



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 would like to thank you for electing me as your Chairman for the coming year; I am fortunate (as a comparative newcomer!) to have the support of an experienced and hardworking committee, and I am sure they will try to keep me on the straight and narrow!

I very much look forward to the next year. We have welcomed new members recently and I'm optimistic of increasing our numbers further. To this end we have had some posters and leaflets printed for distribution in the community.

The Friday coffee mornings at the Old Brewery continue to be well attended and enjoyed. I would also like to remind Members of the following two specific events:

- The Summer Barbeque - this is to be held at the Rugby Club on **Tuesday 6th August**.
- The Chairman's Christmas Dinner – to take place at the Royal Chase hotel in Shaftesbury on **Thursday 12th December**.

On a completely different note, but one that I hope will be of interest, Margaret and I visit the **National Memorial Arboretum**¹ for Anzac Day commemorations in April each year. The photo was taken at this year's ceremony - during cooler conditions!



This under-publicised facility is located in 150 acres just north of Lichfield. It has over 400 military and civilian thought-provoking memorials and is well worth a visit. It has an excellent [website](#), is open daily with free entry, but car parking needs to be booked in advance.

And as a matter of interest - or maybe not - Margaret and I are off on our first-ever coach trip on 3rd June. I will let you know how we get on with the experience!

Andrew

¹ Not to be confused with the National Arboretum at Westonbirt, Gloucestershire.

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare – Dave Hooker

I look forward to once again taking on the role of Welfare Officer for our Club, but the start has coincided with my two-week holiday in the Canary Islands, and I haven't had an opportunity to contact members who have been or are unwell. What I am able to tell you is as follows.

- Roy Stone is in a nursing home in Salisbury, and as a result his wife Angela spends a great deal of time motoring to and fro between there and Penselwood – a considerable journey when done on a regular basis.
- John Owen continues his treatment for a DVT, and we wish him a successful outcome.
- I was at the coffee morning recently at the Old Brewery, where I was delighted to see Bertram Ackhurst again, as I used to visit him when I was last the Club's Welfare Officer.
- We have good news that Ian MacLellan has at last had his operation - and that it has been successful. I will of course follow this up more fully when I get back.
- Likewise I will be ascertaining the state of play vis-à-vis the health of Paul Hooley and John Adams, both of whom have been out of action recently.

Well – that's all for the time being, and I wish everyone well from the Canaries where the temperatures remain rather better than the UK!

Social - June Club Events - Editor

<p>11 June 2024</p>	<p>'Darien Breakthrough' <i>Colonel John Blashford-Snell</i></p>
<p>18 June 2024</p>	<p><u>Visit to RNLI HQ</u> <i>Poole</i></p>
<p>25 June 2024 (Wives & Partners)</p>	<p>'An Auctioneer's Ten Commandments' <i>Richard Kay</i></p>
	<p>Lunch <i>The Hunter's Lodge Inn, Leigh Common</i> <i>(12.30 for 1pm)</i></p>



OUR APRIL/MAY TALKS

'That's the Spirit' (A brief history of alcohol consumption)

Lt Col Dick Taylor – 30th April 2024



Dick Taylor started his service in the British Army at the tender age of sixteen as a Junior Trooper at the Junior Leaders Regiment Royal Armoured Corps in Bovington. Following his soldier service, he was commissioned the Royal Tank Regiment (RTR) and left the regular army as a lieutenant colonel in 2013. He is seen here serving with the UN in West Africa. Dick took us through the long history of alcohol use and enjoyment by people throughout the world.

There is evidence of alcohol use 10,000 years ago in China, made from fermented fruit and honey, and traces of wheat and barley-based alcohol dating back thousands of years have been found in the Middle East.

Alcohol – the chemical name is ethanol – is one of the most commonly consumed recreational drugs. Alcoholic beverages are fermented from the sugars in fruits, berries, grains, and other ingredients such as honey, plant saps and tubers. These may be distilled using heat to produce a liquid of greater strength. Alcohol by Volume (ABV) is the measure of how much alcohol; is contained in a given volume of alcoholic drink – defined as the number of millilitres of ethanol present in 100ml.

Ancient Egyptian wall paintings depict people drinking wine; while the workers who built the pyramids drank beer (and lots of it!). The beer was a source of calories, and safer to drink than dirty water. The Greek 'symposium' was part of a banquet that took place after a meal, when drinking wine for pleasure (men only!) was accompanied by music, conversation and debate. Excessive drinking was notable during the Roman period.

The use of alcohol – wine in this case - for a purpose other than drinking, was the recorded execution by drowning of George, Duke of Clarence, in 1478. He was the brother to King Edward IV and is rumoured to have been drowned in a vat of Malmsey wine. (We don't know if this was by choice!)

The Cistercian monks, founded in 1098, were some of the first people to plant vines in Europe, and became Europe's largest producers, spreading the popularity of wine drinking, and establishing its traditions.

The Belgium Leffe beer dates back to 1240, when monks dispensed their delicious, brewed beers to pilgrims and other travellers. The beer was preferable to water, as part of the boiling process used in the making of the beer killed off the dangerous microbes.

The plays of William Shakespeare have many references to drink, and many of the characters in his plays liked their alcoholic lubrication - often to excess!

The use of hops in beer making came to Britain from Europe in the 14th century, giving beer its flavour, aroma, and bitterness; this helped to preserve the beer. 'Small' beer was beer with a lower alcohol content, drunk in large quantities by the masses.

One historic disaster in beer-making in England is known as the Great London Beer Flood. In 1814, at the Horseshoe Brewery (now the site of the Dominion Theatre), the wooden beer vats exploded, and a vast quantity of the liquid burst through the wall of the brewery, killing eight people.

Dick Taylor explained the origin of various words connected with alcoholic drink and drinking,

some of which are:

Whisky - from the Gaelic word 'Uisge beatha', meaning '*water of life*'.

Alcohol - from the Arabic word 'Al-Kuhl' - meaning '*body eating spirit*'.

Plonk - thought to date from WWI, meaning cheap wine (probably Australian slang).

Brandy - from the Dutch 'brandewijn', meaning '*burnt wine*'.

Booze - from the Middle English 'bouse' (Dutch origin).

Dutch Courage - dates from the Anglo-Dutch wars in the 17th century, when the English soldiers believed that the Dutch needed to drink before a fight.

Vodka - A diminutive form of the Slavic word 'voda' (water), interpreted as meaning '*small water*'.

Gin - a distilled alcoholic drink flavoured, amongst other things, with and by Juniper berries. This originated as a medicinal liquor made by monks. Drinking gin to excess in Britain in the early 18th century by ordinary people became a real social problem – as depicted in William Hogarth's painting Gin Lane. 'Gin and tonic' was created as a mixture by officers of the British East India Company, when quinine (a cure for malaria) was included in tonic water to make the medication more palatable.

IPA beer (India Pale Ale) – IPA is a brew with extra hops added and a higher alcoholic content. It was developed by British brewers in the 1820s in order to better preserve British ales for the long journey to the Indian colonies, and as a result Burton-on-Trent became a key brewing centre for IPA and other beers. One important Burton brewery was the Bass company.

Cocktails. The golden age of cocktails is thought of as being the 1920s, when many iconic drink recipes were created. However, the name 'cock tail' can be traced back to 1806, when it appeared as a definition in a New York publication .

To end his talk, Dick mentioned some of the traditional hangover cures from various parts of the world, many of which are of doubtful effectiveness, and some of which are downright dangerous. The problem of alcoholism was touched on during the talk, particularly in countries such as Russia, where fraudulent counterfeiting of Vodka and other drinks, using toxic chemicals, causes real health problems, and can result in death.

This was an interesting talk, covering the subject from a historical perspective. After the vote of thanks, members showed their appreciation in the usual way.

Alan Jeffs

Building a British masterpiece – the story of John Constable’s *The Hay Wain*

Richard Kay
14th May 2024



Richard Kay is the Picture Specialist at Lawrence’s Auctioneers in Crewkerne. His engaging and accomplished talk was illustrated with numerous images of Constable’s work and pictures that influenced him.

John Constable’s *The Hay Wain* is a popular, familiar and widely reproduced image of rural life in the early Nineteenth Century, which hangs in the National Gallery. It depicts a bucolic scene of the River Stour near Flatford Mill in Suffolk where Constable was brought up. The fact that the work is so familiar means that it is often overlooked for serious study.

Constable was born on 11 June 1776 at East Bergholt in Suffolk to Anne (née Watts) and Golding Constable. His father was a prosperous miller and rural businessman in Suffolk, who on his death in 1816 left wealth of £13,000 (the equivalent of approximately £10 million today). John was schooled at Lavenham and Denham. He initially entered the family business, but was allowed, in his twenties, to study painting by enrolling in the Royal Academy School. Here his early influences were the French Masters, such as Poussin and Claude. Early in his career, he produced commissioned portraits and pictures of country houses, but his great passion was for landscapes and the study of nature.



Although closely associated with his home county of Suffolk, which featured in many of his sketches and paintings, Constable travelled widely within the UK throughout his career. His connections with Wiltshire and Dorset include his famous image of Salisbury Cathedral, completed in 1825 and his study of the watermill at Gillingham which dates from 1827. He produced a number of pictures during his honeymoon at Weymouth in 1816, which demonstrate his fascination with “skying” and his ability to capture fleeting moments of light, movement and weather.

The Hay Wain is a large painting, one of Constable’s “six-footers”, of scenes around the Stour. It was completed in 1821 in his studio in London, based on a series of minutely observed sketches and preparatory works done outdoors in Suffolk. It depicts a rural scene of a cart in the shallow River Stour and Willy Lott’s cottage (Gibbons’ Gate Farm) opposite Flatford Mill, which was owned by the Constable family.



Constable's work symbolises the enduring agricultural traditions and idealised way of life of the English countryside in an age of industrial and social change. Originally entitled "*Landscape at Noon*", it acquired its popular name because the focal point is the cart in the water. Although the scene in the distance is of haymaking, the cart itself does not have the high sides of a hay wain (it may be locally known as a "*put*") and it is not clear why it is in the river as this particular part of the Stour is not an obvious ford. There is clearly an element of artistic licence in this element of the picture, in contrast to the rest of the scene which is largely unchanged and still recognisable today. X-ray imagery shows that the composition of the picture evolved during its creation, with figures in the foreground being painted out, so as not to distract from the focus of the picture. The technique of using bright colours and dabbing paint to depict leaves and scraping paint to show the texture of water was regarded as novel and somewhat shocking when the painting was first exhibited.

During his lifetime, Constable sold only 20 pictures in England. His landscapes, which we now regard as essentially "English", were more popular in France than in England. *The Hay Wain* was bought by the Anglo-French dealer Arrowsmith and was much admired in Paris. Constable rebelled against conventional notions of contrived compositions from the artist's imagination, basing his pictures on minutely observed nature in all its diversity. He was considered something of an outsider by the art establishment, partly due to negative class attitudes to his connection with "trade", only being admitted to membership of the Royal Academy at the fourth attempt in 1829. Following his wife's death of consumption in 1828, after the birth of their seventh child, he cut a rather lonely figure. He died in 1837.

Following a question-and-answer session, the chairman gave the vote of thanks for this masterly and highly interesting talk.

Steve Baines



The Machine Gun Corps

Paul Hooley

Tuesday 28 May 2024



Our Probus club member Paul Hooley delivered an interesting talk on the history of the Machine Gun Corps, which was formed during the First World War and disbanded in 1922. Paul's grandfather and great uncle served in this Corps. Both died during the conflict.

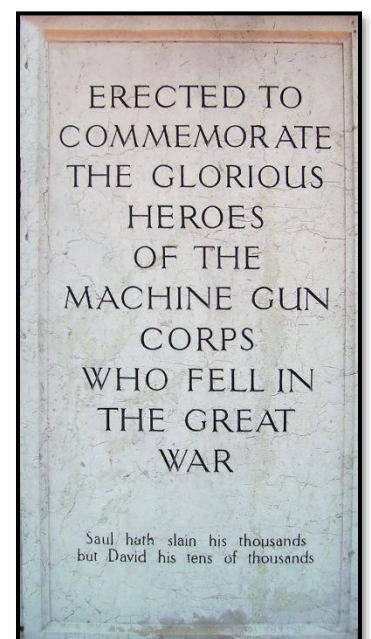


The Machine Gun Corps was formed in 1915. At the outbreak of the WWI, knowledge of the tactical use of the machine gun was undeveloped and it was seen as a minor appendage to the main fighting force. Each battalion was allocated two machine guns, integrated into their established command structure. There were also a number of motorcycle sidecar-mounted mobile machine gun units. With the onset of static trench warfare, the need for separate specialised and better trained units became apparent. The Corps was established with a depot and training centre at Belton Park, near Grantham. Initially divided into infantry, cavalry and motor commands, the heavy command was later created to operate prototype tanks.



Each machine gun unit comprised a team of six men with separate, but interchangeable roles. Recruited from the more educated men amongst the ranks and trained in the use and deployment of the guns, the Corps served in all the major theatres of the war. Its members assumed an elite status and were consequently both admired and resented by the regular foot soldiers. The generals were never fully comfortable with what they regarded as maverick units within their forces. Armed with Maxim and Vickers guns and, later, American Lewis guns, the units were allowed a surprising degree of autonomy in battlefield deployment and could effectively ignore orders in response to battlefield conditions.

The Corps suffered heavy casualties. Of the 170,000 who served, there were 62,000 casualties, of whom 13,000 were killed. The machine gunners were usually the first over the top and last to return. The need to establish a clear line of fire in flat terrain and the glow and steam from the guns meant that the teams were exposed and the target of concentrated enemy fire. It was not for nothing that they were known as the "suicide squad". Seven Victoria Crosses were awarded to members of the Machine Gun Corps.



The Corps was disbanded in 1922. All the records associated with it were destroyed in a fire in Folkestone in 1920. Memories lived on through the Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades' Association and a lodge of the Masons. The last survivor of the Corps, Albert "Smiler" Marshall died in 2005, at the age of 108. The Corps is commemorated by the memorial at Hyde Park Corner, which features a statue of David, having overcome Goliath and the apt inscription from the Book of Samuel. "*Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands*".



Following questions, the Chairman gave the vote of thanks to Paul for his interesting and moving talk.

Steve Baines



ENDPIECE - Editor

Random Thoughts (from the good old USofA)

- *Still trying to get my head around the fact that 'Take Out' can refer to food, dating, or murder.*
- *Threw my back out sleeping and tweaked my neck sneezing - so I'm probably just one strong fart away from complete paralysis.*
- *Dear paranoid people who check behind their shower curtains for murderers - if you do find one, what's your plan?*
- *The older I get, the more I understand why roosters just scream to start their day.*
- *Being popular on Facebook is like sitting at the 'cool table' in the cafeteria of a mental hospital.*

- *You know you're over 50 when you have 'upstairs ibuprofen' and 'downstairs ibuprofen'.*
- *How did doctors come to the conclusion that exercise prolongs life, when ...
...the rabbit is always jumping but only lives for around two years, and
...the turtle that doesn't exercise at all, lives over 200 years.*
- *I too was once a male trapped in a female body ... but then my mother gave birth.*
- *If only vegetables smelled as good as bacon.*
- *When I lost the fingers on my right hand in a freak accident, I asked the doctor if I would still be able to write with it. He said, "Probably, but I wouldn't count on it."*
- *I woke up this morning determined to drink less, eat right, and exercise. But that was four hours ago - when I was younger and full of Hope.*
- *Anyone who says their wedding was the best day of their life has clearly never had two chocolate bars fall down at once from a vending machine.*
- *We live in a time where intelligent people are silenced so that stupid people won't be offended.*
- *The biggest joke on mankind is that computers have begun asking humans to prove they aren't a robot.*
- *When a kid says "Daddy, I want mummy" that's the kid version of "I'd like to speak to your supervisor".*
- *It's weird being the same age as old people.*
- *Just once, I want a username and password prompt to say 'CLOSE ENOUGH'.*
- *Last night the internet stopped working, so I spent a few hours with my family. They seem like good people.*
- *You know you are getting old when friends with benefits means having as a friend someone who can drive at night.*
- *Weight loss goal: To be able to clip my toenails and breathe at the same time.*

- *After watching how some people wore their masks, I understand why contraception fails.*
- *Some of my friends exercise every day. Meanwhile I am watching a show I don't like because the remote fell on the floor.*
- *For those of you that don't want Alexa or Siri listening in on your conversation, they are making a female version.... It doesn't listen to anything.*
- *I just got a present labelled, 'From Mom and Dad', and I know darn well Dad has no idea what's inside.*
- *Now that Covid has everyone washing their hands correctly... next week... Turn Signals.*
- *Someone said, "Nothing rhymes with orange." I said, "No, it doesn't."*
- *The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The realist adjusts his sails.*
- *There's a fine line between a numerator and a denominator. Only a fraction of people will find this funny.*
- *Reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are.*
- *My idea of a Super Bowl is a toilet that cleans itself.*
- *Apparently, exercise helps you with decision-making. It's true. I went for a run this morning and decided I'm never going again.*
- ***SO - REST, CHILL, EAT, DRINK, AND ENJOY LIFE!***