

In Contact



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Editorial

I'm still here! Sadly, my efforts to find a replacement for the post of In Contact editor have not been successful. Still, I remain hopeful that someone with a laptop and a couple of hours might come forward.

You will know that the vote to find a new name for the potential new u3a took place in March. The combined votes of Durham and Dunelm resulted in **Durham and District** being the winner. As a result, we can move forward with other matters and I hope that we will be having the definitive vote on whether to go ahead very soon, possibly in May. All members will be notified of the arrangements whether by email or post.

Some of us were lucky enough to see a preview of a piece of work that has been developed as a collaboration between the Music Group and New College, Durham. You will be able to see this in May instead of the advertised travelogue. Do please come along and hear the stories of members and their musical memories depicted in movement by performing arts students.

New French Group

This new group is now off the ground but has plenty of room for new members.

“The plan is to meet weekly and a few more members would be useful to ensure there always an opportunity for varied and entertaining conversation and discussion. Like the other groups the new group will have conversation topics and opportunities to practice reading and translating French (with maybe a tiny bit of grammar in the mix). The aim is to have some fun and amusement whilst practising French with all the members taking their turn to decide what to do each week. The days and times of the meetings are not set in stone so if you would potentially

be interested in joining the group or want more information feel free to call or email mike.gibb1952@sky.com, 07928486787.”

Off The Wall

Don't forget to mark your diary for this event on 10th May. It's £5 and you need to book a ticket. I've got mine already. Further information at <https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/off-the-wall> which also contains the link to book to attend.

In the week leading up to the day there will be on-line events. I'm pleased to say that the Monday Crime Club is involved in this event having suggested a mass readathon of a crime novel connected to Hadrian's Wall. The historian and novelist Adrian Goldsworthy has agreed to take part and we are looking forward to discussing *Vindolanda* with him. You can sign on for this free zoom session at <https://www.u3a.org.uk/off-the-wall-online>. If you feel so inclined, why not read the book.

Monthly Meeting

Don't forget to contact Maureen Craik if you need or could offer or could offer a lift, and we will try and match people. mcraik-40@hotmail.co.uk.

The future talks are also on the website Events page via the Calendar button. Ed.

Fancy a night out?

I don't usually advertise shows but this one is giving a 10% discount especially for u3a members.

If you have ever been a fan of X=Factor, you might remember that the very first one was won by G4, a group of four terrific male singers. They have since gone from strength and are coming to Hartlepool Town Hall as part of their 2023 tour. Tickets are £25 but you can get the discount by quoting this code **G4DISC10**. You will need to book on their website <https://www.g4official.com/>

You can also have a look at their promotional video before you decide by following this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3iM-KcoL7g>

From Charlie Callus

Charlie has sent me a link to a site dealing with memories of World War II and opportunities to get involved in the project. If you might be interested have a look at <http://theirfinesthour.english.ox.ac.uk/home>.

From James Gilman

In this article, James gives a very personal view of a visit to Sarajevo in 1992 when it was under siege and draws parallels with today's war in Ukraine.

While this article is about the Siege of Sarajevo in the early 1992, it gives some flavour of what life is like in the towns & cities of Ukraine under attack and besieged by Russian Forces.

HELL IS A CITY ...*The Siege of Sarajevo*

The way to Hell isn't via a gaping hole in the ground belching out smoke, flames, and poisonous fumes. You go to Hell in the belly of a Yak, sitting side by side with soldiers squeezed together along the fuselage of a giant Russian cargo plane, knees jammed against mountainous crates of machine-gun shells, heart pressed against the pit of your stomach, waiting for the first of the shell-holes that will puncture the dark interior with daylight. There are no parachutes on board. You fly courtesy of the world's most exclusive airline, operated by the troops of UNPROFOR: whose motto is *'Maybe you'll arrive, or maybe you won't'*; it all depends upon whether the Serb artillery dug in below your flight path chooses to ignore you, or to obliterate you. Exclusive, not because of the cost of your ticket, for travel is free. And certainly not because of the luxurious accommodation, for there is only one class of travel: cargo class, with every comfort ruthlessly eliminated because it weighs too much. It is exclusive because a ticket comes by invitation only, and few civilians make it on to the passenger-list to Hades.

The citizens of this outpost of Hell call it Sarajevo, and I flew there at the invitation of its Lord Mayor with a ticket provided courtesy of the SAS, to report back to Britain on the kind of help needed by these European neighbours of ours in effecting the eventual reconstruction of their buildings and their lives once the military finally abandon their pulverisation of both. And the military are making a thoroughly professional job of the latter. Sarajevo International Airport has earthen ramparts for its walls and sandbags for its windows. You drive into the city in Armoured Personnel Carriers, 8 people to each, in convoy under armed escort from the French Foreign Legion. There are no windows, only gunslots covered with armoured flaps. But you don't need windows to sense the damage -- you experience it in the flesh, through massive jolts from the potholes and sudden detours to avoid the wreckage of homes long-since flushed of their inhabitants by demolition teams of mortar and shellfire. One especially vicious jolt, and an armoured flap momentarily lifts to reveal a glimpse of a neatly-trimmed hedge lining a row of empty suburban homes. The hedge consists of a row of burned-out buses lying on their sides, topped by a row of burned-out cars all minus their bonnets. The latter take over where the line of buses ends, each half-buried in the earth, forming a row of metal shields facing the hills from whence cometh not salvation, but annihilation.

None of this prepares you for the visual shock when at length you arrive at journey's end: the Holiday Inn Hotel, centre and base for all visitor activity in the city. The doors of the APC are flung open, confronting you with the sight of twin skyscrapers facing the hotel, each some 20 storeys high, every window an empty eye-socket, glaring from a facade pitted with the scars of shell-pox and smeared with the streaked mascara of dead ash. Here and there flash the purplish glints of plastic implants plugging these gaping wounds for, incredibly, people still live inside them -- they have no other home.

Sniper's Alley is a broad, treeless boulevard facing the Holiday Inn. And concealed in the mountains looming over Sniper's Alley are the guns that dictate the moment of transition from life to death of all who inhabit the city.

I was there to report on the Siege of Sarajevo: the longest and most devastating siege of modern warfare since the 900-day Siege of Stalingrad in the Second World War. The eyes of ordinary people in Western Europe are closed to the plight of those trapped within this vast cauldron, under which the enemy forces periodically stoke up the fires in order to simmer the broth of humanity seething within its iron prison to a liquid mush, that can then be easily drained via a spout labelled *'surrender'*.

I stood in the ruins of the National Library, once one of the finest in Europe, now an empty hovel propped up by the rubble of its own destruction. I stood in the wreckage of the National Museum, its interior lit by the daylight shed by a gaping shell hole in a side wall, its walls festooned by cascades of plastic sheeting laid to catch the rain entering via the roofless roof and conduct it out through the windowless windows, in a vain attempt to protect empty display cases whose exhibits had long since mouldered away. And I picked my way through the rubble of what had been one of the most prestigious hotels in Europe, its prestige now reflected solely in the fact that its front doors still hang on their hinges, though guarding nothing but empty air.

There are no lights illuminating the potholed streets of Sarajevo after dark, and no-one smokes outdoors any more, once dusk falls: too many people have been shot dead by the glow of their own cigarettes. The cemetery outside the City Hospital grows as quickly as a puddle in a storm.

Do you want statistics? In the 1,000 days of the invisible Siege of Sarajevo, over two million explosive projectiles of various kinds have been fired into the city, killing over 10,000 people of

whom nearly 2,000 were children, and wounding over 80,000 more. The shortage of electricity, gas, water, and food coupled with deteriorating conditions of hygiene have driven over 100,000 inhabitants to flee the city -- a quarter of its pre-war population.

Do you want to know what Sarajevo is *really* like? It's like Edinburgh, or Newcastle or Durham -- with holes. There are holes in the roads, holes in the walls and roofs of buildings, holes in the maimed bodies of the thousands of ordinary people like you and me who have narrowly escaped slaughter, and holes in the minds of thousands more who, whilst physically complete, have experienced too much trauma to be able to cope any longer with the demands of everyday survival. Only the cats and dogs are free from these holes. They have been killed and eaten, somewhere along the dateline separating the 500th from the 600th day of the Siege of Sarajevo.

I stayed in Sarajevo with a welcoming, warm-hearted ordinary family of Muslims, a guest in their apartment on the 8th floor of a block in which the lift has not worked for the past 2 years; in which we went to bed by candlelight, because the electricity is cut off abruptly once the day's meagre ration has been consumed; in which all the food served is cold, because there's no gas to fuel the gas cooker which, though ingeniously adapted by the family to burn wood, still lies unused because there's no wood left in the city to burn; in which there is no water for drinking, washing, or flushing the toilet other than that laboriously hauled up the 8 flights of stairs each day in plastic buckets, bottles and bowls from some anonymous source elsewhere in the street; and in which the only meat comes out of tins of beef hewn from the EC's food mountain, and the ration of these is 1 tin per person per month. *My hosts had nothing to share with me -- and they shared it all with a hospitality that put me to shame.*

The rights and wrongs of who did what in this war in the Balkans are irrelevant to the people of Sarajevo, for whom survival is a daily gamble against the odds written across the face of their city by the pointing fingers of the guns that encircle it. Their survival is not, however, irrelevant to the rest of us on this Continent of ours, however many miles may separate us from this particular outpost of Hell.

There is a bell tolling in Bosnia today, and we have no need to send for whom it tolls. It tolls for Europe as a whole: for Brussels quite as much as for Bihac; for Madrid quite as much as for Mostar; and for London equally as for Sarajevo. It tolls to mark the beginning of the unravelling of the thread of European civilisation our forebears stitched together so painstakingly and so painfully

over the past two thousand years and more. If Sarajevo falls to the enemy, it will not be the fault of its own war-wearied citizens, who have exhausted and bankrupted themselves in their struggle for survival. It will be because we in the rest of Europe have failed to rally to its defence.

It is we who have become bankrupt of our ability to care, and who have exhausted our will to defend not simply a city called Sarajevo somewhere across the sea and over the mountains but, rather, those civilised values we profess to live by but are no longer willing to fight to preserve, and which are the ultimate victim of the dragon of aggression now roaring its flames into that city. It will be because we in the West have grown too selfish, too consumed with the pursuit of our own materialistic goals, to heed the rampaging of the enemy outside our gates; and too blind to recognise the fact that if we cannot muster the will to defend freedom in Sarajevo, we shall never be able to summon up the spirit to defend our own freedom when it, too, comes under assault sometime within the coming 1,000 days or 1,000 months.

We would do well to remember, all of us, that it was in Sarajevo that a spark was struck, a century ago, which consumed the flower of Europe's manhood in the furnace of the First World War. We ignore the history of aggression, writ large under the initials **WWI** and **WWII** at our peril. For if the domino that is Sarajevo does topple, the consequential effects will not be halted at the borders of the former Yugoslavia. We shall all fall, one by one; and we shall have deserved our inevitable fate.

Don't bother to write to Sarajevo -- there are no postal services into or out of Hell. But if you have, by now, glimpsed something of the terror that engulfs this city, write, *now* to your newspaper, your MP, the Government, your MEP, your Church, or your Rotary or similar service organisation, and urge their positive response to the agony of the people of Sarajevo. You will be doing yourself, your correspondents, and your civilisation the greatest possible favour. For as much as Sarajevo needs us, we need Sarajevo even more.

On my way back from Sarajevo to the Airport I glimpsed, through one of the gunslots of my APC, a board on which someone had scrawled: *"You are now leaving Hell. Be thankful. Amen."*

Amen, indeed. And Amen.

James A. Gilman
Sarajevo Airport

NB I was proud to add my name to the list of those who signed the petition from Sarajevo to NATO which resulted in the latter's planes bombing the Serb military forces back into their own territory, thus ending the Siege of Sarajevo. A pity NATO cannot do the same for Ukraine.

JAG

An Invitation from Dunelm u3a

Dunelm u3a are running a trip to Saltaire on 8th June and have a few seats left on the bus if anyone is interested. The cost is £18 but the trip does clash with our own monthly meeting. Nonetheless, if interested please email Jennifer Banks at banksdgjj93@gmail.com. I can personally attest what a great place Saltaire is, having been many times.

More From the u3a Website

You might remember that last month I mentioned an on-line talk by Jim Al-Khalili. It was terrific and there are plenty more to choose from including one from our March speaker, Bob Pullen. What a wonderful talk on the brain we had. This time his subject is *A Day in the Life of Your Spinal Cord*. Why not give it a go and check out the rest of the offerings at <https://www.u3a.org.uk/events/educational-events>.

What's on in April

You can also consult the Groups section on the website and contact Group Convenors from the Contacts page.

13 th April 2023 Kath and Harry Gilbert - Travelogue	Durham Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm
27 th April 2023 The Hartlepool Male Voice Choir	Dunelm Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm (Take membership card)
5.4.23. The Daughter of Time by Josephine Tey.	Book Group	Contact Terry Birchmore for venue on 0191 378 0563	10.00 am monthly.
Every three weeks	German	Contact George Schlesinger for venue on 0191 384 9056	
4.4.23	Topical Discussion	The Beefeater, Brookside Park.	10.00 am monthly.
5.4.23 – Cockfield 19.4.23 - Malton	Strollers	Contact Ken Naples or see the website for details. 07711 979098	10.30 am

Wednesday 2.00 pm and Monday 10.30 am (Conversation)	Café Français and Français Amical	The Gala Cafe	Both meetings weekly
6.4.23	Circle Dancing	Sacriston Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly.
13.4.23	New French Group	Bishop's Mill, Durham	3.00pm
Thursdays at 9.45 am.	French	Contact Elizabeth Morgan for venue on 0191 384 6874.	9.45 am <u>weekly</u> except 2nd Thursday
No meeting in April	Poetry	Gala Theatre Cafe	2.00 pm monthly
6.4.23	Shakespeare Study	Gala Theatre Café	10.15 am
17.4.23 Slow Horses by Mick Herron	Monday Crime Club	Lanchester Garden Centre	10.30 am monthly
19.4.23	Scrabble	Contact Maureen Craik for venue on 0191 371 9521	2.00 pm monthly
25.3.23	Music Appreciation	Carrville Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly
Check with Sylvia	Pub Lunch	Variable arrangements. Contact Sylvia Buxton on 0191 373 1644	As Arranged
4.4.23 – The Reformation	History	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
17.4.23	Quiz	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
24.4.23	History Too	Sacriston Methodist Church	10.00 am monthly
As Arranged	Cinema	Odeon Cinema, Durham Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100.	As Arranged
4.4.23	Spanish Conversation	Gala Theatre café.	2pm fortnightly

And Finally.....

Don't forget you can contact me at the address below if you have something to contribute. I have space in the next edition.

Tina Naples (tina.naples@aol.com)