

The militant and often-bloody campaign waged by the suffragettes in their fight for votes and equal rights for women was recalled in dramatic fashion by Beatrice de Brassey at Kyrle Probus Clubs's New Year Lunch at the Chase Hotel on January 28th.

Wearing a vintage outfit and matching hat, Drybrook-based Beatrice (Nadine Carr's stage name) detailed the suffragettes' brave hunger strikes and martyrdom in a talk she titled 'Skeletons in the Cupboard.'

Adopting the authentic character of a fearless campaigner, as she stepped back in time, Beatrice explained how they had to constantly overcome hostility and police arrests before Emily Pankhurst and her team finally achieved their historic breakthrough.

With the next General Election set for this May, Beatrice reminded Probus club members, wives and partners that the suffragettes had "suffered and died to give us the opportunity to vote."

At their meeting on February 5th, club members were given a riveting account of work carried out by the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in Ethiopia.

The meeting recalled how news of the famine and civil war had devastated the proud country and sparked off a massive reaction of shock and horror at the heart-breaking catalogue of tragic stories.

Happily, Gareth Knutt, who worked for VSO in Ethiopia from 2011 until 2013, said the country's fortunes have made a sensational turnaround. Though surrounded by countries in a "real state of turmoil, Ethiopia has been remarkably stable since 1991," he said.

A talk titled 'A Portrait of a Developing Country,' revealed, however, that some anomalies still remain. Four times the size of the United Kingdom Ethiopia has a population of 97 million, and rising.

But while enjoying the fastest-growing economy in sub-Saharan Africa, with an expanding tourist industry, Ethiopia's per capita income is among the lowest in the world. "The poverty gap is huge," Gareth, whose wife Viv had headed the tourist office, said.

Gareth revealed that of the 33 universities, 30 had been built since 2006. Yet there is still an urgent need for experienced tutors. His educational role with the international charity included running sessions from sunrise to sunset coaching staff to take on the educational programme.