

The cover features a photograph of a church with a stone tower and several arched windows, situated in a cemetery. In the foreground, there is a large, weathered gravestone with a decorative top. Yellow daffodils are in bloom in the lower right corner. The title 'MORPETH PATHWAYS' is written across the top, with 'MORPETH' in white block letters and 'PATHWAYS' in a stylized purple script. Below the title is a dark blue banner with the text 'A FORUM FOR CHURCH & COMMUNITY'. Another dark blue banner on the right side says 'FREE ISSUE'. At the bottom, a dark blue banner contains 'Easter edition 2026' and 'Issue No 14'.

MORPETH
PATHWAYS

A FORUM FOR CHURCH & COMMUNITY

FREE ISSUE

Easter edition 2026

Issue No 14

From the editor

As I write this, the crocuses on the bank at Lancaster Park are bursting into bloom, signalling that spring is on its way and Easter will be here soon.

Pat Fuller has written about The Great Big Green Week which takes place in June this year. She has listed just some of the activities that are happening here in Morpeth. She lays down a challenge: ask yourself if there is ONE more thing you could be doing to show your love for the planet and each other. One thing might be to take a broken household item to the Morpeth Repair Café for a volunteer to mend, or help you to mend, instead of throwing it away. This initiative is designed to reduce waste and help to save money, all in a welcoming café. So what have you got lurking in the back of a cupboard that could be brought back to useful service?

The Rector has written about Easter in his Ramblings, but here in Morpeth the weekend after Easter means one thing: the Gathering. Kim Bibby-Wilson writes enthusiastically about this year's event which coincides with the 300th anniversary of Sir John Vanburgh's death. Vanburgh was the architect of the original Town Hall in Morpeth and will be celebrated during the programme of events. At the same time Morpeth Castle will be open to the public for two days. The rest of the year the Castle is a holiday rental run by the Landmark Trust, so don't miss the opportunity to see it.

Easter for teachers brings a welcome end of term rest. Val Cown sat down with Danielle Brett, the head of Morpeth All Saints' First School to find out how she was enjoying her new role as head and what she does in her spare time.

If you are looking for something to do in your spare time, the Parish of Morpeth has plenty going on to nourish you intellectually and spiritually – and sometimes there is food involved too! This issue introduces you to the Parish Book Group and FEAST. If you are looking to volunteer or would just like to go to a coffee morning, Liz Scott-Tatum has the rundown of Christian Aid's activities for the year. We also have a harmonious recorder concert in St Aidan's. Forget your memories of plastic descant recorders that screeched through

school concerts and hear the range of recorders played in delightful harmony.

And if any of you were wondering what happened to Father Christmas's elves when they were made redundant after Christmas, Martin Booth continues the story of Brian the elf. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did.

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

Sally Keith

Editor.



WHY NOT LEARN TO PLAY BRIDGE IN 2024/25?

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www.Morpethbridge4all.co.uk



Tea-time concert at St Aidan's Saturday 21st March 2026

Following their well-attended and successful concert in St James' Church in March 2025, the Galliard Recorder Ensemble will entertain us again. This time it will be on **Saturday 21st March at 6pm at St Aidan's Church** on Shields Road, Morpeth, NE61 2SA. The concert will last for about an hour and be followed by light refreshments and an opportunity to talk to the players about their instruments. Entry is by donation with a suggested amount of £10 per adult.

The instruments were a great surprise to many last year - very different from the plastic descant recorders many of us learned on at school. They are mainly made from wood - traditionally European boxwood but pear, cherry, olive, ebony and other woods are also used - but some of the bigger instruments are plastic, marine ply or even 3D-printed!! Sizes vary from 4 inches to 16 feet (that is approximately 10cm to nearly 5m). Together they sound wonderful, sometimes likened to an organ, and are in turns sparkling, haunting, mellow or mysterious.



The music will be drawn from the programme we have been working on this year, which ranges from a remarkable canon for 13 parts by John Wilkinson from the 16th century, through arrangements of an exciting Canzon by Johann Schein and a thrilling choral piece by JS Bach, to substantial and playful pieces written specifically for recorder orchestra: a symphony movement and portraits of people, places and animals.

The conductor will (as last year) be Ian Wilson, who is delightful to work under - encouraging, energetic, skilled at bringing the best out of his players and with a mine of practical tips and interesting information. Ian grew up in Aberdeen and maintains his Scottish connections while being Head of Woodwind at Eton College, principal professor of recorder at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and a highly sought after performer and conductor. Somehow he has managed to squeeze in some visits to Morpeth to work with this group of invited players from across the north of England.

We have thoroughly enjoyed working with Ian on this programme and hope you will enjoy listening to it.

Continuing Tradition and Celebrating Morpeth's Heritage

Morpeth is awash with anniversaries this year! 2026 marks 300 years since the death of original Town Hall architect, Sir John Vanbrugh, 80 years of Morpeth Antiquarian Society, 75 years since the Clock Tower restoration and recasting of the bells and 60 years since Jim Alder won the Commonwealth Games marathon.

Older readers will recall huge crowds welcoming local athlete, Jim, in 1966 at a public reception when the Town Hall and Market Place were the focus for civic pride and the townsfolk coming together to celebrate, as they have been for centuries. Over a decade earlier, massive community efforts, including the revived Morpeth Carnival, drew crowds and funds so that the refurbished Clock Tower could be unveiled as Morpeth's main contribution to 1951's Festival of Britain.

The springtime Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering is another such massive communal get-together: it's run since 1968, briefly pausing for Covid, and organisers are ensuring the town's landmark events and buildings are at the centre of this year's festival, with its "Vanbrugh Revisited" theme among the many music and dance events over the three days from 10th to 12th April. The usual weekend after Easter is a celebration of Northumberland's folk music, dialect, craft, family events, heritage and traditions, centred on the Town Hall but also enlivening the town's other central halls and open spaces (including the Morpeth Castle Open Days on Saturday and Sunday).

Sir John Vanbrugh himself will be attending many of the Gathering's events held in his honour - in the person of actor Ray Alexander, who



makes a welcome return to Morpeth. Ray was last here in 2014 for the Town Hall's tercentenary with his one-man show, "A Life of Irony", which this year expands into the opening Friday concert "Sir John's Delight" staged in the grand Ballroom,

with music from fiddler Stewart Hardy and Woosington Strings. Ray is looking forward to meeting the festival's new figurehead Morpeth Gadgy Ron Forster and joining in the annual festival of traditional music, dance, craft, dialect and culture. There'll be 1726-era music and dance dotted across the weekend among the usual run of concerts, dancing, stalls and re-enactments.



This year's programme includes events for audiences but also have-a-go workshops and competitions to give people of all ages and abilities the chance to take part in our regional "intangible cultural heritage". These worthwhile traditions of music, song, dance, craft and dialect can only live on if they are passed on to young people. There are already categories for junior singing, writing and craft, and after

a pause since the pandemic, the clog dance competitions are being resumed, including the Northumberland Clog Solo Championship.

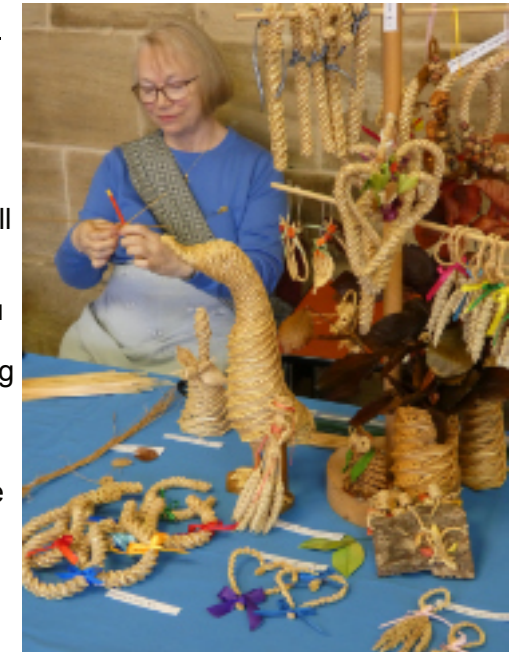
All these are now to be joined by the Alex Swailes Memorial Award for Children's Speaking, being launched this year. Following the sad loss last year of the long-standing Morpeth Gadgy, that great performer Alex Swailes MBE, his family have combined with the Gathering committee and the Northumbrian Language Society to launch the award for the best performance by a child up to 14 of a poem or tale lasting up to three minutes, spoken in Northumbrian dialect or on a Northumbrian theme, preferably by memory. Why not encourage your family or young friends to have a try? The event is part of the friendly and informal dialect session at St Robert's Church Hall behind Collingwood House in Oldgate, one of the competition venues on Saturday 11th April.

Alex is also to be commemorated, along with first Gadgy George Green, on a silver panel on the Gadgy Staff, the large ceremonial wooden staff carried by the Gadgy when he welcomes the Saturday morning costumed procession to the Market Place. All being well the parade and short road closure will happen as normal, with a diversion around the town centre from Chantry Place to Manchester Street from 10.30 am to 11.45 am, and for motorists coming to the Gathering on Saturday, there'll be a free Park and Ride from County Hall.

The full programme of April's events and competition details are at the Chantry TIC; also online at northumbriana.org.uk/gathering and the Gathering's Facebook page. The Patrons scheme offers a discount

(see website) and the crowdfunding campaign to cover festival costs is at: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/morpeth-northumbrian-gathering>


Meanwhile, more special events are being planned for parent body the Morpeth Antiquarian Society's 80th birthday, including in September the annual local history exhibition in the Town Hall for Heritage Open Days – can you help with any memories of events in the Town Hall? Did you queue up for Saturday morning jumble sales? Was your wedding held there? Did you dance the night away at Chamber of Trade theme-night fundraisers for the Christmas lights? Let committee members know if you have reminiscences, programmes, photos or other memorabilia, at MAS meetings or during the Gathering.



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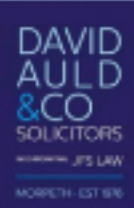
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Contact Us

22 Newcastle Street, Morpeth,
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Morpeth Castle Open Days with the Landmark Trust

Open to the public once a year, Morpeth residents and visitors are warmly invited to step inside Morpeth Castle for free Open Days on Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 April 2026, from 10am to 4pm.

Part of the annual Northumbrian Gathering, this is a wonderful opportunity to explore one of the town's most recognisable landmarks and discover more about its past.



This year we'll be welcoming live music from the Ran Tanners and historical re-enactors John Sadler's Time Bandits. Activities are suitable for all ages at this family-friendly event. Refreshments will be provided by 4th Morpeth Scouts in the park.

Information about the castle's history and restoration will be available on site, together with children's activity sheets, along with our friendly Landmark Trust staff.

The Landmark Trust is a leading UK building restoration charity who rescue and repair buildings of historic interest that are at risk. Restored properties are let for short breaks to maintain them and raise funds for future projects. In 2025 we celebrated 60 years of our work, with over 200 buildings across the UK from castles, towers and follies.

The building we now know as Morpeth Castle began life around 1350 as a gatehouse, guarding the entrance to the original medieval fortress.

It likely replaced an earlier gatehouse that had stood there for over a century. In fact, Morpeth has had a castle since Norman times.

Centuries later, in 1946, the castle was purchased by the Borough Council and became a very unusual council house. In 1988, a new chapter began when the council granted a lease to the Landmark Trust. Careful restoration was completed in 1991, and since then the castle has been available year-round as unique holiday accommodation.

Open Day entry is free with donations gratefully received.

Morpeth Castle is located between the town centre and the train station (postcode NE61 2PP). There is no parking at the castle itself; limited parking is available along the lane leading to the park.

More information and book free tickets at: landmarktrust.org.uk/opendays or search 'Morpeth Castle Open Days'.

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Morpeth Repair Café

The recently established Morpeth Repair Café is a welcoming community initiative dedicated to reducing waste, saving money, and bringing people together. The café offers free repair sessions where skilled volunteers help local residents fix broken household items instead of throwing them away.



Held in a friendly, informal setting at Barnabas Safe and Sound in Morpeth, the Repair Café invites you to bring along small electrical appliances, lamps, clothing, textiles, wooden items, toys, and more. Whether it's a faulty toaster, a torn jacket, a wobbly chair, or a treasured keepsake in need of care, volunteer repairers work alongside you to diagnose the problem and, where possible, restore it to working order. The focus is not only on fixing things but also on sharing practical skills and encouraging confidence in repair.

By extending the life of everyday items, the café helps reduce landfill waste and lowers the carbon emissions associated with manufacturing and transporting new products. In a time when many goods are discarded too easily, Morpeth Repair Café champions a more sustainable, circular approach - repairing, reusing, and valuing what we already have.

Beyond the repairs themselves, the café is a social hub. It is held in a warm and welcoming space serving hot drinks, soup and cakes by trainee young people from the local high schools, providing them with the skills for future careers. Visitors can relax and connect with like-minded people who care about sustainability and community resilience. It's a place where practical action meets friendly conversation.

Whether you have something that needs fixing or simply want to support a positive local project, Morpeth Repair Café offers a practical, planet-friendly solution. Together, we can cut waste, share skills, and build a stronger, more resourceful Morpeth - one repair at a time.

The repair team are also always looking for more volunteers. If you've got an interest in fixing or learning how to, come along to the next repair café or email us at morpethrepaircafe@gmail.com. The repair café is open on the first Saturday of the month.

The Great Big Green Week

This year, 2026, the Great Big Green Week, organised by The Climate Coalition, is being held between 6th and 14th June. The national aim is to create a wave of action for friends, family, climate and nature. It is UK's biggest celebration of Community Action to tackle climate change and protect nature. The First GBGW took place in September 2021 and it has continued to grow. In 2025 an amazing 1.2 million people took part.



In Morpeth there are many ways that people are already trying to make a difference in the choices about how they live and what they get involved with for the sake of our common home. I can list only a few.

St Robert's Catholic Church, emboldened by Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, 'Laudato Si', are working towards their 'Living Simply' awards. A sewing group meets to create items from recycled material and hopes to sell what they have made to support a hospital in Africa. They have also planted a wildflower area.

The Anglican parish in Morpeth are considering how to reflect Eco Church ideals. Already St Mary's has changed the lighting to use less electricity. St Mary's Churchyard is a haven for all kinds of wildlife.

Climate Action Wansbeck is working to create a research project which will help care for the river and develop some citizen science opportunities.

A Repair Café is now running at St Barnabas on the first Saturday of most months.

Morpeth Town Council continues to care for Carlisle Park and to leave areas for greater biodiversity.

Greater Morpeth Development Trust has an Environment Group which organises litter picks to keep the town clean. They have been responsible for bulb planting and the removal of tree guards.

Stobhill Link has a Community Fridge and a store of paint for people to buy cheaply. They run the 'Bread and Butter' Club for people to access food, a pre-loved school uniform store and a lunch club on Thursdays at St Aidan's. They also have two allotments.

Then there is Clark's Bog, an amazing nature reserve run by volunteers on the edge of the town.

These are just some examples of what is going on already in Morpeth and I know I have just skimmed the surface. We do already show the love and care for our common home but there is always more we can do. Keep alert to what is happening in The Great Big Green Week and ask yourself if there is ONE more thing you could be doing to show your love for the planet and each other.

Pat Fuller



Danielle Brett - new Head Teacher at Morpeth All Saints' First School

Morpeth All Saints' Church of England Aided First School has 221 children from the ages of three (Nursery) to nine (Year 4). There are very strong links with the church in Morpeth, with four of the governors being appointed either by the Diocesan Board of Education or the local Anglican PCC. I have been a governor at All Saints' since before the pandemic and I have to say it is a joy to go into school either for governor visits or to help lead Collective Worship.

Val Cowan, a Church governor at All Saint's caught up with the school's new headteacher to find out a little about her and her faith

Tell me a bit about yourself. I'm married with two sons aged eight and two and two dogs - Buckley, a black labrador and Obi, a ridgeback - both designed to add a little more chaos to my already busy life! I have been teaching for 20 years, having trained as a primary school teacher with an English Literature degree. Recently I was a Year 6 teacher and Assistant Head at Ponteland Middle School before moving to Chantry as Assistant Head and SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) for five years before taking up this post last year.

What attracted you to apply for this post at Morpeth All Saints'? I saw this as an exciting opportunity to take on more responsibility whilst staying in Morpeth, to have the chance to work with younger children in a school that is a feeder school for Chantry and part of the same Multi-Academy Trust.

Why Morpeth? I am a local girl and I think Morpeth is a vibrant place with lots of activities and opportunities for the whole family. Also, all the schools in the town have good reputations.

If there is such a thing, can you describe a typical day? As a Head there is no such thing as a typical day! But I see much of my role being to get to know both the students and their parents and carers - so I try to start the day on the yard greeting the children as they arrive and catching up with parents. One of the most important sets of relationships I have is with my staff, so as well as staff briefings I try to get round their classrooms, offering support. The staff at All Saints' are amazing and I like to think that we are building a great

team together. I also attend meetings (lots of meetings!). And respond to whatever is thrown my way. It is never dull!

What do you value most about this school? The children are amazing and it is part of my role to help them foster a passion for discovering new things; to be curious about the world around them and to be independent, enthusiastic learners and the children are willing participants in this endeavour. I also value its Christian ethos and our strap-line - Together we flourish - taken from John's gospel - is designed to ensure that all our pupils, whatever their beliefs, are enabled to explore life in its fullness and flourish both as an individual and in community. I also value the team I have around me. Several key members of staff have moved on in recent years and we have had to build a new team; I could not have started to do this without the support and enthusiasm of all the staff in the school. I also really appreciate the support and trust of our parents and that of our governors.

How important are the links with the local community? I have never worked in a school which has so much community support. For example, Rutherfords sponsor our football shirts and lots of local businesses support our events. We have links with local care homes - the children recently sang at Riverside and the school supports the local food bank. The children love having visitors and particularly look forward to the Open the Book team which comes in twice a month as well as leaders from the parish and St. George's and the Mustard Tree Trust who lead collective worship and help with the curriculum. The Diocesan Education Board have offered, both me personally and the staff, lots of support and training, particularly in the area of spirituality but also with staff health and wellbeing.



How important is faith to you personally? I wouldn't call myself a regular church goer but faith gives me a real sense of peace and the feeling of being part of something bigger, giving me the opportunity to be more open and reflective. The Christian community is important to mark the milestones both in the year and of life.

And finally - given that you are an extremely busy headteacher and a wife and mother - what do you enjoy doing in any precious spare time you have? For me, being a mum brings me so much joy. I try to keep my weekends free to spend with my husband and the boys but if I do have any spare time I love to read - especially the classics and of course I love reading stories to my children.

The Parish Book Club

The Parish Book Club meets on the last Saturday of every other month, in Room 5 of Morpeth Leisure Centre, at 10.30am. The room is accessible by stairs or lift.

At our last meeting on 31 January 2026 we discussed 'In Patagonia' by Bruce Chatwin. Joan Stratford prepared an interesting introduction to the author which stimulated a lively sharing of memories about travels undertaken by members and how these differ from excursions by family members today.

Below is a list of dates we'll be meeting and the books we'll be reading this year -

28 March - 'The Sunday Philosophy Club' by Alexander McCall Smith

30 May - 'The 100 year old Man Who Climbed out of a Window and Disappeared' by Jonas Jonasson

25 July - 'A Month in the Country' by J L Carr

26 September - 'Mrs Dalloway' by Virginia Woolf

28 November - 'To Kill a Mockingbird' by Harper Lee.

You would be most welcome to join this Book Club whose membership extends beyond the church. Please contact Vivienne Sommerville (01670 513181) if you'd like more information.



Would you consider making a donation?

As part of our parish mission, Pathways magazine is produced locally and for donation only. If you are able to afford it, please consider making a donation via this QR code or visit our website www.parityofmorpeth.org.uk to make a donation directly. Thank you so much for your support





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Lady Elizabeth Grey

Lady Elizabeth Dorothy Anne Georgina Grey (nee Howard)

b. 1816 – d.1891

and the Lady Elizabeth Grey Charity

Lady Elizabeth Grey, also known as Lady Howard, was one of three daughters, born into a wealthy family. Her father, George Howard, was the 6th Earl of Carlisle and her mother was Lady Georgiana Dorothy Cavendish.

Elizabeth's husband, the Rev. Hon. Sir Francis Richard Grey, Rector of Morpeth, was the motivator for the building of St. James' Church here in Morpeth. Despite her position in society, Elizabeth was very concerned about the welfare of young women in service. She bought a row of cottages (leading up from the Sun Inn) and these provided accommodation for young women, giving them periods of respite care. At the end of the war, the cottages were sold and the money was placed into the Lady Elizabeth Grey Charity to provide financial assistance for young women in the County of Northumberland.

The charity was originally set up to:

provide care to young women in service who are sick, convalescent or in need of a recuperative holiday so as to enable them to obtain a period of rest and fresh air which they would otherwise be unable to afford.

The charity is still active today and operates under the leadership of the Rector, Simon White and a small group of parishioners. The group meet twice yearly to consider applications from women who find themselves in challenging circumstances, those who are caring for others or those who are convalescing, and would benefit from some respite care.

Over the years, this charity has helped finance short breaks or day trips for young single women or single mums with little ones, who are struggling.

If you meet the charity's criteria, please do not hesitate to contact us - we are here to help, if we can. Applications should be made, in writing, to Simon.



The illustration is Lady Elizabeth Dorothy Anne Georgina Grey (nee Howard) by Richard James Lane, printed by M & N Hanhart, after George Dodgson Tomlinson lithograph, 1850 National Portrait Gallery, London

Both Lady Elizabeth Grey and her husband have a grave memorial in St. Mary the Virgin Churchyard in Morpeth.



FEAST!

Feast (Friday Evening and Spiritual Treasure) is our monthly Friday evening worship where we gather to share a meal and worship following Sabbath liturgy. From teens to seniors, we eat, worship, pray, learn from scripture and help one another to grow as followers of Jesus.

Last year, we began to re-energise this ministry. By inviting guest speakers to join us and talk about their Christian faith or something about Christianity they are passionate about. This was successful, and as a result, we are doing the same for 2026/2027.

Why not join us for our meal and worship?

The evenings start at 7 pm, and we finish around 9.15 pm. We meet on the second Friday of the month at St Aidan's Church, Community room, Stobhill, Morpeth.

Talks are interspersed with dinner and dessert, and we often have some sort of small activity, for example, discussions around the table about the topic or a reflection on something relevant to the topic. The evenings are relaxed and informative, and we all come away having learnt something!

Last year, we had many amazing speakers, both from our diocese and the wider Christian community. It's hard to select a favourite evening from last year. Highlights for me were learning about the Mission Journeys of the Revd. Stephen Tranter and the talk about Science and Faith by Revd. Professor David Wilkinson. We also had fabulous evenings centred on food and faith, farming and faith, art and faith, theology and faith, marriage and faith, to name a few! There really is something for everyone, and it is wonderful to hear how God is at work in so many lives and in such a variety of amazing ways.

This year, our programme began again in February. Our speaker was Beth Rookwood, who gave us a delightful insight into the Roost Community and their invaluable work with 16-18-year-olds as

chaplains in Northumberland schools.

We have almost filled our speaker slots until the end of 2026, and would love to welcome you to join us and listen to their fabulous insights.

There is a clear structure to our evenings, but every session is different.

More details are available from the Parish Office 01670 503326 email:office.morpethparish@gmail.com or the Parish Ministry Team. Please let us know if you are planning to join us so we can cater for you.

Sharon Williams

Feast Programme 2026

Friday 13th Mar 2026: Dr Chris Ferguson FSA - Ad Gefrin

Friday 10th April 2026: Les Stone - Insights into his Teaching and Christian Life in South Africa

Friday 8th May 2026: Rev Robert Lawrence - St Francis and the Third Order

Friday 5th June 2026: Green Feast - A focus on environmental theology (linked with Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, 'Laudato Si') before the Great Big Green Week, organised by the Climate Coalition, being held between 6th and 14th June.

Friday 12th June 2026: David Smith MP and Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief

Friday 10th July 2026: Emma Duff LGBTQI+ Lead Chaplain - on being LGBTQI+ in the Church of England/Chaplaincy

Brian and the silver screen By Martin Booth

Elf Brian looked at the large grey building in front of him with the sign 'Snowflake Productions' on the door. Squaring his shoulders, Brian opened it and walked in. Inside, the cavernous building was dark except for a brightly lit area with a garishly painted red sleigh in the centre. Several people wandered about holding strange pieces of equipment, directed by a man sitting in a deck chair who shouted and waved his arms. Brian went over to him and smiled. "Hello."

The man turned to him. "What do you want?"

"Er, I'm an elf," said Brian, shaking his pointed hat and making his bell jingle. The man in the chair glared at him. "Good. Know what to do?"

"No."

"Read the script?"

"No," admitted Brian. The man sighed and tossed him a pile of paper, held together with an elastic band. "Read this. You are Elves 1, 2 and 3." Brian took the document and went and sat in a corner to read it while the man shouted at some more people.

After ten minutes, a door opened and a man came in dressed as Santa. Brian saw this and immediately stood to attention. Santa ignored him and demanded coffee. The man in the chair spotted the movement and waved Brian over. "Read it?"

"Er, yes, but..."

"What?"

"Well," said Brian, "It's all wrong. I mean, this isn't what happens at the Pole." The director glared at him. "We don't all go around singing all day," said Brian.

"Why not?"

If you're wondering what happened to Elf Brian after Christmas Martin Booth lifts the lid on the next chapter in Brian's eventful life

“Well, we don’t. And the workshop... it’s not red and green, it’s pale yellow. Not all elves wear full dress, like this,” he added. Most of them wear overalls...”

The director looked at him, his face getting redder by the minute. He stood up, then bent down to face Brian. “This,” he said quietly, “is *my* film. Elves *will* sing, they *will* wear costumes and the workshop is Christmas colours.”

“But it’s wrong!” shouted Brian. “Ask Santa... he knows.”

The director looked at Santa, who was chatting up one of the female interns, and waved him over. “This extra,” he said, “tells me that your North Pole isn’t like it is for real.”

“How should I know?” said Santa. “The furthest North I’ve been is Wolverhampton.”

Brian looked at him aghast, then tugged on Santa’s beard – it came off in his hand. “You’re a fake!” he said indignantly. Brian looked around. “That sleigh... it looks nothing like the real one. Where’s Jimmy to service it? Where are the reindeer? Where are all the presents? There should be dozens of elves...” He stopped, his voice choked with emotion. He looked at Santa, the director and all the crew who had stopped what they were doing to listen to the outburst. “Merry Christmas,” said Brian weakly and sat down, cross-legged, on the floor.

There was silence in the studio. Finally the director waved Brian to stand up and looked at him through narrowed eyes. “You’re not an ordinary extra, are you?” he asked. Brian shook his head.

“Who are you?”

“I really am an elf,” said Brian. “Santa used AI to restructure how the North Pole complex works and a lot of us got made redundant. I was just trying to find a job but no-one wants skilled toy train and dolls eye painters out here in the real world.” He stopped, tears running down his cheeks. One of the crew turned to the director. “Boss, I think we could use this elf.” She bent to him. “What’s your name?” she asked.

“Brian.”

“Well, Brian, I think you’ve been promoted. You are now a script consultant on this movie.”

“Pays the same as an extra,” said the director hurriedly. “Here, take this pen and go and write in what you think needs changing. Just don’t make it too expensive!”

“Thank you,” sniffed Brian, taking the pen and script.

For the next two days, Brian sat and changed things. The director accepted some things, and refused others, but in the end, Brian was happy with the compromise. As the days went by and the movie was shot, everyone on set seemed to become happier and more relaxed. “You know, it almost feels like the beginning of December and I’m looking forward to putting the tree up,” said one of the cameramen. “Merry Christmas,” beamed Brian.

Sadly, though, at the end of shooting, the director declared, “It’s a wrap,” and that was that. Everyone shook hands, exchanged phone numbers and promised to keep in touch with Brian.

After a few days off, Brian reported back to the Job Centre, feeling buoyed by his experience in the world of movies. However, this was the real world in February. The lady opposite recognised Brian and smiled at him. “Did you enjoy your last job?” she asked.

“You know, I did,” he replied.

“Well, I’ve got something else for you. A local manufacturer of model trains wants someone who can do detailed painting of the locomotives... interested?”

Sowing the Seeds of Love and Hope in 2026

Here we are at the start of a new year with Easter fast approaching, and I'm sure all of us are hoping for 2026 to be better than 2025. We hope for real change for people whose lives are affected by the consequences of war, political instability, climate change, oppression, hatred and poverty.

Each year our local Christian Aid group in Morpeth runs a number of different events to raise funds to support the work of Christian Aid across the globe, and we continue to be grateful for your support, prayers and donations.

We've already got a schedule of events for 2026 and would love it if you were able to join with us, to support positive change for those in need. Why do we bother when it seems such an impossible thing to change the world? It's the knowledge that collectively humanity has the power to do great things, to make that difference, and for each of us to be able to say, "I've tried to make a difference, because I care about other people".

To learn more about the origins and work of Christian Aid, you may find it helpful to look at the YouTube video, *Christian Aid – 75 years of real people, real change (Subtitled)*.

So, the dates for your diary are:



28th March 10.30am – An Easter Eggstravaganza at Morpeth Methodist Church. This is a coffee morning, cake sale and there may just be an Easter egg or two hiding somewhere, ... I wonder will anyone be able to find them! There will also be a Transform Trade stall at the coffee morning, so please do come and support their work. Transform Trade supports producers around the world, fighting for a fairer trade system.

10th May to 16th May – Christian Aid Week.

We join together for a joint service on Sunday 10th May 4pm at St James' Church, where we will be celebrating the work of our volunteers, supporters and Christian Aid in our world. This Christian Aid week our focus is on raising funds to support Urban Farms in Kenya, which enable people to feed their families.



5th September - Street Collection. Some people may refer to these events as "tin rattles", but in reality I like to think of it more as gathering a collective bucket load of your love. The day involves teams of volunteers from across all our churches, braving whatever the September weather offers (which can range from scorching sunshine to very dull grey and cold days) to receive with thanks any donations people are able to make.

10th October – It's Ceilidh time at St George's URC Church. Why not come and join us for an evening of fun and dancing, with the SGURC dance band leading us through the night. All dances are fully explained, and you don't need a partner. Just come along & have fun.

The evening is supported by the Country Dance group, who meet at St George's URC, and if you would like to know more about them please contact Shirley Foster at SGURC, or take a look at their antics on Facebook Morpeth Country Dance Club



<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16qrZbCJDm/>



November (21st or 28th to be confirmed) – Pre-loved Toy sale and Coffee Morning at St George's URC Church.

We've decided to move the Toy Sale closer to Christmas and are currently exploring whether we will also be able to offer Christian Aid Christmas Cards for sale at the event, and there has been a suggestion of a wrapping service. This is a great

way of upcycling pre-loved toys and sharing the joy of Christmas. There will also be refreshments available to purchase on the day.

Please look out for updated information on flyers or in the Pathways magazine. Some exciting news to end with...

Chrisitan Aid Change Maker Conference – Watch party PRESS RELEASE

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Matthew 13:31-32

In the same way, a seed grows into a plant, we are inviting you to join us for an inspiring gathering to find out how your ideas and talents can help grow support for a national fundraising appeal to help our global neighbours.

Morpeth's Christian Aid Group is hosting a regional watch party alongside the 2026 Christian Aid Changemakers Conference.

The annual event is a chance for supporters to get together to hear about the results from Christian Aid Week 2025, find out about the stories behind this year's appeal and meet up with other supporters and Christian Aid staff and partners.

Newcomers are welcome to find out more about the charity which works with some of the most vulnerable communities around the world, as well as fundraising, and campaigning on issues including climate, justice and poverty.

The Changemakers' Conference takes place on Saturday, March 14, from 10am-1pm, in London and around the country, people are getting together for watch parties so they can take part via livestream – including Morpeth Christian Aid supporters who are hosting a party at Morpeth Methodist Church, Howard Terrace, Morpeth, NE61 1HU.

This is a great opportunity to get together with supporters, current and new, to share ideas and hear about Christian Aid Week and how we can each get involved in our own way. The focus of this year's appeal – the longest running of its kind in the country – is Kenya where urban poverty is making every day a struggle to put food on the table.

Christian Aid's partners in Kenya, Beacon of Hope, will be talking at the conference about projects such as urban gardening, which

teaches families how to grow food in even the smallest of spaces so they have produce they can both eat and sell.

Every gift, act and prayer makes a difference and sows the seeds of hope, so if you would like to find out more, the watch party is taking place from 10.30am-2pm and you can register to attend here :

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/events/changemakers-conference/regional>

Let's make 2026 a real year of action to make a difference in our world, GIVE, ACT, PRAY.

If you'd like to know more about the Morpeth Christian Aid Group, and would like to volunteer or have a fund raising idea for Christian Aid week, please e-mail us on: morpethchristianaidgroup@gmail.com

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

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Cable Street - Marylebone Theatre A review by Val Pope

'¡No pasaran!' is Spanish for "They shall not pass", an antifascist slogan adopted by the inhabitants of Cable Street in London's East end in 1936 when they defended their neighbourhood from Oswald Mosely's fascists. This run is the third of three London try-outs, prior to an off-Broadway run planned for April this year and it's still something of a work in progress. To be honest, it's a bit of a curate's egg; pretty good in parts and not so good in others.

The libretto is by Alex Kanefsky; the music was composed by Tim Gilvin, with actor/musicians augmenting a soundtrack. The narrative arc is reasonably good, and the set is suitably reminiscent of the East End in the 30's. The cast work their socks off to bring the piece to life, but it's badly in need of cohesion and focus. The subject matter is quite clear, but the narrative line is often blurred and multiple 'time shifts' are distracting and sometimes obstruct the narrative flow. Group scenes suffer from some disorienting direction and often lack spatial cohesion, which hampers the dynamic flow of the piece.

I did wonder if the director was attempting to bring a Brechtian feel to the production. If so, it wasn't effective, although the giant police horse puppet was amusing, if unnecessary. The music was also rather eclectic, with classical violin combined with acoustic and electric guitars; some drum and bass and a nod to Hamilton-esque hip-hop. Did I get the giggles?
Yes, I got the giggles. I'm a very bad person.

I wanted to like the production and I hope the cast does get the chance to perform on Broadway, but there's a lot of serious work needed before they pack the suitcases and buy the plane tickets. And given that this is a story about standing up and speaking out against tyranny and who we choose to be in times of oppression, that's a serious issue indeed. Break a leg, people. '¡No pasaran!'



The Rector's Ramblings It just so Eggs-hausting!

So Christmas is over and the discount aisle in Morrisons is brimming over with cheap Christmas crackers and chocolate advent calendars with best before dates of June 2026, along with a tatty box of halloween sweets, which, due to the chemically modified contents, appear to go out of date in 2045! Then right next to the sad discount aisle a tower of colourful chocolate eggs of all sizes and brands which declare in bold enormous letters "Happy Easter" and my head droops as it's still January and I'm just getting over Christmas. The wheels of commerce have again pre-empted and pounced on the Christian calendar before the next season is even close and its just eggs-hausting! Sorry I couldn't resist! But the pace feels relentless; there is no inbetween time, no breathing space. That discount shelf will soon be filled with Valentine's gifts, Mothering Sunday cards and eventually chocolate eggs and bunnies making way for a summer display of Halloween horrors and Grinch Christmas fancies. Even those who do not profess to be religious can be found groaning about the relentless jump from one season to another, leaving the observer no time to even breathe! In the time leading up to Easter the church moves into the season of



Lent. It's not something you will find on Morrisons' shelves as sackcloth and ashes are not a big money spinner! But Lent encourages us to stop, to reflect and take time to observe ourselves, both inwardly and externally. How do we feel deep inside, feelings of worth or anxiety, as well as externally how we treat others, judging or belittling? On Ash Wednesday we are reminded of our mortality, and the sign of the cross is put onto foreheads with the words from Genesis 3:19, "remember you are dust, to dust you shall return". We are encouraged to recognise those things we are not proud of, to

admit them and to seek to become better people, recognising the journey towards a new life. This is celebrated at Easter in the church by the resurrection of Jesus, Who brings new life to us all. Out of death comes resurrection. It's why we have eggs and Easter bunnies as it's all about new life. But new life without shedding our old selves is like putting on new clothes when you're still filthy! It doesn't make sense! That's why the inbetween times are so important, the time to stop and think about life. To make changes and become the person God wants us to be and, to be honest, how we would all want to be! So maybe take time this Lent and Easter, ponder on your journey of life and faith, find a quiet place, think and reflect on where you would like to be and don't get eggs-hausted by the frenetic world around you! I pray you have a Blessed Lent and Easter.

G Bless Simon.

Office.morpethparish@gmail.com



