

## VILLAGE PROBUS CLUB OF HARPENDEN



# BULLETIN



AN OCCASIONAL REPORT ON CLUB ACTIVITIES

Issue: November 2025

7 October

### Visit to RAF Museum, Hendon

David Abernethy, Bryan Coventry, Bill Douglas, Alan Falconer, Jan Grunberg, Bryan King, Paul Manuel, Mike Ryland, Graham Westwell and I met up outside Hangar 1 at the RAF Museum in Hendon after a delay free drive down the M1. We arrived just as the museum was opening at 10:00 but with groups of excited school children already piling-in through the entrance gate and gathering around the site. We wondered what we had let ourselves in for!

We quickly identified Tony Dean our allocated volunteer guide at the entrance desk in Hangar 1 and arranged to meet him later at the entrance of building H345 (Hangars 3,4,5) at 10:45 for our pre-booked private Bomber Command Tour at 11:00.

The Museum site sprawls across a large site alongside the Thameslink railway, with 4 exhibit hangars and a large canteen style café, appropriately named the Hendon Kitchen. H345 is the largest building which incorporates 3 areas covering War in the Air 1918 to 1980, Earlier WW1 exhibits reside in H2 and H6 contains more recent and current fighter and fighter bomber aircraft.

The Museum site was formerly Hendon Aerodrome which from around 1908 and up to WW1 had been the centre of UK civil aviation and could easily have become what is now Heathrow. However, WW1 saw the site taken over by the RAF as well aircraft production by Graham-Wright.

Before our VPCoH party left H1 the fitter members of our party climbed the steps to clamber through a Short Sunderland MR5 flying boat, suitably armed, as Alan Falconer's photo shows.



Hangar 1 (H1) – Complete Short Sunderland MR5

To fill in time before the start of our Bomber Command tour we visited H6 which houses a very impressive display of aircraft used in recent military operations, including Buccaneer, Eurofighter Typhoon, Tornado, Jaguar and Harrier. Some of us also used the stepped access tower to peer into the Buccaneer cockpit.



*Hangar 6 (H6) - The RAF in an Age of Uncertainty*

At 10:45 we assembled in the entrance of H345 to meet our Bomber Command Tour guide, Tony Dean. Tony turned out to be a very affable and knowledgeable volunteer guide. The essence of the tour was for Tony to walk us around a selection of Bomber Command aircraft where with great enthusiasm he recounted stories about the individual aircraft, including their operational history, the crew who flew in them and how the aircraft came to be at the RAF London Museum. Tony really brought the history alive and gave us an insight into what the crew and aircraft went through.

We started in front of what for most people is probably the star exhibit of the Museum as well as the most well know icon of Bomber Command – the Avro Lancaster. An enormous aircraft with the largest bomb bay capacity of all WW2 aircraft (yes, even more than the Flying Fortress). Tony explained that this particular aircraft had a remarkable history in that it some how survived the war having undertaken 137 sorties. To put this into perspective the average for a Lancaster was 20 sorties before the aircraft was lost or damaged beyond repair. Having said this, this particular Lancaster did sustain damage and two crew members were seriously injured but survived. Tony brought his talk alive by recounting stories of some of the pilots, some of whom had their names written below the engine cowling air intakes. It was also an eye opener to us to learn that the Lancaster was a very difficult aircraft to exit in an emergency in the air due to the strengthened airframe and bomb bay intruding into the fuselage. This made the aircraft particularly dangerous for the crew who flew in it.



*Group photo – standing in front of Avro Lancaster 1*

As the tour progressed Tony had very thoughtfully arranged for stacks of folding chairs to be available at a number of points which some of our group were very pleased to avail themselves of to rest their legs.



Another memorable exhibit was a damaged Handley Page Halifax bomber that had been retrieved from the bottom of a Norwegian lake. Remarkably the pilot had managed to land the burning aircraft, missing part of one wing, on a frozen lake where all of the crew managed to escape. The navigator was the only casualty with a broken ankle and was cared for later by a Norwegian family before being taken as a POW. The other crew members escaped to Sweden and after a short internment returned to the UK and back into active duty.

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*Alan's close-up photo of the complete Halifax recovered from a Norwegian lake*

Tony's enthusiasm and engaging story telling ensured the tour duration was rather extended beyond the advertised 1 hour to nearer 2 hours! At the end we retired hungry but happy to the Hendon Kitchen for lunch, a bit later than expected but our pre-booked table was still waiting for us.

The day ended with a walk around some of the other exhibits in H345, before we hit the M1 home before the rush hour.

*Report by Visit Organiser -- David Butler*

15 October

## Inter Probus Golf Day

Each year, the four men's Probus clubs in Harpenden have a joint golf day, organised by one of the clubs on a rota. We used to have a competition between clubs but that was dropped some time ago as the different clubs have widely differing numbers of golfers – so we all turn out for an enjoyable and sociable day with just individual prizes.

Our club has few golfers but three of us did manage to arrive at Redbourn Golf Club to represent us. Even though we were fielding such a small number of players, nothing could prevent Village from triumphing with Scott Prentice winning the overall prize by a significant margin. Unfortunately, neither Sandy Bisland nor Colin Robinson, our other two players, were able to give him any support but did join in the applause when the result was announced.

Teams were organised so that the different clubs were mixed up and Scott's magnificent score helped his team to overall victory, so he truly carried our banner. As Village's best golfer, he won the Drysdale Trophy – awarded to our own club's champion golfer – and would be presented with it at one of our meetings, if only we could find it.



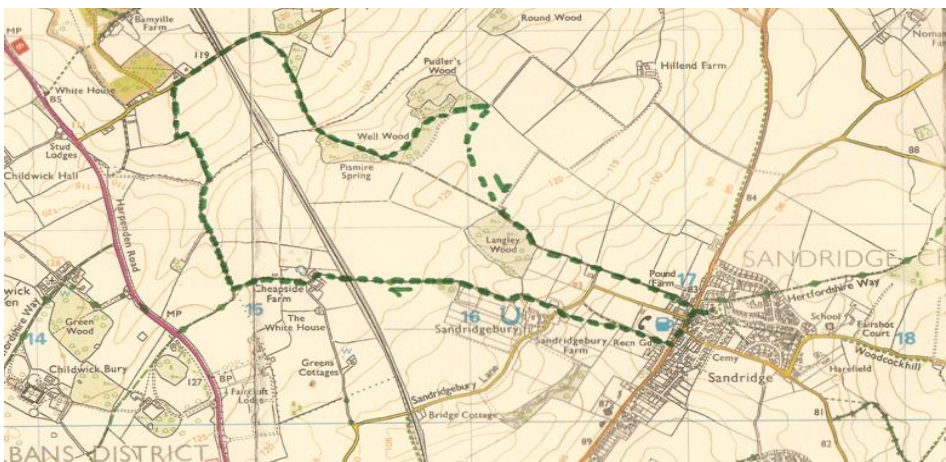
*Report by Golf Leader - Colin Robinson*

23 October

## October Walk

The omens were not good prior to the 216<sup>th</sup> walk this October. The Met Office had announced the approach of 'Storm Benjamin' and had issued a yellow warning for heavy rain and high winds with some media predicting dire impacts. Bryan took on the onerous task of administration, cajoling members to come off the fence and decide whether to risk the conditions. In the end a hardy (foolish?) group of three, led by Tim, braved the weather and set off from the Queens Head in Sandridge, only to find very little rain and wind and relatively firm ground underfoot.

The route took us north from the pub through fields with a few horses in them onto one with a warning of a bull, who fortunately was not at home, and up a sheltered path to Cheapside Farm thence up to Ayres End Lane through farmland.



The return Journey took us down to Heartwood where we took the traditional, although somewhat sparsely populated, 'team' photo with a bit of autumn colour in the distant background.

The walk distance was 4.8 miles.

Returning to our starting point of the Queen's Head twelve of the walking group arrived to join the three walkers for a pleasant meal with many opting for the Asian Menu.

Despite being on the menu, the absence of crumble for desert disappointed some members bent on celebrating departed member Donald Dooley whose delight in the dish is renowned. We believe a record was broken in that non-walkers, on the day, seriously outnumbered the walkers.



Tim chose this occasion to announce that after many enjoyable years he was handing over the organisation of the walking group to a fresh pair of hands in the form of a highly experienced walks organiser, Richard Upton.

*Report by Walk Leaders - Tim Potter and Bryan King*

27 October

## Discussion Group

A meeting of the Discussion Group was held at the Engineer on 27th October. The topic for discussion was "AI: Friend or Foe"

A brief introduction by the discussion leader, David Butler, explained that AI is already big business, with the market capitalisation of just one AI company, OpenAI which is 25% owned by Microsoft, being around \$0.5 trillion, despite not being expected to make a profit until at least 2029. So is the AI industry a bubble? Another concern is that globally AI data centres now also consume around 2% of global electricity production.

The group discussed what the benefits of AI could bring including enhanced internet searches, for example Co-Pilot (and other more sophisticated tools such as ChatGPT and GROK that can write long essays and do your homework!), online customer services and medical diagnostics and interpretation of medical scans. The group was sceptical about the performance of current online customer service 'chat-bots' and also agreed that its role in medicine had a long way to go and for the time being needed a lot of human checking. However, it was noted that the role of AI in providing aides to the visually impaired has already be demonstrated showing that it could have a significant role in future health care.

The negative impacts of AI was discussed and in particular the impersonation of performers and actors was seen as a major issue, although to counter this it was agreed that AI could provide opportunities for TikTok / social media contributors who could more easily make money out of impersonating established performers and actors! The group was particularly concerned about the believability of media images when AI is making it so easy to manipulate images, including pictures taken on our own phones. However, a practical observation was that sub-titles on media content were often frustratingly inaccurate despite the use of AI, suggesting AI might not be as good as claimed!

The discussion ended with a question about whether AI could become sentient and be a major threat or even replace humans. The answer to that question is currently unknown although the whole group was concerned about the possibility!

*Report by Discussion Leader - David Butler*

10 November

## Visit to the Armourers' Hall home of the Worshipful Company of Armourers and Brasiers

19 of us gathered at the station for the 9.52 to London. As envisaged, we arrived at the Hall 10 or so minutes early and were so advised by the door keeper. To use the time, we moved 60 yards round the corner to look at Girdlers Hall built on land bequeathed in 1431. In 2027 that Worshipful Company will celebrate 700 years since Grant of Letters Patent - Royal Charter was granted in 1449.

We then returned to Armourers' Hall, a Georgian Building in neo-Palladian style.

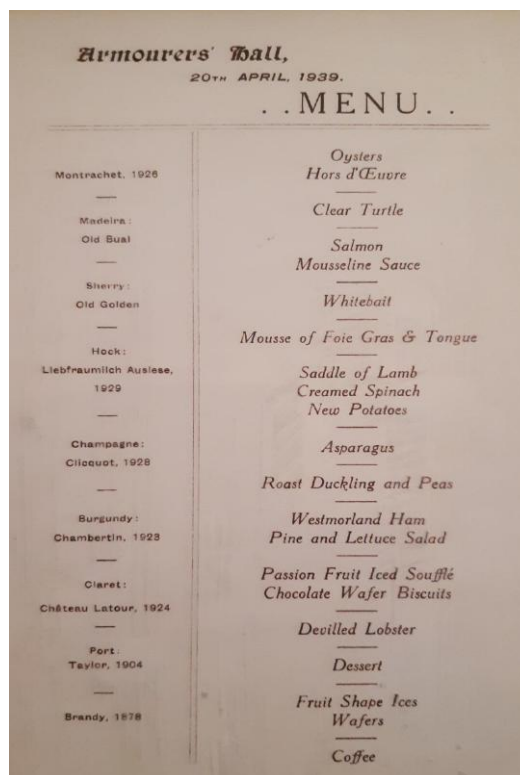


Hall Frontage



Reception Area

In the first floor Gold Drawing Room we enjoyed coffee and biscuits. The Clerk (Chief Executive) Col. Jeremy Pughe-Morgan gave us a fascinating talk on the history of Livery Companies in general and which now number 111 (with Nurses coincidentally and appropriately being number 111) with two more in the pipeline. Many formed as social, religious and benevolent organisations looking after Members and their families who fell on hard times through no fault of their own, but also to maintain standards of workmanship and exclude unqualified "tradesmen". The Livery Companies had the monopoly over the various trades within the City and in some cases further afield and strong links with Royalty and landed gentry - almost a licence to make money. The Armourers Company was a Founder member in 1878 of City and Guilds College. Only three Companies still carry out their original "trades" viz. Gunsmiths, Goldsmiths and Apothecaries. As old trades died out many Livery Companies became gentlemen's Clubs in all but name and dined well as evidenced by the framed menu in the Gents toilet - 13 courses with a different wine at each course was not unusual!



An Order of Preference was introduced in 1515 but based on wealth and importance and whilst the oldest is the Weavers with first records in 1130 the number 1 is The Mercers. Many became very wealthy. Some were bequeathed land. A field held by the Mercers is now a great part of Covent Garden. The Girdlers were given land to the west of London - now Hammersmith.

The Armourers are number 22 and in existence since 1322 initially as a Guild and formed to maintain the standards of armour making (steel) in the City of London. When musketry made armour redundant in 1600's they brought in copper and bronze work and hence "brasiers" and the present name. On display in the Gold Drawing Room was a suit of mail known to us as chain mail and a suit of armour dating back 3 centuries.



Two large paintings on the long wall are of a Lady of the Bedchamber of Elizabeth 1, the infamous Anne Vavosour who, to put it mildly, had a chequered love life and that of the Queen's Champion joustier and swordsman Sir Henry Lee, her husband - albeit she was already married to a ship's Captain. (well worth Googling her and Sir Henry).

The Worshipful Company is, as with most Livery Companies, today very much charity orientated and last year the Livery Companies donated in total over £80 million. The Armourers and Brasiers are now very heavily involved in materials science education and supporting innovative work in that field. Jeremy exemplified a grant of £1 million. Additionally they provide seed funding to many researchers at our leading universities.

We then moved into the Great Hall with a general reaction of WOW!



Round the panelled lower part of the walls were the individual coat of arms of every Master since early 1400's. Earlier Masters have their names listed on Honours boards on the landing. Jeremy highlighted the suits of armour and armaments such as 20-foot lances and halberds hanging on the upper part of the walls. A halberd is a twohanded long shaft with an axe blade topped with a spike mounted at the end. Some have a hook on the back of the axe blade for pulling soldiers off their horses. Ordinary soldiers were then dispatched with the axe. But if it was a high-ranking knight then he was pinned down at the neck by the point. A living knight can be ransomed whereas a dead knight is worth nothing!

It is one of only two Livery Companies that dine by candlelight from the three ornate candelabra and table candlesticks – the candles are smoke free (and very expensive!).

Jeremy then left us to our enjoyable light lunch in the Great Hall and towards the end of which I, a Past Master of the Worshipful Company of Wheelwrights (Royal Charter 1670 and 68 in order of preference), explained about the Silent Ceremony (Installation) of the 697th Lord Mayor and the presentations to the Lady Mayor and two Sheriffs last Friday afternoon. Dame Susan Langley is the third lady to be "Lord Mayor" and has decreed that she will be known as the Lady Mayor. I also covered some of the day-to-day roles of her and the two Sheriffs. During their year of office, the Lady Mayor lives at Mansion House, the Sheriffs live at the Old Bailey and ceremonially open the Courts every working day. The City of London Corporation not the State owns the building and finances the maintenance and running of the building and all the administrative staff costs.

Some of our group went off to do their own thing and the remainder of us made our way to Guildhall. We first went into the Art Gallery with the Roman Amphitheatre in the basement and then to St Lawrence Jewry next Guildhall. The original church building was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666 with the present building designed by Sir Christopher Wren. That was extensively damaged in 1940 but restored. Since 1950's known as City of London Corporation Church.



Finally, to the City Library where we visited the small exhibition of books celebrating the 600 years of existence of what is most probably the first public library in England. The exhibits included the "World's smallest English Dictionary" c 1890 and about 1 inch square.

By now a slightly weary group made their way past the Old Bailey to the station only to find a train had broken down and endured a slow journey to Harpenden.

*Report by Visit Organiser - Graham Westwell (with photos by Paul Manuel, Bryan King and Sandy Bisland)*