



## Cotgrave and District U3A

### Keeping in Touch 27

#### Wine Appreciation Group

The Wine Appreciation Group has not met for some time, of course – it was just about to start up again when lockdown struck and we were all obliged to do our wine drinking in the safety of our homes. That has two disadvantages – firstly, that we probably tend to drink more than we really should and, secondly, that we can't enjoy the exchange of opinions which greatly featured in the old meetings at the Manvers Arms. It should also remind us that it is now almost two years since David Drakes, who ran the Group and who enjoyed a glass of Sauvignon Blanc perhaps more than anything else in life, sadly left us. He even drank Sauvignon Blanc at meetings of the Real Ale Group and that takes a bit of courage, not to emphasise dedication.

Why am I reminiscing like this? It stems from seeing a picture in the paper recently of the grape harvest – its being that time of year again. But where would you suppose it was taken? Bordeaux, Beaune, Burgundy, Beaujolais? No – none of these, but yet another 'B', Bolney in Sussex, just a dozen miles from the South Coast, thus emphasising the growing importance of the English wine trade and, what is more, the rather obvious fact that these grapes are black. There was a time, not so very long ago, when English wine was all white – no-one ever thought of making red wine, that being the province of the more southerly regions of France (and, of course, Italy, Australia, Argentina, California, etc, etc). It is interesting to take a brief look at the English wine scene and follow its development.



The Romans can claim to have first grown grapes in England and, by the time of the Norman conquest, there were still no fewer than forty vineyards in the country (though much of the wine produced was for celebration of Holy Communion and was probably rather sweet). By the time of Henry VIII there were 139 vineyards recorded so it would appear that English wine was growing in importance and it probably continued to do so until in 1860 Lord Palmerston, in pursuit of his belief in international free trade, severely reduced the tax on French wine imports. This left the English vintners unable to compete in commercial terms. The twentieth century was similarly unhelpful, the two World Wars placing emphasis on the growth of food, rather than wine making. It was only in the early twenty-first century that things started to look up again, a major stimulus being provided by success in the making of sparkling wines – several prestigious awards were won in competition with French Champagne

The relatively small rise in temperature consequent upon climate change may well have assisted the growth of high quality English grapes and, while most of the vineyards are in the southern half of the country, there is at least one excellent example at Ryedale in North Yorkshire!

A noteworthy feature of modern-day English wines is their dependence on new grape varieties. While there are a few chardonnays, pinot gris and pinot noirs to be found, names such as 'solaris', 'rondo', 'ortega' and 'bachus' seem to be more common. Indeed, I can personally recommend the bachus wines from Chapel Down in Kent. Both sparkling and still versions exist and the sparkling wine is certainly competitive with many French champagnes both in quality and price. In more normal times I would also strongly recommend visiting one or two English vineyards. Most of them run organised tours and some of them even have places for guests to stay overnight. The Ryedale vineyard has certainly stimulated some very favourable reviews – but then it would, wouldn't it, being in Yorkshire! (I strongly deny any bias!).

So, the English wine trade is certainly looking up and continuing global warming can be nothing but good news in this *one* instance. However, we should keep a sense of proportion – the consumption of English wine represents only one per-cent of total consumption in this country – but it's growing and well worth considering if and when our Wine Appreciation Group manages to resurface. It would also be worth bearing in mind for a future Travel Group outing.

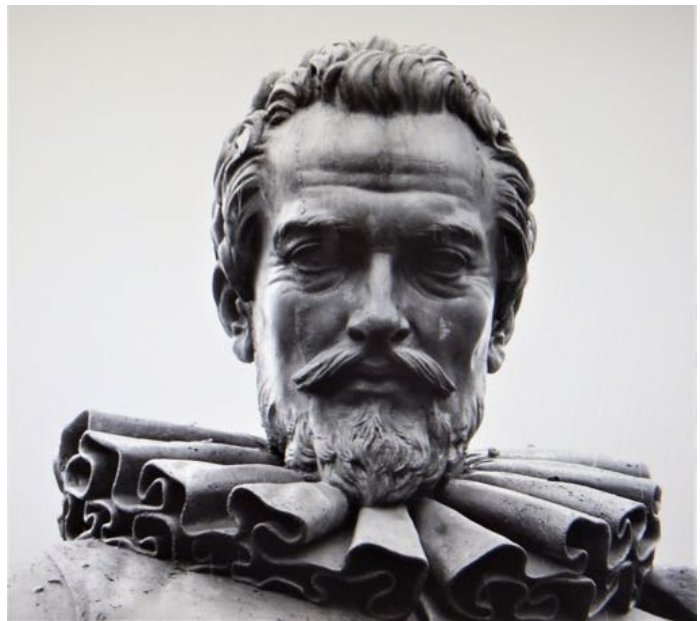


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**Simon Stevin**

A week or two ago, you may remember that we talked about my 'Day in Delft' and I mentioned a story to the effect that two men, Simon Stevin and Jan de Groot, made use of the leaning tower of Delft Church to drop two lead weights of different mass, showing that they reached the ground at the same time. In other words, the acceleration due to gravity was the same for them both – ie independent of their masses. This was an experiment that Galileo is supposed to have conducted from the Leaning Tower of Pisa but there is no evidence that he actually did it! Though he certainly theorised about it and laid the basis for Isaac Newton's subsequent development of gravitational theory.

Shortly afterwards, I received an e-mail from Hannie Woosley to say that she knew of Simon Stevin from his statue in the town square of Brugge ('Bruges' to most of us) where he had been born in 1548. She had at one time taken a U3A group to Brugge and talked to them about Stevin. He was quite famous, apparently, in several different spheres of innovation. His principal claim to fame was his introduction to the Western World of the decimal system – it had been invented much earlier by an Arab scholar but Stevin was responsible for its widespread use.

It would appear that Simon was born illegitimately, a serious impediment in the sixteenth century, but his mother married well and Simon enjoyed a fairly affluent youth and a good education. He moved to Leiden University where he befriended Maurice, Prince of Orange and, when Maurice succeeded his Father, William the Silent, he appointed Simon as his principal adviser, also making him Director of Public Works. Thus, Simon became a skilled hydraulic engineer (very important in Holland!). He later moved to the Hague, where he died in 1620 but, during his life, made valuable contributions to mathematics – he provided the Western World with its first general solution to the quadratic equation - was first to explain the effect of the moon in generating tides, contributed to musical theory and formulated numerous Dutch words for scientific concepts, such as ‘natuurkunde’ (the art of nature) for ‘physics’.



An interesting sideline to his many skills was his invention of the land yacht which he made for Prince Maurice. They raced it together on the beach at Scheveningen and achieved speeds considerably in excess of that of a race-horse. Mention of Scheveningen reminds me of a story we heard during our own stay in Holland in 1973 – the word was used during World War II to trip up Germans who were trying to infiltrate Dutch resistance movements. It is so difficult for any foreigner to pronounce correctly that it became a standard check on anyone

thought to be at all dubious! I can certainly vouch for the difficulty but we were regarded as friends, of course and were made more than welcome.

So, thank you very much Hannie – you certainly set me off on a fascinating trail of discovery.

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## Oddities of Nature

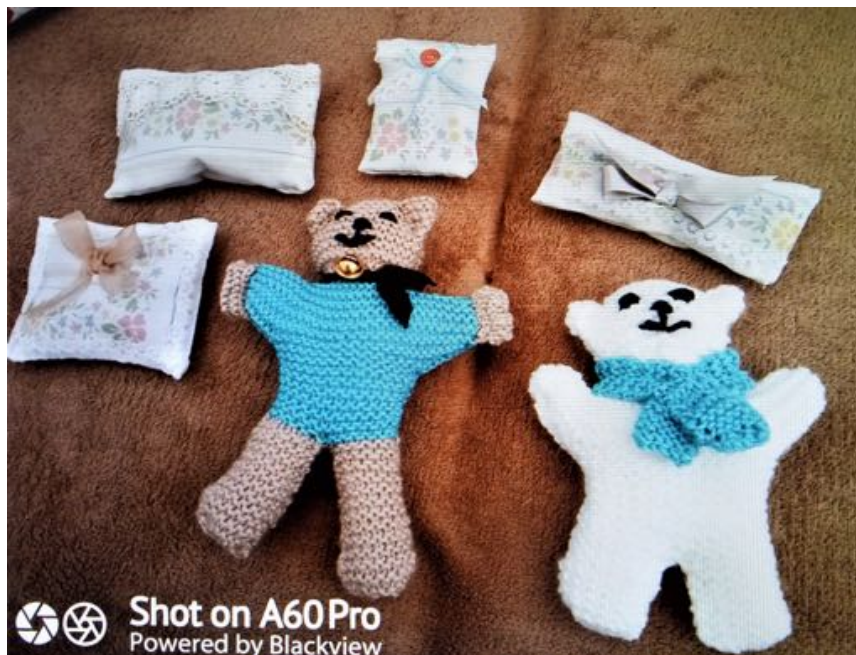
I always love to pick out a funny story from ‘The Times’ and this time it concerns pigs. Did anyone realise that the New Forest has an annual difficulty in that, at this time of year, the ground is covered with acorns and chestnuts, which are poisonous to the famous New Forest ponies, so a bevy of pigs is introduced to clear the site. Here in our photograph are just a few of them, all ready to do their good deed for the year. They look rather charming, don’t you think?

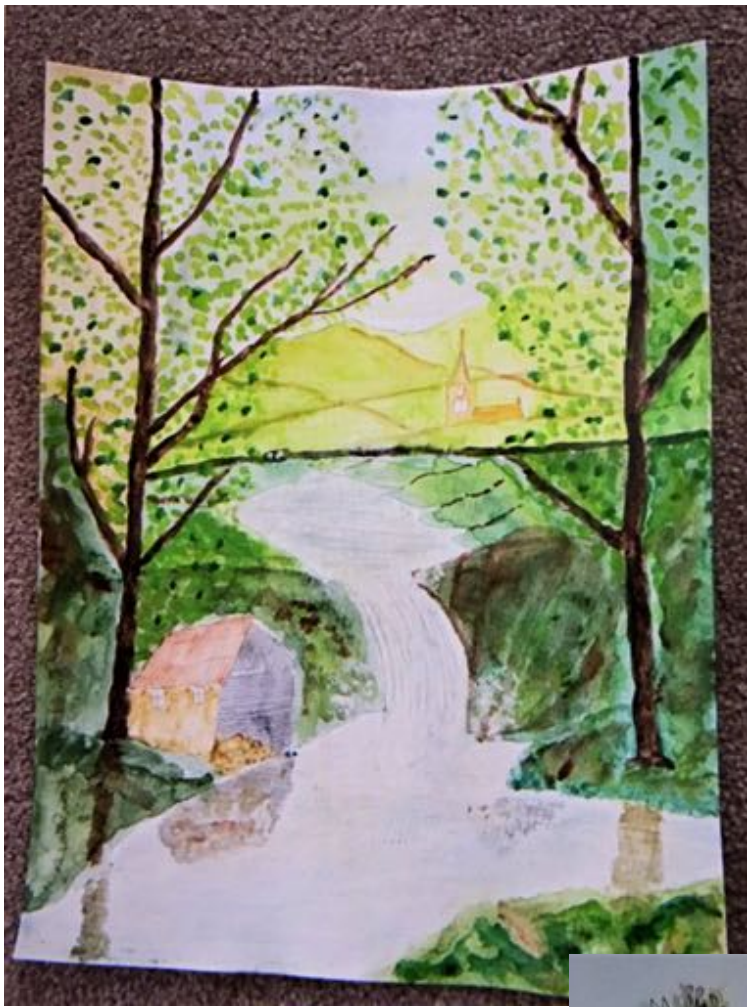


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## Art Group

Once again, we are privileged to admire two pieces of art work from the Art Group, while I am taking the opportunity to include a photograph from Judy Bullock – “Something the ladies can do if we are locked down again. Knit teddies for Tara’s Angels and make lavender bags from your finished lavender.” Thanks Judy.





## **Creative Writing Group**

The challenge this week was to write a magazine article – does this Weekly Letter qualify as a Magazine, I wonder? No, I doubt it! Anyway, here is Elsie Warby's magazine article:

### Your horoscope

by Claire Voyance

Capricorn (21 Dec - 20 Jan)

Capricorn's are usually down to earth. Take no notice of this. Make the most of the freedom offered to you this week. Try dancing naked in the light of the moon!

Aquarius (21 Jan - 19 Feb)

You've a financial windfall coming your way this week. Spend it wisely or alternatively blow it all on a trip to Las Vegas.

Pisces (20 Feb - 20 Mar)

You have a lot of uncertainty at present. Create a list of positive and negatives then completely ignore them, it won't make any difference.

Aries (21 Mar - 20 Apr)

Prepare yourself for hard work. Visitors to your home will cause chaos. Ban them from coming, after all there is a limit of 6.

Taurus (21 April - 20 May)

Don't let people think you're a pushover. If others want you to behave in a way that you're not happy with then stand your ground. Throw yourself on the floor in a tantrum, they'll soon pretend they don't know you!

Gemini (21 May - 20 Jun)

You're probably feeling rather jaded at present. It's time for a makeover. Buy some new clothes, colour your hair, lose some weight, (or just get drunk!).

Cancer (21 Jun - 21 Jul)

A disagreement with siblings or neighbours could arise in which case take a pragmatic approach. Move house!

Leo (22 Jul - 22Aug)

This is a good time for you to take up a new hobby, knitting, crochet, bridge, chess. It doesn't matter what you choose as your star sign means you'll give it up in a few short weeks.

Virgo (23 Aug - 22 Sept)

There's a new moon in your sign this week. This means that new love is on your horizon. Ditch your present husband, wife, partner, lover and get out on the pull!

Libra (23 Sept - 22 Oct)

Your generous spirit will find you planning Christmas presents and celebrations for friends and family. Don't bother, it's not going to happen.

Scorpio (23 Oct - 21 Nov)

Recent progress in your life is likely to grind to a halt. Rather than rail against this, take the opportunity to retune your plans. In other words, stay in bed!

Sagittarius (22 Nov - 20 Dec)

Jupiter, your planetary ruler changes direction this week. You will find that things are moving forward so pick up on the momentum and start training for a half marathon!

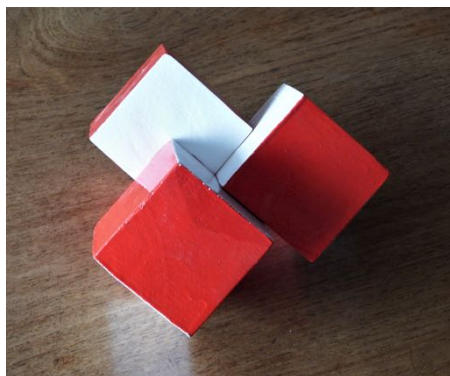
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So that's it for week number 27. You may be feeling a sense of relief that there have been no limericks in this week's edition but I have to confess that I completely failed to realize that twenty-six weeks make half-a-year and we obviously needed to celebrate that last week and that, having failed to do so last week, leaves us with no better option than to do so this week – and how better to do that than by writing another limerick? So here goes:

There once was a U3A Letter,  
Not a dry one – in fact it got wetter.  
Twenty-six weeks went by,  
Then up went the cry:  
Six months gone – but still it's no better!

We shall continue to do our best.

Do look after yourselves. See you next week,



John