



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 13

Smiling

Hello again. This lovely poem requires no introduction from me. Just enjoy it:

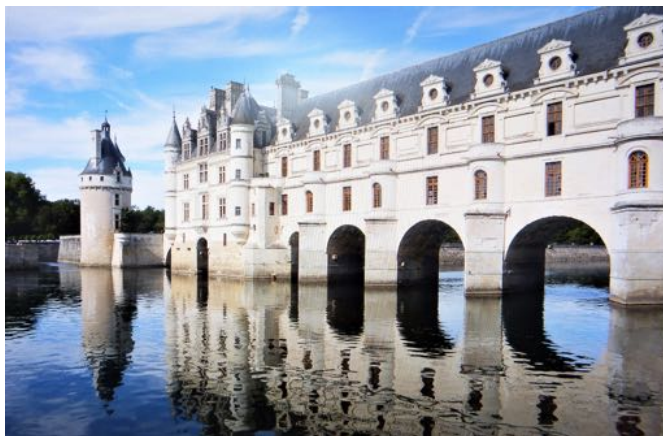
SMILING

Smiling is infectious
You catch it like the flu
When someone smiled at me today
I started smiling, too
I passed around the corner
And someone saw me grin
When he smiled I realised
I'd passed it on to him
I thought about the smile
And realised it's worth
A single smile like mine
Could travel round the earth
If you feel a smile begin
Don't leave it undetected
Let's start an epidemic
And get the world infected

Travel Group

Maureen Johnson asks that we let all members know about the next U3A holiday trip which is definitely planned to go ahead.

This will be a one-week visit with 'Riviera Tours' to the Loire Valley, starting on April 22nd 2021. It will involve train to Paris, followed by coach and will include visits to Monet's Garden and a number of chateaux, palaces, cathedrals and mediaeval towns and there will also be a wine-tasting. Numbers are limited! If anyone is interested in joining this tour, please contact Maureen for further details – her e-mail address is: mjohnson8951@yahoo.co.uk.



And, while thinking about France (even if that is *all* we're allowed to do), reminds me, it's time for another limerick – after all, we haven't had one since last week!

There was a young lady from France
Who led all her lovers a dance.
Her skirts were quite short
But that which they sought
Stayed hidden with French 'élégance'.

I don't know how to include accents in a Word file (so, if they are there, it's all down to John Haskell and, if they're not, I accept full responsibility).

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A Little Bit More Local History (Only a Little Bit!)

At the risk of boring readers even further (!), I can offer a few more interesting (?) tidbits concerning members of the local aristocracy who were involved in the English Civil War. Most of them tended to side with the Royalist Party, of course – though not quite all, Sir John Hutchinson being a notable exception. One Royalist was Robert Pierrepont, 1st Earl of Kingston-on-Hull who was the son of Sir Henry Pierrepont and Frances Cavendish, the latter lady being the daughter of the well-known Bess of Hardwick. Anyway, Robert took rather a long time to commit himself to either side but finally threw in his lot with the King. He was then (1643) made Lieutenant General, responsible for Royalist forces in Lincoln, Rutland, Huntingdon, Cambridge and Norfolk and, in particular, was responsible for the town of Gainsborough, in Lincolnshire, some 17 miles north of Lincoln.

Gainsborough was of considerable strategic importance, being one of very few crossing points on the River Trent so Parliamentary forces made a surprise attack and captured it, in the process of which Robert was taken prisoner. He was then put on a boat on the Trent and sent off to imprisonment in Hull (ironically, his official 'seat'!), which was then in Parliamentary hands. This Parliamentary success lasted only briefly, Gainsborough being immediately recaptured by Royalist troops from Newark, under Charles Cavendish. Further irony was to come – poor Robert was killed by his own troops who, not realising that he was on board, fired at the boat carrying him away from the town on the Trent! A cannon ball literally sliced him in half!

To demonstrate how divisive the Civil War was to prove, the third son of Robert Pierrepont, Francis, decided to favour the Parliamentary faction and he put together a Regiment to defend Nottingham from Royalist attack. He was Colonel, while Hutchinson was Lieutenant-Colonel. Later, Hutchinson took over control and became Colonel, himself. Francis was MP for Nottingham in the Long Parliament. He also built Pierrepont House in Nottingham, a rather grand establishment, fronting on Stoney Street, which has long since ceased to exist. However, we have a painting of it which we copy here for your delectation. St Marys Church is on the left.



It's hard to believe that brother fought against brother and father against son but that's the way things were in the Civil War. Just imagine – we might have had a Civil War over Brexit! Feelings were certainly strong enough. Perhaps one thing to be said in favour of the corona virus is that we now hear very little about Brexit – though the urgency of achieving an agreement with The EU is still as important as ever. But that's politics and we don't want to get bogged down in that, do we?

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It's All About 'Words'

We have two complementary contributions from Peter Shreyhane and Chris Soar – all about words. After all, more than half of our Letter is about words, so the following are entirely appropriate.

Parts of Speech Poem

Every name is called a **noun**.
As **field** and **fountain**, street and **town**.
In place of noun the **pronoun** stand.
As **he** and **she** can clap their hands
The **adjective** describes a thing.
As **magic** wand and **bridal** ring.
The **verb** means action, something done –
To **read**, to **write**, to **jump**, to **run**.
How things are done, the **adverb** tells.
As **quickly**, **slowly**, **badly**, **well**.
The **preposition** shows relation.
As **in** the street or **at** the station.
Conjunction joins, in many ways.
Sentences, words, **or** phrase **and** phrase.
The **interjection** cries out, 'Hark!
I need an exclamation mark!
Through poetry, we learn how each
Of these makes up the **Parts of Speech**.

And, while keeping up with Peter's helpful interjections, we can't possibly overlook his contribution to our better understanding of Cricket. The following are just a few of the somewhat odd terms used by the cricketing fraternity and it does all of us good to keep our minds alert (as we have so often been urged to do) by learning them off pat. And that raises yet another question, of course: the phrase 'off pat' has apparently been in common use since the seventeenth century but no-one knows for certain what was its origin – it may be that it stems from the idea that, if something can be ascertained with only a light pat, then it must be well established - another essential piece of information which can be gleaned from your 'Weekly Letter'.

Cricket Terms

Point - The origin of this term stems from early cricket when the position was called "point of the bat". The fielder stood no more than 3 yards from the batsman – hence the even older name for the position "bats end"

Duck – The origin of this term lies in the old description of a batsman who failed to score as having made a “duck’s egg”, the shape of which resembles a figure 0.

Hat-Trick – from an old custom, probably mid 19th Century, of awarding a new hat to the bowler who achieved this feat.

Crease – Stems from the basic meaning of a crease – “a furrow in the surface”. Originally, the crease was cut into the turf.

This method of marking lasted until the time of WG Grace when painted white lines were introduced.

Pads – Pads were only introduced with the advent of roundarm and overarm bowling. Prior to that, early cricketers did not consider it sporting to defend their wicket with their legs. Hence there was no need for pads, or indeed an L.B.W. law! The first pads were made of wood.

Then in 1836, H. Daubeney invented the forerunners of modern pads.

And on to Chris.

This week he has dragged himself away from of the goings-on in his garden and back to another of his many interests.

Polyptoton. Uh? Polyptoton!

I do like words. I always have. Even as a child, and a teenager, I would love to memorise strange or long words (for instance, the chemical name for methyl orange, which I found by accident, and learnt just for the hell of it, was dithylaminocarbethoxybyciclahexylhydrochloride. I’m not sure of the spelling but, anyway, it is no longer known by that name. Perhaps the chemists in our U3A could shed some light.).

Anyway, I read the word polyptoton in the early 60s. It was easy to remember – my cousin had had an operation for a growth up his nose which was apparently called a polyp. Also, I lived in Attenborough, and the next village is Toton. Easy peasy!

I’ve never heard it spoken but I imagine the emphasis is on the 2nd syllable.

Anyway, you’re unlikely to find it in a dictionary, but it’s a grammatical term (which I am sure Anna will know). Basically, it means the use of the same word in a different grammatical form. The simplest example, and how I heard of it, is in the Beatles’ song Please Please Me, the first “Please” being an interjection, and the 2nd a verb.

However, regrettably, even if you find the above interesting, you’re unlikely to be able to drop the word into a conversation, unless, of course, you steer the conversation onto Beatles’ songs!

While enjoying Chris's effort, I am reminded again of his earlier contributions about various forms of wildlife and can't resist the temptation to write just one more limerick. I was fascinated by his story about the stoat doing an exaggerated ballet dance in order to confuse the rabbit, while working its way surreptitiously closer and closer. So, how about this:

One of Nature's small mammals, the stoat
Does a dance of balletical note.
It's his singular habit
To transfix a rabbit
As a prelude to 'Table d' Hôte'.

There should, of course, be a circumflex accent over the 'o' in 'Table d' Hôte' so we have the same problem over again. I must obviously stick to English in future.

And Pictures

The rest of the Letter is, of course, about pictures. This week I'm showing two more excellent examples of Judy Bullock's work which, incidentally, I have had for some time and not used. Culpa Mea.



Then, I wonder if she would mind them being paired with a mere photograph. This shows the tree in our garden beneath which we are prone to sit in warm weather. (Funny that we are not prone when we sit but are, nevertheless, prone to sit! Chris, is this a 'polyptoton?') It saves me from messing about with sun-shades but also presents me with a puzzle. Just how does a tree decide to branch the way it does? This particular specimen seems to be unusually complicated – as though, twenty years ago, it couldn't make its mind up. Does anyone know? And that reminds me – perhaps other people have interesting photographs they would like to submit? We would be happy to publish them.

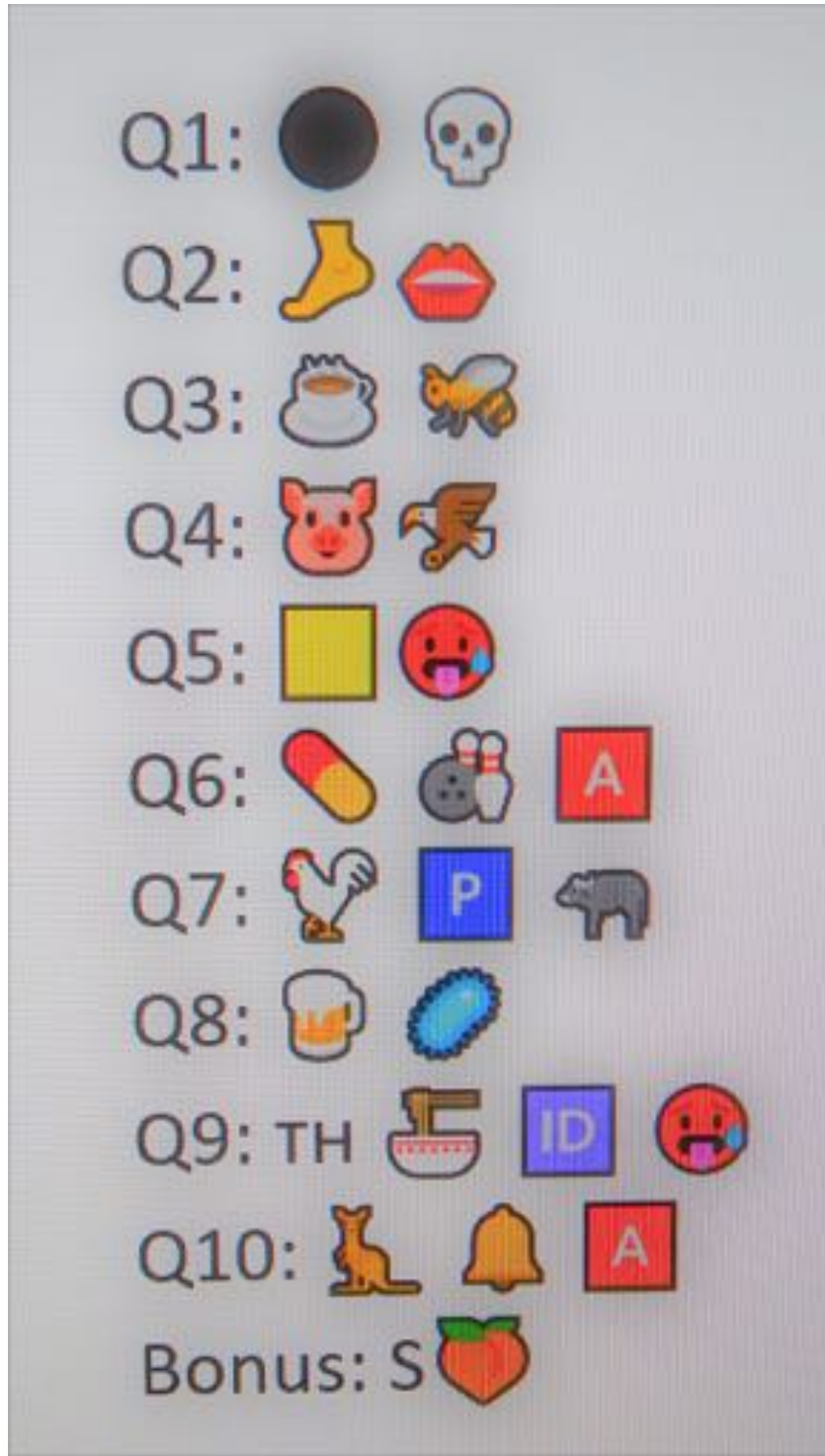


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Puzzle Corner

Peter Foster has offered us the following puzzle:

Can you decipher the names of the various diseases represented here? I must admit, I really haven't a clue – but I assume Peter will give us the answers next week!



And, talking about answers, how many of us were able to unlock John Haskell's padlock last week? The key number was:

Creative Writing

And, finally, the bit that everyone looks forward to – the contribution from the Creative Writing Group. This week it is by Sue Hillyard – a mystery story, and just how appropriate to a U3A Letter – all about those exciting meetings which we can only faintly remember but hope desperately to revisit.

A Mystery Story

It was unusually busy on my road today. In fact it was so bad I had to park 20 metres away from my door. Of course the problem with on-road parking was one I'd had to accept when I moved in here 18 months ago. Lots of my neighbours had had the little stone wall in front of their tiny gardens knocked down so that they could park directly in front of their sitting room.

I staggered with my two heavy shopping bags to my door, then balanced one of the bags on my left foot as I put the key into the lock and let myself in. I had to step over the post on the doormat. I then carried the bags into the kitchen and, before even unpacking either of the bags, I put the kettle on. There was nothing to spoil really – it was more one of those shops when you stock up on things; you know, polish, Mr Muscle, detergent, shampoo. Nothing exciting like a new M&S blouse or a cream bun.

After my pick-me-up cup of tea I unpacked the shopping then remembered the post. There was quite a lot of it and it was a real mixed bunch!

A book, a magazine, a plastic wallet with a couple of sheets of typed-up paper, a charity bag from the Air Ambulance, a letter from the car insurance company and a plain envelope with no writing on.

The charity bag went straight into the box under the sink. I usually use them either to line my bin or to put a bit of garden waste in.

The book was *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett. Arthur, the U3A Book Group leader, must have popped it through my door because I wasn't at the meeting yesterday. Such a nice man, and it was fascinating how his career as an English teacher had led him to write two excellent novels. He'd rallied really well after his wife died last year.

The Magazine was *Third Age Matters*, which keeps us 'Third Agers' in touch with what was happening in other U3As and so on. Old folks all over the country, world even!, keeping themselves busy with walking, chess, philosophy, singing – in fact anything they wanted! I'd only joined Bridge, The Book Group, Creative Writing and Yoga so far. Stan, from Bridge, always passed his copy of the magazine on to me when he'd done with it. Sometimes he couldn't quite finish the crossword and we always had a giggle about it if I managed to solve the clues that had eluded him. Such a nice man, strange that he'd never married.

I slid open the plastic wallet and took out two, no three, pages of typing. At the last Creative Writing meeting, Derek had said he couldn't be at the next one but he did say he'd write something – the topic this month is 'A Mystery Story' – if I'd read it out for him. Dear old Derek, such a nice man. He'd been devastated when his wife of 43 years had upped and left him for someone she'd met at the Bowls Club. Still, he was doing well now and the writing seemed to give him something to concentrate on. He'd even invited me to dinner a couple of weeks ago because he wanted to try a new recipe.

That left two envelopes. I opened the one from Churchill first. Hmm, car insurance renewal due in a month and premiums gone up – again! Why?

Then I turned over the plain white envelope – obviously a card of some sort. How strange. I opened the envelope and pulled out the card – it was upside down. I turned it over. It had a big red heart and just four words – YOU WILL NEVER GUESS...- and then inside...four more...WHO REALLY LIKES YOU! It was only then that I remembered what date it was....14th February...Valentine's Day! Oh, my goodness!

I sat in shock! Then I read the hand written words.....YOU REALLY ARE AS BEAUTIFUL AS YOUR NAME! And a kiss!

Who in the U3A knew my full name? I introduced myself to everyone as just plain Maggie. Had I written my full name on the membership application or on one of the group lists when I joined? Which group? Who'd sent the card? I felt a thrill of excitement.

In fact, I realised, this was just the lift I needed. It had been in my mind that Geoff wouldn't want me to be all alone forever, and it was 4 years now since he died. We'd been together 35 years and he was two years away from his 65th birthday. We'd been planning to go to South Africa on a once-in-a-lifetime safari - that had never happened of course.

Now I had a mystery to solve and a suitor of all things! I was determined to find out who'd popped the card through the door and I set about making a plan of action.

The following week, Thursday at two o'clock, I turned up at the village hall. I'd made a bit of extra effort with my eye shadow and blusher and had put on one of my favourite spring dresses. People were arriving for this month's Open Meeting and I was on a mission.

I spotted Derek first and casually made my way towards him.

"Hi, Maggie," he said, putting his arm around my shoulder. "How are you? You're looking lovely."

"I'm really, really well, Derek," I replied, leaning in to him just a little. "I've a question for you?"

Derek's eyes lit up. "Oh, ok, what can I help you with, dear lady?" (He called me 'dear lady' – what did that mean?).

"I just wondered, Derek," I said, giving him a shy smile and thinking that, actually, he was quite handsome, "You always call me Maggie...do you know my proper name?"

He gave me an odd look.

"Never really thought about it, Maggie. Why do you ask? Is it Margaret?"

"No...it's nothing. Just wondered." I answered as I pulled away. "Catch you later, Derek, there's someone over by the tea urn that I need to see."

Stan seemed very pleased to see me approaching him. I noticed that he had lovely smiley eyes.

"Maggie, just the lady I wanted to see."

This was it! He was going to confess his secret delivery and his undying love for me.

“Did you finish the crossword? That two down really had me flummoxed.”

“Yes, I did,” I said, hoping he’d find my intellect attractive, “It was Keats – an anagram of steak. By the way, talking about names...do you know my full Christian name?”

“Oh, I do like a puzzle,” said Stan, rubbing his hands together. “Maggie...let’s see...it could be Margaret or Marjorie. I’d say ‘Marjorie!’”

I gave him a little smile and said, “Oh, dear, Stan...you really do need to keep practicing your puzzle solving.”

The Chairman called out for us to take our seats. We all sat through the various admin announcements and then the speaker gave his presentation on Arctic Birds. As he droned on and showed endless slides I cast my eyes around. Finally there he was. Arthur, lovely Arthur, was sitting about four rows in front of me right at the end near the exit. I’d have to be nippy to catch him when the speaker finished.

I realised that I’d always liked Arthur, now I knew he must also like me – he was the last of the three and I had to let him know how thrilled I was to receive the card and how happy I was that he’d made the first move.

As the speaker took a few final questions I reached into my bag, found my lipstick and applied a little top up. Then I made my way through the crowd and found Arthur, dear Arthur, lovely, kind Arthur.

“Arthur,” I said, beaming my widest smile and even (I hate to confess it) fluttering my eyelashes a little. “How kind of you to drop that through my door last week. I was quite taken by surprise, I have to say. But it was a lovely, lovely surprise and I’m very flattered.”

“No worries, Maggie,” he said, putting his flat cap on. “I was passing anyway as I had to go to the post office and it only took a minute to pop the book through the letterbox.”

“Just the book, was it?” I fluttered my eyelashes again. “Nothing else you want to admit to?”

“No, just the book. Must dash. Doris is somewhere about and she’s promised to cook me tea tonight. Between you and me, we’re becoming a bit of an item.”

As Arthur turned away my heart sank. What a fool, what a complete idiot I was. I looked around. No-one else was around me, no-one full steam ahead coming my way. I found Angela and chatted to her for a minute to arrange who was driving to next week’s Yoga and then I headed home. I looked at the card on the mantelpiece and decided to let it stay there just a little longer, although I must take it down before Samantha, my daughter, came for lunch on Sunday.

As I settled into Thursday evening with one of my favourite programmes (Masterchef) I smiled to myself. I could take a joke and obviously one of my friends had played a harmless trick on me. It had given me quite a boost for a few days and I’d tell Samantha all about it when she came – it might even have been her as only she, my sister and my closest friends knew my proper name.

I was vacuuming on Saturday morning when I heard the doorbell. I picked up the polish and the duster in case it was someone I had to get rid of quickly, and opened the front door. It was the postman. All the walking he did had kept him incredibly fit but, for a man in his early to mid 60s, he must be approaching retirement. He gave me his usual beaming smile and passed me a package. It was a pair of gloves I'd ordered on line. I scribbled my signature on his electric-recorder thingy. There... 'M. Simmonds'.

"Thanks, Magdalena," he said. And he gave me a wink as he turned to go.

It wasn't until I'd got the little parcel half unwrapped that it dawned on me. Of course, he would know my name....it was on so many of the letters and parcels he'd delivered over the last 18 months. Of course... of course....! Finally, the mystery was solved. Finally I knew what to tell my daughter and finally, yes, finally, I had my valentine.

I was waiting at the door when he came to my house with the post on Monday morning.

By the way...all that's 2 years ago. Tom did retire and we're just back from seeing the Big 5! It's Machu Picchu next! Then the pyramids! More exciting than an M&S blouse or a cream bun, hey?

Thanks Sue – that must have set no end of hearts beating faster!.

Well, that isn't quite 'finally' because I have a bit of graphic news for you all. It struck me as of possible interest to look at the variation of the length of our Weekly Letter, so I plotted it. Here it is – it looks almost like the plots we see in the papers of the number of new corona virus cases!



Well, not quite – in our case it looks as though we are settling into a steady length of about eight pages, with a bit of 'plus and minus' determined by the length of the Creative Writing and other contribution. Not that it matters, of course, no-one would think of judging the merit of our endeavours by its length, would they? Or would they? I make no comment but just leave you with the data. As I said about the science of corona, you can interpret it as you will.

Thanks to all our contributors. Look after yourselves – we may yet see the end of all this! Indeed, the time may come when you won't have to read this Letter any more. That is certainly something to look forward to!

But, see you next week,

John