



# *South East Central* 2018 Annual Report



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

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### Picture on front cover

Openreach Vans - after a year of change! If you are trying to work out where this was taken, it was in the Tonbridge Exchange

*The views expressed in this annual report are personal to the author concerned and may not be the view of the branch. This report is "in confidence" and is meant for CWU South East Central members only.*

# Chairs Report - Dave Kauffman



Hello everyone. As Chairperson of the South East Central Branch, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have participated with, and supported the Branch, during 2018. Anyone who has worked within an organisation will know there has to be a driving force to make things happen, and it is Chris Power, the Secretary, who has done this for our Branch. The Assistant Secretaries, who without their help in sharing the workload, this Branch would be unable to achieve as much as it does.

All the Senior Reps do work in their own time and show great passion in dealing with a variety of issues. Issues, being as diverse as, Political, Women's, BAME, Disability, LGBT, Youth, Equality as well as dealing with the general issues. The Branch Committee, who

also turn out in their own time, travel to Uckfield to debate and make decisions on Branch policy in the absence of General Meetings.

We currently have a few General Meetings a year, but we will have to adapt this, as we have seen attendance at these meetings dwindle. Although we had great support at our Special General Meetings we held on Pensions, the branch is actively looking at ways of improving the way we like to account ourselves to you, the members. However, if you are one of those who came out to one of our General Meetings, thank you!

If you would like to get more involved with the Branch and you have a bit of spare time outside of work hours, then please let us know. If you would like to observe the Committee in action, drop us a line and we may be able to get you to attend as a guest.

As for my role this year in the Branch, I have the lead role on most things within Openreach and have attended many meetings and branch forums over the last year. I also represent members at Grievances, Disciplines or Attendance Hearings that they may find themselves involved.

2018 has seen a change in Openreach again. In 2016, Openreach announced a new CEO and last year we saw BT group make Openreach a standalone Company, but remaining under the BT group umbrella. This led to the TUPE of many thousands of people into this new Company and the CWU have a legal letter of understanding on the transfer of those team member grade people and what it means for them going forward.

With the acquisition of EE, BT had a great number of Managers, Human Resource (HR) and Industrial Relation (IR) people which were duplicated over the two companies. BT announced to the stock market, of its intention to down size its management by thousands over a number of years. In addition, they announced the selloff of its Headquarter Building, in Newgate Street, London. We are now seeing the start of this transformation, with managers in Openreach having to apply for their own jobs. This has led to some big names within Openreach, leaving the



Company. The change has also led to a number of new people coming into Openreach/BT, as HR or IR managers, who have never had to negotiate with a Trade Union of our size and penetration before, and it is my opinion, we will see some tough battles ahead in 2019.

We have already seen Openreach put jobs out on lower terms and conditions, and although the terms within the 20-20 contracts are different from those within NEWGRID, the CWU has worked hard to develop the pay band, so that a triple skilled engineer on 20-20 gets the same as a B2 engineer.

This Branch, under my stewardship, has been pushing for better terms on the

issue of “Personal Travel Time”, and pointing out that BT and Openreach are in breach of the 2015 European ruling on TYCO (the measuring of unpaid time expected by an employer of its employees). The Branch has put a number of propositions to conference on this issue, and it has become CWU policy, to push BT and Openreach for change. I have also been pushing for a debate and a “drains up” on FLEX, as it would seem that Openreach abuses the system and FLEX goes missing without any explanation from the company.

Under the collective bargaining agreement, the company are meant to try and get agreement on changes to Jobs or Job Descriptions before advertising

jobs. This process is something that Openreach seem to have forgotten and I’m sure, during this year we will have to remind them again and again.

I have no doubt that 2019 will have as many challenges as 2018, and my request to you as our members, the eyes and ears of the branch, to let us know what’s going on in your work area. Everything you tell us is always treated as in confidence. You can call or email me on any issue, although I am not the font of all knowledge, I will always help where I can.

I hope that 2018 was a good year for you all and let’s work together to make 2019 the best we can.

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## Assistant Secretary - Richard Cain



I was elected into the role of Assistant Secretary at last year’s AGM in February, but didn’t actual start in the role till about September. In this time,

I have mainly been reading up on the many processes and procedures in the company with a lot of help from the other officers.

I joined the company in 2013 as an apprentice and now most of the time I am a service delivery engineer in

the East Grinstead area.

For the last 3½ years I have also been a Union Safety Rep which has included running a project inspecting all the cable chambers in our region.

In the next year I am hoping to attend a few industrial relations meetings for the branch, as I continue to learn all the intricacies of being a CWU rep. I also hope to get out to see more of you. in your workplaces.

# Assistant Safety Officer - Rick Cobern



his middle, but it did lead to a reported accident.

In all seriousness, the majority of engineers out in the field, work both in and around vehicles and its very easy to become complacent, I mean

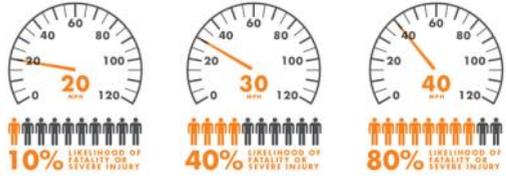
what could possibly go wrong?

Well I'm sure, all those

with a turned ankle will be very pleased to tell you its not much fun when it happens. So please, when In and around your vehicle, be extra careful. It could take only a moment to be vigilant, or a life time wishing you had, it's your choice!

When you are driving just remember you may only think your licence is at threat when speeding, but it

could be someone else's life. Keep to the speed limit, no matter how much of a hurry you are in. If this makes you late and anyone has anything to say about it, drop me a line I will be happy to talk to them about it.



DEATH DUE TO SPEED

Well Comrades, 2018 was a very eventful year.

We had more than the average amount of accidents and incidents. There has been a marked increase of incidents involving vehicles both while driving and whilst parked or around vehicles. We even had two incidents on the same day, by two different engineers, in the same car park, involving the same pothole! You Couldn't make this up! The pothole has been reported and at the time of writing this we are still working towards getting it filled.

In other news, a pothole in East Grinstead TE car park caught someone out in the classic "Dr Foster" fashion, because it looked like a puddle. Fortunately, the depth of the puddle was not as severe as poor old Dr Foster as it didn't swallow the member right up to

Let's be extra vigilant in 2019, because accidents often make all our life's more difficult than they really need to be.

If you see a pothole in a company car park, do me a favour and report it to BTFS (0800 33 44 88) before someone else thinks it's just a puddle, because next time it really could be up to their middle.



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# Assistant Secretary - Pete Francis



Being the co-ordinator for branch recruitment, increasing our membership is one of my chief responsibilities, which means I spent a lot of the time in the field, meeting many potential members. I don't do this alone, as I organise other Branch officers to assist in our recruitment drive. The Branch had a good year on recruitment, as we met our self-imposed targets. I would like to welcome all the new and transferred members who joined the branch in the last year. We will endeavour to exceed your expectations.

ments. There are often other officers on site, when I am not there.

We have had our fair share of issues at Sevenoaks, most have been resolved successfully, but some not so good. One case I have been dealing with since January 2018 is heading now towards an employment tribunal. You never know how each case will go when it starts, but we are prepared for all eventualities.

## Health and Safety Co-Ordinator

As well as my roles above, I am also the Safety Co-ordinator for the branch, assisted by Rick Coburn and Steve Taylor. They work tirelessly for the branch, helping ensure all our Union Safety Reps are looked after. Both manage our ever expanding NAS Drive database, where all our information is stored and accessible for the USR's. Richard Cain continues to do sterling work managing the ongoing exchange cable chamber



It feels the company will be changing even quicker than over previous years, if that is possible? We have been told of the TUPE of all our BTPFS colleagues and the prospect of Fleet, we need to ensure that whatever happens, it is in the best interests of our members. The protection of their terms and conditions is paramount.

We had a new initiative for the field engineers in 2018, "Operation Bump". This was an enormous success for the branch, where we had all the officers meet as many field engineers as possible, and distribute a number of travel thermos mugs. These went down very well. We will be carrying on this initiative throughout the year, but in different formats.



I was always told the longer you do this job the busier it will become. I am also the elected South East Regional Representative for Business and Public Sector, which is now part of Enterprise. Plus, I am also the Safety co-ordinator for the branch.

I am based in the Sevenoaks Workstyle building where we have a branch office on the ground floor, next to the First Aid room. My door is always open for members to come in and I will try to be in the building at least twice a week. Sometimes this has been hard to achieve, due to my other roles and commit-

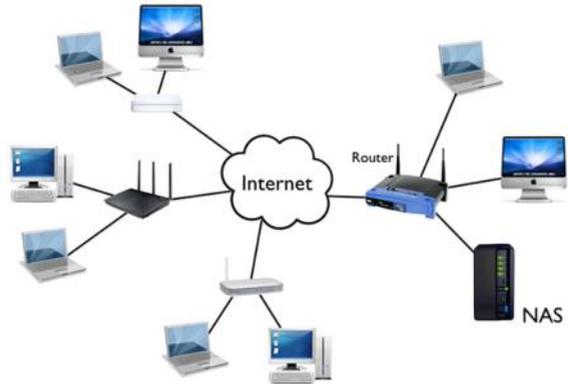
project.

The year has been very difficult for the branch, as the company seems to be reigning back as much time as possible, which can only have a detrimental effect on our ability to conduct as many safety checks as is necessary. This nationwide issue, means we need to ensure we are as diligent as possible in our health and Safety duties.

It appears we have had an increase of accidents in the branch this year, which I am looking into. We are concerned this may be due to an increased pressure on performance, or perhaps it's due to the high number of inexperienced new recruits? Also, an increase can be partly due to our growing membership, which has grown by over 30%, in the last three years.

As I mentioned in my report last year, the NAS drive is enabling us to be more productive and transparent in the way we perform, which can only be of benefit to the branch, as well as BT. It has been so successful that the region is looking to us to help set up the same sort of systems to help the South East Region, move forward.

The branch has been instrumental in instigating a regional project, to look at



dangerous or unsafe positioning of PCP's and DSLAMS. It is apparent that the company have sited many new cabinets in unsafe locations. With electrical testing that is required in some of the "street furniture", there is a real need for all this equipment to be checked, that it is in a safe location for all our engineers and to ensure all electrical testing is up to date. We will be rolling this project out to our USR's in the second quarter of this year.

Due to the operational changes of Openreach, the safety teams have decided to mirror these changes by joining with the London Region, which has resulted a real positive effect in knowledge sharing.

We have also aligned most of our meetings, both internal and with the company with the London Region. The workload for the safety team has probably doubled in the last year, partly due to changes at regional level, but this is seen as a positive move.

Lastly can I thank everyone involved in the Branch safety team and without our USR's, nothing would be achieved. We have a great bunch of rep's who are skilled in identifying and maintaining, a safe working environment, for all our members and employees of BT.



# Political Officer - Dianne Hill

Are we in or are we out?  
Are we leaving or are we staying?  
Deal or no deal?



Another year of austerity and cuts, Council budgets are now at #BreakingPoint – and Labour councillors are saying that **enough is enough**. Over 5,000 Councillors have signed a petition to this effect Councils are facing a funding crisis and the Tory government is to blame.

Austerity has caused huge damage to communities up and down the UK, with devastating effects on key public services that protect the most defenceless in society, children at risk, disabled adults and vulnerable older people and the services we all rely on, like clean streets, libraries, children’s centres, etc. So many Councils now really struggling to cover their statutory duties. With a £3.1 billion funding gap it will be a year of uncertainty

on all fronts. Austerity is not working, it was a political decision where only the rich have benefited. In 2010 the National debt was £811 billion, now it’s £1,729 billion!

Universal Credit is causing havoc across the Country. Amber Rudd said she is looking at it, if she wants to keep her seat in Hastings, she needs to. When in 2016, Universal Credit came in food bank referrals in Hastings went up by over 80% and have remained so. In all Towns and Cities food bank usage is up, it’s up 38% on last year in Tunbridge Wells, many in work, but not earning enough to live on.

In theory, Universal Credit sounds great, bringing six benefits together, but claimants are having to wait between 5-12 weeks before their money is sorted. I’m sure we all know someone who has been through the

PIP procedure, this is where you have an assessment by a trained, medical person, who assesses your disability. It is then passed onto someone with no medical experience who works for one of the four Companies this has been contracted out to, around 50-80 % are refused and end up being appealed, costing us millions of pounds. It is estimated there were 597 deaths of homeless people in 2017, average age 43 years old, a funding gap this year of £100m for homeless help! Mortgages and rents all add to increasing hardship for many people with no sign of social houses being built for the many thousands on our housing waiting lists.

I attended the Tolpuddle Martyrs festival in July, once again it was very well attended with some very good speeches, especially Francis O’Grady and Jeremy Corbyn, on the history of the Trade unions and the



need for them.

Myself and Dave Lomakin attended the march for a “New Deal for Workers”, in London, highlighting low pay, zero-hour contracts, etc. The CWU were very well represented. We did get very wet!!!

I also attended the anti-Trump march, lots of people congregated in Trafalgar Square, many speakers (Dave Ward) from all walks of life, can’t really print what some of the placards said, but they were funny. Trump’s standoff with the Democrats over a border wall which dragged the US into the longest-ever government shutdown? Imagine no wages, very grown-up!

I attended the Labour Party South East Conference in Southampton where I was re-elected to the Labour Regional board to represent the Trade Unions. 350 delegates plus visitors, many MP’s spoke, many workshops and the evening fundraising meal had Emily Thornbury as the guest speaker.

The march for the People’s Vote in October seemed almost as big as the march against the Iraq war. Hundreds of people from across the Region filled trains. Excellent speeches from all Political Parties. it was a wonderful atmosphere and the sun shined brightly.



12<sup>th</sup> November 1918, the day after the armistice saw many Labour branches set up. Centenary events were held across the Country. In Tunbridge Wells we had an evening celebration, speakers included Richard Blackwell ex-BT and ex-Councillor, and I finished the event as the first female leader of the Labour Group on Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Excellent evening.

Local elections in May, many are all out like Brighton and Hove, and Tonbridge, some have a third of the seats up like Tunbridge Wells. Any help really appreciated, but the main thing,, **Use your Vote.**

Back to Brexit ..oh dear.. I do believe we have become a

“bit of a joke” around the world. Very sad! Very confusing with no Government and little opposition! Giving ferry contracts to a company with no ships and no trading history. You really couldn’t make it up, could you? Chris Grayling then has the cheek to blame the rail fare rises on the unions.!

I will finish on a really important issue, **Plastic**. Well done David Attenborough and the Blue Planet for raising the awareness of the damage being done throughout our Globe.



## BTFS National Team - Jim Thompson



It has been a very eventful year, which included the BTFS (BT Facility Services) Pay negotiations, which went back and forth for a while. At first, BT said they had no money available for a pay increase, until the CWU reminded them how much profit they had made. In the end, we managed a reasonable result. The biggest problem being performance related pay, it might work for management but it doesn't work for our grades. It's a shamble's!

Recruitment in BTFS has been steady over the year and we are at our highest level of membership, but we still need to keep pushing for new members.

Around September/October time we heard rumours that PFS (Property and Facility Services) as BTFS is now known, was possibly being outsourced. Someone in the Senior Management team

had let information of their plans leak out, and when we approached BT they had to admit it was true. But the CWU negotiating team had to sign a non-disclosure agreement, which made things awkward for us. We feel BT have once again let its staff down badly, after all the talk of One BT! One BT minus PFS, Fleet and Openreach. Who's next? Who Knows? This is why we all need to back the campaign #Endgame.

Splitting PFS into two Companies is going to make this very difficult. As two separate companies, it will be interesting how it will work on a day to day basis, and

the impact it will have on our BT colleague's.

The PFS National Team and reps will be restructured, this will mean they will have to be voted in for new roles. This is currently being looked into and we should soon know how the Union will fit in with ISS and CBRE. The split is House-keeping and Security will be ISS, Engineering and Grounds will be CBRE.

Just to close. I would like to thank the Branch for their help and guidance over the past year, their keenness to help and support have been much appreciated.



# Women's Officer - Una McMahon



I have had a year which has enriched my personal growth and taken me to places I would never have experienced, if I had not been a CWU Women's Officer.

2018 saw the fruition of an idea I had when the WSEC was created. The WSEC, Women of the South East Central (women who get involved) have our own brand and exclusive group. Members of this group who attended the Walkie Talkie event also were given a Mug with our own logo on it.

I have been active with a recruitment/re-connect drive that our branch has organised to re-connect with the field-based members we might not get to see in the large offices. This has enabled me to reach a wider audience and listen and connect with lots of WSEC

members, to find out if there are any issues, or hot topics affecting them.

Three WSEC newsletters have been sent out and I hope you have enjoyed reading them. If you have any ideas for future newsletters please contact me, I always welcome any engagement.

We had our "Walkie Talkie" event in May, where 10 WSEC members enjoyed a healthy lunchtime walk (Walkie) and snack with videos and discussions (Talkie) afterwards. Thank you for your support at these events. We are creating a Working Women's Forum in Sevenoaks and want to do the same in other areas of our branch.

I planned both the Branch Halloween events, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, one in Sevenoaks and the other in Withean. Both were well received and we felt that it was a fun way to engage with our members. I hope you had time to join in and enjoy the events.

It was a privilege to attend the CWU Telecoms Conference this

year and reported back on this in newsletter 3. I also attended a special conference that the CWU held over a weekend in November regarding proposed "Redesign" ideas for the CWU. Attending conference, let me witness the amazing amount of passion reps, nationally and at branch level, have for their members. I learnt so much regarding the organising and protocol of conference during both visits to the Bournemouth International Conference Centre.

I have had involvement in industrial relations meeting with senior management and have observed some discipline cases this year.

We have a Branch Facebook noticeboard page, if you haven't already, please request to join.

Lastly if any of you would like to get more involved with the WSEC or the CWU in general, please drop me a line or give me a call anytime.



# Equality Officer - Steve Rhodes



I am currently the Equality Officer for the branch, but I am not a full-time rep as I also work on the Brighton/Tunbridge Wells frames team. I came to the Equality role when the previous officer retired, so I have not yet had a full 2-year term.

I continue to Chair the South East Region Equalities committee, although within the CWU re-design I see the format of these committees changing. I still support the branch with its Twitter account and hope to use this more frequently in the future. I have not had as many opportunities to be involved since last year due

to many work-related issues, but this has not stopped me completing the Equal Rights part 2 and Union Essential Skills parts 1 & 2.

Mental health has been one of the big focuses within the Union, the media and government since last year. The CWU has backed various training for Reps (including mental health first aid), as well as initiatives to give people with mental health a better voice and at the same time break down some of the barriers and stigma that there is around mental health. If you feel that you have a mental health issue or that it could affect your work at any time, please do not hesitate to call one of our branch reps for advice.

As a union, we continue to support the fight for Equality, including attending PRIDE marches across the country and supporting LGTB+ rights in the workplace. Fighting against the gender pay gap and other Women’s rights in the workplace. Supporting

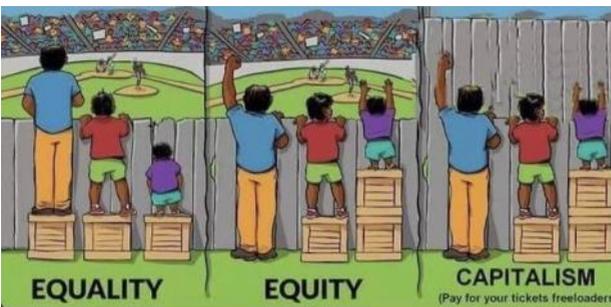


black workers who are faced with discrimination in the workplace. Issues faced by workers with disabilities. And engaging with the company on its recruitment policy, urging it to be more inclusive to all equality strains, so that the workforce has a more diverse demographic, one that is more reflective of the country we now live in.

With such a focus on Brexit right now, I’m sure we will be sure to be at the forefront, when it comes to fighting to keep the Equality rights we gained under the Equality act 2010, if we leave the EU.

Equalities is one of the departments going through various changes as part of the Re-design project within the CWU, so it will be interesting to see what happens in the coming months and what the main focuses will be and how we will approach them as a Union and a Branch.

I look forward to being a part of it.



# Retired Members Officer - David Lomakin



2018 has become a disconcerting year with gradual introduction of BT's newly proposed Pensions plan for its employees. Currently, employed members are urged to take greater interests in the progress of pension contributions with the view as to what will generate a reasonable income in retirement when reaching ages of 60 towards 68. The two schemes are the BT Pension Scheme [BTPS] or the BT Retirement Savings Scheme [BTRSS]. The future of whether BT adopt the Consumer Price Index [CPI] or Retail Price Index [RPI] can have a vastly differing outcome to pensionable returns when retirement is taken.

Throughout the year the Branch has been able to offer support and advice for Retired members on many aspects making full use of the Unions Legal Teams and retired members fo-

rums.

The annual distribution of CWU diaries, Christmas cards and pens continues to be well appreciated by many members spread throughout the British Isles and beyond.

November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1978 was the date when a devastating explosion destroyed Mayfield Telephone Exchange so to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary I assisted in the presentation of an exhibition providing many photos and some memorabilia from Union archives. The exhibition and tour around the modern exchange was very well attended by many retired Engineers, support staff from Telephone House and Mayfield residents who all took part during provision of a temporary exchange. Also attending were representatives from BT Headquarters in London.

On behalf of our Branch, I have remained the Chairperson for the CWU South East Region Retired Members Committee (SERRMC). This past year the committee members have argued strongly with the CWU National Executive Committee (NEC) to provide an easily accessible web page, via the Unions web site, that contains dedicated information that suits the needs and requirements of its members.

Also requested is a permanent presence in the members magazine the VOICE. Both these issues have had slow progress partly due to the CWU Redesign commitment. Our one success is to establish a Retired Members position within the NEC allowing retired members questions to be addressed directly and receive due action.



I continue to represent the CWU at the TUC Retirement and Pensions committee at Congress House in London with the added privilege to attend the MPs Select Committee on Pensions in the House of Commons. During the October meeting I was allowed to question Labour Party Shadow Cabinet member Sharon Hodgson on issues surrounding Buss Passes and extending reduced train fares at off peak times to Pensioners..... work in progress!

The CWU goes forward into 2019 with intrepid horizons and agendas so keep in touch with our three local offices, Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells and Brighton and be sure to keep your contact details up to date.

# Branch Secretary - Chris Power



2018, was my 23<sup>rd</sup> year as a Full time Union Representative, and my 29<sup>th</sup> year as an Officer of the Branch, and this report is a chance to look back at the last year and review what has taken place. Obviously, I have done the review many times over the last 23 years, but 2018 was an especially rewardable one from a Branch perspective, in regard to Project BUMP.

As usual we had many meetings with local Divisional BT Management, as well as casework with Virgin Media and other Telco Companies such as Hastings Direct and others. BT covers the vast majority of the work and therefore it is really important that to have strength when negotiating, we have as many employees within BT as members of the Union. My role, which I am due for re-election around May 2019, as Sup-

ply Chain National Team has taken me away from the local areas quite a lot during the year, has continued in brokering agreements with that division of BT.

## BRANCH ORGANISING & RECRUITMENT

Project BUMP, as we call it within the Branch, is a project that was conceived in April 2018 and implemented in September. Recruitment of members into our Branch is something we like to be involved with every year, and have done so for some years. Usually this involves mainly going into the several major sites we have in the area and checking off members details, giving out new member forms where necessary, and giving away Branch CWU Branded goods such as key rings, pens, diaries and calendars.

For the last few years this has predominantly taken place in buildings' where around 500 of our 1,150 members are based. This year the Officers agreed that we should concentrate on Field engineers, that work outside repairing and maintain the network.

We had four pairs of reps, out twice a month for the last four months of the year, giving away

travel mugs to our members, and this was probably the most successful event we have run for some years. We encountered over 300 of our members, and also ended up with around twenty new members to this Branch. It is an event we hope to continue commencing April 2019, so if you haven't been visited by us reps, and you work out in a Field environment, drop us an email and we will see if we can come track you down. At conclusion we believe it means around about 95% membership level with BT Group.

We didn't completely forget our office-based staff, and during October events at Sevenoaks Workstyle, and Brighton Withdean (Halloween) were held, and also diaries and Calendars given out at both sites around Christmas





On a national basis, several reps from this Branch headed off to Yarnfield, where new recruits are trained, to help out with recruiting them into the Union. Thanks to all those reps who went (Meaning I didn't have to go)

The year ended with the Branch standing at 1120 BT staff, which is the highest this Branch has ever been at. A great year for recruitment.

### **BRANCH GENERAL MEETINGS**

We are committed by our local rules to an Annual General meeting (AGM) and 2 General meetings (GM) a year, and these are usually held in Tunbridge Wells and Brighton as they were in 2018.

These type of meetings are where members attend in their own time during evenings, at a venue outside of the workplace, are something which have happened since the 1900's. 2018 saw quite a reduction in members that attended, sometimes as few as six lay members turned up to some meetings, with Officers and Committee members making up the numbers on top of that. I feel that unless there is a local or national specific topic to discuss, that the normal routine General Meeting has had its day.

When you think that we have 1,150 members, and we sometimes don't get more than six lay members to a meeting, and in a day of modern social media, then maybe other ways should be tried when engaging with members, and save the costs of running these General Meetings. The reasons for this we believe, is that older generation members are leaving employment, and there are different social media methods that younger generation members utilise far more.

There will be a proposal to reposition the way we conduct General meetings at the AGM, although meetings of a national and local significance will continue.

### **BRANCH COMMITTEE/OFFICER MEETINGS**

The Branch Committee meets four times a year on the first Tuesday of each





gether for all Officers.

## Non BT Group Companies

Whilst BT engineers form the majority of the Branch, Virgin Media, EE, Cable TV installers, Hastings Direct and lots of employees of other smaller companies are, and can be, members of this Branch, and I have conducted either discipline/sickness/performance cases in pretty much all the Companies over the last year.

## CONCLUSION

The Union nationally is going through a phase of reorganisation, affecting many aspects of the Union down to Branch level, and is titled “REDESIGN”. There have been several National forums and a Special conference during 2018, and we look forward as a Branch, to the implementation of changes that will safeguard the future of the CWU. Please visit the CWU national website for more information.

month, currently at Uckfield Civic Centre, and is an interface between the General (All members) meeting, and the Officers of the Union, and more so discusses strategic direction of the Branch, and issues that cannot be taken to a General meeting quickly enough.

***We are always looking for new members to join the Committee and take the Branch in new directions. Come along to the AGM and say hello.***

The responsibilities of most Committee members are mainly to contribute verbally, experiences at work and workplace issues, and advise Officers of points to take up with BT Managers. These meetings have continued and work very well, and they will continue on a basis of four per year. I would like to thank all Officers and Committee members for their help during the year.

A minimum of six Officers

(Only) meetings are held each year (Month when there is no Branch Committee) and these are really important for all Officers to discuss all current issues and casework, and decide upon local initiatives such as recruitment. We currently have ten officers that can attend these meetings.

We also had our 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Plan one day conference, at Eastbourne in December, which was the opportunity for every officer to put on record what they wanted to achieve in 2019. A very worthwhile get to-



**PLEASE SUPPORT THE BRANCH IN ATTENDING MEETINGS THAT ARE CALLED**

## Political Women

2018 was the centenary of women over 30 being able to vote, but it was another 10 years before they could all vote. Many marches and celebrations took place throughout the Country. In Tunbridge Wells, 300 women marched, many dressed as Suffragettes (militants) and Suffragists (non-militant), from the bandstand in the Pantiles, with speeches at places of interest on the way.

We marched into the Opera House (now Wetherspoons) filled it with women shouting and waving banners.

We did a small recreation there of when Emily Davidson (who was knocked down by the King's horse at Epsom) jumped out from under the stage at a Liberal Council meeting and then we all sang Jerusalem.

Kent live filmed it and did interviews. It was very im-



portant to recognise and remember the women who fought for our right to vote.

April saw the unveiling of the statue of Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square, the first and only woman's statue amongst eleven men. It was commissioned as part of this year's centenary of the People's Representation Act 1918.

Millicent Fawcett was the President of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Society (NUWSS). The Fawcett Society was formed in her name and still works for the rights and issues regarding women. She holds a banner reading

“Courage calls to Courage everywhere”, an extract from a speech she gave in 1920 David Lloyd George called an election after the armistice, which ended WW1. Eight and a half million women were entitled to vote on December 14<sup>th</sup> 1918.

On that date, 100 years on, the Labour Women's Forum organised a walk in Tunbridge Wells which went through the Town to Calverley House, which was the old Town Hall. Flowers were laid and balloons tied to the railings, in the red white and green of the Suffragists in recognition of those brave women, to whom we owe so much.

## Young Workers - Liam Reed



Firstly, I'd like to thank all of those who voted in the 2018 AGM election, your time to reply back to the ballot was greatly welcomed. In the past year, I've participated in many young workers Events/Forums across the UK, starting off with the 2018 young workers conference in Glasgow where we debated many of the issues that affect you all nationwide. One of the hot topics was around the BTRSS pension scheme and how over the years we've seen an ever-declining trend to the schemes that our employers offer. As a result of motion 2 being passed unanimously at the telecoms conference in April we've seen an improvement to the BTRSS pension scheme.

Throughout the year, I've managed to speak with most of the "young workers" within our branch, either over the phone, or out and about on some of our vari-

ous exercises, to meet you all face to face. I have found this has given the branch and me personally, a better in site to some of the everyday issues that burden us within our working lives. One of the major issues that have been growing ever apparent is the end of day travel time, for the Workforce 2020 employees. For those of you who aren't accustomed to the 2020 contract, this is where an employee will have to travel up to an hour in the mornings and evenings to and from jobs, unpaid, in their own time.

I had first raised the issue back in 2017 with head office, and held a special meeting with guest speakers (Davie Bowman), in Cooden. This was to give the members a chance to feed their views directly to the national executive. Since then I've been working closely with Davie Bowman, assisting him on the campaign and taking part in an interview with the communications department, to help better explain the impact that the travel time has on our members.

In April we founded the first South East Region young workers committee. Where collectively we work on local issues that affect CWU members

across in the South East. As a result of this, we found a common issue within our region for young workers, that is the ever-rising rent for housing. Therefore, as a region we submitted motion 15 to the 2019 Young Workers Conference in Birmingham. This instructed the National Young Workers Committee to lobby the NEC, to actively support and affiliate to renter unions, where possible, in the UK. This motion was carried unanimously, after I rose on behalf of the region to support and enlighten the conference, of difficulties we all face with rent traps in the South East.

Once again thank you all for the time you've given to express your views to me and our branch on the matters we all face. I look forward to hearing from you in the months to come



## BAME Officer - Animesh Kana



At a recent private event, a discussion arose over the lack of ethnic male role models presented in the Media. The discussion revolved round the equality issue over female and male presenters on the likes of News, weather and other media sources. The discus-

sion raised the issue, “why is there a disparity”?

If we watch the media, we tend to see more ethnic women presenting than men. There some male counter parts, but in general, it tends to be more women than men. One of the attendees, at the event, said that, “This is a way of killing two birds with one stone. The gender issue is resolved and at the same time, the ethnicity”.

It was also pointed out that the Media found that having women presenters, increases the viewing figures. So, the content of the news becomes less important, and the viewing statistics takes precedent.

The issue of gender equality in large organisation comes in to question, has racial equality been put on the back burner for gender equality? Or is this easy get out for employers, as earlier stated, to kill two birds with one stone. This would mean the equal numbers of ethnic men and women comes into question.

Another major issue discussed was the glass ceiling, which exists for ethnic minorities in all organisations. As always depicted, a few will make it to the top but never in in equal numbers, even though majority of ethnic minorities finish their education to higher level.

These questions often come up for debate.

## Financial Secretary - Steve Taylor

The Branch finances stand in a healthy state at the end of the year, slightly higher than anticipated, thanks to the officer’s attitude of “make do and mend”, in the last year. However, some of those things which we put off replacing last year, will have to be bought this year. And as Such, a budget has been drawn up and will be explained at the AGM.

The last year, because of financial constraints, Chris

Power has had monthly calls to ascertain the state of the Branch finances. It is anticipated this will continue into 2019.

“Team Tracy”, the auditors (pictured on the right), which consisted of Tracey Faux (senior auditor) and Tracy Harris, went through the accounts and checked all expenditure - and they were happy with what they saw.

Come along to the AGM for a full financial breakdown and the branch budget for 2019.



# Assistant Secretary - Steve Taylor



My perception of the people, when I joined BT, was that they were friendly but they moaned a bit and kept referring to how good it used to be in the “old days”. To give this some context, some of these guys fought in the Korean War! Don’t be good at anything Steve, or you’ll end on doing it forever. How do you think people become managers! Were some of the sayings I heard.

31 years on, I am about to do the same!

Back in the days when the divisions were regional, ND for North Downs and Weald, SD for South Downs, we used to have regional sports days. As I was in North Downs, I shall talk about that, but every region did something similar.

One weekend in the year, BT hired a sports complex for its BT Staff, and we all took part in sporting activities. Families were invited and the Swimming pool was open to all. You took part in whatever sport you liked, as long as you could muster up a team. I remember playing for both Maidstone and Medway in different activities, which meant I sometimes had to run quickly from one event to another.

I was even picked to play

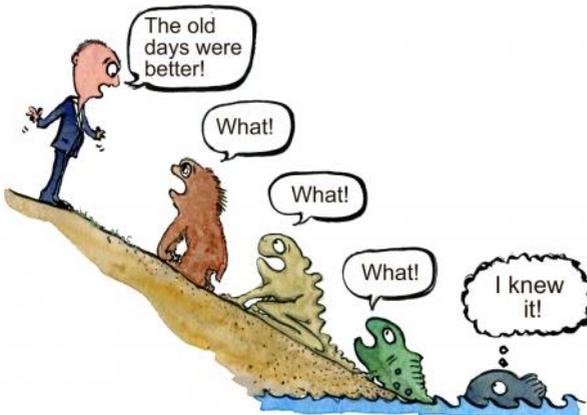
football for North Downs, against Thameside, during the working day. I travelled to Fareham for a 3 o’clock kick off, lost 9-0, had a lovely cooked meal, and headed home!

So, what has this to do with the union. Well this example shows the gradual wearing away, almost unnoticed, of what we accept as normal. Parking at home and travel time, constant improvement goals, later start and finish times, probationary period moving to two years, NEWGRID and 20-20 are all examples.

## BT PENSION SCHEME



BTPS and BTRSS pensions was the hot topic this time last year, with the sweetener of the Hybrid scheme for the more seasoned members. At least with this deal the BTRSS was improved slightly, but still nowhere near what the BTPS had. So, what are you going to do with the Hybrid? I can answer this, don’t ring us up, seek a proper financial expert out or ring the helpline number up.



By Frits Ahnefeldt

Now pensions will be the last thing on any “new starter’s” minds, as they excitedly take on their new telecommunications career, but be sure to keep us informed of what’s happening to you. Some managers, not all, will try and take advantage of you and that’s where you need a union rep to help you, and to curtail the worst of the managers. Don’t go into disciplines alone!

Disciplines, being either for attendance, performance or behaviours, have processes which the company has to follow, do you know them? We do! Remember your probationary period is two years, and you don’t have full employment rights until this period is passed.

Also remember to inform us of any changes in contact details, as you might tell

BT, but they do not forward on the information to us. You’d be surprised how many people who are shocked to find that we still have an ex-partner down as their union death beneficiary (just under £800).

Remember, one day you’ll be in my situation, with plenty of experience and perhaps a lack of hair!

## Photo Competition Winners

**First Prize - Nick Tutt**



Last year both the First and Second prizes were under the category of photo manipulation.

The entrants to the competition this year was high, but hardly

**Second Prize - Ian Carter**



any of the photos were from their families. Well done all that entered.

Look out for this years photo competition later on in the year

**Third Prize - Shaun Bayford**



## Obituary

It is always with great sadness that this list has to be drawn up, but this year, even though there is only two names on the list, it’s done with greater sadness as one was taken from us far too early, and whilst still in service at the age of 33.

Our thoughts go out to both the families, in their first year without their loved ones.

**Richard Kent  
Gerald Williams**



# Local Heroes - Mayfield

Forty years ago, no one gave a thought about Mayfield Telephone exchange, which was set in a semi-rural town, nestled in the rolling Wealden countryside, until Monday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 1978. The legend in Mayfield was that, Saint Dunstan, a local blacksmith was the intended target for the Devil. The Devil disguised himself as an attractive woman, in order to tempt Saint Dunstan and lead him astray. But the blacksmith spotted his cloven hooves beneath the hem of the Devil's dress, so he grabbed the Devil's nose, with a pair of red-hot tongs from his forge, making the devil roar loudly. Thus, the Devil was foiled.

On November 27<sup>th</sup> 1978, it wasn't the Devil roaring, it was the telephone exchange.

Local engineer, Tony Burton, had already signed on in the book, inside the Telephone exchange, and had left the building and nothing seemed to be amiss. But at



7:50 the exchange exploded, destroying itself and unfortunately Tony's Ford Cortina, in the process. Gas had leaked into the building and was set off by a spark from the old Strowger switching gear. Such was the explosion, it was heard for miles around and a mushroom cloud appeared over the exchange.

Local fireman reacted first, acting on their own initiative, they attended the scene and were the first to report to the rest of the world.

By noon, The General Post Office, (GPO) had the first payphone working in the Memorial Hall, connected, by a neighbouring ex-

change. In the days when some people did not have telephones and mobile phones was still many years away, to get a payphone working was important, but to do it within four hours, is some achievement.

Local residents set up an emergency canteen in the Memorial Hall for the swarm of engineers that came to assist. Later that afternoon, a group of GPO canteen ladies had arrived to help out.

By 15:00, the first of three mobile telephone exchanges arrived. By 19:00, leaflets had arrived and were ready to be distributed to the local residents the following day.



21:00 An emergency caravan with payphones had arrived from Guildford. All this was achieved on the first day.

The engineers continued into the night and managed to connect the emergency service at 01:00, in the morning. By 17:00 all emergency lines were connected, including the doctors.

The next few days work consisted of the major re-cabling, which was needed to connect the mobile exchanges to the external cables.

By Day 5, 25% of the subscribers (yes, that's what they were called then) were connected. On Sunday December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Day 7 at noon, all the subscribers were re-connected.

On Saturday February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1979, a party was given for the 290 odd GPO employees, that were involved, by the people of Mayfield, to acknowledge their hard work. A silver cup commemorating the herculean efforts and community spirit was presented to Sydney Shaw, the General Manager of the Tunbridge Wells telephone area.

With such a huge and dangerous explosion, it was surprising that there were only two injuries, and these



**Ford Cortina, One careful owner. A Compact Car**

were minor cuts received from broken glass by two school girls in the nearby dormitories, of the Mayfield Convent School. Had it been much earlier Tony may have died, and a bit later the school would have been open. The only thing that died that day, was a Ford Cortina. May it Rust In Peace!

The new Mayfield Exchange, which can be seen today, was completed and became operational in 1982

So, our local heroes are all

those GPO employees who attended and helped, and the local community, which worked together as a collective.

The lesson to be learnt from this is that Tony never smelt gas in the exchange when he went in. Gas does not always smell, it's the mercaptan that is added to gas that you smell. So, if you go into a subterranean structure, don't rely on your nose, use that gas tester.

*Photos courtesy of Dave Lomakin*



# Up For The Fight?

In 2018, we saw the 100th anniversary of the end of World War One, when the armistice was declared at 11am, on the 11<sup>th</sup> day, of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, 1918. Although this marked the end of hostilities in the trenches, the war officially ended on the 28th June, 1919, with the signing of the Versailles Treaty. But not all the troops had been sent home, some of them had been sent to Russia, to support the White Army, in its battles with the Communists. By December, 1918, there were 200,000 foreign soldiers, supporting the anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia.

You may think, “What has this got to do with the Union, or union activity?” Well it has!

Those service men and women returning home from active duty, at the end of the war, did not just want to settle into the same old down trodden life, that many of them had had before. They didn’t want low paid jobs on 60-hour weeks or slum housing, they wanted that new life that had been promised to them. What they received was disappointing to say the least. But there was a ground swell of support to take action, which resulted in a number of left-wing organisations springing up, to fight for a better way of



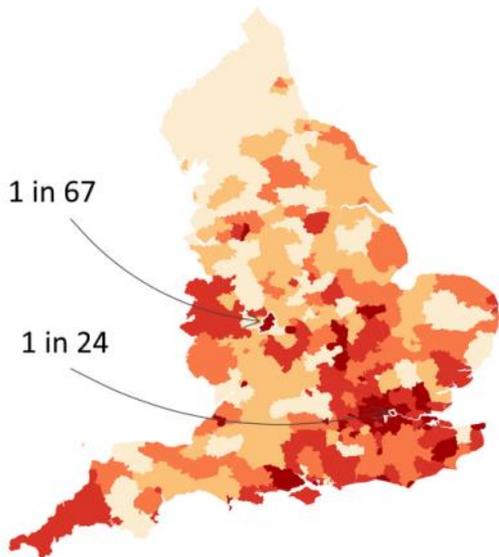
life. It also resulted in more people banding together in Trades Unions to fight for better wages, working conditions and places to live at affordable rents.

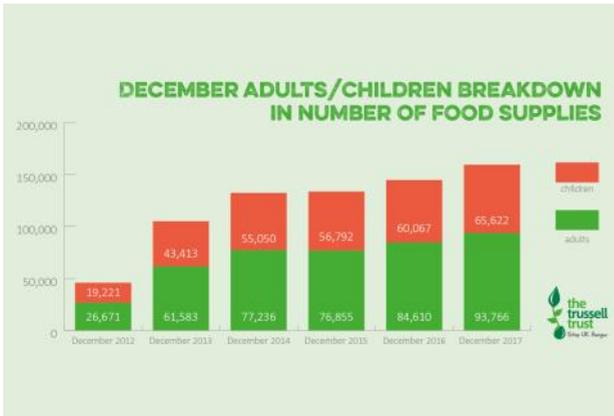
1919 saw a growth in Labour's local activist base and organisation, which was reflected in the elections following the war. The co-operative movement, now

provided its own resources to the Co-operative Party since the armistice. The Co-operative Party, later reached an electoral agreement with the Labour Party. The Communist Party, of Great Britain, was refused affiliation to Labour. Meanwhile, the Liberal Party declined rapidly and the party suffered a catastrophic split that allowed the Labour Party to benefit in support. In 1919, John Adams (later Baron Adams of Ennerdale), led a successful election challenge, to the sitting members of Arlecdon and Frizington District Council, in Cumber-

## Homelessness Highest in South East

More Homeless ■■■ Fewer





land. This established the first all Labour local council to be elected in England. It was with help, of the Unions, that change was affected 100 years ago, through the Labour party. It may be different today but if we want change then, "*the battle goes on*".

As in those days, today homelessness is on the rise. It's not just Homelessness, it's also the use of Food Banks as well. A charity to help people live, to help, as an example, working parents who decide to feed their children while they go hungry themselves. The Trussell Trust said it provided nearly 160,000 three-day emergency food supplies in

December last year – a 49 per cent increase on the monthly average for the 2017-18 financial year. The charity provided over 650,000 emergency supplies to people in crisis between April and September 2018, compared with the 580,000 over the same period the previous year.

This is Great Britain in the 21st century. You have to ask yourself, what are we doing to help? What you can do is fight for better conditions at work, for better jobs, because by driving up standards you are forcing a move away from the race to the bottom, that BT, Openreach, EE and many other employers seem to want to do.

In 1919, it was the working class that wanted to fight for a better future.

A strike over working hours and other things, began on January 27, 1919. Four days

later, this had escalated and there were now upwards of 60,000 men out on strike. The government of Lloyd George was concerned that the situation could escalate into a revolution, as in Russia, and fears increased when large numbers gathered in George Square, Glasgow, in support of their claims being presented to the Lord Provost.

How the ensuing riot started is disputed. Some sources say the workers became aggressive, stopping trams and threatening order. Others that the Glasgow police made a baton charge without any provocation. Whatever the cause, the square erupted into a mass brawl, with the police not discriminating between workers, or their wives, when it came to use of the truncheon.

Workers' leaders, such as Manny Shinwell, were arrested and subsequently jailed; the government reinforced the troops in the area with English regiments, tanks and even artillery. Eventually calm was restored, but the workers had achieved a standard 47-hour week, down from an average of over 55 hours.

We are bound to have a fight on our hands for our terms and conditions that we enjoy, or that we want future generations of engineers to have. **ARE YOU UP FOR THE FIGHT?**





**South East Central**

## Current Points of Contact

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South East Central Branch  
*Annual General Meeting*

**Royal Wells Hotel**

**59 Mount Ephraim, Tunbridge Wells**

**TN4 8BE**

on

**Wednesday 20th February**

**7.30pm**

The agenda will include the submission of the Annual report, Branch committee vacant posts and any proposals pertinent to an AGM, i.e. changes to branch bye laws and any proposals for the forthcoming year, including financial proposals, and proposals to the CWU Annual Conference in April.

The meeting will conclude with any questions, current issues time permitting.

**There will be a buffet provided for members in addition to a drink at the bar**

**YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR SAY**  
**PLEASE ATTEND**