

# NEWSLETTER



## NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



# APRIL 2023

### FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

It is hard to believe that I am putting pencil to paper for my last note as Proboscis chairman. I am taking this opportunity to thank the editor and previous editor for not pulling me up for spelling and grammatical mistakes over the last year. I also thank all of you readers (or am I fooling myself) for not complaining about me rambling on about incidental and unimportant matters such as what I have been doing rather than the club news. I will be covering the years events in my report at the AGM and no doubt this will appear in the May Newsletter so no more on that subject.

Looking back over the last year, it seems to have passed very quickly. Isn't it always the case that looking forward events seem a long way off and then almost before you know it, they have passed? Writing these few words every month has added another element of structure to life in that I have days each week committed to Ramblers; each fortnight to Proboscis meetings or lunches, and then each month to the newsletter and the photo quiz and so the year passes quickly.

I hope you have enjoyed the photo quiz. Some have perhaps been too difficult while others have been quite easy. As long as you spent at least a couple of minutes thinking about it then it has been worthwhile. I am heading for Aberdeenshire again for a few days over Easter and hope Spring is in full bloom when I return.

Andrew



## ***Feeling the cold?***

Members may need reminding that if they use alternative fuels to mains gas for heating (eg; oil, propane, solid fuel) they can now apply for the “Alternative Fuel Payment” if they haven’t received this automatically from their supplier. This is worth £200 to anyone who qualifies, and is regardless of income. Think of it as a tax rebate rather than a handout.

Apply to <https://www.gov.uk/get-help-energy-bills/alternative-fuels>

Be aware that on the first day this site opened (March 6<sup>th</sup>) it crashed! But I was able to submit a claim on March 7<sup>th</sup>. You will need to give bank details and upload a copy of a recent bill (for example oil); if you have no scanner you may need help from Probus members or others who have. If approved, the payment is made, strangely, by your Local Authority within about six weeks.

But I’ll let you know!

Paul Dodd



**PUB LUNCH**  
**The Bunch of Carrots**  
**Hampton Bishop, Hereford HR1 4JR**  
**4 APRIL 12.30 for 1PM**



**11 APRIL 2023**

**ROBERT PRITCHARD**

**40 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT STEAM ENGINES**

**25 APRIL 2023**

**AGM**

**This will be the club's 46<sup>th</sup> AGM, please come along and welcome your new chairman and vote in the officers and committee for the next 12 months.**

**After the formal part of the meeting, we will be playing our version of the popular TV panel game of "Would I lie to you"**

**We played this some years ago and was well received by members.**

### **PROBUS OUTREACH**

Its very pleasing, that so many of our members are availing themselves of the hospitality of the Kings Arms after our meetings, to mull over the talk just given, to run the country better than the present lot, or just to chat about anything and everything.

## ORIGINS OF APRIL FOOLS' DAY



**April Fools' Day**—celebrated on April 1 each year—has been celebrated for several centuries by different cultures, though its exact origins remain a mystery. April Fools' Day traditions include playing hoaxes or practical jokes on others, often yelling “April Fools!” at the end to clue in the subject of the April Fools' Day prank. While its exact history is shrouded in mystery, the embrace of April Fools' Day jokes by the media and major brands has ensured the unofficial holiday's long life.

Some historians speculate that April Fools' Day dates back to 1582, when France switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, as called for by the Council of Trent in 1563. In the Julian Calendar, as in the Hindu calendar, the new year began with the spring equinox around April 1.

People who were slow to get the news or failed to recognize that the start of the new year had moved to January 1 and continued to celebrate it during the last week of March through April 1 became the butt of jokes and hoaxes and were called “April fools.” These pranks included having paper fish placed on their backs and being referred to as “poisson d'avril” (April fish), said to symbolize a young, easily caught fish and a gullible person.

Hilaria in Ancient Rome Historians have also linked April Fools' Day to festivals such as Hilaria (Latin for *joyful*), which was celebrated in ancient Rome at the end of March by followers of the cult of Cybele. It involved people dressing up in disguises and mocking fellow citizens and even magistrates and was said to be inspired by the Egyptian legend of Isis, Osiris and Seth.

There's also speculation that April Fools' Day was tied to the vernal equinox, or first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, when Mother Nature fooled people with changing, unpredictable weather.

April Fools' Day spread throughout Britain during the 18th century. In Scotland, the tradition became a two-day event, starting with “hunting the gowk,” in which people were sent on phony errands (gowk is a word for cuckoo bird, a symbol for fool) and followed by Tailie Day, which involved pranks played on people's derrieres, such as pinning fake tails or “kick me” signs on them.

In modern times, people have gone to great lengths to create elaborate April Fools' Day hoaxes. Newspapers, radio and TV stations and websites have participated in the April 1 tradition of reporting outrageous fictional claims that have fooled their audiences.

## Outrageous Pranks That People Actually Fell For

In 1957, the BBC reported that Swiss farmers were experiencing a record spaghetti crop and showed footage of people harvesting noodles from trees

In 1992, National Public Radio ran a spot with former President Richard Nixon saying he was running for president again... only it was an actor, not Nixon, and the segment was all an April Fools' Day prank that caught the country by surprise.

In 1976, renowned astronomer Patrick Moore appeared on BBC Radio 2 and announced that at 9:47am, we would feel what he called the 'Jovian-Plutonian gravitational effect'. He said that at that exact moment, the planets would align and gravity on Earth would get a tiny bit weaker, so if you jumped in the air at exactly the right moment, you would almost float.

Evidently this was a load of rubbish, but it doesn't stop the pseudo-science from being recirculated every so often by people who fall for it.

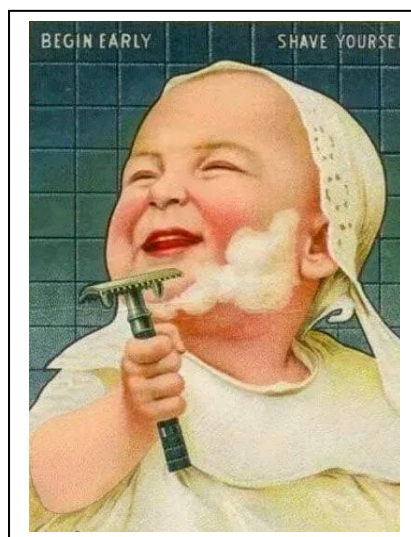
Due to ongoing renovations, it's been a while since we've heard the bongos of Big Ben. However, it's been even longer since the BBC Overseas Service (now called the World Service) tried to convince the world that it would change to electronic beeps.

In 1980, they announced to listeners that not only was the iconic clock face going digital, but that the first people to get in touch could win the hands of the clock.

Unfortunately, this did not go down as well as they'd hoped and the BBC was apologising for weeks after the joke was made. Some people just clearly didn't see the funny side!

Ed

## Some very non pc adverts from the past





Sister Theresa has a high IQ. She's known as Nun the Wiser

So I said to the waitress: "What's the duck like?" She said "Like a chicken, but it can swim".



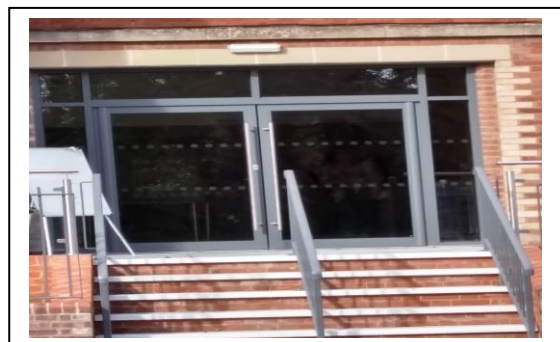
You know you're getting old when an 'All Nighter', means not getting up to take a pee

The cashier told me "Strip Down Facing Me".

By the time I realized they meant the debit card, it was too late.

Who ever said "Out of sight, out of mind" has never had a spider disappear in the bedroom?

Where am I ?



## The Decline of the Aristocracy and Stately Homes

On 14 March we were pleased to welcome back Philip Bowen who gave us a very well-illustrated and engaging talk on the above subject. All the stately homes he mentioned were accompanied by photos or engravings of the property in question.

He explained that until comparatively recently the ownership of land in the UK had been one of the core reasons why there was a great divide between the wealthy and the poor. Once land has less value it destroys both the aristocracy, and the stately homes in which they lived.

In "Barchester Towers" by Anthony Trollope, published in 1857, the character Archdeacon Grantley opined:  
*"Land gives so much more than the rent: it gives position and influence and political power, to say nothing of the game."*



Trentham Hall (Staffordshire)

Many stately homes of exquisite beauty have been destroyed. One was Trentham Hall which had once been visited by the Shah of Persia, who had thought it fit for a king. It was destroyed in 1912. In 1905 John Singer Sergeant painted the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of Marlborough in Blenheim Palace, deliberately reflecting an earlier portrait by Joshua Reynolds. Sergeant's painting shows a tense and anxious Duke. He was obliged to sell off many of his possessions, married a US heiress but was soon divorced.

### In the 1880s there were four groups

- Number of Owners 11,000
- Total of acres owned 47 million
- Owned 66% of the land area (England 56%, Wales 60% Ireland 78% and Scotland 92%)

#### Group 1

- Of the 11,000, 6000 were small landowners – 1-10,000 acres. Rental income £1-£10,000.
- Included the village squire, full-time landowners, many had just one estate and mansion, rarely visited London.
- Top end might have more than a house and estate, some non-farming income, a London town house.

#### Group 2

- 750 families
- 10-30,000 acres
- £10-£30,000 a year
- Often owned land in various counties
- London town house

#### Group 3: Millionaires

- 250 magnates, 30,000 acres + £30,000 a year +
- Widespread estates
- At least two mansions
- A grand London house in Grosvenor or Belgrave Squares, Park Lane, Piccadilly
- Often owned mines, docks, housing estates, funds, railway shares

### **At the top:**

- 29 prodigiously wealthy super rich
- Incomes £75,000 +
- Owned so many houses they did not know what to do with them
- Art collections almost unrivalled in the world

In 1871 the Earl of Derby led the Lords to set up a commission for a land survey and it backfired spectacularly. It revealed that 75% of Britain was owned by 5000 people, 12 men owned 4,000,000 acres and was more concentrated than in any country.

The main causes of the decline and fall were agricultural downfall, due to the Americas land finally eclipsed by a full blown industrial economy, banking, and finance. 3<sup>rd</sup> Reform Act 1832-42, rise of democracy, the masses. Culminates in the constitutional crisis of 1909. Death duties from 1894 to 1909. The Great Depression, Second World War, and the Labour Government of 1945-51. A dramatic collapse of the agricultural base because of cheap food from North and South America and the opening up of the Prairies and refrigeration. The price of land and rentals plummeted. The representation of the Peoples Act of 1832 was blocked by the Lords, led to a campaign 'Peers against the People'

Rich American heiresses were popular brides for the British Aristocracy in the first half of the twentieth century. They wanted titles, the British wanted money. Lord Curzon married 2 different Americans, and the Marquis of Hartington married the famous socialite Kick Kennedy, the sister of JFK.

From 1870 – 1914: 100 marriages by peers eldest and youngest sons to Americans from this period

To raise funds for the stately homes many expensive paintings had to be sold and most were purchased by Americans. But it was often the houses themselves that had to be sold – just before and after WW1 about one quarter of all English land changed hands. This included some of the many stately homes situated in the capital.

In 1894 Harcourt introduced the first comprehensive death duties. 1909 to pay for pensions, unemployment benefit, a major increase in income tax an introduction of super tax and more death duties, an enormous blow. As was a complete land valuation and 20% tax when ownership changed hands.

"The landlord is the enemy - idle land in the hands of idle men". "A Fully equipped Duke costs as much to keep up as two dreadnoughts. They are just as great a terror and they last longer". The House of Lords consists of "five hundred men chosen at random from the ranks of the unemployed"

By Christmas 1914: The following were killed. Heirs to 3 Scottish houses, 6 peers, 16 baronets, 95 sons of peers, 82 sons of baronets and 5 of Lord Salisbury's grandsons.

Land sales: in 1919 the Earl of Northampton sold land because he believed it was seen to be a monopoly and unpopular. 1920 records broken. Half a million acres up for sale. The Duke of Rutland sold 1.4 million acres around Belvoir Castle. Just before and after the war a quarter of England was sold. Relentless in the 1920s. After the Great Depression in the 1930s the markets collapsed.

In WW2 various country houses were occupied by British and American forces and used as HQs and hospitals. Many were damaged by the end of the war and of little use for further occupation. Little was done to save them. In Woodhouse Westwood in Yorkshire, a house with the longest frontage in the country, some mining was taking place nearby and when asked how close to the house it should go, the MP Manny Shinwell famously said "Mine up to the front door".

Luckily the house was saved and can be visited today. In 1954 Tong castle in Shropshire was blown up by Royal Engineers at the request of its owner, and 6000 people came to watch!

Eventually legislation arrived in 1972 which prevented any demolition of such stately homes without council permission. It had taken about 70 years to destroy around 500 years of Aristocracy. Those houses that remain have had to adapt to survive. Longleat has almost 1 million visitors a year, Chatsworth and Castle Howard remain great attractions as does Highclere Castle (Downton Abbey). Perhaps most ironic of all is Knebworth which has become the stately home of rock!

After answering several questions from his interested audience, Philip bade farewell.

John Węzden and Mike Townsend



## *Blood Transfusion*

Norman needed a blood transfusion.  
His doctors asked me if I knew his blood group.  
They needed to know urgently in order to save his life.  
Tragically, I did not know his blood group, nor mine.  
So the only thing I could do, was to sit and say goodbye.  
I will never forget how supportive my Norman was.  
Even as he was fading away, he kept on whispering to me,  
“Be positive, Be positive!!”  
That’s my Norman! Always thinking of others.



**CensorShip** 🙄 🕶️





## ***Tales of a Holiday Rep***

### **HAPPY HOLIDAYS**

Most, if not all of us, have used our retirement to have extended holidays, combining this with the chance to see the world and those places we always wanted to see. The intrepid among us will have travelled independently but those of a meeker disposition will have taken the more familiar route of the package holiday.

And yes, by so doing, the latter will have met the ubiquitous “holiday rep”. To some, they will have looked forward to this experience with the same relish as, say, a visit to the dentist or even trying to negotiate an appointment with their GP via the practice receptionist. To others, meeting one and using the services of one will be like a cross between a kindly playground assistant on one’s first day at school or a particularly benevolent fairy godmother. Pamela Holland, in her talk “Tales of a Holiday Rep” gave her side of being one and more than adequately showed some of the pitfalls but, also, the other side of the coin.

Pamela, like so many of others, got into her career by accident; standing in for a friend as a “temp”; this led to permanent employment with a variety of national travel companies. She described her role as part ..... *mother confessor, nursemaid, bodyguard, banker* and many more. “The English abroad is a truly formidable bunch” she averred.

She could have filled her talk alone, and indeed the audience may have welcomed it, with anecdotes of some of the more printable comments made to her by her clients.

Amongst these, being “ (when on a Indian trip) *Why does every restaurant always serve curry*” and (in the south of France) “ *topless girls on the beach!*” (this from a wife naturally) and “*No one told us to bring a bathing costume*” (on a visit to a water park).

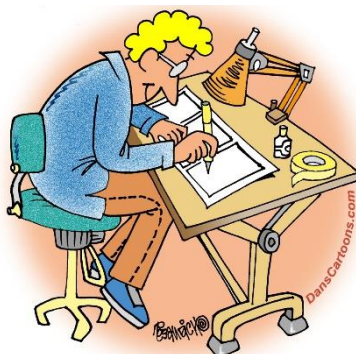
It wouldn’t be a foreign holiday without someone being ill or missing the plane or boat and Pamela has had more than her fair share of those. “ *there is always one who, either by accident or design, mishears the departure time and is left on the quay or runway*”. Before a foreign shore is reached, bugs and fevers too seem to be waiting to strike.. Then she has to negotiate the often conflicting demands of a foreign health system versus those of travel insurance companies.. Although by tipping out a wheelchair bound customer whose leg was encased in a plaster cast, she occasionally had only herself to blame when things went wrong.

It goes without saying that the holiday rep always gets blamed by the client for hotel food, hot/cold/wet weather, surly staff and much much more.

It can be, and is, a lonely life as a holiday rep.. Although it may sound glamorous and luxurious, being accommodated in 4 or 5 star hotels, it can be a lonely life. .The rep can never have a day off even when everyone else is having one and must at all times present a cheerful happy appearance even if he or she is anything but.

And yet Pamela told us that she wouldn't have changed her life for anything. She remained friends with many of her clients. But would she do it all over again she was asked? “ Yes, like a shot” she replied.

Questions at the end of her talk included did she ever run into “Goldfinger” aka John Palmer the timeshare king in her time in Tenerife (No thank goodness was her firm reply) and what was her worst experience (None, since you ask – distance lends enchantment). Pamela was roundly thanked by an appreciative audience for giving us a behind the scenes look at the holiday experience.



**Thanks to all those who assisted  
with the publication and who  
submitted articles.**

**Ed**

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