

# NEWSLETTER



## NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



### JUNE 2022



**PUB LUNCH**



**TUESDAY 7<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2022 at 12.30**

**Walwyn Arms  
Much Marcle**



**14 JUNE 2022**

**John Goldswain**

**ELGAR – THE MALVERN YEARS**

**Sir Edward William Elgar, 1st Baronet, OM, GCMG**

(2 June 1857 – 23 February 1934) was an English composer, many of whose works have entered the British and international classical concert repertoire. Among his best-known compositions are orchestral works including the *Enigma Variations*, the *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, concertos for violin and cello, and two symphonies. He also composed choral works, including *The Dream of Gerontius*, chamber music and songs. He was appointed Master of the King's Music in 1924



**28 JUNE 2022**

**Dennis Harvey**

**SEA CHANGES – CHANGES TO OUR COASTLINE**

The line where land meets water is constantly changing and reshaping. The coastline, that narrow strip of land that borders the sea along a continent or an island, is an ideal place to see a constantly-changing landscape. The nonstop wave action there means nothing ever stays the same.

### **Note from our Chairman**

Already May has nearly gone, and yet I am still wondering what happened to March and April. Disappeared in a wave of Covid I expect but at last the infection numbers are falling rapidly and life around us appears mostly to be returning to “normal” helped by the return of summer. Over the past year we have cautiously returned to meeting in the hall and I sincerely hope that we will not return to Zoom again. Our thanks once more to John for steering us safely though a tricky re-entry to the real world rather than the remote world.

As was the case last year and indeed will be the case every year, we lose a few members for a range of reasons and so it is vital that we keep encouraging more new members to join us. With this in mind Fraser and myself with the support of David and Ray attended an ‘Open’ morning at Gorsley village hall on May 21<sup>st</sup> to promote the hall and the community groups using it. This gave us an excellent opportunity to promote Probus to the local population and especially newcomers who have arrived during the pandemic and may not be aware of all local groups and societies. At least this would have been the case had anyone other than those supporting the various organisations turned up. However, we had the opportunity to network with other clubs. Mentioning events, the monthly pub lunches continue to be an important item on the social calendar, giving our wives and partners the opportunity to meet and know each other better. The committee are also currently exploring possible day trips for the summer and are arranging a summer Garden Party to be held at the hall on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July. More to follow nearer the time.

On a different note, what have I done in May? Now that houses, gardens and places of interest are opening again we have started visiting them again. Also, the big event for the month was that Jenny and I lead a group of Ross-on-Wye Ramblers on a four-day walking holiday in Pembrokeshire. A great success as the weather was kind. Would have been different with horizontal rain! On this note I will be running a ‘Where am I?’ quiz most months in the newsletter. No prizes, just the satisfaction of recognizing the place. Keep well.

*Andrew*

**Has the world gone mad?**

**Vexed locals in Cornwall have branded their town council ‘bonkers’ after 1,000 daffodils were cut down in a play area due to ‘health and safety fears’.** Officials at St Blaise Town Council have warned the flowers can be poisonous if eaten and could give children diarrhoea. A controversial new policy bans new bulbs at the Old Roselyon Play Area for the foreseeable future. ‘At a recent play inspection training day, we were advised not to have daffodils in play areas, as all parts of the daffodil can be poisonous’, a council spokesperson said

5 OUT OF 4  
PEOPLE  
STRUGGLE  
WITH MATH



I see people my age  
out there climbing  
mountains and zip  
lining and here I am  
feeling good about  
myself because I  
got my leg through  
my underwear  
without losing my  
balance.

**WHO SAYS THAT OUR  
EDUCATION SYSTEM IS IN  
NEED OF IMPROVEMENT?**

**HOW COME ABBREVIATED IS SUCH A LONG WORD?**

**WHY DO "FAT CHANCE" AND "SLIM CHANCE" MEAN THE SAME?**

**WHY ARE "WISE MAN" AND "WISE GUY" OPPOSITES?**

**IF LOVE IS BLIND...WHY IS LINGERIE SO POPULAR?**

**WHY DOESN'T GLUE STICK TO THE INSIDE OF THE BOTTLE?**

Age has some  
benefits?



An elderly man walks into a high-class jeweller late on a Friday with a stunningly beautiful young lady on his arm. "May I help you" says the manager. "Yes, we would like to look at some rings" says the man. After a time looking at various trays of rings, the young lady chooses a large diamond ring. "This ring is £15000" says the manager. "That's fine" says the man "But I will have to pay by cheque, I know however that you will want to make sure the cheque is cleared before we can take the ring" "Yes that will be fine" says the manager. On the Monday morning the elderly man phones the jewellers and the manager says "I am very sorry sir but the bank has returned your cheque as you have insufficient funds" "That's what I expected" says the elderly man. "But I can't tell you what a fantastic weekend I had"



**10<sup>th</sup> May 2022**  
**Speaker: Brian Ely**  
**“The world of precious metals”**

Brian explained that precious metals are traded every day around the world, not just gold and silver but also iridium, rhodium etc. The phrase ‘precious metals’ has different meanings for different people. Children will think of treasure, dentists will think of gold crowns, historians will think of wealth. Criminals see gold, for instance, as better than cash as it is very difficult to trace.

Brian explained that he had worked with precious metals all his working life. He had been employed by both Johnson Matthey and Metalworks. Precious metals are safe in all environments and are unaffected by heat, cold etc.

Gold does not tarnish and is used as a connector. Pure gold, 99.9%, can be seen on phone plugs, circuit boards etc, and although only microns thick is robust and reliable. Gold fillings in your teeth are not pure, but mixed with silver and nickel. Pure gold is surprisingly soft in that you can make tooth marks when biting it. However, it can also be used as a missile warhead to penetrate 2-metre-thick steel. This is because of the immediate chemical reaction with steel to make an alloy when the target is hit. Each missile uses about £500,000 worth of gold. At one stage Brian’s firm was refining 3 tons of gold a day and alloying it down to 18 carats before supplying it to Rolex for wristwatch cases! It is used everywhere, such as in kettle contacts when you switch on an electric kettle. One firm made 26.5 million kettle contacts last year. It is even used in the lifejacket lights which come on when reacting with seawater.

The largest nugget of gold ever found was in Australia and weighed 56 kilos, in 1892. It is now in a Sydney Museum. Both platinum and palladium are used for extremely thin gold-plated wires, 300 meters of which may weigh only a gram. These are used in complex electronic situations. Examples of these wires and other items Brian had referred to were passed around the audience. He also showed a breath monitor, used for patients under anaesthetic, which used the minor magnetic effect in breathing to measure a patient’s breaths.

Brian also explained that the word ‘carat’ is derived from Egypt many centuries ago when the weight of carob tree seeds were used to measure the weight of gold. 18 seeds meant 18 carats etc. Gold was probably mined in Egypt long ago, but no longer. He added that gold melts at 1044 degrees.

Gold can be mixed with many other metals, most often silver or copper. But blue gold is gold mixed with iron, and green gold is gold mixed with nickel. Brian told how his firm had a contract with a Swanage company which needed a specific mix of metals for making slightly springy electronic fingers for a church organ. These were gold, silver, platinum, iridium, copper and 2 more. Later, MOD asked his firm for the same mix but in wire form. These turned out to be replacement fuses for atomic bombs!

As for silver, much is used in motorcar connections. Turning on your wipers will cause a number of connections to be made and these have to work time and again over many years. Most such connections are made of silver welded to copper. You hear of catalytic converters being stolen for the metals involved. However, it is hardly worthwhile to do so. There are only small amounts of platinum and palladium available and they have to be refined to be of any use. As regards house fuses these used to be made of silver but were later silver-plated copper. He added that you can still pan for gold in Scottish rivers and Wales has goldmines that could well be reopened now the soaring cost of gold would make the extraction costs worthwhile.

John Weeden



**24 May 2022**

**Paul Barnett**

**“Rout on the riviera,**

**The Slapton Sands Disaster”**

Today, Slapton Sands, a Blue Flag beach between Dartmouth and Kingsbridge in Devon, looks idyllic within season, hundreds of holidaymakers swimming in the crystal clear waters, families picnicking on the pristine beach, children playing.

However, three quarters of a century ago the same location presented a very different scene and housed a grim secret, which, until comparatively recently, was unknown to the wider world.

Our guest speaker, Paul Barnett, disclosed, to a rapt audience the events that led to a loss of life on a huge scale, even by wartime standards, and how the inhabitants of a sleepy part of rural Devon lives were disrupted and a whole community was uprooted.

At the end of 1943, with Italy having surrendered and Germany reeling, Army chiefs were planning the Invasion of Europe to liberate the millions who had been enslaved for half a dozen years and more. The landing site was, of course, a well-kept secret and there was much misinformation that the invasion would start in North Africa. However, the shortest route across the Channel was eventually chosen as Normandy and, under its code name Overlord the huge logistical exercise of planning began.

There were several landing sites, all within a dozen or so miles of each other; one of these was codenamed Utah and was located on the Cherbourg peninsula and the village of Torcross with its adjacent Slapton Sands was selected for training purposes.

Including a mock landing because of its resemblance of the surrounding countryside to the actual invasion site. In an effort to emulate actual battle conditions, participants were warned that real ammunition would be used; this was to have unintended consequences but more of that later.

Before any of this could start, however, the surrounding area had to be evacuated including the many farms and attendant livestock, some 700 inhabitants who had no choice in the matter, it was find your own accommodation, DIY removals and KEEP OUT! No compensation was offered and the only “sweetener” (literally) that was offered was the often-broken promise of extra rations. It was to be as long as 18 months until some residents could return to their homes. This was December 1943 and the mock invasion, codenamed Operation Tiger, was planned for April 1944. Under it, thousands of principally American troops, would be transported from nearby Brixham and Plymouth, across Lyme Bay, to simulate the Channel crossing, to land at Slapton sands.

Although the approaches were to be guarded by Royal Navy corvettes, half a dozen German Schnellboot S-80 torpedo boat, on patrol, entered the mock war zone and were presented with the sight of largely defenceless landing craft, each containing several hundred soldiers unaware of the danger they were in. It was likened to “shooting fish in a barrel”, according to some observers. The soldiers took little notice of the noise of shells and the flames that lit up the sea, thinking it was all part of the “realism”.

In all some 750 souls perished on that night, with a further 200 having been killed by “friendly fire” during preliminary exercises.

The debacle was hushed up for several years and no formal apology has ever been issued to the next of kin of those who perished.

Nowadays apart from an obelisk commemorating the landing, a sole American Sherman tank is on display in a public car park on the beach and thanks must go to a civilian, Ken Small, for the discovery and raising of this from its watery grave on the sea bed.

Paul’s talk fascinated both those who had long followed this tale and those to whom it came as news,

*Peter Hayes*



## THE ORIGIN OF ROAD SIGNS

The first road signs were likely to have been the *Milestones* placed on Rome’s Appian Way(312Bc) After that, road signs were largely a matter of local whim. In 1697 the English Parliament empowered magistrates to position directional *Fingerposts*, and made them obligatory on Turnpikes in 1766.

King Peter II of Portugal instigated *Priority* signs on the narrowest of streets in his capital in 1686. *Signposts*, together with street name and town name signs, became widespread towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as did *Hazard warning signs* erected by intrepid cyclists. The UK painted the first *white lines* on roads in 1918 and installed the first *Cats Eyes* (patented by Percy Shaw in 1934)

*Designated Car parks* appeared in France and the US around 1900, in 1905 the first *Multi-Storey Automated Car Park* was built in Paris. Oklahoma City in the US launched the *Parking Meter* in 1935.

**Headlines! Does anyone actually check them?**

**CITY UNSURE WHY THE SEWER SMELLS**

**Statistics show that teen pregnancy drops off significantly after age 25**

## Supernatural moments

In the 1980's, I was sent to a fire at a large country house which was being converted into multiple residences. When I arrived, there were two fire engines in attendance and the building was heavily involved in fire. Parts of the roof had collapsed. Due to the complexity of the building, I increased the attendance to eight fire engines, as manpower with breathing apparatus was going to be a priority. Crews did an excellent job of controlling the fire and by midnight the fire was under control and most of the fire extinguished. It was apparent that the building was severely damaged and would probably have to be demolished. A number of fire engines were released as I decided that we could finish the job with three fire engines. By the early hours the fire was extinguished and all fire engines were released.

It is normal procedure, following such a fire, to carry out an inspection some hours later to ensure that there are no hot spots and reignition. This would normally be carried out by a fire appliance from the nearest station. As I actually lived nearest to the incident, I said that I would return and carry out the inspection. Some hours later as I approached the building and getting out of my car, I became acutely aware of just how dark it was. When I was at the fire earlier, the whole site was flooded with lights, it now felt quite creepy. As timbers cool down, they make a cracking sound and water dripping creates an eerie feeling. I made my way into the building and up to the first floor via the staircase.

As I walked down the corridor, I heard a voice ahead of me and suddenly a young woman appeared. I was totally shocked and called out for her to stop, as the area was dangerous. Without turning around she continued and went into one of the rooms. I ran down to the room and pushed the door open.....there was no one in there. I immediately felt the hairs on my neck stand up and immediately made my way back to the ground floor and despite looking around I found no evidence of anyone in the area. At this point I got into my car and drove at speed to my home. On the way I thought about what I had just seen and dismissed it as my imagination playing tricks on me. I am a bit of a sceptic in these matters. I told my wife about it and she said I must have been imagining it as I was possibly tired! I didn't mention it to anyone else for fear of having the micky taken out of me.

About a month later I was visiting the local fire station and the subject of the fire was being discussed. One of the firemen, a long serving local man, said "Did you know that the house was supposed to be haunted" we all laughed and said rubbish! "No", he said, "Evidently a young house maid was murdered by one of the gardeners when she spurned his advances." We all said "Ha! That's an old wife's tale".

**Needless to say, I never said a word!**

*Fraser Gunn*



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