BERWICK PARISH CHURCH NEWSLETTER

No. 4 - ADVENT 2026

Dear friends,

It gets earlier every year! That's the constant refrain as, come the end of summer (or sooner) Christmas cards, stocking fillers and treats find their way onto the shop shelves, and then on Boxing Day the sales start as Christmas is packed up for another year. It is particularly frustrating for me because Christmas doesn't really start until Christmas Eve and lasts at least as long as the Epiphany (January 6th) or if I can get away with it to Candlemas (2nd February).

In the Church calendar Advent begins the new year. We see in a new year at the darkest season, the shortest day and longest night, as we sing songs of longing and light candles as signs of our hope of the coming of the Light of the World at Christmas, made known to the whole world at Epiphany and pointing towards spring at Candlemas. The months to come are a journey that each one of us is invited on.

At Holy Trinity and St Mary, Berwick Parish Church, we make that journey in word, worship, song, and ceremony. Carol concerts, nativities, sinfonias and school choirs will fill the building with music and song. Trees, decorations, candles and incense will remind us of the hope we celebrate.

There is something for everyone, in this season when the Christ child is made known to everyone. As the angels invited the shepherds to the manger, and the star led the Magi to the child, may the pages that follow help you to find your way to whatever Berwick Parish Church offers for you this season.

With my love and prayers, Fr Lee

Birds in the Church



There are many images of birds to be found in the church: on the windows, incorporated in some of the memorials, and embroidered on the kneelers at the altar rail. Most people are familiar with the dove representing the Holy Spirit. The dove is shown in the west window's depiction of the Baptism of Christ, descending in a beam of light as John performs the baptism *(right)*.

Lecterns in many churches are often in the form of an eagle, the symbol of the apostle St John. We can remember the opening words of his gospel: *In the beginning was the Word* each week as we hear the lessons read from Scripture at the imposing brass eagle. Less obvious is the sphere clasped by the eagle's claws, signifying the gospel being carried out into the whole world.



Perhaps less familiar is 'The Pelican in her Piety' *(left)*, depicted at least once in the windows and on the kneelers. The image was widespread in medieval bestiaries and Christian art. It draws on the legend of the pelican wounding her own breast to feed her young with her own blood: consequently it came to represent Christ's redemptive blood and the self-giving love of the Cross.

2027 – A Year of Celebration

2027 will be a big year for Berwick. Its parish church will celebrate 375 years since the church building opened and our neighbour, Berwick Barracks, is expected to re-open in the autumn at the end of a major redevelopment project. So stand by for change on Parade!

Berwick Parish Church is one of only a few churches built during the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell and still bears traces of its Puritan origins. In 2027 it will be the setting for a programme of events to mark 375 years of worship and of service to the people of our town.

The programme of events – which will span the whole year – will include worship, music and a good dollop of fun. Highlights will include a Family History Weekend in April and a Bounties of the Earth Festival around harvest time. Music will be a running thread, crescendoing in a week-long Berwick Parish Church 375 Music Festival in May. This will immediately precede the church's Patronal Festival on Sunday 23rd May when the Archbishop of York is expected to visit this most northerly part of his Province.

Other highlights of the planned programme include talks, a humorous tribute to William Shakespeare on his birthday, and a Puritan-style celebration of harvest. The full programme will be published early next year. Get ready to join in the fun!

A first for the Diocese

The choir of Berwick Parish Church became the first from any parish in the Newcastle Diocese to sing both the morning and evening services in the Cathedral, on Sunday 23rd August. The choir and supporters were made very welcome and were proud of their achievements on a very long day away.



'The Time Machine: an architectural introduction to Berwick Parish Church'

Professor William Whyte's intriguing title of his lecture on 30th November drew an appreciative audience to listen to this, the third in a series of talks in the run-up to the 375th anniversary of the opening of the building. Professor Whyte – Professor of Social and Architectural History at Oxford University – began by pointing out that all churches are places where time behaves differently, looking back as they do to before the creation of the first Temple in Jerusalem and forward to the end of time itself.



Professor William Whyte

Churches also embody the history of a place and are impacted by changing theological and social ideas. Over 50 enlightening minutes, Professor Whyte peeled back the layers of history we see embodied in Berwick Parish Church today. Established as a civic church on clear Puritan principles, it changed relatively little in the 18th century, being already well-suited to the dominant emphasis of that century on the church as an auditorium, a place whose key function was to enable people to hear the Word of God spoken and preached.

In the mid-19th century, however, that emphasis changed. The church was seen not just as a building but as a book, the visual symbolism of which was intended to communicate directly to those entering it. Influenced by this thinking, Berwick Parish Church became not simply a civic but a sacramental church, acquiring its chancel, stained glass windows and elaborate reredos, gradually losing all but one of its galleries.

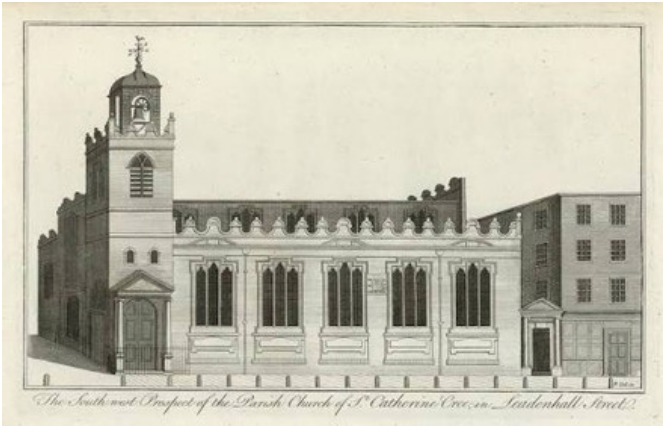
Professor Whyte ended with a challenge. Having inherited a civic and a sacramental church, we have a huge opportunity to adapt our church so it is better suited for worship and service to the community in the future. Will we rise to that challenge?

You can view Professor Whyte's talk at https://www.youtube.com/@holytrinityberwick

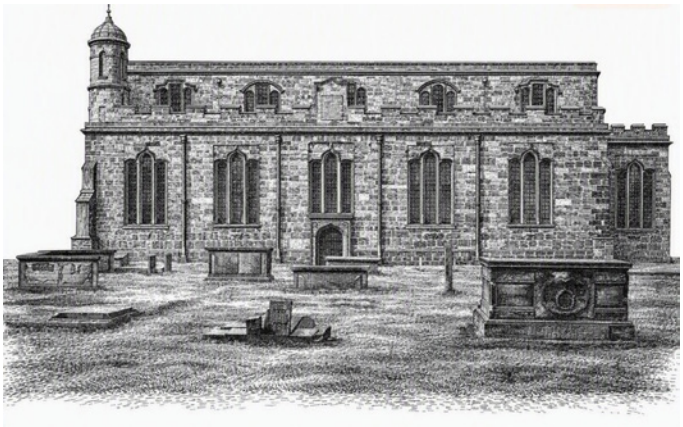
St Katharine Cree, Holy Trinity's 'sister church' in the City of London

The City of London contains around fifty surviving Anglican churches, many the creations of Sir Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor after the Great Fire of 1666. But one which escaped the Fire – and the Blitz of 1940/41 – and whose designer or builder is unrecorded, is the church of St Katharine Cree in Leadenhall Street, a rare combination of gothic and classical architecture dating from the reign of Charles II. Quite unlike any other ecclesiastical building in London, it is the City's only Jacobean church and one that we might reasonably claim as our sister church.

'Cree' means Christ and 'Creechurch' refers to the priory of Holy Trinity which predated St Katharine Cree on that spot. There has been a church on the site since 1280 or earlier; it was rebuilt in 1504 and then again between 1628 and 1631, about twenty years before John Young, a mason living in Blackfriars, was commissioned to build our own Holy Trinity, the design of which was startlingly similar to that of St Katharine Cree. While the designer of St Katharine Cree is not known for certain, Inigo Jones is believed to have at least played a part in its construction, as is Edmund Kinsman, also a London mason. But, as Blackfriars is less than a mile from Leadenhall Street, John Young is bound to have known the area well and it is quite possible that he was involved in the design and construction of St Katharine. It is clear – comparing the two designs – that he took a close interest in it, and his claim that he built Holy Trinity to his "own moddell and draughte" may well suggest that he had already built St Katharine Cree to that "moddell"; although Pevsner and other sources do not go as far as crediting him with the design of the church.



A contemporary etching of St Katharine Cree (above) , with Holy Trinity (below) for comparison



A significant reference to assist us in establishing that connection is a probate record in respect of 'John Young of St Ann Blackfriars, mason', whose will was proved in 1674. If he – as seems possible – is our man, it could mean that he was indeed involved in building St Katharine Cree before he came north with his plans in 1651, to oversee the construction of Berwick Parish Church.

Although St Katharine Cree is part of the Leadenhall Street frontage and Holy Trinity stands alone in its churchyard, the two churches are remarkably similar in design and appearance, certainly externally, but also internally, the principal similarities now being the side aisles on each side of the nave and arcades of the Tuscan order; but an engraving in Fuller's *History of Berwick* (1799) shows that, before a major re-ordering and restoration here in 1885, Holy Trinity had large Gothic windows at both its east and west ends, battlemented parapets to the aisles and north chapel, and small octagonal turrets with spirelets on the west angles of the nave (Pevsner) – all identical with the design and layout of St Katharine Cree.

Stop Press - Parish Administrator Vacancy

As we went to press our Parish Administrator, Linda Foley, announced her retirement as of the end of 2026. We thank her for her faithful service and hard work over the last few years and wish her well.

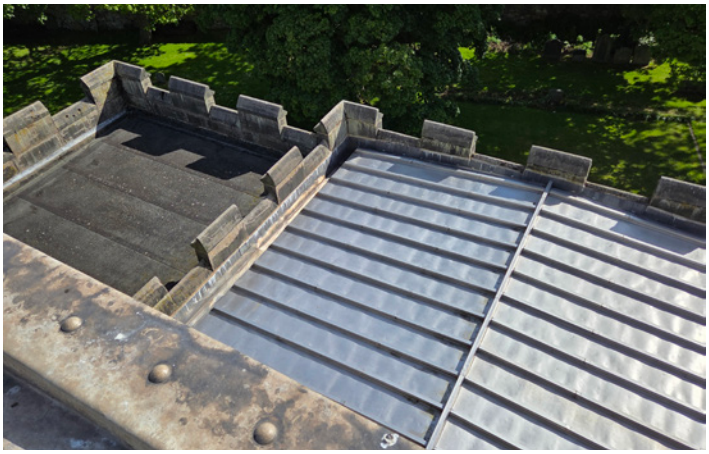
The Parish Administrator is a part-time employed role, working from the Parish Centre office and reporting directly to the Vicar. Part-time working from home is also possible. Sympathetic to the Christian faith, computer-literate and with strong organisational and personal skills, the new administrator will have a warm personality and show that we are open and welcoming to all.

Anyone interested in applying for the vacancy can find out more on our website here: www.berwickparishchurch.co.uk/parish-administrator

Keeping a Roof Over Our Heads – Update

A huge thank you to those who have already donated to this project. We now have approaching £60,000 in donations from our generous supporters and grants totalling £21,000 from the Freemen of Berwick, Coldstream Guards and the Northumbria Historic Churches Trust. We have also been accepted to make grant applications to the Government's Places of Worship Renewal Fund and the National Churches Trust.

We expect there will still be a large funding gap to fill, so further donations are welcome: please use the QR code to donate.



Roofs: the organ chamber – felt (left); chancel – steel (right)

We have recently issued a formal tender document to possible contractors, with tenders to be submitted by 11th January: once one of these has been accepted we'll be able to give a clearer idea of how much we still have to raise.

The Chill in the Aisles: Sacred Spaces in a Warming World

Standing proudly at the heart of the community, Berwick Parish Church faces a modern crisis rooted in its historic bones. This grade I listed treasure is grappling with an environmental dilemma: how to keep its congregation warm without costing the Earth.

Like many historic buildings across the UK, the church relies on ageing heating infrastructure. Soaring gas bills and carbon footprints are no longer just financial burdens – they are moral ones. In an era where climate stewardship is increasingly viewed as a core spiritual responsibility, firing up fossil-fuel boilers to heat thousands of cubic metres of high-ceilinged space is rapidly becoming unsustainable. The challenge, however, is far from simple.

Draughty medieval-style masonry, uninsulated roofs, and delicate stained glass windows mean that with traditional heating methods warmth may escape almost as fast as it is generated. Yet standard modern solutions such as wall-mounted heat pumps or thick internal insulation risk damaging the stonework or altering the historic aesthetic that defines the building's architectural heritage.

To bridge the gap between heritage preservation and environmental sustainability, forward-thinking solutions are required. Congregations across Northumberland are exploring targeted heating strategies: switching from space-heating to "people-heating" through heated pew cushions, localised infrared radiant panels, and transitioning toward green electricity suppliers.

We stand at a critical threshold. The journey toward net-zero carbon emissions is not merely about updating a heating system; it is about redefining how historic sacred spaces can lead by example in the fight against climate change. Balancing conservation with climate action is a complex puzzle, but solving it would ensure that these ancient walls continue to offer refuge – both spiritual and environmental – for generations to come.

Advent and Christmas Services

Sunday 29 November - 6pm
Advent Carol Service

Tuesday 8 December - 6pm
Lord Lieutenant's Carol Service

Saturday 19 December - 3pm
A Quiet Christmas

Sunday 20 December - 7pm
Nine Lessons and Carols

Thursday 24 December (Christmas Eve)
5pm - Crib Service
11.30pm - Midnight Mass

Friday 25 December (Christmas Day)
8.30am Holy Communion
10am Parish Eucharist

Plus all the regular services, of course.