



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 53

Spring Walks

The weather, as I write, is just perfect for a Spring walk and I believe that our Chairman, Peter Shreyhane, is planning to organise an ‘experimental’ walk for Cotgrave U3A members in the near future. As long as the group is outdoors and no more than six strong, it will be legal and there seems to be no reason why two groups of six, well apart, would not also be legal. Whatever - I was excited by the attached photograph which shows part of a walk in Wharfedale – oh the beauty of those dry-stone walls! The village in the background is Grassington, a too-well-known centre of lower-Wharfedale. It emphasises the eternal paradox that the more attractive a village may be the more is it ruined by being overcrowded with visitors! The only thing for it is to get out onto the fells – the higher the hill, the fewer the humans! My trouble now is that I can only climb a rather shallow slope.



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Eakring

Feeling that readers may have tired of articles about the history of Cotgrave and neighbouring villages, I thought it might be a relief to move just a little further afield. Eakring is a small village (population about 420) which lies roughly seven miles due east of Mansfield and almost became famous during the Second World War on account of sitting close to a very productive oilfield – except that this vital enterprise was shrouded in secrecy, to avoid possible attentions from German bombs.

Why, though, should I be interested in Eakring? (You can be sure that there is some reason!). In fact, there are three. Firstly, it has an important connection with the Bubonic Plague catastrophe of the seventeenth century, which also inflicted itself on Cotgrave, secondly it produced an important scientist towards the latter end of the eighteenth century and, thirdly, in the early years of the nineteenth century, the then Rector of Eakring was part-owner of the house here in

Scrimshire Lane where I live. Then, to add further excitement, the advowson of the Parish Church was held by the Savile family of Rufford, who, as I mentioned in an earlier account, originated in the Yorkshire town of Elland where I was brought up. I have to admit that not all of these factors are guaranteed to excite enthusiasm in the average reader but they do excite *me!* – and, as I am writing this, you will just have to put up with it! (Or move on quickly to the Art section?)



So, what about the Plague? The village of Eyam in Derbyshire is well-known for its reaction to the plague – the Rector William Mompesson organised the villagers to ‘self-isolate’ (as we would now put it) so as to avoid spreading it to surrounding villages. It saved few lives in Eyam, of course, and the Rector’s wife was one of those lost, but it was highly successful in saving lives elsewhere. Mompesson worked diligently to nurse his flock and was fortunate, indeed to survive.

“But what has that to do with Eakring?” you may well ask. Well, the Rector concerned was shortly afterwards appointed by Sir George Savile to the Rectorship of Eakring and remained there until his death in 1709. At first, his parishioners feared he would bring the plague to their village so he took the precaution of conducting church services in an open field, whilst he, himself, lived in a wooden hut well away from the village centre. However, he gradually came to be accepted and improved the quality of his own life by marrying a second wife, Margaret Dand, her mother being the daughter of Henry Savile, resident in Copley, a small village just a couple of miles from Elland – a branch of the Savile family which remained close to their roots. By the way, the pub in Eakring is called the Savile Arms. Blood, as they say, is thicker than water - or even beer!



Moving on to the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries, we come across another interesting Rector, name of John Henry Browne, who suffered pangs of conscience when faced with a serious drop in the number of communicants under his care. Such, indeed, was his concern that he wrote a rather strong letter to the leading members of his congregation ‘A Serious Address to the Superior Inhabitants of the Parish of Eakring’ enjoining them to take their responsibilities more seriously and send their inferiors to Church in the manner of old. It had very little effect, however, this being the time when Methodism was flourishing. In fact, both Primitive Methodist and Wesleyan chapels were built in the village to challenge the authority of the Anglican Church. Nevertheless, John Henry made a major effort to restore the fabric of his church and gained a reputation for philanthropy. That he was a man of considerable wealth is borne out by the fact that he joined forces with a gentleman named Anthony Hardolph Eyre Esq. to purchase property in Cotgrave from none other than the Right Hon. Charles Herbert Earl Manvers. There is very little doubt that Orchard Cottage was included in this sale and, at first sight, it appears to be a very strange one. It is well established that the Manvers family was extremely disappointed to have been unable to buy the Scrimshire land and property when the latter moved away from Cotgrave circa 1750 and that they were delighted when they finally acquired it from William Ianson’s son in 1808. Why, then, should they be selling it again in 1826? It is a long, complicated story – too long to spell out here - but, in a word, they were effectively selling it, not to an outsider



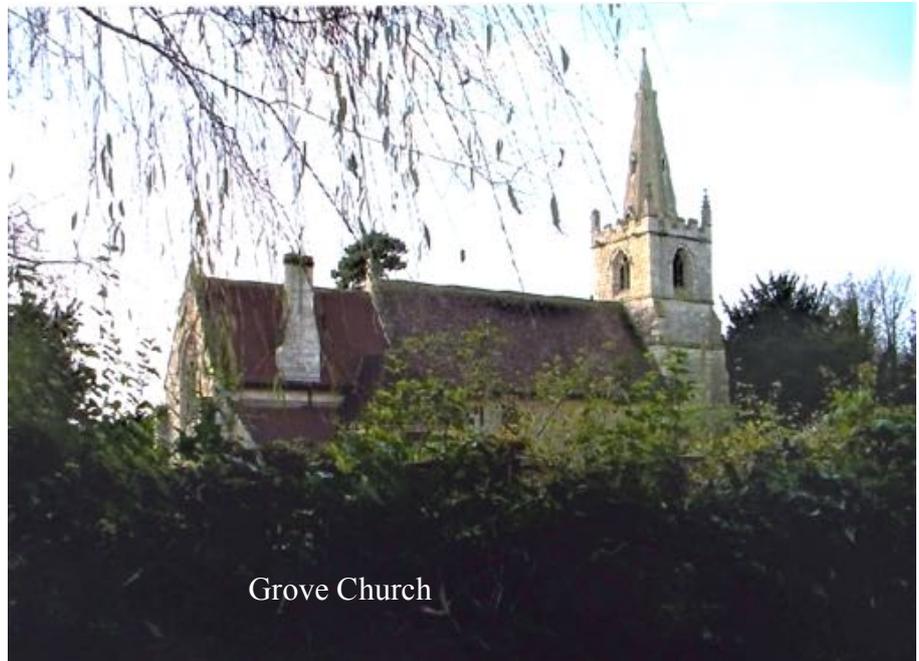
but to another branch of the Manvers family. It is worth pointing out, by the way, that the Manvers family had, by this time, left Holme Pierrepont Hall and were firmly ensconced in their much grander establishment of Thoresby, only a few miles from Eakring.



Anthony Hardolph was another relatively close neighbour, having inherited the Grove Estate from his father Anthony Eyre in 1788– Grove being another small village about two miles from Retford, with a rather interesting church. The important fact, from the point of view of our story, is that he was also related to the Manvers family, his eldest daughter, Mary Letitia, having married Charles Herbert Earl Manvers in 1804. In other words, this purchase of Cotgrave property was designed to transfer it from one arm of the Manvers family to another, some bit of financial skulduggery which leaves my naïve understanding completely baffled!

But, no doubt, they knew very well what they were doing! However, this still leaves the question as to why the Reverend John Henry Browne was involved. I have no answer to that but can merely add an important comment. The financial arrangement was such that, should either partner die, the property would then become solely owned by the survivor. In fact, John Henry died first, some six years before Anthony Hardolph so the obvious intent of this little scheme worked out as intended – but how did they know that John Henry was going to die first? And what would have happened had it turned out the other way round? We shall never know – but I imagine that possibility was covered in some way or other.

There is an interesting rider to the John Henry Browne story which puzzled me considerably when I first began researching our house history. At the time of all these goings-on, the Rector of Cotgrave was also named John Henry Browne! But remember that this was the time of plural livings so it was clear that our Eakring friend also held the living of Cotgrave – no problem.



But, in fact, there was a problem – further study showed that these two John Henrys were quite separate and distinct individuals – pure coincidence was at work doing its best to make my task even more confusing!

Finally, you may remember that I mentioned an important scientist who emanated from Eakring. His name was John Mitchell, son of the Rev. Gilbert Mitchell, Rector of Eakring from 1722 to 1758. He achieved some amazing things, such as being the first man to envisage the concept of a ‘black hole’ but this must wait until another day – I reckon you have suffered enough for one week.

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The Art Group

Once again we can enjoy a few examples of Maggie Spencer's work. I like the cricketer – but, then, I would! They are all impressive. Thanks Maggie.



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Quiz Corner

Firstly, we have the answers to Mike Seymour's Nottingham Place Names:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| 16. Great value to unlock with | Keyworth |
| 17. African diamond | Kimberly |
| 18. A noisy pig | Loudham |
| 19. A poet's area. Good lord | Newstead |
| 20. Sir Isaac's RAF base | Newton |
| 21. Wisdom's 100 | Normanton |
| 22. Ancient river crossing | Old Basford |
| 23. Heavy cow | Oxton |
| 24. Wet weather valued | Rainworth |
| 25. Bird at the front | Ravenshead |
| 26. Races | Southwell |
| 27. Wait at Mable's east coast | Staythorpe |
| 28. Beneath the trees | Underwood |
| 29. Skywards weight | Upton |
| 30. Sun goes down on Welsh veg. | West Leake |

And now a bit of simple maths, for a change – courtesy Sue Hillyard:

A girl picked a large bunch of flowers from her garden. She then decided she had too many and started giving them away to passers-by. Each time, she gave away first one flower, then half the number she had left. After five people had passed, she had just one flower left. How many flowers were in the original bunch?



This is not the bunch, so don't count them!

Then we can give our attention to a similar place name quiz this time put together by Peter Shreyhane. Thanks to all

Can you name the following places in the UK?

1. Which town is most associated with the gemstone Jet?
2. On which motorway are the Ferrybridge Services?
3. Which city is known as Auld Reekie?
4. Where is known as “The City of Dreaming Spires”?
5. If you were shopping in the Bull Ring, where would you be?
6. What is the UK’s smallest city?
7. In which county is the source of the River Trent?
8. Which football club plays at St. James Park?
9. Which railway town, where 6 routes converge, was a train spotters delight. The same town also used to build Rolls Royce cars and now builds Bentleys?
10. In which county is the Eden Project?
11. If you were walking through the Shambles where would you be?
12. The Sydney Harbour Bridge was designed and built by Dorman Long of Middlesbrough. It was based on a bridge they had earlier built in the UK. In which city is this bridge?
13. After London, which UK city has the largest population?
14. What is the name of the fictitious village where the Archers is set?
15. In which UK county would you find Stonehenge?

As usual, answers next week

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Roy's Story

John Ludlam, Chairman of the Cropwell Bishop, Owthorpe and Cotgrave branch of the British Legion, together with other members, has done sterling work putting together a picture of the Cotgrave soldiers, sailors and airmen involved in the two World Wars, particularly, of course, those who lost their lives and he has been kind enough to offer the following account of the wartime experiences of Roy Blowers who served on HMS Ajax during WWII.

For a number of years now I have been privileged to give the talk in All Saints church on Remembrance Sunday. From 2014 to 2017 my talks concentrated on World War 1 and in particular those from our 3 communities (Colston Bassett, Owthorpe and Cotgrave) who gave their lives over 100 years ago. 1917 being the first year in WW1 that, despite the enormous loss of life during the 3rd battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele as it is known, no one from Cotgrave or Owthorpe was killed. Therefore on 12 November 2017 I told Roy's story from the Second World War.

"HMS Ajax was a Leander-class light cruiser which served with the Royal Navy during World War 2. She was built in Vickers Shipyard in Barrow upon Furness and was completed in 1935. This ship was the eighth in the Royal Navy to bear the name and she became



famous for her part in the Battle of the River Plate when in 1939, during an engagement with the Graf Spey she was hit 7 times but not sunk, in the Battle of Crete, the Battle of Malta and as a supply escort in the Siege of Tobruk.

On 6 June 1942, she was taken in hand for refit at Chatham Dockyard, and this lasted until September that year. Her anti-aircraft gunnery was augmented by eleven Oerlikon 20 mm cannons and an improved aircraft warning radar was fitted as well as surface warning and fire control radars for her main guns.

She then underwent post refit trials in October, and after being recommissioned on 24 October, she worked-up at Scapa Flow with the Home Fleet during November.

Roy then aged 16 and having completed his basic training in the Royal Marines joined Ajax while she was in Chatham. He remembers deploying to Scapa Flow although he missed 2 weeks of the trials when he was diagnosed with mumps and had to be removed from the ship as his illness was contagious. He remembered well being passed in a sling between Ajax and another ship while in very unfriendly seas off the coast of Scotland.

On 31 December 1942 after successful sea trials, Ajax, with Roy on board, sailed to Africa and joined Force Q at Bone, in Algeria. Their task was the interdiction of enemy convoys and convoy defence. Bone was a very busy harbour unloading all that Montgomery needed to sustain the North Africa advance against the Germans and Italians. Ajax was escorting convoys or providing air protection for the ships in Bone port.

On New Year's day 1943 Ajax was berthed next to a tanker she had escorted in a day or 2 before. The warning sirens sounded and Roy moved to his Oerlikon gun to fight off an air attack. At that time most of the bombing in N Africa was carried out by Luftwaffe Stukas carrying 500lb or 1000lb bombs. Roy watched as one Stuka dived straight for him and the gun position. He could hear the scream of the bomber and could see the goggles on the pilot, and worse, the 1000lb bomb under the plane.

The Stuka released its bomb which passed a few feet above the gun crew before crashing through the deck of Ajax and exploding two levels down. Had the bomb not been armour piercing Roy would have been killed. As it was 20 members of the crew died in that attack. The next day Roy was on burial detail just outside Bone when another bomber appeared. Everyone stood fast expecting another attack but watched as the bomber flew slowly by and waved his wings in salute.

Ajax had been holed and had lost one of its 2 boilers but was repairable and on 7 Jan 1944 she was towed to Gibraltar for repairs which were to continue into February. Roy and the remainder of the crew moved to Gibraltar by train through Morocco and then across the straights.

Waiting for Ajax to be repaired was a boring time for the crew, however they had been told that the next stop would be the UK and so they were satisfied. Eventually, armed with many different fruits not at that time available in the UK they set sail. On day 2 of the voyage the Captain told them over the tannoy that they were in fact not sailing to the UK but to the USA where Ajax would be repaired and the ship would be fitted with new guns and radars.

They arrived in New York five days later and were welcomed by the US citizens. In their accommodation there was a pin board where invites from the locals to the crew were pinned up. Roy and his friend saw one they fancied, dinner at the Waldorf Astoria. They attended and were befriended by their hostess who on seeing the state of them offered them a bath at her house in Brooklyn, the first bath for many weeks. She asked what their sleeping conditions were like and on being told that they were in hammocks trying to get as close to the ship's funnel as possible to keep warm, she provided them with 2 large sleeping bags, something that the Royal Navy at that time had not heard of. They were the envy of all the other crew.

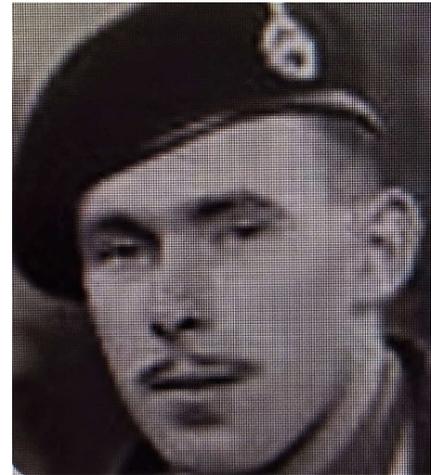
Ajax did not return to the UK until December 1943 but Roy and his friend returned much earlier in March on the QE2 with the US reinforcements. On reporting for duty they saw an advert asking for volunteers to join 'Combined Operations'. 'Combined Operations' consisted of land, sea and air forces of the Allied Nations planning, training and operating together as a unified force on amphibious raids and landings against the enemy. They decided to volunteer and trained for a significant time readying themselves for Operation Overlord or as we know it better the D Day operation.

On D Day, the 6th Jun 1944 at 6.30 in the morning Roy once again came into close contact with Ajax when he beached his Landing Craft Support on Gold Beach near Aramanche, France. His Landing Craft had a crew of 7 and bristled with weapons, it had 2 large Ford engines and was designed to propel itself as far up the beach as possible. There it was to provide a strong point to support the landings of the first wave. Strong it was in weapons but it was made of plywood and had no armour.

Ajax stood off shore bombarding the German positions and destroyed 3 of the 4 guns in the large emplacement at Longues sur Mer. Roy was delighted that the ship's gunners had remained as accurate as when he had been one of them.

Roy only stayed a few days in France as he had been selected to drive a new fighting vehicle which was being prepared in York in the UK. He returned from France to be trained on the vehicle, a Lloyds Carrier which, some weeks later, was deployed back to France to follow up the German retreat. The Lloyds Carrier was an armoured vehicle without a turret but bristling with weapons. It was designed to follow closely the tanks and to mop up any remaining enemy.

For Roy there followed 10 months of intense fighting which finished when he was just outside Wilhelmshaven when hostilities ceased in May 1945.



He had many stories of his progress across Europe and 3 stick out.

- The first was that he and the vehicle crew never really knew where their orders came from. However they knew that they were going North East and therefore fought anything that got in their way.
- The second is of a time when they were with some Canadian Army tanks which one night started to withdraw. Rather than be left alone Roy asked the tank commander where they were going. The commander explained that after 4 days at the front they were being replaced and would go to the rear area for some rest and recuperation. Needless to say this had never occurred to the crew of the Lloyds Carrier who just kept on going. But from then on they too followed this procedure.
- Lastly their life was so hectic and unpredictable that each night they would rest either in their vehicle, which had a tarpaulin over the top, in an old building or in a trench they had dug. For 10 months they had little bedding, no ablutions and, outside their vehicle, had little protection from those trying to kill them.

Seven days after the end of hostilities Roy and his crew were dispatched to take over the German Submarine Base in Wilhelmshaven. This they did and as the submarines returned to their pens, which incidentally were relatively undamaged, so their surrender was accepted and their weapons removed. The Prince Eugen, a famous German cruiser was also surrendered during that time.

But Roy's war was not over and after a couple of weeks in the UK he was dispatched on board ship for Burma. His lasting memory of the voyage was the one record that his friend played incessantly on the ships record player, 'Down in the Valley', by the Andrews Sisters.

His time in Burma was spent with other Royal Marines clearing the enemy from the many islands along the coast. However after the US bomb attacks on Japan enemy resistance gradually diminished and on 15 August, VJ day, hostilities ceased.

After VJ Day Roy moved from Burma to Ceylon and after a few weeks returned to the UK to be demobbed and, like thousands more ex-servicemen, looked for work in the civilian world.

He was still only a young man of 20, he was strong and fit and highly decorated but he didn't have a trade. He decided to become a labourer and on arriving for interview saw that they were also looking for scaffolders, more highly paid, so he applied. And despite knowing nothing about scaffolding he got the job. A measure of the man is that his drive, determination and tenacity over the next 40 years saw him rise to the East Midlands Area Manager of Scaffolding Great Britain.

He had remained a faithful member of the Ajax Association and had a Road, Crescent and Square named after him in Ajax Ontario. And even that is a story in itself:

During WW2 vast quantities of ammunition were made for the British Army and Navy in secret locations in Canada. The workers lived in wooden huts and over time developed their own infrastructure. At the end of the war the workers decided not to go back to their various homes but to stay in this beautiful part of Canada and form a town. And this they did, adopting the name of Ajax because of the incredible efforts the destroyer had made at the Battle of the River Plate. They have named their streets and squares after those who served on Ajax.”

In 2017 Roy Blowers lived with his wife Linda in Cotgrave in his adopted County. He wore 8 medals on his chest including: Atlantic Star and bar, North Africa Star and bar, Burma Star, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal, War Medal, D-Day Veterans Medal (Normandy Campaign) and finally the Legion d'honneur which was presented to him in 2016 by a French diplomat at Nottingham County Hall. Sadly Roy died in 2018 but his memory lives on and Linda his wife is a member of the local branch of the Royal British Legion.

John Ludlam

Chairman

Colston Bassett, Owthorpe and Cotgrave Branch of the RBL

13 March 2021

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Creative Writing Group

This week's contribution from the Group is by Jim Odell and takes up again the challenge of including the same six unlikely words as were contained in last week-but-one's version.

BANANA. CAKE. LIGHTBULB. OWL. PENGUIN. POTATO

The twins, Bobby and Rebecca listened intently as their father, George, related the story of his lottery win at the factory. This was strange because one usually had to raise one's voice to attract their attention.

George Barnes was saying that he invested £10 in a lottery at work and had won the prize. An all found day for the family at the safari park, locally known as The African Adventure. The twins had been pleading to go there for months but it was too expensive.

Ann Barnes was thinking of the £10. A lot of money but as George said, lamely, "we won, and the children are really keen to go." Yes," she said, "but what if you had lost?" George had a thought, a dark thought, 'if I'd lost, perhaps I would not have mentioned it.'

On Saturday morning, the day of the outing, they were all up early. George drove them to the park. They arrived just before nine. There were several cars in front of them but as soon as the gates opened the queue disappeared. George showed all the paperwork to the gateman. He told him to park the car in a space near the gate. They were shown to a special park vehicle. It was an all-round glass vehicle.

The driver's name was Benjamin. He told them that he had been born in Africa and knew a lot about the animals here.

Benjamin turned to the twins and said, "what do you want to see first" they both said, "the lions"

"Right, the lion enclosure"

Since the sun had risen it got slowly warmer. And most of the lions were basking. The animals were taking no notice of the cars that drove slowly by. Benjamin said, "they don't move around much during the day. That is until the meat wagon comes in. Then they run very fast after the wagon to get their share of the meat. If you stepped out of the vehicle, they might suddenly take very great interest.



Having seen the lions the vehicle was driven out of the enclosure onto the road where stalls were selling fruit. The vehicle stopped and George bought some bananas. He gave them to the children. "One each for you and two for the elephant."

They then saw the elephant strolling along the path. His mahout was sitting on its neck and on its back was a big frame with seats either side. In the seats sat children enjoying the ride. The elephant turned and walked back to two sets of steps. She went between the steps and stopped. All the children dismounted and came down the steps.

The twins were more than ready to have a go.

After queuing a few minutes they went up the steps to sit on the jumbo's back. The ride seemed to be very short, but it was time to get off. They took up position halfway along the elephant walk. As the big animal came near Bobby held out the banana. Jumbo slowed and her trunk was swung towards Bobby. She took a firm grip of the fruit and the trunk swung back to its mouth. It did the same for Rebecca and continued the ride. Benjamin said, "she also likes cake when she gets a chance.

Next enclosure was the exotic birds. Benjamin told them that his favourite bird was the screech owl. He had seen them flying about near his parent's home. Africa has more than thirty sorts of owl. Some of which eat fish. Owls are said to possess demons from olden times, a superstition that continues today.



Next, they were driven to the penguin's pool. They saw penguins, that Benjamin said were South African penguins and he had seen them at the Cape of Good Hope. The birds are flightless but have streamlined bodies and use their wings as flippers when at sea.

It was dinnertime. Benjamin took them to the big restaurant. He said that he would be back in an hour. The twins had fish and chips. George and Ann had potatoes, peas cabbage and pork chops. At the till George handed to the girl the four vouchers. These covered the main courses, sweets and a drink each.

An hour later Benjamin was back. He showed them many more of his African animals. All too soon it was time to leave. After saying goodbye and thank you to Benjamin, George drove them home. The car was stopped at the end of their road by traffic lights. The lights jumped to green. The Amber light was not working. "Lightbulb gone," muttered George. "I'll give the council a ring"

At home they all agreed that it had been a very good day in Africa and well worth £10.

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Last week's contribution by Chris Tomblin consisting of extracts from 8-year-old Daisy May Simpson's diary stirred up a minor flurry of interest concerning the veracity (or not) of the various personalities involved. Chris has therefore asked me to include an explanation of exactly how the various names were arrived at. Firstly, Arthur Wallhead Simpson was a real person who lived in Cotgrave and who was killed in the First World War. His details are listed on the Nottinghamshire County Council Role of Honour. His father was a cowman and his mother lived at Vine Cottage. The rest, Chris assures us, was fiction. She tried simply to imagine what life for a young girl in Cotgrave in the early twentieth century must have been like – and I think we can safely say, she made an excellent job of it! After all, it is the *Creative Writing Group*.

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The Week's Cartoon

The verbal battle to settle the balance of military investment will no doubt run and run but the Telegraph's cartoonist is always able to see the funny side, no matter what.



That's all we have for you this week. Enjoy the beginnings of freedom but remember to keep two metres apart just the same.

John

