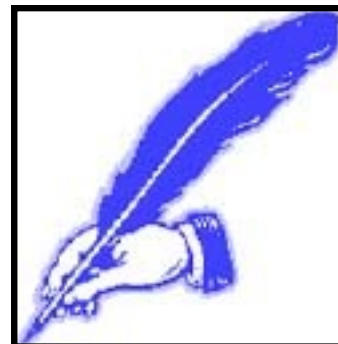


La Plume de Probus Pontivy

The official Newsletter

Of the Probus Club de
Pontivy

June 2011



A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

On May 11th history was made! What a grandiose phrase to describe what, in Probus terms, is a parochial affair! But for the clubs involved, which I will henceforth describe as “The West France and Jersey Group of Four”, encompassing as it does the Probus clubs of Emeraude, Armor and Pontivy together with Jersey, it was anything but parochial, because for the first time the three breton clubs met and were joined by the numerically more important club from Jersey. This sort of get-together is, to say the least, unusual but it is intrinsically logical. Our friends from the Saint Malo and Dinard clubs are nearest geographically to Jersey (and have historically close links with the island), while we in Pontivy are Jersey’s closest English-speaking Probus club, and thus a meeting between the four of us seemed to be a natural first step towards closer cooperation and more serried links.

Thus it was that we all foregathered at an hotel near the sluice on the Rance estuary at mid-day on May 11th, our Jersey friends having come over specially for the event. We all had the opportunity (and seized it) of mingling and getting to know each other. Whereas I had initially foreseen problems with language and communication, this anxiety proved to be groundless, for many of our French colleagues spoke excellent or at least passable English, and I was pleased to note that among our members and our Jersey visitors, serious efforts were being made to speak French. This bodes well for future events of this kind.

After a somewhat indifferent lunch, we were privileged to witness a masterly presentation by Gordon Rayfield on the subject of The Dam-Busters Raid, on which a great deal has been written. To judge by the quality of the questions asked of Gordon, the lecture had indeed evoked considerable interest, and can be judged to have been highly successful.

This however leads me to broach a matter which has been giving me some concern, namely the poor response, all things considered, to invitations to participate in special events and indeed as a broader issue to “put in a pennyworth” by way of contributing either presence at functions or articles for our Newsletter. Despite impassioned appeals by Geoff, our Past President, and John, our Vice-Chairman – and indeed by myself – members have been singularly backward in coming forward. I am fully aware that we are now approaching the holiday period with all that that entails, but I would hope nonetheless that we can henceforth show a bit more of “esprit de corps”.

Not wishing to end on such a sombre note, I look forward to a renascent future with new members aplenty. A pious hope? I think not.

Tony Dyson May 2011

UN MOT OU DEUX DU PRESIDENT

Le 11 mai dernier, nous sommes devenus historiques ! Quelle phrase grandiose pour décrire en termes probusiens une affaire, si pas de clocher, d'intérêt restreint ! Cependant, pour les clubs participants, que je dénommerai dorénavant « Le Groupe des Quatre d'Ouest France et de Jersey », regroupant les clubs Probus d'Armor, Emeraude et Pontivy ainsi que celui de Jersey, cette affaire était loin d'être « paroissiale », parce que pour la première fois les trois clubs bretons se sont réunis avec le concours du club de Jersey, numériquement beaucoup plus important. Ce genre de rassemblement n'est pas habituel, c'est le moins qu'on puisse dire, mais il provient d'une certaine logique intrinsèque, certes ! Nos amis de Saint Malo et de Dinard sont les plus proches géographiquement de Jersey avec laquelle ils partagent une histoire commune, tandis que notre club de Pontivy est le club Probus anglophone le plus proche. Les îles britanniques se trouvent au-delà de l'horizon ! Il s'en est suivi qu'une rencontre entre nos quatre clubs serait un premier pas logique vers une collaboration plus étroite et des liens plus serrés.

C'est ainsi que nous nous sommes tous réunis dans un hôtel près du barrage de la Rance à midi le 11 mai, nos amis de Jersey s'étant déplacés spécialement pour nous rejoindre. Nous avons donc eu la possibilité, que nous avons saisie à deux mains encore faut-il le dire, de faire connaissance et de forger des liens. Je dois avouer que j'avais quelques soucis au niveau des langues, et par conséquent des difficultés éventuelles de communication, mais ces soucis se sont avérés sans fond, car beaucoup de nos amis français possédaient un anglais convenable voire excellent, et j'ai constaté avec plaisir que nos membres ainsi que ceux de Jersey faisaient des efforts surhumains pour s'exprimer en français ! Bravo ! Cela me paraît de bon augure pour assurer un déroulement sans couture d'un tel événement à l'avenir.

Ayant déjeuné d'une façon plus ou moins acceptable, nous avons eu le privilège d'assister à une présentation magistrale de la part de notre conférencier, Gordon Rayfield, ancien officier supérieur de la Royal Air Force, qui nous a entretenu au sujet du raid des « Destrocteurs de Barrages » en 1943. Beaucoup d'encre a coulé à ce sujet depuis cet exploit qui est fort connu. A juger par les questions pertinentes qui lui ont été posées, la conférence a suscité un intérêt palpable, et peut être considérée une belle réussite. Un grand merci, Gordon !

Nous nous sommes tous séparés jurant que nous allons répéter cette expérience dès que nous en entrevoyons la possibilité.

Dont acte !!



Lunch at the Kyriad hotel St Malo

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Lunch at the Kyriad Hotel St Malo



Eat, drink and be merry !

But remember, We are what we eat.

LENT is a good time to ask ourselves about what we eat and drink. One thing is for certain, we must do both: it seems that all living organisms feed. I suppose feeding equates to gaining energy and raw material to grow and replicate.

As Noel Coward might have said, “Elephants do it, Daffodils do it, and even Primitive Slimes do it.” We humans do it and in some cultures, including our own, to great excess when others barely survive.

We now know that everything here on this planet, I hesitate to say our planet, and everything throughout the infinity of the universe originates from the same moment in time and space. From that ‘creative happening’ came everything and at that point an evolutionary process began. Energy moved across what was to become known as the Universe evolving into an infinite range of complexities some of which are now being unravelled and argued about by a privileged few.

What ever is eventually agreed upon, and probably there never will be a lasting agreement on such issues, we ‘lay minds’ can see that from the beginning of space and time evolution towards states of equilibrium have been happening . That is of course what Darwin so contentiously proposed in the nineteenth century: all flora and fauna evolve to a delicate balance within their culture and immediate environment.

Geology and palaeontology, those disciplines which evolved around about the same era as Darwin continue to demonstrate that numerous life forms have existed on this planet and that many are no longer with us. They vanished when something or combinations of events pushed their equilibria too far off balance. Noel Coward again, “Even Dinosaurs did it.” That is excepting the Birds, perhaps?

Homo Sapiens Sapiens has evolved along a still being discovered evolutionary line.

Let me propose to you that each and every one of us is a survivor of everything that has happened in the Universe. Every atom and molecule which make us what we are has its origins at that ‘creative moment’. As a life form we evolved along with everything else from some primeval cocktail of raw chemistry. First

it is proposed there was a slime which was able to feed and replicate. They are still with us eating and drinking and absorbing nutrients. Just as important, rejecting unwanted waste.

They like us evolved within a regime delicately balanced and adapted to everything in their surrounding environment. Changes in those equilibria can destroy reproduction of the species and subsequent survival. Changes also can cause positive evolutionary 'step change'. Possibly many small changes can be accommodated and it may be it is the large events which bring about catastrophic exterminations.

We are all aware of the unresolved debates about how we are still causing damage to this planet. We don't understand it but it is reasonable to propose that when we introduce a new substance onto the planet or construct a new process there will be consequences. A simple 'blackboard' analogy: a new substance or process is akin to firing an artillery shell into the future of the planet. In many cases the full consequences of the 'shot' when it lands and the time of flight are unknown.

Such a series of events occurred on this planet when the great era of industrialization was initiated. Processes and substances came into being which had not existed before. Natural equilibria were pushed off balance. Populations including humans had life styles disrupted. The very atmosphere was altered.

Perhaps also something we do not give thought to is that the new era of industrial chemistry designed and manufactured substances not seen on the planet ever before. The mass manufacture of ammonia, sulphuric, hydrochloric and nitric acids in themselves were of little consequence in the broader debate. Much more important in understanding the intrusive effects of the new chemistry never before experienced on the planet was the 'dyestuffs business'. Derived initially from the readily available 'coal tar' by products of the town gas industry came a range of bright coloured dyes. Following on at a later date came the explosives and chemical warfare products. The twentieth century saw the steady development of agricultural and pharmaceutical chemicals. Through the middle of the twentieth century the effects of the new chemistry started to show in the medical epidemiology studies. People were being exposed to substances they had no natural defense for. The shots from the industrial era were starting to fall thick and

fast. One such shot was the use of beta-naphthylamine in the rubber industry: nasty cancers came to light.

We are what we eat, drink, inhale and absorb through our protective skins.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves much more seriously what we are exposed to, and importantly and controversially, at what dose.

An anecdote relating to an old buddy: he kept a few sheep and was mindful of their welfare. Each year he personally ‘dipped’ them. His quote: “I made sure they were well done by standing in the ‘dip’ with them, pushed them well under and gave them a good hand wash.” He always doubled up the recommended dose.

He had a period of poor health with symptoms of disruption of the nervous system.

He had overdosed his skin absorbency: possibly.

When we consider our eating and drinking habits what we inhale and absorb are equally important in controlling our exposure to potentially harmful effects.

We are surrounded by chemicals once unknown on the planet which until now have not been involved in the evolutionary progress of the planet and its life forms. Those who produce our food are now dependent upon such substances.

Ironically, and topically, radio active substances and their emissions along with a multiplicity of ‘radiations’ from the Universe have always been with us through out the evolution of the planet.

Finally, of course what we eat, drink, inhale and absorb are part of the story. We now know that at birth we come equipped with a chemical template passed on to us from all of our ancestors. Almost weekly there is some public announcement of another piece of revealing information about our genetic inheritance. Some genetic patterns may cause tolerances or weaknesses in those individuals who are born with them.

Never before has life been so complicated, perhaps then it is as well that we can eat, drink and be merry: in moderation and with variation of course.

Tony Rickards 2011

Gore Vidal called Astronauts, Rotarians in outer space

DATES AND WORDS AND THINGS

We all have dates which stick in the mind, and I don't mean the boy and girl variety! An obvious one is '9/11', the 11th September 2001, on which date the infamous destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers took place. Another two are the wedding of Princess Diana and that of her tragic death. For me, with the odd tortuous mind that I have, a notable date was 20th February 2002 written as 20 02 2002, the perfect palindrome. A palindrome is a word or a phrase, or indeed a sentence, which reads the same backwards and forwards, and is derived from the Greek words for 'to run again'.

A simple p. reflects the first words spoken by Adam to Eve in the Garden of EdenMADAM, I'M ADAM. A political one popular after Waterloo was.....ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA, or a somewhat contrived one such asA MAN, A PLAN, A CANAL – PANAMA , and so on. The Germans even came up with a palindrome which is peculiar to say the least.....EIN NEGER MIT GAZELLE ZAGT IM REGEN NIE (A Negro with a gazelle never despairs in the rain.) I ask you!!

We think we have a humdinger of a long word in 'antidisestablishmentarianism', which apart from some compounded medical or chemical words is the longest word in the English language, but it pales into insignificance alongside the German for the captain of the Danube Steamship Trip Company, which reads, would you believe, as follows : “ Donaudampfschiffsfahrtsgesellschaftskapitän”!!

On the broader subject of language in general and English in particular, the strength and dynamism of the latter derive from the addition to the original melting-pot of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Norman French of a multitude of words from Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German, Portuguese, modern French, Arabic, Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish, Malay, Hindi, Chinese, Japanese and many more.

Other than words of North African origin such as Toubib (Doctor), Bled (dusty waste land) etc. and recently imported Americanisms, the French do not enjoy this luxury.

Here are a few examples of 'new' English words

Chinese	.....chow	.....'fried'
	gung-ho	.....'work harmoniously'
	kowtow	.....'bump the head'
Japanese	.....judo	.....'passive way'
	.....hara-kiri	.....'stomach cutting'
	Tycoon	.....'great prince'
Hindi	.....punch	.....'five ingredients'
	pariah	.....'drum' – parai, a shunned caste of drummers.
	shampoo	.....'massage'
	chit	.....'letter'
Sanskrit	.....sugar	.....'gravel' (sakara)
Gaelic	.....whisky	.....'water of life (uisge beatha)
	slogan	.....'war cry' (sluagh gairm)
Arabic	.....sofa	.....'carpet' (suffah)
	magazine	.....'storehouses' (makhazin)
	alcohol	.....'eye shadow' !!!
	mattress	.....'place to throw something' (matrah)

I could go on, but will not bore the back teeth off the reader any further, except to quote a law student's howler. The now discontinued tag for an evil mind, or a mind with criminal intent is the latin "mens rea", and the joke is that the complete answer to a charge of (homosexual) indecent assault is the absence of mens rea! Please forgive me, I just couldn't resist it.

TD



With our Presidents kind permission the following letter is repeated below verbatim. As you can see it is a personal letter but it may serve to introduce the author to us all in anticipation of meeting him at some future date. ED

Julian De Wette February 17, 2011 at 5:34pm

Subject: Witterings
Dear Tony & Barbara

Wonderful to hear from you - and that you are both well. Things are getting a bit hectic here. Have just completed 'Sister Priscilla's Dilemma: The Nun with the Gun' a libretto for which I am now searching for a composer. This is a bit of an uphill battle as no-one wants to do anything on spec. And can I blame them? Queries are met dit demands for a commission, although I can't spend a penny on anything.

In the mean time I've sent it to the Royal Court Theatre in London to see if they might put it on as a play. Also sent it to a theatre group in Buenos Aires, for the same purpose, although they might translate it into Spanish. Everything up in the air. 'The Barber of Bree Street' has now also 're-become' a vague possibility, with a local visitor from the UK who might punt it at the New Vic/or Old.

The poetry (English) is now a collection in search of a publisher. And, although my publisher has what I thought was my 'next' book in hand, they insist that it might be good for a third novel, as readers are expecting something more of a 'follow-up' to 'A Case of Knives'. So what it means is that I will have to complete 'The Dance of the Blue Crane' in a hurry so that they can get it in time to publish in 2012.

A third drama, 'His Master's Voice', has been through the mill so many times and begins to look like an untidy draw. Must do something about that. 'Knives' is now available online all over Europe, which is a bit mind-boggling. The question is: will the book sell in sufficient numbers to attract European publishers?

So, my mind is all in something of a whirl. That is why I so wish for the quiet of the house in Riolo. Wonder what new tinkering David has managed there? Give him & Muriel our regards. Houses are not selling locally yet -- so how will I ever do it without a windfall? Haven't even heard from the Equitable Life yet, although Parliament has approved somewhat of a limited payback.

Charlotte and I are well and would be delighted to join you for lunch in Pontivy -- and we propose to visit Brittany, although we haven't settled on a date as yet because of work pressure. Will let you know as soon as things become apparent. The very lure of a Brittany meal will keep me going, though. Thank you for the invitation. I'm sure that I'll think of something to say to your club members. Keep well, both of you -- and we look forward to seeing you later this year. Love from Julian & Charlotte.

Thought for the day !

Mike Barfield once said that "Easter" was a national celebration of chocolate

A HYDRANGEA ADVENTURE

Our area of Brittany is renowned for the cultivation of hydrangeas, which the French call Hortensia. Hydrangeas will be coming into bloom right about now, in a bewildering variety of species, bloom shapes, varieties and sizes.

To see them planted and flowering in a natural setting is an uplifting experience, and if this setting forms part of a park of outstanding beauty, a visit to the Lac au Duc is a must. This natural lake which is about 2 miles long by ½ mile wide (it varies) lies within the confines of three communes, Ploërmel, Taupont and Loyat, themselves some 7 miles east of Josselin.

Along the south-western shore, between the golf course and the lake, a “Hortensia Walk” was created several decades ago to allow the aficionado to amble gently between hydrangea bushes of practically every known species from the tiny PeeWee to the giant 8 ft varieties. Here the visitor can admire blooms such as ‘Endless Summer’, ‘Lemon Zest’, ‘Dooley’, ‘Forever pink’, ‘Harlequin’ and ‘Frillibet’ among others. To wander down the path between the flowers for several hundred yards is an experience well worth slogging the 50 odd km from Pontivy.

For those whose appetites have been opened by this experience, a visit to the growers is the next step. Their nursery devoted solely to “Les Hortensias” lies some 4 km along the Ploërmel to Taupont road (D 8) and covers about 10 acres, and the enthusiastic gardener could easily spend an hour or two there – many do.

Tony Rickards

Editors Note

The Human Mind

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulacly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid Aoccdrnig to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mtttaer in-waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit a porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Amzanig huh? yaeh and I aw-lyas thought slpeling was ipmorantt.

As you can see the contributions for this edition of the “Plume de Pontivy” came from only two of our members, my grateful thanks to them. This little snippet was sent to me by an acquaintance in England (not I regret to say by one of our members !) I do hope you enjoy reading these offerings and should you feel you would like to contribute please drop me an e-mail, or maybe you have something you would like to get off your chest feel free. Items can be published anonymously or under a “nom de plume” if you would prefer.