

## VILLAGE PROBUS CLUB OF HARPENDEN



# BULLETIN



AN OCCASIONAL REPORT ON CLUB ACTIVITIES

**Issue: May 2026**

**7 May**

### Drop In Coffee Morning

On Thursday 7 May a group of us “dropped in” for coffee at the café on the Rothamsted Institute campus.

We began to gather at about 10.30 and chatted very happily around a large table for an hour and more, with some comings and goings during that time.

There’s always plenty to chat about; indeed we were so absorbed in conversation that it didn’t occur to me to take a photograph for the Bulletin!

This was an experiment and a reasonable success, so we will have another go towards the end of June. When I send out the next invitation I will encourage anyone needing a lift to ask so that transport can be arranged.

*Report by Chairman Paul Manuel*

**11 - 15 May**

### Trip to Istanbul



Blue Mosque at night

I’m pleased to tell members that the holiday to this most historic city was by all accounts a great success. 18 joined the party and all returned home without mishap.

We flew with Wizz Air from Luton. The early start was a challenge for some but it all went smoothly as did our meeting with the transport to our hotel, the Ottoman Imperial.



First night's dinner in the hotel

Rooms were a little smaller than one would wish but the location was first class. Major sites which one could walk to within a few minutes included the Hippodrome, Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Basilica Cistern, and Topkapi Palace.



The Blue Mosque

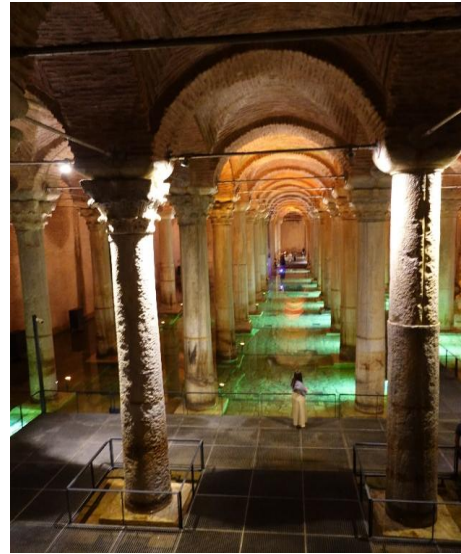


Hagia Sophia

Such a pity Hagia Sophia was under a major restoration.

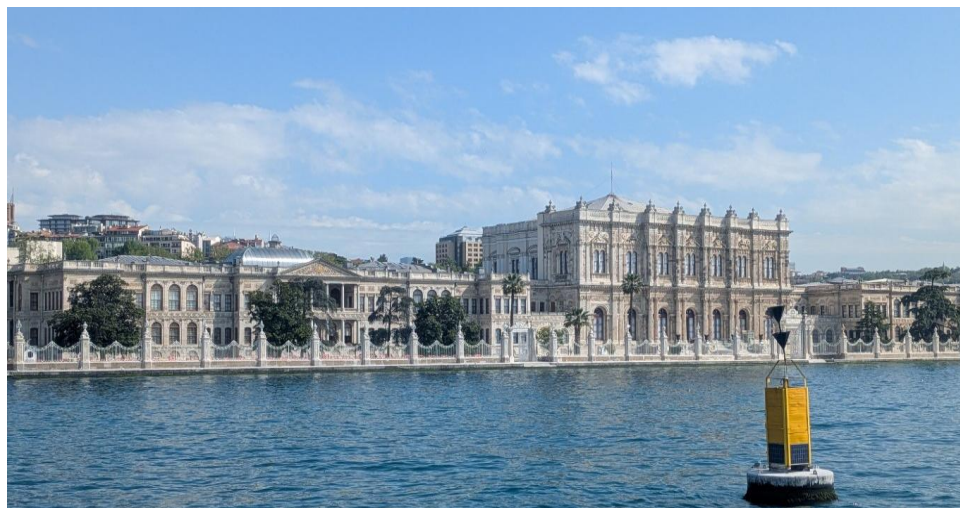


Partially uncovered mural and the main hall of Hagia Sophia



Basilica Cistern

In addition to seeing most of those with guides we took a private boat along the Bosphorus with guide and visited the Spice Market.



One of the former Palaces from the river

Most days breakfast lunch and dinner were included as were tips to all guides and staff. Those joining me on the cookery experience seemed to enjoy themselves and others who shared the food we helped provide all survived.



Cookery Class

The only additional cost was therefore at the discretion of each party member. Some bought gifts including Turkish Delight and spices while others grabbed a coffee at the very welcoming cafes wherever we went.

Istanbul is a busy tourist destination so we suffered a little from the crowds but this is unavoidable these days in any of the great sights.

Fitting all of this into what was essentially three days plus travel kept us all busy with frequent walking, but coach travel was included wherever the distances required.

Everyone on the holiday contributed to its success by always remaining upbeat. My special thanks to Sandy Bisland for his contribution to the organisation.



The travelling party

Note - I'd also like to acknowledge the huge part Fleewinter and their local partner played in supporting us with transport and guides.

*Report by trip organiser - David Jump*

14 May

## May Walk

A walk around Totternhoe in Bedfordshire

The walk was on a cloudy day with long sunny periods and the odd spot of rain.

A group of us met in the car park of the Cross Keys pub, directly opposite the start of the walk. After a steep climb up the chalk escarpment, we reached the remains of the motte-and-bailey castle, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century during the period known as The Anarchy. This was an 18-year period of skirmishes, rather than pitched battles, between two factions supporting rival claims to the throne. Both claimants were grandchildren of William I (the Conqueror). Cutting a long story short, the two individuals eventually agreed that one would reign and upon his death (he had no heir) the son of the other would inherit the throne. So, Henry Plantagenet became king and founded that dynasty, displacing the Anglo-Normans who had preceded him. The castle at Totternhoe was one of some 700 built around that time throughout England and Wales.



*Photo by Ian Davies*

This is the motte, on top of which would have been a wooden tower and at its foot a wooden palisade, this motte, unusually had three baileys (attached fortified enclosures).

Striding down-hill we joined the disused railway in the valley bottom which was part of the Welwyn to Leighton Buzzard line that passed through Batford and was closed by Beeching in the 60s. This was a gently uphill stroll which we left at the start of the impressive Sewell Cutting which was driven through a hill in the way of the railway.

We soon were able to visit Maiden Bower, the remains of an Iron Age Fort where archaeological investigations had found items pointing to earlier neolithic and later Romano-British occupation. The walk leader, by mistake, led everyone for a circumnavigation of the site to his embarrassment and their well-meaning disdain.

Safely back on course.

We walked past the remains of extensive medieval quarrying for Totternhoe stone, a hard type of chalk sufficiently robust to be used for building material (though it doesn't weather well in the long term) The area had been significantly tunnelled and the resultant spoil heaps are now a haven for rare plants, wildflowers, and invertebrates. The area is a SSSI managed by The National Trust.



*Photo by Ian Davies*

There are large deposits of Cretaceous (creta, Latin for chalk, 143 to 66 million years ago) shark teeth reported in this region.

Totternhoe stone was used in Westminster Cathedral and St Albans Abbey and often in churches in this area. St Mary's in Luton is a particularly fine example with characteristic checkerboard design of Totternhoe stone and flint.



Arriving back at the Cross Keys, where we had planned to have lunch, but who had lost their chef, we jumped into our cars and drove the short distance to The White Horse at Eaton Bray. Here we enjoyed lunch together before setting off home.

*Report by Walk Leader - Richard Upton*

**21 May**

### **Chairman's Lunch**

At 12 Noon on a gloriously sunny day, seventy club members, spouses and guests gathered in the Pat Eames Lounge at Harpenden Common G.C. to be welcomed by chairman Paul Manuel and offered a glass of Prosecco or cordial.

At 12.30, the chairman delivered the Grace, whereupon diners sat down to an excellent three-course lunch during which a wide selection of mellow background music was performed by guitarist Chris Flegg.

Each table also had the opportunity of completing a challenging table quiz compiled by guest quiz master Peter Goucher.

Following the dessert course Peter provided the answers which resulted in a dead heat between two tables. Clearly well prepared, he produced a further three questions which were speedily answered by the winning table.



A musical interlude followed comprising three popular pieces performed by Chris Flegg allowing diners to gently recover from their mental exertions.

Paul Manuel then thanked the guitarist, the staff at HCGC and the club members responsible for managing the event. He then thanked the club's management committee for their support during the year and highlighted the contribution made by treasurer Graham Westwell and secretary David Keith. He also thanked Colin Robinson for looking after the welfare of members and expressed his appreciation for the results achieved by the recruitment team during the year.



He went on to highlight the variety of visits and activities that had taken place during the year and thanked all those responsible for their efforts in making these a reality.

Paul concluded his remarks with the loyal toast to the King after which guests mingled briefly before departing at around 3.00pm.

*Report by Vice Chairman - Bryan Coventry*

**28 May**

### **Family History Group**

Following on from Mike Trenchard's fascinating talk earlier in the year on his personal family history research and his professional expertise in genealogy, a group of interested members met at Mike's home on 28 May to explore how we might develop a family history group for the club.

Over the course of a lively couple of hours eight of us shared what research (if any) we had attempted over the years and discussed the various sources we had used and obstacles we had encountered. Mike was able to throw a lot of light on the resources available to researchers beyond the usual internet search engines - including civil, parish and diocesan records, census returns, county and military archives and the national archives at Kew.

We discussed possible ways to proceed as a group and Mike kindly offered to host a second meeting on 24 June and to make enquiries about a group visit to the National Archive and the British Library.

We agreed that in the meantime each of us would do a bit of 'homework' by attempting to take a specific step towards finding out a bit more about our own family trees so that we could share back at the next meeting.

As a grand finale, Mike showed us the Grant of Arms he had recently received from the College of Arms having established (after many years of research) a link back to the Trenchard family of Dorset.

*Report by Chairman Paul Manuel*