



PROBUS RECORDER



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

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March 2024

Chairman's Notes

Firstly I would like to thank the Recorder's Editor for making all my offerings over the last few months both grammatically correct - and possibly interesting, and for filling in for me when times were difficult. On the other hand, I know February is a short month and, even though this is a leap year with an extra day, it still seems like only yesterday that he was pushing me to pen something for last month's Recorder!

Unfortunately during the last two months we have attended two funerals, both held at Yeovil Crematorium, for long-term members of the Club, namely Tom Brain and Horace Erridge. These were well attended by Club members, and we learned much that was new to us of the lives of the departed. Who would have known of Tom's liking the sound of Spitfire engines, or of Horace playing the drums on a recording of 'The Moo Cow Blues'! It also appeared that Horace was the original forerunner of 'Billy Elliot' with his ballet and tap dancing when he was young.

Fortunately we have also managed to attract three new members this year, which I mentioned in the last Recorder - so we must be doing something right! Maybe it is the result of the quality of the invited speakers that Roger Lester appears to have found while on his recent cruises, and for which he is to be applauded. I only hope he does not want to be subsidised!

The lunch after the meeting on 20th February was held at the 'Old Brewery' and was well attended by 38 members, wives and partners. We also had the pleasure of seeing our Honorary Member Peter Marshall and his wife Rita, who had broken their journey back from London specially to attend the lunch. Our Lunch Organiser, Ron Walker, is to be congratulated on promoting this venue, and I understand it is now booked for the **Christmas lunch on 26th November 2024**.

In addition, the **Chairman's Christmas Dinner** will now be on **Thursday 12th December** at the Royal Chase Hotel in Shaftesbury - NOT on 10th December as stated in the membership book! The change is due to availability.

While on the subject of meals out, I also want to remind readers that this year's Probus **Barbeque** is to be held on **Tuesday 6th August** in place of the scheduled meeting on that day, and that it may include members of Yeovil Probus.

Finally, there are only 6 meetings to go until the Club AGM, and the Committee require new blood - in the form of a **'Scribe'** to replace Alan Jeffs, when I understand he intends to stand down from the task that he has undertaken so well over past years. We also need someone to take over as **Vice Chairman** (who could expect to become Chairman the following year). All other positions apart from next year's Chairman are up for a change should anyone wish to get involved with the running of the club. The appointments can be found on the website - 'Club Committee'.

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare – John Owen

It is pleasing to be able to say that there's not too much to pass on to you this month. However, there is always something - and this month a member who sadly we don't see much of currently, Graham Edgar, has recently had an operation on his prostate. Happily, the operation has been a success and Graham is now working on his fitness so as to get back on the golf course as soon as possible.

Ian McClellan has successfully 'passed' his pre-op assessment and, despite being in considerable pain, is stoically preparing for his hip operation in early April. We wish Ian the best of good fortune and hope to see him back amongst the fold by mid-summer.

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And now for some thoughts from Winnie the Pooh (specifically Eeyore)

1. Enjoy boredom ... It's all you've got to look forward to!
2. Life is a box of thistles ... and I've been dealt all the tough and prickly ones!
3. Things ... Can only get wetter!
4. Make first impressions count ...

'Who did you say it was?' asked Eeyore.

'Tigger' said Piglet.

'Ah' said Eeyore.

'He's just come.' said Piglet.

'Ah'. Said Eeyore again. He thought for a long time and then said. 'When is he going?'

Social - March Club Events - Editor

5 th March 2024	The Leprosy Mission <i>Gabby North</i>
19 th March 2024	From Scouse to Grouse - A Fighter Pilot's Story <i>Professor Sir Christopher Coville</i>
	Lunch <i>The Ship Inn, West Stour</i> <i>(1230 for 1pm)</i>



OUR FEBRUARY TALKS

‘Tales of a Roving Reporter

Alan Jones – 6th February 2024



[Alan Jones](#) gives a number of different talks to different groups. The one that he gave us is one of his most popular, being a series of anecdotes from his travels along the south coast during his broadcasting career.

Alan began by explaining that after leaving school, he had enrolled in a journalism course which comprised two topics: broadcasting on radio and television and in the printed word - i.e. newspapers and magazines. Printed journalism seemed to offer more job opportunities, but he started with broadcasting. In those days, only the BBC offered any career opportunities. Therefore, he applied and was interviewed by the infamous and overbearing BBC Committee, consisting of the chairman and twelve members. He was taken on and was offered a place in radio rather than in television, which he was hoping for. As he lived in the New Forest, he could be based anywhere from Kent to Cornwall. Fortunately, his area would be Dorset, Hampshire and West Sussex. He was supplied with a mobile transmitting/studio vehicle and portable recording equipment.

On his first trip, he stopped to extend its tall radio aerial from the van, and a passerby said to him that he was just on his way to the post office to buy his TV licence (assuming that Alan was a licence enforcement officer)! Alan soon learnt that when using a microphone anything can go disastrously wrong

Another story took him to Portsmouth Cathedral, a twentieth century building that was left unfinished due to WWII. When an extension to complete the building was planned, a ceremony was organised to mark the start of the new works. Alan was assigned to interview the Bishop at the top of the building where some symbolic demolition would be carried out, along with a brass band playing, and an invited guest. Alan was all ready to do the interview with his tape recorder and microphone to hand. As the Bishop climbed the scaffolding the great height caused him to panic, and he immediately rushed to get down again. The interview was being broadcast live on local radio at the very moment the bishop did this, and as a result Alan only managed to carry out a breathless interview whilst clambering down alongside the Bishop!



Another assignment in Poole at a Blue Flag Beach Award ceremony had the Mayor's comely daughter in a swimsuit landing from a boat onto the beach accompanied by a troop of Royal Marines - with explosions going off and a choir singing under the flag pole – what could go wrong! Alan always wore ear-plugs so that he could hear his producer in one ear and his radio controller in the other ear. As it was, the ceremony went off as planned - but the radio station was not ready to receive Alan's interview. Alan found himself running up the beach with the Mayor's daughter accompanied by the pack of Marines, while still waiting to be allowed by his controllers to make the news report. And of course ... as he reached the flag pole for the raising of the Blue Flag, the radio controller said to start the report now, but by then it was all over and Alan could only give a brief résumé. The controller then had the nerve to ask, 'Could they do it all again?'

At Bournemouth Airport in 2002 a World Record attempt was being carried out to play the

drums at altitude in an old Dakota aircraft! The drum kit was bolted to the aircraft and the drummer (*'The Jerome Experience'* - slightly mad?) started to play extremely loudly. The noise inside the aircraft was deafening. Because of it, Alan and his team retreated to the toilet at the back of the aircraft. In the meantime, the co-pilot yelled at the drummer to stop as he couldn't hear the control tower on the radio. Finally, the latter's temper snapped - he grabbed the drum sticks and broke them in half. End of the record attempt - and the end of Alan's news report!



In Portsmouth harbour Alan boarded a destroyer returning from the Falklands war to interview the sailors arrayed on the deck. Just as his interview began a huge wave broke over the ship drenching the sailors who naturally swore out loud. Unfortunately, that part of the interview was also broadcast!

Another time, Alan was sent urgently to Southampton Airport where a serious incident was unfolding. As he had no transmitting equipment he would have to report by phone. The incident involved a British Airways aircraft flying from Birmingham to Spain that had suffered a catastrophic failure to a cockpit window next to the captain; the window had blown out and the resulting decompression had sucked the captain out of the flight deck, but luckily his foot had caught on the control column and a steward had rushed in and managed to grab his legs. As a result, the co-pilot had put the plane into an emergency dive to a lower altitude, and subsequently managed to land at Southampton airport. It turned out that the window had been recently replaced, but the wrong fixing bolts had been used.¹ On this occasion, Alan was using his portable tape recorder to interview some of the passengers.



To compile his report, he would mark the sections for use on the tape with bits of paper so that he could splice them into his verbal phone report. All went well until someone grabbed the phone away from him to make an urgent call!

Later in his career, Alan arrived at a charity event in a sports arena only to find the lady in the ticket booth was naked, and the man coming to greet him was also naked. Alan was advised to disrobe (it turned out that it was a nudist club event!). He undressed but hid his modesty using his portable tape recorder (seen here) and a clipboard.



All the people taking part in the event were naked, which was an eye-opener for Alan, especially when watching those on the trampoline!! He then had to interview the local Mayor in the bar upstairs and so, once again suitably dressed, he asked the Mayor to come downstairs. On seeing all the nudity around him, the Mayor was so shocked he fled back to the bar. So - no interview! But Alan managed to keep his dignity throughout - by careful positioning of his recording equipment!

¹ The captain survived with only minor injuries and the co-pilot was promoted for his flying skills.

Yet another incident took place when the United States battleship USS Iowa, on a goodwill visit to Portsmouth harbour, gave a salute from one of its big guns, which suffered a ‘premature’ when the inert shell had exploded in the breech of the gun - killing the gun crew. Alan and his team sped out in a launch to board the ship to report on the incident. Alan had to climb the ship’s ladder up from the launch – which was a dangerous task that he was not prepared for. He struggled up the ladder, all the while fearing he would fall into the sea. As he did so his producer called (in his ear piece) for the interview to start in 20 seconds! As Alan reached the deck, he was pulled over the edge by the commander of the ship - who Alan only recognised from his name badge! But it was a lucky break for Alan, since he managed to make a very rapid interview just in time for the news broadcast.



Another of his amazing fund of stories was witnessing a broadside fired from HMS Victory in dry-dock in Portsmouth (using blanks). 52 canons firing was extremely noisy, and with a lot of smoke. He toured the ship with the crew, checking for any damage. In Nelson’s cabin a window had broken showering Nelson’s cot with shards of glass. If that had happened in a real naval battle !?

Alan also made a visit to the zoo on the Isle of Wight to report on the milking of a venomous snake in order to obtain its venom which would then be used for making an antidote. The snake had to be picked up and secured in a contraption which allowed the snake to bite a pouch, thus obtaining the venom - a very tricky and hazardous operation. Alan gave a humorous demonstration of the way it was done using props, assisted by our own Roger Lester - who had to plunge his gloved hand into a covered bin to extract the snake. It turned out to be a toy snake, much to the relief of Roger - and to the amusement of the audience.

This was followed by questions, which brought forth yet more amusing anecdotes. The Chairman gave the vote of thanks.

Alan Poulter

‘The Vulcanicity of Iceland and the Mediterranean.

John Pett – 20th February 2024

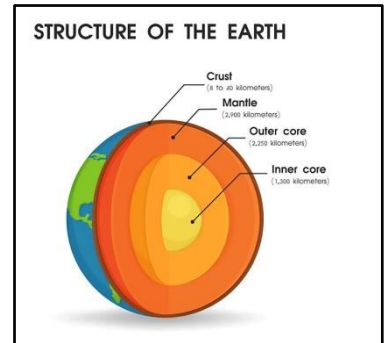


John Pett’s professional background is in the oil industry; he has worked for the Dutch/UK Shell company in various countries, including in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world. He spoke to us last September on the future of the Oil industry, and with his geologist background he explained at the start of this talk how the earth is made up of a number of layers and segments. These are:

The **Crust**, which is the thinnest and outer layer; this is subdivided into huge slow-moving plates (tectonics). Thickness ranges from about 7km under the ocean, to about 70km on land.

The **Mantle**, under the Crust, is the thickest layer, accounting for about 85% of the Earth’s volume. The upper layer of this is liquid, flowing as a convection current.

The **Core**, at the centre, is solid in the inner core, under immense pressure, and a temperature of 7,000°C; the outer core is liquid.



John explained that a controversial and unsuccessful attempt was made in the early 1960’s to drill through the thinnest part of the Earth’s crust (the [Project Mohole](#)) to obtain samples of the boundary between the Crust and the Mantle.

Building on the theory of continental drift, the theory of **Plate Tectonics** explains how the present shape of the continents and land masses started millions of years ago with a single land mass (Pangea); this started to break up from the early Jurassic period². The majority of earthquakes and volcanos now occur on the margins of tectonic plates.



² The Jurassic is a geological period and stratigraphic system that spanned from the end of the Triassic Period (201.4 million years ago) to the beginning of the Cretaceous Period (approx. 145 million years ago).



Closer to home, the Mediterranean Sea was formed as a result of tectonic action around 7 million years ago. There have been many volcanic eruptions in and around the Mediterranean's own 'Ring of Fire', notably among them the mushroom cloud of AD79, resulting from the eruption of **Mount Vesuvius** and the envelopment of Pompeii and Herculaneum in ash and pumice.

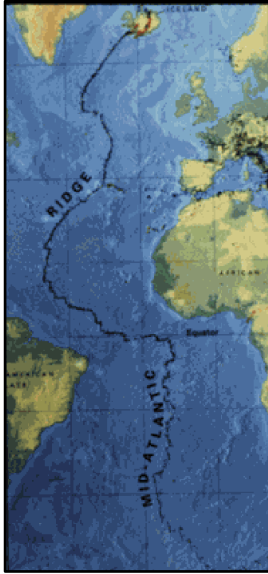
Mount **Stromboli** on the island of Stromboli off Sicily, has been erupting almost continuously, and Mount Etna on Sicily is also active.

And south of these is **Graham Island** in the Mediterranean near Sicily (*Ferdinandea Isle* to the French who also claim it). This is a submarine volcano that has risen from the sea on several occasions, subsequently vanishing below the waves in January 1832.



The volcanic Greek island of **Santorini** in the Aegean was the site of a huge volcanic eruption about 3,600 years ago.





Moving away from the Mediterranean and into the Atlantic ocean, the island of **Iceland** is situated on the Mid Atlantic Ridge, a mostly underwater mountain range in the Atlantic Ocean where the Eurasian and North Atlantic plates are gradually sliding apart, causing earthquakes and volcanos to occur frequently.

Iceland has around 30 active volcanic systems, including volcano-tectonic fissure systems with fissure vents. One of the major volcanos is **Krafla**; this is a volcanic caldera in the north of the island, which is used to utilise the geothermal energy.



Back in 1783/4 the **Laki** mountain fissure and volcano in the south of Iceland poured out toxins of lava, hydrofluoric acid and sulphur dioxide, killing most of the farm animals and 25% of the population.



In 1973 there was a significant eruption on the island of **Heimaey** off the south coast of Iceland which led to the evacuation of the entire population (many of whom returned to rebuild their homes and businesses) and extensive damage to the town of Vestmannaeyjar. Hekla, in the south of Iceland, is one of the most active volcanos, most recently erupting in 2,000AD, and Eyjafjallajokull is an icecap covering the caldera of a volcano, which erupted in 2010.

The fishing town of **Grindavic** on the south coast, also experienced severe seismic activity in November 2023, resulting in the evacuation of the town, with volcanic fissures appearing and lava encroaching the town.



John Pett also briefly referred to the volcanos on other planets, such as Triton (a moon of Neptune), and **Olympus Mons on Mars**, which is the largest volcano in the Solar System.

His talk reminded us of the untamed natural power continuously being unleashed in areas of seismic activity, and how this has an ongoing effect on the lives of people.

Following questions, the Chairman gave the vote of thanks for a very interesting and informative talk.

Alan Jeffs



FEBRUARY VISIT

The Bombay Sapphire Distillery

Friday 16th February 2024

The visit to the Bombay Sapphire Distillery went ahead, but sadly only Mike and Louise went. It turned out to be a rather long journey, taking 1hr 10mins from door-to-door. However, the weather was kind and the A303 even more so, despite being a Friday – not a single hold-up as we followed the A350-A303 and then the short leg of the A34 to get to Whitchurch, after which there was a short leg to the mill at Laverstoke. (On a bad day it may well have been a different story – as we all know, that’s the downside of living this side of Stonehenge!)



Main Still House – built in 1916 and originally housed the mill for Indian paper money.

Some members had been before, and they had found the whole experience well worth the effort. Louise and I opted for the standard tour at £16/head including a ‘free’ gin and tonic – for drivers there is the option to have a token, redeemable in the shop, so one can bring home a miniature of gin and a Fever-Tree tonic. (Once home, I found myself watching the clock, willing 6pm to come around!)

The mill’s story is an adventure in itself. Until the 1960s it was a De La Rue group company making the paper for bank notes.

Apparently, the paper watermark was invented at the mill in about 1724, at which time the mill won the contract to make notes for the Bank of England. The distillery building that houses the two largest stills was where the business made banknotes not only for Britain, but also for the nations of its Empire, including India. The restoration project would be a great talk in itself, amongst other things telling how the Barcardi family seized the opportunity to take on a totally derelict site and repurpose it to house a speciality product that has become a global success story. This was one that had started life as ‘Warrington Gin’ – apparently still available in some export markets. However, the wider paper story and the prosperity of the villages along that part of the river Test was only touched upon as a small part of industrial history, but the mills have been in existence from the Domesday up until the mid 20thC.

Moving on to ‘Bombay Sapphire’ and the distillation story, the process is one of the few for the Bombay Sapphire range of products, being a diffusion of vapour - rather than by boiling the botanicals in the still. Gin itself is a distilled alcoholic drink flavoured with juniper berries and other botanical ingredients. As most will probably know, by UK law the major ingredient of ‘gin’ has to be the juniper berry, with other ‘botanicals’ and flavourings allowed to be added by producers, with the secret being in the proportion of each that are applied. Bombay Sapphire now has a range of ‘specials’ and if one likes gin, they are well worth a try; such names as ‘Bramble Mix, Sunset, Lemon Presse’ and various others. Each is truly distinctive and in the case of the ‘Lemon Presse’ (something akin to a dry limoncello) it is now available in some UK supermarkets.





The two greenhouses – in the right hand one the tropical plants that are used in the manufacture of Bombay Sapphire, in the left one Mediterranean plants also used in its production.

After which, some fascinating facts about the distillery. They buy-in the ethanol base from France - made from winter wheat. The ethanol is about 98% proof. That is what is distilled at Laverstoke, where it ends up at about 88% concentrate. The resulting ‘super-charged stuff’ is then taken by road tanker to Glasgow where there is a huge multi-product/brand bottling facility that caters for many of the Barcardi product lines including those of Bombay Sapphire. The water used to dilute the concentrate down to 37.5% alcohol is the soft Scottish water, which is why there is a huge cost-saving in sending concentrate up to Glasgow, rather than bringing the water down to Laverstoke. A speciality range of higher-proof gins is also on offer

coming out at about 44-45% (still not enough to run one’s car on!). As one might expect, the botanicals³ are sourced from around the globe. For gardeners, the orris root comes from members of the iris family and is used as a fixative, which means one’s Bombay Sapphire will retain its original flavour for at least 10 years.

Once bottled and labelled, the gin is exported around the globe – although about 15% of the Distillery’s production is sold in the UK. It appears that France is now a major and I think if I remember correctly (hic!), the largest single market - followed by many other nations who have come to appreciate gin.

As to the history of gin (or ‘genever’ as it was originally called in England), it reputedly made its first appearance in the 13th Century when monks in the ‘Low Countries’ (Belgium and the Netherlands) distilled sharp, fiery, alcoholic tonics, one of which was distilled from wine infused with juniper berries - they were making medicines, hence the juniper. It is further claimed that English soldiers who provided support in Antwerp against the Spanish in 1585, during the Eighty Years' War, were already drinking ‘jenever’ for its calming effects before battle, from which the term ‘Dutch courage’ is believed to have originated. In this country, gin gained huge popularity during the 18th Century, but this is perhaps best left to a separate discussion since production rates (legal and illegal) were led by taxation, and it covers the whole Hogarthian era, with its prodigious consumption rates. Hard as it is to believe, it is claimed that at its height in this country every man, woman and child was consuming 70 litres of gin a year ... !

As for how much gin is distilled in the factory/distillery – Bombay Sapphire production alone is 70,000 litres a day gulp! (Or maybe several gulps.) This comes from 4 stills of varying designs and – yes - one is called Victoria as befits the Bombay Sapphire label. Being a little ‘green-minded’, I asked how much energy this takes, as 70,000 litres is a lot of kettles boiling away, and I wondered whether anyone has ever worked out a bottle of gin’s carbon footprint? No one could give me an answer, but they are going to find out and include such facts in future guided tours – so that’s one good reason for me to go back!

The visit turned out to be a great day’s outing and I will plug it again since I’m sure many would be just as enthralled as we were. But as an end-note, lock away your credit card when entering the shop! I’m afraid we fell prey to the marketing and decided to buy some liquid Easter presents, along with ‘memories in bulk’ to bring home.

Mike Madgwick

³ *Flavourings often include citrus elements, such as lemon and bitter orange peel, as well as a combination of other spices, which may include any of anise, angelica root and seed, orris root, cardamom, pine needles and cone, liquorice root, cinnamon, almond, cubeb, Savory, lime peel, grapefruit peel, dragon eye (longan), saffron, baobab, frankincense, coriander, grains of paradise, nutmeg, cassia bark and/or others.*



ENDPIECE - *Editor*

A Medical Tale

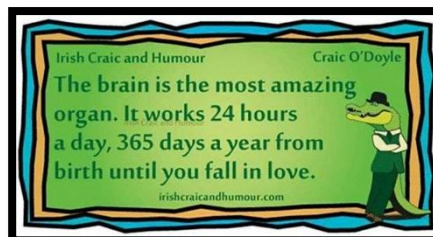
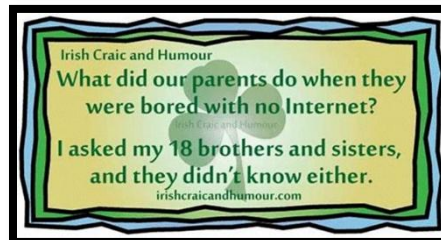
When I was young I decided to go to medical school. At the entrance exam, we were asked to rearrange the letters

P N E I S

and form the name of an important human body part which is most useful when erect.

Those who answered SPINE are doctors today, while the rest are on Facebook..

Some Irish Insights



And finally ...

