

Drumbeat



Durham & District u3a

Issue 30, October 2026



Welcome to the October Drumbeat.

This pic from our resident photographer John Liddle hopefully sets the tone for a gorgeous autumn, now summer has officially ended.

And hello to new members **Esther Ashby, Dorothy Forster, Sally Glover, Christine Kellett, Faith Lewis, Barbara Wood** and **Elaine Wood**. Enjoy your u3a!

Laura Woods, Editor

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NOTICES

Music Appreciation: Check with Stephen Brand for a potential change to the September date.

Christmas Lunch (yes, it's that time again): Book by **9 October** with Theresa Mulkerrin.

Songs of the North East II

Monthly meeting, 24 September

We welcome back Old English, comprising Pete Cryer and Alan Giles, who have been singing together since 1966.

They'll be accompanying their performance of iconic folk songs with a range of instruments including Northumbrian pipes, guitar, whistle and percussion.

The duo will cover the history and background of these traditional melodies with a slideshow, and there'll be plenty of opportunity for audience participation, so get those vocal cords in trim!



"The church with the lantern tower"

Kiplin Hall Visit, 9 September



Firstly, thank you to Noreen for all her hard work in organising a really enjoyable day out: it was so well planned and there were no areas of "what happens now?" as we were given timetables of when to meet for the tour, our slot at lunch, what time to be back on the bus etc. The tour guide was a fount of knowledge and made the history of Kiplin Hall very interesting – he ran out of time but not information!

Kiplin Hall is a fascinating place with the artwork and history; the walled garden with the variety of vegetables including enormous pumpkins and the ancient grape vine in the hothouse, still laden with grapes, in competition with Hampton Court in size.

Lesley Thomas

A Brave New World

Hot on the heels of last month's AI talk from Bill Oxbury, here are some thoughts from John Campbell, whose experiment

with the technology gives him pause for thought.

It is now a year since my book, "An Artist's View", was published. It gives me great satisfaction that this book records the range of my landscapes and explains the development of the skills and tools I needed to practise to achieve this.

It also allowed me to instruct readers in how they might develop similar skills. That is now, but the world has changed. In promoting the book and making potential buyers aware of its existence, my niece took this photograph which contains a landscape I had not completed.

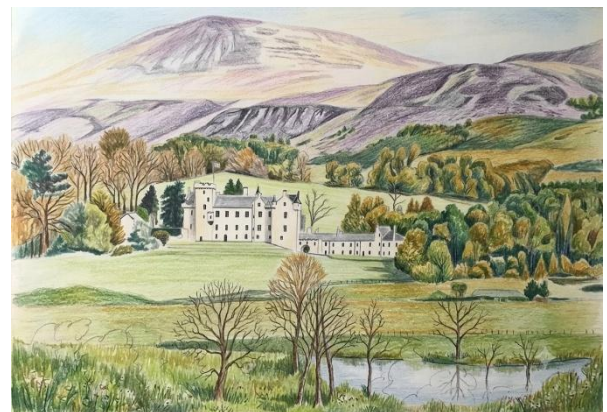


As the uses of AI are being generally promoted and warnings given about its potential criminal use, I wondered if it was really capable of doing the tasks suggested as being possible, so I set to work and took a photograph of the unfinished pencil drawing to test it into the system.



I should explain at this stage that I don't accept that AI is 'Intelligent'. Think of the system rather as a huge database which sorts through possible solutions. The picture above actually contains a lot of information that the data can sort through, such as the colours used, my style of applying the pencil shading, direction of the pencil line and so on.

So, what did AI produce?



My initial response: Amazing! But then further thought generated concern and fear. It took AI about 20 seconds to produce the completed drawing,

This aspect of AI poses great problems and many questions for the art world. How does an artist now "prove" they drew the picture? Indeed, do we need to learn to draw in the first place and spend hours producing the work? (Around 40 to 70 hours for some of my landscapes.)

Thank goodness I did the work and wrote the book – yes, I **did** write the book! – because this can also be done by the system now. In video documentary production, AI can also speak the script in any dialect or language you want.

I am effectively unemployed, because I have services and skills which are now not required. Companies are now discovering that AI will be cheaper.

But consider what this does for the individual's motivation, sense of worth, achievement, or satisfaction in a job well done.

John Campbell

How to Domesticate a Badger



Now for a change of subject (at last, you say!) – from technology to domesticity.

How can I make this interesting? Let's see...

First, a little story. When I was a nipper (OK, late teens), and mad about aeroplanes, I joined Her Majesty's Royal Air Force. I found myself in an RAF technical training school in South Wales (Here be Dragons).

On our own and a long way from home, the first thing we lads were taught was the domestic work usually done by mum (or

dad). Sadly, they wouldn't let your mum join up with you.

The instructors duly taught us to how to iron, sew, clean floors, and feel really depressed.

(To cheer us up they later taught us how to use lethal weapons. We all agreed that the best was the Bren machine gun – excellent!)

Reluctantly, back to domesticity.

Eventually managing to use a washing machine, I quickly learned that washing a favourite wool jumper at the wrong temperature resulted in something that would fit only a teddy bear – unfortunately no military teds were available.

(Finally, after many interminable months of boredom, we were introduced to our real purpose: technical training on nurturing aeroplanes, including carefully repairing the damaged ones. But that's another story.)

So, now the domestic scene is set. Stay with me, as we dive into the fascinating history of – yes – ironing! ...unless you'd rather hear about my adventures in the Middle East? *(Get on with it – Ed)*

OK...Surprisingly, ironing, the smoothing of fabric to improve appearance, can be traced back thousands of years.

During the Han dynasty, the Chinese used metal pans filled with hot coals to press their fabrics. The Vikings rubbed smooth stones or glass 'smoothers' over a damp cloth. (When not pillaging, Vikings were quite sartorially aware.)

Between the 1400s and early 1800s came the heavy metal era. 'Flat Irons', also known as 'sad', were irons of solid metal heated directly on a stove/fire, then used until they cooled.

Because they lost heat quickly, households generally had at least two on the go, one in use and the other heating up. Being cast-iron, they were heavy and their handles got very hot. Fortunately, in 1870 a clever lady, Mary Potts, patented a flat iron with a detachable wooden handle (now you had many irons and one cool handle).



'Box irons' arrived during the 1800s. These had a compartment for hot coals, sand or charcoal, with slots in the sides to let in air, and could be used for longer without reheating. Irons were also experimentally powered by gas and – alcohol (?).

Ah! Electric irons! These were first patented in 1882 by New Yorker Henry Seely. They probably scorched as much as they smoothed, until thermostats were incorporated in 1920 and the scorching (perhaps) diminished.

Steam irons were the next innovation, in the 1930s–1950s.

Today's latest features are non-stick soleplates, cordless and auto shut-off, along with adjustable temperatures and

spray functions for those recalcitrant creases.

Ironing has declined somewhat with wrinkle-resistant fabrics, though Badger's shirts still require detailed attention (any offers?).

Finally, I could go on to the history of ironing boards – but I sense that that's enough for now (*Too right – Ed*).

PS: Notwithstanding Badger's consummate ironing expertise, as above, a place nearby does the ironing for me: 'Can Iron – Don't Iron'.

PPS: Enough of this domestic malarkey! Back to reality. My favourite aeroplanes are the beautiful Spitfire, and this aerial beast; the English Electric Lightning, a now obsolete supersonic jet fighter.

An
awesome
machine.
Perhaps
next time?



Badger (aka Robert Lebar)

Letter from our independent correspondent

My thought for today:

What is newsworthy? On Thursday, 13 August 2026, the "I" paper had nine pages dedicated to the eclipse. It was described as "once in a generation", a "cosmic wonder", "spectacular", "joyful" and "glorious". Some of us merely shrugged our

shoulders and said, "Is that it? Is that all there is?"

On Friday 14 August 2026, the same paper afforded two columns to the fifth anniversary of the Afghan Taliban sweeping back to power, riding on disgraceful treatment of women and girls. This régime has issued over 200 decrees, all mandated by men, limiting female freedoms, with no education beyond 12 years of age and virtually no employment. Men may beat their wives – but not leave broken bones or visible scars – naturally! Men may divorce. The law allows child marriage. All movement outside the home is severely restricted.

Is it fair to measure importance by column inches? Maybe not...but you get my point.

The I paper claims impartiality with its editorial independence. It is probably more balanced than most others. Contributors of headline articles are clearly identified (e.g. "member of a right-wing think tank" or "ex Labour MP"), so the reader may better assess bias.

Newspapers may seem old hat, old school. The modern trend is scrolling on phones for clips, clickbait, reels – all ideal for short attention spans. Toxic influencers fraudulently fabricate "facts" that lack scrutiny.

Editors used to be kings of the newspaper jungle, deciding what went to press and what was buried. Now it's big tech billionaires and algorithms. Viral conspiracy theories, rage, disappointment and panic spread like the recent wildfires. We need to counteract this. We can help by giving

support to ethical, fearless independent reporters who tirelessly seek the truth.

In a world full of shameless leaders and spineless politicians, some attempting to change history, plus social media influencers and their sidekick AI, we desperately need independent reporting.

The biggest problem is what to believe or to dismiss as fake, a hoax or mere propaganda. Seeking the truth demands effort. I suggest that most people cannot be bothered to make that effort. Facts need to be checked, verified, analysed and reflected upon. Support for newspapers, despite all their faults, is essential.

Without independent journalists, we might be unaware of the scale of secret flights and disappearance of thousands of immigrants in the USA, or the true state of our water companies in the UK.

We'd be less aware of covert financial deals to and from individuals that influence elections, or the parlous state of the armed forces.

We might be blind to the lack of long-term planning in infrastructure and energy storage facilities...reaction rather than anticipation.

We'd know less about the Post Office scandal and delays in compensation, or the grooming gangs fiasco. We hear of the police and other agencies tiptoeing around the accusation of appearing racist, causing long delays in justice.

I appeal, once more, for support for independent journalism. These correspondents help us better understand our complicated world. They are digging

deepest in a valiant attempt to close in on the truth– much closer than Trump’s Truth Social or TikTok.

For me, that can only be a good thing, if nothing else.

Brian Watts

Creative Writing Group

Regional News

There’s still time to book on the following events:

[Regional Meeting 23 September](#) – at Whickham Golf Club.

[Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Poetry](#) – a tour and presentation at the Laing, 20 October.

Here’s an opportunity to sing to your heart’s content: [The Big School Assembly Sing-Along](#). Taking place at the Glasshouse, Gateshead on 7 October, it’s a Songs of Praise special event hosted by Aled Jones. Free and open to anyone who wants to sing their heart out – you just need to book a ticket and turn up in good time.

On 16 November, there’ll be a guided tour of [St Nicholas Cathedral](#), Newcastle, along with the opportunity to hear an organ recital. To book, email [Moir Stokoe](#)



Finally, volunteers are sought to run activities of all kinds at next year’s [Festival of Fun, Music and Learning](#) at Ushaw Historic House (19 May 2027).

National News

Remember when concert tickets were 2s6d? *

[u3a rewind](#) is a new project to create an archive of the cultural experiences that shaped us in our younger days. You’re invited to suggest song tracks and share stories and pictures that recall the music and culture of your youth. They could become part of a wider collection in the Museum of Youth Culture.



Were you a Beatles fan?

There are three information packs to help with discussions and memories, covering all aspects of youth culture from teddy boys to goths, with film clips, playlists and talking points. (*Take a look – they’re really good!*)

To send in your memories of what it was like to be young in the last century, click [here](#).

**No, neither do I*

AGM, 14 October 2026

Any u3a member is eligible to attend the AGM, online or in person. To register, click [here](#).

Online learning events this month include:

[Mods versus Rockers: A 1960s moral panic?](#) – how the phenomenon developed.

[The US constitution vs unitary executive power](#), on how the presidential power is reshaping US democracy.



[Art Deco Days](#), on the glamour and innovation of 1930s Scotland.

Statue on top of the Russell Institute, Paisley

Anagrammi!

A recent sojourn in beautiful Florence prompted this little puzzler.

Unscramble the letters to find people and things associated with the city.

Answers on p. 12.

1. It has banks in Florence: RAIN ROVER
(5, 4).

-----/-----

2. A nutty, fruity delight? TEN FOR NEIL!
(10)

3. UGLIFY FIR ZEAL for a famous art museum (6, 7).

-----/-----

4. CIVIL DANE ON ROAD gives us a Renaissance master (8, 2, 5).

-----/---/-----

5. I ALIGHT IN A REED for the author of an absolutely divine comedy (5, 9).

-----/-----

6. DECIDE MACHINE RITE for a family member who became a queen of France (9, 2, 6).

-----/---/-----

7. LIMO DUO make it to this well-known landmark (2, 5).



--/-----

8. This artist produces BILL TO CITE (10).

October 2026 Calendar

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

Date	Time	Place	Group	Contact
September				
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
October				
Thurs 1 st Oct	9.45am	Member's home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 1 st Oct	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare (FULL)	Sue Childs
Thurs 1 st Oct	1.15pm	St John's Church Hall Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield <i>Crime and punishment walk (Ken Bradshaw)</i>	Audrey Adams
Thurs 1 st Oct	2.00pm	The Story	Parlez français	Paul Newby
Thurs 1 st Oct	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Circle Dancing	Linda Murdie
Friday 2 nd Oct	10.30am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Friday 2 nd Oct	2.00pm	Bowls Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Mon 5 th Oct	10.00am	Member's Home	Book Group (FULL) <i>"The Girl with the Louding Voice" by Abi Daré</i>	Lynn Bilsborough
Mon 5 th Oct	1.30pm	Carrville Methodist Church	Quiz at Carrville	Jennifer Banks
Tues 6 th Oct	10.30am	Newton Grange Pub	Topical Discussion (FULL)	Janis Goodson

Tues 6 th Oct	200pm	Sacrison Methodist Church	History at Sacrison	Maureen Craik
Wed 7 th Oct	10.00am	Member's home	Creative Writing (FULL)	Irene Wilkinson
Wed 7 th Oct	1.30pm	Sacrison Methodist Church	Geology	Lesley Collins
Wed 7 th Oct	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 8 th Oct	9.45am	Member's Home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 8 th Oct	10.00am	Waddington St URC	Poetry Reading	Pauline Butler
Fri 9 th Oct	10.00am	Durham Countryside	Walking (with Simon)	Richard Dennis
Fri 9 th Oct	10.30am	Witton Gilbert Community Centre	Historical Novels <i>"The Book of Longings" by Sue Monk Kidd</i>	Tina Naples
Mon 12 th Oct	10.30am	Bowburn Hall Hotel	Coffee Morning	Marion Lotts
Mon 12 th Oct	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Mon 12 th Oct	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Poetry Appreciation <i>Black Poetry</i>	Steve Beckett
Tues 13 th Oct	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Wed 14 th Oct	10.00am	Hybrid – Member's home + Zoom	Creative Writing <i>A love story</i>	Irene Wilkinson
Wed 14 th Oct	10.30am	Meet in the car park – charges apply	Amblers <i>Hardwick Park</i>	Tina Naples
Wed 14 th Oct	1.30pm	Member's home	Craft	Marion Lotts
Wed 14 th Oct	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 15 th Oct	9.45am	Member's Home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Thurs 15 th Oct	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare (FULL)	Sue Childs
Thurs 15 th Oct	1.15pm	St John's Church, Meadowfield	History at Meadowfield <i>Meadow (documentary)</i> <i>Jane Seymour</i>	Audrey Adams J Campbell A Adams
Thurs 15 th Oct	2.00pm	The Story	Parlez français	Paul Newby
Fri 16 th Oct	10.00am	Bowburn Community Centre	Singing for Fun	Mike Forrest
Fri 16 th Oct	2.00pm	Bowls Centre	Bowls	Malcolm Dawson
Mon 19 th Oct	10.30am	Sacrison Methodist Church	Monday Crime Club <i>Murder at the Seaview Hotel by Glenda Young</i>	Tina Naples
Mon 19 th Oct	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Photography <i>Autumn Colours</i>	Alan Morrison
Mon 19 th Oct	2.00pm	Sacrison Methodist Church	Quiz at Sacrison	Maureen Craik
Tues 20 th Oct	10.30am	Visit – contact group leader	Housing and Health	Dorothy Hamilton

Tues 20 th Oct	10.30am	Bishop's Mill, Wetherspoons	Theatre <i>Discussion and Planning</i>	Nancy Gemski
Tues 20 th Oct	12.00pm	For venue contact group leader	Pub Lunch group	Maureen Craik
Wed 21 st Oct	1.30pm	Member's home	Scrabble	Maureen Craik
Wed 21 st Oct	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Wed 21 st Oct	7.30pm	SPRA Community Room, Sheraton Park	Wine Tasting <i>Wines of the Loire</i>	Jennifer Banks Cynthia Bolton
Thurs 22 nd Oct	9.45am	Member's Home	French	Elizabeth Morgan
Mon 26 th Oct	10.30am	Sacriston Methodist Church	History Too at Sacriston <i>Dead Sea Scrolls</i>	David Willock
Mon 26 th Oct	12.00pm	Waddington St URC	Environmental Group <i>"No Miracles Needed" by</i> <i>Mark Z Jacobson</i>	Charles Jolly
Mon 26 th Oct	1.30pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Canasta Cards Group	Mike Forrest
Tues 27 th Oct	10.00am	Belmont Community Centre	Art Appreciation (FULL) <i>Sculpture: Classical to</i> <i>Renaissance</i>	Carol Tritton
Tues 27 th Oct	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Spanish	Mick O'Sullivan
Wed 28 th Oct	10.30am	TBA	Amblers	Tina Naples
Wed 28 th Oct	2.00pm	Business School Bistro	Français Amical (FULL)	Mike Gibb
Thurs 29 th Oct	10.15am	Business School Bistro	Reading Shakespeare (FULL)	Sue Childs
Thurs 29 th Oct	1.15pm for 2.00pm	Bowburn Community Centre	Monthly meeting <i>Mazzeah Spice – from the</i> <i>Middle East to the North</i> <i>East</i>	Lynn Brooks
Sat 31 st Oct	2.00pm	Sacriston Methodist Church	Music Appreciation <i>Clive Wright</i>	Stephen Brand

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.

Anagrammi!

Answers to quiz on p. 8

- 1. RIVER ARNO**
- 2. FLORENTINE**
- 3. UFFIZI GALLERY**
- 4. LEONARDO DA VINCI**
- 5. DANTE ALIGHIERI**
- 6. CATHERINE DE MEDICI**
- 7. IL DUOMO**
- 8. BOTTICELLI**

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](#)).

