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# FORUM

March 2026 No 26/03



## CHAIR'S LETTER

Dear Friends

Here we are with spring well on its way with the daffodils waving their bright yellow heads in the wind. What a difference a day makes, as I am sitting here in lovely sunshine, whereas yesterday it was raining cats and dogs. The wind is still blowing, keeping the temperatures nippy out of the sunshine, so not giving up the coat and gloves yet.

Talking of the weather, it made the Garden Group's trip interesting last week. Woke up to rain, then sleet and finally snow and we were off to Kiplin Hall for a snowdrop stroll. Luckily the weather decided to be kind to us and by the time we arrived it was dry, if still cold. We had a lovely time wandering around the grounds and visiting the Hall, it is so near and a hidden treasure.

February is our shortest month and it seems only yesterday I was writing my last Chair's letter, so I am trying hard to think what I have done, not too much. I did go one of the 'Funny Way To Be Comedy' events, Marcus Brigstocke. A great evening of laughing, very good for the soul, especially in these worrying times. Still madly practicing the music for the Community Choir March concert, only two days to go. 🙌

With warmest wishes

Julie

## 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](mailto:forumeditor@teesdaleu3a.org.uk)

**DEADLINE for the next edition: 6pm Monday, April 13th** and next month's editor is Alyson.

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](http://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](http://www.teesdaleu3a.org.uk)

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## MONTHLY MEETING

### **Ian Reid: *The remarkable, but underrated Arctic Explorer, John Rae***

Report by Annie Clouston

Many thanks to Ian Reid for stepping in at exceptionally short notice. Our planned speaker was unable to attend our meeting because of a very recent bereavement.

Ian's talk was inspired by his admiration for John Rae, now considered one of the most capable Arctic explorers, a man for his time, who shrugged off the habits of traditional colonial explorers and instead paid attention to the way the indigenous people of the Arctic survived some of the harshest conditions on earth.

Born in Orphir in the Orkneys in 1813, he studied medicine in Edinburgh. His father was an agent for the Hudson's Bay Company and through him he became employed in the Canadian Arctic, initially as a doctor, but subsequently he was commissioned to map the previously unmapped north Canadian coast. In 1849 he was second in command of an expedition to search for the lost ships and crew of Captain John Franklin's mission to find the North West Passage. On a later journey in 1851 he found the first traces of the missing ships – part of a flagstaff and remnants of cloth. He met Inuit people who told him that a party of forty white men had perished on King William Island, some of whom had resorted to cannibalism in order to survive. Lady Franklin, Franklin's widow, could not accept this unpalatable story and vilified the Inuit as savages and liars, and Rae for believing the story and relating it. In this, she was supported by Charles Dickens, who trashed Rae's reputation in his magazine *Household Words*.

Rae is now seen as a hugely influential surveyor and explorer for his work in mapping 1,750 miles of the coast of Arctic Canada, as well as finding the key navigable channel in the North West Passage, now known as the Rae Strait. He was also notable for his respect for the native peoples from whom he learned how best to navigate a wild and inhospitable terrain. He died in London in 1893 and was buried in the grounds of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney, where a memorial to him paid for by public subscription was placed in 1894.

## NEXT MEETINGS AT THE WITHAM

**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> April AGM Speaker: Max Adams, *King Offa, the Dyke and the Making of Saxon England***

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> May, Speaker: Mike Thornton and Ann Thornton nee Cornish, *Norman Cornish, the test of time***

## WORKSHOP REPORT

### Classics in a Nutshell Part 2: Gods and Heroes

**Presented by Tim Meacham**

In his second tour de force, Tim delivered a fascinating exposé of the apparent bonkersness of the excesses, vindictiveness and caprice of the Greek and Roman gods. What were mere mortals to make of their goings-on? Illustrated by Tim's own photographs reaped on his relentless quest to the astonishing architectural monuments dedicated to the gods, we were reminded of what we owe the Greeks and the Romans by the magnificence of these edifices.

We started with a quiz: Which Greek twins were the god of the sun and goddess of the moon? / Who cut off the head of Medusa? / Who was the small winged son of Aphrodite? / Which monster was fed 14 young people (7 boys and 7 girls) on an annual basis? / Who fired the arrow which killed Achilles? This revealed my woeful ignorance, but some participants knew their stuff, with a top score, as I recall, of 15/20. Tim then gave us a run through the dramatis personae of Greek and Roman theology with some startling tales of just how malevolent, ingenious and capricious these heroes and gods could be.

I was inspired to rectify my ignorance! Firstly to read more of the mythology (Stephen Fry's series about Gods and Heroes was recommended) and secondly to see more of these remarkable sites with my own eyes. Destination Sicily for starters...

Many thanks to Tim for his talk which was greatly appreciated.

## FUTURE WORKSHOPS AND SOCIAL EVENTS

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

Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup> 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

Thursday June 11<sup>th</sup> Picnic and Open day at Barnard Castle Cricket Club. Further details to follow

Friday July 10<sup>th</sup> Day trip to Pooley Bridge and Ullswater

To book a place on any workshop or any above event, contact Sue Overton at the monthly meeting or email [sueoverton@hotmail.com](mailto:sueoverton@hotmail.com) or 07512 36888

## DAY TRIPS – Jane Mathieson

**Bank code: 20-83-73 Account 03778576. Cheques payable to 'TEESDALE U3A'**

Friday April 17<sup>th</sup>, 9am pick up. Templenewsome House & Farm, Leeds

500 year old Jacobean house & one of Europe's largest Rare Breed Working Farms with architectural outbuildings. Gardens with bulbs & Rhododendron walk. Tea Room & Shop.

Costs, House & Farm £16.65, House only £10.00, Guided Tour of House £3.50, Farm only £8.50, Historic House Members Free for House, Coach £16.50.

**Payments by Cash /Cheque February & March. Bacs after March 1<sup>st</sup>. Reference Temple**

**Friday May 15<sup>th</sup>, 9am pick up. Constable Burton, Leyburn**

Tulip Festival am, afternoon in Leyburn.

No Tea room. Costs, £26.00. Entry/Refreshments/Coach. **Payments March & April. Reference Constable**

Saturday **20th June, 9am pick up. Sunny Bank Mill, Leeds** Home of TV Sewing Bee. Galleries/Exhibition, Retail Outlets, Eateries, Tour about History of Mill & Textiles. Mill is situated on Farsley High Street, so more retail & eateries can be found.

**Costs**, Entry Free, Guided Tour £10.00, Coach £16.50. **Payments April & May. Reference Sunny bank**

Friday July 31<sup>st</sup>. 9am pick up. Alnwick Castle

Alnwick Castle only & grounds. Visit the town with Farmers Market, 'Barthers', England's largest second-hand book shop.

Cost, entry & coach £34.00, HH members £16.25. **Payments May & June. Reference Alnwick.**

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> September, 9.30 pick up** Ushaw House/Chapel, Flower Festival & Plant Fair. Ushaw is holding a Flower Festival within the building, & a Plant Fair in the grounds. There is also an exhibition named 'Extinction', about Dinosaurs. Cost, entry & coach £22.80, HH members £12.00. **Payments July & August. Reference Ushaw**

### **LONGER TRIPS – Dorothy Jameson**

There are over 30 on the trip to Scotland leaving on Thursday, 16th April. There are still some twin and double rooms available, but no single rooms. Included in the price is a visit to Ballindalloch Castle and grounds, a day in Nairn, and a cruise on Loch Linnhe. Sadly, I will not be able to join the party due to a serious back problem but I am sure you will have a great time. The holiday starts and ends in Morrisons car park in Barney!

Bookings have to be made direct with Cairngorm Travel, 01405 761334.

## GROUP REPORTS

### ART APPRECIATION GROUP – Report by Tony Seward

At our March meeting we moved on from art of the Viennese Secession to the development of German Expressionism. We began with an enthusiastic overview of the whole movement from artist and teacher Steve Carroll. The leading artists discussed were: Ernst Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, Emil Nolde, Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky and his partner Gabriele Münter, Paul Klee, August Macke and Max Beckmann. Phew! I can't possibly cover all of them in a short report, but can only pick out trends and highlights.

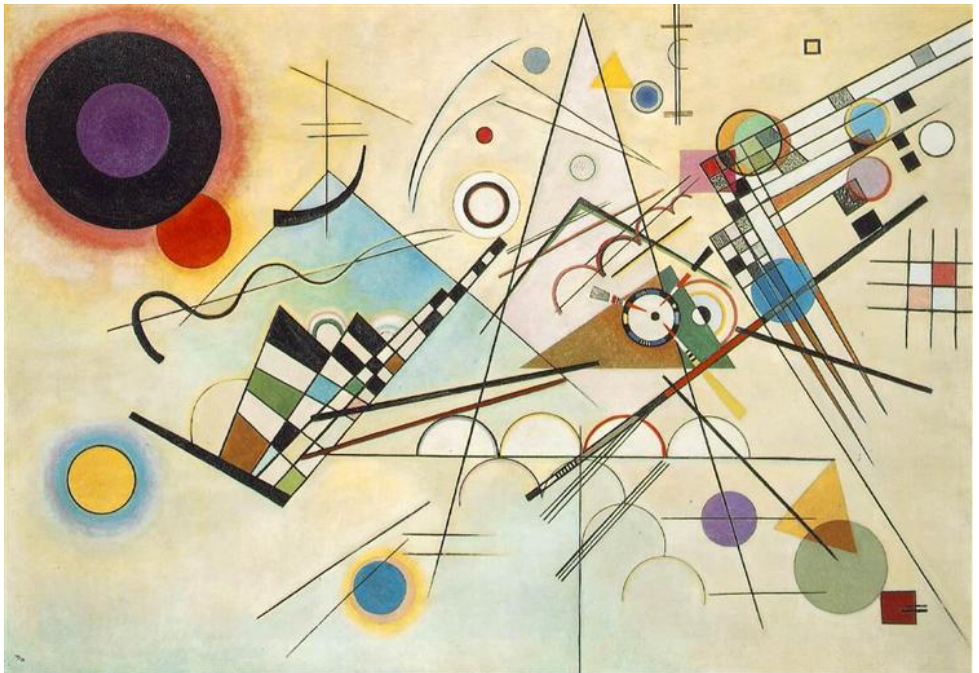
Accounts of German Expressionism usually begin with the groupings known as 'Die Brücke' (The Bridge) and 'Der Blaue Reiter' (The Blue Rider). Both were in revolt against the prevailing classicism of the academies, and focused on developing a new artistic language of direct expression through colour and form. Although influenced by the new trends appearing in France, from Impressionism and the Fauves to Cubism, they evolved their own distinctive style, combining these with elements from folklore and the German woodcut tradition (see Kirchner's Berlin street scenes, for example),

Several of the artists were based in Munich and the nearby village of Murnau, where Kandinsky and Münter settled in 1909. She is a very remarkable artist who has been overshadowed by the famous males surrounding her, but is now recognised for her own distinctive contribution.



**Gabriele Münter, Breakfast of the Birds, 1934 (National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC)**

Kandinsky is regarded as the 'father of abstract expressionism'. Originally from Moscow, he began by painting traditional landscapes, but was increasingly drawn towards abstraction. By the time he was forced to leave Russia, when official Communist policy made only Socialist Realism acceptable, he was already established in a successful career as one of the leading European modernists. Thereafter, he steadily worked towards total abstraction, with a marked tightening and simplification of forms after he joined the Bauhaus in 1921. Nigel Humphreys, who recorded his lecture on Kandinsky for Aberystwyth u3a, did an excellent job of tracing this progression, noting that it took many years for him to finally reach pure abstraction, without any identifiable motifs - but also how his original standard repertoire of motifs gradually turned into compositions of abstract colour and form. If you want to understand what abstraction is all about, there's no better place to start than with the work of Kandinsky.



*Wassily Kandinsky, Composition VIII, 1923 (Guggenheim Museum, New York City)*

**In April, Colin Dunnighan will speak on 'Street Art'. What is it? That's the question he's asked us to think about in the meantime.**

## AUTOMOTIVE GROUP – Report by Peter Colley

After our usual winter break the group reconvened to set the automotive world straight.

We had good discussions about the price and depreciation of EVs, and the difficulty of night-time driving given the brightness of modern LED headlights. We also spent some productive time planning events for the coming months. These are the dates we have in mind:

- 26th April: **Drive it Day**. This is a national fundraiser for Childline, and our group is welcome to join our friends at Teesdale Motor Club. [Drive IT](#)
- 9th May: **Classic to Modern Motor** Show at Croft. This was really popular last year with a large and varied selection of vehicles on display. There is also an opportunity to drive on the track. [Croft](#)
- 12th June: **Solway Aviation Museum**. The plan is to meet at the Alston Road Garage at 10am, then drive to the Nook Farm Shop & Cafe at Slaggyford for refreshments [Nook](#) - from there we will head north to the museum. We are anticipating new aircraft to be on display and there is usually the opportunity to climb aboard the famous Avro Vulcan. [Solway](#)
- 21st June: **Beamish** is hosting a classic car show on Father's Day. [Beamish](#)
- 28th June: **Raby Castle** is following up last year's successful event with their own classic car show. [Raby](#)

Details of the public events are available through these links. Usually we simply meet at the venue and arrange a rendezvous point.

Members interested in any of these activities can contact the convenor by email. [petergcolley@icloud.com](mailto:petergcolley@icloud.com)

## BIRDWATCHING – Report by Andrew Lapworth

### VISIT TO RSPB SALTHOLME MONDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2026

The group made our winter visit to the RSPB's flagship nature reserve on Teesside on a bright February day and after days of gloom and rain. Twelve of us enjoyed coffees and cakes in the warm panoramic cafe overlooking the central lake. We saw rather distant flocks of Greylag and Canada Geese and diving Pochards and Tufted Ducks; a small group of Wigeon were

grazing on the field. We then checked the feeders with the usual Greenfinches, Goldfinches and Blue and Great Tits before setting off for Saltholme main pools. En route we found a few Barnacle Geese with the Canadas.

We spent an hour or so in the main hide, finding a great variety of birds, including a good set of 8 wader species: Dunlin, Redshank, Curlew, Avocet, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwits, Golden Plover and huge numbers of Lapwings; the latter gave us some spectacular aerial displays of maybe around a thousand birds. The Avocets will probably build in numbers as the season continues and stay to breed; the Lapwings & Curlews will mainly disperse for the hills and dales, as will the Golden Plover. We look forward to seeing them back in Teesdale soon. We also had a good variety of ducks in addition to the usual Mallards: Shovelers spinning-around filter-feeding, Goldeneye and elegant Pintails in the distance; through the 'scopes we made out the intricate *vermiculations* (a dense pattern of fine wavy lines) of the drake Gadwalls.

A Kestrel hovered in view as we left the hide, and when we got back to the feeders at the visitor centre we saw the usual small flock of dainty Stock Doves. All in all 37 bird species were seen during our short visit.



A drake **Gadwall**: always worth a close view to see his (word of the trip) *vermiculations*.

## BOARD GAMES GROUP – Report by Jean Bartle

There were eleven people at the board games afternoon in March. Table one with four people played Cascadia, while the other two tables - a four and a three - played Ticket to Ride. My table of three travelled round the USA with varied success, collecting points (or not). It certainly helps if you are good at geography (I am not) or have been there (I have not). Geoff won, guess who came last!

The four people on the next table were in Europe for the same game. Hazel won that game, and Claire won on the Cascadia table.

At three-thirty four people went for an early bath, which left two tables to play on. One table chose Skyjo, this included Annie, and guess which is the noisiest game we play! The other table played Bananagrams, less noisy, but Sue did her best, and won.

Altogether a pleasant and fun afternoon.

## BOOK GROUP 2 – Report by Ruth Stables

We had a lively meeting! We had decided that each of us would choose a biography we had read and talk about that, so that it was the 4 of us present did. First up was *Facing the Music* by Torvill and Dean which Karen had thoroughly enjoyed and recommended warmly. This had included their success at the 1984 and 1994 Olympics and provided an intriguing insight into the politics behind each event.

Julie chose *Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain. This is a real classic describing her life in the early years of the 20th century before, during and after World War 1. She served as a nurse in that time - and was also active in politics, all from the perspective of a woman trying to make her way in the political sphere, so a good insightful social history too. She was, of course, the mother of Shirley Williams. I think I must re-read it!

Maggie chose Lucy Worsley's book about Agatha Christie. She was a contemporary of Vera Brittain. Her early life provided much of the material for her later detective stories (66 in all) - and parts of her life were shrouded in mystery too, not least her disappearance in 1926 and her turning up in a hotel in Harrogate.

I chose Gyles Brandreth's recent biography of A.A. Milne: *Somewhere, a Boy and a Bear*. This is a delight, painting a picture not only of "the

enchanted places", but also A. A. Milne's prolific output for magazines and the theatre - and his time fighting at The Battle of the Somme.

All 4 books sounded fascinating. Is it true that as we grow older, biographies increase their appeal? - I think it is for me.

Do come and join our group. You will be very welcome. Maggie Cleminson is our Convenor and her details are in The Forum.

## **ROOM TO READ BOOK GROUP- Review by Annie Clouston**

*The Road Home* by Rose Tremain

Rose Tremain is a very accomplished writer who has won a number of prizes for her writing, including the Giles Cooper Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, the Whitbread Award and the Orange Prize. My personal favourite is the novel *Music and Silence*.

*The Road Home* was published in 2007 and is a story of an economic migrant from an unnamed Eastern European country (probably Russia) and so pre-dates the worsening anti-immigrant climate that has blighted community relations post-Brexit. At its centre is Lev who has left his home, his mother and his daughter, in order to earn money to offer his family a better life. He is still grieving the loss of his wife, Marina "whose death was with him always, like a shadow on the X-ray of his spirit". He is prepared to do any work, but is unskilled, having worked previously as a labourer in a sawmill that was closed when there were 'no more trees to cut down'. Lev encounters both kindness and rejection, he gets himself into messy situations because of his temper and bad decision-making, but is likeable and makes good friendships, eventually falling in love.

Our readers were impressed with the quality of Rose Tremain's writing, but had some problems with style and plot. Style-wise we wondered whether this book could have been written in this way nearly twenty years later. It is prone to stereotyping that grates somewhat, and a degree of sentimentality that detracts from the credibility of the story. The general view was that the second half of the book didn't live up to the promise of the first.

Overall, however, we found it a readable and compelling book that we awarded 4/5 stars for book group discussion and 3.5/5 for recommending to friends.

### **CHESS GROUP – Report by Diana Marks**

Our happy band of players met as usual at the Old Well. We welcomed a new member who wished to observe so it was fortunate that she made our numbers nine!

All was quiet apart from the occasional call of 'check' or 'checkmate' and a few well-chosen words when one of us made a silly error!

We meet again on the first Thursday of the month. Any new members would be very welcome.

### **Climate Solutions Group – Report by Kate Bailey**

With the convenor and other members of the group on holiday, the March meeting was very informal and sociable. We continue to be delighted with the success of Sue's 'blister pack' recycling campaign, and are very grateful for the donations given by people bringing empty blister packs for recycling; Sue is filling the Terracycle bin faster each month. Please bring your used packets to the monthly meeting and please remember to make a donation to enable us to continue with this very worthwhile recycling campaign.

Those of you who signed up to take part in the 'Big Plastic Count' this month will hopefully have realised how hard it is to avoid plastic waste. *"When counting you might feel like the plastics crisis is your fault. It's not. Only governments and companies can provide accessible alternatives."* Plastic waste is effectively being forced upon us as we shop at the supermarket - I discovered that plastic packaging for fruit, vegetables and other foods made up 91% of my count. The Big Plastic Count website advises that 67% plastic waste is being incinerated, 10% is sent to landfill, 12% exported and only 11% is being recycled in the UK.

Tipping Points: In November 2025 the London School of Economics published a European research blog that defined positive tipping points as *"moments when small actions trigger rapid self-sustaining shifts towards sustainability."* They describe the exponential growth of solar and wind power, electric vehicles and plant-based proteins - as costs fall and policies

align. *"Each breakthrough accelerates others: cheaper batteries stabilise renewable grids, clean power drives industrial decarbonisation, and social norms shift towards more sustainable consumption."*

For general information - if you would like to find out more about the ways the climate is changing, and the risks to wildlife ...

The UN website - <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> provides an introduction to the global issues, essential facts and possible solutions;

YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/@nebriefing> - carries a series of scientific briefings on subjects such as nature, weather extremes, food security and health; the introduction from Professor Mike Berners-Lee provides an informative summary.

### **CRYPTIC CROSSWORD GROUP - Report by Sue Overton**

This month's two crosswords took the whole session to complete! Tricky, but perseverance won through in the end.

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

Greek island company gets fur distributed (5)

Form of expression originally in Douglas, Isle of Man (5)

Answers to clues in last month's Forum :-

Catch sight of article – and fume! (6)

'Fume' is definition, solution is SEETHE

Boss's last greeting extremely tremulous (7)

'Tremulous' is definition, solution is SHIVERY

If you would like to join us at our next meeting in the Guide HQ, Birch Road, Barnard Castle just come long at 2pm on the second Monday of the month. You would be very welcome.

Sue Overton 07512 368884

[sueoverton@hotmail.com](mailto:sueoverton@hotmail.com)

## **DISCUSSION GROUP – Report by Glen Howard**

March 2026

Our discussion was very wide ranging this month and included: Council survey into what people want for Barney; overnight parking of motor homes; proposed wind farm; researching history of items discovered both home and abroad; the Middle East; reparation for slavery and colonialism.

New members are always welcome so do contact me if you are interested in joining us. We meet on the second Friday of each month.

Glen Howard 07975 705816 glenhow31@gmail.com

## **FAMILY HISTORY INTEREST GROUP**

### **Report by Alan Swindale**

Nine members of the group and one visitor listened to a talk on North Atlantic Passenger Lists. This was followed by the usual 'Help Your Neighbour' practical session.

Emigrants have been leaving England for North America since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century but it was only in 1820 that lists of passenger arrivals began to be collected. These lists give the name of the ship, its departure and arrival details and passenger name, age, occupation and country of origin. If the researcher is fortunate an emigrant family will be listed together. This is little enough to go ahead with but details on US censuses and other documents often provide a much better picture.

For example, 'The Manhattan, arrival 21 April 1869, Transcription "Fred Swindall, 20 M, Lab' (actually Swindells) leads to the story of Frederick Swindells who made his way up from a factory worker to running and then owning a woollen mill. The talk went on to discuss fares (around £4 steerage for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and journey times as sail gave way to steam.

In the discussion afterwards one of the members read out part of a letter describing boarding just such an emigrant vessel.

The talk was followed by coffee and then a useful practical session.

An index to PDFs of other past talks is to be found at [Teesdale U3A Genealogy Tutorials](#).

## **GARDENING GROUP – Report by Kate, Julie and Fran**

**March 26**



At the start of March the garden group had a trip out to Kiplin Hall and Gardens near Richmond North Yorkshire. We had previously had a talk from the Head Gardener about the development of the gardens. The initial plan had been to look at the snowdrops, however as the winter has been mild the snowdrops flowered early but there were still some in bloom together with hellebores, daffodils and other spring flowers. After a warm week where it felt as though spring was in the air, Friday turned cold with sleet en route to the gardens. By the time we arrived the rain

had stopped and although cold it stayed dry.

The hall has a new café which was warm and pleasant with freshly cooked goods to tempt us.

As well as looking around the grounds we were able to investigate the house which is well furnished and has lots of information boards and room guides to take us through the history of the house and the families who have lived there.

This was another enjoyable day out for the group.

In April we will be having a talk at Stainton village hall followed by a visit to Howick Hall Gardens in May.

## GEOGRAPHY GROUP - Report by Jane Harrison



**Photograph by Ian Royston. Blackton reservoir with Hury in the distance**

The Industrial Revolution led not only to canal and railway building mania but also to reservoir building mania. We discovered this from our speaker, Ian Royston, who explained that in the Pennines alone, over 200 reservoirs were built between 1840 and 1970.

Reservoirs and aqueducts were first built in Britain by the Romans. Much later reservoirs were built to ensure adequate water levels in flights of canal locks. It wasn't until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, however, that local authorities were under any legal obligation to provide potable water and sewerage. Change followed Sir Edwin Chadwick's report in 1840s which linked poor sanitation to disease and led to the first Water and Public Health Acts.

Demand for water for industry and growing populations led large cities, such as Manchester, to purchase land in upland valleys for building reservoirs. The chain designed and constructed in Longdendale, in the Peak District, by John Frederick Bateman, is one example.

From 1849, water was abstracted from the river Tees, at Broken Scar, near Darlington, to supply towns downstream. Supplies soon proved inadequate and water quality was poor. James Mansergh, who designed the dams in the Elan valley, in mid-Wales, was commissioned to design a scheme for reservoirs in Teesdale but it was the charismatic George Yourdi who

oversaw Hury, completed in 1892 together with a pipeline to supply Lartington treatment works and thus Barnard Castle. Blackton and Grassholme followed although their purpose was to compensate for abstraction at Broken Scar.

The steel and chemical industries on Teesside increased the demand for water in the 1950s. This led to the building of Baldersdale and Selset reservoirs. Cow Green, initially considered too difficult a location, was given approval in 1966 and completed in 1971. It too regulates flow on the Tees. More recently the Tees and Central Strategic Pipeline has been completed, taking treated water directly from Lartington to urban areas further east.

Kielder reservoir, in Northumberland, is also a regulating reservoir. Water is abstracted downstream at Riding Mill from where pipelines running south help to maintain flows on the Derwent, the Wear and even the Tees. Although it is tested regularly, water from the Tyne has only once topped up flows at Eggleston.

Although the heyday of reservoir construction has passed, new reservoirs are being built in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include the Havant Thicket Reservoir in Hampshire (2029), the Fens reservoir (2036) and the Lincolnshire reservoir (2040).

Next meeting: Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April. The Witham. 2pm. Speaker to be confirmed.

## **GEOLOGY GROUP – Report by Bob Tuddenham**

### **January and February Meetings**

The first meeting of 2026 was well attended but was sadly the first without Trevor Morse taking a leading role. Trevor unfortunately has been unwell and has had to step down with immediate effect. We wish both Trevor and Lynn our best wishes for a speedy recovery and thank Trevor for his expert talks and great enthusiasm in leading the u3a Geology group over many years.

The first talk at the meeting was by John Watkinson and looked at mountain building processes and particularly the Himalayas; John showed some very spectacular slides of mountain scenery including Everest itself. He talked briefly about the tectonics of mountains and our greater understanding of

mountain building processes through measurements of gravity to produce maps which depict variations in the Earth's gravitational field due to uneven mass distribution.

In the second half Bob Tuddenham gave the first part of his talk on the Geology of South Shropshire. This beautiful area of grass covered hills and moorland is a National Landscape but interestingly is not a National Park or a Geopark. The variety of the geology is quite remarkable with some eight different geological periods in the 35 miles going from west to east. Bob touched on the 'crumpled' area of the Long Mynd and Stretton Hills which are Precambrian (550 million years old) and are much older than the mountains in North Wales and the Lake District.

In the February meeting, we had two most interesting talks. The first by Chris Lovett was about 'Lava Tubes'. These remarkable features are found in volcanic areas of the world where there are basaltic lava flows. Low viscous fluid flow is essential for lava tube formation. Chris explained the detail of how these tubes are formed and talked about their unusual features with even mineral stalactites and stalagmites with amazing colours.

In the second half of this meeting, David Saville continued his excellent series on the 'Introduction to Geology' with the first part of a talk on 'Life in the Carboniferous'. This period of Geology is of particular interest being the major geology of the North Pennines and Yorkshire Dales. More details will be given after David completes part two of the talk in the April meeting.

The next meeting is at The Witham on Monday morning on **April 27<sup>th</sup>** at 10 am. All are welcome. Please contact the convenor for details.

## **HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT – Report by Tim Meacham**

For our March meeting we went further afield than usual. Tim Meacham presented an attempt to make historical sense of Ancient Egypt as represented by the sites and sights of a Nile cruise. Starting with a brief introduction to the unpromising geographical situation of Egypt (97% desert with most development confined to a thin strip running north to south along the Nile valley or along the Red Sea coast) it seemed an unlikely candidate to host the great civilisation which developed between 5000 BC and the Greek and Roman takeovers in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

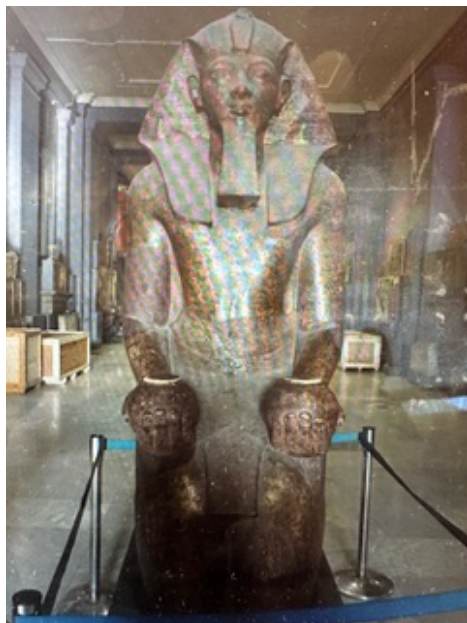
After early development, the 30 (or 31) dynasties of Ancient Egypt got going with Pharaoh Narmer who in about 3100 BC began to create what was to become a highly bureaucratic system of government in Upper Egypt (the southern half of the country as opposed to Lower Egypt in the north). Things then moved fast under Pharaoh Djoser who died in about 2640 BC but not before having a step pyramid built at Saqqara for his burial. A golden age



followed with further social and architectural developments culminating in the two great pyramids at Giza (on the edge of modern Cairo). These formed the tombs of Pharaoh Cheops (also known as Khufu) finished in about 2560, and his son Khafre, who went one better by adding the Sphinx to guard the tombs.

***The Sphinx & Pyramid of Cheops at Giza (Photo by Tim Meacham)***

Trouble between Upper and Lower Egypt brought a temporary slowdown in



progress between 2181 and 2055 BC, but another strong Pharaoh, Mentuhotep II reunited the two kingdoms during his reign of over 50 years up to about 2000 BC. During these years the amazing temple complex at Kharnak was started, a symbol of the emergence of Egypt as the leading civilisation in Northern Africa and the Mediterranean. After a short 'dark age' around 1550 BC when the Hyksos, a tribe from the Levant, seem to have controlled Egypt, the 'New Kingdom' (established by Pharaoh Amose 1) brought about the greatest phase of her history in

***Hatshepsut, the bearded Female Pharaoh in Cairo Museum (Photo by Tim Meacham)***

the 1300s BC, when such famous characters as Hatshepsut, the female Pharaoh whose statues show her with a beard, Akhenaten, adherent of the secondary sun god Aten who tried to overthrow the existing religious practices, his son Tutankhamun, short-lived but celebrated today for the glory of his tomb offerings in the Valley of the Kings, and the beautiful Nefertiti all led the nation. The Ramesses clan (think of Moses and the Israelites) also had their period of power, but like many great civilisations internal strife again intervened.

It was a slow deterioration with many great temples, Kom Ombo and Philae both visited on the cruise, being late and worthy signs of continuing power, but after the Hellenic conquest of Egypt in 330 BC, led by Alexander the Great, it took only another 200 years for the Romans to put the final nail in the coffin of the 500-year Egyptian supremacy.

Our April talk will be Part 2 of Rob Pearson's account of the Quakers in County Durham. Details from Tim Meacham.

### **iPAD and iPHONE GROUP – February report by Mike Sweeting**

Three interesting topics from the Group - an email supposedly from Microsoft bearing virtually a full set of the things you need to look out for when spotting a scam email, what to do about the new multi-screen layout for iPad which requires more dexterity than may be available and, finally, sorting out how much memory space is available. All sorted!

We went on to look at other changes in IOS26, and these are likely to provide the basis of later sessions. We made a start here looking at screening and blocking of calls on the iPhone.

The main topic of the day was to have a closer look at the Passwords app. This provides the answer to all those weak and repeated passwords that jeopardise our online security and helps us, the user, to stop being the weakest link in the security of our day-to-day lives.

Our next session will be on Tuesday 24 March 2026 at our usual venue in Enterprise House.

## **LUNCH CLUB – Report by Kate Keen**

In February the lunch group welcomed 3 new Members with 19 of us meeting at the Fox Hole Piercebridge.

We had pre ordered our meals with the most popular main course being the Hog Roast Sausages served with creamy mash, greens and caramelised onions. Most of us managed a desert and the most popular was the Vanilla Panna Cotta.

The Fox Hole is one of the favourite lunch venues for our group. We always have excellent service there. It was incredibly busy for a cold Wednesday lunchtime in February with all seats taken on both sides of the restaurant.

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

## **NEEDLECRAFT – report by Glen Howard**

We are a very friendly and happy bunch who enjoy chatting whilst we work on our projects, mainly knitting and quilting this month. We talked through ideas of whether we should change our format and meet somewhere more formal but it was unanimously decided to continue meeting in each others' houses, with those unable to host meetings assisting with refreshments.

Our next meeting will be on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April, Easter Monday. New members are always welcome so do give me a call if you would like to join us.

Glen Howard 07975 705816

## **PHILOSOPHY GROUP – Report by Ray and Jenny Lee**

A lively group joined in a discussion about the philosophy of time. Firstly, we attempted to define what we understood about time. The group went on to discuss the history of the philosophy of time which stretches right the way back to Parmenides who was a philosopher in about the year 600 BCE. We also discussed the contributions of Aristotle and Plato to the debate.

Next, we went on to outline the three main theories of time. The first of these is Presentism. This is the view that only the present exists. According to this theory, past entities no longer exist and future entities do not yet exist. The second theory is Eternalism. In this theory events in the past are just as real

as events in the present. Future events are also real even if we haven't reached them yet. Eternalism is often associated with what is called the B theory of time. The third theory outlined the most current ideas Linked to Einstein's theory of relativity. This theory is called the Growing Block Theory. It depends upon the idea that time is a dimension which is dependent upon gravity and speed of travel. This is called space-time. In the growing block theory, the past and present are real but the future is not yet and there are many possibilities for it.

We finished with a quote from Dylan Thomas.

Time sings

Like the intricately dead snowdrop.

Listen

We meet on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month from 10 – 12noon at Enterprise House. Do come and join us.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP – Report by Pete Redgrave**

### **Still Life**

Given the grizzly weather of late, the Photography group wisely chose to meet in the clement indoor atmosphere of Enterprise House. Members



were requested to bring a range of objets d'art to serve as subjects, and sources of light (angle-poise, torches etc) with which to illuminate them.

Before getting down to business of taking photographs I gave a brief PowerPoint presentation on “The principles of lighting used in still-life photography”; ably assisted by Large Language Model AI. Three basic principles identified were: 1) The fundamental quality of light – hard light coming from a direct source producing sharp high contrast vs. diffuse soft light giving low contrast, and a calm mood 2) The direction of light – from the front flattens subjects; from the side enhances textures and shadows; and from the back can create a rim of light, a silhouette or a translucent subject. 3) Lighting the scene not just the subject – using light or shadow to separate the subject from the background, creating atmosphere, and directing gaze.

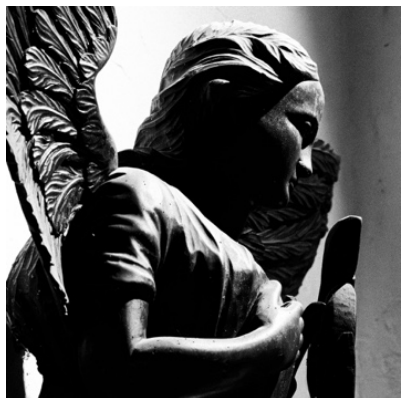
In the rest of the session, we attempted to realise some of these principles ...with some success. Here are a few examples, but more can be found on the following website : <https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipP7auOragf-MrWhfcSRj8RI8vaN8MKtJddFVp22wQw7l-0ntUhrDnBhUspWi3OePw?key=ZjgwdVFmcUF2THc0SE9BM1BGd2w1eUFuLVIRZTJ3>

### **March Report by Alan Kenwright**

#### **Photographs by Robin Taylor, Alan Kenwright, and Pete Redgrave**



On Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, the photography group went to visit the village of Wreay (pronounced “Reah” according to an information panel on the village green), just south of Carlisle. The object of our trip was the village church, built between 1840 and 1842 under the patronage of Sarah Losh, a member of a local land-owning family. She not only funded the building of the church, but was responsible for its design and decoration, even to the extent of personally carving the highly decorated stone font. The church is far from typical of English Victorian churches, owing much to continental



influences, and is full of beautiful details and high-quality materials, which provided many fascinating subjects to photograph, with the added challenge of photographing indoors in relatively low light. Our shots of the exterior of the church and the surrounding village were much easier thanks to cloudless blue skies and real sunshine. I had almost forgotten what that looked like.

Has spring finally arrived?!?

Our next meeting will be a trip to Woodhorn mining museum at Ashington on Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> April.

### **POETRY GROUP – February Report by Robert Alabaster**

This month our theme was animals. In our readings we considered man's division of animals into two categories; those that we treat as friends/ almost human and those that we feel free to abuse or slaughter for pleasure.

Where would we be without William McGonagal? Where indeed He invited us to celebrate the early demise of a giant whale in the north east of Scotland:

"Twas in the month of December, and in the year 1883,  
That a monster whale came to Dundee,  
Resolved for a few days to sport and play  
And devour the small fish in the silvery Tay.

So the monster whale did sport and play  
Among the innocent little fishes in the beautiful Tay  
Until he was seen by some men one day  
And they resolved to catch him without delay."

It goes on... *(It doesn't end well for the whale)*

Lewis Carroll considers the cheerful crocodile:

"How doth the little crocodile  
Improve his shining tail,  
And pour the waters of the Nile  
On every golden scale!  
How cheerfully he seems to grin,

How neatly spreads his claws,  
And welcomes little fishes in  
with gently smiling jaws!"

PGWoodhouse ridicules man's obsession with slaughtering animals for  
'sport':

"A brief suspense and then at last  
The waiting's o'er, the vigil past;  
A careful aim. A spurt of flame,  
It's done. You've pulled the trigger"

Thrushes...may be loved by humans...but Ted Hughes sees them as  
single-minded killing machines. Worms have few champions!

Michael Longley considers the fate of two skunks:

One is "a freshly flattened skunk so pongily alive in death even the magpies  
in the dogwood hesitate". The other is a glass miniature...a gift for his friend,  
to supplement his menagerie of minuscule glass animals atop his TV set.

Ted Hughes' *View of a pig* describes the callous and contemptuous  
treatment of a dead pig...apparently not deserving any respect but merely  
an object-

"The pig set in death seemed not just dead.  
It was less than lifeless, further off."

And to lighten the mood somewhat...Benjamin Zephaniah records the  
endearing indolence of his cat:

"Danny wakes up  
Eats  
Finds a private place in the garden  
He returns  
Plays with the plants  
And sleeps  
Danny wakes up  
Eats  
Watches a nature programme  
Finds a private place in the garden  
Finds Sandy in next door's garden  
Next door's dog finds Danny  
Sandy runs north  
Danny runs home  
Eats  
And sleeps" *repeat*

## March Report by Mike Catling

In my village there is a framed notice that says, 'Friends always welcome, relatives by appointment.' So it was that at our meeting in March the Poetry Group gathered to share a selection of poems on the theme of 'Relatives.'

We began with two humorous apocryphal relatives of Roger McGough, Aunt Ermintrude and Uncle Noah. Having practised in her bath for 18 months, Aunt Ermintrude 'boarded the channel steamer at Dover / went straight to her cabin / climbed into the bath . . . [and] completely nude / swam all the way to France.' In contrast Uncle Noah 'the best hammer-thrower / in Western Samoa' one day forgot to let go and ended up in a crater in Krakatoa; since when 'experts say / of mighty Krakatoa / sunsets have been spectacular.'

The poet, Norman MacCaig, wrote about his relationship with his Aunt Julia who 'spoke Gaelic / very loud and very fast.' MacCaig spoke very little Gaelic and hence their conversation was limited. She lived a crofting life on Scalpay, a small island off the coast of Harris. However, she is remembered with fondness by MacCaig who writes, 'But I hear her still, welcoming me / with a seagull's voice / across a hundred yards / of peatscapes and lazybeds.'

Fleur Adcock, in her poem 'The Video', writes of a young child's response to the birth of her baby sister. The family were all gathered round the bed when Laura was born, including dad armed with a camcorder. Ceri, the older sister, seemingly received less attention from her mother, who now two children to care for, than when she was the only child in the family. 'Ceri played / the video [her father had recorded at the birth] again and again. / She watched Laura come out, and then, / in reverse, she made her go back in.'

In a similar vein, but more personally, Thom Gunn in his poem 'Baby Song', it seems would have preferred to remain in his mother's womb, 'Where it is warm and wet and black,' rather than be 'in a rustling bed / - I lie there, raging, small, and red,' and, 'all time roars outside this room.'

The American poet, William Carlos Williams, remembers his English grandmother ('The Last Words of My English Grandmother') with a degree of fondness despite her rather caustic comments and harsh temperament

caused or accelerated by the ending of her life. As she's taken complaining into an ambulance and driven on her way to hospital the poem ends as she asks, 'What are all those / fuzzy looking things out there? / Trees? Well, I'm tired / of them and rolled her head away.'

From a sense of attachment by Williams to a lack of intimacy is found in Philip Larkin's poem 'Dockery and Son'. Visiting his old college, the Dean tells Larkin that a fellow graduate from the period now has his own son at the college. Larkin reflects on his own solitariness in comparison, 'To have no son, no wife, / No house or land still seemed quite natural. . . . / For Dockery a son, for me nothing.'

Our penultimate poem of the session was a touching memory shared by Pam Ayres in her poem, 'Mother's Apron.' At one time aprons were standard wear for housewives at home and Ayres captured that memory for most of us in the group. The poem ends thus, 'But the greatest of the treasurers / that old apron could hold, / was the endless love from Mother / abiding in each fold.'

We ended the morning with a somewhat melancholy poem by Ogden Nash entitled, 'The Facts of Life.' A father informs his daughter of all the things he is not – an engineer, fireman, Indian chief, aviator, giant, saint, or millionaire. The poem ends as did our morning with the following lines, 'Your doom is to be the daughter / of one as romantic as soapy water / should you like it, you'd overwhelm me, / and if you hate it, please don't tell me.'

The joie de vivre of the Poetry Group continues in April.

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP

Our March meeting was devoted to planning the way forward following the resignation of our convenor, Roy Tranter. The group expressed their thanks and admiration for Roy's many years of conscientious planning. Members were generous with offers of future talks and the programme below was formulated. ***All meetings on 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday, 10am, Witham Room***

| <b>Date</b>  | <b>Chair</b> | <b>Speaker</b> | <b>Topic</b>                                    | <b>Equipment</b>    |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 13 April     | Jenny Selley | Steven Rolt    | Update on the James Webb space telescope        | Standard            |
| 11 May       | Jenny Lee    | Hannah Fry     | (TV documentary, episode 1)<br>Hannah Fry on AI | Standard + Speakers |
| 8 June       | Jenny Selley | Pete Redgrave  | AI Confidential                                 | Standard            |
| 13 July      | David Yeadon | Jenny Lee      | The Nailfile, the Puddle and the Tardigrade     | Standard            |
| 14 September | Jenny Lee    | Ray Lee        | How Fascinating Fungi Shape our World           | Standard            |
| 12 October   | David Yeadon | Ian Royston    | How to paint a ship                             | Standard            |
| 9 November   | Jenny Lee    | Roy Tranter    | tba                                             | Standard            |

### **SCRABBLE GROUP – Report by Ray Thompson**

There were 6 of us who met at Lillian's house for this month's meeting. We split into 2 groups of 3, Team 1 consisted of Ray, Regina and Kate, Team 2 was Lillian, Paula and Monica. Kate won her first game with a score of 244 points and Paula won her game with a score of 238.

We stopped for refreshments of tea and coffee, and were treated to Lillian's delicious homemade Victoria Sponge and biscuits.

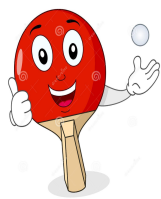
We started our second round with the two winners, and the next runner up in the first group, Paula, Ray, and Kate, and the second group was Regina, Monica and Regina. Ray won his game with 214 points and Regina won hers with 224 points.

Unusually there were no 7 letter words any of the games today.

Thanks to Lillian for hosting and our refreshments.

Our next meeting is on 13<sup>th</sup> April. If you would like to join our group please call Judith on 01833 650150, or text her on 07790 40715

## TABLE TENNIS GROUP – February report by Peter Singer



So, the anticipated tsunami of new members has not materialised to date, despite the success of Marty Supreme, although that might have changed by the time you read this, courtesy of the recent inclusion of our Forum report in The Mercury, for which many thanks. Nevertheless, our little group continues to thrive in its own small way, with 10 or more members turning up every Friday afternoon, meaning we can play doubles continuously and cover the cost of table-hire without causing too much financial anxiety. Changing the players at the end of each game may at times resemble a courtly Elizabethan dance, but we usually manage somehow to cover all possible combinations by the end of our hour of play. To make life easier, we have been thinking of the possibility of acquiring a third table, preferably without incurring great cost – does anyone have a decent table going spare?

Anyway, onto more technical matters, a member asked recently how best to return a back-spin serve, which is a commonly used service action. Back spin, not surprisingly, means that the ball spins backwards or anti-clockwise, just clearing the net and landing with a low bounce. Often, the returner finds their shot landing plumb in the middle of the net (aaargh!). According to coach Tom Lodziak, the stock response is a “touch shot”, also applying backspin, to land the ball short over the net, effectively neutralising the serve and preventing an attacking response. This requires “soft hands”, taking the ball early and opening the face of the bat to stroke down the back of and underneath the ball. The extent to which the bat is opened depends on how much backspin has been applied (the more spin, the more open the bat). There are more aggressive returns, including a “deep push shot” or a backhand or forehand, topspin “flick shot”, but these are more difficult to execute successfully, and it is probably better to master the touch shot first. Lodziak also mentions the “banana” flick and the “strawberry” flick – no? me neither, but maybe we could go all-out for the full fruit salad?

### March 2026

One of the attractions of table tennis as sport/hobby/pastime/social event is that the costs of the necessary equipment do not have to be prohibitive (although, of course, they can be, if you are particularly fashion-conscious or just have no control at all). For example, in our group, the tables, nets

and little white, plastic balls are provided through our relatively modest subscriptions, either £1 or £2 per session, depending on numbers attending and the current health of the kitty. We have a spare bat for general use and the Leisure Centre has some too, although they are very basic, hard bats, of which Marty Reisman (see January report) would approve, but are unforgiving for a beginner. Most of us have gone mad and invested in a bat of our own, priced from a few pounds to perhaps £30 for a half-decent one. As for footwear and clothing, a pair of ordinary, indoor, gym shoes or similar suffices and are probably already owned for other purposes, whilst everyday casual clothing seems to be de rigeur. It's certainly possible to buy dedicated, technical jackets, shirts, shorts, socks, t-shirts and tracksuits and spend a fortune, but you would rather stand out in our company and it could be embarrassing – although yours truly's splendid Hadrian's Wall t-shirt (only £15 from the shop at Chesters Roman Fort, reduced as there are a couple of spelling mistakes on it) gets an outing when the weather (or the body) warms up and I'm more comfortable in common-or-garden Ron Hill trackster trousers than jeans – but we all have our pecadilloes). So, if you're thinking of joining us, a taster session is free and you can probably get started easily enough for under a tenner – and there's not many events you can say that about!

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](mailto: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 February we continued with part 2 of the BBC 'drama documentary' on the "Rise of a Genius – Mozart"

Mozart by 1781 had tired of provincial Salzburg and ventured to Vienna where he was determined to be recognized as a 'great composer', not only in the court of Emperor Joseph II but also throughout all of Europe for Vienna was the artistic, cultural and political capital of the continent. Composers of symphonies, concerti and operas vied to gain favour with the emperor but though Mozart felt himself entitled himself to the top job the court was dominated by Italians such as Salieri and Clementi. On a famous occasion just before Christmas 1781 Mozart belittled Clementi by his flair

and skill at improvisation but as contemptuous and mischievous as Mozart is, the Emperor simply pays him off.

Encouraged by his marriage to Constanze (younger sister of Aloysia Weber) and funded perhaps by a 225 florin 'gift' from Joseph II he set about producing ever-larger concerts by subscription which proved highly lucrative, much more so than a position in court ever could and allowed Mozart both artistic and financial freedom. Mozart quickly became the most celebrated showman and composer in Europe allowing him endless indulgences and the conceit to believe he needed no royal patronage or endorsement.

This led to him taking on Italian opera in the shape of *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), deliberately choosing the controversial work of Beaumarchais which cocked a snook at genteel and aristocratic society. A thinly veiled attack on the upper classes the opera gained short-term critical acclaim but was seen as too rebellious to last long in genteel Vienna.

In the second part of our meeting, still mercifully free from interruptive advertisements we learned a little more of the family of woodwind instruments. In an instructive but at times amusing video we learned that not only are these instruments notoriously difficult to play well, particularly in terms of tonguing technique but also that for the woodwind section to play as one, there is an absolute need to synchronize breathing across the whole section as well as listening carefully to other woodwind players and also the lead strings.

The next meeting is at 10:00 on Friday 27 March at Startforth Community Centre.

**A note from Hazel Yeadon:** Did anyone end up with Disc 1 from *Broadway - The American Musical*, one of the DVDs from Roger's collection. I have Disc 2 (and the case) and it would be nice to get them back together - [hazelyeadon23@gmail.com](mailto:hazelyeadon23@gmail.com)



### **WILDFLOWER GROUP - Report by Anne Thomson**

Members of this group are wild flower enthusiasts ranging from beginners to experienced botanists.

We meet up and amble or saunter at a very slow pace as we are looking in detail at what is around us, spotting and identifying wildflowers both common and rare.

New members are always welcome. Please note that some places we visit are muddy or rocky, so sturdy footwear is advised. We are a friendly group who enjoy ambling along old railways, country lanes, Nature Reserves and wildflower meadows, so come along for a taster session. Our next saunters will be Wednesday, 8th April and Wednesday, 13th May so if you would like to join us for either of these or a future saunter please contact the Group Convenor on [07928 594404](tel:07928594404) or [01833 637044](tel:01833637044).

### WINE GROUP – Report by Tim Meacham



We met at our house in February for our first wine meeting of 2026, tasting a group of French wines currently on sale at Lidl. Instead of our regular multi-choice wine quiz we made use of the “Big Sip Game” kindly donated by a fellow u3a member. This proved to be great fun, if a little more daunting than most of my quizzes!

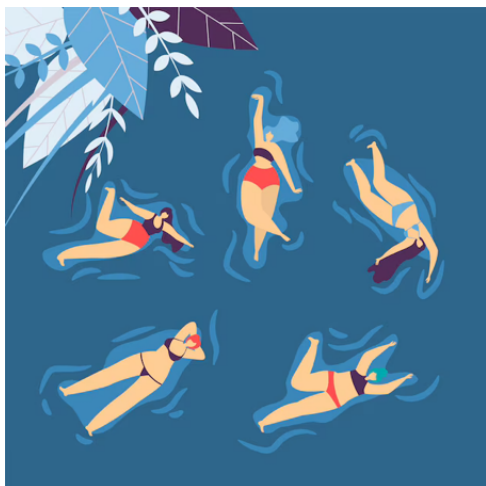
Following mixed experiences with this particular wine recently we gave a second chance to Lidl’s **Cremant de Loire Brut** (£8.99 and 12%) which very much redeemed itself after a less than satisfactory tasting last year. This time all the creamy fizz was present and, even without the smoked salmon recommended as an accompaniment, approval was unanimous. Our first still wine continued the good start. Our **Ventoux Blanc 2024**, a Viognier-based number from Vaucluse (£5.99 and 13%), fully earned its review as “Lidl’s best sub-£7 French white”, marrying a citrusy bouquet with an appealing mineral finish; “bl\*\*dy marvellous”, to quote a succinct second review. By contrast, the expected star performer, a **Chablis 2023** (£14.95 and 12.5%) disappointed rather with its lack of finish. Again, the review got

it right: “Not as much depth as some Chablis I have tried.” The Ventoux wine certainly appealed more despite the price difference.

We moved on to try a **Cotes de Provence Rose 2023** (£8.99 and 13%), a light-coloured blend of Cinsault, Shiraz, Grenache and Mourvèdre grapes which got a more mixed reception. One review curiously spoke of it as “Guava, Passion Fruit, Peach & Apricot, Honey, Gooseberry and Grass on the nose; not particularly memorable.” While accepting the main judgement here, most of us failed to detect the mouth-watering flavours suggested. That left the two reds, both of which helped improve the situation: our Grenache-based blend, the **Cotes du Rhone 2022** (£5.29 and 13%) was a snip at the price, medium-bodied and with a pleasant long finish, but the absolute pick of the pair was the **Cuvee de Brieu 2024** (£8.49 and 13.5% from the Pays D’Oc in SW France), a Syrah-based product which really lived up to its promise of being “rounded and very smooth, with just a touch of tannin”. Even the anti-red brigade acknowledged that this was a very good wine: perhaps the bargain of the day.

On the whole Lidl continues to supply good wines at very acceptable prices. It was a shame about the Chablis.

## WIMMIN' SWIMMIN' GROUP - Report by Annie Clouston



It's surprising what progress can be made in confidence, body positivity and technique at our monthly peaceful swims. Sandra, our gold medal winner, has now achieved both technique and mileage (200 metres or 8 lengths actually) and we are dead chuffed. Others of us are doing our own thing, and there's nothing like being held securely in a gently bobbing bath of warmish water for feeling free and relaxed. Very zen!

A special thanks goes to the staff at Teesdale Leisure Centre who go above and beyond to support us on a Saturday just as the centre is winding down

for the day. Kind and considerate, patient and trustworthy, what more could you ask?

If you are a timid, returning or confident swimmer, this session would suit you. Teesdale Leisure Centre, usually the last Saturday of the month, depending on availability, from 4pm-5pm. £5 per session.

Further enquiries to me 07988 625738 [annie@cloustons.uk](mailto:annie@cloustons.uk), or to book contact Sue Overton 07512 368884 [sueoverton@hotmail.com](mailto:sueoverton@hotmail.com)

## WALKING GROUPS



### 3-4 MILE WALKING GROUP – PECKNELL WOODS Report and photo by Ian Royston



The good news was that the weather was a little warmer and though it had rained intermittently during the morning all was set fair when fifteen of us set off for a circular(ish) walk of just over three miles, starting from Scar Top.

Having been involved in organising walks of a similar distance from the town it's inevitable that there will never be a route which is unfamiliar to any more than a few of our regular walkers, but those who took part acknowledged that it was a change to go 'the other way around', that is anti-clockwise. I've noticed that a bit like Formula 1 all circular walks seem to be taken in a clockwise direction, perhaps it's built into our coding or something?

So, best feet forward we headed downhill (all walks in Barney seem to start downhill and end with a slog back up to the town centre) across the 1893 Tees Aqueduct and along the road to Pecknell Woods. Unlike Formula One however we had to leave the tarmac and progress uphill and through the mud to gain the west (or Yorkshire) end of the old 1863 Tees Bridge. From there we crossed a couple of sheep fields to our first and only real challenge: The arch bridge under the old Stainmore Railway was underwater. The earlier recce had revealed some ponding but now it was wall-to-wall and though it was not terribly deep, at least not quite boot height most of us looked in envy at the one member who had had the foresight to come in her wellies.

We all made it, nobody was drowned and very few of use actually got wet feet. In view of the mud, the slipperiness and the path crumbling beck-wards the option of the narrow path along Scur Beck was not taken and we stuck instead to the metalled road back to Lartington Lane. Of course, we had to go back uphill to the start, though by this time a few who lived in Startforth had decided the extra few hundred metres were not necessary and a somewhat fragmented party made it all the way back to Scar Top.

#### **4-6 MILE WALKING GROUP – Around Auckland Park** **Report and photo by Ian Royston**

Fortune favoured us with dry skies and even a brief appearance of early spring sunshine as five members set out on our "nested figure-of-eight" walk in and around Auckland Park. Conditions underfoot proved considerably kinder than the recce had led us to expect — a small mercy, gratefully received. Pleasingly, two of our number were new to the group, and one

was attending her very first Teesdale u3a activity; we trust the day gave her every reason to return.

Departing from the palace gates, we began with the shorter loop, winding up to the deer shelter familiar to anyone who attended Bishop's *Aglow* event last winter. The path follows the River Gaunless in a gentle, unhurried fashion, and it wasn't long before the sounds of traffic and town fell away entirely.

Returning to our starting point, we crossed into town and descended steeply to pass beneath the Newton Cap Viaduct — a handsome



structure that has reinvented itself from rail to road bridge — before descending onto The Batts, where interpretation boards recall a colourful history of fairs and archery. We followed the Binchester road briefly, crossed the Gaunless near its confluence with the Wear, then turned alongside the deer park wall. This stretch offered the walk's most testing terrain: muddy, undulating, and not entirely forgiving. All five of us, however, remained upright throughout — a small triumph.

We joined a short section of *The Way of Life*, one of the Northern Saints Trails linking Durham Cathedral to Gainford, with ambitions stretching onward to Santiago de Compostela for the truly committed. Our own ambitions extended only as far as the trackbed of the former Ferryhill–Spennymoor–Bishop Auckland Railway, completed by the North Eastern Railway in 1845, closed to passengers in 1952, and finally falling silent for goods in 1966. Here we paused for a well-earned snack.

The stillness was remarkable. With the town barely a mile distant, the traffic had reduced to a faint, almost imagined hum; nothing but open fields stretched to the horizon in every direction.

Walking the old railway, we paused to appreciate the robust Victorian stonework of the accommodation bridges — built simply to allow farmers

continued access to land bisected by the railway, yet constructed with a solidity that has seen them outlast the line itself by sixty years. We followed the old route back towards Bishop, turned alongside the golf course, and concluded a satisfying five-and-a-bit miles in the shadow of the new gardens at Auckland Palace.

### 7-9 MILE WALKING GROUP – Report by Nicky Grace



On February 18<sup>th</sup> 14 of us gathered outside Bishop Auckland town hall for a 7.5 mile walk gleaned from the Ordnance Survey Durham, North Pennines and Tyne & Wear book of outstanding circular walks. The recce had already confirmed that what would be outstanding would be the mud although we were lucky with a dry day which had slightly improved conditions. The walk was a figure of eight starting off with a circuit of the outside of Auckland Park. We soon discovered

quite how hilly Bishop Auckland is as we headed uphill but we were rewarded by fine rural views on the edge of town. Many of the advertised stiles were no longer functioning which made for easier walking as we by passed them or used adjacent gates. We rendezvoused with the missing member of the group appropriately on the former railway line between Bishop Auckland and Spennymoor and the picture above shows us reaching that point.

As ever having gained height, we lost it again as we reached our coffee spot near Jock's bridge and the junction of the River Gaunless and the River Wear. We then had a pleasant stroll by the Wear admiring views of Auckland Castle, Newton Cap Viaduct and bridge. We walked down the road past the Rugby club and then faced the muddy prospect of the suitably

named Broken bank. Despite being on the Weardale way and Camino trail this is poor terrain with a short scramble through brambles to avoid the path going into the river. Having achieved that we splodged straight to Escomb for our lunch stop in the churchyard there. Several took the opportunity to look in the church, one of Britain's finest Saxon churches, although whether to admire the history or to offer a prayer that the route would improve is not known.



We walked up a track, over the railway and along a tarmac footpath beside houses, before a short descent through muddy Broken bank to reach the Rugby club road. Turning right up the hill we were soon back into town for a welcome cup of tea. Sadly even in dry conditions the loop to Escomb is not well maintained so not to be recommended and several walkers are looking forward to a nice fell for the next walk!

Our April walk led by Judith on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Please contact [nickygrace729@gmail.com](mailto:nickygrace729@gmail.com) if you would like to come along.

## **FELL WALKING GROUP – Report by Jim Coleman**

On 28<sup>th</sup> January eleven of us gathered at Mickleton Station car park for a 12-mile walk around Teesdale and Lunedale. I'd like to say the day dawned bright and sunny, but as had been the norm for the previous couple of weeks we were initially met with low-lying mist and dampness. However by the time we set off the sun was threatening to break through and our commitment was subsequently rewarded with clear skies and, for the time of year, reasonably warm temperatures. Later we discovered that most of the local area remained shrouded in mist for the whole day – sometimes climbing hills brings its own rewards!

We began, though, by going *downhill* to Beckstones Wath bridge, more popularly known as the millennium bridge. This 80 metre footbridge, built at a cost of £220,000, was started in 2000 (hence the local name) and formally opened in May 2002, the opening having been delayed because of



the foot and mouth restrictions in place at the time. Before we crossed it we first had to negotiate a nearby field where a spring creates what is usually an easily crossed beck, but had become a swollen river due to January's persistent rain. Once over the bridge we headed towards Middleton-in-Teesdale on the Teesdale Way. Again, this is normally a straightforward part of the walk, but by the end of January parts of the path had become quite eroded, while elsewhere another beck proved challenging because a very simple plank bridge had been washed away. We all made it safely across though with only a few wet feet and soon reached Middleton where we stopped beside the B6277 road bridge for our coffee break. Built between 1810 and 1813 this was the first public road bridge across the Tees.

Coffee over, we walked up the B6277 to the start of the Holwick road, where we branched off for the Pennine Way towards the foot of Harter Fell. From there it is a steady climb of 45 minutes or so until cresting the rise we had lovely views of Grassholme and Selset reservoirs below us. Descending to Grassholme we stopped at the car park for lunch, before continuing along the north bank, eventually coming up to Mickleton road near the Grassholme observatory car park. From there a short walk along the road took us to another footpath leading across some fields until we reached the Tees railway path and so back to the car park – steam train impersonations were optional!

In all we covered 12 miles, ascended a total of 1441 feet, but descended 1627 feet, and got back to our cars exactly 6 hours after setting out.

# COFFEE AND CHAT

Coffee and Chat - Coming up – Thursdays 2.30 – 3.30

Thursday 9 April – Cotherstone Community Café

Thursday 14 May – The Witham Barnard Castle

Thursday 11 June – Picnic and Open Day

Barney Cricket Ground 12.30 - 2pm

## EVERYBODY DESERVES A BREAK FROM THE ARCHERS!

Editor's note: to all those who will miss Annie (she who listens so you don't have to) and her unique reviews of the Archers, apologies. Annie is taking a break because her tolerance of inanity has taken a nosedive and she was in free fall. However, we do have a substitution for her regular spot: **Ask Aunt Norah**. Please write to Norah with issues that you need a fresh take on, advice or non-judgemental support, she will be happy to help. I picked at random this letter from a bulging post-bag (my, my, Teesdale, you do have some thorny issues... )

Dear Norah

The wife is constantly complaining about how much housework she does. I thought she'd be over the moon with the state-of-the-art vacuum cleaner I bought her and even offered to read the manual to her so she could use it properly. But no! she hurled the manual at my head and hasn't spoken to me since. What shall I do to help restore normal marital relations?

Eric

Dear Eric

I am not surprised "the wife" has relegated you to the doghouse. I think you have somehow - and let's be honest, it's a common failing – missed the point of your "the wife's" complaints. I fear that, without a radical personality shift, you will be sleeping on the sofa, eating gruel and have no conversation with anyone other than the dog or yourself for the foreseeable future.

There are however some solutions. Moving out to a Care Home would be one, though a little extreme. Mediation with a skilled conciliator might surface the underlying issues, which frankly begin and end with you being a lazy, sexist selfish slob, and will test out your capacity for change. Your wife may also find some hope in that you have agreed to see a counsellor and at least shed one of the problems of an unreconstructed chauvinist, ie admitting there's a problem.

I hope you won't dismiss this as the rantings of a proto-feminist, for if you do, the doghouse or the Care Home will be your forever home.

Yours in friendship

Norah

After a recent u3a AI workshop led by Prof Pete the editorial team was keen to test out criticisms of AI's usefulness in the interpersonal realm. So we sent Eric's letter to the Chatbot and this was its reply, which may surprise:

**What Went Wrong (Gently Speaking...)** When your wife says she's overwhelmed by housework, she usually means one or more of these:

- She feels **overburdened**
- She feels **it's unfairly on her**
- She feels **unseen or unappreciated**

What she *didn't* mean was: "Please buy me better equipment so I can work more efficiently." And the offer to read the manual — though kindly meant — probably landed as: "Here, let me explain how to do the job you already resent doing." Hence... incoming manual to the head.

### **Step 1: Immediate Damage Control**

Before any practical fixes, you need emotional first aid. Try something like (and this matters): "I realise I completely missed the point of what you were saying, and I'm sorry. I was trying to help, but I can see now it came across as patronising. You're right — the problem isn't the vacuum, it's that you're doing too much."

No defending, no explaining your intentions yet. Just acknowledge impact.

## 🔧 **Step 2: The Only Gift That Actually Helps: You Doing the Work**

If you want to restore marital harmony, the most romantic sentence available is: “I’ll take over the vacuuming from now on.” Even better:

- Pick a few regular chores and **own them completely**
- Don’t “help” — **take responsibility**
- No asking what to do each time (that’s still mental labour for her)

Consistency matters more than heroic one-off efforts.

## 📺 **Step 3: Redeem the Vacuum Cleaner**

The vacuum can still be saved, but only if:

- **You** learn how to use it
- **You** use it regularly
- She never has to touch the manual again

At that point, it becomes a household tool, not a commentary on her workload.

## ❤️ **Step 4: The Bigger Conversation (Later, When Calm)**

Once things settle: Ask (and actually listen): “Do you feel like the housework is mostly on you? What would feel fairer to you?” You may discover it’s not just about chores, but about feeling like a partner rather than a manager of domestic life.

## **In Short (and With Affection)**

You tried to be helpful. She wanted you to be **involved**. Those are not the same thing. Do the chores. Say sorry properly. Retire the manual from active combat duty.

Normal marital relations should resume shortly. 😊



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Front cover picture by Pete Redgrave. It features a gig at Mickleton Village Hall on Saturday 21 February with the Aynsley Lister Band. Mickleton Village Hall has recently purchased a new lighting system, hence the technicolour spectacular. The Village Hall regular host bands, Northern Highlights events, and a fortnightly film club. Always worth having a look at their website for what's occurring.

<https://thevillagehalls.co.uk/mickleton-village-hall/>

| Group                        | Meeting Time               | Contact details               |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Android Group                | 1 <sup>st</sup> Thurs pm   | Martyn Radcliffe 07975 970088 |
| Art Appreciation             | 1 <sup>st</sup> Wed pm     | Tony Seward 01833 630050      |
| Automotive                   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tues am    | Peter Colley 01833 695197     |
| Birdwatching                 | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Mon am     | Andrew Lapworth 07962 038052  |
| Board Games                  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mon pm     | Hazel McCallum 01833 316484   |
| Book Group 2                 | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mon pm     | Maggie Cleminson 01833 640801 |
| Book Group 3<br>Room to Read | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Wed am     | Annie Clouston 01833 637091   |
| Chess                        | 1 <sup>st</sup> Thurs pm   | Diana Marks 07762 626912      |
| Climate Solutions            | 1 <sup>st</sup> Thurs am   | Kate Bailey 07867 683195      |
| Crochet Group                | Varies                     | Hazel McCallum 01833 316484   |
| Cryptic Crossword            | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Wed pm     | Sue Overton 07512 368884      |
| Discussion                   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Fri am     | Glen Howard 01833 631639      |
| Family History               | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Thurs pm   | Alan Swindale 01388 488348    |
| Gardening                    | 1 <sup>st</sup> Fri pm     | Julie Archer 07774 903377     |
| Geography                    | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Thurs 2pm  | Gerald Blake 01833 650899     |
| Geology                      | 4 <sup>th</sup> Mon am     | Bob Tuddenham 07812 378004    |
| Historic<br>Environment      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Thurs am   | Tim Meacham 07847 182554      |
| iPad & iPhone                | 4 <sup>th</sup> Tue 1.30pm | Mike Sweeting 07565 925412    |
| Italian Conversation         | Every Wed am               | Marie Jenkins 07754 205664    |
| Lunch Group                  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Wed noon   | Kate Keen 07880 741151        |
| Needlecraft                  | 1 <sup>st</sup> Mon pm     | Glen Howard 01833 631639      |
| Philosophy                   | 4 <sup>th</sup> Tues 10am  | Ruth Sansom 01325 401850      |

| Group                         | Meeting Time                                 | Contact details                                                                     |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Photography                   | 1 <sup>st</sup> Tues am                      | Alan Kenwright 07731 122399                                                         |
| Pickleball                    | Every Mon pm                                 | Ruth Lapworth 07787 978696                                                          |
| Poetry                        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Wed am                       | Annie Clouston 01833 637091                                                         |
| Science and Technology        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mon am                       | Roy Tranter 01833 638288                                                            |
| Scrabble                      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mon pm                       | Judith Fanner 01833 650150                                                          |
| Rummikub                      | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tues pm                      | Julie Archer 07774 903377                                                           |
| Spanish Conversation          | 3 <sup>rd</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> Fri 10am                     | Ian Royston 07818 046938                                                            |
| Wildflower Group              | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Wed 2pm                      | Anne Thomson 07928 594404                                                           |
| Wimmin Swimmin'               | Saturdays                                    | Sue Overton 07512 368884                                                            |
| Wine Group                    | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Tues pm                      | Tim Meacham 07847 182554                                                            |
| <b>Walking Groups</b>         |                                              |                                                                                     |
| Shorter walks<br>3-4 miles    | 3 <sup>rd</sup> or 4 <sup>th</sup><br>Mon pm | Liz Colley 01833 695197                                                             |
| Walking 4-6 miles             | 2 <sup>nd</sup> Tues 10am                    | Janet Bayles 07887 834346<br>Patrick Neill 07881 811518                             |
| Walking 7-9 miles             | 3 <sup>rd</sup> Wed 10am                     | Nicky Grace<br><a href="mailto:nickygrace729@gmail.com">nickygrace729@gmail.com</a> |
| Fell Walking                  | 4 <sup>th</sup> Wed                          | Jane Johnstone 07771 657440                                                         |

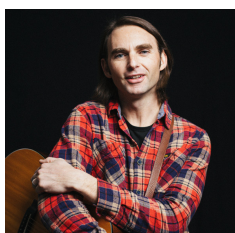
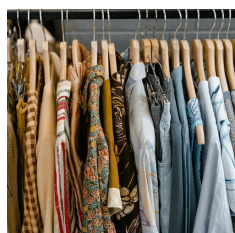
# WHAT'S ON : 2026

## 12 MAR - 22 APRIL

the  
**witham**  
Culture • Community • Commerce

Barnard Castle's Community Arts Centre

[www.thewitham.org.uk](http://www.thewitham.org.uk)



### Showcase Scotland:

Constant Follower & Firelight Trio

Thurs 12 Mar | Folk Music | 7.30pm | £16

### Sam Lewis: Everything's Fine Tour

Fri 13 Mar | Americana Music | 7.30pm | £17.50

### The Witham Wardrobe Sale Fundraiser

Sat 14 Mar | Market | 10am to 2pm

£20 FOR A STALL | FREE ENTRY

### Alasdair Beckett-King:

King Of Crumbs (14+)

Sat 14 Mar | Comedy | 8pm | £20



### Royal Northern Sinfonia:

Brahms String Sextet

Sun 22 Mar | Classical Music | 2pm | £10-£22

### Matt Forde: Defying Calamity (16+)

Fri 27 Mar | Comedy | 7.30pm | £25



### Gary Delaney: Work In Progress (16+)

Thurs 2 Apr | Comedy | 7.30pm | £14

SOLD OUT



### The History Of Rock

Sat 11 Apr | Tribute | 7.30pm | £25

### The Amazing Bubble Science Show

Tues 14 Apr | Family | 2.30pm

£12 Adult | £10 Child | £35 Family (2+2)

### Adventures In Science (6+)

Thurs 16 Apr | Family | 2pm

£16.50 Adult | £14.50 Child | £52 Family

### National Theatre Live: All My Sons (15)

Thurs 16 Apr | Screening | £12-£14

### Pete Firman: Tricks And Giggles (11+)

Fri 17 Apr | Comedy | 7.30pm | £20



### The Choral (15) Shown With Subtitles

Sat 18 Apr | Film | 2pm | £6

### John Otway & Wild Willy Barrett

Sat 18 Apr | Rock Music | 7.30pm | £20

### Royal Ballet & Opera: The Magic Flute

Tues 21 Apr | Live Screening | 6.45pm | £12-£14

### Oysterband's John Jones

With Ray Cooper and Al Scott

Wed 22 Apr | Rock Music | 8pm | £20-£22



**Box Of ce: 01833 631107**

THE WITHAM, 3 HORSE MARKET, BARNARD CASTLE, DL12 8LY