

## APRIL REPORT

CHRISTCHURCH PROBUS CLUB, REPORT APRIL 2024.

CLUB MEETING 2ND APRIL.

The speaker at the meeting was Kevin Patience who gave an animated and illustrated talk entitled. "The True Story of the African Queen".

The film was based on a story by C.S. Forester where the "African Queen" a small steam powered boat loaded with dynamite and crewed by Charlie and Rosie survives rapids and swamps to be driven into a German cruiser on Lake Tanganyika where it explodes and sinks the cruiser leaving only the name plate "African Queen" to drift away.

The true story of events on Lake Tanganyika is different. At the outbreak of World War One German East Africa controlled the East Bank of the lake, Belgium the Northwest and Britain the Southwest. Germany had two gunboats on the lake, the "Hedwig von Wissman" and the "Kingami". They attacked and sank the Belgian steamer "Alexandre Del Commune" and the British steamer "Cecil Rhodes" giving them control of the lake.

This situation was intolerable to the Royal Navy and ideas were sought to rectify matters. A Boer War veteran and big game hunter John R Lee travelled to The Admiralty and advised that Germany was assembling a larger warship the "Graf von Gotzen" on the lake and suggested that the Navy should provide two gunboats to be shipped to Cape Town and transported overland.

The suggestion was accepted, and the project put under the control of LT Commander Spicer-Simpson, an eccentric man who through a series of naval disasters found himself desk bound in The Admiralty.

Two 12m motorboats were found and adapted with the addition of armour, Maxim guns and a three pounder Hotchkiss gun, they were named "HMS Mimi" and "HMS Toutou" and on 15th June were loaded on to the "Llanstephen Castle" bound for Cape Town. From Cape Town the boats travelled by rail to Fungarumi, then overland for 146 miles pulled by traction engines and teams of Oxen to the railhead at Sankisia. Then by rail to Bukama and the Lualaba River to Kabalo, finally a short rail journey to Lukuga, their destination on the Lake.

"Toutou" was launched on 22nd December and "Mimi" the following day. On 26th December they engaged the "Kingami", after a brief exchange of fire "Kingami" surrendered, it was captured and renamed HMS Fifi. In February 1915 the flotilla engaged the Hedwig von Wissan which was sunk by a shell from Fifi. Having suffered several reversals of fortune Germany scuttled the Graf von Gotzen.

Interestingly after the war the von Gotzen was refloated and remains to this day in use on the lake.

The Club meets at 10-15 on the first Tuesday each month at The Harbour Hotel, Mundeford. New members are always welcome. Details from Secretary Maurice Dowling 07769 897955 or our website [www.probuschristchurch.com](http://www.probuschristchurch.com).

## MAY REPORT

CHRISTCHURCH PROBUS CLUB, REPORT MAY 2024.

CLUB MEETING 7TH MAY.

The speaker at the meeting was Peter Ellis who gave a talk entitled “ Eyes Along the Coast” telling the story of the Hengistbury Head National Coast Watch Institution. The organisation is not the Coastguard but feeds information into the Coastguard search and rescue organisation.

30 years ago, there were 43 manned Coastguard stations, most were closed or automated by The Government, the last two to be closed were Lee on Solent and Portland.

In 1994, shortly after the Coastguard lookout at Bass Point on The Lizard was closed two fishermen lost their lives nearby. The local people decided they should reopen the Coastguard lookout and man it with volunteers and the National Coast watch Institution was born. There are now 61 watch stations around the coast of England and Wales manned by approximately 3000 volunteers.

The Hengistbury Head station started life in 1975 as a Coastguard Station, it was closed in 1995 and became a remote relay station, part of the search and rescue system based on technology from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency hubs.

In 2017 local volunteers began the task of reopening the present station as part of the National Coast watch system. There was an encouraging response from the local authorities and in 2017 the Southbourne Beach Office was used as a temporary base while preparations were made to refurbish and equip the present building. On the 10th of August 2018 the building was opened. It achieved “Declared Facility Status” on 2nd September 2021.

The station has never had a problem obtaining volunteers and has currently 111 qualified coast watch staff and two in training. The training consists of a three-hour intensive course followed by 15 watches to establish competence and then further consolidation watches. A final assessment is made by Training Officers. Ongoing annual assessments are made.

The station is totally self-funded and needs to raise £8000 per year to operate. It is open 364 days a year during daylight hours ( 0800 to 1900 ) in summer months, Christmas day is dependent on staffing availability. Since opening the station has reported 61 incidents 12 of them this year.