



PROBUS RECORDER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM, DORSET
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

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From
Secretary
to Chairman →
– what 6 months has
managed to do!!



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES – Colin Chamberlain

As usual I will start with the welcome "*Good Morning Team*", which to those of you who have recently joined is a phrase I have used ever since I became Secretary (and that I also used when greeting my staff every morning in the days that I ran a business).

As your new Chairman I find it difficult to write these notes, but having reviewed what past Chairman wrote I find it is usual to thank all the new Committee members, who I hope will help me through the coming year - including Ron Walker who has returned to organise Lunches, John Owen who has taken over Welfare, Andrew Tinsley who is my new Vice Chairman, and not forgetting Roger Ellis my new Secretary (and long term verbal sparring partner!).

It also seems customary for the Chairman to impart some words of wisdom dragged from his recent experiences, so here goes....

"IT DOES PAY TO COMPLAIN".

As many of you will know, at the end of April Enid and I took a long-awaited River Cruise on the Rhone river in the south of France. We paid for the cruise back in 2018 but, due to the boat breaking down and then the Pandemic, we were unable to take it in 2019. However, using the funds that the company 'held' for us, were able to renegotiate a deal for 2023 - which left us a small amount in Credit. At the time of booking we were given to understand that we would be allowed to use this credit on board.

When we eventually checked on board expecting to be able to use the credit as we had been told, we were told by the crew that the only way they knew for using our credit was to book a future cruise with the Company and offset it against the cost. We were in Catch-22!

However, as the crew on the boat were unclear on the matter, they emailed the Company from the boat and received back a message which not only didn't clarify the position but

accused us - the paying passengers – of "Trying our Luck". Unfortunately for them I was given a copy of the Company's reply (including the slur), and so on our return I emailed the Company and complained that the way they had treated this simple enquiry was both unprofessional and quite rude.

The message I received in return not only agreed with me, but also agreed to pay back the credit - **and** offered a large incentive off another cruise, which would be valid for 2 years. "They Wish!" It was not the money which was the problem, but the principle of the thing that grated with us.

Now for the future.

- Summer BBQ. You will have received my message regarding the Summer Barbeque on the **Tuesday 15th August** at the Rugby Club which, due to the factors I mentioned in the email, is a "*No Brainer*".
- Christmas Dinner. I would also like to remind you that I have booked the Grange at Osborne for our Christmas Dinner on **Wednesday 13th December**, the day after the last meeting of the year.

A couple of gentle reminders please.

- All members please note that Subscriptions are now due.
- For our new Honorary member - Phil Butler - his badge has now arrived.

And finally, have you noticed that when you cut your grass, even with the blade set as low as possible, that both daisies and dandelions have the ability to duck under the cut and spring up again to mock your efforts of a perfect lawn!

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare – John Owen

Firstly, thank you to Roger Ellis for the excellent work as Welfare officer over these recent times, I only hope that I will be as thorough. As you will appreciate, the Welfare officer can only do his job with the support of the members, helping him to keep up to date with fellow members' situations, so please pass on any relevant information. I will do my best to keep us all aware, but obviously this will be sensitive to each member's wishes.

We send our best wishes to Peter Bonson for his recovery, as well as to Jeffrey Hall who has started his 6-month course of chemotherapy. Jeffrey is staying with his daughter five days a week while having his chemo.

Finally on a lighter note I hope to return to the halcyon days of having a Welfare officer who tries to amuse the members with a joke or two, so here goes

- My wife shouted "*And you never listen to a word I say!*" I thought, that's a funny way to start a conversation!
- My wife said "*There are two things I hate about you. You never listen to a word I say*", and I forget the rest!

Social - Future Club Events in June - Editor

13 th June 2023	<i>The Peenemunde Raid</i> <i>17/18 August 1943</i> John Smith
27 th June 2023	<i>‘Little Old Wine Drinker’</i> Chris Walker Wives/Partners Invitation Day Plus Lunch – <u>The Crown Inn, East Stour</u>



REPORTS ON OUR MAY TALKS

‘The Countryside Regeneration Trust’

Elaine Spencer-White

2nd May 2023



Elaine Spencer-White lives in Marnhull and had a career in farm administration both in the UK and abroad. Elaine’s support for the CRT combines her professional experience with a personal concern for nature and wildlife. She spoke to us about the Countryside Regeneration Trust, its origins and work, and specifically about Bere Marsh Farm, a CRT property near Shillingstone in Dorset.



The [Countryside Regeneration Trust](#) (CRT) was founded in 1993 by artist and wildlife author Gordon Beningfield, and Telegraph countryside journalist, Robin Page. They recognised the damage caused by intensive farming methods using soil-compacting heavy machinery and



Bere Marsh Farmland

pesticides, and established the Trust to protect land from this, realising that nature and wildlife are integral to good farming. Strategies are aimed at encouraging the return of native and declining species, changing farm practices so the land can conserve and introduce wildlife habitats. The CRT, through a combination of legacies and purchases, now owns 19 properties in various parts of the country (including two in Dorset), covering some 2,000 acres of small farms, smallholdings, and woodland, with its headquarters in Comberton, Cambridgeshire.

Bere Marsh Farm was purchased in 2020 during the Covid Pandemic; Elaine Spencer-White now manages the restoration of the farm. The farm was originally bought in 1971 by the late Angela Hughes, one of the founders of Dorset Wildlife Trust, to farm in a way sympathetic to wildlife and nature conservation, so it is fitting that CRT purchased the property. The farm has the North Dorset Trailway running on one side (part of the old Somerset and Dorset Railway), and the river Stour forms the boundary on the other. At the far end, the Ham Down burial ground is a two-acre plot reserved for natural burials, and is being gradually planted with native trees in memory of those buried there; these include lime, oak, hornbeam, whitebeam and silver birch.

Elaine explained how much work is going on to regenerate the farm using a team of dedicated volunteers. A nature reserve area has been created at the farm on a section of the former railway, and this is named in honour of Angela Hughes; this can be visited by prior appointment.

87 species of birds have so far been recorded on the farm; the river is well stocked with fish, including roach, perch and dace. Otters, as elusive as ever, are present on the river, having been introduced in 1990. The farm has bee-friendly corridors (part of the [Blackmore Vale beeWayzz project](#)). In addition, a Victorian barn by the Trailway is now home to a breeding pair of barn owls, and the barn has been re-roofed following a £30k fundraising effort.

A team of volunteers has cleared and expanded the pond to create a thriving wildlife area, and there has been replacement tree and hedge planting with native species. In an effort to encourage small mammals and invertebrates, three Oxford Sandy and Black Pigs have recently been brought in to break up the soil on one area of land for six months (tended by the volunteer pig team) in order to help a wider range of plant species to establish themselves, and this will not be grazed for five years. Some of the farm buildings have also been converted to provide rental income. A weekend pop-up coffee trailer has recently opened, sited to encourage users of the trailway to use it, again run by volunteers. Various arts and craft courses and other events are held at the farm each year.



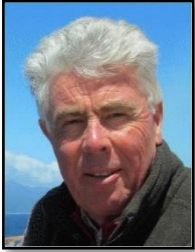
As a longer-term project, it is also planned to allow some of the land next to the river to be flooded to create a water meadow. There is a relationship with the local primary schools for educational visits.

The chairman gave the vote of thanks for the interesting talk, and members showed their appreciation in the usual way. Leaflets etc about the trust were available.

Report: Alan Jeffs

‘The Beauty and Romance of France.’

Christopher LeGrand - 16 May 2023



Christopher LeGrand lives in Dorset; he is an accomplished speaker and presents a number of illustrated talks about a variety of the countries and cities he has visited with his wife Rosemary. This presentation included exploring some of the historic towns and countryside areas of France and some notable chateaux. Unfortunately, the music and romantic songs which normally add to the atmosphere and accompany the illustrated presentation could not be played due to equipment malfunction.

Christopher began his illustrated talk with photographs of cave paintings of wild animals in the Dordogne area of France, painted by the first members of Homo Sapiens to settle in Europe and are some 12,000 years old. This was followed by views of a number of the chateaux visited by Christopher and his wife.

The area of the Dordogne, located in south western France, is named after the river Dordogne, which flows through the region; a confluence of the Dordogne is the Garonne River, which winds its way through the wine-rich lands surrounding Bordeaux.



The Chateau de Marqueyssac, a 17th century chateau and gardens in the Dordogne Department, is a fine example of the notable gardens of France. The Chateau des Milandes, again in that region, was the home of the American Josephine Baker a heroine of the French Resistance in WW11 in the latter part of her life.



Moving further north, the illustrations moved up to Rouen, a city in northern France, where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake in 1431, and to the French capital, Paris.

The presentation also included views of the garden painted frequently by the artist Claude Monet.

The illustrated talk gave us a flavour of the beautiful buildings, history, and countryside of France. The chairman gave the vote of thanks.

Report: Alan Jeffs

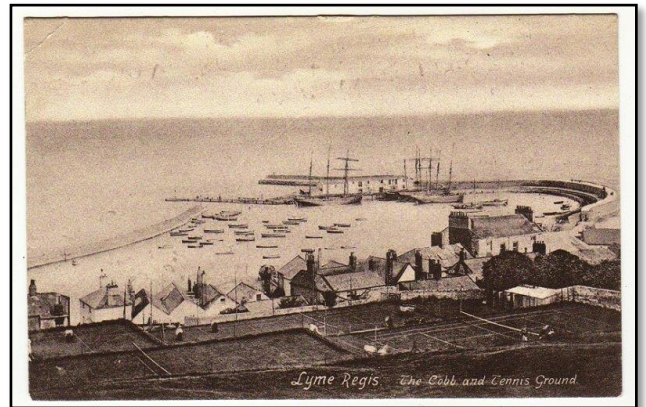
'The West Dorset Coast'

Mike Spencer - 30 May 2023

Mike Spencer has given a number of talks to the Club over the years. This time he told us about the villages and towns on the west coast of Dorset, stretching from Lyme Regis to Abbotsbury. This is part of what is now known as the Jurassic Coast and is now designated as a World Heritage site. It stretches from Exmouth in East Devon to Studland Bay in Dorset. Spanning 185 million years of geological history, landslips and erosion have revealed fossilised remains of creatures long extinct.

Back in the 13th Century, Lyme Regis had developed as one of the major British ports. It was here that the Duke of Monmouth landed at the start of what became known as the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685, and the famous Cobb forms the harbour wall.

The small museum in the town has much information about Mary Anning (1799-1847), a poor local girl; she was a daughter of a cabinet maker and carpenter, who through her shell and fossil collecting, which she sold to tourists to supplement the family income, explored the coastline round the town.



Rock falls and erosion revealed fossilised remains of sea creatures which Mary discovered: these included parts of the skeleton, which she subsequently uncovered, of the first correctly identified *ichthyosaur*, now kept in the London Natural History Museum. Another contemporary of Mary Anning was William Buckland, geologist and palaeontologist, and later Dean of Westminster; he was an eccentric with a particular interest in what he termed

coprolites (fossilised dinosaur faeces) which had been observed by Mary.

Among the many rock falls and land slips along this stretch of coast, the landslip of 1839 is probably the most significant, when acres of farmland slipped down towards the sea, including a cottage which remained standing, but much lower down from its original position!

During WWI the pre-Dreadnaught class battleship [HMS Formidable](#) was struck on 1st January 1915 by a torpedo from a German submarine and eventually sunk some 30 miles off Lyme Regis. Some of the survivors and several bodies were landed in the town, and the landlord of the Pilot Boat Hotel opened it up to receive them. One of these bodies was laid out having been considered dead, but was



subsequently revived by the landlord's dog 'Lassie'; Lassie was awarded a silver collar for this canine feat of humanity.

Moving east from Lyme Regis one comes to the nearby village of Charmouth, located at the mouth of the river Char. This is loved by fossil hunters, stemming from the continuation of soft rock that is still susceptible to landfalls. The Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre is based at a long disused cement factory on the foreshore. Used by sailors as day marks for navigation, Stonebarrow Hill and Black Venn are high points, as is the highest cliff on the south coast of England, Golden Cap. The National Trust also looks after much land in this area.



Approaching West Bay and Bridport is the small settlement of Eype (meaning 'steep place'), where the church is used for art exhibitions.

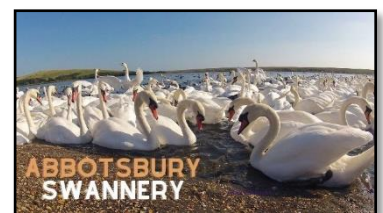
West Bay was originally known as Bridport harbour, at the mouth of the river Brit. The harbour itself is not a natural feature and has a history of becoming silted up and filled with shingle from Chesil beach, and of being damaged by storms. As a result, the harbour has been moved twice, the original move still being a mile inland. This was used to export Bridport's noted production of ropes and nets. The town of Bridport itself is a market town going back to Saxon times. Indeed the butcher's shop, 'R J Barson and Son', known as 'England's oldest family butchers', claims a continuous line of family butchers dating back to 1515!



About six miles southeast of Bridport is the small village of West Bexington, which provides access to Chesil Beach. The nature reserve is a coastal reserve of the Dorset Wildlife Trust, and is important due to the vegetated shingle habitat. One of the line of chalets here was noteworthy when it came up for sale due to the advertised high cost!



The final village covered in Mike Spencer's talk was the village of Abbotsbury, part of the Ilchester estate. Surviving buildings of the original abbey on the site include St Catherine's Chapel, on the hill outside the village. But Abbotsbury is probably best known for its sub-tropical gardens, and the world-famous swannery, sited on to the Fleet Lagoon. The swannery is the only managed colony of nesting mute swans in Britain; believed to date back to Benedictine times, the colony can number several hundred swans. Held in May each year, the



Abbotsbury Garland Day celebrations involve the making of garlands by children of the village.

Although many aspects of this talk would have been familiar to those present, we all learnt interesting new facts about this stretch of coast, and following questions, our Chairman gave the vote of thanks.

Report: Alan Jeffs



ENDPIECE — Editor

SOCKS

Definition: *A knitted garment for the foot and lower part of the leg.* (Oxford Dictionary)

No other item of clothing is as troublesome to the senior citizen as the sock. It would not be far-fetched to think that this sartorial creation was a cosmic joke aimed at those over sixty.

Socks look snug and feel soft, they offer warmth and comfort; they are seemingly the perfect companion for us in our old age. Do not be fooled. Socks don't just disappear in washing machines or inexplicably get lost somewhere between the tumble-dryer and our sock drawers. No, they are also set to taunt us as we grow older, so that attempting to put on a pair of these little blighters becomes an Olympic sport in itself.

The time will come in your life, it will almost certainly come, when the voice of God will thunder at you from a cloud, "*From this day forth thou shalt not be able to put on thine own socks.*"

To the young, to the middle-aged, even, this may seem a remote and improbable accident that only happens to other people. It has to be said, however, that the day will most probably dawn when your pale foot will wander through the air, incapable of hitting the narrow opening of a suspended sock. Those fortunate enough to live with families will call out for help. The situation is, in minor ways, humiliating and comical.

- JOHN MORTIMER, *THE SUMMER OF A DORMOUSE*

