

Conversation Club

Issue 22–November 2024



Conversation
CLUB



CONTENTS

Page 3

Welcome from the co-chairs:
– Christine Barltrop & Brian Helsdon

Page 4

Annual General Meeting
8th December 2023
– Elizabeth Birks

Page 6

Walks Programme 2024
Forge Dam
Buxton
Ladybower Reservoir and Woods
Train to Honley
– Ahmad El Malla
Visit to Sheffield General Cemetery
– Lyudmyla Migal
The Seaside and the City
Scarborough
York
– Brian Helsdon

Page 12

A Student's Perspective
– Madoka Konishi

Page 13

A Volunteer's Viewpoint
– Denis Green

Page 14

A Trustee's Reflections
– Jim Dimond

Page 15

And Finally...
– Elizabeth Birks

For more information or if you are interested in becoming a member or a volunteer

email: enquiries@conversationclub.org.uk

visit: www.conversationclub.org.uk

Our Trustees:

Brian Helsdon – Co-Chair ESOL, language support

Christine Barltrop – Co-Chair

Victor Mujakachi – Finance

Richard Chessum – Advisor

Jim Dimond – Newsletter and Social Media

Ahmad El Malla – Walks

Lee Moran – Wednesday and Friday Groups

Helen Roberts – Membership and Student Liaison

Masoumeh Sahatlyan – Women's Coordinator

Farhan Mordi – Arts Table

Newsletter Editor – Jim Dimond

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info@pickards-tonik.co.uk

www.pickards-tonik.co.uk

Welcome

We are very happy to welcome you to the 2024 Sheffield Conversation Club Newsletter. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to the newsletter. A special thanks goes to Jim Dimond without whom, it is safe to say, you would have nothing to read.

This has really been the first truly normal year since the pandemic. We continue to run our Friday club with an arts table and two English classes including a thriving beginners' class. On Wednesday we have been running an English class at the City of Sanctuary and latterly at Victoria Hall in the centre of Sheffield. We also had two coach trips, one to the seaside and the other to York, see more inside.



None of this would be possible without our sponsors. Conversation Club costs over £7000 a year to run. So thanks to our funders this year, The Lottery Community Fund, the Brelms Trust and the Dyers

Company. A final thanks goes to everyone involved in the club and who contributed to its smooth running.

Christine Barltrop and
Brian Helsdon (co-chairs)

On our travels



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8th DECEMBER 2023

Welcome and Introduction

Brian welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Election of Trustees

The first agenda item was the proposed election of Farhan Mordi and Masoumeh Sahatlyan as trustees; and the re-election of Christine Barltrop, Victor Mujakachi, Helen Roberts and Lee Moran. This motion was proposed by Ahmad and seconded by Viv, and all were duly elected.

Brian and Christine thanked Qais Arrian who had recently stepped down as a trustee after many years of service.

Reports from the co-chairs

The co-chairs then gave brief reports. Brian said that there were plans to encourage more people to come by making contact with the English language support charity SAVTE (Sheffield Association for the Voluntary Teaching of English), and to accompany them to hotels housing asylum seekers. Work on developing a new website would start in the New Year alongside action to raise

the club's profile on different social media platforms.

The year has been challenging and money has been coming in from Brelm's Trust and from the National Lottery Community Fund. But new funding sources will soon be needed. Christine was keen to thank everyone and made reference to our symbolic banner showing us as a family with many branches. She thanked Ahmad for organising walks, Farhan for looking after the art table, Graham, Rosemary and Viv for talking to people, Kathleen, Brian and Denis for classes, Edy and Dave for looking after the facilities, and many more!

Treasurer's Report

Victor Mujakachi, Club Treasurer, pointed out that it was John Barltrop (Christine's late husband) who set up the accountancy systems for Sheffield Conversation Club and Victor has been continuing along the lines established. The accounts presented were for the year ending 30 April 2023. An independent examination of the accounts was carried out by Anderson Moyo MSc MInstF (Cert) of Habitus Consulting & Associates.

Victor in Side by Side



ENTERTAINMENT

A short performance was given by the amateur dramatic company Side-by-Side. Johanna Van de Voort, their lead, led all of us present in a short breathing and relaxation exercise immediately before the performance which dealt with the topic of water scarcity. Anyone who took photos during the performance was asked not to publish them as some of the performers would feel unsafe if images of them were published. It was explained that drama sessions for women only are held regularly on Fridays and for men and women on Tuesdays.

Reflections on Conversation club by members and volunteers

A number of Conversation Club members came to the microphone and gave their thoughts on the value to them of being able to participate in Conversation Club activities. A few spoke in their home language (including Farsi and Arabic) as well as in English.

Songs by Mim Suleyman

Jim Introduced singer-songwriter, Mim. Before giving us a short set of songs in her native language Swahili, Mim told us that she studied as a materials engineer in Zanzibar before coming to Sheffield University in 1994 to do further study. She then started writing and performing songs. We were invited to join in one song by repeating the word 'bakora'! This song was about the mistreatment of people with Albinism. It was only after this, that we learned that the word means 'whipping'!



Mim Suleyman

Brian closed the formal part of the AGM and invited people to stay for food and general conversation.

Elizabeth Birks

Walks Programme 2024

The Conversation Club walks programme started early this year in February when a group of us met in Endcliffe Park and headed to Forge Dam. Further walks followed through spring and summer in Derbyshire, and South and West Yorkshire.



Buxton trip



In May we visited the town of Buxton in Derbyshire. Finally was a visit to Ladybower Reservoir with a complete circuit and a stop midway for a picnic.

In late June fourteen of us took the train to Honley, West Yorkshire where we were hosted by Christine, our co-chair. We had a walk in the meadows behind her house and a visit to the Queen Victoria Jubilee Tower overlooking the city of Huddersfield. And the rolling Yorkshire countryside.

Ahmad El Malla





Visit to Sheffield General Cemetery

Following a successful visit four years ago, members of our Conversation Club revisited Sheffield General Cemetery in August 2024. Over twenty of us gathered there on a warm sunny day.

Phil, our guide, met us at the Gatehouse. Sheffield General Cemetery is one of the oldest cemeteries in England. We learned a lot about famous people, who lived, worked and died in Sheffield. We found the grave of George Basset, the founder of Basset's, a confectionery firm in Sheffield. Albert Leslie Simpkin, the founder of A. L. Simpkin & Co. LTD, was also buried here. Phil treated us with Simpkins Travel Sweets and George Basset's candies, both really very tasty.

Do you know what plants and mushrooms grow in the General cemetery? Some plants, while very comfortable here, like Japanese knotweed, are invasive and aggressive species, and have to be kept under control.

About 87000 people were buried at the General cemetery before it was closed for burial in 1978. Sheffield City Council removed most of the gravestones in the Anglican area to create the green open space there.

We finished our tour in the nonconformist Samuel Worth Chapel, now deconsecrated. Personally, I was extremely surprised by the events taking place in the Chapel – wedding blessings, concerts, film shows and even discos. I think that the General Cemetery is a 'must see' place in Sheffield, if you want to learn more about the history of our city and its community.



The pictures show Simkins sweets, Phil our guide and The Samuel Worth Chapel where we started and finished our tour.

Lyudmyla Migal

The Seaside and the City

This year, for the first time for a while, we have been able to run two coach trips. For our seaside trip we returned to an old favourite, Scarborough. We had a full coach of over 50 people and everyone had a great time as I hope the pictures show.

HERE'S WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT THE DAY...

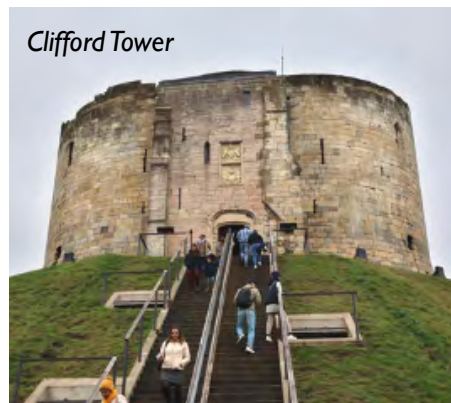
- “ It was an enjoyable day; it was a sunny day; I refreshed my brain. ”
- “ Scarborough is a wonderful town; majestic castle ruins; delicious fish and chips. ”
- “ Thanks for everything, it was a beautiful day. ”
- “ It was such a wonderful day, walking, swimming, chatting, socialising with friends. ”



Thanks to the generosity of our funders it was possible this year to run a second trip. As people reminded us 'we used to go to York' so this year we decided to return, It was what I call a typical autumn day, starting off gloomy and cool, brightening up in the middle of the day with heavy rain towards the end. People split into groups and did what they wanted to. I think between us we saw practically everything there was to see, the Minster, the Shambles, the museums, the river. One person proudly said 'I visited five museums.' Again the pictures tell the story



The Shambles
York, in the rain



Clifford Tower



National Railway Museum

Thanks to everyone who went on the trips and made them so successful.
A special thanks to Lee Moran who tirelessly and patiently organised both trips.

Brian Helsdon

*York Minster
in the sun*



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Sheffield studying Intercultural Communication. I first learned about the Conversation Club through a student-led organisation, STAR (Student Action for Refugees), whose members act as student volunteers at the Club.

Meeting new people can be nerve-racking, but Conversation Club is a very welcoming space. As a newcomer to Sheffield, I find it a wonderful opportunity to talk to both local people and people from all around the world.

As part of my research, I am conducting an ethnographic project to study how a local community and new arrivals, including asylum seekers and refugees, interact and create culture together. Conversation Club kindly allowed me to do this with them, so I am currently documenting my experience at the Club. I am grateful to do this at

Conversation Club, which has a long history of providing a warm welcome for new arrivals to Sheffield. It will help me think about what my home country, Japan, can learn from in terms of creating a friendly space to accommodate the increasing number of migrants.

I asked other student volunteers about their experiences at Conversation Club. One student joined the Club last year through a student-led volunteering project, ARISE (Accompanying Refugees in Sheffield to Events). She told me that volunteering at Conversation Club is different from others because volunteers here can have a “direct positive impact” at a personal level. The other student, who joined through the Sheffield Students’



Union, says some of the people at Conversation Club are now like “grandparents” to him! Conversation Club gives students an opportunity to interact with many people and hear their personal stories. I believe that these individual heartwarming

experiences make strong connections among Club members and enable the community to keep welcoming new people.

Modoka Konishi

A VOLUNTEER'S VIEWPOINT

I'm not sure exactly when I first began coming to Conversation Club: it was eight or nine years ago. I had been volunteering with English and other classes with another charity. I noticed that numbers in the English class had fallen and found out that people were going to something called Conversation Club instead. I had never heard of it and nor had anyone else at the charity. I paid a visit, was warmly welcomed by Ralph and others and found that I liked the atmosphere, the range of activities and the people. What I didn't like, and still find difficult, is hearing what people are saying in the large room full of people in conversation. And in that large room there can be small groups talking, lots around the art table and Chris's class: people seem to come back to that week after week. It's also good to see students from the universities coming. They don't come for as long as the regular volunteers, but I feel sure that they learn from the experience and may go on to volunteer with other organisations after they graduate and begin their careers.

Every week, I join the English class in the small room. Sometimes I can guess what the lesson will be about, because Brian keeps it topical. This can be something in the news or something seasonal and often linked to how it is to live in this country and this city. Sometimes it's obvious what the topic will be if Brian has just returned from one of his trips to countries around the world. Brian is a very good photographer, and he always has plenty of photos to share. Sometimes the lesson strays away from the topic. I like the spontaneity of that: people are interesting and have interesting things to say.



I can't think of anywhere else that I could have met people from all over the world and learnt about their cultures. It is instructive to learn how people from other cultures see the UK and this city: the climate here; our food; our customs; our system of government; our history; the peculiarities of our language (# see below).

Numbers of people coming can differ week by week; I often can't work out why. And then when Covid-19 struck we did not meet at CURC or Victoria Hall. However, we did continue to meet: first of all, in Zoom meetings online and then, when it was permitted, in Weston Park or the Botanical Gardens. Sometimes the squirrels were a delightful distraction, especially when they came right up to us. We even saw people feeding some of them by hand. After the English class I enjoyed walking around the park with people or enjoying the sunshine (there were many sunny days) on the grass. One advantage of the Zoom meetings was that a few

people who were not in Sheffield could join us, even from another country.

The AGMs (annual general meetings) have always been interesting, because as well as the necessary business, there has always been some kind of entertainment such as a play or music. There have been some well-known speakers, like Nick Clegg, who was MP for Sheffield Hallam and Deputy Prime Minister, and Majid Majid, the former Lord Mayor of Sheffield, who had come to this country as a child refugee. Oh yes.... and the food!

I am just one of the volunteers here. Many charities have paid staff as well as volunteers. Conversation Club is run entirely by volunteers. It could not exist without them.

English spelling can be confusing; for example: "ough" is pronounced differently in thought, through, bough and thorough. And it's not just spelling. Why, for example, do we say two sheep, not sheeps? Why men, not mans? Why children, not childs?

Denis Green

A TRUSTEE'S REFLECTIONS

This has been a good year for Conversation Club and it's been brilliant to see member numbers return to pre-pandemic levels. This, together with the arrival of new student volunteers, our positive engagement with STAR and ARISE, and the resumption of a diverse range of activities, walks and outings has been very encouraging.

From a personal perspective I've been busy with modernising the image and raising the profile of Conversation Club to extend its reach and to raise awareness of who we are and what we do.

In February we unveiled our new publicity banner at the first of the student volunteer fairs we attended this year. The design was based on an original concept inspired by drawings by Farhan Mordi, who runs our Friday art table. I'm particularly proud of this design because it encapsulates our role and ethos in one simple picture and just a few key words.



Another positive development has been the appointment of Farhan and Masoumeh to our board of trustees, both long standing members and volunteers, meaning that we are more representative of the people we are trying to help.

March 2024 saw the launch of our new website <https://conversationclub.org.uk/> featuring news, pictures and information about the club. For the first time we now have a fundraising page for donations from the public to help with our running costs <https://conversationclub.org.uk/fundraising/>

The website also gives a dedicated telephone number (075 15 439593) and email address enquiries@conversationclub.org.uk so that we can respond quickly to enquiries from the public, potential members, volunteers and partner organisations.

Looking ahead I think that we need to further enhance our online presence and make better use of social media to reach out to more people, especially younger generations. We have had a basic Facebook page for some time, and, since earlier this year, an Instagram account, but we need more participation and engagement to maximise the potential of these if we are to grow and rejuvenate both our membership and pool of volunteers. Do get in touch if you think you can help us in this regard!

My aspiration for next year is for us to be more confident and outward looking in order to respond proactively to what's happening in our communities at a local level and more widely. These are difficult

times, and unfortunately the planned visits to the hotel and women's hostel (to recruit new members) were cancelled due to security concerns over potential far-right riots in Sheffield city centre, like the one in Rotherham, at that time. To date these visits have yet to be rescheduled. This should not stop us, however, from striving to work even more closely with partner organisations with shared aims and complimentary roles. Sheffield is, after all, the first UK City of Sanctuary!

Finally, I just wanted to echo what others have said about Conversation Club: it's a great place to volunteer and a privilege to meet so many inspiring people from all over the world, where everyone is welcome and their contribution is valued.



Jim Dimond

Lunch during a long walk on the edge of Sheffield



AND FINALLY...

Here are some English questions that will test everyone
What's the big word, beginning with e, hidden inside the word: **antidisestablishmentarianism**?
Can you think of longer words in the English language?

See how many 3-letter words can you make using the letters in the word 'Conversation'? Example: cot, not, etc.
Think of as many English words as you can that contain 4 or more different vowels.

Elizabeth Birks

Tea at home with Christine Bartrop
in Honley

Conversation
CLUB



the
brelms
trust