



ADVENT
2025

BERWICK PARISH CHURCH TRIENNIAL NEWSLETTER

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Fr. Lee Taylor on his first six months in Berwick

"This must be quite a change!" That's probably the most common comment I've had since moving here in March. And the answer is, yes! Berwick is not East London ... but it has been a change for the good. In the last six months I've walked 33.2 miles in my Wandering for God around the parish, met many new people and then re-introduced myself to them because I'd forgotten I'd met them (sorry). I've blessed the Riding of the Bounds, celebrated the 80th anniversary of VE Day, the 300th anniversary of Holy Trinity School and the 375th anniversary of the Coldstream Guards, and festivals galore! There hasn't been much time to put my feet up.



In all the whirlwind of the last six months one thing is clear to me: Berwick Parish Church of Holy Trinity and St Mary has something to offer this community in the 'happiest place to live in the UK'. From its architecture to its green space, from its history to the present, from its music to its peace, and most importantly from the services it holds for the congregation through to weddings, baptisms and funerals, I'm proud to be the Vicar of Berwick, proud to be the priest of Holy Trinity and St Mary. The church is physically open every day, but more than that it is an open church for all, and I hope in the contents of this newsletter you find where you can discover the same pull that made me swap East London for Berwick.

A FEW WORDS OF WELCOME

Welcome to this first edition of Berwick Parish Church's newsletter, a thrice-yearly publication for all who are friends of England's most northerly parish church.

The building of Holy Trinity, the town's parish church, began 375 years ago: the building's opening in 1652 will be marked in two years' time. It has since then played a vital role in Berwick and beyond, as a place of worship, of comfort and of meeting and today hosts concerts, talks and many other events in the wider community. From the Church people go out to offer help and support to those in need.

This, and subsequent Newsletters, will reflect on all that goes on in this historic building and its beautiful churchyard, as well as bringing news of the work that is needed to maintain a church built during the Commonwealth. You are invited to join in the celebrations of the 375th Anniversary and by continuing to receive this newsletter (for which there is no charge) you will become a Friend of Berwick Parish Church.

If you would like to receive future copies, please subscribe using the form at berwickparishchurch.co.uk/keep-in-touch or email parishadmin@berwickparishchurch.co.uk

THE GUARDS COME HOME



On 10th June, 100 soldiers of the 1st Bt. Coldstream Guards returned to Berwick, marking 375 years since the regiment's formation here in 1650.

After parading through the town, a thanksgiving service was held at the Parish Church, a fitting occasion, as members of the regiment had helped build the church in their founding year.

HARVEST THANKSGIVING

Harvest Festival was an exciting occasion as young and old blended in a wonderful celebration with a commitment to work together to care for God's Creation.

Children and families from Holy Trinity and St. Mary's schools joined us as did residents of Tweed View Care Home.

A blend of traditional and modern formed an act of worship for all - "Praise O Praise our God and King" was the first hymn and then "Cabbages and Greens" sung to a modern samba rhythm which had parents dancing in the gallery – in Church!

One poor volunteer was given a shower hat, a back scrub, and a rubber duck as somehow, Fr. Lee managed to take this spectacle and provide a message of thanksgiving to God for his bounty. Celebrations continued when the formal awards ceremony took place for the ECO Church Gold Award and the Highly Commended Love Northumberland certificate.

Later coffee and cake were taken in the Parish Centre and harvest produce sold – the proceeds going to Berwick Food Bank and Solar Aid.



AWARDS AND REWARDS

GOLD! Holy Trinity & St Mary's action towards carbon neutral and biodiversity increase earned the coveted A Rocha Eco Church Gold Award - only the second church in the diocese to win Gold and the only one Grade I Listed.

The Cromwellian castellation on the south side roof hides the solar panels, and the bee hives, developing wild flower meadow, and numerous havens for wildlife are similarly discreet and respectful of the history and beauty of the churchyard.

A Rocha summarised these and the numerous other green projects undertaken as "An exemplar for other historic churches".



LOVE! Another first! Holy Trinity was recognised by the Duchess of Northumberland as the first church in the county to enter the LOVE Northumberland competition and to be rewarded with Highly Commended in the Best Response to the Climate Crisis category.

IN MEMORY OF RAY SIMPSON

Many will have memories of Ray but not know of the full compass of his work. Trained at the London College of Divinity, a college in the mildly Evangelical tradition within the Church of England, he found himself thinking soon after he was ordained 'Well, I'm now clear that I'm more Catholic than I thought!' Ray had extraordinary breadth and gifts far outreaching traditional churchy labels. Each morning he would attend the Morning Office at Holy Trinity - when he led the intercessions you never knew who or what might be included! He had a universal care for others. He was always warm, always engaging - never boring! At Bowthorpe, in Norwich, he was greatly loved and achieved so much in a tough modern housing estate. On Lindisfarne, he was the founder of the dispersed, Celtic style, Community of St Aidan and St Hilda. Sally, his sister - a frequent visitor to Holy Trinity - supported him, until Ray moved away earlier this year. He is greatly missed - may he rest in peace and rise in glory!



HOLY TRINITY SCHOOL - 300TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Holy Trinity Church School and the wider community have celebrated 300 years of education in Berwick. A small group of church members assisted by the Berwick Archivist researched the history of education in Berwick from 1725 when Captain Bolton funded a school to educate children in Berwick. The building still stands not far from the church. Two coffee mornings were held for ex-pupils and well over 60 people came along, bringing class photographs and handicrafts made at school.



The school held a Creative Week when pupils explored the history of education, each class exploring a different section of the timeline. A joint service of celebration was held in church led by Father Lee and the Bishop of Berwick with Head Teacher Nick Shaw. A picnic and games for the children followed the service.

MUSICAL NOTES by Kit Hobkirk

The Anglican tradition of Choral music thrives at Berwick Parish Church as each Sunday the choir, under the direction of Kit Hobkirk, sings Mass settings and some of the great anthems in this tradition.

Recently the choir, augmented by guest singers, gave a moving rendition of Fauré's Requiem, during the All Souls' day service. There is, though, much more than just choral music. In late Spring Holy Trinity acquired a new piano which was given its first airing by the Leipzig-born pianist Max Mostovetski – a large, appreciative audience was treated to a virtuoso performance by a musically and technically gifted young man, whose entertaining introductions to each piece were in fluent English, his second language.

The Organ recital series this summer was dedicated to the Revd Canon Christopher Smith, whose idea it was to invite a distinguished guest organist each month; sadly Christopher died earlier in the year. All six recitals were memorable, especially that given by New Zealand's Zosia Herlihy-O'Brien, who when called on for an encore, did so on the violin!



The Revd Canon Christopher Smith

Saturday morning Coffee concerts have been given by a wide range of performers. Berwick Music Society started its music series with a visit to Holy Trinity in September, and celebrations to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day saw an exciting collaboration between the Choir and the Berwick Concert Band.

CELEBRITY CELEBRANT

The Revd Richard Coles, well-known broadcaster, author and Anglican priest, was the guest celebrant and preacher at the 10am Eucharist on 12th October. Thirty-five years earlier, he had visited Holy Trinity to make what he described as "an impenetrable Radio 3 documentary" on "Berwick's peculiar church".

The Gospel reading was the story of the Ten Lepers healed by Jesus. His sermon described how leprosy had terrified people in ways that were not justified on purely medical grounds, as cancer, Aids and Covid have in modern times – diseases that stigmatize people, using them as scapegoats. The Revd Coles concluded that scapegoating people solves nothing but that, "In Jesus Christ scapegoating is not modified, or circumvented or spun but made obsolete by his self-sacrifice on the cross".



In the afternoon, Richard Coles returned to Holy Trinity as a guest speaker for the Literary Festival.

'A NEW CHURCH IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES'

On the very wet evening of 24 October, the Parish Centre was packed for a talk by Prof. Kenneth Fincham of the University of Kent on the building of Berwick Parish Church during the Puritan Revolution.

Interest in the talk was so great that it was live streamed to an overflow facility in the adjacent church. After explaining the deep divisions in religion and politics in the period which culminated in civil war and social upheaval, Professor Fincham explored the claim that Berwick is the only parish church built during the Cromwellian Protectorate. He drew attention to examples of other churches built during the same period, before examining whether Berwick can properly be called a Cromwellian church.

A recording of the talk can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuYzECbLXV4

FABRIC WORKING GROUP

Every five years there is a professional examination of the church's fabric by an appointed architect when items requiring attention are identified. The most recent inspection, in 2024, showed that the building is in good repair, although a number of items will require attention before the next inspection. The Fabric Working Group, a party of volunteers, meets once a month to make regular checks and identify maintenance needs. Simple tasks that do not need professional advice are tackled by the group.

Celebrating Christmas at Holy Trinity

Sunday 30th November - Advent Sunday
6:00pm - Advent Carols

Wednesday 17th December
7:00pm - Christmas Music by Candlelight
Choir of the Robin Chapel, Edinburgh

Saturday 20th December
3:00pm - A Quiet Christmas

Sunday 21st December
6:00pm - Nine Lessons and Carols

Christmas Eve
5:00pm Crib Service
11:30pm Midnight Mass

Christmas Day
8:30am Holy Communion
10:00am The Eucharist of Christmas Day

Sunday 4th January
10:00am The Feast of the Epiphany
6:00pm Epiphany Carol Service

Saturday 31st January
Evie Coplan, Cello. Programme includes works by Schuman, Dvorak and Faure.

Saturday 14th February
Ossian Ensemble – String Quartet

THE ROSE WINDOW by Trudy Gray

Many visitors to the church are surprised to discover a wealth of stained glass within a Cromwellian church. Perhaps most striking is the Rose Window above the chancel arch, central to the view from main entrance.

The window is dedicated to Revd William Gilly, canon of Durham Cathedral and vicar of Norham who preached at the reopening of the church after its restoration and enlargement in 1855. The east wall of the church had been broken through to provide the chancel and the Rose Window installed above the chancel arch.

The centre of the window depicts Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Agnus Dei, an image which has been used since the early church. It is based on the words of John's gospel: 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world', the focus of Christian faith.

The ten outer segments portray angels representing the great multitude of the heavenly host. Each angel carries a scroll. Not all have inscriptions and the writing is worn in places. The scrolls carry words of worship from the Book of Revelation: 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and blessing for ever and ever. Amen'.

This window is an eloquent reminder to both visitors and worshippers of the message of the Gospel.

