



PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM, DORSET
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Chairman's Notes – Kylie Minogue (aka Roger Ellis)

Before you begin to worry, I have to tell you that I am not going to start a new career as a tribute act to the above young lady. Not just yet anyway, although in a certain light she and I do look very similar!

I was on duty at Bishops Lydeard the other Saturday and was standing on the Platform next to the Guard's Van overseeing the departure of the 12.35 service to Blue Anchor. A ramp had been positioned, as usual, from the van to the platform surface and a number of wheelchairs, scooters and buggies were loaded onto the van. Many of their owners execute clever manoeuvres to get themselves up what is a fairly steep ramp.

I reach the age milestone of 45 next month and am so grateful that I still have my physical and mental health. I have to say that not everyone in Probus thinks that my mental state is normal, but we will pass on that one. My experience on the station reminded me of the Kylie song "*I should be so lucky*" and I think that sometimes many of us forget how fortunate we are.



I penned an article for the Blackmore Vale about Dave Hooker and his authorship of another "Western" novel and was going to include the picture you see in this Recorder. Luckily, I did not send it as we are not social distancing, and nobody is wearing a mask. All the Probus members in the picture have all been inoculated, but it might not have looked too good.

Even when we resume meetings we will still "Zoom", and I hope continue our coffee times on the Town Meadow. I must have a word with Phil about claiming travelling expenses from Martock!

Roger



WELFARE and SOCIAL NEWS – Gordon Banks

Welfare

Mike Gray has moved to a care home in Tavistock to be nearer to his family.

Brian Garton recently enjoyed a visit from Phil Butler, who brought with him a photo album of Leningrad and Moscow in the 80's.

Chas Alberry is to undergo further tests in hospital in the near future.

Bertram Akhurst has a foot problem which he hopes will be helped by physiotherapy.

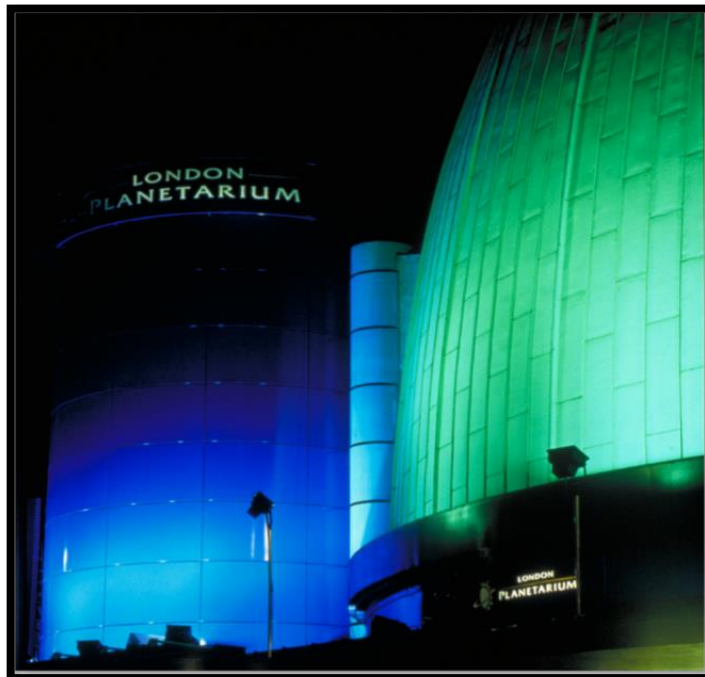
... and now for something different:

- An American tourist in England asks a policeman "*can you tell me the way to Bath?*"
Quick as a flash, the policeman says; - "*Well, first you put the plug in, then turn on the taps.....*"
- Two American astronomers are visiting a French observatory when one asks "*comet Halley view?*" (Boom Boom!!)
- Two slugs are moving along a narrow pathway when they get stuck behind two snails.
"*Oh no*" one says to the other. "*Caravans*".



The Revitalization of a Landmark Building – Alan Poulter

The brief for a major refurbishment of the London Planetarium in the late 1980s was to create a new entrance and to reconfigure the auditorium for other uses as well as a planetarium using a new laser projector for the night sky.



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You may all have visited the original London Planetarium which opened in 1958 and had a circular auditorium with the Zeiss projector at the centre shining the stars onto a metal inner dome (the screen). Hence the familiar round building with its verdigris green copper dome on the corner of Marylebone Road and Baker Street, next to the Madame Tussaud's wax works exhibition.

The Zeiss projector was made in 1934, but the war years delayed the building of the Planetarium. The projector had two ball housings on a pivoting arm. These had miniature camera type shutters that allowed the light from a 1000watt bulb to project the stars. One ball each for the northern and southern hemisphere skies.



The Planetarium, which became part of the Madame Tussaud's group, needed an up-to-date projector and the ability to use the auditorium for films and videos, conferences and other presentations. The programming for the new laser projector was developed from the US Air

Force's mapping of the stars as the guidance system for ICBM¹s.

The scheme to achieve this multiple use of the building was complex and highly ambitious, and the following were just some of the features that were addressed.

A new sloping floor was inserted into the auditorium space with the projector, now the size of a suitcase, at its centre.

The seating was arranged in horseshoe curved rows, the seat backs being upright on the back row and gradually reclining further towards the front row. This allowed each seat a clear view of the domed projection screen and also of a rising stage at the lowest part of the sloping floor.

The domed screen was new, made of perforated aluminium by an aircraft manufacturer in Chicago. It was suspended from the structure to eliminate vibrations from the underground lines immediately below the building.

The seating layout was design by computer with the programme fed into an electronic theodolite to set out each seat precisely on the sloping floor.

The floor slab was carried on a 2.1metre deep steel girder that spanned the width of the building, carried on two columns which penetrated the structural dome and were copper clad on the outside. These and other beams and columns were supported by three groups of 30metre long bored piles positions to avoid the tube tunnels.

The slope of the new floor created additional exhibition space below the floor and perimeter access ramps through the main girder gave audience access into the lower part of the auditorium.

The new entrance was a circular tower alongside the copper dome containing a spiral staircase wide enough to allow customers to queue inside, with a central glass clad lift shaft. The lighting in the tower gradually diminished towards the top landing leading into the building to accustom the audience's eyes to the low light level in the Planetarium. The original entrance became the exit and gift shop for both the Planetarium and Madame Tussaud's Exhibition.

The build took 22 weeks from closure at the end of the Christmas school holidays to the beginning of the Easter holidays (both being crucial times for the Planetarium's income). The cost was £22million (in late 1989/1990), essentially a spend of £1million per week. The laser projector with its programming, together with other types of projection, cost £10million. The

¹ ICBM – Inter Continental Ballistic Missile(s).

building site, backing onto a residential area, operated twelve hours a day and very occasionally overnight as well.

A scaffold platform was erected over the pavements of Marylebone Road and Baker Street to allow free pedestrian movement underneath and to shelter the queues that often stretch around the corner of the building. The platform accommodated all the site cabins and allowed off-loading of materials directly to and from delivery trucks.

The Planetarium was the only public venue that had the audience in complete darkness. It therefore did not comply with the fire regulations. As a result, special systems had to be installed to alert the audience for evacuation and guide them safely out of the auditorium.

At the end of the highly complex and very exacting timetable, the completion of the very tight programme was missed by just 12 hours whilst a faulty motorised smoke extract shutter had to be replaced.

The Planetarium was officially re-opened by Stephen Hawking and provided one of the world's first digital planetarium systems. From then on the Planetarium was used, amongst other things, to teach students from University College London's astronomy department the complexity of the Celestial co-ordinate system.

Sadly, in January 2006, it was announced by Madame Tussauds that the London Planetarium was being renamed 'The Auditorium' and would replace astronomical presentations with entertainment shows. This was despite the growing interest in space exploration, and the increasing knowledge about our own and other galaxies.



Endpiece for Today - Editor



“Every garden, however small, should include at least two acres of rough woodland.”

*The 1st Lord Rothschild
1840-1915*



“The hereditary characteristics of a country squire, namely considerable ignorance, under the guidance and direction of strong prejudice, without any mixture of deliberate malignity whatsoever.”

*The English Chronicle
c. 1780*