NEWSLETTER

NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB

MARCH 2025

Message from our Chairman

As the bridge from winter to spring, March carries strong symbolism: new growth and transformation. It's the time when animals awake from hibernation and when people around the world partake in spring celebrations along with spring cleaning rituals to make their homes feel new.
It also heralds the start of a new astrological year, transitioning from Pisces season to Aries season.
The flower is the Daffodil – which represents forgiveness, trust, honesty and true love. The flower looks like a trumpet -signalling spring's arrival.
Ever hear the term "madder than a March hare?"
The coined term references rabbits going bonkers around this time of year. It's a signal that spring is on its way and the cold grips of winter are behind us. The days are longer, the birds are singing louder and louder as they search each other out. The earth pulls at us all to stir and move. We feel the need to plan and prepare, and set goals. (Fresh mulch, new lawns, landscaping, patios, retaining walls, or new garden?)
Let's hope our club flourishes as well? The social side seems to be on the increase. Members attending our Pub Lunches have reached a wonderful 30. Thanks to Paul for his sterling work. Our Skittles evenings continue to be an enjoyable fun event.(thanks John) Even our club meetings are on the increase. This all bodes well for the future.
I have visited several Probus Clubs with 60+ membership, but I got the impression that they are not such a cohesive group as we are. Our present membership is good but we are endeavouring to increase it.

Fraser

PUB LUNCH

TUESDAY 5TH MARCH
12.30 – 13.00

The Hunter's Inn, Longdon

Tewkesbury GL20 6AR

(What Three Words reference: bespoke. launch. afraid)

Probus has not been to this venue before, but it's easily accessed from the Newent area, has flat access, a private area and a spectacular **Banoffee** pie.
It is not as far as it sounds: about two miles beyond the Corse Lawn Hotel on the road towards Upton on Severn. The staff are welcoming in the extreme.
Try to arrive close to 12.30.

TUESDAY 11 MARCH

Speaker: *Howard Robinson*

"Hoaxes in Science"


The Spaghetti Harvest

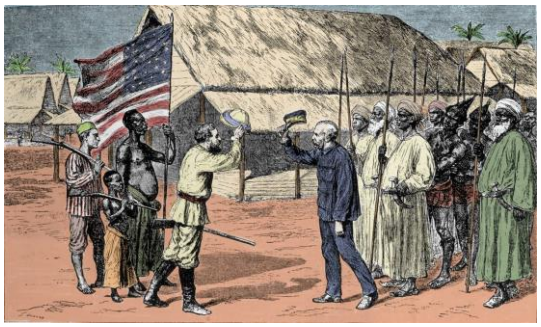

Fairies in the Garden


Nessie

Pranks are generally limited to benign things like dumb Facebook status changes or stunts involving shaving cream. But there are some enterprising individuals that try to get one over on science, with varying degrees of temporary success.

TUESDAY 25 MARCH

Speaker: *John Roberts*



Sir Henry Moreton Stanley I presume

Sir Henry Morton Stanley GCB was a Welsh-American explorer, journalist, soldier, colonial administrator, author, and politician famous for his exploration of Central Africa and search for missionary and explorer David Livingstone.

Why English is so hard to learn

YOU think English is easy? Check out the following.

1. The bandage was wound around the wound.

2. The farm was cultivated to produce produce.

3. The dump was so full that the workers had to refuse more refuse.

4. We must polish the Polish furniture shown at the store.

5. He could lead if he would get the lead out.

6. The soldier decided to desert his tasty dessert in the desert.

7. Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present to his girlfriend.

8.A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.

9. When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.

10. I did not object to the object which he showed me.

11. The insurance was invalid for the invalid in his hospital bed.

12. There was a row among the oarsmen about who would row.

13. They were too close to the door to close it.

14. The buck does funny things when the does (females) are present.

15. A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.

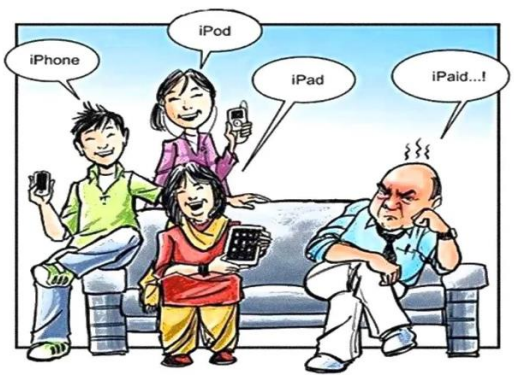
16. To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.

17. The wind was too strong to wind the sail around the mast.

18. Upon seeing the tear in her painting she shed a tear.

19. I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.

20. How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?



I'm Fine Thank You

There is nothing the matter with me
I'm healthy as I can be
I have arthritis in both my knees
And when I talk I talk with a wheeze.
My pulse is weak and my blood is thin,
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

Sleep is denied me night after night
But every morning I find I'm alright.
My memory is failing, my heads in a spin.
But I'm awfully well for the shape I'm in.

How do I know that my youth is all spent?
Well my "Get up and go" has got up and went.
But I really don't mind when I think when I grin,
Of all the great places my "Get up has been".

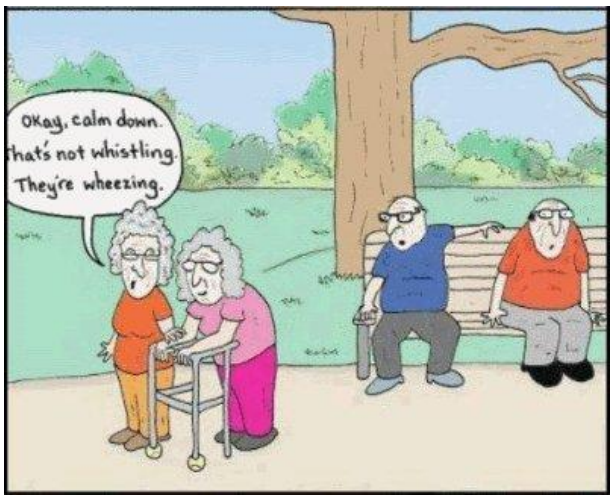
"Old age is golden", I've heard it said,
But sometimes I wonder as I get into bed,
With my ears in the drawer, my teeth in a cup,
My eyes on the table until I wake up.
"Ere sleep overtakes me, I say to myself,
"Is there anything else I could leave on the shelf?.

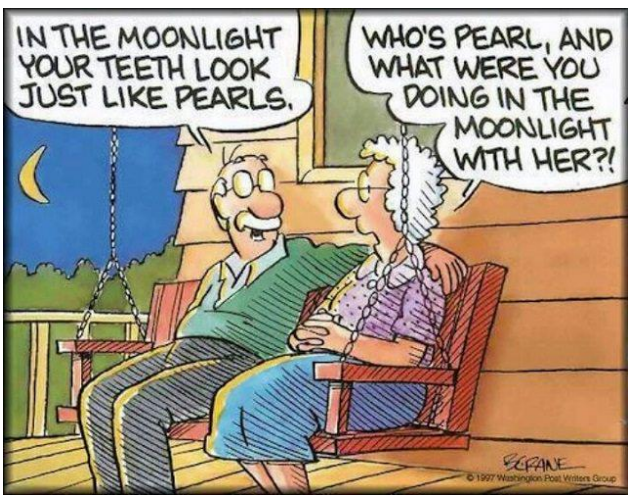
When I was young my slippers were red,
I could kick my heels over my head.
When I was older my slippers were blue,
But still I could dance the whole night through.
Now I am old my slippers are black,
I walk to the store and puff my way back.

I get up each day and dust off my wits,
And pick up the paper and read the "Obits".
If my name is still missing, I know I'm not dead
So I have a good breakfast and face what's ahead.

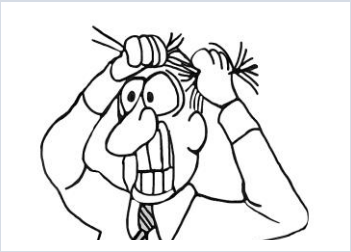
A senior's version of Facebook

For those of a generation who do not and cannot, comprehend why Facebook exists. I am trying to make friends outside of Facebooks whilst applying the same principles. Therefore, every day I walk down the road and tell passers-by what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment, what I have done the night before, what I will do later and with whom. I give them pictures of my family, my dog and me gardening, taking things apart in the garage, watering the lawn, standing in front of Landmarks, driving around the town, having lunch and doing what anybody and everybody does every day. I also listen to conversations, give them "thumbs up" and tell them I "like" them. And it works just like Facebook. I already have 4 people following me: 2 Police Officers, a Private Investigator and a Psychiatrist.





Remarks that, when heard, make me contemplate self – harm



"I had the most amazing dream last night"

"My little granddaughter says the funniest things"

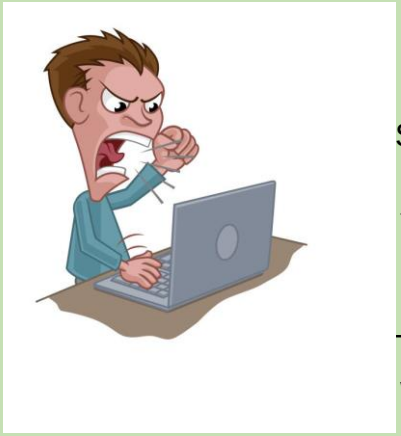
"My dog/cat is almost human"

(From any government department) ***" Is there anything that I can help you with?"***

(On any package or tin) ***"Follow the easy to open instructions"****

(For any new electrical appliance) ***" To operate, Go to our website for our easy to follow instructions"***

On any letter from the NHS - ***"URGENT OPEN IMMEDIATELY"*** ***PH***



WHERE, OR MORE PROPERLY, WHY, DID IT GO?

Somewhat belatedly I admit, I have just realised that the Pound sign is missing from my keyboard! Having enlisted the aid of my resident computer boffin, AKA my 14 year old grandson. I have reluctantly come to the conclusion, like a parrot of yore, it has ceased to be!
That started all manner of trains of thought until my brain was a veritable Clapham Junction and awash with conspiracy theories left right and centre.
Looking closer, I see that naturally I have a Dollar sign, plus what seems to be ones for a Yen and a Rouble. Talk about the once mighty Sterling! Does this reflect our reduced standing in the world. I wondered? What would Kipling have made of it with his tales of Empire and Derring Do, forever linked to the Majestic Imperial Pound.
At this distance of time, this may well be apocryphal, but I am convinced that when I was doing a stint in the Post Room during my National Service, to affix a stamp to an envelope with the Kings Head (*That dates you. Ed*) upside down was a chargeable offence. "Good Lordy", what would omitting a keyboard Pound sign entail?
At the very least, hanging and quartering at dawn.

Now "Where's that grandson when I need him?"

PH "Frustrated Nonagenarian of Newent"

Thomas Telford
"The man who built Britain"

At our meeting on Tuesday 11 February our guest speaker Peter Petrie presented a fascinating account of the Civil Engineer Thomas Telford
Peter commenced his talk by commenting that Thomas Telford is today unknown by many people despite being the Engineer and Architect of many important Buildings, Canals and Roads. Of note, were his masterpieces, Menai Suspension Bridge which was the longest suspension bridge in the world when it first opened in 1826 and the Pontcysyllte Viaduct completed in 1805. It is the longest aqueduct in Great Britain, and is the highest canal aqueduct in the world.

Menai Suspension Bridge

Pontcysyllte Viaduct

Thomas Telford was born in 1757 in the small rural hamlet of Westerkirk in Scotland. His shepherd father died shortly after his birth and his mother was so poor that she was unable to bring him up, so he was brought up by other family members. By his death in 1834, at the start of the railway age, he was a wealthy man and the first Engineer to be honoured with a burial in Westminster Abbey.
Thomas left school at 14 and was apprenticed to a local stone mason, which experience was to serve him well during his later career. At school he came to the notice of William Pultney, the architect of the famous bridge that bears his name in Bath

. Pultney Bridge at Bath

Thomas' friendship with William led Thomas to various work sites, including the rebuilding of Somerset House in London. At this time William became Thomas' mentor and this led him to Portsmouth where he worked on many buildings including the naval Dockyard.
Pultney later became the MP for Shrewsbury and introduced him to many work sites within Shropshire. Telford's work included Montfort Bridge on the route to Wales and also the world's first Iron Bridge constructed in the Severn Gorge at Buildwas which is now known World-wide.
Pultney encouraged the young Telford to get involved in the construction of Canals in the later years of the 18th Century, including the Ellesmere Canal which incorporated the longest viaduct in the UK and the well-known Pontcysyllte Viaduct across the River Dee between Wrexham and Llangollen, when it opened in 1805.

At the same time, Telford became the Engineer for roads in Wales and Scotland, and also the 60 mile long Caledonian Canal through the Great Glen, from the west coast of Scotland to Loch Ness and onto Inverness where it entered the North Sea. Although this canal served its purpose of avoiding a long journey around the stormy north coast of Scotland it took so long to build, 18 years instead of the projected 7 years, that the ships it was designed to carry had been developed into larger sizes and the canal needed to be enlarged and partly rebuilt after his death. It was not a commercial success but was undoubtedly a huge engineering feat which has stood the test of time and is still in use today.

Caledonian Canal

Telford's roads included the A5 to Holyhead passing through the Welsh mountains which required many bridges including one at Betws-y-Coed opened in1815 and subsequently known as Waterloo Bridge in recognition of the battle of that name which occurred during the same year.

This led to the construction of the Menai Straights suspension bridge, a similar bridge at Conwy opened at the same time as the Menai Bridge, thus allowing, together with a short road excavated along the base of the cliff-faces between Conwy and Aber to the west, an all-weather road access to Holyhead and the Irish Ferries.

During his work, among many other projects, Telford was involved with local works in Gloucestershire, including the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal and many bridges over the River Severn, including those at Over, which originally was to be an Iron bridge but the elders of Gloucester wanted a "Proper bridge built of stone" and the Mythe bridge near Tewkesbury.

Over Bridge

Mythe Bridge

Peter spoke of many other projects carried out by Telford and noted that his work in Shropshire is today commemorated in the name of the new town, Telford, built in recent years. A fine memorial to a man who many would claim to be the Architect of transport in the UK that made the industrial revolution possible before the coming of the railways.

David Clowes

STORIES FULL OF MEANING

FAITH

The story about the boy with the umbrella, shows the power of faith in action. Faith is not just belief; it is belief with preparation. It is stepping forward with confidence, even when the skies are clear, trusting that your actions align with a greater force at work. Faith, after all, is not about seeing the outcome; it is about believing in it wholeheartedly.

TRUST

Babies laughing when thrown in the air speaks to the innocence and purity of trust. Trust is the foundation of every meaningful relationship. It is knowing, without hesitation, that someone will be there to catch you when you fall. In a world that often feels uncertain, trust is a sanctuary, a bond that gives us the courage to leap into the unknown.

HOPE

Setting alarms despite no guarantee of tomorrow is a testament to hope. Hope is what keeps us going. It is the quiet yet powerful belief that there is something worth waking up for, something waiting to be discovered. Hope is the bridge between despair and possibility, a light that shines even in the darkest hours.

CONFIDENCE

The audacity of confidence. To plan for a future that is not guaranteed is an act of bravery. Confidence is not arrogance; it is a quiet assurance that we have what it takes to face whatever comes our way. It is the belief that, no matter how uncertain life may seem, we can find a way to thrive. Choosing love in a world filled with suffering is perhaps the most profound act of all. Love is not blind to pain; it is a defiance of it. It is the decision to create beauty in the face of hardship, to nurture life even when the world feels fragile. Love is the thread that weaves meaning into existence, the force that binds us to one another.

Man's attitude reminds us of the gift of perspective. Life is as sweet or as bitter as we choose to see it. Age is just a number; the spirit remains ageless. A positive attitude transforms challenges into opportunities and allows us to savor every moment with gratitude. These stories are more than anecdotes; they are life lessons wrapped in simplicity. They invite us to live with faith, trust, hope, confidence, love, and a bright attitude. And as the past beautifully concludes, good friends are indeed the rare jewels of life. They remind us that we are never alone, even in the vast complexity of existence. Treasure them, for they add richness to the journey and make life's stories worth sharing.

Anon

A PERFECT STORM

There is an excellent novel of that name plus an equally good film of the same title, which deals with a once in a century storm at sea with waves 10 storeys high, hurricane force winds and the crew of a small fishing boat who were unfortunate enough to be caught in it.
I know the feeling, having been trapped in an equally terrifying experience, not this time by Mother Nature but an equally frightening and implacable foe – Microsoft. It all started when I was directed by my Smart TV (which is really a misnomer in that it should be Stupid TV) to visit a website in order to register for some catch up-app or other. No sooner had I done this when a large red blob covered a large part of my computer screen. All efforts to remove it failed and all this did was to accentuate the demands for several hundred pounds to remove it
No matter, there is always my trusty tablet. On opening it, my keen eyes revealed that there was something wrong... After a fruitless hour or so of staring, I realised what was missing- only the virtual keyboard. Don't you just love it when you go to Google for advice and, after being told, for example, to go to Option C, to discover that there are only Options A and B. The keyboard continued to play hide and seek.
How about your phone, do I hear you ask? This one is a newcomer to my stable as my granddaughter, having decided that her two year old one was hopelessly outdated and being embarrassed by the sight of my ancient one, donated it to me. Off to Tesco to switch the Sim card over, only to discover that the otherwise helpful assistant had forgotten to switch off the "roaming" function with the result that my 10 pound credit was exhausted. There followed a painful hour-long conversation with a no doubt charming, if only I could have understood her, Filipina. She could not grasp the fact that the 10 pounds was several months old. In vain I told her that 10 pounds to me is virtually years spend. In the end, she capitulated, from sheer exhaustion I believe and restored my cash.
A happy ending? Yes. And the moral is always cultivate a friendship with a 14 year old and keep him supplied with sweets. He or she will sort it out for you and when he returns your equipment, you will find it works better than new. Just don't ask him how he did it.

PH an Exhausted senior

A little boy goes to his father and asks, "Daddy, how was I born?"
The father answers,
"Well, son, I guess one day you will need to find out anyway! Your mom and I first got together in a chat room on Yahoo. Then I set up a date via e-mail with your mom and we met at a cyber-cafe. We sneaked into a secluded room, and googled each other. There your mother agreed to a download from my hard drive. As soon as I was ready to upload, we discovered that neither one of us had used a firewall, and since it was too late to hit the delete button, nine months later a little Pop-Up appeared that said: 'You've got male!'"

History of the Air Ambulance Service - presented by Fraser Gunn

Having had personal experience of liaising with Air Ambulances during his time in the Fire Service, and following a presentation to Newent Probus in 2024 by a representative from Midlands Air Ambulance, Fraser did further research into this fascinating subject and this presentation is the result of his efforts.

The starting point was, surprisingly, in 1886 when Jules Verne wrote a book entitled Robur the Conqueror (also known as The Clipper of the Clouds), in which he imagined a heavier than air machine (in this case a ship) being able to fly with passengers. This was a time when aviation and the exploration of the skies were topics of great interest and scientific advancement and there were conflicts between different views on the use of aircraft.

Following the successful flight of the Wright Brothers in December 1903, aircraft development moved forward quickly and during WW1 aircraft were being used by the warring armies in a variety of roles. There is some evidence that casualties were removed from near to the battlefield by aircraft. This was very much on an ad-hoc basis as the aircraft were not designed for the purpose. There is further evidence that in the Ottoman War in 1917 a casualty was evacuated and taken to a hospital by plane in about 45 minutes, rather than a land journey over poor terrain that would have taken several hours.

In 1920, during the Anglo Somalian war, Winston Churchill created a special force (Code name Zed) with a fleet of 12 DH9 biplanes to bring in supplies by air. At the same time a dedicated RAF medical unit was formed and the aircraft were also used to evacuate troops for treatment, with around 100 evacuations taking place. The aircraft were still not specifically designed to carry casualties but were modified to allow a stretcher to be loaded through a hatch into the aircraft fuselage.

Australia had a particular need to provide medical care to remote areas of the country. The Rev. John Flynn, a Presbyterian minister, established a number of bush hospitals and by 1917 was considering the possibility of new technology, such as radio and aircraft, to assist in providing a more useful acute medical service. He received a letter from an Australian pilot serving in World War I, Clifford Peel, who had heard of Flynn's speculations and outlined the capabilities and costs of then-available planes. This eventually led to the creation of the Flying Doctor Service (Royal was added later) in 1928, to fly doctors out to patients. The service is still in existence and provides emergency and primary health care services for those living in rural, remote and regional areas of Australia who cannot access a hospital or general practice due to the vast distances of the Outback. The use of aircraft for medical purposes grew rapidly in the 1930’s with the first UK mercy flight taking place between the Isle of Islay and Glasgow. In 1934 a remarkable French lady, Marie Marvingt, created the first civil air ambulance service in Morocco. The Spanish Civil War saw the use of German JU52’s used to evacuate wounded troops back to Germany and in the UK a night time air ambulance service in Scotland used car headlights to mark out landing strips. WW2 saw larger aircraft being used to evacuate troops from war zones to hospitals, with over a million casualties being transported. Evacuation was not without its risks and aircraft were lost for a variety of reasons resulting in several hundred fatalities. For the first time some of the larger aircraft carried doctors and nurses.

Towards the end of WW2 helicopters were starting to make an appearance and, due to the terrain in Burma, Sikorsky helicopters were used to recover shot down aircrew.

Helicopter use for the evacuation of troops grew from the mid-forties to 1975 with conflicts in French Indo China, Korea, Malaya and Vietnam and continue to the present day with ever larger aircraft such a Blackhawks, Chinooks and Pumas.
Lessons learned in conflicts began to be transferred internationally to civilian use. In the USA, increased traffic volumes led to a large increase in traffic accidents. To speed up the evacuation of casualties, MEDICARE was created along with the concept of **"the Golden Hour"** whereby it became recognised that a patient had a better chance of survival if their condition could be stabilised within an hour, by providing rapid trauma treatment.
In Germany, the first civilian air ambulance in Europe was created in Munich by the German General Automobile Club (ADAC). As of 2020 it had 51 helicopters in operation nationally. In Canada in 1985 the Calgary air ambulance, known as STARS, was created. It was recognised as an essential service when it was integrated into the emergency plan for the 1988 Calgary winter Olympics. Since 1990, Mont Blanc Helicopters has been providing helicopter rescue services on the ski resorts in France and Switzerland and Grand Massif.
The first air ambulance service in the UK was founded in 1987 in Cornwall by Geoff Newman, a former Navy helicopter pilot. Initial NHS funding for the service was discontinued after a short time following a report that compared the cost of a helicopter service to road ambulances. At that point the service became a charity and all future Air Ambulance services were created as charities, except in Scotland where the Scottish Air Ambulance Service, which has a mixture of rotary and fixed wing aircraft, is publicly funded. There is also an Air Ambulance Charity operating as well. In 1989 the London Air Ambulance service was created with Dr Gareth Davies, who is known personally by Fraser, as Medical Director. A key consideration for the type of helicopter purchased was that it required a smaller main rotor span to allow it to more easily access landing zones in built up areas.
There are currently 21 civilian Air Ambulance charities, covering all areas of the UK, using a variety of aircraft and with different colour schemes. Medical staff are fully qualified seconded from the NHS. Pilots often have a military background. There are no geographical borders for the individual services. For example, Midlands (one of the largest) and Great Western (founded in 2019 and smaller but responding to an increasing number of callouts) can cover some of each other areas based upon demand. Some services have night-time operations but most don't. The services provide Medicars which are fully equipped vehicles, often 4x4, with a doctor in the vehicle. This higher level of service compliments the ambulance service which only carries paramedics.
Air Sea rescue used to be provided by the military, which was also used for civilian medical emergencies, this was privatised in 2013 and subsequently became operated by HM Coastguard to cover the whole of the UK. It still carries out medical emergencies when required. The contract for operating the helicopters was awarded to Bristow helicopters in a £1.6bn, 10 year contract. The service operates to an extremely high standard and the Bristow contract was subsequently renewed.
UK Air Ambulance services have carried out around 330,350 missions since 1987. There have been 18 accidents, 4 of which involved fatalities, a highly impressive safety record!
As for the future, tests are being carried out using unmanned aerial vehicles (drones). The Coastguard has been using drones on missions over the sea which might be out of range of a land-based helicopter. They can transmit images of the situation where assistance is required to allow decisions to be made about the type of rescue effort required.
It may be possible to fit the drones with equipment that could be dropped to temporarily help someone in need, before other services arrive.
Israel is currently testing a "Cormorant" drone that might replace a piloted helicopter for short-distance evacuation flights. Very much a case of "watch this space".

This was another of Fraser's talks that was packed full of excellent research and detail and of great interest to the members present. Well done Fraser!

Chris Yates

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