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inside

MORPETH



Wall-to-wall fun at new climbing centre

BOOKING YOUR FESTIVAL TICKETS

TRUST SEEKING NEW RECRUITS

SOME REALLY CANNY TRADITIONS

REMEMBERING A FORGOTTEN TOWN



Writers appearing at the festival Thursday 19th, Saturday 20 & Sunday 21 March

Venues – St George’s Church, Morpeth Library, Morpeth Rugby Club, Morpeth Chantry

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Alan Johnson

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The last of the Mitford family

Bridgett Gubbins

Morpeth writer and historian

B A Paris, Trevor Wood, Guy Morpuss

Crime writing trio

Alan Wilkinson

Local author and raconteur

Elaine Cusack & Hannah Hoare

Free workshop to inspire budding writers





inside MORPETH

For more than two decades Greater Morpeth Development Trust has been at the heart of community life in the town and has been at the core of so many of the good things that have happened in Morpeth in that time.

As we point out in this edition, GMDT led the renovation and restoration of two of Morpeth's finest old buildings namely the Town Hall and the railway station. It has brought the cinema back to Morpeth; jointly organised the annual Morpeth Book Festival; made many footpaths through local woods and along riverbanks more accessible to walk; organised the popular summertime Picnic in the Park family fun day to name just a few of its achievements, and well as securing more than £10m in funding to make these things happen – money that would otherwise not have found its way into Morpeth!

All this with almost a skeleton staff, supported by directors who have freely given up their time, as have, over the years, a near small army of dedicated volunteers committed to the cause of helping make Morpeth such a great place to live, work and visit. Right now, however, GMDT has reached a crossroad in its determination to play its part alongside many others, to doing just that.

As we report, current GMDT directors are issuing an appeal to new directors and volunteers to join them to carry on its good work of the last twenty-plus years. Without new blood, fresh ideas, energy and enthusiasm, joining the Trust team, some of those things it has been doing to contribute so much to Morpeth life, may simply not happen in the future and that would be a crying shame.

So, the Trust is looking for people with perhaps a little time on their hands, to give some of that up; add some of their professional skills, their enthusiasm and knowledge, to the team. Could that be you? Or, could you simply spare some time to help out as a volunteer, perhaps taking tickets and showing people to their seats at an event such as the forthcoming book festival or be around to lend a hand at Picnic in the Park day?

The reward would be that you would know you are making a difference in helping in however small a way, to making Morpeth that happy place to be.

Jan Leech
Editor of Inside Morpeth

Front cover: Bethany and Matty in the Coliseum Bouldering Centre

Editor: Ian Leech, Tel: 07377 095 553 Email: ian-leech@sky.com **Advertising:** hello@insidemorpeth.co.uk **Distribution:** Katherine Brodie (TYD) 07540 804 069
Deputy Editor: Jack Brodie, Tel: 07747 108 756

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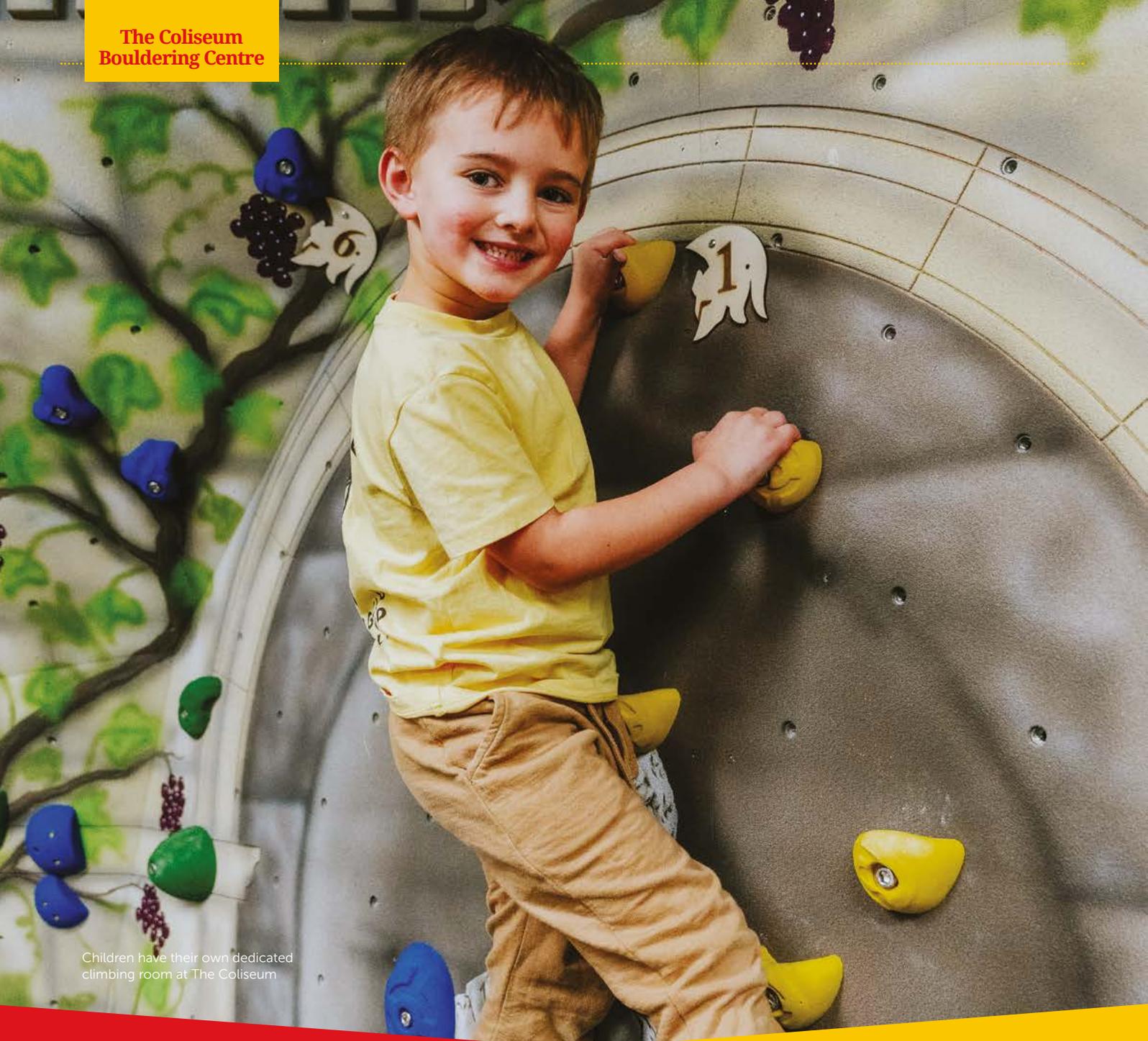
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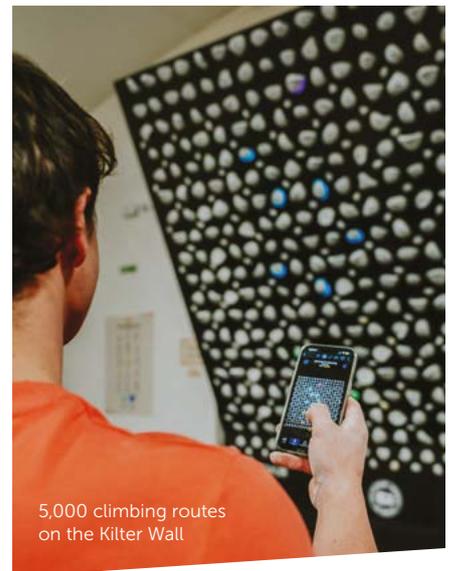
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Children have their own dedicated climbing room at The Coliseum

Morpeth centre that's reaching new heights

A recently opened indoor climbing centre that has brought one of the fastest growing sporting and recreational activities across the UK to Morpeth, is rapidly proving a hit with its users of all ages from four-year-olds upwards, writes Editor **Ian Leech**.



The Coliseum Bouldering Gym in the former cinema building in the New Market, has been opened by father-and-son Gary and Matty Heron. Together, with their Coliseum team, they have completely transformed what was once the upper circle of the cinema above what is now the Electric Wizard gastropub, into Northumberland's first indoor climbing centre - indeed, it is the only one between Tyneside and Edinburgh!

With climbing now an Olympic sport – in the Paris Games 19-year-old Toby Roberts won Team GB's first bouldering Gold Medal – more and more people are looking to give it a try, and Matty and Gary have been determined to give Morpeth enthusiasts the very best possible opportunities to help them do just that. For instance, when they were planning the centre, they brought in industry leaders Lake District-based Kong Climbing Ltd founded by climbing legend Paul Cornforth, to design and build six very different walls to challenge climbers of all ages and abilities.

One of them is what is known as a 'Kilter Wall' on which users can use their own mobile phone app to themselves adjust the difficulty of the climbing angle and the choose from more than 5,000 available climbs! None of the walls are high enough to require climbers to use a harness or ropes, and, of course, there are thickly padded crash mats under all of them. Each week 25 per centre of the hand and footholds on the walls are rotationally reset to keep the 'problems' as they are called, which need solving to reach the top of a wall, freshly challenging.

Weight-training equipment is also available, while physio, massage and meditation sessions are catered for in quiet rooms within the centre.

Judging by the early responses from users on social media sites, they are giving The Coliseum the thumbs-up! As Matty told me: "The first 30 reviewers on social media all gave us a five-star rating and not just for our facilities, the welcome,

help and advice they received from our staff – but also for the coffee and hot chocolate we are serving in our Summit Café which is open to non-climbers to use as well."

The day I visited The Coliseum I was able to chat with regular user Amy Garner from Bedlington. "It's brilliant," she said. "I have done a little bit of climbing, so to have a facility such as this on your doorstep, is fantastic. It is also terrific for people who have never tried indoor climbing before, because there are walls to try for beginners as well as more experienced climbers, and there is also such a great, friendly community feel about the centre." Climbing, Amy says, is great for a cardiovascular work-out, increasing strength and mobility. "I am also a runner and a session at The Coliseum is every bit as beneficial as a 5-mile run, and you don't have to worry about what the weather is like outside either!"

The Coliseum is open seven days a week from early morning to late in the evening, and there are a variety of packages for users to choose from ranging from a full annual membership scheme to a single session payment. There are also plenty of opportunities to learn how to climb the different walls – all of which have been given Roman-themed names in keeping with The Coliseum branding – in a safe and enjoyable way with the centre's team of qualified coaches who are all passionate climbers. For example, there are three different levels of Bouldering Essentials' courses from beginners upwards, while one-to-one sessions can be booked with one of the coaching team.

There's a dedicated and exclusive kids' climbing room for Under 8 'Mini Gladiators' while eight to 11 years old dubbed as 'Centurions' and the over 12 'Emperors' can climb the main centre walls under supervision. Children's birthday parties are also catered for with youngsters attending being able to enjoy a free climbing session in the kids' room or the main centre.

"Our whole approach is to ensure users make the most of our facilities safely and enjoyably," said Matty. "Importantly, we have also created 27 new full and part-time jobs in Morpeth.

"What we have done is to bring something totally different to Morpeth as well as attracting people into the town from all over the area. We are also very proud of the fact that we have given a new lease of life to a building which this year will mark its 100th anniversary of playing such an important role in the social and recreational life in Morpeth since the Coliseum cinema first began screening films way back in 1926."

This is a snapshot of what some reviewers have said about the Coliseum.

'Such a well-thought-out bouldering wall with a great set of walls to climb'

'The kids' area is epic and the hot chocolate is amazing'

'Never been bouldering before so thought I would give it a go. Instructor was very supportive and explained the techniques really well'

'The staff are all very friendly and the overall atmosphere is warm and welcoming'

'Great to have a bouldering centre of this standard in Northumberland'

'Everything you could want from a bouldering gym'

More information about The Coliseum is available by visiting: thecoliseum.co.uk



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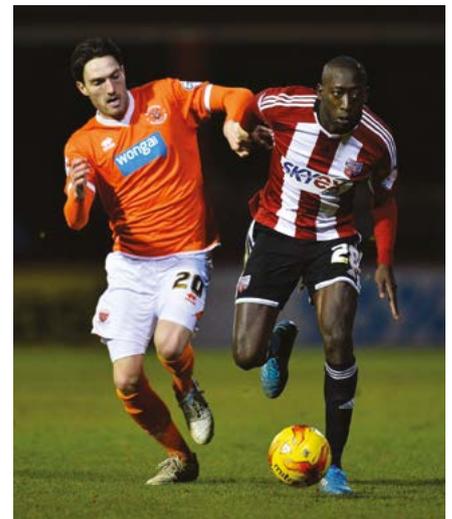
Connor Oliver's path from professional football to financial services reflects a rare blend of discipline, foresight, and adaptability. Before founding Olivers Financial in Morpeth, he navigated the unpredictable world of professional sport - a career where planning ahead isn't optional, and resilience is essential. The lessons learned on the pitch - strategic thinking, preparation, and long-term vision - now underpin the firm's approach to financial planning.

Since its inception, Olivers Financial has guided clients from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, offering clarity and confidence in personal and business finance. Connor and his team focus on solutions that are practical and understandable, empowering clients to make informed decisions whether they are growing a business, supporting a family, or planning for the future.

Firmly rooted in Morpeth, Olivers Financial has expanded its reach across the UK, advising clients from London to Edinburgh and everywhere in between. This combination of local expertise and nationwide capability ensures that every client receives advice tailored to their circumstances, without losing the personal, relationship-driven approach that defines the firm.

Morpeth itself embodies ambition and enterprise, qualities mirrored in Olivers Financial's ethos. The firm helps individuals and businesses remove uncertainty, plan strategically, and pursue their goals with confidence. By blending Connor Oliver's personal values with professional expertise, Olivers Financial bridges the gap between local presence and national service.

Connor's career change is a testament to a simple truth: success isn't about avoiding change - it's about anticipating it and planning effectively. Through Olivers Financial, he has transformed the lessons of sport into a framework for financial security and growth, helping clients across the UK turn ambition into achievement.



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E. **oliversfinancial@sjpg.co.uk**

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Helping more children enjoy the lifelong love of reading

Maximize Education is helping more children across Northumberland develop a lifelong habit of reading as part of its commitment to improving literacy and educational outcomes.

The organisation, which provides alternative education provision five days a week for students from across Northumberland, as well as private evening tuition, is proudly supporting the National Literacy Trust's National Year of Reading 2026 — a UK-wide campaign designed to inspire children to begin reading early and make it part of their everyday lives.

Based at Telford Court in Loansdean, Morpeth, Maximize Education has launched two key initiatives to support the campaign.

CEO Christine Jamieson has invited budding authors to submit a 500-word children's story as part of an exciting competition. The winning story will be beautifully illustrated, professionally printed, and distributed to schools across Northumberland. It will also be showcased at the Morpeth Book Festival on Saturday 21st at 10am in Morpeth Library.

The competition will be one of the highlights of the festival, organised by Greater Morpeth Development Trust and Northumberland Libraries.

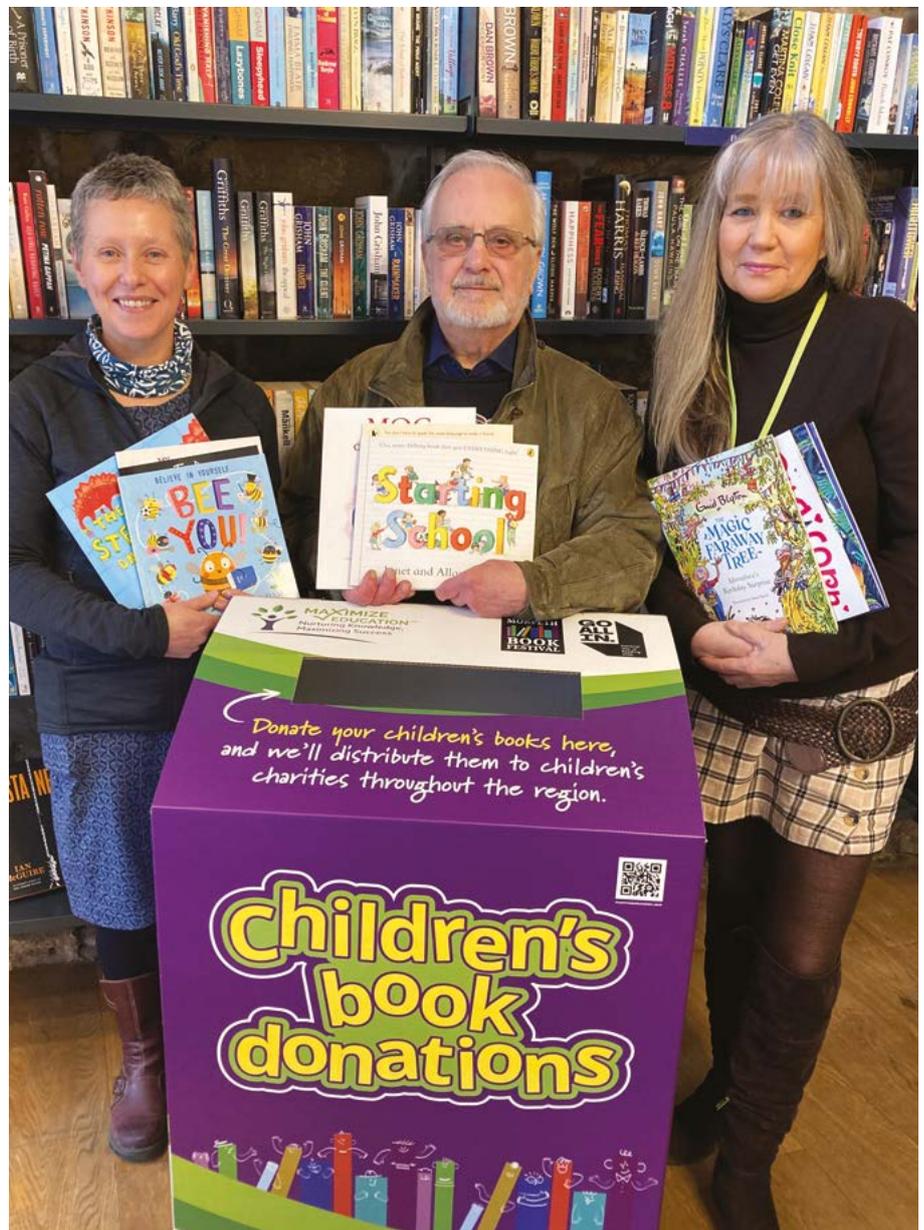
In addition, Maximize Education has launched a community-wide appeal encouraging schools in the Morpeth area and festival attendees to donate new or excellent-condition children's books. Donations can also be made at a collection box in Tesco in Kingston Park.

Books may include unwanted gifts, stories children have outgrown, or brand-new titles — all of which will be gifted to disadvantaged children who may not otherwise have access to books.

All donations will be distributed through Children North East, a charity delivering services and support to children, young people and families, which opened its flagship shop in Morpeth in 2025.

Christine said: "The North East faces significant levels of child deprivation, which can create barriers to children learning to read before they start school. We want to help address this challenge so that more children have equal access to reading and education.

"Children growing up in poverty often have fewer books at home and limited access to enrichment activities such as



Assistant shop manager Tracy Thompson, Book Festival Director Frank Rescigno and Maximize Education CEO Christine Jamieson

libraries, tutoring or extracurricular programmes. Developing early reading skills expands vocabulary, sparks imagination and strengthens school readiness, giving children a stronger foundation when they begin their education."

Maximize Education offers alternative and supplementary education provision across Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3, GCSE, A Level, undergraduate, postgraduate and adult learning.

Christine and her team are now preparing

to welcome students seeking support with GCSEs and A-Levels. Last year saw exceptional results, with 100% of A-Level students securing places at their first-choice university with grades meeting or exceeding their required offers. At GCSE level, 85% of students achieved Grade 4 or above.

Whether students require exam preparation or subject-specific support, the service adapts to individual needs, helping each learner achieve their academic goals.



Victorian re-enactors at the re-opening of Morpeth railway station

'Can you help us make sure Morpeth really is such a happy place to live?'

Two recent surveys – one by none other than The Times newspaper – ranked Morpeth as the happiest place in Northumberland as well as one of the best places to live in the whole of the North of England, writes Editor **Ian Leech**.

Their findings were based not just on the history and heritage of the town; its excellent selection of new and existing housing; its unique shopping mix ranging from the independents to national chains; the acknowledged quality of local schools; the unrivalled choice of places to eat, have a drink or a cup of coffee; or that the green open spaces and river path walks of Carlisle Park are literally a stone's throw away from the town centre.

Both surveys also took-into account, that the attractiveness of Morpeth is not just about its bricks and mortar, or the natural beauty of its setting, but the fact that there's so much to do no matter what your interests, or that so many people, groups and organisations between them do so much work behind the scenes as it were, to ensure that that town's wonderful community spirit continues to shine through to justify that top spot happy place ranking for local residents and visitors.

For more than two decades one of the prime movers behind the drive to make sure Morpeth is such a great place to live, work and visit, has been Greater Morpeth Development Trust, or GMDT for short. The Trust was established as a community-led organisation, to deliver what was known as the Castle, Woods and Water project aided by £2.6 million of Government funding, to enhance and increase accessibility to some six miles of the River Wansbeck valley either side of Morpeth from Mitford to Bothal.

Since those early days, however, GMDT's brief has been widened and expanded to do so much to phenomenally contribute to making the town the place it is today.

For instance, GMDT has brought well over £10 million worth of funding and investment into Morpeth across a whole range of activities and projects, money that very likely would have not have been secured without the Trust's intervention.

That money has supported stand-out projects to breathe new life into two of Morpeth's iconic buildings, both Grade II Listed. The first was the Town Hall designed in 1714 by Sir John Vanbrugh of Blenheim Palace, Castle Howard and locally Delaval Hall fame, and the second was Morpeth Railway Station, designed by the Victoria railway architect Benjamin Green and opened in 1847. Both major refurbishments were commissioned and project-managed by GMDT, which was led at the time by its now retired Chief Executive David Lodge.

Both were massive projects for the Trust to take on board and deliver in association with partners such as the

Heritage Lottery Fund, and with regard to the station Northumberland County Council, the Railway Heritage Trust, Network Rail and Northern trains.

It is probably very fair to say, that without GMDT's contribution, determination to raise the necessary funds and then see through the repair and refurbishment work, neither of those projects would actually have happened.

But, GMDT has done so much more for Morpeth over the past 20-odd years, through the work of four different groups, all headed by a volunteer director, covering the Arts & Culture, the Environment, Heritage and the Community. For instance, more than 10 years ago GMDT brought the cinema back to Morpeth using grant-funded equipment, for monthly film night screenings in the St James' Centre, Wellway.



Picnic in the Park entertainer



KEVI students with a GMDT-inspired information board

The Trust regularly brought to Morpeth popular productions from the award-winning Northumberland Theatre Company.

It has supported the publication of seven spell-binding books by local author Bridgett Gubbins which tell of Morpeth's 1,000-year history, and, of course authors' evenings led to GMDT now organising the hugely popular Morpeth Book Festival in partnership with Northumberland Libraries, which we preview elsewhere in this edition of Inside Morpeth.

The one glaring omission from Morpeth's facilities is a theatre and arts centre, and right now GMDT is working in partnership with other like-minded individuals, groups and organisations, looking into the viability and feasibility of achieving that goal.

At the same time, however, Greater Morpeth Development Trust says it has reached a crossroads in its on-going story to play its part in community life in Morpeth, and, in particular, it is looking for new people with fresh ideas, drive, enthusiasm and energy to help take it forward over the next few years.

Three of the current GMDT Board – Frank Rescigno, Dai Richards and Lyn Robson – have been telling me why they became involved with the Trust, and why it is so vitally important to attract some recruits to support its work.

Frank is an American by birth who came to Morpeth with his family in 1989 when he began work for a division of Kodak International for Eastman Fine Chemicals in Newcastle. “We very early discovered that Morpeth was one of the best places to live, not just in the region but the whole of England,” he said. “So, in early 2000 when I came to retire, there was never a doubt that Morpeth was the place to stay after I retired.”

“I had always been interested in the arts so I joined the then Morpeth & District Arts' Trust, which has been established in the late 1990s to try and establish a theatre in the town after the last cinema closed. Later, when GMDT was formed the two merged and for the past twenty years I have been its Director of Arts & Culture. Now, however, it is time for someone new with fresh ideas and drive, to take over.

“It has been such a pleasure to be involved with the Trust – and I will continue to do so – at a time when it has achieved so much for Morpeth. It is a wonderful opportunity for new people with perhaps a little time on their hands, to join us hopefully as a Board Member, to contribute whatever professional skills, knowledge or special interests they may have, to make a genuine difference to our Morpeth community.”



GMDT's Frank Rescigno with BBC broadcasting legend James Naughtie

Dai Richards created the Morpeth Litter Group in 2018 after being so annoyed at the scale of littering when out walking his dog. “I was able to call upon volunteers from GMDT to help swell the numbers of our Litter Group for our inaugural blitz and it just grew from there,” said Dai. “Now we have more than 120 regulars helping keep Morpeth clean and tidy!”

Four years later Dai took over as the Trust's Environment Director, a role he is now combining with that of being GMDT's Vice-Chair. Since then he has started the signage upgrade work in partnership with KEVI Year 12 students, a project which continues to grow with many new information signs planned across Morpeth and it is worth noting that the scheme recently won a Love Northumberland award. The group has also supported former Environment Director Hugh Edmondson's project to create a new garden in front of the railway station, while at its rear, more volunteers have planted thousands of bulbs to create a spectacular spring floral show.

Last year, GMDT's Environment group also worked in partnership with Northumberland Libraries, to adopt neglected beds down the side of the new leisure centre, which Dai says they hope to turn into a pleasant area where people can walk along and sit in front of the river. For 2026, he will be promoting an adopt a post scheme. “But, we are always keen to hear about any new ideas from people, for us to look at, and it would also be wonderful if they were able to help us deliver those ideas,” he said.

Lyn Robson, who was born and grew up in Morpeth, first got involved with GMDT by chance. As she says, she stopped and talked to a Trust volunteer manning its stall at Morpeth Fair Day. “We got talking and I realised that a lot of things that had



GMDT Director Lyn Robson – passionate about Morpeth

happened or were happening in Morpeth, were being done by GMDT not local authorities or private organisations,” she said. “So, I volunteered to help out and have now become a Board Member for the Community brief.

“What you find with GMDT is everyone involved with it as a board member or volunteer, is passionate about Morpeth – it's history and heritage, the environment all around town – with a desire to develop and improve it for future generations. But we need people to join the Board who feel they can contribute in some way, to help GMDT continue doing its good work and build upon all the positive projects and developments that have gone before.

“What they could get out of being involved with the Trust is a great deal of satisfaction knowing that they are helping make a difference, even in a small way, to preserve and develop this great town of ours for the future.”

Dai Richards summed up the situation when he said: “GMDT gives people the opportunity to make a difference to life in our town and we don't want to lose that. But, we need more people to join us to make that happen.

“Over the last year or two, Morpeth has been recognised by people outside of the town, as a great place to live, work and visit with a marvellous sense of community. The Trust has massively helped to create that situation! Which is why right now we need more people to come forward either as a Board Member or a volunteer, to take the Trust forward for the good of everyone in Morpeth. They will not regret becoming involved with GMDT!”

Anyone with new ideas, energy, and the enthusiasm and commitment to Morpeth, who would be interested in joining GMDT either as a Board Member or volunteer, can contact Greater Morpeth Development Trust for more information, through its gmdt.net website or by emailing info@gmdt.org



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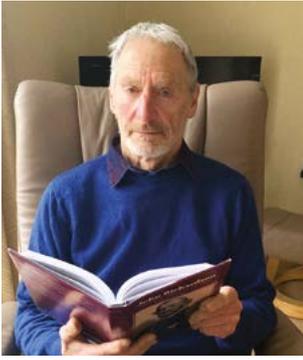
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David Hilton from Morpeth research into his ancestor poet

Memories of a Lakeland poet and ancestor

Retired teacher and college lecturer David Hilton from Morpeth has undertaken what he calls a 'labour of love' to document and pay tribute to the lifelong work of a distant ancestor called John Richardson, renowned as one of the most respected and genuine Cumbrian poets and raconteurs of his time, **writes Ian Leech.**

The result of his work which began as long ago as 1968 when he was a mature student at Lancaster University, is a painstakingly researched and compiled book he has published about the life and times, the poetry and prose of John Richardson who was born in 1817 in the hamlet of Saint John's in the Vale nestling at the foot of the Lakeland fells.

Some of our readers will know Saint John's in the Vale as a quiet corner of the Lake District sometimes use as a shortcut from the Penrith junction of the M6 on to the road to Thirlmere, Grasmere, Ambleside and Windermere, without having to drive through Keswick.

To John Richardson, however, it was home from the moment he was born until he died 68 years later; somewhere he would have known every square inch of from its fells to its fields, its woods and forests, streams and becks. One of seven children born to parents Daniel and Mary, as a young boy he followed in the footsteps of his 'waller' father who was skilled in the traditional Lake District art of building the dry-stone walls which still criss-cross the landscape into a patchwork of fields where livestock graze.

As he grew older, John developed his skills beyond dry-stone walling to become a master mason. He rebuilt the tiny chapel thought to date back to the 1500s, standing just 300 yards from the cottage where he was born and raised, as well as the vicarage and school where he himself had been taught. That old school building is now a youth centre.

Later John would build more properties including a fine terrace of houses in Keswick which have now been converted into popular holiday-lets. When the heavy, manual work was too burdensome John became the teacher at the local school where he was taught as a boy and

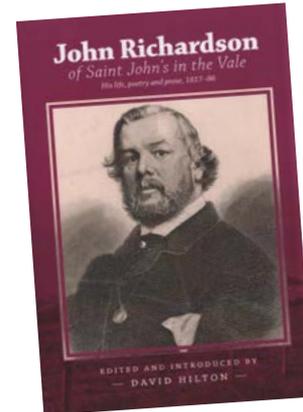
would subsequently rebuild.

Today, however, John Richardson is remembered as more than a dry-stone waller, mason and schoolmaster. A scholarly man, he had a passionate interest in writing poetry and prose, very often written in the vernacular of his beloved Cumbria. At the time he was living and working in Saint John's in the Vale – he never used the abbreviated St. in his writings – a few miles away around the village of Grasmere, a group of friends, inspired by the beauty of the landscape all around them, were establishing a reputation for themselves as the 'Lake Poets.'

William Wordsworth, his sister Dorothy, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southy, would make a lasting impact on the English language. For example, a generation ago, most primary schoolchildren would have been able to recite the opening lines of William Wordsworth's best-known poem when he writes of wandering 'lonely as a cloud' before marvelling at a 'host of golden daffodils'.

John Richardson was never associated with the 'Lake Poets' society, but in his own way his work was just as significant, because he was a genuine Cumbrian-poet writing in the words spoken every day by his Lake District companions and compatriots, rather than in English then having the words transcribed back into the local dialect. A little like the pitmatic language once spoken in a score of pits and mining villages around Northumberland, the words were very peculiar but specific to the part of the world he grew up in.

For example, in a poem said to be based in his courtship of his wife Grace, John Richardson wrote:-



Ya winter neet: I mind it weel.
Oor lads 'ad been at t'fell,
An' bein' tir', went seun to bed
An' I sat be messel
I hard a jike on t'window pane,
An deftly went to see;
Bit when I ax't "Who's jiken theer?"
Says t'chap, "Its nobbut me!"

"The book reflects so many years research and compilation by myself, and I think it is a fascinating insight into the folklore of both the locality and the wider region, as seen or recounted, sometimes with considerable humour and poetic licence, by one of the most significantly, genuinely Cumbrian poets of his time," said David.

David who was born and grew up in Carlisle, has lived in Morpeth with his family since 1986 when he was appointed as a teacher and lecturer at Kirkley Hall College near Ponteland, is still a keen and experienced walker of the Lakeland fells. Writing his book, he says, has been a real 'labour of love' but also a great honour and privilege to write about a true Lake District Dalesman whose work remains a valuable resource for anyone interested in the social history, the culture and traditions of a place he knew and loved, so well.

John Richardson of Saint John's in the Vale – His life, poetry and prose Edited and introduced by David Hilton can be ordered on line or purchased from booksellers on demand.



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Joules clothing blends British heritage with contemporary style, offering vibrant, high-quality pieces for men, women and children. Known for its distinctive prints, premium fabrics and attention to detail, Joules delivers effortless style with a fresh seasonal update for Spring 2026.

The Joules Spring 2026 collection embraces lighter layers, uplifting colour palettes and refined everyday essentials across menswear, womenswear and childrenswear.

For men, the range focuses on transitional dressing with soft-touch knits, breathable overshirts, classic polos and updated tailoring. Heritage-inspired prints sit alongside fresh seasonal tones, creating versatile pieces that work from relaxed weekends to smarter spring occasions.

The women's Spring 2026 collection combines timeless femininity with modern ease. Expect flowing midi dresses,

lightweight jackets, elevated everyday denim and beautifully detailed blouses. Soft florals, subtle stripes and fresh pastels define the season, designed for effortless styling as the days grow brighter.

For children, the new season brings playful prints, practical layering pieces and durable fabrics made for adventure. From cosy sweatshirts to cheerful dresses and easy-wear separates, the collection balances comfort, colour and everyday practicality.

Made to help you enjoy every moment of the season in style, discover the Joules Spring 2026 collection at RUTHERFORD & Co.



JOULES

Spring 2026



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Monday - Saturday 09:30 - 17:30

King honours Barry with an MBE

Here at Inside Morpeth we are delighted to report that King Charles honoured our good friend **Barry Mead** with an MBE in his new Year's Honours' List, reports Editor **Ian Leech**, for his services to heritage and archaeology.

Bedfordshire-born Barry who is one of Luton Town's most fervent supporters, moved to the North East more than 20 years ago, to take up the appointment of curator at Woodhorn Church Museum. Despite our best efforts we have not yet persuaded him to switch allegiance and become a Newcastle United supporter!

Later, when Woodhorn Colliery Museum opened, Barry moved there where he was passionately involved in developing it into a premium North East mining museum.

Since then, Barry has been the driving force in rescuing the 14th Century Cresswell Pele Tower in the village where he lives, from total dereliction and preserving it as a living relic from the days when marauding gangs of the notorious Border Reivers roamed the area. The project to save the tower was so successful that it was removed from the English Heritage 'At Risk' national register of buildings.

Barry and his team of volunteers, then moved on to transforming the adjoining walled garden that was once attached to

the Cresswell Hall stately home. The near-overgrown garden is now open to the public as a tranquil and beautifully kept open space in the village.

Over nearly 50 years, Barry has devoted so much of his time to helping out at archaeological digs, notably lately on sites around Northumberland, work which earned him the title of Community Archaeologist of the Year in 2018. A year later he was named as one of the country's Local Legends during celebrations to mark the 25th anniversary of the National Lottery.

Knowing Barry from our days as colleagues and friends at Wansbeck Council, being awarded the MBE by His Majesty the King, is richly deserved recognition for all the work he has done, and we send him our heartiest congratulations.

Despite everything else he does, as our picture shows, Barry still found time to dress up as a wartime spy during a Heritage Open Day recalling life in an around Cresswell during the war!



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SCAN BELOW TO START YOUR FREE CHECK



Time to come out of hibernation!

Spring is here - well almost - which means its time for gardens and their gardeners to start coming out of hibernation after the long cold, and dark, days of winter and look forward to a bit of warming sun on your back!

One of the first things to do at this time of the year is to take stock not just of the plants and shrubs in the borders and beds, but also the tools and equipment needed to keep the garden looking spic and span right throughout the summer.

Have a look at what might need renewing or indeed, is missing from the garden shed, and if you need a helping hand then there's no better place to go than the Robson & Cowan Country Store in Scots' Gap, just a short and pleasant drive west of Morpeth, to get just what you need. Whether that's small hand digging trowels, a spade or rake, right up to the latest mowers and cutters, then Robson & Cowan have you covered!

These days there's so much available to do the jobs so well, and also to take a lot of



the backache out of tasks such as mowing lawns and trimming hedges.

Nowadays, there's such a wide choice of petrol or battery-powered mowers and cutters - even ones that do the job for you without having to even lift a finger! The store is a leading stockist of garden machinery from specialists such as Husqvarna, Honda and Stihl, including sit-on mowers for the larger areas of grass. But, if you want to sit back, relax and watch the job being done for you, Robson & Cowan can supply a choice of Husqvarna Automowers which rank as

the global leaders in robotic mowing. They can advise, supply and install just the right robotic mower for any garden, to not only effortlessly cut the grass but make it stronger and healthier too. The result - a perfect looking lawn every time!

Right-now battery-operated garden machines are becoming increasingly popular with advances in technology making them so much easier and quicker, to re-charge ready for use again, with no worries about cutting through trailing electric cables.

Robson & Cowan offer an unrivalled after-care service for garden machinery, and they will deliver equipment too bulky for new owners to take home themselves.

The store also always has in stock an extensive range of conventional garden tools, hoses, wheelbarrows and garden furniture, plus the widest choice of composts and feeds for flower beds and lawns. In fact, everything gardeners need to make sure their gardens stay looking their very best until those long-off dark days of winter return.

Why not pop in and have a browse, a warm welcome awaits!

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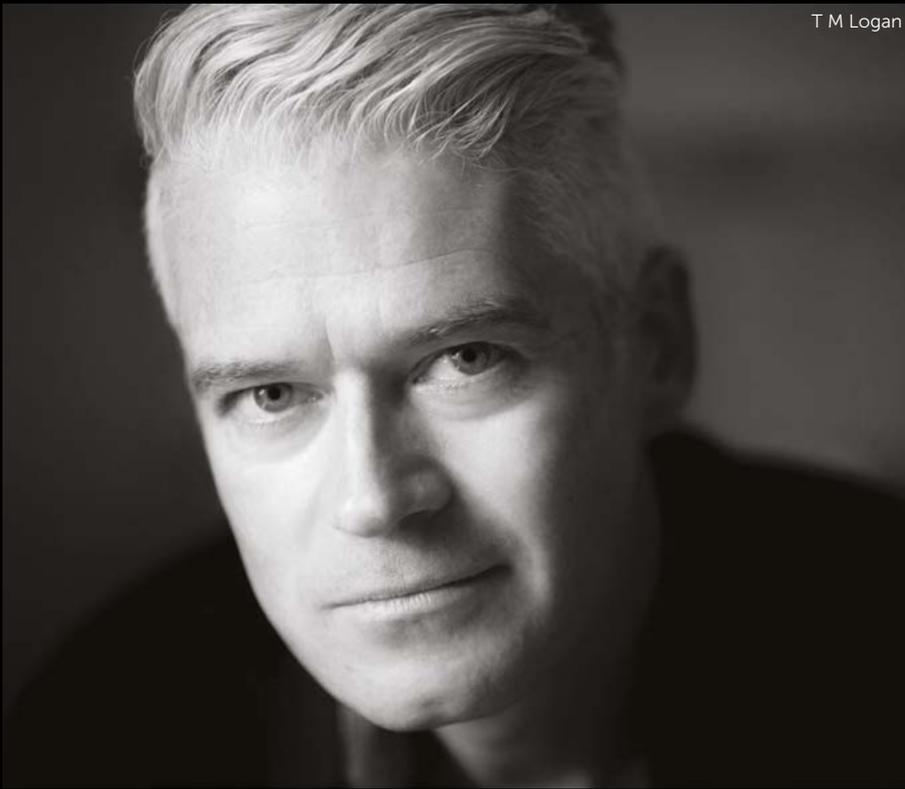
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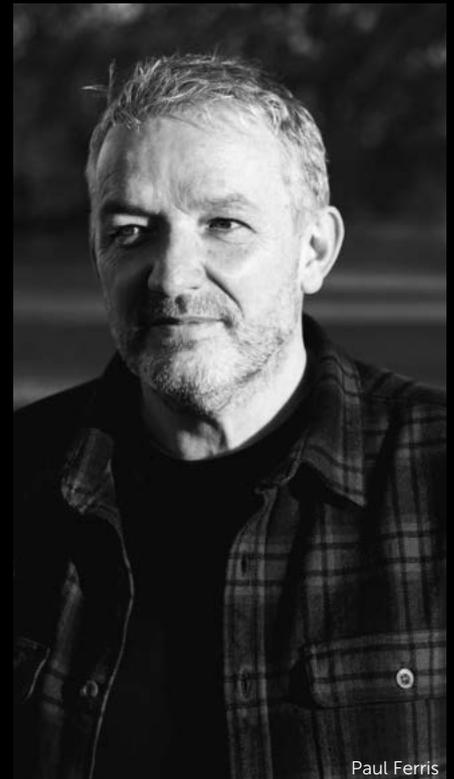
T M Logan



Tim Hodgetts

'We'd love to see you at Morpeth Book Festival' says Mari Hannah!

Not long to wait now for this spring's Morpeth Book Festival... and what a Weekend of Words it promises to be! Saturday and Sunday March 21st and 22nd are the main weekend dates, but two days earlier – Thursday 19th – there's also the chance to hear former Newcastle United starlet Paul Ferris talk about his 18 years' involvement with the Toon **writes Ian Leech.**



Paul Ferris



The festival is the fourth to be organised by Greater Morpeth Development Trust and Northumberland Libraries, and will be staged at four different venues in the town – St George’s Church, Morpeth Library, The Chantry and Morpeth Rugby Club.

And what a line-up of top authors over so many varying genres of writing, the organisers have pulled together for Morpeth’s avid readers to enjoy!

Celebrity journalists and TV presenters Steph McGovern and Sally Magnusson; former Labour Party stalwart, Health Minister and Home Secretary Alan Johnson; thriller writer T M Logan, two of whose books have been adapted as hugely popular television series; retired Major General Tim Hodgetts who was the Army’s top medic in charge of field hospitals in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts; the legendary Scottish author and broadcaster Alistair Moffat; Hugh Mitford Raymond, the last surviving descendant of the infamous Mitford family; the crime-writing trio B A Paris, Trevor Wood and Guy Mopuss; footballer-turned-barrister and company boss Paul Ferris; and ex-MP, diarist, justice campaigner, author and raconteur Chris Mullin, will all be at the festival along with local writers Bridgett Gubbins and Alan Wilkinson.

Speaking of the festival, its patron and North East crime writing queen Mari Hannah told me that the event is ‘a must’ in her diary every year. “Since its inaugural event it has been a joy to watch Morpeth become such 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,” she said.

“I am confident that whatever your tastes in books, we have you covered. We’d love to see you there,” added Mari who will be talking with Steph McGovern about her debut novel ‘Deadline’ as well as promoting her own latest novel ‘Her Sister’s Killer’ which a reviewer for The Times has described as ‘one of the best crime books of the year’.

Festival Director Frank Rescigno says the organisers are confident that they have assembled perhaps the best collection of authors to have visited the Morpeth event. Over the past four years, he said, Morpeth has established a reputation as one of the best book festivals in the region, in no small way thanks to the support of local business such as Zonic Holdings Ltd, Maximise Education and Rutherford’s department store.

“We are also fortunate to have a wonderful team of volunteers without whose support we simply would not be able to run the festival,” he said, adding: “This year promises to be a great event and we hope to see lots of Morpeth people there.”

All the authors will be available to sign copies of their books after their talks, with book sales being provided by Waterstones Morpeth on the day of the events.

Tickets – all at £10 - for the festival events are now available from:- www.ticketsource.co.uk/morpeth-book-festival; Greater Morpeth Development Trust at www.gmdt.net; and The Chantry TIC Morpeth

The full Morpeth Book Festival programme

THURSDAY 19 MARCH MORPETH RUGBY CLUB

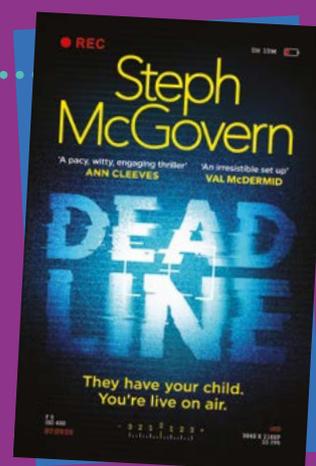
Paul Ferris ex-Newcastle United footballer - 7.30pm

At the age of 16 Paul Ferris arrived at St James’ Park from his boyhood home in Belfast, with the football world as his feet. Hailed as the new George Best, Paul was living the dream. He became the youngest player to ever don a first-team shirt – he still holds that record today – playing alongside his schoolboy idol Kevin Keegan. Just as his career was beginning it was tragically wrecked in a training ground accident. Unable to play again Paul re-trained as a physiotherapist, working under Keegan when he managed the early 1990’s team dubbed ‘The Entertainers’. Later, Paul studied to become a barrister, before being invited by his good pal Alan Shearer, to join his back-room team during his short-lived spell as the Toon’s manager. Paul, who has recovered from two life-threatening illness, now runs a sports’ business as well as being the author of three highly acclaimed books about his life and career. At the festival he will introduce his latest book – Once Upon A Toon – when he writes about Keegan, Shearer, Sir Bobby Robson, Jack Charlton, Paul Gascoigne and those ‘Entertainers’ – Beardsley, Waddle, Ferdinand, Ginola, Albert, Lee, Clarke and many others. Paul knows the inside story of the early Eighties team with Keegan and Terry MacDonald; the ‘Entertainers’ of the early Nineties; and the eight-game spell when Shearer was manager – because he was there all three times!

SATURDAY 21 MARCH St GEORGE’S CHURCH, MORPETH

Hugh Mitford Raymond reveals the history of the Mitfords - 10am to 11am

For nigh on 1,000 years the extraordinary Mitford family were the lords of the manor of the sprawling estate on the outskirts of Morpeth, which bears their family name. They built the now-ruined Mitford Castle, the village church, and their stately family home in the estate grounds. Over generations they were landowners and philanthropists; writers, historians and travellers; activists and controversially fascist associates of Adolf Hitler. The notoriously outrageous Mitford Sisters of the Thirties, were even featured in a six-part television series about their lives. For those who want to know more about the Mitfords, there’ll be the chance at the festival to learn all about them from an insider – South African-born Hugh Mitford Raymond, the last descendant of the family line. Hugh – a racehorse trainer and breeder, writer and broadcaster – will reveal all in his talk The Mitford Family – Nearly 1,000 Years of History.



Steph McGovern in conversation with Mari Hannah – 11.30am to 12.30pm

Award-winning presenter and journalist Steph McGovern has worked in journalism for 20 years, eight of them as part of the BBC Breakfast programme team. She has had her own BAFTA-nominated television chat show; presented a podcast with ITV’s political editor Robert Peston, and recently fronted the Crimewatch programme. Steph will chat with Mari Hannah about her debut novel Deadline, which tells the story of an early-morning breakfast television presenter who live on air is told that her daughter has been kidnapped and to follow instructions if she ever wants to see her again!

Sally Magnusson in conversation with Edward Bindloss – 3pm to 4pm

Journalist, television and radio programme presenter and acclaimed author Sally, was almost always destined for such a career being the daughter of Mastermind's Magnus Magnusson and Scottish newspaper reporter Mamie Baird. Growing up in a household filled with stories, she began her career on The Scotsman before moving into television and radio to present flagship BBC programmes. Sally has written many factual books as well as four novels. At the festival she will talk about her recently published book

'The Shapeshifter's Daughter', which she says was inspired by the tales her father used to tell about Norse myths and legends from his homeland of Iceland. The book combines two related threads - the story of 50-something Helen who returns to the island after 40 years away, to live out her terminal cancer diagnosis, with the myth of Hel, the Norse Goddess of the underworld. Hel tries to deliver a message, while Helen is simply looking for some peace in her final days. Things don't quite work out the way either expected!

B A Paris, Trevor Wood and Guy Morpuss in a crime writers' Q & A – 1pm to 2pm

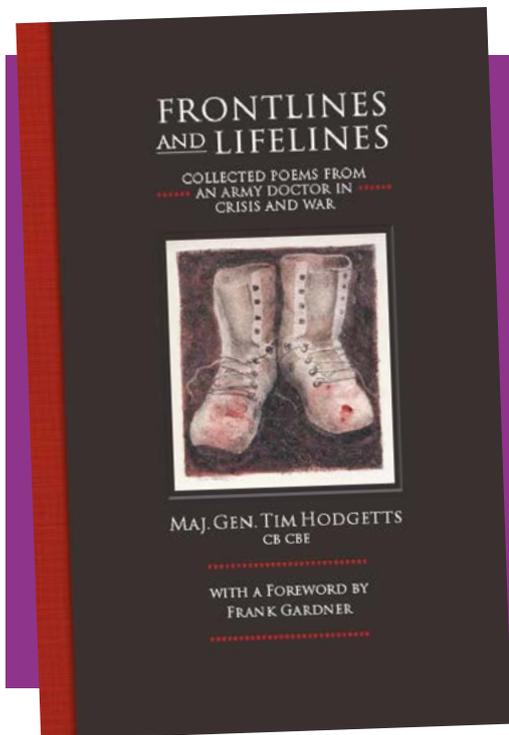
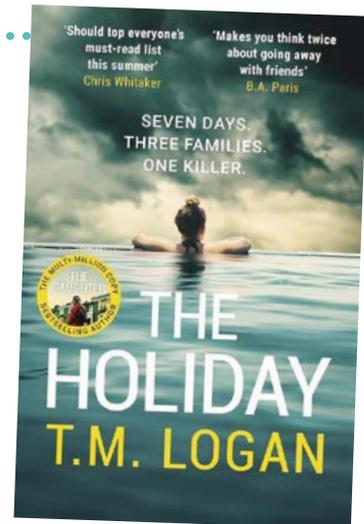
This trio of authors will take audience questions about crime-writing and answer questions about their own work. B A Paris is a New York Times and Sunday Times best-selling author who has sold more than seven million copies of her books; Trevor Wood an award-winning writer of gritty North East-based novels; and Guy Morpuss, a barrister-turned author of legal, courtroom drama thrillers.

T M Logan in conversation with Gerry Foley - 4.30pm to 5.30pm

Festival organisers are delighted to have pulled off another authors' coup by securing a visit to Morpeth by one of the most-read thriller writers of the day. Former national newspaper journalist before turning novelist, T M Logan has sold more than three million copies of his books in the UK which have also been published in translation in 22 countries around the world. Six of his page-turning novels have been Sunday Times bestsellers and two of them – The Holiday and The Catch – have been adapted as tv drama series. Six more are currently under option with various television

production companies! His latest book The Weekend, his tenth, has just been published and Tim will discuss it at the festival with interviewer Gerry Foley.

It tells the story of a group of friends who rent a converted farmhouse with little idea that the weekend could change the course of their lives forever. Before long, the six good friends find themselves sliding headlong into a world of deceit, treachery, betrayal and murder! None other than Lee Childs has described the book as 'Assured, compelling and hypnotically readable'.



Retired Major General Tim Hodgetts – 6pm to 7pm

When he retired from the Army after 40 years' service in frontlines such as Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Iraq (three tours of duty) and Afghanistan (two deployments) Tim Hodgetts was the highest-ranking medical officer in Britain's Armed Forces. In six different conflicts he was the medical director in field hospitals and trauma centres working alongside teams of doctors and nurses to save the lives of seriously injured young servicemen and women, who, in his own words, were experiencing 'the worst day of their lives'. Tim was so highly thought-of by his medical professional peers, that they described him as one of the most innovative and influential doctors of his generation when it came to dealing with mass casualties either in military and civilian trauma incidents. His way of coping with what he saw and had to deal with on a daily basis during his tours of duty, was to write poetry and many of his poems have been published in an anthology titled 'Frontlines and Lifelines'. The book is a moving recollection of those frontlines and in a foreword the respected BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner admits that Tim's powerful words often written very shortly after coming off shift in a field hospital, moved him to tears. Some of the poems have been set to music and at the Morpeth festival they will be sung by Eden Webley and the Wannie Liners Community Choir, while others will be read by KEVI students.

Elaine Cusack & Hannah Hoare – 2pm to 5pm

(At the Northern Poetry Library in Morpeth Library)

Elaine and Hannah are officers of the Business & IC Centre North East, and their job is to help local businesses to establish and thrive. Both are writers themselves so one of the favourite parts of their jobs is to support other local writers. At the festival they will run a free-to-attend Talking Business with Writers workshop divided into two sessions. The first will give budding writers an insight into different routes to help them achieve their goals and avoid the pitfalls. The workshop will conclude with Elaine and Hannah giving those attending the chance to share their stories or poems in an open-mic session, networking with one another, and asking questions of the couple.



Bridgett Gubbins



SATURDAY 21 MARCH AT THE CHANCERY, MORPETH

Bridgett Gubbins – 11am to 12 Noon

Morpeth author extraordinaire Bridgett Gubbins will talk about her latest book which has the intriguing title of 'My Mother and The Curate'. In her own inimitable way, Bridgett offers a snap shot of the lives over a ten-month period, of two people who lived 83 years apart in the village of Hay-on-Wye. Those two were her mother Eileen Ashton and the Reverend Francis Kilvert, the curate at the local church. Using extracts drawn from their personal diaries, Bridgett builds up a picture of their daily lives in the gorgeous countryside of the Welsh Borders, and their shared love of life generations apart in an idyllic rural community. The session promises the chance to share the legacy of two lives beautifully intertwined!

Alan Wilkinson – 3pm to 4pm

What is success for a writer? Is it money or is it fame? Or could it be something less tangible, but just as sweet? When North East writer Alan Wilkinson quit work to follow his dream he was inspired by American authors such as John Steinbeck, Henry David Thoreau and Jack Kerouac. Forty years on, he decided to hit the road again and in 'A Measure of Success' he takes his readers on a coast-to-coast rollercoaster pilgrimage across the USA to see how his career compares to those of his heroes. In an attempt to survive whilst writing, Alan took whatever jobs paid the bills including ghosting memoirs for among others an international dope smuggler, Britain's only bounty hunter, a cricketer and a retired cop! At the festival Alan will discuss his recently published account of his pilgrimage across the States and its underlying quest – what is the nature of success?

SUNDAY 22 MARCH ST GEORGE'S CHURCH MORPETH

Alan Johnson – 1pm to 4pm

Alan Johnson was one of the so-called 'Big Beasts' of the Labour Party during the Tony Blair and Gordon Brown Governments. He served for 20 years as an MP, when he held some of the great offices of state including Home Secretary, Health Secretary, Education Secretary and President of the Board of Trade.

Outside Parliament Alan Johnson, who started his working life as a postman at the age of 18, is an acclaimed author. He has written four volumes of his memoirs – all under titles of songs by The Beatles; three well-received novels; and a series of publications about former Premier Ministers including Harold Wilson, who was twice PM in the Sixties and Seventies and led the Labour Party from 1963 to 1976. Alan's biography of Wilson was judged the best biography at the Westminster Book Awards.



Alistair Moffat – 2.30pm to 3.30pm

Alistair Moffat is not only a Scottish writing and broadcasting legend, but someone who knows what makes a good book festival! The former director of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, programme director and chairman of Scottish television, and a prolific author of books about his beloved homeland, Alistair was also one of the co-founders of the Borders Book Festival in Melrose.

This Morpeth Book Festival will see him return to the town to present his latest offering – a powerful history of 'The North Sea'.

In his book Alistair takes his readers on a sweeping journey from the white cliffs of Dover to the windswept monasteries on the remote islands of the east coast. He explores the lives of 'newcomers' such as the Romans, Saxons and Vikings; the ancient stone circles of the Orkneys; and the resilient communities of the places he visits, that they called home.

He also charts the rise of industries as diverse as whaling and fishing, to the more modern boom of North Sea oil and offshore wind farms. But, in essence, it is a story about how the North Sea shaped the area that we all now call home. Thanks to his unrivalled storytelling, Alistair Moffat will reveal the legacy of a book that connects past and present with lyrical power!

Chris Mullin – 4pm to 5pm

Last but by no means least, journalist, politician, Member of Parliament for Sunderland South for more than 20 years, justice campaigner, novelist and diarist, Chris Mullin will close the festival by talking about his book 'Error of Judgement: The Truth About the Birmingham Bombings'. The book is a compelling account of how Chris was one of the prominent campaigners in overturning what proved to be the wrongful convictions of six Irishmen jailed for the killings of 21 innocent people in the notorious Birmingham pub bombings of 1974 in which another 170 people were seriously injured. Chris, who now lives in the heart of rural Northumberland, was a popular speaker at last year's Morpeth Book Festival, which he says he much enjoyed. Afterwards, he said: "A lively interview; an excellent audience and a healthy number of books sold. What's not to like about Morpeth Book Festival!"





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Rock Choir – 6.45pm to 7.45pm

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<https://www.jasonarnupmusic.co.uk/>

Rugby Tournament

Northumberland RU VetFest Tournament – 6pm start

Wooden Spoon Raffle both days

Day 2 – Live Bands, Singers & Rugby

Saturday 2nd May 2pm to 11:30pm

Teddy King Big Band – 2pm to 4pm

Lou Coel & Local Musicians- 4.30pm to 8pm

The Andy Rayner Band - 8:45pm to 10.55pm

https://www.facebook.com/theandyraynerband/?_rd=1

Rugby - TBC

****This is a Family Festival & U18s are welcome both days till 9pm****

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The team at TMP Wealth Management has been reflecting on 20 years of providing bespoke face-to-face financial retirement planning and investment advice for individuals, families and businesses, not just in Morpeth but right around the UK.

What started as a small Practice involving just four people, including founders James Richfield and Peter Grieves, has grown exponentially over the past two decades to 28 dedicated advisors, financial planners and administrators who between them manage more than £500m of funds under management on behalf of 2,200 clients.

Between the team, they have a total of 465 years' experience in financial services – 211 of those years logged with the Practice, which was rebranded as TMP Wealth Management four years ago.

Founded in Newgate Street when James and Peter merged their two separate companies, The Morpeth Practice as the business was originally known, moved in 2007 into the 19th Century Appleby House, once the home of local businessman Alderman Alfred Appleby, prominently located at the Castle Square entrance into the town.

Since then, Peter told Inside Morpeth: "The Practice has grown to become arguably South East Northumberland's best kept secret in terms of a business success story."

From day one, the Practice has always been an appointed representative of St. James's Place Wealth Management, one of the country's largest financial institutions, listed on the London Stock Exchange as a FTSE top 100 company with £212bn (as at 30 Sept 2025) worth of assets under management.

As Peter says, Morpeth has always been at the heart of a business whose values have not changed since it was founded 20 years ago. "When James and I set up the Practice we had one vision in mind which was to deliver bespoke financial planning in the Morpeth community and beyond, whilst assuring our clients have a positive and memorable experience of their financial planning journey. Our clients are at the core of everything we do, so we take the time to get to know them, listen and learn about them, so we can plan together for the financial goals they want to achieve.

"Arguably, there has never been a more important time for individuals, families and businesses to utilise the soundest financial advice available to them, whether that be in planning for retirement or investing their money to

help them achieve the financial targets they have set themselves."

To ensure they have always been able to offer that sort of first-class financial planning service, James and Peter set out to attract, retain and develop the best financial advisors, planners and administrators they could possibly recruit, always with an eye on nurturing the industry's brightest stars of the future."

With their base in Morpeth, TMP Wealth Management takes pride in giving something back to the town, and currently is the primary sponsor of Morpeth Rugby Club, a sponsor of Morpeth Golf Club as well as supporting charities and worthy causes.

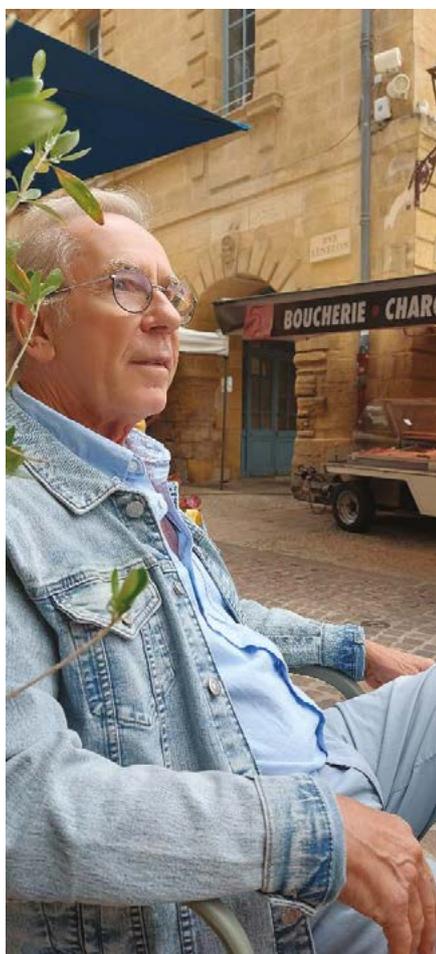
"Last year was a special year for us, being our 20th anniversary in business," said Peter. "James and I would be the first to say the Practice would not have achieved what it has without the loyal support of our many clients, and our dedicated team. Our plan now is to go from strength to strength over the next 20 years, continuing to help local people and businesses to achieve their financial goals to secure their futures."

The value of an investment with St. James's Place will be directly linked to the performance of the funds you select and the value can therefore go down as well as up.

TMP Wealth Management is an Appointed Representative of and represents only St. James's Place Wealth Management plc (which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority) for the purpose of advising solely on the Group's wealth management products and services, more details of which are set out on the Group's website www.sjp.co.uk/products. The 'St. James's Place Partnership' and the titles 'Partner' and 'Partner Practice' are marketing terms used to describe St. James's Place representatives. TMP Wealth Management is a trading name of TMP WM 2024 Ltd. SJP Approved 26/11/2025

Springtime in Lisbon

By **Miles W. Hewitt**
Inside Morpeth travel reporter



Spring is one of the best times to experience Lisbon — a season when the city basks in soft Atlantic light, jacarandas tint the avenues with violet blooms, and the hills are alive with the renewed energy of outdoor life. The winter drizzle retreats and Lisbon reawakens, revealing a capital that is equal parts old-world romance and sun-kissed coastal cool. For travellers seeking a soulful, sensory-rich escape, springtime in Lisbon offers a near-perfect balance of culture, food and leisurely wandering.

Lisbon, one of the oldest cities in Europe predating capitals like Rome and Paris, has a history stretching back 3,000 years. So, let's begin in the oldest neighbourhood, Alfama, where steep streets curl beneath washing lines and the scent of grilled sardines drifts from family-run taverns. Here, the Sé Cathedral rises from the stone like a weathered guardian. And the Miradouro de Santa Luzia offers the best aerial viewpoint across the classic terracotta rooftops sweeping down to the mighty Tagus River shimmering like molten metal.

Yellow trams rattle through the labyrinth of Alfama, but best experience it on foot following the rhythm of its rises and dips. Walk up to the Castelo de São Jorge, where peacocks strut along the ancient ramparts. Flowers bloom around the castle gardens adding colour to the old stone walls. In the distance, the red sweep of the 25 de Abril suspension bridge arches across the estuary with a confidence that mirrors the maritime legacy of Lisbon. Beneath it, the river widens dramatically, merging into the immense force of the Atlantic Ocean — a reminder of the long affiliation with voyagers and open horizons.

From the hilltops, go down into Baixa, the neoclassical downtown area rebuilt after the catastrophic earthquake of 1755. The broad avenues and orderly grid feel worlds apart from the intimate chaos of Alfama. Café tables crowd the pavements of Rua Augusta, musicians fill the air with guitar and accordion melodies, and the triumphant Arco da Rua Augusta frames a sky that is almost impossibly blue. Baixa is also the gateway to the Praça do Comércio, a grand square directly on the river, where Lisboetas begin their seasonal

ritual of lounging at waterfront cafés with a glass of Ginja — sour cherry liqueur — or a selection of world-famous Port wines from the Douro Valley.

If you crave a break from the city, spring is the ideal season for a coastal detour. A short train ride leads to Cascais, a seaside town with breezy promenades, rocky coves and sandy beaches. Closer still is the urban shoreline of Belém and Alcântara, where locals stake out spots beside the river, sipping cold beers as sailboats glide toward the Atlantic.

Night-time in Lisbon takes on a metropolitan vibrancy. Head to Bairro Alto or Príncipe Real where the aroma of grilled octopus and the fragrance of cinnamon-topped cocktails mingle with laughter. You will also find hearty dishes of bacalhau, salt cod, chouriço, smoked sausages and comforting caldo verde soup, a green broth. Not forgetting the Pastel de Nata, a custard tart in flaky pastry, considered a national icon, and a staple found in every bakery, bar and café in the country.

Following dinner, the Fado houses infuse the night with the melancholic beauty of traditional music.

An elderly fisherman told me: 'Fado cannot be explained, the ballads must be felt and experienced, it's irrelevant that you don't understand Portuguese.'

We descended into a cramped cellar bar with one fado singer supported by a 12-string, heart-shaped Portuguese guitar. The intensity of the music from this young woman pierced my heart. And it became evident from their expressions that the compact audience felt similar emotions. A stranger passed me a smartphone, on which displayed the lyrics in English, expressing themes of longing, nostalgia and the hardships of life.

The final ovation turned into a deafening request for the Portuguese guitarist to sing a particular song. He threw his hands up into the air, not wanting to take part, but they persisted. In spite of his reluctance, he took the microphone and the audience roared in support. His delivery brimming with passion. Gradually his demeanour became awkward and seemingly distressed. His voice faltered. In the final throes he collapsed onto the stage in a harrowing heap. The crowd surged forward, kissing and cuddling him in a universal show of empathy. The tears blurred my vision in the emotionally charged room.



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WHY PEOPLE CHOOSE A LIFETIME MORTGAGE... AND WHAT IT CAN MEAN IN RETIREMENT

By Joanne Manghan, North East Equity Release

When people first hear about Lifetime Mortgages (often known as Equity Release), they sometimes assume it's only for those who are struggling financially or "out of options". In reality, that's far from the full picture.

Today's later-life lending market has evolved. For some homeowners over 55, releasing a portion of the value tied up in their home can help support the lifestyle they want in retirement, without having to move home. For others, it's not the right choice, which is why balanced advice exists in the first place.

Below are two examples of customers I've helped recently that show how motivations can differ.

CASE STUDY 1: STAYING IN THE HOME YOU LOVE

A 72-year-old lady living near Morpeth got in touch to ask about borrowing a small amount. Her pension covered her bills but didn't stretch to holidays or simple outings. Like many in later life, most of her wealth was tied up in her home.

In her words: "Although I have some savings, I want to keep them for peace of mind, so I keep putting off booking a holiday. My friend suggested downsizing to help with my finances, but I love my home and garden, I have great neighbours and I just don't want to move home."

Rather than selling, she released £10,000 using a Lifetime Mortgage. It allowed her to book a long-planned trip to Lake Garda in Italy with her friend and set aside some funds for home repairs.

She wasn't in financial difficulty, she simply wanted to stay in the home she loves while enjoying retirement a little more.

CASE STUDY 2: TIME TO ENJOY, AND THE MEANS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

Another couple I worked with last year, both in their late 60s and recently retired, had a list of places they still wanted to see. Their pensions covered everyday living comfortably, but they wanted to make the most of the time they now had together.

They arranged a Lifetime Drawdown Mortgage, which provided a reserve of funds they could access when needed. Because interest only accrues on money released, they avoided borrowing more than required.

Their first decision was to book a retirement cruise to the Norwegian Fjords. Shortly after, they used some of the remaining facility to replace their conservatory roof in time for summer.

This wasn't impulsive spending, it was thoughtful planning. The husband summed it up:

"It's not about money, really. It's about time. We've got the time now, and we don't want to look back and wish we'd done more."

THE IMPORTANT BIT — IT'S NOT FOR EVERYONE

As Martin Lewis often points out, Lifetime Mortgages are not a one-size-fits-all solution. For some, downsizing, using other assets, or doing nothing is more suitable. That's why regulated advice exists, so decisions can be made at the right time, with full understanding.

Modern Lifetime Mortgages offer features such as optional interest payments, fixed rates for life, no-negative-equity guarantees, and consumer protections through the Equity Release Council and FCA regulation. However, suitability will always depend on personal circumstances, goals, family considerations and financial position.

Equity Release will reduce the value of your estate and could affect your entitlement to means-tested benefits.

FINAL THOUGHT

If you're starting to think about retirement, or simply wondering whether Equity Release might be worth exploring, you're not alone. For some people the answer is "yes", for others it's "no", and for many it's "not yet".

Whatever the outcome, the process always begins with a friendly conversation and the right information, so you can decide what is best for you.

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



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North East Equity Release

Joanne Manghan

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TOWN CRYER!

The latest News from Morpeth Town Council

Thanks for making Morpeth a great place to live, work and visit



As I write this for Inside Morpeth, I find myself reflecting on what has been a wonderfully eventful autumn and winter in our special town. Even as the days shortened and the temperatures dropped, the warmth of community spirit has shone brighter than ever.

Our Remembrance Sunday parade on 9th November was, as always, a deeply moving occasion. Led with great dignity by the Morpeth Pipe Band, the parade saw a marvellous turnout from residents, veterans, cadets and community groups. We were blessed with beautiful autumnal weather, which seemed fitting as we gathered to remember and honour those who have given so much for our country.

It was heartening to see so many generations represented, standing together in reflection and respect.

The festive season began in spectacular fashion on 15th November with the annual Christmas Light Switch On, organised by Morpeth Town Council. Thousands gathered in the town centre to enjoy free live entertainment, fairground rides and a host of Christmas activities. The atmosphere was simply magical.

A particular highlight, as always, was the wonderful Rutherford's Christmas window reveal - a tradition that continues to delight families year after year.

We were also delighted to welcome back the popular Pavilion Tipi in Carlisle Park. The Tipi brought live music and festive entertainment to the heart of the park, providing a cosy and vibrant space for friends and families to gather.

I am thrilled to report that we saw record footfall on our High Street over the Christmas period. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all our local business owners and their staff who work tirelessly to make Morpeth such a magical Christmas destination. Your creativity, dedication and community spirit are what make our town truly special.

Burns Night Success

January brought another highlight - our annual Burns Night Supper. This year's event, organised by Deputy Mayor Cllr Wendy Fail and held in partnership with Morpeth Golf Club for the first time, was a complete sell-out.

It was a fantastic evening of tradition, laughter and fellowship, raising a record £1,300 for the Mayor's Charity. A wonderful time was had by all who attended.

Supporting Macmillan - £16,000 and Rising

We have continued to raise funds for the Mayor's Charity, Macmillan Cancer Support, and I am delighted to announce that our total now stands at over £16,000. Every penny raised is ringfenced for the new Macmillan Hub at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust's Wansbeck Hospital.

In February, I had the privilege of visiting the new Hub. It was inspiring to meet the dedicated staff and to hear first-hand about the invaluable services they provide to both patients and carers. The Hub will make a real difference to families across our area, and I am incredibly proud of Morpeth's contribution towards this important facility.

A Call for Volunteers - The Millennium Green

Finally, I have been asked by the trustees of The Millennium Green - Morpeth's award-winning "secret garden" - to share an appeal.

Tucked away behind the shops on Newgate Street, the Green is a much-loved haven of peace and natural beauty. It is maintained by a dedicated team of volunteers who meet monthly for a couple of hours of gardening to keep it looking its best.

There are currently nine trustees who oversee the charity and they are keen to recruit a few more. Trustees meet three or four times a year to help manage events such as the Summer Fete, plan improvements like renewing flower beds, and consider ways to raise funds to keep the Green thriving.

If you feel you might like to get involved in preserving and enhancing this special space, you can find out more at millenniumgreenmorpeth.org.uk or contact the secretary, Rod Mathieson, at rodsuemath@talktalk.net.

As ever, I remain immensely proud of Morpeth - a town that remembers with dignity, celebrates with enthusiasm, supports with generosity and cares deeply for its community spaces. Thank you for continuing to make Morpeth such a vibrant and passionate place to live, work and visit.

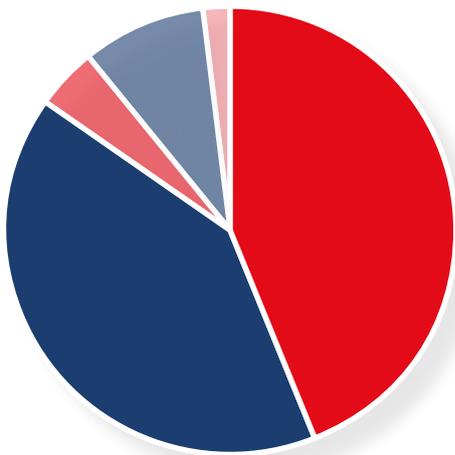
With warmest wishes,

Rachael Hogg
Mayor of Morpeth



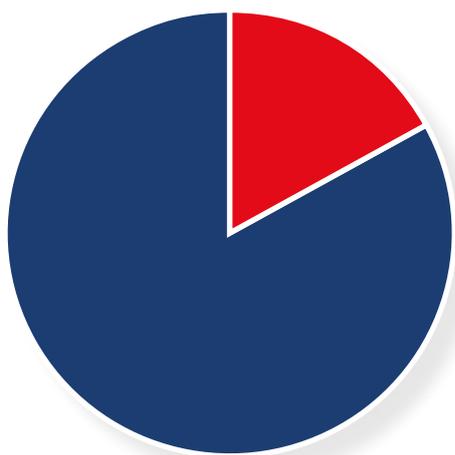
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Budget 2026/27



Expenditure

■ Management & Support	428,747
■ Recreation & Leisure Services	396,868
■ Environment Services	41,800
■ Cemetries	0
■ Tourism, Grants, Subsidies	85,675
■ Other Services	18,280
Total Gross Expenditure	971,370



Income

■ Fees and Charges	-164,627
■ Council Tax	-806,743
■ From balances	0
Total Income	-971,370

Annual Assembly

All Parish and Town Councils throughout England are required by law to hold an Annual Parish Meeting or Annual Assembly which must take place between 1st March and the 1st June.

This is an open meeting, chaired by the Mayor of Morpeth, for all local government electors of the Parish. It is not a meeting of the Town Council.

The Annual Assembly gives all residents the opportunity to hear about what has been going on in the town, ask questions of the Council and discuss current issues. It also gives local residents the opportunity to meet their Town Councillor.

This year the Annual Assembly of Morpeth Town Council will be held on Wednesday 18th March at 6.30pm in Morpeth Town Hall.

The Annual Report of Morpeth Town Council will also be available, so come along and see what your Town Council has done for you in the past 12 months.

Allotments available

Ever wanted to grow your own fresh produce or keep chickens?

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www.morpeth-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2020/11/Allotment-Application-Form-Editable.pdf



Thank you

Morpeth celebrated in style on the run up to Christmas with the lights switch on event in November. The town was jam packed with lots going on for all ages to enjoy, there were kiddies rides, face painting, photo opportunities in the snow globe as well as some fantastic entertainment on stage all day.

A huge thank you to everyone involved in making the day as special as it was, with special thanks going to Duncan at NB Clark Ltd, based in Morpeth, for arranging the delivery of the town's Christmas tree free of charge, which I'm sure you'll agree looked fantastic!

COUNCIL MEETING TIMETABLE

SEE NOTICEBOARDS AND WEBSITE

Meeting Timetable for March and April 2026. All meetings will be held in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall, unless otherwise stated on the agenda. All Committee meetings commence at 6:30 pm, unless otherwise stated on the posters or website.

Planning and Transport Committee

11th March 2026

8th April 2026

Finance and General Purposes Committee

4th March 2026

1st April 2026

I can see clearly now...

Mark Stephenson, Inside Morpeth wine correspondent tells of his journey to become the owner of Bridge Street's Grape & Grain store.

It's spring and there is evidence of new beginnings all around us. The daylight hours are getting longer and flowers are starting to bloom.

I am writing this article on a severely delayed train from London to Morpeth. These things happen, and as a former train guard myself, I know how difficult situation it can be for all involved.

The near three hours standing stationary south of Grantham have given me time to reflect on my new beginnings in the wine industry and contrasting that with my previous career and whether there are any crossovers (excuse the pun) between my current and previous occupations.

Firstly, I was very proud to have worked on the railway. It's quite a unique industry and my job as a Train Manager couldn't exactly be easily summarised. I really thought I had a job for life and it was certainly the best paid job I've ever had. However, hands up, I couldn't hack it. There was lots of confrontation involved and that's not my style.

However, I'd never tire of the view from somewhere like that from the Royal Border Bridge in Berwick. At times, I couldn't believe that was my office window. The problem was when stepping into the carriage, particularly on a weekend, you'd be faced with stag-dos, hen-dos, the lot. Utter carnage. What seemed unusual became the norm. I probably could write a book about it. One notable quirk of the reservation system on one trip saw a hen-do placed in a carriage next to a school trip. With no other seating available it was a dicey situation to handle. The only positive was the fact the kids got some extra biology tutoring with the presence of some of the various inflatable items the hen-party had accompanying them on their travels that day! I think we'll leave that there, but I am pleased to say I don't have to deal with that kind of thing anymore. After all, not every train journey is like the one you see Mr Portillo enjoying!

It was a tough decision to leave the railway, especially due to the financial security it brought. So, I wasn't going to leave that role for anything, and when the opportunity to work in the wine industry came up I took the plunge to work with one of my passions. Yes, the bank balance doesn't look as healthy as it once did, but most importantly I feel happier and, ironically, healthier.



The Border Bridge at Berwick which Mark always enjoyed seeing out of his train 'office window'.

And that is true. One of the biggest contrasts from my new career compared to my old is alcohol. On the railway they have a zero-tolerance policy. You could be randomly breathalysed at the start of shift. Any alcohol detected and you were out. No ifs, no buts. I never drank the day before a shift. So it's ironic that when it has come to people asking about non-alcoholic substitutes, I am well versed. Non-alcoholic beer is pretty decent. Non-alcoholic wine- don't bother. Get a nice fruit juice but drink it out of wine glass (the latter is very important).

I've gone from a job where I couldn't drink to a job where it is beneficial to drink at work! However, hand on heart, I drink less than I ever have. May be it's because I "taste" a lot of wine and get so much enjoyment from that I don't need to drink as much. Or, is it because I am surrounded by it all day? I mean, a butcher doesn't have steak for tea every night do they?

One thing I do know, I make sure when I do drink, it's a wine that is of good quality and something I will enjoy. Life is too short for drinking rubbish wine!

One area that both careers are similar is dealing with people. It's a lot more fun now to talk about wine rather informing

some poor soul that they've missed their connection at Doncaster with a 45 minute wait for the next train! I would say a wine shop is a lot friendlier environment than the last train off Birmingham on a Saturday night.

So it seems to be little in common between the two jobs. I guess, it's a career path that is not well trodden. May be I am the only one who has done that. Who knows? Certainly, many questioned my sanity when I left the railway as it is an industry where many spend their whole working lives. Sometime though, life is about risk. You've got one go at life and I may as-well be happier in it. The fact the two have so little in common is the reason I feel no regrets... although, I do regret not getting the earlier train home to avoid this three hour delay!

So, back to the day job!

Perfect wines for spring include Two Rivers Convergence Sauvignon Blanc from NZ (£17.00). Hints of freshly cut grass, bright fruit, and a crisp finish. Also, Guerrieri Rizzardi Bardolino Delara DOC (£21.50). A lighter red from Lake Garda, Italy. Bright, fresh and juicy red fruit in flavour and incredibly more-ish. Almost thirst quenching.

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Children who lived at the camp on the outskirts of Morpeth



Morpeth's forgotten township

Inside Morpeth's David Thompson tells the story of a long forgotten settlement on the outskirts of town that became 'home' to Polish and local families for two decades.

Morpeth Common Camp was a small settlement situated near to the Grandstand Cottages next to Craik Park football ground. The locals called it the Crash Camp, although it is not certain how it received that name. Allegedly it was occupied by the Company of Royal Argyll and Southern Highlanders. However, historians at the regiment refute this.

The camp originally started life as a military establishment during World War One. Later it was extended and comprised approximately fifty army huts to accommodate troops at the start of World War Two. Conditions in the camp during the war years were very poor. The huts were unfurnished and had no running water or heating. Basic improvements followed.

After the Second World War ended in 1945/46 Morpeth became the home for many Polish servicemen and their families. Most felt they were unable to return to their homeland, now occupied by the Soviet Union.

To relieve the acute housing shortage in Morpeth after the Second World War Alderman W S Sanderson recommended to the town council that they acquire the military camp on Morpeth Common

for residential use. In moving the proposal he said that amenities such as water, electricity, cement roads and pathways were already in situ and that the accommodation would only require modernisation. The motion was seconded by Alderman R Elliott and duly passed by the remaining council committee members. Eventually permission was granted from the Ministry of Health to allow Morpeth Corporation to take over the camp and transform it into a housing estate consisting of over three hundred Polish and English families.

George Niewiadomski from Morpeth has clear happy memories of living at the Common Camp. He lived in number 54b with his mother, father and younger sister Marysia. He told me his house was rather spartan with a wood-fired range in the middle of the living room, windows with metal frames which frosted up in the winter. His mother would make clippy mats from old sacks and recycled fabric. They were an economical option to keep warm in an era before fitted carpets.

Facilities at the Common Camp were numerous and included a dance hall, general shop, (Alderson's) doctor's surgery, school for Polish children, and an officers' mess later to become the social club.

Tait's bus would call at the camp every day on its return journey from St Mary's hospital and Stannington village to transport George and his sister to Goosehill primary school Castle Square.

George's father, Jozef Niewiadomski, was a member of the Polish army and saw service at Monte Cassino, Italy, and Palestine. He was awarded the merit medal by General Wladyslaw Anders, who was the commanding officer of the Polish army in the Middle East and Italy during the Second World War.

Many of the returning Polish servicemen worked in the surrounding coal mines of Northumberland: Netherton, Ellington and Broomhill Collieries. George's father took up employment at Linton Colliery. A weekly wage of £20 plus free coal was very welcome in those days.

The Common Camp was demolished in 1964 and, apart from some of the concrete footings in the nearby plantation, virtually nothing is left of it or its thriving community. It would be a wonderful gesture if a plaque could be made up by a local organisation or Morpeth Council and placed somewhere around Craik Park as a fitting reminder of Morpeth's long lost forgotten Polish township.



Volunteers make a big impact in Morpeth thanks to Litter-Blitz

The first Morpeth litter blitz of 2026 has set an impressive standard for the year ahead, with local volunteers rolling up their sleeves to restore a neglected corner of the town.

The clean-up focused on the area behind Castle Close and Church Walk, where an enthusiastic team of 17 "blitzers" came together with one simple goal: make a difference.

And what a difference they made.

By the end of the effort, volunteers had collected an astonishing 80 bags of rubbish. Among the more unusual finds were three bed springs, a shopping trolley, a very large suitcase, and a wide assortment of miscellaneous debris that had built up over time. The pile of waste was striking - not just for its size, but for the transformation it allowed in the surrounding streets and pathways.

For organiser Dai Richards, the results were both surprising and inspiring.

"The huge pile of rubbish collected was simply astonishing and what a difference



it made to the area, local streets and paths," he said. "I've said it before but I will say it again - Morpeth is so very lucky to have such wonderful volunteers who want to make a difference in our town, and boy do they make a difference!"

Community clean-ups like this highlight the power of local action. What might seem like a small effort - a few hours of time and a willingness to help - can dramatically improve shared spaces and boost local pride.

For residents passing through the area after the blitz, the results were clear: cleaner paths, tidier streets, and a reminder of how much can be achieved when people come together.

With the first blitz of the year already such a success, Morpeth's volunteers have shown that community spirit is alive and well - and that even the biggest piles of rubbish don't stand a chance against determined locals.

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Gathering that's true to its roots



Actor Ray Alexander as Sir John Vanbrugh

This spring's annual Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering will mark two very special milestones associated with the town. The first is the tercentenary of the death of Sir John Vanbrugh (1664 to 1726), who left such an everlasting mark on Morpeth through his design of the magnificent Town Hall which has dominated the Market Place for more than 300 years. The second is the 80th anniversary of the founding of Morpeth Antiquarian Society, which is the parent-body of the Gathering.

Sir John was a man of many parts – soldier, playwright, courtier, diplomat as well as halfway through his life, becoming one of the great architects of his generation. He designed and built six grand houses, the first of which was Castle Howard in Yorkshire and the last being much closer to home at Delaval Hall. In between his third great house was Blenheim Palace, famously known as the birthplace of Winston Churchill.

Amazingly, Castle Howard was Vanbrugh's first foray into architecture. He had been commissioned to design the house without any architectural experience behind him, by the 3rd Earl of Carlisle, who would then go on to engage Vanbrugh to design Morpeth Town Hall in what became known as his Baroque-style. The building was completed in 1714.

Throughout this year which has been designated as Vanbrugh 300 Revisited, events will be held all over the country to mark his life and work, with some of the first being incorporated into the Gathering programme over the weekend of Friday 10th to Sunday 12th April. Bringing Sir John's character back to life will be actor Ray Alexander, well-known in Morpeth for his portrayals of the great man. Along with fiddler Stewart Hardy, Sir John (alias Ray Alexander), will present his 'A Life of Irony' re-telling of Vanbrugh's life and music of the day, in – where else of course than - the Town Hall beginning at 7.30pm on the Friday evening.

Then, at 4pm on Sunday afternoon in the Bagpipe Museum in The Chantry, there'll be a chance to enjoy 18th Century music from the countryside and vintage Vanbrugh theatre-days with Bennett Hogg, Matt Seattle and friends on strings, as well as Border pipes.

This year will be the 58th Morpeth Northumbrian Gathering festival of Northumberland's traditional music, dance, dialect, crafts, stories, heritage and family events.

Once again, a packed programme of events has been arranged running from early morning to late in the evening involving a crafts' exhibition; outdoor entertainment with Ellington Colliery Band, clog, Morris and rapper dancers and Punch & Judy shows; musicians' sessions for fiddles, pipes, accordions and guitars; singalongs; dance workshops including clog dancing; a chance to have-a-go at playing the Northumbrian Pipes; storytelling with the inimitable Taffy Thomas; a barn dance plus a family ceilidh; competitions; a church service; two open days at Morpeth Castle; and a heritage walk, to name but a few.



Wallace, Lachie and Craig - winners' concert guests Ape House

Making their Gathering debut will be traditional and contemporary folk trio – Wallace Calvert (concertina and cello) who grew up in Bamburgh and is a former champion instrumentalist at Morpeth, Lachie Robertson (guitar and vocals) and Craig Harrison (fiddle and bodhran). They will be performing at the Winners' Concert from 6.30pm on Saturday evening at the Town Hall.

This year for the first time, a speaking competition will be held with young people bidding to win the Alex Swailes memorial award in memory of the Gathering legend, who sadly passed away last year.

As always, there will be a pre-Gathering fund-raising Northumbrian Concert which this year will be held on Friday March 20th at 7.30pm in The Ballroom at Morpeth Town Hall, featuring the legendary Northumbrian piper and fiddler Alistair Anderson, Graham Bell, the Border Directors, Teddy Cuthbert, Martha Darcey and James Tait, Miggins Fiddle and Sophie Fraser and friends.

Tickets at £16 (Children £8) are on sale at The Chantry, Morpeth (623455) or from Kim Bibby-Wilson (01670 513308). More information is available from kim@northumbriana.org.uk and tickets and full details for the Gathering programme itself, are also available through the same contact details.

Music Society concerts

Two more Morpeth Methodist Church concerts to tell you about, the first being on Thursday March 19th (7.30pm) featuring Trio Shaham Erez Wallfisch made up of Hagai Shaham (violin), Amon Erez (piano) and Raphael Wallfisch (cello). All three have flourishing solo and chamber music careers, and, as a trio, recently released a recording of all Beethoven's works for piano trio as part of the 250th anniversary of the composer's birth.

The programme for Morpeth will open with a late trio by Mozart, followed by the darkly contrasting Smetana composed in memory of his young daughter. The second half will open with the prodigiously talented Lili Boulanger's Deux Morceaux for violin and piano. The final work in the programme will be Shostakovich's powerful trio written during World War II, commemorating the death of a dear friend. The last movement – 'The Dance of Death' – is noted for its Jewish themes.

The final evening of the current Morpeth Music Society season, will feature the Brass Tacks quintet, on Thursday April 9th, again beginning at 7.30pm. The five musicians – Finlay Hetherington (trumpet), John Sampson (trumpet), Fiona McLean-Williamson (trombone), Robert Newth (French Horn) and Robert Fraser (tuba) – have been entertaining audiences across the UK since 2013 with their engaging and eclectic style with a range of musical experiences from orchestral and chamber music to



Trio Shaham Erez Wallfisch

freelance work in film and television. Their programme for Morpeth covers centuries from traditional folk tunes to the well-known tango La Cumpersite.

Tickets for both concerts are priced at £19 each for adults (children free with adults, carers free), and are available from www.morpeth-musoc.org.uk and The Chantry Tourist Information Centre.

Morpeth St George's Players

Will present an excruciatingly hilarious modern comedy 'The Unfriend' by Steven Moffat at St George's Church, on Thursday and Friday March 26th and 27th (7.30pm start) with a matinee on Saturday March 28th beginning at 2pm. The plot centres around a couple Peter and Debbie, whose polite invitation to a woman they meet on holiday, has dire consequences. Tickets are available from The Chantry or online.

Bewick Orchestra concert

Following their policy of giving concerts in aid of charities, the Bewick Orchestra will give another in their home town of Morpeth, this time in support of Parkinson's UK which works directly with the NHS to improve services for everyone with Parkinson's offering practical and emotional support. The programme for the evening includes four well-known works which are rarely heard live in the region.

Robin Forbes will conduct the orchestra and the soloist will be cellist Nick Bryne, a student of the Royal Academy of Music who is now sub-principal Cello in the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra as well as finding time to be the cellist with the Liverpool String Quartet. At the concert, he will play the popular Cello Concerto by Elgar, and the evening will open with Schubert's Overture to Rosamunde. Also included in the programme will be another work by Schubert, this time his Unfinished Symphony as well as Rossini's Overture to the Barber of Seville.

The concert will be on Saturday May 16th at the Church of St James in Copper Chare, Morpeth, beginning at 7.30pm. Tickets (£10, children and students free) are available from The Chantry, Morpeth (01670 623455) and at the door.



Cellist Nick Bryne - soloist at Bewick Orchestra concert

General strike Centenary

Two chances are coming up to see productions by local playwright Ed Waugh, about an anniversary etched in working-class history marking the centenary of the 1926 General Strike described by some as the biggest rupture in British society since the English Civil War! Millions of workers and their families led by the country's miners who had been told to take a 40 per cent cut in their wages to improve productivity, withdrew their labour to challenge the British state and the very existence of the Establishment. Locally, it led to the imprisonment for a total of 48 years of eight Northumberland miners after they accidentally derailed the famous Flying Scotsman train as it steamed past Cramlington. They had intended to target a good's train to draw attention to their cause.

On Monday May 8th at The Glasshouse, Gateshead (4pm and 8pm), Ed's team behind his smash-hit plays such as Hadaway Harry, Mr Corvan's Music Hall, the Great Joe Wilson, Wor Bella and The Cramlington Train Wreckers, will present 'Centenary' – a show of songs, comedy sketches, satire and recitations, marking the eight-day General Strike, when workers believed a new, equal and better world was possible.

Before that, there's also a chance to see again The Cramlington Train Wreckers story re-told by Russell Floyd, Micky Cochrane and Alex Tahnee, this time at Newcastle's Theatre Royal on Sunday July 12th. The show - hailed by the Daily Mirror's associate editor Kevin Maguire as 'Absolutely brilliant' - was sold-out when it toured the region last year. Tickets for either production can be booked on line via The Glasshouse and Newcastle Theatre Royal websites.

The optimism of early springtime in the garden!

By Inside Morpeth columnist **Ross Pearson**

Spring is when the garden wakes up with all the subtlety of a Labrador puppy. One minute it's asleep, the next it's chewing the furniture and demanding constant attention. Snowdrops give way to daffodils, the soil warms and suddenly everything needs doing at once. You step outside for a "quick look" and return two hours later, muddy, knackered and slightly confused about what you achieved.

Gardening is an optimistic business. You plant things assuming this year will be different, no late frosts, no slugs with Olympic-level ambition and no mysterious failures that leave you blaming the compost. The days lengthen, sunshine and optimism return and even the shed smells less damp and more ready for action.

It's also the season of light jackets, dry-ish boots left by the back door and that particular joy of seeing green shoots where previously there was only soggy disappointment. So, sharpen your secateurs, locate your gloves (one will be missing), and prepare to get stuck in. Spring waits for no one, especially not gardeners still sitting indoors making 'to do' lists.



Cut back the dead stuff

Perennials left standing over winter now need trimming back to make room for fresh growth. Be decisive but not brutal - you're clearing the stage, not demolishing the theatre. New shoots will appear almost instantly, just to prove you should have done it sooner.

Feed the borders

After winter, soil is tired and borders are peckish. Add compost or well-rotted manure to give plants a decent breakfast. This is less about precision and more about generosity. Plants appreciate enthusiasm so the more the merrier. If you can't cover everywhere in a thick layer, concentrate on one area at a time and mulch the next area next year.

Sow hardy veg outdoors

Broad beans, carrots, beetroot and parsnips can all go straight into the ground as spring progresses. Straight lines are optional, labels are not. Otherwise, you'll be playing a confusing guessing game by June.

Start tender crops under cover

French beans, squash and sweetcorn prefer a bit of cossetting early on. Start them in pots somewhere sheltered. They'll sulk if rushed, so be patient - spring always rewards restraint (eventually).

Prune roses and shrubs

Spring pruning encourages strong growth and better flowering. Roses, buddleja and dogwood all benefit from a confident chop. If in doubt, remove anything dead, crossing or obviously up to no good.

Divide congested plants

Clumps of perennials that have outgrown their boots can be lifted and split. You get healthier plants and free extras - gardening's version of a two-for-one deal.

Spring is chaotic, muddy and occasionally overwhelming but it's also exhilarating. Get stuck in now and by May you'll feel like a horticultural genius. Or at least someone who gave it a good go.



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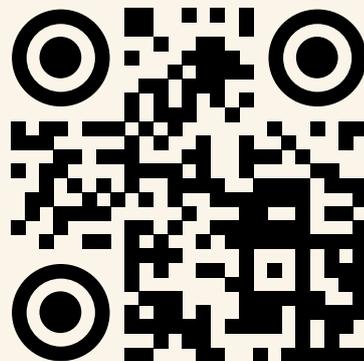
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