

PROBUS SECUNDUS CLUB HARPENDEN

Chairman's Report August 2022

This year, after the bizarre year we had in 2021 with Covid, we were able to return to normal operations, and a great relief it was too. Our lunches and activities all returned to physical meetings and we remembered what we all looked like in the flesh. Although Covid is still very much with us, we are in the phase of living with it rather than hiding from it. However, whatever the circumstances and restrictions, your committee has been watching the statistics and risks closely and is very much ready to react to any new developments this virus might throw at us. We are well aware Covid is not through with us yet.

We got back to physical lunches in August 2021 with the rest of our activities returning to normal at about the same time. Our new venue, Aldwickbury Park Golf Club, has bedded down well. The club has been very responsive to all our needs and the room and facilities are a considerable improvement, particularly for the speakers. While some members have missed Darren's cooking at Hammonds End, most members have been perfectly happy with the food and, overall, the venue has been a big improvement. Our new venue for our Discussion Group and similar activities, the Plough and Harrow pub in Southdown, has also proven to be very satisfactory, indeed a big improvement on the pre-pandemic arrangements.

Our events programme was a bit slower getting going again, because the venues we visit were slower to open again, but is back at full speed now. We had an excellent visit to the Peacock's auction house in Bedford and a similarly received trip to the St Pancras Station and Kings Cross regeneration project.

Our walking group was able to run for much of the lockdown, because it functions outside, and quickly went back to a full schedule, with lunches following the walks. The golf group started slowly, because matches required those we play against to get back running as well, but is now back into full swing with three inter-Probos golf days and several additional social fixtures.

The Discussion Group continued an active programme, with good attendance at each meeting, on a wide variety of topics, both geopolitical and more eclectic in focus. The Finance group widened its focus during the year to look at any financial topic that might interest people of our age and demographic (not just investment), and indeed these topics have attracted wide interest. The Coffee mornings run on the first Monday of each month and attract a steady interest. All these groups meet at the Plough and Harrow in Southdown.

The Book group has a steady following and meets in members' houses at intervals that vary depending on the length of book they are reading. Bridge continues in members' houses as well, usually with one table each month. Our Pilates instructor Antonella continues to keep

our members fit. This group continues to operate online, because that avoids the need to find (and pay for) an appropriate gym in which to operate. And during the full lockdown we added quizzes on Zoom as well.

For two years, we were unable to run our Spring and Summer lunches because of the pandemic. At last, in September (and after two previous cancelled attempts) we staged our Grand Release lunch at Shendish Manor. More importantly, this lunch celebrated our 40th birthday, and we made it an excellent celebration. We were able to toast one of our founding members, George Whitehead, who gave a very entertaining speech reminiscing on our early years. The lunch was extremely well attended and the relief at finally being able to get out and socialise with our friends was quite palpable.

In June, we staged our Spring lunch at Lussmans in St Albans. Again, this event was very well attended and at both events we were joined by our partners and several of the widows of past members. It is a great pleasure to be able to run these events again and I felt privileged to host them.

Sadly, four of our members passed away during the year – Nick Menges, whose major contribution as Events Secretary I have spoken about elsewhere, Peter Arnold, Meric Jenkins and Noel Roberts. We miss their company and contribution very much. At the same time, we have welcomed 10 new members to the club, whose presence adds considerably to the vibrancy of the club.

As a club for retired professionals, we pay a lot of attention to supporting our members in times of ill health, and supporting the widows of those who pass away. That has been a particular focus during the pandemic, when isolation is a bigger issue than in normal times. Member welfare has always been a major feature of our club and it will remain so.

Now to the running of the club. Can I express my great gratitude to all the members of the Committee and leaders of the individual groups who have put in an enormous amount of work in organising our activities over the last year. Without these people's work we would not have a club.

Two of our Committee members are retiring from the Committee at this AGM, both of them Past Chairmen. Graham George was Chairman in 2018/9 and Charles Yuill in 2019/20. Both have given immense support in getting through this difficult pandemic period and I am extremely grateful to them. John Minchin, who has been our excellent Membership Secretary since 2011, has had to stand down because of ill health but I am delighted to welcome Graham Lee as our new Membership Secretary. John will remain on the Committee as an Ordinary member so we will continue to have the benefit of his experience and advice.

Sadly, Denis Cooke has not been able to take over as Chairman at this AGM for medical reasons, so the Committee is proposing Richard Linsell as Chairman for 2022/3. Denis will

remain as Vice Chairman and we all hope that his health will enable him to take up the role of Chairman in 2023/4. Richard has been Committee Secretary for the last two years. This is a role that is not terribly visible to the membership but it is a vital role in making sure the club runs smoothly. During the pandemic, he took the time to update a number of our organisational matters that were badly overdue for revamp, not least of which the Constitution. I would particularly like to thank him for his work over those two years, which made my job far more tenable. Terry Turner joins the Committee as Committee Secretary and I am sure he will continue in the same vein as Richard.

As you will see from the accounts, we made a small deficit of £120.66 in the year. This deficit was entirely due to a deficit of £598 on the 40th anniversary lunch, where the Committee decided to subsidise the lunch so that we could celebrate both the anniversary and our release from lockdown in some degree of style.

The Committee this year is proposing a small increase in our subscription to £30. As you know, inflation is impacting every area of life and we are no exception. One of the major expenses of the club is the cost of speakers and their expenses which is paid from subscriptions and not born by the lunch costs. The joining fee is proposed to be unchanged at £20.

The balance on our Charity account – the money raised via our monthly raffles – stands at £159.60. As Chairman, I am nominating that this balance be donated to the charity Breast Cancer Now to assist them with their work in helping women get through the trauma of breast cancer.

Finally, can I thank all of our members for the contributions you have made and the support you have given the Committee. After all, without your energy, we would not be what we are today – the best Probus Club in Harpenden.

Chris Bunton
Chairman