

# Northumbria Region u3a

## The Messenger

### Newsletter – Magazine for October 2024



u3a runners at the Great North Run

An economist is an expert  
who will know tomorrow why  
the things he predicted  
yesterday didn't happen  
today.

Laurence J Peter  
1919 - 1990

## Chair's Report for October

Welcome to the latest edition of Northumbria Region's online magazine, The Messenger.

I hope everyone has had a good summer, enjoyed holidays and generally relaxed. I thought the month of August would be a quiet one for me, but I was still kept busy...so therefore out of mischief!!

I wish to thank Peter Barnett, the Region's webmaster for his excellent work developing the new Northumbria Region's website <https://northumbria.u3asite.uk/>. u3as in the Region have been migrating their websites from Sitebuilder to Siteworks and as far as I am aware everything is going to plan. However, as Northumbria Region u3a is classed as a formal Network, not an individual u3a, our new website has had to be built from scratch. It has been a huge undertaking. **Thank you, Peter.**

Mary Barlow, editor of the Messenger was very pleased with the response from many u3as, as the last edition was one of the largest produced. Many u3as sent in articles. Thanks very much ... long may it continue.

Northumbria Regional Committee has not had a Committee Meeting since July, so at the Regional Committee in the middle of September there was a lot to catch up on, especially the arrangements for Northumbria Region's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary taking place, late October at the Little Haven Hotel, South Shields. It's been a massive undertaking organising this event. The Vice Lord Lieutenant for Northumberland, Stuart Birkett and the newly appointed CEO of the Third Age Trust, Ian Cassidy are both attending.

The Regional Events Team are constantly working hard behind the scenes. They are organising events around the Region, but they are now organising a few workshops. The Newsletter Workshop in September was a great success and there will be a Zoom workshop hosted by National u3a in November. There's a flyer about registering for this in the magazine. This workshop is for every u3a member, not just for those on Committees. A further two workshops are being looked into, so when details are finalized, they will be advertised.

The Regional Quarterly Meeting in October 2024 will be via Zoom. It's been decided that the January 2025 Regional Quarterly Meeting will be at Gateshead Metro Centre.

**Cecilia Coulson 25/9/2024.**

### **Short Story Competition**

We are delighted to include in this issue the winning short story followed by the two runners up stories.

#### **The Winner**

#### **The Storm**

**By Olivia Neigh, Newcastle u3a**

Fiona was the first to cancel, phoning from her home at the coast:

'It's pouring here Rosie darling. Little Leander will be drenched before we reach our garage. Big hugs for Joe from both of us.'

Then her brother James:

'The sidings have collapsed. We could come over the bridge but don't want to risk it, you know with the baby, and getting back could be tough? Wish 'Happy Birthday' to Joe. Catch you soon.'

Outside the rain had turned to hailstones, so strong it forced those awful bird-droppings down the chimney. The house inside was grey, lightless. What a day to celebrate a sixth birthday.

Joe walked round the food table. Rosie didn't tell him not to nibble, knowing that if the weather continued like this there would be no guests anyway. The local news informed her the High Street was flooded and was to be avoided; this was the only access to her house. She sighed, praying the rain would stop, got up and put on the lamps,

The table was laid with sausages in bacon, ham and cheese sandwiches, cupcakes. She'd opened packets of crisps, hula hoops and those marmite sticks. Pizza slices and quiche were cooked and ready to eat. Rosie's eyes fell on the huge bowl of fresh salad which would never keep. She'd thrown away all the

packaging. Looked like the only winner would be Asda! She remembered the 'Big Six' cake hidden in the top cupboard. It was baked to feed twenty and now it looked like two. What a lot of work for nothing; drat the weather.

Joe said: 'Can we play on my swing soon?'

Outside the sky lit up, a huge zigzag of lightning, then a deep far way rumble of thunder. A real storm was now directly overhead. The noise of hail increased as the pellets danced in her grate, sprayed black dot onto the carpet, soaked sliding doors to the garden, forced their way through that draughty gap in the window frame. Joe's Birthday Surprise, a new blue swing was shrouded in low murky cloud; little more than a cumbersome shape, stranded on a water-logged lawn. Flowers, she'd so lovingly tended, drooped their heads accepting their fate: they had had it! A bunting stretched across the narrow side of a fence, told her guests in red and blue 'Happy Birthday Joe', now too hung limp, washed out, uninviting.

'Mummy, can I go out and play?' Joe was standing wellington boots in hand.

The phone rang, it was her boyfriend Dave:

'I'm stranded Love, so sorry. I've the presents wrapped up here in the hall. Tell Joe I'll make it up to him later. Love you.'

'Fat chance.' thought Rosie. How could she break the news to Joe that there was not going to be a party. No children were coming to play, and worst of all, that dripping swing, she couldn't let him out to play on, was his only gift? A black thought entered her head; perhaps a real catastrophe would be easier to handle? Then it wouldn't be just about her and Joe – this mess wouldn't be her fault. Again, she'd relied too much on others and had no plan 'B'. There never was with Rosie. She felt neglectful, guilty.

'I'll have a cup of tea to steady my nerves, give me time to think.'

Rosie clicked down the switch on the electric kettle – nothing. She noticed it was darker, tried the main light – nothing, reading lamps – nothing. The outside security light was off also. She panicked: 'What about the T.V. - it too was lifeless. She ran upstairs to try her small portable radio. She hadn't used it for months, but she had batteries. Yes, they were in the drawer. Rosie lifted the antennae for a signal, twirled the knobs; only hissing and interference. She found 'Radio Newcastle'. A News Bulletin informed that:

**Much of the City has been affected by a severe storm. A Red Alert is issued, and residents are asked not to panic. We stress that the situation is under**

**control. Help will be available in your area. Repeat Help will be coming to your area. Residents of the following post codes are advised to move themselves and precious belongings to a higher floor.**

Her post code was listed with advice that residents should wait for emergency services to assist rescue. Outside, her path was swimming in about two inches of muddy brown water.

'Ugg – it was from overflowing drains,' 'My new settee, it'll be ruined and my carpets! She looked at Joe who seemed so tiny. It hit her then that an eight stone woman and a little boy would not be able to save much.

Rosie had wished for a way out and now the genie was out of the bottle. Outside the water had reached her front door, but she had time to salvage something. It was then Joe started to cry huge plopping tears that had welled up in his eyes. He was trembling.

'Not now Joe.' she scolded, but it was no use. She put her arms around him, though her rescue plan played over in her head. First she must turn up the volume on the radio in case she missed instructions.

'What is it Joe, what's upsetting you?'

He wouldn't speak but clung to her like a limpet. He wasn't letting go, so the two, plus radio climbed the stairs in a crablike cuddle. Joe spoke:

'There's a slug, Mummy, it's come through our front door – it was floating. Are all creatures going to die? Is it the end of the world, like they talked about on the news?'

A tear trickled down Rosie's cheek. This was too much and she'd expected so much from today. Joe was terrified by those fanatics from London.

She explained that when she was a little girl, people had preached that the world would end, but it never had: 'Look Joe, I'm still here. That's not it at all. Listen to the radio: the man is telling us there is flooding in our city. He is telling us what to do to make ourselves safe.' They listened:

**Rescue Operations are under way the west side of the city. The local stream has burst its banks affecting local properties. All householders are advised to**

**move to upper floors. To assist rescue teams could residents show that they are home by hanging something orange or yellow from their upper windows. Rescue vehicles are on their way. Do not leave your homes. Loose debris can be dangerous. The sewerage is overflowing, and this is a health hazard.**

Joe, still young enough to trust his mum totally, and with the idea of the slug off this chest, rallied with:

'There's my Soft Play 'T' Shirt Mummy. It's 'High Viz' Yellow! We must make our flag.'

'Yes,' answered Rosie, 'Good idea' 'Now what can be secure it with?'

Joe lifted his hand, just like he was at school: Jumping on the spot as he made his suggestion.

'My bow Mummy. Let me do it – this is a real adventure!'

He deftly unfurled the string, threading it through his bright 'T' shirt. Rosie tied a knot for him and anchored it back in place, attaching the string to the bow with extra tape. It was a good flag, taut and securely fixed.

Now they had to hang it from a window. Together they hung the bow from the knob of a bedpost, opened Rosie's front window and hung the shirt on its string outside. The wind picked it up immediately blowing it wide for rescuers to see. Rain gushed in soaking a pillowcase. They closed the window trapping 'T' Shirt flag and bow string outside.

'Can we can eat the party food? Can we bring it up here? All the lemonade and we mustn't forget the Big Six cake. Don't forget its hidden in the top cupboard?'

Rosie smiled, ruffled Joe's hair.

In no time a wonderful array of goodies were laid out on the special party cloth on the bed in Rosie's bedroom. There were matches for the candles, drawing books and crayons. Big Ted was taken from his seat by the window to join the tea. The scene was an overflowing bazaar. With one eye on fun and another searching for the rescue services the two of them had their party.

'This must be the most exciting party ever!' said Joe

## **Life Afloat**

**By Dorothy Hullah, South Durham u3a**

I suppose I have a strange kind of existence; you see I have lived on a converted narrow boat all my life; you may not find that unusual or strange to be fair, but my life is very strange and unusual. My family and I travel the length and breadth of what I suppose is Great Britain, you see for some years now there isn't actually any land to see, it has long since disappeared under the water. My father tells of a time when he was young when the narrow boats would traverse along manmade canals which would cut through the rolling countryside.

But since the polar ice caps melted with global warming things changed drastically. Great Britain was blanketed under permanent rain our rivers breached their banks and after a while it was clear that the waters would not be receding.

Life afloat is the norm for me, finding out the places that food can be found. Supermarkets which are now on the sixth floor of high-rise buildings diesel and petrol stations inside huge plastic bubbles, that's of course if there is any food or petrol to be had. That is why father converted the barge to have sails so that we could save our fuel and take advantage of the strong winds that accompanied some of the storms.

Don't get me wrong, life is not all doom and gloom, although there is a fair share of both in my life, but life afloat can be exciting and dangerous in equal measures.

For instance, a couple of days ago the rain was particularly heavy and made the waters quite choppy. It took all of my father's strength to hold the boat on a straight course.

We had heard of a place nearby where the waters had receded a bit to reveal the top mansard tower of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century chateau. It was an outing just so we could touch base with an actual bit of history.

As we neared the tower, we could see that we were not the only ones with the same idea. Father is very wary when encountering strangers in this way, so we made our way around to the far side of the tower so that we could moor up away from the other boat.

I begged father to allow me to climb onto the mansard roof to actually feel something solid under my feet. At first, he refused saying it was too dangerous.

But after a considerable bit of nagging on my part he said that I could as long as I stayed in sight of the boat and didn't stray anywhere near the other visitors.

It didn't take me long to scramble over the side of our boat and onto the lead mansard roof. The windows in the mansard stood proud of the water and I was able to look inside. The sight that greeted me was heart stopping. The void was filled to the top with water held back by the windows. After a bit of manoeuvring, I managed to leave the window open a bit which allowed the water to flow out. Soon the inside of the tower revealed a stunning painted ceiling.

The disturbance to the water in the tower had caused an uplift of items which had been trapped floating in a suspension of water for years. To my right I caught sight of a brown furry object as it broke the surface only an arm's length away from me. I stretched my arm through the window into the space to try and reach it, but it bobbed just out of reach. I glanced back towards our boat and noticed that there was no one on deck so I decided to slip into the space through the open window. Now everyone is screaming at me to stop and that it is the most stupid thing to do, but I was set on retrieving the object that was bobbing just out of arms reach.

The water was freezing inside the tower, and it felt incredible to be inside a building, I tentatively lay on my back so that I could look up at the beautiful ceiling. Small cherubs smiled back at me through watery eyes or peeped through fluffy clouds. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. As I flapped my arms and hands under the water to maintain my floating position the brown fluffy thing brushed the side of my face. I made a grab for it as it swirled past. To my joy it was a small brown bear with blue glass eyes. Around its neck was a red silk ribbon. I had now been treading water for a while and I was beginning to feel tired. I swam towards the window but was shocked to see that it was closed. On the other side of the glass a strange boy watched me with a sinister smirk on his face.

I felt instantly afraid and knew that I wouldn't be able to tread water for much longer. I shouted for him to open the window and let me out. His face contorted into a menacing leer as he slowly shook his head. I swam to the edge just under the window and was able to cling to the windowsill, at least I could rest and try again to persuade the boy to open the window and let me out.



What seemed an age passed with the boy steadfastly holding the window shut, then I could hear voices, it was my father shouting for me to return to the boat. I heard him call to the boy asking if he had seen me, the boys reply sent shivers down my spine, as casually as you like he turned to my father and told him that he hadn't seen me. Panic took hold and I began to scream and shout at the top of my lungs. I heard my father climbing onto the tower roof and approach the boy. As he got closer the boy scuttled off towards his boat laughing. The next thing I saw was the face of my father filling the window. Relief and shame flooded through me. I had broken the cardinal rule of life afloat. I had put myself in great danger by crawling into a space that would be difficult to get out of, and for what, a small stuffed toy.

Father could see that I was frightened and immediately released the window and helped me out. He was silent as he pulled me through the window and into his arms which made me feel even worse. "I'm sorry father" I whispered into his chest. "I know you are" was his curt reply.

As the rain began to fall in ever increasing torrents, we made our way back to our boat. As we climb back on-board father looked at the small fluffy brown bear I was still clutching and said "I hope that your life was worth it"

But of course, to me it was, it would be something I would treasure for the rest of my days. Life afloat was boring, mundane but it was times like this that punctuated my existence with hope that perhaps things would change, that the waters would drain away and that we could look forward to life on dry land as our ancestors had, before they had ruined the atmosphere with greenhouse gases and woeful disregard of our fragile planet.

## **A Walk in the Rain**

**By Leigh Murphy, Cramlington u3a**

I yawned my best yawn of the day and stretched out from my nose to my tail. My name is Arthur and I'm a ten year old golden retriever.

It seems early but nevertheless it must be time to get up. Outside I can hear the birds singing the dawn chorus. They are making such a racket with their twittering and chirping it's a wonder everyone wasn't already awake.

I live with my best pal, Dougal. He's a senior west highland terrier with a little shih tzu in his mix and he keeps me right. I don't know what I would do without him.

He is also awake but pretending not to be. He prefers his bed and the crumpled up blankets he's made into a comfy nest. He often hides treasures in there too. He collects essential things from the kitchen cupboards during the night. These can be anything from bags of flour, boxes of rice Krispies to packets of tealights and tea bags. It's quite impressive considering he has no teeth.

It's not daylight yet but I'm sure there's a glimmer of light behind that very grey cloud so it must be time to get up. I need to wake my master so from the deepest depths of my chest I bark my loudest bark. It's so loud I can hear the glassware hum. I'm so proud of that bark. Now Dougal joins in. Not with a bark but with shrillest howl you have ever heard. It puts your teeth on edge.

Yes, I can hear him coming downstairs now. Oh dear he's not very happy. He hasn't got his socks on which means he's not ready to get up yet. Dougal and I cease the noise and listen to him shout, "Do you know what time it is? It's still dark! Too early! Go back to sleep!"

He goes back to bed. We wait for ten minutes before we start again.

Here he comes again, maybe this time? .... No socks, bother. But this time we go upstairs with him, and we climb on the bed where my mistress is sleeping. Dougal gives her a gentle lick on the hand. She can't resist and he gets a special cuddle.

My bladder is growing like a football so we can't stay here for much longer. I lick my master's hand, but he's still not impressed. He turns over, away from me.

Through the bedroom blinds I can see it getting lighter so now we must go for our morning stroll. I come to my master's head and make another impressive bark. This time Dougal joins me. My master elevates a few inches off the bed. Ahah the bedclothes are pulled back.

At last, he's putting on his socks.

When we are leashed, and our owners are dressed we leave the house. Sniffing the fresh air, I can tell if we will be getting wet on our walk this morning. I suspect we will but I'm not letting my master know or he'll cut our walk short.

Theres dew on the grass so it must have got cold during the night. This means "Heaven!". I dive into the green, damp grass and throw myself onto my back. I wriggle and jiggle and kick my legs in the air. I can feel a soft, cool layer of wetness get through my thick coat and onto my skin. Oh, it feels wonderful. After a few moments of pure bliss my master raises his voice for us to move on.

I am now wet through and pale green. Not to worry it'll be fine. I have magical hair and water just runs off me. I don't know about the green though.

My master just looks at me and shakes his head. He's smiling and I know he doesn't mind. He says, "Oh Arthur, you must be the only dog in this park that does that, daft lad". I feel so loved.

We walk on and the wind picks up a northerly breeze. It feels chilly and I wish I hadn't got myself quite so wet. Dougal isn't impressed. He scrunches up his eyes and sticks out his snout as the breeze ruffles the hair on his face. He walks a little faster and strains his lead. He wishes to be home and warm again.

We have reached the park with the football pitch. We must be about halfway through our walk now. The sky has become darker, and the wind is stronger. The trees are being whipped up and leaves and little branches are being tossed about.

My owners have pulled their woolly hats down and put up their hoods. Their pace has increased, and I have to pick up my paws just a little. I hate to be rushed.

We leave the park and walk past the school. At this point we are freed from our leads. Dougal and I get a chance to explore the bushes. There are so many messages from the overnight wildlife visitors. Of course we must answer them all.

I look up and notice my owners are ahead. It starts to rain.

I hear my master call our names and we run to them. The droplets of rain are large, and puddles are quickly forming on the path. I can see its not appreciated by all, especially not by Dougal. The rain is getting heavier.

Our leads are put on and we head towards home.

We've walked this route since I was a puppy. Every post, gate and blade of grass is familiar to me. We meet other regular dogwalkers and their dogs. We exchange sniffs and nods. I usually get a head pat and if I'm lucky a treat, but not today.

Theres not a lot of conversation between our master and mistress, they are concentrating on getting home and having one of their cups of tea.

My master steps into a puddle as he steps off the curb. It was deeper than his shoe. He groans and shakes his foot. He's going to need another pair of socks.

He is not impressed and is now squelching and limping. I notice my mistress is hiding her face in her scarf and tries not to laugh out loud. But her shoulders are shaking, and her eyes are wrinkled. At least she can see the funny side.

We're on the home straight now and the rain has stopped. In fact, the wind has dropped and there is blue sky. By the time we reach our front door it is really quite pleasant.

Perhaps we could go out again? No, my master needs to change his socks. Anyway, once we're inside its time for breakfast!

Dougal and I are so very, very hungry. Dougal and I are so excited we must let our owners know by a reprise of our morning chorus.

After a large drink of water and emptying our bowls, our bellies are full and we are very satisfied. Its nap time. Dougal finds a sun ray by the French doors, lies down and instantly falls asleep. I like to lie on the cool tiles between the kitchen and the dining room. I completely block the doorway, but I can keep one eye on everything going on.

Its quiet time now. After all, we need to catch up our sleep after that very early start.

### **Birdwatching**

Since the inception of U3A in France and the uptake of the idea by the 3 founding members Peter Hazlitt, Michael Young, and Eric Midwinter in 1981, the University of the Third Age has developed beyond all expectations. Likewise Birdwatching has changed with the times; In the 1800s people like Hancock and Backhouse, if they saw a bird they didn't recognise it was shot and the specimen examined. The motto at the time was 'what's hit is history and what is missed is mystery'!

The Hancock Museum is full of the stuffed corpses of rare visitors, a poor welcome indeed.

Nowadays improvements in photography have made shooting unnecessary, also Smart Phones which can fit into the inside pocket or handbag have made bird books superfluous. They have Apps that can recognise bird songs, also pictures of the birds, and details of their habits. These are very useful for beginners. It is far more satisfying to identify birds by memories of previous encounters. Like other U3A activities, birdwatching is often more enjoyable when done in the company of friends.

Colin Freeman – South Tyneside u3a

## Lindisfarne Field Trip



As a follow up to our one-day archaeological workshop at Durham University back in June, on Saturday 21st September 14 members from across the Northumbria Region went to Lindisfarne to visit the Durham University/Dig Ventures excavations adjacent to the ruins of the medieval Benedictine Priory.



Our host was project director Dr David Petts from Durham University. This is the 7th season of digging at this site. David began by taking us up to the Heugh and giving us a short and succinct history of the island from the first settlers through into the early modern period, and putting the current dig into perspective, primarily focusing on the early medieval period as what they are digging is a cemetery of this date.

We then visited two of the trenches where we had a more in-depth explanation of the visible



features found and of the skeletons that were currently being uncovered. Following this it was off to site HQ where the finds were being cleaned and catalogued ready for expert analysis. The vast majority of material was of course human bones amongst which we shown two beautiful 8th century name markers.

So, it is thanks from us to the whole dig team for a wonderfully informative visit and follow up to our day back in June at Durham.

Dave and Vivienne Fleet - Coquetdale u3a



## Great North Run



A group of volunteers got together at Newcastle u3a on Saturday to welcome the runners from all over the country who were doing the race on behalf of the u3a. The actual day of the race it was absolutely pouring with rain, and this wonderful band of u3a members were out and about along the route of the race at Newcastle, Heworth and South Shields etc to raise the profile of the u3a and support the runners. The two hardy gentlemen for Blyth u3a were at South Shields very early on the Raceday in thick mist to raise the u3a banner, and then telling all who passed by the benefits of joining the u3a. They all got very wet, but with smiles on their faces did a great job representing the North East u3a groups.



Jean Cubbin – Trustee for the North East



### **A Regional Newsletter Workshop**

A Regional Newsletter Workshop was held in the middle of September at Gateshead Library. A u3a Newsletter Workshop hasn't been held for over 6 years. Members from the following u3as attended. Cestria, Caer Ufra, the newly formed Durham and District, Ashington, Cramlington, Whickham and Bishop Auckland. Alnwick u3a's Newsletter Editor sent in a report about the organisation of their Newsletter.

It was a very informal workshop. It was to enable members to learn from each other.

#### **It was a success.**

Members used various methods of organising their newsletters ...Word, Microsoft, Publisher and PowerPoint. Some newsletters were professionally printed, some printed on printers at home, some not printed, but only sent out via email online. It was identified that a generic template needed to be sourced – this is now being looked into via National.

Many other points were chewed over .... concern about members not reading emails, therefore not reading the Newsletter. Many hours are involved in producing a Newsletter. Newsletter Editors had problems getting members to send in articles for Newsletters. Val from Bishop Auckland gave everyone sight of their 'leaflet instructions' for sending in information to their Editors. (they have two). The future of a hard copy Newsletter was discussed. It was thought this will not be viable in the next few years.

Members felt this workshop was extremely beneficial as topics other than their Newsletters were chatted about. Conversation just flowed e.g. concept of taking photos for advertising, the problems of getting a member to volunteer for anything and so much more.

As I was so busy; this Newsletter Workshop was full on, I was guilty of something everyone does. I forgot to take a photo. I preach to everyone that a photo tells a thousand words and it does.

Everyone wanted another workshop in 6 months' time, they found it so beneficial. Watch this space for a date in March 2025 for another workshop.

Cecilia Coulson



## NR u3a Tours of 'Turner: Art, Industry and Nostalgia'



Some of NR u3a members recently embarked on an enlightening journey through the captivating world of J.M.W. Turner exhibition 'Turner: Art, Industry and Nostalgia' at the Laing Art Gallery.

Over the course of eight engaging sessions, approximately 170 members took part in an exploration that celebrated Turner's revolutionary contributions to the art world, showcasing his distinctive ability to entwine beauty with the industrial changes of his time.

This exhibition, which brilliantly juxtaposes Turner's work with items from the National Gallery's collection, offered a unique perspective on the dialogue between art and the burgeoning industrial landscape of 19th-century Britain. Our tours delved into Turner's masterful use of light and colour, his innovative techniques and the emotions that his pieces evoke, providing members with a deeper understanding of the artist's vision and the societal context in which he worked.





I thoroughly enjoyed each of the tours in great company. Members were not only engaged and curious about the exhibits but also took the initiative to contribute their own insights and information, enriching the collective experience so that each visit became a collaborative exploration of art.

We were also thrilled to welcome prospective members, a guest from the U.S.A. and even a member from Sheffield u3a further enhancing the sense of community within our u3a.

Thank you to all the members for coming along and contributing to make each of the tours special. A big thank you also goes to the NR u3a Committee and the Events' Team, members of which supported the tours by being guides on some of the days we met. Your efforts were much appreciated. The Laing staff were also very helpful during each tour.

Together, we have not only explored Turner's legacy but also celebrated the joy of learning and connection within our u3a community. I am looking forward to future cultural adventures!

Catherine Stevenson - Newcastle u3a and IGO

### **u3a Festival 24<sup>th</sup> July, York University**



How lucky was the u3a to hold the first national festival with such fabulous weather! The Campus is based in beautiful parkland and we were in the Science area around the lake.

There was a sense of excitement as members started to gather on Thursday morning. With a number of sessions running, it was straight into 4 sessions before the dinner on the first night. I enjoyed a lecture on gardening & wildlife with a RHS gardener. Swiftly followed by a craft session, and after dinner, a

band and a mega quiz.

Friday was the full day and for many members the perfect choice for a one-day experience. Over 900 members arrived, and the energy and enthusiasm was buzzing. It was also the hottest day, and many of us had to escape into the grounds to cool off under the trees and look over at the lake and the fountain. To entertain us, unexpectedly, Strictly Come Dancing were filming with a live band on the other side of the lake.



This was when I was making my fresh flower crown. I'm no florist or flower expert, but I was so pleased with the results: The whole group were photographed the results of which I'm sure will appear on TAT website and in TAM. How spectacular were the 30 versions of the crown.

I also called into the Concert room and was entertained by a variety of music. The u3a has so many talented musicians. It was cool and glorious to spend a couple of hours there.

There were many sporting opportunities to choose from too, throughout the 3 days, from walking netball to croquet, and lots in between, with the University Sports complex nearby. I stuck with Invigorating Yoga on Saturday morning.

Then, all too soon, it finished. It felt like we'd been cocooned in this lovely university, talking to members who'd come from all parts of the country, with their different accents, experiences and interests all coming together to learn, laugh and enjoy being members of u3a. Thanks to all the organisers, volunteers and deliverers of the sessions. It was a wonderful experience.

Looking forward to the next one.

Felicity Pullen – Prudhoe and District u3a

## Regional Quiz Organised by South Durham on 27<sup>th</sup> June

100 members of u3as from all over our area joined us at Hurworth Grange for our summer quiz. The weather was very kind to us and the sun shone as we all gathered together.

Once again Dave Tucker supplied us with a brilliant quiz, and the outcome was that the five gentlemen from **Hartlepool** won the first prize and were thrilled with their trophy and the gift of chocolates they received. They obviously had a great advantage as men can always answer the sports questions! The loser's title was decided by 2 penalty questions, but in the end **Bedale Group 3** 'won' the title and the fantastic wooden spoons that had been decorated by our own Dot Hullah. They were received with much hilarity, but it was all taken in good fun.

We were happy to receive a lot of kind words from our visitors and promises they will see us again in November! Note for your calendar - Wednesday 27th November for the Christmas Quiz.







South Durham u3a

### **Our Weekend Away 28<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024**



The weekend away was arranged by Seaham Harbour u3a and we were joined by members of our sister u3a, Seaham and District. A total of 39 members took part, accompanied by our wonderful driver Steve, whose driving skills would come into play as the weekend progressed.

Our journey by coach took us south to Oxford, the city steeped in history and renowned for its prestigious universities and captivating architecture. Some folk

chose to wander the quaint streets and revel in the ambience that inspired the magical world of Harry Potter and was home to Inspector Morse. Some elected to visit the exquisite Ashmolean Museum, an experience not to be missed. By chance some members even spied the Emperor and Empress of Japan coming out of the Bodleian Library. (Perhaps he was returning some books he had borrowed whilst studying at Merton College in 1983. The Empress studied at Balliol College). Continuing our journey south we arrived at the Hilton Hotel, Reading for our two nights stay. Some of our more energetic souls went swimming before dinner others took liquid refreshments.

Saturday dawned a beautiful sunny, but not too hot day. We travelled to Hever Castle experiencing some very heavy traffic and Steve showed us how he could turn the coach on a 'sixpence' as someone had most inappropriately placed their advertising banner on a church fete across the road sign to Hever.



Hever Castle was the childhood home of Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry V111. Their daughter became Queen Elizabeth 1. The castle is a moated 13<sup>th</sup> century castle filled with 16<sup>th</sup> century furniture and tapestries. Over the centuries the castle fell in disrepair. In 2903 it was acquired and restored by the American millionaire William

Waldorf Astor. His Italian garden is breathtaking and displays his collection of statuary. Over 1000 men worked on the garden design and around 800 men took two years to hand dig the 38 acre lake. In 19893 the Astor family sold the castle to the Guthrie family.

Sunday saw us heading north from the hotel to Bletchley Park, home of the codebreakers of World War 11, and one of the best kept secrets of the war. We were to learn how the achievements of the codebreakers helped shorten the war by two years. The organisation started in 1939 with one hundred and fifty staff but its numbers grew rapidly until nearly ten thousand people worked in the Bletchley Park organisation. A small group of Americans were also involved. Famous codebreakers included Alan Turing, Gordon Welchman and Bill Tutte.

Dilly Knox and Nigel Gray had started their code-breaking careers during the Great War of 1914 – 1918

The team worked tirelessly trying to break the German coded messages. They famously devised machinery to help with decryption, which speeded up the process considerably. “Colossus”, was the world's first electronic computer. Their work in breaking the coded messages sent through the German “Enigma” machine, saved a great many lives.

A fascinating end to an enjoyable weekend.

Gordon Ayre – Seaham Harbour u3a

### **Northumbria Groups Coordinators network**

The coordinators meet approximately monthly on Zoom to discuss anything connected with their role, including asking any questions or getting advice on problems they may have. Mo Brown is there to help us not to stray from official u3a policy or advice, and notes from the meetings are circulated afterwards to everyone who has said they are interested. So if you are a Groups Coordinator who hasn't yet signed up for this, why not give it a try? Or if the Groups Coordinator of your u3a doesn't know about this network, please tell them! Attendees report that it's really helpful to get the opinions, suggestions and ideas of others who have been in the same boat.

The meetings are on different days and at different times to suit the participants. The next one is on Tuesday November 5th at the slightly odd time of 11.35 am for a chat or 11.50 for the start of the business, and it'll finish by 1.15 pm. To receive the Zoom connecting details beforehand and/or the notes afterwards, email Kathy on [u3a.prudhoe@gmail.com](mailto:u3a.prudhoe@gmail.com).

Kathy Clegg – Prudhoe u3a

**ETERNAL FATHER...**  
**The Astronauts' Hymn**  
***Families' version***

Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm doth bind the restless waves  
Of radiation, solar flares,  
The isolation of their fears.  
A light Divine to those who face  
The endless, timeless night of Space.

O Saviour, whose almighty word  
The winds and waves submissive heard,  
Bring ordered calm to stormy waves  
Of elemental cosmic rays  
That stream across Creation's face  
Endangering all who sail in Space.

O Holy Spirit, who didst brood  
Upon the waters dark and rude,  
Who walked the Sea of Galilee,  
Walk now with those who trust in Thee  
To calm their fears; Thy love embrace  
All those in peril deep in Space.

O Trinity of love and pow'r,  
Your children shield in danger's hour  
From fiery impact, alien foe;  
Protect them where-so-e'er they go;  
From Earth lift-off to Lunar Base,  
Then Mars and onward, conquering Space.

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Years ago I had the privilege of sitting inside the co-pilot's seat of NASA'S 2-man GEMINI Space Capsule which once circled the Earth in orbit. Closing my eyes, I pretended to be one of its original occupants, and felt a fear of the unknown and the sense of isolation that led me now, years later, to my present hymn.



## **April 2025 will be the month of the Northumbria Region u3a's AGM**

**This notice is asking all u3a members to consider becoming a member of Northumbria Region u3a's Committee.**



**Why, several reasons:**

- 1. At the moment there are only seven members on the Committee.**
2. Next year, 2025 **the Chair, Business Secretary and Membership Secretary** will all have completed their length of time they are allowed to serve in their roles and therefore have to stand down, according to the Northumbria Region u3a Constitution. It has been said that the Constitution could be changed, yes it could, but none of the trustees, who are standing down, wish to serve another year in their roles, although they would give it some thought to still remain on the Committee.
- 3. Unless a member comes forward to be Chair of the Northumbria Regional Committee it will have to dissolve.**
4. According to our Constitution the number of trustees shall be not less than 5 and not more than 12. If the three trustees no longer stand for re-election as trustees of the Committee, there will only be 4 trustees. **So again, the Committee will have to dissolve.**

Northumbria Region u3a, as many of you know, is a formal Network of 47 u3as in the North East and North Yorkshire. The objective of the Network is as follows as per the Constitution.

Object 3.1 The Network's object (the 'Object') is the advancement of education and in particular the education of older people and those retired from full time work, by all means including associated activities conducive to learning and personal development in the Network Area, in particular by providing support and assistance to the u3as in the Network Area.

**If any further information is required please contact Cecilia Coulson, Chair on 07881768301 /email [cecu3a@gmail.com](mailto:cecu3a@gmail.com)**





## **'Keeping it Legal'**

**A Zoom presentation by National u3a, specifically organised for members of Northumbria Region u3a**

### **What does it cover?**

Information about the key areas all u3as need to be aware of and understand –

1. Insurance
2. Data protection.
3. Equality and inclusion.
4. Safeguarding.
5. Looking at practical steps to ensure compliance.
6. Advice where further information and support is available.

**Date: Wednesday November 27<sup>th</sup> 2024.**

**Time: 10.00 - 12.30**

**Please email Cecilia Coulson to reserve a place.**

**[cecu3a@gmail.com](mailto:cecu3a@gmail.com) / 07881768301** (at least 20 members have to be interested for this workshop to be viable)

## **Durham & District Merger**

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 the newest Northumbria Region u3a came in to being, Durham & District u3a. It was formed by the merger of Durham u3a and Dunelm u3a, both based in Durham City and its surrounding area. This article explains how it came about, what lessons were learnt and what pointers can be given to other u3as contemplating a merger.

In the summer of 2022, emerging from the restrictions of Covid, the Chairs of both groups met at a local garden centre to discuss a joint recruitment event to coincide with that year's national u3a week. Over coffee, the two Chairs, Tina Naples, Durham u3a and Mike Forrest, Dunelm u3a took the opportunity to talk of how each group were managing to function, coming out of the pandemic restrictions. They also chatted about u3a-related problems that seemed to be common to both. High on the list was getting members to participate on the committee and expanding the interest groups available to members. After Covid, some interest groups had not restarted, either due to the group leader stepping down or the group members having reservations of meeting up.

As regards the enlisting of committee participants it was suggested that, if there was a bigger pool of members, that task may be easier, so why not have a merger of the two u3as. Both Chairs agreed this was quite a radical solution that may not be welcomed by some of their respective members. Neither Tina nor Mike knew the true history of why Durham City had two u3as but were aware of a sense of rivalry starting from when the original Durham u3a were unable to accept new members way back in about 2005.

At the time of this meeting, Durham & Dunelm had a similar number of members, approx. 160 each, and both had sufficient financial resources to continue operating. Both groups were using Bowburn Community Centre for their Monthly meetings, and this had sufficient capacity to accommodate the merged group.

The two Chairs thought that the merger was something they would like to progress. As a first step they agreed to allow each other's members to attend monthly meetings, events and interest groups without having to become associate members of the u3as. A protocol was written and, within a couple of months and with the agreement of their respective committees, it was publicised to their members.

The next step was to get each committee to consent to the idea of a merger, which they did. There were some dissenting voices, as was to be expected, but a steering committee with delegates from both groups meeting monthly started in December 2022.

It was decided to aim for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 as the date of the merger, giving the steering group 15 months to prepare. Items to be considered included :-

- Banking arrangements, both closing current bank accounts and opening a new one.
- Alignment of financial and membership periods.
- New Beacon database (both groups already used Beacon).
- A new website
- Creation of a constitution.
- Charity Commission application.
- Informing the National u3a of the proposed merger.

The membership of both u3as were informed of the proposed merger but it was emphasised that each group would hold a General Meeting where the members would have the final say on whatever the steering groups proposals were. There would also be a vote as to the choice of a new name for the merged u3a.

Both memberships were assured that nothing major would change in how the merged group would be run. Financially, the members would be better off with a reduction in yearly fees and that both the current u3as would be contributing a similar bank balance to the merged group.

Over the next year the constitution (based on the National u3a template) was drafted and agreed by the steering group, membership classes and fees were agreed and EGM's were held where the membership of both groups agreed to proceed with the merger.

Banking arrangements were settled but not without the anticipated "Chicken & Egg" situation. The Bank - *"You can't have a charity account until you're registered."* The Treasurer - *"We can't be registered as a charity until we are formed in April 2024"*

In the end the Co-operative Bank, which was used by Dunelm u3a, saw their way to allowing an account to be created and it was up and running before the merger.

Throughout the process, the steering group members were positive in their attitude to the merger and both sides were willing to compromise where necessary so that progress could be made.

Group leaders were told they would not be expected to change how they ran their groups and that pressure would not be brought to bear on them to enlarge beyond their natural capacity (e.g. a discussion group with too many members cannot give each one an opportunity to speak). Duplicate groups would not be expected to either merge or close. Many of our interest groups dovetailed well

e.g. Durham had the Cinema Group and Dunelm a Theatre Group, and there were few overlaps

The next hurdle would be getting Beacon for the new u3a. This turned out to not be a hurdle. With the help of John Alexander and John Hopkins from the Beacon team extracts from the current Beacon databases were forwarded and, within a very short time, the data had been validated and a new Beacon system for Durham & District was available, well ahead of the merger date. This was a big help.

The transition from Sitebuilder to Siteworks web sites coincided with when Dunelm u3a was allocated a training session for the new system. Instead of rehashing the Dunelm web site for Siteworks the web master was able to incorporate the content from the two old sites into a new Durham & District Siteworks website and have that live in the same week as the inaugural AGM of the new u3a. We were fortunate to have a very competent webmaster.

That AGM took place on April 25<sup>th</sup> at Bowburn Community Centre. Despite the required notices being sent out and requests for nominations for the committee positions, there was still a last-minute rush to get a volunteer for the Secretary and Vice Chair. So the committee membership problem hasn't been fully resolved. The new committee is formed of members of both the former Durham and Dunelm which conveys a unity of purpose. So far, the merger appears to have gone well. Were there things that, in hindsight, could have gone better? – Yes

- Ensure that the steering group knows how each u3a operates now and understands what compromises might have to be agreed.
- Where any decision requires the approval of current members, coordinate these meetings to be as close as possible to each other.
- When agreeing a venue / date for the monthly meetings take in to account the expanded membership and make sure of its availability.
- Don't take for granted that National u3a will make the appropriate arrangements for the new u3a. Despite getting excellent advice and cooperation from the Regional Trustee, the Beacon and Siteworks teams and informing TAT by email of what was happening and asking had all relevant parties been informed, in the words of Private Eye, *answer came there none*.

The combined u3a now has 302 members and 32 interest groups, with two new ones being formed since the merger. There are regularly 100 members attending the monthly meeting, on the last Thursday of each month.

In September 2024, during National u3a Week, Durham & District u3a will have a publicity and recruitment stand at Durham City's Saturday Outdoor Market, as well as a Launch Event, open to all, at Bowburn Community Centre on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup>.

Mike Forrest – Durham & District u3a

### **Northumbria Region u3a Treasurers' Network**

Come along to the next Treasurers' Network Meeting for a unique opportunity to connect with fellow u3a Treasurers, share insights and stay at the forefront of the latest trends in treasury management. Enhance your skills, exchange best practices and forge valuable connections in an engaging environment.

Why not come to a meeting to discuss any issues on which you'd like some support and ideas? Don't miss this chance to contribute to the success of your u3as.

### **S.E. Northumberland and Coast Chairs' and Business Secretaries' Network**

Join our SE Northumberland and Coast u3a Chairs' and Business Secretaries' Network for a gathering of like-minded u3a members. This unique platform offers a dynamic space to share strategic insights, navigate governance challenges and foster peer-to-peer collaboration. Connect with fellow Chairs and Business Secretaries, stay informed and gain valuable tools to support your u3as.

Come along to a meeting to discuss your challenges and successes. This network is open to members from all parts of the region.

### **Northumbria Region u3a Art Appreciation Network**

Join a vibrant community of art enthusiasts eager to explore the diverse world of visual expression. Immerse yourself in lively discussions, uncover the stories behind masterpieces and connect with fellow art lovers. Learn more about how to enhance art group meetings and keep the members interested and wanting to participate.

Whether you have a vast knowledge or are just starting your artistic journey, our network provides a welcoming space to share, learn and be inspired.

For all of the above informal networks, please contact:  
Catherine Stevenson: [intoto444@hotmail.com](mailto:intoto444@hotmail.com)

<b>Regional Committee April 2024 - 2025</b>	
Chair	Cecilia COULSON, Whickham and District
Vice Chairman	Vacant
Business and Minute Secretary	Mary BARLOW, Sunderland
Treasurer	Theresa MULKERRIN, Durham
Member	Ann CARR, Bishop Auckland
Member	Malcom WILKINSON, Seaham Harbour
Member	Peter BARNETT, Wessington
Member	Tedd WATT, Seaham
Member	Vacant
Trustee for the North East	Jean CUBBIN, Whitley Bay

Members of the committee can be contacted by email through the website:  
<https://u3asites.org.uk/northumbria>

### **Distribution**

Messenger is distributed electronically. Chairs and Business Secretaries of u3as receive a copy as an email attachment. They are asked to distribute this to their members.

### **From the Editor**

May I thank everyone who has taken the time to provided articles and assistance for this edition of The Messenger. I do hope that you have enjoyed reading this issue and that it has given you inspiration for the future. Please forward your articles to [regnewseditor@gmail.com](mailto:regnewseditor@gmail.com) May I please have all contributions for the next edition by Friday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2025. Thank you.