



u3a learn,
laugh,
live
Tynedale

April 2026

Newsletter

Monthly Meeting at the Mart, 2pm, 7th April 2026

Crystal-Ball Gazing: The Future with AI

Nick Rossiter was a lecturer in computing science at Newcastle and Northumbria Universities from 1990-2010. His specialist subjects are databases, AI and information retrieval, in which he did research from 1968 to the present day. He has a PhD in physical chemistry from Hull University.

This talk will look at the current status of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and possible future trends. Areas investigated will include the reasons for the recent upsurge in AI, the course of the dotcom boom, and the companies involved in the AI technical revolution, with emphasis on the benefits and drawbacks for society and individuals. The current weak AI will be compared to possible future extensions, which would considerably alter the scope of the technology. The talk will not go into technical detail.

Stay afterwards for a chat with free tea and coffee

New Groups

España Viva

Exploring the richness of Spain — past and present

Do you visit Spain regularly? Are you fascinated by its food, wine, culture and history? España Viva (Living Spain) will be a new u3a group in which we can share our love of Spanish life in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Together, we can broaden our understanding of what makes Spain such a wonderful country to visit — and explore.

What we'll do

- Monthly meetings, each led by a volunteer group member (no compulsion to lead!) on an agreed theme. The language will be English. Presentations will be interactive.
- Explore history, art, literature, geography, cuisine and wine
- Discuss current affairs and social issues in modern Spain — including a short monthly update
- Share travel experiences, photos (no selfies!), and personal insights
- Enjoy relaxed and lively discussion — the group will be focused on *alegría*, not *academia*



Why join?

- Broaden your knowledge of Spain beyond the simple tourist trail
- Experience the “flavours of Spain” from all its regions — with occasional meals out
- Learn from each other’s experiences of holidays or business in Spain

Practical details

- When: Monthly (2 hours), initially the first Monday of each month in the afternoon (TBA)
- Where: Initially in members’ homes
- Cost: Small contribution for venue/refreshments if pre-agreed
- Format: Members take a turn preparing and chairing a session (not compulsory)

First Sessions

- Introduction: Each member describes what draws them to Spain. Discussion of future themes.
- First themed session: The Story of Tapas — with tastings

Potential future sessions

Gaudí • Andalucía • Spain after Franco • Expatriate Life • The Spanish Empire • Paella and other classic dishes • Spanish Art from El Greco to Picasso • The Basque Country • Football — La Liga • The Spanish Armada from a Spanish perspective • Almodovar film

Graham Dimmock is the group's convenor and can be contacted through the Groups Page on the Tynedale u3a website at [Espana Viva Group](#)

Events Report

Church Organ Building and Oriental Museum – 26th February 2026



A u3a group had a most interesting trip to Durham. In the morning, the group visited Harrison and Harrison the church organ manufacturers to see a very large new church organ being constructed, destined for the USA. Upon arrival we had a very informative talk by our guide Owen Woods, and then a tour of the factory to see manufacture, tuning, 'voicing', pipe construction, bellows, 'shallots' and keyboards.

After lunch we moved to the Durham University 'Oriental Museum' for a fascinating guided talk by Charlotte Spink on their purpose, acquisitions, collections and future. The highlight was undoubtedly the handling of some ancient Egyptian artifacts (picture refers).

A good day was had by all.

And it was all free!!

Andrew Rigg



Wildlife Group Visit to Northumberland Zoo Report



The Wildlife Group had a sunny day to visit Northumberland Zoo.

The staff were all welcoming and spoke knowledgeably & enthusiastically about the conservation work. The zoo is very well run & geared to endangered species recovery, involved in global projects to restore critically endangered animals to the wild. Livingstone's fruit bats, snow leopards and the recently arrived Linne's two-toed sloth are among the highlights. Members were enchanted by the active harvest mice, part of a British recovery story, they were much smaller than any of us had imagined.

Jenny Loring

Showtime!

March Play at Queen's Hall Theatre

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (HangFire Theatre; Adapted by Rory Stuart)

Members of the Showtime group thoroughly enjoyed this production of Shaw's most popular play. It was written in 1912 and first performed in London in 1914. It dramatises a social experiment, whereby Henry Higgins, a Professor of Speech, accepts a bet that he can transform a cockney flower seller, Eliza Doolittle, into being accepted in high society as a Duchess by only changing her accent.

HangFire's production gave us a barnstorming performance by Jamie Brown, as Professor Higgins, who managed to be both bombastic and domineering while showing a total lack of empathy and social skills. A show stealing performance by Jacob Anderton as Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, had the audience enjoying plenty of laughs. He also managed to double as Freddy Eynsford-Hill, the rather weak suitor of Eliza.



The ending of this production followed that of the original play, in that there was no reconciliation between Eliza and the Professor. This ending was controversial at the time, and it was frequently romanticised in later productions. This was the case with the hit musical, *My Fair Lady*, and associated film, where Eliza returns to Professor Higgins and he simply says, "where are my slippers?"

Shaw himself was irritated by attempts to create a 'happy ending' in later productions. He added a postscript essay to the 1916 print edition for inclusion with subsequent editions, in which he explains precisely why it was impossible for Eliza to agree to marry Professor Higgins. He simply isn't the marrying kind, but is an inveterate bachelor, twenty years her senior. Freddy, on the other hand, loves her unaffectedly, and is not her master; he does not dominate her. As Shaw says in his essay, "Will she look forward to a lifetime of fetching Higgins's slippers or to a lifetime of Freddy fetching hers?"

All in all, this was a very enjoyable performance, and it is definitely worth watching out for future productions by this theatre group.

Margaret Elliott & Liz Barnes, Showtime Group.

Attorney: How was your first marriage terminated?

Witness: By death

Attorney: And by whose death was it terminated?

Witnesss : Take a guess.



From Disorder in the American Courts via La Contessa.

Groups News

Ian Diggory is our Programme Secretary – and he is keen to encourage more meetings open to all members.....

AD-HOC MEETINGS

With over 600 members and around 60 groups Tynedale u3a is very active. The Committee organises a general meeting on the first Tuesday of each month that is open to all members and is free of charge. We usually engage an external paid speaker, although we do occasionally call on one of the talented speakers from within our own membership - and they don't charge! As the person responsible for organising these meetings I am always grateful for suggestions from members if they have a topic or speaker they would like to see featured at a monthly meeting.



Some time ago the Committee was approached by Book Group 4 seeking financial support for an “Author Event” where the author in question had written books about engineering families in the north-east. It was felt this topic would not only appeal to Book Group members but also those from Science and History groups. The event was opened up to all members and proved to be successful. Since then, the Book Group and History Group have run similar **ad-hoc meetings**.

The Committee is keen to encourage more of these **ad-hoc meetings** and has drawn up a protocol for groups wishing to engage an external speaker on a topic that they feel will have an appeal beyond their own group. The Committee can offer some financial support but unlike the monthly meeting there is a charge for members attending these **ad-hoc meetings**.

If your group has an idea for an event or speaker that interests you but at the same time you feel would also have wider appeal to other u3a members, please email me, call me or catch up with me at the convenors lunch.

Ian Diggory

Email: tyneu3anewprogsec@gmail.com

Mob: 078765 91183

On page 7 you can read Alicia's report on the most recent Ad-hoc meeting, featuring local crime author Mari Hannah.

Book Group 4 Guest Author Event

On 26 February, Book Group 4 held its second guest author event, open to all Tynedale u3a members, in the Great Hall of Hexham Abbey. We were delighted to welcome Mari Hannah, the award-winning author of three crime fiction series: the CDI Kate Daniels, Ryan and O'Neil, and Stone and Oliver series. Mari spoke about her career as a writer and her approach to writing crime fiction.

Before becoming a writer, Mari worked as a probation officer. This experience gave her a good knowledge of the criminal justice system and a deep insight into human psychology and social issues. Her career as a probation officer came to a sudden end as a result of an assault she suffered at work. She subsequently trained as a screenwriter before developing an interest in writing crime fiction. The insights she gained in her job as a probation officer and her knowledge of police procedure, gained partly in conversations with her partner, a former murder detective, explain the authenticity of her voice as a crime writer.



Mari's account of the process she follows when writing a new piece of fiction was interesting and thought provoking. The first step in the process is, as she put it, to "nail" the principal character. Once she has a clear idea of the character's personality, background, behaviour and relationships, she works on the plot, tackling the twists and turns in the story that keep her readers engaged and make her books real page turners. Setting her fiction in the Northeast, where she has lived for many years, gives her work a strong sense of place. Mari told the audience that she visits all her locations and researches them thoroughly, often using the names of real streets, pubs, restaurants and other venues.

Her latest book, *Her Sister's Killer*, the fifth in the Stone and Oliver series, has received very favourable reviews. Despite being part of a series, the book can be read as a standalone.

Currently, Mari has two TV adaptations on the go. The Stone and Oliver series is at an early stage, while the CDI Kate Daniels series is in active development for ITV.

The event was well attended and feedback has been positive. We thank Mari Hannah for accepting our invitation and delivering such an engaging talk. We also thank Julia Madgwick, Book 4 Convenor, for organising the event.

Alicia Cresswell

2026 EVENTS from May to September

- May 6th Marley Cote Farm visit to see the robotic milking machines. Sorry this trip is full.
- June 10th Eggar site visit for a tour of the factory. This trip is also full, with a reserve list.
- July 1st Garden Party at the Racecourse. More details to follow very soon.
- Rington's Tea Factory and Chillingham Castle visits are being planned during the summer.
- September 18th All day visit to the Harrogate Flower Festival at Newby Hall in Yorkshire.



Unfortunately, I will be in London, but Margaret Wall and Marjorie Marram have kindly offered to coordinate on the day. I will arrange a bus trip if interested parties could let me know (1) of their definite interest in the visit and (2) whether or not they want the coach. I am at present getting quotes for the bus, and it looks around £18 per person if we fill a 50-seater.

Names to me please. (events2riggtu3a@gmail.com)

Entry price on top of the bus fare will be about £25 but the prebooked tickets are not yet available.

Finally, apologies for those u3a members who don't want to be kept in touch of Events via the Beacon System. It really is the only way to distribute information but if you don't want to read about it, please just delete the message.

Andrew Rigg (u3a Events Secretary)

From the Tynedale u3a Committee

Chair's Address to the 2026 AGM

I would like to start by welcoming everyone here today, we will try to keep the formal proceedings as short as possible then we can enjoy the presentations of our two speakers Colin Argent and John Dark.

We continue to maintain membership numbers with a current total of 625 of which many are involved with our various groups.

The highlight of the year was the Summer Garden Party held for the first time at Hexham racecourse which proved an excellent choice having both indoor and outdoor facilities and excellent catering.



In addition, our Event Secretaries Fran Fuller and Andrew Rigg have organised a number of visits including a well-attended and much enjoyed visit to the Sunderland Nissan factory and a Christmas tea at Wallington House amongst others. We have also had a number of meetings organised by specific groups but open to all members such as the talk on St Cuthbert and the forthcoming talk by Mari Hannah both at the Abbey. It is very much our

intention to continue to encourage and help finance these supra group events over the coming year.

Our Facebook page continues to attract members and has proved useful in publicising trips and meetings. We will continue to limit membership and postings to Tynedale u3a members in order to keep it focused on us.

The new members coffee mornings organised by our Membership Secretary John Darke have been well attended and continue to provide a useful conduit into our activities and groups. These will continue this year.

We on the committee are very aware of the vital and important role played by our Group Convenors in the continuing success of Tynedale u3a. As such our Groups Liaison Secretary Steve Rozario has organised a lunch meeting for all Convenors in April to show our appreciation and to hear any suggestions or issues they may have. Our Groups are the lifeblood of u3a and as such the Convenors play a vital role in their success. It is a simple equation – no Convenors means no Groups!

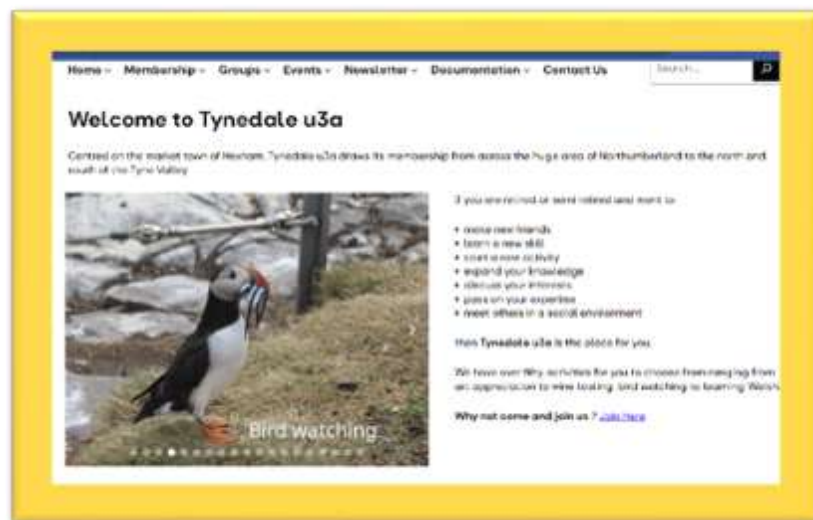
The monthly meetings are now firmly established here at the Mart and during the year our Program Secretary Ian Diggory has continued his hard work in procuring many interesting speakers, the highlight of which seemed to be the presentation on the Brain which was both informative and thought-provoking.

We have continued to video record these meetings for the benefit of those who were unable to attend, and the viewing figures have been very encouraging. It is our intention to continue this facility.

The [website](#) has been brought up to date and refreshed by our Website Manager Michael Brockway and will continue to form part of the main channel of information to members together with the monthly Newsletter. and group coordinators

I would like to offer my personal thanks to all

the committee members who have diligently applied themselves on your behalf to ensure the continued success of Tynedale u3a. I would like to give a particular vote of thanks to our three retiring members Ann Atkinson and Tim O'Brien who have respectively kept our administration and Monthly Newsletters in good order and Fran Fuller who has acted in the role of Events Secretary alongside Andrew Rigg, but who has now decided to step down. They will be missed.



We have two members who have been Proposed and Seconded:

1. Di Downie as Newsletter Editor who will I know bring her usual energy and enthusiasm.
2. Roger Hancock as Business Secretary who brings real experience to the role.
3. Voting will take place later.

COMING EVENTS:

This year we will again be having a Summer Garden party at the Racecourse, and we will be increasing the capacity. The date will be the 1st of July.



I know Andrew has a number of events coming up this year details of which will be in the newsletter and notices will be sent to all by email. These will include a tour of Eggar, a trip to Harrogate Flower Show, a visit to Chillingham Castle and a visit to a fully automated farm.

Finally, I would like to conclude by wishing all the members of Tynedale u3a a happy and healthy year.

Barrie Mellars, Chair

Finance Report Tynedale u3a for Year ended 31 December 2025

During the year Tynedale U3a (TU3a) received £22,854, of this £10,080 covered membership fees, Gift Aid, Third Age Trust magazine fee, interest, and other items, this is comparable to the prior year of £10,166. The remaining £12,774 were receipts from members for Groups and Events.

Payments for the year were £22,490, of this £10,061 covered general activities of affiliation fees, member communications and general payments. Reduced costs regarding the TU3a newsletter, convenors lunch, summer party compared to the Christmas party, and the absence of last year's 40-year booklet contributed to member communication costs being £1,307 less than in 2024. Lower General Payments this year were mainly due to reduced capital expenditure and lower speaker fees, enabled by using the talent of TU3a members to provide a variety of talks for some of the monthly meetings. The Group and Events payments £12,429 almost match the Group and Events receipts. The increased cash flow in the Group and Events is a testament to a busy events calendar and the health of groups.

As a result, the overall cash balance increased by £364 in 2025 (mainly due to an increase in group balances) to £19,685. Of this £17,102 are for general activities and £2,583 are group and events balances. This current general balance allows us to maintain a six-month coverage of expenses throughout the year, in accordance with the Finance Policy on reserves. The Group and Events balances are for the payment of invoices for core activities, in line with the constitution of TU3a, to be incurred in 2026.

Kate Stephenson, Treasurer



Clay tablet; record of barley; barley appears four times on this tablet represented by a single stalk with ears at the top; three different types of numerical symbol are used.

3000BC, Mesopotamia

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From the Editor

Hello, my name is Di and I am your new Tynedale u3a Newsletter Editor.

Firstly, a big thank you to Tim O'Brien who has just completed his three-year stint as Editor. Tim did a fabulous job, and I am going to be hard pressed to keep up his high standards.

I have no experience in editing a newsletter but the u3a's motto is 'Learn, Laugh, Live'. So, I will be learning about formatting a newsletter and living through my mistakes with, no doubt, many a rueful laugh.



However, the most important part of the newsletter is your news. So, please send me your photos, your articles, your reminders about events, stories about new and current groups. Many thanks for all this month's contributions!

The deadline for the May newsletter is 19th April 2026, but feel free to send your contributions at any time.

The email for sending copy for the newsletter is tyneu3aneditor@gmail.com. This is subtly different to the previous email! (It's lost an 'l')



Previous Editors – Kevin Stephens, Sue Charlton, Alicia Cresswell and Tim O'Brien (left to right)



The u3a Friends newsletter brings the best of u3a straight to your inbox. Each edition features exclusive member stories, national u3a events, new learning opportunities and the latest news from across the movement. By signing up, you'll be the first to hear about upcoming events, like the u3a Festival, and ways to get creative with our national competitions. Sign up on the [u3a website](#)

New Members Coffee Morning.

All members who have joined in the past year but have not been to one of our Coffee Mornings, will be invited to come along on May 13th. It will be held in the Prior's Hall at Hexham Abbey, starting at 10.30am.



There are brief presentations from various committee members about how the u3a works. But it is mainly an opportunity to meet other new members and particularly, to let us on the committee know what you want out of Tynedale u3a.

Invitations will be going out shortly. If you don't get one and would like to come along, please get in touch with the Membership Secretary on tyneu3amemsec1@gmail.com

Helping others Learn...

If you have difficulties with conversation in noisy environments, you might be interested in participating in this research by a PhD student at the University of Nottingham.

Natalie Lerigo-Smith, Lead Investigator and PhD student writes,



We are looking for people who find it hard to hear speech in noisy places to join an online training study.

In this study, we will be testing two new training games in a program called PLUS.

PLUS stands for Practice Listening and Understanding Speech. These listening and thinking games were developed with people with hearing loss and are designed to improve listening abilities including listening in noise.

This study is not suitable for people with cochlear implants because the way sounds are processed is different. However, people who use hearing aids and people who do not use hearing devices are able to take part.

To find out more/join the study go to <https://tinyurl.com/PLUSOptimal1>

To contact Natalie <mailto:Natalie.Lerigo-Smith1@nottingham.ac.uk>

(NB the study has been ethically approved by the University of Nottingham, but Tynedale u3a has no direct link with the research).

Noticeboard

Online contacts for the u3a locally, regionally and nationally.

Tynedale u3a website [here](#) for your local u3a information.

Tynedale u3a Facebook [page](#) for regular local updates (you don't need to be a member of Facebook to see what's happening).

Northumbria Region u3a – includes online groups and occasional visits



For online highlights of the latest u3a Matters Magazine click [here](#).

Dates for your diary

05/05/2026	Monthly Meeting @Mart	Digging up Northumberland's Past by Barry Mead
06/05/2026	Marlet Cote Farm	FULL
13/05/2026	New Members Coffee	Prior's Hall, Hexham Abbey
02/06/2026	Monthly Meeting @Mart	Strawberry Fields Forever by Dave Milne
10/06/2026	Eggar Factory Visit	FULL with reserve list
01/07/2026	Summer Garden Party	Hexham Racecourse
07/07/2026	Monthly Meeting @Mart	The Kremlin's Geordie Master Spy by David Saunderson
18/09/2026	Harrogate Flower Show	Newby Hall and Gardens

Welcome!

New Members

Kim Lurati
Andrew Thurm
Hilary Rackstraw
David Rackstraw
Mary Stivala
Jan Walton
Kevin Gee
Graham Smart
Mandy Smart

We now have 649 members

Please send your contributions for the May Newsletter to Di at tyneu3aneditor@gmail.com by April 19th 2026.



Your Committee

Chair	Barrie Mellars	078312 55520	chairtu3a@gmail.com
Vice Chair/Membership Sec	John Dark	014346 02584	tyneu3amemsec1@gmail.com
Treasurer	Kate Stephenson	074705 76385	tu3atra2@gmail.com
Business Secretary	Roger Hancock	074786 54919	tyneu3absec@gmail.com
Events Secretary	Andrew Rigg	079300 05008	events2riggtu3a@gmail.com
Group Liaison Secretary	Steve Rozario		tyneu3agroupliaison@gmail.com
Newsletter Editor	Di Downie	077433 14201	tyneu3aneditor@gmail.com
Programme Secretary	Ian Diggory	078765 91183	tyneu3anewprogsec@gmail.com
Website and Beacon	Michael Brockway	078757 38557	mjb.TynedaleU3a@proton.me