



**NEWENT &
DISTRICT
PROBUS CLUB**
Inaugurated 23rd March 1977
**MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER**

July 2020

August Zooming

11 August: The future of Artificial Intelligence in our society – John Handby

25th August: General de Gaulle – Fiona Morison

Retirement – a wife's view

A frustrated wife told me the other day her definition of retirement: "Twice as much husband on half as much pay."

Sports Headlines

England cricketers must use own balls among new training rules

Desperate Queries

Can anyone tell me is it OK to take a shower now or do we just keep washing our hands?

I phoned B&Q and said "Are you open?" "Yes" they replied. "How big is the queue?" I asked. And they said: "The same size as the B."

July Diary

July is not quite as cancelled as June was

NB All Zooms begin at 10:30



14 July: Fraser Gunn: The History of the UK Air Sea Rescue Service



28 July: Philip Bowen - The Gunpowder Plot: A Midlands uprising



Zoom: a definition from the OED. To move at speed; hurry

That definition certainly applied when our resident techies put their minds to alleviating the withdrawal symptoms that many members were experiencing following the halting of club meetings due to the coronavirus. In doing so, they may well have created another one: - "how to bring and keep club members together from the comfort of their own homes". Secretary Fraser, Chairman Mike and Treasurer Jim hit on the idea of using one of the well known technologies such as Skype, which was quite successful initially but was rather cumbersome in operation. It was decided to try an alternative called Zoom, which was a very popular system used by millions throughout the world. This has proved to be very successful with over 25 members signing up. One drawback was that meetings were limited to 45 minutes, so the committee decided to purchase the Pro version (on the advice of Glevum Probus) which gave unlimited time and a lot more features. To this end they were helped and encouraged by a Mike Aggleton, of whom more later, from Glevum (Gloucester) Probus. Several dummy runs followed, with the above trio acting as guinea pigs sorting out the inevitable technical hitches. A little daunting at first to non-techies but, after the first or perhaps the third attempt, the process is as easy as, well, switching on the computer – although to the author, drawing on his early computer experience back in the Stone Age, even that can be off-putting. Now Fraser, having previously notified us of a forthcoming meeting, some 24 hours beforehand

Cont.....

Cont..... sends us a link, which simply consists of a line of code which the recipient must click to be wafted into the magical world of the ether. The “host” or the one arranging the meeting then admits each member into the “waiting room” with each member still firmly ensconced in his favourite armchair. Thanks to the gallery, members can see who else has joined the meeting and the inevitable banter occurs until the host, coming over all school-masterly, uses his prerogative of the mute button to silence us all. Then, as normal, with a few announcements and then the speaker. Sound and vision quality so far has been good and then, still using the education analogy, it’s back to primary school and if any of us wishes to ask a question it’s hands up and wriggle to try to catch the teacher’s eye.

To date, we have only had one “proper” talk, that by chairman Mike, who emulated Malthus and gave us a view of what the UK economy, post coronavirus, might look like. Not a pretty picture however excellently delivered. However, thanks to the aforementioned Mike Aggleton, we have been spoilt for choice when it comes to talks. Mike has made many of us “honorary members” and “admitted” us to talks via Zoom that he has arranged. One of which “The Truth About Climate Change” opened the eyes of many of us. Thanks are due to Mike for this and the author recommends that members take advantage of this. One criticism though. There are no virtual half covered chocolate Digestives on offer but I expect that our trio is working on this. Will we want to revert to our person to person meetings when normalcy returns? As good as Zoom is, no doubt we will but this is proving an excellent interim measure. Perhaps this a foretaste of a world to come in the not too distant future? One in which we all dwell in hermetically sealed germ free bubbles with personal contact just a memory?

Peter Hayes

The Cuban Missile Crisis – David Head

This was the second time in as many weeks that some members would have heard David talk, the previous one being on climate change. His delivery was at times slightly difficult to follow and some of his slides were not fully explained but nevertheless he displayed an impressive personal knowledge of his subject. He also had personal

experience of the impact of the crisis at the sharp end having been in the RAF flying Victor nuclear bombers at the time.

He began with a detailed explanation of the run up to the crisis. When Castro came to power in 1958 he nationalised American businesses in Cuba, severed relations with the USA and reached out to the Soviet Union. At the behest of President Eisenhower the CIA organised an invasion of Cuba with the aid of Cuban counter-revolutionaries to bring Cuba back under the American umbrella. The invasion, on 17th April 1961, was an unmitigated disaster because of poor planning and the fact that President Kennedy had only taken office a few days before and was deeply sceptical about the whole operation. As a result only half the forces required by the CIA were made available and the invaders surrendered on 21st April.

Following this debacle Castro turned even more to the Soviet Union for help in dealing with the Americans whom he loathed. The many factors which led to what we know as the Cuban Missile Crisis included Castro’s almost complete lack of experience in international relations/diplomacy and Soviet realisation that they were being surrounded by American long range, nuclear armed missiles for which they had no equivalent. Also Khrushchev thought JFK was something of a playboy and JFK was suspicious of his own military following the Bay of Pigs fiasco. All this led to Khrushchev believing that he could get away with placing nuclear missiles and other military hardware on Cuba in the expectation that he could force the Western allies to pull out of Berlin in return for withdrawing the missiles from Cuba.

David then explained the complicated series of events, most of which were well documented at the time, which began with the movement of missiles and aircraft by the Soviets into Cuba and ended with a little known event when a rogue Soviet submarine commander ordered his crew to fire a nuclear torpedo at the American fleet. He was stopped at the last moment by a senior Russian naval officer, who realised the disaster which would follow, and ordered the captain to surface. The submarine was then seized by the US Navy and the crisis was defused. Poor communications, particularly between Moscow and the submarines and with Soviet forces in Cuba, were largely responsible for the situation escalating in the way it did and resulted in the installation of a direct hotline between Moscow and Washington.

All in all a detailed and fascinating account of an episode which brought us closer to nuclear war than any other before or since.

Tony Pearson

Lockdown Blues

One or two members, and honorary members, seem to have occupied themselves (or not)

The weeds are coming up again
The jigsaw lies undone
The garden shed's still cluttered
Oh where have those weeks gone?

I meant to tidy cupboards
Improve my Spanish too
But I never got round to it
And I bet you didn't too!

Lee Hines

Gareth and Sarah Williams have - predictably - been doing rather a lot of gardening. See **"Close Encounters with Greatness."**

Mike Warburton apparently has a habit of buying books that look interesting but failing to read them. So in this lockdown he's been able to catch up. History has so much to teach us, he says, and he now wishes he had studied it with more determination when he was at school. He has no excuse, therefore, for not making some recommendations next month (see below).



Your editor has been busy building, or rather rebuilding his model railway - still very much a work in progress and a poor substitute for going

to the pub, although in the case of Bromsash the pub has been coming to him.

Probus members are (again) invited to share interesting or unpredictable activities in this space next month. Have most people really been doing nothing unusual?

**** Libraries open soon! In the August issue members are also invited to reveal their favourite READING during lockdown (or maybe why they haven't been doing any). Titles/authors will do, with or without any critical commentary! Deadline July 25th***



Military Banter

8 hrs · 🌐



From a fan:

"If WWII happened today...

Can I have more clarity on the "Your country needs you" slogan, it's too ambiguous

Why aren't you doing enough to prevent these air raids?

Does the siren apply to everyone?

There are only male and female toilets in the air raid shelter and I don't identify as either.

This respirator haversack has a leather strap and I'm a vegan.

Why cant I have almond milk on my ration card

I find the term "black out" offensive.

I find the lack of colour options within military uniforms oppressive.

Why didn't we have stock piles of spitfires at the start of this conflict?"

After isolation



On a Presidential visit to a farm, Mrs Coolidge asked her guide how many times the rooster copulated daily. "Dozens of times," was the reply. "Please tell that to the President," Mrs Coolidge requested. When the President passed the pens and was told about the rooster, he asked, "Same hen every time?" "Oh no, Mr President, a different one each time." The President nodded slowly then said, "Tell that to Mrs Coolidge."

Close Encounters with Greatness

An occasional series in which members write, giving details of any well known or interesting person they may have met or known.

I met Princess Anne in 1995 on the official opening of the last major project at the London Air Traffic Control Centre at West Drayton. I had taken over responsibility for this project about 12 months before completion. I had quite a lengthy conversation with her and was impressed with her understanding of the project.

For some years, Sir Douglas Bader was a Board Member of the Civil Aviation Authority for whom I worked in London. By chance, I had a very brief meeting with him sometime in the early 1980s when I met him coming towards me in the corridor. His words of greeting were not, "Good Morning John", as you might have expected but, "How do I get out of this bloody place". He had got out of the lift at the wrong floor and was completely lost. Needless to say, I recognised him from a distance but of course he didn't know me from Adam!

The third person, although famous by his achievements as a highly respected physicist and the brains behind such devices as the miniaturised radar generator (Gunn diode) with which most of us who have been booked for speeding are familiar, and the liquid crystal display (LCD), is probably unknown by most people. I met Cyril Hilsum in 1967 when I was working at what was then known as the Royal Radar Establishment at Malvern. Incidentally, Professor Hilsum was well known by our dear departed friend, Morton Brydon.

John Martin

.....
I once met Lord (Joel) Joffe. Actually I met him many times; he in his capacity as chairman of the then Swindon Health Authority and me as his "gofer" and general dogsbody. He was plain Mr then, or, more likely Joel to most of us. His fame had preceded him and most of us were in awe of him but, it must be said, not due to his demeanour or even his stature. In fact, and this is in no way derogatory or seeking to diminish him, he reminded me of the (probably) apocryphal remark of Clement Attlee by Churchill qv "he was a modest man but then he had a lot to be modest about."

One day, I finally plucked up the courage to ask him directly "Joel, were you really the lead defence solicitor when Nelson Mandela was tried for Treason?" To which he replied, without hesitation or without turning a hair but cocking his head

sideways with that impish smile that continually played upon his face, "I was yes but don't be too impressed. After all, he is still in jail."

That just summed up the man, I believe. I am proud to have known him, even in such a humble capacity.

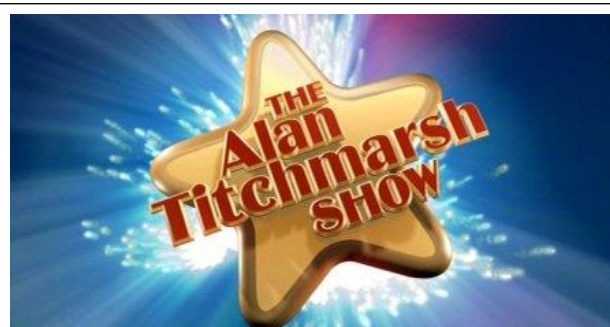
Peter Hayes

.....
I can confirm that when I was a trustee for the RAF Benevolent Fund we had our own marquee at the International Air Tattoo at Fairford and would invite visitors with interests in aviation. One year in the early two thousands I was asked to host a Mr Len Deighton, and it was he! He had written his 2 books 'Fighter' and 'Bomber' a few years earlier and was very interested in the displays, particularly that of the USAF B2 Stealth Bomber (which looks like a flying wing) which did its first ever visit to the UK that year. He was great company over lunch and he was accompanied by his wife who was Dutch. Amazingly she had gone to the same school in central Holland as my wife Marjanne, albeit a few years earlier! I thought it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship but he lives in Portugal and we have never met again!

John Weeden

.....
Jeremy Paxman once addressed Alan Titchmarsh on Newsnight as "Saint" Alan, "Patron Saint of Gardeners", This is a tale of how I came to be blessed!

My wife Sarah and I have been opening our garden for the National Garden Scheme for many years, As a spin-off from this, some 6 years ago we were approached by ITV asking if they could use the garden for filming an episode of the "Love your Garden" series, a programme which features garden makeovers with a human interest angle. At the time we knew little about the programme & its format, except that it was presented by a Mr Titchmarsh. Alan Titchmarsh, radio and TV presenter, author, poet, the doyen of gardening, a Chelsea Flower Show institution, and a national "pin-up", who was said to have been told by the Queen, when presenting him with his OBE that "you have given many women a great deal of pleasure" -- How could we refuse?



Following an inspection by one of the production team, the garden was deemed suitable and dates were arranged. Shortly before the team turned up, I happened to catch a Newsnight feature on the Chelsea Flower Show, in which Jeremy Paxman referred to and addressed Alan (I can call him that now) as “*Saint*” Alan Titchmarsh. The accolade stuck in my mind. A film crew spent two damp days filming background material in the garden. Sarah and I were kept out of the way, shut up in the house. It wasn’t about us! Alan was to be turning up a couple of days later, to film his contribution. We were sworn to secrecy, and ordered not to tell a soul about this, particularly not neighbours or friends,—the team didn’t want Mr Titchmarsh to be mobbed at the gate! He duly arrived, early in the morning, in a special car with driver, preceded by the production team of five or six others. It was a dull, damp day, but not cold. Introductions were made, and after a brief chat Alan wandered into the garden to start his work. We were again banished to the house and told to keep our heads down, reduced to watching through the bedroom windows and snatching surreptitious photographs!

After an hour or so, it began to drizzle. Umbrellas went up, but filming of sorts continued, now with Alan holding a brolly over his head. Then, suddenly, Alan took it upon himself to remove his shoes and socks and started walking around barefoot on the lawn. The crew filmed for a while but then left him to wander. We had seen him on TV doing this. We had thought it was to make useful filling-in footage (sic) but he did admit later that he actually enjoyed the sensation. We managed to snap a few photos of him in action, but kept that to ourselves!

Then, there was a knock on the back door. There was a barefoot Alan Titchmarsh asking apologetically did we have something to dry his feet? I could see that they were soaking wet and covered in grass cuttings! I let him in, sat him down, grabbed a washing-up bowl from the sink, filled it with warm water, laid it at his feet, & snatched a towel from the kitchen. There we were, Alan, sat on a stool, with his feet in the bowl, me standing by, holding the towel, when I was suddenly reminded of a certain religious scene, and I recalling Jeremy Paxman’s remark. I said to Alan, “This strikes me as being very biblical. Did you know that you had not long ago been christened “*Saint*” Alan by Mr Paxman? Here we are, me, towel in hand, watching you washing your feet. To complete the scenario, perhaps I should offer to dry them for you, although to be authentic, and you being the saint, maybe our roles should be reversed!”

He was suitably amused, but made no comment about his sanctity. He dried his own feet! With his footwear restored, we continued to chat

including his remarking on the value of our watering cans (we have a collection of old battered and rejected ones),-- a nice “pension pot” he suggested. Outside, filming activities had ceased, the production team were satisfied. They packed their kit; Alan said his thanks and farewells, was escorted to his car, and off they all went.

Nearly a year later, we were given notice that our “*Love Your Garden*” episode was due to be broadcast. At the time we were on a walking break with some old college friends in North Yorkshire. We all crowded into our hotel room before a delayed dinner to watch the programme. After a few minutes, it became apparent that the garden featured was not ours, much to our embarrassment and our friends’ chagrin. It transpired that “our” instalment had been switched with another, and would be aired the following week.

When eventually shown, our garden featured for a few minutes, mostly as background. The barefoot Alan appeared briefly, quipping about “not letting the grass grow under his feet” It wasn’t much after three days of filming. The garden’s name featured briefly in the credits, but blink and you missed it. Neither we, nor the NGS were offered any fee or donation—apparently appearing on ITV was reward enough! ***I had, however, touched Saint Alan’s feet.***

Our impressions of Alan? -He came across just like his TV persona, likeable, unassuming, self effacing, and very easy to talk to. A nice man. We didn’t embarrass him with requests for selfies, nor did he offer! The towel that touched the feet; the “saintly” towel? That’s still kept in a special place—the airing-cupboard --along with all the other ones!

Gareth Williams

.....
Some years ago, at a mutual friend’s wedding reception, I found myself sitting next to the retired MP, Cecil Parkinson. He was charming and was happy to make small talk but shied away from any major political issues. What I did learn was on leaving Cambridge he joined the Metal Box Company Management Training Programme later qualifying as a Chartered Accountant before becoming a consultant and starting his own business. What did surprise me was to learn he had been a member of the Labour Party before switching to the Tories. It was evident he was an ardent Margaret Thatcher supporter and her campaign manager for her 1983 General Election success. His wife, Anne, nursing a broken leg, was the other side of the table talking to Ursula.

Jim Stewart

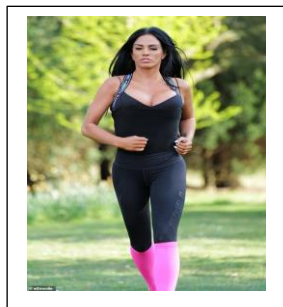
As far as I recall the only person I've met who might be a familiar name I met, in fact, long before he became better known: the actor Tim McInnerny. I "met" him because I taught him at A level before he left school to go off to an Oxford Scholarship to read English. He was very complimentary about my teaching at the time, but I've never seen or heard from him since (except on screens of course), and so draw no conclusions at all!



Paul Dodd

.....
I was a guest on the Jimmy Young show several times. Jimmy was, of course, born in Cinderford and he remained a humble man despite his fame. Sitting in the studio I remember the pictures round the wall of Jimmy with Margaret Thatcher, President Reagan and Moshe Dayan. He was so friendly and unassuming. A real gentleman. Sitting in the green room on one occasion

I was joined by Katie Price, otherwise known as Jordan. She was very friendly but was in some pain following an operation on her teeth veneers.



Leaving Wogan house, for the only time in my life I was confronted by a bank of photographers. I waved at them and duly received back a torrent of abuse.

Mike Warburton

.....
I was sitting in my office when our Fire Control asked me to attend an incident on the M4. They said that they didn't have any details but the Crew Commander specifically ask for me to attend. As I approached the incident, I noticed a bright yellow Rolls Royce parked on the hard shoulder with the fire crew stood around talking to the driver. As I got out of my car the Crew Commander approached me with a huge grin on his face. He said "Guv, we thought you must see this" as I got closer to the vehicle, I noticed a middle age woman in a black leather cat suit about three sizes too small with the result that her voluptuous figure was on full display.

It turned out it was "Miss Whiplash" (Real name Lindi St Clair) the notorious Madam!! The crew insisted we all had our photo taken with her. It would appear there had been a small



engine fire which was extinguished quickly and she was waiting for a tow truck. I left the scene and, on my return, I was asked by Fire Control why I was needed. When I told them why, they cracked up hysterically? Whenever I visited Fire Control, the girls used to pull my leg "Seen any Madams lately Guv" I never saw the photos but someone somewhere has a copy!!

In 1986 I was sent to a fire at Windsor Castle. On arrival I was escorted to the staff quarters in the Castle. The fire was fairly small, a lot of smoke damage. It had been caused by a staff member leaving a candle burning beside their bed. As I was leaving the area and going down some stairs, I noticed two people coming up towards me, it was then that I noticed it was the Queen with the Master of the Household. As she approached, I stood to attention and said good morning Ma'am (The correct way of addressing her I was told). She asked what had happened, I explained the situation and that all was well now. She said why hadn't the fire alarm been sounded; I explain that there was no alarm in this area or smoke detection.....oops! She immediately turned round to the Master of the Household and asked why not!!! He glared at me, his face went crimson and the veins on his neck stood out and he stammered that he did not know, but would find out. At this point I said goodbye and returned back to my office. As I walked through the door my secretary said "The Chief wants you to ring him straight away"! I rang him and got the biggest roasting of my career. He said "What the hell were you thinking of giving the Queen that information? You never offer any comments or opinions" He added that the Master of the Household (a bumptious toady) did not want me to attend the Castle again" I explained that I was asked by the Queen, what I suppose to say "I don't know?" "The Chief did point out to him in my defence that I was correct, there is no detection or alarm in that area, something we have been advocating for years. He did not have the authority to dictate who attends emergencies at the Castle and I attended many incidents after that. I just kept out of his way and avoided the Queen!! I often wondered what his opinions were following the disastrous fire of 1992?

Fraser Gunn

Cont.....

Quote of the Month

"No pleasure is worth giving up for the sake of two more years in a geriatric home at Weston Super Mare" – *Kingsley Amis.*

On a cruise last November we encountered Derrick Evans, better known to TV viewers as Mr Motivator. Every morning at 10am he would lead a group of about 100 geriatrics in half an hour of reasonably strenuous exercise accompanied by music and an often quite risqué commentary.

On a couple of occasions I was able to have a quiet conversation with him over a cup of coffee and discovered that



despite his flamboyant persona he was a serious and thoughtful individual who believed that everyone should be positive and feel good about themselves. He has had a successful career in retail and in property development despite a fairly humble upbringing in Leicester and currently owns a leisure business in Jamaica where he was born. His efforts to motivate people, both physically and emotionally, show that by lifting people's aspirations his name Derrick is most appropriate.

John Slack

Special Feature: Is it goodbye to the state pension triple lock?

I strongly believe that we will soon see the end of an arrangement which has served pensioners well over the last ten years since it was introduced by the coalition government. The current rules provide that our state pension will increase each year on 6 April by inflation (CPI), wages, as recorded to the previous September, or 2.5%, whichever is highest. UK state pensions are low by European standards and the coalition government wanted both to protect pensioners from economic fluctuations and gradually improve their position relative to our neighbours.

Although announced by the chancellor, the architect of the triple lock was Steve Webb, the young LibDem MP for Thornbury and Yate who was appointed pensions minister when the coalition was formed in 2010. It has nevertheless been firmly adopted as a policy by the current government with a manifesto pledge that it will remain throughout the life of this parliament.

Within it, however, there is a fundamental flaw which is about to be exposed by the coronavirus pandemic. We cannot be sure, but inflation is heading downwards and may be negative by September. Wages are also unpredictable but with about

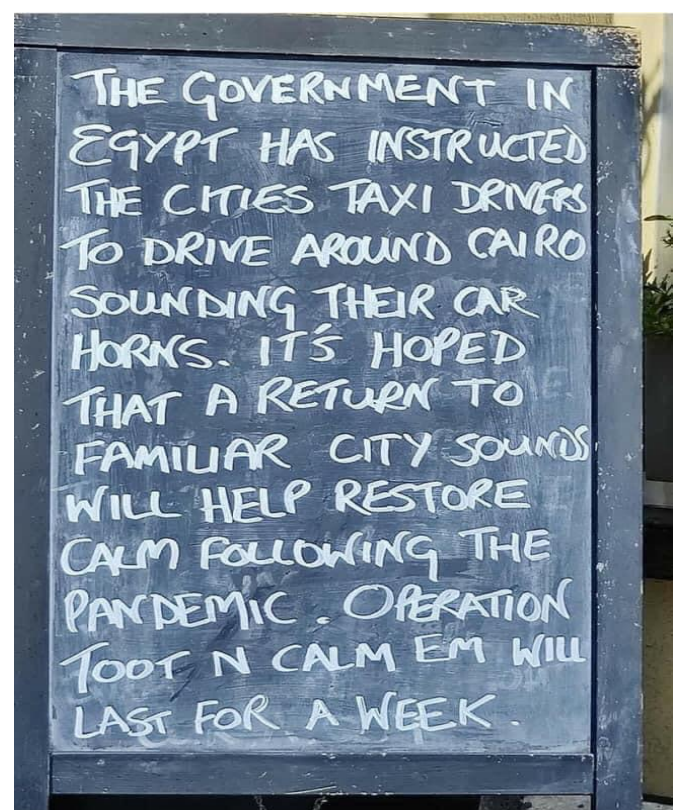
10 million people currently on government support and jobs losses inevitable, some projections suggest that wages will fall by at least 10% and possible more. So how do the current rules then apply? Suppose wages to this September fall by 10% but then bounce back by September next year to the pre coronavirus level, as currently hoped. In April 2021 state pensions would still increase by 2.5%. In April 2022 state pensions would increase again by a factor of 100/90 leaving pensioners almost 14% better off relative to wage earners as a whole. This would be not only very expensive for the government (about £15bn on OBR estimates) but unfair on the young working population who have been suffering most financially from the lockdown. The older generation who have also benefitted disproportionately from rising asset values resulting from the Bank of England support in the form of quantitative easing.

I do not think the arrangement will disappear completely but something has to give in order to maintain intergeneration fairness.

Obviously I am not alone in saying this. Sir Steve Webb, as he now is, agrees that the arrangement he championed ten year ago is not suitable for our current circumstances.

Last month I said that politicians should not make reckless long term commitments on tax policy, and the same applies to spending. I suspect that the government will now be forced to break their manifesto pledge and, however sound the reasons, will suffer a loss of political capital in doing so.

Mike Warburton



Coronavirus - the view from London

In March 2020 on the 23rd day
Boris told the nation he had something to say....

'Covid-19 spreads quickly' he said
If you think you have it, stay in bed!

Don't go to work, don't go for a drive
Stay far from home and the virus will thrive

Don't sell your house, don't get married
We really don't know how this virus is carried

Schools are shut, the kids are all at home
The Queen tells the nation that 'we are not alone'

She speaks to us all: children, women and men
And signs off saying: 'We Will Meet Again'

Boris gets poorly, he's hospital bound
Number 10 is empty, the PM is not around

Buses still run but you should enter at the back
Passengers on them fearing virus attack

Shopping is an issue, toilet rolls are few
Highlight of the week: the on-line order is due

In short supply also: bread flour and yeast
Our penchant for baking has somewhat increased

Panic buying shoppers empty the shelves
Thinking not of others but only themselves

As supply chains buckle, eggs run out
You shop for rice and pasta but come back without

If you do go shopping, new rules apply
The empty shelves might make you cry

The news comes in quickly, it's all data and numbers
We're now at the mercy of government blunders

Given the virus is super contagious
The lack of testing is deemed outrageous

The public push boundaries and flout the advice
Police dole out fines whilst trying to be nice

Vocabulary changes, there's new phrases and words
Social distance, lockdown and immunity herds

The economy's in crisis, jobs are lost
No matter who you are there will be a cost

People struggle to pay their bills and rent
They blink and all their money is spent

Some are furloughed, some work for nothing
Most just hope they don't wake up coughing

New hospitals are built, almost overnight
Great Britain unites, up for the fight

Keeping in contact becomes a priority
As it dawns the virus will affect the majority

So people have virtual parties on-line
For Zoom or Houseparty, you will need wine!

Kids paint rainbows all over the land
Festivals, gigs and weddings are banned

On Thursday evenings, we go out on our street
A chance for the neighbours to meet and greet

We cheer for key workers and the NHS
The heroes, toiling to get us out of this mess

A mention also for Captain Tom (with his frame)
Raising millions and gaining well-deserved fame

Advice is a-plenty: STAY AT HOME!
If you do go out, do it alone

Wash your hands often, stay away from others
Keep your distance from elderly fathers and mothers

At 2 metres away we're socially distant
Heed the advice, don't be resistant

So hug your family, phone a friend
Look forward to a time when this will end

Be grateful, be thankful for whatever you've got
Don't sweat the small stuff and panic not

And when this is all over.... whenever that is
Plan a big party, crack open the fizz

It'll go down in history, it's like nothing we've seen
This is my story of Covid-19

Carolyn Crisp (Richard's daughter-in-law)

Man of the Month: Ray McCairn

Many apologies to Ray that
He failed to appear in the
Committee Collage last month.
This is was due to "editorial
oversight and incomplete
information gathering." Ray is
in fact a vital cog and the go-to
man for anything involving
the internet, emailing,
zooming, tweeting and much
else. He's also an occasional source of some scurrilous
jokes – but then isn't everybody?

