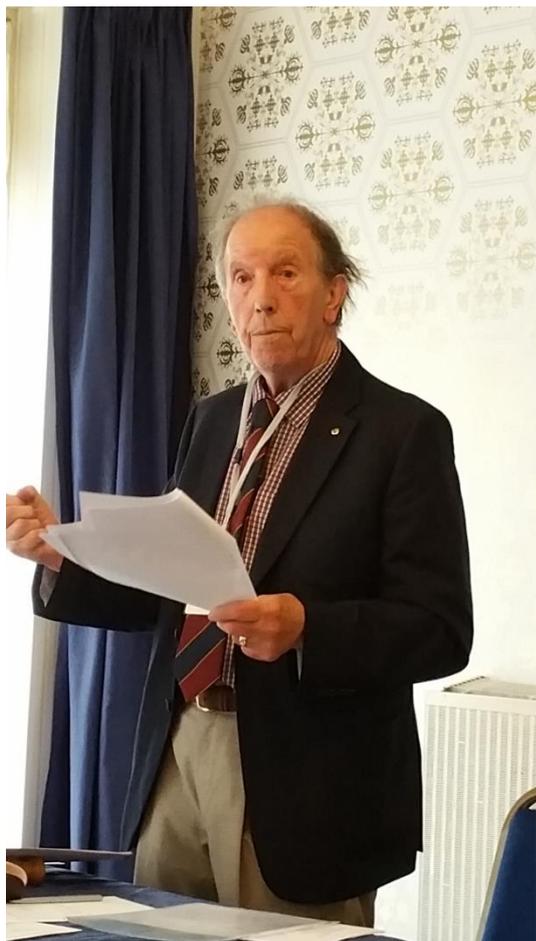


'GREAT Losers in History' was the subject of an absorbing, well-researched talk by Kyrle Probus member Mike Stares at the club's recent meeting.



Mike had a list of some 24 of these 'fallen angels' going back over 2,000 years, but for the purpose of his talk, he concentrated on those in the 20th century. He said history showed that all these losers had a certain flaw that caused them to fall from grace.

Adolf Hitler, having risen to be the most powerful dictator, had Europe at his feet, but then started making mistakes. Mike said Hitler's story got him thinking about other icons of history who went from hero to zero.

One of these was Marshal Philippe Petain, whose outstanding military leadership in the first World War made him a national hero in France. But at the end of World War II, he was found guilty of collaborating with the Nazis and sentenced to death. This was commuted to life in prison by General Charles de Gaulle.

Another was Tsar Nicholas II, last of the Romanov dynasty. His reign saw the economic and military collapse of Russia and he and his family were imprisoned and then executed by the Bolsheviks in July 1918. Benito Mussolini, the founder of fascism and Dictator of Italy was eventually sacked by King Victor Emmanuel and executed by the Italian Communists in 1945. His body was taken to Milan and hung upside down for public viewing.

As the clouds of war gathered in 1939, King Leopold III of Belgium determined to keep his country out of the conflict. When war came, he offered unconditional surrender to the Germans and most Belgians believed he cooperated with the Nazis.

Also on Mike's list of losers was Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the republic of China and three Britons – Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, General A E Percival and Oswald Mosley. Dowding was head of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain and recognised as the architect of that success. He was fired from that position in November 1940, for what some saw as spurious reasons.

Arthur Percival's downfall came with defeat and surrender to the Japanese when he commanded British Commonwealth Forces at the Battle of Singapore in 1941. Percival had warned he needed more resources, but Britain couldn't help because of fighting the war in Europe and North Africa.

Mosley had been a minister in the 1929 Labour government, but he then left the Labour party and set up the British Union of Fascists in 1932, also creating the infamous 'blackshirts.' Mike said he was another who chose the wrong side in the War.