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Britain's first investigative website

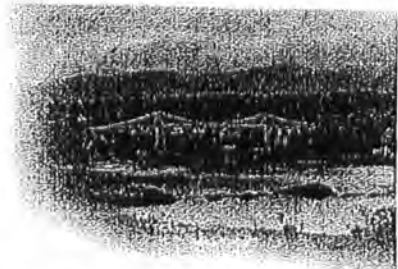
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THIS SEPTIC ISLE

ONE OF the reasons REBECCA is moving to annual membership and a rolling programme of releases is the size and complexity of some of the investigations being undertaken.



Public Access

REBECCA TV

Brothers in the Shadows

One example is our inquiry into Anglesey County Council. This has been dogged by scandal ever since it was formed in 1996.

The REBECCA investigation is already two years old.

Members Area

Rupert Murdoch And The Dogs of Wapping

Rupert Bared

The No 1 Corrupt Detective Agency

REBECCA TV

The Case of the Flawed Tribunal

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The components of the probe, which lays bare the responsibility for the culture that has brought the island to its knees, are shown in the panel on the right. These articles are currently in preparation.



At the end of this month the two men who were entrusted with the job of sorting out the island — interim managing director David Bowles and the Leader Clive McGregor — will leave the council.

REBECCA believes that, although they may have been well-intentioned, they failed to solve the fundamental issues that face the authority.

The following article is a brief extract from the REBECCA Inquiry.

BOWLED OUT

IN 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government finally lost patience with the Isle of Anglesey County Council.

After a procession of scandals, local government minister Brian Gibbons stripped the authority of the right to appoint its managing director.

He forced the council to appoint a high-powered trouble-shooter to hammer the Island into shape.

Bowles costs £1,160 a day — making him one of the most expensive public servants in Britain. With the cost of travel and accommodation, the figure rises to over £1,300 a day.

Anglesey is the smallest council in Wales and one of the poorest in Britain.

Bowles is a tough administrator who made his reputation when he was chief executive of Lincolnshire County Council from 1999 to 2004.

The county was dominated by a Tory Leader who Bowles quickly decided was running the authority as a personal fiefdom.

Bowles fought back. It was a campaign which saw Tory Leader Jim Speechley sent to gaol for corruption.

The Tories never forgave Bowles and he left the authority with a massive £400,000 "golden goodbye". He was given a standing ovation by staff when he



IN PREPARATION

THE ROAD TO INTERVENTION

It took the Welsh government far too long to intervene in the affairs of Anglesey.

THE LORD OF AMLWCH

Gareth Winston Roberts OBE is one of the island's most important politicians. He became a millionaire partly on the back of his council dealings. He also stood by and watched fellow councillors ruin an innocent man who happened to be a business rival ...

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN ARTHUR JONES

Former council official and councillor, John Arthur Jones is one of the island's most controversial characters. This is the story of a man who considered himself better than Tony Blair.

CANNON BALL

Lawyer Lynn Ball is the council's officer charged with keeping the council on the straight and narrow. But she refuses to answer REBECCA questions about some of her activities.

A PLAGUE ON ALL THEIR HOUSES

The engine of Anglesey's troubles is the planning regime. Millions have been made out of the system — this article homes in on some of the more outrageous examples.

DURKIN'S LAST STAND

Councillor Barrie Durkin is one of the few people to fight against the island's culture. But his own council has

left.

branded him a troublemaker and he's fighting for his political life.

Since then he's built a reputation as a council doctor. Before Anglesey, he helped to restructure West Lindsey and Bridgend councils.



On paper David Bowles was just the man to deal with the island's political problems.

But Bowles started his reign on the island with one of the most jaw-dropping moves imaginable.

He went to stay at a property owned by John Arthur Jones who REBECCA believes embodies everything that is wrong with the Island's political culture.

David Bowles tried to keep the amount he was paid a secret. It took the council months to reveal his basic daily rate of £1,160 but it still refuses to say what his expenses are. REBECCA has analysed the council accounts and has worked out that these add a further £166 a day to the bill Anglesey ratepayers have to pay. The money is paid to the organisation which negotiated the contract so Bowles does not receive the full amount.

In this single act, Bowles triggered some potent memories and aroused doubts about his credibility.

John Arthur Jones is a truly remarkable character. A clever, charismatic figure, he gives the lie to the expression that lightning never strikes twice in the same place.

For he has blighted Anglesey on two separate occasions. In the mid-1990s, as the council's director of housing and property, he drove the authority onto the rocks. His department was damned by the District Auditor.

The council set up a committee to assess the District Auditor's findings but before its work could be completed another committee was set up and abruptly sacked him.

He was apoplectic with rage. He told HTV that he was being persecuted in the same way that the Pharisees treated Jesus.

"A man stood in front of Pilot 2,000 years ago and Pilot said I can see nothing wrong in this man but at that time the Pharisees said crucify him. Now then, the descendants of those Pharisees are living today on Anglesey. They're saying crucify him."

Six years later after he was sacked, he was elected to the council and it didn't take him long to create his own party. Soon he was the leader of the junior member of a new coalition.

In a couple of years his party — just four members strong — were being accused of driving a coach and horses through the island's planning regime.

Critics said they were bending planning rules to generate millions of pounds worth of profit by granting planning permission for housing on land where permission was virtually impossible to obtain.

Once again, the council's external auditors were forced to intervene. Finally the council changed the constitution to stop the rampage. It was too late to save the ruling group and it was swept away in the elections of 2008.

John Arthur Jones was one of those who lost his seat.

In 2003 he purchased a disused Welsh Water depot in the centre of the island, near Llangefni, and obtained planning permission to turn it into a holiday destination called Parc Cefni. The development was widely welcomed.

But he was determined to sweep away the restrictions on its use as a tourist destination with short-term guests and turn it into a colony of holiday homes. This would have increased the value of the site by over a million pounds. All his attempts met with failure ...

In 2006, by which time he was a councillor and vice-chairman of the planning committee, he was told by a planner that he was in breach of the conditions on the site.

He's always insisted that he did done nothing wrong and the issues were resolved.



John Arthur Jones has rarely been out of the limelight. Sacked as a council official in the 1990s after his housing department was hammered by the District Auditor, he was elected to the council in 2004. He then helped form a coalition that generated one controversy after another.



By 2010 he'd built just two Canadian-style chalets on the Parc Cefni site.

It was into one of these chalets that troubleshooter David Bowles moved into when he took up his post on the island in October 2009.

Bowles had spent eight days on a fact-finding mission before starting his job. The cost of this exercise was more than £10,000.

In that time he failed to watch the 18 programmes made by the ITV WALES THIS WEEK current affairs series, many of

The chalet at Parc Cefni that David Bowles moved into in October 2009. The chalet featured in many TV current affairs programmes. Bowles says he knew his landlord as "Arthur" and did not connect him with John Arthur Jones.

which featured John Arthur Jones.

If he had seen these videos, he would have realised that eleven of them had flagged up the controversies surrounding Parc Cefni.

For three months the fact that the Assembly's saviour was renting from John Arthur Jones stayed out of the public domain.

The Parc Cefni programmes were produced by REBECCA editor Paddy French while he was employed as a producer on the ITV WALES THIS WEEK strand. He left the programme in 2008.

But in December 2009, David Bowles says he discovered who his landlord was. He told council leader Clive McGregor and "subsequently had reasons to be concerned about issues relating to the planning permissions for the site and restricting lettings for holidays only".

By mid-January 2010, after discussions with council officials, he decided to give Jones his notice.

John Arthur Jones dismissed these broadcasts, saying they "relied on repeating the falsehoods and lies put forward by those who have a personal agenda based on malice and jealousy."

Two days later a local reporter was also asking questions about his decision to stay at Parc Cefni. One of these was that some councillors were concerned that John Arthur Jones might have tried to influence David Bowles.

Bowles went ballistic. In an extraordinary letter, sent to all councillors in January 2010, he said: "I find these comments abysmal and an extraordinary and disgraceful attack upon my professionalism and integrity."

"This is a disgraceful example of an attempt to use an officer as the meat in the middle of the sandwich of personality driven infighting; even worse those involved see nothing wrong with dragging an officer's personal and private life into these matters."

He also added: "Such a smear is an attack upon the integrity of all officers of this council and undermines the essential relationship of mutual trust and respect between officers and members generally."

In this letter, there wasn't a word of criticism of his former landlord.

It was to be another nine months before he finally publicly criticised John Arthur Jones. It happened when WALES THIS WEEK invited REBECCA editor Paddy French back to help produce an update on Anglesey and the programme-makers asked Bowles to comment on his time at Parc Cefni.

Bowles told the programme: "I was surprised that Mr Jones ... let the property to me in the full knowledge that he would be in breach of the planning conditions which limited lettings for holiday purposes only."

"Whilst I consider the Council has learnt a lot from past problems with planning, I regret the same clearly can not be said of Mr Jones," he added.



Council Leader Clive McGregor: had business dealings with John Arthur Jones.

Council Leader Clive McGregor has never made any public criticism of John Arthur Jones over letting the property to Bowles.

He told WALES THIS WEEK in November last year: "I certainly haven't considered it a problem then or now. I discussed with Mr Bowles and eventually Mr Bowles ceased residing at that address."

Last week he expanded on that statement: "I consider it to be a commercial transaction even though it was not the brightest thing for either party to be involved in considering the history of Parc Cefni and Mr John Arthur Jones."

"When I became aware of his [Bowles'] rented accommodation I made it clear that I did not think it was suitable and that he should instigate some enquiries regarding the legality of planning restrictions."

"It would have helped him enormously had he sought prior information before completing a tenancy agreement with JAJ."

McGregor himself has also been involved in business dealings with John Arthur Jones.

He featured in the District Auditor's report in 1997 which criticised John Arthur Jones' handling of contracts without going through the proper procedures.

One of these was with a company called Mön Investigations. A partner in this business was Clive McGregor who had retired from the North Wales Police in April 1997

In August 1997 John Arthur Jones decided to modify the way the council's housing department was investigating benefit cheats. Up to that point, the council carried out the job itself and had been praised for the work it was doing.

So much so, that the Department for Social Security awarded it another slice of money, worth £3,000 a week, to employ another fraud investigator to extend the work.

But in August 1997 Jones decided that this extra cash would not be spent on employing another council fraud officer. Instead, he decided, entirely off his own bat and without going through any of the council's standing orders, that he would give the work to a private contractor — Mön Investigations.

of them and I have made it clear from the outset that the ills of the Council are directly attributable to these two characters and the total lack of governance within both the Anglesey Borough Council and Isle of Anglesey County Council over almost three decades."

"My eventual decision to stand for Council came from the support of a number of local people who really wanted to change the behaviours within the Council."

John Arthur Jones was a man who was on friendly terms with another North Wales Police officer — Roy Gregson, a detective inspector who lived on the island.

In the late autumn of 1997, when Jones had already been charged, D I Gregson and his partner, a civilian employee with North Wales Police, went on holiday with the former housing director.

Gregson and his partner were given "suitable advice" from a senior police officer. This is one of the mildest forms of disciplinary sanction the force can impose.

The force said neither Gregson nor his partner were involved in the investigation into John Arthur Jones but added "we do regret, however, that the detective and the civilian employee acted so unwisely."

When the news leaked out, the daily paper for North Wales did not name Gregson so it has taken fourteen years for his name to emerge.

Clive McGregor told us: "I was aware that D I Roy Gregson and his partner Mrs Myfanwy Roberts Owen were personal friends of John Arthur Jones and his then wife. I have never been and never will be considered in that category."

"After JAJ had been charged, I had already left the Police Service so have no knowledge on whether any Police Disciplinary action was taken against Gregson for holidaying with a 'criminal suspect'."

"They had certainly been on holiday together in the years since the friendship was formed."

After Gregson retired from the force, he joined John Arthur Jones in a housing and planning consultancy which was called Best Value.

This was a dig at District Auditor Ceri Stradling whose reports had branded some of the contracts John Jones had awarded while housing director — including the one to Mdn Investigations — as not being "best value" for the people of Anglesey.

John Arthur Jones left Best Value after he became a councillor in 2004.

David Bowles is on record as saying he found Parc Cefni on the internet.

REBECCA asked him make available the email audit trail that would substantiate this account and so lay to rest concerns about how the man charged with solving the island's problems came to rent a chalet from one of the men responsible for those same problems.

David Bowles did not respond.

By January this year, it was clear that the Bowles-McGregor programme wasn't working. McGregor announced his decision to leave the council in May.

Last month Carl Sargeant decided that a new direction was needed. He replaced the elected Executive with a set of five commissioners paid £500 a day.

David Bowles announced he would leave at the end of April.

Almost immediately one of the commissioners, former Flintshire leader Alex Aldridge, was criticised because he's a friend of Sargeant and for presiding over a series of scandals at his old authority.

Another commissioner, former Cardiff City chief executive Byron Davies, was in charge when the council was rocked by a serious multi-million pound scandal over unlawful expenses paid to some councillors and

are "vexatious" and "manifestly unreasonable".

We asked for a review of this decision which was carried out by Caren Lewis, a lawyer from Lynn Ball's department.

She noted "that the opening sentence of the request 'Happy New Year — it's certainly going to be an interesting one' is language that is strongly suggestive of vexatiousness".

Needless to say, the review found the decision was valid.

REBECCA is appealing this nonsense to the Information Commissioner but, of course, this will take months to hear.

Officials are also refusing to answer letters. We wrote to Lynn Ball in January this year.

After three weeks, the council press office said Lynn Ball "had been instructed not to reply" and the letter had been referred to the council's external solicitors.



Anglesey Council Offices: siege mentality.
Photo: Barry Davies

Finally, seven weeks after it was sent, David Bowles answered: "Neither Miss Ball or any other council officer will reply to your letter."

He added, "our refusal to reply to your letter does not imply that any of its contents are accurate or that the council or Miss Ball cannot answer your questions. We choose not to do so."

Bowles added that "your letter contains and implies a number of scurrilous allegations against Miss Ball and others" and warns that "Miss Ball reserves the right to take legal action against you on that account."

REBECCA replied to Bowles and urged him to answer the questions: "In a democracy, openness and transparency — especially in an authority as troubled as Anglesey — are priceless."

There was no reply.

We had also written a long letter to David Bowles on January 25. By the time this article was completed he had not replied...



Anglesey Commissioner Byron Davies collecting his OBE in 2008 from the Prince of Wales for services to local government. Davies was chief executive in the Welsh capital during the expenses scandal which cost the city millions of pounds.

officers.

When the District Auditor wrote a damning report, the council mounted a long, expensive and unsuccessful court battle to try and over-turn the verdict.

Davies was awarded an OBE for services to local government in 2008.



The REBECCA investigation continues...

Editor Paddy French said: "Inquires like *This Septic Isle* are immensely complicated and take huge amounts of time. Because of the danger of litigation, everything has to be checked with great care."

"This article is published partly as an example of the depth REBECCA goes to but also because Bowles and McGregor leave soon. We wanted to say something about their time on the island before they departed from the scene."

"The closest definition to what we believe is wrong with Anglesey are Clive McGregor's remarks about John Arthur Jones and the former Leader of the council Gareth Winston Roberts being the key architects of all that has gone wrong on the island."

"It is for this reason that a proper history of these two men — and the band of fellow travellers who have prospered by supporting them — is provided for the voters of Anglesey."

"We hope that all those who care about the future of Anglesey and its governance will support the work of REBECCA by becoming members."

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