

# NEWCASTLE READER

ISSUE 18 AUTUMN/WINTER 2021



Diocese of Newcastle   
growing church bringing hope



In this issue...

## JERUSALEM

Anne Horne describes an adventurous visit to Jerusalem.

**P9**

### ALSO

COMING WHERE WE ARE, COMINGS AND GOINGS,  
DOODLING WITH INTENT, THE GOD OF THE UNEXPECTED,  
BEN DOOLAN, MASTER OF ST THOMAS NEWCASTLE, THE  
TRINITY AS OUR ROLE MODEL, JUST A SEC  
and LAST WRITES

# CONTENTS

Newcastle Reader: a magazine produced by Readers in the Diocese of Newcastle, with the valued support of others, in a spirit of being generous, open and engaged.

DESIGN: JON KIRKWOOD

3

**EDITORIAL** A new communications group

4

**COMING WHERE WE ARE** Bishop Stephen offers some ideas for sermons at Christmastide

6

**JUST A SEC** Jan Porter reflects on recent Reader news and offers a message of hope

7

**COMINGS AND GOINGS** A welcome to new Readers in the diocese, a thank you to those who have become emeritus or moved away and a farewell to those who have died

8

**DOODLING WITH INTENT** Chris Hudson interviews the Holy Island artist Mary Fleeson about her work

9

**JERUSALEM** Anne Horne describes an adventurous visit to Jerusalem.

12

**THE GOD OF THE UNEXPECTED** Diane Armstrong reflects on her path to Readership and her work as chaplain to a mental health trust

14

**BEN DOOLAN, MASTER OF ST THOMAS NEWCASTLE** in conversation with Chris Hudson

16

**THE TRINITY AS OUR ROLE MODEL** Paul Hobbs and Richard Bryant write about the Shirley Community Chaplaincy (North-East)

18

**LAST WRITES** The editor writes of Reader Ministry in the Newcastle Diocese, past and present, and ponders what the future holds for Readership



# EDITORIAL

**The editorial in the previous edition of Newcastle Reader was written at the beginning of this year when we were all in lockdown and snow lay thick on the ground.**

I offered the possibility that the vaccination programme, then only just beginning, brought hope that by the time this edition of the magazine appeared things would have improved. Thankfully, that has been the case. As we approach another winter, we all know that the virus is most certainly not beaten and the daily death toll is stubbornly high, but we have been able to enjoy a return to near-normality for some months.

This near-normality has impacted positively upon our ministry as Readers. And, at the time of writing, the Annual Meeting and Licensing is approaching, providing an opportunity for us to meet together again, to worship together and to meet in person our new Warden, Bishop Stephen Platten. The relaxation of restrictions has also made it possible for a new communications group to come together and make plans for this and future editions of the magazine, as well as at long last getting to grips with our presence online.

At Executive Committee level, a decision to close down the standalone Readers' website was made in 2019, so it has taken some time to resolve the matter. Now, however, Readers have a revamped page on the diocesan website, where the last two editions of Newcastle Reader can also be found. Instrumental in that work has been Louisa Fox, Reader at St Mary Magdalene Longbenton. A huge thanks to Louisa for carrying out this work so efficiently and speedily. If there is anything you would like to have uploaded to the website, please do contact Louisa. We may also have a Facebook (Meta) and Twitter presence at some point in the future – let's wait and see.

As for the magazine, we give you edition 18, and plans are afoot for edition 19. Every member of the group is committed to working as a team and, with the exception of Jan Porter, the Secretary to the Readers' Executive committee, who is an ex officio member of the group, everyone has taken on a specific responsibility. So, let me introduce the new communications group:



**Olwyn Black,**  
Reader with PTO  
at Gosforth St  
Nicholas, who is the  
group's minutes  
secretary.



**Louisa Fox,**  
Reader at St  
Mary Magdalene  
Longbenton, who  
is responsible for  
website matters  
and liaising with  
Bethany Browning  
at Church House



**Gwyn McKenzie,**  
Reader at St James  
Riding Mill, who has  
agreed to gather  
information for our  
new magazine  
feature 'Comings  
and Goings'.



**Chris Hudson,**  
Reader at  
Tweedmouth,  
Berwick-upon-  
Tweed, who for this  
edition has been  
our roving reporter.



**Gloria Bryant,**  
Reader with PTO  
at St Francis High  
Heaton, continuing  
to edit Newcastle  
Reader and chair  
the communications  
group.

**Please contact any  
of us if you would like  
to support our work in  
any way.**

**GLORIA BRYANT**

# COMING WHERE WE ARE....

**+ STEPHEN PLATTEN**

Bishop Stephen is the former Bishop of Wakefield and Associate Bishop and Warden of Readers in the Diocese of Newcastle.



**Many years ago, a well-known and respected bishop was making a visit to a theological college. While he was there, he said to the Principal, who seemed a pretty 'switched on' person, 'Do you know, I have to preach this coming Sunday and the gospel reading is the Good Samaritan.**

How can anyone say anything new or interesting about the Good Samaritan?!!' The younger man responded thoughtfully, and then he said: 'You know it's odd how sometimes even the style of a translation can give you a cue for your sermon. So, I'm thinking of the King James translation of the Good Samaritan story. It offers a most interesting thought. The priest and the Levite both 'pass by on the other side', but of the Samaritan, the translation notes: 'A certain Samaritan, as he was journeying, came where he (the wounded man) was....' It's a very simple construction but it says so much. The young Principal continued - 'Isn't that about the Incarnation? That's exactly what happens in the Incarnation, 'God comes where we are' - it could almost be a Christmas gospel,' he said. The bishop went off jauntily with a pre-packed sermon in his knapsack! The young Principal many years later, one John Habgood, would become the Archbishop of York!

Now it's a helpful tale, since it answers the first question we should be asking as we prepare a sermon for Christmas or Epiphany, or indeed for any other time 'What is the message we wish to convey?' Surely the answer here must be that we want our hearers to understand anew what it means, for all of us, that 'God comes where we are'. From that will follow so much of what the gospel is all about. For the King James Version continues:

**'....and when he saw him he had compassion on him.'**

That was the impulse, and finally,

**'....he went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.'**

In that is brought together so much of what preaching is about - knowing the message we wish to convey then seeing how to communicate it - here is the power of Jesus' parables. After that comes the impact of the gospel on all our lives, then finally what is the response which is called out of us.

So, then, having seen the key is to be clear about the message we wish to convey, the next issue is how do we go about conveying it? I've already dropped a few hints here with the reference to Jesus' parables. For, perhaps paramount is that at some point and preferably very near the beginning there should be narrative. Concepts are fine but most people, above all, remember stories, however simple and brief they may be. What is your reaction if someone begins 'Today is the Twenty third Sunday after Trinity', or indeed 'as Irenaeus points out in his *Adversus Haereses*, the fourfold nature of the scriptural canon is at the heart of our faith'? I'll leave the answer to my rhetorical question with you. Thus, it's important to engage people from the beginning by somehow touching their lives. But we do so not simply by gimmick - I remember someone slamming their hand on to the pulpit at the start of the sermon and proclaiming 'a thunderbolt hit the church spire' - I cannot remember another word he said! Or, again, I remember reading in a newspaper after Easter, of a priest eating a daffodil in the pulpit and saying '...you'll all read about this in the papers - that's how news of the resurrection



spread...', but whatever did it have to do with the Resurrection? Then also we need to avoid being simplistic - 'what would Jesus have done in a train strike', I remember one sermon beginning - 'I suppose he'd have gone by bus', was the immediate answer.

What might be a way into the sermon? Well, there are countless possibilities. One interesting reflection came from the writer, G K Chesterton. He had a favourite aphorism: 'only the local is real'.

He was not referring to preaching but to speaking more generally. His point was that when someone begins with the local, with reference to people, to buildings, to local tales, it engages people's attention much more immediately. Now, I realise that most of you will largely preach in your own parish but even there, or perhaps especially there, local references abound. But, of course, one can't be limited by that. Instead, it's a matter of exercising one's imagination. What events, what recent happenings, somehow relate to Christmas or any other season. A dramatic example is that August 6th is not only the Feast of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, it was also the day on which tragically the first atomic bomb was dropped - another ghastly transfiguration. It was on Christmas Eve in 1979, I remember well, that the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan - a sobering thought for this year. It's was at Christmas 1914 that a truce allowed Germans, French and British soldiers to play football on the 'no man's land' on the western front. All of these offer starting points for stimulating people's thoughts in relation to the incarnation.

Or there are literary allusions. Scrooge and Marley's ghost in Dickens' Christmas Carol has often been used. Thomas Hardy's lovely poem, The Oxen is another, or Betjeman's words, in his poem, Christmas. Or, of course, there's Clement Clark Moore's On the Night Before Christmas. But alongside literature there's much else, some of it personal to each of us. I know a pub, for example, with the unusual name The King and Tinker. The name comes from the tale of King James I hunting in a Royal Chace. The hunt is stopped by a humble tinker asking if it's true the king is hunting today. His interlocutor says, 'Yes, jump on my horse - we're stopping at the next inn. The king will be the only man remaining on his horse. When they arrive at the inn, it turns out that the tinker has been riding on the king's horse! It's a vivid example of the monarch stooping to be with one of his subjects, like Jesus humbly coming among us - so, that story, points us toward the Incarnation. These are just some random examples. Of course, it's best of all when an example springs out of your

own mind and imagination. Locality and echoing something from a recent event is most vivid of all.

It's often easy to bemoan the commercialisation of Christmas and the distancing of secular festivities from the feast itself, but instead, it may be more constructive to see how to use the extraordinary publicity and media interest that Christmas generates. That in itself shows an incarnational instinct, since it implies God's engagement with the world. How then, can we engage with all the froth and excitement which precedes the great feast? What is there in this year's John Lewis advert? How does the way in which children are caught up in the excitement relate to the birth of the babe of Bethlehem? Can the giving of gifts echo the greatest gift of all, the gracious gift of God coming among us, for the word grace itself means gift.

This is a key part of our preparation, for we are not there simply to define doctrine and teaching. Our task is to help others capture the impact of God's greatest gift upon human life. Christmas is an unparalleled opportunity to touch people's hearts. So many people will be in church who are not there otherwise - can we prompt them to rediscover an active faith? Generally, this requires being concise and economic in our words. At Midnight Mass, for example, five minutes is almost always enough, as long as the message is strong.

Christmas and Epiphany are the feasts that assure us of God's presence with us whoever and wherever we are. Oddly enough, the Road to Emmaus, a gospel story almost always associated with Easter is just as dynamic in its message at Christmas. Jesus catches up with his followers and, as they converse, they suddenly realise that as before he is still always available, always there waiting in the wings for us to offer our worship and adoration. The lyrical words of so many carols capture this: Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. Someone recently came up with a code which crystallises how we can convey the message of Christmas. The code was SAS! Not quite as with the crack Regiment but just as alive and invigorating - SAS here means the message should be Straightforward, Applicable, Strong!

Music, readings, excitement everywhere, the unforgettable story itself of the shepherds, the magi and the stable - all these offer so much. We shall never say anything entirely novel - however, we can capture the message in a new and imaginative way!



# JUST A SEC

JAN PORTER IS SECRETARY OF THE READERS' BOARD AND A READER AT MONKSEATON ST PETER.



Exciting things have happened since the previous edition of this magazine was published and distributed. The distribution was accomplished thanks to the magnificent efforts of Gloria Bryant and her team. Special thanks to Richard Bryant for continuing to look after us all (as he did for many when leading us through training) by ensuring the mailing could be completed.

Gloria continues to lead the Communications team with her customary efficiency and has found new recruits to join them in their work. Chris Hudson is researching articles and Louisa Fox has sorted out the past difficulties we have experienced in managing our presence on the web.

The Diocese has appointed two Reader colleagues to roles which will benefit everyone and will hopefully answer some of the points Readers have raised in the past about continuing ministerial formation and development of lay ministries. Ce Pacitti is now Continuing Ministerial Support Officer and Nicola Denyer is Lay Ministry Development Officer.

At the end of October, many of us were able to meet in person in the beautiful worship space at Newcastle Cathedral. Gathering for the first time for some while, we heard inspiring words from Bishop Stephen. He challenged us with the message **"to all God's saints: can we, as our final hymn will bid us, bring these 'tidings of a new creation to an old and weary earth?'"** (Bishop Stephen's complete sermon will be circulated to you all.)

I want to repeat the words included in my report to the AGM regarding the places where people have perceived **"God working his purpose out"** during the pandemic. They are the places where people have worked together and listened to each other attentively and responded to the needs expressed by their communities. They are places where people have cooperated with their brothers and sisters of all faiths and none, to serve one another as Jesus served us. Places where respect is shown to others and factional interests have been transcended. Places where there has been what Bishop Christine, in a farewell interview, calls **"an extraordinary outpouring of passion and care."**

Just the other day a member of our local ecumenical group was being introduced to a new person in the district who enquired as to whether they were an ordained or lay minister? The person laughed and replied **"no I'm not either of those things I am just A. N. Other."** Well, the person in question has much experience and wisdom in matters pastoral together with requisite safeguarding training and is much more than A.N. Other. This friend doesn't however need a label to be confident in working for the Lord. I am not undervaluing the careful discernment and formation required to become a member of the clergy or to be licensed or authorised for aspects of lay ministry, but I am valuing the wisdom of seeing where we can interact and build good relationships to bring in the kingdom. In his cathedral sermon Bishop Stephen reminded us forcefully **"For it is not 'my ministry' or even 'our ministry', no, there is only one ministry and that is Christ's, and we are called to share in that."**

The artist, David Hockney, spent time in Normandy in 2019 painting the arrival of Spring. He exhibited the works produced at the Royal Academy this year and together with the art critic, Martin Gayford has published a beautifully illustrated book of conversations and correspondence entitled **"Spring cannot be cancelled"**. Hockney for me is one of the people who reminds me, when I am feeling low, that in God's world nothing is **"ordinary"**, and no one is **"A.N. Other"**. He provides an example of a human who **"keeps going and growing"** -as Gayford describes him. In interviews Hockney encourages people to **"really look"** at the world because **"you are always seeing more"**. As an artist he concentrates on the visual, but one might apply the **"really"** principal to the uses we make of all our senses as we reach out to share God's message with others. The book is from the art section of a bookshop not from the religious section but pictures and words within it have resonated for me, and for some bereaved friends, calling to mind **"the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations"** from Revelation 22.

p.s. Newcastle Readers continue to say Zoom Night Prayer on the first Tuesday each month.

**Hockney, D and Gayford, M. (2021) Spring cannot be cancelled. London: Thames and Hudson.**

# COMINGS AND GOINGS.

## WELCOME:

At the Annual Licensing Service in St Nicholas Cathedral on 30th October 2021 DAVID CAREY was licensed by the Right Reverend Stephen Platten to be a Reader in the Diocese of Newcastle and to serve in the parishes of Upper Coquetdale. We welcome him from Winchester Diocese.

## WELCOME BACK:

Welcome back to IAN FARRIMOND after several years' service in Mali. He is returning to serve at Jesmond Holy Trinity.

## READER ANNIVERSARIES: CONGRATULATIONS TO READERS WHO HAVE CELEBRATED SIGNIFICANT ANNIVERSARIES OF SERVICE:

### 40th Anniversary:

DEREK BURTON  
JOHN FINLEY  
DEBORAH ELLIOTT  
MARY LILLIE

### 25th Anniversary:

HARRY PLATER  
SHEILA SMITH  
MARGARET PATTERSON  
IAN FARRIMOND  
FRANCES PATTISON  
JOHN BRIERLEY

## READERS EMERITUS: ON THEIR RETIREMENT OUR GRATITUDE FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE:

ANNE BARTLETT  
HARRY PLATER  
RON BLACK  
SUSANNA SWALES  
MARY LILLIE  
DEREK WALTON



## IN MEMORIAM:

KATE CLARKE  
LORNA ENGLISH  
DAVID GRAY  
DAVID HIDE  
FRANK ROGERS  
MICHAEL SPEARS  
CAROL WOLSTENHOLME  
**MAY THEY REST IN PEACE  
AND RISE IN GLORY.**

# DOODLING WITH INTENT

MARY FLEESON WAS INTERVIEWED BY CHRIS HUDSON, READER IN THE SCREMERSTON, SPITAL AND TWEEDMOUTH BENEFICE.

Mary Fleeson's distinctive style of Celtic artwork is immensely popular across Northumberland and beyond, finding homes on many walls as postcards, posters, banners and more. Based on Holy Island since 1997, Mary continues to create, market and sell her work from the Lindisfarne Scriptorium, a shop she runs from Lindisfarne village with her husband Mark.

**Q: Mary, how did you manage to carve out a career for yourself as a professional artist?**

I headed down one or two other paths before feeling confident in the title 'professional artist'. When I was very young, I wanted to be an artist but the general response was, and often still is, 'That's nice but you will need a proper career too!' I thought about acting, heard the same line, so I trained to be a teacher - that wasn't for me, so I did my degree in Jewellery and Silversmithing and left university with a call to ministry. I explored the path to Anglican service but along that road met my husband and decided that if the call was genuine, it would allow us time to settle into our marriage. Rolling on a few years and we moved to the Island and opened a Christian Resources Shop, I started illuminating Bible passages and poems and prayers that I'd written, just to be creative, and developed my style using Celtic knots and lettering. My husband Mark's work supported us as a family as my work became Lindisfarne Scriptorium and branched out into prints, cards and books.

**Q: Celtic Christian spirituality infuses your work. What part does faith play in the way you live and work as an artist?**

My work probably wouldn't happen without my faith, I might still be an artist but I doubt there would be any messages of hope, challenge or reassurance in the words or images. Each piece I create, every word I write, comes from prayer.

**Q: You've obviously taken a lot of inspiration from the Lindisfarne Gospels. What do you personally admire about them?**

The detail and skill - their creator, Eadfrith, was an astounding artist but had to fit in his work on the Gospels between the demands of a very busy life, he was pulled in many directions, as am I as a Mum, wife, shop owner, designer, writer and artist. All my art is originally created on A4 paper so I work with very tiny details in an homage to the detail of the Lindisfarne Gospels and I keep practising in the hope that my skills will continue to hone and grow.

**Q: How do the scenery and surroundings of Holy Island inspire your work?**

Many people say the Island is a 'thin' place, where God's presence is felt more easily, I am aware of the prayers that have gone before surrounding and blessing me. The colours



of Northumbria and the sea and shore are always inspiring as are the big skies and starlit nights.

**Q: Holy Island is famous for its scenery and other-worldly-atmosphere that attract pilgrims and tourists, but what's it actually like for you both, living there?**

It's a microcosm of the world! It has conflicts and community, beauty and ugliness, good and bad, a need to change in some ways and a desire to stay the same, it is both sacred and secular.

I was born and grew up in the landlocked midlands, so I feel very blessed to be able to walk 2 minutes to the shore and to enjoy the very different feeling of Lindisfarne when it becomes a true island twice a day. In practical terms we have to plan everything very carefully - shopping, takeouts, appointments etc. all have to work around the tides which change every day.

**Q: You now do a lot of business online. How has the covid-19 pandemic affected your business?**

We have run an online store for the Scriptorium since 2010 and have successfully built it up to allow us to survive the winter months. Thankfully during Covid-19 people wanted our resources to share with their friends, family and churches. During the lockdown I was able to spend more time writing and developing useful prayer and activity books which were gratefully received by our customers.

**Q: Are you sometimes surprised at what sells most?**

It's always hard to predict, no patterns have emerged as yet but we are delighted when people trust our previous work enough to order the latest!

**Q: Many visitors to the island visit your shop. I wonder what they make of the spiritual element to the artwork, because it's not something they'll see elsewhere. (Do you get any strange enquiries?)**

Best question... Are you a Christian then? You'd have to ask a visitor what they think!

**Q: What are you currently working on? What new products would you really like people to know about?**

At the moment I'm working on a new piece of art for the Scriptorium based on Isaiah 41:13 and I am designing a booklet for children for St Mary's Church on the Island.

There are a couple of new items I'd like to tell you about. Firstly, my newest piece of artwork is called 'God can do anything!' and is available as a signed print and a Christmas card. I'd also like to highlight two books, 'Doodling with Intent' is how I describe my art and in this little book I lead you gently through creative ways to play, relax and pray with knots and lettering. 'Meditations from Lindisfarne' has beautiful photos and meditations inspired by the Island and is one of the ways we have tried to share our lovely home.



# JERUSALEM

ANNE HORNE IS A READER AT BERWICK HOLY TRINITY AND ST MARY.

**Let me take you for a stroll. Many times, over the years, in my mind's eye, I've walked this route, down the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane, as Jesus did on that last night.**

It's my personal Maundy Thursday meditation. I sit in the place where Jesus sat, where Jesus spent his last night on earth, sit enveloped in the peace of the night. In the peace of the Lord. But the peace had gone that night in Gethsemane. It was a time of tension. A time when Jesus struggled with himself, and a time when Jesus struggled with God. That night in the garden was one of the most agonising in Jesus' life. Read the passage. There's a sense of intruding on the private anguish that Jesus went through. "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by". This was the very turning point of Jesus' life. Up to this moment he could still turn back. He could refuse the cross. And here I was, in Jerusalem, walking in those footsteps, living my meditation. Past Absalom and Zechariah's tombs, towards those olive trees, as old as time itself, in Gethsemane. Vast trees with twisted trunks that look more like rock than wood. New olive shoots spring from old roots, so these trees could well be the descendants of the very trees that Jesus knelt under.

"Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by"



How did 2 overweight ladies, past their prime, come to be wandering around Israel alone. For my travelling companion, it was a bittersweet trip. Her husband, a priest, had celebrated 25 years of ordained ministry with a service and 'do' afterwards. He always said that they'd mark the occasion when she reached 25 years as a Reader. Alas he died before that milestone was attained. She moved away from the parish, and it didn't seem to have the same significance. That's when I suggested we celebrate her 25 years in the Holy Land. 'All we have to do is fly to Tel Aviv and rent a car, I've done it before. Simple'. What I failed to say was the last trip nearly ended in disaster. Lost, on foot, in the wilderness, in searing heat, trying to locate King Solomon's copper mines, I really thought I was in serious trouble on that first trip.

Best not mention the other times when I was hopelessly lost. My Reader friend was entrusting her safety and wellbeing to me as we set off to explore Israel armed with 2 hymn books, a sizeable wooden cross, a Bible, guidebook and a booklet of devotions on the Stations of the Cross. We stood on the platform of Leeds Railway Station, waiting for a train to Manchester Airport, when my mobile phone rang. An unknown voice informed me that the satnav I'd booked via the internet couldn't be collected at Ben Gurion Airport. It was available from an address in Tel Aviv. Great –no satnav and he's telling me to find someone's house in a city of nearly half a million. We decided to manage without satnav. After all, our hire car came with a map of Israel, about the size of a folded A3 sheet, but a map. How difficult could it be? At least this time, I had the guidebook. Improvement on my earlier wanderings.

On our first morning, we started at St Peter in Gallicantu, the name means cock crow. Walking towards the Kidron Valley, we spotted the Potter's Field on route, bought with 30 pieces of silver. 2 poignant landmarks. Peter went out and wept. Judas went out and hanged himself. Alas, returning from Gethsemane, the peace was shattered by gunfire. At first, we didn't realise what

it was, then a jeep full of young Israelis drove past, celebrating Jerusalem Day by firing into the air. I'm afraid guns became a familiar sight in Israel. I worked on the theory, however, that we were two chubby aging women with dodgy knees. We looked harmless, so didn't draw attention. It seemed to work. Our next destination was the Via Dolorosa, armed with our cross and devotions. The Crusader Church of St Anne near Lion Gate made a good starting point, especially as we experienced the superb acoustics of the crypt when a group of pilgrims burst into song. The church also has a fine statue of St Anne with her daughter, Mary, as a young girl. Nearby is one of the places in Jerusalem that fascinates me – the Pool of Bethesda. Climbing down to the pool, you see how the city has grown, layer upon layer, over 2000 years.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the holiest site of our faith, is far from being a green hill outside a city wall. It's a collection of chapels and noise and bustle, hemmed in by the city, but also, a place where you feel the devotion of centuries in the stones themselves. We returned several times. Late afternoon was good with no queues and time for serious reflection in the Sepulchre itself. A Sunday morning visit was memorable as we joined Armenian worship in a crowded chapel with lively bells and unusual drums. I

must mention the teardrop shaped Church of Dominus Flevit (John 11:35), on the mount of Olives, with its mosaic under the altar of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34) Behind the altar is a window overlooking the city with a cross and chalice in the design, aligned with Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Before leaving the UK, we booked a Western Wall Tunnel visit. A presentation on Herod's Temple was followed by a walk under the city, along the ancient Roman streets that Jesus walked. Definitely worth doing. So too the Western Wall. While there with our cross, we watched a youngster's Bar Mitzvah, only to find ourselves invited to the celebratory

picnic afterwards. One place that affected us both considerably was Lazarus' tomb. Maybe it was because we were the only people in Lazarus' tomb, but there was a feeling that something special happened here.

No one can remain unmoved at Yad Vashem by the Children's Memorial. About 1.5 million Jewish children perished in the Holocaust. On the Hill of Remembrance, there's an underground cavern with a large central glass pillar and five candles inside. Lighting candles to remember the dead is a tradition we have inherited from the Jewish faith. There are numerous mirrors set at different angles so the flames from the five candles are reflected backwards and forwards, a million and a half times. Tiny lights flickering in the prevailing darkness, giving the impression of millions of stars. Isaiah 9:2 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned'. And a continuous commentary reads out the details of the children who died - "Martin Goldstein, aged six years, Holland, Ruth Schenkel aged 13 years, Germany, Jakov Altman aged 16 Poland" - name after name, on and on.

During our time in Jerusalem, we arranged to visit Bethlehem in a local taxi, and so found ourselves facing the Wall. At 8 metres high, with razor wire and electric fences, it encircles Bethlehem. You enter on foot, through a checkpoint, then transfer to a Palestinian car distinguished by green numberplates. At the Basilica of the Nativity, we were met by a guide, arranged by our driver. As we entered through the Door of Humility, a low entrance which means you must stoop, he chatted away and told us that he was a widower with 6 children, so I informed him that my friend was a clergy widow. He seemed interested and attentive, she looked like she meant me serious harm. He also bribed officials in the Basilica, which enabled us to





bypass the queues waiting to enter the Grotto of the Nativity. At the end of the trip, our guide also happened to have a cousin, who happened to have a gift shop which happened to be close by, and where we could be assured of a good deal. With no chance of escape, and as my friend was not going to take him on with his 6 children, buying an olivewood, star-shaped candle holder seemed a reasonable gesture.

After visits to the Milk Grotto and Shepherds Fields, we reversed the process of arrival, transferring into a second car at the checkpoint, to find our driver offering us an extra. I'd been long enough in Israel previously to know that this is common, and to negotiate a price before we set off. It seemed reasonable, so we headed for Ein Karem. Luke 1:39 – 'In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country'. Returning to Jerusalem, our driver proved very useful, showing us the signs to look for and the right road out of the city to our next destination, Ein Gedi. 1 Samuel 23:29 'And David went up from thence and dwelt in strongholds of Ein Gedi'. Before departing, there was one place left on the list. Behind a noisy bus station, next to a rocky cliff face in the shape of a skull, is Gordon's Calvary, the Garden Tomb. At the very least, it gives an idea of how Joseph of Arimathea's tomb may have looked, and it provides an oasis of calm in a bustling city.

**... to be continued**

Luke 1:39 – 'In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country'





# THE GOD OF THE UNEXPECTED

DIANE ARMSTRONG IS A READER  
IN THE PARISH OF ST HELEN,  
LONGHORSLEY



support and enable my ministry. What I am excited about is that the church is looking at other forms of authorised ministry for laity and would encourage others to think that God may be calling us to work in different ways.

My Licensing as a Reader took place in December 2020 alongside two fellow Lindisfarne students. This special service brought home to me the enormity and privilege of being able to serve the Church of England both as a chaplain for Cumbria, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust and as a Reader at St Helen's Longhorsley.

What has the first year as a Reader entailed? Well, I now work 30 hours per week as a chaplain for a mental health trust in a multi faith chaplaincy

**Turn back the clock to 2013, this is when I left a 30 year career working for Barclays Bank PLC and started out on a new journey not quite sure where God was taking me. Finance and figures had been a huge part of my life but it was all about to change when I started studying as an independent student with Lindisfarne College of Theology.**

The experience of training with Lindisfarne and the people I met along the way I will never forget. There was never any intention at the outset to become a Reader and believe you me this remained the case until 2018 when I was about to finish my studies with Lindisfarne. After much discernment I had come to the conclusion that I would simply become more involved in parish life as I stepped away from formal studies. I live in the Northumberland village of Longhorsley and have done so since 1997; it is a very friendly place and started worshipping in the parish church of St Helen's about 17 years ago now.

But that was not the end of the story... I wonder if you like me believe in a God of surprises or the unexpected shall we say. I am very much of the belief that we can find God in the most unexpected of places and encounters. In the autumn of 2018, a part time job as a chaplain in a mental health hospital in Morpeth came along. I had volunteered there each month, ever since my very first pastoral placement with Lindisfarne in 2013 and loved it. To cut a long story short I found myself after much encouragement applying for this job and being offered it. But in order to be licensed by Newcastle diocese I found myself back at Lindisfarne in 2019 for a year of study and formation to become a Reader. I am still there endeavouring to finish off their new three-year MA course in Theology, Ministry and Mission. I am very grateful to both Lindisfarne College of Theology and Newcastle Diocese that they found a way to



team. This work is so varied no one day ever is the same. If you wanted to gain further insight into working as a chaplain there are two books I would recommend. The first one is, 'Being a Chaplain' by Miranda Threfall-Holmes and Mark Newitt. This book presents stories from all areas that chaplains find themselves in, including the armed forces, education, prison, healthcare and more. The second book published in 2019 some 8 years later, purely focuses on chaplaincy work in mental health settings, 'Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care in Mental Health Settings,' edited by Jean Fletcher. John Swinton, a practical theologian who has published widely in the fields of disability theology, spirituality and health, and qualitative research and mental health, writes in the forward to the second book that mental health challenges are complex. So to give you a sense of the people I encounter in my work, there are those who are trying 'to negotiate a world full of disturbing voices, the highs and lows of bipolar disorder, anxious and crippling thoughts and troubling compulsions as well as those living with the onset of dementia. Often when patients are very ill my sense is that it is the 'being with' that matters.

My experience has been that in facing the kinds of confusing experiences that mental health brings I am often trying to help patients make sense of some big spiritual questions:



### Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going to? Is there a God? Why do people suffer?

I am immensely grateful that I have been able to continue to work into wards at the hospitals despite Covid this year and am now very attuned to putting on the required PPE and following the other rules the NHS has in place. As chaplains we are there for those who say they are religious and those who say they are not. However, this year I have taken my share of weekly Christian services of worship which are currently still on line via Microsoft teams. It certainly has developed my technology skills. I have learnt to share the screen so that all can see the liturgy and the words to hymns, as well as downloading and playing music from the internet – not good if you forget to toggle the share computer sound button! Christmas just gone, another chaplain and I busked our way around the individual wards at St Georges Park delivering the Christmas message. This replaced the usual whole hospital carol service which took place every year pre Covid. Sadly, I have been involved in memorial services for a couple of patients who have died during the year with staff wanting to reflect and remember their lives. In the daily ward rounds I find myself responding to requests for Holy Communion and among those requests was a weekly visit to an autistic boy who struggled with his mental health. The ritual and liturgy seemed to bring him peace and comfort. A welcome interlude in a world he finds difficult to navigate.

The trust has many community-based teams spread throughout Northumberland and I am there for referrals from teams in south east Northumberland. I have found myself doing a lot of work with the addictions service based in Blyth which comes under the umbrella of NRP (Northumberland Recovery Partnership). From this work with staff and patients we are looking to collaborate with Changing Lives. Changing Lives is a nationwide charity tackling social exclusion and helping people facing challenging times to make positive change for good. The hope is to set up and facilitate a

bereavement group in the not-too-distant future which is exciting.

As no doubt you will know parish life for the last 18 months or so has been challenging. But for St Helen's it was good to be able to welcome a new parish priest in September 2020. I meet with Audrey on a regular basis usually on my day off, a Friday. During the year I have helped with pastoral visiting, assisted at a funeral, preached, which usually happens every 4-6 weeks. We have also tried a few new things, a lent group via zoom which I planned and facilitated. There was also a carol service on the green; Covid certainly pushed us out of our comfort zone here in Longhorsley.

What have I learnt this past year? That listening and 'being with' people in a non-judgemental way is so important. There are three stories that myself and fellow chaplains think are helpful when thinking particularly about mental health chaplaincy. The first is the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39). Where all others show fear and disdain to the demoniac, Jesus simply asks, 'What is your name?' He connects straight away with the humanity in the tormented man. I know from encounters with patients that the heart of care for them is not the drugs or 'talking therapies', valuable as they are, but the recognition of their human nature beyond their condition.

The second is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:4-26. Here Jesus again spends time with a woman who society despised in a non-judgemental way and opened her eyes to new possibilities and the living God. And finally in the stories we have of St Aidan of Lindisfarne.

We are told that he walked from kingdom to kingdom, learning the context in which people lived and the language they spoke, not judging them by their actions or beliefs but loving them for who they were and helping them to recognise

something of the divine within themselves. I leave you with a few lines of a meditation written by William Broderick that has spoken to me this year, 'We have to be candles, burning between hope and despair, faith and doubt, life and death, all the opposites.' Christians can be light in the darkness!



# GROWING FRUITFUL CHURCHES IN NEWCASTLE DIOCESE

**BEN DOOLAN WAS INTERVIEWED BY CHRIS HUDSON, READER IN THE SCREMERSTON, SPITAL AND TWEEDMOUTH BENEFICE.**

**Jesus told his disciples to 'bear fruit' - but what does that mean in practice for a church? It might mean encouraging discipleship, supporting Christian vocation, or reaching out to local communities in different forms of mission. This is the first in a series of articles, interviewing church leaders whose churches (large and small) are showing signs of 'growth' in very different settings. Let us know if you have other stories to share, and we'll feature them in future editions.**

## **St Thomas Resource Church, Newcastle City Centre**

Ben Doolan is senior minister at Newcastle diocese's new resource church, supported by both the Church of England's Strategic Development Funding and the diocese itself. In 2017, he and his wife Ellie were invited by Bishop Christine to plant a resource church in Newcastle city centre. Despite the onslaught of Covid-19, their church has successfully launched and built up a thriving congregation whose personal financial giving to the project has meant that the diocese has saved money on their planned contribution to the project.

### **Ben, what's your church's story?**

St Thomas' Newcastle is a 'peculiar' placed within the parish of St Andrews, a variety of church established by an Act of Parliament. It is around 850 years old- but recently became re-established as a Resource Church, tasked with reaching the unchurched (especially young people), supporting mission and ministry, and planting new churches across the diocese. Ellie and I were serving my curacy at St Michael le Belfry in York, and we have always had a strong call to church planting. Newcastle diocese was already interested in planting a resource church, so in 2017 we were invited to consider the possibility of planting one. We began by travelling up to make a prayer-walk around the city.

All Saints Church on the Quayside had already been identified as the location for the Resource Church, but after much prayer and further discussion with the diocese, it became clear that St Thomas' was exactly the right place.

After further prayer and discussion back in York, around 25 of us at St Michael le Belfry decided to move our lives to Newcastle in the summer of 2019, requiring a change of addresses, jobs, and for those with children, new schools. As you will understand, this was not easy, and I was amazed at the obedience and sacrifice shown by those whom God had called to Newcastle.

Newcastle has been described as one of the youngest cities in Europe, with the highest proportion of its population under the age of 25. Also, St Thomas' Church has an amazing strategic position right at the heart of the city, situated between two university campuses. There is so much potential here for mission and outreach. We used social media blogging to tell the real story of this church planting, including the costs and the hardships- amidst all this, Ellie and I had to handle a close family bereavement as well. But we reflected that there's always going to be a cost and a challenge to obeying God's call, and we wanted to be open about that.

The launch took place in October 2019- and from the beginning, the church grew fast by gaining new members with people becoming Christians every week. Many were students. (The average age of our congregation is about 23.) Soon, we were baptising new members of the church family, developing teams to do outreach work on the streets outside the building, engaging with those who live and work in the city in a variety of ways, from simply giving out free pizza to helping clubbers stay safe.

### **University city churches have a high turnover. Aren't you likely to lose a third of your congregation every year as students move on?**

Unusually for a university city, Newcastle has one of the highest retention rates for its students in the country. Many come here, get their degree, and then choose not to leave the area because they like it and want to build a future here. We definitely encourage that. In Jeremiah 29 it says, "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you". That chapter's a key text for us. It's not about simply comforting a people in exile who are hoping for a rescue and return- it's about encouraging them to see that God wants them there for the long haul, seeking the peace and prosperity of the city where they can live and prosper. To all our students, we say we believe it was God who carried us here, and not blind chance. We tell them, 'You are not here by accident- so learn to live in this city as a native'. Many students can come to a city and only mix with other students and don't like as residents but live more like tourists. At St Thomas', we encourage them to meet real local people and engage with them, serving their diverse communities in places like Byker and not just the city centre. We try to engage our





**The launch of St Thomas', October 2019**

students with the fabric and life of the city at the centre, not the edge, and of course, we encourage people to stay here after their studies if it is possible.

### **So, in what way would you see St Thomas' being fruitful, especially when we've all been dealing with the effects of a global pandemic?**

Covid has been awful in so many ways...but every week, we see new people coming to church both online and in person. Interestingly, many say their first contact with us came from watching a service online. One young woman started watching online church with a friend who had started worshipping at St Thomas' because Bishop Christine suggested it. After watching our services together, that young woman became a Christian who now comes to church in person every week and was recently baptised.

During the second lockdown, we sent out an invitation across the diocese to consider running an Alpha course online. Bishop Christine shared this on Facebook, enquiries came in, and we were then able to run an Alpha course online for the diocese, partnered with nine parishes. 90 people took part each week in a giant zoom call and some made professions of faith.

I'd be very interested in also hearing how you managed to generate such healthy levels of personal financial giving amongst your church members. How were you able to achieve this in such a short time? (Was there a teaching programme? What were its key messages?)

The key message around giving is that Jesus gave everything for us, the call on us is to give everything we have back to him. God wants us to be generous, and everything we have is his anyway! We often sing the hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." The last verse goes like this:

**Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**



**St Thomas' at St Hilda's, October 2021**

Even if we were to offer everything in the universe and lay it at Jesus' feet that would be an offering far too small! We must respond to God's generosity by giving everything of us, and that includes our wallets!

### **What's next?**

Our building refurbishment finishes this autumn, with a reopening launch planned for late 2021 when the Bishop will come to bless the building. We're also continuing to work with MINE in Byker and Walker and some of our congregation will be going to live in Byker to support that, as an 'Eden project'. We're also working with the diocese on where we might plant churches in the future.

### **As a resource church, how do you now intend to be a resource for the diocese?**

We are running an internship 'discipleship year' for young adults from around the diocese and are up for conversations about supporting mission, ministry and church planting wherever we can.

### **Do you have any Readers serving your church, or in training?**

We are keen to model lay leadership and our full time Associate Minister is a licensed lay minister. I believe that leadership isn't just for the ordained. I believe that if you are baptised and a follower of Jesus, you are called to full-time Christian work, whether you clean a school, clean the streets, help lead church services or live as a full-time stay at home parent. Why stoop to be a vicar if God has called you to be a teacher? If you are a Christian, there's no such thing as a secular job - the only thing secular is sin! So, we try to model lay ministry well.

Prayer played a strong part in the establishment of St Thomas' Resource Church. If you could ask Readers to be praying for one thing regarding your church, what would it be?

**For God's kingdom to come and his will to be done!**

# THE TRINITY AS OUR ROLE MODEL

**Registered Charity Number:** 1158939

**Patron Sir Simon Hughes**  
(Chancellor South Bank University)

**Chaplain**  
Paul Hobbs (former Reader in Newcastle Diocese)



## Introduction

Paul, the chaplain, and the trustees are delighted to be asked to provide information about the Shirley Community Chaplaincy, which illustrates the diverse nature of

Readers' ministerial experience. The article below consists of information about the charity, interspersed with a message from Paul himself, once a Reader in Newcastle and now active in church life in Durham diocese.

## Ethos and Practice

The Chaplaincy was founded in 2014, following conversations about the care of ex-offenders with the Chaplaincy staff at Northumberland HMP, and it seeks the welfare of released prisoners from the Tweed to the Tees. In the first two years the work was focused largely upon activities with men from HMP Northumberland, whom the Chaplain had known in his time as Chaplain there. In the last five years, the Chaplaincy's scope has broadened through referrals from existing members, regional prison chaplains, probation officers and other agents. The Chaplaincy is a member of the Community Chaplaincy Association.

Shirley is a client-centred organisation, and in previous years there has been a growing list of



**The Shirley Community  
Chaplaincy (North East)**

group events, outings and meetings. In 2020/21 the pandemic affected all these, with the result that the Chaplain's activities were driven largely by particular clients' practical and spiritual needs, and opportunities to socialise were effectively reduced to zero. Some activities were able to continue through zoom, but most clients did not have the technology to access them. With the easing of lockdown restrictions, many of these activities have begun to open up again, among them the weekly prayer meeting, fellowship group, Celebrating Recovery and Life Skills group and Church services. The chaplain and clients are active members of Greenside parish (Holy Spirit Crawcrook and St John's Greenside) in the diocese of Durham and of Elim Pentecostal church in Heaton, Newcastle.

## Message from Paul Hobbs the Chaplain

We become what we worship! Our theology guides our thinking. As a younger man, having called out to God 'there must be more than this!', I believed that he led me to Word and Spirit. This directional or cooling steered me for perhaps thirty years, which included sixteen years in prison Chaplaincy and now nearly eight years running the Shirley Community Chaplaincy (North/East).

Some might think it surprising that my theology developed from working closely with the offenders/ex-offenders the Shirley Chaplaincy (named after my mother, Shirley) works with. Let me explain. Having seen close up the brokenness of the lives of the men and women (mostly men but the occasional woman) I work with (drug abuse, alcohol abuse, violence, family breakdown, poverty, poor mental health, criminality and imprisonment), I would say that more often than not there is a common factor, and that is the lack of a significant father figure in their life: this leads to significant defects, which give a poor model and little positive steer. If



you like, 'the sins of the fathers go from generation to generation.'

This in turn encouraged me to look at my own history and my own concept of fatherhood:

my commitment to the clients enlightened me and encouraged me to develop my own understanding of fatherhood and ultimately to concept of Father God.

I said 'surprising' earlier, because it is very clear in the Bible that Word and Spirit lead to Father God. The Trinity now has become my focus of theological thinking: God is love, God is light, God is spirit, within himself. He has always been relational, and these things flow out from the Godhead to us, in creation, redemption and the life of the on-going church, which includes the work of our charity.



"We  
become  
what we  
worship!"

The people we work with need a positive role model, and Jesus is that perfect model, who teaches us the ways of God, including salvation through the forgiveness of sins. We gain relationship with him in prayer, reading the Bible, worship, fellowship and doing good actions. This is what I tell the members in a large variety of activities, from prayer meetings to standing up from them in court, from taking them fishing to visiting them or writing to them in prison. The Shirley Community Chaplaincy is a charity that is both faith-based and faith-promoting. For all the above reasons, please support our kingdom work. **Paul Hobbs**

### A message from Richard Bryant

#### The Past Year

This year the Chaplain has been working with twenty-six clients. As always, his main concern has been to enable them to develop self-confidence and to integrate well with other people, and he has been available on a 'phone line, to

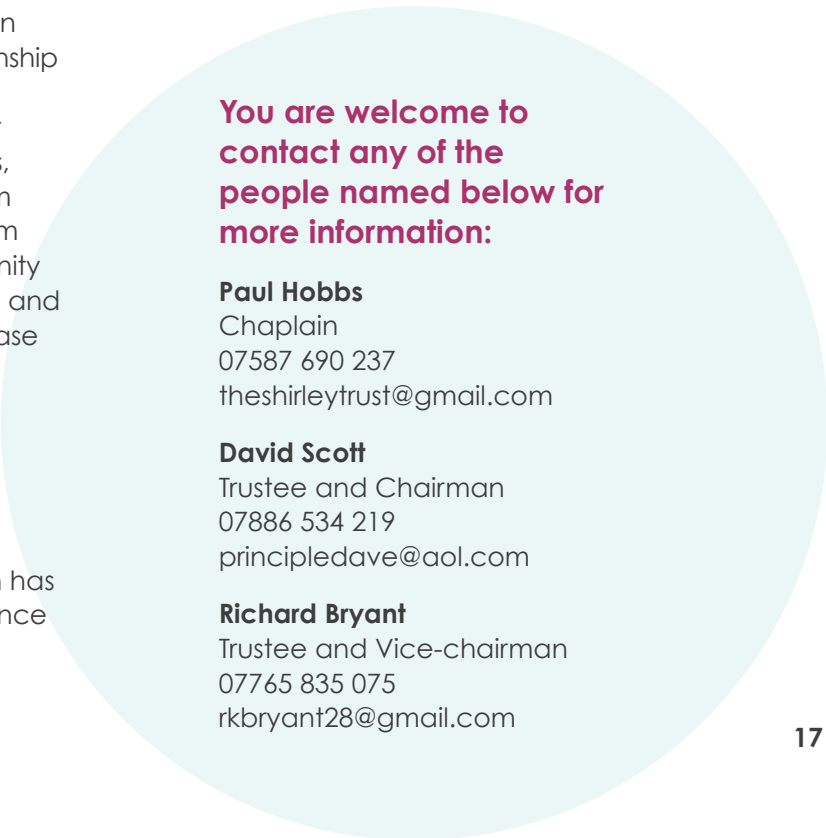
offer support to clients at home, in prison and in hospital. The Chaplain has continued to speak as an advocate for several clients in court and before parole boards. He works constructively with solicitors, the probation service, police, MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection) and hospitals. He visits clients and potential clients regularly in Northumberland, Durham and Holme House prisons, and occasionally further afield.

### Chaplaincy Structure and Support

The Chaplaincy offers support to the Chaplain and his work through its Board of Trustees, the Management Committee and the Pastoral Group. The Chaplain is assisted in his work by a small number of volunteers, but the pressing needs are to increase his hours from .7 to full-time and to appoint some part-time assistants. This can happen only with a sharp rise in the Chaplaincy's income: the current annual income of £25,000.00, much of which comes from individual and a few churches' contributions, allows for little more than half-time work.

### To Register an interest

We welcome expressions of interest and support from all comers. Our most urgent requirements are for prayer, personnel and money. Knowledge of your prayerful support will be a great encouragement. The Chaplaincy can respond to the growing needs only by adding to the professional and voluntary staff available, and that will necessitate an increase in regular, annual income. **Richard Bryant**



**You are welcome to  
contact any of the  
people named below for  
more information:**

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# LAST WRITES

GLORIA BRYANT IS A READER WITH PTO  
AT NEWCASTLE ST FRANCIS

## READER MINISTRY IN THE DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE: PAST AND PRESENT (AND FUTURE?).

In the summer of 2016, Newcastle Readers worked with the people of Newbiggin on an event which was labelled '**A CANNY DAY OOT**'. On the day, as I recall, the weather was less than kind, but that did not prevent us enjoying a day filled with a variety of activities which ended with a service in St Bartholomew's, followed by fish and chips on the beach. The event was a wonderful example of Readers engaging with a community to bear witness to the Good News. Needless to say, a programme was prepared for the day's activities which included a brief history of Reader Ministry in the diocese. The content for this was researched by Chris Bryars, Reader at Seghill, and myself. The archives at Woodhorn offer records aplenty for the historian researching the history of the diocese, but we were constrained by time. However, Chris and I were able to gather together enough information to be able to discern how Reader ministry has developed in our diocese.



When twenty archbishops and bishops assembled at Lambeth Palace on Ascension Day 1866 and decided to re-establish the office of Reader in the Church of England, the diocese of Newcastle did not exist; it would not come into being for another sixteen years. And, from the time of its establishment in 1882 until 1906, we could find no evidence of Reader activity, though that does not mean there was none. However, in 1906 the Newcastle Readers' Association was formed. The setting up of such a group suggests that by the early years of the twentieth century there were at least some Readers in the diocese engaged in their core task. So, what was their core task? Well, when the archbishops and bishops decided to re-establish the office, it was with the intention that a body of lay ministers

would undertake pioneering work among lay people who, for a variety of reasons, had lost their connection with the parish church. The main task of the Reader was to give meaning to the Bible among the many who had not heard the Good News. In the slums of Newcastle and in the mining communities of south-east Northumberland, where the priority was very often survival, this cannot have been a job for the faint-hearted. Perhaps that is why the stated purpose of the Newcastle Readers' Association was 'to bring Readers together and give them a voice', support and strength being in numbers and unity. The first secretary of the Association was a Mr Benton Ord, about whom we know little – perhaps someone out there does and will get in touch! However, ten years later, we know that in 1916 there were 54 Readers in the diocese – perhaps there had been that number of Readers for some time or perhaps there had been a successful recruitment drive - it is impossible to say.



Readers then as now were licensed to ministry by a Bishop after a period of training. For those early Readers training was delivered by means of lectures, followed by an examination. After licensing, they wore a variety of items in church to identify them as Readers, including a capelet, a medallion and a cincture (See Images). By 1919 Newcastle Readers had a mission statement, which declared that they should '**endeavour by prayer, study, and conference to make the ministry of laymen an increasing power in the Church and particularly in the Diocese of Newcastle**'. In those early years, congregations and the public in general might have become aware of Readers through their leading of children's and adult services, Sunday Schools and Bible classes, very often away from their parish church. Some Readers also held services on Newcastle Town Moor for the showmen attending the annual fair.

Needless to say, both world wars had an impact on Reader Ministry. Readers plugged the gaps left by the clergy who served in the armed forces. For example, Readers maintained the missions at Carham, Killingworth, Kenton, Benton Square, Shiremoor, Newburn and New York between 1915 and 1918. During World War Two, Readers were more likely to be found working within their parish church and as a consequence, it is claimed, Readers became increasingly 'clericalised'. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the process of creating a gender- equal society began in earnest.



The Church of England moved rather more slowly than the rest of society, though in 1969 the first women Readers were licensed in the Church of England, being allowed after much discussion to wear the same robes as their male counterparts. A considerable amount of time seems to have been spent on considering how appropriate it would be to allow women Readers to appear hatless in church! But the times were definitely changing. Presently in the Newcastle Diocese there are more women Readers than men in active ministry. We have not yet had a female Warden of Readers, but the Secretary to the Executive Committee of the Readers' Board, which at some point replaced the Readers' Association, is a woman. What would Mr Benton Ord make of that?

"In the aftermath of the Second World War, the process of creating a gender-equal society began in earnest"

Training has also changed, and, for the last thirty years at least, Readers have been licensed by the Bishop of Newcastle after three years of quite rigorous training, which does not include a written examination, but instead continuous assessment by means of essays, presentations, placements and residential. During that time responsibility for training Readers has changed, and it is now in the hands of Lindisfarne College. Diocesan Readers also have a new mission statement, which notes that we exist **'to preach and teach the gospel, to lead worship, to develop a supportive ministry for those exploring their faith, and to energise others to be drawn to God through all that they are and do both inside and outside the church'**. In 1990, Canon Timothy Tyndall described a Reader as **'a bit of an evangelist, a bit of a pastor, a bit of an educator. Readers have to think how best they can communicate'**. Today's Readers may exercise their ministry by being a bit of all those things, though many will recognise that they are at their best when employing their particular gifts: some will wish to focus on preaching, teaching and leading worship, whilst others will be fulfilled in a chaplaincy role or by working with refugees or supporting food banks. The person who will do most to exploit the talents of a Reader will be his/her incumbent and,

sadly, some over the years seem to have seen their Reader as **'a bit of a nuisance'**. However, no one feels called to be a Reader unless they wish to communicate the connection between the Gospel and daily life to all God's people, and incumbent and Reader have to work out how that may best be achieved.

But what of the future? Reader ministry seems under threat from a number of directions: the apparent lack of commitment to Readership from the Central Readers' Council, which was demonstrated in their decision to change the title of the national magazine to Transforming Ministry. Rather more worrying is the decision of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to abandon their 100-year practice of appointing the Chair of CRC: the next Chair will not be a Bishop and CRC must work out who to appoint now that Bishop Martyn has stood down. Additional threats to Reader Ministry are smaller congregations (from which Readers are drawn); the average age of Readers (on the high side, in this diocese at least); and the appearance of Authorised Ministries. Do we actually need a proliferation of ministries, especially of the kind which allow those who are Authorised to take on some of the roles of Readers after a far shorter period of training? Perhaps what is needed is a strengthening of Readership and a greater general recognition of its worth. Perhaps, also, the greater need is for a more well-informed and theologically literate laity. This is where discipleship courses come in. In this diocese many Readers contributed over the years to the delivery of Faith and Life and Living Theology North East. Sadly, nothing has replaced them. Discipleship courses enabled those who attended to enrich their faith and grow in knowledge and confidence – become, in other words, better informed and theologically literate. (Though this was not their purpose, they also proved to be fertile ground in which to grow vocations to ordained and lay ministry.) In other words, discipleship courses empower the laity.



Is there a future for Reader Ministry? Will enough younger people come forward to have their calling to Readership discerned? Do the Church of England and its parish clergy actually want or need the office of Reader? Time will tell. What I fear, however, is that, without a reigniting of the spark which for over one hundred years has inspired and sustained those of us who wear the blue scarf, Reader Ministry will embark on an ignominious drift into oblivion.