



PROBUS



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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES – Colin Chamberlain

As there is nothing much to write about this past month's dismal weather, I will firstly mention that the Probus Club of Gillingham will be 40 years old in December this year, and we will be finding some way of celebrating this - probably at the Christmas Dinner. And then as well as this, the decision to hold the BBQ at the Rugby Club now gives us the option of an indoor venue should the weather continue to be as bad in August.

I will now continue with - PART 2 of 'IT DOES PAY TO COMPLAIN' (See Issue 221 – June 2023).



Back in November Enid and I decided we needed a new mattress and - with advice - purchased quite an expensive one from a well-known local Furniture Retailer. It was duly delivered and went straight onto the bed, but by the end of January one side wall was bulging by about 2"!

A phone call to the supplier resulted in the usual responses: "*Have you sat on it*", and "*Have you turned it as per the manufacturer's instructions?*" As we had been given no instructions, the second question was answered with "*we have never had instructions before when purchasing a mattress*" - while the first was laughed off, expecting the supplier to question whether we had actually lain on it.

Nevertheless, without too much discussion they agreed that the mattress would be replaced, which they did, and this time it came with manufacturer's instructions, "*rotate the mattress every week for a month and then every 3 months*". We carried out these instructions religiously despite the difficulties stemming from a very heavy mattress and a bed with a raised brass frame at the foot. By June the new mattress was again showing the same problem, and so a further phone call was made. Photos were taken and sent to the supplier, who contacted the manufacturer who was locally based in Westbury, and they agreed to change the mattress once more; and so in early July we went back to the Retailer, and with their help we chose a new mattress, this time from a different manufacturer - so far so good!

Throughout this time the Furniture Retailer never once suggested that any problem was down to us and could not be faulted in its customer service.

And finally - having a mixture of King, Double and Single beds in the house, don't you find it so annoying that manufacturers of fitted bottom sheets are happy to tell you on the label the various sizes of the different beds, but fail to tell you the size of the sheets you have just bought - leading to so much wasted time when it is time to change them. *a wearisome tale!*

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare – John Owen

Honorary member **David Bryan** is unfortunately still in hospital having broken his hip but is desperate to escape soon.

Good news for **Peter Bonson** and his family in that he is now home but somewhat housebound. He would welcome any visit or other communication.

Jeffrey Hall continues with his treatment and recently met up with the medical team to plan his future treatment. He remains active but is feeling tired at times.

Finally, **John Heap** and his wife are our latest victims of Covid, but after a few days coughing all is now well.

If anyone has any information that they think I need to be aware of, please don't hesitate to contact me.

In the meantime:

- *'Don't believe everything you see/read on Facebook'*
– William Shakespeare!
- If you wish to make your wife feel special, just put a sign in the kitchen saying, *'Employee of the month'*! She'll love it! Follow me for more relationship tips!
- Bob's wife shouted downstairs to her husband *"Bob, can you feel a pain in your neck?"* "No" shouted Bob. *"How about now?"*

Social - Future Club Events in August - Editor

8 th August 2023	<i>Flags of the World</i> Dick Taylor
15 th August 2023	<i>Probus of Gillingham Summer Barbecue</i>
22 nd August 2023	<i>The Golden Age of Glass</i> Francis Burroughes



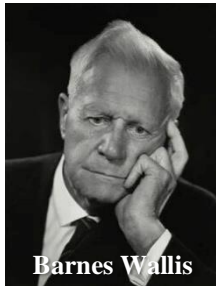
REPORTS ON OUR JULY TALKS

‘Barnes Wallis and the Dambusters.’

Colin Higgs

11th July 2023

The main interest of Gillingham resident Colin Higgs’ is the RAF, and particularly its service people, past and present. During the course of his career, Colin has been a producer, director and author. In 2013 - together with Bruce Vigor - he wrote a book on 617 Squadron RAF “The Dambusters”; this entailed interviewing many surviving members of the 1943 raid and recording their recollections. He realised the historical importance of recording the experiences of these people before it was too late, and as a memorial to those veterans. The book, published to mark the 70th anniversary of the Dambusters raid, records the personal reflections of those who had a part in contributing to the daring raid to bomb dams in the Ruhr valley in Germany, with the aim of disrupting German industrial production in WW11. 617 Squadron RAF, formed to carry out this mission, dropped the ‘bouncing bombs’ designed by Barnes Wallis (1887-1979).



Barnes Wallis

Barnes Wallis was an engineer and inventor. Originally trained as a marine engineer, he became an aircraft engineer with Vickers (later part of BAC). His early work on the R100 airship design was followed by design work on the fuselage and wing structures for various aircraft, including the Wellington bomber.



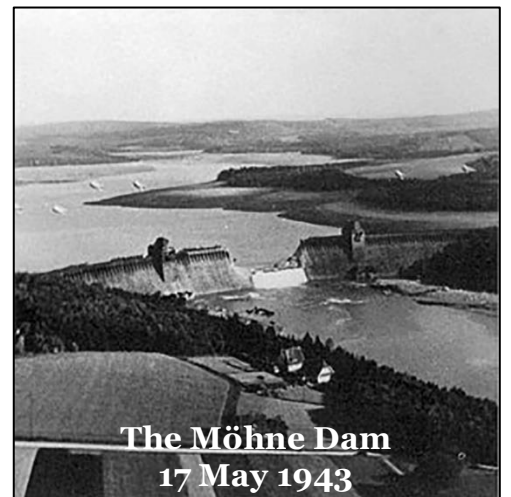
Wellington Bomber

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Wallis saw a need for strategic bombing using large bombs.

His 1942 paper suggested a spherical bomb to bounce across water until it struck its target, then sink to explode under water; he identified suitable targets – such as dams, and floating targets. This proposal underwent testing and development with the use of a modified Wellington bomber (Lancasters were subsequently used for training and for the actual raid).

617 Squadron was formed at RAF Scampton with sergeants as aircrew in March 1943. In addition to RAF British personnel, the squadron included Canadian, Australian and New Zealand servicemen; it was formed specifically for the mission (*Operation Chastise*) with the aim of bombing the dams that provided water to the Ruhr industrial region of Germany - the Möhne, Eder and Sorpe dams. Some of the training for very low flying took place over the dams of the Derwent valley in Derbyshire. The Squadron’s Commanding Officer at the time of the raid was Wing Commander Guy Gibson, a veteran of many bombing missions, who was awarded the VC following the operation.

The mission, comprising 133 men and 19 aircraft, was carried out on the night of 16/17 May 1943, using Lancaster

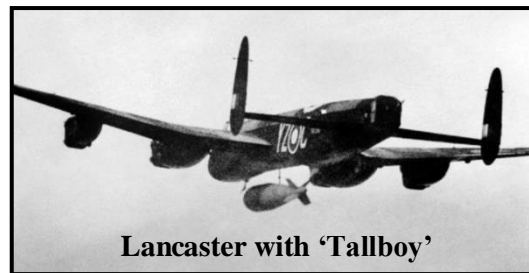


The Möhne Dam
17 May 1943

bombers. The outcome was that the Möhne and Eder dams were breached, causing flooding in the Ruhr valley; but the Sorpe dam only suffered minor damage and was not breached. An estimated 600 Germans and 1,000 slave labourers were killed by the flooding. This was in return for the loss of 56 RAF aircrew (53 dead and 3 captured), and the loss of 8 Lancaster aircraft.

Wallis carried on working on the heavy 12,000lb 'Tallboy' bomb, used by 617 Squadron on later precision raids. However, Wing Commander Guy Gibson was withdrawn as its Commanding Officer after Operation Chastise due to the high number of missions he had already completed. Wing Commander George Holden took over briefly until he was shot down and killed. After a brief temporary command by Wing Commander 'Mick' Martin, Wing Commander Leonard Cheshire VC OM DSO DFC¹ took over the squadron.

During his talk, Colin Higgs read a few personal recollections from veterans taken from his book.



Following questions, the Chairman gave the vote of thanks.

Report: Alan Jeffs

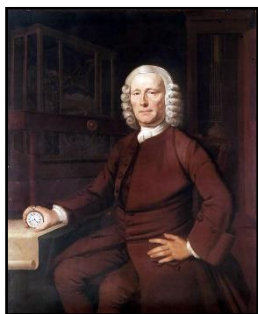
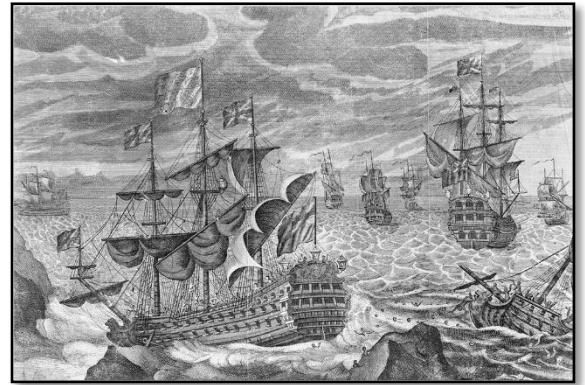
‘Solving the longitude problem.’

Mike Rendell – 25 July 2023

Mike Rendell told us about the difficulty that faced seafarers for hundreds of years of how to work out their ship's position at an east-west point on the surface of the Globe. This is opposed to latitude, which is the position north-south, and can be calculated by reference to the position of the sun at mid-day. In order to work out the position of a ship at sea, Navigators used 'dead reckoning' from a previously determined position using estimates of speed, heading and elapsed time. Due to lack of accurate information of ocean currents, wind speeds and direction, and of inaccurate calculation of time, mistakes led to vessels being hundreds of miles out from their assumed destination; this often led to ships crashing on to rocks and sinking with tragic loss of life.

¹ Leonard Cheshire was later to be one of the official British observers of the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki.

A notable catastrophe occurred in 1707, which led to the British government taking action to encourage the solving of the longitude problem. It happened when ships of the British fleet, returning from action against the French and commanded by Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovell, struck rocks off the Isles of Scilly due to inaccurate estimation of their position. In addition to the loss of ships, some 2,000 lives were lost. As a result, the government offered a reward of £20,000 to anyone who could come up with a solution to the longitude problem, under the Longitude Act of 1714. The outcome of this was the invention of the marine chronometer by John Harrison.



John Harrison (1693-1776) was a Yorkshireman, the son of a carpenter and furniture maker. Following his father's trade, he built and repaired clocks in his spare time; he built his first longcase clock, which had a wooden mechanism, at the age of twenty, followed by other examples. He worked to improve the accuracy and performance of pendulum clocks, and invented the gridiron pendulum, consisting of brass and iron rods to cancel out expansion, Harrison also invented the grasshopper escapement to control the movement of the cogwheels.

The need for a reliable and accurate measure of time at the point of reference (in Britain's case the Greenwich Meridian) had been addressed by others, and Harrison applied his mind to inventing an accurate timepiece that was not affected by variations in temperature, pressure or humidity, and his various designs and improvements took years of work. In 1730 he designed a clock to compete for the longitude prize and approached the Astronomer Royal Edmund Halley for support. His first 'sea clock' (known as H1) took several years to build; this was demonstrated to members of the Royal Society. The society spoke on his behalf to the Board of Longitude; this was considered worthy of a sea trial, which was only partially successful. However, the Board granted Harrison £500 for further development, which resulted in version H2. This second version was subsequently abandoned, and work began on a third version (H3), and a further grant of £500 was made. Work on H3 took 17 years, but this version still had problems due to some inaccuracies.



These early 'sea clocks' were relatively large, and Harrison decided that improved versions of pocket watches could be the answer, and designed and made a sea-going marine chronometer. Work on this version (H4), took several years, and the result was a large watch which could be used to find a ship's longitude position. In 1761 it was trialed on a voyage to Kingston, Jamaica.



By this time Harrison was 68 years old, and he sent his son on the voyage. The watch performed well, losing only seconds over the length of the voyage. The Board decided that because of this a further trial was required, and the prize of £20,000 was not awarded. £5,000 was offered, but Harrison refused it. An interim payment of £10,000 was made. By this time Harrison was working on a second 'sea watch' (H5) but he was so annoyed that he had not received the full prize money that he managed to obtain an audience with King George III. The king tested the watch himself and was so impressed that he advised Harrison to

petition Parliament to release the prize money. Parliament eventually awarded a further £8,750 but by this time the inventor was 80 years old and only lived another 3 years.

This was an interesting talk about a clever man who never gave up; his invention made a massive contribution to marine safety. The chairman gave the vote of thanks.

Report: Alan Jeffs



ENDPIECE – Editor

Insults in the English Language

Some insults from an era before the English language was boiled down to 4-letter words. Insults in those days had a little more class!

1. "I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play; Bring a friend - if you have one."
- *George Bernard Shaw to Winston Churchill.*
"Cannot possibly attend first night; I will attend the second ... If there is one."
- *Winston Churchill, in response.*
2. A member of Parliament to Disraeli:
"Sir, you will either die on the gallows, or of some unspeakable disease."
"That depends, Sir," *said Disraeli*, "whether I embrace your policies or your mistress."
3. "He had delusions of adequacy."
- *Walter Kerr* (American writer and theatre critic.)
4. "I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure."
- *Clarence Darrow* (American Lawyer)
5. "He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary."
- *William Faulkner* (about Ernest Hemingway).
6. "Thank you for sending me a copy of your book; I'll waste no time reading it."
- *Moses Hadas* (American classical scholar and teacher)
7. "I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it."
- *Mark Twain*
8. "He has no enemies but is intensely disliked by his friends."
- *Oscar Wilde*
9. "He is a self-made man and worships his creator."
- *Christopher Sylvester* (writing in the Guardian about Nigel Dempster.)
10. "I've just learned about his illness. Let's hope it's nothing trivial."
- *Irvin S. Cobb* (American author)

11. "He is not only dull himself; he is the cause of dullness in others."
- *Samuel Johnson*
12. "He is simply a shiver looking for a spine to run up."
- *Paul Keating* (former Australian PM)
13. "In order to avoid being called a flirt, she always yielded easily."
- *Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord* (Talleyrand: 1754–1838)
14. "Why do you sit there looking like an envelope without any address on it?"
- *Mark Twain*
15. "His mother should have thrown him away and kept the stork."
- *Mae West*
16. "Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go."
- *Oscar Wilde*
17. "He has Van Gogh's ear for music."
- *Billy Wilder*
18. "I've had a perfectly wonderful evening. But this wasn't it."
- *Groucho Marx.*