



PROBUS RECORDER

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

Issue No. 204
January 2022



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES – *Roger Ellis*

A Semblance of Normality!

I spent a number of days prior to Christmas at Bishop's Lydeard on the West Somerset Railway and volunteered to assist organising our visitors on their entry and exit into the car park. You might think that sounds really boring being outside in December weather, sometimes wet, always cool or cold, but believe me there were compensations.

Nearly all our visitors were delighted to be at the station, and I got cheerful greetings when I stopped them and indicated where to park their vehicles. I told some of them that of course the charge for the car park that day was £30 cash (parking is free) and waited for the re-action! I offered one lady to valet her car whilst she was on the train with her family, and when it wasn't done, she threatened to write in to complain. It was so nice to have fun with the visitors and everyone waved to myself and my colleagues when they left, many of them opening the car window and thanking us for the super time they had at the WSR.

The Santa Trains were especially lovely, and it never ceases to delight me to see children's re-action to seeing Father Christmas. We are arranging for him to come down to Somerset from the Artic Circle next year to be on our trains. The "Winter Lights" trains are being repeated next year and enhancements made to improve the display.

All the above is to tell you that life does continue despite the current problems. People wear their masks as requested but have seemed to be so pleased to be out and about doing something "normal".



I hope, as we all do, that the restrictions imposed on us for the past eighteen months will soon be over. How nice it will be to have outings organised again and seeing members again that have

been absent from our meetings.

May I wish you all a happier New Year than we have had recently, and I hope to see you as many of you as possible on 11th January.

WELFARE and SOCIAL NEWS – Gordon Banks

It is with great sadness that we record the death of **Brian Garton**, who died on 4th December. His wife Sidonie has indicated that his funeral will be in the New Year, when family members can attend. The Chairman has passed our condolences to his family; further details are not yet available.

Ken Stedman has returned home from hospital for Christmas but still has trouble sleeping. He continues to have his legs dressed regularly, and it is understood that he is to undergo surgery in January.



REPORTS ON OUR DECEMBER TALKS

‘SO FAR SO GOOD’

Malcolm Wells MBE 30 November

Malcolm Wells delivered his talk at the pace of lightning, covering aspects of his 24-year Army career as a musician, and working with charities as a fund raiser; his individual delivery style certainly held our attention!



Born in Swindon, Malcolm left school when he was 16 and joined the Army in 1975 as a musician in the Royal Artillery Orchestra, receiving training as a cello player. The orchestra played on many state occasions and at state banquets. Due to cuts in defence spending, there was a reduction in the number of military bands, and musicians – including Malcolm – were required to learn and play a second instrument in the reconfigured remaining bands. He recalled several amusing incidents during his career, including playing the wrong national anthem at an international football match; and playing the BBC ‘match of the day’ theme at a match being broadcast on ITV!

During the 1990 Gulf War, Army musicians were trained as medics, and Malcolm was involved with his unit in the construction of hospitals in the desert.

After leaving the army in 1999, Malcolm was appointed fund raiser at a hospice in Chichester, and in 2003 joined the charity [Canine Partners](#) as a fundraiser, later becoming a national speaker. He worked with various celebrities in this role, including the late Sir Terry Wogan.



Canine Partners helps to improve the lives of people living with disabilities by training and providing assistance dogs. In addition to offering companionship, the dogs are trained to help with everyday tasks (such as turning on the washing machine!). The canine ‘partners’ are carefully matched to the needs and lifestyle of each applicant. The charity works closely with rehabilitation centres of the armed forces, as well as with civilians living with a range of disabilities.

Malcolm was awarded the MBE in recognition of his charity work, and he recalled when he received the honour from HRH Prince Charles. As he was wearing a (specially designed) military uniform for this event he was mistaken for a palace flunky and approached by a female celebrity (who was also receiving her award) for directions to the ladies’ powder room!



Malcolm also talked briefly about the work of the charity [Literacy in a Box Trust](#), a charity run solely by volunteers. The trust aims to send boxes of basic educational materials to schools, mainly in Zambia. A Literacy Box contains exercise books, writing utensils, chinks and other stationery items, a pencil case and backpack, along with footballs, a pump, and skipping ropes for exercise. Malcolm’s message in relation to the Trust was that education is the passport to a better life, and Probus Club members had the opportunity to make a donation towards the work of the charity at the end of our meeting.

This was an interesting talk, with many elements of humour, but underlined the importance of charities and voluntary work. The Chairman gave the vote of thanks.

Report: Alan Jeffs

Addendum: *The following message was received from Malcolm Wells following his visit and talk.*

Dear Roger,

May I take this opportunity to thank yourself, the President and all members of Gillingham Probus Club for the outstanding hospitality and friendship given to me when I visited yesterday and gave a presentation of “So Far So Good”.

I am pleased to confirm that your members donated the princely sum of £ 62.50 to “Literacy In a Box”. This will be used to purchase school equipment which will be sent to the 41 schools we currently support in Zambia.

If you are aware of any other groups or organisations that may wish to receive a presentation by myself, please do pass on my contact details. My website address is www.malcolmwellsmb.com

It was a pleasure to meet you and thank you for your kind support. It really is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm

Malcolm Wells MBE
National Speaker

‘The Dorset soldier who won the First World War’

Rodney Atwood – 14 December

Rodney Atwood is a military historian and author who lives in Dorset; he has previously given talks to the Club.



His talk was about the senior Army officer **General Henry Rawlinson**, his career and notably his role in the battles leading up to the conclusion of the First World War. Rawlinson, who ended up as the 1st Baron Rawlinson, was born at Trent Manor, Dorset, in 1864.

He commanded the Fourth Army of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) at the battles of the Somme in 1916 and Amiens in 1918, and also in September of that year commanded a force of British, Australian and American divisions that participated in breaking the [Hindenberg Line](#); this preceded victory over the German forces (hence the title of this talk!).

An Army career was the obvious choice for young Henry, as his father was an Army officer (as well as being a respected Middle East scholar). So, after education at Eton, he went on to officer training at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, from which in 1884 he was commissioned into the King’s Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC). His early service saw Rawlinson serving on the staff of General Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief, India.

Rawlinson returned to Britain five years later after the death of his mother and transferred to the Coldstream Guards. Marriage followed in 1890. He served overseas in the colonial wars, including service under Kitchener. On promotion to the rank of Colonel in 1903, Rawlinson became Commandant of the Army Staff College, transforming the Staff College into a real ‘war school’.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, he served briefly in the War Office, before being appointed in September as General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 4th Division in France, then taking command of the British IV Corps which took part in the battle of Ypres in October of that year.

After further promotion to Lieutenant General in 1916, Rawlinson assumed command of the (new) Fourth Army, which was heavily involved in the battle of the Somme and later battles, leading to the breaking of the Hindenburg Line, and ultimate victory. He recognised the value of employing tanks, planes and artillery in coordination, and the Fourth Army’s advance in the Autumn of 1918 gained 85 mi (137 km), taking 80,000 prisoners and 1,100 guns.



The value of Rawlinson’s contribution was recognised following the end of the conflict, and he was bestowed with many honours, amongst which he was raised to the peerage as **Baron Rawlinson of Trent in the County of Dorset**. He was again called on to organise an evacuation, this time the evacuation of Allied troops from Russia. In 1920 he became Commander-in-Chief, India, and remained in that role until his death at the age of 61 in

1925. His body was brought back to England and is buried in the chapel of St Andrew's Church, Trent.

Rodney Atwood's detailed account of Rawlinson's career and his involvement in the battles of the First World War gave an impressive account of the man and the contribution he made. Our Chairman gave the vote of thanks for the talk.

Report: Alan Jeffs



ENDPIECE FOR THE ARRIVAL OF 2022 - Editor

Some Regional Insults

'Brighton has the air of a town helping the police with their enquiries.'

Keith Waterhouse (Novelist & Journalist)

'Erith is so miserable it's not even twinned with anywhere, though it does have a suicide pact with Braintree'.

Linda Smith (Comedian)

'Middlesbrough: the Soviet Union with take-away pizza.'

Anthony Daniels (Actor)

Manchester: the only town where there's lifeboat drill on the buses.'

Les Dawson (Comedian)

Happy New Year!

