



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No. 178 - September 2019
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)



Chairman's Notes

Back to skool! I hope that everyone feels refreshed having enjoyed their recess, during which many of us enjoyed yet another splendid barbeque from Poulter Productions. I'm unsure whether Alan has a hotline to the Almighty, but yet again we were blessed with warmth and sunshine on the day; wasps aside, it was a highly enjoyable occasion for which my thanks go to Alan (and Elaine) for their organisation of the event (*Pictured above: members queue for the excellent food*).

I also wish to mention the Club's outing to the Newt Gardens in Somerset at the end of July. John Owen set up a visit to what is still a work in progress, but which has all the hallmarks of being a future entry in many people's 'bucket lists' (*See pictures of that event and the skittles evening on the back page*). Once again, we were blessed with good weather (it was almost too hot!), but we were treated to a very interesting and informative tour of the gardens, which are part of a multi-million-pound development near Bruton. Thank you, John!

As we set out on our autumn session in a new home, I cannot help but comment on the change in ambience. I am of course only too well aware that there are some who felt happy to remain at the Olive Bowl, but the open vistas of Slaughtergate help to lift the spirits in way which was denied in our previous setting. Let us hope that we will all grow to appreciate and enjoy the surroundings for our future meetings. But even more to the point, I hope that we continue to enjoy each other's company and fellowship, and that our Club flourishes for years to come. *Nick Hall*

FUTURE EVENTS

3 September

Venue: North Dorset
Rugby Club

Speaker: **Chip Chapman**
'The Falklands War – My part in the Downfall of General Galtieri'

5 September

Golf Day at Long Sutton

17 September

Speaker: **Dr Ed**
Derbyshire

'Space in Everyday Life'
Ladies' Invitation
Lunch at the Walnut Tree,
Mere 12.30 for 12.45

23 October

BSO Concert at Poole
Lighthouse. Travel by
coach

Roman life around Gillingham – John Smith - 8 July

John Smith is a military historian and former curator of Roman sites. He has spoken to our club on other occasions. One of these was several years ago when John, dressed as a Roman soldier, told us about military dress, armour, and weapons used at the time of the Roman Empire. This latest talk was about how, after they arrived in Britain in AD44, the Romans changed British life fundamentally, affecting the lives of the general population.

When the Romans arrived and imposed military administration and order, an early important task was to undertake an economic survey. Roman Soldiers, trained to read and write, would note down on their wax tablets (*no letter 'J' in their 23 letters alphabet*) details of population in a particular area, farms, crops, animals etc for tax purposes. John Smith reminded us of many things introduced by the Romans we now take for granted – consistent measurement of distance (the inch, the foot and the mile); weights and standard weights of coinage. Proper roads were constructed, using gravel, chalk and flint, cambered with drainage ditches at each side – and driving on the left! As part of a massive building plan, Roman settlements were established in towns such as Winchester, Dorchester and Bath. More advanced building practices were used, including the use of cement and concrete in construction of permanent structures. Whereas the 'locals' lived in roundhouses with one family living space, the Romans used a rectangular structure for their buildings, with rooms and heating systems, and glass for windows. Originally ceramic roof tiles were used, but as climatic conditions changed, limestone and sandstone tiles were used. Special tiles were used for heating.

John showed us various artefacts as examples of household and personal items, including smooth-surfaced red-brown decorated Samian ware. He explained how herbs and spices were used in cooking, imported from various parts of the empire, and beyond. Carpenters' tools unearthed in excavations of roman sites would be recognisable by present-day carpenters, including trowels and planes. Wool and linen were used for women's clothing in various ways, and cotton and silk. Footwear, with hobnails for outdoor use, designed for left and right feet. And slippers for indoor use.

This talk underlined how events, such as the Roman occupation, and later (*such as 1066 and all that!*) have shaped our lives today. After questions, Sam Woodcock gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

Namibia and Botswana Odyssey – Christopher Legrand - 23 July

Christopher Legrand – members may recall – gave a talk on Vienna when he last visited our club. This time we were transported, aided by his photographs, to Namibia and Botswana in Sub-Saharan Africa. Before showing photographs of the scenery and varied animal and bird life encountered during his 15-day trip with his wife, Rosemary, covering 3,580 km in this very dry region, Christopher explained a little about Namibia and its origins.

Most of the territory formed part of the German Empire in the latter part of the 19th century, known as German South-West Africa. After World War I, South Africa was mandated by the League of Nations to administer the colony. Namibia obtained full independence in 1990. The adjoining Botswana (70% of which is the Kalahari Desert) was formerly the British Protectorate of Bechuanaland, gaining independence in 1966. These countries are sparsely populated; Namibia has a population of only 2.6 million, although twice the size of the UK.

Embarking on the trip in a Ford Ranger, travel was arduous. Because of the rutted state of the roads, with deep ditches, speed was limited to 70km per hour. It was necessary to carry two spare wheels and more fuel and water to avoid being stuck in the desert with no help. The terrestrial telephone system is largely inoperable. The trip used a number of lodges for stop-overs in the area, starting at

Corona Guest Farm, about 183km from the Namibian capital of Windhoek at the foot of Mount Gamsberg. The clear skies at night showed the stars in all their glory without light and air pollution. The Rostock Ritz Lodge overlooked the colourful dune landscape of the Namib Desert. A welcome stop was at Solitaire; this small settlement is at the edge of the Namib-Naukluft National Park, just below the Tropic of Capricorn. At least this offered a filling station, café, bakery, vehicle repair facilities and public conveniences.

Creatures surviving in this dry arid region include snakes, geckos, insects, hyenas, gemboks and jackals. Later, at the thatched Hoodia Desert Lodge tracks could be seen in the sand of animals and insects, and the white lady spiders and scorpions. The huge orange-coloured dunes continually change shape with the strong winds that blow from the Atlantic. The remains of long dead trees scatter the landscape.

The remote Skeleton Coast, now part of a national Park, still has evidence of former shipwrecks. The City of Walvis Bay has much marine and bird life, including flamingos and huge great white pelicans. Tourists are able to swim with friendly and inquisitive fur seals. Many Namibians live in small basic self-constructed dwellings; Christopher showed us a photograph of one, with a wooden framework and walls of cow and elephant dung.

The Legrands stayed at Doro Nawas Lodge, where their guide 'Reggie' showed them desert adapted elephants. They saw an array of bird life, and viewed the ancient famous rock engravings made by the indigenous people. The last lodge visited was constructed on stilts, to avoid the danger caused by hippos!

Leaving Namibia, the Legrands crossed the border into Botswana, visiting the Chobe National Park with its large concentration of lions, elephants and other game. There are also hippos, minitor lizards and crocodiles. Bird life includes the colourful carmine bee-eater, fish and tawny eagles, storks, bustard and many others. Christopher concluded his talk and mentioned that his next trip would be to Uganda to see mountain gorillas! Peter Grange gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeff*

Ian McLellan's holidays with a difference



After our holiday in Venice and the area around, described in the last Probus Recorder, we came home for a few days and then left on our next eight-day trip to Lake Maggiore by rail from St Pancras. This was a fully escorted rail tour, something we have never done before. Via Eurostar to Paris, on to Strasbourg for overnight: a charming city which deserves more attention. The next day we went via Basel to Stresa on the lake. We came across the difficulties of changing French to Swiss trains. At Basel station each has separate platforms and you have to leave the station to go out in the street to the other. For all 33 of us it was a rush as we only had 12 minutes to detrain, move 400 yards and get on the other train. We made it by 1 minute! Also even with

our light luggage continental trains/platforms are low and there were three steps up, as well as going to our seats on the top of the double decker carriages.

However, Lake Maggiore was really beautiful and Stresa full of life. Our hotel was well situated and our balcony was overlooking the waterfront close to the ferry terminal. We had lots of free time from the group to travel on the lake but also tours to one island, Isola Bella (*picture above*) with its Borromeo Palace and wonderful gardens. The next day was free time so we took a ferry to Isola Pescatori where we wandered the narrow ancient streets and then back to walk round Stresa, The third day we took the

Centovalli narrow gauge railway journey to Lucarno. On the last full day we went by coach to Lake Orta, one of the other Italian lakes where we took a boat to Isola San Giulio. This island is extremely picturesque. It was a most relaxing and peaceful day and we thoroughly enjoyed it. On departure day from Stresa we had time to visit the weekly market. It turned out to be much larger than we thought for a small town. Unfortunately we could not bring the wonderful fresh food products home.

Because of the luggage and steps issue we decided to get a case couriered home. It arrived safely four days after we got back. We recommend this for easy holidaying in Europe. The journey home worked well, Paris was quiet with no protests when we passed through.

However when we got to Waterloo, trains were being cancelled so we opted to for the Salisbury train. Our train was 20 minutes late leaving, no air conditioning - temperature outside was 32C and no toilets. At Salisbury the train to Gillingham was also 20mins late.

In summary 500 miles in Europe took 6 hours and 100 odd miles from Waterloo took 2.5 hours!

Despite the train issues this was a most enjoyable and relaxing holiday and in fact we recommend these holidays as both fulfilled what we wanted. *Ian McLellan*



The Club's annual skittles tournament was held on August 13 at the British Legion HQ in Gillingham. The ladies' prize went to Elaine Poulter and the men's trophy was presented to Roger Ellis by Peter Grange, the tournament founder.

Earlier, a visit to the Newt Gardens between Castle Cary and Bruton was organised by John Owen on a scorching hot July 25 (pictured above right).

Please Note: The next edition of Probus Recorder will be published late, because of the Editor's holiday plans. There will be no printed copies available until October 15

Material for the October edition should be sent to Richard Clarke on: richardpclarke69@gmail.com