



# PROBUS RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF GILLINGHAM, DORSET  
([www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk](http://www.probus-gillingham-dorset.org.uk))

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## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES – *Roger Ellis*

### I didn't expect that!

I have just returned from a holiday in Switzerland via Koblenz and Köln, to petrol shortages and empty Supermarket shelves, but sometimes human nature surprises me.

On arrival in Switzerland the Hotel was not expecting us for our five days stay which was unfortunate to say the least. I don't think it was my fault as the Hotel owner was most apologetic but said that she did not have two rooms available for that night. Instead, she rang a hotel in a nearby village to find us accommodation and took us there by car. As we wanted to go out the next day the owner said he would take our cases back to the original establishment where we would be staying for the next four nights. We got back at 21.00 to find our cases in our rooms.

When returning to the UK I had a problem with the now infamous Personal Location Form, in that I didn't have one so I might not have been let back into the UK. Hurray, some of you say. A very nice Belgium Border Officer sat down at his PC, took down all my particulars (shades of a Carry On film- "Oh Matron!"), lied about where I had stayed and printed the form I needed for the UK Border Officials.

All I have to say is that in this World there are some very nice and helpful people around, especially when you have persons like myself who on occasions is a tile short of a roof!

Anyway, I have included two pictures which show, I hope, why I like going to Switzerland.



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## WELFARE and SOCIAL NEWS – Gordon Banks

**Welfare.** It is good that we are mostly keeping going in these odd times, and so there is little to report at present.

- **Brian Garton.** Until recently, Brian was receiving care at home, but the care company ran short of carers and stopped attending. As a result, Brian is now in the Mellows care home in Gillingham where Sid sees him every day. Unfortunately, he does not appear to be improving and he is not happy in the Home. Not a good situation for anyone.
- **Peter Nation.** Peter has been forced to take stock of his situation, and recently reached the decision that his present medical condition dictates that he since he is unable to play an active part in the Club, he has advised the Committee of his intention to terminate his membership. This is sad, but we appreciate that he has thought it through very carefully before coming to the decision.

### ... onward – ever onward

A few of us were discussing the perils of drinking and driving, when a five-year-old gave her opinion.

*"I can see why it would be dangerous to drink and drive" she said.  
"The straw could go up your nose"*

A little girl climbed up onto to her grandfather's lap and asked –

*"Did God make me?"  
"Yes" Granddad replied.  
"Did he make you too?"  
"Yes" said Granddad.*

Looking at his wrinkles and thinning hair she said.

*"He is certainly doing a better job nowadays"*



## Reports on our September Talks

### “Classic Cars” - A Talk by Simon Hill given on 7 September

One of our new members, Shaftesbury resident Simon Hill, had kindly agreed at relatively short notice to give a short talk about classic cars.

Former businessman and company CEO, Simon lists classic cars and motor sport amongst his interests. His talk focused on classic cars that he had owned or driven during his long career, with photographs of some of the models involved. The prestige of these increased as Simon progressed in his career.

Broadly speaking, ‘classic cars’ are currently categorised as vehicles made from 1945 onwards up

to the 1970's. 'Vintage cars' are those dating from 1930 – 1945. Many manufacturers of the cars shown in Simon's display are no longer in existence. The first car he drove was a 1934 Wolseley Hornet, and Simon recalled that the starting handle had a dual use – starting the car and winding the hood down! Other cars had their own idiosyncrasies, such as the Ford Popular, where the faster the car went when it was driving, the slower the wipers operated.

The school Simon attended as a weekly boarder encouraged students to develop their interests, and he had a chance to become proficient in car maintenance and driving skills, amongst other things helping to maintain his French teacher's car.

The classic cars mentioned during the talk provided an eclectic mix of models, ranging from a 1948 Austin 15, and a 1956 Ford Popular, to a Mercedes! The chairman gave the vote of thanks.



**“Captain William Dampier - Outstanding sailor, major explorer, brilliant hydrographer, successful writer” - A talk by Mike Rendell given on 21st September**

We convened again at the Rugby Club on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September to hear the first outside speaker for quite some time. Sherborne-based Mike Rendell, an author of no less than twelve books on Georgian Britain including, last December, *'In Bed with the Georgians - Sex Scandal and Satire in the 18th Century'* (have a look at the index of that online!) chose to speak to us about the explorer William Dampier, who hailed from East Coker and attended school at King's Bruton.

William Dampier was a navigator, explorer, privateer, and writer who lived from 1651 to 1715. Pirates do not usually have a great reputation, but the buccaneer William Dampier was a unique and incredible individual – a pioneering naturalist, meteorologist, hydrographer, and cartographer. On his voyages to Central and South America and to the Pacific he mapped winds and ocean currents and understood the difference between trade winds and monsoon winds. On July 4, 1687, Dampier survived what he called a “tuffoon” off the coast of China. His plant collection is preserved at Oxford University and includes *Dampiera*, a blue-flowering genus. His expeditions were the among first to identify and name a number of plants, animals, foods, and cooking techniques for a European audience; being among the first English writers to use words such as avocado, barbecue, and chopsticks. Dampier's careful charts, illustrations and account of his travels published in his book – *'A New Voyage Around the World'* - aroused the interest of the Royal Society and the Royal Navy. In 1697, Dampier was commissioned to explore the coasts of New Holland (the name first applied to Australia in 1644 by the Dutch seafarer Abel Tasman) aboard HMS *Roebuck*.



It's surprising then that William Dampier is less well-known in the UK compared with other great explorers, yet he surveyed Australia 80 years before Captain Cook and made such outstanding observations of plants and wildlife that 150 years later Charles Darwin called his reports a mine of information. He was also cited several times by fellow evolutionist Alfred

Russel Wallace in his 1869 tome *'The Malay Archipelago'*. Not being a particularly religious man, one wonders if Dampier had, many years before Darwin and Wallace, drawn inferences akin to natural selection theory in his studies of animals and their subtle differences in various parts of the world.

The William Dampier pub in Yeovil, and the names of streets in that town and in Gosport are apparently the only memorials to this astonishing man in England. The antipodeans have taken a more enlightened view. In 1965, the new port of Dampier was named after the offshore archipelago in northwest Australia, which the explorer first visited in 1688. Actually, Dampier was not impressed then by Australia, describing it as cursed, and signing off his logbook with the comment *"I'll have nothing more to do with it"*. In New Zealand, Mount Dampier is the third highest mountain, rising to 11,290 ft.

Mike Rendell delivered his talk in a clear and cogent manner supported by many colourful slides including maritime charts, drawings and modern depictions of flora and fauna that Dampier would have observed. A frequent speaker at social clubs, and cruise ships, Mike has reason to be welcomed by us again in due course – perhaps to speak about his new book, the third which he has written on sex life during the Georgian period!



## **'Tales of Cruising in Troubled Times'**

### **Cruising Experiences – Roger Lester**

We have been cruising for 15 years and we have had some marvellous trips around a lot of the world, but never a whole world cruise; just a half world cruise of 56 days back from Australia. We also met some very interesting people, a few of whom have become friends of more than 13 years standing!!

It all started with a trip to Norway to see the Northern Lights in 2006 on the Hurtigruten MS Nordlys (Northern Lights). We saw the lights at 0300 one morning when we were woken by a call to tell us they were happening. It was *'get your cold weather gear on & get out on deck'*. The lights were there, but not like you see them sometimes on TV.



Our next trip was to Alaska with Saga, a 'Rockies & Cruise' trip on the Holland America line's MS Zuiderdam, and in our case to be recommended as it included a very nice young lady from Weston-Super-Mare (Canadian immigrant) as our guide for the whole trip.

Following on from these, we have been on some wonderful trips with Cunard to the USA (one was

when Ian & Isabel, of Probus fame, were en-route to New York), Canada, Norway, the Mediterranean and the Canaries. With P&O we have been to Greenland, the Baltic, the Eastern Mediterranean, and back from Australia via Hawaii and Panama. We also undertook a Celebrity Cruise to St Petersburg. All these happened with no restrictions applied.

On the 8th of August this year, we took a 'Staycation' cruise with P&O on their ship Britannia, just sailing around Devon & Cornwall and out to Lundy and back over 4 nights. With Covid restrictions it was a lot different!

It all started 3 weeks before the trip, with check-in being done at home on the computer. We had to provide an NHS covid pass (proof of both vaccinations), our photo, a health declaration and as usual, passport & contact details. All this was pinged off and we got our E ticket and Boarding Pass with our arrival time stipulated – 3pm, so we'd miss lunch!! We normally arrived between 12.00 – 12.30.

On the 8th we drove to Mayflower Terminal in Southampton as instructed, because we were leaving our car with CPS parking for the duration. We arrived at 2pm and joined the queue for our covid test, a stick up the nostrils job. All our paperwork was checked, and we were given a barcoded wrist band for our results in about an hour, and to prove we'd been tested. We then had to drive to the Ocean Terminal in a long queue of traffic where we joined another queue for about an hour, when we were pinged on our phone with clearance to board at 4.15pm.



No porters were available, so I unloaded the car and carried our case to the conveyer belt in pouring rain, while the CPS driver took the car away to park it. Following this we entered the terminal to join another queue to get our paperwork checked again, which saw us stamped with "OK to Board" on our Passes, and then on to the Security Check, with yet another queue!!!

Having finally been cleared, we were allowed to board, when a visit to our emergency station was the next step. We had no cabin key as was normal (it was in the mail rack outside our cabin). When we entered the cabin at 5pm, which was "sealed for your safety", we were pleasantly surprised to find a balcony with no obstruction at all. I had booked a 'fully obstructed' balcony. 'Good one P&O!' It made up for all the queueing and missing lunch. We left our hand luggage and headed for the pool deck, the only place where food was available, where we managed to get a burger and our first drink since coffee in the garden centre in Cranborne about 1pm, to see us through until dinner.



Throughout our time on the ship there were a number of restrictions in force. We had to wear masks when moving around inside the ship, including during shows in the theatre (about an hour); a maximum of 4 people were allowed in the lifts (1 in each corner, and no talking!!). We also had to download an app to our phones so that we could book shows and restaurants. There were no set dining times, and so we had to join a 'virtual' queue on the app. Because we were so late getting aboard (and also

experienced a bit of trouble with the app) our dinner time was 9pm on a lonely table for 2 (social distancing in force), when we would normally have a table for 6 so you could meet & talk to people.

The whole cruise was fine with views of the coast and plenty of relaxation in the mostly sunny weather. We managed to see our old bungalow at Portreath and the next day we saw the Minack Theatre in Cornwall through binoculars. Would we do another cruise with these sort of restrictions - you betcha!!! (After all, we were given a half-bottle of 'fizz' in our fridge on the 'formal night'.)

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### **Cruising With Covid - John Houchin**

I suspect that many of our members will have been on a cruise in the past. Until very recently, Christine and I had not tried it, and were slightly put off by friends who had not enjoyed the experience. However, undeterred, a couple of years ago we decided to give it a try. We booked a seven-day voyage to Norway with SAGA, as we heard that they had recently launched two new ships, and because they specialised in older customers - over 50s only (except for carers!). All was going well until a couple of weeks later, when we were all faced with the advent of "the Virus". Needless to say, the cruise was cancelled.

Following a serious medical problem for Christine, and a subsequent house move, we decided to have a second attempt at the cruise. SAGA informed us that they would be restarting their voyages at the end of July this year. Full of hope, we rebooked, and began to look forward to a visit to the land of the fjords. Then came the next difficulty, as in early June it was announced that the Norwegians didn't want us, and the itinerary was changed to a visit to the Orkneys and the Shetlands. This was fine for us as neither of us had been to the outer Scottish Isles before.

However, life is never simple! Ten days before our departure Mrs Sturgeon decided that she didn't want us either and would not allow cruise ships to land. (Politics not allowed in Probus!) We were then offered an alternative itinerary which involved visits to Portsmouth, Anglesey, Falmouth, the Isles of Scilly and Portland. The change of plan was softened by a reduction in the price of the trip. So we were faced with a decision: do we cancel, or tell our friends that we were going for an expensive holiday to Portsmouth? In spite of the prospect of jokes from family and friends we decided to stick with it as we reckoned we deserved a break wherever we were taken.



Saga – MS Spirit of Discovery

Departure date was set for 25 July. The ship was starting its voyage from Tilbury but included in the package was a car to collect us from home and bring us back at the end of the trip. At the agreed time, an executive Mercedes turned up at the house, complete with a bar in the rear

armrest and adjustable rear seats with a button to start a massage, if needed. The driver, no doubt, thought that passengers such as us were a bit beneath him, as he told us he normally dealt with pop stars and top business executives. However, times were hard for everyone, and he had decided he had to lower his sights.

I fear that I have taken up most of my allocated number of words without actually mentioning the cruise. The important points to make are that the ship was wonderful, the cabins were very comfortable (all with balconies), the food was excellent, the entertainment options were many and varied, and the staff (nearly all Filipinos) couldn't do enough for everyone. The most important thing is that we got away for a week, met some interesting people and had a relaxing time – and for now we are happy to be back home.

Will we do it again? Maybe, but the jury is still out.



## **Endpiece for Today - Editor**

### **On Architecture**

- “Building certainly ought to have the attribute of eternal, and therefore the only thing incapable of new fashions.”  
*Sir Christopher Wren*
- In 1957 Khrushchev outlawed architectural decoration in buildings in the Soviet Union.
- “Tower blocks, a permanent combination of lavatory and crime scene.”  
*Simon Heffer – 2010*
- “A barren phallus of egg boxes, without eggs.”  
*The poet Alan Brownjohn’s description of the 33-storey Centre Point office block near Tottenham Court tube station*