



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 33

Do you realise that we are now almost a third of the way to our first century!

School Memories

Peter Shreyhane has suggested that we all try to remember something from our School Days – an excellent idea – and he has offered an introductory account from his own experience. Here it is:

I'm sure we all remember our School Days, with memories sometimes positive but perhaps not always so!

I struggled with reading at school. In those days everyone had the same Beacon Reader (remember?), regardless of your reading ability. I dreaded it when, as we read round the class, it came to my turn. So, by the time I reached 2nd Year Juniors (Year 4), I was still a virtual non-reader.



Then I went into Mrs Gallagher's Class.

To visualise Mrs Gallagher, think of Ronnie Corbett's Mum! She was small, wore tweed skirts and glasses and she smoked. I can see her now.

She was patient and kind and she taught me how to read and love books. Without her I would never have achieved what I went on to do.

She taught me another skill – how to sow on buttons! In her class we were all given a square of material and a threaded needle. When we had any spare time, we took a button from her button-box and practiced sewing it to the cloth.

Something I can still do!

Thanks for that, Peter – an excellent starter. Let's see who dares to try following it with their own tasty titbit! And, having thrown down the challenge, I suppose the least I can do is offer myself as second victim!

My recollections of my Junior School days are buried in unfathomable depths – apart from the time that the school was burned to the ground and I had to move to another local school! Perhaps it was a good move because I managed to pass the 'Eleven Plus' and gain entrance to the local Grammar School where I met my future wife (but that is quite another story!).

At the Grammar School I also met Mr Kniveton who taught Art (at which I was pretty hopeless) and Woodwork (at which I was, at least, somewhat better). From very young days I had enjoyed sawing bits of wood and knocking nails in but with Mr Kniveton things were different – we were taught the *proper* way to do things! I learned how to use a tri-square and marking knife to make an accurately square saw-cut. I learned how to use a marking gauge to achieve a flat surface with a wooden plane. I even learned the art of making a mortise and tenon joint – that was progress, indeed – then, sophistication of a really high order, a dovetail halving joint.

Then there was the glue pot! In those days, things like Araldite or Gorilla Glue or Evo-Stick didn't exist. If one wished to stick two pieces of wood together, one was obliged to face the terror of the glue pot. It had to be boiled on a gas ring and contained some fearful concoction of animal bones or worse – I never did learn exactly what the glue was made from! And, of course, the messy stuff had to be transferred onto one's bits of wood by means of a glue-brush. It may have once been a decent brush but inevitably it very soon became a clogged-up mess and more glue ended up on the bench than in the joint it was supposed to stick!

However, I did make modest progress and, after a number of years of trying both for myself and Mr Kniveton, I was allowed to make something useful. It was a walnut coffee table, which had to be French-Polished. That was an art in itself and took almost for ever – coat after thin coat was carefully applied, then a final coat of methylated-spirit-diluted polish and, finally, a 'coat' of meths alone which must have taken off at least one of the carefully applied earlier coats! Anyway, it was all worthwhile and we still have the finished product in our present sitting room. Here it is as proof that I haven't made the whole thing up! It must be almost an antique by now.



So, we shall be happy to hear from all of you about your own school days – don't be shy! And, as a matter of editorial convenience, could you send them in the form of attachments, please.

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Nature Red in Beak and Claw

From time to time I see a photograph in The Times which particularly appeals to me and this one really amazed me. Just how does anyone obtain a photograph like this? It's altogether beyond my comprehension. Anyway, I thought you might enjoy it too – the woodpecker is making it very clear that the nuts (or whatever is stored in the tree) are, not for sale at any price and the squirrel looks suitably impressed, don't you think?



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David Drakes

Michael O'Connor has thoughtfully sent us this appreciation of David, who died just two years ago:

In these difficult times we have had cause to think back to a dear friend who sadly passed away 2 years ago this week. Time does fly. David Drakes.

When anybody asks me what was the purpose/ use of the U3A I always immediately thought of David and answered with him as a perfect example. From living on his own with few friends he suddenly gained a new lease of life. He became an active member of the U3A Committee, a regular attendee at the history group, the Real Ale group, an organiser of the Wine Appreciation group, the Monday Club meetings and quite a few others.

He was a bit quirky! He never missed a Real Ale or Monday Club...although I never saw him drink beer...always a glass of sauvignon blanc..sometimes more than one! He worked hard for the wine group always choosing testing quizzes and offering red and white quite liberally! He usually managed to take home a few boxes of wine though!

His contribution to history was immense. Although a naturally quiet and softly spoken man, he nevertheless never missed a meeting and trip and thoroughly enjoyed himself. His work for the Committee was tireless. I learned a lot about him on car trips to regional meetings and, although he rarely talked about himself, I learned a lot about his interesting and not always pleasant past. He was a great lover of opera and a regular visitor to the city for concerts. I think he was the kind of man who would help you out if he possibly could.

My personal image of him would always be walking in Cotgrave, with his stooping gait and clutching his briefcase to his side. We never found out what was in it! Chris Soar and I visited him in hospital as did John Orton. But I always look up when passing his old flat and remember him.,

It may be 2 years since he passed away and a lot has happened locally. But he was a silent supporter of Cotgrave. We used to raise a glass of wine to him every Monday. I am sure his close friends will remember him in the same way this week. I know John Haskell, John Orton, Chris Soar, Barry, Tony Bullin, and all the other of his many friends will remember him with the same affection this week. David Drakes.

Michael

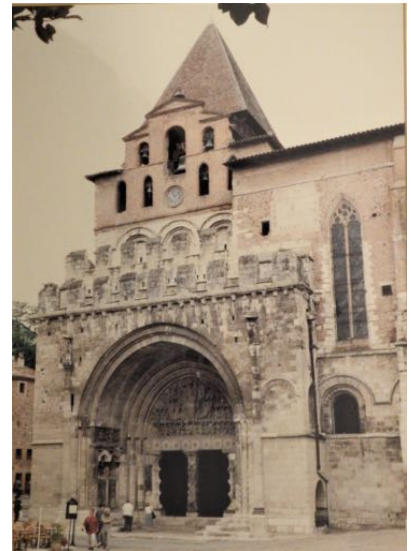


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Moisac and the 24 Elders

A week or two ago I spent time and space telling you about the stone carvings at Autun Cathedral in Burgundy. This week it's going to be the Abbaye St Pierre at Moisac.

Moisac is in south-western France, about forty miles north of Toulouse and the Abbey is another Romanesque building which grew to fame during the twelfth century as a calling point on the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain. Again, we were so enchanted by the Abbey that we bought a large photograph and had it framed in West Bridgford – here it is as living proof.



We took it for granted that it represented the Three Kings of Orient en route to see the new-born baby Jesus and it is only recently that I discovered how wrong we were. The merest casual exploration of the Internet was sufficient to show that it was nothing of the sort, Let me explain.

As you can see from the photograph of the South Porch (which I took during our visit all those years ago), the entrance to the Abbey has a large doorway with an elaborately carved tympanum above. It is from this tympanum that the photo of the 'Three

Kings' was taken. But, by selecting just three 'Kings' it is a trifle misleading! There are far more than three – in fact, there are no less than twenty-four! And it turns out that they aren't 'Kings' either! They are 'Elders' and that obviously requires an explanation.



This stone carving, which is reckoned to be one of the finest examples of French Romanesque art, represents the 'Apocalypse', as described in 'The Book of Revelation', the final chapter of the New Testament. This book consists of the highly imaginative 'visions' of St John and is well beyond my comprehension, so I make no attempt to describe them but it would appear that the subject of the Tympanum carving is God's 'Council' at his 'Second Coming' and the 'Elders' might be said to be his 'Counsellors'. Why twenty-four, one may ask and, like much else in 'Revelation' it is far from clear. One suggestion has it that the number is derived from the 'Twelve Tribes of Israel' in the Old Testament together with the 'Twelve Angels' from the New Testament. Note that many of the Elders are holding musical instruments, rather like primitive violins, though none of them seem interested in actually playing them. Many are also holding small containers of something-or-other, which some commentators interpret as being the 'Essence of Christianity'. Make of all that what you will!

However, looking at it from a more human perspective, we can surely be amused by the struggle of many of the Elders, who are craning their necks to see their Master from odd angles and the fiercely Regal 'God' (Christ?) in command of the overall scene. Looking further into the charms of the Abbey itself, I remember being truly impressed by the beautiful cloisters, with their superbly carved capitols. The attached photograph hopefully illustrates the point – it is a wonderfully tranquil spot, shaded by an ancient cedar tree.



We can sum it up with our customary limerick, as follows:

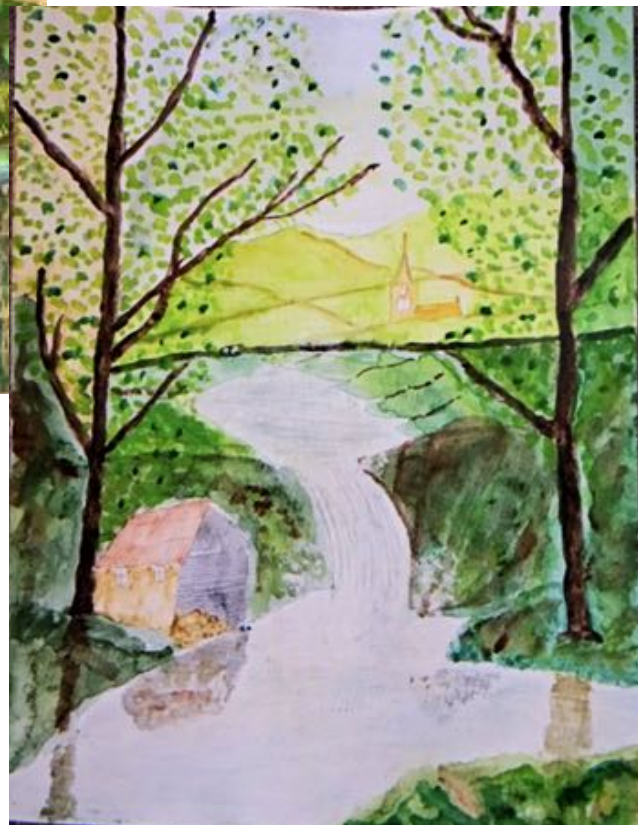
The Moissac Abbaye Saint Pierre
Is a Romanesque gem sans compare.
Its tympanic charm
And cool cloistered calm
Attest to its cultural flare.

I apologise if some of that was rather 'heavy going'. Anyway, you may be relieved to know that Joyce and I have no more photographs of French Romanesque architecture so I'm unlikely to repeat this week's 'Lesson', however long the line of Weekly Letters has yet to run!

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The Art Group

This week we shall take pleasure from three paintings by Bernie Besnard. Bernie sent these to me ages ago and I haven't managed to find space for them – the other members of the Group are being so helpful in sending copies of their work – but it seems high time they had an airing. I hope you enjoy them.



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Christmas Cards

Judy Bullock has suggested that we might spend some 'Lockdown' time making our own Christmas Cards and has sent us a few examples to light the way.



This reminds me that I was thinking only the other day that we might send our cards by e-mail this year to minimise the possibility of Covid contamination. Making one's own would fit nicely with this notion.

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Quiz Corner

One of my favourite pastimes during lockdown is tackling the 'Codeword' problems which appear every day in The Times (and other papers, for that matter). In the crossword-like grid attached each letter of the alphabet appears at least once. The challenge is to fill in the grid with real English words (no proper nouns, though), while keeping track of each letter as it appears in the double line of letters below. Three letters have been given to start you off. Answer next week.

Codeword No 4109

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1	5	20	6	11	15	23	5	26	15	23	5	
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Creative Writing Group

This week we have the first of a series of creative contributions on the subject of 'Write something Medical', this one is by Sue Hillyard. Thanks once again to Sue and to the Group.

Henry was a third year medical student. He had spent his time at Thursbury University well and had experienced a wide range of medical and surgical interventions and operations. These ranged from making a simple diagnosis of chicken pox to more complex life saving operations such as kidney and heart transplants. The latter had always been of particular fascination.

He was well regarded by his tutors, mentors, fellow students and patients. In fact, one of the reasons he was so well liked by his peers was because, as well as being academically brilliant, he also had a sense of fun. If a skeleton was found in someone else's locker, or fake blood was found in a milk carton in the common room fridge, everyone new Henry had been up to his tricks. One of his latest was to alert a colleague's pager and send them scurrying off to a ward to save a patient in distress, only to find them chatting and laughing and eating grapes. Despite being perceived as 'one of the lads' he was also admired for his attention to detail, his wide range of knowledge and, not least, his dedication to learning.

At home, Henry was nothing like the Jack the Lad that he portrayed at University. He was quiet and introspective. He didn't make personal friends easily. For that reason he had been amazed when he'd met Greta. She shared his tastes and interests.

They'd met at the library. She was a first year medical student and was studying a battered copy of Gray's Anatomy at one of the desks at the back of the library. They'd got talking and found common ground and, since then, had become rather more than friends. That had been almost a year ago. Slowly they had revealed more and more about themselves and now Henry felt it was time to see how she really felt.

Henry took the object of his interest in his hand. It was a superb specimen, fresh that morning. It was going to be the centrepiece of this evening's meal. He'd gently boiled it until it was just perfect and now he began the delicate 'operation'.

He looked at the plump round object carefully as it lay on a metal plate, deciding how best to tackle the procedure. He had two or three scalpels and a pair of forceps. He made the first incision and watched as red stains appeared on his surgical gloves. He slowly carved into the object, gently removing any loose or spare material and placing the pieces onto another plate - they would be used later, nothing would be wasted. He was looking forward to the earthy flavour even though Greta would be given the larger portion.

Fine beads of sweat formed on his brow. He looked at the clock and started to worry that everything wouldn't be ready in time. He'd cooked for Greta before but nothing like this. This was special. He bent low, this time putting on magnifying glasses in order to achieve the finer detail. There should be no flaws...everything must be perfect. They'd hinted at this in recent 'between the two of us' conversations, but this was the first time that Henry was making himself truly vulnerable. Then it was finished.

Henry sat back and looked at his masterpiece....it was extraordinary and unique and no-one, absolutely no-one, at university would suspect that he was capable of such a thing.

He washed his surgical instruments carefully. He scrubbed down the work surface, not a single spilled red spot would be left. He scrubbed at his surgical gloves then removed them, carefully turning them inside out before placing them at the bottom of the bin.

Finally he disinfected everything using tissues which he flushed down the loo and put his apron in the washing machine. The machine was still going when he went to the window and saw Greta getting off the bus.

He quickly lit candles and put a small posy of flowers in the middle of the small table. He turned on some music and lowered the lights.

Greta turned her key in the lock and came into the flat.

“Oh, this looks amazing,” she exclaimed. “What’s that fabulous smell? I’m starving.”

“It’s all for you, Greta, all for you.” said Henry. “Come and sit here. I’ve made a steak and kidney curry but, first, I thought we’d start with a salad. Close your eyes.”

“What on earth are you doing, Henry?”

“Trust me, Greta. I’ve never shared this with anyone before you but....well...you are the one!” He poured rich red chianti into her wine glass. “Please, close your eyes.”

Greta did as she was asked.

“Now, open your eyes!”

Greta opened her eyes and looked across the table at Henry. There was his salad, the usual stuff; a little rocket, small cherry tomatoes, diced red and yellow pepper, pomegranate seeds and some other deep, red flecks that she didn’t recognise.

She looked down at her own plate. There, placed right in the centre was the most exquisite and intricately delicately carved deep red rose. It’s petals looked as thin as paper, it was stunningly beautiful. In the centre of the rose was a diamond ring.

“I love you, Greta,” said Henry. “The rose might only be made out of beetroot but the diamond is real. Greta,” Henry knelt at her side, “Greta, will you marry me?”

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**That's all for this week. Keep safe,
John**

