



RCN Retired Members' Network
National Pensioners' Convention affiliated
Newsletter | Autumn 2025

Welcome to the Autumn edition of our newsletter. A big thank you to all our contributors for their articles.

We have a report from the RCN Retired Members' Network Conference of 15th September 2025, some feedback and lightbulb moments from the conference, two inspirational narratives of keeping active in retirement, a history article – Do you know who Kathleen Butler is and her contribution to health and activism – news from Northern Ireland, and information and some dates for your diary – including how to participate in our network meetings, where all are welcome.

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RCN Retired Members' Conference 15th September 2025, RCN HQ, 11am-3pm

Sue Warner

Margaret McCambridge and myself, Sue Warner, flew together from Northern Ireland to attend the RCN Retired Members' Conference, at RCN HQ in London.

This year, the conference had been organized by the Activism Academy. The event was well attended, with a great feeling of positive energy in the room.

The formal programme opened with an introduction and a tribute to Professor Dame June Clark and her work on behalf of retired members. Rachel Hollis then coordinated a workshop session, on staying engaged after retirement. She took us through the structure of the RCN and opened discussion on how retired members could stay connected and involved.



Lunch gave time for networking and the opportunity to look at the exhibitions.



Sessions resumed in the afternoon, with an interactive dialogue on activism in the RCN, based on pre-submitted questions and those arising in discussion. The richness of the experience, knowledge, and expertise of retired members was acknowledged. At the same time, there was a feeling that their potential contribution was undervalued and unrecognized. Many considered that retired members from the network should be able to submit resolutions to RCN Congress and have voting rights there.

The concluding substantive session of the conference was a presentation by Jan Shortt, General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC), to which the RCN is affiliated through its Retired Members' Group. RCN members contribute to the NPC, including being active on working parties, such as the Women's Working Party, LGBTQ, Structure, and Ethnic Minorities. The NPC had been highly active in resisting the cuts to Winter Fuel Payments (<https://www.npcuk.org/post/npc-campaign-success-as-nine-million-to-get-winter-fuel-payment-back>) and in campaigning for a commissioner for older people in England (<https://www.npcuk.org/post/our-open-letter-a-commissioner-for-older-people-and-ageing-in-england>). Jan Shortt also shared her warm personal memories of June Clark, well supported from the audience.



A very positive day. Onwards and upwards to the next steps.

Photographs, by kind permission of Zeba Arif.

Some Conference lightbulb moments

It was an honour to attend the Retired Members Conference at the start of September. It was inspiring to hear from our retired membership, who bring with them such a wide range of backgrounds, skills, knowledge, and experience within nursing profession and the College. At the same time, it was deeply concerning to hear many express that they feel undervalued and unrecognised within the College. This has had a real impact on me, and I feel strongly that this is unfair. I will be taking everything I have heard back to Council for further discussion, and I am committed to keeping in close contact with the Retired Members Network to ensure they can continue to share their thoughts, ideas, and contributions to these important conversations. If anyone would like to discuss anything please email me on natalie.brooks@reps.rcn.org.uk.
Natalie Brooks, Vice Chair of RCN Council.

'At long last, we are probably heading in the right direction.' Cordelia Okwusugo, RCN Retired Members' Network and NPC Ethnic Minorities Working Party.

'The best tribute we can pay to June Clark is to build a strong and recognised Network on the foundation she assiduously built.' Zeba Arif, RCN Retired Members' Network and Vice-Chair, Mental Health Forum.

'Really felt we got our message over to the staff of what we have to achieve as a steering group.' Peggy Pryer, RCN Retired Members' Network.

'It was a great positive conference.' Margaret McCambridge, RCN Retired Members' Network.



My experience of using ChatGPT

Pat Hughes

There is a lot of focus nowadays on the use of Artificial Intelligence. I don't want to get left behind in the digital age (AI) and I wondered how I might use it. I downloaded ChatGPT onto my laptop and typed in the following question, ***What could the RCN do to enhance its offer to retired members?*** This is a summary of the helpful response I got within one minute. I was quite impressed!

Representation and Influence – Guarantee representation on Council, Boards and Forums. Consult retired members on relevant policy issues

Community and Engagement – Establish local or regional groups. Offer volunteering or mentoring roles. Host social and professional events related to wellbeing, transition to retirement and staying connected.

Learning and Development – Develop sessions on post-retirement opportunities. Provide training on digital skills.

Practical Support – Enhance pension and financial advice services. Provide clear advice and insurance options for volunteering or casual work after retirement.

Recognition and Value – Celebrate retired members contribution and encourage story-telling to enrich nursing archives and inspire current nurses.

Communication and Access – Improve communication channels and ensure digital inclusivity.

Pat Hughes is a member of the RCN Retired Members' Network and Secretary to the Women's Working Party, and a member of the Structure Working Party, of the National Pensioners Convention.

Staying active in retirement

Two, very active and inspirational retired members, share their experiences of being active in retirement.

Liz Curr

A housing scheme in Manchester called Russell Road Extra Care Scheme - it is a social housing development - designed with LGBTQ+ in mind to provide a safe housing environment – at least 51% of the 80 one- or two-bedroom apartments will be reserved for those within the LGBTQ+ community who either have care needs now or might in the future. The development will have a number of multiple purpose spaces open to public use. Some details can be found online (<https://lgbt.foundation/russell-road-extra-care-scheme-approved/>).

I have been working with Manchester University on a project put together alongside the charity Schools Out, producing a toolkit to help provide extra support to LGBTQ+ students. However the toolkit could be used to help support any individual facing extra challenges in life

I am representing both the RCN and the NPC in two other organizations. First, the NHS LGBTQ+ Leaders Network - as the lead for both the RCN and NPC I have been allowed to join, even though I no longer work for the NHS, because of the work I am doing in supporting not just LGBTQ+ people but those before, through and after retirement and those who are elders amongst their communities. Secondly, an organization called *We Create Space*, whose work focusses on supporting LGBTQ+ people and their allies both at home and in the workplace, teaching leadership skills and building self-confidence, providing knowledge and skills to help improve their local communities.

Whenever I actually stop and think about how much I do have going on I sometimes think I'm not really retired even if my 31 years of care over 4 decades helps me think I earned it anyway. Thankfully I can pick and choose how much I can take on and the time constraints involved, balanced alongside my physical and mental health constraints. The best I can do though is content myself in the secure knowledge I am doing what I still can to try and leave the world my country and my communities in a better situation than the one I was born into and that all of the hardship endured by those who came before does not go to waste.

Liz Curr is a member of the RCN Retired Members' Network and Chair, NPC LGBTQ+ Working Party.

Peggy Pryer

My retirement from the nursing profession in which I had been employed as a General Nurse from 1959, followed by qualifying and working as District Nurse, Midwife and Health Visitor, came to an end without warning in 1987 when I sustained life changing injuries in a car accident that occurred while travelling in my role as an RCN Steward.

After enduring two years of my enforced retirement with its increasing mobility problems and never ceasing pain, another RCN 'Work Injured Nurse' known to me, advised that I join the now defunct RCN WING (Work Injured Nurses' Group). I did this and doors that opened for me – I met other members with either injuries or illnesses that had caused them to be retired, I was not alone! I was soon to become WING's Public Relations Officer (PRO).

As PRO, I was to attend many functions as a representative of the WING. At Congress each year I was to meet successive Secretaries of State for Health to suggest that a number of the WING members could be back at work if re-deployment were to be encouraged. In 1993, I was funded by *Nursing Times* to attend other functions, including the International Council of Nurses 20th Quadrennial Congress held in Madrid and later a very much publicised 'Mind Your Back' campaign. One year I was invited to attend *Nursing Standard's* 'Nurse of the Year' event. Unexpectedly I was called to accept the gift of £500 for WING and personally a huge bouquet of flowers given by the then Prime Minister John Major. In 1996, I attended the service held in Westminster Abbey marking the College's 80th anniversary.

Outside the RCN, I am an active member of my local church in which I am involved with groups for the very young and those of more mature years. I have organised a Computer Support Group for villagers once a month and 'Golden Oldies' lunches twice a month at the village Pub.

I have tried to keep as active as I was during my 'working life'. I must acknowledge the support I have received from family members and in particular many of my RCN friends I was fortunate enough to have met during my 'working life' who have continued to give me their wonderful friendship and support.

Peggy Pryer is a member of the RCN Retired Members Network and hosts its monthly chats.

Josphine Butler (née Grey), 1828-1906

Joyce Still

Josephine Elizabeth Grey was born on 13th April 1828 in Millfield, Northumberland, seventh of nine children of John Grey and his wife Hannah. He was an agricultural reformer, a supporter of the anti-slavery campaign, a leading Liberal and a relative of Lord Grey, the Whig Prime Minister (1830-1834) who helped to secure the Reform Bill which extended the franchise and improved the fair distribution of parliamentary seats.

Josephine had a happy childhood – the family lived in a large house in beautiful Northumberland countryside where the children had plenty of freedom and many pets. Music was encouraged and she became a talented pianist. The sisters were educated at home by their mother with minimal formal schooling. Josephine's feminist instincts were early aroused by stories of slaves made pregnant by their masters then forced to give up their babies.

In 1850 Josephine met George Butler, then working at Durham University and hoping for an academic career at Oxford. By the end of the year, George had moved to Oxford, and he and Josephine were corresponding regularly. George was nine years her senior: she was attracted by his status as a teacher. The couple married in January 1852, and their first son, George Grey Butler, was born in November. Josephine found life in Oxford difficult: during a discussion of Mrs Gaskell's *Butler in 1851*,

portrait by George Richmond novel Ruth, which centred around an unmarried mother, the men of their acquaintance (mainly unmarried dons) argued that Ruth was far more culpable, more immoral, than the father of the child. The double standards of Victorian Britain, where women were blamed for the actions of men, Josephine could not abide. Oxford's damp and unhealthy air also took its toll on her health – her lungs had not been strong since serious illness in her teens. George's move to a post in Cheltenham College in 1857 suited them both.

Josephine and George went on to have two more sons and a daughter, Eva. Tragically in 1864, Eva, then five, was killed in a fall at their Cheltenham home. In 1866 the family moved to Liverpool, where Josephine worked with women imprisoned in the Bridewell, part of Liverpool Workhouse. Many were prostitutes whose livelihood she bettered: she and George raised money to open a House of Help and an Industrial Home which they both helped to run. Josephine became the President of the North of England Council for the Higher Education of Women and was also involved in campaigns to make marriage law fairer. Despite minimal



formal education, she became a prolific writer of books and pamphlets and a competent speaker of French and Italian.

She devoted herself to campaigning to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, which allowed the police to detain any woman they suspected of prostitution and subjected them to regular degrading physical examinations by police surgeons. Women described this indignity as 'instrumental rape'. For Josephine, it was another shocking example of double standards and an infringement of all women's civil rights.

In 1869, Josephine became the Secretary of the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, engaging in a campaign of pamphlet and letter writing, Parliamentary lobbying, petition gathering and nationwide speaking, until the acts were repealed in 1886. Despite her devoted group of followers, the campaign aroused hostility – for example in Pontefract the barn in which she was speaking was set on fire.

She then became involved in W.T. Stead's campaign against child prostitution in London. Josephine persuaded a woman who had worked as a prostitute, to obtain a child 'for sale' to Stead, who was arrested and imprisoned, not being believed that this had been undertaken to show how easy it was to obtain a child prostitute. However, sensational headlines ensured that the facts around child prostitution became public knowledge. Within weeks, Parliament voted to raise the age of consent from 13 to 16.

George's support was unwavering, though it must have damaged his career: he was shouted down when he tried to make a speech about the Contagious Diseases Acts at the Church of England Congress. After retirement to Winchester, and a long illness, George died in 1890, however Josephine continued to write and campaign until she died in 1906, in Northumberland, not far from where she was born.

Joyce Still is Vice- Chair, NPC Women's Working Party and was a health visitor.

The article was previously published in Exchange 65, the newsletter of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) Women's Working Party. We reproduce here, for its relevance to health issues and to activism.

News from Northern Ireland

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

To commemorate this, the RCN History of Nursing Forum, Northern Ireland are organising a special event, in Belfast, to honour the nurses who served both at home and overseas, volunteering with the armed forces medical corps to care for the casualties of war.

There will be an evening of music, personal recollections of nurses from the time, archival readings and reflections on their enduring legacy, on Friday 26th September 2025 (<https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/events/rcn-northern-ireland-history-of-nursing-network>).

In attendance will be Margaret McCambridge and Sue Warner, who will also be laying a wreath. We will report on the event in the next issue of the newsletter.

Information and dates for your diary

Information

Voting for two members to represent the RCN on the NPC National Executive Council remains open until Wednesday, 22 October 2025. You should have received an email, on 24 September 2025, inviting you to vote.

A Facebook page is available at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/RCNNationalPensionersConventionNetwork>

Previous issues of the newsletter can be found by searching, *RCN retired members network newsletter*.

The National Pensioners Convention home page can be found at <https://www.npcuk.org/>.

Age UK gives useful information on safety online and at home at https://www.ageuk.org.uk/siteassets/documents/information-guides/ageukig01_staying_safe.inf.pdf.

Dates for your diary

Members are welcome to attend our formal and informal meetings, and the Chat, all held online.

- Formal meetings are held on the last Thursday of the month 11.00-12.30. Please contact Lucy Williams our RCN support officer Lucy.williams@rcn.org.uk for the link to join the meetings.
- Informal meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month 14.00-15.00. The link is posted on the RCN Retired Members Network Facebook page.
- The online Chats tend to be held on the third Tuesday of the month 19.00-20.00 and the link is posted on the RCN Retired Members Network Facebook page.