

Friday 23rd May - Elvis Presley 'Live' at Symphony Hall

This concert was a clever combination of a live orchestra and historic film, put together in such a way as to seem almost like a 'live' Elvis concert. From our point of view the success of the evening was ensured by the excellent and detailed arrangements made by Harry Medcalf. The seventeen of us travelling by coach were especially privileged – not only did Harry arrange 'pick-up' at several homes of members, but he had advised the times almost to the minute. En route, he poured glasses of champagne for those on board with great aplomb and without major loss of liquid (I think he must have had much previous experience in this operation).

We met up with four more at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Restaurant, which despite a slow start eventually provided our meals in good time to allow everyone to move next door to Symphony Hall for the start of the performance. The Elvis fans in the audience clearly thought it was wonderful and I did anticipate that some of the lively young people might start dancing, but did not expect any of the Probus group to be so carried away. However, it became apparent that at least three of our members must have married girls much younger than themselves. Everyone in our party said it was a thoroughly enjoyable evening and I heard no complaints despite the fact that the volume of the music was a bit high – I could tell this as I left because those men replacing their hats could not keep them on because their heads were vibrating so much. As Tony said, Elvis would be 79 or so now. He could have joined probus!

– Keith Keeley

Lay off the morphine!

While Keith and June were enjoying the Elvis concert (he took over my tickets) I was having an experience of a rather different nature. This was my third night in Heartlands Hospital after my recent operation, and I won't go on about it except to say that all the doctors and nurses were absolutely marvellous and I had world-class treatment.

However, when I came round they put a 'morphine button' into my hand and told me to squeeze it to relieve any pain. Well, I didn't really have anything other than vague aches and twinges, but hospitals are noisy places and I found that by pressing the button I could get some hours of refreshingly deep sleep. So I gave it a few squeezes, as you do, until late on the Friday night I noticed something strange was happening in my little ward.

Overhead was the usual pattern of square ceiling tiles, but gradually they began to drift and change shape. Little black spots issued from the fluorescent lights and the room expanded so that I felt I was in some sort of huge warehouse with hulking creatures coming to life across the room. These were actually TV sets mounted on pivoted arms but in my excited state they looked like the heads of monsters on long, reaching necks. My perception of sound was heightened, I felt I was inside some sort of howling machine which wouldn't stop. Next morning I was discovered fast asleep on a spare bed—it turned out that I had been put into an air-bed attached to a small compressor, and the vibrations through the steel frame had been driving me wild.

I hallucinated, I was delirious, I didn't know where I was, and the whole thing was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. Why anyone would want to take drugs, deliberately, is something I will never understand. Apart from all that, however, thanks to everyone in the club for being concerned about my welfare. I hope to be back soon. [pw]

MAKING YOUR APOLOGIES

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

If you won't be able 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 can't provide the Newsletter Report or deliver the Vote of Thanks please get in touch with me, **Peter Weston**, before the meeting concerned (pr.weston@btinternet.com).



Sutton Park Probus Club

(Founded 1998)

President: John Fellows

Newsletter

No.187

June 2014

May Speaker:

'Jetman' Frank Whittle and flight history at Baginton Airport,
by Barry James, Museum Chairman & Curator
Report and pictures by Dale Lyons



Barry James with his beloved Vulcan at the Midlands Air Museum

Once again we had a riveting talk in the monthly speaker spot which this time featured Barry James, the Chairman and Curator of Baginton's Midlands Air Museum in Coventry. For someone so deeply in love with aviation Barry confided that he *doesn't really like flying!* but he then went on to serve up a flowing, in-depth, note-free talk, the bulk of which related to Frank Whittle. (Unfortunately because of a glitch in the technology we were denied a visual-aid presentation on the Museum's collection)

Born in Earlsdon, Coventry in 1907 and at first rejected by the RAF as being physically challenged, Whittle did some Charles Atlas-type bodybuilding and successfully re-applied. He subsequently became a test pilot, volunteering to crash planes into the sea to see if they would float, and was a regular in daredevil acrobatics at the Hendon Air Show. Children often mistook him for Hitler with his Chaplinesque moustache and his Brylcremed hair! Without his RAF engineering training the world would surely have been jet-less.

Continued...

Eventually a government grant enabled Whittle's first Merlin turbo-jet engine to fly in a Gloucester E28 in 1941. He rose to the rank of Air Commodore in 1946 and was knighted in 1948, but patenting issues denied Whittle any meaningful riches – both the USA and Russia were 'given' the jet-engine, and by the late 1940s he was largely forgotten. Relocating to the US he married an American, Hazel Hall, and settled there until his death in 1996, aged 89. His ashes were scattered at Cranwell.

Baginton, known as Coventry Airport, was a WW2 RAF station, then became a centre for air shows and races, and after a 3-year dalliance with Thomson Air in the early 2000s as a passenger terminal it is now used primarily for freight, executive jets, and as a flight training centre. It is unlikely to become a commercial airport again because of conflicting priorities of rural Warwickshire and urban Coventry council.

The Air Museum is 25 years old and contains masses of aircraft data and the Sir Frank Whittle Jet Heritage Centre. The biggest attraction, however, both inside and on the tarmac, are the 60 aircraft, including a passenger Viscount, MiG 21, and a recently-arrived Tornado, sent by road from Cambridge. As Barry said, "It was a mammoth task to get it in and required a sort of Air-fix kit assembly at the Museum."

An enthusiastic response ended with Neil Crabb giving an inspired vote-of-thanks to Barry, recounting that his father had worked with Whittle, and he had himself worked with Whittle's son at Cranwell – small world!

- Dale Lyons

Tony Ferneyhough adds: *Our speaker had technical problems with his LCD projector. I was asked to help but to no avail, and am fairly certain the bulb had blown (an expensive item—£100 or so to replace!). He carried on with the talk without his props and kept me captivated by talking non-stop for about 40 minutes, mostly about the history surrounding Sir Frank Whittle. It's always good to get an insight into famous people.* [tf]

On 12th June on a bright sunny day John Cheal led a group of fourteen members to the museum to admire some of the planes on display.

Some of the chaps told stories about their exploits, (real or imaginary) while Neil was in ecstasy to see so many aircraft lined up on the tarmac! [pw]



"Go up, knock down a couple of Heinkels, come back for a cup of tea then up again and..."



"Yes, we flew in Lightnings all the time when I was at the BBC...."



Pay attention, class! Sit down at the back!

We then visited a toll-keepers cottage to see how life unfolded at that time, before we met up again at St James School - originally built as a church school - where life for the children in 1912 was described by a retired school teacher dressed in period costume.

By now it was lunch time and being in the black country many of us had faggots and pays (peas in English) or fish and chips cooked in fat. All good healthy dishes! And - for some - came a compulsory visit to the pub, where we consumed the guest ales in the warmth of the 'snug'.

Our final tour was by way of a canal boat, examining how the tunnels were excavated and what life was like for a navigator (navvy). We ventured as far as the Wrens Nest and the Singing Gallery (where many events are held every year) and noted the Blue Peter plaque on our way back to the canal basin.

Much more could be said about the tremendous ongoing effort being undertaken at the site but there is insufficient space. A special thanks was given by our President, John Fellows, to Mike Gospel for doing an excellent job in putting together a fascinating insight into yesteryear.

- Tony Ferney-



And now for something completely different.....

Through the efforts of John Vickers a select few from Probus visited St Barnabas Church on 17th May to hear the Sutton Coldfield Orchestra play a night of Russian music by composers Borodin, Tchaikovsky and Glazunov. The audience numbered over one hundred.

Borodin was not a prolific composer, with fifty or so pieces in total. We have Glazunov and Rimsky-Koraksov to thank for preserving 'Prince Igor' as Borodin died before the completion of his work. We were treated to the Overture, and Piano Concerto No.1 by Tchaikovsky, with piano being played by a very accomplished Liang Shan. I could not help but notice his performance was being recorded on an iPhone by - I suspect - very enthusiastic members of his family. The music which completed the evening was by Glazunov - 'The Seasons, Opus 67'. Thanks to John, those who went experienced a very special evening.

- Tony Ferneyhough

Tony also wrote about the total transformation of the church since the terrible fire in 2007, and I hope this will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter. - pw

Thursday 29th May—Visit to the Black Country Living Museum

Organised by Mike Gospel, report & pictures by Tony Ferneyhough



“No, we don’t like it”, the ladies decided, after filling their hand-bags with Nutty Slack.



In typical Probus fashion some of us arrived a little early and spent time chatting and having a cuppa. Once we were all together we had our own introductory guide who told us about the beginning of the museum in 1978, illustrating the foresight of those who felt strongly about commencing such a monumental project.



One of the major attractions is an underground drift mine where we were given a very informative and interesting tour. Several times we were requested to turn off all torches while a commentary ran - in a typical black country accent - about the activities performed underground and on the surface.

Apparently, boys (and girls) from a very young age would be made to sit in the dark, opening and closing doors to

ventilate the shafts with fresh air. Originally they were supplied with candles but the youngsters became so hungry they would quite often eat them! Yuuucchh!!

Even in modern times mining is a dangerous environment but then there was little consideration given to personal safety. The miners would undercut a coal-face then knock out the supporting beams and remaining coal pillars to allow, maybe, a 30 foot-high seam of coal to fall. And all for a £1.00 a week! If a miner was injured at the commencement of a shift he was sent home and would receive no pay for that week. Miners were lowered and raised in a large bucket twelve at a time, four seated inside, four on the rim and four more standing on the lip of the bucket!



Thursday 5th June— ‘Three Dales around Hartington’

Report by Rod Crowley, photographs by Rita Rooke

The Queen went to Epsom but we had our own Classic in Derbyshire. Barry Gill was our trainer for the day and set us off from Hartington. Immediately, there was a testing climb up to the Youth Hostel. Pausing for breath was clearly not on the schedule as Barry cracked the whip, asking why we had stopped!

The course continued over high ground, with great views, before dropping down Biggin Dale. This is a dry river bed and was a good test of our sure-footing over the limestone boulders. The reward was a wonderful stretch of scenery along Wolfscote Dale. After the previous day’s rain we had expected heavier going, although the river Dove was flowing swiftly. Neither we, nor the anglers seemed to catch a glimpse of any trout.

After our first picnic of the year we were fast approaching the home straight at Hartington village. There had been no fallers and we were soon celebrating with our cups – full of tea! Fred N. needed little encouragement to join with me in enjoying a scone and jam, the

thought of which had been an incentive over the last upward slopes.

Many thanks to Barry and Carol, who had prepared for the day so thoroughly.

-Rod Crowley



Wonderful scenery and beautiful weather for this Derbyshire walk, covering six miles through three of the famous dales.

Diary of events and activities to August 2014

Thursday 26th June

Club meeting:

'Bringing Theatre to Africa'

Speaker; Ian Appleby

Newsletter Report: Brian Mallett

Vote of Thanks: David Roy

Kitchen Rota:

**Dennis Rose, Ernest Williams,
Brian Harbourn,
Fred Nightingale, Bryan Nicholas**

Thursday 3rd July

**Tour of the Cotswolds &
Gloucester & Warwickshire Railway**
(now) organised by Brian Mallett

Thursday 10th July

Long Walk in Shropshire
led by Dennis Rose

Friday 11th July

President's Supper
at Swinfen Hall
Harry Medcalf, co-ordinator

Thursday 17th July
Pub Amble— 'Green Man'
led by Fred Nightingale &
Alfred Wallwork

Thursday 24th July

Club meeting;

'My Visit to Afghanistan'

Speaker: Mrs Erica Perkins

Newsletter Report: Tim Daly

Vote of Thanks; Mike Taylor

Kitchen Rota:

**Selby Betts, John Buckland,
Neil Crabb, Brian Senior,
Brian Spencer**

Monday 28th July

Bowls at the Rag
Mike Lock, co-ordinator

Sunday 3rd August
Barbecue at the Fellows

Thursday 7th August

Visit to Buckingham Palace
Brian Mallett, co-ordinator

Monday 11th August

Long Walk led by Brian Spencer

Thursday 21st August

Pub Amble led by Bob Badham

Thursday 28th August

Club meeting:

**'A funny thing happened at the
Registry Office'**

Speaker; Mr John Yates

Newsletter Report: Alf Dineen

Vote of Thanks: Brian Harbourn

Kitchen Rota:

**Mike Haynes, David Rooke,
Bob Badham, Dennis Perkins,
Fred Nightingale**

Monday 1st September

Visit to JCB Excavators
John Fellows, co-ordinator

Thursday 4th September

Long Walk led by Don Cooper

Friday 5th— Monday 8th September
Weekend at Lakeside Holiday Village,
(Warners) at Hayling Island
Organised by Jim Bailey & Mike Gospel

Thursday 18th September
Pub Amble (to be advised)

Tuesday 23rd September
Ladies Bowls Day
Geoff Silvester, co-ordinator

Thursday 25th September
Club Meeting

'Hadrian & the Pork Scratchings'

Speaker; Mr Bob Bibby

Newsletter Report; Richard Humphrey

Vote of Thanks: Graham Jones

Thursday 3rd July; The Cotswolds & Gloucester & Warwickshire Railway

John Cheal has organised this event but will be unable to join us, so I have accepted his invitation to act as your host for the day. We will travel by coach, leaving from Aston Wood Golf Club at 9.30am. Please park in the first car-park on the right-hand side. We arrive at Broadway around 11.15, where there are plenty of options for lunch, leaving at 1.45pm for Toddington to board a steam train for Cheltenham Racecourse. Journey takes 35 minutes, with a 20 minute stay at a café before returning to Toddington. We leave at 4.30 and should be back by 6.30pm. Places are still available at a cost of £24.00 per person.

- Brian Mallett

Thursday 10th July, Long Walk in Shropshire

Our walk starts in Shifnal, meeting at 10.00am. It will be about 5½ miles on mostly dry paths and quiet lanes, although there are a few minor muddy parts, some gentle gradients and several easy stiles. Wonderful views of rolling Shropshire hills.

Directions; Take M54 to Junction 4, sharp left on exit to A464. Go into Shifnal town centre, just before railway viaduct turn left and immediately right, signed 'Free Parking'. Car park is off Aston Street at rear of shops. Decent public toilets nearby.

- Dennis Rose

Friday 11th July, President's Supper

This year's President's Supper takes place at Swinfen Hall Hotel, with Reception from 7.00pm. Your President has requested the dress code to be black tie or lounge suit. The hotel is about 2 miles south of Lichfield on the southbound side of the A38 dual carriageway. If travelling from Sutton go all the way to the roundabout for the A38 north, then return on the south carriageway. The sign for Swinfen comes up very soon on your left. Exit via a slip road and then do not turn left into the crafts centre but go ahead to a small roundabout where you take the second left. The metal gate will open automatically on approaching

- Harry Medcalf

Thursday 17th July Pub Amble, 'Green Man'

Meet at 'The Green Man' in Middleton at 10.00am. This is reached by taking the A446 south from Bassets Pole and turning left into Middleton Lane/Alan End. The lane twists and turns for several miles but ends in Middleton Village at the pub. Note: follow the sign for Vicarage Hill. Allow 25 minutes for journey time. Walking distance three miles; can be muddy in wet weather. OS Map Ref. 175 984

- Alfred Wallwork

Monday 28th July, Bowls at the Rag

This popular annual all-day event was previously held at The Windmill at Gentleshaw but will now be at the Rag Inn at Rawnsley. We will start with coffee at 10am. followed by continuous bowling, except for a lunch break, until about 4.30pm. when we will finish with tea and the presentation of prizes. The Rag has a good reputation for its food: please book your place for this great day-out with Barry Parsonage at today's Club meeting. More details, including directions to The Rag will be given at the July meeting.

- Mike Lock

Sunday 3rd August, Barbecue at the Fellows

The BBQ commences at noon at John & Marlene's home near Middleton, and after a welcome drink we shall be entertained by a tropical steel band followed by a hog roast. Drinks will be free and we ask members and their wives to come dressed as colourfully as possible. Cost is held at the same level as last year, at £25 per head. You should put your names down at the next meeting if you have not already done so.

- John Buckland

Thursday 7th August, Visit to Buckingham Palace

Forty of us will be travelling by coach to visit the State Rooms of Buckingham Palace, which is a self guided tour followed by a Garden Highlights Tour with an official guide. The visit will last 3¼ hours and we will have time for tea on the terrace. The coach will depart from Foley Road Community Centre at 7.45am.

- Brian Mallett