



The Probus Club of Berwick-upon-Tweed

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

Issue 16 – 24th March 2021

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Dear Member,

Hopefully by now you will have received your second vaccination or are about to be called with an appointment. I am very impressed with how the vaccination programme has been executed in the UK. Wellclose Medical Centre has done a superb job too! I get my 2nd jab tomorrow.

To celebrate some might wish to go for fish and chips for tea or dinner; **Colin Wakeling** provides us with an in-depth article about the UK's favourite take out meal; **Michael Wright** reminisces about a Visit to France and **Alan Dumble** chats with his teddy bear about Staffordshire figures.

I include a copy of the latest newsletter from **Probus Global** (as a separate attachment to my email) and there are a few snippets from the Newsletter of **Porthmadog Probus Group** dated 15th March.

The days are getting longer and we have had a pleasant run of weather so it is to be hoped that we will be able to 'take the air' and enjoy our daily exercise with more enthusiasm; my wife and I and the two yorkies have been taking to the walls in recent weeks; we are so blessed here in Berwick with stunning views and outdoor choices. Can't wait for the coffee shops to reopen.

Enjoy! Homer

Who Said?

"I have always been an honest trader. I come from a school of traders where there was honour in the deal. No contracts, just a handshake and that's it, done. That's the way I prefer to do business but it's not always possible these days, sadly."

Answers on last two pages of the newsletter

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This is for YOU!

This is your chance to share stories or information, so please send articles.

- Holiday storytelling and pictures
- Favourite radio programmes
- Web resource and web links
- Local knowledge
- Humour (clean)
- News about members or ex-members
- Interesting pictures
- Interesting walks
- Poems. Recipe, Gardening, Books?
- Anything!

Deadline for next edition: 12th April

Probus Global

I discovered through George Martin that our details are held on the Probus Global website / database. I had not realised that there was such an organisation nor that they knew about us. I have now personally joined (for free) and I've updated the Club's details – apparently, we have zero members who meet every Wednesday at 10:30am! If anyone is interested in joining, their web address is <https://probusglobal.org/>.

They have regular virtual meetings using Zoom with over 100 clubs participating.

That is something I would love to host for Probus Berwick if there is enough interest. It would follow a similar format to our normal meetings (without teas and coffees, unless you provide your own!) with a presentation or talk given by an invited speaker. I rather think that we would keep them 'in-house' for the first one or two Zoom meetings.

I have included for your interest the latest copy of the Probus Global Newsletter (March 2021) in our edition.

- *Homer*

Lockdown is Taking its Toll!

This morning as my Teddy Bear and I were having our usual chat over morning coffee he raised the question of Sir Tom and his deserved adulation, and glanced around saying that no doubt if Staffordshire figures were still in vogue then one of him would soon appear.

This set us off to wondering what other modern-day figures might have appeared. I was quite taken with his interest as I had only a dozen or so figures on show in the room. The other two hundred approx. of my collection having been boxed up by my wife and confined to the loft. Those on show were just a random selection which included Napoleon, Sankey, Moody, and Shakespeare. In fact, staffordshire figures provide a visual nineteenth century history from everyday figures of working day people to famous and Royalty Figures. What is quite remarkable is that from the great houses of England to the lowliest you, if not now, but certainly in the recent past, would come across figures which seem to bear no relationship to the wealth the owners.

Back to our chat. We now had a debate about who would qualify for a twentieth century collection of figures. This was to prove more difficult than we thought. Perhaps you yourself might find it an interesting task. Naturally Teddy insisted, next to Sir Tom, the most obvious figure was Winnie the Pooh. The debate came to a close when I heard a familiar voice, "Leave that coffee and get those logs brought in at once!" Teddy was left alone no doubt wondering when those days of going 'down to the woods' when all the bears met to have their picnic would arrive again.

© *Alan Dumble*

A Visit to France

© Michael Wright

Before moving to Berwick permanently in 2014 (we've had a house here since 1997 so knew the place quite well), we lived in Sandwich in East Kent for many years. At the time I worked in Canterbury which was about ten miles away. My daily drive to work was through villages and past fields. I even passed two of the growing number of vineyards in Kent and Sussex. They produce high quality white wines to rival that produced in France. Very occasionally I stopped at one of them to purchase a bottle to enjoy with visitors from Scotland. More frequently, I went to France to purchase many bottles at one of the supermarkets in Calais. This article is about one of many such visits.

The ancient town of Sandwich (one of the original Cinque Ports) would make an interesting article in its own right. However, for the moment I will confine myself to observing that, whilst at one time it was beside the sea, the land has encroached on the sea and the land between the town and the sea (about two miles) is called Sandwich Bay and occupied by some very large houses and the three championship golf courses for which Sandwich is famous. One of them is Royal St George's at which the Open Championship is still regularly played. Another is Prince's of which I was a member and honoured to be Captain in 2007. Prince's was the venue for the Open in 1932 but it was requisitioned in the Second World War and the land used for tank training. Fortunately, the course was restored after the War and now comprises 27 holes (in three loops of nine) and a modern clubhouse. From the golf courses it is possible to see the coast of France across the Channel, very clearly when the weather conditions are right.

We lived about eight or nine miles from the port of Dover and twenty miles from the Eurotunnel station near Folkestone. As was the case with many people in East Kent, we therefore regularly visited France to buy wine and such things as French cheeses and pate. We also used to go over (or under) the Channel to have a special lunch since it was much easier and cheaper to go to Calais rather than to London.

Naturally, the continent also became a favourite holiday destination. The ferry crossing only took about 90 minutes (the tunnel took even less time) which, allowing for the time change, meant that one was home less than an hour after boarding the ferry. We preferred the ferry to the tunnel since it felt more like "going abroad". However the tunnel was very useful in winter weather!!!

We visited France (and particularly Calais/Boulogne) many times but I'm going to recall one particular trip. It was a celebration for my 50th birthday in May 1999 and had been arranged by my wife as a surprise for me. At the time, our eldest son lived with his family in Manchester, our daughter in Scotland and our youngest son was at university in Southampton. The older two were therefore some considerable distance from East Kent (Sandwich is 75 miles east of London). Naturally however, we were used to seeing our youngest son regularly so his coming home for the weekend came as no surprise to me. At about three o'clock in the morning, I awoke to the sound of "intruders" in the house. I soon discovered that it was our older children and their families who, at my wife's invitation, had come to celebrate my birthday weekend.

After greeting them and returning to bed for a few hours, we had a delightful day. In a convoy of cars we drove to Dover and boarded the ferry. Once in Calais we went a few miles to the small town of Ardres where, at one of our favourite restaurants, we enjoyed a typically leisurely lunch. After lunch we had a lovely walk (and an ice cream I suspect!!!) along the banks of the lakes which were just outside the town. The very familiarity of the place was part of the reason why the day was so enjoyable. The return drive to Calais and a visit to the supermarket followed by the short ferry ride and drive back to Sandwich were accomplished without incident. The following day we enjoyed a family barbecue on a beautiful early summer day. In summary, it was a lovely family weekend, not least the visit to France.

© *Michael Wright*

Battered not Beaten

© *Colin Wakeling*

A chance conversation with my eldest son had me thinking about an institution which is part of our urban fabric.

As a child I had only limited experience of fish and chips – the latter were a real treat because my mother never maintained a chip pan or deep fried anything. Occasionally I would be sent



out to bring home some cod and chips, to be eaten, of course, from china plates pre-warmed in the oven. There always seemed to be queues at our neighbourhood chippy, partly because of the popularity of its product, but also an apparent lack of co-ordination in its cooking. Whenever I reached the stage of ordering, they were either waiting for a batch of fish or chips, or both, so

another delay before running home with a rapidly cooling parcel. As an adolescent I did manage a surreptitious poke of chips after scout meetings.

At university, college meals sometimes lacked substance or appeal, so recourse was had to 'Sweaty' Betty's for a nutritional supplement or settle a stomach full of beer from the Market Tavern. A girl friend who saw college meals prepared at first hand was partial to the occasional fishcake, so there was an easy way to her heart within a limited budget.

I remember hearing of a group of students, returning to our Chester-le-Street residence at Lumley Castle having an altercation with the Northern General bus conductor who challenged their eating of fish and chips on the bus after a night out in Durham. For the record, bus company conditions of carriage still contain clauses preventing the consumption of hot or strong-smelling food. They were charged with contravening the Company's bylaws and summoned to appear before the local magistrates where they were duly fined. Since the university was regarded as being in loco parentis, it paid the fines and reclaimed them via battels accounts. The Vice-Master interviewed the recalcitrants, who included among their number some prominent members of the University Conservative Association, and

poignantly observed that it was “not really gentlemanly to eat chips out of a paper bag”.

I launched into married life living in West Hartlepool in a mid-terraced house which was snug, cheap and brilliantly convenient for local amenities – a Co-op including an off-licence across the road, and Mrs Lancaster’s chippy on the street corner. Both premises still exist, although with changed ownership. Evenings cosied up on a well-worn second-hand sofa watching television were made all the more enjoyable by forays across the road to the ‘offie’ and the chippy during the ads.

The constituent parts of Britain’s ‘National Dish’ came separately to these shores – deep fried fish with Sephardic Jewish refugees from Portugal, and chips via France or Belgium – and were only paired in the 1860s. Refrigeration, deep sea trawling and a comprehensive railway network brought plentiful supplies to growing urban areas until over-fishing and Icelandic Cod Wars reduced availability of traditional species, so that a ‘fish and six’ became less of a bargain.

As a British institution, the chippy was credited by George Orwell, in ‘The Road to Wigan Pier’, with helping to prevent revolution in the country. The meal was regarded as such an important staple that it was not rationed in either of the two world wars.

Although numbers of outlets have declined from their peak between the two wars, when there was little competition in the hot food take-away market, there are still more chippies

than branches of McDonalds, selling some 300 million portions annually.

Newspaper wrapping which often provided interesting reading and a handy finger-wipe, was banned in the 1970s on hygiene grounds and fears that printing inks contained toxic elements. Polystyrene containers and those annoying plastic forks whose prongs always broke, have given way to more environmentally friendly wrappings, but you can’t beat fingers for sheer taste!

My favourite Norman Cornish painting of the street corner chip wagon – a precursor of ‘street food’ - captures something of the atmosphere of a bygone age. In both the Black Country and Beamish Museums, the popularity of fish and chips is evidenced by the queues that regularly formed outside their restored chippies using traditional coal-fired fryers and beef dripping. There is something atmospheric about these institutions with their roaring fires and sizzling fat.

Some chains, with formulaic output, such as Harry Ramsden’s – now owned by Deep Blue Restaurants Ltd who have now abandoned Harry’s original site at Guiseley and even have an associated company registered as 149 (Barnard Castle) Ltd. - that’s before Dominic Cummings’ visit to the town gave it an infamy of its own - have muscled into the fish and chip world. But, outlets are still preponderately individual, often family, concerns, jealously guarding trade secrets and individuality.

Local custom and tradition were the start of my conversation with the senior member of the junior Wakeling clan – the kind of discussion which has no beginning and no end but which is likely to cause phone bills to escalate and eyes to glaze over. What goes on a fish supper? Could a cultural map of Britain be created based on predominant regional tastes in garnishes?

I prefer salt only whether the meal is to be eaten

on the hoof or at home since anything extra makes the chips soggy. All my children spent their formative years in Edinburgh where 'salt 'n' sauce' is the default option, yet only one of them maintains this tradition – he is



fortunate to live in Falkirk which lies in 'neutral' territory, on the boundary between 'eastern' and 'western' (salt 'n' vinegar) preferences, so chippies maintain stocks of both condiments, with serving staff heeding accents to judge which is likely to be the more appropriate. A similarly fine-tuned ear is required in places like Livingston where shop staff knew to have both on offer because there are 'westies' working in the East and 'easties' working in the West.

Quite when, or why, the Edinburgh preference for sauce originated is shrouded in the mists of time, as is its full geographic reach. With changing demographics, social mobility and increasing commuting the boundaries are bound to become blurred. However, sound commercial sense prevailed in 2012 when the Scottish Cup Final at Hampden was an Edinburgh derby. Chippies on both sides of the National Stadium prepared for the onslaught by laying in stocks of brown sauce – branded as Golden Star and produced since 1901 by a Glasgow concern, Walter Black's. Whether they added the right blend of water or vinegar to create the final garnish is not recorded.

Middle son, born in Essex, and now living in Berkshire prefers curry sauce – incidentally produced in quantity by Maysan, claimed to be the original manufacturers, at a factory in Ponteland, just outside Newcastle. Youngest son, actually resident in Newcastle for some while, and as a brass bandsman with several Miners' Galas under his belt, no stranger to the joys of a carry-out, responded to my straw poll: "Well, I have salt and vinegar (both from home as I'm a posho) and curry sauce (of the chip shop variety). When I'm back 'home' though it has to be salt n sauce when said carry out is purchased as part of a sesh." Home, by the way, is still Edinburgh – you can take the boy out of Edinburgh but not Edinburgh out of the boy! For his wife, from Yorkshire, it's just salt and vinegar, although they "have just discovered that our local does amazing onion rings".

Two of my three granddaughters still live in Edinburgh, the third in West Lothian. She takes salt 'n' sauce with her fish suppers, as does her partner. The youngest is slightly more nuanced in her preferences and shows a welcome degree of discrimination in her tastes: "I do love a fish supper but what I put on it really does depend; if it's a standard Leith greasy chip shop then it's 'salt n sauce' but only ever brown sauce. If it's a posher establishment like Welch's in Newhaven it's salt and vinegar with a squeeze of lemon."

This statement echoes one from Berwick-on-Tweed, just south of the Border: "Depends on the chippy as to the quality obviously. Nothing worse than crap fish and chips. Castlegate Chippy is the best in Berwick, I think, and they do great haddock which is far nicer than cod. I'd have salt and vinegar and mushy peas. I do like curry sauce but on chips only. I'd never have it on fish."

Mushy peas are expected more in the north of England – not any old mushy peas sourced from over-sized catering cans, but, like the batter, produced in time-honoured fashion to unique recipes difficult to reproduce at home. The

availability of mushy peas is now more widespread, even to the Home Counties, with some establishments apparently gentrifying their product as 'pea purée. There is an apocryphal tale that Peter Mandelson, Tony Blair's 'spin' doctor, a 'southerner', was parachuted into Hartlepool to be the town's MP, and was duly taken around for a series of photo shoots which included a call to a local chippy where he espied a green concoction and indicated that he would have a portion of the 'guacamole dip' with his fish supper. Politicians should be warned to avoid staged encounters, not just with children and animals, but with take-away food outwith their comfort zones. Remember Ed Miliband and that bacon butty?

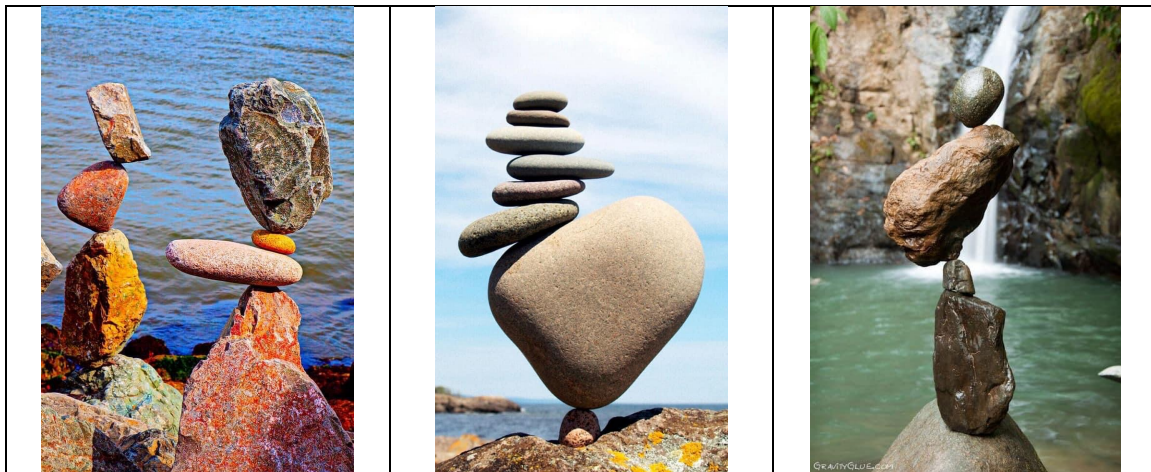
I have come across plenty of 'cod science' in my time but have been unable to source serious academic research into the cultural significance of the preferred accompaniments to the 'Great' British fish and chip over the

past two centuries. Trade surveys and the occasional article, generally promoted by the industry around National Fish and Chip Day (4th June in 2021) are no substitute. There could be a PhD in it somewhere for an enterprising research student, or even for a Chair to be endowed in some seat of higher learning keen to identify an academic niche.

© Colin Wakeling



Editor's Note: What's your favourite take out dish? Let me know; with enough input I'll publish the results.



No blu tac nor cement; finely balanced; works of art demonstrating great patience!

Lawyers! *(courtesy Gwilym Hughes, Porthmadog Probus Group)*

A very successful lawyer parked his brand-new Porsche car in front of his office, ready to show to his colleagues. As he got out, a truck came along, too close to the kerb, and completely tore off the driver's door of the Porsche. The lawyer immediately grabbed his mobile phone, dialled 999, and it wasn't more than 5 minutes before a police officer arrived. Before the officer had a chance to ask any questions, the lawyer started screaming hysterically. His Porsche, which he had just picked up the day before, was now completely ruined and would never be the same no matter how the garage tried to make it new again. After the lawyer finally wound down from his rant, the police officer shook his head in disgust and disbelief. "I can't believe how materialistic you lawyers are," he said. "You are so focused on your possessions that you neglect the most important things in life." "How can you say such a thing?" asked the lawyer. The officer replied. "My God, don't you even realise that your right arm is missing? It got ripped off when the truck hit your car!" "My God!" screamed the lawyer. "WHERE'S MY ROLEX?"

Who Said?

"I have always been an honest trader. I come from a school of traders where there was honour in the deal. No contracts, just a handshake and that's it, done. That's the way I prefer to do business but it's not always possible these days, sadly."

Full Name: Alan Sugar aka Baron Sugar of Clapton, who was born on this day in 1947.

Profession: Computer Entrepreneur



Nationality: British

Why Famous: Came to fame in the home computer battles of the 1980s with his AMSTRAD (Alan Michael Sugar Trading) brand; eventually he bought out his main competitor, Sinclair Research (headed by Sir Clive Sinclair). Now better known for the UK version of The Apprentice TV series and his catchphrase 'You're fired!'.

Born: March 24, 1947

Birthplace: Hackney, London, England

Age: 73 years old

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.