

NEWSLETTER



NEWENT & DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



Message from the editor

Please accept my apologies for not producing a newsletter for February. This was due to my computer malfunctioning and not being able to retrieve much of the data, despite having it backed up on a separate disc drive.

I now have a new one and hopefully I will get back to normal.



NEWENT AND DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

On 12 February we said farewell to John Atkinson at a service at Forest Crematorium, it was well attended by our members.

John joined the club in 2007 and was one of the most consistent attendees, both at our meetings and with Julia at our Special and Pub Lunches.

The last meeting he attended was in November and because he was having difficulty driving, I collected him from his home, On the way back he said how he valued the fellowship he had enjoyed in his time as a member. He will be missed.

On a lighter note, on January 19 we held our annual Quiz at the Kings Arms when Fraser once again gave us a varied selection of questions to test our creaking memories, well mine anyway. The six teams battled hard answering sets of strange questions that only Fraser could have conjured up. After 5 rounds the Quizzicals had established a commanding lead, only to see it slip away in the final round as the Boars steamed home, beating the Quizzicals by strategically playing their Joker. A good time was had by all.

The food provided by Wayne & Chrissie was up to its usual high standard. Our thanks go to our demanding Quiz Master once again.

The days are at least getting longer and Spring is not far away. Let's hope that the rain stops and we can soon enjoy some Spring sunshine.

Mike



**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO
FRED BACH AND
FRASER GUNN**



PUB LUNCH

TUESDAY 3 MARCH

KILCOTE INN
ROSS ROAD
KILCOTE
GL18 1NA

What Three Words: nasal.passports.weddings



Speaker: Tuesday 10 March

Zak Coombs

“SS Uganda and the Falklands conflict”

The [SS Uganda](#) was a pioneering British educational cruise ship (1967–1982) that hosted tens of thousands of school children on voyages to the Mediterranean, Baltic, and Atlantic islands. Converted from a liner, it featured dormitory accommodation, classrooms, and specialized educational programs to facilitate learning history, geography, and marine studies firsthand. Requisitioned for the 1982 Falklands War as a hospital ship (“Mother Hen”). Refitted in Gibraltar in 3 days, it treated 730 British and Argentine casualties, operating in the conflict zone from May to July 1982, before serving as a troop transport.



Speaker: Tuesday 24 March

Steve Bryce

“The work of the Marine Conservation Society”



Ocean Conservation Charity is a leading **marine conservation** charity protecting seas in the UK. Combating Climate Change. fighting pollution. Cleaning up our Beaches. Helping our **Ocean Wildlife**.

Obituary

John Atkinson



1939 – 2026

The Forest Crematorium was packed as we said farewell to John Atkinson, with Newent Probus Club well represented at the service. It was both a service of thanksgiving and a celebration of a life well lived. Julia Atkinson was supported by the many members of their family.

In a moving and at times amusing tribute from their son Chris, we learnt of the hard life of hill farmers on the often-harsh climate in the area where Cumbria and Yorkshire meet.

We learnt that John was always destined to be a farmer demonstrating a natural affinity with animals coupled with an ability to ensure that farm equipment kept working as it should.

He worked hard on the farm without complaint while, with Julia, bringing up a family and even finding time to do most of the work on their house.

Sadly, the conditions contributed to several bouts of pneumonia which, coupled with a back injury, forced their decision to move south to the “sunny climes” of Gloucestershire where they made their home in Upleadon. We heard that John played an active part in village life becoming church warden at the behest of Canon Richard Franklin who gave the address.

RIP Old friend

A LION THAT DIDN'T NEED TAMING

The New Year usually brings a new venue for our popular monthly pub lunches and this year was no exception with a visit to the Red Lion, just over the Herefordshire border at Peterstowe. An unexpected snowfall on the evening before brought numbers down slightly but still over twenty of us gathered there. It is, however, an ill wind though because on a freezing cold day, our reduced numbers meant that we could all be accommodated in the conservatory which, due to some miracle of insulation was not only warm but quiet, protected from traffic noise from the busy adjacent main road, while we were rewarded by a view of May Hill from an angle that was different.

Many members confessed that it was the first time that they had heard of the pub, much less visited it but within a few minutes of entering, after a cheery welcome from mine hosts Kath and Dave Rapson and their delightful daughter Nicki, we felt as though we were long standing regulars.

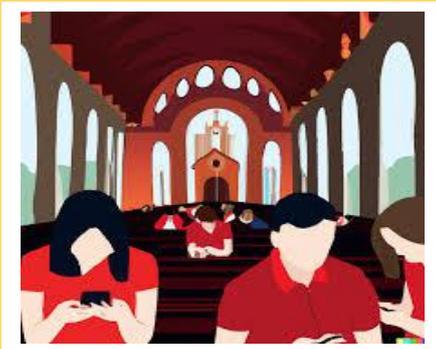
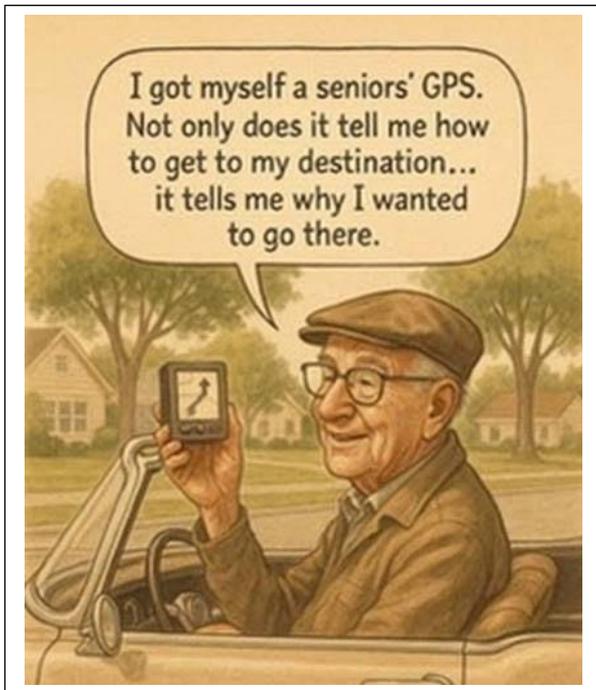


Who among you has experienced “plate envy”? That is when you see what your companion has ordered and wish you had chosen it. This certainly didn’t apply when, from a menu of vast proportions, a succession of dishes emerged from the kitchen and you realise that you would have been happy with any of them, such was their range and appetising appearance. My game pie had the crackliest pastry ever while, without dwelling too much on its contents, could be imagined inhabiting the grouse moors and heather clad hills.

One of the ironies of modern days is that now we can afford to eat whatever we wish from the menu, our doctors forbid us to on health grounds. Notwithstanding that, as a compromise, my wife and I shared a bread-and-butter pudding which evoked memories of schooldays and Mother’s cooking. Long after the last mouthful had been swallowed, the conversation ensued with Kath happy for us all to continue as long as we wished.

In short, a successful pub lunch, thanks to Chris Lathan who organised it with great panache. If, inexplicably, you have never tried one of the club’s lunch dates, why not give it a go? No great formalities. The location is announced in our monthly newsletter so just let the organiser know with your menu choice, then turn up and enjoy. Alternatively, if you have a favourite pub, why not share it with your colleagues and organise a lunch there

Our in- house food critic “Jay Rayner” Hayes



Notice found in a Church in France.....(translated)

When you enter this church, it is possible you will hear “the call of God”. However, it is unlikely that he will call you on your mobile. So, thank you for turning off your phone. If you want to talk to God, enter, choose a quiet place and talk to him. If you wish to see him, send him a text while driving.

The mother had washed her hair and put rollers in — but she didn't have a hair net, so she used a pair of panties to keep them in place.

Her 4-year-old son watched the whole process, fascinated.

His mother said,

“Good thing it's only us here so nobody sees me like this...”

Suddenly, the doorbell rang. The little boy ran to open it, and there stood a salesman wanting to speak with the woman of the house.

The boy yelled:

“Mom, Mom! Quick - take your panties off! There's a man here who wants to talk to you!” 🤪🤪



Billy who has had Parkinsons for some years recently said he has started to dribble, but hopes women like a man with a shiny chin!

My definition of an intellectual is someone who can listen to the William Tell Overture without thinking of The Lone Ranger

Driving Safely, for Longer

At our first February meeting we heard from Nigel and Alexandra Lloyd Jones of the Older Drivers Forum. They both established the Gloucestershire branch of the organisation in 2018. In a well delivered presentation, they spoke about the challenges of mature driver safety. These apply to all drivers as they reach and pass usual retirement ages. Whilst older drivers can have the benefit substantial driving experience, Nigel and Alexandra gave us some very pertinent reminders that age inevitably brings with it unavoidable decline in physical and neurological capabilities of which we need to be aware and for which we need adapt our driving to in order to remain safe on the road.

The most important decline is in visual acuity with reduction of both field of vision and spatial vision. Furthermore, older persons eyesight can take up to 7 seconds longer to recover from glare. Older persons speed of reaction also declines with age – at 65 it can be over 20 times slower than that of a 30-year-old.

Nigel and Alexandra made clear these issues can be managed and mitigated with various strategies. In addition to a realistic awareness of ability, effective journey planning and ensuring vehicle preparedness (especially in winter) were key considerations. Nevertheless, they also touched on prior planning for eventual retirement from driving to ensure one does not cling on so long as to become a danger to oneself, passengers and other road users.

Whilst much of their presentation contained sobering reminders, it was delivered in a positive manner with many references to helpful resources and further information. In particular they referred to the many online resources available from www.olderdriversforum.com/gloucestershire including a monthly online webinar.

They also drew attention to the availability of some subsidised places for the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) Road Smart Mature Driver Review - "a relaxed one-hour session with an experienced driving expert in your own vehicle". This is a no consequences way to ensure your skills are as sharp as they can be and help get confidence back. Applications can be made to odfglos@gmail.com.

Nigel Johnson

WHAT'S IN A NAME

It is a source of never-ending wonder, to me, at least after a seemingly unrelated query, what esoteric piece of information, perhaps more suited to a trivial pursuit quiz, can result. For example, when the venue for our monthly pub lunch was announced, I thought of the one owned by that shy and retiring TV personality Jeremy Clarkson, the Farmer's Dog, and *or the one justifiably famed for its pies, The Farmer's Boy etc would be high on the list of pub names. Alas no, it doesn't even make the top 100*(The Pole position there, since you ask, is occupied by The Red Lion)

Be that as it may, in spite of, or perhaps because of an apparent lowly position in the nomenclature charts, "*our' Farmer's Arms*" situated just outside the picturesque village of Apperley, has many other claims to fame; one being perhaps a menu so long that after scanning it and arriving at the foot, you will likely to have forgotten most of what you read before.

What with two swollen rivers to cross and waterlogged fields all around, plus more than our fair share of winter sniffs and snuffles, numbers attending was understandably down this month. They don't know what they missed! A far cry from the usual pub range of pub grub, the menu included Chicken Chasseur and freshly caught fish. For my part, having been tipped off that the owner was a dab hand in the kitchen and who prepared his own ham, I opted for that with just a couple of just right eggs, rounded off with some chips just on the right side of crispiness, I did not regret my choice, it was a belt busting portion with perhaps only the trotters and '*oink*' missing from it' The Banoffee sundae, combining the excesses of both dishes proved arrestable to those of the sweet toothed persuasion and so it proved to be of belt busting waistlines variety, not to say the effect on one's blood sugars.

No one got marooned on the homeward journey and it only remained to thank Paul Dodd for his excellent choice of venue.

If, for some inexplicable reason you have never tried our monthly pub lunch, why not do so next time? There is no great mystery in joining; just give your name to whoever is organising it, make your menu choice and just turn up. There's more than food on offer, including good *craic* and usually a choice of a good drink

Our resident Gastronomer Peter

The French Foreign Legion –

presented by **Richard P. Jeynes** (Tuesday 13th January 2026)



Our speaker, Richard Jeynes, studied archaeology before joining the British Army where he worked in Military Intelligence. During his eight years in the army, he served with a French Foreign Legion unit and was presented with the legendary Kepi (white cap) and Green Beret. Richard is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (FRGS).



Many of the members present recalled the adventure novel “Beau Geste”, written by P.C. Wren. The novel provides a detailed and fairly authentic description of life in the pre-1914 French Foreign Legion (the Legion), even though the author never served in the unit. The Legion was formed in 1831, when France was short of troops. Foreigners were invited to join a unit, within the French Army, that was only to be used on operations outside France. The troops were not mercenaries, nor was it possible for just anyone to join as recruits went through a vetting procedure.



The Legion badge is the Flaming Grenade. The white Kepi (Kepi Blanc) has also become synonymous with the unit. Recruits to the unit commit to the Legion’s Code of Honour, swearing loyalty to the Legion itself, rather than directly to France.

The talk then covered some important Legion battles.

On 30th April 1863, at Camerone in Mexico, which at the time formed part of the French empire, a force of 64 troops was surrounded by 2000 Mexicans. The leader of the Legionnaires, Captain Jean Danjou, was killed early in the battle. Eventually only 4 Legionnaires were left standing but they charged at the Mexican forces who were so impressed with their courage that the Legionnaires were captured, not killed. This battle became the standard by which the Legion would operate – fighting to the last man.



Captain Danjou was an amputee with a wooden hand. After the battle his wooden hand was retrieved and eventually returned to the Legion. It is now one of the most important artifacts held in the Legion museum. It is paraded annually on 30th April to commemorate Camerone Day. The Legion Veterans Institution in Marseille is named after Captain Danjou.

The battle of Boudenib Blockhouse, in Morocco, took place on 1st September 1908. The Legion contingent of 35 troops was surrounded by 15,000 Berbers. When almost out of ammunition the commander of the Legion garrison called down artillery fire from a supporting unit on his own position which resulted in the Berber forces being driven off. The Legion garrison survived with no troops killed.

In WW1, Legion forces were heavily involved and they became one of the most highly decorated units on the Western Front. At the end of the war, German troops joined the Legion, as well as Russian Cossacks who formed cavalry units. Cavalry was still very useful in Northern Africa due to the rough terrain which was unsuitable for mechanised units.

WW2 also saw Legion forces being active in many theatres, after which the Legion was involved in Vietnam and featured in a battle of Dien Bien Phu. A large base was created behind enemy lines that would be re-supplied by air. The base eventually became surrounded by enemy forces and suffered huge losses – around 10,000 of the Legion forces were killed, 30,000 wounded and 6,000 captured.

The modern-day Legion remains active and has been deployed during the Gulf War, in Afghanistan and Mali. Changes have been made in recruitment and French nationals now form about 1/3 of the contingent. “Legion” French is the only formal method of communicating within the Legion so all recruits must undergo language training

Upon completion of their military training the recruits are awarded the Kepi Blanc. As the Legion is “an army within an army” it is fully self-sufficient and contains all of the units of the regular army. Recruits are given 5-year contracts, which can be renewed. After 5 years of service, French citizenship can be claimed.

During Bastille Day celebrations, the Legion, with their slow marching pace, are always at the rear of the procession and are generously applauded by the spectators.

It was also mentioned that the most decorated soldier in the French Army is a British Legionnaire who was deemed medically unfit for service in the British Army.

After taking questions, Richard was thanked for his fascinating talk which was excellently presented. The members showed their appreciation in the usual way.

Chris Yates



Modern vehicle designers think of everything?

Old Farts Farting?

Probus' great columnist Peter Hayes has for some time now generously passed on his copies of *The Oldie* magazine to me, and these afford hours of pleasure. I particularly enjoy a regular column called "*Rant*" which does what the title suggests – although to be fair it's accompanied by a much shorter column (one sentence in fact) called "*Small Pleasures*", the most recent example being "dropping a China cup onto a hard floor and it not breaking." My own small pleasure would be getting to know people who still call it wireless.

I'm sure Probus members would enjoy improved mental health if they had an outlet for things that really infuriate them? So, in the generous spirit of healthy plagiarism, I offer these below and invite other contributions to be sent to our indefatigable editor. We could call it "Old Farts Farting." Perhaps someone may even topple Peter from his crown as Scribe of the Year. I hereby declare my candidacy.

Trying to get cufflinks into double cuffs (surely, we all dress for dinner these days?)

Tattoos not applied by radiographers (especially on otherwise attractive ladies)

Loose change

Liquid soap dispensers running out just when you're filthy from gardening

Buffering (that is a technical term not a euphemism)

Car manuals (in fact, manuals for almost everything, usually written in Chinese English)

Multicoloured Christmas lights

Square chutney jars

Kneeling

Road restrictions with no-one working

Replacing car wiper blades

Misplaced or missing apostrophes (that's one for the intellectuals)

Squeezy sauce bottles (ketchup can be a marital and laundry disaster)

Carols and Christmas adverts before Advent Sunday

Anything *Christmassy before Advent Sunday*

Morrisons in Ross, who sell Easter Eggs on December 27th

Crisp eaters during theatre or concert performances (cinemas are louder)

Having constantly to agree to cookies

Electric toothbrushes that come with an app

Trying to relocate a microwave plate on its lugs

Amazon packaging

Cyclists in Lycra on A roads

Paul Dodd

CHRIS AND LINDY LATHAN'S SOUTH AMERICAN ODYSSEY



Hi

I am writing this on I phone.

We boarded Borealis on Jan 28th at lunch time. We were scheduled to leave for Corina, Spain. We had a 42-hr delay in leaving and lost our stop in Spain and Cape Verde. Seas were still 5 to 7 metres which was quite bumpy and we made Las Palmas on 3rd Feb. The temp was a nice 20c. We then ran straight for Salvador Brazil, six days at sea we arrived there Unfortunately, our first port of call was cancelled due to **nine metre swell** in the Bay of Biscay. Temp is now 28c and sea temp is according to our Captain is 26c.

We crossed the Equator on Sunday morning at 0200 hrs. Around 1000 miles from Africa and Brazil, ie middle of nowhere, we hit an area with many small patches of sargasso weed. This bloom of weed has apparently become a phenomenon since 2011. As the ship disturbed these patches the small fish that used the weeds for nursery's were homeless and predator fish moved in you could see flashes of silver under water. The sea was then full of small flying fish escaping the water. 400 miles or thereabouts from land we saw lots of boobies and frigate birds around the ship I guess hunting for fish the ship disturbed.

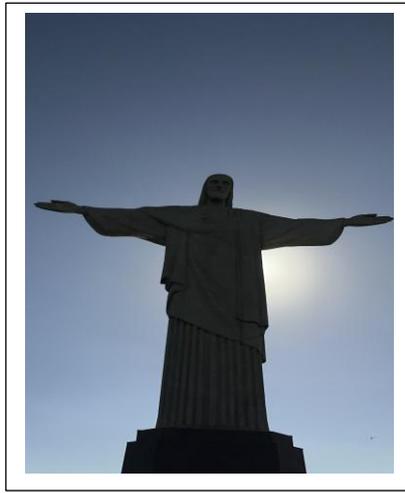
We are managing to fight off scurvy with a possible seven meals a day and no weevils in the biscuits yet.

I'll try and send you an update around 21st 22nd Feb when we should be leaving Montevideo for port Stanley.

We crossed the Tropic of Cancer around the 8th Feb and landed at Salvador, Brazil in all Saints Bay had great beach day on one of the 43 islands in the bay.

We then sailed 750 miles down to the carnival which was very noisy and colourful started at 9pm and we stayed till 4.30 am. After two days we arrived at Buenos Aires for spectacular tango and evening dinner.

This was held in an atmospheric cellar with 250 people crammed in. Fortunately we got a table at the front. Good job there wasn't a fire officer here to comment on the one fire escape!!! I always know how to spoil a good night. Just back from a tour of the pampas area and off soon. We will be leaving Argentina in a few hours for Uruguay and Montevideo then tomorrow evening we head for the Falklands but not sure if we will land due to storms



18 members enjoyed our annual Skittles evening held at the Kings Arms, on Wednesday 18 February, ably organised by John Weeden. Some members showed their expertise, others not so. After three exciting rounds "mine host" was in the lead, having been the only person to knock all pins down, but was pipped at the post by the winner **Jane Townsend**. She was presented with a bottle of wine for her efforts.

After a very pleasant meal we rounded the evening off with a "Killer" round, where each person has three lives and plays with one ball, "Killer" involves knocking down pins without resetting them until all nine are down, making it increasingly difficult. Again, the ladies excelled with **Jenny Graham** taking the honours, much to her surprise!!



Where am I?

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

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