

VILLAGE PROBUS CLUB OF HARPENDEN



BULLETIN



AN OCCASIONAL REPORT ON CLUB ACTIVITIES

Issue: April 2025

27 March

Verdi Requiem

As a bit of an experiment a few months ago we offered to put together a group visit to a London classical concert venue. Verdi's Requiem was selected as a dramatic and exciting piece and a group of nine signed up.

In the event, after original members (the Kings and the Kenyons) sadly had to withdraw for personal reasons and others stepped in, seven of us made our way to the South Bank on a sunny Thursday afternoon: Brian and Barbara Grant, John Jones, Graham Westwell, David Butler, John Bryant and Paul Manuel.

Blackfriars to the Royal Festival Hall, enjoying the sights and sounds by the sparkling river, including HMS Wellington sitting across the water, a relic of WW2.

We then enjoyed a leisurely light meal at Côte Brasserie adjacent to the concert hall to sustain us, before taking our seats for the concert.



This was a Philharmonia concert, conducted by the world renowned Riccardo Muti, (now in his early 80s) who had been the orchestra's principal conductor from 1972 to 1982, a firm favourite of the orchestra ever since, but who had not appeared in London since 2010. The concert was sold out and has been described subsequently as a big musical event for London.

The performance was fantastically good, with all sections of the band producing beautiful sounds - sometimes stupendously powerful, sometimes shimmering and delicate. The timpanists worked specially hard in the Dies Irae! The Philharmonia Chorus was out in strength and in good voice.

The four solo singers were well balanced, essential in the sustained vocal quartets with which Verdi excels. A note of local interest was that the bass, William Thomas, (who was a late replacement due to illness of the advertised singer), is from Harpenden and a former pupil at St. George's.

The requiem is a long work (84 mins) and it was performed without an interval, but the energy and quality of the performance swept us along and kept our attention throughout. There was enthusiastic and sustained applause and several "curtain calls" before we made our way back to Blackfriars soaking up the night time cityscape, with high rise buildings lit up throughout the financial sector, like a modest Manhattan.



I hope that we can find other classical music opportunities during the year, including a Prom concert at the Albert Hall in the summer. When the Proms programme is published in April we will try to choose a concert that will attract a good number so that we can enjoy another great musical evening.

Report by trip organiser - Paul Manuel

2 April

Indoor Bowls Competition

We held a very successful bowls competition for the Alan Cox Trophy 2025. There were 11 entrants and as usual the event ran from early January till early April - with a total of 8 practices on Wednesday afternoons in the first two months leading to the competition itself in March.

There were four rounds including the Final with a total of 10 knockout matches. Bowling standards are improving every year and there were some very close matches in each round. For example:-

In Round 1 David Stevenson squeezed past John Bryant 21-19

In Round 2 Doug Hall narrowly beat Steve Maynard 21-19

In Round 3, Sandy Bisland beat Roy Polley by the closest score possible - 21-20.



This led to the Final between Doug Hall and Sandy Bisland on 2nd April. In a very good match, with a number of spectators, the winner of the Alan Cox Trophy 2025 was Sandy Bisland. This is the first time that Sandy has won the Trophy. Many congratulations.

Report by bowls organiser - Roy Polley

10 April

David Abernethy's Induction

New member David Abernethy was warmly welcomed to the Club by Chairman Colin Robinson with presentation of our induction pack including the Club Tie and Pin.



15 April

April Walk

On a dull and initially damp day eight of us met in Aldbury to pre-book our lunches at the excellent Greyhound Pub.

Aldbury is a pretty village, population 1000, which has a varied and interesting history. It is mentioned in the Domesday Book as Alderberie. Originally there were 4 manors, Aldbury, Stocks, Cherrywicke, & Launcelennes. Stocks Manor was rebuilt in 1773 and remains to this day. In 1972 it was purchased by Victor Lownes, who with Hugh Hefner, founded the Playboy Empire. He held many lavish and rowdy parties there, attended by notables of the day, and staffed by scantily clad bunny girls. The Manor and its estate are now a quiet and sober golf course.

Many films and TV shows have used Aldbury. Some that you will recognise are The Dirty Dozen, Bridget Jones Diary, The Avengers, Inspector Morse and Midsummer Murders. The local shop was used in the original promotion of the National Lottery, even though at the time it didn't sell the tickets.

Leaving our assembly point at 10 am we climbed the chalk escarpment to The Bridgewater Monument. Arriving there breathless but undaunted we paused to inspect the recently refurbished monument. The monument, erected in 1832, is in memory of Francis Egerton 3rd Duke of Bridgewater. It commemorates the construction, in the 1750s, of the first true canal in Britain to move coal from the Egerton Northern estates the 41 miles from Salford to Runcorn, in part, initiating the Industrial Revolution. The Egerton family owned Ashridge House, its estates and forest.



Heading off towards Duncombe Terrace we crossed the medieval hollow way that the local peasants used to drive livestock up to the forest to graze, the much older bowl barrow (Bronze Age about 3000 yrs. old) and the woodmen's shack used by the Egerton family as a picnic spot.

Arriving at the terrace we were delighted to see a small herd of Fallow Deer who seemed completely at ease with us.

Photo by David Butler



Taking a left hand turn, downhill through the trees, we followed the path and turned back on ourselves to cross two fields. In the first field the deer reappeared being chased by a dog which I think was more enjoying the chase than trying to bring down any of the animals. The dog was eventually recovered by his owner who didn't seem worried about his dog's behaviour. Much tut tutting amongst us walkers! A farm track led us eventually to Stocks golf club which we walked around, and so back to a well-earned lunch at the pub

Report by Walk Leader - Richard Upton

24 April

Annual Past Chairmen's Lunch



This year's lunch was attended by 11 Past Chairmen at The Queen's Head on Southdown Road, a risky (but researched!) choice of venue given that the pub's ownership had only recently changed. However, it was a very covivial event with the pub's staff providing excellent food and attentive service.

Report by Sandy Bisland