



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 48

Spring is Springing

I keep telling everyone that Spring is almost with us – here is even more evidence.



An important message from our Chairman:

Members are receiving very realistic e-mails/calls, seeming to come from companies such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon, etc.

These e-mails/calls will then ask for details such as Passwords.

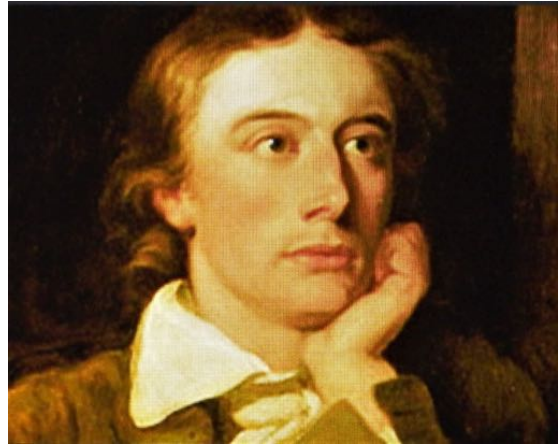
Members have also been receiving an e-mail that appears to come from another member or friend. This says they want to buy an Amazon Gift Card for a dying friend but they are unable to get out to shop. Therefore would they help by buying the card, scratching off the number on the back and send it to them and they will settle up when you meet.

PLEASE BE CAREFUL – SCAMS ARE EVERYWHERE!

Suspected scams can be reported at report@phishing.gov.uk.

Hail to Thee, Blyth Spirit

According to last Saturday's newspaper, it is just two hundred years since John Keats died and I was tempted to look again at my copy of 'The Oxford Book of English Verse' and renew acquaintance with the young man (he was only 25 when he died) as, all those years ago, I 'did' Keats for School Certificate. The Times article quotes Simon Armitage (the present Poet Laureate and a modern-day Keats?) as saying that Keats' 'Ode to Autumn' is one of his favourite poems and I think it is one of mine, too.



Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness;
Close bosom friend of the maturing sun,
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

It's too long to reproduce in full here, though it is readily available on the Internet. However, I was much amused by a few lines from Simon Armitage - a take-off of Keats, appropriate to the modern experience:

Now bats roost in the plush colonnades
Of human veins, while naked arms
Are offered up to the dewy-eyed syringe.

I realise that I shall be tempting fate to offer my own poetical (?) contribution in close juxtaposition to these superior examples, but it seems like a heaven-sent opportunity to slip in one of my limericks – we try our best to include at least one, every week:

A romantic young poet named Keats
Achieved num'rous sensual feats
And well did it bode
That his autumnal ode
Should enlarge on sweet Nature's repletes.

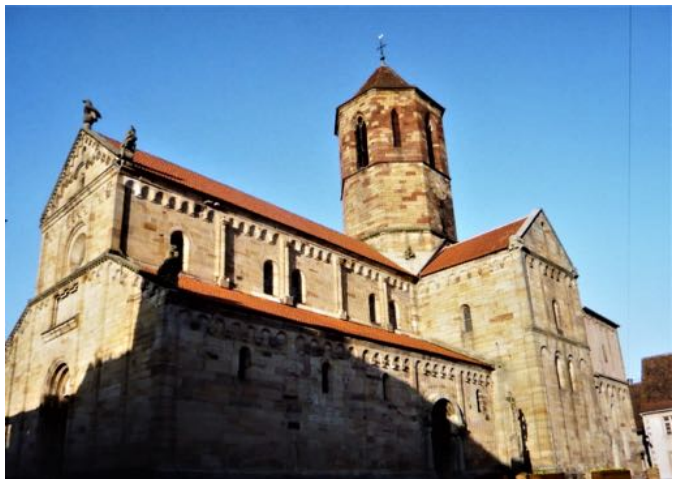
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Alsatian Delights

I wrote this some twenty years ago but I hope it still stimulates a little interest.

One of the more satisfying aspects of retirement must surely be the possibility of taking holidays when and as one pleases, avoiding, in particular, busy times of year when those less fortunately placed are obliged to take theirs. This was certainly one reason why, during mid September, we found ourselves sampling the delights of Alsace, that distant corner of north-eastern France which has suffered such frequent changes of ownership that it scarcely knows whether to think of itself as French or German (or neither!). It is certainly characterised by a strong individuality; wonderful timbered buildings, dry but highly fragrant white wines (a few interesting reds too), a broad selection of more or less ruined castles topping the protective range of the Vosges mountains, delightful small villages nestling along the many valleys which cut into those mountains and, of course, flowers. The caption "Ville Fleurie" appears alongside nearly every town identity sign and it stands there for good reason - the blanket of vibrant colour which engulfs most of the buildings practically takes the breath away. But, what is more, there is never so much as a single petal out of place. In our garden here in Cotgrave we too have plenty of colour but almost always there are dead heads or broken stems which detract, if only so slightly, from the overall effect. Not so in Alsace - there they have perfected a range of blooms which remain in perfect condition throughout the whole summer without, so far as we could see, the need for even the most cursory attention. I strongly suspect GM. Perhaps Lord Melchett and his friends should investigate! (Though I doubt that EC sentiment would turn out to be quite as sympathetic as that of an English jury!)

But my intended theme is neither horticultural nor political. Our experience in Alsace is common, I suspect, to many holidays - it is the unexpected twists which stay most clearly in the memory, rather than the carefully planned events that probably constituted the original motivation for the visit (no matter how pleasurable those may turn out to be). Two such pleasant surprises remain with me as I write, the first of which occurred as we were driving through a small town called Rosheim, a little way west of Strasbourg. It is on or near the famous "Route du Vin" but our interest at that moment was not in the least bibulous. Joyce has a surprisingly well developed sixth sense, honed to the detection of French street markets (she has bought no end of amazing bargains in French street markets!) and it was as accurate as ever in the case of Rosheim - the whole of the main street was given over to stalls which, in our customary fashion we explored with an enthusiasm known only to foreign tourists. But this time it was not the market which captivated us so much as the discovery of the nearby Romanesque parish church (built about 1150). Being only a humble parish church, the building lacked the characteristic pair of western towers typical of most abbey churches of the time (Southwell Minster illustrates the type) but sported an attractive octagonal tower over the crossing. Inside, the building was simple, almost stark, but the outside was wonderfully decorated.





The somewhat quaintly translated "English" version of the guide pamphlet drew attention to sculptured representations of men and/or women burdened with unpleasant creatures thought to represent the sins of man (and presumably woman) kind, but what really caught our eyes was the likeness of a mediaeval workman crouching uneasily on the steeply sloping roof just below the base of the central tower (SW corner).

The guide suggested that he might have been the architect though it was not immediately clear to us why he should be clutching a bag of something or other (perhaps his payment for the job newly completed?). He must have been there now for upwards of eight hundred years but still gave the impression of fearing an imminent (and inevitably fatal) slide down the precipitous slope below him.

Perhaps he doubted the efficiency of mediaeval mortar and, if architect he was, he was surely in an excellent position to judge! But what, without the aid of our ever-helpful pamphlet, we might well have failed to notice was the existence on the diametrically opposite corner of the tower (ie NE corner) of a balancing figure, that of a monk in characteristic robe and hood. Though his position may have been the very mirror image of that of our architect friend his demeanour could scarcely have been in greater contrast. No doubt possessed of a confidence generated by his religious conviction, he appeared totally indifferent to the perils presented by gravitational force and positively radiated an air of devout tranquillity.

We were duly impressed. Being thus alerted, we later spotted similarly placed figures on the church in Guebwiller, further to the south, possibly designed by the same architect - I wonder?

Our second unplanned visit was to the "Tour de l'Ancien Telegraphe" perched on a ridge overlooking the town of Saverne where we spent several nights. It turns out that the World's first optical telegraph system was constructed in France following a proposal made by a certain M. Claude Chappe in the year 1793 (of interest here in Nottingham as the year in which the famous miller/mathematician, George Green was born). Communication was between a line of stations some 10km apart, each making use of a wooden arm pivoted across a vertical support pole and carrying at each end a shorter, rotatable flag. Some 98 distinct arrangements of the arm and flags allowed pre-selected coding of messages which could be read by the operator at the next station and passed on to those further down the line (an early example of digital signal transmission!).



The line from Paris to Strasbourg employed 52 stations and was much used by Napoleon in the early nineteenth century in his military campaigns against France's numerous enemies. The Chappe system was eventually overtaken, of course, by the electric telegraph and fell into disrepair but in 1968 the station above Saverne was rebuilt by enthusiasts and stands today as a splendid monument to a once exciting technology. Making a scheduled visit to the ruined castle at Haut-Barr, we stumbled on it totally by accident and were rewarded with a full demonstration by an enthusiastic Frenchman, in near-perfect English. He even told us about the English version which the Admiralty set up (some few years *later!*) to connect London with Portsmouth and Plymouth! It certainly made my day - though I suspect that Joyce still prefers street markets!



The Fox and the Grapes

Chris Soar has been watching his garden with some care and has sent us this:

Everybody (I assume) has heard Aesop's fable about the Fox and the Grapes.

As far as I'm concerned that Fox got it right because only once in five or six years have the grapes on my outside vine ripened sufficiently to be eaten, or tasted even, without screwed up eyes and distorted mouth!

However, that's not the point today - what indeed do foxes eat? They are, of course, omnivorous, but what are they eating now?

A couple of years ago a portion of my lawn looked as though ploughed by wild boar. I thought at first it might have been a badger searching for worms, but concluded it could only be a fox (the clue being the trademark territory marking deposit!). This was in an area where squirrels had been burying peanuts nicked from the bird feeders!



Then, last year, I was speaking to the Head Greenkeeper of the golf course, who told me that one of the tees had been similarly treated, and that they too thought it might be a badger after worms. They set up a camera, and it was a fox.

Since Christmas my lawn has been receiving similar attention again, and, I suppose, there being a lack of people about, it has become bolder, because it has visited my garden in the early afternoon, and quite regularly throughout the day.

There have been reports that wildlife has benefited throughout the Covid lockdowns but I haven't seen any evidence of that because last year was disastrous so far as I am concerned.

First, after 10 years of nesting in my barn and garage roof space, not one swallow returned last Summer. In fact, only on one occasion did I see them flying high overhead. This is weird because John told me that there were plenty of swallows in Thoroton.

Then there was the complete absence of any frogs or toads in my garden ponds or elsewhere, so the grass snake, which I'd seen 4 times in 2019, didn't appear.

I had heard that a certain "group" of swallows fly to the Middle East in Winter, and journey back through Greece and that, last year, at the time they were passing through Greece, there was an unprecedented three-week spell of very bad weather and therefore no insects, and hence many swallows perished.

As for the amphibians, well, I understand there is some virus (we all know about viruses, don't we?!), which has been killing them - "wiping them out"

In addition, in the Summer, rabbits disappeared overnight. For several days 4 baby rabbits had been playing at the end of my lawn and then, suddenly, they disappeared and I only saw the occasional one thereafter. Still, hopefully, they will return, as have the pheasants – a cock and three hens.

So, back to the fox! There being few rabbits and no frogs, and the mice and voles being well hidden at this time of year, the fox has been digging up peanuts buried by the squirrels, and even eating bird seed, both of which activities are shown in the photographs.

To save my garden some damage, I have once or twice put out some dog food (which I bought to feed the hedgehogs), but I'm not sure this is a good idea! But, hey ho, what do you do?!

We'll have to see what the new Spring and Summer bring us.



I understand, too, from my copy of 'The Week', that rats are doing extremely well during lockdown. They love empty buildings, can eat wood and propagate at a frightening rate of knots.

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The Art Group

We're again lucky to have some lovely paintings from the Art Group. This week the artists are Desna Haskell, Dorothy Albans, Mike Smith and Bernie Besnard.



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Better by Myles

Last week Mary Myles brought us recollections from Bangalore – this week she brings us the story of her military experience as a medical executive in Germany, part of the British Army of the Rhine. Hearing about people's life experiences is truly absorbing and perhaps we may look forward to enjoying more of it. The floor is wide open, so come on the rest of you – if we don't receive more contributions, I may be tempted to tell you something of my life in scientific research! Anyway, thanks Mary for this:

John Orton had asked me to write about my early days as a nurse, but as we've all seen Call the Midwife, which spans my training at Kings College Hospital from 1960 to 1963, I thought I'd fast forward a few decades to 1989 when I moved to Germany following my marriage to my second husband, a GP Trainer with the British Army. I was asked to write this article for inclusion in a magazine not unlike our Newsletter, to be distributed to newly arrived personnel on the RAF base I was working at in 1989. For those readers not from a Military background I will start with a Glossary of Terms - the Military love initials for things and posts, so here are a few explanations
GNO - Group Nursing Officer - a trained Nurse with Managerial responsibilities a rank equivalent to Squadron Leader in the RAF or Major in the Army
SSAFA - Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families Association - a Charity founded by Queen Alexander to care for the families of serving soldiers back in the day. At the time of writing this article, SSAFA was contracted by the Ministry of Defence to employ Health Visitors, Social Workers and Midwives to care for Service families in Germany, Hong Kong Brunei and Holland.
Health Visitor - a trained nurse or midwife who undertakes further training in child development and child protection. The role has changed considerably since this article was written.
SMO. - Senior Military Officer, usually with the rank of Colonel or Wing Commander - equivalent to a Senior Registrar or junior Consultant in the NHS
OP Granby - this was the military term for the 1st Gulf War in 1991
RGN - Registered General Nurse usually with rank of Captain or Lieutenant and a Staff Nurse in the NHS
BASPCAN - an organisation related to the training and development of Social Workers, Nurses and other Professionals concerned with Child Protection issues
So, having given you the Glossary, I'll start my story! First written in 1991 at the start of the 1st Gulf War.

What is a GNO?

You may remember the Flanders and Swann song "I'm a Gnu!" - no - you're far too young! Well, anyway, I'm not - I'm a GNO or for those not in the know (pun!) a Group Nursing Officer

I thought I'd begin by defining the term - Group - that in SSAFA parlance means you cover a variable area of the country, in my case, Germany or BAOR (British Army of the Rhine). Mine extends from RAF Laarbruch in the North, near the town of Kevelar in North Rhine Westfalia to RAF Ramstein in the South, being an RAF base it is in the middle of nowhere! (I have looked on Google and can't find any well known towns nearby!!) and RAF Wildenrath in the East - the nearest big town is Munchen Gladbach, about 20 miles from Dusseldorf. To cover all these bases was a round trip of about 700 miles in order to visit my "Group on a regular basis. The Group consists of

1). Health Visitors, full time and Bank - not the moneyed variety - they are Health Visitors who work just as hard as full-time staff but usually during term-time only, and we would be struggling to cover the area without their skilled support.

2). Midwives, who are usually wives of serving Airmen or Soldiers who bring a wide variety of skills to their role.

3). Registered General Nurses - a relatively new role in SSAFA but most welcome and again highly skilled. They will have accompanied their husbands on his posting to Germany having worked and trained in the UK so they also bring a wide variety of different skills. At the moment they are carrying out routine vaccinations on all the babies and children in their base - which releases the Health Visitor to do more child development and education to families.

Health Visitors work very closely with their Social Worker colleagues, especially within the Military framework, which is not always the same in UK
So, I have a lovely Group to look after, and Mr Harker (Chief Administrator) helps me organise their cars (loaned to us by the Military) and their holidays.

Now then, Nursing - that's a funny term and often misinterpreted, I feel by our Military colleagues. I am not about to don cap and apron and do a ward round with bedpan trolley in tow, nor am I about to minister to ailing airmen who bang their thumbs whilst winding up the starting handles of their jets! (I actually know they use something more sophisticated than that, but you get my drift!)

Yes, I am a qualified Nurse, and trained to perform the above tasks, but I wanted to be a Health Visitor because I had had a surfeit of the above tasks and felt a change of direction was in order. My second husband (A Scot!) had also told me that I would need to earn my keep once we were married and so I should get my HV training done ASAP!! It was the best advice he ever gave me!! Now I've reached the first rung of the Management ladder - albeit reluctantly - I would like "Nursing" to be altered to something more romantic like "Liaison" or Co-Ordinating" - which may not help our Military colleagues understand our role but it would dispel the bedpan image, I feel!

The third part of my job title is "Officer" - a term with distinct Military connotations - as my dictionary states "One in command in Army, Navy etc". I am certainly not a Commander and I'm only just learning to be a Manager, so what I'd really like to be known as is "Group Liaison Manager or "GLUM", which is what I often feel when there are people from above telling me what to do and people from below asking why I haven't done it! That said, being a GNO or a GLUM is on the whole a great learning experience and one which I intend to enjoy!

So, having briefly described my job title, what do I do?

I find sitting in an office a difficult thing to do in itself. Having been used to being out and about visiting families at home as a Health Visitor for 6 years, it takes a lot of will-power on my part to actually sit in my office and put pen to paper and delegate!

Another test of will power! However, the up side is that every month I get to visit all the bases, discuss families causing concern and meet with the SMO where possible.

I was very fortunate to be sent on The Ashridge Management Development Course last year and it certainly taught me a lot about group dynamics and different types of Management . As I “died” in the Blizzard game and my group became bankrupt very early on in the Management game, it’s perhaps fortunate GNOs don’t hold a budget! The Tutor did say that “Blue” people of which I am one apparently, are compassionate and caring, which I hope all nurses are, including Managers!

Since Op Granby started at RAF Bruggen - an RAF Base just on the Dutch/German border, the Community Health and Social Work Team have tried to be involved as much as possible with the Station arrangements for the wives and families left behind whilst their husbands fly sorties over Iraq and Iran and others work non-stop to keep the Tornado jets in the air. We try to attend the briefings , but with an average of 20 babies born each month it can be difficult!

We have close liaison with the Padres (Priests) and the Admin. Wing - similar to a town council - this is also in place in all the other RAF bases around the country.

So, after nearly a year in post, where am I at? I am at last getting to grips with Office Management, thanks to the wonderful clerical staff I have! SSAFA is very fortunate to be able to employ these highly qualified secretaries as PA’s!

I have taken part in an excellent study day run by BASPCAN, well, I thought it was excellent until I learnt I was to be one of the Speakers! However, with a lot of help from colleagues and my wonderfully competent computer literate husband, it was a good day, but one thing I learnt - never volunteer for anything until you know all the facts! Just as a sideways point - my late husband received the Order of St John for his work in computerising Army Medical Records years before the NHS did!

Becoming a GNO has been a difficult metamorphosis for me as I still actually enjoy practical Health Visiting*, but what it has done is prove to me that Field Workers need good and effective management if they are to perform their role effectively, especially in this strange and ever- changing place called British Forces Germany.

*on our return to UK in 1996, I got a job as a Health Visitor in Sneinton and St Annes’, where I worked part-time until my retirement in 2004.

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So, You Thought You Knew Everything?

Sue Hillyard has been a regular contributor to our weekly musings and this week is no exception. Thank you, Sue for this – I am reminded of a contribution from Chris Soar in a very much earlier Letter which overlaps to some extent but there's much that's new.

Stewardesses is the longest word typed with only the left hand.

Lollipop is the longest word typed with your right hand.

No word in the English Language rhymes with **Orange, Silver** or **Purple**.

Dreamt is the only English word that ends with the letters **mt**.

Our eyes are always the same size from birth but our nose and ears never stop growing.

The sentence:

'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.'

Uses every letter in the alphabet.

The words **racecar, kayak, level** are the same read left-to-right or right-to-left – ie they are 'palindromes'.

There are only four words in the English Language which end in '**dous**'. **Tremendous, Horrendous, Stupendous, Hazardous**.

There are two words in the English Language that have all five vowels in order – **Abstemious, Facetious**.

Typewriter is the longest word that can be made using the letters only on one row of the keyboard

A cat has 32 muscles in each ear.

A goldfish has a memory span of three seconds.

A jiffy is an actual unit of time – one thousandth of a second. (Scientists call it a 'millisecond').

A shark is the only fish that can blink with both eyes.

A snail can sleep for three years.

Almonds are a member of the peach family.

An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain.

Babies are born without kneecaps. They don't appear until the child reaches 2 to 6 years of age.

February 1865 is the only month in recorded history not to have a full moon.

In the last 4000 years no new animals have been domesticated.



If the population of China walked past you, eight abreast, the line would never end because of the rate of reproduction.

Leonardo Da Vinci invented the scissors.

Peanuts are one of the ingredients of dynamite!

Rubber bands last longer if refrigerated.

The average person's left hand does 56% of the typing.

The cruise liner QE2 moves only six inches for each gallon of diesel that she burns.

The microwave cooker was invented after a researcher walked by a RADAR tube and a chocolate bar melted in his pocket.

The winter of 1932 was so cold that Niagara Falls froze completely solid.



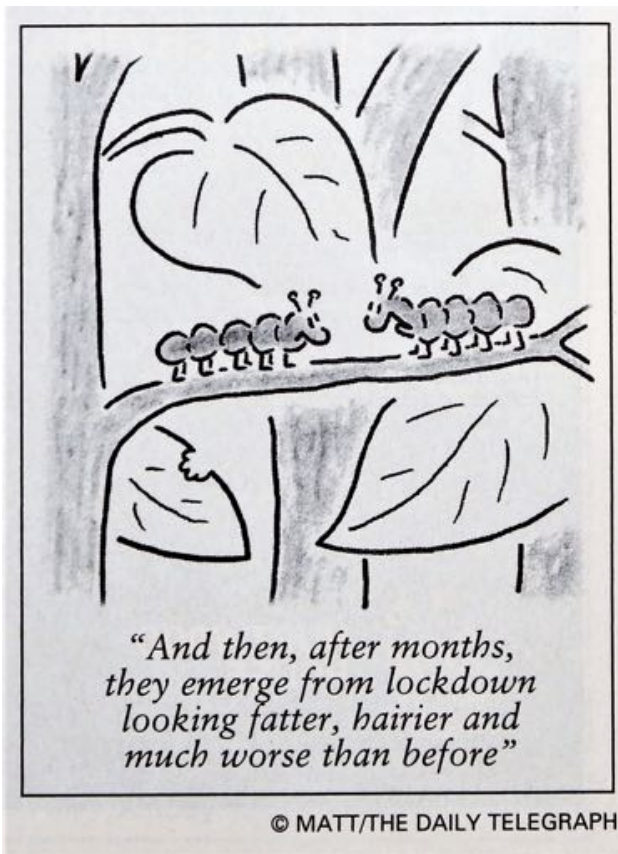
There are more chickens than people in the World.

Winston Churchill was born in a Ladies Room during a dance.

Women blink nearly twice as much as men.

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Cartoon



The one saving grace of 'Lockdown' is that it serves as a stimulus to humour and the Telegraph cartoonist can always be relied on to keep us amused.

Quiz Corner

Once again, Peter Shreyhane has come to our rescue with a quiz based on song titles. Good luck – answers next week.

Song Titles – can you name the colour and the performer(s)

1. ? Submarine
2. ? Eyed Girl
3. ? Velvet
4. A ? Shade of Pale
5. Band of ?
6. Forever in ? Jeans
7. Lady in ?
8. ? Moon
9. Paint it ?
10. ? Tambourine
11. Mellow ?
12. Silence is ?
13. ? Suede Shoes
14. Nights in ? Satin
15. Little ? Bull

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Creative Writing

We are indebted to Chris Tomblin again for this week's piece of Creative Writing and it is on a topic which must concern all of us – my hair is looking more and more like Boris Johnson's, with each passing week! Thanks, Chris.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Ode to my hairdresser

I knew you so well many months ago
But regarded you not as a cherished friend.

But now I long to be with you and so
All my pleas and requests I solemnly send.

Let me compare you to an artist rare
Whose hands create illusions of great charm
Will by your close attention to my hair
Soon banish grey and beauty reaffirm.

How do I love you let me count the ways
I love your colour cut and style
Thinking of meeting fills my days
Whilst hoping to see you in a short while.

Now why this love for you I wonder
Of course, Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

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That's all for this week – but it's beginning to look as though we may yet celebrate our half-century! So, Keep safe for just a little bit longer.

John

