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It hardly seems possible that Christmas and another New Year will soon be with us again. What happened to 2013? Anyone know?

It looks as though, as we enter 2014, the members in the Region will be involved in discussion about what the Region will look like in the future. I made my feelings known to you in the last Messenger, so I won't repeat them, but I would make a plea to you all that, whatever process of change is decided, or indeed if there should be any change at all, please make sure your voice is heard, don't let a minority decide for us all. What we have is good and of course can be improved, but let's do that without throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Have a lovely Christmas everyone, and look forward to a full and happy New Year.

Brian Stephenson
Regional Chairman
**U3A Northumbria Region -**

**Committee -** Elected at the AGM in April 2013 was as follows:

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<tr>
<td><em>Chairman</em></td>
<td>Brian Stephenson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bsteph316@btinternet.com">bsteph316@btinternet.com</a></td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Maureen Stephenson</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Mesteph7@btinternet.com">Mesteph7@btinternet.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Minutes Secretary</em></td>
<td>Maggie Grocott</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mad36g@aol.com">mad36g@aol.com</a></td>
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**Ex Officio**

Regional Trustee: Gwen Dawe (elected Autumn 2013)

Ed. & Development Contacts

- Anne Finn (south) annefinn@blueyonder.co.uk
- John Leiper (north) j.a.leiper121@btinternet.com

Contact List & Website Ed.:

- Mo Brown regionalu3alist@btinternet.com

Newsletter Editor

- Sandy Hood regnewseditor@gmail.com

Committee Members

- Bill Brookes billbrookes@msn.com
- Derek Grocott mad36g@aol.com
- *Joyce McKay jmcmckay1@btinternet.com*

*These posts are to be vacated at the next AGM

If you would like to nominate someone, or take on any of the jobs yourself, please contact Alexa (details above) or any of the present committee. A replacement editor will be taking over. Details coming soon.

Jim will stand again as Vice Chairman. His work with Research Ambassadors and other commitments does not allow him to take the chair.

Sub Committee Members - at the time of going to press (email addresses are above.)

**Development:**

Chairman: Brian Stephenson with Anne Finn, John Leiper, Joyce McKay, Gwen Dawe, Maureen Stephenson, Joyce Watts (joyce.lorbottle@btinternet.com) and Bill Brookes.

**Events:**

Chairman: John Leiper with, Brian Stephenson, Joyce Watts, Bill Brookes, and John Lloyd (johnlloyd73@hotmail.com)

**Research projects:** leader Jim Edwardson with

**VoiceNorth representatives:** Maggy Grocott, John Leiper, John Lloyd and Joyce Watts (Jim Edwardson is a member of VoiceNorth committee)
**Stars in Their Eyes**

No, this was not a celebrity game show nor even a preview of the new Star Trek film 'Into Darkness' but an 'Introduction to Astronomy' given to Ponteland U3A members by Dr Pete Edwards from the Department of Physics at Durham University.

Dr Edwards aimed to convince us that the universe is HUGE and BEAUTIFUL. The latter was easily achieved through gorgeous visual effects but the concept of 'huge' is rather more difficult to grasp.

The figures were mind blowing and by way of a disclaimer I shall say that they are all approximate. Here is a short example:

The Big Bang, 13.8 billion years ago, formed our Universe. The number of stars in the visible (our) universe is 10,000, million, million, million or 1 followed by 22 zeros! The average star takes 0.25 million years to form and lasts 10 billion years. Stars are not randomly scattered, they are pulled into galaxies. Each galaxy has 100 billion stars. Our galaxy is the Milky Way. People count galaxies, rather like train spotting, and, as an analogy, if our universe is equivalent to all the grains of sand on earth, and there are 10,000 galaxies in a grain of sand, that's a lot of galaxies!

It takes 13 million years for the light from the furthest galaxies to reach earth, by which time those stars have died!

Well, I think you get the picture. The concept of 'HUGE' made me feel tiny and insignificant.

I am not a scientist, but amazingly Dr Edwards made this all sound very interesting. I particularly liked the simpler explanation, that stars are big balls of hot gas and that the compacted gases of the sun (a boring star!) shoot out flames in an eleven year cycle, which pass our earth and form the picturesque aurora borealis. We would all love to see this, but there are no guarantees, even when visiting Tromso, Norway. Cheaper and more convenient just to nip up to North Northumberland when Hannah Bayman gives the word!

If your group would like to learn more, Dr Edwards can be contacted at Durham University. Alternatively, log onto the Open University Science/Astronomy section at [http://www.open.edu/openlearn](http://www.open.edu/openlearn) or visit the Kielder Observatory.

*Margaret Chaytor*

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The members of the Regional Committee send seasonal greetings to all our members and look forward to seeing you at one or more of the events planned for 2014.
I would like to thank all of you who voted for me to represent you on the National Executive Council as your Regional Trustee. As there is a lot going on I feel privileged to be getting involved at such an exciting time.

At National level, the groundwork is being prepared for a three year plan, something which has been attempted in the past but never achieved. There is renewed interest in research, following the example set by Northumbria Region in partnership with Newcastle University.

At Regional level there are moves afoot to energise the quarterly meetings by changing the format and embracing more of what the membership will find useful and interesting.

At local level there are murmurings about U3A becoming too much of a social network at the expense of the original ethos of teaching and learning, while others feel we should be moving with the times and accommodating the needs and wants of the current membership.

Plenty of issues - not to mention that of intergenerational communication, which appears to be a growing subject at all levels of the organisation – which, if they are to be resolved to the satisfaction of all members, need the views of grassroots members to be voiced at the appropriate time and place.

So please let us have your views and ideas, to your chairman or regional representative locally, by attending the Regional Meeting on 22nd January, or by contacting me so I can relay your views nationally.

I hope I can rely on your support to help make improvements at all levels of this wonderful organisation.

With kindest regards

Gwen Dawe
Regional Trustee
Location of Regional Meetings – a Personal Reflection

With reference to the suggestion that we hold regional meetings in different parts of the region, rather than always in a central location, I have been trying to think of advantages and have managed to come up with only one - some people would not have to travel so far every time. Set against this, I can think of several advantages of a central meeting place, for the purpose of this exercise taken as the Angel Inn.

Using very crude methods (drawing circles on a map) I reckon that half of our U3As (24 out of 48) are within a 20 mile radius of the Angel, a further 13 are within 30 miles and 11 have to travel over 30 miles. Of these 11, 4 are in the north and 7 are in the south. If we were to hold meetings in either the north or the south of the region (as suggested) many more people would have to travel further and those who now travel furthest would in some cases have to travel even further.

Another issue that regularly comes to the surface is that of access by public transport. We are a very rural region and I think that the idea of relying on public transport to get anywhere at a time to suit meeting times, and to get home again without having spent all day in the effort, is a joke to many of our members. Even if meetings were held in places which appear to be accessible by bus or train from most areas, how are members, many of them with mobility difficulties, supposed to get from the station to the venue? As for using bus passes - I wonder how many of us could manage to get to a meeting that started at 10 am or even 10.30.

The Angel Inn may not be a perfect venue, but it has the advantages of being easily accessible by car and having adequate parking space. The latter is important for those of us who have a lot of equipment to take to meetings.

I have been looking back over attendance records for regional meetings. Since October 2011, only 5 of our U3As have not been represented, only one of those coming into the 'over 30 mile' group.

My concerns are that, if we start moving meetings to other parts of the region, we will lose the continuity and cohesion that we now have, and that no one has really considered that it might lead to a north-south divide, nor thought through the consequences of such a move. What would happen to the regionally organised events, which are so successful and attract members from throughout the region? What would happen to the committee structure? What would happen to the present systems of communication?

I like going to regional meetings. I am prepared spend an hour and a half or two hours to get to a meeting, as long as it is by car with guaranteed parking next to the venue when I get there. I am not prepared to attempt to struggle with public transport.

Maureen Stephenson, Alnwick U3A
The main event was the second Editors’ Day

Ten U3As met in the offices of Newcastle U3A in Pink Lane. This is an ideal setting, easily accessible by public transport, the room has a large screen so everyone can see what is being discussed. The refreshments are good, too.

The session was split into two, the first centring on websites, the second on newsletters. Many of the points raised are actually applicable to both. Those attending had been asked to look at several websites beforehand to form the basis of discussion, to submit questions or points of interest in advance and to bring their own laptops, ipads, tablets, etc. if possible. This latter proved invaluable as we were able to compare the differences. Not all had the same software. Some were not able to download material in the original format. A point to be noted by originators.

The discussions were chaired by Sandy Hood, supported by Mo Brown and Anne Finn with major contributions from all present.

Discussion points on websites are on page 15
Discussion points on newsletters are on page 8

The next Editors’ Day is scheduled for May (that’s the earliest we can get into Pink Lane again). If you would like to take part – be it as learner or adviser – please contact Anne Finn on 0191 487 4743 or annefinn@blueyonder.co.uk
Visit to the Durham Record Office

Thursday 9th January 2014 at 2.00pm.

Organised by the Family History Group of Newcastle U3A

This visit is limited to a maximum of 12 people

The cost will be £5 per person

The programme is planned at an intermediate level of family history research and would include:

- How to interrogate the RO catalogue;
- The Bishop Barring registers;
- National Coal Board and other mining records;
- Rate books and land taxes

To book a place: please ring Doreen Elcox on 0191 281 4423.

Cheques (payable to Newcastle U3A) should be sent to: The Treasurer, Newcastle U3A, The Old Post Office, 5 Pink Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 5DW

Confirmed places cannot be cancelled.

Please note the very small number of places available for this event.
It is advisable to ring to confirm a place before sending money

Findings from the second Editors’ Day discussions on Newsletters

- Editors seemed to use either a Microsoft Word programme or Publisher.
- Actual content was usually the Editor’s decision. The committee was consulted if in doubt.
  - Captivating headlines and opening sentences encourage further reading
  - Careful choice of colours was recommended. Not all photocopy well in black and white.
  - The use of adverts from outside organisations was welcomed by some, negated by others.
  - One U3A lists, with agreement, recommendable local tradespeople.
  - Printing costs varied enormously, depending on where the printing was done – from home printers to professionals.
  - Distribution methods included a pickup point in the local library, and members leaving an sae with the committee to have a personal copy mailed direct.
  - The end product is determined by where and when it would be read and members’ preferences.
History on our Doorstep
(Washington U3A’s visits to Washington Old Hall and Sunderland’s Donnison School)

So many of our members regularly pass Washington Old Hall and although some have visited before, others were amazed at what was behind the high stone wall. It was mid-June and it all started on a beautiful sunny day. First we met on the lawns in front of the Hall and looking back at photos of the day, we appear to be at a very elegant garden-party.

Three knowledgeable guides took us on a walk around Washington Village and the planned half hour walk doubled due to our members wanting to know more about the place we had called home for a number of years. We were entertained by many anecdotes of bygone days and certainly learned a lot.

Then we were given a tour of the Old Hall and watched a DVD. The Old Hall has links with George Washington’s ancestors, but also has a more recent history, being a tenement building before it was condemned in 1936. Upon which local people formed a committee and successfully saved the hall from demolition.

One Washington resident, who was born in the building, regularly comes in to talk to visitors. The National Trust now runs Washington Old Hall and recent developments have included extensive work on the gardens.

Our visit ended with feeding the body, as well as the mind, as we sat down to enjoy a cream tea.

Our next visit to the Donnison School was quite educational, in a number of unexpected ways.

The school itself is quite small and is situated in an historic part of Sunderland, between the Trafalgar Square Mariners’ Homes (1840) and Old Sunderland Parish Church (1790). The school room was originally built in 1798 from a bequest by Elizabeth Donnison and added to in 1827 by Elizabeth Woodstock. It provided education and clothing for 36 poor girls aged 7 to 16.

The school is now part of the Living History project in Sunderland and staffed by volunteers. Local schools are able to visit and experience a 19th century classroom.

The small garden is a little gem. There is an air raid shelter next to the school and WW2 themed experiences are part of the project.

We enjoyed tea and scones, while listening to music by The Shadows and watching a 1960s slide show of Sunderland, evoking many memories.

Then we were given a talk about pigeons used by bomber command during WW2. Quite a range of subjects for one afternoon!

Both Washington Old Hall and the Donnison School are well worth a visit and could easily be seen in one day for members travelling from further afield.

Diana Clark

Best wishes to Joyce McKay, virtually confined to barracks, as she recovers from a broken wrist.
CESTRIA U3A INVITES YOU TO

THE NORTHUMBRIA REGION U3A ANNUAL LITERARY LUNCH

COME AND MEET AND LISTEN TO

MAX ADAMS

on

“Fiction versus Fact: The Writer’s Dilemma”

Max Adams is a critically-acclaimed biographer, archaeologist, traveller and writing coach who lives in North-east England.

Website: theambulist.co.uk

Venue: Beamish Hall Country House Hotel, Beamish. DH9 0YB

Date: Wednesday 30th April 2014

Time: 12 noon for 12.30pm

Ticket: £21.50 per person

Apply for tickets (preferably through your U3A) to:

M. A. Pescod, 5 Glanton Close, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham DH2 3SW
Tel: 0191 3888340 or mapescod@gmail.com

Cheques made payable to ‘Cestria U3A’

Closing Date is Saturday 22nd March 2014 or when sold out.
LITERARY LUNCH Booking Form
Beamish Hall Country House Hotel, Beamish, Co. Durham. DH9
Wednesday 30th April 2014

U3A

Remittance enclosed £

Contact person (to whom all details will be sent)

Address

Email

Phone No.

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Cheques for £21.50 per person should be made out to Cestria U3A. Please note applications are on a first come, first served basis and once accepted we will be unable to offer a refund.

Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope for the return of tickets, Thank you
A Great War Battlefield in England

With the commemorations of the Great War very much to the fore at the moment, the Hartlepool U3A History Group’s November field trip was organised at the Heugh Battery situated on the Heugh in the town, or the Headland to give the area its modern name.

Though the town has been defended for many centuries, the present Heugh defences were first constructed in the post Crimea War French scare which resulted in a wave of coastal defence construction, and the Heugh defences along with others on the North East Coast, continued in use until 1959.

After standing abandoned for some time, the site has now been refurbished and open to the public over the long weekend of Thursday to Sunday, and traces the history and use of the site over the century of active service. Most prominent of course is the fateful morning of the 16th December, 1914, when three German Battle cruisers appeared in the bay to bombard the town as part of a raid on Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool, with the Heugh and the Lighthouse Batteries fighting back in a short, sharp and brutal encounter, to qualify the site as the only Great War Battlefield in England.

On a brisk, sunlit morning in 2013 with clear visibility giving a sweeping view from Sunderland down to Saltburn, it seemed almost unbelievable that just under a century ago where we were stood, the battle cruiser “Blucher” engaged the Battery allowing “Seydlitz” and “Moltke” to attack and then to lay off Crimdon Lido and bombard the towns of Hartlepool and West Hartlepool with some shells landing as far away as Sedgefield and Stockton. The casualty rate was appalling with over 100 people killed including 37 children and fatalities among the D.L.I. and Royal Navy units on the day, the attackers did not get off scot free with 9 Germans being killed and much later all the raiding vessels met their fate at the Battle of Dogger Bank or the Scapa Flow scuttling.

Further details on visits to the Battery can be obtained from www.heughbattery.com

Chris McLoughlin

Recommended Reading:

JoJo Moyes’ *Me Before You* tells about two young people from very different backgrounds brought together by tragedy. It will open the door for discussion on relationships, dealing with disability, euthanasia and Dignitas.
Hidden Treasures in the North East

On a very wet and windy evening seven hardy souls from Tynedale U3A Art Appreciation 2 group joined the Northern Architecture and History Society to hear a talk entitled “From the Tweed to the Tees - the Legacy of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the North East” by Wendy and Barrie Armstrong. The area in the late 1800s and early 1900s was known more for its coal mining, ship building and steel industry than in making crafts which would conform to the principles of the movement in being beautifully made and yet fit for purpose. But from the first photograph of Lindisfarne War Memorial by Edward Lutyens to the feast of photographs on buildings, wood carving, sculpture and stained glass which followed we were enraptured. Wendy began with the well known Wallington Hall and its Bell Scott’s murals and the flower columns painted by Lady Pauline Trevelyan then on to Alnwick Castle where Anton L Bulleti with his school of apprenticed wood workers began its restoration, and was also responsible for the beady eyed Eagle Lectern at Matfen. Barry encouraged us to look around more carefully at buildings in future and in particular at roof lines. He showed us photographs of Shepherd’s Dene in Riding Mill by William Dixon with its tall chimneys and the Community Church in Hexham with its conical shaped roof and interesting shaped millions built by Robert Burns Dick as was also the Laing in Newcastle and the Police Station at Berwick. Other buildings included Emmerson Chambers in Blackett Street by Simpson with its art nouveau windows and Ouseburn School which has three tiers of pagoda-like eaves.

Ralph Hedley, whose art work we had already seen in an earlier visit to Shipley Art Gallery, was also a craftsman. He had studied under Bell Scott and later founded his own furniture workshop. His reputation was enhanced when he won the commission to do carvings and woodwork at Newcastle Cathedral but his work can also be found at La Sagesse High School (now Jesmond Towers) and Clayton Memorial Church amongst others. Also in Newcastle, Wendy showed us photos of the beautiful stained glass in the church of St. James and St. Basil at Fenham which we shall be visiting in December. It is one of the most prestigious buildings in the North East and it is known for its fine windows designed by Edward Woore and George Jack who was also responsible for the woodwork and chandeliers. We saw photos of many other fine churches in the area including St. Andrews, Roker, Sunderland where a co-ordinated group of craftsmen produced the font, the woodwork, the lectern, the altar cross and its brilliantly coloured East window.

From Berwick to Guisbrough Wendy and Barry displayed the richness of the legacy left by the Arts and Crafts movement, all of which can be found in their newly published illustrated book, ‘The Arts and Crafts Movement in the North East of England’. This is a companion book to a previous one on the North West and a third is in the pipeline on Yorkshire. Each book is a slim volume just right for the side pocket of your car or tucked in your rucksack and it will take you to many more glorious sights than those mentioned here.

Joan Sykes

Regional Meetings need not be about “business”, i.e. the usual agenda of reports, etc. Why not additional gatherings of members with little or no formal “business” – just a topic of interest and opportunity to get together?
Now we are six!

Bede of Jarrow is now six years old and members are enjoying all activities & culture outings. Members have visited many interesting places including a visit to the famous Lindisfarne Gospels, the Sunderland Glass Centre which recently had a 2million pound makeover. We’ve enjoyed some very interesting walks, including a visit to see the restoration of the famous historic South Shields lifeboat and the multi-million pound new walkway and leisure centre. Members enjoyed the interesting speakers at Durham and Barnard Castle and are looking forward to the science day at the Centre for Life & the Laing Gallery.

Best wishes to all for 2014, Mavis Hudson

Speakers to add to your list ...

(Always check details when booking, especially prices which sometimes vary.)

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<tr>
<th>Name of Speaker</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Contact details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mike Fraser</td>
<td>Sir William Beveridge, MP for Berwick – His life in Northumberland</td>
<td>Tinyurl.com/ccp36dg</td>
<td>No fee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carol Burnett</td>
<td>History &amp; Architecture Classical Architecture Arts &amp; Crafts Movement</td>
<td>1 Garden Terrace, Shilbottle, Alnwick, NE66 2HX Tel. 01665 581126 Mob. 077 11837 492 email: <a href="mailto:carol.burnett@hotmail.co.uk">carol.burnett@hotmail.co.uk</a></td>
<td>£30 for one hour – extra if longer + 25p per mile from Shilbottle</td>
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Editors’ Day - Website findings:

- The needs of the people accessing the site. What are they looking for? What do they need to know? It seems that many people accessing a site are prospective members.
- The opening screen/the home page should contain important information, such as details of the monthly meeting, a contact for more information and easily understood buttons/links to other pages.
- Link buttons should be easy to spot.
- The use of colour. A multi-colour background to information was thought to cause confusion.
- Print (font). Some fonts do not transfer in their original form. Advice is to stick to the few transferrable fonts such as Times Roman, Arial, Comic Sans.
- Keeping the information up to date is most important, but also quite difficult because much of the information is supplied by, or even updated by, individual groups and is not under the direct control of the site manager.
- Photographs of key members of each U3A would be a useful addition for identification at meetings.
- Password Protection is possible with Site Builder – to limit access for both managers or surfers.
- Site Managers: Sometimes the person who set up the original website moves on and those taking over are less skilled. This may be a problem brewing.

Members, keep up to date

U3As are invited to send the names of any of their members who wish to be added to the Extras List, to Mo Brown, who administers the Regional U3A list, using the address below.

There is the assurance from the committee that this information will not be divulged to any third party.

You will then get all the information being circulated round the Northumbria Region, including the Northumbria Messenger.

Ask your committee for details or contact Mo Brown at …

regionalu3alist@btinternet.com
Northumbria Region supports research by U3As in two ways. Over half our U3As now have Research Ambassadors (RAs) whose role is to promote interest in research and provide information about research-related events and activities. A local Research Network for RAs has been set up in Tyne and Wear and others will follow.

A second approach is through our annual competition, RITA – Research Ideas from the Third Age. Ideas are judged for their originality, feasibility, potential impact, and opportunity to involve U3A members. It was always hoped that some ideas would benefit U3A directly but this year’s results have produced a bumper crop.

The awards for RITA 2013 were made at the Regional Meeting in October. **First Prize of £700 went to Teesdale** U3A for a proposed study of the demography of the U3A in the North East. **Two joint Third Prizes of £250 were given:** one to Boldon U3A for a strategic approach to membership retention, the other to Seaham U3A to compare the provision of lifelong learning in Seaham and Gerlingen in Germany - towns ‘twinned’ for the past 25 years. The RITA entries were judged by senior researchers from Newcastle University. They were impressed by the ways in which these projects potentially add value to each other, and to the work being done by the RITA 2012 winning project from Hartlepool U3A on social inclusion. Together the four studies should provide a strong evidence base for our regional strategy.

**Joint Second Prizes of £400 each went to Tynedale** U3A, for a proposed study of older people’s perceptions of receiving care from neighbours, and to Ponteland U3A for an audit of ‘one-off’ free services for older people such as fire alarm installation or property security advice. The quality of entries was high and several projects which did not get a prize have potential to be taken forward, especially with advice from experienced university researchers.

**RITA 2014** will be more ambitious. We are working with colleagues from the Human-Computer Interaction group at Newcastle University to develop an online platform supporting development and delivery of U3A research projects. It will provide guidance and checks on design; enable U3A members to seek specialist advice or resources; and receive expert feedback as projects develop. Our hope is that it will provide a tool useful across the U3A nationally and to any community groups with ambitions to engage in research.

*Jim Edwardson*
From the 2013 RITA winners ....

How good is your U3A?
How many members does your U3A have? Do you have many who leave, and how many join each year? How does attendance at monthly meetings represent your membership?

How does one U3A compare with another in terms of length of membership, involvement in interest groups? What could we learn from your U3A?

I have been pondering such questions about U3A membership for a while, discussing issues raised in Third Age Matters and thinking about how different regions and those within our region recruit and retain members and improve their activities. This led a group from the Teesdale U3A to submit a proposal in the recent RITA (Research Ideas for the Third Age) competition.

Much to our delight we won the competition!!

We propose that we examine the demography of the U3A in the Northumbria region and seek implications for a regional strategy - well, maybe learn lessons from the success of others and stimulate our own enthusiasm for how we run our organisation. I know there is much expertise in the North East, we have excellent people across the region, we have support from Newcastle University and I feel it would be beneficial to us all to know how we have become successful. In our region there are 48 U3As with over 8,000 members, with membership increasing year on year. We are told that the national population is ageing and that healthy old age includes life-long learning, so how do we do it?

We will be taking advice on collecting and making sense of the data on existing membership, with a view to building on current success. We will be asking for information from U3As across the region to form a picture and would be grateful for your response. Many of you may belong to more than one group and know the similarities and differences between groups, many may wonder why other U3As do not do things 'your way'!

Let us share success, celebrate all that is good and work together to make our region even better - maybe we could spread the word of the results to other regions!

Ruth Sansom, Teesdale U3A
ruth@sansomfamily.org
RITA: Research Ideas from the Third Age

RITA emerged from collaboration between Newcastle University’s VOICE North initiative and the Regional U3A. VOICE (Valuing Our Intellectual Capital and Experience) works with many agencies including 25 businesses, to encourage research ideas and implement results.

Jim Edwardson, an academic and vice chair of the regional U3A, is passionate about developing a research culture to generate ideas and lobby government on issues which affect us. Research is the basis of change for good. His favourite quote is ‘nothing about us without us!’

RITA began in earnest last year. There have been a number of workshops for Research Ambassadors (RAs), volunteers from each U3A who can inform, recruit and harness the ideas and enthusiasm within their U3A. To stimulate participation, a competition invites U3A’s in our region to submit topics for research in any field of science, technology or the arts and humanities. Last year’s winners included an analysis of the contribution of the elderly to society and a mobile phone alert system.

Ponteland U3A has submitted an entry each year. The entries are evaluated by an independent panel and five prizes were awarded this year. The results are a closely guarded secret until the award ceremony at the regional meeting in Gateshead. This year Ponteland received one of the two second prizes of £400 towards our research project. The project will investigate the provision of free, less known services available to our community, how their availability is communicated to potential users and what prevents access or use by individuals. It will be based on our members.

The next step is to recruit a research group who are interested in pursuing this further. We are waiting for guidance from Jim Edwardson but in the meantime you can find out more on the website:
http://u3asites.org.uk/northumbria
and click on the RESEARCH button.

Margaret Chaytor, Research Ambassador

Play Readers and Players may find inspiration in the latest edition of Third Age Matters. Page 9 ....
A new collection of 8 plays written by thirdagers, perfect for U3A groups is available from Third Age Press, 6 Parkside Gardens, London, SW19 5EY or contact dianne@thirdagepres.co.uk or direct mail www.thirdagepress.co.uk
Events Sub Committee Update

Since the last edition of the Messenger there have been three Regional events.

Vindolanda Study Day – Monday September 23rd. This was, I believe, very successful, helped by the fact that the weather could not have been better. The lectures, two of which were outside, were given by the three senior members of staff covering the excavations, history and the work of the Vindolanda Trust.

Science Day at the Centre for Life – Wednesday November 20th. Another interesting and thought provoking day with the scene set initially by Professor Carlos Frenk from Durham University who is a world famous cosmologist. We shall shortly be talking to the Centre for Life about the possibility of an event in 2014. If anyone has a burning desire for a particular topic to be tackled please let me know.

Dame Laura Knight at the Laing – A study Day with Dr Barbara Morden – Thursday December 5th. This was the first of three events planned due to the enormous response we have received. We could not have picked a worse day for this first event as it coincided with the worst storm we have seen in this area for a long time. Barbara Morden had great difficulty getting to Newcastle as most of the trains were cancelled but did make it albeit over an hour late and we are very grateful for her dogged determination to get to Newcastle at all costs. The timetable was rearranged and in the end the day was, once again, very successful and enjoyable. Despite the weather the turn out was 75% of those booked. I would like to thank all those who made the effort to attend and for accepting the necessary changes with understanding.

Dame Laura Knight at the Laing – There are still two more events to come; January 29th and February 5th. These are both fully booked and there is a reserve list so if anyone who has booked knows they will not be able to attend please let me know so that we may offer a place to someone else.

We have a number of events that we are currently considering:

- A study day at the Laing Art Gallery in conjunction with the forthcoming Turner/Constable exhibition if we can get something organised in time
- An Event at the Kielder Observatory
- Another event at Vindolanda
- Visit to Delaval Hall
- Something at the Sage – possibly about the Pitman Poets
- Centre for Life
- Science City – Energy and Environment

As soon as any details are available they will be circulated to all the Regional Contacts

John Leiper
December 2013

Footnote – there was a possibility that we would run an awareness day about Data Protection in conjunction with the Charities Commission – unfortunately they have now declined to take part.
Birds And Music Hungary and Slovakia – Part 3

Day 7 Monday April 22nd

We set out for our next hotel in the Slovak Karst Region of Slovakia, meeting up with our local guide Josef, en route. After a short drive we walked through some deciduous woods alive with the song of Wood Warbler and Collared Flycatcher, and we looked down at a Goshawk on its nest. A Ural Owl barked its displeasure as we approached its nest, then swooped down at Josef as he got closer. Josef has increased the population of this species of owl in the area by providing many nest boxes.

A Great Tit harrying a Nuthatch too close to its nest hole, entertained us during a picnic lunch, while several species of Woodpecker called. Excitement increased when we found a Grey-headed Woodpecker which was a first for most.

On our return to the minibus Middle Spotted Woodpecker gave very good views, and another Hawfinch came close.

Day 8 Tuesday 23rd April

A short walk in the Forest, while keeping absolutely quiet, paid off eventually with brief views of a Hazel Grouse, a very shy and elusive bird. Along another forest track after lunch gave us even longer views of a Hazel Grouse, and we also lured a Firecrest into view by playing a recording of its song. An evening trip to a local quarry, but Eagle Owl was only heard before darkness came. Driving back to hotel, we nearly ran into half a dozen Wild Boar, picked out in the headlights.

Day 9 Wednesday 24th April

A short excursion into a very scenic nature reserve in a gorge, where Serins sang as we arrived, and soon everyone had good views. The stream was in full spate and we were told several Dippers nests had been washed away this spring. Some saw a Peregrine and butterflies were plentiful with Brimstone, Orange Tip and a Swallowtail in evidence, then we set off for Budapest.

We finished the holiday in fine style at a restaurant in Budapest accompanied by entertainment with a small band playing Hungarian music, with singing and dancers in traditional dress.

Colin Freeman
Regional Birding Group
STEPS TOWARDS THE REGIONAL STRATEGY: CAN YOU HELP?

The last Regional Meeting considered how to shape a regional strategy which best supports our U3As. We agreed that the learning and social networks which we provide are vital for wellbeing. Differences in views emerged on issues including: getting the balance right between educational and social activities; social inclusion; how best to attract younger retirees; promoting the public image of U3A as a major provider of life long learning; and whether we could engage more effectively with external bodies. It was agreed that we need more evidence on some issues and also that Task Groups should develop focused proposals for consideration. The Regional Committee has since met and suggests three Task Groups, as follows:

(i) **Regional Profile of Membership and Activities** - this will benefit from ongoing and proposed U3A research studies supported through RITA (see article in this issue of the Messenger). We hope input from the teams at Hartlepool, Teesdale, Boldon and Seaham as well as other interested U3A members will support this group.

(ii) **Public and External Relations** - we need to consider our public profile, how to improve this, how to encourage U3As to publicise their work, and how better relations with some other organisations could benefit our activities.

(iii) **Internal Communications** - there is evidence of problems in the spread of information from the region to the U3As and within U3As. We need to re-examine our internal communications and how we can better use the regional website, 'Messenger', e-mail 'contacts' list and other forms of communication.

We are seeking the help of U3A members willing to contribute to any of these Task Groups. We need ideas, experience and enthusiasm. The aim is to have as few meetings as possible. The Regional Committee would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in the possibility of serving in this way, or who has views to contribute on these themes. My e-mail address is jim.edwardson@ncl.ac.uk

Other challenges were identified at the Regional Meeting and these will continue to be addressed in this forum. They include possible sub-regional networks; the format and location of Regional meetings; sharing ideas for regional educational, training and recreational events; and Third Age Trust policies. The need for U3As to share views on these and other concerns with the Regional Committee and bring them to the Regional meetings was stressed. Some of these will form part of the agenda for the next meeting and further proposals will be circulated.

*Jim Edwardson*
U3A and High School work with IT

Following an article in the Third Age Matters, Morpeth and District U3A have set up an intergenerational computer group with the local High School, King Edward V1, A level students. This has been highly successful and is now in its second year. It has the added bonus of being a teaching tool for the students and both parties have gained a lot of pleasure from it. The students have been a pleasure to work with - not to mention very tolerant of our perceived ignorance!

Maryan Duckworth

Flying visit

Two groups of members of Guisborough U3A have visited RAF Leeming recently, and spent the day there, including a good lunch in the Junior Officers’ Mess.

We were initially met at the gate and transferred in their own minibus to the museum where we learnt about the history of the base. It is a particularly interesting airfield because of the variety of aircraft and helicopters on the site. We then proceeded to the air traffic control site, where the radar system was explained to us and we were even able to pick out the Bilsdale transmitter and various wind farms.

Travelling again in the minibus around the surprisingly extensive site we next inspected the fire engines and clambered aboard, some even venturing on top to try out the massive spraying gun.

The highlight though had to be a visit to the hangar to see a Hawk jet (the aircraft of the Red Arrows). Everyone had the opportunity to climb into the cockpit, although sadly it stayed on the ground!

We had a fascinating insight into another world, and thank John Wardill for organising the days.

Margaret Walkley

More from the grapevine ….

Regional Meetings at the Angel? No problem with the destination - easy to get to by car and easy parking - enjoy meeting members from other U3As in such an informal atmosphere.

Would prefer not to hear long reports repeating what we’ve already heard through our committee and seen in the Messenger - an introduction to a place of interest or debate on point of regional or national interest (wider than U3A) or a topic lead by an individual U3A maybe about their area or particular interest.

Gleaned from several members from different U3As
The regional IT group …
continues to be held in the office in Pink Lane, most Wednesday mornings. People from about 3 - 7 different U3As attend frequently and occasionally there are short-term visitors from other U3As.

We deal with topics as they are requested, gadgets people bring in, reports from magazines and newspapers, interesting websites we have found and we discuss solutions to specific problems anyone has experienced during the week. Then most of us go for lunch.

Recently 5 members of the group have acquired iPads, so a study of those has formed our main topic for the last couple of weeks. Newcastle U3A are purchasing an ipad, and Apple TV for ‘mirroring’ the ipad on a large screen to make it easier for everyone to see.

Anyone is welcome to join the group or even come for a one off visit - just email, text or phone beforehand in case we’re gadding (should that be “padding”) off to the apple store for a free demo....

Mo Brown: email: regionalu3alist@btinternet.com or phone 0191 252 9603

REGIONAL RESOURCES for everyone
The following equipment is available for loan by any U3A within the Region

- Notice boards (4)
- Banners (4) - floor standing, depicting activities in the Region
- Lap top computers (2)
- Projectors (2)
- Screens - (1)
- Digital camera/camcorder (2)
- Flip charts (5)

Get in touch with the "Regional Volunteer" nearest you for more information:
Anne Finn: 0191 487 4743 in Gateshead, for those in the south
John Leiper: 01890 840 494 in Coldstream, for those in the north
# Dates for your diary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 9(^{th}) January</td>
<td>Visit to Durham Record Office with Newcastle U3A (see page 8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, 22(^{nd}) January</td>
<td>Regional General Meeting for all members at the Angel View Inn, Gateshead, 9.45 for 10.15am (see page 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, 29(^{th}) January</td>
<td>Laing Art Gallery: Dame Laura Knight by Dr. B Morden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, 5(^{th}) February</td>
<td>Laing Art Gallery: Dame Laura Knight by Dr. B Morden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, 8(^{th}) March</td>
<td>Deadline for next Northumbria Messenger (see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday 24(^{th}) March</td>
<td>Ri Lecture, London. Details: <a href="mailto:philippa@u3a.org.uk">philippa@u3a.org.uk</a> (National. Office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 23(^{rd}) April</td>
<td>Regional AGM with elections for Chairman, Treasurer, Minutes Secretary &amp; others atop the agenda &amp; General Meeting Angel View Inn, Gateshead. Time to be finalised.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, 30(^{th}) April</td>
<td>Annual Literary lunch at Beamish Hall (see page 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 5(^{th}) June</td>
<td>Bird watching event with Scottish U3A. Details early 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>9-10(^{th}) September</td>
<td>National AGM &amp; Conference, Cirencester</td>
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**Final copy date**

for the next edition of The Northumbria Messenger is

**Saturday 8th March 2014**

Please send to Sandy Hood at email: regnewseditor@gmail.com

snail mail: 4 Glenfield Road, Darlington DL3 8DZ
tel. 01325 384496

For copies of this publication, photographs of some events and other regional information visit the Northumbria Region website:

www.u3asites.org.uk/northumbria

or

If you are a U3A member you can get your own personal copy by email. (See pg 15)

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