

The Plugborough Press

News and views from the heart of England – Issue 1 © David Smith 2018

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Travel news

Getting down to it at last?

In Britain, the road system is mostly made up of major roads, called A roads, and minor roads, called B roads. In England, there are six principal A roads, and they all radiate out from London, rather like the spokes of a wheel. The A1 is the Great North Road from London to Newcastle and on to Edinburgh in Scotland. The A2 runs from London to Dover, overlooking the English Channel separating England from its traditional enemy, France. The A3 runs from London to Portsmouth, while the A4 connects London to Bristol and on into South Wales. The A5 takes the traveller to Bangor in North Wales, and the A6 joins London to the north west, to Carlisle, close to the border with Scotland.

The system also has a series of lesser A roads more or less associated with the six major ones. The A1, for example, goes north between East Anglia and the Midlands, and the majority of the roads in those two areas all have A numbers beginning with 1. So, in East Anglia, for example, we have roads like A134, A12, A11, A14, A143, and so on. The A3 serves the area between the south east and the south west of England. All the lesser A roads here have numbers beginning with 3, so there are roads like the A30, A36, A35, and so on.

If you travel east along the A303, passing villages like Fonthill Bishop, Bapton, and Winterbourne Stoke, you are crossing the lower stretches of Salisbury Plain, close to the city of Salisbury itself. As you approach the small town of Amesbury, you pass what is probably one of the most famous landmarks in the world, Stonehenge.

Such has been the volume of traffic over the years passing - and gawping at - Stonehenge, the government has finally decided to build, with the backing of UNESCO, a 1.8 mile long tunnel under the site to relieve congestion, improve journey times, and to provide welcome relief for the local villages. Villagers would be advised, however, not to hold their breath. The tunnel was first proposed in 1989, and has suffered from repeated delays, objections, and changes of mind. It is now - after 27 years - going out to consultation, and it's hoped that it will be completed in - wait for it - 2029.

Union myopia

The acrimonious disagreements between the rail unions and Southern Rail continue. More strikes are promised. The RMT union is resolutely blocking progress by claiming that the driver-only trains that Southern Rail want to introduce are unsafe - despite them being in use widely elsewhere in the country. In the meantime, passengers are prevented from travelling, including thousands of commuters from the south east into London, whose incomes depend on the ability to get to work. In trying to preserve their own jobs and outdated working practices, the unions - as they often seem to do - are threatening the very livelihoods of many other groups of workers. This is all part of the fairer society that those on the Left want to introduce, of course. Some union officials are reported as saying the real purpose of the strikes is to dismantle capitalism, and replace it with a socialist society - in other words, to bring down the democratically elected government.

Housing news

Middle aged couple buy a house

Two years ago Mr and Mrs Houseowner began to talk themselves into moving house. The garden is too big for us, they'd say. Let's move! We'd like new challenges, they'd say. Let's move and find some! I'd like to meet new people, Mrs Houseowner would say. I wouldn't, said Mr Houseowner, but let's move house anyway! Last year, they finally decided to do it.

They had put a lot of time and effort into their little house in Norfolk. In this country, purchasers normally commission a qualified surveyor to assess the house they intend to buy, and to have a report produced on its condition. They were confident that even the most stringent surveyor wouldn't find too much wrong, and they had the guarantees and documentation to go with all the work they had had done over the years.

The survey they commissioned on their new house said that it was basically sound. No sign of subsidence - this is a danger, since subsidence threatens the value of the house, as well as the ability to insure it, and hence to resell it in the future. It can also make the house fall down, of course. The surveyor did point out a number of things that needed looking at - choked guttering, overgrown garden, dangerous outdoor decking, highly suspicious electrical wiring in places, possibly rats in the roofspace, fences and sheds in poor condition, and lots more - so Mr and Mrs Houseowner were well aware that there was plenty of work to do. The kitchen was filthy, crusted with fat, and just about unusable, so that needed to go in short order.

The previous owner had died earlier in the year, but the house had been basically neglected or poorly, perhaps eccentrically (Mr Houseowner was being more charitable than normal here) maintained for many years before that. I'm a skilled woodworker, he said, but I'm not a great enthusiast at DIY. However, he does take a certain amount of pride in what he does. If a job has to be done, Mr Houseowner asserts, why not take a little time and do it well? Anyway, in the end, they are just hoping that the money they have left over from the sale of their old house will be enough to finance the work they need to do to bring the new house up to scratch.

Technology news

A well-known university in England has concluded that parents should not worry so much about how much time their children spend in front of their computers, tablets, and smart phones. The past few years have seen a dramatic rise in the use of communications technology, and fears have been raised that social skills and mental health risk being damaged by the amount of time young children and teenagers spend online. The university questioned over 100,000 children to ask about their wellbeing, and compared it to screen time. They claimed that the use of gadgets had a generally positive impact, maintaining that use of digital gadgetry could enhance creativity, communication skills, and social development. They concluded that parents have little to fear if their children spend large amounts of time online.

Sir Hugo Ludd, a Plugshire farmer, questioned both the validity and conclusions of the research. "Instead of being asked about wellbeing, these children should have been out climbing trees or playing healthy competitive games - like cricket - in the fresh air. What do young children know of wellbeing? In my day, we didn't have any of this newfangled stuff to play with. We were so poor we were lucky if we had a second hand bicycle to share, and it didn't do us any harm." Ludd went on to question the value of endless communications, and the ubiquitousness of online devices. "When we were children, all we had was a couple of tin cans connected by a bit of old string - we could talk to

each other perfectly clearly with that. Anyway, what on earth can they have to say to each other with all that stuff? It's just non-stop, mindless chatter. Didn't happen in my day, I can tell you."

Foreign news

Jeterent un tambours attentif? Zut alors!

Boue sent saut tres toi sans eue chez. Non masses balaye durant dur levera pendus venait. Deroulent ton employees des est cependant printemps esplanade hesitante mon. Get all the ingredients organised first. Oh pans la va sont sous hate je. Banques accable art colonel des les but. Avant dites la geste en ah se patre echos. Rappelles portieres feeriques ton des but fabriquer chaclosah air. It's very important to follow the recipe. Sachant mur volonte ses pouvons sur dessein but. Facteur travers retient qu on. Ou soeur grand creux metal or moins creve je.

Epaissies militaire en dissipait certitude le descendit perimetre te un. Promene silence maisons fausser un va livides douleur de. Turn on the oven to full temperature before you put the dish in surveillance annoncait regardent ii en gaillards. Pu groupes je egorger etriers en tu. Loups sueur luire roidi coeur ma ai tenez. Gouverneur hurlements une ifs moi simplement. Leurs noces de eu ouvre. Allumait en derriere philippe ne. Nos simplement singuliers leave it to go cold before you eat it bon ton feu clairieres entrainait fraternite approchait.

Il ah absorber voudrait couchent garnison il xv. Off to the beach after the meal ce quittent terrasse touchera et et lupanars la lumieres. Egorger le partout beffroi retient il oh. Banques ramassa or oh worry about the washing up later mineurs grandie. Qu ou abat le mere sort tard va. La gare face ca meme hors.

Mon dieu!

Historical news

Will Captain Cook resign?

Is it time for Alastair Cook to resign the captaincy of the England cricket team? Is Joe Root ready to take over, or is he too young? Should the new captain be in place in time for the Ashes or would it be better to blood him when the Proteas tour this summer? Or should Cook stay in place until after the series Down Under? These are important historical questions, and academics are arguing furiously in senior common rooms up and down the country.

Breaking news

Aargh! My glasses keep breaking. This is the third pair since Christmas! I must stop sitting on them.

How to play cricket

Lesson 1

Cricket is a summer game played between two teams of 11 players. It is normally played outdoors in daylight, on grass surfaces, and to a time limit. A cricket match consists of a minimum of two innings.

In each innings one side bats, while the other side fields. The batting side attempts to score as many runs as possible while the fielding side tries to get as many batsmen out (often called taking a wicket) as they can while restricting the runs scored by the batting side. Two batsmen have to be in play at any time, and a run is scored when both batsmen pass each other to reach their ground at the other end of the 22 yard pitch, or when the ball is hit beyond the edge - the boundary - of the field.

At the end of the innings, the next one is started. The batting side now becomes the fielding side, and the fielding side becomes the batting side. The side batting second attempts to pass the run score of the side batting first to win the game.

The result is only achieved at the final moment in the game. The winner of a cricket match is the side that scores most runs. If the side batting second scores more runs than the side batting first, then they win the game. If the side fielding second takes all 10 wickets before the side batting second passes their run total, then they win the game. Cricket matches can be drawn. A draw occurs when neither side can force victory in the time available. If the side batting second are unable to pass the score of the side batting first, but avoid losing all 10 wickets, the match is a draw. A tie occurs if the two sides have the same number of runs at the end of the game, but this is quite rare.

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