



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO MEMBERS 2022/2023

My term of office was advanced by a year shortly before the 2023 AGM and at the same time my successor as Committee Secretary (scheduled to take over as I became Vice-Chairman) had to stand down on medical grounds. We had booked a holiday in Europe not returning until 20 September! I just had time to help Chris Bunton arrange a lunch at The Waggoners near Welwyn before we left. Great thanks are due to Chris for stepping into yet another breach.

I am happy to report that the lunch was a great success due in no small part to the quality of the food and service at The Waggoners. I resolved to return there for the Past Chairmen's lunch held in early February.

The Club has to be very grateful to the current Committee Secretary, Terry Turner, for agreeing to take this important role at very short notice. It was only in the last few months running up to the 2022 AGM that Graham Lee had taken over as Membership Secretary from John Minchin. Those months leading up to Christmas went pretty well given all three key roles in the Club had inexperienced members at the helm. I doubt and hope we will ever have events like those of summer 2022 again. It has been a pleasure to be Chairman with Terry and Graham in support. Their humour in fraught times keeps one sane!

The Christmas Lunch was set for a strong attendance with 81 acceptances. You will all know what befell us. Covid spread after the Walking Group Christmas Lunch. The weather turned very cold with snow and ice lasting more than a week. By the time of the lunch we were 63; three cancelled the day before. I want to set on record how good the team at Aldwickbury Park were in this fraught time. On the day the room looked great and the seating plan was posted up by them in a version they had received around midnight. No Covid was spread and I am grateful to those who wisely self-tested prior to coming.

The Spring Lunch at St Villa had a smaller turn out than I had hoped. Choosing dates in April and early May was always likely to clash with holiday plans. At least it did not clash with the Coronation week. We have since carried out a consultation on best dates for special lunches. My thanks to all who responded.

The year has been as close to "back to normal" as I am sure we all hoped, notwithstanding the Covid near Christmas. The Events team led by Theo de Pencier have excelled themselves. The May visit to Wimbledon (Adrian Peter's swansong on this Committee) must be my highlight, but all were much enjoyed. My thanks to the team who help in this important area. There is a good pipeline and a host of ideas for future events. My thanks also to John E Lowe and Tony Usher for joining the team this year.

Membership numbers kept up well during the past year until May when we came to the deadline for renewals. 4 members did not renew for a range of reasons. We look to you to bring forth the next generation of members. This may be less easy due to people choosing to remain in the workplace, part or full time, into their "senior years". We have no membership ceiling so keep up the good work!

Our lunch meetings have seen a wide variety of speakers including some memorable talks from our own members. Paul Wakeling has held the Speaker Secretary role for a long time and will during the course of next year hand over to David Levy who will join the Committee.

Thank you to Paul who has been a very involved member of the Committee. We will miss his wise counsel and humour.

It is with sadness that I pay tribute to John Minchin who died on 28 May. He served the Club as Membership Secretary from early 2010 until the Spring of 2022. He was a rock upon which the Club was anchored and grew. A keen walker until the last years, an organiser of trips, a regular at most sub-groups, John was always focussed on our success even in those last difficult months he endured. As a Past Chairman said to me recently: "John had the good of the Club flowing through every vein."

Mehmet Yilmaz is retiring from the Committee at the AGM. He wrote a paper to the then Committee in 2013 outlining the need for and the role of a Welfare Secretary. Anyone who does that is likely to find themselves asked to do what they proposed. For over 10 years Mehmet has done this job with a smile and warmth that reassures those he helps. I have spent some time talking to members about this role and working with Mehmet to make the role more organisational than one where the holder is expected to make lots of calls "and house visits."

As I write we do not have a successor. The Committee have put in place temporary measures to ensure continuity which are set out in a paper from me that accompanies this Report. I or my successor Denis Cooke, and of course Mehmet, are ready to talk to anyone considering helping the Club in this area. I want to set on record our thanks to Mehmet for his outstanding service in this role.

Having reported on the Club as you the members see it in action, I want to talk about a number of important operational areas where we have made very good progress this year.

The first is our website. We must all be very proud of and make good use of it. I have not seen a Probus Club with one as good as ours. This project was taken on by Richard Koppel after he had been a member for less than a year. An excellent example of how members can put value and service back into their club. Richard led the project with enthusiasm and energy. We owe a great debt to him. We would never have been able to afford to commission such a project. Assisted by John Berry and Theo on Events it is being kept up to date well. Our annual running costs are only a small amount higher than before and we have what we need to run the Club and keep attracting new members.

The Club has carried large financial reserves for many years. It has been an important cushion for large deposits. But I was aware that it is too large. Covid showed how we could run the Club in lock-down for just an annual Zoom subscription and waive annual subscriptions. Our move to online banking has meant that deposits that are paid out are recouped long before the event is held. Our cash flow is much better. Lots of cheques are not waiting to be cashed after an event. I wanted to address this surplus during my year in office and I am grateful to Allan Atkinson, our Treasurer, for all the time he spent with me working on this.

As you are now aware the result is a material reduction in the membership fee to £25. Hopefully this will hold for some years to come, despite high inflation. There is likely to be a small operating loss each year as we reduce this surplus. My successors will keep a good eye on safeguarding our finances.

This reduction is in part a reward for most of you moving to online banking. I know I have nagged and cajoled you to stop using cheques. But given where we were 12 months ago there has been a transformation. Our risk from bank charges being imposed on cheques is now greatly reduced. Thank you to all who have helped.

The perk of being Chairman is to be able to give the surplus from our raffles to a charity of my choice. In January I had surgery to help with Dupuytren's Contracture of my right hand. In waiting rooms and physiotherapy I discovered that my surgeon operated on many musician's hands, enabling them to continue to play. The Charity Help Musicians funds many patients and is charged much reduced rates or procures NHS funding. The surplus will go to that charity.

And almost finally .... I would like to thank all of you for your support, to thank the Committee and all those who in many other roles help make our Club the success it is.

Finally I wish Denis Cooke "a calm sea and prosperous voyage" as he embarks on his year as our Chairman.

Richard Linsell  
August 2023