



# PROBUS



# RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM, DORSET  
[www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk](http://www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

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## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES – Roger Lester

As many of you know, Susan & I enjoy cruising. We had booked our current cruise in January 2021 - and it was to take place this August on the P&O Aurora to Iceland & the Norwegian Fjords.

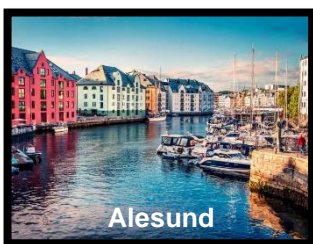
Our first stop was at Kirkwall, Orkney Islands. We did a ship's tour there, which took in the Italian Chapel built by prisoners of war and very impressive it was. We also took in the Churchill barriers built to keep U-boats out of Scapa Flow, an RN anchorage at the time, after the disaster of HMS Royal Oak sunk with the loss of 835 men & boys. The roads that join a few of the islands are across these barriers. Having never been there before, we were very impressed with the way of life etc.



Next stop was Reykjavik where we had an overnight break; we'd been here before so there were not a lot of new things to see. Our next stop was Akureyri, a very pleasant town with a Lutheran church on a steep hill with pleasant temperate gardens further up the hill and a good view.

The next day I had a 'cold & cough' & had to report it, as we were duty bound to do. A nurse in protective kit came and tested me & Susan at 0930. Half an hour later we were confined to our balcony cabin with Covid for 6 days with meals delivered on trays! No-one was allowed in or out. It could have been a lot worse, an inside cabin for instance.

So, we missed the North Cape which we had been looking forward to (booked the trip a year previously) plus Alta, Tromso & Leknes. Testing day arrived and we were tested at 0800; at 1100 we were given the all clear and immediately left the cabin (prison). Unfortunately, the port that day was Kristiansund which had to be aborted due to high winds - so no shore leave! As we were travelling with 4 friends, we made a beeline to the coffee lounge where we knew they'd be, and walked up to them with happy smiling faces, quoting 'freedom at least'. They didn't get Covid on the voyage, but they had had it a few months before.



The rest of the cruise was great, with visits to Alesund and Haugesund. After all of that we arrived home safely and on time. Thank you, P&O!



## WELFARE & SOCIAL

### Welfare Report – Roger Ellis

I am sure you will all appreciate that undertaking the welfare role sometimes places me in a difficult position. We have a number of members who have not been to meetings recently, and while I know the reasons for these absences, it will be appreciated that I have been asked not to divulge this information - for a variety of reasons.

Those of you who have been present at recent meetings will be aware of our concern regarding Chas Allberry. I understand from Ron Walker and from Chas’s wife Christine, that he is shortly to return home from a short stay in hospital, but that assistance at home will be available on a permanent basis.

### Social – Lunches - Roger Ellis

On a lighter note, we have a lunch at **Hill Brush on 26th of September**, and I am about to call in and see **The Walnut Tree** in Mere to book a lunch there on **Tuesday 18th October**.

We have a **Christmas Lunch on Tuesday 29th November** and several members have suggested I enquire of the Royal Chase Hotel to find out whether they would be able to accommodate us on that date. If they cannot help, then there is always the drive-through McDonalds at Wincanton. We all have cars, and I’m sure the staff there would find my red trainers very tasteful!



### Future Club Events - Editor

<b>Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September</b>	<b>Talk</b> - ‘ <i>The Falkland Islands</i> ’ by Beverley Verwoert *Wives/Partners Invitation Day.
<b>Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> September</b>	<b>Talk</b> – ‘ <i>Grandma flew Spitfires</i> ’ by John Webster <b>Lunch</b> – Hill Brush Factory
<b>Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Talk</b> – ‘ <i>Royal Shenanigans in the Georgian Era</i> ’ by Mike Rendell



## REPORTS ON OUR JULY/AUGUST TALKS

### ‘Vietnam Venture’

*Mike Spencer – 26<sup>th</sup> July 2022*

In 2014 Mike Spencer joined a sponsored five-day 50-mile trek to northern Vietnam; this was organised for **St Margaret’s Hospice** to raise funds for the continued operation of that charity.

The group stayed in local village accommodation, including a stilt house with very basic facilities. Mike’s talk with photographs, showed the varied scenery of this part of Vietnam, the local dress of the villagers at work in the local rice paddy fields, and the beast of choice, the water buffalo.



The photographic record of the venture included – apart from the rural trek – the chaotic scenes in Hanoi of cars, motor bikes, overburdened cycles and people coming from all directions – certainly not complying with the highway code rules we are used to in the UK! Health and safety did not feature in the photographs of workers working amidst the jumble of electric cables strung overhead.

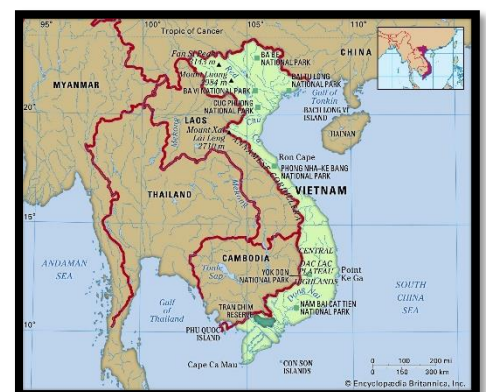


The Vietnamese are a nation of early risers, and early morning exercise of fan dancing, ballroom dancing, playing table tennis and other activities are a common sight, and a regular ritual for many.

Over the course of the trek, after leaving the city of Hanoi, the group walked in country with limestone hills, terraced paddy fields, palm trees and banana trees. They sampled fish cooked in bamboo and other dishes; and were actually invited to attend a local wedding celebration, sampling the rice wine.

When the walk had been completed, the group helped for two days at a government run facility run for disabled and disadvantaged people near Hanoi. Mike Spencer worked on clearing and levelling ground used as a rubbish tip, so that a drying shed could be erected, and then helped to prepare ground for planting. A total of about £50,000 was raised by the group in sponsorship for St Margaret’s Hospice.

At the start of his talk, Mike gave us a little information about the country of Vietnam. This socialist republic is a long, narrow, country in southeast Asia. It borders China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, and the South China Sea to the east, and it has a population of about 96 million. Hanoi, in the north, is the capital; with Ho Chi Min City (Saigon) in the south being the largest city. Vietnam has a violent history, with the Vietnam War (known locally as the American war) being the last in a long line of conflict and external control.



Previously under Chinese influence, the French colonised the country in 1887. There was prolonged warfare in the 20th century, and after WW11 in 1945,

the French reclaimed colonial power, leading to the First Indo China War. The Vietnamese under Ho Chi Min were victorious in 1954. The country was then divided, with the communist north supported by the Soviet Union and China, and the south supported by the USA, leading to the Vietnam war.



The war ended in 1975, with the Communists the victors, and the country was reunified in 1976. Now, the country has a fast-growing market economy. A lot of coffee is grown, in addition to the traditional rice crop; as a result, there has been substantial land clearance. The Viet ethnic group forms about 85% of the population, but there are 54 ethnic groups making up the total. One of these recognised groups, mostly in the northwest region (where Mike's group trekked) is the Thai group (seen in the photo on the left).

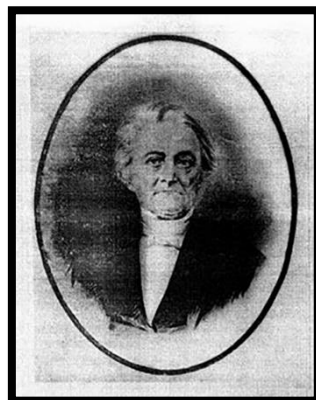
After numerous questions, The Chairman gave the vote of thanks.

*Report: Alan Jeffs*

## **SURVIVING NAPOLEON – The Clockmaker's Tale**

***John Baxter, 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022***

*John Baxter, a graduate of Rhodes, Oxford and Bristol universities, has worked as a teacher, writer and photographer. He lives with his wife Elizabeth in Wincanton and is an active member of Wincanton Museum and History Society and Bruton Art Society.*

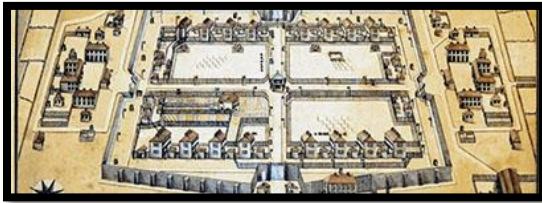


After two years of research on the life and times of **Alberto Bioletti**, a Napoleonic Soldier and Master Clockmaker of Wincanton, author John Baxter decided the best way to bring Bioletti and his amazing story to life was to write what he refers to as being a 'novelized history in the first person as if it were an autobiography'. John's aim was to make the book 'a good, gripping read with end notes and sources that assist readers to understand exactly what is historical and what is a literary creation'. (*The book, which retails at £10, is available from Papertrees Wincanton, Winstone's Sherborne and on [Amazon](#) - or directly from John Baxter, 2 Lifeguard Villas, South Street, Wincanton BA9 9DW.*)

Based on a careful piece of research by family archivist Phil Stevens, John dug deeper to find out what lay beyond the simple outline and list of dates Bioletti left behind. In doing so he brings the man and his story to life as he details the extraordinary times and experiences through which Bioletti lived; the characters who influenced him; and the moral, political and religious values and practices he encountered.

Coming from a Waldensian family (an ascetic movement within Western Christianity before the

Reformation), Bioletti was born and grew up in Turin, Northern Italy, where he was recruited as a teenager into the French Revolutionary Army. He took part in Napoleon's first victorious Italian campaign and then in the Egyptian campaign – which was a disaster. His survival of the latter could have been due to his having been appointed to the position of 'ordonnance' (an orderly officer considered to be a junior ADC<sup>1</sup>) to General Jacques Boye, whom he served under the most difficult of conditions in a third campaign in what is today Haiti. Defeated by the Haitians, the French surrendered to the British to avoid being massacred.



Norman Cross PoW Camp

Bioletti was taken to England's first Prisoner of War Camp at Norman Cross near Peterborough before being moved to another camp at Wincanton. In total he spent seven years as a prisoner of war in England during which time he met, fell in love with and married Mary Feltham who lived in Wincanton.



The Blockhouse, Norman Cross

In 1811, following a prisoner exchange, Bioletti returned to Paris (still as an 'ordonnance' to Boye) with his wife and two children. He then took part in the Russian campaign where he and Boye were again taken prisoner and survived an appalling march across Russia from Berezina to Kazan in freezing conditions. They were eventually saved and then released by a member of the Tolstoy family.

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Somehow Bioletti managed to return to Paris where he re-joined Mary and his family who were waiting for him. After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, he finally brought his family back to England to settle in Wincanton. Arriving penniless in 1816, he worked first as a barber before establishing himself as a master clock and barometer maker, the head of a large family and a highly respected and valued member of the community. Alberto eventually moved to Portsmouth by rail in April 1861, and died there on 14th March 1869, aged 91.

John Baxter finished by showing examples of some of his clock and watchmaking work, explaining that some are still linked to the Bioletti family, through descendants in New Zealand and in Dublin, and with others living in Brighton.

*Report: Paul Hooley*

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia – [see Napoleon's Military Household](#).

## ‘Origins of the Internet – Part II’

*Peter Mason – 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2022*

Peter Mason’s initial talk (Part I) to the Club last February told us how the use of computers as a means of communication had evolved and developed, leading to the invention of the Internet. This second talk continued the theme, showing how increased processing speed and capacity following the invention of the modem, the router and web servers, the use of the internet and miniaturization, has vastly increased the capabilities of computerised systems and their uses. The introduction of broadband has enabled the simultaneous use of data.

In this wonderful, computerised world what could possibly go wrong? Quite a lot, actually. Network failure, server failure, power failure, and – increasingly – cyberattacks and cybercrime.

Peter Mason spoke about more common examples of Cybercrime, which is a crime that involves a computer and a network. The computer may have been used in the commission of a crime, or it may be the target. Peter listed some of the sorts of cybercrime:

- **Hacking** – An act committed by an intruder by accessing a computer system without permission, such as breaking into systems to steal personal data, for example banking information; or to steal confidential commercial or military details.
- **Denial of service Attack** – An explicit attempt by attackers to deny users access to the service they require, typically by flooding systems with data to cause them to crash.
- **Virus Dissemination** – Computer viruses are computer programs that infect a system of files, and often are able to spread to other computers; they disrupt and corrupt stored data.
- **Software Piracy** – The unauthorised use and distribution of computer software; for example, loading unlicensed software on to a computer, thus denying revenue to the author of that software.
- **Manipulation of Video Evidence** – altering to apparently show (or not show) something which has happened, for fraudulent purposes.
- **Credit and debit Card Fraud** – Stealing identity to access financial resources.
- **Spoofing** – An attack to trick computer users into thinking a message came from a person they know or can trust.

These are some of the common sorts of cybercrime. There are various measures that can be employed to reduce the risk of cybercrime succeeding, including the use of anti-virus security packages, regular software updates, the use of strong passwords, and two-factor identification.

The uses of the internet have now encompassed what is known as ‘the internet of things’ (IoT) - Network-enabled devices, such as ‘smart’ devices (e.g. refrigerators and thermostats), and smart speaker devices, like Google Home. A likely next step will be the increased use of personal computer implants into individual humans.

As with Peter’s previous talk, it was followed by plenty of questions from members; Peter Grange gave the vote of thanks.

*Report: Alan Jeffs*



## **ENDPIECE – Editor**

### **Gillingham Car Link**



Gillingham Car Link is a charity set up to provide transport to enable the people of Gillingham and surrounding villages to get to all the facilities available to them. The Link provides transport to enable people who live in the SP8 area to get where they need to go, with **volunteer** drivers using their own cars to do this.

The organisation is currently running a campaign to **recruit new volunteer drivers**. Demand for their service continues to grow and they desperately need more drivers to be able to help our community. They ask:

- ***Might you be interested?***
- ***Do you enjoy driving, meeting and helping people?***

Gillingham Car Link drivers use their own cars to take people in the SP8 area who have no transport to hospital and to other medical appointments.

Drivers receive 45p a mile expenses. Drivers decide which journeys they are prepared to undertake - and can limit their availability to only a few sessions a week.

If you live in or near the SP8 area, are **under 80**, have a car, and enjoy meeting people, please contact **Philip** on 01747 824645 or email [walkerphilsu@gmail.com](mailto:walkerphilsu@gmail.com).

More detailed information is available on the [Gillingham Car Link Scheme](#) website.

***and finally .....***



Our determined Club biker **Dave Hooker** has now emerged from his garage, and his wife Pam tells me that she has even allowed herself to ride pillion with him – and survived the experience unscathed and unbowed! Well done Dave - now for the Dakar Rally!!

### A Poem for Computer Nerds

The computer has swallowed Grandpa.

Yes – honestly, it's true!  
He pressed 'Control' and 'Enter'  
And disappeared from view.

It devoured him completely,  
The thought just made me squirm.  
He must have caught a virus  
Or been eaten by a worm.

I've searched through the recycle bin,  
And files of every kind;  
I've even used the Internet,  
But nothing did I find.

In desperation, I asked 'Jeeves'  
My searches to refine.  
The reply from him was negative  
Not a thing was found 'online'.

So if inside your 'inbox'  
My Grandpa you should see,  
Please 'copy, scan' and 'paste' him.  
And send him back to me.

*This is a tribute to Grandpa, who was fearless in using his computer and keeping in touch with us all; from Anya, Barney, Ella and Alex; Fiona, Paul, Charlotte and Ted; Ed, Amanda, Lily and Henry; Will, Polly, Dotty and Bruce.*