

A Word from the Chairman

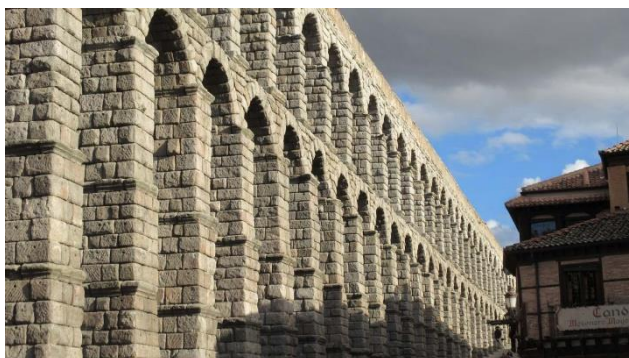


The autumn leaves have fallen, the clocks have gone back, Hallowe'en and Bonfire Night are behind us, so time to cosy up these dark evenings with small dogs and cats asleep on the mat or on our laps as we toast tea cakes and crumpets on the flickering red embers of a log fire - metaphorically at least.

We might, whilst staring into the fire, give a reflective thought to the autumn budget now receding into the past and think "Well, that wasn't too bad was it?" True, we have taken a hit on the Winter Fuel Payment without any measures to smooth the transition, but then again our universal benefits like free bus passes and NHS prescriptions have been protected, so also the triple lock to increase our state pensions next April. Although of course, for many of us, that increase will be taxed at 20% because personal tax allowances remain frozen. Added to which our CS pensions will increase by less than the expected rate of inflation next April following the surprising dip in the Consumer price index to 1.7% in September. So a mixed bag really, but time to move on and think about Christmas to come.

Anyway, you'll see from Martin's report below that a number of motions were submitted by Bristol, Bath and other groups to this year's AGM, which CSPA will now take forward with our Later Life Ambitions and other partners to protect our pension entitlements earned through a lifetime of work and commitment to service. So with that encouraging message I wish everyone a very happy Christmas with better things to come in the New Year.

Old Roman or New Concrete? On our recent holiday in late September to the Madrid area in



Spain we saw an example of very old Roman architecture and building methods still safely standing today. We visited Segovia, UNESCO world heritage status, famous for many splendid buildings and this wonderful example of Roman engineering. Built in about the 1st century AD, still standing, albeit restored in the 15th Century. The structure is built from granite blocks without any mortar and was in use as an aqueduct for the city well into the 20th century.

Compare this to our fairly new concrete structures built in in the 1960's and their current safety problems. The local example being the A432 road bridge across the M4, connecting Coalpit Heath and Downend which is being completely replaced (this part of motorway opened only in 1966). So, this modern structure declared unsafe in 2023 has lasted only 58 years. The Roman structure meanwhile has lasted about 1900 years or about 32 modern bridge replacement time equivalents. Maybe our engineers should have used granite?



The troubling thought for all of us is that all the other bridges and viaducts crossing the M4 (and other motorways) will need replacing in the not-so-distant future. Hopefully our Chancellor has calculated in enough extra

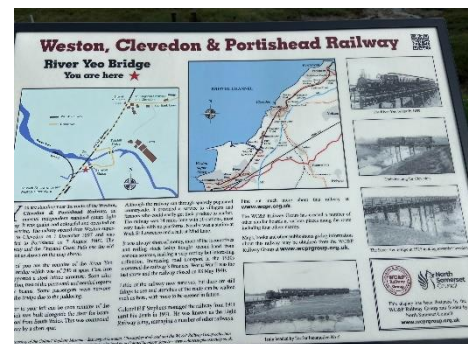
borrowing to cater for the increased maintenance costs of full replacement. Or will we pensioners be asked to take a further pension cut to pay for these 'unforeseen' replacement costs?

On a more joyous note, we enjoyed the holiday, which was very good, very busy and quite tiring. Fortunately, we stayed at very nice Parador hotels for the six-night tour so we could relax a bit in the evenings. The weather overall was very good, not too hot and surprisingly cool in the mountainous areas near and in Segovia. The central Spanish cities including Madrid are well worth a visit if you get the chance.

Colin F

The Pier to Pier Way

As a break from writing about my travels abroad I thought I would describe one of my (very) local pedestrian and cycle paths which links Clevedon to Weston super Mare on the North Somerset coast. All of the path is walkable and cyclable but some parts are not easy to access, so you will need to choose your starting point with care if coming by car. The last link in the path finally opened this summer after a protracted delay due to a dispute between North Somerset Council and a local farmer who wanted one of the necessary bridges to be built to a standard strong enough to take his weighty tractors while the council was keen only to meet the less demanding needs of pedestrians and cyclists. I should mention that much of the path follows the route of the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Railway which went out of business in the 1930's. Still, the initials WC&P tickle my schoolboy sense of humour.



The path starts, or ends depending on your perspective, at Clevedon pier and officially ends at Weston super Mare pier. The Clevedon end is easily accessible and a good place to visit with a café at the far end of the pier and a gift shop and bistro at the shore end with plenty of coffee shops nearby. Steam ferries from South Wales once plied between Cardiff and Clevedon carrying day trippers who were keen to sample the English hostleries, especially when Sunday observance

prohibited the sale and consumption of alcohol on the Welsh side of the Bristol Channel. The path along Clevedon seafront offers great views across the channel and then runs along the top of a broad seawall as it progresses south around the harbour towards Kingston Seymour. It then takes to the back roads which are very quiet but there are no footpaths. Kingston Seymour is very flat and watery with 17th century Dutch engineered drainage ditches (rhynes, pronounced reens)



alongside every road – typical of this part of North Somerset which is only a few metres above sea level. There's a lot of wildlife to be seen – swans, herons, moorhens, pheasants and a couple of peacocks (!!) I spotted a few weeks ago! Naturally there are plenty of four legged animals too. The route runs close to the Owl in the Oaks café on Ham Lane where coffee, tea and cakes are served with lots of ducks wandering about the yard. This is roughly the halfway point on the 10 – 12 mile route, so it's a good place to rest for a moment, but not too long – the best part is yet to come!

The path then dog legs across the tidal outlet of the Congresbury Yeo and Oldbridge Rivers on the new bridge that caused so much delay to opening of the path to mere tax payers. Here there are screens with viewing slits to permit observation of the wildlife along this stretch, and the remains of a WC&P railway wharf can also be seen. At the southern end of this newly engineered section the path rejoins the public road which then leads on to Wick St Lawrence, a small attractive village that the 20th century appears to have passed by before crossing the River Banwell at Ebdon. The path then wiggles it's way past a housing estate on the edge of Worle. I would give this section a 'miss' if on foot –



it's a little hilly and not very attractive, before dropping down towards Kewstoke. Here there is a choice: turn right to Sand Bay along an easy flat section, or left to Weston super Mare along the hilly shoreline past the ancient Worlebury Woods, a fairly hard ride on a bike and not a great walk as it approaches Weston but there are remains of a medieval Hillfort to be visited. Sand Bay is a long stretch of west-facing beach that has several seasonal cafes and a fish 'n' chips shop. Car parking is available or you can get there by bus in the summer months from Weston.

This is definitely a 'summer' route, in my opinion, unless there's something seasonal you really want to see along the way. I'm not a wildlife or wildfowl expert but it is enjoyable to see unspoiled countryside so close to the open vistas and massive tides of the Bristol Channel. All of the path is walkable but the section from Kingston Seymour to Wick St Lawrence is the quietest and easiest. The route is well signposted and the surface is generally good. My wife and I have enjoyed riding this path several times in the past few months and I hope that you might consider it for an outing on foot or by bicycle.

Martin R

Secretary's note(s)

- **Group Merger:** The CSPA Bristol Group and our neighbours from the Bath and District Group have now merged. We have about 1100 members in the area we cover. As a group we welcome our new members from Bath & District and we look forward to meeting and working with you. Along with 'The Pensioner' magazine this printed newsletter is one way for your Group committee to keep in touch with our members. We try to include local matters and a shortish essay or two (see above). However, we also forward emails from fellow organisations such as Age UK, The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) and the Bristol Old Peoples Forum (BOPF). These emails highlight many useful forthcoming local events and issues. I only have about 100 email addresses out of a possible 1100. So if you do wish to receive emails from your local CSPA Group and our fellow organisations please get in touch with me. I will not share your email or other details address with anyone without your express permission. My email address is: martin@mjlrobertson.org.uk
- **CSPA Annual General Meeting:** Chair Stuart Tarr, myself, and Colin Fender attended the recent AGM held at Kenilworth on the 9th & 10th of October. Our Group submitted 5 motions mainly aiming to preserve or improve the conditions of retired Civil Service Pensioners, and to improve representation for those CSPA members who are almost disenfranchised because they are not members of an active group. We are pleased to report that all our motions were successful or were subsumed into other motions which were successful. Stuart, our Chair, was also nominated for a position on the Executive Committee but did not get voted in.
- **Pension increases from April 2025:** The State Retirement Pension should rise by 4.1% next April and the Government has confirmed it will honour the 'triple lock'. Our Civil Service Pensions are not calculated in the same way but are tied to the CPI with the result that we are likely to see only a 1.7% increase from next April – nothing like the annual rate of inflation we've all seen at our local supermarkets. A further issue is the current regressive approach to Income Tax which was discussed at the CSPA AGM (see above). The effect is that more and more pensioners will find themselves paying Income Tax on their Civil Service Pensions in coming months and years, some for the first time.
- **Next Bristol-Bath Meeting:** Don't forget our next quarterly meeting and lunch at the Toby Carvery, Almondsbury starting at 11am on Thursday 12 December. Please let Colin or I know if you plan to attend.
- **Bristol-Bath Newsletter:** Again, a warm welcome to our Bath & District members and congratulations for reading this far. Along with local news and commentary we have managed in past issues to include essays which might be of interest to our wider membership and would welcome submissions from our Bath & District membership – just send them in to me!

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