



# Cotgrave and District U3A

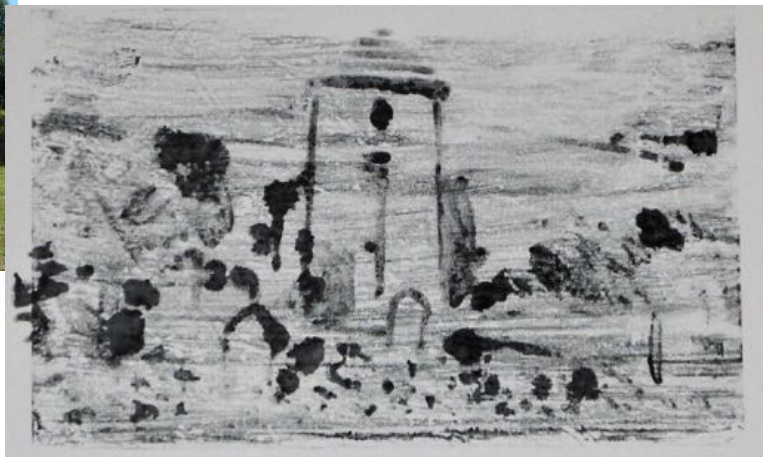
## Keeping in Touch 42

### Art

This week I am taking the opportunity to introduce readers to another of my personal interests. When we lived in Sussex, I made a practice of visiting as many of its old churches as I could and fell in love with many of the less imposing ones. St Botolphs (near Steyning, just off the South Downs) is one such and I happen to have both photographs and a couple of interesting drawings, given me by one of our daughter's erstwhile boy-friends. The contrast between photographic precision and his vaguely



impressionistic account of the same building makes for a fascinating comparison. The church, itself, would never win an architectural prize but has Anglo-Saxon origins and a bewitching atmosphere, once one is within its solid walls.



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## My Suez Crisis

Do you ever look back on your life and recall some incident which may have totally transformed it? One of those incidents happened (or, in this instance, *didn't* happen) during my two years of National Service with the RAF. I was lucky enough(?) to be posted to the Suez Canal Zone for a year. It was in 1952 and diplomatic

relations between the UK and the Egyptian Government were beginning to show signs of stress and what this meant for us inhabitants of RAF Abyad was a lack of a local labour force. Until then, the rougher domestic jobs, such as lloo cleaning, had been done by Egyptians but, when relations deteriorated, such tasks became the delight of 'other ranks'. I was lucky enough to escape this particular chore but



ended up on permanent guard duty instead – two hours 'on', four 'off' – twenty-four hours a day! There was I, just twenty years old, all alone in the dark, with my trusty '303 rifle', parading round a section of the camp perimeter, wondering what on earth I would do in the unlikely event that I should spot some sinister goings-on beyond the wire! I had fired a similar rifle, perhaps a dozen times on a training course some twelve months earlier in the kinder climate of Somerset but that represented the totality of my experience of 'warfare'. Fortunately, perhaps, this particular conundrum was never put to the test but what I do remember was being accosted by a small group of RAF Officers *inside* the perimeter, checking up on how effectively the guard duties were being undertaken. I happened to know the Squadron Leader fairly well, having played cricket with him on various occasions, so, when he asked me to hand over my rifle, I had no qualms about doing so. Imagine my embarrassment when I was given the fiercest dressing down I can ever remember and told **never, ever** to do such a thing again. I certainly learned an important lesson that night!

However, talking about cricket, brings me to the point of my story. What may come as something of a surprise to many is the fact that Egyptian sand, when well-watered, carefully rolled and covered with a strip of cocconut matting could be persuaded into forming the basis of a very true and rather fast wicket. Indeed, cricket was the one bright spot in this rather stressful life – it provided the only opportunity for travel outside the confines of RAF Abyad, though only, of course, to other RAF camps within the Canal Zone. It also provided me with a personal experience which literally frightened the daylight out of me! I was fielding fairly close to the wicket at backward short leg – perhaps ten yards behind the batsman. I can no longer remember who was bowling, only that he was rather quick but I do remember that the batsman played a rather unusual shot which resulted in the ball travelling like the bullet I never had to fire in my general direction, It ended up on the fine-leg boundary a few moments later, having passed within a couple of inches of my right eye! As I jogged gently backwards to recover the now-static missile, I gradually came to appreciate the fine detail of just how important had been those few inches separating the rapidly moving cricket ball from my right eye. The realisation came gradually to my mind that, not only had I not so much as ducked but that I had not even blinked, so rapidly had that cricket ball moved past my consciousness. Had it not been for those two, vital inches, I would surely have lost my eye – a sobering thought at the time but one that grew in significance over the years as I contemplated the effect it most probably would have had on my career as an experimental scientist, not to mention cricket.



Needless to say, the experience did nothing to spoil my enjoyment of cricket – as readers will now be well aware – but it certainly made me realise how very fortunate I had been. I might add that, being confined to camp, as we were, I never saw so much as a pyramid, nor, for that matter, did I glimpse the Suez Canal, itself! I have seen both these man-made wonders since and fully appreciated being able to see them with binocular vision.



Finally, I can rejoice in the fact that I suffered nothing worse than a broken little finger in some fifty-odd years of playing cricket

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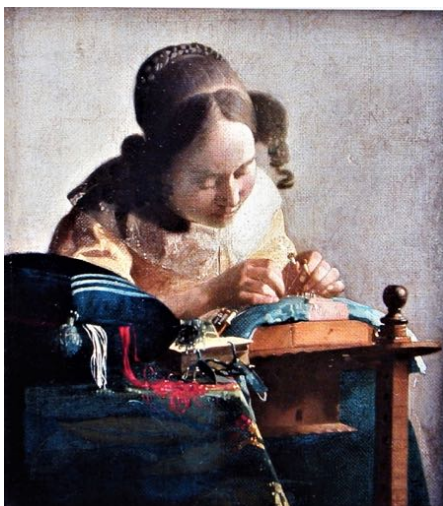
### Lace

Readers will be well aware that Nottingham is famous for its Lace manufacturing but what may be somewhat less well known is the part played by residents of Cotgrave. I could certainly not pretend to be any kind of expert on either topic but there is sufficient evidence available to make an interesting story. First of all, we might attempt a brief account of just how the Lace trade came to Nottingham, then look briefly at Cotgrave's contribution as revealed by the appropriate Census returns.

Hand lace-making dates back to mediaeval times and has been well illustrated – for example by the two paintings we show here, one by Caspar Netscher in 1662, the other by Johannes Vermeer in 1669. Lace threads were attached to bobbins which could be pushed into a straw-stuffed pillow, and they could then be taken out one at a time and replaced so as to produce cross-overs in a multiplicity of loops, pattern making being an essential part of the skill. However, the machine lace industry which made Nottingham's name began in the more pedestrian area of stocking-making. The first stocking machine was invented in 1589 at Calverton by the Rev.



William Lee who watched his wife (or girl-friend) knitting and devised a mechanical equivalent of her hand motions. He hoped to obtain a patent from Queen Elizabeth but was disappointed and took his ideas to France. Nor was this a great success, as he died in poverty but his brother brought the machine back to London and succeeded in establishing a machine industry there during the seventeenth century.

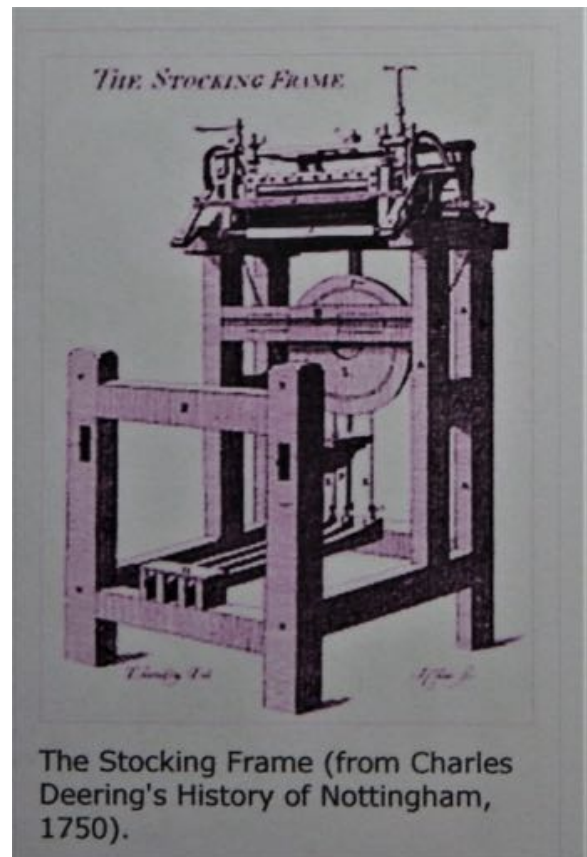


This was based on a combination of home-based framework knitters who made the cloth and entrepreneurial ‘hosiers’ who made the money! Eventually they seriously fell out and the industry moved lock, stock and frame to the Midlands (Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.) where there was an ample sufficiency of labour and, what was more the ability to fit the work into the farming year. By the year 1812, the Midlands possessed 85% of all the knitting frames in the UK.

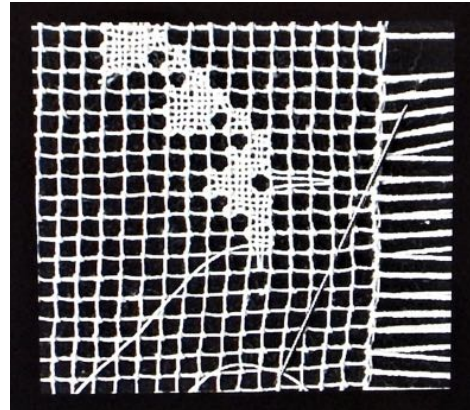
However, the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a decline in the stocking industry (one reason being the male fashion change from stockings to trousers) so, having learned how to modify their machines, the Nottingham workers chose to concentrate on lace – hence the development of the Lace Market. The city of Nottingham suffered from a severe lack of space due to the city Burgers having hunting rights over much of the outer countryside and this meant that a sizeable fraction of the actual framework knitting took place in surrounding villages such as Cotgrave, while the entrepreneurs held court in the city, itself. For example, in 1851 in Ruddington roughly 50% of households were engaged in the trade. Once again, the entrepreneurs’ selfishness drove the knitters to desperation, resulting in the Luddite Rebellion of 1811. In spite of this, however, it eventually became possible for Nottingham to expand and many large

factories were built to accommodate much larger frames so, by the end of the nineteenth century, two things had become clear: hand-made lace was a thing of the past, as was the day of the village cottage industry. In practice, there was a movement of population from local villages into Nottingham – Census returns show that, from 1850 to 1910, Cotgrave’s population, which had earlier been growing, actually *decreased* from about 850 to 650.

With that bit of background, we can now look at what little we know about framework knitting in Cotgrave. Starting with the 1841 Census, we find that there were eight men who described themselves as Framework Knitters, eight as Lace Makers, another as a Silk D Maker (?) and a fourth as a Stocking Maker. No women were listed as being involved but that is almost certainly misleading – it is well known that whole families were *very much* involved – it had merely not occurred to anyone to list them as working! This becomes much clearer in the 1851 Census, when we meet with fourteen Framework Knitters, five Lace Makers, two Lace Menders, thirteen Lace Runners, two Seamstresses and (interestingly!) one Frame Smith. There were enough framework machines about that this one engineer could make a living by servicing them all. However, the significant feature of these Census returns is the presence of women. While all the FWKs and Lace Makers were men, the Lace Runners, Lace Menders and Seamstresses were all women, their ages spanning the range 14 to 55.



A key to understanding the above statistics is to appreciate that a Lace Runner was *not* some fleet-footed damsel who chased about carrying lace, thread, bobbins, bits and pieces, etc between knitters and between them and the Nottingham entrepreneurs – she (they were all women) was a skilled lace worker, probably the key worker in the making of attractively patterned lace. The truth of the matter was that the rather crude machines available at that time were capable of making only uniform (ie un-patterned) lace material. To make the material look attractive, it was necessary to stitch, by hand, a much coarser thread into the basic lace material, thereby making a pattern – see our illustration. This thread was known as a ‘gimp’ and here we have an interesting word – it has several related meanings. It can refer to a fishing line which is strengthened with fine wires, it describes the coarse thread we have just met, which is made up of several finer threads twisted together and it can also refer to a sheet of paper with a rough edge – a ‘gimped edge’. I can remember this latter application from my childhood days but I haven’t heard it at all recently.



To summarise, there were eighteen men and nineteen women listed as working in the lace trade (or, possibly a few still making stockings?). As a rough estimate, this probably represented something around twenty per-cent of the working population. Obviously, farming was far and away the most important occupation – nevertheless, lace was quite significant. However, it was not to last. In 1871 only three men were still employed as framework knitters, though eighteen women were involved as Lace Runners or Seamstresses. In other words, the crude lace material could be better made on the large power-driven machines in the Nottingham factories – only the skilled hand work could be done in surrounding villages. What was more, by 1881 just two Cotgrave women were involved in lace work – the development of more sophisticated machines now allowed the whole process to be done mechanically and Cotgrave’s role was very nearly dead! Only Cotgrave people who had moved to Nottingham were involved from this time onward.

Finally, there can be little doubt that such beautiful workmanship merits the reward of a suitable limerick:

The stitching of Nottingham lace  
Is a thing of great beauty and grace.  
But, although it’s a stunner,  
It was done by a Runner,  
A young woman who ran a good race.

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## Comics

Following Michael O'Connor's article last week about comic papers, we have a follow-up contribution this week from Peter Shreyhane:

Michael's piece about characters in the comics we used to read stirred some memories for me of Alf Tupper, The Tough of the Track, Dan Dare, Luck of the Legion and I Flew with Braddock.

But my favourite was Bernard Briggs who, as a goalkeeper, only ever let in one goal! In one episode a penalty was awarded against his team. Instead of standing in the middle of his goal, as is usual, he stood way over to one side to encourage the penalty-taker to shoot at the open wide space. As you've probably guessed, Bernard flung himself across his goal and saved the penalty.

Now, as a ten year old goalkeeper for my primary school team, this really impressed me. So, the next time we gave away a penalty, I decided to do the same. No prizes for guessing what happened this time. The ball flew into the net (though we didn't have nets!) and I think this may be the first time the expression 'Stupid Boy' was used!

I was also fascinated by the cross-section of planes, cars, trains, etc that appeared in the centre pages of the Eagle. I still have some of these and they continue to interest my grandchildren.



Ed: They interest me too so I've copied out the account, on the following page, of the Coronation Scot for readers' delectation.

Eagle December 1959

A new chapter in British rail history was written in the summer of 1937, when streamlined expresses began to run between England and Scotland. The LMS express Coronation Scot was booked to reach Glasgow in six and a half hours from Euston, running to Carlisle at an average speed of 63.4 mph. The engine shown here, No 6220 Coronation, was the first of the streamlined Pacifics built in 1937. They were four-cylinder 4-6-6 types with huge 6ft 9in wheels and a total weight of 164 tons.

The Coronation Scot train was painted throughout in Garter Blue, to commemorate the Coronation of King George VI. On a record-breaking test run from Euston to Crewe, the Coronation Scot reached a peak of 114 mph. On the return journey the unprecedented average of 79.7 mph was kept up over the 158.1 miles from Crewe to Euston.

The Coronation is now No. 46220 of British Rail, the original streamlining having been removed in 1946.



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## **Creative Writing Group**

The ever-welcome contribution from our Creative Writing Group is another account of a Stolen Ring – this time by Elsie Warby. Thanks Elsie and thanks to the Group for their regular support.

### **The Stolen Ring**

I didn't need a ring. I usually only wore my wedding and engagement rings. If I'd wanted another ring I could have easily afforded to buy one. So what was the attraction of that particular ring?

I was at my firm's Christmas party at a high class hotel, we'd eaten a sumptuous meal and the free bar ensured that everyone was soon letting their hair down and any lingering inhibitions flew out of the window. For once I wasn't knocking back the alcohol as I was six months pregnant.

On one of my frequent trips to the luxurious bathroom I overheard two of my colleagues, enthusiastically, and in great detail, discussing their love life. I was horrified to then hear them talking in a disparaging way about Alice, the new girl in the office. To hear them criticising her dress sense and her unwillingness to engage in their often coarse banter made me see red. I'd got to know Alice and found that she was shy, didn't have much confidence but was kind and thoughtful. The girls didn't know I was in one of the cubicles so I waited until they had gone. I wasn't sure whether to follow and challenge them and determined to ask my husband's advice.

This all changed when I went to wash my hands. I noticed that one of them had left behind a ring. I picked it up and was struck by how pretty it was, gold with a large flecked opal surrounded by diamonds, clearly it was extremely valuable. I was seething at the unfairness of it all, why should such a spiteful person own such a beautiful object? It fitted me beautifully and that's when I decided to keep the ring for myself, I couldn't believe that I could be so dishonest.

I went back to the party and my husband Rob noticed the ring straight away.

"That's a fabulous ring" he said "I've never seen it before, where did you get it?"

I stammered my excuse "Oh Mum gave it to me when I saw her this afternoon. It had been passed down from her Grandmother to be given to the first grandchild to have a baby and of course that's me. I put it in my evening clutch bag and forgot to tell you about it until I found it in my bag just now."

"You're very lucky, it looks valuable, you must look after it," replied Rob.

Rob went to get some more drinks and I sat feeling bemused. I couldn't believe how easily that lie had tripped off my tongue, I'd always considered myself to be pretty honest, what was happening with me?

Suddenly I heard a commotion nearby. The two girls were down on their hands and knees searching.

"What if I can't find it, I'll never forgive myself, it belonged to my Great Grandma and has been passed down to me."



The girls headed back into the bathroom and I knew then what I had to do. I followed them and watched as they frantically searched for the ring.

“Is this what you’re looking for?” I asked whilst holding out the ring.

“Yes it is. Oh where did you find it?” One of them squealed in a relieved voice.

“You left it in here when you were in earlier. I admit I was tempted to keep it but realised that I didn’t want to be so dishonest. You must take more care of such a valuable piece. Maybe if you thought more about others rather than spending your time slagging off people you haven’t bothered to get to know you might not have lost your ring.”

I could see realisation dawn on the girls’ faces.

“ You heard us, didn’t you?”

“Yes I heard everything and to be quite honest I don’t think you deserve such a lovely gift from your Great Grandma. Maybe you’ll think about that next time you feel like being nasty about people you know nothing about.”

As I left I looked back to see the dumbstruck look on their faces. I felt so much happier than if I’d kept the ring.

But what to tell Rod? I knew I couldn’t lie again so I came clean and confessed the whole story. Naturally he was shocked but was pleased that I’d returned the ring.

“That’s so unlike you Sarah, I can only put it down to your ‘baby brain’, however let’s hope that those two have learnt their lesson.”

How did I manage to find such an understanding husband, how lucky am I?

The following week at work Alice came quietly up to me.

“The other girls in the office have been much more friendly this week. They’ve invited me to go shopping and for lunch. They’ve promised me that they’ll help me with choosing some new clothes. I wonder what happened to make them do this?”

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**That's all for this week. Keep safe – the Vaccine is on the way. Some of us have already been lucky!**

**John**

