



NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

Inaugurated 23rd March 1977

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

April 1st 2021

May (the great unlocking?)

11th Why is flying so safe?

**(unless you are on a
Boeing 777)**

A talk by Ron Jefferies

25th Understanding heraldry with John Bromley

**Probus subs now
due £60**

**Please pay the
treasurer by BACS
if possible**

Are you drinking more alcohol
than usual during quarantine?

Yes

No



April Diary



**Pam Street:
The Wonderful
World of Ivor
Novello
(A musical
morning)**

Zoom Etiquette: a reminder

Please join Zoom meetings between 1015 and 1030. Any later and you will interrupt the speaker.

Do MUTE your microphone so that any extraneous noises, barking, spousal arguments etc are not broadcast to the rest of us.

27th Probus AGM - Speaker/Entertainment TBA

Chairman's Chat

As I write, spring has truly arrived. Lambs are frolicking on the fields across the road and the birds are singing at full volume. Our garden is full of daffodils and many other flowers that I cannot name. Jan is the expert and seems to know every plant we come across. If it were not for Covid life would be good. Even on that front we are continuing to make great progress with our vaccination programme despite the best efforts of some to disrupt it. I hope it is not too political if I suggest that the attacks on Astra Zeneca are a disgrace. This is a pharmaceutical company independent of government which has made a massive investment in vaccine production and distribution to be sold at cost for the benefit of all those who placed an appropriate order. Other vaccine suppliers are making handsome profits by selling their alternatives at ten times the price. In saying that I should declare an interest in that we have a shareholding in Astra Zeneca in the Borders invest club affiliated to Newent Probus!

This month we have enjoyed two fascinating talks with a good attendance. I am pleased that we have been able to welcome visitors at each event. Some clubs are already making arrangements to meet up and both Fraser and I have been receiving requests to speak at them. Some may be optimistic about when the restrictions will be relaxed but your committee will keep monitoring the position and we will meet up in Gorsley as soon as it is safe and legal to do so.

Wishing all of you a very happy Easter

Mike

The Great Flood of Gloucestershire

As I drove in to Gloucester on the morning of Friday July 20th 2007, I could barely see the Cathedral tower. It was, as they say in Sheffield, siling it down. The poor driving conditions were the least of my worries as I headed in to Shire Hall. Government Inspectors were due to visit the following Monday, and they had dropped a curveball request for extra data on us at 5:30 p.m. the previous night. So my day was taken up with dashing around the offices of colleagues involved in trying to meet this request, and on one trip back to my office at about 2 p.m., I met a colleague on the stairs; he was dressed for going outside.

“Late lunch?” I asked. “No, we have been told to evacuate”, he said.

Back in my office overlooking Quay Street, I actually looked out of the window for the first time that day, to see firefighters unloading a boat, the streets towards the river full of water, and a fountain where there had been a manhole cover.

Tim Brain was the Chief Constable of Gloucestershire Constabulary, and has told his story of the events many times. But it retains its power to amaze.

The dry Spring of 2007 had been followed by an unusually wet June and July before a unique weather pattern dropped 2 months’ rain in 14 hours. Flash floods were succeeded by fluvial flooding and then by groundwater flooding. The water simply had nowhere to go, and by 3 p.m. that Friday, natural and man-made drainage was overwhelmed.



Everyone who tried to get home that night remembers the traffic chaos. 10,000 motorists were stranded. Already, 4,000 homes were flooded.

The trouble really escalated over the weekend, when the Mythe water treatment plant near the confluence of the Severn and Avon was overwhelmed, with loss of water to 350,000 people.

Worse was threatened, as floodwater surrounded the Walham electricity station. This would have affected up to 8 million people.

The Chief Constable is always responsible for the command and control system, and every local authority has to have an Emergency Planning team, ready to bring in whatever help and agencies are needed. It was this moment, on the Sunday 22nd, with water supplies lost and electricity threatened, that Tim had to bring in the army.



Tim vividly described the extraordinary efforts of the uniformed services, civilian and military, and the various agencies to combat the problems. Nor did he neglect to praise the many volunteers, in particular for their role in distributing the bottled water on which so many depended. Even the Sally Army turned up out of the blue with a field kitchen to support and feed those labouring to build a flood defence around Walham. Though he did not say this, the water finally topped at just over an inch below the hastily-constructed defences.

Eventually, a fortnight and about £50 million of expenditure later, clean water was restored, and life began to return to normal, though many people were in temporary accommodation for anything up to a year. Tragically, 3 people lost their lives.

As a footnote, I was sent home about 4 p.m., wading through floodwater to reach home. Some of my colleagues slept in Shire Hall that night before being evacuated. And the wretched Inspectors? They didn’t come for weeks!

Jonquil Dodd

Q You never actually own your neuroses. You merely look after them for the next generation.

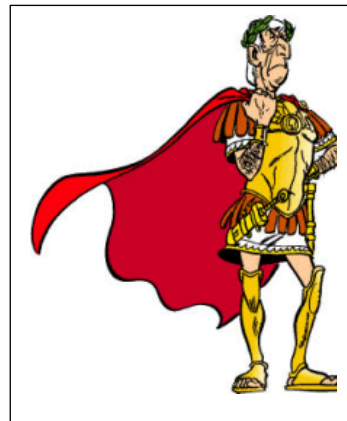
James Scudamore

Roman remains in Newent

Now that work has started on the new housing estate off Southend Lane it will be interesting to see what archaeological finds might turn up. Newent has a long history of settlement and previous developments have revealed evidence of Roman, Saxon, Norman and Medieval populations together with relics from the English Civil War.

Some of the finds are on show in the Market House, which is normally open on weekends from May to September, others are at the Gloucester Museum. One of the most interesting, though not on public show due to its fragility, are fragments of a letter, written on wax enclosed in a wooden cover, like the one found at Vindolandia on Hadrian's Wall. It was found amongst pieces of a stone jar, which helped to preserve it. It is an informal letter to a friend or family member from one *Rufus Barbatus*, boasting that he has just been elected *consul urbis* (town councillor). We are not sure that "Rufus Barbatus" is his proper name but perhaps a nickname, as it translates to "red beard".

He has celebrated with some friends including one *J Martinus*, a servant of Mars, ie someone with military connections, and another man, *Crispus*, who has told him something important, or maybe scandalous as he refers to it as *mihi Crispus dicit* (so Crispus tells me).



To go with his new social standing Barbatus has had an extension to his villa which is *finis urbis* (at the town's end or outer limit) on a small hill surrounded by birdsong - *ad collina ave*.

The poetic language used in this pastoral scene tells us that Barbatus has obviously employed an accomplished scribe, as the final fragment reveals *P Doddius scriptor* (writer) in smaller letters.

The new building mentioned is a small temple, as thanks to the gods for his good fortune, dedicated to a minor deity, a harbinger of Spring, the goddess Aprilla Prima.

Domum Fordum



The European Medicines Agency has been looking at the link between clots & jabs & discovered the EU has got all the clots & the UK has all the jabs 😊

Disclaimer: Probus is a strictly apolitical organisation but this one is irresistible - Ed

Lockdown Leisure

Last year I invited members to tell us what they had been reading during lockdown. Next month (if I receive any contributions) I will publish an article outlining:

- Books more recently read
- Projects begun, finished or abandoned
- Holidays booked in hope
- Netflix/TV bingeing enjoyed
- New skills developed

If members, partners or widows would like to contribute, submissions will be gratefully received. There is no need necessarily to write "articles": just a sentence or a list of how you've been occupying the time can, with luck, be woven into a seamless narrative. Anonymity optional!

Ed



©Brian Crane. All rights reserved.

Weird and Wonderful Engineering leading up to D-Day

In the build up to, and during the Normandy landings in 1944, it became apparent to the military planners from bitter experience gained from the Dieppe Raid in 1942, that some ingenuity would be needed to overcome some of the obstacles expected to be encountered during a beach landing. John Clark gave us the benefit of his background in the development of armoured fighting vehicles, and having spent many years at the FVRDE (Fighting Vehicle Research and Development Establishment) near Chobham in Surrey, he was well placed to give us a fascinating insight into some of the developments which took place.



Sherman Crab – Sherman M4 fitted with a flail

John put his talk into context by describing Hitler's Atlantic Wall, the line of defences bordering the coast of Continental Europe and Scandinavia, so that we could understand the nature of obstacles and defences likely to be met during the Normandy landings. He described and illustrated such things as tank traps, land mines, pill boxes, mortars and colossal coastal guns. In addition to the armed defences which had to be overcome, there were expected to be difficulties encountered with the nature of the sand and gravel on the beaches. Once the invasion forces had got past the beaches, there were further difficulties to be encountered in the particular nature of the hedges, ditches and sunken roads (bocages).

It was also important to get the Germans to look in the wrong place for signs of a build up in preparation for an invasion. To help with this, various dummy machines including fighter and bomber aircraft, and land vehicles such as tanks were manufactured as inflatables which could be deployed quickly and easily to create the appearance of live operations in parts of the country well away from the actual sites under preparation; John showed pictures of examples, some of which were manufactured by the Bristol Balloon Company.

John then went on to illustrate some fearsome looking machines, mostly modifications of existing tanks. These included 'Duplex Drive' (DD) tanks which were waterproofed and therefore able to be launched in the water and driven by propellers. Most of these DD tanks were based on the American Sherman tanks and were partially successful although some were lost due to encountering waves which were too high and sank, some were launched too far out and therefore exposed to German firepower for too long and some sank as soon as they were launched.

There was also the 'Flail Tank', fitted with a terrifying array of chains on a drum at the front of the tank rotating at high speed to trigger land mines safely before the tanks got close enough to suffer damage.

A further tank modification was in the form of a mobile workshop armed with a 9 inch mortar instead of the standard gun, and it was thanks to this that tanks were able to be repaired and modified to suit local conditions. One such modification was the Rhino hedge cutting tank to solve the problem of the sunken roads formed by the build up of land/hedges along the verges. This formed a severe obstacle to the tanks so a form of hedge cutting device was made by the mobile workshops using the steel taken from the tank traps on the beaches. Further modifications included road laying (Bobbin) tanks which carried rolls of steel reinforced canvas to form roads on soft ground and beaches.

The Fascine was a 10 ft wide bundle of wooden poles or rough brushwood lashed together with wires carried in front of the tank that could be released to fill a ditch or form a step. Metal pipes in the centre of the fascine allowed water to flow through. The small box girder was an assault bridge that was carried in front of the tank and could be dropped to span a 30-foot gap in 30 seconds.

The ARK was a Churchill tank without a turret that had extendable ramps at each end; other vehicles could drive up the ramps and over the vehicle to scale obstacles, effectively functioning as a mobile bridge allowing tanks and other vehicles to scale sea walls, the sea walls at Calais being 10-12 ft high as an example.

The Crocodile was a Churchill tank modified by the fitting of a flame-thrower in place of the hull machine gun. An armoured trailer, towed behind the tank, carried 400 gallons of fuel and it had a range of over 120 yards far greater than man-portable units. Regarded as a powerful psychological weapon, this flame tank proved highly effective at clearing bunkers, trenches and other German fortifications.

Cont.....

Cont.....

These examples of what have been referred to as 'Hobart's Funnies' after Major General Percy Hobart the commander of the 79th Armoured Division, were well described and illustrated by John.



The Churchill "Crocodile"

During his career with the FVRE, John was involved with the design and development of specialised vehicles for later theatres of war/combat, including equipment for the SAS.

One of these vehicles, a modified Landrover, was nicknamed the 'Pink Panther' because of its colour scheme, and it was said that the crews could have whatever equipment they wished, including Russian sniper rifles (reputedly the best in the world), and sawn off shotguns.

John Martin

Class Act

Teacher asks her class, "If there's 14 crows on a fence and you shoot 2 off, how many are left?" One little boy says, "None, the shotgun scared them all away."

Teacher says, "That's not the answer I was looking for, but I like the way you're thinking."

Boy says to teacher, "I have a question for you." "There's 3 women eating ice cream cones. 1 is licking, 1 is sucking, 1 is biting. Which one is married?"

Teacher answers (slightly embarrassed), "I imagine it's the one sucking."

Boy says, "No, it's the one with the wedding ring, but I like the way you're thinking!"

Tall Story

Two women were sitting next to each other in a bar.

After a while, one looks at the other and says, 'I can't help but think, from listening to you, that you're from Ireland.' The other woman responds proudly, 'Yes, I sure am!'

The first one says, 'So am I! And whereabouts in Ireland are ya from?'

The other woman answers, 'I'm from Dublin, I am.'

The first one responds, 'So, am I! And what street did you live on in Dublin?'

The other woman says, 'A lovely little area. It was in the west end. I lived on Warbury Street in the old central part of town.'

The first one says, 'Faith, and it's a small world. So did I! So did I! And what school did ya go to?'

The other woman answers, 'Well now, I went to Holy Heart of Mary, of course..'

The first one gets really excited and says, 'And so did I! Tell me, what year did you graduate?'

The other woman answers, 'Well, now, let's see. I graduated in 1964.' The first woman exclaims, 'The Good Lord must be smiling down upon us! I can hardly believe our good luck at winding up in the same pub tonight! Can you believe it? I graduated from Holy Heart of Mary in 1964 myself!' About this time, Michael walks into the bar, sits down, and orders a beer. Brian, the bartender, walks over to Michael shaking his head and mutters, 'It's going to be a long night tonight.' Michael asks, 'Why do you say that, Brian? Brian answers, 'The Murphy twins are drunk again'.

First outing with friends after quarantine

