



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 28

Are we going to the Dogs?

These hounds are bred near Holmfirth – where I once played cricket – so, of course, I feel a sense of comradeship. But aren't they lovely? Holmfirth is also the place where 'Last of the Summer Wine' used to be imbibed!



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Covid Fun

Once again, I was amused to see the following cartoon in my copy of 'The Week' magazine. It appeared originally in the Telegraph:

Then, alongside it was the story of the German football team who took 'Social Distancing' perhaps a little too seriously. Throughout their last match they insisted on keeping two metres between themselves and their opponents, a tactic which led to their being defeated by thirty-seven – nil!

Now for the serious stuff:



Autun Cathedral

Many years ago Joyce and I used to visit France fairly regularly and one of our delights was to look round some of that country's wonderful cathedrals and churches. On one particular occasion we very much enjoyed a visit to Autun, down in Burgundy, not too far from Beaune. The Cathedral of Saint Lazarus is so-called on account of the discovery of Lazarus' remains in Autun during the twelfth century. Such an important find represented too good an opportunity to miss – there would be hundreds of pilgrims wishing to see the remains – so it is hardly surprising that the earlier cathedral was rebuilt in the so-called 'Romanesque' style, in vogue at the time. It is characterised by massive pillars and heavy round arches and St Lazarus represents a superb example, having amazingly tall columns, capped by wonderful carvings. In fact, it is these carvings, by a sculptor named Gislebertus, that make St Lazarus truly memorable – they are quite superb and we took the opportunity of buying two photographs which, suitably framed in West Bridgford, have decorated the staircase in our present house for more years than we care to remember. I hardly ever go up or down stairs without at least a glance at the pair of them as I pass.

They are both concerned with the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. You may recall that, when Herod learned of the birth of a new 'King of Israel', he ordered the assassination of all babies but Joseph and Mary were warned to make their getaway into Egypt until the danger had passed. So the first of these photographs shows Mary riding side-saddle on a donkey (which is being led by Joseph, though he is actually not shown on this particular version), holding her child in front of her, as though to show him off to the adoring world. It is a rather moving image and beautifully carved. Just look at the detail, even



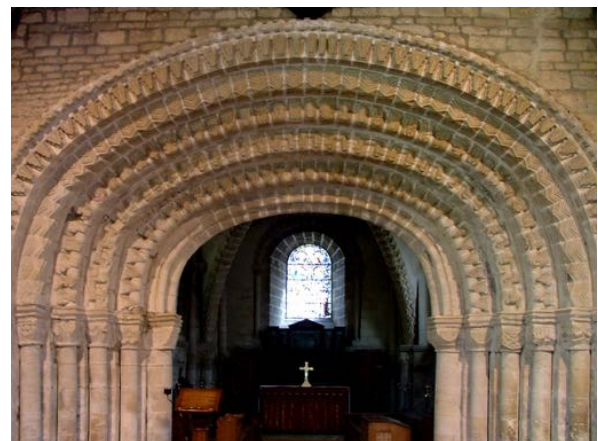
down to the texture of the rope guiding the donkey along (use your zoom facility if you don't believe me!) The second photograph is my favourite – it simply shows Joseph, sitting there with legs crossed, looking somewhat perplexed. "What, exactly", he thinks, "is all this stuff concerning a new 'King of Israel' about? And why are we making this crazy journey to Egypt?" (it wasn't to bolster the Coptic Church cos it didn't exist in those days!) "But I suppose I'll just have to make the best of it – at least I seem to be doing the right thing by the wife." I love his hat with its bobble on top. Presumably that was fashionable in the year 1130 (or thereabouts) when the sculpture was created – it certainly wouldn't be fashionable in first century Nazareth, or Egypt.

Another of Gislebertus' fascinating carvings alludes to a Romanesque story concerning the dream of the three kings who travelled from the east to worship the baby Jesus. This shows them asleep together under one blanket, while an Angel gently touches the hand of one King to waken him (note that *his* eyes are open) and points to the star which was to guide them safely on their journey. As one commentator pointed out, they must have been very uncomfortable wearing their crowns in bed but this was the only way in which their kingships could be clearly indicated. Sadly, the Angel has a broken nose but his gentle caring nature is beautifully brought out by the sculptor.



As something of an afterthought, it might be helpful to point out that the French 'Romanesque' style is known in the UK as 'Norman' and an excellent example can be found at Melbourn in Derbyshire (you will remember that we have earlier referred to Lord Melbourn as 'political tutor' to Queen Victoria). An oddity concerning the Melbourn church is that the Melbourn 'living' was granted to the Bishop of Carlisle in 1133. Conditions near the northern border with Scotland were none too settled at that time and the Bishop was rather glad to be based a useful distance to the south. This is also the likely answer to the question 'why was such a huge church built in what was then such a small village'.

Another of my personal favourites from the Norman vintage is the much smaller church at Tickencote in Rutland, close to the A1, some few miles north of Stamford. There is much here to romance about but one feature stands out above all else, the absolutely magnificent chancel arch, made up of six separate courses, five of which are dramatically decorated. The whole effect is breathtaking – it must surely be the finest Norman arch anywhere in England, possibly the world. And then one can scarcely help wondering whether it might almost have collapsed at some point in its history – what should be a geometrically accurate semi-circle is obviously distorted, as though the foundations shifted slightly, causing the arch to sag. But it all adds to the excitement. At least, it all adds to *my* excitement – I can only hope that others amongst our readers will share it with me.



Tickencote also holds yet another remarkable relic, that of a *wooden* effigy of a knight dating from the fourteenth century. There are many, many alabaster or stone effigies of similar style dotted around the country's churches but very few wooden ones. I think this is probably the only one I, myself, have ever seen – or, perhaps, I should say it's the only one I can remember!



Of course, I have to say that, in present circumstances, none of these churches is likely to be open, so this is perhaps not the best time to be extolling their virtues. However, I have included a good number of photographs which I hope may serve to illustrate the points I make. We can only long for the end of our present viral predicament to materialise.

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Art

Two very different examples of artistic endeavour for you this week, two of 'ours' and one from the more expensive realms. Firstly, I love this photograph of the local Country Park sent in by Peter Shreyhane – as Peter says:

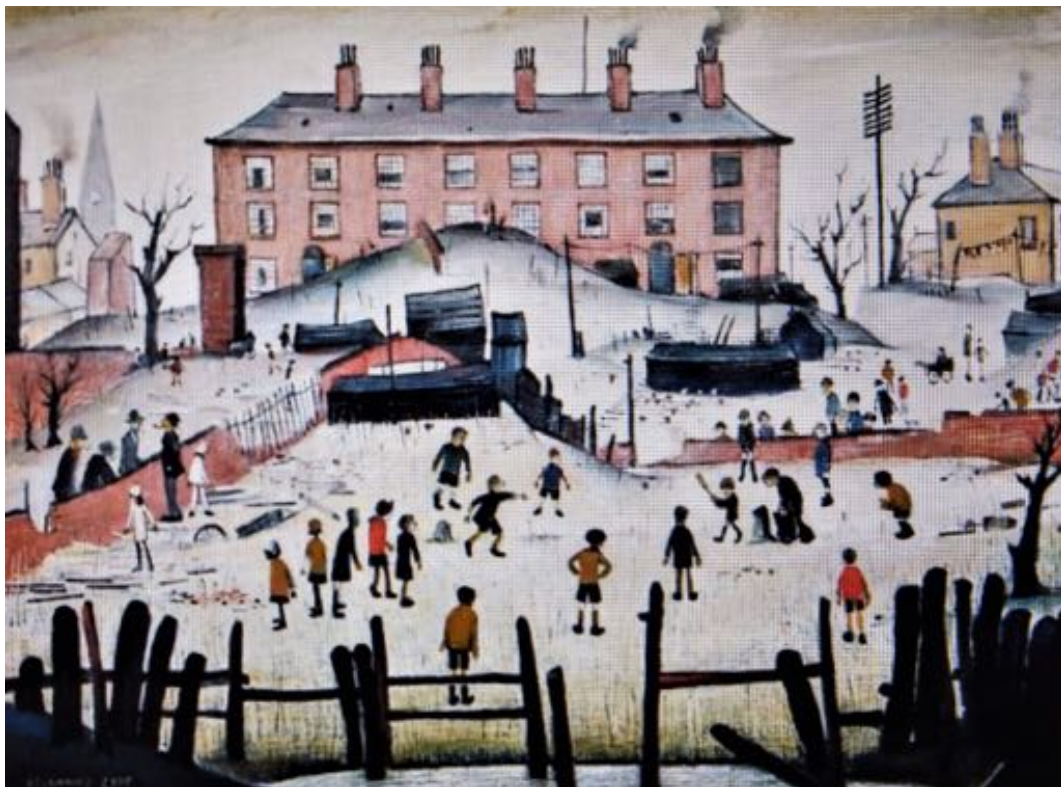
“What an asset the Country Park is – but I can't help imagining John Wayne riding out of the trees.”



Secondly, my daughter just sent me this superb photograph of Firle on the South Downs (where I used to walk).



Then, thirdly, you have my personal choice of a cricket painting. I have always enjoyed L S Lowry's work and this is, I believe, his only diversion into the world of Cricket, a somewhat informal match in the heart of Salford. It sold recently for well over a million pounds!



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Quiz Corner

All of a sudden, we have a plethora of quizzes (an interesting plural – double the ‘z’ and add an ‘e’) so I’m making an arbitrary decision (like the Government does over the plethora of Covid cases!) and giving you this one from Chris Soar. Should keep you busy for a while – answers next week (if I remember!) There is a total of 35 answers, how many can you get?

1. Red Red wine is a song made famous by **which reggae group**? **Who** wrote it? (2)
2. **Which drink** was the title of a Boots Brown & the Block Busters’ instrumental record in the late 1950s? (1)
3. **Which drink** did the Champs record an instrumental about in the late 1950s? (1)
4. **Which drink**, in which vessel, did the Dubliner’s make famous, and was a hit with a famous guitar riff for **which group** in the 1980s? (2)
5. **Which establishment** was lamented about by **which** Aussie singer in the late 70s? (2)
6. **Which cocktail** was sung about in the late 70s song “Escape” by **whom**? (2)
7. **Which** refreshing alcoholic drink was sung about by Neil Diamond in the 1970s? (1)?
8. **Which** refreshing drink did **who** offer to buy “one more” of in the 1960s? (2)
9. **Who** said **what** were “sweeter than wine” in the late 1950s or early 1960s? (2)
10. **What** type of sunrise did **which** famous American group suffer “just another” of, in the 1970s? (2)
11. **Which** singer of cowboy songs sought **which** refreshing drink in the 1950s? (2)
12. **Who** was the main actor in the film, **and** the singer of the hit song, “days of wine and roses”? (2)
13. **What** was made of “strawberries, cherries, and an Angels kiss in Spring”? **Who** had a hit with the song either in the 1960s or 1990s? (2)
14. **Which** spirit was the name of someone sung about **by whom** in the song renamed, but rhyming, by Barry Manilow? (2)
15. **Which** Rat Pack member sung about **whom** it was “crying in the corner”? (2)
- 16 **Which** drink was recommended by Mme Ruth on “34th and Vine”, and **which** 1950s group or 1960s group sang the song? (2)
17. Perhaps not from drinking, but **how** did Andy Fairweather Low end up in the 70s? (1)
- 18 **Which** fortified wine was the name of someone sung about by **which** American foursome in the 70s? (2)
19. **What** did “she” drink “another of” in the Mike & the Mechanics song? (1)
20. **Who** sang “Summer, the first time”, when she sipped on a **what**? (2)

Creative Writing Group

This week's Creative Write is once again on the theme of 'Short Story plus Poem' and is by Heather Lea. Thanks Heather.

There once was a lady called Heather
Who wished she was light as a feather
She had never achieved her dream
'cause she ate too much ice cream
And she was at the end of her tether

The day had finally arrived. Twenty-three weeks of waiting were almost over.

Heather phoned Alison and Trish on a What's App video call (they had really enjoyed these during Lockdown. It had been a great way to keep in touch and compare notes on how things were going).

"I'm so excited for today" said Heather "I can't wait to see you both and all the others too".

"I wonder how Steph and Kath have been getting on" Trish commented. "I've seen them in the Village but you can't really tell when they have got all their clothes on!"

Alison added "I've seen Jane out running lots of times. I've walked the dogs every day in Lockdown but I doubt that will have made any difference"

Heather went on to ask her friends what they were going to wear. She was wearing a leopard skin shift dress - it was paper thin so she would take a cardigan for afterwards. She had everything laid out on the bed in the spare room – bra, pants, dress and flip flops (she was disappointed she couldn't wear her new black sandals as they would go well with the dress). No jewellery or hair accessories – Heather even removed her wedding ring. The final piece of her outfit was a gold face mask. Heather thought it went well and it was a good addition to her growing stock of masks. She would need to make room for them in her dressing table drawers.

Alison told them she was going to wear the black dress she had worn the first day the three of them had met – over four and a half years ago. Trish had made a new dress for today – she was so talented.

The girls arranged to meet outside the entrance five minutes before the start as they wanted to be at the front of the queue. "Remember to go to the toilet before you leave home" Trish reminded. They had been advised that the toilets could only be used in an emergency.

As Heather got ready, she thought back to the day she first met her friends. They were all there for the same reason- to achieve their dream. This time they were going to do it – they were all really determined.

Heather parked in the Car Park at the side of the Hall. She was the first to arrive and she walked round to the front to wait for Alison and Trish. As she turned the corner, she saw it – the familiar sign they had missed for so many weeks -

“Welcome to Slimming World”

The girls arrived soon after Heather and they managed to refrain from hugging each other - it wasn't easy.

“Did you weigh your mask?” Alison asked them. “It could make all the difference!” “What about the flip flops – I weighed mine and they weigh half a pound” Heather was frustrated she hadn't weighed the mask but at least she had weighed her flip flops.

“Ok. Masks on and in we go girls” Trish led the way into the hall.

They had calculated that between them they had spent almost £4,000 on their Slimming World sessions.

Their husbands thought it was hilarious that they would pay to get weighed and learn about cauliflower pizza bases and tomato soup made out of tinned baked beans. They had not achieved their dream weight either. However, they'd certainly had lots of fun and supported each other through some very difficult times. It was worth every penny for the friendships they had formed and this time they were going to achieve their dreams together.

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Now, think back a few weeks and recall that in our eighteenth Weekly Letter we enjoyed an article by Chris Tomblin recounting the romantic experience of Dave and his slightly too-tight corset. Well, Chris has obviously been entranced by the wealth of limericks which seem to appear in our Letters from nowhere in particular and for no particular reason and thereby felt obliged to join in this creative endeavour. Here is her limerick, summing up poor Dave's humiliation:

There was once a young man called Dave
Who decided he had to be brave?
He got rid of his fat
By squashing it flat
But his corset just wouldn't behave.

When all this viral misery is over and we can finally cease publication of our Weekly Letters, I shall make a collection of our limericks and publish them as a book. No doubt Edward Lear will turn in his grave at the thought that it was all his fault! But he should have thought of that before he launched his verses on an unsuspecting literary world! This is our rejoinder:

There was an odd fellow named Lear
Who wrote verse which was hardly austere.
Three lines with stress three,
Interspersed, as you see,
With two more with stress two, is that clear?

It's as simple as that! Keep well and don't all groan at once. See you next week,

John

