



## *The Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed*

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

Issue 12 – 23rd December 2020

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Dear Member

Christmas cannot be cancelled, despite the headlines! I feel sorry for all those whose plans have been disrupted but wouldn't it be better to miss that hug now and have a better chance of being there to experience it next year?

Antony Chessell, Alan Dumble, Ian Hannah and David Mumford, with seasonal greetings from other members make up our recipe for this edition.

Copy date for next edition 8<sup>th</sup> January ~ HL

### Who Said?

“ Let's drink to the spirit of gallantry and courage that made a strange Heaven out of unbelievable Hell, and let's drink to the hope that one day this country of ours, which we love so much, will find dignity and greatness and peace again. ”

*Is this about WWI, WWII, COVID-19 or Brexit?  
The answer is revealed on the last page / HL*

With Best Wishes for Christmas 2020 and for 2021 to you all. I look forward to seeing you all in person as soon as it is possible for us to re-convene

*Michael Wright*

### *A Christmas Short Story*

I have included one of my short stories, 'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas' – I hope you enjoy it - Homer

## Chairman's Report 2020

It all started quite smoothly with our meetings and talks in their normal format in the church hall. George Martin had arranged a varied list of subjects ranging from a moving account of the massacres in Belarus during WW2; handmade paper in Berwick; Border General's twin hospital in Zambia; the first railway in the world - Stockton and 'Hand - hewn stone' - an impromptu talk by our oldest member, Dr Jimmy Mitchell.

This turned out to be the last meeting in the church hall before "Lockdown" on 23rd March. Of course, the virus has had a serious direct impact on the ability of our club to fulfil its aims during the last nine months of 2020. It has also had some indirect affect in that it is difficult to encourage new members if they cannot attend meetings and talk to existing members. During the year four of our members sadly died, there were no new members, leaving total membership of forty at the end of this year.

Some good news! The club has a number of members over 80 and they should be getting their "Get out of jail" injections shortly, followed by younger members so we should see a return to near normality next year. I hope!

We are still looking for an ambitious younger member (anyone under 80) to take over as Treasurer from Homer (who already does a fantastic job as Hon Secretary and Editor of the Probus Newsletter, as well as acting Treasurer!!) Harry Wilson has kindly agreed to take over the vacant position as Hon Auditor and Antony Chessell will take over as Acting Chairman when I stand down at the year end.

*David Mumford*

*Harry Wilson* would like to wish all members of Berwick Probus Club a better 2021 than the year we have just experienced, probably with an early dose of COVID vaccine as I guess we will all be eligible for some measure of priority! As we go forward let us not forget those members who we lost on the way.

As for a memorable Christmas for me. One of the best was a dinner with my wife's family when her brother arrived in an enormous yellow stuffed turkey suit and talking gobble di gook. Needless to say, turkey was not on the menu.

## Amazing works of art – where are these installations?



*This can be found in Leper, Belgium*



*Entrance to Skipton Woods.*



*Appeldoorn, Gelderland, Netherlands*

### *Letters to the Editor*

Dear Half Secretary,

While this may not be of any interest to yourself, I believe that it could be of interest to some of our members. You may recall Harry Wilson giving a talk about his book selling days in those far-off times when we could meet together as a club.

Well, a few weeks ago, on one of my book buying sorties I came across the remains of a collection of Railway Books which I duly purchased. Later, on closer examination, I came across a bookmark extolling the amazing attributes of the bookseller - a Henry Wilson of Broomheath Lane, Tarsion, Chester. Not only a seller of Antiquarian, Rare and Out of Print Books and Printed Items on Railways ..... but also ..... Book Searches ..... Book Repairs etc , etc..

Then, as a further twist to the tale, I found two with invoices in dated October 1988 for "Unusual Railways" and a note indicating, "We will let you know if we can find a Carter "Unusual Locomotives". You will have guessed that the next invoice was for the said book '£9 net, post free'. This dated almost a year later Sept 1989!

To complete the story, as you are aware, Henry Wilson now lives close to Berwick and the recipient of the books was a Mr. P. Miller of the Dower House, Paxton, just a mile or so away. So after 31yrs, I as a would be writer, wonder if they ever met as I do like happy endings.

Well, I certainly had a happy ending as the last time I looked the books were priced on Amazon at £40 each!

*Alan Dumble*

*Correspondent please note, I am a whole Secretary and half a*

*Treasurer!! – Editor ☺*

### **Bin collections - Christmas 2020**

Find out about changes to bin collection days during the festive period.

Collections up to and including Thursday 24 December will go ahead as normal.

**Please click here to search for your collection day** and ensure your bins are ready for collection at 7am on the day.

Collections for the **week commencing Monday 28 December** will take place either one or two days later than your usual collection days. Please refer to the table below:

Normal collection day	Day collection has been moved to
Monday 28 December	Tuesday 29 December
Tuesday 29 December	Wednesday 30 December
Wednesday 30 December	Thursday 31 December
Thursday 31 December	Saturday 2 January

**Please note: There will be no collections on Monday 28 December and Friday 1 January, as these are bank holidays.**

Collections will return to normal from Monday 4 January 2021.

### **COVID-19 Vaccine**

Berwick is still going to be one of the places where you can get the vaccine.

There has been a slight delay due to the new guidelines about having to wait 15 minutes afterwards due to a few experiencing allergic reactions.

Therefore, there needs to be adequate waiting space which Well Close is limited on. The arrangements for this are just being put in place.

The start date is to be confirmed but it is expected to be 28th December.



## A Memorable Dorset Christmas

Happy Christmas to everyone in Berwick Probus! My most memorable, but definitely not my most amusing Christmas, occurred during a previous pandemic, the Hong Kong flu pandemic of 1968/69 which is said to have killed between one million and four million people, worldwide. Gwen and I set out by car from our home in Christmaspie Avenue, Normandy, Guildford (yes, it's true!) to Lyme Regis in Dorset, the home of my parents and where my grandmother was staying for Christmas. In the back of the car was our baby daughter of 9 months, Katharine, and a large, fearsome black cat with yellow eyes named William of Normandy (of course!). As we neared Lyme Regis, I was starting to get double vision which was a severe disadvantage when negotiating the steep and narrow lanes leading into the town.

On arrival, I was in a sorry state for the next few days. Even worse, when we got there, we discovered that my father and mother had already succumbed to the flu and they retired to bed for the whole of the Christmas break. Gwen was tasked with all the cooking including, on Christmas Day, the Dorset-bred turkey with all the trimmings, the vegetables, the pudding and the table decorations. My father, mother and I were unable to partake of this magnificent repast. Baby Katharine helped out with puréed turkey and sprouts. But Gwen, with a justifiable air of effortless superiority, and my 90-year-old grandmother, did full justice to everything spread out before them. Even William of Normandy did not disgrace his conquering namesake!

© Antony Chessell



Dear Home and all members of  
Berwick Probus,

Wishing you a Happy Christmas  
and a Peaceful New Year

Wishing you all good health in 2021.  
Thank you for your support of the  
Fishwives' mission.

Kind regards, Claire (McIntosh)

**If anyone gets a  
message from me  
about canned meat,  
don't open it.**

**It's Spam.**

## My Memorable Christmas

© Ian Hannah

Irene and I spent Christmas and New Year in Benidorm in 1955. The reason being that we had normally spent it at my mother-in-law's, but she had died, and this would be the first time since, so I thought it would be easier for Irene if we went away.

The Presidente provided a beautiful Christmas Lunch but of course it was really Hogmanay that we were looking forward to. The seating arrangements for the Hogmanay Dinner were totally different; they had set long tables and sitting opposite us was a party of Dutch people and of course their English was perfect.

After dinner, we made our way to the entertainment lounge, except the Spanish residents, who were having their party in the Restaurant. As we entered the Lounge, we were given a small bag containing twelve grapes and were told it was customary to place a grape in your mouth every time the clock struck. A few seconds before midnight the entertainment officer appeared carrying a metal tray and a small hammer. She struck the tray twelve times in rapid succession and of course everyone struggled to put a grape in their mouth each time getting it off to a good start.

A few minutes later, Irene said that she would like to go to bed, so I helped her up. On our way, we met Rosa, the hotel manager who said that she hoped that we were not leaving already. I said that Irene was tired but that I would be coming back. After helping Irene to bed, I made my way back to the lounge. The first people I saw were a group of eight Spanish people (non-residents), six I knew, four of them really well. One of the men and I had actually been judges for the Miss Presidente Beauty Competition. One of them signalled to me to stay and he called the entertainment officer over and said a few words to her. She then turned to me and said that he told her that he would trust me with his life, so of course I told her that I would trust him with mine. Getting back to the Hogmanay Party, I asked the waiter to take two jugs of sangria with glasses over to their table.

When the waiter-served their drinks, the waiter pointed in my direction and they signalled me to join them and I was introduced to the young couple. The son of one of the couples had married the daughter of the other couple and their ten-year-old daughter was there too. None of the Spaniards spoke English and I only knew a few words of Spanish but the ten-year-old girl spoke beautiful English, so I asked her to stay and translate, but she had better things to do. I had a camcorder and gave it to the Spaniard man, who I knew slightly. He swivelled it from left to right and up and down very quickly and handed it back to me. I rewound it to where he had started and handed it to his wife. She rocked with laughter, tears running down her cheeks and it was passed to each one, including the man who had taken it and everyone laughed. At 1am all the restaurant staff came running in, wishing everyone a Happy New Year and blowing kisses, it is the only time in the year that they are allowed to come into the Lounge. When I told her I was Scottish, she made signs to her husband, as though she was playing the bagpipes, but he didn't understand and she gave up. She then got me up to do the Birdie dance with her. I must have had a few or I wouldn't have done it but it was good fun.

I had a guilty conscience thinking about Irene sobbing her eyes out and made my excuses and left. Needless to say, when I entered our room, I found Irene fast asleep.

## It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas

A short story by ©Homer Lindsay

***'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go.'***

I hate this time of year! Not only is it getting colder and darker but having suffered Guy Fawkes night, which seems these days to last for over a week, ever increasing the stress levels of the dogs and therefore me; we are all bombarded in the media and shops with subliminal and far less subtle marketing messages extolling the virtues of Christmas. Virtues? If only that were true. It is a nothing more than a spendfest dreamt up by commercial interests to part us from our hard-earned cash in the pursuit of profit. I hate Christmas!

***'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, toys in every store.'***

Who have I got to buy toys for? Sophie and Mark, my children, are with their father, Amal; I haven't seen them for five years; ever since he smuggled them out of the country to Saudi Arabia. He'll have alienated them against me; I don't know where they are now. They are eight and six and will probably not remember me.

We'd had an idyllic life until *she* came along. I brought *her* into the house; *she* was employed as an au pair to look after the kids while we worked, he as a financial analyst, me as a recruitment specialist. *Dominique!* I can barely say her name! She was the ideal young lady to look after our children. She was caring, thoughtful and loving; the kids loved her. It was a while before I discovered my husband did also. *The slut!*

***'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, soon the bells will start. And the thing that makes them ring is the carol that you sing, Right within your heart.'***

I hate carols; and my heart was broken when I discovered they had left. It still is. I'd been away for a conference and came back to an empty house. No note. No message. Only empty wardrobes and drawers. It took me several weeks of frantic activity and despairing worry before The Foreign Office told me where they were and who they were with.

"Nothing we can do," they'd said.

***'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, toys in every store. But the prettiest sight to see is the holly that will be. On your own front door.'***

I have no front door and I hate holly! Amal had sold the house from under me and our joint bank account was cleaned out before I even had an inkling of what was going on. I had to move back with my mum, who has been wonderful, but at thirty-four I need to regain my independence. I am struggling to get back on my feet financially. I miss my kids and so does Mum.

I had just about managed to hold on to my job. My employer has been patient and understanding but after I had fallen into a deep depressive state it was touch and go for a while. Fortunately, I am now giving them added value again so my future is as secure as it can be in these difficult economic times.

"Mum, I'm home!" It has been a stimulating day at work and I'm exhausted.

"Hello Dear, Mr Lawrence is here to see you; he's in the lounge. I told him you were at work but would be back soon and he asked if he could wait for you. I hope that is alright, Angela?"

"Of course, Mum." Mr Lawrence is our solicitor and was brilliant at sorting things out at the time. "Hello, Mr Lawrence, sorry to have kept you waiting. Has there been some news?"

"Hello Mrs Nazari," says Mr Lawrence, "I do have news; I thought it better to come and see you about this rather than write. It may be a little delicate."

"Oh! Perhaps you should continue."

"I have been approached by someone who says they know where your children are," replies the solicitor, "but they wish to see you in person to explain."

"Who is this person? Do I know them? If they have news about their whereabouts, I definitely want to meet them," I say with fear and hope in my heart in equal measure.

Mr Lawrence clasps his hands together, "Well, I have to caution you that this may not be what it seems, but this woman was adamant that she has your best interests at heart. She claims to be Madame Lisette Beauchemin."

"Oh, my God, that's Dominique's mother!" I cry, "Is she in this country? I've got to see her. Where is she?"

It appears that she is staying in an hotel in York, just an hour from where we live. What if something has happened to Sophie and Mark? All sorts of scenarios flash through my mind. What if they want to see me? What if I can get them back? My children will not know me. How can I possibly take them back without frightening them? What if this is all wild speculation? I do not know what to do, except I must see this woman, I must take that step. Mr Lawrence will make some enquiries on my behalf and arrange a meeting.

***'..... There's a tree in the Grand Hotel, one in the park as well...'***

I am to meet Madame Beauchemin in the Grand Hotel in York tomorrow morning at 11:00am. What can she have to tell me? Will she have news of the children? Of course, she will. Will it be good news? I cannot settle; I am restless, cannot sleep; I must be sure to wake early enough to get to York in time.

Morning dawns at last and I get showered and ready. I take much more time and care with my hair and makeup than I have done for a long time. I met Lisette once before; she had come over to visit her daughter. I felt a connection with her at the time and liked her. How will I feel when I meet her today?

She is in the drawing room and rises to greet me as I enter. I can see she is also apprehensive. I realise that I have no antagonism towards her; what happened was not her fault. I smile and we embrace, in the customary French style. We talk over coffee.

"Angela, I realise my making contact must have been a shock to you, but I truly regret what happened between my daughter and your husband. It was unforgivable of Dominique and I have told her so many times, alas, all to no avail," she says, "but I am here now to bring you some news. Sophie and Mark are well; they are in Paris! They are with Dominique."

"What! Are you sure? Where? Can I see them?" I cry.

Lisette takes my hand, "Please let me explain. Dominique has come back and taken the children with her. Your husband has taken no interest in Sophie and Mark since they left you and they are strangers to him. They are well cared for but lack the bonding and love of a parent. Dominique has nurtured them and truly loves them, but she realises that they need more. She has left Amal. He thinks she is on a trip home just to spend Christmas with me in Paris; but she is not going to return."

I am stunned! "What does she intend to do?" I ask, "She cannot keep them!"

"She knows that. She wants to help you re-engage and bond with Sophie and Mark; she wants them to come back to their mother."

I realise it will take time to integrate them back into the maternal fold but there is nothing I want more than to have my children back.

“Will you come and stay with us in Paris for Christmas?” asks Lisette, “It will give you an opportunity to see them and perhaps discuss with Dominique a way forward. She loves them dearly but understands how you must feel about her. She only wants what’s best for Sophie and Mark; and they need their mother.”

I hate Dominique, but I quickly realise what she is trying to do; she wants to reunite the children she has been bringing up with me, their mother. I admire Dominique for that. I feel such conflicting emotions. One thing is certain, I want to see my kids; I want them back.

Fortunately, I am on holiday anyway for Christmas and New Year. I will go to Paris.

I am one hour away from Charles de Gaulle airport, the flight is on time, and Lisette is meeting me on arrival. We have discussed at length how to approach my presence to the children. I am terrified this will all go wrong, and they will reject me. I am to be introduced as a friend of Lisette’s, here to enjoy Christmas with them. I have to be strong and take matters at the childrens’ pace, not mine.

Lisette opens the front door; their house is warm and bright. A Christmas song is playing; I recognise it - **‘It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas’** by Perry Como. I used to love that song when I was a child.


“Welcome to my home, Angela,” beams Lisette, “I hope this is going to be the best of all Christmas’s.”

I hear the patter of little feet; I look to the left and Sophie is walking towards us. She pauses, an enquiring look on her face, then a beaming smile, “Mummy!”

© Homer Lindsay

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*This edition was originally to be published on 16<sup>th</sup> December, but a number of other challenges got in my way last week causing a delay to this Newsletter. Although it is now dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December, there were no famous birthdays that would suit these columns on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, so I have retained the ‘Who Said?’ candidate from the 16<sup>th</sup>.*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who Said?</b></p> <p>“ Let's drink to the spirit of gallantry and courage that made a strange Heaven out of unbelievable Hell, and let's drink to the hope that one day this country of ours, which we love so much, will find dignity and greatness and peace again ”</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Well, as you can see, it was <b>Sir Noël Peirce Coward</b> who was born on 16th December 1899.</p> <p>Coward wrote 27 plays, his most famous include "Private Lives" with <a href="#">Laurence Olivier</a> in his first major role, “Blithe Spirit”, “Cavalcade” and “Bitter Sweet”. He wrote for film also, “In Which We Serve” was a WWII epic for which he was awarded an honorary Academy Award and the classic romantic film “Brief Encounter”, directed by <a href="#">David Lean</a>.</p> <p>He died on 26th March 1973.</p>
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**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.**