



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 44

The Snow

When I was a boy, living in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it was more or less taken for granted that each winter would see at least two snowfalls, each at least a foot deep. How else could we go sledging? I expected to walk about a mile to school in my wellington boots, sometimes on top of walls – the best way of following a white-outed route! Oh, and we were very disappointed if the lovely white stuff didn't last at least a week. How things have changed. Today, we marvel when we receive a couple of inches and it usually lasts a couple of days only. As I write this, today has been one of those days – I wakened this morning to the most beautiful glistening scene which urged me out into the garden to photograph it while it still lasted. Already (4pm) most of the snow has disappeared from the trees and bare patches are beginning to show on the paths. The camera did, though, catch the morning scintillation in full beauty, as you will see from the three examples shown. The first photograph is of the tree that was in full flower a couple of weeks ago – today it was in even more brilliant 'flower' with freshly deposited snow, while the second is my favourite, a picture in detail which only the camera can fully 'appreciate'. The third is a lovely general view of the garden. We celebrate in the usual style:

On Sunday it snowed quite a bit;
And the sun then shone upon it.
The effect was dramatic
And I was ecstatic;
What a change from life's nit and grit.

With apologies to Laura Kuenssberg.





However, having got so far, I was offered an even more dramatic photograph by our neighbour Pam Crowshaw. She had taken the opportunity to walk in a snow-covered Country Park and came across this – which must take pride of place – a snow sculpture of a man, his dog and his cat on one of the many seats to be found there.

Nothing we can offer can rival it but we'll do what we can.



Oh, before we go on, I have to show you an alternative representation of a man and his dog in the snow– not quite so artistic but better known to us – Michael O'Connor, one of our leading contributors.

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Cotgrave Place – the End

I know you are all eagerly awaiting the final section of the Cotgrave Place saga so I won't keep you in suspense any longer. Here is all we know about the last few years.

You will remember that we examined an interesting collection of residents – tenants of the Earls Manvers – who effected a connection between the village and the wider world of the aristocracy, as evident from the Census Returns from 1841 to 1881. We have already covered the period 1830 to 1881, at which time Edward Waite Browne, son of the Cotgrave Rector, was in residence and actively running the associated farm - we have no definite evidence, but it seems reasonable to assume an area of some 430 acres. What, then, can we discover from succeeding Census Returns?

Firstly, we come across a distinct oddity. The Cotgrave Census return for 1891 makes no mention of Cotgrave Place at all! Nor is there any hint of an 'important' person who might be running the farm in an appropriate Trade Directory. Then, in 1901, Cotgrave Place does get a mention but the only individuals listed are clearly farm workers or 'domestics' (presumably living in the collection of small houses shown on various maps) – still no reference to a 'private person' of consequence. However, in Trade Directories for 1893 and 1894 there *is* mention of such an individual, Albert Armitage. He is interesting in so far as he is a farmer in Cotgrave and a Butcher in Angel Row, Nottingham. He also has a home in Nottingham at 23 Magdala Road (I have no idea where that is (or was) but it isn't important). I managed to look him up on Ancestry and found out a bit more. He and his wife Penelope Elliot "Nellie" Goodacre, from Lowdon, *were* present in Cotgrave for the 1891 Census, together with three servants so they were presumably living at Cotgrave Place then (though that particular Census makes no mention of anyone's address!). In the early years of the 1900s, he is listed in several Trade Directories as farming at Cotgrave Place but, on the other hand having a residence in Nottingham, so the lack of mention of any important resident in 1901 can clearly be understood as meaning that he was living in Nottingham on the day of the Census. That he was a serious member of the Cotgrave hierarchy is indicated by his being listed in the 1896 Wright's Directory as Vice Chairman of the Cotgrave Parish Council. He was certainly running the Cotgrave Place farm at this time but I have no further news of his activities until his death in Nottingham in 1911 (he left no children). In any case, the 1911 Census shows that Cotgrave Place was then occupied by John James and his family.

Sorting out the Armitage family was easy, by comparison with that of the James's. So far as I can be sure, John James was born in Langar in 1864 but it would appear that he had a cousin, also born in Langar (or Langar-cum-Barnstone) in the year 1863! Ancestry would insist on confusing them! Apart from learning of his birth, the first definite statistic concerning his life story is provided by the 1891 Census Return for Holme Pierrepont, where he is listed (aged 27) as living with his parents John and Mary James and two sisters, his father being a farmer. Then, in the 1901 Census for Holme Pierrepont, he is head of the household, together with his sister Annie (or Annis?) and three servants. Two of these are significant in our searches because they reappear later in Cotgrave Place – their names are Rosa Caunt, of Farndon and Edwin Smith of Aslockton. We note that John was married, though his wife was not with him on Census night! As it happened, she was visiting her unmarried sister, Annis Marriott in Cropwell Butler, together with their baby daughter Hester Mary. Their parents were probably dead at this time but her father, John Marriott, had been a major farmer in Cropwell Butler, running a 415 acre farm and employing eleven men and four boys. Their household was supported by no less than five servants.

So much for background. As we saw earlier, the James family had taken up residence in Cotgrave Place by 1911. John described himself as ‘Farmer and Land Agent’ – we must assume that he was running the Cotgrave Place farm. The family were served by five servants, including Rosa Caunt and Edwin Smith (which helps to confirm that we are dealing with the same John James family!) Indeed, the family were still in residence at the time of the 1939 mini-census, which was put together in the interest of manpower planning at the beginning of World War II, though, by this time the farm was being run by their son John Hubert James – John was retired and Frances Mary was an invalid.

In fact, John Hubert continued to run the farm until his death in 1986 but there was, of course, a major change of ownership in 1941/ 2 when Earl Manvers sold all his land in Cotgrave. Cotgrave Place was bought by Robert Oswald Smith of Langley Mill, whose wife later sold it to John Hubert. On his death the property came into the possession of his unmarried sister Annis Frances Griffin James. However, she too died in 1988 and eventually it was sold to ‘European Golf L L C’ who developed the property into its present use as a Golf and Country Club.

That’s it. Perhaps, when I no longer have to edit the Weekly Letter, I may find time to write all this up for the U3A History of Cotgrave.

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The Art Group

That was a lot of words and no pictures so here we put things to rights by showing a lovely set of new paintings from the Art Group. They are by Desna Haskell, Bernie Besnard and Roy Fardell. Thank you all again for brightening the Weekly Letter, as you do. We also have a photograph of Roy at work – I like the sheet spread out to catch any excess paint which might discolour the patio!





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Quiz Corner

Michael O'Connor's piece about Wireless (or was it Radio?) stimulated Peter Shreyhane to conjure up the following quiz – can you recognise the various radio personalities from the 50s and 60s shown here?



1. Can you name the show and who is on the back row turning in?



2. Who is this? Can you name one of his shows?



3. Can you name the programme and the three performers?



4. Name the programme.



5. Who is this?



6. He hosted a programme called “Have a Go” Who is he and who was “at the table”?



7. Who was being educated?



8. Name the four Goons.



9. Name the family.



10. Can you name all three?

As usual we will publish the answers next week.

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Lillibulero

Michael's piece about wireless last week also made me think about the BBC's use of 'Lillibulero' as a theme tune so, of course, I looked it up on the Internet. I little knew just how important a history the tune possesses – it was composed as a March by Henry Purcell in 1686 and was used by several later composers, including Mozart. However, its popularity with the English public sprang from lyrics written by Lord Thomas Wharton, also in 1686. These were intended to satirise King James II's appointment of the Roman Catholic, Richard Talbot, 1st Earl of Tyrconnell as Lord Deputy of Ireland, which appeared to be a counter to the dominance of Puritan appointments during the Commonwealth. James then began to import Irish regiments into England and Lillibulero became extremely popular as a song demeaning these Irish troops.



There were many other uses of the tune with different lyrics – it would take too long to refer to all of them – however, I can't restrain myself from mentioning just one, a much-loved drinking song, 'Nottingham Ale', popular round about the end of the eighteenth century. Apparently, a landlord named Gunthorpe kept a hostelry known as the 'Punch Bowl' in Peck Lane (near the Lace Market) and he sent, as a present to his brother, a barrel of 'Nottingham Ale', in return for which, his brother composed the lyric. It is too long to reproduce here but I will just whet your whistles with the refrain:

Nottingham Ale, boys, Nottingham Ale;
No liquor on earth is like Nottingham Ale.
Nottingham Ale, boys, Nottingham Ale;
No liquor on earth like Nottingham Ale.

Not difficult to remember! And it's easy to see how it can be sung to the tune of Lillibulero. It is also intriguing to know that there is a Peck Lane in Gunthorpe as well as the Gunthorpe who used to live in Peck Lane, Nottingham!

However, this is all very well but it doesn't explain why the BBC should choose Lillibulero as its signature tune. There seem to be two factors. Firstly, it is a relatively short snatch of melody, easily recognised by a wide range of listeners but, perhaps more importantly, a tune easy to disentangle from the 'short wave mush' typical of the early BBC World Service. Apparently, it was chosen originally by the engineers who first popularised these transmissions and there is a suggestion that several of them learned the song while members of REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) during the Second World War.

So, there you have a brief summary but there's a lot more in the Wikipedia article.

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Further Childhood Memories

The idea is really catching on – this week Anthony Taylor has been good enough to send us his contribution. Anthony and Lyn moved to Cotgrave last July and immediately joined the U3A Branch. Welcome to both of you – here's hoping we shall soon be able to meet! Anyway, thanks very much for the article:

My early years up to the age of 7 were spent in Braunstone on the outskirts of Leicester. Our house backed onto fields and the farm access to the fields beyond ran at the side of our house. I remember kindergarten and particularly the little camp beds to which we reposed after lunch. Primary school was a good mile and a bit away. At age 5 Mum took and collected you on the first day. After that you went alone picking up newfound school mates along the way. We soon learnt that when the weather was right we could go to and from school via the fields. Here we found ponds and places where dens might be made and noted for the holidays. Even at that young age holidays were spent out all day whenever possible. Armed with fishing net and a jar with a string handle and jam sandwiches in a paper bag for lunch we just played and played. Sticklebacks caught were brought home with such pride. I was extremely fortunate that my parents came from Bournemouth and grandparents remained there. From age 5 onwards for my summer holiday I was put alone on a train at Great Central Street station. With a tip to the Guard to look after me I was collected by my grandfather at Bournemouth Central. Some Guards would have me in the Guard's Van and I sat on the chair looking through the periscope pointed down the train to the puffing steam engine at the front.

In the early 50s farms were still labour intensive with widespread mechanisation only just beginning to come in. The community turned out at harvest time and with my father being a frustrated farmer we were always first there. The older lads came up with a plan for a den. The rick of straw bales was constructed in such a way that inside was a cavity to create a den. Access was from a bale turned on the periphery and returned back for privacy inside. The inevitable darkness was cured by the jar and string handle this time containing a lit candle.

My parents were churchgoers and I still chuckle at the memory of a family service at Braunstone St Peter's at which the church officers were despatched to the four corners of the church with instructions to look up to the roof for fear it might move as the congregation was exhorted to render 'Onward Christian Soldiers' fortissimo.



At 7 family needs took us in Leicester itself close to Spinney Hill Park to a corner shop run by mum. Life was obviously quite different with all hands put to use. In those days sugar came to shops in large bags which the shopkeeper and family then weighed out into 2lb blue bags. Sides of bacon were hand boned before slicing to order. My mum taught me to cook and my speciality was bread and butter pudding. I remember the older boys making trolleys out of old pram wheels a few bits of wood and string to steer. My older brother made a sledge out of a pallet and with flat steel runners (obtained from where I know not) and painted it scarlet red.

The sledge was for the hill in Spinney Hill Park and that was great winter fun on the doorstep. I recall the winter smogs and my job of walking in front of the car being driven by my father guiding him with a white handkerchief. I was old enough by then to be wary of Jumping Jacks and Penny Bangers at Guy Fawkes time. My bedroom was on the third floor so pretty high up and from my window I could see the city of Leicester laid out in front in the Soar valley. Lewis's the then city centre departmental store had an illuminated tower and was the focal point of the vista. I distinctly remember one evening when I was in bed and a terrific thunderstorm was brewing. My father came unexpectedly into the bedroom and threw open the sash window. He invited me to join him and the two of us knelt leaning against the window board watching the storm as it lit up the valley beneath us with huge flashes followed by crash bang wallop. It was an inspired move by my father as from that day I have had no fear of thunderstorms – rather the opposite – bring it on! Some years ago with a relative staying with us we set off to revisit the corner shop and what did we find – it had been turned into a Mosque. I think my late parents would have raised a wry smile at that.

At 9 we moved again this time to a village Post Office General Stores and News Agency near Hinckley with both parents now involved. This was a real change in business intensity and to be honest my childhood was probably foreshortened on the move.

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Other Welcome Contributions

We are grateful for two further contributions, one from Maggie Spencer and one from Sally Bates. Thank you both for helping the Weekly Letter to express the feelings of members.

Maggie has recently moved to Ruddington but still hopes to join her Cotgrave friends when it becomes possible again. She is a member of Ruddington Methodist Church and has sent us an extract from their monthly magazine in the form of an updated version of the Twelve Commandments.



As she says, they are both amusing and profound:

1. Thou shalt not worry – worry is the most unproductive of all human activities.
2. Thou shalt not be fearful, for most of the things we fear never come to pass.
3. Thou shalt not cross bridges before you get to them, for no-one has yet accomplished this.
4. Thou shalt face each problem as it comes. You can only handle one at a time, anyway.
5. Thou shalt not take problems to bed with you for they make very poor bedfellows.
6. Thou shalt not borrow other people's problems. They can take better care of them than you can.
7. Thou shalt not try to relive yesterday. For good or ill, it is gone. Concentrate on what is happening today.
8. Thou shalt count thy blessings, never overlooking the small ones, for a lot of small blessings add up to a big one.
9. Thou shalt be a good listener, for only when you listen do you hear other ideas from your own. It's very hard to learn something new when you are talking.
10. Thou shalt not become bogged down by frustration, for 90% of it is rooted in self-pity and it will only interfere with positive action.

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Sally is a protagonist of ‘Plastic-Free Cotgrave’ – a worthy cause:

As a member of the U3A I’m delighted to get the weekly articles from John- it’s a great way to be in touch with the wider community as we all get used to more local and home based activities. Over the last year we’ve all developed new interests and skills.

I’m delighted to be a designated Champion for Plastic Free Cotgrave. Like all of us I want to do what I can to reduce the amount of single use plastic in my life. The danger of plastic to the environment and wildlife has been highlighted by Sir David Attenborough and Chris Packham amongst many.

Working from home, mainly online, I had initially found it difficult to think of three ways I could help to make a difference. Happily Brenda Ainsley was able to help me and, with the use of a toolkit, I committed to these simple changes:

- I will remove take away drinking containers
- I will use pod free coffee machines
- I will recycle my ink print cartridges
- I will reuse document wallets and ban single use plastic wallets
- I will replace plastic tape with paper tape
- Easier than I thought!
- Have a think about what you could do. Only needs 3 changes to be a Champion!
- Every little helps! Together we make a big difference

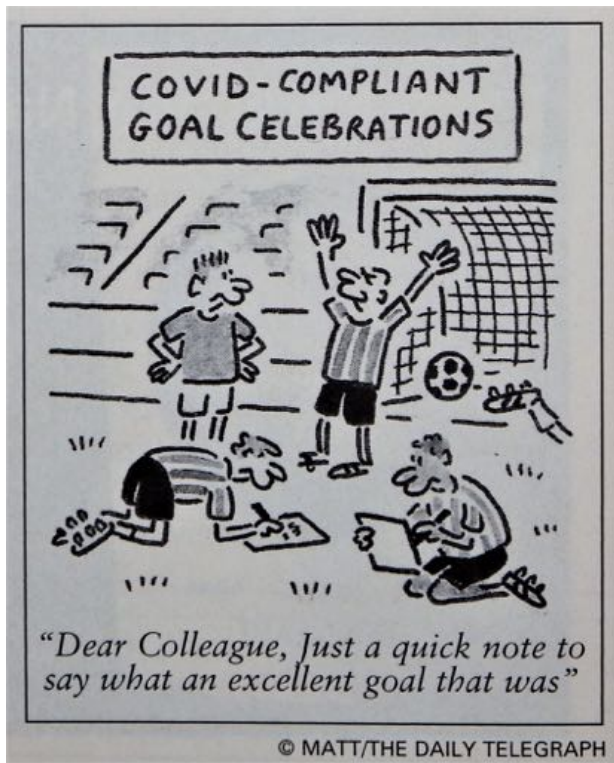
Have a look the local website: <https://www.plasticfreecotgrave.org.uk>



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From the Press

Just one cartoon for you this week and an interesting early-morning photo from Newmarket. In case not everyone is an ardent football supporter, perhaps I should explain that there has been a move to stop footballers flinging their arms about one-another when they score a goal – all in the interest of keeping Covid at bay!



Creative Writing Group

We are lucky enough to have two contributions from the Creative Writing Group. Thanks to them for being such good supporters.

The creative writing group's recent assignment was to write a description of a famous person living or dead, real or fictional in 500 words or less.

Who am I Christine Tomblin

I am a man and I must be oh about 180 years old now. I feature in a book and several films. You're sure to have heard of me as I'm quite famous and if I say so myself my fame hasn't diminished over the years and in fact I would say it's grown.

I wasn't too happy as a child. Most of my childhood was spent at boarding school as my mother died when I was a baby, in fact when she was giving birth to me. I did have an older sister though who loved me but she died giving birth just like our mother. Childbirth was hard in those days and some babies didn't survive at all. So I suppose I was lucky..

Anyway I knew from an early age that I had to make my own way in the world and any money I could expect would be of my own making. I decided to become an accountant as I liked numbers and oh money of course. I was good at it and eventually I had a partner and my own business. Oh yes I forgot to say, I became engaged when I was an articled accountancy clerk but eventually I couldn't make her understand that I needed to make more money before I could settle down and be happy and she called the engagement off. I didn't make that mistake again. Anyway it gave me more time to concentrate on the important things in life like making money for one.

The years seemed to fly by. I was so busy with business that I rarely saw my nephew but I kept my eye on him of course although the silly fool made a huge mistake by marrying a silly girl with no money. In love he said Pah! I washed my hands of him but he kept pestering me with good will.

My partner died eventually. Shame of course but I carried on and like me of course he'd never married so I moved into his house and took over his possessions. I became richer than ever.

Any of you believe in ghosts? No me neither until one snowy night on Christmas Eve. Dreams/ghosts who knows which but that night changed my life. I used to hate Christmas now I love it. I don't have as much money as before but I know how to keep Christmas.

Who is she?

Jim Odell

She was born in Swindon, Wiltshire 2nd. October 1968. An award-winning stage and film actress. In the Queen's Sister, she played the part of Princess Margaret. In the Cape of Wrath, Evelyn Brogan and in Torchwood, Alice Carter.

She was educated at the Royal School of Speech and Drama.

In 1994 she married Coney Johnson. Now parted. There are two children, Lila and Alexander.

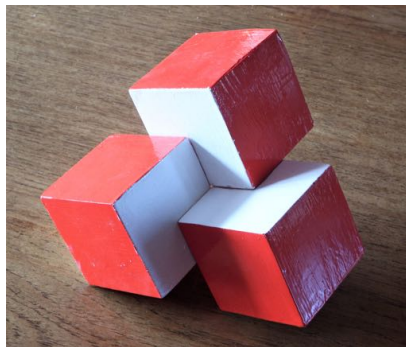
She was awarded the International Emmy Award for Best Performance by an Actress.

More recently she has played the part of Mrs. Maigret to Rowan Atkinson's Jules Maigret.

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That's all for this week. Keep safe and remember to keep your distance.

John



PS Just so you don't forget, I might remind those with appropriate taste that:

There once was a Nottingham ale,
A beer known never to fail.
It was brewed in Peck Lane,
Come fine weather or rain,
Or so goes the publican's tale.