



Cotgrave and District U3A

Keeping in Touch 56

Lost Post

No, not for the Duke of Edinburgh!



This represents yet another bit of ‘borrowing’ from Beeston U3A’s Monthly Bulletin, though the following limerick is (regrettably?) my own:

There once was a solitary pole
Buried deep in a solitary hole
But the threat of a fence
Led to public offence:
Now the hole plays a solitary role.

.....

The Beginning of the End?

Our Chairman, Peter Shreyhane has taken a lead in re-starting the Walking Group by leading a party round the local countryside. Here is his brief report on this heart-lifting venture:

Following the easing of Government Guidelines, we have been able to arrange our first walk.

The walk, on Friday 16th April, started from the Post Office and was an anti-clockwise circular walk across the fields to Clipston and then, through the Cotgrave Forest, back to the village, a distance of five miles.

The regulation limited the number who could take part to a maximum of six and, as we had more than that number wishing to take part, the walk was repeated on Monday 19th. It was a real plus to be able, in glorious sunshine, to be out in the fresh air, chatting!



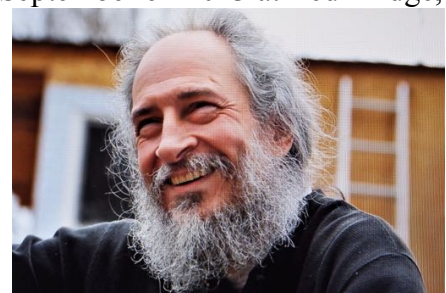
Our next walk is scheduled for Friday 19th May. Then, fingers crossed, further easing of lockdown regulations will have removed the ‘maximum of six’.

.....

Stone Skipping



Most of us have done it at one time or another but probably in a very light-hearted fashion. Did you realise, though, that there are those who take it very seriously, indeed and enter International Competitions to see who is World Champion? I suppose that many of us have taken the opportunity provided by a shingly beach to pick up a fairly flat pebble and skim it into the sea when the water becomes just moderately smooth and have been well satisfied by achieving perhaps half-a-dozen bounces. Not so the serious competitors, who select very flat pebbles and depend upon the dead flat calm of a suitable small lake to achieve almost unbelievable numbers of bounces – in fact, the present World Record is eighty-eight! Yes, eighty-eight!! It was achieved by an American, Kurt Steiner on September 6th 2013 at Red Bridge, Allegheny National Forrest, Pennsylvania. Though International Competitions are held annually, this record has already stood for nearly eight years and it is reckoned by the cognoscenti that it may never be beaten! How do they know that? Well, there is a theory of stone skipping which aids prediction – though (like Covid predictions) it does suffer from a degree of unpredictability! Who knows?



I have been interested in the topic for quite a while (having written an earlier article about it in 2006), but it was only very recently that I discovered something of its history. As is so often the case, I had assumed that it was a relatively recent pastime but now know that it has a long history, going back, at least, to the ancient Greeks. As to the scientific explanation of the interaction between stone and water surface, even that goes back to the eighteenth century, when the Catholic Priest Lazzaro Spallanzani argued that the stone should make a small angle with the water and that the water pushes the stone upwards, as the stone pushes down on the water, displacing some of it. It is also necessary for the stone to spin, which stabilises it – otherwise it would tilt downwards and ‘dig’ into the water, rather than bounce (this is known as the ‘gyroscopic effect’). A more complete theoretical account was published in ‘Nature’ in 2004 by a French group headed by Lyderic Bosquet. They showed that the optimum angle between stone and water surface is about 20 degrees. Typical values of velocity and angular rotation were 25 mph and 15 rotations per second. It is important that the stone should rotate at least once during each bounce. Later work has shown that, if the horizontal velocity can be maintained, stone skipping can continue to an unlimited extent. What actually happens in practice, is that, at each bounce, the stone loses energy due to friction between it and the water but its horizontal velocity remains unchanged – the overall effect is that the height of each consecutive bounce is reduced. Therefore, the time between bounces gradually reduces, with the consequence that the distance between bounces also gets smaller. Eventually, the bounce height becomes so small that the stone never leaves the water, simply skimming until, finally, it sinks. Clearly, the initial velocity and spin rate are important, so competitors need a strong right arm and a final flick to impart spin.

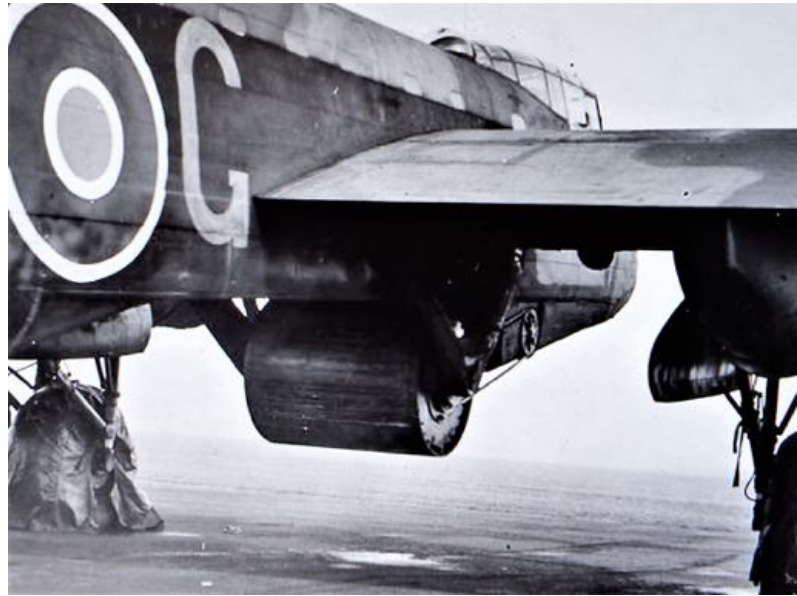
International competitions seem to be held all over the world, though most countries go in for stone skipping, rather than skipping – the objective being to maximise the overall *distance*, rather than the *number* of bounces. There is a regular annual event at Easdale in Scotland and various similar events in Japan, with the added attraction of including the ‘overall aesthetic quality’ as well as the ultimate distance. Exactly how this is measured is not clear to me! The record distances achieved are currently 121.8 metres (just over six cricket pitches) for men and 52.5 metres for women, each competitor being allowed three throws.

In the United States, the North American Stone Skipping Association NASSA (not to be confused with NASA – National Aeronautics and Space Administration) was founded in 1989 and has held annual competitions ever since, though with the objective of maximising the number of bounces. The stones are, of course, prescribed and must not exceed three inches in diameter. Competitors devote as much time to collecting suitable projectiles as to their actual projection. An example of one competitor’s collection is shown in our photograph.



They are not the kind of pebble one might find on the average British beach!

There is some slight similarity, of course, between stone skipping and the famous ‘bouncing bomb’ developed by Barnes Wallis during the Second World War in so far as the bomb was designed to skip along the surface until it reached the Dam, when it then sank before exploding underwater against the dam wall. However, there is an important difference. The bomb was cylindrical, not flat and it was arranged to spin backwards, to keep it on the surface, rather than sideways to stabilise it against premature sinking. Notice, in our photograph, the chain drive which imparted back-spin to the bomb shortly before release. It also produced severe vibration in the Lancaster but that is quite another story.



A final thought: how about a Cotgrave stone skipping competition on Heron Lake in the Country Park? But, first you have to find the flat stones!

.....

Cartoon Corner

This week is special - we have *two* cartoons from Matt

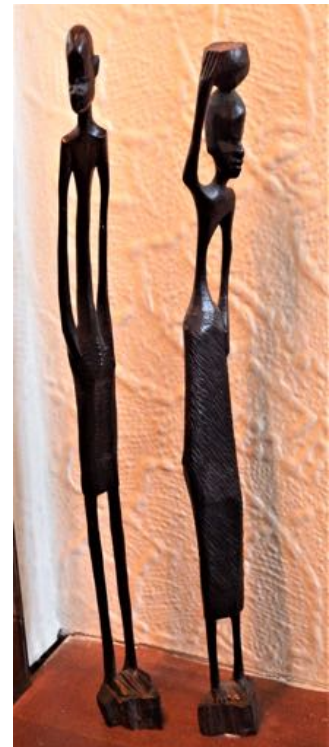


.....

Art

I was fascinated by the much-photographed Benin Bronzes, recently and sensed just how wonderful their craftsmanship was.

So, just for a change this week, I am choosing some examples of art from far afield – things Joyce and I have picked up during our various forays to foreign parts. The painting of the buffalo we brought back from our stay in Malaysia – it was done by an artist in Kuala Lumpur – while the wooden carvings are typical of native crafts from Borneo – we visited Kuching a couple of times. Finally, the long, thin characters came from South Africa as a present from Joyce's cousin. They may not be to everyone's taste but I think they show how art can take a wide variety of forms, particularly when one takes a world-wide viewpoint.



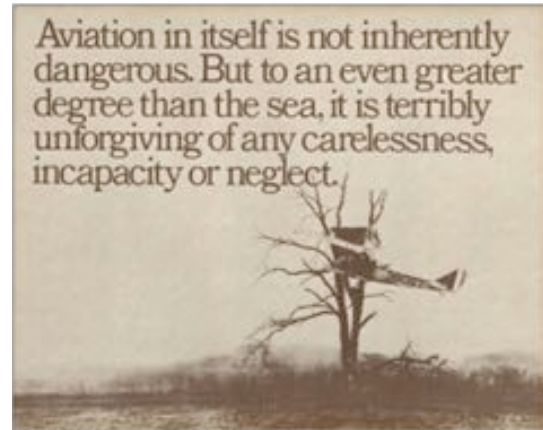
Airborne Computers

Jim Benn has already contributed several articles on aeroplane technology and has now come forward with an interesting contribution concerning the use of computers in controlling modern aeroplanes.

Before I talk about computers and aircraft I should introduce you to a word you may not have heard before. It is “avionics”. It comes from a mixture of “aviation” and “electronics”. It means electronics as they apply to aircraft. “Wiggly amps” as mechanical engineers sometimes describe them.

Now aircraft are different! Something that was drummed into me at college when I was learning to be an aircraft engineer. You might like this poster I saw many years ago. When electronics (radios, radar, navigation aids, etc.) are applied to aircraft they have to be designed that bit more carefully to make sure they don't go wrong.

When it comes to computers this was a real problem. But before I get on to that, I need to talk a bit



Up until the Second World War the flying controls of aircraft (elevators, ailerons and rudder) were connected by levers, rods, chains and cables. In the period after the Second World War aircraft became much faster and much bigger. Because of this the pilot needed assistance with the controls. Also as aircraft flew near the speed of sound, funny things happen and powered controls help very much with this.

These “Powered Flying Control Units” as they are called work a bit like the powered steering on your car. If your car has hydraulic power steering, it's very much like it.

The flying controls were still connected by levers, etc. but engineers decided that these could be dispensed with and the signal could be sent electrically. The first “fly by wire” in fact. Incidentally, the steering of your car *must* be connected mechanically – by law!

Now there is a relationship in aerodynamics between stability and performance. It is complicated but you can make a very stable aircraft but it can't manoeuvre very well and this is important in military aircraft. What you want is *more* manoeuvrable aircraft and they are inherently less stable. If you go too far the aircraft becomes so unstable that the pilot can't fly it.

Computers don't do much but they do it very fast. Engineers realised that if a computer was put to control the aircraft the aircraft could be made very unstable – and have very high performance. There was a snag in this. A snag we all know about; and that is computers go wrong and spit out rubbish. Crikey, we all know how often they “go pear shaped” now that we have all come to rely on computers for buying things and talking to our loved ones! You couldn't trust a computer to fly an aircraft.

I know – we will fit two. Sorry, it doesn't work. You see, if computer A says one thing and computer B says something else *you don't know which one is correct!* The answer to this is to fit *three* computers. Now if computers A & B say one thing and computer C says something else it's almost certainly computer C that is wrong. That is what is done. Now engineers could fit computers to aircraft flying controls and reap the benefit that computers can bring.

The Typhoon aircraft is totally controlled by computers. If all of them go wrong the pilot cannot fly the aircraft and he has no recourse but to eject. Civil aircraft also rely on computers but they are aircraft that are *not* designed to be unstable. They also have lots and lots of computers and they have systems so that when problems happen the system degrades gracefully so that the pilot can still always fly the aircraft safely.

.....

What is more, Jim has also alerted me to the use of a new word. This follows from the photograph in last week's Letter, showing a pair of lions yawning, the one having stimulated the other, as also happens in human beings. The idea is far from new to me but the expression "you *smickled* me into it" came as a complete surprise. Jim is unsure exactly where it came from but, as a relic from his youth, it may have originated in Goole or in Yorkshire. My own origins rule out the possibility of it having come from the West Riding but I can't rule out the other two.

I can find no sign of it in any of our several dictionaries so one can only assume that it is a dialect word of fairly local usage. However, it does make an appearance on the Internet, there being a reference to the passing on of a cold virus: "don't go near to him – he has a cold and will smickle you with it". This is obviously a very similar usage to the one connected to yawning but again, there is no evidence given as to the word's origins.

However, this is far from being the end of our investigation – there is yet another completely different meaning attached to it on another segment of the Internet. It is described as "a polite word for 'shit'". Sorry if that is offensive but this is a serious scientific investigation and demands precise quotation from its various sources!

"That surely is quite enough" you may be thinking but I'm afraid not. John Haskell has found yet another (not altogether inoffensive!) meaning which is enough to flabbergast even the most open-minded researcher. The word can be used to refer to the phenomenon of a person's "being tickled so much as to wet his pants." (Note: '*his*' – there is no reference to 'her'). This takes us into altogether deeper waters – is it really a masculine effect? Or was it simply a matter of thoughtless word usage by the source's author? Come to that, is it a phenomenon with a pedigree? I, personally, was unaware that it could ever happen!

Thinking about it, reminded me of a saying which definitely was commonplace in Yorkshire: "mony a mickle maks a muckle" – many small items add up to a significant total – but that is obviously not the same word as 'smickle'. Can any reader throw further light on the subject? Please don't be shy about coming forward if you happen to know anything about this fascinating subject. And 'thanks Jim' for smickling us into this serious study – after all, it is surely what the U3A should be about!

.....

Quiz Corner

Firstly, we must not forget to give the answer to Sue Hillyard's puzzle from last week. The one about the eight people sharing information by unique person-to-person connection. The answer is 'three minutes' Once again, there is a simple general expression which covers the general case. The point to notice is that at each stage the next minute allows for a doubling of the number of people acquiring the information. So, after one minute, two people have it, after two minutes four, after three, eight and so on. If 'm' is the number of minutes, the number of people with the information is 'p' where:

$$p = 2^m$$

.....

As to this week's quiz, once again, Peter Shreyhane has come up with a quiz for us. Thanks Peter.

Can you name the TV programmes these Catch Phrases came from?

1. I don't believe it.
2. Lovely Jubbly
3. Am I bovvered
4. Here's one I made earlier
5. I have a cunning plan
6. Listen, I will say zis only wunce
7. You stupid boy
8. I've started so I'll finish
9. No, no ,no, no, yes
10. It's good night from me and it's goodnight from him
11. Good night John boy
12. Oh you are awful but I like you

.....

And, for those who prefer puzzles, Sue has sent us yet another one:

You find a piece of paper with the following message on it:

'1 ___ is 1,000 times 1 ___ ___ '

All you have to do is fill in the three gaps with one and the same letter of the alphabet.

Answers next week.

.....

Creative Writing Group

This week we have another contribution from Chris Tomblin – quite apposite, considering the recent attention given to the Royal family.

It was a beautiful day in May the sun was shining and the crowds lining the approach to Windsor Great Park were in a good mood laughing and joking with each other as they waited. The crowd had been gathering since very early morning and some hardy people had even spent the night there in makeshift tents and sleeping bags to get the best view. Even the police, strolling up and down to keep people behind the barrier were in a good mood laughing and joking with the crowd and lots of banter was being exchanged. They were waiting for a glimpse of the Queen and Prince Philip as they drove past to attend the Royal Windsor horse show. The Queen had attended every year since 1943 when it first began so they were practically guaranteed to see her drive past.

The crowd was made up of some locals and professional royal watchers, the locals were staunch supporters of their local family and always gathered when they knew they could catch sight of the Queen, the professional Royal watchers came from all over the country to see the Queen or other members of the Royal Family. It was a kind of hobby. They particularly liked the younger members with Princes William and Harry being their favourites, but they would always travel to see the Queen who was still considered the greatest prize.

One of the locals nudged her friend. 'He's here' she said swivelling her eyes to the right where a fair haired miserable looking man of about forty-five in a beige anorak and grubby trainers stood with his hands in his pockets. 'Yes, that's him' her friend replied 'on his own again. She's not with him anymore is she? I often see him on his own now, shopping and what have you, whereas she was always there ordering him about before. I used to feel sorry for him a man of his age tied to his mother's apron strings, perhaps she's dead.' Just then there was a stir amongst the crowd and people started craning their necks to see what was happening. Firstly, an official looking black car drove into view followed by a black Land Rover. 'Ooh that's Philip driving' someone in the crowd exclaimed and everybody oohed and aahed as sat next to him was her majesty the Queen. As the car slowly drove past the Queen smiled and waved at the people waiting. As usual she wore her trademark head scarf of which she had many and this was her standard attire for the horse show. The crowd enthusiastically waved flags and cheered and only when they were certain the cars had gone past, they started to disperse, and the man went for the bus and made his way home.

The old lady sighed impatiently to herself 'Where has that boy got to, he's never here when I need him, those carers are useless they always forget something. He's just as bad though why does everything take him so long, I send him on a simple errand, and he's gone for hours and he knows I'm waiting for him.'

' Just then the door slammed ' is that you Charlie? Come straight up here don't be wandering off into the kitchen' He plodded up the stairs slowly his face was expressionless but a small muscle twitching in his cheek gave away his tension. His eyes looked dead as if he hadn't smiled in a long time. 'Well 'demanded his mother. 'Which one was she wearing' She was sat in her chair in front of the television set which was on as usual and her heavily bandaged bad leg was resting on a stool. To the side was her walker which she only ever used to get to the commode which was right next to her chair. Charlie's stomach turned as he caught sight of it. On her lap was an array of head scarves all different patterns and colours. 'I've never seen it before' he said' it must have been a new one, but I didn't get a good look.'

His mother tutted furiously, 'you should have gone earlier and got a good place, you're useless just like your father. Thank goodness Her Majesty doesn't have to put up with useless men like I've had to. Philip and her sons are just marvellous' She picked out a scarf 'Here you are I'll have this one today put this one on and be quick about it because I need you to put me on the commode' she said handing him a blue and red patterned one. 'This is one of her favourites, now be quick and put it on my head.' Charlie stood behind her chair and proceeded to drape it onto her crisply permed grey curls. 'Not like that you idiot. No wonder you're such a useless idiot boy, your father was a complete simpleton. You don't know what I've had to put up with and now I'm stuck in this damn chair all day' Charlie's stomach lurched as he thought about his wonderful calm patient father who had tried to protect him from his overbearing possessive mother. He had died when Charlie was eighteen. Just then he was engulfed with such feelings of sorrow and rage that seemed to rise up and consume him until the whole room went black. He was aware of his pulse pounding in his temples and he was vaguely aware of his mother making a noise droning on and on as usual. After a while everything started to subside, and he came to with a start and he was back in the room in the same place. He noticed his hands were trembling but clenched. 'Mother 'he said 'where's the scarf', but she didn't answer. He touched her and her head lolled forward and just then he noticed the scarf wrapped tightly around her neck. She was dead.

It was breaking news in Windsor that evening that a son had killed his mother on the first day of The Royal Windsor Horse show. Some thought what a terrible thing to have happened especially here in Windsor that a son should kill his own mother like that, what possible reason could there be, he must have been evil. There were others though who had seen mother and son together over the years that completely understood and were not even surprised.

.....

A Final Thought

There's a splendid real ale known as Doombar
Which we drank at our local tap room bar
But for meetings 'online'
There's a new beer that's fine:
Believe it or not, it's called Zoombar.



I leave you this week with that lubricious thought. See you all next week.

John

