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WINTER 2025

inside MORPETH



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THE MAGIC OF
STORE WINDOWS

CLIMBING TO
NEW HEIGHTS

IVAN'S LEGACY
TO MORPETH

WEEKEND OF WORDS



Saturday 21st March 2026

AT ST GEORGE'S URC

10am Hugh Mitford Raymond - 1000 years of the Mitford family dynasty

11.30am TV presenter and author Steph McGovern in conversation with Mari Hannah

1pm B A Paris, Trevor Wood & Guy Morpuss - Three crime writers Q & A session

3pm Broadcaster and author Sally Magnusson talks with Edward Bindloss

4.30pm Multi-million book-selling thriller writer T M Logan

6pm The Army's former top medic turned poet Tim Hodgetts

AT THE CHANTRY

11am Bridgett Gubbins - My Mother and The Curate

3pm Alan Wilkinson discusses his latest novel A Sandhills Legacy

WORKSHOP AT MORPETH LIBRARY

2pm Elaine Cussak and Hannah Hoare - Talking Business with Writers

Sunday 22nd March 2026

AT ST GEORGE'S URC

1pm Former Labour Cabinet Minister Alan Johnson presents his biography of PM Harold Wilson

2.30pm Scottish literary legend Alistair Moffat on his latest book The North Sea

4pm Ex-MP Chris Mullin on his campaign book Error of Judgement: The Birmingham Bombings and The Scandal that Shook Britain

THURSDAY 19TH MARCH PRE-FESTIVAL WEEKEND EVENT AT MORPETH RUGBY CLUB

7.30pm Ex-Newcastle United player Paul Ferris and his 18 years at the Toon



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10



12



20

inside MORPETH

Not everyone gets a statue of them no matter how famous they are or what wonderful things they have achieved in their lifetime. But, it might be about to happen for Morpeth's running legend Jim Alder as we exclusively report in this edition of Inside Morpeth. At the time when the word 'Superstar' had not been invented by the press in the days when athletes were true amateurs and not professionally paid sportsmen and women, Jim Alder was exactly that. A world superstar!

A Commonwealth Games gold, silver and bronze medallist. A European games medallist in at all places Athens where the marathon originated. A World Record holder three times over, and equally important to him five times a winner of the New Year's Day Morpeth to Newcastle road race. He was an inspiration not only to generations of Morpeth Harriers but also to the likes of North East 'superstars' – there's that word again – Brendan Foster, Steve Cram, Mike McLeod and Charlie Spedding.

Which is why local sculptor Tom Maley believes Jim deserves a statue in his adopted home town of Morpeth. Tom is already well-known for his statues of local footballer legends Jackie Milburn, Sir Bobby Robson, Wilf Mannion and Alan Shearer – and he now wants to add Jim to that illustrious quartet of North East sporting greats. Could it happen? We'll keep you posted in future editions of Inside Morpeth.

We say it every year, and we make no apologies for saying it again, but aren't the Rutherford's Christmas windows just spectacular once again. No other store in Northumberland does this, and this year it has been fascinating to 'hear the noise' on social media that Rutherford's windows not only match but are better, than that famous Tyneside store which makes such a fuss about its windows' reveal.

We couldn't possibly comment, rather we let you dear readers, come to your own conclusion. Once again, it has been a huge privilege for Team Inside Morpeth, to produce our magazine for you over the past 12 months, and we do so value your loyalty and support as our readers. From everyone at Inside Morpeth, we wish you all the merriest and most peaceful Christmas, and a happy, prosperous and above all, healthy New Year.

Ian Leech
Editor of Inside Morpeth

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4 STATUE TRIBUTE TO LOCAL HERO

8 THE MAGIC OF STORE WINDOWS

10 TRUST IN JOYS OF CHRISTMAS

12 TOWN'S OWN HADRIAN'S WALL

14 IVAN'S ART LEGACY TO MORPETH

19 2026 FESTIVAL TICKETS ON SALE

32 CITY LINKING PAST TO PRESENT

Front cover: Jim Alder meets his lifesize statue. Photo by Brian Wade

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The making of Jim Alder!

Statue would be a lifelong tribute to a true local hero.
Inside Morpeth Exclusive
Report by Editor Ian Leech.

Jim Alder and sculptor Tom Maley with his statue



Sculptor Tom Maley is planning what would be the ultimate tribute to local hero Jim Alder – a life-size statue in his honour in his adopted home town of Morpeth. As our exclusive pictures show in this edition of Inside Morpeth, Tom is working on a statue of the marathon gold medallist, distance world record holder and one of the greatest athletes of his generation.

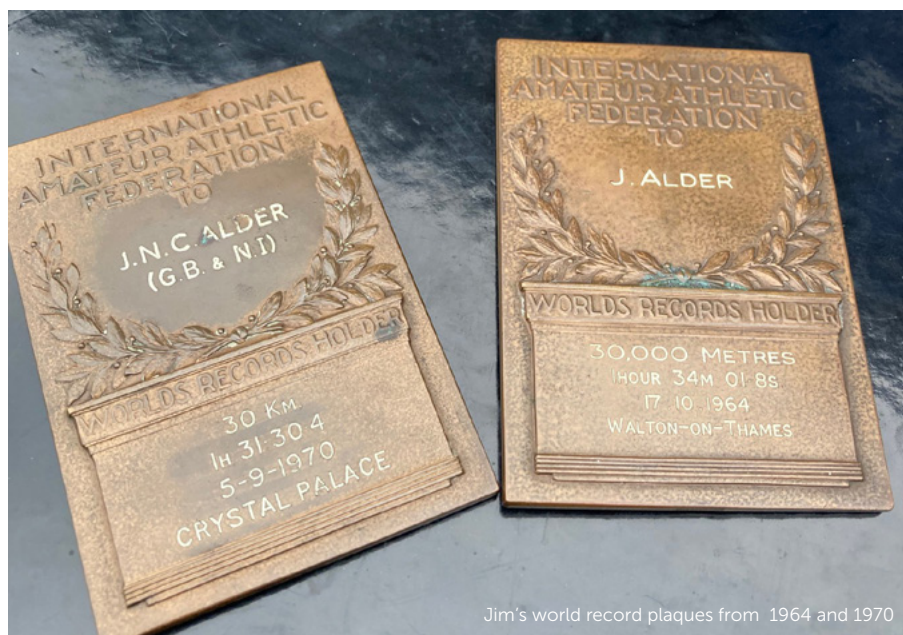
The pose he has chosen depicts Jim crossing the winning line at the scene of perhaps his greatest victory at the 1966 Commonwealth Games' on the Caribbean island of Jamaica, when he won the marathon Gold Medal against all the odds in arguably one of the most dramatic and bizarre finishes ever seen on an athletics' track.

As he approached the stadium after 26 gruelling miles in the searing heat and humidity of an early summer's morning, Jim, proudly running in the blue vest of his native Scotland, was some 200 yards clear of his nearest rival Englishman Bill Adcocks, and the winner's gold medal was within his grasp. However, at exactly at that moment, the Royal Party of the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Charles and Princess Anne, unexpectedly arrived at the stadium entrance and in the total confusion of their unscheduled appearance, race officials abandoned their posts so no one was around to direct Jim on to the last lap track.

By the time an alert Scottish team official named Dunkie Wright, who co-incidentally was a seven times' winner of the Morpeth to Newcastle Road Race, had spotted that Jim was lost and re-directed him to the stadium entrance, Adcocks was nearly a quarter of the way around the last lap and only 300 yards stood between him and the tape. But, Jim being Jim, was determined that the medal would not be snatched from his grasp, so summoned all his last energy and strength to catch and pass his rival just 15 yards from the tape.

If that was the race that lifted Jim Alder into international stardom, what followed propelled him into the ranks of the top athletes of the Sixties and early Seventies with medal-winning performances and race results across the world. At the same Jamaica games, Jim had four days earlier won a bronze medal in the 6 Miles or 10,000 metres as the race distance was later known.

Jim was presented with his marathon Gold Medal by the Duke of Edinburgh, and four years later when the



Jim's world record plaques from 1964 and 1970

Commonwealths were held in the Scottish capital, he took the Silver Medal in the marathon behind England's Ron Hill. At the opening of those games in the Meadowbank Stadium in Edinburgh, Jim had been afforded the honour of running the last leg of the baton marathon, to present it to Prince Philip.

There was a bronze in the marathon at the 1969 European championships in Athens, the home of the modern marathon; while Jim was also selected to run for Great Britain in the 1968 Mexico Olympics where sadly the heat, humidity and running at altitude, destroyed his chances of a medal. Four years earlier a freak accident had ruined his chances of being selected for the Tokyo Olympics, but while the games were being held, Jim had recovered his fitness sufficiently to set a new world record for 30,000 metres, plus another world record for 20,000 metres and for the furthest distance ever covered in two hours by an athlete.

Before he called a halt to his running career, there were victories in far too many races at national, international and local level to record them here.

But, five victories still stand out in Jim's memory and they were, of course, in the New Year's Day Morpeth to Newcastle, the oldest road race in the country that first began in 1904 and ended a century later. As a youngster running for Morpeth Harriers, Jim always dreamed of winning his home town race which he did for the first time in 1965. He would go on to win 'the Morpeth' four more times with his last victory coming in 1974 and indeed, he ran the race 25 times.

Jim was actually born in Glasgow in 1940, the son of Noel Deane and his wife Margaret. Tragedy struck the family on

the penultimate day of World War II when his father was blown up by a land mine in Berlin. Then when Jim was just seven years old, his mother died of tuberculosis. For the next few years Jim and his siblings Pat and Terry were shuttled between orphanages and foster homes in Scotland, before in December 1950 they were moved over the border to Morpeth into the foster care of local couple Janet and Joseph Alder, and the town has been 'home' to them ever since.

So, imagine the pride when returning home from Jamaica, Jim was afforded a civic reception by the then Mayor Dunstan Garry, driving into a packed Market Place in an open-topped yellow Rolls Royce, to be greeted by a huge crowd in front the Town Hall.



Jim was given the honour in 2012 of carrying the Olympic torch through Morpeth on its way round Britain, to the London Games



Jim, his wife Kathleen and Tom Maley

"What he achieved in his running career is nothing short of phenomenal..."

Amazingly, Jim's welcome home came the day after brothers Jack and Bobby Charlton were honoured with a similar reception and drive through the streets of Ashington, after they had helped England win the football World Cup in 1966.

As he told me, that civic reception honour would be matched if Tom's statue plans become reality. "It would be the ultimate honour and I would be truly humbled," said Jim.

Without any prompting from anyone, Tom has worked on the statue of Jim because, in his own words: "If anyone deserves this sort of recognition it is Jim Alder. You simply can't make up a story like Jim's; how he won the race that day; then went on to become one of the very best middle and long-distance runners of his day in the whole world."

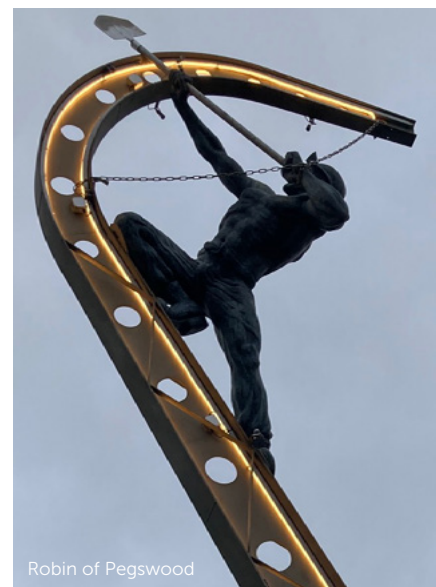
Throughout his running career Jim combined his athletics' career and the long weekly hours of running and training – often as many as 150 miles a week – with holding down a job as a bricklayer at St Mary's Hospital Stannington. When he was away on international duty which could be for several weeks at a time for one of the top games' event, Jim had to take unpaid leave of absence so he could represent Scotland or Great Britain. So unlike today when the top athletes are big money earners and beneficiaries of lucrative sponsorships deals.

Tom who originally trained as a mechanical engineer, has been a full-time sculptor for nearly 20 years and in that time has created some memorable

works of art. Close to home his most recognisable is 'Robin of Pegswood' which depicts a miner standing on the top of a 36-foot high girder firing a bow and shovel-arrow towards the village of Bothal. Another mining piece has a pitman standing alongside a pit wheel at the entrance to the former Ellington Colliery, while his unknown soldier stands guard over the Garden of Remembrance in the town centre of Ashington.

But, Tom is perhaps best-known for his statues of three of Newcastle United's all-time legends – Ashington-born Jackie Milburn, the club's beloved manager Sir Bobby Robson, and the Toon's all-time record goal scorer Alan Shearer. Every home game at St James' Park, thousands of United fans pay homage to Sir Bob and Shearer at the entrance to the ground. Even one of the game's most high-profile managers Jose Mourinho, recently paused for a moment to remember his old boss and mentor from their days together at Porto and Barcelona, when he brought his current Portuguese team Benfica to play the Toon in a European Champions League game.

"When it comes to North-East sporting legends, Jim Alder has to be up there with the best of the rest," said Tom. "What he achieved in his running career is nothing short of phenomenal, and others who followed in his footsteps including Brendan Foster, Steve Cram, Mike McCleod and Charlie Spedding, have all freely admitted that Jim Alder was their inspiration to go on and achieve great things in their own athletics' careers.



Robin of Pegswood



Tom's statue of Sir Bobby Robson

Jim still also devotes much of his time encouraging and mentoring young runners at Morpeth Harriers where he is the club President.

"I believe a statue of Jim Alder in the town centre of Morpeth is long overdue," added Tom.

With Jim and his wife Kathleen having given their approval to the statue, what Tom has to do now is seek approval of a location for the statue, which he would love to unveil next August – the 60th anniversary of that Gold Medal run in the Carriibbean.

Tom who is freely giving up his own time to work on the statue, is now looking for sponsorship support to help cover the cost of the bronze casting and installation of the Jim Alder statue, which he hopes can be located in the town centre of Morpeth. Any local businesses or indeed individuals, who can help, can contact Tom Maley by calling him on 07940 104 803.



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Step inside and be welcomed into a festive wonderland. Every corner sparkles with inspiration, from beautifully dressed trees to shimmering garlands and characterful ornaments. Whether you're refreshing your décor or building your own winter scene, you'll find endless ideas to bring the spirit of the season into your home.

A visit to our iconic Christmas windows is a tradition for many, and this year, they're more enchanting than ever. Children press their noses to the glass, grown-ups pause with a smile, and the whole town feels that familiar flutter of festive anticipation. Let the soft glow and whimsical storytelling whisk you straight into the heart of Christmas.

When it comes to gifting, our shelves are filled with treasures waiting to be

discovered. Find thoughtful surprises for loved ones, playful stocking fillers, and secret Santa ideas that are sure to delight. Imagine unwrapping a beautifully boxed Radley handbag or indulging in the rich scents of Molton Brown's seasonal collection. Explore our beauty floor, where timeless favourites from Estée Lauder, Clarins, Clinique, and L'Occitane add elegance to every stocking and every dressing table.

The party season brings with it the chance to shine. In our fashion department, fabrics shimmer, colours glow, and the latest collections from Soyaconcept, Fransa, Part Two, Masai, and Sahara offer stylish options for every festive moment. Whether you're dressing for the office gathering, a family celebration, or Christmas Day itself, you'll find the perfect look to make every occasion feel special.

Then there's the joy of preparing your home for the season. Discover luxurious throws, plush cushions, and decorative touches that transform any room into a cosy retreat from the winter chill. Let warm candlelight flicker across carefully

chosen decorations, unique keepsakes, and beautifully crafted baubles that give your tree its own personality.

If you're welcoming guests, our homeware collections help you create a space that feels truly inviting, crisp linens, soft textures, and thoughtful finishing touches that make every visitor feel instantly at home. It's effortless, elegant hosting, all under one roof.

And for many, Christmas reaches its heart at the dining table. Our cookshop is brimming with inspiration for creating a feast to remember: pans for perfect roasts, dishes for sharing, sparkling tableware, and centrepieces that set the mood. Add the finishing touches with napkins, candles, and decorations that make every meal, big or small, feel like a celebration.

This season, let Rutherfords of Morpeth bring the magic to your festivities. From treasured gifts to statement decorations, from partywear to home comforts, everything you need for a truly unforgettable Christmas is waiting in store. Step inside and let the season begin.



*Merry
Christmas*

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Christmas comes to life at the National Trust

Christmas magic and sparkle at Wallington, Cragside
and Seaton Delaval Hall this festive season.



Seaton Delaval Hall at Christmas © National Trust Images - Rebecca Hughes



Central Hall Christmas tree, Wallington © National Trust Images - Rebecca Hughes



Seaton Delaval Hall's giant Christmas bauble © National Trust Images - Rebecca Hughes



The UK's tallest Christmas tree, Cragside © National Trust Images - Rebecca Hughes

Wallington

There's plenty of Christmas spirit both indoors and out at Wallington this festive season from Monday 1 December until Sunday 4 January.

The downstairs rooms of the House will be dressed to impress with the Central Hall's beautiful 20ft Christmas tree the jewel in the festive crown. Walkaround Father Christmas will be popping in to say a merry hello and Mrs Christmas is back for storytelling on weekends throughout the month. Adding to the festive atmosphere, there'll be live music in the Central Hall both before and after Christmas.

The courtyard will be sparkling with its thousands of twinkling lights and impressive Christmas tree. 'Magnificence', the reindeer pulling the Wallington sleigh, will once again take centre stage at the front of the House.

This year you can also join Robin's Lantern Quest, a free magical adventure around China Pond. Follow fun clues to discover hidden augmented reality lanterns. Collect them all in the app and then watch as a charming character skates across the virtually frozen pond! Completing the trail also unlocks a special discount in the café.

If you're keen to create something hand-made for your home or to gift to someone special this Christmas, check out the craft workshops on offer.

Find out more and plan your visit at nationaltrust.org.uk/wallington

Seaton Delaval Hall

Visit Seaton Delaval Hall over the festive period and see inspiration from Christmases of its Georgian past with festive decorations in the Saloon, Stables, and West Wing plus a giant suspended bauble in the Entrance Hall.

To get into the Christmas spirit, why not wrap up warm and join us for two special evenings of extended opening hours on Friday 12 and Saturday 13 December?

See the hall lit up, enjoy live festive music and have a trip to the Brewhouse for seasonal tasty treats.

There's festive live music with Aurora Strings on Sundays and little ones can get creative with festive crafts every Friday in the run-up to Christmas. Join Robin's Winter Wander trail until 4 January!

Track down the Christmas reindeer, hunt for hidden festive baubles around the gardens, and step onto the Baroque stage for a panto challenge surrounded by magical, hand-painted winter scenery.

Take the stress out of Christmas and enjoy a relaxed festive visit, no booking, no extra charges, just plenty of Christmas cheer.

The hall is open daily from Wednesday 17 December through to Sunday 4 January (excluding Wednesday 24 to Friday 26 December).

Find out more and plan your visit at nationaltrust.org.uk/seatondelavalhall

Cragside

Celebrate Christmas with a twist at Cragside where festive fun, colourful chaos, and seasonal sparkle await from Saturday 29 November to Sunday 4 January.

Inspired by a real-life Servants' Ball at Cragside in 1894, the servants are at play and throwing a mischievous party while the Armstrong family are away. It's a revelrous rebellion of ribbons and oversized decorations, with a sprinkle of rule-breaking.

With the servants in charge, the House is in colourful, festive chaos, and nothing is quite as it should be. Expect the unexpected, embrace the topsy-turvy and prepare to be joyfully immersed in a creative Christmas spectacular.

Outside, the celebration continues with a festive 5-mile waymarked walk, which winds along the banks of frost covered lakes and beneath towering trees, and the return of Cragside's showstopper – the UK's Tallest Living Christmas Tree. For its second year running, the Giant Redwood Wellingtonia will be decked out in 1,200 lightbulbs, but this year in glorious multi-colour.

Standing at over 42-metres tall, this towering Christmas spectacle is more than twice the height of the Angel of the North! With late-night openings on selected dates, you can experience the magic of the tree until 5pm.

Find out more and plan your visit at nationaltrust.org.uk/cragside



Discover Morpeth's 'Hadrian's Wall!'



An exciting new facility is opening in Morpeth that will bring hours of endless fun and fitness to people aged four and upwards! The Coliseum Bouldering Centre is the brainchild of father-and-son Gary and Matt Herron, who together are transforming what was the grand circle of the former cinema in the town's New Market into a venue for one of the fastest growing recreational and sporting activities.

The Coliseum is set to become Northumberland's first-ever bouldering centre and will be the only one of its kind between Tyneside and Edinburgh.

The popularity of bouldering – or climbing specially designed indoor venue walls of varying heights and difficulty – has been rapidly increasing in recent years, particularly since climbing was first introduced as an Olympic sport at the 2020 Tokyo games. Four years later in Paris 19-year-old Toby Roberts won Team GB's first Olympic bouldering Gold Medal.

In designing their Morpeth venue, Gary and Matt were determined to make it the very best it can possibly be, so they engaged the services of industry leaders' Kong Climbing Ltd from Threlkeld, Keswick, to design, manufacture and install a series of six walls at The Coliseum so that climbers of all ages and abilities

can challenge themselves and grow into bouldering.

Kong Climbing, founded by legendary Lake District climber Paul Cornforth, has been at the forefront of manufacturing and installing state-of-the-art climbing walls for the past 25 years.

In keeping with the venue's name, all the climbing walls have their own unique identities brought together through a Roman theme, starting with the iconic Maximus competition wall, which will host competitive events on its showpiece sets of steep angles, dynamic problems and big moves, all designed to test both elite climbers and anyone wanting to challenge themselves on the wall.

The aptly named Hadrian's Wall is described as being the friendliest at The Coliseum, and because of its gentle angles and balance-focused climbing is said to be ideal for beginners offering a

great introduction to bouldering with a range of problems (climbs) as experience levels grow. Spartacus, the centre's freestanding central boulder, offers every climbing angle imaginable from verticals to overhangs, while climbers can step down into The Crypt cave for steep, powerful climbing.

The Pit will be the venue's dedicated strength and conditioning area with weights, a digital circuit board, hang boards, campus boards and a full size 12' x 12' Kilter board – offering nearly limitless routes to practice on.

Finally, Minimus has been built for The Coliseum's youngest boulderers as a safe and engaging space within its Junior Academy Zone. Lower wall heights, softer angles and playful routes are all designed to help children build their confidence and co-ordination while having fun on the Coliseum's themed wall.


All of these walls can be viewed in a realistic 3D model accessed via The Coliseum's website at www.thecoliseum.co.uk.

Structured and supervised sessions will be run by qualified coaches to introduce youngsters to climbing in a positive and supporting environment, from taking their first bouldering steps

Opening hours at The Coliseum will be Mondays to Fridays 10am to 10pm Saturdays and Sundays 9am to 8pm.

There are a number of user packages including day passes or full monthly or annual membership schemes.

The Junior Bouldering Clubs will begin in early January 2026 and people can register their interest now to secure a place.



Challenges such as these will face climbers of all ages at The Coliseum bouldering centre

to mini-competitions, and there will be opportunities to join the venue's Mini Gladiators and Centurions Junior Bouldering Clubs as well as development and performance pathway programmes for those who are keen to compete.

The hand and foot-holds on the walls will be reset on a regular basis throughout the centre so that the problems set for climbers are constantly being refreshed to create new challenges.

"What we have tried to do is make sure we are catering for users of all ages and abilities, men and women and boys and girls," said 25-year-old Matt, who will manage the venue. Matt will have a staff of 20-plus working with him – all new jobs to Morpeth.

Safety, of course, will be paramount at The Coliseum. None of the walls are higher than 4.5 metres – or 15 feet – and all will be surrounded by 300mm thick crash mats. No ropes or harnesses are needed by the climbers and all that is required is a pair of special climbing shoes that can be hired at The Coliseum or, indeed purchased by regular climbers from its own in-house shop, which will

also stock unique branded clothing and accessories.

There is also lift-access from the ground floor which will mean wheelchair users will be able to reach the climbing zone and try out climbing for themselves with the help of staff.

Matt first got hooked on bouldering when he went travelling for 18 months after graduating from Edinburgh Napier University with a degree in digital marketing.

When he got home he discussed the possibility of opening a bouldering gym in Morpeth with his father, and they identified The Coliseum as an ideal venue to put their ideas into practice. The top floor or former circle had been standing empty since before J D Wetherspoons opened the Electric Wizard pub in 2011, in what had once been the stalls of the cinema which had first opened in the New Market in December 1926. Initially, The Coliseum stopped showing films in 1964 before re-opening as a bingo hall. Later, a two-screen cinema opened in the circle, but when that closed the venue was briefly used as a gym and then a nightclub before standing empty and unused until now.

But, after the old nightclub has been stripped apart and the building rebuilt as the bouldering centre, Gary and Matt are giving it a new lease of life. As Gary told me: "We are delighted at being able to give such an iconic building in the centre of Morpeth, an exciting new future in its 99th year. What we are offering at The Coliseum really is something completely new to Morpeth and, indeed, the rest of Northumberland for that matter.

"The social aspect is very much a key feature of bouldering and we are catering for that at The Coliseum. People will be able to climb on one of the walls, take a break in our mezzanine floor coffee shop overlooking the bouldering arena, then go again or just simply enjoy watching their friends or other climbers."

Gary and Matt are clearly excited by the prospect of bringing an exciting and brand-new facility to Morpeth. "What we want to see is people using our facilities safely while enjoying with us an indoor climbing experience like no other, whether they are first-timers or more experienced climbers," said Matt.

"Who knows – one day we might be welcoming back to Morpeth an Olympic Gold Medallist who learned to boulder at The Coliseum!"



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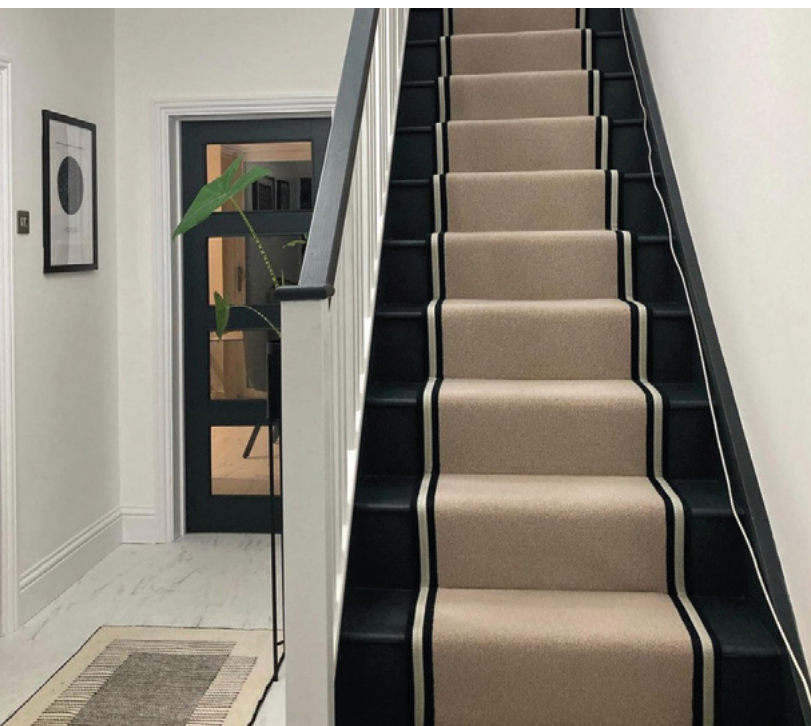
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Ivan Webley's painting of two small boys on The Chantry footbridge

A chance to buy into Ivan's Morpeth legacy

By **Jack Brodie** Inside Morpeth's Deputy Editor

Few towns and villages have been immortalised in such vibrant and beautiful ways by their own resident master artists like Ivan Webley, as Morpeth has. Ivan was born in Staines, Middlesex, in 1941, and grew up in post-war Birmingham after moving there when he was adopted at the age of two months.

He earned a scholarship to King Edward's school in the city, before undertaking higher education at the Birmingham School of Art where he not only studied the masters, but trained to become one himself. Over the course of a long artistic career, Ivan created more than three hundred paintings mainly focusing on what by then had become his 'home town' of Morpeth, which he moved to in the early 1970s.

He had a deep love for the region, and while he paid great attention to Morpeth, Ivan also produced some wonderful paintings depicting landmarks such as Bamburgh and Alnwick castles, as well as many landscapes and villages across Northumberland.

Ivan had a dedication for educating, establishing adult education courses through King Edward's school (now, of course, KEVI), and teaching thousands of people across Morpeth, to develop their own talents until his death in 2023.

To honour his father, his son Robin has been devoting his time to collating and

producing some of Ivan's best works as high-quality prints and postcards which can be seen in the town at Dave's the Barbers in Newgate Street, the Santander bank, as well as the FIKA gallery and coffee shop in Oldgate, Mackay's shop on Bridge Street and The Chantry where they can also be purchased.

The current collection for sale stands at 15 favourite pieces of work including those depicting Morpeth Castle, Carlisle Park, the Chantry footbridge, his favourite 'watering hole' The Joiners, and the River Wansbeck stepping stones, as well as other paintings of Morpeth in all seasons.

In discussing his father's work, Robin told Inside Morpeth: "Dad left a truly breath-taking legacy for all of us through his paintings, which evoke nostalgia and

real-life memories of our town over the past 50 years. He contributed so much to Morpeth through his passion for art and education, and it is nice to be able to share that legacy through the sale of our prints and postcards. Many people, of course, already have one of Dad's paintings hanging on the walls of their homes and we are hoping to stage an exhibition of his work in the town next year, so we would so appreciate the loan of some of their paintings if they feel able to do so."

Robin says his project would not have been possible without the support and help of Paul Wright, Tom Maley, Dave Robinson, the FIKA gallery, The Chantry and the Mackay family, all of whom have aided him along his journey of nostalgia.

Today, Ivan Webley's work serves as a living archive of Morpeth over half a century of his passion and dedication for art and capturing his favourite views in and around the town, on canvas, and is now available to anyone who wishes to share in his legacy by purchasing a print or some postcards, perhaps as uniquely Morpethian Christmas presents.



Of course, where else would Ivan painting but the stepping stones across the River Wansbeck



Morpeth parents' concerns over their children and smartphones at school

By Inside Morpeth's **Ross Pearson**

Spend five minutes outside any school gate and you'll witness a phenomenon that would have seemed utterly surreal to anyone raised in the age of landlines and Ceefax: small children, backpacks bouncing, marching into freedom after a day of times tables and Tudor monarchs... only to disappear straight into the pale blue glow of a smartphone. For many families, the smartphone is now as standard in a schoolbag as a water bottle or slightly squashed banana. Yet growing numbers of parents and teachers are starting to wonder, quietly at first, then with increasing conviction, whether this is quite the childhood we meant to hand over.

Across the UK, research has raised concerns about the impact of early smartphone use on children: disrupted sleep, reduced concentration, and the

ever-creeping pull of social media long before most youngsters are emotionally ready for it. First and Middle school pupils, in particular, can find themselves navigating pressures that even adults struggle with. Algorithms, after all, do not care how old you are; they care only that you keep scrolling.

Against this backdrop, a national grassroots movement has been quietly gathering momentum: Smartphone Free Childhood. Its premise is simple enough to fit on a fridge magnet, children thrive when we delay smartphones until they're older. No lectures, no judgement, simply a friendly rebellion in favour of childhood as we once knew it, full of bike rides, daft jokes, and actual eye contact.

One of the most striking examples of this shift has come from nearby Hexham, where 14 schools joined forces earlier this year to support families in delaying smartphones. Their collective approach, encouraging brick phones for communication and age-appropriate boundaries, has been met with relief from many parents who had long felt stuck in a lonely tug-of-war between "everyone else has one" and "surely this can't be good for them."

And now, Morpeth is watching with great interest. Local schools are increasingly

concerned about the effects smartphones are having on pupils, not only the well-known issues of distraction and late-night use but also the subtle ways online life can shape friendships, confidence and learning. They are exploring all options to support families, not with a heavy hand but with a clear message: there are alternatives. This point is worth underlining. A child does not need a fully-fledged smartphone with internet access to stay in touch. Basic phones still make calls (remember those?) and can text and some simple devices allow tracking without opening the door to the vast unfiltered world of apps, advertising and social media.

The conversation now unfolding in Morpeth isn't about being anti-tech. It's about giving parents permission to pause. To ask, does my eight-year-old really need the internet in their pocket? And increasingly, to realise that the answer, comfortingly, may be no. Perhaps, just perhaps, the tide is turning. And if it means children spend a little less time scrolling and a little more time looking up, then Morpeth's schools, parents and pupils might all breathe a quiet sigh of relief.

To find out more about the Smartphone Free Childhood movement, head to smartphonefreechildhood.org

Far from the madding Christmas crowds!

Christmas shopping doesn't have to be a frantic dash to join the madding crowds in the city centre or out-of-town retails parks, battling through the traffic to get there and then struggling to find a parking spot. Far from it, in fact, because there is an alternative and, in the case of the good folk of Morpeth, that could mean just a short drive through the picturesque Northumberland countryside on uncongested roads, to the village of Scots Gap.

There you'll find the Robson & Cowan Country Superstore – the biggest independent in Northumberland - that has been trading in the village for more than 100 years.

These days the store doesn't just look after

its local rural and farming communities, but has customers right across the county, down into Tyneside and north into the Scottish Borders, who well know the depth and quality of the products it stocks, as well as the friendly customer service its staff provide for anyone who steps through its doors.

And, at this time of the year the store is awash with wonderful Christmas present ideas from stocking-fillers of tempting local products, to high-tech equipment for the home or indeed, the garden.

The store's newly-refurbished electrical department stocks the very latest televisions from Samsung, LG and Sony with sizes from 24" to 85" as well as home entertainment systems from Freesat and Humax and a great range of Roberts radios, one of the UK's market leaders in portable radios.

They are also stockists of the new Robotic Cleaners from Shark, making the chore of vacuuming much easier, and the new

vacuum cleaner range from Miele.

The electrical department also stocks a vast range of smaller appliances such as kettles, toasters, Ninja air fryers, microwaves and much more.

It might not be the weather for it right now, but the store has a huge selection of gardening hand or power tools that would make great Christmas presents right up to the Husqvarna robotic mower for anyone looking to push the boat out a little further!

As personal presents, the store's clothing department has everything needed to keep out the current winter chill from gloves, hats, scarves and boots, to jumpers and sweatshirts, as well as coats and jackets including brands such as Hoggs, Lighthouse, Redback and Buckler.

All in all, for anyone looking to buy some great Christmas presents without having the hassle of the shopping crowds, the Robson & Cowan Country Store in Scots Gap, has you covered!



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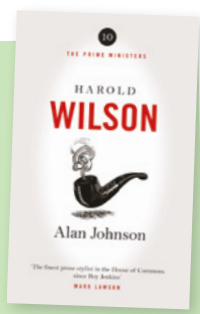
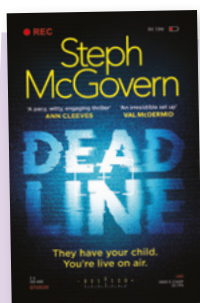
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MORPETH BOOK FESTIVAL

Book now to see Morpeth festival celebrity authors

Tickets are now on sale for the 2026 Morpeth Book Festival and the tip from its organisers is to buy them now to be guaranteed of seeing and hearing your favourite authors, before they are snapped up, **writes Ian Leech**.



What will be the fourth festival to be staged by joint organisers Greater Morpeth Development Trust and Northumberland Libraries, promises to be the best yet in terms of the calibre and variety of authors who will be heading to the town next spring.

Heading the line-up will be television journalists, presenters and authors Steph McGovern and Sally Magnusson who will talk about their new books *Dead Line* and *The Shapeshifter's Daughter*; Labour politician and one of the so-called 'Big Beasts' of the party in his day, former Home Secretary Alan Johnson who will talk about his acclaimed biography of former Prime Minister Harold Wilson; and Scottish literary legend Alistair Moffat discussing his latest book that tells the history and impact of the North Sea on communities the length of its coastline.

Crime-writing trio B A Paris, Trevor Wood and Guy Mopuss will together hold a unique question-and-answer session with their audience; national newspaperman turned author T M Logan, whose thrillers have sold more than three million copies in the UK alone with a number adapted as hit television dramas; and former MP, investigative reporter, author and diarist Chris Mullin who will discuss his book which sets out the work he did to help expose the wrongful convictions of six IRA men accused of the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings which killed 21 innocent people and injured 170 more.

Local authors Bridget Gubbins and Alan Wilkinson will be back again, while Elaine Cusack and Hannah Hoare – officers from the Business & IP Centre North East – will hold a workshop sessions to pass on tips and advice to help would-be authors achieve their writing goals.

Also appearing alongside them on the festival bill will be Hugh Mitford Raymond, a direct – and the last –

descendant of the notorious Mitford family who owned and ran the huge estate on the western outskirts of Morpeth, for some 1,000 years; retired Major General Tim Hodgetts, who during his 40 years of service was the highest ranking medic in the Army; and footballer Paul Ferris, whose book 'Once Upon A Toon' lifts the lid on his 18 years as a Newcastle United player then physiotherapist when in the Eighties and Nineties the Toon were the 'entertainers' of the Premier League.

You can read more about Hugh, Tim and Paul on the following pages of this Inside Morpeth feature on the book festival.

The weekend of next March 21 and 22 is the date of the 2026 festival with Paul speaking at a pre-weekend evening on March 19th.

It all promises to be a celebratory event that should be a 'must' in the diaries of avid readers, says Festival Patron and herself one of today's most successful crime writers, Northumberland's own Mari Hannah, who will open the festival in conversation with Steph McGovern. As she told me: "Since its inaugural event, it has been a joy to watch how the festival has become an important part of the regional book festival calendar, showcasing established and exciting new voices with fascinating talks and the inside track on their journeys to publication and beyond.

"As festival patron I am confident that whatever your tastes in books, our director Frank Rescigno, our organising committee and brilliant volunteers, will have you covered next spring!

The 2026 Morpeth Book Festival will be staged in four venues around town next spring when its major sponsors will be Zonic Holdings, a local company investing in Morpeth.



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Brutal horrors of war reflected through Tim's poignant poetry

By Ian Leech

Coping with the horrors and aftermath of war in conflicts all around the world, has for generations of servicemen and women, been a very personal and individual approach to take to living through and surviving the nightmares they witnessed with their very own eyes. Tragically, for many, however, it was a processing step too far to take.

Retired Major General Tim Hodgetts - who when he left the Army last year after 40 years of distinguished service, was the highest ranked medical officer in the entire British Armed Forces - found that his way of coping with daily having to try and save the lives of terribly wounded young soldiers, was to write poetry.

War poetry has always had its unique place in literature with some of the greatest poets of their generation - Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Brooke and Robert Graves from World War I - becoming household names in their day. In 1915 Canadian doctor John McCrae penned a poem in memory of his friend who lost his life in 1915 the first line of which begins... In Flanders fields the poppies blow... words which inspired the adoption of the poppy as a symbol of Remembrance.

A year earlier Robert Lawrence Binyon wrote in the fourth stanza of his poem For the Fallen... They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old... words which are emotionally spoken every Armistice Day in cities, towns and villages across the UK and further afield, at services to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice in war.

As we chatted in Morpeth's St George's United Reformed Church where next spring he will talk about and read his poems, Tim told me they were initially written purely for himself as his solace as well as a tool to process the traumatic injuries he was faced with in conflicts such as Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Iraq (four tours of duty) and Afghanistan (three deployments), culminating in the Covid pandemic and the Russo-Ukraine war. When he wrote his poems there was never any thought of them being published, but when the chance came to do so, however, he published his collected works in an anthology aptly entitled 'Frontlines and Lifelines' - collected poems from an Army doctor in crisis and war.

"Poetry provided me with the ability to say what is otherwise difficult or unpalatable," said Tim. "Some of the poems in the book are critical and challenging; some people might find them tough to read without shedding a tear; while some are humorous as dark-humour is a well-recognised resilience tool of the soldier. All, however, are observational - and all are grounded in the realities of crisis and conflict."

Very often his poems were written within days or even hours, of the incident he and his team of doctors and nurses had been dealing with in a field hospital or on the front line, so capturing in stark and graphic detail the raw emotions of a particular moment of crisis in what he says was always the 'worst day in the life' of the young soldier they were treating.

Those moments of crisis might have been on the battlefield after



Retired Major General Tim Hodgetts in Morpeth to arrange his Book Festival talk

being flown there in the back of the Army's workhorse Chinook helicopter where patients had to be initially assessed and treated, often under enemy fire. Other moments would be back at a field hospital such as at Camp Bastion which has been dubbed 'the greatest trauma hospital in the world'. Remarkably, patients making it back to the field hospital alive, had a 98 per cent chance of surviving their injuries. On six overseas tours Tim served as Medical Director of the base's field hospital.

Tim Hodgetts was commissioned in the Army in 1983 after qualifying with distinction from the Westminster Medical School. Faced with the choice of a career in the NHS or Army he chose the latter, and one of his first deployments was to Northern Ireland. So, the first poem in his book - Belfast Bomb - deals with an incident in 1991 when the IRA targeted hospital staff watching the Rugby World Cup final between England and Australia. As senior clinician that day he assumed the role of Medical Commander to evacuate the building and set up an improvised casualty clearing centre outside in the road.

The event was to change his career in that it set him off down the path of championing, developing and raising both the highest military and civilian international standards to manage the scene of a multiple casualty incident, whether that is in a war zone or in an ordinary life situation. It was a cause that would enduringly motivate him over the next 30 years of his career!

Since then he has written numerous books and given countless lectures all around the world, to army medics as well as

civilian doctors, nurses, paramedics, the police, firefighters and ambulance crews, to deliver the message that preparedness, attention to detail and team leadership can improve and enhance the chances of victims and casualties surviving the horrors a situation whether that be at a battle frontline; a road, rail or air crash; the scene of a terrorist bombing; a multiple stabbing or shooting.

As his career progressed Tim collected too many roles and titles to mention here, other than to say he was elected by the nations to be Chair of the Committee of Chiefs of Military Medical Services in NATO; from 2004 to 2010 he was Her Majesty the Queen's Honorary Physician; he has been the King's Honorary Surgeon since 2018; has been head of the Army Medical Services and Commissioner at the Royal Hospital Chelsea (the Chelsea Pensioners); and is a Trustee of The Poppy Factory where disabled veterans make Remembrance poppies, wreaths and crosses. His book sales' royalties are being donated in support of The Poppy Factory.

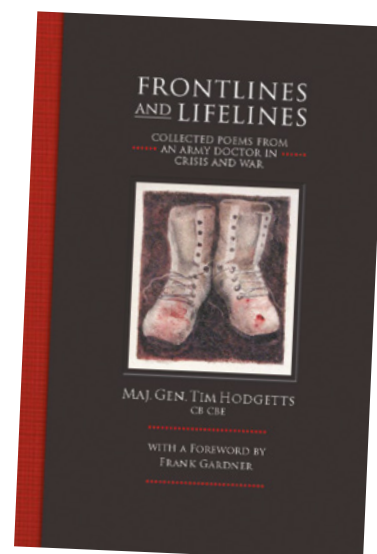
Tim Hodgetts has been described by his peers as one of the most innovative doctors of his generation, an influencer for change and for revolutionising the way multiple casualties are treated whether that by in a war zone or in a civilian incident.

The front cover of his book features a painting of Tim's Army boots soiled with blood, painted by artist Gordon Rushmer, to represent the poem Dressing the Dead. The painting now hangs in the Imperial War Museum collection. In a foreword to

Tim's book, the BBC's renowned security correspondent Frank Gardner, who has been confined to a wheelchair after being shot six times in terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia, also wrote: "The first time I heard his poetry – I think it was Major Incident – I was moved to tears. It was not just the power of the poetry, it was a reminder of the terrible choices thrust on to the shoulders of trauma medics, especially in the theatre of war."

Some of Tim's poems have been set to music especially commissioned from Australian composer Cate Carter, which will be sung at the book festival by the Wannie Liners Community Choir, while musicians and readers from KEVI will also support the event.

Retired Major General Tim Hodgetts will talk about his anthology of war poems *Frontlines and Lifelines* at 6pm on Saturday March 21st, at St George's United Reformed Church, Morpeth. It promises to be a session not to be missed!



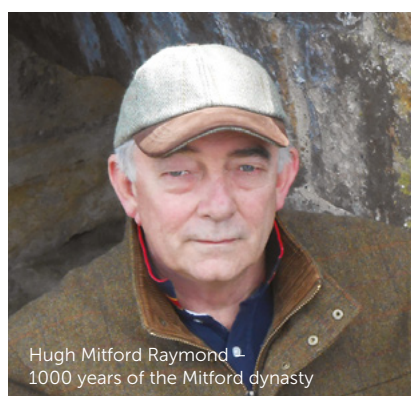
1,000 years of the Mitford dynasty

By **Philip Kramer**

Rarely do you get a chance to shake hands with history but that, and more, will be found at Morpeth Book Festival 2026, when Hugh Mitford Raymond, a scion of the Mitford family, and the last descendant of its main line, will talk about the influence and energy of the Mitfords, squires of the parish from 1066 to the 21st Century.

Baron Roger Bertram II and, his son the third Baron, opposed King John and Henry III respectively, in the first and second Barons' War. Loosing their estates on both occasions, it took generations of the Mitfords to recover. The family have been landowners, philanthropists, writers, historians, supporters of the first Parliament, activists, communists and fascists. Theirs is a fascinating story told with additional authority due to Hugh's place within.

Now the shaking hands with history bit. For those who did, or did not, see 'Outrageous', a six-part TV series on the Mitford sisters, the festival will be the chance to hear the story from an insider. Hugh shares his knowledge of the sisters as someone who knew Deborah Mitford



and as a long-standing friend of Lesley Blanch-Gary, wife of French icon and diplomat Romain Gary, herself close to Nancy, Diana, Deborah as well as the late Duchess of Windsor.

Hugh's talk will not all be about glamour and scandal. His forebears have been distinguished in other spheres. He relates the story of his great-great-grandfather, Edwin Ledwich Mitford, the first British Consul for the Middle East in Morocco, and later Colombo in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon.

Before telephones existed and photography invented, aged 28 he rode 10,000 miles on horseback from London to Colombo through the towns and

villages of Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Afghanistan and India. His experiences led him to present a detailed plan to the British Government for a Jewish national home in the Middle East, leading to the Balfour Declaration and British Mandate.

Hugh was born and educated in South Africa. He presents a unique insight into the history and culture of the country through the writings of his great uncle Bertram Mitford FRGS, considered one of the founders of South African literature. He wrote 44 bestselling books covering the history and politics of South Africa from 1880 to 1913. In his novel 'The Induna's Wife', Bertram describes a conference between the Amabuna (Afrikaners) and Dingane, King of the Zulus. The Afrikaners argue that they can live on good terms with the Zulus, separated as they will be by the waters of the Tugela River.

Bertram writes 'I know not' answered the King. "When two great bulls stand looking at each other over a fence, are they friends for long?" As Hugh observes, nothing much has changed.

Hugh Mitford Raymond will talk about *The Mitford Family* – Nearly a Thousand Years of History at 10.00am on Saturday March 21st at St George's United Reformed Church, Morpeth

The boy from Belfast's 18 years at the Toon!

By Ian Leech

When he arrived in Newcastle from his native Belfast at the tender age of 16, young Paul Ferris had the football world at his feet. As a speedy and tricky winger, the comparisons were inevitable with another young man from the city who went on to become a global superstar of the game – of course, the one-and-only George Best.

Those early days in Newcastle in 1981, far away from his family and friends back in Belfast were in Paul's own words 'brutal' as he settled into life as a professional footballer in a new country.

However, Paul wrote his name in the United record books when he became the youngest ever debutant in a first team black-and-white shirt at the age of 16 years and 294 days! He was living the dream – in the first team squad with none-other than boyhood hero Kevin Keegan as a team-mate.

Four years on from that debut, the dream life of a professional footballer came crashing down around his ears, when he suffered every players' worst nightmare – the dreaded medial ligament knee injury which could subsequently wreck his career almost before it had begun.

Less than 10 years later, however, this time as a qualified physiotherapist working with the first team managed now by Keegan who returned to the club in that role in 1992, Paul was back with the Toon living the dream during what was perhaps one of the most exciting times ever in the history of the club as Keegan built a squad capable of challenging for the Premiership league title. With players like Ferdinand, Beardsley, Ginola, Gillespie, Albert, Lee, Batty and eventually Shearer, playing swashbuckling, free-flowing football, the team was quite rightly dubbed 'The Entertainers'. Ultimately, however, the team lost out on the title to Manchester United and the squad was broken up, never to go so

close again to being league winners.

Remarkably, Paul then turned his back on football to study law and pursue a career as a barrister, being called to the bar at Middle Temple in 2007.

Two years later, however, the lure of the game drew him back to Newcastle United when his friend Alan Shearer appointed Paul to his management team, as he attempted – unsuccessfully as it happened – to avoid relegation from the Premiership during eight games in charge of club.

But there were more twists and turns in Paul's life. In 2013 he suffered a heart attack, before three years later as he continued his recovery and rehabilitation, Paul was given the devastating diagnosis of prostate cancer. Today, he has recovered his health, lives in Northumberland with his wife Geraldine and family, and is the Chief Executive Officer of a health and fitness club. He has also found the time to write three widely acclaimed books about his journey through life.

His latest – Once Upon A Toon – is the book Paul will discuss with his audience at a Morpeth Book Festival evening at Morpeth Rugby Club on Thursday March 19th, starting at 7.30pm.

As the title suggests Paul recounts in a light-hearted, often hilarious, sometimes unbelievable but very readable way, tales from behind the scenes at St James' Park, and the characters he met and played with. Kevin Keegan; Ashington's Jack Charlton who managed the club in his own unique and unconventional way; of course, the genius that was Paul Gascoigne; and the beloved Sir Bobby Robson, all get a mention in the book alongside so many other famous black-and-white names.

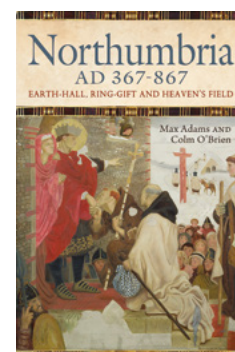
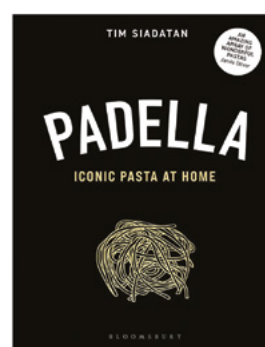
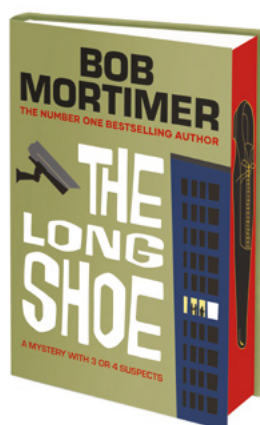
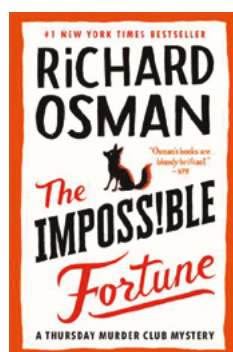
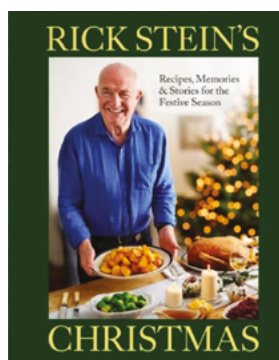
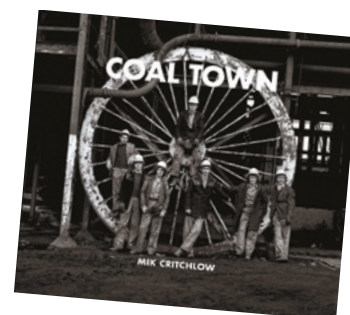
If you are a Toon fan or just a lover of the game, the Morpeth Book Festival evening with Paul Ferris promises to be the ultimate way to revisit some of the club's precious glory days of football.



Some good reads for Christmas!

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Waterstones

Books are always a popular present and our good friends at **Waterstones in Morpeth**, have some across-the-board suggestions as best-buys this festive season



Rick Stein's Christmas by Rick Stein £28RRP

Rick Stein's new festive cookbook is a love letter to Christmas. Including a range of mouthwatering recipes alongside stories of what makes Christmas special, Rick Stein's Christmas will be the only festive cooking companion you need this year.

The Impossible Fortune by Richard Osman £22RRP

The Thursday Murder Club are back with the fifth instalment of Richard Osman's cosy crime phenomenon. With cryptic codes and ruthless villains, this is the perfect gift for any crime reader this Christmas.

Coal Town by Mick Critchlow £28RRP

A beautifully photographed book depicting Ashington and its colliery, a slice of local history and a tribute to the people who worked there.

The Long Shoe by Bob Mortimer £22RRP

The comedian and bestselling author returns with another laugh-out-loud, characteristically whimsical and witty slice of cosy crime.

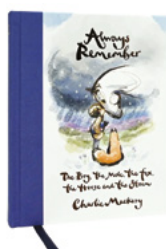
Padella £25RRP

A cookery book for all pasta lovers, with over 100 delicious recipes from the heart of the Padella restaurant. Full of all their best loved recipes as well as off-menu favourites, Padella is the perfect book to help take home cooked pasta to the next level.

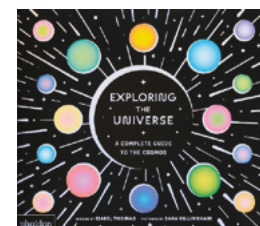
Northumbria AD 367 – 867 by Max Adams Colm O'Brien £25RRP

This exhaustively researched book covers a period of early Northumbrian history showing how the political, cultural and religious elements of our region came together to create the powerhouse that is Northumbria.

Always Remember by Charlie Mackesy £22 RRP



The life-affirming follow up to The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse, Mackesy's exquisitely illustrated volume finds our four friends navigating both literal and metaphorical dark clouds. The perfect gift for anyone this Christmas.



Exploring the Universe by Isabel Thomas & Sara Gillingham £17.95 RRP

Science meets design in this beautifully illustrated tour of our universe. This accessible guide to space allows young readers ages eight and up to understand everything in the universe, from Earth to our solar system to the Milky Way and beyond. A great gift for young scientists.

The Forever Bear by Lu Fraser £7.99 RRP

This beautiful picture book is a heart-warming tale about a little boy looking for his perfect teddy bear.

The Cafe at the Edge of the Woods by Mikey Please £7.99 RRP

This wonderfully illustrated picture book with a fantastic rhyme scheme won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize 2025. We all loved it!



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Leave a thoughtful legacy

There are few more confusing – or unpopular – taxes than Inheritance Tax (IHT). If you're unsure of the details, or you'd like more of your inheritance to go to your family and less to the HMRC or on care fees, we can help.

Leaving loved ones to incur up to a 40% reduction due to tax on their inheritance is a hard ask. Yet despite many children and grandchildren being ill-equipped to grapple with IHT, more and more families are having to deal with it.

It's a situation that is set to continue, with the Office of Budget Responsibility forecasting that IHT revenues will reach £8.4 billion by 2026/2027.

Once thought of as a tax on the truly affluent, IHT now affects more families than ever

In better news for your family, there's been a staged increase in the residence nil-rate band threshold, which is now set at £175,000 for those who qualify when passing their main residence to direct lineal dependants. This goes some way to reflect the growth in property prices, as well as other asset values, which together have dragged more households into the IHT net.

Nevertheless, it can come as a shock to discover that a large proportion of your wealth, which includes the family home, investments such as Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs), life assurance plans not in trust and even old family heirlooms, might have to be sold to meet tax bills when you die.

Get in the know

So what exactly could your family be liable for? We've already discussed the residence nil-rate band threshold of £175,000. Then you can factor in that the first £325,000 of your estate is likely to be exempt from IHT. This means that, subject to various conditions, if you're married or in a civil partnership, you could have a tax-free estate worth £1,000,000.

Yet the simple fact is that IHT could be considered a voluntary tax. The Treasury relies on our inertia and reluctance to confront the issues of death and inheritance. To make things worse, the Treasury's coffers are boosted at the exact time your loved ones least need the added hassle.

Help your family now

There are many perfectly legitimate ways to mitigate IHT through foresight and careful financial planning. You don't need high-powered tax planning, just a willingness to discuss the issue, act and make use of the many options available. These include establishing trusts and making use of annual exemptions such as gifting.

With a little planning, more of your wealth can be passed on to future generations

Bear in mind that if you're domiciled, or resident, in the UK, IHT rules are complex. Certain transfers are deemed exempt from the tax if they pass between a husband and wife or civil partners.

The levels and bases of taxation, and reliefs from taxation, can change at any time. The value of any tax relief depends on individual circumstances.

Trusts are not regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Get in touch

If you're after a little help to guide you through the IHT maze, give us a call. We're here to make a difference to your family's future.

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Exciting news from Vets4pets Morpeth

Did you know that earlier this year, our very own Head nurse, Seb Morgan, became the proud owner of Vets4pets, Morpeth. This marks an exciting new chapter for our practice, one built on the same compassion, expertise and dedication that has always been at the heart of everything we do.

A familiar face leading the way

Many of you will already know Seb - she's been an integral part of our team for years and a much loved and respected figure among clients and their pets alike.

With her warmth, professionalism, and tireless commitment, Seb has become a cornerstone of our practice.

She brings a wealth of clinical experience, alongside an unwavering passion for animal welfare. Ensuring pet owners feel supported, informed and valued every step of the way.

Born and raised here in Northumberland, Seb has deep roots in the local area and a genuine understanding of the community we serve. Her local insight, combined with her professional expertise, means that she's perfectly placed to lead Vets4pets, Morpeth into an exciting future - one that reflects the values of our town, kindness, integrity and community spirit.

A supportive and inclusive team

Seb is passionate about creating a supportive, inclusive and positive workplace, where every member of the team can grow, learn and thrive.

Together our team strive to deliver the highest standard of care for you and your beloved companions.

Looking to the future

We are all incredibly excited about this new chapter, under Seb's ownership and look forward to welcoming you all in to our practice.

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Have yourselves a canny little Christmas

By **Mark Stephenson**, Inside Morpeth's wine correspondent

It's the most wonderful time of the year. It is also the most expensive too when we look to enjoy ourselves and push the boat out. Nice party food. Expensive cheese and posh chutneys. Ritz crackers and twiglets that never get opened and eventually go out of date. Yep, we really know how to live at Christmas!

It may also include fine wines, top brandies, and excellent whiskies. I would like to think we've got one or two of those. It's a time to enjoy the finer things in life- and why not?

However, there's no escaping it, people's budgets are tighter than ever as prices rise and our disposable income decreases. One of the first casualties of cost cutting are the luxuries I mentioned above (although, there's always enough in the budget for the ritz crackers). Because of that, we are more conscious than ever about how important it is to offer quality items at a good price at Grape and Grain.

Now, it would be easy for me to reel off a list of wines that go perfect with Christmas dinner, from Burgundies to Barolos, and Bordeaux's. We've got them, and they are fabulous.

They also carry the price tag too. Due to an increase in demand coupled with some tough vintages, classic Burgundies from Nuits-Saint-Georges to Chassagne Montrachet cost about £20 more than they did a few years ago. They've gone from £40-ish to around £60- which is a lot of money.

One accusation that is often thrown our way when people walk past is that 'it is expensive in there'. That couldn't be further from the truth. We work hard to sell our products at a price that is fair and competitive with online and the supermarket.

We very rarely sell products that are available at the major retailers, but when we do, we ensure that we at least price match them...or even sell them cheaper! When we get a good deal from our suppliers, we pass it on to you.

How can we do that? Well, we try to



cut out steps along the supply chain by working as closely as we can to the producers of our products.

Okay, this means we have to spend a significant amount of outlay on stock and that can be difficult at times for a small business. But, most importantly, it means we can sell our products at a good price.

Examples include Tomatin Legacy at £36.00, Pussers Gunpowder Rum at £45.00, and Tobermory Gin at £34.50.

All of which, when taking into account delivery charges, are within a couple of pounds of the prices online... and you won't have to worry about it being left in the "safe place" of the blue bin on blue bin day!

As for wine, we want our £10 wines to taste like a £15 wine, and our £15 wines to taste like a £20 wine, and so on.

Great examples of wines that we believe "punch above their weight" include the incredible Seifried Old Coach Road selection of wines.

The Chardonnay (£16.50), Sauvignon Blanc (£16.25), and Pinot Noir (£16.00) - all taste like wines that are worth £5 or £10 more. Bernard Remy Champagne may not be the best known producer in

the region, but at £34.00 it can stand up to more famous champagnes that are £15-£20 more.

Lastly, Burgundy at a good price is as rare as a funny joke on Mrs Brown's Boys (no doubt that will be inflicted on us again this Christmas), but the Fontaine Goby Bourgogne Blanc Gran Reserve £24.50 is a steal- and would go perfectly with Christmas Dinner.

One last thing, I would actively encourage you to compare our prices with others. The prices of our products are on display in our window because we're proud of them.

Don't just buy from the first place you see or walk past. Shop around. That extra time to visit us on Bridge Street could save you money... and we're confident it will.

So, save yourself a bus trip into town, or the risk of a blue bin catastrophe by shopping local and supporting independent businesses.

Keep our town a vibrant place to live and work. We may even be able to recommend a wine to go with twiglets!

Merry Christmas from all of us at G&G!

How to ensure your assets will be distributed exactly as you wish

By David Lamb CFP™ MCSI



Many people do not make wills; the most common reasons being procrastination, fear of tempting the Grim Reaper, not being able to decide who should inherit, not wanting to pay the fees or thinking that assets will pass automatically to the family.

Some people are just selfish and do not care what happens after they have gone.

There are many reasons to make a will, which include:

- **Name guardians for children:** If you do not state who should look after your children, should you die, the family courts may need to choose a guardian which could be somebody you would not agree to.
- **Provide for financial dependents, including stepchildren:** This may include allocating funds for education or a deposit on their first home. Stepchildren will not automatically

inherit which could be against your wishes if they are a big part of your life.

- **Protect partners:** Unmarried partners will not automatically inherit if there is no will, which could include the family home.
- **Avoid family disputes:** Family arguments often arise when the deceased is intestate and can be costly and damage family relationships.
- **Inheritance tax planning:** Writing a will can be a good opportunity for inheritance planning which is a tax on accumulated assets after paying tax.
- **Who takes care of your pets:** You may also want to allocate money for food and healthcare.
- **Protect your digital assets:** What do you want to happen to your music, photos, emails etc? How can people access these? Can your passwords be located?

There may be issues with your beneficiaries:

- Are they responsible enough to benefit? If not, what could the possible consequences be?
- Your beneficiary's legacy may be lost should they be involved in divorce or bankruptcy proceedings at the time of inheriting. Do you want your potential ex son or daughter-in-law, to effectively inherit your assets?
- Ultimately, who will benefit from your personal assets – your children or your stepchildren? Or even your surviving partner's new partner!

Death in service benefits and pension death benefits can be very flexible, with a little planning, but many people do not give much consideration to nominating beneficiaries, losing out on huge potential benefits.



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EQUITY RELEASE... THE ANSWERS YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR...

By Joanne Manghan, North East Equity Release

For many homeowners, the thought of arranging a new mortgage in later life is understandably a big step, which is why most people often start with the same questions, worries and uncertainties.

Perhaps you've been thinking about your own situation and how some extra money could help, whether it's for something essential, aspirational, or simply to make life a little easier.

Maybe you're nearing retirement and unsure what happens with your existing mortgage, or perhaps you've heard of equity release but aren't sure how it really works.

If this sounds like you, you're not alone...these are exactly the kinds of questions I'm asked every day.

Setting out on this journey can feel daunting, but the good news is, there are clear and straightforward answers. By sharing some of the most common questions I am asked when people first call me, I hope to give you a sense of clarity, and perhaps the reassurance that you've come to the right place.

I'VE GOT AN INTEREST-ONLY MORTGAGE. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN IT ENDS?

This is one of the biggest concerns I hear. Many people took out interest only mortgages years ago and now face the reality of repayment. If you don't have the funds set aside to clear the capital, it can feel overwhelming. The truth is, there are solutions. Options range from remortgaging onto a repayment mortgage, to using equity release to clear the balance, or even switching to a Retirement Interest-Only product. There are several options designed to fit later-life circumstances.

AM I TOO OLD TO GET A MORTGAGE?

A question I hear far more often than you might think. The simple answer is... age doesn't necessarily stop you. Lenders are increasingly aware that people are living longer, working later, and needing flexible solutions. Later life mortgages, Retirement Interest Only mortgages, and Lifetime Mortgages are all specifically tailored

for people in their 50s, 60s, 70s and beyond, in fact, in some cases right up to age 95.

What matters is finding the right fit for your circumstances, not your date of birth.

HOW DOES EQUITY RELEASE ACTUALLY WORK?

Equity release often feels like a mysterious concept until it's explained in plain English. Put simply, it is a loan secured against your home which allows you to unlock some of the value tied up in your property, while continuing to live there. This could be to clear an existing mortgage, fund home improvements, or simply give you extra financial comfort.

Equity release is fully regulated and supported by the Equity Release Council to give you peace of mind when making decisions.

The key is to get clear, independent advice so you understand both the benefits and the long-term considerations.

WILL I STILL OWN MY HOME?

Yes, absolutely, 100%. With modern Lifetime Mortgages, the lender simply registers their financial interest against your property with Land Registry, just like a standard mortgage. This means the lender's interest is officially recorded, while you remain the legal homeowner and continue to live there as long as you choose.

If you've been wondering about similar things, you're not alone. My role is to guide you through the options, explain things in clear language, and help you make a confident, informed choice.

When you feel ready, you're always welcome to get in touch for a friendly, no-obligation chat.

Call Joanne on **01670 209 925** or **0191 695 9493** or email joanne@northeastequityrelease.co.uk
www.northeastequityrelease.co.uk



Are you looking for clear guidance about mortgages in retirement?



With the right advice, you can make the most of your retirement choices.

Whenever you're ready, I'll be here to talk things through and help you find the right way forward.

Your Easy Steps to Get Started:

Initial Phone Call - I'll take the time to understand your needs, explain how equity release works, and help you determine if it could be a suitable option for you.

Choose the Meeting Option That Works

Best for You - Your choice of meeting, phone, video call, or in-person in the comfort of your own home.

Personalised Illustration - I'll provide a straightforward, customised illustration based on your individual situation.

Independent Legal Advice - A qualified solicitor will guide you through the legal details to ensure everything is clear and in your best interest.

No Obligation Decision - You'll have all the time you need to thoughtfully consider your options, with no rush to make any decisions.



We're here to help.

Get in touch to request a brochure or for a friendly chat and free advice.

North East Equity Release

Joanne Manghan

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"Joanne was extremely helpful, I would recommend her services to anyone"



141 reviews



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Prague: The Golden City

A roving report for Inside Morpeth by former Morpeth resident **Miles W Hewitt**

In the Autumn of 2025, I set out from Northumberland to explore twelve European cities across five countries in my campervan, following a thread of history, culture and chance encounters. Among them: Vienna in Austria, Bamberg and Koblenz in Germany, Karlovy Vary, Brno and Český Krumlov in the Czech Republic, and Bratislava in Slovakia. Prague emerged as the most evocative - a city that unites past and present with a rare mix of grandeur, mystery and human warmth.

Few cities manage to feel both like a living museum and a restless dream. Prague does. Its cobbled streets, worn smooth by generations of footsteps, carry echoes of emperors, artists and revolutionaries.

The Czech capital, often called, 'The City of a Hundred Spires', is an architectural manuscript - layer upon layer of Gothic, Baroque and Art Nouveau opulence - set along the serpentine Vltava River.

Yet for all its postcard perfection, the real magic of Prague lies in the details that are not framed. Like the shadows under Charles Bridge at dawn, the hum of conversation in a timeless café or the melancholy notes of a violin echoing through the Old Town Square.

To truly engage with Prague, start early. Watch the sunrise from Charles Bridge, the mist drifting over the river and the city towers glowing gold. The bridge, where east meets west, lined with saints frozen in stone, becomes a quiet gallery before the tourists arrive.

From there, climb toward Prague Castle, an entire hilltop of history crowned by St. Vitus Cathedral. Its stained glass and vaulted ceilings more like a celestial map than architecture. Look back over the red rooftops of the Malá Strana district and you will understand why artists have chased this view for centuries.

Down below, the Old Town pulses with life. The Astronomical Clock, a 15th century masterpiece of medieval engineering, still puts on an hourly show,

though the real theatre happens in the crowd. Faces tilting skyward, phones raised and laughter bouncing off the pastel facades. Around the corner, narrow alleys twist into hidden courtyards where tiny bookshops and absinthe bars compete for space. So easy to get lost, and better not to resist. Part of Prague's charm is to lose track of time and direction.

Modern Prague is not just a relic of empire, it's alive with youthful energy. In the chic Žižkov and Holešovice districts, street art and experimental galleries bloom in old factories. Cafés serve third-wave coffee beside microbreweries and beer halls. You may spend a morning touring the Kafka Museum, pondering existential absurdity, and an evening at a digital beat club in a repurposed warehouse - both equally authentic expressions of the city's spirit.

Brewing here is a craft and a point of pride. There are more pubs per square mile than perhaps anywhere else in the world. And U Fleků, the city's oldest brewpub from 1499, is where the Praguers still debate politics over half-litres of flekovský ležák - a smooth dark flagship beer with a bittersweet malty flavour and notes of dark chocolate.

Food in Prague tells its own story of contrasts. Traditional Czech dishes like svíčková, tender beef sirloin in a rich creamy vegetable sauce or hovězí guláš, a medieval meat stew. Modern-day chefs reinterpret these staples with surprising delicacy.

Despite that, all meals are served with dumplings - the culinary cornerstone of Czech home cooking - each region have its own version. For something sweet, try a trdelník, a cinnamon-sugar pastry, made from yeast dough wrapped around a stick, that perfumes the autumn air.

By night, Prague turns cinematic. Streetlights gild the bridges, the castle glows on the hill and the river reflects it all in trembling gold.

I wandered through the Old Town to the Ernest Hemingway Bar and ordered a cocktail - Winter is Coming. Consisting of absolut vodka, blackcurrant, lemon, sugar, Peychaud's bitters and egg white.



The waiter said, 'Vinter ess coming,' pouring the frothy purple drink into an antique wooden goblet. After sampling Hemingway's Gasoline, Short Story and The Revenant, I stepped out of the hullabaloo onto the quiet street. There was a stillness in the air that felt suspended between the centuries, as if time had decided to pause for just a moment longer...

Miles W. Hewitt is the author of five travel novels - Lifetime of Travel in Asia and Latin America, Travels Through a Fragrant Europe, Timeless Odyssey, Slow Travel Trilogy and Culatra Island.

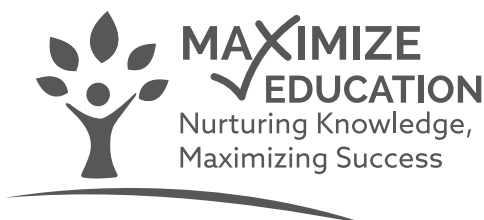


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What's on in Morpeth

Tree of Light

The Rotary Club of Morpeth's Tree of Light appeal will be once again be in Sanderson Arcade until Christmas Eve. This Christmas all money raised will be for the Dransfield Foundation which supports local worthy causes; Newbiggin RNLI which since it was founded in 1824 has saved the lives of 146,700 people in trouble at sea; and Barnabas Safe & Sound, whose purpose is to make a difference to the lives of young people in Morpeth.

Morpeth Music Society

Classical concert with Pocket Sinfonia – Thursday December 11, 7.30pm at Morpeth Methodist Church, Howard Terrace. Pocket Sinfonia is a young ensemble aiming to reinterpret orchestral masterpieces for chamber music. They bring together a varied programme featuring arrangements by their talented violinist Eleanor Corr, who plays along with Rosie Bowker (flute), Thomas Isaac (cello) and Emil Duncumb (fortepiano/piano). Their Morpeth concert will feature works by Salieri, Mozart, Grieg and

Prokofiev. On January 15th, the Society will welcome musicians from the Royal Northern Sinfonia, to a concert featuring the work of Dvorak, Beethoven, Ruth Gipps and Mozart. As well as performing full orchestral works, the musicians love to play chamber music and the Morpeth concert will feature wood wind and brass players. Single tickets for each concert are £19 for adults (children free with an adult) and are available from The Chantry Tourist Information Centre or www.morpeth-musoc.org.uk

Morpeth Community Cinema

The first screening of 2026 will be 'The Ballad of Wallis Island' on Friday February 6th at 7pm in the Wellway Centre. Described as a comedy/drama with music and romance thrown into the mix, the film tells the story of an eccentric lottery winner living alone on an island off the Welsh coast, who tries to make his fantasies come true by hiring his favourite musicians to play at his home. The film stars Carey Mulligan, Tom Basden, Tim Key and Sian Clifford.

St George's URC Morpeth

Christmas events at the church this year are – Annual Community Carol Service on Monday December 8th beginning at 6.30pm. There'll be a Christmas Coffee Morning on Saturday December 13th from 10am until Noon, followed by Carols in the Car Park on Saturday December 20th at 4pm. An all-age Nativity Service will begin at 10.30am on Sunday December 21st, and the Midnight Service to welcome Christmas starts at 11.30pm on Christmas Eve. The next day – Christmas Day – a family morning service will begin at 10am.

Morpeth Pantomime Society

Cast and crew of the Society are busy rehearsing for the New Year production which will be Mother Goose, to be staged over three days from 22nd to 24th January. There will be two evening performances on Thursday and Friday, both beginning at 7pm, while the curtain will go up on Saturday afternoon matinees starting at 12 noon and again from 4pm. Tickets costing £7.50 each are available from the Box Office on 0333 666 4466, or online from morpethpantomimesociety.com



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Making memories is the most wonderful way for families to remind one another of the most precious and lasting special moments in their lives that they all want to share and remember forever.

Now, thanks to Morpeth's Joshua Beasley there's a novel way of doing that. Joshua is giving families the chance to tell their stories at the same time as leaving a lasting legacy all about them.

As he told Inside Morpeth, starting his Legacy Film business came about in an unexpected way. When he began researching his family he was disappointed to find he knew so little about his maternal grandfather who had died many years before Joshua was born. "I thought if only he had created a Memoir – and that became the inspiration to start my business," he said.

"I had the skills in both sound and video, and, after doing my research, it seemed that creating memoirs was an excellent idea."

"Everyone has their own special reason for creating a Memoir," said Joshua. "So, when I started Legacy Film my paternal grandfather Roy Beasley, was for me, an obvious choice to start with. It was something he enjoyed doing and it also gave me a chance to recall his life in a positive way. Since then my grandfather has died, so you can imagine this Memoir is important to both my family and myself, and for future family members to know a little about him."

Anyone thinking of creating a Memoir of themselves of their family, can find about more Joshua and his work by logging onto legacyfilm.co.uk or calling him on 07563 974761.



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Windows of opportunity to improve your home

At the turn of the year a local family owned and run company will celebrate twenty successful years in business in one of the most competitive markets of the home improvement world.

Kudos Windows Ltd was established by owner/director Karen Oswell with the support of brothers Tom and David Wall, on the North Seaton Industrial Estate in Ashington.

Since then they have steadily built up a reputation as one of the most respected companies supplying and fitting replacement windows and doors, new conservatories, warm rooms and orangeries, across the North East.

When they started out in 2026 the trio had one goal in mind and that was to be the best in the business combining honesty and integrity in all their dealings with customers, along with supplying and installing the highest quality products at affordable and competitive prices.

Over the years Kudos has kept pace with all the latest trends and new technology coming on to the market so that they can supply the highest quality, energy efficient products tailored to suit the needs of every single customer, whether they are wanting replacement windows or doors for their property, a new conservatory, warm room or orangery.

"Twenty years of living, breathing, eating and sleeping double glazing tends to give you the sort of expertise in the business that we like to think gives customers the peace of mind knowing that they are in safe hands with us."

Karen Oswell,
Kudos director

As Karen says, Kudos has established its reputation for supplying high performance products, matched by quality workmanship, a personalised service and second-to-none attention to detail on every single job.

The company's products also provide customers with a world-leading multi-point locking system fitted as standard, along with toughened glass to deter would-be burglars.

A visit to the Kudos showroom on the North Seaton Industrial Estate is well worth it to discuss with Karen or Tom, how they can help improve a customer's home, and get a free no obligation quote for any potential work on their property.



Time for gardens to call a truce in their pyjamas!

By Ross Pearson - Inside Morpeth's gardening expert

As another year draws to a chilly close, it's safe to say the garden isn't top of anyone's to-do list. December is about friends, family, and food, not flowers and fertiliser.

Time loses meaning as we slip into a comfortable, food-induced fog. Days blur together, meals merge, and we tell ourselves January will be all discipline and green smoothies, which conveniently justifies eating everything in sight now. It's not greed; it's strategy.

Fortunately, the garden feels much the same. The lawn's a soggy carpet, the flowerbeds are in pyjamas, and the only things thriving are moss and denial about how much chocolate you've eaten. But that's fine. There's comfort in knowing the garden has matched your own energy and agreed to call a truce. I love December's low-effort pleasures: standing outside in a big jumper breathing cold air, lighting the greenhouse heater, drinking hot chocolate at any hour and calling it "seasonal." Indoors, the gardening life continues with poinsettias in various stages of survival, paperwhites on windowsills, and hyacinths quietly preparing for their moment.

This is not the time for fixing or planting. It's about staying warm, staying cheerful, and occasionally stepping outside to show the garden you still care. Admire how even a half-dead hydrangea looks poetic under frost. Then go back inside, wrap your hands around something hot and sweet, and give yourself permission to do the most un-gardenerly thing of all: very little.

Sharpen your tools

If the idea of gleaming secateurs thrills you (and if you're reading this, it probably does), December is your moment. Sharpen, clean, and oil everything. It's oddly satisfying, mildly therapeutic, and counts as gardening, which conveniently keeps you out of the January sales for an afternoon. Line up everything that's blunt or rusty, put on some music, and make an afternoon of it. There's a quiet joy in bringing old tools back to life.

Check stored bulbs and tubers

Inspect dahlias, gladioli, and other stored bulbs for rot. Keep them cool, dry, and mouse-free until spring. Talking to them is optional, but not unheard of.

Feed the birds

By now, the garden birds are running a full-time café. Keep feeders topped up with seed, suet, and fat balls, and refresh the water regularly. Robins will pose, blue tits will perform acrobatics, and blackbirds will scowl. It's free entertainment and good for the soul.

Keep poinsettias alive

Poinsettias are tropical drama queens. They hate cold draughts, overwatering, and radiators. Keep them in bright, indirect light and water sparingly. Above all else, don't let them sit in water, they will huff quicker than a moody teenager. If yours survives into February, congratulations, you have achieved the almost impossible.



Plan next year's crops

When the soil's too wet to dig, settle in with seed catalogues and tea. December is for dreaming of perfect harvests and pest-free cabbages. Every gardener becomes a visionary at this time of year, promising tidy rows, glorious brassicas and zero slug damage. You know it's delusional, but it's a lovely delusion. Order too many seeds. It's tradition.

Protect winter crops

Kale, leeks, and cabbages will soldier on through the cold but appreciate a little help. Clear soggy leaves to prevent rot and cover tender plants with fleece or cloches. And keep an eye out for pigeons who see your kale patch as an all-you-can-eat buffet.

Clean the greenhouse

Yes, it's cold, but a quick clean now - glass, shelves, pots, the lot - will stop diseases from lingering and give you a pleasant sense of control in an otherwise chaotic season. Warm soapy water, a brush, and a good podcast make the job almost enjoyable.

Force rhubarb

For early pink stems in February, cover established crowns with large pots or forcing jars now. It feels like cheating, but deliciously so. Don't force the same plants two years running - even rhubarb needs a rest.

Final Thoughts

And so, another gardening year ends. The tools are cleaned, the gloves hang limply by the back door, and the garden itself has curled up under a blanket of mulch, dreaming of spring. It's been a year of triumphs, surprises, and the occasional mystery plant that wasn't what the label promised, as tradition demands.

Here's to another year among mud, blooms, bees, and good intentions. May your wheelbarrow never squeak, your dahlias stand tall, and your compost always smell faintly of success.

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