



KESWICK CREATIVES: Art club members at their first show, (back left to right) Judy Sutcliffe, Caroline Howarth, Monique Gadella, and Alan Weightman, (front left to right) Nicola Leah, Dorine Tinnion and Christina Kyprianou.

ART CLUB HOSTS INAUGURAL EXHIBITION

BUDDING artists from Keswick Art Club enjoyed a successful exhibition of work last Saturday (July 25), attracting nearly 100 visitors to their inaugural show at the local rugby club.

The group – all beginners who took up their new creative pastime just over a year ago – displayed a variety of their best works in different styles and techniques.

Sandie Craig started the Tuesday art class for beginners in Threlkeld in March 2025. Since then, following a move to Portinscale then Keswick, membership has grown from four to 15.

Member Judy Sutcliffe said the two-hour class was “the best zen time of the week” while Christina Kyprianou said that she was delighted to have joined the club although she hadn’t expected to be entering an art exhibition.

Describing the club as tremendously encouraging and supportive, Caroline Howarth said it was “the best mental health tonic that money can buy!” and Nicola Leah particularly enjoyed being among like-

minded and non-judgmental people.

Dorine Tinnion added: “The Keswick art club has opened up a whole new world that I revel in!”

Fellow artist, Monique Gadella, agreed, adding: “It’s great to switch off and be in the moment during our sessions.”

Throughout the show, friends, family and passers-by expressed surprise at how much the artists had learnt in a year and many praised the high standard.

Lakeland artist, Paul Wilmot, was equally impressed during his visit and offered to hold a session with the budding artists, who thanked Keswick Rugby Club for hosting the event and St Herbert’s School for providing display boards.

From September 1, the group will restart without a teacher, encouraging and supporting each other. Members meet from 10am until noon every Tuesday at the Keswick Rugby Club. Newcomers can participate in a trial session, paying £50 in advance for five classes thereafter. Any surplus funds will be used to engage tutors.

CALL TO DITCH TOURISM LEVY PROPOSALS

THE Country Land and Business Association (CLA) has joined a coalition of more than 30 business, tourism and hospitality organisations urging the Government to abandon plans for an overnight visitor levy.

In a joint letter to the Chancellor, the coalition warns that a holiday tax would increase the cost of domestic breaks, reduce visitor spending and damage businesses across the rural economy, including pubs, farm shops, attractions and accommodation providers.

Analysis by Oxford Economics suggests the policy could result in 33,000 fewer jobs and a £2.2bn hit to UK GDP.

CLA President Gavin Lane said: “A tourism levy sends entirely the wrong signal at a time when many rural businesses are already under significant financial pressure.

“Business taxes seem as incoherent as they have ever been. Increasing taxes via a visitor levy while at the same time reducing VAT on visitor attractions and business rates for pubs and clubs seems very poorly thought through and confusing.

“The profit warnings from Greggs and

Wetherspoons demonstrate that UK retail and hospitality is grappling with significant cost pressures, including 20 per cent VAT, business rates and rising labour costs. This is compounded in rural areas with poor transport links, weak digital connectivity and restrictive planning rules.

“Rather than introducing new costs for visitors and businesses, policymakers should focus on creating the conditions for this vital sector to thrive.”

Following the first Cumbrian mayoral election in May 2027, a newly-elected mayor will have the power to introduce an overnight tax. In December 2024, the Friends of the Lake District (FoLD) published Who Pays for the Lake District? – a report laying out the impacts of tourism on the national park and the successful use by cities and regions across Europe of visitor taxes to mitigate visitor impacts. One of the other suggestions mooted in the report was to introduce a vehicle levy.

And in the same year a YouGov survey of 2,000 people found that 68 per cent of Cumbrian residents and 64 per cent of visitors would support some kind of visitor levy.

Pupils’ art on display

THE work of pupils from Keswick School has gone on show at the annual exhibition of young artists at the Rheged Centre in Penrith.

It is being displayed alongside work from other participating schools which include: Appleby Grammar School, Austin Friars Independent School and James Rennie School in Carlisle, Queen Elizabeth Grammar School and Ullswater Community College in Penrith, the Nelson Thomlinson School, Wigton, and the Windermere School.

The work of A-level students is on a wide variety of themes, some designated by the exam board while others were inspired by their own ideas. At the opening of the exhibition, Sarah Dunning



OPENING: From left: Sarah Dunning, with Fiona Campbell, Stuart McElhinney and Linda Ivson from The Arts Society Cumbria.

of Westmorland Family Business selected three prize-winning artworks.

They are: *Abstract Memory* by Laura Per; *How Long Is It Going To Take?* by Cecily Shaw and *Silence* by Aarupi Javeria.

A special prize was awarded to a collaborative work of pupils from James Rennie School who created a collage titled *Other* made from recycled materials.

Young Keswick actor delighted to be making professional debut at local theatre

By ANDREW KEOGH

A KESWICK actor is excited to be making her professional debut at Theatre By The Lake in *Calendar Girls: The Musical*.

Leah Montgomery, aged 24, who grew up in Portinscale, is playing the role of Jenny, the rebellious daughter of Marie, chair of the small Yorkshire Women’s Institute who create a nude calendar to raise money for charity.

“It feels incredibly special to be doing my first show in my hometown at my local theatre,” said Leah, who attended St Herbert’s Primary School before going to Keswick School, where she is now a singing tutor.

Growing up, Leah, who is also a front of house volunteer at the theatre, was part of numerous shows at Theatre By The Lake, as part of its young cast, including *Keep Smiling Through*, *Rogue Herries* and *Peter Pan*.

“Being in these shows are some of my favourite childhood memories,” she said.

“It makes it even more exciting to be returning to the TBTL stage as a professional,” said Leah, who trained in musical theatre at The Arden School of Theatre, Manchester.

“I think at drama school there can be an expectation that you will instantly move to London or stay in a major city when you graduate – but that’s not always the path everyone wants to follow.

“I love living in Keswick – and I’m feeling very lucky to be a part of such a heartwarming show in – and I’m biased – the most beautiful place.”

Calendar Girls: The Musical, written by Gary Barlow and Tim Firth, opens in Keswick on Thursday August 6.

Based on a true story,

LOOK OUT FOR LEAH IN CALENDAR GIRLS SHOW



REVEALING: *Calendar Girls: The Musical* is coming to Theatre by the Lake next Thursday and runs until September 5. Picture: Tony Bartholomew.



THRILLED: Leah Montgomery will be playing the part of Jenny, the rebellious daughter of WI chair Marie.

the show tells the tale of an ordinary group of women who do something extraordinary and their actions have since been made into a record-breaking movie, a West End play and now an award-winning musical.

Of her character, Jenny, Leah says: “She’s strong-willed and sharp-tongued and definitely isn’t afraid to be herself.”

Of the rehearsal process, Leah said it has been unique for her in the way that the supporting cast are integrating into an already

“I grew up singing and dancing constantly – and I still do now!”

established production following the show’s run at The Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough.

“Our associate director Chantell Walker has been very keen to develop our own authentic versions of each character within the show so it really feels as though I’ve been able to put my own stamp on Jenny,” said Leah.

“*Calendar Girls The Musical* has humour with a lot of heart.

“It’s got some deeply moving moments which explore loss and finding the strength in others around you in life’s hardest moments. This is paired with a brilliant script that has you roaring with laughter unexpectedly. It’s wonderfully honest and beautifully written.”

Her first memory of going to the theatre is watching *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* at The

Liverpool Empire with her nana.

“I grew up singing and dancing constantly – and I still do now! After doing shows at TBTL when I was in school, I really became more interested in acting,” she said.

“I shared my love of music with my grandad. A gifted self-taught pianist, he encouraged my love of singing and violin from a young age and was always very proud to watch me perform – I still remember him buying me my first full set of violin strings.

“I knew I wanted to go to drama school when I was about 12 and I eventually decided to audition for musical theatre courses so I could continue training in all three disciplines – singing, dancing and acting.”

“The thing I most enjoy performing is losing yourself in a different world to your own. I think to be interested in acting, what you actually have an interest in is the psychology of people – you get free rein to explore a life that isn’t your own and to make choices that aren’t yours – it’s very fun.

“*Calendar Girls* also has the added bonus of being a musical, and I think my favourite thing about performing musically is how music can transport you – it can make you (as an audience member or a performer) feel emotions that spoken word can’t evoke on its own.

“I’d absolutely encourage people to come along to see the show. Whether you’re already familiar with *Calendar Girls* or experiencing it for the first time, it’s a wonderful evening at the theatre.

“It’s a show that has something for everyone – you’ll laugh, you’ll probably shed a few tears, and you’ll leave feeling uplifted. It’s a really special story that stays with you long after you’ve left the theatre.”

Leah, whose parents Gill and Paul Montgomery and grandma, Maureen Montgomery, all live in Keswick, has a younger sister, Erin, who is a talented chef, specialising in pies and pastries.

“They are all very excited to come and watch the show,” added Leah.

BOTTOMS UP FOR NEW BEER CELEBRATING THEATRE PRODUCTION

KESWICK’S Theatre by the Lake has joined forces with Jennings Brewery to launch a new beer, ‘Calendar Girls’, celebrating the arrival of the musical at the attraction this summer.

The beer is a nod to Jennings’ real-life connection to the Calendar Girls story: in 1999, Rylstone Women’s Institute met at their local Jennings pub, the Devonshire Arms in Cracoe to create the alternative WI Calendar in memory of a member’s husband.

The calendar raised more than £6m for charity and inspired the hit film, with Jennings helping to meet demand and distribute it at the time.

Simon Stephens, executive director and joint chief executive officer of TBTL, said: “We’re delighted to partner with Jennings to celebrate the arrival of *Calendar Girls: The Musical* here at TBTL.

“The beer is a fitting nod to the pivotal role the brewery played in the original story and we’re



CONNECTION: Jennings has launched a new beer called Calendar Girls in collaboration with Theatre by the Lake.

pleased to be able to celebrate this Cumbrian connection. We hope our audiences enjoy a glass or two over the summer as we toast a fantastic story and production.”

Chris France, of Jennings, added: “Like Jennings, TBTL is an iconic Cumbrian institution, so when they told us they were putting on *Calendar Girls* we were really excited!

“The wonderful story of those determined northern women doing something quite exceptional deserves to be celebrated with a beer, especially

when Jennings was part of that original story.”

Pale gold, spritzzy and full-bodied, with refreshing flavours of citrus, floral pine and delicate hints of lychee, the beer has a 4.1 per cent ABV and is available in 500ml gluten-free bottles as well as on draught.

It can be enjoyed at the bar at TBTL during performances, picked up in bottles at Booths in Keswick, sampled on draught at the Jennings Taproom in Cockermouth, or ordered online via the Jennings Brewery webshop at jenningsbrewery.co.uk.



CRAFTY: Members of Thirlmere WI making sunflowers for theatre volunteers to wear during the run of *Calendar Girls the Musical*.

WI members make sunflowers for TBTL volunteers

MEMBERS of Thirlmere WI have been busy hand-crafting beautiful sunflower badges for volunteers to wear at Keswick’s Theatre by the Lake during its production of *Calendar Girls the Musical*.

A Theatre by the Lake spokeswoman said: “Inspired by the flowers at the heart of the story, each sunflower has been lovingly made by hand – with even some homegrown blooms providing inspiration! We can’t wait to see our volunteers wearing them throughout the run.”

The WI has been thanked for their generosity, creativity and support.

“It’s partnerships like these that make this production feel so special,” the spokeswoman added.

Cancer patients praise level of care

CANCER patients in north Cumbria have praised the services of hospital staff in a national survey, highlighting clear communication, strong teamwork and high-quality support throughout their journey with the illness.

Patients said they received easy to understand information, felt involved in treatment decisions, and received good care and support while in hospital. Many also reported having a helpful main point of contact and said that diagnostic tests and results were explained clearly and sensitively.

The National Cancer Patient Experience Survey 2025, led by NHS England, shows that cancer teams at North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust (NCIC) continue to perform strongly, with several areas rated above the expected range nationally, including:

● Almost nine out of 10 (89 per cent) of patients said treatment options were explained in a way they could completely understand – above the national expected range;

● Almost everybody (95per cent) felt the whole care team worked well together;

● Almost everybody (93 per cent) said they had a clear main point of contact, and (98 per cent) found their advice helpful;

● Almost everybody (95 per cent) said they were always given enough privacy when receiving diagnostic test results;

● Overall, patients rated NCIC 9.1 out of 10, which is higher than the national average (8.9).

Kiyla Murray, lead cancer nurse, said: “These results are a real testament to the dedication of our staff. Patients are telling us that they feel listened to, supported and clearly informed at every stage.

“That’s exactly the experience we want every person to have. Patients are getting the information they need, they feel involved in decisions, and they know who to turn to for support.”

Vanessa Connor, deputy chief operating officer, said “We’ve been on a significant improvement journey, and that’s reflected here but also in the fact that patients are being seen and treated much more quickly.

“Patients felt well supported during hospital stays, with strong scores for discussing worries, controlling pain, and receiving clear information when leaving hospital.”

Slip on Catbells

A YOUNG woman injured her ankle while descending Catbells after she slipped on rocks made greasy after a rare spell of rain on Saturday afternoon.

Keswick Mountain Rescue Team was short on team members and requested the assistance of RAF Leeming MRT which was training in the area.

By the time the RAF arrived on scene the casualty was splinted and loaded onto a stretcher. A back rope was used to prevent a *Cool Runnings*-style runaway as the casualty was sledged down the steep slopes to the track at the base of the fell from where she was taken to a friend’s car for onward travel to hospital.

The rescue lasted just over two-and-a-half hours.

Meet the commissioner

CUMBRIA’S Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, David Allen, is hosting a surgery in Cockermouth to listen to residents’ concerns and views around Cumbria Constabulary and Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS).

The surgery will be held at Cockermouth Town Hall, Market Street, on Wednesday (August 5) from 9.30am to 10.30am.