

not the national information forum

But still working for the inclusion of disabled and other disadvantaged people
by encouraging better information provision

News Briefing No. 33. May 2011

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Dissolution

The deed is done. We have surrendered our charitable status and have asked to be dissolved as a company. We have disposed of our assets to chosen charities, namely:

Sense

The Seashell Trust

Crossroads Care

Snowdon Award Scheme

All Together Now!

Community Services Group of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.

The first three were those chosen by Lord Morris of Manchester; the remainder by the Directors.

Final accounts will be prepared and made available on request.

The formal position is that the Registrar will arrange for a notice to be published in the *London Gazette*. Unless there is an objection, the Forum will be struck off the register and dissolved in due course. However, a minimum of three months must elapse between publication in the *Gazette* and final dissolution.

We have appreciated the kind messages, not only from those who have benefited, but also from a number of those who have not; in particular, generous appreciation of our *News Briefings*. So much so that we have decided to continue the series, though no longer as being from the National Information Forum. We hope that without the charitable tag we may go further and take the gloves off: there is room for a forum for disquiet and dissent from the charitable sector. Perhaps we may play a part in representing to a wider audience the grievances that currently abound. We hope that charities will continue to retain us on their mailing lists and send us information.

We intend to retain but remodel our website, and Chris Bazeley has volunteered to work on this without charge. He has been and remains a tower of strength in presenting our message.

Unless you count the Green Party, we have no political affiliation, but we despise hypocrisy and duplicity in any party. We champion non-aggressive secularism, repudiating (though tolerating) religion if only on the ground that



the multiplicity of faiths are mostly at each other's throats and find it difficult to embrace equality.

We regret that the monarchy has been given a cloak of secrecy and hope that its custodians will move to be more open and to keep out of politics. To quote the former Edward VIII, speaking in the 1970s: "as we all know, politics is the one thing that the royal family has to avoid, however much they may like to express their opinion."

We are sorry that Dignity in Dying chose such a name, which could apply to those of entirely contrary views. What we want is *choice* in dying.

We have lately been impressed by the writings of the Rev. Dr. Richard Price (1723-91) and hope to write a short article. We hope that Liberty appreciates his pioneering contribution to the cause of civil liberties.

Finally we have belatedly been struck by the remarkable parallels between Thomas Paine and Robert Burns. These may have been obscured by Burns' reticence but also by the fact that whereas Paine's writing was a model of plain speaking, Burns' use of dialect and his poetic expression have perhaps disguised their unity of thought. Hopefully, perhaps more on this later.

Blind but capable of work

Normally our worry is the danger that people are unreasonably being found capable of work whose incapacities are such that they are effectively incapacitated in the present job market. But blind and partially sighted people of working age are a different case. Those who are fit and well normally do not want to be unemployed, but only about a third are able to find work. They really do need support to overcome the barriers they face. Ann Lee, editor of the RNIB magazine *NB* stresses that the availability of the Access to Work scheme is vital. But the scheme is currently "under review". We hope that this government and the Department for Welfare Pruning (sorry Roger) are genuinely focused on getting people into work rather than simply off benefit.

Deprivation 2010

The Department for Communities and Local Government has published *The English Indices of Deprivation 2010*. Go to www.communities.gov.uk, and search for 'deprivation'. But remember, of course, that they only have themselves to blame!

RoadPeace

The spring issue of RoadPeace's newsletter draws attention to the UN's Decade of Action for Road Safety which is to be launched on 11 May. It points out that 1.3 million people are killed on the world's roads every year, with over 20 million injured, and that these terrible figures will only rise unless action is taken. It is anticipated that by 2030 road deaths will outnumber those from malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS at all ages.

In this country RoadPeace is committed to continuing its core work on three fronts:

- campaigning for justice for road crash victims with an improved post-crash response, and highlighting criminal, civil and social injustice that adds to the suffering of the bereaved and injured
- supporting victims of road crashes by providing practical information and advocacy, as well as emotional support
- campaigning to reduce road danger, particularly the speed, volume and dominance of motor vehicle traffic, whilst promoting more active and sustainable ways of travel.

Our government, unfortunately, is not doing enough. It has decided against reducing the drink/drive limit from 80mg per 100ml to 50ml, despite a recommendation to do so in Sir Peter North's Review of Drink and Drug Driving Law. Along with Malta we now have the highest limit in Europe. Worse still, our Minister for Transport, Phillip Hammond, has suggested that he will be considering increasing the motorway speed limit to 80mph if it can be shown to decrease journey times.

The RoadPeace newsletter and its website are a mine of information. We may not be able to avoid all crashes, but there is much that we can do to reduce the carnage on our roads.

Contact details: Shakespeare Business Centre, 245a Coldharbour Lane, London SW9 8RR; helpline: 0845 4500 355; tel: 020 7733 1603; e.mail: info@roadpeace.org; website: www.roadpeace.org.

Mobility controversy

In *Society Guardian* (27 April) Saba Salman referred to the mobility problems of Jenny Wilson, a 13-year-old girl with athetoid cerebral palsy who is unable to use the modern wheelchair she needs because of legal restrictions. The article cited the Road Traffic Act 1988, but our understanding is that the limits frustrating her are set by The Use of Invalid Carriages on Highways Regulations (SI 1988 No.2268) made under section 20 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. These stipulate (among other things) that Class 3 vehicles (those capable of exceeding 4mph but not 8mph on the level under their own power) must not be used by persons under the age of 14 (seems reasonable) and in order not to be classed as a motor car may not exceed an unladen weight of 150kg. The argument here is that the law has not kept up with the development of more sophisticated, and heavier, wheelchairs.

But in *Mail Online* (20 September 2010), Barney Calman, under the headline 'Mobility Mayhem', points out that under the existing law there are now some 300,000 mobility scooters on Britain's roads and pavements, and argues that their sale is not in practice limited to disabled people, that training is inadequate or non-existent and that they can pose a risk not only to their users, but also to other road users and pedestrians.

On both fronts we think that this needs sorting out and that since it does not require primary legislation to do so the sooner the better.

Welfare reform

The controversial Welfare Reform Bill will return to the Commons on 24 May. Ian Duncan Smith MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, has presented it as "a new course for the welfare state" which, he believes, "will enable us to reach out to some of the groups of people who have become detached from the rest of society – trapped, too often, in a permanent state of worklessness and dependency." Many disabled people have a different view; so much so that they are planning a mass march to Parliament on 11 May, to be followed by a rally in Methodist Central Hall. Marchers will assemble from 11.30am at Embankment by Horseguards Avenue.

For further details go to www.ukdpc.net, the website of the UK Disabled People's Council.

The Olympic Legacy (official version)

The Office for Disability Issues and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has published *2012 Legacy Opportunities for Disabled People*. It identifies priorities chosen by disabled people and covers three themes:

- transforming the perception of disabled people in society, particularly their economic contribution to society
- supporting opportunities for disabled people to participate in sport and physical activity
- promoting greater participation in the community through the Olympic Games.

Go to <http://odi.dwp.gov.uk>

OFT NEWS

We draw attention to the website of the Office of Fair Trading, an agency that seems to be going from strength to strength. Log on to www.offt.gov.uk, and access 'News and Updates' for monthly newsletters. The April issue includes:

- action taken against webuyanycar.com
- a study which finds that government commissioners and procurers of public services could do more to leverage competition as a means of achieving long-term value for money
- a super-complaint from *Which?* concerning surcharges on the use of debit or credit cards
- the move of online consumer information from Consumer Direct to Directgov
- the launch of a consultation on revised debt collection guidance.

On the same site you can find press releases, which include:

- the launch of a market study into extended warranties for domestic electrical goods (14 April) and the closure of 19 unlicensed lead generation websites. These businesses source information from people looking for credit and sell this data on to other businesses.

We Hate No.41: The Grand National

Derek Kinrade

As a teenager I was deeply affected by the 1947 French film *Monsieur Vincent*. The opening scene depicts a race between two French galleys. On board one of them Saint Vincent de Paul watches, horrified, as the manacled galley slaves are mercilessly flogged to greater efforts. When one of them collapses, the captain calmly explains to St Vincent: “their hearts fail”. The response of the Catholic priest is to rush to take the place of the afflicted slave.

60-odd years later this scene came to mind when I watched the 2011 Grand National, particularly its conclusion as the gallant, ten-year-old Ballabriggs was ‘encouraged’ to be first past the winning post. The events, for all to see, have re-opened an old controversy. Jason Maguire immediately dismounted so that the exhausted animal could receive attention, and unusually made his way to the winner’s enclosure without the horse. Later he received a five-day ban for his use of the whip.

But that is not all. Only 19 of the 40 runners finished the course and two of the 21 who did not died earlier in the race, bringing the total number of fatalities since 1839 to 67 (according to Wikipedia), 22 of them since 1984. Many more have been injured. Now I was born in Liverpool. I am well aware of the status of the race and the sense of occasion attached to the Aintree meeting. I am told that it was watched by an estimated five to six million viewers (including myself) in over 140 countries. Clearly the severity of the course is why the Grand National attracts such enormous interest and popularity. I am also aware of the efforts made by the promoters to reduce the risks associated with the testing four and a half mile steeplechase. Jockeys and devotees of the race tend to argue that risk in sport is inevitable and that the industry has a genuine concern for the welfare of the horses. Abattoirs are far more offensive. But none of this can overcome the bottom line that races over fences are for our entertainment, as once was bear-bating. Risk may be unavoidable but its acceptability in the context of providing excitement for our pleasure is surely a matter of degree; I believe that measures taken so far have not succeeded in reducing jeopardy to a tolerable level.

The Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals evidently feels the same way for it has called for a “root and branch” review of the annual Aintree meeting. The League against Cruel Sports is more specific. It wants the heights of the jumps to be lowered, the length of the race to be shortened and the number of runners to be reduced. Excessive use of the whip is another particular issue. David Ashforth in the *Racing Post* has called for an end to the whip as a tool to encourage horses, and Towcester Racecourse plans for a ban after October 5. The respected Clare Balding agrees that racing would be “more entertaining with significantly less use of the whip”.

I think that the Grand National remains a brutal test that appeals to our ignoble instincts. We need to move on.