



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No. 182 - February 2020
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)



Glittering party of members enjoying the Christmas dinner at The Grange in Osborne. More pictures on the back page

FUTURE EVENTS

04 February

Speaker: Brian Freeland
'Sussex Lives'

18 February

Speaker: Bob Messer
'Travellers' Tales – the
Scary Bits'

Lunch at the Hillbrush
Factory, Mere. 12.00

11 March

Skittles Evening

Chairman's Notes

As I pen this introduction to the first issue of 2020, I can't help reflecting on the name 'February'. It comes from a Roman god Februus, but much more to the point was the Olde English name of 'Solmonath', which translates literally as "mud month" - how very apt!!



We head into another year with high hopes for an enjoyable Club life in 2020. Our programme of talks and outings for 2020 has yet to be fleshed out, but I have great expectations that we are going to be treated to new speakers, new outings and new or well-loved lunch venues. Above all I hope that we will find new members wishing to join our happy band. The latter depends on

all of us, so please bear that in mind as you go about your daily business!

Since the editor of this eminent publication has exhorted me to be brief, I will end on that note and wish everyone the very best of health and happiness for 2020. *Nick Hall*

Kingston Lacy: 'An undiscovered history' - David Smith - 10 December

David Smith was the head ranger at Kingston Lacy until his retirement. Indeed, he was an estate employee before the National Trust took over in 1982. Many of our Probus Club members will have visited the House, garden and grounds on more than one occasion, and will therefore have some knowledge of its more recent history; and the association with the Bankes family, the owners of the estate for several hundred years.

The present house was built between 1663 and 1665 by Ralph Bankes. He was the son of Sir John and Lady Bankes, who lived at Corfe Castle until its destruction in the English civil War. The last incumbent of Kingston Lacy (Henry John Ralph Bankes) died in 1981 and bequeathed the whole estate to the National Trust. At that time the House was in a poor state, and needed considerable restoration. The present estate covers 16,500 acres, including houses and farms.

The main purpose of David Smith's talk was to explain that the whole area of this part of Dorset, and in particular the Kingston Lacy estate, is steeped in history. The discovery of detailed estate records in the muniments room* at the House gave a valuable insight going back hundreds of years.

The Royal estate of Kingston within the manor of Wimborne (*Old English Cyning Tun – The King's farm or estate*) can be traced back to medieval England. The former house was used as a hunting lodge in connection with a nearby deer park. The Crown leased the estate to various tenants – including the de Lacy family, Earls of Lincoln; hence the Lacy part of the present name. The estate was later leased to other important figures, including the Duke of Somerset, whose daughter Lady Margaret Beaufort was the mother of Henry VII.

David Smith read a translation of one of the discovered* documents, an instruction dated 1308 from the Earl of Lincoln's Bailiff to the Steward of the Manor of Kingston, regarding the requirements for the forthcoming visit of the King and his large retinue for Christmastide,



The menu instructions and precise nature of these gives an indication of the huge and varied appetites of the ruling classes at that time! Lots of meat, game, fowl and fish – and plenty to drink!

Extensive archaeology of the area has been uncovered, and much remains undiscovered. When an oil pipeline was dug across the land, this alone revealed over 20 sites of interest. Field boundaries and their names have remained largely

unchanged for hundreds of years. There is also visual evidence of Norman strip farming. Bradbury Rings, one of a line of Iron Age Hill forts, has evidence of occupation during the Neolithic, bronze, and iron ages. A Roman temple was located immediately west of the fort and nearby there was a Romano-British town known as *Vindocladia*, near Shapwick. During the Roman era five Roman roads intersected near Bradbury Rings, linking important settlements of Dorchester, Exeter, London, Old Sarum, Bath and Poole Harbour; aerial photographs show the line of these roads. In the bad storm of 1987, a fallen tree revealed the skeleton of a female from 2,200BC (now in Dorchester museum). There were other roads from the Saxon era, and the royal farm at Kingston had connections with the monastery at Wimborne. In the 1300s the estate encompassed 109,000 acres (16,000 acres today).

David Smith's interesting talk demonstrated that there is much more to Kingston Lacy and its estate than appears to the casual visitor to this National Trust property. David wrote a book on this undiscovered history in 1990, but – as archaeological excavations have occurred

since, and are planned in the future - there remains a story still to be told. John Houchin gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

John Gidley – ‘Safari’ - 7 January

John Gidley is a member of Salisbury (Sarum) Probus Club. He came to show us a video he filmed of his holiday in southern Africa in 2018, when he stayed at four different lodges to look at the wildlife. He is raising funds for the Salisbury Hospital Stars Appeal, and members had the opportunity to contribute to the retiring collection for this worthy cause. John is committed to raising £5,000 towards the appeal in recognition of the work of the cardiac team in successfully resuscitating him following his heart attack.

Unfortunately, there were initial problems in getting his computer to behave (our IT expert finally succeeded in getting the film up and running!). Some members took advantage of the delay, after the Chairman allowed a break in the proceedings and the bar to be opened!

The film John took gave a fascinating insight into the wide variety of wildlife shown on his holiday – including rare white lions, and a group of elephants congregating at the place where one of their family group had died, and giraffes towering over the vegetation as they grazed off the tops of trees.

Ian McLennan gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

Miranda Pender – ‘Lifting the Lid’ - 21 January

Miranda Pender is a talented lyricist, who intersperses her talks with songs she has written, playing her guitar. The result is a light-hearted mix of words and music. Miranda lives in Sherborne.

‘Lifting the lid’ refers to the darkly comic aspects of researching family history. These days it is possible to trace details of one’s ancestors fairly easily (but it can be expensive when – as is often the case – this hobby turns into an all-consuming passion). But, when finding out about the family history, this might uncover something nasty!

Miranda’s interest in her family history began after her second cousin got in touch some years ago. Her song ‘*Lifting the lid*’ underlined the perils of finding out about the past. Their research revealed that their great grandfather Abraham James was a Cornish mining engineer. Two of a later generation, William and John Henry, married two sisters; unfortunately, having tossed a coin they chose the wrong sister! The second song *Tails you get Marie* refers to this. John Henry turned out to be a philanderer and adulterer, and the marriage ended in divorce. His daughter was Norah C James, the author. Her first novel *Sleeveless Errand* (1929) was ruled obscene in this country, and most copies were ordered to be destroyed.

Having embarked on searching the family history, Miranda’s mother decided to reveal the well-kept family secret to her. Miranda’s grandfather Joseph was a brother of William and John Henry. After moving his pharmacy business to Hastings, he had fallen into arrears with his rent in 1911, resulting in the landlord calling in the bailiffs. Joseph went to the landlord’s residence with a loaded revolver, and during the subsequent altercation the landlord Mr Womersley was shot and killed.

Joseph was arrested and charged with murder, almost certainly destined for the gallows. Due to James’s brothers hiring an expert barrister, he was spared a hanging verdict, but committed to Broadmoor on the grounds of insanity, where he died in 1936.

Miranda’s talk proved that one never knows what will come out when you ‘lift the lid!’

Peter Grange gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*



Party-goers: members and their guests enjoy the delights of the club's Christmas Dinner at The Grange in Obourne. All pictures by John Owen

EXHIBITION – HERITAGE, BUILDINGS and PEOPLE: 3 – 7 MARCH 2020

This exhibition will be at Gillingham Public Museum and Library, Chantry Fields from Tuesday 3 March until Saturday 7 March 2020 during normal opening hours.

The exhibition presents an architectural survey of all the pre-1920 buildings of Gillingham, Dorset and tells the history of their owners and residents and their occupations. It will include many old photographs of the buildings and the people who lived and worked there. Over the past year Gillingham Local History Society has researched all the old properties in the town and compiled a photographic register of the buildings which is now available to the public. A range of sources has been used including census returns, old newspapers, and title deeds of properties. It is hoped that members of the public will not only enjoy discovering more about the town but will also be encouraged to bring along further materials that can add to the history of the town and its people.