

**Impressions of a Pub Amble from 'The Bear' at Berkswell
Thursday 2nd October, led by Geoff Silvester**

Well, what do you expect from a walk without Roy's benevolent intervention with the elder gods? Stair-rods, that's what, and by the time we sat down in 'The Bear' the lane outside was turning into a tributary of the Avon and the cellars were flooding.

"But some of us were prepared," said new member **Allan Powers**, "aware of the impending weather Jackie and I dressed accordingly, although on the way back we had to go into the local Church to dry our wet trousers on the central heating radiators." (and wouldn't that have been a great picture for the Newsletter!)*

"Berkswell is pretty and oozing with the pleasant atmosphere of a by-gone era," Allan continued, with all the attributes of the perfect English village, leafy lanes, ancient church and historic timber-frame properties, a picturesque village green with quaint stocks and The Bear itself, a 16th century pub. The original name was the 'Bear and Ragged Staff' which comes from the arms of the Earls of Warwick; Shakespeare refers to Warwick's emblem '*The rampant bear chain'd to the ragged staff*' in Henry VI, and a giant wooden bear climbing a pole is still to be seen outside the pub today."

Enjoying her first walk since her recent troubles, **Annette Medcalf** writes, "Leaving The Bear we headed off through the village and gradually the more able-bodied drew away from us. Harry and I continued at my slower pace with Sheila acting as our guide. Although we were doing the shorter route there was still so much to enjoy. Contented sheep were grazing to one side and a crystal-clear brook ran along to the left. We passed through sheltered copses and a blustery open field planted with an unidentified root crop."

Roy Willson continued, "To start with we walked on an unusual wooden-planked walkway over marshy ground and found some blackberry bushes still bearing, though the fruit was quite bitter. Soon after we were able to crunch on sweet chestnuts littering a wooded area and several walkers collected them for roasting later. And then to our surprise (because this was a 'no stiles' walk) we came to a stile."

"We literally came to a dead end after a mile-and-a-half," added Allan, "and then more-or-less retraced our steps, which was just as well since the rain and wind were getting stronger all the time." By then Annette and Harry were back in the village, taking time to admire the ancient church of St. John the Baptist (patron saint of Turin and Walkers with Wet Trousers), and then back to the pub to be joined by the 'fair-weather' brigade, including yrs truly.

It certainly was a quaint old place. "One or two amblers collected sore heads because they didn't read the notices on the low beams," commented Roy. Ouch! – one of those was me, colliding with a rafter on my scramble for the bar. "Duck or grouse" is the usual inscription.

Final quip of the day came as always from **Tony Ferneyhough**, who mentioned his stiff legs, to which I replied that I had dodgy knees. "Wasn't he a Greek philosopher?" asked our man. "Yes, he lived in a barrel!" I retorted, and honour satisfied we sat down to splendid portions of fish and chips. Well done Geoff & Sheila for steering us through a difficult morning. -pw

** My little joke; Allan made it quite clear they only leaned against the radiators!*



CHRISTMAS CARDS: Some members may prefer to donate to their favourite charities rather than give Christmas cards to friends within Probus, so if they will advise me I will make sure their names are published in the November Newsletter. The 'postal service' will distribute cards as usual at the Christmas lunch. - pw

MAKING YOUR APOLOGIES: If you are can't attend a General Meeting advise **Mike Terry**, If you can't do the Kitchen Rota, advise **Graham Jones**, can't provide Newsletter Report or Vote of Thanks contact me, **Peter Weston**, before the meeting concerned (pr.weston@btinternet.com).



Sutton Park Probus Club

(Founded 1998)

President: John Fellows

Newsletter

No. 191

October 2014

September Speaker:

**'Ken Knowles, Lichfield Town Crier
& Sword Bearer'**

Report by Paul Beaumont

Wow what a voice – 96 Decibels, our speaker Ken Knowles certainly did not need our sound system!

There he stood resplendent in his very impressive scarlet tunic, breeches and tri-corn hat to cry the news, 'Oyez, Oyez, Oyez – God Save the Queen'.

Interestingly, he told us about the details that contributed to the design of his uniform including the name of the item in which he carried his bell - this is named a "Baldric" and I can see why it may have an alternative name, which David Roy referred to but which, to be polite, I shall refrain from stating here.

His position enables him to travel widely, having partaken in competitions both in this country and in Canada. The Town Crier competitions run from April to October each year and are judged on volume, content and diction and Ken has won a clock on more than one occasion. He advised us that he is also shortly to visit Bermuda and New Zealand.

Ken works fifteen days a year for the council including Shrove Tide, Sheriff's



Ride, Remembrance Day & Bower Day, but gets no holidays. He is also Master of Ceremonies at the Mayor's Ball, introducing and announcing guests on their arrival.

Obviously there is a wonderful history of the Loyal Company of Town Criers and it is a tradition that should be kept alive. I'm sure that Ken Knowles will ensure this will continue.

- Paul Beaumont



'BEHIND THE SCENES'

By Brian Mallett

A review, with some background, of the club's visit to The Garrick Theatre

In 1989 Margaret and I answered an advert from the Sutton Coldfield Musical Theatre Company for people to join them for their next production. We had been theatre-goers for many years and particularly enjoyed the amateur productions. We thought that we could stand at the back of the stage, sway and sing. A rude awakening was coming up. We duly auditioned (another shock) and turned up at the Friday rehearsal. After 1½ hours singing and an hour of dancing, we all retired to the Park House for well deserved alcoholic refreshment.

The principals rehearsed their lines on Tuesdays but they needed to be singing on Fridays. As the show drew nearer, extra rehearsals were called for the chorus including dance routines on Sunday mornings. Meanwhile, the principals and the main dancers would be having their own intense rehearsals.

The week before a show opens is very hectic. The costumes arrive and they need to be fitted, as you may have four changes even as a chorus member.

Finally, you have a full dress-rehearsal on a Saturday in your normal room before you go into the theatre on Sunday for a technical rehearsal, followed on Monday night by a full Dress Rehearsal with the Orchestra.

I had fourteen very happy years with the Company and was fortunate to be part of twenty shows as well as numerous Christmas concerts. Margaret was a member for over twenty years, performed in 25 shows, and became a Director and Patron Secretary of the Company.

Our very first show was performed at The Old Rep in Station Street, where we followed in the footsteps of some very famous names. But the dressing rooms for the chorus were on the third floor, and you certainly knew 'the pecking order'!

And twenty-five years ago, our first show was - HALF A SIXPENCE. So how did the modern version compare with our experiences?



Brian and Margaret in costume in 1989

Afterwards, our President made a short speech announcing with sadness that we were having to leave our 'home' green. We have played there for five seasons or so, and always have been made very welcome. The good news is that arrangements are in progress to move to Sutton Park Bowling Club, at Boldmere. Agreement has been reached in principle and details will be finalised next year.

Due thanks and appreciation were noted to Geoff and myself for helping to make the day pleasant and successful, and then came the results.

Over the years the ladies have always given a good account of themselves on the green, all playing well above the normal standard. So the men's position was precarious. Would the ladies win this year to have an unbroken record at the Conservative Club? They had some excellent scores, all quite close together. The top three ladies were announced: Sylvia Bailey (3rd), Pauline Standerwick (2nd) and Margaret Dineen was First, receiving a medal and a prize.

Amongst the men, 3rd was Mike Gospel, 2nd was Geoff Silvester and a very fine score from Tim Daly made him top - he also received his medal and prize. It was quite a surprise all round - especially to Jackie Powers (who had never held a bowl in her hand before) - to find she had won the Spider! And yes, the men finally broke their 'duck' to be overall winners. A good end to a great season.

- Tony Ferneyhough

Members will remember that in the April Newsletter we reported on our crazy mad Marathon man, Dale Lyons, who this year hobbled around the 26-mile London circuit on crutches. Dale was undeterred by further surgery (to his ankle) and recently took part in the Nottingham Robin Hood Half-Marathon on 28th September, sending us this despatch:-

'The Nine-Minute Mile Man'

By Dale Lyons

"I thought you and the Probusians would like to know the result of my latest wheel-chair exploit. Despite being knocked over by a runner at about two miles which messed-up my steering for the next eleven, I fizzed around the undulating course including lumpy tracks around the University and two sections of grass (one of 600 metres), in an unbelievable 1 hr. 58 mins. 45 secs. (I was targeting around 2.5 hours).

"As one of only two wheelchair entrants who started the race I was featured on the front page of the *Nottingham Post*.

"Overall my time worked out at 6.60 mph, or nine minutes per mile. I was in the first 45% of the 7,000-odd finishes, with about 4,000 behind me! Surprisingly, I had virtually no physical after-effects of note but learned a few more tweaks I can make to the wheelchair's performance for my next race at the Donnington Half Marathon in November, such as 'keep clear of the runners'.

"The new ankle is still not up to the marathon grind (as yet) so the only alternative is the wheel-chair which of course uses a totally different muscle group. Getting the muscle bulk for next April is the next challenge but I'm well on the way."

- Dale Lyons



Tuesday 30th September, Ladies Bowls Day
Or, 'Confessions of an apprehensive organiser'
 Report and picture by Tony Ferneyhough



This year all previous organisers of the Ladies' Bowls Day were away and without their finely-honed skills the event was in danger of not taking place. For this reason I was 'volunteered' to arrange matters but I found the prospect quite daunting because there almost seemed to be something of an air of mysticism about the event.* Turning to Google in search of guidance, I found several approaches and it seemed fairly straightforward, though time-consuming, to modify a format to suit us. (These templates are now on the Club website—I like the idea of having a repository of documentation for all event co-ordinators).

But would it work on the day? The only way was to try it out, and to say I was apprehensive would be an understatement!

Around ten, the players and watchers filtered in, and with Geoff's help all scorecards were distributed. Naturally there was some speculation as to what these actually meant, but before we started I explained the format and anxiety was abated. Names were called and the Ladies and Gents eagerly took to the green.

We had excellent weather - Captain Sunshine and his trusty partner ensured us of that – and the morning whistled past, the scores rolled in and everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. There were some good scores, but I was not letting on who was leading. They would have to wait until after lunch. To finish off the bowling everyone, but everyone, bowlers and watchers alike, took part in a 'Spider'. President John explained what was involved, in principle easy enough to understand but difficult to adjudicate and someone else might like explain the details. It was a fun way to finish off a fun morning!

By this time everyone was hungry and we were not disappointed by the spread in the Conservative Club Function Room. The food quickly evaporated, with some liquid refreshment to wash it down. (Cont/d)...

* I wonder if Tony is thinking of the somewhat arcane calculations performed previously by 'Professor' Mike Lock? - pw

'HALF A SIXPENCE' at the Garrick, October 2014

It was a very lively and energetic show, that showed the musical talents of the Company to the full. When you have main roles and supports that can all sing well and harmonise it adds a further dimension to the enjoyment. The dancing allied to the choreography was first class and I find it hard to believe that Maggie was our choreographer back in 1989, though she was very young in those days. The humour supplied by the writer Harry Chitterlow was at the right level, for it is easy to be 'over the top'.

The cricket match was slightly spoiled as the orchestra overpowered the singers but this has happened for the occasional number in every show that I have done. The appearance of the young children is due to the reworking of the show in 2008 when it was decided the 1963 original production needed new songs, pace and humour. Those who saw Tommy Steele in the role of Kipps may have been surprised by the changes. One interesting footnote for ourselves is that the cast included seven children belonging to members who were in the 1989 production including the leading lady and a shop-boy and girl. Their parents were also in this current production.

All the hard work over the past months by the Company resulted in a show that seemed to be very well appreciated by the audience. An excellent night.

- Brian Mallett

How does it work? The world of amateur theatre is a mystery to most of us but here Brian gives us a glimpse of the way in which shows are planned and organised.

Selecting the Show: Two or three years earlier, NODA (the National Operatic & Dramatic Association), the governing body of amateur theatre, would have issued a list of available shows for companies to perform in Autumn 2014. The directors of SCMTC (Sutton Coldfield Musical Theatre Company) would make a choice and hope that no other company, based in their region, had chosen to perform the same show.

The 'Set': All scenery and hanging cloths would be ordered, costumes provisionally reserved and theatre date confirmed, though at this stage maybe only the month would be fixed.

Show Preparation; The director, musical director and choreographer for the show are normally chosen one year ahead and apart from mailing updates nothing will happen until the Spring Show (May) is finished, but rehearsals will start on the Friday after that show closes.

-bm

Thursday 2nd October, Warwickshire canal walk

Led by Graham Jones, Report by John Vickers

About a dozen of us gathered at the 'Black Boy' pub for a delightful walk. It must have been unseasonably warm because Don was seen to shed an outer garment for the first time in the recollection of well-established members of the walking group. The only slight problem encountered at the start was the mysterious disappearance of Graham's Penguin.

The route took us from the canal, across fields to Temple Balsall. We stopped for a coffee break in Barston Churchyard where the oldest gravestone we discovered dated back to 1689, but there was still no sign of Graham's Penguin.

From Barston we headed across country again to meet up with the Grand Union Canal and walked back to the pub along the canal side. We had caught sight of kingfishers along this stretch of water on a previous walk, but none were evident today – and no penguins either. It wasn't until we had completed the walk and Graham removed his boots that we finally discovered the whereabouts of the Penguin – a little sticky and misshapen but otherwise intact. A great relief.

The pub food was excellent. Unfortunately I had to relinquish my record for tackling the largest fish served to a Probus walker to David, but even this was overshadowed by the size of Graham's pudding. No need for the penguin after all. So many thanks to Graham for an excellent day out, and full marks for the choice of pub.

- John Vickers

Diary of events and activities to March 2015

Thursday 23rd October Club meeting:

'How to be an Advanced Driver'

Speaker; Mr Neil Atkins

Newsletter Report: John Carrington

Vote of Thanks: Bryan Nicholas

Kitchen Rota:

Jim Bailey, Tim Daly, Graham Jones

Mike Gospel, Barry Parsonage

**Thursday 30th October
Dinner at The Boathouse Restaurant**
Organised by Harry Medcalf

**Thursday 6th November
Long Walk to Worcestershire Beacon**
led by Mike Haynes

**Friday 14– Sunday 16th November
Thursford Weekend**
Organised by Jim Bailey

**Thursday 20th November
Pub Amble led by John Fellows**

Thursday 27th November Club Meeting

'A Scientist turns to Crime'

Speaker; Mr Rodger Ide

Newsletter Report: Mike Gospel

Vote of Thanks: David Roy

Kitchen Rota: Dale Lyons

Paul Beaumont, Brian Mallett,

Peter Prime, Peter Weston,

**Friday 5th December
Christmas Lunch at Moor Hall**
Organised by David Rooke

**Thursday 11th December
Long Walk led by Rod Crowley**

**Thursday 8th January AND
Wednesday 14th January
Lunch at B'ham College of Food**
Organised by Brian Mallett

**Thursday 15th January
Long Walk led by John Vickers**

Thursday 22nd January Club Meeting

'Six Thousand Years of Clay'

Speaker; Mr J. Christophers

Newsletter Report: Tim Daly

Vote of Thanks: Mike Lock

Kitchen Rota:

Barry Gill, David Roy, Ivor Wesley,

Ernest Williams, Brian Nicholas

**Thursday 5th February
Long Walk led by Bob Badham**

Thursday 19th February 'Bucks Fizz' walk

Hosted by Allan & Jackie Powers

Thursday 26th February Club Meeting

'An Inspector Calls'

Speaker: Mr David Howe

Newsletter Report: Terry Booth

Vote of Thanks: Roger Phillips

Kitchen Rota:

Brian Harbourne, Brian Senior,

Fred Nightingale, Brian Spencer

John Buckland

**Friday 27th February
Skittles Evening at
Lea Marston Leisure Centre**
Organised by Jim Bailey & Mike Gospel

**Thursday 5th March
Long Walk led by Mike Haynes**

**Thursday 12th March
Visit to B'ham Assay Office**
Organised by Bob Badham

**Saturday 14th March
Spring Dining Event
at Walmley Golf Club**

Thursday 30th October, Dinner at The Boathouse

We have booked this popular restaurant for our autumn 'dining experience' and menus have been circulated in advance for members to select their choices. The board will be out again at the October meeting, cost £20.00 per head. - Harry Medcalf

Thursday 6th November, Long Walk—Malvern,

Start from North Quarry Car park on the B4232 West Malvern Road, at 10:30am. We then traverse North Hill on the East zig-zag path to Sugar loaf Col, and ascend Worcestershire Beacon on West path (425 m above sea level). It is a good path with no stiles but steep gradient in places. Then we descend via East path, Green Valley back to Sugar Loaf Col and return to the car park.

We then drive to Lygon Bank, corner of Bank Street, Malvern Link, for lunch in 'The Nags Head' (about ¾ mile from car park). Details re. facilities at Malvern Link and travel plans will be provided at the October meeting. - Mike Haynes

Thursday 20th November, Pub Amble, Gentleshaw

Meet at the Park Gate Inn, Park Gate Road, Cannock Wood, WS15 4RN at 10.15am. The walk will be the usual three miles or thereabouts, starting and finishing from the pub car-park. Lunch is available at £11.00 for two courses plus tea or coffee.

Directions: This is not the easiest place to find [*I always get lost looking for Gentleshaw—pw*] so allow plenty of time. Probably the best way is to take the A51 to Longdon then turn left into Borough Lane, keep on for 1-2 miles then turn left into Buds Road. It may be signposted towards 'Castle Ring'. Good luck! - John Fellows

Friday 5th December, Christmas Lunch at Moor Hall

The board will be out again at the October meeting for you to select your lunch menu, cost £33.25. Arrive at 12.00noon, for 12.45pm. - David Rooke

Thursday 8th January AND Wednesday 15th January, Lunch at Birmingham College of Food

Partly because of the increased size of the club and the popularity of this event, the College has had to limit the numbers that can be served at one seating. We are therefore offering two dates and the second will automatically be reserved if places are not available on the first occasion. - Brian Mallett

Members are reminded that if you want to join the Amblers for a pub lunch, you cannot just 'turn up on the day' but must book in advance - and you are then committed to pay for

November Speaker: 'A Scientist turns to Crime', presented by Roger Ide

Roger Ide worked for many years at the Birmingham Forensic Science Laboratory in Birmingham, since closed, where he gained particular experience in the fields of fire investigation and examining knotted material involved in cases of hanging and garroting.

I've previously heard him talk at the U3A about the great advances that have recently been made in forensic science, enabling police forces to track down and convict villains from seemingly insignificant traces. This will be a particularly interesting talk to attend—pw