



PROBUS RECORDER



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

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Chairman's Notes

This month we enjoyed an excellent lunch at the Plough Inn at Manston - well done Colin for finding this venue.

The Rotary Club of Gillingham are organising an Open Day at *RiversMeet* in June to give local Clubs and Organisations an opportunity to promote their wares. Our committee has yet to decide if/how we might take part.

It is disappointing that we continue to have zero offers to fill the post of Welfare Officer, but I hope that someone will find it in their heart to take up the challenge in the near future.

On a completely different note, I became convinced that the Tinsleys were paying far too much to Wessex Water, and my Yorkshire instincts were feeling pretty offended; I felt we needed to stop wasting money and instal a water meter. This was duly done – and a leak (6 litres per minute!) was quickly revealed. Our insurance company was not interested because they saw the matter as normal 'wear and tear'. However, the leak was located - and then another - and another!!



The outcome of the whole business has been the fitting of 40 metres of new pipe between the water meter and the airing cupboard in the house. I'm sure you will appreciate that this was only achieved at vast expense, and the whole process also took 5 months to complete. Life can be such fun!!

Andrew

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Social - April Club Events

1st April 2025 <i>(Men only)</i>	U Boat! The Battle of the Atlantic (Part 1) <i>Dick Taylor</i>
15th April 2025	Healthwatch Dorset <i>Lindsey Fish</i>
29th April 2025 <i>(Wives/Partners)</i>	Corvette! The Battle of the Atlantic (Part 2) <i>Dick Taylor</i>
	Members' Lunch <i>North Dorset RFC, Gillingham¹</i> <i>12.30 for 1pm</i>



¹ Yet to be finalised, but probably a curry meal.

MARCH TALKS

CUSTER'S LAST STAND - 1876

Lt Col (Retd) James Porter

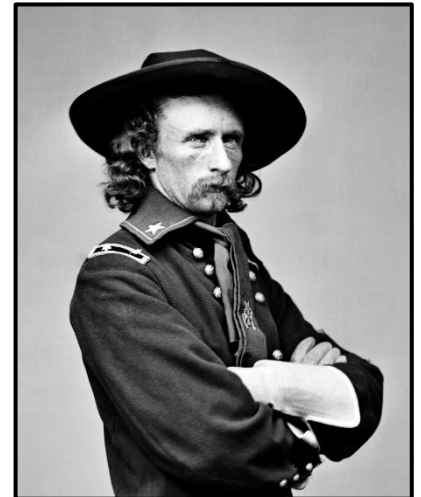
4th March 2025



James Porter told us about the famous 1876 battle of the Little Bighorn in the Indian wars of the 19th Century, and the role of George Armstrong Custer, who commanded companies of the 7th Cavalry Regt; and, together with his men, was massacred in the battle.

George Armstrong Custer (1839-1876) was a colourful character; he had experience as a Union Cavalry Officer in the American Civil War. After the war and by now commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel in the US standing army, he was sent west to fight in the ongoing Indian wars against the Sioux and other Great Plains Indian Tribes.

A number of reservations had been established for the native indigenous population, as the new settlers moved ever westwards into traditional Indian lands (together with gold prospectors). Effectively, the native Indians had been forced to move from their traditional lands and rich buffalo hunting grounds, which was alien to their traditionally nomadic lifestyle. Problems and fighting ensued when the Indians broke out and moved their camps out of the reservations.



The Great Sioux War of 1876 brought together an alliance of Sioux, Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes against the Government cavalry forces. The Battle of the Little Bighorn (known to the Plains Indians as the battle of the Greasy Grass) was one of the battles in this war. Two of the Indian Chiefs were Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. A major sparking point for the war was



the aim of the US government to obtain ownership of the mineral rich Black Hills of Dakota.

The US campaign started earlier in 1876, with US forces under generals Crook and Terry; and in the spring of 1876, General Terry commanded 15 companies of 2,500 men, including Custer and the 585 men of his command. These and two other columns were to converge simultaneously on the hunting grounds and pin down the Indians in a pincer movement.

Custer was to spy out the enemy along the Little Bighorn River in the Crow Indian reservation in South Eastern Montana. He split his force, retaining 270 men, with Major Reno commanding the other part of his command. The strength of the Indian forces was



much larger than anticipated. The problem for ensuring the success of co-ordinating the pincer movement was maintaining communication over distances of hundreds of miles. The army was equipped with Springfield rifles, but about half the Indian forces were armed with repeating rifles.

Custer was therefore away from the main US force, and he attacked early. His force retreated to a hill top, which was poorly defended. He was overwhelmed, by Chief Crazy Horse and his braves, and the whole force of 270 men was butchered, including Custer and his brother. After the discovery of the tragedy, Custer's body was sent to West Point for burial.



Following questions, the Chairman gave the vote of thanks and closed the meeting.

Alan Jeffs

THE VOYAGES OF THE BEAGLE: ROBERT FITZROY AND CHARLES DARWIN

Dr James Taylor FRSA
18th March 2025



James Taylor gave a fascinating talk on the voyages of HMS Beagle in the 1820s and 1830s. Born into a family of scientists, James became an art historian with a particular interest in naval history and maritime art. He was curator of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. His publication, "The Voyage of the Beagle" (2008) approached the history of the voyage through the works of the artists on board the ship, principally Augustus Earle and Conrad Martens.

HMS Beagle, a Cherokee Class 10-gun brig sloop, made two survey voyages to South America. During the first mapping expedition, 1826 to 1830, the ship was captained by Captain Pringle Stokes under the supervision of Captain Philip Parker King of HMS Adventure.

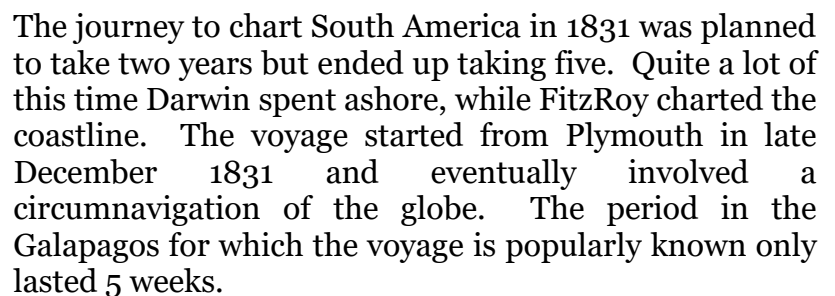


This expedition was somewhat eclipsed by the more famous second voyage, but it is notable for two incidental facts. The first was that following a fracas with the local inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, the English took hostages. Four of these hostages, bizarrely named by their captors Fuegia Basket, Jemmy Button, York Minster and Boat Memory, returned with the ship to England in 1830 and gained some celebrity as curiosities. The second incidental fact, although not so incidental to the unfortunate Pringle Stokes, was that Robert FitzRoy took over command of HMS Beagle off the southern coast of South America when his predecessor shot himself.

Robert FitzRoy, 1805-1865, was of aristocratic lineage and could trace his family line back to Charles II on the illegitimate side. His uncle was Lord Castlereagh, who was Foreign Secretary 1812-22. He joined the Navy at the age of 12 and attended the Naval College in Portsmouth where he was the first student to achieve "full numbers" (100%). He is remembered today for his role as captain of the Beagle's second voyage with Charles Darwin and his later career as the leading light in weather forecasting.



Between captaining the Beagle and developing what we now know as the Met Office in 1854, FitzRoy had a distinguished career as a naval commander, rising in rank to Vice Admiral. He was briefly a Tory MP and junior government minister. From 1843-45 he was Governor of New Zealand in the early days of colonisation, in which role he had a difficult time mediating between the Maori and the European settlers. He was a complex, highly intelligent man, known for his fiery temper. He struggled to reconcile emerging evolutionary findings that would eventually lead to Darwin's *Origin of Species* with his own orthodox Creationist views and belief in the literal veracity of the Bible. He suffered periods of depression and at the age of 59, cut his own throat.



Tierra del Fuegians from the previous voyage and a missionary, Richard Matthews, were also on board so that they could be returned home and spread Christianity.

In addition to completing his journals, Darwin collected masses of specimens of fossils, dead animals and plants, all of which were shipped home on passing ships. These formed the foundation of his subsequent work on the diversity of species and evolution through natural selection. The Origin of Species, published in 1859 was the culmination of this work. It was a momentous and original work, but it also a synthesis of much of the intellectual enquiry about the natural world in the middle of the nineteenth century. Alfred Russell Wallace reached similar conclusions at much the same time, although it is Darwin whose name endures.

The Chairman thanked James for his very interesting talk. After inviting questions, he closed the meeting.

Steve Baines



ENDPIECE (Editor)

I make no apologies for including this lengthy article, which you may have heard or seen before. However many ‘wrinkles’ the UK continues to experience in its relationships with France, I suggest that the thoughtful words of M Claude Malhuret deserve the widest circulation. It may yet prove to be one of those speeches that live on in history.

*Transcript of a speech in the **French Senate**
by*

**MR. CLAUDE MALHURET
(4 MARCH 2025)**



“President, Mr. Prime Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen Ministers, My dear colleagues -
Europe is at a critical turning point in its history. The American shield is crumbling, Ukraine risks being abandoned, Russia strengthened.

Washington has become the court of Nero, a fiery emperor, submissive courtiers and a ketamine-fuelled jester in charge of purging the civil service.

This is a tragedy for the free world, but it is first and foremost a tragedy for the United States. Trump’s message is that there is no point in being his ally since he will not defend

you, he will impose more customs duties on you than on his enemies and will threaten to seize your territories while supporting the dictatorships that invade you.

The king of the deal is showing what the art of the deal is all about. He thinks he will intimidate China by lying down before Putin, but Xi Jinping, faced with such a shipwreck, is probably accelerating preparations for the invasion of Taiwan.

Never in history has a President of the United States capitulated to the enemy. Never has anyone supported an aggressor against an ally. Never has anyone trampled on the American Constitution, issued so many illegal decrees, dismissed judges who could have prevented him from doing so, dismissed the military general staff in one fell swoop, weakened all checks and balances, and taken control of social media.

This is not an illiberal drift; it is the beginning of the confiscation of democracy. Let us remember that it took only one month, three weeks and two days to bring down the Weimar Republic and its Constitution.

I have faith in the strength of American democracy, and the country is already protesting. But in one month, Trump has done more harm to America than in four years of his last presidency. We were at war with a dictator, now we are fighting a dictator backed by a traitor.

Eight days ago, at the very moment that Trump was rubbing Macron's back in the White House, the United States voted at the UN with Russia and North Korea against the Europeans demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops.

Two days later, in the Oval Office, the military service shirker was giving war hero Zelensky lessons in morality and strategy before dismissing him like a groom, ordering him to submit or resign.

Tonight, he took another step into infamy by stopping the delivery of weapons that had been promised. What to do in the face of this betrayal? The answer is simple: face it.

And first of all, let's not be mistaken. The defeat of Ukraine would be the defeat of Europe. The Baltic States, Georgia, Moldova are already on the list. Putin's goal is to return to Yalta, where half the continent was ceded to Stalin.

The countries of the South are waiting for the outcome of the conflict to decide whether they should continue to respect Europe or whether they are now free to trample on it.

What Putin wants is the end of the order put in place by the United States and its allies 80 years ago, with its first principle being the prohibition of acquiring territory by force.

This idea is at the very source of the UN, where today Americans vote in favour of the aggressor and against the attacked, because the Trumpian vision coincides with that of Putin: a return to spheres of influence, the great powers dictating the fate of small countries.

Mine is Greenland, Panama and Canada, you are Ukraine, the Baltics and Eastern Europe, he is Taiwan and the China Sea.

At the parties of the oligarchs of the Gulf of Mar-a-Lago, this is called "*diplomatic realism*."

So we are alone. But the talk that Putin cannot be resisted is false. Contrary to the Kremlin's propaganda, Russia is in bad shape. In three years, the so-called second largest army in the world has managed to grab only crumbs from a country three times less populated.

Interest rates at 25%, the collapse of foreign exchange and gold reserves, the demographic collapse show that it is on the brink of the abyss. The American helping hand to Putin is the biggest strategic mistake ever made in a war.

The shock is violent, but it has a virtue. Europeans are coming out of denial. They understood in one day in Munich that the survival of Ukraine and the future of Europe are in their hands and that they have three imperatives.

Accelerate military aid to Ukraine to compensate for the American abandonment, so that it holds, and of course to impose its presence and that of Europe in any negotiation.

This will be expensive. It will be necessary to end the taboo of the use of frozen Russian assets. It will be necessary to circumvent Moscow's accomplices within Europe itself by a coalition of only the willing countries, with of course the United Kingdom.

Second, demand that any agreement be accompanied by the return of kidnapped children, prisoners and absolute security guarantees. After Budapest, Georgia and Minsk, we know what agreements with Putin are worth. These guarantees require sufficient military force to prevent a new invasion.

Finally, and this is the most urgent, because it is what will take the most time, we must build the neglected European defence, to the benefit of the American umbrella since 1945 and scuttled since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It is a Herculean task, but it is on its success or failure that the leaders of today's democratic Europe will be judged in the history books.

Friedrich Merz has just declared that Europe needs its own military alliance. This is to recognize that France has been right for decades in arguing for strategic autonomy.

It remains to be built. It will be necessary to invest massively, to strengthen the European Defence Fund outside the Maastricht debt criteria, to harmonize weapons and munitions systems, to accelerate the entry into the Union of Ukraine, which is today the leading European army, to rethink the place and conditions of nuclear deterrence based on French and British capabilities, to relaunch the anti-missile shield and satellite programs.

The plan announced yesterday by Ursula von der Leyen is a very good starting point. And much more will be needed.

Europe will only become a military power again by becoming an industrial power again. In a word, the Draghi report will have to be implemented. For good.

But the real rearmament of Europe is its moral rearmament.

We must convince public opinion in the face of war weariness and fear, and especially in the face of Putin's cronies, the extreme right and the extreme left.

They argued again yesterday in the National Assembly, Mr Prime Minister, before you, against European unity, against European defence.

They say they want peace. What neither they nor Trump say is that their peace is capitulation, the peace of defeat, the replacement of de Gaulle Zelensky by a Ukrainian Pétain at the beck and call of Putin.

Peace for the collaborators who have refused any aid to the Ukrainians for three years.

Is this the end of the Atlantic Alliance? The risk is great. But in the last few days, the public humiliation of Zelensky and all the crazy decisions taken in the last month have finally made the Americans react.

Polls are falling. Republican lawmakers are being greeted by hostile crowds in their constituencies. Even Fox News is becoming critical.

The Trumpists are no longer in their majesty. They control the executive, the Parliament, the Supreme Court and social networks.

But in American history, the freedom fighters have always prevailed. They are beginning to raise their heads.

The fate of Ukraine is being played out in the trenches, but it also depends on those in the United States who want to defend democracy, and here on our ability to unite Europeans, to find the means for their common defence, and to make Europe the power that it once was in history and that it hesitates to become again.

Our parents defeated fascism and communism at great cost.

The task of our generation is to defeat the totalitarianisms of the 21st century.

Long live free Ukraine, long live democratic Europe.”