



Leicestershire & Rutland Group Newsletter No. 46

Welcome to the **Spring** Newsletter which brings you up to date with what's been happening in the Group.

Group Meeting

Our next scheduled Group meeting will be our **AGM** on **Wednesday 15th April 2026, 1.30pm for a 2pm start** at the **Royal British Legion Club, 4A Wigston Road, Oadby, Leicester LE2 5QA**. The club has its own (free) car park and there is a regular bus service from the city. Tea and coffee will be available.



We will be welcoming **Jonathan Safir** as guest Speaker; who became the CSPA's newly appointed Deputy General Secretary on Monday 9th February 2026. On taking up post Jonathan provided the following background;

I come to the CSPA with a background in both the public and third sectors. My career began in local government before I moved to the National Pensioners' Convention (NPC), where I worked on some of the very issues that matter deeply to CSPA members today. During my time at the NPC, I focused on challenges such as pension adequacy, social care reform, digital exclusion, cost-of-living pressures, and the persistent inequalities affecting older people across society.

Throughout my career, I have been involved in policy development, advocacy, and organisational change – work that has strengthened my commitment to championing the rights and wellbeing of older people. I am eager to bring this experience to an organisation with such a strong sense of purpose and an unwavering, member-led focus.

During our AGM we will of course be selecting our Group Committee for the coming year. The present Committee is as follows;

Chair: Rob Jameson - 0116 259 2680 - Jamesonrobert1947@gmail.com

Vice Chair: Simon Connolly - 0116 271 8641 - Simon1connolly@yahoo.co.uk

Treasurer: Liz Ellis - 0116 269 2399 - lizellis450@icloud.com

Secretary: Kevin Billson – 07827 320 413 - kevinbillson@ntlworld.com

Minutes Secretary: Haydn Starkie - 0116 269 3072 - haydn.starkie@btinternet.com

Committee: Philip Coomes - 0116 271 8030 - Coomes.philip@outlook.com

Committee: Margaret Bagur - 0116 319 5140 - margaretmmb@hotmail.co.uk

Committee: Eamon Furey - 0116 273 7425 - eamon.furey@ntlworld

Committee: Ahmad Khwaja – 07879 470584 - ahmadkhwaja@yahoo.com

Group Meeting 7th January 2026

The last Group meeting in January was opened by Chair Rob Jameson who welcomed everyone and introduced **Geoff Harris** who gave an interesting and entertaining talk on **Folklore and the Eccentricities of British Culture**.

Geoff opened by stating that there are laws still extant that are over 1000 years old. As an example, he cited the requirement to ring the curfew bell in London at 9:00 pm every evening. Other laws included making suicide a capital offence and an act that makes it illegal to be drunk and in charge of a cow. Many ancient laws are related to National Security. When these laws were made it was a time when ancient rivalries made the Scots and Welsh England's greatest enemies. Thus, it became legal in York to shoot a Scotsman with a bow and arrow.

He cited the example of how Berwick upon Tweed remained at war with Russia until 1669. Berwick upon Tweed was treated as a separate entity from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland in the 17th century because it had been passed between England and Scotland so many times previously. Berwick upon Tweed had been included in the declaration of the Crimean war but omitted when the peace treaty was signed. This omission was finally rectified in 1669.

Other eccentric laws were cited including one that stated that only carrots could be sold legally on a Sunday and the example of a student at Cambridge who researched ancient statutes that stated that he was entitled to be served a sherry whilst he was writing his finals exams. He was served a sherry and subsequently fined £5 for not wearing a sword after his supervisor had also researched ancient statutes. Geoff Harris added that the death penalty remains for acts of treason. Currently this penalty remains in abeyance but could be reinstated at a time of war.

Examples of treasonable acts include starting a fire in H M shipyard and placing a stamp on a letter upside down.

Not all eccentric laws are ancient. Geoff cited examples of it being illegal to import potatoes that were suspected of being Polish, for a woman to be topless in Liverpool and having sex on a parked motorcycle in London. Until 1967 a woman who accused of having a harsh tongue was required to wear a 'scold bridle'.

The next part of the talk considered the folklore of how Chesterfield church had gained its twisted spire. In the first explanation the Blacksmith of Bolsover had such a good reputation for his workmanship that news of it reached the devil. The devil ordered him to make a pair of shoes from a silver ingot. Having made the shoes, the Blacksmith nailed them to the devil's hoofs. In the process one of the nails became twisted and caused the devil so much pain that he screamed and ran. When he reached Chesterfield, he twisted the church spire out of anger. In the second explanation the devil learned that a virgin was about to be married in Chesterfield church. Out of curiosity he went to Chesterfield and sat on the church roof to observe proceedings. Under his weight the spire became twisted.

In the next part of his talk, Geoff Harris considered the origins of some sayings. Thus, the expression that it is cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey relates to a time when cannon balls were made of brass. In very cold conditions the balls would undergo greater thermal contraction than their iron holders and thus fall out. The term slush fund comes from the practise of boiling poor-quality meat to cook it. In the process the fat would float to the surface, be skimmed off and sold to manufacture candles.

In the final part of his talk, Geoff considered some eccentric British customs. Although these customs were local in origin, they were often spread throughout the country by travelling priests. These customs included ways of finding witches, finding out who would die in the parish in the next 12 months by sitting at the lynch gate of the church during the night of 24/25 April, when the souls of those who would die could be seen. Other customs cited included Cheese rolling, Morris dancing, bog snorkelling and gurning at the Egremont Crab-apple fair. Gurning is a competition to see who can pull the ugliest face.

On completion of Geoff's talk, **Liz Ellis**, the Group Treasurer reported a balance of £766.32 with a further sum of £30 to be added. A total of £90 in expenses were expected to cover the cost of venue hire and speaker's costs which would leave a healthy balance of £706.32.

Liz reported that she expected to undergo a medical procedure early February and therefore her attendance at the Group AGM would be dependent on the amount of recovery time needed.

Kevin Billson, Group Secretary, reported on the three Group Circulars that had been received since the last meeting. Kevin commented that he had not received an update on our Group membership figure since May 2025 at which point we had 293 members of whom 278 were "active". The national membership total stood at 33,326 on 3rd December. Kevin has been notified of two new 'joint' members in our area in November (West Langton near Market Harborough) and he has sent them a 'welcome letter' by email.

The meeting then discussed the process of consultation on CSPA incorporation in 2026. The Group will be invited to send two members to a regional meeting on Thursday 16th April (in addition to Kevin who will be attending in his role as Regional Representative) as part of the consultation. This will take place in Reading at the Abbey Baptist Church commencing at 11am.

Travel expenses will be paid centrally. After some discussion it was agreed that **Ahmad Khwaja** and **Rob Jameson** would attend the above meeting.

YOUR CIVIL SERVICE PENSION

Capita Plc was contracted by Cabinet Office from 1 December 2025 to administer the Civil Service Pension Scheme for the next 10 years. Its contact details are Capita Pensions Solutions, PO Box 713, Darlington, DL1 9JZ; Phone: 0300 123 6666 (Mon-Fri: 0800 -1800). Information about our pension scheme is available at: <https://civilservicepensionscheme.org.uk>, including various “what to expect” guides. The Civil Service Pension Portal gives online access to your pension information and provides an online contact form. If you experience any problems with your pension, which Capita cannot resolve, please contact the Group Secretary for initial advice. More complicated matters are dealt with by David Luxton, the Pensions & Personal Case Manager at CSPA HQ.

The transition to Capita has unfortunately been beset with problems from the outset, partly caused by the backlog of work handed over by MyCSP, including the large amount of work arising from the McLeod judgement. CSPA has had weekly meetings with the Cabinet office throughout 2026 as attempts are made to return the service to something approaching normal. Capita issued a detailed update on 23 January about their efforts to tackling the backlog and restoring normal service -<https://www.capita.com/news-and-insights/news/2026/civil-service-pensions-scheme-service-delivery-update>.