



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No. 173 - March 2019
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Roger Lester again arranged two excellent speakers which gained the interest of members on both subjects. The first, Col John Blashford Snell, talked about his diving experiences for underwater antiquities around the island of Cyprus. He is a member of an archaeology society that covers the subject. In addition to his fee the members raised a further £25 that he donated to the society.

The second speaker was a very interesting lady, Rosie King. She gave us a history lesson based on her research of monastic life in our local area: Sherborne, Shaftesbury, and Gillingham during the 1400s. She has written two books on the subject and is working on a third. Members purchased eight copies from her. Both speakers asked me to thank all the members for your kindness and generosity during their visits.

Interestingly, both of these speakers live in Motcombe as does Graham Dunlop who talked to us about World War I in November. It would appear that there is some very interesting talent in our neighbouring village.

Roger Ellis organised an excellent lunch at the Hunters' Lodge and as it was a Carvery we more than filled our boots with plenty of good food! Roger also announced at the last meeting that the next lunch will be held at the Wine Bar, Gillingham, and the April lunch at the Hill Brush Company in Mere.

Colin Chamberlain, our secretary has arranged the next outing on 10 April to 'Arundells' house and gardens in Salisbury, the former house of Sir Edward Heath. Colin is considering a visit to the candle-makers in Mere and will announce the details as soon as arranged. *Ron Walker*

Colonel John Blashford-Snell -The Eighth Wonder of the World – Operation Aphrodite – 5 April

John Blashford-Snell (*pictured right*) spent 37 years in the army, retiring with the rank of Colonel in 1991. Always an interesting speaker, the renowned explorer gave a revealing and humorous talk about his first operational tour as a young 2nd Lieutenant to the Eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus in 1958. This was during the

FUTURE EVENTS

5 March

Speaker: **Mike Webber**

'Botanic Gardens of the Arctic Circle to the Tropics'

19 March

Speaker: **Nigel Hawkins**

'Russia from Yeltsin to Putin'

*Ladies invitation

*Lunch: The Wine Bar, Gillingham 12.30 for 12.45

10 April

Visit to Arundells in

Salisbury, Home of Edward Heath. Own transport. 11 am





period of British Colonial rule before independence, and prior to the subsequent de facto partition of the island between the Turkish and Greek communities. The conflict with the EOKA Greek fighters finished in 1959 (independence granted in 1960).

The island, where the young Royal Engineer got married during his posting, has many world-renowned archaeological sites, spanning several civilisations. This posting turned out to be notable in the development of Blashford-Snell's later career as a well-known scientific explorer.

He led a group of mainly National Service lads in the official task of surveying the various beaches to identify possible landing sites; this information was required by the military in case of future action by British Forces. A Z-Craft landing vessel was used in the in-shore waters; and during the course of this operation many ancient artefacts were discovered on the sea bed (as well as searching for – and locating – a Royal Navy Venom aircraft) The Sappers used improvised lifting equipment to haul items up from the sea bed.

During the course of operations, the activities of Blashford-Snell's section widened considerably, including being hired out at the rate of 1d per minute per diver – working to release a Greek timber ship from the reef where it had struck. This had entailed burrowing under the reef and using explosives! The next salvage job took the team to Kyrenia, where a wooden wreck dating from 300-400 BC was discovered; an important find, which was raised and preserved years later (now in Kyrenia Castle Museum – *pictured above*)).

The team worked in conjunction with the local antiquities department, searching for the legendary lost port harbour of Paphos, believed to be near the sea stack known locally as Aphrodite's Rock, until destroyed by an earthquake. Lt Blashford-Snell and the soldiers were briefed on the operation; many artefacts were raised from the numerous wrecks in the area. The divers improvised by using fire-fighting equipment as aqualungs.

The site was recognised as being very important in archaeological terms. Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who had visited the area with Blashford-Snell's uncle, advised that help on site by a trained archaeologist was necessary. This was obtained in the form of an attractive female French archaeologist (very popular with the soldiers!).

Other activities and incidents were explained by Colonel Blashford-Snell, aided by colour photographs of sites in the North (Now Turkish controlled) and the South of the island; including finding the great gun of Paphos, which had been destroyed and dropped in the sea by the Greeks.

John Blashford-Snell founded the Scientific Exploration Society in 1969, and during questions following his talk we learnt that he will be taking an expedition to Nepal in March 2019 to study the wild elephants and other animals, and his team will also work on aid projects to the local community. Andrew Tinsley gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

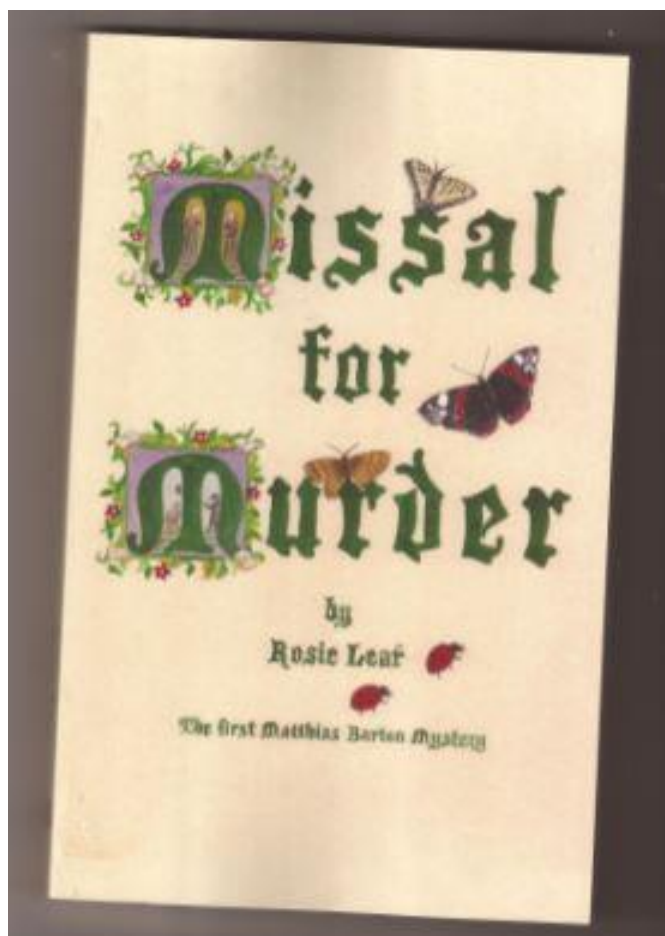
Historical Fiction from scratch – Rosie King - 19 February

Mrs Rosie King is a retired teacher, having taught in Cornwall for 27 years. She moved to Zeals after retirement, and now lives in Motcombe.

Mrs King explained that her enthusiasm for writing her first book was engendered when she attended a carol service in Sherborne Abbey. The Abbey is a magnificent building, steeped in history – a fine example of medieval church architecture. The idea came to her that ‘this would be a wonderful setting for a medieval murder’; so the idea of her first book – a mixture of historical fact and crime fiction gradually took shape.

This entailed about 18 months of careful research to get the historical background right, into which she wove her fictional characters and criminal events.

Writing under the pseudonym of Rosie Lear, her first murder mystery *Missal for Murder* was



written – a work of fiction, based on real historical events, in and around Sherborne Abbey in 15th century England - featuring the fictional young schoolmaster and amateur sleuth Matthias Barton. The tale was finally completed years later, and has led to a second Matthias Barton mystery *A Quenchless Fire*, again set against the history of Sherborne Abbey and the surrounding area.

Mrs King detailed the meticulous research necessary before embarking on a work of historical fiction, in order to set the story against a factual background – in this case Sherborne Abbey. *Missal for Murder* was set during the reign of Henry VI – a tumultuous period of dissent in the country at large (culminating in the wars of the Roses). At this time, 1436, there was indeed a dispute between the townspeople of Sherborne and the Abbot of Sherborne, Abbot Bradford. He had made alterations to All Hallows, a chapel of Ease, situated next to the

Abbey. The fictional attempted theft of the illuminated *Sherborne Missal* (which actually did disappear until it resurfaced in France) is woven into the story.

A second book *A Quenchless Fire* is set around the fire in Sherborne Abbey, which actually took place in 1437. These books were self-published; there will be a third mystery entitled *A tale of two Abbeys* (Sherborne and Shaftesbury), set in the time that the forest of Gillingham still existed.

Members enjoyed this talk, also hearing about historical events which took place so near to what is now our town of Gillingham.

Rosie King had brought copies of her books along, so members had the opportunity to peruse and purchase, should they wish to do so. Following the vote of thanks, members showed their appreciation in the usual way. *Alan Jeffs*

Peter Marshall continues his series of talks by members in the past

Roy Stone – ‘Lloyd’s Insurance’

In his report on Roy’s talk, Bertram Akhurst recalled how Mr Lloyd owned a coffee shop in London in the 17th century, which became a venue for conducting business and it became involved in the recovery of stolen watches. In the 18th century, a ship owner trying to protect himself from losses spread his risk by arranging for “Lloyd’s names” to underwrite it.

Roy described how, on leaving school, he started as a junior assistant at Lloyd’s, documenting their international business and gaining experience of world events. He went on to be involved in settling a number of important problems and obtained increasingly more interesting but demanding posts. With the growth of maritime business, insurance had become Lloyd’s primary concern and through many changes over the years, it has continued to conduct its dealings in ‘The Room’ and it continues to be the oldest active insurance market in the world.

Having a long-term interest in flying, Roy gravitated towards aviation insurance and was eventually Head of Claims Assessment for an important aviation syndicate.

Bertram wrote: “One of the delights of this talk was Roy’s great enthusiasm for his work, which afforded him both a successful career and great joy”.

I’m Dying!

Yes, really. I went to the doctor’s this morning, and we had a long chat. Many of you will know that my life’s plan is to live to be 150, and then review. It has gone to plan so far, but now this! I’m told that the end is nigh. But 87 isn’t old!

Where did it all go wrong? Are we all like this???

I’ve done or been all the things they tell us, although I don’t remember ever worrying about whether I was a boy or a girl, or wanting to change. Or meeting anyone who was in doubt!

I have never smoked [camp fires?] or got hooked on drugs [Aspirin?] I eat [mostly] modestly. I exercise obsessively [Everest, Kili, walkies, weekly gym, etc].

I drink water and red wine, every day. I can’t remember sex.

Vice is for holding things tightly [not to be confused with sex!].

I have avoided really dangerous sports. [I don’t count various sorts of skiing or parachuting].

I am only mildly worried by the IT revolution, as the following sad experience illustrates:

Tech Support: ‘I need you to right-click on the Open Desktop’

Me: ‘OK.’

Tech Support: ‘Did you get a pop-up menu?’

Me: ‘No.’

Tech Support: ‘OK. Right-click again. Do you see a pop-up menu?’

Me: ‘No.’

Tech Support: ‘OK, sir. Can you tell me what you have done up until this point?’

Me: ‘Sure. You told me to ‘write click’; and I wrote ‘write click’.’ *Thanks to Dick Ripper*

Material for the April edition of the Recorder should be sent to Richard Clarke on:
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