery of an integrated health and care system."

I say the government must scrap this measure and get back to grown up politics. If they do not, the most vulnerable will pay the price for their folly. Whoever is elected in less than a year's time must sort out social care once and for all by providing the funding and support it needs to sustain a professional and modern service integrated with the NHS.'

Personally, speaking column by Andy Day, President of the North Staffs Pensioners' Convention, which appeared in the Sentinel on 30th December 2023.

Dear Mr. Sunak,

Much has been written and spoken about the financial effects of expecting women to work into their late 60's. I ask you to take some time and consider the physical, mental, and emotional challenges as they are required to continue in their employment beyond the age of 60 – the age at which we grew up expecting to be able to retire and rest after 44 years of mostly continuous working.

Like many of women of my age – 64 – my body and mind are slowing down. I am living with the effects of cancer treatment, menopause and lymphedema, thyroid problems, asthma, and the onset of arthritis. The very fact that we are fortunate to get free medical prescriptions indicates that the over 60's are prone to medical conditions.

We are worn out by helping with childcare and looking after elderly parents – we are very happy to help our families, but this comes with the physical and emotional cost of being a carer. We are in fact contributing to the economy by enabling our children to work so that they can contribute to the economy directly, and enable our parents to stay longer in their own homes which, again, benefits the economy.

The voluntary sector relies on older ladies, to flourish through their dedicated voluntary work.

As I have already mentioned, I have worked continuously from the age of 16, rearing a family during that time. Because of the nature of my employment - supporting adults and children with learning disabilities- I worked throughout the pandemic so was unable to enjoy months of rest and relaxation.

So, Mr. Sunak, that is 48 years of contributing to the economy.

We may be living longer but our quality of life is greatly compromised. I work at two jobs to maintain a very modest lifestyle. I cannot go on holiday unless it is to stay with friends. If I were to receive my pension, I would only have to work perhaps one day a week to cover my expenses.

Mr. Sunak, I feel that I have had 4 years of my life stolen from me and dread the next two years that I must spend forcing my body to keep going until I will be able to rest.

I appreciate that you are a very busy person, Mr. Sunak, but please think about the points that I have raised.

Thank you,

c.c. Lord Ian Austin

UNISON CALLS FOR AN IMMEDIATE CEASIFIRE



UNISON calls for an end to the targeting of civilians, refugee camps and critical public services, including healthcare, and calls on the Israeli government and Hamas to respect international law. The union reaffirms the right to public services, including clean water and sanitation.

UNISON condemns the indiscriminate bombing of Gaza and reaffirms its call for a ceasefire and full access to humanitarian assistance. We reiterate our condemnation of the heinous crimes by Hamas on 7 October and call for the immediate and safe release of all hostages.

UNISON also condemns any victimisation and harassment of Jewish and Arab anti-war protestors in Israel. We condemn the use of sexual violence in war on any side.

UNISON calls for a renewed impetus from world leaders, including the UK government and the Opposition, for an immediate ceasefire, peace, and a political solution to the crisis, resulting in an end to the occupation and a contiguous Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel.

Posted on [6 December 2023](#)



Mass turnout for Birmingham ceasefire march

Members of the WMPC and Birmingham UNISON Retired Members Section joined around 15,000 people who marched into Birmingham city centre on Saturday 20 January, in the largest protest yet in the city. The bulk of the protesters were from feeder marches from the communities of Alum Rock and Spark Hill who braved the bitterly cold winter weather for the packed rally.

Sadly, lacking from the mass protest was the trade union movement, with only three banners present; two from UNISON and one from the PCS. However, there was a genuinely warm reception from the marchers towards those of us who did turn out. Indeed, UNISON nationally has called for a ceasefire and donated £10,000 to the Medical Aid for Palestine fund, and urged members to join the protests.

The huge protest has shown the call for a ceasefire and for the Israeli state to end its murderous campaign is not going to go away – let us hope the recent condemnations from the United Nations will bring peace a day nearer.

By Maureen Wade

Chair, Birmingham UNISON Retired Members Section



December 2023 saw the latest gathering to discuss an international approach on co-ordinated climate change.

COP 28 was controversially held in The United Arab Emirates, the heart of oil wealth. Do the outcomes offer optimism for the world, or simply offer little change?

Firstly, this was the 28th gathering of the United Nations ' Conference of the Nations' (COP) since 1994.

It was agreed for the first time, that the international community would ' transition away from fossil fuels.

Also, all governments should plan for more action with a view to eliminate fossil fuels and develop renewable energy sources.

However, they should transition according to their needs (including the use of coal, oil, and natural gas) and it was agreed that COP 28 outcomes are not binding.

So does that look like a 'COP out'?

It is certainly good news that the global community are agreed that the way forward is 'without fossil fuels' at some point in the future. The interim period is clearly the challenge. This is particularly difficult for some developing countries and those countries most affected by climate change.

However, there is now a lot more optimism that global warming can be contained to the target 1.5 degrees Centigrade by 2100 and net zero by 2050.

The renewable alternatives are now, greater, greener and cheaper than ever, offering hope; wind, wave, solar etc.

Even in fossil fuel champion countries like USA emissions have fallen by 20% over the last 15 years. (Jonathan Foley study)

Over the last 100 yrs. surprisingly, deaths by natural disasters have halved (Gap minder 14 nation study), not increased as is perceived by most people.

It is very clear that ALL governments need to plan for the transition away from fossil fuels and not 'COP out'. They need to be held to account by us all. This current Tory Government has for example opened up the possible development of a massive oil field off Shetland against all logic. Shetland is the windiest part of the UK with great potential for more wind power turbine alternatives. With a general election looming we can hold them to account.

We can ask all the political parties what their plans are and vote accordingly.

All countries need to be held to account and their plans examined at COP 29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

If the world's superpowers can divert their energies away from war and towards peace, they may be able to prioritise their climate plans.

We are one world, there has to be one solution and it is a green.



Many thanks to our friend and comrade Donald McCombie

ANOTHER BUSY YEAR FOR THE WMPC



The Stronger We Are - The More Effective – We Are Help Build the WMPC in 2024

We are now seeking nominations from branches and affiliates to the 2024/25 West Midland Pensioners Convention Executive Committee.

We welcome nominations for the following Officer Positions

- Regional Chair
 - Regional Secretary
 - Assistant Regional Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Press and Campaign Officer
 - Womens Officer
 - Membership Secretary
 - I.T. Manager
- Gender Balanced Ex-Officio Positions
- 3. Women
 - 3. Men

Nominations and motions to the 2024 A.G.M. should be received by February 29th.

V.I.P. Guests to the Halesowen Pensioners Convention Xmas Party



At our recent Xmas party held in the Caslon Hall which is located above Halesowen library our guests of honour were the deputy mayor of Dudley and his wife. This was Cllr Pete Lowe and Gloria.

Upon their arrivals and after introductions Cllr Lowe was asked to approach the choirmaster of the Shenstone singers to commence their programme this he did and everyone enjoyed a sing -a-long.

Then Cllr Lee was asked to open our buffet which he did and everyone then enjoyed the food which was provided by all the members.

There was then a relaxed atmosphere where everyone enjoyed circulating and chatting.

Just before he left Cllr Lee extended an invitation to the members to visit the mayor's parlour and council chamber for a visit and refreshments.

This invitation I am currently following up on.

Editor: Jenny Sims
 Deputy Editor Violet Rook
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 We would love to hear from you

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 Or write to:
The National Pensioners Convention, Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London WC1N 1AB
 Telephone: 02078376622
 Email: info@npc.org.uk

Members of the NPC Digital Working Party: Jenny Sims (Chair), Verena Beane, David Briggs, Maureen Childs, Sandra Durkin, Alan Edgar, Luke Howard, David Luxton, Violet Rook, Alan Sidaway, Lawrence Huston, Anne Gray.

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 Page 6: News in Brief: Help and information.

Three years on!
 February 1st, National Dignity Day, marks the 3rd anniversary of the NPC's campaign launched in 2021 to end the digital divide. What's the state of play? Jenny Sims reports

The *Connections for All* campaign was launched to address both digital inclusion and exclusion. Its twin aims are to help more older people get online and ensure those who are not, out of choice or for any reason, are not excluded – and are always offered alternative access choices to digital.

Members of the Digital Working Party (DWP) are currently updating its '4 Nations Report' on the digital policies of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, produced in autumn 2019, which included recommendations for NPC campaign actions. Its aim is to help the NPC consider its priorities for digital campaign actions, and the DWP with its workplan for the next two years. Many reports show that too many people are still being left behind if they are not online, do not use a computer, laptop or smartphone (and cannot use Apps).

To campaign successfully the NPC needs information and real-life examples from its members to use when making its case for change, whether to government e.g. over the planned closure of rail ticket offices; BT over its planned 'digital voice' switchover, or internet providers over the unaffordable costs of broadband. It needs regions to "engage" in the campaign, as the NEC agreed in 2019, which could include helping to raise awareness of the *Connections for All* newsletter, and its signposting information to the many opportunities nationwide - from Swansea to Southwark to get online.

E.g. Thanks to NPC Wales chair's influence, Swansea Council this month launched a series of digital training days and presentations for older people at the Waterfront Museum, which are being published in NPCW's own newsletter, *Dragonspeech*.

Our own survey of NPC found that many members would take up an offer of free training if they knew about it. Our *Connections for All* newsletter will always carry some information both regional and national on getting help – and updates on avoiding scams. Please spread the word! Please tell us your stories. NPC *Connections for All* presentation for the Dignity Action Day Guest Speaker Elizabeth Anderson 2pm 31st January 2024 See the NPC article on: <https://www.npcuk.org/post/connections-for-all-2024>

IN THIS ISSUE

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- Trans day of Remembrance
- Cost of Living; energy cap; Standing Charges; State Pension 2024
- State of Ageing
- Conversion Therapy



CHAIR'S BLOG

Welcome to our latest newsletter. I hope that you will find it interesting in providing information on issues in the community as a whole and also a reflection of the work the group has been involved in.

As chair of the group I truly believe that every individual has the ability to be a leader – not because they are

big shot city high flyer or the CEO of some international organisation, is hugely wealthy or an elected official – but on a 1:1 basis with every interaction you have with others.

Where you can lead by example, in being open honest truthful and that your actions match your words. Where you do what is right not what is easy. The work that truly needs doing regardless of cost or loss of profits and you treat everyone with respect and dignity for the person they are and the inherent right to live on a planet we all respect and look after.

How many of us can hold our head up high and say we have put our heads above that parapet, that we have called out the bullies, openly challenged when things are not right, stuck to your guns when your inner self is screaming there is a problem, even when you can't identify what is wrong, in trying to get others to listen and act.

Most of the world lives in a digital age where it can be easier than ever to hide behind an on screen name and cyberbully people with hateful talk directed against your gender, your ideologies, your creed. Or buy in to extreme views, simply because loud prominent people just say whatever they want – regardless of proof or evidence to back up their views and opinions. In an age of fake news, people need to be broadening their world knowledge and learning more about what is going on behind the scenes not what is published or seen. By being actively engaged with those around you, those you meet through work or socially, where you can see differences as a chance to learn rather than as a wedge to drive between communities. Rather than being a passive observer and by doing nothing, allow history to repeat all of its horrible mistakes, where society lambasts what has happened yet does nothing to alter any of the underlying issues that causes the problems.

I want to share just some of the things that, as Chair, I have been doing over the last few months and also some of what is up and coming in the next few months for our Working Party.

Recent work:

- Ongoing piece of work looking into the mental health, well-being of LGBTQ+ people through their lives and into older age. To highlight the points at which support interventions may hold the most benefits in protection against depression, anxiety, self-harm and other mental ill health issues



Issue : December 2023

Members of the Health & Social Care Working Party:

- June Clark
- Mary Cousins
- Martin Gallagher
- Jean Hanlman-Smith
- Valerie Johnston
- Pat Roche
- Christine Sanders
- David Vickers
- Maureen Wade

We hope you continue to enjoy our newsletter and that you will share your stories with us.

- Office Xmas closure will be from end of day on 15th December 2023. Re-open 2 January 2024
- Preparing for End of Life: The working party has produced a document with guidance from the National Bereavement Service. This will be available in the new year.
- We wish all NPC members a safe and relaxing festive break with the hope of things improving some time soon.

Dr John Carlisle is an Economic Socialist Researcher. He contributes to the 'Yorkshire Bylines' and chairs the Yorkshire Socialist Health Association. He campaigns for economic reform particularly in relation to public services. John was a contributor to the National Policy-Makers Guide to the NHS. He attended the meeting of the Health and Social Care Working Party on 7 November and gave a very interesting talk.

John's opening statement was, "if the NHS fails, the economy will fail with it. For economic reasons alone the NHS has to succeed." The NHS generates employment and money which is spent locally. There is a failure by Government and top management. Why are they such a failure? The Government keeps changing decisions, makes policy and thinks it will happen. There is a failure to 'look upstream', i.e. to look and investigate trends and address the causes of health problems. 80% of emergency care is for 20% of the population. There is a need to look at and work on the reasons for this. The NHS does not need reform. It needs constant improvement. The focus has been on cost cutting. The statement that the NHS is unaffordable is wrong. The Government can always find money as it did during the COVID pandemic.

Delays with hospital discharges have been increasing dramatically since 2014. A chart was presented showing repeated imminent crises since 2014 due to delays with hospital discharges when services needed going out of control. In 2017 delayed discharges were 200% higher than in 2014. Sheffield Older Adults Home Treatment Team developed a way of cutting delays with discharges to a minimum, by putting together a team of a Consultant Psychiatrist, medical staff, Nurses, Advanced Support Workers, Administrators, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists, Non-Medical Prescribers and an ACP (Advanced Clinical Practitioner). The team work with the patient to find out what she or he needs. They reduced delays with discharges from 5.7 to 1.2 days. But this has not been adopted across the country as it should have been.

While the workforce kept things under control initially, over time the healthcare system became destabilised. Doctors will look at cutting costs and making improvements with services, but they tend not to look at issues with the system. So there is a need for other voices to raise problems with the system. When asked whether the Government is deliberately running down the NHS in order to privatise it, John replied, "yes."

Welcome to this very special edition of Exchange: a tribute to a women who made a big difference to the work of the Women's Working Party. We celebrate and remember Janet Shapiro, whose editorship of Network Exchange is a living legacy. We hope it will both interest and inspire.
 info@npcuk.org NPC 62 Marchmont Street, London, WC1N 1AB
 Ruby Cox

Remembering Janet
 1939-2023

Janet was an inspiration to us all. I first met Janet when I was elected to the Women's Working Party of the National Pensioners Convention in 2014 and immediately recognised that she was a remarkable and resourceful woman with an abundance of energy, drive and intellect. A great campaigner for the rights of women and all older people. She was caring and compassionate as well as fierce a defender of all that is right and good.



Rosie and Janet carry the banner at 1816 NPC Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool.

Her commitment and contribution to the National Pensioners' Convention, the Women's Working Party and others has been immense; especially her knowledge of economics and as Editor our Women's Network Exchange Newsletter.

Over the years I came to regard her as a friend as well as a fellow campaigner and will remember her with great fondness. We will all miss her. The contribution she made to the work of the National Pensioners Convention will not be forgotten.

Janet was a stalwart of the trade union movement, especially her own union UCU, but also NPC and the Hornsey Pensioners Action Group. She also appreciated art, music, theatre, literature and good food. I was sorry that she was unable to attend the NPC Convention in Blackpool in June. It had been our custom on one evening

during our stay to take a bus to Lytham to enjoy a meal in a lovely, if rather expensive, Italian restaurant. It was a real treat and an enjoyable excursion. I told her subsequently how much I had missed her company. It came as a terrible shock so soon afterwards to hear that she was no longer with us.

Rosie MacGregor National President, NPC
 Tributes to Janet:
 The Guardian Other Lives
 Janet Shapiro obituary | Mathematics | The Guardian
 The Ham and High—her local paper
<https://www.hamandhigh.co.uk/news/2381734R/1/obit-janet-shapiro-hornsey-pensioners-willton-act15/>

For electronic copies of the latest Newsletters from the National Pensioners Convention Open the link below www.npcuk.org

WHAT'S ON



West Midland Pensioners Convention

WMPC Regional Council Meeting

Thursday February 8th

11.00 till 1.00p.m

Guest Speaker

Dawn Montgomery

Information and Advice Officer

AGE UK Birmingham

Thursday March 14th

Guest Speaker

Sarah Honeysett

Benefits Advice Officer

Birmingham UNISON Local Government Office
19th Floor the Maclaren Building Dale End B4 7LN

Visitors and guests always very welcome.

Halesowen Pensioners Convention

The Branch meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month in the Shenston Theatre in Halesowen Library from 10.30 to 12.30.

Future Meetings

Thursday February 15th
Midlands Air Ambulance

Thursday March 21
Royal National Institute

For the Blind

New members always very welcome

Contact: Tony Whitehouse 07715314608 or

email: whitehouse970@gmail.com

Walsall Pensioners Convention

The Branch meets at 10.30 a.m. on the first Friday of each month at TMO Offices meeting room- Richards House, Burrows Street, WS2 8NN

We also have a very active ladies' group and new members are always welcome.

For further information contact:

David Lawrence: email djlaw211@gmail.com or

Call: 07895979537

Sandwell and West Birmingham

Pensioners Convention

Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at West Bromwich Central Library from 11.00 a.m. till 12.45. New members are always very welcome to join our friendly and diverse group of pensioners. We also hold monthly social events.

Contact: Brian Allbutt 07342264482 or

email brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk

East Birmingham Pensioners Convention

The Branch meets on the second Tuesday of each month between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. at:

Ward End Library

Washwood Heath Road, B8 2HF

New Members Always Welcome

Contact: Branch Secretary: Stan Simpson

Email: simpsogs@yahoo.co.uk

Or call: 0121 783 0734 / 07930182269