

## In Contact



### **Editorial**

Many of us enjoyed a wonderful performance at our May meeting of a collaboration between some members of the Music Appreciation Group and Performing Arts students from New College. The piece was called the 3D Memory Juke Box and comprised our members reprising their memories with the music that inspired them, and the memories enacted by the students. It was all beautifully done and professionally directed by Chris Meads, a very experienced professional theatre director. Everything took place on the stage with lighting, visuals and sound, and we had a Q&A session afterwards. We were all inspired by the occasion and would love to see a future collaboration. I shall be writing an article with photos and sending them in to Third Age Matters. Our regional trustee has promised to help publicise at Head Office.

A big thank you to all participants. A special thank you to Mary Adcroft who also made some of her wonderful cakes for the occasion. The homemade Millionaires' Shortbread was particularly memorable.

## Off The Wall

Several members went up to the event and others participated in online events. As well as events being hosted by local u3as we had some professional input as well. A good time was had by all.

It was great to see a national event coming to Northumberland, bringing people up from London and elsewhere. Let's hope they can now appreciate how lucky we are to live in this wonderful region. Of course, we don't want too many coming and spoiling the sheer emptiness that is a feature that we all know and love.

The History Too Group continued the theme with an extremely interesting discussion on The Romans. Turns out they did quite a lot for us.

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

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

## Merger News

I announced at the May meeting that we have decided to hold the vote in July as part of the monthly meeting. I have also sent an email to everyone, so this is belt and braces. We want as many people as possible to attend so please keep a lookout in your inbox for the calling notice and the resolution. I'm afraid that our constitution does not allow for proxy or postal voting so if you are keen to cast your vote, you will need to come in person. I hope to see you there and hear your views.

Dunelm will be having their vote later on, possibly in late September. At that time, we will be busy with preparations for our AGM which will take place as normal in November. Nonetheless, I will keep you posted on their vote because as I have said, both us3as need to return a positive vote for the merger to go ahead.

## History Group

The History Group is taking a summer break after Charlie Callus stood aside as Group Convenor. I'm pleased to say that a new leader will be taking over in September. She is Kim Jennings so I hope you will all continue with the group and give Kim your support.

## From Clive Wright

*Clive is a member of the Music Appreciation Group. He came to Durham from Stirling as an established poet and makar. I invited him to submit a piece for In Contact: I hope it will not be the last. Ed.*

"I guess my 3 years as Makar at Stirling gave me a taste in particular for what you might call the poetry of place, and so it has been more than natural to write in appreciation of my new home (since 2021) in Durham, and in particular of the Durham countryside, its rise and fall and ebb and flow throughout the seasons. This particular piece is one of a set of four, one for each season, which was entitled Sherburn Field; the songs were in fact set to music by a composer from the Glasgow Conservatoire (Tom David Wilson) and they had their first performance in a recital in Belmont last March."

## *Spring sown field*

evening at Sherburn

Black grows the earth  
to green then back  
to black again, then green,  
so to and fro and  
fro and to so on  
for acres.

I look to read  
between the lines of  
Nature's barcode  
no man can,  
that's all,  
leave it to the shining sun  
to scan...

### **From James Gilman**

#### **‘WHAT’S IN A NAME?’** (*W.Shakespeare*)

Quite a lot, I'd suggest. I've travelled through life hiding myself under some **14** different names; some of which, in the words (almost) of Billy Shakespeare, I was born with, some I achieved, while others were thrust upon me. But each was adopted for a reason, each reflects a different aspect of my nature, and each has a story behind it.

While I was christened James Alan, the first name I was known by was my Chinese name: **Di-Di** (*Dee-Dee*) meaning 'little brother'). As befits a Chinese baby I wore Chinese clothing, ate Chinese food (spat into my mouth after being chewed by Ming T'ai T'ai, my Amah), spoke Mandarin Chinese, learnt Chinese nursery rhymes, and tried to figure out why I was condemned to share my house with 3 foreigners who spoke some barbarian tongue. As Di-Di, I was immensely huggable.

Once Anglicised after our journey to England, I was known by my family as **Alan**, my father being also a James, and the name by which my family – now sadly dwindled down to just 3 – still know me. Alan was an inquisitive, lively young boy, full of life, care-free and fun-loving.

On my return from Trinidad in 1944 aged 12, I entered a London grammar school where I was promptly accorded the nickname ‘**MINNIE**’ from a popular song at the time called ‘*Minnies From Trinidad*’. It was a terrible cross to have to bear over the next 3 years – you can’t escape a school nickname, and this one did little to enhance my self-esteem. It left me hesitant, withdrawn, and desperate to keep out of everyone’s way. On moving to Southampton in 1947, however, I became **Jim** or **Jimmy**, the former to my few school acquaintances, the latter to my equally few friends.

Jim / Jimmy was an angry teenager, in revolt against my parents, my school, and my life in general which I tried to terminate suicidally, but failed. Instead, I settled for being expelled at 16 for forgery, whereupon I made my way to London and took up a post at New Scotland Yard – a classic example of a poacher turned game-keeper – and began calling myself **James**.

James was a sober, quiet, respectful young man who got on with everyone and enjoyed his independence and the social ‘street cred’ that came from being at ‘The Yard’ in a somewhat mysteriously secretive role which he was not allowed to talk about with his new-found friends. One of my tasks was to authorise and sign each warrant card given to newly qualified police officers, leaving me wondering to this day just how many murders were arrested over my signature.

At 18 I was captured by the Army, losing all my previous identities to be given a new one: **22455546**, known as 546 for short. Under this *nom de guerre* I was taught to kill people with a pistol, rifle, machine gun, flame thrower, and large artillery field gun which I lost one night in a Welsh lake and was promptly clapped in jail facing a Court Martial. It was with some relief that I was instead transferred into Military Intelligence where 546 morphed into ‘**Marco**’, my new *nom de guerre*.

In addition to the usual tradecraft of interrogation, surveillance, bugging, and the use of codes, Marco was taught such useful skills as making a bomb out of a pack of playing cards, and the most appropriate use of different poisons. As a result, I became a most unsociable person, suspicious of everyone, friendless, someone to avoid, who sat on my own in the back row of any meeting, observing without being observed and with a direct line to the exit. I still do – old habits die hard. Marco was totally obnoxious; but I did enjoy my work helping to prevent a nuclear World War Three.

Eventually I exchanged the unreal world of MI for the equally unreal world of primitive colonial Africa, there to run a trading estate 300 miles removed from civilisation with no electricity or telephones, and where a letter to my boss on the coast took a week to be delivered via a runner jogging down the length of the River Niger to reach his destination. Rejoicing in the soubriquet ‘**MASTER**’, saluted by police and military as they passed by, treated deferentially by my three servants, lord of all I surveyed, unquestioned authority on all matters and respected hunter of crocodiles, my life took on a totally new dimension. I was reborn as a masterful, affable, confident bearer of the White Man’s Burden.

It was an unforgettable experience which, when it ended, saw ‘Master’ being transformed back into ‘**Mister**’ upon my return to London to take up the post of Assistant Sales Manager of Britain’s principle plastics manufacturer. Once aging donning the mantle of James, I became a sober umbrella-wielding, hat-wearing businessman, taken most seriously by everyone -- except by my Russian secretary Sasha

and her exotic sister Mischa. They laughed at me; I melted in their presence; and we became good friends.

Badgered to reveal the secret of my middle initial 'A', I told them it was **Ambrose**, and under this name I was transformed into a bohemian, almost a part-time hippie. I joined their band of itinerant musicians – I played a cornet in those days – and we toured Europe that summer, busking for our daily bread. My hair didn't grow longer, but my soul did.

Like Jekyll & Hye, I underwent a transformation as night fell to become a nightclub greeter in dinner jacket and Brylcreemed hair having acquired a share in a West End night club. The club's manageress was Ruthie, a bombshell blonde who welcomed me with a kiss that exploded into my mouth like gunpowder and lava'd throughout my body like steamed nitro-glycerine Ruthie called me **Billy Boy**, but the relationship didn't last long; weeks later Ruthie Ellis shot her boyfriend, was arrested for murder, and executed soon after, the last woman to be hanged in Britain. But a talented kisser.

I used the name **Didymus** as a penname when I first started writing; it was the loin cloth concealing my insecurity at venturing into this new territory which I felt totally unqualified to explore. Once I'd become familiar with the territory, however, I dropped the loin cloth in favour of the traditional explorer's garb of shorts, pith helmet and machete, the better to withstand the emotional heat generated by slashing my way through forests of verbiage.

As a real explorer, however, in the jungles of Sumatra overseeing a 3-month expedition, my African 'Master' tendencies bubbled up to the surface again, and, slashing my way through the jungle and conferring with witch doctors, I was given the tag '**Jungle Jim**', a reference to a Tarzan-like comic book hero of my Dad's era. Very satisfying to my ego.

Upon retirement, I adopted the name **John**; it felt comfortable somehow and fitted me like a glove, and under this ultimate name I drifted into my pension-hood, enjoying time with my grandson fishing for tiddlers, collecting wildflowers, making napalm – always in demand on Bonfire Nights -- and other grandfatherly pursuits. My sunset years are very peaceful.

Just don't tempt me with a pack of playing cards...

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## Scams

We all know what a scam is. For instance, someone rings you up pretending to be something they are not and tries to get your bank details out of you. Very plausible and easy to be taken in. Also keep an eye out for small, unexpected details on your bank statement. If someone has your card details this is a common way to check if you are taking notice. There are other things that people are up to. All geared to cheating you out of your money. The Citizens Advice Bureau have a very good website which is well worth a look. Just follow this link. Better safe than sorry.

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/scams/check-if-something-might-be-a-scam/>

## What's on in June

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

8 <sup>th</sup> June 2023 King Tut by Olive Hogg	Durham Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm
29 <sup>th</sup> June 2023 Funny bones and Wisdom Teeth by Ray Lowry	Dunelm Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm (Take membership card)
5.6.23 Ridley Road by Jo Bloom	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	
6.6.23	Topical Discussion	The Beefeater, Broomside Park.	10.00 am monthly.
14.6.23 Cockfield	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
1.6.23	Circle Dancing	Sacriston Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly.
8.6.23 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
12.6.23 Travel	Poetry	Gala Theatre Cafe	2.00 pm monthly
1.6.23 and every fortnight	Shakespeare Study	Gala Theatre Café	10.15 am
19.6.23 Code to Zero by ken Follett	Monday Crime Club	Lanchester Garden Centre	10.30 am monthly
21.6.23	Scrabble	Contact Maureen Craik for venue on 0191 371 9521	2.00 pm monthly
24.6.23 Maureen's June Jollies	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
19.6.23	Quiz	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
22.5.23 Unsung Women	History Too	Sacriston Methodist Church	10.00 am monthly
15.6.23 Fleabag 7pm	Cinema	Odeon Cinema, Durham Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100.	As Arranged
6.6.23 and every fortnight	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](mailto:tina.naples@aol.com))