



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No. 174 - April 2019
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

At the last meeting I mentioned that my wife Linda and I had booked a Sunday lunch at the Bell Inn Hotel in the New Forest, which is opposite the Green Dragon Pub which we have used many times. The food was excellent: a bit more expensive than the Green Dragon but in very nice surroundings and finished off with a relaxing coffee in the lounge afterwards. It also benefits from a large car park next to the local Golf Club.

The drive through the New Forest was very pleasant with wild ponies stopping traffic so they could amble across the road, the journey takes about 50 minutes from Shaftesbury via Cranborne and Fordingbridge. It is well worth a visit.

With regard to club matters, we recently had two resignations, our numbers have slowly declined over the past years and we are in great need of new members, maybe with new ideas and perhaps future committee members to help run our club.

Meanwhile, members should consider if there are any changes to your details as the secretary will be organising the new handbook, you can amend your details on the web site which will need to be done before it goes to print - the secretary will let you know the deadline.

After the last meeting Roger Ellis with the help of Ralph Jerram organised a lunch at the Wine Bar in Gillingham. Although some members have dined there after a walkabout led by Sam Woodcock, it's the first time we have held one of our monthly Tuesday lunches there; and it was a great success and our thanks go to Roger and Ralph.

The two speakers we had during March covered botanical gardens and Russian history, both very different but very informative. However with regard to the speaker on botanical gardens it was raised at the meeting that a subject like this could be co-ordinated with the ladies' invitation, and the committee will be considering the options on this matter. *Ron Walker*

FUTURE EVENTS

2 April

Speaker: **Brian Garton**

'Budhanikantha – the Premier School'

10 April Visit to Arundells, the Home of Edward Heath.
11 am. Own transport

16 April

Speaker: **Dave Hooker**

'The V2 Rockets on South London'

25 April

Golf Day at Long Sutton

30 April

Speaker: **Mark Temple**

'The Ffestiniog Railway'

*Ladies invitation

*Lunch: Hillbrush Factory

12.30 for 12.45 followed by:

Visit to Charles Farris,

Candle Maker 2.30pm.

Own transport



Botanic Gardens of the Arctic to the Tropics – Mike Webber - 5 March

Mike Webber gives talks in aid of St John's Church, Broadstone. This talk took us round the world looking at botanic gardens spread across five continents. Most of the quality close-up photographs of plants and flowers, showing their Latin names, were taken by Mike himself; these showed how in the most challenging climatic conditions, plants survive – from the Arctic circle to the warm and humid conditions of the tropics.

Botanic Gardens have an important role in bringing together a wide variety of plants, many extremely rare and deserving of conservation, cultivation, display, study and conservation. These should be displayed with their botanical names. Often botanical gardens are linked to universities or scientific organisations. Their purpose can be traced back to Physic Gardens used for the curation of plants for medicinal purposes.

The most northernmost botanic garden is at Tromsø, Norway, and displays arctic and alpine plants. Due to long dark winters, the growing season is short. This is truly the land of the midnight sun.

There is a good collection of saxifrage and primulas. Among others, members were shown the Canadian Hepatica, a wildflower of the buttercup family, and the Italian Spectabilis from the Italian Alps. Plants have to have good wind resistance in these conditions.

The garden at Leicester University focuses on education and study courses. Programmes use the plant collections to teach children about biology, ecology, and the environment – and even mathematics, using the garden's Fibonacci Pavement, based on this sequence. The garden has collections of alpine hardy plants, hardy fuchsias and gardenias.

Oxford Botanic Garden (est'd 1621) was the UK's first botanic garden. The collection includes Amazonian Water Lilies, Gunnera from the Brazilian mountains, alliums, and a section devoted to poisonous plants. Cambridge University Botanic Garden also concentrates on university research and education, containing representative plants from all the continents. A specimen of the Flower of Kent variety of apple, said to be the variety Isaac Newton saw falling to the ground, inspiring the laws of gravitation, is in the garden.

The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, Richmond, is a world leading site devoted to education, research into the diversity and uses of plants, conservation and cultivation. There are extensive collections of herbaceous, alpine, carnivorous, and succulent plants from all continents. The design of the famous Victorian Palm House (*pictured above*) has been copied in many other botanical gardens.

The climate at San Francisco Botanic Garden provides a suitable environment for plants from many areas of the world, such as hyophorbe (the bottle palm) from Mauritius, sennas from the tropics, the Chinese Rock's Peony, and callistamon from Australia.

The Washington Botanic Garden is on the grounds of the United States Capitol building in Washington DC and has good collections of late asters, orchids, and *tredecantia*. The gardens at Christchurch, New Zealand now has collections from all continents. A notable specimen in the gardens is the rare native kaurie tree. Mike Webber was not so impressed by the Atlanta, Georgia, Botanic Garden due to the absence of plant labels, but many art exhibitions are held there.

A much older botanical garden at Lisbon (est. 18th century) houses a wide variety of plants brought to Portugal during the period of colonisation in many parts of the world. The younger botanical garden of Madiera has a climate suitable for exotic plants. Here may be found frangipani, jacaranda, flamboyant mimosa, and brunfelsia.



Kirstenbosh, Cape Town champions the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity.

The gardens at Singapore is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with collections of orchids and gingers.

Mike Webber stressed the importance of botanical gardens in terms of research into the uses of plants, and the need to conserve biodiversity; indeed, the possible uses of many plants remain to be discovered. Bill Sims gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

Nigel Hawkins – Russia, from Yeltsin to Putin - 19 March

Following on from his talk about Russia up to the time of Gorbachev last July, Nigel Hawkins continued in this talk from when Boris Yeltsin took over from Gorbachev, to the present days of Russia under Vladimir Putin. Based partly on his own experiences of daily life as a businessman in Russia, Nigel painted a picture of a country where the people have endured much under their leaders – where political intrigue, economic problems and corruption were commonplace.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union occurred when the republics of the USSR were formally granted self-governing independence on 26 December 1991, the day after the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev resigned. The recently elected Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, Boris Yeltsin, continued as the President of the Russian Federation. In 1996 he was re-elected, defeating the communist Gennardy Zyuganov.

By 1992 Russia no longer had an Empire.

Yeltsin had the task of transforming the ailing communist command economy, starting to make shock changes out of desperation. Empty supermarket shelves often greeted would-be customers. Government subsidies on food and other goods were ended; hyperinflation, with inflation reaching 2,300% per annum, rendered the rouble almost worthless. The trusted unit



of currency was the US dollar. GDP contracted. The privatisation of state enterprises was mismanaged, leading to the transfer of wealth to a few, and corruption was endemic. The ‘purchase’ of these state enterprises for much less than they were worth led to the

creation of the Russian ‘oligarchs’, who had considerable political influence at that time. There was increasing crime and corruption, and the general quality of life for the general population deteriorated. Yeltsin found governing the country very difficult, with confrontations with the Russian Parliament; there were attempts to impeach Yeltsin in 1991 and 1993. There was a major constitutional crisis in 1993, when Yeltsin ordered the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet Parliament, which in turn attempted to remove him from office, and – with a State of Emergency, civil war was a distinct possibility. By the end of December 1999, under considerable pressure, Yeltsin resigned, handing over to his successor, the then prime minister, one Vladimir Putin (*pictured above*).

Putin had been a KGB intelligence officer before entering politics, moving to Moscow and joining Yeltsin’s administration, rising quickly through the ranks. During the period of Russian reforms under Yeltsin, the Chechen republic in the Russian Federation rebelled, leading to the first Chechen war of 1994-96, with the Chechens resorting to guerrilla tactics. By 1999 the second Chechen war had begun under Putin. As a strong leader, Putin’s popularity soared. Putin obviously had designs of regaining influence and power for the Russians, as evidenced by the incursions into Georgia, Eastern Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea.

Nigel has a wealth of knowledge about Russia, and his talk was informative and interesting. The Chairman gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

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