

Drumbeat

Durham & District u3a

Issue 20, December

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NOTICES

Still wanted: Monthly speaker co-ordinator

Check the calendar for details of group meetings this month: some times and venues have changed

Monthly meeting, 27 November Charles Dickens talk

If Christmas is coming, can Dickens be far behind?



On 27 November, we'll be getting a welcome taste of the great author and social commentator, with a talk on his life and readings from his works by actor and director Frank Kennedy.

Frank, a man of many parts – he's also an English language teacher and a trustee of the Liverpool World Centre – is a true



Dickens aficionado, known for his lively performances.

Expect a Dickensian tour de force!

Thurs, 27 November, Bowburn Community Centre (doors open 1.15 for 2pm start)

Wine Group

The meeting in November saw the end of the wine group meetings for 2025. We celebrated with German wines and savoury snacks to compliment the wine.

Over the year we had been looking at wines from various countries. We started in February with the country that produces the most wine, Italy, and worked our way down the top 10 wine-producing nations, ending with Germany. Many interesting wines had been tasted along the way.

We look forward to more wine adventures in 2026.



Jennifer Banks

Music Appreciation

The last meeting of the year is always a special one, featuring as it does the musical choices of all group members.

With no specific theme this year, we each picked a song or a tune that meant something to us, or simply one that we liked. That was how we came to be

listening to Talking Heads and The Cure one minute, and a Chopin Étude and Schumann's dedication to his wife Clara the next.

We were treated to some out-of-the-



Carolina Eyck,
theremin player

ordinary experiences, too, in the shape of Duke Ellington's "In a sentimental mood" played on the theremin, and an exuberant performance of "Fairytale of New York" at Shane

McGowan's funeral.

The afternoon was suitably rounded off by King's College choir singing "O come, Emmanuel". All set for Christmas now !

Thanks to Stephen for all the work he puts into our wonderful musical experiences.

October Monthly Meeting The life and Times of John Smythe

Did you know that Krio, the lingua franca of Sierra Leone, was developed by freed slaves from Jamaica, Nova Scotia and Africa who all ended up in the country in the 18th and 19th

centuries? The fact

that they owed

their freedom to

Britain was one of

the reasons why, many decades later, thousands of Sierra Leoneans volunteered to fight for king and country in the Second World War.

This was one of the fascinating facts recounted by Eddy Smythe, speaker at

October's monthly meeting, as he presented the life and times of his phenomenal father Johnny.



Eddy Smythe

As one of those volunteers, Johnny went on to distinguish himself, one of only 60 Africans to be recruited into the RAF, by flying 26 missions as navigator before being shot down and captured in Germany.

A larger than life character, after the war he was a role model to the Windrush generation, and retrained as a lawyer, becoming Attorney General of Sierra Leone.

Eddy, who alongside his own business career has extensively researched his father's background and experiences, was a hugely engaging speaker. He brought John Smythe to life in a truly excellent presentation.

You might be interested in this docudrama, [Flying for Britain](#), produced for the RAF in 2022 and narrated by Eddy.

Strange but true: 10 curious facts

1. Earlobes have no biological purpose.

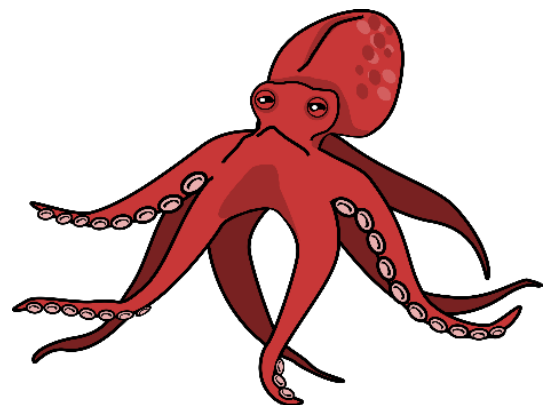
While they're rich in nerve endings and may play a role in social bonding, many scientists argue that earlobes don't have any true biological purpose.

2. Animals can experience time differently from humans.

The world around smaller animals moves more slowly than for humans or larger animals. Salamanders and lizards, for example, experience time more slowly than cats and dogs. This is because the perception of time depends on how quickly the brain can process incoming information

3. Octopuses don't have tentacles.

They have eight limbs, which for most species are arms.



4. **Your signature could reveal personality traits.**

Among men, a larger signature correlates with higher social bravado, while among women, it correlates with narcissistic traits.

5. **Deaf people are known to use sign language in their sleep.**

A case study of a 71-year-old man with rapid eye movement disorder and a severe hearing impairment showed him using fluent sign language in his sleep.

6. **Martial artists who smile before the start of a match are more likely to lose.**



This could be because a smile can convey fear or submissiveness.

7. **Giraffes hum to communicate with each other.**

It's thought that the low-frequency humming could be a form of 'contact call' between individuals separated from their herd, helping them to find each other in the dark.

8. **Football players spit so much because exercise increases the amount of protein in saliva.**

When you exercise, the amount of protein secreted in saliva increases. A protein mucus named MUC5B makes your saliva thicker when you're

exercising, which makes it more difficult to swallow – hence the tendency to spit.

9. **People who eat whatever they want and stay slim have a slow metabolism, not a fast one.**

A skinny person tends to have less muscle mass than others, meaning their basal metabolic rate (BMR) is lower than that of people with a high muscle mass – giving them a slow metabolism, not a fast one.

10. **Giraffes are 30 times more likely to get struck by lightning than people.**

True, there are only five well-documented fatal lightning strikes on giraffes between 1996 and 2010. But given the population of the species was just 140,000 during this time, this makes for about 0.003 lightning deaths per thousand giraffes each year – 30 times the equivalent fatality rate for humans.



Badger (aka Robert Lebar)

A Journey to Homs

(Inspired by T.S. Eliot's poem Journey of the Magi)

A hard time we had of it,
On our journey to Syria; our longed-for return
From those years of exile, forced upon us by war.
Our hearts full of fear
As we anticipated the worst:
We remembered the streets, destroyed, covered in debris
And the trauma of memories; of destruction and death
We hardly dared speak of it, my sisters and I
As we stepped onto the tarmac
Then journeyed in tense silence
To the windowless ruins
That once had been our home.
Then .. we stepped through the door.
We saw family faces beaming with joy
And the new children too, born,
Long after the time when we were all forced to flee.
Reunited, we wept, we embraced, with laughter and joy,
Swept up in excitement at our moment of meeting.
Days of celebration, of singing and dancing
And telling our stories of our refugee lives.

And all of us searching for what remained unchanged.

Joy mingled with longing for the lives we had lost:

And all the time knowing ,

The pain of departure back, to our new lives,

Of better futures we could never have dreamed of.

Long ago, when we were young.

Even so, on the road back, our hearts carried with us such longing ..

The scent of jasmine and the salt of tears,

The music and the dancing

And the Minaret calling us all to our prayers.

Every return, we have learned, no matter how brief,

Must always carry the shadow of goodbye.

It brings both blessings, and sorrow,

Measured in all that is gone, and all that endures.

Irene Wilkinson

Creative Writing Group

New Walking Cricket hub in Durham City

Inspired by the Ashes?

Durham Cricket Foundation are hosting free walking cricket "taster" sessions at Freemans Quay Leisure Centre (opposite the Passport Office) from 4 - 5 pm on Mondays in November and December. So

far there has been good interest and it is likely the hub will continue for the foreseeable future. Please come along if you are interested.



The mixed-sex sessions have been a gentle introduction to the game, suitable for both novices and those who have some experience of cricket in their youth! People can just turn up to the sessions (in the sports hall on the 1st floor of the centre). There's more info on the Durham Cricket Foundation pages on the web. There's a very friendly and competent female coach – Alex – who will cater for all ages/abilities/mobilities etc.

Walking cricket offers a version of the game designed to encourage people to keep active and play the game they love. The indoor game follows the same format as regular cricket, although the ball is softer so there is no requirement for helmets or pads.

You don't have to have a cricketing background. It could be that your only experience of cricket is on the beach or in the back garden with kids and grandkids. Perhaps you have a cricketing background but time and age caught up with you, or maybe you have never had the opportunity to try the game but have loved following it on TV or at a local club.

I've been to the last few sessions and really enjoyed it. Please come along and try it!

You can just turn up and/or express your interest by filling in this short form: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/S_LW33N7. Wear comfortable clothing. All equipment will be provided. You are also welcome to turn up and watch a session.

Mike Gibb

A gift for Christmas?

Member John Campbell's book on the art of pencil drawing, "An Artist's View", is still available to buy.

This readable "how to" guide uses intricate drawings to illustrate specific techniques, such as the way smoke and mist are created using pencil. But it's



the beautifully crafted drawings themselves that for many will be the reason to buy the book.

It's only by browsing through the extensive images of Durham over the years that it becomes clear just how much has changed.

A timely reminder as Durham World Heritage Site nears its 40th year in 2026.

Regional Items

9th December 2025, 10:30 am

[New light on Lindisfarne](#)

Reflections on ten seasons of fieldwork on Holy Island

Venue: [Zoom](#);

Cost: Free



Booking Required – contact [Cecilia Coulson](#) if you want to attend.

12th May 2026
Summer School

[Special Day at Ushaw Historic House](#)

A Festival of Fun, Music and Learning for all Northumbria u3a members

National items

u3a Matters – content wanted!

The national u3a are on the lookout for stories, ideas and recommendations to feature in *u3a matters*. Specifically, they're interested in:

- winter and spring recipes – ideally with seasonal ingredients
- audiobooks you've enjoyed recently
- any other news, stories or recommendations of interest to other members.

You can submit recommendations to the magazine editor at editor@u3a.org.uk.

Online learning

Forthcoming talks include:

[Geology of Britain in the Mesozoic](#)

Nov 27 from 2pm to 3:30pm



A regional look at the history of Britain 250–65 million years ago,

[Take ten songs 2 – how pop songs work](#)

28 November, 10am

Deep dive into songs including Good Vibrations, Walk On The Wild Side, Maggie May and The Boys Are Back In Town.

[Making your smartphone easier to use – \(Apple\) 9 December, 2pm.](#)

Guiding you through practical ways to make your iPhones more accessible, intuitive, and enjoyable to use.

[Ways we can be happier](#)

10 December,
2pm

A whistle-stop review of some of the best science-backed tips on how to be happy.



[What the future changes in landlines will mean for you](#)

11 December, 3pm

UK landlines go digital by the end of January 2027. Join to find out everything you need to know.

There are many more talks – see [this page](#) for details.

u3a Eye

The theme for December and January is “trickery”.

See [here](#) for more details.

Advent Calendar Puzzle



The numbers contained in the clues make up the 24 days (Answers: p.11)



(a) House number of an irascible resident of East Cheam	(b) Strange happenings in this non-existent room, in a haunting story by M R James	(c) Dave B recommends taking this many	(d) How many men on a dead man's chest?	(e) The number of timepieces featuring in an area of Covent Garden	(f) "...now I am ... /I'm as clever/So I think I'll be ... now for ever and ever"
(g) This many diminutive avians pitched by Bob's doorstep	(h) A villanelle has this number of lines	(i) How many years of servitude for Solomon?	(j) Janis Ian learned the truth at this age	(k) Categorisation of this fluffy cumulonimbus, the site of euphoria	(l) Number of love poems Neruda coupled with a song of despair
(m) "The ...th novel in a series covering 50-odd years of social history is "The Soldier's Art"	(n) Jack Bauer was the hero of this gripping real-time TV drama	(o) Chilling collection of short stories from Mr Ripley's creator	(p) Number of end-of-the-world equestrians	(q) Number of things Kat hates about Patrick in this homage to Shakespeare	(r) On this date in December, Argentina snatched victory from the jaws of defeat
(s) Juliet's age	(t) Takes you from Durham to Sunderland	(u) Number Mma Ramotswa gives to her business in Botswana	(v) Tom plugged this many shells from a thirty-ought six	(w) Terry Laybourne's restaurant in Newcastle	(x) How many tribes, Frankie?

CALENDAR

Date	Time	Place	Group	Contact
NOV				
Mon 24 th	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too at Sacriston: <i>The Battle of the Somme and family involvements in WW1</i>	David Willock
Mon 24 th	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group: <i>"Breaking Together" (Jem Bendell</i>	Charles Jolly
Mon 24 th	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta	Mike Forrest
Tues 25 th	10.00am	Bemont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL): <i>Open session - Paintings of the decade 1880-1890</i>	Carol Tritton
Tues 25 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish conversation (FULL)	Group Leader
Wed 26 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 27 th	10.15pm	Business School Bistro	Shakespeare (FULL)	Sue Childs
Thu 27 th	1.15 for 2.00pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly Meeting: <i>Charles Dickens (Frank Kennedy)</i>	Paul Newby
Fri 28 th	10.00am	Broom Park Picnic Area	Walking: <i>Broom Park to Brandon Village</i>	Richard Dennis
DEC				
Mon 1 st	10.00am	Member's home	Book Group: <i>"Buddenbrooks" (Thomas Mann)</i>	Lynn Bilsborough
Mon 1 st	1.30- 3.30pm	Carrville Methodist Hall	Quiz at Carrville	Jennifer Banks
Tues 2 nd	10.00am	Broomside Park Beefeater	Topical discussion (FULL)	Janis Elaine Goodson
Tues 2 nd	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish conversation (FULL)	Mick O'Sullivan
Tues 2 nd	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	History at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Wed 3 rd	12 noon	Bowburn Hall Hotel	Christmas Lunch	Lynn Brooks
Wed 3 rd	2.00pm	Gala Café	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 4 th	11.00am	Visit	History at Meadowfield	Audrey Adams

Thurs 4 th	9.45am	Member's home	French (FULL)	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 4 th	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Circle Dancing	Linda Murdie
Thurs 4 th	2.00pm	The Story Café	Parlez français: Christmas	Paul Newby
Fri 5 th	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Fri 5 th	2.00pm	Indoor Bowling Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Mon 8 th	10.30am	Bowburn Hall Hotel	Coffee Morning	Marion Lotts
Mon 8 th	1.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta	Mike Forrest
Mon 8 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Poetry Appreciation: Children	Steve Beckett
Tues 9 th	1.30pm	Member's home	Craft (FULL)	Jan Fish, Marion Lotts
Tues 9 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish (FULL) Christmas Lunch	Mick O'Sullivan
Tues 9 th	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL): Christmas Social	Carol Tritton
Wed 10 th	10.00am	Member's home	Creative Writing (FULL)	Irene Wilkinson
Wed 10 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 11 th	9.45am	Member's home	French (FULL)	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 11 th	10.00am	Business School Bistro	Poetry reading: Planning meeting and Christmas Lunch	Pauline Butler
Thurs 11 th	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare (FULL)	Sue Childs
Fri 12 th	10.00am	Christmas Lunch Walk	Walking: Christmas Lunch Walk	Richard Dennis
Fri 12 th	10.30am	Witton Gilbert Community Centre	Historical Novels: "Days without end" (Sebastien Barry)	Tina Naples
Mon 15 th	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	Monday Crime Club: "The Couple at No. 9" (Claire Douglas)	Tina Naples
Mon 15 th	1.45pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Quiz at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Tues 16 th	10.30am	Bishops' Mill (Wetherspoons)	Theatre: Discussion and planning	Nancy Gemski
Tues 16 th	12.00pm		Pub Lunch	Sylvia Buxton
Wed 17 th	1.30pm	Member's home	Scrabble	Maureen Craik

Wed 17 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 18 th	1.15pm	St John's Church Hall, Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield: <i>Christmas Lunch</i>	Audrey Adams
Thurs 18 th	9.45am	Member's home	French (FULL)	Elizabeth Morgan
Fri 19 th	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Fri 19 th	2.00pm	Indoor Bowling Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Mon 22 nd	10.30am	Sacrison Methodist Church	History Too at Sacrison	David Willock
Mon 22 nd	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group: <i>"Breaking Together" (Jem Bendell)</i>	Charles Jolly
Mon 22 nd	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta	Mike Forrest

Other groups/activities include:

Cinema – normally Mondays, but depends on film being shown

[Paul Newby](#)

Lunch Group – meets once per month for meals at local venues

[Rita McGarr](#)

And all volunteers/suggestions for **occasional outings** are welcomed.

The following groups are full: Art Appreciation; Craft; Creative Writing; Français Amical; French; Shakespeare; Spanish Conversation; and Topical Discussion. But that needn't hold you back – you can start another group! And there are start-up funds available where needed. Contact [Paul Newby](#), groups coordinator, if you think you'd like to set one up.

Advent Calendar Puzzle Answers

(a) **23** (Railway Cuttings – Tony Hancock); (b) (Room) **13**; (c) (Take) **5** (Dave Brubeck); (d) **15**; (e) **7** (Dials); (f) **6** (A A Milne); (g) **3** (Little Birds, Bob Marley); (h) **19**; (i) **12** (Years a Slave, Solomon Northup); (j) **17**; (k) (Cloud) **9**; (l) **20** (Pablo Neruda); (m) **8** (Dance to the Music of Time, Anthony Powell); (n) **24**; (o) **11** (Patricia Highsmith); (p) **4** (Horsemen of the Apocalypse); (q) **10** (Things I Hate About You – film); **18** (World Cup win against France); (s) **14**; (t) **22** (bus); (u) **1** (No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency); (v) **16** (Tom Waits song); (w) **21**; (x) **2** (Frankie goes to Hollywood)



Your contributions to Drumbeat are actively invited! Send items by mid-month (around 400 words max) to [Laura Woods](#), editor, or [Jim Crinson](#), deputy editor.

