



Darlington Lecture Association

Season 2023–24 141st Year





From the President

Dear Friends

Welcome to the 2023-24 season of the Darlington Lecture Association – our 141st year! Wow! That's even older than any of our members or committee.

When my grandparents and their many siblings, growing up in Darlington in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, referred in their letters to attending lectures in the town I have often wondered if they were members of our association. It would be nice to think so.

I am very much looking forward to being your president again for the coming season, and what a programme Margaret has put together for us! We will be whisked off to Costa Rica and China, back to Anglo-Saxon times and the Middle Ages and off again to the Royal Opera House.

So please come along – and bring your friends and relations. Tell the whole world about us – well, Darlington and district anyway.

Wendy E Acres

2023

Sept 4th

Camino de Santiago: one of world's most famous pilgrimages

Alan Chape, long-distance walker extraordinaire

Oct 9th

(President's Evening 6.45pm. lecture 7.30pm)

Richard III: his own story

Gareth Williams, British Museum curator

Nov 13th

Costa Rica: a near-Utopia with added birdlife

Keith Offord, traveller, photographer, ornithologist

Dec 4th

Digs at Bamburgh Castle and Durham Cathedral: resting places of 7th century pilgrims and Scottish soldiers captured in 1650

Charlotte Roberts, emeritus professor of archaeology at Durham

2024

Jan 8th

When the Royal Opera House is a Pressure Cooker

Nigel Bates, musician with the London orchestras and who was for eight years a Covent Garden executive

Feb 19th

Dirty Work at the Tower of London: the Missing Princes Project

Philippa Langley, former Darlington schoolgirl who found Richard III's skeleton, seeks to acquit him in the notorious double-murder case

March 11th

A Diplomat's Memories of China

Jean Harrod writes crime novels set in exotic locales where she had top jobs in our embassies

April 8th

(AGM 6.45pm, lecture 7.30pm)

Looking After Britain's Heroes

Lieutenant General Sir Gary Coward, national chairman of SSAFA

Monday 4th
September 2023
at 7.30pm *



Is this the way to Santiago?

ALAN CHAPE

There are pilgrimages and then there are pilgrimages. Bookworms can make one vicariously to Canterbury alongside the bawdy Wife of Bath; or by watching BBC TV's Pilgrimage (2018), to Istanbul with the bumptious Edwina Currie and even to Santiago de Compostela itself with the bonnie Debbie McGee.

Wife of Bath is a broadminded Christian bound for Canterbury, Edwina a lapsed Orthodox Jew traipsing to a great mosque, Debbie a lapsed Catholic giggling towards an appointment with St James the Great.

Pilgrimages, of a kind, can be short, local and still be a bit trying. On a damp Sunday, harried in Salutation Road by a gale direct from the Pennines, you press on to hymns at Elm Ridge; or suffer wet trouser legs crossing the sands to Holy Island.

When we rang our lecturer he was braving clifftop winds at Staithes before going to a Tuesday service at his Baptist church. After his own epic walk to Santiago in 2019 he wound down with a 300-mile return stroll to Lindisfarne. He's also done Land's End-John O'Groats and two coast-to-coasts.

The pilgrimage to north-west Spain dates from medieval times when it became an article of faith that Santiago's great church held the remains of St James. How so? That's one for theologians and

mythologists to argue over. The senior Apostle was beheaded in Jerusalem by Herod II and the story is that angels put the martyr into a rudderless boat which carried him to a preaching tour of Hispania.

El Camino, or The Way, to Santiago, is actually a network of routes throughout France, Spain and Portugal to this point just short of Finisterre.

Mr Chape, a retired college lecturer, walked his 500-mile Camino from France, crossing the Pyrenees. He overnighted at hostels that issue proofs of stay that ensure a certificate – the compostela – awaits those who trek at least the last 100km to Santiago. He usually carries his own tent, as on this year's planned 2,000-mile valedictory walk to explore Scotland.

*A week earlier than usual

Monday 9th
October 2023
President's
Evening 6.45pm
Followed by
lecture at 7.30pm



Richard III: My truths

GARETH WILLIAMS

Shakespeare was in *Happy Valley/Line of Duty* mode. A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse! Richard's cry at Bosworth was today's urgent radio call for back-up. The king, in the dramatic finale of a thriller that anticipated television drama, had disposed of five thugs sent to kill him on the 1485 battlefield and showdown was nigh. Back-up came there none.

Scriptwriter Will spurned what is now cliché: his anti-hero was the one to die. Henry

Tudor (whose descendants the scriptwriter sought to flatter) struck Crouchback down. And, of course, the play was based on actual events, as they say, but laced with audience-pleasing dramatic licence.

Gareth Williams, a historian at the British Museum and a noted actor in the cause of historical truth, comes here in full Richard fig to tell the real story of this enigmatic royal character. The following is from an introduction to the Richard role he played at Tutbury Castle, the historic Staffordshire site where Dr Williams led seven years of archaeology and which – like our own Middleham – is rich in Ricardiana:

"Seen by some as a ruthless murderer and by others as a

victim of Tudor propaganda. [His short reign] is often seen as the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Modern period."

Our man also specialises in ancient coins and the Vikings. Erik Bloodaxe (killed on our Stainmore) is another acting role for him.

There's more on Richard later in the season – the March lecture is by an ex-Darlington girl and discoverer of Richard's Leicester grave.

Above: Laurence Olivier starred, directed and produced a 1955 film.

Monday 13th
November 2023
at 7.30pm



No generals and a five star-rating

KEITH OFFORD

Costa Rica is Latin America without the bad bits. Few countries in that generally benighted region don't have trouble with its generals. But here in a couple of weeks' time the public holiday, Abolition of Army Day. It will be sunny, peaceful and no-one will be surprised. Clean and tidy, too.

Three centuries ago the country was Spain's most dire colony in the Americas: no gold or silver, not enough locals to fuel a slave trade. But things have looked up since then. There's gold in the

form of the Yankee ecotourist dollar, the wage-slavery of a falling unemployment rate and claims that the five million people are among the world's happiest.

It is, of course, also that fabled institution, a banana republic. Well, yes, they still grow and export an awful lot of the fruit that in living European memory was once a symbol of pre-war indulgence and is still condescendingly linked to political and economic instability. We don't, though, mock "precision engineering republics." Respect then for a Costa Rica which has medical instruments as its top earner of hard currency.

We've been to this surprising country before with Keith Offord, a fine photographer. It's his favourite place to indulge his ornithology.

We'll see his pick of the country's 900 bird species.

There are some 4,000 other wildlife species and his pictures will show many of them in this overview of – double-cliché alert – a tropical paradise twice the size of Wales. And there'll be spectacular landscapes between its Pacific and Caribbean coasts, including benign volcano peaks and "cloud forests."

Even Mr Offord probably won't have been quick enough to snap a man in combat uniform toting a Glock. They do exist for internal security but could have been away at their only other legal task, peacekeeping abroad. A couple of thousand miles north, you don't see Costa Ricans wading the Rio Grande to reach Texas (OK, we didn't actually check that one).

Monday 4th*
December 2023
at 7.30pm



Auld battle, silent witnesses

CHARLOTTE ROBERTS

*Week earlier than usual

Life is not a dress rehearsal, Charlotte Roberts says in response to the incredulity often a reaction to her vast number of “leisure” pursuits. And we can coin our own phrase about her working life. How about “The after-life is one long post-mortem”?

For this trained nurse and retired professor of archaeology at Durham digs up the dead to find out what killed them centuries ago, partly in the cause of delaying our own departure; the job description includes bioarchaeology and paleopathology. It's led to

expertise in leprosy and TB, ancient and modern.

Her work with JCB and trowel has taken her around the world (as has her quest for novel after-hours experience and new ways of finding discomfort, even danger). But her digs for us are nearer home. Before new building work at Palace Green, next to Durham cathedral, she found skeletons of Scottish soldiers. Three thousand had been marched there after defeat by Cromwell in 1650 and jailed in the castle and rundown cathedral.

The Scots had fought the short, brutal Dunbar battle in the cause of Charles II; 1,700 prisoners died at Durham.

We will also hear about her research on denizens of the 7th and 8th century Bowl-Hole

cemetery, near Bamburgh Castle (above), exposed by an 1817 storm. This early outpost of Christianity in England was a place of pilgrimage, it was concluded: DNA testing found that many who died there were born abroad.

What then does it take this professional explorer of long-dead civilisations and innards to feel alive as an amateur poly-enthusiast today? Physical effort, for one thing. She has cycled Land's End to John O' Groats, walked long-distance footpaths, run marathons (especially in Nepal), parachuted, potholed, wind-surfed. And there's bell-ringing, yoga, bee-keeping, pop and other concerts, choirs, Man United, the WI....

She gained her SRN certificate in Leeds, and she was at the coalface before academia called at 21.

Monday 8th
January 2024
at 7.30pm



Diverse thoughts on the diva

NIGEL BATES

Let's play word association. And it doesn't take long to get from Covent Garden, via ballet, opera and prima donna to diva. You could write a thesis about that word, which is Latin for goddess. It now means a supremely successful female, especially an artiste, but in the popular imagination a diva is....a difficult woman.

To many, complains Mariah Carey in a Duchess of Sussex podcast, a diva is a b***h. An American columnist writes: "Diana Ross a

goddess? Then again, how does she get her hair to do that?" A Yale professor goes deeper: "Too easy to call any bossy, tempestuous, self-conscious woman a diva....a certain loneliness comes with the word."

To switch cultures, a star football striker can be a diva. Their manager cannot afford "to lose the dressing room"; neither, it may occur to some during tonight's lecture, can opera house executives.

Mr Bates may or may not use the word when he tells of the stresses and tensions that build in the pressure cooker the Royal Opera House becomes as curtain-up looms. But the possibility is there. So Mesdames Ross and Callas have their pictures on our front cover.

Our man knows the world of classical music inside out. He was for eight years the Royal Ballet's music administrator at Covent Garden. As a young man he drummed with the band of the Scots Guards, and now is a freelance percussionist with the great London orchestras. A year ago he gave us a memorable evening with his presentation on *The Nutcracker*.

He calls this talk *Tantrums and Tiaras*: backstage life at the ROH, especially the pressures faced by performers, be they singer, dancer, musician or conductor. How does the world-class building cope? What is the audience expectation? We will be told the highs and lows of its history.

Monday 19th
February 2024
at 7.30pm



Princes: Little, Happy - and Missing

PHILIPPA LANGLEY

*Week later than usual

Princes. We have a thing about them. In literature, Saint-Exupéry's Little one is innocent, inquiring and wise, Oscar Wilde's Happy one is a pillar of guilty compassion. In fairyland, Charming is gallant and coveted.

Today, we have a crown prince less glamorous than he is dutiful, while his spare is dashing and troubled. And our grandmothers sang of dancing with a man who danced with a girl who danced with the Prince of Wales.

So, less whimsically, to the Princes in the Tower. The word dastardly could have been coined for this 540-year-old

crime, yet now somehow diminishes it.

The murders were the worst of King Richard III's alleged sins. Or, certainly, someone's. We can be jury for a trial tonight. Is Philippa Langley prosecutor or defender? A clue – she is a leading Ricardian. Undoubtedly she is an expert witness. She has sifted evidence gathered by historian detectives over the centuries. Her *Missing Princes Project*, from 2015, has over 100 lines of enquiry, including overseas.

The disappearances were just before the elder prince's planned coronation. Uncle Richard stepped in. In his defence: others also wanted the crown; he had been loyal to the boys' father; a confession was tortured from a

known plotter.

Ms Langley must surely have insight. She was so close to him in the years she sought to prove his skeleton lay hidden in historic Leicester. Famously, this amateur archaeologist triumphed. What bathos: under a car park. In the disabled bay? A blue-badged blue blood? Well, spine-curvature helped to confirm identity.

A writer and film producer, she was portrayed in *The Lost King* with Steve Coogan, the story of highs and lows at Leicester. Born, Kenya; aged 2 to Blackwell, Darlington; then Hummersknott comp and QE sixth form

Monday 11th
March 2024
at 7.30pm



Novel memories of China

JEAN HARROD

Very early on she was a young lady of ours in Geneva and, if she'd been a bit more conscientious with her paperwork there, she might not have gone on to have been our young married woman in Shanghai.

That personal conundrum will be explained in a moment. Jean Harrod MBE is here to talk about the eternal conundrum that is China – its history, the Opium Wars and how they led to Britain's century of rule in Hong Kong, Mao's revolution, and on to its emergence as a formidable economic and military power; then to her own memories of experiences in a vast country.

Who better than a diplomat who has lived in Shanghai to explain the system of European and American enclaves that operated there and in other Chinese cities until well into 20th century? Two of a trilogy of crime novels she has written involve that teeming Yangtze port.

Interest in a Foreign Office career was sparked by a careers session at her London sixth form. As a newcomer at 19 it was luck that saw her sent to Geneva for an expected week or so at an international conference that in the event lasted for two years. There she met and wed her senior diplomat husband, at a time when protocol was that when a woman employee married she had to leave. She "just didn't get around" to signing the resignation forms

sent from London. Meanwhile the rules changed and all was well.

The couple were sent to the Beijing embassy in 1980 and three years later to Shanghai to open the new consulate there.

Other postings were Australia, Brussels, the Caribbean, Chile, East Berlin, Indonesia – there were hostage negotiations with terrorists – and Mauritius. She has a new novel out In 2023!, a change of genre, a spin-off from her 2014 York Theatre Royal play. Her home is in North Yorkshire.

Above: Shanghai today.

Monday 15th
April 2024
AGM at 6.45pm
with lecture at
7.30pm



No ceasefire on the home front

SIR GARY COWARD

Always a pleasure to, ever so subtly, let old soldiers know they're not alone in being able to discern military stuff from ordinary stuff.

But is Sir Gary Coward KBE, CB, the Army's former Chief of Materiel, able to press control and apostrophe simultaneously and e sharply afterwards to conjure up that pesky é? That, sir, marks one as a true (keyboard) warrior.

He retired in 2012 as the lieutenant general holding that key quartermasterly post. He moved on to become national chairman of SSAFA, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association. In that role he will survey for us the landscape of

armed forces charities in a society where over the centuries the government itself has usually stood aside from the after-care of those who defend our way of life.

There have been distinguished exceptions, such as to look after the old redcoats at the Royal Hospital Chelsea (1692), and the orphans of Napoleonic wars at the nearby Duke of York's Royal Military Asylum. "Dukies" is now the Royal Military School, Dover, where Sir Gary boarded; his is an Army family.

Besides household names like the British Legion there's over 2,200 smaller charities devoted to the needs – physical and mental health, employment problems, brushes with the law – of veterans and their families. Scotty's Little

Soldiers, helping bereaved children, and Combat Stress are offshoots of an 1803 fund set up by Lloyd's insurance.

SSAFA helps Gurkha families in their own language and also has under its wing the 75 Military Wives choirs, the Catterick-inspired network of 2,200 spirited women who sing against loneliness and in solidarity with often absent menfolk.

Sir Gary's overseas service included Germany, Hong Kong, the USA, Brunei and Bosnia. With the UN in besieged Sarajevo he gave the nightly report to TV networks. A Paxman grilling was survived and he thwarted a 45-minute attempt by an ABC anchor to get him to criticise his boss, General Sir Michael Rose.

Membership 2023-24

Fees

Subscription is £30 a year, under-18s and students £10. Adult visitors pay £5 for each lecture, juniors and students £2.

To avoid long queues at the first meeting, subscriptions should be paid beforehand.

You can do this at the Art Shop, 12 Bondgate Darlington DL3 7JE from July 24th to September 2nd (9.30am-4pm CLOSED WEDNESDAY). Take the completed membership form (from the letter delivered with this brochure) and your cheque – not

cash or card – to the shop, near Nationwide. Or send them, with SAE, to Sue and Roger Colley, 78 Neville Road, Darlington DL3 8NE. Queries to 01325 356876.

Venue

Carmel College, The Headlands, Darlington DL3 8RP off Hummersknott Avenue, which is off Carmel Road North. We meet in John Caden Hall, which has a loop hearing system. There is ample parking.

Times

Lectures, almost always illustrated, start at 7.30pm. The

President's Evening reception is at 6.45pm with the lecture following at 7.30pm. Lectures are an hour to 75 minutes. They are usually the second Monday in the month, but this season a week earlier in September, December, February and April.

Contacts

Email: dlecture@live.co.uk

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Officers and Committee

President: Wendy Acres, Vice-President: Margaret Cunningham, General Secretary: Annie Mollart. Programme Secretary: Margaret Cunningham, Treasurer: Ian Whitfield, Membership Secretaries Roger and Sue Colley. June Goodrick, Robert Jones, Melanie Pears and Peter Ridley are also committee members.

Retirement has further weakened our committee this year. It would increase our chances of survival if you would join those who remain. It is not a demanding job - three or four meetings a year – but without new blood we will follow other societies into sudden collapse. This organisation has been a part of Darlington cultural scene since 1882; complacency puts it at risk.

You can help. You will make new friends while doing something important for your town.



