

Teesdale u3a Monthly Meeting – November 2025

The Golden Age of Radio

By popular demand Roger Browne, jazz musician, actor and raconteur returned to Barnard Castle u3a at their November meeting 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 the 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 is still broadcasting today and 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 a rendition of '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. Roger said 'the best pictures are on the radio and you have to listen, not so with TV'.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 22nd January when David Williams will be speaking on 'George Stephenson, Tribulations, Trials, Triumphs'.

Ian Reid

28 November 2025