

In Contact



Editorial

February doesn't have much to recommend it apart from my husband's birthday and the first appearance of snowdrops. They are always beautiful and the harbinger of Spring. They remind us that we have lots to look forward to in the months ahead.

And speaking of looking ahead, you should all by now be aware that the Committee is in talks with Dunelm about the possibly of merging the two u3as. I use the word 'merging' loosely as we will need to close down both u3as and open a new one. There will of course, be the opportunity for everyone in both u3as to vote on the proposals at an Extraordinary General Meeting at which we will present a new Constitution for approval and elect a new committee for the new Chapter. This is all some way in the future, and we are aiming at April 2024. In the meantime, things will carry on as normal while work goes on in the background.

I have already outlined the advantages to this move, but they do bear repeating:

- More opportunities for social contact and to make new friends
- The opportunity to develop new interest groups
- Potential to add new members to groups that are struggling with low numbers
- More skills available to the Committee and a greater pool of people to serve on the Committee
- The chance to have back-ups for the Committee jobs – without which we cannot function.

If this goes ahead, we will have around 300 members – far less than many others and more manageable nowadays with the help of technology. As the Chair of Dunelm has said to his membership – we are discussing a merger, not a takeover. We will need a new name and we hope you will give this some thought. Please send me your ideas. I already have about eight suggestions. You will have the opportunity to vote for your favourite.

I am pleased to say that consultations with the Third Age Trust have confirmed that we are going about this in exactly the right way. All the boxes are ticked and we just have to deliver now for your approval.

Finally, we hope that you are happy for your Committee to proceed with this matter. I appreciate that some of you will have concerns or objections. Please feel free to contact me and I will try and allay any fears. I reiterate that this will only go ahead with a democratic vote of the members when we are able to put firm proposals to you.

Tina Naples Editor

New Spanish Conversation Group

¡Holá!

You might recall that we used to have *un grupo español* some time ago and we are pleased to announce the formation of a new group. The new Group Leader is Mick O’Sullivan and you can contact him direct at mjosully@hotmail.co.uk to express interest. The group will be relaxed and friendly and open to all abilities. There will also be a signing up sheet at the next monthly meeting and an email to all members. Hopefully, this will capture enough people to make a viable group. The group will meet in the Gala café on alternate Wednesdays at 10.15am. Once Mick has the names of those interested, I’m sure he will let you know the proposed start date.

The Wall

Some of you who read stuff from the Trust or the region will have picked up that there is to be an event all around Hadrian's Wall on 10th May. The trust are organising it and there is a programme of events on the day and more fringe events to be announced. Our Monday Crime Club came up with the idea of a big crime readathon based on a murder mystery connected to the wall. Additionally, the organisers have been given details of a Roman re-enactment organisation by Paul Newby. Durham is doing its bit and we hope to hear soon how our ideas have been taken forward.

Anyone can attend the 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. It is likely that there will be some zoom events.

Musical Evening

Our member, Clive Wright is involved in a musical evening and a cordial invitation is extended.

The event is "**An Evening of Readings and Song**" and will be held on **March 11th** at 7.30pm at **Belmont Parish Hall on Broomside Lane** - just along the road from Carrville Church.

Included in the evening's entertainment will be music by Faure, Debussy and Grieg played by a pianist and soprano who are coming down from Scotland to perform. But the highlight of the show is bound to be poetry written by Clive himself which has been set to music - Sherburn Field.

The cost is £10 - £8 concessions and it promises to be a lovely evening. For further information and to book tickets, please email Clive at clivewright1903@gmail.com.

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.

From Jean Bainbridge

Hello everyone, my name is Jean Bainbridge and I am the Speaker Finder for Durham u3a. This is a job which I have done for various organisations but nearly all for women only groups. As you can appreciate, it is totally different looking for suitable speakers for mixed groups and inevitably some will appeal to women more than men and vice versa. However, I will try to find topics that should mostly appeal to all of you. You should by now have a copy of, or access to the programme of speakers arranged up to and including June 2023, the rest of the year is still to be finalised. Please let me know if you have any particular ideas for future subjects and I will be happy to try to incorporate them for you.

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

From James Gilman

TEA WITH A WARLORD

Fancy a nice cuppa?

My father once took tea with a Chinese warlord. It happened in Sheng Feng, a tiny town to the south-west of Peking in which, back then in 1923 no European had ever set foot— except for my father, James Gilman. The 21 year old Salvation Army officer was the sole occupant of a small wooden shack, the site of a recent successful suicide, which the town's Governor had graciously rented to the foreign religious movement my father represented.

One October morning, engaged in his daily Bible study, James was startled by a ferocious rapping on his door. Opening it, he was confronted by a tall military figure wearing an unkempt uniform, an officer's cap, and a large revolver in its large leather holster strapped around his waist. Beside him stood another soldier, this one armed with a naked scimitar sword. **"I am Warlord Chung. I have come to kidnap you."**

James courteously invited the Warlord to take tea with him, as one does with any guest in China. Chung strode inside, looked around him at the single ramshackle bed, the rickety table, the solitary kitchen chair, the flimsy bookcase, and the dirty kitchen sink, and commandeered the chair, leaving my father to sit at the edge of his bed. The bodyguard stood silently just inside the door, sword still drawn. James made and served the tea.

"I need money, so I will kidnap you, you will pay me, and I will let you live." James laughed. **"I have no money!"** **"Then your employer will pay for your life."** James laughed again. **"My employer has no money either. See for yourself!"** and waved his hand at his sparse furnishings. **"So why are you here in China?"** queried Chung. **"I come to tell people all about God."**

"We have many Gods. We don't need a new, foreign one!" James proceeded to explain that *his* God was the only true God, who came to earth as a man and died for the sake of mankind. The Warlord listened in silence; then, with a snort, he stood up. **"I will let you go this time. But I shall be back"**, True to his word, a few days later he returned, this time leaving his bodyguard outside. **"Tell me about your God."**

My father slowly and simply, in terms a Chinese Warlord could perhaps understand, recounted the story of Jesus Christ, his life and death, and how this led to a new religion called Christianity. Over the next few weeks the Warlord returned on several occasions, his curiosity clearly aroused, until one day he announced that he, too, wanted to become a Christian, and demanded to know what this involved. My father explained the basis of baptism, after which he filled a crackled jug from his kitchen sink. poured it over Chung's head, said the appropriate words, and pronounce him now to be a fully-fledged Christian.

"Good. Now we make my men Christians too!" With that, the Warlord strode outside into the courtyard, found an old hosepipe lying on the ground, connected it up to the nearby stand pipe, lined up his squad of some 30 or 40 men into some semblance of a military formation, and marched up and down their ragged ranks dousing them all with unholy water while pronouncing to each in turn: **"You're now a Christian!"** without bothering to tell them why he was doing them this favour.

Dropping the hosepipe, Chung shouted an order to his squad, who began to shuffle off the courtyard down the narrow lane.

The Warlord turned, saluted my startled father, and strode off after his men. That was James's last sight of him in Sheng Feng.

Fast forward to 1937, some 14 years later. James had exchanged his flimsy shack in Sheng Fang for a comfortable detached house in the seaport of Qingdao, on the North East coast of China. This house was now home to my parents, my sister, my 5 year old self, and our Amah, Ming T'ai T'ai.

One morning, when my parents had gone out and my sister was at school, leaving me in sole charge, there came a loud rapping on the front door. I ran to open it, to be confronted by the menacing figure of a tall military officer in an immaculate white uniform festooned with gold braid, and with a large revolver in its large leather holster strapped to his waist. Beyond him on the road stood an enormous limousine, its driver standing to attention beside the car's passenger door.

Terrified at this apparition, I slammed the door in his face and ran into the kitchen, telling Ming T'ai T'ai that there was a soldier at our door coming to kill us all. She seized a knife from the drawer, and with it advanced to the front door and cautiously opened it. **"I have come to see Officer Gee-mun (my dad's Chinese name)."** **"Officer Gee-mun not in. Go away!"** **"I will wait."** The white-uniformed officer walked back to his car, the driver opened the door for him, he got in, and the door was slammed shut, the driver remaining standing on guard. I hid in my bedroom, ashamed that, having been left in charge of our house, I'd failed so miserably to defend it against this intruder.

A little while later my parents returned; my father remained on the doorstep, awaiting his unexpected guest who descended from his car and walked slowly up the drive. **"You know who I am?"** My father nodded. **"Warlord Chung"**, he replied. **"I am now General Chung of the Chinese National Army. Let us now take tea again, as we once did in Sheng Fang. You remember?"** **"Yes, I remember,"** my father replied. The General snapped his fingers behind his back, and immediately an orderly descended from the rear of the limousine bearing a silver tray on which reposed a steaming pot of tea and two tiny teacups, one of which the General solemnly handed to my father after pouring out a draft of tea. They both sipped delicately from their cups.

"I have come to make you a Colonel in my Regiment." My father smiled. **"I am already an officer in another Army"**, he replied. The General laughed. **"You are too brave a man to remain in an Army that doesn't fight. What good is such an Army in the face of enemy invasion?"** My father remarked that throughout its history, China has always sought the blessings of the gods in its fight against invaders. Perhaps his prayers would be a more effective weapon than his rudimentary skill with a rifle. **"Very well, Gee-mun. You fight your war, and I'll fight mine."** With that, he saluted my father and began to walk away.

"Are you still a Christian?" my father asked. "The General turned and smiled. **"I am an excellent Christian!"** he replied. **"I have already killed many Japanese! Tsai Chien!" -- see you again!** and he climbed into his limousine and was whisked away. But they never did meet again. Ironically, though, just a few years later my father returned to China as an officer in an Army that *was* engaged in a fighting war with the Japanese: the British Army, in which he served under the command of the American General Stilwell.

Fast forward again, this time for 54 years to 1991. My wife and I were on holiday in Beijing with my 91 year old widowed mother. Leaving her in the care of old Chinese friends, Pauline and I made our way to a military airport on the outskirts of Beijing, there to catch a flight to Xian and its famous

terracotta warriors. Waiting in the vast hall for our flight, I noticed around the walls a series of mosaic depicting scenes from the Chinese Army's history. Following these round the walls, I stopped dead in front of one. It showed a Chinese officer, immaculate in a white uniform with shiny boots and a large revolver in a large leather holster at his waist, solemnly hosing down a small contingent of Chinese troops, all wreathed in smiles. There was an inscription below in Chinese which I couldn't read. However, it was clearly a sanitised version of Warlord Chung baptising his troops – I recognised the revolver in its holster. He was busy transforming them into a band of Christian soldiers preparing, as in the words of the Christian hymn, to go 'marching as to war' and the killing of yet more Japanese.

Tea for two in China can have a different flavour compared with your friendly cuppa with a neighbour here in England.

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Vacancy

It is now time for me to find a new editor for this newsletter. I was not on the committee when I took it on, and I have carried on with it ever since. Now, however, I am very busy and would welcome someone taking over. It is not a committee position and there is a very open brief. If you would like to have a go, please email me and we can meet, and I will explain what is entailed.

Tina Naples

What's on in February

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

9.2.23 The Tanfield Railway	Durham Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm
23.2.23 Tax, Care and Toy Boys by Lauren Banford	Dunelm Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm (Take membership card)
6.2.23 Burial Rites by Hannah Kent	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	
7.2.23	Topical Discussion	The Beefeater, Broomside Park.	10.00 am monthly.
Winter break – resumes in March	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
2.2.23	Circle Dancing	Sacriston Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly.
Thursdays at 9.45 am.	French	Contact Elizabeth Morgan for venue on 0191 384 6874.	9.45 am <u>weekly</u> except 2nd Thursday
13.2.23 Love	Poetry	Gala Theatre Cafe	2.00 pm monthly
9.2.23 Othello	Shakespeare Study	Gala Theatre Café	10.15 am
20.2.23 Toxic Shock by Sara Paretsky	Monday Crime Club	Lanchester Garden Centre	10.30 am monthly
15.2.23	Scrabble	Contact Maureen Craik for venue on 0191 371 9521	2.00 pm monthly
25.2.23 Love at First Hearing	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
7.2.23	History	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
20.2.23	Quiz	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
27.2.23 The Gunpowder Plot	History Too	Sacriston Methodist Church	10.00 am monthly
As Arranged	Cinema	Odeon Cinema, Durham Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100.	As Arranged

And Finally.....

For the traditionalists among you, it is Candlemas on February 2nd so you can finally take your Christmas decorations down. Also, we have Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day if you prefer, on 21st February so get stocked up with eggs and flour and look up those savoury as well as sweet recipes. 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)