

Berwick United Reformed Church



November 2020

Looking Forward

On 1st December Berwick United Reformed Church closes. Responsibility for the manse, church buildings and financial assets passes to the Synod Trust. To date the Elders have received no information as to what the future holds for the church building and hall and those who use the premises, though no doubt various possibilities are being explored. When the Elders informed the Synod of the decision of the Church Meeting to close, we did include a letter setting out our hopes for the future use of the buildings, with the needs of the local community and hall users in mind. But that is out of our hands now. And of course the decisions made by the Trustees will have to be in line with Charity Law. Let us hope and pray for a positive and imaginative outcome.

As for the Berwick Fellowship, we hope to maintain links with each other, not least with the continued publication of a **newsletter**, the first of which will be issued over the weekend of 19/20 December in time for Christmas. Of course to make this a success we need you to supply news and items of interest, so please keep Eddy supplied with information.

We also need to think of a new title for the magazine, for we can no longer refer to ourselves as Berwick URC unless we add 'formerly', which seems rather unimaginative.

So I was thinking of a new title and came up with *St. Paul's Alumni Magazine*. But that leaves us with the acronym **S.P.A.M.** which conjures up all kinds of images, whether of the tinned or email variety! So perhaps not.

How about a **competition** to choose a title? Free entry and submissions to the Editor (Eddy) by Friday 18 December. The Richards family to pick the winner. And a prize for the winning entry—an irresistible chocolate cake. (No, Eddy, you cannot enter yourself.)

It is also to be hoped that sometime in 2021, when circumstances permit, we will be able to meet together as a fellowship to reflect upon and give thanks to God for all the worship and witness that has taken place over the years at Berwick URC. Similarly many of you will hope to be able to find another place to worship. I know that the various churches in Berwick will make you feel welcome. St Andrew's Wallace Green have extended a warm invitation to any who would care to worship there in due course.

Berwick URC has supported many charitable organisations over the years and the Elders felt it appropriate that we should make some modest donations to some of these as we near closure. These organisations are: Christian Aid, Work Aid, Berwick Food Bank, A Rocha (Christian Environment Charity), Embrace the Middle East, Berwick Churches Together, Traidcraft Exchange and Spittal Improvement Trust. We should all try to offer continued support to these organisations that do so much.

As we enter the season of Advent, I will be 'walking through Advent with R.S.Thomas'. This is the subject of the book, *Frequencies of God*, by Carys Walsh (Canterbury Press £12.99). R.S.Thomas is described as a poet of waiting and anticipation. 'His spiritual and poetic trajectory of discovering the presence of God- divine frequencies- even in apparent absences, can help lead us into an Advent landscape of surrender, open-hearted discovery, epiphany and encounter.' Perhaps some of you might like to join me on this journey through 28 reflections. We could share our thoughts and responses.

Despite all the disappointments, loss and trauma of the past year, may this season of Advent be one of waiting and anticipation, looking forward with revitalised hope and ever deeper trust in the God who is with us all in the Incarnation.

Graham Ferguson

BERWICK UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

(a brief historical background culled largely from memory during Covid restrictions)

Berwick United Reformed Church was formed in 1997 by the uniting of St. Paul's United Reformed Church, in Spittal, with Bankhill United Reformed Church in Berwick.

It was following the retirement of Mr Bindeman, the minister of St Paul's Church, that the proposed union of St Paul's Church and Bankhill Church was mooted. The prime driver behind this proposal was the understanding that it was unlikely that a minister would be available to replace Mr Bindeman.

Under the chairmanship of the then minister of Bankhill Church, the Rev Dr A R Ritchie, the respective elders' meetings met to consider how best the proposed union might be implemented. These meetings were conducted in a very constructive manner, showing a clear understanding of the needs and future aims of each congregation, and a desire to conclude how best these could be addressed. It was recognised that a principal benefit of the union would be a strengthened, larger congregation, with potential for wider development in the fields of pastoral work and mission, and that a single location was appropriate for the proposed united church.

Decisions on which church site to focus, and the extent and merits of both sets of premises were fully explored. While Bankhill Church had been recently upgraded to provide more flexible accommodation for members' social activities, it was noted that the accommodation at St Paul's included the larger of the church halls that served not only church-based social activities, but was used also by organisations within the local community. The then Methodist Church minister, who was attending as an observer, provided helpful insight by pointing out that a decision to locate at the St Paul's church would retain a non-conformist presence in close proximity to the part of the town where most future housing expansion was likely to be centred, and where a secondary school was based. The decision was taken that the united church should be located in Spittal.

Also, during the elders' joint meetings, it was agreed that a substantial upgrading of the church accommodation should be carried out at the St Paul's Church premises. This would involve the removal of the traditional pew forms and the subdivision of the worship area to form an annexe (the Aidan Room) with the installation of a new electric organ and a new public address system. A consequence of this decision was that morning worship needed to alternate between the two church sites – the church hall being used at St Paul's- while the alteration works were carried out.

It was not until June, 1998, that the united congregation began to regularly worship at Spittal under its new name, St Paul's, with Bankhill, Horncliffe and Norham United Reformed Church - later to become Berwick United Reformed Church – served by the continuing ministry of the Rev Dr A R Ritchie, with Mrs Sheila Ritchie as organist. Horncliffe and Norham United Reformed Churches became associated with Bankhill United Reformed Church when the Rev Dr Ritchie was inducted to the combined charge that continued as Berwick and Horncliffe URC - the church at Norham then closing - and, after the union between St Paul's and Bankhill, later becoming part of Berwick United Reformed Church, worshipping at two locations. Eventually, when the church and manse at Horncliffe were sold, members of their congregation joined the congregation at Spittal.

Prior to 1997, the church hall at St Paul's provided accommodation for several local community organisations and, to enhance its appeal, with the possibility of some limited outreach, the building was substantially upgraded to time with its centenary in 2004. The reaction from local organisations justified the effort involved attracting, by 2020, no less than 21 different hirers, in addition to church social events.

The Rev Dr A R Ritchie retired as minister in 2000, to be succeeded by the Rev Rodney Ward for a further six years. After the Rev Ward retired, a diet of much appreciated worship continued to be provided with the assistance of several ministers, including retired ministers from other denominations. Subsequently this was provided by a group of preachers on a rotational basis that included the Rev Rachel Poolman, a URC minister; the Rev Stephen Hewitt, a retired vicar, and his wife, Sheena, an Anglican lay reader; the Rev Mary Taylor, a retired minister who made light of her journey from her home near Galashiels; all underpinned by Mr Graham Ferguson, Berwick URC's lay-preacher, who had for several years provided spiritual and lay leadership.

Berwick URC, although having had a fairly brief existence, has roots that penetrate deeply into the layers of the developing Protestant Church that followed the Reformation. The church that became St Paul's has its origin in a mission established in a disused malting house in 1745. The date is significant in that it was the time of the uprising by supporters of Charles Edward Stuart – the Jacobite Rebellion. Apparently authorities in the town of Berwick became so alarmed by the story brought by General Cope and his forces, following the battle of Prestonpans, that they caused all gates through the Walls, including the bridge gate to be closed all day on Sundays, and only open for limited periods at other times. This effectively prevented people living in the villages and country south of the River Tweed from attending public worship in the so-called Low Meeting (1719) off Hide Hill. As the new mission in Spittal prospered, the congregation determined to build their own church, the selected location being the site of the present church, and the new church was opened for worship in 1752. After a further period of expanding membership, it was determined in 1876 to build a more modern structure on the site, opening in 1878 as St Paul's Presbyterian Church.

Bankhill Church, of much later date than St Paul's, also traces its origins to the Low Meeting from where, in an age of fervour and dissension, the congregation split, part of which remained in the Hide Hill building while the remainder purchased a vacant church on Bankhill, in Berwick, and there commenced to worship in 1852.

Over these many years this church, in its various forms and locations, has been well served by devoted followers of the Christian Faith in its membership, elders and church officers who, in the words of an early account from the time of the mission “were there supplied with sermon“, no doubt sometimes for considerable periods time, by the many beloved preachers who have left their deeply spiritual imprint on the church. More recently, as the church sadly is about to finally close for public worship, it is recognised that there also is owed a great debt of gratitude to those preachers who have led worship, providing spiritual guidance and refreshment until these last few difficult months when restrictions, together with our limited human resources to maintain the special standards of protection called for by the Covid 19 pandemic, made continuance of public worship impossible.

Leslie Cook

Church Family News

Mary Black: Elder and Organist at Horncliffe

Mary Black lived most of her life in Horncliffe and was much involved in the Church and in village affairs. She trained as a tailor before her marriage to Wattie, and maintained her interest in needlecraft all her life. Her house was full of cross-stitch pictures, and she was a good cook too. Much of her time in Hillside Lodge was spent crocheting knee blankets and cot covers to give away. She has been in the church choir, and later Sunday School teacher, then became organist and an Elder. She was a member of the W.I., and always had jobs at the Bulb Show. Whenever help was needed Mary would be there quietly giving a hand. She had a difficult and painful old age, but managed to stay cheerful and keep her interest in her friends and family. We miss her.

Allan Burn

It is with great sadness that we learned of the death of Allan Burn at Cramlington Hospital on 14th November. Allan took over the family firm of A. C. Burn when he arrived back from National Service in Germany and spent many years upholding the tradition of good workmanship in the area. He was a well respected business man in the town and carried out many official posts connected with the building trade. When St. Aidan's Church in Berwick closed he became a Member and Elder of St. Paul's Church in Spittal where for many years he cheerfully carried out his duties as an Elder. Many of the repairs around the Church were carried out voluntarily by Allan in his own quiet way and were much appreciated by the members. He will be cremated at Houndwood Crematorium on 26th November with a limited number of family due to the corona virus. He will be sadly missed by Anne, all his Family and friends.

Members in Care Homes

Tweedmouth House

Lillie Leach

Tweed View Care Home

Anne Thomson

Turret Villa Care home

Greta Toward

Isabel Calcutt

Frances Monks

Unsung Heroes

Many of you will know of the Collingwood Arms Hotel at Cornhill on Tweed. It takes its name from a local family of merchants who owned the impressive Georgian building for generations. They had links with Newcastle born Vice Admiral Collingwood who was Nelson's second in command at the Battle of Trafalgar. I have just read a compelling biography of Cuthbert Collingwood by Max Adams. There can be no doubt that he was the 'forgotten hero of Trafalgar'. His reputation has been overshadowed by that of his friend Nelson. In fact the victory at Trafalgar was in many respects down to Collingwood and he was in effect responsible for conducting British maritime policy in the Mediterranean in the struggle with Napoleon right up to his death in 1810. He clearly had a great sense of duty to his country, something which those above him took advantage - they regarded him as indispensable, off-setting their own limitations. After 1805 he was constantly at sea, never seeing his wife and daughters again, despite seriously failing health and therefore his wish to be relieved of his command. At a time when the life of ordinary seamen was at best harsh and when brutal discipline was the norm, Collingwood treated those under him with humanity and sensitivity, achieving results way beyond those who saw bullying and exemplary punishments as the order of the day. He never sought 'celebrity status'! Instead, self-less service, underpinned by an understated but very real Christian faith characterized Collingwood. History is littered with unsung heroes. Some have come to our attention as the result of research many others no doubt remain obscure or unknown. A characteristic that more often than not unites them is their personal humility. This helps to explain their very anonymity but also their positive impact on those people and situations they encountered in their lives, albeit below the radar.

In the ancient world humility was generally regarded as a sign of weakness, the antithesis to greatness. Those who displayed humility were either obsequious or simply unworthy, feeble individuals. However, humility was transformed by Christ into a necessary and paramount virtue. We see this in the New Testament references to this quality. There is little attempt to define humility. But the teaching and example of Jesus Christ provides us with pretty clear guidance as to its meaning and importance for the Christian life. Jesus' own life was one of humble service: 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Mark 10). The incident of Jesus washing his disciples' feet was in effect a parable of his self-less ministering to others, the keynote of his ministry, this in itself being the essence of true greatness, as Jesus pointed out in the conclusion to the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector- 'All who exalt themselves will be humbled and all who humble themselves will be exalted' (Luke 18, reiterating a saying recorded earlier in chapter 14 and leaving us in no doubt as to its importance). Some of the most moving and profound writing to be found in the letters of the New Testament has humility as its central theme. Philippians 2 verses 3-11 is an unambiguous call to the Christians of Philippi and beyond to make the spirit of humility and concern for others the bedrock of their lives and witness. 'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves....', Paul states, going on to challenge his readers to 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.....[who] emptied himself.....and being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on a cross.....'. 1 Peter 5 sets out the Christian attitude of dependence on God as contrasted with human pride. 'All of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another' the writer asserts. 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'

As we come to 1st December 2020 and the deeply sad and upsetting closure of Berwick URC, it is both apposite and enriching that we should reflect on the lives of those who have gone before us in serving Christ at St Paul's Spittal, and also Bank Hill, St. Aidan's and Horncliffe. Some we may remember personally, others have long faded from memory. Some held offices in the church, many did not. So many we might describe as unsung heroes of the faith, whose own personal humility and lives of service made a deep and lasting impact on all those they encountered. Sometimes they were taken for granted, sometimes undervalued then and since. But this did not concern them. Their practical insight into the Gospel and Christian service transcended such matters. I suspect that some of the most influential people on us and our personal faith have been people such as these. We thank God for them.

And as we enter the season Advent (Advent Sunday is on 29 November) we are again reminded of that inextinguishable hope in the birth of Christ, in the most humble of circumstances; once again resetting our horizons, challenging the misplaced views of greatness and success that persist in our society and many institutions, making the impossible possible and leading us forward beyond personal tragedy and setbacks- even church closures, from darkness into light. It is this hope that leads us to join with Paul in his great hymn of praise: 'Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' Amen.

Graham Ferguson

Dear Friends in Berwick URC,

As I write this poignant note I should like to thank you most sincerely for the time being involved in Berwick United Reformed Church in Spittal as your pastoral friend. It has been lovely spending time worshipping together and the friendly Thursday coffee mornings.

Berwick is a place which now has so many good memories from early childhood to the present day. I have moved on from Berwick cockles to special memories of community Burns' Suppers and a school's visit, to Traidcraft stalls and Easter morning on the beach at Spittal followed by such a special Easter breakfast in the church.

Preparing to leave a church building involves much soul searching about looking for "good homes" for "church treasures" including furniture, Bibles and communion silver. Local archivists are also helpful with regards to preserving records of the past. Thanks to technology, emails and phone calls decisions are discussed with regards to sharing ideas re donations and emptying the church of sundry artefacts.

We are pilgrims. Some of were worshipping together in the middle of March and left the building never guessing what the rest of this year would hold. Graham Ferguson lent me a book of George Herbert's poems called "My Sour-Sweet Days" which has on reflection has been a good title for this year.

Tomorrow is Christ the King Sunday when the church comes to the end of a year before Advent. So we leave the year of Matthew and enter the year of Mark.

George Herbert wrote these famous words

"Teach me, my God and King,

In all things thee to see,

And what I do in any thing,

To do it as for thee"

As we enter a new chapter in our pilgrimage looking perhaps for new spiritual homes may I encourage you to continue to keep in touch with each other. I am delighted that the inspiring weekly worship and newsletters are currently continuing.

My phone number is 01896 756990 and I do enjoy chatting with folk from Berwick URC.

May I take this opportunity to wish all the readers of this newsletter much joy and peace during the Advent season.

The International Prayer for Peace

Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth

Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust

Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace

Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe

Mary Taylor

Memories

I still chuckle about the day in 1999 or 2000 when I did an "Orgathon" lasting 12 hours on the newly installed organ. I think I managed to raise about £800 for church funds and remember walking back home afterwards feeling like my hands, legs and feet had actually run a marathon! The event was a happy day, very well supported and I was kept going by lots of cups of tea, homemade goodies and words of encouragement from various people who came into the church to see me. It was around the time that mobile phone technology was starting to take over our lives and whilst sitting at the console I was even spurred on by an international call from a friend who was working in Los Angeles at the time!

I'm also sure that Gordon and Carmen's wedding in 2015 must have been the longest ever wedding ceremony in the church building, given that David Herbert asked for everything to be conducted not only in English but also in Spanish for the 60 or so guests who had flown over to attend the proceedings! I think the whole thing lasted about 1 hour 25 minutes in total.

Now for my mum's memories:

In the mid 1930s, every summer there was a flower festival in the church. All the children in the Sunday school took part. I remember wearing my best summer dress and my straw hat was trimmed with flowers. And you weren't correctly dressed unless you wore your gloves as well! I always carried a bunch of Sweet Williams on that occasion. Whenever I see these flowers now, I think of the St Paul's flower festivals.

When I was 7 years old, I took part in a concert in the church hall. I had a piece of poetry to recite from memory. It was a poem entitled "Little Sidney Simpson"

Little Sidney Simpson once was very ill,

The doctor gave an order that he should have a pill.

The pill was put in jam from out the strawberry pot

The jam was eaten but the pill was not

Unfortunately I suffered from stage fright and forgot the last line so, much to everyone's amusement, I shouted to my mother in the audience to prompt me. At the same concert, Douglas Whitley (whose family owned the fish shop opposite the church) sang "Soldiers of the King." Sadly, Douglas and his grandfather were killed in the 1941 air raid which destroyed their fish shop and other surrounding properties.

Robin & Elsie Turnbull

I have no memory of my first visit to St Paul's Church in April 1956, which is hardly surprising as I was only 6 weeks old and the occasion was my baptism! I do however have a very strong recollection of a very wet Sunday morning when I was first at Sunday School aged three or four. I had insisted on going despite the weather. My parents had told me no-one else would be at Sunday School (they were right), but they probably gave in to have an hour's peace and quiet! I remember sitting between Auntie Lillie (my Sunday School teacher) and another teacher. The congregation was very thin that morning but I felt so grown up sitting through the whole service with the grown ups!

I loved Sunday School, the children's talk in 'big church', the hymn singing, sitting with the choir at the front as we got older (though you had to behave as you were on show), and daringly once or twice sitting up in the gallery with a friend (children weren't meant to be up there without an adult), we would sit on the floor between hymns and whisper to each other and share sweets if we had any. And the Sunday school picnics were wonderful, streamers flowing from the bus windows, parents waving us off, packed teas in paper bags, games in grassy fields or parks; I don't think we ever went very far but it seemed an exciting adventure to children who rarely went on holidays.

It was a joy to reconnect with the church about 15 years ago when we were on holidays to our little house in Waterloo Place, and then more regularly 6 years ago when Stephen retired and we moved to Prior Park.

I have appreciated being part of the fellowship at Spittal, and been grateful to be able to contribute to the life of the church there. I shall miss the Sunday worship and the Thursday coffee morning, but hope that there will be occasions where we can meet up in the future.

Sheena Hewitt

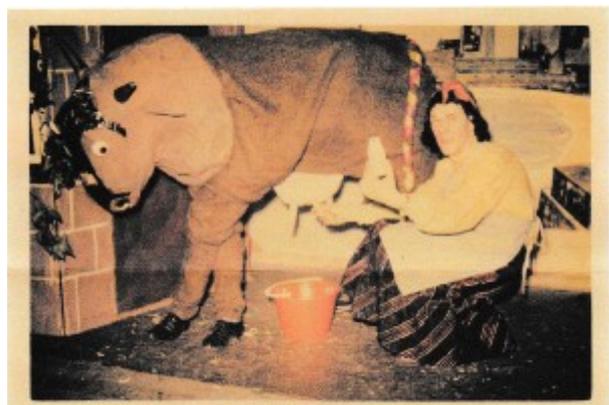
I first visited St Paul's whilst on holiday. Sheena and I had a cottage in Spittal from 2005 and we attended the church from time to time. When I retired in 2015 we began to come more regularly and I soon started to lead services on occasion. As a church St Paul's was important to Sheena as her family church, but I also began to appreciate the fellowship very much and developed a high regard for the congregation. I have enjoyed planning and leading services and was impressed how 'game' people were to new ideas. Sadly numbers gradually dwindled during this period and I have come to see that this is the right time to close the church. However I very much hope that the church and hall can remain available to the community of Spittal and beyond.

Stephen Hewitt

I have known of Spittal Church almost all my life as my uncle, Rev Frank Waddell, was minister in the early 1940's. His elder son, Michael, started school at Spittal – probably about 1943. By the time the war ended and our families were able to get together again, Uncle Frank had moved to Stafford. At least I have always known where Spittal is! I did not have any close contact with Spittal Church until after Horncliffe closed. It has always seemed strange that I should become an Elder in a church where my uncle served – a sort of family circle.

Margaret Waddell

I was christened in 1939, joined the Sunday School at 4 years old and became a Sunday School teacher when I was 16, and Elder at 21, the auditor at 23 and the property convener at 58. There are many memorable events – services for Easter and Harvest, Flower services and Christmas day especially. I also fondly remember the Young Worshippers League, Sunday School Christmas parties and trips to Wooler, Yetholm, Dunbar and Norham by train, Burns suppers with the Rev Strachan Hughs, socials, sales of work (opened by



the Mayoress), coffee mornings and pantomimes – I remember I was the back end of the cow in Jack and the Beanstalk!

I thoroughly enjoyed my time here, and am very sorry to find all these events finished - many thanks to all who made them possible.

Jimmie Johnston

When we moved to the Scottish Borders in 2009 we spent some time looking for a church that suited us; although there were several that were nearly right, we widened our search until we lighted upon Berwick URC, where we, with a young family, immediately felt welcomed. Over the years we have made many friends and have been encouraged to participate in many ways. We've really enjoyed running the Traidcraft stall and have been impressed by just how much chocolate and cookies a small congregation can get through. Our efforts at singing and drama have always been appreciated, and we're glad to have been able to help occasionally – though listening to the thought-provoking words offered by others has been more beneficial to us, I suspect. We're sad that the church has to close, particularly in these circumstances where we can't even hold a celebration together – but life is full of changes and surprises and will go on. Thank-you to everyone who welcomed us so warmly and made us feel part of the church family right from the start.

Eddy and Helena Richards (plus Rebecca, Matthew – now engaged! - and Daniel)

Notices

Communion chairs

The three communion chairs that came to Spittal when Horncliffe church closed have now been returned to Horncliffe. The chairs were gifted to Horncliffe church in 1949 by Mr George Purvis, the session clerk. Mr Purvis's great niece felt that it would be good to keep them in the family as the church no longer needs them. They are now in her house next door to her great uncle's house and the church.

Keys

As the date from which the church will finally close - 1st December - is fast approaching, any elder/member who still retains a church key is asked to please return the key, only when it is safe to do so, to either Mrs Maureen Patterson, 16 West Street, Spittal, or to Leslie Cook, 37 Castle Drive.



The URC on the web

Blog www.northernbreeze.org

Synod www.urc-northernynod.org.uk.