

VILLAGE PROBUS CLUB OF HARPENDEN



BULLETIN



AN OCCASIONAL REPORT ON CLUB ACTIVITIES

Issue: February 2026

22 January

January Walk

A Walk Around Sharpenhoe Clappers

On Thursday 22nd January 2026 an intrepid band of 8 walkers assembled in the car park of the Chequers pub in Streatly. This walk was the first of twelve planned for the year and the first in January for quite some time.



Streatly is just to the north of Luton on the chalk escarpment that forms the northern limit of the Chiltern Hills.

The pub had been closed, but the new current licensees have created a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere in an upgraded building. The building itself dates back to the 18th century

Behind the pub was the parish church, the core of which is 12th century. The building is grade 1 listed and its patron saint, unusually, is Margaret. She was born in Hungary of English stock and was related to Thomas Becket the murdered Archbishop of Canterbury. She was a devout Christian and had travelled on pilgrimage to Bethlehem where she lived an austere life of penance. Eventually she became a nun and died in France in 1192. She was canonised in the mid-13th century.

The church fell into disrepair and was closed in 1918. After much renovation it was reopened after WW2.

So, to the walk. The weather was cold, grey, but dry, as we set off on reasonably dry terrain, mostly on the flat and easy going.

Sharpehoe stems from the old English for a wooded spur of land, an apt description of what is still there today. The whole is now owned and managed by the National Trust.

The Clappers is thought to get its name from the old Latin word for rabbit and there was a fenced rabbit warren on the clappers in medieval times.

Great views were enjoyed where the land dropped steeply and the trees permitted. To the north were Barton-le-Clay (with Wrest Park beyond) and Sharpenhoe, with the Sundon Hills to the west, and Barton and Pegsdon Nature reserves leading the eye to Hitchin to the east.

Towards the end of our trek on the clappers, we visited the site of an iron age fort that had used the high ground rather than throwing up an earthen mound. The term used to describe such a feature is a promontory fort and there are very few known in the country.

On the site of the fort is an obelisk raised after WW1, by the then landowner, to commemorate the sacrifice of young gentry serving as junior officers in the trenches. As we all know a very high number of such brave men perished leading their men across no-mans land to attack the enemy.

Leaving the clappers we followed the path leading towards the Sundon Hills taking a sharp left to join the road to take us back to the pub. After a change of footwear and a well-earned drink and a lovely lunch



we returned to Harpenden where I suspect most of us dozed the afternoon away in our chairs.

Report by Walk Leader - Richard Upton (with photos by David Butler)

26 January

Discussion Group

Twelve members exchanged their views when the Discussion Group met on the 26th January; the topic was The Defence of the Realm - Part 2, and was led by Chris Dean. The subject was first aired in Part 1 last May and much has happened internationally since then. In particular Donald Trump continues to present his sometimes incoherent thoughts upon the world.

These have and continue to have impact on the leaders of the Western World and threaten the integrity of the NATO alliance. There is no doubt that this has caused Europe to wake up to the need to increase defence spending. But what to spend it on? Where is the money to come from – in the case of the UK, defence spending up and welfare down – surely political suicide! Would an issue of Defence bonds be worth exploring? There is much chatter from the arm chair generals etc but very little discussion by the Government and even less positive sign of action.

As for the UK, seem to consist of cyber attacks and vulnerability to attacks on our various gas, electricity and internet connections to our neighbours principally under the North Sea. Disruption of these would cause untold chaos and seriously affect the economy. All could be easily accomplished at minimum cost to a potential aggressor.

Our discussion ranged widely and was animated at times. Another enjoyable occasion helped by good service, food and drink at The Engineer.

Report by Discussion Leader - Chris Dean

29 January

Visit to Hampstead Theatre - Indian Ink

This Tom Stoppard play has had a successful and extended run at the Hampstead Theatre.

12 of us gathered, some arriving by public transport and others by car.

The play comprised two acts. The first act is set in 1930 India with the lead character, Flora Crewe, visiting the country for health reasons. The dialogue was rapid and a little challenging. Witticisms and facts were interspersed in such rapid order that one had no time for reflection. The second act is set in 1980s England when Flora's elderly sister (played by Felicity Kendal) is visited by an American writer seeking information about Flora's time in India. The experiences of a sickly but nevertheless confident and adventurous young Flora who died in India were laid bare. Her adventures were the focus, but with references to white privilege, the British Raj, the Indian caste system and unequal wealth all playing a part as illustrated in an ending where it is revealed that a punkah wallah had observed the woman during her liaison with an Indian artist although no one cares because of his lowly caste; an insight that may well still be the case in modern India today.

Following the play we retired to Bradley's restaurant for a most enjoyable supper. Bradleys is just a couple of hundred yards away and specialises in catering for theatre patrons.

Report by Visit Organiser - David Jump

23 February

Discussion Group

Hospitality - The end of the road?

Amazingly, as many as 15 stalwart members gathered in The Engineer conservatory on a bright day to consider the plight (or otherwise) of the Hospitality industry in England currently – Is It Nearing The End of The Road as we have known it?. Yours truly was tasked with opening discussion, taking the opportunity to review the "Vibes" as reported in the Press; the negatives to start, then inviting comment on history and positives as may be perceived, generally covering the topics noted here:

NEGATIVE VIBES

- Introduction of tourist visas
- Up to £500 for 2 years, £20 per visit
- Introduction of tourist taxes (£2 per night)
- Spend reduction >£1bn
- General uncertainty

POSITIVE VIBES

- Enthusiasm
- Lifestyle
- Human contact
- Free speech
- Return of drinkers pubs (after office closes)

COSTS

- Hops - UK yields down
- Waste disposal
- Business rates up 50% where pubs >1/1000
- Upwards-only leases

- £4.3bn support this year/next
- 15% discount in April, frozen for 2 years

EMPLOYMENT

- NI rises
- Fair work rights
- Minimum wage rises

COMPETITION

- Other pubs and restaurants
- Supermarkets
- Deliveroo
- Foreign holidays
- High earners moving abroad

ANTI-ALCOHOL ATTITUDES

- Legislation reducing U-18 exposure
- Duty (RPI over CPI) & tax rises
- Harsher drink/drive legislation
- Lower cask-ale prices
- Reform-UK proposals
- Limits on pubco's

MANAGEMENT & FINANCE FAILURES

- Revolution bars/peach pubs
- Liberty -TGI Fridays
- Windmill theatre
- Costa Coffee unsellable (Coca Cola)



'The Government has introduced assisted dying, but only for pubs, small businesses and hospitality'

We continued with more open discussion on What's To Be Done – By Whom and Do We Care? Despite the usual (welcome) diversions alongside the main topic, we covered the topics that I had dreamt up and enjoyed lively, interesting contributions from all present:

GOVERNMENT

- Reduce beer duty
- Cut VAT
- Abolish business rates
- Reduce NI
- Limit pubco's

LICENCEES

- Ban Labour MPs
- TV & special events (Pancake Day)
- Reduce opening days/hours
- Offer takeaways/Deliveroo
- More gaming/vending machines
- Customer transport
- Subsidise with 2nd job/business
- Micro brewery/distillery
- Overnight accommodation

CUSTOMERS

- Celebrity visits (Daisy Cooper MP haunts Robin Hood and Mermaid, St Albans)
- Community purchase
- Visit frequently
- Tip where suitable

As the only conclusion, we all disagreed with the proposal that we should club together to buy a pub, but did happily agree that once again The Engineer team had been extremely hospitable and deserved our ongoing patronage from 23rd March onwards!

Report by Discussion Leader - Alan Falconer

24 February

De Havilland Museum Visit

Eleven club members visited the De Havilland Museum, London Colney for a fascinating guided tour by John Magowan and David Asher.



The De Havilland Museum is located just off the London Colney to South Mimms road, hidden down a narrow lane and behind Salisbury Hall. Salisbury Hall dates back to pre Norman times but the current house was built in 1507 by Sir John Cutte, Treasurer to King Henry VII and Henry VIII. From 1905 the Lady Randolph Churchill lived at the hall and her son Winston Churchill was a regular visitor. During the 1930's the Hall was the home of Sir Nigel Gresley of A4 Pacific Steam Locomotive fame.

The site was taken over in 1939 by the De Havilland Aircraft Company to develop the highly successful Mosquito high speed bomber, away from a disapproving Air Ministry and also away from known airfields and other aircraft manufacturing sites that would be vulnerable to German attack. The site became the UK's first aviation museum in 1959, firstly as the Mosquito Museum and then later as the de Havilland Aircraft Museum. The museum is a charity essentially run and staffed by enthusiastic and skilled volunteers who also undertake restoration projects on many of the exhibits.

The Museum houses an amazing collection of De Havilland aircraft and other related aviation artifacts, but the star exhibit is the first Mosquito prototype which was 'saved' by dismantling and hiding the parts before reconstruction at the museum. Another exhibit proudly shown off to us was a badly damaged RR Merlin engine recovered from a crash site in southern England and restored by the Museum volunteers to become a working cut-away demonstration.



The 'new' hangar containing a walk-through Comet 1A, Vampire and others



The Mosquito Prototype housed in the 'old' hanger



RR Merlin engine from a Mosquito crash site recovered and restored by the Museum

Our tour was about 2 hours duration, frankly far too short to see all the exhibits but an eye opener and realisation that the museum is a hidden gem that deserves a much longer return visit.

The visit was concluded by lunch at the Colney Fox in London Colney.

Report by Visit Organiser - David Butler

26 February

February Walk

Ten club members met at 10am on Thursday 26th February at The Boat public house situated at the Port of Berkhamsted on the Grand Union canal (originally Grand Junction canal) Ravens Lane and Castle Street Berkhamsted. The first section of this canal was from Brentford to Berkhamsted completed in 1798 and later extended to Birmingham by 1805.



The weather was overcast with a cool breeze; pleasant for walking.

We walked along the canal tow path with the canal on our left side and the river Bulbourne, a small chalk stream, on the left which in the Victoria era was the site of watercress beds.

After about a mile we crossed over the canal and railway lines up along the Bridleway and onto the footpath across the fields, some of which are planted with wheat. From this elevated section we had an excellent view overlooking the town of Berkhamsted.



Some sections of the foot paths were quite saturated and muddy but easily navigated. Following the footpath we gradually descended to Berkhamsted cricket club passing newly planted trees on Castle Hill farm intending to cross the road to Berkhamsted Castle.

However, at this point our proposed route was blocked by maintenance engineers who closed off the entire roadway as they were in the process of completely resurfacing that section of the roadway. We had to retrace our footsteps until we came to a footpath that led out onto Castle Hill and down to Bridgewater Road and the rear entrance to the railway station.

From there we walked past the remnants of Berkhamsted Castle which was originally of Norman motte and bailey design. It was at the site of the castle where William the Conqueror received the submission of the English after defeating King Harold at the Battle of Hastings.



From there we then had a short walk back the Boat pub for a very enjoyable lunch.

Due to the brief detour the distance walked was estimated to be just short of 5 miles.

Report by Walk Leader - Bill Douglas