

## VILLAGE PROBUS CLUB OF HARPENDEN



# BULLETIN



AN OCCASIONAL REPORT ON CLUB ACTIVITIES

Issue: August 2025

10 July

### Induction of New Members

Four new members were warmly welcomed to the Club by Chairman Colin Robinson with the presentation of our induction pack including the Club Tie and Pin.



Clockwise from top left, the four new members are Ian Davies, Keith Hamilton, Mike Trenchard and Chris Smith.

15 July

### Visit to Eltham Palace

A Village Probus group comprising 31 members and guests made this full day trip to Eltham Palace and almost everybody agreed that the experience was way beyond our expectations.

Our coach left Harpenden for the trip to Eltham in South London at 9.00 and the M25 was on its best behaviour, so we arrived around 10.30.

The Eltham Palace is an English Heritage site of 19 acres set in suburban South London. At its heart is the old Tudor (and pre-Tudor) Hall, attached to which is a 1930's Art Deco building designed and furnished by Stephen Courtauld, a member of the Courtauld's Family. There are also extensive grounds and gardens; but we were excluded from seeing these due to the Health & Safety risk of falling trees. Such a shame because from a distance they looked magnificent.

The Old Hall came with the purchase of the estate and Stephen was obliged to restore / maintain the Old Hall. In fact, the original building was commissioned by Edward IV, but it was the Tudor kings and queens who made most use of it. Both Princess Mary and Princess Elizabeth grew up at this Palace.

It is in excellent condition and has a wooden roof in the 'hammerbeam' style and is approaching 600 yrs old.



Stephen Courtauld and his wife Virginia luxuriated in his share of the Courtauld's money and spared no expense on having the 'new' building constructed and furnished in the Art Deco style; primarily for country weekend parties! He and his wife had no children but kept a ring tailed lemur; a fair trade-off some parents might think!



Our guide Ruby starts the house tour. Clearly someone isn't paying attention!



The Art Deco building was really impressive but at the same time on a manageable scale. It really felt as if you could live there. This is one of the reception rooms; again with our excellent guide Ruby.



Visitors managed to squeeze lunch into this hectic schedule and the on-site café set in a greenhouse, provided a great choice of foods.



So after the tour of the house and grounds along with a great lunch our trip visitors are ready for home!



We finished the tour of the palace at 4.00 and then took a slightly more arduous journey home, arriving back around 6.00 pm.

All in all, a successful visit to a venue that isn't as well-known as it should be.

*Report by Visit Organiser - Ernie Richardson*

16 July

## July Walk

The walk was led by William Douglas, who was accompanied by Bryan Coventry, Sandy Bisland, Mike Trenchard, Graham Westwell, Bryan King and Paul Manuel.

We met at the Candlestick pub in the hamlet of West End which is about a mile west of Essendon.

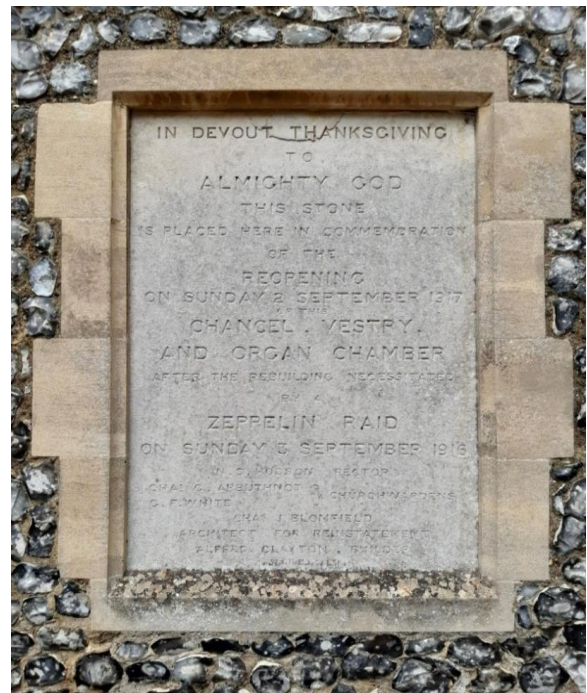
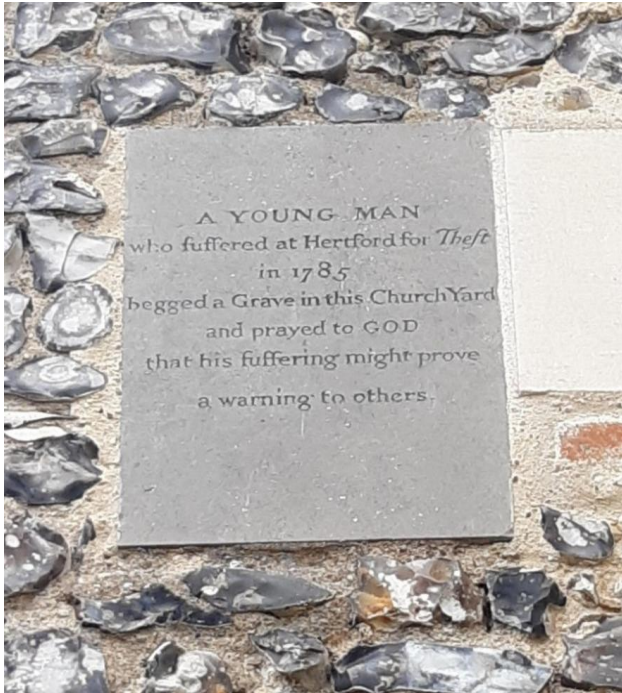


The weather was a balmy 65F with a light breeze plus light cloud cover.

Just after 10am we left the pub car park and took the footpath through the woods towards Essendon arriving at St. Mary the Virgin church.

The church tower was built in the 15th century with a knapped flint fascia.

The church has two memorial plaques. The first relates to a young man who was hanged for theft and pleaded to be buried in the church grave yard as a warning to others. The second plaque relates to a Zeppelin raid in September 1916 when the church was badly damaged but fully restored twelve months later.



In the grave yard there is an enormous Cedar tree, obviously several hundred years old.

The Hanbury family of Bedwell Manor paid for the church lynch gate constructed in 1919 and is inscribed commemorating the victory over the Germans.



We then left the church and walked down West End lane for about half a mile crossing the dried-up ford of Essendon brook and then turned right across the corn fields towards Ox Wood and the river Lee.

This section of the river Lee is owned by Hatfield fishing club and at various points along the river bank there were designated fishing points. We encountered a lone fisherman who said he was hoping to catch either chub or barbel but without success. The fishing club in the past constructed an artificial weir.



During the walk Paul Manuel identified a Jersey Tiger moth and later he spotted a Comma butterfly.



Jersey Tiger Moth



Comma Butterfly

We then turned south along the farm road keeping Hatfield park on our right and back towards West End hamlet and the Candlestick pub for refreshments.

My thanks to Paul Manuel, Bryan King and Sandy Bisland for the excellent photographs.

*Report by Walk Leader - Bill Douglas*

28 July

## Discussion Group

The Discussion Group has now held six very enjoyable discussions at its new venue, The Engineer:

24 February	The Future of UK Policing (Pt 2)	Mike Stevens
24 March	1984 and All That	Ian McNicoll
28 April	The Defence of the Realm	Chris Dean
2 June	Heat Pumps and Hot Air	David Butler
30 June	Making (in) Britain Great Again	John Jones
28 July	How long can we go on (spending) like this?	Paul Manuel

Meetings start at 12 noon, begin with coffee and drinks, and finish with lunch for those staying on at 1:30pm. We aim to meet on the fourth Monday of every month, adjusting as necessary for Bank Holidays.

The Engineer has proved just right for us, friendly and welcoming with good food, good beer and good service. Our numbers have ranged between nine and twelve, and all Club members or prospective Club members are warmly invited to join us and share their thoughts. Suggestions (and volunteers) for topics are also more than welcome!

Nine members met at The Engineer to consider the topic of the current level of the UK National Debt - but also similar high levels of indebtedness across many advanced economies.

Paul Manuel introduced the subject, noting that at the start of the 20th century the debt level represented 30% of GDP, WW1 took the level to 150%, and WW2 even further to 200%. By 1970 this had fallen to 50% and by 1990 to 25%. The banking crisis of 2008 raised the level to 80%, and a combination of factors since then, particularly "quantitative easing" during the Covid years had taken the level to just below 100%.

The UK's national debt stands at £2.8 trillion, or £39000 per head.

It had to be noted though that the UK is not alone: the average level of government indebtedness across advanced economies stands at 110%.

Japan's national debt equates to 251%!

Denmark - as low as 29%.

We moved on to discuss the high cost of interest being paid by the UK government, and the role of the bond markets, and their confidence or lack of confidence in various countries government backed loan stock. This results in the UK paying 4.6% interest, rather higher than a number of EU economies (around 3.5%) - and much higher than Switzerland's 0.4%!

When we began to consider how the UK government's spending had increased in recent years, it was seen that health and social security was costing £190bn a year, vs Defence at £37bn. Pensions were costing £150bn. Education at £88bn.

Government spending was running (2022/23) at 45% of GDP, equating to £24000 for every adult in the country .

Alarmingly the government is now having to pay interest of £105bn annually to service the debt, and in June this year borrowed another £20bn, of which £16.4bn was spent on interest payments. Commentators speak of a debt spiral.

Over our refreshments (Pimm's for some!) we considered what possible actions the governments of the advanced economies (and the UK in particular) could take, both in terms of cutting costs and raising revenues. Sadly we could not find a quick and easy set of solutions, which will come as no surprise! We did feel however that we were not only facing economic difficulties but a lack of political and community willingness across the country to work together to tackle some deep rooted problems.

Fortunately as we continued to wrestle - in a good humoured way - with these frankly alarming statistics and spending trends, relief arrived at 1.30pm with our excellent Engineer lunches.

We agreed that although this was a hard subject to tackle we had enjoyed getting to grips with the scale of the issues in the UK and beyond, and imagining the difficult choices being proposed to the Chancellor.

*Report by Ian McNicoll and Paul Manuel*

1 August

## Visit to Thenford Gardens and Arboretum

Thenford House has been the home of Lord (Michael) Heseltine and his family since 1976, when he and his wife Anne had the vision to create an arboretum and garden in the somewhat neglected grounds around the 18th century mansion.

Almost 50 years later, they hold open days occasionally through the year, and on 1st August a group of 20 members and guests drove off to the Northamptonshire/Oxfordshire border near Banbury to explore this little known attraction.

With the help of satnav we navigated the country roads and arrived on time at 2pm. No guided tours are available for these open days, which meant that we could roam freely, taking in as much or as little as we fancied within the 40 acres of woodland, formal and informal gardens, a 2 acre lake, a mediaeval church and picturesque walks.



Having strolled for 90 minutes we regrouped for refreshments in the visitor centre, where freshly made cakes were being served.

I had jokingly mentioned in our initial invitation to join this trip that I couldn't guarantee that Lord Heseltine would be greeting us on the day, but in fact this was very much a family occasion. A blond haired grandson waved us into the car park and later manned the till in the cafe, one son was clearly in charge of all the arrangements for the day, and as we sipped our cuppas Michael Heseltine strolled through the room and engaged in some brief chat here and there. He is 92, but you would not know it. Later in the afternoon he nearly ran me down in the golf buggy he uses to get around the estate as he careered around the corner of the house.

It was impossible to see everything in the 3 hours or so we had available; most of us focussed on the walled garden, herbaceous borders, the sculpture garden and modern rill, while others enjoyed the walk around the lake and soaked up the views across the countryside from the grade 1 Palladian house. Not to mention the huge number of specimen trees!

By 5.30 we all deserved more refreshment and we stopped off in Brackley and enjoyed a meal together at the Greyhound pub in the High Street. Given the size of our party, the pub coped very well indeed, giving us a room to ourselves: the hospitality of the staff and the food itself was very good.



Thenford is about 100 minutes from Harpenden, and well worth the visit.

Perhaps we could return in the early Spring for the snowdrop display?

*Report by Visit Organiser - Paul Manuel*