



u3a learn,
laugh,
live
Tynedale

October 2026 Newsletter

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

Newcastle Castle by Mick Wilkes

From the Roman fort of Pons Aelius (bridge of Hadrian) right up to modern times and the current business plan, this talk takes you on a journey of around 2,000 years, leaving you thinking about the Castle's future.

Using maps, drawings, paintings and old and modern photography, it offers a light-touch overview of history, myth, facts and future plans. It's a light touch overview of the history, popular myth and some hard facts, as well as thoughts for the Castle's future.

Originally built in its current form as a Royal Fortress, the whole Castle Garth area is a cross section of our country's history: Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Normans and then the Victorian railway engineers, if only the Vikings had paid the city a visit...

As the head of the team operating the Castle, supported by a brilliant board of Trustees, I feel extremely privileged to be leading the next stage of the Castle's development.

Mick Wilkes is Chief Executive Officer of The Heart of the City Partnership, the independent charity operating Newcastle Castle. Born in the North East, Mick is an RAF engineer veteran. He has worked for 25 years in the heritage sector and now also chairs the Elders Council of Newcastle.

Stay afterwards for a chat with free tea and coffee

Chair's Report

Changing Times

As required under our Constitution I will be completing my term as Chair at the AGM next March. I have greatly enjoyed my time as the Chair of Tynedale u3a but all good things must come to an end.

This creates an exciting opportunity for a member to take on the Chair role and help Tynedale u3a continue to thrive. Third Age Trust rules require us to have a Chair, and I warmly encourage members to consider putting themselves forward. While committee or board experience can be helpful, it is certainly not essential. The role is for three years and offers a rewarding chance to meet and work with people across the Tyne Valley, both within the u3a and in the wider community. The main commitment is to attend and chair eleven monthly committee meetings, currently held at Hexham Golf Club, with any additional involvement shaped by the time and interests of the person taking on the role.



Barrie, representing the u3a, and Wendy Dale (a previous Chair) at Langley Castle.

It is a wonderful opportunity to work alongside a supportive committee, build on Tynedale u3a's many strengths, and help guide the organisation into the years ahead and the new decade.

I have greatly valued the encouragement, kindness, and goodwill shown by members throughout my time as Chair, and I am especially grateful to the committee members both present and past for their help and support. I know my successor will receive the same warm welcome and encouragement.

If you, or someone you know in Tynedale u3a, would like to find out more about this rewarding role, please do get in touch with me or any committee member. Our details are on the u3a website, and we would be very happy to speak with you at the monthly meeting.

Barrie Mellars, Chair

Assistant Treasurer Call Out

My tenure as treasurer will come to an end in March 2027, and as Tynedale u3a cannot operate without a Treasurer I felt it was time to put out the call for a volunteer to start as soon as possible.

Creating the role of Assistant Treasurer will allow a gradual transfer of duties so that the Assistant Treasurer would be ready to assume the role of Treasurer at the next Annual General Meeting.

If you are interested, please contact Kate Stephenson, email: tu3atra2@gmail.com



Electrum coin from Lydia about 6th century BCE – one of the earliest coins
© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) licence

Tynedale u3a cannot practically or legally function without a Chair and a Treasurer. We are a registered charity and will have to close if we cannot fill these positions. If you think you might be able to help – talk to Barrie and Kate. Please! Or persuade a friend....

Di Downie, Newsletter Editor



Searching for a new Chair.....
Preferably one who can walk on water.....

Photo and caption by Tim O'Brien

New Members' Coffee Morning

All members who have joined in the past year but have not been to one of our Coffee Mornings, have been invited to come along on Friday October 9th, 2026. 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 in early September. If you don't get one and would like to come along, please get in touch with the Membership Secretary

on https://tynedale.u3asite.uk/u3a-contact-form/?contact_id=36586

John Dark, Membership Secretary

Membership Renewal Time

September 1st was the date when you should have renewed your subscription!

We've had a wonderful response – out of over 600 members due to renew, even halfway through the month, it's less than 200 who have yet to respond.

Remember, we need your money - £14.00, or £18.00 if you take the Third Age Matters magazine by post. And we also need a renewal form.

Most people use the online form, which is very simple. If your contact details have not changed you can skip things like addresses and phone numbers and go directly to the Gift Aid section before pressing "Submit".



All you need to know is on the relevant page of the website, at

<https://tynedale.u3asite.uk/membership/#renewals>

John Dark, Membership Secretary

But don't forget, we need *both* the **subscription fee *and* the **Renewal form**!**

From Our Members

Play Reading Group

It is rather sad that so few plays are seen on the TV these days. We seem to get a series of never-ending murder mysteries. Happily, play reading in Tynedale is flourishing and continues a fine tradition which began in 1986. We were one of the first groups in the new Tynedale U3A forty years ago.

We have two groups of ten members. Each group meets fortnightly and we read one play a month. There are only six copies available through Newcastle Library for each play. This means numbers must be limited as some members find sharing books difficult.

We cannot accept new members at present. However, if someone would like to start a new group, I would be happy to offer support and guidance. [Play Reading Group](#)



Bill Walton, Convenor

Writing Together Group



This is a call for expressions of interest in joining the *Writing Together* group when we restart after the summer break.

This is not a creative writing group; there's no homework, and no writing to a theme or prompt during the session. Rather, it's time set aside for writing, whatever the project may be - poetry, a presentation, family history, a diary, a speech, a short story, a book or film review, a novel - any kind of writing short of maybe a shopping list! And rather than write alone, all too often staring at a blank page waiting for inspiration, it gives the opportunity to discuss ideas with others beforehand, to set goals and to help fellow writers over their stumbling blocks.

We have been meeting every two weeks on Thursday afternoons, but if it suits potential members better, we can change to Wednesdays (all day) or Friday afternoons, and more or less frequently. We are open to suggestions!

If you have a writing project on the go, or would like to start, please contact me, Liz Barnes via the Group List page on the website.

[Writing Together Group](#)



Liz Barnes

Book Group 4

I've belonged to several book groups over the years, and each one has had its own character. None has been better or worse than another; they have simply been different.

My current book group meets once a month and includes both men and women.

We read a wide range of books: fiction and non-fiction, ancient and modern, British and international. Members suggest titles, and for each meeting one person introduces the author and the book before guiding the discussion.

Everyone shares an opinion. We rarely all agree, but I always come away having noticed something about the book that I had missed before we met. As we get to know one another better, the conversations become deeper and richer.

One of the pleasures of the group is being encouraged to read books we might not have chosen for ourselves. Whatever we read, we always manage to have a stimulating discussion, and some fun.

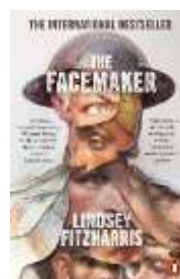
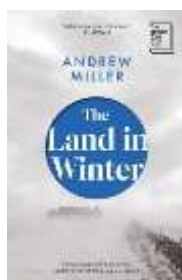
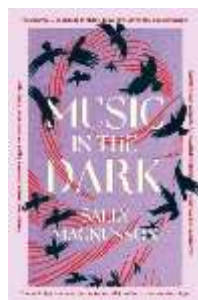
We meet in one another's homes, and the host provides tea, coffee and cake. Recently, we have started trying to match the cake to the book. For example, the photo shows the Scottish Diet Cake and Empire Biscuits that accompanied our session on Sally Magnusson's *Music in the Dark*, a book set in Victorian Scotland.



We've also asked writers to come to talk to a wider audience of u3a members – this year local author Mari Hannah came to talk about her detective novels which are set in the North East.

Many thanks to our convenors past and present – and to all my book group friends.

Di Downie



The Environment Group

Have you seen the film 'People's Emergency Briefing + Discussion? We think everyone should see it and if you haven't, we can put on a screening.

The People's Emergency Briefing is a 50-minute public information film. It is an attempt to ensure that the UK is fully briefed on the climate and nature crisis. There have been several screenings in Hexham, at the Queens Hall, The Abbey and twice at The Forum. The environment group had their own viewing in their July meeting. We like to think we have a good understanding of the climate emergency, but I think all of us felt there was something that we learned from the film.



We would like to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to see it, and we want to encourage all our members to see it at least once. For this reason, we are hoping to provide a further viewing in the autumn. It is important that we are all well informed on the issues and watching it together can be supportive. Can I reassure people that this is not a political film, the climate emergency affects everyone.

I need to have an idea of the number of people who would come along if there were to be a viewing for members, so please contact me if you will come along.

Wendy Dale (w.dale381@btinternet.com)



This space is waiting for your photo, news, plea or report....deadline is the 19th of any month.

Podcast Review

A Tour de Fromage

With so much media coverage of the Bayeux Tapestry it's easy to lose the thread. But the most interesting stuff for me was *The Food Programme* on BBC Radio 4 looking at how the Normans enhanced English cuisine <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0030yr1>. Alongside having more chicken, pork and rabbit, the big change was much more cheese and many more types of cheese. With cheese making adopted by monks and nuns, it would be a very enjoyable research project to understand how Hexham monks found their whey.

Coming up to date, we now have the Oh La La café and deli in Hexham. As well as great coffee, they have some wonderful cheeses. However, rather than the Gallic goodies, I mostly have the German Alp Blossom and Isle of Mull cheddar. I hear voice of the



Bishop Odo blesses the food – from the Bayeux Tapestry

newsletter editor pointing out how all this fat may be unhealthy, so I also need to mention the other Norman contribution to our culinary delights, cider. The Normans introduced both new varieties of apples plus new methods of production. So, perhaps we need to have a flagon of craft cider with our chasse to get our five a day.

Mike Foster

New Tynedale u3a Members

Tynedale u3a extends a very warm welcome to all our new members this month.

AnneMarie Grant
Jennifer Telford
Geraldine Tate
Jean Patterson
Kay Murray
Margaret Wood
Michele McKenzie
Jean Maskill
Carol Alcock
Joan Goodfellow
Barbara Clayton

Pauline Ramsay
Jean Conteh
Susan Nicholson
Eileen Connelly
Linda Devlin
Anne Deif
Maggie Smith
Jane Denchfield
Joy Kitching
Emma Young
Helen Lewins

Shiela Patterson
Joan Kennedy
Gabrielle Maughan
Carolyn Howell
Colin Wilson
Helen Blackburn
Alistair McPhee
Louise Harty
Carrie Hawksworth

Talk open to all u3a members

My Family's DNA and Me:

Understanding your Ancestry using DNA Testing

The two Family History Groups of Tynedale U3A have united
to host this presentation by guest speaker, Di Downie.

Thursday 22nd October from 2-4pm in the Prior's Hall, of Hexham Abbey.

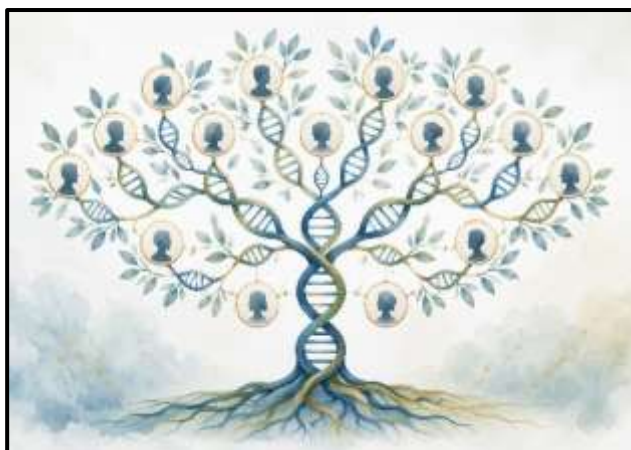
REFRESHMENTS WILL BE AVAILABLE.

Understanding DNA and Ancestry Testing

This lecture explains the basic science of DNA and how ancestry companies use test results to:

- identify genetic matches between relatives.
- estimate ancestral origins.
- explain why some known ancestors may not appear in your results; and
- show why having an Indian great-grandmother may not produce an Indian ancestry estimate.

Since commercial family-history DNA testing began in 2000, millions of people have taken DNA tests. Computer programs compare an individual's result to the ever-growing DNA databases and offer possible family matches and ethnicity profiles. By understanding how DNA is inherited from your ancestors, you can interpret your results more effectively and use them to help unravel your family tree.



Di Downie worked as a GP in Guildford for 35 years before moving to Northumberland five years ago to explore retirement and help care for her grandchildren. She enjoys exploring the science behind medical topics and making it accessible to others.

The talk is free of charge, but you must book through [TryBooking](https://www.trybooking.com/uk/GZXW)

(<https://www.trybooking.com/uk/GZXW>) from Thursday September 24th

Donations (cash please) welcome to cover the cost of refreshments.

Val Argent

u3a North East Region Events

St. Nicholas Cathedral, Newcastle–Visit with Organ Recital – 16 November 2026

The u3a North East Region Events Team have arranged a visit and tour of St Nicholas Cathedral, Newcastle with the opportunity to attend an afternoon organ recital.

For over 900 years, Newcastle Cathedral – originally the Parish Church of St Nicholas – has been at the pulsing heart of Newcastle, as a place of worship and community. From its creation, rebuilding in the Medieval era and the drama of the English Civil War to the extensive remodelling across centuries, the Cathedral echoes stories and history from every corner.

The interior of the Cathedral is a visual feast of stained glass, monuments, memorials, military colours and other sculptures. Each tells a story. Following a guided tour of the Cathedral at 11am, you can further explore the Cathedral or have lunch at Cafe16 which offers lunches as well as lighter snacks.

At 1:05pm there is an opportunity to listen to an organ recital.

The organ, parts of which are over 350 years old, is exciting and colourful. Its magnificent case in the North Transept catches the eye of all who visit and serves as a striking reminder of how essential music is to the daily rhythm of this sacred space. Today's organ has over 5,600 pipes and 94 speaking stops, making it one of the largest in the North of England. Please note there is a retiring collection after the organ recital.



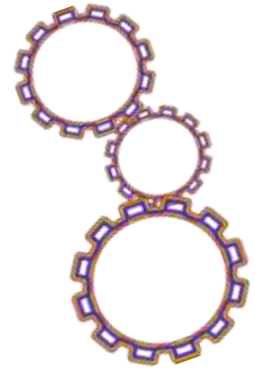
Newcastle Cathedral Organ By John Salmon, CC BY-SA 2.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13674108>

Meet at 10:45am outside the Cathedral's main door, St Nicholas Square, Newcastle NE1 1PF

To book a place contact Moira Stokoe (moirastokoe@gmail.com) or visit the website [Cathedral Visit](#) for more information

End Pieces

This page includes notices, reminders, and information which I hope will be of interest to fellow u3a members. Please feel free to submit any items you think may interest others.



The following events are not organised by the u3a.

True Crime Forum comes to Newcastle this October



Curious about true crime beyond the headlines?

True Crime Forum Newcastle brings together experts, researchers and practitioners for a full day of conversation and interactive experiences in Newcastle on Saturday 10 October 2026.

Choose two workshops on topics such as Lucy Letby, the manosphere, violence against women and girls, CSI, Peter Sutcliffe and wildlife crime. Lunch is included, and the day ends with an interactive detective experience.

Find out more and book at truecrimeforum.co.uk

Tynedale u3a members get 15% off with code **TYNEU3A**. (Full price £89)

Northumberland Wellbeing Walks! Free, with trained leader. Thursdays, 11am, Café Enna. 15- or 30-minute route. No booking—just turn up. Wear sturdy shoes and suitable clothing. Contact Christine Ward: wardm17@sky.com



To-do list



- ☐ Renew u3a membership
- ☐ Find a new Chair
- ☐ Find a new Treasurer

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

06/10/2026	Newcastle Castle	Mick Wilkes
09/10/2026	New Members' Coffee Morning	Prior's Hall Hexham Abbey
22/10/2026	My Family's DNA and Me	Di Downie - Open Talk
?/10/2026	Rington's Tea Factory	book via Andrew Rigg
03/11/2026	Sleep and Dreams	Bob Pullen
01/12/2026	Geology of Carlisle to Newcastle Railway	Ian Jackson

New Members

All this month's 31 new members are listed on page 8. Welcome!

Tynedale u3a now has 664 members – don't forget to renew your membership!

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



Your Committee

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