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Service above self



HUB

Rotary Club of the City of Wolverhampton

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Pandemic

The first case of infection by CoronaVirus/COVID-19 occurred in Wuhan, China in December 2019. Some 7 weeks later it had emigrated to various countries and was declared a pandemic. This was nationally and internationally 'the day that sport was called off' – Premier League football. European football, Six Nations rugby, horse racing (after the Cheltenham 4 day meeting), the Masters, the London Marathon, F1 motor racing. (At this moment it is proposed to postpone the Olympics due in Japan in July). Parochially Rotary club meetings are cancelled as well as various quizzes and sports and inductions of new members, and excursions. (Parrys will probably cancel the Wonders of Wiltshire trip for which many of us are enrolled.) Prime Minister Johnson is holding daily TV events sometimes flanked by the Chief Medical Officer (Professor Chris Whitty) and the Chief Scientific Adviser (Sir Patrick Vallance) giving increasingly restrictive advice as the UK figures for infections and deaths increase – on 23rd March 5683 and 281 and rapidly increasing daily. China's figures have stopped increasing towards the end of March, Italy's have overtaken them, Spain is also very 'hot', France is heating up and the USA, with Trump already heralding a big economic take-off after the Virus, is just beginning. We all started cheerfully bumping elbows instead of touching hands. Now we are being exhorted to avoid crowds and keep a 'social distance'. In some cases e.g. my own case (having just completed 20 weeks of chemo for myeloma) we have been specially written to and told to self-exclude ourselves remaining at home for 12 weeks. There are references back to the Spanish Flu in 1918 and to World Wars 1 and 2. Keep calm and carry on seems a bit lame! Thank goodness for spouses (if you have one), books and Netflix.

Brian Woolley writes...

We have been obeying the rules re lock-down and self-isolating: As from tomorrow, it is Mary's turn to spend a week in the garden shed... Highlight of the day - waving to the postman (he doesn't even bring junk mail any more!) Second highlight – waving to the dustmen. Now to submit the weekly online Sainsbury's order for home delivery and basic needs: 12 red wines; 2 loaves; 1 packet of aspirin

T.V. usage in average day: 2 hours of "Boris and Co" and solemn-looking Cabinet members, 25 hours of repeats of Escape to the Country, 28 ads and reminders of the virus (in case we had forgotten).

2 p.m. phone rings. Great excitement but It's "Sheila from B.T" again to say I'm being cut off again...

4 p.m. walked round the garden five times...decided I'd never catch Captain Tom Moore in raising £33m. All I raised was my right arm to have another glass of red.

5 p.m. thought (briefly!) about painting the garden shed (but then remembered I'd only done it in 1968 so thought no more about it)

5.30 p.m. Mary mentioned "the spare bedroom could do with a coat of emulsion".....went to bed with a headache.

Next day switched on T.V. If I'm told once more to "take care; wash my hands; stay home" I'll say "My word! – what a good idea!..." or words to that effect. Switched off the "telly" and went to bed with (another) headache

Signs of lock-down relaxing a bit. Started car – dashboard warning message said "Your battery is nearly knackered..." (but you're not allowed to take it for a run to re-charge it!).

John Pearce Baker

1926-2020



John was born in Wolverhampton on May 25th 1926, the only child of Douglas and Violet. He was educated at Tettenhall College and then read Natural Sciences at Queen's College, Cambridge. He undertook his National Service in the Royal Navy and spent most of his time in Malta involved in weather forecasting.

He joined James Baker and Sons Ltd in 1949 representing the fourth generation of the family business and later becoming Director. In the 1960s an old friend Brian Woolley became assistant manager of Barclays Bank, Snow Hill. He well remembers

whenever 'Mr Douglas' (father) or 'Mr John' came to the bank from their nearby offices and factory the staff were under strict instructions to give them the 'best possible courteous service'.

John married Doreen at St Mary's Church, Stafford on 25th July 1962 and they had two daughters, Annabel and Caroline. They met at Wolverhampton and Stafford Car Club of which they were both members. They also shared a keen interest in sailing and were members of South Staffordshire Sailing Club where they raced GP 14s. They later graduated to a larger boat when John bought a 30 foot yacht called Crispin (Saints Crispin and Crispinian are the the patron saints of shoemakers) which he moored on the west coast of Scotland. Old friends Rod and Jen Jones were among those who sometimes crewed for John on trips around Scotland and Ireland. He was always a perfect gentleman but occasionally crafty – putting Rod at the helm at tricky times! The Bakers also enjoyed many happy family holidays at Aberdovey and Abersoch.



John was chairman of Round Table in 1966-7 and later chairman of the 41 Club from 1971-2. He was introduced to Rotary by Rod Jones in 1971 and became president of the club in 1981-2. He was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship for long service in 2016. Both Doreen and John made many friends through all these clubs.

In 1984 the club was interested in opening an MS treatment centre using high pressure (hyperbaric) oxygen and John drove Dr. Fraser Dukes and Peter Williams, Club President and President Elect, to Glasgow (and back on the same day!) to visit a centre of Action for Research into

Multiple Sclerosis. Subsequently John became chairman of our local ARMS committee and was fully involved in a public meeting, fundraising and setting up the Wolverhampton and District MS Centre with a small pressure chamber in 1986 and a larger one (brought from Middlesex Hospital) in 1993. John arranged the refurbishment of the new chamber by a Tipton company. The Centre is now a charity offering relief to many MS patients.

John has four grandchildren, Harry, Isobel, Lottie and Katie of whom he was immensely proud. He enjoyed spending time with them while they were growing up and in recent years loved seeing them at family occasions and Sunday lunches.

He had a keen interest in classical music and enjoyed evenings at the Birmingham Symphony Hall and the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, In later life he took up woodwork and created several beautiful pieces of furniture, winning amateur cabinet maker awards.

Doreen is now 95 and though sadly unable to take part in John's Memorial Service she was able to spend time with him in his final weeks.

Pandemic 2

At the end of May the UK death total is around 38 500, only smaller than the USA at around 100 000. (The death rate in Brazil is rising fast where President Bolsonaro is in denial in a similar way to President Trump.) Nevertheless it has been decided that we should begin to lighten the lockdown – by 'baby steps' because the R rate could again exceed One and a resurgence begin. So various team sports may begin again, behind closed doors. Primary schools should reopen for certain classes but the experts and the parents are not everywhere prepared to take that risk. (And in Italy the Tower of Pisa will reopen for controlled numbers.) For the economy the furlough system will become a flexible furlough in a move to encourage employers to bring their workers back to work. The government is not helped by its determination to exonerate adviser Dominic Cummings despite his excursion to Durham. Rotarians are relieved to be still alive although we have recently lost our two nonagenarians Fraser Dukes and John Baker, the latter perhaps from Corona Virus. The Corona crisis is currently exacerbated in the USA by race riots in 30 cities following the death of a black man (George Floyd) at the hands of a white policemen in Minneapolis. And the Black Lives Matter demonstrations continue in the UK.



LOCK-DOWN IN WIGHTWICK

Spring arrived at the Courtlands and with it a new combined greenhouse/potting shed, which Cynthia soon filled with the 110 tomato plants raised from seed in heated propagators in the section of the conservatory which daughter Julie had not converted into a Home Gym. These she raises annually for family, friends and neighbours, Rotarians and Uncle Tom Cobby! Over Easter Julie sowed spring vegs in her raised beds and I planted some early potatoes and prepared the bean trench. The established espalier fruit trees which surround the fruit and kitchen gardens looked exceptional, as this year the blossom had not gone with the usual high winds, Hopefully this will enable us to bring in the harvest of pears, plums, cherries and eight varieties of apples. The now established rows of raspberries, black currants and gooseberries were tidied up, together with the blackberry and loganberry which now cover the old tennis court netting, not forgetting my favourite, rhubarb (with custard) The bare root, field grown strawberry plants arrived and were duly planted on trestles in the poly-tunnel. Six varieties to provide fruit from June to October. The peaches and figs share space in the hothouse with oranges and lemons, with added colour provided by the oleanders. Six varieties of tomatoes now fill the old greenhouse and half of the new one, as well as

half a dozen pots on the balcony. The other half of the greenhouse is filled with cucumbers, peppers and butternut squashes raised by "her indoors". (I'm thinking of having a produce stall at the bottom of the drive!) Two rows of runner beans and french beans, also raised by "Greenfingers", have now reached the top of the canes and together with courgettes, now fill the vegi. garden. The first crops were from the asparagus and spinach beds and the first fruit ready for picking was an early golden variety of raspberries given to us by Richard and Cherry for, appropriately, our Golden Wedding Anniversary. The ornamental gardens are now, after twenty years, nicely established and now require less annual maintenance. With the lack of hard frosts this year, the blossom on the magnolia, camellias, rhododendrons and azaleas has been spectacular for much longer than usual, followed by an equally pleasing display of roses and wisteria. Cynthia's collection of hellebores, which now form a major part of the rockery down to the kitchen garden, never fail to impress and this year was no exception. Over 100 plants in more than twenty varieties, from mottled white and cream, through shades of pink and red to almost black! The spring bulbs and primulas planted in the window boxes and ornamental pots and troughs have now been replaced by begonias and the 85 geraniums over-wintered in the hothouse, plus the hanging baskets. The blackbirds, robins and wrens have all raised families in their usual favourite nesting spots in the hedges and a family of blue tits were raised in the nesting box on the kitchen wall. Add to that a family of squirrels in the Lime tree which dominates the back garden and tawny owls in the Ash tree next door, are only a few of our wildlife visitors, fortunate as we are to be living on the very edge of the countryside. We do manage to find some time to sit down and enjoy the fine views from our elevated position, overlooking the Smestow Valley, where in the meadow the sheep gently graze by the river-side and we have been treated to some spectacular sunsets beyond the Clee Hills in the far horizon. Yes, although life can be cruel, it can also be good and bounteous. We may no longer be in our mid-forties, we may not live in Surbiton, but we do have Richard and Penny as neighbours. Take care and we hope to see you all again soon,. Who knows, like Brian and Ann, you may even see us with Monty Don? **Peter**, Cynthia, Julie and new arrival Honey, who loves digging (unfortunately!)



Corona in Germany

(Editor: I sent my old friend Gerhard living in Schleswig Holstein, Germany my account of the pandemic in the UK on 4th May 2020. He replied later on the same day with the report below, translated by me.)

Thank you for your news. Here in Germany TV and other media are of course full of Corona reports and debates. Until the present the unity among responsible politicians in the Federation and the Laender has been remarkably strong. All have got behind Chancellor Merkel and her medical specialists. As a science graduate she developed after sober analysis a clearly convincing and effective plan to combat the pandemic. Quite early it was recognised that there were three clearly delimited areas in Bavaria and North Rhine Westfalia in which Corona was spreading quickly and violently. (First half of February a Webasto companies meeting and Carnival sessions in a village in NRW.) These were at once appropriately quarantined.

In the following period infection numbers in the individual Laender developed very differently, in part because the internal borders between the Laender were closed. For example owners of holiday homes or second residences on the North Sea or the Baltic were not allowed to visit them. In Ditmarschen (Gerhard's 'county' in Schleswig Holstein with 130 000 inhabitants) there were only 54 positive tests with 3 deaths. (One of them was a teaching colleague who started like him in 1973.) Now however many people are becoming impatient because the economic consequences of the lockdown (English word used) are getting serious and they no longer understand the social distancing (English term used) measures in the less affected Laender.

There are gradual loosening measures in the Laender, which our Chancellor (Mrs Merkel) does not entirely accept but which are being brought in by the Minister Presidents (chief ministers of the Laender) by virtue of their legal authority. In this way the unified strategy for combating Corona is being broken. We'll see what that produces. We go shopping, walking, take short bike rides and watch the telly. We also saw The Crown some time ago, with great interest and enjoyment. Netflix's Unorthodox is also worth watching. We very much miss our children's visits and ours to them. However in a little place like Meldorf it is possible and not forbidden to chat with friends and acquaintances on the street and at the market, while observing the required separation. We also occasionally allow ourselves coffee and cakes in the garden with two neighbours at a time. Hoping for better times for us all. All the best to you both.

Gerhard and Renate

(P.S. I commented that their federal system appeared to be advantageous. He agreed that many Germans think so. However there is a downside to federalism, a 'small state mentality' which shows for example in the variations in schools policy. As examples of variations in infection rates among the Laender he gives : Bavaria 40 000 infections and 1900 deaths at this time, against Meckpom (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) only 700 and 19. The English words for lockdown and social distancing are commonly used.)



Valedictory Zoom

President Richard chaired another club meeting by Zoom on 30th June, this time his Valedictory. The meeting made good use of the technology, the turnout being 26 including Geoff Lowndes in sound only, Sudhir Handa briefly and Colin Cundy with his dog. President Richard thanked the officers and Governing Council, congratulated the Club on managing Zoom well and recommended to all the Future Proofing proposals, soon to



be issued. (His full Valedictory speech has been emailed to all members.) Richard Green reported on a few Rotary contacts he has made and referred to the new R.I. President Holger Knaack whose mission statement is Rotary Opens Opportunities. He also reported that the generous collection for Fraser Dukes will result in a plaque and a trophy. The next agenda item was the award of the Les Burrell trophy to Richard Green for his many activities – Jeremy confessed that the trophy was currently broken! The Shelter Bus is parked for the moment. Dick Dawes is poorly and we all wish him well. Brian Bailey gave a sincere vote of thanks to Richard (with Penny) who had played a game of two halves and performed well in both! Next week will be Brian's induction as President (and will be reported in the next Hub, in October.) SW

Pandemic 3

As June ends the global number of deaths exceeds 500 000, the USA has 120 000 and Brazil well over 50 000. India is looking grim. On 23rd June the Downing Street press conference is declared the last of this regular kind. We are gradually loosening lockdown – the hospitality field and hairdressers are due to open for business on 4th July. Our death rate is approaching 44 000 and, as professor Whitty says 'we are going to be living with this for a long time to come'. Dexamethasone and remdesivir are emerging new treatments but a vaccine is still far off. On 25th June, the hottest day of the year, the packed beach in Bournemouth was declared a major incident. There are illegal musical events and Black Lives Matter demos, dangerous in the circumstances and Leicester has been locked down. We will be looking at calculated risks in future, including school reopenings. The new normal? SW