



PROBUS RECORDER



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

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Chairman's Notes

In Colin's April report he stated that *"This is the worst start to the year weather-wise that I can remember"*. Right now - as I write this month's report, the sun is shining - dare we hope that summer is coming?

This month we extend a warm welcome to John Walker who has rejoined us.

As always, we have had excellent speakers this month, and our thanks to Roger Lester for his choices. And Friday coffee meetings at the Old Brewery continues to be popular - although it would be good to see a few new faces!

We enjoyed an excellent lunch at the Royal Chase in Shaftesbury, and we now look forward to our Christmas Dinner there on the 12th December – for all of which, our thanks go to Ron Walker.

In August we have our BBQ at the Rugby Club - with Yeovil Probus Club joining us for the event. And we also have visits to the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton and the Army Flying Museum at Middle Wallop, for which our thanks go to Mike Madgwick.

Although we are living in an interesting - some say dangerous - world, the best way forward is surely to live each day to the full. To this end, as well as our personal holidays to Wales and Turkey, Margaret and I look forward to future Probus events and outings throughout the year.

Andrew

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare

As most readers are aware, our current Welfare Officer, Dave Hooker, has been hors de combat for a while, but recently there has been positive news of his condition which is most welcome.

In the meantime we battle on and hope that someone will feel able and willing to take up the reins of this important post. For the moment no update can be provided, but we hope this will have changed by the time of the next publication.

Editor

Social - August Club Events - Editor

6 August 2024 (Wives and Partners) (From 12.30)	The 2024 Probus BBQ <i>North Dorset Rugby Club</i> <i>(with attendance by Yeovil Probus)</i>
16 th August 2024	Visit to the Army Flying Museum <i>Middle Wallop</i>
20 th August 2024	'Climate Change' - A Geologist's Perspective <i>John Pett</i>



OUR JUNE/ JULY TALKS

The British Honours System

Ashley Jones MBE
25th June 2024



Ashley Jones has worked in the military, law enforcement and in the charity sector. His talk provided a survey of the British honours system, including some of the lesser-known awards and some well-known recipients. He also offered advice on how to nominate worthy individuals.

The honours system provides an insight into British culture, governance and the role of the Monarchy. With its origins in the distant past, it has relevance today, as it demonstrates how we collectively recognise achievement and service and how this is intricately entwined with political patronage. Honours are split into classes ("orders of chivalry") and are graded to distinguish different degrees of achievement or service according to various criteria.

Awards. Ashley's talk started with a description of the various honours conferred by the Monarch and focused on those awarded biannually: at New Year and on the Monarch's official birthday in June. These are available to both the military and to civilians. The talk did not venture into peerages, or the arcane territory of medals and decorations awarded to the armed forces for bravery in battle etc. Honours are available to British citizens and those from 15 Commonwealth Realms (for which the King is Monarch). Non-British recipients can be awarded "honorary" honours.

- **BEM:** The British Empire Medal. This is the 'entry-level' honour. It recognises people who make important contributions to their communities. It was phased out by John Major's government in the 1990s but reintroduced by David Cameron in 2012. It is usually ceremoniously conferred by the Lord Lieutenant of the County rather than by a trip to the Palace.



- **MBE:** Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. It is awarded for outstanding achievement, often in sports and entertainment, but is also used to reward long-serving military and civil servants. The ribbon for military awardees has a red stripe.
- **OBE:** Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire was first introduced in 1917 to recognise civilian contributions to the war effort. It is the most commonly awarded of the honours.
- **CBE:** Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire is awarded to higher achievers. This is worn around the neck (on a bow for women) rather than simply pinned to the chest.
- **KBE/DBE:** Knight of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire/Dame of the British Empire. This is awarded for significant contributions and comprises a medal and a breast star. A knighthood entitles the recipient to use the title “Sir” or “Dame”.
- **GBE:** Knight Grand Cross/Dame Grand Cross of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire; it is signified by an eight-point star and a sash.
- **Knight Bachelor.** This award originated in the reign of Henry III and is nowadays often given to “national treasures” in the world of entertainment. Billy Connolly, for example, is a Knight Bachelor.
- **Companion of Honour.** This is limited to 65 living recipients at any time and is for lifetime achievement. (e.g. Sir Paul McCartney).
- **Knight of the Garter.** This is about as high as it gets. It was the only regalia (he had many honours) on Sir Winston Churchill’s coffin in 1964. It is limited to a group of 25 and is in the personal gift of the King. Garter recipients process each year through the grounds of Windsor Castle on St Georges Day. The ‘star’ of the insignia has to be returned on the death of the recipient.
- **Order of Merit.** This award is the gift of the monarch and is limited to 24 recipients. It is usually given to high achievers amongst artists and scientists, who get together once a year for lunch with the Monarch.



Unsurprisingly, given that the system of honouring courtiers and retainers has developed since early mediaeval times, various accolades have come and gone over the years. Many of the ‘gongs’ associated with British rule in India are no longer used. Amongst the lesser-known awards that are still conferred are the following:

- **The Order of the Thistle**, specifically for Scots.
- **The Royal Victorian Order**, for courtiers and royal household retainers
- **The Order of the Bath**, mainly for senior military and Civil Servants, including Sir Kier Starmer, whose KCB was awarded for his time as Director of Public Prosecutions.

- **The Order of St Michael and St George.**



This is the variety of knighthood usually distributed to Diplomats and senior Civil Servants, although others - often associated with overseas travel - also qualify, e.g. Michael Palin in 2019. The various gradations of this “gong” are popularly labelled:

- * **CMG:** Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (“*Call Me God*”).
- * **KCMG:** Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (“*Kindly Call Me God*”).
- * **GCMG:** Grand Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (“*God Calls Me God*”).

One of the features of the honours system is the gradation of approbation that each level signifies. Particularly prominent individuals can accumulate higher and higher honours. As an example, **Sir David Attenborough** is probably the most decorated individual alive today. He has been awarded:

- CBE
- Knight Bachelor
- Knight of the Royal Victorian Order
- Companion of Honour
- Order of Merit
- KCMG.



The Awards System. The system for choosing who gets an honour is organised through a series of committees comprising government officials and various co-opted members. Traditionally Civil Service, diplomatic and military awards were “expected” once the recipient had achieved certain ranks or served for certain periods. In that sense, the honour went with the job. “Buggins turn” is still a feature of how the system works.

Since 1993, however, the system has been partially democratised, allowing the general public to nominate deserving individuals. This involves filling in a nomination form detailing the individual’s particular achievements and contributions to public life and the community. It also involves providing referees. Roughly 50% of those nominated in this way get an award.

Honours are sometimes refused. Examples of people who have declined honours are:

- **David Bowie.** (“*I would never have any intention of accepting anything like that*” - the same year in which Mick Jagger was given his knighthood.
- **Michael Winner.** (On the grounds that it was the sort of honour awarded “*if you clean toilets well at King’s Cross station*”.)
- **Stephen Hawking.** (“*Prof Hawking does not like the whole concept of them.*”)
- **Alan Bennet.** (turned down the offer of becoming a CBE in 1988 and then rejected a knighthood in 1996. He said the reason for doing so was because he did not believe that he could carry off being a knight: “*I felt that, in my case, it just wouldn't suit me, that's all*”.
- **Rudyard Kipling.** (declined knighthood in 1899 and again in 1903; his wife stated that Kipling felt he could “*do his work better without it*”. Kipling also declined the Order of Merit in 1921 and again in 1924.)

- **L.S. Lowry.** (*“All my life I have felt most strongly against social distinction of any kind.”*)

Others have had their honours revoked. These include:

- Rolf Harris
- Lester Piggott
- Fred Goodwin
- Anthony Blunt
- Robert Mugabe.

Paula Vennells, of Post Office notoriety, was pressurised by public and press opinion to hand back her CBE. Unfortunately, Jimmy Saville’s awards could not be revoked, because he died before his true nature was revealed.

In theory, the Sovereign has the sole right of conferring titles of honour. The late Queen was known to have taken a keen interest in the conferring of honours and in the ceremonies involved. Our current King is said to be equally keen. In practice, the majority of the approximately 2,600 honours distributed annually are decided in committee - and ultimately by the Prime Minister.

The use of honours for political patronage is one of the more controversial features of the system. There are periodic “cash for honours” scandals, the most egregious of which was Lloyd George’s sale of peerages and other honours, which came to light in 1925. Harold Wilson was much criticised in 1976 for awarding his friends – his so-called ‘Lavender List’. Controversy surrounding honours and donations to political party funds seem to bubble up from time to time and the system is clearly vulnerable to abuse. Liz Truss’s resignation honours list after 49 days in office raised eyebrows.

Steve Baines

Racing Sideways

Richard Hutley
23rd July 2024



Richard Hutley is a retired Police Inspector (Dorset Police). His talk on Motorcycle Speedway covered the thrills and dangers of racing on bikes at high speed on a loose surface and with no brakes. He told his tale from a rider’s perspective.



Motorcycle speedway is a sport that involves four and, on rare occasions, six riders racing anti-clockwise four times around an oval track. The tracks vary in circumference between 200 – 400 metres and are a minimum of 10 metres wide on the straight and 14 metres on

the bends, and the surface consists of shale-mix.

The start line is halfway along one of the straight sections of the track. The starting gate is a spring-loaded mechanism that raises two or three strands of tape to start the race. A typical race meeting consists of several races or “heats” with each heat lasting about 60 seconds. These are between teams of riders who these days are mainly professional or semi-professional, and since the 1990s commercial sponsorship has become important to the sport.



Jap

Speedway motorbikes are specialist machines. They have 500cc engines with only one gear, no cooling system and no brakes. Engines are either upright, as in regular motorcycles, or “lay down” which lowers the centre of gravity. Early



Weslake

machines were made by Jap, but Weslake now dominates the market. They are fuelled by methanol. Originally the handlebars were dropped, but in more modern times, they are generally cow-horn shaped, which improves the handling. Trailing from the back of the bike is a dirt deflector, named after Barry Briggs - one of the legendary riders in the sport.

The machines have acceleration of 0-60mph in 3 seconds, the equivalent of FI racing cars, and bends are entered at around 70mph. Competitors use the loose surface to slide their machines sideways through the bends, which is referred to as “*powersliding*” or “*broadsideing*”, and to this end riders’ left boots are steel-shod. Before the race, riders walk the course to assess the weather and moisture content of the surface and adjust the gearing of their bikes to suit the conditions. During the race, advantage is gained through use of the throttle to gain traction and physical strength to keep the wheels in line around bends, and not surprisingly riders get extremely dirty in the process!

The sport originated in Australia and can be traced back to a race meeting at the Rugby Ground in Newcastle, New South Wales in 1905. The earliest Dirt Track race in the United States was in 1906. In UK, the sport is thought to have developed from a race meeting at High Beach, Epping Forest in February 1928. Most of the riders on that occasion were Australians, but the UK domestic sport developed rapidly both for riders and spectators in the 1930s. It is now very popular in the UK and races are even broadcast on Sky Sports. It draws huge crowds in Australia and USA. It also has a sizable fan base in Poland, Sweden, Denmark and elsewhere in Europe.

Various spin-off activities, such as Grass Track Racing, Long Track Racing and Side-car Racing have developed over the years. Each require different riding techniques. Ice Speedway, using two speed gearboxes and spiked tyres, is popular in North East Europe and North America. Cycle Speedway, using stripped down bicycles with no brakes or multiple gears is said to have developed from informal races around inner-city bombsites after World War II.

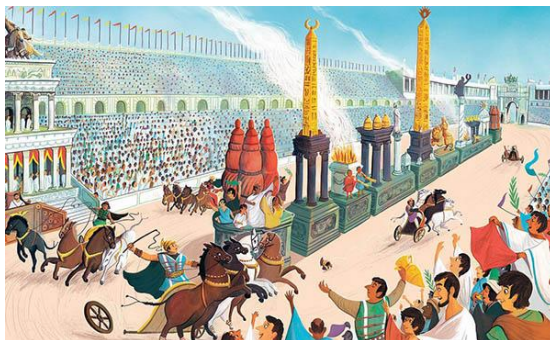
Speedway, in its origins, had rudimentary rules and little regard for safety. Today it is more regulated, and riders are better protected. Leathers have been replaced with Kevlar for body protection, the moving parts of the bikes are covered, and tracks have padded surrounds to mitigate the effects of collision. However, Speedway remains a highly dangerous game. Over 350 riders have been killed between 1927 and 2021 and injuries of varying degrees of seriousness are commonplace. Richard showed video sequences of some horrific crashes and told stories of riders continuing their heats with major trauma injuries. It seems that Speedway attracts the kind of participant whose surfeit of testosterone and competitive spirit supersedes any reasonable sense of self-preservation.



The skill of the riders is not in doubt. They have to adjust the mechanics of their machines to match particular track conditions in order to maximise speed and traction. They also need physical strength and mental acuity to maintain control at speed, and split-second reactions to cope with race conditions and the actions of other competitors.

While the riders may be a race apart, Speedway affords plenty of vicarious thrills for spectators. Like Roman chariot races and mediaeval jousts, it provides a series of concentrated bursts of excitement. It engenders a sense of involvement because of the noise, the dust and the contagious excitement of the crowd.

Each race meeting follows a pattern that builds up the crowd's expectations. In the pageantry of the pre-race parade, the riders are presented like gladiators to the spectators. Each heat allows the opportunity for partisan loyalty to the local team or favoured riders and provides an adrenaline rush from the spectacle of skill, courage and foolhardiness. It also offers the exciting possibility of hideous mishaps and the occasional on-track punch-up. It is the 'Circus Maximus' recreated in provincial towns like Poole, Workington and Glasgow.



The Chairman thanked Richard Hutley for a highly interesting and entertaining talk, and members duly showed their appreciation.

Steve Baines



ENDPIECE – Editor

A Way With Words

He was in ecstasy, with a huge smile on his face, as his wife moved forwards and backwards, forwards and backwards - again and again.

Back and forth, back and forth... and in and out, in and out... a little to the right, a little to the left...

She could feel the sweat beading on her forehead and trickling between her breasts, down the small of her back - she was getting near the end.

Her heart was pounding ... her face was flushed ... then she moaned, softly at first, and began to groan more loudly.

Finally, totally exhausted, she let out an almighty scream and shouted,

"OK, OK! I can't parallel park! You do it, you SMUG bastard!"

