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FORUM

January 2026

No. 26/1



u3a

CHAIR'S LETTER

Dear Friends

Wishing you all a very happy and healthy 2026. I hope you had a lovely time with family and friends over the Christmas period.

We passed the shortest day in December and now have the joy of each day offering longer hours of daylight. We have managed to mainly missed the first storm of 2026, Storm Goretti. Where do they get the names? We have even been lucky when it has come to snow, a very light touch for us. At one point I was the only person in my NENW friends group snow free.

2026 and another year of opportunities to take part in. I hope like me you are looking forward to the Teesdale U3A 2026 meetings, workshops and trips. Are you thinking you might manage another interest group, we have such a wide range with which to tempt you. Then there are the workshops held roughly once a month, Do check out the 2026 workshops. Then in March, Saturday 21st, there is the quiz social event at the Glaxo Social Club, teams of 6 people, can you persuade others from your interest groups to form a team? Check out Sue Overton's emails for further details.

I joined Annie Coulston at the January Coffee and Chat in Cotherstone. It was lovely catching up with everyone, I think we numbered about 14 people including Annie and I. What's not to enjoy, good coffee/tea, cakes and news on what everyone has been doing or planning to do.

Can I add my plea to Ian Royston's message about not paying your 2026-7 membership before the 1st March. It helps us keep the finance books on track. We do however wish you to continue your membership with us and enjoy all that we offer, and how can you resist when we are even cheaper than last year, with an annual membership fee of just £16.

I am looking forward to the first monthly meeting of 2026, with a link to the 200th anniversary celebrations of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. Hope to see you there and catch up with all that you have been doing.

Bye for now, Julie

Cover: Dawn (11.12.2025), Victoria Road, Barnard Castle (*photo Tony Seward*)

It's Your Forum

Editors: Kate Bailey, Annie Clouston, Jane Kenwright, Alyson Kuby, Tony Seward. This month's editor is Tony: Edition No: 26/1

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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: 6 pm Monday 16 February and next month's editor is Kate.

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
- Asking a friend to collect one for you at the meeting - the cost is £2 on a 'first come first served' basis.
- Back copies are available online and also at Coffee and Chat events.

www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk

TEESDALE u3a Officers

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MONTHLY MEETING – Report by Ian Reid

By popular demand Roger Browne, jazz musician, actor and raconteur, returned to Barnard Castle u3a to talk about 'The Golden Age of Radio'. This time he brought with him Roy Chappell, formerly singer with the Sid Phillips band? - or was he Bing Crosby in disguise?

Roger described the early days of radio after WW2 when programmes were used to 'raise the spirits of the nation'. Programmes such as 'Round the Horne'; 'Take it from Here', 'Housewives Choice', 'Family Favourites' and many more. The programmes provided a mixture of styles: 'Music while you Work' was broadcast in factories with tempos which would fit in with the timing of repetitive work, and there were no gaps in the music. Many performers cut their teeth on 'Workers Playtime' where prominent people often spoke in the break, e.g. Ernest Bevin. Alistair Cooke broadcast his 15-minute 'Letter from America' from the United States for 58 years, which was largely unscripted. Special Agent 'Dick Barton' was broadcast every evening for 15 minutes, beginning and ending with its memorable signature tune. 'Journey into Space' featured famous actors, although David Jacobs was used to play many of the parts. 'In Town Tonight' was the forerunner to many TV chat shows. 'Family Favourites' on Sunday lunchtime provided an opportunity for families to keep in touch with their loved ones who were still serving in the forces abroad. 'The Archers', piloted in 1950 for 5 episodes and initially intended to help farmers after WW2, still attracts millions of listeners throughout the world. It was one of the first 'soap operas'. 'Mrs Dale's Diary' with its catchy tune, although popular for some time, did not survive long term.

Roger is a brilliant jazz pianist and he embellished his presentation with well-known tunes on the keyboard, supported by his excellent vocalist Roy Chappell. Together they performed 'The Blue of the Night', 'Basin Street Blues', 'It was just one of those things'. The audience joined in for 'I'm dreaming of a White Christmas' as they knew the words. The session finished with a selection of songs by Al Jolson. There was a buzz amongst the audience who had been taken down memory lane by two excellent musicians who were also enjoying themselves. As Roger said, 'the best pictures are on the radio and you have to listen, not so with TV'.

NEXT MEETINGS AT THE WITHAM

26 February 2026 – Paul Isherwood ‘Child Gambler Wins Life Back’

A 10-year-old boy, lured by the magnetic pull of a 4-year-old gambling addiction, having a lightbulb moment, seeking help here and now, well into his 50s, hasn't gambled since. *[That's all we know – sounds intriguing!]*

24 March – Beverley Still (Durham University) ‘Investigating the Bronze Age in the Greta Valley’

MEMBERSHIP FEES – 2026/27

We want your money – just not yet please

Thank you for your membership of Teesdale u3a.

Annual membership fee for Teesdale u3a becomes due on 1 March 2026.

We are pleased to inform you that the membership fee for 2026-27 has been reduced to £16.00 or £12.50 for associate members.

If you already pay by Bank Transfer (BACS) then when you are amending the amount to £16.00 (or £12.50) then please make sure that the payment is scheduled for no earlier than 1st March 2026. This helps us keep our accounts straight.

If you do not already pay by Bank Transfer (BACS) then we would very much much appreciate it if 2026 could be the year when you make the change. Banks make it difficult for us to pay in cash and are making it increasingly onerous to handle cheques and some banks have already started imposing fees for this.

Please make your BACS payments to:

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

Please include as your reference the name by which your membership is registered and if possible, your membership number.

BACS payments can easily be set up online, at a branch of your bank or at the banking hub on the right day. Once done it can be set up to make an annual payment.

If it is impossible for you to pay by BACS we will be accepting CARD, CASH and CHEQUE payments only at the 26 February and 26 March Witham meetings. We will NOT be accepting payments on 28 January 2026.

We look forward to receiving your membership fees in due course and thank you again for remaining members of Teesdale u3a. We look forward to seeing you in 2026 and beyond.

Finally, for those who joined after 1st September 2025 no membership fees are due until 2027.

Ian Royston
Membership Secretary

Blister Pack Recycling



We did it! In just three months: we filled our first box with empty medicine blister packs and it has been sent for recycling.

A BIG THANK YOU to all those members who made donations to enable us to purchase a second box which has now arrived. So we can continue to do our bit to reduce the amount of plastic and aluminium going into landfill or being incinerated.

You can bring your empty blister packs to any monthly meeting or drop them off any time at 5 Cecil Road, Barnard Castle DL12 8AL

Image: Climate Solutions Discussion Group

RoADAR Driving Review

It is years since I took my Driving Test and last November, having reached the age of 80, I decided, voluntarily, to undertake the RoADAR Driving Review. I cannot recommend it too highly.

It is organized through RoSPA Advanced Drivers and Riders Tel. No. 0121 248 2099 and costs £85 in total including VAT and you need to ring them to get an Application Form.

After sending off the Form, a local examiner contacted me and asked if I wanted to undertake the Review on roads with which I was very familiar or go further afield. I elected to go further afield (Kirkby Stephen). After answering some questions in the car, I was taken out on the A66, through Appleby and then on a country road. The drive took about 45 minutes and I was asked various questions, but in a relaxed manner, as we drove along.

I learnt a lot during my drive, and was reminded, in a kindly manner, of things I once knew but about which I was aware I had become less than perfect! However, I was told at the end of the session that I had 'passed' the test. A few days after the drive I received a report from RoSPA giving overall comments on my drive and a summary of my Development Needs. I agreed with everything that was recommended.

Overall it was a totally worthwhile experience and one I will repeat in the future, possibly having had a couple of lessons to brush up my skills.

I do recommend it and if you want to talk to me about it please do. Read your Highway Code before undertaking the Review but, on the day, just drive as you would normally – and then be prepared to take the advice. Yes, it is a test but it was NOT threatening in any way. It was a totally positive experience

Ruth Stables 01833 688162

WORKSHOP REPORTS

A Medieval Winter – Report by Hilary Dunnighan

On Saturday, 28 November, 29 members gathered at the Guide HQ for an enlightening talk on Medieval Winter. To set the mood, guests were welcomed with mulled wine and mince pies in keeping with the theme of the afternoon.



The session was led by Kim Harding, the local vicar's wife, Chair of the Northern Dales Richard III Society, and an esteemed local historian. Kim brought a wealth of knowledge and captivating insights to the event, sharing her expertise on the customs and daily life of people during the Middle Ages.

The medieval period, or Middle Ages, lasted approximately one thousand years from 500 AD to 1500 AD in Europe. Kim illustrated her talk with a variety of slides from that era, featuring artwork, Books of Hours images, and historical paintings.

Attendees learned about the necessity of early winter preparations, long before the days grew short and cold. November, often referred to as 'the blood month', was the time when animals were slaughtered, and their blood collected to make blood pudding. The meat was carefully preserved through salting, drying, or smoking. Simultaneously, logs were gathered and stored in anticipation of the winter snow, ensuring warmth for the colder months ahead.

The talk delved into the living conditions of the general population, most of whom resided in single room huts with open fires and no chimneys. Earthen floors were the norm, and meals consisted primarily of bread and pottage—a stew of vegetables such as peas and onions—accompanied by beer.

As temperatures dropped, people layered their clothing, donning cloaks, scarves, and distinctive three-fingered mittens. Linen undergarments,

which could be washed, were worn beneath woollen outer garments that provided warmth throughout the winter. These woollen clothes absorbed the pervasive smells of fire and livestock, as animals frequently shared living spaces with their owners.

Advent, spanning forty days, was marked by penitence: fasting, abstention from sexual activity, and refraining from travel. This period of austerity was succeeded by the festive twelve days of Christmas, a time of abundant feasting. Wealthier households would enjoy extravagant dishes such as a whole boar's head, a four-bird roast, and even peacock, while all classes partook of savoury mince pies filled with spiced meat and fruit. These pies were traditionally rectangular, symbolising the manger. Large quantities of mulled cider and ale were consumed, and homes were adorned with evergreen boughs. The Yule log was burned on Christmas Eve, carols were sung, and music played, with mummers providing entertainment. Some even used animal bones as makeshift blades for ice skating.

The first of January was celebrated as the Feast of Fools Day, during which clerics engaged in playful mischief, donning masks and sometimes eating sausages and blood pudding at the altar. The festivities were overseen by the King of Misrule, chosen by whoever found a bean in their slice of pudding—a tradition like that of finding a sixpence in a Christmas pudding today. The King of Misrule wore a crown for the day, a custom that has endured in modern times as the paper crown found inside Christmas crackers.

All attendees agreed that the talk was both informative and engaging, providing a fascinating glimpse into the customs and traditions of the Middle Ages. Special thanks were given to Kim Harding for sharing her knowledge and delivering such an interesting presentation.

Cocktail and Mocktail Workshop – Report by Liz Colley

This workshop was a great precursor to the party season, and the festive spirit was definitely in the air and in our glasses. The team had gathered a delightful selection of cocktail glasses to show off the cocktails. To start the

ball rolling we opened a bottle of Oddbins non-alcoholic Sparkling Rosé. For some in the group it was the first time they had tried this and they were pleasantly surprised.



The workshop format was for a mixologist, a new word in my vocabulary, to demonstrate making a cocktail which was then taste tested by the willing volunteers. Julie was the first mixologist up and made a punch with Prosecco, cherry brandy and ginger ale. A combination which on paper sounds unlikely turned out to be much appreciated. Peter followed with a garden spritz using Seedlip, elderflower cordial and tonic. Alternating cocktails and mocktails worked well and gave everyone some new ideas. The non-alcoholic choices are now much more appealing and this was a good opportunity to try them out.

The next cocktail by Sue was probably the favourite. She made a large jug of vodka and cranberry blush, consisting of vodka, Cointreau, cranberry juice and orange juice. The fruit juices contributing to one of our 'five a day' and they proved a good balance to the alcohol. We also had a few nibbles to accompany the cocktails. Sue's homemade cheese straws were a big success.

Annie's demonstration of a mocktail started with pulping six passion fruit into a cocktail shaker followed by two egg whites, alcohol free gin, sugar syrup and sparkling grape juice. This was then expertly shaken and sieved before being served over crushed ice.

The afternoon was rounded off with a Christmas Gimlet, mixed by Liz. The recipe calls for gin, lime juice, cranberry juice and sugar, to be served on crushed ice with frozen cranberries and a sprig of rosemary. The verdict on this recipe was that it was improved by adding a teaspoon of sugar syrup to balance the tartness of the lime juice. This cocktail could easily have been made using the zero-alcohol gin.

A very sociable afternoon which also gave us a chance to try all these cocktails and mocktails; recipes were provided to take away and try at home. A special thank you to Annie for hosting the afternoon.

FUTURE WORKSHOPS AND SOCIAL EVENTS

Dates for your new 2026 diary

February 21 Classics in a Nutshell part 2 – led by Tim Meacham 10 a.m. to 12 noon in the Guide HQ, Birch Road, Barnard Castle. Cost £2 payable on the day.

March 21 Quiz night

From 6.30 p.m. in the Glaxo Sports and Social Club (bar available), Barnard Castle. Cost £5. Further details to follow.

Nothing planned for April – we're taking a break!

May 9 Glass Workshop - led by Helen, the Crafty Cumbrian Lass.
1pm – 3pm in the Guide HQ, Birch Road, Barnard Castle
Cost £35 for a T-light holder or £40 for a flower panel with wooden base.

To book a place on any workshop, contact Sue Overton at the monthly meeting or email sueoveton@hotmail.com or 07512 368884.

DAY TRIPS - 2026

The following are some ideas for this year's trips, a few have not yet been confirmed.

Friday 17 April, Temple Newsam House, Leeds. 500-year-old house, one of Europe's largest rare breed working farms with historic outbuildings. Gardens with spring bulbs and rhododendrons. Tea room and shop

Friday 15 May, Constable Burton Gardens, Tulip Show. Afternoon in Leyburn

Saturday 20 June, Sunny Bank Mills (Home to TV's 'Sewing Bee') Galleries/exhibition, tour the mill, retail outlets, history of the mill and textiles, Places to eat in the mill and on the High Street.

Friday 24 July, Brancepeth Castle and Craft Fair

31 August (Monday Bank Holiday), Newburgh Priory, Coxwold, Thirsk Plant Fair and house tour. Gardens and tea room

ANNUAL THEATRE TRIP – Report by Diana Marks

Twenty of us travelled to the Theatre by the Lake at Keswick, plus three who came along to spend the day enjoying the market and shops.

The production this year was *The Wizard of Oz* (sort of!). A great deal of jiggling with the plot made it no less entertaining. Not sure where monkeys on motorcycles came into the original story. It never ceases to amaze that seven players, with speedy costume changes, can take two or three different roles very convincingly. In fact the two main characters, Dorothy and Toto the dog (very convincing woofs and barks) were constant so it was left to the remaining five actors.

It's always a pleasure to visit the Theatre by the Lake and this year was no exception. The only fly in the ointment was that, due to an administrative misunderstanding, everyone ended up paying twice for the driver's tip even though he only received one payment. My apologies.

GROUP REPORTS

ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

At our December meeting we viewed a made-for-cinema film on Goya (1746-1828). The Exhibition on Screen films are created by Seventh Art Productions and generally use the occasion of a major exhibition to explore the life and work of an artist, featuring location footage, interviews with leading experts, and a look at the work of conservators and museum curators behind the scenes.



In this case the exhibition was from the National Gallery and focused on Goya's portraits, set within the narrative of his life, from birth in a small town in Aragon, through his training in Madrid and career as a court painter, responses to the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, and final years in France. His portraits of the aristocracy, royal family and intellectual elite are notable for their realism and refusal to become formulaic, unlike the work of so many portrait painters. A very fine example is that of his friend the poet and lawyer Juan Meléndez Valdés in the Bowes Museum.

(above) Portrait of the Duchess of Alba, 1797 (The Hispanic Society of America, New York). She is pointing to the ground, where the words 'solo Goya' appear, and wearing two rings, one engraved with the word 'Alba', the other with 'Goya'.

His darker side was briefly sketched in – studies of madness, savage satirical etchings of the vices of society and the horrors of war and, in his last years, isolated and profoundly deaf, nightmare visions of conflict, witches and monsters.

In January we began to look at the art of Northern Europe – Germany, the Austro-Hungarian empire, and Russia. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) from

Nuremberg was a true Renaissance man, the greatest north of the Alps, and Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) the leading German painter of the Romantic era.

Dürer was a pioneer of the intimate self-portrait, and the first artist to fully exploit the new medium of print through his astonishingly detailed, often mysterious, wood engravings. He saw the potential of what we would nowadays call 'branding', inserting his distinctive 'AD' monogram on all his works and fiercely protecting his intellectual property (copyright had not yet been invented). His work was distributed all over Europe and became a dominant influence on generations of artists who came after him.



Dürer, A Young Hare, 1502, (Albertina, Vienna)



Friedrich grew up on the Baltic coast and later settled in Dresden. His landscapes explored the power of nature to stimulate the imagination, and as a manifestation of the divine. They often foreground solitary figures gazing out over the sea or mountains, viewed from behind so that we contemplate the scene through their eyes. There are overtones of German nationalism, and of a Gothic religious mysticism harking back to the middle ages.

(above) Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, 1815, Kunsthalle, Hamburg

AUTOMOTIVE GROUP – Report by Peter Colley

Ice, rain, salt, darkness. Perhaps snow, fog and gale force winds. Best to leave the 'pride and joy' in the garage. Soon it will be the winter solstice and we can anticipate more daylight and more agreeable driving conditions.

A quick recap of 2025 saw a good selection of activities:

- Lunch at the CB Inn with our partners
- A trip to the Yorkshire Air Museum with colleagues from the Photography and Science groups
- A Dales drive to Hardraw for lunch at the Green Dragon
- Attendance at the Dalemian Classic car show c/o Teesdale Motor Club
- Action and excitement at the Battle of Britain race day at Croft with Photography Group
- Locomotive power at Hopetown 'Titans of Steam' (*right*)
- A visit to Carrosserie at West Auckland to see skilled restoration of modern and classic cars



Thanks are due to members who drove for the group and organised trips. And to all who joined in. Showing up is an underrated quality!

A short sample of photos from our trips:





No meetings are planned for December and January so the next date for your (new) diaries is Tuesday 17th February, 10:30 to noon at our usual venue.

We shall try for a 'cobweb' run up to the Solway Aviation Museum in April, perhaps treating ourselves to a refreshment break at The Nook Farm Shop & Cafe near Slaggyford.

Happy Motoring!

CHESS GROUP – Report by Diana Marks

There were nine of us this time, not ideal for a game with two players, but one person arrived a bit later and another had to go early so it all fitted in beautifully.

One of our strongest players gave a very helpful tutorial to another player. Two other sets of two battled it out, taking all of the two hours to complete their games. I had a lovely time playing two different opponents and managed a couple of good games.

Since the first Thursday of next month happens to be 1st January, when some of us might not be thinking so clearly 🤪 we agreed to meet again in February.

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS GROUP – Report by Kate Bailey

As our January meeting would have been on New Year's Day, when many of us were still on holiday, we cancelled it. So, instead of a report this month, we want to make you aware of an event at Westminster, at the end of November, that launched a major public engagement plan intended to inform the public and cut through the fossil-fuel funded disinformation presented in the mainstream media.

Over 1200 MPs, Peers and leaders of business, faith communities, sport and culture attended a 'National Emergency Briefing'. They heard science-led evidence from independent UK specialists about the climate and nature crisis, including implications for public health, food security, national security, the natural environment, energy and the economy.

Their open letter to government, and to UK public service broadcasters, calls for a multi-channel televised briefing and an urgent emergency response to strengthen our national and economic resilience and improve lives. It has now been signed by over 47,000 people.

To find out more, we urge you to read the letter and watch the presentations on the National Emergency Briefing website - <https://www.nebriefing.org/>

CROCHET GROUP – Report by Hazel McCallum



At our Christmas meeting, we created some Christmas decorations. A favourite was a Christmas tree where a simple crochet shape was cleverly folded to create the decoration - photo left!

We meet on the third Thursday and fourth Monday of the month and the sessions are good natured with many 'creative' efforts to show at the end. New members are very welcome.

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD GROUP - Report by Sue Overton

For our final session of the year seven of us worked as one group and completed two Times Quick Cryptic Crosswords before the break for mince pies and coffee. The third crossword from the Telegraph produced more head scratching and groans! Maybe we were past our best at this point.

Here are a couple of the easier clues for you to try:

Determined what may be carried by shippers is ten tons (10)

Joy beat up a hero and I must intervene (8)

And here are the answers to last month's clues:

Lion cub playing with me in plant (9)

Definition is PLANT

Solution = COLUMBINE – an anagram of lion cub and me

Aversion revealed by some Methodist as 'terrible' (8)

Definition is AVERSION

Solution = DISTASTE – a hidden clue

Please contact me if you would like to join us at our next meeting on Wednesday 14 January at 2pm in the Guide HQ, Birch Road, Barnard Castle.

Sue Overton 07512 368884/ sueoverton@hotmail.com

DISCUSSION GROUP

December – Report by Glen Howard

Despite there being a lot of depressing news at the moment, we had a very enjoyable meeting.

Subjects discussed included: the Labour Together questionnaire; an advert for a wife; the heritage status of Italian cuisine; President Trump on Europe; and the NHS.

January – Report by Liz Colley

The threatened snow stayed away and nine of us met for the first time this year. As usual our discussion topics were wide ranging. We each chose an item of either local, national or international interest. These included in no particular order:

- The proposed Cape Froward National Park in Southern Chile
- Therapy dogs
- The changing face of the High Street in general and Barnard Castle in particular
- Are people becoming more foolhardy?
- Garden birds
- Do we become more pessimistic as we grow older?
- Trump, we try to avoid him but somehow, he always turns up!
- The demise of the NHS Fax machines (or not)
- Reimagining the Bowes Museum collection
- Security arrangements for Harry and Meghan and their relationship with the Royal Family. Not forgetting the abolition of the monarchy
- The Defence Spending Review
- The evolution of the Lego brick

If you are interested in joining the group please contact the group convenor, Glen Howard, by telephone 07975 705816 or email glenhow31@gmail.com. We meet on the second Friday of each month.

GARDENING GROUP – Report by Julie, Fran and Kate

At the end of November the gardening group had a trip out to the Winter Wonderland Christmas Fair, which was held in The Garden Rooms at Tennants Auctioneers in Leyburn.

It was a rather wet showery day so most of the group stayed indoors at Tennants with only a few venturing up to the town.

This was a busy and popular event, especially early in the day. There were over 60 stalls selling all manner of food, gifts and clothing. It was almost impossible to get a table at the bistro and café but fortunately Tennants had

arranged a 'pop up' café which turned out to have a large number of tables and seating facilities. The range of lunchtime snacks and cakes was very good.

This was a great day out and enjoyed by all. We were glad to board the coach back to Barnard Castle by the afternoon.

In January we will have a break and then our meetings will restart in February. A full schedule will be sent out to the group by email.

GEOGRAPHY GROUP - Reports by Jane Harrison

November

Gerald Blake's talk at our November meeting on 'The Geography of Ice' looked at the physical, political and social geographies of ice. It introduced us to the cryosphere, which encompasses those parts of the Earth where water exists as ice. It includes snow, glaciers, ice caps, ice sheets, sea ice, frozen rivers and lakes, and permafrost.

Although 60% of the world's population lives frost-free, the cryosphere affects all life on Earth. The high reflectivity of ice and snow helps to reflect solar energy back into space, whilst ice sheets and glaciers act as stores of freshwater and feed meltwater streams. Increasing temperatures cause loss of ice which affects global sea levels.

For the 10% of the world's population who live in high latitudes, ice presents a challenge. Indigenous populations have adapted to live in these harsh environments. Sometimes the advance of winter can be used to people's advantage. In northern Canada frozen rivers and lakes become essential transport routes for about 8 weeks of the year

Polar regions have attracted explorers and claimed lives. Lives were lost on the HMS Erebus and HMS Terror in the 1840s trying to find the North-West Passage, and on Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole, in 1912. Icebergs still present a hazard to shipping in the northern Atlantic, long after the loss of the 'Titanic'.



Arctic shipping routes have been of strategic importance since the days of Russia's Tsar Peter the Great. Countries have disputed land in polar regions and now claim their extended continental shelves, hoping to exploit untapped resources. Fortunately, in Antarctica, the 1959 Antarctic Treaty set aside the continent for scientific research rather than exploitation.

Antarctic iceberg (photo by David Yeadon)

Even in temperate Britain ice has an impact. Roads must be ploughed and pavements gritted. Between the 14th and 19th centuries there was a period of global cooling, known as the Little Ice Age, which was depicted by contemporary artists. Huge 'frost fairs' were held on the River Thames. Thomas Wyke's painting shows the longest fair (1683-84) when temperatures remained below freezing for two months.

Prior to the arrival of refrigeration, ice houses were often built in the grounds of stately homes. In the 19th century there was a world-wide trade in natural ice from North America to places as far away as India and Australia.

Gerald concluded his excellent talk by looking at recreation. From the 18th century, ice sports became popular in Britain. Skating, ice hockey and curling took place on frozen rivers and lakes. Today tourists head off to Everest base camp and cruise to the Arctic and Antarctic.

December

Gerald's talk on 'The Geography of the Nativity' has become something of a Christmas tradition and on this occasion there was a full house. Whilst the theology and history of the nativity of Jesus have been much discussed, the geography of the gospel stories has been largely overlooked. It adds a grittier dimension to the magic of the story.

Having set the geopolitical scene, Gerald used photos, paintings and cards to describe Mary and Joseph's arduous 95-mile journey to the census count in Bethlehem. The route would have been challenging at any time of year. In winter time it would have been cold and wet. The exact date of the census, however, is unknown.

Using his original maps, Gerald then discussed the layout of Bethlehem and the land use of the surrounding countryside, focussing on the shepherds and their flocks. He finished by looking at the likely route taken by the Magi from Babylon to Bethlehem and the origins of frankincense and myrrh.

The meeting concluded with thanks and words of appreciation to Gerald, for running the Geography Group for seven years. Gerald is now stepping down as lead convenor, although he will continue in an advisory role. He will no doubt deliver more excellent presentations!



Gerald was presented with gifts, including two books on maps, for which Phil Johnson had created unique book plates. Phil, in his role as the new lead convenor, gave a short introduction to future meetings. These will include more talks and activities organised by group members. Topics related to Physical Geography will be explored in more detail. The convenors are keen to tailor the programme to reflect the interests of the members, so would welcome suggestions. We look forward to welcoming you on the third Thursday of each month.

Next meeting in The Witham at 2 pm: 19 February, Ian Royston 'Reservoir Mania 2'.

GEOLOGY GROUP – Report by Bob Tuddenham

Meetings on Mondays 24 November and 15 December

In the last two months of 2025, we had two excellent and varied meetings at The Witham.

In November, Les Knight gave a most interesting talk entitled 'Snowball Earth - when the Earth iced over completely'. This is a proposed state of the Earth in the neoproterozoic era some 1000 to 541 million years ago. The discovery of ancient glacial deposits at various 'unexpected' locations including at the equator was difficult to explain until the acceptance of plate tectonics in the 1960s gave an insight into the state of the planet at this time. There is now a better appreciation of the key factors that affect the climate and particularly the role of atmospheric carbon dioxide levels. A fascinating topic!

Andrew Lapworth then gave an overview of a great holiday he had had in the Assynt area of NW Scotland. Here are some of the oldest rocks in the UK and this Geopark provides some excellent information boards at key sites. The formation of the Moine Thrust was a major controversy in the late 19th Century and it was eventually resolved by the eminent geologist, Charles Lapworth - a distant relative of our speaker! As expected, we were shown some amazing photos taken by Andrew.

In December, David Saville continued his excellent 'Introduction to Geology' series of talks. This one was about the evolution of the tetrapod; a vertebrate animal that has four limbs. The process took place mainly in the Devonian period, 420 to 360 million years ago and was essentially the evolution of fish into land animals. This involved significant changes in anatomy and physiology and David outlined the external conditions necessary for this process to take place. He showed some remarkable pictures of animals found in the fossil record. A most helpful information summary sheet was sent out after the meeting.

To round off the year, Trevor Morse then gave a brief talk about his recent visit to Lanzarote and the geology of the Canaries. He showed some wonderful photos of the remarkable volcanic landscape which has geysers

and the ground is still hot in places. We all enjoyed the mince pies at the end!

Our next meeting will be at The Witham on Monday morning 26 January at 10 am. All are welcome to join us. Please contact the convenor for details.

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT – Report by Tim Meacham

Apologies for the lack of a November or December report from the group. We enjoyed Ian Reid's excellent account of John Rae, explorer, in November but had to postpone our December Members' Session until January. It was well worth the wait however, as ten members each delivered their very different but equally fascinating 5-10 minute historical snippets, while Mandy's mince pies kept up the illusion that the festive season was still in full swing.

Sue gave us a great start with her illustrated account of her home, Balder Grange, enlarged in the 1840s by the Quaker Francis Gibson, and retaining many original features. His wife Elizabeth was from another great Quaker family, the Peases of Darlington. By contrast Alan brought along four card games he had collected dating from the early 20th century, beautifully illustrated and containing contemporary information on the counties of England. Ann then struck a very different note by recalling her great-great-grandparents who were swept away by the Tees in 1896, making orphans of six young children, as the couple unwisely undertook a crossing by the ferry at Whorlton in a fierce spell of weather. Ann read a sad account of the event as reported in the *Teesdale Mercury*.

Celia had brought along her stamp collection, focusing in particular on one from West Australia featuring a black swan image issued in 1994 to mark the centenary of the state's first postal service. This represented the Swan River and was evidence of Perth's local pride. Liz followed this by showing us several books of carols from the Sheffield area, including one, 'A Fantasia on Oughtibridge Carols' whose cover showed an illustration of Liz's great-grandfather! Some of the carols within were local hymns dating from the mid-19th century, but since largely disregarded in favour of the national favourites.



David then produced 3 ancient-looking tools (see *photograph*) for discussion. It was generally agreed that the top one was a 'proddy mat tool', while there was less certainty about the lower two. A consensus was reached eventually that the uses of these were both linked with saw setting. Further information would be welcome!

Nicky then had a suggestion for a good read. During a recent visit to Mellerstain House near Kelso she had purchased a

book *Lady Griselle Baillie, Mistress of Mellerstain* by Lesley Abernethy. This amazing lady had a multiplicity of interests as far apart as gardening and writing Scots songs, all of which she chronicled in her diaries between the 1690s and her death in 1746: not to be missed! We then came more up-to-date as Rob described three bomb craters in the field behind his house. Despite the limits on reporting during WW2, Rob had discovered that about 100 German planes had set out on from Norway on August 15th 1940 to bomb targets in NE England. Luckily a small number of British Spitfires were available to combat these, and one Messerschmitt was shot down over Streatlam. Possibly the bombs responsible for Rob's craters were offloaded by one of these German planes which never reached its target.

Robin followed this with a further local story. He was asked for help by the Vicar of Whorlton who was arranging for attention to be paid to water leaking at his church. Being a retired archaeologist Robin agreed to report on the digging of trenches through the churchyard for new water pipes in connection with the repair work. This took two days and Robin checked the two trenches to ensure proper respect was shown to those buried there. In fact very little was revealed by the digs apart from some Victorian pottery, possible from the large manor house which once adjoined the churchyard.

We finished with two railway-inspired items. Ian produced a 1975 Railway Timetable which covered the whole country. He lamented the loss of this comprehensive timetable since the break-up of British Rail – 'very handy on a rainy day in Banbury after a cancellation' - but said how useful this bulky volume had been in accompanying him on his (successful) mission to travel

on all extant railway lines in Britain since the 1970s. He has to remain vigilant however because of the recent revival of services on long-defunct lines. Tim then passed round an LNER corkscrew as used in the 1920s in restaurant cars plying between London and East Anglia. The item contained advertisements for the celebrated beers produced by the Tollemache Brewery of Ipswich, at its height in the 1920s. A wine list from the mobile restaurant survives for 1926 showing that for wealthy patrons a bottle of that year's Pol Roger Champagne could be ordered for a mere nineteen shillings (just under £100 by modern price comparison).

As has been true every year since we started these sessions, an amazing amount of historical information emerged during our 90-minute meeting! Sincere thanks to all those who took part.

LUNCH CLUB – Report by Kate Keen

In December we had our biggest turnout of the year, with 16 members getting together for an enjoyable pre-Christmas lunch at an old favourite, 'The Three Horseshoes' in Barnard Castle. Many of our members were able to walk to the venue, allowing them to enjoy a glass of wine.



We had pre-ordered our meals from the Christmas menu, which was good value for two or three courses. The most popular main course was the Braised Lamb Shoulder followed by the Traditional Turkey Dinner. The most popular desserts were the Christmas pudding and the Winter Spiced Panna Cotta. As usual we were well looked after and had an enjoyable afternoon.

Our January meal will be at the Bowes Museum café.

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

NEEDLECRAFT – Report by Sheila Kilgarriff

When the Needlecraft group meets each month, we carry out various needlework techniques, but we also discuss numerous topics. The December meeting naturally led us to the subject of Christmas. This year and previous years we have produced some interesting items, which you



can see in the photograph. They include the Christmas trees that we made last year, and the cute Christmas gnomes which several of us produced previously. Other items attempted are cards, embroidered pictures, tree ornaments etc, which will no doubt be brought out each year.

This month we had members undertaking knitting, quilting, embroidery and crochet work. It is so good to swap our ideas and experience with others. We will not be having our usual meeting in January, but instead will be going out for our 'Christmas' Lunch !!!

New members are welcome and should contact our convenor, Glen Howard.

PAINTING GROUP – Report by Val Hobbs

Sadly, this will be the last writeup for the group, as it will no longer exist in the New Year.

Five of us, including Anne, met for the last time on Friday, 12 December. Determined to make the last meeting a memorable one, we all took some festive goodies to have on our last coffee break. Anne had a great last project for us - painting some honesty she had picked from her garden. She gave us each a couple of stalks, some unbleached watercolour

paper and some white artist's gouache paint. Demonstrating first how to sketch it, she then proceeded to use a piece of candle wax to block the colour of the paper in certain areas of the stalks and leaves, added white gouache to part of the drawing, and then applied a variety of greens, blues and purples, either through wet on wet, or wet on dry to achieve a layered effect on the plant. Munching away on mince pies, shortbreads, and a selection of cakes and coffee, we each completed our last ever piece of work (*photos by Martin Page*).



It was very sad when we said our goodbyes, and we thanked Anne for all her hard work over the past 'nearly' seven years.

PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP – Report by Alan Kenwright

[Photographs by Pete Redgrave, Val Reynolds, and Ian Royston].

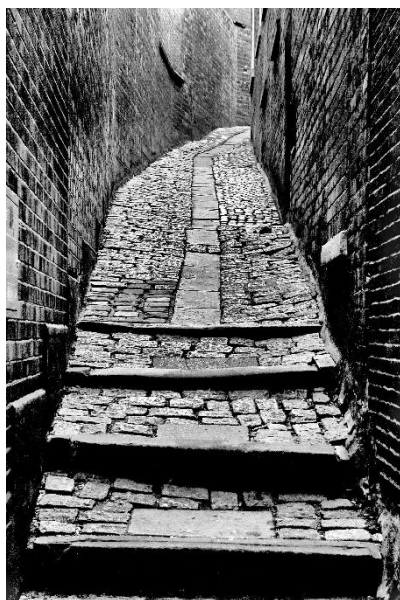
The photography group had a relatively quiet end to 2025. Our planned outing to Grassholme Observatory in November to try our hands at astro-photography was cancelled due to unsuitable weather, although a couple

of us did manage an outing there at short notice one evening later in the month and were duly chilled to the bone. Apparently, according to Pete, you have to suffer for your art!

Then in early December we had an indoor meeting at Enterprise House to discuss monochrome photography (mostly black & white). This proved to



be a very popular topic, giving rise to a lot of lively discussion and exchange of tips and techniques, with the group producing an extensive collection of interesting monochrome images. It turns out that monochrome is far from dead and we may well return to the subject in the future.



Our next meeting will again be indoors at Enterprise House on Tuesday, 3 February, when we will be trying to find interesting ways to photograph random objects brought by the group. Should be fun!

PICKLEBALL – Report by Ruth Lapworth

The pickleball group has met every Monday afternoon for two hours during 2025 with the exception of bank holidays and a few days when the sports hall was taken over by NHS Blood Donation sessions. We are now spending 5 -10 minutes at the start of each hour practising ‘dinking’ and then trying to ensure that this technique, which is similar to a drop shot in tennis, becomes part of our play. It seems that a strategy which employs more play at the net and dinking leads to success and more enjoyment than hard hitting from the back of the court.

During the year Teesdale Leisure Centre kindly invested in two specific pickleball nets which have been a distinct improvement from the improvised badminton nets we had been using. The plastic balls originally purchased by the committee have been replaced a couple of times due to cracks which appear from wear and tear. The cost has been funded by the small surplus accumulated from weekly court fees.

We have been joined by a number of new members but sadly one of our group (Jan Slinger) died suddenly and unexpectedly in October. Jan and her husband Peter were instrumental in setting up the pickleball group and



will be much missed. A couple of other players have also left for various reasons so if anyone wants to try this activity please contact me via the u3a Teesdale website.

Seventeen members attended our first annual Christmas lunch on 1 December at Café Bowes. It was a very enjoyable occasion with good food and service.

SCRABBLE GROUP – Report by Ray Thompson

Eight of us met at Judith and Phil's house on 8 December.

We split into two groups of four. Team 1 consisted of Jeanette, Regina, Kate and Phil, Team 2 was Ray, Judith, Lillian and Monica. Phil had a 7 letter word IMAGING, for 66 points. Kate won this game with a score of 202. Ray won his game with a 7 letter word CURVIEST for 65 points, with a score of 211.

We stopped for refreshments of tea and coffee, mulled wine, mince pies and Jaffa cakes.

Our second round was made up of the two winners, and the next two runners up. So Ray, Kate, Jeanette and Regina played. Kate had an 8 letter word LISTENER for 66 points, and went on to win the game with 181 points. Lillian, Phil, Judith and Monica played their game which Lillian won with a score of 194 points

Thanks to Judith for hosting and the delicious refreshments.

Our next meeting is on 12 January. If you would like to join our group, please call Judith on 01833 650150, or text her on 07790 40715.



TABLE TENNIS GROUP – Report by Peter Singer

It is widely predicted that there will be a surge of interest in table tennis in 2026. The reason is the release of the film *Marty Supreme*, starring the charismatic, American-French actor Timothee Chalamet, fresh from playing Bob Dylan in his previous film. It is loosely based on the true story of Marty 'The Needle' Reisman, a small-time hustler and natty

dresser, known for his panama hat, who used his table tennis skills and quick wits to escape from his dead-end job in a shoe store. He went on to win over 20 major titles and become US Men's Singles champion in 1958 and 1960, always preferring a hard bat rather than the sponge bats we use today. Incredibly, in preparation for the role, Chalamet spent seven years learning to play table tennis and would clearly be much too good to join our group (I know, he'll be so disappointed). Critics of the film have focused on

the likeability of the character played by Chalamet, who has been described as a 'nogoodnik' and a 'sociopath-screwball nightmare'. In real life, Reisman certainly became involved in some nefarious activities, including bending the rules, illicit gambling and smuggling contraband gold, so you probably wouldn't invite him home to tea. This may or may not make you want to see the film, although the promise of a glimpse of Chalamet's naked buttocks might sway you one way or the other. In any event, we await a possible and welcome tsunami of new members to our table tennis group, although we might have to persuade DCC to buy more tables to supplement the two that we play on presently.

On a personal note, very sadly we recently lost my lovely wife Jan, who really enjoyed playing and having a good old chat with everyone at our sessions. Jan played with a style all her own, mixing a hard, fast serve with delicate returns, some eccentric mis-hits (with accompanying groans) and occasional flashes of pure brilliance. Jan will be greatly missed by me and everyone who knew her.

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

In our last meeting of 2025, we looked at Simon Russell Beale's 'History of the Symphony: Revolution and Rebirth', covering the symphonies and other works of five composers.

Dmitri Shostakovich will forever be associated with Revolutionary Russia and as the first composer of the Soviet regime his music both reflected the time and the arts of the country. Initially a favourite of the regime, particularly for the propaganda value of his work, his fortunes then ebbed and flowed, regularly falling out with Stalin, particularly with his Symphony No.9 where he created a symphony not of triumphant, glorious marches reflecting the

successes of the Soviet Army in WW2 but a more light-hearted farewell in the style of Haydn.

Contemporaries of Shostakovich were Americans Aaron Copland and Charles Ives. The latter, thinking he could not make a living as a composer, rather made his small fortune as an insurance salesman. Both were known for works based on American tunes, but Ives also penned complex multi-part works which would eventually come together, sometimes literally when he had two marching bands, each playing different tunes play towards one another. Amongst Copland's output was 'Fanfare for the Common Man' from his 3rd Symphony.

In England, Elgar and Ralph Vaughan-Williams, though having different styles, sought inspiration both from the bloody conflict of WW1 and the English landscape. Elgar, latterly associated with the formal occasions of the British establishment, was perhaps the first composer to understand the opportunities offered by the electric microphone and the gramophone, being the first composer to work in the Abbey Road studios of the Gramophone Company (later EMI) and conducting there on its opening day. Vaughan-Williams's compositions span a much longer period - nearly fifty years between his 1st and 9th Symphonies - and he remains better known for shorter works and encouraging new talent.

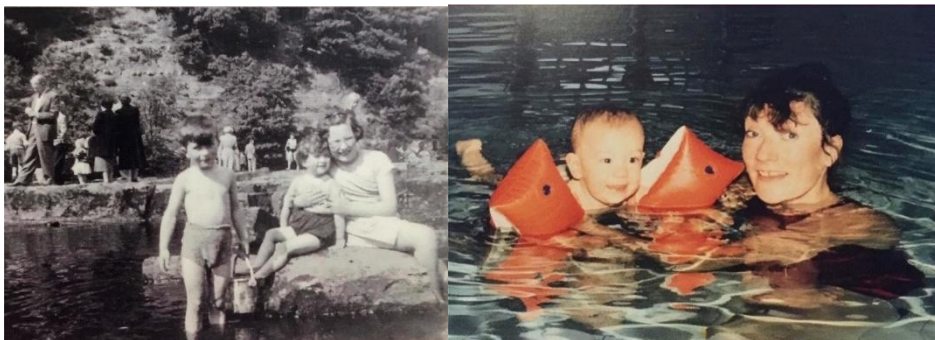
Sibelius, ever the nationalist, also embraced these new technologies, notably that of radio in his native Finland. Like Ives though, he lacked self-confidence, published no new works in the thirty years after his 7th Symphony and had those written subsequently destroyed before his death.

By 1945 the country which had invented the symphony was in ruins and democratisation marked a trend away from nationalist forms.

In the second part of our meeting, we mapped out some ideas to get us started in 2026 and changed our minds about venue, deciding that in view of the new blood and new support at Startforth we would stay there for the time being.

The next meeting is at 10:00 on Friday 23 January at Startforth Community Centre.

WIMMIN' SWIMMIN' GROUP - Report by Annie Clouston



When I was three I fell in the river at Winston, got a soaking, and was rescued by my dad. He was a swimmer himself having been chucked in the harbour at Old Hartlepool as a young boy and didn't drown. Somehow, we Cloustons were not adversely affected by these traumas. The photos show me, my brother and older sister at Whorlton circa 1954 (note the knitted budgie smugglers) where I learnt to swim. My daughter Olivia was more warmly introduced to swimming at nine months at the wonderful Art Deco Mounts Baths in Northampton.

What we have heard from a number of our women swimmers is that they have had negative experiences in relation to being immersed in water, mostly as children. Being dragged along in a hoop wielded by a stern-faced matron, having a tsunami engulf them caused by a divebombing youth, being barked at to get dressed in record time (and going back to school wet!) behind a rubber tarpaulin by a resentful teacher, are just a few of the reasons why swimming pools have not felt like sites of enjoyment or places of safety.

But it's never too late to change your swimming story, and for lots of positive reasons, you can. Swimming can be such an antidote to stress – just floating weightlessly, having a zen moment or two – in the right environment. On Saturdays between 4 and 5 once a month, a peaceful, safe and supportive space is on offer at Teesdale Leisure Centre. Wimmin Swimmin' have exclusive use of the pool and a trained lifeguard. Whether you are a beginner, a timid swimmer or want to be re-introduced to exercise from

which you have lapsed, Sue, Ruth and I will welcome you and help you if you need it and leave you alone if you don't..

If you want to give it a try contact Sue: sueoverton@hotmail.com 07512 368884.

Sessions cost £5 and are usually the fourth Saturday of the month. Our next three sessions are: 24th January, 28th February and 28th March.

With special thanks to Pete Redgrave for improving the quality of the photos

WALKING GROUPS



SHORTER WALKS

3-4 MILE WALKING GROUP - Report and photo by Ian Royston

It was not a promising start; it had rained much of the morning and for good measure the heavens opened just as we were about to start but nevertheless seven of us set off to circumnavigate Auckland Deer Park.

A hasty 'phone call confirmed that with 'AGLOW' due to open at 4.00 p.m. we could still make it through the Deer Park until 3.00 p.m. which wasn't too much of a challenge to our intrepid band and within a couple of hundred metres we were literally walking through one of the installations, the Tunnel of Light, the longest outdoor light tunnel in the region.

AGLOW runs from late November to the end of the year and this year claims to be bigger, brighter, and more magical than ever before. An enchanting 1.5-mile-long trail bursting with Christmas sparkle, incredible illuminations and one of the tallest Christmas trees in the North of England – standing over 30 metres high! [*enough – Ed.*]

After a quick descent and a slower ascent from the Gaunless Valley we were now on a short section of 'The Way of Life', one of the Northern Saints Trails, this one leading from Gainford to Durham Cathedral, though we were taking it across not-too-muddy fields only as far as the track of the former Ferryhill – Spennymoor – Bishop Auckland Railway, built by the North Eastern Railway in 1845, closed to passengers in 1952 and which last saw goods in 1966.



The rain was around but didn't hamper us as, safe from being mown down by trains, we negotiated a tricky stile then continued on this path, popular with cyclists, runners and dog walkers, to the outskirts of Bishop before dicing with the traffic to take us back up the hill to the gates of Auckland Palace from where we'd started 90 minutes previously.

7-9 MILE WALKING GROUP – Report by Judith Coleman, **photos by Ian Royston**

For our November walk we had planned to meet by the River Tees below Cotherstone Castle. Snow had fallen overnight, so much so that some would-be walkers encountered roads blocked by accidents and weren't able to get through. Fifteen of us made it though. The steep road down to the river would be icy, we thought, so most of us parked up in the village. But actually Cotherstone had no snow! And all along the walk we were to have glimpses of the very white landscape on the other side of the Tees whilst

encountering hardly any on our route. Remarkable – which is why I'm remarking on it!

We began by following the Teesdale Way on the south side of the river as far as Romaldkirk (*below*). Some of this was a muddy path which climbed



steeply above the river over rocks and tree roots - a bit tricky but sunlight was reaching through the bare trees and it was a lovely time of year to be in the woods.

From Romaldkirk the route followed the Tees Railway Path

southwards for several miles. In the year of the 200th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway it seemed fitting that one of our walks should include the old railway line. This branch line from Barnard Castle to Middleton-in-Teesdale operated 1867-1964. It transported rocks and minerals from the quarries, materials for building of the dams and, later, passengers. Notable features we passed on this stretch were the Baldersdale viaduct and Cotherstone station (now a private house, the owner of which aims to restore the platform).



Leaving the railway path (*left*) just before Lartington Hall, we made our way back towards the River Tees and rejoined the Teesdale Way, which runs from Dufton to Teesmouth and came into existence a mere 45 years ago. Though not of the same national, or even worldwide, impact as the S&DR, it is, nevertheless, of great local value and interest. This last section of our route, heading back north-westwards towards Cotherstone, with the sun still shining, was a pleasant conclusion to the walk. Many of us

enjoyed a cuppa in Cotherstone Old Chapel Community café before heading for home.

FELL WALKING GROUP – Report by Phil Clarke

On Wednesday 26 November nine walkers met for the start of the walk at Surrender Bridge, a well-known meeting spot approximately halfway between Arkengarthdale and Swaledale. Why is it called Surrender Bridge? --- Don't know, I give in.

The walk headed off eastwards past an old smelting mill towards Cringley Bottom (no not Crinkley Bottom as in Noel's House Party programme) towards the edge of Healaugh. After passing Nova Scotia Farm, just outside of the village, we headed northwest to the ford at Fore Gill Gate. Here the fun started! Some of the group tried to hum and/or sing the opening bars of the theme tune to the seventies 'All Creatures Great and Small' TV programme. The ford was used in the opening credits of the programme. As most of us had earlier driven over from the Stang and encountered the bridge the brains/memories had started ticking. They had continued to tick and thoughts/memories shared provoked the 'music'.

As we hummed, we covered a little road walking, then headed up towards Great Pinseat. At the top the weather was still sunny but now a biting, freezing wind had joined us, therefore the original suggestion of bagging a trig point of 583m (1912ft) was turned down - it was only 10 mins away – in favour of a quick lunch whilst hunkering down in a sink hole for shelter.

After lunch we walked southeast with some brilliant views towards Old Gang Smelting Mills. Here we saw evidence of protecting Barney Beck. The measures being taken were aiming to reduce heavy metals being washed out of waste contaminated mines and thereby encouraging vegetation to grow. Very encouraging!!

The end of the walk finished back at Surrender Bridge. The walk was just under 10 miles but challenging. As a reward we warmed up in the CB Inn with a cuppa/coffee. The theme tune was still on our minds, so one member used their phone to find the 'All Creatures' theme music so that we could have a good listen, provoking further flashbacks! And yes, one walker was spot on with their earlier rendition.

The IMB (Independent Monitoring Board)
at HMP/YOI (Deerbolt) needs you!

COME AND JOIN US

For more information about this interesting voluntary work, please
contact:

Patrick Neill 07881 811518 or

Charlie Ing 07732 380247

COFFEE AND CHAT

Thursday 12 February, 2.30-3.30, The Witham, Barnard Castle

Thursday 12 March, 2.30-3.30, Winters Cafe Middleton-in-Teesdale

ANOTHER YEAR, MORE AMBRIDGE! – REPORT by Annie Clouston

This month marks the 70th anniversary of the Everyday Story of Country Folk. So, in order to shake you out of the complacency that is the very essence of *I listen so you don't have to* I have decided to write a poem in the style of my hero (poetry group members incomprehensibly do not share my adulation), that epitome of the rhyming verse, William McGonagall.

And so it goes:

**“The Silvery Am and the Downfall of Hapless George
in the year of our Lord 2024”**

The Am, the Am, the Silvery Am
Wherein Egregious George did come to sin
By knavish deception his heroic acts were plauded
But in truth it all was sordid.

How his calumny was unmasked was not a joke
For a mighty chasm in his family it did provoke
And for his evil deeds he was tried and jailed.
Ambridge was satisfied that justice prevailed.

Pathos engulfed our Fallen Hero in despair and whining
Alone he was in his dank stinking be-grimed dungeon.
Then in miracle not of his own construction
Which caused his abandoned heart to malfunction
He was sent an angel of salvation
Whose name was Amber, mistress of web-persuasion*.

Alas, all came to grief with some prediction
For Amber was a fickle maid
Though in truth George's whinings, love-sick pinings, and egregious ways
Sent Amber into the arms of another and to George's hopes put paid.

Hapless once more, George was bashed with a bottle
And who wielded the cosh is not yet known
So many would delight if they could throttle
The Fallen Hero of the Silvery Am.

So all you erstwhile listeners must agree
That the story begun in the year after 2023
And gripped the nation via Radio Four
Was a sorry tale that will be a cautionary legend this day and evermore.

*an 'influencer' [Ed.]

And finally, with Burns Night imminent, a seasonal poem as we toast the Immortal Memory!



Up in the Morning Early

Cauld blaws the wind frae east to west,
The drift is driving sairly;
Sae loud and shrill's I hear the blast,
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

Up in the morning's no for me,
Up in the morning early;
When a' the hills are cover'd wi' snaw,
I'm sure its winter fairly.

The birds sit chittering in the thorn,
A' day they fare but sparely;
And lang's the night frae e'en to morn,
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

Up in the morning's no for me,
Up in the morning early;
When a' the hills are cover'd wi' snaw,
I'm sure its winter fairly

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 Room to Read	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
Crochet Group	Varies	Hazel McCallum 01833 316484
Cryptic Crossword	2 nd Wed pm	Sue Overton 07512 368884
Discussion	2 nd Fri am	Glen Howard 01833 631639
Family History	2 nd Thurs pm	Alan Swindale 01388 488348
Gardening	1 st Fri pm	Julie Archer 07774 903377
Geography	3 rd Thurs 2pm	Phil Johnson 07792 959320
Geology	4 th Mon am	Bob Tuddenham 07812 378004
Historic Environment	2 nd Thurs am	Tim Meacham 07847 182554
iPad & iPhone	4 th Tue 1.30 pm	Mike Sweeting 07565 925412
Italian Conversation	Every Wed 10 am	Marie Jenkins 07754 205664
Lunch Group	3 rd Wed noon	Kate Keen 07880 741151
Needlecraft	1 st Mon pm	Glen Howard 01833 631639
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 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 Conversation	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	3 rd or 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

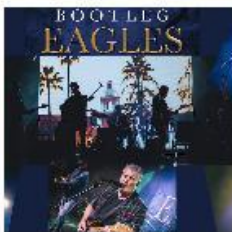
WHAT'S ON : 2026

7 JAN - 13 FEB

the
witham
Culture • Community • Commerce

Barnard Castle's Community Arts Centre

www.thewitham.org.uk



Jim Smith: Prime Cuts (14+)

Wed 7 Jan | [Comedy](#) | 7.30pm | £24



Royal Ballet & Opera: La Traviata

Wed 14 Jan | [Live Screening](#) | 6.45pm | £12-£14

The Castle Players: Ladies' Day

Sat 17 Jan | [Theatre](#) | 7.30pm | £12-£14

National Theatre Live: Hamlet

Thurs 22 Jan | [Screening](#) | 7pm | £12-£14

Stephen K Amos: Now We're Talking (16+)

Fri 23 Jan | [Comedy](#) | 8pm | £22



Paul Jones & Dave Kelly

Sat 24 Jan | [Blues](#) | 7.30pm | £30

Royal Northern Sinfonia: Spohr's Nonet

Sun 25 Jan | [Classical](#) | 2pm | £10-£22

Witham Youth Theatre Seniors:

William Shakes-Beer's Twelfth Pint

Wed 28 & Thurs 29 Jan | [Theatre](#) | 7pm | £5-£10

Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale (PG)

Sat 31 Jan | [Film](#) | 2pm | £5 WITH SUBTITLES

Carl Hutchinson: Greatest Hits! (14+)

Sat 31 Jan | [Comedy](#) | 7.30pm | £18



Gavin Webster: The Gathering of The Gav Tour Show (16+)

Fri 6 Feb | [Comedy](#) | 7.30pm | £15



Bootleg Eagles

Fri 6 & Sat 7 Feb | [Tribute](#) | 7.30pm | £20-£22

Royal Ballet & Opera: Woolf Works

Mon 9 Feb | [Live Screening](#) | 7.15pm | £12-£14

Simon Brodtkin: New Work in Progress (14+)

Tues 10 Feb | [Comedy](#) | 7.30pm | £20



Jessie Reid

Thurs 12 Feb | [Indie Folk](#) | 7.30pm | £18

Pal Sinha: 2 Sinha Lifetime (16+)

Fri 13 Feb | [Comedy](#) | 7.30pm | £17-£20



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