



## Cotgrave and District U3A

### Keeping in Touch 45

#### Spring

It seems to have been a particularly long winter, what with lockdown, two snowfalls and much gloomy, overcast sky but spring really is on the way – witness these snowdrops at the top of our garden, basking in winter sunshine.



## Data

Data has become all-important these days, to the extent that the buying and selling of data is now a business in itself, so it is of interest to know something of the mechanism by which it is accumulated. The following tale may help to clear up any misunderstanding.

### Where do our big chiefs find their wisdom?

In these difficult days, most of us have wondered how our great leaders and policymakers reach their 'wise' decisions. A few days ago, I came across this little fable which may help.

It's late Fall, and the Native Americans on a remote reservation in South Dakota ask their new chief if the coming winter is going to be cold or mild. Sadly, the new leader has never been taught the old secrets and when he looks at the sky, he can find no answer.

But he thinks it wise to be prepared just in case, so he tells his tribe it will indeed be a cold winter and they should start collecting firewood immediately.

A few days later, he decides to check with the National Weather Service and it tells him: 'Yup, it looks like it's gonna be a pretty cold winter.'

So he goes back to his people and tells them to collect even more firewood.

A week later, he makes another call. This time, he's told it's going to be a very cold winter. So the chief goes back to his people yet again and orders them to collect every scrap of firewood they can find.

By now, winter is almost upon South Dakota, so the chief makes one last call.

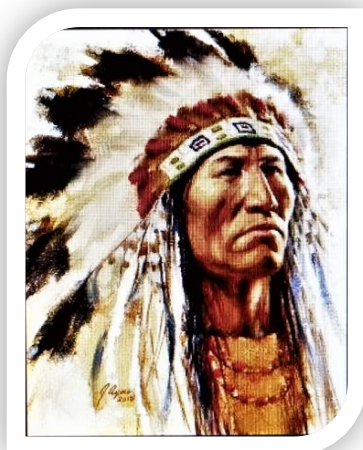
'Are you absolutely sure that the winter is going to be very cold?'

'Absolutely,' the man replies. 'It's looking more and more like it is going to be one of the coldest winters we've ever seen.'

'How can you be so sure?' the chief asks.

The weatherman replies: 'The Indians are collecting a load of firewood.'

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The Red Indians came to be called 'Indians' because Columbus, wishing to show that the world was round, set off westwardly with the intention of reaching India. He just didn't realise that the Americas came first! 'Red' of course because of their ruddy features.

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## Bricks (They're usually red, too!)

I first became interested in bricks when I began working on the history of our present house in Scrimshire Lane, some twenty years ago. We believe that it was built by the Scrimshire family to house some of their servants, the Scrimshire manor itself being located roughly where Green Platt is today – just a little way from the top of our garden! Exactly when our house was built is a matter for speculation but the previous owner told us she thought it was “about 1690”. My interest in bricks was based, therefore, on the fact that brick sizes varied somewhat during those early years and I hoped to learn something of the house history from the size of the bricks used and the manner of their bonding. Sadly, the main structure of the house is invisible, beneath a healthy coating of render. All I had to judge by was a couple of layers of brick at ground level, below the rendering and a few sections of walling in the roof space. These latter were triangular in shape, suggesting that they had played a role in supporting an earlier roof (the house had originally been thatched, judging by the scraps of straw I found in the roof space but there may have been more than one roof in the succeeding years). An example of one of these bits of wall, shown here, is rather alarming in its crazy and random bonding – one can only hope that the load-bearing walls are better structured! (They probably are – they've been standing securely for at least three hundred years!)



But what of the *size* of the bricks which are visible? It is clear from the photograph that the roof-space bricks are variable in size and, perhaps more importantly, they are about two-and-a-quarter inches thick (compared with 3 inches today). As I understand it from various books, this is typical of bricks made round about the end of the seventeenth century. Bricks were about two inches thick up to the middle of the sixteenth century, then gradually increased to two-and-a-half inches by 1725. The bonding (or lack of it!) is also consistent with a 1690 date.

That is enough about our house – this is intended to be about bricks. The obvious question one must ask is ‘how were bricks made in those early years?’ and it is an interesting story, particularly in view of the fact that Cotgrave had its own brickyard (to the right of the road about half-way up Owthorpe Road) until the end of the nineteenth century. We have lots of evidence from OS Maps and from Census Returns to this effect. What is not clear is when brick-making actually started in the village. It would be nice to believe that our house, for example, was built from Cotgrave bricks. The earliest evidence for brick-making is provided in the WEA booklet ‘Cotgrave, Aspects of Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, which includes a map of 1731 showing ‘Brick Kiln Close’. We cannot pinpoint the start-up of Cotgrave brick-making any more precisely, the difficulty being that very early brick houses used bricks made on the spot, rather than carted from some distance away.



The best local example of this is Holme Pierrepont Hall which was built round about 1500. There is clear evidence that the bricks used were made on site but it was, of course, necessary that an adequate supply of suitable clay was available.



The key to a shift towards more centralised manufacture is provided by the coming of canals in the eighteenth century, followed by railways in the nineteenth. Thus, Mapperley, to the east of Nottingham, which had a good source of clay, only developed large-scale brick-making from about 1800. In fact, clay digging was illegal until at least 1766! It is interesting to learn that suitable clay is frequently associated with the presence of coal so coal mining and brick-making tended to develop together, Nottinghamshire being a good example of the trend. The clay dug out to expose each coal seam was used to manufacture bricks as a by-product.

Whilst we have no evidence when the Cotgrave brickworks might have started, we do know quite a lot as to the techniques involved. Firstly, the clay had to be dug out by hand and there is evidence that the Cotgrave clay was dug from the hillside just above the brickworks - obviously, the nearer to the brickyard, the better. It was then necessary to expose the clay to the weather – winter freeze and thaw served to break down the structure so that it was ready for brick-making in the spring. Then came the hard bit – the clay was ‘puddled’ in a ‘soaking pit’, where it was kneaded by both hand and foot until it was ready to be pressed into suitable wooden moulds, together with sand, which prevented it sticking to the mould. A typical moulder (the key man in the whole enterprise) might work for 12 to 14 hours a day and make up to 5,000 bricks. The brick moulds were then left to dry in air, two days one way up, two the other. They were then further dried under cover for two weeks before being taken to the kiln for firing (with coal or log fuel).



Heating had to be gentle at first (for two weeks), or there was danger that the bricks would explode! Then firing continued (for another week) at a temperature of about 1000 degrees centigrade. When cool, the bricks could be sorted into different qualities according to where they had been in the kiln. The best bricks were used to face a building, the less satisfactory ones for use ‘behind the scenes’.

An interesting detail of the Cotgrave activity concerns the puddling process. At some point, the hard work associated with puddling was handed over to an unfortunate horse, which plodded round and round, turning a wooden beam which stirred the soaking pit. However, there is a distinct possibility that, towards the end of the nineteenth century, this task may have been taken over by a steam engine. Census Returns record the fact that in 1851 and 1861 there was a Steam Mill (probably used for grinding corn), which was located at the Gripes, very close to the Brickyard. What is more, in 1881 we find mention of a Cotgrave resident, Joseph Jimson who worked as an ‘Engine Driver’. The evidence is far from clear, but it seems possible that this steam mill may have been used as a replacement for the poor old horse in the Brickyard, the grinding of corn having moved into factories in Nottingham some time prior to 1881.

So much for Cotgrave bricks but we might draw this account to a close with a brief reference to an important development at Mapperley. It was here in 1866 that an entrepreneur from Essex, Edward Gripper, together with his associate, William Burgess, developed modern brick-making. They negotiated with a German brick-maker, called Hoffman to use his ‘continuous burning kiln’ which enormously speeded up the firing process. They also developed the use of plastic wire cutting, rather than the use of moulds to define individual bricks, thus taking the annual brick production out of the thousands and into the millions. Not only did they spur the development of Victorian Nottingham Brick but they also supplied the facing bricks for the building of St Pancras Hotel in London, opened in 1873. Nottingham brick-making should surely be as well-known as its lace-making.



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## Art Group

Three contrasting paintings from the Art Group which demonstrate their versatility. They are by Desna Haskell, Bernie Besnard and Don Whitaker. Thanks once again to the Group for brightening our lockdown lives



## Quiz Corner

Firstly, we give you the answers to Peter Shreyhane's Radio quiz of last week:

1. 'The Navy Lark' – top left Ronnie Barker, who played 'Fatso' Johnson
2. Kenneth Horne – 'Beyond Our Ken' and 'Round The Horne'
3. 'Take It From Here' – Jimmy Edwards, Dick Bentley, June Whitfield
4. 'Ray's a Laugh'
5. Jimmy Clitheroe in 'The Clitheroe Kid'
6. Wilfred Pickles -Mable was at the table.
7. Archie with Peter Brough – A ventriloquist with a radio show!
8. Harry Secombe, Michael Bentine, Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers
9. 'Life With The Lyons'
10. Tony Hancock, Bill Kerr, Sid James – 'Hancock's Half-Hour'

And, as a follow-up we have an interesting contribution from Sandra Seymour:

A little quiz to while away the time when the Telly gets boring or the weather is wet or cold. Bear in mind that only those of a certain age will be able to complete it. The answers are all amounts of 'old money' and total up to the grand sum of £17 – 5s – 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>. (I had to work hard to produce that 'half' symbol!)

1. A Cycle
2. A Man's Name
3. A Kind of Pig
4. A Man who works with Leather
5. A Male Voice
6. A Tiara
7. A Poorly Octopus
8. Part of a Gorilla's Leg
9. Mars, Jupiter and Neptune
10. A Girl's Name

Answers next week.

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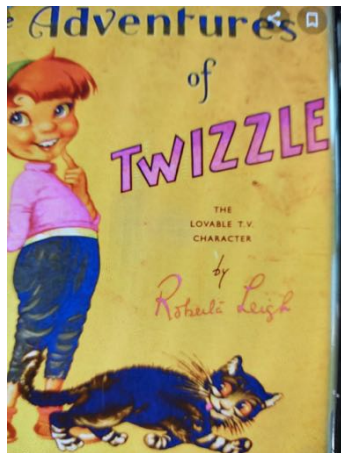
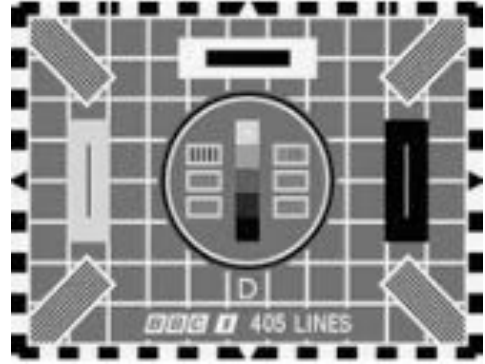
## More From Michael

Having regaled us with reminiscences from the days of Wireless, Michael O'Connor now wants us to think ahead to the early days of TV. Who am I to frustrate him?

Having given my recollection of wireless in the 1950's I now turn to my thoughts on early TV. Usually when I arrived home from my primary school I went straight outside to play with the gang I ran with, over the railway tracks to the banks of the river Usk. It was a different and exciting time. We went to the banks of the cocky elbow stream and on to Newport Docks and the transporter bridge.

TV was only on for 39 hours a week until ITV arrived and by 1955 it increased to 49 hours. Like most people we didn't have a set at first but I remember watching the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth on a very small box set in a neighbour's house. Mostly we were fascinated by the 'test card'...watching nothing but a still picture or a hand working a potters wheel. But TV did give a face to the wireless voices. We laughed at Peter Brough the ventriloquist with Archie Andrews.... in wireless he was great, on sight he moved his lips obviously. The presenters were very correct...posh southern accents, short back and sides haircuts with suits for men and the women sat down like the Queen with designer dresses.

Most of it was live with all the pitfalls that brought. I remember later Charlie Drake being seriously injured when thrown through a bookcase and window and nobody realising. And of course Tommy Cooper, dying on stage with viewers thinking he was joking.



The shows I can remember.... the Adventures of Twizzle, Torchy the Battery Boy, Muffin the Mule, Whirligig and especially Watch with Mother 1953 to 1973 and Playbox. I may be wrong but I remember Monday was Picture Book, Tuesday was Andy Pandy, Wednesday The Flowerpot Men, Thursday the Woodentops, Friday was Rag, Tag and Bobtail. All 1950 to 1970. How did we believe in those puppets on strings and Flobalob and the largest spotty dog you ever did see?

Pinky and Perky were a favourite and Sooty and Sweep, Ivor the Engine, Noggin the Nog, Captain

Pugwash, Crackerjack. The last, started in 1955 and ran until 1985. It had Eamonn Andrews, Lesley Crowther, and Michael Aspel. I well remember the cabbages! Blue Peter began in 1958. David Attenborough began Zoo quest in 1954. And ITV had the adverts!!! Do you recall....the Esso sign means happy motoring...put a tiger in your tank...you will wonder where the yellow went when you brush your teeth with pepsodent...murray mints, murray mints, too good to hurry mints.







I used to watch Dixon of Dock Green.. “evening all”!...and Emergency Ward Ten had, Joanna Lumley, Albert Finney, Bill Owen and John Alderton. Adults watched The Army Game with Alfie Bass, Will Hartnell, Bernard Bresslaw...well I only asked! Sunday Night at the London Palladium with Bruce Forsythe! This is your life, what’s my line!

My own favourites were the Lone Ranger and the Cisco Kid. Hi Ho silver...away!!! The masked man and his faithful companion Tonto on Silver and Scout ruled the west. Clayton Moore who played the lone ranger came to Newport and I was amazed to see him in his blue costume.. We only had black and white!!! Who was that masked man? That was the Lone Ranger Kemo Sabe!...Lassie, Rin Tin Tin, Felix the cat, Billy Bunter, William Tell, Robin Hood with Richard Green. 'They called the greatest archers to a tavern on the green, they vowed to help the people of the king...'



Do you remember Circus Boy with a young Micky Dolenz, later of Monkeys fame?  
It was all a wonder to me. Somebody said that you would soon be able to see a singer sing the song live...how could that be! Of course my next interest was music..50's and 60's next!!! And cinema!!! Be warned.

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## SPORT

Sue Hillyard sent us this poem a week or two ago. I really like it – thanks Sue.

Sport is really good for you.  
It's never done me any harm,  
Unless you take into account  
Two black eyes and a broken arm.

I remember a game of badminton,  
Those smashes and gentle touches.  
The slip at the end only hurt a bit  
And I didn't mind six weeks on crutches.

Then it was during another hard-fought match  
That my ligament gave way,  
Just another six weeks on crutches  
Then I was able to go back and play.

The shoulder I pulled on my first ski lift,  
When I went to play in the snow,  
So what if it hurt for weeks and weeks,  
I just didn't know when to let go!

A cricket ball is very hard I've found  
Against a poor ankle bone.  
I was shocked to see it swell so quickly,  
The pain made me limp and moan.

Of course, playing bowls is very good,  
Trying to find the most accurate track  
But I've found that all that bending  
Isn't good for my poor old back.

In fact, I went to see my doctor  
To see if there's anything she could do.  
She recommended that I take up sport,  
Saying "It really is good for you!"

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## A Childhood Prank

One good deed leads to another - Norma Furnell has sent us this.

After seeing the picture of Wilfred Pickles in last week's Weekly Letter, I was reminded of a childhood memory. My sister and I used to take a standard poodle called Ricky for a walk in the park every Sunday. His owners were a couple who lived in a very smart block of flats round the corner from us. I can't remember how much we were paid but, for us, it was a great way of subsidising our pocket-money. On our way home one Sunday, Wilfred Pickles popped out of his house and asked if we would take his dog out when we took Ricky. We agreed and dutifully picked up his tiny pooch the next Sunday.



When we returned, Mr Pickles opened the front door, took the dog in, thanked us and was about to close the door. We looked somewhat taken aback and remained on the doorstep. He then disappeared into the house and returned with an envelope which he gave to us. We thanked him and went on our way. When we opened the envelope, inside was a signed pack of photographs of himself but no cash. Needless to say, we were a bit miffed by this!

A few days later a school-friend of my sister came round and, being a little 'unorthodox', she suggested we change Wilfred's appearance on the photographs, so we proceeded to decorate his face with a moustache, beard, spots, eye patch, etc, etc. having great fun whilst doing this. We then took all the photographs round to his house and posted them through his letter-box, stifling our laughter as we ran home. Suffice it to say, we did not call again to take his dog for a walk.

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## Creative Writing Group

This week we have two more examples of the 'Who Am I?' genus, one by Elsie Warby, the other by Heather Lea. Our thanks go, once more, to the Group for their constant support.

Who am I?

by

Elsie Warby

I was born in 1947 and grew up in a council house in Stanford in the Vale in Oxfordshire. I was the youngest of six (four brothers and a sister). We had a loving childhood with a brilliant mum and we've stayed close.

I left school at fifteen and my first job was as clerical assistant at the Central Ordnance Depot at Dicot, Berkshire for which I had to pass the civil service exam. That was quite an achievement in itself but the job was mind blowingly boring as it was just filling in identical forms all day. I loathed it so much that I joined the WRAF. I didn't want to be a servicewoman but it was the only way I could see of being able to travel without any money!

I was stationed at RAF Brampton where I trained as a plotter of aerial photography. I wasn't very good at it as it involved maths at which I was hopeless. I had a fortunate break when I stepped in for one of the actors who dropped out of a performance at the base. I must have made a good impression because the Commanding Officer praised me the next day for my acting saying how good I was, and asked me what my ambition was in the RAF. I said I would like to go to Singapore.

To my delight shortly afterwards I was posted there. I loved my time there, it was a glamorous, colourful and exciting place to live. I starred in plays at RAF Seletar where the crowds were roaring with laughter at my performances. I soon started to write and perform my own work.

I was disappointed that my posting came to an end after just 14 months and I had to return to the UK although it was lovely to see my mum again.

I left the RAF and started playing my guitar in folk clubs. Eventually I realised that I was getting requests to appear at enough clubs that I could make a living from doing what I loved.

I appeared on 'Opportunity Knocks' and won! I've written several books and am best known for my poems, which I love writing and performing.

You've probably guessed who I am by now.

If you need one more clue one of my best known poems is 'I wish I'd looked after my teeth.'

A little bit about someone I admire

Who am I

By Heather Lea

V is for violence – something I strongly abhor

I is for inspiring – of which I want to do more

V is for velvet – a fabric I use

I is for Idol – my clothes Billy would choose

E is for Emin – that's Tracey, my muse

N is for Naomi - who fell in my shoes

N is for New Romanticism – a period I loved

E is for Elizabeth – our Queen so beloved

W is for wonderful – as “Sex” was – the name of my shop

E is for eccentric – I dress up when I mop

S is Sex Pistols - God Save the Queen

T is for tailoring – of which I've always been keen

W is for World's End – my brilliant store

O is for outrageous – you can always be more

O is for our planet - for which we should care

D is for Dame – the title I wear

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The answers to last week's Who am I's are,

First, Ebenezer Scrooge and second, Lucy Cohu. She is (or was) an actress

### **This Week's Cartoon**

The EU vaccine wars make sad news but this cartoon from The Times makes it all worthwhile, a beautiful take-off of the Bayeux Tapestry



**That's it once again. Hope you have enjoyed the variety. Our thanks go to all those who have contributed – a very welcome help to the Editors.**

**John**

