

WEST MIDLANDS

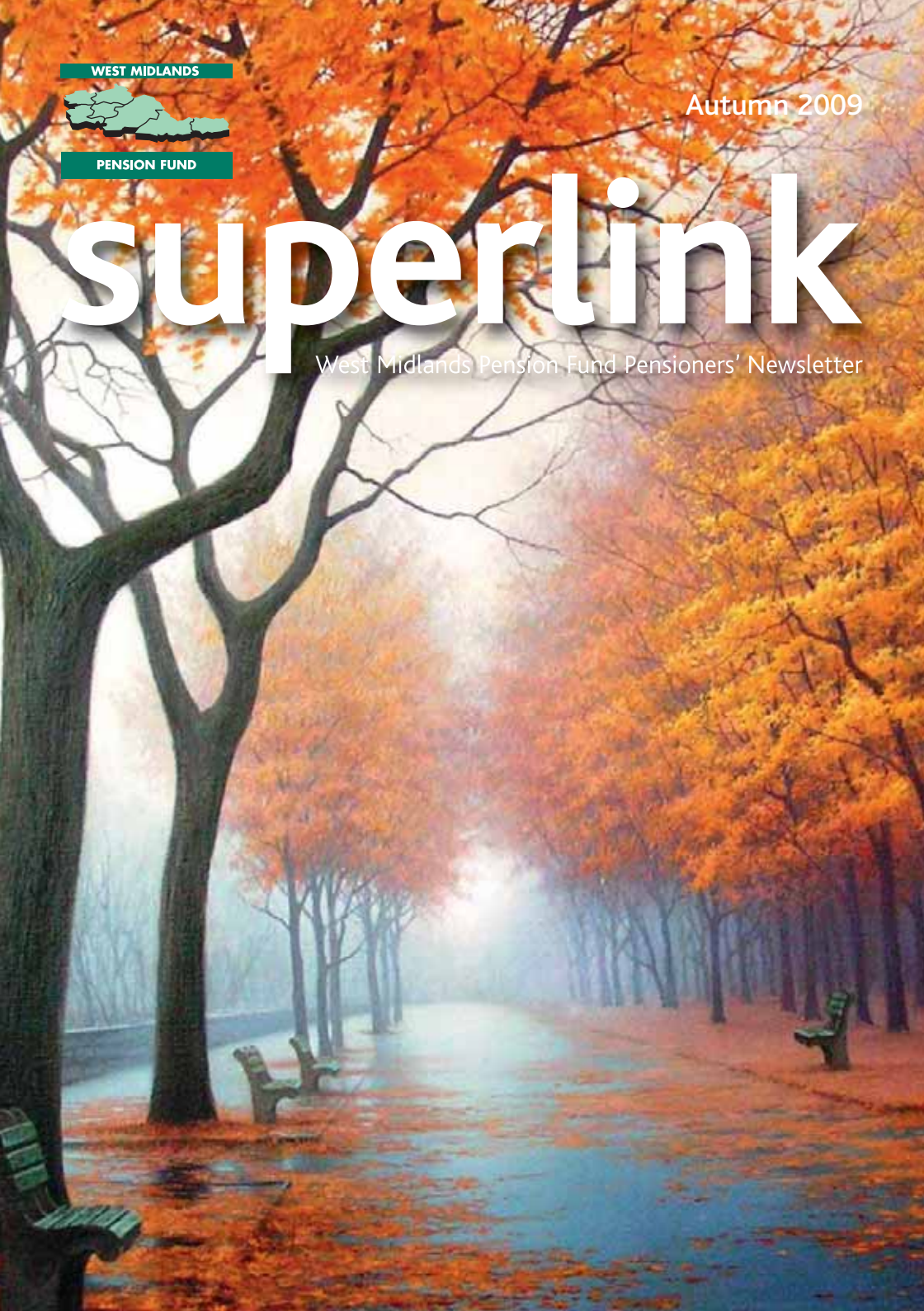


PENSION FUND

Autumn 2009

superlink

West Midlands Pension Fund Pensioners' Newsletter



Brian's Blog

As I sit down to write the introduction to this edition, it seems only a matter of weeks since the last one; time certainly does fly when you are busy.

The fine weather we were promised for summer has yet to materialise in any visible form, but hopefully this would also suggest a mild winter too. I would urge you all, once again to take advantage of the mild weather to ensure those last minute jobs around the home are dealt with, prior to the onset of winter.

This edition brings together the usual mix of offers and stories, as well as some useful information in the form of an article by Yvonne Davies from the Birmingham Citizen's Advice Bureau about how to deal with debt. We are informed that the 'credit crunch' is abating, and the economy is showing signs of recovery – although for those unemployed or facing financial hardship through rising fuel or utility costs, it is hard to see how they would view the "green shoots of recovery" that are increasingly mentioned in the media.

Looking ahead to future editions, it seems the whole credit crunch issue has bought back a nostalgia for wartime rationing, although my thoughts are that this could be soon lost if the individuals themselves had to endure it. Many daily newspapers have been carrying tips on how to make ends meet during frugal times. In this spirit, we'd like to include some tips and tricks that you may have encountered – whether it's a thrifty way to reuse an item, or even if there's



something you think that our other readers may benefit from, drop us a line (you'll find our address inside). We'll ensure the reader with the best suggestion receives a prize. A recent example mentioned to us was free passports, so for those that missed it first time round, we have included this again.

Several of you have contacted us about your memories of yesteryear, we've included some where we can in this edition, but as they say: "Keep 'em coming". We would love to hear about your views of days gone by and, if we get enough, we are planning to include a special feature in a forthcoming edition of Superlink.


Brian Bailey
Director of Pensions

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Fighting stroke with FAST

If you suspect that someone is having a stroke, Act FAST.

What is a stroke?

A stroke is a brain attack. It happens when the blood supply to the brain is disrupted. Most strokes occur when a blood clot blocks the flow of blood to the brain. Some strokes are caused by bleeding in or around the brain from a burst blood vessel.

What are the symptoms of stroke?

- Sudden weakness or numbness of the face, arm or leg on one side of the body;
- Sudden loss or blurring of vision, in one or both eyes;
- Sudden difficulty speaking or understanding spoken language;
- Sudden confusion;
- Sudden or severe headache with no apparent cause;
- Dizziness, unsteadiness or a sudden fall, especially with any of the other signs.

Why act FAST?

Stroke is a medical emergency. By calling 999, you can help someone reach hospital quickly and receive the early treatment they need. Prompt action can prevent further damage to

the brain and help someone make a full recovery. Delay can result in death or major long-term disabilities, such as paralysis, severe memory loss and communication problems. Ambulance crews use FAST, and with hospital staff can act fast to identify and diagnose a stroke quickly.

What is FAST?

FAST requires an assessment of three specific symptoms of stroke:

- **F**acial weakness - can the person smile? Has their mouth or eye drooped?
- **A**rm weakness - can the person raise both arms?
- **S**peech problems - can the person speak clearly and understand what you say?
- **T**ime to call 999.



Did you know?

- 1) Every five minutes someone in the UK has a stroke. That's an estimated 150,000 people per year.
 - 2) A stroke is a brain attack. A stroke happens due to a clot or a bleed in the brain, causing brain cells to die.
 - 3) Signs of a stroke appear suddenly and most commonly include one or more of the following:
 - Facial weakness
 - Arm or leg weakness
 - Speech problems
 - Visual problems
- If signs of stroke only last a few minutes or a few hours, then a Transient Ischaemic Attack (TIA) or mini-stroke may have occurred.

- 4) A stroke is an emergency. If you see the signs of a stroke act

FAST and call 999. Early treatment saves lives and increases the chance of making a better recovery.

- 5) A TIA is a warning sign that must never be ignored. Seek urgent medical attention for assessment and treatment. High-risk TIA patients must be assessed by a specialist within 24 hours of onset of symptoms.
- 6) Stroke is the third biggest killer and the leading cause of severe disability in the UK. More than 250,000 people live with disabilities caused by stroke.
- 7) Most people affected are over 65, but anyone can have a stroke, including children and even babies. Around 1,000 people under 30 have a stroke each year.
- 8) Almost one in four men and one in five women aged 45 can expect to have a stroke if they live to 85.
- 9) Around three times more women die from stroke than from breast cancer in the UK.
- 10) Eating healthily, taking more exercise, not smoking and ensuring blood pressure is normal, can all help to prevent stroke.
- 11) The Stroke Association is the only national charity solely concerned with helping everyone affected by stroke.

For further information, including a range of information leaflets, contact Stroke Helpline 0845 3033 100

Random recollections

One of the joys of motoring these days is getting caught up in the morning or afternoon school rush hour – dozens of parents in cars, trying to find somewhere to wait or park, delivering or collecting their offspring.

As I sit in the traffic queue, I think about my own school days, most of them during the Second World War. Only essential users had cars, so there were three travel options: walking, cycling or public transport (buses and trams). I lived about three miles from school, so I cycled unless the roads were snowbound. Most of the journey was pretty uneventful, but the last bit involved negotiating tram lines. Crossing them at 90 degrees was fairly safe, but if you approached them diagonally, there was a risk of getting your tyre in the track, which was decidedly hazardous. Equally dangerous was the space between the tram track and the kerb: cars and lorries overtaking the tram on the left-hand side forced one onto the pavement in self-defence. British Summer Time (BST) and Double BST continued all through the winters so that we could travel home in daylight. Occasionally, the route had to be changed because a bomb crater had closed a road. Having the bike at school meant that there was time for a few

minutes of train-spotting during the lunch hour.

Economy was the order of the day: 'Make Do and Mend' was one of the wartime slogans. Clothing was rationed, so boys wore short trousers until they were about fourteen-years old, because long trousers cost more in clothing coupons. Shoe repairers did well because repairs were not rationed – new shoes were. Nonetheless, we all turned up in





Bomb crater in Scotland Road, May 1941

uniform, shirts tucked in and caps on our heads. Economy in books and stationery was important, too. Before you could be issued with a new exercise book, you had to produce the old one and show that both sides of every page had been used. At the end of the school year, textbooks were handed in for reissue to the following year.

Of course, all the male members of staff who were of military age had been called up, so their places were taken by retired teachers recalled to service, women teachers (unusual in a boys' school) or refugees. There were two or three very learned professors from Germany or Austria who were totally unaccustomed to teaching unenthusiastic schoolboys. Any teacher who had served in the First World War or who was a member of the Territorial

Army carried a rank: we had several captains, one major and one naval commander who, as our headmaster had been called into government service, was deputy headmaster throughout the war.

Our PE teacher was a sergeant-major who had lost his right hand in the First World War.

My final recollection is of wartime school dinners, which were not rationed, so they eased the pressure on home catering. Cornish pasties (dinosaur pies) had rock-hard pastry, custard was nearly solid, and some of the braver boys used to hold their dish upside down to see if the skin on the custard would take the weight of the pudding.

The return to normal after the war was a very gradual process, but that's another story.

Memories

My call for memories of forgotten workplace equipment and/or practice produced a feast of both amusing and sobering contributions. Particularly fascinating has been the extent of detail readers have been able to recall.

One such example came from **Peter Makinson** who described his early days working for Blackpool Corporation Transport as a seasonal tram conductor in 1964.

Trams have enjoyed something of a revival in the West Midlands over recent years...but conductors? Together, with open platform double-decker buses, I doubt if we shall ever see the return of the 'clippie'.

All the more interesting then that Peter can provide an insight into his experience of life (in this instance) on the trams of Blackpool. He tells us on his first day he "joined a group in the training classroom for a basic induction day. We were issued with our uniform which included a leather cash bag and a strap for the ticket machine. In the classroom we were shown how to fill in the waybill on which you recorded each journey and issue tickets from a machine called a TIM. We were also given some basic do's and don'ts and then told we would be attached to a senior conductor on a normal shift for three days as a 'probationer' conductor on a tram on Blackpool promenade. Living in the town, I had a pretty good idea of where all the main stops were,

but I was not prepared for the wide variety of names which the passengers would use to describe where they were going. On the fifth day we were back in the classroom with the chief inspector, no less, and I clearly remember how he told us that if we got two dogs on a bus or tram at the same time, we were supposed to make sure they were different sexes".

Those familiar with Blackpool promenade may be particularly interested in Peter's next memory: "In those days the minimum fare on the promenade was five old pence, about £0.02 in today's money. Even then, people would complain especially if they came from towns where fares still started at two old pence which is less



than one new penny. The full journey from Starr Gate to Fleetwood cost one shilling and eight pence, which is about £0.08. The coinage back then was much heavier than today and we got a lot of half crowns (two shillings and sixpence or £0.125). At the end of a shift, we might pay in over £30.00 all in coin, and that was a heavy weight in the leather cash bag. Very rarely were you offered a note for a fare."

Peter goes on to share a ruse the more experienced conductors practiced:

"If you sorted the money out in advance you would get paid in much more quickly, so you always had a supply of small paper cash bags for copper, threepenny bits (known as washers), sixpences, shillings, two shillings and half crowns. These could be weighed by the cashier and it made paying in much easier." There was, however, a sting in Peter's recollection: if there was a cash shortage, it was deducted from a conductor's next week's wages.

The traditional cuppa

To prove how times have changed, Peter outlines some of the essentials of the refreshment break for Blackpool's bus and tram drivers and conductors at that time: "One of the time-honoured traditions of the industry in those days was the 'brew'. Every driver and conductor carried an enamel brew can in which you could make tea during the day. On the promenade, water heaters were actually provided in the inspector's offices at the Pleasure Beach, Bispham and Cleveleys. On the bus side, you could brew up in the main bus station, but also many café owners along the routes would let you have hot water for a penny a time." You have to wonder what arrangements the crews of today are able to make.

To conclude, Peter helps solve the mystery of how staff working the last shift managed to get home at a time when having your own car was less common. He writes: "Finally, of course, you had to get home, but the last service buses had finished. If you lived

close to the depot you could walk of course, but few staff in those days could afford a car. I cycled or caught the staff bus which ran a circuit around the town for the benefit of crews on late duty. The last staff to finish were the cash clerks at just after 1.00am, together with the crew of the last tram from Fleetwood. To get them home, the cash van was made available and a driver who stayed on all night worked this and drove the first tram of the following morning."



Les Haynes describes his early days in the 'Swinging Sixties' working in an architect's office in Birmingham.

After a passing reference to Birmingham's 'pigeons and all', he reminds us this period was pre-computers when, for him, drawing boards were a big feature in an architect's office. Part of his duties was to carefully write out the accompanying notes onto each drawing, copying onto paper copies from the local printer (accompanied by the stench of ammonia) and spending hours water colouring-in the plans and other drawings ready for submission to the local authority.

And this was pre-central heating too it would seem. In winter (those were real winters), his office was heated by a small electric fire. When the boss was out, to keep warm, he and colleagues would play cricket in the corridor.

For **Dorothea Abbott** the office setting in the 1940s was a somewhat different scene. Dorothea worked in the Binding Room of Birmingham's Central Library which she describes as 'lurking' behind the town hall. Her office, formerly the home of the building's caretaker, lay "deep in the bowels" of the library and required her and her colleague to constantly work in artificial light. It wasn't all doom and gloom however because (a) through the one window

they were blessed with, they "enjoyed a view across a yard, to the staff toilets" and (b) they had a coal fire.

Dorothea reveals some of her duties at that time, eg, newly bound books had to be checked to ensure pages were in correct order, ie, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 etc. The excitement, she suggests, encouraged "some of us to escape to join the ATS, WAAF, Civil Nursing Reserve, Civil Defence or Land Army". At other times they were required to manufacture scrap



IN THE BINDERY

This is one of the stitching machines used for pamphlets, catalogues or books, which cuts and shapes its own wire staples from the spool, one being driven through and clenched over in less than a second. With a power drive to do the work, the needle only to tap the foot control. We have one at the other end of the bench which stitches up to a 2 inch thickness.

1957 September 1957

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

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pads from waste paper. This early example of recycling – it was wartime after all – resulted in paper sheets, all of an exact size, being pierced in the top right-hand corner with the aid of a gimlet in order to allow a length of string to secure all the sheets together.

Armed with experience as described, Dorothea and colleagues had to secure a pass in the Elementary Examination of the Library Association to remain a member of staff. A novel twist to the halcyon days of 'post-entry training'?

For "the older girls", writes Dorothea, writing instructions to the binders for each book featured in their work while the section head "maintained the ledgers of stationery stock for the whole of Birmingham public libraries and branches".



Finally, Dorothea refers to the mystery of the missing toilet rolls. The aforementioned ledgers recorded a stock of 200 toilet rolls that were located in a nearby cupboard. But on checking, a discrepancy was discovered which necessitated the attendance of 'detectives'. No culprits were discovered, leaving Dorothea to suggest that, as it was wartime, they were hard to obtain and "probably ended up being sold on the black market".

Elsewhere in Birmingham at about the same time, **Pat Howell** started her working life in 1945 at the age of 14. Pat joined a small printers in Summer Lane as a 'tablehand' later renamed 'print finisher'.

Her diminutiveness (five foot nothing, she says) proved a mixed blessing, apparently. She recalls having to operate a treadle punch in an upstairs room with a ceiling so low it required her to bend. Pat's next company brought her in contact with a forewoman who refused to allow the staff to talk to each other and to play a radio, she tells us, was "unheard of".

Things improved, however, and at her next job, the staff "sang as we worked".

After a change of company, Pat was employed doing work she thoroughly enjoyed and found really satisfying. Essentially, she was required to see a job through from start to finish. At odds perhaps with modern methods, Pat describes in some detail producing invoice books from piles of coloured sheets through a seven-stage process to a point where they were ready for delivery to the customer. As if that wasn't enough, Pat wistfully recalls they had tea breaks and "music while you work".

With those happy memories in mind, Pat concludes her contribution by expressing her sadness when she hears people saying that they dread going to work because it's boring.

The pleasure and satisfaction gained from work was a powerful part of a contribution submitted by **Kenneth Wintle**. He writes with some pride for the work he did when employed by Sandwell MBC. Although no dates are quoted, he mentions he is now in his seventies.

Together with a colleague, he worked as a 'special collector' visiting addresses across the borough collecting unwanted items such as three-piece suites, beds, mattresses, fridges and washing machines to name but a few.

Kenneth's memories of those days includes the day they collected just half a bed, without ever learning what had happened to the other half. And on another occasion, half a bath was waiting for them to collect. Kenneth writes of an explanation for only half the bath (which left him and his colleague laughing) but regrettably, we are spared the details.

We are assured by Kenneth that he has recorded on his computer hundreds of anecdotes, and by way of example relates the occasion they collected a

settee from a resident who, when they met her in her lounge was "bent at right angles and hobbled round the room". She had asked for the settee she had been sitting on to be collected. Kenneth's concerns about what she would then sit on were met with an explanation that she had another settee in her bedroom and Kenneth plus colleague immediately volunteered to remove one and transfer the other to her lounge in its place. During the ensuing banter, Kenneth observed a "startling transformation." The old lady was beginning to stand completely upright. No longer frail but lithe and tall, issuing crisp commands as one used to handling authority. The grave look had been replaced by more lively features. Before leaving, other household items seemingly dumped in the back garden were spotted and with the resident's blessing, also collected. Kenneth is convinced that her transformation can be attributed to the passage of the scripture that directs: "It is more blessed to give than receive."

Late breaking news

ATTENTION - Overseas members paid using TAPS facility

We have recently been notified by the Bank of Scotland, the current provider of TAPS payments facilities for our overseas members, that they will be terminating their services with effect from December 2009.

We are in active negotiations with other suppliers to provide you with a seamless transition of this service. Any implications will be communicated directly to those members who use this facility in the next few weeks.

TO END THIS WANDER DOWN MEMORY LANE, WE ARE INDEBTED TO ALAN PIKE FOR SENDING TO SUPERLINK A COPY OF THE FOLLOWING WHICH HE HOPES MIGHT “PUT A WRY SMILE ON MEMBERS’ FACES”.

OFFICE STAFF PRACTICES 1852

Buried deep in the demolition rubble of an old building in Lichfield was this gem directed at clerical staff who had just benefited from the new labour laws of the day. It reads:

- 1) This firm has reduced the hours of work and the clerical staff will now have to be present between the hours of 7.00am and 6.00pm
 - 2) Daily prayers will be held each morning in the main office. The clerical staff will be present.
 - 3) Clothing must be of a sober nature. The clerical staff will not disport themselves in raiment of bright colours.
 - 4) Overshoes and top coats may not be worn in the office but neck scarves and headwear may be worn in inclement weather.
 - 5) A stove is provided for the benefit of the clerical staff. Coal and wood must be kept in the locker. It is recommended that each member of the clerical staff bring four pounds of coal each day during cold weather.
 - 6) No member of the clerical staff may leave the room without permission from Mr. Rogers. The calls of nature are permitted and clerical staff may use the garden below the second gate. This area must be kept in good order.
 - 7) No talking is allowed during business hours.
 - 8) The craving of tobacco, wines or spirits is a human weakness and as such is forbidden to all members of the clerical staff.
 - 9) Now that the hours of business have been drastically reduced, the partaking of food is allowed between 11.30am and noon, but the work will not on any account cease.
 - 10) Members of the clerical staff will provide their own pens.
 - 11) Mr. Rogers will nominate a senior clerk to be responsible for the cleanliness of the main office and the private office. All boys and juniors will report to him 40 minutes before prayers and will remain after closing for similar work. Brushes, brooms, scrubbers and soap are provided by the owners.
-
- The owners recognise the generosity of the new labour laws, but will expect a great rise in output of work to compensate for these near-Utopian conditions.
-

Worried about debt?

Do's and don'ts

1 If you're in debt, **don't** try to avoid dealing with it.

2 It's important to **do** something, because the problem won't just go away.

3 **Don't** ignore calls or letters from the people you owe money to (your **creditors**).

4 **Do** contact them to explain why you're having problems and follow the simple steps in this article to help you get back in control of your finances.

If you don't agree that you owe any money, get advice from an experienced debt adviser straightaway.

What You Can Do Yourself

Steps 1 - 4 (including a section on 'jargonbusting' which seeks to explain what the words actually mean)

Step One: Make a List of Your Debts

You will need the following information for each debt:

- 1) the name and address of the creditor.
 - 2) the account or reference number.
 - 3) the amount you owe.
-

It's a good idea to keep the latest letter and statement for each debt together in one place so that you can easily find them if you need them.

If you've received any court papers or letters that seem urgent, get advice straightaway from an experienced debt adviser.

Once you've made a list of all your creditors, you need to work out which ones to deal with first.

You need to deal with some particular debts first. These are called 'priority debts' because the consequences of not paying these debts can be more serious.



a) 'Priority debts' include:

- 1) court fines - such as magistrates' court fines for traffic offences;
- 2) mortgage or rent arrears - you could lose your home;
- 3) council tax arrears;
- 4) fuel arrears - your fuel could be cut off;
- 5) arrears of child maintenance;
- 6) income tax or VAT arrears;
- 7) TV license or TV license arrears - it's a criminal offence to use a TV without a valid license and you could be fined or imprisoned.

If you don't arrange to pay council tax arrears, court fines, maintenance, income tax or VAT arrears, bailiffs can take your belongings. As a last resort you could be sent to prison or made bankrupt.

The debts you deal with after these have been dealt with are called 'non-priority debts'.

b) 'Non-priority debts' include:

- 1) benefits overpayments;
- 2) general credit debts - such as banks' overdrafts, loans, hire purchase, credit card accounts and catalogue debts;
- 3) student loans;
- 4) money borrowed from friends or family.

You can't be sent to prison for not paying non-priority debts. But if you don't make any offers to pay without explaining why, your creditors may take you to court. If you still fail to pay, your creditors can take further court action against you, which could allow them to send bailiffs round to take your belongings away.

Step Two: Work Out Your Budget

List all the income and expenses for your household.

Be honest and make sure that the amounts are realistic. You can use a budget sheet to help you do this.

Under 'Income' you should include all income:

- 1) earnings - for your partner and yourself;
- 2) benefits – your family are paid, including child benefit and tax credits;
- 3) maintenance - from an ex-partner for you or your children. Include any child support from the Child Support Agency;
- 4) contributions - from other members of your family and any lodgers.

Try to think about all the different ways you might be able to earn extra money or increase your income in the future. You may be able to claim additional benefits or tax credits.

Under 'Expenses' you should include all spending:

- 1) housekeeping. Fill in realistic amounts for what you spend on all your expenses, including food, cigarettes, newspapers and all ad-hoc purchases;
- 2) housing costs. This should include mortgage or rent, a second mortgage or secured loan, service charges and life or endowment insurance cover that is attached to your mortgage;
- 3) council tax liability;
- 4) fuel and water charges;
- 5) telephone charges;
- 6) travel expenses. Include both public transport and the cost of running a car such as road tax, insurance, and its maintenance costs;
- 7) insurance, such as buildings and contents insurance on your home;
- 8) childcare costs.

Step Three: Tackle Your Priority Debts First

When you've worked out how much you have left over after paying your expenses, contact each of your priority creditors.

Show them your budget and try to make an arrangement to pay back what you owe, at an amount you can reasonably afford.

For example, you may be able to pay an extra bit each month, until the arrears are cleared. Or you may not have any extra money at the moment, but know you will have a lump-sum in three months' time, which will clear the debt completely.

If you can't afford to pay anything to your priority creditors and your situation isn't likely to get better, the outcome may be very serious. Get advice straightaway.

Below are some reasonable figures that may help you prepare a fully thought out personal budget. Too often people underestimate their spending. Remember, you will need to have a small amount of money put aside for birthdays and Christmas, as well as a budget for replacing worn clothing and household items. It is important to build a small additional amount into your personal budget to allow for these things:

Expenditure	First Adult £ per month	Additional Adult £ per month	Children under 14 £ per month	Children 14-18 per head £ per month	Own Vehicle
Telephone	40	15	7	11	
Travel	49	40	18	31	88
Housekeeping	242	141	63	107	
Other	100	82	36	62	



Step Four: Sort Out Your Non-Priority Debts

How you deal with your non-priority debts will depend on whether you have any money left over from dealing with your priority debts and paying for essential household expenses like housing costs and food.

If You Have Money To Spare:

You may have several options for dealing with your non-priority debts. You may have the option of:

- 1) making offers to creditors yourself;
- 2) asking a free debt management company to make offers for you;
- 3) applying to court for an administration order;
- 4) arranging an individual voluntary arrangement (IVA);
- 5) putting all your debts into one loan – ‘loan consolidation’.

It isn't usually a good idea to borrow more money to get out of debt, and there can be serious disadvantages. Make sure you get advice before you take out another loan.

If you have little or no money to spare

If, after you've done your budget, you really have no money or anything of value that you can sell – and you know little will improve in future, you will have limited options for dealing with your non-priority debts. The only options available to you are:

- 1) asking your creditors to write off your debt;
- 2) applying for bankruptcy;
- 3) applying for a debt relief order (DRO).

To get more detailed information about dealing with debts, contact your nearest advice agency and they will be able to assist you.

Yvonne Davies

Birmingham Citizens Advice





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Autumn wordsearch

Enter our competition and win a DVD of the Oscar-nominated drama 'The Wrestler' starring Mickey Rourke and Marisa Tomei.

Here is a list of items associated with autumn. See how many you can find. The words can go up, down, diagonally or backwards.



AUTUMN	FIRES
ORANGE	REDS
STRAW	SCENERY
SEASON	SUNLIGHT
YELLOW	HAYRIDE
RAKE	TREES
LEAVES	HARVEST
BROWN	HAYSTACK
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One lucky winner will be drawn at random by the Director of Pensions on 23 October 2009.

The winner of the summer wordsearch was Mrs Margaret Pountney of Wednesfield, Wolverhampton – congratulations, Mrs Pountney.

To enter, send your completed word grid to: West Midlands Pension Fund, PO Box 3948 Wolverhampton WV1 1XP.

Don't forget to include your name and address.

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www.superlinksavings.com



Please find below a small sample of the most popular offers available to you.

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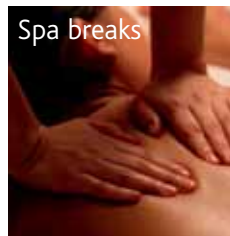
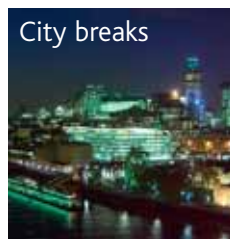
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Passport essentials

If you need to renew your passport urgently, IPS (Identity and Passport Service) offers a fast-track one-week service and a premium one-day service. You should make an appointment for either of these services by calling their adviceline on 0300 222 0000.

If you need more information about passports go to the travel and transport section of Directgov (<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/index.htm>).

Whether you need a passport renewal or want to apply for your first – or wish to find out what to do if you are changing your name, reporting a stolen or lost passport or are interested in obtaining a collective passport for a group of people going on a trip together, you'll find what you want on Directgov.

Passports in their historical context

The idea of a passport has existed since people began to travel from one country to another. In the United Kingdom, the origin of the passport is the 'Safe Conduct', which was, at first, little more than a note signed by the king or queen asking that the person who held it be allowed to travel freely. Safe Conducts were issued to people of all nationalities and were mentioned in an Act of Parliament in the reign of King Henry V in 1414.

The first United Kingdom passport was issued in 1915 when the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act



came into force. It was a one-page document folded into eight, with a cardboard cover. It contained a photo and signature, together with details of the holder. Some might say these details were overly personal: it would give the size of a person's nose and eyes (small, large) as well as their forehead (broad, narrow) and also describe their complexion.

After the First World War, the 32-page blue British passport came into use – and with it, the modern British passport service.

When the blue UK passports were phased out and the the burgundy ones were introduced in 1988, these mentioned the European Community (EC) – but they were still UK passports, not 'European'. They were also machine-readable. Information on a strip within

the passport could be read electronically and validity checked on the spot. This innovation aided faster progress through border controls. The passport has a traditional role as a document of national identity, as well as an aid to travel.

Passport history timeline

Date	Event
1414	A reference is made to 'Safe Conducts' (the earliest passports) in an Act of Parliament during the reign of King Henry V.
1450	The Privy Council Register begins, leaving us a record of Privy Council business. According to the Register, this includes granting passports.
1641	A passport from this date still exists. It was issued on 18 June and signed by King Charles I.
1644-1649	References in the Commons Journal show that both the House of Commons and the House of Lords grants passes to foreign and British subjects during these years.
1772	Until this date, passports were written in Latin or English. From this date onwards they are written in French (but see 1858).
1794	From this date, all passports are issued by the Secretary of State and their issue is recorded. (Before this date some passports were issued and signed by the king or queen.)
1858	From this date, passports are restricted to United Kingdom nationals. (Before this date a 'passport' could be issued to a person of any nationality as a promise of 'safe conduct' from the king or queen.) Passports start to be written in English again from this date, having been written in French since 1772.
1914	Start of the First World War. By this point British passports are printed on paper and contain a photograph of the passport holder. The British Nationality and Status Aliens Act is passed. Around the world, states start issuing passports as a way of distinguishing their citizens from others they think of as 'foreign nationals'.
1915	The first modern UK passport is issued. It is a folded one-page document valid for two years.

1918	End of the First World War.
1920	The League of Nations International Conference on Passports agrees on a new book format for passports.
1954	From this date UK passports no longer show the name of the Secretary of State.
1961	The British Visitor's Passport is introduced. It is available from Crown Post Offices and can be used for visiting Western Europe.
1968	The first 10-year UK passports are issued.
1972	Passports are changed slightly, for example the paper used now has a special watermark for security.
1973	A 94-page passport is introduced for frequent travellers.
1975	Passport photographs are now laminated for security - it is harder to change the photograph.
1981	An overprint is added to the laminate to further increase security.
1984	Occupation and country of residence details are no longer included on passports.
1988	'Family' or 'joint' passports are no longer issued. The first burgundy-coloured machine-readable UK passports are issued. A common format is introduced for European Community member states' passports.
1995	The British Visitor's Passport is discontinued.
1997	The first UK passports with references to the European Union are issued.
1998	New security measures include the use of a digital facial image rather than a laminated photograph, and intaglio or raised printing on the inside on the front and back covers. Children under 16 can no longer be included on new adult passports but must have a separate child passport.
2005	The UKPS planned to use a facial recognition image biometric in British passports from late 2005/early 2006.
2006	26 October - The Identity and Passport Service started producing 100% fully biometric passports that comply with the US visa waiver programme.

Free passports for wartime generation

Britain's wartime generation now receive free passports, as announced by the then (13 October 2004) home secretary, David Blunkett. In recognition of the sacrifices made by World War II veterans and civilians, every British citizen born on or before 2 September 1929 will no longer have to pay for a UK passport.

Many veterans received free one-year passports to enable them to revisit battlefields in the 60th anniversary year of the D-Day landings. The home secretary announced in 2004 that this would be extended to cover everyone that played a part in the war effort, who will now receive free passports for life.

Mr Blunkett, when home secretary, said: "The years of the Second World War were amongst the darkest in our nation's history. We must never forget the sacrifices made and bravery shown by the entire wartime generation. They endured the horrors of the battlefield, terrible losses and unremitting hardship at home to secure our country's freedom and prosperity. Next month we will observe Remembrance Day, an annual reminder of their dignity and pride.

"I want to thank and honour every adult who helped us defeat the Nazis and their allies - not just those in our brave armed forces, but those who played their part on the home front. Now the wartime generation - some 4.5 million people - will receive free passports for life in recognition of what they gave to secure our nation's liberty and democracy."



Brigadier Ian Townsend, Secretary General of the Royal British Legion, said:

"The Royal British Legion warmly welcomes this new scheme which, through the generosity of the Government, will enable all those who lived through and remember World War II to travel the world and visit places they may remember, countries which were liberated by the Allies, or beyond."

Ramblings of a retired mind by Tom Weir

- I was thinking about how mobile phones are the status symbol of today, and that everyone has one clipped on to them. I can't afford one. So, I'm wearing my TV remote.
- You know, I spent a fortune on deodorant before I realized that people didn't like me anyway.
- I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a lot more as they get older. Then, it dawned on me – they were cramming for their finals.
- I thought about making a fitness movie for people my age and calling it 'Pumping Rust'.

Nine sayings used by married couples



1) Fine: This is the word use to end an argument when they are right and you need to shut up.

2) Five minutes: When getting dressed, this means a half an hour. Five minutes is only five minutes, however, if you have just been given five more minutes to watch the TV before helping around the house.

3) Nothing: This is the calm before the storm. This means 'something', and you should be on your toes. Arguments that begin with 'nothing' usually end in 'fine'.

4) Go ahead: This is a dare, not permission. Don't do it!

5) Loud sigh: This non-verbal statement is actually a word, but is often misunderstood. A loud sigh means they think you are an idiot and wonder why

they are wasting their time standing here and arguing with you about 'nothing' (refer back to 3 for the meaning of 'nothing').

6) That's okay: This is one of the most dangerous statements you can hear from a partner. 'That's okay' means they want to think long and hard before deciding how and when you will pay for your mistake.

7) Thanks: A partner is thanking you; do not question it, or faint. Just say you're welcome. (I want to add in a clause here: this is true, unless the partner says 'thanks a lot' - that is pure sarcasm and they are not thanking you at all. Do not say 'you're welcome'. That will bring on a 'whatever'.)

8) Whatever: Is a way of saying 'just you wait!'

9) Don't worry about it, I got it: Another dangerous statement, meaning you knew it had to be done, but you were too lazy to do it and had to wait till I came home to do it (men should automatically know it has to be done). Also meaning this is something that a woman has told a man to do several times, but is now doing herself. This will later result in a man asking 'what's wrong?' For the woman's response, refer to 3.

'No shows' cost the NHS millions

Data has shown that patients who fail to keep hospital appointments cost the NHS more than £600 million a year, enough to run two medium-size hospitals.

Between 2007 and 2008, 6.5 million appointments were missed in the UK, with hospitals losing around £100 per patient in revenue. The Patients Association said missing an appointment was "unforgivable".

The Department of Health in England says initiatives such as text message reminders are being rolled out. But Unison said patients were not always to blame as check-ups are often arranged months in advance and easily forgotten. The public service trade union said primary care trusts should find ways of reminding patients of their appointments, which could include text or email alerts. Some are already doing this.

'Did not attends'

Young men in their early 20s are the worst offenders, and people aged 70 to 74 are the most conscientious about keeping an appointment, the figures from UK health departments and analysts revealed.

There has been a slight improvement in attendance over the last few years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, however, the figure is higher than in recent years.

Some clinics in the UK are now over-booking patients in anticipation of

no shows. But Karen Jennings, Unison's head of health, warned: "Hospitals who go down the route of over-booking, based on previous experience of missed appointments, must ensure that it doesn't disadvantage patients if there is a 100% turn-out."

Michael Summers, vice-chair of the Patients Association, said: "It's unforgivable really. It doesn't take much to lift a phone and say that you have recovered or to apologise because you will have to miss an appointment. We owe a responsibility to our doctors to behave properly. Missed appointments waste healthcare professionals' time and a great deal of money."

A Department of Health spokesman said successful initiatives, such as text messages to remind patients, were on the rise. He said the 'choose and book', which allows patients to select a chosen time, date and place for an appointment at their own convenience, was also helping reduce the number of missed appointments. He added: "The NHS Constitution gives patients the right to access NHS services, but patients have responsibilities too – it is important to keep appointments, or cancel within reasonable time. Otherwise, receiving treatment within the maximum waiting times may be compromised."

Stranger than fiction

They say that truth is stranger than fiction. Judge for yourself with these nine peculiar facts from around the world.

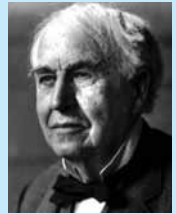
- If you are visiting Tokyo, don't forget to take your push bike with you, as it is the fastest form of transport on journeys averaging fifty minutes or less.
- If you fancy a game of cards, then take a good look at the kings – notice anything? The King of Hearts is the only king that bothers to shave; he is the only one without a moustache.



- The next time you go to fill up your car with a few gallons of petrol, spare a thought for the poor guy who has to fill up a Boeing 747 with aviation fuel. This gas guzzler consumes over 57,000 gallons of fuel each flight.
- Crazy laws are always worth a mention: if you have a bucket of beer, and you are in St Louis (USA) then you must not sit on the curb to drink it – it is illegal to do so.

- If you cut the head off a cockroach and think that you've killed it, then think again – this animal can survive for several weeks in a decapitated state; it will, however, eventually die of hunger.

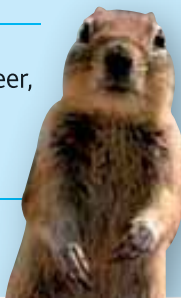
- This one is a matter of necessity being the mother of invention: the inventor of the light bulb, Thomas Edison, was scared of the dark.



- If you think that chewing gum is a relatively new thing, it's not. A piece that has been found has been dated at around 9,000 years old.

- It's hard life being the male of the species, as they are six times more likely to be struck by lightning than the fairer sex. Now it could be the males are the more outward bound types, or it could be they are the more stupid to stand outside in a thunderstorm type – who knows!

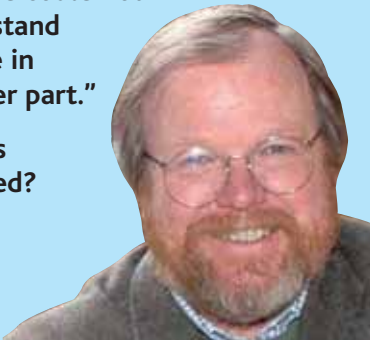
- And lastly, I think we should all take a leaf out of the books of squirrels; these green-minded creatures plant millions of nuts around the world every year. Trouble is they forget where they put some of them. Result? Millions of trees.



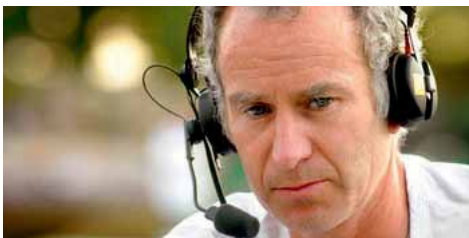
The End Column by Max Bowen

Many readers will no doubt have enjoyed reading books by Bill Bryson. His extensive writing about the English language had this item: "Thanks to the proliferation of English dialect during the period of Norman rule, by the fifteenth century people in one part of England could not understand people in another part."

What's changed?



It's a bit late but I must have my annual jibe about the 'arrogant' John McEnroe. I watched a number of matches and was met with McEnroe pontificating at enormous length about what was happening on and off the courts. I turned on the TV to watch the matches. He spoilt the show by suffering from verbal diarrhoea.



Does anyone understand the profusion of train companies, their timetables and particularly their fares? There is a genuine need for an integrated rail system; for timetables to be clear and for fares to be based on mileage. The latter would have some logic to it and would cut out the complications of different prices at different times; hundreds of enquiries would not be necessary. If you were to travel from one station to another and the mileage was 100 or 300, then just multiply by the current rate per mile. At 10p per mile, a 100 mile journey would cost £10; at 30p per mile it would be £30 – a return ticket would be £60.

A true story

Parked off a main road, on a driveway, are two or three cars. They are not outside any house and are on council property. One curmudgeon who thinks it is private ground leaves a note on the windscreen of one car, asserting it was on private premises and in the way. The note read: *'Not a pubic car park.'*