

# PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No. 181 - December 2019 (www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

# Chairman's Notes

Christmas is almost upon us – faced by some with dread, and by most with resigned forbearance (and a little light retail therapy?). A few little musings:

May you never be too grown up to search the skies on Christmas Eve.

Christmas isn't an event - it's a state of mind.

Christmas: The strange day where we sit around a dead tree eating sweets out of socks.

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas. But if it runs out, I'll drink the red.

Enough of such idle inanities! What has happened since the previous issue (No 180) of The Recorder hit the streets? First, as a counterpoint to Sam Woodcock's talk on preserving Gillingham's heritage, we were treated to a talk on development aspects of the town's facilities (other than housing). Mike Gould of the Gillingham 'Town Team' set out the areas of the town being looked at — what development might be put in place and how it might be achieved. It was an interesting reflection on current thinking, and it also showed that the town's heritage is being taken into account.

Then we had a talk from Graham Dunlop, retired Royal Marine, on the history of, and lessons from, the troubles in the Former Yugoslavia. It is easy to forget that this started nearly 30 years ago with the declaration of independence by Slovenia and Croatia and didn't end until 2001 when Milosevic was

removed from power in Serbia. Apart from reminding us of the huge religious and cultural tensions that in the area (which probably still exist), it also illustrated the powerlessness of the EU and the UN to bring the troubles to an end, and reinforced the fact that Nato was the only force capable of doing this. (President Macron please take note!)

Both talks took place in our new venue and proved conclusively that feeling cold was never likely to be a problem! The sound system is yet to reach perfection, but the heating system most definitely works well – long may it remain so.

In between the two talks, John Owen led an intrepid group to the Somerset Rural Life Museum in Glastonbury. Well – what a wonderful trove this turned out to be! A small but beautifully laid out reflection on life in Somerset over the last 200 years or so – the history of its landscapes, food and farming, working life and rural crafts. Oh, yes – and a small café! I

### **FUTURE EVENTS**

26 November

**Speaker:** Brigit

Strawbridge 'Dancing with

bees'

Ladies' invitation

Christmas Lunch today at

the Half Moon

10 December

**Speaker:** David Smith

'Kingston Lacy: An

Undiscovered History'

19 December

Christmas Dinner at The Grange in Oborne. Travel

by coach.

Various pick-up points

7 January

**Speaker:** John Gidley

'Safari' 21 January

**Speaker:** Miranda Pender

'Lifting the Lid' Ladies invitation

There is a lunch today

can only urge people to visit; a thoroughly worthwhile and interesting guardian of times past (see report below).

Finally – and without any excuse for repeating myself - the Chairman's Dinner is being held at The Grange at Oborne on Thursday 19 December, and I look forward to being able to share it with as many of you as possible. I hope that you will feel able and willing to attend, especially as it is so close to Christmas and should provide a wonderful culmination to the Club's events in 2019. Nick Hall



On Tuesday, 8 November, 14 members, wives and partners (pictured left) visited the Somerset Museum of Rural Life in Glastonbury. After a damp start, we enjoyed a thoroughly enjoyable morning guided by the excellent Joanna from the museum. The Abbey farm, which was once part of Glastonbury Abbey's estate, now houses a recently upgraded collection of examples of rural life across the centuries. Farming, fishing, local industry, brewing and hunting all featured along with personal

stories of the lives of those who featured in these activities. The whole collection is sensitively put together with many personal touches and has a variety of display styles which demonstrate the passion of those who have compiled the exhibits. I know we all enjoyed our visit and would recommend anyone who missed the opportunity, to consider a visit in the future. *John Owen – Social Organiser* 

# Mike Gould - The future of Gillingham - 29 October

Mike Gould is a Gillingham Town councillor, and has been involved as a member of the "Town Team" in planning for the future challenges, needs and opportunities for Gillingham. He highlighted some of the issues in his talk.

Looking briefly at how Gillingham developed from a small village to the town today of some 12,000 people, Mike explained how the Town Team wanted to rejuvenate the central core of Gillingham, which was sorely needed, with the national trend of the demise of the High Street inevitably having an impact.

A considerable increase in housing provision expanding the size of the town – particularly on the sites of Newhouse Farm and Ham Farm – already planned for, will result in a major increase in population. An area of interest is the land round and near the rail station – the 'Station Hub'. The Town Team envisage the need to create 'destination reasons' for visiting or using Gillingham, for example recreational facilities (such as a cinema); a technical hub (fast internet speeds is essential); and opportunities for mixed-use start-up businesses.

The Station Road, area, the former Co-op site and the Brickfields Business Site have all been identified as appropriate for improvement. The need for a hotel of some description, probably in the Orchard Park area, is also recognised, as is the requirement for more parking provision at the station. The number of parking places at the station precinct could be achieved by building a second tier. Another associated factor recognised by the Town Team is the wish to focus on the heritage aspects of Gillingham, and to work with Historic England and other bodies to look at the wider possibilities for heritage and creative improvements.

Local business ratepayers are considering whether the establishment of a 'Business Improvement District' (BID) is appropriate for Gillingham. BIDs are business-led and funded bodies established to improve a defined commercial area.

Mike answered questions, and invited suggestions. The talk was interesting; how many wished-for improvements will be achieved in the future remains to be seen. The Chairman gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs* 

# Graham Dunlop - 'Peacemakers' - The fall of Yugoslavia 1991-1996

A year ago, former Royal Marine Graham Dunlop told us about the origins of the First World War, a conflict which was ignited in the Balkans. This latest talk was of a much later conflict – the Civil War and break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, where he served for two years as part of the UN/Nato peacekeeping operation.

Yugoslavia was a country established as a socialist State in the aftermath of the Second World War (there had been a kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1918 to 1941). The country was made up of six socialist republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, with the Serbian city of Belgrade as its capital. There were autonomous provinces within Serbia: Kosovo and Vojvodina. The country was held together by the strong war-time partisan leader President Marshal Tito, from 1953 until his death in 1980. Serbia was the dominant republic in the country, but the complicated ethnic mix of the population perhaps inevitably led to difficulties, stirred up by some bad people. Ethnic Serbs are generally orthodox Christians, and Serbia fought against the Germans in WW11. Croats and Slovenes are mainly Catholic; most of Croatia was for the Germans. Also, resulting from migrations stemming back to the Middle Ages, Muslims made up a significant percentage of the population.

The declaration of independence by Croatia and Slovenia in 1991 led to Civil War, fought between Croat forces and the Serb-controlled Yugoslav Peoples Army. The Bosnian War followed violent



incidents in 1992; Serbs and Croats living in Bosnia wanted to annex Bosnian territory for Serbia and Croatia. About 44% of the population of Bosnia were Muslim, with over 30% orthodox Serbs and 17% Catholic Croat. This developed into a particularly nasty conflict, civilian populations were targeted with violence and murder. Entire villages were destroyed, and the Serbs ran concentration camps. The world got used to the term 'ethnic cleansing'.

The worst atrocity in terms of sheer numbers was the Srebrenica massacre – a genocide of more than 8,000 Bosniaks, mainly men and boys, during the Bosnian war – by units of the Bosnian Serb army under the control of General Mladic. The area had in fact been a declared 'safe area', but the UN protection forces failed to prevent the town's capture and the massacre. The initial international reaction to the war was dysfunctional; mediating did not result the cessation of hostilities, and the initial UN involvement was to deliver humanitarian aid. The UN military response failed due to bad rules of engagement, a

long chain of command, insufficient force, and troops stuck in the middle between opposing forces, and the inability to call in prompt air support. Eventually the Americans and NATO forces got involved, and the situation changed. The American negotiator Richard Holbrooke led the effort through NATO. General Rupert Smith, The UN commander in Sarajevo, created the UN rapid reaction force, and, by calling in air strikes on the Serb positions, ended the siege of the city. Bosnia was divided into three sectors - American, British and French. The arrival of overwhelming Nato forces and Holbrooke's clear political direction led to an end to the fighting. The Dayton, Ohio, peace agreement, reached in November 1995 and signed in Paris that December, put an end to the Bosnian war. The warring parties agreed to a single sovereign state of Bosnia Herzegovina (comprised of two parts, Republika Srpska (mainly Serb), and the Croat-Bosniak Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mr Dunlop told us about some of leading figures in the conflict: Slobodan Milosovic, the communist President of Serbia, and later Yugoslavia, who died in captivity at the Hague during his trial for war crimes; Radovan Karadzic, Bosnian Serb leader, now a convicted war criminal; Ratco Mladic, the Bosnian Serbian General, also a convicted war criminal; and (pictured above with his armed thugs and an unfortunate tiger cub) Arkan, a Serbian career criminal and paramilitary commander, who was indicted for war crimes, but later assassinated.

The process leading to the end of the war proved that strong resolve, backed up by military action, can result in a peaceful conclusion. Alan Poulter gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs* 

## A Tale of Two Weekends

Following our earlier holidays Isabel and I decided we would take a couple of weekend breaks. The first of these was in September in Belfast, a city we had never explored before only having previously been to the Titanic Experience. This time the main reason for going there was to visit the Giant's Causeway, a sight we wanted to take in and it was well worth it. Belfast is a city well visited by tourists for four main reasons, the Titanic, 'The Troubles' including tours of the main sites, the Giants Causeway and somewhat to our surprise 'The Game of Thrones'. We have never watched this series and did not realise how many tourists were making the trip from all over the world to see the



various filming locations. Our driver was surprised we were not interested and showed us just a few of the main spectacular places. It was actually worth it.

It is impossible to describe the dramatic nature of the Giant's Causeway (pictured left), it was as wonderful as we hoped. After that we called in at Bushmill's Distillery shop to buy some local produce. Northern Ireland is in danger of being overrun

with tourists and needs more infra-structure especially in the future as the port of Belfast is building quays to take the new large liners. Overall we were impressed with the province and city and realised that although the population are part of the UK they feel Irish and part of Ireland first. There is a lot of optimism and they are welcoming to visitors.

The second of our breaks was to Lille in early October. It's only 90 minutes by Eurostar from St Pancras. A dramatic historic city which had many new developments alongside the old in the area known as EuroLille. We strolled the narrow streets and visited the shops as well as a market with an impressive display of produce, both fruit and vegetable as well as fish and meat. We were welcomed everywhere despite Chelsea Football Club playing at Lille the night before we got there. Many of the supporters stayed for an extra day and seemed to be quietly enjoying their stay. We luckily blundered upon a restaurant near our hotel which was a carnivore's delight serving meats and fish that had been smoked. The city was vibrant and full of life. We will return to Lille in the future as it has the biggest flea-market in France when the city centre is closed and 25 Km of roads are used. However, we had travel issues coming back, not on Eurostar I must add but crossing to Waterloo by taxi with all the climate demonstrations (1hr £40.00) and then the slow two-hour train trip to Gillingham.

We have found these weekend breaks have been interesting and stimulating and intend doing more in the future. *Ian McLellan* 

There will be no January edition of the Recorder. Material for the February edition should be sent to Richard Clarke on: <a href="mailto:richardpclarke69@gmail.com">richardpclarke69@gmail.com</a>