

Portland Probus Club Website Articles Archive – 2018/2019

Thursday 1 March 2018 - Portland Probus Club AGM - Postponed

When I looked out of the window at breakfast time yesterday morning there was a thin layer of snow on the ground and a beastly strong cold wind blowing. Mo told me the temperature was below freezing but equated to minus 11 degrees when the wind chill factor was taken into consideration.

I can normally see the Portland Beach Road and the 'golf ball' near the Verne prison from an upstairs window, but not today with the sky looking decidedly as if it was full of snow.

As a committee member I knew I had to attend the AGM today but, I was not enthusiastic at the prospect. What a relief it was then that the telephone rang and President Trevor advised me that the AGM meeting had been called off. Do you know in the 10 years the club has been in existence I think that this is the first time we have had to cancel a meeting! It was definitely the right decision though.

It was not long after receiving this good news that I was at my computer when a flurry (ugh!) of emails starting coming through from President Trevor and President Elect Ken with proposals on what we should do to rearrange the AGM together with the changeover of the committee members for our new Probus year.

I think that the decision reached will please members and especially those not keen on AGM meetings. The plan is as follows – our meeting on Thursday 5th April 2018 will start at 11.00 a.m. and will commence with the AGM. The intention is that this part of the meeting will not last longer than 30 minutes including the presentation of the Egg award and the handover to the new committee and President. Our new President will then introduce the guest speaker.

In order to achieve the above time plan our secretary Lis will send out the committee members' reports for the last year at least a week before the 5th April. She will arrange for a few hard copies to be available to those who do not have internet access. The present committee will remain in force until 5th April so that members have the opportunity and vote in a new committee for the 2018 year.

It looks like it will be another day spent indoors again today. Hey ho.

(by Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 15 March 2018 - Visit to The Tank Museum at Bovington followed by lunch at the Countryman East Knighton

This was my first visit to the tank museum which was easy to find as a tank was at the entrance and been there so long greenery had grown all over it or maybe that was camouflage! We all met in the cafe to sustain us for what was to be a visit to very many tanks! Originally commissioned by Churchill as First Sea Lord and being part of the Navy as they were 'landship', the term 'tank' was used latter to protect the secrecy of the project.

We saw a split open Centurion which was interesting as it had a detuned Merlin engine, used in the Spitfire, and a Morris Minor engine that was used to back up the electrical items and make the tea when the Merlin engine was not running to save fuel. It looked very cramped and we must remember that sadly tanks are still very much used today. The exhibits were well laid out, particularly the Afghanistan display. I'm sure everyone could find something to interest them.

We later assembled for lunch and a welcome sit down at the Countryman Inn where we discovered that the portions are slightly on the large side! But I think we all agreed they were very delicious. We went on our merry way about 2-30 having had a very entertaining day.

Thank you to Graham for his organisation.

(By Brian Kent)

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Thursday 5 April 2018 - Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Talk by Douglas Beazer on the Berlin Military Train

There were a large number of our members at what was supposed to be an abridged AGM. Members had already been sent the committee members reports so it was only necessary for President Trevor to answer any queries raised. This format was due to the AGM being postponed from March because of snow.

Ken was awarded the EGG award for the second year with Graham being a very close runner up. After presentation of the award Ken decided that the EGG should be held by Graham and himself for 6 months each.

Geoff spoke against the proposed change to our constitution. Much discussion then followed with many members expressing a view on the proposal "To remove the role of Vice President and to introduce the position of Immediate Past President" After the committee took a 5 minute break to discuss the meetings views and feelings, it was agreed and passed by the meeting that there would be an Immediate Past President and a Vice President on the Management Committee.

The meeting voted in the new Management Committee as stated on the AGM Agenda and including Rob as the Vice President for the coming year.

New President Ken said how proud he was to be appointed President of the Portland Probus Club. He echoed feelings expressed by Margaret Culley about the club when she was interviewed last year. Ken is hoping that more members can be persuaded to help with the running of the club in capacities that they feel comfortable in undertaking.

Our speaker Douglas Beazer had to wait longer than usual for his turn to speak due to our AGM over running. In addition Douglas was not able to initially access his computer based presentation due to technical difficulties. Douglas gave us a detailed and interesting talk on the Berlin Military Train, 'The Berliner'. We also had the chance to view some rare books which Douglas had brought with him.

I have been on this train and thought that I knew a lot about it but, I was surprised at how little I did actually know. Three facts for you 1. This train ran from 1945 -1991 every day except Christmas Day. 2. During the time it ran it covered 7.5 million miles. 3. There is one carriage from this train still in existence this was originally held in the Durham Military Museum but is now believed to be located somewhere in Norfolk

I was interested when speaking to Jim, who of course gave us a similar talk, that he also learnt some new facts.

Thank you Douglas for giving us this talk and to Rob for making the arrangements

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 19 April 2018 - Visit to the Etches Collection, a Fossil museum in the village of Kimmeridge

Carol and I set off under blue skies for Kimmeridge only to be halted on our journey by an army tank approaching us down the middle of the road....we stopped!!! At first I wondered if the West Dorset Remainers were mounting an armed coup against the Brexiteers but it turned out that the tank had suffered a gear box failure and thankfully came to a halt.

Despite this we arrived at 10.15 and joined twenty three other members for coffee in brilliant sunshine. We were privileged to be shown around the Etches Collection by Steve Etches the curator and principle collector of the exhibits. He has followed this interest for thirty five years and the excellent purpose built museum provided with funding from the National Lottery displays about 10% of his collection in cabinets and additionally explained with video and CGI illustration.

Exhibits ranged in age from 157-250 million years and from the fossilised remains of a dragon fly to an Ichthyosaur and the tiny eggs of an ammonite. His collection includes several unique specimens not found in any other collection. He described to us the fascinating and meticulous methods he employs to uncover, preserve and display his finds.

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Clavell's Cafe staff efficiently provided us with a very good lunch and members departed Kimmeridge well satisfied following an informative and most interesting visit.

Our thanks to Ken for organising the visit and to Graham for ensuring it's smooth running on the day.

(By Geoff Lambkin)

Thursday 3 May 2018 - Talk by Dr Anne Collier-Morris on the American Wild West

There was a good representation of club members today at President Ken's first meeting in charge.

In order to tighten up our timings Ken re affirmed that any announcements that need to be made by members prior to the speaker must be restricted to a minute in length. This happened today. At the same time meetings are to conclude at 12.45 pm. with the aim that members will be sitting down in the restaurant so that lunch can be served promptly at 1.00 pm.

Well, I suppose quite a few of us have in the past watched many a western on the television or a film in the cinema and thought that we knew about the Wild West. However, I think I would be correct that whilst Dr Anne Collier Morris mentioned many well known names e.g, Jesse James, many of us were probably surprised at just how little we did actually know.

The amount and range of information, the periods covered and the detail that Anne gave us at all stages in her talk was staggering. If I had not been scribbling in my note book I know that I could not have retained half of what we were told. Undoubtedly a very learned lady who loves this subject and has spent an enormous amount of time researching into this topic. Just to give you a flavour of some of the areas I found interesting in the talk.

1. Whilst the French and Spanish occupied the American Atlantic seaboard it was only the British who colonised it.
2. President Jefferson helped Napoleon fight the British.
3. The Native American Removal Act.
4. Californian Gold Rush. The population went from 5 million to 100 million in a year. There were 50 men to every woman!
5. Mexico has 53 different languages - even today.
6. Levi Strauss and Blue Jeans.
7. Methodism and religious fever in the 19 century.
8. Oregon and Mormon trails.

There were many more - The history of the White House being burnt down by the British is another.

Incidentally Dr Anne was selling copies of her book "Weymouth up the George 111" which were of interest to a number of members. Maybe at some future time we could have a talk on this subject?

A really good start to our 11th Probus year.

Thank you Dr Anne for your super talk and also to Rob Scott for making the appropriate arrangements.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 17 May 2018 - Visit to National Trust Lytes Cary Manor

President Ken could not have had a more fitting end to his existing stint in organising events for our club with the visit to this National Trust property – Lytes Cary Manor.

The 23 members attending gathered under blue skies, with many house martins circling the house, at 10.30 a.m. We quickly swooped en masse on the tea room – well we had travelled a long way and were in a different county after all.

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After we were duly refreshed we re grouped on the lawn out side the house and were given a super presentation by David Brent, one of 75 house volunteers – in addition there are 70 garden volunteers with a waiting list of people wanting to be volunteers! Last year the property received 72000 visitors.

Basically there have only been two families occupying this property, the Lytes for 500 years and the Jenners for 40 years. In between these two families the property was left to decay and was used as an Agricultural barn! (it was hard to visualise this walking around the property today).

David gave a good summary of the history of the property and extensive details of the families who had lived there. The property which has a Chantry Chapel attached was taken over by the National Trust in 1948. There are some wonderful exhibits in the house including two Delft vases from the 17 century, a first edition of an herbal book printed in 1578 and pictures by Dutch painters.

The house was rented out to Jeremy and Bidy Chittenden 1955 – 2003. They were responsible for the splendid gardens. Most stunning are the topiary of yew trees and a similar parallel line of pollarded trees both at the front of the house. The orchard in unusual containing not just fruit trees but weeping ash, black walnut and an impressed display of camassia flowers growing amongst buttercups and other wild flowers. All in all the gardens were in pristine condition, very peaceful and tranquil.

Naturally it was necessary after such an educational and inspirational visit to seek further refreshments and in this respect Ken had booked us into the Lime Kiln Inn a short drive away. We then made the trip home!

Thank you Ken for setting up this lovely day out and for insuring that the weather was perfect.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 7 June 2018 - Talk by Merv Sharp on His English Channel Swim Experience

37 of us gathered on a dull misty day to hear Merv's talk on his channel swimming, wondering what kind of talk this would be, perhaps only of limited interest.

Larger than life Merv blew us away with his mostly unscripted accounts of his amazing swimming activities told with warmth and great humour. He kept us spellbound without any props or visual aids. Towards the end he did produce a few articles out of a yellow plastic bucket: huge swim trunks, goggles, a yellow polo hat and a jar of lanolin (all the gear needed on a channel swim).

In 1967 he made his first cross channel swim. In 1974 he swam his seventh, which at that time was the world record for the number of cross channel swims by one person. He turned professional during that period, spent time in Canada and swam for England. After his record breaking swim he swam mainly in long distance events and more or less finished his career after another 4 years. These facts were told with such self-deprecating humour and accompanied with so many highly amusing anecdotes that it was easy to forget what amazing achievements Merv was describing.

What I personally found so moving was how he explained that he had always been "in love with the sea" and, as far as he could remember, had always been able to swim. Even as a young boy he had harboured a secret ambition to swim the channel. He belonged to swimming clubs played water polo up to county level but even so his ambition remained secret. At 16 a friend of his did a channel swim which deeply impressed Merv. He described so vividly how he decided to go and see his friend although he was having a family party. Merv cycled through the pouring rain, got let in by his friend and for the first time articulated his ambition. He was introduced to the trainer and told he "was big enough and ugly enough" to be taken on. From there he never looked back.

The point he made was how one simple action had set in motion his entire career and how fortunate he had been. He underplayed the hard work he had undertaken.

It was a fascinating and somewhat humbling talk.

Thank you Merv !

(By Ann Ashworth)

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Thursday 21 June 2018 - Visit to Compton Acres

It is disgraceful I know especially after living in the area off and on for nearly sixty years but I corrected my failure and visited Compton Acres for the first time today, together with 2 other gentlemen and 12 ladies.

In order to avoid school and business travel it was an early start from Weymouth but, as it happened the traffic was light and we arrived well before the arranged 10 am meeting time.

Yes, correct! Coffee, gossip and a loo call were all necessary before we did anything else.

As I am sure most of you know Compton Acres are stunning and a real oasis of green in the built up conurbation of Poole and Bournemouth.

On starting our walk around these gardens created by Thomas W Simpson in 1920/22 on what was a wild moorland site, we immediately went into the Italian Garden, this together with the Japanese Gardens are probably the main attractions. Both these gardens were fantastic and take your breath away. There was a large statue in the Italian Garden of Bacchus, God of Wine. A festival known as Bacchanalia used to be held on 16/17 March each year but, as this turned into a sexual and criminal orgy and got out of hand, it was banned by the Roman Senate in 186 BC.

I could not possibly do justice I, and I think, the rest of group got from visiting the diverse areas these gardens have, be it the Bog Garden, The Rock and Water Garden, which is the largest rock garden in England or The Wooded Valley. I particularly like the graceful Scots Pines and the Heather garden, where there are over 100 different species. Scattered all around the gardens were a number of sculptures, interesting and unusual and most were for sale but, to me these seemed to be at extortionate prices.

It was a beautiful sunny day with a slight breeze and lovely slowly sauntering along the paths and I am so pleased that I visited today. If you have visitors and are unsure what to do with them I recommend them do try Compton Acres. Like me I am sure they will enjoy the experience.

We had a very nice lunch in the refurbished café which rounded off the visit.

A big thank you to Joan F for making all the arrangements for this splendid visit.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 5 July 2018 - Talk by Peter Lush on Raid on St Nazaire

President Ken had the pleasure of inducting and welcoming Rosie as a new member of our club today.

Ken also advised us that Avery and Pam are both well and send their regards to us from Dorchester.

Our Vice President and Webmaster, Rob, requested that members are diligent in deleting previous copies of information on members, whether in written or electronically format. Any changes to information held should be notified to Rob as soon as possible, similarly if members require information about them removed. This is to meet the new data protection legislation (GDPR).

I suppose that you could say that today's talk would appear to be for "the lads", but there was in fact a large attendance of "the lasses" as well.

It was interesting to learn that Peter Lush our speaker, a member of the St Nazaire society, actually had no direct connection with the Raid. It all started for him over 50 years ago when he was selling books and by chance took home a couple of military books on the Second World War to read. The Raid on St Naziare particularly appealed to him and over the years he has researched, talked and written on the subject. extensively.

Peter spoke with no notes but used a collection of photographs and maps, old and new, to illustrate his talk. We were told in great detail but, in a way that was easily understood about the preparation,

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execution and outcome of the Raid. What is amazing is that Peter could name without referring to notes many of the personnel taking part in this operation, not only that, he met and became friends with many of the survivors of the Raid. Some of them came from our local area. It is quite sad that there are now only 3 still alive.

The raid was a success and Normandie Dock, the main target, was put out of action for 6 years. There were 131 decorations made, including 5 VCs but, unfortunately 169 were killed. Those who volunteered were told at the outset not too expect to return.

As Ian said in his vote of thanks this all happened 76 years ago and yet Peter made it sound like yesterday.

Thank you Peter for giving us such a fascinating and factual talk and Rob for making the arrangements

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 19 July 2018 - Abbey House Lunch, Abbotsbury

Once again the weather was wonderful for our annual Abbey House lunch. What a lot of happy people sitting chatting in the sunshine in the superb surroundings of Abbey House.

The food was delicious as ever and the organisation was impeccable.

Thank you so much Andy and Mary for yet again masterminding, so effectively, this wonderful event.

(By Rob Coward)

Thursday 2 August 2018 - Talk by Chris Hornby on A Mild Colonial Boy

Another first I think holding our main meeting at 09.45? This was to allow those members going Margaret Wood's funeral service at 12.00 in All Saints Church adequate time to get there.

Those members not living on the Island also had to contend with road works in Wyke Regis. I am sure these two factors contributed to there only being 30 members present.

At a recent committee meeting it was suggested that committee members giving announcements should do so from the front of the meeting. This happened today and was I hope beneficial to members.

President Ken also advised the meeting of the concern that he and indeed the rest of the committee have when looking to future years at the lack of members prepared to serve on our committee. Please give this some thought and speak to Ken if you can offer your help in anyway, however small. The future of our club depends on you!

I am sure that there is nobody who could have had a childhood and upbringing to equal that of our speaker Chris Hornby. I was amazed that after about 50 minutes Chris had only spoken on his life to age 7 years. He said that he has clear memories of childhood from age of 2 years old.

After telling us comprehensively about his grandparents and more up to date family history we learnt of Chris being brought up in Nyasaland, England and Rhodesia, by partially his mother and partially by an aunt. Chris spent a very carefree, safe and enjoyable life running wild often with black boys and doing more or less anything he wanted. Education and learning was a very low priority. It was during this period that Chris's lifelong passion for nature and particularly butterflies started. Chris's talk was illustrated with old photographs'.

It was a pity Chris had to rush through his military life in the Rhodesian Army and other aspects of his early adult and then later life but the time restraint today prevented this and limited questions. This could be the subject for a future talk.

Chris's talk is based on a book " A Mild Colonial Boy" he has written and he is quite agreeable to letting any members interested having an electronic version.

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Many thanks Chris for filling in this internal speakers slot. As I have written before our members do have fascinating and absorbing tales to tell and yours is just one of them.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 16 August 2018 - Visit to Kingston Lacy for a Walk and Picnic

When I woke this morning I knew it was our club's annual picnic day. The sky was leaden with a steady drizzle and a light wind blowing.

It was raining even harder by the time we arrived at Kingston Lacy, The journey was a challenge in itself due to an accident and a road being blocked. As anticipated because of the weather there was a reduction in numbers but 14 of us braved the elements.

Just before going for our coffee break we decided to adopt plan B. This was to visit the house if we could, as we had not booked 'timed' tickets which you need to do. Luckily we managed to agree a time for our group.

I expect many of you have been to Kingston Lacy many times probably as one of the 100,000 visitors they had last year but, this was another first for me and what a treat it was. I cannot do justice here to describe the paintings by Berchem, Van Dyke (Richard Weston, Earl of Portland), Annibale Carracci, Rubens and Velazquez amongst others. The intricate and exquisite carvings and lavish interiors all have to be seen to be fully appreciated.

There is marble throughout the house which looks new as if it has just been installed. What we could not understand was that there was a very light coloured carpet on the floors and stairs. Apparently in previous years visitors were required to wear plastic overshoes but, they are experimenting without them this year. A unique feature of this property is that nothing has been added or taken away since the National Trust took over the running of the property.

Guess what? Whilst we were enjoying the splendours of the house, the rain stopped and the sun came out. There are plenty of tables and benches overlooking the lovely 8,500 acre landscape and we were able to sit there for our picnic luncheon, joined I might add by a few wasps who were anxious to share our meals. It had become quite warm and I was sorry I did not have my sun hat with me!

After lunch several of the group went for a walk in the grounds.

I know that Judith was disappointed about the weather but, that was out of her control. Thank you Judith for organising this year's picnic, Kingston Lacy is a lovely place to visit and we had a very pleasant visit and day.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 6 September 2018 - Talk by Bruce Upton on Ropes and Netting

As usual President Ken started the meeting by bringing us up to date on club activities and news since we met four weeks ago. This was followed by various committee members updating us on future events.

I learnt some new words today: Retting, Bolling, Scutching and Hackling. These were words used by our speaker Bruce Upton to describe the initial stages of gathering and treatment of hemp for rope making. This is at times a smelly process and was dangerous to young children who used to be employed.

Bruce, a retired school teacher and now working part time at Bridport Museum gave us an informative, interesting and incisive talk. Most of us probably knew that Bridport has been associated with rope and net making for hundreds of years but, did you know this industry is still the largest employer in the town? Today it specialises in ultra high specification ropes and nets (as the bulk of ropes are made in the Far East) including for space shuttle, parachutes, twin coloured football goal netting, curtains. Bridport still makes and provides the Wimbledon tennis court nets.

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We were told the difference between Flax and Hemp and shown and felt samples of both. You can also make rope from stinging nettles; we did not however, feel any of these plants. Apparently the ground and soil around Bridport is just right for growing Flax and Hemp, probably stinging nettles as well! The favoured material used today is the synthetic Polypropylene (90%).

Bruce was able to show us many super photographs from a 100 years or more ago showing people employed in various parts of the process, as well as the factories and properties used, a number of which can still be seen in Bridport today.

Apparently rope making demonstrations take place at Bridport Museum on Wednesday and Saturday mornings which we are welcome to attend.

I really enjoyed the talk this morning and I think most members present would agree. Every time I pick up a biro, in future, I more than likely will think of Retting and Bolling!

Thank you very much Bruce.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 20 September 2018 - Visit to Langham's Vineyard

Well, when food and / or drink are concerned you can usually reckon on a good club attendance and the visit to Langham Estate vineyard was no exception, with some 30 plus members present today. This was our second visit to a Dorset wine producing vineyard, the other being Purbeck vineyard near Swanage some 10 years ago.

As we were sitting in the café area topping up our addiction to caffeine, we were introduced to our guide Bryony. Over the next 2 hours Bryony showed us around what used to be a working dairy farm. Our visit started by looking at the vines being grown of which there are 3 types – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier.

This vine growing business was set up in 2009 on 29 acres when 35,000 vines were planted over a 3 day period. Today, there are 40,000 vines making this the largest wine producing site in the south west. There are some 789 vineyards in the country many very small – the most northerly being in Yorkshire. Langham's is rated medium size in English terms. 'Quality over quantity' is what the vineyard strives for in its production of 30,000 bottles p.a. which are aged for a minimum of 24 months.

Most of the processes are carried out by hand, such as picking the grapes undertaken by 5 permanent staff and 10 /12 temporary staff and completed in a 3 week period. It is anticipated that this year's grapes will be harvested in about a week's time.

After looking at the grapes on the vines, we visited the converted barns and farm buildings to see where the wine is actually made and stored. Bryony was absolutely brilliant in describing and telling us about all the equipment we saw and the procedures used to produce the excellent and award winning wine that the Langham Estate produces.

Several times during the morning we heard extremely loud bangs which made us all jump. The thoughts were that this was an armed raid on the wine store. Bryony smiled broadly and told us that it was a 'bird scarer'. Apparently all animals love grapes and just before harvest is a particularly vulnerable time, especially with the grapes so visible. Badgers are the worst as they also damage the vines.

At about 12.30 pm. All ears pricked up as we heard Bryony say "Shall we go and taste some of the wines now?" We tasted 3 sparkling wines all superb – there was certainly no spitting out, with the main comments being that the samples could perhaps have been a tad larger.

We finished off this visit with a very pleasant lunch in the reception / café area.

Madeleine was responsible for organising this visit together, with a little help from Graham so a really big thank you to both for the work involved in making this visit so successful and enjoyable. Let us hope that there is not another 10 years before we visit the next vineyard!

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(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 4 October 2018 - Talk by Dr Anne Collier-Morris on Weymouth and the New World

As a result of technical problems, our President had more time to bring several matters to our attention before our speaker was able to start.

Ken reported that Alan has been co-opted on to the management committee prior to taking over as treasurer next year. Ken re-emphasised to the meeting that the management committee is still seeking new blood.

Members will recall that "The Egg" award had, equal winners last year. After holding the egg for 6 months, Ken has now passed it over to Graham for the second half of the year.

Ken brought to the meeting's notice a national 'Probus' magazine which appears to be published quarterly. He is going to arrange for us to subscribe to this publication.

Angela reported that our club membership stands at 64 members.

Today, we had the pleasure of welcoming back Dr Anne Collier-Morris for her second talk to us this year. When Anne started speaking it was obvious that this talk was going to be just as well researched and in great depth and detail as her first talk to us on the 'American Wild West' at the May 2018 meeting.

The main thrust of her talk today surrounded the efforts of Sir Walter Raleigh, and Revs Hall and John White to colonise Massachusetts in the 16th and 17th centuries sending out ships from Weymouth and Plymouth.

As usual I scribbled down numerous facts in my note book on various aspects of Anne's talk including on Indentures, Dissenters from the City of Boston, Knights Templar, Quakers and the three William Penns, all which had a tie in to Anne's talk.

Sometimes you can gauge a talk and the interest it provokes by the number of questions asked at the end of the talk. Today there were certainly more questions than usual from members wanting more information.

I noticed that Anne had several other talks and maybe we can invite Anne to return in the future. In the meantime thank you Anne, for your very informative and enjoyable talk this morning.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 18 October 2018 - Visit To Highcliffe Castle, Christchurch

I have Probus to thank!

I am 100% certain that if I was not a member of Probus that I would not have visited Highcliffe Castle and especially as it is not a National Trust or English Heritage property – interestingly it is run by Christchurch Borough Council.

The 20 members and guests who went on this visit had to get up early to travel the 45 miles to the castle and at a busy travelling time. We all made it though to the tea room in good time.

We were split into 2 groups, each with an enthusiastic and very informative guide who took us on a 1 1/2 hour tour of the castle.

Highcliffe Castle is a Grade 1 listed building built between 1831 and 1836 for Lord Stuart de Rosethay. As with properties of this type there is a wonderful history attached which, is set out in a very easy to read format in the guide book.

The castle was derelict in the 1960s and there were serious fires in 1967 and 1967 following which the property remained in a derelict state for the next 30 years, with only a flock of white doves as residents. It was in the 1990s that phase 1 of the repair and conservation started thanks to funding

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from Christchurch Borough Council, English Heritage and a grant of £2.65 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Restoration work is still on going – they are now on phase 7 with the help of a grant of £2.9 million. I anticipate that there will need to be many more phases and substantial further funding before the castle is totally restored to its former glory.

There are some truly lovely features to see, even though there is scaffolding obscuring some external aspects and certain internal areas are presently closed. What was particularly impressive was the wonderful Jesse stained glass window in the Great Hall, the carved oriel window known as the King's Oriel and basically looking at the superb exterior of the whole building which has some magnificent carvings and gargoyles. There is a huge quotation from the poet Lucretius on a stone parapet which translated reads "Sweet it is when on the great sea the winds are buffeting the waters to look from the land on another's great struggles"

The grounds were one of only 2 marine sites designed by Lancelot Capability Brown. There is a superb view of "The Needles" from the Castle.

We had an enjoyable lunch in the tea room after this visit. Thanks go to Graham for organising this outing which really was first class and which I was so pleased to have attended.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 1 November 2018 - Talk by Dave Carter on The Life of Dr Marie Stopes

President Ken aptly opened the meeting with a minute's silence to remember the 100 years since the end of the First World War.

Ken then had the privilege of inducting David and Sue Geary as new members of our Probud Club. Several committee members made announcements.

We were then really lucky that David Carter was able to step in at very short notice to give us a detailed and at times humorous presentation.

Marie Stopes was a very accomplished and clever lady who went to UCL at 18 years old and took 2 degrees in 2 years. After this she spent time at Munich and Tokyo obtaining Masters and Doctorate degrees.

Early in his talk David asked us if anybody had read Marie Stopes book "Married Love", not one hand went up. Melvyn Bragg has written that this book is one of the 12 influential books that have changed the world. Marie Stopes wrote many other books, poems and plays.

What is amazing is the number of 'firsts' Marie Stopes achieved. In 1905 she was the youngest female Doctor of Science at 25 years old, she formed the first Tokyo Woman's club and she opened the first birth control clinic, amongst many other fine achievements in her lifetime. As well as bright and inventive, she appears to have been a forceful and determined lady indeed.

Marie Stopes lived on Portland in the upper Lighthouse for many years, a "Kimberlin" and the first curator of Portland Museum in 1930. She remained associated with the museum until 1957.

David told us that there were blue plaques commemorating Marie Stopes works and achievements in London, Manchester and other places but, not here on Portland but an application for a blue plaque is being worked on. He also told us that there is a celebration of Marie Stopes at the Weymouth Pavilion on 14th February 2019.

Another first today! David G a new member and attending his first meeting was asked to give the vote of thanks. Well done David G for accepting this challenge and doing a fine job.

Thank you again David C for stepping in and giving us an entertaining, detailed and informative presentation and indeed Rob for making the arrangements.

(by Mike Duthoit)

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Thursday 15 November 2018 - Visit to D Day Museum at Castletown, Portland

It was nice to be on home ground for this month's interim event. This could well have been the reason that we had 38 present - a splendid turnout.

We congregated at the Agua hotel for coffee and then crossed the road to the D Day Museum. One of the soldiers on duty (dressed in American uniform but sounding very English to me) gave us a brief introduction to the museum which was only opened in March 2017 by Richard Phillips, a 91 year old Normandy veteran. Unfortunately not everybody could hear what was said due to external noise but, whilst disappointing, there were several extremely keen and knowledgeable volunteers on hand as we strolled around the museum to field our questions.

How foolish it was to tell us that we could climb on and play with the majority of the exhibits. We could even do this suitably dressed up in the uniform of the time. As you know there are many in our club and not just the male members who did not need to be told twice as you can see from a selection of the pictorial evidence above.

The museum has been well thought out and contains many artefacts, vehicles as well as videos posters, advertisements and general signage all depicting the time of the American forces build up in 1944, prior to going to the Omaha beach. There is a good view of the Phoenix Cassons (Mulberry Harbour) from the upstairs windows and incidentally Crabbers Wharf.

Today we were really lucky in being the first to visit a new extension which does not officially open until tomorrow. This contains a mock up of a German bunker and next door a tea room, as it would be have been in war time.

This is my 3rd visit and I have learnt something with every visit. If you have grandchildren and it is wet you could easily pass away several hours at the museum and at a reasonable cost.

We returned to the Aqua hotel again for lunch which was most enjoyable.

Thank you to Graham for organising this super local visit and arranging lunch at the Aqua hotel for us.

(by Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 6 December 2018 - Christmas Revue and Lunch

Well, that was a surprise! President Ken had the pleasure of announcing to the club that Ian and Ann are getting married next Wednesday, 12th December 2018. After the formal proceedings have been carried out by the Registrar, club members are invited to join the happy couple at The Ship, Upwey from 2.30 p.m. to help them celebrate. We wish you both many congratulations from us all in the club.

This year the Christmas revue was undertaken by Welton Enterprises. The services of that well known and respected MC Trevor with his trade mark 'Bah Humbug' hat were also employed.

There were 5 stunning acts commencing with a poem read out by Trevor. This was followed by Carol and Angela dressed as two fairies of a certain age giving us an amusing take on 'Nobody loves a fairy when she gets old'.

We were then privileged that 5/6 members of the Portland Probus Occasional Choir were able to fit us in to their busy schedule to sing a ditty on 'Cheap Flights'. As we had paid Trevor an astronomical fee for appearing, it was only right that he did another turn and this he did by reading a few Christmas jokes and facts. Carol and Angela returned to sing / narrate the Christmas Story of the 'Ugly Duckling'.

In case there is any doubt I can confirm that the 4 cygnets who came on stage next and danced an excerpt from Swan Lake were in fact Rob, Graham, Ken and Mike and not members of the Russian State ballet which has been in town. Amazing, I know.

Thank you Trevor, Angela, Margaret C and all guest artists for providing us with today's entertainment.

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There were some 48 of us who sat down to a splendid Christmas lunch which we were able to linger over. This actually was a fitting finish to what has been an enjoyable Probus year in which we have had a wide variety of talks and activities.

Ken concluded the luncheon by thanking The Heights hotel for all the help and assistance that they have given us this year.

(by Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 3 January 2019 - Talk by Stuart Morris on Weymouth Piers and Pavilions

What a super way to start the New Year than by President Ken inducting Richard and Christine Prior as new members of our Probus Club. We hope that they enjoy our activities as much as we all do. The good news gets better in that there were 2 other new members, Kate and Michael Wheller, who were unfortunately not able to be present today.

Although I was late arriving I did a quick count up and reckon there were approximately 50 members at today's meeting. This is an excellent turn out but, the attendance is often high when one of our members gives the talk.

I have not checked my records but, I would estimate that Stuart is the club's most prolific speaker / presenter. He always comes up with a different topic on a specific local aspect. It was particularly interesting that he choose to present us with a Weymouth themed talk as opposed to talk about Portland this time.

Stuart's was actually a pre recorded PowerPoint talk! – what a good way of addressing the club and thereby avoiding the stress and nerves of standing in front of a large audience for close on an hour. This was especially so as the quality of the presentation, material and commentary Stuart gave were very good and certainly kept us all enthralled and watching attentively.

It is lovely reminiscing on how things were and we were all able to do this in large chunks. Most of us can probably recall clearly back some 60 years but, Stuart went back as far as 1721 and then proceeded to give many notable dates right up to the present day of critical events in the life of both the Pavilion (The Ritz) and the piers.

Stuart included really clear black and white footage from old Pathe news showing visits from various members of Royalty going back to the early part of the 20th century which was amazing and a real treat to see.

Undoubtedly a great deal of time has gone into researching and compiling this talk and indeed it will be a valuable permanent record of how this area of Weymouth has developed, the changes that have occurred and the often considerable costs of keeping or claiming land from the sea.

Thank you once again Stuart for sharing with us your love of the history of Portland and Weymouth through the comprehensive detailed drawings, plans and photographs. Our knowledge of the delightful place where we are lucky to live has been enhanced tremendously from today's presentation.

(by Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 17 January 2019 - Portland Probus Club Quiz

It was a lovely day with bright and clear blue skies and sunshine. I am told that the view across Lyme Bay was amazingly clear and that from The Height's hotel you could see Start Point in Devon.

Some 33 of the club's top brains gathered for what it is often a regular early year gathering to pit their wits against one another, in the friendliest of ways (as you would expect of our members).

Today's quiz master, oops! quiz mistress was Angela. The competitors were divided into four teams who during the course of the quiz had to answer 75 general knowledge questions.

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It has to be recorded that there was a definite competitive spirit but, in a jokey way between the teams as evidenced when the scores were totted up at the end of the quiz. After all everybody knew that there was a box of Ferrero Rocher as a prize for the winners.

The winning team scored 50 with the runners up obtaining 47.5 (yes I know how did they get that ½ point). Even the other teams obtained respectable scores of 42 and 32 respectively. Interestingly wrong answers elicited cries of “Oh yes, of course” when the correct answers were read out for scoring.

As Angela tells me “We all seem to have trouble dredging up the things we have stored in our brains” Luckily today’s four teams shared some chocolate mini eggs to try to refuel their grey matter half way through the quiz.

This was a morning when all who attended seemed to have enjoyed the quiz even if they were in the team that finished 2nd, 3rd or 4th.

Thank you Angela, for organising this quiz, this was a good mental challenge for participating club members.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 17 January 2019 - Talk by Charles Barter on The Watercress Company

President Ken started the meeting by inducting 3 more new members. He formally welcomed Kate and Michael Wheller and Dianne Pilliaert. This was of course Ken’s last full meeting as president of the club and a very pleasing way to start the meeting. I am sure our new members will derive pleasure from participating in our meetings and events as well as getting to know other club members, as we will them.

Today was the last day for nominations for next year’s management committee. A proposed list of members willing to serve in various roles on next year’s committee is now available for examination and this will be formally put to the AGM at the March meeting.

As usual various committee members brought the meeting up to date regarding future events. Mike advised us that there will be no further ‘Probes’. He also thanked those members who completed the feedback forms – these are so useful in assessing our future activities, as well as deciding the EGG winner!

I was looking forward to hearing today’s speaker, Charles Barter, addressing us on watercress, due to loving watercress and also having lived in Alresford, the home of watercress for 10 years. I was not disappointed.

Charles gave us a splendid talk not just on the company he inherited from his father but the developments which have occurred since in the demand for watercress and modern production methods used.

Although Charles told us watercress can be traced back to Roman times, the first commercial watercress grown in the UK was in Kent only 200 years ago. Most UK watercress is grown in Hampshire, Dorset and Herefordshire. As a result of pressure from supermarkets for watercress all the year round Charles had to open watercress farms in Spain and Florida.

What I like about this type of talk is the unusual facts I learn. Such facts today included:-

It is necessary to sow 5/6 thousand seeds per sq. metre to obtain 200 plants per sq.metre.

It takes 40 billion seeds to be sown to obtain 10 tons of watercress. This is not surprising when you see that one seed is smaller than a pin head.

Walking on watercress when it is growing does not bruise or damage it.

No pesticides are used in the growing process.

Automation is the reason for the changeover from buying watercress in packets as opposed to bunches.

Watercress has more Vitamin C than oranges.

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The benefits that watercress has is being looked at on cancer prevention programmes and in particular bowel and breast cancers.

There is a watercress festival held in Alresford which started in 2002 and this year is on the 19th May 2019.

Thank you Charles giving us such an enlightening talk and for providing us all with samples of the company's watercress.

(By Mike Duthoit)

Thursday 21 February 2019 - Portland Island Discs

Our compere / disc jockey for today's reminiscences and music was Jim. Approximately 26 attendees came to what turned out a most enjoyable and revealing morning.

Five members of the club had volunteered to play a piece of music, giving us a short story surrounding the reason for their choice. This morning there was no classical music and the choices played all came from the volunteers' teenage years.

Graham started us off by giving us an amusing account of his earlier years when he was a 'Mod' dressed in the appropriate clothes. The pride of which was when he was able to buy a Burton's mod style suit for £12.00. He also saved weekend earnings to buy a scooter which was soon after adorned with numerous mirrors and lights. Graham's music choice was 'Tin Soldier' by Small Faces, with Steve Marriott as the front man i.e. prior to Rod Stewart taking over.

Joan related her early days working for TSB and then joining the Woman's Royal Army Corps for more excitement and greater challenges. One of the records playing on Juke boxes at the time was Elvis Presley singing 'Suspicious Minds' and this was Joan's choice today.

New member David told of the frightening incident he was involved with when a policeman. This concerned attending with a colleague and bailiffs a 6th floor flat to evict a tenant. His colleague had an ear cut off with an axe and the building was set on fire during the eviction – the only time David was in a life threatening position during his career! David chose 'Amazing Grace'.

It was interesting hearing Madeleine talking about being brought up on a rural farm. In particular the hop picking time of year with all the casual labour who came and temporarily lived on the farm. We learnt of the travelling Madeleine did to get to school and then college and how she eventually came to live in Weymouth. She chose a real classic 'Smile' by Nat King Cole. By sheer coincidence when I got home this was the first tune played when I switched on the radio.

Lastly Paul gave us a brief resume of his career from trying to become a fisherman in Newlyn, working on repairing sea defences, becoming a Blacksmith's apprentice and then joining the Royal Navy. He told us of his time in Hong Kong prior to joining HMS Berwick. Paul chose a timeless classic, 'I left my heart in San Francisco' by Tony Bennett.

There was sufficient time for Jim to play a bonus track. As he has told us previously this recording means a lot to Jim 'All the time in the world' by Louis Armstrong.

Jim expressed concern at the start of this event that it could be the last due to lack of volunteers. However, 6 volunteers came forward today. Mo, Richard and Trevor were 3 of the volunteers but I was too slow recording who the other 3 were so if you could advise Jim that would be super.

Jim thank you one again for putting on an entertaining and relaxing session of Portland Island Discs today and I for one look forward to the next such event.

(By Mike Duthoit)