

VILLAGE PROBUS CLUB OF HARPENDEN



BULLETIN



AN OCCASIONAL REPORT ON CLUB ACTIVITIES

Issue: December 2025

20 November

November Walk

On Thursday 20 November 2025 eleven members met at the White Horse Hotel in Hertingfordbury.

The route of the walk was through the 1000 acre Panshanger Park which is owned by TARMAC company of which only 200 acres are open to the public. On leaving the park the route is over the A414, on through the village of Birch Green and then turning left onto Chain Walk to track our way back to Hertingfordbury. Total distance 5.5 miles.

Starting out we walked down Hertingfordbury High Street turning left just after the Mill and into Panshanger Park, stopping at the wild fowl viewing point overlooking one of the ponds forming part of the River Mimram.

From there we walked along the footpath on the side of the river, crossing the river and past the obviously unoccupied River Cottage up a slight incline towards the site of Panshanger House, stopping on the way to view some large fungi beneath an oak tree.



Scale provided by Sandy Bisland's foot.

At the top of the incline was the site of Panshanger House. This was an impressive house built by the extremely wealthy 5th Earl Cowper between 1806 and 1811 in Regency-Gothic style. Such was the wealth of the Cowper family Queen Victoria and Prince Albert stayed there in July 1841.

By 1905 the 7th Earl Cowper had died without any male descendants and the house and estate passed to Lady Desborough who apparently had little interest in the property. On her death in 1952 her descendants could not find a purchaser for Panshanger House and shortly afterwards the property was demolished leaving only the Orangery and some outbuildings.

A short distance from the site of Panshanger House are the remains of the orangery and the boiler house which heated the house and orangery which, sadly, are the only remaining structures on the Panshanger estate.



The House in its heyday



The remains of the Orangery

Then onto the largest Maiden Oak tree (one which has not been pollarded) in the country with a girth in excess of 7.6 metres; considered to be over 500 years old and allegedly planted by Queen Elizabeth 1st whilst living at Hatfield House.





From there we walked back down to the River Mimram valley passing a tree covered in mistletoe.

Then on up a slight incline to the foot bridge crossing the A414 and through the village of Birch Green, turning left along Chain Walk and back into Hertingfordbury for lunch at the White Horse.

Report by Walk Leader - Bill Douglas

24 November

Discussion Group

Eleven of us took our seats at The Engineer, ordered our sustenance, and then tackled the burning issue of “**Digital ID – Like it or Not**”. Any doubt that Digital ID was coming, like it or not, had been laid to rest just a month earlier, when, on 23 October 2025 a press release was issued stating:

“Today the government announced that in order to deliver this cross-government priority, the Cabinet Office will have overall responsibility of the new digital identity scheme, including policy development, legislation and strategic oversight. This is a top priority for the Prime Minister that requires all government departments to be engaged...”

While Singapore has developed such a wide-ranging Digital ID system, encompassing fields from taxation to booking medical appointments, we noted that in Singapore trust in government was rated in the high seventies percent, compared with the UK, where trust in government is in the low thirties. It is probably fair to say that such a rating of UK government competence was reflected in the opinions around the table, although one member, determined to look on the bright side, suggested that maybe Digital ID could make life easier in some respects.

Concerns were expressed about state surveillance, function creep, and, considering JLR and the summer clothing still on sale at M&S despite imminent winter, the catastrophic consequences of a breach of a UK government-created data honeypot by hackers.

In summary, the group felt reluctantly obliged to accede to the inevitable, but not without serious qualms. And then along came some excellent food and drink (Side Pocket clearly a favourite) to divert our thoughts in a happier direction.

Report by Discussion Group Leader - Ian McNicoll

27 November

Philharmonia Concert

A group of 20 members and partners travelled into London on a dry afternoon on 27 November to enjoy another Philharmonia concert at the Royal Festival Hall. As evening fell we enjoyed a walk from Blackfriars along the brightly illuminated South Bank and assembled at Côte Brasserie to enjoy our pre-ordered meal, which was served in a timely but relaxed fashion allowing us plenty of time to relax and enjoy chatting as we ate.



The concert was a feast of Berlioz's liveliest music: the Roman Carnival overture and the Symphonie Fantastique. We had seats in the front stalls (enjoying our 25% group discount) and so got the full benefit of the massive (c.70?) orchestra - such wonderful sights and sounds as the themes passed between the sections of the band. The bright and energetic playing under the dynamic (sometimes balletic!) direction of Rafael Payare was stirring stuff. The members of the orchestra were clearly having a great time celebrating their 80th season, fresh from a US tour last month.

Between the Berlioz works came the London premiere of Gabriela Ortiz's trumpet concerto. With a combination of Mexican composer and Venezuelan conductor and soloist, the piece was as full of Latin rhythms and playfulness as you might expect. The trumpeter Pacho Flores brought four instruments onto the stage with him and switched between them as the piece unfolded: a solo fanfare which was echoed and by fluid orchestral textures, a central section with references to Stravinsky's punchy off beat rhythms and a final movement with a more clearly South American vibe - and improvised humour - at Flores's request (as the work was written with him in mind).



Flores, following a terrific reception in the hall, then gave us an encore - a soulful and personal tribute written by him and dedicated to his mother.

There was a real buzz in the Festival Hall as the evening developed. The Roman carnival overture set the exuberant tone, Flores was spellbinding, and the March To The Scaffold was as rousing (and as chilling in its climax) during the symphony as it is possible to be.



To cap it all (although I did not personally count everyone at Blackfriars station!) I believe we all managed to catch the 10:12 train home, the last fast train on the timetable.

Report by Visit Organiser - Paul Manuel

9 December

Christmas Lunch

Members and their guests enjoyed Christmas Lunch at the Harpenden Golf Club on Tuesday 9 December. 71 acceptances were received although regrettably 5 could not attend due to illness. The lunch provided the opportunity for members to bring guests and for us all to meet and enjoy the company of others.



The lunch began with the formal welcome by our Chairman Paul Manuel who later proposed the loyal toast to the King and absent friends. During lunch two quizzes were circulated to be completed between courses. A total of 50 questions were set and the winning table achieved the grand total of 41 correct answers. Well done to Table 3 who received the prize of Toblerone for all on their table.



Thanks were made to the Harpenden Golf Club Team for their support in making the Lunch run smoothly.

The organising committee – *Jim Davies, Guy Kenyon and David Stevenson* - thank all those attending and contributing to an enjoyable extended social event.

“A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world!” *Quote from Christmas Carol.*

Report by Christmas Lunch Team member - David Stevenson

***Best wishes for a merry Christmas
and a happy and healthy 2026.***