NEWSLETTER

NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

AUGUST 2024

Message from our Chairman

As we continue into the second half of the year, I ask myself where on earth did the last 7 months go?
When I was working there never seemed enough time in the day to get everything done. Now when one has plenty of time, the hours just disappear. It seems that as one gets older time passes much faster than ever I imagined.
Perhaps it's due to the fact that the sort of jobs we now do take longer to achieve?
I used to be able to spend a whole day in the garden, nowadays by early afternoon I'm done! I am pleased to know that I am not alone in this area. It's learning how to pace oneself.
The weather still can't seem to make its mind up whether its summer or autumn.
I still haven't been able to sit out in the garden much, but at least the gods were with us for the garden party. It was touch and go with many areas having rain but it stayed away for what turned out to be a lovely afternoon.
I have always said that social events are the life blood of our club and this year proved to be one of our best.
It was so pleasing so see so many of our new members attending and getting to know each other. It surprised me when talking to each other how much we have in common, sharing our experiences. This is what the club is all about, fellowship.
I look forward to our forthcoming pub lunches when again we get the opportunity to enjoy each other's company with the bonus of good food.

Fraser

Tuesday 13 August 2024

Kelvin Ashby

“ Land speed records
The History of a British obsession“

The land speed record (LSR) or absolute land speed record is the highest speed achieved by a person using a vehicle on land. The first record was set in 1898 by Frenchman Gaston de Chasseloup-Laubat in an Electric car recording a speed of 39.24mph. By 1909 the speed had increased to 125.94mph by Englishman Victor Hemery. By 1997 this increased dramatically to 760.34mph by British driver Andy Green and is the current holder of the record

Tuesday 27 August 2024

John Martin

“Horology revealed”

The term ‘Horology’ refers to the art and science of measuring time and the construction of time measuring instruments including clocks and watches. John last gave this talk during Lockdown when the Club met on ‘Zoom’ and instead of being able to show physical examples, he was limited to showing pictures. On this occasion, he will bring examples of clocks, watches and tools etc to allow members to see at first-hand what he is talking about.”

Our Garden Party

For once the lovely warm summers day that the committee had been praying for actually arrived.
A record number of 56 members and partners were able to enjoy the sunshine on the lawned area behind the Gorsley village hall where tables, chairs and gazebos had been set up.
Jon Gurney supplied and served excellent roast pork and together with quiche and various salads there was plenty of choice on offer. Thanks again to those members & partners who supplied a wide range of desserts which completed the menu.
This year, after the food, we were entertained by Phil Collins and his ukelele group who managed to get everyone singing along. They even persuaded our Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary, to don their hula skirts and dance along to one their Hawaiian songs.
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Thanks to all who attended for making it an extremely enjoyable event with plenty of opportunities for everyone to socialise.

Also, a big thankyou to everyone who supplied prizes for the raffle, which was a great success.

Kelvin

Thanks to Mike Townsend for taking all the wonderful photos which really captured the Garden Party atmosphere

Due to the number of photos taken I have created a supplement to the newsletter which I will distribute separately

On Tuesday 9 July our speaker Robert Toseland gave a most detailed and interesting talk on the Schneider Trophy

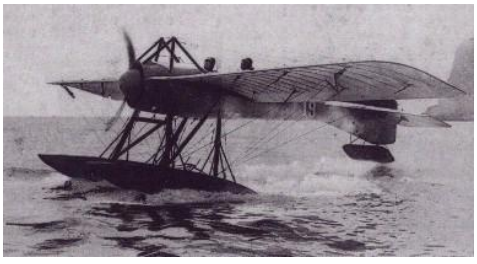
In 1912, Jacques Schneider, a wealthy French balloonist and Aircraft enthusiast announced a competition which would award a prize of £1000 to the winner of a race for seaplanes and flying boats; the winner would also receive a trophy, the Coupe d'Aviation Maritime Jacques Schneider, more usually referred to as the Schneider Trophy. The competition would be held annually and later biennially.

The race was held twelve times between 1913 and 1931 and was intended to encourage technical advances in civil aviation but became a contest for pure speed with laps over a (usually) triangular course, initially 190 miles and later extended to 220 miles. The contests were staged as time trials, with aircraft setting off individually at set intervals, usually 15 minutes apart. The contests were very popular, some of them attracting crowds of over 200,000 spectators.

The rules required that Aircraft taking part had to be seaworthy, having to float for six hours and travel about 550 yards on water. Twice during the flight, they had to land on or "come in contact" with the water. If the floats took on water, the flight had to continue with the added weight. Each competition was to be held in and managed by the country currently holding the trophy. If a country won three consecutive races, as the British finally did, they would retain the trophy permanently and the winning pilot would receive 75,000 French francs for each of the first three wins. The races were supervised by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI) and the aero club in the hosting country. Each club could enter up to three competitors with an equal number of alternatives.

Robert talked us through each event in some detail, noting the various mishaps, accidents and mistakes such as mis-counting the number of laps completed and short-circuiting the course.

The first competition was held on 16 April 1913, at Monaco, consisting of six laps, 190 miles distance in total. It was won by the French at an average speed of 45.71 mph.



The French Deperdussin Hydro monoplane

From 1915 to 1918, the competition was suspended for the duration of World War I. After the war, the competition resumed in 1919 at Bournemouth where in foggy conditions the Italian team won but were later disqualified and the race was voided, as the referees ruled they had incorrectly flown around a marker buoy. Benito Mussolini instructed the Italian aircraft industry to "win the Schneider Trophy at all costs" to demonstrate the effectiveness of his Fascist government. In 1931 the British government withdrew support, but a private donation of £100,000 from the wealthy and ultra-patriotic Lucy, Lady Houston, allowed Supermarine to compete.

When the French, Italian and German teams dropped out, leaving no other competitors, the British team flew the course alone on 13 September and won the coveted Schneider Trophy outright, having beaten the time record from the 1929 competition setting a new world speed record of 380 mph. Reportedly half a million spectators lined the beachfronts. The following days saw the winning Supermarine S.6B further break the world speed record twice, making it the first craft to break the 400 mph barrier on 29 September at an average speed of 407.5 mph.

Supermarine S.6B

Robert Toseland talked us through the details of the various aircraft types and their accompanying engines, carefully drawing the parallels between the aircraft available at the time and the developments necessary to give them an "edge" over the competition which unbeknown at the time would shortly become either enemies or allies in the first and second World Wars. It is important to note the rapid increase in performance and reliability of engines and aeroplanes throughout the series which led directly to improvements in military aircraft in both world wars.

A measure of the extent of this development is seen in the comparison between the aircraft, engines and maximum speeds reached between the start in 1913 and the finish in 1931.

The winning speed in 1913 was 45.71 (75) mph and in 1931, it was 380 (407) mph. The corresponding engine power was 160 HP and 2350 HP respectively. The aircraft can be compared in the relevant pictures.

Particular mention is made of Supermarine's 'S' series of aircraft designed by R J Mitchell who went on to design the famous Supermarine Spitfire, and Rolls-Royce's 'R' Engine which after considerable development and drawing on the experience of their competitors was to become the world leading Rolls Royce Merlin Engine which powered most Spitfires. This engine went on to power most of the successful allied aircraft of WW2, including Hurricane, Mustang and most of the Lancasters, and continued in Civil Aviation for several years afterwards. A non-supercharged version was also used in some non-aviation roles.

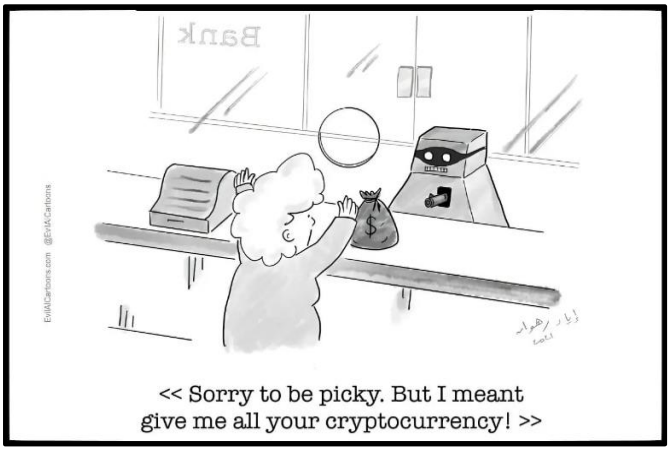
Robert covered some of the technical issues of operating single engine aircraft and the torque reaction associated with a powerful engine driving a large propeller; there is a tendency for the aircraft to rotate in the opposite direction to the propeller and to help counteract this, the "opposite" float would be weighted with ballast or used as a fuel tank. Amongst the amusing anecdotes recounted was the occasion when the Italian team filled this float with Chianti!! This was done to overcome the prohibition laws in the US.

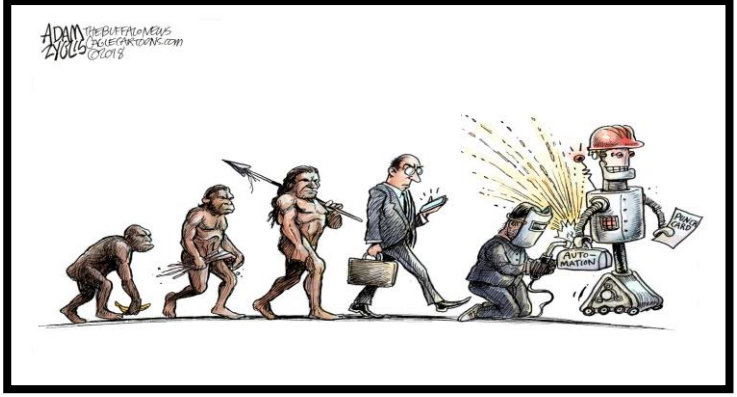
The Italian Macchi seaplane

Robert's talk was well received by all members and their appreciation was shown in the usual way.

John Martin

How we blocked people in the 1980s





FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

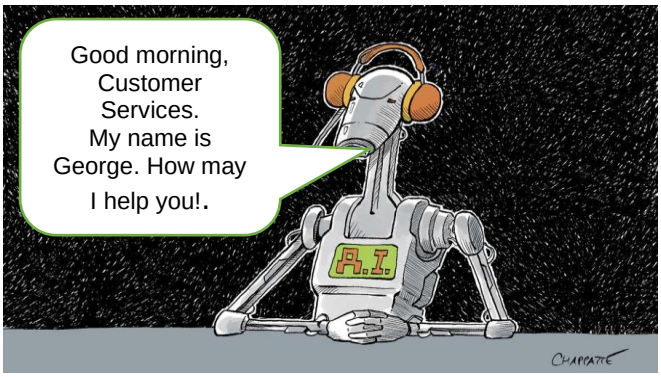
This seems to be "foodie" edition. What with details of our Summer garden party, reported elsewhere, we all could well be putting on the inches but what's wrong with that? Particularly when it is allied to the product of the noble grape.

I thought it an idea to remind everyone, especially our newer members, of our monthly pub lunches which are ably organised by Paul Dodd and his equally able team of "volunteers". Just to recap: Paul, each month, searches out a pub, very often from personal experience, which is often a little bit different. It could well be one of your tried and tested favourites or somewhere of which you have never heard, much less visited. Perhaps, even, it is one of those that " You always intended to visit one day". No matter which; it will always be welcoming and have that delightful bit of elusive quality – character.
There is no great mystique in joining us. Monthly, secretary Kelvin sends out the name and location of the current venue. All you have to do is send your menu choices to Paul and turn up on the day. Apart from enjoying some invariably good food – and drink- it is a chance to get to know your fellow members better and the same goes for our spouses as they too are invited.
Last months was a good example. Over two dozen of us gathered at the home of that most local of drinks, namely Weston's Cider Mill, just over the border at Much Marcle where we enjoyed an eclectic selection of good grub, washed down, in many cases by cider that was made just a few yards from where we were seated. Indeed some of you may have actually visited the Weston's factory and seen the product being made "before your very eyes".

You might even like to organise one yourself? Have a go. Let Paul know if you are interested.

So, keep an eye open for your email box and give the next pub lunch a go. You won't regret it.

There is no lunch in August due the close proximity to the garden party. Next one ***3rd September***



Hidden Dangers of AI

To say that Franz Kafka, a Czech writer's work is gloomy probably qualifies as the understatement of the year if not the century

The characters in his works fail to establish communication with others, they follow a hidden logic that flouts normal everyday logic, and their world erupts in grotesque incidents and violence. Each character is only an anguished voice, vainly questing for information and understanding of the world and for a way to believe in his own identity and purpose.

According to the dictionary, ''Kafkaesque'' means ''**having a nightmarish complex, bizarre, or illogical quality**. '' Also necessary to the term are the aspects of absurd bureaucracy and the character's responsibility for the terrible situation he or she experiences. To get the full effect of his works, they are best read in their native Czech!

What is this to do with a Probus newsletter, you may well ask.? Simple because I too have been caught up in such a world, at time doubting my sanity. It is also a modern day morality tale

It started innocuously enough with cancelling my order for a new TV set plus installation from the Cheltenham branch of Curry's. The refund, for the TV, paid via my credit card arrived promptly enough but, after some weeks, when I tried to contact the store was when my trouble started. Its telephone number was ex-directory so I commenced a dialogue with what is euphemistically called "customer services" which is anything but. Back and fro flowed the emails with each reply yielding either a reply to a question that I had not asked or, worse still, a vague statement that bore little or no resemblance to the subject in hand,

Eventually, the metaphorical penny dropped; Curry's had dispensed with humans and were using AI, aka "bots". Via the internet I then obtained a telephone number of some "helpline" (Ed note; I almost typed that most Freudian of slips - "Hell-line) which, incidentally, was anything but. Many many conversations followed with was sounded like sweet young, but almost unintelligible Eastern European or Asian girls who assured me that, yes, someone would ring me back with the information. Needless to say I am still waiting.

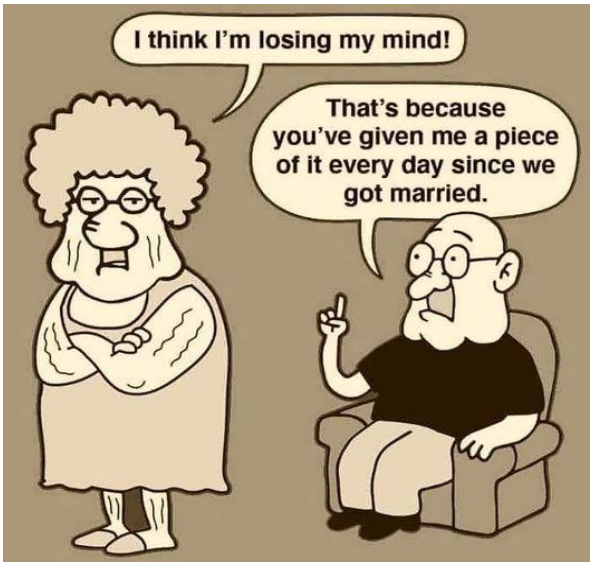
By now, suicide was seeming the least worse option or at least writing off the £50 owing. But no, I invoked the aid of the redoubtable Jill Insley of the Sunday Times travel department. A flash of light and the power of the press! Within 48 hours Jill had replied, saying Curry's would contact me, with fulsome apologies and the refund. And sure enough they did. I also received an additional £50 compensation but I must have already spent that on tranquilisers and calls to The Samaritans help line (staffed by humans please note)

The moral of this sad tale is not the £50 but the grief that can be caused by the maximisation of profits by replacing humans with AI. Where will this end?

Peter Hayes

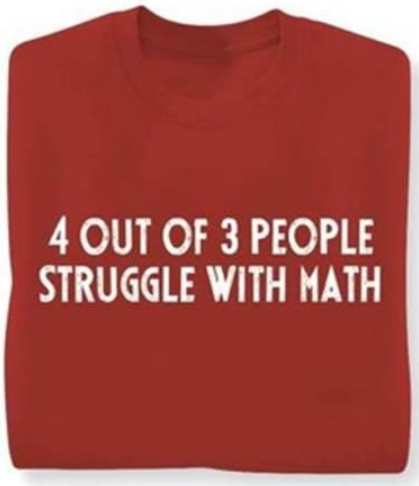
A young blonde landed a job as a Physical Education Teacher with a group of 16 year olds. As she was supervising the students playing football on the playing field, she noticed one boy standing alone at the far end of the field away from the group. Feeling sympathy for the boy, she approached him. “Hi, is everything alright?” she asked kindly. The boy nodded. Sensing his reluctance to join the game, she encouraged him, saying, “You can go and have fun with the others, you know. To her surprise, the boy shook his head. “I think it’s best if I stay here,” he replied. The teacher inquired further, “And why is that,?

The boy looked at her confused and said, **“Because I’m the goalie!”**



My doctor asked if anyone in my family was suffering from mental illness. I said “No, we all seem to enjoy it”

I feel sorry for parents nowadays. They have to explain the Birds & the Bees, the Birds & the Birds. The Birds that used to be Bees. The Bees that used to be Birds. The Bees that look like Bees and the Bees that look like birds but still got a stinger!



Thanks to all those who contributed to the newsletter. I really appreciate your input.