



PROBUS RECORDER



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

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Chairman's Notes

I write this, my final offering, as my Chairmanship comes to an end early - as I shall be on Holiday on a short cruise at the end of the month but will be back for the AGM.

This last year has been a period of much change - not only for me - but for the Royal family, with both King Charles and Kate, Princess of Wales being diagnosed with cancer; also for the crazy weather worldwide; and with wars across the world.

Nevertheless throughout all of this, and Covid, the Club has survived and would appear to be still going strong when others have fallen by the wayside.

Now for not one of my *'It Pays To Complain'* contributions, but how dealing with a problem by telephone can easily bring huge frustration.

As you know I drive a Mercedes and last week I received an Email from the dealer in Salisbury saying that *'Mercedes Me'* - a system which keeps an eye electronically on your car - had detected brake wear and would I like to book it in for repairs?

Unfortunately the car's details showing on-screen related to a car I sold 2 years ago to a Mercedes dealer in Bristol! So I rang the Salisbury Dealer and asked them to remove this car from the *Mercedes Me* system. Bad Mistake!! They said they could not help me but would put me through to those running the *Mercedes Me* system. After being transferred 3 times to various members of the organisation, each of whom I could hardly understand, I was finally informed that they couldn't help me as I had to do it myself, but they would send me instructions on how to do it myself.

Unfortunately (but predictably) the instructions didn't work, but knowing I now had no choice I went on line to *'Mercedes Me'* and was able to cancel the car in my entry - which actually showed I had 2 cars, the one I had sold and my current one. Frustration Over!

I have enjoyed being your Chairman and would like to thank the Committee and all the club Members for their continued support over my time in office.

Together you have all helped me to carry on this year – at a time when the future was difficult for me to look forward to.

Colin

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare – John Owen

Once again, we all seem to be fairly well - all things considered! Ian McClellan has had a successful hip operation; Paul Hooley has had both his cataracts operated on (with dubious results if his assessment of Roger Ellis's appearance is anything to go by!!) We had the pleasure of seeing Bertram Akhurst at one of our recent coffee mornings and he seemed remarkably sharp and thoroughly enjoyed being with those present. His eyesight and hearing are diminishing, but they're really not bad for a gentleman in his 90's! To my knowledge, only John Adams is currently under the weather, suffering from a very nasty cyst in his armpit which fortunately has not shown any signs of becoming anything worse following a biopsy taken two weeks ago.

As this is my last report for the Newsletter, I hope that I have managed to keep everyone up to date regarding members' wellbeing throughout the year and that my small asides have brought some light relief.

A Man's Guide to a Happy Life:-

Find a woman who makes you laugh.

Find a woman with a good job.

Find a woman who can cook a romantic meal.

Find a woman who can be completely honest,

Find a woman who will pamper you with gifts.

Find a woman who is awesome in bed.

Most importantly, make sure that none of these women ever meet!!!

Social - April Club Events - Editor

14 th May 2024	Annual General Meeting (AGM)
	Building a British Masterpiece (John Constable's Haywain) Richard Kay
28 th May 2024	The Machine Gun Corps Paul Hooley
	Lunch The Half Moon, Shaftesbury (12.30 for 1pm)



OUR APRIL TALKS

‘A Rude Awakening’ – Transfer to [CID](#)

John Bartlett – 5th March 2024



Our fellow Probus Club member John Bartlett is a former policeman. Having originally joined the Surrey County force, he transferred to the Metropolitan Police, and eventually moved from being a police driver to become a CID officer. This talk followed on from the talk given in January 2023 about his experiences as a ‘Q’ car (high performance) driver. Working in the CID was indeed a ‘rude awakening’ for him, and he quickly realised that the Met had their own special ways of doing things.

John began by explaining that the wide variety of criminal activity that the police had to deal with in “the Met” was on a completely different level to life in a county force. In John’s case it ranged at one end of the spectrum from arresting ‘consorting men’ on charges of gross indecency in a public toilet (cottaging) - still very much illegal in those days, to - at the other end of the scale, dealing with terrorism involving the IRA at the height of ‘the Troubles’, when the IRA were active on the British mainland.

But first John recalled that at the beginning of his time with the Met when he had still been driving a Q car, he became involved in a car chase with a drug dealer that resulted in the seizure of a considerable quantity of drugs.

When John moved to CID there were postings to various stations within the Metropolitan Police area. While he was stationed in Kensington he was called to a pub where a Russian gentleman was pestering a British soldier (a sergeant in the Royal Signals) trying to get information (for the Soviet Union) out of the man. This turned into a full-blown diplomatic incident, with the Russian Ambassador arriving stony-faced at the scene. It subsequently transpired that the ‘Russian gentleman’ was in fact a Vice-Admiral who, following his house arrest, was subsequently escorted onto an Aeroflot flight back to the USSR.

John also became involved with the never-ending spates of burglary in the capital, when criminals were arrested while they used all sorts of disguises, including wigs. John told how he had been warned off one particular case of burglary (of gold jewellery) where a Swedish blonde was arrested when, for some never-explained reason, the case was suddenly discharged. Another incident in which John became involved was the search for a murder weapon involved in a knife killing.

A further recollection of John’s was becoming involved in three months’ surveillance on an operation with the Anti-terrorist branch, collecting evidence against a suspected IRA cell. During this time it was discovered that a lady member of the cell had in fact befriended a Met Detective Sergeant, obviously trying to get ‘inside knowledge’.

Further recollections saw John posted to Brixton, where there had been a spate of rapes and many burglaries, as well as an enquiry into a ‘breakout’ from Brixton prison. His CID career ended with him moving to the ‘Complaints’ Section.

The colourful talk ended when John ran out of time, and the Chairman gave the vote of thanks.
Alan Jeffs

The Quaker Burial Ground at Ashmore

Martin Shallcross

16th April 2024



Martin Shallcross is a retired farmer, who lives on the family's mixed farm at Tisbury. A former Anglican priest, he is now a Quaker, and is connected with the [Friends' Meeting House](#) in Shaftesbury. Before telling us about the Quaker Burial Ground, he gave a brief outline of [his own interesting background](#).

Now 87 years of age, and a lifetime Wiltshire-man, Martin recalled that during WWII he was packed off to boarding school at Burnham-on-Sea, before attending Sherborne School, and subsequently moving on to Agricultural College.

Like many young men at that time, the young Shallcross was called-up for National Service (at Catterick). His subsequent 18-month overseas posting, with the Royal Signals, was spent in Bavaria, Germany.

After National Service Martin became a pupil with land agents who later became Humberts, and he eventually ran their Shaftesbury office, staying with the firm for many years. His professional career ended at the age of 82, when he retired as a consultant for Savills. During that time he also became an Anglican priest, this lasting for thirty years, following which he became a member of the Shaftesbury Society of Friends (Quakers) for fifteen years.

The Quaker burial ground at Ashmore is set in a deep-sided valley in the area of the village; it was gifted for this purpose in 1678 by William Fry, who at one time owned the farm land in which it lies. Fry actually knew George Fox, who founded the Quakers. Today the burial ground is surrounded by the land of Ritchie estate and is pretty inaccessible. Normally every ten years, the Friends organise a right-of-way walk to the site followed by a service, in order to maintain the right-of-way, which was established in the late 19th century. At this ceremony, a bottle containing a parchment recording the signatures of people who attended the last visit is dug up.

Martin Shallcross showed overhead photographs of the 2010 walk, and the service. There is a stone marker at the ground. For many years there were no new burials, but its use was re-started (primarily for the burial of ashes) with the involvement of the Rutter family.

Following the talk, we were told of the discovery at the Shallcross farm in Tisbury of a number of objects from the Roman period and were able to handle one of these (a bird fishing).

The chairman gave the vote of thanks.

Alan Jeffs



APRIL VISIT

The Great Bustard Project

Tuesday 23rd April 2024

The first point is that it did not rain I repeat, it **did not rain!** We were lost for words; the skies were slate grey as we drove to Enford, our tour meeting point, yet we escaped yet another downpour.

The visit was a follow-on to the talk we had last year. My goodness - how time has flown. April 2024 seemed a long way away when we first started talking about a field-trip to see the birds live, and the 10 of us who eventually attended all saw, dare I say - a 'flock'? [*Flock is correct for bustards and there is apparently also a wake of bustards as a collective noun.*]

Those who attended the talk last year will recollect that the Great Bustard Project has been an act of love and single-mindedness on the part of a small and determined band of volunteers. They are re-introducing the Bustard back to the UK lands it once inhabited, the last UK Bustard having been shot in 1832. One of the spin-offs from the Group's work is that the bustard is now a part of Wiltshire's flag and it's Coat of Arms.



Our party arrived at Enford village hall early as instructed, where we met our hosts, Phil and John, from the Great Bustard Project. Both are enthusiasts, and this proved infectious. We left our cars at the hall and travelled on to Salisbury Plain in two Land Rovers. I am sure we all know that the 'Plain' is the size of the Isle of Wight and that it is mostly owned by the MOD, thus having a large 'tenant' community - encompassing some 8,000 people, scores of farms, and hundreds of miles of roads, byways and footpaths. Fortunately, the section on which the Great Bustard Project is sited was only a few miles away from Enford.

After an initial early false sighting - these things happen at long distances, and it was possibly a parachute from a military flair, we moved to a second location and found our first - and sadly only - Great Bustards. In total we spotted maybe 8 males, many in courtship mode, rear-ends out and up, displaying their white under feathers (as we chaps do!) and 10-12 females utterly unimpressed (sound familiar?). Maybe a change of approach from displaying the rear-end might help.

The flock of birds, in two slightly separate groups, males and females in each, was about ¼ mile away, and so appeared as mere specks in the distance. (*'Pause for thought'* - maybe 'Specsavers' could sponsor the trips, since it was a real strain focusing with the naked eye, and I think all participants would agree this was not a function of age.) Once binoculars were out, we had a far better view; the birds were still 'specks' but at least were recognisable as birds, and rather large birds at that.



Our band of bird spotters all looking at the flock. Arrows point to one prominent male in the distance strutting his stuff. Whilst one of our guides wore camouflaged clothing, it seemed to be more for his own dramatic effect than any fear of scaring off a dot on the horizon!

For what is the largest flying bird (by weight) on the planet, the Great Bustard is indeed a magnificent sight. The population on Salisbury Plain is estimated to be about 50-60, with a 60/40% split, females to males. Although there are many successful matings, the losses are staggering – some 75% of birds are currently not making it through to maturity. There are various theories for this attrition rate, but as yet nothing has been verified with any certainty.

The Great Bustard is on the UK endangered species list. Globally the population is thought to be in the region of 10-15,000. The Russian-Ukrainian war is hampering regional efforts to improve numbers, and obviously it might have a devastating impact on that whole element of the world's species; the terrible events make bird census and conservation a pretty low priority.

There are also bustard populations in Spain, Portugal and Morocco. The Spanish group are thought to be declining as a result of reduced rainfall, and hence changes in agricultural practices, losing open spaces as land use moves from arable crops to trees.



The rather typical terrain of Salisbury Plain – chalkland with low rolling hills and large arable fields.

The habitat of the Great Bustard is a land of chalk plains and arable crops, which are under pressure throughout the world, including in the UK; Salisbury Plain is possibly unique in that the vast majority of it is a military training area, and as such has a form of protection from development, and tenant farmers have more limited development options than freehold farmers.

There was also thought to be the possibility of seeing some Stone Curlew – but alas, the farming operations had started early on the day of our visit and scattered the birds. There are reputed to be a group of some 30 that congregate on the Plain prior to migrating in order to breed.

However there were a couple of Red Kites circling, and as we all know they have the most distinctive of silhouettes, as per the photo below.



Most of our intrepid group - with Jill's hair acting a worthy windsock. does the wind ever stop blowing on the Plain?

I mentioned the enthusiasm of all those involved with the project, and its accompanying lack of funding, but one organisation (of which I happen to be a member) that helps is the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC), which has funded one of the Land Rovers used by project.

BASC has done a great deal over the decades to promote endangered species survival, including research on how to enhance the habitat to allow of native species to flourish. At times it can be a losing battle, such as with Bustard and Curlew, where the birds need a lot of space, and we humans encroach on this space relentlessly from all sides.



Had we been able to get up really close to any birds during the visit, this might have been one of our photos!



Alas, I have resorted to using a Great Bustard Project image from their web-site titled: "Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*) males displaying on Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire".

We can say with a clear conscience that our group saw this in the distance - and what a splendid sight they were!

We followed the trip with lunch at the Lamb at Hindon. Three from the visit group were unable to join us, and so it came down to 7 who enjoyed the sandwich options. Hindon being a lovely village, mainly un-spoilt, has a lack of parking and Alan Poulter drew a rather short straw, with the longest walk back to his car - closer to Tisbury some might say than to Hindon's village centre!

For more information:

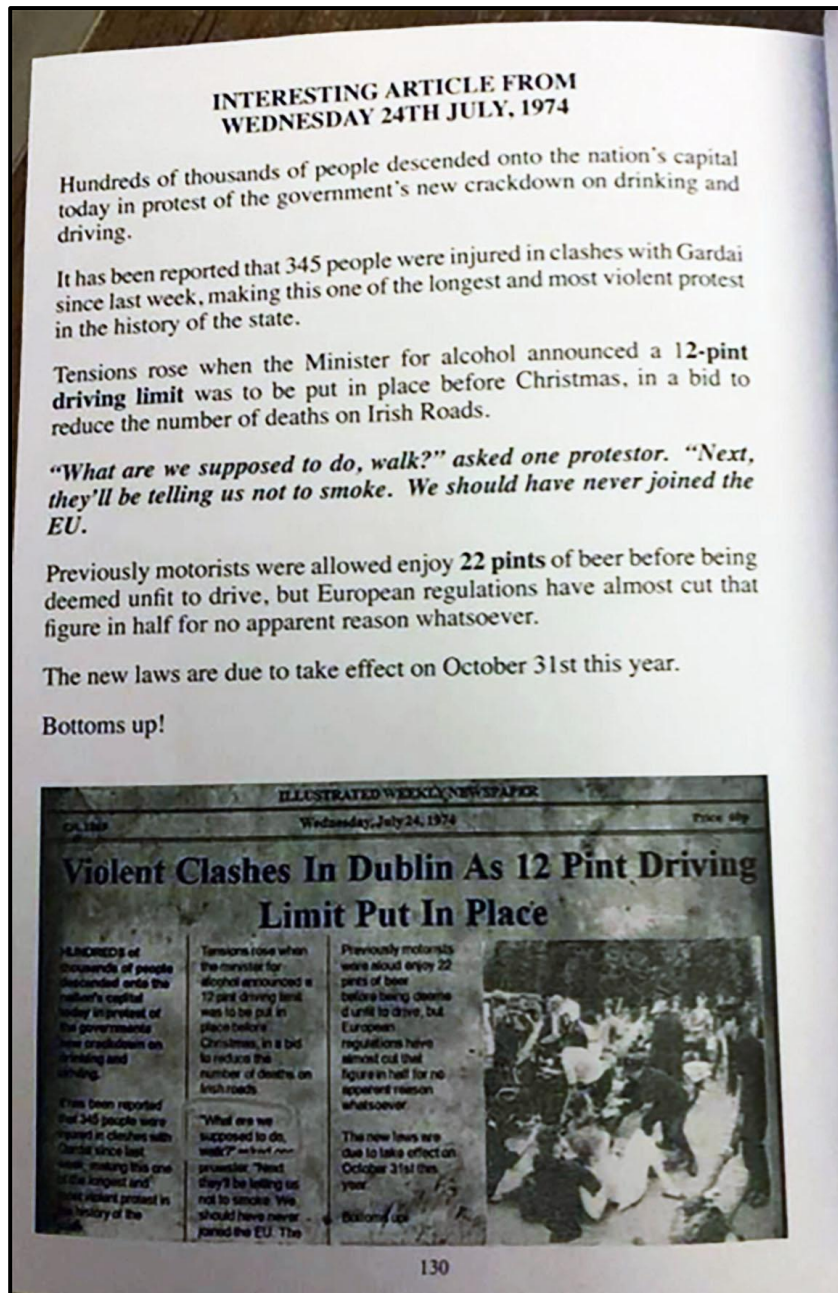
- The Great Bustard **Wiki link** is: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_bustard
- And '**The Great Bustard Project**' website is here: <https://greatbustard.org/>

Report - Mike Madgwick



ENDPIECE - Editor

Remember??? (Well – only the Irish etc)



Food for thought?



Current Military Etiquette.

The French 'Garde républicaine' have been performing guard duties at Buckingham Palace to celebrate the anniversary of the '*Entente Cordiale*' and are seen below being put through their paces with/by the Coldstream Guards, under the eagle eye of the Garrison Sergeant Major.

It's pleasing to see that French instincts haven't changed!!

"Right Sir, the New Guard enters the Forecourt, they march in front of the Band and halt facing the Old Guard, that's you Sir. The Band then performs the New Guard's Regimental Slow March as it advances towards the Old Guard, and you do what?

"We surrender?"

sighs "No Sir."

