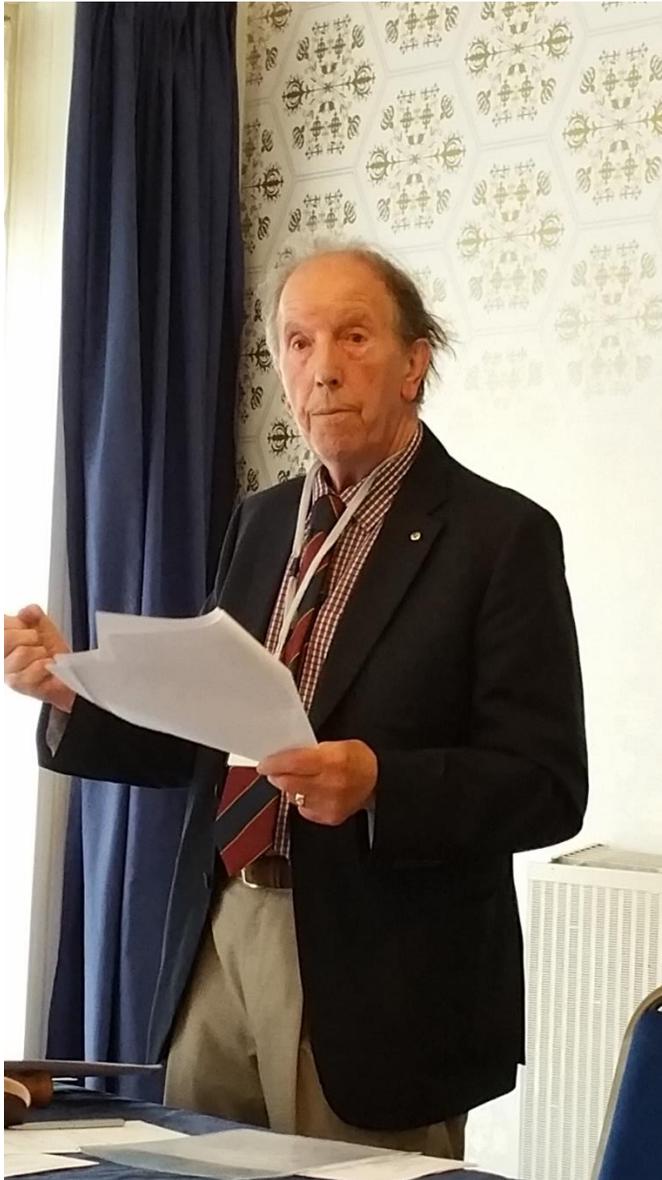


Mike Stares, Press Officer, took members of Kyrle Probus on a voyage to the stars as he went back to his youth when Hollywood stars shone on the silver screen. Biblical epics such as Samson and Delilah (1949), musicals such as Showboat (1951) and 7 brides for 7 brothers (1954), war films starring John Wayne, and cowboy westerns starring Alan Ladd all made the industry successful year after year.



Memories from the cinema fired up Mike's passion for history, lasting a lifetime. As Mike grew up he began to appreciate the more serious and sober side of film-making. It was "Julius Caesar" (1953) starring Marlon Brando that made Mike start researching and checking historical facts. His enthusiasm led to writing and teaching ancient and modern history on courses and at colleges, alongside his journalist day job.

Next came "Cleopatra" (1963) starring Elizabeth Taylor seducing both Caesar and Mark Antony in her fight to save her Egyptian empire from Roman domination. Mike said that while historical films do play "fast and loose" for dramatic effect, he emphasized that modern historians frequently revise their perception of the "accepted truth".

Mike picked out a number of major films with a historical storyline, starting with "Gone with the wind" starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh. Not only a lush love story, with gorgeous music, but set in the American Civil War, with the burning of Atlanta, and the desperate plight of the Southern states.

Three great films based on British history were the British-made Richard III (1955) starring Laurence Olivier, regarded by many as one of the very best historical films, "Becket" (1964) starring Richard Burton as Thomas A'Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury with Peter O'Toole as Henry II bringing to life the 12th century clash between King and Church and the third film was a battle between King and a Catholic statesman. "A man for all seasons" (1966) starred Paul Scofield as Sir Thomas More, and Robert Shaw as Henry VIII. This battle led to the formation of the Church of England and the Reformation.

Mike continued the historical theme, coming more up to date with "Lawrence of Arabia" (1962) starring Peter O'Toole, and introducing Omar Sharif. The next film "Dr. Zhivago" (1966) starred Omar Sharif with Julie Christie in the Russian revolution and Civil War of 1917-18. Mike's next choice was "Charge of the Light Brigade" (1968) a British made film relating the blunders that led the valiant 600 into the valley of death in the Crimea War, and starring Trevor Howard.

Mike chose 5 films from WWI and WW2, beginning with "Schindler's List" (1993) starring Liam Neeson a very popular film. Less well known is "King and Country" (1964) starring Tom Courtney as a traumatized soldier facing a charge of deserting his company on the WWI battlefield. Dirk Bogarde plays the role of his counsel. Two more of Mike's favourites were "Downfall" (2004) relating the last 10 days of Hitler in the bunker, and "Operation Daybreak" (1975) a plot to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich in Prague.

Mike finished his selection of historical dramas with "Tora! Tora! Tora!" relating the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, and "War and Peace" based on Leo Tolstoy's classic novel of the Russian revolution in 1812.

The number of questions and comments that followed Mike's talk, showed not only a keen interest in Mike's choice of subject, but also an enthusiasm for showing one of Mike's favourite film at a future Kyrle Probus event - watch this space.