

May / June 2026



A word from the Chair – Stuart Tarr

As I write, the country is once again plunged into political uncertainty, with the Government seemingly divided and struggling to deliver its promised change agenda. The kickstart to economic growth and rebuilding the NHS is faltering, against a backdrop of world turmoil centred on the middle east. This forcing up energy costs leading to inflationary pressures that are driving up the price of food and everyday goods and services, not to mention the sharply increased costs of lighting and heating our homes as we move into autumn and winter which is now not so very far away.

So it is very much against the unresolved cost of living crisis requiring more help for hard-pressed families amid ongoing background noise from think tanks on both the left and the right of the political spectrum aided and abetted by an unhelpful press, that there are again renewed calls to end the state retirement pension triple lock as unaffordable. There is also pressure to bring forward from 2044-2046 to 2037-2039 the increase in state pension age to 68. This despite falling life expectancy as widely reported in the media.

Doubtless, we can confidently expect groups and branches to submit renewed motions to this year's AGM to redouble CSPA's efforts with its Later Life Ambitions partners to protect the triple lock - motions which we will of course support. Whilst, for our own part, we will submit a motion that is currently being drafted to resist any proposal to bring forward to an earlier date the increase in state pension age to 68. Beyond that we will probably not suggest any further motions although, if you do have a burning issue on your mind that you think should be submitted as a motion, then please do let Martin and me know (our next group meeting is on Thursday, 11th June at which possible motions will be discussed in time to submit to CSPA Head Office by Friday, 3rd July).

So that really is enough from me, beyond mentioning that I may put myself forward again to stand for one of the five national positions on the Executive Council as I did last year when I fell short of being elected by just a few hundred votes when branch and group block votes, counted in thousands, were cast. There will be more on one member, one vote, in the summer edition of The Pensioner when it comes out in June.

Sorry, I have gone on a bit ... So over to Martin, Group Secretary and Colin, Membership Secretary and Treasurer, to finish ...

A 'horrible' acting experience – with thanks to Andrew Sherriff

THE DAY I EMBRACED NAPOLEON (MANY TIMES)

The email mentioned filming but I'd gone off filming. It stated £110 plus £5 travel expenses for a day's filming in London. "No way", I thought, and dismissed it. I'd been an extra before, or to be more correct a 'supporting artist', several times, but last time was a bad experience. It was terrible. The film company was badly organised and unreliable, and after a whole day, we appeared in one final scene in the early evening. I vowed – "Never again."

One of my interests is historic dancing. It's a bit different from normal hobbies, and it is a bit of a challenge as I am not a natural dancer. The dancing I do is of the Georgian and Regency period, and this had led to being a film extra from time to time.

Two days before filming, Diana, from my group Jane Austen dancers, phoned. They were desperate and would pay realistic travel expenses. It would be an early start – 7am in film studios at Twickenham, London, the historic home of British film making. Somehow, despite my vow, I found myself saying yes.

It had been a terrible journey, with tail backs on the M4 but eventually Liz, Martin (*not me Ed*) and I arrived at the film studios an hour late.

Despite this, the costume department was an oasis of calm as we caught our breath. Martin went off to find the Director to tell him we had arrived at last. Liz and I started to get our Regency costumes ready. A familiar face popped up from behind a rack of Tudor clothing, it was our friend Ann, who was about to go to 'makeup'. We hadn't realised that she was doing this filming with us. Martin joined us and we all started to change into our Regency costumes.

Halfway through our transformations, another friend Alberto appeared, and we didn't recognise him at first. He was magnificent with his cutaway green coat, court shoes, and an amazing handlebar moustache.

We had been told that there would be time for breakfast after all. I selected sausage, eggs, bacon and fried bread. It was a bit congealed, but to me gorgeous, particularly the fried bread. We ate carefully, minding our precious costumes. The two girls wore the high waisted gowns so familiar in the various Jane Austen films, Ann in blue and Liz in off white. Meanwhile we three men felt all buttoned up with our tight tail coats. Movement was quite restricting and sitting down had to be done very carefully.

At last satisfied, we made our way to the makeup section. There was a separate room for each of us, with a swivel chair a bit like a barber's, and a massive mirror facing us.

There were loads of brushes, powders and other items of the makeup artist. There was a photo of the Prince of Comino, my character on the table in front of me. The girl was friendly, but I didn't catch her name, and her accent was eastern European. She set to work and I saw the years come off my sixty three year old face. It was amazing, with my dark wig and lengthy sideburns, I looked the veritable Napoleonic prince.

I was finished, whereas Martin and Liz were still being transformed. I glanced in on Liz, and she looked bemused. She showed the picture her makeup artist was using – it was Eighteenth Century, and she had a Regency dress on. It just didn't seem right as the fashion of her hairstyle and that of her dress were historically fifty years apart. Then her makeup artist returned and I left the room.

We were done and the hanging around began. With filming, it always runs later than planned, and to pass the time, we took photos of each other. Liz was still bugged by her wrong wig. Eventually we wandered over to the canteen and were just about to have a coffee when we were called.

A heavy black door was slid open and we were escorted into the gloom. The studio was like an aircraft hanger, with cables snaking over the floor and film cameras everywhere. People in casual clothes with radios and various tools clipped to their belts, scurried around. At the far end of this vast space was the only brightness to illuminate the gloom. This was the actual film set.

It was dressed up like a TV chat show, with a large sign at the back, over an entrance saying:

THIS IS YOUR REIGN.

Martin, who had been there yesterday, explained that the format was similar to 'This is Your Life' related to historical characters. Yesterday was Henry VIII, and today it was Napoleon's turn.

I could see the actor playing Napoleon standing in the middle of the set, as well as a man in modern dress who was to play the presenter. They smiled at our gaggle of European royalty, as we were led through the entrance at the back, into a twilight of lights and cables. A man in a red tee shirt greeted us, he seemed important.

It was difficult to see who was in charge as there was also a gentleman in a striped shirt directing people and cameras around. He explained that we were to enter the set one at a time, shouting 'ciao' or 'bon giorno Napoleoni' in our best Italian accent, and embrace Napoleon in the most flamboyant way possible.

Why Italian? I couldn't think, and all that went through my brain was:

"Just one Cornetto!" Not very appropriate!

It was time to rehearse the scene, and from our sanctuary behind the set, we heard the presenter start his preamble.

"Tonight our guest is someone who has had wars named after him. May I present the Emperor Napoleon."

Napoleon, winks at us behind the set, then enters. We see him pretend to hesitate, and then disappear from view.

The introduction continues and Napoleon, in best mock Italian accent enthuses, saying how proud his family will be for him to receive this honour.

"But you're Italian," exclaims the host. "You're meant to be French."

"But Corsica is neara Italy, it is neara France. The Italiano thinka I'm French, the French thinka I'm Italiano."

I am forth in line after 'The King of Holland', 'The King of Spain', and 'The Duchess of Tuscany'.

The King of Holland, an actor, not an extra, disappears onto the set.

"Ciao, ciao!" followed by lots of sounds of lips smacking.

"But you're meant to be Dutch." It's the confused narrator.

"Well he'sa my brother. I cannot give hima socks for Christmas, 'cos he's allergic to wool, so I give hima a country."

The host sounds exasperated and introduces the next guest saying that it is not a family reunion show, but the King of Spain is also a relative. So is the next, and then:

"Oh my God, it's me".

I rush onto the set arms, wide shouting a rather choked "ciao, ciao", and embrace Napoleon. I exaggerate kisses on both cheeks, then I turn to my left to see the King of Holland rushing towards me, wide eyed and arms outstretched. As soon as we've embraced, we are joined by the others, shouting "ciao, ciao", and jumping up and down. It was all gloriously silly.

The host pretends to be exasperated and shoos us all to rows of seats at the side of the set. He continues:

"My next guest is definitely not family. Please welcome the Duke of Wellington."

Napoleon is taken aback.

"Oi'm Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington....."

"But you're Irish! You're meant to be an English general"

The actor is brilliant as a cartoon Irishman dressed up as the great general. He is also dismissed by the host.

"Well Napoleon," he says, handing him the red book. "This is your very confusing reign."

Napoleon goes to embrace him, but is pushed away.

"Now take your hand out of your coat. It looks silly."

"You won't like it."

At this point his breeches are meant to fall down. That is the end of the rehearsal and the man in the striped shirt is pleased. It is time for a 'take', and we're back to 'first positions'.

There is something thrilling about the sounds of "quiet please", "turn over", "turning", "action", and hearing the clapper board.

So we do it again, and again so many times. We get hot in our costumes and there are the inevitable mistakes. The most funny was:

"Oi'm Arthur Wellesley, Duke of *Edinburgh*....."

“Cut!”

Everyone in the studio collapsed laughing.

Suddenly it was over, a ‘wrap’ as they say, and we were out blinking in the sunlight. Several of the crew said how good we were as we left the studio, which boosted our confidence.

We changed, had lunch, and signed our discharge papers. I overheard one of the crew say they had to use chicken wire to get Napoleon’s trousers down, as they wouldn’t drop of their own accord. They were getting ready to do the Emperor Nero and I wished we could have seen it. We left for home.

The next day I got an email, from Liz. She had been right about her unease at being the Queen of Naples, with an Eighteenth Century wig and a Regency dress. She had Googled, and found they had the wrong queen of Naples. She had been deposed by Napoleon and replaced by his relative Caroline Bonapart.

But then the programme is called ‘Horrible Histories’ after all!

Secretary’s notices – Martin Robertson

If any member would like to share their experiences please send them to me for inclusion in future editions.

Our next meeting will be on 11 June at 11am at our usual location The Toby Carvery, Almondsbury, BS32 4QB. Please let me or Colin Fender know if you intend to come in person so that we can plan the somewhat limited seating. In the meantime I will try to get the Teams video conferencing up and running reliably in good time to let you know if we can host a Teams session.

Stuart has mentioned his intention to stand again as a candidate for election to the Executive Council at our National AGM in the autumn and our intention to submit a possible motion which is in draft that I have produced below. If any member wishes to submit any motion on behalf of our group then please feel free to do so via myself and Stuart.

Draft motion – subject to amendment:

“Following the UK’s The Health Foundation report of data (<https://www.health.org.uk/reports-and-analysis/analysis/healthy-life-expectancy-trends-in-the-uk-a-watershed-moment>) dated 26 April 2026 reporting a reduction of around 2 years in healthy life expectancy (HLE) for men and women this AGM instructs the EC to campaign with our LLA partners for retention of the existing Statutory Pension Age (SPA) arrangements and associated Civil Service Pension age entitlements, and where possible campaign for a commensurate decrease in the SPA and CS pension age requirements.”

Membership Secretary’s and Treasurer’s Report – Colin Fender

Current BBW Group membership is 1764 active members after adjusting for 25 new members (in part due to Capita’s mismanagement of the administration and payment of Civil Service pensions) and 53 members lost since January – a significant improvement on previous loss rates which were running at 1 to 4. The current Bank balance at 25th May is £2225.72 with our thanks to colleagues who have kindly donated funds in 2025 and continue to do so in 2026. If you would like to donate to funds, you can do so by cheque to Colin Fender, Honorary Treasurer CSPA Bristol, Bath and West, Flat 304 Stoke Gifford Retirement Village, Edward Parker Road, Bristol BS16 1YF or by bank transfer to Civil Service Pensioners Alliance Bristol, Sort code 52-10-07, Account number 90010841.