



## Lessons to be learned from floods

The flooding that has hit Britain in recent days has been a real shock to the system.

In the West Midlands on Sunday there was more rainfall in a few minutes than would usually have been seen in the entire month of May.

In parts of the country thunderstorms more readily associated with tropical climes were striking.

It was the latest example of the wild weather conditions we have experienced in Britain this year, and follows on from 'the Beast from the East', which saw temperatures plummet and snow pile up back in February.

And just like then, our infrastructure has not been up to the standard required to deal with the storms we have seen this week.

There is no easy way to cope with flooding, but questions must be asked about whether our defences are up to scratch. Planes have been grounded and diverted, roads were blocked for hours, there were widespread power cuts reported, and homes were flooded.

Tragically, an elderly man lost his life in Walsall after the vehicle he was in was submerged.

If there is a lesson to be learned from all of this, it is that the authorities need to look carefully at the mechanisms that we have in place to deal with inclement weather.

One question that must be answered relates to the amount of cash that goes into our flood defences. The Environment Agency's £2.5 billion flood investment programme is geared towards minimising the impact of heavy rainfall, but the bulk of this funding is focused on coastal towns and resorts.

When a conurbation such as the West Midlands is hit with flash flooding, there appears to be little response.

In years gone by local authorities spent millions improving drainage in an effort to restrict flood damage.

Sadly, with years of budget cuts behind them, such investment has been put on the back-burner. Undoubtedly, it is time for a rethink on this issue.

There are circumstances when to some extent, we are all at the mercy of the weather conditions.

But we must make sure that every possible precaution is taken to preserve public safety.

If Britain is unable to deal with extreme weather conditions, then people will start to wonder what they are paying their taxes for.

## Council budgets at breaking point

Anyone who thought our local authorities were heading for better financial times had better think again.

Bosses at Staffordshire County Council say they face a budget shortfall of £37 million over the next 12 months, prompting concerns that key services will face the chop.

This comes at a time when council tax across the county has gone up by almost six per cent.

Since 2010 the authority has done a fantastic job in reducing its running costs by £240m. This has not been achieved without some difficult decisions along the way, although the fear is that the worst is yet to come.

It is a simple equation that all of our local councils have been faced with. Government funding has gone down, while on a local level, costs have continued to spiral. Balancing the books is undoubtedly a major challenge.

After eight years of belt-tightening, budgets have almost hit breaking point. The Government must understand there is not much fat left to trim.



Abandoned military theatre being brought back to life

# New lease of life for Army's old trooper

Abandoned British military theatre to become cultural hub for German community, with the help of Black Country-born university academic

**It was built to provide entertainment for British troops stationed in Germany in the 1950s and help keep them connected with home.**

Now an abandoned military theatre and cinema is being brought back to life with the help of a Black Country-born university academic who is hoping to unlock the mysteries of its past.

Volunteers in Germany have raised 275,000 euros to buy The Globe, built on the site of the Oldenburg-Donnerschwee barracks in 1954, and plan to transform the building into a regional cultural venue.

Dr John Goodyear, who grew up in Rowley Regis, is searching for people who served in Oldenburg between 1945 and 1958, as he writes a cultural history of the building which will also help to form a blueprint for future use of the theatre.

"There were once 66 of these British military theatres in Germany and this is the last of its kind in the country. The Globe has a very special history as it was built for the British Army to entertain troops with films and theatre and inform them of what was happening at home and abroad with news reels.

"The building was also used to train soldiers before it was taken over by the Bundeswehr in the late 1950s after Germany became part of NATO. The site was abandoned in 1991 and the building was left to decay, with nobody taking care of it.

"A few years ago work began to turn the former barrack buildings into social housing but The Globe was left empty. Then last year a group got together to actively save it," he explains.

The origins of theatres like this one lie in the

First World War and the creation of the first Globe at Gobowen, Shropshire, in 1916.

Spearheaded by Basil Dean CBE, a leading light in the British Government's Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), the theatre sparked the spread of similar facilities around the world. Globe theatres hosted many of Britain's best loved performers, including comedians Arthur Askey and Spike Milligan, singer Gracie Fields and actor Laurence Olivier.

The Globe in Oldenburg, which has listed building status, has an auditorium seating 400 people and facilities to operate as a theatre or cinema.

GLOBE Theatre and Cinema Trust aims to preserve the building as a historical monument and create a cultural venue for cinema, theatre, festivals and more.

Buying, refurbishing and restoring the building in line with historical building regulations will cost 1.5 million euros. The Trust is seeking funding from grants, sponsors, donations and crowd-funding.

Artist and senior trust member Michael Olsen said: "Given today's political situation in Europe and the wider world, remembrance of the Allied liberation armies' contribution to free Germany of fascism must be maintained and deepened. The Allied victory forms the basis of peace and prosperity enjoyed by Germans today and, in Oldenburg, the British contribution stands out."

Dr Goodyear, who has recently returned to the West Midlands after working in education in Germany, described The Globe as a 'fascinating' building.

"The entire interior of the building is British in design but the outside is German. It's a part of history that isn't told as much. Most people know all about the Second World War, how it started and how it ended, but they don't know

so much about occupied Germany in the years that followed," he says.

The 37-year-old is particularly keen to hear from people who were stationed at the site while The Globe was being built as well as those who visited after it opened. "With the Worcestershire and Staffordshire regiments, there may well be people who served in Oldenburg in this area. I would love to hear from them about their experiences of The Globe and the barracks."

Dr Goodyear, a German teaching fellow at the University of Birmingham, said: "It is the human dimension which will breathe new life into the theatre and help to create a vibrant cultural hub. By talking to service personnel we can reflect the building's past in its future."

Former military personnel who served in Oldenburg and would like to contact Dr Goodyear can call 0121 414 7503 or email J.Goodyear@bham.ac.uk



Dr John Goodyear: unlocking history Credit: Gerd Schütt

## PETER RHODES



PREPARE yourselves for one of the great contradictions in modern life. In countless opinion polls, we say we love the NHS and are willing to pay more tax to support it. But God help the government that tries to collect it.

THE latest prediction is that, merely to fund the NHS at its present level, every household will pay an average £1,200 a year extra. Which means your well-deserved family holiday may have to be sacrificed to treat your neighbour's self-inflicted obesity. Still love the NHS?

I SUGGESTED a few days ago that Loch Lomond might be rather bonnier and litter-free if it were transferred to England. I cannot guarantee, however, that the signposting by the English authorities would be any better. A reader points out an English Heritage sign at an ancient monument with the confusing instruction: "You need to purchase a ticket beyond this point. Please obtain your tickets from the shop behind you."



Come again...?

UNINTENDED consequences. Research in Wales shows that fining parents for taking children out of school in term time not only has no effect on overall absence rates but the number of unauthorised family holidays actually increased after £60 fixed penalty notices were introduced five years ago. How can this be?

I RECALL a conversation in the barbers where a mum, just back from Spain, was describing her dream family holiday, in term time. It was obvious she saw the fine as just another holiday expense, like airport taxes or a sea view. By charging for something, the education authorities make it look like they're selling something. No guilt, no shame, just a £60 deal.

A READER accuses this column of going quiet on Brexit. Not really. It's just that Brexit has gone a bit quiet and descended into complex economics when, for me, the issue is about politics and peace. Personally, the referendum was never about refugees, wages or the wider economy. It was an historical feeling, a gut instinct that Britain should be friendly with Europe but not totally immersed in it. Call me a Little Englander but I want my country's borders to be at Dover, not somewhere on the Iraq or Syrian frontier. I know, from having friends in France and Germany, that we Brits will never feel like citizens of the EU in the way that they do. For them it spells destiny and security. For me, the EU is just another European superstate, an unpredictable empire in waiting. And that's not a sudden, retreating change of heart. I wrote those words just before the referendum two years ago and I stand by them.

AND now, the last word on the Royal Wedding sermon by Bishop Michael Curry which seems to have divided the nation into supporters and cynics. A Daily Telegraph reader tells the tale of a worshipper who at the end of a service congratulated the vicar on 'a very good sermon'. The vicar replied: "And what are you going to do about it?"