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## Chair's address at the 2022 AGM

In the past year, Covid restrictions have had an impact on our ability to operate, but despite all the difficulties, we have achieved a great deal.

Our membership, currently 415, is down slightly compared to March 2021 (428). Although we have lost some members in the past year, 62 new members have joined since the 2021 AGM. We have fared better than many u3as, and this is something we can all take credit for and be proud of.

We remain a robust organisation because you, our members, have been loyal. Some of you belong to groups that remained active throughout the restrictions. But sadly, not all groups were able to continue, and some of their members may have felt as if the organisation had deserted them. Yet many in these dormant groups have shown their loyalty by renewing their membership.

Some of our strength is derived from a desire to be flexible in our approach and keep pace with technology. We have met in person when possible, have had several Zoom events and group meetings, and have introduced hybrid meetings. We have tried to support members with no experience of video conferencing, but we regret that not everyone has been able to participate.

Group convenors have been impressive in responding to the changing circumstances: some acquired new technical skills; others had to look for new accommodation for their groups.

The committee of eight worked well together and have not been afraid to challenge each other.

The membership renewal date has changed from March to September. John Dark, our Membership Secretary, introduced a system for online membership renewal as an alternative to the existing paper-based system. The new system is cost effective and easily managed. We are delighted that 200 people renewed their membership in this way, but the paper-based system will continue to be available for those that prefer to use it. I want to thank John Dark for steering us through these changes.

Last summer, we asked members whether they wanted a membership card. The majority view was that they did not. The committee were unable to find an alternative arrangement to measure attendance at the monthly meeting and other events, so from September 2022, we will provide membership cards to

new members, but we will ask existing members to continue to use their current card. We will only replace lost or damaged cards. This approach will enable us to avoid the unnecessary cost of regular replacement. More importantly, reusing the card is kinder to the environment.

I want to thank Barrie Mellars for keeping the monthly meetings going. Shouldering the responsibility for the technical issues associated with Zoom and managing hybrid meetings is challenging and stressful. Barrie has spent hours researching the technology. He has also spent time rehearsing to find on the day that a new problem has emerged. It has not been easy, but we are all pleased he has stuck with it.

Barrie is grateful to members who have come forward to do the talks. We have a hugely talented membership. When Margret Jacot spoke at our first hybrid meeting in September with such energy and enthusiasm, she set the bar high. Since then, we have had the Space Exploration group, Iain Moffat, Colin Argent, Chris Pollock and Oliver Dixon. They have all been brilliant. Thanks must go to our speakers.

Barrie has also been key in the success of our Desert Island Discs programme. He and Mike Worthington deserve a big thank you for the second season. It has had a good following and, when it concludes later this month, there will have been 15 programmes with 120 pieces of music. We hope to offer a third series starting in the autumn, but it will be dependent on castaways coming forward. Many thanks to the castaways of the second series.

Alicia Cresswell has maintained the high standard of monthly newsletter, which I know is well read because of the level of response to the content. Our finances are secure with David Pattinson as Treasurer. The business of the committee runs smoothly and reliably in the hands of Susan Turnbull, our Business Secretary.

The Groups Liaison Secretary role, previously shared, became vacant when Margaret Earl came to the end of her term and Jane Perona-Wright moved out of the area. We are grateful to Colin Argent for taking on this role single-handedly as the Group Fixer. Colin has been fully committed to our recovery, supporting convenors as groups resumed face-to-face meetings, and working hard to address issues such as the shortage of suitable venues for group meetings.

Kevin Stephens is leaving the committee today after a period of three years as Publicity Officer. He has held some responsibility for the website for far longer. This has been his second period on the committee; previously he was Newsletter Editor.

Kevin is committed, reliable and creative. He has made significant changes to the website, updating and improving it, and making it look more attractive. Kevin has ensured that the profile of Tynedale u3a is maintained by writing pieces for the Courant and producing adverts, articles, and letters. I would like you all to join me in thanking Kevin for the work he has done on the committee.

We have three new members joining the committee, which is exciting.

We plan to have

- regular coffee mornings for new members and potential members, to be advertised in the Courant
- a lunch for convenors to acknowledge the importance of their role and say thank you
- a Garden Party in June – it is three years since our previous one
- an Open Day in September to coincide with the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the u3a

We will be able to do more with your support.

I want to close by thanking those of you who have given us feedback. Many members have told us how much they appreciate the work of the committee; how good the newsletter is; how much they enjoy Desert Island Discs and the monthly meetings. Thank you for this feedback, but please let us know too what you think we can do better. We have received ideas and suggestions and we do welcome them.

I am looking forward to the year ahead and hope you are too.

Wendy Dale

# Monthly Meeting, Tuesday 5 April 2022 at 2pm in the Great Hall, Hexham Abbey - and on Zoom

**Topic:** Northumberland Wildlife Trust

**Speaker:** Frances Smiles

Northumberland Wildlife Trust is a charity dedicated to protecting wildlife and wild places, and helping people to get closer to nature. The Trust was set up in 1971 following a split from the Northumberland & Durham Trust, established in 1962.



The Trust is a member of The Wildlife Trusts partnership. Nationwide, there are 46 Wildlife Trusts with 850,000 members and 2300 reserves.

Northumberland Wildlife Trust looks after over 60 nature reserves in Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside. It has recently acquired a 327-hectare piece of land close to Druridge Bay, which is going to be extensively rewilded. As well as managing the habitat on its own reserves, the Trust advises other landowners and runs projects to protect endangered species.

Supported by over 600 volunteers, the Trust runs campaigns, events and education programmes.

**Tea and coffee will be served after the meeting.**

## Tynedale Desert Island Discs

My castaway for March's Desert Island Discs was John Loader. The following were his eight choices of music:

1. Don't Stop the Carnival – The Alan Price Set
2. African Sanctus, David Fanshaw, performed by Bwala Dance from Uganda
3. Piano Concerto No 2, Second movement, Rachmaninov
4. Because All Men Are Brothers – Dave Brubeck, with Peter, Paul & Mary
5. Shakespeare and All That Jazz: the Compleat Works – Cleo Laine & John Dankworth
6. To Hope (All My Hope): a Celebration – The Dave Brubeck Quartet & RNO
7. Shipping Forecast (Guide Cats for the Blind) – Brian Perkins
8. Pavane Pour Orchestre et Choer, Faure

This was the last Desert Island Discs of the second series. We plan to run a third series next autumn/winter. This is of course dependent on enough volunteers among our members agreeing to be cast away on the desert island and share their eight choices of music to take with them. We have a healthy and loyal number of members who enjoy the monthly programme in the dark days of October to March. So please do think about taking part and get in touch with me, or talk to a committee member or any of our previous castaways. I can be contacted on [worthington1942@btinternet.com](mailto:worthington1942@btinternet.com) or by phone on 01434 606215.



I look forward to hearing from you and planning another successful series for 2022/23.

Mike Worthington

## Groups liaison news

### Bridge

COVID restrictions have been abandoned and most of us will, by now, have been on the receiving end of three injections. That means we can start to think about getting together to play bridge. We are now trying to re-activate the bridge play group so if you are interested, please contact the bridge convenor, Margaret (01434 632637) or the Group Fixer.



### Dog walking group



Our new dog walking group met for the first time in March. Walks are scheduled for the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month. New members are most welcome on a regular or occasional basis. Check out the Tynedale u3a website for details. If you are interested, contact Mon Richford or, if you have any problems, contact the Group Fixer.

### Gardening group

#### Hexham's green gym

Do you know about Hexham's Green Gym? In the grounds of the former Middle School there is a community garden, currently overseen by Transition Tynedale, which would benefit enormously from more person power! We grow fruit and vegetables organically and try to run the site sustainably. There are opportunities for a wide variety of workouts from high impact digging and landscaping to the gentle stretches of sowing, weeding and pruning - or just pottering about enjoying the space. Now that the school has left, the garden is accessible all the time and we are negotiating for it to play a part in the Council's green agenda.



If you would like to get involved, please contact Elizabeth Leonard. Phone: 01434605980. Email: erleonard45@icloud.com.

### New group suggestions

Three new suggestions were proposed at the recent coffee morning, namely: Russian studies, adult ballet and table tennis. As usual, if you are interested let me know.

### Meeting rooms

Thank you to everyone who responded to my email with suggestions for meeting rooms. My plan was to look at the feasibility of block booking rooms, but it quickly became apparent that this could only work by increasing the cost of room hire to all concerned.

I am aware that a number of groups are not fully satisfied with their current arrangement, particularly in regard to displaying information. The Newcastle Building Society have agreed to install a flat screen TV in their free meeting room but the installation is in the queue with other building work.

Excellent meeting rooms are available outside Hexham at very competitive prices, so any groups looking for better accommodation may wish to contact me for more information.

Colin Argent, Group Fixer

## Group news and activities

### Landscape group

The Landscape group is up and running. We have 10 active members - and room for more.

We are exploring the human influence on the landscape we see around us. For our first meeting in January we had an excellent talk from Colin Argent on the landscape of Whittonstall.



Pastures, East End Reservoir and plantations above Allenheads

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For our second meeting we invited short contributions from members on any aspect of the landscape around Allenheads. This produced a varied selection of material on subjects such as the evidence to be found on OS maps; mediaeval farming and the first settlements in the area; the impact of the Blckett-Ords and lead-mining; moorland horse-racing and race courses; the reservoir system that powered the lead-mines; and much more. A lively discussion followed.

For our next meeting we are continuing to explore the Allenheads area, with topics such as the impact of grouse shooting on the landscape; helipads; pollen records; and the history of deforestation.

In the summer months we will be holding field trips, including pub lunches, to look at landscape features in the area. The programme is still developing and we welcome new members. We meet on the fourth Monday of the month. Please contact Steve on 07748981847 if you are interested in joining.

### Environment group

#### Flying and the environment

The Environment Group met in March to talk about flying and the environment.

Most people aren't aware how huge the global environmental impact of flying is. If the aviation industry were a country, it would be the sixth highest CO2 emitter in the world, currently at 2.5% of CO2, and projected to grow to 16% by 2050. Per passenger kilometre, train travel creates 41 grams of CO2, and a domestic flight 254 grams.

Yet in most countries, travel by car, train or bus is more expensive than by air. So why is flying so cheap? Because road and rail fuel is charged high excise duty, but aviation fuel for jet engines is completely free of tax. It has always been so. This is an economist's nightmare and an indefensible anomaly.

Of course, occasional flying, for example to see family who live abroad, is important and very necessary for many.

Greta Thunberg attended the World Economic Forum at Davos travelling by rail, while 1,500 private jets brought in the rich and powerful. Most flying is carried out by a small, very wealthy group, who are in effect being subsidised by us, the occasional flyers.

One final stupidity is of take-off and landing slots. Under EU rules, airlines must use at least 80% of their landing slots to keep them. So completely empty flights are deliberately flown just to retain slots.

By radically cutting down, we need not go back to the dark ages; it is an opportunity to redraft what travel truly means. We must get back to the idea that travelling is special; that it is a privilege. What we do as individuals is so important because it influences those around us. The 'No Fly Movement' was started in Sweden by people who drastically reduced or gave up air travel altogether, and it is slowly spreading.

Basically, it is an economics problem for our politicians that will only be solved by international agreement, because most planes can just fly across a border to fill up.

Colin Gallagher



## Flash fiction winners

### First prize: Colin Argent

She sat, motionless, staring at the letter trying to comprehend the full implication of it. The letter itself was of no concern, just the normal news about his latest overseas trip. He had saved the bombshell until last, a postscript that stunned her into silence.

Why now? They had been together for seven years, happy and carefree with a 'for life' home financed by his overseas work. What had changed? He had never mentioned anything to make her suspect such a decision.

Her mind raced, struggling to understand what it would mean. One thing was clear, there would have to be changes. But could she cope? These things could easily get out of control and impact her future happiness.

"Damn it!" She scrunched the letter and hurled it across the room. "Double damn it. If that is what he wants, he can damn well move into the garden shed."

Her mind made up, she slumped back onto the bed and scowled malevolently at the crumpled letter which glowered back at her from the bedroom floor. One part had survived her anger and remained defiant, and readable. The postscript bombshell.

"P.S. I have bought a train set, a big one!"

### Second prize: Colin Argent

Mike sank back with a long, sad sigh and looked up at the sky. His mind was racing, repeatedly going over the events of the last few days. Could he have done something to prevent it? Who could have known it would be so bad?

He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly and carefully, finishing with a muttered "fate". He knew that life could be difficult at times, even cruel, but this had come at him from left field, with no warning and when it hit, it hit hard.

"Sod it" he fumed, then turned his attention to the stars in a bid to find some peace. It was as if he was seeing the night sky for the first time. There were more stars than he imagined possible and the enormous, awe-inspiring beauty of it left him breathless.

"Wow! What a revelation! To think you can only see this in the real darkness. Darkness unblemished by street lights, and cars and all the paraphernalia of modern life."

He lay back on his bed and drank in the majesty of the primeval night sky.

"Thanks Arwen" he whispered, "but when will the bloody insurers mend my roof?"

### Third prize: Helen Houghton

#### The girl

I watched her move between the trucks and SUVs. Caught in the headlights. Small, thin, scared. What was she? Migrant, run-away kid, prostitute? Those words in my ear: 'Disgusting the way they dress these days. Asking for trouble'.

Neon signs advertised the steamy café. Wet inside and out then. I could have made sandwiches. I could have made a fortune over 40 years. No takeaways. No fags. You can always do better.

Resigned, I locked up and went in. The murmur surprisingly comforting. The décor and food? Well, nothing surprising there.

It was over coffee - strong, black - I saw her. Perched, looking like she'd feasted. I knew the tactic though: pretend you're eating and they leave you alone. Always head for a dirty table.

I tried to look away but kept staring. My imagination working overtime. They called it day-dreaming at school. But it was better than geometry. And it got me through to this. A temporary job that became a job for life. A career? Hardly.

As I stood up, I thought 'This is it. I'll go over, make small talk, find out more'. But should I? I'm conditioned, you see, not to interfere.

## From our members: Downsizing

Last month we asked our members:

**Are you downsizing, or perhaps clearing a house after a bereavement?** Neither is easy. If you have any tips on what to do with treasured possessions you cannot keep, or how to get rid of unwanted 'stuff', we would love to hear from you.

And so would **Mary Oswell**, who told us, "Oh I second that! Not just my own lifetime's accumulation, but 'stuff' left by my three 30-something kids... which I may not jettison but which they refuse to deal with..."

**Marjorie Calverley** moved to a much smaller house a few years ago. She has this to say:

"Downsizing is incredibly hard. Starting well in advance is worth it because it's really difficult to part with things. My first option was to try local selling websites and I had a little success. eBay may be better, but I have never done that before.

We took some furniture to Anderson & Garland and sent quite a bit up to the Rothbury sale. I found that for what we got for it, it was hardly worth the hassle. The local people who offer to buy from your home just pick over things and want payment to take it away - that was an interesting experience.

We ended up using the local furniture recycling centre, Core. They are quite busy and needed two to three weeks' notice in our case, but they are polite and courteous and take your stuff for free. A lot of my china and smaller things went to charity shops. Unfortunately, what you think may be of some value invariably isn't. My philosophy now is less is more.

A good tip if you move to a much smaller property is to purchase an ottoman bed, which gives a lot of storage. Just make sure it's easy to lift. Having fitted wardrobes maximises your storage area.

We have absolutely no regrets about having downsized - we really do have more than we need and it makes life simpler. I am occasionally still sending things to the charity shops and it will have made it so much easier for our children when we are no longer here.



**Hilary Gordon** is doing it now. She says:

I'm in the process of downsizing and knew I'd have to put everything in storage for months so I started recycling about a year ago. A large quantity of books went to Oxfam bookshop, and clothing to Scope. I knew there'd be too much furniture and initially tried to have it collected by someone from Tynedale Hospice at Home. I believe they've recently opened a shop. But there were many provisos and regulations, which a lot of items didn't comply with. So the surplus furniture went to The British Heart Foundation shop in Westerhope. Both organisations are able to collect.

I did sell a few small items on Facebook's Tynedale Selling Page, and also tried Newcastle Gumtree, but they are both a bit oversubscribed so there wasn't a lot of interest. Also it's worth warning people to be very wary if using Gumtree. It seems local but it's also accessed nationally. I was very quickly contacted via WhatsApp by three different people who were clearly trying to gain access to my bank details. The advice would be, don't discuss anything on WhatsApp - always use the Gumtree's safe contact and payment methods.

Charlotte Pearson of Tynedale Hospice at Home sent us some information via Tynedale u3a member **Gillian Jones**, who is Co-Vice Chair of the charity:

Tynedale Hospice 'Furniture at Home' opened in October 2021 at Bridge End Industrial Estate, Hexham. The charity accepts pre-loved good quality furniture and is happy to provide a free furniture and bulky items collection service. Tynedale Hospice at Home will always endeavour to sell any items that have kindly been donated, however there are some items they can't accept due to health and safety and legal reasons. A full list is available online at [www.tynedalehospice.com/shops](http://www.tynedalehospice.com/shops) For further information on donating furniture, please contact the shop directly on 01434 447 748.



## u3a learning events

Central u3a offers selected national events online, ensuring that learning opportunities are available to local u3as and their members. This includes events with the National Gallery, Royal Institution, Guildhall Art Gallery, and the British Library (for which there may be a charge).

u3a also offers a number of [workshops, webinars and interactive sessions](#) delivered by members for members, which are free to join. These are in high demand and spaces are limited, particularly for those with an interactive element. At the time of booking, please ensure that you are committed to attending to avoid other members missing out on places. If you are unable to attend, please cancel your place through Eventbrite. Some of these learning events are available via Zoom. If you are unfamiliar with Zoom, you can watch a [Zoom tutorial for beginners on YouTube](#).

## Spring learning programme

The new spring learning programme has launched with a range of opportunities for members to learn something new. Read more on [the u3a news pages](#).

Talks, workshops and discussions on topics such as 'How to crochet a creature', 'The geology of igneous rocks', 'An introduction to evidence-based medicine', 'Laughter yoga', and 'Cryptic crosswords for beginners' are all free of charge and available on Zoom. Information on dates, times and registration is available [here](#).

## New u3a film: Do something brilliant today

In the latest u3a film, members share their stories of how u3a changed their lives for the better. It showcases how u3a helps members to learn new things, laugh together and live life to the full. If you have not yet seen the film, watch it on [our YouTube channel](#). Please share with your u3a colleagues and friends and we hope it is a useful tool to promote your own u3a.

## A new episode of the u3a radio podcast

In the [latest episode of the u3a radio podcast](#), the team hear about the Specsavers partnership with u3a which showcases the skills of [#GenerationWOW](#), talk to u3a members who contributed to the 40th anniversary quilt, and learn about the many usages of seaweed. The next episode will be available on 17 April.

## UK creativity and wellbeing week: Photography competition

UK creativity and wellbeing week will be held from 16 to 22 May. Northumbria u3a is organising a photography competition.

You are invited to take good quality photos of your u3a members laughing and learning (and, naturally, living!) between 22 February and 22 May 2022. Each u3a in the regional Northumbria u3a can submit up to ten colour jpeg photos, either portrait or landscape, to be sent by 22 May 2022 to Kelvin Rushworth on [kelvinregnat@outlook.com](mailto:kelvinregnat@outlook.com)

An email, with the photos attached, should be from one nominated u3a contact and each photo should clearly state the name of the photographer, the name of the u3a, and an appropriate title, as well as date taken. A judging panel will select the 40 best photos, which will be publicised and exhibited in the region. The photographer must seek the expressed permission of the subject/s and both the photographer and the subject/s must agree that Northumbria u3a can use the photo extensively, as required, locally, regionally and UK-wide.



## Your committee

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## Membership

We currently have 426 members, including eight associate members.



Tynedale u3a is a registered charity (number 515733).

# Welcome

A very warm welcome to new members Neville Parkin, Vivien Prime, Eileen Elliott, Maggie Davison, Marjorie Henry, Gillian Shaw, William Shaw, Paul Holmes, Richard Walker, Bernadette Walker, Kathy Fairless, Stephen Chadwick, Kathryn Chadwick, Jacque Clarke and Janet Rix.

## Dates for your diary

### Monthly meetings - April to September 2022

#### All meetings start at 2pm

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 3 May:       | Chris Tipple, Tales out of school life in rural Northumberland schools in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century |
| 7 June:      | Jenny Elliott, Tyne Rivers Trust   |
| 5 July:      | Professor Mike Bentley, Living, working and doing scientific research in Antarctica                    |
| 6 September: | Tony Flynn, The Brasilia of the North?   |
| 4 October:   | Richard Young, Buildings of Northumberland   |
| 1 November:  | John Richards, Flora of Northumberland   |
| 6 December:  | Chris Pollock, Plants that kill you  |

## Next issue of the newsletter

The next issue of the newsletter will be published in May 2022.

We welcome contributions from groups and individual members.

**Please send your contributions to the newsletter editor, Alicia Cresswell, by 21 April. Email address: [tyneu3aeditor@gmail.com](mailto:tyneu3aeditor@gmail.com).**

Thank you