

Walk in the Churnet Valley, Monday 2nd December

On an overcast but dry day, a group of members and ladies gathered at the Ramblers Retreat situated in the Churnet Valley near to Alton in Staffordshire. Our walk of approximately 4.5 miles started with a steady climb out of the valley following the course of “Dimmingsdale”, a feeder stream to the river, passing two beautiful but remote properties.

On the high ground we passed a youth hostel which was suggested, tongue in cheek, as a likely high-class venue for a Probus weekend. Our way lead us to a vantage point with an unusual view of the turrets of Alton Towers and, following a steep descent, to a welcome coffee stop next to a pool and stream.

The remainder of the way took us on ancient tracks through woodland and open fields, finishing back at “The Ramblers” after a remarkably mud free, pleasant and interesting journey. We finished the day with a superb lunch in good company and in the most attractively decorated surroundings.

— Dennis Rose

Luncheon at Birmingham College of Food, Thursday 9th January

We have been having lunch at the College for many years and I believe that this year the food and service was a ‘step up’ on previous occasions. The quality and portions of the meals were excellent, especially the profiteroles! The service was prompt and we had staff who seemed happy with their chosen career.

The lunch epitomised why our club is so successful, as was commented upon by our President— ‘Good company, conviviality, and having a good time’. If you can also throw in a decent meal, then we really have enjoyed ourselves!

- Brian Mallett

And a few words from your Editor.....

I really must apologise for the lateness of this ‘January’ Newsletter, but the sad truth is that I managed to get my dates hopelessly mixed-up. Only when I spoke to President Rod last Thursday morning did I realise that was the day of the meeting—somehow I’d thought we met on the *last* Thursday of the month and not, specifically, the fourth. Hence a rapid quick-change act in order to get up there and show my face, *sans* Newsletter!

The problem, as most of you already know, is that I have a daily appointment at the Q.E. for radiotherapy, which takes a huge slice out of the day, is very tiring, and has totally messed-up my calendar. Otherwise I feel a bit of a fake in feeling so well, although there’s a way to go yet and the treatment promises to get worse before it gets better. But enough of that.

Regarding Tony’s account of the November speaker, I just wanted to note a couple of links between Probus and the Pat Collins empire. For some years I lived at ‘Four Winds’, the house on the corner of Halloughton Road from which Pat’s son, ‘Walsall John’ ran the Sutton Park Crystal Palace, menagerie, etc., until around 1955. The property originally had 7½ acres, with the bottom bit known to long-time residents as the ‘donkey field’, subsequently built upon as Anderton Close, home of Harry & Annette. Small world, isn’t it!

- Peter Weston

MAKING YOUR APOLOGIES

If you are unable to attend a General Meeting please advise **Mike Terry** by the **Sunday** before.

If you are unable to carry out your duties on the Kitchen Rota please try and ‘swap’ with someone from the following month, and advise **Graham Jones** of the change.

If you will be unable to provide the Newsletter Report or deliver the Vote of Thanks please get in touch with me, **Peter Weston**, before the meeting concerned.



Sutton Park Probus Club

(Founded 1998)

President: Rod Crowley

Newsletter

No.182

January 2014

‘FAIRGROUND TALES’ – November talk by Mr Ned Williams

Report by Tony Ferneyhough



Fairground people are a breed apart, or so it would seem. The lives of these ‘travelling entertainers’ are rooted in a long history; they all know each other and the bonds that exist within the fairground families are very strong.

Ned Williams, our November speaker, gave an overview of the families, their lives and their outlook on life. He told us that all of the ‘resident’ fairgrounds are governed by medieval charters going back hundreds of years, and at some events such as the Nottingham Goose Fair, for instance, all the families try to get there to make it a grand social occasion.

Many of us will also remember the old ‘Onion Fair’, one of my favourites (though they never sold onions) which we used to enjoy in the Autumn at the Serpentine grounds in Aston, long since built-over, until 1968. This was at the ‘back-end’ of the season for the fairground families, after which they tended to retreat to their ‘winter yards’ until the Spring.

Ned Williams reminded us of the Pat Collins Fun Fair in Sutton Park – Pat died in 1943 but his name actively still lives on, to such a degree that folk like Anthony Harris who took over the business (through family connections) is still referred to by Pat’s name.

Many of the families still live in their vans (*not* caravans!), mainly given to them at the time of marriage and painted in family colours. When there is a ‘joining’ of two families then the vans reflect these colours. There are two distinct groups, the ‘Showmen’ and the ‘Flatties’ (an unkind term for those who are not directly descended from the original families), and there is no love lost between either of them and gypsies, while the so-called ‘New Age Travellers’ are held in disdain.

Ned is a Black Country man and proud of it, with interests in such diverse subjects as railways, chapels, the cinema, Tibet, and corrugated iron (!), and he is currently working on his 50th book. Ken Shaw summed-up by thanking him for a truly fascinating insight into what is still very much a closed world.

- Tony Ferneyhough

Diary of events and activities to May 2014

Monday 3rd February
Long Walk around Kenilworth Castle
 led by Bob Badham
 (re-scheduled from January)

Thursday 13th February
Visit to Avery Museum
10.15 for 10.30am start
 Meet in Museum car-park,
 Foundry Lane, Smethwick
 David Rooke, co-ordinator

Thursday 20th February
'Bucks Fizz' short walk around
Sutton Park, 10.00a.m.
 Starting at the home of Barbara & Mike
 Taylor, 10 Featherstone Road.

Thursday 27th February
'Global Warming—Myth or Fact?'
 Mr David Muntzer
 Newsletter Report: Ian Scholes
 Vote of Thanks: Mike Terry
Kitchen Rota:
John Cheal, Keith Keeley,
Barry Parsonage, Roger Phillips,
Philip Troman

Friday 28th February
Skittles Evening at Lea Marston
Leisure Centre, 7.00p.m.
 Organised by Jim Bailey & Mike Gospel

Thursday 6th March
Long Walk led by John Carrington

Saturday 15th March
Bavarian Evening, 7.00pm for 7.30pm
All Saints' Church Centre, Belwell Lane
 Organised by David Rooke

Thursday 20th March
Short Walk led by Roy Willson
 (details to be advised)

Thursday 27th March
The history of English to 1381
 Mrs C. Millin
 Newsletter Report: Keith Keeley
 Vote of Thanks: Mike Lock
Kitchen Rota: Tim Daly,
Mike Gospel, Peter Prime, David Roy,
Derek Smith

Thursday 3rd April
Long Walk led by Geoff Silvester

Thursday 10th April
Short Walk (to be advised)

Thursday 17th April
Visit to 'The Mousetrap'
at the Garrick Theatre, Lichfield

Thursday 24th April
Club AGM
 Newsletter Report: Peter Weston
 Vote of Thanks: Tim Daly
Kitchen Rota: Barry Gill,
Brian Mallett, Ian Scholes,
Alf Dineen, John Carrington

Thursday 1st May
Long Walk organised by Mike Lock

Thursday 15th May
Short Walk (to be advised)

Saturday 18th May
Concert at Sutton Town Hall
 John Cheale, co-ordinator

Thursday 22nd May
'Baginton Airport'
 Mr Barrie Jones
 Newsletter Report: Dale Lyons
 Vote of Thanks: Neil Crabb

*We are looking for volunteers to organise
 future 'Pub Ambles' - please get in touch
 with Brian Spencer if you can help.*

Monday 3rd February; Long Walk led by Bob Badham

This will be a six-mile gentle circular walk commencing from the entrance to Kenilworth Castle. It will be across flat farmland & open countryside. There are no stiles. There is a free car park by the Castle and also a pay-&-display by the Queen & Castle pub, or the one opposite the entrance to the castle itself. Hopefully lunch will be taken in the Queen & Castle pub but I've yet to check it out.
 - **Bob Badham**

Thursday 13th February; Visit to the Avery Museum, Smethwick

Unfortunately the announcement in the previous Newsletter was in error, in that the promised 'Titanic' exhibit at the Museum has now gone back to Liverpool. There will, however, be plenty to see in this collection of weighing instruments with origins going back over 6000 years, and the site itself is perhaps the last remaining vestige of Matthew Boulton's famous manufacturing enterprise.
 - **David Rooke**

Thursday 20th February; 'Bucks Fizz' Short Walk

Meet at the home of Barbara & Mike Taylor, 10 Featherstone Road, Streetly, at 10.00a.m., for 'Bucks Fizz' and chatter until 10.45. Leave for walk across Sutton Park to Boldmere Gate, to the Miller & Carter, who are catering for the group. Non-walkers should go direct to the lunch venue for 12.00 noon. Cost about £10.00 for lunch, plus £1.00 per head for the Bucks Fizz. The board was out at the January meeting and those who have not already signed-up should contact me in advance, please.
 - **Brian Spencer**

SUTTON PARK PROBUS CLUB

Be in it

There is nothing like taking part and being a member of a team to form bonds, to foster companionship and to stimulate friendships - the essential ingredients needed for any club to succeed and prosper. This, we have an abundance of in SPPC thanks to the 'Taking Part' ethos generated and practiced by its members.

We have 44 active roles within the administrative structure of the club (discounting the kitchen roster participants) providing plenty of opportunity for members to be involved. Some can barely be described as "arduous". In my report at the last AGM, I mentioned that these roles, in the current year, are filled by 33 members - 60% of the membership. On this basis, and with an average membership life of 20 years, this equates to each and every member taking active roles for 12 years. Otherwise, relying only on new members to fill these offices, membership will need to expand exponentially into oblivion; or administration carried out by less and less members, ultimately diminishing into oblivion. In the long-term interests of the club the established and well-proven ethos needs to prevail.

We are now entering the period when we seek to fill the positions for next year. Would you please give this some careful thought and have a word with a Club Committee member with regards the part, or parts, you would like to take for 2014/2015.

Nomination Forms for the election of the Club Committee will be issued at the February meeting and need to be submitted within 14 days.

- **Fred Ditchfield Hon. Secretary**