



Drumbeat

Durham & District u3a Issue 27, July 2026

Welcome to your midsummer Drumbeat.

And what a scorcher of a summer it is! It's a time that calls for forest shade, Factor 50 and no end of ridiculous hats.

As our days seem to heat up, and what were unusual weather events become almost the norm, concern for our environment grows more pressing. You'll see in this issue that the Environmental Group is inviting all members to the screening of a UK-wide release on 27 July: "The People's Emergency Briefing" sets out the climate and environmental risks facing the UK, and the positive responses we can make.

In other news, reports from our music-loving and music-making contingents, some intriguing mathematical and scientific insights, a brilliant nature pic and a short story from Annie Hitchman. And don't forget the Summer Quiz and the September trip to Kiplin Hall.

Finally, a warm welcome to new members **Lorna Anness** and **Pat Wood**!

Laura Woods, editor

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NOTICES

There's no Singing for Fun on Friday, 3 July.

£10 deposits for the Kiplin Hall trip (9 September) are due by 25 June – see Noreen's email of 18 June.

The eventful story of the Suez Canal

Monthly meeting, 25 June

A certain waterway has been very much in the news in recent months; but the subject of June's monthly meeting is another crucial trade route with a tumultuous history.



The world's most vital waterway has been at the centre of geopolitics for centuries, beginning over 3,000 years ago with the 'Canal of the Pharaohs', through to the 19th century, when Britain fought against French ambitions to build a passage for ocean-going ships.

However, once it was built, so critical was the Suez Canal to colonial interests and so great was its stranglehold on world trade, that 'Perfidious Albion' finally seized total control and fiercely defended it against other rising powers. Modern day geopolitics have made it equally contested.

Derek Potter will be recounting the fascinating story of the Suez Canal at the monthly meeting on Thursday, 25 June.

*Venue: Bowburn Community Centre,
1.15pm for 2.00pm start*

Waste Lines

May monthly meeting

Last month's meeting may have been all about waste, but it was far from rubbish. Ian Burns of Durham County Council was there to give us the latest updates on household waste disposal, including what to expect from the new food waste collections now being rolled out in the county.

Ian wasn't just clear and informative – and clearly passionate about the environment – he was highly entertaining too. Some of the messages he got across:

- DON'T put your takeaway pizza boxes in the recycling! They're greasy, and they've been treated with a forever chemical.
- Bottles and jars can go in the recycling with lids attached – they're sorted on site.
- Broken glass (carefully wrapped) can go in the recycling bin.

What happens to all this recycled material? Aluminium cans go to make car engines, aeroplanes, mobiles, watches, kettles – and much more. Glass goes into road construction. Paper can end up as loo rolls, pencils and cards; and plastic is used to produce a huge range of things from window frames to swimwear. Garden waste is turned into compost in just 10 weeks. And methane biogas captured from the waste at the former Coxhoe landfill site, now greened over, is converted to electricity for the National Grid.

As for food waste, lockable caddies will be distributed over the next few months in a

phased approach across the county, and their contents collected weekly. Bags will be provided, but any bag can be used – the anaerobic digester removes bags before processing the food waste. (It's not compulsory to leave food waste for collection, by the way.)

Anaerobic digestion is not a pretty process (viewing it had put our speaker off beige food for life...), but it produces methane for electricity conversion, and fertiliser. The county council expects eventually to be processing about 50 tons of food waste per week.

Who'd have thought waste could be so interesting?



Ian explains DCC's approach to waste

Environmental Group Invitation: People's Emergency Briefing

The u3A Environment Group is planning to watch the film 'The People's Emergency Briefing' at our meeting at 12 noon on 27th July at Waddington Street URC. We would like to invite other u3A members to watch this film, as part of a roll-out by the

National Emergency Briefing Project to everyone in the UK.

Charles Jolly



Music Appreciation Group: The tracks of his years



Ken Naples was the presenter at our May meeting. He led us through a fine selection of songs that have punctuated his life, with an anecdote for each track.

"Riders in the Sky" by The Outlaws took him back to Saturday matinees and a cinema full of boys riding pretend horses; while the Drifters' "Save the Last Dance for Me" recalled nights at Newcastle's Oxford.

His musical journey took us from Ella Fitzgerald to the Beatles, and Nat King Cole to Wet Wet Wet – not forgetting "Nights in White Satin", the Moody Blues classic that was playing when he and Tina met.

It will remain forever their song.



Singing for Fun: Ushaw Event, 12 May

Twenty-two of our group assembled ready for our performance at 3.15 pm in the main building's theatre hall. There was a slight delay while we waited for the previous performers to leave.

Some of our members took the opportunity to rehearse their harmony part, standing quietly listening to a recording on their phone, while others sat nonchalantly in the auditorium showing no signs of nerves.

We were the last musical performance of the event and as our compère Bob Pullen said, the Region had "saved the best till last". We were definitely the largest group and it was pleasing to see that we were outnumbered by the audience. Armed with lyric sheets, they were encouraged to sing along with us.

Our first number, "Lean On Me" by Bill Withers, included three-part harmony that we'd been coached in by Jessa Liversidge back in February. It was a great way to start our performance.

We continued with John Denver's "Country Roads", accompanied by the audience.

Our group showcased their a cappella skills with "All Around My Hat" and "Super Trouper" and our audience joined in enthusiastically with The Proclaimers' "500 Miles". Our finale was "Those Were The Days" and, again, the whole hall sang along with gusto.

I can't thank the twenty-two members enough for the way they represented

Durham & District u3a. And how much fun they had!

I'll have to end the article here, someone called Simon Cowell is on the phone – watch this space.....

Ushaw Playlist

- Lean On Me
- Country Roads
- Top of the World
- The Wild Rover
- Walk Right Back
- All Around My Hat
- I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)
- Super Trouper
- Those Were The Days

Mike Forrest



Factors: Prime Numbers

Last month we discussed factors. Now we'll move our attention to prime numbers – a subject close to our heart as all of us in the u3a are in the prime of our lives. 😊

Some numbers have lots of factors – for example the number **24** has the following factors: **1,2,3,4,6,8,12 and 24**. Numbers that

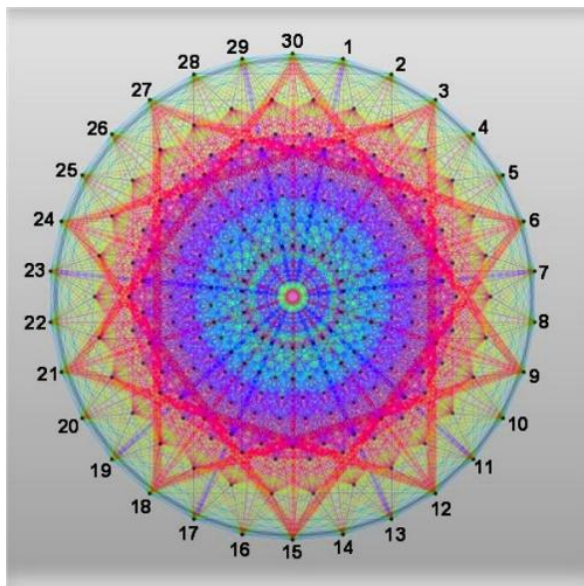
have multiple factors are called **composite numbers**. They can be “composed” or built from other smaller numbers.

However, some numbers don’t have any factors at all – other than 1 and the number itself. These numbers are called **prime numbers**.

For example, the number 13 has no factors other than 1 and 13 itself. There are no other numbers that divide into 13 exactly.

The number 13 is therefore a **prime number**. The first few prime numbers are:- 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23.....

The number 2 is a special prime number as it is the only one that is **even**. All other prime numbers are **odd**.



Prime numbers are of huge interest to mathematicians. For example, any number can be broken down into its **prime factors**.

The prime factors of 24 are: $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ (=24). The prime factors of 66 are: $2 \times 3 \times 11$ (=66).

Perhaps surprisingly, there are an **infinite** number of prime numbers – no largest or final prime number exists. There is an

ongoing hunt for new examples. The largest found so far, in 2024, has an incredible 41,024,320 digits (over 41 million). This was discovered using a vast array of computers with a huge amount of processing power. To put this into context, the Bible has roughly 4.5 million characters including punctuation and spaces.

Prime numbers are not just of interest to mathematicians: they have many uses in modern technology, computer security and practical calculations. In particular, the process of cryptography, which safeguards your online banking activity, makes use of prime numbers.

In the next instalment I will discuss another aspect of factors – **perfect numbers**.

Stephen Brand

Where are you? Where am I?

You’ll always know where you are by using the Satnav in your car or your smartphone.

This is a brief article about the story of Satnav – used by lots of people worldwide to guide them unerringly into rivers, or the wrong town. Even occasionally into the sea. Thankfully, mostly to their intended destination. Without using a map.

Satnav is the name given to any navigational system that uses satellites (well I never!). There are several different satellite systems used by the UK’s Satnavs – the most famous is the American GPS (Global Positioning System). Others used in our part of the world are the European ‘Galileo’ and the Russian ‘Glonass’. Satnavs show your position on Earth using any of

these systems. (Though they don't work under the sea.)

This is mostly about the American GPS, the first system set up in the 1990s. GPS is now used to refer to all satellite navigational systems – a bit like Hoover for any vacuum cleaner.

HOW IT WORKS



Your Satnav listens to the signals emitted from various satellites, normally four out of the 30 available. Each satellite broadcasts its exact location in space and the exact time this signal was sent. Your Satnav device then calculates how far away each satellite is based on the exact time the signal is received. Each satellite has a very expensive and very accurate atomic clock.

(Thankfully, your satnav doesn't. However, this cheaper clock can interpret the time from the satellite.)

ALBERT

Satnav is a real-world application of Albert Einstein's theories based on the nature of time. Using these theories, the atomic

clocks are deliberately set to run slower by 38 milliseconds. Not a huge amount – but this makes a big difference to accuracy on the ground. Without it, ground accuracy would be in error by about 10 km per day (you would most probably then end up in the sea.)

Not bad from one of history's most eminent scientists whose theories from the 1920s are now used in the 21st century.

HISTORY

The Global Positioning System was set up by the United States military. To prevent the opposition using this system, the signals were deliberately degraded. This applied to civilian use as well. The most accurate location was therefore reduced from feet to the size of a football field. Not much help in finding your way home.

However, in May 2000, President Bill Clinton decreed that the degraded signal be removed, meaning that we now have pin-point accuracy in our Satnav. This single event paved the way for accurate car/air navigation, smartphones and many other facilities. (Pizza delivery, for example.)

INTERNET BY SATELLITE

There are also satellite-based internet providers, the most famous being Elon Musk's Starlink, which provides internet access to remote parts of the world.

Whilst Satnav has around 31 satellites, Starlink currently has 10,000. (This facility is heavily used by the Ukrainian military.)

All parts of the rocket used to launch the satellites are returned to Earth for re-use. My friend, Janis, has managed to photograph the final stages of some of these rockets returning to Earth as they



speed over Newton Hall. Also captured are the blue clouds of the dumped residual fuel. Incredible.

Brilliant for a smartphone, our Janis!

Robert Lebar (Badger)

Short Story: **The Vase**

Samuel, a vase by birth, stood proudly atop the old cinema pillar, displaying his bouquet of spring flowers. Sam, as he was better known to the surrounding furnishings, shouted out to the brown leather settee and its two armchairs:

"Here, look, I don't mean to brag but it takes more than a quick wipe with a damp dust cloth to keep my admirers happy." Sam was ignored as usual by the lobby's other inhabitants. He smiled contentedly, having had his water changed less than an hour ago.

"He's always a bit aggressive when he's had fresh water," confided Sally, the art nouveau candleholder to Beatrice, the redundant hotel lobby ashtray. Both Sally and Beatrice now shared a shelf in the lobby's tall, glass-fronted corner cabinet.

The carpeting, which stretched from the revolving street door to the check-in desk, was a soft, rich burgundy colour. This was echoed in the glorious pinks and purples of Sam's cloisonné surface.

Sam began to preen himself, as he was now able to see his reflection in the ornate 19th century mirror with its bevelled glass. He comfortably stretched out his flower stems which had become stiffened with the fresh water.

At this point there was a sudden loud burp. No one claimed or apologised. Everyone pretended not to have heard it.

"I think it's time for the night staff to come on duty," ventured Sam, after a couple of minutes of embarrassing silence.

"Honestly, I can't understand how some hotel lobby decor can be so infatuated with their own importance," said the couch.

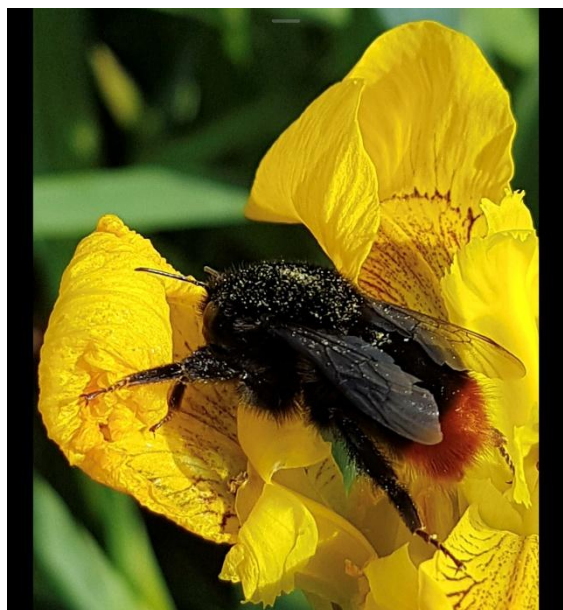


Annie Hitchman

Creative Writing Group

Busy Bee

Here's a beaut: one of the great welcome signs of summer, photographed by John Liddle.



Regional u3a news

There are still places available on the two events planned for July:

- **Golf Day, 10 July**

Full round, taster session or crazy golf at High Gosforth Golf Club. Email mike.wallace.u3a@gmail.com for details.

- **Historic Stockton, 30 July**

Illustrated talk at Central Library, followed by a guided tour of the town. Email patricia.a.marcus@gmail.com for details.

A new **Geology Network** is starting up on 15 September, with monthly talks and discussions via zoom. Email Elizabeth

Devon for details:

elizabeth@earthlearningidea.com

Finally, a **short story/poetry competition**, open to all. You're invited to submit a story (no more than 1500 words) and/or a poem (no more than 16 lines) on the theme of "happiness". Entries due in by noon on 11 September. See [here](#) for details, or email Cecilia Coulson: cecu3a@gmail.com

National u3a news

U3a essay competition

This year's topic is a remarkable real-life journey – of discovery, adventure or transformation – bringing the story to life in fewer than 1000 words.

The deadline is 31 July. Find out more [here](#).

u3a getaways is a new programme of bespoke holidays exclusively for u3a members and friends. The first trip is "The Agatha Christie Story" from 14 to 18 September. Find out more on the [u3a getaways website](#).

The **u3a Festival Fringe** starts on 25 June and runs until 10 July. It features online events in the run-up to, during and after the u3a Festival in York. Topics include Alfred the Great, Mrs Charles Dickens and the history of shoes. See [here](#) for more.



Catherine Dickens tells her story, 2 July

The Durham and District U3A – Summer Quiz - 2026

When is it happening?

Tuesday
August 11th at
1:30 – 3:45pm
(doors open at 1:15 pm)



??

Numbers

??

Where is it taking place?

Bowburn Community Centre



Who can come along?

ALL U3A members are welcome.

Geography

Music

History



Featuring MC and quizmaster,
Dave Tucker

Entertainment

??

General Knowledge



How much does it cost?

£2:50 including light refreshments

??



Tickets from Maureen Craik or Cynthia Bolton, or at the monthly meeting



July 2026 Calendar

To contact a group leader, please see the website Groups page, or click [here](#)

Date	Time	Place	Group	Contact
JUNE				
Mon 22 nd June	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group <i>No miracles needed</i>	Charles Jolly
Mon 22 nd June	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too <i>Prelude and Aftermath of Little Big Horn</i>	David Willock
Mon 22 nd June	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 23 rd June	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL) <i>Less Famous Renaissance Artists</i>	Carol Tritton
Tues 23 rd June	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Wed 24 th June	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Wed 24 th June	10.30am	Tesco Annfield Plain	Amblers: <i>A leafy walk from Annfield Plain</i>	Tina Naples
Thurs 25 th June	10.15am	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Reading Shakespeare	Sue Childs

Thurs 30 th June	1.15 pm for 2.00pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly meeting <i>The Eventful Story of the Suez Canal (Derek Potter)</i>	
Sat 27 th June	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Music Appreciation <i>Gill Maggs</i>	Stephen Brand
Mon 29 th June	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
JULY				
Wed 1 st July	1.30om	Member's home	Craft (FULL)	Marion Lotts
Wed 1 st July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Wed 1 st July	1.30pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Geology	Lesley Collins
Wed 1 st July	2.00pm	Indoor Bowling Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Thurs 2 nd July	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Circle Dancing	Linda Murdie
Thurs 2 nd July	9.45am	Member's Home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 2 nd July	2.00pm	The Story	Parlez Français: Un jour je voudrais...& Chp14	Paul Newby
Mon 6 th July	10.00am	Member's Home	Book Group (FULL)	Lynn Bilsborough
Mon 6 th July	1.30pm	Carrville Methodist Church	Quiz at Carrville	Jennifer Banks
Tues 7 th July	10.00am	Newton Grange Pub	Topical Discussion (FULL)	Janis Goodson
Tues 7 th July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Tues 7 th July	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	History at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Wed 8 th July	10.00am	Member's Home	Creative Writing (FULL)	Irene Wilkinson
Wed 8 th July	10.30am	Meet at the café Postcode for walk: DL14 OAG	Amblers <i>Low Barns Nature Reserve</i>	Tina Naples
Wed 8 th July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 9 th July	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 9 th July	10.00am	Waddington Street URC Church	Poetry Reading	Pauline Butler
Thurs 9 th July	10.15am	Riverfront Bistro, Business School	Reading Shakespeare	Sue Childs
Fri 10 th July	10.00am	A walk in East Durham with Richard	Walking	Richard Dennis
Fri 10 th July	10.30am	Witton Gilbert Community Centre	Historical Novels <i>The Year of Wonders by Geraldine Brooks</i>	Tina Naples
Mon 13 th July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Poetry Appreciation: Nature	Steve Beckett

Mon 13 th July	10.30am	Bowburn Hall Hotel	Coffee Morning	Marion Lotts
Mon 13 th July	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Wed 15 th July	10.00am	Member's home	Creative Writing (FULL) <i>A Watershed</i>	Irene Wilkinson
Wed 15 th July	1.30 pm	Member's home	Scrabble	Maureen Craik
Wed 15 th July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Wed 15 th July	2.00pm	Indoor Bowling Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Wed 15 th July	7.00pm	SPRA Community Room, Sheraton Park	Wine tasting <i>A new-to-you wine</i>	Jennifer Banks Cynthia Bolton
Thurs 16 th July	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 16 th July	10.00am	Waddington St URC Church	Poetry Reading	Pauline Butler
Thurs 16 th July	1.15pm	St John's Church Hall, Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield <i>St Godric</i> <i>The Bishop's Wood</i>	Audrey Adams <i>John McManners</i> <i>John Campbell</i>
Thurs 16 th July	1.45pm	The Story	Parlez Français	Paul Newby
Fri 17 th July	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Sat 18 th July	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Music appreciation <i>Stephen Brand</i>	Stephen Brand
Mon 20 th July	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	Monday Crime Club <i>Pretty Girls by Karin Slaughter</i>	Tina Naples
Mon 20 th July	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Photography <i>Architecture</i>	Alan Morrison
Mon 20 th July	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Quiz at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Tues 21 st July	10.30am	Wetherspoons Bishop's Mill	Theatre: <i>Discussion and planning</i>	Nancy Gemski
Tues 21 st July	12.00	For venue contact group leader	Pub Lunch group	Maureen Craik
Tues 21 st July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Tues 21 st July	12.00am	Contact group leader for details	Housing and Health <i>Visit to village</i>	Dorothy Hamilton
Tues 21 st July	12.00pm	Various	Pub Lunch	Sylvia Buxton
Wed 22 nd July	10.30am	Details to follow Coffee at Congburn Nursery	Amblers <i>Walking on Waldrige Fell</i>	Tina Naples
Wed 22 nd July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 23 rd July	10.15am	Riverfront Bistro, Business School	Reading Shakespeare	Sue Childs

Mon 27 th July	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too at Sacriston <i>British East India Company</i>	David Willock
Mon 27 th July	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group <i>Showing the film: 'The People's Emergency Briefing' – ALL INVITED</i>	Charles Jolly
Mon 27 th July	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Photography	Alan Morrison
Mon 27 th July	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 28 th July	10.30am	Wetherspoons Bishop's Mill	Theatre: <i>Discussion and planning</i>	Nancy Gemski
Tues 28 th July	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL) <i>Art from former Soviet Union countries</i>	Carol Tritton
Wed 29 th July	2.00pm	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 30 th July	10.15am	Riverfront Bistro Business School	Reading Shakespeare	Sue Childs
Thurs 30 th July	1.15pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly meeting <i>The Power of Plagues (Paul Nash)</i>	

Other groups/activities include:

Cinema – normally Mondays, but depends on film being shown

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

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

[Paul Newby](#)

[Rita McGarr](#)

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 (lauramw100@gmail.com), or Jim Crinson, deputy editor (website committee page).

