

South Durham u3a

Registered Charity Number 1207225

Active in **Darlington, Cockerton and surrounding areas**

<https://southdurham.u3asite.uk/>

Thursday 2nd December, 2025

Christmas Party Event 9th December 2025

MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAIR

Welcome to our new members

Andrea Banner
Sheila Dawson

Eleanor Mollart

Having been the editor for a year now I am used to waiting for Ruth to send me her Chairs report for inclusion in the newsletter, but it is very different this month as I am at the end of the line now and I was waiting for the new chair, ME, to write the report which seemed weird.

I would like to thank the members who turned up at Bowen Road for the AGM, some 99 of you, for their support when they voted me in as Chair. I hope that I can stand up to the challenge and move forward with some exciting events planned for later next year.

I take this opportunity to thank Ruth again for all her efforts over the past 4 years. To say that the shoes are big to fill is an understatement.

Going forward I am excited to tell you that we have a brand sparkly new committee with lots of ideas to help keep our u3a moving in the right direction.

This coming year it will be South Durham u3a's Silver Anniversary, so if anyone has any thoughts or ideas on how we will celebrate such a milestone please let me know. We have sometime yet to think of a suitable event, so thinking caps on everyone, let's mark this occasion in style.

During our AGM meeting many of our members contributed to the Royal British Legion collection pot on the front desk. This was in instead of your usual £1 monthly subscription. I am delighted to report that we raise £116.23 for such a worthwhile cause.

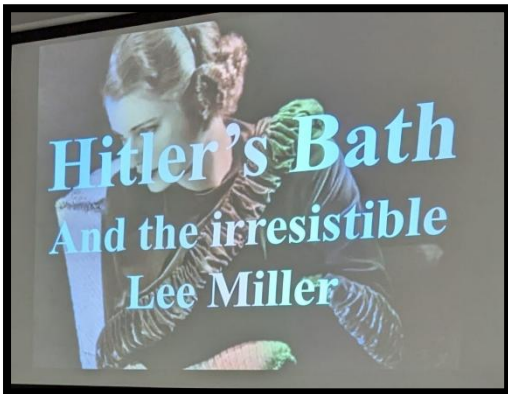
So now as we move into the final newsletter of the year, we look forward to our Christmas Party Event next week, hopefully, the members who have bought tickets, are, as we speak, digging out their Christmas Sparkle to enjoy the day. No doubt the Editor of the newsletter (oh that's me) will have photographs to share with you in the new year.

**Once again thank you for making our u3a the success it is today.
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.**

**Dot Hullah
Chair**

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

Stan Miller talking about Lee Miller war time photographer



This talk gave us all much to think about. What a life! What photography! No wonder the Tate Britain retrospective is sold out. I was tempted to indulge in amateur psychoanalysis to explain the ongoing effect of childhood abuse and creepy relationship with her father, but I became daunted by the complexities of history which led her via modelling, free love and Surrealism to the first use of napalm



in St Malo, a suicide scene, Hitler's bath and a drunken end with a son who hated her. Even Shakespeare couldn't make it up. Were any of you, like myself, drawn to make comparisons with your own lives?

Linda Chadd

CHRISTMAS EVENT

THIS EVENT IS **INSTEAD** OF THE NORMAL MONTHLY MEETING

The time to sparkle is nearly upon us

Our Christmas Party Event is on the 9th December from 10 o'clock

Dress Code

Think, Christmas Jumper, Sparkly dress or top, festive head wear.



Doors will open at 10 o'clock sharp so please **don't** come earlier

LATEST NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

COFFEE & CHAT

As the last Wednesday in December will be New Year's Eve, I assume everyone will have other plans so the group meeting in Binns will be cancelled for this month.

We shall meet again on 28th January from 10.30 to 12.30 and I look forward to seeing everyone. If you are free on that date and fancy joining us, do please come along to Cafe Zest in Binns. You will be very welcome.

In the meantime, may I offer everyone my best wishes for a very happy Christmas and my hope that 2026 will be a wonderful year for all of us.

Pauline Noble

DOT'S JUNGAGLOW CRAFTS



This month my crafting ladies were beginning to think festive haha. We made miniature beaded wreaths to hand on the Christmas tree



Dot Hullah

CREATIVE WRITING

This month's focus title was "The Postman" a Christmas flash fiction challenge was given out at the beginning of the session to get us all in the creative mood.



Next Meeting is 7th January 2026 from 10 until 12 noon at 15 Elton Grove.

Dot Hullah

FRIDAY WALKING GROUP



The prospect of icy roads and treacherous paths were not welcomed by the Friday Walking Group and we abandoned our planned route from Redcar to Saltburn in favour of a walk from Hurworth. Six hardy ladies met at Hurworth Grange in glorious sunshine and -2 degrees! Our path took us on part of the Teesdale Way at Rockcliffe Hall walking alongside the main East Coast railway line for a short way. We were delighted by 4 trains speeding their way to London / Edinburgh, not as romantic as the Railway Children, but we waved to the passengers all the same. The river Tees was very calm and shone like a mirror in the sunshine, however, evidence of raging waters from previous weeks was visible by the amount of debris lying high on the riverbank. The sun had not yet reached most of the path we walked on and the frost gave us a crisp surface rather than the muddy quagmire we were expecting. It was disappointing not to see any famous

Middlesborough footballers training on their pitches at Rockcliffe, and the golf club was eerily quiet too as we passed the well kept greens. We felt it was too cold for a break so took a quick stop for refreshments standing



up then continued on our way by the twisting river, passing farmers fields and sheep grazing happily in their thick winter coats. The man watching us with his binoculars as we approached the Green in Hurworth caused much debate as we walked past the many interesting old properties on our way to the Mustard Tree. This is a fabulous asset to the village, doubling up as a well used cafe during the week and a Methodist Church on a Sunday.

Thank you to my fellow companions for a lovely energising walk with interesting chats along the way. There will be no walk in December. Our next walk will be on Friday 16th January 2026. Destination and distance still to be arranged. Details of which will be in the next

newsletter and at our general meeting on Tuesday 13th January.

Wishing you all compliments of the season and very best wishes for a healthy and happy 2026!

Wendy Nordmann



INTERMEDIATE WALKING GROUP



Eleven of us stood in the car park and wondered whether we were wearing enough clothes. The sky was brilliant blue, the wind was cruelly bitter. Too late now.

Our walk would take us along the Castle Eden Walkway as far as the Hurworth Burn Reservoir, and back again. Happy days. For someone with a limited sense of direction, a straight line, there and back? "I'm walking on sunshine" and "don't it feel good" Three miles there, three back. What's not to like? The sun did indeed shine, all the way, the fields were lit up to an emerald green, and trees were silhouetted black and stark against the sky. At the reservoir we found enough seats for all, and we faced the wind bravely while eating whatever we had brought, before setting off to retrace our steps, all the while dodging those fast relentless cyclists' intent on getting somewhere fast.



Our "pit stop" of choice was Wynyard Hall. The grounds are extensive, rolling acres of beautiful parkland, driving past some very desirable residences. The cafe wasn't bad either, and indoors, bathing in the warm sunshine while partaking of coffee and cakes of choice? it was easy to

feel that "lady of the manor" vibe, if only for half an hour.



All good things come to an end, so thanks to the organiser, and the drivers. They know who they are!

7 hardy people set off on the 1st December, despite the awful forecast, from Middleton St George. We walked along the old railway track heading east towards the Whinnies nature reserve. From there we eventually crossed the Darlington/ Middlesbrough railway track and back into Middleton St George.

As normal, we then headed to the cafe for scones and a cuppa. The only time we saw the rain was after we had been to the cafe. Thankfully!

Alex Bailey

LOCAL HISTORY



Nov 18: RUTH BECKETT on LOOKING CLOSELY AT HOPETOWN How to entertain 14-year-olds (and anyone else from Darlington) for the best part of an hour: Use the Centre for Local Studies to obtain a 1915 map of the original Hopetown area, contemporary photos and relevant Street

Directory pages. Bear in mind the publication dates of these documents, if known. Consider first how this area could have got its name. Hone in on individual streets and identify any original buildings extant. Point out variations in house design and status. Are there gardens? Bay windows? Examine the Directory pages for occupations - do these match the houses? Any surprises? Explain the more esoteric job titles such as slinger or striker. Sprinkle liberally throughout with audience contributions and personal knowledge. Encourage questions to which there may be no definitive answers. Simple!

LINDA CHADD

NEW MEMBERS (and not so new members) COFFEE MORNING



This will take place the fourth Tuesday of each month- in Café Zest Binns 10.30- 12.00



Our aim is to allow new members to get to know each other in a less busy setting than the monthly Bowen Road meetings. There will be committee members present should you have any questions to ask. We hope that this will help you make new friends and meet with our recently joined members in a relaxed environment. No need to book, just turn up.

Jenny & Brenda

FRENCH CONVERSATION



We all love to learn from each other and really enjoy trying to improve our French conversation. We would welcome new members to the group! Our sessions are from 11.15-12.15 at the Newcastle Building Society and in the Autumn will run on Mondays:

December 1 and 15.

Please contact me if you have any queries.

READING GROUP 2



November book was "Precipice" by Robert Harris. We have read other titles by the same author but this one was preferred by most of us. Set around the beginning of World War 1, the historical novel is based on authentic letters written by the Prime Minister, HH Asquith, to a young woman, Venetia Stanley. The nature of their relationship was not entirely explicit in the book, but appeared to be a romantic affair, tolerated, albeit reluctantly, by the PM's wife. We found the PM's irresponsibility in sharing state secrets with Venetia and sometimes tossing papers and telegrams aside quite astonishing. It was amazing that Asquith would write letters to her during cabinet meetings. He appeared unable to deal with the big issues of the war and wanted support from Venetia. The reliability and speed of delivery of letters by post was noted! We speculated on attitudes to affairs of people in the public eye and politics, and wondered how the press would report on this today.

Next meetings

We elected to have no book for our social get together in December.

Friday 9 January 2026 - Our selected book for discussion is "James" by Percival Everett.

13 February 2026 - The chosen book is "The Silence in Between" by Josie Ferguson.

Judith Bryant

LUNCHEON GROUP

35 members met at Bannatyne's for the November Lunch Group get-together.



The hotel had started offering their Christmas season menu and , therefore, some members chose the traditional Turkey with trimmings followed by Christmas Pudding. I have received some very positive feedback and I would like to thank Babs Myers for creating the name cards with personalised menu choices and Sue Clark our Treasurer, for sorting out the payments. There is no lunch group meeting in December , so the next one will take place on January 30th, 2026 - venue to be confirmed in the next Newsletter.



SCRABBLE GROUP



This is a fairly new group, and we need some new members. We are a mixed ability group so whatever your level you're sure to fit in. Held on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month in The Travellers Rest, in Cockerton - Interested? Contact Brenda Ellidge

READING GROUP 1



At our 12th November meeting we discussed "The Nightingale" by Kristen Hannah, an American author who has won many awards.

This hugely popular story is set during the turbulent times of the Nazi occupation of France (1940 to 1945)

It is a work of fiction inspired by real events and the courage of a Belgian woman, Andrea de Jong, who helped downed allied airmen to escape from Nazi occupied France via the Pyrenees mountains.

The story centres around two sisters, very different in their responses to the challenges and choices faced by women during this terrible time.

Isabelle, young, beautiful and starved of affection, plunges into the dangerous world of the French resistance, her often reckless actions compromising the safety of others.

Vianne, her elder, sister has a family and faces a daily struggle to survive amid the excesses of the occupation of her small town.

Her contribution to the resistance is low key but no less courageous than that of her sister.

The story shifts between two time frames: 1995, when one of the sisters is musing on her past, and 1939 where Vianne and her husband, a postman, are fearful of the coming war.

The author describes, not only the audacious activities of the resistance, but also the sheer hard grind of the Occupation on ordinary people. The book highlights how war changes people and how the sexism of the occupiers, who assume "The Nightingale" is a man, enables Isabelle to continue her life-saving work.

This book has sold over 4.5 million copies and has been published in 45 languages and a movie version is on the cards.

Our group found much to enjoy from this book and, I for one, would be happy to explore others.

With many thanks to Lorna for hosting the meeting and providing the delicious refreshments.

Our December 10th meeting will be held at Lorna's and will be a social event.

Toni Carr

ITALIAN CONVERSATION

Our group is always fun and everyone is very supportive! We have learnt how to say some phrases about the weather. The group is continuing in the Autumn, and we will learn how to talk and understand about health and illnesses - often useful on holiday! Our sessions will be from 10.00-11.00 at the Newcastle Building Society on Mondays:

December 1 and 15

Celia Howarth

BRIDGE CLUB

Starting up again after their Summer break is the Bridge Club. They meet in the Travellers Rest in Cockerton at 1.30 on the 1st Monday of the month.

This New session begins on the 1st December at 1.30 in the Travers Rest

FAMILY HISTORY

The Family History Group meeting will be at 2.00 pm the next meeting of will be Friday 12th December in the Local Studies Centre of the Library.Room at the Public Library in Crown Street. If you are interested in tracing your ancestors and wish to join our group, If you do not have a valid library membership card, please contact the library before the meeting to obtain this.

CREATIVE CORNER

Christmas Dinner

The turkey strutted the farmyard squawking,

“Turkeys of the World unite”

“Cos if you don’t, you’ll find you’re someone’s dinner by
Christmas night”

He knew his end was coming soon,

He knew he’d had his chips,

He knew he’d end up on a plate

With gravy and turnips.

Why did they have to eat all his tribe?

His mind was in a flurry,

What was wrong with murdering veg

And eating veggie curry?

Kate Brown



The bungalow that you pass on road entering Bowen Rd Community Hall is part of Tees Valley Beekeeping Organisation.

They have candles and honey for sale & will be at home on Tuesday December 9th if you wish to call after our party. He will do honey tasting for you.



VISIT TO LIT & PHIL NEWCASTLE

Despite the drizzle and biting wind, 25 members came for a guided tour of the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle, or the Lit and Phil as it is more commonly known. The Society building is in a Neoclassical style and the library is accessed by a grand staircase displaying portraits of Earl Grey, an early President of the Society and the Duke of Sussex, who laid the foundation stone in 1822 together with a statue of James Losh, a lawyer, antiquary and former vice President. The first-floor reading room and library are sky lit by three enormous dome lights set into the roof. Here we split into two groups and were taken around by volunteer guides. Lawrence, our guide, gave a fascinating insight to the history of the Society which has had many famous Presidents, including Lord Armstrong, Robert Stephenson and Robert Swan. The current president is Alexander Armstrong (of Pointless fame)

The Society was founded in 1793 by the Reverend William Turner as a “conversation club” and considered the intellectual centre of Newcastle to which the Society of Antiquaries, the Natural History Society and the University of Newcastle all owe their origin. Initially Society members met in locations around Newcastle and by 1804 women were admitted as associate members.



Members met to exchange ideas and hold discussions about new discoveries. However, religion and politics were banned topics through fear they might incite revolution. New technologies were demonstrated, such as George Stephenson’s miner’s lamp in 1815. The Society’s lecture theatre was the first public room using electricity to be lit by Swan’s incandescent lamp in 1881. This early pursuit of curiosity and knowledge continues today with lectures, recitals and much more.

The Society thrived, and in 1822, the members found a permanent home and the present building was completed in 1825. Then the Society had some 8,000 books all non-fiction. Novels were not permitted until 1891. Today the walls of the galleried double height space houses nearly 200,000 books some dating back to the 16th century, includes the largest collection of music script in the Northeast. On the top floor gallery, accessed by a wrought iron spiral staircase, we could see the library below with its many bookcases and several large tables with seating for visitors. Two of the many taxidermic curiosities were spotted; a dog called Sybil and a baboon.

In the ‘Committee Room’, Lawrence chose two books to show us. First was “Treatise on Mensuration” published in 1770 by Charles Hutton, a self-taught mathematician, later a professor of mathematics and it was Thomas Bewick who engraved the mathematical diagram for calculating the height of a building. The other volume by James Losh, was a collection of 30 years of meteorological data. A significant detail is that the River Tyne froze for the whole of January 1814.

The Lit and Phil is open six days a week and free to anyone to browse the books and take some refreshments from the cafe. Our time there passed quickly, and we all found it enjoyable and interesting. If anyone has some free time in Newcastle, it is well worth a visit.

Lesley McGee

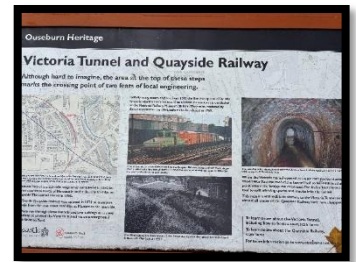


VICTORIA TUNNELS



On a blustery wet and cold day 20 intrepid tunnellers met at The Ouseburn Valley Trust office in Newcastle upon Tyne to prepare for our trip down under.

After a safety talk from our guides John and Dave we set, off equipped with safety helmets and torches down the Victorian Tunnels which were built to carry coal from the pit at Spittal Tongue down to the River Tyne. John was an excellent guide full of interesting facts all delivered with a wry sense of Geordie humour.



On the way in he told tales of how the tunnels had been used as air raid shelters during the 2nd world war and many lives must have been saved as thousands of people crowded into them to hide from the German bombers. Johns' description of the toilet facilities made us all glad that we hadn't been there at the time.



On the return journey he relayed the story of why the tunnels were built - the council decreed that the waggon way couldn't be over land as there were too many beautiful buildings in Newcastle, so it was decided to send it underground. The whole thing was dug out by men with shovels and the clay that was removed was later returned in the form of bricks to line the walls. A marvellous feat of engineering carried out by big Geordie Navvies according to John.

The wagons were not pulled by horses, men or engines but using the gradient in the tunnel and a clever rope system which along with a bell mechanism meant that not a life was lost either in the construction or working on the waggon way. It took 2.5 years to build and was only used for 18 years until it was closed in 1860.

All in all, it was a marvellous day out and as a proud Geordie myself I felt really thrilled when John led us back thru the tunnel all singing the chorus to The Blaydon Races. A big thank you to Carol Boyd for organising the trip.

Ann Cartwright

SOUTH DURHAM QUIZ

SOUTH NORTHUMBRIA REGIONAL QUIZ NOVEMBER 2025

South Durham hosted the South Northumbria Regional Quiz on Wednesday 26th November 2025.

This is a biannual event. We had 18 Teams of 6, from 11 different u3a's taking part.

Our Venue Hurworth Grange Community Centre has extensive grounds with ample parking. Member's driving a distance were able to visit the on-site café to partake of refreshments prior to the quiz.

It was a very pleasant afternoon, a chance for friends and potential rivals to catch up with each other.



The range of questions set by our Quiz Master; Dave Tucker didn't disappoint with a Tie Break question at the end to select the team who would take home the coveted Last Place Prize of hand-crafted Wooden Spoons. Congratulations to this year's outstanding winners, Durham Carville Team 2.

WINNERS: Durham Carville Team 2. **LAST PLACE:** Sedgfield Ladies.

Prizes were presented by Dot Hullah (Chairperson)



u3a's in attendance:

Bedale, Darlington, Bishop Auckland, Durham Carville, Northallerton, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Stockton, Sedgfield, South Durham and Teesdale.

Jenny Hurt

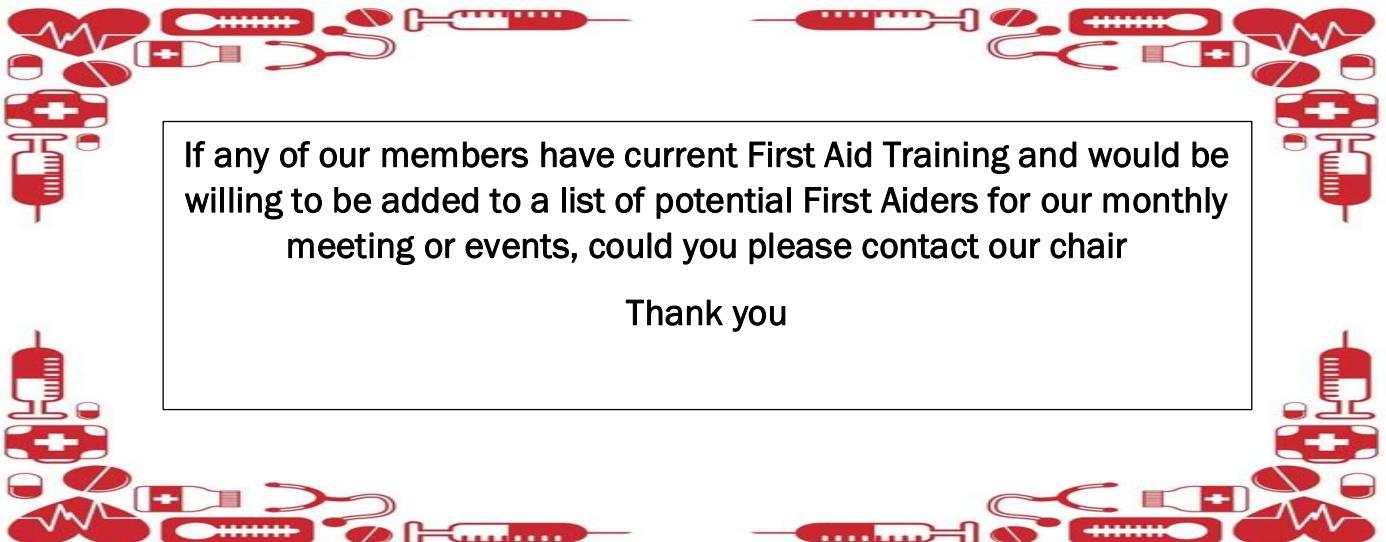
NEW GROUP FOR 2026

We're exploring the idea of setting up a new **U3A Gardening Group** and would love to know if members would like to take part.

The group would be open to anyone with an interest in gardening—whether you're an experienced gardener, a complete beginner, or simply someone who enjoys plants and the outdoors.

Activities may include sharing gardening tips, visiting gardens, nurseries and parks, plant and seed swaps, talks and demonstrations, hands-on simple planting sessions and friendly discussions about what we're growing. We have lots more ideas too!

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED MORE DETAILS WILL FOLLOW SO KEEP YOUR EYES PEELED



If any of our members have current First Aid Training and would be willing to be added to a list of potential First Aiders for our monthly meeting or events, could you please contact our chair

Thank you

Monthly Meeting Speakers - 2026

Jan 13	CHRIS LLOYD ON PATONS AND BALDWINS A multi-national company once based in Darlington
Feb 10	MY LIFE AT SEA INCLUDING DISATERS, by Russell Carnelley.
Mar 10	MARY'S MEALS Presentation by a global charity
Apr 14	THE FORESTRY COMMISSION SPEAKS
May 12	MORE COURTROOM MEMORIES FROM DAVID JAFFA
June 9	"THE PEARL OF AFRICA" REVISITED Visions of Uganda from Sarah Cartwright
July 14	A HISTORY OF CINEMA, DENIS FOX
Aug 11	BROTHER KHADIM FROM NEWCASTLE CENTRAL MOSQUE A Geordie convert speaks
Sept 8	LOOKING AND SEEING Dave Phillips on aspects of art
Oct 13	GARY BANKHEAD ON HIS TIME AS A FIREMAN
Nov 10	SADDAM HUSSEIN, MY PART IN HIS DOWNFALL By our very own John Sloss
Dec 8	tba, hopefully musical

Groups on Offer

Bridge – David Dixon	Travellers Rest	1.30 -4pm every other Tuesday from 10th December
Canasta – Sylvia Elliott	Travellers Rest	2pm alternate Thursday of the month. £2 each – includes refreshments.
Coffee & Chat - Pauline Noble	Binns cafe	10.30-12.30am last Wednesday of each month
Creative Writing – Dot Hullah	Leader's home	10-12am first Wednesday of each month
Current Affairs – Gill Turnbull	Members' homes	10am-12 noon on the 3rd Monday of the month
French, Advanced Celia Howarth	Above Newcastle Building Society, Market Place	11.15 on 2nd & 4th Monday of each month
Friday Walking Judith Bryant	Park cars in Linden Ave (nearest Coniscliffe Rd end)	9.30am on the 3rd Friday of each month
Intermediate Walking	Cockerton car park	10am on the 1st & 3rd Monday of each month

Susan –		
Italian for beginners Celia Howarth	Above Newcastle Building Society	10-11am on 2nd & 4th Monday of each month
Jungalow Crafts – Dot Hullah	Above Newcastle Building Society, Market Place	10am-12pm Last Thursday of the month
Local History – Ruth Beckett/Linda Chadd	Willow Road Community Centre	1.30pm on the 3rd Tuesday of the month
Luncheon Group - Stella Barnes	Pubs/restaurants	1.00pm on the last Friday of each month
New Members (and old) coffee morning Jenny Hurt	Binns café	10.30-12 on 4th Tuesday of each month
Play Reading – Muriel Jones	Members' homes	2pm on the 3rd Tuesday of the month
Reading Group 1 – Toni Carr	Members' homes	2nd Wednesday of each month
Reading Group 2 – Judith Bryant.	Members' homes	10.30am on 2nd Friday of each month
Rummikub – Liz Kay	Members' homes	10am-12 noon on the 1st Friday of each month
Scrabble Brenda Ellidge	Travellers Rest Cockerton	2pm on 2nd & 4th Monday of each month

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS

Journey to Bethlehem is again playing this Christmas at Elmridge Church. This live action telling of the Christmas Story is well worth a watch and is completely FREE to attend. Please note that booking your slot is essential.

Elm Ridge Methodist Church,
on behalf of Darlington and Teesdale Methodist Circuit

Presents

Journey to Bethlehem

Friday 12th December
6-8pm

Saturday 13th
Sunday 14th
4-8pm

Booking is essential: for more information please contact:
Tel: 07895 747 948 daily from 9am - 5pm

Come along and join us for the journey to Bethlehem. One of our Wise Men will lead you through the story of the Nativity from Nazareth to the stable. The event is entirely free and includes refreshments at the end of your tour.

The production tells the story through the eyes of the Wise Men as they travel towards Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Travel with them in small groups through a series of scenes to meet the characters of the nativity story and experience life in the Bethlehem market and at the Inn.

- Meet the astronomers and gaze at the stars
- Meet Mary as she listens to a message from an angel
- Share Joseph's apprehension in his carpenter's shop
- Take part in the Bethlehem census
- Sample food and try some crafts in the market place
- Meet the Innkeeper and his family
- Travel to the hillside to hear the Shepherds and their sheep
- Greet the new-born Jesus in the stable

Your tour will take approximately 40 minutes and is entirely free.

We wish you a very blessed and joyful Christmas and a peaceful New Year

Booking your tour is essential

For more information and to book your tour please contact the booking line:
07895 747 948 between the hours of 9am - 5pm