

In Contact



Editorial

As you know, this is my last edition of In Contact. My stint as editor lasted far longer than I anticipated. I wasn't even on the Committee when I took it on, let alone in the Chair. A very great thank you to all of those who have contributed. Without you there would be no newsletter other than a calendar of forthcoming meetings.

I wanted to change the newsletter from twice yearly to monthly. It's been interesting, and sometimes frustrating in finding enough copy each month. More than that, it has been very uplifting to find how much talent resides in our u3a. We are surrounded by a talented bunch of friends, and it has been wonderful to be able to showcase some of that over the last few years. I do, however, remain convinced that there are still lights hiding under bushels out there, and I hope more of you will emerge to amuse and educate us all in the future.

As I told you last time, your new editor will be Laura Woods. She will no doubt be doing things her own way, just as I did. Do give her all the help and support you can. You will find her contact details at the end of the newsletter.

Museum of Archaeology

I know that some members are interested in Archaeology, and I have been approached by Durham University to tell you about a twilight series on the 4th Thursday every month 5.30 – 6.30pm. The August session is about the club the Museum runs for youngsters aged 7 to 11 years. (Durham Archaeology Explorers). This might be of

interest to grandparents who have some caring duties and are looking for things to interest their grandchildren. The university contact has promised to pass on details of future talks as they become available. They are free and open to all.

Monthly Meeting

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

Merger News

Two significant decisions if you have not yet heard of them.

Firstly, the new Durham & District u3a (assuming it gets a positive vote from Dunelm), will meet on the second Thursday of the month. This happens to be our current meeting day, but it is also the one that minimises disruptions to interest groups in both the current u3as.

Secondly, the Steering Group have now adopted a constitution for the new u3a. This will only come into effect if there are positive votes from both Durham and Dunelm. It is similar to our current constitution with the addition of some useful items such as the possibility of postal voting. We will be circulating the document later in the year. Forgive me for re-iterating but this document will be formally for adoption by Durham & District u3a at the inaugural meeting at which we shall be electing a new Committee.

RETURN OF THE DRAGON

the sequel to 'Dragon Song'

In the last issue James told us how he stole a dragon's tooth from the museum in Tsingtao just as he and his family were escaping to Shanghai and ultimately, England. This is the story of how James returned the dragon's tooth to its rightful home. Many thanks to James to keeping us all entertained over the months and years with stories of his amazing life.

"The whole of China wants to meet you!" The excited reporter thrust a leading Beijing newspaper into my hands, its headline screaming the message **'ENTER THE DRAGON!'** **"Old Dragon Tooth is our hero!** the reporter beamingly proclaimed. We were standing at the entrance of a 5-Star hotel on the Qingdao seafront, a crimson banner stretched across its entrance, emblazoned in gold lettering, in English and in Chinese: **WE WELCOME MR. & MRS. GILMAN**".

Preceded by the Manager carrying a huge bouquet of flowers for my wife and supported by his Deputy, a beautiful Chinese lady in traditional robes carrying a similar bouquet destined

for me, we were ushered into the hotel, ushered into an express lift, and finally ushered into the Presidential Suite in order to ‘freshen up’, we were told, before an appointment with China Central Television at the local TV Studios. Alone at last, we collapsed into adjoining armchairs and looked at each other, bewildered, stunned, and exhausted in equal measure. Expecting to return to the sleepy seaport of Tsingtao I’d left behind me 65 years ago, we found ourselves instead in a city of 7 million now called Qingdao, its citizens all agog with excitement at our arrival. Envisaging a low-key handing-over of my dragon’s tooth, and an equally quiet departure. we’d walked instead into a Rock Star welcome. It was all too much to take in.

On our arrive from Shanghai an hour or so earlier, we found a stretch limo crammed with reporters waiting to greet us, ply us with questions, and explain that we were being taken as honoured guests to a leading hotel owned by their newspaper, the Qingdao Daily News, circulation 5 million. The Elite Hotel, it turned out, was located on the same seafront road as our 1930s house, itself now a hotel.

At the TV Studios, Pauline was ushered into a seat in the front row while I was brushed down, made up, and injected on to the TV stage to be greeted by a smiling Ni Ping, China’s most famous TV presenter, and escorted to my settee to a background of rapturous applause from the invited audience. Provided with a tiny electronic bug in my right ear which instantly translated from Chinese into English and vice versa, Ni Ping told me that the whole of China was gripped and fascinated by the story of my returning, aged 70, to Qingdao to hand back the tooth I’d stolen, aged 5. This programme, she assured me, would be transmitted nationwide to an audience of millions of viewers, thus satisfying the desire of at least some of the nation to have a close encounter with ‘Old Dragon Tooth’.



I was immediately bombarded with questions by my interrogator, mainly centred on my experience of 1930s Tsingtao, which I soon realised was as foreign to my audience as today’s Qingdao was to me. The Mayor of Qingdao, invited to join us, graciously accepted my tooth together with my apology and humble request for forgiveness for my childhood crime. Reassuring me that my criminal’s slate had been wiped clean, he shook hands and handed the tooth, in its tiny wooden container back to me, to be later restored to the Aquarium where it belonged.

At this point Ni Ping advanced to where my wife was sitting, leaned forwards towards her, slipped a silver bangle from her own wrist, encircled Pauline's wrist with it and in halting English told her it was her personal welcome to China and to Qingdao. Another distinguished figure from the audience was invited on to the stage; he was China's leading zoologist, who was asked for his opinion as to the validity of my claim to possess a dragon's tooth. He replied that while in the whole of his professional career he'd never had the good fortune to come across a dragon, he nevertheless had no wish to dispute Mr. Gilman's claim that he had done so.

More questions, centring upon my reason for returning the tooth, and the show was wrapped and we were released to take the next step on this extraordinary journey, which was to a magnificent banquet in our honour at Qingdao's Civic Hall, where I was expected to make another impromptu speech. By now thoroughly drained – I was 70, after all! -- we were transported back to our hotel to relax and get our heads around what had been the most overwhelming day of our lives.

But upstairs, where I'd repaired to the Bar leaving Pauline talking with our new friends downstairs, one more assault upon my senses awaited me. Without warning, suddenly over the loudspeaker came the strains of '*Rainbow on the River*', my old Dragon Song. Tears sprang into my eyes and overflowed uncontrollably as a beautiful Chinese girl invited me to dance to the music. We slowly circled the floor, the tears still streaming uncontrollably down my face as I relived memories of those vanished, golden 1930s days. Quietly, inconspicuously, the TV camera that had been following me around recorded, for posterity, the sight of this elderly Englishman confronting, so emotionally, the ghosts from his Chinese past.

Following a welcome night's sleep watched over by a young lady on duty outside all night to fulfil our slightest request, and after a sumptuous breakfast we were whisked off in our limo on a tour of the area including a visit to our old house, to the Clinic set up by my father in 1936, and to the Sports Stadium where I'd celebrated the Coronation in 1937. We eventually arrived at the Aquarium. A red carpet covered the pathway from the gated courtyard to the decorated doorway, where an array of microphones queued up to welcome us, along with a crowd of excited fans eager for our autographs. After half an hour spent scrawling our signatures into the wads of proffered booklets, we were finally ushered into the Aquarium itself.



There on a plinth, 6 feet high and surmounted by a glass dome spot lit from above, reclined my dragon's tooth in all its solitary, splendour. All around the walls were displayed hugely enlarged photos of 1930s Tsingtao taken by my father at the time.

Stepping forward in his impeccable formal wear, the Aquarium's Director listened to my own halting words of apology, then made his own speech of welcome, assuring me that I and my wife were welcome and honoured guests and, against a background of clicking cameras, flashing TV lighting, and cheers from his assembled staff, we were finally released into our welcoming vehicle and driven back to our hotel. The most incredible, unbelievable, two days of our lives had been concluded. The next day we were driven to the Airport, farewelled by the same reporter who'd welcomed us a century earlier, and then off to Shanghai and on to London.

Back home and once in recovery mode, I wanted to show, in some practical form, my appreciation of the incredible reception and hospitality we'd experienced. Having learned that Qingdao would be hosting the Sailing Events of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, I felt my answer lay in that direction.

Accordingly, I wrote two Olympic songs for my 'home town': '*Welcome To China!*' and '*Sailing For Qingdao*'. Both were performed at a public concert at The Sage Gateshead in June 2007, and were placed on the British Council's website for use by schools throughout the UK during the Olympics period. I recorded both on CDs and sent these to Qingdao where '*Sailing For Qingdao*' was enthusiastically received and was played to incoming Olympics visitors at the city's International Airport and throughout the Sailing Events (all won by the

British!), and finally was awarded a prize by the Beijing Olympics Sailing Committee: 4 solid silver Olympics medallions – my own Olympic silver!

Since then, I've kept in touch with Qingdao, and was recently informed that a website had been set up there on which some 50 million Chinese had followed the story of my Dragon's Tooth, bestowing upon me their own fond name: **Old Dragon Tooth!**

So much to have resulted so unexpectedly from the theft of a small tooth from a small dragon in a small town by a small boy once upon a time in a far-distant past.

And they say crime doesn't pay!

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The 3D Musical Jukebox

As I hoped, Chris Meads has given permission for us all to explore and enjoy the recent work between Durham u3a Music Appreciation Group and New College, Durham. You can see the whole thing via the link below. You will need a password to access the Jukebox part of it – the password is **memory**. This is to protect copyright.

<https://www.chrismeads.com/work#/jukebox/>

What's on in August

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

No meeting in August due to annual outing.	Durham Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm
31.8.23 How do you do that? Stuart Bowie	Dunelm Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm (Take membership card)
7.8.23? Contact Group Convener.	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	
Summer Break	Topical Discussion	The Beefeater, Broomside Park.	10.00 am monthly.
9.8.23 and fortnightly	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
3.8.23	Circle Dancing	Sacriston Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly.
Every fortnight	Beginners French Group	Botanic Gardens, Durham. Contact Maria Cook for details at wildswimmer1@gmail.com	3.30pm
Thursdays at 9.45 am.	French	Contact Elizabeth Morgan for venue on 0191 384 6874.	9.45 am <u>weekly</u> except 2nd Thursday
14.8.23	Poetry	Gala Theatre Cafe	2.00 pm monthly
10.8.23 and every fortnight	Shakespeare Study	Gala Theatre Café	10.15 am
21.8.23 The Silver Pigs by Lindsey Davies	Monday Crime Club	Lanchester Garden Centre	10.30 am monthly
16.8.23	Scrabble	Contact Maureen Craik for venue on 0191 371 9521	2.00 pm monthly
Summer Break	Music Appreciation	Carrville Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly
15.8.23 12.pm Seven Stars, Shincliffe	Pub Lunch	Variable arrangements. Contact Sylvia Buxton on 0191 373 1644	As Arranged
Summer Break	History	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
Summer Break	Quiz	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
Summer Break	History Too	Sacriston Methodist Church	10.00 am monthly
As Arranged	Cinema	Odeon Cinema, Durham Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100.	As Arranged
1.8.23 and every fortnight	Spanish Conversation	Gala Theatre café.	2pm fortnightly
Fridays weekly	Swimming Club	Variable arrangements. Contact Ken Naples on 07711 979098	As arranged

And Finally.....

Don't forget you can contact your new editor at the address below if you have something to contribute.

Laura Woods (lauramw100@gmail.com)