

Drumbeat



Durham & District u3a

Issue 29, September 2026

This month's Drumbeat opens with a lovely seasonal pic from Peter

Jackson. It features the Walking Group on their August outing, when Jennifer and Derek Banks led a scenic trail from Beamish along the old railway line to East Tanfield station.



Stunning! (And the scenery's not bad, either.)

Lots of items of interest in this issue, including a poignant story, a review of Durham Fringe, more friendly numbers, and everything you wanted to know about WhatsApp but were afraid to ask.

Kiplin Hall trippers – enjoy the visit on 9 September, and bring back photos!

Finally, a warm welcome to new member **Lesley Rowley**.

Enjoy the rest of the summer!

Laura Woods, editor

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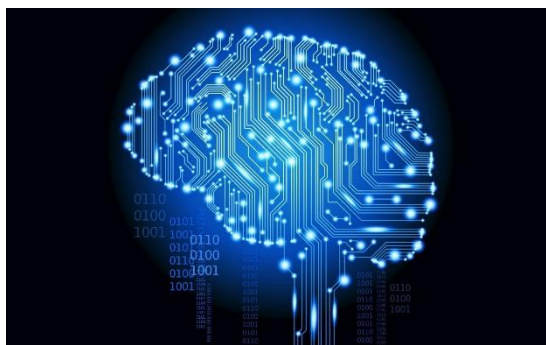
NOTICES

No meetings for:

- **Geology Group on 2 September**
- **Singing for Fun on 4 September**
- **Amblers on 9 September (Kiplin Hall day)**

AI: The Good, the Bad & the Unknown

Monthly meeting, 27 August



Artificial Intelligence (AI) has already changed our lives in so many ways. How can we best understand its potential for good – and bad? And what it might be capable of in the future?

Here to help enlighten us at the August monthly meeting will be mathematician and data scientist Dr Bill Oxbury, who has worked in both academia and government.

He's currently Professor in Practice for Data and Cyber Research at Lancaster University, where he focuses on AI for environmental applications, as well as cybersecurity.

Bill, who lives in Durham, is also Chair of Durham Wildlife Trust.

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

Monthly meetings: Can you help?

If you attend the monthly meetings at Bowburn, could you help out once in a while with the teas and coffees?

You'll already have had an email about this from Lynn (Brooks). It would make a big difference to have more people willing to

help – especially for the small number of regular helpers who currently turn out every month to serve everyone.

It's very straightforward:

- Helpers (3 or 4) turn up just after 1pm to set up. Serving begins at 1.15 and finishes at 1.45, then cups are washed and put away.
- All the equipment is there (someone brings the milk in). and as well as written guidance someone can always answer any questions.
- If you sign up then need to cancel, that's fine – just let Lynn know.

Please do think about offering your help. More volunteers mean that people only need to help out every so often.

You can sign up by contacting Lynn (via website contacts page), or by signing the sheet on the counter at the monthly meeting.



Victory is theirs!

Aptly enough, Team Number One won the great summer quiz on Tuesday, 11 August.

Their superior knowledge of car makes and models, 1970s hits, history, geography and a whole range of motley facts gave them the edge over a roomful of enthusiastic quizzers.

University Challengers, eat your hearts out!



The triumphant team (L to R): Kersty Evans, Steve Beckett, Cynthia Bolton and Derek Banks

The grand prize was the chance to come away with a fantastic £100,000. (Unfortunately, the scratch card proved a dud. Ah well, you can't win 'em all.)

With Dave Tucker as quizmaster and Mike Forrest as MC, it was a great afternoon.



Did anybody get Question 6??

Plagued by plagues July monthly meeting

Paul Nash, our speaker for July, gave us a fascinating history of some of the world's most devastating plagues, from Roman times through Spanish flu, right up to the Covid pandemic.

He made the point that plagues don't themselves bring about radical change, but they do speed up change that's already under way. And it's certainly true that Covid significantly accelerated our use of technology, and our reliance upon it.

Another message from Paul – and a sobering one:

plagues are something we'll never be without.

Paul prefaced his talk with a call-out

for Support for Prostate Cancer UK. Having survived prostate cancer himself, he uses his presentations to raise awareness of the disease and to raise funds for the charity.

Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases



As Dangerous as Poison Gas Shell:
SPREAD OF SPANISH INFLUENZA
MENACES OUR WAR PRODUCTION

Driving Aid

New member Karl Hemmingway has made a terrific offer to members.

Until he retired earlier this year, Karl was a driving instructor.

He has offered reassurance



lessons on any aspect of driving if anyone would like to take him up on it. This is your chance to see if your reversing is as good as you think it is!

Contact Karl direct on 07904 535457 or k_hemmingway@sky.com.

You could always drop a letter to the editor to let us know how you got on.

Tina Naples

Fringe Benefits

The sixth Durham Fringe Festival has just concluded. Having been to the last three, I was willing to give it another try.

Accompanied by my wife and sister and brother-in-law who had come over from the North West, I saw thirteen out of 140 Fringe shows – all in Durham City centre, which made it easy to navigate round the venues. There was also a good selection of refreshment establishments.

As with all Fringe-type events, the acts were varied in both quality and content, with magic, cabaret, theatre, music and comedy performances.

To give you a taste of what I enjoyed, here are reviews of three of the best shows.

But first, honourable mentions must go to productions of John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men"; Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor"; and a political comedy satire, "The Last Days of Trump".

In third place was The Durham Revue (City Theatre, Fowlers Yard). This was a fast-paced student revue, with three male and three female performers. While some sketches fell a bit flat, others worked very well. A typical students' revue: I can't fault them for their enthusiasm and timing, and the show rattled on for a full 60 minutes. I've seen them before and, no doubt will see them again.

My second favourite was Daniel Cainer: What am I, Chopped Liver? (Music Dept., Palace Green). One of the surprise shows. Inger/songwriter Daniel Cainer, has worked for, among others, LBC and the BBC. His songs related to his heritage (his family

being of Jewish origin from Europe). They were humorous and touching, covering topics ranging from how a parent felt when his daughter was one of the last children to leave Vienna on the Kindertransport, to another about his father having an affair and losing his toupée in windy Bournemouth. Some of the songs had a "Victoria Wood" feel to them. I thoroughly enjoyed this trip through his family history.

My favourite event was the Marsh Family (Stretch Tent, Palace Green).



This family of two parents and four children became a "YouTube sensation" during Covid, uploading musical videos onto the platform. They started with a parody of One Day More (Les Misérables) and continued with lockdown and political issues. Six years later, they are still doing it and sometimes performing live.

They were funny (Measles and Polio Down in the Schoolyard) and thought-provoking (Puppet on a Kremlin String). They were very good singers and musicians and obviously not a showbiz family. (Check out https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbDPdLsFPkc&list=RDJbDPdLsFPkc&start_radio=1.)

I would encourage all u3a members to give the Fringe a try next year. Most tickets

were £8 concessions, with some charging £5 and a few £11. With the weather we've had this year, it was a very pleasant way to spend a few days

Mike Forrest

For the love of numbers

Factors: Amicable Numbers

Last time we discussed perfect numbers. For the final article on factors, we're moving on to *amicable numbers*. These are pairs of numbers that have a special, friendly relationship – purely platonic, of course.

I will give you the definition of amicable numbers and then describe an example.

Take two numbers, say A and B. For each number, list its factors, but exclude the number itself from each list. Now add up the factors for A and B separately. If the sum of the factors for A is equal to the value of B and the sum of the factors for B is equal to the value of A then the numbers A and B are amicable.

As an example, let's look at the smallest and most famous pair of amicable numbers: 220 and 284.

- The factors of 220 are: 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 20, 22, 44, 55, 110.
- The total of these numbers is 284.
- The factors of 284 are: 1, 2, 4, 71, 142.
- The total of these numbers is 220.
- Hence, 220 and 284 are a pair of amicable numbers.

Pythagoras and his followers studied amicable numbers and regarded them as having mystical properties.



Here are the first ten:

1	220	284	6	10,744	10,856
2	1,184	1,210	7	12,285	14,595
3	2,620	2,924	8	17,296	18,416
4	5,020	5,564	9	63,020	76,084
5	6,232	6,368	10	66,928	66,992

There are over 1 billion known amicable pairs, and there is an ongoing hunt by mathematicians to find more. It is not known at this stage whether there are an infinite number.

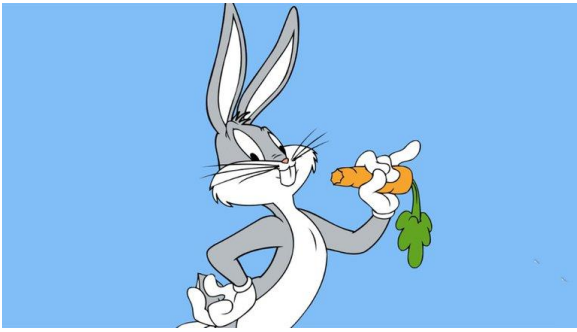
Time for numbers to take a break from Drumbeat, but I have received requests to cover other aspects and types of numbers, which I will do later in the year.

Stephen Brand



WhatsApp, Doc?

A Brief Story Concerning Electric Chat



You've probably heard of WhatsApp, even if you haven't used it. It's part of what is known as Instant Messaging (IM), and is named to sound like 'What's Up?'

Background

WhatsApp Instant Messaging relies on something called computer 'push' technology. Users are alerted by the software that there is an incoming message on their phone – they are 'pinged' even when not actually using the application.

Over time, there have been various IM applications: Microsoft Messenger, Skype, Facebook, Chat, to name but a few. WhatsApp was launched in 2009, initially for the iPhone; Androids followed in 2010. Now available on PCs too, it was bought by Meta (Facebook) for \$19 billion in 2014. Deep pockets indeed.

WhatsApp is a revolution: its messaging service includes the sending of text, pictures, video and audio. All for free.

Now the world's most popular messaging service., it has about 2 billion users. Why so popular? It runs equally efficiently on slow and fast networks and cheap phones, using internet data instead of expensive texts.

WhatsApp versus email

WhatsApp two-way chat is more natural than email (where replies can be slow as people take time to open their inbox). It gives you immediacy, with instant messages and replies. Very near a proper face-to-face conversation. Though don't get me wrong – misunderstandings can still very easily occur!

Instant delivery with real-time replies (possibly and hopefully!).

Development

In 2020, WhatsApp partnered with the World Health Organisation to provide messaging services during Covid.

It now includes the facility to delete sent messages after they have been delivered (even if they were read by your recipient, although this can lead to interesting explanations).



It also has excellent security, called 'end-to-end encryption', which was implemented in 2016, meaning no-one can read your private messages. Your message is sent to the WhatsApp server, where it lurks until it can be sent to the recipient (their phone may be switched off). Once the message is sent and received it is deleted from the server.

Practicalities – including 'the ticks'

Your WhatsApp profile shows your contacts the following information:

'Online' – if you have the app open.

'Last seen' shows the date and time you last communicated with someone (it doesn't show who you were contacting).

And for you, the sender, it shows icons:

One grey tick – your message has been received by the server but not delivered (recipient's phone may be turned off – but see below*).

Two grey ticks – the message is on the recipient's phone, but they haven't yet read it.

Two blue ticks – your recipient has received and read your message.

A clock icon – your message hasn't left your phone for the server – possibly a poor connection.

(There are several other icons, but the above are the most common.)

**NB: If the one grey tick is there for days on end, you may have been 'blocked' and are being ignored – is the recipient mad at you or have they gone from your life for good? Time to move on!*

Finally, WhatsApp is now firmly an important part of our current culture. From snail-mail via email to Instant Messaging! Yay!

The final Finally

Send me a message – please!



Badger (aka Robert Lebar)

Climbing Up

*The eensy weensy spider climbed up the water spout
Down came the rain and washed the spider out
Out came the sun and washed away the rain
And the eensy weensy spider climbed up the spout again.*

Cara closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She blew as hard as she could at the candles on the birthday cake.

Her friends were all sitting on the living room floor to watch. Five of the candles obligingly flickered out. Cara looked around at her friends' smiling faces as they clapped and cheered; then she closed her eyes, holding back the tears as she quickly blew out the remaining candle.

Amidst the background noise, Cara's grandmother stood up and made her way through the tangle of little girls' legs protruding from their party dresses to put on the overhead lights. Cara looked over to where her mother sat on the settee near the piano. When her eyes lighted upon her mother's smiling face, Cara ran over and threw her arms around her. 'It won't come true now,' Cara whispered in her mother's ear, 'my wish won't come true, will it, Mum?'

'Let's wait and see, sweetheart.'

Just then the front doorbell rang. Cara's grandmother went to open the door. 'Daddy!' Cara cried in surprise and delight! She ran across the room to throw her arms around her father's neck as he lifted her in the air and twirled her around.

After setting Cara down, her father went over to where her mother was sitting and gave her a big hug and a kiss before joining her on the couch. While they were talking together, Cara ran along to the kitchen where her grandmother was setting the table with party hats and plates of sandwiches and sausage rolls.

From the living room window Cara could now see some of her friends swinging from the branches of several big apple trees which grew toward the back of the garden, so she ran out through the kitchen door to join them.

The windows of the house were all closed so the raised voices in the living room couldn't be heard outside even as they grew louder and angrier. Cara covered her ears as she felt the tears rush to her eyes. She whispered quietly to herself, 'Oh, please, don't let it start again.'

But it was too late.

As tears began to course down her cheeks, Cara ran back indoors where she found her mother on the settee as before but her dad was gone. Cara threw herself into her mother's lap.

Her mother hugged her as Cara cried, 'I wish I'd never promised the good fairy.' Her mother comforted Cara, saying softly, 'Let's not blame the good fairy, let's just remember what else she told you: "If success doesn't come at first ..."'

*Annie Hitchman
Creative Writing Group*

Regional u3a news

Regional meeting, 23 September



The next regional meeting will be held at Whickham Golf Club from 10am to 3.30pm. It includes a buffet lunch (optional) and afternoon entertainment by "Old English". All are invited – cost is £7 (£15 with lunch).

Please register and pay by 11 September using this link: [September 2026](#)

Or use the website (Events page): <https://northumbria.u3asite.uk/>

20 October: Pre-Raphaelites

Expressions of interest are invited for tours of the Pre-Raphaelite exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery on 20 October.

Please email Catherine Stevenson at Intoto444@hotmail.com if you're thinking of going. Cost to be determined once entrance fees are known. More information [here](#).

Short story/poetry competition

Open to all, on the topic of "happiness".

Entries due in by **noon on 11 September.**

See [here](#) for details, or email Cecilia Coulson: cecu3a@gmail.com.

Ushaw 2027: Call for volunteers

Another regional Ushaw event is to be held next year, on 19 May. Would you like to lead an activity? See [here](#) for details.

Regional Comms help needed

Calling anybody with an interest in or experience of SiteWorks and Beacon!

Peter Barnett, regional website editor and main Beacon administrator, is looking for someone to help him.

Training is available for anybody new to these systems.

If you're at all interested, please email Peter using the contact details on the Committee page of the website <https://northumbria.u3asite.uk/>

National u3a news

Online learning events in September include:

[Triumph to Trauma \(940 to 1042\)](#)

[The Titanic sails at dawn – punk in the 1970s](#)

[The Enchanted Archipelago: A journey through the Galapagos](#)



And plenty more – see [here](#).

September 2026 Calendar

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

Date	Time	Place	Group	Contact
August				
Mon 24 th Aug	10.30 am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too at Sacriston <i>The French Revolution</i>	David Willock
Mon 24 th Aug	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group <i>'No Miracles Needed' by Mark Jacobson</i>	Charles Jolly
Mon 24 th Aug	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 25 th Aug	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL) <i>Open session – Forceful women</i>	Carol Tritton
Tues 25 th Aug	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan

Wed 26 th Aug	10.30am	Meet outside Annfield Plain Tesco (DH9 7UZ)	Amblers <i>The reverse Annfield Plain leafy walk</i>	Tina Naples
Wed 26 th Aug	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 27 th Aug	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare (FULL)	Sue Childs
Thurs 27 th Aug	1.15pm for 2.00pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly meeting <i>Artificial intelligence: the good, the bad and the unknown (Bill Oxbury)</i>	Lynn Brooks
Sat 29 th Aug	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Music appreciation <i>Robert Lebar</i>	Stephen Brand
Mon 31 st Aug	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Sept				
Tues 1 st Sept	10.30am	Newton Grange Pub	Topical Discussion (FULL)	Janis Goodson
Tues 1 st Sept	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	History at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Wed 2 nd Sept	1.30pm	Member's home	Craft (FULL)	Marion Lotts
Wed 2 nd Sept	2.00pm	Business School. Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 3 rd Sept	9.45am	Member's Home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 3 rd Sept	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare (FULL)	Sue Childs
Thurs 3 rd Sept	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Circle Dancing	Linda Murdie
Thurs 3 rd Sept	2.00pm	The Story	Parlez Français: TBD	Paul Newby
Fri 4 th Sept	2.00pm	Bowls Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Mon 7 th Sept	10.00am	Member's Home	Book Group (FULL) <i>"The Old Wives' Tale (Arnold Bennett)</i>	Lynn Bilsborough
Mon 7 th Sept	1.30pm	Carrville Methodist Hall	Quiz at Carrville	Jennifer Banks
Wed 9 th Sept	10.00am	Member's Home	Creative Writing (FULL)	Irene Wilkinson
Wed 9 th Sept	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 10 th Sept	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 10 th Sept	10.00am	Waddington Street URC Church	Poetry Reading	Pauline Butler
Fri 11 th Sept	10.00am	County Durham	Walking <i>A walk in the Durham countryside</i>	Richard Dennis
Fri 11 th Sept	10.30am	Witton Gilbert Community Centre	Historical Novels: Azincourt <i>by Bernard Cornwell</i>	Tina Naples
Mon 14 th Sept	10.30am	Bowburn Hall Hotel	Coffee Morning	Marion Lotts
Mon 14 th Sept	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest

Mon 14 th Sept	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Poetry Appreciation <i>Partings</i>	Steve Beckett
Tues 15 th Sept	10.30am	Wetherspoons Bishop's Mill	Theatre <i>Discussion and planning</i>	Nancy Gemski
Tues 15 th Sept	12.00pm	For venue contact group leader	Pub Lunch group	Maureen Craik
Tues 15 th Sept	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Wed 16 th Sept	1.30 pm	Member's home	Scrabble	Maureen Craik
Wed 16 th Sept	2.00pm	Business School. Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Wed 16 th Sept	7.00pm	SPRA Community Room, Sheraton Park	Wine tasting <i>Bordeaux Region</i>	Jennifer Banks Cynthia Bolton
Thurs 17 th Sept	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 17 th Sept	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare	Sue Childs
Thurs 17 th Sept	1.15pm	St John's Church Hall, Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield: <i>The Mongols</i> <i>From Himalayas to Hutt</i>	Audrey Adams David Willock John Cambell
Thurs 17 th Sept	2.00pm	The Story	Parlez Français: TBD	Paul Newby
Fri 18 th Sept	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Fri 18 th Sept	2.00pm	Bowls Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Mon 21 st Sept	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	Monday Crime Club <i>Mischance Creek by Gary Disher</i>	Tina Naples
Mon 21 st Sept	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Photography <i>Landscape</i>	Alan Morrison
Mon 21 st Sept	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Quiz at Sacriston	Maureen Craik
Tues 22 nd Sept	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL) <i>Symbolism</i>	Carol Tritton
Tues 22 nd Sept	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Housing and Health	Dorothy Hamilton
Wed 23 rd Sept	10.30am	Pow Hill Country Park (signs fizzy campus)	Amblers <i>Derwent Reservoir</i>	Tina Naples
Wed 23 rd Sept	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 24 th Sept	1.15pm for 2.00pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly meeting <i>Old English – Songs of the North East</i>	Lynn Brooks
Sat 26 th Sept	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Music appreciation <i>Sheila Forrest and Alan Bell</i>	Stephen Brand
Mon 28 th Sept	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too at Sacriston <i>The Great Explorers</i>	David Willock
Mon 28 th Sept	12.00pm	Waddington Street URC Church	Environmental Group <i>Discussing book chosen by group members</i>	Charles Jolly

Mon 28 th Sept	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 29 th Sept	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Wed 30 th Sept	2.00pm	Business School. Bistro	Français Amical (full)	Mike Gibb

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

