



# Cotgrave and District U3A

## Keeping in Touch 47

### The Weather

The British are supposed to devote much of their conversation to the state of the weather and I realise that the Weekly Letter has not always been consistent with that premise. So, here is an appropriate introduction to this week's Letter: "Isn't it nice to have temperatures a few degrees above freezing!" But, without the cold we should never have snow and photographs such as the attached would hardly be possible.



‘And where do you think you are going?’

.....

### Elland



I think that, some considerable number of Weekly Letters ago I may have mentioned that I grew up in in a small Yorkshire town called Elland, mid-way between Huddersfield and Halifax. I was greatly cheered the other day, therefore, to rediscover my copy of: ‘A History of Elland’, written by a friend of my parents. Not that Elland, itself, was of great historical importance, apart from the Saville family and the Gannex Mill which made Harold Wilson’s raincoats but it was fascinating to renew acquaintance with long-forgotten facts and figures and to enjoy the old photographs to be found therein. The Savilles, by the way, ended up at Rufford Park in Nottinghamshire during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – but I have a feeling I’ve told you all this before! The problem with having edited so many Letters is that I can no longer remember what was included when! But maybe neither can you? As ever, we can sum it all up with a suitable limerick.

The old town of Elland in Yorks  
Has rarely been featured in Talks  
But the Savilles were there,  
As was Gannex rain-ware  
And Leeds play where Elland Road forks.

However, I feel confident in saying that the Grantham Canal has not figured previously in our brief exploration of Cotgrave's history, so here goes.

### **The Grantham Canal**

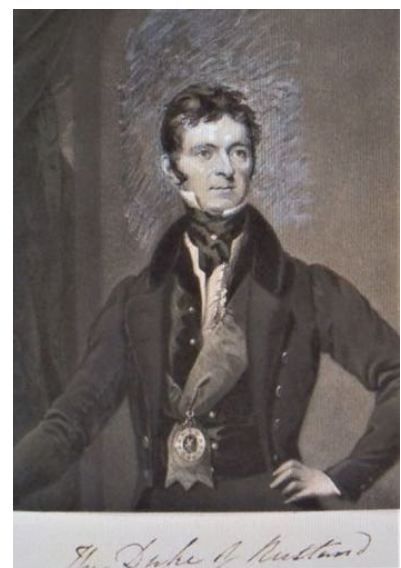
The Industrial Revolution was stimulated, as much as anything, by the development of the canal system which allowed the transport of heavy goods much more efficiently than could be effected via the rather inadequate roads then available. The first canal to be opened (in 1757) was the Sankey Canal which joined St Helens to Widnes in Lancashire and stimulated the chemical industry there. This was followed, in 1761, by the famous Bridgewater Canal from Runcorn to Leigh, built by the Duke of Bridgewater to transport coal from his mines to Manchester, effecting a reduction of the price of coal by a factor of three. The period 1770 to 1830 was designated the Golden Age of canal building, huge sums of money being invested and traded by wealthy patrons. Some 4,000 miles of waterway were constructed in the process, covering the whole country.

The Grantham Canal was opened in the very centre of this 'canal mania', stimulated by the need to transport Nottingham coal to Grantham. It was first proposed in 1792 but the first Act of Parliament (necessary for the construction of any canal) was defeated by the coal merchants who were transporting their coal by road. However, a second Act, submitted in April 1793 was granted Royal Assent. There followed a period of financial bickering over the details but the canal was finally opened in 1797. It involved the building of 69 bridges and 18 locks, the first eleven of which occurred within the first four



miles between Trent Bridge and Cropwell Bishop, four of these being located in Cotgrave. The locks were built to the same dimensions as those on the Nottingham Canal, to allow the same barges to use both. They were, of course, horse-drawn, so a suitable towpath was required over the full length.

The canal was an undoubted commercial success, debts having been cleared by 1805 and steadily increasing dividends being paid, reaching a peak in 1839. The principal goods transported to Grantham were coal, lime, groceries and building materials, though there was also a less salubrious traffic of Nottingham's 'night soil' for distribution along the adjoining farm lands. In the reverse direction were agricultural products such as corn, malt, beans and wool. An interesting by-product of the canal traffic was the 4ft 4½in gauge tramway built by the Fifth Duke of Rutland, John Henry Manners, linking the canal at the village of Musters to Belvoir Castle, a distance of a little over a mile and a half. This functioned from 1814 to 1914 and still exists as a country walk today





As with all canals, the Grantham canal eventually suffered from competition by railways and in 1854 it was sold to a railway company who (surprise-surprise) neglected it until, in 1929, boat traffic finally ceased. The canal was formally closed in 1936, though with the proviso that it should retain water in order to satisfy agricultural needs. More recently, there have been various attempts to restore sections of the canal, witness the restoration of the two locks within the Cotgrave Country Park, but the lowering of many bridges makes any hope of overall restoration highly improbable.



So much for an overview – what do we know of its relation to Cotgrave and to Cotgrave’s inhabitants? There are two sources of information, firstly maps, secondly Census Returns. We are fortunate in having relatively early maps, which were prepared for Charles Medows (Pierrepont) with reference to the Cotgrave Enclosure Act of 1791. Four such maps exist in the University of Nottingham archives and I have made photographs of each of these. They date (to the best of my understanding from 1790 to about 1795 and, while the first two, of 1790 and 1791 do not show the canal, it appears loud and clear on the other two. The interesting point is that we know the date of the third map fairly precisely (1793) and this is some four years before the opening of the canal! However, it is clear that the line of the canal had already been specified in the first two proposals so the map was showing where the canal was destined to be, rather than where it actually was!



Our photograph represents only a section of the map and we must bear in mind that it was drawn in order to show land ownership and tenancy, so it looks a trifle confusing but we can clearly see (top left) the bridge where the Nottingham Road crosses, the two locks which are now within the Country Park and (bottom right) the bridge where Hollygate Lane crosses. In those days this was no more than a footpath. There also appear to be two small bridges crossing the canal (centre field) which were presumably for agricultural convenience.

So much for the maps – what can we learn from Census Returns and Trade Directories? Firstly, we note that in 1851 and 1861 John Skinner was living in the House at ‘Skinner’s Lock’ (near Shepherds) and working as Lock Keeper. In fact, the Skinner family remained there until 1902, though I am not clear how long they continued to work as Lock Keepers.



During the successful period of the canal’s working, there were several Cotgrave men who described themselves as ‘Boatman’ or ‘Boat Owner’. For example, in 1841 there were four boatmen, Joseph Jackson, William Randall, John Randall and John Barratt. Then, in 1844, a further name, that of John Thraves was added to the list. Note that the canal company itself did not run barges – in common with most canals, they franchised private individuals. Also of significance was the fact that three men described themselves as ‘Coal Merchant’. It seems likely that there was a direct link between the two occupations – no doubt some fraction of the coal coming from Nottingham mines was burned in Cotgrave. Thus, William Randall worked as a boatman in 1841, a boat owner in 1851 and as a coal merchant/grocer in 1861. Similarly, John Randall worked as boatman in 1851, boat owner in 1861 and 1871, then as coal merchant/farmer in 1891. It is significant that there is no mention of the canal in either the 1901 or 1911 Censuses – by this time, it was in serious decline and very few boats were still operating.

By way of a post-script, I should point out that anyone wishing to learn more will find lots of information about the Skinner family, the Skinner Lock House and details of canal management on the Cotgrave History website. You can access it on:

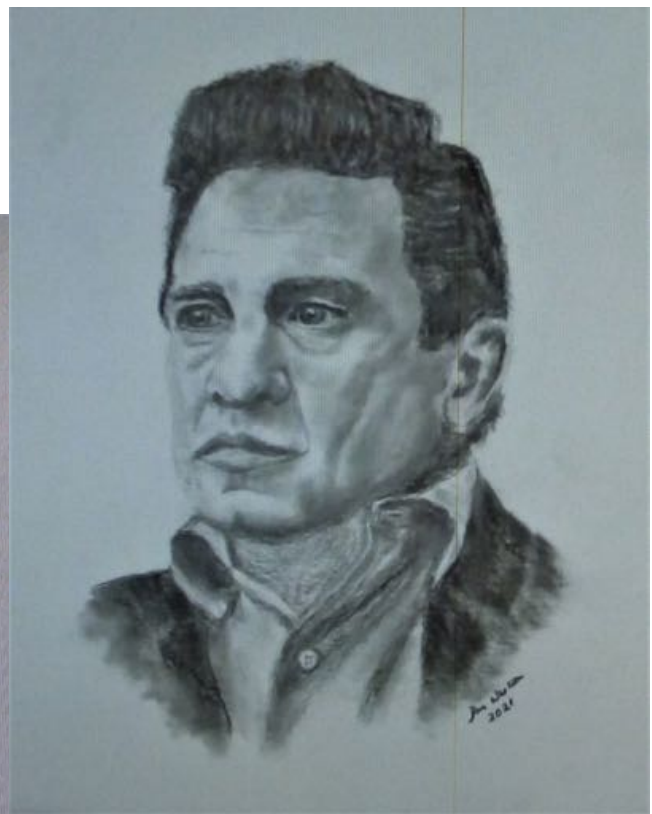
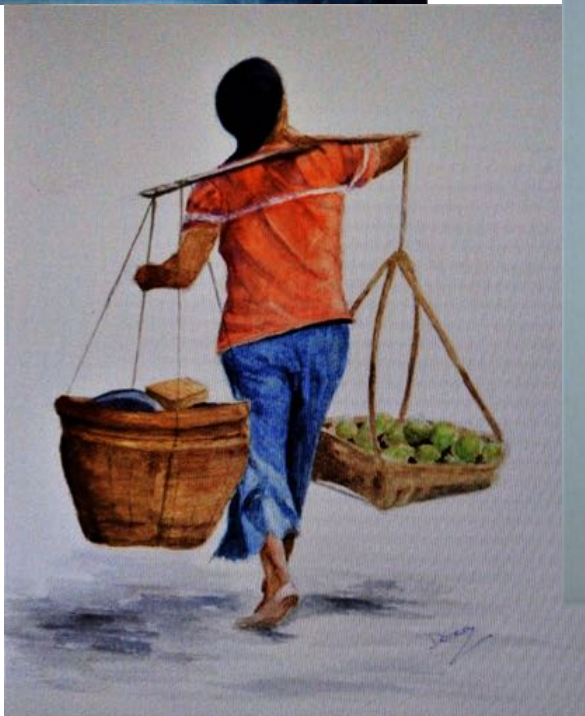
<https://historyofcotgrave.weebly.com/>

.....



## The Art Group

As I have said before (probably more than once), we are lucky to have such a talented group of artists in Cotgrave and this week's offerings continue to illustrate the point. We have contributions from Dorothy Albans, Desna Haskell, Mike Smith and Don Whitaker. Mike Smith's study of a dead robin was stimulated by the very lively robin painted by his friend Bernie Besnard (see last week's Letter). Whether it is the *same* robin is not clear but I understand that the artists are still friends!



## Quiz Corner

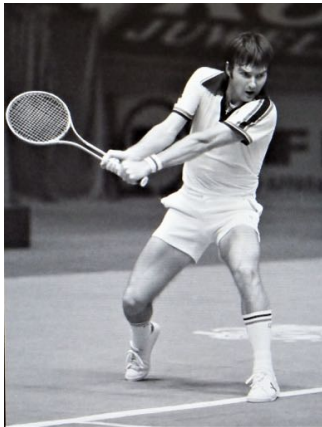
Last week's personality was, of course, Sir Tom Moore as a young man.

.....

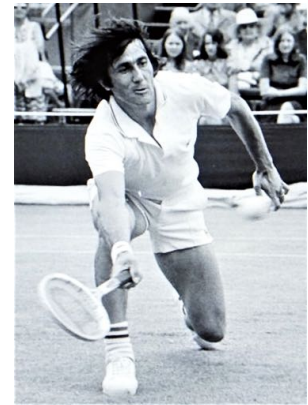
### Home Thoughts from A Broad

Mary Miles has sent us this lovely piece written while staying in Bangalore with her son in the early 2000s.

Our Bangalore Correspondent, Mrs Mary Miggins was fortunate enough to witness, last Saturday, a tennis match of such brilliance that she had not seen since she watched Connors and Nastase at Wimbledon in the last century! She kindly agreed to give our reporter her reflections on the match.



The two contestants were equally matched in so far as they both work in Bangalore and both wore tennis shorts of such excellent cut and style that she had to look away when they were serving or running for the short ball! The taller player, from over the water, known locally as The Hammer, had a service style Mrs Miggins had not witnessed before – “interesting and effective” she was heard to comment. The slightly



shorter and better-looking player, known to his fans as “TJ”, served with such velocity that they are still searching for his balls in Kerala (a State some 500 miles away!).

The first few games were only ‘quite exciting’ and Mrs Miggins was able to take her eyes off the match to muse on her surroundings and the wonderful birds flying round the court and the interesting stance of one of the ball boys. However, once The Hammer had exuded ten pints of barely diluted alcohol from his pores, he came into his own and Mrs Miggins, berated by TJ, a close relative, for not paying enough attention to the game, could not take her eyes off the rest of this scintillating and challenging match.

One of her lasting memories, she said wistfully, was of the colourful and explicit terms used for missed shots and balls not landing in the right place. Even McEnroe would have been hard-pressed to emulate their phraseology!

The other lasting memory is of The Hammer, not the younger of the two players, showing such modesty and self-control when, after a match lasting one hour and forty minutes in temperatures exceeding 35 deg, he won a hard-fought and silent game. Mrs Miggins was sorry she only heard the first few bars of “Take me home to Tyrone” as she thinks the rest of it, sung in his best Tenor, would have put the icing on the cake, for her too, too short a stay in the bar of The Taj West End Hotel after the match.

On a final note, Mrs Miggins was also very fortunate to watch a game of golf, played on a beautiful course, just south of Bangalore. Here TJ and two of his friends played a round of golf that our correspondent tells us brought tears to her eyes at the excellence of the shots and the cut of the shorts of the players. She did notice that TJ played an exceptional round of golf and he did win but there was no singing of “We Are the Champions” or “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” at the end of the round, just a quiet acceptance that he is the best.

Lastly, Mrs Miggins has asked our reporter to say how lucky she was to have been with two such great sportsmen at the well-known Bangalore hostelry, Cosmos on her last night in India and that she hopes The Hammer and TJ were not too embarrassed to be in the company of a much older woman!

.....

### **Rodin’s Thinker**

It was pleasing to receive the following comment from Hannie Woolsey, following last week’s photo of Rodin’s ‘Thinker’.

It was nice to see a photograph of Rodin’s ‘Thinker’. It took me back a few years to when I was a Tour Manager. In Paris we would do a City Tour and the coach would take us past the garden of Rodin’s house (which is now the Rodin Museum). As the coach was high, you could peep over the tall gates and just see the back of the famous statue! Once I had a small boy in the front seat and he asked, “What is it?” I explained that it was a huge statue of a naked man with his chin in his hand, thinking deeply and that was why it was called ‘Le Penseur, (The Thinker)’. “Oh” he said “I know, he’s thinking where have I left my clothes?”

.....

## How Does an Aeroplane Fly – Part 2

In Part 1, we learnt how a wing gives lift (and also drag) but this is a long way from a flying aeroplane. Now let's look at stability.

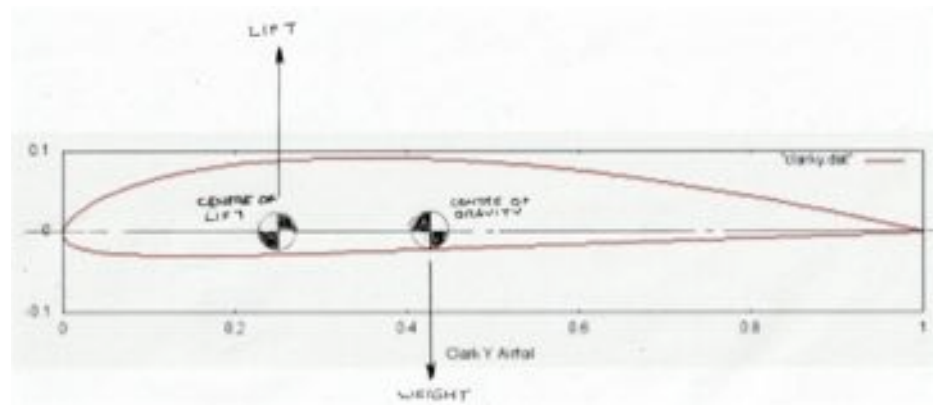
I would like you to carry out another experiment now, if you would. Take another piece of cardboard about 2½ inches wide by, say, 18 inches long. Launch it as you would a model aeroplane and see what happens.

It just flutters down to the ground but what I would like you to notice is that it *always* rotates leading edge (front) up! Why is this?

To answer this question we have to take another look at an aerofoil section and I will again choose the famous Clark Y aerofoil section.

Incidentally, the Clark Y aerofoil was used in The Spirit of St Luis that Charles Lindburg flew across the Atlantic. In a slightly modified form it was also used in the Hurricane.

Here it is and this time I have drawn on it. I have drawn the centre of gravity. This is, if you like, the point of balance. I have also drawn the centre of pressure. This is the point where the lift is acting. If you like, this is also the point of



balance *but upwards*. You will immediately notice that the centre of pressure is well in front of the centre of gravity. *This* is why your piece of cardboard always rotates leading edge upwards.

So, what to do about it? The simple answer would be to add a weight to the front of the wing to move the centre of gravity forwards to the centre of pressure. You can do this with your cardboard “wing”. Add a number of large paperclips or even a small clothes peg. You will find it quite tricky to get the weight just right but it can be done and your cardboard wing will fly.

Hooray!

So that's it then. Well actually no, I'm afraid. Do you remember in Part 1 of this series I talked about the amount of lift changing as the angle of attack increased or decreased? Well not only that but the centre of pressure moves back and forth with angle of attack. So your cardboard wing flies *but only at one speed*.

So we need to be cleverer than that. I suspect you might have guessed the solution and that is to add a tailplane. What aircraft designers do is fit another small “wing” (which is called the tailplane) some way off at the back. Yes I know some aircraft have a tailplane at the front (when it is called a foreplane). These, however, are rare and it all gets a bit more complicated!



What aircraft designers do is first design a fuselage which is horizontal. They add a wing with a suitable angle of attack (which is now called the “angle of incidence”; it is really the same thing). They then add a small tailplane at the back but with zero, or even a negative, angle of attack. Then they have an engine at the front which moves the centre of gravity forward (just like your clothes peg) to balance everything up.

Now, when the aircraft flies and goes faster or slower (and the centre of pressure moves about) the tailplane balances everything back up and the aircraft continues to fly in a stable way. Finally a flap is installed on the back of the tailplane; the elevator (or, as our American cousins call it, the horizontal stabiliser) which allows the pilot to adjust the flight of the aircraft. Working out all the angles and sizes and weights is very tricky but that is what aircraft designers do!

The last thing I want to talk about is the fin (and rudder) and now a bit of history:-

*In the beginning* there were boats and, of course, these have a rudder at the back. When in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century people tried to make aircraft the thought was that you only need a rudder (to turn) and elevators of some sort (to go up and down). It was the genius of Orville and Wilber Wright that realised that you need control in *three* planes. Yes, you need a rudder (for yaw) and elevators (for pitch) but you also need to control *roll*. The Wright Brothers used wing warping but now we use ailerons.

In fact in a well-designed aeroplane the rudder is used very little. When you fly on holiday (and I very much hope we all can soon) you will now notice with your new found knowledge that the pilot turns by first rolling the aircraft in the direction he wants to turn. He then gently pulls back on the stick to lift the aircraft round. In the air it all feels very natural but in the early days of flying it was hard learnt.

So that’s it! I hope these 2 articles have given you an insight to aerodynamics. It’s a huge and fascinating subject and I have very much enjoyed writing about it.

Jim Benn

.....

## Climate Change

Those of us who ‘attended’ Brenda Ainsley’s Zoom Talk last week enjoyed a highly stimulating talk and it struck me that a brief summary might be welcomed by all our members, so what better than to include it in our Weekly Letter. Brenda has very kindly written a summary for us, with emphasis on the various ways in which we, ourselves, might do something to help. She has added a brief account of the activities of the ECO Group, which is keen to add to its membership!

### What is Climate change and what can I do?

We are throwing up 152 million tons of global warming pollution made by humankind into the thin shell of our atmosphere every 24 hours\*.. Increased CO<sub>2</sub> (Carbon Dioxide) in the atmosphere traps heat, hence global warming. Most of this CO<sub>2</sub> comes from the burning of fossil fuels and has grown steadily since the Industrial Revolution, most notably since the Second World War.



Global average temperatures are increasing in an alarming manner: 19 of the hottest 20 years recorded have been since 2001, with the other year being 1998\*\*. Australia experienced a massive heatwave during January/February 2020.

The other side of the global warming coin is that we see catastrophic flooding events around the world, including here in the UK in places such as The Somerset Levels, Cumbria and York. Increased evaporation creates more clouds which then release large amounts of precipitation and with more water vapour in the air, there are more extreme single-event downpours\*\*\*\*. Globally, floods and extreme rainfall events occur four times more often than in 1980.



### The ‘Paris Agreement’

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 parties (including the UK) at COP 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. It is currently standing at 1C.

To achieve this long-term temperature goal, countries must aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible to achieve a carbon neutral world by mid-century.

The Paris Agreement is a landmark in the climate change process because, for the first time, a binding agreement brings all 196 nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects.

### What is COP 26?

This huge event, which we will host along with Italy, will attract world leaders to Glasgow in November 2021. It is the 26th annual meeting of the United Nations' Conference of the Parties (COP) on Climate Change. It is important for the UK because of its potential to place us as world leaders in climate change.

The acronym ‘COP’ stands for Conference of the Parties. It will be attended by leaders from all the countries that signed up to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change – a treaty agreed in 1994. This meeting will be the 26<sup>th</sup>, hence COP26. Nations will be keen to show to the international community that they are introducing measures to meet – or even exceed – their obligations.

Everyone can get behind actions to combat climate change. The UN has made it clear: it matters that we do.

### **What can I do?**

You have more power than you probably think! Many members of the ‘older generation’ are coming to realise that they have the time, the resources and the will to make - and demand – changes that will limit global warming, in order to provide a better future for generations to come.

The three main ways you can do this are to use:

1. **Your voice:** write to Ruth Edwards MP (a member of the Conservative Environmental Network); Nottinghamshire County Council; newspapers; social media. Talk to your family and friends. Draw attention to news linked to COP26 in November 2021
2. **Your vote:** vote for the party you think has climate change at the heart of their policy-making. Local council elections are in May 2021...
3. **Your choices as a consumer:** find out whether your bank, mortgage provider or pension fund is investing in fossil fuels and be prepared to move your money. Switch to a sustainable energy provider such as bulb, ovo or Octopus. Consider generating your own energy. Think about how much ‘stuff’ you buy. Calculate your own carbon footprint and aim to reduce it. (WWF have a [simple calculator](#)).

You will probably read and see increasing quantities of features and articles about the forthcoming United Nations ‘[COP 26](#)’ conference. Through ‘Third Age Matters’ and other u3a media, you will be able to access articles, podcasts and social media posts, providing you with information and discussion platforms so that you have a clear understanding of what is happening throughout the build-up and into the event itself.

### References

\* Al Gore, 2019

\*\* National Aeronautics and Space Administration Goddard Institute for Space Studies, “GISS Surface Temperature Analysis (GISTEMP): Global-mean monthly, seasonal, and annual means,” last updated February 2018. [https://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/tabledata\\_v3/GLB.Ts.txt](https://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/tabledata_v3/GLB.Ts.txt)

\*\*\* Rajendra K. Pachauri et al., “Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report,” Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Cambridge University Press, Topics 1 and 2 (November 2, 2014): 40-62. [https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/05/SYR\\_AR5\\_FINAL\\_full\\_wcover.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/05/SYR_AR5_FINAL_full_wcover.pdf)

\*\*\*\* Environmental Protection Agency, “Climate Change Indicators: Heavy Precipitation,” last updated August 2016. <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-heavy-precipitation>



## News from the Eco Group

We continue to meet via Zoom each month to discuss a wide range of topics. This week we are looking at the 'intergenerational' aspect of climate and ecology, including this [report](#) that has some interesting things to say on the matter.

If you attended the Branch's first zoomed monthly meeting on Tuesday and would like to learn more about eco-matters, climate and the environment, then these are some of the options:

- Cotgrave and District u3a Eco Group currently meets via Zoom on the second Friday of the month at 2.00pm.

In addition, Trust u3a\* offers 3 Eco/Climate groups:

- Eco Matters, monthly on a Sunday evening (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday)
  - Eco Group, every other week on a Tuesday afternoon
  - 'Countdown to COP' monthly on a Friday morning (last Friday of month)
- 
- Trust u3a is an online u3a that gives you the opportunity to join groups, talks and courses. Like any u3a, activities are run by members for members. Take a look at the [Groups](#) page, for details of groups, courses and talks.

.....

## Creative Writing Group

As always, we leave our creative writing till the end so that there is still something exciting to look forward to! This week it is by Sue Hillyard, written, she tells me, some time ago – though it certainly is forward-looking!

### TRAVEL:

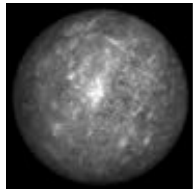


Chad and Graim had been friends since childhood and were now just way, way too excited about taking a break after the completion of their university studies. Their guardians had, with reservation, given their permission to allow the boys to take time out and to travel.

Both were doing well and, despite many troubles in their childhoods, particularly those associated with the loss of their parents in the war, had achieved good results and were expected to have promising careers.

Their guardians, teachers and peers accepted that the boys both had rebellious, free spirits and wondered if they would ever come back from their travels. The parting at the station was loving but controlled – they weren't the sort to show a lot of emotion and, anyway, the boys were now almost men and would find their own way wherever they ended up. The boys and guardians waved a final goodbye and then the adventure began.

Chad and Graim had already loaded their supplies and now



climbed into their ISC Mark 4.

Their Interstellar Craft Mark 4 was a rather battered basic model but had all that was necessary to make the journey to Zebron without too much trouble. They settled in, took off and then, after an uneventful start, set the co-ordinates for Zebron.

Once they were clear of local traffic they grinned at each other, plugged into the life support systems and punched their respective auto-sleep controls. The sleeping bodies of Chad and Graim were placed into homo-stasis – set to wake in 720 days.

The computer never sensed the band of space dust until the very last moment! One minute everything was on track then, within a split second, a sudden jolt registered a punch to the shell of the ISC Mark 4. Rather more scratched and dented than it had been, and with its navigation system now faulty, the ISC Mark4 had changed its course by .009 degs. The small craft continued on at warp speed through cold, dark space whilst the boys slept, oblivious to the fact that they would wake up in an unfamiliar sector.

720 days after leaving home on Stoll-Catay, the life support systems carried out a final check of the health of both boys and then, entirely satisfied, disconnected in order to let the boys wake naturally.

Graim woke first.

“Hey, Chad, wake up,” he punched his friend in the shoulder gently. “We’re here”

Chad stretched and smiled at his friend. “Good morning,” he said, “Let’s have a look at Zebron.”

Both boys leaned forward as Chad lowered the forward visor.

“Hey, that’s odd,” said Chad, giving his friend a quizzical look, “Zebron should be right here.”

Graim looked through the window and then down at the console in front of him. “Hey, look at this. The co-ordinates show we’re 1745 g-clicks beyond sector 28 and 1240.92 g-clicks outside the Stoll-Catay safety zone.”

The boys gave each other a worried look. No-one ever went outside the Stoll-Catay safety zone.

There was nothing for it but to send out a May-Day – Graim pressed the emergency signal button.



Neither of the boys wanted to admit that, being so far off course, their signal might take months, if not years, to reach Stoll-Catay. They might make it if they plugged back into homo-stasis and re-set the course for home but it would be a big risk. Then, just as they were about to make that decision, their computer screen flashed up a grainy image.

\*\*\*\*\*



On Earth, in a remote region of Canada, Greg Newbold had picked up an odd signal – something he’d never heard before.

As a final year college student with a passion for IT and all things weird and wonderful, he often spent time in his room searching through the wavebands to see if he could pick up anything interesting.

He’d followed many police car chases and helicopter conversations and this time, right at the edge of his receiver’s capability, he’d heard a sound. This was different. Not the run of the mill information or instructions, or just plain chat, but something quite odd. A high pitched signal with a regular rhythm. He listened carefully. Yes, there it was...ZZZZZZZZ, ZZZZZZZZ, ZZZZZZZZ, ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ. The last ‘ZZZZZZZZZZZZ’ getting even higher and higher until it disappeared from hearing.

He uncoiled the headset which was already, and always, connected to his computer. Using his state of the art gear he quickly homed in again on the sound...there again.....ZZZZZZZ, ZZZZZZZZ, ZZZZZZZZ, ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ! He configured his system and then typed in, “Hello”.

\*\*\*\*\*

“What is that?” said Graim.

“How do I know, try to sharpen up the image,” replied Chad.



Graim reconfigured his settings, “There...look,” he said. “It says, ‘Hello’. I’ve no idea who’s sent that but it could just be that we have someone out there who could help us get home”. He spoke into the voice transponder, “*Hello, back at ya! Who are you?*”

Greg, watched his screen and saw the message appear. Okay then, looks like this could be interesting, he thought. This was most odd...who could be sending this message on such an unusual frequency?

“*Who are you? Where are you?*” Greg pressed Send.

Graim gave a little cheer, “Yay, we have real contact here” he exclaimed. “What shall I send back?”

Chad and Graim decided that they should be just a little bit cautious. They were, after all, way outside their safety zone.

“*We are friendly. We were on our way to Zebron but accidentally went off course. We’re fine and don’t mean any harm. Can you tell us who you are?*”

Chad and Graim felt that this message was not threatening in any way and didn’t give away too much information. They certainly didn’t want an enemy to get the wrong idea and this message seemed harmless enough.

“*Zebron? Where’s that? Who are you?*” Greg replied.

Chad gave Graim a little nudge. “Who is this creep, never heard of party-planet central? Let’s see if we can get a visual.”

“*Configuring to send visuals and audio*” Graim messaged.

Greg’s screen image changed to show two young men grinning at him. He adjusted his settings and heard, “*Hi, can you see us?*”

He dived under his desk, grabbed his camera, plugged it in and replied, “*Hey guys, how’re you doing? Where’s Zebron?*”

The two travellers raised their eyebrows, “*Gee, have you never been to Zebron, dude? Party central just 470 g-clicks from Stoll-Catay. We were heading there for an end of studies rave and seem to have got lost.*”

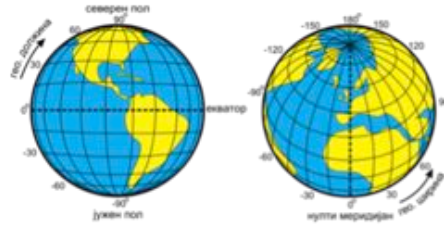
“*What’s a g-click and where the hell is Stoll-Catay?*” Greg replied.

“*A g-click, you dork, is, as any high school student knows, the speed of light divided by the force of Stoll-Catay’s gravitational field. If you don’t know that no wonder you have never been to Zebron!*”

“*Guys. I hope you are sitting down. I have to tell you that I haven’t the faintest clue where Stoll-Catay is, nor Zebron, nor what a g-click is, nor what the heck an interstellar craft is – are you telling me you are in a spaceship? I am on planet Earth, third rock from the sun, Sol, The Milky Way, The Universe.*” Greg waited with baited breath – if this wasn’t a hoax it was MASSIVE!

Chad and Graim looked at each other. What was this guy raving about? What sun? What Milky Way? There was only one way to find out.

*“Dude,”* said Chad, *“I think we need to talk. You seem even more confused than we are. Can we dock or not? What are your co-ordinates?”*



\*\*\*\*\*

For the next 3 hours, communication continued until Greg became convinced that the two young men were NOT from Earth and that they were, instead, lost in space in what was apparently a flying saucer. On the other hand, Chad and Graim came to realise that they had travelled close to the home planet of Greg - this place called Earth- and that their best option was to land. They drew nearer and nearer to Earth and Greg helped them to identify the great lakes of the North American landmass. They agreed that the ship should land in a spot 150 miles north of Niagara Falls. Chad cloaked the ISC Mark 4, landed safely and turned off the cloak. They lost contact during the landing but it had been agreed that Greg would come out on his snow-mobile to find them. Chad and Graim were excited to meet this Earthling and settled down for a nap while they waited to be picked up.

Greg searched and searched but, despite his best efforts, couldn't see the ship anywhere. Had it all been a big hoax all along? “Hell, I really am a dork!” he smiled to himself, disappointed but still having to admire the sheer inventiveness of the two guys. It had been fun while it lasted but he felt quite relieved that Earth wasn't about to be invaded after all. He headed for home and kicked off his boots just as his mum was plating up his favourite steak dinner.

\*\*\*\*\*

150 metres north of Niagara Falls, two tourists were watching the river flow past. It looked beautiful. They walked along until, suddenly, the man saw what looked like a child's battered and dented old humming top laying in the grass. “Hey look at this, Belle,” he said to his wife as he picked it up. “Nice paint job. Look, it says, “ISC Mark 4” – perhaps that's the makers' model number. I don't reckon it'll work – it doesn't have the handle any more.”

He placed it on the wall at the side of the river where it stayed until it was dropped into the water half an hour later by a group of teenage lads. They wondered if it would float and how far it would travel as they watched the little toy spinning top drift downstream towards the mighty waterfall. As for Chad and Graim, well..... their travel adventure was just beginning!

Once again, that's it for this week but we can surely look forward to meeting again before very long, even if it's only outside.

Best wishes.

**John**

