



## NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

Inaugurated 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1977

### MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May 2020

**Coronavirus  
references  
guaranteed over all  
these pages**

## June Onwards

'We are one day closer  
to everything being  
back to normal again'.  
Thats a good thought  
to wake up to every  
morning ❤️

*Stay safe and healthy  
everyone and see  
you on the other side.*

*(Which side though?- Ed)*

## May Diary

**May is cancelled**

## CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT – APRIL 2020

To put it mildly it has been an eventful year. This time last year nobody could have imagined the situation we would find ourselves in a year later. But, despite the suspension of our fortnightly meetings and of all social activities and visits, the club is managing to keep functioning. Each committee member is in regular contact with nominated members to ensure that we are all coping with the strange experience of isolation, and the committee is having weekly meetings via Skype so that we can, amongst other things, keep tabs on any problems that members may be having and offer help where we can.

My year as chairman started on a very sad note with the unexpected death of Robin Vizer in April followed, six months later, by Morton Brydon who passed away in September. More recently Peter Attenborough, who many of you knew well and who had moved to Probus in Ledbury some years ago, died in February. I am sure that, like all of us, they would be astonished at how the world has changed since they passed away.

Looking back over the year up to this March the club functioned pretty much as it had done for many years. We continued to meet twice a month and we had many fascinating talks. Our indefatigable secretary, Fraser Gunn, carried out all the required administrative tasks with his usual panache and kept us entertained at meetings with his regular birthday announcements and amusing snippets; he also ran the programme of visiting speakers and organised the popular annual pub quiz. Jim Stewart looked after our finances with commendable efficiency. He also assisted the Webmaster, Ray McCairn, in overseeing the club web site. Andrew Graham organised theatre visits, David Clowes did the same for our outings to a variety of interesting locations, Mike Witcomb, as Almoner, kept an eye on some of our more vulnerable members and I took over organising monthly pub lunches when Robin Vizer passed away. Last but by no means least, a big thank you to Paul Dodd for producing the monthly newsletter and to John Slack for organising the hugely enjoyable and competitive annual skittles evening.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought all this to an abrupt halt in mid-March. We had our last regular meeting on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March and a few days later the government announced a nation-wide lock down beginning on Mon 23<sup>rd</sup> March. As I mentioned at the beginning of this report club activity is now focused on the weekly online committee meetings. Before the world turned upside down we had planned to have our AGM on 28<sup>th</sup> April. This will now be held as soon as we return to normal hopefully sometime later this year. In the meantime, I will hand over the chairmanship to Mike Warburton on that date.

It has been an interesting year to be chairman and I would like to give warm thanks to all members for their comradeship and to the committee for their unflagging support. In addition to the uncertain future that we all face, falling club membership poses a particular uncertainty of which the committee is acutely aware and is addressing with some urgency. I would therefore like to wish Mike all the very best of luck as he takes over the chairmanship and to assure him of my full support at all times.

*Tony Pearson, Chairman*

## From the New Chairman



*Mike Warburton has been (digitally) installed as our new Probus Chairman. Below he contributes some thoughts for members.*

May I start by thanking Tony on behalf of all members for his work as chairman over the last year. He would be a hard act to follow at the best of times but sadly these are anything but.

Without wishing to be too dramatic, I suspect that I am taking over the chairmanship under the most difficult circumstances that the club has ever faced. We are required to operate under a national lockdown which currently precludes any club meetings or social events. While we can all hope to return to business as usual later this year, I fear that the timing is out of our hands. My hope is that we will be allowed to resume meetings in October, possibly with an Autumn lunch to set the ball rolling again. However, the lockdown is likely to be eased in stages and there is a suggestion that vulnerable groups will continue to have restrictions imposed for an extended period so the timing is uncertain.

That said, the club exists primarily for fellowship and I would argue that it is at times like this that it is particularly important that we all be able to access moral support from our club colleagues. That may not be through conventional meetings but we are able to keep in contact using the technology available. Your committee have been meeting on skype on a weekly basis and I intend that this should continue. You will, for example, be aware of the proposal by the committee to make a contribution, which you kindly supported, to the Lord's Larder food bank in Newent. I understand it has been gratefully received by this worthy cause. We have decided to retain the website as a means of communication and I would encourage all members to submit material to Paul for inclusion in future editions of the newsletter. He tells me that, while jokes are always appreciated, he also needs some serious stuff, so please keep that in mind.

Obviously I welcome any suggestions for ways in which the club can continue to function and for the committee to serve our members, so please feel free to contact me.

In the meantime, keep safe and we will meet again, hopefully before too long.

*(The new Vice-Chairman is to be John Weeden. More of him, hopefully, next month)*

## Thoughts of a Local Geographer

Back in the mid 70s a buddy of mine at Oxford who became prof at Liverpool wrote his doctorate on applying random walk theory to predict the spread of the West Indians outward from London. Because they would have special needs, including medical ones such as sickle cell anaemia and educational ones, he was in fact predicting where these needs should be planned for. When I see the detailed patterns of the location and spread of the coronavirus in this country, I see almost the exact same trends. The virus seems to be taking advantage of lines of social weakness, especially underemployment, poverty, overcrowding, group religious behaviour, distrust of authority and anomie. Throw in some data on obesity, isolation and agedness, and you get a strong suspicion that ethnic minorities are going to get disproportionately hammered. The government will not even contemplate saying this, and so we are left in the dark about who SHOULD be tested. The public want to know who to avoid but, unlike in other countries, they are denied this information. In the next year or so geographers will be turning out endless maps and models to show that it was all so predictable from Wuhan day 1. Individuals behave individually but aggregate behaviour does not lie. As Marx might have said, ethnicity and social class are overlapping concepts. White middle class people live in Rutland and Herefordshire, and don't get dragged into the mire, or so we hope !

I have also yet to see any EXPLANATION of the geographical pattern of the SPREAD of the virus. We are shown the distribution day by day but not a word about how, why and where it is changing. It is as though no-one has a geographical bone in their body. I assume five forces at work. First, a spread down the urban scale from order 7 to order 1, but only when each higher order has been saturated. Thus after London, where they foolishly built a new hospital after the horse had bolted. Viz. 19 patients but 4000 beds, then comes Birmingham and Manchester where those beds should have been built en avance. Then

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the likes of Bristol, Sheffield etc. Second, a distance decay or “friction of distance pattern” from the centre of conspicuous outbreak (London) Hence hardly any cases in Cornwall or Herefordshire. Third, a spread along commuter lines, large and long for London, much less so for each of the regional centres. So we now have Haggett’s points, areas and lines, but with a fourth element thrown in, that of demographic differences. These include age, gender, ethnicity, religious practices, housing density and social class.

Hence, Hull has relatively missed the virus because lots of the above influences do not apply. It is relatively remote, especially from London, has a small commuter field, a very low proportion of immigrants and it is full of Yorkshiremen too mean to catch anything! The final factor is Chance or randomness or stochasm. This could include unfathomable variations in the efficiency of hospitals, supplies of protective materials, and attitudes to social distancing. I produce this model on the basis of a lecture by Brian Robson in the SOG where he explained how innovations spread, geographically. In his example it was gas works in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it could equally be applied to disease. My Oxford friend wrote a doctorate on this very topic in relation to the innovation waves (Hagerstrand) of mechanised harvesting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Luddism was alive and well, and some areas put up real resistance, especially where villages were closed, and not open. It’s not the way we do things round here, said many of the squirarchy. No railways across my land etc. The fact that we presently have a Luddite government almost refusing to respond to what Germany did weeks ago comes into it, and I suppose that is one of the chance factors. If Corbyn had won the election, would it have reacted faster and in a more effective manner ?

*(The writer is an alumnus of Newcastle and Oxford universities, and, even worse, a Yorkshireman – but now living in Herefordshire)*



## Staircase summits

Sir, I, too, attempted to climb Everest via my stairs (letters, Mar 28 and Apr 27) but unlike Alan Phillips and his wife I was unsuccessful. I gave up when I reached the summit of a local beauty spot, May Hill, a mere 971ft. The main reason was not virtual altitude sickness or fatigue but the premature wear of my stair carpet. An attempt at a virtual long distance walk similarly ended in failure. Of the 630 miles of the South West Coast Path I covered a mere 30: my footprints were causing my lawn to need reseeding.

**Peter Hayes**  
Newent, Glos

TIMES 28/4/20

## Headlines from American/Canadian Newspapers

City unsure why sewer smells

Miracle cure kills fifth patient

17 remain dead in morgue shooting spree

Bridges help people to cross rivers

Homicide victims talk to police

Barbershop singers bring joy to school for deaf

Worker suffers leg pain after crane drops 800 pound ball on his head

Statistics show that teenage pregnancy drops off significantly after age 25

Bugs flying around with wings are flying bugs

Study shows frequent sex enhances pregnancy chances

Marijuana issue sent to joint committee

Diana was still alive hours before she died

Republicans turned off by size of Obama’s package

Federal agents raid gun shop, find weapons

Starvation can lead to health hazards

Man accused of killing lawyer receives new attorney

Hospitals resort to hiring doctors

## From the Treasurer



As I write this, the country and Club is in lockdown. We are all facing some very challenging times which will be with us for many months. The Club's Management Committee holds weekly Skype meetings to manage the ever-changing situation.

Turning to the Club's finances and, predicting how they will unfold this year, 2020/21, is particularly difficult.

Mindful that the lockdown for the Memorial Hall, our meeting venue, means their income has evaporated whilst they are faced with fixed running costs, the Management Committee has decided to pay a monthly retainer until end of September to help them defer some of their losses. Likewise, we have decided to pay a retainer to our tea lady, Gilda.

Thinking about the wider community and those in particular need, we put the proposal to the membership that they pay the full membership subscription of £60 this year on the understanding that half would be donated by the Club to Lord's Larder Food Bank Newent <http://thelordslarder.org.uk/> This initiative has the overwhelming support of the membership and we have donated £1,000.

Unfortunately, the news doesn't improve. The Club has issues it must address; a falling membership, down 12 in the last two years. The impact on the Club finances is predictable:

<b>Key Numbers</b>	<b>Budget 2020/21</b>
Income	2,030
Expenditure (Running Costs)	<b>2,652</b>
<b>Net Deficit</b>	<b>£622</b>
Bank Balance	3,358
Less Liabilities & Reserves	<b>1,540</b>
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>£1,818</b>
Membership	30
Subscription	£60
Running Cost Per Member	<b>£88</b>

Clearly, we must look critically at how we run the Club and make changes to what we are doing to ensure we reverse the trend of falling membership. A first step is soliciting ideas from the membership and we are using a questionnaire for that purpose. What is evident is that **more of the same** is not the solution.

Thanks to the Assistant Treasurer Mike Warburton for his support and to Brian Parker for organising and managing the Club raffle.

**Hon. Treasurer Jim Stewart**

## BIRTHDAYS IN MAY



**We have several special birthdays in May:**

**Richard Crisp on 14 May**, becomes a member of the society of Octogenarians.

Statistical studies prove that at the age of 80, there are four females for every male. Hell of a time for a guy to get odds like that.

Turning 80 and thinking about what tattoo to get? You might want to consider your name and address...

**We then have a cluster of birthdays on the 18 May,**

**John Franklin** is inducted into the society of Septuagenarians.

**A septuagenarian millionaire had just married a 20-year-old woman.**

'You crafty old thing', said his friend. 'How did you manage to get such a lovely young wife?' 'Easy', the millionaire replied, 'I told her I was 95'

And youngsters **Mike Warburton** and **Mike Townsend** also celebrate their birthday on that day. Congratulations to you all.

**Forget about the past, you can't change it. Forget about the future, you can't predict it. Forget about the present, we didn't get you one!**

Know how to prevent sagging? Just eat till the wrinkles fill out.

Accept the fact that some days you're the pigeon and some days you're the statue.

## **Probus Handover: Chinese hacking reveals secret deals**

Another little known Chinese virus, Probid 20, has wormed its way into committee computers and allowed us to hack partial access to the digital handover of the Probus Chain of Office from Tony to Mike. Fearless of the data protection act the newsletter prints a short decipherable extract below.

“Hi Mike. Fraser here. Can you hear and see me ok?”

“Loud and clear, Fraser. Sorry I’m late logging in – hellish commute upstairs from the kitchen.”

“The sound is a bit faint from your end Mike but don’t worry about it, just open a window and we’ll hear you easily from Taynton. Who needs microphones? Let’s see if Tony’s online and we can get this started. Tony, are you there?”



“Well I can hear you but I can’t see you. I’ve got this little square in the top right corner but it’s only showing.....hang on a minute, what *is* it showing? Er....looks like three slightly out of focus figures naked on a.....whoah! Blimey! We never thought of that in the RAF!”

“Ok Tony no worries. We’ll both just patch into that and mute the sound. Jan, can you turn Vera Lynn down a bit? I need to hear what Tony’s.....cripes, I see what you mean Tony. We may have our wires crossed here a bit. Have you cleared your history lately?”

“Sure have. Mike, are you quite sure about your own computer security? You know what Five are like once they start coming after you with all that forensic accounting you did.....of course if Keeley Hawes is with them you could just beg to be arrested. Bet *she* knows how to torture a bloke.”

“Fraser here again. Try control, alt, delete Tony then double back on the tab key and....”

“Not likely. Need to see how this ends. Phew! Chocks away guys. Rotate..... Rear gunner at the ready.....ah, got your picture now. Bugger, I’ve lost that window - pity we never saw the rest of the clip. Now where’s that chain of office? Last saw it holding the side gate open.”

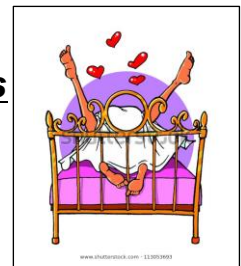
“If you’re posting it to me, Tony, stick a duster and a bit of polish in with it. Jan doesn’t clean baubles like that, I’ll have to do it myself before the club meets again.”

“Anne neither. She’ll be here in a sec to witness this handover business. Whoops Anne, didn’t see you come in. Just finishing the Probus chain handover. Now mind where you’re putting that apple corer.....suffering sardines, Fraser, I don’t like the look on her face.”

“Tough luck Tony. Pam could do with an apple corer. Just wash it first and if Jim thinks it’s an unsolicited bribe I’ll stick it in the minutes under AOB.....”

*At this point the dialogue descended into some confusion and signs of distress as a DNS notice appeared on all three screens.*

## **Love in the Lockdown: a couple’s Story**



The only way to pull off a lockdown afternoon 'quickie' with their 8-year old son in the apartment was to send him out on the balcony with a Mars Bar and tell him to report on all the street activities.

He began his commentary as his parents put their plan into operation:

'There's a car being towed from the car park,' he shouted.

'An ambulance just drove by!'

'Looks like the Anderson's have company,' he called out.

'Matt's out on his bike and his mum is telling him off'

'Looks as if the Sanders are going into full isolation!'

'Jason has had his skate board taken off him.'

After a few moments he announced, 'The Coopers are having sex!!'

Startled, his mum and dad shot up in bed!

Dad cautiously called out, 'How do you know they're having sex?'

'Jimmy Cooper is standing on his balcony with a Mars Bar.'

Q

“The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.”

“Light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.”  
“Nobody realizes that some people expend tremendous energy merely to be normal.”

“Men marry women with the hope they will never change. Women marry men with the hope they will change. Invariably they are both disappointed.”

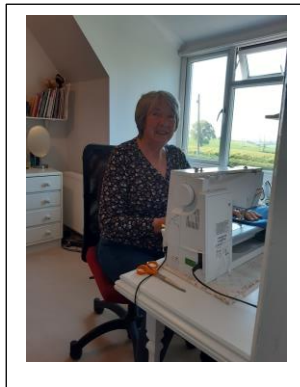
After 2 weeks of quarantine with her husband, Gertrude decided to knit him a scarf..



## Probus Newsletter

The monthly newsletter is primarily a memory aid for members and a means of keeping in touch with what is going on (at the moment, not much). The committee has asked that it continues to appear while the club is not meeting. While hoping that amusing bits are found to be....er.....amusing, I also welcome serious contributions (or photographs: see below) for printing that may be of general or specific interest to club members, as long as they are not too long.

Ed



The indefatigable Pam Gunn doing her bit to produce PPE for the NHS

An airplane was about to crash. There were 4 passengers on board, but only 3 parachutes. The 1st passenger said, "I am Steph Curry, the best NBA basketball player. The Warriors and my millions of fans need me, and I can't afford to die." So he took the 1st pack and left the plane.

The 2nd passenger, Donald Trump, said, "I am the newly-elected U.S. President, and I am the smartest President in American history, so my people don't want me to die." He took the 2nd pack and jumped out of the plane.

The 3rd passenger, the Pope, said to the 4th passenger, a 10 year old schoolboy, "My son, I am old and don't have many years left, you have more years ahead so I will sacrifice my life and let you have the last parachute."

The little boy said, "That's okay, Your Holiness, there's a parachute left for you. America 's smartest President took my schoolbag."

No pubs, no gambling, no football, nowhere to get a breakfast, restricted freedom, draconian police and everyone's covering their faces. How are you enjoying your free 30 day trial of life under sharia law? #COVID19 🤪

Quarantine survival tip #463: empty your glass bottles into the recycling bin at 8pm on a Thursday so the NHS clapping drowns out the sound of your household's descent into alcoholism.