



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM, DORSET
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

Issue No 191
December 2020

Chairman's Notes - *Nick Hall*

Honorary Membership

I wish to begin by letting you know that two Honorary Memberships have been awarded in respect of:

David Bryan
Dick Ripper

Your Committee offered the award of Honorary Membership in recognition of their long and valuable service to the Club in a number of offices and appointments, as well as for their staunch and loyal support. I am delighted to report that both have accepted the offer, and formal recognition will appear on the Club website and in the Club Handbook when the latter makes its appearance.

Meetings - 2021

- Dates. It has been decided to publish our meeting dates for 2021. It is hoped that as soon as we are allowed to meet again, meetings will pick up from the next due date on the list. The dates are:

Probus Meetings 2021			
January	5 th	19 th	
February	2 nd	16 th	
March	2 nd	16 th	30 th
April	13 th	27 th	
May	11 th	25 th	
June	8 th	22 nd	
July	6 th	20 th	
August	No meetings		
September	14 th	28 th	
October	12 th	26 th	
November	To be decided		
December			

- Reconvening. Your Committee has been deliberating on the form of the first meeting back once it is allowed and, although not yet set in stone, we have come to the following conclusions.
 - The first meeting should provide the means to re-confirm our core aim as a Club - of providing social contact for and between all members.
 - It felt that this is best achieved without the intrusion of a talk, whether by an internal or external speaker; it should be purely social.
 - The meeting should be for members with their wives/partners. It would seem churlish and unfitting to exclude our wives and partners, who will have shared with fortitude the trials and tribulations of the Covid period and supported us throughout.
 - If conditions and circumstances allow, it should be accompanied by a buffet lunch.

Other Matters.

The continuing restrictions on our lives don't make for sociability or conviviality, and I'm sure that most of us long for the day when we can resume 'normal life'. We have a glimmer of hope through vaccination, but when it might be on offer to the likes of us is a total unknown. However, it is of particular import for a Club like ours that is wholly based around the concept of personal social human interaction.

Because that concept is our Club's raison d'être, we have not galloped down the course of holding on-line meetings. Such meetings are useful for those that are engaged in business or education, where the fundamental need is to impart information, or to tease out answers to questions posed. But, by their nature they do **not** promote sociability - social interaction is severely limited, the more so with larger numbers, and so they are not considered core to our existence, even if all our members were technically able and willing to join them.

The outcome is that we have a happy band of voluntary electronic pilgrims engaging in Zoom meetings laid on by Peter Grange, and they may even arrange speakers (as per Peter's recent email), but there is no question that they should become a mainstream feature of the Club with people feeling pressured into joining them because they have become officially sanctioned policy – **they are not.**



WELFARE and SOCIAL NEWS - Gordon Banks.

Dick Ripper remains seriously ill at home in Shaftesbury. Peter Marshall was able to visit him last week for a nostalgic chat - and reported that Dick was truly delighted to have been made an Honorary Life Member of Probus.

David Bryan also expressed himself delighted with the offer of Honorary Membership. He and Daphne have at last managed to move to Scotland, albeit they are currently only in temporary accommodation. They remain unable to move into their new house while others in their 'purchasing chain' sorts themselves out. However frustrating for David and Daphne, they are at least near their daughter

John Houchin reports that he is well and has "*survived the trauma of moving house*". He and Christine are now busy with all the next stages of settling into their new home in Sutton Veny, near Warminster.

Brian Garton continues to recuperate at his Care Home in South Petherton. Unfortunately, Sidonie has been unable to visit because of the restrictions of the current lock-down.

Ken Stedman is safely home having had an operation to remove a cataract.

Bertram Akhurst is generally well but takes a tumble now and then as his sense of balance becomes impaired.

*I can't take my dog to the park, because the ducks keep trying to bite him.
I guess that's what you get with a pure bread dog!*

*What did the beaver say to the tree?
It's been nice gnawing you.*



Tales of a Relieved Traveller - Roger Ellis.

“I saw my life flash before me - Thank you, Brienz Rothorn Bahn!”



The train, now bereft of passengers, watches us descend the line.

In June 2018, a few members of the Swiss Railways Society and myself decided to spend a few days in Spiez, and towards the end Pamela flew out to join me.

The weather was excellent and so I thought what a good idea it would be to travel to Brienz by lake steamer and then go on the “[Brienz Rothorn Bahn](#) (BRB)”. This is a steam locomotive operated mountain railway much like the one that ascends Snowdon. After refreshments at the BRB station we boarded the train which was lightly loaded with only one of the two coaches in use and steam locomotive number 15 pushing. The line ascends steeply with a “rack” (toothed rail) in the centre of the track to allow cog wheels on the locomotive and coaches to engage so allowing the train to climb, and also to assist in braking. After about fifteen minutes the line levels out to pass through a loop where ascending and descending trains can pass before climbing once again and entering a tunnel. Up until then we had an

uneventful journey with wonderful views of Lake Brienz.

After leaving the tunnel we travelled for about fifty meters - when there was a load ‘bang’ from the locomotive and the train shuddered to an abrupt halt. That would have been fine, but we then proceeded to descend back down towards the tunnel. I recall that we gathered speed and although the train halted again after about twenty meters you can imagine the look on the passenger’s faces, mine and Pamela’s included. I think I said something stupid like *“that was interesting”*

The guard talked to the driver and came back to see us and explained that one of the three emergency brakes on the locomotive has failed, but that we would descend back down the line through the tunnel to the passing loop where we would wait for a rescue locomotive. This we did until after leaving the tunnel the train halted once again and the guard said that the driver was unhappy to continue with passengers on the train, and that we would have to walk down the line to the passing loop.

Now the line is as steep as the Snowdon Mountain Railway and walking down on the “cess” (this is what the side of the line is known as) on the ballast is no easy task. It was a walk of some three hundred meters downhill. That said, everyone took their time and reached the passing loop safely. After about thirty minutes a rescue locomotive arrived and coupled itself to our train, which by then had descended, empty of passengers, and very gingerly to where we were. The guard did say that if anyone did not want to continue their journey they could return to Brienz and a full refund would be available. Only one couple decided to take up this offer, my re-action being that the odds on it happening again were very slight, and so we joined other passengers on the next service which stopped especially to pick us up.

We had a lovely time at the top of the Brienz Rothorn. Time to enjoy the view and reflect on an experience I would not want to repeat!



The rescue locomotive attaches itself to the train to take it back for engineers’ attention!

A Nautical Japanese Adventure - *Andrew Tinsley*

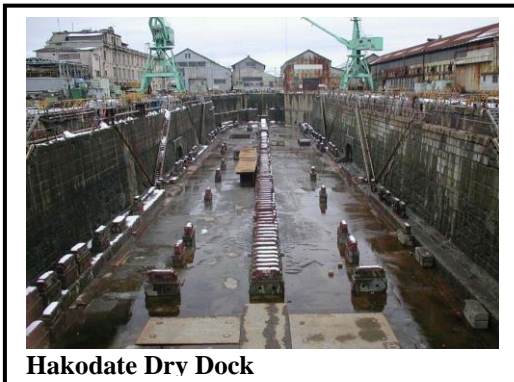
When you walked up the gangway to join a new ship there was no indication as to what lay ahead. This was the case when, as third officer, in November 1963 I travelled to London to join the P&O cargo ship **M.V. Surat** which traded between Europe and the Far East. The Surat, 9,500 tons, carried a crew of 70 plus 12 passengers. Whilst the Officers were all British, as were the passengers, the crew were Bombay Indian (deck crew), Pakistani (engine room) and Goanese (catering).



On the outward voyage we sailed via The Suez Canal calling at Penang, Port Swettenham, Singapore and Hong Kong, then on towards Kushiro, a small port on the East coast of Japan's Northernmost Island Hokkaido, where we were to load cuttlefish.

Our Captain, known as Fearless Freddie, was a "character" who liked to impress passengers and crew by passing close to land and other vessels. Unfortunately, one beautiful January morning with only a few miles to our destination, we ran aground on a charted rocky outcrop. The impact was at 18 knots and resulted in the ship hard aground on a reef and suffering severe damage. Efforts to free the ship by running the engines full astern were to no avail. With water entering the engine room, the watertight doors were closed, and the Japanese Coast Guard advised, with a request to evacuate our passengers to a nearby fishing village. Miss Peebles, who had been a Governess to Prince Charles, was one of the passengers and she regarded the whole episode as a great adventure. They subsequently joined another P&O vessel.

With calm weather we waited until morning for salvage tugs to arrive. P&O London arranged for repairs to be carried out in Hakodate which was the nearest port with dry dock facilities. The dry dock was too short but the Japanese, in their usual manner, advised it would be extended by the following day. This was done by blasting and involved evacuating some of the locals! The salvage tugs laid out four anchors and together with tugs and ship's power managed, after 24 hours, to free the ship and we headed, assisted by tugs, to the nearest port to assess the damage.



Hakodate Dry Dock

We then went on to dry dock in Hakodate where it was found that most of the bottom plating was damaged beyond repair with the coagulated heavy fuel leaking into the dry dock. With temperatures well below freezing it was a horrendous task for the shipyard workers to shovel 600 tons of coagulated oil into 40-gallon drums. This job was completed in three days then the steel work repairs commenced.

The ship's officers and crew all stayed aboard, except for the Captain who was recalled to London and subsequently sack.....he was later a successful secretary of a Southport golf club!



'The Boys' – MV Surat

Most people had never seen a European and very little English was spoken in the area. The salvage company were very helpful in arranging various activities for us including ice skating and skiing on the mountain which caused much amusement for the locals. Report of the activities of us all were shown regularly on TV and in the press - we became part of the entertainment!

With three friends I was fortunate to visit the local Trappist Monastery, established in the late 1800s by nine monks from France. They were so pleased to see other Europeans and welcomed us warmly.

Although there were cinemas in Hakodate the numerous bars and nightclubs were most popular. The pretty Japanese hostesses were eager to entertain the strangers from a foreign land. I was friendly with the 'Mamasan' of one bar, who appointed me "bar manager" to keep order and drink as much beer as I wished.

Repair work remained on schedule with oil tanks, plus over 50 bottom plates, being replaced. After sea trials, by which time our new Captain had arrived, we loaded a full cargo of motorcycles and sailed for London via Hong Kong and Malaysia.



At the Trappist Monastery - Hakodate

Our Northern Japanese adventure still brings back happy memories of kind people, wonderful hospitality and great fun despite the fact it was actually a marine disaster.



It remains for me as Chairman and Editor to wish you all a very **Happy Christmas** – may it be enjoyable despite the impediments and irritations of Covid.

“Stay Positive – Test Negative”

