Newent and District Probus Club

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2026

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Usually, August is the month when cities become quieter, seaside towns become louder, and though warm it is not dependently dry. In August this year however for much of the month the country behaved as though it had permanently relocated to the Mediterranean – albeit including its wildfires.

Parks filled with sunbathers, shorts and t shirts became a compulsory dress code, trains acquired the atmosphere of slow-cooking appliances, and every indoor (usually commercial) space held a tense diplomatic summit over whether the air conditioning was “too aggressive.” Holidaymakers discovered that “staycation” means paying premium rates to sleep near a roundabout, while those flying abroad enjoyed the special thrill of waking at 3:15 a.m. to join an airport queue that appeared to have its own postcode.

Then came the familiar return to type: rain for the Bank Holiday weekend. Meteorologists became the country’s most closely watched performers, delivering maps of alarming colours while reassuring everyone that it was “a mixed picture.”

There were lighter notes. A total solar eclipse crossed Greenland, Iceland, Portugal and northern Spain on 12 August with a partial eclipse locally - briefly giving millions a reason to stare safely upward rather than doomscroll downward. Meanwhile, sport pressed on: the Commonwealth Games wrapped up in Glasgow, the Premier League returned, restoring a vital national service: strangers confidently explaining transfers to people who had not asked. By now the country was united by one thought: September might bring routine, jumpers, and an end to the annual debate over whether 28°C is “unbearable”.

I trust that amongst all these vicissitudes you and yours were nevertheless able to enjoy the traditional month of leisure.

Nigel

PUB LUNCH



TUESDAY 1st SEPTEMBER

Old Court Hotel

Symonds Yat West,

HR9 6DA

TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER

SPEAKER: Douglas Butler

AN HS2 UPDATE



HS2 the controversial project is intended to be Britain's largest rail infrastructure project in over a century, aimed at increasing rail capacity, reducing journey times, and supporting economic growth. It is being built in phases, with the first phase linking London and Birmingham.

TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER

SPEAKER: Paul Barnett

"THE BIG FREEZE OF 63"



The winter of 1962-1963,

Known as the Big Freeze of 1963, was one of the coldest winters (defined as the months of December, January and February) on record in the United Kingdom. Temperatures plummeted and lakes and rivers began to freeze over.



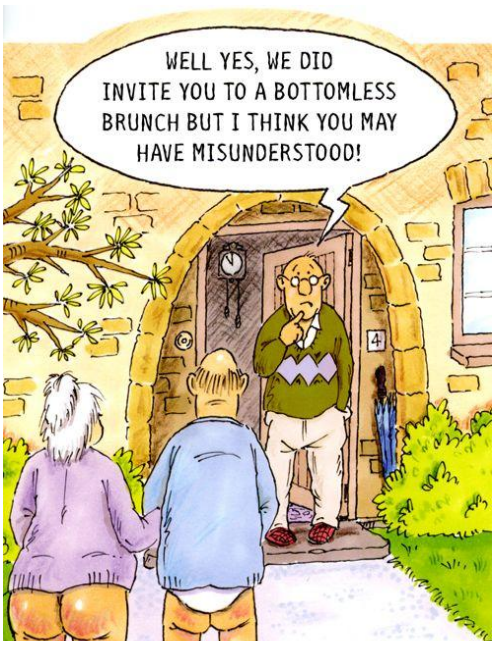


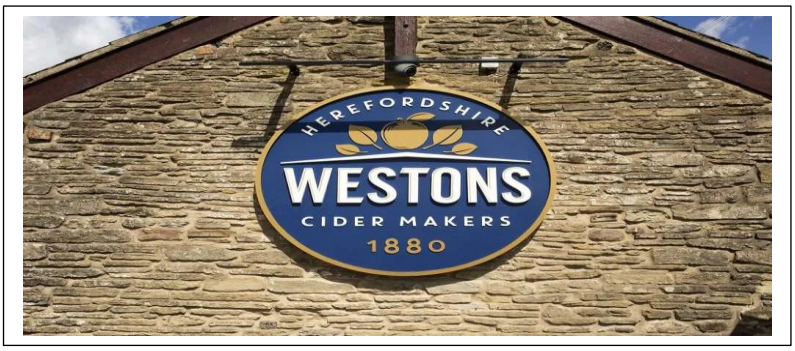


An elderly woman had just returned to her home from an evening at church service when she was startled by an intruder. As she caught the man in the act of robbing her home of its valuables, she yelled, **"STOP! ACTS 2:38!"** *(Repent and be baptized, in the name of the lord, so that your sins may be forgiven.)*
The burglar stopped in his tracks. The woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done.
As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar, "Why did you just stand there?
All the old lady did was yell scripture at you."

"SCRIPTURE?!" replied the burglar, "She said she had an AXE and TWO 38's!







IN THE CIDER COUNTRY

Food tastes that much better when you know that it came from your home county and the origin of your drinks is measured in food yards rather than food miles. Such is the case with the Scrumpy House, home of Weston's Cider and the venue for this month's pub lunch, coordinated by our secretary Kelvin, stepping in for Paul who was indisposed.

The holiday season is proving what seems to be our normal summer weather, and now continues to take its toll on members attending but we still managed a respectable fourteen, which would have been even higher but for some extremely vague roadworks diversion signs which beat some members' satnavs.

Weston's is a fascinating location, ever popular with members and is surely an example of how an industry, located so rurally, literally in the middle of nowhere, can provide worthwhile employment for so many, with a delicious product(s) and somehow enhance the countryside

Deep in the heart of the Herefordshire countryside Westons Cider is situated in the village of Much Marcle. It was established in 1880 and is still a family- owned firm, renowned for both traditional and premium ciders, such as Stowford Press, Old Rosie and Henry Westons Vintage. Along with its world-famous products, they have an award-winning herd of Hereford Cattle and much-loved resident shire horses Ben and Prince, who are great ambassadors for Westons heritage, offering anything from dray rides to a one-of-a-kind wedding transportation. meetings.







Many others seemed to share our choice of venue, as the rustic dining room, furnished appropriately, was crowded but thanks goodness for reservations as we were all accommodated on two adjacent tables and so what if at times, we had to strain our ears to hear what our neighbour was saying.



The variety of the food on offer matched the quality of it. Ignoring, "what the doctor ordered'. I opted for both a calorie and carbohydrate filled dish of Sausages, Yorkshire Pudding and Mashed Potato & Veg, which was so redolent of the schooldays favourite 'Toad in the Hole". It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder and this was certainly true of my dish; while eating it I became a schoolboy again, eating it against a background of air raids with sirens wailing and Mr. Churchill on a valve powered wireless urging us, with that often-parodied lisp, to 'Never Surrender".

Back to reality, my wife's choice of a three-cheese salad was perhaps the most sensible option but I have never been sensible when perusing a menu. Appetizingly presented, it looked too good to eat and my wife concurred.

For once I was sensible, eschewing a pud but I was in a minority of one as the rest of us made a choice from a wide selection of ice creams.

The meal continued over coffee/tea with no hints from the staff such as overzealous clearing of tables that we were overstaying our welcome. This is one big plus about our pub lunches- the social aspect. It gives us all a chance to know other members better, including those to whom somehow, we never get chance to speak to at our regular club

Not tried one of our lunches yet? Why not make it an Autumnal resolution to rectify that? No mystique – just give your name to Kelvin when he sends around the next notification.

Our Galloping Gourmet Peter



Small modular nuclear reactors – Shortcomings of power

The talk was presented by Dr John Rhys Jones
Our presenter, Dr Jones (John), has an extensive background in nuclear power. In the 1980s Dr Jones lectured on nuclear power at the Royal Naval College where he led a team designing a small modular reactor. Later, he worked mostly on modelling and on the Generic Design Assessment of new nuclear reactors. He chaired the OECD subcommittee for the assessment of potential faults in the European Pressurised Water Reactor (EPR), served on various United Nations committees relating to the safety of nuclear power and has chaired numerous UK and international conferences

Background:
When looking at UK-specific reasons to consider the use of SMR's, it's important to understand how power is currently generated. Coal has been replaced by gas. Wind capacity can match electricity demand, but wind power is not constant. Methane gas, leaking from gas pipes is a much worse polluter of the atmosphere than CO2, which is part of the reason why the gas mains infrastructure is being upgraded, resulting in major road works. A key consideration is the push from Government to make transport more electric and phase out diesel and petrol vehicles. As a result, the UK needs to produce more electricity.
John presented a number of graphs but some of the key metrics are:

- UK power generation (Winter) – Wind can provide most of the capacity, and uses gas as a back-up. Solar PV generation is largely absent. Some nuclear generated power is supplied from France.
- UK power generation (Summer) – Solar PV is more significant and very useful for transport (charging electric vehicles – EV's), wind makes a significant contribution but any shortfall is provided by gas. Both Solar and wind power are unpredictable. Trends show that every 2 years there is no wind power for a fortnight so planners' factor in 40 days of "wind drought" when estimating power supplies.
- Electricity generation for the UK is expected to increase by a factor of 4, resulting in wind & solar PV making a lower percentage contribution to the overall need.

What needs to change for more of the UK power requirements to be met by nuclear?

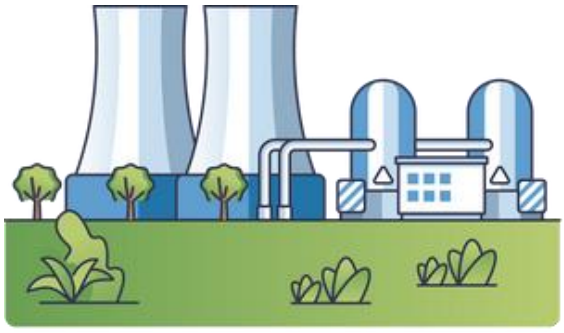
Building a nuclear power station is a major capital project spanning many years and at huge cost. There are a number of factors that directly impact the costs, amongst them being:

- High financing charges, particularly after the energy industry was privatised – our presenter believes that 80% of the cost of the new Hinckley Point C reactor are directly attributed to the financial lending institutions, particularly interest charges over the many years duration of the project.
- Scope creep – design changes being requested and approved that can put the project over budget in terms of both cost and time
- The need to make structures strong enough to resist an aircraft crash, which became a design criterion after 9/11 – 3 million tons of concrete will be used at Hinckley Point C, and as the concrete cannot all be poured at the same time due to the curing process, this has a direct impact on the project schedule and financing charges.
- High turnover of experienced staff - arising from the length of the project that requires contractors to work away from home for very significant periods of time, often years.

Reducing the cost of the civil works would significantly reduce the cost of a nuclear reactor project

Why consider SMR's?

SMR's are advanced nuclear reactors that generate up to 300-megawatt capacity – about one third of a traditional reactor's capacity. SMR's, being modular in design, can be built offsite and are compact enough to be easily transported to site for final assembly and testing. They are generally also small enough to fit onto half a football pitch. They promise faster and cheaper builds with low-carbon solutions



Large Conventional Reactor
700+ MW (e)



Small Modular Reactor
Up to 300 MW (e)

Large reactors are usually built near the coast to provide access to the vast quantities of sea water required for the cooling process. SMR's require significantly less cooling water and so could be sited at decommissioned coal-fired power stations.

While SMR prototypes and some global plants exist, commercial deployment is scaling up. Companies designing factory-built, compact nuclear fission systems include NuScale Power (US), Rolls-Royce SMR (UK), GE Vernova Hitachi (a US/Japan joint venture), and TerraPower (US - focusing on innovative sodium-cooled fast reactor designs – backed by Bill Gates).

The world's few currently operational commercial SMR units have been built by Rosatom & CNNC which are both state-owned Russian and Chinese enterprises.

Rolls-Royce has considerable expertise in designing, building, and maintaining the pressurised water nuclear reactors that power all Royal Navy nuclear submarines. Almost certainly the company is using its existing expertise to produce a commercial SMR solution. It currently has initial contracts for 12 reactors, which if the contracts are finalised, could lead to considerable cost savings due to economies of scale. At present the cost to build a single SMR, with a capacity of around 340 Megawatts, are estimated to be around £6 million. It is hoped that through "mass production" the cost could be reduced to closer to £1 million.
Given that the cost of building the 1700 Megawatt reactor at Hinckley Point C is estimated to cost £18-£20 million, the cost to produce the same output using five Rolls-Royce SMR's would be significantly higher unless the costs can be reduced through higher production volumes for the SMR's.
A Rolls-Royce SMR solution, to produce 470 Megawatts, is awaiting final approvals to be built following various consultations. Approval to proceed is expected in December 2026. It is anticipated that financing arrangements will be completed by September 2028 (almost 2 years!) and building the reactor would take a further 4 years.

What to do with spent nuclear fuel (nuclear waste)?
Nuclear waste, when it is taken from the reactor, is extremely hot and radioactive. It has to be cooled in deep water pools for up to 10 years. Thereafter, it can be transferred to thick steel and concrete dry casks, which are cooled by natural airflow.
Although some countries treat used nuclear fuel as waste, most of the material in used fuel can be recycled. Approximately 97% – the vast majority (~94%) being uranium – of it could be made into new fuel. Recycling typically involves separating out uranium and plutonium, which can then be mixed with fresh uranium and turned into new fuel. Countries such as France, Japan, Belgium and Russia have been using this approach, which also reduces the amount of long-lived radioactive waste.
Not surprisingly, the general public are not keen on having spent nuclear fuel stored near them, so the issue becomes a political, rather than technical, problem.
Conclusion.
Having read about SMR's in the Press, this scribe was surprised that SMR's hadn't already been more widely adopted as the underlying technology seems proven. A further surprise was the amount of time taken before the build of an SMR could start, particularly around arranging financing. Given governments are pushing for an ever-increasing use of electricity to meet their climate targets it seems there is a risk that current electricity generating capacity may be over-stretched before SMR's are ready to fill any shortfall.

The talk, which was a bit technical in places, was very interesting. John, our presenter, is extremely knowledgeable on the subject and fielded numerous questions from the audience. The members present responded in the usual way with a generous round of applause after a vote of thanks.

Chris Yates



Did you know in Newent? The George Hotel has over 370 years of History, Ghosts, and Hidden Gold.

Part I

There are old hotels, and then there are places where history seems to cling to every brick. The George Hotel in Newent, belongs firmly in the latter category and well worth a visit.

Standing at 21–23 Church Street, the George is a Grade II listed building whose present structure dates largely from the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Historic England records its Flemish-bond brickwork, slate roof, carriageway and surviving architectural features, while the building itself is traditionally associated with an inn dating back to around 1649.

For centuries, the George occupied an important position in Newent. The town stood on routes connecting Wales with Gloucester and the Severn crossing, making it a natural stopping point for travellers, merchants and coach passengers. The George developed as a coaching house on the post road to South Wales, and by the early 19th century coaches to Gloucester and Hereford were departing from its doors.

By 1876, the George was still very much part of Newent's travelling and commercial life. The Ledbury–Gloucester mail coach called at the inn, while the Inland Revenue office was also based there. A few years later, Kelly's Directory described it as "The George Commercial Hotel and Posting House" — a reminder that this was far more than simply a place to have a drink. It was a hub of communication, transport and business.

Even today, traces of its coaching past remain. The archway beside the building once provided access to the stables, where horses and coaches would have been accommodated while travellers rested inside.

But it is the stories surrounding the George that give the old inn an altogether different atmosphere.

The Ghosts of the George Hotel.

Like many historic coaching inns, the George has accumulated a reputation for strange happenings. Modern paranormal investigators and ghost-tour organisers describe it as one of Newent's haunted locations, with reports attached to several parts of the building.

Among the reported hotspots are Rooms 4 and 9, where investigators claim to have encountered unexplained presences. The bar has acquired the sinister nickname Dead Man's Corner, while the restaurant is associated with reports of a man — sometimes accompanied by a dog.

The kitchen has its own reputation, with reports of unexplained footsteps and movements when nobody should have been there. Perhaps most intriguingly, the alley leading towards the car park has been associated with reports of apparitions and unexplained lights or "orbs".

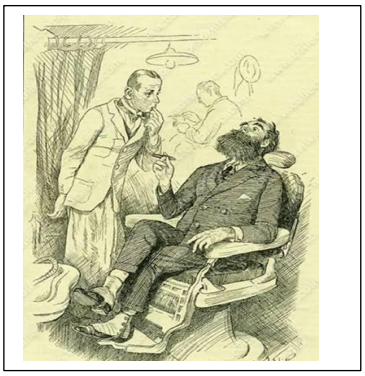
These are, of course, stories of reported paranormal experiences rather than established historical facts. There is no scientific proof that ghosts inhabit the George. Nevertheless, the fact that the building continues to feature in organised ghost investigations shows just how strongly its reputation has taken hold.

Ghosts & Giggles, which runs paranormal events in Newent, currently lists the George Hotel among its investigation locations. The overnight investigations invite participants to explore the building and investigate its reported haunted areas.

And perhaps the most appealing aspect of the stories is that the George does not need a dramatic tale of murder or tragedy to feel mysterious. Hundreds of years of travellers passing through its doors are enough to fire the imagination. How many conversations took place beside its fires? How many secrets were carried through its rooms? How many travellers arrived — and never lived to make the return journey?

A Forester goes to the doctor and says he is worried about the moles on his back.
The doctor examines him and says "You have nothing to worry about they are Benign"
The Forester says " Oi think yous need to check agin, I think you will find there be ten" !!!

A man is waiting for a bus in Cinderford when a woman came up to him and asked" Is that the Sun or Moon up there in the sky?" The man says "I dunno, I am not from here I am from Lydney"!!







Hair today – gone tomorrow?

At the time of writing we are sweltering in, what is now, one of our regular heatwaves although it is quite likely that, at the time of reading, we may be shivering in near Arctic weather! That said, I was thinking myself lucky that I am not covered in hair, as was our very distant forebears.

In terms of geological time, it is not so long, relatively speaking, that we were all quite hirsute- just think of our closest relative, the chimpanzee. Perhaps the advent of a previous global warming or the discovery of 'clothes' in the shape of animal skins or the discovery of shelter such as caves, has rendered such covering both obsolete and unnecessary. Be that as it may, nowadays, we just present ourselves, although not as Nature intended bur rather something like recognizable as our present form. Which set me thinking. Consider that attention (and the cost) that our current puny patch hair receives, you only have to look at any High Street and not be amazed at the proliferation of tonsorial twisters there are and it is not being discriminatory to say that 90% will be catering for the female of our species.

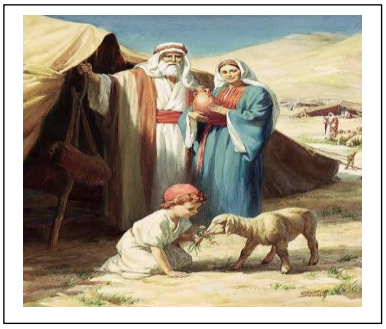
Suppose, then, at the number of such artists who would be required if were still concerned in hair, as opposed to a tiny percentage that we now have. Imagine heated rollers switched on or near your most sensitive parts and the constant need to check for singeing. Where would permanent waves be situated, I wonder. There would no doubt be many anxious moments when the hairdresser wielded their fearsome scissors a bit too near

our locks and tresses on all parts of our bodies. One plus I suppose would be that we would not need as many clothes but, with the advent of global warming, there would be some very hot humans around panting like our canine friends and, no doubt, friendly shopkeepers would place bowls of water for us to drink from.

Although, a final thought. What we have saved on the lack of need to shape and fashion in outlandish styles is more that swallowed up in the need to buy clothes to replace our bodily hair!

It seems as if Mother nature knows best as always but how fascinating it is to conjecture.

Concerned Androgenetic





In ancient Israel, it came to pass that a trader by the name of Abraham Com did take unto himself a healthy young wife by the name of Dorothy. And Dot Com was a comely woman, large of bosom, broad of shoulder and long of leg. Indeed, she was often called Amazon Dot Com.

And she said unto Abraham, her husband, "Why dost thou travel so far from town to town with thy goods when thou canst trade without ever leaving thy tent?" And Abraham did look at her as though she were several saddle bags short of a camel load, but simply said, "How, dear?"

And Dot replied, "I will place drums in all the towns and drums in between to send messages saying what you have for sale, and they will reply telling you who hath the best price. The sale can be made on the drums and delivery made by Uriah's Pony Stable (UPS)."

Abraham thought long and decided he would let Dot have her way with the drums. And the drums rang out and were an immediate success. Abraham sold all the goods he had at the top price, without ever having to move from his tent.

To prevent neighboring countries from overhearing what the drums were saying, Dot devised a system that only she and the drummers knew It was known as Must Send Drum Over Sound (MSDOS), and she also developed a language to transmit ideas and pictures - Hebrew to the People (HTTP).

And the young men did take to Dot Com's trading as doth the greedy horsefly take to camel dung. They were called Nomadic Ecclesiastical Rich Dominican Sybarites, or NERDS and lo, the land was so feverish with joy at the new riches and the deafening sound of drums that no one noticed that the real riches were going to that enterprising drum dealer, Brother William of Gates, who bought off every drum maker in the land. Indeed, he did insist on drums to be made that would work only with Brother Gates' drum heads and drumsticks.

And Dot did say, "Oh, Abraham, what we have started is being taken over by others." And Abraham looked out over the Bay of Ezekiel, or eBay as it came to be known and said, "We need a name that reflects what we are."

And Dot replied, "Young Ambitious Hebrew Owner Operators." "YAHOO," said Abraham. And because it was Dot's idea, they named it YAHOO Dot Com.

Abraham's cousin, Joshua, being the young Gregarious Energetic Educated Kid (GEEK) that he was, soon started using Dot's drums to locate things around the countryside. It soon became known as God's Own Official Guide to Locating Everything (GOOGLE).

That is how it all began. And that's the truth.

You can’t make this stuff up!



ENGLISH CHINA CLAY

Our speaker Mike Kippax worked for English China Clay for 25 years. Starting as a basic engineering apprentice and progressed to a development and research engineer

He started by explaining how China Clay was discovered in Cornwall.

In 1746, William Cookworthy, a Quaker apothecary and chemist from Plymouth, was visiting a fellow Quaker Richard Hingston, a surgeon in Penryn, Cornwall. It was during the visit at the Great Work Mine at Tregonning Hill, near Helston, that William discovered a source of clay which was to lead to developments in English porcelain and the birth of the China clay industry in Cornwall.

As demand grew from the centres of porcelain manufacture for the raw material, which became known as white gold, so too did the means of transporting the China clay which in turn led to the construction of harbours such as Charlestown, near St Austell, for its export.

China clay is the common name for kaolin, which is a hydrated aluminium silicate crystalline mineral. The fine mineral deposit is the result of hydrothermal decomposition of granite rocks and the deposits around St Austell in Cornwall were once the largest in the world. The area became the centre of China clay mining, extraction, and export. By the mid-19th century, 65,000 tonnes were mined every year and Cornwall monopolised the world supply.

The clay is mined in open cast pits using high pressure water and the resulting slurry is dried and processed into the material used not only in porcelain manufacture and ceramics but in a myriad of manufacturing processes such as pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, paint, and many others.*70% of the China Clay from this pit is used in the manufacture of high quality paper.*



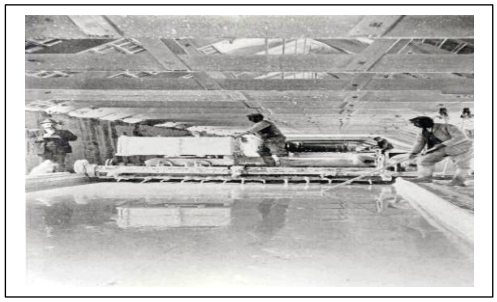


Manufacturing Steps

- **Extraction:** Workers mine raw kaolin from open pits using excavators and dump trucks.
- **Slurry Creation:** The raw material is crushed and mixed with large amounts of water to form a fluid mixture.
- **Refining and Separation:** The liquid passes through centrifuges, screens, and magnetic separators to pull out unwanted quartz, mica, and iron oxides
- **Drying:** The purified mixture is filtered and dried using natural sunlight or industrial dryers.
- **Milling and Packaging:** The dried clay goes through grinding mills to produce a fine white powder.









19th Century: Independent pits and family operations—such as those at Wheal Martyn—expanded rapidly to supply clay for international ceramics, paper production, and industrial fillers.

- **1919:** Three major West Country China-clay producers merged to form **English China Clays Ltd.** to stabilize and streamline production after World War I.
- **Mid-20th Century:** The company aggressively consolidated smaller regional competitors, modernizing extraction methods and building dedicated infrastructure like the Port of Par to handle massive global exports.

Expansion: ECC diversified into international shipping, construction materials and quarries, becoming a staple of the London Stock Exchange's FTSE 100 Index

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Acquisition and Legacy

1999: French industrial minerals group Imetal (later renamed **Imerys**) (staff pointed out that is an anagram of Misery) acquired English China Clays, absorbing its operations into a worldwide network.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO.....?

Who remembers that slightly puzzling sign, at least to a non-driver, "'Free Air" that figured prominently on so many garage forecourts? Alas no more. No, we must pay around 50p to pump up our tyres and what's more do it in Olympic times too otherwise you are faced with paying again. Time was, if we were lucky, a petrol pump attendant would do it for you as well as check your oil and maybe clean your windscreen. 'All part of the service, Guv" you would hear.







And what happened to the telephone directory?' The joy under the much-maligned GPO Telephones, of eagerly scanning the newly arrived one to check that your name was included. Oh, and don't forget the surreptitious joy of using it to look up someone's address. Now if we wish to find out someone's telephone number or even address yes, you've guessed it; a whopping fee to BT. And how about those free calls that we used to get when one's phone was first installed. Don't ask.









Time was when you bought a new appliance, toy, indulgence – call it what you will – accompanying it was an instruction book of such quality that it occupied pride of place in your bookcase. No more! Now, competing for space alongside the Serb-Croat, Japanese, Bulgarian and a host of others, in a print barely large enough to read, will be what passes for instructions. Or, even worse, will be a command to 'scan the QR Code (whatever that means); it is then I give up and invoke the aid of the all-knowing slave granddaughter.

Your weekly shop could be delivered free of charge, with the driver collecting the next week's order as he delivered. A weekly visit to the cinema provided for the price of admission the main feature film, a second one, a Movietone News plus a Look at Life short film. OH, and it wasn't "chomp while you view" either- not a single piece of popcorn within sight (nor smell)

It was some high-powered business guru, whose name I forget, indeed it I ever knew it, who said (and I paraphrase) that it is everyone's duty to extract the last penny of profit from every service that he/she provides"

Be that as maybe but in doing so haven't we lost something? What happened to service or just doing a good turn to someone? Or am I just trying to build a better yesterday?

Can anyone recall more examples of services that we once took for granted that are no more?

Nonagenarian Rant









Out and about again…. But where?

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



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