NEWSLETTER

NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

FEBRUARY 2025

Message from our Chairman

February is known for love and romance, and it's also recognized as National Creative Romance Month. As we age, it's important to keep the spark alive in our relationships. Psychologists emphasize that dating isn't just for the young — it's essential at any age to keep the romance flowing. Dating doesn't have to be a chore; it can be fun, relaxing, and exciting for both partners.

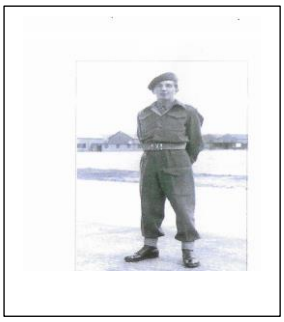
Trying something new and different is one way to bring a fresh dynamic to your relationship. A spontaneous getaway, for example, can reignite the thrill of adventure and give you both some quality time away from everyday life. Make the destination a fun mystery by turning it into a game. It's all about adding an element of surprise and excitement.

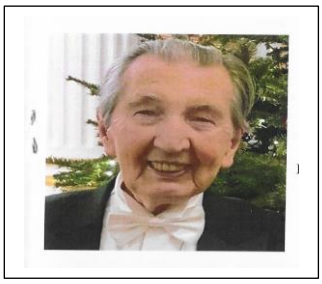
Another romantic idea is a cozy film night. Whether it's at the cinema or at home, share a film that holds special memories for you both or pick a new movie to enjoy together. It's the perfect way to relax and enjoy each other's company in a low-key, intimate setting.

This Month, take a moment to surprise your partner and remind each other of the magic that can still be found in love at any age.

Fraser

OBITUARY





"GEOFF" GEORGE WILLIAM THOMAS
1924-2025

It was with great sadness to hear of Geoff's passing. Our first Centenarian member. All those who met with Geoff would have been very impressed as how articulate and sharp minded he was. Although not in the best of health he demonstrated his ability to communicate when he gave us a potted history of life at 100 last October, standing for nearly an hour.

Geoff was born in Bloomsbury, London in 1924. This was a literary area at that time near Russell Square station. A mixed area of housing, some affluent but many relatively poor, an exciting place for a young boy to grow up. His first memory, was at 4 years old being pushed in a perambulator by his mother in Market Street, Summer Town, where they passed a sweet factory.

He lived in a tenement house with his mother, father and sister (now 102) and an extended family on different floors until he was 12. There was gas lighting in the house and in the streets, with Lamplighters going round daily switching them on and off.

They then moved nearer to Holborn, where he met Queen Mary when she visited the area during King George V's Jubilee. He developed an interest in current affairs at this time, news was spread by newspaper vendors as little radio or TV was available.

Overall, they were good times until war was declared and life would never be the same again.

In August 1939 Geoff went on a Scout camp to Cornwall and when he returned, plans to evacuate children from London had been made. At 14 years he went to Kentish Town station with a small case and gas mask to be evacuated, but he didn't know where he was going. It turned out to be Luton, which was equally likely to be bombed as London with munitions and car factories there. He didn't like Luton and after 6 weeks he went back home to London.

London was completely different as it was on a war footing, no lights anywhere, it was the end of an era. People were tense but calm and morale was good. This was the Phoney War period, and in December the Expeditionary Force left for France.

Schools were closed but Geoff was able to obtain a 5-year apprenticeship with the help of his Scout Master. This was an Environmental Apprenticeship, and he was involved in the design of munitions factories and other similar buildings. He trained as air crew and later joined the army.

Geoff became involved in the redevelopment of London after the war, designing environmental services (gas, electricity, air-conditioning etc) for many different building projects.

He is a member of the Guild of Freemen of London and is a member of the Guild of Fan Makers.

He retired in 1990.

Geoff a deeply spiritual person, was involved in founding the Healing Fellowship, running courses in London and this area.

RIP

PUB LUNCH

TUESDAY 4 FEBRUARY 2025

Farmers Boy

Ross Road, Boxbush, Longhope GL17 0LP

Tuesday 11 February

Speaker: *Peter Petrie*

Thomas Telford

The renowned Civil Engineer famous for the construction of bridges & canals and major infrastructure projects.

Tuesday 25 February 2025

Speaker: *Fraser Gunn*

THE HISTORY OF THE UK AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

The good thing about being old is that we did all the stupid things before the internet !

or

Česká pošta

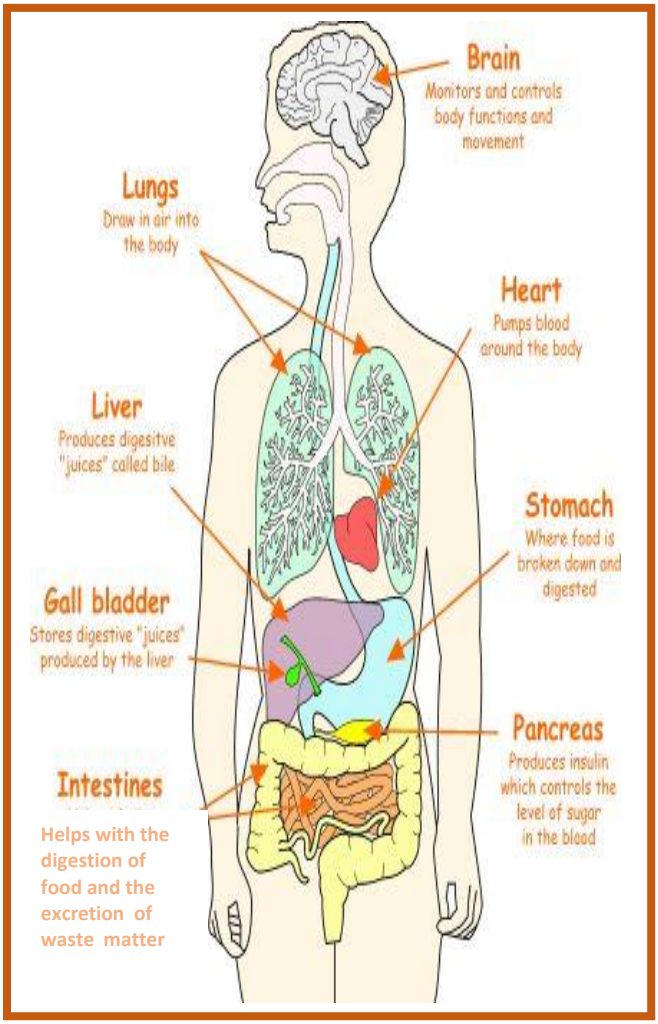
A LAST THOUGHT ON CHRISTMAS

Is it just me or has anyone else received so much unfranked mail this Christmas? Time was, when the odd one slipped though the franking machine but, before delivery, an eagle eyed postie would have got out his heavy standard issue pencil and scored through that pristine stamp.

No more; this year I received over 20 such letters (OK cards then!). All staring up at me from the front door mat in their virgin like innocence. That's around twenty pounds worth these days, a week's wages not so many years ago

Could the postie have been too busy to notice or, more likely, could he just not be bothered to cancel them? Symptomatic of what has happened to the pride that our posties once took in our once proud Royal Mail ? Perhaps a Privatisation too far?

I wonder what its latest owner, a billionaire Czech, will make of it?



DOUBLING UP

Was our Maker absent-minded or just a little careless? I ask because there seems no rhyme nor reason in the way that our internal organs are provided.

For starters, we have two kidneys and the same number of lungs. Half of us have got two testicles. Great. And we have just one liver but that regenerates itself, admittedly over time. But then, for that all important one, the heart, we have only one and that does seem to be susceptible to all manner of wear and tear. Some of us clever clogs, the author excluded, are mocked as having "two brains"

Why, I wonder, didn't He /She finish the job and give us a spare of everything. I am sure that, given a bit of redesign here and there, there would have been room for everything.

And why was it decided that we need two eyes and ears but only one nose although perhaps two nostrils cover as a cut price proboscis. Was it just a sense of heavenly symmetry or, in that famed garden of old, a shortage of bits. I mean, early on, we could surely have swapped an appendix or maybe our tonsils for another heart and most men, I am sure, would die for another spare you know what.

February is a unique month in the calendar, often associated with transitions, both in terms of seasons and personal experiences.
Here are a few thoughts on February:

1. **Winter's Heart**: In the Northern Hemisphere, February represents the middle of winter, with cold weather, shorter days, and sometimes even heavy snowfall. It's a time when people can feel the weight of winter but also look forward to the eventual arrival of spring.
2. **A Short Month**: February stands out for being the shortest month of the year, only 28 or 29 days. This brevity can make it feel like a time of fleeting moments, sometimes leading people to either make the most of it or feel like it passes by in a blur.
3. **Valentine's Day**: February 14th is celebrated in many countries as Valentine's Day, a day dedicated to love and affection. Whether people celebrate it with romantic gestures or appreciate the love in their lives in general, it brings a sense of warmth and connection in an otherwise cold month.
4. **Leap Year**: Every four years, February gains an extra day, adding an interesting twist. Leap years are a reminder of the complexity of timekeeping and the adjustments we make to align our calendars with the Earth's orbit.
5. **Reflection and Renewal**: As February falls early in the year, it provides an opportunity for reflection on New Year's resolutions and goals. It's a month where people can assess their progress and adjust their plans for the months ahead.
6. **Cultural Significance**: In many cultures, February marks the beginning of important celebrations. For example, Chinese New Year often falls between January and February, depending on the lunar calendar. This brings festivals, family gatherings, and rich cultural traditions.
7. **Sense of Anticipation**: With its shorter days and still-chilly air, February can be a time of anticipation for the changes that March will bring. People start to notice subtle signs of spring — like longer daylight or the first flowers appearing — making February feel like a bridge to brighter, warmer days.

Whether it's about enduring winter, celebrating love, or looking forward to what lies ahead, February is a month full of contrasts and opportunities for growth.

An elderly lady went into the doctor's office where she was seen by a new young Irish doctor.
After about a couple of minutes in the examination room, she burst out screaming as she ran down the hall.
Another doctor stopped her and asked what was the problem, she told him her story. After listening, he had her sit down and relax in another room.
He then marched down the hallway to where the Irish doctor was and demanded, "What's the matter with you? Mrs Terry is 68 year old, has four grown up children and seven grandchildren and you told her she was pregnant?"
The young doctor continued to write on his clipboard and without looking up asked, **"Does she still have hiccups?"**

A couple went to breakfast at a cafe where the "Seniors Special" was 2 Eggs, Bacon, Hash Browns and Toast for £3.99.

"Sounds good" the wife said, "but I don't want the eggs."

"Then, I'll have to charge you £4.49 because you're ordering a la carte," the waiter warned her.

"You mean I'd have to pay for not taking the eggs?" the wife asked incredulously.

"YES!" stated the waiter.

"I'll take the special then" the wife said.

"Great. how do you want your eggs?" the waiter asked.

"Raw and in the shell" the wife replied.

She took the two eggs home and baked a cake.

DON'T MESS WITH SENIORS!!!
We've been around the block more than once !

You're not getting old; you're becoming a classic

aunty acid

Why do retirees smile so much? Because they can't hear a word you're saying.

Retirement is wonderful. It's doing nothing without worrying about getting caught.

These are not grey hairs! They are wisdom highlights

I called the incontinence hotline recently. They asked if I could hold?

The UK used to have more electric vehicles than anywhere else in the world:

A fleet delivering local, organic produce on a next-day/subscription model, with payment after delivery, zero single-use plastics, and daily recycling pickups.

TIME

The world hasn't *always* thought about time in the same way. Before the 1800s, different places around the world would keep their own time according to the rising and the setting of the sun.
There was no universal time framework to connect different cities and countries. Scientists at the Greenwich Observatory changed all that in 1884 when they created Greenwich Mean Time the first national standard time framework.

Ok, it would be a push to say that the British invented roads. They've been around for quite a long time! However, road construction as we know it today – that is, a hard stone layer covered in a softer, absorbent surface, was pioneered by Scottish engineer John Macadam during the 18th century. Without his innovations, the world we live in today would look very different indeed.

We hardly have to explain the significance of the world wide web in shaping today's socio-political landscape. The father of today's digital landscape was an English computer scientist named Tim Berners-Lee, who created the first web browser whilst employed at CERN in 1989.
The world wide web should not be confused with the internet, which is the series of networks through which we access the web

Major theorists include Isaac Newton whose laws of motion and illumination of gravity have been seen as a keystone of modern science and Charles Darwin whose theory of evolution by natural selection was fundamental to the development of modern biology

PAUL EVANS
Raconteur

Monologues, Anecdotes & Recitations

When a speaker arrives wearing a garish waistcoat that was last fashionable in the 1970s, a shirt that would clash with any apparel of clothing, a not quite matching cravat and a sports jacket and trousers so immaculately pressed that they could only have come from a top of the range charity shop and all this surmounted by a beard last seen being worn by Doc, one of Walt's seven dwarves, then odds on you are in for something special.

Paul Evans did not disappoint. He treated us to a range of monologues, ad-libs, readings and personal memories that referenced, among others Stanley Holloway, Pam Ayres and Laurie Lee, to name just a few. A born raconteur, he lapsed into our local dialect when reciting the grumpiest farmer imaginable whose whole working life had revolved around several pieces of baler twine and the unorthodox uses to which they were put.

Although nostalgia played a large part in Paul's reperformance, the idiosyncrasies of modern life did not escape his eagle eyed scrutiny; the retaliation of a feisty nonagenarian to the seemingly endless buttons which one must press to navigate modern banking security. Many club members were seen nodding in assent and most felt a sense of solidarity and perhaps wished they too had the courage to take on the internet in this way. Most of us identified with Paul's description of "Just What is a Grandparent" and perhaps adding more than a few thoughts to the way today's youngsters both see us and use us.

Puppy love, school days' crushes and the ways that we, in turn, may have driven our parents to despair if not escape is satire and it would have been a rare child who had not transgressed in a least one of the many ways that Paul instanced.

Paul was given a heartfelt vote of thanks and a burst of applause that threatened to last as long as his talk.

Peter Hayes

At election time a coachload of politicians leaves the road and crashes into a field.
When the emergency services arrive the coach is empty and there's no sign of the passengers.
A farmer is parked nearby with his tractor and the Police asked what became of the politicians.
The farmer leaned out of his tractor and said "I buried them."
The Police officer looked surprised and said " Were they all dead then?"
"Well, he said, some of them said they were alive but you can't believe anything a politician says can you?"

Coventry, Alvis and the Iron Lung.

Captain GT Smith-Clarke

On 28th January Dr Adrian Padfield, a retired Consultant Anaesthetist from Cheltenham gave a talk on the work of George Thomas Smith-Clark, who he strongly believes is a sadly overlooked engineer responsible for a great many developments in the field of aircraft and automobile engines, as well as a number of items of medical equipment. He has fostered an interest in this gentleman for 60 years, and considers him a “forgotten hero”.

Born in Bewdley in 1884, his father was a brass-finisher and his mother’s family were brass founders. In 1897 when his father died, his mother generated income by working as an assurance agent and George worked as a chemist’s messenger. Dr Padfield suggests that this may have been his first introduction to medicine, which was to become a passion in later life.

In 1901 he began work with the Great Western Railway (GWR) in Swindon, where he showed an aptitude for mechanical and electrical engineering and was transferred in 1905 to the road transport department in Slough where he worked on magnetos, while also taking City & Guilds evening classes in engineering. He had found his calling, and in 1910 won several awards for his work as well as a prize from ‘Commercial Motor’ in 1911 for the best mechanical suggestions in the previous year.

However, in 1911 he suffered an accident at work, possibly a boiler explosion, and suffered severe facial injuries. His time in hospital following this accident meant that he was unable to take his City and Guilds exam. He often disguised the facial injuries with a moustache but suffered from severe headaches for most of his life. That same year his mother became a certified midwife, again possibly adding to his general interest in medicine.

In 1915 he married Mary, the daughter of a blacksmith in Aldbourne near Swindon. It is thought that they may have met during his stay in hospital.

In the First World War he was rejected for active service on health grounds and instead went to work at the Royal Aircraft Factory in Coventry, where he began work as the assistant inspector of aircraft engines. He was given the rank of Honorary Lieutenant and later promoted to Honorary Captain.

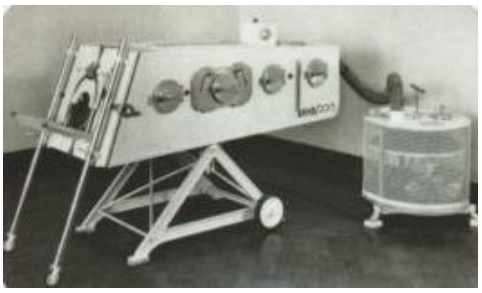
After the war from 1918 to 1922 he worked as the assistant works manager for Daimler, before being appointed chief engineer at Alvis in 1923.

ALVIS

Alvis had been formed in 1920 to build motor cars, but when Smith-Clarke joined them he was unimpressed with the designs and quality of manufacturing. He upgraded the original 10/30 model to the 12/50 incorporating many of his design innovations. This car won the 200 mile race a Brooklands. He continued to develop his designs, switching to front-wheel-drive in 1925 and then, in 1928, the Alvis won its class at Le Mans. In the 1930's the Alvis 6-cylinder models competed with the best.

Dr Padfield told us that during this period Smith-Clarke enjoyed a wide range of interests including having an amateur radio licence and building his own astronomical telescope. However he continued to suffer from the severe headaches and it is said that he believed at one stage he was going mad.

In 1935 he was attached to Coventry and Warwick hospital and in 1942 became Chairman of the hospital board of management. During World War Two, Alvis switched to the manufacture of military vehicles and Smith-Clarke was responsible for a number of 'shadow' factories that worked on aero-engines.



An outbreak of Polio in Australia drew Smith-Clarke's attention to the design of the 'Iron Lung' being used at that time, which was a very cumbersome wooden contraption. Metal versions were built in the United States, but these too were cumbersome and extremely heavy to move.
With sponsorship from Lord Nuffield, Smith-Clarke formed Cape engineering and began making the Nuffield Iron Lung in Cowley. He made it much more mobile, with several side-access ports to enable access to the patient. Later versions included a lifting lid, nicknamed 'the alligator', but properly known as the Coventry Respirator.
Smith-Clarke had resigned from Alvis in 1950, but he continued his work in developing and modifying medical equipment, as well as indulging in his main hobbies of astronomy and amateur radio.
In 1956 he was awarded the James Clayton prize by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, recognising contributions to engineering science.
He died in February 1960 and Dr Padfield believes that his work was finally due to be recognised later that year in the Queen's birthday honours.

Graham Mawdsley

THE ROAD TO HELL

Like many, if not most people, I have an annual flirtation with mending my ways, curing my many faults, eating healthily and leading a more virtuous life; this year was no exception. The First of January found me full of zeal, undeterred by 90 previous failed attempts (yes I was inordinately precocious), determined that, "yes" this year would be different.
Alas, by the Third, I had succumbed to sloth, gluttony and was contemplating a choice of the remaining five deadly ones plus a few more hitherto untried ones. However, before the twin joys of daytime TV and the last remaining tin of Quality Street were sampled, I did at least make a start on what, over the years. has become one of my favourite resolutions, beating procrastination by a narrow head, namely to Declutter.
A long departed boss once held the theory that "*working surfaces attracted litter and therefore, by removing much office furniture, a tidy office would prevail"* Alas, his theory did not reckon with the likes of me and chaos usually reigned but that is another more gruesome story. Come January 2nd, I contemplated the many drawers, alcoves, ledges etc. at home and delved into their murky depths, worrying what I might discover. Indecipherable notes on grubby scraps of papers, assorted book marks , even a half-eaten bacon sandwich (sacrilege to waste such gastronomic treat) of indeterminate age all saw the light of day. However pride of place went to a fine collection of no less than seven mobile phones, of varying vintages.
How technology has changed in the relatively short time since their invention. Inevitably, just, for example, just like cars and TV sets, they have grown. Some of my cache could be lost in a closed fist while screens are barely readable. None possesses cameras while I can barely work out how to switch them on. And what is their fate ? Even a charity shop does not want them but, thankfully, the local council accepts them for recycling. Just place them in a bag and leave then on top of your black bin at the next collection.
Now, how about those others things that I hoard in the belief that " *They will come in useful one day?*

Peter Hayes

Where am I ?

Thanks to all those who submitted articles and assisted with production.
Ed

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