

In Contact

Durham U3A, September 2023

Dear all

A warm welcome from me, **Laura Woods**, to September's In Contact. I'm delighted to take up the baton from Tina as newsletter editor, and hope In Contact can continue to keep the Durham U3A community informed, in touch and entertained.

A little bit about myself: I live in Durham City, where our children were born and brought up, and joined U3A in 2022 after retiring from my (non-teaching) job at Teesside University. It proved the right thing to do – there couldn't be a better way of disconnecting from the world of work than by connecting with a friendly and like-minded bunch of people with such a wide range of interests. It's been great picking up on my French again with Français Amical, and reading an eclectic set of novels for pleasure with the Book Group.

There's so much more going on, of course, and I'm looking forward to getting to know more about you and the other interest groups through In



Contact. It's your newsletter and it's your news, ideas and creative efforts that make it. So don't hold back! Send in your words and pictures to share with the rest of the U3A

community. It's what a newsletter is for, after all. lauramw100@gmail.com



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September Monthly Meeting

Thursday, 14 September, 1.30 for 2pm

Travelogue with Kath and Harry

Bowburn Community Centre

(Contact Maureen Craik to offer or ask for a lift: 0191 371 8521 or mcraik-40@hotmail.co.uk)

News from the groups

“A poem begins with a lump in the throat” (Robert Frost)

The **Poetry Group**, which meets at 2pm on the second Monday of every month at the Gala Café in Durham, is happy to welcome new members to swell its ranks. Members choose a theme for each meeting, and bring along an appropriate poem, either published or one they’ve composed themselves. Themes so far this year have included travel, love and family relations. September’s theme is food, with Robert Browning, the elements and E.E. Cummings to follow in the coming months. Contact Ivy Hudson on 0191 384 4317 or through the U3A contacts page.

Fancy improving your language skills? Keep your eyes peeled for future news of **Beginner’s French**, which has recently started up and is looking for new members from end October, when coordinator Maria Wood, who’s temporarily away, returns to the group.

History 1 and **History Too** are two vibrant groups open to all. Meeting monthly at Sacriston Methodist Church (separate times and days), they cover some fascinating topics. History 1’s theme this month is *A history from my holidays!* when members will share snippets about their holiday destinations. History Too will be looking at the impact of mining on North East communities and culture. Future topics have a strong local flavour, and include *The blue plaques of Durham City* (H1) and *The effects of WW1 on the womenfolk* (HToo). All that, and tea

and biscuits too! Contact Kim Jennings (H1) or David Willock (HToo) via the U3A contacts page.



For those with an abiding interest in clever crime fiction, the **Monday Crime Club** could be just the ticket. It meets in a back room (appropriately enough) at Lanchester Garden Centre to discuss a selected book and plan the next ~~job~~ work of fiction. There’s room for a couple of new members: contact Tina Naples via the U3A contacts page.

The **Music Appreciation** group, meeting at Carrville Church, have activities and events lined up for the rest of the year. This month’s session on 30 September will be led by Linda, with the intriguing title *A little bit of* Nine members are attending a performance by the Orchestra of the North East at the Gala on 24 September, and there are plans to see renowned Northumbrian piper Kathryn Tickell at the Sage on 23 October. Contact Stephen Brand via the U3A contacts page.

The first rule of **Film Club** is that members only go to see the films they want to see. The second rule is that it’s (usually) on a Monday, at the Odeon or Gala, with coffee or drink before or after the showing. Discounts available at both venues. Contact Paul Newby on 07814 518100 or through the U3A contacts page for details.

Fancy a pint?

Those with a recurring thirst may like to come along to a meeting of the U3A's Real Ale Appreciation Group. Apart from slaking their thirst the members also like doing their bit to support local hostelrys and businesses - we are a very public spirited group!

The group met in Durham recently on 10 August and visited a few local pubs including the historic Victoria in Hallgarth Street.



The group meets at 12 o'clock on the second and fourth Thursday of the month and we usually have something to eat in the first pub and then slake our thirst in one or two (sometimes three) more. The group is organised under the auspices of the Northumbria Region of the U3A and most members live in and around Newcastle, South Shields, Chester le Street or Sunderland. We try to visit as many different areas as possible. Recent meetings have been held in Corbridge, Newcastle, Wylam, Gateshead, Whitley Bay, Tynemouth and Sunderland. Almost everyone uses public transport to get to and from the meetings and that is a key consideration about where we will meet.

Joining the group when I moved to the North East was a useful way of being introduced to the area!

At our meetings there are occasional comments made on the drink consumed but the more usual topics of conversation are those routinely heard in a public bar! The erudite members of the group can be relied upon to discuss any topic raised with courtesy and deliberation.

In these difficult times we take great comfort from Abraham Lincoln's view: *"I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts, and **beer**."*

New members will be welcome and occasional attendance is not a problem. Details about the group, including the venue for the next meetings, are on the Northumbria Region's website: [u3a: Northumbria Region U3A: Real Ale Appreciation Group \(u3asites.org.uk\)](http://u3a:NorthumbriaRegionU3A:RealAleAppreciationGroup(u3asites.org.uk))

Cheers

Mike Gibb

Gunfight at the Raffles Hotel

Now for another vivid and entertaining account from James Gilman, whose life stories are the very stuff of adventure...

The two men faced each other in the half light. Each drew his pistol, and fired. The first shot missed, and ricocheted into the distance. The second shot hit the wrong target. My father had shot my mother, instead of the intruder he'd aimed at.

In the 1950s Communists were invading Malaya (now called Malaysia, which at the time included the city of Singapore), with a view to taking over the country from its British rulers and making it a Communist state. With the Raffles Hotel being the most famous hotel in that part of the world, they decided to send a soldier with a home-made Communist flag to break into the hotel, climb up to the roof, lower the British Union flag flying there, and in its place fly the Communist flag. This would have been a tremendous publicity victory for the Communists had it succeeded, and a major embarrassment to the British Government.

The soldier chose to enter the hotel via the window of the bedroom in which my parents were asleep, assuming it was unoccupied. Hearing the sound of breaking glass and alarmed at the sight of a uniformed figure climbing in through the window, my father leaped out of bed and, with a tremendous roar, lunged towards his opponent with a view to capturing him. They wrestled for several minutes, each trying to overcome the other. Then the soldier, breaking free, drew his pistol and fired at my father, but the bullet went wide and vanished into the ceiling. My father, at the same time drawing his own Biretta pistol, fired at the soldier, but the bullet missed and instead struck the bed in which my mother lay, watching in horror the scene before her. Amazingly, the bullet passed between her closed legs, scorching the skin, then went right through the bed and lodged in the floor below.

The soldier managed to break free, and fled into the hotel grounds and out of sight. However, my father managed to

seize his flag and his cap, both of which are displayed here. The Communists never did succeed in taking over Malaya, which later became an independent nation, minus the city of Singapore, under its present name of Malaysia.

In 1988 I stayed at the Raffles Hotel en route to Indonesia, and found that the Chinese doorman on duty had been there on the night the soldier tried to break in, and remembered the occasion. I invited him to join me in my room that evening and we noisily celebrated 'the old days', accompanied by much consumption of the hotel's own unique alcoholic drink: the Singapore Sling!

James Gilman



*James referred to two Olympic songs in his story about the dragon's tooth in the last issue. Both are now available on YouTube – have a listen. **Sailing for Qingdao** (an Olympic award-winner) can be recognised by the photo of the dragon's tooth, while **Welcome To China!** has a black and white photo of a Chinese building attached.*

Quiz of the Month

It could well be the first and last, but for a bit of fun, here's a cryptic quiz themed on the Durham U3A interest groups. No prizes, except the satisfaction of getting



the answers right (and your forgiveness if you spot any howlers). Enjoy! Answers upside down below.

- 1 *Book Club*: They mar all in move to produce Booker prize-winner.
- 2 *Circle Dancing*: Dana and sisters blend together beautifully as Catalan dancers.
- 3 *Film Club*: A cinema convert, I got to unearth this classic thriller.
- 4 *French*: Confusingly, I need lamé to enjoy this Proustian delicacy.
- 5 *German*: Hide snug tie for good health.
- 6 *History*: With a hiccough, Adrian swallowed a monumental piece.
- 7 *Monday Crime Club*: Procure the oil mixture for our literary sleuth.
- 8 *Music*: Bleed is free for Leo.
- 9 *Poetry*: She's preparing a bedtime drink for an irascible author.
- 10 *Pub*: Cold? Warm? Seer is bemused by this NE hostelry.
- 11 *Quiz*: MFRSTR (vowels removed) was the inspiration for this panel game's name.

12 *Scrabble*: The lettuce was so green, the tomatoes so orange, the radishes so red, I ate them all, concealing a championship Scrabble word.

13 *Shakespeare*: Bard showed his great side in creating these.

14 *Spanish*: Señora mistakenly sat under beans without noise initially to give a greeting.

15 *Strollers*: Informal greeting for a ruler out walking?

16 *Swimming*: Fat diptera engaging in swimming stroke.

17 *Topical*: He's the man to duck and override the truth.

The September group calendar is on page 6.

Material and suggestions for the next issue are very welcome. Please provide by 26 September latest to lauramw100@gmail.com. Thank you, and have an enjoyable month.

Answers:
1 Hillary Mantel
2 Sardanistes
3 Vertigo
4 Madeleine
5 Gesundheit
6 Hadrian's Wall
7 Hercule Poirot (who else?)
8 Delibes
9 Wendy Cope (Making cocoa for Kingsley Amis)
10 Lord Crewe Arms
11 Only Connect (EM Forster)
12 Sorelia (organs of reproduction in lichen, apparently)
13 Tragedies
14 Buenas tardes
15 Hiking
16 Butterfly
17 Donald Trump

September Calendar

Group	Meetings	Contact
Monthly U3A meeting (2 nd Thurs in month)	14 Sept , 1.30 for 2pm: Travelogue with Kath and Harry, Bowburn Community Centre	If you need a lift, contact Maureen Craik: 0191 371 8521 or mcraik-40@hotmail.co.uk
Book Group (1 st Monday of month)	4 Sept , 10 am: Stoner, by John Williams	Venue varies Lynn Bilsborough via U3A contacts page
Circle Dancing (1 st Thurs of month)	7 Sept , 2 pm Sacriston Methodist Church	Linda Murdie via U3A contacts page £2 for room hire; refreshments incl
Film Club (usually Mondays)	13 Sept , 6pm, Gala Cinema: Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake	Odeon or Gala showings Paul Newby 07814 518100
French: Beginners (fortnightly, 3.30 pm)	Botanic Gardens	Maria Wood (from end Oct) Wildswimmer1@gmail.com
French: Café français (Mondays)	4,11,18,25 Sept , 10 am Gala café	Mike Gibb via U3A contacts page
French: Français amical (Weds)	6,13,20,27 Sept 2pm, Gala café	Mike Gibb via U3A contacts page
French (Thurs, except 2 nd in month)	7, 21, 28 Sept , 9.45 am	Elizabeth Morgan 0191 384 6874 Contact Elizabeth for venue
German (every 3 weeks)		George Schlesinger 0191 384 9056 Contact George for details
History 1 (1 st Tuesday in month)	4 Sept 2pm, Sacriston Methodist Church A History of my Holidays!	Kim Jennings via U3A contacts page. All welcome. £2 charge for room hire. Tea and biscuits/cake included
History Too (monthly)	25 Sept 10 am, Sacriston Methodist Church Local Mining	David Willock via U3A contacts page All welcome. £2 charge for room hire. Tea and biscuits included
Monday Crime Club (monthly)	18 Sept , 10 am, Lanchester Garden Centre 1979 by Val McDermid	Tina Naples Room for new members
Music Appreciation (Last Saturday in month)	30 Sept 2pm, Carrville Church A little bit of...(led by Linda)	Stephen Brand via U3A contacts page
Poetry (2 nd Monday in month)	11 Sept , Gala cafe 2-pm Theme: Food New members welcome	Ivy Hudson 0191 384 4317
Pub Lunch (monthly)		Sylvia Buxton 0191 373 1644 for details
Quiz (Mondays, monthly)	Sacriston Methodist Church	Contact via U3A contacts page
Scrabble		Maureen Craik 0191 371 9521 for details
Shakespeare (every other Thursday)	7 and 21 Sept , 10.15 am Gala café	Members select extracts/poems for discussion Sue Childs via U3A contacts page
Spanish (every other Tuesday)	12 and 26 Sept 2pm, Gala café	Mick O'Sullivan via U3A contacts page
Strollers (Weds monthly)	10.30 am. Circular walk round Escomb	Ken Naples 07711 979098
Swimming (Fridays)		Ken Naples 07711 979098 for details
Topical Discussion (1 st Tues in month)	5 Sept 10 am, Beefeater, Broomside Park	Janis Goodson via U3A contacts page