

'Who am I and how did I get here?' asked Andrew Chalmers as he opened his inaugural talk as a new member at Kyrle Probus Club on Thursday (April 2).

Some 45 minutes later, fellow members could reflect that Andrew had many dramatic twists and turns to relate during a career in engineering. Now living in so-called 'retirement' in Herefordshire with his wife Allison, Andrew says he has 'never been busier.'

From his early College days, Andrew had determined to aim for a 'practical' engineering degree in Metallurgy. And he planned a career in the steel industry – much to the fury of his half-sister Isabel. 'She was livid I had not decided to be a doctor' Andrew recalled. 'I felt my bedside skills were more suited to being an engineer. She did not speak to me again until I married 7 years later.'

Fate had taken a hand when Andrew was invited a friend's party. 'The party, as expected, was boring except for one development. I met Allison, a third year student at Guy's Hospital.' They celebrated 50 years' of marriage last year. Andrew also recalled 'talking his way' against the then-rules into a hospital sick bay where Allison was a patient – and hiding in a wardrobe until the patrolling Sister had departed.

Drama at a different level was never far away – Andrew still remembers a 'near run thing' during a training period at a steelworks in Cardiff. He slipped and crawled to safety as a river of molten steel threatened to run across him. While working in the blast furnace, Andrew had to manage many 'hard nosed' and resentful steel men. 'I am sure it knocked the rough edges off my personality, he said.

Andrew learned to be resilient and 'tough but fair' as he faced challenges in more demanding management roles in industry, with its fluctuating fortunes and increasing competition from abroad. He moved to plants in Avonmouth, Poland (at the height of the Cold War),] Bradford, Gloucester, Stroud and Colchester, finally launching his own management consultancy for 20 years before retirement.

Andrew's 'leisure years' have included road running – he completed the London Marathon in 4 hours in 1988 – singing in a male voice choir; painting and invigilating exams at John Kyrle School in Ross-on-Wye....before joining Kyrle Probus Club.