



## The Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed

Welcome to our 'It's Good to stay in touch' Newsletter – Issue 2 –  
23rd<sup>nd</sup> April 2020

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Hello All,  
We are in week four of the lockdown. I hope you are all keeping well and finding interesting ways of coping with the isolation. In this edition we have contributions from Antony Chessell, Alan Dumble, Ian Hannah, Tony Lee, David Mumford, Bob Steward and Harry Wilson.

I am sure you will enjoy their pieces.

HL

Making a return for a limited time, from last year's Probos Meetings, I bring you..

### Who said?

**"Maids want nothing but husbands, and when they have them, they want everything."**

Answer at the end of the Newsletter.

HL

### Coronavirus Myths debunked

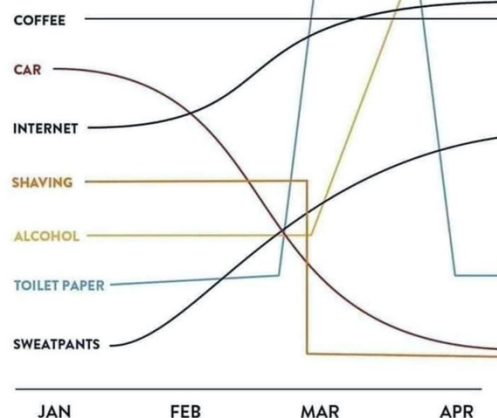
There has been many a scare story put about in the social media and by politicians, not least President Donald Trump, about COVID-19; some quite ridiculous but others quite dangerous.

We will all have heard about the news that coronavirus is being spread by the 5G network; some of the 5G masts in England have been targeted by arsonists who tried to burn them down. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) this is pure myth. COVID-19 is spreading through many countries that do not have 5G networks.

Check out other myths at the WHO website: -

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

### RELATIVE IMPORTANCE IN 2020, SO FAR



Snippets 1 on COVID-19 from Social Media

'Millions of surgical masks were stolen from New York hospitals which is why there are shortages' – Donald Trump – there is no evidence of widespread theft.

**From Tony Lee**

Thanks for your messages, it is good to keep in touch.

I am fine – being looked after very well by the Missus!

One of our neighbours has been doing shopping for us which has been a real boon. We get out for a daily walk round the village (Belford). We are fortunate to have a couple of small parks to the south of the High Street – one, the Belford Community Woodland has been an absolute picture with daffodils, primroses, celandines and various other spring flowers; the bird song has also been wonderful – we heard our first chiff chaff of the year there a couple of weeks ago. The other park, called the Jubilee Woodland, is more ‘cultivated’ with a lovely camellia, fritillarias, daffodils and many other shrubs and plants. This woodland was created by local Groups donating trees which are all now in blossom – lovely.

The Co-op is open, Sunnyhills Farmshop has organised a food delivery service and the paper shop also deliver milk and other consumables. Bell View is co-ordinating the assistance and other people have volunteered to pick up and deliver medicines; there is also a system for telephoning vulnerable people to check that they are OK. All in all, Belford is doing us proud!

Keeping ourselves occupied is not, as yet, a problem. The fine weather has been a great help!

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well.

Best wishes to all

**Tony**

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**Probus Hon. Auditor Required**

Tony has been our Hon. Auditor for many years but at the last AGM he intimated his resignation. While thanking Tony for his long service, Chairman David Mumble now seeks volunteers or nominations from members.

**TAKE TIME TO  
STOP AND  
SMELL THE ROSES**



**Travelling Incognito**

Lola, one of the receptionists at Hotel Presidente said, "You don't speak much Spanish but your pronunciation is very good."

Walking along the street I saw three young ladies in bikinis standing outside a hotel. As I got nearer, one of them approached me and asked me to take their photo. A little devil got inside me and I said, "Noh Comprendre!"

She came nearer and said, "You look through here and then you do this and do that." I kept saying "Si" and eventually "Okay."

I took their photo and handed the camera back to her saying, "Which part of Edinburgh do you come from?"

Their faces were a picture and I wished I'd had *my* camera with me.

***Ian Hannah***

## Contraband

by © Antony Chessell

News reports suggest that sales of alcohol in the UK have increased substantially since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is unlikely that the North-east as a whole will differ from the national statistics, whereas I am sure that the residents of north Northumberland, and certainly members of Probus, are models of self-restraint. However, two hundred years or so ago, there were many people in our area who enjoyed their whisky and took advantage of their proximity to the border with Scotland to indulge in smuggling; this was due to the difference in taxation rules between the two countries. Apart from monetary gain there was an excitement in taking part in clandestine operations.

The roads were patrolled by mounted excisemen armed with pistols. Their main task was to stop the smuggling of untaxed whisky from Scotland to England and to prevent its manufacture in secret stills south of the Border. A bottle of whisky could be bought in Coldstream for eighteen pence, just half what it would cost in England. The whole countryside seems to have been involved in getting cheap whisky across the Border, often involving farmers who might conceal bottles in corn stacks, walls and under fences. Even dogs were trained as carriers; one of them, a Dandie Dinmont terrier called Caesar, with a long body and short legs, used to carry a low-slung bundle containing a bottle, across the border from Coldstream. A tall hat could be used to hide a bladder into which was poured whisky enabling its wearer to walk slowly and sedately into England. Women wore tin cases made to fit under their clothes; these had a hinge at the back, clasps at the front and a small tap on the side creating an early travelling off-licence.

There were many stories of hidden supplies such as when a farmer was entertaining a friend and fetched a bottle from the pile in the corn stack; his friend pulled a face and it

was discovered that all the bottles had been emptied by the farm hands and refilled with water. A deep well near Ford Bridge had bottles underwater, suspended from hooks in the side of the well. The excisemen were often outwitted by the smugglers and, even when the latter were caught in the act, they could often escape by coming off best in a struggle or by outstripping their pursuers on horseback.

Illicit stills were secreted in woods and caves in north Northumberland. Work took place at night so that the smoke might not be detected and, when not in use, the 'worm' was taken away and hidden. Kegs of spirits were hidden in the disused shafts and adits of the local collieries such as those on Ford Common. Even with a strong cordon of mounted excisemen watching the Border, manufacture and sale of whisky was carried out with impunity. Local people kept quiet about the goings-on and, in view of their involvement, it was in their interest to do so.

As a result of devolution, now in 2020 there is a widening gap between the taxation laws of England and Scotland, for example in relation to income tax, and the minimum price to be charged for alcohol. Will there be a temptation at some stage to indulge in a resumption of cross-Border smuggling from north to south or from south to north, or even illicit manufacture, depending upon the circumstances? Of course, I could not possibly recommend such a thing.

©Antony Chessell

Reference: Neville, Rev. Hastings, *A Corner in the North*, Andrew Reid & Company Limited, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1909, pp 121-125



## Diary Keeping

By Bob Steward

As a former Archivist, I would encourage PROBUS members to keep a diary recording these days of lockdown and coronavirus. They needn't be just observing life about Berwick, or neighbourhood, but could take in your impressions and feelings at this time. They also could include impressions from friends and family further afield – in different parts of the country, and even overseas. Include rumours heard – I noted on 21 March, there were rumours of troops in Wooler!

I have been keeping such a diary from the start of the epidemic and it already makes for interesting reading. I was mindful of making such a diary (and I have never been a diary keeper before) following my talk to PROBUS the other year on the Spanish Flu and how I relied on people who kept diaries at that time, for information. Linda Bankier, Berwick's Archivist is also keen that people keep such diaries as a future historical record.

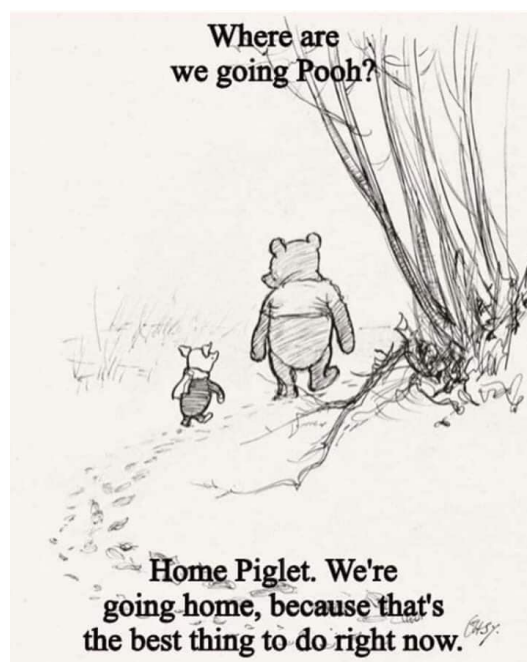
Already I have noted some common themes emerging from my conversations with friends and family, and observations around Berwick. As for the latter – how gradually the shops closed and how supermarkets got their acts together after the panic buying of a few weeks ago ie. Limiting customers into their shops. Also, how people are following the rules of keeping apart – I note people swerve past you when passing on the pavement. In addition, shops insist, not only on cards to pay for purchases, but insist one swipes the cards (using contactless) instead of tapping in one's code – this has become common in some shops in Berwick – the beginning of a cashless society?

As for wider observations: i) I note the growth in home working and video conferencing and wondering whether this will be the future, as bosses realise, they don't need their workers in expensive

offices. ii) There is the rapid growth of families and friends interacting on social media via computers, eg using the Zoom app. iii) Similarly, there is a huge appreciation by parents, of the demands on their children, especially daughters, at home, working or otherwise, in looking after young children during the day – and, as grandparents, they can't help, since they are required to self-isolate. Where both wives and husbands work from home, they often have to determine working patterns between themselves for each day. (Problems in home teaching seem to be common, as parents find they are at a loss with modern teaching – especially maths – so they can't help their children.) iv) Also, on problems, there seems to be difficulties in booking for food from supermarkets online – quite often people have to wait until midnight to book a slot, and deliveries can be weeks away. v) On the bright side you are saving money by driving very little and not having meals out. vi) There is, also, a lot more of keeping in touch by telephone, and even talking to your neighbours.

One personal issue, how do we get haircuts, or will we all end up as 1960's hippies?

**Bob Steward**



*Snippets 2 on COVID-19 from Social Media*

**FICTION: Alan Dumble** is a prolific writer and has published his own book 'Alan's Short Stories'. He is also one of the contributors to 'Berwick Crimes and Punishment' published in December 2019 by Berwick U3A Creative Writers. Here is his latest story, commissioned exclusively for Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

## Lockdown

by ©Alan Dumble

I have just received a rather worrying email from my 10-year-old granddaughter, begging me to stop sending any more stories to "that old men's club you belong to". As she was a computer geek, I was fascinated enough to ask her why on earth I should.

She replied that while trawling around the internet she had picked out a sheaf of emails, one of which was asking me to supply a couple of stories for this man's online magazine. Well I said that seemed quite a reasonable request. What was her objection? "Grandad, wait until you hear some of the follow up emails to that request. I'm well aware that you barely know how to use a mobile telephone let alone a computer so I'll read out one or two."

1) From Mr Po Face, "If he dares to refer to me again as 'that would be famous geologist' I'll hit him over the head with my geologist's hammer prior to voting for his compulsory resignation.

2) "If he calls me once more 'the mystery walker' who always forgets where he is →

heading for then I won't be responsible for wrapping one of my golf clubs round his neck."

3) From Mr. Half Secretary, half well known Bridge Player, "If that appears again then tell him that for any book of his he will be looking for a different publisher/printer."

4) And now 'Jimmy the fisherman,' "I won't be responsible if he is found tied and bound with a fishing line wriggling in the river Tweed with a fish in his mouth."

5) This one, printed in capital letters "I AM NOT A CAR PARK ATTENDANT. If this appears in print again don't ever let him out of 'Lockdown.' I am not a violent man but I do have my limits!"

Grandad you will get the gist, there are several more. The final one, I think it's from the secretary, says, "Calm down chaps, I know these are trying times but if he ever refers to me again as 'Mr. Secretary Homing Pigeon,' I shall flatten him with one blow!"

Right my darling granddaughter, I shall do as you say. Look forward to when we can actually meet again.

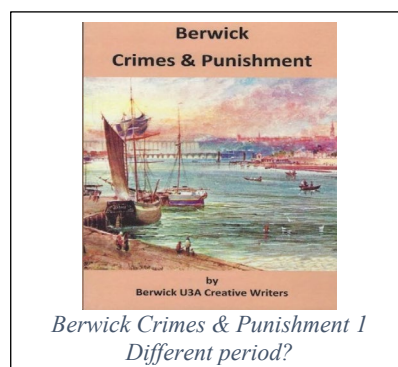
Love Grandad ❤️



*Editor's footnote: Writs to author, not me!*



*Berwick 1 Painting by Frank Wood, 1934; owned by David Mumford*



*Berwick Crimes & Punishment 1  
Different period?*

## Social Distancing in the 1950's by © Harry Wilson

No, not Covid -19, but my early experience of enforced isolation might strike some chords amongst Probus members as we seek to cope with Lockdown. At the time I was an only child living in a Durham pit village and going to school in Newcastle. My father was a schoolmaster and my stepmother was a nurse in charge of the medical centre at the local colliery. My journey to school was always a source of interest as the bus route to Newcastle was crossed by four level crossings, two of which were NCB rope-worked inclines. Rarely did the bus get through without being stopped at least once.

I suppose with my stepmother being a nurse I had an interest in matters medical and at that time our local council published figures for the number of cases of infectious diseases occurring in the District. Often reading these whilst waiting for a bus, I never thought that I would feature in one report. Coming home from school one day and feeling unwell I was duly sent to bed and, feeling no better the next day the Doctor was summoned. I never heard the diagnosis but the outcome was clear, I was to be sent off post haste to the local Isolation Hospital where I was to stay for the next three weeks.

Scarlet fever it was and I developed all the classic symptoms including the unique strawberry tongue which I examined daily in the hope that it would have gone and I might be allowed home. As a 14yr old, I was too young to be given a bed in an adult ward and so was put in a children's ward where I was about twice the age of the next oldest patient. This posed a few problems, not the least of which was the early lights out (which meant reading by torch light under the

sheets). One concession to my age was that I was given an adult diet, crucially with supper at 6 instead of tea at 4. Isolation meant I could receive mail but not send any replies and I soon exhausted the books which the nurses brought from the hospital library. My main solace was the hospital headphones but I longed for some Meccano or a model aeroplane kit. My routine was rudely interrupted when I caught my thumb on my locker, putting a wooden splinter under my nail. Sadly the wound turned septic and I was put on penicillin injections every six hours (necessitating being woken at midnight for an injection into my backside). Eventually my thumb got better, my red skin all came off and my strawberry tongue disappeared and I heard the magic words, "You can go home tomorrow."

Unfortunately there was yet another trial to bear. In my absence my room and bedding had been fumigated but my old teddy bear had been destroyed. I had had my bear for years and it took a long time to forgive my stepmother for allowing him to become a casualty.

I can't remember when we stopped sending patients to Isolation Hospitals but I did drive past the site of my incarceration a few years ago. It must have been long gone for in its place was a well-established housing development complete with a few trees.

It seems strange that we are all now experiencing our own form of isolation, at best in family units but sometimes on our own. Let us hope that the pandemic soon passes its peak and we can begin to return to what must surely be a very different world from that which we left behind.

Who said, "*Maids want nothing but husbands, and when they have them, they want everything.*"

Well, it was William Shakespeare, who was born on this day, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1564



Was this Newsletter worthwhile? Your feedback would be appreciated, along with suggestions and contributions for future editions during the COVID-19 crisis. Contact details on page 1.