



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 11

Important News

The Annual General Meeting 2020 (AGM)

This is a short piece that I thought I should write as Chairman of our Cotgrave and District U3A to keep you all up to date concerning our 2020 AGM.

Firstly, I hope you are keeping well and staying safe. What strange times, and sad times for some, we are living through. Many of us have been confined to our houses for extended periods. This sounds dreadful, almost appears like being under house-arrest but it seems from those members I have spoken to that we are coping fairly well. So that's good news.

Secondly, concerns our annual AGM. Officially, the AGM should have taken place by now with a new committee being elected, the Chairman's report delivered and our financial position signed off. This usually takes place at the beginning of one of our monthly meetings and lasts about twenty minutes. This can't happen due to the virus so the committee had two alternatives. We could have had a virtual meeting using zoom or a similar platform but that would have meant members who did not use a computer or similar being excluded.

Alternatively, we could postpone our AGM until we could all meet. The committee agreed unanimously that the latter was the best option so that every member could be involved. Thus, as soon as we can all meet the AGM will take place with new committee members elected to replace those current committee members who are due to leave due to the time constraints of our constitution. The Charity Commission requires us to have our finances audited annually and this has been completed and signed off. I hope this is agreeable with all our members but it is the best we can do given the unique circumstances. Your committee looks forward to meeting you as soon as is possible. May I just add that we will need some "replacement" committee members so we hope that some people will come forward and put themselves forward for election.

May I just conclude by saying a big thank- you to the Group co-ordinator and all her Group leaders for their wonderful efforts in keeping in touch with their group members by various means. Thank you also to the two producers of this weekly letter which is a very time consuming job but enjoyed by many.

Well, we are now being allowed out a little more and are able to have some contact with our friends and family. The weather has been good and Cotgrave and District gardens have never been so pristine. So let's hope we will soon return to enjoy our familiar group activities when we all meet up.

Keep safe. Barbara.

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The Albino Mole

In last week's Letter we showed you Chris Soar's excellent photographs of what appeared to be an albino mole in his wild garden. But was it? The true albino does exist, even though it represents only 1 in 100,000 of the estimated forty million moles living in the UK – in other words, roughly 400 albinos in the whole of the UK.

However, there is more to this than meets the eye. Thanks to Pam Crowshaw, who pointed out the appropriate website, we can learn more. The true albino mole is completely white, while Chris's mole was obviously partially coloured. In particular, it had a gingerish head and somewhat dirty-looking back. What is more, on careful enlargement of Chris's photographs, it is clear (but see below!) that his mole had only four closely spaced toes (or claws), while the typical common mole has five well-spaced toes with a suggestion of web-footedness. This latter feature is made very clear in the attached photograph which I obtained from the internet. This set me thinking and exploring alternative



possibilities. It turns out, for example, that the common vole is characterised by having only four toes. However, it can't be a vole because voles are vegetarian, while Chris's creature was very definitely a worm-eater! But so, for that matter, are shrews. Could it possibly be some kind of shrew? Well, no – shrews are much more like mice than moles and are significantly smaller. They also have eyes which are quite clear to see and not at all hidden behind fur. Moles, on the other hand, have

tiny eyes which are almost invisible to an observer, being hidden behind a thick covering of hair. Being creatures who live most of their lives underground, they have relatively little need for eyesight – they rely much more on senses of smell and touch. The fact that moles spend rather

little of their lives above ground makes it even more surprising that Chris saw this particular one foraging for its worm in the open. Anyway, to cut a complicated story short, it would appear that Chris's mole was not a true albino but something of a half-breed, suffering (if that is the right expression) from a condition known as 'Leucism'. The true albino results from a complete lack of melanin, whereas, in the case of leucism, the pigmentation mechanism merely works only partially, resulting in a body with some degree of colour and, in particular, a reddish tinge to the mole's head. This is well illustrated by the second photograph taken from the internet which shows an example of a mole with very much the same colouring as Chris's sample. It is also apparent that its feet look very different from the 'typical' mole shown in the first photograph. In particular, it appears to have only four toes, though it must be said, they are far from identical to those of Chris's mole.



There is no discussion in the web article concerning moles' feet so we have no information concerning any possible connection between leucism and number of toes so we can only conclude that there is more to moles than might be imagined by the typically casual approach the likes of ourselves usually bring to such matters! And this brings me to the final denouement – no matter what the photograph may say, Chris assures me that his mole definitely *has* five toes (he's keeping it in his fridge for further study – at least, I think it's for further study!) so there can be no doubt about its being a mole. That is where we are for the moment but 'keep alert' – it's time to bring the experts in, so this saga may well run and run! Watch this space.

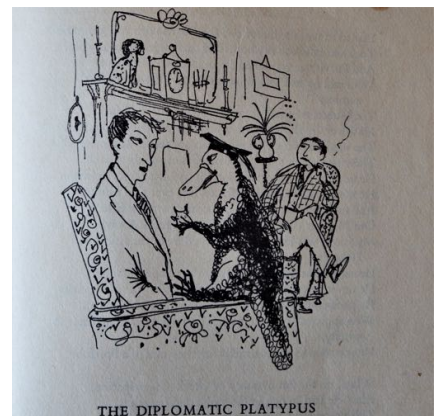
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PS. If this Weekly Letter is to keep going for another month or so, we shall certainly need *something* that runs and runs! Now for something lighter:

Verse and Worse

I warned you all earlier that I might descend to the level of copying comic verse from a book by the above name which I acquired during my university career (which means that they are very old-fashioned!). Here is one of my favourites – at least, it isn't a limerick!

I had a duck-billed platypus when I was up at Trinity,
For whom I soon discovered a remarkable affinity.
He used to live in lodgings with myself and Arthur Purvis
And we all went up together for the Diplomatic Service.
I had a certain confidence, I own, in his ability;
He mastered all the subjects with remarkable facility.
And Purvis, though more dubious, agreed that he was clever
But no-one else would give him any chance whatever.
I failed to pass the interview, the Board, with wry grimaces,
Took exception to my boots, then objected to my braces.
And Purvis, too, was failed by an intolerant examiner
Who said he had his doubts as to his sock-suspenders' stamina.
The bitterness of failure was considerably mollified,
However, by the ease with which our platypus had qualified.
The wisdom of the choice, it soon appeared, was undeniable;
There never was a diplomat more thoroughly reliable.
He never made rash statements his enemies might hold him to,
He never stated anything, for no-one ever told him to.
And soon he was appointed, so correct was his behaviour,
Our Minister (without portfolio) to Trans-Moravia.
My friend was loved and honoured from the Andes to Estonia,
He soon achieved a pact between Peru and Patagonia,
He never vexed the Russians nor offended the Rumanians,
He pacified the Letts and yet appeased the Lithuanians,
Won approval from his masters down in Downing Street so wholly-O.
He was soon to be rewarded with the grant of a Portfolio.



When, on the anniversary of Greek Emancipation,
Alas, he laid an egg in the Bulgarian Legation.
This untoward occurrence caused unheard-of repercussions
Giving rise to epidemics of sword-clanking in the Prussians.
The Poles began to threaten and the Fins began to flap-at-him,
Directing all the blame for this unfortunate mishap at him:
While the Swedes withdrew entirely from the Anglo-Saxon dailies
The right of photographing the Aurora Borealis.
And all efforts at rapprochement in the meantime proving barren,
The Japanese, in self-defence, annexed the Isle of Arran.
My platypus once thought to be more cautious and more tentative
Than any other living diplomatic representative
Was now a sort of warning to all diplomatic students
Of the risks attached to negligence, the perils of imprudence,
And, branded in the Honours List as 'Platypus, Dame Vera'
Retired, a lonely figure, to lay eggs at Bordighera.

Anon.

I hope you liked it! And, while on the subject of verse (or perhaps worse), I am reminded of a long-felt concern about shredded wheat! What is it about that inovative example of breakfast cereal that attracts such opprobrium? I quote:

A Russian stood on Nevsky Bridge,
Chewing his beard for something to eat.
"Jolly dry stuff, this beard" he said
"But a damn sight better than Shredded Wheat."

Then again:

The glances over cocktails
That seemed to be so sweet
Don't seem quite so amorous
Over the Shredded Wheat.

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Arts and Crafts

The Arts and Crafts Movement flourished in Europe between about 1880 and 1920 but that's not what I have in mind here. I'm concerned with arts and crafts which flourish in Cotgrave during the twenty-first century. First of all, let me show you the wonderful effort of a member of our Knit and Natter Group, a quilt made for her grandchild's bed.



Then I'm going to risk making a fool of myself by showing you photographs of one or two bits of woodwork for which I am responsible. They were originally intended to illustrate the symmetry properties of various solids but perhaps they could also be thought of as artistic? Let me know what you think – I don't mind adverse criticism! Perhaps other people have similar bits of artwork they dare share with us?



Then there's this photograph of a Dominic Cummings cut-out which (amazingly enough) appeared at a Rugby League match in Sydney. It may not be 'art' but it surely is 'artful'. Thanks to Peter Cadwallader for this.



And, thinking of Dom., reminds me of the following 'Golf Shot' parody contributed by Doug Pimblett:

'A long drive which ended up out of bounds but incurred no penalty'



Finally, if not exactly 'art', this photograph (sent in by Bernie Besnard) of a David Austin rose called 'Winchester Cathedral' is certainly a thing of beauty and also 'interesting' in so far as, although a white rose, it has recently sent out a branch with pink flowers.

Luncheon Group

Last month the suggested menu for the Virtual lunch club was Stuffed Mushrooms for Starters, Main was Salmon fillet in a tinfoil parcel followed by Sue's Lemon Meringue. That was the theme but what was produced depended on what people had their cupboards, what their diets allowed and most importantly what they fancied. We, as we had planned it, stuck to the menu and had all three courses, these were washed down with a glass or two of vino.



Creative Writing

Last but not least, we have the weekly contribution from the Creative Writing Group. This week it is Anna's turn and she has taken up the theme of a fairy tale.

JACK

After the beanstalk was chopped down, Jack and his mother were in possession of untold riches. They had the chest of gold, the hen which laid the golden eggs and the magic golden harp. And no-one knew where they had come from; nobody challenged Jack's right to them. At first, the chest was hidden carefully, as were the golden eggs, and the harp sat in the middle of their poor living room, and played the most beautiful music whenever they wanted to listen to it.

But the point of being rich is to become richer. Jack did not know this, but his mother did. It was she who made enquiries as to businesses needing capital. She did not trust Jack to do it, after his fiasco with selling the cow. Soon, she had found investment opportunities with a number of businesses, which were soon amalgamated into one concern, Beanstalk Enterprises. Jack went in to the office every day, met clients, started to travel, attended conferences. The business expanded. Soon it had its own headquarters, Beanstalk Tower. The eggs kept on coming and the gold kept on multiplying. Jack's mother now had her own apartment in the city, overlooking the river, with Beanstalk Tower in sight. She could see it across the glint of water as the sun rose, and as it set. She was always looking and gloating.

Her one slight disappointment was Jack himself. She would have expected him to show more enthusiasm, more energy for the task. It was exciting! Money kept on coming and there was more and more potential to do things with it. Why didn't Jack get on and do them? His partners seemed to be ensuring the growth of the businesses, not him. And why, when he could have any number of sharp suits, did he possess only six? Why had he not bought himself a yacht? And why, though beautiful women were throwing themselves at his feet, did he not choose one of them, settle down in a mansion, buy three cars and have children who would be heirs to one of the greatest fortunes on the planet? Really, Jack had hardly changed. Just like his father. Still the same stupid boy who would sell their cow for a handful of beans.

Jack travelled more and more. He was in demand as a speaker. He spoke rather well. His modest assurances that he had done very little met with riotous applause. His description of a giant and a hen which laid golden eggs were taken as witty use of metaphor. The world knew of the harp. One of the sidelines of Beanstalk Enterprises was its wonderful concerts, which sold out the day they went online. Audiences were transported by the playing, and amazed at the technology, which had never been replicated, though many concerns had tried.

But gradually, Jack started to become depressed. He had less energy, everything seemed too much of an effort. One day, Jack was speaking in Slovenia. After he had given his speech, he was expected at a dinner reception. Suddenly, he could stand it no more. He told the security man, left the building, asked the chauffeur to drive him no matter where.

The huge car purred into the countryside.

Jack ordered it to stop beside some woods, and plunged into them, deeper and deeper, never minding the ferns which caught at his expensive shoes, loving the scent of leaves and honeysuckle around him. He stumbled onwards, on and on, wanting only to get as far into the woods as possible. For several hours he walked until he was exhausted. Just at that point he reached a lake and collapsed beside it. He stared into the water, and suddenly began to cry, as if his heart would break.

He cried for a long time, and when his grief started to subside, he became aware of a man by his side. The man spoke to him very gently. Jack said, "I have all these riches and I don't want them. They aren't really mine. I stole them. There is no way to put it right."

"There is always a way," said the gentle man, "to put things right".

"Not this time," said Jack, still tearful. "The giant is dead, and the giantess died soon after him. She died of grief. They had no children. There was no-one I can give all the money back to. And no-one else thinks it is wrong, But I am no better than the giant."

There was a silence. Then the other man asked, "What would stop you giving it all away?"

"My mother. She would never consent to go back to the poverty we used to know. She would fight to keep everything. And she would despise me. She always said I would amount to nothing. Now she is happy"

"I think", said the gentle man, "that you will find a way. I will help you. You may not see me again for a long time, but I can help you nevertheless. I will ask my mother too. She is a loving mother, who will understand".

Jack raised his head, just long enough to catch a glimpse of the man's face, with its melting, compassionate eyes. Then the man was gone.

Jack never knew how they found him. Hours had passed, and evening had come when the search party arrived beside the lake. Jack was still there, spent and detached. He said little to his rescuers; he seemed half-asleep. Everyone was very understanding. A nervous breakdown was diagnosed. Overwork, pressure of heading up such a massive concern, the delayed shock from the speed with which it had all happened. He must not worry. They could carry on well without him while he took some rest. Phuket would be a favourable resort, or he might like California, or perhaps a trip to the Himalayas if he wanted something different. Anyway, all would be well until his return.

Jack did not go to any of these places. Instead, he found himself drawn to a desolate camp where displaced refugees lived. We who watch television and read newspapers know what he saw there, and can imagine how deeply it moved him. And it touched something else. These people were trapped and frustrated, grieving and afraid. He too was all of these things. He often thought about the man he had met by the lake, and remembered their conversation.

When Jack returned to England, things seemed suddenly very simple, very clear. He would leave others to run the colossal, international web that was Beanstalk Enterprises. He would take only the hen, and enough money to buy a modest farm somewhere a long way from any city. And the people who would help him would come from Calais. He could offer work to a few at a time - only a few, but it would be something. And when the hen came to die, as one day she must, he would be self sufficient and would not need her. She would be happier on a farm. And so would he.

And so it was. The farm was deep in the country - some land, some woods, and a lake. Jack's mother was disgusted. To throw away all he had gained, to go to exactly the miserable life he had started out with! She had known he hadn't any backbone in him. Just like his father all over again. But at least things were arranged properly - she had overseen the legal process which allowed her to keep a finger in the business, and her flat overlooking the city. She never visited the farm, and once he had moved there, she rarely saw Jack again.

Jack dug and planted. He bought sheep and cows, and other hens to keep his company, and a cock which crowed and strutted proudly round the yard. First one refugee arrived, then another, then two more. Wide-eyed young men, and women, fearful, hardly daring to believe in their second chance. Some stayed a short time and then moved on, others longer. It was good to see how they threw their backs into the work and grew stronger on the diet of farm vegetables, meat and good fresh eggs.

Then one of them stayed longer than the others, and Jack was happy, and this was the person whom he at last asked to share his life. Their hand-fasting took place beside the lake. Jack was sure he glimpsed the man he had met beside that other lake in Slovenia, and by his side a woman with a soft azure cloak who must be his mother, come perhaps because Jack's mother would not. But maybe he did not really see them. Maybe he had just thought about them so much that he imagined it. But he believed he saw them. It would be a long time till he saw them again.

And Jack and his soul-mate lived happily ever after.

Thank you Anna

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Continue to keep well. See you next week,

John