

## In Contact



### **Editorial**

Once again, some sad news to begin. We send our condolences to Janis Goodson who has recently lost her husband, Brian. Janis will be known to many of you as a Group leader and doing the 'meet and greet' at the monthly meetings. I'm sure we will all give her our support at this difficult time. The funeral is at Durham Crematorium at 1.30 on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> July.

I am pleased to say that after several years, I shall be surrendering the newsletter to someone else from September. The new editor will be Laura Woods and I hope you will all start giving some thought to giving her some copy to publish. Some of you will know Laura from the Francais Amicale and Book Groups.

This month we showcase some work from our very talented members. Read on .....

### **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](mailto:mcraik-40@hotmail.co.uk).

### **A New Group**

The Swimming Club has just been formed and the intention is to meet every Friday at 2pm at the Louisa Centre pool in Stanley. The leader is Ken Naples. Please check with him beforehand if you want to join – as the school holidays approach it may be necessary to make some changes. Nobody fancies being in a pool full of excited children splashing around. You can get Ken on [kennaples1@sky.com](mailto:kennaples1@sky.com) or 07711 079098.

## Merger News

This month sees the vote on our proposed merger with Dunelm u3a. Do, please, do your utmost to turn up and vote. As I have said before, we do not have postal vote provision. We will be having the resolution, discussions and questions after the monthly talk. If you are interested, get ready to volunteer when I ask for tellers to count the votes.

## Another Delightful Story from James Gilman

### *Dragon Song*

*“When you and I go sailing  
Along the rippling stream,  
Holding hands together,  
Together we’ll sing:  
‘When there’s a rainbow on the river...’ ”*

It was a lovely sunny day in early Autumn, decked out with all the traditional props of that season: a bright blue sky, small white clouds, the glint of silver sparkling the waves along the promenade, and a love-song oozing into my ears – courtesy of Radio Shanghai – from a loudspeaker way above my head. I was too preoccupied, however, to notice any of these.

I was busy stealing.

I knew what I was doing was wrong. Not because I’d just become a thief – I’d spent half my young life coveting the dragon I was wrestling with, with the fierce possessiveness of a child’s lust after a personal treasure. But because I was supposed to be where my father had planted me: safe on the deck of the Fu Hsing, about to sail for Shanghai. When his back was turned, however, I’d jumped ship, running down the single gangplank closely followed, as always, by my protector, Joan.

Reaching the Aquarium, we made a beeline for the stuffed dragon. I knew there’d be no such creatures in a barbarian country like England, so this was my last chance. The custodian being absent and the building empty of visitors, there was no reason why I couldn’t steal the creature and smuggle it on board our ship. But to my dismay, it turned out to be wired securely to its shelf, and I had no means of releasing it. I decided to settle for second best. With Joan’s help we managed to prise one of its teeth free and, with this in my pocket, it was time to flee.

### Dragon’s Tooth

Joan seized my hand, and together we scurried through piles of rotting food enveloping gorging rats back to the gangplank where, furiously wits-ended, our dad was threatening the captain with arrest by invisible British troops if he didn’t stop his ship’s inexorable drift away from the quayside. We were grabbed, sworn at by one parent while cried over by the other, thrown physically across the widening gap of water over which dad then splendidly vaulted, and thrust to safety below decks.

Farewelled by a small crowd of spectators lining the quayside, many of whom were to have their destinies rewritten in their own blood in the coming Japanese Occupation, and among whom were numbered Ming T'ai T'ai, Rex, and the staff & pupils of Joan's school, our idyllic life in Tsingtao came to an end abruptly that Autumn afternoon in 1937, as we drifted down the coast of China towards Shanghai. It was the end of an era, and the fall of the curtain upon my own brief career as an heir to the privileges, and the responsibilities, that were the birthright of every son of the British Empire. Japanese planes buzzed us every day of our 10-day voyage, weighing up our potential as a juicy target against the political cost of consuming the carcass of a ship which, with a huge Union Jack painted on both sides above the waterline, was clearly identifiable as sailing under the flag of a non-belligerent Western nation. Thankfully, I was able to chase them away by shouting at them from the deck, though I was compelled, occasionally, to resort to firing all ten fingers at them in rapid succession.

Towards the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> day we noticed – like Madam Butterfly – a thread of smoke arising from the sea, on the far horizon. In our case, however, it didn't represent a ship sailing to our rescue. Rather, it was the funeral pyre of Shanghai, fuelled by the flames of thousands of Chinese shacks and hovels erupting, volcano-like, to spew their ash towards the Mitsubishi's orchestrating this symphony of terror from the skies overhead. We sailed slowly up the Whang Po River. All the warehouses we passed were burning, and Japanese planes were strafing and bombing everywhere we looked. It was like watching a film – a film with real blood, real bombs, and real smells. The International Settlement area of the City, ringed by European troops, was an oasis of sanity, protected from assault by its sanctity as an outpost of the Western Powers in what was, in 1937, still only a Chinese/Japanese war. The contrast with relatively peaceful Tsingtao was totally traumatic for me, an experience on a par with children caught up in the London Blitz that was to come a few years later.

*“When you and I go sailing, along the rippling stream...”* The same song, which had been my favourite back home in Tsingtao, was being broadcast throughout our ship from Radio Shanghai as we sailed up that river, rippling now with the charred hulks of burnt-out junks, sampans, and coolies.

I could still hear the song in my head, as we drove from the blazing dock towards the safety of the International Settlement. It was the last thing I remembered that day. I never saw the bomb which hit the road in front of our car and exploded, turning the vehicle over and ripping open its guts with shrapnel. Both my parents and my sister survived unscathed, whilst I was really very lucky. The only reminder I have of the attack is a shrapnel scar embedded for ever across my right arm, and a song embedded forever inside my head.

I was just 5 years and two months old.

\* \* \* \* \*

It's the Autumn of 2002, 65 years later, and I am planning to return to Shanghai for the first time since that momentous day, en route to Tsingtao, having decided to return my dragon's tooth to its rightful owner: the town's Aquarium, and to ask forgiveness for my childhood crime. Shanghai will have changed beyond belief. So too, I suppose, will I.

Modern Shanghai is booming, once again assuming its traditional role as Asia's capital city of commerce. The skyline has changed dramatically, as has the quality of life of the citizens of this great metropolis. My parents would still recognise the Bund, and applaud the

prosperity of the Shanghai people whilst, probably, regretting the loss of so much of the flavour of the city they once knew and loved.

I am told that the Peace Hotel at which we shall be staying still holds, in the evenings, dances at which the popular music of the Twenties and Thirties is played and danced to by residents and visitors alike. In my luggage will be a battered 10-inch 78 rpm record made of unfashionable shellac, 70 years old, its label bearing the legend: *RADIO SHANGHAI*. I shall be taking it with me to the Peace Hotel and, hopeful that they can still lay their hands on an equally old, probably battered, 78 rpm gramophone, ask them to play it for me.

As I dance the foxtrot with my wife around that ballroom, my feet will be firmly located in the present; but my mind's eye will be gazing once again upon a vista of a lovely day in early Autumn long, long ago, decked out with all the traditional props of that season: a bright blue sky, small white clouds, the glint of silver sparkling the waves along the promenade, and a love-song oozing into my ears, courtesy of Radio Shanghai:

*“When there's a rainbow on the river,  
You get the feeling  
Romance is stealing right into your heart...”*

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*There is a clip of the song Rainbow on the River on Utube sung by Bobby Breen (it's lovely) – you can even watch the film from 1936. Ed.*

## **Another Beautiful Poem from Clive Wright**

### *Sunrise over Sherburn*

Upon a bed of meadow green  
on a pastel pillow of cloud  
he rests his head, hovering ,  
whether to simply sink back  
in the softness of the grey,  
or else, into the Blue  
poke that blond, bald head,  
and blaze away.

## A Rather Different Poem from Mick Sullivan

### Muscle Release

Urgent muscle release and cold water splutters  
soon calm the alarm and ease a claggy throat.  
Other moody muscles squeeze the brakes on dressing  
and the sock stage cavorts into a can-can.

Pukka porridge and honey slides sweetly down –  
gruel that will fuel the fading motor later.

Roughly arranged and dressed brighter than I feel,  
emerging through that complicated back door,  
I quaff the magic potion;  
that first lungful of crisp morning elixir.  
But still the body seeks an order of semblance,  
while the mind is off wandering about the routes.

Squirted oil silences those nagging squeakers,  
and attending the tyres with a few puffs of air,  
Hey Presto! The faithful steed stands alert.  
Synchronized now, legs and wheels  
process down the garden to a little earlybirdsong.

Some tender bits do not relish the saddle's first touch,  
but most doubts dissolve and the trail beckons  
as the back gate clatters in farewell.

## A Short Story from Stephen Brand

You'll need to follow the link to read this rather disturbing short story. I have put it on the members page of our website.

<https://u3asites.org.uk/files/d/durham/docs/stewartandolivev0.4.pdf>

*Personally, I was totally drawn in. ed.*

## The 3D Musical Jukebox

Many of you will remember the recent performance of the collaboration between the Music Appreciation Group and New College, Durham to produce a performance of musical memories. I am hoping to have Chris Meads' permission to share the work he has done to showcase the whole event. Watch out next month/

## Quiz Group

The group had a great time at the South Durham inter-u3a quiz. While they didn't win, they were only three points behind the winners.



What a handsome crew!

## What's on in July.

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

13.7.2023 The Old Wild West	Durham Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm
27.7.2023 What happens to Recycling Waste?	Dunelm Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm (Take membership card)
20.7.23	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	

4.7.23	Topical Discussion	The Beefeater, Broomside Park.	10.00 am monthly.
12.7.23 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
6.7.23	Circle Dancing	Sacriston Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly.
23 and every fortnight	Beginners French Group	Botanic Gardens, Durham	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
10.7.23 War Poetry	Poetry	Gala Theatre Cafe	2.00 pm monthly
13.7.23 and every fortnight	Shakespeare Study	Gala Theatre Café	10.15 am
17.7.23 The Lincoln Lawyer by Michael Connolly	Monday Crime Club	Lanchester Garden Centre	10.30 am monthly
27.7.23	Scrabble	Contact Maureen Craik for venue on 0191 371 9521	2.00 pm monthly
29.7.23 Margaret's Marvellous Favourites	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
Summer Break	History	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
17.7.23	Quiz	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
24.7.23 The Battle of Neville's Cross	History Too	Sacriston Methodist Church	10.00 am monthly
As Arranged	Cinema	Odeon Cinema, Durham Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100.	As Arranged
4.7.23 and every fortnight	Spanish Conversation	Gala Theatre café.	2pm fortnightly
7.7.23 and every Friday	Swimming Club	Louisa Centre, Stanley.	2pm weekly

**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](mailto:tina.naples@aol.com))