

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF CIRENCESTER

*Dear Sir,*

*"I write to you on behalf of the Rotary Club of Cirencester. The town has done a great deal for one section of retired people, but, we feel, another section is left very much on its own, namely the retired Professional and Businessman of whom you are one.*

*Such people, we believe, often feel somewhat lost and lonely when they retire, the more particularly so if, on retirement, they have moved into the town or surroundings and so may not know many, or any, local people"*

So began a letter from Lang Walters distributed amongst various 'lost and lonely' of Cirencester in January 1971. He envisaged a place where old guys could meet for coffee and a chat from 11 until 12.30 on a regular basis. Possibly there could be an occasional speaker. A sort of blokes' version of the Women's Institute.?

Anyway, the letter resulted in a meeting of a score of retired lost and lonely. It transpired that most had held quite senior positions in their working lives and had been through World War II in some capacity. They agreed it was a good idea (well, it was, wasn't it?) and a steering group would be formed.

So the next meeting saw the formulation of a constitution (based on an existing constitution of the earlier Hereford Probus) and the

**election of officers. The regular meeting place was to be in the Waterloo Community Room which became the headquarters for the next four decades. Incidentally, the room was owned by the Urban District Council who let the club use it for free! Maybe that's why we stayed there so long! Needless to say, later in our history a fee was charged. The room seated about 40 comfortably so it was agreed maximum number of members should be set at 40. The front row of chairs was occupied, as a matter of custom, by the poorly sighted and hard of hearing and the rear row for those who just wanted a good sleep. You can see how logic prevailed – even then!**

**The magic number of 40 was soon reached and, with an average attendance of 25 and a high of 30, no further members were accepted. However, the idea of a Probus Club, as it was agreed it should be called, was a popular one. A waiting list was formed. Indeed, it became so long that those on it got fed up and decided to form their own Probus Club in Stratton!**

**Originally proceedings were quite formal. Members were called to order once coffee was over, the meeting declared open, the meticulously recorded minutes of the last meeting were read, the officers gave their reports, the speaker introduced and afterwards thanked for their presentation. All very serious stuff.**

**Over time the 'founding fathers' were gradually replaced by a different membership. Although the average age remained about 80, they possessed a sense of fun, were amenable to change and all for lunches and visits to interesting places. By the 1990s the recording of minutes had been abolished and reports on previous**

meetings done away with. After all, they consisted only of brief facts that the membership remembered having been present at the time, provided they could still remember them! But the absence of minutes meant a sense of time was lost from the archives.

The Chairman was now required to have a welcoming smile on his face and a well-prepared litany of amusing anecdotes. The other officers were expected to report with brevity and not moan about such trivial things as outstanding subs. This humour had its effect on visiting speakers who entered into the spirit of things by beginning their talks with some amusing story!

On the subject of subs, at the outset these were 10/- pa (old money) plus 2/- a time for coffee and biscuits. Over time they increased and by the late 1970s stood at £1 pa (new money). In those days many of the speakers were provided on a reciprocal basis by other Probus clubs and did not require payment. Other speakers were club members. A few others required a small donation towards their charities. This is quite different to the present era of 'professional' speakers offering a variety of talks for a price and travelling expenses. Nothing wrong with that of course, the talks are fascinating and well-presented - but they come at a cost.

Strangely enough, the question of subscriptions increases form an interesting part of the old recorded minutes. Particularly endearing is AGM an entry for 1977. An application was made to increase subscriptions from £1 to £1.50pa. Members were rather grumpy on

**the day and the application, which would have added a mere £25pa to the funds, was adjourned *sine die*!**

**The subject raised its head again in 1979 when, again, there was opposition. Members had to be reminded that even the Brownies paid £2 pa! This obviously had its effect and members relented by approving an increase to £2.50p. These same guys would turn in their graves and probably regard the 2020s subs as eye-watering!**

**But the important point is this. The Probus Club of Cirencester has stood the test of time. It is virtually unheard of for a Probus Club to meet weekly. Most manage by coming together fortnightly, some even monthly. Back in the 1990s some clubs were struggling to recruit members. Some didn't have a fixed home, meeting in different pubs until they found one with the best ale. Some have even fallen by the wayside.**

**Other like ours keep going, even a little matter of a pandemic can't beat us. With the use of modern technology even Covid19 becomes merely a passing inconvenience.**

**We have changed premises twice since the early days yet the club sticks to its brotherly, light hearted, principles. So stay safe, keep well and look forward to our Golden anniversary in January 2021!**

**Peter Rowe**