

# NEWSLETTER



## NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



## JULY 2023

### FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

When I wrote to you last month, we had continual rain, since then we have had none of note and it's been very warm of late. In the garden I am now digging new potatoes and will have courgettes ready by the weekend. The tomatoes and cucumbers in the greenhouse will be soon ready for salads.

Our best wishes to John Slack, who recently had a bad fall and is at present in The Dilke Hospital. We wish him a speedy recovery.

You will be aware that Lee Hines recently passed away. Our thoughts are with Peter at this very sad time.

Over twenty of us had a very enjoyable pub lunch at The Weston Cross, Weston under Penyard. It was John Martin's special birthday, and he treated us all a drink. Thank you, John! Members then treated John to a rendition of happy birthday after we had enjoyed an excellent lunch. Our next pub lunch is at the Duke of York, Berrow, on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> July, organised by Paul Dodd. There were a few away and on holiday at the last meeting, when Dr Brian Witcombe gave us a very interesting talk and rather gruesome presentation on the "Science and side effects of sword swallowing", "It was too hard to swallow"!!.

Our next meeting is by our own member Chris Lathan on Isaac Newton, Scientist, Theologian, Magician and Crime Fighter.

On Tuesday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, the ladies are invited to our meeting when our speaker, Dr Katy Bellamy, will give a talk on "Sleep perchance to dream: the neuroscience of snoozing". Something I am sure we all have experience of!

Preparations are well underway for our Summer Party, at **Gorsley Village Hall** on **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July**, from 12pm to 3.30pm, let's hope for a fine day. (Don't forget to book your place)

Please bring your garden chairs with you, and an umbrella if the warm weather persists.

David Clowes confirmed that he had recently circulated a list of Future Social Events which contained details of two outings being organised by the Newent Local History Society (NLHS). To which they have kindly invited Probus club members.

For those who have been on holiday, I hope you have had an enjoyable break and to those going away soon, have a great one.

Best wishes to you all and enjoy the Summer.

Mike

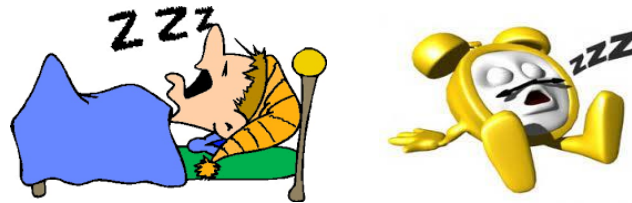


**PUB LUNCH**

**TUESDAY 4 JULY 2023**

**The Duke of York at Berrow**

**Tewkesbury Road, Berrow, Malvern WR13 6JQ**



**TUESDAY 13 JULY**

**DR KATY BELLAMY**

**“ Sleep perchance to dream: The neuroscience of snoozing”**



**SUMMER GARDEN PARTY**

**THURSDAY 20 JULY 2023**

**At Gorsley Village Hall**

**12.00 – 3.30 ish**

# OBITUARY



## **John (Jack) Davidson Porteous**

**1932 – 2023**

**Newent Probus Chairman 2002-2003**

Jack as he was known to us all was born in Galashiels, a Scottish Border town. On passing his 11+ he went to Galashiels Academy, where he passed his Lower & Higher Scottish School Certificates. Whilst there he was introduced to Latin, Rugby, Cricket and Athletics. He later found that a knowledge of the Classics, school record for 100yds Sprint and a school record for the Long Jump would be useful in the future. Another highlight was playing for the Scottish Schools Rugby XV. All of these achievements led to other contacts later in life. In 1951, he finished school to work as a Cartographic Draughtsman in the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in London. Two months later the Ministry posted him to Nottingham. Within a month his Draft papers arrived for his National Service. He was able to choose the RAF and was posted to Lytham St Annes for initial training. He was then posted to Hong Kong as part of the RAF Photo Intelligence Branch. After two years he returned to Nottingham, but this time to study and take his Degree in Town & Country Planning. This was where he met Rita, who was doing a Geography degree. Jack & Rita married in 1957 and a year later their first son Robin was born. They moved to Birstall, Leicestershire. Four years later they had their second son Kevin and moved to a larger house in Nettleham, Lincolnshire. A few years later he designed a beautiful four bed bungalow in South Rauceby, Lincolnshire. Looking for a new challenge in 1969 he took up a three year post in Hong Kong as a Town Planner. The family enjoyed the ex-pat lifestyle and on his weekends he coached a boy's football team. When his posting was ending he chose to stay and took up a teaching post at Hong Long University as a lecturer in Town & Country Planning. During his second three years, he and his son Robin played Hockey for the HKFC Hockey team. The family returned after the second three year posting as he wanted to get back into the UK job market, unfortunately there were several months unemployment until he obtained a Planning position at Melton Mowbray Borough Council. After a couple of years he applied as Assistant County Planning offer at Gloucestershire County Council and remained there until his retirement. Shortly after his retirement he was approached to become a DoE Inspector, which he did for a few years before he finally retired. Jack & Rita were very competitive in their later activities and both won many competitions and prizes at Newent Camera Club. Jack was also a well-practiced wine and beer producer, both he and Rita were members of Newent Wine Circle. Jack was diagnosed with Parkinson's about 9 years ago, which slowly started to affect his mobility and his eyesight. Recently he was getting physically weaker and this resulted in a few falls, in one he suffered a fractured hip. He had a hip replacement operation and although coming through the operation successfully, he never fully recovered and passed away peacefully at Hereford Hospital.

From all the sympathy and condolence cards the family received, there was an overriding comment :

***“ He was such a nice gentleman ”***



On Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> July we were treated to a talk entitled “**The science and effects of Sword Swallowing**” by Dr Brian Witcombe.

Dr Witcombe is Hon. Consultant Radiologist at Gloucester Royal Hospital and Medical Adviser to the Sword Swallowers’ Association International (SSAI). The talk was supported by a slide presentation containing images that were not for the faint hearted!

Brian began by explaining that no trickery is involved in Sword Swallowing. The feat is possible due to the anatomy of the human body, starting with the nasal passage and mouth being connected, which in turn lead to the oesophagus. It is crucial, when inserting the sword (or other object) through the mouth to ensure it is vertical or it could result in internal injury.

Brian first began to think about Sword Swallowing and its side effects having come across an injured Sword Swallower in his professional capacity in around 2003. He found that very little information about Sword Swallowing injuries was available but over the next year or two became aware of the Sword Swallowing Association International in the USA, and got into communication with their President, Dan Meyer (who uses the stage name Dan Dipstick). SSAI define Sword Swallowing as “the act of inserting a solid metal blade at least 16 inches long into the mouth, down the oesophagus, through the oesophageal sphincter and into the stomach”. At the time SSAI had around 110 members in 16 countries.

Brian decided to write a research paper for the British Medical Journal (BMJ), with the same title as his talk, with the collaboration of Dan and the SSAI members. The Abstract of the paper, published in 2006, is as follows:

**Objective** *To evaluate information on the practice and associated ill effects of sword swallowing.*

**Design** *Letters sent to sword swallowers requesting information on technique and complications.*

**Setting** *Membership lists of the Sword Swallowers' Association International.*

**Participants** *110 sword swallowers from 16 countries.*

**Results** *We had information from 46 sword swallowers. Major complications are more likely when the swallower is distracted or swallows multiple or unusual swords or when previous injury is present. Perforations mainly involve the oesophagus and usually have a good prognosis. Sore throats are common, particularly while the skill is being learnt or when performances are too frequent. Major gastrointestinal bleeding sometimes occurs, and occasional chest pains tend to be treated without medical advice. Sword swallowers without healthcare coverage expose themselves to financial as well as physical risk.*

**Conclusions** *Sword swallowers run a higher risk of injury when they are distracted or adding embellishments*

The link to the full BMJ paper can be found here:

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.39027.676690.55>

Brian's story then took an unexpected turn when, after publication of the BMJ paper, he was contacted by Marc Abrahams, editor and co-founder of the Annals of Improbable Research, from the USA, who advised him that the paper had been selected for an **Ig Nobel Prize**.

The Ig Nobel Prize is a satiric prize awarded annually since 1991 to celebrate ten unusual or trivial achievements in scientific research. Its aim is to "honour achievements that first make people laugh, and then make them think." The name of the award is a pun on the Nobel Prize, which it parodies, and on the word ignoble ("not noble"). The Ig Nobel Prizes are presented by Nobel laureates in a ceremony at the Sanders Theatre, at Harvard University, and are followed by the winners' public lectures at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (source – Wikipedia).

Brian duly travelled to the USA in 2007 and, along with Dan, collected the award. Dan apparently did some Sword Swallowing on stage to support Brian's lecture. That in turn led to subsequent speaking engagements in the UK and Europe where the Brian and Dan double act once again featured.

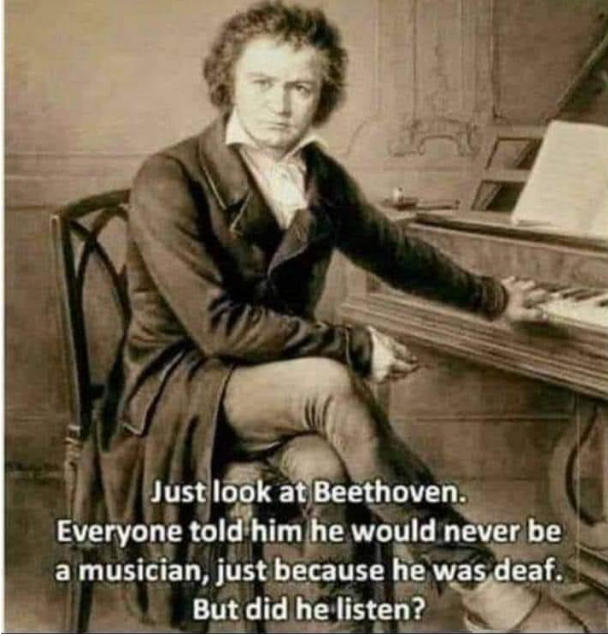
What did we learn from the talk?

- 1) Sword Swallowing has a very definite technique that must be mastered and it takes considerable time and practice:
  - Lubricate the blade before inserting into the mouth (e.g. with saliva, butter, olive oil)
  - Learn to suppress the gag reflex (there is a lot of detail in the BMJ article that is best not written here in case anyone is squeamish)
  - Get the alignment of the blade right
  - Relax the Upper Oesophageal Sphincter (UOS), which is a muscle that controls swallowing, to allow the sword to continue down the oesophagus towards the stomach
  - Suppress retching, which also requires practice
- 2) A Sword Swallower calls a "sore throat" a "Sword Throat".
- 3) Swords that are swallowed can be likened to military dress swords whereby they have edges, but the edges are not razor sharp.
- 4) Sword Swallowing is not restricted to a just a sword, or multiple swords. Performers have swallowed strange items such as table legs and even jack hammers!
- 5) Brian has found that Sword Swallowers often come from a background of circus work, are extrovert and like to gain recognition for their feats which leads them to further embellish their performances but increases the risk of injury.

**Brian has never tried Sword Swallowing and never intends to. The Probus members present seemed to be in full agreement with Brian.**

Chris Yates

**NEVER LET ANYONE TELL YOU  
WHAT YOU CAN OR CANNOT DO.**



Just look at Beethoven.  
Everyone told him he would never be  
a musician, just because he was deaf.  
But did he listen?

**COLIN THE CATERPILLAR  
FACING THE SACK AFTER  
NUDE PHOTOS APPEAR  
ONLINE**



**I told my wife that I would  
like to be cremated..... she  
has booked me in for next  
Tuesday!**

**Wife: "Why can't you treat me like you did when we  
were courting?"**

**So her husband took her to the cinema, then onto a  
lovely meal, kissed her then dropped her off at her  
parents. 🤩**

**As a child, we were so  
poor, all my school  
clothes came from the  
Army Surplus**

**I was the only  
Japanese general in  
my class**



**I trained my dog to  
fetch my favourite red  
wine... ..  
He is a Bordeaux  
Collie!**

**My dad used to say, always fight fire with  
fire. That's probably why I was so  
successful in the fire brigade!**

A young woman from New York was driving through a remote part of Texas when her car broke down. She was sitting, out of sorts, when a Native American on horseback came along and offered her a ride to a nearby town. Thankful, she climbed up behind him on the horse and they rode off. The ride was uneventful, except that every few minutes the Indian would shout out a wild "Ye-e-e-e-e-ha-a-a-" so loud that it echoed off the surrounding hills. When they arrived in town, he let her off at the local service station, she expressed her thanks, and he yelled a final "Ye-e-e-e-e-ha-a-a!" and rode off. "Why was that Indian so excited?" asked the service station attendant. "I don't know. I just rode behind him on the horse with my arms around his waist and holding onto the saddle horn so that I wouldn't fall off," the woman answered.

"Lady," the attendant said with a broad smile on his face,  
"Indians don't use saddles."



Did we really sit and  
listen to a  
ventriloquist ...  
**ON THE RADIO ?**

**How to write " I changed a light bulb" on your  
Resume:**

**"Single-handedly managed the successful  
upgrade and deployment of a new  
environmental illumination system with zero  
cost overrun and no safety incidents"**

After seeing a group of people in a pool,  
huddled together under an umbrella to stay dry,  
I understand why Aliens don't visit us.





## ISAAC NEWTON

"Scientist, Theologian, Magician and Crime Fighter"

Our member Chris Lathan gave us a fascinating and very well researched presentation on the life and work of Isaac Newton.

Astronomer, alchemist, theologian, and author who was described in his time as a natural philosopher. He was a key figure in the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment that followed. His pioneering book *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica (Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy)*, first published in 1687, consolidated many previous results and established classical mechanics. Newton also made seminal contributions to optics, and shares credit with German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz for developing infinitesimal calculus.

Isaac was born on Christmas Day, 25 December 1642 at Woolsthorpe Manor in Woolsthorpe-by-Colsterworth in Lincolnshire. His father, also named Isaac Newton, had died three months before. When Newton was three, his mother remarried and went to live with her new husband, the Reverend Barnabas Smith, leaving her son in the care of his maternal grandmother.

From the age of about twelve until he was seventeen, Newton was educated at The King's School in Grantham, which taught Latin and Ancient Greek and probably imparted a significant foundation of mathematics.

In June 1661, Newton was admitted to Trinity College at the University of Cambridge. His uncle Reverend William Ayscough, who had studied at Cambridge, recommended him to the university.

At the time, Cambridge's teachings were based on those of Aristotle, whom Newton read along with then more modern philosophers, including Descartes and astronomers such as Galileo Galilei and Thomas Street. He set down in his notebook a series of "*Quaestiones*" about mechanical philosophy as he found it. In 1665, he discovered the generalised binomial theorem and began to develop a mathematical theory that later became calculus.

In April 1667, Newton was elected as a fellow of Trinity. Fellows were required to be ordained as priests, although this was not enforced in the restoration years and an assertion of conformity to the Church of England was sufficient. However, by 1675 the issue could not be avoided and by then his unconventional views stood in the way. Nevertheless, Newton managed to avoid it by means of special permission from Charles II.

Newton formulated the laws of motion and universal gravitation that formed the dominant scientific viewpoint for centuries until it was superseded by the theory of relativity. Newton used his mathematical description of gravity to derive Kepler's laws of planetary motion, account for tides, the trajectories of comets, the precession of the equinoxes and other phenomena, eradicating doubt about the Solar System's heliocentricity. He demonstrated that the motion of objects on Earth and celestial bodies could be accounted for by the same principle.



Newton observed that the spectrum of colours exiting a prism in the position of minimum deviation is oblong, even when the light ray entering the prism is circular, which is to say, the prism refracts different colours by different angles. This led him to conclude that colour is a property intrinsic to light – a point which had, until then, been a matter of debate.

In his *Hypothesis of Light* of 1675, Newton posited the existence of the ether to transmit forces between particles. The contact with the Cambridge Platonist philosopher Henry More revived his interest in alchemy. He replaced the ether with occult forces based on Hermetic ideas of attraction and repulsion between particles. : He was the last of the magicians Newton's contributions to science cannot be isolated from his interest in alchemy. This was at a time when there was no clear distinction between alchemy and science, and had he not relied on the occult idea of action at a distance, across a vacuum, he might not have developed his theory of gravity.

In 1679, Newton returned to his work on celestial mechanics by considering gravitation and its effect on the orbits of planets with reference to Kepler's laws of planetary motion.

Newton's postulate of an invisible force able to act over vast distances led to him being criticised for introducing "occult agencies" into science.

In the 1690s, Newton wrote a number of religious tracts dealing with the literal and symbolic interpretation of the Bible.

Newton was also a member of the Parliament of England for Cambridge University in 1689 and 1701, but according to some accounts his only comments were to "*Complain about a cold draught in the chamber and request that the window be closed*".

Newton moved to London to take up the post of warden of the Royal Mint in 1696, a position that he had obtained through the patronage of Charles Montagu, 1st Earl of Halifax, then Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Newton became perhaps the best-known Master of the Mint upon the death of Thomas Neale in 1699, a position Newton held for the last 30 years of his life. These appointments were intended as sinecures, but Newton took them seriously. He retired from his Cambridge duties in 1701, and exercised his authority to reform the currency and punish clippers and counterfeiters.

In April 1705, Queen Anne knighted Newton during a royal visit to Trinity College, Cambridge.

The knighthood is likely to have been motivated by political considerations connected with the parliamentary election in May 1705, rather than any recognition of Newton's scientific work or services as Master of the Mint. Newton was the second scientist to be knighted, after Francis Bacon

Newton died in his sleep in London on 20 March 1727. He was given a ceremonial funeral, attended by nobles, scientists, and philosophers, and was buried in Westminster Abbey among kings and queens. *He is also the first scientist to be buried in the abbey.*

In a later memoir, Newton wrote, "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.

#### **His epitaph read**

Nature and Natures laws Lay hid in night

God said let there be Newton

And All was Light

Chris Lathan

## DID YOU KNOW ?

On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1867 following a Grand Parade through the city streets of Gloucester, the RNLI lifeboat “City of Gloucester”, a 33 ft, 10 oared self-righting lifeboat, was launched into Victoria Basin, Gloucester Docks. The ceremony was conducted by the Mayor and the lifeboat was launched by the Lady Mayoress.

The cost of the lifeboat and carriage was £420 (£60,161 in today’s money) and this was raised by public subscription in the City following an enthusiastic campaign headed by the Dean of Gloucester, the Mayor, the Corporation and a number of prominent citizens. Raising the required amount took just 9 months and the order for the lifeboat was placed with a prominent London company of boat builders in November 1866. The lifeboat was built and completed its “sea trials” on the River Thames by April 1867. It was transported from the Thames to Gloucester by the Great Western Railway (free of charge).



**The “City of Gloucester”**

The launch took place before an enthusiastic crowd of over 10,000, just close to where the Soldiers of Gloucester Museum currently stands. After the launch the lifeboat gave demonstrations of its capabilities, including the rescue *of some over-enthusiastic members of the crowd who accidentally fell into the Basin.*

The Lifeboat was then transported by Great Western Railways (again free of charge) to Falmouth in Cornwall where it served for 20 years.



**Falmouth’s current Lifeboat the “Richard Cox Scott, is a 56ft Severn Class All-Weather, self-righting Lifeboat. Arriving in 2001 at a cost of £2 million. It is powered by two 1600hp Caterpillar engines giving it a speed of 25knts and a range of 250 miles**



We are a literate lot in Probus, judging by the number of letters we get published in that esteemed organ, *The Times*.

It used to be the paper of choice for “*Disgusted of Tonbridge Wells*”, but now he/she or even they, have competition from our ranks. The most recent one (at time of writing) was from our resident financial expert, Mike Warburton who wrote, as eloquently as ever, on the “*Governments interest rate policy*”.

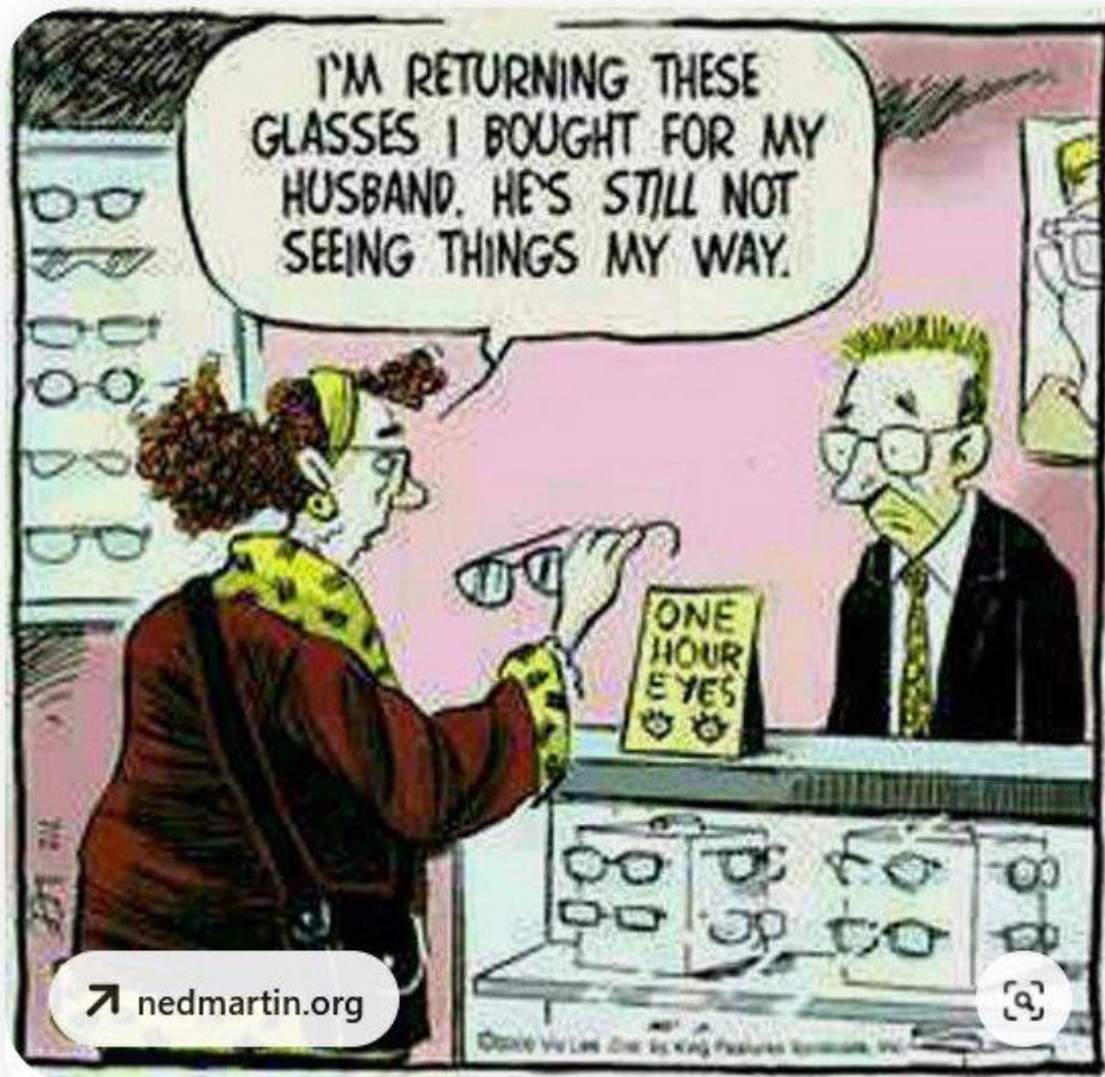
Following closely behind was Paul Dodd who wrote of the difficulty in persuading the Norwegian authorities to let him bring a “*Tin of condensed milk through Customs*”.

Former member Gareth Williams wrote a well- reasoned letter on “*Governmental health policy in the face of the Covid epidemic*” while member’s wife Lee Hines was rightfully indignant on “*Litter droppers*”

Even yours truly got an honourable mention, opining on how “*Our town of Newent was being taken over, following local horsewoman Charlotte Dujardin’s success in the 2012 Olympics*” and “*The multiplicity of choice of breakfast cereals*”, although not in the same letter.

**I don't know if Facebook has ever caused the lame to walk, but it has sure caused the dumb to speak.**

*If Twitter combined with Facebook would it be known as "Twitface"?*



*Action may not always bring happiness, but there is no happiness without action.*

*Benjamin Disraeli*

**Where am I ?**



**Thanks to all those who  
submitted articles and helped  
with the production of this  
newsletter.**

**Ed**

