



# *South East Central*

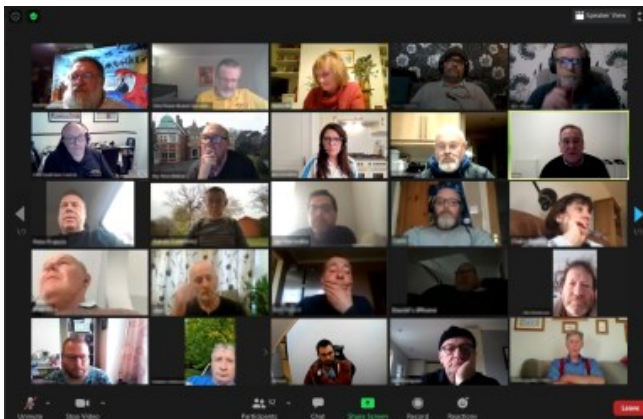
## **2021 Annual Report**



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

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### Front cover

Memories of 2021!

A fictitious CWU branch meeting. Can you see yourself there, or did you turn your camera off? Can you see the guest appearance of the DGST?

*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.*

## Branch Secretary - Chris Power



2021 was my 26<sup>th</sup> year as a full time Union Representative, and my 32<sup>nd</sup> year as an Officer of the Branch, its been a real privilege and this report is a chance for me to look back at the last year and review what has taken place. Obviously I have completed this review many times over the last

26 years, but 2021 was the most unusual due to the lack of direct contact with members, and with negotiating with management. The pandemic has taken its toll over all members, in various horrible ways, but lack of human contact at work must be high up the list of undesirable situations.

### Branch Organising and Recruitment

We did interact with many field based members during our “BUMP” recruitment campaign that’s run through the year, which meant many car park type meetings outside various BT Buildings during high peak months mainly in the winter time. During the summer, it was a bit easier to interact with members but still mainly outside

buildings. We have been to Hastings in the East, to Hove TEC in the West and Sevenoaks in the North of the Branch, and many other smaller buildings. One of my favourite visits was at Pevensey exchange, where I met half a dozen Openreach Field engineers over a lunch period - and at an exchange that I had never been to in my 38+ years on the Company. It was good to meet members I had not met before. A good discussion with members, and there were many over 2021.

We try not to isolate our office based staff, mainly concentrated at Brighton Withdean and BT Sevenoaks Workstyle building, as they have faced a very maverick employer, whom have stated they will not entertain any office based



Pevensey Exchange late 2021

staff in London and the South East within a few years. The vast majority of those members were working from home during 2021, so direct contact was impossible, together with government and Company restrictions that were imposed. Voluntary leaver packages were announced, and up to 80 Union members left the business in the latter part of 2021, with more to leave in early 2022. The main way to liaise and discuss issues with these office based members has been via our Facebook page, but also the virtual Union meetings we have held over the year. It has been a tough year for desk based Union members, but the Union does fight for your position in the business as much as we can, it's just the business does not listen. We realise there is disgruntlement and upset in that section of membership, but maybe the only thing that will make the business take notice, is direct action, but seeming the national CWU hierarchy doesn't see it the same way.

2021 ended with the Branch standing at 1042 BT/Openreach members which is really as a result of dedicated hard work from the 6 senior (BT/Openreach) officers of the Branch, and my thanks

goes to them for their commitment in getting up sometimes prior to 6am in the morning, to travel to BT sites to recruit members, but also talk to existing members. Over 15 Branch sites were visited, resulting in 80 new members to the Branch.

## Branch Meetings

### General (Open to all Branch members)

We are committed by our local rules to an Annual General meeting (AGM) and 2 General meetings (GM) a year, and actually 3 planned General meetings took place in 2021, and 3 (2 x Field, 1 x Desk) Special Meetings, and all were held virtually on the ZOOM platform over the last year. At the AGM in 2021 there were 65 members, and at one other Special meeting we had over 100 members attend and contribute to debate.

There was also a joint meeting the we participated in, which covered all

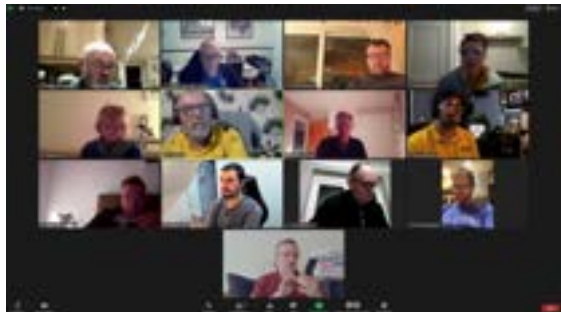
London and Home Counties Branches, that had over 300 members attended.

### Branch Committee (Open to elected Committee members)

The Branch Committee meets 4 times a year on the first Tuesday of each month. Currently these are held on Zoom and they are 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, and consider joining the Committee*

The responsibilities of most Committee members is mainly to contribute verbally, experiences at work and workplace is-



sues, 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 4 per year.

I would like to thank all Officers and Committee members for their help during the year,

### **Officers Meetings**

Officers meeting are held every 2 weeks virtually at the moment, where the 6 senior officers whom are allocated time off work for Union purpose attend, and these are really important for all Officers to discuss all current issues and case-work, and decide upon local initiatives such as recruitment.

### **Count Me In**

In my opinion it started very well as a Campaign at the beginning of 2021, the strategy led nationally to oppose, and threaten the use of an Industrial Action Ballot, with the vast majority of members supporting. Opposing Compulsory redundancies and the new terms imposed, opposing many building closures which eradicates Desk based members in the Openreach Centres of Excellence (Brighton Withdean, Sevenoaks Workstyle), and getting



### **The Grand Old of Duke of Kerr?**

better contracts, terms and conditions, for new staff and eradicating the bonus pay aspect. All these were worth fighting for issues, but nationally they felt there was a deal to be done, and the Count Me in campaign was stopped- hopefully with the chance of a national CWU ballot on these issue in the first part of 2022.

The Branch position on the direction of the CWU nationally, did not concur with the national position. We end up as ALL members being taken for a ride by BT/Openreach unless we fight. We should get ready to fight, and this Branch may have to lead this fight if the membership want that. Just my opinion of course.

### **Non BT Group Companies**

Whilst BT/Openreach engineers form the majority

of the Branch, SKY, Virgin Media, 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.

### **Generally**

The Branch is in a good position in relation to numbers. To finish 2021 with over BT/Openreach 1000 employed members is fantastic, and a credit to all the Branch Reps getting involved with recruitment. It is only with the membership at this level, we can retain the amount of Union Reps working on your behalf. We are a strong Branch and WE MAKE OUR VOICE HEARD at National level. Keeping above the 1000 mark for 2022 may be very difficult.

# Assistant Secretary - Una McMahon



Covid 19 is here to stay it seems, after a year of not ups and downs, but *Mess-ups* (polite version) and lock-downs. 2021 was the new year of vaccinated hope. Or as it turned out, the year of the variant.

In 2021 I have been in, I have been out and felt a little shaken about!

Through 2021, I have been Covid scared, Covid brave, Covid jabbed and Covid infected. So I am looking forward to a new year with anti-bodies and hope

Work wise its been a transitional year for me, I have gone from a part-time union rep to full time. This has been something I have wanted for a long time, and I am really enjoying

the level of focus I am now able to give my work.

We started the year midst the “Count Me In” campaign to which the WSEC (Women of South EAST Central) members showed huge support, They did this with photos and videos of support.

This time last year I was designing the front cover for this publication with regard to our Facebook closed group competition. While I am on that subject, please join our members only noticeboard on Facebook, search “CWU SEC Noticeboard” and ask to join, I will then add you almost immediately. This Facebook page is branch and member focussed, announcing anything of importance in real time, along with some fun engagement ideas.

Last year I ran the “drink

are on us” competition, which was a great success. Our AGM was dominated by the Count Me In campaign and we were pleased that our Secretary, Chris Power, managed to book Andy Kerr, Deputy General Secretary for Telecoms & Financial Services, for live video debate. Just to remind you all, the Annual general meetings and general meetings can be attended by all members, you do not need to be an activist so please come along an join in.

I held a remote Zoom International women’s day event on the 8<sup>th</sup> March, it was great to have an all female catch up. If you were unable to attend last year, watch this space for International Women’s Days event 2022. The theme will be celebrating women, with stories of female family members



that have inspired you.

Spring 2021 and spring 2022, is all about the start of our efficient recruitment drive, I have been visiting a multitude of sites and locations and people last year and will be doing the same this year. We have lost many members from our busy centres in Brighton and Sevenoaks, due to the companies vague possible exit announcements and voluntary release offers. However the recruitment in the field is still at full throttle and we have needed to make sure that all of those new recruits are looked after.

As lead for Technology, 2021 was overshadowed by redundancy announcements. Technology has been negatively affected by IT outsourcing, the companies so called “better workplace” program and their transformation plan.



The CWU are trying to negotiate a “Job Swap” where by, people in scope for redundancy could potentially swap with others that want to take voluntary release. This is thanks to the counter proposals discussions, that are ongoing by the National team who are leading for Technology team.

I have successfully completed learning courses in 2021 such as Advanced Skills 1, Mental Health

Awareness and Women’s Leadership. I already have Advanced Skills 2 booked in for March 2022 this year.

In 2021, I have represented our members in IFW’s and Second Line Reviews. I will continue to be there defend our members, as a union rep, and maintaining and improving our members terms and conditions, in Industrial Relations meetings in 2022.

## Obituary

This section of this report is where we celebrate the life of certain members, but mourn their passing during the last year.

The branch sends its condolences to their family members.

**Trevor Read**  
**(Retired Member)**

**Douglas Seath**  
**(Retired Member)**



## Assistant Secretary - Pete Francis



When I submitted my report last year, we had just completed our first nine months of Covid-19 and I think we all thought we would be leaving it in our wake in a few months with the role out of the vaccination, how wrong could we be.

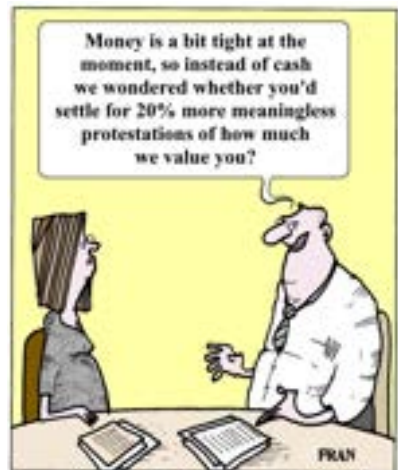
Since the last report, I have been re-elected to the National Executive for another term and firstly I thank all of you who voted for me. It has been a strange experience in many ways as I have not been able to travel nationally meeting our members and BT/Openreach management face to face on any occasion but it has not stopped the company carrying on the redundancies across the organisation. We had the winding down of the “Count Me In” campaign in

the Spring of last year with promises from the company to change tact and the way they have conducted redundancies across the company. Yes in some ways, they have and the re-introduction of Pay and Pension Protection has been a big help in helping members find other roles affected by redundancy. Unfortunately, the scale is enormous and feels at times like a Tsunami. Our branch has suffered enormously especially in Withead and Sevenoaks that is heart breaking.

Redundancy was not the only issue we had to deal with under the, “Framework Agreement” problems such as grading; un-agreed pay scales as well as a suitable consolidated pay rise are still on the table. I am sure pay will be on everyone’s minds with no rise last year and only 1.5% imposed over 15 months the previous year, on top of all the inflation, national insurance, fuel rises it is going to be on top of every members agenda over the coming months. We have all been promised a consolidated in-

crease and this can only be agreed with your input on the ballot paper you will receive once we have had an offer the executive feel is acceptable or not.

I believe that we are in a constant fight within BT/Openreach, every day is a battle and any success is a hard fought. PTT (personal travel time) is one success, the promotional ladders for engineers is another, the bigger picture we cannot take our eye off the ball and representation and ongoing recruitment must be at the heart of it. As a branch, the officers are on the ball with representation and ensuring they are talking and signing up new members to ensure a strong CWU. This has to be ongoing and I am sure you are safe in their hands.





# Out and About



# Retired Member Rep - Dave Lomakin



everyday communication forum for meetings and conferences, but it can become impersonal and restrictive with their outcome.

Following BT Retirement and Pension proposals for current and future employees, still needs examining and questioned by our CWU negotiating committee. Reducing BT pension deficit is still within the commitment strategy, but at present remains an eye watering amount.

The CWU Retired Members Conference will take place this year, after the cancellation of the 2021 conference, all be it a virtual occasion, via a Zoom link. Accepted propositions from the 2020 conference will be resurrected and progress examined with questions asked of our National Executive Committee representatives with preparation to be placed before the next Annual General Conference later this year.

I have also maintained my association, on behalf of the Branch and CWU, with TUC and NPC highlighting state pensions, social reforms and National Insurance fund contributions. The CWU, along with

other Unions and collective associations, are pressurising the present Government over proposals to suspend the “triple lock” for 2022-2023. Triple lock dictates the percentage increase for State Pensions, prior to any future budget constraints this should be restored for the remainder of this Parliament which ends in 2024.



The balance of the triple lock has been upset by the large rise in average earnings, during the middle of 2021, as people came off furlough and returned to full pay. Under the rules set up for triple lock this would have benefited state pensions having to be increased in line with the higher average earnings indicator. Due to this suspension, state pensions have been increased at a much lower percentage related to last September’s Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation figure. A huge saving for the Government running into Billions of pounds.

The CWU and selected

Again, another year has passed us by living with the continuing Covid restrictions. Maintaining contact with the membership in all divisions of our Branch has become an evolving hurdle. The use of Whatsapp and Facebook platforms provides indirect informality and views about topical stories of the time whilst maintaining self-isolation practices.

2021 continued with the closure of our local Branch Offices, CWU HQ in Wimbledon and the T.U.C. building in London which limited the formulation and progression of current Union political and social programs.

The use of “Zoom”, “Office 365” and “Skype” have provided the new

TUC committee's have held the present Government to account over their manipulation of State Pensions and social services. Unfortunately, the response from the present opposition party has been ineffective and do not stand up for pension status, social needs and acknowledge the benefits the retired population

bring back into society.

Many of the safeguards for pensions and protection for retirement in society attributed to the European Union scrutiny are now fading away along with state allowances not keeping up with ever changing demands of the elderly and established family structures.

To join our Branch Retired Community once you have left work, either contact the branch or visit the CWU members web site. Retired members are able to receive all CWU benefits, legal services and are entitled to receive the Union Death benefit for your nominated next of kin.



## Financial Report

There had to be a positive with the Covid pandemic and for us it has been less expenditure as face to face meetings ceased. Zoom will never replace a face to face meeting, but for now, it's a good sticking plaster.

For the two years of lockdown, reduced movement and social distancing, the amounts in our bank accounts have gone up. Sometimes alarmingly so.

Every silver lining has a cloud! CWU HQ only allows us to have one years worth of rebate in our ac-

counts and last year, for the first time we crossed that line and HQ sequestered that months rebate. The branch has replaced our aging IT equipment and we have heavily invested much more time and money into recruitment than normal. So we are keeping a cautious eye on the levels in the banks.

Last years audit has still yet to be done and there will be a delay on this years too, as getting the auditors into a room, huddled together over a bunch of receipts is not condu-

cive with not catching the dreaded germs. But I suspect, things might change in the summer.

The branch continues to enter all expenses on SAGE software, so HQ can see what the money has been spent on. As SAGE is a bit of a beast to understand, Rick will also be learning how to tame the beast - just in case. Una has already had an over view.

Full details of expenditure will be given at the AGM.



# Branch Chair - Dave Kauffman



As the Chairperson of South East Central Branch, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have participated with and supported the Branch during the year of 2021.

I would like to thank the Branch Secretary for the hard work that he puts in driving the branch forward, anyone who has worked within any organisation will know these things do not *just happen*.

As for my role this year in the Branch, I have the lead role on most things Openreach, within the industrial relations remit and have attended many meetings and branch forums on Openreach issues over the last year. I am now also the regional Co-Ord for Openreach within the Re-

gion, which covers the three branch areas in the South East (South East Central, Meridian and Portsmouth & Isle of Wight).

I also have the role of representing members at Grievances or Disciplines that members may find themselves involved in. As a branch, we make sure all officers have an overview of members issues in the Branch and make sure that we all take on the mantle of case work, which includes disciplines, attendance and grievance hearings.

I'm not sure how we can mention 2021 from a work perspective without mentioning the Pandemic that we are all living through. I just Hope and pray that you are all well and as safe as we can be.

Throughout 2021, I have continued to highlight and campaign for the Open-

## OFFICE *Closure*

reach Desk based members. Openreach have stuck by their guns and have still not advised their loyal staff anything concrete about their future employment, other than the fact that Withead and Sevenoaks offices have not been chosen as strategic sites for the future. I have bought this up with all the senior managers at Director level and I had the opportunity to tell the Openreach CEO, Clive Selley, that the way he was treating these staff was unacceptable.

As far as Field staff are concerned in Openreach, there have been a number of issues some of which are fully on my Agenda.





Within FnD, there have been issues on Integrated patch, training and safety (including power training for PCR and NGA engineers) and the issue of unagreed pay points at some grades. On the issue of pay points the grades have been agreed in many cases but the some pay points have been stalled by BT Group senior management, but Andy Kerr is dealing with this issue, as a result of the Count Me In Campaign.

For Service Delivery we have a few issues that have been bubbling along, we have the issue where

Frames have been targeted by Openreach as a dwindling product and has seen Voluntary Paid leaver offers for Frames staff. This will lead to another reorganisation as people leave. For field people we have seen the announcement in December on LTB 569/2021 about Personal Travel Time (PTT). I have spoken on this subject at CWU annual conference on many occasions and moved a motion, back in 2018, about the unfairness of it all. I like to feel that as a branch we were instrumental in getting the issue of PTT dealt with, in the HQ's campaign "Our

Hours". Hopefully all our engineers who start from home with a work van, will be dealt with fairly.

I am sure there will be individual issues that some team members will have as the company changes its processes in PTT. We will assist any member, on a one to one basis, if they come across issues. But, I would ask engineers to contact the branch, if their Patch manager goes out of his or her way, to give the maximum amount of travel time to all engineers on their team. I will, in turn, take up the issue with the senior manager concerned.

I also understand there has been issues in Chief Engineers, the Civils and Poling teams. If you have an issue regarding you, or a another team member, and want the branch to look at it, please contact the branch and if we can, we will take on the challenge of dealing with the issue.



# Equalities Officer - Steve Rhodes



Equalities have been on a bit of a “go slow” for me this year. With the Union’s new “re-design” structure and then Covid restrictions, we have had a lot of false starts.

With the focus being put on the new stream ‘leads’, the Equality officers have found they have been mostly out of the loop. I have of course kept up to date with all aspects of what the CWU have been doing and supporting, but as with the previous year, meetings have been few and far between and all have been online. Our first one, specifically for Branch Equality officers, was actually this month (January 2022). The outcome is that the regional leads will be working directly with us and initially

the focus will be on finding ways to collect data on the diversity and proportionality of our members.

The info we are talking about are things like:

- Ethnicity and background.
- Age and Generation.
- Gender and Gender Identity.
- Sexual Orientation.
- Religious and Spiritual Beliefs.
- Disability.

In the past, when becoming a new member, this sort of information was not on the sign up form. I believe some of it is now, if you sign up online, but it means there is a big gap in information known on member diversity. Being as this information is “personal data”, there will

have to be secure ways to collate this information and so we are looking at how this can be achieved. One possible way is through the new CWU app that was rolled out back in September. Version 2 is already on its way and will allow members to input their diversity information in a secure way. It is understood that this information is private and sensitive and is not always going to be shared and for good reason. However, the more information we have, the better the Union can be at supporting and understanding the needs of its members.

Child care issues, for families having to isolate; having to work from home, without the room to do so; working with no job security, with looming redundancies; being at work and not able to interact with colleagues; public suspicion with 5G conspiracies; Having a different religion and getting time off to accommodate religious practices all these things,



to name but a few, have had a knock on affect to our members' mental health.

Reps have had a lot to take on board when dealing with mental health issues. It has been noted that after receiving "Mental Health Awareness" or "Mental Health First Aid" training, reps were left to their own devices with no support. Starting in 2020 and with a further push during 2021, I have been involved with the national mental health network. This body is in place to provide support for reps, directly through a network of regional groups and to the branches in the region. We are now looking to have more trained reps and even more "Mental Health First Aid" trainers across the country.



As well as this, I support the branch working alongside Rick, our health, safety & wellbeing coordinator as a health and safety officer.

Accident investigations, work place inspections and keeping on top of the latest Covid rules and guidelines are just a few of the things I have been part of. Health and safety, in the current climate, is not always easy but it is an ongoing passion and I look forward to the challenges of the year ahead.

If you or anyone you know is being affected by any Equality or Mental Health issues, please reach out to us or if you would rather there are many groups and agencies, download an app called "Hub of Hope", it can point you to support groups in your local area, or there is always the Samaritans who are there 24/7 on the phone, telephone no: 116123.

Stay safe and be mindful of others around you.

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## The Fight Goes on!

I know there will be some who shout that the CWU has not delivered for them and will cite different challenges that have led to a difference at work or in working conditions.

But we have to take a look around in the UK and you can see that Management in Business is as greedy as ever. For Management, it's all about what they can get

before they move on to the next company. But for the average employee it's about supporting a family

The CWU understand this and that is why we fight every day to provide a safe place for employees to work. It's not acceptable, that in 2022, we still have to fight against discrimination, for sexuality, religion, race and still have

to fight against Bullying in the work place.

Even though most employers have policy against these injustices, it seems that the employer spends more time trying to cover up what's happened than trying to deal with it.

If you see such things, call them out! Lets stamp out this bad behaviour.

# Assistant Secretary - Steve Taylor



2021.. A year to remember but not favourably! As a union rep, the commute to work has been a doddle, but the workload has been difficult.



At least with Covid, it seems most of the 5G conspiracy people have gone away, I mean, how can you catch covid from 5G? I live in Heathfield and we've got Covid, but 5G is years away! I probably like most of you have been jabbed up to the eyeballs

and it hasn't affected me...what's that mother?

I can't believe Amazon sell anti radiation 5G hats...there's one born every minute!

I do get really annoyed when people spread untruths online (that's what we will call them), I just have to say something in defence. Whether it be on Covid, the Union or even the Telecoms companies we serve. However, our own "factual" social media sites are up and running, so if you want to join then please do. The Facebook page is for members only, so you can only see it if you ask to join.

This meant our website needed an overhaul and that too was renewed last year. We even have a news feed, which is filtered for the Telecoms section.

We normally hold an annual photograph competi-

tion, but that was put on hold due to the pandemic. But we hold high hopes it will be back on again this year; fingers crossed.

Last year I reported that I got a call from Clive Selley in regards to the office closures in our branch and he advised me that Philip Jansen would ring me as well. I can confirm that Philip did ring me a second time in the new year, but I was talking to a member at the time. He left no message!

The company's push for the Better Workplace Programme has not gone away, its slowly chipping away underneath. Even though most people have worked at home successfully for nearly two years now and they still insist on people being in one office. That office being (for Openreach) Birmingham! Even when the company was only insisting a partial return (1 in 4 days) to the workplace, this is still not





a long term option for those the programme will displace. How can this be justified? We leave this one in the negotiating skills of Andy Kerr and his “Count Me In” team.

This moving out of offices is not new to the branch as in 2020, BT Enterprise exited Sevenoaks Workstyle Building, whilst people were distracted by the Covid outbreak. Some went willingly, some were forced, and some took jobs miles away from their homes to another office which has no guarantee of being safe from another closure.

As for disciplines, they still keep on coming. Not as thick and fast as they once were, but they are on the rise, in particular for attendance.

Mental health is an issue throughout society, it’s not just us! I had to support one member from a non BT company who had a harrowing story to tell. It was difficult for all involved but I believe it is

resolved now. My only advise to anyone who has a mental health issue, is to reach out to others, you are not “fine”, but you can get better. There are a few resources on our website, under Health and Safety.



Other disciplines that spring to mind are the ones involving safety. Normally with a safety discipline the company dismisses. But one of my cases, the planets must have aligned, the wind was in the right direction and there was a black cat doing something or other and the member kept his job. So why am I mentioning this? Simple, do everything according to the safety manual. No, “I’ll just pop up the ladder and have a look”...It just won’t

wash with the senior manager. Don’t cut corners, go home safe, and go home with a job.

You are not individually performance managed on productivity, but you are individually disciplined on safety.

We have now gone a year with our texting service and it seems to go well. We will not overload you with texts! However, our email system broke! The company pulled the facility that we used, so we have now gone to a new provider and if you get an email inviting your to the AGM meeting...it works!

One of the jobs we have to do is to sign up new members. If you see any new people with their shiny new equipment; chat with them and let us know who they are and we will welcome them into the fold.

One meeting that we normally hold is our officers “strategic review”, where we plan for the coming year and report back on the previous. With the rise of the omicron variant, we decided to lead by example and we postpone this meeting. A few days later, the government announced restrictions once again. Ahead of the government again!



# Safety Coordinator - Rick Cobern



Just as we knew it would, our workforce has shown its metal by forging ahead every day to keep the country connected, enabling a massive change to accommodate the huge number of people working from home. We have demonstrated that we really are “essential workers” and deserve our key worker status. We have met the challenges thrown at us by

Covid and we have changed the way we work to mitigate some of the risks involved with the virus. I am hugely proud of all our workers who have achieved so much in the face of such adversity.

However, our Incident accident levels have taken a bit of an upturn over the year. Looking at the data there seems to be an early pattern with higher levels of new joiner incidents than would normally be expected. I place the fault firmly at the door of the training times and regimes, not with any individual new joiners.

I understand the need to train the workforce and being efficient, but this accelerated drive has highlighted what I consider to be some major concerns, such as new recruits being buddied up with engineers

who have very little time on the company themselves (some less than a year). Not only do I think it unwise not to use our more experienced engineers and workers to buddy these new recruits, I also believe it also puts too much pressure on these “relatively” new engineers.

These engineers have not been given the time themselves to have detailed knowledge of all the processes needed to perform their own job safely, but through a willingness to help, are volunteering for the role of “buddy”. The buddy is expected to demonstrate the correct way of doing things, instilling confidence and professionalism, all the while with the pressure to keep performing at the usual rate. This, in my opinion is asking for trouble. I think we should better utilise our most experienced to guide the way of our Newest.

This brings me onto my next point, STRESS in the workplace. I have taken many calls over the past year from employees who have been at the end of their tether, be it Covid, Redundancy, Workload, Money, Relationships or indeed all of these and many others besides. The





damage excessive stress can cause is very real and very present, if you are suffering from excessive stress don't shoulder or endure it alone, talk to someone, call us, talk to your GP, I can assure you that you are not alone and nobody will judge you,

your mental health is as important as your physical health, indeed they are both connected and inseparable.

The company has systems in place to try and help those who are struggling, be it the EAP (Employee

assistance program), STREAM that can be accessed from a company computer just search for "STREAM" on one of the company computers. We also have Reps in the branch who have Mental Health Awareness and will be able to point you in the right direction, you don't even need to give us your name, just give us a call.

As always, if you have any Health, Safety or Wellbeing questions don't hesitate to drop us a line, we know far from everything, however we are happy to go looking for answers wherever that may take us. If you see a safety issue we are here to help, we will even report it for you if you are not able to do it yourself.

Remember Work Safely, drive Safely and return home Safely.



## Political Officer - Dianne Hill



Oh dear, another fine mess you've got yourself into this time Prime Minister, you can't laugh this one off, people are upset and angry.

What can we say about 2021? It was another strange year, people in the main were very unsure what was happening or



what was allowed? But most of us knew we couldn't have parties.

We had probably the largest set of elections in May, they were a very mixed bag of results for Labour, of the ten directly elected Mayoral seats across the Country, Labour took eight. Andy Burnham being the most high-profile taking on the Government for Greater Manchester and taking the people with him. I was re-elected as a Labour and Co-op Councillor in Tunbridge Wells (53% of the vote). I was also elected Mayor of Southborough. I did an interview for the press "jobs for the boys" after the new Tory leader of the Council announced the committee chairs, vice chairs, portfolio holders all men except one woman Tory Councillor who shared a portfolio with a man. Council meetings went back face to face, it's like being at school sitting at a single desk surrounded by Perspex.

Keir Starmer is doing well, barrister style, holding Johnson to account, but I think Angela Rayner is doing really well, it must be all that Union training.

We have seen a lot of our

money being wasted, £milions given to Tory donors and mates for PPE equipment, £2.6m spent on a room (like Trumps') to make public announcements, the makeover of the Downing Street flat, come on we all pay £800+ for a roll of wallpaper don't we?

It has been very difficult for many of us during the lockdowns and it was hard when we saw Matt Hancock flouting the rules it's no wonder people were getting angry. When we couldn't have friends' round, or see loved ones in care homes or go to our children's sports days. G7, Johnson takes the family to Cornwall, no masks, leaders flying in from all over the World. Even the Queen and the rest of the royals had a few days away, all had a very expensive lunch paid for by us.

I attended Labour Women's Conference we do seem to have some amazing young women coming through. Francis O'Grady (TUC secretary) spoke saying 88% of social security cuts hit women and social distancing has impacted more on women who are mostly key workers, 57% of Trade union members women. I attended Labour Annual Confer-

ence in Brighton and S.E. Regional Conference in Reading where I was re-elected onto the Regional Executive.



The vaccine roll-out has been very good, but done locally not by the Government, I have many friends, as you probably have, who have volunteered in the centres, many retired doctors came back to help, Homelessness is still on the rise, Renting is unaffordable for most people on the minimum wage, usually a minimum of 65% going on rent. The £20 was taken from the Universal credit, all the charities were saying “don’t do it”, but no, most of this Government don’t understand what it’s like living on the breadline which thousands of families are now doing. Mental health is through the roof and teachers are saying they have never

seen so many children in poverty, many living with alcoholic parents, domestic violence, abuse, hunger, it’s heart-breaking. Services cut to the core.

We have had cuts to Universal Credit, an upcoming hike of National Insurance, Council tax set to increase and rising energy costs set to go up 50%! Price of fuel, food all rising, food banks are overwhelmed and Community Larders being set up to help local communities. Inflation the highest for over 30 years and still rising. The cost of living is a real crisis.

Hancock, Raab, Jenrick, Patel, and on it goes we thought the Barnard Castle eye test was bad but Dominic Raab on holiday knowing we were about to pull out of Afghanistan was unbelievable. He said it was fine, he was checking it out from his lounge in Crete. As Kabul fell, he couldn’t be bothered to help the Afghans who had helped us, leaving men, women and girls in the hands of the Taliban, he had to be shamed into coming back to do his job. Boris thought it was OK, made him Deputy Prime Minister!

So Priti Patel bringing in the Navy to patrol the Channel! They did this in 2019, HMS Enterprise and

Mersey did not intercept a single boat and cost “us” £780,000. She is pushing her new Law, trying to ban the right to protest, also trying to destroy the BBC.

Making Misogyny a hate crime could become Law as the Lords have just agreed it even though the Commons didn’t. Spiking, this has become a real danger, mainly to our young women having a night out. Disgusting.



Of course, all you members out there, your team meetings always have a trestle table full of booze, if not why not? They must think we are really stupid to just accept this, and not knowing the rules that you have rolled out for us, unbelievable, thousands of people so far fined for breaking these rules!! **One Rule for them, another one for us.**

Johnson has created this culture in Downing Street but it’s the staff that will pay the price. We know that one, don’t we?

# Local Hero - Robert Tressell (Noonan)



Although I have called Robert Tressell a local hero, he was in fact born in Dublin. Come to that, this name wasn't that either as his surname was actually Noonan.

Robert was born in 1870 and worked as a painter and decorator in South Africa. When he came to England it was in Hastings he resided (that's local). The then 31 year old took up employment with Burton & Co, but was paid a lot less than he got in South Africa.

Whilst in this employment he became acutely aware of the employers exploitative use of a recession in what nowadays we refer to the race to the bottom. It was these observations that would be the basis of his book, "The Ragged

Trousered Philanthropists".

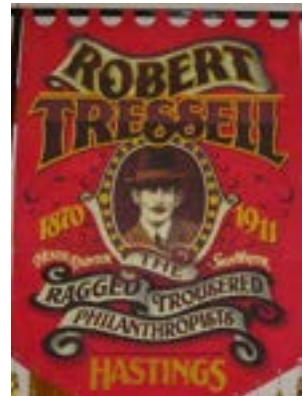
In 1907, he had a row with and left his employer, when they wanted him to speed up his work. He became a member of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and even painted the branch banner for them in 1908.

He completed his book in 1910, under the pen name of Tressell (for fear of blacklisting). 1,600 hand written pages about a painter and decorator (surprise) to point out the greed and dishonesty of the capitalist system, to his work colleagues. This book highlighted the "theory of value" or money trick! Robert's manuscript was turned down by three publishers.

In late 1910 and in failing



health, he moved to Liverpool, with the hope of emigrating to Canada. He died there in February 1911 (possibly of TB) and was buried in a paupers grave without any memorial, until 1977.



His daughter sold the rights to the book for £25 in 1914. Only sections of the book were published, and it wasn't until 1955 the original was fully published. To date, over one million books have been sold. George Orwell described it as, "a book that everyone should read".

See [hastingschronicle.net](http://hastingschronicle.net) for more info

## Meeting Dates 2022-23

Members of the South East Central, CWU Branch, are advised that the following meetings are open to all members:

General Meeting	Wednesday, May 18th	2022	Venue TBC
General Meeting	Wednesday, September 7th	2022	Venue TBC
General Meeting	Wednesday, December 7th	2022	Venue TBC
AGM	Wednesday, February 15th	2023	Venue TBC

Meeting venues will be advised closer to the time. Special Meetings may be called to address urgent issues and notified to you via the email address we have for you.

Committee members are advised that the following meetings are open to committee members

Committee Meeting	Tuesday, April 5th	2022	Venue TBC
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, July 5th	2022	Venue TBC
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, October 4th	2022	Venue TBC
Committee Meeting	Tuesday, January 10th	2023	Venue TBC

Dates of all meetings are advertised on the website [www.cwusec.org.uk](http://www.cwusec.org.uk)

## Current Officers Contact Details

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South East Central Branch  
*Annual General Meeting*

**Via Zoom Video Link**

(Log On details will be sent via email before the event)

on

**Wednesday 16th February**

**7.00pm**

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, delegation and proposals to the  
CWU

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

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