

Syston and District

u3a

learn, laugh, live

AUG

2026

Vitality!

Official newsletter of the Syston and District u3a

CHARITY No 1180152

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Hi Everyone,

Well, the nights are starting to draw in to remind us that summer is coming to an end.

We have just finished the last of our 4 summer fetes and I would like to take the opportunity to thank Jill, Barabara, Jenny, Indigo and Dave for all their help and time they have given to the success of the fetes.

Now is a very good time to start thinking about any new groups you would like to consider joining through the winter months. Don't forget the display boards will be up for you to see at our next Members meeting.

Clive

WE WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW

HAVE A QUERY? WANT TO SPEAK TO SOMEONE?

Occasionally, some members (or potential members) may prefer to speak to someone about an aspect of our u3a, rather than locating an email address or looking on our website.

So, we now have a contact number for Syston & District u3a, which is:



0300 102 1381

At the moment, this number goes through to Steve Kenney's (Webmaster) mobile phone, and if he is unable to answer the query, then he can advise who to contact.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

RENEWAL NOTICES have been sent out.

Please check email spam/junk in case the message ends up there.

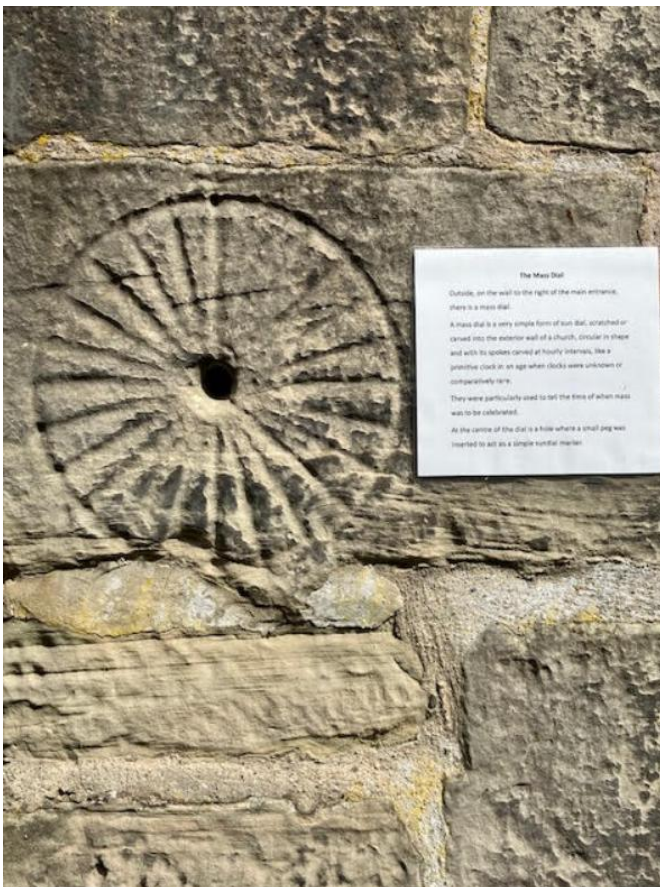
If you prefer to pay via card, please bring your card along to our General Meeting in October at Syston community centre, 9.45am or after the meeting 11.30am.

GROUP NEWS

NEW GROUP IDEAS

If you have any ideas for a new group, please contact Barbara Sargeant our groups co-ordinator sadu3agroups@gmail.com or speak to her at one of our monthly general meetings. Alternatively contact her assistant Angie Baker email sadu3agroupsasst@gmail.com Acting as a group organiser doesn't have to be onerous, it doesn't have to be down to just one person, and it doesn't mean you have to organise everything the group does.

POSSIBLE NEW GROUP – CHURCH ARCHITECTURE



Whilst out with our Photography group I saw this very interesting feature on the side of the Church in Thornton. It is a Mass Dial; a simple form of sun dial used in an age when clocks were unknown or rare. By putting a small peg in the hole, the time could be read. I wonder if anyone has an interest in **Church architecture**? Maybe a few of us could get together and discover more about this fascinating subject.

Please email me sadu3agroups@gmail.com if this is something you would like to follow up on. We have lots of local churches just waiting for us to discover.



New Proposed Group

Indoor Carpet Bowls

After the success of the

One Off Event

Venue Syston Community

Centre



It will be on a Friday Morning

The room is booked for the 18th September.

12 people maximum - **If you are interested please**

email Barbara - sadu3agroups@gmail.com

email Angie - sadu3agroupsassist@gmail.com

2ND TAI CHI GROUP

This 2nd group is now full, but you can go on a waiting list.

LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

The group looked at the history of Syston Railway Junction and the village stations that operated along the lines to Loughborough and Melton Mowbray.

Some of you may be able to name several of those stations, but can you name them all? The Midland Mainline to Loughborough and beyond has the revived Barrow on Soar and Sileby stations that reopened at the same time as Syston in 1994, but there was another station on that line for a few years – Cossington Gates. It only operated from 1846 until 1873.



The line to Melton had village stations at Rearsby, Brooksby, Frisby and Asfordby, but can you name the other station that only operated for a few years? It was Queniborough Halt. It wasn't a station that the general public could use, only those who worked at the Royal Ordnance Factory during and just after World War 2 used it to commute to work. For those who may not be aware, that factory site is now the village of East Goscote. There is still a short section of track that was deliberately retained - pictured left.

Next month we plan to look at the history of Barkby Road cemetery and the keeper's lodge.

ART GROUP

The art group have been producing quite a few different pieces of work over the past month as we didn't have a theme set. I have included some examples of the artwork here.







BOOK GROUP

The book group met as usual at the Britannia to discuss *The Midnight Feast* by Lucy Foley. We generally found this book very confusing, a bit far-fetched but entertaining and in main we enjoyed it. It was set at a time when the main characters were in their teens and also later when they were adults. The story revolved around the characters of the people concerned at both times in their lives, with a 'cult of blackbirds', a house fire and death. Weirdly enjoyable! This month we are reading *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes.

FAMILY HISTORY GROUP

We were a little thin on the ground at the August meeting, but we made use of the free library access to Findmypast, Ancestry and the British Newspaper Archive and helped each other to find and interpret information about our families.

One of our new members has Irish ancestry and was using some free sites to further her research. Contrary to popular myth, it isn't impossible to research such families, just a bit more difficult. So, if

you have Irish family connections, it may still be possible to find out more about them. We can help you do that, but only if you join the group.

As a reminder - we meet on the 3rd Tuesday each month at Syston Library 10.15 – 12.15. If you want to join us or have any questions please contact me, email juliedjohnson@yahoo.com

CRAFT GROUP

The craft group has been busy with various projects of their own plus our joint project for this year which is focusing on Christmas. We had Marie growing, carding and weaving flax and we now have a picture of the finished product, also there are some examples of our Christmas decorations, a couple of examples of needle felted pictures and some crocheted items.





LITTER PICKING GROUP

Some of the 8 bags of rubbish and other items collected from Whiles Lane and Meadow Lane, Birstall this morning by the U3A litter picking group.

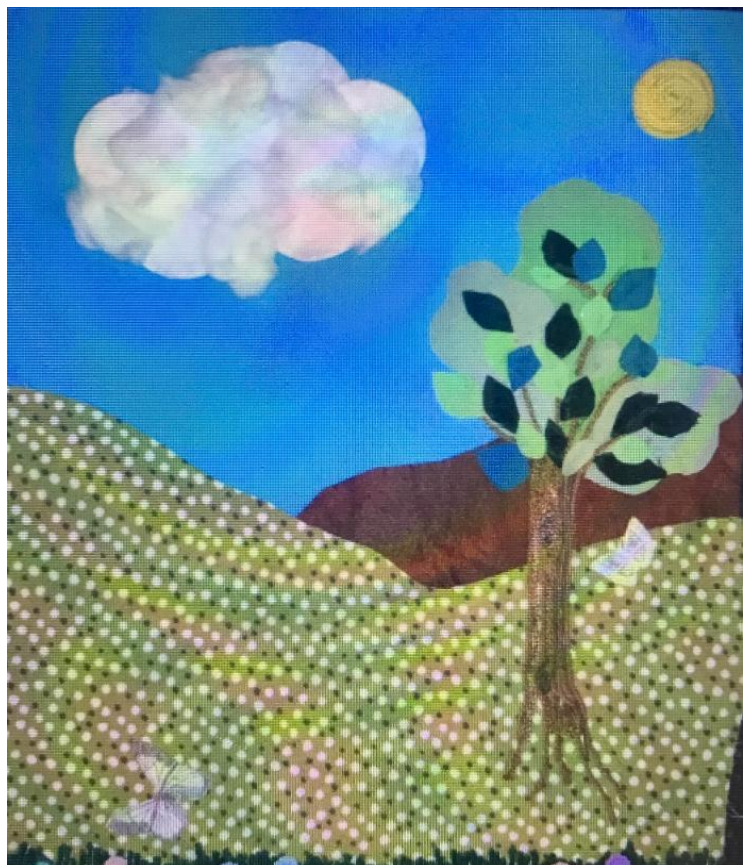


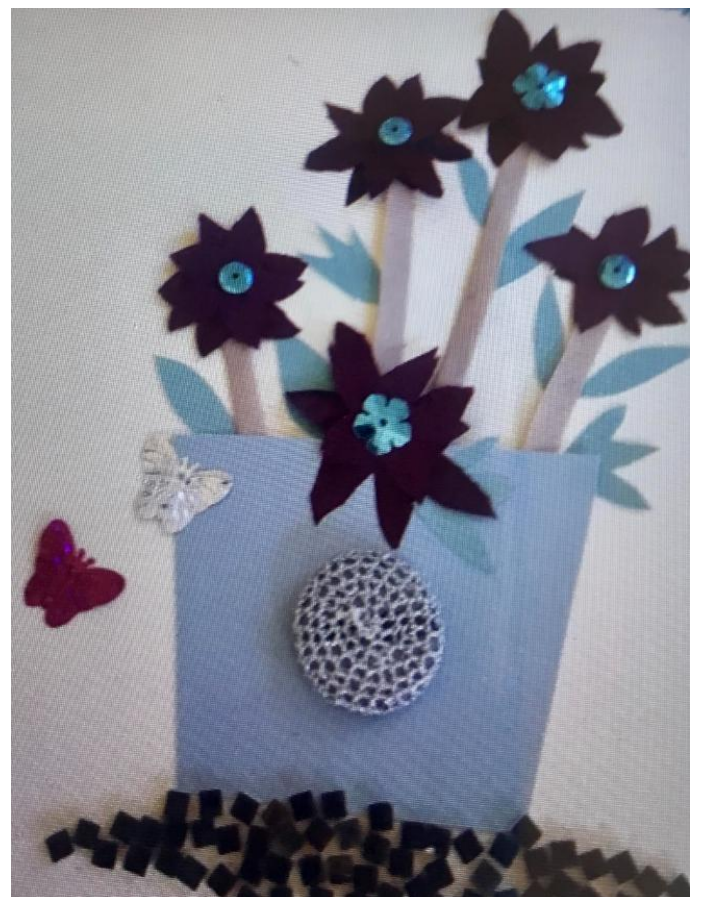
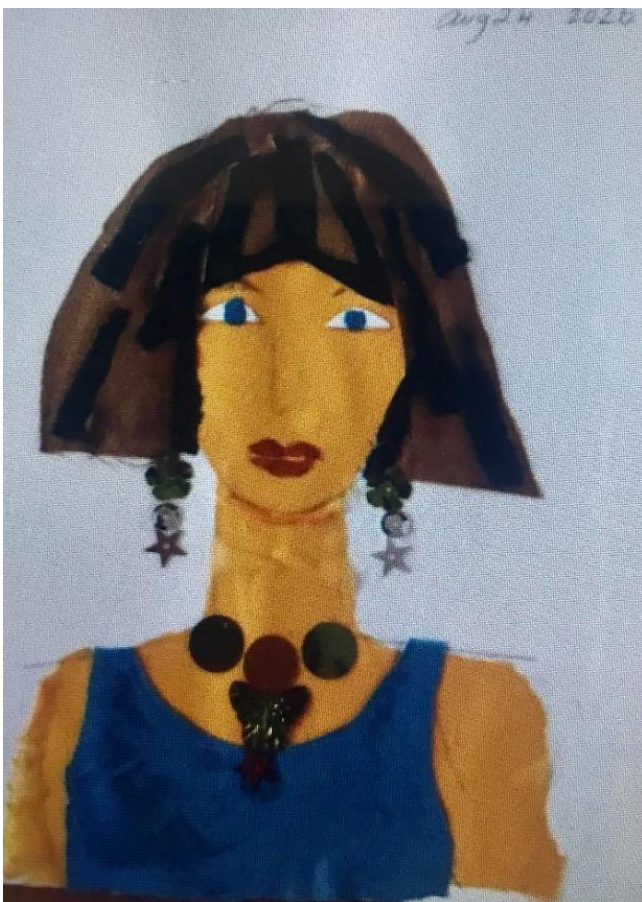
PAINTING & DRAWING GROUP

We have some spaces in the group if you are interested in trying us out.

We meet every other Monday 10-12am (7th & 21st September, 5th and 19th October) at the Old School Room in Syston Community Centre. Come along and see what we are doing and have a chat with group leaders Marion or Helen and maybe have a go. We have paints brushes etc. for members to use, and we aim to base the group on all levels of experience.

Last meeting we tried Collage using textiles. Here are some examples –





EVENTS – PAST, PRESENT & PLANNED

NEWS FROM THE DESERT ISLAND

16 members met in August on another desert Island with music at the ready and stories to tell.

What tales were told! Such a lot of reminiscences.

The power of music moves us all in one way or another.

Luxury items ranged from a Piano, to a torch, to a full painting kit.

The chosen books were varied from novels to practical books on survival.

The music choice was so special to each person, so, Rock and Roll, Crooners, and Comical ones.

We witnessed a stunning performance from Joyce and John who "signed" to "Unchanged Melody"

We heard some songs we haven't heard in years and some we didn't know at all.

Who knows "Englebert The Elephant" by Tom Paxon? Look it up!

So for £3 we had music, dancing, laughter, drinks and Cake.

We have had a request to do it again but I'm afraid that will have to wait until next year.

Thanks to all who helped setting up and tidying up at the end.

Barbara



WHAT'S ON NEXT

GENERAL MEETINGS

In the Brookside Room at the Community Centre – talks usually start 10.30am
Tea/coffee and mingling from 10.00am



Wed, Oct 14 at 10:30 AM

BRIDGESCAPES OF SCOTLAND

👍 Going

A journey celebrating Scotland's bridge and bridge-building heritage. A talk by Bruce Keith.



Wed Nov 11th @ 10.30 AM

Lynda Hill talks about Project Linus UK, which provides love, a sense of security, warmth and comfort to children, who are sick, disabled, disadvantaged or distressed by donating gifts of NEW, **HOMEMADE, WASHABLE** quilts and blankets, lovingly made by UK volunteer knitters and quilters.

Wed Dec 9th @ 10.30am

Christmas Social – more details nearer the time.

NATIONAL U3A ITEMS

u3a TALKS



Life in your smallest rooms: the history of personal hygiene

Learn about the history and science of washing, shaving and personal hygiene, with David of Wrekin u3a and Wolverhampton u3a.

Wednesday 16 September at 10am

Free – online via Zoom



The Enchanted Archipelago – a journey through the Galapagos

Join HX Ambassador Monty Halls as he tells the remarkable story of this most iconic of archipelagos and learn about the wildlife and history.

Tuesday 22 September at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom

A u3a week event



Mods versus rockers: a 1960s 'moral panic'?

In the early 1960s, most young people defined themselves as either 'mods' or 'rockers'. Jack Fawbert charts the development of this phenomenon.

Thursday 1 October at 2pm

Free – online via Zoom

u3a Rewind

Phil Sellens from East Sussex, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

Book [here](#)

More talks can be found [here](#)



Explore our research into the transformative potential of the u3a model. We heard from over 800 members from across the UK about the impact of the movement on the quality of their lives.

Our findings demonstrated the exceptional impact of the non-formal learning model on wellbeing in terms of boosting confidence, combatting loneliness, feeling supported in new communities, learning new skills and, perhaps most important of all, feeling valued and enjoying life.

You can download your copy of the report below.

[Learning not lonely report \(628.74 KB\)](#)

NOT u3a BUT YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED

20 September @ 9:00 am – 4:00 pm Classic car meets @ Hollands Nurseries

Classic car meets @ Hollands Nurseries

Holland Nurseries Tilton Road, Twyford, Melton Mowbray, United Kingdom

The Classic car meet at The Welcome Cafe, Holland Nurseries Melton Mowbray. Every third Sunday of the month until October. Cafe and vintage shop open from 9am, Nursery open from 10am.



3 October @ 10:00 am – 4 October @ 4:00 pm

East Midlands Food Festival 2026

Venue: Stockyard Melton Mowbray, United Kingdom

The Food Festival has been going for 22 years and is a showcase of food from across the East Midlands and beyond. With around 200 stalls from the East Midlands and beyond, a Food Theatre with professional chefs, a Kids Food Zone and street food dishes from around the world, the festival is a wonderful day out for the whole family.



HERITAGE WEEKEND EXHIBITION AT THORNTON

12th September – 13th September

St Peter's Church, Church Lane, Thornton, LE67 1AA

[Book now](#)



THE BUILDINGS ARCHAEOLOGIST – DR JAMES WRIGHT

11th October

The Guildhall, Guildhall Lane, Leicester, LE1 5FQ

[Book now](#)



600 YEARS SAVED: THE HISTORY AND RESCUE OF LEICESTER GUILDHALL

18th September

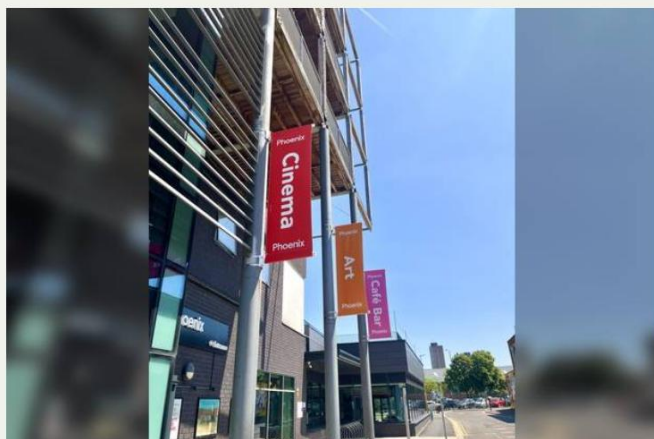
The Guildhall, Guildhall Lane, Leicester, LE1 5FQ

A DOG'S LIFE

19th September - 15th November

Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, 53 New Walk, Leicester, LE1 7EA

[Book now](#)



SUNDAY JAZZ

4th October - 4th April

Phoenix Cinema and Art Centre, 4 Midland Street, Leicester, LE1 1TG

[Book now](#)

FREE!

 **Sat, 19th Sep 2026 - Sun, 20th Sep 2026 on Saturdays and Sundays**

 **Loughborough Heritage Sites**

Loughborough Heritage Open Weekend Venues open at no charge on Loughborough Heritage Open Weekend on 19th and 20th September, walks may be on different dates.

Promotional Market Stalls on September 12th, 19th and 20th

FROM OUR MEMBERS

The Story of the Redcar “Guy” Gansey



Family history throws up a lot of surprises. Despite being born in the landlocked East Midlands I am proud to find that I have distant maritime links to both the explorer Captain James Cook*, and the heroic lifeboatman William Guy*. Cook's story is well known but the story of William Guy less so, he however is the inspiration behind the unique Redcar "Guy" gansey.

William Guy was born in Redcar in 1795. He married Mary Wilson in 1818 and together they had five children. William was a religious man whose occupation was as a marine pilot; he was also a volunteer lifeboatman.



"The Launch" (of the Zetland) by John Freeman

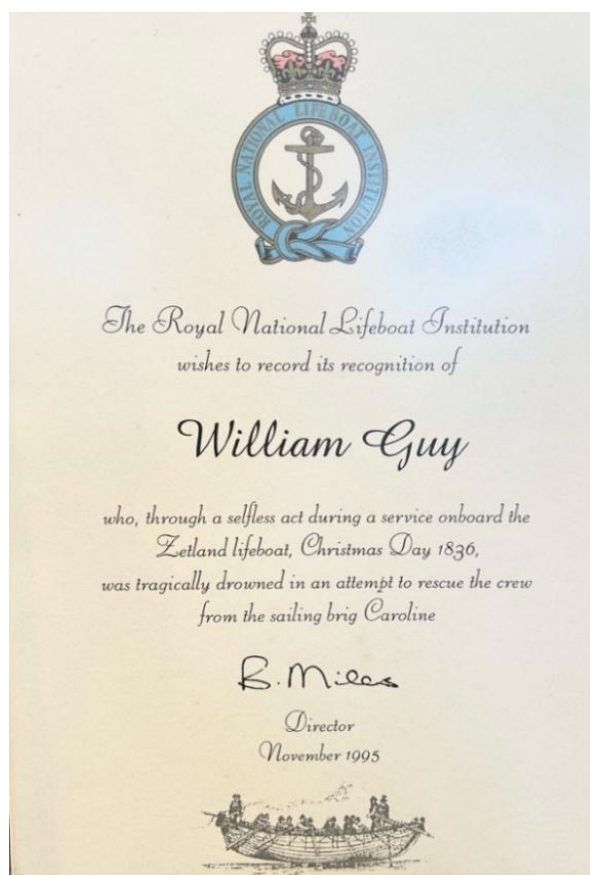
On Christmas Day 1836 a severe storm blew up and the Danish brig the "Caroline" from Aalborg, was floundering close to Redcar's Salt Scar rocks. It was decided to launch Redcar's "Zetland" lifeboat, and the call went out to summon a crew. William left his family in chapel, and he formed part of the lifeboat crew which rowed out to the stricken "Caroline" battling against gale force winds and waves.

William's job was as bowman, and he was tasked with standing in the bow of the "Zetland" and throwing a line over to help the stricken brig. At that crucial moment the lifeboat was overcome by mountainous raging seas and William was washed overboard.

The lifeboat and the rest of her exhausted crew were washed ashore, but William was drowned and lost at sea. The crew of the "Caroline" had also perished. William's body was found 17 days later, at Sandy Wyke, Staithes, around 15 miles away. He was subsequently buried in March 1837 at St Peter's Church, Redcar. William Guy was the only Redcar lifeboatman to lose his life whilst on duty. The "Zetland" lifeboat is the oldest surviving lifeboat in the world and can be seen at Redcar's Zetland Lifeboat Museum (www.zetlandlifeboat.co.uk).

William's gallant efforts were later recognised by the RNLI and his name appears on the memorial outside of the RNLI Training Centre in Poole.

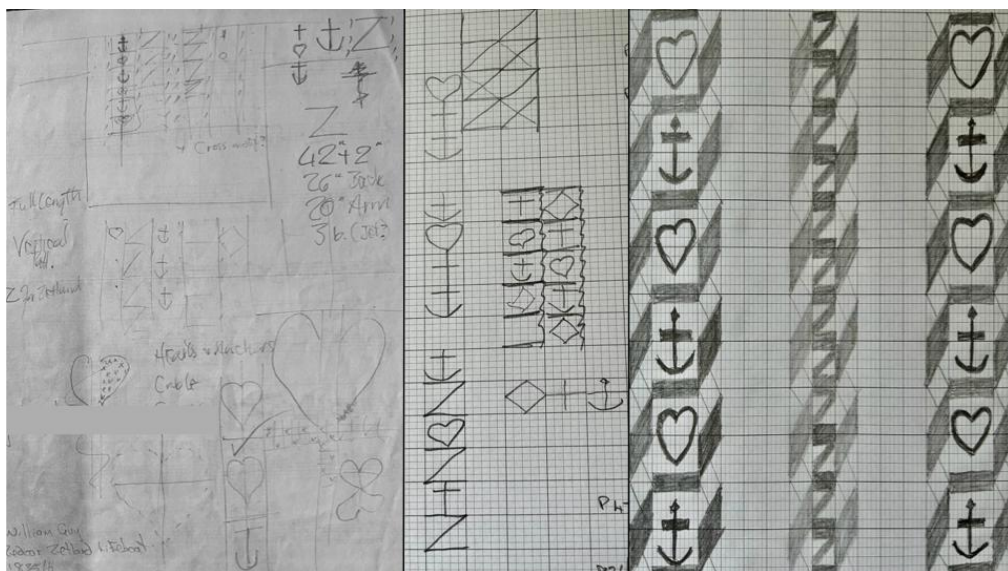
RNLI Commendation Certificate



Redcar has no well documented history of a local patterned gansey. Ganseys are traditional handknitted jumpers which have been worn for generations by fishermen and others in seafaring occupations. They are usually knit either by the wearer or one of their family members using fine natural yarns whose properties offer warmth, freedom of movement, and a small degree of water-resistance. Designs are traditional and contain patterns which are often unique to a family or place, they also reflect local terrain or practices. Motifs representing ropes (cables), chevrons, diamonds, flags, herringbones, ladders, marriage lines, sand or rock bars, stars, steps, and waves are well documented.

Despite a variety of patterns arising from many of Britain's seafaring towns and villages, including Cullercoats, Staithes, Whitby, Robin Hood's Bay and Scarborough, Redcar appears to lack its own distinctive pattern.

Gansey knitting is a skill, and having taught myself some basic knitting, I decided to attempt to knit a gansey as a memorial to William Guy. Unfortunately, knitting a one-piece jumper in-the-round with complex patterns, gussets and shoulder straps to contend with proved too much for my very amateur skills and so, armed with a few design thoughts, I decided to consult the experts.



Sketches of original design ideas.

I took my ideas to Deb Gillanders (www.propagansey.co.uk) who runs the annual “Propagansey” exhibition and workshops at Robin Hoods Bay. Together we worked up the design, me throwing in ideas and Deb suggesting how they could be worked together to create a fitting tribute to William. We eventually settled on a design featuring anchors and hearts. The anchors contain an integral cross motif, to signify William’s Christian and maritime faith and steadfastness, whilst the hearts, signify his love of the sea and family. Surrounding this are rope cables to indicate his maritime occupation and columns of “Z”’s to commemorate both the “Zetland” lifeboat and the fund initiated by the Earl of Zetland (Lord Dundas) to support William’s widow and family. The final design was commissioned and completed earlier this year (2026).



The Redcar “Guy” Gansey

This fitting memorial, completed 190 years after Williams Guy's death, stands as a tribute to his bravery and that of lifeboat crews volunteering around our shores. Redcar, at last, has its own distinctive Redcar "Guy" gansey design. The Redcar "Guy" gansey was knitted using Frangipani 5-ply yarn in the colour "Cordova" and was finished with Whitby jet & silver neck buttons.

** Captain James Cook was the brother-in-law of my 4th great-granduncle, and the heroic William Guy was my 3rd great-granduncle.*

For further information please contact:

John Stafford. j.stafford999@btinternet.com

Unpicking the History of the Gansey

For centuries along the windswept coasts of Britain, the **gansey** (or guernsey) was far more than a simple jumper—it was a fisherman's primary line of defence against the elements. Born in the early 19th century out of necessity, these hand-knitted work garments were engineered specifically to keep lifeboats, herring fleets, and coastal crews warm and dry in the harshest seas.

Engineered for the Elements

Long before modern synthetic waterproofs existed, local women hand-knitted ganseys using a dense, hard-twisted 5-ply worsted wool. Worked tightly on fine steel needles (often up to five at a time), the resulting fabric was almost windproof and naturally shed water.

The design was purely practical:

- **Seamless & Reversible:** Knit in the round, a gansey had no side seams to chafe or rip under strain. The front and back were identical so a fisherman could wear it either way around, doubling its lifespan when the elbows began to wear.
- **Underarm Gussets:** Square knitted inserts under the arms allowed full shoulder movement for hauling nets or pulling oars without pulling the hem out of trousers.
- **Easily Repaired:** The lower body was kept in plain stockinette stitch, making it quick to unravel and re-knit when the lower edges frayed.

Patterns, Port Identities, and Myths

While the lower half was left plain, the yoke, shoulders, and upper sleeves featured intricate raised textures. Common motifs were drawn from daily seafaring life: **ropes** represented safety, **ladders** symbolized success, **anchors** meant security, and **diamonds** reflected the mesh of fishing nets. A popular modern myth claims that every family had a unique, registered pattern used to identify drowned sailors washed ashore. In reality, patterns were primarily **regional**. Experienced eyes could tell whether a fisherman hailed from Whitby, Sheringham, Flamborough, or the Scottish borders based on the combination of stitches on his yoke.

However, individual knitters frequently added personal tweaks—such as initialling the hem or combining local motifs in unique ways—creating distinct family variations designed to honour loved ones and commemorate extraordinary maritime events.

From Local Tragedy to a National Service: The Story of the Lifeboat

For centuries, saving lives from a shipwreck depended entirely on local fishermen risking their own working boats in raging surf. Standard fishing cobs, loaded with gear and lacking buoyancy, were easily swamped. The movement to create dedicated, unsinkable rescue craft was born out of tragic necessity in the late 18th century.

The First Purpose-Built Rescue Boats (1780s–1790s)

In 1789, the merchant ship *Adventure* ran aground on the Herd Sands off South Shields during a winter gale. Horrified crowds on the shoreline watched helpless as crew members dropped one by one from the rigging into the freezing sea.

Spurred by the tragedy, a local committee launched a competition for a boat designed specifically to survive extreme coastal breakers. The result was the *Original* built by South Shields boatbuilder Henry Greathead in 1790. Featuring a curved keel, a double-ended hull, and hundreds of pounds of cork lining the sides for extra buoyancy, Greathead's design established the template for early lifeboats across the British Isles.

The Founding of a National Institution (1824)

While early lifeboats were funded by local subscriptions, port authorities, or wealthy benefactors, there was no coordinated national network.

That changed thanks to **Sir William Hillary**. Living on the Isle of Man, Hillary witnessed dozens of shipwrecks along the treacherous Irish Sea coast and personally helped rescue survivors from the packet ship *City of Glasgow* in 1823.

In 1824, Hillary published a passionate appeal to the nation, calling for a voluntary rescue service capable of responding to coastal disasters anywhere in the country. His vision led directly to the founding of the *National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck*—renamed in 1854 as the **Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)**.

Evolution of the Self-Righting Boat (1851)

Early rowed lifeboats were buoyant, but if flipped by a massive wave, they could remain trapped upside down. Following a disaster off South Shields in 1849 where 20 lifeboatmen lost their lives when their boat capsized, a competition was held to design an unsinkable, self-righting craft.

The winning design, developed by James Peake, incorporated:

- **High, air-filled bow and stern boxes** that made the boat unstable when upside down.
- **A heavy iron keel** that pulled the vessel back upright automatically within seconds.

The Volunteer Legacy

As steam and petrol engines replaced oars and sails in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the range and speed of rescue operations expanded dramatically. Yet, despite two centuries of evolution in maritime technology, the core of the service remains what Sir William Hillary envisioned in 1824: a charitable organization funded by public generosity and crewed by local volunteers ready to launch at a moment's notice.

POETRY CORNER

"The Life-Boat" by Matthias Barr (1865)

Over the waves when the sea-mew flies,
And the terrible dark comes down on the
skies,
Out on the reef where the breakers leap,
And the great winds roar on the angry
deep;
There is work to be done in the blinding
spray,
And the life-boat crew must be up and
away!
No thought of self in a hero's breast,
When the signal lights flash over the crest;
Strong hands on the oar and a stout heart
within,
Through the rush of the sea and the
deafening din;
Out in the gale and the black of the night,
To battle the storm till the morning light.
Honour the brave who go forth to save
A brother that sinks in the ocean grave!
Long may the story of courage be told
Of the gallant deeds of the hearts of gold,
Who leave the warm hearth when the
storm-winds blow,
And down to the surf of the white sea go.

"Launch the Life-Boat!" (Victorian Coastal Hymn, c. 1870)

*Launch the life-boat! launch the life-boat!
See, the storm is raging high;
Hear the signals of distress, lad,
Echoing through the stormy sky!*

*Pull away, lads! pull away, lads!
Strong of heart and brave of hand;
God will speed the gallant life-boat
Far away from off the land."*

"The Coastguard's Story" by Sarah Williams (1868)

The gale blew wild across the bay,
The foam was driving high,
No star was seen to lead the way
Along the midnight sky.
A signal gun came o'er the sea,
A cry of deep despair,
And every man of local birth
Stood ready waiting there.
They did not ask the risk or cost,
Nor wait for morning light,
But launched into the roaring surf
To meet the storm that night.
With steady arm and measured stroke
Against the tide they pulled,
While back upon the shingle shore
The frightened voices lulled.
Remember those who take the oar
When coastal waters rise,
Who leave the safety of the land
Beneath the winter skies.

"The Sailor's Heritage" (19th-Century Coastal Verse)

The hand that knit the heavy wool
Worked in the candlelight,
To wrap the sailor on the deep
Against the bitter night.
The hand that held the wooden oar
Pulled strong against the tide,
When rescue called the lifeboat crew
Across the waters wide.
Though tides may turn and years roll past
Above the quiet sand,
We honour still the loving thread
And double-gifted hand.

Sad News....

Those of you who knew Robin Perry from the Birding and Wildlife groups, or Creative Writing, will be sad to hear of his recent passing.

Robin began writing poetry at the age of 16 and, with only a few short interruptions, continued writing for more than 50 years. He attended school in Manchester before going on to study English Language and Literature at Sheffield University. After university, he travelled and worked in mainland Europe and Africa for nearly two years—a period during which his writing style evolved to encompass a growing awareness and concern for the peoples and cultures of the countries he visited.

He went on to spend 25 years as a social worker, mainly supporting adults with mental health problems, learning and physical disabilities. He later trained and worked as a teacher and served for 10 years as a career's adviser working with young people in schools and the community. He also set up his own part-time non-profit careers service operating in the Leicestershire area.

Robin's other great love was nature. He carried out voluntary wildlife surveys both for Leicester City Council and for Butterfly Conservation. Over his lifetime, he wrote around 3,000 poems and several novellas and short stories. While many of his themes centred on wildlife, the environment, social issues, and Christian spirituality, his writing was by no means wholly serious; it was often filled with rich humour.

He wrote tales of his own amusing exploits in *"The Eccentric Exploits of an Idiosyncratic Accident-Prone Dyspraxic"* and told *"The Many Sagas and Sayings of Horace Bear and His Merrie Bears"* alongside two other collected sets of Horace stories. He also shared the adventures of a cat named Flynn in *"The Tales of Finn the Wanderer"*.

Robin won first prize in two poetry competitions and achieved high placings in several others, with more than 50 poems published both in his own collection, *Out of the Wild*, and in various magazines and booklets.

We end with a short excerpt from Robin's own writing – at the conclusion of his *Eccentric Exploits* collection. It typifies his approach to life—and, we suspect, his "new start" in heaven:

"A new life start never means that everything will be easy. It is the start of a new journey, a pilgrimage with the Lord at your side as companion, challenger and friend. I make mistakes every day, sometimes very serious ones ..., but I'm human and I have someone to bring them to, someone to talk to, to listen to, to correct and advise me. At times I even get direct guidance from the Holy Spirit to avoid certain situations, like avoiding certain roads where I later hear there was an accident. What doesn't seem to change, though, is that I still have funny and wacky experiences. God likes that! He's got a sense of humour. Many of us forget that."

R.I.P. Robin