



According to the John Lewis ad-watchers, harking back to times gone by is all the rage this Christmas – even if they are referring to the 90s, which was surely just the other day?

Whatever, this is most definitely the time to regale anybody younger with reminiscences of Christmases in your day: how you were happy with a wooden spoon and a tangerine, and how much better telly was in the days of black and white. Just ignore the eye-rolls and do your stuff.

No eye-rolls required, though, for the delightful seasonal memories in this issue, which – as well as being laced with the obligatory corny cracker jokes – also includes a gallery of photos from the Christmas meal and group festivities.

However you're spending Christmas and New Year, here's wishing you a lovely time.

See you in 2026!

Laura Woods, Editor

PS: A warm welcome to new member **Anthony Talbot.**

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No Circle Dancing in January – next meeting is Thursday, 5 Feb at 2pm.

How many letters are there in the Christmas alphabet?

A: 25 – there's Noel.



2026 Membership Fee cut

Annual D&D membership fees will be **reduced from £11 to £5** in 2026, following a decision by the committee at its November meeting.

In addition, monthly meetings will continue to be free to attend until December 2026.

Both decisions, which were made because of the healthy state of D&D reserves, will be reviewed towards the end of the calendar year.

Esteemed writer visits Bowburn

In the year of our Lord, Thursday 27th November 2025, a most agreeable visitation took place.

The highly esteemed and beloved author, Charles Dickens Esq, gave a most memorable recitation of his own works.

Though 213 years old, he was still extremely hale and hearty, and using most amusing props and other disguises, and through most effective changes of the use of his voice, he was able to delight a large audience, who responded most appreciatively.

Some of the works performed were 'David Copperfield', 'A Tale of Two Cities' (*'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'*), 'Great Expectations', 'Hard Times', 'Oliver Twist', and of course 'A Christmas Carol' (*'I wear the chain I forged in life'*).

The final reading was of Christmas at the house of Bob Cratchit, which all found most moving and powerful.



'Mr Dickens' in full flow

Many thanks to Mr Frank Kennedy for his efforts in bringing about this most marvellous episode in time travel !

Jim Crinson

- How does Good King Wenceslas like his pizzas?

A: Deep pan, crisp and even



More D&D quizzing success

Two teams from the quiz group at Carrville battled through the rain to drive to Hurworth in Darlington to take part in the South Regional quiz event.

I am pleased to report that one of our teams was victorious. Well done to them!

Out of the four regional quiz events we have attended in 2025, we have won three of them. Well done to all our members who take part.

Cynthia Bolton



To the victors the spoils!

Bog Trotters United

The Walking Group's run of good weather for its outings ended abruptly in November, when, already drenched by torrential rain, doughty (foolhardy?) members found themselves confronted with a sea of super-squelchy mud just outside Broompark.

Once across, there was nothing for it but to knock the planned pub meal on the head and make for a hot shower. The bliss!



Nothing quite like it for cooling the blood...

New Housing and Health Group

Would you like to know more about housing options for people over 55 in the

North East? If you plan to stay where you are, what kind of adaptations might make your own home safer and easier to live in as you age? How can the right housing and the right location help us to age well?

If enough people are interested in a group on this topic, knowledgeable speakers can be invited, and it may be possible to organize visits to relevant places.

The plan would be to meet once a month, either morning or afternoon.

If you're interested, please come along to an initial meeting with member Dorothy Hamilton at **Shincliffe Garden Centre café** on **Tuesday 20th January, 2026, 10.15 am**. Buy a drink at the counter in the back room, then find us round a large table at the back of this room.

Or you could contact me, Paul Newby (newbypaul51@gmail.com), and I will pass your details on to Dorothy.

Many thanks

Paul Newby D&D u3a interest group coordinator



What does the King call his Christmas broadcast?

A: The One Show

Gifts

Oh the Joy. Look at them.

Bobble hats bobbing. What else can they do?

Cashmere scarves, globe- trotting anoraks, walk weary boots -

Gloves abandoned, sharing the sheets.

Feet shuffling, tapping tippy toes on the beat.

Three generations, sweet descanted voices.

Glowing faces on the green.

Oh the Joy. Hear them.

Arrowing the icy air, touching azure sky.

Adeste, Fideles

Laeti triumphantes.

Invitation to all. No matter no one comes.

The message is all.

It is over and no room at the inn.

Home. Excited present opening. Each in their turn

Touched. Loving. Delight.

Her garden voucher envelope

Bright with Summer fragrance – read...

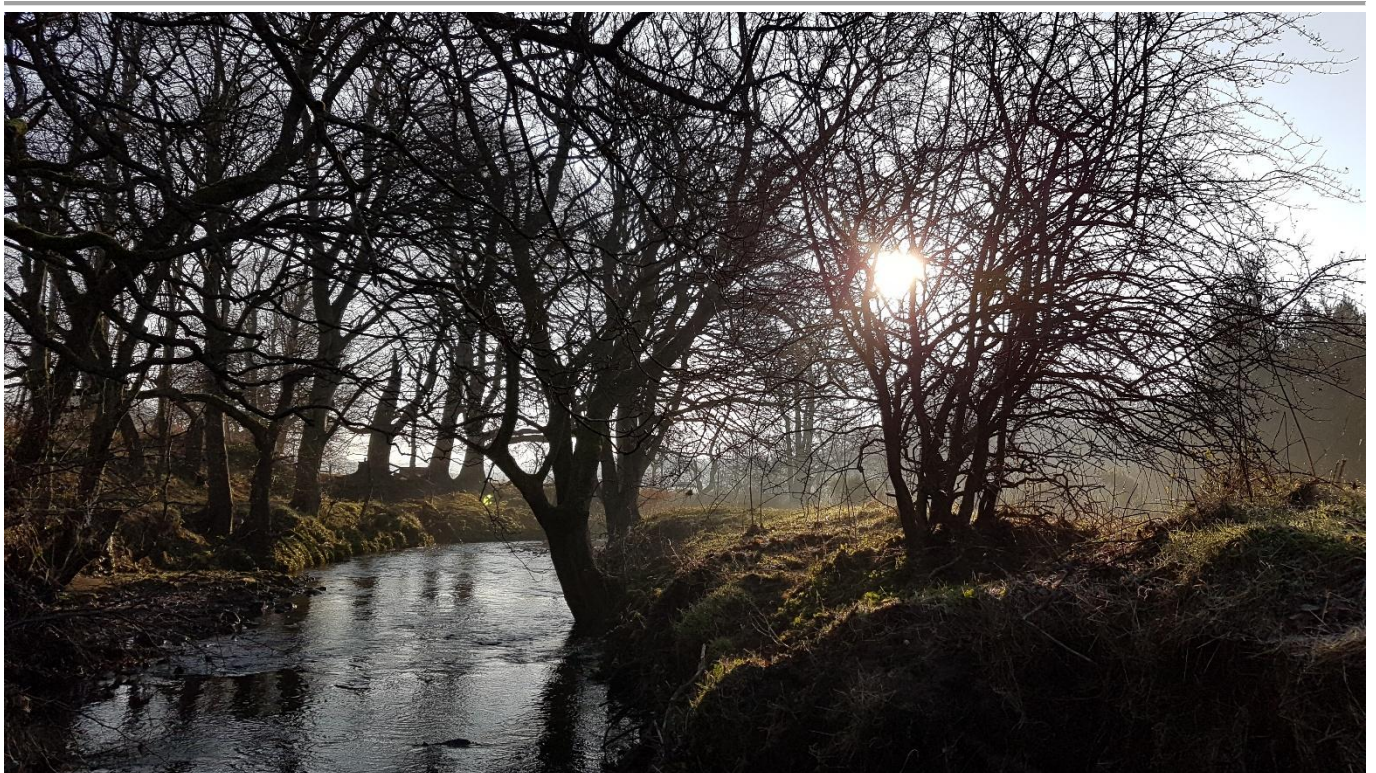
“Dear Mum,

For your Christmas present this year, we would like to take you to Madrid....in May.”

Smoke gets in your eyes.

Judith Weygang

Creative Writing Group



An atmospheric December riverscape at Malton, Lanchester, courtesy of John Liddle

Memorable Christmases: 1943 & 1953

Of the 90-odd Christmases I've seen, two in particular are forever etched on my memory.

Christmas 1943: I'm 11 years old and living in Port of Spain, Trinidad, with my mother and sister, my father having joined the Army. With no Christmas trees on Trinidad, we – me, my best friend Henry, and his brothers Dennis and Wesley – decided to make our own.

First, a bucket. A brilliant scarlet specimen stood outside the Fire Station, so one evening we liberated it (*'There's never any fires over Christmas'*). Next, we separated Mum's broom from its head (*'She never sweeps over Christmas'*). There followed several sorties to the beach, armed with anything that could hold sand – bottles, cans, socks, school caps, the cat's litter tray (*'It can use the tree instead'*). Emptying sand into our bucket, we pushed, stamped and hankered away till our 'soil' was firm enough to hold the broomstick 'trunk'.

Next day, with the promise of a large slice of rum-soaked fruitcake after Christmas (*'if there's any left'*), we persuaded a local lad to shin up a palm tree and pull down leaves which we trimmed with our knives .

One more foray was needed, for drawing pins and twine. Oh, and coloured wool – all filched from home. Time to make our tree bloom!

Pinning the leaves round the trunk, we attached wool to the ends, gently pulling

them upward until the whole tree was festooned with coloured strands.

We then hid our tree in the garden.

After triumphantly wheeling it out on Christmas Eve, we lit candles, joined hands to sing 'King Wenceslas', drank a toast of a lovely frothy brown fizz called Coky Coly, and heartily wished each other a Merry Christmas.

Which it was.

Fast forward 10 years to **Christmas 1953.**

Now aged 21, I was sitting in my bungalow on the banks of the Niger, 300 miles from civilisation, where the term 'electricity' had yet to find its way into the local vocabulary, and the only telephones were the drums beating out from village to village. It was 88 degrees, and I felt a trifle hot in my dinner jacket, but in this outpost of Empire a gentleman always dressed for dinner.

My four company servants were out the back, giggling over the dinner they were preparing for me and my dining companion Derek, also a company employee, who lived some 80 miles downriver. He'd be in the process of being poled along in a dug-out canoe, the boatmen carefully steering clear of crocodiles cunningly disguised as floating logs.

Soon after Derek's arrival, we were seated at table awaiting our Christmas feast. A beaming Amadhu, in his white steward's uniform garnished with gold, placed before us two piping hot platters covered by

domes. These he ceremonially whipped off to reveal, nestled on each platter, a gleaming tin. Deftly opening both, Amadhu decanted half a dozen skinless sausages onto each plate.

When George the cook brought in a bowlful of steaming rice, Amadhu placed it in a ring around the sausages. George followed with tankards of foaming Becks beer, and the two left us to enjoy our feast. With a heartfelt toast of 'Happy Christmas, old chap!' we set to. Our otherwise bland dish was enlivened by the tiny bodies of flying ants, which had clustered around two hurricane lamps above our heads before shedding their wings and kamikazeing to their doom in our dinner. Not the same flavour as cracked black pepper, perhaps, but we appreciated their sacrifice.

Next came two large helpings of home-made chocolate ice cream, consumed with a great deal more gusto than the previous course. Protocol permitting loosened collars at this stage, we retreated to armchairs with cigars and coffee, sinking into a companionable silence. My eyes fell upon the 3 Christmas cards from my parents in Singapore, my sister in Rhodesia, and my girlfriend in London. I tried not to envy them their more convivial Christmases.

Time for Derek to depart, my nightwatch lighting him to his canoe and kicking the sleeping ferryman awake. A final wave as my friend retreated into the dark, then back home, to a bath and bed.

Christmas had come and gone. The merriest I'd ever known? Hardly. One of

the most memorable? Certainly. But one never to be repeated from that day on.

A Merrier Christmas to all!

James Gilman



What song celebrates board game enthusiasts bragging in a hotel lobby?

Chess nuts boasting in an open foyer

National Items

Lots of online learning events in January, including:

[How to build confidence in later life](#)

Wed 14 January, 2pm

Join Rebecca Roonane to discover how to strengthen self-belief and resilience.

[From Roman Britain to the Dark Ages](#)

Thurs, 15 January, 2pm

Author Charles Boundy is back by popular demand.

[The Story of Tootje \(Cato\) Granaat, 1926 – 2020](#)

Thurs, 28 January, 2pm

The real-life account of a girl's life in occupied Amsterdam, by her daughter.

[How do Your Medicines Work?](#)

Wed, 7 January, 10 am

Mike Trevethick explores pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics – or how medicines get to where they need to be, and how they work when they get there.

CALENDAR

Date	Time	Place	Group	Contact
JAN				
Fri 2 nd	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Mon 5 th	10.00am	Member's home	Book Group	Lynn Bilsborough
Mon 5 th	1.30–3.30pm	Carrville Methodist Hall	Quiz at Carrville	Jennifer Banks
Tues 6 th	10.00am	Broomside Park Beefeater	Topical discussion (FULL)	Janis Elaine Goodson
Tues 6 th	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	History at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Weds 7 th	1.30pm	Member's home	Craft	Jan Fish, Marion Lotts
Wed 7 th	1.30pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Geology	Lesley Collins
Wed 7 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 8 th	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 8 th	10.00am	Waddington St URC Church	Poetry reading: Scottish Poets	Pauline Butler
Thurs 8 th	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare	Sue Childs
Thurs 8 th	2.00pm	The Story Café	Parlez français: My plans for 2026	Paul Newby
Fri 9 th	10.30am	Witton Gilbert Community Centre	Historical Novels: Precipice by Robert Harris	Tina Naples
Fri 9 th	10.00am		Walking	Richard Dennis
Mon 12 th	10.30am	Bowburn Hall Hotel	Coffee Morning	Marion Lotts
Mon 12 th	1.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Mon 12 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Poetry Appreciation: Peace	Steve Beckett
Tues 13 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Wed 14 th	10.00am	Member's home	Creative Writing: (FULL)	Irene Wilkinson
Weds 14 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 15 th	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 15 th	11.00am	St John's Church Hall, Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield Oilly <i>Burton: Celtic Art in the Lindisfarne Gospels</i>	Audrey Adams
Fri 16 th	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Fri 16 th	2.00pm	Indoor Bowling Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson

Mon 19 th	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	Monday Crime Club: <i>Sibbet: A Body under the Bridge</i>	Tina Naples
Mon 19 th	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Quiz at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Mon 19 th	1.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Photography	Sue Vanden Bon
Tues 20 th	11.15am	Gala balcony	Theatre: <i>Discussion and planning</i>	Nancy Gemski
Tues 20	10.15am		Housing and Health	Group Leader
Tues 20 th	12.00pm		Pub Lunch	Sylvia Buxton
Weds 21 st	1.30pm	Member's home	Scrabble	Maureen Craik
Weds 21 st	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Weds 21 st	7.00pm	SPRA community room Sheraton Park	Wine tasting: <i>Christmas wines and planning meeting</i>	Jennifer Banks Cynthia Bolton
Thurs 22 nd	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare	Sue Childs
Thurs 22 nd	1.15pm	St John's Church Hall, Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield:	Audrey Adams
Thurs 22 nd	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 22 nd	2.00pm	The Story Café	Parlez français: TBD	Paul Newby
Fri 23 rd	10.00am		Walking:	Richard Dennis
Sat 24 th	1.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Music Appreciation:	Stephen Brand
Mon 26 th	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too at Sacriston: <i>The Opium Wars</i>	David Willock
Mon 26 th	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group	Charles Jolly
Mon 26 th	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 27 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish conversation (FULL)	Group Leader
Tues 27 th	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation: <i>Lee Miller and Man Ray (FULL)</i>	Carol Tritton
Wed 28 th	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 29 th	1.15pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly meeting: <i>Fashions in English Gardens (Lesley Collins)</i>	

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; Shakespeare; Spanish Conversation; and Topical Discussion. Contact [Paul Newby](#), groups coordinator, if you're interested in setting up a new group.

'Tis the Season

And so, Christmas jumpers to the fore, people got together to celebrate.



Carrville Quizzers



Walkers



Circle Dancers

Creative Writers



The Christmas meal at Bowburn Hall Hotel went down a treat and, as you can see below, a good time was had by all. Thanks to Lynn Brooks for all the organisation (and to Theresa Mulkerrin for the raffle).





Happy Christmas!