

u3a learn, laugh, live

Tynedale

December 2026 Newsletter

Monthly Meeting at the Mart 1st December 2026

Geology of the Carlisle to Newcastle Railway by Ian Jackson

Time Travelling by Train

There can't be many members of Tynedale u3a who haven't journeyed to Carlisle or Newcastle on the Tyne Valley Line. Perhaps you've looked out of the window and wondered about the scenery along the way: why does the route go through here? who built this bit? where does that disused tunnel go? why did that landslip happen, and will it happen again? If you want your questions answered, then come along and listen to geologist and writer Ian Jackson tell you about the line's history and deep history. And you won't need a Tardis.

Ian Jackson was born in Carlisle and read geology and geography at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. A Chartered Geologist and Fellow of the Geological Society, he spent 18 years surveying the geology of northern England for the British Geological Survey. He later led national and international programmes that produced the first UK, European and global digital geological maps and made them web accessible. He has written many scientific maps, articles and reports, as well as several popular books about the rocks of Northumberland, Cumbria and Durham. Ian is a regular presenter at our meetings. Although he has taken a rest from writing this year, I have encouraged him to bring a selection of his books, which explore how rocks shaped the landscape of Northern England and the people who lived here. Ian donates all proceeds from book sales to charity.

Jan 5th 2027, Monthly Meeting-What the Baby Boomers watched-TV from 1946 to 1969 by Ian Diggory (p13)

Stay afterwards for a chat with free tea, coffee and mince pie.

Chair's Report

As we come to the end of the calendar year, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your help and support especially during my recent travails.

It has been a very active year for Tynedale u3a with our membership rising well above 600. Groups have come and gone as is often the case, but we remain with over 50 active groups. I would like to say a special thank you to all the Group Convenors who so unselfishly give of their time and without whom the groups would not operate.

The monthly meetings have successfully prospered under the auspices of our Programme Secretary Ian Diggory with talks many and varied from the 'Navy Lark' to brain function and all stops in between.

The trips out have been a great success with outings from country houses to Buddhist Temples! I have no doubt that Andrew Rigg's trips next year will prove equally popular.



Your support for the new type of multi-group meeting has been evident from the number of attendees, and I anticipate further significant growth in this area in the coming year.

Whilst thanking people I would like to pay tribute to all our committee members who work hard behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of our organisation. Without them we would not be able to function and thrive.

It only remains for me to wish you all a very happy Christmas and hopefully to look forward to a peaceful New Year.

Barrie Mellars, Chair

Photo – Lesley Parsons

SEASON'S GREETINGS TO ALL TYNEDALE U3A MEMBERS FROM YOUR COMMITTEE...





Environment Group

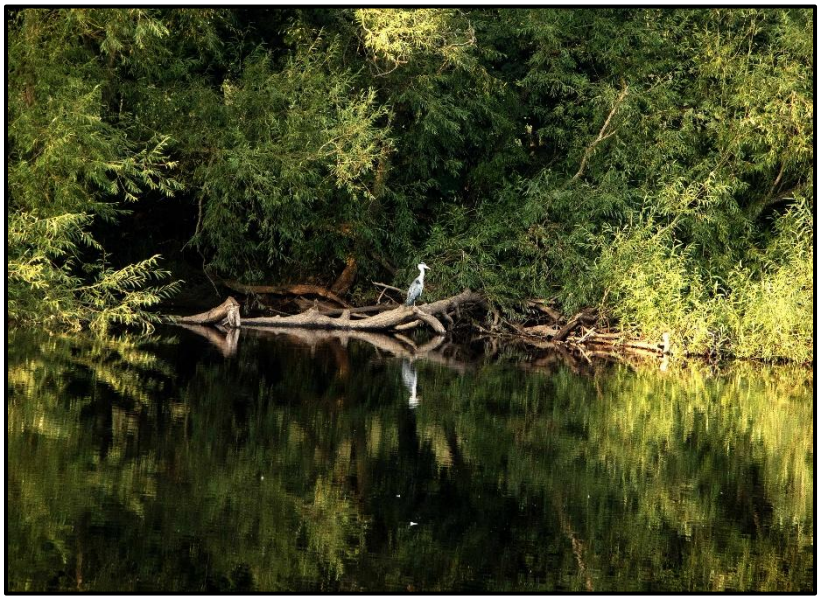
We were delighted to have Jonathan Mullard, local author and naturalist speak at our meeting about his recent book, Forgotten Woodlands. Jonathan lives in Hexham and has been touring the UK speaking about this book at festivals (oddly not Hexham!) and this talk completed a busy year for him.



He gave an erudite and wide-ranging talk describing how twelve thousand years ago as the ice retreated, forests recovered Great Britain. These forests, now largely destroyed by humans through agriculture, war and development have largely vanished, but remnants remain in the form of fossil forests, pre-historic and medieval wooden artifacts and ancient trees dotted in our landscapes, many of which stunning oaks that have survived for centuries. He drew on archaeology, historical records, landscapes poetry and philosophy to trace this journey.

We were joined by members of the u3a Wildlife Group and several potential new members.

Selena Gray



Heron on the River Tyne at Tyne Green by Tim O'Brien.

The River Tyne valley was also sculpted by the melting of the ice about twelve thousand years ago. The River Tyne itself is about thirty million years old.

Garden Visiting Group

The garden visiting group has enjoyed a delightfully varied series of visits this year from heritage snowdrops and beautiful fritillaries in February to our final garden in September- eleven gardens in all.

We would like to thank all our hosts, many of whom are members, for their inspiring gardens, friendship and, of course the tea and cakes.

If any U3A member has a garden which they think we would enjoy, please contact the convenors by the Group Contact page on the website.

Vivien Hubbock













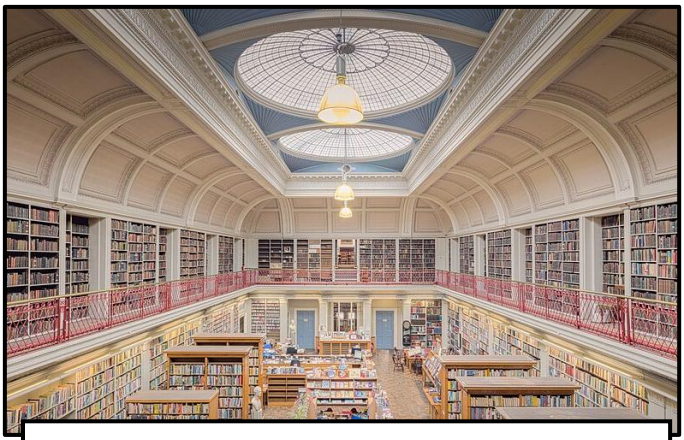


Hadrian's Wall Group

In September, the Hadrian's Wall Group visited the beautiful Lit and Phil in Newcastle under the watchful guiding of one of our own - 'book meister' Alastair Fraser, who had likely sold his soul to gain us access to the inner sanctum of the Lit and Phil's book collection of many rare antique books and manuscripts regarding the Roman occupation of Northern Britain.



Alastair had selected about a dozen books highlighting how people have seen and understood the Northern Frontier of Rome since the early 1600s. They demonstrated to some extent how we know what we know and how what we thought we knew in many cases turned out to be wrong. The works began with William Camden's "Britannia" (in a 1787 edition), then through the 18th century surveys of the antiquarians Alexander Gordon, John Horsley, James Warburton and William Stukeley. It included the forged itinerary of Richard of Cirencester which fooled William Stukeley as well as the surveyor William Roy, leaving a legacy of confusion well into the next century. The 19th century element included early editions of the "Handbook to Hadrian's Wall" by John Collingwood Bruce which established the Wall as a tourist attraction. Also on display was the first modern mapping of the Wall by Henry MacLauchlan from the 1850s. We concluded with the travel writing and watercolours of Jessie Mothersole in the aftermath of the Great War.



Hadrian's Wall lies under and alongside the Lit and Phil.

After lunch in town, a contingent visited The Great North Museum (Hancock) specifically to peruse, gawk at and conjecture over the Mithraic Cult archaeological finds from the temples at Carrawburgh and Housesteads forts.

All in all, a 'nerd- fest day' of the highest order!

Carole Soulsby, Convenor

Environment Group – Air Quality In Northumberland

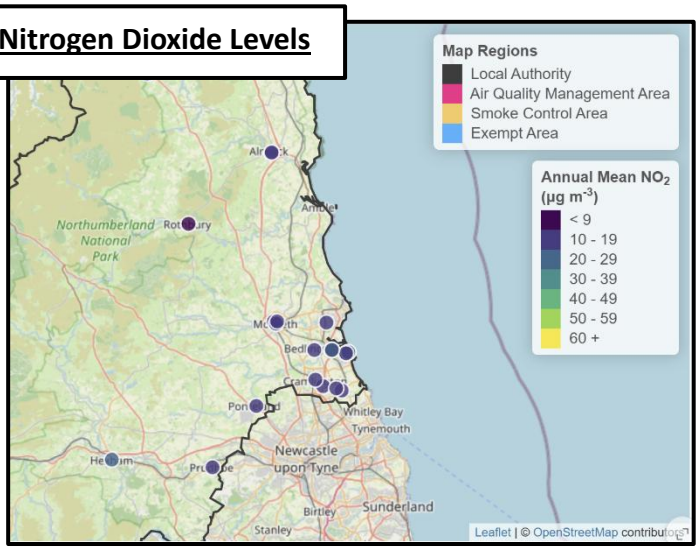
For the last meeting of the year the Environment Group heard a presentation on Air Quality in Northumberland from an Environmental Protection Officer at Northumberland County Council.

An estimated 4% of deaths in Northumberland (about fifty a year) result from poor air quality.

One hundred and forty commercial or industrial sites, including petrol stations, dry cleaners and combustion processes such as at Egger, are inspected each year by an Emissions Testing Company at the company's expense. Results go to the County Council. All testing is assessed separately for each chemical.

The County Council has four automatic particulate monitors (PM10 and PM2.5, the number indicating particle size) – two in Blyth, one in West Hartford and one in Pegswood – plus two automatic iGas monitors for NO_2, SO_2, CO and O_2, and 19 roadside diffusion tubes for NO_2. The tubes are easily moved, give monthly and yearly data, and are mostly in southeast Northumberland, with one at the Tesco roundabout in Hexham and one in Haltwhistle.
All are placed in roadside locations. Northumbria Healthcare monitor air quality at Cramlington Hospital.

Nitrogen Dioxide Levels



The Environment Agency also monitor other large scale industrial sites across Northumberland.

The local authority produces an Annual Status Report to the Secretary of State and is consistently classified as 'good' for outdoor air quality.

It also reports on projects it is involved in to improve air quality such as the Northumberland Line active travel corridors.
The Council's new Air Quality Strategy, a statutory requirement, is currently aspirational with no clear delivery plan; this will be developed over the next couple of years. Its seven key commitments are to: reduce concentrations of air pollutants from road traffic; ensure developments address air quality throughout planning and construction; work with local industry and businesses to reduce air pollution; monitor air quality; improve domestic air quality; communicate and engage with the public; and promote Northumberland as a clean air destination.

You can check your local air quality by going on the DEFRA Local Air Quality Dashboard (see map above)https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/local-authorities-dashboard/

Ann Atkinson

Music Appreciation Group

The Music Appreciation Group, which has been running for many years, is seeking new members.



The group, which has a maximum size of seven people, meets usually on the first Monday afternoon (2-4pm) of the month at the Corbridge home of the convenor, Ruth Bramfitt. We take turns in presenting classical composers or choose as a group to study composers of an area such as Eastern Europe. These presentations are always interesting, sometimes surprising, and invariably lead to discussion. We have found we have much to learn from each other.

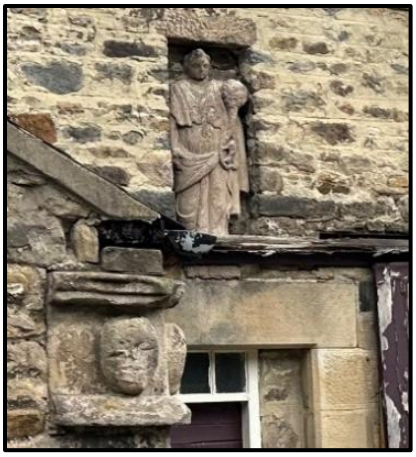
Each meeting ends with further discussion, tea or coffee, cake, and biscuits.

To contact the convenor please use the Contact Page on the Group's page of the website.

Ruth Bramfitt, Convenor

Where? What? Why?





Submitted by Richard Steel

See End Pieces page 13 for answers!

Spain – Past and Present

Exploring the richness of Spain

This U3A group first got together under the name of España Viva in June 2026. Eight of us met



to talk about our experiences of Spain and to learn more about its history, current affairs, culture, and food and wine. Sadly, we lost three members during the second half of the year, all because of significant changes in personal circumstances. We would love to get back to a group of 8 to 12 members. We are changing our name to Spain – Past and Present as several people who contacted us thought we were a Spanish Language group! Our meetings are entirely in English. If you want to learn more, you can phone me (Graham Dimmock) on 07841 426442 or email on dimmockg@yahoo.com. As a u3a member you can come along to a free taster session with no obligation. So, here is what we do……

SPAIN – PAST AND PRESENT

Do you visit Spain regularly? Or would you just like to?! Are you fascinated by its food, wine, culture, and history? **Spain – Past and Present** is a u3a group in which we share our love of Spanish life in a relaxed atmosphere. Together we try to broaden our understanding of what makes it such a wonderful country to visit.

What we do

- Monthly meetings focusing on an agreed region. The language will be English.
- Explore history, art, literature, geography, cuisine, and wine.
- Discuss current affairs in modern Spain – we produce a short monthly news summary.
- Share travel experiences, photos, and personal insights.
- Enjoy relaxed and interactive discussions – the group will be focused on *alegria* not *academia*.

Practical Details

Monthly meetings in the afternoon of the first Monday. Meeting in members' homes but on a voluntary basis. Nothing to pay unless for an agreed special event.
We are hoping to have a tapas evening as we restart in the New Year and a tasting of wines from Spain's diverse regions later.

If you love Spain, do get in touch. Graham Dimmock, Convenor

Hexham Town Twinning Association

NOYON IS COMING TO HEXHAM!

14th – 17th May 2027

Would you like to be involved in hosting friends from our twin town Noyon in France?

Town twinning promotes and fosters international friendship and understanding. Each year there are long-weekend visits to and from our partner towns. There will also be an opportunity to visit Metzingen, our German twin town, later in 2027. People stay with host families and are immersed in local life, with a programme of events.



A party in Noyon at the end of a weekend visit from Hexham Photograph © HTTA/SC

Please join us! Contact us via our website www.hexhamtowntwinning.co.uk
or by email to: info@hexhamtowntwinning.co.uk

Aside from visits, we also organise social meetings in Hexham, and our informal language groups run throughout the year.

Stephen Conlin

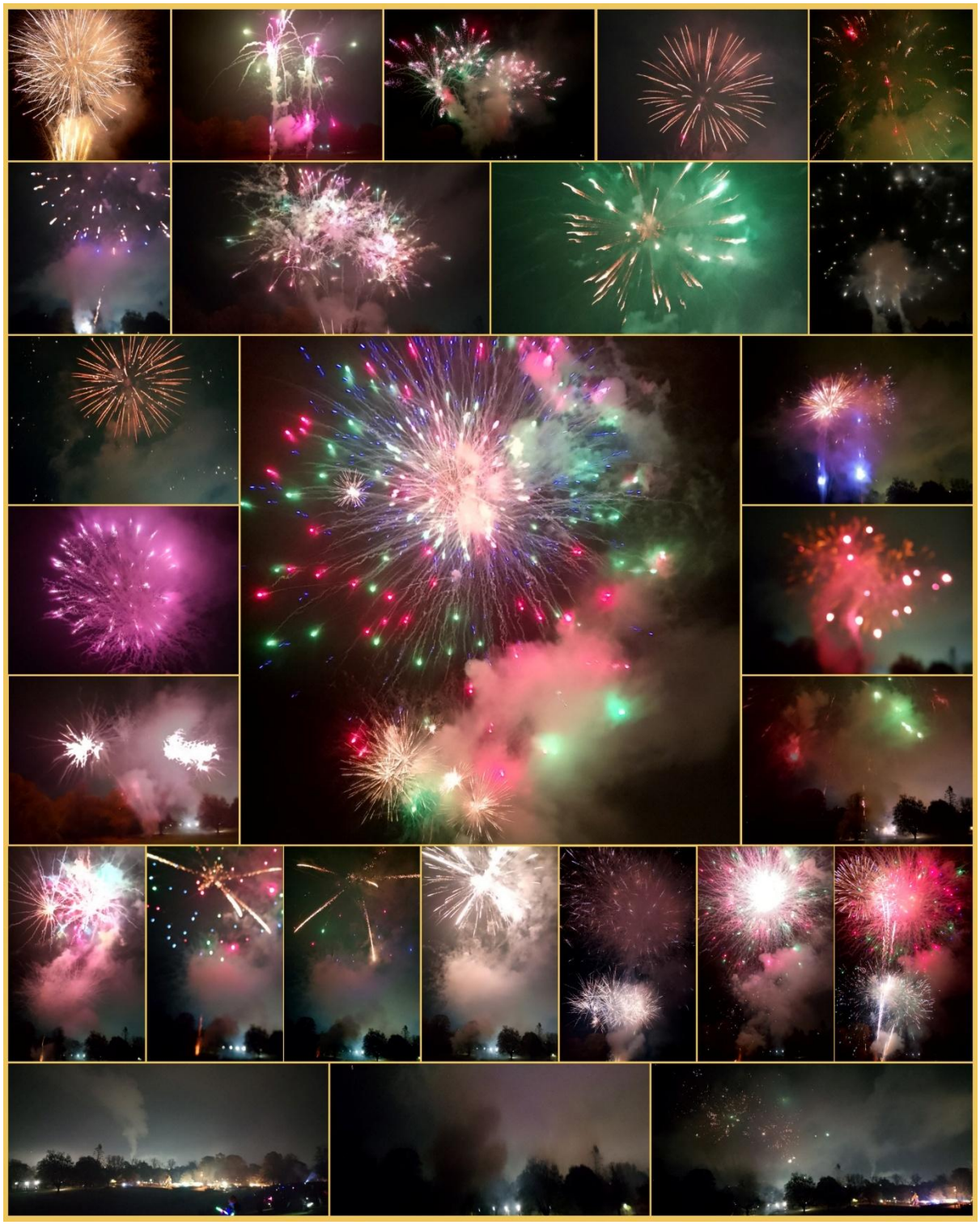
(HTTA is not part of Tynedale u3a, but we do have French and German language groups so some members maybe interested).



"Warming and Comforting"

Hairy Biker's Apple Pie by Jenny L from local shared apples.

https://hairybikersrecipe.co.uk/hairy-bikers-apple-pie-recipe/#wpzoom-recipe-card

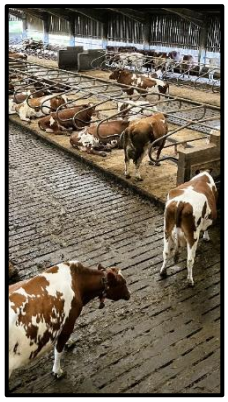


Sele Park Fireworks – November 2026- photos by Jenny L

Events 2026

Andrew Rigg, Events Secretary, has organised some splendid visits over the last year. Here are some photos of happy days out….









Thank you to Andrew, and indeed to all our members who organise events, groups, talks, walks and the myriad other activities that we all enjoy.



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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.



Volunteer Voices Exhibition at the Sill –The story of Northumberland National Park told by the volunteers– free and open daily. See November Newsletter p10.

Where? What? Why?

Behind the Wheatsheaf Pub, Corbridge. Roman Statue. The Upper Statue: believed to depict Abundantia, the Roman goddess of abundance, success, and prosperity, shown holding a cornucopia



Monthly Meeting at the Mart, 2pm, 5th January 2027

What the Baby Boomers watched – TV from 1946 to 1969

by Ian Diggory

January's talk is a follow up to last years' Radio Nostalgia talk that was presented by Colin Argent and myself. As a baby boomer this talk is a personal recollection of programmes and personalities that I recall appearing on our screens. Since many of you qualify as a baby boomer the talk will hopefully revive some memories but just in case it doesn't – I will be asking questions! Who remembers Noggin the Nog?
Ian had a serendipitous career studying nuclear physics, cosmic rays and environmental acoustics before taking on a consultancy role at British Gas then working with Colin Argent to build an engineering consultancy.

Ian became involved in the u3a after an invitation from Colin Argent to join his newly formed Space Group. He has been a Group Convenor for the past 6 years and Programme Secretary for the Tynedale u3a since 2024.

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

01/12/2026	Geology of Carlisle to Newcastle Railway	Ian Jackson
	Volunteer Voices at The Sill	
01/01/2027	Happy New Year!	
05/01/2027	What baby boomers Watched-TV from 1951 to 1969	Ian Diggory
02/02/2027	Blyth Wildlife Rescue	



Please send your contributions for the February Newsletter to Di at tyneu3aneditor@gmail.com by January 19th 2027.

Published and Printed by Tynedale u3a

New Members

We have 5 new members.

Geraldine Green
Elspeth Peddie
Robin Atkin
Alison Peberdy
Rachel Ogilvie

We now have 656 members

Your Committee

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