



## Cotgrave and District U3A

### Keeping in Touch 49

#### Spring

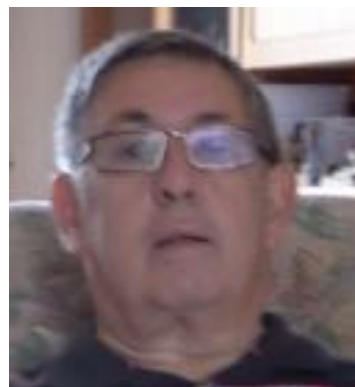
The arrival of Spring has been emphasised by some glorious weather which makes every aspect look so very much more positive. Walking through the Country Park recently, I suddenly realised that catkins were everywhere – then, while admiring our Hamamelis shrub, I noticed that we have some in the garden, too. Here they both are, beautifully illuminated by the spring sunshine.



## Committee News

Our Chairman, Peter Shreyhane has asked us to include the following note in this week's Letter:

“Due to a change in personal circumstances, Malcolm Baxter has been obliged to step down from his roles in our U3A. As well as being Treasurer, Malcolm has led the Walking and Table-Tennis Groups, in addition to undertaking many other, often unseen, supporting roles.



I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of us all, to thank Malcolm for all of his unstinting work.



We are fortunate that Chris Soar has agreed to take over the role of Treasurer.”

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## Coming Out of Lockdown

At the recent (Zoom) Committee Meeting, the future Branch Programme was discussed and we have been asked to include the following statement in this week's Letter:

“One thing your Committee want to avoid is overpromising and under-delivering so, when making decisions as to when activities may resume, we shall be guided by:

Government Rules and Guidelines, Advice from National U3A Sources and Availability of Venues (The Welfare, Group Leaders' Homes and Pubs).

As members will be aware, the Government 'Road Map' sets out four stages, each five weeks apart, and it appears from this, that outdoor activities could well be the first to resume: eg, from 29<sup>th</sup> March, a group of six people will be allowed to meet outdoors – including in a private garden. However, all these stages depend on four key tests being met:

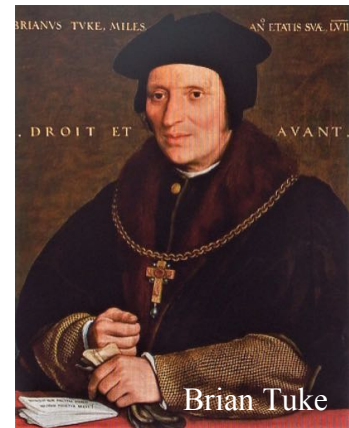
Success of Vaccinations, Reductions in Hospital Admissions and Deaths, Drop in Numbers of Infections, No New Variants Causing Concern.”

We shall, of course, keep you informed, week by week, of any new developments in the situation.

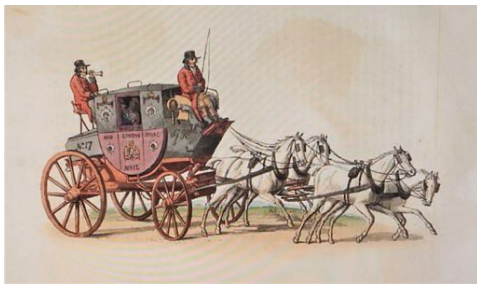
And now to this week's topics.

## Royal Mail

Royal Mail has a long history, having begun life in the reign of a well-known Royal Male. It was in 1512 that Henry VIII appointed Brian Tuke to the role of 'Master of the Posts' and it was, of course a specifically 'Royal' appointment, designed to serve only the sovereign himself. The rest of us had to wait until 1635 when Charles I set up the first Public Service. This involved a system of Post-to-Post letter deliveries, either by foot or by horse. At each Post the local Postman extracted those letters addressed to his area, while the remainder were taken on to the next Post. I must admit that I had a mental picture of a line of posts set up along the Great North Road, each with a postbag hanging from it but, alas, that was never the case – the word 'post' implies the sort of posting that a soldier might receive when 'posted' to the Middle East (or wherever). Yet another fond imagining bites the dust! Six main post-roads were designated with a maximum rate of 120 miles per day and a charge of 2d for 80 miles. Hundreds of competing carriers set themselves up, each with his own charges, until, in 1657, a Postage Act was passed specifying fixed rates.



Delivery over any distance was far from reliable on account of footpads so, in 1784, mail by coach was established, protected by guards equipped with blunderbusses. Results were more reliable and faster – typical speed was 8 mph – but prices were correspondingly greater. In 1812, a charge of 4d for a mere fifteen miles was quoted. Apparently, Nottingham was the proud possessor of a Post Office as early as 1779, a High Street shop owned by a seedsman named John Raynor, while the present, purpose-built Post Office in Queen Street dates from 1898. Bingham had a Post Office and a Post Master from 1835.



A serious weakness concerned the fact that payment was the responsibility of the recipient and many such recipients refused to accept delivery, so a major improvement was introduced by Rowland Hill in 1840 with the concept of the postage stamp, paid for by the sender. Hill fixed the charge at one penny for a half-ounce letter and two pence for a full ounce – hence the 'Penny-Black' and 'Two Penny Blue' stamps. They were unperforated and had to be cut from a sheet by



hand, resulting in a degree of damage which proved a major concern to future stamp collectors! Also, the black stamp had to be cancelled with a red mark which proved too faint, so the printing inks were changed, resulting in the longer-lived 'Penny Red'.

In fact, the Penny Black lasted less than a year but the stamp system has, of course, lasted until the present day, the first perforated stamps making their appearance in 1854. Another significant development was the proposal to fit letter-boxes to house doorways so that mail could be delivered securely to individual households – this happened as early as 1844.



At the same time, the magnificent Victorian Posting Box came into being – see our photograph. Hill’s innovations, spurred on by his decision to keep charges low, resulted in a rapid increase in letter-writing and consequent burgeoning of the postal service, country-wide.



So much for the National story – but what about the effect on a tiny country village such as Cotgrave? As it happens, the development of the Postal Service coincided with the onset of the system of Census Returns, the first one being published in 1841, followed by repetitions every ten years until 1911 (we look forward to seeing the 1921 edition this year). The Cotgrave U3A History Group Website includes a correlated version, covering the whole period, together with accounts in various Trade Directories, which add a certain amount of useful information, so it was far from difficult to pull together a rather imperfect account of Cotgrave’s postal experience.

So far as I can tell, the first references to a Post Office were in 1853 and 1855, when a lady by name Mrs Jane Hames (an ex-school mistress) would receive mail at 10-30 am and dispatch it at 4-45 pm. However, there was no building designated as ‘Post Office’ – it would appear that the good lady’s son, who was a high-class shoemaker, ran a workshop somewhere between the Rose and Crown and All Saints Church and this doubled as unofficial Post Office. What’s more, this arrangement seems to have continued for some considerable time – Jane was still recorded as dealing with the mail at her son’s shop at least until 1871. There were, though, no facilities for paying money orders (the nearest money order office being in Radcliffe) nor for the use of the electric telegraph. The first successful telegraph transmissions were developed round about 1850 but the Post Office only took over responsibility for this in 1870 and, even in 1885, Cotgrave residents were being advised that the nearest telegraph office was situated at Plumtree Railway Station. However, in the 1911 Census, there is a reference to a young man named Arther Denholm who functioned as a ‘Telegraph Clerk’, so we can assume that the facility was then available ‘in house’.

Jane was aged 83 in 1871, while still acting as Post Mistress but, by 1881, her responsibilities had been taken over by another elderly lady, Mrs Sarah Cupitt (then a 73-year-old widow). Once again, there appears to have been no Post Office building – Sarah described herself as ‘Post Mistress and Grocer’, her shop being somewhere along Main Road. Sarah continued in office at least until the 1891 Census but, by 1911 the Post Office had moved to Walter White’s plumbing and grocery shop, where his wife Winifred took responsibility for dealing with the mail. Then, by



1922, Walter, himself, had taken over, describing himself as ‘Grocer and Post Master’. By this time, there were outlying post boxes in Owthorpe, Cotgrave Place and Stragglethorpe, which imply that someone was acting as Postman. There was also a Telephone Call Office. However, even as late as 1941, the Post Office seems to have been combined with the workshop of Walter’s son, Eric, who offered his services as a builder, plumber, painter and decorator, together with serving as Post Master! We also know, from the 1939 Census, that the Post Office was located in the present building

An interesting observation is the complete absence, during the period up to 1940, of any evidence for the existence of a Postal Delivery Service. One can only conclude that letters were not delivered but were collected from and taken to the Post Office by the correspondent – this is surely the reason why various Trade Directories record the times at which mail was delivered to and collected from the Post Office. It also seems consistent with the lack of precise household addresses in almost all the Census Returns (though the 1939 version did include addresses).

So, what of more recent developments? I am indebted to Dorothy Albans for information bringing our account up to date. She remembers that the Post Office was definitely located in its present building, at least from about 1945, which is consistent with our Census data (it would seem reasonable to suppose that Walter White's shop and the present Post Office building are one and the same place). She also recalls that the Post Office was run by Eric and Mary White, then by their daughter. Later Post Masters (Mistresses?) were Valerie Ogle and her daughter Sue Fisher, which brings us right up to date. Another interesting piece of information Dorothy has given me concerns the existence of two Post Women, Ada Woolley and Winnie Bowden, who delivered mail to individual houses, wearing navy blue outfits (whether official uniforms is not clear!). So far as her memory serves her, these ladies functioned from the mid-1940s - we can only speculate how much earlier such a delivery service might have been in existence.

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## Puzzle Corner

Judy Bullock sent in this week's puzzle.

Seven 5-letter words must be entered into the grid so that the three words written across each line are connected – for example 'wishing – well – done'. Reading downwards, the seven letters in the shaded squares spell out a plant.

Food						Letter
Oven						Puppet
Stark						Flame
Cricket						Point
Egg						Dwarf
Silver						Glass
Top						Band

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And the answers to last week's quiz by Peter Shreyhane

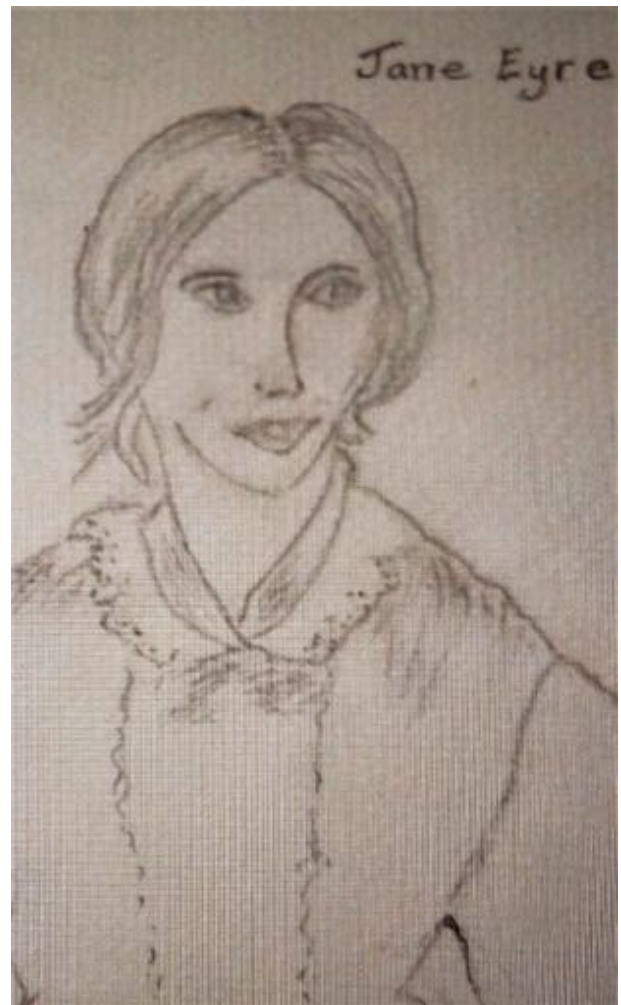
### Song Titles – can you name the colour and the performer(s)

1. **Yellow** Submarine      **The Beatles**
2. **Brown** Eyed Girl      **Van Morrison**
3. **Blue** Velvet      **Bobby Vinton**
4. A **Whiter** Shade of Pale      **Procol Harum**
5. Band of **Gold**      **Freda Payne**
6. Forever in **Blue** Jeans      **Neil Diamond**
7. Lady in **Red**      **Chris de Burgh**
8. **Blue** Moon      **The Marcels**
9. Paint it **Black**      **The Rolling Stones**
10. **Green** Tambourine      **The Lemon Pipers**
11. Mellow **Yellow**      **Donovan**
12. Silence is **Golden**      **The Tremeloes**
13. **Blue** Suede Shoes      **Elvis Presley**
14. Nights in **White** Satin      **The Moody Blues**
15. Little **White** Bull      **Tommy Steele**

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## Art Group

This week we show yet more lovely paintings by members of the Art Group



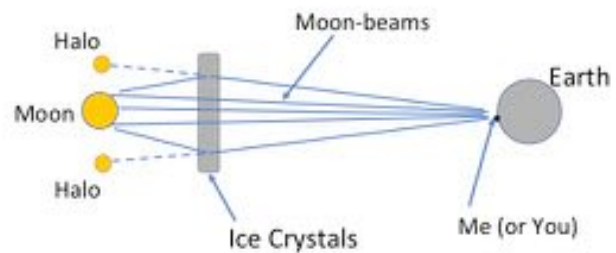
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## Science Group

We don't often cater for the Science Group but I recently happened to look out of a bedroom window late at night and was surprised to see not only a very clear image of the moon but also a quite distinct halo surrounding it, though well separated from it. My attempts to photograph it proved a failure but I came across an excellent photo on the Internet, together with an explanation! The halo is caused by light from the moon being refracted through ice crystals in the upper atmosphere which bend the light by 22 degrees, thus forming a ring round the moon. This represents light which would otherwise miss the earth and not be seen by our eyes.

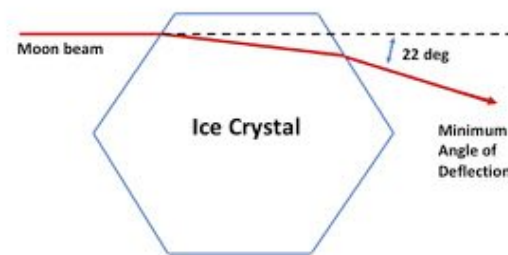


Needless to say, it only happens on very clear nights and only a fraction of the light is bent so the halo is very weak, compared to the brightness of the moon, itself. The process is somewhat similar to the formation of a rainbow when sunlight is refracted by water droplets in the lower atmosphere.



### HALO ROUND THE MOON

Though it is a commonly observed phenomenon, details of the explanation are far from clear. Our diagram of light refraction through a hexagonal ice crystal represents the minimum angle of refraction as 22 degrees. This suggests that the halo should be sharp on the inside edge but more fuzzy on its outer edge and this is certainly seen in some photographs. It also suggests that there should be a hint of colour due to the fact that the refractive index varies slightly with wavelength. Our halo photograph does indeed show a hint of colour. A full understanding must consider the effect of ice crystal orientation and how this may depend on the aero-dynamics of the crystals and such details are still far from thoroughly understood.



### FORMATION OF MOON HALO

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## Real Ale Group

We don't often cater for the Real Ale Group, either but this will be an exception – because this week's cartoon is specifically aimed at them and we have not one, but two appropriate limericks:

T' Real Ale Group's bit down i' the dumps,  
Being unable to visit the pumps?  
Well, let's be quite clear  
We're in sight of a beer  
If, together, we just stir our stumps.

While not yet allowed at the bar,  
It may well be we're not at all far  
From our vision of Arden  
In somebody's garden,  
Complete with a glass of Doombar.

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## Cartoon Corner



Is there life still here? I sometimes feel a distinct lack of life has enveloped me during the long lockdown! Perhaps we all feel a bit the same – certainly, our favourite cartoonist seems to be suggesting so. But, hopefully, it will not be very long before we can prise ourselves into a moderate degree of activity.

Consistent with Reason and Rhyme,  
We've been locked-down for quite a long time  
But the time's almost here  
When we all should change gear  
And, determinedly, upwardly climb.

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## Creative Writing Group

This week's contribution from the Creative Writing Group is by Heather Whatnall. Thanks once again to the Group for keeping us supplied with imaginative stories.

### A NIGHT OUT

by

Heather Whatnall

Maggie had been getting ready for the night out for months. Ever since she had been given permission to go to the dance, she had been making plans with Peggy, her friend and colleague. They had both dreamt of going to the Plaza Ballroom in Glasgow since they started seeing the stunning building from the bus on their way to work. Every day they would talk about what they would wear when they were allowed to go dancing. After a lot of groundwork, Maggie's mother, Violet, finally persuaded her husband to let their daughter go. The preparations could truly begin when Peggy's father agreed she could go too.

The girls spent numerous lunchtimes in Frasers department store looking at dress patterns and, eventually, they both chose "Simplicity" ones. The girls were proud owners of Singer sewing machines; their grandfathers had worked at the factory and had bought their granddaughters the latest version before they retired. Peggy had decided on a swing dress and chose a red and white polka dot fabric. Maggie had decided she wanted a sophisticated look and had chosen a pencil dress pattern and a bottle green velvet fabric. They worked on their dresses every evening apart from when they were at Secretarial College. At the weekends Maggie and Peggy would meet up and show each other how much progress they had made. They were both skilled dressmakers; their mothers had taught them well.

The dresses were both completed the Saturday before the dance. Pearl necklaces and earrings were laid out along with shoes, gloves, handbags and new underwear. Maggie had bought the latest "waspie" corset to give her figure an even more curvaceous appearance. Hairstyles and makeup had been practiced; Maggie was going for the "Elizabeth Taylor" look whilst Peggy had chosen a more "Doris Day" style.

It was a Tuesday dance that the girls were allowed to go to. This was the busiest night at the venue and the night when men and women could go individually.

When the evening of the dance arrived Maggie and Peggy rushed home from work and got ready for the night out. Maggie was deciding what coat to wear when her mother came into the bedroom carrying her champagne mink stole and asked Maggie if she would like to borrow it. It looked so stylish over the fabulous green velvet dress; Maggie had to fight back tears of gratitude and joy. She really did look absolutely stunning.

The girls had arranged to meet at 7pm at the number 17 bus stop. Thankfully the weather was dry and quite mild. Peggy arrived first. She was wearing a full-length swing coat over her polka dot dress and she, too, looked stunning.

Maggie arrived just as the bus pulled up. The girls were busy chattering away as they got on the bus and hurriedly sat down before the bus set off; they didn't want to stumble or fall in their new stilettos. After a while they noticed there were other people they knew on the bus who were also dressed for the dance. The atmosphere was brilliant, everyone was so excited and it was the first time going to the dance for most of them. The Bus conductor, Bill, was very amused and envious of all their energy. He had been working all day and was nearly at the end of his shift. He would have loved to join everyone at the Plaza if it had been his day off. However, after being on his feet all day he was looking forward to getting home and sitting down.

The stop for The Plaza was approaching and people were already pressing the bell. Anticipation filled the air. Maggie and Peggy didn't want to get up from their seats until the bus stopped in case the driver pressed the brakes too hard and the bus lurched forward as it would throw them off balance. When the bus stopped Peggy got up. Maggie could not get up properly, something was stopping her. It took a moment before she realised what it was... a great big blob of chewing gum was sticking her beautiful dress to the bus seat!!! Everyone else was jumping off the bus and joining the queue outside the Plaza. Maggie could feel the horrible sticky mess on her dress and, although she soon detached herself from the seat, she could not remove the gum - it was well and truly stuck. Poor Maggie burst into tears, there was no way she was going into the dance with a great big splodge of chewing gum stuck on her bottom – the embarrassment would be too much to bear. She made a quick decision and told Peggy to get off the bus and go to the dance with the other people they knew. Peggy was reluctant but agreed when Bill said he would make sure Maggie got home safely. Through her tears Maggie watched as they left behind the giddy crowd waiting for the Plaza to open. Her tears started to flow more freely now the bus was empty except for herself and Bill.

Bill left Maggie for a few minutes. She had sat back down, too upset to care if it made things worse with her dress. She didn't really hear what Bill was saying to her as she sobbed into her mum's mink stole. However, after a while, she did manage to stop crying long enough to hear Bill tell her they were at the Bus Depot and she would have to get off the bus. The thought of trying to find another bus to get her home was too much for Maggie and the tears started flowing again. It was then that Bill told her he was true to his word and would get her home safely. He had his motorbike at the Bus Depot and would give her a lift home. Even though she was still upset, Maggie almost laughed at having to hitch up her pencil dress and protect her modesty with the mink stole as she climbed onto the bike.

Bill was an excellent driver and Maggie felt safe with him. He got her home in no time and was very courteous, watching until Maggie was safely inside before driving off into the night.

The story could end there with Maggie inside her home, trying to remove the gum from her dress. However, a few weeks later, who do you think was in the queue outside the Plaza for "Couples Night"?

Maggie and Bill! X

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## **Membership Subscriptions – An Important Announcement**

### **RENEWING YOUR U3A MEMBERSHIP**

The subscription renewal date for the 2021-22 year is 1st April 2021.

In previous years members have had a form to complete to pass to the membership secretary along with their payment.

After a lot of consideration and looking carefully at our financial position the committee has decided there will be NO subscription payment required in 2021. No action being needed by you if you intend to continue with your membership.

This will have a serious effect on our financial reserves, but the committee decided that this is the fairest way forward given the limited activities that have been possible during 2020.

However, if you DO NOT wish to continue with membership please let the membership secretary, Sue Childs, know. This will greatly help our financial situation because the payment we make to the Third Age Trust per member every year is based on the previous year's membership.

Also, if there have been any changes to your email address, telephone, home address or emergency contacts please let Sue know so that we hold up-to-date contact details for you.

The national magazine, Third Age Matters, is sent to all our members, this involves us in payments to the magazine for distribution costs.

The magazine has recently had a change of editor and a face lift but even so, we know that some members put this in the recycling bin without reading it. If you DO NOT read the magazine and would like to help us save costs, please let Sue know and we will remove you from the distribution list. (If you have already let Sue know there is no need to do this again).

The lack of a subscription fee for 2021 does not apply to new memberships or to any member who did not renew in 2020 but wishes to re-join us. All new members will be required to pay the full subscription of £15.00.

The next yearly subscription for all members will be on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 and will last until 31 December 2022. It is hoped that this can remain at £15 but the final decision will be taken at a later date when more information about our financial commitments are available to the committee.

Sue's contact details are: email: [sue2childs@gmail.com](mailto:sue2childs@gmail.com) Tel 0115 989 2145  
or directly to 1, Daisy Close Cotgrave, NG12 3QL.

Please do not hesitate to contact Sue or any other committee member if you have any questions or queries about this year's changes.

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**That's all for this week. Keep safe but think about waking up, nevertheless!  
The end really is in sight.**

**John**

