



The Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed

Welcome to our 'It's Good to stay in touch'
Newsletter –

Issue 11- 18th November 2020

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Dear Member,

I hope this finds you all safe and well.

Our Chairman, David Mumford, laid a wreath on behalf of Probus at the War Memorial on Saturday 7th November; COVID-19 restrictions meant that organisations could only lay wreaths by appointment on Saturday 7th and on Remembrance Sunday.

There is a report of our Annual General Meeting held on 18th November 2020 that you may find interesting.

Harry Wilson recounts growing up in the 1940's; **Antony Chessell** is seeing things through a farm gate while **Colin Wakeling** has a flight of fancy.

Local COVID-19 statistics are borrowed from the Berwick Coronavirus Forum page on Facebook as is an old photograph of Rotary planting daffodil bulbs on Rotary Way in 1999.

If you have something to reminisce about and are willing share it with Probus let me know.

Stay well; stay safe - Homer

Who Said?

"Man is nature's sole mistake."

Answer on last page of the newsletter

HL

Who is This?



This is the photograph of a Probus member long before he joined the Club. Who is he?

Suggested answers to the Editor.

Birthdays

9th November – Charles Fairfield

23rd November – Tom Brewis

25th November – John Southern

Many happy returns to you all

The Annual General Meeting

The AGM of The Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed is held on the third Wednesday of November each year, according to the Constitution. This year, 2020, it is being held today in unusual circumstances.

Members begin to appear well on time to enjoy their virtual tea or coffee and biscuits provided by a hologram of Gwyneth and her band of volunteers. For all this is something of a reunion as they have not seen each other for many months. The Parish Hall sparkles with virus-resisting anti-bacterial and chemical sprays. The tables and chairs have been spaced out in socially distanced crescents to accommodate a maximum of fifteen members, plus the Chairman.

The Secretary/Acting-Treasurer/Doorman/Editor/Immediate-Past Chairman, recognised only by his cashmere jumper as his face is covered by facemask and visor, is flitting hither and thither with Agendas and Reports, one moment checking another member in, the next briefing the Chairman on the Agenda. There is heated debate between Chairman and Vice-Chairman about what week number this is.

“This is only the 12th time Probus has met this year,” says the Vice-Chairman, “so this should be the 12th Meeting.”

“But 18th November is week 47 of the calendar and we do not meet on the first Wednesday of January; so, it is week 46 in the Probus calendar,” asserts the Chairman, “We don’t want members to gain the impression that they are getting less for their subscription than in normal years.”

“What about the eleven Newsletters; don’t they count as meetings? Perhaps we should call this week 23.”

“I do not believe I’ll even mention the week number to the members,” concludes the Chairman, “hopefully no one will notice.”

They are both happy with this ‘win – win’ decision.

The Chairman raises the gavel and pounds the meeting to order.

“Members present?” asks the Chairman.

“Virtually none,” replies the Acting Treasurer.

“Are we quorate, Mr Secretary?” continues the Chairman.

“Virtually,” comes the reply.

“On a point of Order,” says a member, “you have not announced the week number.”

“Not relevant,” the Secretary states, “There is nothing in the Constitution that requires us to announce Meeting Numbers; move on.”

“Can we move to the Minutes of the last AGM; can we take them as read?” asks the Chairman. “I haven’t read them,” says Ron, “or at least I cannot remember reading them.”

“Has anyone read them?”

The immediate past-Secretary confirms he wrote them so he must have read them. On that basis and with great relief the Meeting approves the Minutes.

“Treasurer’s Report,” calls the Chairman.

Silence. A few heads turn to see who the Treasurer is. No one knows; the last one resigned through ill-health in February!

The Chairman looks up, “Ah! I think he might be off searching for cheque signatories. Mr Acting Treasurer, have you anything to say?”

“I have been searching for bank statements but I believe one of the new cheque signatories might have them as part of his identification to the bank. I cannot provide a report until I receive them. Oh! I’m also looking for an auditor. That is all I can report.”

“I propose we accept the Acting Treasurer’s Report,” says Colin.

“Seconded,” cries another member.

“Splendid,” murmurs the Chairman, “we are making progress. Can we now move to the election of Office-Bearers and Committee Members?”

“I nominate Daniel as Chairman and Geoffrey as Vice-Chairman,” shouts Raymond in a throaty voice.

“They’re not here!” says someone.

“That’s why I’m nominating them. Move to vote!”

All raise their hands in approval.

“Treasurer?” asks the Chairman, rubbing his hands in glee. Things are going so well. A truly remarkable thing then happens. Fifteen hands are raised. They all are volunteering to be Treasurer.

At this point the world begins to wobble! I have this sense that the impossible has occurred. I come to, slowly, from my slumber, to realise that a miracle has not happened after all; I’ve been dreaming!

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Five-barred field gates, a 17th century meeting house and two unusual farm workers

© Antony Chessell

During the course of our locked-down exercise outings, I speculated on the origins of timber five-barred field gates that can be seen everywhere throughout the English countryside. Why do farm gates invariably have five bars? Research suggests that the design dates back over two hundred years and has lasted because of aesthetic appeal, strength, reliability and versatility. My thoughts were that the gaps between the bars needed to be sufficiently narrow



to prevent, for example, sheep, from getting through, whilst at the same time, keeping the gate high enough to prevent stock leaping over it. Five bars or rails instead of, say, six bars, prevents the gate from becoming too heavy and unwieldy and enables it to be at just the right height for leaning over for viewing stock (see left) and for leaning on to conduct conversation! There are different gate styles, ideally involving mortice and tenon joints and different bracing styles; the gate in the photo has

diagonal braces and a vertical brace for extra strength.

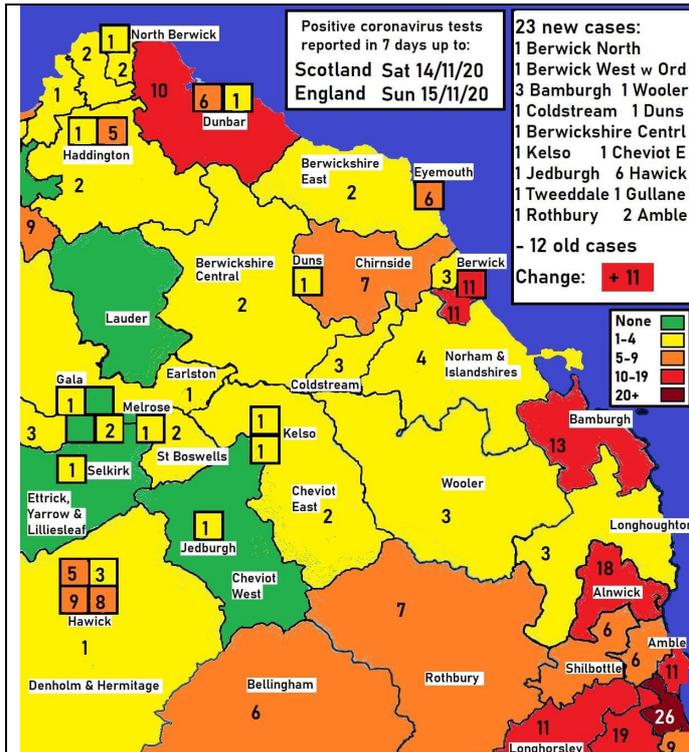
My musings reminded me of a very strange, out-of-this-world experience involving a five-barred gate when Gwen and I lived on the border between west Dorset and east Devon and visited a small, very early Baptist meeting house owned by The National Trust, the Loughwood Meeting House. The meeting house may have been founded by two Cromwellian army officers and the majority of the early congregation's elders may have been other army men suggesting that the chapel was formed when the New Model Army, under the command of General Fairfax, occupied nearby Axminster during the siege of Exeter during 1645-6. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and prior to the Act of Toleration 1689, Baptists and other dissenting groups were persecuted and meeting houses such as this were illegal. Persecution was such in this area that dissenters even held services in the open air at the 'pulpit rock' hidden in the 'Undercliff' area near Lyme Regis, in order to escape detection. The Loughwood Meeting House is tucked away into the side of a hill and would have been screened by woodland and only approached by a narrow path in order to preserve secrecy. Moreover, the external appearance with its thatched roof, gives it the appearance of a farm-worker's cottage which would have been helped by the presence of the nearby Loughwood Farm. The meeting house may have been positioned on the county boundary to allow preachers to flee into the neighbouring county when threatened.



When Gwen and I visited the interesting and atmospheric meeting house, we looked back along the narrow path towards the entrance to Loughwood Farm. We saw what we took to be two farm workers dressed in dun-coloured smocks and floppy hats, in discussion and leaning against the five-barred entrance gate to the farm. The farm looked to be in working order and we didn't take any further notice at the time, and somehow, at the back of our minds, just linking the unusual costumes with the landscape of very rural Devon. A short time

later, we took friends to the meeting house and were astonished to see that the nearby farm was derelict and looked as though it had been so for a long time. Everything looked different, quite unlike our previous visit. A small incident, but one which made an impression on both of us. The original scene was firmly fixed in both our memories. Did we have a glimpse into the past? Unfortunately, we will never know. But the design of the five-barred gate hadn't changed a bit!

Photo of Loughwood Meeting House: Creative Commons Licence, Dereck Harper/Loughwood Meeting House



[FaceBook Page Mikey Michael McMik](#) on
[Berwick Coronavirus Forum](#)

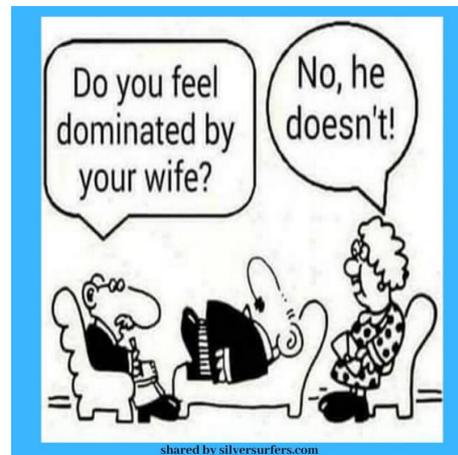
Sources:

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/julian5701...>
<https://public.tableau.com/profile/phs.covid.19...>

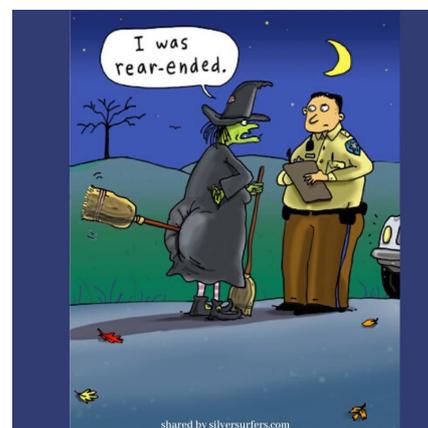


"No thanks. Do you know how much sugar is in those things?"

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Growing up in the 1940's

I have very few memories of my mother who died in April 1943 when I was four. She had gone to hospital for a routine ear operation but later developed meningitis and died. I went to stay with my paternal grandparents (my father was in the RAF as an Instructor Officer based in York) together with my father's sister and my cousin David who I have always regarded as the brother I never had.

Dad being 40 at the time was able to resign his commission and come home to take up his former profession of schoolmaster and set about finding a suitable housekeeper. The first, and for me the best, was Mrs Wright who had been housekeeper for Lord Durham and was living in retirement in our village on the edge of Lambton Park. She and I had a marvellous time playing bombers in our kitchen, I was the pilot and bomb aimer (of course!) and she released the bombs (my cricket bat) when I called.

Sadly, she was only a stop-gap to buy time for Dad to find a more permanent replacement who turned out to be Hannah Hall, an American from Cleveland, Ohio. I liked her stories of life in the US but she was unable to adjust her lifestyle to the demands of wartime rationing. She left with no regrets on either side but after the War when she went back to the US, she sent us regular food parcels which not only included tinned pork sausages and peaches but also bubble gum and American comics (both of which were invaluable for "trades" with my schoolmates).

Dad and I managed at home by ourselves for a while until our last housekeeper arrived from Scotland where she had been working in a country house near Peebles. She was gentle and kind and soon became "Auntie Jean", quite literally some months later when my father married her sister Mary. She was then working as an occupational nurse for ICI. She gave up her job on marriage but some years later when I went

to Grammar School went back to work at our local pit as a nurse for the NCB.

By then we had met her other sister "Auntie Ann" who, like my stepmother, had also trained as a nurse at Aberdeen Royal in the 1920s. All three girls were from Shetland and Ann became Matron of Lerwick Hospital during the War. At that time the Medical Director of that hospital was Daniel Lamont, father of the Tory Chancellor Norman Lamont. Later I learned much from my aunt about the wartime patients (mainly ditched aircrews, shipwrecked sailors and wounded Norwegian Resistance workers brought



home by the "Shetland Bus"). Many years later I stood on the quayside in Bergen and saw the magnificent bronze statue of her friend Leif Larsen, skipper of one of the fishing boats that comprised that bus service.

I count myself lucky that my father re-married and that I came to love my extended family. As a schoolmaster my father had to count the pennies and our 1933 Austin 7 remained on blocks in our garage until well after the War. I remained friends with our first housekeeper and through her met several of the retired Lambton estate staff including the gamekeeper and gardener who still lived in cottages in the village.

The biggest change came when I passed the 11-plus exam and suddenly I was going to school by myself on the bus to Newcastle. So many exciting things to see and do, new friends to make and my new bike to ride to watch trains on the East Coast main line (about five miles from home). I was careful to keep in touch with my old friends in the

village and still found time to see ships launched in Sunderland and visit my Grandfather's small hill farm in Frosterley. Here we were always able to enjoy fruit cake baked by the farmer's wife and I could dig for fluorspar on the old spoil heap (much of

Weardale still bore evidence of earlier leadmining and our tip always repaid an hour or so's digging to unearth some splendid examples, one piece of which we still have on our front doorstep).

© Harry Wilson

FLIGHT OF FANCY OR MUCH A-DOO

WARNING: This is a true story, but I am not certain if it has a happy ending

A fortnight before THAT Referendum, I gave shelter to a Scottish refugee, from Bathgate, which had fluttered in on a stiff westerly wind.

I found the bird on my windowsill and, assuming it had collided with the glazing, and, because of its size, initially mistook it for a wood pigeon, thought it represented a fine slice of breast for my tea and was planning the garnish ... until I noticed its leg rings.

Despite its possible exhaustion and bewilderment, the bird revealed from the outset a feisty determination, and evaded capture.

I later learned that it had been released at Otterburn some days previously, and expected to make its way straight back home, but it was now some 50 miles off course. Clearly pigeon fanciers have no sense of history or they would have appreciated the release area was the site of a significant 14th Century Border skirmish, the Battle of Otterburn (Chevy Chase), which resulted in the death of Harry Hotspur. Against the background of heightened nationalism in Scotland, there may have been Northumbrians anxious to exact their revenge, even by nobbling racing pigeons.



This doo clearly came to appreciate the ambience of Berrington Lough, and frequented the roof, the woodpile and the lane outside, where it found plentiful supplies of newly harvested grain scattered by trailers rushing to the dryers.

One day its neck feathers were out of place, possibly the result of a tangle with a hawk, but more likely the result of snagging my drain cover. It spurned the offer of fresh water, indicating its disapproval by leaving a deposit in the bowl, and persisted in stretching down into the drain to sup the liquid remains of my washing up. Could this really replicate the taste of water back in West Lothian?

Unfortunately, homing pigeons seem to lack environmental awareness. It shunned the trees and shrubs which would have afforded it shelter, preferring nights on the (roof) tiles. I suppose pigeon crees are a sheltered environment. It also had no road sense. The lane outside the house is not the A1, but at harvest time it can get hectic. One evening I found it

in the middle of the road and unwilling to move – perhaps it had gorged too much grain – until I got out of the car when it showed it had not lost the power of flight.

It then took to perching by the edge of the road on the stone blocks intended to protect the verges from 4 x 4s and tractors. It clearly did not appreciate that harvest time vehicles take no prisoners. A cloud of feathers suggested it had jumped the wrong way, and no doubt an itinerant fox would make a meal of the corpse.

But, not a bit of it. This bird was clearly a survivor. It reappeared on its favourite drain cover, somewhat the worse for wear with a damaged wing and an injured foot. My instinct was to end its misery and forward it to the great heavenly pigeon loft in the sky, but my partner decreed that the bird was “plucky” so that was the end of that.

In its weakened state I managed to catch and box it long enough to take a note of its ring number, which I forwarded to a stray pigeon website. Whilst this was going on, obviously relishing neither incarceration, nor the prospect of re-homing, it promptly broke out of its cardboard home.

Its Bathgate owner did contact me. Any idea that he would rush down the A1 like a knight in shining armour to rescue his beloved bird was swiftly dispelled by his almost detached view that it should be able to make its own way home. In the Red Lion (safely on the south bank of the Tweed) I learned from folk who know about such things, to my horror, that if the bird did make its way back home, rather than welcoming the return of a prodigal racer, the owner would likely wring its neck, since it had neither proved its racing mettle, nor would win prizes, and was thus a waste of grain.

If you want to study the hidden passions involved in the pigeon world Google “Pigeon Cree South Shields” (not case sensitive) and learn about the union ‘boss’ attacked over the birds.

Upset, and against my better judgement, I scooped up some grain from the lane, but it turned up its beak at my offering and fluttered on to the wall where it stolidly remained with its back to me.

Most of its nights were spent on the roof, and days on the drain, but just about Referendum time, it took a fancy to the ridge tiles of a neighbouring property where it hopped about or simply settled down to enjoy the view across the Tweed in the warm September sunshine. Only once did a rook drive it off. It seemed bemused by the pair of pied wagtails who fluttered around beside it, while a passing visit from a flock of starlings caused a brief element of confusion.

As the Referendum results were announced I thought I detected a longing to head back north, hopeful, perhaps, that its “Noo, noo, noo” vote would be forgiven. Shortly thereafter it took to disappearing during the day, only returning to roost at night. Its foot seemed to be making good progress since it could now stretch it out.

But, one morning, it was there no more. I have not seen it since, dead or alive, nor have I had word of its whereabouts. That’s gratitude for you. Not even a pigeon post card. However,

also absent at the same time was the obese lothario of a wood pigeon, which had taken up residence in my Leylandii. Perhaps the prospect of a bird with rings around its ankles – definitely a racy one that – was too alluring to resist. Could this pair of love birds have eloped to Lamberton Toll, the east coast equivalent of Gretna, and even taken up residence there in its unauthorised (to the chagrin of Scottish Borders’ planners) pigeon loft?

If it has made it back to Bathgate, I hope its owner appreciates its stamina and gives it a reprieve, but wherever it is, I miss it, and wish it well, even if it has left a pile of “doo” on my roof tiles as a reminder of its presence.

© Colin Wakeling



Berwick Rotarians who spent most of a Sunday planting 14,000 daffodil bulbs in the verges between the two Ord Roundabouts in 1999

Who Said?

“Man is nature's sole mistake”

It was William S Gilbert who was born on this day in 1836.

Profession: English Dramatist

Nationality: [English](#)

Why Famous: He is best known for the fourteen comic operas known as the Savoy operas.

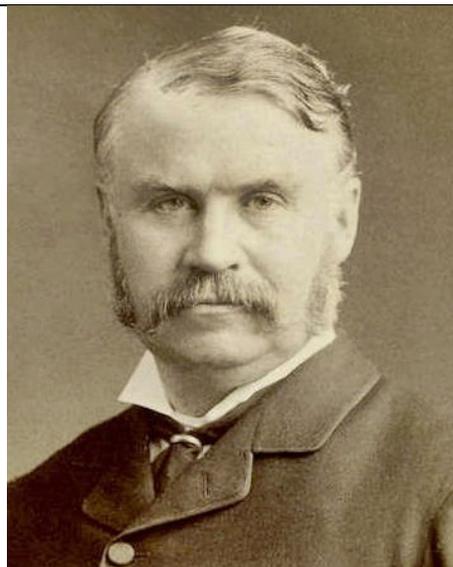
Born: [November 18, 1836](#)

Birthplace: London, England

Star Sign: [Scorpio](#)

Died: [May 29, 1911](#) (aged 74)

Cause of Death: [Heart attack](#)



Historical Events

25th May 1878: W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's comic opera "H.M.S. Pinafore" premieres in London, their first international success

William Gilbert Quotes. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved November 17, 2020, from BrainyQuote.com Web site:
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/william_gilbert_105922

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.