



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No. 183 - March 2020
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

Chairman's Notes

When April with its sweet-smelling showers
Has pierced the drought of March to the root,
And bathed every vein (of the plants) in such liquid
By the power of which the flower is created;

Geoffrey Chaucer 1387

I get the feeling that Geoffrey Chaucer wouldn't have understood our changing weather patterns. Maybe in his day March was very dry and cold, but while the start of our current March promises to be cold, the idea that it might be dry is almost laughable!

Let us hope also that the current Coronavirus pandemic starts to peter out, and that we don't suffer the same March outcome as in 1918 when the 'Spanish' flu struck at its worst, killing about 100 million people worldwide.

I'm sure that we good folk of Probus aren't going to be deterred by the weather or viruses – are we?!!

On the bright side of our Club life, Roger Lester has provided us with interesting speakers, and the list of future speakers looks set to continue this enjoyable trend. John Owen is starting to line up a great series of outings, which I hope will be well supported – and I'm sure that we are all keeping our fingers crossed for a bit of dry warmth to make them even more enjoyable.

Our lunch scene is also coming on apace. The last such event at the Hillbrush café was exceedingly well attended, and very good it was too - even though we were surrounded by large numbers of non-Probos punters. But if the lunch numbers continue to hold up in a similar way, it may provide our Lunch Organiser with a considerable challenge in finding suitable venues. (Was he really joking about a Probus lunch at the KFC!!) *Nick Hall*

FUTURE EVENTS

03 March

Speaker: Chris Spencer
'How I Learned to Draw and Paint in Colour'

11 March

Skittles Evening 7.45 pm
Gillingham Royal British Legion. Cost £4

17 March

Speaker: Rodney Atwood
'The Soldier who Won World War I'

19 March

History Walk around
Bradford-on-Avon. Cost £5
Own Transport

31 March

Speaker: Nigel Hawkins
'Tsar Putin'

Lunch at the Udder Farm Shop, East Stour. 12.30

29 April

Visit to Cardiff Castle



Brian Freeland: Sussex Lives – From John Freeland to Rudyard Kipling – 4 February

Brian Freeland has been a theatre tour manager, script writer, director and author – and now gives many talks to clubs and groups. He lives in Arundel, having moved from Eastbourne. Brian is a Sussex man born and bred. His branch of the family in East Sussex goes back at least 480 years in the county. Freelands from earlier centuries mainly worked on the land as farm labourers, but some advanced to work as farm bailiffs. And one John Freeland was recorded as a shopkeeper; he had amassed sufficient funds (probably as a result of his marriage to a rich widow) to be able to purchase a 17th Century house called Batemans for £950 in 1773. Over a hundred years later Batemans became the home of Rudyard Kipling (*now owned by the National Trust*). Kipling based many stories in Sussex.

This John Freeland later sold Batemans (*pictured above*) to his step-son Robert Pattenden; when John died, he left provision from his estate to establish a trust for the purchase of bread to distribute to poor parishioners after church on Sunday (note *after* they had been to church!).

From Roman times, East Sussex was an important centre for the early iron industry as a result of the discovery of iron ore in the area. There were many forges in the county, smelting iron and the forging of cannon. Brian Freeland discovered during his family research that some of his forbears worked in the industry. As well as the iron ore deposits, Sussex had a plentiful supply of wood and water, both essential for the smelting of iron. Many rich landowners made their fortunes from the industry, branching out into owning plantations in the West Indies (and the slave trade).

Later, with the shortage of wood, iron smelting moved to the Midlands, where coal fields provided an alternative source of fuel; another factor in the cost of production was the awful state of Sussex roads, and the heavy tolls imposed for repairs. The last iron forge to close was Ashburnham in 1827.

Brian Freeland mentioned that parish records often contain snippets of interesting social history, where priests – in addition to recording births, deaths and marriages – often recorded significant local, and sometimes national, events. Brian's ancestor (another John Freeland) was gamekeeper to the Webster family; they acquired Battle Abbey in 1719, later adding Northiam Abbey, Bodiam Castle, Robertsbridge Abbey and other land and property.

Many village churches in Sussex were built in the Norman French style following the Conquest, and there was a strong French influence in the county for much of the Middle Ages; Cistercian monks arrived from Burgundy in the 12th Century – they built Robertsbridge Abbey. A much later French arrival was the author and poet Hillaire Belloc, who settled in West Sussex.

Another big landowner in the county was the Brassey family. They owned most of the village of Catfield and the Normanhurst Court estate. The house (now demolished) was built by the son of Thomas Brassey, the famous builder of railways in this country and overseas in the 19th Century..

This was an interesting and well-researched talk. Chris Spencer gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

Bob Messer – Travellers Tales: The scary bits - 21 February

Bob Messer, well known locally for his work on environmental conservation and improvement, is a former teacher with considerable experience of teaching overseas.

After teaching in various locations in this country, Bob took his family to work abroad, After a spell of teaching in Khartoum, in Sudan (the subject of an earlier talk to our club some years ago), the Messers moved on to Papua New Guinea – the main subject of this talk.

Papua New Guinea is now an independent state, previously administered by Australia, that



Port Moresby has a fine setting: but there are scary parts to the city

occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and its offshore islands, situated north of Australia. The capital is Port Moresby.

Rich in natural resources, the country is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. Due to the inaccessible nature of the country, most of the indigenous population live in customary communities of strong social groups based on subsistence farming. There are hundreds of different languages that are the result of groups having had little interaction with one another.

Bob explained that in the compound where he and his family lived, there was a mix of teachers and researchers. The country has much biodiversity, some of which is still being discovered. There is a large variety of reptiles, mammals, fishes, birds and insects, and Bob commented particularly on the large bird eating spiders, poisonous bugs and creepy crawlies. He recalled his son running into a large colony of wasps and being covered, having to be sprayed to get rid of the little creatures.



When an old man died in the geriatric ward of a nursing home in North Platte, Nebraska, it was believed that he had nothing left of any value. Later, when the nurses were going through his meager possessions, they found this poem. Its content so impressed the staff that copies were made and distributed to every nurse in the hospital

Crabby Old Man

What do you see nurses? . . . What do you see?
What are you thinking when you're looking at me?
A crabby old man, . . . not very wise,
Uncertain of habit with faraway eyes?
Who dribbles his food and makes no reply
When you say in a loud voice 'I do wish you'd try!'
Who seems not to notice . . . the things that you do.
And forever is losing A sock or shoe?
Who, resisting or not lets you do as you will,
With bathing and feeding The long day to fill?
Is that what you're thinking? Is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse you're not looking at me.
I'll tell you who I am, as I sit here so still,
As I do at your bidding, as I eat at your will
I'm a small child of Ten with a father and mother,
Brothers and sisters who love one another
A young boy of Sixteen . . . with wings on his feet
Dreaming that soon now a lover he'll meet.
A groom soon at Twenty. My heart gives a leap.
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep.
At Twenty-Five, now I have young of my own.
Who need me to guide And a secure happy home.
A man of Thirty My young now grown fast,
Bound to each other With ties that should last.
At Forty, my young sons . . have grown and are gone,
But my woman's beside me to see I don't mourn.
At Fifty, once more, . . Babies play 'round my knee,
Again, we know children My loved one and me .
Dark days are upon me . . My wife is now dead.
I look at the future I shudder with dread.
For my young are all rearing young of their own.
And I think of the years . . . And the love that I've known.
I'm now an old man and nature is cruel.
Tis jest to make old age. look like a fool.
The body, it crumbles grace and vigor, depart.
There is now a stone where I once had a heart.
But inside this old carcass . . A young guy still dwells,
And now and again my battered heart swells
I remember the joys I remember the pain.
And I'm loving and living life over again.
I think of the years . all too few gone too fast.
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.
So open your eyes, people open and see..
Not a crabby old man . Look closer . . . see ME!!

Thanks to Dick Ripper

Sharks, salt water crocodiles, and the venomous sting of cone shells are to be avoided, not to mention sea snakes, stone fish and pythons.

During his travels round the country, Bob encountered evidence of the local criminal gangs ("Raskols"), and had to take evasive action on one occasion to protect his family.

The native people living around the coastal strip were ethnically different from the population of the highland region of the country. The local farmers know how to manage their crop rotation to maintain the fertility of the soil, and the need to control brush and tree cover by managed burning.

After Papua New Guinea (and a trip to Shimla in India) Bob and his family moved to Tanzania, and stayed for eight years. After getting used to the different climate, the family managed to travel around the country; during their stay there; his children have climbed to the top of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain. On one of these trips the Land Rover broke down in the middle of nowhere, but help was at hand. On another occasion, Bob came face to face with a hyena near a camp fire, but this luckily wandered off, much to his relief!

Mike Robinson gave the vote of thanks. *Alan Jeffs*

Contributions to the next Probus Recorder should be sent to richardpclarke69@gmail.com