



# 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

Once again, the Editor is pressing me for Chairman's Notes for the April copy of the Recorder, and in desperation I thought I would look at last year's Chairman's notes to get some help.

Apart from the clocks having changed earlier last year (Remember!! - **this year** they change on Easter Sunday), the content was mainly about the weather and Out-of-Club meetings at the Slade cafe or on Zoom.

As far as the weather is concerned now - and backed up by the media telling us last February was the wettest on record - this has been the worst start to the year weather-wise that I can remember. Rather than being able to start cutting the grass, it would be nice if you could just walk on it without it trying to suck off your shoes! Perhaps the best thing would be to plant Rice and call it a Paddy Field.

On the subject of Out-of-Club meetings, our allegiance has now swapped to The Old Brewery where they welcome us with a reserved large round table where we can regularly expect up to 12 members, and where we are able to converse in normal tones without having to compete with the noise of the Slade's coffee machine!

During the last month we have been able to welcome 2 new Club members - namely Les Yeats and Michael Warren - by presenting them with their Probus badges, and we have also had 2 further guests at our last meeting. This goes to show that whereas other Clubs seem to be struggling, we must be doing something right.

On a lighter note - because John Owen (our Welfare Officer) was away at our last meeting, Dave Hooker took over in a trial run for Welfare Officer on next year's committee. Dave, who has held this position in the past, carried off his duties with aplomb despite not being allowed to tell any 'Good Stories'. When John heard that Dave's piece had been greeted with a round of applause he felt upset, since it is something to which he has not been treated - yet!

Finally, and on a more personal note, I recall that on March 27th last year Enid and I were

on holiday in Valkenburg in Holland, and then in early May we had a long-awaited River Cruise on the Rhone - unaware of what heartache awaited us in December.

Thank you all for your continued support to me since that time – it has been very much appreciated.

## WELFARE & SOCIAL

### Welfare – John Owen

Yet again, we all seem to be mostly in good health.

**John Heap** is finding it increasingly difficult to get the most out of our Club meetings, but we are making a concerted effort to support him and aid him to return, and thus to enjoy both the excellent speaker programme and the general camaraderie generated within our meetings.

**Paul Hooley** has had one cataract operation and hopefully is recovering from his second operation as I write this article.

**Ian McClellan** will soon be having his hip operation, hopefully providing relief from the pain he has been experiencing recently.

Finally, we have not seen too much of **Jeffrey Hall** since his cancer treatment. His treatment went well, but he is still experiencing mobility issues. Hopefully this will improve once the weather improves, when he is able to get out more.

A humorous aside ....

*A farmer dropped his tractor off for repair and decided to walk home. He passed a man selling farm equipment and bought a bucket and tin of paint. He then passed a smallholding and bought a goose and a couple of chickens. His problem now was how to carry them all home.*

*At this point a smartly dressed lady saw his dilemma and suggested he put the paint in the bucket, carry it over his arm; put the chickens under each arm and carry the goose in the other. "Thank you" said the farmer, "but where are you going?"*

*"Mockingbird Lane," said the lady. "Oh that's near me. I'll show you the way" said the farmer. A minute later the farmer said, "here's a short cut - we'll get there in no time this way". The lady got suspicious and said "how do I know you won't hold me up against a wall and have your way with me?"*

*"Lady" said the farmer "how could I possibly do that with all these things I'm carrying."*

*The lady replied, "Put the goose down, cover it with the bucket. Put the paint on top of the bucket - and I'll hold the chickens."*

Boom – Boom!

**Social - April Club Events - Editor**

<p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024</b></p>	<p><b>The Peenemunde Raid</b>  <b>17/18 August 1943</b>  <i>John Smith</i></p>
<p><b>16<sup>th</sup> April 2024</b></p>	<p><b>The Quaker Burial Ground at Ashmore</b>  <i>Martin Shallcross</i></p>
<p><b>30<sup>th</sup> April 2024</b>  <b>(Wives/Partners)</b></p>	<p><b>‘That’s the Spirit’</b>  <i>Lt Col (Retd) Dick Taylor</i></p>
	<p><b>Lunch</b>  <i>The Walnut Tree, Mere</i>  <b>12.30pm for 1.00 pm</b></p>



**OUR MARCH TALKS**



**Gabby North – 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024**



*The speaker, Gabby North, is a Community Partnership Manager for the Leprosy Mission Charity. She was originally from Frome and studied at Southampton University. Her current role is to spread information and understanding about Leprosy, and to raise funds for this global charity.*

*Before the talk began, the Chairman began by reminding members that a past Branch Chairman - the late David Bryan - had previously worked for this charity for many years after leaving the Army, and so it was a fitting talk to have been arranged.*

The talk began by Gabby asking the audience some general questions to tease out our general knowledge about the disease. Our responses showed that we had a broad understanding, but some important aspects of the disease were based on generalisations which were sometimes wrong. Gabby then showed a short video explaining that leprosy is caused by a bacterium, similar to tuberculosis, and that about 5% of the world population are thought to be susceptible to contracting it.

It is rife in poorer communities where malnutrition and poor hygiene tend to lower the body’s immune system, thereby allowing the disease to take hold. The disease affects the nervous system, mainly the peripheral nerves around an injury, and thus affects the ability to feel pain. By doing this, injuries deteriorate allowing other infections to cause skin ulcers which in turn

spread and worsen. This can lead to cramped hands, stiffness of joints and the loss of fingers and toes, and eventually to the need for amputation of arms and legs.

This disfiguring tends to be a cause of fear among the population. The ulcers are hidden from sight and medical treatment is rarely sought. Hospitals and doctors are usually too far away, and therefore the symptoms have the time and opportunity to propagate. In the past, sufferers were shunned and cast out of society, which made the effects of catching the disease much worse. However, the disease is only mildly contagious, being spread by bacteria in airborne water droplets. It is not spread by contact.

In poor communities such as found in India, discrimination towards sufferers remains endemic; indeed there are 108 laws world-wide that limit the rights and freedoms of leprosy sufferers, and hence curtail their access to medical treatment.

On a recent trip to India, Gabby had met Sarojanis, a sixty-year-old lady. She caught leprosy aged ten - but was not diagnosed until she was twenty-four. By the time she was treated and cured, she had lost part of a hand and a leg. Her husband abandoned her, and her newly-born baby was taken away from her by her sister on the grounds that she could not look after the child. Her life thereafter descended into depression and desperation. Later she arrived at a hospital that cared for her, and then she moved on to a leper colony - not the castaway places of bygone times, but a community of fellow sufferers. Here, her life changed dramatically. She was empowered to improve her life. She reclaimed her son, saw him grow up and start a family with her.



Leprosy **is** curable over time - with the provision of multi-drug therapy and antibiotic treatment. The aim of the Leprosy Mission is to achieve zero transmissions and zero disability, whilst increasing diagnoses, educating communities and maximising the care of those affected by the disease. Their mission statement can be found [here](#).

Unfortunately, it is women and girls who suffer the most. This is due to social factors, together with living in a male dominated society. It is difficult for women to leave home to seek diagnosis - or even treatment. Most doctors are male and are often not allowed into the family home, and women are apprehensive of approaching them. Husbands all too frequently desert the home when leprosy appears. This is still the culture of modern Indian society but is also seen throughout the world wherever the disease is found.

Research into the behaviour of communities is now being carried out by (mainly) women volunteers, and facilities for treatment are improving. The care of the disabled is also slowly growing, with the fitment of prosthetic limbs being on the increase, as is reconstructive surgery

and the awareness of and assistance with mental health issues.

Gabby told the story of a teenage boy, Santosh, who had lost both legs below the knee from the disease.



Eventually fitted with prosthetic legs, he grew in confidence, started his own small business and was given a motor-tricycle to get about and prosper.

Medical research has developed LPR treatment. A patient's blood is taken - and then forced into combining the red and white blood cells; the resultant poultice is used on ulcers, thereby improving the body's immune system and speeding ulcer curing - often within weeks.

The charity's latest campaign entitled '*The Unseen*' seeks to change perceptions by contesting the stigma of the disease. Of course, all this costs money and [Donations](#) are always welcome.

Following the talk, the Club gave a donation, and members present all contributed to the pot in their own right.

*Many questions and many comments were asked and given following the talk, and the Chairman gave the vote of thanks.*

*Alan Poulter*

## **'From Scouse to Grouse' – A Fighter Pilot's Story.**

***Air Marshal Professor Sir Christopher Colville KCB FRAeS***

***19<sup>th</sup> March 2024***



*Retired Air Marshal Colville was a Liverpool Grammar School boy. He talked about his long career in the Royal Air Force. Since leaving the Service he had a business career and is now a visiting professor with the Freeman Air and Space Institute of the School of Security Studies (Kings College, London). Sir Christopher periodically lectures on cruise ships. He married his wife Irene in 1967.*

Sir Christopher was born in 1945 and grew up in Liverpool at the time of the 'Mersey Sound' of popular music. He attended the De La Salle Catholic Boys' Grammar School. The yearning to fly was inherent in his life - he actually became a gliding instructor in his teens, and the young Christopher joined the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell after gaining the necessary A level

GCEs. Sir Christopher explained that it was quite an achievement to get into Cranwell, as the majority of students hailed from a 'Public School' background, as opposed to his background as a Grammar School 'Scouse'. Indeed he was advised to get rid of his Liverpool 'scouse' accent if he wanted to progress in the RAF. This all took place at the height of the Cold War.



After six months' initial training, his flying experiences started with the BAC Jet Provost, an initial jet trainer, then progressing to the Folland Gnat – a subsonic fighter aircraft. In his subsequent flying career Sir Christopher



flew the English Electric Lightning aircraft which served as an Interceptor, having an incredible rate of climb and capable of a top speed above Mach 2.



He went on to fly the Lightning's replacement, the F4 Phantom.



Sir Christopher's career progressed, and he assumed command of No 111 (Fighter) Squadron in 1983, following which in 1986 he became Station Commander at RAF Coningsby - where he flew Tornados; Coningsby was the home of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF), and he was lucky enough to fly frequently with them - and with the Red Arrows.

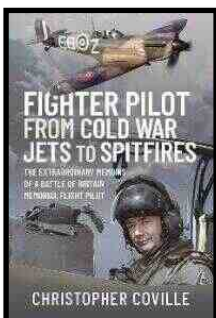


Eventually, promotion to Air Vice Marshal led in 1992 to Sir Christopher becoming Air Officer Commanding (AOC) Training Units, with an area of responsibility covering training and personnel, and it was in this capacity that he attended a lunch with HRH Queen Elizabeth II in place of another senior RAF officer.



After a spell of duty in the MOD, he was appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT) in 1998. His final appointment was that of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Personnel and Training Command, RAF.

After a long career, Sir Christopher retired from the RAF in 2003, having been made a Knight Commander of the Bath in the 2003 New Year Honours List, and been knighted by the Queen.



*A lively question and answer session followed the talk, in which Sir Christopher covered current global security issues and concerns. The chairman gave the vote of thanks, and members showed their appreciation in the usual way.*

*Sir Christopher had a number of copies of his book available for sale about his life in the RAF 'Fighter Pilot - From Cold War Jets to Spitfires'.*



## MARCH VISIT

### Dorset & Somerset Air Ambulance Service – Henstridge Airfield

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

Six Gillingham Probus members were able to take up the offer to visit and meet the pilots, medical staff and volunteers of the Dorset & Somerset Air Ambulance Service who together keep our local Air Ambulance service running. This was one of two days each year that the charity lays on to thank donors and interested parties for their support, and we (Probus Gillingham) were lucky to get 6 of the 60 or so tickets available.

As an aside, many members and spouses have indicated that they would have liked to have also come along and a date for a future visit will be explored. As usual, you can ‘collar’ Mike and let him know of your interest; indeed, being an ex-medical professional, Mike’s wife Louise also wants to go!

Most - if not all – Probus members will be aware that the Air Ambulance Service is a charity-run capability. There are 5 county charities in the Southwest, of which Dorset and Somerset is just one. The Dorset and Somerset branch is a £10million p.a. venture, where 95% of the funding comes from individuals, regular donations, legacies, and groups such as ours. It is a salutary thought as to just how much the charity has to raise ‘per head’, when one thinks of the relatively small populations of these two counties.

Shown below, our Gillingham Probus group can be seen handing over our cheque for £170, made up of £120 raised at the last Christmas Dinner and an additional £50 that the attendees contributed. (Hint!! As a very worthy cause, perhaps we might think of supporting the Air Ambulance again at the next Christmas Dinner?)



The eagle-eyed will notice that the helicopter is the ‘wrong’ colour. At the time of our visit, a helicopter from a neighbouring Air Ambulance charity had landed and had gone into active service from Henstridge. The Dorset and Somerset colour is yellow (*below*) and will be a familiar sight to most of us as it is a regular service provider to patients with life-threatening injuries in the



North Dorset locality.

We were fortunate to meet many of the 100+ volunteers who keep the Air Ambulance going, all with a strong personal connection and motivation to drive forward the service. Whilst there I decided to do a little digging to get a better understanding of what is involved. So - some facts and figures.

The cost per flight is £3,500 – staff, maintenance, crew, fuel etc – so it’s a costly exercise;

but as we know from our own backgrounds, cost is not everything. In addition to these costs, there are also 6 paramedics who are seconded from SW Ambulance Services to supplement the charity staffing – these account for the ‘missing’ 5% alluded to earlier (95% of the funding).

Pubs and bars with Air Ambulance collection boxes raise £200,000 p.a. – a startling figure when one thinks back to how many times perhaps each of us have donated the 10p change from buying a round! As we move more and more to cashless, one wonders what will happen to that £200,000. I think we can be certain is that it is unlikely to go up.

The Air Ambulance Service is available 19 hrs a day – which is from 7am to 2am, 7 days a week, with Sunday being the busiest day when averaged out over a year. The actual property and land that the service sits on is provided at a peppercorn rent by the owner of Henstridge Airfield, a factor many may not realize.

Thinking of the crews, they spend quite a lot of time actually sitting about and on average might only get one call-out per shift. But then that one call-out is likely to be something pretty dramatic.

The Service has ambitions to expand and would like to purchase/lease a further aircraft and expand its hanger facilities. It is a bold ambition, and yet it is one borne of the increasing usage of the Service.

Afternote. As this was a Saturday, we agreed to meet our better halves at The Ship in West Stour for lunch after the members’ tour. The set menu proved very popular, and all thoroughly enjoyed what was on offer - good local food, cooked well and with outstanding service. Ron Walker has done us proud by arranging lunch after the next Probus talk to be there. Perhaps it was ‘fitting’ for our team, but we were located in the part of the pub that Alan Poulter reminded us served as the old jail during the Napoleonic Wars. He (Alan, that is) is a fount of local knowledge. Returning to the subject of the pub, it was gratifying to see and meet a team who have made a superb success of a village pub through hard work and the application of outstanding customer-centric thinking – the place was, to use the hospitality industry technical term “rammed”, full of customers for lunch. Of note - those who partook of a glass of wine with their meal were impressed with the house wines on offer!

### **Photographs.**

The helicopter in its full glory – aviation buffs will recognize the helicopter as an AgustaWestland AW169 helicopter: this particular one is Callsign ‘*Helimed 10*’ (operated by Specialist Aviation Services).







The onsite **refuelling** capability – with a capacity of 3,200 litres of aviation fuel.

**'Facts & Figures'** Board – for the year to April 2023



**Rear Cabin of AW169 'Helimed 10'**

**Report - Mike Madgwick**





## ENDPIECE - Editor

A new map – well, would you (or George Galloway) believe it?!

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### I'll show them I mean business!

The new CEO decides it's time to rid the company of slackers.

On a tour of the facilities he notices a guy leaning against a wall. The room was full of workers. Seeing a chance to show he means business he says to the guy 'How much money do you make a week?'

A little surprised, the young man says, 'I make \$400 – why?'

The CEO says 'Wait right here. He walks back to his office and comes back in two minutes, and then he hands the guy \$1,600 in cash and says 'Here's 4 weeks' pay. Now get out and don't come back!'

Feeling like a real boss now, the CEO looks around and says, 'Does anyone want to tell me what that goofball's job was around here?'

From across the room a voice says – 'Pizza delivery guy from Domino's.'

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Video link. You might find this fun – if you can get it to work! [Trump give his opinion of the Scotland "try" against France.](#) (Control + Click, then click on 'Read More' under the left side of the picture - you may also have to make sure the mute is off.)

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**And finally ... thought for today ....**

