The Roundup

November 2026



THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF DUMFRIES u3a

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Living Independently with Care Call

Our November meeting welcomed Iain Callander, Senior Telehealthcare Assessor Technician from Dumfries and Galloway Council's Social Work Services, accompanied by Neil Hewitson, who joined him to give us an insight into the Care Call service and the range of telecare support now available across the region.

Many of us will recognise Care Call as the familiar emergency button, sometimes affectionately known as the 'granny alarm'. However, the service has developed considerably over the years, embracing digital technology to offer a much wider range of solutions designed to help people remain safe, independent and living in their own homes for longer.

Iain explained how the system works. When a user activates their alarm equipment, a call is raised to a monitoring centre where a trained operator can assess the situation and arrange appropriate assistance. Depending on the circumstances, this might involve contacting a nominated family member, friend or neighbour, or calling the emergency services.

We were introduced to some of the equipment available, including personal alarm pendants, fall detectors, smoke and flood detectors, and other sensors that can be positioned around the home. The equipment provided is tailored to the individual's assessed needs and circumstances, rather than being a one-size-fits-all package.

It was particularly interesting to see how technology can offer reassurance not only to the person using the service but also to family members and friends who may worry about a loved one living alone. These relatively unobtrusive devices can make a significant difference, helping people maintain their independence while providing peace of mind to those around them.

Although some of our members may not consider themselves typical Care Call users, many of us have parents, relatives, neighbours or friends who might benefit from knowing more about the service. It is certainly worth sharing what we learned, as the right support can make a real difference to someone's ability to remain safely in their own home.

Our thanks go to Iain and Neil for an informative and engaging presentation, and for helping us understand just how much modern telecare has to offer.



Neil Hewitson and Iain Callandar from the Telecare team



Telecare equipment can make all the difference to being able to live independently

December Meeting - A Festive Get Together

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, and we're getting into the festive spirit at our December members' meeting!

Join us on Thursday 3 December at 2.00 pm for an afternoon of Christmas music, good company and seasonal treats.

We're delighted that our very own Ukulele Group will be providing the entertainment, so expect some familiar festive tunes and perhaps, if we ask them nicely, an opportunity for a little singalong?

There will also be tea, coffee and a tempting selection of festive home baking.

We'll be meeting at our usual venue, Dumfries Baptist Church Centre, but with a slight change of location within the building. This time we'll be gathering in an upstairs meeting room which has lift access.

We hope lots of members will be able to join us. It's a lovely opportunity to catch up with friends, enjoy some Christmas cheer and get December off to a really festive start.

We look forward to seeing you there!



Dates for Your Diary

DATE	MEETING / SPEAKER / TOPIC
3rd December	The Ukulele Group will entertain us and get us into the Christmas spirit!
7th January	Shirley Ferrier will talk on the topic of *Refugees*
February / March	To be confirmed - watch this space
1st April	*The Wonders of Wiff-Waff: Romance, Villainy and 11 Surprising Facts about Table Tennis* with Anne Borrowdale
6th May	Deputy Lord Lieutenant, Charles Milroy, will speak on *The History and Role of Lord Lieutenancy*
3rd June	*A short story of Singers: Clydebank Museum's Sewing Machine Collection and its History* with Andrew Graham, collections officer with the Heritage Team at West Dunbartonshire Council

Join us on the

1st Thursday of every month

2.00 pm – 4.00 pm

Dumfries Baptist Church, Gillbrae Road, Dumfries DG1 4EJ

Behind the Scenes

Highlights from the latest Committee meeting

The committee met on 20 November, with plenty to discuss as Dumfries u3a continues to grow and develop. Membership now stands at 327, which is wonderful news!

Welcoming new members and developing our website

Kathleen has been making personal contact with new members, inviting them to attend our monthly meetings and explore the many interest groups on offer. One new member has already complimented our website, which is encouraging to hear. The website continues to develop, with work underway to find a way of introducing an online application form.

Making life easier for members and group leaders

The Members' Portal remains a work in progress, with some technical hurdles that the committee are working to resolve. Once operational, it will allow members to join, renew their subscriptions and update their personal details online.

Group leaders are also being reminded to keep their meeting dates up to date on Beacon, so that room hire charges are accurate. There is flexibility for groups to have two leaders, with one organising meetings and another taking care of the administration.

The search for a Treasurer

Finding a new Treasurer remains a priority. The committee discussed ways of making the role more manageable, including sharing the work between two people or employing someone to undertake the role.

Finding suitable meeting spaces

The future of the North West Resource Centre is still uncertain, and the committee has been exploring alternative venues for groups. Possibilities include the Icebowl, local libraries and the Queen of the South Arena. Further enquiries are being made.

Policies and planning ahead

The committee has signed off the Data Protection and Privacy Policy, which will be added to the website. Work is also continuing on an Accessibility document and an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. The aim is to ensure that Dumfries u3a remains a welcoming organisation where everyone is respected and treated equally, and that groups consider accessibility when arranging their meetings.

Future Speakers

A list of possible speakers for future meetings has been drawn up which takes us well into 2027.

As always, there is plenty happening behind the scenes to keep our u3a running smoothly, welcoming new members and providing opportunities for everyone to enjoy!

Meet the Committee

Introducing Carol Moyes



Carol is our Newsletter Editor and she's the one who sends you emails each month with the latest copy of the Roundup.

Carol joined Dumfries u3a around three years ago after attending a talk organised by the Art Appreciation Group. She was immediately struck by how welcoming everyone was and, having thoroughly enjoyed the experience, decided that u3a was for her!

Since then, she's become involved in several groups, including Mahjong and Fun Quiz, and is also the Group Leader for Craft & Chat.

Carol is responsible for producing The Roundup, but has also, of her own accord, expanded her role to include managing our social media presence across Facebook and YouTube. She clearly enjoys keeping busy!

A retired primary teacher, Carol has always had a passion for creativity and crafting. Her main interests are ceramics and stained glass, although she's always keen to explore new techniques and have a go at something different.

Carol says: "I've been described as a 'serial crafter' which is pretty accurate, but I prefer to think of myself more as a 'crafting butterfly' ... flitting from one craft to another!"

Carol also enjoys sharing her enthusiasm for making things by leading craft workshops, supporting or raising funds for various charities along the way. For her, crafting is as much about bringing people together and sharing skills as it is about the finished creation.

That's probably why she is such an advocate for u3a!

Note: the rather fancy photo was taken by Carol's husband Dave, who was practising a new portraiture technique!

Could You Lend a Hand with Our Finances?

Last month we put out an appeal for someone to take on the role of Treasurer. Unfortunately, we didn't have any takers so the committee has agreed that the role can be divided into two separate tasks. This will make it much less onerous.

We're therefore looking for two volunteers to help with the day-to-day financial administration of Dumfries u3a.

This is a flexible role that can be shared between two people, perhaps friends who would enjoy working together, or undertaken by one person. Equally, if you feel you could help with just one of the tasks below, we'd be delighted to hear from you!

What help do we need?

- **Making payments**: Processing online payments and transfers. This will mainly be paying the room hire invoices for our groups and all payments will be authorised by a committee member.

- **Keeping the records**: Recording transactions in the financial ledger, reconciling the figures and helping keep our accounts up to date.

You don't need to be a qualified accountant or have previous experience in a similar role. A reasonable level of confidence with computers, an eye for detail and a willingness to help are much more important.

Also, you don't need to join the Committee to take on this role. It's an opportunity to contribute your time and skills behind the scenes, without taking on the wider responsibilities of committee membership.

And you won't be left to figure things out on your own! Plenty of help, guidance and ongoing support will be available from the existing committee.

If you could spare a little time to help keep Dumfries u3a running smoothly, we'd love to hear from you.

Please get in touch with the committee for an informal chat. You might be surprised how straightforward it can be!

Lights, Camera, U3A! Our YouTube Channel Is Up and Running

Have you discovered our YouTube channel yet? Dumfries u3a now has its very own channel, and we're busy creating a series of short introductory videos to showcase our wonderful range of interest groups.

You might wonder why we've chosen YouTube. Isn't that more for the younger generation? Well, not necessarily! YouTube is one of the UK's most widely used online platforms and many of us already use it regularly ourselves. Whether it's watching a gardening demonstration, learning a new craft technique, following a favourite travel vlogger or simply looking for a bit of entertainment, there's something for everyone.

There's another good reason for us to be there, too. While younger people may be the ones who discover our videos, they could also be the ones who encourage their parents or grandparents to take a look at u3a. A recommendation from a son, daughter or grandchild could be just the nudge someone needs to discover a new interest and make new friends.

Our aim is to give every group the opportunity to feature, although with more than 40 groups, that might be a little ambitious! We've made a start, though, with videos featuring Fun Quiz, Mahjong and Craft & Chat.

The videos are designed to give people a flavour of what each group gets up to and, hopefully, encourage others to come along and join in. They're also being shared on our Facebook page, where they've proved incredibly popular, attracting more views than anything else we've posted so far!

Could your group be next?

We'd love to see as many of our groups represented as possible. Carol Moyes is overseeing the project and is very happy to come along to a group meeting and help with the filming.

Alternatively, group leaders can do the filming themselves. Don't worry – you don't need fancy equipment, editing skills or any technical know-how. Everything can be filmed on an ordinary smartphone, and Carol has put together some simple guidance notes to help you along. There's no need to worry about editing either; Carol will take care of that.

So, if you'd like your group to feature, or have an idea for another video that might be suitable for our channel, please get in touch with Carol Moyes. It would be lovely to build up a collection that reflects the variety, enthusiasm and creativity of Dumfries u3a.

How to find us on YouTube!

Simply search for Dumfries U3A on YouTube and you'll find our channel. Why not have a look, watch a few videos and give them a thumbs up while you're there? And don't forget to subscribe so you can see what's new!

Congratulations to our competition winner

As we reported last month, Karen Little was the winner of the prize quiz at our Discover Day.

Sue Price, leader of the Fun Quiz group, was delighted to present her with her prize when she caught up with her at this month's Craft & Chat get-together.

Karen has obviously been bitten by the quizzing bug and has started coming along to the Fun Quiz. We suspect people will be fighting to have her on their team, as this month she helped T&T (plus One!) to victory.

Well done Karen!



Follow Us on Facebook – There's More to Discover!

Have you visited the Dumfries u3a Facebook page recently? If not, now might be a good time to pop over and take a look!

We're planning to make our page a much more lively and interactive place, with plenty of regular content that you won't necessarily find in The Roundup.

Look out for our new Mystery Monday posts, where you can test your powers of observation and have a little fun; spotlights on our different interest groups; reminders about forthcoming meetings and events; and interesting news, activities and ideas shared by other groups that might appeal to you. We want the page to be somewhere members can discover something new, find out what's going on and perhaps be tempted to try an activity they hadn't considered before.

But we need your help to make it work!

The more people who follow and interact with our page, the greater the opportunity for our posts to reach a wider audience. Facebook takes account of activity such as likes, comments and shares when deciding what to show in people's feeds. So, if you enjoy a post, give it a like. Even better, leave us a comment – we'd love to hear from you! And if you see something that might interest a friend or family member, please share it.

If you're on Facebook, please follow the Dumfries u3a page and encourage others to do the same? You could also share our page with your own Facebook friends and followers. Every new follower and every bit of interaction helps us spread the word about what Dumfries u3a has to offer. After all, the more people who discover us, the more potential members we can welcome into our u3a community.

So come and join us on Facebook. Follow, like, comment and share – and help us make our page a great place to visit!



Camera Group

The camera group met on Friday 13th November for another competition, entitled "Autumn Colour".

The top 3, shown opposite, were:

- 1st Earl Gemmell "*Autumn leaves over a stream*"
- 2nd Roger Shann "*Reflections on the Nith*"
- 3rd Gordon Wilson "*Autumn Leaves*"

If anyone would like to join us for our next meeting, it's on Friday 27th November, Kirkton Hall, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm. We will be running our next competition titled "*Black & White*".

We are a friendly bunch who would welcome all new members into our fold. You don't have to enter the competition (but if you would like to, send your entries (up to 3 images) to u3a.camera@gmail.com by 6pm on Wed 25th). You also don't need a camera. Use the one on your phone! I frequently do! You can just come along for the chat and coffee if you'd like.

Contributed by Terry Howat

The Camera Group meets on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month in Kirkton Village Hall. Contact Terry Howat, Group Leader, for further information.

Writing Together

On the morning of 11 November, nine members, including one new member, gathered at the North West Resource Centre in Lincluden to share their latest pieces of writing.

The chosen topic for the month was '*I Remember*', and, as always, there was a wonderful variety of interpretations. It's one of the pleasures of the group that a single topic can inspire such different ideas, memories and approaches to writing, making every meeting an interesting and enjoyable experience.

The subject had been deliberately chosen to coincide with Remembrance Day, and at 11.00 am we paused to observe the traditional two minutes of reflective silence.

A thoughtful meeting, combining the sharing of memories and creativity with a moment to remember those who have served.

Contributed by Ruth Thomson

The Writing Together Group meets on the 2nd Wednesday of the month in the North West Resource Centre. Contact Bill Walker, Group Leader, for further information.







Craft and Chat

This month, Craft & Chat swapped our usual crafting tables for a little culture and creativity with a visit to the *Growing Pains* exhibition by Lindsay Mendick, organised by Jupiter Artland and currently showing at the Loreburn Centre in Dumfries.

We were delighted to be invited by Stephen Rutt, Learning Coordinator for Jupiter+Dumfries, who arranged a private viewing of the exhibition for our group. Stephen also organised a clay and collage workshop, giving us the opportunity to try our hands at something a little different.

The exhibition certainly made us think, provoking discussion about our own teen years, and everyone enjoyed the chance to explore the artwork before getting creative themselves. It was a really enjoyable visit and a lovely change from our usual activities.

But our adventures weren't quite over! We had also been very generously gifted a huge quantity of crafting materials by a lady who was clearing out her craft stash. After the exhibition, we headed back to the boot of Carol's car to investigate our treasure trove. We must have looked a rather curious sight to anyone passing through the car park, with a bunch of crafters enthusiastically sorting through bags and boxes of goodies! Everyone left with bags full of supplies, although there's still quite a bit in my car waiting to find new homes. I'm hoping to pass some of it on to our Sewing and Art groups.

Our next meeting is on 15 December, when we're having a Christmas-themed Show & Make. A little like show-and-tell, members are invited to bring along their favourite handmade Christmas decorations or something festive they're currently working on, to share with the group.

It's another opportunity to exchange ideas, admire each other's handiwork and enjoy a little Christmas creativity together.

Contributed by Carol Moyes

The Craft & Chat Group meets on the 3rd Tuesday of the month in Lochvale House. Contact Carol Moyes, Group Leader, for further information.






LEISURE
Food & Drink
'Blethers
Dumfries
2026
u3a
tech.
Birdwatching
WALKING
Gardeners'
Adventures
Family history
reads
Drama


GROWING PAINS
FOR SALE
"THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER"


JUPITER+NATION
JUPITER+NATION
JUPITER+NATION


YOU COULDN'T PAY
ME TO GO BACK!







Birding

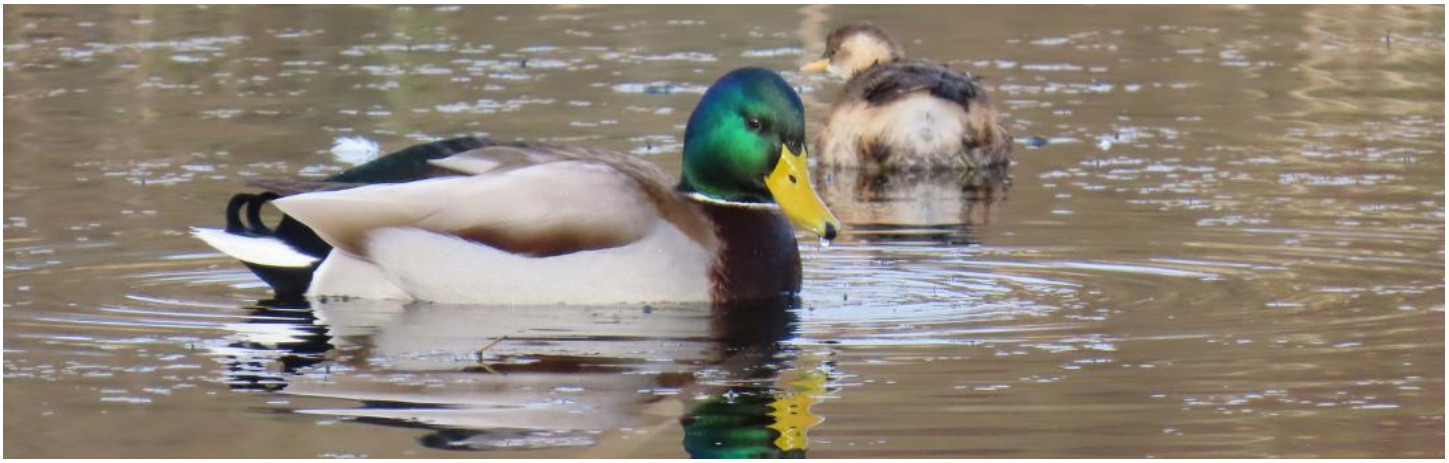
The Birding Group features on our front cover this month after enjoying a lovely outing to Eskrigg. Good weather making for a very pleasant day's birdwatching, and the group spotted an impressive 14 different bird species during their visit.

There is plenty more to look forward to, with the group's Christmas lunch planned for 2 December at the Woodlands Hotel.

Their first outing of the New Year will be on 6 January, when they head to Mersehead Nature Reserve. Let's hope the good weather and excellent bird sightings continue into 2027!

Contributed by Monica Callander and Pauline Smith

The Birding Group meets on the 1st Wednesday of the month. Contact Monica Callander, Group Leader, for further information.











This month's selection from the Enjoying Music Group

This month the Enjoying Music Group have been delving into the music of virtuosos.

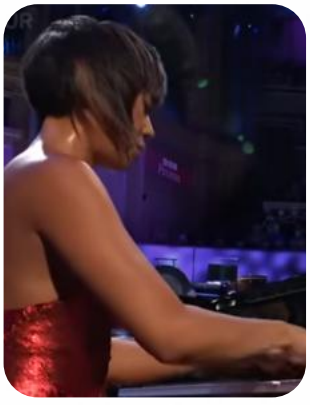
The BBC Music Magazine describes virtuosos as, "musicians whose technical brilliance, interpretative depth and magnetic stage presence have left audiences spellbound. They dazzle with lightning fingerwork, evoking deep emotions with subtle phrasing, or pioneering new techniques that redefine their craft."

Here we focus upon the players, but they do of course depend upon virtuoso composers.



Earl Wild - Beethoven Piano Sonata in E Flat

Wild was almost 89 at the time of this performance. He suffered a heart attack soon afterwards, and then went on a world tour. You might want to listen to all of this, but the group only listened to the scherzo starting at 19.05. This is an example of a "taster" that members might want to pursue later.



Yuja Wang - Carmen Variations - 2022 Proms Encore

A contrast with the quieter presentation of Wild from a pianist, very popular with audiences, orchestras, conductors, and most critics. She was winning prizes from a very young age.

Click on the pictures to listen to the pieces



Evelyn Glennie - Askell Masson - Prim

The remarkable Glennie plays for the first 7 minutes of this concert on a single drum. You may have seen her several years ago at the Crichton Church, when she stepped (ran) rapidly between an array of instruments. Brilliant performance!



François Leleux - Mozart - Oboe Concerto in C Rondo

We played this from 15.37. In addition to technical skill, communicating with the audience and orchestra is vital. Here Leleux's impish approach adds to that as well as seeming most suited to the composer's intentions. Breath control is pretty good too.



Itzhak Perlman - Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto Finale

A passionate performance of a passionate piece. Combining competence with the ability to throw your emotions at a piece cannot be easy to maintain. Video here is very effective at displaying the skill of the performer.

Click on the pictures to listen to the pieces

I Remember.....or do I?

Memory is fickle. It plays strange tricks, especially as we get older or so it seems. We can all recall where we were and probably what we were doing, at the time of major world events, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall (a Best Western Hotel in Southampton, in my case whilst plotting my escape from my job at the bank); the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (in bed at home, sitting bolt upright listening to the radio news) or the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon (ironically, in a meeting with a Director of the Atlantic Council, part of NATO).

But what else we remember depends on so many factors. How unusual was the event or gathering? What else of note has happened since? Big personal events loom large and permanent in the memory of most of us; when we first met our partner, our wedding day (assuming we had one), or the arrival of our children.

Christmases, birthdays, and holidays seem to merge into each other over time – was it five years ago when our Australian cousin turned up out of the blue, or was it six, or ten ...?

What we remember, and in how much detail we can recall it, often depends on not only the significance of the event itself (both at the time and subsequently), but how well-anchored it is in our memory – what else did we have going on at the time, and can we recall that as easily?

For most of my life I've been blessed with an almost photographic memory from my very early childhood, so my earliest memories are of things which we aren't supposed to recall, as our brains were not sufficiently fully-formed at the time for the events to register.



Yet I can very clearly remember the morning my sister was born, when I was aged just two and a half. But what I recall actually has nothing to do with my sister (unusual, since we quickly became, and remain to this day, the best of pals). I remember eating Kellogg's Ricicles for breakfast, and being given an enormous red-and-yellow plastic bus, which I still have and which I was told by my father that my sister had "brought with her, for me" in some kind of biological miracle which must have made my mother's eyes water!

Even earlier, at around eighteen months of age, I was apparently seriously ill with glandular fever and not expected to survive. I was, of course, completely unaware of this situation, but what I do remember is the very distinctive voice of the nun as she prayed over my cot for my recovery - it's still as clear as a bell. It was some years later that I explained this to my astonished parents, who had kept the whole traumatic episode quiet from me in the years since.

My first-ever view of a steam train was slightly earlier still, at around fifteen months old. I was laid in a carry-cot on the back seat of my father's Morris 1000 and the train in question was arriving from Kirkcudbright into Castle Douglas, although I didn't know this at the time.

It was during my early secondary school years that I next surprised my parents when my father returned home one Bonfire Night, apologising for not having been able to obtain any fireworks for us, as he'd unexpectedly had to work late that night, and en route home, every shop he'd tried was either closed or sold out. I politely reminded him that we had kept a box back the previous year, as the weather had deteriorated to the point where none of us wanted to remain outside any longer. Puzzled, he immediately ventured to his shed and returned minutes later with the box I'd remembered, but no other member of the family had. "God bless you and your memory, Son", he said, beaming with relief and surprise!



Sometimes being able to recall things which others who were there at the time can't is a source of frustration and argument. Some years ago, well before satnavs, I was trying to find my way out of a major city one evening (and getting hopelessly lost in the process), and I found myself stuck at a red light alongside a taxi rank. As the type of car I was driving resembled those being used as taxis, my back seat quickly filled with complete strangers, whom I had to tactfully ask to leave! My wife, who was in the front passenger seat at the time, cannot remember this bizarre episode at all, and thinks I've dreamed it!

When it works in reverse, ie, someone can recall an incident which I cannot, it sends shudders through me. Why can I not recall it? Is this the onset of some cognitive impairment? More likely it's simply that I had other things to worry about at the time, or they're mistaken and I wasn't there at all!

What determines what we remember, and for how long, is a complex process which is beyond my limited scientific understanding. Apparently, things remain in our short-term memory long enough for us to decide whether or not it's something worth remembering and, if so, they then get committed to longer-term memory. But how these unconscious decisions are reached, and when, remains a complete mystery to me.

All I know is that I'm very grateful to have such an apparently large and thus far reliable memory capacity. What happens when my disc is full, and when that will happen, is anyone's guess. I suppose some of what I currently consider important to remember will get junked if and when something more significant comes along to replace it. But that doesn't explain how one is supposed to see one's entire life flashing before one's eyes when we are about to depart this realm.

Maybe I'll need an external hard drive before then?!

Written by Graham Hand



Quiz of the Month

Where's it from?

This month our quiz takes you on a culinary world tour.

Can you identify from which countries the following dishes originated?

1 Goulash

2 Ramen

3 Apple Strudel

4 Pad Thai

5 Quiche

6 Peach Melba

7 Sauerkraut

8 Paneer

9 Fondue

10 Stroopwafel



Lemon Posset

A super easy dinner party dessert

Given that we're heading into the festive season, and with this month's *Final Nugget of Wisdom* being all about easy entertaining, I thought it would be nice to share one of my favourite make-ahead desserts.

Lemon Posset is deliciously creamy, wonderfully tangy and incredibly easy to make. It can also look rather fancy, depending on how you choose to serve it. I have a set of cocktail glasses that were given to me by friends for my 21st birthday. They're not exactly fine crystal (we were students then, after all!), but they're just the right size for this rich, indulgent little dessert.

If you've never made a posset before, you'll be surprised at just how simple it is. It uses only three ingredients and requires very little effort. However, it does need several hours to chill and set, so it's definitely not a last-minute supper party option. That's when you need to apply the 'buy it' element of my 'wisdom' and pop out to the shops for a cheesecake!

Ingredients (serves 8)

- 600ml double cream
- 150g caster sugar
- 3 lemons (finely zested and juiced)

Method

1. Put the double cream, caster sugar, and most of the lemon zest (save a little for garnish) into a saucepan. Heat gently until the sugar dissolves, bring to a boil stirring constantly, then simmer for 3 minutes.

2. Take the pan off the heat and let it cool slightly for about 5 minutes before whisking in the lemon juice.



3. Pour into serving glasses or ramekins (strain first if you want a smoother finish). Cover and chill in the fridge for at least 4 hours or overnight until set.

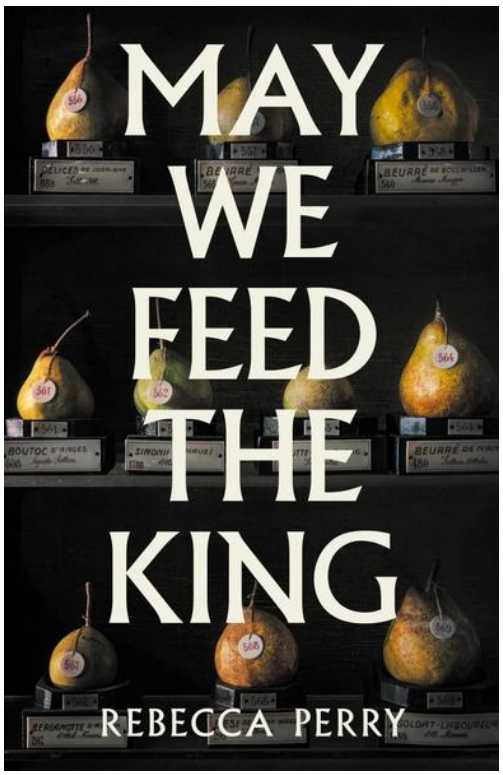
4. To serve top with the remaining lemon zest and serve with shortbread biscuits or fresh berries.

This month we review one of the six novels shortlisted for the 2026 Booker Prize and an old favourite.

May We Feed the King by Rebecca Perry

A beautifully written novel in which the narrator (a curator) has been tasked with arranging scenarios within a historic royal palace. After studying the palace archives, aided by the resident archivist, they select the story of a young king who had once lived there. There is little detail in the archives but the curator fleshes out the king's story, using their imagination and knowledge of the period, to create a possible sequence of events and goes on to construct atmospheric, detailed tableaux of his life in the palace.

Incredibly rich in visual detail but very spare in storyline, the narrative is liberally laced with intriguing clues that leave us questioning what actually happened – in both the king's and the curator's lives – and simultaneously recognising that we can never truly know. As in life, we can only use the small details to which we have access to fill in the bigger picture.

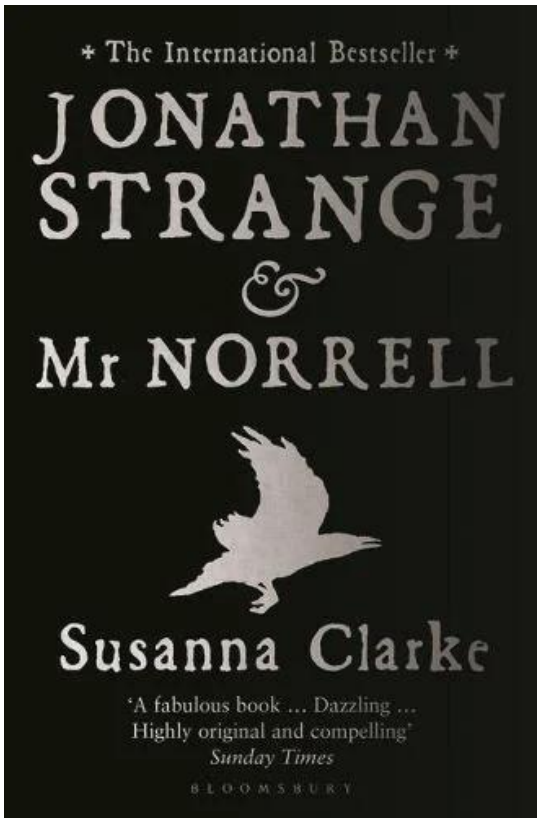


Reviewed by Amanda Fergusson

Publisher: Granta Books
ISBN: 9781803513867

Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell by Susanna Clarke

I am not the most enthusiastic reader of fantasy novels but in January 2026 I finally blew the dust from a copy of a book I've owned for over 20 years. It begins in the early 19th century and while the Napoleonic Wars feature heavily near its start, this is very much an alternative history with magic and rival magicians providing the fantasy elements and occasional doses of horror and humour.



To begin with, there is only one remaining man in England who is openly practising the magic arts but Mr. Norrell is, after a somewhat stodgy first 200 pages, joined by and then in battle against the far more intriguing Jonathan Strange. The plot becomes extremely complicated, far too much so to devote proper attention to here, so I shall instead recycle what I wrote about it on Goodreads ten months ago:

"Wow, this is a wonderful book! The only reason I'm not giving it the full complement of 'stars' is because, for my taste, too much time was spent with Wellington in the Peninsula Wars. Once past those pages though, something utterly fantastic would invariably happen and I would again be entranced. The wit and subtlety of the writing, the sheer complexity and density of the apparently accurate historical passages and the brilliance of the almost convincing magical elements gave me an urgent need to discover how so many beguiling characters and narrative peculiarities would be satisfyingly bound together by the author.

Then, of course, there's the not insignificant matter of the huge 'bibliography' of magical writings that the author conjured into being. There are references in the footnotes I found so convincing that I typed keywords into search engines. To my delight, I did discover some characters whom Clarke had lifted from their real place in history, mixed them up with dollops of magic and then placed them into entirely different contexts. Some of the great set pieces (involving, for example, Arabella and, later on, a mouse) actually did cause me to gasp out loud with fear, amazement, disgust or sheer admiration. When I reached the latter part of this huge book (1006 pages in my paperback edition), I had to hide in a spare bedroom, having stuck a 'Do not disturb' sign on the door.

A novelist who was once lauded but is now still possibly under clouds of suspicion, Neil Gaiman, said of the book: "Unquestionably, the finest English novel of the fantastic written in the last seventy years." I would not go quite that far, but I think this an astounding book and a great one in which to become immersed during the dreary days of January.

Reviewed by Helen Gage

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Out and About

Things to do locally

Christmas Tree Festival

St John's Episcopal Church, Newall Terrace, Dumfries
2nd December 7-9pm; 3rd-5th December 10am-9pm; 6th December 2-4pm - £5 entry including refreshments
Visit the beautiful display of trees (including our own u3a one!) and get into the Christmas spirit. If you can, visit between 7pm and 9pm for the magical sight of the church lit only by tree lights. "A beautiful, thought-provoking, community prelude to Christmas"

The Farmers' Choir in Concert – Supporting Maggie's Dumfries

Fri 4 December 2026 · 7:30 pm
Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries, DG1 4TA
Join The Farmers' Choir for a special evening of musical theatre and popular music at Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries, raising funds towards the development of a new Maggie's Centre in Dumfries. For more information and to book tickets click here.

Event Cinema - André Rieu's 2026 Christmas Concert: Let it Snow

Sat 5 December 2026 · 1:15 pm C
Robert Burns Centre Film Theatre, Dumfries, DG2 7BE
This heartwarming festive spectacular, filled with beloved Christmas classics, enchanting waltzes, and magical surprises, will leave you smiling long after the final encore. For more information and to book tickets click here.

University of Glasgow Christmas Concert

Sat 5 December 2026 · 7:00 pm
Crichton Memorial Church, Dumfries, DG1 4ZE
The School of Social & Environmental Sustainability welcomes you to join us in getting into the festive spirit. Held in the beautiful Crichton Memorial Church, you will hear the stunning Glasgow Chapel Choir and Dumfries Town Band. In amongst the stunning music, you will also hear some readings from our colleagues and students. After the show, stay for a mince pie and mulled wine (non-alcoholic options are also available). For more information and to book tickets click here.

TASDAG – Christmas Ghosts: the Tradition of Winter Tales

Tue 8 December 2026 · 11:00 am
The Gilchrist Room, Easterbrook Hall
We've told supernatural tales at midwinter for a very long time. In this talk Kirsty Hartsiotis takes us back to the earliest winter tales of the Middle Ages and the age of Shakespeare and Marlowe. We then explore the lost years of the 17th and 18th centuries, where it's often thought that Christmas wasn't celebrated much – but ghost tales at Christmas-tide were very part of the season. For more information click here.

‘Jingle and Mingle’ with national demonstrator Kate Kerr

Tue 8 December 2026 · 7:00 pm for 7:30 pm

Dumfries & District Flower Club warmly invites you to join them for a special seasonal demonstration and sociable evening. It promises to be a super night’ entertainment. Tickets £7 on the door.

Curator Talk and Tour of new exhibition ‘Objects from Africa’ and new display ‘Objects from India’

Tue 8 December 2026 · 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Dumfries Museum, Dumfries, DG2 7SW

Their curator will be explaining how this exhibition was developed including its rationale and some of the research undertaken. The purpose of the exhibition is to increase access to these incredible objects, and the talk will be as transparent as possible about why they are in Dumfries Museum and the histories that they may reflect. The new museum display of ‘Objects from India’ will be considered too. For more information click here.

Absolute Classics Series: Sempre Amabile, choir

Sun 13 December 2026 · 2:30 pm

Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries, DG1 4TA

This Christmas, Sempre Amabile presents a rich and thoughtfully woven programme of music celebrating both the season and the many facets of the human experience. Alongside beautiful sacred works by John Rutter and Benjamin Britten, audiences will enjoy timeless favourites from the American Songbook, bringing warmth, nostalgia and sparkle to the festive season. For more information click here.

Galloway Conversations: Dumfries and Galloway Around the World with Museums Curator Judith Hewitt

Sun 13 December 2026 · 3:00 pm

The Smiddy, Balmaclellan, DG7 3QE

Museums Curator Judith Hewitt will provide an overview of the connections between Dumfries and Galloway and the world. This global history will explore objects in the museum’s collection from China, Japan, South Sea Islands, Africa and America. It will also cover personal histories including explorers such as Hugh Clapperton, Joseph Thomson and Sir John Richardson, migrants such as Werner Kissling and emigration accounts. For more information and to book tickets click here.

Mid Winter Folk Session

Sun 20 December 2026 · 5:00 pm
The Clachan Inn, Saint John's Town of Dalry, DG7 3UW
Come along to celebrate Mid Winter with seasoned folk musicians at the inviting and cosy Clachan Inn, in the Bothy. Bring along an instrument to join in or simply come along to listen to the heart-uplifting tunes. For more information click here.

The Longest Night – A winter solstice walk at Castle Loch

Monday 21 December 2026 5:00pm – 7:00pm
Castle Loch, Lochmaben
As the year reaches its darkest point, join Luonto Living for a special evening walk marking the winter solstice. We'll gather at Castle Loch in Lochmaben to explore the natural world at a time when daylight is at its shortest and the nights are at their longest. Guided by the soft glow of lanterns, we'll follow the lochside landscape after dark, discovering how plants, wildlife and ecosystems respond to the changing seasons. For more information click here

Looking for a Christmas movie? Or a Christmas market for some last-minute gift shopping? Maybe you'd like to join a craft workshop to make some Christmas decor? Or do you fancy getting in a festive mood with a good old-fashioned panto?

There are listings for these and other activities in December to view on: EventsDG or DGWGO Events

If you know of a local event that you think might appeal to our members, please contact Carol Moyes, Newsletter Editor, with the details

The Art of Easy Entertaining

As we move into December, the season of invitations, get-togethers and festive entertaining is upon us. So this month I am sharing a little advice for anyone who enjoys having people over but doesn't necessarily enjoy spending three days preparing for their arrival.

Now, I am certainly not the 'hostess with the mostess', but I do love gathering around the table with good food, good wine and good company. Whether that's my own or friends' dining tables, I'd much rather stay in than go out these days.

One of the many cookery books on my shelves is an old favourite, *Entertaining with Katie Stewart*. Do you remember her? She had her own TV series and wrote columns in Woman's Journal and The Times. I think she had such a practical approach to entertaining, and there is one piece of her advice that has stayed with me over the years. She suggested that when hosting a dinner party, there was absolutely no reason why you had to prepare every course yourself. Instead, buying something ready-made was perfectly acceptable!

I have taken that advice a little further and adopted what I like to call the *'Make One, Buy One, Assemble One'* philosophy of entertaining; with the *make one* ideally being done the day before.

If I'm serving three courses, I might make the main course, buy the dessert and simply assemble the starter. A grazing platter is ideal for this. Open a few packets of cheese, cured meats, olives, crackers and other tasty morsels, arrange them attractively on wooden board or nice platter and, hey presto, a rather impressive-looking starter with very little effort.

Dessert is equally easy. I'm certainly not above buying a supermarket cheesecake, then giving it a little dusting of icing sugar or adding some grated lemon zest to make it look a bit more homemade. Nobody needs to know, and frankly, if they do notice, so what!

And sometimes, even a meal is more than I want to organise. There's nothing wrong with inviting friends round for drinks and nibbles, provided you make it clear that it's a 'have-your-tea-before-you-come' occasion. A few bowls of savoury treats, some crisps, perhaps a little cheese, and you're ready to enjoy the evening.

I think we sometimes put far too much pressure on ourselves when entertaining. We worry about the food, the presentation, whether the house is tidy enough and whether everyone is having a good time. Meanwhile, we're so busy being the perfect host that we forget to enjoy ourselves.

And that's really the point, isn't it? As we move through our Third Age, friendship and social connection become increasingly important. Research continues to highlight the benefits of maintaining social relationships for our health and wellbeing. Sharing a meal, laughing over a glass of wine or simply catching up with friends can be just as nourishing as anything we put on the table.

So, this December, don't feel you have to be a master chef or a domestic goddess to open your front door and welcome people in. Make one, buy one, assemble one – or just put the kettle on!

And at the risk of being cheesier than the cheeseboard, the best thing you can serve your guests is your company.



Quiz Answers

Answers

1 Goulash - Hungary

2 Ramen - Japan

3 Apple Strudel - Austria

4 Pad Thai - Thailand

5 Quiche - France

6 Peach Melba - England

7 Sauerkraut - Germany

8 Paneer - India

9 Fondue - Switzerland

10 Stroopwafel - The Netherlands

Did you get question 6 correct? Don't be too hard on yourself if you said Australia, as the dish was named for Australian opera singer Dame Nellie Melba. However, the dish was created in 1892 or 1893 by French chef Auguste Escoffier at the Savoy Hotel, London.

Escoffier first served peaches over vanilla ice cream in a silver dish set inside an ice swan—a nod to Wagner's opera Lohengrin—calling it Pêche au cygne. Later, when Dame Nellie Melba was performing at Covent Garden, he added sweetened raspberry purée and renamed it Pêche Melba.

Keep In Touch

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We're here to help!

For all committee and other contact details, visit our website and select **Contacts** from the menu.

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