

SOME of the most absorbing talks Kyrle Probus members hear at their regular bimonthly meetings, come when members themselves talk about their working life experiences. Such a talk was given recently by Tom Courtney and by the end it was hard to imagine how anyone could have packed much more into his working life.

Tom was born in a two-up, two-down house on the edge of Birmingham and passed to get into King Edward Grammar School. His father taught him a love of playing darts, which was to prove of some significance many years later in his working life and he also taught him how to drive.

Tom left school with five O-levels and in 1954 started work as an apprentice at the Bakelite factory at Tyseley. Bakelite, an early plastics company, was famous for producing the classic covers of the radios and telephones of the time.

Tom married in 1960 and started looking round for a job, which he found with Marley at its factory in Somerset producing Marley flooring. During this period, his two sisters moved to the USA and wanted Tom to join them. But when Marley closed the department he was working in, he got a job as production controller with a company called Formwood at Coleford, producing table tops.

After four years at Formwood, he started getting itchy feet and after trying another couple of jobs, he decided to join his sisters in New York. He got a job there with a plastics company, but in 1974 a worldwide energy crisis saw the company's profits drop and he was made redundant.

He was playing darts with a team at an Irish pub in New York and got some labouring work for an Irishman, a fellow darts player, which helped to keep the wolf from the door. His brother-in-law then got him a job looking after apartments, carrying out necessary repairs. Eventually he was called to the headquarters of the company that owned the apartments and told that he would now be managing eight buildings, a total of over 600 apartments.

He had to return to the UK when his mother-in-law died and his wife Judith, as an only child, could not leave her father on his own. Back in Britain, they moved to Devon and went into the pub business. And there, because of pressure of time, Tom had to leave his life story, leaving his audience with a final titbit that they later moved to Spain clearly there is more to come.