

Kyrle Probus members were looking forward at their recent meeting to member John Harley's presentation entitled 'The King is Dead, Long Live the King.' about the recently-retired Sea King helicopter. They ended up having three talks for the price of one!

John began his talk by explaining that the Westland Sea King helicopter was a British version of the American Sikorsky Sea King. The British version had Rolls Royce Gnome engines, the design of which John had worked on. The first British produced Sea King was delivered at RNAS Culdrose in August 1969 and the aircraft remained a faithful servant for the best part of 40 years.

Unfortunately when John attempted to play a filmed tribute to the Sea King in a BBC documentary by John Sergeant, he ran into technical problems and had to call a halt to his presentation. Member Geoff Blake immediately stepped into the breach with an impromptu talk on Ross Baptist Church which this month celebrated its 200th anniversary.

Geoff told of how two local clergymen, one at Weston-under-Penyard and one in Ross, lost their livings after they refused to sign up to the 1662 Act of Uniformity. They started a little Baptist Church at Ryeford, which was also attended by churchgoers in Ross. At the beginning of 1818, church members from Ross bought a plot of land in Broad Street and a little chapel was built, which lasted until 1881.

By this time the building was in a poor state and inadequate for the growing membership. A meeting was held to discuss how to proceed and a certain Thomas Blake put up £500 towards building a new chapel, which was opened in December 1881.

Thomas Blake was Geoff's great grandfather's younger brother and a well-known philanthropist and he eventually financed the whole of the new church. The church's big stained-glass window facing Broad Street, was paid for by churchgoers in his memory.

Following Geoff's talk, another member Dr Andy Rogers, spoke about the end of an era, with Ross weather station being automated and no longer having data manually recorded. Andy, who was the station's last observer in charge, said a local draper, Henry Southall, began recordings in 1859 and continued for 55 years.

It was then taken over by Ken Parsons, who continued for a record 60 years before giving up in 1974. The station closed in 1975, but in 1984, the then mayor of Ross made its re-establishment his mayoral project and it was opened by TV weather presenter Ian McGaskill in May 1985. With close on 160 years of manual daily records, Ross has one of the largest sets of weather information in the world, said Andy.

The Ross recordings, including Henry Southall's ledgers in beautiful copper-plate handwriting, are still held in the Metrological Office in Exeter, he said.

Following on from that, club vice-president, John Taylor, recalled that in his capacity as a water and environmental manager, one of his responsibilities was to verify rainfall data. He came across a series of rainfall data books going back to 1855 and they included instructions on where to place a bucket to record the rainfall!