



LOCKED - DOWN TIMES

A monthly news update from the

Probus Club of Bransgore

February 2021

In the middle of a lock-down that threatens to be the longest yet, we are all searching for not only the light at the end of the tunnel but anything that purports to be good news. Most of us by now will either have been vaccinated against Covid, or be very near to the top of the list, which means that as individuals we are much less likely to end up fighting to breathe in an ITU. The not-so-good news is that "normal" is still a long way off. Nevertheless, we might be justified in a gentle rendition of the Monty Python anthem of "always look on the bright side" not only because of the vaccine roll-out but also because Spring is being rolled out at the same time!

On our daily walk we are seeing an increasing number of snowdrops and periwinkles in the hedgerows, daffodils are beginning to appear, the nights are drawing out and our gardens are coming back to life. Time to look forward and think of days spent in the garden, possibly even with friends and, whisper it quietly, maybe even holidays!

Club News

The committee met by Zoom on the 1st February and, as might be expected, there was very little to discuss once we had dealt with the pressing business of who had been vaccinated and where.

Matters of significance are: -

1. Speakers for April and May are being cancelled as we see no prospect of us being able to meet as a group for some time yet.
2. Our sub-groups are likely to be able to meet again relatively soon and, of these, the golfers are likely to be among the first to be set free. Anyone who has ever hacked around a golf course will find a home in this group.

Social – Quiz Night

The idea of a virtual quiz night was floated in the January newsletter and we are going to press ahead with this using Zoom at 7.30pm on Thursday 4th March.

If you are totally and completely bored with evenings in front of the TV, why not sign up for this? It is not intended to be anything other than a light-hearted social gathering, and an opportunity to catch up with friends on the pretext of answering a few easy(ish) quiz questions. Sign up through the website or email Stephen Dennison (dennisonstephen@yahoo.co.uk) if you want to be included. Bernard Gilbert will be asking the questions and Len Morel is in charge of the technology.

The Good Old Days. . . (as recalled by Bernard Gilbert)

Len's stories in the last newsletter of his time as a banker brought back many memories of my own career. Like so many lads of my generation, with a crop of "O" levels and a grammar school education, I ended up working for a major insurer in the City of London. In those days, banks and insurers had a voracious appetite for young men to perform fairly dull routine clerical tasks and an equally large appetite for young ladies to be typists. It is fair to say that the young people themselves also had healthy appetites and the basement filing rooms, adjacent to the heating boilers, could be surprisingly busy.

Our office was a seven storey building with an open plan staircase. This was the era of flouncy dresses and stockings (remember stockings?) and we young men would never use the lifts in the hope of seeing the young ladies ascending the stairs ahead of us. A glimpse of stocking top made our day!

In those far off days, the dress code was strictly dark suits and white shirts. The older men still wore bowler hats and carried furled umbrellas. As the swinging sixties gathered pace, the dress code was relaxed to the extent that we were allowed to wear pastel coloured shirts. Pink, however, was frowned upon! On one sweltering hot summer's day (no air conditioning in those days) a group of us lads spent our lunch break in the gardens adjacent to our building and strolled back into the office with our jackets slung over our shoulders. The manager came over and said "I say, you chaps, put your jackets back on please. This isn't Butlin's you know!"

There was a strong sense of hierarchy. Across the road to the office was a really good pub but this was the preserve of management and woe betide anyone else that ventured in there! By the same token, though, management never used "our" pub although it was such a dive that the temptation to enter was easy to resist!

Once a week I was sent off to the local College to study for my professional exams and it was here that I first came across yoghurt. In the restaurant, adjacent to the till, was a display of unrefrigerated Ski yoghurt and one of my companions persuaded me to try it. To my horror it tasted like warm sick and it was only many years later, when I was in the habit of hoovering up food left on our children's plates, did I discover that it was actually quite pleasant.

A year or so later, I joined the Insurance Department of British American Tobacco. It's unbelievable now but we were actually encouraged to smoke, with heavily discounted prices and smoking allowed everywhere, especially in the staff restaurant. A pall of cigarette and pipe smoke was in every office and as a non-smoker, I guess I was passively smoking about 20 a day!

In that job, I quickly learned that thatched tobacco drying sheds, heated by propane gas, had a remarkable propensity for catching fire, which would then attempt to self-extinguish when the propane tank exploded!

Which brings me full-circle because in my later years, we were, I think, the only insurance brokerage whose offices were destroyed by fire! That, however, is a story for another time. . . !

If anyone else has stories that they would like to share please email them to Bernard Gilbert (bgilbert46@hotmail.co.uk.) If you would prefer just to tell your story over the 'phone you can call me on 01425 672317.

Hang on in there, everyone.

Stay safe, keep well