

Cestria u3a at Chester- le-Street

Website – <https://cestria.u3asite.uk>

December 2025 Newsletter



Chairman's Corner

Hello everyone. Welcome to the Christmas edition of our u3a magazine.

I haven't made much progress towards Christmas myself, perhaps that's a typical male position. However, the December meeting, at Cornerstones on the 3rd, features the Cloth Cap Skiffle Band which should get the festive season off to a great start.

We also have a good variety of speakers for 2026, thanks to Margaret Chilver. More groups are getting going, including the French group and hopefully a Photography group. Thanks to Anne Lanigan for her work as co-ordinator and to all the group leaders both new and longer term. It's a reminder that the u3a works best when we all help as and when we can.

Plans are taking shape for the celebration of our 20th birthday and money has been allocated towards the costs. Keep an eye on emails and check our website for further details.

As we get to the end of another year (where did the time go?), may I wish you a Happy Christmas and a good New Year.

.....**Best wishes, Mike Parker, Chair.**

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This edition includes important documents for our February AGM. Please take a moment to read through them so you're up to date with what's happening and can take part in shaping our future.

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Monthly Meetings

**1st Wednesday of month Cornerstones Methodist Chapel
9.30 – 10.00 pre meeting Coffee & Chat.... Prompt
10.00- Noon Main Meeting**

Speakers

**7th January.....
Beamish..... Recent Developments...
Conno Emmerson**

**4th February
AGM.... George & Robert Stephenson
Railway Pioneers.....,
David Williamson**

**3rd March.....
Road, Wall, Rail..
History of the Newcastle to Carlisle Crossing
Margaret Bozic**

**1st April.....
The Birtley Belgians –
Wartime refugees settle in the NE.....Val Greaves**

From the Editor.....



Christmas is a time for remembering friends—and here at Cestria u3a, we have so many to cherish. As our 20th birthday approaches, it's a moment to pause and reflect on the countless happy memories we've shared together. From outings and talks to laughter-filled gatherings, our journey has been rich with community spirit and camaraderie.

The committee is already busy making plans to celebrate this milestone in style—so keep an eye out for the latest news! We promise it will be a celebration worthy of all we've achieved together.

As with other years, this one seems to have flown by. I'd like to extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to these newsletters throughout the year. Your stories, updates, and reflections help keep our community connected. A special mention goes to my ever-reliable proofreader, Jennifer Ritchie, whose keen eye and dedication ensure each edition shines—thank you, Jennifer!

And now, as the year draws to a close, it only remains to say: have a peaceful and Happy Christmas—and most of all, a healthy New Year.

.....**Christine Logan**

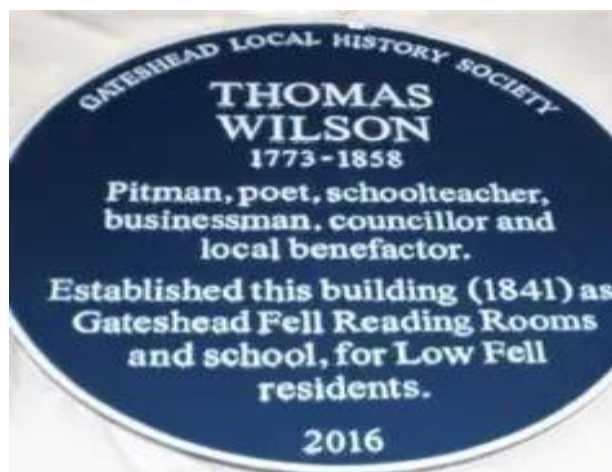


Sending special Christmas wishes to Inca, Hearing Dog and Influencer, who was our sweetest visitor in March this year. Still working hard, delivering talks on behalf of Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, Inca and his 'daddy' Martin took part in the fantastic 'BBC Children in Need Thousand Mile Challenge' in November..... Well done!

Walking Tour of Low Fell.....

On a bright September morning a group from Cestria u3a lead by Margaret Bozick, met at the Boer War memorial in Low Fell, and waited for our Newcastle City Guide Jan Morris to arrive. The memorial honoured one sergeant and four troopers from Low Fell who had lost their lives in the war. Jan pointed out and discussed many things during our walk including:

1. The split from the higher class turnpiked High Fell from soggy moored Low Fell when a new by pass road was constructed in 1827.
2. The development of local churches, in particular St. Helens on Belle Vue Bank, paid for by Edward Joicey and with awesome stained glass windows. Also the visits of John Wesley to Low Fell's Methodist churches.
3. Carters Well, 1856, was the chief drinking water supply in Low Fell until near the end of the 19C, it started as a mere ooze, but when a drift was excavated from Sheriff Hill Colliery, plentiful water was found from old coal workings.
4. The oldest pub in Low Fell is The Cannon, 1826, called The New Cannon, as it was modelled on The Old Cannon situated on High Fell.
5. The terminus for the Victorian Tram, working until 1951, was situated at the corner of Kells Lane.
6. The life and home of the Dodds' sisters, developers of the Little Theatre. And nearby, Underhill, the home of Joseph Swan, the first private house anywhere to be lit by electricity c.1878.



Low Fell was and still is a busy vibrant area. It was the home to many famous people and innovators, but the one that caught my eye was Thomas Wilson. Born 1773, to a very poor family, he went down the mines when he was 8 years old. He was very bright and studied to become a teacher and poet.

Becoming very rich when he went into commerce by joining the Losh Lubbin counting house. Wilson was made a partner in 1807 and the company became Losh, Wilson and Bell, manufacturers of Alkali and Iron. He was still very interested in education and wanted to share this interest, and in 1841 built and opened a reading room, lecture room and schoolroom

to the public. This was financed by 2 issues of 5 shilling shares and public subscription. The building was later owned by Lloyds Bank, and is now a successful bar/restaurant called The Bank.

In 1878 the school room was moved to Kells Lane and became the primary school. It is still open today. We walked past this, and what a joyous sound emanated from the children in the school yard. Low Fell is continuing to benefit from the generosity of the self made man Thomas Wilson. The man that was such a great benefactor to Low Fell died 1858 and now lies in a neglected grave in a Sheriff Hill cemetery!!

Thank you Jan and Margaret for such an interesting outing.....

u3a Week: 20-28 September 2025...



u3a Week ran from 20–28 September 2025 and Cestria u3a marked the occasion with a promotion in the foyer of Chester- le- Street Library. Committee members spent 2 busy mornings welcoming visitors, sharing information about interest groups, and inviting new members to join our activities.

Kathleen, Anne, Margaret and Angela displayed information boards and handed out promotional materials, to raise awareness of Cestria u3a, recruit new members, and celebrate community learning.

One photograph captures the display in situ, showing the boards positioned around the foyer where they drew interest from library-goers. A second photograph shows Anne and Kathleen at the end of the day, packed up and ready to leave, wearing their coats with the boards stacked together. Their smiles reflect the friendly, organised spirit that Cestria u3a brings to every event.

If you enjoyed meeting us at the library and want to find out more about Cestria u3a, visit our website or contact the committee to discover groups that match your interests.



Love your u3a!!!

Text by Cestria u3a committee.

Photos provided by Cestria u3a.

Drums in my Ears - Jef Robinson.....

I was very fortunate, 1956 arrived at just the right time in just the right place - Liverpool. It was the year that changed my life and that of thousands of other adolescent boys like me.

By that time the life rationing caused by the war and its aftermath had worn very thin and a whole new world suddenly rose out of the dreariness, changing British culture for us all - Lonnie Donegan released his record "Rock Island Line". It was a revelation and it quickly dawned on us that to make popular music you didn't have to wear a white shirt and a bow tie, you didn't have to read the dots, you didn't need expensive instruments, and above all you didn't have to be American.

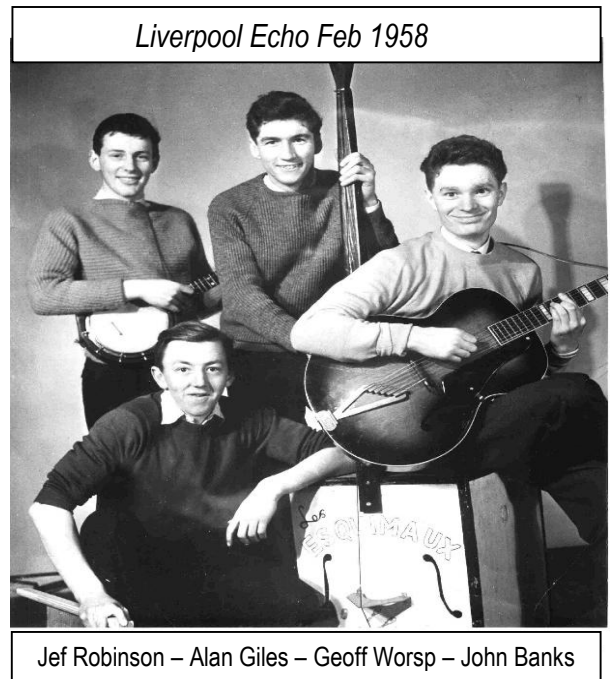
The Skiffle craze swept through the British music business releasing a wave of suppressed talent that would change everything. It was the first music for teenagers by teenagers in our cultural history. We didn't have to sit passively and wait to be told what to listen to by the music industry, we could take the initiative and create our own sound. So we did.

Four of us, schoolmates, could muster a guitar and a banjo. We made a tea chest bass, and I bought a washboard (the domestic washing machine hadn't been invented and washboards were available in any local hardware store). All I needed then was 10 thimbles and a sense of rhythm, neither of which was a problem.

I learned the difference between the beat and the after - beat and, essentially, how to swing - even on a washboard !

Liverpool was buzzing at that time, the local evening paper, the Liverpool Echo, estimated there were 350 bands active in the city so they published a music section "Merseybeat" on Friday evenings - our group "Les Esquimaux" was featured in February 1958.

We only played once on the same bill as the "Quarrymen" (later to become the Beatles) and afterwards each group passed judgement on the other's performance - each of the two groups declared the other to be "Rubbish" - A lack of judgement that explains why we didn't become millionaires!!



My first paid gig (10 shillings) was in 1958 when Tony "Lofty" Davies asked me to sit in with his GinMill Skiffle Group (later to become "The Spinners", Britain's most popular Folk Group). The gig was an interval spot for the Mick Mulligan jazz band featuring George Melly, which had been booked by a school in Shrewsbury - probably a school leavers dance at the end of the summer term in July. The venue was a typical school hall, having a stage at one end with a first-floor balcony round the other three sides and the ground floor cleared of the usual chairs, which were stacked out of sight behind the back-drop curtains of the stage.

It was the first time I'd seen a professional jazz band up close and I was really keen to watch the drummer, Pete Appleyard, in action. So when the first set began I made my way up some back stairs to the balcony, which was closed to the dancers in the hall, but where I had a good view. I was blown away by it all, so much so that when George Melly and the band walked off stage it wasn't until I saw Lofty coming on to announce the interval skiffle slot that I suddenly realised I should be down there - not up here in the gods!

I had to race down the back stairs, grab my washboard and then, whilst trying not to lose any thimbles in the almost total darkness, negotiate a very narrow passage that had been left between the stacked-up chairs backstage - because the only entrance to the stage itself was at the far end. As I approached it, I noticed two dimly lit figures each holding a glass of beer - George Melly was propping up the chairs on the left and Frank Parr, the band's trombonist, in a similar pose on the right. As I passed through, Frank Parr said "Here son, have a drink" and proffered the glass - a thought flashed through my mind 'Yeah, this is the big time' and I took a swig - but it wasn't beer, it was WHISKY!

My debut into the heady spotlight of showbiz was as a pitiful, stumbling creature, eyes streaming, coughing, spluttering and gasping for breath - accompanied by the sound of loud guffaws emanating from backstage.

A couple of months later our school careers came to an end and we all moved on to other destinations. For myself that meant 4 years studying Metallurgy at Durham University's Kings College in Newcastle (which became Newcastle University shortly after I left).

Within a fortnight of my arrival I met Bill Croft, another new student from Hull, who was a clarinet player, in the Nelson St Jazz club near Grey's Monument. He'd been playing jazz for over four years and had recently returned from Moscow where he had been to the World Youth Festival playing with Hull's Crescent City Jazzmen. He'd been collared and questioned by the police there for playing solo clarinet in Red Square - which they deemed disrespectful to Stalin's tomb! I don't know where the disrespect came from because Bill was really good - and Stalin didn't complain.

Before the night was over we'd decided to put a band together.

That was going to take some time so meanwhile I took up playing drums with the most popular band of the college - the Quaysiders - which introduced me to the Inter-Universities Jazz Contest (IUJC).

The IUJC was a very popular annual event that first took place in 1954 and by 1959, so many bands wanted to take part that it was necessary to hold five regional semi-finals of 10 or a dozen bands each with the best two bands from each region going on to a final in London to find the top university band in the UK judged by prominent musicians and critics in the jazz world. My first attempt in 1959 with the Quaysiders in the Norther Region semi-final was unsuccessful, we didn't get to the final but I thought it

good experience as the audience of some hundreds was the biggest I had faced up to that point.

By the time of the next IUJC contest in Feb. 1960, Bill and I had put our band "The Blue Star Jazzmen" together and had six months experience under our belt, in such venues as Melbourne Street jazz club, the Marimba and the Corner House.



Keith Foggin – Bill Croft – John Walters – Jef Robinson – Lou Townson – Dave Rowberry

The 1960 IUJC Northern semi-final was held in the City Hall Newcastle and featured eleven bands from as far apart as St Andrews and Sheffield - this time we won and went through to the London final, sadly won by London University. However, the City Hall event had been such a success that we were signed up as a resident band at the Downbeat Club when it opened in Carliol Square shortly afterwards - we did the Thursday night 8 to 12 slot as a double header together with the Alan Price/Eric Burden band the "Kansas City 5" – later to become "The Animals". The entrance fee in 1960 was 3s/6d!

By the time the IUJF came around again in 1961 we had moved on from "Trad Jazz" and were now playing a more progressive style of jazz under pianist Dave Rowberry's influence – so, for the 1961 contest held again in Leeds, we called the band the "Dave Rowberry Septet" by adding John Shepherd on tenor sax while Bill swapped from clarinet to alto sax.

For the second year running we won the Northern region semi-final this time with a glowing reference from one of the judges, Benny Green (saxophonist and Observer jazz critic) who wrote:-

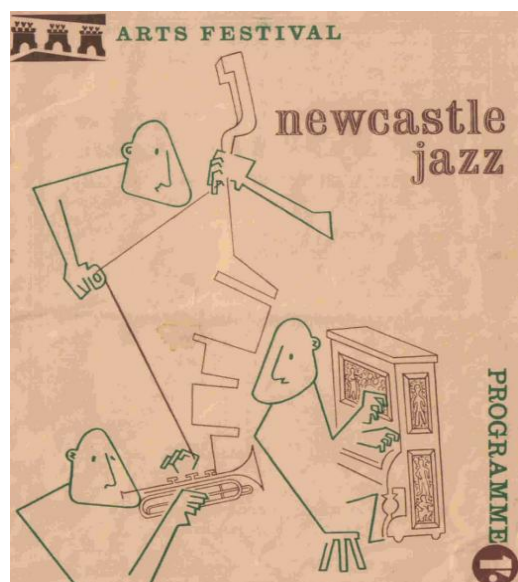
..... this was supposed to be a "Jazz Contest" and good musicianship and arrangements, pleasant as they may be to listen to, do not constitute jazz. This was my chief reason for placing the Dave Rowberry group first - they look as though they were enjoying it.

And from the event organiser:-

Back again after the interval to hear the Dave Rowberry band from Newcastle - a set of comedians really swinging, due chiefly to the drummer. (my best crit ever)

But, again we didn't make the cut in the London final - won by the Cambridge University band led by Dave Gelly and featuring Art Themens (who later successfully combined two careers - saxophonist and orthopaedic surgeon – perhaps not surprising since both involve joints).

A few weeks later, Newcastle Arts Festival, sponsored by the Downbeat club, put on a jazz night in a packed City Hall featuring Ronnie Scott with the Emcee 5 and performances by a number of local bands



It was a great night and I remember it well. The Evening Chronicle (28th April 1961) reported..... *One cannot forget the spontaneous rising of the audience to applaud the brilliance of Dave Rowberry on piano with his own group.....* That was virtually an epitaph for the band who within a few months would reach the end of their academic courses and move on to other careers.

I'm proud of what we achieved, but it was the end of an era and only three of us remained in Newcastle - John Walters (tpt), Lou Townson (bass) and myself – who all joined the Mighty Joe Young band in a weekly residency in the New Orleans Club then behind Newcastle's Central Station.

It was there, one night in May 1965, that Alan Price walked in to our utter astonishment, saying that he had quit the Animals in the middle of their Norwegian tour and was never going to touch a keyboard again! But by the end of the night he was sitting in with the band on piano and a few weeks later, after Dave Rowberry had taken his place in the Animals, he decided to set up a new band and asked John Walters and myself to join him.



The Alan Price Set 1965 – John Walters (tpt) : Cliff Barton (bass) :
Alan Price (Keyb'd) : Nigel Stanger (Sax) : Jef Robinson (Dms)
Photo from Jackie magazine taken outside the ASTORIA London theatre & music venue, which was demolished in 2009

I discussed it, of course, with my wife Yvonne who said, very philosophically *"If you don't do it, you'll regret it for the rest of your life"*.

So I took her advice.....to be continued

Daft as a Brush....Last night of the Proms.....



Bernie the instigator of Daft as A Brush has his next dream - 'To build a hospice in South Tyneside'. What an amazing man .

.....Anne Lanigan

It was a great night and the singing as per usual was tremendous. Daft as a Brush are now trying to fund a South Tyneside hospice as well as an electric vehicle.

.....Kathleen Atkinson



Thank you Anne for organising our trip to LNOP. I consider it was the best yet. Hope you can do the same for us next year.....Margaret Bozic

Regional Quiz – October 2025.....



Cestria quiz team had great fun at the Regional Quiz, held as usual at Sunnyside Social Club. We got 80 points out of a possible 117, putting us in 11th place out of 20 teams. The winners scored 96 and the bottom team 58.

Thanks go to Moira Foster and Margaret Stoye for stepping in at the last minute helping our team maintain it's usual middle of field position.....**Steve Willan**

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Sunny Afternoon with the Kinks.....



Good pretheatre lunch at the Fire Station, before a super show at Sunderland Empire, telling the story of the Kinks career.....

Another great outing organised by Anne Lanigan.

Bus Pass Group.... October.....



Our final bus pass trip for this year. Roll on Spring 2026!

How lucky were we - such a beautiful day! Of course we started the event with a coffee together! We then split up, some enjoyed shopping and the Indoor Market whilst some enjoyed a three mile stroll through Palace Green down to Prebends Bridge then an amazing peaceful stroll through autumn trees and back to the market place.

Lunch was at the Turkish Restaurant over looking the River Wear - delicious food, all agreed!

After a short wander through shops (few and far between now in Durham) we headed towards the bus station and soon boarded our bus – a sociable and successful end to our day. Thanks to the group for a positive finale to the year.



**Wonder where we will wander next year.....? Who knows.....?
Anne Lanigan**

Visit to Oriental Museum.....



On Thursday 10 October the History and Nature Walks Group made their last trip of the year to The Oriental Museum in Durham. And what a grand finale! I cannot be the only one who always meant to visit it, but had never got round to it. What a treat it is, and it was made all the more interesting by our guide, Charlotte Spink. The Museum came about because Durham University was encouraged to teach oriental languages in the 1950s. Soon afterwards they needed premises in which to store the artifacts that were being donated to them. Hence the Gulbenkian Museum of Oriental Art and Archaeology, now the Durham University Oriental Museum.

They acquired collections from such collectors as The Duke of Northumberland (the Egyptian Collections) and from Harold MacDonald (son of Ramsay MacDonald), the Chinese collection.

The Egyptian and Chinese collections dominate but there are also artifacts from across The Silk Road Countries and Korea. That included two Korean Wedding ducks which indicate the present state of a marital relationship (love's dove or tail to tail).

The Museum was open to the public in 1960 and is now open Tuesdays to Sundays, and it is free entry. It also still acts as a Learning Resource. The collections are of International Significance.



Charlotte led us round her favourite exhibits, she then allowed us a sit down and a hot drink, before moving in to the workshop area to handle real and original relics. Jewellery, a perfume pot, a jar lid for a container of intestines (it smelt strange) and objects discovered in Egyptian tombs.



It was a real treat, but so is the Museum itself. Do go and visit... Margaret Bozic

Photographs.....Lyn Cutter



1st December 2025

To Members of Cestria u3a at Chester-le-Street

This letter gives notice of the Cestria u3a at Chester-le-Street 20th Annual General Meeting.

The date of the AGM will be Wednesday **4th February 2026** at our regular monthly meeting on that day.

A Nomination Form for committee positions is attached together with the Agenda for the meeting.

Appointment of Officers and Trustees - as set out in the Cestria 2018 Constitution

At every Annual General Meeting, the serving Officers shall retire from office and the members shall elect from amongst the membership, individuals to serve as Officers. The term of office is one year from the date of that meeting until the next Annual General Meeting. A retiring Officer may be re-appointed provided they remain a member of The u3a and subject to the limits on periods of service as set out below.

Chairman four years. Treasurer six years. Secretary four years.

Those up for re-election or replacement are:

Mike Parker – Chairman (Served 2 years)

Tony Morrell - Treasurer (Served 6 years)

Angela Hamilton – Secretary (Served 1 year as secretary 5 years as a committee member)

Appointment of Non-Officers and Trustees - as set out in the Cestria 2018 Constitution

At every Annual General Meeting the Non-Officer members of the Executive Committee shall all retire. A retiring Executive Committee member may be re-appointed provided they remain a member of The u3a. A person may not serve more than six consecutive terms of office as a Non-Officer member of the Executive Committee.

Those up for re-election are:

Kathleen Atkinson (Served 7 years)

Margaret Bozic (Served 7 years)

Rachel Burton (Served 3 years)

Margaret Chilver - Speaker Secretary (Served 9 years)

Ann Lanigan - Groups Coordinator (Served 8 years)

Christine Logan - Newsletter Editor (Served 10 years)

Pat Rule - Membership Secretary (Served 6 years)

Steve Willan - Website Administrator (Served 2 years)

Lorna Thompson (served 1 year)

If you are interested in joining the committee and feel you would like to know more, please contact me or another committee member to get more details.

Angela Hamilton Secretary of Cestria u3a at Chester-le-Street

Registered Charity Number 1163334

Cestria u3a at Chester-le-Street
Annual General Meeting - No.20
Wednesday, 4th February 2026

Agenda

- Chairman's opening remarks
- Treasurer's report
 - 2025 Accounts
 - Appointment of 2026 Auditor
- Election of Officers and Committee members to February 2027
- Any other business
- Date of next AGM - Wednesday 3rd February 2027
- Close of meeting

Charity Number 1163334

Cestria u3a at Chester le Street

Annual General Meeting No. 20 - Wednesday 4th February 2025

Nomination Form

Nomination of members to stand for election as Officers and Non-Officers of the Cestria u3a at Chester le Street

The form below is to be used for nomination of members of Cestria u3a at Chester-le-Street to stand for election in the role of Officer and Non- Officer as described above for the period of one year from the date of the A.G.M.

Members nominating any Cestria u3a member for election to the Committee in the roles shown in the below form must obtain the signature of the nominee, which will serve as the nominated members acceptance of his/her nomination for that particular role.

Nomination forms received without the nominee's signature will not be considered.

In the event that there is more than one nominee for any of the committee positions shown in the table below then an election by ballot will take place, the winner will be declared by a simple majority of the vote.

Position	Nominee Name	Nominee Signature	Proposers Name and Signature	Seconders Name and Signature

Prior written nomination of any candidate for appointment as an Officer or a non-Officer of the Executive Committee at an Annual General Meeting shall normally be required, made by a proposer and seconder from amongst the membership of The u3a (not being themselves Officers or non-Officer members of the Executive Committee). **Form to be in the hands of the Secretary of Cestria u3a at least 28 days before the meeting.**

Committee 2025

Honorary President - Robert Berry

- . **Chair:** Mike Parker
- **Treasurer:** Tony Morrell
- **Secretary:** Angela Hamilton
- **Groups:** Anne Lanigan
- **Membership:** Pat Rule
- **Newsletter:** Christine Logan
- **Speakers:** Margaret Chilver
- . **Website:** Steve Willan
- Kathleen Atkinson
- Margaret Bozic
- Rachael Burton
- Lorna Thompson

Contacts for the above from our White Cards or website.

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Cestria u3a at Chester-Le-Street is a Registered Charity no1163334

Cestria u3a (University of the Third Age) is an autonomous, self-help organisation run by the voluntary efforts of its members.

It is a member of the Third Age Trust (a Registered Charity) which is its national support and advisory body. The word "university" is used in its original sense of people coming together to share and pursue learning in all its forms aims to encourage and enable older people no longer in full-time paid employment to help each other to share their knowledge educational, cultural, recreational, physical and social.

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