



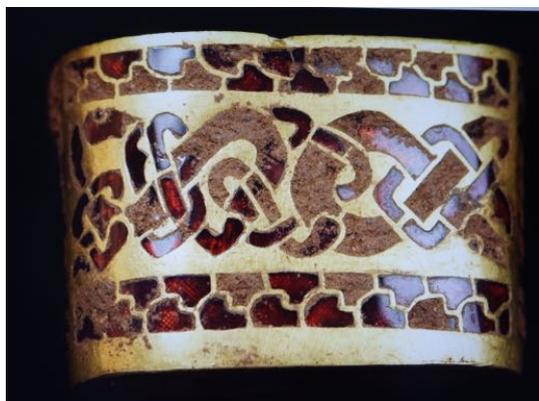
## Cotgrave and District U3A

### Keeping in Touch 6

#### The History Group.

Last week we concentrated on the Science Group. This week, by contrast, we shall take a look at the History Group. Hopefully, members will find it of interest to learn something of the activities of Groups other than the ones to which they happen to belong.

A recent Group meeting took the form of a visit to the Potteries Museum in Stoke-on-Trent where we were fascinated to see and learn about the so-called 'Staffordshire Horde' of Anglo-Saxon artifacts which were discovered by an amateur metal-detector enthusiast in a field near Litchfield in 2009. In total some 3500 pieces were found, probably dating from the seventh century. The quality of workmanship is extremely high and it constitutes a major archaeological find. Once catalogued, it was purchased jointly by Museums in Birmingham and Stoke for the princely sum



of over £3 million and is on display in separate lots in both places. Interestingly, all the artifacts are martial in nature (for instance, the photograph represents a sword hilt) and appear to represent the aftermath of some battle – possibly the spoils of the losing side being buried ignominiously by the victors? Whether that surmise is correct or not, there can be no doubt that all of us who made the trip to Stoke agreed that it was very worthwhile. Entry is free and we can recommend it to anyone looking for a rewarding day out – when, that is, days out become possible again.

Reference to the History Group reminds me that I must not omit to mention one of the Group's principal activities, the setting up of a website concerned to catalogue the history of Cotgrave. This activity has something of a long history, in itself. It all began with the formation, in 1980, of a Local History Group in the village (as it then was) by the then Rector, Bryan Barrodale. The Group met monthly and devoted itself to researching village history. I remember giving a talk (in the year 2005 or thereabouts) to the Group on the history of the house where I live. When the Cotgrave and District U3A Branch was formed in 2013, the U3A History Group and the Local History Group joined forces to build a website, Paul Childs and Malcom Baxter being prominent U3A members in this activity. Sadly, the original Local History Group folded but the U3A activity has continued right up to the present time and I am happy to say that an excellent site now exists, which I can recommend to all U3A members. It contains articles on all aspects of life in the village during the nineteenth century, together with more recent details, such as the coming of the coal mine in 1963 and consequent major changes to Cotgrave life. There are also, for example, articles about the discovery of the Anglo-Saxon burial site and of the Hutchinsons of Owthorpe but it makes no sense to continue the list here – far better that members should read it for themselves in the original format. Attached is a link to the website which will allow members access to this wealth of information about the town (as it now is) in which we all live.

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

However, while on the subject of ‘history’, how about a rather different bit of history:

### The History of the Cricket Ball

We hear much discussion these days concerning the use of sweat or saliva to modify the dynamic properties of a cricket ball, in other words to affect its ability to ‘swing’ in the air. It is this which lies at the heart of so-called ‘seam bowling’ and that brings us to the small matter of why a cricket ball should possess a seam and exactly what this seam consists of. The answer to the *second* of these questions is readily provided by the first of several attached photographs, which shows the seam to consist of six lines of stitches running equatorially round the circumference of the ball. These stitches are slightly raised from the ball’s surface, resulting in a change in the ball’s dynamics. Much scientific hot air has been generated over the precise nature of this modified dynamic but I



have no intention of boring U3A members with an attempt to describe it – our interest here is in the history of the ball itself. Just when did it acquire such a seam and, even more importantly, why? At first sight, there would seem to be no reason at all for the seam’s existence – it is perfectly possible to make a ball without any such seam, as witness the example of the baseball ball, with its characteristic S-shaped stitching, shown in our second photograph.

The ‘when’ and ‘why’ questions are closely linked and take us back to the latter half of the eighteenth century. The origins of the noble game go back much further than this, of course. There is clear evidence of its existence in the fourteenth century but at that time it was a purely pastoral occupation with no firm set of rules or definitions. It was only in the eighteenth century, when it was taken up by the aristocracy (who were greatly interested in the possibility of betting on a game’s outcome) that it became necessary to specify the precise nature of the game and its component parts. Early Laws specified, for example, the width of the bat, the size of the ‘wicket’ and even the diameter of the ball but there is nowhere any mention of such an anomaly as a seam. Indeed, why should there be? The ball was bowled, underarm, along the ground and the concept of ‘swing’ was totally irrelevant. The bowler’s skill was concerned with selecting the best examples of humps and hollows in the pitch, which caused the delivery to jagg about and confuse the opposing batsman. In fact, the visiting side was allowed to choose the precise bit of ground on which the wickets were to be pitched and this, in itself, represented an important skill – one well-known practitioner, Lumpy Stevens, was renowned for his ability to make life difficult for the opposition in this fashion. So how did the seam come into being?

It is impossible to give a precise answer to this question but there are two sources of information which at least allow us to make intelligent guesses. The first is an early account of the game written in 1832 by a gentleman called John Nyren, whose father had been the driving influence behind the formation of the famous Hambledon Cricket Club in Hampshire. Nyren describes the development of a new style of bowling, perfected by a Hambledon player, David Harris (who played first-class cricket from about 1780 to 1800).

This involved the idea of bowling the ball (still underarm) in the air so that it landed on the pitch and bounced more or less erratically to the discomfit of the batsman. What was more, Harris and his contemporaries developed the technique of putting spin on the ball which had the effect of exaggerating any deviation generated by vagaries in the pitch. Here we have our first glimmer of understanding about the seam – it being much easier to impart spin to a ball with a raised seam than to one which was perfectly round. The second bit of evidence which correlates with Nyren’s little book is beautifully presented in a relatively modern (1983) book, ‘The Art of Cricket’, written by a pair of Nottingham University academics, Robin Simon and Alastair Stuart. They were not only members of the Art Department but also cricket lovers.



The evidence is contained in a number of paintings and drawings of cricket matches and cricket personalities with which Simon and Stuart illustrate their volume. This artistic interest in cricket coincided (for obvious reasons) with the involvement of the aristocracy in the game, such paintings dating from round about the year 1740. There are several examples which illustrate the nature of the cricket ball then in use and it is clear that the advent of the seam dates from roughly the end of the eighteenth century, in general agreement with the development of spin bowling described by Nyren. In our third photograph we show a detail from a painting by Daniel Gardner (circa 1780) of a young woman holding a cricket ball which can be seen to follow the S-shaped stitching pattern still in use in the case of baseball missiles. Our final photograph shows a similar detail from a somewhat later (1793) painting by Thomas Beach in which the ball obviously has a seam similar to that of a modern ball. We rest our case! Whilst it is interesting that the written rules of the game make no reference to it, it is clear that the ball took on the raised seam round about the end of the eighteenth century, coincident with the development of ‘spin’. Finally, we should note a comment made by Simon and Stuart to the effect that the firm of Duke (who still make English balls today) presented the Prince of Wales (later George IV) with a seamed ball in 1780. The Prince was apparently a keen adherent of the game, even though only a modest performer.



Finally, it is worth mentioning that this same change of bowling style also resulted in the more obvious change of shape in the bat, from curved (almost hockey stick) shape to the straight variety with which we are familiar today. And, even more finally(!), it may interest our female readers to learn that there is good evidence to show that women were playing the game at least as early as the middle of the eighteenth century, though that, so far as I know, has no bearing whatsoever on the shape of either bat or ball! It may, of course, have had some bearing on the attire adopted by Georgian ladies but I am not qualified to comment on that aspect.

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## Molly

You will remember Molly, our precocious six-year-old who wrote that fascinating account of her domestic life in an earlier Weekly Letter. Well, here she is again, commenting on the complex relationship between herself and that alien species known as ‘grown-ups’.

Wen my mummy red my skoolwork yesterday she toled me of for using a bad word and made me promis not to ever ever ever do it agen so i sed sorry i will never ever ever do it agen i promis and she gave me a hug and then i crid and then she made me sum toest then she sed i was a clever girl and i shud rite sum more storis so i am.

wen i was cuming down stares this morning i herd daddy showt that bluddi cat from next door has been in our garden agen so i was fritend to go in the garden becos i thort that pinky from next door had had her tale cut of. i ran back up to my bed room and ~~huk~~ lookt out of the window but i cudnt see any blood anyware so i went back down the stares and sed to my mummy wares the bluddi cat she sed what in a lowd voys and i sed that bluddi cat that daddy sore and she said you see wot yuve don tony how mani times have i sed you shudnt sware in frunt of the children. i thort she was going to send daddy to the norty step she was so cross but then daddy went outside very kwikly and she gave me another big hug and sed sorry molly daddy was just being silly. she sed dont use that werd but she didnt say wich one she ment.

after i stopt crying she made sum more toste but this time she put sum hunny on it cos she nose i ~~huk~~ like hunny. then i got my teddyted from bildabare and my too best dolls and we had a piknik i made shur there was no blud anyware on the gras first. peter was playing foot ball and he nockd over my teddyted and i toled him he was norty and he sed sorri and i sed im going to tell daddy that you were being norty and he sed im not being norty you are and so i said well im not you are mummy thinks daddy is silly and i think you are silly so all boys are silly and anyway you carnt play at pikniks so there.

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## The Art Group

We should never forget the contribution made by the Art Group – here are a couple more photographs of their work for us all to admire.



## The Lunch Club.

Last week members of the Luncheon Club had an “at home” Luncheon. The suggested menu was



Asparagus with poached egg for starter followed by Sausage Ratatouille and for pudding Speedy Banana Split. Some members decided on variations to the menu and recipes, depending on what was in the cupboard, what was available in the shops and their level of cooking skills. With the advantage of not going out allowed for a very casual dress code and not

having to drive home afterwards made the temptation of a glass or two (or maybe more) of wine was hard to resist.

Next month we may change the venue from kitchen to outside on the patio as the weather improves.



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## More of the Palindrome

Chris Soar has recently added to his earlier contribution with yet another palindromic sentence and I believe this to be even better than the first:

‘Was it a car or a cat I saw?’

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## Creative Writing Group

Once again, we welcome an ambitious contribution from the Creative Writing Group. This contribution is from Elsie Warby and is a combination of two subjects the first is Chance Encounter that then flows seamlessly into the second subject which is a mystery. Hope you all enjoy it as much as we did.

### Chance Encounter (a mystery)

It was just another normal Saturday. I was doing the weekly shop after a busy week working. I was trying to decide what to buy for myself. After years of catering for myself and my husband I had to adjust my expectations.

We’d separated after twelve years of marriage when I found out he was having an affair. My divorce was going through, and I was still getting used to being on my own.

“Amy, Amy Burton is that you?”

I turned to see who was calling out my maiden name. I didn’t recognise the tall, slim woman who was speaking but then she reminded me.

“I’m Zara Smith. We were at school together in Class 5 Heathfield Primary”.

Memories came flooding back. We weren’t best friends, but I always admired Zara. She was very pretty and popular and had long blonde hair. I was never allowed to have long hair. My auntie, who was a hairdresser, made sure that my hair was cut short in a ‘sensible, manageable style’ in other words ‘boring’.

“You’ve hardly changed at all” said Zara, “I’d have known you anywhere. What are you doing with yourself these days?”

Reluctant to engage in conversation I meekly reply “I’m a lawyer “.

“Oh brilliant you’ve done well for yourself. I went down the typical teenage route, falling pregnant at sixteen, married and staying at home with a useless husband. I’ve got three children but I finally got rid of my husband- we divorced recently and my kids have flown the nest so now I’m single again.”

I couldn’t believe how much Zara had told me in the few minutes since we met in the middle of the supermarket. Then I remembered what a chatterbox Zara used to be, forever in trouble for talking in class!

“I’m not busy now. Do come for a coffee so we can have a proper catch up “ pleaded Zara.

I must admit she caught me on the hop and I struggled to find an appropriate excuse. As a result 15 mins later I was sitting with a caramel latte listening to Zara’s life story!

“Now you must stop me if I’m going on too much Amy, it’s one of my many faults. Tell me about yourself.”

“Well there’s not too much to tell. I went to university after school and became a lawyer .”

“That’s fascinating. Have you had any juicy cases to deal with?”asked Zara.

“Nothing that interesting I’m afraid. I’m a corporate lawyer working for a finance company in the city. I don’t go into courts. I haven’t got any children and have just separated from my husband James.”

“Wow what a coincidence. We’re both free agents. Oh Amy I think fate has brought us together! I’ve got a fortnight’s holiday booked for two people and don’t want to go on my own. Why don’t we go together? Please say ‘Yes’.”

What could I say? It might be a nightmare but on the other hand it could be just what I needed. After all I could spend my days on a sunbed by the pool, pretending to be asleep when I didn’t feel like talking ( or rather listening).

Feeling like I’d stepped into the story of Shirley Valentine, that is how I found myself three weeks later on a Jet2 flight to Palma Majorca. To prove to myself that it wasn’t a dream I took a selfie of us both on the plane.

We landed at midday and were quickly transferred to our all inclusive hotel. The flight had been incident free and fortunately Zara slept for most of it so I didn’t have to suffer her incessant chatter for the whole journey.

We found our room and I unpacked straight away as I like to do when I arrive anywhere. Zara, not unexpectedly, simply dived into her case and pulled out the smallest bikini I’d ever seen.

“ I must try out the pool and then start on my suntan” she shrieked.

“It looks fabulous outside. Aren’t you coming?”

“Not just yet” I replied “ I’ll join you later.”

Zara rushed out of the room, and I lay down on my bed and contemplated how my life had changed. From being in a relationship which had ended disastrously I was now having to adapt to single life and somehow I’d ended up on holiday with a woman who I barely knew and to be honest didn’t like very much!

I wandered out onto the balcony. The sun was beaming down. People were sunbathing, enjoying cocktails or swimming in the crescent shaped pool. Why was I staying in the hotel room when I could be enjoying myself outside? I determined then, to make the most of this holiday starting with my favourite cocktail, pina colada. I quickly changed into my bikini ( fortunately I’ve kept a reasonable figure so I could still get away with one) and gathered up towels, sun cream and my Kindle e-reader and headed downstairs.

On reaching the pool area I looked round for Zara but couldn’t see her anywhere. I assumed she had gone for a walk to investigate the area so I collected a pina colada from the pool bar, covered myself with sun cream and settled down on a sunbed to read.

I must have been more tired than I thought as the next that I knew I was waking up. The sun had gone down and the staff were packing away the sunbeds. I was surprised to find I’d slept so long but where was Zara? I’d have thought she would have come and woken me up.

I gathered my belongings and went back to our room hoping to find her there. I went in but there was no sign of her. My luggage was there but all of Zara’s belongings were gone. It was as if she’d never been there. Where was she?

### The mystery of Zara’s disappearance

I hurried down to reception to see if they had seen Zara. Fortunately the girl behind the desk spoke impeccable English. She looked up our room details on the computer but couldn’t find any Zara Smith ( if that was her name now) registered.

“I’m sorry Mrs Barnett but the registration is only in your name” she said.

“But I don’t understand” I stammered “ I didn’t make the booking and why would I book a double room just for me.”

“If you’re worried about paying there’s no need to as everything is covered.” she pointed out.

“ But I want to know where Zara has gone and why.”

I took out my phone and called Zara’s number but only got the message ‘This number is unobtainable’. Then I remembered the selfie I’d taken on the plane. I showed it to the girl with no luck, she didn’t recognise her. Just then the receptionist who’d booked us in came along.

“ Can I help you?” he asked.

I explained the situation and asked him if he remembered booking us in.

“I remember you but you were on your own,” he told me.

I showed him the picture but he didn't recognise Zara either. I was confused, Zara was definitely with me when we registered but then I remembered that I didn't actually see her sign anything and she'd wandered off to another part of the reception area. I decided to ask staff and holiday makers in the hotel if they recognised Zara from the photo but had no luck, no one had seen her.

It was too late to do anything further that night and I realised that I hadn't eaten since breakfast. I went and helped myself to the all inclusive buffet ( delicious by the way). Whilst I was eating I tried to make sense of things but my head just kept going round in circles. I kept trying to phone her but kept getting the unobtainable message.

I decided to go to bed and spent a restless night trying to sleep. In the morning after breakfast ( I had to keep up my energy!) I decided to go to the airport to see if they had any information about Zara. I caught a local bus and arrived in Palma airport half an hour later. The arrivals hall was busy and I looked around for the jet2 desk.

Then I noticed something out of the corner of my eye. I couldn't believe it! There was Zara hugging and kissing a man but not just any man, my ex husband! What on earth was going on? I tried to catch up with them but by the time I'd reached where I'd last seen them they'd disappeared.

Now what? I had no idea how I could solve this mystery. I decided to head back to the hotel and on the way I mulled over what I had just seen. Was Zara the woman James had had an affair with? So why had she brought me on this holiday? I must admit they made a handsome couple and I still had feelings for James.

I was so confused that when I got back to the hotel I went straight to the bar and ordered my favourite cocktail to give me time to compose myself after my shock discovery. I really didn't want to stay here any longer so I decided to go to my room and pack and get the next available flight home.

I made my way back to the room but when I went to unlock the door I found, to my surprise, that it was already open. I thought it must be the cleaner but when I went in I saw that it wasn't. James was standing there holding an enormous bunch of flowers!

I was speechless

"What, how, why?" I stammered not knowing what to say.

"This must be a surprise Amy" said James.

"That's an understatement" I shouted "What are you doing here and why were you with Zara?"

"I can explain everything Amy. Please listen" he pleaded.

"Ok " I agreed but only because I wanted this mystery solved.

"I wanted to show you how sorry I was having an affair. I'd foolishly let my head be turned by a woman who flirted with me. If I could turn the clock back I would. I thought if we could meet up here for a holiday we could give our marriage another go."

"But why all the subterfuge and what has Zara got to do with this?" I asked him, still feeling confused.

“Zara wasn’t the woman I had an affair with but she was her friend and wasn’t happy about the way we were treating you. When she realised we had separated she wanted to help to try to get us back together. She had worked out that she knew you from primary school so came up with this idea to get us on a holiday together.”

“But why didn’t you just ask me to come on holiday?” I wondered.

“Would you have come if I had?” he asked.

“No I guess not.”

“Exactly hence the reason for secrecy.”

I was amazed that James would go to such lengths to try to get us back together but I still had so many questions I needed answered.

I was reluctant to give up on this holiday and decided to stay and give James a chance to show genuine remorse. We did a lot of talking and resolved to discuss problems in the future, something we should have done sooner. I’m pleased to say we had a lovely time and agreed to give our marriage another go. We both realised that we were still very much in love.

This all happened a few years ago and we are now the proud parents of twin boys Alex and Michael.

You may wonder about Zara. She was still in Majorca, in fact she had a room in the same hotel and she’d asked the staff and holiday makers to pretend they hadn’t seen her. She left us to ourselves most of the time and fell for one of the Majorcan waiters. In fact she’s married him and they live happily in Palma.

We regularly fly over to Majorca to stay with Zara and Raphael and they were godparents to Alex. They also witnessed our renewal of our wedding vows.

Mystery solved and a happy ending.

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*Look after yourselves – we shall need all our members to be active when the present lock-down is lifted.*

**John**

*PS. You will remember, of course, the time when hundreds of people were confined to their cabins on luxury cruise ships? But did you also realise that this was the first recorded method of berth control?*