



PROBUS RECORDER



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

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Chairman's Notes

Margaret and I recently enjoyed a coach trip to Austria staying six nights in Feldkirch, a medieval town, close to the borders of Germany and Switzerland. Travelling to these countries was especially interesting for me. As a seafarer I only visited ports!

Unfortunately, Margaret had a fall during a walking tour of Feldkirch and, although not serious, our tour guide insisted on calling an ambulance. The care she received at the hospital was outstanding. Fortunately we were carrying our Global Health Insurance Cards (GHIC) which covered her treatment, including several X-Rays and a couple of stitches. When visiting the EU I would strongly advise you to carry this card, which is free of charge via the NHS Website.

It is wonderful to have summer at last (I think!), enabling us to be in the garden, play Boules and enjoy watching our grandsons' sporting fixtures. However, the news is understandably dominated by the upcoming Election - enough said !

We have decided to pay another visit to Turkey in September with the organisation [Gallipoli and Dardanelles International](#). There will be 11 of us in our group and we very much look forward to meeting up with our Turkish friends.

On the home front, Mike Madgwick continues to do a grand job fostering our relationship with Yeovil Probus Club.

Andrew

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare – John Owen

Many members may well be aware that Dave Hooker who took over from me at the AGM as Welfare Officer has unfortunately had to step back from the role as he has sadly become very unwell. We wish him well, and Pam asks for peace and quiet while Dave recovers.

It was good to see Jeffrey Hall at the last meeting despite having both good and bad days. An inspiration to us all in dealing with health issues!

Having taken my own eye off the ball since Dave took over, I am unaware of any further health issues members may be experiencing. That said, having attended the last meeting and meal at the Hunters Lodge, I have since tested positive for Covid!!!

This will be the last Welfare report from me, so **we need a volunteer** to step up a take on this important role - **PLEASE**.

Late News. It is with sadness that we report the death of former Probus Club member **Roy Stone**. It is understood that he passed away on 26th June in a Care Home in Mere, having been moved there from Salisbury to be nearer to his wife Angela, who lives in Pen Selwood. Condolences have been passed to Angela on behalf of the Club. Funeral details will be provided when known.

Finally

I genuinely and sincerely want to thank Gareth Southgate and the England football team. My Gran has been bed-bound for the last 20 years and she's just got up to turn the TV off thanks to all that rubbish!!

John

Social - July Club Events - Editor

9 July 2024	The British Honours System <i>Ashley Jones MBE</i>
23 July 2024 (Wives & Partners)	Racing Sideways – Speedway <i>Richard Hutley</i>
	Lunch <i>Royal Chase Hotel, Shaftesbury</i> <i>(12.30 for 1pm)</i>

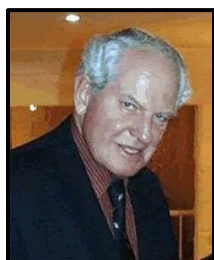
N.B. Please don't forget the Club BBQ
Tuesday 6th August from 12.30pm



OUR JUNE TALKS

Darién Breakthrough

Colonel John Blashford-Snell CBE
11th June 2024



John Blashford-Snell is a former British army officer, explorer and author. In 1971-72 he oversaw the first north-south vehicular journey from Alaska to Cape Horn. Part of this journey involved crossing the Darien Gap - thick, uncharted jungle and swamp in Panama and Colombia. This was the focus of his highly interesting talk.

An expedition to drive two newly introduced Range Rovers 17,000 miles through North and South America was initiated and funded by the British Ministry of Defence in 1971 and 1972. It entailed crossing a 250 mile stretch of extremely inhospitable land in the

isthmus of Central America, through which there was no discernible route. The terrain was regarded as impassable, consisting of thick rain forest, several sizeable rivers and an extensive swamp, known as the Atrato. The area is home to all manner of ferocious, biting, poisonous creatures and vicious thorny toxic plants. It is an environment of endemic tropical diseases. Colonel Blashford-Snell's account was illustrated with pictures and cine footage and peppered with anecdotes of encounters with snakes, rabid bats, peccaries, hornets and ticks etc.



There can be no doubt that crossing the Darien Gap was a major feat of engineering and ingenuity, involving considerable discomfort and requiring extremes of effort and will-power from those involved. The expedition consisted of a contingent of Army personnel



and associated scientific specialists and medical officers. Along the way the expedition was joined by an unruly group of Panamanian irregular troops and a more disciplined and better-trained detachment of Colombian soldiers. The extreme practical difficulties required make-do-and-mend approaches. The expedition, at various times, enlisted the help of local inhabitants and even a group of Colombian prisoners in Panama, who volunteered to assist in order to gain repatriation.

The two Range Rovers had many technical problems. They broke nine rear axles in the process of the expedition. Repairs had to be done in situ in the most difficult of circumstances. Apart from the Range Rovers, equipment consisted of a motorised and tracked wheelbarrow known as a Hillbilly, which was of limited utility, and an old Land Rover, acquired locally. Inflatable boats, with aluminium ladders attached, served as rafts for the vehicles.



Reconnaissance and air-drop supplies were provided by a Beaver aircraft of the Army Air Corps, which had been disassembled, shipped out in the back of a Hercules and reassembled. Air drops were not always successful. One barrel of diesel went through the roof of a local village house. For carrying supplies of food, diesel and spare parts, pack ponies were used. These were regularly preyed on by vampire bats and vulnerable to equine encephalitis.

The whole operation entailed complicated logistics, innovative leadership on the ground and a supply back-up team able to work miracles. Despite all the odds, the expedition made it to the other side. The Colombian army organised a completion ceremony and extended warm hospitality, partly because British and Irish mercenaries had assisted

Simon Bolivar against the Spanish a hundred and fifty years earlier. The Range Rovers eventually arrived at Cape Horn in June 1972. However, no road has subsequently been built across the Darien Gap. It remains an inhospitable region, currently claiming the lives of many Latin American migrants attempting to travel to the United States.

In his closing remarks, Colonel Blashford-Snell quoted “*only those who attempt the absurd can achieve the impossible*”. The expedition seems very much a product of its time – an optimistic time of moon landings and “doing things because they are hard” attitudes. It is difficult to imagine that, in today’s world of cost-consciousness, austerity and diminished international status, a British government would initiate and fund such a seemingly madcap endeavour.

This was a highly interesting talk, accompanied by photographs and film that brought the heat and flavour of the Darien Gap into the room! Following questions and a Vote of Thanks, members showed their appreciation in the usual way.

Steve Baynes

An Auctioneers Ten Commandments

Richard Kay

25th June 2024



Richard Kay is the Picture Specialist at Lawrence’s Auctioneers in Crewkerne. He has been in the antiques business throughout his working life. He confounded his father’s scepticism about his choice of university course by finding employment with Sotheby’s in Chester in 1987, one of the few jobs for which a Fine Arts Degree seemed relevant. His entertaining talk was based on his experience and the advice he would give to his younger self.

First Commandment: Learn not to judge a house by its address.

Sometimes amazing things can be found in unexpected places. In 1997, Richard went to value paintings, part of the estate of an old lady who had lived in a tiny cottage on the Wilts/Hants border. Amongst these was a large painting, which the lady’s son had been told was valueless. It turned out to be by Peter Bruegel and subsequently sold for **£750,000** - ten times the value of the cottage.

Second Commandment: Be diplomatic, especially when the articles for sale have been made by the vendors themselves.

Richard introduced us to the term ‘*floccinaucinihilipilification*’: the action or habit of estimating something as worthless. As an example, he produced a toilet roll cosy, competently executed in long-stitch craftwork. Letting the seller down gently involved explaining the very limited market for such items.

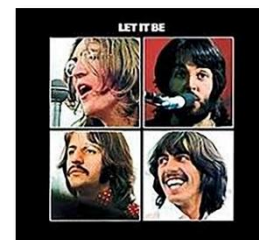
Third Commandment: Do not assume a signature is correct.

Richard produced three examples for which suspicion proved justified.

- A picture with the signature ‘LSL’, bought in a car boot sale in Bridgewater, whose owner was convinced it was by the well-known artist LS Lowry. It had been painted on old paper, but this turned out to be from the flyleaf of an old book.

- A card with the “genuine” signature of John F Kennedy, which had been bought in Dallas for \$2,500. Its guaranteed authenticity was only marred by three things:
 - JFK’s signature would be on documents rather than in the centre of a blank card;
 - JFK always used a fountain pen rather than felt-tip;
 - and the signature on the card looked nothing like JFK’s signature!

The real thing →



Fourth Commandment: Nothing readily available in an average kitchen cupboard can clean pictures.

The following are examples of substances that members of the public have recommended for restoring pictures, in descending order of ‘barminess’:

- Lavender oil
- Hair spray
- Domestos
- Jayes’ Fluid
- Mr Muscle All-purpose Cleaner
- Dog urine
- Nitromors paint stripper



Fifth Commandment: Never underestimate the importance of provenance.

Richard produced three items of little intrinsic value, but for which documentary evidence exists of a connection that makes them marketable:

- A photograph from Shackleton’s Antarctic expedition, which could be proved to have sat on Leonard Hussey’s bedside table.
- A pudding mould that had been owned by Mrs Isabella Beaton.
- A medicine phial known to be connected to the serial killer John Bodkin Adams.

Sixth Commandment: Do not be baffled by the popularity of E-Bay.

Instances of items sold on the on-line marketplace and their sterling equivalent selling prices include:

A 10" length of WWI barbed wire	£175.00
Britney Spears’ discarded chewing gum	£514.00
An X-ray of Kirk Douglas’ chest	£800.00
A potato crisp in the shape of the Pope’s mitre	£800.00
A slice of cheese on toast resembling the Virgin Mary	£20,000.00
Plastic debris from the Duke of Edinburgh’s crashed Range Rover	£65,900.00
The window from the Texas Book Depository from which JFK was shot	£2,000,000.00

Seventh Commandment: The antiques business is about people, not objects.

Objects have sentimental value that far exceeds their intrinsic value. Family history, war memorabilia and medals have poignancy and importance that is sometimes overlooked. As an example, the sale of medals as ‘fancy dress’ seems particularly inappropriate.

Eighth Commandment: Do not equate age and value.

The antiquity of an item is not a guide to how much it will sell for. Examples provided by Richard included:

- A theological text, printed in 1646, worth £70
- An Egyptian funerary figure from 1500BC, which would sell for just £60.

Ninth Commandment: Never be astonished by what people will collect.

Bizarre and esoteric collections cited included:

- A chronological collection of empty picture frames.
- Maps of the island of Sark.
- Photographs of Welsh cricketers.
- Chisels.
- Biscuit tins.
- Railway chairs (heavy steel clips that connect rails to sleepers).
- Items associated with Lord Lucan.
- Coprolite¹. (George Frandsen in Williams, Arizona has recently opened a “poozeum” to display his collection of nearly 10,000 fossilised faeces).
- Books about Bedford. (A lady in St Albans with no connection to Bedford was an avid collector and was recently excited by a Council publication of ‘*Declined planning applications*’).

Tenth Commandment: Do not underestimate the satisfaction collectors get from finding something they want.

The converse of this is also true. The regret of foregoing a wanted item can also be painful. The moral of this is that opportunities to assuage the collecting bug should always be seized!

An interesting end-note to this highly engaging talk, was that our Probus colleague, Paul Hooley, not only knew the Bedford Council planning committee publication to which Richard had referred but had also been involved with the Cecil Higgins Gallery in the same town, whose prized Samuel Palmers turned out to be rather good fakes by Tom Keating. Following a question-and-answer session, the chairman gave the vote of thanks for this highly interesting and stimulating talk.

Steve Baines



¹ A coprolite is fossilized faeces. Coprolites are classified as trace fossils as opposed to body fossils. (Wikipedia)

JUNE VISIT

Visit to RNLI, Poole

18th June 2024

This was the first of what we hope will be many more joint visits and interactions with our colleagues at Yeovil Probus. The event was primarily arranged by Yeovil, who had a contact at the RNLI College, and it started as a members-only visit. However, it soon became clear that we would not get the numbers to make the visit worthwhile and so it was opened to include partners as well. Interest swelled with this change, and in the end we had 15 Club members and partners from both Yeovil and Gillingham.



Life being full of many competing priorities, the final number of attendees on the day dropped to 26. Spare spaces were advertised with both Clubs, and it was just such a pity that these spare places found no takers. *(There is perhaps a debate to be had about trips that are for members and partners rather than members alone - informal chats with our Yeovil colleagues indicate that they have a deal of enthusiasm for these sorts of visits when they appeal to a wide range of interests and backgrounds.)*

Moving to the visit and its accompanying buffet lunch. It is 200 Years since the foundation of Royal National Lifeboat Institution - to give it its full name; the organization is impressive and has become an iconic brand in this nation and overseas. It is rare one goes out and does not see a RNLI car sticker or branded RNLI product - be that a tote-bag, sweatshirt or baseball cap.

The slightly disappointing part of our visit was the buffet lunch; the lunch was all a little chaotic in places and the food was frankly not that inspiring. There was also a lot of food waste. I have given feedback on this as it was the only low point of an otherwise absolutely riveting visit and tour.



Each year the RNLI raises £180M to keep the whole organisation going – and that includes all its training and, importantly, the capital costs of building and fitting-out boats. In round terms that equates to a spend of £500,000 a day, with the income found from:

- Legacies.
- Direct contributions.
- Fund-raising events.
- from ‘collecting-tins rattled in our faces’.

Tens of thousands of volunteers participate² and their collective effort makes this one of the most significant charities in the UK.

² There are 209,892 registered RNLI Volunteers at the time of writing - Ed.

The site in Poole houses the HQ, the Training Centre and the ‘dock-yard’ - as well as the boat building sheds. Many of the solid-hull boats are now constructed with Glass Reinforced Plastic (GPR), although other materials (e.g. steel) are also still used. The numbers that can be seen on each boat denote the following: the first number gives the length of the boat in metres; the second number is the number of that boat off the production line.



During the visit, we were privileged to watch some live training in the pool – the drills being practiced in the photos are of abandoning ship, jumping from a high platform, and reforming in the water as crew to stay together and support each other until the life rafts deploy or rescue occurred.

Obviously, it is far less traumatic in a pool than a real-life situation in the dark and in high seas, but the pool is equipped to provide total ‘black-out’ and waves up to the equivalent of Force 6 – impressive! (Watching the training, we were spared the ‘high seas’ experience – thank goodness!)

We were also shown a selection of satellite and comms equipment available to stranded crews.



In order to provide perspective, we were reminded of the history and record of the RNLI.

- **SAVED!** 144,000 plus lives saved in 200 years – 389 alone in 2022.

Date	Event	Date	Event
1785	The first lifeboats were deployed (and patented in 1786)	1891	First RNLI street collection .
1824	Sir William Hillary ’s vision for a service dedicated to “saving lives at sea” became a reality in Bishopsgate’s trendy London Tavern on 4 March 1824.	1905	Introduction of the first RNLI motor lifeboat .
1824	The first RNLI Gold Medal was awarded for savings lives at sea. It was awarded to Charles Fremantle for bravery when he swam out to a Swedish brig that had become stranded off the coast of Christchurch.	1930	Introduction of first RNLI fast motor lifeboat .
1835	Grace Darling became a national heroine after risking her life to save the stranded survivors of the wrecked steamship <i>Forfarshire</i> in 1838.	1940	Dunkirk – RNLI participation
1854	RNLI Inspector, Captain Ward, broke new ground in lifesaving in 1854, with his new design of cork lifejacket .	1963	Introduction of the first RNLI Inflatable lifeboats .

1861	Whitby Disaster - During a huge storm on 9 February 1861, a Whitby lifeboat capsized, throwing the crew overboard. Only one member of the crew, Henry Freeman, survived.	1969	Introduction of the first RNLI female crew member
1880	Lifeboat Zetland's final launch. Built in 1802, the Zetland is the oldest surviving lifeboat in the world and saved over 500 lives during her service.	1981	Penlee Disaster - 19 December 1981 , off the coast of Cornwall. The RNLI lifeboat Solomon Browne, based at Penlee, near Mousehole, went to the aid of the vessel Union Star after its engines failed in heavy seas. After the lifeboat had rescued four people, both vessels were lost with all hands. Sixteen people died, including eight volunteer lifeboatmen.

Should you wish to find out more, greater detail can be found on [this webpage](#).

This was a great tip and appreciated by all – it was borne in on us how lucky we are to have such amazing volunteer-driven institutions such as the RNLI serving our islands (UK and Eire)!

Mike Madgwick



ENDPIECE - Editor

Some Election Thoughts

Will our wonderful election system work for everyone while it takes place against:

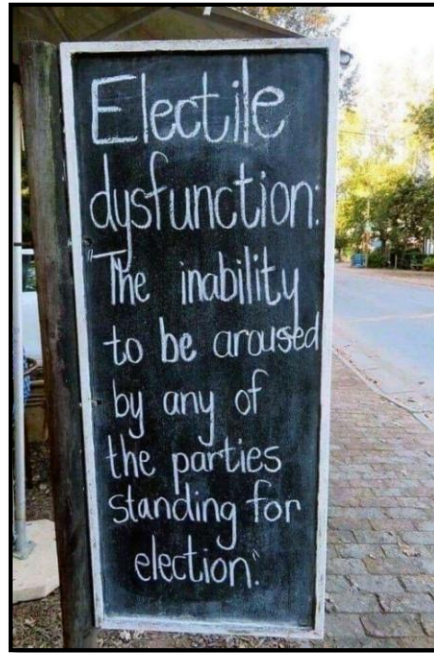
Euro 2024: Should England progress to the quarter-finals (???), they could play a match less than 24 hours after the polls close on 4 July. It has been estimated that nearly half a million ‘fans’ might be in Germany on Polling Day.

Wimbledon: The tennis tournament gets under way on Monday 1 July, with players in the men's and women's competition on the courts on election day.

Glastonbury: This will have finished 3 days before polling and on past record, festival-goers will still be ‘recovering’ (and irritating local residents!).



Sweet Diane!
As ever - up to date and up
to the mark ... !?



Voter Apathy or Ennui?

@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@

And if you think we are dreadful in this country, here is what is being said on their website vis-à-vis the 2024 Presidential Election by

OXFAM in the USA

“FIGHT FOR ECONOMIC, GENDER, AND RACIAL JUSTICE FOR FAMILIES – AND TAX THE RICH.”

@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@@

But lest you forget, there is a current pledge in this country to start (re-start?) National Service.

