



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM DORSET - No.195 - April 2021
(www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk)

VICE-CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Our Chairman is on the road to recovery - Rejoice!

As most of you will know there has been a marked improvement in Nick Hall's health, and John Owen tells me that he has now returned home. He will continue to receive physio to improve his mobility, but the release from hospital must be a great tonic. I know this news will be welcomed by all Probus members and committee members will, as usual, keep you informed as to his progress.

I was reflecting on the past year now that we seem to be nearing the end of the restrictions and the effect this period has had on all of us. I viewed grandchildren as a necessary evil and of course couldn't eat more than one at a time, but I seem to have mislaid six of them over the past four years.

However, one compensation has been the contact that has been maintained with Probus members. It was Nick Hall's idea that Committee members should ring designated individuals to make sure they were getting on okay and I must admit that I would never have thought of that. Another suggestion that has worked, was the occasional meeting for coffee on the Town Meadow at the instigation of Alan Poulter. And it resumes this Friday at 11 o'clock and please bring a folding chair!

Peter Grange can be very pleased of the response to his Tuesday Zoom meetings which has kept us in touch with some of our own Gillingham members as well of those in other Probus Branches. It does not suit everybody, but I would countenance those who have yet to try it to do so. So nice to see David Bryan on a regular basis and much missed.

I have been lucky in many ways, and for instance I am now Station Master at Bishops Lydeard on the West Somerset Railway. I don't particularly like steam locomotives, but the persons I have met there have been a delight. I went to the station yesterday and shook hands with someone I had not seen since December. I imagine I should not have done that, but what a nice thing to be able to do.

When we at Probus are able to see one another again it will be so welcome to be able to have a conversation with another person in close proximity. I might even hug Colin, although I would prefer to hug Enid, no on second thoughts I'll still hug Colin!

The point I am making is that the past year has been strange for all of us in many ways, but it is the physicality that has been missing and I know that our Chairman feels this point most strongly.

For those of you who do not “Zoom” on a Tuesday”, I can tell you that I spoke recently to Rob Richardson, he is in good form and keeps in touch with Horace. I do have his landline number for any of you who would like to ring him.

Keep safe and well. God bless.

Roger Ellis

Welfare officer’s report

It is so good to learn that Nick Hall is out of hospital and making good progress. William Johnson passed away after a short illness. He was vice-chairman and a good friend.

Chas Allberry has various tablets to help him with his heart.

Looking forward to longer warmer days and the second vaccination to keep us safe, but first:

Rambling:- Jewellery for sentimental sheep.

Relief:- What trees do in the spring.

Rubberneck:- What you do to relax your wife.

Hope you are all well.

Gordon Banks

TALES FROM WALES

How fate saved me from a whirling disaster

I recently wrote a piece on Quinton Hazell in the Recorder. Those eleven years working in the drawing office for him were a somewhat special time for me and Q.H. became a base from where I was able to do many things; some successful, some not.

I made contact with a naval architect who had an idea to build up a group of like-minded people across the country who were willing to make the patterns of the fibre glass moulds, for his design of boats. He wanted to set up small boat building businesses, overseen by him, a consortium that would be able take on the big boys because we would be able to buy materials etc. in bulk.

It seemed to a rather unworldly 30-year-old worth a try. I was a good practical engineer/designer. I had a good job. In the 1970s engineering seemed to be bullet proof. If my boat business failed I could stay at Quinton Hazell. The only thing was, I needed to keep working full-time with commitment. All the boat building had to be done in my spare time. I thought I could keep all this quiet. Not in a small community in Wales. Soon everyone knew. Through the project, which went on for three years, I made many friends and contacts.

Contact with a neighbour whose family had a sheep farm up in the hills, miles from anywhere, allowed me to rent one end of a Dutch barn from them. Pam and I built the framework of a workshop inside and covered it in heavy duty polythene, working on the assumption that the barn would keep the worst of the weather off us – this proved to be the case over many a hard winter.

Next thing was mains power, for there was none up there. A cousin of mine had married a big time builder and he had a Lister diesel generating set for sale down on his site in Kent. My good friend Dave was later coming up with his wife to see us from Kent. He was going to pick up the generator in a Transit van and bring it with him.

Outside the workshop, still under the protection of the Dutch barn we had built a wooden frame, and poured concrete in to make a base for the generator. Dave had measured the centres of holes on the foot, sent them up by post and we put studding into the wet cement at the given centres. When Dave arrived he backed up the Transit and the generator, with much effort for it was very heavy, came straight onto the studs. Nuts and washers were added and the generator was ready to be primed with diesel (no air in the fuel lines or it wouldn't run).

This we did and wired up the workshop including some free sockets on leads. Then we built housing around the generator to keep the sound down. The starting handle, a great heavy steel forging, once had a ratchet arrangement inside the round machined slot that allowed it to be slid onto the crank shaft end which poked out of the generator. The ratchet mechanism was missing and in its place someone had put a huge nail through a hole drilled from the outside of a boss. The nail had been filed so that the end fitted into the lengthways slot machined into the crankshaft. After an early attempt I found that the handle did in fact turn the crankshaft over via the nail and thus the huge single cylinder diesel engine. What I didn't know was that if one timed everything just right the rotating crankshaft and handle (before it speeded up) would give time for the handle to be slid off, providing it was held very firmly square on. This starting method I soon perfected with practice and over three years it never failed me.

The original design had the ratchet clicking away as the generator powered up, allowing the operator to keep the handle still and removed it when he was ready. However, what happened on my first attempt to start the generator, following advice from my cousin's husband over the phone, was that while the diesel was slowly taking over from me as I turned the handle, I was to pull the handle off making sure it was square, but it jammed itself onto the crankshaft. I let go.

In that split second of time the following took place – which could have well saved my life. The handle was whirling around like something demented, I was alone, trapped for a second or two in that housing as the speed continued to increase. In that time as the handle continued to rotate frantically, it chose to come off in the vertical position and flew straight through the workshop roof. Thus there was 360 degrees of potential disaster and Fate chose to look kindly on me. Any other angle of release and I could have been in a very sorry state alone on a mountain hill farm. Above this now new sound of the roaring diesel, I waited transfixed until a crash came from the handle hitting the slate roof of a shippon on the other side of the yard; and it slid down to the floor. I rushed out into the dusk, found the handle, noted sheep were making a hell of a din inside, no one was to be seen and I returned to the now illuminated workshop - full of wonder.

See the next episode with pictures to follow telling how the boat began to be constructed.

Dave Hooker

Note from your editor/sub-editor: this is my final edition of the Recorder as editor. All the bests to my successor. *Richard Clarke*