

## In Contact



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### Editorial

This month, I have to give you some sad news. Sadly, our long-standing member Joe Thackray, died recently. Joe had been a member of the walking group until he was no longer able to continue. He also until recently enjoyed ten-pin bowling with some u3a friends and enjoyed nothing more than a good chat with friends about his days on the docks and his interest in military history. Our condolences go to Janet who many of you will know is a past Chair and Group Leader. Several of us attended Joe's funeral to remember him and represent Durham u3a.

I am also sad to report that our member Flick Smith has recently lost her husband. We haven't seen much of Flick for a while due to her caring duties, but we hope that she will soon be able to rejoin her friends in the various groups of which she is a member. We also send our condolences to Flick.

### Off The Wall

I understand that all tickets for the event up near Hadrian's Wall are now sold.

Just a reminder that 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. There are several other zoom sessions that you can sign up for.

## 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.*

## May Meeting

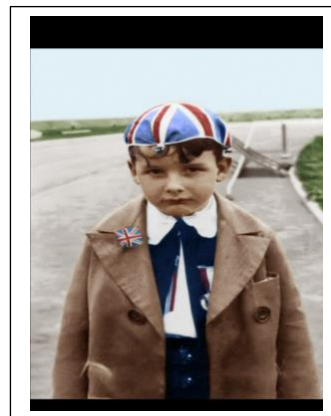
This meeting promises to be very special, and I urge you all to attend. For those who haven't yet heard we will be having a special performance of a collaboration between the Music Appreciation Group and Performing Arts students from New College. The event has been developed by Chris Meads who is a professional theatre director. Several of our members have contributed memories and the associated music that took them back in time, and the students act out the memories. So, there will be voices, music and performance and displays on the big screen. This promises to be a very special event so do please come along and support your fellow members and encourage young people just starting out on their careers.

## Merger News

Both the Steering Group and your Committee have unanimously agreed a resolution to put to the membership so that you will be able to have a proper debate on the matter and a vote on the continuance of the project. Work has started on developing a new constitution. I'm afraid I am still not able to give you a date for a vote. We are trying to keep in lockstep with Dunelm who are not yet ready to take a vote.

## The Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1937

The Reminiscences of James Gilman



I am a child of the British Empire; I was born into it, and it formed the backdrop to my life from birth to my mid-20s, when I finally laid down the White Man's Burden and did my best to become integrated into the drab, but more democratic, daily life that was the trademark of post-War England. By contrast, life for a small boy in 1930s Peking was certainly more colourful. I remember rickshaw rides and picnics in the Western Hills just outside Peking; camels plodding their way alongside a

Great Wall which started way over the horizon and went on for ever; labourers carrying everything from live chickens to dead bodies in baskets on their backs; street processions filled with the clamour of brass trumpets and crashing drums; fire crackers exploding everywhere at unexpected moments; and street magicians clothed entirely in tiny writhing green serpents.

And I remember the grand celebrations marking, with all due Imperial pomp and ceremony, the Coronation of Their Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in May 1937 in the Chinese seaport of Tsingtao where we were living at the time, when I was just 5.

To an English man or woman today, the fact that the Coronation of their one-time King was an occasion for a major social event in a small seaport in China must seem rather strange. In 1937, however, Britain was one of the world's Great Powers. the centre of a worldwide Empire of which the new King was Emperor, as well as ruler of his own small nation. It was only natural that the movers & shakers in Tsingtao -- its leading Chinese officials and citizens as well as its Western population -- would wish to honour such a major event in the history of such a Great Power. It would have been not only discourteous, but positively counter-productive, not to show one's presence on such an occasion -- for with Japan's army on the march, one needed all the influential friends one could retain, and participating in a day out with food and entertainment provided was a very small price to pay for such advantageous insurance.

The memory of that day resides in my mind like a burnished jewel, savoured for its brightness and its summation of all that was pleasurable about life as a very young citizen of an Empire upon which the sun had not yet set. The celebrations took place in Tsingtao's Sports Stadium, where the day's activities commenced at 11.00 am with a formal welcome in the Pavilion to all guests, young as well as adult. There were men in formal wear or uniforms with decorations; ladies in summer frocks with garden-party hats; schoolchildren in their uniforms; and younger children like myself in our best clothes.

The welcome to guests was presided over by the British Consul and his lady wife, with appropriate selections of melodies provided by a United States Marine Corps Band resplendent in their ceremonial uniforms, there being no British military presence in the area at the time. At the conclusion of the speeches, we British children were lined up, introduced personally to the Consul in his imposing uniform, and each presented with a Coronation Medal in honour of the occasion, Suspended from a red, white and blue ribbon with a metal clasp across it, the silvery medal was inscribed, in English and in Chinese, with the words: **"Presented to the British children of North China to commemorate the Coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth"** I still have

mine, a valued memento of a unique occasion. I wonder how many are still in existence. I also have my sister Joan's medal, together with two others presented to her in China before my birth commemorating British Empire Day, once a public holiday for citizens of the Empire scattered around the globe.

While the adults enjoyed their lunch and alcoholic refreshments in the Pavilion, a magnificent spread was set out for the children, on a line of tables placed in the centre of the Stadium. Filled with traditional party fare of cakes, jellies and ice cream, we nevertheless had room for the *piece de resistance*: a large, iced cake in the form of a British naval battleship, festooned with miniature Union Jacks. There were races and games for the children, and the day's celebrations concluded with a brilliant fireworks display. Then the Band of the United States Marine Corps swiftly formed up into ranks, six bandsmen abreast and ten deep, with the front six swinging their Sousaphones before them. Led by their Drum Major with twirling baton and moustache, they marched in proud formation, swinging to the beat of '*The Stars & Stripes For Ever*', down through the centre of the Stadium, out through its gates, and into my memory, where they've been imprisoned ever since.

The next day, all the town's schoolchildren were invited aboard an American submarine at anchor at the Pier. Joan, of course, had a wonderful time exploring its entrails while I, forbidden entrance through being too young, sulked for the whole of that day. Life could be so unfair at times. On my return to Tsingtao some years ago at 70, I stood once more at the centre of the now-empty Stadium while the ghosts of be-jewelled ladies, handsome uniformed men, and excited children, swirled around me to the faint strains of American patriotic music. In the words of one of my own songs: '*...all the glories of the past / will never come again.*'

This celebration was the last Hurrah for Tsingtao; within a few months the Japanese began their invasion of mainland China, leading to the internment of all Europeans trapped in Tsingtao, including the staff & pupils of my sister Joan's school. We were very lucky, securing a berth on the last ship leaving the town, a rusty Chinese cargo ship, the *Fu Hsing*, bound for Shanghai, from where we transited to Hong Kong and eventually to England, arriving in Tilbury on Christmas Eve. Before we set sail from Tsingtao, however, I had a date to keep with a dragon...

But that's another story.

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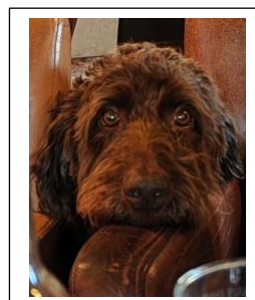
*March 2023*

## 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>.

## Strollers

The Strollers have a new member. He is called Rolo and is a large chocolate labradoodle. We all adore him. Rolo is still trying to train his human companion, John Tompkinson on the use of the long lead. Despite Rolo's best efforts John still manages to get himself tied up in knots. Rolo teaches us a lot about all the interesting things to be smelt along the walks and we look forward to having him with us for many walks to come – and John as well, of course.



## Vacancy

There is a vacancy for a group leader for the History group as Charlie Callus is standing aside. Please do consider stepping forward for this group. Charlie was the founder member of the group and as a result of its popularity, we now have another group called History Too. I'm sure Charlie will be delighted to hear from anyone interested. You can email him at [charlie0859@gmail.com](mailto:charlie0859@gmail.com).

## What's on in May

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

11 <sup>th</sup> May 2023 Special Performance Large Hall	Durham Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm
25 <sup>th</sup> May 2023 The Bayeux Tapestry	Dunelm Monthly Meeting	Bowburn Community Centre	1.30 for 2.00pm (Take membership card)



9.5.23 Cousin Bette by Balzac	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	
2.5.23	Topical Discussion	The Beefeater, Broomside Park.	10.00 am monthly.
3.5.23 From the Newton Grange pub.	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
4.5.23	Circle Dancing	Sacriston Methodist Church	2.00 pm monthly.
11.5.23 and every fortnight	New 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
8.5.23 American Poetry	Poetry	Gala Theatre Cafe	2.00 pm monthly
4.5.23 and every fortnight	Shakespeare Study	Gala Theatre Café	10.15 am
15.5.23 Night Passage by Robert B Parker	Monday Crime Club	Lanchester Garden Centre	10.30 am monthly
17.5.23	Scrabble	Contact Maureen Craik for venue on 0191 371 9521	2.00 pm monthly
27.5.23 Mary's Musical May	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
2.5.23	History	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
15.5.23	Quiz	Sacriston Methodist Church	2pm monthly
22.5.23 The Romans	History Too	Sacriston Methodist Church	10.00 am monthly
As Arranged	Cinema	Odeon Cinema, Durham Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100.	As Arranged
9.5.23 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. In the meantime, I hope you all enjoy the coronation celebrations with lots of jelly and cake. Personally, I love all the pomp and circumstance and will be glued to the television. It's also May Day today. I used to love dancing around the maypole as a youngster. I wonder if today's children do it – if not they are really missing out.

Tina Naples ([tina.naples@aol.com](mailto:tina.naples@aol.com))



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