

# MORPETH PATHWAYS

A FORUM FOR CHURCH & COMMUNITY

FREE ISSUE

Issue No 10

Summer edition 2025

## From the editor

Welcome to the summer edition of Morpeth Pathways.

I must start by thanking our previous Editor Lyndsey Phillips, who is standing down after ten tremendous issues for family reasons. Lyndsey successfully launched this magazine and has skilfully overseen every issue with meticulous care and flair. We are fortunate to have had her talent and experience to take us this far along our own Pathway and we are very grateful to her for all her hard work and tenacity in putting together so many interesting magazines.

When I was asked to edit this issue I took a look back to the very first issue, when Lyndsey wrote about our aspirations for the magazine, which she wanted to include interesting articles about Morpeth and church family life. She wrote: "Our hope is that it will reflect the Pathways trodden by people through the years and of those who live here now, revealing their stories and portraying their hopes and aspirations, and the enduring values that they bring." I have endeavoured to fulfil that hope in this issue.

The magazine is bookended by two beautiful churches, St Mary the Virgin in Morpeth and St Mary's in Stannington. The Rector of Morpeth, Rev Canon Simon White, is blessed to have charge of both churches. We are grateful to Chris Teasdale for his wonderful cover photograph of St Mary's Morpeth and the accompanying article, together with Pat Nicolson's history of St Mary's Stannington.

As I write this the sun is shining and we are promised record temperatures over the weekend. These records are an indication of the changing climate that Liz Scott-Tatum writes about when she discusses The Big Green Week and the work of Christian Aid supporting those affected by climate change. Pat Fuller explains some of the practical steps we can all take in our own gardens and in the town of Morpeth by "Sowing the seeds of change".

I was fortunate to meet the new Mayor of Morpeth, Cllr Rachel Hogg, for this issue and was impressed by her energy and enthusiasm. She has some exciting plans for her year in office and I am looking forward

to supporting the Mayor's Jam Initiative in aid of her chosen charity Macmillan Cancer Support.

There are more people to meet in this issue and more to learn about Morpeth past and present. If you have any comments about the articles in this issue or have ideas for stories for future issues do please let me know.

I hope you are able to enjoy some warm summer weather, whatever your plans are for this holiday season.

Sally Keith



### Would you consider making a donation?

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## St Mary the Virgin, Morpeth

Morpeth is unusual in that its ancient parish church, St Mary the Virgin, is located away from the town centre. It is located on the ridge formed between the Church and Postern Burns. The crest of this ridge is where the medieval castle stands for strategic defence purposes.

Although it can't be stated with any certainty, it is logical that the ancient settlement of Morpeth was also located on this ridge between the castle and the church, as the church would not have been built away from the population. It is possible that the layout of Morpeth would not have been unlike Warkworth village, with its castle on the hill, the church at the hill foot, and dwellings in between. However, at the time of writing, there is no archaeological evidence to support this theory – and it is *only* a theory. The development of Morpeth on the north bank of the River Wansbeck may coincide with the granting of the Market Charter by King John to the Lord of the Manor of Morpeth, Roger de Merlay, in A.D. 1200. Hence, we are left with the curious circumstance of church separated from the town centre.

Although not grand in scale, St Mary the Virgin is one of the finest ancient parish churches in the county. It likely replaces an earlier Anglican building on the same site. Thankfully, the church has received little attention from our Victorian forebears, who often had a penchant for restoring churches to their idealised version of Gothic architecture. As we view St Mary's today, it retains its fourteenth-century character; the south aisle windows and chancel windows contain reticulated tracery dating from the decorated period of Gothic architecture. The decorated period is the shortest of the three phases of Gothic architecture (Early English, Decorated, Perpendicular) and covers roughly only a century from the late 1200s to the late 1300s. Pevsner's guide to the buildings of England points out that the only addition to the church later than this date is the south porch, which dates from the sixteenth century.

The church's crowning glory is undoubtedly the eastern chancel window depicting Jesse's dream. Pevsner notes that it is the most important fourteenth-century glass in the county. All five lights depict Christ's genealogy back to Jesse, the father of David, King of the Israelites. The stone-carved headstops underneath the window hood

would be thought to represent King Edward III and his consort, Queen Philippa. Therefore, the window, and much of the church, dates between 1327 and 1377. In 1851, the Jesse window was restored by the celebrated stained-glass studio of William Wailes of Newcastle upon Tyne. Medieval Jesse windows are extremely rare in England; other fine examples may be found in Wells Cathedral, Selby Abbey and St Mary's Church, Shrewsbury. During the Second World War, the window was carefully dismantled and stored in the old rectory (now Rectory Park estate) for safekeeping.

Pevsner also highlights several other important original features, including the thirteenth-century octagonal font; the sedilia, which dates from the fourteenth or fifteenth century; the original vestry doorway, dating from c.1350 retaining its original branched iron hinges ending in leaves; and the doorknocker on the south door which also dates from the mid-fourteenth century. Additionally, the west tower has a fine fourteenth-century stone vaulted ceiling. St Mary's Church is truly a hidden gem; even if one is not religious, one can admire its graceful beauty, architecture, and the craftsmanship that went into its construction around 700 years ago. It is worth discovering and exploring.

Christopher Teasdale

## King's birthday honour for Elanor

Morpeth resident Elanor Johnson (Hillier) has been awarded a British Empire Medal in the King's Birthday Honours.

"It was a big surprise, but a very good surprise," exclaimed Elanor, who lives in Loansdean. She says her three children and her husband were very impressed, adding that her mum is beside herself!

The award is for her services to heritage and the community in the North East. She has spent the last 20 years advocating for greater investment in heritage skills and the need to fully embed training into all forms of conservation practice.

Most recently she worked at the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) where she shaped and delivered the apprenticeship programme at multi-million-pound regeneration projects such as Seventeen Nineteen Sunderland and Sound and Art, St Swithun's Worcester.

Elanor has delivered Heritage Action Zone training schemes across the country to upskill owners, building managers and professionals ensuring the benefits of multi-million pound investments were sustained. She is acknowledged as a leading voice for heritage skills in the sector and is widely regarded and respected.

She first came to the north east when she studied Archaeology at Newcastle University. After spending time away she was drawn back to the region by its access to hills, the beach and friendly people. That was 20 years ago – "and we're not going anywhere" she declares.

Elanor jokes that her career has gone from caring for what is underground to working her way up to buildings above the ground and giving people the skills to use and value them.



Aside from her day job with the Northumberland Coast National Landscape, Elanor is an energetic trustee of the project to conserve and revitalise the Boys' Brigade Hall. The ambitious plan is to create a vibrant hub for the children and young people of Morpeth. It ticks all the boxes that Elanor is an advocate of – bringing heritage buildings back to life and engaging and training people to look after them, as well as giving young people somewhere to go to chill or for specific activities.

Picture credit: Dru Dodd

A promotional graphic for David Auld &amp; Co Solicitors. The left side features a large dark blue background with the text "DAVID AULD &amp; CO SOLICITORS" in white and light blue, with "INCORPORATING JFS LAW" and "MORPETH · EST 1978" below. The right side is a light blue background with a list of services: Wills &amp; Probate, Inheritance Tax Planning, Agricultural Property, Commercial Property, Residential Property, and Family Law. Below the list is the text "The solicitor's firm in the Heart of Northumberland" and three headshots of staff: David Lee (Managing Partner), Steve Frake (Partner), and Jennifer Bell (Partner Non-Solicitor). At the bottom, there is contact information: "22 Newcastle Street, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 1BA", phone numbers "T: 01670 506844" and "F: 01670 506846", an email address "enquiries@davidandco.co.uk", and a Facebook icon. A small version of the firm's logo is in the bottom right corner.

# Record Crowds Celebrate 40<sup>th</sup> Morpeth Fair Day

Approximately 36,000 visitors attended this year's annual Fair Day in the Town Centre, with a full day of attractions and stalls.

The Fair was opened by the Mayor Cllr Rachael Hogg with her consort Cllr David Bawn. The Children's Fun run had a record 140 entries which set the scene for a record-breaking day.



There were over 160 cars and motorbikes in the parade at noon, which is the highest number recorded and included 50 bikes from the Harley Davison Club and 30 Minis from the local Mini club. The vehicles parked up on the Stanners after the parade so visitors could admire them.

The main stage hosted live music throughout the day and Oldgate was home to a wide variety of food stalls. Bridge Street hosted the main stalls with many charities and community groups being represented. Turners funfairs took up New Market and the crowds enjoying the rides were very apparent.



The icing on the cake was that despite doubtful forecasts the sunny weather continued throughout the day making it the perfect family day out.

The organising team led by Cllr John Beynon and Cllr Pat Elton really did themselves proud.

Cllr David Bawn



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## Music in Morpeth Parish

Thank you for the warm welcome I have received from all the churches in the parish of Morpeth since I first started playing the organ at St Mary's in 2024 and for all the words of appreciation for my music.

I started officially in my role as director of music on 1<sup>st</sup> March. It is an exciting new challenge working in a town parish after so many years working as an organist in the rural villages of Alnmouth and Lesbury.

Alison Rudd is reinvigorating music in the Parish of Morpeth. Here she looks back at her first three months.



It has been a busy few months as I have tried to raise the profile of church music in Morpeth. The organ workshop at Stobhill was a very successful event creating interest in playing the organ. The choir have worked hard and gained confidence singing unaccompanied, culminating in the uplifting experience of The Come and Sing evensong event in June. What a delight to see 24 singers in the choir stalls! It was also a pleasure to join forces with St Robert's choir to sing at Pentecost. In July I will be giving an organ recital at St James' and the choir are singing evensong in Stannington church.

All this has been achieved thanks to everyone responding so positively and enthusiastically to my ideas. I am sure there are many more exciting days ahead. If you have any ideas for future church music events for children, teenagers or adults or are interested in joining the St Mary's church choir please contact me at [music.morpethparish@gmail.com](mailto:music.morpethparish@gmail.com) . I would be delighted to hear from you.

Alison Rudd

## 200 years of the modern railway

Railway 200 is the nationwide celebration marking 200 years since George Stephenson's steam-powered 'Locomotion No. 1' travelled 26 miles between Shildon, Darlington and Stockton on 27 September 1825, carrying hundreds of passengers to great fanfare.

Although it was not the first steam locomotive or even the first passenger railway, it was the first public railway to use steam locomotives and set in motion a 'train' of events that changed the world forever.

Coal had originally been brought by pack horses to the ports, then as the roads improved, by horse and cart. By the 1700s, miles of wooden track had been built to haul coal using horse power.

In Darlington, wealthy woollen merchant **Edward Pease** (1767–1858) brought influential local businessmen together to agree a more efficient way to transport coal. Pease was a prominent local Quaker, a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Because they are not permitted to take an oath, Quakers were banned from serving in public office, and as pacifists, could not serve in the military. However they were respected in the world of business for their trustworthiness, frugality and dedication to the common good.



During his travels around the country, Pease saw that many changes were afoot, notably in the coal and iron mining industries, in which other family members were involved. He became convinced of the need for a horse drawn railway to bring local coal from the pits to the ports and on to London.

Alison Byard give us a fascinating insight into the birth of the modern railway.

The obvious route was from Darlington to Stockton-on- Tees, and Pease and others proposed this to Parliament.

Pease, described at the time as “a man of weight, of prudence, of keen commercial instincts”, was charged with showing that the railway would be a sound investment, and his 19-year-old son Joseph drew up the company prospectus.

The managing committee, many of whom were fellow Quakers, designed a seal, showing waggons being pulled by a horse, and adopted the Latin motto 'Periculum privatum utilitas publica'- At private risk for public service.

The **Stockton and Darlington Railway Act 1821**, with route surveyed by Welsh engineer George Overton, received royal assent on 19 April 1821.

However, concerned about Overton's competence, Pease consulted **George Stephenson**, an experienced enginewright of the collieries at Killingworth, who convinced him that steam engines were the future, not horses. Stephenson made a new survey of the proposed route, assisted by his 18-year-old son Robert, and the shareholders elected him as Engineer in January 1822, on a salary of £660 per year.

In May 1822 a ceremony in Stockton celebrated the laying of the first track, the rails 4 ft 8 in apart, the same gauge used by Stephenson on his Killingworth Railway and still the UK standard gauge.

A new bill was presented, requesting Stephenson's deviations from the original route and the use of “loco-motives or moveable engines”, which received royal assent as **the Stockton and Darlington Railway Act 1823**. Importantly, the bill also included passengers to the long list of things that could be carried by the railway. The same year, Stephenson and Pease opened Robert Stephenson and Company, a locomotive works at Forth Street, Newcastle.

In mid September 1825, the first locomotive, '**Locomotion No. 1**', left the works, and it was advertised that the railway would open on 27 September 1825.

That morning, Locomotion No. 1, passenger coach 'Experiment' and

21 new coal waggons fitted with seats, were ready for passengers at the Mason's Arms at Shildon Lane End. George Stephenson was at the controls, with his brother James acting as fireman. Thousands of people from all over the region waited along the line to watch its progress.

The directors had allowed room for 300 passengers, but the train left carrying between 450 and 600 people. Brakesmen were placed between the waggons, and the train set off, led by a man on horseback with a flag. It picked up speed on the gentle downward slope and reached 10 to 12 miles per hour, leaving behind men on horseback who had tried to keep up with the procession.

Despite injury to one man hanging onto a wagon during the historic journey, the first victim of overcrowding on a train, the opening ceremony was considered a great success.

The new railway initiated the construction of railway lines all over Britain, bringing about significant developments in railway mapping and cartography, iron and steel manufacturing, as well as in any industries requiring more efficient transportation.

Edward Pease is now considered to be 'the Father of the Railways' and because the majority of the managing committee and many of the shareholders were Quakers, the Stockton and Darlington Railway became known as the 'Quaker Line'.

You can find out about local events celebrating Railway 200 on the following link: <https://railway200.co.uk/search-for-activities-and-events/>



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## Sowing Seeds of Change

Pat Fuller writes:

As I begin this article I look out on our front lawn and see the wildflower areas we have created by not cutting all the lawn into pristine stripes. A few years ago I bought some wild flower plugs and then some yellow rattle seed. It was an experiment really to see what would grow and what we could attract to our garden.



The yellow rattle, an annual, has self-seeded and is prolific. We have oxeye daisies, orange fox and cubs and a teasel standing magnificently in the middle. The cowslips have finished now but will return next year. There are pink and white campions, plantain, clover, buttercups, speedwell and salad burnet. In a pot there is a common spotted orchid that now has seven flowers this year. We get rabbits, goldfinches, bees and butterflies. The rest of the lawn is mowed about once a week but the wild flower areas are left until September when we cut them back and rake off the cuttings. Then we will see what arrives next year. It is such a joy.

Our garden wildflower areas.

For about 4 years, as part of my role as Climate Champion for Morpeth, working alongside Northumberland County Council, I have had a yearning to encourage others to leave wild flower patches in urban spaces and gardens, to create hedge corridors for wildlife and maybe plant a community orchard.

Meadows in Morpeth was set up as a Facebook page and the project has taught me patience and team working. There were already areas in the town, like a strip in Deucher Park and the area behind County Hall which were rich in wild flowers and biodiversity. I wanted to see more areas being deliberately left to support our insect population, including

bees and butterflies, which are declining fast. So, together with others, we approached the grass maintenance team for Castle Morpeth and identified four areas in Morpeth where it might be viable to change the cutting regime to a single cut in September and raking off the cuttings. We wanted to see what would grow without creating any additional spending for the local authority.



Yellow Rattle

The four areas were chosen and paths were regularly cut through the vegetation so that the areas still looked cared for. QR codes were put on posts so that people could send in their comments about the trial. Now in 2025 there are two remaining areas and these are proving delightful. Each year the meadow areas have looked different. This year Norham Drive Meadow still has plenty of amenity area but there are wide paths cut through the swathe and it is alive with insects which feed the birds and helps our own human flourishing. It is well proven that mental health benefits by us having access to natural green spaces.

#### Bankside Meadow in 2025



Bankside Meadow is a smaller area and has had more intervention. In 2023 I acquired some yellow rattle seed, a parasitic on strong grasses, and sowed it in patches in the meadow. I also sowed some orchid seeds and sow thistle, It was a delight to find that the yellow rattle had germinated in the spring and this year it has spread and has reduced the amounts of strong grass.

I hope you can imagine my absolute joy in finding a pyramidal orchid in the meadow this year. These orchids take longer to germinate than other seeds and to find just that one is so amazing. Maybe next year....

This article is not only about sowing seeds in meadows but it is about sowing the seeds of an idea. You may just know the story of the mustard seed! Northumberland County Council has, this year, carried out a survey entitled. 'Supporting Nature in our Green Spaces'. They want to review their ground maintenance arrangements so that they can better support nature recovery and improved biodiversity in our public green spaces.

I would like to think that, along with other Northumbrian projects, Meadows in Morpeth has helped to initiate this plan to identify more areas that can be left to grow wild and to support greater biodiversity. We can all tackle climate change and the loss of biodiversity by sowing seeds of change in small ways to begin with and by encouraging local town and county authorities even bigger changes can happen.

The very first Pyramidal Orchid on  
Bankside Meadow



Pat Fuller, June 2025

## Meet the Mayor



It's been a whirlwind three weeks for new Mayor, Cllr Rachael Hogg.

And she's already raised £ 2,500 for her Mayor's Charity Macmillan Cancer Support. She confesses that some people wondered why she had not chosen a local charity. However, all the money she raises is being ring fenced to support a new MacMillan Cancer Care hub at the Wansbeck Hospital. This means that people from Morpeth who are referred to the Wansbeck for any cancer related appointment will be able to benefit from

the services of Macmillan Cancer Care at the hub.

Rachael has been a councillor for Morpeth North for eight years now. It all began with the saga of the traffic lights at the end of Bridge Street. "I was heavily involved in the public campaign in 2012 to have the newly installed traffic lights reinstated to a roundabout and even ended up being interviewed on the local news. I'm very much the sort of person who will get involved with something rather than moaning about an issue. I met the Conservative councillors and helped them to deliver leaflets before they asked me to stand as a Town Councillor. At the time my daughter was quite young, but I felt that I wanted to help my community and to make Morpeth a better place." Rachael's skills as a project manager help her to balance her time with her daughter and her commitments as Mayor.

Her energy is infectious. "I want to try to do some things differently," she said. "Over the last few years, the fundraising has involved food in some form and the same 40 or 50 people have supported the events. This year I am trying something new – for example a golf tournament at Morpeth Golf Club on 21 September. There will of course be the traditional Mayor's Ball on December 6<sup>th</sup> which will be held at Morpeth Golf Club this year.

"I want to make the events as accessible as possible and to raise awareness of the role of the Mayor and the Town Council. For

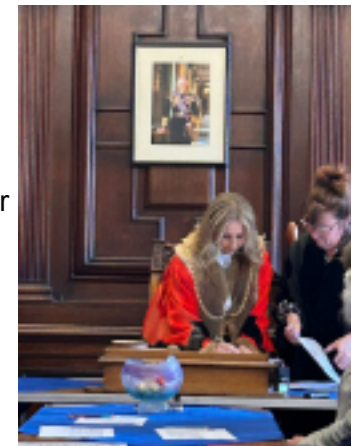
example, many people do not know the difference between the Town and County Councils. I would like to create awareness of the local services offered by Macmillan Cancer Support and the role of the Town Council, and get more people actively involved."

Rachael's Consort is Cllr David Bawn and her Deputy is Cllr Dr Wendy Fail. On top of that support, Rachael's family are already busy in the background, working on the Mayor's Jam initiative. As well as opening the Morpeth Fair, Rachael persuaded her mother and her sister to make cakes, scones and jam to raise money for her charity. Nature's Finest Fruits have agreed to donate the jamming fruit and now Rachael's family and friends are working hard to produce the branded jam for the Picnic in the Park event on 13 July where Rachael and her charity will be there. Rachael is proud of her family's support: "It's three generations involved now, my mother, my sister and my daughter so that's great!"

"I see my role as mayor to promote the town, create civic pride and raise awareness and celebrate individual and group contributions to life in our Town. I will be promoting and supporting our new and existing businesses, whilst promoting events and welcoming visitors to Morpeth." said Rachael who already has a busy diary of meetings and discussions to help her make a success of her year as mayor.

She is also supported by Rev Canon Simon White, Rector of Morpeth, as her Chaplain. "I chose Simon because he is a great guy. One of the special events in the civic year is Armistice Day and I always find Simon's addresses moving – and enjoy hearing him belting out the National Anthem. Although I am christened, I do not practice but I support people having a faith. To be honest I do not know what I believe. Simon has also explained that there is more he can do to support me in my role as well as at the set civic events, such as acting as a mediator."

Talking to Rachael you get the impression that she is determined to do her best for her adopted hometown. "I have lived in Morpeth since 2010. I have a daughter at KEVI. I would not want to live anywhere else. It's a wonderful town with wonderful people. It's an honour to be chosen the Mayor of Morpeth".



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## Part of the family



“Write something about being part of the church family,” said Simon. “Are you sure?” I asked. Well, OK, here it is. Firstly, cards on the table, to the readers of this magazine I am an atheist, and have been for all of my adult life. So why am I doing this?

Anyone who goes to St Mary’s will recognise me sitting at the front of the church next to my wife Kate... she’s the one in the wheelchair. I am there to help and support her in following her faith, which she has had all her life. I don’t take part in the service, because I believe that that would be hypocritical – so I draw cartoons instead to amuse Simon. However, this does not really explain why I should be writing this piece.

Wherever we have lived, and Kate has worshipped, I have helped and supported her. This has meant helping and supporting the church as well, from all the driving (taking kids to choir practise) to acting as fire marshal (during those services when people were allowed to carry real candles). I do not have, and never have had, a problem with other people’s beliefs, and if Kate wants to worship then I will do all I can to facilitate that. Incidentally, the fact that she is a Christian and I’m an atheist has never been an issue between us: we simply respect each other’s position and agree to differ.

Over the years, I have examined my ideas of religion and faith many times. I went to a very traditional school, with daily religious assemblies. At Uni I made friends with people from many different cultures and religions. Again, I looked at my own ideas and beliefs. Indeed, I was asked to teach RE in the school where I was Head of Science (I refused). Each time, I have come to the same conclusion, and I am more than happy with that. I suspect that a great many Christians could benefit from going through the same self-appraisal process... just to check what their beliefs and motivations actually are.

Several years ago, Simon came to me with a request: could I do some data entry for him, being able to use a computer. I agreed, and ended up with the job of Gift Aid secretary. It was, I have to say, a difficult thing to set up, but it now works. Why should I do this, for something I really don't believe in? Well, it's because I am happy to help something which is important to Kate and to many other people around Morpeth. I also volunteer at a local Community Hub - it's just a job, if you like, with a large degree of personal satisfaction for helping people.

So, there we are. An atheist who helps out at the church because it's a good thing to do. (Yes, non-believers can be good people too)! As a final thought, being an 'outsider' to the Church allows me a degree of freedom to do stuff which someone more beholden to the system possibly could not. I'm happy with that! An example: a few years ago, Simon asked me to go on an Alpha course. Not, he hastened to add, to try to convert me but simply to ask all those difficult questions and keep the evenings fun. I happily agreed.

### Martin Booth



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Mustard Tree Trust



# Generous June

Here in Morpeth Parish, we took part in an initiative called 'Generous June'. This means that throughout the month of June, we explored ideas surrounding generosity. Each Sunday our sermons and services have been somehow shaped by this theme. In particular, we have been thinking about the idea of 'paying it forward'. When I think of this, I am reminded of this poem:

*Milena James explores the concept of generosity*

"Smiling is infectious,  
you catch it like the flu,  
When someone smiled at me today,  
I started smiling too.  
I passed around the corner  
and someone saw my grin.  
When he smiled I realized  
I'd passed it on to him.  
I thought about that smile,  
then I realized its worth.  
A single smile, just like mine  
could travel round the earth.  
So, if you feel a smile begin,  
don't leave it undetected.  
Let's start an epidemic quick,  
and get the world infected!"

- Jez Alborough



How beautiful is that? Whether it is a smile, your time, skills or money - generosity is indeed infectious! As Christians, we are also thinking about how our faith leads us to be generous.

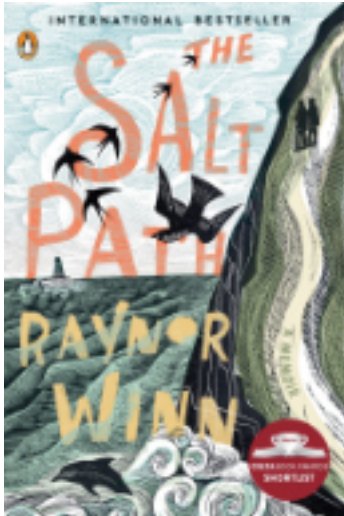
On the 8th of June, it was Pentecost, a celebration of the first time the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus' disciples. What we often miss about this celebration comes just after the main event - the book of Acts tells us what the disciples did after being filled with the Spirit. They didn't keep it to themselves, or use it against others, no, instead they "were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need ... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:44-46 NIV). That is the kind of thing we wanted to emulate during 'Generous June' and of course throughout the year and indeed our lives!

There are many instances of amazing things happening when a seed of generosity is planted. A Canadian woman started with a simple paper clip, and over a series of months and many trades, wound up being given a house, which instead of keeping as an example of this amazing feat, she gave away to someone in need. Ian Simkins, Pastor of the Bridge Church in Tennessee, often speaks about his alternative idea for evangelism: he suggests that his church members become known for being the most generous tippers in their city. He wants his church to use what they have to bless others. He says Christians should be best known for extravagant, unreasonable generosity. Recalling those words from Acts he reminds his congregation that early Christians were known even by their enemies for being incredibly generous. Generosity is perhaps one of the most beautiful declarations that we belong to a different Kingdom and follow a different King.



Whether Christian or not, we can agree that a little generosity goes a long way, and we hold onto memories of others being generous to us. How might you 'pay it forward'? If you buy someone a coffee, or give an elderly neighbour help with their garden, or donate to charity - your generosity matters more than you might think!

## The Salt Path by Raynor Winn



I wish I'd written a bestselling novel that was turned into a film starring Gillian Anderson and Jason Isaacs, but alas, I did not. Raynor Winn, the author of "The Salt Path" certainly did. "It is a book about love, loss, rediscovery and self-belief and at the core of it is the idea that these things are all bound up in our connection to the earth" she says, and the book does exactly what it says on the tin.

Given The Salt Path's success, it was only a matter of time before it was chosen for discussion at the Morpeth Parish Book Club. The Club meets every other month in one of the upstairs conference rooms in

Morpeth Sports Centre, conveniently situated next door to Morpeth Library, which kindly provides sets of books for members to borrow, free of charge. An added bonus is the sports centre's very nice coffee shop downstairs, where you can drink coffee, eat pastries and watch energetic people doing sporty stuff before you go upstairs to discuss literature while sitting down.

Absolutely everyone who loves reading books is more than welcome to come along – there is no requirement to be a churchgoer – just be an enthusiastic bookworm and enjoy the company of other enthusiastic bookworms! We meet every other month and this month's review was our May choice. The July book choice is "The Uncommon Reader" by Alan Bennett.

Briefly, "The Salt Path" is a non-fiction account of a 630 mile walk round the Cornish peninsula, undertaken by Raynor Winn and her husband Moth, after they lost their home, their farm and their livelihood. Moth, who was diagnosed with corticobasal degeneration; a rare condition that can cause worsening problems with movement,

speech, memory and swallowing, had invested a "substantial sum" into a company owned by a friend. The company failed, leaving unpaid debts; the friend insisted that the Winns were liable for payment and took them to court. Unable to afford a lawyer, they lost their case and their farm.

As a result, they did what they felt was the only option and took to the road.

The narrative is brutally honest; the couple experience intense discomfort; they make mistakes and endure humiliations. At times they resort to petty thieving, and they survive on a poor and inadequate diet, but somehow, they resist the temptation to give up.

They encounter people who react to them in many ways; some seeing them as being lucky and free; others eyeing them with suspicion. They experience astonishing generosity and acts of kindness as well as mistrust from some of the people they encounter on the path, but despite being rather bleak and depressing at times, the journey they experience is also full of hope.

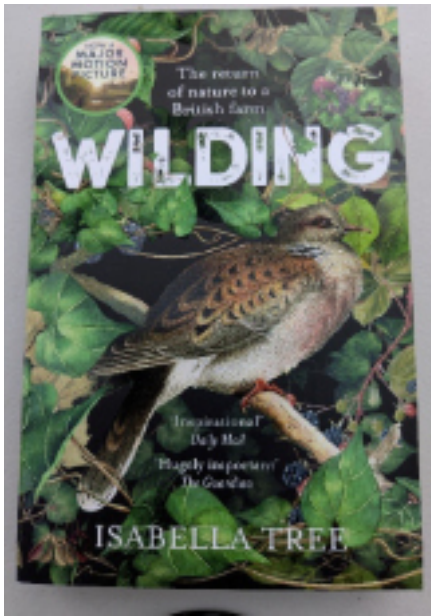
At its heart, The Salt Path is a love story which reassures us that even in the depths of despair there is always a light somewhere in the distance. Moreover, on that journey from darkness to light, great things can be achieved.

Please feel free to come along to any of the book club meetings. Further details are available from Morpeth Parish Office via the contact number below.

Morpeth Parish Office: 01670 503326

“There are skys of blue, fields of green,  
... and I think to myself, what a wonderful world”

Our planet has inspired awe and wonder not only in song writers, poets and artists, but for each and every one of us at some point in our lives; whether it's seeing a spectacular sunrise, the excitement of a thunder storm, the bright blue flash of a kingfisher darting by, or just lying in the grass gazing up at a blue summer sky and listening to the skylarks whilst deciding what animals we can see in the clouds. It feels that these things will never end and that life is good. But is it?



I recently attended our community cinema and saw a screening of the film *Wilding*, one of the events put on by Climate Action Wansbeck as part of the Big Green Week. This is an account of a couple's personal realisation of the damage caused to their land by intensive agricultural methods, and how they took a risk to change the landscape by re-introducing herbivores such as wild cattle, pigs and ponies, and letting nature re-establish a natural balance. It's a really thought-provoking film, well worth a watch or you could read the book. It does have a feel good factor.

Last year in Big Green Week the community cinema screened *The End We Start From*, which had quite a different feel, showed an apocalyptic crisis where vast areas of the country were flooded, and as a result people turned against each other as they fought to survive for basic resources such as food and shelter. Both show us a glimpse of our possible futures, one of hope and survival or a dystopian world where society breaks down and we and our world are destroyed. We all make choices how we live our lives, but do we consider the impact we make to others and our world, and ultimately our own families and futures.

Part of the work of Christian Aid is to help support those around our world affected by climate change, working with “local partners and crisis-affected communities on the causes and consequences of climate change, helping the most marginalised to adapt, build resilience and reduce their vulnerability” (source CA website) - please visit [www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk) and search Climate adaptation and resilience for a full report of our work. In Christian Aid week we focus on how projects in communities affected by climate, poverty or injustice can be empowered through your support. Thank you to everyone who made a donation to Christian Aid, together we can change the lives of many.

The next events to look out for are:

- 6<sup>th</sup> September – Morpeth street collection - we'll be there from 9am-2pm
- 11th October – Ceilidh at St Georges URC Morpeth 7.00pm to 9.30pm

Please do think about supporting these events which generate funds for Christian Aid projects and emergency relief but also think about the differences you can make to positively impact on the future for you, your family and friends and the wider world.

Why not -

- contact our MP David Smith to let him know your concerns
- contact Climate Action Wansbeck [www.climateactionwansbeck.org](http://www.climateactionwansbeck.org) to find out more about their work and to access useful resources
- check out Northumberland County Council's website and look at their climate plan, and find better ways to recycle our waste
- check with your energy supplier about support to go greener
- buy local if you can and reduce food miles and waste
- keep the world and all our neighbours in your prayers.

Together we can keep hope alive and build a better future for all.

Liz Scott-Tatum,  
Co-chair Morpeth Christian Aid Group.

## Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Stannington

Welcome to our beautiful Church

Its origins began around 1190, with the possibility that a Saxon church was here earlier, a Saxon gravestone being found when the old Norman church, being worse for wear, was demolished in 1870 at the behest of the 4th Baronet Ridley, who promoted this present church, started in April 1870 and completed in 1871. Built in Bassington dressed stone quarried locally and designed in the Early English/ Decorated Style.

*Churchwarden  
Pat Nicholson  
proudly shows  
off the second  
St Mary's that  
Rev Canon  
Simon White  
looks after*

The four bays and south aisle end in the south porch and embattled western tower 80 feet high with eight bells. Two Norman pillars are in the north nave, and the north east arch is also original Norman, along with the sundial over the South door.



The stained glass of the east window shows in vivid colours, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection; on the North side it depicts the Annunciation, Gabriel carrying a rod of office, Mary holding the lily of purity declaring 'I am the Handmaid of the Lord.'

On the south side finds Fortitude with a sword and the martyr's papyrus palm and St Cecilia has an organ and sheet music. The two light windows show the female virtues. Faith carries a cross and gospel, Hope an anchor, Charity a burning heart and Fortitude a sword and shield (with a pretty plait).

Lovely predella panels (above a shelf) below each light show incidents in Our Lord's life concerning the virtues. In the south aisle are two three light windows showing in the main the Saints of the north. These were placed in memory of 4th Baron Ridley and Cecilia, his wife, by their children.

A marble memorial on the south side of the chancel to the memory of Georgiana Lady Ridley and the two light windows on either side were given by her husband the 5th Baronet & 1st Viscount. The window in the south wall was given in memory of the 2nd Viscount by the tenantry of Blagdon and Blyth with a loving sentiment: "He ruled in the noblest realms, the hearts of his people" and shows St Benedict as Bishop with a model church, King Oswald with the cross of Heavenfield and St Aidan with a stag.

Next to this is the Parish War memorial; along side which is a plaque commemorating the boys and men from Netherton Park, the then Correctional Institution, who lost their lives in the First World War. The chair below is an example of the boys' wood carving skills.

In the east wall the stained-glass window is in memory of Rev. Ambrose Jones (1867 – 1909) and his wife. On the left is St. Cuthbert in Bishop's robes carrying the head of St. Aidan, in the centre is Mary of Bethany and in the background her sister Martha with an armful of washing. St Paulinus of Yeaveering fame is on the right holding a model church, depicting his missionary endeavours.

Adjacent to the south door hangs the Garter Banner of the late Matthew White 4th Viscount Ridley of Blagdon (1925 – 2012), previously hung in St George's Chapel, Windsor, until his death when it was bequeathed to the church and proudly displayed.

A bronze memorial to the 1st Viscount Ridley (d1901) Secretary of State to Queen Victoria (1895 – 1900) at the east end of the north aisle is by Sir William Reynold Stevens.

In the bell tower the ring of eight carillon bells was installed in 1935 weighing in at approximately ten tons. The largest bell is 4'7" in diameter, weighs 30 cwt (1524 Kg) embossed with the name Doddie, probably named after Alfred Dodderidge St Mary's Vicar, who personally paid £96 (valued over £7000 in 2022) for the bell the remaining £948 was covered by local donations.

The font is traditionally sited near to the main entrance, which marks the first stage of a child's christian life; it is furnished with the same marble shafts at the east end of the church. Eight additions to the various faces are symbolic of four evangelists: winged man (Matthew), winged lion (Mark), winged ox (Luke) and eagle (John).

The Organ was built by Nicholson Bros for the new church in 1871 with two manual keyboards, the Swell and the Great with a 30 note pedal board. The wind was provided originally by a pump worked by a lad or a lass, who always left their name for posterity on the woodwork! A modern electric pump replaced the old.

The entrance to our church is through a beautiful lychgate, which in days gone by, was built to provide shelter for bearers and coffins, where they would have to wait for the priest and clerk to come from the church to meet them.

A few changes took place inside the church in the early 2000's including extending the chancel step, the addition of a community room, kitchen and toilet facilities, and a new vestry in the base of the tower sympathetically to provide modern amenities.

We hope you will visit our church to truly appreciate its splendour.



# The Rector's Ramblings

## Paying it forward

I so love having grandchildren.

The ability to hand them back is one of the positive attributes of grandparenting. I also love to see the grandchildren push some of their parents' big red buttons and watch how my children have to deal with the same stropy mannerisms I had to deal with when they were children, it feels like Karma! But I suspect it's all part of the cycle of life, observing generation after generation do the same things, irritate, bicker and fight in the same way every generation has.

As our grandchildren are fairly small at the moment the present learning observations are how to share. It appears that sharing is not a naturally found gift; I have seen, even with prompting, sharing is a foreign concept. They are all perfectly happy with the idea of others sharing until it involves them! Then the tears and stropy tantrums emerge, and the naughty step is invoked until reason is found or mum and dad forget why they are on the naughty step. But I wonder if even when older we understand the idea of sharing without gain. Giving without condition. Even things like forgiveness, "I will only forgive you, if you forgive me!" "I am sorry for what I have done but you need to know why I did it" We seem to live in a transactional world, tit for tat. If I give you something I want something in exchange, be it money, love or respect. We find it hard to just give without expectation.

In the bible we read that God so loved the world, (John 3:16) that's me and you and all people not just the holy folk, that he gave himself, in the form of Jesus, to take away the sins of the world (which are pretty massive). He did it as he doesn't want us to be burdened and weighed down with them. He wants humanity to be free to live



"Oh wow, a Kew Gardens fifty pence piece...! That's very generous of you sir."

life to the full. To live lives that are unencumbered, he doesn't want to put us on the naughty step of life, but offers us complete forgiveness and it's that act of forgiveness that inspires many of us to follow and seek how we too can be purveyors of that same light and life we found ourselves accepting. Hearts we thought generous were often hearts of stone, but inspired by God through Jesus they become hearts of flesh. Freely given and freely accepted!

Last month we had our annual Generous June in church and thought about how we respond to God's blessings. The theme this year was "Paying it forward". The idea that when we receive, we are then inspired to give ourselves. Three years ago, Radio One tried an experiment. Every Thursday they challenged people to "Pay it forward" then to ring or email the radio station with what happened. One listener wrote in to say that every morning he would go to his local McDonalds and order a coffee. Inspired by the Radio One challenge he had bought a coffee that Thursday and then asked to pay for a coffee for the car behind him, explaining the Radio One challenge to the teller. He then recounted how the next morning on the way to work, he pulled into his local McDonalds to buy his usual coffee and yes, you guessed it, the car in front had already gifted him a coffee. His small act of generosity had inspired hundreds of drive-through customers to gift a coffee to the next person in the queue. And so it is with faith, passing on the blessings we received without expectation or requirement for response or recompense. So, this month maybe ponder on the blessings you have and what you might do with them? Gift them to others or keep them for yourself? Pay it forward or keep it? Which will bring you more freedom? I will leave you to ponder the answer. Praying God's blessing on you over the coming weeks.

God Bless, Simon

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