

## STOKESLEY PROBUS CLUB

### **Speaker Notes – Jack Brunton Room at Stokesley Town Hall Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2025 at 10.00am**

The Chairman was very pleased to introduce Martin Peagam to deliver his talk, “Hearing Dogs for the Deaf”.

Martin brought his hearing dog, “Inca”, to the meeting, accompanied by his colleague and Probus Member, Paul Hayton, also deaf, and his hearing dog, “Briar”.

Despite being deaf since birth, Martin learnt to speak very clearly and followed a career in further education. Retired, he now follows his interest as a local historian, carries out much charity work and makes frequent TV and radio appearances in connection with these activities. He has been appointed ambassador for Assistance Dogs UK, which trains and provides all kind of support dog.

Having managed with deafness all his life Martin was approached in 2019 and asked if he would like the assistance of a dog. Never having had a dog before, Martin was apprehensive about the responsibility that it would entail. Nevertheless, arrangements were made and he drove to York to be handed a fully trained hearing dog. He collected cocker spaniel Inca and was initially nervous about caring for a dog, but very quickly adapted and a strong bond developed between them. It totally changed his life. He cannot envisage life without Inca who has been trained to make Martin aware of important sounds, most importantly fire alarms, then the usual sounds of everyday life such as the doorbell and the oven timer. This necessitates Inca always being by Martin's side. They are now inseparable, and they go everywhere together – shops, restaurants, hotels, trains, planes, boats, etc. Inca is welcome everywhere as he is well trained, well behaved, very clean, and in top health.

The training takes between 3 and 4 years, followed by an expected 10 year effective working life. The dogs continue to be owned by Assistance Dogs UK and are allocated to selected deaf persons. The total cost over a dog's lifespan, including training, is around £40,000. Being a charity, this necessitates much fund raising, and Martin is very active in this area. Training is a continuing process, and each week Martin conducts a refresher course to practice Inca's response to vital sounds. This is always in the form of games and treats and is much fun for Inca to ensure his attention and interest are maintained.

Deafness can happen to anyone, and at best it is inconvenient and socially isolating. Martin can lip read, but in many situations, people speak and it is not possible to see their face fully. As there is no physical sign of deafness, not replying to people, or ignoring them, is seen as rude. By having a hearing dog by his side, it is obvious to others that Martin is deaf, and these problems are eliminated. Since having Inca Martin's life has changed in many areas such as travelling, pursuing new interests, being heavily involved in charity work giving talks and organising events. Dog walking has developed into joining a running club, and entering charity runs.

Martin explained the various degrees of deafness, and in his case, he cannot hear high frequency sounds, but has very limited sensitivity to low frequencies. This results in his ability to faintly hear owl and gull calls, but he has no idea of how birds in general sound. He has always been baffled at how he learnt to speak fluently and clearly when he cannot

hear much of what he is saying. Hearing aids are more than just a microphone, as they enhance frequencies as required specific to each person's hearing deficiencies. However, they are not effective in many cases, and that is where hearing dogs play a vital role. Martin has been unable to find a hearing aid that works properly to help his situation requiring enhanced high frequency.

The hearing aid was first developed by Alexander Graham Bell after he attended a conference in Milan in 1880 to discuss deafness. He didn't support sign language and believed you had to put a voice into a person's head. Interestingly, Martin is not an advocate of sign language and cannot communicate with it, which has surprised people when he turns up to an event and is greeted in this way. Apparently, sign language is not universally standard and variations occur between countries, and even localities.

While fundraising for the Assistance Dogs UK Martin has undertaken numerous adventurous stunts including climbing up the rigging and along a high yardarm of the Cutty Sark and scaling the outside of Liverpool Cathedral – both feats achieved wearing a dog suit!

Inca is now quite a celebrity having his own Facebook page with thousands of followers! He demonstrated this star quality by charming Members as he wandered among them during the talk.

At one time Inca developed a large malignant tumour on his rear end, which caused Martin immense anxiety. Thankfully, surgery was successful and Inca soon recovered to full health. That episode reinforced to Martin how close and dependent he had become to Inca.

After several questions and thanks from the Chairman for a fascinating and very engaging presentation, Members expressed their thanks and appreciation to Martin and Inca in the customary manner with an enthusiastic round of applause. In addition, a collection bucket was taken around the room, and Members showed their generosity, and appreciation to Martin, by donating to Support Dogs UK.

JE 18.11.25