

A Fresh Start

New brooms sweep clean they say, and so it was with the new Secretary. He had been a member for only a few months, and his first priority was to get to know the members, and later on their wives. The Club rules were updated and re-issued, together with a list of club members. Officers name plates were made for the top table, and when we settled at the Mundy Arms, menu sheets were issued, as for the first time members had a choice of menu when they arrived. Previously, an attendance book was circulated which members ticked. Now slips were issued which informed the Secretary of anticipated attendance at the next meeting, since he only had to look round to see who was present at the current meeting. Something that he found curious was that the Secretary never spoke at meetings, but left it to the President to make announcements. To him, the President should control a meeting, using an agenda provided by the Secretary, leaving the Secretary to make announcements as necessary. Gradually this system was brought in.

Members noticed the changes, and some questions were asked, but the changes were soon accepted and a fresh, cheerful atmosphere prevailed at the meetings. Roy Cozens described it as "like a breath of fresh air".

Ken Hopkin, as may be gathered from the foregoing story, was a club stalwart, but he ceased to meet soon after the 1991 A.G.M., and died the following year.

In a club of elderly men, it is inevitable that there should be a continuous loss due to illness and death, necessitating new members. This is never a problem, since members introduce friends regularly, and they stay to enjoy fellowship, so that club membership always remains at about 55.

By this time, the meeting time had changed to 12 noon for lunch at 12.30 p.m., but there is no record of when this change took place, and everyone seems quite happy with it. Inevitably, members begin arriving well before noon, and simply enjoy chatting with a glass of something from the bar, and the room is filled with cheerful fellowship at 12.30 p.m., the President bangs his gavel, bringing everyone to order, and asks Morris Porter to say grace.

The meal is served, and during coffee we remember absent friends and have announcements. There is then a "comfort break" for a few minutes before the speaker is introduced. Not always does everything go to schedule, but we usually break up to return home about 3 o'clock. As I have remarked elsewhere, this is the format for our club. Other clubs may vary a little but are generally similar

A small problem cropped up in 1991. The Rev. Frank Brown had naturally been in the habit of saying grace before lunch, but he died quite suddenly, and the question arose as to who was to be asked to take on this small but important task. Studying the list of members whom he still did not know sufficiently well, did not really help the Secretary, so he decided that perhaps the right person would be the longest serving member, who was Morris Porter. Morris readily accepted the invitation, and he has done the job superbly well ever since.

The Christmas Ladies Day in 1991 brought an innovation, in as much as the Secretary bought a posy for each of the ladies, and this was very well received. At the Committee's request he also bought bouquets for Wenda Williams, who once again entertained with carols and other Christmas music, and also for Mrs Wood, Harry's wife. In view of Harry Wood's long service as Secretary, a gift of a piece of crystal was made to him.

In January 1992 the President and his Lady were invited by the Rotary Club to a dinner function in the Lund Pavilion at the County Cricket Ground. Ray Brindley was unable to go, and passed the invitation to Harold Bates, the immediate Past President, who did attend with his wife Marjorie. In February 1992, Tony Box agreed to be nominated as Vice President at the AGM, and Fred Ward agreed to take over Roy Cozens job as Treasurer. The Secretary obtained permission to overhaul the Constitution, which by now was quite out of date, and also to bring the regalia up to date, as a longer ribbon was needed with name plates for recent years to be added.

At the AGM in April, Roy Cozens succeeded Ray Brindley as President, and Tony Cox was elected Vice-President. Fred Ward was duly elected as Treasurer and all other officers and committee were re-elected. Fred Ward immediately pleased the membership by announcing that the annual subscription would be frozen at £4.00.

Everyone was presented with a revised copy of the Constitution and an updated membership list. It was announced that our club would be hosts at the next meeting in May, when we would be joined by members of the other Derby Probus clubs.

During the year there was a heavy loss of members, bringing the total down to 45, and members were encouraged to bring in new recruits. Enquiries had been made about insuring the regalia, but the cost would be far more than the regalia was worth, and all agreed not to pursue the matter further.

About this time, the Secretary obtained permission to order lapel badges for all members, bearing the letter "P", together with the christian and surname of the member, on a blue background. They were quite attractive and certainly helped everyone to put a name to a face. At that time, they were obtained quite easily and cheaply from a firm on the outskirts of Derby, but later the firm became part of a larger business and moved to Poole, but they still produce the badges on request.

Sadly, Tony Cox died late in the year, and the Committee was faced with the urgent need to find a new President elect who would become President in April 1993. In the event, Harold Bates asked Bob Hamilton to accept the post and he readily agreed.

Thus it was that at the AGM in April 1993, Bob Hamilton duly replaced Roy Cozens as President. No nominations were forthcoming for the office of President elect, and after some discussion Jack Tuxford was nominated, seconded and accepted unanimously – an unusual situation since this would be his second time as President. During his announcements, the Secretary offered to arrange a club outing if there was enough interest, a visit to either Lord's cricket ground or Weston Park being suggested. It was agreed that he send a letter to all members to elicit the response.

The letter was duly circulated, and there was much interest in the visit to Lord's, but too few members to make it viable. However, the suggestion of Weston Park was particularly well received, so that with members, wives and friends making up the number, some 48 made the trip on July 1st. The weather could hardly have been better, the house and gardens were beautiful and full of interest, a very good lunch was included and everyone had an excellent day.

The requests for more outings were numerous.

On August 5th we joined the City club at the Masonic Lodge for the annual combined meeting.

Christmas Ladies Day lunch fell a little bit flat this year, as at the last minute, Wenda Williams was unable to come. She had led our Christmas singing for several years, her father being one of our members, but after a long period of failing health he died and Wenda felt unable to join us again. She was very outgoing and professional in her singing, and served the Club extremely well for several years, and we were very grateful.

At the request of the Committee early in 1994, the Secretary wrote to the Derby Rotary Club, inviting their President to be our guest, which he eventually did on the 9th of June.

The Secretary had announced that the outing this year would be to Shugborough on the 30th of June. He was strongly assured of support and proceeded to make the arrangements.

At the A.G.M. in April, Jack Tuxford was duly invested with the Presidential regalia, exactly ten years after his first year in the office. Cliff Smith was accepted as President – elect, and all other officers were elected.

Fred Ward suggested that there ought to be a scrap book of the club's memorabilia. The Secretary agreed to compile one if contributions were forthcoming. None were!

June 30th was a perfect summer's day, and a full coach made the pleasant run to Shugborough. Everyone enjoyed the beautiful house and gardens, particularly so as there was the added bonus of watching Lord Litchfield carrying out a photographic assignment of some two dozen vintage cars lined up along the drive. Again it was a most enjoyable day, leading to more requests for further outings.

The Probus Club of South Derby were the hosts for the combined meeting at La Gondola on 15th August.

At the request of the Committee, Colin Ashton was invited to entertain the Christmas meeting on December 8th. He brought his

own keyboard, had a lovely tenor voice, and was very experienced. He served us well both this year and the two following years.

Due to a larger than usual bank balance, the cost of the Christmas meal was subsidised, bringing our total assets to around £300.

As is always the case on Ladies Day in March, the Mayor was in attendance and brought Civic greetings. On this occasion in 1995, because our usual M.C. , Jack Tuxford was President, a new M.C. was required , and Roy Cozens performed the task very well.

The March Ladies Day is always a more formal affair, whereas the Christmas Ladies Day is very much a festive occasion. In between, of course, there are the normal meetings on the second Thursday of each month. I do not record them individually but they always seem to be happy conversation pieces, with generally a high standard of speakers on a variety of subjects. There are always some members who are unwell, and some who are on holiday or on business, so that the average attendance is about 40.

At the A.G.M. in April 1995, Cliff Smith took over the Presidency from Jack Tuxford and Albert Marshall was accepted as President-elect. All the other officers were re-elected, though Reg James , not for the first time, asked for someone to take on his job as Speakers Officer. He had done the job for fourteen years, was now 84, and wished to relax. There were no volunteers and he agreed to carry on a bit longer. The meeting agreed that in order to ease the membership list, anyone who had not attended for two years should be removed.

Early in 1995, the Secretary had arranged for an outing to Bruges, with an overnight stop in Eastbourne and crossing through the tunnel via Le Shuttle. This was to have been on the 1st of April, and was well supported and deposits forwarded. Unfortunately, Le Shuttle, which was to have opened in March, had a hitch which postponed the opening until mid-May. An alternative October date for the outing did not find favour, so the visit had to be cancelled and deposits returned.

However, on 23rd of August, he did arrange a visit to Buckingham Palace, when a full coach load arrived at the Palace in time for a picnic lunch in nearby St. James Park, entering the Palace at 15.30.

The visit took about two hours and eventually, we had dinner on the homeward journey at a place just off the M1 in Northamptonshire. As always taxis were waiting on our return to Derby and everyone had a memorable day.

We were the hosts for the combined meeting with the other Derby Clubs at our September meeting. The Treasurer reported that our assets were now £172.12. We had overspent about £30 on the year but the situation was satisfactory.

There was some discussion in Committee about speakers requesting a fee, which was becoming more prevalent. It was finally agreed that the Speakers Officer should have the discretion to offer up to £10, perhaps to cover travelling expenses, where the speaker did not have lunch.

At the A.G.M. in April 1996, the Treasurer said that the overspend on the year was due to the cost of the lunch meal being £8.50, which was exactly what members paid. There was no surplus to cover meals for guests. The choice was to increase the cost of the meal to members by 10p, or to increase subscriptions to £5. The latter was approved unanimously.

Albert Marshall succeeded Cliff Smith as President. Bob Waterfield was to have been President-elect but he died suddenly, and Tim Paisley became the President-elect. All other officers were re-elected although again, there was a plea on behalf of Reg James.

It was agreed that the total membership could be increased to 55, since there were several men wishing to join. There was discussion about the problem of having two Probus Information Centres. It was finally agreed not to support the one that called itself Probus Press Ltd., but to continue to support Ralph Harper, who ran the original Centre.

Due to his wife undergoing major surgery during the first half of 1996, the Secretary was unable to organise outings until later in the year. His first arrangement was for a visit to Toyota, which aroused great interest and was heavily over-subscribed. This meant that he had to organise two visits, the first being on 31st July and the second on 21st August. Meanwhile he put in hand the postponed visit to Bruges, which was again well supported.

On October 12th, the coach took us to the Lynwood hotel in Eastbourne and on the 13th we crossed to France on Le Shuttle which most found quite an exciting experience. Bruges itself was far from being at its best, as the centre was criss-crossed by trenches where new pipes were being laid. However, the beauty of the town was appreciated and most people said they would like to go again.

For the Christmas dinner arrangements, a problem arose in that Colin Ashton, who was to entertain, was engaged elsewhere on the 12th December. Eventually, it was agreed to re-arrange our dinner to Wednesday 11th December. This was done, Colin was booked for the new date and all went smoothly.

At the A.G.M. on 10th April 1997, the Treasurer reported an overspend of about £50 on the previous year, leaving a balance of just less than £100. It was felt that the new subscription of £5 should rectify the situation, and his report was accepted.

Tim Paisley took over as President from Albert Marshall, and John Banham was agreed as President-elect. All other officers were re-elected. It was agreed that Colin Ashton be booked for our Christmas Meeting once again.

Regarding outings, the Secretary had arranged a visit to the Post Office for 23rd April, a proposed visit to the flower show at the N.E.C. was not supported, and a proposed holiday in Normandy brought some interest, but had to be postponed as it clashed with members holidays. He did arrange a holiday on the Isle of Wight, when twelve members shared a coach with another club, but he was unable to go with them as planned because he had to go into hospital himself.

Later that year, Fred Ward asked to be relieved of the Treasurer's job due to ill health. Also, the speaker in August was a blind man, and quite exceptional. He asked no fee, but the committee agreed to make a donation of £40 to St. Dunstons. Appropriately, Morris Porter gave the vote of thanks.

It was about this time that a lady from Long Eaton rang the Secretary to enquire about a ladies Probus Club. She was informed that there was not one in this area, but she was glad to receive

information in starting one. Strangely, there were several queries from ladies about now, mostly wanting to join our club. Our members quickly made it clear that they wished to stay single-sex, so the enquiries were referred to the lady at Long Eaton. According to the Probus Directory, there is a club at Long Eaton, but whether it is men, women or mixed it does not say.

One couple rang to say that they had just returned from holiday on the South East coast, where they had enjoyed fellowship at a local mixed Probus Club and asked if they could join our club. Regretfully, we never heard from them again after they were told that the man would be welcome but not his wife.

Early in 1998, John Potter volunteered to take over from Fred Ward as Treasurer, and his first statement showed a balance of £44.62, plus stocks of ties, badges etc. valued at £92.55. The increase in subscriptions had not yet taken effect, and was expected to improve the situation.

At Ladies Day on March 12th, since the President did not have a lady to speak, it was agreed that the Secretary's wife would respond for the Ladies. This she did very well, and was presented with a bouquet by the President-elect.

The A.G.M. in April saw John Banham take over as President from Tim Paisley and Douglas Williamson volunteered to be President-elect, to unanimous approval. All other officers were re-elected. Members agreed that there should be a change from Colin Ashton for the Christmas Ladies Day. Other singers were available, but since there was no piano to accompany them they could not be invited. It was decided to rely on conversation round the tables to carry the day. In the event, John Potter provided a quiz for everyone and the Secretary provided a puzzle for the ladies. Both went down very well and the occasion was a great success with about 80 guests in attendance.

Meanwhile, John Banham proved to be a more active President than most, and was particularly keen on club outings. In this respect he lost no time in instigating a visit to the Cutlers Hall in Sheffield. He had been before with another group, and supplied the Secretary with the right contacts.

The "Study Day" as it was called, was arranged for the 17th June with lunch and refreshments. Again, a full coach load made the journey, the talks proved both entertaining and informative, and everyone enjoyed a memorable day.

Quite soon after this, again enthusiastically supported by the President, a full coach made the trip to Normandy on the 3rd July, staying in Rouen, a fascinating city with a beautiful cathedral and unusual Joan of Arc church. Visits to Giverney and Monet's garden; to Bayeux with its tapestry, with the added bonus that it coincided with the town celebrating a medieval occasion; a visit to one of the D-Day beaches followed by a visit to Honfleur. The whole was full of interest and pleasure and we returned home on the 6th of July agreeing that it was well worth it.

Another outing on 12th October proved very popular. This was to the newly re-furbished Windsor Castle, and again it was a lovely day in every sense, thoroughly enjoyed by another full coach of members and friends.

On 8th October the speaker at our monthly meeting was Heidi Sutton, who arranged for our members to go behind the scenes at Derby Playhouse on the 15th October. A number of us went and had a very interesting evening.

There was a request for a visit to Burghley House, but the calendar was too full and this outing would have to wait until the following Spring.

Richard Oldershaw explained how difficult it was for members at one end of the room to hear the speakers, and asked if amplifiers could be used when slides were shown. The idea for re-siting the screen was tried but it was not really successful.

Unfortunately, John Banham suffered a heart attack later in the year and Tim Paisley was called upon to stand in as President.

We had been puzzled for some months as to why we had not received directories and newsletters from the Information Centre, until we eventually found out that Ralph Harper had suffered a stroke and was unable to produce them as previously.

One consequence was that at a committee on 11th February 1999 the Treasurer announced that there had been about £86 less expenditure than anticipated, which gave us about £440 in the bank

At Ladies Day on 11th March, Albert Marshall took on the duties of M.C., and all went smoothly. Reg James had composed numerous poems which he produced in a small book. It was very well done, and the sale of them raised over £100 which he donated to the Club, helping to give us a healthy surplus in our accounts.

John Banham was able to return for the A.G.M. in April when Douglas Williamson succeeded him as President. Des Jackson became President-elect and all other officers were re-elected, though the Secretary made a plea on behalf of Reg James, who had been speakers Officer for 19 years, was now 89 years of age, and needed to stand down. After the meeting, Rex Archer approached the Secretary and agreed to take over from Reg James. To round off the meeting, the Secretary gave a slide show of a tour of Europe, which included a visit to Holland, anticipating the coming visit there by the Club.

At the following meeting a presentation of a Probus plaque, suitably inscribed, was made to Reg James in recognition of his long service as Speaker's Officer.

On 20th May 1999, another lovely day saw a nearly full coach go to Burghley House, near Stamford. The Secretary and his wife should have gone too but she was unexpectedly admitted to hospital the previous evening, so the outing went ahead without them. All reports spoke of a very successful day.

September 1999 saw our long awaited visit to Holland. On the 24th a full coach left for Dover in brilliant weather, but was held up for some ninety minutes on the M25 by an accident. We had to take a much later Shuttle than planned, then on the way into Holland we were held up again by road-works, so that we eventually arrived at our hotel in Delft very tired and hungry, only to find that the staff had gone home and there was no food. From this inauspicious start things could only get better, and the next day we had a most interesting visit to Delft pottery factory, with visits to Volendam and Amsterdam on the following days, concluding with a visit to Bruges at its loveliest.

The weather was generally favourable , and the company rang continuously with happy laughter. We returned to Derby on 28th after a smooth journey and with many happy memories.

Earlier in the year the Treasurer had felt it necessary to increase the subscription to £8.00. A committee meeting in October received a report from the Treasurer that our bank balance now showed an excessive credit of £640, and it was readily agreed to reduce subscriptions to £6.

Rex Archer produced new programmes with the aid of his computer, which were of notably high quality. The cost of the coming Christmas Lunch was maintained at £10, as last year. The format for the occasion had been so successful last year that it was agreed to follow the same lines this year.

With the Millennium approaching, several suggestions for further outings were offered. A visit to the Dome was not well received and visits to Ghent Floraries and to World War 1 Battlefields similarly gained no support, but a visit to the Hampton Court Flower Show the following July did rouse some interest.

At a Committee meeting in February 2000, John Potter again reported an excessive balance of £503 and proposed to further reduce subscriptions at the A.G.M.

Giving his report on the new programme, Rex Archer proposed that following the business of the A.G.M., the outgoing President should arrange either to speak himself or to arrange a speaker. This was thought to be a good idea and was accepted.

Since the Mayor this year was a lady, there would not be a Mayoress, so our usual gift would not be required. The Secretary therefore, suggested that we make a donation to the Mayor's Charity Fund in lieu. This was agreed in the sum of £25.

The Ladies Day in March went smoothly in all but one respect, nearly everyone sent back their meal because the meat was not properly cooked. Apparently one of the two ovens had broken down and the chef failed to notify the management who were very upset at not having time to make other arrangements

At the A.G.M. the following month, Des Jackson took over from Douglas Williamson as President , and Robert Young became President-elect. All other officers were re-elected unanimously. Notably, Fred Cholerton still continues quietly to audit the accounts year by year.

There were some repercussions from the Ladies Day lunch problem, and the Secretary said that he had spoken to the management, who offered recompense by way of not charging the ladies for their next lunch. Richard Oldershaw proposed that we changed venue to Park Farm Restaurant, and offered to host a lunch there with the President, Secretary and Morris Porter as guests, so that we could investigate it as a possible alternative. The President asked for a show of hands to see how many were in favour of a change and it seemed that about half the members were in favour.

A special Committee meeting on 8th June discussed three alternative venues, the Spot Club, The Grange at Littleover and Park Farm, all of which were visited by committee members . It was clear that there was no point in moving unless it was to somewhere very much better, and the facilities at the Mundy Arms were such that it would be difficult to improve on them. There were problems at the Mundy Arms, but it was agreed that we meet the management the following month to sort these out. Before the meeting closed the Secretary announced that he would relinquish his office at the next A.G.M., allowing several months to find a replacement.

The committee met the management on 13th July when there was a full and frank discussion, and this was followed on the 10th August by a further meeting of the committee, when the Secretary produced a statement covering the whole situation, including the committee's findings and conclusions. This was approved unanimously by the committee and circulated to all members, who accepted it without demur.

The committee agreed to the purchase of a Probus plaque, which was ordered and eventually fitted to the wall at the entrance.

Meanwhile, the Secretary had managed to fit in an outing to the Hampton Court Flower Show on 6th July. For the first time in any of the club's outings we set off in rainy weather, but as we travelled south the sun came out and the day at Hampton Court was brilliant.

There was a hiccup on the way there ,when the coach broke down and we had to await a replacement, but other than that it was a very happy and successful outing.

By this time the cost of our monthly luncheon was £9.50, and members readily agreed to the suggestion by Ken Green that it would be easier for everyone if we made it £10, the 50p paying for speakers fees. In the event, by October John Potter announced that our bank balance was such that he expected to reduce subscriptions at the next A.G.M. to £3.00.

At the committee on 12th October, arrangements for Christmas Ladies Day were covered, the general format being similar to last year. The Secretary pointed out that next year , 2001, would be the club's 25th anniversary, and asked if we should mark it in any way. It was agreed that thought should be given to ideas.

At the Ladies Day Christmas Lunch, a record 83 people enjoyed a very happy occasion. The increasing numbers caused the Secretary to wonder if we were nearing the limit of seating capacity, but he was assured that there was room for more yet.

It was in February 2001 when the club was saddened by the death of Harold Bates. He had always been a leading figure, full of wise counsel, and responsible for bringing many members into the club. His death was the result of an accident nearly three months earlier, and he lived just long enough to reach his 90th birthday. His passing left a void very difficult to fill.

A Committee was held on 8th February 2001, when the Treasurer reported a surplus of £30 on the previous year, giving a balance £454.06. The speakers Officer reported that the programme for the coming year was complete. The Mayor this year was Councillor Ashok Kalia, and this year his wife would accompany him. The committee agreed to make a donation to the Mayor's Charity Fund, and would present the Mayoress with a bouquet. It was on this occasion that the Club accepted the hotel management's offer not to charge the ladies for the cost of their meal. John Banham took on the task of M.C., which he performed very successfully. As usual, the President and his lady accompanied the Mayor and Mayoress to the door, and John was about to close the meeting when the President hurried back to announce that there was another item of

business not on the agenda. This turned out to be a presentation to the Secretary, consisting of a beautiful Best Wishes card signed by all members, a Probus plaque suitably inscribed, a life members' badge and a superb camera. In addition there was a huge flower arrangement for his wife Iris, who unfortunately was at that moment in hospital undergoing major surgery.

All this took the Secretary by surprise, especially so as it was in anticipation of his retirement at the following month's A.G. M. It so happened that there had been no volunteers to take his place until at the last minute Ken Green agreed to take it on next year since he was not in a position to do it this year, John Smith had therefore decided that he would continue for one more year, so the presentation was one year early!

Much to the pleasure of Reg James, he too was presented with a life membership badge at this meeting, in recognition of his long service as Speaker's Officer.

At the A.G.M. on the 12th April, Des Jackson handed over the Presidential Office to Robert Young, and Ted Gapp became President-elect. All other officers were re-elected. It was announced that it was our turn to host the combined meeting with the other clubs, and this was fixed for the 14th June. Since it was our 25th Anniversary Year, the President of Rotary had been invited to the same event.

That A.G.M. brings to an end the history of the first twenty-five years of Derby Probus Club. The record of the coming combined meeting and whatever follows must be left to the history of the second 25 years.

I conclude by paying two tributes, firstly to Ken Green, who has patiently transferred my scribbling, with its numerous amendments, to his computer, and finally made it all into a real book. Secondly, to the numerous unsung members who attend faithfully every month, the likes of Harold Barnes, Arthur Elms and Richard Edwards, who do not become officers and although very long serving members, would not otherwise get a mention. In many ways the likes of them are the real backbone of any club.