



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM, DORSET - No. 186 - July 2020
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

CHAIRMAN'S JOTTINGS - FROM NICK HALL

We are now going into the rather martial month of July, which was named after the Roman general Julius Caesar, it being the month of his birth. On a more prosaic note, and having passed the Summer Equinox, we are now properly into our Summer. I don't know about you, but I'm finding our 'summer' weather somewhat confusing – we had a very sunny dry late Spring, and now we are being treated to a surfeit of showers – all the better to make things grow and bring on the weeds in profusion. At least my grass is recovering from the drought conditions, which is a blessing.

As to the Club's wellbeing, I suspect that all of us are getting used to the gradual loosening of lockdown but wonder where it is all heading. When are we going to be allowed to meet again, and under what conditions? We all appear to be coping reasonably with our current living conditions, but I reckon we are keenly in need of gathering socially. (Perhaps we should all become rent-a-mob protestors – after all, the authorities don't seem to mind such "social gatherings"!)

On a positive note, I can assure you that your Chairman is in touch regularly with North Dorset RFC to find out what their plans are for opening their Clubhouse – and thus what possibilities might be open to us and when. Nothing has changed as I write but 'watch this space' as the saying goes.

Moving to greater matters, we are all in awe of a memorable occasion that looms in the near future, for which the Editor has produced a special piece (see below). We honour the marvellous achievement of **Horace Erridge** in reaching his Centenary this month, and although we are unable to celebrate the event properly for the due date, I assure you that the Club hopes to be able to mark the occasion suitably as soon as circumstances allow. I think you will agree that in view of Horace's naval background this wonderful feat admirably suits the martial aspects of July!

WELFARE NEWSfrom Gordon Banks.

What side of a duck has the most feathers? - "The outside".

Chas Allberry is not very mobile, but improving.

Richard Clarke is also improving, slowly.

John Houchin's wife Christine is also on the mend.

Peter Nation finds the Physio a help.

Dick Ripper's wife Jenny is back to normal – says, Dick!

What did the left eye say to the right eye. - "Between you and me something smells".

A man went to see the Doctor, with a strawberry in his ear.

The Doctor looked at it closely and said. -- "I think I have got some cream for that".

BOOKS OF INFLUENCE

Chris Spencer writes: The book that changed my life was probably "Scouting For Boys." I remember reading it by torchlight under the bed covers. I liked the idea of being able to track animals. However, the most practical things I learned was how to light wood fires, and how to do whipping and tie knots. I went camping for a few nights with a friend who was a scout. That gave me credibility with my parents. Initially my kit was in an old army square pack that had no carrying straps so I had to hold it in my arms. My parents bought me a length of canvas and a pattern for a framed rucksack so I sewed it by hand. Then they bought me some basket makers handle cane to make the frame. I used string to whip it into shape. A few years later, when we were on holiday in Norway, my parents bought me a Bergen rucksack.

I did join the Scouts but did not stay for very long before joining the CCF. They had guns and were also better financed! There I meet a group of friends that went camping for a weekend most months on Butser Hill, some 15 miles from Portsmouth where I lived. So on Saturday morning we would walk to the site, and Sunday afternoon we would walk back. In the Easter and summer holidays we would stay a week or so. Water came from a horse trough. The scouts were allowed to camp there for free. We had little money so we let the owners assume we were scouts! We had to cook over wood fires. There is a poem in "Scouting For Boys" that tells you the easy way to light a fire. It starts along the lines of: "First a piece of birch bark, fresh from off a tree, then a piece of dead wood, dry as it can be..." The only other part I can remember is that ash wood can be burned new or old!

At 16, I gained a place at Welbeck College, an army-run boarding school for boys wanting to join the technical arms of the army. Here I learned to sail, and climbed mountains. There were occasions when being able to tie knots was vital. At the age of 17 I joined the army!

Dave Hooker writes: Per the request for stories about books we read when young that influenced us. My school friend (whom I still phone today) and his twin brother, were going up to Foyles Book Shop in (I think) Charing Cross Road, London, to buy a reference book. We were fourteen and I offered to go with them. I bought "Inside Flying Saucers" by George Adamski. I read it from cover to cover and was very impressed (for a fourteen-year-old) and later learned it was total fiction. This had a sobering effect on me - I had been tricked, because I had believed him utterly. I now filter everything I read into three options:- one: it is the truth; two: it probably has some truth in it; and three - it is rubbish!

Now we all do this of course, but I can relate it back to George Adamski which is rather nice as a grounding for cynicism.

That Crossword (in the June issue). For those who completed it, Alan Poulter would like you to know that it was part of a competition organised by the Eccentrics Club. And the prize was a donation to the Minesweepers' Fund.

And he adds: ***"If you were successful, please report to Bletchley Park for work of utmost national importance! In December 1941, this crossword was a test for applicants to work at the now famous secret Government codebreaking centre"***.

Here are the Solutions:

ACROSS: 1 Troupe; 4 Short cut; 9 Privet; 10 Aromatic; 12 Trend; 13 Greal deal; 15 Owe; 16 Feign; 17 Newark; 22 Impale; 24 Guise; 27 Ash; 28 Centre bit; 31 Token; 32 Lamé dogs; 33 Racing; 34 Silencer; 35 Alight.

DOWN: 1 Tipstaff; 2 Olive Oil; 3 Pseudonym; 5 Horde; 6 Remit; 7 Cutter; 8 Tackle; 11 Agenda; 14 Ada; 18 Wreath; 19 Right nail; 20 Tinkling; 21 Sennight; 23 Pie; 25 Scales; 26 Enamel; 29 Rodin; 30 Bogie.

HORACE - OUR CENTENARIAN!

It is time to splice the mainbrace! (as they say in the Navy).

Our longest serving member, Horace Erridge, will celebrate his 100th birthday on July 11th. Sadly, the Covid19 'lockdown' has affected plans for the big day, but his son David has arranged a "socially distanced" garden party at his home in Tarrant Hinton, with most of the widespread family – including eight grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren - linked in by Zoom. The celebration event planned by his Probus friends for this remarkable man will take place as soon as the current restrictions make it possible.

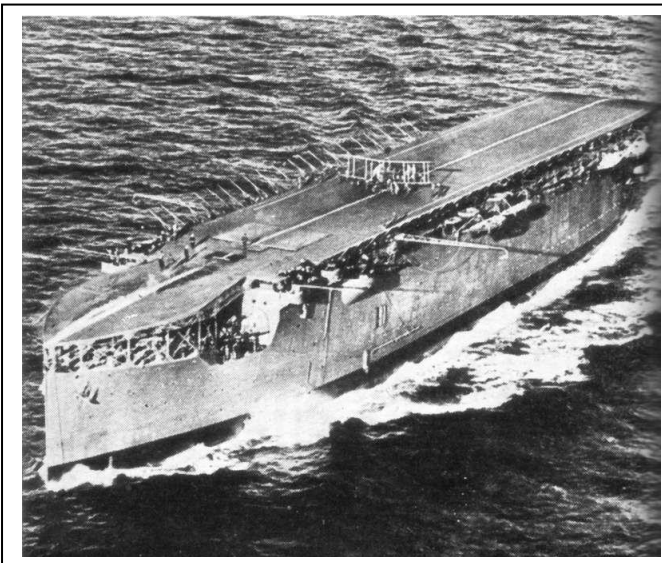
I describe him as 'Remarkable' because our quiet and modest Honorary Member, who still drives his car to our meetings, has packed so much into his long life. When prompted, he has many fascinating stories to tell – not only from his wartime days in the Royal Navy, but also about his career with the London Brick Company, a short interlude in New York working for the American Sugar Corporation, his life-long "hobby" as a first-rate jazz drummer, his work for the Boy Scouts movement, his love of hockey and golf and his membership of the Royal Naval Association. And there is much more. After his retirement to Penselwood, he started the village gardening club and joined Gillingham Probus Club soon after its formation in 1983. He went on to serve as Secretary from 1987 until 1996 and was then Chairman in 1997-98.

But it is his wartime exploits which are most vivid in Horace's memory and he is proud of his service in the Royal Navy – as can be seen in the accompanying photo with his array of medals. Most notable are the three on the right side of his blazer, all awarded by the Russian government in recognition of his part in the crucial Arctic convoys which took supplies through the ice floes and German U-boats from the UK to Russia from 1941 to 1945.



He had joined the Royal Navy in 1940 as a Supply Assistant. "It was soon after Dunkirk", he recalled, adding that he signed on in the Navy's Supply and Secretariat Branch – "so that I had a peaked cap and did not have to wear bell bottoms." After training in Skegness, he went to the Fleet Air Arm base at Lee-on-Solent to take a course in Royal Air Force accounting procedures

Then In February, 1941 he was assigned to join the aircraft carrier HMS Argus (*Britain's first aircraft carrier, pictured*) at Greenock in Scotland. His job was in the cipher room and he was also in charge of the air stores. The ship sailed to



join convoys carrying aircraft and other supplies to the Mediterranean until in August 1941 when, unknown to Horace and his shipmates, it was prepared for the first hazardous voyage from Scapa Flow to the Russian port at Murmansk with a vital cargo of 24 Hurricane fighters for Russia's air force. Horace recalled: "My job was keeping records and stores down in the lower deck and I saw very little of the Arctic. We were at action stations, but we were escorted by the aircraft carrier HMS Victorious and four destroyers and apart from rough seas it was really a quiet trip. On the way, a team of RAF technicians worked flat out assembling the aircraft and as we approached Murmansk we could hear them as each plane was safely flown off from our flight deck by RAF pilots to a Russian air base".

Horace and the crew of Argus were fortunate. The audacity of this first convoy apparently took the German command by surprise, but when some 70 more convoys followed this route between 1941 and 1945, they were increasingly attacked by German U-boats. Over 100 naval

and merchant ships were sunk and more than 3,000 allied seamen were lost as they delivered more than 4-million tons of vital supplies to Russia.

But HMS Argus did not repeat the Arctic voyage and went instead in several more convoys to the Mediterranean to deliver more aircraft to Gibraltar and Malta. "There was plenty of action in these operations," Horace recalled. "But we were lucky and were only damaged once, suffering casualties when a 1000-lb bomb hit the Argus off Tangiers. Among the many other actions, we saw the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat and we rescued about 600 of the crew."

In recent years, the Russian government made great efforts to locate survivors from the Arctic convoys and in 2015, an official from the London embassy arrived by car at Horace's home in Gillingham to present him with the sterling silver Ushakov Medal. A second medal was sent to him in 2011 on the 70th anniversary of his voyage and recently, in June, on the anniversary of VE Day, he received a third medal from the Russian embassy. He is probably the only remaining survivor from that historic first convoy in 1941. And so he now proudly wears three Russian medals on his jacket, together with his six other awards from his service in World War Two, which included sea battles with the German Navy in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Ocean.

For relaxation, Horace found time to play drums with the ship's band and with Royal Marines musicians as well as playing hockey. He became a Petty Officer and went on to serve at naval air stations in Lancashire and in West Africa. It was at the Kirkham base in Lancashire where he met Hilda, a Petty Officer in the WRNS, who became his wife. He left the Navy in 1946 but remained a reservist.

After working for the London Brick Company at their head office for some 30 years, he retired to live in Penselwood in 1983, where he started the village gardening club. Then in 1992, Horace and Hilda moved to Bruton ("to be closer to Wells Golf Club!") for three years before settling in Gillingham, where Hilda died in 2000. Over the years, Horace also found time for his many other interests as a Scoutmaster, as a golfer, as a member of the Royal Naval Association and as a top-level jazz drummer - playing with many bands in London and elsewhere with names as famous as Kenny Ball. He has continued to play drums with local groups well into his 90's.

He joined Gillingham Probus Club soon after it was formed in 1983 and went on to serve as Secretary from 1987 until 1996 and was then Chairman in 1997-98. And as we all know, Horace remains an active member. He is fit and well, continues to drive his car and lives alone in his bungalow at 8 Shreen Close, Gillingham. A remarkable man indeed!

Gillinghams In The USA

Ian McClellan writes: As a postcard collector I was aware of the three English towns of Gillingham - ours, Kent and in Norfolk near Beccles. I have also found a number of cards of Gillingham in the USA. This is in the state of Wisconsin, west of the capital Madison, close by a larger town of Richland Center which was the birthplace of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect who designed a building in that town. In the early 1900's this US Gillingham was in a typical farming community with a Presbyterian Church, a school, a logging yard, a cheese-making works and a post office. The latter was founded in 1880 when the postmaster was appointed by John Gillingham, who may have been the reason for the town's name? The population had a European background and a 1910 card shows there was some crowd funding taking place for one inhabitant. The town today is much smaller with a population of a few hundred and can be viewed on IT maps. It has a major good point—no traffic lights! It has a variety of small buildings and possibly industrial units and is part now of a small township called Marshall.

There is also a community called Gillingham in Pennsylvania. This has a small number of buildings along a roadway, Gillingham Road. In fact, Pennsylvania once had another Gillingham, a suburb of Philadelphia, which has now been absorbed into the city and identity lost except for again the street called Gillingham Road.

Also, it is of interest that Gillingham is a quite common surname in the North-east USA including blacksmiths, shopkeepers and one even being a locomotive builder. One of the descendants has traced her family back to the Lydlinch area of Dorset. In Philadelphia there was a building called Gillingham Mansion, named after the owner and builder Joseph Gillingham. I have the impression that the Pennsylvania Gillingham descendants seem to be from the Kent area of the UK whereas the townships round Gillingham, Wisconsin, have similar names to Dorset and Devon towns.

**CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE AUGUST EDITION OF THE RECORDER
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