

Jazz legend 'Bix' Beiderbecke, described as a 'born genius' by maestro Louis Armstrong, died at the age of just 28 from pneumonia brought on by alcoholism, member of Kyrle Probus Club were told on Thursday (April 16th).

The brilliant trumpet player's drink-wrecked career was related on a return visit by Brian Read. He had spoken previously about another jazz icon Billie Holliday, who died aged 45 while under arrest for heroin possession.

Members were also entertained by three taped recordings underlining Beiderbecke's inimitable style.

Songwriter-pianist Hoagy Carmichael, who later wrote the immortal 'Stardust,' would say of him: 'He hit the notes like a mallet hits a chime.' Beiderbecke, also a cornet player and pianist who appeared at Carnegie Hall in New York with the renowned Paul Whiteman Orchestra, toured throughout the USA in 1927, probably his most prolific year.

Despite his mounting drink problem, probably brought on by the relentless touring, his popularity with top bands meant typically playing in 20 US States in six weeks. Famous crooner Bing Crosby was among his many admirers.

'Bix had now reached the top of his profession, but unfortunately, the drinking continued,' said Brian. 'Just before the orchestra was due to play in Davenport, his home town, he stopped drinking because he wanted to impress his parents. But his parents were not interested in his success. He began drinking again.'

With his playing suffering, and unreliable, his recording career came to an end. Bix was playing in clubs and college dances when he fell ill and died on August 6th, 1931.

Band leader Paul Whiteman said: 'Bix was the greatest musician and the greatest gentleman I have ever known.' His status was further enhanced when Dorothy Parker wrote a novel 'Young Man with a Horn' inspired by his life.