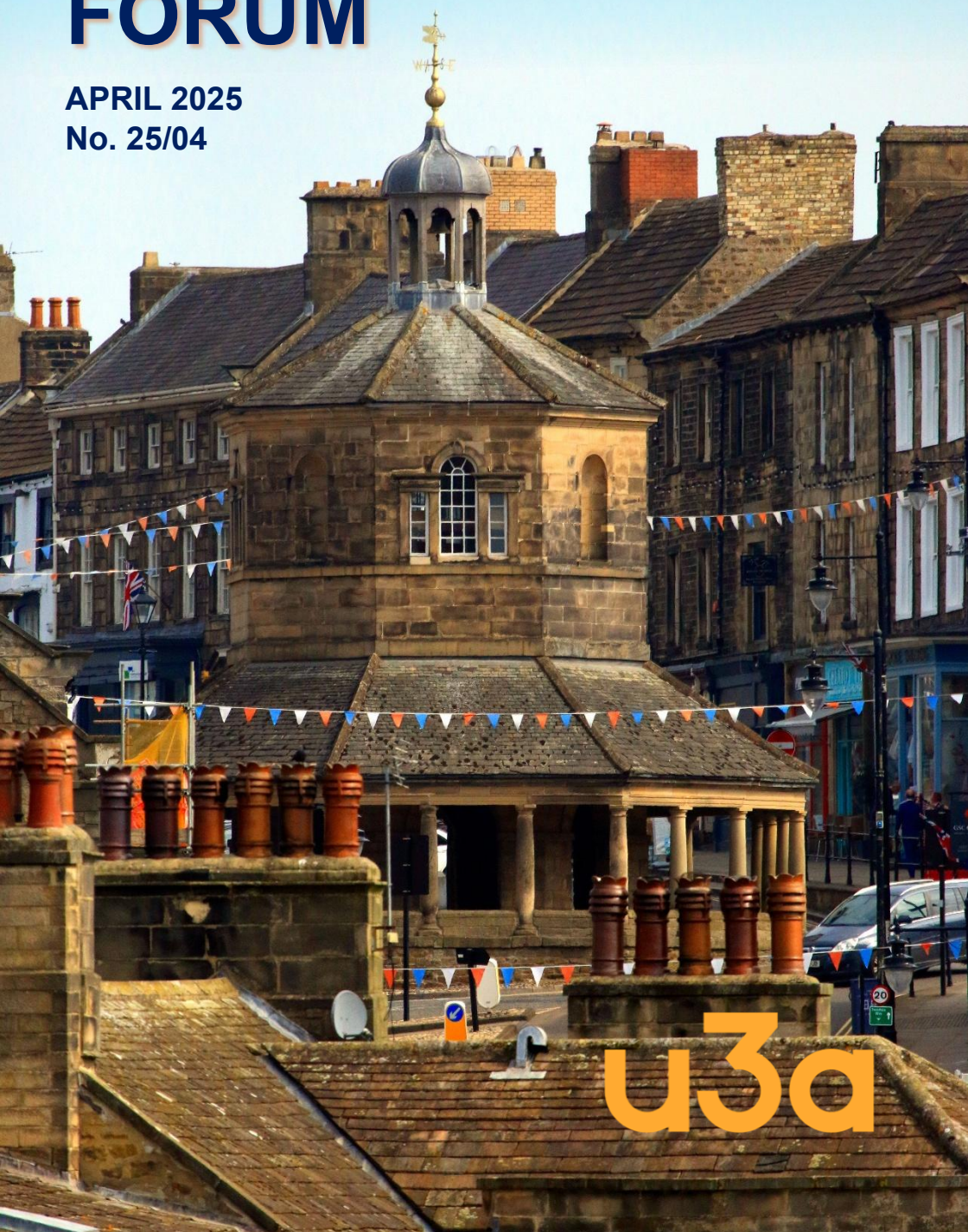


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FORUM

APRIL 2025

No. 25/04



u3a

CHAIR'S LETTER

Dear Friends

April already, how time flies! They say time speeds up when one gets older, I am not so sure that's for the best, though at last we've had some sunny weather, let us hope that wasn't our summer.

Though I enjoy our monthly Witham meetings, revel in being on the committee and look forward to editing the Forum, for me, the main draw of u3a is the interest groups in which I take part. Every month I am taken at just how many interest groups we have in Teesdale u3a. It must be around 40 which theoretically means one could spend every weekday, morning and afternoon at a u3a group meeting or walk. None of us are members of every group, some people are happy to be in just one and that's fine. However, very few of our groups have a waiting list to join so why not try filling what little time you have in your busy retiree's diary and explore something else this year?

Of course, just as groups would not exist without their members they couldn't exist without their convenors. The convenors make sure their members are kept informed, book venues, arrange speakers, plan routes, check out facilities, organize trips, collect and pay in money every month. It need not be onerous and there's plenty of past experience on which to lean but I'd like to pay my thanks to all those who quietly work in the background just to keep the groups running.

This is my last Chair's letter before I hand over the baton at the AGM. It has been a privilege to have served, if briefly, in this capacity and I look forward to continuing to serve in another rôle from next month.

My thanks to all members who have supported and encouraged me.

Ian

Cover Photo Barnard Castle Market Cross, aka The Buttermarket by Ian Royston

It's Your Forum

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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, and also 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: 12 MAY and next month's editor is Alyson. 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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MONTHLY MEETING – Report by Ian Reid

Steve Regan, the speaker at the March meeting, introduced the audience to Astrophotography. After a varied career in teaching and in the armed services, Steve retired to follow his main interest, the photography of astronomical objects. He now owns 8 telescopes and he brought two of them to the meeting. One he uses for observing dark sky and the other for observing the planets. Steve has always been interested in technology and finding out how things work. He set himself the task of building his own telescopes to satisfy his own stringent demands for 'purity'.

He began by describing the Bortle scale which is a nine level numerical scale that ranges from class 1 (excellent dark sky) to class 9 (bright inner city sky). The reading at Steve's home in Piercebridge is usually 4 and occasionally 3, but Steve has produced some excellent images from his 'back yard'.

Steve took us through the various stages that he worked through in order to build and adapt his telescopes to produce the best images, e.g. how to gather as much light as possible, the use of different mounts and eyepieces, how to use a guide scope to give good polar alignment, the need to take account of the earth's atmosphere, how to use focusing arrangements and how to determine the best field of view.

Steve then displayed some of the images he had obtained of various star formations and nebulae using different telescopic arrangements, e.g. well known ones such as Seven Sisters, Andromeda, Orion and other less well known ones which are difficult to observe. Some of the images showed the presence of oxygen, hydrogen and sulphur evidenced by a red cloud. He also showed the effect that filters could have on these images and finally he

explained the term electronically assisted imaging which uses cameras to take images through telescopes.

This was an excellent presentation to an audience, many of whom were not familiar with the technology or the terms involved. U3A is all about learning.



Photo: The Andromeda Galaxy

NEXT MEETINGS AT THE WITHAM

22nd May 2025: Dr Patrick Eyres - Turner in The Pennines.

The Pennine journeys of the landscape artist, J.M.W. Turner, were to sketch material for artworks later painted in his London studio. The Victorian art critic, John Ruskin, considered that the watercolours created for Dr. Thomas Whitaker's 'History of Richmondshire', which included views in Upper Teesdale and along the river Greta, were among the finest of Turner's landscapes. These will be discussed alongside his explorations of other picturesque and sublime terrain within the Pennines.

26th June 2025 : Dave Palmer – The Georgian Theatre, Richmond

Dave is a retired IT consultant and one of his interests is Georgian Theatre. He has been a volunteer Theatre guide for 15 years and has developed an interest in Georgian society and the influence of theatre on it, and vice versa. His talk starts with the founding of the theatre, the background of the founders and the social environment through its first period of life. He then goes on to cover its long period of dormancy as a theatre and its many other uses. Finally, he covers the restoration of the building as a working theatre again, leading to its current use and future.

WORKSHOP REPORT

APRIL'S POETRY WRITING WORKSHOP LED BY RAY LEE **Report by Annie Clouston**

Imagine this! Someone making us work hard in the brain department on a Saturday morning. Six of us did, and we all produced some good work. Gold stars all round.

Ray took us through various aspects of using words in ways that intensify their impact, as poetry should. We followed exercises in rhythm, imagery, metaphor, simile, personification, conciseness, emotion and subjectivity, and finding your own voice as a poet, using examples from our great poets like Dylan Thomas, Sylvia Plath, Langston Hughes and Wilfred Owen. Then encouraged us to have a go! In the personification section I managed this abject bit of doggerel:

Toe!
Toe, toe! You hurt me so...
I think you are malign.
All I did was stub you
And then whine and whine and whine.

Ray was kind: "You have something there to build on". My fellow aspiring poets tended to the more aesthetic, although their subjectivity was there in spades, particularly one participant who gave away his fascination with motors in a number of the exercises.

Many thanks to Ray for his meticulous preparation and for his own poems which showed us the way. Here is one that exemplifies much of what he was trying to get us to do. Its personal, poignant, delightful.

Hen

Although the sky was
Cloudless and calm,
The sun soothing
And sympathetic,
The summerhouse peaceful.
My discontent was septic
My foot without several toes
Ached with the continuity
Of Schoenberg.
A disjointed thrum thrum
And bloody thrum.
Who could sleep to that rhythm?
Then she came with red feathers glowing
A soft throaty hypnotic chuckle
Expressing her contentment.
To my surprise she settled on the grass
Like an animated dumpling
And continued to
Fuss her ticking call gently
Until I slept.

FUTURE WORKSHOPS

Saturday 10th May 2pm – 4pm Richard 3rd - Walk and Talk led by Kim Harding with finish for refreshments in St Mary's Parish Hall. Cost £3. Maximum of 10 people. This workshop is now FULL but there is a reserve list – contact Sue Overton **07512 368884** or email sueoverton@hotmail.com

Saturday 31st May 10am – 12 noon – Classics in a Nutshell led by Tim Meacham “A selection of practical experiences offering insights into how Greece and Rome continue to be relevant to us today. Art, Drama and History will feature in fun and thought-provoking ways” at Guide HQ Birch Road. Cost £2. Contact Sue Overton **07512 368884** or email sueoverton@hotmail.com

DAY TRIPS

I have organised the following trips for this year. If you want to put your name down for any of them, please email, janem1947@hotmail.com, phone **07591095765**, or sign up at monthly meetings. Payments can be made by Cash, Cheque made out to 'Teesdale U3A' or BACS, 'The Teesdale U3A, 20-83-73, 03778576', please identify which trip the money is for. Coach & Cattle tour costs are non-refundable.

Friday 16th May Chillingham Castle & Cattle visit. 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 Pavillion & 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 foot bath. 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 £7.50, payable as soon as possible please.

Friday 20th June Ushaw Chapel, House & Gardens, 9.30 leave outside Addisons, return before 6pm. Entry to Chapel, House & Gardens £9.00, Historic Houses members free please remember your card. Coach price £12.00. 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. Payment can be taken at monthly meetings or as above.

Friday 18th July Helmsley Walled Gardens am. The gardens are a few minutes walk from the carpark, they are flat with seating & a cafe, Afternoon in the town. Helmsley has many shops, cafes, galleries & Friday is market day. The Castle is English Heritage. If you want to visit the cost for non-members is £8.10. There is a small Brewery with shop or there are tours around it. Leaving at 9am outside Addisons, return before 6pm. Cost £25,50 includes Gardens & coach. Payments as above.

Friday 19th September A day in Skipton. Free to look round this 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 & cafés. Walks along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. Leaving at 9am outside Addisons return before 6pm. Coach price £18.00. Payment as above.

LONGER TRIPS

The trip to Scotland was a huge success. It was one of the most reasonably priced holidays we have done and also there was no problem with single rooms.

The Tenby holiday is fully booked. There are 30 of us going and Maude's coach will pick us up in Barney to take us to Scotch Corner, and bring us back, at a cost of £10 per head, payable in cash to Kyle Travel.

There are 18 of us going on the trip to the Cotswolds. All the single rooms have gone but there are twin and double rooms still available. Booking with Kyle Travel. Contact Dorothy Jameson **01833 637957**

Summer Picnic at the Cricket Club

Saturday 12th June at 12 noon – 2pm – Bring your own picnic
at Barnard Castle Cricket Club

Bar available. Raffle included in ticket price of £2

This social event is also open to non-members.

Contact Sue Overton 07512 368884 or email sueoverton@hotmail.com

BILL HEYES

Members will be saddened to learn of the death on April 4th of Bill Heyes, one of our longest-standing members, convenor of the Understanding Classical Music Group and an active member of the Historical Environment and Geology Groups.

Bill, originally from Blackburn, came to Teesdale in the mid-70s with his wife Doreen and 2 sons - Robert & Andrew – to work at GSK in Barnard Castle. Bill had a BSc in Chemistry and later a PhD in Analytical Chemistry.

Bill was a chorister at Blackburn Cathedral in his early years and maintained a deep faith in the Christian church for the rest of his life. He also had a great love of classical music and an impressive knowledge of the subject. He started the u3a Understanding Classical Music Group in 2017 and put a great deal of research into the subject matter for each meeting, drawing on many different sources. The members all found the meetings both fascinating and enlightening.

He was also very interested in the history of Teesdale, particularly lead-mining activities, and played an important part in the Teesdale Record Society. He had a very large collection of printed material, photographs and postcards covering Teesdale's history.

Bill is survived by Doreen and Andrew & his partner, also his 2 sisters – Gillian & Dorothy.

He will be sadly missed

GROUP REPORTS

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

This time we moved from the familiar landscapes of home to those of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. In an hour's lecture Dr Anne Anderson gave us a packed survey of Scandinavian history, legend and the artistic influences behind the 'Nordic Vision' of those painters who flourished c.1880-1914.

In common with many small European nations at the time, their art was inspired by the impulse to establish a strong national identity, focusing on the landscape, people and cultural history of their homelands. There was a special quality to the Northern light, and they celebrated this and the long summer nights, but in other respects they tended to follow trends established elsewhere – notably by the French Impressionists and Realists, and the English Arts and Crafts movement led by William Morris. (It is worth noting that Morris himself was strongly drawn to the North, his translations of the Icelandic Sagas being a major part of his literary output.)



Image: Evening on Skagen Beach by PS Kroyer,1893 (Skagens Museum)

Many had spent time living and working in the artists' colonies which were such a feature of this period, in places as widespread as Grez-sur-Loing south of Paris, Pont-Aven in Brittany, and Newlyn in Cornwall. Here they lived cheaply and convivially with artists from other countries, using local

people as models and developing their ideas together. Eventually they set up their own colonies, most famously at Skagen on the northern tip of Jutland, where the Baltic meets the Atlantic. Here they took full advantage of the light, favouring especially the 'blue hour' just after sunset, as in Kroyer's painting of his wife Marie and fellow artist Anna Ancher.

Family and friends and simple domestic delights were central to their vision. They loved to paint homely interiors (an early form of *hygge*?) with an innate stylistic flair, often reflecting the craft expertise developed by their wives.



Image: Flowers on the Windowsill, from the 'At Home' series by Carl Larsson, c.1895

We ended on a more sombre note with (inevitably) Edvard Munch and his anguished, Ibsenesque paintings of failed relationships and tubercular young women – a touch of Scandi noir after all that light and fresh air.

Next meeting Wednesday 7th May: Introduction to the Ceramics Galleries at the Bowes Museum, led by Howard Coutts. Assemble by 2 p.m. in the foyer.

BIRDWATCHING – Report by Peter Singer

On a cloudy and still rather chilly Spring morning, fifteen hardy souls gathered on the Demesnes for a morning's birdwatching walk alongside the River Tees. We were without our excellent convenor (who had the audacity to be away birding in Colombia), who normally keeps us straight on recognising both birds and birdsong, so it was with some trepidation that we set out. Fortunately, several members had the Merlin bird id app on their phones and this was deployed to useful effect (other apps are no doubt available).

Spring is a time of transition in the bird world, with some species beginning to don their fine, breeding plumage and other, migrant species returning to the UK after lengthy journeys from their wintering grounds. We had heard that chiffchaffs had arrived and were hopeful of seeing some river residents, such as heron and dipper.

We headed off towards the old corn mill and almost immediately a kestrel flew past and perched briefly in a nearby tree, giving us a great view of this splendid falcon, with its beautiful, reddish-brown back. Continuing beside the river towards Abbey Bridge, we did indeed spy a chiffchaff, although it was surprisingly silent – maybe feeling the cold or had other things on its mind. We were also pleased to see a pair of dippers on a rock in mid-river, showing their smart, white fronts and curtsying to each other and their audience. Soon afterwards, a grey wagtail appeared, picking along the edge of a pebbly beach, with extensive yellow in its plumage, often leading to confusion with the yellow wagtail, although distinguishable by its grey back. The day had already yielded more delights than we had expected.

Other species seen along the river included cormorant, oystercatcher, black-headed and common gulls. Some of the former had their breeding plumage of a black (or rather chocolate brown) head, but others still retained the small dark spot on the cheek that would soon become a brown/black head. In the trees were several of our more common species, including long-tailed tit, great tit, coal tit, blue tit and nuthatch. Some of us also had a fleeting glimpse of two tiny goldcrests. Our return along the top path was accompanied by the melodic song of a mistle thrush and the surprise sighting of a number of pied wagtails on the tanks of the sewage plant. Altogether, a productive day (27 species seen) and a lovely walk.



ROOM TO READ BOOK GROUP- Review by Kate Bailey

Susan Hill: In the Springtime of the Year is the story of a young woman as she grieves the sudden and unexpected loss of her new husband. She isolates herself in the countryside, avoids everyone except her 14 year old brother-in-law, and closes her door against the world.

This very sad book elicited a wide variety of responses from our members. We thought that it could be a semi-autobiographical account as Susan Hill had suffered the loss of a fiancé when she was young. Everyone deals with loss in their own way but Ruth doesn't want to see, or even think about, anyone else who might be grieving. Only Jo, the young brother of her husband, is allowed in and he calmly keeps the house and the animals going, even providing plates of food for her, though she mostly ignores his kind gestures.

Ruth has "*a vivid certain awareness*" of her dead husband, Ben, being with her in the house, with her and not his family. She is angry then resigned when her in-laws refuse to accept her need to be alone: "*it was like trying to make the deaf or the mad understand what she was saying.*" She admits

her own bitterness towards Ben's family, saying that "*there is no love, no kindness, no friendship*" to bind her to them and she never wants to see his parents again.

For months, Ruth is unaware of the devastating effect of his death on the many local people she has excluded from her life. However, at Easter, she clears out all Ben's things, opens up the house to fresh air and light, then helps to gather flowers to dress the churchyard. There is an undertow of the author's religious beliefs in Ruth's recovery, as she becomes reconciled to living alone. Eventually she realises she can find a way forward by helping others instead of turning them all away.

Most of us agreed it was well written, especially where the author talks about the changing seasons and the bird life around the cottage. However, those of us who have been widowed found it distressing to read the many descriptions of anguish and wretchedness. Some of our group found the characters unconvincing and depressing; two couldn't bear to read to the end; others really liked the book. The scores were mixed and one person said we should be careful who we recommend it to! Overall, we scored 4 for a book group, 3 for a friend.

CHESS GROUP – Report by Diana Marks

There were eight of us for the April meeting, so it was great to welcome so many new members. As the weather was so glorious we moved to the Conservatory in The Old Well. We were mixed abilities so hopefully the pairings worked well, anyway most managed two games and there didn't seem to be many arguments! Hopefully our new members will all return for the **May meeting on 1st May**. Enquiries to Diana on **0776 2626912**

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS GROUP – Report by Kate Bailey

Our main topic for discussion in April was suggested by a u3a member at the monthly meeting. If a topical environmental issue is concerning you we will be happy to consider your suggestion.

The Radio 4 programme 'File on 4' in (25 March 2025) examined the scandal [their word] of tyre recycling. We may think that, when we buy new tyres, the old ones will be repurposed or recycled properly, for example shredded into crumbs and re-used in 'safety' surfaces on children's playgrounds. After all we pay an Environmental Disposal Charge for that reason. However, it appears that the majority of the 50 million tyres

disposed of in the UK each year are crushed, baled and exported in shipping containers without anyone tracking where they end up. The researchers put trackers into bales of tyres and discovered that most by-passed legitimate recycling plants.

The tracked tyres ended up in remote rural villages in India where primitive boilers heat the tyres to extreme temperatures to produce pyrolysis oil, which is a hydrocarbon. The BBC reported that *"conditions at these plants can be toxic and harmful to public health, as well as potentially dangerous. In January 2025, two women and two children were killed in an explosion at a site where European-sourced tyres were being processed."*

This report differs from our usual positive approach to climate solutions, but we wanted to raise awareness of this important issue. The File on 4 report will be available on BBC Sounds for a year –

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00238mf>

PS. The BBC subsequently reported (2 April) that *"The Environment Agency has launched a comprehensive review into shipments of waste tyres from the UK to India."*

Positive news this month:

1. Eight beavers have saved the Czech government CZKrona 30millions. Despite 7 years of planning, officials had failed to get building permits for a new dam on a by-pass channel on the Klabava River. A beaver colony created dams in a few days, raising water levels, returning a former military base to a natural wetland area and safeguarding local habitats.



Image: Beaver dam- pressway.org.uk/news/297828

2. In the UK, a new GCSE course in Natural History is being introduced. It aims to give people the chance to learn about protecting the planet and understanding their local environments.

3. For members interested in Regenerative Farming practices - these aim to build soil health and fertility, sequester carbon and reduce emissions, enhance watershed quality and increase biodiversity - the Sustainable Markets Initiative's Agribusiness Hub has launched a new guide (Feb 2025). 'Scaling Regenerative Farming: A Practical Guide' can be downloaded from their website:

<https://www.sustainable-markets.org/taskforces/agribusiness-task-force/>

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD GROUP - Report by Sue Overton

This month's group of thirteen successfully completed three crosswords of varying degrees of difficulty.

We continue to work in two small groups to facilitate support of those with less ability (me!) in puzzle solving, so you would be welcome to join us no matter what your level/experience.

Did you solve last month's clue? Flexible sort of ice-covered shoe form (7)

Solution: ELASTIC

Now try this one: - A pint courtesy of Paddy? (4,4)

Our next meeting at 2pm in the Guide HQ, Birch Road will be on Wednesday 14th May

Contact Sue Overton **07512 368884** or email sueoverton@hotmail.com if you would like to join us

DISCUSSION GROUP – Report by Glen Howard

A very enjoyable meeting and our discussions were wide ranging. Topics considered were votes for 16 year olds; young drivers; starlings; a womb transplant; buildings' cladding; handwriting particularly re exams; changes in the High Street; and plastic bags.

Our next meetings will be on Fridays 9th May and 13th June. If you would like to join us please give me a ring on **07975 705816**.

FAMILY HISTORY INTEREST GROUP – Report by Alan Swindale

Mark Thompson gave an up to the moment talk from RootsTech2025 on how to “[Learn Genealogy Faster and Easier with Artificial Intelligence](#)” He worked through three examples: firstly learning how to estimate genealogical relationships from DNA matches, secondly how to research a locality guide for a particular district in which you have a genealogical interest (ie description, source repositories etc) and thirdly how to learn to read documents written in Old English scripts. He discussed how to assess whether a given task was suitable for the application of AI and how to write suitable ‘prompts’ to ensure that the AI tool provided an answer at the level and in the format you desired. A message that Mark hammered home was that AI tools can provide incorrect answers (he said, “They LIE”) so “Verify, Verify, Verify”. Another message was that it was better to use AI to teach you how to tackle a task rather than just give you an answer.

Unfortunately, it seems that as far as the Teesdale audience was concerned it was hard to teach old dogs new tricks but there was a lot to take in in the course of a one-hour presentation. For anyone wanting to investigate further they should go to TinyURL.com/Mark-RT2025-1 and TinyURL.com/Mark-RT2025-2 which give the prompts and answers for the second and third examples. I think sceptics will be surprised by the quality of the results, and the prompts can readily be copied and adapted for your own purposes. I used the Perplexity tool (for free) to produce a ‘Locality Guide’ for County Durham in just a couple of minutes!

The next meeting of the group will be held on the second Thursday **May 8th, at 13:30** in Enterprise House when the topic will be **the parish register records tool FreeReg – what is it and how do you use it.**

GARDENING GROUP – Report by Kate Keen

In April our guest speaker was Sarah Hopps to talk about the All Seasons Garden. Sarah Hopps has spoken to the group on 3 previous occasions and is always interesting and engaging as a speaker. She regularly presents sessions at the Harrogate Flower Show and is a tour guide for garden holidays and has run her own plant nursery.

Sarah brought along a large selection of suitable plants flowering at this time of year, she used these to illustrate her talk and many of us purchased plants at the end of the session.

Sarah likes to have deciduous plants which change throughout the year as this provides seasonal interest. She suggests that we consider the structure of the plant and think of the texture and smell. She suggested geraniums as a key plant which provides colour for a long flowering period but also to have peonies which have a short season but are star performers. When walking around our gardens look at the finer details of the plants for example how cobwebs light up in dew and frost. Sarah has 3 topiary chickens in her own garden but few of the group had created their own topiary shapes.

This was a fascinating talk which was well received by our group.

As the weather is improving and the days are longer in May we begin our coach trips.

On Friday 2nd May we will have a coach trip to Burnby Hall Gardens, Pocklington for the tulip festival.

On Friday 6th June we have a visit to Wynyard Hall and Mount Grace Priory.

GEOGRAPHY GROUP - Report by Les Knight

North of the Thames, 'foreign' boulders known as erratics are occasionally found. We now know that these were transported hundreds of miles by ice during the various glacial events over the last 2 million years. Historically, they were attributed to the work of giants or the Devil, but by the C18th the favoured explanation involved the Biblical flood. In the 1840s evidence from the Alps suggested that they had been transported by glaciers, either as small-scale valley glaciers, or by more extensive ice sheets. Between the 1840s and the end of the century the transport mechanism was a hotly debated controversy, but convincing evidence eventually showed that

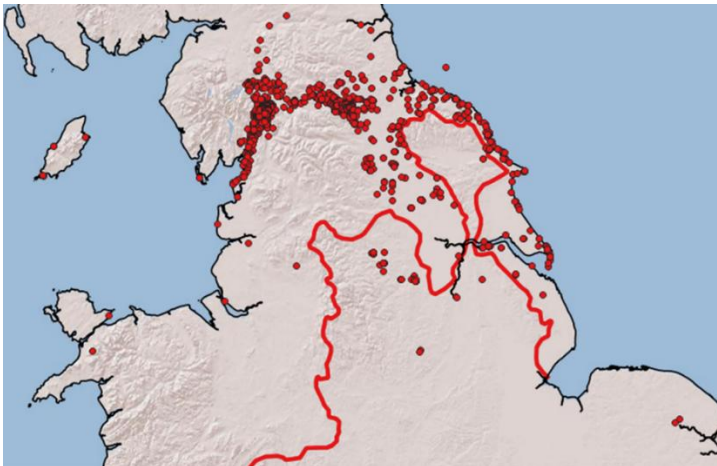
Britain had been covered by a succession of ice sheets with thicknesses in excess of 1km.



Image: The Cat Stone – A huge boulder of Goat Fell granite, Isle of Arran

While the glacial transport of boulders is now accepted, the full significance of this process is often overlooked by the archaeologists. Here the presence of 'foreign' rocks in an archaeological context is often attributed to long-distance trade. This may be so, but Les provided evidence from the known distribution of flints and materials used to make some types of hand axes that in many cases these materials were available locally.

The most controversial example involves the building materials used in Stonehenge which lies south of the known extent of glaciation. The henge was built in stages using different rock types. The latest phase was the construction of an outer circle of large 'sarsen' stones. Geochemical evidence suggests that these were sourced about 25km to the north. While the transport of these would have required considerable effort, experiments have shown that it is possible. The older, more central 'bluestone' circle is made from a number of rock types, some of which are now known to have been sourced on the north side of the Preseli Mountains, 200km away. A heated argument is ongoing between archaeologists who favour human quarrying and transport and geomorphologists who favour glacial transport, either the whole, or part, of the way to Stonehenge. Evidence for both explanations was put forward.



Distribution of boulders of Shap Fell granite. Note at various times they have been taken south, east and north from their outcrop north of Tebay. The red line is the extent of the last glaciation, boulders beyond were moved in an earlier event.

Next meeting: Thursday 15th May. Richard Witham: " John Wood's 1827 map of Barnard Castle". The Witham at 2.00 pm.

GEOLOGY GROUP – Report by Bob Tuddenham

In March we returned to face to face meetings at the Witham with a very interesting meeting with talks by two experienced geologists.

In the first half, John Watkinson gave a talk about the 'Architecture of Mountain Belts and the Himalayas'. As a structural geologist, John has studied mountains all over the world. He first mentioned that early in his career he had been in Peru with the UN when a catastrophic earthquake took place. Their priority shifted from research geology and they joined the rescue teams! John explained there are four ways of mountain building and three key measurements – the topography, the gravity and the analysis of earthquakes. The iconic Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau have formed where the Indian plate collided with the Eurasian plate resulting in buckling and uplift of the crust. This explains the fossils and the extensive metamorphism in rocks high in the Himalayas and why Everest is still rising despite the massive weathering at over 8000m!

In the second half, Trevor Morse described three types of volcanoes. Non-violent volcanoes emit low viscosity, free flowing basaltic lava and examples are at hot spots such as on Iceland and Hawaii. In contrast, violent and cataclysmic volcanoes arise at subduction zones with continental plates where viscous felsic lava is formed. An example is the Eastern Mediterranean where, in simple terms, the African Plate is moving north and subducting beneath the Eurasian Plate. We then looked briefly at Vesuvius and then Santorini where there has been much earthquake activity recently.

Our next meeting will be at The Witham on Monday morning April 28th at 10 am. All are welcome to join us. Please contact the convenor for details.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT – Report by Tim Meacham

Once again Enterprise House was packed in April, this time to hear Ian Royston's talk on 'Reservoir Mania'. Ian spoke of the three great 'manias' of the 19th century – Canals, Railways and Reservoirs; much has been said about the first two of these, but the third has often been unfairly neglected. Ian's talk did much to correct this unfairness, at least for this audience. Ian started his tale with the Romans who (as so often) were the first to set up reservoirs and their dams, aqueducts and other associated water conduits. He mentioned the Roman reservoir and aqueduct at Lanchester of which traces may still be seen. Following the departure of the Romans there followed nearly 1500 years of 'Dark Ages' before the 'modern' reservoir

mania of the 19th century got underway, resulting in the building of over 200 reservoirs in the Pennines alone between 1840 and 1970.

Before 1793 most of the population centres of Northern England relied on wells and rivers to supply water for drinking, as well as for the relatively small amount of industry which required it. As the industrial revolution gained impetus these resources became sorely stretched and public health became a major concern. As early as 1793 the lower reservoir at Foulridge had been built to provide water for the Leeds and Liverpool canal, but the rise of industry and its associated population growth in Manchester ('Cottonopolis') throughout the 19th century required a huge building programme. This brought to the fore John Frederick Bateman who was known as 'the greatest dam builder of his generation'. Between 1835 and 1860 Bateman oversaw four great reservoir schemes which provided water for Manchester and Salford.

Following accounts of similar schemes for other cities (Nottingham and Bradford, Sheffield and Lincoln for example), Ian moved on to describe Birmingham's massive venture in Central Wales, the Elan Valley project. This was overseen by James Mansergh, another great name in 19th Century dam building. To combat the diseases arising from poor public health Birmingham purchased 180 square kilometres of Welsh land to construct five linked dams (with two supplementary dams), all constructed of stone and feeding into a 117 km gravity aqueduct from the reservoir to the outskirts of Birmingham. Designed by Mansergh the scheme was approved in 1871 and was completed by 1892.

Moving to more local matters, water in Darlington had been abstracted from the Tees at Broken Scar to serve Darlington since 1849, with a steam pump installed in 1860. The poor quality of the water however led to the appointment in 1876 of the same James Mansergh to produce plans for reservoirs in Teesdale. Work was started in 1891 to construct Hury reservoir under George Yourdi, a Greco-Irish citizen domiciled at Cotherstone since 1884. Assistant to Mansergh since 1871 this mercurial character man-managed every aspect of the construction, before being head-hunted in 1893 to successfully oversee the afore-mentioned Elan Valley project.

Ian went on to further describe the addition of Grassholme reservoir which Mansergh's son Ernest built between 1901 and 1914, as well as a plethora of later 20th century schemes which threatened to destroy the tranquil setting of High Force. He then finished the local picture with the works at Cow Green, and the major Kielder 'megadam' unveiled in 1982, including its links with our current water supply in Teesdale and beyond. This was a

superb talk, well illustrated and told in great detail, but with a lightness of touch that kept the audience's attention throughout. **The next meeting on May 8th** will feature our member Christine Price speaking on **Richard Cobden and his links with the Schools at Bowes**. Further details from Tim Meacham.

iPAD and iPHONE GROUP – Report by Mike Sweeting

One of our group raised queries about running out of memory space on a device and also about keeping it up to date. We reviewed the options and discussed some recommendations for keeping control.

There are a number of frequently used apps where, if users are not careful with their information, they can leak personal details or financial information. We looked at the recommendations of a recent Which? report that put particular emphasis on setting up and using two factor authentication (2FA).

This lead naturally onto the main topic of the day – the recently introduced Passwords app. This builds on the existing facility called Keychain and is Apple's way of helping their users in recording and keeping control of their security information – passwords, security codes, etc. It safely synchronises the information across all Apple devices and can even be accessed from the iCloud app on Windows PC's.

Our next meeting is on 27th May at Enterprise House.

LUNCH CLUB – Report by Kate Keen



In March, as the weather was starting to warm up, the lunch group ventured out to High Conniscliffe to the Spotted Dog. We had been to the Spotted Dog for our December meal and wanted to try the standard menu. We were very well looked after and had a range of options to choose from with a 3 course set menu, specials and the standard menu.

The salmon starter was the most popular item we ordered and it was presented beautifully. Several of us managed all 3

courses with the coffee affogato being the most popular desert and again it was so well presented.

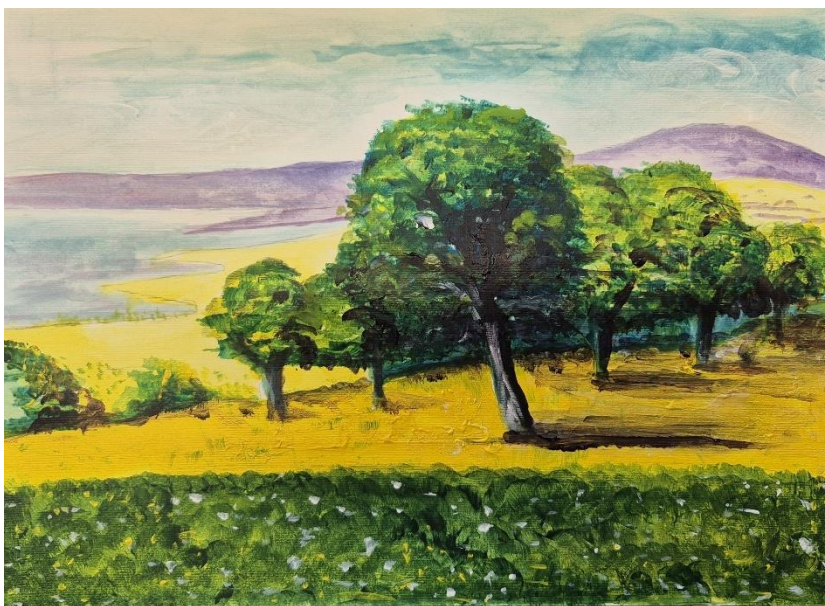
In April we went to the Rose and Crown in Romaldkirk which is an old favourite.

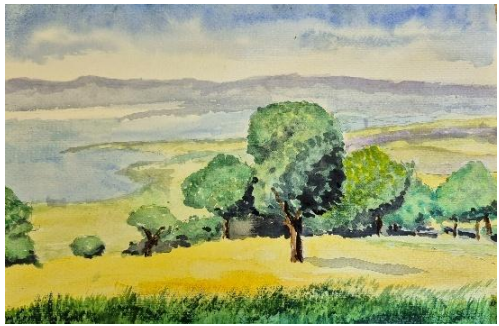
If anyone is interested in joining our friendly group then please contact me.

PAINTING GROUP – Report by Val Hobbs

The heady quantity of seven of us met for the April meeting, so Anne had a right royal greeting as she returned after her operation! We welcomed another new member, Stephen Roberts, to our group, who was looking forward to painting with a tutor led group, so he could resume one of his hobbies after a couple of year's lapse.

Anne had a tree lined landscape planned for us, and she took it through us step by step....wet on wet....wet on dry and dry on dry! The build up of hues from pale to dark is imperative to give a painting depth...and it's not as easy as it sounds. All paintings produced were totally unique to us, as always and a very productive session had by all.





PHILOSOPHY GROUP – Report by Wallace Anderson

Schopenhauer 1788 to 1860 regarded himself as a genius and perhaps he was. His mother disagreed. She thought she was a genius and contended that there was only room for one genius in the family and that was her.

Schopenhauer's great work was **The World as Will and Representation**. The term **The Will** does not mean will in the way we mere mortals understand it. It stands for reality as opposed to appearance. The Will is the life force and is blind and purposeless. It is indifferent to human suffering and morality. Representation (or appearance) is the way in which we as individuals see the world through our senses. The Will generates wants in us which even if satisfied lead to further wants. We are caught in a circle. One way out is through an aesthetic or monastic life, which enables a person to turn away from the brute force of will, desire and the body and cut ourselves off from society. Thankfully, there is another escape route from the driving force of **The Will** and that is through **the experience of nature or art**. The normal human state of mind is constantly analysing, reasoning,

or evaluating, but it is possible to give our individual mind to the present moment.

When looking at a landscape, for instance, some can lose themselves in the object, such that they forget their individuality which can lead to compassionate sympathy for all living things. This feeling for others is a means for us to remain beyond the grasp of **The Will** and our ego at least for a short period of time.

The conventional view of Schopenhauer is that he was the “**supreme pessimist**.” And yet, **perhaps**, Schopenhauer’s conclusion is not actually dark at all, but rather uplifting: it is only our dependence on the world of phenomena (appearance) as the source of truth that always proves to be such a painful dead end.

Though we are beings who exist in time and space, paradoxically it is only in moving beyond these constructs that we are liberated.

Of course, the ability to transcend every day points of view in regard to objects of nature aesthetically is not available to most human beings. Rather the ability to regard nature aesthetically is a hallmark of a genius (and he should know).

Do come and join us at our **next Philosophy meeting** on the fourth Tuesday of the month **at Enterprise House from 10am – 12noon 27th May. 24th June.**

PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP – Report by Alan Kenwright

In April the photography group visited Farfield Mill, a former Victorian textile mill near Sedbergh in Cumbria, now converted to use as a museum and gallery space (“cultural venue”). Twelve members of the group made the trip over the Pennines and the day looked set fair with cloudless blue skies and brilliant sunshine but, when we arrived at the mill, we found that the tea-room in the mill was not open that day due to staff shortages. Disaster!!

We are not easily deterred, however, and soldiered on for an hour or so photographing the mill and its exhibits before deciding to adjourn to nearby Sedbergh for lunch at the Black Bull (extra-ordinarily good chips!). Our time there was further enlivened by the local chip shop catching fire – nothing to do with us, your honour.



In the afternoon we moved on to explore the picturesque village of Dent, before returning via a scenic route through the northern Dales to Kirkby Stephen and so home. A very pleasant day out in glorious spring weather.

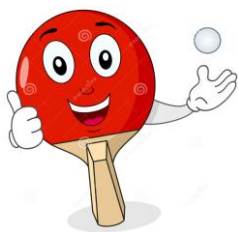




Photographs by Ian Royston, Pete Redgrave, and Robin Taylor

Our next outing will be to **the ruined castles at Brough and Bowes, on Tuesday, 6th of May.**

TABLE TENNIS GROUP – Report by Peter Singer



Our Friday afternoon table tennis group varies in size, depending on holidays, family commitments, pesky health issues and so on, but we generally have fun, however many or few we are. Recently, only five of us showed up, which worked out quite well, allowing one person to have a rest each game. The only problem was the brisk competition to be the one to sit it out and have a breather! Which raises the question of whether or not we are too old to be playing table tennis at all.

Coach and self-styled table tennis “expert” Ben Larcombe has some reflections on this on his website. He writes:

“Are you too old to start playing table tennis? Not at all!”

Sure it would have been nice if you’d started training seriously ten years ago, but you can’t do anything about that now. Be happy that you have the

chance to start now and don't wait another ten years before you finally muster up the courage and self-belief to get started.

Who cares how old you are. You can't change your age... This, today, right now, is the youngest you will ever be from now. That makes now the perfect time to start. Don't spend your time wishing you were younger, or better, or able to pick it up faster... and don't stop until you're an expert."

We have certainly found that age is no barrier to picking up the game, either for the first time or after half a lifetime's break from it. So we would wholeheartedly agree with Ben (whilst not endorsing his literary style) that it's never too late to start and there is much enjoyment to be had in playing with others of varying standards. We may not become "experts", but we have all made some progress and even small improvements can be very rewarding (just don't mention my last attempt at a forehand smash that almost went into orbit).

We also wish a fond farewell to our newest, enthusiastic members Lisa and John, who have jetted off back to the States (for better or worse!) and look forward to seeing them again in November, when they return.

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 (pandjsinger@btinternet.com 07508 663998). All are welcome, whether you play regularly, have not played for some time or have never played before.

UNDERSTANDING CLASSICAL MUSIC

Report by Ian Royston

I regret to have to report the death of the Group's convenor, Bill Heyes who passed away on Friday 4th April after a short illness. Bill possessed both enthusiasm for and an encyclopaedic knowledge of Classical Music and led the Group from its formation right up to the end of 2024. Bill had already suggested a programme for 2025 which the Group intends to follow. He will be sadly missed.

In March we continued with Howard Goodall's BBC Series on The History of Music, the second episode being entitled 'The Age of Invention'. The period 1650 – 1750 was the one in which the very rules of classical music were established and those rules codified. Advances in science and technology, particularly in mathematics and the measurement of time were reflected in much greater precision of the musical form. The establishment of the even-tempered scale has attuned all western ears for more than three

centuries. History does not record if J S Bach was a good mathematician yet the complexity of many of his fugues cannot be explained without it. Einstein was said to be an admirer.

The period also saw a massive upgrade in music from the small, private chamber ensemble to the full orchestra with a myriad of instruments all capable of playing in tune with one another.

In the second part of the meeting, we saw Simon Callow visiting that most musical city, Vienna, and explored the patronage of the Habsburgs in developing the classical form.

You do not need to be an expert on classical music to enjoy our sessions, even less so have any proficiency of any instrument. Just an ability to listen, enjoy and learn about classical music of all flavours.

The meetings are held on the fourth Friday at Startforth Morritt Memorial Community Centre starting at 10:00.

WIMMIM'SWIMMIN' – Report by Annie Clouston

Our wimmin are gaining confidence and skill in the certainty that their flotation will not be disrupted by pool-bullies, walruses, hippos and other aquatic nuisances. Noodles were again in use this month and there was an outbreak of anarchic play when a beach ball was batted about.

For those who wanted to improve their technique, Shirley was on hand and her help was most appreciated. There was also advice on goggles for those who are disinclined to have their eyeballs popping out with the suction of the racing-type instruments of torture: try Aquasphere Seal Masks available online from a number of suppliers of swimming kit. However, goggles are a trial and error sort of a thing, everyone's face is different and the perfect fit therefore can be elusive.

Our next session is on Saturday 26 April at Teesdale Leisure Centre from 4-5pm. If you would like to join us please contact Sue Overton, sueoverton@hotmail.com.

WALKING GROUPS



SHORTER WALKS - Report by Peter and Liz Harding

On Monday 24th March there gathered together at Scar Top, adjacent to Barney Post Office, a group of 18 people all members of u3a shorter walking group. All were happy to feel the sunshine and see an almost cloudless blue sky. Convener Liz introduced some new members into the group, then introduced the leaders for the afternoon's walk - Liz and Pete.



Members had been forewarned regarding today's route, wisely some wore wellies and carried walking poles. Down by the side of the castle we strolled, along Bridgegate onto Gray Lane. We entered The Demesnes area from there we found our way to Mount Eff Lane, which becomes Mount Eff trail. As expected, underfoot was fairly muddy and wet, time was

taken walking along the Trail as no accidents or falls were desired. A rest was made by Mount Eff farm. Then we undertook the gentle incline up Mount Eff Rd to turn onto Green Lane and the return to Barnard Castle. Everybody enjoyed the views of the surrounding landscape, the newborn lambs, daffodils and scilla plants.

Upon reaching Green Lane School and as they were near their homes a few people left. After winding our way back to Barney Post Office via a few little paths and alleys some retired to a local coffee shop for refreshments. A lovely little 4 mile walk, great weather and good company.

4-6 MILE WALKING GROUP – Report by Janet Bayles

Eight members of the group met outside the castle gates at Scar Top before walking down to the river bank. After about two miles the river bent away from the path leading us through a gate and into a field. A sign on the right lead us up to rather steep and muddy bank into farm land. Turning right we headed back towards Barney with open fields to our left and woods to our right. After a short while a gate ahead lead us into the woods and eventually to Percy Beck.

At this point, after 4 miles, several of the members decided to leave the group while the rest continued onwards through Flatts Woods, past the golf course and the Red Well and back into town.

The weather couldn't have been better as lovely sunshine and very little wind blessed us all the way.



Photo by Ian Royston

7-9 MILE WALKING GROUP – Report by Nicky Grace

There were 16 of us starting out from the cattle grid on the road above Sunbiggin Tarn, a beautiful spot north of Newbiggin on Lune. Initially climbing toward Great Asby Scar then taking a track across the moors to the limestone pavings on Asby Scar where we stopped for coffee.



Then down to Little Asby village, from there dropping down into Potts Valley which we followed for a couple of miles before our one steep climb of the day up onto Crosby Garrett Fell. Along the fell, stopping at about the highest point for lunch, then dropping down towards Bents Farm.



Joining, initially the Coast to Coast, then the Dale High Way, we returned to the cars. When we got back we found it was nearer 9 miles but the going had been good and the weather great, so we all enjoyed it. Good clear skies, skylarks etc..., and wonderful views across to Wild Boar Fell and the Howgills.

Photos by Ian Royston

COFFEE AND CHAT

Coffee and Chat - Coming up – Thursday 8th May 2.30 – 3.30pm

Winter's Cafe, Middleton in Teesdale

THE RAILWAY

I remember Banktop Station in 1959
The ultimate destination of the Darlington-Stockton line.
I was the new girl in the office.... a real 'greenhorn.'
My Colleagues worked there before I was born!!
But they really made me welcome....no sitting on the fence,
With lots of kind advice.... And jokes at my expense!

We plotted the Goods' trains movements from Crewe to John O'Groats
With slide rules, logarithms and many copious notes.
Then all the information was collated by the Boss.
It had to be most accurate, anything else just made him cross.
No spreadsheets, no computers, no device of any kind,
Just slide rule, pen and paper and a mathematical mind.

I made a friend of Claude, the porter, he knew a joke or two.
Most of them were funny... and some were very blue!
Beside the Station-Master there were so many that I knew
The Guard, the Ticket Collector and all the Banktop crew.
I look back with nostalgia of happy days because –
It was the PEOPLE of the RAILWAY that made it what it was.

A Poem written by Ann Richards to mark the 200th anniversary of the first journey on the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

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 626912
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
Men's Book Group	3rd Thurs pm	David Pennington 07392 758444
Needlecraft	1 st Mon pm	Glen Howard 01833 631639
Painting	2 nd Fri 10am	Val Hobbs 07900 497503

Group	Meeting Time	Contact details
Photography	1 st Tues am	Alan Kenwright 07731 122399
Pickleball	Every Mon 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	Ian Royston 07818 046938
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



Thurs 24 April 2.00pm	FILM – Mufasa – The Lion King (PG)
Thurs 1 May 7.00pm	SCREENING – Big Screen Musicals: Bonnie & Clyde (12A)
Fri 2 May 8.00pm	COMEDY– Stuart Mitchell: Tips Not Included (16+)
Sat 3 May 7.30pm	TRIBUTE – The Jerseys Celebrating the timeless music of Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons.
Thurs 8 May 7.30pm	COMEDY– Kai Humphries: Gallivanting (16+)
Sat 10 May 7.30pm	MUSIC – Tenors Unlimited: Great Songs Tour Popular classics, crooners and pop favourites. With local choir Noaddedsugar!
Wed 14 May 5.15pm	LIVE SCREENING: Royal Ballet & Opera: Die Walküre (12A)
Thurs 15 May 7.30pm	TRIBUTE – Josienne Clarke Sings Sandy Denny A folk-rock set-up of guitar, piano, bass and drums.
Thurs 15 May 7.30pm	COMEDY – Lauren Pattison: Big Girl Pants (14+)
Fri 16 May 7.30pm	TRIBUTE – Lonnie Donegan: The Stories (18+) Peter and Anthony Donegan present a fantastic and unique evening of songs and stories about their legendary father, 'The King of Skiffle'.
Wed 21 May 7.30pm	MUSIC – Lee Mead: The Best of Me An evening of unforgettable music from the world of Musical Theatre.
Fri 23 May 8.00pm	JAZZ & SWING – Strictly Smokin' Big Band: Time After Time

www.thewitham.org.uk

Box office: **01833 631107**