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FORUM

FEBRUARY 2025

No. 25/02



u3a

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear Friends

Well, that's the long month of January over with and we can start to see the days lengthen. February is the month of my birthday (you really shouldn't have bothered!) and as my mother was fond of telling people, I was born during a blizzard. For many years I noted in my diary there being snow on the ground or snow from the sky on my birthday but this stopped being the case in the early 2000s. So it continued until 2025 when again I saw snow, at least on the hills of Teesdale. Whether or not you are a climate change sceptic it cannot be denied that something odd seems to be going on.

Last month I appealed for volunteers and I must ask again. Though we have secured a new Web Secretary (welcome back Mike) and have not one but several prospective Editors for the Forum we still need new committee members. In particular, Hazel is appealing to members who could assist her in the rôle of Treasurer. Help will be given for those non-accountants!

It was gratifying to see virtually 'full house' at the Witham in January – the largest attendance since before Covid I'm told and we have a wide and interesting programme of speakers going forward. Teesdale u3a is very fortunate to attract speakers of high quality and we're ever grateful to our 'Speaker Finders' for securing a seeming endless supply. Nevertheless, if you know of a talk you can recommend or indeed if you'd like to present something yourself, please let us know.

Many of will remember Neil Hanson's very entertaining talk to us last March where he recounted the exploits of himself and his wife running the Tan Hill Inn in 1978/79 and then, as if experience had taught them little, to return as owners for more of the same. The first of his books "The Inn at the Top" has been adapted by Laurence Sach and performed by Castle Players throughout the dale. The play has received rave reviews and has been a sell-out at many venues.

We thoroughly enjoyed it and found Janie Caldbeck's unique portrayal of a Swaledale sheep unforgettable. I do hope you caught it, if not then at the time of writing there were still a few tickets available at Richmond and for the performance at the Tan Hill Inn itself.

Ian Royston

It's Your Forum

Editors: Ian Royston and Kate Bailey

This month's editor is Kate: Edition No: 25/02

e-mail: forumeditor@teesdaleu3a.org.uk

Phone: Ian **07818 046938** Kate **07867 683195**

All editors receive all contributions and share the email account.

NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS

We are very grateful for all your contributions. Wherever possible, we will try as editors to include your work. We urge you to be succinct. The more succinct you are the more photos, illustrations and interesting articles and silliness we can include! Photos should be credited, of high resolution in jpg format and sent separately. Please limit submissions to 1 page or 400 words, and 1 photo, and send them to the Forum Editor at:

forumeditor@teesdaleu3a.org.uk

DEADLINE for the next edition: Monday 17th March 6pm and next month's editor is Ian. Handwritten/typed contributions can be left in the u3a file in the library. Please phone to let us know if you have left a contribution in this file. If you want to receive a copy of the Forum but cannot make it to the monthly meeting, you can acquire one by:

- Viewing it online on Teesdale u3a website at: www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk
- Sending us some SAEs and a cheque (£2 per copy payable to Teesdale u3a) and we shall post them to you each month.
- Asking a friend to collect one for you at the meeting. The cost is £2 on a 'first come first served' basis.
- Email: forumeditor@teesdaleu3a.org.uk or call Celia **07783 419067**
- Back copies are in the u3a file in the Library or in The Witham Shop.

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TEESDALE u3a Officers

Chair: Ian Royston chair@teesdaleu3a.org.uk

Membership Secretary: Tim Meacham memsec@teesdaleu3a.org.uk

Business Secretary: Liz Colley bissec@teesdaleu3a.org.uk

Treasurer: Hazel McCallum treasurer@teesdaleu3a.org.uk

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE TEESDALE U3A MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

To all members:
Just a quick reminder that **February 28th** is the renewal date for all memberships - apart from new members who have joined since September 1st 2024. The growth in membership since COVID has allowed us to set the 2025-26 membership fee **at £18.00** (a reduction of £2 on last year). For those of you who are associate members (with a main membership at another u3a), this will **be £14.50**.

We would be most grateful if you could arrange to pay by bank transfer. The closure of our local Barclays makes the banking of cheques and cash a much more difficult process. You can pay by BACS at:

Account: **The Teesdale U3A** Sort Code: **20-83-73** Account Number:
23470873.

Please type '**The Teesdale U3A**' in full and **quote your name** as your reference for the bank transfer to make sure we can identify the source of all payments.

If this is not possible, we will have a further stall at the March main meeting to allow payment by

- **Cheque** for £18 made out to: '**The Teesdale U3A Number Two Account**'.
- **Cash** – exact money would be helpful!

Alternatively, you can send your remittance by post to me at: S T Meacham (Teesdale u3a Membership Secretary), The Sidings, 1a Station Terrace, Cotherstone, Barnard Castle, DL12 9PZ.

Please write your name or names on the reverse of cheques. Please send any cash in a strong envelope and be sure to enclose your name.

I do hope you are enjoying your membership. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or observations. Thanks to those who have already done so.

Tim Meacham (Membership Secretary).

ADVANCE NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THURSDAY APRIL 24th 2025

The 17th Annual General Meeting of Teesdale u3a will be held on Thursday April 24th 2025 in The Witham Hall, Barnard Castle commencing at 10.30am. Doors open 10.00am.

All AGM documents will be sent out by email.

Nominations for Committee and Motions for debate must be received by the Business Secretary on or before Thursday March 27th 2025.

URGENT APPEAL - YOUR u3a NEEDS YOU !

Our current Treasurer, Hazel McCallum, is stepping down after 3 years of keeping our finances in excellent order.

To continue to function as a u3a, we are required to have a Treasurer in post or a Treasury Team with 2 or 3 people sharing the tasks involved.

A financial background is not necessary and Hazel will be happy to support you in the role.

Not sure if this is for you? Come and talk to us –

Contact Hazel (treasurer@teesdaleu3a.org.uk) or any member of the Committee.

MONTHLY MEETING FOR JANUARY – Report by Ian Reid

David Phillips' topic at the January meeting was *Paintings that pose Questions - a Personal Choice*. David chose several paintings to illustrate symbolism and hidden meanings and three of these are summarised here.

THE SWING, painted about 1767 is Fragonard's best known work. It depicts an elegantly dressed young woman on a swing. A smiling young man hides in the bushes below. A smiling older man, hidden in the shadows, propels the swing, as a small white dog barks nearby. The lady wears a shepherdess' hat as she flings her shoe with an outstretched left foot. A statue on the left watches with his finger on his lips. What could all this mean? The young woman is the mistress of the gentleman who commissioned the painting. Fragonard was originally asked to paint a bishop pushing the swing but he declined. The smiling gentlemen and the discarding of the shoe implies a carefree attitude and the scene has suggestions of sexual connotations. The dog suggests fidelity.

THE BAR AT THE FOLIES BERGERE was painted by Manet in 1882. The central figure is a barmaid based on Suzon, who worked in the Folies Bergères in the early 1880s. Behind her is an enormous mirror, showing reflections of what might be going on in front of her. Critics have suggested that what she is looking at is not accurately reflected by the mirror. Is this deliberate distortion of the perspective? On the bar is a bowl of oranges which has implications of prostitution. The barmaid is depicted as a salesperson and also a commodity, to be purchased along with a drink.

LAS MENINAS (ladies in waiting) was painted by Velasquez in 1656. It shows a large room in the Madrid palace of King Phillip IV of Spain. There are several people in the painting, mainly from the Spanish court. Some are looking at one another and others are looking out from the painting at the viewer (the person who is looking at the painting). There is a mirror in the room reflecting the upper bodies of the King and Queen. Who are the figures in the painting looking at and why are they standing there?

David gave a fascinating presentation, recognising that there were other interpretations apart from his own. The audience were left thinking that in future they would be looking at paintings in a new and more analytical light.

NEXT MEETINGS AT THE WITHAM

27 March 2025: Steve Regan – *My Journey into Astro-Photography*

Steve Regan recently changed the topic of his presentation as he thought it would be more interesting and unusual to talk about his development of a number of telescopes which reach far into the solar system. He will bring some of these with him and explain in easy language how they work, together with examples of the spectacular photographs he has taken.

24 April 2025: Prof. Alec Ryrie - *Protestants: A History in Seven Characters*

Protestant Christianity emerged from Martin Luther's Reformation in the early 1500s. It spread across Europe, to Britain and eventually around the world. In this lecture, church historian Professor Alec Ryrie will tell the story of how Protestantism got from there to here by introducing seven remarkable men and women who exemplify different parts of that story: some heroes, some villains and some who, like most of us, are caught uneasily somewhere in the middle.

FUTURE WORKSHOPS

Saturday 12th April 10am - 12 noon - Poetry Writing Workshop led by Ray Lee at Guide HQ Cost £3. Contact Sue Overton **07512 368884** or email sueoverton@hotmail.com

Saturday July 5th, 9am, Exploring Tynemouth Workshop. I'm sure your 2025 diary is filling fast with all the u3a activities on offer! Here is another to consider, a day in Tynemouth with attractions such as the Saturday Market; Green Ginger Arcade; Priory and Castle; Longsand Beach and Pier Riley's Fish Shack; Headland walk (30 mins) to visit North Shields Fish Quay;
NB: This outing is for Members only

The coach will leave Barnard Castle at 9am and return for 6pm (leaving Tynemouth at 4.30pm). Cost will be approx £12 each. If you would like to join us, email me :- sueoverton@hotmail.com and I will add you to the list Sue Overton **07512 368884**

DAY TRIPS FOR 2025

Jane Mathieson has organised the following trips for this year. If you want to put your name down for any of them please email her: janem1947@hotmail.com, or phone **07591095765**, or sign up at monthly meetings. If you have already informed her you don't have to do so again.

Payments can be made by Cash, by Cheques made out to 'Teesdale U3A' or by BACS, 'The Teesdale U3A, 20-83-73, 03778576'. Please identify which trip the money is for.

Please make BACS payments after March 1st for ALL TRIPS

**Friday May 16th 9am, Chillingham Castle & Cattle visit.
NB. Chillingham Coach & Cattle tour costs are Non-refundable**

Extensive grounds including gardens, lakes & woodlands. The castle includes an Armoury, Torture chamber, Museum & Dungeons. Chillingham Castle boasts some of the highest levels of paranormal activity in the country, with a large collection of spectres and apparitions spotted by visitors over the years. The Cattle tour starts at 1.45 pm from the Visitor Pavilion & lasts about an hour, please be there a few minutes early, it can be a bumpy drive & please wear suitable footwear as the fields are uneven & hilly & you have to go through a disinfectant footbath.

Coach leaves from outside Addisons at 9am, return before 6pm. **Entry to Castle & Gardens £11.00, which is payable on the day at entry, Historic House members free.** Please remember your card. Coach price £20.00, Cattle tour £7.00, payable as soon as possible please by cheque or cash.

Friday June 20th, Ushaw Chapel, House & Gardens, 9.30am

There are permanent exhibitions about Pugin & Life at Ushaw & a Display of books showing Bird art through the centuries. Most of the areas are accessible, with ramps where there are a few steps, some of the outside areas can be uneven.

Coach leaves 9.30am from outside Addisons, returns before 6pm. Entry to Chapel, House & Gardens £9.00, **Historic Houses members free** please remember your card. Coach price £12.00. Payments as above.

Friday July 18th, Helmsley Walled Gardens 9am. The gardens are a few minutes walk from the carpark, they are flat, with seating & a café. Afternoon in the town. Helmsley has many shops, cafes, galleries & Friday is market day. The Castle is English Heritage if you want to visit, costing £8.10 if not a member. Leaving at 9am outside Addisons, return before 6pm. Cost £25,50 includes Gardens & coach. Payments as above

Friday September 19th, 9am, A Day Out in Skipton. Lovely market town with lots of shops, galleries, eateries & walks. Impressive Castle, £11.40. Hour long boat trip from £9.50. Friday is Market day. Craven Court off the main street has many independent & known shops & cafes. Walks along the Leeds Liverpool Canal. Leaving at 9am outside Addisons return before 6pm. Coach price £18.00. Payment as above.

LONGER TRIPS - ROUND BRITAIN IN 2025!

SCOTLAND - 15th to 19th March - There are 17 of us booked on the trip to the Cairngorms. The highlights include a train journey from Fort William to Mallaig, and a visit to Neptune's Staircase. The Cairngorm Brewery and Red Deer Barn are extra and have to be booked and paid for in advance. Coach pick-up in Barney. There are still places available. Contact Cairngorm Travel on **01405 761 334**.

WALES - 21st to 25th June - There are 30 of us going to Wales, which includes visits to St David's, Saundersfoot, Cardigan and Fishguard. Coach pick-up in Barney. Further details from Kyle Travel, tel: **01833 690303**.

ENGLAND - 22nd to 26th September - Visits to Tewkesbury, Morton-in-Marsh, Stow-on-the-Wold and Broadway. A day is spent in Stratford which includes a cruise on the River Avon. Also included is a trip on the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway. Coach pick-up in Barney.

Full details from Kyle Travel, tel: **01833 690303**.

Dorothy Jameson, tel **01833 637957**

GROUP REPORTS

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

Twelve of us made it through the snow and ice for our meeting on 8 January. We decided to postpone the second landscape lecture and relaxed instead with Professor Kloss. He gave us 10-minute introductions to each of 6 painters - from the early 1700s, Poussin, Watteau and Claude Lorraine (the last highly relevant to the development of the Picturesque in England); and from the revolutionary period of 1780 to 1820, David, Goya and Caspar David Friedrich.



The most memorable image of the afternoon was David's *Death of Marat* – pure political propaganda but powerful nonetheless. So, on 5 February we ran Professor Andrews' second lecture, on John Constable and 'the peasant poet' John Clare, both active from the 1790s to the 1830s. In poetry and painting there was a new determination to reflect the lives of ordinary people, and during the wars with France, to celebrate Englishness and the English scene.

Image: *The Death of Marat* by Jacques-Louis David, 1793

'I was born to paint a happier land, my own dear England', said Constable. Casting aside the classical Italian influences that held sway in the 18th century, he and his fellow East Anglian painters, like Gainsborough, Crome

and Cotman, looked first to Dutch painting as a model before developing their own distinct style.

Where, for their predecessors, landscape painting was all about correct *composition* in the fashion of Claude, from Gainsborough on the emphasis was on the *texture* of rural scenes, reaching its apogee in Constable's practice – what he called 'the broken ruggedness of my style'.

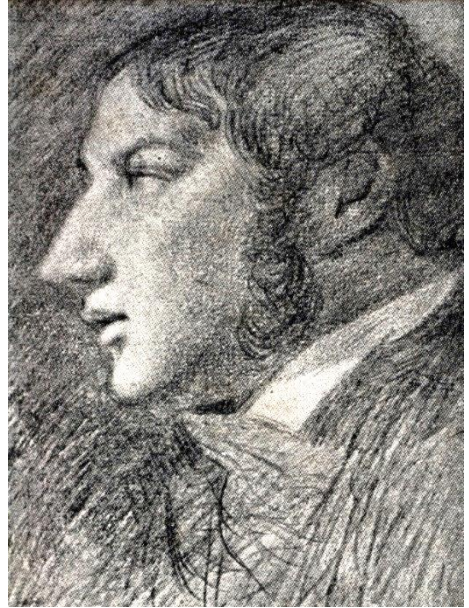


Image: *John Constable, self-portrait, 1806*
(Tate)

Especially favoured were old, neglected cottages and mills, much-repaired gates and rugged oaks: '*nothing is ugly*'. For him – and poets like Wordsworth and Clare – their main source of inspiration was always nostalgia for childhood and its associations. This marked a significant democratisation of culture, relying on experiences available to everyone, not just the wealthy who were able to refine their tastes through education and foreign travel.

After the break we watched an illuminating half-hour talk by National Gallery curator Colin Wiggins, introducing Constable's *The Hay Wain*. While we all think we know this icon of Englishness so well, do we really? His witty and irreverent approach (Hay Wain wallpaper, anyone?) succeeded brilliantly in making us realise how radical and innovative Constable really was.

Next meeting: Wednesday 5 March: Samuel Palmer and the English Pastoral tradition.

AUTOMOTIVE GROUP – Report by Peter Colley

The days are getting longer and our thoughts turn to days out on the open road. Our next meeting is at the Lord Crewe Arms in Blanchland on 18th March when we shall no doubt set the world to rights while enjoying their hospitality. If you have not yet reserved a place, please contact Peter Colley petergcolley@icloud.com Looking ahead, **the 15th April meeting** will be at the usual venue, 10:30 to 12:00.

Other dates will include the Darlington & District Motor Club "Battle of Britain" race weekend at **Croft on 23rd and 24th August**. Last year this provided a full schedule of modern and classic racing with the opportunity to meet the teams and cars in the paddock. Race enthusiasts will not want to miss the British Touring Cars Championship at **Croft on 3rd August**. This is the premier race series in the country and invariably provides a great spectacle.

Last year we expanded our interest to trains with a well supported visit to Locomotive and this year we plan to broaden our horizons with a visit to the Yorkshire Air Museum near York.

BIRDWATCHING – Report by Andrew Lapworth

Our first group meeting of 2025 saw fifteen of us at Durham Wildlife Trust's **Low Barns nature reserve** beside the river near Witton-le-Wear. It was a cold and chilly morning and pretty quiet with very few birds calling.

At the first spacious West Pasture hide overlooking West Lake we were entertained by numerous small birds coming to the feeders, including Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and a female Reed Bunting, plus Moorhens and Coots feeding on the ground below. Anne spotted a distant strange beast across the far side of the pond which turned out to be first the rear end of, and eventually, a whole Roe deer!

Next we were treated to wonderful close views of a normally secretive and shy Water Rail. The bird was probing for food in the ground and tangles of vegetation but gave prolonged views almost at touching distance below two sides of the hide. And then there were two !

We wandered along the path beside the Wear without seeing or hearing much. At the second hide we filled it to scan the still frozen Marston Lake.

Alas the two female Smew present the previous week had departed so our best birds there were a couple of Goldeneye amongst the other diving ducks and some well concealed Teal dotted around the scene. To our amazement another Water Rail gave further good views. Back at the cafe we ended our brief visit; not very many birds but what cracking and privileged views of not one but at least 3 Water Rails.

Our Group's Bird of the Month - Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*.



A usually shy bird more often heard than seen. We often only know it's there by hearing its piglet squeals. Cold weather with frozen ponds and lakes make the rails venture out into the open to the delight of birdwatchers.

Photo: Andrew Lapworth

Seen well and closely its plumage is a subtle mix of blacks, brown and greys, in contrast to its bright red long bill and pink legs.

BOARD GAMES – Reports by Clare Tamea and Jean Bartle

Ten of us met in the warmth of the Old Well on a dismal January afternoon for some light-hearted fun. We split into groups and played several rounds of two games:

No Thanks – a new game for the group, this is an easy to learn, fast-paced and deliciously tactical card game. The aim is to get the lowest score. Whilst some played safe, avoiding high cards, others adopted very risky tactics - and more often than not pulled a win out of the bag to the astonishment and amusement of their fellow players.

Rummikub - many of you will be familiar with this tile game, based on rummy, which combines thinking and strategy with a helping of luck. The aim is to get rid of all your tiles first, by laying out sets and runs, or manipulating those already played to create others. As the number of tiles increases, so does the complexity of working out how to swap everything round so you can lay your own tiles, whilst ensuring each set or run remains viable.

“Qwirkle” (yes that is how it is spelt) - in February, nine people gathered at the Old Well - 8 regulars and a new gamer. This became two groups, one of 4 and one of 5 and the game of choice this month was It was new to most of the group, and after playing one game to learn, two more were requested.

Qwirkle is a fun game, needing concentration, and the will to win. Basically it consists of putting tiles in row, but they have to be the same shape or colour. Points are given for the number of tiles that are placed, unless you manage to complete a row of six correct tiles and score a Qwirkle, which is twelve points. (See Hazel or Jane for the exact rules).

With this group there are no quiet games, just different words, which this month were Qwirkle, purple Qwirkle, and one double Qwirkle, scored by Celia, the most observant and focused of her group.



There were the usual cries of “sorry” followed by “no you’re not”.

If you want an afternoon of solemn, serious and thoughtful activity, maybe this is not for you, but if you would like 2 hours of fun, lots of laughs, with games that make you think and prove you have a brain, or not, come and join us.

Many thanks to organiser Hazel and fellow board gamers!

Qwirkle photo by Jean Bartle

ROOM TO READ BOOK GROUP- Review by Annie Clouston

This month's book under discussion was *Big Sky* by Kate Atkinson who, like J K Rowling, has two strands to her writing career; the first, as in *Life After Life*, social/historical and the second, as in *Big Sky*, in crime fiction. This is the fifth of Atkinson's Jackson Brodie novels. Jackson Brodie, like Cormoran Strike in Rowling's (writing as Robert Galbraith) series is a private detective. Both protagonists share certain lugubrious characteristics.

The Guardian review hails *Big Sky* as "a tale of sordid crimes on the Yorkshire coast, with a sprinkle of postmodernism" – it has to be said that the postmodernist aspects of this novel were not instantly recognised by our members. (Postmodernism would argue with itself about what is postmodernism.) On the positive side, and it is debatable whether this is acceptable, difficult subjects – murder, human trafficking and prostitution, embezzlement etc - were handled with humour. However, we found the narrative over-populated with people and tangential themes, repetitive and distracting, and this wadding resulted in a novel that was way too long and in places bordering on the tedious.

It was interesting to discuss why there is a fashion in publishing for novels that are far too long. While we all liked Sarah Winman's *Still Life* it too suffered from a fair bit of wadding, and the Cormoran Strike novels are stuffed with wadding. One of our members with a career in publishing told us that the absence, through economising, of copy editing has led to an epidemic of overblown novels, exemplified in the case of the likes of the massively commercial Rowling, Atkinson and Osman (he of the *Thursday Murder Club*) who can write very much on their own terms. It also has a further side effect of sometimes allowing anomalous, error-ridden or plain illiterate material to be published. A personal beef I have with the three authors named above for their commercial heft is that I find their tone very patronising: The Thursday Club series towards older people, Rowling, writing as Galbraith, and to some extent Atkinson, particularly towards people evidently not of their social class.

So... back to *Big Sky*. In summary our group were mostly lukewarm about it, giving it 2.5 stars out of 5 for discussion and 2.5 for recommending to friends.

CHESS GROUP – Report by Diana Marks

We met at The Old Well as usual at 2pm on the first Thursday of the month. Our plea for more participants obviously fell on deaf ears as there were only three of us this month!

Not to be daunted, the 'Grand Master' of the group offered to take on two of us. Impressive. However he was beaten squarely by one of us, having lost his queen fairly early on in the game.

We hope to see a few more of you next month. I'm really happy to teach complete beginners. It's such a good game!

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS GROUP – Report by Kate Bailey

This month we tackled a number of thorny issues. We have continued our search for viable alternatives to the recycling of garments and textiles via charity shops, as we have realised that many of our donations end up in landfill. We have decided to support a local charity in Barnard Castle - Woodhouse Close Crisis Intervention Project (providing emergency packs of food, fuel and household items). They collect donations of clothing and household textiles and give them directly to people in need.

Looking for secure ways to repurpose redundant smart phones, tablets and laptops, we concluded that many of us hang on to old technology because we fear our personal data will be stolen. There are programs and other systems to delete old data but the only safe way to dispose of a laptop is to remove the hard drive, which contains all the data, and then destroy it.

After the sim is removed, a smart phone can be returned to factory settings. This 'wipes' the data so that the phone can be recycled. Charities such as Oxfam will sell them on for re-use. Tablets are like phones, with no hard drive, so can also be returned to factory settings before disposal. Durham County electronic recycling collections are available at Barnard Castle Library, Barnard Castle School, Teesdale Leisure Centre and at most domestic waste recycling sites.

We discussed government proposals to establish '*carbon capture and storage*' infrastructure projects on Teesside, Merseyside and around the Humber. Existing energy-intensive industrial, chemical and power-generating complexes in these locations propose to feed their CO2 emissions into pipelines taking the gas offshore. The CO2 will be injected into former oil and gas production sites in the North Sea, helping to squeeze more oil and gas out of the ground (in the USA this is called '*enhanced oil recovery*'). We agreed that most of these proposals are a '*greenwashing*' distraction from the need to reduce, not increase, global energy needs.

We ended as always on a positive note, talking about recent "Good News".



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For example, in India, it seems that endangered tigers (at high risk of extinction) are breeding successfully. It is claimed that an increase in the population (doubled in a decade) has been made possible by expanding their habitat by 30% between 2006 and 2018 and by keeping them safe from poaching. And an expedition into Alto Mayo, a wildlife conservation area in Peru, has discovered 27 new species, including an amphibious mouse with webbed feet, a blob-headed catfish and a tiny arboreal

opossum with large ears and excellent hearing. It is a type of marsupial, most of which carry their young in a pouch.

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD GROUP – Report by Sue Overton

Six regulars were absent for our monthly session but we welcomed one new member and split into two groups of five. One group romped away and managed to complete three different crosswords before brain fatigue set in despite a break for the usual refreshments. The second group finished the first two crosswords but declined a third preferring to quit while in the glow of success.

Did you try to solve last month's anagram clue? :-

Unfinished poem client composed (10) Answer: INCOMPLETE

Now try a hidden clue type:- Perfect extract from guide altered (5)

For many more, come and join us at our next meeting **on Wednesday 12th March at 2pm** in the Guide HQ, Birch Road Sue Overton **07512 368884**

DISCUSSION GROUP – Report by Glen Howard

There was plenty for us to discuss this month. Topics included: James Bond; will we be losing pennies; problems at the MET; conduct in parliament; views of Gen Z; social mobility; military strategy; fast food outlets; sticks; gas security. Everyone deliberately tried to steer clear of talking about all the terrible things that are happening in the world and to find something lighter to talk about.

Our next meetings will be on **Fridays 14th March and 11th April**. If you would like to join us please give Glen Howard a ring on **01833 631639**.

FAMILY HISTORY INTEREST GROUP – Report by Alan Swindale

18 members attended the talk on Civil Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths and the subsequent general discussion. Civil registration of births, marriages and deaths (BMD) was introduced in England and Wales in 1837, later in Ireland and Scotland.

Combining census information with information on the BMD certificate can lead the researcher back to 1837 (or earlier) but you need to find the certificate for the right person. This means using the quarterly BMD index, most easily accessed with FreeBMD which is a transcription by volunteers of the General Register Office (GRO) quarterly index. With the search facilities within FreeBMD you can review a list of potential matches to your ancestor and search for them in the census.

Marriage partners will have the same index reference for the marriage and FreeBMD provides a search for any marriages on the same register page but it will require further research in the census to select the correct spouse. The index entry may provide sufficient information for your purpose (name, approximate date and location of event) but the full certificate provides much more – address, occupation, fathers of married couple, for example.

Once you believe you have the right index entry, extra information may be available on the GRO's own online computerised index of births and deaths, namely the mother's maiden name in the case of births and the age at death in the case of deaths. This information is available in the quarterly index for later entries and is free whereas you must pay £3 to view the full BMD certificate.

The next meeting will be on **Thursday 13th of March at 13:30** in the Dales room at Enterprise House. Pam Taylor will be talking about the use of DNA testing in Family History research, followed as always by a general discussion.

GARDENING GROUP – Report by Julie, Fran and Kate

In February we held our first talk of the year at Stainton Village Hall. The garden group is continuing to increase in popularity and we had a record turnout for this talk with the hall being almost at capacity.

The guest speaker was Sue Wood who came along to tell us about the history of Valley Gardens in Harrogate. Many of our Members had previously visited the gardens and it was new to others. Sue has worked for the council who own the gardens for over 30 years and until recently was responsible for horticultural planning of the flower beds. She is now responsible for surveying the trees.

Sue told us about the history of Harrogate and how in the year 1571 the first mineral spa was developed. Over the years the popularity of “taking the waters” increased as a health option to help those inflicted with gout and rheumatics. The town continued to grow with lodging houses, hotels and theatres. The gardens were developed with bandstands and deckchairs placed to offer entertainment to the tourists.



The site had been the Royal Bath Hospital and later a museum and it housed casualties from the First World War. Over time, several wells and the bog garden were developed and the site increased in size. The gardens

are now a Grade 2 listed heritage site with 17 acres of gardens and various historic buildings. There is a walk from the Valley Gardens up to the RHS Harlow Carr gardens which are about a mile away.

This was a very interesting and enjoyable talk for the group, Sue was an engaging speaker who had put a lot of effort into the presentation.

On **Friday 7th March** we will have a talk from Eddie Harland about the Little Thorpe Manor Physic Garden.

Please Note: The capacity of the hall at Stainton is 60 people maximum, we had 57 people in attendance in February. So that we don't have to turn anyone away at the door we have decided that from March onwards we need to **introduce pre-booking for the meetings**.

We will send out an email the week before the meeting and people can reply to this to book their place. For those not on email, a text or phone call to Kate Keen on **07880 741151** will suffice.

GEOLOGY GROUP – Report by Bob Tuddenham

We had two excellent well attended one-hour meetings on Zoom in January with two talks by Les Knight and one by Trevor Morse. All three talks were about igneous rocks, with particular reference to the north of England and the Whin Sill in our local area.

Les started the New Year with an introduction to basalt, the most common igneous rock. He explained the different types of basalt, their formation and where they arise. He made what was quite complex mineralogy and terminology most accessible with clear graphs and explanations. We were also given a world view of where basaltic rocks arise before we started looking more closely at Whin Sill in the north of England.

Trevor then continued the theme with a short talk entitled *The Whin Sill continues to keep on giving in Upper Teesdale*. As an expert on the geology of Teesdale, Trevor took us through the geological history of the dale and the importance of the Whin Sill intrusion in shaping the dale's topography and in forming many key features including High and Low Force. Also, as a

very hard igneous rock, the Whin Sill is still used for roadstone with an active quarry at Force Garth in Upper Teesdale.

In his second talk, Les Knight explained about the extensive igneous activity and massive intrusions in northern England and the Midland Valley in Scotland at the end of the Carboniferous period. This is some 300 mya and took place over a period of some 70 million years. Historically much of our understanding about igneous rocks was the result of research into the local geology at Edinburgh University in the 19th Century. As well as basalt, the samples contain other rocks and crystals which also tell a story. However, even now, geologists do not fully understand the tectonic processes that took place at that time though there is some evidence that there was a triple junction of plates in Scandinavia which could have been similar to that found today at the south-west end of the Red Sea.

Our next meeting will be held at The Witham on Monday **March 24th at 10 am**. All are welcome. Please contact the convenor for details.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT – Reports by Tim Meacham and Celia Chapple

Our January meeting was the annual session where members share a five-minute item of historical interest. Every year this produces a good hour of fun and surprises: 2025 was no exception.

This year we suggested reading a short excerpt of a historical item. One member introduced us to the book *Cocoa at Midnight* by Kathleen Clifford written with Tom Quinn, an account of Kathleen's life as a housekeeper for wealthy families between and after the wars. This is one of a series of memoirs and candid accounts of *The Lives of the Servants* and really brings the era to life. By contrast we heard newspaper accounts of 17th and 18th century feuds (verging on riots) in Teesdale as described in Volume Two of *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham* by William Fordyce in 1867; this made clear that social divisions are not simply a modern manifestation!

Another member displayed a lovely map of Hadrian's wall which he had been instrumental in producing, a work of art in itself. Another recommended book was *The River Wear From Source to Mouth* an

enigmatic work at a low price providing a real pot-pourri of fact and fiction. We were then taken through brief histories of two very different buildings: Sherburn Hospital, opened as a Leper Hospital in 1173 and still operative under a different guise today. More locally we heard of the life of Thorngate Mill under its various guises; it was remarkable how short a time it served as an actual mill! Still in Barney we met the George Browns, father and son, who in different ways contributed much to the life and health of our town. Another member gave details of the life of their indentured great-great-grandfather in Newcastle-on-Tyne, who was expected to survive in 1835 on 7 shillings a year (less 3 shillings deductions)!

Finally In a very different mood we had two real performance highlights: we were shown the Marxophone, a musical instrument of 1912. This included a delightful demonstration of this remarkable invention, a most versatile and rich-sounding instrument. Then a member read us his own thought-provoking poem (also a song) written in response to the British government's *Protect and Survive* campaign of the 1970s which was intended to allay fears on dealing with the threat of nuclear attack. This cheerily dark poem concludes: "*Protect and Survive, Prosper and Thrive, Hold onto your family if the night should turn to day, Hold on tight or they might just blow away*" - a sobering thought to finish with.

February meeting - Life in Elizabethan England 1558-1603 – talk by Marilyn Anderson, report by Celia Chapple

Elizabeth came to the throne at the age of twenty-six, inheriting a society with religious and social problems, and divided by extremes - wealth and poverty, with little in between. Through words and detailed pictures, Marilyn illustrated a life in an unpredictable society. The hierarchy was clear: God was supreme followed by royalty and then peasants. Queen Elizabeth created her own religion, Protestantism, eliminating rule by the Pope and bishops with their Latin texts and saints. The prayer book was in the Queens' English with little heed to the saints, and an oath of allegiance was taken to the Queen as governor.

The wealthy spent money on colourful clothing fabrics worn in layers with embroidery and sewn-in jewels. Peasants wore brown and green muslin or wool, and leather boots with wooden soles. However, no-one escaped the

bed bugs, lice and fleas which were rampant in bedding, clothing and wigs. Bedding was wrapped tightly in boxes to suffocate the fleas.

The threat of death was always around the corner as no-one was exempt from the plagues. Quarter of a million people died in her reign. Little was known of the cause or cure of illnesses such as rickets, scurvy, TB and 'the sweating fever,' or of the role that poor sanitation played. Vegetable matter, faeces and meat scraps were swept onto the streets. In addition, famine hit the poor. The penalty for quite small misdemeanours such as stealing bread or poaching could result in a public hanging.

The Queen died leaving a legacy of £300k in contrast to the £300k debt she inherited, with a merchant 'middle class' developing. Her 45-year reign was one of change as she confidently made her mark although global travel also brought new ideas. Woodland shrunk as it was made over to farmland and timber usage. Public latrines were established in 1568. More public schools were established between 1560 and 1590 although teachers were given a lowly status as were servants. Art, music and dance were revived (since Henry VIII's destruction of monasteries) and plays, Morris Dancing and madrigals are some examples we know from Elizabethan England.

Marilyn's thoroughly researched talk held the group's interest from beginning to end, ranging from gruesome to fascinating and intimate details of the life of Elizabethan rich and poor. The next meeting will be on **Thursday 13th March** at Enterprise House (starting at 10am promptly). Details of the 2025 programme are available from Tim Meacham.

iPAD and iPHONE GROUP – Report by Mike Sweeting

In January, two queries were received from Group members. The first related to the Lock Screen and Home Screen wallpapers. These are capable of being highly personalised and we looked at how to take advantage of the various options. The second query related to controlling tabs in Safari, this proved a little more involved than anticipated and will be covered as a main topic in February.

We briefly discussed the new Apple Intelligence function. As a useful feature it has a little way to go and, as only the most up-to-date models of iPad or iPhone support it, we will leave further discussion for the future.

Apple has had a 'behind the scenes' password manager for some time known as Keychain. This has now acquired a front-end app called Passwords which allows the user to better see what is going on and manage their library of passwords. We looked at the features and benefits and discussed the importance of keeping passwords accessible and up to date as well as secure. We will look at how to set it up and make full use of it at our February meeting.

The next meeting will be on **Tuesday 25th March 2025 at 1:30pm** at Enterprise House.

LUNCH CLUB – Report by Kate Keen

January was our change over month for the lunch group with Jane Mathieson handing over to myself, Kate Keen. Thanks to Jane for arranging many fine lunches for us. I will be assisted by Elizabeth Carrick who will help out if I am away.

With a last minute hitch the venue was changed to Clarendons who were extremely helpful in accommodating our group at short notice. On a cold winter's day we had a great selection of warming meals to choose from. Most of the group were able to manage a desert too.

Our lunch venues will be a selection of old favourites and some that we have not tried before. If anyone is interested in joining our friendly group then please contact me.

NEEDLECRAFT – Report by Glen Howard

It was good to get together again for the first time this year as we had to cancel our planned "*Christmas*" lunch in January because of the weather. Most of us were working on our knitting projects (or in my case unpicking). Our chat was very varied but included holidays, and the reasons several no longer go abroad, being diagnosed as pre-diabetic but still enjoying ourselves, and the difficulties of driving at night with oncoming headlights so bright.

Our next meeting will be on **Monday 3rd March 2025**. New members are always welcome and you certainly don't need to be an expert to join us, just enjoy stitching with like-minded folk. Please give me a ring if you are interested - Glen Howard **01833 631639**

PAINTING GROUP – Report by Val Hobbs

Anne had chosen the very appropriate winter theme of painting a robin. She issued us with a variety of illustrations of robins, from which we each chose one. First, we sketched the outline (it wasn't as easy as it looked to achieve a 'robin' shape). When sketching, not only is the scale and proportion vital, but achieving the angle of the subject is tantamount to success.



Anne illustrated how to apply a wash of wet paint to the upper background, and then how to add salt. The salt then absorbed the paint, and when dried with a hairdryer, and gently rubbed off, gave a mottled effect. However, if rubbed off whilst still damp, the paper becomes scuffed, and the mottled effect won't be attained.

Images: Martin Page

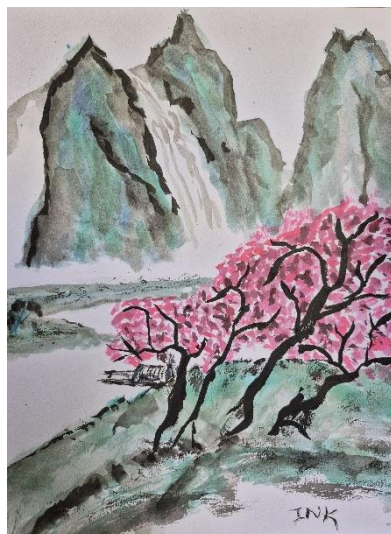


We then proceeded to paint the robin with a series of different sized brushes, and added fine detail, such as the eye, with a black fine liner. It was a very enjoyable project, and the group ended up with a 'flock' of very diverse birds!

In February, five of us met...sadly without Anne, the tutor, who couldn't attend. We had decided on an earlier date that we would all 'do our own thing', but I had taken some ink and bleach, some books for inspiration, and some do it yourself book marks.

We began the session with coffee and chat, and each of us chose our subject and medium. A few chose to have a go with the ink and bleach...some attempting landscapes, others playing with patterns and couple of us took a botanical leaning.

Of course, it was all very experimental, and we produced some very interesting pieces.





PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP – Report by Alan Kenwright

In February the photography group visited the National Glass Centre in Sunderland, an ideal venue for the time of year as we were more or less independent of the vagaries of the weather.



In addition to the photographic possibilities provided by the architecture of this sadly neglected building, we were able to explore the various exhibitions at the Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art (housed in the same building). Not all of it to everyone's taste (as you would expect!) but it certainly provided some interesting subjects for photography.

Finally, we were treated to a demonstration of breathtaking skills by the glassblowers who fashioned a beautiful vase from scratch before our eyes. If anyone has never visited the centre, I would strongly recommend a visit before it closes (possibly permanently!) in July this year.



Photographs by Ian Royston and Alan Kenwright

PHILOSOPHY GROUP – Report by Christine Price

The topic for this month's Philosophy group was *Art, Aesthetics and Philosophy*. We first considered the view of the Arts of the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Plato found the arts to be mere imitation (mimesis) of the real world and advocated censorship. He said that the arts were potentially a bad influence, appealing to the senses and desire for pleasure rather than '*the highest faculty of the soul*': pure reason and the desire for knowledge.

Aristotle, however found arts to be cathartic; allowing a release of emotions which could be beneficial - not unlike the feelings of release we might have when watching a sad film, or even the benefit of laughter provoked by comedy. The term '*Aesthetics*' was reconsidered by philosophers in the 18th century as the study of judgements of taste. The discussion of whether beauty was found within objects themselves or came from the mind of the perceiver was considered by philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke and

Kant. The concept of the sublime, or sublimity was also raised by these philosophers.

'*Sublime*' refers to a work of art that goes beyond everyday experience and into grand, grotesque, outrageous and overwhelming experiences. Terror was a key component of the sublime and can be seen in paintings such as *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* by John Martin, c1821, or poetry and literature such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Musical works such as *La Mer* (1905) by Claude Debussy and controversially John Cage's *4'33'* (1952) have been given as examples of '*the sublime*' in music.

This took us into a discussion of more modern philosophical theories of art and the perhaps muddy waters of '*Conceptual Art*', and whether contemporary judgement about 'what is art?' have changed the focus, meaning and function of art. We considered works by Duchamp - *Fountain* 1917 (a urinal), Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* 1964, Damien Hirst's *Mother and Child Divided* 1993, and Catalan's *Comedian* 2019 (you may remember this is a fresh banana fixed to a wall with duct tape, sold in 2024 for c\$6.2million). Peter Cooke and Dudley Moore's sketch *The Art Gallery* (1965) finally put the Art World to rights!

POETRY GROUP – Report by Elizabeth Long

Our theme this month was '*Praise*', which provided a wide range of poetry from the humorous to the elegiac and/or religious. We began the session with our own local poet, Meg Peacocke's, *In praise of Aunts*. A nostalgic poem, evoking memories of a bygone age when Aunts, very often not actual relatives but single, childless, friends of parent, could be a large part of a child's life.

*"I conjure Aunts, sly laughers,
Aunts not of the blood
but of the spirit;"*

A more reflective piece followed, *Salvation* by Denise Levertov about a river, once underground being uncovered within a city. We discussed how many

of our streams and waterways in cities were covered up, e.g. Fleet Street in London and how uncovering them brought a little piece of nature back to life. A very interesting part of a longer poem, by Christopher Smart (1722-1771) followed. *Jubilate Agno* is thought to have been written when the poet was in a lunatic asylum. The poem has a religious theme and refers to the poet's cat and his relationship with God.

Juke Box Love Songs by Langston Hughes, one of my personal favourites, painted an evocative picture of Harlem with lines such as '*Take the neon lights and make a crown*'. The next choice was a poem by one of our group, Terry Whitfield, *To Herbert Von Karajan*. His politics in pre-war Germany may have been suspect but as a conductor of music, he can transport us with his skill.

A simple poem extolling the beauty of *Snowdrops* by Teresa Hooley was followed by the famous *Sonnet from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. '*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.*' *Praise of a Collie* by the Scottish poet, Norman McCaig listed the attributes of a small collie dog and its skill in rounding sheep. We then listened to *Ode to Dirt* by Sharon Old, asking dirt for forgiveness for overlooking such an important part of nature.

We finished with *Everything is Going to be All Right* by Derek Mahon, reminding us that no matter what is happening in the world or around us, we can look at the sunrise and be impressed.

*'I lie here in a riot of sunlight
watching the day break and the clouds flying
Everything is going to be all right.'*

Our next meeting is on **9th April** when the theme is '*Childhood*'.

SCRABBLE GROUP – Report by Ray Thompson

The January meeting was held at Lillian's house. There were 6 of us, we made 2 teams, Phil, Ray and Marilyn, and Judith, Paula and Lillian. Ray won the 1st game with a score of 264, including a 7-letter word, PALADIN,

for 66 points. Judith won her game with a score of 215 and a 7-letter word, SHIFTER, for 71 points

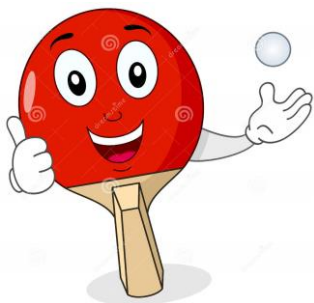
In round 2 the two winners and next highest scorer played each other, Ray, Judith and Paula, with Paula winning this game with a score of 226. Phil, Lillian and Marilyn played their game, which Phil won with a score of 191.

In February, 8 of us met at Judith's house. Marilyn, Regina, Monica and Ray made up one team, whilst Judith, Phil, Lillian and Paula the other. Ray won his game with 2 7-letter words, ROADIES (63 points) and ESSENCE (70 points) and a score of 201. Judith won her game with a 7-letter word CHORTLE (80 points) and a score of 230. We then had a tea break with tea, coffee, a homemade lemon cheesecake, and biscuits.

The second two games were made up of the two winners and runners up, so Ray, Judith, Paula and Phil played and Phil won this game with a 7-letter word COVERTS (67 points) and a score of 212. Marilyn, Lillian, Regina and Monica played their game which Marilyn won with a score of 140 points.

Thank you to Judith for hosting this month's meeting. Next month we are meeting at Judith's on **Monday 10th March at 2pm**. If you would like to join our happy group, please phone Judith on **01833 650150**.

TABLE TENNIS GROUP – Report by Peter Singer



If you wish to see table tennis played with panache, aplomb, skill and style, it's probably best not to come along to one of our sessions at Teesdale Leisure Centre on a Friday afternoon. On the other hand, you would certainly find endeavour, creative (sometimes magical) shot-making, laughter and (mostly) good-natured banter, as we indulge in our own, particular version of the game.

As convenor, I can attest that it can be difficult to keep changing the combinations of players so as to ensure that everyone plays with and against everyone else, but we usually manage somehow or other (or else no-one knows quite what's going on and we carry on regardless).

The standard of play has undoubtedly improved over the years we have been toiling away. We all, in our own way, play to win and, at the end of a session, the general feeling is one of having enjoyed some robust and competitive encounters. Recently, we have had a dozen or so members at each session, so have been able to play two tables of doubles, with the chance for four of us to have a welcome rest between games.



Photo by Pete Singer

The modern game is quite quick, being won by the first team to eleven points, with a margin of two points. As it happens, many of our games are quite close, so scores of 12-10 or even 17-15 are not unusual, but even so, sitting out never lasts very long.

In terms of technique, some of us have been trying to master the backhand drive – one of the four basic strokes and a very effective but devilishly difficult shot to play. Coach Ben Larcombe of Expert Table Tennis (no, don't know him either) advises not playing it off a short or backspin ball and the key points are to take the ball at the top of the bounce, hitting from around your waist, using your elbow and forearm, with the bat angle closed (downwards facing) and hitting over the ball to create some topspin. Easy as that! Happy backhand driving.

If you would like to join our group to learn the game, improve your skills or just enjoy playing and socialising, please contact Peter Singer (pandisinger@btinternet.com 07508 663998). All are welcome, whether you play regularly, have not played for some time or have never played before.



WINE GROUP – Report by Tim Meacham

For our January meeting we returned to Australia to try out a variety of recent wines from some of the relatively smaller winemakers. We started off in Western Australia where climate change has seen the Swan Valley lose its prime place as a wine producer to areas like the Margaret River, south of Perth, where conditions for growing remain relatively cool. We tried a **Mad Fish Sauvignon Blanc 2023** (11% from Morrisons), a little pricey at £10.00, but quite drinkable. This family run business since 1993 is named after Madfish Bay, a peaceful & remote beach facing the Southern Ocean. Moving eastwards we compared this with a fellow Sauvignon from South Australia, the **Mount Benson Wave Crest 2023** (12.4% from Majestic) and a good buy at £8.99, down from £11.99. This had more about it, with a livelier finish and extra complexity. Mount Benson experiences cold, wet winters followed by a long growing season, and we enjoyed this wine.

Moving on again but still in South Australia we tried a **Lodge Hill Dry Riesling 2022** from the Clare Valley (12.0% from Majestic). Not a grape often associated with Australia, this very much lived up to its 'Dry' descriptor and at £11.99, down from £15.99, was our most expensive white. One review states "It needs time, but it is still juicy, citrusy and drinkable now", which was a fair reflection. Again, Lodge Hill winery is set high up above the valley allowing ideal growing conditions: another very pleasant drink.

Finally, we continued our eastward journey into New South Wales to taste a **Riverina Viognier 2024** (13.0% from Lidl). This was a fine example of one of our favourite grapes, all the more so when I revealed the price of £6.79! This was our hands-down winning white, both for value and flavour. Light and fruity with a long finish this lived up to its claim to be “bursting with flavour”. A visit to Lidl to restock following the meeting was perhaps unsurprisingly met with a ‘sold out’ notice!

We finished off with a couple of reds as usual. We returned to the Mount Benson vineyard for their **Mount Benson Wave Crest 2022** (14.2% from Majestic, again on offer at £10.99 (from £16.99). This Syrah-based wine, made in the European North Rhone style rather than by the more common indigenous Australian ‘Shiraz’ model was certainly strong and tasty, but again Lidl stepped in with a steal at £6.79, their **Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon 2022** (13.5%) attracting the approval of even our dyed-in-the-wool non-red drinkers! This light South Australian variety, “seasoned by a dash of smokiness” as the label claimed, was a perfect finish to a session that restored our faith in the largely mass-produced Australian wine sector. There are some fine, affordable Australian wines out there.

WIMMIN’ SWIMMIN’ GROUP - Report by Annie Clouston

There was such an enthusiastic response to this new group that we could have done with a 50m Olympic Pool for our inaugural session. But we had to make do with Teesdale Leisure Centre’s more modest dimensions, and limit numbers to 14.

The aim of the session, which enabled us to have exclusive use of the pool for an hour and the services of a trained lifeguard, was to reintroduce or encourage swimming as a recreational, relaxing, companionable, healthy activity to women who were timid about the routines and unknowns of getting into the pool. It is great non-loading bearing all round exercise, and having the pool to ourselves ensures a calm, safe environment, free from the bashers and crashers who, thrusting through the water like walruses after a mate, can be a bit intimidating.

Some of us were recent swimmers, others hadn't been chlorinated for at least fifteen years, so it was good to just get in and do our own thing. For some, techniques learned while being barked at by a school swimming instructor seemed to be recalled and a stately back crawl or two was in evidence, whereas the head-up-don't-ruin-my-hair brigade was also in attendance. There were a few not-yet-registered by the British Swimming Association strokes too. How original are we wimmin' while swimmin'!

Next sessions are **Saturdays 1st and 29th March from 4pm-5pm**. For more information and to book a place, please contact Sue Overton: sueoverton@hotmail.com

WALKING GROUPS



SHORTER WALKS - Report by Liz Colley **A Tour of Barnard Castle Sporting Venues**

After all the weather January had thrown at us, the afternoon of our walk turned out to be bright with little wind. Our theme for the walk was sporting venues of Barnard Castle with a sub heading playgrounds of Barnard Castle. Starting outside Addisons Estate Agents we headed up Galgate taking the alleyway to cross over to Victoria Road.

Our route took us down Richardsons Fields taking the path past the playground behind Dawson Road. Fortunately, no one volunteered to play on the zip line as I hadn't risk assessed it. Heading into the Bowes Museum

gardens we avoided the tree surgeons who were clearing up debris from two trees which had come down in Storm Eowyn.

Image: Liz Colley



The path took us past the Bowling Green, my favourite, but then I'm 'biased' and the Tennis courts which were 'love-ly' and we 'try-ed' to make out the posts on the rugby pitches. We also spotted a plucky daffodil already in flower. Retracing our route to leave the gardens our next sporting destination was the Football Club pitch which has recently been upgraded as the club has been promoted a division. As they say 'Life's a pitch'

Heading up to Green Lane and returning to Victoria Road we crossed over to Bede Road and took the path towards Teesdale School and the Leisure Centre. Walking around the back of the Leisure Centre we found the Skate Park, Sue did contemplate 'an Ollie' but discretion proved to be the better part of valour.

Taking the path down to Harmire Road we crossed over to Railway Terrace and noted the old station house as we headed to Bouch Way following the

footpath to Woodside. From here we took the footpath down towards the Cricket Club enjoying the views out over Barney. Returning to Galgate a few of us headed into The Three Horseshoes for a hot drink. In all the walk was nearly 4 miles and we were pleased not to have been 'stumped' by the wintry weather of January

4-6 MILE WALKING GROUP – Report by Janet Bayles

Our walk in February started from the Manor House Hotel on West Auckland Village Green. Five of us ignored the dire weather forecast for rain and managed to complete the walk without a drop of rain falling on us.

Passing by the Manor House Hotel we briefly joined **The Way of Life Northern Saints Trail** then diverted to follow field paths adjacent to the River Gaunless as far as Spring Gardens where we crossed the A68 and continued on to Spring Mill dam.

Following significant flooding of properties the earth dam – a 400 ft wall - was completed in 2005 to stem the flow of the River Gaunless. The dam has the capacity to hold back 420 million gallons of water in a lake 1,000ft wide by half a mile long. A tunnel through the barrier allows the river to flow as normal.

From Spring Mill Dam we followed the Wetlands Path to eventually join the track bed of the Haggerleases Branch railway, a branch of the Stockton and Darlington line. This multiuser path took us to Ramshaw.

Image: Janet Bayles



From Ramshaw we retraced our steps remaining on the railway track bed until we reached Spring Gardens where once again, we crossed the A68 to continue along the track back to West Auckland and the Oakleaf café for welcome refreshments.

We saw enroute, on what was a dreary grey winter's day, some early signs of spring (hawthorn in leaf, daffodils and snowdrops) and briefly enjoyed watching the antics of pygmy goats in a field adjacent to the path.

7-9 MILE WALKING GROUP – Report and photo by Jim Coleman

A group of 10 of us met on Eggleston Green for an eight mile walk around the surrounding area which, coincidentally, took the form of a figure of eight. Given that there was still deep snow and frozen ice around just two days previously we had been uncertain about the walk going ahead, but over the next 36 hours it nearly all disappeared, although we did encounter some on the higher ground – just enough to cover our boots and enable us to say we had been on a proper winter walk.

The weather was cold but dry as we set off, heading for the Teesdale Way as it leads north-west out of the village. Crossing some fields afforded a lovely view of the dale. We soon reached the intersecting part of the figure of eight at what is known locally as the 10-ton bridge. No one quite knows where the name comes from, especially as there are signs showing a weight limit of just 7.5 tons. Continuing on the other side of the bridge we looked down into the deep gorge of Eggleston Burn, before climbing up to the B6278 Eggleston to Stanhope road. Turning left for a couple of hundred yards brought us to a cattle grid and the start of a steep climb up and over the Knotts, where we stopped for a well-earned coffee break while admiring even better panoramic views in all directions.

Suitably refreshed – and having recovered our breath – we were soon making our way downhill. The OS map clearly showed we were on a path, but that hadn't stopped it from becoming overgrown with heather! Nevertheless we all managed the descent without incident, things becoming much easier on reaching a gravel track leading down to Blackton. From there we actually enjoyed being able to walk the next mile on the road leading down to the B6282 Middleton road, again crossing the 10-ton bridge

in the process. Crossing the main road at Eggleston we soon stopped for lunch, before heading back towards Eggleston alongside the Tees.

On the way we passed the Beckstones Wath footbridge, more popularly known as the Millennium Bridge. Opened on the early May bank holiday in 2002 by the Earl of Strathmore and Lord Barnard, and thought to be the first bridge to be built to span the river for over 200 years, its completion marked the culmination of a 30-year campaign by local residents. It now enables circular walks linking Middleton-in-Teesdale, Eggleston, Mickleton and Romaldkirk.



We didn't actually cross the bridge, instead heading towards the B6282. On the way we had to contend with an old drovers track which, although not particularly long, was flooded in places. Having safely negotiated that particular challenge we were soon back at the start point via a relatively easy stroll across a few fields. We then enjoyed refreshments courtesy of Nicky, who lives right beside Eggleston Green.

Thanks to everyone for tackling the climbs, snow, fences, becks, stiles and flooding with such grace and good humour – in all we climbed a total of 1282 feet! Our walk **on March 19th** will take us north of Newbiggin on Lune

to the Potts valley for an 8-mile walk led by Lynda. Please contact nickygrace729@gmail.com if you would like to come along.

FELL WALKING GROUP – Report by Annie Clouston

I have gate fever on two different fronts, not unrelated: firstly, I am off on a long holiday for the first time since before lockdown, and secondly, because of that, I went in search of a new group convenor and was immensely grateful to Jane Johnstone for volunteering.

Gate fever makes me lyrical and so I have taken to seeing haikus in all I do (guess where I am going). This month's fell walk sparked just such a one:

*On an eye-bright day
A winter steal of a day
Magnificent fells!*

Eleven of us met at the fountain at Middleton and walked up to Monks Moor on an amazingly calm and sunny almost windless morning – astonishing to think Storm Eowyn was only 24 hours away. Conditions underfoot were not too slimy though, and waxing lyrical once more, I did try out an adapted bit of Jabberwocky nonsense on my fellow walkers – who were singularly unimpressed:

*'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the fellwalkers,
And the mome raths outgrabe.* (With apologies to Lewis Carroll)

I think in our case that last line could be roughly translated as “*And our breath came out in short pants*”. It is a steep climb.

We stopped for lunch by the shooters' hut, happily not in use by those of the firearm persuasion and returned after 8.5 miles via the lower route along the King's Walk by Hudeshope Beck to Middleton, where we supped and had fruity cake at Lynda's.

Another great day out and such a bonus for January. Many thanks to the group's members for their excellent companionship and to Lynda for leading a splendid walk.



FEBRUARY IN AMBRIDGE – Report by Annie Clouston

What a load of Excrement! No really, literally, Ambridge has become Poobridge – the Am has been flooded with noxious overflow from the local sewage farm. The script has more retching than an MRSA epidemic. So bad in fact that it actually made me nauseous. As if the message about river pollution wasn't enough, we had an Archers style warning about building on a flood plain – the Beechwood Estate has been inundated with raw sewage; one resident renamed their house Poo Palace!

Zeinab the Brat, is beating her teenage breast about losing her father's archive of family photographs, which in the latest round of Ambridge-style ridiculous apologising, she had moved to the ground floor of Poo Palace. Apologising for not anticipating that the house would be – at the scriptwriter's whim – lathered in the brown stuff seems ludicrously unnecessary even by the standards of this excessively sorrowful soap. Meanwhile Ben is pathetically chasing the Brat who has made no bones about her disinterest.

Readers, my patience is wearing thinner than an anorexic stick insect. Fallon and Sergeant Burns being highly instrumental in this. Sergeant Burns is off to '*Undercoverland*' somewhere "*up North*" (poor soul) and Fallon has gone into denial overdrive, mostly visiting her agitation upon the menu at The Bull. Turns out her Dad, the chef Wayne, currently on a gig-holiday, has been cheating the gourmards of Ambridge with ready-made pastry, and whiting instead of cod. In her flurry of distracting activity she has been proposing a different menu for customers. Who thinks Korean Brisket with Yuzu puree and a Pickled Radish, Rocket and Quinoa salad will fly?

Another irritant is the unctuous Lynda and the appearance of a repulsively even-more-unctuous prospective collaborator in the Cricket League, Lawrence Pompous Plonker who turns out to add racism to his list of toxic qualities. I think Robert (Lynda's spouse) needs to watch out for this one stealing her heart with his oleaginous creepy bossiness and interfering (these last two characteristics will resonate well with the lovely Lynda). But she may surprise us yet!

Next month, my friends, I will be unable to listen so you don't have to, though a chronicle from NZ's Embrudge may be forthcoming. Enjoy the break, it'll be good for us all!

COFFEE AND CHAT

13th March 2.30pm at Andalusia, Galgate, Barnard Castle

10th April 11am at Cotherstone Community Cafe

Come and meet members of the Teesdale u3a Committee and do what it says on the tin – just chat !

Teesdale Special Flora Trust have organised a series of LIVE talks in The Witham Room in Barnard Castle

Talk at 7.30pm 6th March 2025 - Geoff Herbert: *The Botanical Treasures of Upper Teesdale*

Talk at 7.30pm 20th March 2025 - Deepdale Nature Reserve - *Nature for all ages* - Louise Shepherd & Gemma McCall from Bright Woods Forest School.

The tickets (£7.50) are on sale at the Witham. All receipts will go to the Trust.

Wednesday 12th March

FILM SHOW AND LECTURE ON THE HISTORY OF WITTON PARK

- **Where the Stockton & Darlington Railway actually started**
- **Where once was Europe's largest steelworks**
- **The home of two local lads who won VCs in WW1**

**Mike Smith presents his film 'Streets of Steel'
commended at the 2024 Tees Valley International Film Festival**

Doors and Bar 7.00 for 7.30pm start.

Tickets £5 from Staindrop Post Office or at ticketsource.co.uk



A HALL FOR ALL

**Scarth Hall South Green Staindrop
DL2 3LD
07881 248478**

Teesdale and District Rotary Club is holding a
DEBATING COMPETITION

Date: Saturday 1st March at 1pm
Venue: Barnard Castle School

Debating motions that address topical environmental issues will be young people from Barnard Castle School, Teesdale School & Sixth Form and a Community Group.

A panel of judges (chaired by a member of North Pennines National Landscapes team) will ask debaters questions and provide critical feedback. The audience will be invited to ask questions and make points of their own.

Free admission, refreshments will be available

For more information contact:
teesdalerotaryecoclub@gmail.com

EDITORS NOTE:

One of the winning limericks from the 2024 competition, published in the January Forum magazine, was incorrectly attributed to Anne Jackson. This delightful limerick was submitted by Ann Richards. Apologies to Ann and Anne !

REMINDER TO ALL REPORTERS:

As you can see the Teesdale Forum goes from strength to strength and we have received so many great contributions that we have extended this issue to our maximum of 48 pages! If this happens again we will need your greater cooperation. **We must ask you to be more succinct and to strictly limit your reports to 400 words. Thank you.**

| Group | Meeting Time | Contact details |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Android Group | 1 st Thurs pm | Martyn Radcliffe 07975 970088 |
| Art Appreciation | 1 st Wed pm | Tony Seward 01833 630050 |
| Automotive | 3 rd Tues am | Peter Colley 01833 695197 |
| Birdwatching | 3 rd Mon am | Andrew Lapworth 07962 038052 |
| Board Games | 2 nd Mon pm | Hazel McCallum 01833 316484 |
| Book Group 2 | 2 nd Mon pm | Maggie Cleminson 01833 640801 |
| Book Group 3 | 3 rd Wed am | Annie Clouston 01833 637091 |
| Chess | 1 st Thurs pm | Diana Marks 07762 6265912 |
| Climate Solutions | 1 st Thurs am | Kate Bailey 07867 683195 |
| Cryptic Crossword | 2 nd Wed 2pm | Sue Overton 07512 368884 |
| Discussion | 2 nd Fri am | Glen Howard 01833 631639 |
| Family History | 2nd Thurs pm | Alan Swindale 01388 488348 |
| Gardening | 1 st Fri pm | Julie Archer 07774 903377 |
| Geography | 3 rd Thurs 2pm | Gerald Blake 01833 650899 |
| Geology | 4 th Mon am | Bob Tuddenham 07812 378004 |
| Historic Environment | 2 nd Thurs 10am | Tim Meacham 07847 182554 |
| iPad & iPhone | 4 th Tue 1.30pm | Mike Sweeting 07565 925412 |
| Italian Conversation | Every Wed am | Marie Jenkins 07754 205664 |
| Lunch Group | 3 rd Wed noon | Kate Keen 07880 741151 |
| Needlecraft | 1 st Mon pm | Glen Howard 01833 631639 |
| Painting | 2 nd Fri 10am | Val Hobbs 07900 497503 |
| Philosophy | 4 th Tues 10am | Ruth Sansom 01325 401850 |

| Group | Meeting Time | Contact details |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Photography | 1 st Tues am | Alan Kenwright 07731 122399 |
| Pickleball | Every Monday 2-4 pm | Ruth Lapworth 07787 978696 |
| Poetry | 2 nd Wed am | Annie Clouston 01833 637091 |
| Science and Technology | 2 nd Mon am | Roy Tranter 01833 638288 |
| Scrabble | 2 nd Mon pm | Judith Fanner 01833 650150 |
| Spanish | 3 rd Thurs 10am | Michael Harris 07799 051389 |
| Table Tennis | Every Fri 3pm | Peter Singer 07508 663998 |
| Theatre | Varies | Elizabeth Formstone 07979 204212 |
| Travel & day trips | Varies | Jane Mathieson 07591 095765 |
| Understanding Classical Music | 4 th Fri 10am | Bill Heyes 01833 640885 |
| Wildflower Group | 2 nd Wed 2pm | Anne Thomson 07928 594404 |
| Wimmin' Swimmin' | Saturdays | Sue Overton 07512 368884 |
| Wine Group | 3 rd Tues pm | Tim Meacham 07847 182554 |
| Walking Groups | | |
| Shorter walks 3-4 miles | 4 th Mon pm | Liz Colley 01833 695197 |
| Walking 4-6 miles | 2 nd Tues 10am | Janet Bayles 07887 834346 Patrick Neill 07881 811518 |
| Walking 7-9 miles | 3 rd Wed 10am | Nicky Grace nickygrace729@gmail.com |
| Fell Walking | 4 th Wed | Jane Johnstone 07771 657440 |

www.thewitham.org.uk

Box office: **01833 63110**

Community Arts Centre

the
witham
Culture • Community • Commerce

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Fri 28 Feb 7.30pm | THEATRE – Jarman: The Story of Derek Jarman (14+) Performed by Mark Farrelly (<i>Quentin Crisp: Naked Hope, Howard's End</i>). |
| Tues 4 Feb 7.00pm | SCREENING – Big Screen Musicals: Jesus Christ Superstar(12A) |
| Thurs 6 March 7.30pm | FOLK MUSIC – Kathryn Tickell & Amy Thatcher |
| Thurs 6 March 7.30pm | SPOKEN WORD – Teesdale Special Flora Trust: The Botanical Treasures of Upper Teesdale |
| Fri 7 March 7.30pm | FOLK MUSIC – The Fureys |
| Sat 8 March 7.00pm | CLASSICAL MUSIC – Ida Pelliccioli: From South to Vienna - Piano recital |
| Sun 9 March 11.00am | CLASSICAL MUSIC – Ida Pelliccioli: Bach Transcriptions - Piano recital |
| Thurs 13 March 7.30pm | THEATRE – Witham Youth Theatre Seniors: You 2.0 (12+) |
| Fri 14 March 7.30pm | SPOKEN WORD – Finding W.H. Hudson – A Talk by Conor Mark Jameson about the conservationist, influential in the creation of RSPB. |
| Sat 15 March 2.00pm | FILM – Wicked (PG) |
| Sat 15 March 7.30pm | FOLK MUSIC – Bob Fox |
| Sun 16 March 2.00pm | CLASSICAL MUSIC – Royal Northern Sinfonia: Debussy & Brahms String Quartets |
| Tues 18 March 7.30pm | FOLK MUSIC – Eliza Carthy & Jennifer Reid |
| Thurs 20 Mar 7.15pm | LIVE SCREENING – Royal Ballet & Opera: Romeo & Juliet |

www.thewitham.org.uk

Box office: **01833 631107**