

THE MIDLAND PENSIONER



HANDS OFF THE WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

Summer 25



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THIS IS THE QUARTERLY 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).

Regional Secretary:

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wmpcec@gmx.co.uk

Assistant Regional Secretary:

Brian Allbutt: 07342264482

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:

Bulletins/Newsletters and more

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

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

Halesowen: Bob Davies

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

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Sandra Durkin :07860576701

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Individual Members: Brian Allbutt 07342264482

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/7125023377569919>



WEST MIDLAND PENSIONERS CONVENTION



ANOTHER BUSY YEAR FOR THE WMPC



The Stronger We Are - The More Effective – We Are Help Build the WMPC in 2025

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| • Regional Chair Yvonne Washbourne | Ex-Officio Positions |
| • Regional Secretary Sandra Durkin | Women Three Vacancies |
| • Regional Vice Chair Owen Sloss | |
| • Assistant Regional Secretary Brian Allbutt | Men |
| • Treasurer David Williams | Santokh Singh Sahota |
| • Press and Campaign Officer Vacant | Pat Collins |
| • Womens Officer Maureen Wade | One Vacancy |
| • Membership Secretary Vacant | |
| • I.T. Manager David Humphreys | |
| • Transport Group Secretary | |
| Interim: Yvonne Washbourne | |

International Workers Memorial Day 2025



Members of the West Midlands Pensioners Convention joined our Labour Movement colleague to

Commemorate International Workers Memorial Day in the church yard at St Phillips Cathedral 28.3.25

With the State Retirement age set to increase to 67 by 2028, more and more older people are remaining in the work place into their late 60s.

For some this will be a personal choice but for many older working people, struggling to get by, working into their late 60s will be more about keeping a roof over their heads, heating their homes, and having enough of an income to be able to feed themselves and their families. The risks faced by older people in the work place have been highlighted by the Health and Safety Executive:

"In 2023/2024, workers in the UK aged 60 and over accounted for 34% of all work-related fatal injuries, despite making up only 11% of the workforce. This indicates that older workers are disproportionately at risk of fatal workplace accidents, with the rate of fatal injury increasing with age.

International Workers Memorial Day is not only the annual day when we remember those who have tragically lost their lives in the workplace but also the countless numbers of retired workers whose lives have been shortened and blighted by the conditions they faced in the workplace often many decades before.

The Health and Safety Executive have identified several key factors that go some way to explain why workers over the age of 60 account for a significant number of work-related injuries including 34% of fatal injuries in the workplace.

Factors Contributing to Higher Risk:

- **Physical Changes:** Age-related decline in physical abilities, such as reduced mobility and reaction time, can make older workers more vulnerable to falls and other accidents. * **Musculoskeletal Disorders:** Increased prevalence of musculoskeletal problems in older workers can lead to more severe injuries from workplace accidents. * **Health Conditions:** Older workers may be more susceptible to the effects of workplace hazards due to chronic diseases or other pre-existing health conditions. * **Longer Recovery Times:** Injuries sustained by older workers may require longer recovery periods, potentially leading to longer absences from work. * **Increased Risk with Age:** Research shows that the risk of fatal injury increases with age, with older workers experiencing higher rates of fatal injuries than younger workers.



Yvonne Washbourne Regional Chair West Midlands Pensioners Convention

"It is important as ex workers we honour colleagues, friends and family who have died due to work. Many people are still working into late 60's and 70's. Some unfortunately will not live to get a pension"

"Fight for the Living, Remember the Dead."

Mike Shakespeare from the UNITE North Birmingham Community Branch



To Mike Shakespeare right is the plinth commemorating the death of two young workers who lost their lives building Birmingham Town Hall in 1834.

As a young apprentice I came across a much older electrician whose name was Billy Shaw

Billy had spent time in the merchant navy; he was also some forty years older than me.

We got talking about his time at sea. He told me of when in the 1930s he sailed from New York on a ship loaded with arms for the Spanish republican army fighting Franco. When, to get through Franco's blockades, the crew were obliged to learn fascist songs enabling them to sail through and deliver the ship's cargo and bypass the blockade.

Billy told me of another time in the merchant navy collecting cargo in the sub-continent in 1947.

Billy noticed that the Dockers there had lumps protruding from all parts of their bodies. He asked the officer in charge why and was promptly told that it was caused by the sheets of asbestos they were in the process of loading for shipment to the UK.

Some years ago, I got talking to a trade union official, for what was then the Transport and General Workers Union, the official in question tended to mainly represent plasterers, a trade that often used to lag pipes with materials containing asbestos. He told me that there was hardly a week went by when he was not attending a funeral for a past one-time union member probably for an asbestos related death.

In 2006 I was working along with three other colleagues on a job at a junior school in Aldridge. The job was to replace and rewire light fittings, all very straight forward with one major exception the ceiling was a Artex ceiling. Artex contains, albeit a small percentage of asbestos. So, when drilling into the Artex ceiling throwaway overalls masks, goggles and hats needed to be worn. Artex can be found in most offices, factories, and buildings and on building sites. When refurbishment is taking place in many a building it is almost certain that asbestos will be in situ somewhere.

Asbestos has been prevalent in many places of work where I have attended for work related reasons.

Less lucky, were my two brothers who while young men, one still in his teens, were carrying out a short-term contract in Long Acre in Nechells, both contracted asbestoses which they put down to this short-term work. Both told me the air was thick with dust and sadly no doubt had their lives shortened by that asbestos in the air.

The one thing they and I would agree on is when it comes to asbestos, then an ACCIDENTAL death is the last thing that asbestos can be attributed to. The state and the corporate world have known of the danger from asbestos for a hell of a lot longer and far pre dates its common use in the west. But despite the evidence the dangers were ignored resulting in a shorter life and often an unnecessary painful death

We thank Mike for sharing with us his own work life experiences.

The West Midland Pensioners Convention is Supporting the UNITE Refuse Workers



the public in what is a difficult and demanding highly physical job. With a reduction in their wages of over £8,000 annually.

The West Midlands Pensioners' Convention (WMPC) sends its full support and solidarity to the Unite refuse workers in Birmingham in their action to defend their pay, health and safety and working conditions.

We stand with you in the face of these unacceptable cuts which will impact on Unite members involved, their families and the vital service you provide to communities in Birmingham.

We recognise the difficult, essential, crucial work undertaken by you and believe you deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and fair pay.

WMPC condemns actions taken to undermine the strike and urges Birmingham City Council to recognise your concerns and enter meaningful negotiations and negotiate a fair and just settlement.

The decision to strike is never taken lightly and we commend you for standing up for what is right.

Solidarity.

The Regional Secretary of the West Midlands Pensioners Convention said of the dispute

"These are skilled and responsible jobs that this council is prepared to down grade, putting members of the public and refuse workers at risk of injury and even loss of life; as sadly was the case in Coventry when a crew member was crushed to death after being caught in the loading gear on the bin wagon."

The Birmingham UNITE Refuse workers have been out on indefinite strike now for over two months with no sign of a real breakthrough with the City Council. Who, far from negotiating in good faith, declaring a "state of emergency" and Labour government Cabinet ministers, including Wess Streeter, feeding the media biased against the industrial action being taken by the UNITE refuse workers; rather than, as the General Secretary of UNITE Sharon Graham has, called for the government to intervene constructively to resolve the ongoing Dispute.



“The impact of Social Media Platforms on our lives”

In 2001/02 I was a non-executive director of an NHS Trust and for most of that period admits to taking little or no interest in personal information and data; like most members of Parliament that was my standard reaction in those days.

I do now come to this issue of personal information from a political standpoint, particularly when you look at the use of personal information in a health context. On reflection I had been involved in political campaigning for about thirty years and the methods I would use in campaigning, especially has a Member of Parliament would largely stay the same over those thirty years.

In the last ten years we have seen a generational shift in the way politics is conducted and that is a reflection in the way our society has changed because of the advent of social media platforms and the internationalisation of information and data. What happened, around 2015 the social media platforms, facebook and others, realised that they themselves were gathering huge amounts of information on individual voters. What they were in effect doing was recording individuals use of their own computers.

Going on a computer is a bit like having a parrot on your shoulder, looking at everything you search, investigate, and are interested in. All that information is recorded on a platform and may well determine what you are interested in and importantly, how you vote.

A relatively small number of people realised how valuable that information was. In the political context, it was possible to tailor messages individually to persuade them how they vote; rather what had been the case throughout my political life time of communication with people broadly with generalised messages; that is completely revolutionary in our society.

What is also important is that the platforms collecting this information are international platforms and in effect outside the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom and our Laws and Parliament. This began around 2015 at the time of the UK General Election and in 2016 with the election of Donald Trump in the US.

At this time also there was the beginning of the very large social media groups, which in my view has had a major effect on the polarisation taking place in our society at the present time. This polarisation was exploited in 2018 and exposed in the Cambridge-Analytica scandal which was using information gathered from millions of users of these social media platforms, without their knowledge or consent, for commercial gain.

The other thing that became obvious from the enquiries we conducted in 2018 was that these social media platforms were completely undemocratic and unaccountable, for example we wanted Mark Zuckerberg to appear before our committee and he refused to come to parliament.

Turning to health. We know that the Conservative government, before last year's general election, contracted with another company Palantir, which is a US Digital company, to gather National Health data. The subject matter of this contact with Palantir, has been largely hidden from view or open to public consultation. Subsequently we have difficulty in knowing what information is being taken, what information is being used and for what purposes. We do know that the social media platforms are exercising huge influence over the Trump administration. We have legislation in the UK which lays down some legal framework for on-line safety which we know the Trump Administration is opposed to. My fundamental concern is that we have lost control of all this information.

This is an edited version of a talk given by the former Labour M.P. Ian Lucas to the National Pensioners Convention Health and Social Care Working Party.

Adopting the policies of Reform UK will not solve the crisis in Social Care

UNIONS and campaigners have condemned Labour's immigration reforms after the Home Secretary confirmed that "We will be closing the care worker visa for overseas recruitment."

Under current rules, care workers need a certificate of sponsorship from a British employer, from which the Home Office now plans to demand more, urging them to hire locally and train domestic staff instead.

Unison general secretary Christina McAnea said "The NHS and the care sector would have collapsed long ago without the thousands of workers who have come to the UK from overseas. "Migrant health and care staff already here will now be understandably anxious about what is to happen to them. "The government must reassure these overseas workers they'll be allowed to stay and continue with their indispensable work." "So long as care wages stay barely above the legal minimum, employers will never be able to recruit the staff needed to deliver a national care service of which we can all be proud."




She said: "The way overseas care workers have been treated by some corrupt care bosses is shameful. "Politicians must stop describing care jobs as low-skilled. They are anything but. "The work is tough, requires a high level of skills and huge amounts of empathy — as any family who's relative is receiving care support knows only too well."

Ms McAnea said that the social care sector has been in crisis for years, is severely understaffed and "unable to provide care packages for all those needing support." "That has a huge impact on the NHS too," she said. "The government must get on with making its fair pay agreement a reality and ensure social care is funded properly."



Care England chief executive Professor Martin Green described the decision as "a crushing blow to a fragile sector." "The government is kicking us while we're already down," he said. "For years, the sector has been propping itself up with dwindling resources, rising costs, and mounting vacancies." He said that "while the government had made promises of reforms under the Employment Rights Bill and a Fair Pay Agreement, those were "years away and come with no significant funding attached." He warned of 70,000 domestic workers lost in the last two years, with vacancies still soaring. "We need proper funding, a real workforce plan, and immediate recognition that, without care, the NHS, our communities and countless families will fall apart."

This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in the Morning Star:



CONNECTIONS FOR ALL

Issue 9
January 2024

The Newsletter of the NPC Digital Working Party

Editor: Jenny Sims
Deputy Editor Violet Rook

CONTACT US DIRECTLY

We would love to hear from you

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

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Safer Internet Day
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to digitally excluded. Some get
online some don't.
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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 NPCV'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 about 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>




RAINBOW NEWS LGBT NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE

- Chairs Blog
- 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 LGBTQI+ 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

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Health & Social Care News

National Pensioners Convention Health & Social Care Working Party

Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, London NW1N 1AB
020 7837 6622 info@npcuk.org www.npcuk.org



Issue : December 2023

Members of the Health & Social Care Working Party:

June Clark
Mary Cousins
Martin Gallagher
Jean Hardiman-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 rolled going out of control. In 2017 when 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."

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Women's Network Exchange

NPC Women's Working Party
Issue 60 December 2023

Welcome to this very special edition of Exchange: a tribute to a woman 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.

Ruby Cox
info@npcuk.org
NPC 62 Marchmont Street, London, WC1N 1AB

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.

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



Rosie and Janet carry the banner at 2016 NPC Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool.

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 2 Mathematics 1 The Guardian
The Ham and High – her local paper
<https://www.hamhigh.co.uk/news/238121ARLOBakes-janet-shapiro-hornsey-pensioners-action-group/>

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 June 12th
11.00 till 1.00p.m

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

Visitors and guests always very welcome.

For further information contact:

Sandra Durkin: 07860576701

Brian Allbutt: 07342264482

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.

New members Always very welcome.

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 1.00p.m. New members are always very welcome. We also hold monthly social events.

Contact: Brian Allbutt 07342264482 or
email brian.j.allbutt@hotmail.co.uk

East Birmingham Pensioners Convention

**MEETS ON THE SECOND THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH
10.30 A.M TILL 12.30P.M.
WARD END LIBRARY WASHWOOD HEATH ROAD**

**FOR FURTHER DETAILS CONTACT THE SECRETARY:
STAN SIMPSON: CALL 07930182269
EMAIL: simpsogs@yahoo.co.uk**

UNITE Community Birmingham North

Next Branch Meeting

Wednesday June 11th – 7.30 p.m.

Chester Road Baptist Church Chester Road
Sutton Coldfield B73 5HU

In the aftermath of May's local elections, the meeting will discuss the rise of Nigel Farage's Reform Party and the threat it represents to the Labour Movement and its allies.

Please join us for this important discussion.

THE WOMEN CHAINMAKERS' FESTIVAL 2025



Come and celebrate our local history at this year's Chainmakers' Festival—right here in the heart of Cradley Heath!

This special day brings our community together to remember the incredible women chainmakers' of 1910, whose fight for fair pay helped shape workers' rights across the UK.

What's on:

Live Music & Entertainment
Street Theatre & Re-enactments
Traditional Chainmaking Demonstrations
Guest Speakers
Stalls, Food & Fun for the Whole Family

It's FREE – and everyone's welcome!

SATURDAY 28 JUNE 2025

11AM - 4PM

**MARY MACARTHUR GARDENS
B64 5AP**

Bring your friends, your family, and your community spirit.
Let's celebrate Cradley Heath's proud place in history!