

York u3a york

NewsMail

No 33



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OFFICE OPENING TIMES

Tuesday 10am to Midday

Wednesday 1pm to 3pm

Thursday 10am to Midday

Friday 10am to Midday

FRONT COVER PICTURE

Autumn In York

Chair's Message

I'm writing this following our Open Day. I have sore feet and am in urgent need of a cup of tea, or perhaps something a little stronger (please drink responsibly) but, what a wonderful day it was! For full details there is an article on pages 6,7 of the NewsMail.

We will be spending some time now evaluating the event; learning lessons and seeking to make any improvements for future Open Days.

I would like to give my personal thanks to all those involved in both organising and volunteering at the event. We are fortunate enough to have some amazing, dedicated volunteers at York u3a and without them we couldn't do what we do. The volunteers on the day ranged from those who manned the reception, helping usher people around, the Group Leaders (who gave talks, undertook taster sessions and manned tables, providing information about their groups), to the Trustees who spent time both organising the event and welcoming those attending on the day. Thank you all!

In September the Board of Trustees approved the submission details required by the Charity Commission to become a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). The submission has now been made and we should only have to wait 4-6 weeks to find out if our application has been successful. Then the hard work begins as we set up new bank accounts and transfer our assets across to the new charity. We will keep those involved closely informed of the changes, as they occur.

Following on from the success of last year's u3a Festival, there is a steering group already starting to plan the next one. u3a Festival 26 will be taking place between 1-3 July, 2026 at the University of York.

As with the last Festival, members' skills and interests will be at the forefront of the festival. The steering group are looking for activity leaders, crafters, speakers, musicians, and sports enthusiasts in order to help build a rich and engaging programme. If you'd like to contribute, please email festival@u3a.org.uk.

Time for a cup of tea I think.

Karen Sawyer Chair

Editorial

Welcome to the October edition of our the u3a Newsmail. Thank you to all members who have submitted articles. We strive to keep members informed about upcoming events, group news, and opportunities to get involved. Whether you are a long-standing member or have just joined, there is always something new to discover within our vibrant community.

York u3a has nearly 2000 members and is the third largest u3a in Yorkshire, offering a variety of groups and activities for its members.

If you have an idea for a new group, please contact Samantha Triggs, our Groups Coordinator on 07584121167. I'm sure that many of our members enjoyed the open day on September 25th, which showcased a range of activities on offer. You can read about this day further on in this issue. We hope that new members will find groups which suit them and hope that you will make lasting friendships.

To anyone who would like to submit an item of interest, story, anecdote or puzzle, please send to editorYorku3a@gmail.com Please ensure that articles are no longer than 700 words.

The closing date is Monday November 24th for our December edition. We really welcome articles with a festive theme! Please remember that you can see the colour edition of the Newsmail on line.

The weather has been lovely this summer and we have enjoyed long, lazy days. As the Autumn leaves start to fall, bringing beautiful colours to our landscape, we look forward to lots of u3a experiences.

Sue and Nick Tompkin (Editors)



Can you name the ABBA song depicted here?

Saturday Talks

Saturday Talks take place at 10.30am on the second Saturday morning of each month, in the Central Methodist Church Hall in St Saviourgate. Parking is available nearby and tea/coffee is served from 9.45am. Admission is £3, payable in cash on the door, and tea/coffee is £1.

If you are unable to come to the talks in person, most can be attended on Zoom and we ask for a contribution of £3 for Zoom attendance. A link will be sent out during the previous week and a recording made available after the talk. Please note that the concert on 13th December will not be zoomed.

Saturday 8th November

Fire Safety North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service

The Fire Prevention team are looking forward to attending this meeting to talk about their role within the Fire Service promoting the benefits of their Home Fire Safety visits. A Home Fire Safety visit involves giving fire safety advice such as how to reduce and prevent fires, looking at any possible fire risks in your home, information about bedtime routines to help keep you safe at night and helping you to think about an escape plan.

As well as giving fire safety information, the team can also give advice about health and wellbeing. This may include where to find support and further advice on giving up smoking, avoiding falls and keeping your home warm. They are hoping you will be able to come along to their session.

Saturday 13th December

Christmas Concert York u3a Music Groups

Our Annual Christmas Concert has become a great York u3a tradition. This year, we are delighted that our Choir, Guitar, Ukulele and Singing Together groups will again be entertaining us with a programme of seasonal music. As in previous years, we can expect a variety of items - some well known, some less so - and perhaps an opportunity to join in with some of the singing.

The concert will take place in the Central Methodist Church, across the corridor from the hall where we usually meet. Tea and coffee will be served in the hall before the concert and, as has also become traditional, there will be mince pies.

Please note that the concert will not be zoomed, so we hope you will be able to join us in person. We look forward to seeing you if you are able to come along to either of these events.

Liz Swinbank and Anna Baldwin *Joint Talks Secretaries*

York 50+ Festival, York u3a Open Day and Festival Parade

On 25th September, and as part of the York 50+ Festival, York u3a welcomed more than 150 people to the Priory Street Centre for our annual Open Day. Attendees were a mix of existing members, including many who turned out to volunteer to make the event a success, and non-members interested in finding out more about what u3a has to offer.



The day was split into similar sessions running in the morning and afternoon to allow for the widest possible opportunity for people to attend. This was the first time we have tried using the Priory Street Centre as a venue and it offered ample space for talks, “taster” sessions, and, importantly,

the opportunity to mingle with Group Leaders and the Travel and Membership Teams to hear in detail more about the range of activities available to members.

Talks included topics such as the history and background of u3a (Karen Sawyer, Chair), astronomy (Quinn Smith), local history walks (Richard Taylor) and military history (Martin Cooper). Attendees could



be seen trying out Dao Yin, an ancient Chinese mind-body exercise, and a meditation workshop, as well as learning to play Go (definitely a Chinese theme here!), and taking part in discussions on Folk and Fairy Tales and Current Affairs.

More than 30 Groups displayed information about their topics with opportunities for attendees to find out more details about what was on offer and how to get started.

Continued on page 7

From page 6

On Saturday 27th September York u3a members joined a range of organisations and individuals to celebrate International Day of Older People by taking part in a Grand Parade of Elders and Friends. We gathered at York Theatre Royal for a quick coffee and then donned our bright blue u3a sashes and beautifully crocheted autumn leaves ready



for the walk.

The Town Crier met us outside and started us off with a cheerful proclamation, and then, accompanied by the York City Football Team mascot and our dedicated student stewards, we paraded through the Museum Gardens and down into the city centre, with passers-by stopping to watch and wish us well.

We entered St Helen's Square to the choir's rendition of "Dancing Queen" where we were welcomed by the Sheriff of York. After more music and a little gentle dancing, we retired to St Sampson's for a well-deserved cup of tea and delicious cakes.

New Members Meeting

16-Sep-2025

About 20 new members turned out for the September "New Members" meeting, where our Chair (Karen) provided a potted history of the u3a in general, and York u3a in particular, followed by a general piece on groups and events by Beryl. Lorrae then gave the low-down on the Travel Groups (both UK and Abroad), and Martin took us through the equipment that is available for group leaders to use in support of their



groups. Tea, coffee and biscuits were preceded by Paul walking those present through the website. There was plenty of discussion during the drinking of tea, with new ideas for groups popping up as well as general social chit-chat.

Eco Friendly Support Group

We meet once a month, on second Friday afternoons, to share and inspire each other in our efforts to care for our environment. We would welcome new members. Topics are led by volunteers from within the group. In September the topic was 'York and Climate Change'. On 10th October it will be 'Food', on 14th November probably 'Biodiversity Loss: Protecting the World's Wildlife' and on 12th December probably 'Ocean Plastics'.

If you are interested do contact me -

Elisa Main elisamain@yahoo.co.uk

If you aren't on email my phone number is **01904 438976**.

Timing - 1.30pm - 3.15pm **Venue** - at my home in Badger Hill

There is no charge.

Recorder Group

This is a new group which has recently started. For many of us, it has been quite a number of years since we were in recorder groups, so there are several challenges! We are, however, having a great time as we come together to make music, mainly Early English. There are 2 groups; one in Fulford and one in Acomb. These take place in the houses of 2 members. We have descants, tenors and trebles, but sadly no bass player in the Fulford group.

Despite the absence of a bass player, we've been creative with our arrangements and everyone is encouraged to try different parts. Our sessions are informal and supportive, making it easy for players of varying abilities to participate and enjoy themselves.

So, if anyone who plays bass would like to join our group, please contact our leader, **Elizabeth Bacon**. Email ptbacon8@gmail.com

u3a FILMS PLUS

Size of group – Not sure whether this has a limit since we could easily split into discussions on several tables.

Frequency – Aim for monthly – changed to twice a month

Day and Time – Early evening, around 6pm, on a Tuesday or Wednesday evening

Location – City Screen followed by a bar, probably 'All Bar One' on New Street.

What we do - Watch the film at City Screen and then meet at 'All Bar One' on New Street shortly afterwards for a discussion of the film and of suggestions for future films.

My responsibilities

Check out reviews for upcoming films. Inform group members of the film, date and time, by email and a few by phone.

Facilitate discussion, Collect suggestions.. elisamain@yahoo.co.uk

AUDIO READING GROUP – NEW GROUP

I enjoy listening to literature – books - fiction and non-fiction, podcasts, dramatisations, etc. If you do too would you like to join me in forming an 'Audio Reading Group'?

I propose that we meet at my home on Badger Hill, to the east of York off the Hull Road one Friday each month, 1.45pm-3.15pm.

At our first meeting we will discuss what type of things we enjoy listening to and choose what we will discuss in following meetings.

There will be no charge.

Elisa Main elisamain@yahoo.co.uk **01904 438976**

Jive and Social Dancing

The 'Jive and Social Dancing' sessions have been carrying on successfully throughout the year and we would like to invite newcomers at any time to come along.

All are welcome, particularly couples. However, we could certainly do with more men participating. For details of when and how to find us, please ring:- **Neal Guppy 01904 622 879.**

Answer to Brain Teaser on page 4

Knowing Me Knowing You

u3a visit to Allerton recycling Centre York

u3a Eco Friendly Support and Sustainability Group members visited the Thalia waste recycling plant at Allerton in York on 30th July. Altogether 9 members of Elisa Main's group travelled in three car-loads to the site.

There were strict requirements for dress, which were a bit of an eye-opener for those of the group not used to undertaking industrial site visits. These included the wearing of suitable footwear and clothing, thick soled shoes, no open toes, feet fully covered, with legs covered by trousers or leggings" We were also asked not to wear high heels, which was helpful advice for those group members who might still have a pair languishing in the back of a wardrobe and still able to wear such!

The Thalia hostess gave us a useful and informative talk on aspects of recycling in York before leading us into the plant. We toured and marvelled at all areas, enjoying the chance to discuss aspects and ask questions of the teams managing the various works.



It was amazing to see and hear about the amount of waste generated in York, the procedures for managing and sorting it, and the other elements associated with the work of the Thalia team such as alternate carbon capture and landfill management.

Discussions at the next meeting of Elisa's discussion group on Sustainability on are likely to be very lively. The group meets on the second Friday afternoon of each month.

Discussions are lively - Climate change in York on 12th September - Food on 10th October.

Elisa Main

Water Fitness Group

There are still places for anyone who would like to join our water fitness group. You do not have to be a swimmer! We meet at the Better Energise Pool on Cornlands Road Acomb every Monday (apart from bank holidays) from 1.30 to 2.30pm. The gentle exercises take place in the shallow end, where we have lots of fun whilst contributing to our general fitness. There is time at the beginning and the end of the sessions for a free swim for those who enjoy swimming. The cost is £25 for 8 sessions.

Many of us go to the café afterwards for a hot drink and “get together”. We are a gregarious group, who, like all u3a groups, have made many lasting friendships during our time with the water fitness group.

At the beginning of August, many of us met for lunch at the Black Bull and enjoyed delicious food and lots of chats.

Anyone who would like to join the group, please contact :-

Anne Fox (Group Leader) email anne25fox@gmail.com

Sue Tompkin (Secretary) email sunic911@gmail.com Tel 07894831756



Travel Team News

Your inventive Travel Team have been at it again – we are doing something different for Christmas this year! Our coach will take us to the centre of Beverley, that delightful town with so many independent shops and cafés. Some people may take the opportunity to do some Christmas shopping, but our trip offers you the chance to go to the Minster to experience the Christmas Tree Festival. For a cash payment of £5, it is a bargain! Last year 150 organisations decorated Christmas trees: charities, schools, communities and businesses. The trees are beautiful and very different, with prizes awarded for some outstanding entries. Then once you have had your fill of Beverley's Christmas offerings, the coach will take us to Murton Park where we have arranged a special festive afternoon tea.

We have never done that before, but we have it on good authority that Murton Park's café produces delicious afternoon teas. Do come and join our festive celebration! Details are contained in this Newsmail, with the usual online booking option or printable booking from on our webpage https://york.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/travel-uk/

Our most recent trips have been to Brodsworth Hall and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in July, with good weather and interesting visits, and then to Flamborough Head and a summer lunch at the North Star Hotel in August. The weather at Flamborough started with drizzle and ended in warm sunshine, and most of us enjoyed a walk to see the seals and admire the cliffs there.

The lunch was voted excellent, with the superb sweet trolley that the hotel is renowned for. Full reports of these trips, complete with photos, are available on the Travel page of the website. For those without internet access, there are paper records in the u3a office.

If you have the enthusiasm to contribute to future trips with the Travel Team, there is another article in this Newsmail giving some idea of what we are looking for in new recruits to our team.

Sheila McKilligan

chairtravelukyorku3a@gmail.com

TRAVEL TEAM

Christmas visit to Beverley

Festive Trees and Festive Tea! Tuesday, 9th December 2025

COST OF TRIP: £38.00 to include the cost of coach, Afternoon Tea and driver gratuity

The Travel Team is offering something new and exciting for our December outing. We invite all u3a members to join us for a visit to Beverley Minster's Christmas Tree Festival and then to Murton Park Museum for a festive Afternoon Tea (with optional Prosecco - cost not included).

Our coach will set us down in the centre of the town's inviting cafes and shops. Visits to the Minster (a short walk from the centre) is at your own chosen time and the entry fee will be £5 per person. We will all meet again at 2.15 pm for the journey to the Museum where our tea will await us. We expect to be back in York by 6 o'clock.

Coach pickups are 9.00 Fulford Main Street, opposite Pavilion Hotel; 9.15am Memorial Gardens, Leeman Road; 9.30 Tadcaster Road corner with Middlethorpe Grove.

The u3a Travel UK mobile phone number on the day is:- 07939 601636.

Organiser: Hilary Davies

Bookings close on **28th October**, places will be allocated the next day and a waiting list will be started if the trip is oversubscribed. You will receive confirmation as to whether you have a place or are on the waiting list. Those booking online will need to pay by 3rd November.

To apply for a place:

EITHER complete the **online** booking form on the Travel section of the website (https://york.u3asite.uk/u3a_groups/travel-uk/), a request for payment by bank transfer will be sent to you if allocated a place

OR complete a **paper** booking form and send it with a cheque, which will not be cashed until the place has been confirmed. Paper forms are available to download from the website or can be collected from the office. Should you have any query please ring Lorrae on 07967 128 321.

Your booking is a commitment to pay if allocated a place. If you cancel, then you are released from payment only if a replacement can be found. All travellers must be York u3a members.

Socials, events and volunteering

Saturday Socials usually take place on the fourth Saturday of each month (with some variation depending on room availability) at the Friends Meeting House, typically alternating between informative and engaging talks and social events where members can play card or strategic games. Admission is £3 to include tea/coffee and biscuits and all these do need to be booked in advance to help us manage numbers. We now have the full programme for Socials for 2025 and preliminary information leading into 2026 on the website, so please do take a look.

What's Coming Up Soon

On **Saturday 25th October starting at 10am** we will have the usual Saturday "Games Social" - typically, the morning starts with a half hour of chatting/gossiping over some coffee/tea and the odd biscuit, followed by about two hours of board games such as Scrabble, Canasta, Rummikub, Ticket to Ride, plus any games brought along by enthusiastic participants (new games always welcomed!!). Members participating for the first time will always feel very welcome as the session is fully hosted and it is a great opportunity to meet like-minded members and make new friends. We were delighted that so many new members came to the last Games Social so would love to see this continue. Watch out for the email and please register to attend as spaces may be limited.

On **Saturday 22nd November starting at 10am** we have a talk by **Richard Taylor** (known to many of us as History Man) who will give a talk entitled "**Rhyme or Reason - Not everything you have learned to recite is child's play**"

Does your memory of nursery rhymes fill you with childhood nostalgia for tea, crumpets, playgrounds and swings? Before you find yourself dewy-eyed, there's more to those cherished narratives than simple entertainment. So be warned. Gleaned from archives and the internet, Richard will share with you some disturbing discoveries.

Richard is a retired freelance writer, working in the museum sector, whose past projects included the Museum in Docklands, Woodhorn Mining Museum, Dynamic Earth and HMS Caroline in Belfast.

Continued on page 15

From Page 14

This promises to be an extremely entertaining talk and we do hope as many of you as possible will be able to make it – again do watch out for the email and make sure to register to attend as spaces will be limited

Feedback always welcome

Thank you so much to all the members who have already contacted me with feedback or ideas. We are currently still planning our programme for 2026, so if you have a special interest that you would love to share with us, or know of anyone else who might be able to give an interesting presentation do let me know on

eventsleadyorku3a@gmail.com.

Why not get more involved?

We always require new volunteers to help out or take the place of others who are no longer able to undertake this work, so if you do find yourself with some time to spare, please do get in touch for an informal chat. For very specific requirements for volunteers we will continue to send out emails requesting assistance and explaining exactly what is required

Beryl Oppenheim (Events and Volunteering Lead)

The Singing Together Group

We are looking for a new leader. Principally this means someone with the ability to play the keyboard for a group of people who sing for fun. That is to say, there is no music-reading or harmony required and obviously no audition.

The group was set up several years ago by Margot Blanchard, who compiled a number of extensive folders of popular songs. This collection has been supplemented by the present leader, who will be happy to provide explanation and introduction to anyone who's interested.

This cheerful and companionable group has been a pleasure to work with, and members willingly help to put out or put away the equipment. We meet on the second and fifth Friday of the month, from 1.30 to 3.30. If you're interested please contact:-

Peter Wells at petermiwells@gmail.com or 07871 478891

YORK U3A MAP READING & NAVIGATION GROUP

Session: Wednesdays 16 July – 20 August 2025

Venue: Welburn Village Hall, Church Lane, Welburn, York YO60 7EG

Group Leaders: Tania Dickinson & Ann Simpson

This York u3a group which was founded in August last year, is now flourishing and has recently completed the latest session which was a five week course which took place on a Wednesday from 10.30 am at Welburn Village Hall through July and August. Ten people signed up to do this course.

Our leaders, Tania Dickinson and Ann Simpson, offered a very well planned and structured course to a group of 10 u3a participants in the lovely Welburn Village Hall for a morning information and activity session together, followed by chatting over our picnic lunches. After a picnic lunch at the Village Hall, we all went 'out in the fields and woods' together to gain practical experience of map and compass reading. As always, Tania & Ann were on hand to help where needed.



The participants are a very varied bunch of people. Some skilled already in the art of map reading, but others, like myself, knew absolutely nothing at all about it and started from 'scratch'. However, Tania and Ann took us 'by the hand' and gradually unlocked the secrets of the Ordnance Survey Map in a logical and comprehensible way. Handouts were given in advance for each session and also homework given to revise what had been taught.



As with everything, however, practice makes perfect, and the practical lessons we received on the walks after the classroom sessions were invaluable. The walks took place in the beautiful surroundings of Welburn, where Tania and Ann helped to bring the invaluable knowledge, held in the Ordnance Survey maps, to life, and also how to master the ever hovering compass needle and decipher its meaning.

Continued on page 17

From page 16

At the last session, which took place on Wednesday 20th August, it was fascinating to learn from the other participants' experiences and knowledge.

Also, Tania and Ann were also open to listen to any suggestions participants had to offer to improve the course.



We were then divided into two groups, one person in each to take a session as Group Leader for a space of time. We were thoroughly drilled on the expectations & requirements of this position before leaving. These were written up on the board for all to see. Two walks were chosen in the Terrington area, and our group was divided, each to take on part of one of the walks.

What a lot of ground we covered! Our afternoon sessions put all that into practice literally, where, armed with the morning's information and handouts, we set off to navigate a short walk and complete the tasks related to our learning.

At the end of our day of navigation, we all repaired for welcome refreshments in the Dogh cafe in Welburn Main Street:

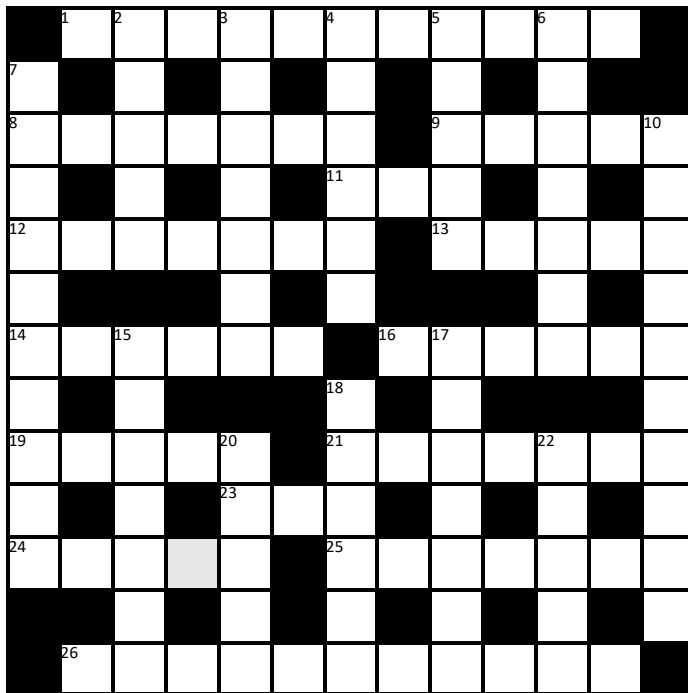


There we debriefed our learning together with our leaders. The whole course was extremely rewarding, informative and it was fun!. Tania and Ann were excellent leaders to facilitate our learning in a participative manner whilst providing essential and practical information and introducing the skills involved in Map Reading and Navigation.

On the last day of this session, Bill presented Tania & Ann each with a card and some flowers on behalf of all the participants to express our admiration and thanks for all the hard work they had put in to making the course so enjoyable and beneficial.



Caroline Boom



ACROSS

1. Clandestine worker from satellite boat (11) 8. Wild mad tune (7)
 9. Edward's mother paired off (5) 11. Headless rodents are frozen (3).
 12. Hoarding at the north gate (7). 13. Sketch plan sounds a breeze (5).
 14. Royal Academy meal for salad days (6). 16. Against endless deed (6).
 19. Wined around Northumbrian king (5). 21. Outing allowed one of a
 trio to appear (7) 23. Atmosphere found on a G-string (3). 24. Fragment
 found in hut round river (5). 25. Eastern winner throws out (7). 26. Can
 poser regain a place on the stage? (5,6)

DOWN

2. A host can swear them (5). 3. Anaesthetics can be totted up (7). 4.
 Ten eat the antiseptic (6). 5. Housed hospital with broken dome (5). 6.
 Former pamphlet to withdraw (7). 7. Fans swallow carriers (10). 10. Des
 keeps farm vehicles for those who diminish (10). 15. Maybe we'd prod a
 little drip (7). 17. Duck feather for a point of view (7). 18. Strain accent
 (6). 20. Broken drain at the very bottom (5). 22. The flat heater holds a
 machine tool (5)

Brian Waddington

Digital Photography Group



Anita Hannam



Kate Kieran



Simon Eedle

Eric Smith



A poem by Antony Ridge

Oh helicopter!

You swing low, sweet helicopter, over us:
Why swoop so low o'erhead our house?
Is it World War III? A monarch's death?
First aid to one with failing breath?
Honest wretch on way to torture cell
Who would prove, if heard, the lies police tell?
Deal-hovering developer?
Important personage? Or mariner,
Snatched from the jaws of a raging sea?
Or the pilot going home for tea?
Saviour on whom our hopes are built?
Or eye in sky filming our suburb's guilt?
Go, clatter on your busy way,
Leave me in peace for the day.

WORLD'S SHORTEST PILGRIMAGE?

To start the 'academic year of 25-26 the Exploring the Bible group undertook a mini pilgrimage focusing on the life of the York Saint, Margaret Clitherow.



We started in the Bar Convent on Blossom Street, where we listened to a fascinating talk about the life and times of Margaret by Dr Hannah Thomas, and inspected a macabre relic of the Saint – a withered hand

Walking down Micklegate we soon arrived at Ousebridge, where a plaque commemorates the martyrdom of Margaret in 1586 for the crime of treason. A convert to Roman Catholicism, she was considered an enemy of the State because she did not attend worship in the Established Church and sheltered fugitive Roman Catholic priests. The method of execution was by pressing her down on a sharp rock with huge weights.



Not long afterwards we swung into Conyey Street to visit St Martin's Church, where Margaret was baptized into the Established Church. She married a local butcher, a man of standing in the city, who stood by her after she converted in 1574, though he himself remained Protestant.

Continued on page 21

From page 20

We completed the mini pilgrimage by arriving at the Shrine of St Margaret in the Shambles, which is a good place to sit and meditate.



Finally, at the conclusion of our .6-mile trek we repaired to the Earl Grey Tearooms for refreshments and a chat.

It wasn't the Camino de Santiago, but it brought us together in a common enterprise to relax together and share our thoughts and news prior to the coming year of study.

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD ANSWERS

ACROSS

1. Moonlighter. 8. Untamed. 9. Mated. 11. Ice. 12. Postern. 13. Draft. 14. Radish.

16. Contra. 19. Edwin. 21. Triplet. 23. Air. 24. Shred. 25. Evictor. 26. Opera Singer.

DOWN

2. Oaths. 3. Numbers. 4. Iodine. 5. Homed. 6. Extract. 7. Supporters. 10. Detractors.

15. Radish. 17. Opinion. 18. Stress. 20. Nadir. 22. Lathe.

The Twilight Zone.

I call it the 'Twilight Zone' - that curious period of phoney war which runs from the autumn equinox, around the twenty second of September, to the clocks going back in the last week of October. The leaves are turning colour but have not yet fallen. The weather is mild and daylight still lingers through the early evening. This is not winter; not yet. This is merely the absence of summer.

It's a good time of year to go running. Light evenings. Nice temperature. There is a temptation to wish the time away. Winter is obviously on its way so let's get it over with. But these last few weeks are precious. Make the most of them.

I never know, at the start of a run, how it will go. Will my knees ache? Will that ankle injury play up again? Will I feel full of energy or just slog round pulling dead weight?

But occasionally, I just feel like cutting loose, and the sheer adrenaline gives me an unexpectedly fast time. Each time that happens, I wonder if I will ever run that fast again. So I set off, steadily at first, testing how my legs feel. They are creaking a bit today but it feels good to be out. When you're into your seventies and still running, you're on borrowed time and you are just grateful still to be able to do such things.

Over the bridge and down onto the cycle track that used to be a railway line. The relatively clean air along here carries the scent of the autumn trees which always reminds me of school, which is strange considering we were there all year round, but there was a strip of woodland adjoining the playing field where I noticed, perhaps for the first time, how much stronger woodland scents became in the autumn. My appreciation of this, as I'm running along, is, however, rudely interrupted when I pass a couple of people walking and get a sudden blast of their deodorant. From another I get cigarette smoke.

I reach the half way point and turn round. A slow time. Last week I did my fastest time for nearly a year. Today my time is going to be well adrift but I'll make it easily to the end and feel good for days afterward. To achieve the distance is a success in itself.

In another few weeks, the winter will close in. The cold will make running less pleasant and sometimes the underfoot conditions render it impossible. But for now, I am enjoying the autumn... ..while it lasts.

John Walford. walford1649@gmail.com

THE WEST FRIESLAND ISLANDS

Islomania, an enthusiasm for islands, is a passion I need to feed, especially with my bicycle. So we set off for the string of islands curving round The Netherlands north coast: Texel, Vlieland, Terschelling, Ameland, and Schiermonnikoog, known collectively as the West Freiland Islands. I'd cycled on Texel before with its 140 kms of cycle paths, dunes, forest, heath, beaches, mudflats, and its birdlife, especially Spoonbill colonies. This time we circumnavigated the island stopping at one of the lovely beach shack cafes and taking in the island architecture and landscape.

In July and August ferries link most of the islands but in June only the Texel to Vlieland cyclists ferry was operating. From Texel we boarded the ferry with fifty other cyclists, disembarking at the bottom end of Vlieland on the vast sand bank that covers about one third of the island, and known locally as 'The Sahara of the North, transferring to a huge all terrain vehicle complete with trailer to carry the bikes! Ten miles over the sand later we arrived at the Posthys hotel at the end of the island's road, our accommodation for a couple of nights.

Vlieland is a delight, the Jewel in the crown with its quiet lanes and cycle paths through the sand dunes. Cycling the east coast first and with the tide out the Wadden Sea had almost emptied, leaving sailing boats high and dry in the mud, and spoonbills having a feast. We stopped at the only village, Oust Vlieland for coffee, then continued down the west side back to the Posthys, the whole way dotted with thatched holiday homes.

From Vlieland we caught the ferry back to the mainland, it was Midsummer's Day and hundreds of classic sailing boats were afloat, as we made our way to Harlingen. We didn't get to Terschelling nor Schiermonnikoog, our next island was Ameland. Very much a holiday island it had a different atmosphere; agricultural with small villages scattered around the island. High winds characterised our stay with the North Sea grey and bleak and drifting sand stinging our legs, whilst on the Wadden Sea thousands of redshanks were feeding.

There is a wildness about these islands, where time slows down so if you too suffer from Islomania, and love beach cafes and birdlife, sand dunes and cycle paths, go to the West Freiland Islands.

By Sandy D. Franklin

How do you solve a problem like Corncrakes?

(With apologies to Rogers and Hammerstein)

The UK population of Corncrakes has steadily declined until, as of 2023, only 870 calling males were recorded. These are now found mainly in the Hebrides, where once they were commonplace throughout the UK's countryside. The RSPB's frustration in supporting the birds population might well be reflected in the line sung by Mother Abbess about '*flibbertigibbet, will-o-the-wisp*' [Corncrake]; "*How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?*"

To better understand the problems facing Corncrakes and to gain an insight into the programme, Birding Group Leaders Harold and Adele Morris arranged a visit to the Lower Derwent Valley National Nature Reserve (LDVNNR). Ten birders met Senior National Reserve Manager Craig Ralston from Natural England, to hear a detailed account of the Corncrakes life cycle, the unintended but catastrophic consequences of modern farming practices, and the critical undertakings necessary for a successful breeding and re-populating programme.

The Corncrake itself, is a Blackbird sized bird, similar in stance to Coots, Moorhens and Water Rails, but superbly camouflaged in the fields. It's summer habitat is among the hay meadows and corn fields, silently skulking among the long grasses, eating seeds and insects, darting rather than flying as it feeds and breeds. Around late August/early September it migrates to the Eastern parts of South Africa, before returning again to the UK late April/early May. The ancient practice of cutting hay in July allowed the birds to arrive, mate and breed under cover while the slow speed of cutting allowed birds to dart away from the approaching blades.

However, with early twentieth century populations growing and wartime pressures on UK farming to produce more, mechanised harvesting began. Later, the widespread adoption of silage as a feed crop saw farms cut grass in late May and June while breeding was in full swing; the advent of bigger and faster tractors meant less time taken to harvest, and more significantly, no chance for the birds to out run the blades. These changes, coupled with an increasingly perilous 10,000 mile migration and return has decimated the numbers.

So how is the problem solved?

Firstly, Craig explained that for many years Corncrakes, initially sourced from the Hebrides, have been captive bred, in a purpose built centre in Norfolk. Captivity involves being moved between two different areas (to mimic migration movements) providing African temperatures and 'sunshine'.

Next, following several and varied setbacks in other parts of the country, over many years, LDVNR was identified and chosen to initiate a further attempt. Its mix of habitat, well above flood levels and, in partnership with local farms, is cut only in July leaving cover friendly margins. Given the go-ahead on 1st March 2025, Craig called on the LDVNNR volunteer team (Friends of LDV), and sponsor partners, to create 16 predator proof pens suitable for hosting separated batches of young Corncrakes

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margins. Given the go-ahead on 1st March 2025, Craig called on the LD

Phase one was based on the known behaviour of parent Corncrakes abandoning their offspring once 12 days old. Junior being left to build up body mass for migration over the next 35 days. Craig would drive and collect a clutch of birds, 14 day-old, during the night so as not to unduly stress them and then release them into one of the newly built pens. He repeated the trip regularly during the breeding season, garnered around 80 birds in total.

Phase two saw feeding and monitoring of the fledglings in preparation for release and migration. The first week saw trap door feeding with high nutrition feed pellets and meal worms alongside parasite treatments in the drinking water, thereby aiding strong growth. The next two weeks saw the diet altered in preparation for a more natural diet in the wild; often requiring volunteers to sweep meadows with nets to capture small insects which were then introduced to the pens for the birds to discover and pounce upon. a further attempt. Its mix of habitat, well above flood levels and, in partnership with local farms, is cut only in July leaving cover friendly



Phase three, prior to release, the birds are ringed and colour-ringed, given a veterinarian health check, DNA swabbed and (for a small sample of birds), fitted with tracking tags.

Outcome? Initial data from the tracking is encouraging. The birds roamed the margins and then set off in the darkness, around 1030pm for South Africa when between 41-47 days old.

Next year will reveal whether any successfully survived the trip and think of the LDVNNR as home.

Postscript.

All that is left now is to hope that some of the birds return next Spring. To that end, Craig would like to hear of any findings of Corncrakes, whether hearing the call (a rasping 'crek-crek') or discovery of a body. Contact him on craig.ralston@naturalengland.org.uk

The programme has cost around £75,000. While individual donations, partner sponsorships and the services of the Friends of LDV have supplied much of it, further contributions are always welcomed.

If you would like to join in with the Friends of LDV, contact Craig as above.

Michael Wajdner

FRIDAY the THIRTEENTH Part 1 – The Background Story

It was with some reluctance and a sense of foreboding that Flt Sgt Joe Hitchman of 158 Sqn along with his 6-man crew boarded HP Halifax LV907 in the evening of 30 March 1944 at RAF Lissett near Bridlington for a raid on Nurnberg in Germany. Their reluctance was because of their disappointment at being recalled just as they were leaving the camp for a well-deserved rest break at the half-way point of their tour. Their foreboding was because they

would not be flying their usual aircraft 'G for George' as it had been allocated to Sqn Ldr S D Jones DFC. Instead they had been given LV907, a newly arrived replacement aircraft and the eighth one on 158 Sqn to carry 'F for Freddie'



as the Sqn designator. All the previous 'F for Freddie's' had been lost to enemy action and the previous seven had only averaged 3 operational sorties each! Crews were reluctant to fly 'Freddie the 8th' including Joe's crew.

At 2203 hours Joe hauled the heavy Halifax into the air in the fourth wave to join the stream of 795 bombers. It would not be a good night for Bomber Command as 95 aircraft were lost on this raid, one of the worst of the war. Of the 19 dispatched by 158 Sqn 4 failed to return, including 'G for George', but Freddie landed safely at 0534 on the 31st after an uneventful trip with a very relieved Joe at the controls and 6 relieved crew with him.

After several more uneventful missions 'Freddie' was taken on as the regular aircraft of Plt Off Cliff Smith who was a down to earth, no nonsense type who did not believe in superstition so took the 'curse of F for Freddie' head on and with typical RAF black humour christened the aircraft 'Friday the Thirteenth'. Fitter LAC Jack Wicks was asked to paint the name below the cockpit and then added other artwork to provoke the jinx; an upside down horse-shoe, .

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The Grim Reaper complete with bloody scythe, a skull and cross bones and even a ladder over the crew entrance door! The crew even awarded the aircraft with a series of medals painted after the name including the VC.

Freddie continued unscathed until 1 July 1944 when on an operation to a V1 launch site at Oisemont, a flak shell burst nearby starting a fire on-board and causing a shrapnel injury to the Navigator, Plt Off King. The fire was extinguished and Plt Off King stayed at his plotting table until they were clear of enemy territory. Despite encounters with night fighters over the next months the missions mounted up with raids to targets including Dusseldorf, Essen and Hanover, supporting the Normandy Landings and operations into France and Belgium supporting the Allied advance. Freddie's final operational sortie was to bomb the coastal gun batteries on Wangrooge Island on 25 Apr 1945. This was the 128th operation and made 'F for Freddie' a true survivor and the Halifax with the most operational sorties of WW2.

After VE day Freddie was dismantled and displayed in London outside the John Lewis store but, just as at the start of the war the population had given their metal objects to the war effort, at the end of the war they wanted their pots and pans back. So LV907 was delivered to Clifton Moor airfield near York, broken up and melted down to make those pots and pans with little or no thought to preserving such a notable airframe for the future. In fact, of the over 6000 built, there are no complete and original Halifax airframes to see anywhere in the world. True the Halifax in the RAF Museum at Hendon is 'complete' but it is in an 'as found' state after many years underwater in a Norwegian lake and looks like it is made of lace rather than metal. And yes, there is a reconstruction project in Canada at Trenton using a similar find to the RAF Museums exhibit but it will be years before it looks whole again, however, you can see a 'bitsa full size reconstruction' at the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington near York. Part 2 of this article will describe the reconstruction of YAM's Halifax

Erik Smith