

**COMMUNICATION  
WORKERS UNION**

# South East Central CWU Annual Report *2008 / 09*



**In Confidence for South East Central CWU members**

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**BRANCH SECRETARY – CHRIS POWER**  
**Annual Report for 2008**

**INTRODUCTION**

It is now some 16 years since I started taking time as a Trade Union representative from the BT Group of companies, and there certainly have been some changes. The company has gone from around 200,000 to less than 100,000 and the Union membership has also fallen due to that drop. We have held fairly stable as a branch at around 1000 members, not only from BT Group, but also other companies associated with the Telecoms sector. The branch has some good activists, and a full range of officers whom take time to assist the membership in issues they face both individually and collectively in regard to the employer. In fact new activists are coming through and this is really encouraging, and there are more reps around, other than the Branch Chair and myself, to represent members in difficulties. However, the difficulties are ever more difficult to overcome especially in the current economic climate.

**GENERAL MEETINGS**

During 2008 we had 9 General meetings in total around the branch area. 2 of these toward the end of the year were pretty much exclusively on the *BT PENSIONS* issue. Meeting attendance ranged from the 20's to the 50's depending on issues at the time. Venues were the traditional Brighton, Tunbridge Wells and Hastings main areas, and we also we had a meeting in the Sevenoaks area for the first time in a while and due to the large BT Sevenoaks Workstyle site we are having another meeting there in March 2009. All meeting dates for 2009 are advertised within this Annual report.

**BRANCH COMMITTEE MEETINGS** (Photo January 2009)

4 meetings during 2008 were held and it is great to see commitment from the committee members taking time to come along 4 evenings a year to decide on issues which affect the running, and direction, of the Branch. They have been full flowing and sometimes heated debates, but I believe the committee gets stronger. Decisions on recruitment activities and in depth reports from officers on the last quarter's events are submitted. However, the committee has only 1 female delegate, and no delegates from outside the BT Group of companies. We represent members within 9 different companies in the Branch and we could debate issues to those companies in a more knowledgeable way if the Committee had delegates from those companies in attendance. I would like to thank all Officers and Committee members for

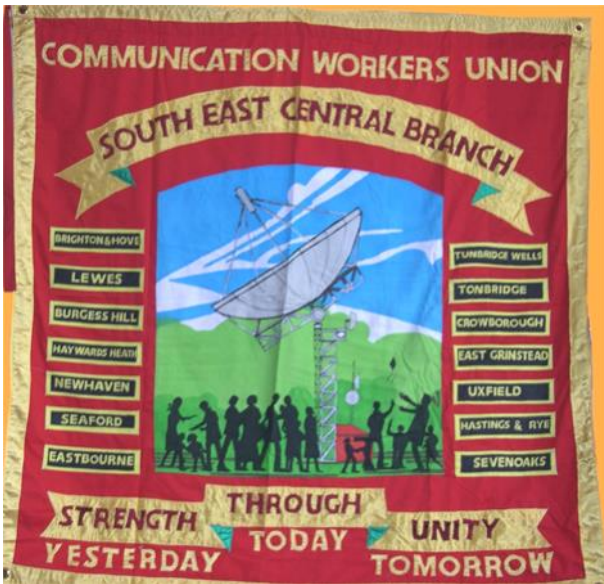


their help during the year, especially to the Branch Chair Dennis Noble as he has to put up with my manic ways more than most.

## **BRANCH ORGANISING & RECRUITMENT**

South East Regional Organiser Nic Childs has been working closely with the Branch toward the end of the year in relation to targeting companies for Organising within the Brighton area. PTF- A charitable fund raising call centre- was a company of about 100, whose employees contacted the CWU and asked for assistance in relation to issues being faced by employees from their employer. Several informal meetings and several leafleting exercises took place resulting in a substantial sign up to membership. During this period, one employee was dismissed (Successfully gaining reinstatement upon appeal) and company management became extremely agitated with CWU reps attendance at site. This campaign continues to grow and illustrates the necessity of advertising and expanding Trade Union values.

Virgin media members have also been contacted over the year and representation



**Branch banner—new for 2008**

75% of the Branch membership, the main event of the year has been the PENSIONS issues. The company went to great depths of explanation to basically say that the Pension fund is under funded. Rather than go through the whole basket of issues raised and implemented, it is enough to say that the resulting deal is a deterioration in BT Group Pension rights. However, as the CWU National Executive stated all along the deal has resulted in having a defined benefits pension fund, and many recently joined employees have a much better pension entitlement at the end of their working life.

### **BT Group Companies**

Within the BT Group of companies, which covers about

both locally and nationally has taken place. The membership within Virgin Media is stable and to a degree increasing. Other companies such as INKFISH, American Express and other Telecomm contracting companies are all areas being looked at for increasing Union membership over the next year. Within BT, the Sevenoaks Workstyle site is an area where non membership is at a hard core level and this is historical in relation to contract conversions and lack of information on non membership employees. The Branch has run a recent recruitment campaign and intends to continue on a bi-monthly basis.

The other major issue through the year and one that has involved meeting after meeting within all divisions of the company is that of attendance patterns. A dozen set of local negotiations have taken place within Openreach , BT Global and BT Operate, the majority of which have reached relatively acceptable conclusions. It does, however, underline the fact that BT Group companies want to ally the workforce to the world and home economy, and encourage workers to work later and later into early evening. The traditional 8-4pm appears to be at an end but the Union will continue to pursue that the company adheres to agreements where they are in place. The most difficult set of negotiations are those that are still going on as this report is written- those negotiations with BT Global Services at Sevenoaks. The negotiations are hampered at this site, to a degree- with a hard core of non members which the CWU will not be able to support.

One of the most serious events within BT Groups this year, took place toward the end of December on the Openreach division. BT Openreach employs around 6000 people in South England and after having recruited steadily over the last 3 years the economic slowdown has drastically affected work volumes. Particularly hard hit is the Frames environment with around 50% volume reduction. Meetings were attended which detailed to the Union the requirement for downsizing although the company has said that there will be no compulsory redundancy's. However, with around 50 employees being selected for the Career Transition Centre in the Downs area (CTC) it is an unstable time we enter into on Openreach. There are concerns that the compulsory redeployment will



Branch members attending a General meeting  
And Les is there too!

also continue through the next financial year.

BT Operate was also another division that announced 1800 surplus staff during 2008 and the majority of these have been transferred to the CTC also.

It is understood generally, that members levels of importance are pretty much how much they get paid, what their start and finish times are and their PENSIONS. Well, we have had issues on all these over the last 12 months. With the identification of surpluses in BT Group it is unsteady times we are heading for. United we stand should definitely be the rallying call!!

I wish all members well for the coming difficult year. Chris Power. Branch Secretary. SE-Central CWU.

## Branch Chair Dennis Noble Annual Report 2009

May I begin by wishing all our members & their families a belated “Happy New Year” on behalf of all the officers and committee of the South East Central Branch of the CWU.

You know, when you get to my age the years just seem to fly by (Ah). Yet again last year was another year when we saw a relentless need for change by the company as far as our members were concerned.

The pace of change never seems to slow down even for a minute, to allow us to get our breath back. I can safely say that the officers of the branch have never known a year quite like 2008.

Needless to say along with changes comes the uncertainty for some of our members. For example, will my job still be there in 2009? Will technology engulf my present job? will I be identified as a career changer? Will I be made redundant this year? These are all questions we in the union office are frequently asked. Unfortunately we do not have all the answers at present. What we do know is that as we start this New Year we are in the middle of an economic downturn the likes of which, we have never seen before. At the time of writing this report I can tell you that work volumes have fallen drastically across all divisions. Everybody I talk to (including managers) is worried about losing their jobs. Unfortunately I don’t believe the company has all the answers to our questions at this moment in time either. Like I say, unsettling times for us all.

### **Regional /Committee Structure.**

The branch committee did meet on a regular basis throughout this past year.

We have had some good contributions and debates at the meetings and overall attendance has been good.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those members who served on the branch committee this year. They have all given up their free time to attend committee meetings in the evenings on behalf of the branch. It can seem to be a thankless task serving on the branch committee; however it is much appreciated by us, the officers of the branch



Chris Power and I have once again been part of the South East Regional Committee. We also attend the Openreach Southern Committee on your behalf. We also sit on the South East Regional Joint committee of which I am the Chairperson.

These regional meetings prove very useful to us in getting across the same message to our members across the whole of the region. We have continued to raise your concerns right across the South East area via these meetings.

I am also pleased to report that both Dave Kauffman & Steve Taylor have again been attending Industrial Relations meetings with management on your behalf, so many thanks Dave & Steve for your efforts throughout the year.

## **Finances.**

I would like to thank both Chris Dunn our former Financial Secretary and Dave Kauffman for looking after our finances for the past year.

The union finances are coming under ever closer scrutiny by CWU head office these days. With that in mind, it gives me great pleasure to tell you that the branch accounts are once again looking very healthy for the year. We shall be moving to a new accounting system called “Sage” in the new financial year. This system allows Head Office to look directly at our accounts. As a consequence of this, Head Office will be looking to see what plans branches have in place regarding where, when, and what branches wish to spend their money on. “Use it or lose it” looks like the motto for 2009.

## **Women’s Issues.**

Dianne Hill has served as our Women’s officer again this year. She has also looked after the Political, Equal Opportunities, and branch membership so thanks to Dianne.

## **Health & Safety.**

I would like to thank Steve Awcock, Nick Smith, George Hannah and all the safety team for all the excellent work they have done on the safety front again this year.

I have to say once again the South East Central branch has been at the forefront of the Health and Safety arena with innovative ideas such as holding “Workfit Road shows” to enhance the way forward as far as Health & Safety is concerned.

I do need to tell you though that accidents involving our members this year have still been higher than we all would like. As the officer who deals with the accident cases for the branch I have to say that one accident is one to many. We all need to particularly focus on our individual risk assessments and work safely. I know there is currently a big drive by management and the union to try and get the accident rate down within our area. Good news for us all.

## **Openreach**

One of the biggest issues on the Openreach agenda last year was the “Attendance Patterns” review. Both Chris Power and I attended several meetings with all our local tier2 managers on the subject. I am pleased to report that all of these negotiations have now been concluded. We as a branch together with management managed to maintain a voluntary approach to the negotiations and unlike most other branches we did not have to escalate to national level because we could not agree. All in all we gained a lot of accolades for the way in which we achieved a resolution.

We continue to meet with all the local senior managers on a regular basis to air your concerns.



Dennis Noble and Alan Eldred

Chairs Report Continued.....

Here are just some of the other main items discussed with managers throughout the year , Work Allocation, Jobs Furthered Back, Tour build, Disciplines, Performance/ Attendance, Critical Defects, Right First Time to name but a few. We still currently meet with five Senior Operations Managers or SOMs in our branch area. So as you can see we are kept pretty busy with Openreach issues.

### **BT Wholesale.**

The 21CN project seems to have been placed on the back burner so to speak this past year. Job cuts have continued further throughout the year on this division. There doesn't seem to be a clear direction forward for our members to take to enhance their working lives at the moment. I can only say these are still very worrying times for our members within the Wholesale division.

BT's "Efficiency Challenge" is now very much in evidence.

There is no doubt that 21 Century Network will decimate the traditional work our members have always embraced if and when 21CN or its predecessor finally gets going in earnest

**BT Operate and Design** was set up last year and is now fully operational. Most of our members mainly at C3 grade fall into the category of BT Operate. Again it's still wait and see as to how this new set up performs.

### **Global.**

Our members in Global services have had a particularly hard year as this division

which has always been held up as the flagship of the BT fleet ran into massive financial troubles. Locally we are currently involved in the Attendance Patterns review that is taking place in the Sevenoaks Workstyle building on behalf of our Global members. There is some good news for the site as it looks likely that it will expand by way of more contracts being won by Global which will in turn mean more jobs we hope.

Our business division colleagues have also faced similar cuts and changes to their work streams.

### **Branch Meetings.**

We have held regular branch meetings around the patch and they have been on the whole fairly well attended. It would be nice if you could please try and get along to a branch meeting near to you. I will guarantee you will find out about something that is of interest to you, so come on give it a try.

I would just like to thank Chris Power our branch Secretary for putting up with me over the past year.

Finally, I would like to thank "You" the members for giving me your support as your Chairperson over the last year.

It really has been a pleasure to serve you on behalf of the CWU. I hope to see & talk with many of you at this years AGM in Tunbridge Wells.

Should I be re-elected, I promise you I will continue to fight for better terms & conditions of employment for you all.

Dennis Noble South East Central Branch (Chair)





**Asst Sec Report**  
**David Kauffman**

2008 has been a year of challenge. We as a branch have had to negotiate with many different parts of BT

What started out as a challenge to accommodate the Other Licence Operators agreement that BT has by extending operating hours within departments at the start of the year, has seen Departments look at all aspects of there operation as work flows slowed during the year.

There has been a National down turn in the economy of the country which has had an effect on BT like all companies and we have seen BT push for a change in working patterns in:

Field service

Controls

BT operate / wholesale

Global

This has been by changing attendance but also in managed workforce redeployment .

The Fibre Work streams and 21cn are on the horizon but have not yet been rolled out with the opportunities for our members that we would like to see .But we will push for direct labour and NOT contractors wherever possible.

BT as a company has moved and negotiated with CWU head office for a change in the pensions. As a Branch we held several meeting that where well attended and supported by members as we had National Officers down to talk on the changes .The changes have now been agreed . I am sure we are all opinonated on the situation, as some will now have to work longer to get similar benefits

To those that did manage to retire this year I wish a happy retirement .

I have assisted on recruitment drives with other branch officials like we do every year. This has consisted of approaching non members and members of other branches who have moved to work in our area at places like Sevenoaks Workstyle.

We would always encourage people to join the union so we can negotiate on there behalf from a position of strength

These recruitments went well but if you know of anyone who wishes to join please let the branch office know and we can get forms out for you to sign them up.

Yours sincerely  
David Kauffman



# Annual Reunion of Retired Union Members

Held on Friday 10th October 2008

At the Tunbridge Wells Football Club

The annual reunion was very well supported with colleagues from Sevenoaks, Tonbridge, Hastings and Eastbourne. The Venue provided comfortable and relaxed surroundings, enabling friendships and past memories to be shared and relived. An enjoyable evening was spent by everyone.

Many thanks to Dianne Hill who helped with the organising and refreshments and Dennis Noble who kept an eye on the bar and Paul Bridger who organised the Hastings coach.

Editor; A special thank you to Dave Lomakin for organising the event and for submitting this report



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## Branch committee 2009

If you are interested in joining the South East Central branch committee which meets 4 times a year on a Tuesday evening in a central location (At the moment Uckfield Civic centre) to help formulate branch policy and discuss the branch negotiating standpoint on many issues please return this form to either branch office as detailed in this report, or make yourself known at the AGM, at the Preston Park Hotel in Brighton on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February starting 7.30pm. It is unlikely all positions for committee will have been filled.

Committee meetings last 2 hours and we are especially seeking members from ethnic minorities backgrounds, women, and gay/lesbian members to join the committee.

Also members from companies other than BT are particularly welcomed as we represent members in some 9 companies in this area. If you are unable make the meeting please forward the slip below to **fax 01273 555533** where upon receipt an officer will contact you to discuss more

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NAME.....

EMAIL ADDRESS.....

CONTACT NUMBER.....

# Through the Ages

*A fun quiz to test your knowledge of days gone by!*



- A) 604
- B) 614
- C) 406



- A) Renown
- B) Ambassador
- C) Relate 90



- A) 200 series
- B) 300 series
- C) 400 series



- A) Adastralfon
- B) Astralfon
- C) Astrofon



- A) Delta
- B) Viscount
- C) Renown



- A) Ambassador
- B) Venue
- C) Delta



- A) Ambassador
- B) Trim Phone
- C) Renown



- A) Relate 90
- B) Relate 100
- C) Relate 80



- A) Freestyle Range
- B) Converse Range
- C) Diverse Range

*Answers can be found at the Branches web site: [www.cwusec.org.uk](http://www.cwusec.org.uk)*

## Steve Awcock Health & Safety Co-ordinator

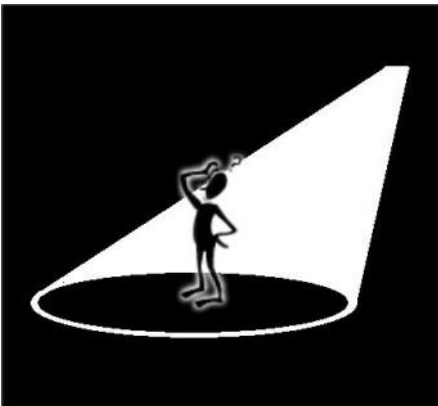
As always I would like to use this opportunity to thank the Branch members and Branch Officers for their continued support throughout the year, all without whom this role would be almost impossible. The Union Safety Reps again have shown that they are all more than capable of their role in the health & Safety committee within the Branch. A special thank you to George Hannah and Nick Smith for their continued support and help throughout the year, and helping me to hopefully remember more things than I forget.

### Openreach

It has yet again been an up and down year as far as Health & Safety is concerned within Openreach. There has been a complete overhaul by the company in the way that they structure the management side of health & Safety. This has caused a few problems regarding representation at a regional level.

A situation compounded by the extremely unfortunate and premature death of the representing manager towards the end of last year. We now have a replacement and regionally things seem to be moving in the right direction after our first formal meeting with the new management lead. Included in the talks was the promise of certain aspects that we have been very keen to get involved in with the company, to form a joint approach to Health & Safety within Openreach.

WITHOD (Working in the Hours of Darkness) : Towards the end of last year external engineers would have been aware that the WITHOD agreement was bought into doubt. This was due to the fact that there was no current risk assessment on how to use the WITHOD equipment with the new Safety Belt No. 11. There were other issues along side this point so a full review with consultation between the Union and Openreach management took place. In December '08 an agreement was been reached and training with the WITHOD Equipment and New Safety Belt have now started throughout our Branch area. However everyone should still carry out a full personal risk assessment and anyone in any doubt should contact their manager regarding the activity they are due to undertake.



It would appear that there is a big focus by Openreach at present on Risk Assessments being carried out, especially by engineers in the field. There have been a couple of disciplines that have been taken out by the company within our Branch area covering this issue. It reinforces the need to carry out a thorough risk assessment and if there is any doubt at all please make sure AGAIN that you contact your manager. That does not mean that the risk assessments carried out by the disciplined individuals were not thorough and this is an issue that I am making representation to both regionally to management and nationally to Head Office. With recent announcements from Openreach these are (as already reported from other Officers) worrying times for everyone, however it is important to keep doing your safety and in the way you have been trained.



### **A thorough risk assessment is vital**

### **Accidents in the Workplace**

This year we have focused a lot on accident investigations within the branch safety education programme. It is vital that all the branches safety reps are well trained when it comes to accident investigation and all members have an equal role to play to aid them. If you are unfortunate enough to have an accident at work it is vitally important that you report it. You must report it to the company, this should be done within 24 hours (ideally) of the accident. When reporting it you will be given an incident report number. Please keep this number safe.

We have had a couple of accidents recently that have been hard to track down and in some cases gone missing and if you have the incident number it makes this work a lot easier. Secondly it would be of enormous advantage to us (your branch) if you

would inform us as soon as possible as well. All the contact numbers you need are in this report. The earlier we have knowledge of your accident the quicker we can react. It is a well known fact that the sooner an accident is investigated the easier the process becomes.

Remember an accident investigation is not about apportioning blame, it is about finding the cause of the accident. We do not always get to hear of an accident until sometime later sometimes as much as a week to two weeks later and by then any evidence that would have been at the site would be long gone.



## Safety Cont...

We stated last year that it was our aim to get out a monthly publication to members. We didn't quite manage one every month but it was a good start. It's not until you try something you realise what's involved. We have tried to make it as varied as possible to include as many diverse activities that all our members undertake. If you are a member of the South East Central branch and didn't receive our "Safety Net" last year please contact the branch and we can add you to our mailing list.



Publication from the Health & Safety Committee of the South East Central Branch

[safety@btinternet.com](mailto:safety@btinternet.com) [www.btdinternet.com](http://www.btdinternet.com) [www.sec.btinternet.com](http://www.sec.btinternet.com)

Lastly if there is anyone out there interested in becoming a Union Safety Rep, please contact myself or either Safety Officer or Branch Office and we can arrange for you to come to a meeting to see what the Safety Committee does..

## Equality Report

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Linda Roy is our new National Equality officer, she is from the postal constituency, her department at CWU Headquarters work hard to keep our Union in the loop with other Unions and also getting information out to branches.

**Equality is about making sure people are treated fairly and given fair chances.**

**Equality is not about treating everyone the same, but realising their needs are met in different ways.**

Our Union recognizes this and that is why we have separate Equality Conferences, Disability, Women's, Lesbian, Gay Bisexual & Transvestite, Youth and of course the Retired members Conference. From each of these Conferences 2 motions are voted for to go on to Annual Conference, bringing together the main



issues of our diverse membership to a wider audience. By having separate Conferences we continue to represent all the various strands and here in the South East we have just set up an Equality Committee, our first event shall be at Gatwick with displays depicting Black history. Hopefully a SE equality newsletter will follow.

Reports from this years Conferences can be found on our website. [www.cwusec.org.uk](http://www.cwusec.org.uk).

We still need a youth representative (under 30); we also need a rep for issues and a retired rep.

If you have any queries or would like to get involved in any of the above areas of equality within the branch please contact.

Dianne Hill 07747 193133 or [cwu.sec.tw@btinternet.com](mailto:cwu.sec.tw@btinternet.com).

## Women's Report

Once again as the elected secretary of the SE women's regional committee I represented the CWU SE at the Chainmakers festival in the Black Country which saw over 200 CWU members (lots of branch banners) marching to celebrate the victory of the women chainmakers in Cradley Heath. In 1910 they went on strike for 10 weeks for 10 shillings (50p) a week this laid the foundation for the campaign for the National minimum wage.

SERTUC hosted an event to celebrate the centenary of the Matchstick Girls strike 1888. 200 young girls (many only 15) were protesting about the poor working conditions and health issues during their 14 hour day in East London. After 3 weeks of strike Bryant & May (employers) gave in. This was the first organised strike giving hope to the "poor" low-paid workers; this was followed by the Dockers strike of 1889.

**Women leading the way!!!!**

The TUC women's committee are looking to have another day out in the region. Last year it was Oxford. I have been trying to find out what women's events/strikes over the years have taken place in our branch area. Does anyone know of any in Brighton or the surrounding area? If so please contact me.



Violence against women is 15% of all crime with 2 homicides a week in the UK and it crosses all races and classes. Because domestic violence causes distress to members and can affect their employment it is also a trade union issue.

The CWU is committed to oppose all forms of domestic and workplace violence and to assist members who are affected by such violence

The CWU & TUC have and are involved in many campaigns, Reclaim the Night/Worker's Rights Day plus working with the Eaves Poppy project helping young women who have been exploited in the sex industry.

If there are any issues you think we should be getting involved in or any problems please let me know, especially local issues or campaigns or if you would like to be involved in the women's committee, please contact me 07747193133

[cwuse.women@btinternet.com](mailto:cwuse.women@btinternet.com)

or the branch 01892 522948

## So what's been happening in the last year?

Early in the 2008 season we held our second PO/BT Vehicle Rally another great success, with a number demonstrations carried out by the CE volunteers and our colleagues from both Local and National Openreach, Andy Moore demonstrated current Fibre Splicing while one of our volunteers Bob Awcock showed how it used to be done - Peter Jones, another of our volunteers showed jointing of conventional cables, Steve Awcock demonstrated Pole Testing past and present and gave an idea how it will be done in the future.

At the other end of the site, Martin Porter and his team from Openreach Network development and Capability gave a glimpse of the future of the Network. All demonstrations drew a constant audience throughout the day.

A great day was had by all and this year's show we hope will be even better—with demonstrations and interactive activities.

The date for your diary this year is **SUNDAY 19th APRIL**.



**Connected Earth Amberley**

In June we invited Telephone Operators from the Worthing area to a reunion, it was some 40 years since most finished work and we expected around 40 to attend. In the end over 90 enjoyed the event with several attending having started work during the Second World War.

Apart from getting re-acquainted with one another, the Operators had the chance to sit at the CB1 switchboard to have their photo taken along with their friends, see a film from 1964 in which many of those present starred and enjoy a buffet lunch courtesy of BT Archives.

In the second half of the year, the museum as a whole took a look into the future and one of the things decided was a change of name to something which better described the attraction. From the start of this season the museum will be known as ;

**Amberley Museum & Heritage Centre**



**Volunteers preparing the Semaphore exhibit. Editor :Apparently, Health & Safety doesn't run in the family (thanks Dad).**



Our biggest project in 2008 was the revamping of the external display with the creation of a half scale replica of the Chaley Heath optical Telegraph mast, which was part of the 1820s Portsmouth to London Admiralty Telegraph route. The mast is a faithful replica in every detail and is the result of many hundreds of hours work by all the team.

Over the winter we have been making changes within the Telegraph room, new displays will show how the Portsmouth to London optical Telegraph operated, where the 15 stations were located and models showing the different types of station employed.

In addition, a number of other changes are being made to the other exhibition rooms including an interactive display allowing visitors to try their hand at some testing using a Wheatstone bridge - as used in the 1920s Cable Test Desk..

**To find out more log onto [www.amberleymuseum.co.uk](http://www.amberleymuseum.co.uk) or to see details of all the Connected Earth sites [www.connected-earth.com](http://www.connected-earth.com)**

**Remember as a current or retired BT employee you can still gain free entry to Amberley Museum & Heritage Centre by producing your BT Pass OR BT pension slip.**



**Semaphore Exhibit finished**

**CWU**  
The communications union

**FREE**



Will writing service for ALL CWU members and their partners

CWU's Legal Services Department is offering a FREE will-writing service for members and their partners.

To take advantage of this service simply telephone  
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or email

**[freewills@cwu.org](mailto:freewills@cwu.org)**

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## Smoke Alarms George Hannah



While watching the world's strongest man competition, in the holidays, I was reminded of a strong man, Precious McKenzie, who regularly would appear on Blue Peter when I was a child. I searched for him online and was quite surprised to be directed to the New Zealand Safety Council website where I discovered that he was a manual handling advisor and back injury prevention consultant. While navigating through this websites pages I came across a banner which read "Stop the Children Burning".

This rather alarming statement was the title to a short film in which Adrian Butler, chairman of the World Fire Safety Foundation and former full time New Zealand fire fighter explained how ionisation smoke detectors, widely available throughout the world were, in effect, useless as smoke alarms. There was a practical demonstration in which a piece of foam, the type used in furniture, was placed into an aquarium with a hot soldering iron embedded into it and one of this type of smoke alarms placed beside it, then the lid of the aquarium was placed on top.

I was quite shocked as I watched the aquarium fill up with smoke and yet the alarm made no sound. Mr Butler answered the question of why then does my alarm go off when I cook toast, he explained that this is because they do detect tiny "particles of combustion" but these are not smoke.

After watching this frightening short film I went on to read a bit more of what they were saying. The New Zealand safety council are running a campaign to have ionisation smoke alarms banned from sale in New Zealand. They quoted the case of Freda Birch a 91 year old that was killed when an electrical fault in her fridge became a smouldering fire. Her home was fitted with three of these smoke alarms which failed to warn her. The New Zealand safety council strongly recommend that photo-electric or optical smoke alarms be fitted instead of ionisation alarms.

I have since done little bit of research and have found that one supplier suggests that ionisation type detectors are better suited for detecting fast flaming fires and would be best placed in rooms where there is a greater risk of fire where as optical smoke alarms are better at detecting smouldering fires and are ideally suited to hallways and landings.

Kent Fire and Rescue service have, on their website, good practical advice regarding smoke alarms in which they give a brief description of both types.

My feelings match their thoughts it is better to have some form of smoke detector than none at all. Please be safe.



**Fin Sec Report**  
**Report to the branch for 2008**

The branch finances remain healthy for the year ending Dec 08 .During the year the incumbent Fin sec Mr Dunn stepped down from the position and I would like to thank him for his diligence over the past years in keeping the accounts .

I was persuaded to act as financial secretary up to the next AGM and during this time I have had to pay out death benefits to one retired member Mr John Creese and one working member Mr Dave Birchall and are condolences go to there families .



There looks like change on the horizon for all at the CWU as branch accounting systems will be done on line to a server maintained at head office in the future.

We wait to go live !

We have had a couple of welfare payments to members this year agreed by the trustees. We have several trustees across the branch and these will need to be re-elected at the AGM.

The branch has purchased a number of digital cameras this year distributed amongst safety reps and branch officials to help with Accident investigation .

We did purchase a number of Pens that we sent to members during the year and a number of diaries were purchased and may be available from one of the branch offices on a first come first serve basis .

A fully detailed financial report will be available at the AGM

Yours sincerely  
David Kauffman

**Obituaries**

John Creese  
Ian Cutting

Dave Birchall  
D. Whatman  
P. Goldfinch

Tim Gibbons  
M. Tanner

Our sympathies go to all the families and friends of the members  
that have passed away over the last year.

# Re-launching the learning agenda

The union learning project has been running for some years now, in our branch area we set up a learning centre at Withdean three years ago but, unfortunately, it fell into disuse. I felt a sense of disappointment when it turned out that the learning centre was not being used, after all Di Hill had spent an awful lot of time and energy getting the idea off the ground.

Di decided she didn't want to stand as lead ULR (union learning rep) and passed the baton on to Peter Hartley who found, due to pressures of work and other commitments that he couldn't give the role the time it deserved.



I took on the role of lead ULR just over three months ago and after a short time got down to the business of breathing new life into our branch's learning agenda.

The regional project worker, Tracey Bent, and I have met on a number of occasions and, with her help and support, put together a short survey. It was, and still is, my intention to survey as many of our branch membership as possible to ascertain what training they would like and, almost as importantly, where they would be prepared to travel to in order to get this training.

I feel that one of the reasons our learning centre stalled was due to poor, if not non-existent, advertising of that fact that is there. I also feel that, to some degree, we aimed our efforts at the wrong target audience.

I have spent over twenty years as a BT field engineer during such times as the introduction of the cipher hand held terminal through to the advent of the laptop computers and although I fully understand that technology can improve things I realise that some people may have difficulty adjusting to the new ways of working.

In fact I can well remember some of my colleagues, in those early days, throwing their ciphers across the room in sheer frustration as they tried to input their times for the day.

The union learning project gives us all the opportunity to gain new skills at little or no cost, I believe that no one is ever too old to learn something new, although I recognise that learning may not be to everyone's taste as a fun thing to do in your spare time. The thought of returning to learning after some years may seem daunting, there may be the fear of failure or perhaps an adult may feel they are open to a certain amount of ridicule.

If you have not heard of the union learning project and would like more information, or if I haven't got round to your team briefing yet please feel free to contact me.

George Hannah

## Political Report

I was elected to the Southern and Eastern Region TUC executive this year and represent the CWU on the SERTUC regional council. All Unions vote at this forum to support various campaigns.



We are also seeing trade councils being re-launched. We now have an active Trades Council in Hastings along with the one in Lewes.

2009 will see unemployment rise constantly, some predict it will hit 3-4 million but no-one knows as a recession driven by financial collapse is unknown territory. Gordon Brown appears to be the right person to lead us through this “recession” or whatever it is. At present there is nothing much coming from Cameron or Clegg.

It has been 10 years since Labour introduced the National Minimum Wage Act ignoring opposition from the Conservatives and CBI. Labour saw this as a vital part of delivering fairness at work. There are always some who will abuse the law but we don't hear of people working for £1 an hour as we did under the Tories. If we did we would have the

law on our side. We have won many rights for workers that we would lose under the Tories.

Again I have represented the branch on political issues as Chair of the SE political Region. We continue to support various campaigns, the Rights for Agency Workers being won with the help of Labour Members of the European Parliament. This was a long and hard-fought battle, but we won. In the South East we have only one elected Labour MEP Peter Skinner who is always very supportive of CWU issues. We need to get him re-elected in June along with other Labour candidates. We need stronger Labour support here in the South East.

We have many MP's in our Region who support our issues including Michael Foster, David Lepper, Des Turner and Celia Barlow who is often at union events. We also have Gary Heather (CWU Executive) standing in Tunbridge Wells.

The Hooper Review has recommended that the Royal Mail should be privatised. With TNT, a Dutch firm waiting in the wings, Gordon Brown faces a large back-bench revolt over these plans, which threaten tens of thousands of jobs. With banks almost “Nationalised” it beggars belief that in this economic climate we can look to sell off parts of the Royal Mail. The Tories and Lib Dems want all of it privatised.

The BNP will be fielding candidates in the June European Elections.

Racism has no place in our World.

Use your vote keep them out.

Perhaps now would be a good time to make the case for a National comprehensive fibre network !!!!! Public ownership sounds like a good idea.

Dianne Hill

# **South East Central CWU General Meeting Dates 2008**

AGM Wednesday 11th February Royal Wells, **Tunbridge Wells**  
Wednesday 4th March **Sevenoaks (Venue TBC)**  
Wednesday 6th May **CSSC Hastings**  
Wednesday 3rd June Preston Park Hotel, **Brighton**  
Wednesday 5th August Royal Wells, **Tunbridge Wells**  
Wednesday 2nd September **CSSC Hastings**  
Wednesday 4th November **Brighton**  
Wednesday 2nd December **Tunbridge Wells**  
Wednesday 10th February **AGM Brighton**

## **Committee Meeting Dates 2008**

Tuesday 13th January **Uckfield Civic Hall**  
Tuesday 7th April **Uckfield Civic Hall**  
Tuesday 7th July **Uckfield Civic Hall**  
Tuesday 6th October **Uckfield Civic Hall**

**All members of the South East Central CWU Branch are welcome to all General Meetings. There will be a buffet and a drink courtesy of the Branch at every General meeting.**

# **South East Central**

## Points of Contact

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# South East Central CWU

## 2010 AGM

*Wednesday 10th February*

*The Royal Wells Inn*

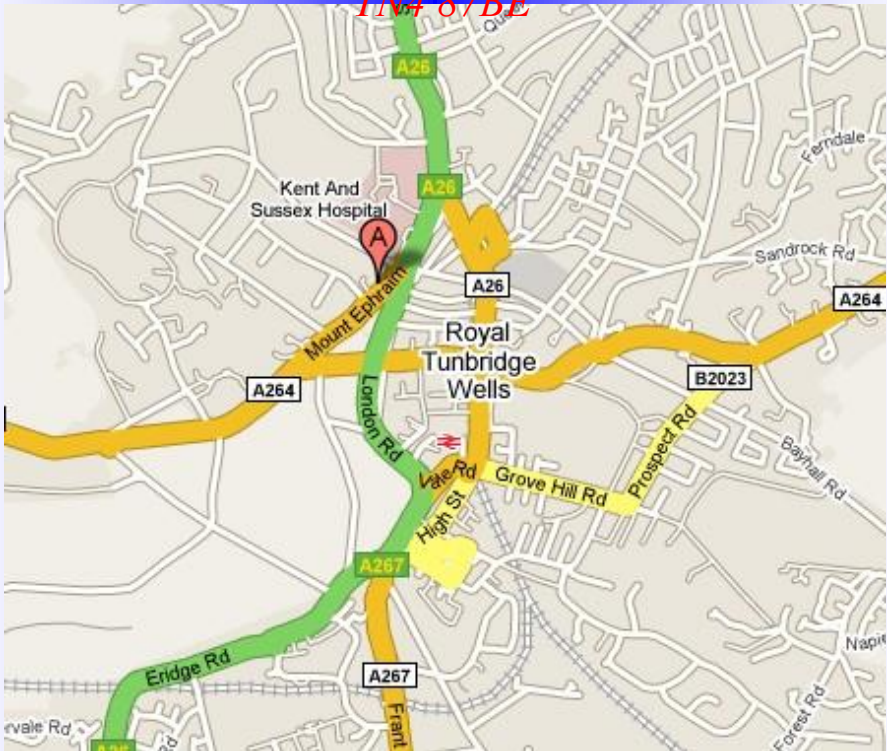
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There will be a buffet and a drink on the Branch at the meeting for all members who attend. If anyone requires transportation can they please contact either Branch Offices please.