Newent and District Probus Club

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2026

From our Chairman

In the last decade or so Remembrance has become a noticeable feature of the whole of the first fortnight of November rather than being limited to just a few days either side of Remembrance Sunday. Indeed yesterday I was involved in setting up a 'Silent Soldier' (the soldier silhouettes widely seen now) outside our local church and large poppies already adorn the lampposts of our local market towns.

The generation of those who served in the Second World War has almost entirely passed now. [I do however have to mention 105-year-old Colin Bell who flew Mosquito aircraft in the latter part of the War. He gave a public talk in Hereford in late September this year that I attended and was a remarkable sprightly man who strode unaided to the stage and spoke clearly for an hour!] I, like many Probus members, am of the baby-boomer generation - born in the late forties or first part of the nineteen fifties. Many of us will have parents or relatives who served as twenty-year-olds in the War. My father was called up in September 1939 just before he began his second year at Cambridge University and was not demobbed until mid-1946 when he returned to Cambridge to finish his degree!

After the euphoria of peace being declared and a return to civilian life he, and many like him, wanted a return to normality and did not dwell on their wartime experiences (except perhaps the occasional anecdote of events encountered outside combat and during leave etc). So, other than on Remembrance Sunday itself he and many like him did not go in much for recalling their wartime experiences and those of their comrades.

Some therefore may say that modern remembrance practices and activities have gone too far and are just reflected glorification. I disagree. Yes, we are also remembering those who served in more recent conflicts, but we as a generation we have not had to experience those six years of total mobilisation (military and civilian) but instead have benefited from more than half a century of relative peace (and, dare I say, relative prosperity).

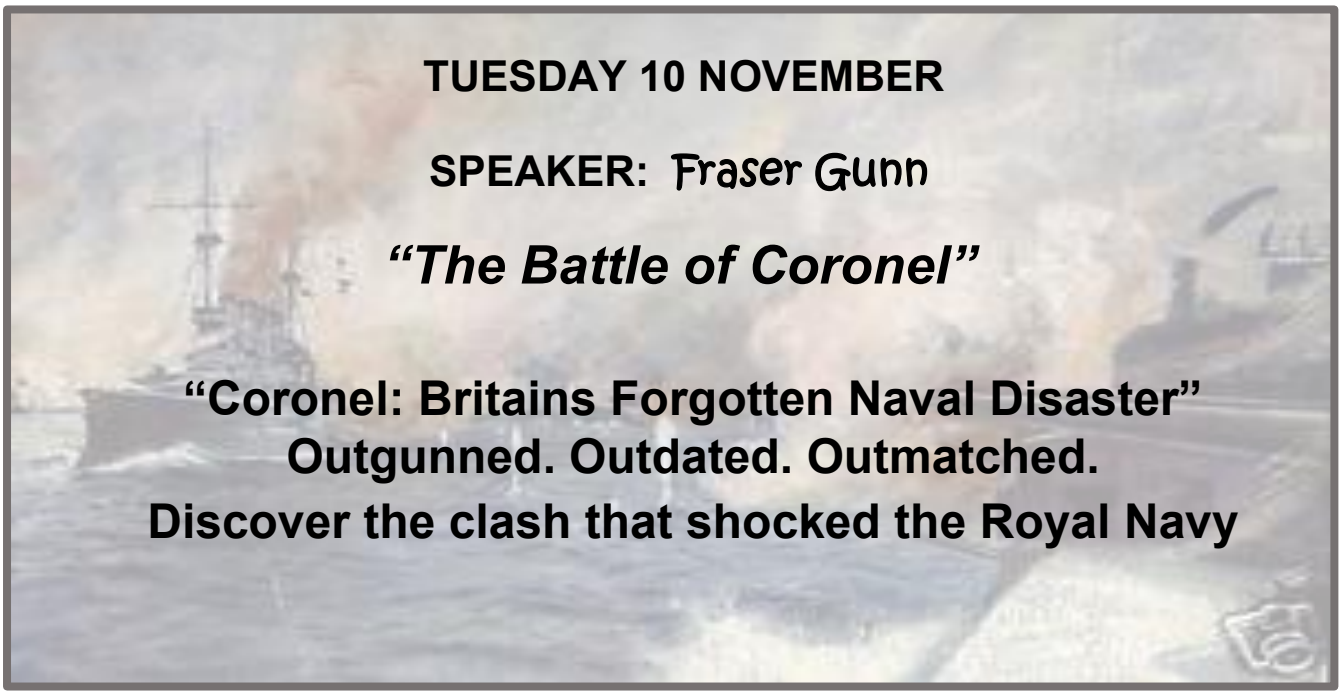
In the first half of the twentieth century both my father and his father before him, like millions of others, lived through and served in successive world wars. We have reason to be extraordinarily grateful to them for the relative peace and prosperity that followed in the next half century or so and must never forget their sacrifices.

Nigel



TUESDAY 3 NOVEMBER

The Bunch of Carrots
Hampton Bishop
HR14JR
What 3 words
stud.beakers.employ



TUESDAY 10 NOVEMBER

SPEAKER: Fraser Gunn

"The Battle of Coronel"

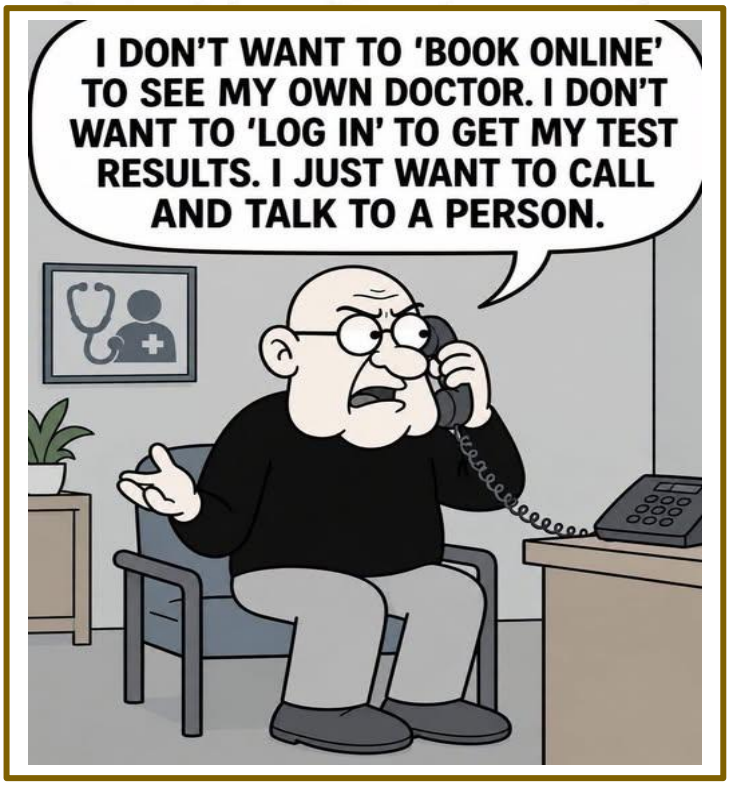
"Coronel: Britains Forgotten Naval Disaster"
Outgunned. Outdated. Outmatched.
Discover the clash that shocked the Royal Navy

TUESDAY 24 NOVEMBER

SPEAKER: Richard Aylward

"The death of British Humour"

We seem to have lost our British sense of humour. It's a great shame, we have to be so careful nowadays, we have lost a lot of humour because people are too frightened of getting too near touchy sybjects. Modern society has grown overly sensitive, arguing that heightened awareness of political correctness and a fear of causing offense led to self-censorship. Critics claim that this atmosphere stifles the boundary-pushing silliness, irony, and dark self-deprecation that historically defined iconic British sitcoms.







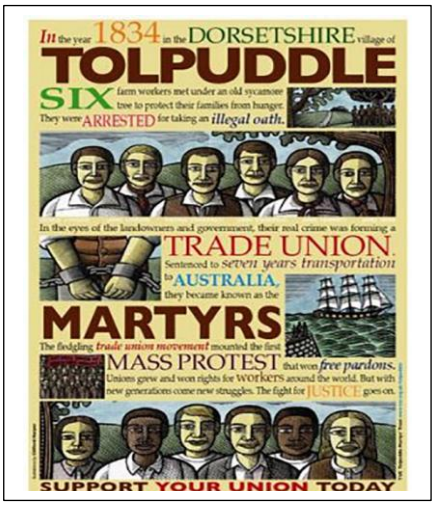






I hate when a couple argues in public, and I missed the beginning and don't know whose side I'm on.

AN UNLIKELY SPOT FOR A MARTYR



Tucked away in a peaceful corner of rural Dorset, the sort of place where not much has happened in the last hundred years or so amid such surroundings that only Dorset can provide, is an unlikely memorial to the beginnings of the Trade Union movement in Britain.
Tolpuddle is the name of this rural hamlet and it was from here nearly 200 years ago, that six farm workers, whose only crime was to band together in a bid to improve the slave like conditions under which they worked, were sentenced to deportation to Australia.

Virtually on the site of one of their mean dwellings is now a memorial to these trailblazers in the shape of a museum. On seeing it at first glance, a visitor might think that the term “museum” flatters to deceive. One room, staffed by volunteers, one immediately thinks of unfortunate felines barely being given enough room to rotate. Yet what it lacks in size, it makes up for in terms of content.

The museum evolved from the library which formed part of the Tolpuddle Martyrs’ Memorial Cottages, built in 1934 to mark the centenary of the Martyrs’ conviction. The library, meant for use by the workers living in the cottages, soon became a depository for various artefacts, documents and memorabilia relating to the history of the Tolpuddle Martyrs. Over the years, a rather ad hoc display telling the story of the Martyrs had evolved into the Tolpuddle Martyrs’ Museum.
Tolpuddle has long been a place of pilgrimage for trade unionists and visitors from the UK and around the world, for young and old alike. Visitors can discover for themselves how the Tolpuddle Martyrs changed the face of social history and, through their beliefs and actions, made such an impact on society.
It is virtually impossible to be absorbed into the peaceful surroundings of the museum and to reflect on the present-day contrasts in which the Trade Union movement today finds itself. Would the Martyrs? Could the martyrs have envisaged the skull shattering violence of the Miners’ strike of the 1970s. Had, indeed they ever heard of Orgreave? Would they believe in the doings of Red Robbo, who, according to some popular talk of the day, single handedly brought down the mighty British Leyland with his Union activities.
Don’t worry, let the hamlet of Tolpuddle work its spell.



The Men: George Loveless, James Loveless, Thomas Standfield, John Standfield, James Brine, and James Hammett.

The Cause: In 1834, they formed the *Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers* in Tolpuddle to protest falling weekly wages (reduced from 7 shillings to 6 shillings).

The Charge: Although trade unions were technically legal, the authorities prosecuted the men under an obscure 1797 law (the Unlawful Oaths Act) for swearing a secret oath of loyalty.

The Sentence: In March 1834, a jury at the Dorchester Assizes sentenced all six men to seven years of penal transportation to Australia.

The Protests: The harsh sentence triggered massive national outrage, including a huge demonstration at Copenhagen Fields in London and petitions signed by hundreds of thousands of people.

The Pardon & Return: Home Secretary Lord John Russell remitted their sentences in March 1836, and the men returned to England between 1837 and 1839. Most, later emigrated to Canada, except for James Hammett, who stayed in Dorset.

Tolpuddle gets its name from a combination of an ancient landowner named Tola and the local River Piddle in Dorset, England







An Extraordinary Adventure Through the Northwest Passage

Our speaker, Tim Riley, a local man with a remarkable story to tell, took us on a thrilling journey into one of the world's most remote and challenging sailing routes: the legendary Northwest Passage. Accompanied by his partner, Carol, Tim navigated the icy waters of the Canadian Arctic aboard their 47-foot yacht, *Lumina*, retracing the route of Captain Sir John Franklin's ill-fated expedition of 1845.

For centuries, European explorers dreamed of discovering a shorter sea route between Europe and Asia. The search began in earnest during the 15th century, when Portuguese and Spanish explorers ventured into unknown waters in pursuit of this elusive passage.

In 1845, Captain Sir John Franklin set sail from England aboard HMS Erebus and HMS Terror, tasked with navigating the remaining unexplored sections of the Northwest Passage and recording magnetic data to improve navigation. However, the expedition ended in tragedy. Both ships became trapped in the ice near King William Island in what is now Nunavut, Canada.

After enduring more than a year imprisoned by the Arctic ice, the ships were abandoned in April 1848. Franklin and two dozen other men had already perished, and the remaining 105 crew members, led by Francis Crozier and James Fitzjames, set out towards the Canadian mainland. None survived. Their disappearance remains one of the most haunting mysteries in the history of Arctic exploration.

More than 170 years later, Tim and Carol would follow part of this historic route, facing many of the same unforgiving elements that defeated Franklin and his crew.

Tim introduced us to *Lumina*, an impressive 47-foot yacht built by the French company Boreal, specifically designed to cope with demanding conditions. Constructed around a high-tech aluminium frame with aluminium cladding, the boat was engineered to withstand the harsh Arctic environment. Insulation and central heating provided essential protection against the bitter cold.

This was no ordinary sailing holiday. Their vessel needed to be a robust, self-sufficient home capable of carrying them thousands of miles through isolated waters, unpredictable weather and ever-changing ice conditions.

Tim was the 27th person to complete the Northwest Passage in a yacht, an achievement that gives some idea of just how extraordinary their undertaking was.

Before setting off, Tim decided to embrace the spirit of adventure in his own distinctive way. Inspired by his friendship with the current owner of Westons Cider, he grew a beard and donned a hat resembling that worn by the cider company's founder.

He also loaded *Lumina* with a generous supply of Westons cider, which would prove to be an excellent icebreaker in more ways than one! Along the route, Tim and Carol shared their cider with local residents and fellow sailors, helping to create friendships in some of the world's most isolated communities.

Their journey began in Oban, Scotland, before crossing to Greenland and heading west through the maze of waterways north of Canada, eventually reaching Alaska.

Timing was everything. They had a narrow window between August and October to navigate the passage before the advancing pack ice could trap them. Yet the Arctic had plans of its own. Ice appeared in unexpected places, forcing them to change course and make several diversions along the way.

Despite the challenges, the rewards were spectacular. Tim described breathtaking scenery, with vast stretches of rugged coastline, remote islands and dramatic landscapes that seemed almost untouched by the modern world. It was beautiful, but also stark and desolate, with enormous distances between settlements and little room for error.

Before leaving Greenland, they received some rather practical advice: obtain a rifle, as polar bears were a real possibility along the route. The purpose was deterrence rather than killing. Tim duly visited a Greenland supermarket, selected a rifle, was asked how much ammunition he wanted, and completed his purchase with remarkable simplicity! In a place where polar bears are a genuine part of everyday life, this was apparently quite normal.

Along the way, Tim and Carol visited an island where a hut built by the Hudson's Bay Company trading enterprise has become a tourist attraction, offering a glimpse into the region's trading history and the hardy people who once lived and worked there.

Tim also noticed an interesting contrast in local infrastructure. On some of the islands, electricity cables ran overhead on poles, exposed to the elements, whereas in Greenland the cables were buried underground. Even in these remote regions, the practicalities of everyday life offered fascinating insights into how communities adapt to their surroundings.

One of the most poignant stops came at Beechey Island, where they visited the graves of members of Franklin's expedition. Standing in such a remote and unforgiving landscape, it was impossible not to reflect on the hardships endured by those early explorers.

The mystery surrounding the expedition continues to fascinate historians. Lead poisoning from the solder used in the tins of preserved food carried by Franklin's men has been suggested as one possible contributing factor to their deaths. Many old tins still lie scattered near the graves, silent reminders of the expedition's tragic fate. In a particularly striking discovery, one of the crew members' graves was opened in modern times, revealing a remarkably well-preserved body thanks to the permafrost.
For Tim and Carol, this was more than a sightseeing stop. They were sailing through living history, following a route where the past remains startlingly close to the present.

Although they had embarked on a sailing expedition, the Arctic weather had other ideas. The combination of unpredictable winds, powerful currents and ice meant that they were able to sail for only around 10% of the journey.
For the rest, *Lumina* relied on her engine. The yacht carried 900 litres of diesel, stored in the main tank and additional containers on deck, providing a motoring range of approximately 1,000 miles. Fuel planning was therefore crucial. With vast stretches of wilderness between places where supplies might be available, every litre counted. There was little opportunity to pop into the nearest marina if they miscalculated!
Despite the isolation and demanding conditions, Tim and Carol were not entirely alone. They encountered several other boats travelling in different directions, as well as an icebreaker. These meetings provided welcome opportunities to exchange stories, share experiences and enjoy some well-earned relaxation. On at least one occasion, the crews gathered together for a party, and a substantial portion of the Westons cider brought from home was consumed!
It was a wonderful reminder that even in the most remote corners of the world, a shared adventure can bring people together. A little cider and good company can go a long way, even when the nearest pub is hundreds of miles away.

Not everything went according to plan. At one point, the yacht's autopilot developed a fault, leaving Tim and Carol to steer manually for extended periods.

With strong currents and powerful winds to contend with, keeping the boat on course was physically demanding and exhausting. In such conditions, a reliable autopilot is more than a convenience; it can make a significant difference to the crew's workload and safety.
The problem was eventually resolved when they reached Nome, Alaska, where the faulty equipment was replaced. Reaching Nome must have been a considerable relief after such a challenging stretch of the voyage.
With the Northwest Passage behind them, *Lumina* was eventually lifted out of the water at Kodiak, Alaska, and left there for the winter.
Tim explained that Kodiak is famous for its enormous brown bears. The Kodiak bear is among the largest populations or recognised subspecies of brown bear, and one of the two largest types of bears alive today, alongside the polar bear. Even after completing their Arctic voyage, the prospect of sharing the landscape with these magnificent animals added another element of wilderness adventure.
But this was not the end of the story.
Tim and Carol returned the following year and sailed *Lumina* down the west coast of America. Their yacht is now in Los Angeles, where it awaits their next expedition.
Tim's talk gave us a fascinating glimpse into the realities of undertaking such an extraordinary voyage. Behind the spectacular scenery lay careful preparation, technical expertise, difficult decisions and the ability to adapt when nature refused to cooperate.
From navigating shifting ice and visiting the graves of Franklin's crew to sharing cider with fellow adventurers and dealing with equipment failures in remote waters, Tim and Carol's journey was filled with memorable experiences.
Their voyage demonstrated that true adventure is about far more than reaching a destination. It is about embracing the unexpected, learning from the challenges and discovering places that few people will ever experience.

And with *Lumina* now waiting in Los Angeles, one thing seems certain: Tim and Carol's appetite for adventure is far from satisfied!

WE DIDN'T TRAVEL FAR

Members found new territory at this month's pub lunch yet it was a case of being on very much familiar territory. The King's Arms, in Newent, is the nearest the club has to a 'local' yet we have never sampled licensee Wayne Childs almost legendry lunches.

Fraser, donning yet another hat, organised this one and it was another instance of breaking new ground, this time holding the lunch on a Wednesday. With numbers slightly down, perhaps due to the very day change from our usual Tuesday, we all tucked in, albeit with some eyebrows raised when we saw the size of some of the portions.

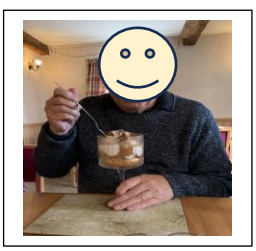
The K.A, as it is colloquially known, makes no pretensions to be anything than what it is- a traditional, and I hate the term – "boozer". Those from the evangelical wing of the drinking fraternity might go so far as to describe it as a branch of the much-discredited Social Services or Samaritans, in that on both sides of the bar there is usually a willing ear or a friendly voice (well, a voice anyway) to advise on a problem.

It hosts, among others, a regular games Evening, rendezvous for Bikers, skittles and darts matches. In fact, the KA plays host to our Probus committee meetings, Quiz nights and the ultra-competitive Skittles evening. All, may I add, at a very reasonable cost and with unfailing courtesy and panache. Much thanks to Landlady Chrissie and Bar Manager Sam.

But what, do I hear you ask, was our inaugural lunch there like? There was a steady stream of locals eating in the bar but we almost had the freshly refurbish dining room to ourselves. New tables and chairs ensured that we were comfortable for our meal and we were all seated together on one long table judging from what is an inaccurate statistic, it seemed that between us, we tried every dish on the menu. Home cured ham was a particular delicacy, a curry or two appealed to those with a taste for the exotica and no pub meal would be complete with the pub favourite fish and chips.

The dessert menu was a challenge which the club accepted manfully and it can be reported one which the club triumphed 16 to nil. This included one member who must be nameless who succeeded in eating an ice cream variant which members swore was intended for two!

Yet another successful lunch, thanks to Fraser, if you are one of the very few who have never tried one, why not give the next one a go? No mystique of complications. Just give your name when Kelvin sends out the next invitation, turn up – oh and bring an appetite



Not Winners' Dinners but Peter's eaters







TAXING WAYS – AND MEANS

In my experience, there aren't many times when using an AI, a bot – call 'em what you will – represents an improvement on the original humanoid thingy but I genuinely believe (and believe me, it hurts to say it) when it comes to taxing one's car, times have changed for the better

Let me delve back in what seems like prehistoric times. In the mid twentieth century, cars were taxed (Road Fund Licence to be pedantic) either on an annual or a quarterly basis and from memory, the annual one fell at the year end, while the quarterly ones fell on, surprise surprise, in the Quarter days I.e. 31st March, June 30th etc.

In those far off days, it fell to the local taxation department of the local authority to administer this and indeed, Gloucester City had a purpose-built building at Montpelier, Gloucester, near the park, and inevitably huge queues developed around taxing dates. Temporary staff were taken on to deal with this peak demand (Indeed for me it was a useful source of extra cash), on the lines of the Christmas card posting rush. The voluminous application form had to be completed in black ink (why? No one ever told me) And in those far off days before "The Computer Says No mentality, we bureaucrats would take a perverse delight in rejecting an application on the slightest infringement,

After what seemed like hours – and probably was - the customer would emerge with his wallet lighter but clutching the oh so precious round disc that was affixed to his car's windscreen in a variety of ingenious ways.

How about Today? I am not ashamed to admit that my middle name could easily be Luddite and I often fantasise about taking a sledgehammer to my long-suffering computer but, hard as it is to say, the present system is an improvement. I timed myself because of my latent nerdish and it was six minutes from dialling the first digit of the freephone number and a relatively painless interrogation by that voice until the computer, who must be a kind of a Dalek, said in a suitably metallic voice, Your Vehicle is now Taxed

Any complaints? Well, I do miss that tax disc, sitting reassuringly on my windscreen

Peter (Tolpuddle Martyr) Hayes

FOOTNOTE

The local authority was also responsible for issuing new Vehicle Registration numbers. Gloucester City was FH while the county ones were DG, DF DD and AD and the official in charge of their issue was the Local Taxation Officer (LTO). Imagine our surprise when, one day, a new car appeared in his parking bay bearing the treasured registration number LTO 1. How on earth did he acquire that number> Pure coincidence, we were assured. Mind you, perhaps we shouldn't have been surprised. The car belonging to the Clerk to the County Council, a man named Guy Davies, bore the number GD1. Nice work if you can get it eh!

The Secret Radar Scientists of Malvern: A Wartime Story

Members were treated to a fascinating and informative talk on the history of radar in Malvern during the Second World War, delivered by Mike Burstow, accompanied by Tony Waller, from the Malvern Radar and Technology History Society. Although the subject became quite technical at times, the speakers brought the story vividly to life, not only through their presentation but also by bringing along a selection of electronic equipment and fascinating reconstructions of early radar devices, examples of which are on display in the Society's museum.

Mike began by introducing the work of the Malvern Radar and Technology History Society, a charity dedicated to preserving this important part of our local and national heritage and inspiring the next generation of scientists and engineers.

A Secret Mission Comes to Malvern

The story began in 1942, when the growing threat of enemy attack made it necessary to move radar scientists and their equipment from the south coast to a safer location. The relocation was carried out at remarkable speed, with the team arriving in Malvern in May 1942, following preparations completed in less than 30 days.

The scientists were accommodated in a large former hotel in the town centre, while others were billeted with local families. They were an unusual sight in wartime Malvern. They wore no uniform and appeared to have little connection with the armed forces, leading some local residents to question what they were doing while so many of the town's young men and women were serving in the forces, the Merchant Navy or other essential wartime occupations.

What the local population could not know was that these seemingly unremarkable newcomers were engaged in work of enormous importance. Their activities were top secret, and they were unable to explain the vital contribution they were making to the war effort. *It was only after the war, in 1945, that the true significance of their work began to become clear.*

The Development of Airborne Radar

At the time, Britain's principal radar defence system was Chain Home, the network of coastal radar stations developed before and during the early years of the war. It played a crucial role in detecting incoming enemy aircraft and was instrumental in Britain's defence during the Battle of Britain.

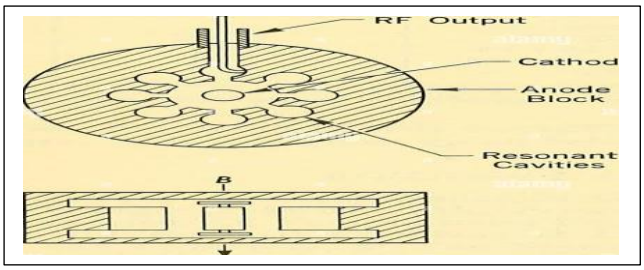
However, there was a need to take radar beyond the coastline and into the air. The challenge facing the Malvern team was to develop a radar system that could be carried by an aircraft, while meeting extremely demanding restrictions on size, weight and power. The equipment had to weigh no more than 90 kilograms and operate within a power limit of 1,000 watts.

Achieving this was no simple task. Different designs were tested in a variety of aircraft, with engineers constantly seeking ways to make the equipment smaller, lighter and more effective. Experimental prototypes were built to demonstrate that the technology would work, paving the way for practical airborne radar systems.

One of the highlights of the talk was the opportunity to see examples of these early devices. Tony had painstakingly recreated several prototypes using the original scientists' notebooks as his guide. These remarkable reconstructions helped members appreciate the ingenuity, patience and sheer determination required to turn scientific theory into working equipment under the pressures of wartime.

The Magnetron: A Revolutionary Breakthrough





A major turning point in radar development came with the introduction of the cavity magnetron. This ingenious device generated powerful, high-frequency electromagnetic waves known as microwaves, making it possible to develop radar equipment that was considerably smaller and more effective.

The breakthrough transformed the possibilities for airborne radar. Smaller equipment could be fitted into aircraft, opening up new opportunities for detecting enemy targets and improving operational effectiveness. The development work also required large-scale manufacturing. Established radio and television companies, including Pye and EMI, were called upon to produce equipment in the quantities needed. The combination of scientific innovation, engineering expertise and industrial production ensured that these advances could be put to practical use during the war.

A Lasting Legacy

Mike's presentation offered a fascinating insight into a largely hidden chapter of Malvern's history. What had once appeared to some residents to be a mysterious group of scientists living quietly among them was, in reality, a team making a significant contribution to Britain's wartime technological effort.

Their story is a reminder that victory in the Second World War depended not only on those fighting on the front line, but also on the scientists, engineers and manufacturers whose work helped give Britain a vital technological advantage.

The Malvern Radar and Technology History Society continues to preserve this legacy, ensuring that the achievements of these pioneering scientists are not forgotten and that their story can inspire future generations.

Fraser thanked Mike and Tony for a thoroughly engaging, detailed and informative talk. Members showed their appreciation with warm applause, having gained a new understanding of the remarkable scientific work carried out in Malvern during the Second World War.



Ed





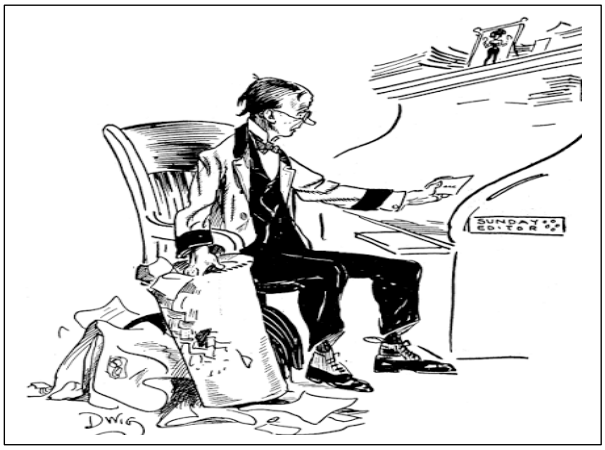


PICTURE QUIZ

CHRISTMAS LUNCH

WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER

Bells Hotel and Country Club
Lord's Hill,
Coleford
GL16 8BE



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