

# NEWENT AND DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



# NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026

I

## FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

My thanks go to everybody for making our Christmas lunch such a success. The feedback has been very favourable with everybody enjoying themselves.

The only complaint I have received is from a member who said his legs were sore after rising for all the toasts!

As we start 2026, I imagine that most of us will be making New Year resolutions which we hope we will keep, although I seldom do.

My plan for the next few months is to work with the committee on a programme that will keep you all entertained and enthused, so it is a good job that Probud does not encourage political debate.

We have passed the shortest day, so perhaps we can start thinking about the spring. We already have the bulbs in the garden showing through despite the wet weather.

My thanks again to the members of the committee for their support and for members who have helped organise the very successful pub lunches with the next one being a return visit to the Red Lion.

My very best wishes go to all members and partners for a very happy and prosperous 2026

*Mike*

## *PUB LUNCH*



**THE RED LION**

**TUESDAY 6 JANUARY**

**WINTERS CROSS,  
PETERSTOW,  
ROSS-ON-WYE  
HR9 6LH**



**TUESDAY 13 JANUARY**

**SPEAKER: RICHARD JEYNES**

**THE FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION PAST AND PRESENT**

The French Foreign Legion is an elite military corps of the French Army that allows foreign nationals to enlist in French service, originally created in 1831. Today, it is a volunteer unit open to men and women of any nationality, with recruits enlisting under an assumed name, though they can request to serve under their true name after one year. The Legion is known for its high standards, disciplined training, and role in overseas missions



**MONDAY 19 JANUARY**

**QUIZ EVENING**

**KINGS ARMS, NEWENT**

**7 PM**

**£15 PER PERSON**

**FOOD INCLUDED**

**TUESDAY 27 JANUARY**

**SPEAKER: FRASER GUNN**

**“THE GREAT FIRE OF WINDSOR”**

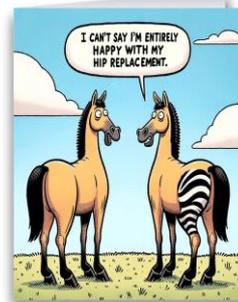


In 1992 a catastrophic fire occurred, the worst in its history  
The longest occupied palace in the world, the home of monarchs since Henri I. The fire heaped more tragedy on what her Majesty Queen Elizabeth referred to as her “Annus Horribilis”.

Fraser describes the history of the Castle, the Fire Service planning for such an event and how they dealt with such a complicated and high profile incident



Just finished reading an excellent book called  
“Fights on a Narrowboat”  
by R.G. Bargee



Off to Suffolk for a serious operation. The surgeon is going to swap my left hip with my right. The only hospital qualified to do this procedure is ....Ipswich.



In days gone by when about everyone smoked.

A familiar sign would be placed in public toilets

**“DO NOT DROP CIGARETTE ENDS IN THE URINAL**

Of course there was always a comic who would add a comment.

**“As they get soggy and difficult to light”**



A wife complained to her husband that the sparkle had gone out of their marriage, she said she wanted to be treated like she was before they were married.

So he took her to the cinema and then to dinner.....**then dropped her off at her parents and went home!**



*And a good time  
was had by all!*

### **THE FESTIVE SPIRIT AT HATHERLEY**

I like a hotel that listens to its customers. Making a return visit to the Hatherley Manor, the scene of our Christmas lunch for the past few years now, we were pleased to find that the bar service had been restored to the standard more in keeping with its reputation. It was good, also, to be able to dispense with our overcoats while eating, the hotel having closed all the exits leading to the outside.

Over fifty of us, including wives and partners met there, our spirits matching our seasonal dress with many a red reindeer and a jovial Father Christmas on show.

Once again, the hotel chef had done us proud and certainly our table had no complaints with our choices.

Chairman Mike, in a rousing speech which was no doubt aided by a generous slug of the house wine, thanked all those who had organised the lunch and, indeed, all those who had contributed to the successful year that the club has enjoyed.

The chat and general bonhomie continued long after the tables had been cleared and the last mince pie eaten but, ever hospitable, the hotel was in no hurry to see us leave but when we did, it was with a feeling of being replete both with joys of Christmas and a good meal.



**PETER HAYES  
RECEIVING HIS  
"SCRIBE OF  
THE YEAR"  
AWARD**







Photos courtesy of Mike Townsend



Smiling is infectious,  
You catch it like the flu,  
When someone smiled at me today,  
I started smiling too.

I passed around the corner,  
And someone saw me grin,  
When he smiled I realised,  
I'd passed it on to him.

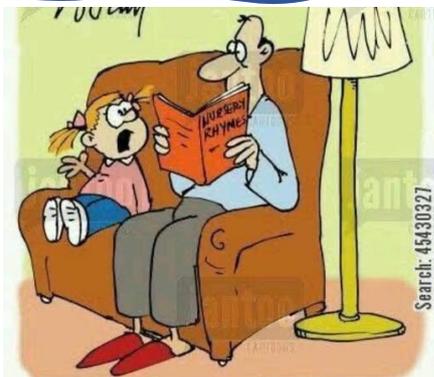
I thought about that smile,  
Then realised it's worth,  
A single smile just like mine,  
Could travel round the earth.

So if you feel a smile begin,  
Don't leave it undetected,  
Let's start an epidemic quick,  
And get the world infected.

*Spika Milligan*



It's weird realising we're  
the last generation on  
earth to know what life  
was like before social  
media.



"SO, THESE THREE LITTLE MICE ARE  
BLIND AND THE FARMER'S WIFE COMES  
ALONG AND CUTS OFF THEIR TAILS  
WITH A CARVING KNIFE!?! WHO WRITES  
THIS STUFF, STEPHEN KING?"

*You couldn't make it up.*

Printed on the label of Boot's Children Cough  
Medicine: "Do not drive a car or operate  
machinery after taking this medication."



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A long time married husband and wife whose marriage  
had become somewhat jaded and stale, decided to have  
a short country break in a bid to spice things up.  
Alas, same old same old.

After breakfast the one morning, they decided to have a  
walk around a farmyard. There to the wife's delight, she  
saw the cock perform his duty no less than a dozen or so  
times.

Quickly, she nudged her husband "Did you see that? It  
must have been twelve times"

*Wistfully, the husband replied "Aye, but it was with a  
different hen every time"*

**We always get each other  
ironic gifts, but my brother  
killed it this year.**



"My Willie"

My Willie disappears in Winter,  
It doesn't like the cold,  
My Willie disappears in Winter,  
But it's really very old.  
I've tried a Willie warmer,  
But that's no good at all,  
I've tried a Willie warmer,  
But my Willie is too small.  
I tied some string to it one day,  
To keep my Willie at my side,  
But the knot dropped off, and he went away,  
And disappeared inside.  
I remember in the summer,  
When my Willie was so big,  
I nearly trod upon my Willie,  
And snapped it like a twig.  
But now these days are over,  
And frosty days are here,  
And just the hint of a flake of snow,  
Makes my Willie disappear.  
I hope the day will come when I  
Will hold my Willie in my hand,  
And wave him proudly to the sky,  
As the pride of all the land.  
I hope you aren't offended,  
It should come as no surprise,  
That my 'Willie' is a tortoise,  
And not what you surmise!"

**In Shakespeare's time, mattresses were  
secured on bed frames by ropes. When  
you pulled on the ropes the mattress  
tightened, making the bed firmer to sleep  
on. Hence the phrase..... 'goodnight,  
sleep tight.'**

Many years ago in Scotland, a new game was invented. It was ruled '**Gentlemen Only... Ladies Forbidden**'... and thus the word **GOLF** entered into the English language.

**Allegedly!!**



A woman goes into a pet Shop and asks the shopkeeper if she can purchase the parrot in the window.

"Well I must confess, it was brought up in a brothel" says the shopkeeper.

"And to put it politely, it has quite an extensive vocabulary"

Never mind" says the woman. "At that price, I'll take it".

So she takes the parrot home and puts it in its cage in the living room and takes the cover off.

"New place, very nice" says the parrot. Then the woman's two daughters come into the room. 'New place, new girls' says the parrot.

Then the woman's husband walks into the room and the parrot says "Oh hello Keith"

## Counting Crows

**ONE** for sorrow

**TWO** for mirth

**THREE** for a wedding

**FOUR** for a birth

**FIVE** for silver

**SIX** for gold

**SEVEN** a secret ne'er to be told

**EIGHT** for a wish

**NINE** for a kiss

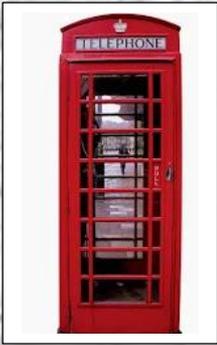
**TEN** a bird you must not miss

**ELEVEN** for hope

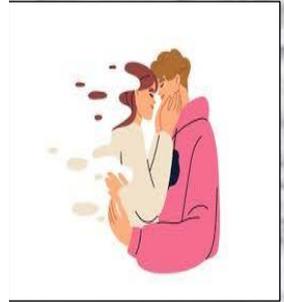
**TWELVE** for health

**THIRTEEN** beware of the devil himself





It all started with a phone call not, I hasten to add, that we did possess a phone. The Post Office paid us the princely sum of a shilling (5 pence to the modernists among you, to attach the kiosk to our house wall.) This doubled up as our personal phone as its rings could be heard in our lounge. So, it was on a dark Winter's night and feeling my usual sorry for myself and feeling that suicide was an attractive option when the phone rang and its sound percolated through the brickwork.



Now, it was an unwritten rule that as owners of the wall to which the kiosk was attached, that we had first answering rights to it but, should it not be for us, then we were to relay a message via the village until it reached the recipient.\

I clutched the phone, lest I cut the caller off. "Hi Pete" I almost fainted; the call was from a girl who had always rejected my amorous advances and one whose hair always seemed to need washing whenever I asked.

"Look I can get out after all and I would really like to meet you"

Suddenly the world seemed a better place and the Sun seemed to shine on that cold December night. To my joy and astonishment my ancient car started and there was petrol in the tank. A drink in a rural pub beckoned, and who knows perhaps even a chicken in a basket and Lord knows what other unimaginable joys awaited.

A lager and lime for me, a Babycham for her, sticky fingers from the chicken, rinsed in the obligatory side dish of a lemon immersed in water and then were off.

My ancient wireless, not radio surely, firmly wedged on the back seat with my girl deputed to turn it as we cornered so as not to lose the signal and an all to brief stop in a secluded lay by somewhere, listening to the mellifluous tones of Dean Martin blasting out "A Winter Wonderland". As I drove home, after a chaste kiss, a strange feeling pervaded my body! "Was this what people meant by Happiness?" I wondered. Whatever it was, it was a nice feeling and the World did not seem such a bad place after all.

Of course, it could not last; she was not the sharpest knife in the cutlery drawer and the next time, I asked her for a repeat performance she let slip that here regular date had stood her up that night.

Truly, *la Donna a mobile*

*Memories of a love sick youth*



Tiger Woods was on holiday in Ireland. He went into a garage to fill up with petrol. When he went to get his wallet out to pay, a couple of golf tees dropped out onto the floor. The garage attendant asked "What are those". Tiger said " I use them to rest my balls on when I am driving" The attendant said " Begorra, Mercedes think of everything"

## HOW OLD?!!!

I have several items of “required reading” in my daily perusal of the nation’s newspapers (OK then The Times), and principal among these is the daily list of birthdays of the great and the good.

It is always a shock to discover that those we have envied, lusted after or even loathed are flesh and blood creatures just like you and me in that they grow old. What’s more, time does not respect them either. Olga Korbut, that impossibly young-faced elfin slip of a girl who charmed us with her three gold medals for Gymnastics at the 1972 Munich Olympics is surely not 70. While Agnetha of ABBA fame and voted Rear of the Year is now a matronly grandma of 75 years.



Can Pete Murray, that ever youthful DJ who rocked us in Six Five Special in the 1950s, really be a centenarian?

It is wishful thinking on our parts that “age shall not wither them.” Forever youthful, they symbolise our reluctance to acknowledge that we are mortal; instead, we lock away our dreams and preserve them in aspic.

However, there is one celebrity who never seemed to get old until he did – and died. If you have ever watched old films, particularly in black and white you will no doubt have spotted William Hartnell, the original Doctor Who, who had a long career before that. He was in the 1939 Classic Brighton Rock, playing what else but a craggy faced gangster, and as a rascally foreman in Hell Drivers instantly recognizable with that face hewn out of stone alongside a young Sean Connery, Incidentally, to digress, one of our Probus members, Alan Kemp, no longer with us, officiated at his funeral.

There is, however, one who is truly immortal. Old Blue Eyes, aka Frank Sinatra, and who would be 110 today, only has to open his mouth to sing and there he is in front of us, a skinny youth with a voice to die for.



So, we must accept the inevitable. We are born and we die. Just let us make the best of the years in between

*A nostalgic, ever youthful Peter*

# *Seasonal Travails in the Organ Loft*

*Why did the organist stop after only three verses of We Three Kings? He always believed you should leave the congregation asking for myrrh.*

A few of you know that in my declining years I've become a reluctant organist again, after a break of some decades for a lot of singing. I've always preferred singing because you only have to get one note right at a time. Fraser asked for some filler for his January Newsletter so I thought I'd review a few seasonal experiences over the decades since I studied the instrument and reveal one or two pitfalls for the unwary *pulsator organorum*. Remember too that most organists are normal people until clergy get in the way, but I've only once had that problem. 'Nuff said: I can't afford lawyers.

I'm old enough to remember Christmases spent with family around the piano singing carols to my rather shaky accompaniment. I suppose that started it all off. My first organist post as a teenager was in rural Herefordshire where Christmas included sherry and mince pies at the "Big House" lived in by generations of the same family with stone tombs all over the church; it was always fun to be part of that, and indeed for several months to have the added bonus of the Rector's rather attractive teenage daughter to go out with. The relationship, unsurprisingly, declined somewhat when I discovered that "Let me show you the organ" is not the best chat up line.

I was older and safely married before taking on another rural parish in the Cotswolds where the people in the Big House would have the church choir and clergy for Christmas refreshments, and the organist got a bonus of a pair of pheasants shot on the estate. My then young wife balked at plucking them and delegated the rather medieval job to her mother. Said wife later developed a handy skill at the equally grotesque task of de-boning a capon for some Christmases, and I've kept a safe distance from her knives ever since.

Playing a carol service for an old College friend's primary school was the first really brown trouser moment: the Mayor of Cheltenham was exiting down the aisle at the end of the service in full regalia as I launched into Widor's *Toccata*. Alas, the organ was a fine three manual instrument but had very light touch stop tabs, and my glamorous assistant was wearing a fetching number with floppy sleeves; as she turned the first page she brushed the stops and everything went off. I just about rescued the situation, after two or three seconds of total silence, by ramming everything in sight down fast with a forearm. And no, if you're thinking of hiring me, forget it: I can't play the bloody piece any more. Or very much else, come to that. Organists' country-wide cursed Princess Alexandra who popularised this fiendishly tricky piece by having it at her wedding because we all had to learn it for copycat nuptials.

Another year was memorable when I calculated that if you included rehearsals, I had to get through *O Come All Ye Faithful* twenty-six times. And people still wonder why I get somewhat jaded every December.

The real fear of course is wrecking someone's special day, and one does try harder for weddings, funerals and inevitably Christmas. This good intention didn't go too well in 2024 when next up was Hark the Herald, and, distracted by inattention, stupidity and a worrying medical diagnosis (since dismissed, fear not guys), I launched into O Little Town of Bethlehem. The congregation was very kind and wondered whether they'd stumbled into I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue and did they have to sing the tune of one carol to the words of another? In 2025 though I was more careful, and had a blast segueing from the Archers theme tune to On Christmas Night and I Saw Three Ships (same triplet rhythm if you think about it).

You also need care in Crib Services, where there is an annual invasion of what the late lamented Peter Moore used to describe as "ankle biters" charging about. I always observe extreme caution not to employ the Great Tuba stop by accident and blow timid little Jemima out of the West Door. I admit I've sometimes been tempted to do this to members of the clergy, safe in the knowledge that I'm louder than they are. It's also important to adjust the speed of carols one way or the other so that the service ends at the same time as the pub opens. This is a skill I am still honing. Even better, of course, is to start the service just as it closes; I think the Italian music instruction *sotto voce* is aimed at the organist who is quite possibly a bit pissed again. At weddings, by contrast, all the guests are tanked up anyway and I can get away with playing any old rubbish until the bride arrives. If she ever does. This is never a problem at funerals, where guests stay respectfully sober and *then* head to the pub after saying goodbye to the deceased, who of course thanks to undertakers rather than the wedding photographer, is never late.

**WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN AN ORGANIST AND A  
TERRORIST?**

**YOU CAN NEGOTIATE WITH A  
TERRORIST**

**The phrase "Pulling out all the stops"  
refers to organists who want to make  
the voluntary so loud that the  
congregation finally stops talking and  
leaves!**

**IF YOU ARE WONDERING WHY  
BACH HAD SO MANY CHILDREN, IT  
WAS BECAUSE HE DIDN'T HAVE  
ANY ORGAN STOPS!!**



And yes, organists do decorate their organs, as it were, over Christmas, in my case with tastefully naff mini trees and snow scenes. Oh, and the Santa hat comes out. I am not, though, allowed by my wife, still my moderately glamorous assistant despite our advancing years, to have anything on display that flashes. A flashing unit is handy, used occasionally to signal to me that the priest is ready to start, or that the mince pies are ready, or simply that I should keep going because a tractor has blocked the access to the church; however the churchwarden sometimes forgets to switch it off and the flashing continues to enhance the candlelight and blind the organist into playing even fewer correct notes.

I have sometimes had to deputise in foreign parts on a wheezy old pipe instrument, which can present its own challenges. One church had recently spent 25K on a rebuild only to have what are known as ciphers all over the place, where wooden trackers or leather valves stick open because of damp. The result? Think bagpipes on a bad day, played by a piper who's working off several pints of McEwan's. Reassuringly my present organ is digital, and as long as it is kept warm (stop giggling at the back - the electronics have background heat) it is usually happy. It's just all my other organs that freeze up, although that situation has improved since John Atkinson showed me his hand warmers and Amazon delivered some to me next day. It's surprising where you can usefully put them. Ask John. Or even Julia.

Perhaps the Puritans had the best idea about Christmas after all?

Finally, if you're ever tempted to applaud your local organist, don't bother. Just throw money. He's probably working for free.

*Happy New Year, everyone!*

*St Paul of Bromsash*



## **PUMP UP THE VOLUME**

As a young Altar Boy at our local church, one of our duties was to pump a lever at the back of the organ to provide air for the organ pipes. The organist was a tyrannical old lady with a moustache who would hiss at you if you were not pumping hard enough. Quite often we would pump like mad and then nip out the side door for a smoke!! Occasionally we overstayed our time and could suddenly hear the organ making a terrible wailing sound, much to the amusement of the congregation, who knew exactly what was happening and disliked the organist as much as we did and delighted in her predicament.

*Ed*

## POSITIVES for 2026

Football world Cup.

250th anniversary of U.S. independence:

One year less to go of Trump

Bayeux Tapestry returning to UK



Answers on a €20 note

Where am I?



**A special thanks to all those who submitted articles in 2025 and to my proof reader extraordinaire John Martin for his assistance with the production.**

**Ed**



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