



## Probus Club Ellesmere



## Covid-19 Lockdown 2021 Newsletter

Issue 35

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### From the Editor

Dear all,

I hope you are all keeping well, some will have had their second jab by now, but most are waiting until next month.

At least the weather is getting better and we will be putting the clocks forward this weekend, so the days will be getting longer daylight hours. All this helps keep the mood positive.

Best wishes

Paul

### Speaker's Corner

**At our next Probus Zoom meeting on Thursday 1st April at 10.30am will be John McGinn speaking to us about 'Hearing dogs for the deaf'.**

If you have not yet been able to join us at a Zoom meeting (a relatively simple type of on-line video conferencing) and need any help or advice do let me know and I will talk you through the process.

Dear Probus Friends,

Welcome to our latest Ellesmere Probus Newsletter and thanks as ever to Paul for all his time and effort putting



**Storms draw something out of us that  
calm seas don't**

it together. Everyone is invited to let us have contributions of articles which please send through to Paul. I hope that you and yours are keeping safe and as well as can be as Spring officially arrives at last. We are delighted again to give a warm welcome two more new members since the last edition, Cyril Baldwin and Peter Cartledge. At our first Members meeting in January each year we invite new members to give a brief pen-picture of themselves so plenty of time to prepare and gather your thoughts! It is always a very interesting and often entertaining event to hear about our diverse back-grounds and careers. Each week that goes by gets us closer to being able to meet up face to face which will be good. It is not yet possible to predict when that will be and even when it is we are looking at the possibility of 'streaming' the speaker on Zoom for those who are not able to be present at the Comrades Club. No promises but that's the ambition.

The current warm weather lifts the spirits and gives us a hint of longer and happier days, some amazing blossoms are gracing our hedgerows and gardens. The gentle step by step release of Covid-19 lockdown will never please everyone but is generally welcome.

Do spread the word about Probus amongst your friends and family, it is tremendous that our membership has now grown to above 50 and that we have some lady members (I hope that is the right expression these days, it's a job to keep up with political correctness!) for the first time. We are always happy to have folk coming along as guests to our current Zoom sessions as a 'taster' (thanks for that expression John Vernon) and hopefully join our Club for friendship and fellowship and support, that's what we are about. Our thoughts remain with those members and their friends/families who have sadly passed away recently.

As you may well know I will be handing over the President's Chain of Office to Bill Ferries next month with some local media publicity. My thanks to Bill and all of our Committee for their valued contributions and support over the past 18 months and to you personally for 'flying the flag' and helping each other out whenever possible. I will be staying on as Almoner and Speaker Secretary.

One almost last word for now, I have always thought that it would be a good idea to 'pair-up' online with an overseas Probus Club, perhaps in Australia/New Zealand where Probus membership represents almost 50% of our world-wide wonderful group of Clubs. Let us know what you think about that idea.

As ever, best wishes, stay safe and thank you.

Jeremy

President Ellesmere (Shropshire) Probus Club

## Probus Ellesmere Zoom meeting 18/03/21

We had 26 members attending on-line.

Jeremy welcomed two new members to the Club, Revd John Vernon and Cyril Baldwin. Apologies were noted.

Laura Kavanagh-Jones of **Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service** gave us an excellent and informative talk on 'Fire Protection Awareness'. The Service provides fire prevention advice, support and information across the county as well as a water rescue team. There are 23 fire-stations, 3 (Shrewsbury, Wellington and Telford Central) 'whole-time' manned 24/7 and 20 'on-call' fire-stations where fire officers are called up via pagers to deal with specific events as they arise. Locally there are stations in Ellesmere, Wem, Baschurch and Oswestry.

The Service has 5 Prevention Officers for vulnerable groups plus 2 for Arson/Fire Crime, 1 for young persons, 1 for Road and Water Safety, 2 Prevention Advisors for community initiatives and outreach and 1 Prevention apprentice.

Fire needs three components, oxygen, heat and fuel. The most common cause of house-fires is cooking (over 50%) errors, next common is electricals. Flat gang-extension leads are favoured for safety but should not carry appliances with more than a joint amperage of 13. Although fuses should blow in the event of a fault fires can start before the fuse blows. Plug-in cube-shaped extension units are not recommended as they risk over-heating. Washing machines and tumble driers should not be left running when the house is un-occupied or overnight, over-loading is a common poor practice that can put strain on the drum and build up heat to fire levels. Electric blankets should be disposed of after 10 years, should not be folded (rolled instead) and not be used in conjunction with hot-water bottles, air-flow mattresses or water-beds. The Fire and Rescue Service occasionally provide free PAT (Portable Appliance) testing of these across the county. It is recommended that all electrical appliances are switched off at bed-time although items such as Sky-boxes may need to be kept on for uploading. Front-door keys should be kept to hand close to the door and internal doors should be closed over-night. All exits should be kept clear of obstructions.

Smoking and candles are the next risk - smoking is the highest cause of death by fire. Candles are becoming more popular but a torch is more appropriate during a power-cut. Smoke alarms are essential, there should be at least one on each house-floor, tested once a week. Alarms (battery or mains) do not last for ever and should be changed every 10 years.

In the event of a fire it is essential to leave the building, stay outside and call the Fire Brigade. Only three breaths of toxic smoke can be enough to cause unconsciousness. Current thinking is that fire blankets are not appropriate at home and small household fire extinguishers can soon become out-of-date and ineffective. If trapped in a house you should block the bottom of the closed door with clothes, go to the window and shout "FIRE" for help if you cannot escape. However commercial properties are legally obliged to have a Fire Protection Policy, appropriate equipment, regular testing and training to ensure effective evacuation safety. Laura said that she would check to see the position for churches.

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a by-product of burning wood, coal, gas and some other solid fuels. It is poisonous and potentially lethal, unable to be detected by taste, smell, sight or taste. Symptoms start with a headache leading to nausea, breathlessness, dizziness, collapse and loss of consciousness. CO detectors are recommended for all houses where there are open fires, gas fires or multi-fuel burners. Chimneys should be swept annually and gas-fires/boilers serviced annually.

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Mobile phones/laptops/tablets etc should not be left charging overnight and once the appliance is fully charged the lead should be switched off and put away. Live, loose charger leads can deliver unpleasant burns to children and pets if put into the mouth. It is essential to use the right charger for the right appliance and it can be helpful to attach a label to each lead showing what it belongs to.

Laura mentioned that the Service also has a Road Safety and Water Safety section. If you fall into deep water, float on your back, try not to panic and call for help. In Shrewsbury emergency throw-lines have recently been introduced due to the incidence of drowning accidents.

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service provide free home fire safety visits ("Safe and Well") which include smoke alarm tests, discussing points to consider to optimise fire safety in the house and advising on a fire escape plan. Free smoke alarms can be made available under certain circumstances.

Numerous further questions from our members noted that old-fashioned fuse-wire fuse-boxes should be replaced with modern updated ones (fuse-wire can overheat) and landlords have recently become legally responsible for annual electricity/gas/CO safety checks.

Jeremy thanked Laura for her excellent, professional presentation and the members joined in a round of applause for Laura.

Laura's contact details are tel: 01743 260189, mobile 07967 465822, email [laura.Kavanagh-Jones@shropshirefire.gov.uk](mailto:laura.Kavanagh-Jones@shropshirefire.gov.uk)

The Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service website address is [www.shropshirefire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk)

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## How can we help you?

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service are continuing to provide key services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic:




We are protecting people, the environment and property by responding to emergency incidents.

 [shropshirefire.gov.uk](http://shropshirefire.gov.uk)



Installing and replacing smoke alarms in essential circumstances and when our criteria has been met.

 [shropshirefire.gov.uk/safety-community](http://shropshirefire.gov.uk/safety-community)



Conducting virtual Safe and Well visits via smart devices to provide people with fire safety advice.

 [shropshirefire.gov.uk/safe-and-well-visit](http://shropshirefire.gov.uk/safe-and-well-visit)



Carrying out school visits virtually using Microsoft Teams or pre-recorded video lessons



Delivering virtual training to our partner agencies to build confidence for giving fire safety advice to clients and making referrals.



Educating children and young people who have fire setting behaviours about the dangers and consequences of fire setting.

 [shropshirefire.gov.uk/safety-community/i-learn](http://shropshirefire.gov.uk/safety-community/i-learn)



Offering talks to community groups via Zoom and Microsoft Teams to covering fire prevention, detection and escape.

To find out more about any of these services and how we can help you or someone you are concerned about to stay safe from fire, please get in touch:

 01743 260 200

 [safeandwell@shropshirefire.gov.uk](mailto:safeandwell@shropshirefire.gov.uk)

## The Story of the Haircut

Blessed are those that can give without remembering and take without forgetting.

One day a florist went to a barber for a haircut. After the cut, he asked about his bill, and the barber replied, 'I cannot accept money from you, I'm doing community service this week' The florist was pleased and left the shop.

When the barber went to open his shop the next morning, there was a 'thank you' card and a dozen roses waiting for him at his door.

Later, a cop comes in for a haircut, and when he tries to pay his bill, the barber again replied, 'I cannot accept money from you, I'm doing community service this week' The cop was happy and left the shop.

The next morning when the barber went to open up, there was a 'thank you' card and a dozen donuts waiting for him at his door.

Then a Congressman came in for a haircut, and when he went to pay his bill, the barber again replied, 'I cannot accept money from you. I'm doing community service this week.' The Congressman was very happy and left the shop.

The next morning, when the barber went to open up, there were a dozen Parliamentarians lined up waiting for a free haircut .

And that, my friends, illustrates the fundamental difference between the citizens of our country and the politicians who run it.

**As Ronald Reagan said: "Both politicians and diapers need to be changed often and for the same reason."**

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## Well I never...did you know?

- ♦ Hot water will turn to ice faster than cold water in certain conditions
- ♦ It is physically impossible for pigs to look up to the sky
- ♦ If a statue of a person on a horse has both front legs in the air the person died in battle. If the horse has one front leg in the air the person died as a result of wounds received in battle. If the horse has all four feet on the ground the person died of natural causes.
- ♦ All polar bears are left-handed
- ♦ Butterflies taste with their feet
- ♦ The cigarette lighter was invented before the match
- ♦ Most lipstick contains fish scales
- ♦ Rats multiply so quickly that in 18 months two rats could have over a million descendants
- ♦ The "sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep's sick" is claimed to be the toughest tongue-twister in the English language
- ♦  $111,111,111 \times 111,111,111 = 12,345,678,987,654,321$
- ♦ The names of all the continents end with the same letter that they start with
- ♦ During World War II the crew of the British submarine HMS Trident kept a fully grown reindeer called Pollyanna on board their vessel for six weeks. It was a gift from the Russians.
- ♦ A family of people with blue skin lived in Kentucky for many generations. The Fulgates of Troublesome Creek are thought to have gained their blue skin through a combination of inbreeding and a rare genetic condition called 'methemoglobinemia'.
- ♦ In 2008 scientists discovered a new species of bacteria which lives in hairspray
- ♦ The largest recorded snowflake was 15 inches across
- ♦ The 'katzenklavier' (cat piano) was a 17th century musical instrument made out of cats. It consisted of a row of caged cats with different voice pitches who could be 'played' by a keyboardist driving nails into their tails.
- ♦ Lt Col "Mad" Jack Churchill was the only British soldier in WW II known to have killed an enemy soldier with a longbow. "Mad Jack" insisted on going into battle armed with both a medieval bow and claymore sword.

## **My later years of motoring: Part 9 by Brian Rodgers**

On leaving Africa, initially we returned to the UK. Since the children were now of senior school ages, we decided that Shirley and children would stay in the UK. We had no reason to remain in Surrey and so Shirley and children came to Shropshire, whilst I went off to the Sultanate of Oman. To me, it became "God's Own Country" and I remained there for more than 20 years.

Oman; my first employment there was probably the most interesting, partly because in my early days, the country had been emancipated for less than ten years and also, the war with Yemen had been over for only a comparatively short time. Much of the Sultanate was still in the Middle Ages although developments were taking place at a high rate under Sultan Qaboos bin Said. However, blacktop roads were the exception rather than the rule and fuel stations in the Interior were very few and far between, with only one station in the 800 kilometres between the last northern town, Nizwa, and the first town in the south, Thamrit.

The terrain varied from the enormous red sand dunes (some as much as 200 metres high in the Empty Quarter to the west) to mountain ranges in the north and south of the country. Also, there were gravel plains over most of the Interior, with lightly forested areas to the east. Whatever the terrain, it was nearly all desert and woe betide anyone breaking down, becoming badly stuck, running out of fuel or becoming lost there. For those who did so and did not have ample drinking water and some food, the consequences could be disastrous. Obviously, in 20 + years, my motoring experiences were many and varied. To describe them all would involve writing a book and not a series of articles, hence I will confine myself to describing the various vehicles that I had, and some of the many incidents in which I was involved.

For my first two years in the Sultanate, I used Toyota Land Cruiser pick ups and I found those to be excellent vehicles for the type of work that we were undertaking. In them, I always carried a 205 litre drum of petrol, partly for refuelling and partly to keep the back wheels down on the very rough roads. The MD offered me a Range Rover but, remembering the reputation for overturning they had had in Africa, and considering the much rougher roads in Oman, I opted to keep to Land Cruisers. We had minimal problems with them other than fuel lines and filters becoming blocked, mainly with dirty fuel. The remedy was to blow back through the line or to take the filter off and blow it back, or replace it, when carrying a spare. The Land Cruiser bodies were not particularly strong and on one occasion I had the rear body fall off while I was driving off road over extremely rough, rocky terrain, but regardless, the Land Cruisers took me through all sorts of problems, including deep loose gravel, dune sand and very heavy, thick mud – yes, there can be extremely heavy rain in the desert, even in mid summer.

In the winter of '81/82 I was flying in a 6 seat Britten Norman Islander aircraft from the Capital to the Elf Oil concession in the Empty Quarter, close to the Saudi Arabian Border. As we approached our destination, we flew into torrential rain, and then ground control called us to say that the cloud base was down below the tops of the sand dunes. We had no alternative then but to head back. However, we had insufficient fuel reserves to reach the Capital, and so we were directed by ATC to go to another Interior airstrip which, because of the country wide rain, was the only Interior strip still open. We touched down there without difficulty but, as we were turning on the dumbbell at the end of the strip, the wheels of the aircraft sank into the flooded gravel surface and we were stuck.

The pilot radioed a message to ATC, which was relayed to my company and about an hour later we were met by one of my foremen from our nearest fly camp, and he provided me with a Land Cruiser. The aircraft was carrying provisions for the Elf Aquitaine Camp at our intended destination, and I volunteered to take the provisions by road to the camp, 320 km away. That was a drive I would not want to repeat. The rain became heavier and the gravel road became muddier and muddier. The Land Cruiser, in 4x4 all the way had excellent traction but, at one low lying section of road, the mud was so heavy that I was forced to use low ratio 2<sup>nd</sup> gear for several kilometres, in order to keep going. That was a frightening situation because, had I become stuck, the water level might have risen up to the height of the seats of the car or more and I would have had to spend a very wet and uncomfortable night in the car.

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However I did manage to get through and, finally I reached camp just after dark and I was welcomed warmly because food stocks were running low. Also, among the provisions, I had two personal cases of beer and I was doubly welcomed.

Later that year I had to carry out an inspection of a proposed road to an isolated small town on the east coast. The town was located at the bottom of a high cliff and, until then, the only contact that the town had with the outside world was by sea, although it was affected by tides. Now, however, with oil company funding, a 120 km road to the town was to be constructed over some very rugged country. The district governor had arranged a guide to show me an approximate rough route to the town from the oil company base camp. I had a helper with me and we collected the guide. He took us along a route which followed an oil company exploration track until we came to a major wadi (dried out prehistoric water course) some 500 m wide and perhaps 30 m deep. There we drove down to the wadi bed which was very heavy loose gravel and continued in low ratio for almost 20 kilometres. When we reached the town I was met by the district governor and we inspected the route along which he wished the road to be brought into the town.

After quick dates and coffee, I left but without the guide, who claimed that he had been told that he was to take me one way only. Much as I tried to remember the route that we had come down by, I mistook a turning and left the wadi at a wrong tributary wadi, and then could find no sign of the exploration track. Knowing that I had to travel approximately west, I set out, navigating by sun as best I could. I could find no recognisable land marks and continued for approximately 30 km before I came across a track. In fact that track was an extension of the road that we had come out by, but my sun navigation had not been very accurate. Eventually, much to my relief, we reached an area that I knew, and we reached the base camp shortly after dark. In those days I possessed both prismatic compass and military maps of the area but I had not brought them with me, thinking that I would be accompanied by the guide both ways. I learned a lesson that day; never travel over unknown areas of desert without compass and maps, even with a local guide.

A change within the company saw the Land Cruisers being replaced by Land Rovers. Sad to say, the 4 cylinder LWB Land Rovers were no match for the Land Cruisers and, generally, were not liked. I had a 10 seat station wagon very briefly and on one occasion, when I was driving into a headwind on a loose gravel road, the car would not exceed 60 km/h (about 40 mph) regardless of whether 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> gear was engaged.

While the car was almost new, I had a transmission problem when crossing a wadi one day. The wadi bed was deep loose gravel and I selected 4x4 but, regardless of the selection, the rear wheels just dug in and I came to a standstill. Obviously the 4x4 was not functioning and I opened the top of the transfer gear box to investigate. A bolt had not been tightened fully at the factory and the selector was sliding around freely inside the transfer box, and not engaging 4x4. Even with only a very basic tool kit, I had no difficulty in tightening the bolt and restoring the 4x4, and then I resumed my journey, albeit some two hours later. Another lesson was learned then; always check the vehicle thoroughly before travelling in the desert.

While I had been working on the car, I had heard another vehicle, or two vehicles, pull up alongside me and, thinking that it was a bedu scrounging fuel, I just ignored it until a very English voice said to me, "Spot of bother, old boy?" On turning around I found four men all wearing identical desert clothing, with shamaqs and goggles on their heads. When I asked who had spoken, a British major of the Sultans Special Forces came forward and identified himself. He was accompanied by an Omani lieutenant and two Omani troopers. We had a long chat and the major invited me up to their mess for a drink any evening but, sadly, I never had time to take up the offer.

Some nights later, I did what no sensible person should do. I had to go from my base camp to one of our fly camps, 20 km away and I chose a short cut that I knew well, but in daylight. Then on my return journey in the dark, I found that at night, all desert tracks look alike, and in no time I was completely disoriented and lost.

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There was nothing I could do other than sleep in the car for the night. With night time temperatures in the 30s I had no problems sleeping. However, we were not far from the Yemen border and I had been warned by an officer from Special Forces a few days earlier that there were still minor skirmishes taking place between Yemenis and Omani security forces. Needless to say, I was none too happy with my situation. It worsened during the very dark night when I wakened to hear knocking on the body of the vehicle. I was convinced that it was a guerrilla trying to get into the car but at first I was too afraid to investigate. Eventually, I plucked up courage and went out and looked around in the starlight. There I found that a very large moth had become trapped between the double roof of the car, and its wings flapping against the lower roof had sounded like someone knocking. As dawn was breaking, I was very happy to see the correct track and return to my base camp, only 10 minutes distant. My lesson there, never try to take a short cut in the desert in the dark.

Later that year, during the Holy Month, the owners of the company all went home and I was called to Head Office to take overall charge of the company. The Chairman, thinking that I might need a suitable vehicle (to impress people?) left his beautiful Mercedes 450 SEL for me. What a lovely vehicle that was. One day I parked it, without realizing that I had blocked the car park exit. A very belligerent local gentleman accosted me and wanted to take me to the nearest Police Station, until I mentioned the name of the owner of car. It belonged to my chairman, who was also the uncle of a minister. When I mentioned his name, the gentleman had nothing more to say and just faded away. In those places, whom you know is much more important than what you know.

And that, I am afraid, sums up some of the interesting motoring I carried out in my early days in the Sultanate.

**Continued in next issue**



**"The doctor said to sleep on your stomach tonight and he'll see you in the morning."**



**"I get a real sharp pain when I do this."**



## HOW THE INTERNET STARTED, ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE

Please do not Google or check this with Snopes. They will lie to you and call this False. Trust me.

In ancient Israel, it came to pass that a trader by the name of Abraham Com did taketh unto himself a healthy young wife by the name of Dorothy. And Dot Com, as she came to be known, was a comely woman: large of breast, broad of shoulder and long of leg. Indeed, she was often called Amazon Dot Com.

And she said unto Abraham, her husband, "Why dost thou travel so far from town to town with thy goods when thou canst trade without ever leaving thy tent?"

And Abraham did look at her as though she were several saddle bags short of a camel load, but simply said, "How, Dear?"

And Dot replied, "I will place drums in all the towns and drums in between to send messages saying what you have for sale, and they will reply telling you who hath the best price. The sale can be made on the drums and delivery made by Uriah's Pony Stable (UPS)."

Abraham thought long and decided he would let Dot have her way with the drums. And the drums rang out and were an immediate success. Abraham sold all the goods he had at the top price, without ever having to move from his tent.

To prevent neighbouring countries from overhearing what the drums were saying, Dot devised a system that only she and the drummers knew

It was known as Must Send Drum Over Sound (MSDOS), and she also developed a language to transmit ideas and pictures - Hebrew to the People (HTTP).

And the young men did take to Dot Com's trading as doth the greedy horsefly take to camel dung. They were called Nomadic Ecclesiastical Rich Dominican Sybarites, or NERDS

And lo, the land was so feverish with joy at the new riches and the deafening sound of drums that no one noticed that the real riches were going to that enterprising drum dealer, Brother William of Gates, who bought off every drum maker in the land. And indeed, lo he did insist on drums to be made that would work only with Brother Gates' drum heads and drumsticks.

And Dot did say, "Oh, Abraham, what we have started is being taken over by others." And Abraham looked out over the Bay of Ezekiel, or eBay as it came to be known. He said, "We need a name that reflects what we are."

And Dot replied, "Young Ambitious Hebrew Owner Operators." "YAHOO," said Abraham. And because it was Dot's idea, they named it YAHOO Dot Com.

Abraham's cousin, Joshua, being the young Gregarious Energetic Educated Kid (GEEK) that he was, soon started using Dot's drums to locate things around the countryside.

It soon became known as God's Own Official Guide to Locating Everything (GOOGLE).

That is how it all began.

And that's the truth.

Amen!

## **The Series of Memories of Ellesmere Residents Extracts from book 6 of the “Memories” Booklets Published in early 2000 by the Ellesmere Society**

Memory 33

### **Farming Around Ellesmere**

***Remembered by Stan Horton***

Farming has changed almost out of recognition during the century. At the start the only sources of power on the farm were muscles. either of horses or humans, with a small input from steam and the occasional water mill. In a dairying and stock - raising area such as Ellesmere, nearly everything had to be done by horse or hand. Stock moving and feeding, milking, mowing, haymaking, and stacking, hedging, and ditching, were all done by hand. assisted, where possible, by horses, although a few farms would have a small stationary steam engine, or a water wheel to drive simple machinery such as feed choppers, or churns. The main products, meat, and milk, were perishable, and there was little refrigeration. as the power sources required were limited to large operations such as ships and cold stores.

Meat therefore, was exported alive, either on the hoof, or by rail to its destination. Milk was to some extent, exported to large centres of population in rail tank cars, but much was converted on the farm to less perishable forms such as butter and cheese before export. These dairy activities were undertaken by women.

Arable production was also largely a hand and horse operation. but had some mechanical aids available. largely on a contract basis, to larger farms. Steam ploughing engines using multiblade ploughs could be used in large fields. horse drawn reapers eased the labour of hand reaping, although binding the sheaves was still done by hand until the reaper and binder arrived in the early years of the century. Carrying and stooking the crops was again hand and horse work. Root crops would be clamped and stacked in long heaps at the side of the field and covered with earth and turf until required and cereals would be stacked in the farm yard. The one operation really penetrated by mechanisation at the start of the century was threshing, which was almost always done by contractors with threshing machines hauled from farm to farm and operated by steam traction engines. Even after threshing the straw had to be stacked by hand, to preserve it for animal bedding.

The industry was thus at this time highly labour intensive and the large square-built farmhouses characteristic of the Ellesmere district were intended to accommodate a large part of this labour force who would "live-in", being housed and fed by the farmer. Today, virtually every task on the farm is performed by the internal combustion engine or the electric motor. the staff have all but gone, and farming is reckoned to be one of the loneliest occupations in the country.

To follow the detailed changes in agriculture through the century would require a large volume or perhaps several. A few snapshots, however, may give an impression of the way things changed.

One such is given by A.H.M.Lee who farmed at the Springs in the 20's and 30's. The farm was part of the Brownlow estate and Lord and Lady Brownlow would, at times. attend the Farmers' Ball which was held in the Town Hall. but the running of the estate was in the hands of his agent Brownlow R.C.Tower, who was very particular, and on one occasion reprimanded Spring Farm for not "pulling the ears" of a boy who had thrown a stone and broken a window.

Tower's second in command was Mr. Hesp who supervised the estate maintenance yard at the far end of Wharf Road and kept it extremely tidy.

The 20's and 30's were essentially the era of the horse, and the farm bred its own horses, sired by one of several travelling stallions based locally, sometimes staying in public house stabling and sometimes staying on the farm. They were mostly of the Shire breed. Breeding was a lengthy process.

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The gestation of the mare took eleven months, and the foal was weaned until nine months old, needing then a special diet to replace the loss of the mare's milk. Handling of the young horse started at two years of age, and breaking to harness took a further six months - a total of three and a half years from conception to the horse taking its place in a team to work farm transport or equipment.

The Springs was a dairy farm typical of the area. The herd was milked by hand - eight milkers dealing with about eight cows apiece. Some milkers were more powerful than others and might milk more cows. Milking took about one and a half hours, and the labour force was augmented by two women from local cottages, who would turn up wearing appropriate hats and smocks.

What corn was grown was threshed by a machine under contract from J.T. Evans of Whittington, hauled and operated by a steam traction engine. Two men came with the threshing set, a driver and a "mourner", so called because he followed behind, but ten men were required for the actual operation. The straw was tied up by a "trusser" until the advent of a wire baler, which compressed the straw much more tightly. The farmer's wife would provide the midday meal for all ten men. As the end of the stack was approached, the resident rats would try to escape only to be set upon, with great glee, by the farm's ratting dogs.

Marketing of the products of dairy farming was a problem. Milk, in pre-refrigeration days, was highly perishable, and the options were essentially to sell by retail, or to convert to less perishable products. Some farmers had their own retail rounds, but serving the relatively small population of Ellesmere and district could not absorb the output. Rail transport in tank wagons to larger centres of population offered an extended market, and the first dairy operation at the Wharf, operated by United Dairies, was established in 1919, to collect milk and dispatch it in bulk by rail.

This operation was sited at the Wharf in order to have a convenient supply of water from the canal, and a convenient disposal route for waste products down the Newnes brook. When sufficient farmers had agreed to sell their milk, a collection round was organised using Dennis and Albion motor lorries, although horses and carts were still needed on some cold mornings when the lorries could not be started! Milk was originally collected in 17 gallon churns, later reduced to 10 gallons. The lorries when full of empty churns made more noise than when full.

Normally, the milk was poured into silos at the dairy, and transferred to the railway sidings by small tankers, but sometimes the churns were emptied directly into the rail wagons by hand. It is recorded that when the milk train reached Paddington during the General Strike of 1926, pickets were swept aside by large numbers of housewives desperate to get milk.

Even the above outlet could not cope with production, particularly early in the century, and there was a strong farmhouse industry converting milk into the less perishable cheese and butter, particularly cheese.

This work was the responsibility of the farmer's wife. The mature cheeses were taken to the Ellesmere Cheese Fair, held monthly in the Market Hall, and placed on a bed of straw on the floor. At 11 am, a bell would be rung to start the fair, and cheese factors would take samples from the cheeses and, on the basis of taste and smell, bargain with the farmers. The bargain would be sealed by a slap of the hand. The Cheese Fairs died out in the depression of the 1930's because of lack of demand.

The remaining product of dairy farming was meat, both beef from the dairy cattle and pork, raised as a means of obtaining a profit from the whey and buttermilk left from the production of cheese and butter. Beef was normally driven to the Ellesmere Smithfield, held each Thursday on a site behind Brownlow Road, and apart from what was slaughtered locally was exported live from the adjacent railway sidings. There was little transport of cattle by road in the early part of the century - a milking cow might be taken to market in a horse cart or, later, up to three might be carried in a 1 ton lorry.

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Probably pigs were treated similarly in the first quarter of the century, but being smaller and thus more easily transported than cattle, were earlier taken into road transport. W.G.Clevely recalled the type of operation carried out in the second quarter of the century by Paddock, Sapple and Whitfield. Wednesday would start early with collection of stock for Oswestry Smithfield, and in the afternoon, store pigs would be loaded for Charlie Clutton, a store and fat pig dealer, for transport to Stowmarket in Suffolk. This journey would be accomplished at speeds rarely exceeding 30 mph. On Thursday, a stop would be made at Kettering to collect another load of Clutton's pigs for delivery to Burnley in Lancashire. After unloading these, the journey home would be made on Friday, stopping at Greenwood and Nichol's mill in Liverpool to pick up 5 tons of Danex pig feed for distribution to farmers around Ellesmere - hard work in which the farmer rarely helped.

The second World War produced pressures to increase arable farming. Haughton Farm, at the start of the war entirely grassland, was at the end growing wheat, mixed grain for animal feed, and potatoes on 70 acres of ploughland. Two farm workers, two members of the Womens' Land Army, and two Italian P.O.W'S were employed, but after some difficulties, a permit to purchase a Fordson tractor had been obtained and the march towards total mechanisation of agriculture had begun. As this gained speed after the war a short-lived trade in horsemeat for human consumption in Belgium developed as redundant horses were slaughtered.

After the war "mechanisation" in the form of the Milk Marketing Board, in the establishment of which several Ellesmere farmers were prominent, began to penetrate the dairy industry. The Board was required to buy all the milk produced by milk producers for resale to the retail and processing trades - the qualifying level for a milk producer was enough land to pasture two cows.

Farmers benefited considerably as they had a better price and a secure market for their milk, while the Milk Marketing Board had an incentive to develop technology to deal with the bulk supply of milk not required for the retail trade.

The Milk Marketing Board took over, and expanded the Wharf site of United Dairies, the pre-war capacity of which was 34 vats, each holding 1,200 gallons of milk, the produce of around eight hundred farms. The factory prospered, and was always in the forefront of the drive to find more uses for milk and the by-product of cheese making - whey. Much of the whey was concentrated by advanced technological processes into animal feed, particularly suitable for pigs. Unfortunately, by the late 1980's the factory was becoming out-dated, and government development policy made it more attractive to the Board to build its replacement across the border in Wales.

When it closed some four hundred jobs were lost - a severe blow to Ellesmere. Ironically, shortly after this the Milk Marketing Board itself as a government agency ceased to exist, its functions being transferred to private enterprise.

The second half of the century has seen a steady and continuous change in agriculture. Mechanisation has grown. Milking machinery - a substantial industry in Ellesmere - has taken over both the actual milking and the subsequent handling of the milk. Improved transport facilities and tighter hygiene regulations have killed the local slaughtering trade, which has become concentrated in large, mechanised centres. Arable farming is now almost entirely performed by the internal combustion engine and in particular the combine harvester has replaced the entire operation of reaping, binding, stocking, stacking and threshing cereal crops. New crops have replaced the traditional ones - potatoes for crisp manufacture, sweet corn for animal feed, oil seed rape, to name but a few.

All this has, of course, had a profound effect on rural life, both in matters of employment and social contacts, which will probably not be fully resolved until well into the 21st Century.

**More memories in the next issue**



## MOTORING MEMOIRS OF CHRIS STRETTON, b1950 Part 5

The Escort Sport was quite a contrast from the old Anglia that it replaced although it did not come without its problems. The most serious of these was the unpredictability of the braking system due to the front discs grabbing and causing the car to dart in unexpected directions. It was in and out of the main dealer numerous times without any improvement. Following one of these visits I was driving down a hill not long after leaving the garage when the steering felt vague and there was an ominous knocking noise from the front of the car. On inspection both front wheels were loose, not having been torqued up when the mechanic had reattached them after trying to sort out the disc problem!

Even after twelve months there were many outstanding issues with the car. In a letter to the dealer just before expiry of the warranty I listed seventeen separate problems that needed resolution! It must have been a 'Friday Car'!

The reorganisation of Local Government in 1974 resulted in me changing jobs when my role required the collection of routine and investigative sewage samples. Not wanting to risk spillage in the Escort, I bought an old Volvo Amazon 121 from a friend for about £100. This needed some work doing on it, first cosmetically. Fibreglass filler was needed on the front wings and, once all was patched up, I brought out the Burgess spray-gun again. It looked good when I'd finished after which it lived on the road outside the house in our cul-de-sac. Not long after completing the respray I was watching the TV one evening and there was a knock on the door. A neighbour had come to apologise for running into the Volvo! She had been reversing up the road when she contacted the back bumper, panicked, hit the throttle instead of the brake and run all up the side of the car. She gave me £100 cash and I made good the damage with some profit. Not long later the car was run into again! This time I was innocently driving on a main road into Bridgend when a woman shot out of a side road and into the rear wing. This was an insurance job. I got £120 to write it off and they let me keep the car which was easy to patch up so I could keep running it.

The car was certainly built well. One day I was out visiting sewage works when one of the front engine mountings broke, allowing the engine to drop sideways. It came to rest on the chassis cross member but, amazingly, I drove it home with the universal drive in the propshaft coping with the mis-alignment easily. With all the problems inherent in the Escort I decided to trade this in for one of the new VW Golfs, which



I bought from Gerry Hill in Hirwaun in about 1975. The Golfs caused quite a stir in the VW world with traditionalists not liking the move from the air-cooled Beetle. I had the perfect solution.

A friend of mine had a Beetle that needed a new engine. He asked if I could collect it for him and it fitted in the Golf's boot easily. This prompted me to write a letter for publication in the VW magazine, Safer Motoring. The editor must have liked it as it was there in the November 1979 edition:

In 1984 I bought a VW Devon conversion for family holidays. In the summer we had a few nights in Snowdonia, staying at the Beddgelert campsite where, on 19<sup>th</sup> July at 0756h that year we experienced the Llyn peninsula earthquake which registered 5.4 Richter. I was on the loo at the time and a bit uncertain as to what was happening!

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On another trip to the Lake District, I was descending Hardknott Pass when brake fade set in. The van had disc brakes but no servo and I was off the seat, standing on the brake pedal with two feet trying to get it to slow down. Thankfully all ended without disaster.

1989 was a big date in the water industry as we were privatised. Inevitably I had another change of job. One benefit of this was provision of a company car. The first of these was a black, top-of-the-range Vauxhall Cavalier Diplomat. Comfortable rather than sporting but it was good not to have to worry about the costs of maintenance. Build quality was a lot better than the Escort but it did have its moments, including on one occasion when an electrical gremlin resulted in the passenger window opening when the radio was switched on! Other people clearly liked it too as it was stolen from the car-park one night when we were in the cinema. The Police did find it soon after. A large screw-driver had been used to force open the door and remove the steering/ignition lock and then stuck through the leather seat.

With responsibility for the operations personnel running the waterworks I had people working in some challenging places. One of the maintenance staff looked after some of the upland waterworks in the Bridgend valleys, and had to travel on forestry roads in the mountains. Going off the track one day to let another vehicle past, he went over the edge in his Land Rover. At first just heading downhill on all four wheels he then started to roll over and over down the mountainside before coming to rest. Windsor put his survival down to the fact that the back of the vehicle had been fitted out to include a wooden partition just behind the seats. This acted as a life-saving roll-bar. Land Rover weren't slow to use the event for advertising in the national press!

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**To be Continued**

## Local information

### Age UK Befriending Service

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/services/befriending-services/sign-up-for-telephone-befriending/>

Good news the Vaccine is here. **Please don't phone the surgery to book a vaccine.** You will be phoned from the surgery and be offered an appointment at the RJAH hospital, or Prees surgery. The invitation could be from either Ellesmere or Whitchurch surgeries. If you receive a letter from the NHS offering you an appointment at one of the large vaccination hubs in Birmingham or Manchester etc there is no need to accept it, if you don't take up the invitation you will still be on the local practice's list.



Take 1 minute each day and help fight the outbreak.

Get the Covid 19 Symptom Tracker App from the App store or Google

### Urgent Care Centres

Urgent Care Centres (UCCs) at Princess Royal Hospital (PRH) in Telford and the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital (RSH) will temporarily relocate to the Minor Injury Units (MIUs) in Whitchurch and Bridgnorth to form two Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs).

### **PLEASE CONTINUE TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR YOUR NEIGHBOURS .....**

**Key contact details:** Ellesmere Covid-19 Community Support Group:  
01691 596290 / 622689

[www.ellesmerecovidsupportgroups.org.uk](http://www.ellesmerecovidsupportgroups.org.uk)

**Shropshire Council Helpline:** 0345 678 9028

**For people living in the Welshampton or Lyneal area** - please contact the Parish Council on 01948 710672 or go on their website <https://www.welshamptonandlyneal-pc.gov.uk/> where you will find information about their local Community Support group



## *Pastoral Support from the Churches in Ellesmere*

### **Rev'd Pat Hawkins St Mary's Church**

Tel [01691622571](tel:01691622571) email [revpat.hawkins@gmail.com](mailto:revpat.hawkins@gmail.com).

**St Mary's Ellesmere:**

**Weekly services have once again had to stop during this 3rd Lockdown.**

**However, some services are streamed and are on You Tube**

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The  
**Cellar  
Church**  
ELLESMERE

### **Pastor Phil Wright 'The Cellar Church'.**

[07711 986694](tel:07711986694) email: [pastor.phil@me.com](mailto:pastor.phil@me.com)

The Cellar Church online every Sunday 10am and Wednesday 6pm

Follow the link Directly on our Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmxif6AT5w7IJH4Yxkbi6tQ>

On the cellar church website: <https://www.cellarchurch.co.uk/audio-video/>

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### **Rev Julia Skitt Ellesmere Methodist Church**

[01691 657349](tel:01691657349) email: [rev.julia@mail.com](mailto:rev.julia@mail.com)

Ellesmere Methodist Church Services can be streamed from:

Wesley's Chapel in London - on Wednesdays 12.45, Thursdays 12.45 and Sundays 9.45 and 11.00am

<https://www.wesleyschapel.org.uk/livestreaming/>

Methodist Central Hall, Westminster - Sundays at 11.00am

[https://www.youtube.com/user/MCHWevents?](https://www.youtube.com/user/MCHWevents?utm_source=Methodist+Church+House&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11417259_Update)

[utm\\_source=Methodist+Church+House&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=11417259\\_Update](https://www.youtube.com/user/MCHWevents?utm_source=Methodist+Church+House&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11417259_Update)



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### **Ellesmere Catholic Convent Chapel**

The Chapel is open, the building on the left as you drive in. 8:30am - 6pm.

If you have anything that you'd like to ask the sister to pray for you: Phone [01691 622 283](tel:01691622283)

