

NEWSLETTER



NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



JULY 2024

Message from our Chairman

Another month has been and gone and at last the fine weather is being kind to us. At last I have been able to get out into the garden and do all the jobs I have been unable to do for months due to bad weather, I have even managed to do some left over from last year! Although, I must admit there has been a bit of procrastination with regard to some. The light evenings are a real bonus, I love walking around the garden at dusk watching the different wildlife appear. Ducking from the bats, I still wonder at their ability to avoid objects, the haunting sounds of owls and even the bark of a fox and muntjac. I never take for granted the joy of the countryside and how it enhances our life.

I have found one of the benefits of having to get up at various times during the night is that I have seen some spectacular sunrises.

Age does have its advantages, sometimes!

Our club seems to be on the ascendancy with several new members joining us, I hope they enjoy their membership. I am sure there are more people out there who would find great benefit from being a Probus member. Pass on the word.

Our pub lunches are as popular as ever with an average of twenty five which is great. My thanks go to Paul for organising them. It's so nice to meet up in convivial surroundings and enjoy each other's company. The summer garden party this year looks like being another successful event with numbers likely to exceed last year. We have made a change this year by having some musical entertainment. I hope the weather gods are on our side and make it a memorable day.

Fraser



PUB LUNCH

TUESDAY 2 JULY 2024

Westons Scrumpy House Restaurant
Much Marcle
HR8 2 NQ



TUESDAY 9 JULY

Robert Toseland

The Schneider Trophy – How it influenced WWII aircraft design

The **Coupe d'Aviation Maritime Jacques Schneider**, also known as the **Schneider Trophy**, is a trophy that was awarded first annually, and later biennially, to the winner of a race for seaplanes and flying boats. In 1931 Britain met the conditions to retain the Trophy permanently; it is held at the Science Museum in South Kensington, London.

Lovely
garden
setting



Good
Company

Great Food

TUESDAY 23 JULY 2024

SUMMER PARTY – BBQ

Gorsely Village Hall

12.30 16.00

Entertainment



IN MEMORIAM

THE DECLINE AND DECLINE OF NEWENT

When I downsized to my adoptive town of Newent some 20 odd years ago, it was a bustling friendly place with pavements that one could, at times be forced to step off from, such was the amount of foot traffic. Today, in spite of new housing developments that must have well-nigh doubled its population and the planners' claim that such housing would provide much needed extra trade to our shops and businesses, it is a much different story.

Although the friendliness is still much in evidence and we don't have, as yet, tumbleweed blowing down the main street, much has changed and not always for the better. Who has tried to get a reply from the hard pressed reception staff at our surgery, much less to secure an appointment with a doctor and as for seeing the same one on consecutive appointments – forget it. A regular user of prescriptions? Don't forget to give the busy pharmacy staff at least a fortnight's notice.

Pay Newent a visit in the afternoon and whilst it is not yet a ghost town, and maybe Probus members are taking a well-earned post prandial nap, there is scarcely a soul to be seen, in spite of often heroic efforts by our Town Council and others.

A decade ago, from memory, we had at least three banks, two, maybe three, butchers, a fruit and vegetable shop, a busy travel agent, two garages, even an electrical shop where one could get small appliances repaired (imagine it!) whilst a good selection of cards could be bought from a specialist shop; we have even lost two of our centre pubs, the Red Lion and Black Dog and, of course, a dedicated Post Office in spite of the efforts of the saintly Ms Vennells. The number of vacant shops is depressing.

All is not lost however. Today we've seen an increase of ladies' hairdressing salons to our present day total of at least seven, not counting the innumerable freelance ones operating from their own homes. Truly the customer is king, or in this case, queen. Thank goodness, however, for our library; I believe that I do more than my fair share in keeping it open. As the economists would have it – sovereignty of choice rules OK!

Although I highlight problems, I can offer no solutions. Newent's malaise is no different from that of many small, and not so small, towns and cities. Whether it is the inexorable march of internet based shopping or just a sea change in consumers behaviour, I do not know and would hesitate to voice an opinion. I do know, however, that we do not realise and value what we have until it is gone.

Peter Hayes



Why we join

"A newcomer to Probus, on being asked why he joined, replied "The socialising is good and the speakers are excellent but the real reason is that I learn , from my fellow members, so many fascinating new ailments and the accompanying symptoms. It beats going to the doctors any time."

NEW DESIGN FOR UK BORDER CONTROL



I've got a date with a woman who identifies as a wheelie bin, but I can't remember if I'm taking her out on Tuesday or Wednesday

I can't afford an Ancestry DNA Kit to learn about my relatives. So instead, I posted online that I had won the lottery.

Doctor Waiting Room



If you die whilst waiting to see the doctor please cancel your appointment



POLICE IDENTIKIT
PICTURE OF SUSPECT...

Waiting to see how long it takes this police sketch artist to realize I'm describing him.



THE CITY OF LONDON

Our speaker Rod Barker is from Ross on Wye and a member of that Town's Vaga Probus Club but had a working life in the City of London. He fully demonstrated his fascination with 'the City' from his time spent there by taking the meeting through the full span of its history but in a condensed narrative that focused on many of the little known but most interesting historical facts and stories.

A key point he made was that right from Roman times until the beginning of the modern era, the City always had a substantial degree of self-governance and a negotiated distance from national authority, whether Imperial Roman or English and British sovereign power. Rod said that arguably it is the world's oldest continuous democracy.

London 'proper' began as a self-governing Roman 'commune' with legal, trade and military presence at the lowest feasible bridging point on the River Thames. It would be many centuries before the City returned to the population of 100,000 that it had at the height of its Roman era.

After a period of post-roman abandonment and then fluctuating Saxon and Viking occupation the City firmly established its semi-independence in a deal with William the Conqueror in 1067. The City did not have an army to resist the Normans but equally the invaders were very reliant on London as a trading and mercantile hub. The Charter of 1067 guaranteed its citizens historic pre-invasion rights whilst William sought to stamp his military authority by building the Tower just outside the City walls. Many subsequent monarchs made similar deals with the City (including in Magna Carta) and King John commented that "Londoners have no King but their Lord Mayor". For these reasons (amongst others) sovereign power (monarchical or parliamentary) has been centred on Westminster rather than the City.

To this day, when the Monarch visits the City on ceremonial occasions, there is a pause at the City boundary where the Lord Mayor will invite and permit the monarch to enter the City. Furthermore the King's Judges have to be given permission to sit in the City (at the Old Bailey) by the Lord Mayor.

The mercantile, and particularly financial, role of the City that we are now familiar with began properly in the 16th Century with the establishment of the Merchant Banks, the Royal Exchange and then the Bank of England in 1694. Lloyds Insurance followed (originating in a coffee house) and the joint stock banks and Stock Exchange in the 19th Century.

Also important in the development of the City were its Guilds that evolved into the Livery Companies of today. Rod entertained us with many interesting anecdotes and explanations along the way, the most fascinating of which were the etymological ones. Phrases such as 'all at sixes and sevens' (from Guild pecking orders) and 'money for old rope' (sale of parts of post execution hangman's rope thought to have beneficial properties) have City origins.

Bringing us fully up to date, Rod reminded us of the City's crucial economic importance to the nation despite some common negative perceptions – he informed us that 22% of all UK taxes derive from the City.

Rod's talk was a 'tour de force' in taking us through key aspects of the history and life of the City in around just one hour leaving us all so much better aware of its story and significance.

Niggl Johnson



THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

A story of violence, lies and corruption - presented by Ian Boskett (Tuesday 25th June 2024)

The Great Train Robbery took place on 8th August 1963 and it has been well chronicled over the years with various films and documentaries. Ian, our speaker, has carried out a significant amount of personal research into the event, including reviewing official papers after they were released to the public 50 years after the robbery took place.

The plan was to rob a Royal Mail train, of £2.61 million, heading from Glasgow to London on the West Coast mainline in the early hours of 8 August 1963 at Bridego Railway Bridge between Leighton Buzzard and Cheddington in Buckinghamshire. The money on the train consisted of used 10 shilling, £1 and £5 notes that had been in service for some time and were due to be replaced/destroyed. The serial numbers of the notes were not recorded, making tracing the money after the robbery extremely difficult.

The money was carried in the High Value Coach (HVC), which was the second carriage behind the locomotive. There were 5 post office staff in the HVC but no additional security personnel. The remaining 10 carriages on the train carried between 70 and 80 post office workers who were sorting mail as the train went along. The robbers planned to stop the train at Sears Crossing, overpower the train drivers and staff in the HVC, decouple the locomotive and the first 2 carriages from the remainder of the train, and then move the train a short distance along the line to Bridego Bridge to unload the money and make their getaway.

The robbers, who were well known and violent criminals from South London, were initially informed about the possibility such a robbery could be carried out by a Post Office employee who was never officially identified or charged. It was rumoured to be a gentleman who coincidentally retired a few weeks after the robbery. Over the years many of the convicted robbers later claimed they were the “mastermind” behind the robbery. Ronnie Biggs, who subsequently became probably the best known of the robbers, only had a “bit part” in the robbery as he was a small-time criminal. His task was to recruit a retired train driver to move the train from Sears Crossing to Bridego Bridge once the robbers had taken over the train.

A key part of the plan was to tamper with the trackside signals in order to bring the train to a halt. The sheer weight of the train meant it would need over one and a half miles to stop, so several signals had to be “doctored”, without setting off any alarms that they had been interfered with. Our speaker brought in a real railway signal of the type the robbers manipulated to stop the train. He showed exactly how they covered over a green signal lamp with a garden glove while attaching an external battery to the amber or red lamps to provide a fake signal to the train driver. A surprisingly simple technique but completely effective.

The HVC's had, in the recent past, been upgraded with additional security measures. The robbers dealt with this complication by bribing railway employees to declare all of the more secure HVC's as unserviceable, resulting in a reserve HVC, without additional security, being used on the train to be robbed. Unbeknown to the robbers, the train was to be pulled by a new diesel locomotive rather than a steam engine.

The robbery took place as planned and the train was brought to a halt by the driver, Jack Mills, obeying the robber's signals. The robbers then attacked the train crew and HVC staff, tied them up and decoupled the locomotive and first 2 carriages from the rest of the train. Ronnie Biggs had brought his train driver accomplice but the retired driver could not move the new diesel locomotive. The original train driver, Jack Mills, although quite badly injured having been coshed by the robbers, was forced to move the locomotive and 2 carriages down to Bridego Bridge. There the robbers unloaded 120 sacks of money, leaving 8 behind due to them having to flee the scene just before a scheduled train service was due to pass. The robbers made off with their loot in a lorry and 2 Land Rovers, all of which had been stolen. It took about 30 minutes to carry out the robbery, from stopping the train to leaving the scene.

The non-arrival of the Post Office train was noticed at Cheddington, and a “search party” was sent out. The stopped train was fairly quickly located and the alarm was raised. In the meantime, the robbers made their way, by back roads, to Leatherslade Farm, almost 30 miles away. The robbers had a radio tuned to the police frequency and were able to monitor how the search for them was progressing.

Leatherslade Farm was quite run-down and had been purchased by a solicitor acting on behalf of the robbers specifically as a hideout. It was well provisioned as the robbers initially intended to lie low for quite some time. The police had been able to calculate that the robbers may be within a 30 mile radius of the crime scene and within 48 hours were tipped off, by a member of the farming community, that unusual activity had been spotted at Leatherslade Farm. Through their radio, the robbers learned that they might be under suspicion and abandoned the farm after having split up their haul into 17 “whacks” of £150,000 (about £2.5 million today) for each of the main robbers, plus other monies that were kept back to pay “expenses” and other accomplices. Ronnie Biggs was given £20,000 to pay the retired train driver but never passed on the money and thus, when added to his “whack”, he became the highest paid robber!

It had originally been intended to burn down the farm to hide all traces but this never happened. When the police arrived at the now deserted farm they found the stolen getaway vehicles, buried mailbags and many fingerprints in the vehicles and in the farm. It transpired that the robbers had played Monopoly, using real money, while they hid and the board was covered in fingerprints. It was fortunate that evidence was found at the farm as, due to incorrect assumptions, the locomotive and rolling stock were moved from the crime scene before the police had checked for fingerprints and the rolling stock was immediately put back into service throughout the rail network. As a result, very little evidence was gathered from the crime scene.

Tommy Butler, a well-known Scotland Yard detective, was assigned to the case and before he started his investigation he wrote down the name of 20 suspects. It soon became apparent that he had 15 of the robbers on his list! The police started work on tracking down the robbers and recovering the stolen money. By January 1964, 12 men were put on trial in connection with the robbery. One was acquitted and the remainder received jail sentences. 7 of the robbers received 30 year terms, which were unprecedented. Before their capture the proceeds from the robbery were laundered through bookmakers, hidden, or left with family/friends so very little (about £650,000) was ever recovered. Unfortunately for the robbers who were sent to prison, many found that when they got out, their money had been appropriated by their “friends” and nothing was left. Not all of the robbers were caught. In recently released official papers, our speaker discovered that the jury in the trial had to be given police protection while the trial took place. Despite this, contact was made with some jurors and some police officers apparently were moved to other duties.

After the trial the Judge ordered that all evidence related to the robbery should be destroyed, under police supervision, to prevent them becoming souvenirs. This included the HVC and getaway vehicles. Despite this order items linked to the robbery sometimes appear, such as the getaway lorry, plaques from the HVC and number plates from the locomotive. The Monopoly board and some other evidence is on display at the Thames Valley Police Museum.

The train crew who were overpowered by the robbers suffered badly as a result of their experiences. Jack Mills, the driver who was coshed, never returned to main line work and his career and life were ruined. David Whitby, his assistant on the train, was traumatised by his track-side assault and subsequent rough treatment and never recovered from his ordeal. He did resume his job but died 8 years later aged just 34. Crewe, with its considerable railway heritage, has remembered the two men by naming roads in their honour and there is also a plaque in their memory at Crewe railway station. A locomotive was named “Driver Jack Mills” in December 2014.

The locomotive involved in the robbery (no 326, later renumbered 40-126) was scrapped under police supervision in 1984. After the robbery it was involved in 3 fatal accidents and was considered to be jinxed!

Chris Yates proposed a vote of thanks to Ian for his excellent talk, with many humorous anecdotes, and members showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

Chris Yates

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The first head of state to be assassinated by a Firearm was in 1570, when James Stewart 1st Earl of Moray, Regent of King James VI of Scotland's was shot whilst in the street, by James Hamilton (Allegedly) using an early flintlock gun.



COCAINE

Realising early on in life that it was “Nasty, Brutish and Short”, *Homo Sapiens* sought ways of alleviating their misery by taking substances that eased their grip on reality. The preferred option by South Americans was chewing on the leaves of the *Coca* plant.

Though this habit is said to be thousands of years old, the first documented use comes from the mummified corpses of Inca children, who in 1400's were made high before being sacrificed to the gods.

In the following century, Spanish invaders not only partook in the drug but made money by taxing it.

Its first advocacy for medical purposes- specifically for healing rotten wounds came shortly afterwards.

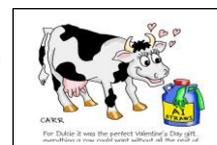
In 1855, German chemist Frederick Gaedcke isolated the effective alkaloid. Another German, Albert Niemann, came up with the name “Cocaine” (from the coca plant) when working on the alkaloid for his PhD in 1860.

Before long the substance was everywhere: in cigarettes and in the original recipe for Coca Cola.

Due to its highly addictive properties, in 1931 the drug received its first International ban at the Paris Convention for Limiting the Manufacturing and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs.

THOUGHT FOR TODAY – and tomorrow

Please remember that when Artificial Intelligence (AI) is tipped as the answer to everything, it also stands or Artificial Insemination.



**Notice on Care Home
noticeboard**

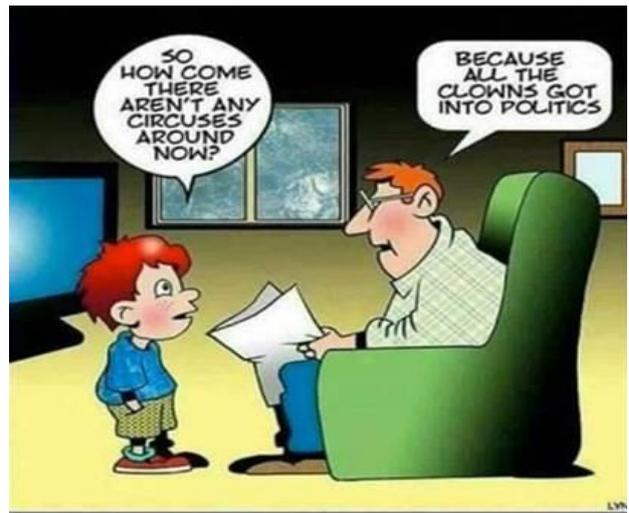
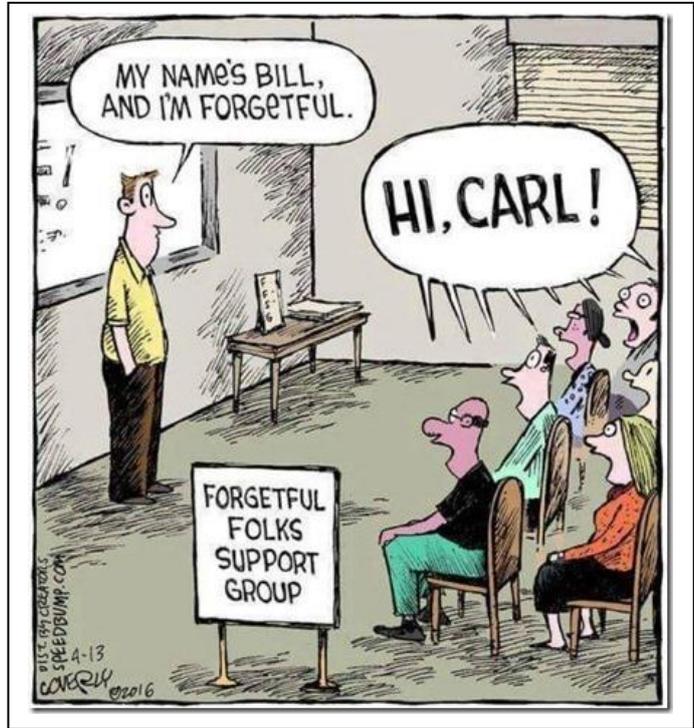
Until further notice days of the week are now called:

Thisday, thatday, tutherday,
someday, yesterday, today and
nextday



I asked my daughter to pass me the phonebook, she called me a Dinosaur and passed me her iPhone. The spider is now dead but her iPhone is broken and my daughter is furious!

It was only a matter of time, first hybrids then electric and now vegan.





Psychotherapy

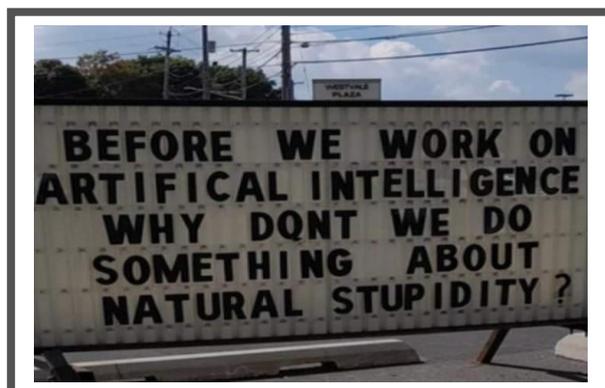
How to Maintain a Healthy Level of Insanity in Senior living.

- At lunch time, sit in your parked car with sunglasses on, point a hair dryer at passing cars and watch them slow down!
- Skip down the street rather than walk, and see how many looks you get.
- With a serious face, order a Diet Water whenever you go out to eat
- Sing along at The Opera.
- When the money comes out of the ATM, scream 'I Won! I Won!'
- When leaving the Zoo, start running towards the car park, yelling, 'Run For Your Lives! They're Loose!'
- Pick up a box of condoms at the pharmacy, go to the counter and ask where the fitting room is.

And The Final Way To Keep A Healthy Level Of Insanity: My Favourite...

Go to a Department store's fitting room, drop your pants to your ankles and yell out, "There's no paper in here!"

Pre internet chat room using
An old version of windows...





STAYING SAFE AT THE BEACH AND NEAR WATER



3 in 5 people will head to the beach this summer but taking some basic precautions can ensure it is a pleasurable event.

190 people die each year around the coast of the UK. - **40%** of them never intended to go into the water. **60%** die within the first few minutes.

50% of the people who die at the beach, slipped, fell or were swept into the water

The RNLI carried out over **200** rescues last year to people cut off by the tide, mostly were people taking part in Coastal Walking.

When visiting the beach, always try to visit a Lifeguarded beach.

Check the tide times. Never use an inflatable when there is an offshore wind.

Take care when Paddle Boarding as you can easily be swept out to sea.

Staying safe at the beach is crucial to ensure a fun and relaxing experience without unexpected incidents.

1. Swim in Designated Areas: Always swim in areas supervised by lifeguards. These zones are monitored for safety, and lifeguards can provide immediate assistance if needed.

2. Understand the Water: Be aware of the sea conditions, such as rip currents, tides, and waves. Rip currents can quickly pull swimmers away from shore; if caught in one, remain calm, swim parallel to the shore, and then swim back to land.

3. Stay Hydrated and Protected: The sun can be intense at the beach, leading to dehydration and sunburn. Drink plenty of water throughout the day and apply sunscreen with a high rating. Reapply sunscreen every two hours and after swimming. Wearing a hat, sunglasses, and protective clothing can also help shield you from harmful UV rays.

4. Mind the Marine Life: Be cautious of jellyfish. If stung by a jellyfish, rinse the area with vinegar or saltwater and seek medical attention if necessary.

5. Watch for Weather Changes: Sudden changes in weather can lead to dangerous conditions. Pay attention to weather forecasts and heed warnings from lifeguards. If you hear thunder or see lightning, leave the water immediately and find shelter.

7. Avoid Alcohol: Drinking alcohol impairs judgment, balance, and coordination, which are crucial for swimming and dealing with unexpected situations in the water. Save alcoholic beverages for after your swim.

By following these guidelines, you can enjoy a safe and pleasant day at the beach, making the most of your time in the sun and surf



Anyone can drown,
no one should.

ALWAYS SWIM AT A LIFEGUARDED BEACH

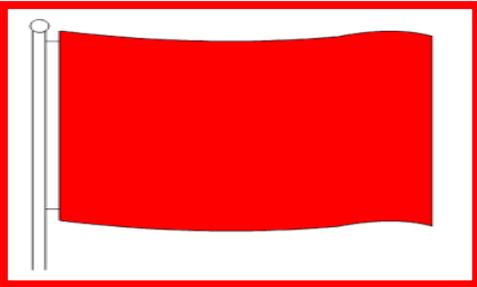
KNOW YOUR FLAGS



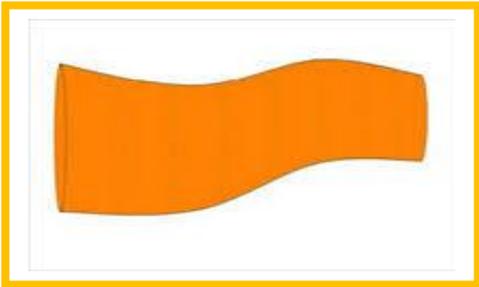
SAFE AREA TO SWIM



SURFING AND OTHER WATER SPORTS ONLY



DANGER - DO NOT ENTER THE WATER



STRONG WIND - DO NOT USE INFLATABLES

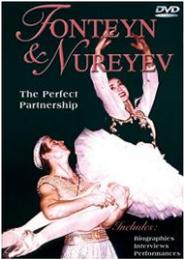


BEACH SAFETY 1950'S

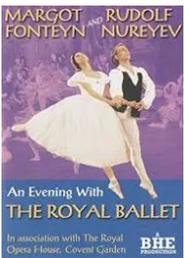


BEACH SAFETY 2024

TOO MUCH STUFF SALE



DVD: An Evening with the Royal Ballet
Excerpts from four ballets danced by Fonteyn & Nureyev (85mins)



DVD: Fonteyn & Nureyev
Excerpts from Ballets, plus profiles, interviews etc (100mins)

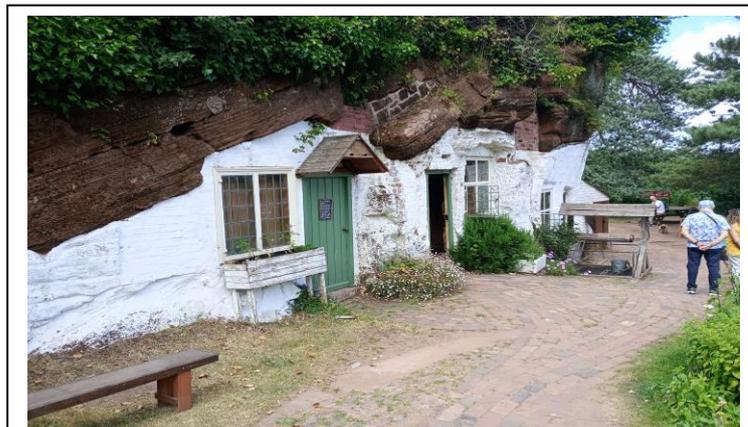


DVD: Winter Dreams
Full length ballet by Kenneth McMillan with Darcy Bussell
Profile of McMillan with many excerpts from his ballets (123mins)

Interested? Please contact Peter Hines: phah024@hotmail.com
Mobile: 07561 023699
Peter asks for a donation to the club £10

PICTURE QUIZ

Where am I ?



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



To the best of the Editors knowledge, images used
are not subject to any copyright issues.