

# NEWSLETTER



## NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



# DECEMBER 2023

### CHAIRMAN'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE



As we approach December and as I write this letter, we have had our first hard frost. I had not put my geranium pots to winter in the greenhouse, as I usually do, so I quickly covered them with sacks, they are quite a hardy plant, so hopefully they will be OK. The birds are so hungry too, filling up the bird feeders every couple of days. We have three lesser spotted woodpeckers that visit us, and they very much enjoy the peanuts.

Jane and I, together with my brother and sister-in-law attended a Quiz on Friday evening at Huntley Village Hall, in aid of the Mayhill and Huntley Scouts, it's their 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. I was one of the founder scouts when I was 12 years old.

I have been doing a bit of Christmas shopping, some online and visits to town, all my grandchildren's presents sorted now.

We had a change of venue for our November meeting, to the Newent Community Centre, Newent, while the new roof and heating is replaced at Gorsley. It is hoped it will be all finished in January ready for our meetings back there. There are no meetings in December, only The Christmas Lunch.

Not too long now to our Christmas Lunch, at The Hatherley Manor, on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> December. I have been busy putting a picture and an anagram table quiz together, so get your thinking caps on!

I hope you all have a pleasant and peaceful Christmas and I look forward to meeting you at The Christmas Lunch.

Best wishes

*Mike*



***“When you go home, tell them of us and say  
For your tomorrow, we gave our today. “***

Has there ever been written a dozen or so more poignant words than these? A fine example surely, of the adage “less is more” in that it sums up so eloquently in those few short words the sacrifices made by the fallen in the bloody carnage that was World War One. The author, incidentally, was John Maxwell Edmunds,, who was born in nearby Stroud .

I thought of this when I was attending, on behalf of PROBUS, the Service of Remembrance, originally to commemorate the ending of WW1 but also including the many wars since.

Many organisations were represented in the wreath laying service, including the Armed Services, Police and Fire & Rescue. While it is invidious to single out any particular branch, I was struck by the fresh faced members of the many youth organisations represented, including the Scouts, Cubs, Guides and Brownies. I thought then that those local men whose deaths we were commemorating were once just like these youngsters – innocent, keen, ambitious with a whole life ahead of them -only in their case it wasn't to be. Mention too must be made of the buglers rendering of The Last Post by a young member of the congregation.

It was described as the “*war to end all wars*”; this was ironic on a day that was are witnessing the slaughter in both the Ukraine and the Middle East!

The actual wreath laying was curtailed due to inclement weather but the Probus wreath will soon be among the many others lain on the memorial in Newent churchyard.

*Peter Hayes*



# CHRISTMAS LUNCH



**TUESDAY 12 DECEMBER 2023**

**HATHERLY MANOR HOTEL**

**Down Hatherley Lane, Gloucester,  
GL2 9QA**

**12.30 for 1pm**



**One Christmas Eve Santa was under a lot of stress,  
He and Mrs Claus had just had a row, he was just about to leave  
and his sleigh wasn't loaded and the elves were talking about  
going on strike. Just then an angel walked in the office and said  
"Hi Santa ,what do you want me to do with this Christmas tree.**

**And so was born the tradition of there being an Angel on top of  
the Christmas Tree**

## **JANUARY'S SPEAKER**

**TUESDAY 9 JANUARY 2024**



**Susan Humphrey**

(Granddaughter of)

**Neville Chamberlain**

Arthur Neville Chamberlain FRS, who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from May 1937 to May 1940 and Leader of the Conservative Party from May 1937 to October 1940

He is best known for his foreign policy of appeasement, and in particular for his signing of the Munich Agreement on 30 September 1938, ceding the German-speaking Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany led by Adolf Hitler.

## **JANUARY'S SPEAKER**

**TUESDAY 23 JANUARY 2024**

**David Keen & Frank Skilbeck**

**“The art of making and flying large model aircraft”**



**You know you are getting old, when  
you look at the clock to see if its late  
enough to go to bed!**



**I phoned my Grandad to warn him that there is a man driving down the M6 the wrong way.**

**He said “What do you mean, there’s hundreds of them”**

*“I’m dreaming  
of a white  
Christmas. But  
if the white  
runs out, I’ll  
drink the red.”*

— Unknown



**The Statue of Liberty is the largest Christmas present in the world when it was gifted to the United States in 1886. It officially became the largest Christmas Gift in the World**



**“Jingle Bells” became the first song to be played in space using a musical instrument**


**On 16 December 1965 it was played on a harmonica and bells by astronauts Wally Schirra and Thomas P Stafford during NASA’s Gemini 6A space flight.**



**It’s estimated that around 8 billion Christmas cards are sent annually in the UK.**

**The average UK household sends 50 Christmas cards each year**

**Around 500million E - Cards are also delivered**

Santa came home with a reindeer  
 And Mrs Claus said with a sneer  
 'Did you have to bring  
 That horny old thing?'  
 Rudolph said, 'Madam, he lives here.'

**The one thing women don't want to find in their stockings on Christmas morning is their husband!**  
*Joan Rivers*

I made myself a snowball,  
 As perfect as could be,  
 I thought I'd keep it as a pet,  
 And let it sleep with me.  
 I made it some pyjamas,  
 And a pillow for its head,  
 Then last night it ran away,  
 But first - it wet the bed!

Dear Santa,  
 I tried to be Good  
 But I take after my Mommy

'TIS THE Season TO BE Freezin'

We have been helping with the cake, and licking out the pan.  
 And wrapping out our packages as neatly as we can.  
 We have hung our stockings up, beside the open gate.  
 And now there's nothing more to do, except to wait

# DISPELLING CHRISTMAS MYTHS

## ❖ Christmas day isn't Christ's birthday

There is no mention of December 25th anywhere in the Bible, in fact there is no mention of when Jesus was born at all. There was much debate amongst early Christians and it wasn't until the fourth century AD in the Roman Empire that Jesus's birthday was celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup>

## ❖ Boxing Day is actually about boxes

Multiple theories abound as to how this bank holiday received its name; the most popular theory suggests it was traditionally a day when servants had the day off to visit their families. Their employers would send them home with "Christmas boxes" containing money, gifts or food to thank them for their reliable service throughout the past year.

## ❖ Xmas doesn't take Christ out of Christmas

In fact "X" comes from the Greek letter "chi" which happens to be the first letter of the Greek word for Christ (χριστός ανέστη) (christós anésti), and Greek was the original language of the New Testament. The word was simply created as an abbreviation and was first used in the mid -1500s.

## ❖ Santa doesn't wear red because of Coca-Cola

Contrary to popular belief, Father Christmas's red coat was not the creation of a clever Coca-Cola advertising campaign. Before the company had even been invented, St Nick was being depicted in multiple books and illustrations wearing a scarlet coat. From the 1930's onwards Coca-Cola did, however, help shape the image of Santa as a jolly old man.

## ❖ Christmas trees have pagan roots

During the time of the winter solstice, pagan homes would be decorated with evergreen branches in the hope of scaring away evil spirits and to remind the occupants that spring was just around the corner. This tradition survived the conversion to Christianity and during the 16th Century in Germany devout Christians began bringing Christmas trees into their homes. The practice was made fashionable in the UK during the mid -19th Century, when popular Queen Victoria, German Prince Albert and their children were drawn in The Illustrated London News standing around the main Christmas tree at Windsor Castle.

## ❖ Rudolph was created by an advertising copywriter

The red-nosed reindeer was created in 1939 by Robert L. May, an advertising copywriter for Montgomery Ward department store based in Chicago. Every year the store would give away free colouring books as holiday gifts to the children who visited the store Father Christmas. Rudolph's story sold 2.4 million copies in its first year of publication. The famous song was released in 1949 becoming one of the best-selling songs of all time.



## The Special Operations Executive



Our first meeting in November saw a change of venue; while the roof was being repaired at Gorsley, we decamped to the former grammar school, Now Newent Community Centre, where we heard in some style, Rev Dr Chris Hucker give us an interesting talk on the Special Operations Executive [ S.O.E] that clandestine wartime organisation which, in the words of Winson Churchill was tasked to “Set Europe Ablaze). Set up soon after the Declaration of War in September 1939, alongside the **Home Guard aka ”Dad’s Army”**, initially it attracted resistance from the more traditionally minded “top brass” on the grounds that it was somehow “unsporting” to use guerilla tactics rather than face to face fighting!

From top to bottom, it was manned (and” womanned” - itself a revolutionary step) by people from all walks of life who had just one thing in common- a belief that the means justified the ends. These, after training in the UK in such diverse skills as wireless operation, the making of explosives and intelligence gathering, were parachuted into occupied Europe where they assimilated into the indigenous population, liaising with local partisan groups or working independently either in gathering information useful to the Allied cause or acts of sabotage such as blowing up railway lines. Their contribution to the war effort was not without its critics, perhaps compounded by professional jealousy: one view was

*“SOE was inefficient as an organization, unnecessarily dangerous to work for, ineffective in its pursuit of its aims, and counter-productive in the results achieved.”*

At the end of the War, Churchill would probably have retained them but he lost the post war election. The incoming Labour government was not so sympathetic so they were disbanded. Some top ranks were summarily retired, others found jobs in the military but ,irrespective of rank, they all had this in common: they kept their mouths shut, literally abiding by the Official Secrets Act and to this day, certain aspects of their work remains hush hush. Indeed, when eventually their obituaries were published, many were incredulous that they had participated in such activities, “What, old so and so a spy? Never, he, and often she, could never do anything like that! “ was a common reaction.

*LAC Peter Hayes (RAF retired)*



Leonard Townsend our Chairmans dad!

### NOT A STUPID BOY IN SIGHT!

These were members of the **Longhope Home Guard** and their headquarters was the Farmers Boy, (of course!) Longhope, where our last pub lunch was held.





### **EVEREST BASE CAMP SOUTH – Walking in the shadow of giants**

Our speaker on the 28<sup>th</sup> November, Eric Moore, started by telling us how and why he became interested in high level walking. Quite simply, a close friend of his died at the early age of 43 and this caused Eric and his wife to reappraise their lives and what they wanted to do. Having always been a walker in the UK he set his sights on higher altitudes and further away. He has now been to Everest Base Camp (EBC) twice with an organised trekking company. Mt Everest lies between Nepal and Tibet but historically no surveyors were allowed into Tibet and the mountain became known as Peak 15. In 1865 the name Everest was given to the mountain in memory of George Everest who had been Surveyor General in India. In fact China, Tibet and Nepal all have their own names for Mt Everest.

The walk or hike to EBC through Nepal as opposed to the route through China and Tibet, starts at Kathmandu with a flight to Lukla (2680 mts) considered to be one of the most dangerous airstrips in the world. The runway is short with a cliff facing you as you approach and a sheer drop over the end of the runway as you take off. Not for the faint hearted! The best time for embarking on the adventure is between October and March when the weather is stable, cold and bright. It was explained that there would need to be several days of altitude acclimatisation by doing a series of local uphill there and back walks.

Eric showed us a map of the route with its stop over villages and towns. Unfamiliar names such as Phakding, Tengboche, Dingboche and Gorak Shep (EBC) became a little more meaningful as photos of the countryside and towns were shown. Baggage was carried by oxen to around 3,000 mts and then transferred to Yak which need to stay at high altitude to remain physically well. The journey progressed with wonderful pictures of the mountains as the group approached the final destination. A visit was made to a monastery en route to ensure good fortune as from that point on the track becomes tougher with deep ravines and rickety suspended footbridges over them. A sobering note is introduced when the track passes a memorial to all those who have died on Mt Everest, most of those being Sherpas. At this height drinking water becomes an issue as the temperatures can fall well below freezing and everybody needs to drink about 5lts per day to avoid dehydration.

At last Base Camp was in sight at 5632 mts. The camp is situated at the base of the Ice Fall glacier which is the route up Mt Everest. The camp itself is on seemingly rough ground adjacent to the glacier. In fact the whole camp looked pretty rough from a distance but tourist groups are not allowed too close to the camp as the Everest climbers wish to remain as bio secure as possible. Eric wound up by saying he would return to Nepal in April but to a different mountain. The talk was completed with a Question and Answer session.



## Dangerous Fizz

The first sparkling wine was simply ordinary wine that bubbled because it had not finished fermenting, a phenomenon noted in the ancient world. The first reference to deliberately fizzy wine was in 1531

*Blanquette (Little White) de Limoux* made by the monks of the Abbey of Saint-Hilaire, who distributed it in flasks sealed with cork stoppers.

Champagne came later, largely thanks to the demands of seventeenth century English drinkers for more wine from the Reims region that continued to ferment in the bottle (hence the fizz).

The English were also responsible for bespoke champagne bottles. The original ones were liable to explode, injuring cellar workers, who wore protective face masks and occasionally destroyed 90% of a year's production in a chain reaction.

Dan Gurney, the American winner of the 1967 24 hour Le Mans was the first driver to spray champagne in celebration of a motor racing victory.

Today Champagne may only be called Champagne if it is produced in the Champagne region just outside Paris.

The UK import 29 million bottles from France each year.

## BEER

It is possible that beer was first brewed about 13,000 years ago in what is now known as Israel. Other archaeological finds suggest that around 8000 BC, the inhabitants of the near east (Turkey) became the first brewers. More reliable evidence points to the amber nectar being first sipped in Persia some 2,500 years after this. Its popularity soared rapidly, with workers on a variety of strenuous projects (including building the Pyramids of Giza) being rewarded with daily pints, quarts or even gallons

The first record of hopped beer in England was circa

1362 imported from Amsterdam into Great Yarmouth. The earliest mention of beer being brewed in England (from imported hops) was 1412, made by a German alewife in Colchester. Cultivation of hops started around 1520 when *humulus lupulus* was planted in Kent

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates.

"In honour of this holy season,

" Saint Peter said, "You must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven."

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. "It represents a candle", he said.

"Very well, you may pass through the pearly gates," Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, "They're bells."

Saint Peter said, "You may also pass through the pearly gates."

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's panties.

St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, "And just what do those symbolize?"

The man replied, "These are Carol's."



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**WHERE AM I ?**

*May your Christmas sparkle with moments of love, laughter and goodwill. And may the year ahead be full of contentment and joy. Have a very Merry Christmas.*

*Fraser*



**Thanks to all those  
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and submitted articles.**

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