



Edenbridge u3a Chairman's Newsletter May 2023

Dear members

I hope this newsletter finds you all well – as I write this we are just two days away from the coronation of King Charles. My memories of the previous one in 1953 are somewhat hazy – I lived in a small village on the Isle of Grain. In the village there were only two TV sets, and my mother and I were invited into one of those two houses to watch the ceremony. The TV was a big box with a tiny 9-inch screen, but I do remember being impressed by being able to watch the broadcast live!

We were all very sad that our planned speaker for April had to cancel at short notice – she was filming in Manchester that week as she is still actively involved in stunt work for film and television. At very short notice we were able to get a replacement speaker, Steve Hookins, who entertained us admirably with a wide ranging and humorous talk on the title of 'Bits that don't fit'. Once again 'thank you' to our speaker organiser, Maureen Young, who spent hours on the telephone getting Steve as a replacement.

Now onto this month. In India in Victorian times if you wanted to get from Calcutta (now known as Kolkata) up to the tea growing region of Darjeeling, it would have been a two-week journey involving part rail, part boat and two parts in a bullock cart! Darjeeling at the time was an important hill station high up in the foothills of the Himalayas. It was decided to build a narrow-gauge railway up the slopes to connect New Jalpaiguri with Darjeeling - an incredible engineering task in those Victorian Times.

Our speaker, Major Paul Whittle, will be taking us through the construction and the problems experienced. It is known as the 'Toy Train to the Clouds' because it is a narrow-gauge railway compared to other rail lines, and the steam trains that hauled the trains up to Darjeeling were so small they looked like toy trains. Nowadays most journeys have diesel engines pulling the carriages but occasionally steam trains are brought out of retirement for special occasions.



What a challenge, and it's not surprising that this engineering marvel has now been awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status. So, on the 31st its all aboard for a fascinating talk on this little gem in India!

Reminder – just two months of this year's membership left, so membership fees are due from the 1st July and are:

Single membership will be just £15

Joint membership will be £25

That's all folks – stay safe and stay healthy, see many of you on the 31st May

Mike Collins

Chairman

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