

Cestria u3a at Chester-le-Street

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

March 2026 Newsletter

Monthly Meetings

1st Wednesday
Cornerstones
Methodist Chapel
9.30 – 10.00 Pre
Meeting Coffee &
Chat –Prompt 10.00 -
Noon Main Meeting

Speakers

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

6th May.....
Three Chapters of
War- Trial,
Tribulation & Tragedy
..... Eric Ryles

3rd June.....
Elvis – who was the
real Elvis.....
Stephanie Yearnshire

1st July.....
The Japanese
experience – culture &
lifestyle with a display
of artifacts.....
Denise Howe

Chairman's Corner

Hello and a belated Happy New Year to you all. I trust that you are coping with the gloomy weather that seems to have gone on for ages. I have been pleased to see good numbers at the January and February meetings despite the conditions.

Perhaps before too long we can see more signs of spring and an improvement in sunshine. All too soon it will be summer. Talking of which, make a note of 11th June this year. That's the date to celebrate our u3a's 20th anniversary at Cornerstones. There will be food, live music and games – what more could we want?

Those of you at the AGM will realise that I will be stepping down as Chair at next AGM, and Margaret Chilver will also be stepping down as Speaker Secretary. Margaret has done a great job for many years. She usually works on the next year's list of speakers in the summer. It might be helpful if someone could see how the system works ready to take over. There is also a committee vacancy as Margaret Bozic has resigned, but she will continue with her talks and visits as previously.

We do need people to come forward in order to keep our u3a going – it is in the ethos of things that u3as are self-help organisations. Unless someone volunteers to be Chair by the summer then we shall have to begin closing down our group.

Robert Berry has now resigned as Hon. President. He was Treasurer for many years followed by Chair for a further spell. In particular he guided our group through the many problems when Covid and associated restrictions happened. We are very grateful for his service to us.

Enough from me. Enjoy the rest of the newsletter.

.....**Mike**

From the Editor.....



We Brits are notorious for complaining about the weather — and after the dark, dreary days of January and February, who could blame us. This year's gloom seemed to settle over everything, and I'll admit it left me feeling decidedly blue. But then came our February Cestria u3a meeting, and suddenly the clouds lifted.

The room was buzzing with optimism. Everyone seemed full of plans for brighter days ahead, chatting about walks, trips, and projects they'll pick up again once the sun remembers where we live. And then I spotted our speaker for the morning, David Williams — and my spirits rose even further.

David's personality fills a room. The moment he began to speak, he held us completely captivated. His talk on the lives of our local heroes, George and Robert Stephenson, was nothing short of inspiring. As he spoke, I felt a swell of pride for our "local lads" whose ingenuity helped shape the modern world. David's years of research have culminated in his book *Mr. Stephenson's Regret*, first published in 2012 and now republished to mark the 200th anniversary of the Stockton to Darlington Railway. Naturally, I was first in the queue to buy a copy.

What struck me most was the contrast between George Stephenson's humble beginnings and the extraordinary legacy he left behind. Raised in a tiny cottage in Wylam, Northumberland, he grew up in conditions that would challenge anyone's ambitions. I had always assumed the Stephenson family — mother, father, and six children — occupied the whole cottage. But no. They were just one of four families living there, each squeezed into a single room. It's almost unimaginable.



And yet, from that cramped little space emerged a mind that would change the world. How does such brilliance thrive in such modest circumstances? How does a boy from a one-room home go on to revolutionise transport, industry, and global connectivity? These are the questions I'm eager to explore as I make my way through David's book.

.....**Christine Logan**

20th Anniversary



Cestria at Chester-le-Street
20th Anniversary Celebrations
u3a

Wednesday 10th June: 1-5pm
Beetle Drive-Afternoon Tea & music from the Saxoholics
Cornerstones: Methodist Church, North Burns DH3 3TF

**Don't miss it!!! ... £5 per ticket....
on sale soon**

Morano Mediterranean Restaurant....



16th December 25 saw Anne Lanigan work her magic once again as she organized one of her famous Christmas lunches at Moranos', Chester le Street. As you can see, everyone had fun, the room was full of chatter, laughter, and that unmistakable warmth that only a good Christmas gathering can bring.

In true festive spirit, everyone wore something to show Christmas as requested. Some choices were bold, others a little more subtle, but together they created a wonderfully cheerful scene that set the tone for a memorable afternoon.

It was one of those occasions that reminds us why these traditions matter: good company, good food and a shared sense of celebration. A perfect way to mark the season.

Drums in my Ears - Part 2 Continuation

Jef Robinson



The Alan Price Set 1965 – John Walters (tpt), Cliff Barton (bass)
Alan Price (keyb'd), Neil Stanger (sax), Jef Robinson (dms)
Photo from Jackie magazine taken outside the ASTORIA London
theatre and music venue , which was demolished in 2009

It didn't take long to weld the group together, four of us had been active on the Newcastle jazz scene for six years and we knew each other well, only Cliff was new to the band, he'd been the bass player from the Long John Baldrey band.

The group's debut at Newcastle's Club A GoGo happened in July 1965 and for the next month we played there twice a week with other featured bands of the time - I recall Manfred Mann, Spencer Davis and Stevie Winwood - with occasional gigs further afield like Redcar where the Coatham Hotel on a Sunday night turned into a music venue. Topping the bill on the night we played there was the Graham Bond Organisation which transformed a year later into the supergroup Cream (Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker & Eric Clapton).

Inevitably we had to base ourselves in London and cut a record. Alan and the band manager, Mike Jeffries, decided that the first record would be a Burt Bacharach song called "Any Day Now" which took up most of the allocated studio time, then when somebody asked "What are you going to do for the B-side?" We hadn't thought of that. So John came up with an original 12 bar theme that sounded good and I suggested doing it in 6/8 rather than 4/4 time to make it sound different. It was completed in two takes, and Decca released the disk in mid August 1965.

There is an online Alan Price biography that says of it *"Although it failed to chart (the reviews generally categorised it as either 'too good' or 'too classy' for the Hit Parade) it was a magnificent start."* . I'm not at all sure what that meant!

At that point, somebody turned the dial up to 'FRANTIC' and the purpose of it all changed from a making music to plugging the record. Five guys and a driver criss-crossing the country packed into a Ford transit van with all the instruments, stage suits and personal gear, day in, day out - pounding round the country at a time when motorways were in their infancy. It was an experience graphically described at length by George Melly in his book about the Mick Mulligan Band "Owning Up".

The bookings sysetm was crazy. It was as if someone was throwing darts at a map to pinpoint venues. We'd play Basingstoke Town Hall one night then Morecambe Central Pier the next, then down to the Flamingo Club in London then up to the Mojo Club in Sheffield and down to the Fairfield Halls in Croydon - and all before mobile phones and satnav - we never knew where we were or where we were going we'd have to collect pockets full of change and stop at a almost every other public phone box to see if there had been a change in plan; it was like a mad roundabout at full throttle with no brakes.

But a few of the gigs do stand out in my memory.

Granada TV Manchester - a band interview with Michael Parkinson before he got his own show on BBC. He didn't take the music seriously, understandably, but he seemed like a genuine nice guy.

Boston Spa - where, out of the blue, the audience suddenly erupted in a huge fight, it was just like the Blues Brothers movie, but we survived unscathed.

ITV Wembley Studios - "Ready Steady Go" with Donovan, Wayne Fontana, Herman's Hermits and 18-year-old Kiki Dee (Pauline Matthews). We plugged the record of course but we closed the show backing her with a joyous impromptu version of "You Are My Sunshine" and I've been a fan of hers ever since. To be honest I didn't much like the record but it is the only one I ever made - at least I think it is. One day Cliff said to me that he had a session job and they needed a drummer did I fancy it, I said yes and went along with him to the recording studio. It was for a band called Marmalade, I don't know if the record was ever released but I was paid on the spot - £25, I thought that was great for about two hours work (*I just checked that for inflation it's worth £500 pounds today- that's astonishing!*).

But the magic was starting to fade. The music we were playing wasn't giving me anything, it didn't fire up my soul and I was beginning to feel that I was letting down my family. Added to that, I started to notice more and more the unsavoury side of the music business - the plain brown envelopes of cash slipped to radio DJs as inducements to play records on air to lift them up the charts - and the uneasy presence of the criminal underworld. I was just a country boy from the sticks but even I encountered Ronnie Kray. I left the Alan Price Set around October 1965, came home and slept for three days. I then needed to find a job quickly so I got in touch with my old boss at Consett Iron Company and he took me back at a salary 20% more than before. My musical interlude had only lasted about six months but I'm glad I did it. I'd given it a go, found out what the music business was about and I came to the conclusion that it just wasn't for me. So I made a clean break and gave up drumming completely .



But I got a nostalgic reminder almost 60 years later during the 2018 Newcastle Heritage Open Weekend with my god-daughter Jo and her mother Phil. It started to rain when we were walking up Pink Lane so I suggested that we should have lunch at the nearby Jazz Café, which I'd known about for years but had never visited. I was dumbfounded to find, among the memorabilia they had, that a poster from around 1960 of the band I was in at the time, had survived all of that time - in rather better shape than I had myself.

My wife Yvonne had been right – I'd had no regrets at all for the rest of my life.....

Summary of Accounts Presentation to the AGM 4th Feb. 2026

Cestria u3a - Changes in Bank Balances during 2025

<u>Bank Balances</u>			£
Current account			93
Deposit account			4,850
<u>Total Bank Balance at 31 December 2025</u>			4,943
<u>Total Bank Balance held for future social/educational activities</u>			0
<u>Bank Balance belonging to u3a at 31 December 2025</u>			£4,943
<u>Decrease in Bank Balance / Deficit during 2025</u>			(£209)

Cestria u3a - Actual Spending compared to Budgeted spending for 2025

	Actual Net Spending 2025	Budgeted Net Spending 2025	Better/(Worse) than Budget
	£	£	£
Subscriptions	2,715	3,000	(285)
Deposit interest	72	63	9
Sale of books	71	60	11
Monthly meetings	(375)	(480)	105
u3a National and regional expenses	(1,549)	(1,780)	231
Groups	(609)	(514)	(95)
Cestria u3a running expenses	(555)	(849)	294
Surplus social activities	21	0	21
Surplus/(Deficit)	(£209)	(£500)	£291

The bank balance held by the u3a, which the Committee consider to be too high, has started to drop. We hoped to reduce the balance by £500 during 2025, it actually reduced by £209 to £4,943. This was due to net expenses increases we thought may occur during 2025 not materialising.

However 30 fewer members had renewed their membership during November & December of this year compared to 2024. Although up to 3rd February 2026, 184 members had renewed, which is 10 fewer than had renewed to the of February 2024.

A copy of the signed accounts, which have been accepted by the Committee, is on the Cestria Website & can be viewed on the notice notice board at the Monthly Wednesday meeting.

Cestria u3a - Budgeted spending for 2026 compared to Actual Spending for 2025

	Budgeted Net Spending 2026	Actual Net Spending 2025	Better/(Worse) than 2025
	£	£	£
Subscriptions	3,000	2,715	285
Deposit interest	70	72	(2)
Sale of books	60	71	(11)
Monthly meetings	(640)	(375)	(265)
u3a National and regional expenses	(1,730)	(1,549)	(181)
Groups	(750)	(609)	(141)
Cestria u3a running expenses	(590)	(555)	(35)
Surplus social activities	0	21	(21)
Surplus/(Deficit) normal activities	(£580)	(£209)	(£371)
Anniversary events	(1,200)	0	(1,200)
Surplus/(Deficit) after Anniversary events	(£1,780)	(£209)	(£1,571)
			£
<u>Budgeted u3a Bank Balance as at 31 December 2026</u>			£3,163
<u>Lowest u3a Bank Balance expected at 31 October 2026</u>			£1,324

Now looking forward to 2026.

There will be no increase in subscription fees and the fees to attend the monthly meetings and the groups meeting in hired premises. We have anticipated some cost increases during 2026 but these will be paid for by a reduction in the bank balance.

The bank balance held by the u3a is still higher than we would like it to be, so again on ordinary activities we've budgeted it to reduce during the year by £580. In addition up to a maximum of £1,200 has been budgeted to partly finance anniversary events during 2026. The actual amount that will be available to finance these events will be determined by the actual level of normal income and spending recorded as the year develops.

The Committee are working on events and you will be kept informed as they develop. **Tony Morrell – Treasurer**

Live Theatre.....



On Saturday 13th December I managed, as the saying goes, to kill two birds with one stone. In the afternoon I took my grandkids to see Fenwick's Christmas Window — another fantastic display from the Newcastle store, full of sparkle, imagination and that unmistakable festive magic. Watching their faces light up was a joy in itself.

Then, as day slipped into evening, I joined the Cestria u3a Crack Group for something entirely different but equally special: an evening of songs from Crocodile Shoes with Jimmy Nail at the Quayside's Live Theatre. Jimmy has always been a firm favourite of Ray and me, and hearing him in the intimate setting of the Live Theatre felt like being welcomed into a familiar, much-loved room.

The musicians supporting him — Trevor Brewis on drums, Tony Davis on piano, Michael Crystal on electric guitar and Dave Taggart on acoustic guitar — were superb, each one a performer of real calibre. Together they created a sound that wrapped around the audience like a warm coat on a winter night.

Jimmy's loyalty to the Live Theatre runs deep. His sister, Val McLane, was one of its founders back in 1973 alongside Geoff Gillham, Tim Healy and others, all determined to champion new writing and regional stories. The company finally settled on the Quayside in 1982, and it's been a cultural treasure ever since. Knowing that history made the evening feel even more rooted in the North East's creative spirit.

There's already talk of a full staging of Crocodile Shoes at the theatre in 2026 — and I, for one, can't wait.

It was a fabulous, relaxing night, rounded off perfectly by the chance to sing along to 'Big River' grandchildren, Christmas magic, music, memories and the unmistakable heartbeat of the North East — all in one go.....**Christine Logan**

Happy Anniversary everyone!!!



It seems Chester-le-Street celebrated its 1900 anniversary recently. An article popped up on the internet and then I could find very little more about it – except that Luke Akehurst tabled a motion that the House congratulate the people of Chester-le-Street on the town's 1900th anniversary being marked, This will be documented in

Hansard. It was noted that in 2009 the then County Durham archaeologist dated the construction of the Roman Fort of Concangis, under what is now Chester-le-Street and its vicus (village) at 125CE, 1900 years ago.....so once again happy anniversary everyone maybe you know more about it.....let us know!



.....Christine

.... you can't move around Durham for blinking students



'... you can't move around Durham for blinking students ...' is sometimes uttered by the residents of Durham City. However, following a recent visit to the Durham Gala Theatre to watch the Durham University Light Opera Group (DULOG) perform the musical 'Grease', 24 members of Cestria u3a may not necessarily agree with that sentiment, well, as far as the art and culture scene of the city is concerned.

For over 75 years DULOG has been providing opportunities for Durham University students to perform in high quality shows each term, and the annual Gala show allows for the largest number of students to get involved. This year over 80 students were involved as members of the cast, production team, creative team and band.



The members of DULOG are forever changing as students leave following the completion of their course, to be replaced by "less experienced" freshers.

Astronomy PhD student Sarah Johnson, who is defending her thesis in the autumn, was the shows co-director along with second year music student Michael Nevin. This collaboration highlights the blend of experience throughout the group.

You may remember the name Michael Nevin. Michael as a fresher, sensationally played Bobby Child in last year's production of "Crazy for You". Hopefully next year he can be persuaded to take up an acting role.



Durham University has numerous well resourced, and highly motivated student groups covering many genres of theatre and music. These groups stage many events during term time and local residents are actively encouraged to attend. I have been attending these events for the last 4 years, I wish it had been for the last 40 years!



The Durham students' music events can be found here: <https://durhamstudentmusic.org/what's-on>

The Durham students' theatre events can be found here: <https://durhamstudenttheatre.org/whats-on>



Meanwhile, browse a few photos of rehearsals for this year's Gala spectacular.

.....**Tony Morrell**

2nd January.... First Walking Group of the year.....



A cold but bright day around Durham.



Our beautiful Cathedral provided our group with Sanctuary from the icy cold winds.



Photos Marilyn Fox



- **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
- Rachael Burton
- Lorna Thompson

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Cestria u3a at Chester-le-Street is a registered Charity no 1163334

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

It is a member of the Third AgeTrust (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 learning in all its forms. It 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.