

# NEWENT AND DISTRICT PROBUS CLUB



# NEWSLETTER

## AUGUST 2026

### MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

On the basis of the initial feedback I have seen or heard, our Summer Party on 28 July was enjoyed by many. The weather was just about right with protection from the spells of direct sun from several gazebos kindly provided by members. The pork roast provided on this occasion by Country Butchers was well received with veggie options also available – as well as plentiful salad and deserts kindly provided by member partners.

The music entertainment was again provided by Mumruffins with the occasional chorus from audience. The music followed the raffle that did well with a good range of donated prizes. My thanks go to all that helped with the event – the booking of the catering and of the entertainment; the provision of delicious food and good raffle prizes and particularly the few that arrived early to assist with the set up.

The Committee will want to review how things went and although the initial feedback has been positive there is always room for new ideas and tweaks to make things even better – so please do provide any further feedback to myself, Kelvin or any Committee member.

Sadly, we learnt of the passing of John Oakman some days before the Summer Party. John joined Probus in July 2008, almost exactly 18 years ago. We shall mark his passing at the next Club meeting.

The weather continues to be a 'hot' topic of conversation with drought as well as heat of real concern. Where is the 'minister of drought'? I remember that back in 1976, the appointment of Denis Howell as such was soon followed by heavy rain. What is the new PM waiting for?

*Nigel*



## **PUB LUNCH**

**TUESDAY 4 AUGUST**

**The Scrumpy House  
Westons Cider,  
Much Marcle  
HR8 2NQ**

*Mine Host Kelvin Ashby*

**TUESDAY 11 AUGUST**

**SPEAKER: JOHN RHYS-JONES**

### **Why small nuclear reactors? - short comings of power**

John covers the background of future energy needs, the shortcomings of current power generation and how we can change

Small modular reactors (SMR's) are advanced nuclear reactors that generate up to 300 MW of electricity—about a third of a traditional plant's capacity. Factory-assembled and transported in pieces, they promise faster, cheaper builds. While prototypes and some global plants exist, commercial deployment is scaling up.

**TUESDAY 25 AUGUST**

**SPEAKER: Mike Kippax**

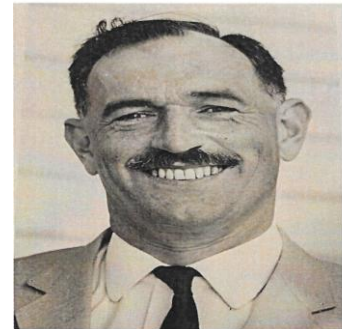
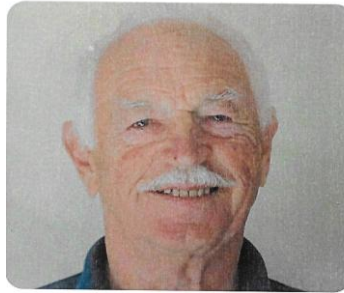
### **The History of English China Clays**

English China Clays plc (or ECC), was a mining company involved in the extraction of China clay, based in St Austell, Cornwall.

English China Clays was incorporated in April 1919 through the amalgamation of three of the largest producers: Martin Bros. (established in 1837), West of England China Clay & Stone (1849) and the North Cornwall China Clay Company (1908). The three companies accounted for around half the industry's output at the time.

in 1999 *ECC International* was acquired by the French company Imetal which subsequently changed its name to Imerys.

## OBITUARY



### JOHN VERE SLACK 1928 – 2026

John Vere Slack was born on 1 December 1928 in the Derbyshire town of Chapel-en-le-Frith, nestled in the hills of the Peak District.

*"The name slack refers to a shallow dell, hollow, or depression in the ground. Early examples of this origin are locational, identifying families who lived in these geographical features, it is also connected to specific villages and hamlets named Slack in areas like Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Derbyshire."*

His father George, worked in the family greengrocer business and later for Ferodo Brake Linings. John's mother Olive, was a nurse and it was she who chose his middle name of Vere in honour of a young French boy she nursed.

John often reminisced about his childhood and would tell with his typical humour how he learned of both the outbreak and end of the Second World War whilst sitting up a tree with a friend; although he was always keen to point out that whilst it was the same friend on each occasion, but were two entirely different trees. There was always a theory that he spent the whole war up a tree!! John loved a good story and never missed the opportunity to add a little humour. John possessed a sharp mind, an inquisitive nature and quiet determination. These qualities served him well throughout a distinguished career in electrical engineering. Starting as a junior draughtsman with the Trent Valley and High Peak Electricity Company. He worked diligently through his apprenticeship, gaining professional qualifications and building an impressive reputation as a highly respected engineer, manager and leader within the electrical industry. His expertise was recognised nationally and internationally, including consultancy work in Jordan. He served as Chairman of the Institute of Electrical Engineers a member of the British Institute of Management and a Governor of the Institute of Electrical Engineers Benevolent Fund.

John was never defined by his professional achievements. His greatest pride and happiness came from the people he loved. In 1952, he married Pamela White, together they started building a life based on love, faith, community involvement and service to others. A shared love of ballroom dancing "eventually reaching competition level."

John and Pamela were blessed with two children Michael and Joanne. Family life brought them immense happiness. John was a devoted husband and father. Life seemed full of promise as his family grew and his career flourished.

Then came a tragedy that would shape the rest of his life. In 1974 John and Pamela suffered the devastating loss of their son Michael, just weeks after his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Those who knew John understand how deeply he carried that grief. Loss visited John again when Pamela, aged 57 died unexpectedly, shortly after his retirement. Having looked forward to many years together, he instead found himself facing a future he had never imagined. It was another period of profound sadness, one that found him lonely and adrift.

Thankfully, life still had happiness in store for him. In 1992 John met Yvonne whilst on a walking holiday in the New Forest. Together they discovered companionship, happiness and love. They married in 1996. In fact, they married three times just to make sure – once in the registry office, once in St Marys Church Upleadon and later in the Catholic Church. They had 30 years of happy memories. John embraced Yvonne's children and delighted becoming a grandad of 10 and great-grandad of 5.

John loved golf, travelling, cruising (he *must have almost circumnavigated the world*), nature, art and dancing.

John not only enjoyed competing in quizzes, he also loved writing them. Writing many quizzes for the local community.

John and Yvonne volunteered at the Willow Trust. After many years as a crew member on one of their boats, he was entrusted to take the steering wheel with disastrous results when he misjudged a bridge and gave everyone a gentle jolt.

John joined Newent Probus in 2013 and valued his time with us. It was important to him to join our fortnightly meetings, talk to friends and enjoy interesting talks. He arranged our Skittles evening which have become a favourite with members. He loved to join us at the Kings Arms for a pint and a chat. He had a wicked sense of humour and would often hold us in awe as he recounted one of his stories which would often turn out to be a joke.

Despite his deteriorating health in recent months, he still used to arrive with his Zimmer frame, in fact he attended his last meeting a week before he died.

Several members attended his Funeral at St Marys Church, Upleadon on a blisteringly hot day, the church offered some relief to a packed congregation. John and Yvonne were active members of the church. Canon Richard Franklin who conducted the service spoke of John's faith and commitment to the church. As John's coffin left the church for his burial in the church cemetery (*a lovely spot in the shade of a large tree*)

The music of Louis Armstrong filled the church with the tune "What a wonderful World"

Donations were made to Médecins Sans Frontières/ Doctors Without Borders

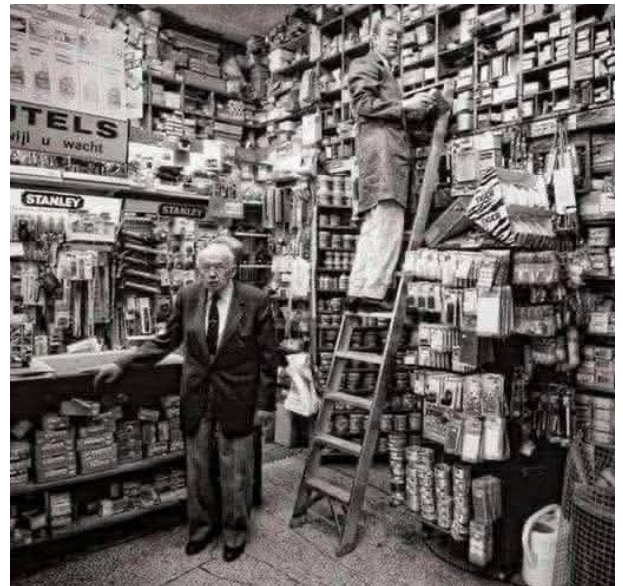
***REST IN PEACE OLD FRIEND***

**John was a lover of Limericks**

**There once was an eager astronomer,  
Who studied a stellar phenomenon.  
He gazed through his glass,  
At a passing young lass,  
And ended the night as a phenomen-on.**

**There was a young lass of Madras  
Who had a magnificent ass  
Not rounded and pink  
As you'd probably think  
But was grey, had long ears, and ate grass**

Busy night at Stonehenge as they move the stones back one hour...



They are still around – Try Parkers of Newent

**DID YOU KNOW?**



Sudan holds more pyramids than Egypt, with over 200 ancient structures built by the Kushite kingdoms across the Nubian desert



Whittier, Alaska (population ~272) is famous for having nearly all of its residents live under one roof in a 14-story structure called [Begich Towers Condominium](#). Originally built by the U.S. Army during the Cold War, this single building contains apartments, a post office, a police station, a general store, a clinic, and a church.



The inventor of **fire hydrant** is unknown — the patent was **destroyed** in the US Patent Office fire of 1836



### **Richard Milhouse Nixon – Crook – Statesman**

On Tuesday 14 July we were treated to an excellent presentation by our speaker Philip Bowen. Philip's most informative talk included a detailed description of Richard Nixon's background and the influences contributing to his complex character, which led to his rise to prominence in U.S. politics and later his disgrace, threatened impeachment and resignation. He explained how Nixon's difficult early life and education seems to have instilled in him a resentment of those more privileged, represented by the 'elites' that he encountered both in college and later in politics. Richard Milhouse Nixon was brought up by extremely strict parents on a lemon ranch in southern California where he had to combine his studies with working for his father. Nevertheless, he worked through college, achieved his law degree and practiced in California before moving to Washington. During the Second World War he served in the Naval Reserve.

After the war, in 1946, he was elected to represent California in the House of Representatives, before becoming a Senator for California in 1950.

Early in this period he worked with Joseph McCarthy on the "Witch Hunts" of the 'House of un-American activities' and had a reputation as a ruthless anti-communist. He then gained national prominence by his relentless pursuit of a conviction of Alger Hiss, a former State Department employee who was eventually proven to be a spy for the Soviet Union.

His reputation established, he was appointed Vice-President by Dwight D Eisenhower from 1953 to 1961, during which time he re-defined the role, taking on unprecedented executive responsibilities and acting as a key diplomatic envoy across the globe. He visited more than 50 countries on 'goodwill' tours, including meeting with Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union. Domestically, he helped push through the Civil Rights Act of 1957.



Despite his accomplishments as Vice President, he lost the 1960 presidential election to John F Kennedy whose privileged background, sharp dressing and good looks compared well with Nixon's awkwardness and unshaven appearance in the newly introduced series of TV debates.

The Election results were incredibly close, but despite allegations of voter fraud in Texas and Illinois (both won by Kennedy) Nixon refused to contest the election, believing that a lengthy controversy would damage the reputation of the United States. This demonstrates a marked contrast with the current US administration!

Following Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Nixon declined to stand against Vice President Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 Presidential elections, but after several years out of politics he did accept the Republican nomination for the 1968 election. In January 1969 he was inaugurated as the 37<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, with a promise to end the Vietnam War, which had become immensely divisive in the U.S.

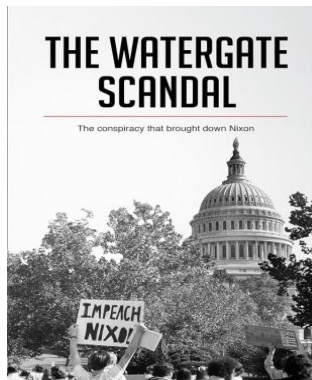
During his term as president, he achieved many commendable things including de-segregation in the US, establishing rights for Native Americans, funding a 'war on cancer', establishing the Environmental Protection Agency, forging diplomatic links with China and undertaking discussions with the USSR on arms limitation.



However, his promises to end the Vietnam War proved unachievable and instead he initiated carpet bombing and spread the conflict to Cambodia, ultimately triggering the rise of Pol Pot. Huge protests were triggered in the U.S. and at Kent University 4 students were shot dead by the National Guard. It is said that Nixon referred to the students as bums.

Despite the above, he was delivered a landslide victory and second term in the 1972 elections by a public unaware that he had become increasingly insecure and paranoid about enemies, drinking more and more, not sleeping at night and instead making endless telephone calls. Then, to make matters worse, within a few months he was fighting scandal resulting from 'Watergate'.

In 1973 it became public that immediately after his first election in 1969, his team had been tasked with creating an 'Enemies List' of people known to be active in their opposition to his administration. The declared aim was to "use the federal machinery to screw his political enemies". Secret tapes, recorded in the Oval Office had exposed this, together a series of highly offensive quotes by Nixon, revealing racism, anti-Semitic attitudes and illegal plotting.



At the same time, an investigation by the New York Post and others uncovered that, in June 1972, a break-in and an attempt to bug the offices of the Democratic Party Headquarters in the Watergate Complex in Washington had been instigated by the committee working on Nixon's re-election campaign. A number of his officials resigned, and some were later convicted of attempting to cover up the plot. Although he denied personal involvement, the tape recordings that Nixon had been forced to give up showed that he was aware and had attempted to squash the investigation.

The republicans deserted him and, threatened with imminent impeachment, he resigned the presidency on August 9<sup>th</sup> 1974.



In September 1974 he was pardoned by Gerald Ford who had succeeded him as President.



*Graham Mawdsley*

## AND A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL



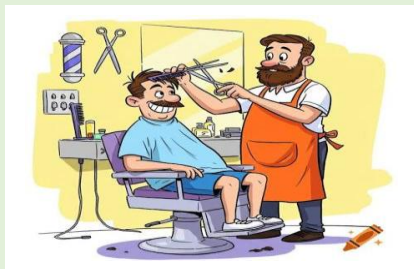




*Thanks to our  
photographer  
Mike Townsend*



Two boys are arguing over whose father is the biggest "Scaredy Cat".  
The first boy says "My dad is the biggest scaredy cat, when lightning strikes, he hides under the bed"  
The second boy says "That's nothing, my dad is so scared that when my mum is working a nightshift he has to sleep with the lady next door"!!



A man was having his haircut when the barber asks "How's your mother-in-law these days?" "She's fine" the man replied.  
A few minutes later the barber asks again "And your mother-in-law, she is doing well?"  
The man frowned and said "Yes, she is fine, why do you keep asking about my mother-in-law?"  
The barber chuckles and says "It's not because I am interested, every time I mention your mother-in-law your hair stands up on end and makes it easier to cut"!!!!

### Unusual Fact



**Australia is wider than the Moon  
by about 300km**

Richard Nixon on the White House Tapes  
"You know, I've always wondered about the taping equipment. But I'm damn glad we have it."



A car driver is pulled over by a Police Officer and tells him that his rear light is defective.  
The man gets out of the car and walks to the rear of the vehicle and suddenly becomes distraught and trembling. The Police Officer says "Calm down it's only a small defect and no need to get upset."

The man still trembling says "It might not be a big deal to you, but I have lost a Caravan, my Wife and Three Children"!!!!

**George W. Bush on His Legacy**  
"I'll be long gone before some smart person ever figures out what happened inside this Oval Office."

**"When your back is against the wall,  
it's time to turn around and start fighting." - John Major**



A boy has just passed his driving test and asks his father when he could use his car. His father says "if you improve your grades from

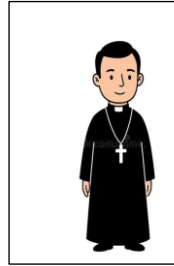
C to B, study your bible and get your hair cut, we will see" The boy accepts the deal. Six weeks went by and his father said "I notice your grades have improved and you have been studying your bible but I am disappointed you have not had your hair cut?"

The boy says "Whilst studying the bible, I noticed that Samson had long hair, so did Moses and there is strong evidence that Jesus also had long hair"

His father responded "Yes, but did you notice that they walked everywhere?"

"If God had not wanted us to eat animals, how come he made them out of meat?" Sarah Palin

I went to a Christian religious convention



I was approached by a priest who held my hand and gently said "By the will of Jesus Christ, you will walk again" I looked at him puzzled and said "I am OK I am not paralyzed"



I was then approached by a Rabbi who took my hand and said "By the will of God Almighty you shall walk again" Again confused I said "Honestly I am OK thank you"



Then a Buddhist Monk came to me and said "By the will of Buddha you will walk today" I rolled my eyes and left.  
**When I came out of the building, I noticed my car had been stolen!!!!**

### FUN AND GAMES IN THE DRUGS CABINET

The NHS is forcing us to play a game of Jenga every time we take a pill from the many packets that adorn our drugs cupboard, Jenga, to the uninitiated, is a game involving 50 odd wooden blocks that players must use to build a tower without it falling down. We play this game inadvertently when we try to stack our pill packets inside our drugs cabinet.

Why O why? do pill and potion packets come in so many different sizes, seemingly irrespective of the size of its contents?

Most, if not all of us have reached a stage in life when we are dependent upon a daily intake of chemicals of various hues, sizes and shapes. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that some of us will have forgotten just why we are taking them.

We accept as necessary the daily ritual of swallowing a combination of these, accepting that the alternative to this daily intake doesn't bear thinking about

Surely there can there be some uniformity in the boxes that our pills and potions arrive in? Square ones, round ones, oblong ones yet all contain basically the same product. Whilst we are at it, we could all teach Amazon a thing or two about excess packaging. That great shop in the cloud, most recipients of its wares will know, are great exponents of the art of using a pound weight of cardboard when an ounce would have sufficed. You only have to look at a recycling skip in our car park to see it piled high as with box after box of high-grade cardboard that require a chainsaw to access their contents.

And while we are at it, let's rename then all with names we can actually pronounce and perhaps even remember too, perhaps with a brief explanation of what they are for? ..... Gulp Swallows!

*Frustrated Nonagenarian*

# THE WHITE HART AT BROADOAK



The White Hart at Broadoak is a popular venue for our monthly pub lunch, the club having made many return visits there and the July one was no exception, albeit with numbers down slightly due, no doubt, to the hot weather and the competing attractions of Wimbledon and the World Cup football.

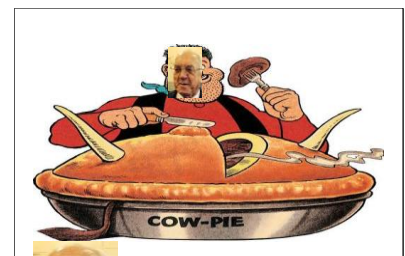
The pub itself has an unrivalled location, on the banks of (*and at times has been known to be in*) the mighty River Severn. From its capacious dining areas, the whole vista of Gloucestershire's main river (*and longest in British Isles*) can be seen as it tumbles its way, first to estuary and then the sea. Nowadays, though, it is but a shadow of its once mighty self; from underneath the Hart's windows salmon fishermen would once ply their trade, catching the "*The most regal*" of all fish using the quaintly termed "putcher" nets to capture this most elusive and wily of fish. Standing thigh deep in the swirling waters, the fishermen would catch, inspect and retrieve their nets and very soon a fish would be en route to the finest London hotels



At the other end of the scale, come Spring, would be the Elver fishermen. Perched precariously on the river bank, at times of high tide, these intrepid fishermen would dangle their home made, distinctive nets in the water, hoping to trap many thousands of the baby eels. A 'feast' of elvers was a delicacy in times past for Gloucesterians, but now the twin evils of overfishing and more lucrative foreign markets have made the dish on a par with caviar.

Writing as a former Severnsider, the river will always hold a special place in my affections. Indeed, touching on the twin topics of salmon and elver fishing reminds me of a neighbour, Bill Collier, who, illegally, combined the two arts, from the opposite bank at Framilode. He would watch the river and upon seeing a hapless salmon thrashing on a mud bank, out would come his trusty rowing boat and with a few quick blow, he would despatch the unfortunate fish and soon it would grace the plates of a "*no questions asked*" restaurant. Incidentally, it was Bill who showed me that it was possible to walk across the Severn at certain tides. Wading through the heavy silt on the Framilode bank and keeping one's eyes firmly on one's feet, it is, or perhaps was, possible to land on Rodley Sands, just below the White Hart. **A word of warning should anyone be foolish enough to try it – don't.**

The Hart is known for the size of its portions and this visit proved the rule. My pie would be of a size that *Desperate Dan* would recognize, it only requiring a pair of horns to protrude through the short crust pastry topping to complete the picture.



It would been sacrilegious to refuse one of the many desserts on offer and a cream roulade completed what had been yet another happy clubby experience, thanks to Paul. Who cares about the inevitable upbraiding from the scales in the morning?

*Our galloping gourmet Peter*



**“Been travelling a lot this month”**

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

**Ed**

**Can I remind readers that the Newsletter is for the  
enjoyment and information of Newent Probus Club  
members & partners and should not be reproduced or  
passed to third parties**



