



# PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No. 175 - May 2019

([www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk](http://www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk))

## CHAIRMAN'S END OF TERM REPORT

Reflecting on the past year, the start of my Chairmanship was a busy time. I was still organising the monthly lunches, and dealing with the data protection system. During the year I had the opportunity to enrol new members but we also had members resign, and sadly a member died.

With regard to the lunches Mike Robinson kindly stepped in to organise the lunches from July to November, then Roger Ellis took over from January and is still organising them. My special thanks goes to both of them for assisting me by taking on this job. The Christmas dinner at the Grange was again very well supported as in the previous year and my thanks to Mike and Liz Robinson for running the raffle.

Roger Lester as usual arranged some excellent speakers throughout the year and Colin Chamberlain organised several enjoyable and interesting outings, Gordon Banks our Welfare Officer continued telling his usual amusing stories. My thanks to these gentlemen and to all the committee members for their support. My biggest thank you goes to Colin Chamberlain our secretary and social coordinator; he has carried out his duties in the most professional manner and he has given me untold support throughout the year and I am confident that he will give the new Chairman the same support.

Finally I would like to mention that back in 1997 I was elected as Captain at my old golf club in Bexleyheath Kent and it was an honour and privilege to serve that club and I did not consider I would ever get the opportunity to be in that position again. I was wrong because it has been an honour and a privilege to serve the Gillingham Probud Club as your Chairman and that is down to all the support from the members throughout the year.

THANK YOU ALL *Ron Walker*

## **Brian Garton – Budhanilkantba, the premier school of Nepal – 2 April**

Probus Club member Brian Garton is a former headmaster of international schools. This talk was about one of his schools in an unusual location, where he obtained the post of headmaster, and served in this post from 1989 to 1992 – Budhanilkantba School, Kathmandu, Nepal. Nepal is a landlocked South Asian country, located mainly in the Himalayas, bordering China to the north, and India to the south. Nepalis are categorised by a caste system. This is poor country, and due to the mountainous region

## FUTURE EVENTS

14 May

The Club's Annual  
General Meeting

Speaker: **Andy Muckle**  
'From Vet to Vicar'

28 May

Speaker: **Mike Spencer**  
'Ice, Fire and Fjords'

Lunch at The Kitchen at  
Kimber's Farm. 12.30 for  
12.45

30 May

Golf Day at Long Sutton

covering most of Nepal, the infrastructure is under-developed, leaving some village communities isolated because of the lack of roads and transport, making travel for people really challenging. Before the 1970s, rich Nepalis tended to send their children to Indian boarding schools before university. The idea of establishing a model school providing an excellent education for students from all castes and backgrounds was initiated by the late King Mahendra (Nepal is now a republic), and the form of education was influenced by the English Public Schools system, notably Eton. And so, after much planning – and technical and financial support from the British Government through the British Council, the school came into existence in 1972, initially under British management.

Teaching started in 1973, and later English was made the language of instruction.

Kathmandu is the capital and largest city in Nepal, built in a bowl-shaped valley; due to its location and climate Kathmandu suffers from a high degree of air pollution, but Budhanikantha (*pictured below*) avoids much of this, being situated at the valley rim.

One third of the students were provided on full scholarships – subject to written tests for applicants. To avoid the problems of the caste system within the school, students were addressed by their first name (and number) rather than their surname. When the first batch of students took the school leaving



certificate at the end of class 10 in 1980, most of the top students taking this exam nationally were from this school, establishing its premier position. The Cambridge University O and A level programs were later introduced.

During Brian Garton's headmastership a notable change was the switch from a 'Boys Only' school to a co-educational institution in 1991, when the first batch of girls was introduced.

Budhanikantha is supported by strong links with a society of ex-students,

parents, and friends of the school, and has strong outreach programmes. The late King Birendra was very supportive of the school, and his two sons were students there. Tragedy later struck the Royal family when ten members of the family, including the King and Queen, were allegedly murdered by Prince Dipendra, who then shot himself.

Management of the school was handed over to the Nepalese in 1994. In the years that followed there was much political turmoil, and civil war, with the proclamation of a secular republic in 2008; but the school has continued to be a centre of educational excellence up to the present day, despite the period of Maoist revolution.

Nepal experienced a severe earthquake in 2015, and the school took part in the relief effort, providing outreach relief to the community.

The power point presentation accompanying this talk showed interesting photographs of the country's people and notable buildings (many of these were destroyed in the earthquake). Following questions, the Chairman gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

## **Dave Hooker – V2 rockets on London 1944/45 -16 April**

Dave Hooker was born in London on 27 March 1945 – the last day that Hitler's awful V2 rockets fell on the capital. His family, along with all Londoners, had endured months of the bombing campaign. His mother, pregnant with Dave at the time, was in their house in Albany Park in November 1944, when it was bombed and suffered substantial damage; she could easily have been killed. Years later David's father, who was an engineer and in a reserved occupation working on projects required for the war effort, told him a little about the traumatic time experienced by Londoners during the bombing and the V2 rockets. This led to him researching the V2 project into rocket propulsion, and how this work

led in the second half of the 20th century to major scientific advances, with man reaching into space and aiming for the stars.

Walter Dornberger, a German professional soldier, was a qualified engineer. He was assigned to the Ballistics Council of the German Army in 1930 to secretly develop a rocket for multiple launchers. The vision of Dornberger went way beyond artillery rockets, however. His interest in a young German scientist named Werner Von Braun led to a research grant and working to develop rockets ultimately capable of space flight. During this time the Nazi party had come to power in Germany, leading up to the outbreak of war. Later, after the war ended, Von Braun moved to America to continue his work, leading him to be recognised as the father of the space programme.

Dornberger and Von Braun had been joined by another engineer, Walter Reidal, and the team worked initially at Kammersdorf, moving to the Army Research Centre at Peenemunde on the Baltic coast. Now part of the German war machine, under the Minister of Munitions, Albert Speer and other Nazis became involved. This led to pressure to hasten progress, with stringent targets to gain the Fuhrer's approval. The emphasis was on developing a military rocket weapon for mass strikes on London.

The V1 flying bomb (known to the allies as the buzz bomb or doodlebug) was produced first before the V2, with a relatively short range. Fired from along the northern French coast, thousands of rockets were



launched, particularly against London. Because of allied bombing of identified enemy launch positions, this led to mobile launch positions being used by the Germans.

Later reconnaissance by the RAF revealed V2 rocket sites being built, without their significance being realised. The V2 rocket development site at Peenemunde was bombed, but V2 production was moved inside a mountain at Blizna, Germany. Mass production continued, with some 60,000 Jewish slave workers being employed on the work. The use of slave labour was a significant blunder on the part of

the Germans, which slowed the process down.

The V2 offensive against London began on 8 September 1944 (some 3 months after the allied D Day invasion). The British Government initially attempted to conceal cause of the explosions by blaming them on defective gas mains. V2 rockets rained down on London until 27 March 1945. This was truly a terrible and frightening time for the people, as there was no defence against this new form of warfare; Dave Hooker's talk and family recollections brought home the effect this had on ordinary families. The Germans had developed mobile *meillerwagons* (pictured above) from which the rockets were launched, which could then move to other locations.

Despite the terrible reason for the V2, its development was a major scientific advance, with its fuel a mixture of liquid oxygen and alcohol enabling a launch to a height of 50 to 60 miles, returning to earth at 2,500 mph.

Dave's talk, combining many details of the V2 project with the personal stories he learnt from his parents, made an interesting and enjoyable talk. Questions followed, and Peter Marshall recalled Arthur C Clarke writing an article in wireless world in January 1945 envisaging space flight. The chairman gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

## **Mark Temple – The Ffestiniog Railway - 30 April**

Mark Temple lives in West Knogle, and is a lifelong railway enthusiast. He has been a volunteer working on the Ffestiniog railway in North Wales since the 1960s – originally as a platelayer, and more recently as a refreshment car steward. His talk covered the history of this railway and its locomotives and rolling stock.



The railway is approximately 13-14 miles long, mainly in the Snowdonia National Park, and running from the slate mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog to the harbour at Porthmadog. Both this railway, and the longer Welsh Highland Railway (now also owned by the FR) are 2ft narrow gauge.

The Ffestiniog Railway Company was formed by Act of Parliament in 1832. Its original purpose was to transport slate from the quarries to the harbour at Porthmadog, where it was loaded on to ships. This coastal town was also a centre for shipbuilding at the time, where

graceful schooners were built. The line which was subsequently built, was graded to allow loaded wagons to use gravity to run downhill; and empty wagons were pulled back up by horses, these travelled down on the train in a special wagon. The narrow gauge line principle proved so successful that it was used in overseas countries of the British Empire and elsewhere.

In order to increase the operational capacity of the line, the company changed to steam locomotives, with the first engines being built in Newcastle and delivered in 1863. This also enabled the introduction of passenger trains two years later. Some engines were later built locally at the Boston Lodge Works, which is still building and restoring engines and carriages for this and other heritage railways.

Slate trains of 80 wagons carried two brakemen. Mark Temple used power point to show photographs of engines and carriages used over the years. These demonstrated developments in design and technical improvements, such as the introduction of bogies to increase safety, speed and comfort. The line operated commercially until 1946; demand for slate had fallen after the First World War, due to the use of other building materials. The railway had continued to be used by a combination of slate trains and passenger traffic, but passenger trains had stopped with the outbreak of WW2 in 1939. After use ceased in 1946, the unused track and infrastructure remained in place, as there was no statutory authority to permanently close the railway.

A band of volunteers planned to restore the railway and bring it back into use for tourism. A new company was formed and took over the line in 1954; later becoming the Ffestiniog Railway Trust. Restoration included diverting the Northern section of the line, which had been flooded, and other major works.

Another line, the Welsh Highland Railway, had ceased to operate before the war because of the decline in trade and build up of debt. Following restoration and extension and opening as a tourist attraction, this now runs from Caenafon to Porthmadog. This now links up with the Ffestiniog Railway and is owned by the Ffestiniog Railway Company and both railways are marketed together for tourism purposes. Following questions, the Chairman gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

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

[richardpclarke69@gmail.com](mailto:richardpclarke69@gmail.com). The June edition will be published late because of the editor's holiday