

MORPETH PATHWAYS

A FORUM FOR CHURCH & COMMUNITY

FREE ISSUE

Autumn edition 2026

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Issue No 17



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From the editor

Welcome to the Autumn issue of Morpeth Pathways.

Autumn. The season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. Perhaps, although who knows what the weather will bring. However, the temperature is dropping and the clouds are bringing much needed rain, so now is the time to pour yourself a cup of tea and settle down to read this issue. Hopefully you'll find something to interest you.

Autumn is synonymous with harvest festivals and this year rather than bringing the traditional fresh produce we are, as a parish, once again asking for donations for the Wansbeck Valley Foodbank. Volunteer Nick Stratford has written an article about their work, how the charity is developing and has more details about their harvest appeal. Please support this cause if you can.

This month's cover photograph of Morpeth's wonderful floral clock was taken by Alison Byard, who has written about the touching history behind the clock. I did not know of its rarity, being one of only four floral clocks in England and the only one with carpet bedding planting. Still on planting, Rebecca Wootton explains why she has opened her garden to the public again this year and leaves the plants and animals to do the talking, showing the benefits of permaculture.

Turning to planting on a different scale, Beth Rookwood reports on the work her charity, The Roost, and the work it is doing with young people. She is positive about the benefits of the space they have at Netherwitton. Young adults go to The Roost in groups, or on their own, sometimes to think something through, sometimes just for a break, to experience the peace, to do some gardening, and to be creative. Jo Murgatroyd has also experienced the space of the natural world, but her tale is of a more invigorating time; she did a 26 mile sponsored walk around Alnmouth in aid of the Alzheimers Society. All in eight hours!

If you are feeling curious rather than energetic, it is the Heritage Open Days event from 17th to 20th September when you can take a look inside buildings that you may not have had the chance to visit at other times of the year. Kim Bibby-Wilson gives us a rundown of the

buildings and events taking place in Morpeth. Two of our churches, St Mary's and St James' will be opening. Liz Scott-Tatum has an update of the work that has been going on at St Mary's that you will be able to see for yourselves. At St James' you will be able to see some drawings and the work that is being planned to transform the interior of the church. Why not pop along and have a look? Or you could take up Prof Andrew Cant's invitation to come along to a choral evensong at St Mary's and step back from the noise and bustle of everyday life.

Recently I sat down with the current Chair of Northumberland County Council to find out just what the Chair actually does. Chair Cllr John Beynon told me about his role and the funds he has raised for Young Lives vs Cancer in Northumberland.

Two charities that have made lasting contributions to the life of Morpethians are the Mustard Tree Trust and the Mary Hollon Trust. You can read about the work of both these charities in this issue and look forward to the annual Hollon tea in November, for residents aged over 75 living within the historic Borough of Morpeth. Rev Matthew Tetley has written about his life serving as a prison chaplain and the charity he supports, Welcome Directory, which works to provide support and a welcome for those leaving prison.

And finally, we reach the penultimate chapter of the tale of a modern day Santa's elf, Brian. This time Brian takes a gamble ...

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Pathways. If you would like to contribute or have any suggestions for articles, please do let me know. My email address is sally.borderkeith@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sally Keith

Editor



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Three Churches
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Morpeth's floral clock

Have you been enjoying the glorious colours of the floral planting in Carlisle Park again this summer? Including, of course, our floral clock, one of only four floral clocks in England, and the only one with traditional carpet bedding.

Morpeth's Floral Clock was created in 1972, when it was a gift to the Borough of Morpeth from James Fairbairn Smith, in commemoration of four years' service as Mayor by his friend Alderman Bertram Jobson.

The floral clock formed part of a beautifully planted flower bed for many years until it sadly fell into disrepair. It was restored and replanted in 2018 due to a Community Partnership between Northumberland County Council and the Friends of Morpeth Floral Clock.

With much hard work fundraising, as well as nearly 100 generous donations from Morpethians, both at home and abroad, and local businesses, the Friends raised the £10,000 necessary for the clock's reinstatement. We are grateful to Northumberland County Council, who have played their part by offering their support, labour, and expertise.

The clockworks continue to be maintained by the original clockmaker and acknowledged experts in public clocks, Smith's of Derby. Since its reinstatement, the Friends and their supporters have funded improvements such as a concrete chamber to protect the clockworks and raised the angle of the retaining wall to make the clock more visible.

The low and slow-growing plants necessary for a stunning carpet bedding display every summer are provided by a specialist supplier and assembled by the County Council's Carlisle Park garden staff in mid-June into the finished design, rather like a jigsaw.

Cllr Alison Byard explains the history of Morpeth's magnificent floral clock, one of only four floral clocks in England!

The Friends must continue to raise funds for the future planting and maintenance of Morpeth's Floral Clock. We welcome donations c/o TSB, Newgate St, Morpeth.

The picture shows the presentation of the clock to the Borough of Morpeth in 1972 by James Fairbairn Smith of Chicago to his old friend Alderman Bertram Jobson, to mark the latter's four terms as Mayor of Morpeth.



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Opening The Doors To Morpeth's Heritage

Ever wondered what it's like inside the Clock Tower or why Morpeth has such an imposing Town Hall, designed by the architect of grand stately homes Seaton Delaval and Blenheim Palace?

Well, now you can find out! As the national Heritage Open Days website says: "Every September thousands of volunteers across England organise events to celebrate our fantastic history and culture. It's your chance to see hidden places and try out new experiences – all of which are FREE to explore."

Search "Morpeth" on the Heritage Open Days website to discover the full programme, co-ordinated by the volunteers at Greater Morpeth Development Trust. Thursday 17th to Sunday 20th September see hands-on bell-ringing, guided tours of the civic treasures, history walks, a lecture by the Collingwood Society, poetry and piping at the Chantry, and special open sessions at local churches and halls including the Boys' Brigade and Masonic Lodge.



Morpeth Antiquarian Society's annual exhibition in the Town Hall on the Friday and Saturday is *Four* Anniversaries and a Funeral* (*at least!). The funeral reference is to the 300th anniversary of the death of architect Sir John Vanbrugh, marked along with other 2026 anniversaries including 150 years of the YMCA, centenaries of Morpeth Bowling Club and 4th Morpeth Scouts, 75 years since the Clock Tower's Festival of Britain revamp, and local hero Jim Alder's Commonwealth marathon win 60 years ago. There are refreshments, a book stall and children's activities, with a Friday fringe event inside

the exhibition celebrating the Antiquarians' 80th year – a wine-tasting featuring drinks relating to Northumberland's history (tickets from Grape and Grain – not part of the official free HODs activities programme, since there is a charge and raffle to raise funds for the Antiquarian museum store). Discover the drinks enjoyed by Admiral Collingwood (we know his waistcoat sported wine stains) or the town's much-travelled Tudor herbalist William Turner.

Morpeth in the Time of William Turner is the subject of Marie Addyman's latest book, officially launched later in September, but the Society's other new publication *The History of Westgate House* will be on sale at the exhibition and at the Chantry.

Kim Bibby-Wilson

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An historic and sacred space in your town

I was just reflecting on the article I wrote about the work at St Mary's (October 2025) and thought it would be good to talk about where we are now with the Lamplight Project work, the next steps and some of the complications that have cropped up.

So, the Lamplight Project has three main aims:

- 1) **To upgrade the old wiring and replace the old halogen light fittings with LED units.** Now, remember the church was last re-wired in 1985!! Good news, the wiring and lights have been upgraded in the chancel and nave and this has made quite a difference. We still need to upgrade the wiring in the tower and the outside lights, for which we are seeking permission from the Diocesan Advisory Group, and need to raise approximately £10,000 in funds for this.
- 2) **To repair the plaster work and then to redecorate the nave, baptistery (where the font is) and the organ chamber.**

Whilst preparing for these works, we've identified issues of damp affecting the stonework to the rear of the church, caused in part by cement pointing having previously been used, which traps water in the stone. Also, water run-off from the churchyard and damaged or missing drainpipes are a factor. Some high-level plaster is also de-bonding which increases the risk of it falling off. Active woodworm has been noted in some of the roof timbers and there are urgent external repointing works needed on the arch between the chancel and nave. Obviously, this has made a significant impact on the funds we had available for the planned repair and redecoration work, needing to prioritise the urgent works. These unexpected costs amount to an additional £31,552.33!! Monies we had previously identified for the repair of downpipes, low-level plaster repair and redecoration of the church. We will move on with the project work in stages, as funds



allow, but bear with us as when you visit us, you may find some areas of bare, new plaster for a while longer than anticipated!

- 3) **Making St Mary's Church more accessible for our community** – sadly like many churches it's not possible to leave St Mary's unlocked, but we now have a group of volunteers who will be opening the church each Friday morning 9.30am-12.30pm, and Tuesday afternoons 1.00pm -4.00pm throughout August until the end of the Heritage Open Day weekend, 20th September, and we are always open every Sunday at 9.30am for worship, except for the 5th Sundays of some months when as a Parish we worship together at St Aidan's Church. Please do drop in to have a look round, have a chat or a cuppa. As a Parish, we also recognise the importance of the closed churchyard to our community. We know that there are significant graves such as the final resting places of the suffragette Emily Wilding Davison, the artist Joseph Crawhall, the Commonwealth War graves of members of the Polish Community, and other well-known Morpethian family members. Some graves however have no marker – and if you have a family member buried in the churchyard who has no grave marker, please let us know so we can record electronically their final resting place – as some records were unfortunately lost in a fire many years ago.

We also recognise that the churchyard is home to a wide range of birds, animals, trees and plants. With other churches in Morpeth, we are looking at how we better protect and support our created world. Our three churches have signed up to A Rocha's Eco Church scheme <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/> and we will be audited against their standards, to help us identify where we are now and what we need to change.

Some positive steps we've already taken:





St Mary's is a certified Fairtrade church – meaning that the products we purchase, our tea, coffee and sugar benefit more effectively the communities that produced them. There will be more information on Fairtrade at the Morpeth Churches display at the Festival of Community, Nature and Environment with Climate Action Wansbeck; this is at the Town Hall on the 5th September 2026 10am-2pm.

Thanks also go to Elaine, who is recycling the wax and wicks from used candles to create new votive candles in reusable candle holders.

Please do get in touch if you would like to make a donation to the Lamplight Project, or have ideas for fundraising events we could hold at St Mary's Church. We look forward to seeing you.

Liz Scott-Tatum E-mail: liz.scottatum@gmail.com

Church Warden, St Mary the Virgin Church

WANSBECK VALLEY FOOD BANK REVISITED

Wansbeck Valley Food Bank, serving the whole of Wansbeck Valley and the largest independent food bank in Northumberland, became a registered charity in 2011 with the object of preventing or relieving poverty or financial hardship by providing emergency food parcels and other services to those in need. The founders naively thought this would be a short-term project, whereas, paradoxically, the need for assistance has since increased almost every year since then.

As we approach harvest season Nick Stratford takes a look at the work of the Wansbeck Valley Food Bank

The two - plus years which have elapsed since my previous Article in the Whitsun 2024 Morpeth Pathways have seen a number of significant changes and improvements in the way the Food Bank operates, but sadly the needs of individuals and families experiencing food insecurity have not changed for the better. During 2025 the Food Bank received 3,265 referrals providing support for 5,773 adults and 1,604 children for varying periods of time. Fortunately our wonderful local communities responded with great generosity to help meet these needs. Over the 2025 Christmas period alone food donations from schools, churches, businesses and individuals were weighed and equated to 4,301 meals.

It is still run by a small body of volunteer trustees, two paid administrators and around 70 other volunteers. At the time of my previous Article, the Food Bank was operating from three separate units on the Northgate Hospital site but in 2025 it moved into a much larger, purpose-built facility housing all three units under one roof with adjoining car parking - with grateful thanks to the generosity of the CNTW NHS Foundation Trust which provided the building and services, leaving the Food Bank to design and fit out the interior.

The move to a single building with the layout designed to maximise the use of available space made for a more efficient operation with a streamlined workflow and better working environment for volunteers, enabling them to respond more rapidly to meet changing client needs,

including an increasing provision for homeless people and those with particular food requirements.

Owing to the large geographical area covered by the Food Bank, food parcels are delivered by vans directly to clients or to distribution hubs at the YMCA and Hirst Welfare in Ashington where clients can collect. The previous fleet of four vans has been reduced to three by the sale of two older vehicles and the acquisition of a new larger Ford Transit van, which enables the Food Bank to reduce running costs and cope with collecting and delivering larger and heavier loads.

The Food Bank is only able to operate through: -

(a) the generosity of local people, groups, schools, churches, businesses, job centres, Councils and other organisations which donate food or money with which it can buy food and cover necessary running expenses. This was particularly evident in the run up to Harvest Festival last year when everyone working for the Food Bank was overwhelmed by the kindness of our local communities. For the first time every item donated during the Harvest Festival period was weighed and provided 3,492 meals for those in need -a truly impressive figure and a remarkable display of collective goodwill making a real difference to the lives of many. If you would like to know how you could help during the forthcoming Harvest period, please contact the Food Bank on 01670 943014 or email wansbeckvalleyfoodbank@gmail.com

(b) the assistance of its volunteers who sort and prepare food bags for distribution, drive the vans to collect food from collection points in supermarkets, community centres etc. and deliver made-up parcels to people's homes and the collection hubs. At times of the year when the food bank is exceptionally busy (pre-Christmas, school holidays and Harvest time) volunteers invariably rise to the challenge. If anyone is interested in helping the Food Bank as a volunteer, there are a variety of different roles available, including warehouse work, driver collections/deliveries, drivers' buddies, overseeing collections/distributions at our distribution hubs and delivering leaflets and collecting food at Asda in Ashington monthly.

Clients can only access food following referrals from a variety of sources, principally from care professionals such as doctors and health visitors, the CAB, social workers, job centres and other agencies able to identify people in crisis. They are best placed to

assess and help clients with their underlying problems and ensure that referrals are genuine.

There are many reasons why people use food banks (unemployment, low wages, relationship breakdown, homelessness) but the predominant cause of food poverty is the enormous rise in the cost of living. Unacceptable choices are having to be made between keeping warm and feeding families. Most of us would probably agree that this is an unacceptable situation but sadly there does not appear to be any imminent solution and we can only look to the continuing goodwill and generosity of our wonderful local communities.

Nick Stratford (volunteer)



Abbeyfield First School Harvest Festival

Show, don't tell Rebecca Wootton of Green North Ltd

A year ago, my husband and I opened our garden for the National Garden Scheme for the first time. We were approached by a regional organiser to become involved with the charity during an open day we had for our local gardening club the previous month. We were a little hesitant, as we thought the NGS was just for large homes and estates, not a suburban semi in a market town. But we were wrong...so wrong! During our first open day, we welcomed nearly 70 guests. This year, we welcomed over 130 guests.

During our first open day, a lady asked me if I 'did this for a living', and I replied that I worked and was a passionate permaculture practitioner in my spare time.

Fast forward a year, and I now have my Permaculture Design Certification and am embarking on my Diploma. I designed this pathway in my Introduction to Permaculture course towards the end of last year.

Whenever I discuss Permaculture at my gardening club, even after my short talk on the subject I gave in January, I often receive puzzled looks. In my area, there is a community creative space which regularly holds garden design courses and workshops. I had a conversation with the owner of the space one day and chatted about possible Permaculture-based workshops in the future. They told me the story about a sewing workshop, which was advertised as a reuse and recycled fabric session and sold no tickets. When the same workshop was re-marketed as sewing for beginners, it sold out. I got the message, and so my husband and I got to thinking about how we could spread the permaculture word. My husband simply said, 'Show, don't tell'.

When people came to our garden this year, I made sure to announce that we practise permaculture. After answering the basic question of what permaculture is, I shut up and let the garden do the talking. I let people see with their own eyes the power of whole system thinking. I let the abundance and, as one guest said, the 'enchantment' seep in. I let the rescue hens win their hearts, the compost bins with 8-foot

sunflowers growing out of them widen their eyes, and the scent of brushing past the herbs on the edges of natural footpaths fill their noses. When they came back out full of questions and excitement, I chatted a little, but I told them, go away and look up permaculture, find out about soil and microbes, and start your journey.

I have found that sometimes a concept that is not mainstream can worry people. Equally, subscribing wholeheartedly to an ethos, and it being received time and again as marginal, can be frustrating. But what I have learned from this experience is that infiltrating the mainstream with healthy, beautiful plants, as well as smelly JADAM (which 30 people bought a bottle of), microbes and wormeries is a great way to debunk and make concepts more accessible. We let our permaculture garden put on the show and let it do the talking for us!



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A sponsored walk around Alnmouth.

I like to walk. I like the rhythm and find that queries in my head become unknotted. I am mentally restored by being in God's creation and watching how my surroundings change with the seasons. However, when a walking friend told me that she was going to walk 13 miles for the Alzheimer's Society and that there was also a 26 mile, or walkathon option, I did pause. For quite a long time.



I figured that my friends would just laugh at me if I asked for sponsorship for 13 miles, so if I did it, it would have to be the full 26 miles. More pausing as I thought and prayed this through. I was comfortable with the charity choice as I had watched as dementia caught up with a friend of mine. It caused much unpleasantness as his personality became twisted. It also adversely impacted the life of someone in our extended family. But 26 miles? With other people? And asking people to donate?

In the end I decided to sign up and get walking and asking. My first donation came in very quickly and others soon followed. The Society's target was reached and then exceeded. Ok; others evidently thought this was a goer, possibly because earlier this year I had walked from London to Birmingham along the Grand Union canal in 9 days, supported by my husband, although my longest day had been 22 miles and canals are rather flat (lock flights excepted).

I didn't have a specific training plan, but did increase my weekly walking mileage and pace, making sure that I did something active every day. A holiday based in the Mourne mountains (Northern Ireland) also helped. I chatted with runners who told me that I was very likely to fall in with someone who walked at my pace. At this point I was just aiming to get round and thought I'd take about 10 hours.

The week of the walk came. I consciously slowed down, trying to give my body some reserves to pull on.

At 4:30am get up to be at the Alnmouth start point for 6:10am for a 6:40am departure on 18th July. Suddenly it was all very real. I shed a

tear or two and after a route briefing we were off. No-one was hanging around! I quickly fell in with another lady and then a gentleman. We were to more or less walk with each other throughout the day, which was very companionable and all three of us felt we benefitted from each other's company. Mileage markers helped us to keep track of our progress as we nattered on and off and strode through the mizzle that accompanied us for the first three hours or so; damp, but preferable to burning in the sun.

Texted my husband at the first six-mile comfort stop; he had underestimated the pace, so we missed each other. Onwards to the midpoint, "lunch" when actually it was too early even for brunch! Wonderfully, my husband did have dry boots for me as my feet were sodden from the fields and my socks full of seeds and husks. The Society made sure that toilets and snacks were available. Chocolate really does help.

On to the next section. Spotted a deer looking questioningly on at all these people trekking by and some swans also glided by. Then had a bit of a hold-up as people negotiated a set of stepping stones. I waved to friends on the 13-mile trek and stepped up my pace as my walking buddies hadn't used the third rest stop and I had. I was now back on the coastal path and beach and the home stretch. I really noticed how few other 26 trekkers I was seeing, but did see some friends and my husband who had come to support me on the last stretch.



Back with my buddies as a marshal cheerfully told us half a mile to go! Really! How had that happened? Crossed the line in sunshine eight hours from starting off and in the top 5% of 26-mile walkers. A surprise, as I don't consider myself to be competitive. Big smiles as we were given a medal (my first, will it be my last?) and a glass of Prosecco. Home to rest? That would have been sensible, but the pub with friends and a look at Warkworth Castle beckoned instead. Thank the Lord for a very good day.

Thank you to everyone who has already made a donation. If you would like to make a donation, please go to the Parish WhatsApp and scroll up to between Trinity 6 and 7 to find the link to the Just Giving page.

Jo Murgatroyd

Chair of the council

John Beynon is a busy man!

He is chair of Northumberland County Council, a member of the Morpeth Chamber of Trade and co-chair of the governors at Collingwood School. On top of all of that, he has his role as a county councillor for the Stobhill ward of Morpeth.

So what, I asked him, does the chair of the County Council actually do?

The chair is elected by the members of the full County Council.

John explained that initially there were three chairs of the county council: a civic chair, a meetings chair and a business chair. Today all three roles are combined in the current role of chair of the council. This means that he chairs the full council meetings, of which there are nine or ten a year. The meetings are open meetings and they go out



live on YouTube so, he ruefully points out, everyone wants their say. "It's one of the challenges of the role, trying to control 68 councillors at a full council meeting!"

"The chair is non-political and I try to help new councillors as much as possible," continues John. "One of my biggest achievements is the respect I am given by the other councillors. This was demonstrated by the fact that I was asked by the other parties to stand again as chair, because they felt I had been fair to them."

The role of the business chair is closely allied to this. The business chair is responsible for the running of the council, helping councillors and officers schedule

I sat down at County Hall with the Chair of Northumberland County Council, Cllr John Beynon to find out just what the chair of the council actually does

meetings and making sure that the business of the council runs efficiently and smoothly.

But it is the role of civic head that John enjoys most. "I'm proud to represent the county on the civic side", he says and continues with a wry smile that although he has a chain of office he doesn't have to wear a robe like the town and city mayors. "I carried out 105 engagements in my first year! I wanted to experience everything and it was a fantastic year." He has travelled from Berwick and the Borders in the north of the county down to Blyth and Seaton Delaval in the south and not only in Northumberland, but as far south as North Yorkshire and everywhere in between.

"I have met and worked with so many amazing people from royalty to people doing unbelievable work that is not often acknowledged. Stobhill Link is a prime example." John recounts how he has helped at the Christmas Lunch run by Stobhill Link for the last two years. The lunch, complete with Father Christmas, is held at St Aidan's church and is, John says, "A lovely way to spend Christmas day. There are lots of volunteers who help to provide lunch for around 20 people. Everyone is welcomed with a drink and everyone is given a present. I gave one to a man in his late 40s who told me this was the first present he had had for 11 years." John was visibly moved by this and said events like the Christmas Lunch restore your faith in human nature.

The chair of the county council has a chosen charity and for his term John has chosen Young Lives versus Cancer, which was also known as CLIC Sargent Cancer Care for Children. The charity helps any child up to the age of 25 and stays with the child and the family all through the illness. Young Lives vs Cancer is the only charity in the UK with specialist social workers who provide tailored support to children and young people with cancer, and their families. John was thrilled to tell me that, "After two years of generous donations and civic events, we have raised £64,199.44 for the charity, all ringfenced for children in Northumberland."

And that ringfence is important to John. He is proud of his Northumbrian heritage. "I'm Morpeth born and bred", he says "and come from a family business." His father was a founder of the Morpeth Chamber of Trade in the 1960s and John has carried on the tradition, having been chair two or three times. He looks back to the Covid years when demand for the Chamber fell but is pleased to see it starting to reignite again now.

John inherited his civic pride from his father and has a long history of service to the community. He served as a town councillor for around six years, then was a councillor on Castle Morpeth Borough Council for 17 years until the reorganisation of local government. He was elected for the North Ward of Morpeth for both the town and Borough Council. He has now served nine years as a County Councillor for the Stobhill Ward of Morpeth. "I live in Middle Greens, so I'm only a few hundred yards from my ward."



On top of his role as chair of the council, John still has his work as a county councillor to do. The phone calls and emails can come at any time during the day or the evening, but I get the sense that he wouldn't have it any other way,

"It's a privilege and honour to be chair of Northumberland County Council. I respect the role and care for it – it's been the best time of my political life".

Spaces for Life...

Beth Rookwood keeps us in touch with what is happening at The Roost charity - and in her family life at Netherwitton

I wonder where you feel most yourself? Most connected to what is going on for you in your head, your body, your soul. The places where you can just breathe a little more deeply, get some perspective, feel yourself smile, relax, and start to experience joy and hope again.

For many of us, these are in outdoor spaces. Walking in a forest, watching the sea, up a mountain, or even just a cuppa on the bench in the garden or in a local park. Being outside does something to us; it takes us away from our screens, reminds us of wide horizons, and teaches us as we watch and learn from the natural world.

The Celtic saints knew the power of nature - and it was often in the wild spaces that they chose to spend time as they pondered and prayed. Our recent pilgrimage day with a bunch of young adults gave us a taste of this as we walked across the pilgrim poles to Holy Island. One young adult said the day had given them the courage to face their struggles. Another said the reflection times were deeply meaningful. Others enjoyed listening to the seals.

Another of the strands of work at The Roost is our outdoor meadow space - a third of an acre of land where we live in Netherwitton. Our landlord generously lets it to us, and over the years we have cultivated it to be a community garden. We have raised beds growing veg, wildflower beds and two benches we bought with money from the Queen's Jubilee grant. We officially have an orchard (apparently an orchard is 14 trees, and we have 16!) and a large area of fruit bushes.

We try to grow things that we can enjoy and do something with; flowers we can sell, produce we can turn into chutneys and jams, herbs for tea

& fragrance, and Barney even suggested drying the seed from the wild grass and selling it but that's a stretch too far for this year!

Mostly we have come to realise what the gift of the space really is, and it's just that: space. Young adults come in groups, or on their own, sometimes to think something through, sometimes just for a break, to experience the peace, to do some gardening, and to be creative. Some come to grieve and remember, as over the years the meadow has become a sacred place where we have planted trees in memory of young adults who have died.

On a recent school group visit organised by our chaplain, we invited students to leave their phones in their bag for a day. We dug, planted, weeded, harvested. We paused to listen, to watch, to be still. We wrote poems and shared food. At the end of the day, as we took time to reflect, some of the comments were:

"I laughed today, and I haven't laughed for a long time."

"The best thing was having my phone in my bag and not being interrupted - I could just be here."

"I feel so much better for just having some space."

We see the power of the natural world - some may say the divinely inspired natural world that speaks to our souls - and we want to share it.



Our next big funding bid is to recruit a team who can develop the work in the meadow and reach out to young adults in need of support with their mental health. Those for whom self-esteem is low, where it's a struggle to leave the house, where loneliness, isolation, and 'stuckness' seem to be winning. We want to connect with GP surgeries, care agencies, community groups and churches who can point young adults to this shared, wild, beautiful space - letting them know it is there for them.

We want it to be a place they can learn skills, make friends, and be nurtured by the natural world. One young adult who has started coming to our gardening club through our chaplaincy is already so much more confident when she is here - becoming a teacher of others of the things she is planting and growing.

To do this we need resources - of finance and of people. We are asking people to consider if they could become a regular giver to our work. If 150 people gave £10 a month, we would be well on our way to making this next stage of our vision a reality. Alongside our chaplaincy and community work, young adults will now be invited into this outdoor space - to shape it and nurture it, just as we trust it will nurture them.

If you can help, we would love to hear from you. You can sign up to give through our website, where gift aid will be processed in our system.

On a personal note, you may have heard that Barney and I are expecting a little one - number two! We will be seeking our own spaces which nurture us as our family grows in this next chapter of life. As on my previous maternity leave, I am sure this will involve a lot of time outside; come rain or shine, there are gifts in each season.

Thank you for all of your love, care and support. We leave The Roost in the hands of a fabulous team as we take some time out. Do contact them with any questions and to offer your support.

Beth & Barney Rookwood
www.roostcommunity.org
info@roostcommunity.org

The Mary Hollon Trust – A Legacy of Kindness in Morpeth

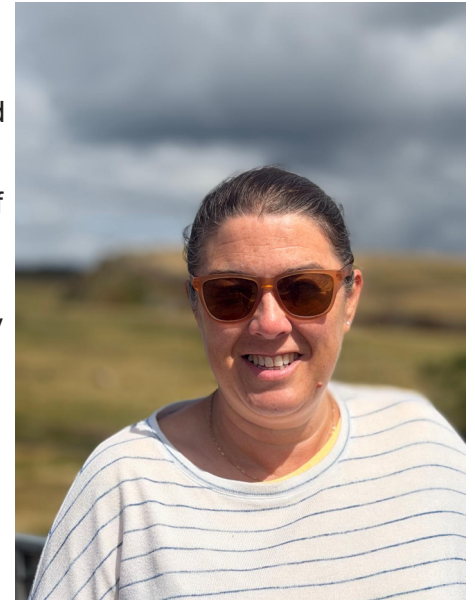
Many people in Morpeth have heard of the annual Hollon Tea, but fewer know the remarkable story behind one of our town's oldest and most enduring charities.

The Mary Hollon Annuity and Relief in Need Fund was founded in 1881 by Richard Welch Hollon following the death of his beloved wife, Mary. The couple shared nearly 25 happy years of marriage, and Richard wanted to create a lasting tribute to Mary, who had grown up in Morpeth and held a deep affection for the town.

Richard gifted the Corporation of Morpeth the extraordinary sum of £5,000 — worth well over half a million pounds in today's money — to establish what was originally known as the Mary Hollon Annuity and Coal Fund. His generosity ensured that local older residents living in hardship would receive practical support, friendship and dignity.

The original Trust supported 25 annuitants — 13 women and 12 men, representing each year of the Hollons' marriage. They were invited each year to enjoy a "liberal meat tea", received quarterly financial payments and were given a ton of coal at Christmas. The first Hollon Tea took place on 5th November 1880, the date that would have marked Richard and Mary's 25th wedding anniversary, and this tradition continues every year on 5th November.

Today, more than 145 years later, the Trust remains active and relevant. We continue to support residents aged over 75 living within the historic Borough of Morpeth with a warm welcome, some tasty food and plenty of friendship at our Hollon tea in November and recently with a summer social both held at the town hall. We also provide financial assistance to local people experiencing hardship and



financial distress through referrals from organisations such as Social Services, local schools and Citizens Advice.

One fascinating glimpse into history is that a newspaper report from the 1890s recorded the cost of the Hollon Tea for 25 annuitants and their guests at just £3 6s 6d—around £3.32 in decimal currency. It is safe to say that hosting the event today costs considerably more!

As Chair of the Trust, I am continually inspired by Richard Hollon's extraordinary generosity and vision. His kindness has touched generations of local people, reminding us that acts of compassion can leave a legacy that lasts for centuries. Long may the Mary Hollon Trust continue to bring support, friendship and hope to the people of Morpeth.

Kathryn Daws



Brian takes a gamble

By Martin Booth

Shaking slightly, Brian got down from his workbench and went to the office. “Er, boss, can I have a word?”

“What is it, Brian?”

“This.” Brian put his phone on the desk and his boss, who was called David, read the message. “Ah,” he said. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” Brian replied. “I really ought to go, but I have responsibilities here now.”

David nodded. “Sit down, Brian,” he said. “I’ve made a few calls. We are going to start a new ad campaign. ‘Let’s make Christmas what it used to be.’ The more children and grown-ups, we can get into the idea of going back to a more, er, traditional Christmas the better. Show Santa that AI and being all modern isn’t perhaps the best way forward.”

Brian looked up. “You’d do that to help me?” he asked.

“Might just help us sell a few more trainsets,” smiled his boss. “OK, Brian, you are on indefinite, paid leave. Go home and sort this out.”

“Thank you,” said Brian. “But I think this is my home now.”

Sitting at his workbench, Brian messaged Jimmy. ‘How do we get back?’ Within a minute, Jimmy replied. ‘I’ve got the sleigh. I can pick everyone up in a couple of trips this evening. Be at home at six.’ Carefully putting his stuff away, Brian slipped out of the building and went back to his flat. At six o’clock, there was a faint buzzing sound and Santa’s sleigh landed outside. No one else could see it, of course, because the magic of the sleigh kept it hidden. Hitching his bag over his shoulder, Brian locked the door, went down the stairs and

Here is the latest instalment in the life of Elf Brian. Brian faces a dilemma

out to greet Jimmy. The engineer elf was dressed, not in elf greens, but in his usual grubby grey overalls with the equally grubby knotted handkerchief on his head. Brian climbed aboard and waved at the other elves on board. None of them looked happy, he thought. I guess I must have been lucky in my job choices.

The flight back to the North Pole took about twenty minutes under Jimmy's careful guidance. To greet them on the ice was a party of about twenty elves, who quickly collected the returnees and hurried them inside. Jimmy took Brian to one side. "Briony wants to see you," he said. Brian immediately looked worried. "Why? Am I in trouble?"

"Oh no," replied Jimmy with a rare smile. "She wants to offer you a job."

Briony sat in Santa's office, behind his desk. Normally, she ran the day-to-day operations of the Pole, but even she had been sidelined by the AI, back to being a secretary. Brian went in and looked around. "Ah, Brian," said Briony. "Welcome. Sit down, please."

Brian sat. "Where's Santa?" he asked.

"Locked in his rooms with no phone or computer," she replied. "The AI was, frankly, ruining everything we stand for here, so it had to go."

"How is he?"

"He's angry that we've disobeyed him, of course. I've tried talking to him, but..."

"So, what's going to happen at Christmas?" asked Brian.

"Good question. If all else fails, Jimmy will have to fill in for Santa!" she smiled. "He's got the figure for it!"

Brian sighed. "But what can I do?"

Briony looked at him with a curious expression. "You work for a toy firm in the real world," she said. "Talk to him. Make *him* believe in Christmas again." Brian sat for a minute, remembering what his boss

had said to him about making Christmas more traditional, then he smiled. "I know just what to say," he said.

Santa looked up at Brian when the two guard elves let him in. "What do you want, elf?"

"To talk some sense into you," said Brian. Taking a deep breath, he began to speak. "Santa," he said, "I think I have a way out of this situation."

"I had this all under control," said Santa. "The AI was..."

"The AI was ruining things," interrupted Brian. "Now, Santa, please just shut up and listen!"

Brian spoke for half an hour, ignoring Santa's occasional outbursts, until he had explained his plan. Santa looked at him. "Could it really work?" he asked.

"If you agree to throw the whole AI thing away and use your own common sense, then yes," said Brian. "I have people in the real world working hard for this to happen... please don't let them down. You owe it to all the elves and most of all, you owe it to all the children out there."

"Can I think it over?" asked Santa.

"You have one hour," said Brian, "although I would appreciate an answer sooner. I have things to do and people to see."

"Think he'll go for it?" asked Jimmy as he took Brian back to his flat in the sleigh.

"Dunno," said Brian. "I really hope so, because if he doesn't, I don't have a Plan B!"

Don't miss the final episode in the next issue of Pathways ...

Mustard Tree Trust

24 years ago this trust was set up to support local schools and to provide a Christian message in them. It is still going strong and now we are in almost EVERY school in Morpeth!



In first schools we run an "Open the Book" programme. This involves Bible storytelling assemblies – along with getting dressed up and singing a really catchy (annoying?) song, a team of volunteers telling an interactive story. If you know someone in a first school in Morpeth, please ask them about it – and they will

probably start singing the song! We are now at the stage where the children recognise the volunteers in the street and talk to us. One volunteer has admitted to driving much more carefully around Morpeth, in case he gets recognised!

The big highlight of the school year is when the Year 4 children come to Lifepath at Brinkburn Priory, (see the Whitsun issue of Pathways) and many of the volunteers are involved in this too, meeting up with the children in a different setting and exploring Christianity through one of our local saints. This year was St Aidan with the theme of his life, caring and sharing.

Transitions are difficult for any age group, so we try to ease the one from first to middle school by our work at Chantry. We run "The Shelter" in the year 5/6 playground during a Tuesday lunchtime. On the surface, it is a chance for the children to come and do a craft activity, but underneath it is a chance to mentor these children and chat to those who may be struggling a little bit. We are familiar in an unfamiliar environment and so they enjoy coming and saying hello. Often, we chat about a new friend, or the loss of a pet as we fold origami swans or make pipe cleaner people and bracelets. The connection is there

and the children seem to continue to come regularly, even when they feel settled in the school.

The Christian Union at King Edward VI School is run by Mustard Tree Trust. We run in the Sixth form café room at 3.30 on a Tuesday. The numbers vary, but the majority of the children are from the sixth form. It seems difficult to spread information around the school, so many children may be unaware it is there. If you know a pupil from year 9 to year 13, from a Christian background or just interested in finding out more, please tell them about it. It is very informal and starts with a Hot Chocolate, often resulting in a competition to see who makes the best one each week... is there such a thing as too much squirty cream? We then chat about a topic from a Christian perspective and end with a game.

We have also run a few annual events. Our Nativity trail and Easter Egg Trail have been greatly supported, with lots of families coming and enjoying the fun. Wandering around Morpeth in a dress with a donkey is one of my highlights. We underestimated the numbers for the Easter trail this year and ran out of resources, but managed to provide enough eggs!

We are a charity and so receive no funding from the schools or government. This is a huge challenge as most grants are for new projects rather than sustaining those already running. We employ two people, Kirstine, our schools worker, and Debbie, our administrator. This is obviously our main cost, but it takes £150 a year to run the Open the Book project as each person needs to be insured to be in a school and the bill for the pipe cleaners, beads, origami paper and hot chocolate soon rises. If you would like to support us in any way, financially, prayerfully or as a "Champion" within a church, please contact Debbie (debbie.mustard.tree@gmail.com) or look at our website www.mustardtreetrust.org

KEVI Christian Union

- Come and Join us for a Hot Chocolate And a Chat
On Tuesdays, 3.30 – 4.30pm

- Have you ever wondered about God?
- Do you want support in your faith?
- Would you like to know what Christianity is really about?

Come and relax, chat and have fun
We meet in Café VI

hosted by Kirstine from Mustard Tree Trust

Why Choral Evensong is Special for me.

Life is busy, fast-moving, frantic; marked by alerts, messages, instant communications, reminders, calls, deadlines and demands. We quickly move from one thing to another, we want information in “bite-sized chunks”, and to “relax” we sometimes play even faster-moving computer games! Sounds familiar? Wouldn't it be good to close off all this, slow down, allow ourselves time and space just “to be” and quietly connect with the less fleeting, the deeper, the more lasting?

Perhaps you find serene and calming music can help, for whilst listening, other senses fade out, and one can be gently lost in very different sounds and time. Or maybe for you a beautiful place, especially an ancient one, can bring calm as one senses being simply one of thousands who over the centuries have also found peace and rest there, maybe pictures and colour add to this, maybe poetic words from a bygone age help still further to let go and focus on the unchanging things?

Choral Evensong brings all these together in the joining of the seventh and eight monastic daily services. Leaving a busy week behind, stepping into a beautiful place like St Mary the Virgin Morpeth or Durham Cathedral is a lovely beginning, the light through the stained glass windows, attuning the ear to the music, the calm measured, timeless words and responses of the Book of Common Prayer, singing the psalm, Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis and hymns knowing that countless others have done the same over the centuries. I particularly love the Magnificat or Song of Mary and the Nunc Dimittis as the first expresses the Joy of Mary at the coming of Jesus and the second the wonderful fulfilment for Simeon, a holy man who has waited a lifetime to meet the saviour of the world.

Don't just take my word for all this. Whether you will hear through Christian or secular ears, why not join us at St Mary the Virgin on the first Sunday of each month at 6 pm and find out for yourself.

Andrew Cant

Behind Bars

by Rev Matthew Tetley

I would like to start this article in the words of a person whom I met in the community after they had been released, who described Prison Chaplaincy as “bringing light into a dark place”.

I had the privilege of serving God as a prison chaplain for just under 20 years at three northeast establishments.

The role of a prison chaplain is set in statute as every prison by law is required to have an Anglican Chaplain and today the chaplaincy team operates in a multi-faith setting. I found from my experience of working alongside colleagues from all the world's major faiths or beliefs to be a great blessing which both deepened my knowledge and understanding of other faiths and enriched my own faith. Each member of the chaplaincy team in a prison is responsible for

delivering appropriate worship and teaching, according to their tradition as well as taking part in the pastoral care of all those in the prison. The daily duties of a prison chaplain may include seeing those who have come into the prison in the first 24 hours, seeing all those held in the separation and care unit (terminology varies), seeing all those in inpatient healthcare if the prison has one, seeing all those approaching release. Other duties may include communicating “bad news” of a death of a relative of a prisoner, care of those at risk of self-harm or of taking their own life,

Matthew Tetley
reflects on his
career as a
prison chaplain
and how we can
help people



and those who have applied to see a Chaplain. The Chaplain is involved in the whole life of the prison and works as part of a multi-disciplinary team with staff from prison officers, governors, healthcare staff, education staff and various organizations that may work in a modern-day prison.

What I always felt was so important for the chaplain was that he or she can offer time and space for someone to talk openly. The person in front of you as chaplain, for example, in a local prison who has just been remanded into custody was probably sitting on their own sofa the day before and will naturally feel shell shocked. Seeing a friendly face able to give some time could make a real difference. Or, communicating the death of a close relative to someone in the safe space of a chapel or multifaith area can shed a ray of light in a dark and difficult place.

I now work for an amazing charity called the Welcome Directory who exist to build capacity for faith or belief communities to welcome those leaving prison. This is achieved through building community connections of a growing directory of faith or belief communities who will offer that welcome to those leaving prison. We have just under 600 communities registered. We also operate community capacity building, offering the prison awareness course to those communities with little knowledge or experience of how to welcome those leaving prison and importantly we elevate and encourage prison leaver voices. Those leaving prison often face incredible challenges like having no accommodation, employment and severe health issues, either physical or mental or both etc. The support of a welcoming faith or belief community can make such a difference. It isn't necessarily that the faith or belief community can offer specialist advice on issues like mental health, although a knowledge of local services available to signpost to would be a good idea anyway, but it is often a little time that can go a long way. For example, to be able to sit down and help someone fill in a form or accompanying to an appointment can go a long way. If you would like to find out more, please see our website [The Welcome Directory](http://TheWelcomeDirectory.org.uk) or email me at matthew@welcomedirectory.org.uk



WANSBECK VALLEY FOOD BANK

HARVEST Festival

DONATIONS

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What to Donate
Non - perishable foods (canned goods, pasta, rice, cereals, soups, sauces, tinned fruit and vegetables, UHT Milk, Biscuit, Jam, Tea/Coffee)

All food items must be in date

For more information email admin@wansbeckvalleyfoodbank.org or telephone 07841 908 477

Rector's ramblings

Every cloud has a silver lining

Many years ago, when I was a young, slender, cool 17-year-old with hair that I could put gel in, I remember my grandmother asking me if I would like an all-expenses holiday to Granada, in Spain. Wow, of course my answer was obviously yes! What I had not realised was that the trip was not to be an 18-30 hedonistic nightclub extravaganza but a Saga tour around the many sites of Spain with a whole bunch of people the same age as my grandmother. I was told not to pack my hip, cool t-shirts, and I was promptly taken out to Austin Reed to buy a suit, tie and blazer! Oh, my goodness, how was I going to survive a 14-day wrinkly-infested bus touring marathon? Which worryingly I would quite fancy today!



Well, believe it or not, I had a great time. My grandmother made me laugh and laugh, and I discovered we had a ton of things in common. Ok, it was a little embarrassing when she forgot the code to the hotel safe and we had to get the hotel staff to take the whole thing apart to get her passport out, or when she decided to hide her money down her tights, which then slipped down her leg so she had to go to the ladies' toilet before she could pay the bar bill! But I survived and the memories always make me giggle.

Sometimes the experiences we think are going to be difficult can in fact be life-changing and very rewarding. Sometimes things can feel bleak and the situation feel super uncomfortable. But every cloud has a silver lining, as my father used to say, the trials of life can often bring surprising blessings.

I'm reminded of the story in Matthew 14:22–33, when Peter sees Jesus walking on the water and in the heat of the moment, with a sudden feeling of elation at seeing Jesus, Peter steps out of the boat and then realises what he has done. The sudden terror must have felt petrifying as he promptly started to sink! I'm imagining the other disciples laughing as he climbs back into the boat, looking rather bedraggled, but they had not experienced what Peter had: stepping out in faith, walking on water, even for a moment, and being saved by

the hand of Jesus. Wow, what an experience—and it only happened because Peter had stepped out in faith. So many times, in my life I have found myself thinking, “This is going to end in catastrophe,” only to discover a strength I never knew I had. Muttering under my breath, “Lord, how am I going to survive this?” and somehow, surprisingly the answer comes back to me: “Trust me”. So I trust the voice from the one I have got to know and time and again the thing I feared most is either transformed into nothing or often becomes a blessing. So if life feels impossible, just step out. You might find you are not just surviving but actually thriving. The next time you feel out of your depth, hold your nose, say a little prayer and dive in. It might actually be a blessing in disguise!



Simon

Rector of Morpeth

Interested in finding our more?

explore
life
faith
meaning

Alpha

@ Morpeth Parish
email office.morpethparish@gmail.com or call Simon on 07749866402

