NEWSLETTER

NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

APRIL 2024

Message from our Chairman

It's hard to believe this is my last note as Probus Chairman, where has the year gone. As I write, Spring is still holding back, nice one day then next day more rain. Lambs are playing in the fields next to me, the birds are singing at full volume and the nesting boxes are fully occupied, so Spring cannot be that far away. I still have my potatoes to plant out, just need some dry weather. The clocks go forward this weekend and I look forward to the light evenings.

Our thoughts to members that are not too well at present and hope to see them back at our meetings soon.

We have a few new members and have good attendances at the meetings. This month we have enjoyed two very good talks. The gas industry – seen from the inside and Mike Warburton gave us a very informative talk on The Battle of Midway. John Martin organised the pub lunch at The Weston Cross, Weston under Penyard, which was very well attended.

Thanks to all that organise the pub lunches, Christmas Lunch, Summer Party, and trips.

A special thanks to all the Committee members for all their help and support throughout my year as Chairman.

The Technical team for ensuring it all goes to plan on the day. Chris Lathan for running the raffle each meeting.

I wish the new officers my best wishes and support for the coming Probus Year.

I am sure the club will enjoy success and an increased membership.

Hoping you have all had a happy and peaceful Easter.

Best wishes

Mike

TUESDAY 9 APRIL

Fraser Gunn

"200 years of Service and Sacrifice"

"The History and work of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution"

The RNLI with 236 Lifeboat Stations and over 460 Lifeboats and 7500 volunteers, is The Charity that Saves Lives at Sea.
Fraser will start with its inception in 1824, to what it is considered today to be the premier Rescue Service in the world.

TUESDAY 23 APRIL

Newent and District Probus Club

47th AGM

OFFICER NOMINATIONS

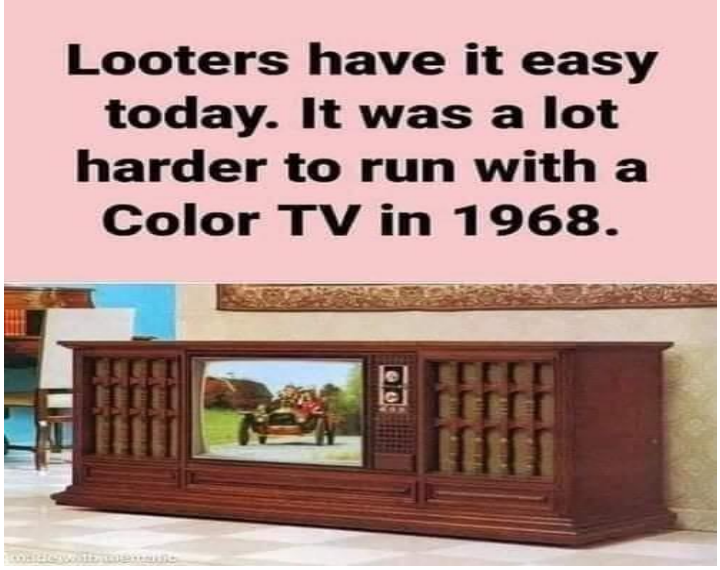
CHAIRMAN:	Fraser Gunn
VICE CHAIRMAN:	Mike Warburton
SECRETARY:	Kelvin Ashby
TREASURER:	Mike Warburton

COMMITTEE

PAST CHAIRMAN:	Mike Townsend
PROGRAMME SECRETARY:	Fraser Gunn
EVENTS ORGANISER:	David Clowes
WEBMASTER:	Ray McCairn
SUBSIDERY MEMBER:	John martin
SUBSIDERY MEMBER:	John Weeden
SUBSIDERY MEMBER:	Andrew Graham

ASSOCIATED APPOINTMENTS

SPECIAL LUNCHES:	John Martin
TECHNICAL SUPPORT:	John Franklin
ASSISTANT TREASURER:	Graham Baum
RAFFLE ORGANISER:	Chris Lathen



FACTS TO BLOW YOUR MIND

Fax machines may be outdated now, but they had a longer run than you probably realized. The fax machine was patented by Scottish inventor Alexander Bain in 1843. Then, three years later, he actually created it. At the time, it was not referred to as a fax machine, but a *facsimile* machine. Bain used a clock to synchronize the movement of two pendulums, which would then scan each line of the message during that process.

(When I joined the Fire Service in 1967, we were mobilised from our control by the use of a *facsimile machine*)

Professional chefs and home cooks may use the word "vegetable" to describe everything from asparagus and broccoli to zucchini and yams. But it turns out the term has no scientific value. When the BBC asked botanist Wolfgang Stuppy of the Royal Botanic Gardens if vegetables really exist, he answered, "No, not botanically... the term vegetable doesn't exist in botanical terminology."

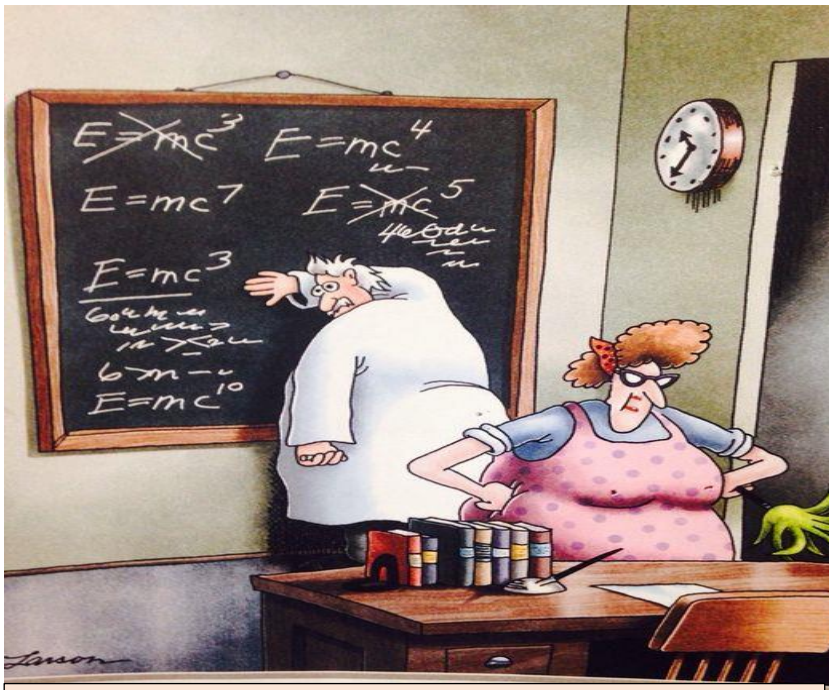
While it might seem like you've been afraid of snakes and spiders since you were born, that's not totally true. Scientists have found that humans have just two innate fears: the **fear of falling** and the **fear of loud sounds**. The rest of your phobias are learned over time

If you learned Roman numerals in school, then you might have realized you were never taught the number for zero—and that's because there isn't one. While the ancient Romans (and Greeks) were fully aware of the concept of having nothing, they skipped over zero when it came to numbers. In fact, Aristotle himself is said to have dismissed the number because you couldn't divide it and get a reasonable answer.

When travellers take cruises, they're focused on the sunshine and the seawater. But those who run the ship have to consider the practical side of being out on the ocean for days at a time, and that includes what happens when someone passes away onboard. In order to deal with this unfortunate reality, most cruise ships have their own morgue that can accommodate multiple bodies

Every woman's dream is that a man will take her in his arms, throw her into bed and clean the house while she sleeps.

Dirty Crude Jokes 21+



Now that desk looks better. Everything squared away, yessir ,squaaaaaaared away!

STRANGE FEELING

I woke up on my 83rd Birthday and thought its really weird being the same age as old people!!

The Gas Industry first hand

A presentation by Peter Marsden (Tuesday 12th March 2024)

Peter, our speaker, spent 44 years in the gas industry, starting his career in Burnley in the North West of England. His talk was structured into 3 main areas:

- What we know (interesting facts about the industry)
- Explore the start of the gas industry and the manufacture of "town gas"
- Conversion to Natural Gas

1. What we know (interesting facts about the industry)

There are more than 23 million gas meter points in the UK – domestic, commercial, and industrial
The gas network moves around 3 times more energy than the electricity network
Mercaptan is a non-toxic and harmless smell that is added to natural gas, which is naturally odourless. Before conversion to natural gas, marketing caravans were taken around the UK and consumers were invited to visit the caravans. While they were inside various odours were released and it was determined that Mercaptan was the odour that most people identified with the smell of gas.
There are 3 different types of interconnected gas pipelines – high pressure pipelines running at 1000 psi; medium pressure running at 200 psi and low pressure into homes running at 10 psi.
There is a vast network of gas pipes in the UK with 176,000 miles being underground, including 6,000 miles of high-pressure pipeline and 55,000 miles consisting of iron pipes that are between 50 and 100 years old. It should be noted that initially the underground pipes were manually laid in trenches dug by gangs of navvies.
The extensive pipeline network is also used to store gas, but the loss of a large reservoir below the seabed, due to Centrica closing the facility in 2017, means that the UK only holds gas reserves equivalent to 4 o 5 days winter usage, which is far less than the storage capacities of other European nations.
A critical component of a gas meter is the gas governor/regulator that sits on top of the meter. The regulator must be set at the correct pressure by trained engineers or appliances connected to the meter may not work.
What is Liquified Natural Gas (LNG)? LNG refers to natural gas which has been cooled to approximately -160°C, changing its state from gas to liquid. This means it can be transported by ship, as the volume is around 600 times smaller than the gaseous state. Once at its destination, LNG is "regasified" and used in the same way as natural gas which has not been liquefied. The UK terminals handling LNG are situated at Canvey Island and Milford Haven.

2. The start of the gas industry and the manufacture of "town gas" (or coal gas)

William Murdoch was a highly respected mechanical engineer who also experimented in the field of chemistry. In around 1790, in Redruth, Cornwall, Murdoch began experimenting with generating gas from the burning of coal and other materials. It is believed it took him some time to develop a working method for the production and capture of the gas, but around 1792 he was able to install gas lighting in his house.
In 1855 Robert Bunsen created the Bunsen Burner which, through better control of the air and gas mixture, allowed the gas to be burned more efficiently (the famous blue flame) and transformed the gas industry.

Gas production resulted from coal being burned in a retort. Retorts were effectively ovens, used to bake the coal for about ten hours. The gas produced was collected through a series of pipes. Once the coal had been baked, a residue called 'coke' was left behind. Initially the retorts were arranged horizontally and loaded manually, but later improvements in technology resulted in vertical retorts which were up to 3 storeys high and loaded, mechanically, from the top.

The coal burning process also produced toxic by-products such as methane and carbon monoxide making working conditions hazardous with severe effects on the health of the workers.
Gas works were large chemical works producing by-products that were then used in many different processes such as fertilisers, explosives, drugs etc. The large-scale production of town gas resulted in storage facilities having to be created, hence gasometers, which were widespread across the country.
The **Gas Act of 1948** took the gas industry into a new era of Nationalisation. The 1,064 local gas undertakings were vested in twelve Area Gas Boards, each an autonomous body with its own chairman and Board structure.
The Gas Council was also established to act as a liaison between the Area Boards and the Ministry of Fuel and Power, though the Council had no direct powers over the Boards. The Gas Council was made up of the twelve Area Board Chairmen and had a chairman of its own.
Each Area Board divided its region into geographical groups or divisions which were often further divided into smaller districts. The boundaries of these groups were changed frequently and several divisional reorganisations took place during the 1950's and 1960's.
With so many individual gas works being merged within a Gas Board, it was found that standardisation was required to ensure a consistent specification for the gas nationally, resulting in the Wobbe Index being used to create standard measurements to which all gas must conform.
During the 1960's technical advances were made within the industry and the first imported liquified natural gas appeared.
In 1962 the first surveys of the North Sea took place and by 1967 North Sea gas was being brought ashore at Easington terminal. This year also saw the beginning of the ten-year national conversion programme which involved the physical conversion of every appliance in the country from town gas to natural gas.

3. Conversion to Natural Gas

The natural gas conversion project was the largest engineering project undertaken in Britain. Converting domestic premises was fairly straightforward when compared to commercial and industrial premises, particularly where continuous processes, such as glass making, could not be interrupted to allow machinery to be changed to use natural gas.
Peter Marsden wrote a paper in 1968 entitled ***"Planning for conversion of natural gas for industrial premises"***. The publication of this paper led to Peter taking a senior role in converting complex industrial environments to natural gas.

Examples of conversion complexities mentioned by Peter included:

- Having a new Wobbe Index for natural gas (predominantly composed of methane in the UK). A conscious decision was made to create a new Wobbe index value for the UK which was different to other countries. This was to ensure that British gas appliance manufacturers were protected from imported products from other countries as the imports would have to be converted to use UK gas specification.
- Learning "on the job" in situations no-one had experienced before
- Machinery that had never previously run on natural gas, requiring new parts to be made
- Working on machinery that had just finished a production process and was still hot, but parts had to be changed quickly before the machinery cooled down so that it could be restarted without any problems
- Sensitive situations, such as converting Crematoria. In one situation, an engineer's van with the slogan "More and more heat for everyone" was on a crematorium car park on the day the crematorium was due to use natural gas for the first time. This was deemed insensitive and the engineer had to swiftly remove his van before the mourners arrived.
- Hazardous situations where the conversion had not gone exactly to plan resulting in explosions and injuries

Peter's talk contained several humorous anecdotes and during the Q&A session at the end he confessed that he had indeed been "blown up" and suffered some superficial burns when a large industrial oven in a bakery exploded when it was turned on for the commissioning test. The subsequent enquiry found that it was not a fault with the conversion but due to dust within the oven being disturbed by the engineering works, such that when the gas was lit the dust inside the oven exploded, in similar fashion to the cause of mining accidents.

Chris Yates

The Battle of Midway
4-7 June 1942

Our own Mike Warburton treated the 26 March Probus meeting with a fascinating and (as you would expect with Mike) thoroughly researched talk and presentation about the Battle of Midway, seen by many as the turning point of the Pacific War.

Mike began with setting the context of both the emergence of naval airborne warfare generally and the prior Battle of Coral Sea a month earlier, which was the first naval action in which the opposing fleets neither sighted nor fired upon one another, attacking over the horizon from aircraft carriers instead.

The outcome of that battle was inconclusive (albeit the US gaining a slight edge) with both sides sustaining notable losses (of both aircraft and carriers). The US capability to rapidly mitigate those losses by speedy repair to the *Yorktown* carrier and reallocation of aircraft from the lost *Lexington* to the surviving US carriers was a significant factor contributing to the US success in the subsequent Battle of Midway.

Mike explained that the overall Japanese strategic objective in the Pacific was to extend the Pacific perimeter of Japanese control to reduce the risk of air attacks on Japan such as the Doolittle raid on Tokyo that had a major impact on Japanese morale and confidence. The plan of Admiral Yamamoto to attack the US held Midway Islands was to extend that perimeter and also to draw out and destroy the US carrier fleet that had survived the attack on Pearl Harbour. There were a number of potential US held Pacific Island targets, but the US had the advantage of signals intelligence that, by partial code breaking aided by disinformation ruses, allowed them to learn that the Midway Islands were the target and also of the planned timing of the attack. The US also had the advantage of both land based (at Midway) and seaborne radar that reduced the need for widespread air patrols and which gave some prior warning of enemy airborne approach. The US did not have all the technical or combat advantages, however. US torpedoes were far inferior to Japanese torpedoes and Japanese pilots had greater combat experience. But with the advantage of the signals intelligence, the US was able to reinforce the Midway airfield with additional aircraft providing in effect an overall combat aircraft advantage of some 100 or so aircraft. That advantage was not however as efficiently used as it could have been as Mike went on to explain.

It is sometimes said that success in war is often down to who makes the fewer mistakes (though undoubtedly both misfortune and fortune plays its part). In bringing his well-known analytical skill (familiar to Probus members) to his talk, Mike took the meeting through a succinct but clear summary of the many incidents and events that illustrated how those adages were very relevant to the Battle of Midway.

- The advantage of early warning from radar enabled the land-based US aircraft at Midway to significantly disrupt the initial Japanese carrier aircraft attack on the islands (intended to be a knock-out blow). Although heavily bombed, the Midway airbase was still able to operate.
- Accordingly a second wave attack by the Japanese was deemed necessary, including by aircraft armed with torpedoes being held in reserve to attack the US fleet. This necessitated rearming those aircraft with bombs.

- It was while refuelling and rearming the Japanese aircraft on their carriers was taking place that the US carrier aircraft were able to attack at a time of greatest vulnerability.
- The US attacks were however piecemeal and not well coordinated. The *Hornet* in particular suffered from insufficient training and take-off of its squadrons of various aircraft types took a very long time.
- US attacks mainly began by torpedo carrying aircraft and suffered greatly from defence by Japanese fighters whilst having to make low and slow straight-line attack runs. For example only one aircrew member from the whole of Squadron 8 from the *Hornet* survived.
- Nevertheless, by fortunate chance, three squadrons of US dive bombers arrived over the Japanese fleet almost simultaneously. Whilst only a very few bombs hit ships directly, due to the vulnerability of the Japanese carriers at that time, two, the *Kaga* and the *Soryu* were ablaze very quickly whilst the *Akagi*, having been hit by just one bomb took longer to become disabled albeit that one bomb having struck an aircraft elevator and exploding in the hanger below full of armed and refuelled aircraft.
- *Hiryu*, the sole surviving Japanese carrier launched a counter attack on the *Yorktown* hitting it with two of their much more effective torpedoes and crippling it.
- A US counter attack later in the afternoon of 4 June focused on the *Hiryu* with dive bombers then crippling her.
- In the days after the main battle the *Yorktown* (while under tow) and *Hiryu* (having been abandoned) both sank.

After winning a clear victory, there was no appetite amongst the US naval leadership to acknowledge or even disclose one of the more glaring US errors. This was the so-called 'flight to nowhere' that Mike explained to the meeting with the same antipathy for dishonesty that Probus is familiar with from his attention to the 'dodgy' financial affairs of certain politicians or other well-known figures.

Captain Marc Mitscher had command of the *Hornet* which had the least experienced crew and air group aboard. Following early sightings of Japanese forces there was disagreement amongst the air group commanders on the *Hornet* as to the best course to intercept the Japanese fleet, with Mitscher overruling the commander that had argued for what turned out to be the correct course.
A due west course was chosen for the whole air group but the leader of the torpedo bombers, after a short while into the flight chose to change course to near south-west that then flew them directly to the Japanese fleet. Unprotected by other aircraft of the air group the torpedo bombers were devastated by Japanese defences.
The remainder of the air group returned to the *Hornet* having never engaged with the enemy (hence 'flight to nowhere'). Captain Mitscher in his After Action report covered up the error that led to the annihilation of the torpedo squadron. He went on to gain promotion to Admiral and took on senior command roles during the remainder of the Pacific war and post war. It was only in the 1980's (well after his death in 1947) that Mitscher's fabrication about the 'flight to nowhere' emerged.
To those of us who have grown up with a much greater awareness of the European theatre in the Second World War, Mike's talk was a very welcome reminder of the critical action that changed the course of the war in the Pacific theatre.

Nigel Johnson

Unusual facts about Easter

Have you ever wondered where the Easter Bunny story originated?

We can say that the story of rabbits bringing eggs doesn't make a lot of logical sense, so there must be a reason why every year children rush to see what treats this mythical creature has left for them.

But just like Santa Claus has no Christian significance to Christmas, the Easter Bunny also has no real connection to this holy day.

The origin of the Easter Bunny dates back hundreds of years, beginning in pre-Christian Germany. Here, the hare was said to be the symbol of the Pagan Goddess of Spring and Fertility.

As Christianity spread across Europe, Pagan traditions were blended with Christian holidays, which saw the Easter Bunny lay a nest of colourful (today, chocolate) eggs for children who were well-behaved on Easter Sunday

According to scholars, this Christian holiday was named after the Anglo-Saxon goddess, Eostre, who was depicted as a Fertility Goddess and a Goddess of Dawn and Light.
She was honoured at Pagan festivals celebrating the arrival of spring, further highlighting the blend of Pagan traditions with Christian holidays.

Have you ever wondered who started the trend of tucking into chocolate-shaped eggs on Easter Sunday?
It was during the 19th century that the Fry family of Bristol ran the largest chocolate factory in the world and produced the first chocolate egg, in 1873. It was two years later in 1875 that saw Cadbury's make their first Easter egg.

Another fascinating Easter fact for you, Cadbury's makes 500 million Creme Eggs every year! If you piled them on top of each other, it would be 10 x higher than Mount Everest.
The Birmingham factory produces 1.5 million Creme Eggs every day, and the Creme Egg is the most popular egg-shaped chocolate in the world.

For countless generations, Ukrainians have been decorating eggs as a calling out to the Gods and Goddesses of health and fertility. This traditional act of pysanka ("pih-sahn-kah") is made by using wax and dyes, but this colourful custom didn't take off until Ukrainian immigrants came to the U.S.

Possibly the world's most expensive egg was sold at Christie's in London for £9 million, breaking Faberge records. The enamelled egg contains a multi-coloured cockerel which at every hour pops out of the egg and flaps his wings, before nodding his head three times.
The egg was made by Karl Fabergé in St Petersburg in 1902 and is the second-largest egg ever made by Fabergé

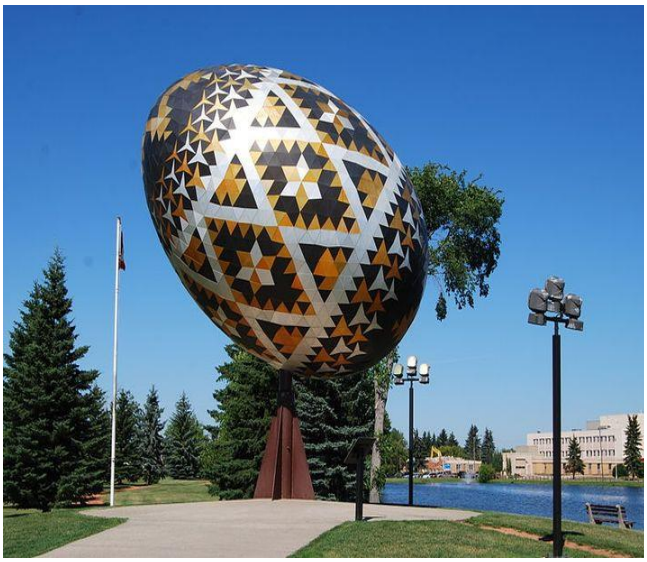
On Good Friday, which sees the start of the Easter weekend, it is illegal to dance in public in the majority of states in Germany.

Even Europe's clubbing capital, Berlin, becomes a dance-free zone out of respect for the religious day.

In Baden-Württemberg, music is allowed to be played but dancing is not allowed, whilst in Bavaria, if you are caught playing music of any kind in a bar, you could be fined up to 10,000 euros.

So why the boogie ban, Germany?

The thinking behind this ban is out of respect for Christians, who mourn the death of Jesus on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, and in Germany, these days are considered to be holidays of silence.



Standing 31ft tall and 18ft wide is the world's largest Easter egg. Found in Vegreville, Alberta, Canada, the egg weighs a hefty 5000 lbs and took 12,000 hours to complete. Named the Vegreville Pysanka, the world's largest Easter egg is actually more of a jigsaw than a sculpture, as it is made from 3500 pieces of aluminium.

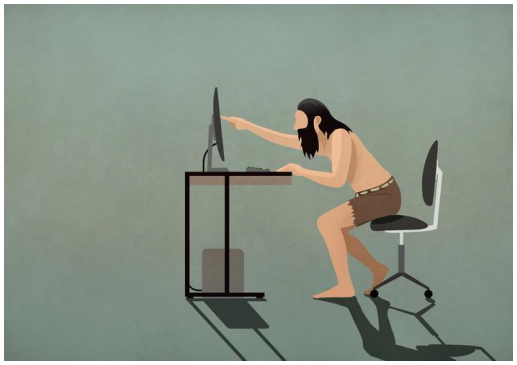
I am sure I am like a lot of you that have "Stuff" stored away in your loft, shed or garage. I am loathed to throw it away as "You never know when it will come in handy".

I have timber in my garage which I brought with me from our last house 24 years ago!!

I am sure you might have something which you might like to sell or even offer for "Upcycling".

I am thinking of including a section in the Newsletter where members can offer items for "Sale"
or "Freecycle" to just get rid.
If you think this would be a good idea let me know and we can trial it.

WHERE AM I ?



Thanks to all those who submitted articles and assisted with production.
Ed