



Bill Armstrong – Going Strong at 100

Our associate member Bill Armstrong celebrated his centennial birthday on 12 January. Bill has been a Club member since joining in 1984. He was Chairman in 1991 and served on the Committee for two years. Stuart Brown and I visited Bill in his lovely suite at Coombe House to wish him well on his special birthday and present a gift from the Club – a CD of Mozart’s Die Zauberflöte (Magic Flute) which we understood to be a favourite of his.

Bill was dressed to the nines and ready for the celebrations to come. Several friends and family members joined in the lunch at The Swan. Bill was also honoured with a birthday party at Coombe House. My

thanks to several of our members for their advice and help and to John Gray for sourcing the gift. Our best wishes to Bill for continued happiness.

Preston Bemis



Bill, accompanied by his daughter, Carolyn (Caro), with his 100th birthday cake and greeting card from Her Majesty the Queen. Photo: Adrian Turner. Bill with another cake on page 2. Photo: Clive McCann.

“It’s been said before!”

Sculpture—a painter’s definition

“Something you bump into as you step back to get a better view of the picture”

Benjamin Disraeli on Sir Robert Peel

“How much easier it is to be critical than to be correct.”

Anon

“You only have one chance to make a first impression.”

From the Chairman...

It is the committee's goal to keep members informed. Some of the notes below answer a few of the survey comments on improvement.

- If you have difficulty with stairs, the Golf Clubhouse has a **ramp** behind the building leading to the first floor. This ramp is also wide enough for wheelchairs. Any staff member can show you how to access this.
- Our Probus Club has no specific

dress code. However, in hot weather it is acceptable to remove coat and tie in favour of comfort.

- Switches for the meeting room **lighting** are located in the kitchen and not accessible by Probus members. The Golf Club will operate them at our request.
- Our **lunch fee** has been increased to £18 from March. This is to offset increased costs charged by the Golf Club. Please note there is also a moderate increase in drinks prices.
- We are still looking for a volunteer to act as **Lunch Secretary.**



Bill Armstrong with another cake!



Mystery member number one has, by the standards of most people, led a colourful life, not least with the paint brush.

HE HAS met two serving Labour prime ministers at the height of their powers. His students included Chris Lowe, one-half of the 1980s pop legends, the Pet Shop Boys. He is a keen fan of the music of Johnny Cash and was school mates with James Smith, better known now as the singer and actor, Jim Dale.

He admits to only cursory appreciation of high-brow music but did enjoy *La Traviata* in the arena at Verona. He and his wife have married each other twice and, in what today might be described as “Trolling”, he conducted a youthful, one-way correspondence, under the pseudonym, Oscar, with Beryl Bainbridge, a former acquaintance and friend of his old Liverpool landlord. This ended happily in 1980, in a reunion lunch with the celebrated novelist.

He recalls two formative influences. The first was JL Carr, an “excellent teacher” of his at Kettering Grammar School. Carr, who, lived until 1994 and was author of *A Month in the Country* and *The Last Englishman*, imbued him with “a love of maps and history”. His second formative influence was Tommy Cork, another teacher, who raided the

stock cupboard at Kettering to keep our mystery member supplied with the paper needed to satisfy his artistic appetite, especially in watercolours. If he had a hidden talent, he said, it was painting and his unfulfilled dream was “to be a famous painter”, not unlike his favourite artist, the German-Danish Expressionist, Emile Nolde.

Our mystery member had the rare distinction of providing technical advice to the Russian space team on the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz Test Project that marked the end of the USA-USSR space race. It was testimony to the warmth of this relationship that one of the Russian team, Serge Stetsky, made him a gift of his KGB medals, including the Order of the October Revolution.

Among other unique assignments, he was commissioned to conduct practical research, at Chatsworth and in other large country houses in the UK and Ireland, into the eighteenth century fabric colours and weaving technologies of Axminster carpets. This was an indispensable contribution to a project, completed in 1987, to replicate the carpet in the room where American independence was declared in July 1776. The original, which was destroyed by fire, can be seen clearly in John Trumbull's 1818 painting of Philadelphia's Independence Hall, on display in The Capitol Rotunda, Washington DC. The Axminster company, which was set up in the 1750s, had long since moved on from its founding production methods. It was declared insolvent only last month.

Away from his chosen profession, our mystery member boasts an immense collection of space memorabilia that is orderly but in need of curation. He also has the largest collection of cheese labels in Europe.

His most fascinating travel experience was in 1984, to Bugøynes, a fishing village on a tiny peninsular in north-east Norway, close to the borders with Russia and Finland. Bugøynes was one of the few Lap villages not destroyed in 1944–45 by the retreating Nazi forces under their “Northern Light” scorched earth operation. He was surprised to be greeted in English by the local language teacher and, on being welcomed into their homes, to find villagers avidly watching Coronation Street on their TVs!

If ever he were called upon to appear on Desert Island Discs, our mystery member's luxury would be a supply of watercolour paints and paper. The book he would take to supplement The Bible and Shakespeare is *The World's Desire* by Henry Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang, a novel that “picks up the Odyssey where Homer left off”. The disc he would salvage from the wreck is *What a Wonderful World* by Louis Armstrong.

In 2017 his professional knowledge and expertise were much in demand as the world digested the horror of the Grenfell fire and its technical implications.

Who is our first mystery member?

Look for the answer in the next Probity

XEDSXWORD No 1

The Compiler will pay £10 to the charity of choice of the sender of the first all-correct solution drawn out of the hat at our April meeting.

Closing date 31st March

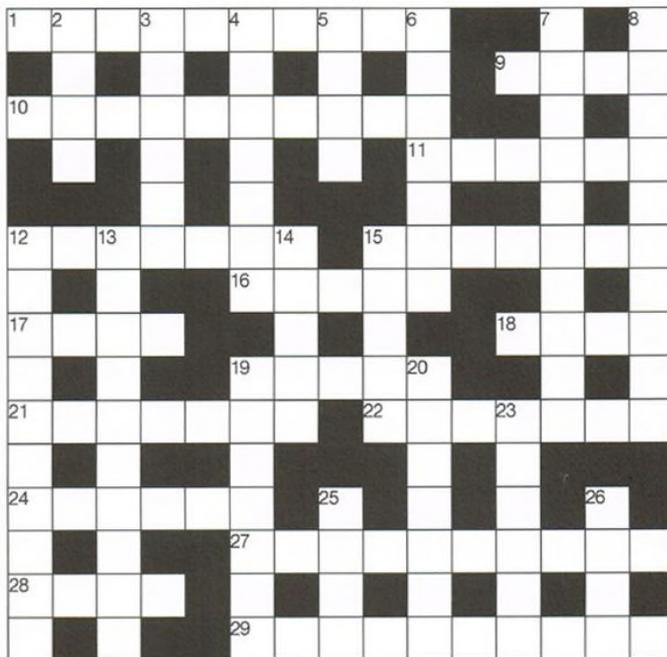
N.B. Send your entries to John Gray,
john@thegrays.myzen.co.uk

or

13 Holmlea Road

Name(s)

Charity



*Solution to Ed's Xword No.26
 Congratulations to Winner,
 Yvonne Francis*

Across

- 1 Does this give meaning? Definitely, to begin with! (10)
- 9 See 11 across.
- 10 Feline feature on crazy pug coming from behind. (8,2)
- 11 Sworn, as in compiler's worn-out clue method. (6,4)
- 12 Fine cut for monarch taking International Baccalaureate. (7)
- 15 Upset caused by water contamination of Loch Rea. (7)
- 16 Famous clown took a nightcap. (5)
- 17 Raise back? (4)
- 18 Egotistical-sounding operatic heroine. (4)
- 19 Nothing to plagiarize about this acid. (5)
- 21 A horse and sheep may give you a clue! (7)
- 22 Sentence Tories and Democrats to join unknown number. (7)
- 24 Floral tribute recalled the war. (6)
- 27 Return by duplication of posterior aspect. (6,4)
- 28 Summit seen through gap exposed between clouds. (4)
- 29 Davy replied "I lost, corruptly." Indeed! (10)

Down

- 2 Trading post in Eastern cove? (4)
- 3 Heard to be seen to provoke action! (6)
- 4 Foolishly, 1 twice went into Didcot and turfed 500 out—foolish indeed! (7)
- 5 Villain—one since gone. (4)
- 6 Distillate produced when Gordonstoun founder turned tap? (7)
- 7 Belie words, and so expurgate them. (10)
- 8 Nation teed up to loss of teeth. (10)
- 12 Listen! White tie-and-tails supports computer viruses. (6,4)
- 13 Having lost half-a-thousand, Edward Keane thus came to his senses again. (10)
- 14 Bunch of sad old men initially made a clean breast of it! (5)
- 15 Officer-in-Charge is such a pain? (5)
- 19 Book hotel with father — capital! (7)
- 20 Och, Alec! Confused? A word in your ear! (7)
- 23 Take a slight interest in youth group in valley. (6)
- 25 Quickly swallow stopper-up. (4)
- 26 Bridge system leading back from local area. (4)

“The third battle of Newbury”

It seems only yesterday that Swampy was headline news. Hence it came as a shock to be reminded, at the March meeting, that the Newbury bypass was opened nearly 22 years ago. We heard, from retired chief superintendent **Mervyn Edwards**, all about the strategy and tactics used by the police to control protests and enable nine miles of the A34 to be constructed, between January 1996 and the opening of the road, in 1998. Mr Edwards was in charge of police operations throughout.

Mr Edwards spent his entire career on operational duties, including royal protection, firearms and preparations for chemical, biological and nuclear terrorism. He was involved in policing



Mervyn Edwards shows tools used by protesters: a caltrop (left) and a “Dragon” device

construction of the biomedical sciences building at Oxford university and was called out of retirement to advise on policing protests during construction of Heathrow terminal 5.

He was appointed 25 years ago to command operations at “my road”, as he now thinks of it, having walked it many times, before, during and after construction.

Mr Edwards’s brief was to evict protesters and enable the road to be completed. Safe areas were allocated for protesters. Everyone with a lawful purpose was allowed access. But, “Most protesters were not law abiding”.

He first walked the route weeks before construction began. He found the first protest camp, including tree houses, already on site. One became three and eventually 35, including seven main camps. Protesters would gather around camp fires each evening to review their tactics. They invariably got up early to beat the police to the site, even in minus temperatures. Their basic tools were sleeping bags and mobile phones.

A permanent population of 150-200 protesters was reinforced daily by 150-300 “sensible” people. These would go home at night to charge phones and return with flasks of hot water. At weekends 6-7,000 protesters would arrive to disrupt construction. In light of this contractors were advised to take the weekend off where possible.

Among other tactics, protesters used

“D” bolts to lock themselves high up in trees, “Dragon” devices to concrete themselves into the ground and caltrops to injure police horses.

The protesters’ stated concern was trees and along the route 10,000 mature trees were felled. But 200,000 new ones were planted. Protesters demanded that a “classic” oak tree be preserved. They were promised it would be but were pushing at an open door because it had never been scheduled for felling.

Present on the site were many protected wild animals, including birds, bats, and badgers. At one stage protesters tried to halt construction by claiming otters were also on site. This was discounted when it was shown that the otter droppings used to justify the claim had been brought in secretly from Wiltshire. A protected species of tiny wall snail was found on site, however, and in a response that had to be approved by the courts but was resisted physically by protesters, the snails were re-housed nearby at a cost of £500,000. Badger tunnels were installed beneath the road and, evidently, badgers are intelligent enough to use them.

The protest campaign became known by some of the protest groups as the “Third battle of Newbury”, adopted in reference to the English civil war battles close to the town in 1643 and 1644.

In total around 7,000 people demonstrated on the site of the bypass route in some way and over 800 arrests were made. The operation required 120-150 police officers each day, with 250 at peak times. ♦

Anyone who missed the talk last August by **Stuart Nelson** on electric vehicles may be interested to hear that “the greenest cars are not always the ones that emit the least CO2. Often they are the ones that last the longest.”

Sunday Times reporter, **Nick Rufford** pointed out on 9 February that as much as half of a car’s life-time [carbon] footprint was from its manufacture. “So buying a new one, even an electric model, is polluting.”

Columbo: eco-warrior?

He noted that, if you bought a car in the past five years, when new emissions standards came in,



then arguably the greenest thing you could do, at least as far as carbon emissions were concerned, would be – like TV detective, Columbo – to keep it going. **If you want to go green, he argues, do as Columbo did.**

Columbo, played by the late Peter Falk, drove a Peugeot 403 that was already 12 years old when the series was first broadcast, in 1971. The car lasted until the final episode, in 2003. ♦