

Drumbeat

Durham & District u3a

Issue 25, May 2026



Welcome to this month's Drumbeat.

I hope you're enjoying the fabulous spring weather – it certainly adds some zing to life to have sunshine and light evenings again.

Three intrepid members took advantage of the clear skies to go on an epic adventure this April – read on to find out more...

Don't forget that the monthly meeting on Thursday, 30 April is the AGM. Be there if you can.

Finally, a warm welcome to this month's new members: **Andrew Brown, Craig Hudson, Geraine Jassat, Gloria Juniper, Sandy Robinson and Andrew White.**

Laura Woods, editor

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NOTICES

There's **no Circle Dancing or Wine Tasting** in May.



Lintzford (Peter Jackson)

Monthly meeting, 30 April

AGM



Our Annual General Meeting takes place at Bowburn Community Centre at the usual time (1.15 pm for 2pm start). You should already have received the agenda and papers.

There will be the usual refreshments and opportunities to catch up with each other. Do attend if you can.

What did the Romans do for us?

(Monthly meeting, 26 March)

Well, in addition to the long list of engineering and cultural innovations still with us today, it seems they also did an awful lot on the medical front. The only trouble is, we went and forgot it all again...

Putting his encyclopaedic knowledge of Binchester and the everyday life of the Roman military to good use, our guest speaker in March, Gordon Henderson, gave a lively talk on medical practices at the camp and further afield.

Archaeological finds at Binchester show that medicine in those days was remarkably advanced – thanks to the need to keep Roman soldiers, and hence the Roman empire, in good health. From spring-loaded clamps for amputations and mouldy bread for eye infections, to

boiled hellebore water for anaesthetic and the ingenious use of egg white in post-surgical care, medical practitioners had an effective treatment for many illnesses and injuries – and soldiers were trained to apply them in the field.

The array of medical implements Gordon had on display bore a strong resemblance to many that are used today.



And what's more, treatment for every Roman citizen was free at the point of care. What a brilliant idea!

Sad to say, all this public health expertise was lost to us in Western Europe when the Roman Empire declined. It had to be painstakingly acquired again, centuries later.

We all love a medical tale, and Gordon injected a good deal of humour into his fascinating description of the Roman health service. Well, laughter *is* the best medicine.



Gordon demos a rather alarming medical implement

Sticking with the Romans, here's a bit of poetry that will be familiar to many – though it's doubtful that this little verse was found on anything at Binchester:

**Caesar adsum iam forte
Brutus aderat
Caesar sic in omnibus
Brutus in is at**



(For declamation – not translation – very much in an English accent)

A grand day out

On Friday 17th April, we had a very special day out.

Mary (Air Commodore), Robert (Badger – Squadron Leader), Stephen (Wing Commander) and Elaine (Supernumerary) headed to Eshott airfield in Northumberland. The mission being to board a Cessna light aircraft and fly to Durham and back, having a lot of fun along the way.

Such a challenge obviously has a risk element and we were all amused and “comforted” to see that right next to the airfield was a crematorium – very handy, just in case.

Eshott was called RAF Bockenfield during the war when it was the biggest training airfield for Spitfire pilots. So we just had to

have our photo taken in front of a model of the famous plane.



Our 3 adventurers in front of a Spitfire

Following a short pre-flight briefing in the officers' mess with our pilot, Peter, we walked across the tarmac to our aircraft – a 4-seater. Elaine stayed behind to take photos. Robert sat in the front, with Mary and Stephen in the back seats.

The take-off was a little bumpy but we were soon climbing above the Northumberland countryside, heading south following the A1 road we had just driven up. After only a few minutes in the air, Peter told Robert to take the controls – which he was happy to do.

So Robert flew us towards Newcastle like the old pro that he is. Seeing the Glasshouse and bridges over the River Tyne was one of the highlights of the trip. Onwards over Gateshead and Birtley to “home ground” as Chester-le-Street loomed into view.

Mary took a photo of Frankland Prison with parts of Newton Hall in the foreground including the homes of Janis and Linda. We found out later that as we flew by, Linda looked up from her drive and said to

her husband, "Mary's going up in one of those today!", not realizing it was us that she could see.

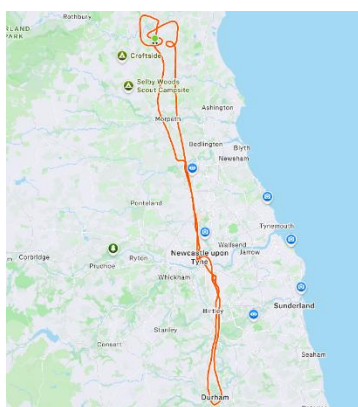


A loop around Durham city, with the cathedral looking surprisingly diminutive 2000 feet below us, and then back to Eshott. But not before a tight circle of the area around the airfield which caused one of the party, Stephen, to become rather queasy.

The landing was incredibly smooth and we were back safely on earth, walking to the cafeteria for the flight debrief and soup, toasties, tea and lemon drizzle cake.

As we set off home, the heavens opened and torrential rain made the first part of our journey challenging. But we were glad the downpour hadn't arrived an hour earlier!!

So a fantastic day was had by all. An adventure that we will always remember.

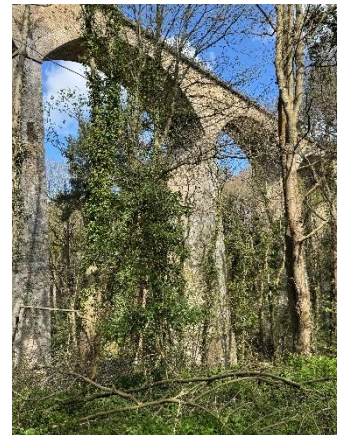


Stephen Brand

Flight statistics:
 -Distance flown:
 94 miles
 -Average speed:
 94 miles per hour
 -Maximum speed:
 160 miles per hour

A walk in the Land of Oak and Iron

April's walk, led by Simon Pedley, took the Walking Group on a scenic circular from Lintzford, in the beautiful and historic Derwent Valley. Taking in Pontburn Viaduct and Hamsterley Hall en route, we followed forest paths and crossed green (and dry!) fields in brilliant sunshine, the descent back to Lintzford rewarded with some fabulous long-distance views.



Pontburn Viaduct (Peter Jackson)

All rounded off with a very satisfactory meal at the Miners' Arms. Thanks, Simon!

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Still pursuing the Romans theme, did you know there was a theory that Hadrian's wall was directly inspired by the Great Wall of China? The story goes that when Hadrian was governor of Roman Syria, Chinese traders told their Roman contacts about their Wall. The Romans began to build their own frontier, but it never got

anywhere.
Hadrian would
have
remembered
this, and the rest
is history!

James Gilman



Caught in the sun's rays



These beautiful pussy willow catkins were captured by John Liddle's camera at a magical moment.

Durham CC Adult Social Care Service User Forum

A new on-line forum, for anyone with experience of adult social care services as a user or supporter, aims to involve them in planning and decision-making to improve provision. To find out more, see www.letstalkcountydurham.co.uk/adultsocialcareforum.

True Colours

On a walk at Blackhall Rocks,
Pale lemon cowslips nod gently in the breeze,
A holly blue alights on butter-yellow gorse,
Cotton-wool cumulus scuds across a sky
So dazzling azure that it almost hurts the eyes.
Emerald-green fields are dotted black
With stalking crows; while showy oystercatchers
Poke their orange bills about the shore.
The North Sea shimmers silver in the sunlight
And grey-white gulls soar high above the cliffs.

Back home, on screen, a different world of colour:
A blinding yellow flash lights up the night
As silver streaks rain down upon a town.
The next day's sky billows black with smoke
And dust smears hands and faces ashen-grey.
A lone pink tent amidst the rubble
Makes sorry refuge for the dispossessed.

Then, ever-present on the air,
A familiar orange face contorts with rage
And blares out terror and destruction.
Black hearts plunge worlds into the shadows
While we enjoy the vivid hues of spring.

Creative Writing Group

Regional u3a news

Northumbria becomes North East

At the regional AGM on 24 April, the name of our regional network was changed from **Northumbria** to **North East**.

Durham Botanic Gardens, 22 June

Cost: £6.65 per person

Meet at the main entrance to the Gardens between 10.30 am and 11.15 am.

Guided tour begins at 11.30, and you can stay until the 4.30pm close. More details [here](#). Book your place with Kathy Clegg at kathy.clegg@u3a.org.uk.

Calling all twitchers!

Are you the proud owner of a pair of bins (binoculars, that is, not waste receptacles)? Might you be interested in joining the Regional Birdwatching Group for monthly sessions with experts?

Send a message (no obligation) to Kathy.clegg@u3a.org.uk.

NOTE: Booking for the Ushaw Historic House event on 12 May is now closed.

National u3a news

U3a Festival 2026 – Festival Fringe

The national festival, 1-3 July, is now fully booked, but there's an opportunity to take part in a programme of online events running alongside it. Highlights include *How to watercolour*; *The role of women in ancient Egypt*; and *The role of wind energy in the UK's electricity system*. More information coming soon.

Positive impact of learning

The u3a Trust is collaborating on a PhD project at Oxford Brookes University to explore the connection between learning in later life and



improved wellbeing. [Help support this research by taking this survey.](#)

Missing Pieces



Escomb Church

This excellent new initiative encourages members to create a short written or visual record inspired by a listed building in their local area. (No shortage of those around here.) This can cover memories, photos, creative work or historical research. There's a resource pack that groups might like to use – more detail [here](#). If you have something you'd like to contribute, send it to learning@u3a.org.uk for display on the website.

u3a Friends Extra

If you don't already, it's worth subscribing to [u3a Friends](#) (the source of all the information above). Members can save money on a huge range of products and services, including holiday travel, hotels and airport parking See [u3a Friends Extra](#).

Online learning

No end of opportunities here, from *Oi! Mind your Language* to *Suffering and Hope in Anna Karenina*, not forgetting the ubiquitous *Laughter Yoga*. See [here](#) for details.

May 2026 Calendar

Date	Time	Place	Group	Contact
APRIL				
Mon 27 th April	10.30am	Sacrison Methodist Church	History Too at Sacrison <i>Alfred the Great and the struggle for England</i>	Group Leader
Mon 27 th April	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group <i>The man who planted trees (Jean Giono)</i>	Charles Jolly
Mon 27 th April	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 28 th April	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL) <i>Open session – materials other than paint used in art</i>	Carol Tritton
Tues 28 th April	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Group Leader
Wed 29 th April	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 30 th April	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare	Group Leader
Thurs 30 th April	1.15 pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly meeting <i>AGM (No speaker)</i>	
MAY				
Fri 1 st May	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Mon 4 th May	10.00am	Member's Home	Book Group (FULL) <i>The Nether World (George Gissing)</i>	Lynn Bilsborough
Mon 4 th May	1.30pm	Carrville Methodist Church	Quiz at Carrville	Jennifer Banks
Tues 5 th May	10.00am	Broomside Park Beefeater	Topical Discussion (FULL)	Janis Goodson
Tues 5 th May	2.00pm	Sacrison Methodist Church	History at Sacrison	Group Leader
Tues 5 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Group Leader
Wed 6 th May	1.30pm	Member's home	Craft (FULL)	Marion Lotts
Wed 6 th May	1.30 pm	Sacrison Methodist Church	Geology	Lesley Collins
Wed 6 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 7 th May	2.00 pm	The Story, Durham	Parlez Français <i>Nourriture et Restaurants</i>	Paul Newby
Thurs 7 th May	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Fri 8 th May	10.00am	A walk in Durham countryside with Richard	Walking	Richard Dennis

Fri 8 th May	10.30am	Witton Gilbert Community Centre	Historical Novels <i>A Gentleman in Moscow</i> (Amor Towles)	Tina Naples
Mon 11 th May	10.30am	Bowburn Hall Hotel	Coffee Morning	Marion Lotts
Mon 11 th May	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Mon 11 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Poetry Appreciation <i>Narrative Story</i>	Steve Beckett
Tues 12 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Group Leader
Wed 13 th May	10.30am	Meet at The Story	Amblers <i>Observatory hill & environs</i>	Tina Naples
Wed 13 th May	10.00am	Member's home	Creative Writing (FULL) <i>Light</i>	Irene Wilkinson
Wed 13 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 14 th May	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 14 th May	10.00am	Waddington St URC Church	Poetry Reading	Pauline Butler
Thurs 14 th May	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare	Group Leader
Fri 15 th May	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Mon 18 th May	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	Monday Crime Club <i>Everyone on this Train is a Suspect</i> (Benjamin Stevenson)	Monday Crime
Mon 18 th May	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Photography <i>Macro/close-up</i>	Sue Vanden Bon
Mon 18 th May	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Quiz at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Tues 19 th May	10.30am	Wetherspoons Bishop's Mill	Theatre <i>Discussion and planning</i>	Nancy Gemski
Tues 19 th May	12.00pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Housing and Health	Dorothy Hamilton
Tues 19 th May	12.00pm	Various	Pub Lunch	Sylvia Buxton
Tues 19 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Group Leader
Wed 20 th May	12.00pm	Indoor Bowling Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Wed 20 th May	1.30pm	Member's home	Scrabble	Group Leader
Wed 20 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 21 st May	1.15pm	St John's Church Hall, Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield <i>Bonny, bonny town! A history of Chester le Street from Roman times to today</i> <i>New Lanark</i>	Audrey Adams <i>Margaret Bozic</i> <i>John Campbell</i>

Thurs 21 st May	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 21 st May	2.00pm	The Story Café	Parlez français	Paul Newby
Mon 25 th May	10.30 am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too at Sacriston <i>Great British inventions of the past 250 years</i>	Group Leader
Mon 25 th May	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group	Charles Jolly
Mon 25 th May	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 26 th May	10.00am	Bowburn Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL) <i>Miniatures in art, especially gardens in India</i>	Carol Tritton
Tues 26 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Group Leader
Wed 27 th May	10.30am	Meet in the café car park DH5 ORH	Amblers <i>Lyons Park, Hetton le Hole</i>	Tina Naples
Wed 27 th May	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 28 th May	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare	Group Leader
Thurs 28 th May	1.15 for 2,00pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly Meeting <i>Waste management update</i>	Lynn Brooks
Sat 30 th May	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Music Appreciation <i>Ken Naples</i>	Group Leader

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; 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.

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

