



# PROBUS RECORDER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM, DORSET  
([www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk](http://www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk))

Issue No. 244  
May 2025

## Chairman's Notes

As this is my last Chairman's notes before the AGM on 13<sup>th</sup> May I should like to thank the Committee and all Club members for all their support over the last year.

Especially, I wish to thank Colin Chamberlain who has stepped in at short notice to be both Lunch Organiser and Club Secretary.

Looking back at my first newsletter on becoming Chairman, I saw that I mentioned the visit that Margaret and I made to the National Memorial Arboretum for Anzac Day last year. This year we are again going to the Commemorations, staying four nights in Ashbourne in the Derbyshire Dales.

Nearer to home, I really do hope that we are able to attract some new members soon. Keeping our numbers up is so essential to the continuing success of our Club, and this is the responsibility of all of us.

I have very much enjoyed the privilege of being your Chairman this last year, and I look forward to keeping up with you all over the coming months and years.

Thank you.

*Andrew*

## WELFARE & SOCIAL

### Social - May Club Events

|                           |                                                                                             |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 <sup>th</sup> May 2025 | <b><u>Annual General Meeting</u></b><br>+<br><b>Pop Music 1960s</b><br><i>Les Yeates</i>    |
| 27 <sup>th</sup> May 2025 | <b>Speaker</b><br><i>Not Yet Scheduled</i>                                                  |
|                           | <b>Members' Lunch</b><br><i>The Montague Inn (Shepton Montague)</i><br><i>12.30 for 1pm</i> |

**17<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

An invitation to join  
**Yeovil Probus** for  
Visit to:

**Yeovil Railway Centre**

Consisting of:

- Origins of The Railway Centre
- Tour of the transfer shed/engine shed/workshop
- Trip on diesel hauled guard's van
- Café/museum

*Visit is free and includes wives/ partners*

***Please contact our Club Secretary should you wish to attend.***



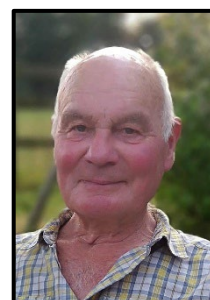
## **APRIL TALKS**

### **MEETING – TUESDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2025**

*I suppose the date should have set off warning bells! The talk that was to have been given would have been the first part of talks on **The Battle of The Atlantic in WWII**. In the event, the speaker failed to turn up and apologised profusely when he found out that he had made a mistake with his dates!*

*Nothing daunted, and after the wait for the first speaker to show, one of our own members put himself forward to speak. Club member **John Bartlett** gave an extempore talk reminiscing on his post-Metropolitan Police career as an insurance assessor.*

*As in his previous talk, there were many amusing and interesting anecdotes, and John was thanked for his efforts at such short notice.*



## HEALTHWATCH DORSET

**Lucy Cribb and Linsey Fish**

**15<sup>th</sup> April 2025**



*Lucy Cribb is the Engagement Officer of Healthwatch Dorset. This organisation's role is to seek out and listen to people living in Dorset, to record their experiences of using health and care services, and to provide feedback to NHS service providers. Linsey Fish, the Volunteer Officer is responsible for recruiting and supporting volunteers and for coordinating their activities and their training.*

Healthwatch Dorset acts as an independent champion for health and social care. It provides information about available services, raises awareness, gives feedback and assists with complaints and advocacy. There is a similar organisation in every county. Each county Healthwatch derives funding from the NHS but is independent. Private companies are contracted to fulfil this role for a set number of years, through competitive procurement processes.

In Dorset, Healthwatch is based in Littledown, Bournemouth and has a county-wide remit. It is run by Evolving Communities CIC, a community interest company, which also provides similar services in other counties. It consists of a small number of paid employees (two full time and two part-time) coordinating a larger circle of volunteers, under the policy supervision of a Steering Group. There are currently about 50 volunteers, but Healthwatch Dorset hopes to expand this number.

The principal purposes of Healthwatch Dorset are:

- to gather information from the customers of health and social care services,
- to record patient experiences, both positive and negative,
- to undertake research on care quality and to feedback findings at relevant levels of the NHS.

The intention is to ensure that the Health Service thereby learns and improves. The approach is collaborative rather than confrontational, but the relationship with the NHS is challenging rather than cosy. Many of the volunteers are former health professionals, who have inside knowledge of the way things work.

However, the NHS is a behemoth of massive scale and complexity. The first problem for a monitoring organisation like Healthwatch is to build awareness and gather information. Healthwatch Dorset is not a household name and gaining better public awareness and understanding is clearly a priority. Attempts to publicise the group's existence and its activities are made through organising talks, attending public events and taking part in fun runs etc.

Coping with the quantity and diverse nature of public concerns is also a challenge. As the Q and A session after the talk demonstrated, many people have a tale to tell about the NHS and an opinion on how to fix it. The NHS is a 'national treasure' but, post pandemic, it rarely receives universal applause. Monitoring its performance involves filtering through a mass of individual experiences, identifying common themes and establishing evidence and trends. For this evidence to effect change, findings have to be coherently presented to service providers, and action needs to result. However, change in a large complex organisation with many moving parts is incredibly difficult to bring about. One

of the hardest nuts to crack lies in establishing accountability in an organisation that is so complicated that buck passing has been institutionalised within its governance structures.

Tracking changes and measuring results are also problematic. For monitoring organisations, it is never straightforward to attribute results to specific monitoring inputs, and thereby justify their existence.

While there are 'big-picture' organisational problems for anyone monitoring the NHS, there are things that can be done at an individual level to help the process along. Healthwatch Dorset is keen to engage more volunteers to fill a variety of roles. The commitment of time and energy required of anyone who wants to "give back" can be varied to fit individual circumstances and Healthwatch Dorset is looking for inputs from active people with professional and business backgrounds, such as ourselves. More information can be found on:

- The Healthwatch Dorset website ([www.healthwatchdorset.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchdorset.co.uk)).
- The phone number is **0300 111 0102**,
- The email address is [enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk).

*The Chairman thanked Lindsey and Lucy for their interesting and informative talk. After inviting questions, he closed the meeting.*

*Steve Baines*

## **THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC**

***Dick Taylor BA (Hons) MPhil MA – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025***



*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 into the Royal Tank Regiment (RTR) and left the regular army as a lieutenant colonel in 2013.*



*He was engaged in 15 operational deployments. He is now a military historian having written 28 books. He is also the Royal Armoured Corps historian and has taken part in television documentaries. He is seen on the left serving with the UN in West Africa. On the right and since retiring – the London Marathon.*

*His talk covered the Allied view of the most critical battle of WWII, and how the U-Boat menace was managed and eventually mastered, leading to Allied success. The talk was a combination of two separate talks he gives on the Atlantic submarine war 1940-45. The first part concentrated on the German U-Boats and the second part covered the Allies actions against them.*



In 1640 the first submersible craft (built by Dutchman Cornelis Jacobszoon Drebbel) was demonstrated to Charles I on the Thames in London. It was a 'contained' rowing boat covered in leather to make it watertight.



The idea of a true submarine appeared in Jules Verne's novel 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea of 1870, where his vessel, the Nautilus, accurately predicted modern submarines.



In the 1870s, engineer John Holland, an American of Irish descent, devised an all-metal submersible craft which he demonstrated to the US Navy in 1878<sup>1</sup>. It contained an engine and lead/acid batteries for both surface and underwater propulsion.

Various submersible boats and ships were developed leading to the sea-going submarines of the British and German navies prior to the First World War, when the German navy launched viable coastal vessels. During the war, Germany's change to unrestricted warfare brought the United States into the war and hastened submarine development. After the war, the Treaty of Versailles prohibited Germany from building submarines.

### **The Offensive – A German Perspective**

The rise of Hitler's Germany and the development of its navy concentrated on battleships to combat the power of the British Navy. But submarine development continued. Admiral Karl Dönitz (shown in 1943) had commanded a U-Boat in WWI following which he was



imprisoned and continued whilst incarcerated to develop his ideas for submarine warfare, subsequently becoming the driving force behind U-Boat strategy and the world-wide U-Boat deployments at the start of WWII.

The practical concern for the Germans was to get their submarines out from Germany and into the Atlantic, and this remained a problem until 1940, when the over-running of France allowed U-Boat pens to be constructed along the Atlantic coast thereby giving free access for German U boats to range into the North Atlantic and attack the supply convoys crossing to Britain.

Dönitz realised that if U-Boats could sink allied shipping faster than they could be built, they could starve Britain of all supplies. The first U-Boat attack was carried out on the very first day of war, and fourteen days later a British aircraft carrier was sunk. In addition, the battleship HMS Royal Oak was sunk in Scarpa Flow naval base with the loss of 835 lives. With the opening of the bases in France, shipping in the Mediterranean was now also within reach.



From North America to Liverpool is 2,050 miles. Convoys were formed as protection

<sup>1</sup> His first submarine the Holland No. 1 (in his image above) was built in Todd & Raftery's shop, Paterson, NJ, USA. It saw the light of day in 1877. It was 14 feet long and was powered by a primitive 4 hp engine and carried one man. It was brought down to the Passaic River and launched before a big audience, but someone had forgotten to insert the two screw plugs, and the vessel began to sink underneath the water.

against the U-Boat danger, and convoy speeds had to be as slow as the slowest ship (6 knots), which took 16 days to cross the Atlantic. Faster merchant vessels travelling at 12 knots would take 8 days. Convoys started as group of about 30 ships, later rising to 80 vessels, and at the start their protection vessels were limited in number and lacked the speed or armament to successfully attack U-Boats.



hours maximum for submersed speed. Thus, U-Boats often attacked on the surface using their deck gun. Most torpedo attacks were at night when U-Boats were hard to detect.

Dönitz evolved the 'wolf pack' method of attacks. One U-Boat would locate a convoy and report its position and course by radio, which would then be relayed to other U-Boats to gather and simultaneously attack the convoy, often from within the convoy's midst. Oil tankers were important targets. Sinking ships were left behind because it was too dangerous to stop. Navigation information could be gleaned from survivors of boats that had been sunk, but rescue of survivors by U-Boat became rare.



Allied shipping losses grew substantially during 1940/41 and started to become unsustainable. The U-Boat pens in France were bomb-proof. The situation became desperate. When the U.S. entered the war, their lack of convoy experience gave rise to huge losses of ships along the eastern seaboard. U-Boat targets were backlit from the shore where blackouts were thought to be unnecessary. However, as allied anti-submarine tactics evolved, and with the number of naval ships available and equipment developed, the tide of losses began to fall.



The capture of Enigma code books, and even just an Enigma machine's wooden case, helped Bletchley Park code breakers, already decoding submarine radio messages (Tunny), they could now decipher the new Enigma codes. U-Boats needed to surface to send radio messages and thus became targets.

The lack of operational contact and coordination between the German air force and the submarine service did not help. German developments of high-tech submarines and snorkel equipment came too late in the War to make any difference.

The percentages of losses - allied ships v U-Boats - began to turn; convoy losses declined whilst U-Boat losses grew, peaking in 1943/45. U-boat crew losses in particular were to rise to 93% at their peak.

### **The Defensive Campaign – The Allies**

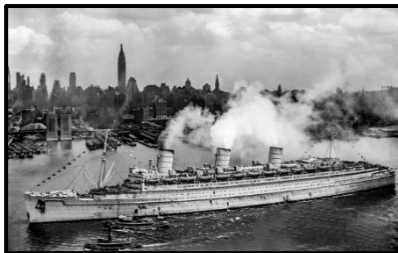
This lasted the whole of the war. The convoy system was the initial response to the U-Boat threat, but at that stage convoys were too slow and very under-protected.

The convoys became better protected as the War developed. RN destroyers and frigates became more available as the threat of German invasion disappeared. A new ship design, the Corvette, was built in great numbers (300+ in total) for the convoy protection role, based on the design of South Atlantic whalers. They were crewed by RN reservists (e.g. in the film 'Cruel Sea') and were effective although not at all comfortable for the crew, being exposed to all weathers and having a roll angle of 35 degrees. They were fitted with ASDIC (sonar) and high-frequency radio direction finding (known as 'huff duff'), depth charges, and later with 'hedgehogs' (rocket launched depth charges).

U-boats on the surface (where they had to spend most of their time) could be detected and their position triangulated by two other Corvettes giving an almost exact target to attack (creeping tactics). Such tactics were developed by Wrens at the command centre in Liverpool and the results were used by all convoy protection ships and attack aircraft.

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On the other hand, the individual ships RMS Queen Mary and RMS Queen Elizabeth were converted to troop ships and being very fast - 30 knots - could outrun U-Boats (top surface speed 17 knots). They continuously crossed the Atlantic without protection for the whole war – this shows RMS Queen Mary returning New York with US troops in June 1945.

However, the one overall factor that increased the effectiveness of the individual ships, systems and aircraft was the coordination of effort provided through the Western Approaches Command Centre located at Derby House, Liverpool. Ships became stronger and faster and so were even able to ram U-Boats, but in the overall campaign aircraft became increasingly important especially as their ranges increased. The "air gap", an area in mid-Atlantic beyond the range of land-based aircraft, but the 'gap' was closed as long-range aircraft such as the Sunderland flying boats (flying from Northern Ireland and Scotland) and Catalina flying boats based in

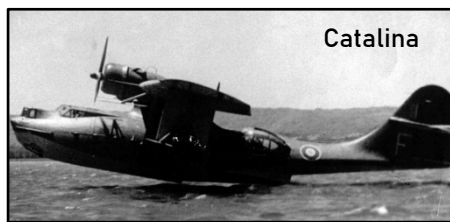




Newfoundland, and American liberator bombers all entered service.



Sunderland



Catalina



Liberator

The Sunderland flying boats of RAF Coastal Command had a 14-man crew with space for crew rest allowing an endurance of 14 hours. They carried machine guns and depth charges and the bulky equipment of early radar, which became the key to locating surfaced U-Boats.

Radars became smaller when the Post Office engineers in Birmingham invented the magnetron (a small vacuum tube [valve] that produced microwaves for radar pulses).



Thus, smaller aircraft such as the Bristol Blenheim could be radar-equipped and with their machine guns and rockets they could catch and damage U-Boats before they could submerge. When fitted with a Leigh search light, they could operate at night when radar beams became “fuzzy” at close range.



Other inventions that helped included a towed device that emitted sufficient “noise” to confuse acoustic homing torpedoes. The whole Bay of Biscay air space could be saturated with aircraft hunting U-Boats coming from or going to the submarine pens on the French coast.

With more escort vessels, they could hunt U-Boats in groups, all linked by radio and using radar and sonar. Aircraft-carriers, based on converted merchant ships, accompanied convoys providing instant protection with aircraft such as the Swordfish, slow and outdated but able to carry a torpedo and numerous rockets.



Liberty ships were being built in American shipyards using welding rather than rivets; they were built so fast (in just 39 days) that losses at sea could be replaced, and convoy sizes could grow.

By late 1943, more U-Boats (including their crews) were lost than could be replaced.

In total through the whole campaign 3,500 merchant ships and 175 warships were lost by the Allies, together with 32,250 seamen.

But the battle has been won!

*Following questions from the audience, the Chairman thanked Dick for his for his very interesting and informative talk. He then closed the meeting.*

*Alan Poulter*





## ENDPIECE (Editor)

St George's Day in England is normally celebrated on **23 April**, but the Church of England (who else!) decrees that no Saint's Day can take place in the week before or after Easter - and as a result this year it was celebrated on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April.

Many people and organisations appeared puzzled by the change??




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## US MEDICARE (coming to the UK soon?) PLAN "G"

If you're an older senior citizen and can no longer take care of yourself, and the Authorities declare there's no Nursing Home care available for you ..... what do you do?

### **You opt for 'Plan G'.**

This plan gives anyone 65 years or older a gun (hence **Plan G**) and four bullets.  
Which produces the following consequences:

You are allowed to shoot four politicians.

This means, of course, that you'll be sent to prison where you will be provided with:

- three meals a day,
- a roof over your head
- central heating
- air conditioning
- cable TV
- library
- **And** all the Health Care you need.
  - ❖ Need new teeth? No problem.
  - ❖ Need glasses? No problem.
  - ❖ Need a hearing aid?
  - ❖ Need a new hip/ knees/ kidney/ lungs/ sex change or even heart?

**No sweat - they're all covered.**