



# **DERBY PROBUS CLUB**

**THE FIRST TWENTY FIVE YEARS**

**John D Smith**



**John D. Smith**  
**The Author**



**Harold Bates, Past President  
and responsible for appointing  
the Author as Secretary**





**Fred Cholerton**  
**Long serving Past President**  
**and Auditor**



**Reg James**  
**Speakers Officer for 19 years**

## Introduction

Whenever I mention Probus to the uninitiated, I always know that there will immediately be the question "Probus – What's that"? Perhaps, therefore, it would be as well if I start by answering that question.

Basically, a Probus club is a meeting of retired PROfessional and BUSIness men for social fellowship. Most clubs, I believe, meet for lunch with a speaker to follow, though all clubs are free to arrange their own constitution, and some do have their own formats. There are some 3000 clubs world-wide, with about 2500 of them in Britain. Derby has three clubs, but more of that later.

Regarding the story of our own club, which was formed in 1966, I can find very little detail of the early years. Our only remaining founder member is Morris Porter, whose memory of those days was of great help. I suspect, since it was he who urged me to write this record, that had his sight not been impaired, he might well have written it himself, and no doubt considerably better.

As for the story itself, I came onto the scene in 1990, and although I shall do my best to keep the record objective, it is inevitable I suppose, that I should intrude after that date rather more than previously. I just hope that the whole is reasonably accurate and readable.



## How Probus Started

Again I am indebted to Morris Porter for this bit of history, which I think is of general interest before our own story begins.

It was in July 1965 when the Vocational Services Committee of the Rotary Club of Caterham commenced its deliberations as to its programme for the ensuing year – never an easy task for any committee. In September, the chairman of the committee retired from business and very shortly afterwards, the inevitable happened – trying to be helpful he got under his wife's feet in the kitchen.

His wife made a comment to the effect that she was thankful that he went to a Rotary lunch once a week, and after a few minutes thought added, "Why can't you do something for the wives of retired men who are not Rotarians"? Although almost an exercise in 'Women's Lib', thus Probus was born!

Caterham, eighteen miles from London, is very much a dormitory area for commuters, and it seemed that after a day in the City, with a fairly tiring journey each way, the professional businessman nearing retiring age did not have the same opportunities or inclination for social contacts, or for participating in the very considerable charitable activities in the district. Those who lived and worked in Caterham and were in Rotary, by the very nature of their membership, had a large circle of friends and they felt that the retired professional and business men were a class completely neglected.

Members of the Vocational and Services Committee decided that the least that could be done was to organise a club for the retired professional men with perhaps a monthly lunch, to enable them to widen their circle of acquaintances among men of similar age and interests.

The Committee made proposals and called a public meeting at a local hotel in February 1966, where the idea of the new club was floated to possible members attending. A monthly luncheon meeting was agreed, to be chaired by the Rotary Club president and organised by his club.

At the fourth meeting, a decision was taken on independence with a working committee. A simple set of rules and regulations were to be adopted.

The name Probus was finally chosen from a list of ideas. Probus is a Latin word meaning good, honest, excellent, upright, from which the word 'probity' is derived. Some clubs toast 'Probus and Probity' at their meetings.

The membership snowballed very quickly and this created a serious problem regarding seating accommodation for the monthly lunch. They now have a venue which seats 110 and have an average attendance of just over one hundred. They have placed a limit of 120 on their membership, and normally have a waiting list of 10.

Arguably, a Probus club with a membership of 120 is too large and it creates problems with outings etc., but Caterham seem to have coped quite happily. They did at one time ask their members if they would like to split into two clubs, but the feeling was definitely against it. An applicant can be as long as a year on the waiting list, but they have taken steps to reduce this as much as possible. They have introduced into their rules one to the effect that if a member misses four consecutive lunches without prior approval of the committee, he loses his membership, thus getting rid of the member who pays his annual subscription, but seldom attends the monthly luncheon. There is also a supplementary waiting list to which are transferred the members who, due to age or illness, cannot keep up their attendance, but who wish to continue as members. They are guaranteed an early return to full membership if they find it possible to attend once more.

The success of the Caterham Probus Club very quickly became known among neighbouring Rotary Clubs, and members of both Rotary and Probus were in demand to speak at other Rotary clubs and at public meetings organised by them. The concept being basically very simple, new clubs sprang up far and wide.

A member of a Rotary club in the Midlands has for some years sold a small badge similar to the Rotary badge but with a 'P' in the middle, and he states that he has sold 10,000 of these. Since then, two Probus Information Centres have been selling badges, ties plaques and various other items in addition to a periodic Newsletter



which carries contributions from clubs all over the world.

It is obvious that Probus meets a need and it is well known that quite a few members belong to at least two clubs.

The original Information Centre was run by Ralph Harper, a bluff, cheerful rough diamond of a man, judging by his voice on the telephone. His office is in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, but due to his ill health, his newsletter has not been forthcoming for more than a year, and we are left wondering if that Information Centre will fold up if his health causes him to retire. The other Information Centre came on the scene more recently. Although probably more efficiently organised with a larger staff, they seem to rely heavily on insurance and advertisements. Derby club discussed the matter in committee, from which I wrote to this centre telling them that we are staying with Ralph Harper and would they please stop sending magazines and requesting money for them. They have ignored that letter and continue to send magazines and demands for money. To date I have ignored their letters but can not help wondering if we shall need them if and when Ralph Harper finishes.

## Derby Probus Club

It took ten years for Probus to reach from Caterham to Derby, as it was early in 1976 that Derby Rotary club extended an invitation to a number of men to attend a meeting on April 15<sup>th</sup> at the Albion restaurant, to consider the desirability and practicability of forming a Probus Club in Derby.

At this meeting, Mr L R Brownsey in the chair, and with other Rotarians in support, introduced the subject and, with his colleague Mr T Watson, provided full information and answered questions which led to the unanimous approval of the idea.

The following officers were elected :-

Chairman            L L McDonald

Vice Chairman    D E Redfearn

Sec/Treasurer    E H Gregory

Committee Members :- Dr J B S Morgan, F Barfoot, T C Uff.

These officers were authorised to prepare draft rules and proposals to establish the club. The newly elected chairman of the Probus Club expressed sincere thanks to the Rotary Club and its members who attended.

April 15<sup>th</sup> 1976 must have been a very busy day for Louis McDonald and friends, as following the meeting with the Rotary Club, presumably they had a break for refreshment but then they set straight into their first Probus meeting, when they sorted out the details for the format of the new club, authorising a Speakers Officer, the opening of an account at the National Westminster Bank in Irongate and duly producing the club rules. They also agreed that the club should meet at 10.00 a.m. on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1976 for the club rules to be submitted.

It is perhaps worth quoting these rules in view of later changes:-

1) *TITLE*. The club shall be called "The Probus Club, Derby".

*MEMBERSHIP* – shall be open to all professional and business men aged 60 or over, resident in or near Derby, who have fully or partially retired from their normal business or profession. (a note here queried whether this clause was contrary to the Equal Rights for Women Regulation). The restriction regarding

residence or age may be waived at the discretion of the Committee. An applicant for membership shall be introduced by an existing member and his application approved by the committee. A member leaving the district may retain his membership. The total membership shall not exceed 40.

- 2) *CONSTITUTION* – There will be a Chairman, Vice Chairman and honorary Secretary/Treasurer, and the affairs of the club shall be managed by a committee consisting of these officers and three others, all to be elected at the A.G.M. The Chairman will automatically retire on completion of one year in the chair, but he will then become an ex officio committee member for the year following his retirement. No ordinary member shall be eligible to serve as such for more than two consecutive years. Three members of the committee shall constitute a Quorum, and the committee shall have power to co-opt and to appoint one or two sub-committees. The committee shall meet after lunch on not less than two occasions during the year.
- 3) *MEETINGS* – An A.G.M. will be held in May of each year at such time and such place as may be determined by the committee, and at least three weeks notice of such meetings shall be given to all members. The Hon. Secretary shall call a special general meeting on the written request of not less than five members and shall give to members at least three weeks notice of such meetings.
- 4) *VOTING* at all meetings shall be by show of hands or by ballot if so determined. In the event of an equal division of votes, the chairman of the meeting shall have a second or casting vote. Meeting place – Albion Restaurant, Derby, on the second Thursday in every month at 12.30 p.m. for 1.0 p.m. unless otherwise determined by the committee.
- 5) *SUBSCRIPTION* – The subscription shall be £1 per annum, payable in May of every year unless otherwise determined at an A.G.M.
- 6) *ACCOUNTS* – An income and expenditure Account for the period to the end of April of each year shall be prepared and presented for approval at the A.G. M. after audit by a member appointed at the previous A.G.M.

Luncheon dates were booked with the restaurant manager until the end of the year, the price of the meal initially being £1, excluding wine and gratuities.



There is no record of the 3<sup>rd</sup> May meeting but apparently all went well.

A committee meeting was held on October 14<sup>th</sup>, but Louis McDonald was very ill (and died soon after) and Donald Redfearn became acting Chairman. It was reported that membership was 46 and the club had £61.07 in hand. The Secretary (Eric Gregory) was asked to obtain name tablets bearing one Christian name and the Surname for each member, to be produced at each meeting. A Ladies lunch was agreed for the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1977. Extending the meal by one course. An invitation was extended to the President of Rotary, plus two other members, to the December meeting as guests.

There was a committee meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1977 in preparation for the A.G.M. in May. At this meeting it was agreed that the titles of chairman and vice chairman be replaced by 'President' and 'Vice President'. Also that the office of Secretary/Treasurer be separated and two officers be appointed. These two plus the Speakers Officer would serve on the committee.

All these changes were to be put to the A.G.M. and at the same time obtaining from members a decision as to the continuation of the present system of deciding table places.

The A.G. M. met at 11.45 a.m. on 12<sup>th</sup> May and all the changes were ratified. Accounts then showed a balance of £70.29. Harry Gregory was confirmed as Secretary, Ken Hopkin as Treasurer and Tom Uff as Speakers Officer. Also on the committee, Bryn Morgan, John Peet and Lance Waud were appointed with Frank Butt as auditor. The present system of drawing for table places was to continue.

Apparently, applications for membership must have been flooding in, since in the following month on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, there was another committee meeting when the formation of a second Probus Club in Derby was discussed. In view of this, it was agreed to maintain the membership at 51 and propose to members that the name of the club be changed to "The Derby Probus Club". This was duly ratified by members later that day. Also at this meeting it was agreed to buy the President's regalia, with name plates, and members and past presidents pin badges. The first President's name plate on the regalia would be inscribed with the name of Louis MacDonald. Another important decision was taken regarding charities. A member suggested that as a club we should support a charity of our

choice. After discussion, the committee considered it prudent to defer any action until the club's financial position was stronger, and recommended that a minimum surplus of £100 should be achieved before any action was taken.

The second A.G.M. took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1978, when Frank Barfoot succeeded Donald Redfearn as President and Bryn Morgan was elected Vice President. The committee was to investigate the possibility of arranging visits by members and their wives to places of interest, the CWS bakery and Royal Crown Derby being offered as suggestions. The Treasurer was authorised to spend £3 on a present for Mrs Gregory as a token of the club's appreciation for her help to the Secretary.

A committee on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1978, making arrangements for the coming Ladies day on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1979, agreed that Ken Hopkin would propose the toast to the Ladies and would present a gift to the President's wife, Mrs Barfoot. It is unfortunate that there is no record of activities between committee meetings, nor any details of what transpired on Ladies Days, for instance, nor whether the visits proposed ever took place.

The record leaps forward to the next A.G.M. on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1979. On this occasion the bank balance had increased to £102 and the Treasurer told members that when the new subscriptions were in, the club would be in a position to consider a donation to a worthy cause. He asked members to let the Secretary know of any suggestions. Bryn Morgan succeeded Frank Barfoot as President and Lance Ward was elected Vice President. The other officers were all confirmed re-elected, and it is worth noting that at this meeting Reg James was elected to the committee. It was approved that the practice of drawing for table places at meetings be discontinued, allowing members to sit wherever they wished.

Derby City Probus Club had recently been formed and apparently there had been some confusion in the local press regarding the two clubs. Charles Box suggested that we invite the President of the local clubs to lunch, when any problems might be sorted out over a friendly chat. The committee was asked to examine the situation and make recommendations.

There was a General meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1980 at which it was proposed that the membership total should be increased to 65, so



there is no doubt as to the success of the club. These minutes were not completed, but there must have been elections since a few months later, the minutes recorded that Harry Wood , Ralph Willingham, Gordon Hope and Fred Cholerton were on the committee. Also in June 1980 the club moved its meeting place from the Albion Restaurant to the Derbyshire Yeoman.

At the A.G.M. on the 9<sup>th</sup> May that year, Lance Waud took over from Bryn Morgan as President and Ken Hopkin was elected as vice President. The other officers were again confirmed including Tom Uff as Speaker's Officer, but he was very ill so Reg James took over the job. He was then 70 years of age and little did he realise that he would remain in that post for 19 years.

1981 saw the ground work laid for future Ladies Days. At a committee on the 8<sup>th</sup> January, in preparation for Ladies Day on the 12<sup>th</sup> March, a special luncheon menu was agreed, Jack Tuxford was asked to be Toastmaster and Ken Hopkin as Vice President would propose a toast to the Ladies. Principal guests would be the Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire (Col. Peter Hilton) and Mrs Hilton, the Mayor and Mayoress of Derby (Mr J Thorpe and Mrs Thorpe), and Mr A Naylor (Mayor's Officer). The price of the lunch would be £4.85 and pre lunch drinks would be provided for principal guests and top table. The Mayor would extend civic greetings , Col. Hilton would address the assembly and the President's wife would respond to the toast to the Ladies. This format for Ladies Day remains more or less intact to this day.

It was during this year that a vacancy for a speaker occurred at short notice and Reg James volunteered his daughter Catherine, who had recently visited Petra and had some slides of the visit to show. She was not over awed by the occasion , spoke confidently and the members were well impressed. Charles Cox also stood in at short notice for a speaker suddenly taken ill and Donald Redfearn addressed the combined meeting with the City Club.

In preparation for the 1981 A.G.M. there was a committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, at which it transpired that both Lance Waud (President) and Fred Cholerton (by this time Treasurer) would both be away on the 14<sup>th</sup> May, the date scheduled for the A.G.M. It was therefore agreed to hold the A.G.M in June that year. Thus the meeting duly



took place on the 14<sup>th</sup> June when Fred Cholerton announced a balance in hand of £198.28 .

Ken Hopkin, after four years as Treasurer, took over from Lance Waud as President and Gordon Hope was elected Vice President. Harry Gregory who had been Secretary from the beginning, retired and was succeeded by Harry Wood, a very experienced Secretary of the Derby Co-operative Society. With Fred Cholerton and Reg James re-elected to their offices, the rest of the committee was made up of Ralph Willingham, Jack Tuxford and Arthur Hodgkinson. An invitation from the City Probus Club to join them for their meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1982 was in response to their visit to us in January 1981, when 110 were present. Also an innovation was to invite members partners to the Christmas luncheon plus the President and Secretary of the Rotary club along with their partners. This was apparently a meeting of new proposals as it agreed to make a donation of £70 to the charity 'Action for the Crippled Child'. It was also agreed to limit the membership to 70 for the time being.

On January 5<sup>th</sup> 1982 the committee made the arrangements for Ladies Day on 11<sup>th</sup> March. A menu was agreed at a cost of £5. In addition to the Mayor and Mayoress, the Provost of Derby and his wife would attend. Other arrangements would be as last year.

The A.G.M. in 1982 was held on 13<sup>th</sup> May when in his report on his year in office, Ken Hopkin referred to a club visit to the new premises of the Derby Evening Telegraph. Gordon Hope was appointed President and Ralph Willingham Vice President. All the other officers were re-elected and the annual subscription was now two pounds.

The months passed happily and on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 1983 the committee met to arrange Ladies Day , as had become the usual order of events.

On this occasion, the President and Secretary of Derby Rotary Club were invited along with the Mayor and Mayoress. The meal cost £5 and the Rev. Frank Brown would say grace. The gift to the President's wife and Mayoress to be Crown Derby as last year. The City club would join the Derby Probus meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> February.

At about this time an invitation was received from the Burton Probus Club to attend their social evening on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. It is not recorded whether anyone accepted. At the A.G.M. on 12<sup>th</sup> May, Ralph Willingham took over as President from Gordon Hope with Jack Tuxford becoming Vice President. Other officers were re-elected and Harold Barnes joined the committee.

On September 8<sup>th</sup> a committee meeting agreed the menu for Christmas Luncheon for which the cost would be £5.25. The President and Secretary of Derby Rotary Club, along with their partners, were invited as guests. An appeal letter from Derby and District Continuing Care Unit, Cancer Relief was left 'on the table'.

The committee on January 12<sup>th</sup> 1984 made the usual arrangements for Ladies Day. An invitation from the City Club for 2<sup>nd</sup> of February was announced.

At the A.G.M. on 10<sup>th</sup> May, Fred Cholerton announced a balance in hand of £144.80 and recommended an increase in subscriptions to £2.50, which was agreed. Jack Tuxford succeeded Ralph Willingham as President and Major Arthur Hodgkinson was elected Vice President. Again the other officers were re-elected, with Ellis Haslam and John A Smith joining the committee.

A committee meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> September approved the Christmas menu at a cost of £5.50, with the President of Derby Rotary Club and partner being invited. The President, Jack Tuxford, would arrange if possible for Wenda Williams to entertain with carols. We extended an invitation for the City Club to join us at our January meeting

Immediately prior to the Christmas Luncheon on December 13<sup>th</sup> 1984, an emergency meeting was called to consider a message from the manager of the 'Yeoman' to the effect that the Brewery required the assembly hall on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March, which was to have been our Ladies Day. Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 1985 was offered as an alternative, and with some misgiving this was accepted by the committee.

When that day arrived the Yeoman was unable to supply the agreed menu, so the manageress gave a reduction of 50p per head on the cost of the meal.



This entailed an adjustment to the subscription of the members involved, and this was duly arranged. The meal must have been quite acceptable since the Mayor wrote a message of thanks for the luncheon and hospitality.

Dr. Raymond Chapman, retired headmaster of Bemrose Grammar School, sent a letter of resignation due to ill health. Mr Philip Jones of 'Hambro' offered to give a presentation on "Financial Planning for the Retired", but this was turned down as our programme was fully booked for a considerable time.

By the way of a personal note of explanation, John A Smith comes into the records here, and I must address him thus to differentiate from myself as John D Smith, so as to avoid confusion. John A was a teacher at Hardwick Boys School, and actually taught my son Richard, so we were often able to chat in later years before John A retired due to ill health in 1999.

At the A.G.M. on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1985, Arthur Hodgkinson succeeded Jack Tuxford as President, and John A Smith was elected Vice President. Again the remaining officers were re-elected, and new members on the committee were Roy Cozens and K Williamson. On the vexed question of membership, Hugh Allen suggested that new applicants should be precluded because the club's quota would be exceeded when there was invariably a shortfall in enrolled members attending meetings. It was agreed that while it would not be policy to refuse the subscriptions from those members who for one reason or another could not retain regular attendance, new applications would receive due consideration. Regarding the Income and Expenditure Account, it was agreed that it should be altered to the calendar year, 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December, commencing in 1986.

John A Smith took the chair at a committee prior to lunch on the 12<sup>th</sup> December, as Arthur Hodgkinson was absent following an accident. The menu for Ladies Day on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1986 was approved; it was agreed to accept the invitation from the City Club to join them for their meeting at The Grange, Littleover, on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1986. Due to the change in accounts to the calendar year, it was agreed that the A.G. M. be held in April in future. The January meeting had to be cancelled due to snow!



Thus it was that the 1986 A.G.M. was held on 10<sup>th</sup> April. The president, Arthur Hodgkinson was present but was not fit enough to take the chair, so Jack Tuxford sat in for him. Fred Cholerton was absent due to illness, and had sent a letter of resignation from the office of Treasurer. The accounts were presented showing a balance of £182.41. John A Smith took over as President and Ellis Haslam was elected Vice President. Ken Hopkin, who had previously been Treasurer for four years, agreed to take the position again for twelve months only, and Roy Cozens was appointed Assistant Treasurer. Selbourne Smith, a near neighbour of John A, joined the committee.

The Christmas Luncheon that year followed the pattern of the previous year, and once again Wenda Williams, with Christopher Daily-Atkinson accompanying, entertained.

The A.G.M. in 1987 was held on 9th April, but unfortunately, both Arthur Hodgkinson and the retiring President John A Smith were absent due to illness, and once again it fell to Jack Tuxford to take the chair. Ellis Haslam was installed as President, with Fred Cholerton elected Vice President. Roy Cozens took office as Treasurer and Henry Ward (Secretary) and Reg James (Speakers Officer) were again confirmed in office. Rev. Frank Brown and Bill Land joined the committee.

John A Smith was welcomed back to the committee held on 10<sup>th</sup> September, following a long absence due to illness. The Christmas menu had been agreed with the management of the Yeoman , the cost being £6.25 compared with £6.00 for the previous year.

A committee on January 15<sup>th</sup> agreed the menu for the Ladies Day on 10<sup>th</sup> March at a cost of £6.95 per head, and it was agreed to dispense with the usual arrangement respecting seat reservations.

At the A.G.M. on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1988, the passing of Arthur Hodgkinson was regretted. The Accounts showed a credit balance of £145.99. Frank Butt, who had audited the accounts from the Club's beginning, retired from the office with appreciation from all members. Fred Cholerton became President, and Bill Land Vice President, Roy Cozens was elected Treasurer. Arthur Elms and Bob Panton joined Rev. Frank Brown on the committee and Ken Hopkin took over as temporary Auditor.

The first committee of 1989, on January 12<sup>th</sup>, was interesting in as much as it referred to the newly formed "South Derby" club. Both South Derby and City clubs were invited to join us for our meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> February. The annual subscription was increased to £3.00.

The A.G.M. on April 13<sup>th</sup> regretted the passing of several members during the year. The accounts showed a balance of £123.00. Bill Land was invested as President, and Harold Bates as Vice President. Frank Brown retired from the committee, his place being taken by Ray Brindley. In his closing remarks, the President enquired as to other possible activities, but no suggestions were forthcoming.

At a committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> October, the subscription was increased to £3.50 as from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1990, and it was agreed to order a Probus Directory and ten copies of the Probus Newsletter from the Information Centre.

We leap forward to 12<sup>th</sup> April 1990, when at the A.G.M., Harold Bates succeeded Bill Land as President and Ray Brindley became Vice President. All other officers were re-elected, with Fred Cholerton, Fred Ward and Bob Panton making up the committee.

The next year seemingly passed without untoward problems but at the A.G.M. on April 11<sup>th</sup> 1991, important changes were to take place. Harry Wood had been Secretary for ten years, and he was not in very good health and wanted to retire. Roy Cozens was appointed Vice President, so a new Treasurer was required. Also, The Derbyshire Yeoman was closing shortly, and a new meeting place would be needed after May. In this last respect, after considerable enquiries by the President, it was decided that our meetings in June and July would be at the Masonic Lodge in Littleover, moving to the Mundy Arms Hotel, Ashbourne Road as from August.

Harold Bates had approached John D Smith and asked him if he would consider being Secretary. After taking time to think about it, he agreed, and took over at the A.G.M. Ray Brindley followed Harold Bates as President, Fred Cholerton was elected as Auditor and Tony Cox and Bob Panton made up the committee.