

Happy June!

I hope, like me, you've been enjoying the glorious weather we had in May. Perhaps you're one of the many talented gardeners in our Branch who's been making the most of the sunshine.

Before I launch into the ramblings of a salty old Norwegian sea dog, I'd like to briefly raise a topic that needs your attention. As you may know, we run a regular Afternoon Social Meeting in Shalford on the last Tuesday of each month. Historically, these have involved a short talk or presentation by one of our members or a guest speaker, usually accompanied by tea, cake, and good conversation.

Like many of the things we do as a committee of unpaid volunteers, we aim to provide the best experience we can. Recently, we've been fortunate to secure some impressive speakers—experts in their fields—covering topics that are both enlightening and educational. But here's the real question: "Do you feel we're getting value from our presenters?". Some of these speakers charge a fee, so we need to be sure these are what you want.

My personal view is that the speakers are excellent. The real challenge is encouraging more members to attend the meetings. From experience, I know how disheartening it can be for a presenter to prepare thoroughly, only to be met with a very small audience. Even seasoned professionals feel deflated in those moments.

So this is a call to all of you: Please consider coming along to the Shalford meetings. Details are on page three of *The Park* May edition, and on our website, and for completeness below. Your presence really does make a difference. Please let me know your thoughts.

Future Diary Dates and Other Branch Notices

- **Shalford Afternoon Meetings–2.00pm:**
 - **June 24** –Presenter Zoe Sole, Our Volunteer Lead, Parkinson's UK
 - *July and August – No Meetings*
 - **Sept 30** – Presenter Lucy Wyndham–Read "Chair Exercise"
 - **Oct 28** – "Halloween Silliness"
 - **Nov 25** – Parkinsons update/Q&A – Amanda or Dawn, Parkinson's Nurses
 - *Dec– No Meeting*
- **Dates for Friendship Group and Newly Diagnosed meetings** and venues are on our website

- **Branch Summer Picnic**– This fun filled annual event will be held on Sunday **July 20** (Great Halfpenny Farm, Great Halfpenny Lane, Guildford GU4 8PY).
- **Remember, it is not too late to support Hazel Davies who is Fundraising for the Branch again!** This year she walked 40 miles along the National Forest Way on **May 27**, with the funds raised again split 50:50 between us and Parkinson's UK. At the time of writing she is still slightly short of her fundraising target, so please support her (and us!) by sponsoring her:

<https://www.justgiving.com/page/hazel-davies-3>

- **100 Club** – Steve, our Treasurer will be contacting many of you shortly to renew your annual subscriptions. Watch your Inbox for his email.
- **Branch Annual Raffle:** – Tickets for our second annual fundraising raffle will soon be on sale. This year we have a fabulous **1st Prize of a week in a holiday cottage in the Lake District!** We will be selling tickets at the Summer Picnic and other events, and to ensure you don't miss out we will also be sending you some books with the September edition of The Park magazine for you to sell to friends and family.
- **Branch Christmas Lunch**– This subsidised event will be on **Dec 2**, starting at 12.30 for 1.00 at Godalming Rugby Club, Broadwater.
- **Christmas Evening Dinners** for the Friendship Group and Newly Diagnosed Group will also be in December and we hope to provide some subsidy again.

On to Other Matters... Urban Myths and Holiday Slideshows

You're probably familiar with the idea of urban myths—those curious tales repeated so often they begin to sound true. Think of the belief that you can see the Great Wall of China from the moon, or the infamous (and inaccurate) rumours about the names in Captain Pugwash.

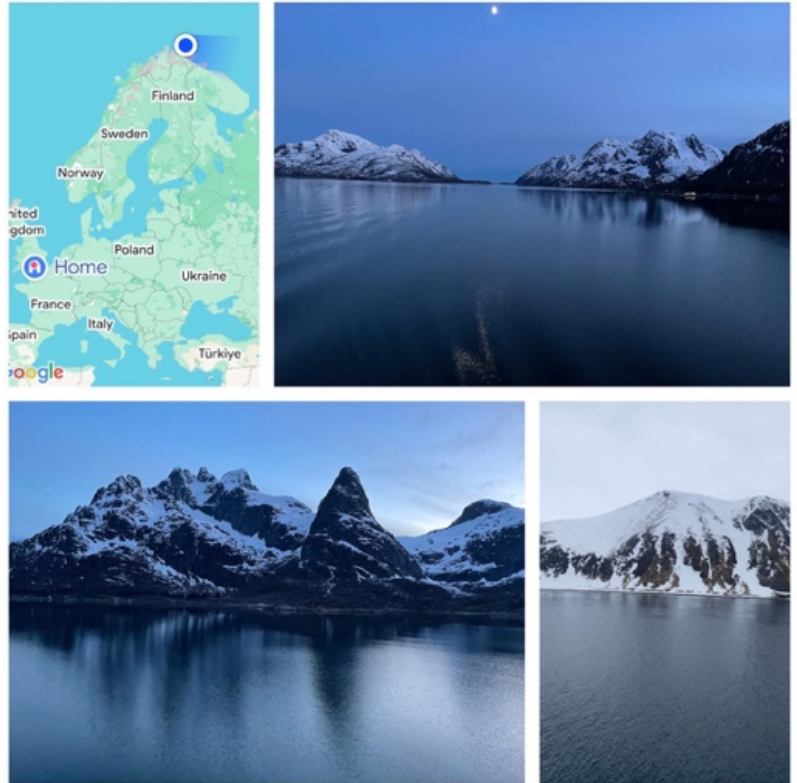
I'm unsure whether one particular tale falls into this category: the legendary 1970s tradition of subjecting guests to holiday slideshows. One couple, one projector, 120 slides of caravan holidays in the Algarve! If you suspect this to be true, then prepare yourself for what may feel like a similarly meandering narrative...

My suggestion: if you're tempted to throw this edition of *The Park Bench* on the compost heap, why not instead volunteer to write a future column while I'm away? That way, you can choose any topic you like.

And Now... Back to the Ramblings of a Norwegian Sea Dog

As someone who believes in staying physically, socially, and intellectually active, I've found travel to be a wonderful way to engage the mind. You may have heard of the Norwegian postal ship route—a service that's operated along the coast for over 100 years. A while ago, the Hurtigruten Group began offering holiday experiences aboard these vessels. More recently, a new competitor, Havila, has joined the fray with a fleet of four modern ships built to impress.

So my wife, two friends and I decided to take the plunge. We flew to Bergen and embarked on a 12-day round-trip cruise up and down the stunning Norwegian coast. I've attached a few photos of the magnificent scenery.



As always, I'd like to reflect on the experience from the perspective of living with Parkinson's: the highs, the lows, the unexpected challenges, and the downright peculiar.

Travel, Trains and Traps

Living in Ash, I can catch a direct train to Gatwick on the GWR line. Our flight was sensibly scheduled for around 2 p.m., avoiding the rush hour. I made the classic error of choosing a single seat next to a wheelchair space—ideal for my heavy bag, or so I thought. That was fine until we reached Gatwick around 11 a.m., right when I needed my second dose of Sinemet.

With my Parkinson's symptoms kicking in, I struggled to stand, pivot, and lift my rucksack. I was effectively wedged in as a crowd of new passengers with suitcases boarded. I managed to get off eventually, but it was a wake-up call. I've known this day would come—the moment when I need to accept that pre-arranged assistance at stations and airports isn't "giving up," it's just sensible planning.

On Board the Ship

The ship was modern, small by cruise standards (around 260 cabins), and remarkably stable. Even in rougher seas, it only rocked during four short stretches when we were in open water. During those times, I had to recalibrate my walking, which surprisingly strengthened my legs. Parkinson's shuffle meets nautical sway—it's a workout I didn't expect!

A Kindred Spirit

On board, I met Peter, a fellow Parkinson's traveller from Australia. We immediately bonded – we were 'Mates'. He displayed all the classic Parkinsonian signs, and we were open enough to acknowledge them in each other. Peter, originally from the UK, had lived in Australia for three decades and had been diagnosed for about 15 years. He'd undergone DBS and had fascinating insights into treatment and research in Australia.

Unbelievably, he hadn't heard of PD Warrior—despite it being an Australian programme! We shared stories, experiences, and struggles. Turns out Peter's real "story" wasn't Parkinson's—it was cycling. A former world-class competitor, he once raced in team pursuit events that involved near-impossible speeds and coordination.

Bikes and Airlines

Peter had a particularly memorable tale involving his Qantas flight being cancelled and his ticket being re-issued by British Airways. He telephoned BA to discuss arrangements for his bike and was told categorically he was over the baggage limit and his bike would need to stay in Australia. He argued long and hard with BA for hours all to no avail. It was then he threatened to march around the velodrome with a placard saying he could not compete in the World Championships blaming British Airways—and, lo and behold, 10 minutes later the CEO personally intervened to resolve the issue.

Another gem: Back when Peter was in his prime, he and three mates were tearing down a country road in a four-man pursuit, single file and flat out. The lead rider missed a roundabout—completely. One by one, all four crashed straight into it.

With cuts, bruises, and a few broken bones, each of them was taken to the local cottage hospital—in four separate ambulances. By the end of the day, they were lined up again, this time in hospital beds side by side, battered but still laughing.

Final Reflections

Peter and I both struggle with speech, speaking far too quietly. We were comfortable enough with each other to politely say, "Speak up!" It was a welcome mutual understanding.

So, what have I learned?

- Travel is still very possible, with a little extra planning and willingness to accept support.
- Small-ship cruising suits me well—everything stays in one wardrobe, and you step off the ship to explore without daily suitcase dramas.
- The scenery was astonishing and reminded me how important it is to live life fully.
- River cruises might be next—more my style than 5,000-person floating cities.

The internet offers a wealth of information to plan around your needs. There are always new experiences waiting, adapted to your abilities.

Live fully, travel wisely, and always be ready for a story or two.

David Lowther