



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 must apologise as to the newsletter being slightly late this month, but recent events have led me to rewrite my original script. As someone who lost a family member in the Iraq war, I feel particularly moved by the actions of our so-called allies and their predictably unpredictable President. At the very least, I sincerely hope that our current Government will keep our involvement to an absolute minimum. I appreciate that Probus is not based on political or religious views, but on this occasion, I make no apologies for my words.

On a much lighter note, may I wish you all "Dydd Gwyl Dewi Hapus", otherwise known as "Happy St David's Day!" I hope you are/were all wearing your daffodils or leeks! The weather, having made a turn for the better, has allowed a significant change to the appearance of my garden, and signs of new growth always lifts the spirits. Hurry up Easter and the warmth that eases these old bones!

At our recent committee meeting we once again discussed recruitment, annual fees, and whether to open the club up to female members. These all have major implications to our sustainability - and I thank Paul Hooley and David Roberts for doing much of the groundwork in preparing details for members to discuss at the AGM in May. On a similar theme, I can only applaud members for their contributions to the programme of talks this year - and we haven't finished yet, with Les Yeates ready to take us down memory lane yet again in March, which makes a total of nine talks from members!

Finally, my commiserations to all England rugby followers And it hasn't finished yet! Enough said, from a fellow sufferer.

John

WELFARE & SOCIAL

Welfare

- **Linda Walker.** On the one hand Linda continues to wait for a specialist's appointment in relation to her blood pressure, but on the other she has had the cataracts in both eyes dealt with and is back to seeing properly.
- **Phil Butler.** Our thoughts are with Phil as he undergoes treatment for his condition, and we hope also that his eyesight doesn't deteriorate too far or fast to make life more difficult than it has become.

Social – March Club Events

3rd March 2026	<p style="text-align: center;">A Most Unusual Season! <i>Lt Cdr Tony Ellerbeck DSC (late RN)</i> <i>Tales from the Falklands Conflict</i></p>
17th March 2026	<p style="text-align: center;">'30 Years a Soldier' <i>David Leakey CMG CVO CBE</i> <i>Reflections and a Look Ahead</i></p>
31st March 2026	<p style="text-align: center;">Films of the 1960's <i>Les Yeates</i></p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Lunch: The White Lion Inn, Bourton 12:30 for 13:00.</p>



Reports on February's TALKS

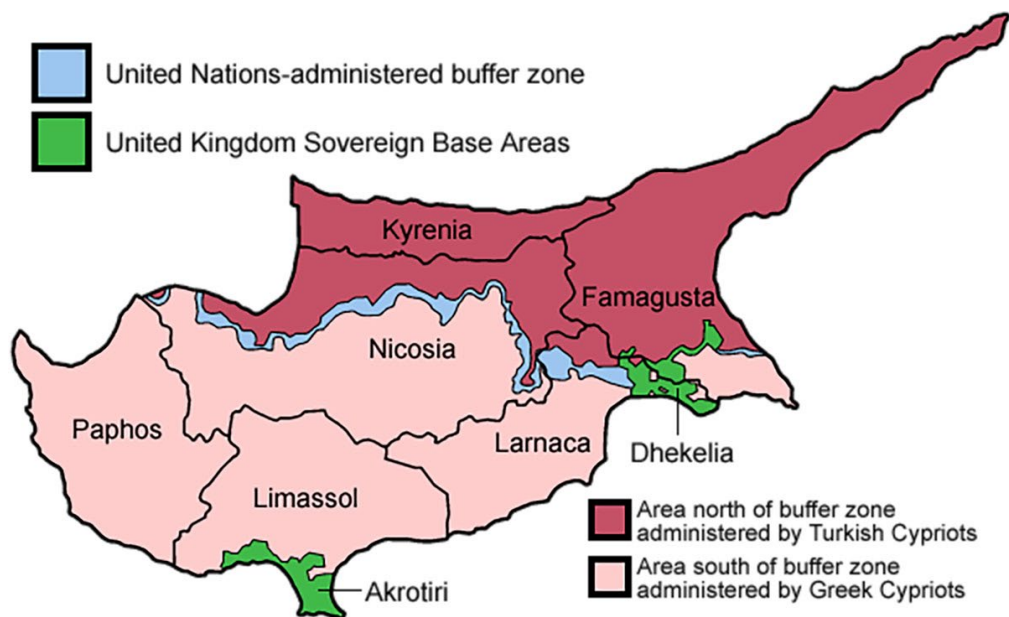
3rd February 2026

Alastair Olver

The Chequered History of Northern Cyprus

Alastair gave us an interesting insight into the recent history of Northern Cyprus. Officially the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) - is defined by a shift from failed reunification efforts toward an assertive "*two-state solution*" stance. While the territory remains internationally recognised only by Turkey, it has recently secured observer status in several regional organisations and seen significant infrastructure investment despite persistent economic challenges.

He produced the following graphic showing the UN Buffer Zone that has been in place for the Island for many years.



The key events for the island have been:

- 2003: Border restrictions eased; first crossing of the "Green Line" in 30 years.
- 2004: Turkish Cypriots accept UN reunification plan; Greek Cypriots reject it. Cyprus joins the EU as a divided island.



- 2020: Under a new North Cypriot President, partial reopening of the ghost town **Varosha** began.

However, the "ghost town" of Varosha remains a flashpoint of contention, even though its use has evolved since the initial 2020 opening. As of now, only approximately 3.5% of the district is open to the public, primarily as a "dark tourism" site featuring the beachfront and specific streets.



- 2025: A new President was elected (in a 'landslide' vote), signalling a potential return to federalism talks, which reflects a community shift toward reunification and European (EU) integration.

Trade across the "Green Line" with the Republic of Cyprus remains limited, accounting for only 10% of the north's external sales. Alastair showed a photograph of Famagusta port which is one of the main trading facilities for the north.



Alastair was talking on the basis of his own travels in Northern Cyprus with his wife, Julie, and he showed a number of personal photos from their own visit.

Overall, the message appears to be that although contact and commerce

between Northern and Southern Cyprus remains difficult, there appears to be a gradual lessening of the barriers, and hope remains that further improvements may be achieved for the benefit of all islanders. In this respect, Alastair mentioned that it is worth noting that North Cyprus is now getting quite a lot of foreign aid - \$500 million from Turkey for the water Pipeline from Turkey, and about €1 billion from the EU for various infrastructure projects, the latter on the grounds that the people of North Cyprus are EU citizens even if their land is “occupied” by Turkey.

17th February 2026

Andy Newton

The Third Cod War - A Sailor's Perspective

Andy gave us a very personal account of the relatively short lived but extremely impactful third Cod War of 1975, where Iceland - for the third time - increased the exclusion zone surrounding the island to 200 miles, thus preventing British Trawlers from carrying out their traditional fishing. Cod live largely in the cold waters of the North Sea and because of this blocking action, British trawlersmen lost their livelihoods almost overnight.

Andy was on one the Royal Navy ships sent to support the trawlers and showed numerous pieces of video evidence as to how the Icelandic gunboats would deliberately crash into our ships causing severe damage. The gunboats were also piloted directly



behind the trawlers in order to cut the nets, which meant that the trawlers had to return home with no catch - and therefore no money to pay the crew. While

our government provided compensation to the boat owners, the crew went empty handed and Andy was very clear as to the injustice of this situation. It took nearly thirty years before compensation was offered to the men who lost their jobs and as is often the case in these long running disputes, many of the men had

probably died and it was too late. The simple outcome from all this was that the British fishing industry died shortly afterwards. Hull and Grimsby in particular suffered severe deprivation for years.

What particularly galled Andy was the seemingly futile nature of our government's actions in that, while it made protestations to the Icelandic Government, in reality they were very pleased at the outcome - because the 200-mile exclusion rule applied to all countries and allowed the UK to drill for oil in the North Sea without too much competition!



Andy's talk was extremely well illustrated with many of the images taken by Andy while on board his ship. He set the scene well by donning his old naval sweater and finished with a moving poem written by an old trawlerman bemoaning the unfairness of their treatment and the devastating impact it had on their lives.



ENDPIECE (Editor)

In view of current Middle East events, the following might prove helpful – particularly if you are a US serviceman - or even the President!



Iran

Iran, historically known as Persia until 1935, is an ancient, culturally diverse nation in Western Asia, featuring the world's 18th largest population (>90million). It is one of the world's oldest civilizations, with settlements dating back to 4000 B.C.. It is also the birthplace of Zoroastrianism, produces 90% of the world's saffron, and features a young population with over 60% under the age of 30. The name "Iran" means "land of the Aryans".

Iran has a number of Cultural quirks (in no particular order):

- **University Attendance.** Over 50% of university students in Iran are women.
- **Picnics.** Iran is the world's #1 nation for picnics.
- **‘Taarof’:** Iran practises the ancient art of *taarof*. This is a complex system of extreme politeness where people (especially hosts) often offer things they don't mean, and guests are expected to decline several times before accepting. As a slightly different example, if a taxi driver refuses your money, they are not being generous; they are engaging in *taarof*, and you must insist on paying.
- **Hyper-polite Compliments:** Iranians often say "*Ghorbunet Beram*" (I will sacrifice myself for you) to friends to express affection, not literally!
- **Nose Jobs.** Iran is the "nose job capital of the world". The hijab clothing code places a greater emphasis on the face, so the quest of the ideal nose has a lot to do with that, but it's about more than physical

beauty. It's also a sign of riches and social position for Persian ladies (and some males). In fact, the treatment is so popular that many patients keep their bandages on long after they've recovered just to demonstrate they've had it done — and some even wear fakes!

- **Age:** Iranians tend to ask in what year you were born (e.g. "Are you a '68-er?") - rather than ask your age.
- **The "Perfectly Imperfect" Persian Rug:** Weavers often intentionally include a mistake in Persian rugs, because they believe that only God is perfect.
- **Fruit Bowl Surprises:** Iranians often add cucumbers to their fruit bowls, and you will always find a salt shaker nearby.
- **Payment Card Obsession:** Iranians use debit cards for everything, even for a small bottle of water. (Mind you – we seem to be catching up fast!)
- **Thumbs Up Gesture:** A thumbs-up is considered an obscene gesture, similar to the middle finger in the West. If you give a thumbs up in Iran it is used as an indecent and offensive insult which means “sit on it”.
- **Sex Paradox:** While homosexual acts are punishable by death, the state subsidizes sex-change operations.
- **Soccer Scandal:** In 2015, it was reported that eight players on the Iranian women's national soccer team were actually men waiting for sex-change operations.
- **Traffic Honking:** There is a complex ‘language’ of car honks, ranging from "*excuse me*" to "*I can't believe they gave you a license*".
- **No Alcohol:** Alcohol is banned, but the homemade 50% alcohol drink Aragh Sagi ("Persian vodka") is still consumed.
- **Iranian Weekend:** The weekend falls on Thursday and Friday, with the workweek running from Saturday to Thursday.
- **Natural Resources:** Iran holds the world's 2nd largest natural gas reserves and 3rd-4th largest oil reserves.
- **Spy Squirrels:** In 2007, authorities reportedly detained 14 squirrels suspected of carrying spy devices.