

By James Wheildon *

Newly retired? A gentleman of leisure, but now what? Does making new friends, enjoying convivial lunches, joining social gatherings with Probus colleagues and their partners, visiting interesting places, going for a long weekend away anywhere in the country once a year appeal?

If so, Christchurch Probus Club would welcome you. The club is set up for retired professional men to meet monthly, hear a talk on a wide array of subjects by speakers from all walks of life, chat over coffee before and after the talk, and to share a lunch at Christchurch Harbour Hotel with its magnificent views overlooking the estuary in Mundeford.

But the club is much more than a jolly gathering of like-minded chaps at monthly club meetings.

The essence of Probus as I see it is friendship, conviviality, our monthly lunch meetings with a guest speaker, along with a wide variety of optional entertaining outings,

Regular social gatherings are arranged for members and guests — at nurseries, castles, coffee mornings, the pub, a brewery, visiting the New Forest, quiz nights, a round or two of golf, photo competitions and of course the slap-up Christmas lunch.

I'm a retired journalist and I've been with Christchurch Probus for over five years and what I particularly like about the club is that it offers such a variety of speakers, outings and places to visit, and it doesn't come heavy on pushing causes, whether charities or politics, though we do toast His Majesty the King at our lunches.

Before the pandemic struck in my first year with the club, we had a very enjoyable long weekend away with our partners in the Cotswolds, with excellent meals at our Hilton hotel, and a trip along a steam railway.

In the midst of the pandemic we spent four days at a Warner's hotel near Hungerford, this time enjoying a glorious sunny trip along the Kennet & Avon canal, and since then we've been in jail, well visiting the infamous one on Dartmoor while staying at a nearby hotel where Agatha Christie wrote her first published novel.

Last autumn our weekend away was spent in glorious sunshine on the Isle of Wight and this October we are booked in at Hilton St. Annes in Wokingham, Berkshire with a cruise along The Thames.

The annual weekends away usually attract a good number of members but by no means all. Like all our social events it is entirely up to members what they want to attend. And while our Probus is a male club, all our partners are

welcome at all social events, as well as the annual President, Ladies, and Christmas lunches.

Other monthly social outings my short time have included visiting a restored Saxon flour mill an evening's boat cruise along Christchurch's two rivers with a barbecue at Tuckton, skittles tournaments, an annual fish and chips quiz night, a Poole to Wareham boat ride, and a visit to Burley's Durmast House, where the Gertrude Jekyll designed garden has been brought back to its former glory. And numerous pub lunches, posh lunches and picnics.

Outings this year include tasting Turkish cuisine, the Lord Bute restaurant under its new management, a visit to a grand stately home, and Buckler's Hard. We are game for most things and ideas from our members are always welcome.

As to the monthly club lunch guest speaker talks, I've learnt a thing or two about submarines, sugar and slavery, the Normandy landings, scams, taxes and investments, Lawrence of Arabia, Dylan Thomas, Winchester Prison, Kingston Lacy manor house, what being a stuntwoman for film and TV involves, literary Paris, Namibian wildlife, "The Man who Wasn't There", and growing up in Mundeford from a local fisherman's perspective.

If our club appeals, you can opt for a test run first by signing up for a one-off monthly lunch by emailing our club secretary Maurice

maurice.dowling@gmx.com.

Come and join us.

***James** began his career at the Eastern Daily Press in Norwich, was on The Times in London and The Wall Street Journal in Hong Kong for 30 years, and he has also worked in Australia, Abu Dhabi and Shanghai.