



## NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

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

### MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

February 2021

### Coming up in March:

9<sup>th</sup>

The Gloucester Flood  
of 2007 – Dr Tim  
Brain

23<sup>rd</sup>

Weird and Wonderful  
Engineering leading  
up to D Day - John  
Clark

### Nothing New Under the Sun Corner

*"The year of Our Lorde  
1665 hath been such a ter-  
rible one for ye plague. I  
cannot wait for 1666 for  
which I have especial ex-  
citement to try the newe  
bakery that hath opened on  
Pudding Lane"*

*(Pepys, quoted in The  
Times. But NB it's Fake  
Pepys)*

## February Diary



**February 9<sup>th</sup>** John Ambrose's talk is called 'Tax, Care and The New Guy'. This covers some issues that affect individuals, families and what they own. The objective is to highlight these problems and explain what steps can be taken to safeguard against them. John's talk is thought-provoking, interactive with added humour.



**February 23<sup>rd</sup>** Ken Ingamells : Shackleton's Fateful Antarctic Expedition

Shackleton is more than a man renowned for surviving his ship being crushed by the ice. I've done his boat journey four times, walked part way across South Georgia and ventured into the Weddell Sea, and consequently feel more for the man than just a remote hero from the past and how different he was from his contemporary Captain Scott.

***Both talks via Zoom. Don't forget to invite your friends to these talks (contact Chairman Mike first) as they are a potential recruitment aid!***

### Chairman's Chat

What confusing times we are living through. I find myself swinging between optimism to pessimism several times a day. Watching the evening news is almost always depressing so we have been seeking out box sets and light hearted alternatives on Sky Arts. The grim statistics on the impact of the pandemic are balanced to some extent by the welcome success of the vaccine rollout. From responses at our last zoom meeting it looks as though half our members have already had their first vaccination which gives some support to the government commitment to have all of our age group vaccinated in the next few weeks. Unfortunately that will not mark the end because the gap between the two doses having been extended means that it will now be several months before we will have had second doses and be in a position to resume meetings. Last month I said I was hopeful that this would be achieved by Easter but that now looks optimistic. Never mind, the days are drawing out and we have even managed to get some gardening done.

Since our last newsletter your committee has met to consider the budget for next year which Jim will be sharing with you before for the AGM on 27 April. We have also been discussing ideas for another evening of entertainment following the successful quiz evening. Fraser plans to seek members' views on this at our next meeting on 9 February. We have a full schedule of speakers, thanks to Fraser's sterling efforts and I am delighted that attendance at our zoom meetings has remained high. Once we have a better idea of a date for meeting again we are planning a number of initiatives for recruiting new members with a particular focus on those in the Gorsley area who may be interested in joining us at our new venue. Finally I should again thank Paul for putting together this newsletter which remains an important way of keeping in touch with each other.

*Mike*

## *Myanmar or Burma?*

On a damp January morning, with the use of zoom, David transported us to the warm sunshine of the Far East and took us on a fascinating journey down the Irrawaddy River, travelling through the centre of Myanmar, or Burma, as it was known up to 1986. The change of name gives a clue as to why this enigmatic country is unfamiliar, and why it remains in a kind of time warp.

Myanmar, the largest country in SE Asia, is roughly the size of the UK and with a similar sized population. It lies between China to the North East, Thailand to the east and south, borders India/Bangladesh in the north and with The Bay of Bengal to the west. It is mountainous in the north and opens out into flatter plains further south. The Irrawaddy river, rising from the Himalayas, runs through the centre of the country, through Mandalay, the second largest city, (pop 1.7 million) southwards to the sea at Yangon (Rangoon) the capital, (pop 7 million) dividing the country roughly in half. The river is one of the most important routes for transport of goods in the country, with the majority of the population living in small villages. Road and rail communication are not good.

Conditions in the country stem from the nation's history. Myanmar's golden age was in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century when there was unified dynastic rule from the old, central capital of Mandalay. It was an era of great temple building, which all ended with Mogul invasion. Then followed five hundred years of fighting and power struggles between rival internal factions, tribal dynasties and ethnic groups, the legacy of which continues today. In the 1850s, Burma was invaded by the British and became part of the Empire, as an offshoot of India. Rangoon in the south was established as the new capital. In 1941 Burma was occupied by the Japanese who drove the Allies out, and by 1943 the country was effectively a puppet state under Japanese control. In 1944 with Burmese Nationalist support, the then Defence Minister, Aung Sang secretly re-established contact with the Allies and a year later, he and his Nationalist forces switched sides, and supported the Allies in driving out the Japanese, and retaking Rangoon.

The country had been devastated by the war; the British colonial influence had been greatly diluted, tribal & ethnic groups were vying for power, but Aung San was able to unify the country sufficiently for Burma to be able to declare independence by 1948, though he himself was assassinated shortly before this happened. He became a Gandhi-like National Hero thereafter. Independence however unleashed civil war and regional rebellions which continued until a left-wing military coup in 1962

established a revolutionary council. Civil unrest continued, with further calls for democracy. Following a second military coup and crackdown in 1988, the country was renamed Myanmar. Many in the West didn't (and still don't) recognise the changes, and applied strict economic sanctions.

At this time, General Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi returned to Myanmar, and with the influence of her father's reputation, attracted support and became leader of an increasingly popular Nationalist Democratic party. Oxford trained, with an English husband, awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1991, she suffered two long periods of house arrest, before being allowed to return to the government. Despite the military control, she is regarded by many, particularly the Buddhist majority, as the leader of the country. However, her management of the Rohingya crisis has led to her international fall from grace. It's probable that Aung San Suu Kyi has little room to manoeuvre when it comes either to standing up to the military or endangering what there is of a democratic process. The Rohingya are ethnic Muslims, unpopular with the majority Buddhists, and thought to be under strong Chinese influence. The military control 25% of the vote in parliament, vote "en bloc" and still dominate politics. They are paranoid about the Chinese.

Political turmoil throughout its history means that the country has failed on many fronts to progress and modernise. Its economy is predominantly agriculture based, with a near subsistence level of existence for the majority. Rice is the main crop, and the country's major export, closely followed by opium. Myanmar produces 25% of the world's legal supply of medically used opium. The country has some of the world's largest deposits of precious stones, particularly rubies & emeralds, and there are major gas & oil deposits, as yet undeveloped. With the heavy economic sanctions suffered until 2011, the country has missed out on the growth & prosperity of the SE Asia "tiger economies" though a Stock-Exchange opened up in 2016. Tourism enjoyed an important brief upsurge some 10 yrs ago, but is suffering again as a result of the Rohingya problem.



With this background sketch of the country, David then moved on to describing his journey, starting at Mandalay. With colourful illustrations, we were introduced to the cultural capital and centre of Burmese tradition, a city of temples & pagodas, dominated by the vast moat-surrounded Royal Palace. We visited the Kuthadaw Pagoda, containing the “World’s largest book”, in reality a complex containing more than seven hundred large stone tablets, each inscribed with Buddhist texts, and each in its own small gleaming white temple. Next, we shared a leaky boat ride at sunset under U Bain’s bridge—a 1.7 km. long walkway on stilts, crossing a lake, and built of teak 200yrs ago, used daily by villagers & monks,—a great photo opportunity!



Then it was down to the boat that was to ferry the party down the Irrawaddy for the next two weeks along “The road to Mandalay” The boat looked impressive; not so the approach and means of boarding! Because the river rises & falls so much over the seasons, the banks are shallow, sloping and muddy, with no permanent structures or quays built on them. Access to all the boats was via rickety wooden walkways & long swaying gangplanks, all temporary and moveable. This arrangement was to be the case for all the stops along the whole length of the river.

For the first part of the journey, the river was shallow, with very little other traffic. The view from the deck was of a continuous skyline of tree-lined banks pierced by the golden spires of large and small temples and with glimpses of glittering pagoda, interspersed with occasional small villages.

A long day’s cruise ended in the ancient city of Bagan, a World Heritage Site- a 50 sq.km. vast plain dotted with the remains of thousands of stupas, red-brick pagodas and temples, monuments, stone Buddhas and burial sites. The whole complex, founded in the 900’s mostly built by 1200 was overrun by the Moguls in 1287. It suffered a large earthquake in 1975. The original medieval city of over 100,000 people is now gone, but what’s left of the ancient architecture and ruined temples is nevertheless spectacular, Until 3 years ago Bagan was the most popular tourist site in Myanmar, but politics have taken their toll, David was lucky to have such an amazing & inspiring site almost to himself.

On down river, and visits to several small villages, the ones close to the river with wooden houses built on stilts. All were cheerful places, with many colourful markets. Often there was a festival or local procession and wedding parade in progress. Everywhere, the streets were lined with artisan and craft workers’ stalls, food stalls and hardware stores selling everything needed for daily life. People were friendly, well-dressed, and seemed content and industrious, although evidently not well-off, but there were no beggars. Street food featured prominently. The streets were bare earth; transport was at best, old motorbikes and bicycles. More often, it was oxen towing wooden carts. There were few cars. All the villages had their own beautifully decorated temples in stone or wood, some in caves, all with much gold leaf and many statues of Buddha.

Buddhism is the religion of 90% of the population, and determines the way of life. There are no priests in the particular type of Buddhism practised, but there are around 400,000 monks. Most male teenagers spend at least a few weeks & up to several years as monks. Hence there are many monasteries. On a visit to one of these, David illustrated the frugality of their meals and accommodation.

And so on down to Yangon, the capital and the main (and surprisingly modest) port of the country. Our visual tour showed a city of contrasts, with colonial buildings, lakes and parks, many markets, moderate traffic, and yet more temples. All is dominated by the hugely impressive and massive Shwedagon Pagoda with its enormous gold covered stupa, the images of which will remain in the memory.

This was a tale of a troubled and still divided county influenced by multiple cultures, as yet unable to shake off its past; nevertheless a land of very friendly and welcoming people.

Some questions followed, largely related to politics and religion. No easy solutions were forthcoming!

*Gareth Williams*

## *Molly Necker: a Tribute*

Molly Necker has died, aged 97. Her husband was a sometime treasurer of Newent and District Probus but Molly made a huge contribution by holding for many years, an annual Probus summer garden party, for which she did all the catering and did not charge. She was a very resourceful and capable lady and, if it rained, she would welcome a crowd of about thirty people and seat them by a carefully planned strategy. Once, she showed me her "to do" list of twenty or so items, the last of which was "Enjoy". Typical of my dear friend. We got to know each other when Peter and I down-sized from our family house and moved to Culver Street, opposite Molly and George. We were friends through thick and thin: illnesses, operations, the deaths of husbands. Ten years ago she moved to north Somerset to be near her son Roy and her daughter Linda. I had no response to birthday and Christmas cards and lost touch. Apparently, for the last four years she was in a care home with a lovely room overlooking the garden. She was well and alert until just before her death from an infection in a sore on her leg. She had requested not to be taken to hospital and died in the familiar surroundings of the home.

If members wish to contact the family, I can give them the address.

*Marian Moore*

We still smile at the delight on Molly's face when she received her card from the Queen on her 60th wedding anniversary. Julia had been talking to her at the gardening club and she said the family hadn't been in touch with Buckingham Palace and she seemed disappointed. Julia did some detective work and found how to arrange it, Marion Moore managed to track the paper work down with the help of St. Mary's Church and Mollie got her card. She was slightly disappointed because she didn't think the Queen was as dressed up as she could have been. It was good she got the card because it was shortly after that George died.

*John Atkinson*

Evelyn and I were great friends with Molly and George both through Probus and Newent Gardening Club. (Molly was the seed ordering lady) We kept in touch for a long time after we and Molly moved from Newent.

I remember several occasions with affection.

The Gardening Club organised an annual wine and cheese Christmas Party. Molly and I were committee members and I was usually on duty at the bar on party night. Molly would categorise some of the (male) members to identify who were the heavy drinkers and from whom the wine had to be hidden! A tricky diplomatic situation for us! When I became a new club member I put her down on my list as Mollie and she hated that spelling. I was never allowed to forget it!

George and Molly were a friendly and loving couple. When George passed away I had the honour, at Molly's request, to give the eulogy. Molly sat a few yards in front of me in St Marys Church in floods of tears as I spoke. Without doubt that was the most difficult and proudest task I have ever completed in my whole life.

*Peter Lawson-Smith*

I first met Molly nearly thirty years ago. I had just joined Probus and quickly found myself midst an embarrassing situation. Molly's husband, George had very publicly formed very critical views about the way that the accounts were presented. As an ex-company secretary he was pedantic about the accuracy and presentation of the accounts and this ended with the Treasurer resigning. As a 'new boy' I was asked to fill the post of Treasurer and prepare new accounts.

With much unease I asked to talk to George and I was invited to tea. I quickly became aware that Molly was sympathetic to my situation and quickly persuaded George that I should present the accounts in my own way and he agreed amiably. Problem solved. From that day I became a frequent visitor to their house and I realised just how much work Molly did for Probus. There was a Garden Party at their house each year and Molly insisted on providing the bulk of the food. George was left to organise the outside arrangements but Molly inspected the final organisation and invariably made some minor changes.

Molly was a feisty, energetic lady who knew exactly what she wanted and had the skills to achieve such aims. She certainly eased my path in the Treasurer's post and George never once asked for any changes. When I let him examine the accounts in advance he was always very agreeable and Molly sat in her chair looking entirely happy. A very talented lady and exceptionally good company.

*Colin Chave*

## *The Fairey Swordfish at War*

Mike Aggleton, a familiar face from Glevum Probus, gave a detailed talk on the role of the Fairey Swordfish in WW2. He revealed that his father had piloted these planes on many operations during the war, but never spoke of his open cockpit flying experiences in the Arctic.

The Swordfish, [nicknamed “Stringbag” after the net shopping bags, owing to its cross hatched webbing and ability to carry anything] was introduced into service in 1936 as a carrier launched torpedo – bomber and reconnaissance aircraft. By the outbreak of war this slow, canvas clad bi-plane was already obsolete, overtaken by more powerful all metal combat aircraft. However the Swordfish was versatile, able to operate in extreme weather conditions, land on and take off from a ship, to be fitted with floats for landing on water and carry a pay load of 1600lbs with extended flight range of 1,000 miles. Many early aircraft carriers were converted ships with small and weak landing platforms resulting in numerous accidents. The first purpose built carriers entered service at outbreak of war allowing little time for training naval aviators of The Fleet Air Arm; but Swordfish pilots soon acquired the skill to land on half the length of the flightdeck allowing space for parked planes to have wings manually folded before lowering below decks. Designed for a crew of three: pilot; gunner and navigator, some operations increased flight range by replacing the navigator with a barrel of aviation fuel, resulting in a perilous unchartered return flight onto a moving ship. He gave a tragic account of one such crew ditching after being unable to catch up with the Mother carrier.

Mike explained and illustrated the roles and “rolls” of the Swordfish in action or “in-the drink”. At the Battle of Narvik [Norway Spring 1940], first blood went to the Swordfish catapulted from HMS Warspite to surprise, torpedo and sink a German U boat nestling in the fiord. Later the same year Swordfish stationed in the Mediterranean were instrumental in decisive Battle of Taranto, home port to the Italian Fleet. Their slow al-fresco flying avoiding barrage balloon defences to drop bombs and torpedoes onto the penned ships. Only two Swordfish were lost but the Italian Navy was scuppered. The squadron of Swordfish stationed on Malta sank more than 1.5 million tons Axis shipping, more than all other planes. Germany had sought to control the North Atlantic, the vital supply line for Great Britain. In late Spring 1941 the battleship Bismarck was torpedoed and immobilised by Swordfish launched off HMS Ark Royal.

However a greater menace lurked beneath the waves. Mike relayed the ordeals faced by the crews Swordfish in The Battle of the Atlantic, showing catapult launches from merchant ships and recovered by winching aboard if the flight was successful.

The tactic that made the Swordfish so successful in ensuring the safe passage of convoys was not only the number of U-boat kills, but the deterrent effect it had in keeping U-boats submerged. The Swordfish crews flew over 10 sorties daily on anti-submarine patrol showing extraordinary bravery in the face of atrocious conditions.

*Ray McCairn (whose father served on a frigate protecting North Atlantic convoys)*

## *Anne Pearson writes.....*

*Anne very kindly volunteers here some advice for other couples in the light of her experiences after Tony's all-too-sudden death.*

As a new widow I thought it might be helpful to pass on to those who are still couples some lessons I have learned recently. These suggestions could help to lessen the stress at a difficult time, when the inevitable happens.

As most people do most things on line, do ensure that both of you know details for access to bank/building society accounts etc. Passwords are vital. (Even if one of you has a secret nest-egg make sure that someone has the details or it is lost!) it is also useful to have the occasional paper copy of statements as these are sometimes required. Share certificates are another nightmare. Tony dealt with all insurance on line so paper copies are critical.

It is useful to both know how the house runs. For example, using the washing machine and cooker, how to contact the oil supplier, how to tell when supplies are running low and where the key to the tank is. Likewise, investigate stopcocks, spare light bulbs, emergency plumber/electrician, spare keys etc. Obviously the name of your Solicitor and the whereabouts of your Wills and Lasting Powers of Attorney are important. Both our sons are very IT savvy but it is still very difficult and COVID has certainly not helped. Some organisations have ‘Bereavement Teams’ but they seem to be under-trained to say the least.

These are initial thoughts and I know there will be more hurdles along the way. All this is morbid but it is intended to help not depress you and I hope none of you will need any of this for a very long time!

.....  
See also <https://www.gov.uk/after-a-death>



BORIS JOHNSON



DAVID BOWIE



ELVIS PRESLEY



HELEN MIRREN



MICK JAGGER



FREDDIE MERCURY



JOHN LENNON



MAGGIE SMITH



VICTORIA BECKHAM



KATE MIDDLETON



JOSE MOURINO



HUGH GRANT

***Before they were famous***

***ANSWERS***

The Plain English Foundation said that the pandemic had generated many worthy contenders for 2020, but the invention and official use of “vertical consumption” to describe whether or not drinking was permitted while standing at SA venues under Covid health restrictions was a clear winner of its annual obscurity challenge.

“When South Australia announced it would ease coronavirus restrictions and allow people to drink in bars while standing up, it was cause to celebrate,” the foundation said. “When the SA Government decided to describe this as ‘vertical consumption’, we thought they’d started their own tittle a tad too early.”

Previous winners include corporate doublespeak, such as Orica referring to chemical leaks as “fugitive emissions”, and Volkswagen citing ‘possible emissions non-compliance’ when it was caught cheating on environmental tests.

In 2018, the ABC won the annual gong for using “external career development opportunities” when firing staff.

**For 2020, the foundation voted “alternative facts” the worst phrase of the decade.**

*John Slack's recommended reading  
for 2021:*

A CLIFFTOP TRAGEDY by Eileen Dover  
BETTER GARDENING by Anita Lawn  
DEALING WITH ALCOHOLISM by Carrie. M. Holme  
COOKING WITH GARLIC by Y.I.Malone  
ESCAPE TO THE FOREST by Lucinda Woods  
THE GOLDEN STREAM by I.P.Standing  
JUNGLE FEVER by Amos Quito  
THE SAFE CRACKER by Jemmy Wielder  
RURAL RIDES by Orson Kart  
POLITICAL MEMOIRS by Lisa Lott  
ON THE BEACH by C. Shaw  
PRIMARY SCHOOL by L.M.Entree  
SWIMMING THE CHANNEL by Frances Near  
CANNIBALISM by Henrietta Mann  
THE INSOMNIAC by Eliza Wake  
THE RUNAWAY BULL by Gay Topen  
TRY AND TRY AGAIN by Percy Vere  
THE PLANTATION by Rosa Trees  
WAIT FOR ME by Isa Cummin  
WHEN SCHOOL ENDS by Wendy Bellgoes

*The Great Covid Disaster*

*(with absolutely no apology to William McGonagall or anyone else)*

Twass in the year 2020 and on the 20th day of November,  
A date which many will long remember,  
That some two million Scotsmen – and perhaps  
thousands more  
To fight the pandemic were put in Tier 4.

The High Streets closed, the shops were shut, you  
couldna travel far  
Or go out for a curry, or have a bevvie at the bar.  
“We must defeat the virus” cried wee Nicola Sturgeon  
And law-abiding folk needed no further urging.  
“If everyone obeys the rules, and there is no disorder,  
We’ll prove we managed better than those south of the  
border.”

And if we do it well enough, she was heard to say  
The SNP will surely triumph next May  
We’ll strike a blow for nationhood with Indyref2  
Throw off Westminster shackles and rejoin the EU.

But she was deaf to doommongers who cried, “Nicola,  
beware  
The economy won’t stand it,” said the men of Charlotte  
Square  
“Because of Greta Thunberg the oil price has been hit  
Without the Barnett formula we’ll be truly in the shit.  
And even if you win and indyref goes your way  
The Orkneys and the Shetlands will apply to be part of  
Norway.

A vote for independence may attract the true believers  
But the only ones to profit will be bankers, crooks and  
reivers.

*Lee Hines*

*Virus Alert*

Even the most advanced computer programmes from Norton, McAfee, and others cannot take care of this one! It appears to target those who were born prior to 1955, but can affect others too. The lockdown seems to be increasing the chances of being affected, and the virus symptoms cause you to:

- send the same e-mail twice. (Done that)  
send a blank e-mail. (That too)  
send an e-mail to the wrong person. (Yup)  
send it back to the person who sent it to you. (Ah-ha)  
forget to attach the attachment. (Done that)  
hit SEND before you've finished. (Oh no, not again)  
to hit DELETE instead of SEND. (Hate that)  
to hit SEND when you should DELETE. (Heck, now what?)



*This virus is called the **C-NILE** virus!*

A lot of us have already been inflicted with this disease and, unfortunately as we age, it seems to get worse.  
If you can't admit to doing any of the above, you've obviously caught the other strain - the **D-NILE** virus.

## Not today Love



*The Hills are alive with the sound of sirens.....*

## Picklenash – Taking the P?

Sitting at home one day, reading the Log Books of Picklenash School in the 1880s (as one is surely often driven to during the Lockdown), I came across the following. I am still undecided whether the clerk had a sense of humour or whether he or she meant this literally.

*April 17 1874 "A lavatory has been erected for the boys. It will be a great convenience for the school"*

Source Chapters in Newent's History – Newent local History Society



## Thought for the Future.

"I desire to go to hell and not to heaven. In the former place I shall enjoy the company of Popes, Kings and Princes, while in the latter are only beggars, monks and apostles."



*Niccolo Machiavelli*

