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AUTUMN 2026

# inside

MORPETH



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# inside MORPETH

**Not long now until the next Morpeth Book Festival. Well, six months actually, but, believe me, the time will fly by! Planning is well underway for the 2027 event with the organising committee lining up another exciting range of authors and speakers who will be coming to Morpeth next spring to entertain book festival audiences.**

For now, most of the names are being kept under wraps, but you can read about two of them in this edition of our magazine. Local cartoonist David Haldane who actually lives in Morpeth, will be talking about and displaying his talents for raising a laugh among readers of Britain's biggest-selling national newspapers plus magazines Punch and Private Eye.

Joining him will be writer and broadcaster Graeme Rigby who for nearly 30 years built up his encyclopedic knowledge of the herring which he calls the 'King of Fishes.' Both promise to deliver fascinating book festival talks. We will be revealing all about the 2027 Morpeth Book Festival, where and when to buy your tickets, in our winter edition of our magazine.

We have plenty more local stories to tell you about in this edition of Inside Morpeth, however. For instance, we report on local athletics hero Jim Alder celebrating with family and friends, his greatest race 60 years ago. Young jeweller Kian Brown winning a prestigious national students' award. Proposals to launch a new business club in Morpeth. James Davies and his family opening Morpeth's independent book shop; Amanda Little buying the fruit shop where she has worked for almost 40 years; plus lots, lots more stories.

We hope you enjoy reading about them in your very own Morpeth magazine!

*Ian Leech*  
Editor of Inside Morpeth

4 DAILY KEEPING NATION SMILING

7 GRAEME'S KING OF THE FISHES

9 KICKING OFF A BUSINESS CLUB

11 MEETING HIS MINATURE MATCH

12 TOP OF THE JEWELLERS' CLASS

16 TURNING OVER NEW LIFE PAGE

19 TUNING IN TO GREEN MESSAGE

27 CHOIR HITTING ALL RIGHT NOTES

**Front cover:** Pat Fuller, Dorothy Moore and Dorothy Waddington, three of the 'green' festival organisers

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# A laugh a day with David!



For the past 50 years cartoonist **David Haldane** has been raising a chuckle and a laugh over millions of breakfast table bowls of cornflakes and toast, or on the daily commute to work by train, bus or tube, **writes Ian Leech.**

In that time his cartoons have appeared on the front or inside pages of practically every major national newspaper, as well as in perhaps two of the world's famous satirical and current affairs magazines – Punch and Private Eye!

And for much of that time his cartoons have been drawn and submitted from a studio converted from one of the bedrooms of his family home in Morpeth.

David (72), who was born and grew up in nearby Blyth, developed a passion for drawing around the age of 10 when he was confined to home by a bout of the very contagious scarlet fever. As he recalls, all his books had to be burned in case of infection, but a neighbour who was a merchant seaman, brought him American comic books featuring the likes of Popeye and Prince Valiant from his trips across the Atlantic.

Using a jotter, pens and pencils bought for him by his Mum from the Woolworths store in the town, David spent many hours copying the cartoon characters and discovered he had a real talent for the art.

As he recovered, however, his style of humour got him into a spot of bother along with schoolboy pal Alan Ferguson of the Blyth family transport firm and now the Ad Gefrin whisky distillery and museum at Wooler, when they launched their own cartoon book for patients at the local hospital. "We only lasted two editions because the hospital thought the cartoons I drew about operations, were in bad taste for the patients," said David.

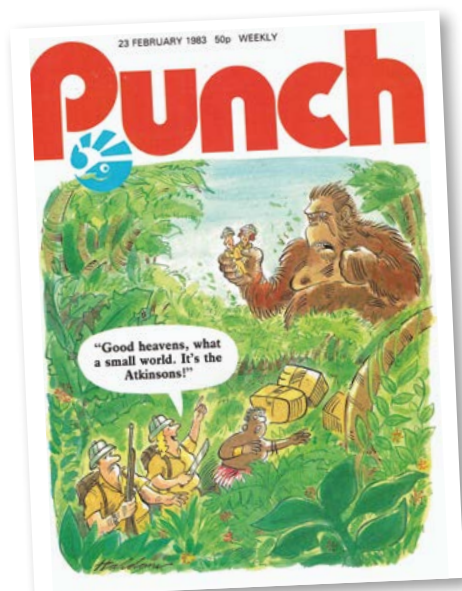
On leaving school, he studied graphic design at the Newcastle Polytechnic (now Northumbria University), and after graduating travelled to London hoping to seek his fame and fortune as an studio animator.

David managed to get an interview with noted animation director Richard Williams of the Who Framed Roger Rabbit and two of the Pink Panther films fame among many others, who advised him, however, he would be better off honing his skills as a cartoonist rather than an animator.



So, he travelled back home to Northumberland to find work in the art department of the Shields Gazette newspaper. "That was an invaluable experience because it taught me so much about hitting deadlines which has stood me in good stead ever since," he said.

After four years at the Gazette, David decided to bite the bullet and strike out on his own as a freelance cartoonist. By that time, he had already had his first six cartoons accepted for publication by Punch, the world's oldest satirical magazine that first hit the streets way back in 1841. "That was a great achievement for me and gave me the confidence to go it alone as a freelancer," said David.



As it turned out, it was also a decision that opened the door to David becoming one of the very best cartoonists in the business! Since then, the list of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers his cartoons have featured in, reads like a 'Who's Who' of the British media.

The Times, The Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Sunday Times, The Observer, Daily Mail, Daily Express, Mail on Sunday, The Mirror (he did the illustrations for Piers Morgan's column in the paper) and The Sun... the list just goes on and on! As David told me he has had more than 3,500 cartoons printed in The Times alone.

Aside from cartoons David has published an illustrated children's book *The Zoo Goes to France*; contributed sketches to the television programme *Spitting Image*; and created greetings cards and advertising illustrations for companies like ASDA, Cellnet and Pedigree Chum.

The way David would work was an initial chat with the paper's editorial team about potential ideas for the next day's cartoon followed by the submission of four or five rough ideas so that one could be selected. David would then work-up the finished artwork by hand, using pen and brushes rather than computer graphics, in time for the next day's deadline.

His style could be categorised by his sharp wit, satire and a distinctive hand-drawn image. Of course, David had to be on top of the stories making the news as well as the characters in the headlines, to retain the topicality of his cartoons – and it was always a race against time to hit the deadlines.

"I am often asked what makes a great cartoon, which is a good question but not a straightforward one to answer," said David. "A good snappy caption and simple drawing can make a cracking cartoon, but also an idea that takes a while to sink in and isn't immediately obvious can be just as funny."

"Finally, any cartoonist will tell you, the best cartoon is the one the editor doesn't pick!"

These days, David still submits an occasional cartoon to the papers, but he is a regular contributor to *Private Eye*. The great news for *Inside Morpeth*, however, is that David has happily agreed to draw a cartoon with a local flavour, for future editions of our magazine, which our little team is thrilled and delighted about.

David Haldane will also be taking part in next spring's 2027 Morpeth Book Festival, talking about his career... and drawing a few cartoons at the same time. Don't miss his talk!



VACUUM COMPRESSION STORAGE BAGS. THE OBVIOUS SOLUTION TO PRISON OVERCROWDING

# A fishy tale of the truly not-so-humble herring

It's probably fair to say that you would go a long way before coming across anyone who knows more about the humble herring than **Graeme Rigby**. For nearly three decades Graeme has been passionately – he might even admit to obsessively – absorbing all he could about what he calls the 'King of Fishes'. Our **Inside Morpeth Editor Ian Leech** went to learn more over a cup of coffee.

In that time, Graeme has built up an encyclopaedic knowledge of a fish that wars have been fought over; poets, musicians and writers – including Shakespeare – have waxed lyrical about; sustained armies over long battles in foreign lands; swims in such massive shoals that they can be seen from space and turn the water white whilst spawning; controversially fed those trapped in the slave trade plantations of the Caribbean; as well as inspiring very many generations of fishermen and 'Herring Lasses' to follow its seasonal journey down the east coast of Scotland and England from the Shetlands Isles to the Channel.

Not surprising then, that Graeme has managed to fill 462 pages of a book full of fascinating herring facts, anecdotal adventures and fishy tales going back very many hundreds of years. I say book, but in actual fact to quote its title, it is 'Rigby's Encyclopaedia Of The Herring.'

It all began in the late 1990s when Graeme was commissioned to make a BBC Radio 4 programme about Bombay duck, which, of course, is actually a saltwater fish, and when salted, sun-dried and smoked is a much-favoured delicacy of Indian cuisine. As he told me, he all-too-quickly agreed to the commission, at the same time as stipulating that the documentary needed expanding to include other species of preserved fish such as the Arbroath Smokies, lamprey pie (a favourite of the Royal Kings over many years in the middle ages), and, of course, the red herring!

(We'll return later to how the phrase became such a part of the English language!)

The chapters follow in alphabetical order from A to Z, although there's a break with logic right at the beginning starting with 'Y is for Why.' Graeme explains. "When people ask what I do I say writer... but just about the herring these days.

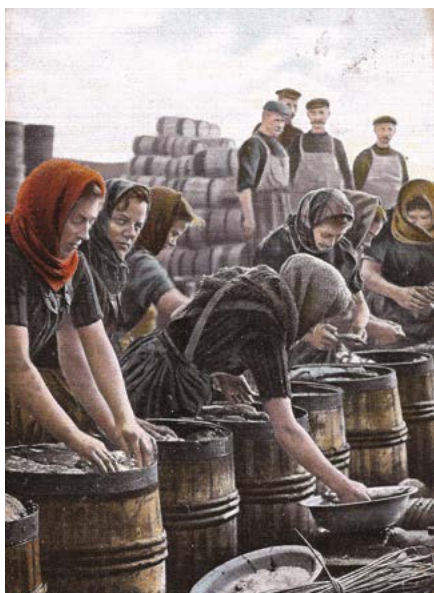
"I'm working on an encyclopaedia. There's a pause, then maybe 'the heron?' I shake my head, 'No, herring the fish.' Another pause, then 'Why?'"

It's a good question he says. Why indeed an encyclopaedia for one species of fish, and perhaps the answer lies somewhere in the fact that as he says: "There is more beautiful information about herrings than any other fish."

When he started out on the book Graeme was part of the influential Amber Film and Photography Collective documenting the North East's working heritage through films and photographic exhibitions as well as being closely involved with poetry, comedy and jazz. Perhaps surprising then, that he found time to set out in the wake of the herring, but stick with the story he did over 27 years!



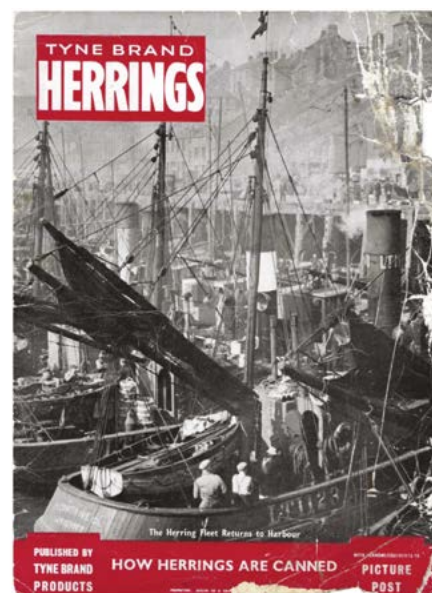
Graeme Rigby meets a herring thanks to artist Keith McIntyre



Early postcard of herring girls at work



Inside the Marshall smokehouse at North Shields.  
Photo courtesy of Nick Hedges



Front cover of the Picture Post magazine

As I hinted earlier, it's a story that goes back centuries. Herring have always been plentiful around the shores of Britain, and for many were a cheap source of sustainable and nutritious food that also had the properties of preserving well for perhaps up to a year after the fish was caught.

Cleaned, gutted, salted and packed in barrels, herrings could be transported across oceans and continents, and eaten for up to 12 months from the day the fish was caught.

From the days of Catholic Britain, the herring was also the universal fish of fasting from meat eating, long before chip-shop Friday became the weekly norm.

The Dutch were the early masters of curing and preserving herring. In his book Graeme says there is evidence that the first Dutchman to catch and eat a herring, did so in 1163!

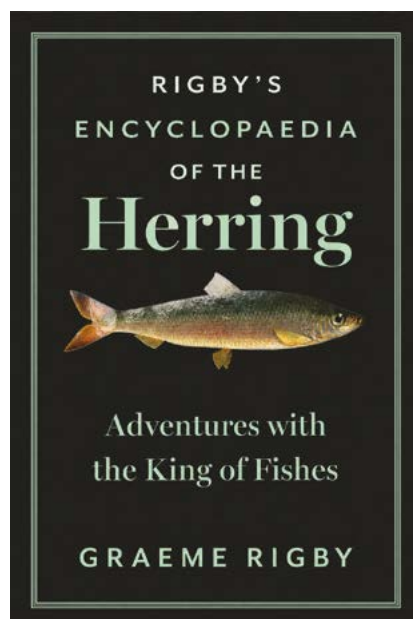
Three centuries later the Dutch had developed what in reality was a forerunner of the factory ship called a Herring Buss where the fish could be gutted, salted and packed on board once the catch had been landed.

As the industry grew in size so did the busses and by the 1500s more than 1,000 of them were sailing the seas and an estimated 450,000 people were employed in catching and selling herrings. An average Dutch herring buss could hold up to 400,000 barrels of catch before heading back to port from the the fishing grounds.

Consequently, the Dutch were raking in a fortune from fish caught around the coast of Britain....and the Scots and English did not take kindly to that leading to a situation that in Graeme's own words was 'always bound to end in tears.' Hence the first three Anglo-Dutch wars.

Over the years, however, the English and Scottish fishing fleets gradually started to come into their own, which, in turn, created another herring phenomenon.

The Herring Lasses! From the mid-19th Century curers began to need thousands of workers to process the fish and Scottish womenfolk were overwhelmingly the best in the business. The 'lasses' as they became known, would stand for perhaps 12 hours a day at what were known as farlins or long troughs filled with fish, gutting, salting and packing them into barrels.



The work was highly-skilled but tough, arduous and dangerous because they were using extremely sharp implements at great speed. An average lass could process up to 40 herrings a minute – yes a minute not an hour – while the very best upped that to 60 fish a minute.

At first, the lasses travelled south on the fishing boats following the herring, but as rail travel became more readily available, they would take the train to their next port of call. Fishing started early in the year and went on for eight or

nine months as the fishermen and lasses followed the shoals down the coast to Yarmouth and beyond.

Here in Northumberland, they would start at Spittal in the port of Berwick, before moving south to Seahouses, Newbiggin and on to North Shields, staying either in tents, huts and bothies. They worked in threes with the tallest girl packing the barrels as she could reach further down into them.

After the war years and up until the 1960s, curers were using less and less herring lasses, but the stories about them live on. Even today the port of Eyemouth just over the Scottish border holds a popular week-long Herring Festival electing a Herring Queen to preside over events.

Eventually herring fishing died out as the popularity of the fish waned and people got out of the habit of eating it – although here in Northumberland, kippers traditionally smoked over a slow-burning fire of sawdust or woodchips, in Seahouses and Craster remain as popular as ever and indeed are still sent all over the world. The Robson family have been processing kippers just above the little Craster village harbour, since first opening their smokehouse in 1856 – and it is still in use today

So, what about the red herring? Red herrings were so called because the silvery fish do turn a reddish-brown colour when smoked for a length of time and that 'red herring' phrase has come to mean a misleading statement or distraction? The story goes that one William Cobbet, radical journalist writing in the early 19th Century, told a tale of a red herring being dragged in front of pack of hounds to distract them from their quarry by its pungent smell. It was indeed, a red herring!

Perhaps, that will be one of the fishy tales Graeme Rigby tells when he talks about his encyclopaedia of the herring, at next Spring's Morpeth book festival!



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# Try-ing to form a new business club

Plans have been unveiled to launch the first business club of its kind in Morpeth. TMP Wealth Management and the town's Rugby Club, are organising an inaugural meeting of the proposed new club at the Mitford Road home of the rugby teams, to which local businesses are being invited writes **Editor Ian Leech.**

The organisers say that representatives from companies and business in and around the Morpeth area from the manufacturing, service and retail sectors, are very welcome to attend the meeting to discuss launching the proposed new club.

They say they want to bring local businesses together for the first time, to explore opportunities for building valuable connections between one another, as well as unlocking potential new sponsorship opportunities.

Peter Grieves, joint Managing Director of TMP Wealth Management which for the past 20 years has been providing its clients with sound financial planning advice from its offices in Castle Square, Morpeth, is one of the organisers of the business club meeting.

"We are so lucky in that Morpeth has such an extensive range of businesses and companies from all walks of life in the manufacturing, retail and service sectors that together help make it the vibrant and thriving town it is today," he said.

"However, we feel at the moment there is no one organisation where we can all meet to not only talk about issues affecting the town, but to build valuable future connections between one another."

For many years Morpeth had a thriving Chamber of Trade organisation which not only provided that sort of forum for local businesses, but played a huge part in the successes the town enjoyed in regional and national Britain in Bloom competitions, as well as raising many thousands of pounds to fund the fabulous Christmas Lights' displays Morpeth is now



Simon Harries (left) and Peter Grieves - an invitation to a new business club meeting

so famous for. However, the Chamber has not been active for a number of years now.

The new club, the organisers say, could help fill that void by giving local businesses the chance to meet on a regular, informal basis.

The first meeting is being held late on a Friday afternoon, which Peter says, could be possibly be a good time to meet in the future. "Nothing is on or off the table, however," he said.

"The first meeting will be a chance to

bring influential people together, to listen to what they have to say, and to gauge the response from local business people to see if there is a feeling that a new club would be something beneficial in the town. So, we think it is well worth giving it a try!"

The inaugural meeting of the Morpeth RFC Business Club will be held from 4pm on Friday September 25 at the Rugby Club ground in Mitford Road. Any businesses thinking of attending can register their interest by contacting Olivia at [oliviamrfc@gmail.com](mailto:oliviamrfc@gmail.com)



**Greater Morpeth  
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Regeneration of town & countryside  
[www.gmdt.net](http://www.gmdt.net)

# Join the GMDT Board

We are looking to appoint new Directors to the board of GMDT. This is an exciting opportunity to be a part of a not-for-profit charity whose aim is to improve the lives of people living in Morpeth and the surrounding areas.

## A bit of background about us:

- We started life some 20 years ago in Carlisle Park Lodge
- We are now situated in Morpeth Train Station, and we led on the restoration of the beautiful Grade II buildings here and at Morpeth Town Hall.
- We organise and host the annual Morpeth Book Festival, Picnic in the Park and Heritage Open Days
- We run an Environmental Group who litter pick in the area, maintain signage and look after the library and station gardens. Recently this group were successfully involved in tree planting initiatives in the area.
- We run a community cinema 9 months of the year
- We have future projects which are in the early stages of planning

## About you:

You do not need to be a train buff to join us! All we ask is that you are enthusiastic about Morpeth and are keen to get stuck in.

If you have a background in finance, railways, community, charity or anything relevant, and would like to have a chat about what being a director would look like, we would be delighted to hear from you.

If you are interested, please send an email telling us a little about yourself and what you think you could offer to [info@gmdt.org](mailto:info@gmdt.org). We will then arrange an informal chat.

**We look forward to hearing from you!**

**MORPETH**  
RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB LTD

# Fireworks Display

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1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2026**

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Kathleen and Jim Alder, Tom Maley and Cllr John Beynon remembering his golden day

# A day to remember for Jim 60 years after winning gold

Sixty years to the day of his victory at the 1966 Commonwealth Games in Jamaica, local athletics hero Jim Alder was joined by family and friends including former teammates from Morpeth Harriers, at an event at the town's golf club, to mark the anniversary of his marathon race win. **Words and pictures by Jack Brodie.**

During the race, Jim was leading comfortably when the runners approached the Kingston stadium, but was misdirected away from the entrance during a moment of confusion when the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Charles and Princess Anne arrived unexpectedly to see its conclusion.

By the time Jim found his way back to the track, his nearest rival English runner Bill Adcocks, was well ahead of him on his race to the tape. However, determined not to lose the gold medal, Jim set off in pursuit, caught and passed his great rival yards from the finishing line.

At the same games Jim also won bronze in the 10,000 metres and over the following years he went on to have a glittering career, winning a silver medal four years later when the games were held in Edinburgh. He set world distance records, won countless races at home and abroad, including five victories in his local Morpeth to Newcastle New Year's Day race, the oldest road race in the world.

Now, local sculptor Tom Maley has

Fine and Dandy  
- front page  
cartoon of Jim in  
the comic



created a life-size statue of Jim, in his iconic race winning pose. Tom, who is best-known for his statues of three Newcastle United legends Jackie Milburn, Sir Bobby Robson and Alan Shearer, has been planning the statue of Scottish born Jim, for around 10 years.

"Jim put his adopted town of Morpeth and the local harriers, on the world athletics map, and no one deserves a statue in his honour more than him," he said.

At the event a miniature of the statue, was presented to Jim by Councillor John Beynon, chairman of Northumberland County Council and himself a former Morpeth Harrier. He told guests at the event: "Morpeth Harriers would not be the club it is today without what Jim Alder has done for it over so very many years. As Club Life President, he still regularly attends training sessions to pass on his tips and advice to today's young runners. He is a living legend."

After the presentation, Jim told me: "I am totally honoured and flattered by the fact that Tom has created such a wonderful statue of me. I never expected anything like this in my lifetime."

Tom and several colleagues, are now in talks with the County Council, to agree a permanent site in Morpeth to install the statue.



(Left to right) Kian Brown, Deborah Green, Paul Easton and Tricia Robertson



The Mondaïne clock telling the time in Bridge Street

# Little gem of a jeweller's shop

High above the doorway of Osborne Jewellers' shop on Morpeth's Bridge Street, there's a sight you won't see anywhere else in an English town or city centre, **writes Ian Leech.**

A clock made by the world-famous Mondaïne watchmakers from Switzerland, accurately tells the time 24/7 for Morpeth shoppers glancing upwards as they walk along the street.

It was gifted to shop owner Deborah Green when she and her team, began selling the Swiss brand's watches and they believe they are the only jewellers in England to have been afforded such an accolade by the company.

Around 3,000 classically Swiss designed clocks have synchronised the time for rail travellers across the country, for more than 60 years, with customers' now being able to purchase their own scaled-down wristwatch replicas.

"We were so delighted and honoured to accept the gift," Deborah told me. So much so, that she had to arrange a cherry-picker to arrive outside the shop at the crack of dawn one day, to safely fix the clock in place before the first early-morning shoppers began going about their daily business on Bridge Street.

Deborah actually owns two jeweller's shops in Morpeth – Osborne's, of course, and a smaller unit in the centre of the Sanderson Arcade precinct, which she says complement one another perfectly.

While Osborne's is more of a traditional high street jewellery shop dealing in rings for all occasions - engagements, weddings and anniversaries – bracelets necklaces, earrings, pendants, watches and clocks, the smaller unit concentrates more on gemstones and precious metals' jewellery.

She first became involved in the jewellery trade following the untimely death of her late husband Sean from cystic fibrosis. Sean had been running the jeweller's shop in Newgate Street, which he had bought from husband-and-wife team Lionel and Enid Ross, who had owned the business for many years.

After Sean sadly died Deborah left her job as the assistant manager of a travel agents to take over the shop.

"Sean passed away just before Christmas and one of his last wishes was that we kept the shop open because one of the busiest trading periods of the year was coming up," said Deborah. So, she did with the help of Sean's parents David and Maureen.

When the shop in Sanderson Arcade, became vacant, however, Deborah decided to relocate to the precinct. But, she had only just done that when she was approached by Tony Osborne asking

if she wanted to buy his shop as he was retiring.

"It seemed too good an opportunity to miss and that is exactly the way things have turned out," said Deborah who says she is so fortunate to have such an experienced and loyal team helping her run the two shops.

Manager Paul Easton has worked in the shop for 33 years; Tricia Robertson has been there for 14 years; while Michelle Simpson has come out of retirement after selling her own Willcox Jeweller's shop in Alnwick to join the team. The youngest recruit is Kian Brown, and you can read all about his early career achievements on the page opposite.

Between the two shops Deborah and team can also design and make in their in-store workshop, bespoke items of jewellery for customers; carry out personalised engraving; repair, clean and polish items; as well as repurposing in a modern style, jewellery that has perhaps been handed down as family heirlooms.

"Between our previous owners and ourselves, Osborne's is a family business that has been proudly trading in Morpeth for more than 125 years, and we intend to be around for very many more years to come," said Deborah.

# Osborne Jewellers' success at Goldsmith Hall London

Kian Brown from Osborne Jewellers, Morpeth, has just won a prestigious award from the National Association of Jewellers, an organisation in London whose aim is to represent the jewellery industry of goldsmiths, designers, manufacturers and valuers. **By David Thompson.**



It acts as a voice for jewellery businesses throughout the UK, setting professional standards and a code of conduct based on honesty, integrity and professionalism. It also handles jewellery valuation and assists retailers through its consumer resolution schemes.

It was by pure chance that Kian came into the jewellery trade. He was attending an induction course in Manchester for employment as cabin crew for Ryanair, based at Newcastle Airport. However, on the very last day of training Kian was informed that he was no longer to be located in Newcastle. The company still offered him a contract but they wanted him to commence his flying career from Stanstead Airport, which Kian decided was not an option. Later, during a casual conversation with Deborah Green, owner of Osborne Jewellers, she told him that there was a vacancy as a jewellery assistant coming up at the Bridge Street shop if he was interested and would he like to come along as one of the candidates for an interview.

The rest is history.

From over 80 students Kian was presented at the company assay office in Goldsmith Hall London EC with the Greenough trophy for the highest pass rate in the National Association of Jewellers ATHE level 3 course of 2025.

Kian explained that to win this award the course pushes students to take a deep dive into the history of the jewellery industry and the complexity of diamonds, gemstones, precious metals and the intricacies of gold hallmarked. When Kian found out he had actually won the



Kian collects his winner's trophy

top student award he was overjoyed and felt that all the hard work and energy put in over the seven assignments was truly satisfying. Not only did Kian aspire to pass the course he wanted to graduate with honours to make the most of his education and hopefully walk away from the course truly confident in his abilities as a retail jeweller.

Personally, he said, the award is proof of the dedication and professionalism he and his colleagues give to the jewellery trade.

Kian acknowledged that all of his colleagues had a huge influence on his success on the course, especially Paul, the manager, and Deborah, the owner, of Osborne Jewellers. Without this total support he may not have taken the course in the first place and he offered special thanks to his work colleagues Tricia, Matthew, Wendy, Joel and Michelle.

Deborah has spoken highly of Kian's work and ambition. Following his completion of the course, he wants to focus more on his day-to-day responsibilities and continue to perfect his trade as there is always more to learn no matter the qualification. She asserts that having pride in one's work starts with recognising the importance of delivering good service and both he and his work colleagues are very passionate about that at Osborne Jewellers.

Once the dust has settled, Kian intends to return to the NAJ to further his education by way of the JET Management and Leadership qualification and move into more specialised qualifications like the JET Foundations of Appraisal Practice course to expand his expertise.

Deborah praised how, through dedication, commitment and unwavering professionalism, he has turned challenges into opportunities. "We are all so proud of Kian," said Deborah.

# Rhona's shoes will be tough ones to fill!

"I'm not sure yet what I am going to do with all time on my hands because I have never been one for just sitting at home doing nothing!" So, said **Rhona Dunn** when we met up over a coffee for her to tell me she was 'retiring' from all the good work she has done over so many years for so many other people, reports **Inside Morpeth Editor Ian Leech**.

Much of her lifetime's work for good causes, has been done in and around Morpeth, but not exclusively in the town.

It all began when Rhona was a teenager living with her family at North Seaton Colliery. At the time she wanted to join the Boys' Brigade in the village but was persistently told she could not. I guess the clue to local officials saying no, probably lay in the name... Boys' Brigade.

But, eventually persistence paid off when she was allowed to join as the first female member, beginning a long association with the brigade which would eventually lead to her becoming on one of its national officials. As Training Officer, she travelled all over the British Isles visiting local brigades to pass on her knowledge and advice, and eventually she became the first lady member of its national executive council.

After marrying husband Jim in the early Sixties, they moved to live in Morpeth, where Jim became Captain of the town's Boys' Brigade in Manchester Street.

After working as a PA at St George's Hospital, Rhona trained to be a business studies teacher working at the Hirst High School in Ashington, Bedlington Grammar School and Alnwick's Duchess school before she retired.

However, she then spent nine years teaching inmates at HMP Acklington Prison.

It was when she retired from teaching that her charity work on behalf of so many good causes, began in earnest.

In 2006 she became a volunteer at the Contact Morpeth Mental Health Group, a charity founded in 1986 to offer friendship and support to help reduce social isolation for people with mental health problems and their carers.

Although based in the town's Grey's Yard, Contact's facilities are open to anyone from the wider area of South East Northumberland. Rhona became the Groups chairman eight years ago, a role she has just relinquished as part of her 'retirement' plan.

In 2008 when Morpeth town centre was



Rhona Dunn with the Duchess of Northumberland and the Tree of Light

overwhelmed by devastating flooding, Rhona – and husband Jim – played a huge part in helping out local residents who has lost everything in the floods.

Along with others including Morpeth Lions' and Rotarians, they actively helped organise the collection and distribution of furniture and household items to so any grateful local families.

As a result, the couple were jointly awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship by Morpeth Rotary Club, which in turn led them to becoming Rotarians. Rhona, was in fact, the first lady to join the club and then was its first lady President.

During that year of office Rhona also launched a Christmas Tree of Light with the support of the Dransfield owners of Morpeth's Sanderson Arcade. Every year since then, people have been able to tie a message to loved ones no longer

with them, on to the huge Christmas Tree in the Arcade in return for leaving a donation to charity.

The idea has raised over the years, an astonishing £45,000 to be distributed among local good causes.

But, Rhona has also been a very hands-on supporter of charities herself, having done an abseil, travelled down a zip-wire and on two occasions, slept out overnight in Morpeth Market Place, to draw attention to the plight of the homeless.

In 2021 Rhona was awarded the British Empire Medal which was presented to her by the Duchess of Northumberland, at Alnwick Castle.

As Rhona told me: "It's time for others to take over from me"... but goodness me, her shoes will be hard ones to fill!



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# The 'Book Gadgie' arrives in Morpeth

After more than five years selling pre-loved books at Tynemouth Market, **James Davies – better known as 'The Book Gadgie'** – has begun a new chapter of his life by opening Morpeth's only independent book shop with the support of his wife Sharon, daughter Megan and son Euan. **Inside Morpeth's Deputy Editor Jack Brodie** has been to meet him at their House of Stories shop.

Following a career working for energy and industrial equipment companies, James has chosen to indulge his passion for books old and new, by opening the shop in Newgate Street.

The House of Stories specialises in both new and pre-loved books along with a selection of Antique and Folio Collection books. On its shelves are a mix of everything from fiction to non-fiction, children's books to one even older than

Morpeth Town Hall!

James told me he plans to constantly grow his selection of books, which he says, will truly be shaped by his customers. As he said: "If people are interested in reading something, I'd love to help them find it."

In fact, his commitment to engage with the local community is clear with his goal to organise author talks most months, and for the shop to become a place where people can gather in a book

club, to read....and to enjoy a cup of good coffee.

After searching for somewhere to open their shop, James and his family settled on Morpeth as just the right place for their new business. "We looked at premises between Harrogate and Berwick, but we just kept coming back to Morpeth because the town has just the right feel about it for us," he said.

As you walk into the shop, it is clear the passion James has for reading and books. While talking to him we had the pleasure of watching him regularly engaging with customers about their particular interests, their current reads and what they were looking to choose as their next read.

And there's plenty of choice in the House of Stories! Alongside a selection of well-known authors of regional, national and international fame, the shop also stocks an

impressive selection of books by local authors.

Alongside the selection of new and used books, House of Stories also has a case dedicated to rare and antique books for sale, as well as those of the Folio Collection known for their reproductions of historical texts. For example, on the shelves the oldest book James has in stock is about the Romans that dates from 1713, meaning it was printed before the construction of Morpeth Town Hall even started!

Other beautiful old books include a family bible from 1878, a collection of Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales, and two volumes of poems by Scotland's beloved Rabbin Burns.

James also has a curated selection of currently stocked books to be found online at [www.houseofstories.co.uk](http://www.houseofstories.co.uk)

So, it's well worth popping in a browse, a chat and that good cup of coffee!

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# Fresh start for Amanda!

Thirty-seven years after starting work at Morpeth's only independent fruit and vegetable shop **Amanda Little** has taken over the business.

She has bought the E Price shop in Newgate Street where businesses have been trading since 1876. For much of that time fruit and vegetables have been sold from the shop starting with the Price sisters.

Then, Alan Smith ran the business for 40 years before selling it another employee Linda Bright. Now nine years later, she has sold the shop to Amanda who couldn't be happier at taking it over.

"I've loved working in the shop from day one," she told me. "We have so many loyal customers who have become good friends over the years and I didn't want it to close which would have happened if I had not taken it over.

"Morpeth has so many independently owned business especially in Newgate Street, which help make the town centre so very different to many others.

"In this day and age, so many high streets are suffering because of out-of-town shopping malls as well as the rise in on-line retailing, and that is a great shame because communities like ours need thriving town centres. But, we do need customers to support our local high street to keep it is lively and vibrant as it is."

Amanda says she likes

to think she knows her customers and what they want by way of fruit and vegetables which are fresh every day in our shop.

At Price's customers can do just that even if it is only two carrots, a few potatoes, an apple or an orange they want to buy. "In a way that's what makes us different to the supermarkets and that we try to buy local produce wherever possible," she said.

Running an independent greengrocer's shop will mean a crack-of-dawn start several times a week for Amanda, to stock up at the North East's fruit and vegetable wholesale market at Team Valley.

"But, it is worth it to know that the produce we have on our shelves is as fresh as it can possibly be," said Amanda.

"In a way I like to think of that as giving back something to our customers who support us every week by making sure we have the best and freshest fruit and vegetables for them to buy."

Amanda's shop is open six days a week from 8.30am to 3.30pm on weekdays with closing time half an hour earlier on Saturdays. Home deliveries can also be ordered on Mondays and Thursdays.



New shop owner Amanda Little



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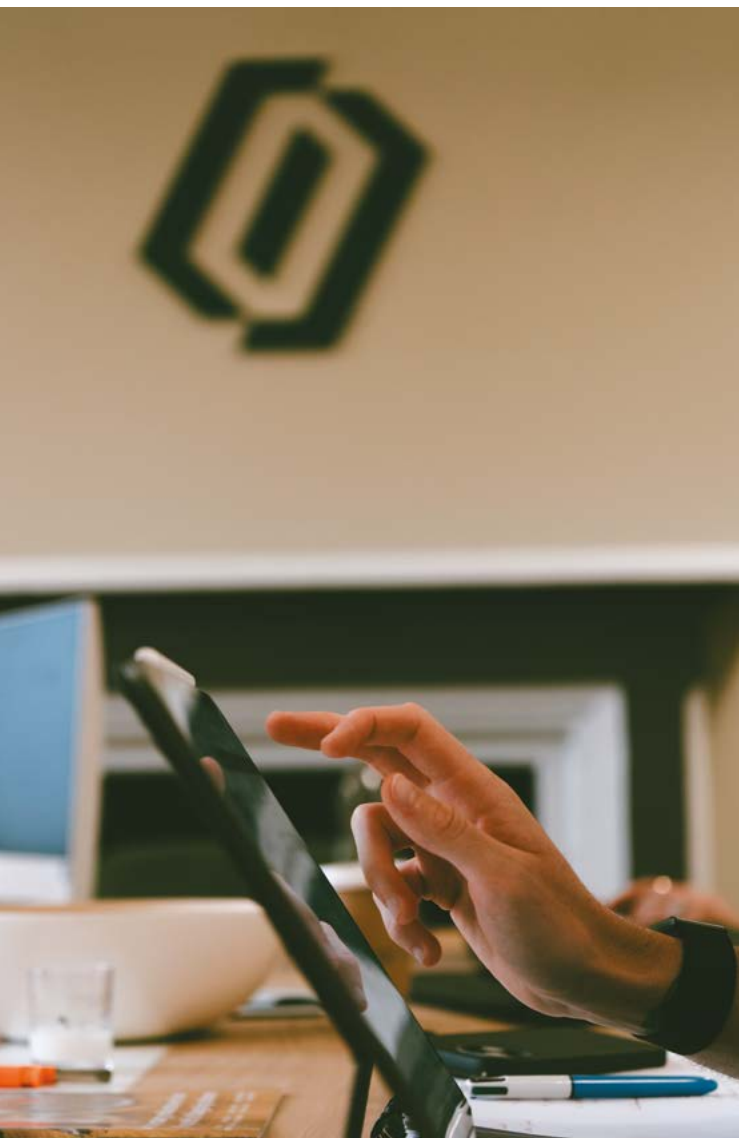
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# Olivers Financial expands office space and welcomes new team member



Olivers Financial has recently expanded its office space at Benjamin Green House in Morpeth and welcomed a new member to the team as the business continues to evolve.

Founded by Financial Adviser Connor Oliver, Olivers Financial provides financial advice to clients across the UK whilst remaining proudly based in Morpeth. The business works with individuals, families and business owners, helping them make informed decisions around their finances and plan for the future with confidence.

The additional office space has been created to enhance the experience for clients and provide room for the business to continue developing. Situated within the unique setting of Morpeth Train Station, the office offers a modern and welcoming environment for meetings and financial planning discussions.

Alongside the office expansion, Kelly Grainger has recently joined the business. Many clients will already have spoken with her as she helps manage client communications,

coordinate reviews and support the day-to-day running of the business.

Connor Oliver said: "Over the past year we've been fortunate to welcome a number of new clients and, with that, came the opportunity to make a few changes. Expanding the office space and bringing Kelly into the business allows us to continue providing the level of service we're known for, while creating a better experience for both existing and new clients."

Whilst the business supports clients throughout the UK, remaining based in Morpeth continues to be an important part of its identity. The office expansion and addition of a new team member reflect a considered approach to growth, ensuring the business can continue to provide a personal and professional service as it develops.

For Connor and the team, the focus remains the same as it has always been: building long-term relationships, offering clear and straightforward advice, and helping clients feel more confident about their financial future.

This next chapter for Olivers Financial is not about getting bigger for the sake of it, but about investing in the people, space and support needed to continue delivering a high-quality service for clients, both locally and across the UK.

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SJP Approved 03/09/26

Associate Partner Practice  
**St. James's Place**



Organisers Margaret Adam, Pat Fuller, Catherine Allen, Wendy Fail, Dorothy Waddington and Dorothy Moore

# Working together for a 'greener' Morpeth

More than a dozen local groups and organisations joined forces over a recent weekend, to raise awareness and showcase what they are doing together to help make Morpeth and the surrounding area, a 'greener' place to live and work.

Coming together under the umbrella of Climate Action Wansbeck (CAW) they organised and staged Morpeth's very first Festival of Community, Nature and Environment in association with Northumberland County Council's Waste Management Department.

Three days of events began with a screening by Greater Morpeth Development Trust's (GMDT) Community Cinema, of the hugely acclaimed Sir David Attenborough documentary 'Ocean' at St James' Community Hall.

The film which was released to coincide with Sir David's 90th birthday, examines the importance of the world's oceans, as well as highlighting the threats they are facing and the impact that could have on the future survival of the planet.

The following day, 15 groups and organisations brought together for the weekend, manned their own stalls to showcase what they are all doing to

respond to climate change in and around Morpeth, followed by a closing open-air service organised by Churches Together in Carlisle Park, to mark Creation Sunday, a Christian observance of God's creation of the universe.

CAW was founded around five years ago to bring together residents of the area, to help mitigate and minimise the potential local effects of climate change, and the festival was a chance for them to highlight how they are working together with other local organisations such as the ones who attended the event.

For example, at the festival, CAW was able to demonstrate its recent citizen science activities connected with the River Wansbeck, whereby members have been learning how to use water testing kits to keep a check on potential pollution by taking water samples between Mitford and Sheepwash, to help keep the river healthy.

At the festival, the County Council also provided information about future opportunities being planned to give local residents the chance to recycle food waste in their homes.

Members of the GMDT litter-picking team, shared news of how they have collected hundreds and hundreds of bags of rubbish after blitzing litter hotspots around the town centre. Stobhill Link reported on its work to recycle clothing and perfectly edible unsold food collected from local supermarkets; while local schools explained how they are involving their pupils in learning more about climate change.

Morpeth Town Councillor Pat Fuller, speaking on behalf of CAW, "Putting the festival together has given everyone a real buzz at seeing what so many people are doing in their own groups for the good of everyone in the town."

Groups and organisations taking part in the Festival of Community, Nature and Environment, included CAW, Northumberland Waste Management team, Stobhill Link, Cycle with Jan, the Millennium Green, Clark's Bog, The Repair Café, Churches Together Eco Group, GMDT, Friends of the Earth, Barnabas Safe & Sound, the Red Squirrel Group, Groundwork NE, the National Gardens Scheme, Morpeth Camera Club, the Storyteller's Band, Newminster and St Robert's schools.





# Experience the beauty of autumn at Wallington

**Autumn is one of the most spectacular times to visit Wallington, when its woodlands come alive with vibrant shades of red, gold and amber. Stroll beneath the changing colours, crunch through fallen leaves and enjoy the sweet scent of the Katsura tree in the Walled Garden, famous for its distinctive 'toffee apple' aroma.**

For a peaceful seasonal walk, follow the River Walk along the banks of the Wansbeck, crossing bridges and stepping stones while taking in the autumn scenery.

## Autumn photography exhibition

This year, it's not just the trees putting on a show. Dotted around the woodland, find a stunning range of photographs celebrating autumn in the North East (until 27 November).

Following an open photography competition in 2025, 29 winning images and 34 highly commended photographs have been selected across three categories: Up-Close, Autumn Colour and Wildlife.

Displayed throughout Wallington's woodland, the exhibition showcases the colours, textures and wildlife that make autumn such a special season and highlight the creativity and talent of nature lovers from across the region.

## October half term fun

Families can enjoy a range of seasonal activities during October half term, including Creatures of the Night, a self-led woodland trail following the adventures of Beatrice and Bertie as they encounter Wallington's nocturnal wildlife (17 October to 15 November).

Drop-in craft sessions take place on 27 and 29 October, offering children the chance to create autumn-themed keepsakes. Budding gardeners can also join Little Leaf Collectors (24 October to 1 November), helping the gardening team

gather fallen leaves around the courtyard using wheelbarrows and rakes.

## Be a part of Christmas at Wallington

There's something rather special (and sparkly) about Christmas at Wallington. The House will be dressed in its seasonal splendour, the courtyard lights will be twinkling, there'll be Christmas craft workshops, Festive Afternoon Tea and the sounds of live music in the Central Hall. Plus, little ones can join the Father Christmas Experience (booking required).

This year, Wallington is inviting visitors and local crafters to help decorate the House with handmade decorations inspired by traditional and contemporary craft techniques linked to the property's heritage. Craft sessions suitable for all skill levels will run on selected dates throughout September and October.

**For more information and to plan your visit, go to:**  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wallington](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wallington).



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# Autumn Photography Exhibition 2026

at Wallington

**11 September to 27 November 2026**

Discover a stunning collection of photographs celebrating the beauty of autumn across the North East.

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# Time to wrap up warm for those chilly mornings

With the first cool mornings on the horizon, our Autumn Winter 2026 womenswear is arriving in store. This season is made for layering: soft knits over dresses, neat jackets over easy separates, and colour that lifts familiar neutrals. The collection brings together brands with distinct personalities, so you can choose one special piece or build a complete look around clothes you already own.

From Cotswolds-based Lily & Me, look for relaxed shapes, soft textures and nature-inspired, hand-drawn prints. Navy, sage and olive sit beside warm burnt-caramel tones, while cord, denim and knitwear make the shift into colder weather feel effortless. These are cheerful, easy pieces with thoughtful details and the sort of comfort that works from morning to evening.

Part Two brings its familiar Scandinavian ease to the new season. Feminine dresses, polished trousers and soft cardigans can all be dressed up or down, with corduroy and clean outerwear adding texture. Modern shapes and subtle prints sit easily with the favourites already in your wardrobe.

Soyaconcept is ideal for everyday outfits that need to work hard without feeling overdone. Relaxed cuts, comfortable waistlines and light-to-medium layers

come in a calm palette of cream, sand, navy and dark green, with plum adding depth. Mix a blouse with easy trousers, or take a simple dress into winter with knitwear and boots.

Fransa adds a little more structure, pairing textured knits with corduroy trousers and skirts, useful blazers and straightforward dresses. Rich brown and Bordeaux shades give the range an autumnal warmth, while coordinated separates make getting dressed refreshingly simple. It is an easy way to bring colour and shape into an everyday wardrobe.

Celebrating 50 years in 2026, Orientique remains the choice for women who enjoy print and individuality. The Australian label's winter collection combines natural fibres with expressive patterns, from statement jackets to relaxed long-sleeved dresses and lightweight knits. One

printed layer can transform a plain outfit, while the easy shapes keep bold colour wonderfully wearable.

Tirelli takes a more pared-back, architectural approach. Designed in Melbourne, its Autumn Winter 2026 collection centres on versatile layering, with wrap coats, asymmetric knits, diagonal-seam dresses and easy trousers. Aubergine, amberstone, moss and deep ocean sit alongside graphic stripes, giving comfortable silhouettes a sharper, more graphic feel.

Start with the piece you will wear most - perhaps a cardigan, printed dress or well-cut pair of trousers - then add a new colour or texture as the weather changes. Our team loves helping women find clothes that suit their shape, style and day-to-day life, so call in, try something unexpected and let us help you put the new season together.

# Autumn Winter 26

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# A New Home, A New Chapter...

How a lifetime mortgage could help you buy the right home for the next stage of your life writes  
**Joanne Manghan, North East Equity Release.**

## **A home for the way you live now**

Later life can bring change. Once children have grown up and moved out, the family home may feel larger than needed, or the stairs and garden may demand more attention than you would like. Perhaps you want to be closer to family, within walking distance of Morpeth's shops, or somewhere with less upkeep and more time to enjoy yourself.

## **When smaller does not mean cheaper**

A bungalow, apartment or more manageable property may seem the natural next step and be cheaper to run, however, a smaller home does not always mean a lower purchase price than the value of your current home. A convenient location, accessible layout or room for family to stay can come at a premium. Once moving costs are included, the proceeds from your existing home may not stretch as far as you hoped.

## **Beginning again independently**

For others, a move may be required following a change in personal circumstances. When a couple separates later in life, dividing the proceeds of one property may leave each person with equity, but not enough to buy the home they would choose. It is easy to assume that age, retirement or income rules out borrowing, leaving a significant compromise as the only option.

## **Could a lifetime mortgage help?**

A lifetime mortgage could provide an alternative. Typically available from age 55, it can be used to purchase a home, with the loan secured against the property you are buying. You remain its owner. The borrowing can sit alongside your sale proceeds and savings, helping bridge the gap between your available funds and the price of a suitable home.

## **How much could you borrow?**

The amount available depends largely on your age and the value of the property being purchased. For joint applicants, the younger person's age usually determines the maximum available. Health and lifestyle can also affect some lenders' offers. The property must meet the lender's criteria, so checking suitability early can help you understand your budget before committing to a purchase.

## **Are monthly repayments required?**

With a roll-up lifetime mortgage, contractual monthly repayments are not required, and borrowing does not depend on a standard income assessment. Interest is added to the loan, although voluntary payments can help control the balance. The mortgage is normally repaid from the property's sale after the last borrower dies or moves permanently into long-term care.



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## **What should you consider?**

Interest is charged on both the original borrowing and interest already added, so the debt can grow substantially and reduce the inheritance you leave. Fees and early repayment charges also need consideration, along with any effect on means-tested benefits. Borrowing against your home is a long-term commitment, and the flexibility to move again or repay later deserves careful thought.

## **Making the right decision**

Every situation is different. Taking time to talk through your circumstances, priorities and future plans with a specialist adviser can help you understand your options. Together, you can explore the benefits, costs and alternatives, including other mortgages or using savings. Involving family, where you wish, can also help everyone understand how the arrangement would work.

## **Your next chapter**

Understanding your options is the first step towards finding a home that feels right. Whether you hope to stay close to familiar places around Morpeth or start afresh elsewhere, the decision should reflect what matters to you.

# Are you making the most of your retirement?



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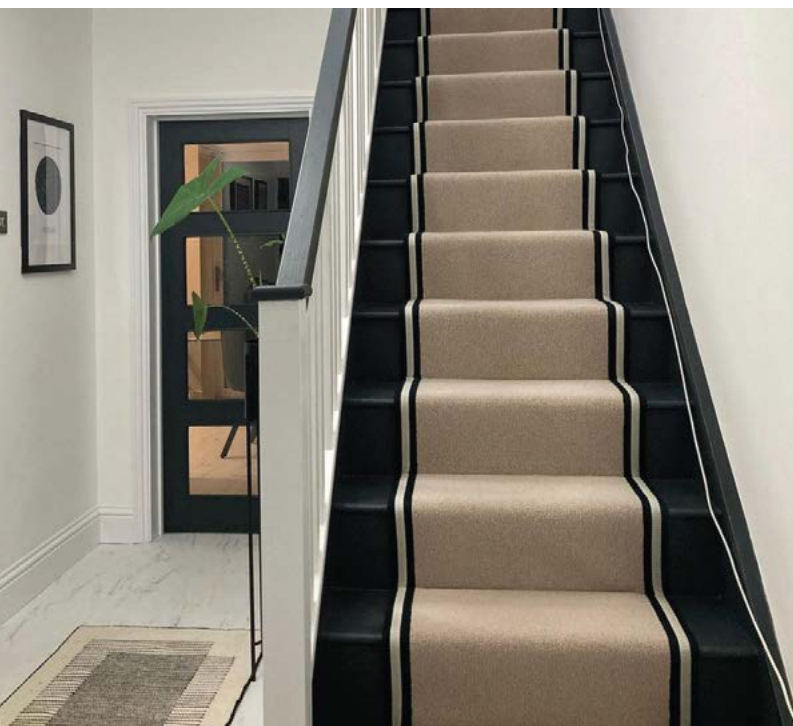
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Picture by Jack Brodie

# From cathedrals to distilleries a choir that sings in harmony

VoiceMale's Nigel Jenkins introduces this Morpeth choir

**The VoiceMale Folk choir isn't what you would expect from a traditional male voice choir. We are based in Morpeth, where every week we attract between 20 and 30 male singers from all over Northumberland to our practice sessions.**

We sing acapella and specialise in folk songs, both traditional and contemporary

VoiceMale was established 25 years ago when renowned folk musician Sandra Kerr, working with music charity 20,000 Voices, set about recruiting male singers in the county. A few years down the line, the baton was passed to Graham Stacy, who ably and inspiringly led the choir until his retirement in 2021, before it was again passed on, this time to a young and highly respected folk musician Jon Doran.

Our broad repertoire has an emphasis on the rich and varied folk traditions of Northumberland and Tyneside, but we also include traditional songs from

elsewhere in the British Isles, together with contemporary material and folk songs from around the world.

Arrangements by our talented musical director Jon, are sometimes traditional, sometimes less so, but are always innovative and exciting – and all are performed with wit and humour.

The ethos of the choir is first and foremost the quality of our singing, but this is equally matched by the informality, enjoyment, fun, camaraderie and inclusivity which is engendered in the group.

As Jon says: "The choir is open to men of all ages and from all backgrounds – all you need to join is enthusiasm, and ability to sing in the shower, and a willingness to enjoy good company. You don't even need to be able to read music."

The choir performs on average a dozen times a year at various venues, and our concerts often support charitable good causes. Last year, for example, we sang at Newcastle Cathedral, Beamish Museum, Alnwick Playhouse and the Ad

Gefrin whisky distillery at Wooler, among others. Audiences told us how much they enjoy and feel energised by our singing, resulting in a lot of repeat gigs.

In addition, we have recently recorded our first CD for a number of years. We also took the unusual step (for us) of entering a music competition where we were awarded first prize with supportive comments and praise from the judges. This month we are embarking on a singing tour to Germany.

We look forward to welcoming men who enjoy singing and can play their part in a very friendly and inclusive group. If you feel you would like to come along to one of our practice sessions (without obligation or audition), or would like to invite us to sing at your function, then please contact us through our website to have an informal chat. We'd love to hear from you.

We meet at the Methodist Church on Howard Terrace, Morpeth, from 7.30pm on Wednesdays in term time. See our website at [www.voicemale.org.uk](http://www.voicemale.org.uk)

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# Still crazy after all these years

**Mark Stephenson**, our wine expert, reflects on how in an anniversary year, Morpeth's independents work together for the good of one another.

The year 2026 is a special one for many reasons. Numerous associations, clubs, and businesses in the town are commemorating landmark anniversaries.

They include the Morpeth Antiquarian Society who are now in their 80th year, as well as Morpeth Bowling Club and Morpeth Scouts who are both celebrating their centenary. That's just to name a few, as listed in an article in the previous edition of Inside Morpeth by the editor of this fine publication, Sir Ian Leech (okay, he's not a sir officially, but it's only a matter of time isn't it?).

As a business owner in Morpeth, there was one anniversary that caught my eye and made me pause and take a moment to admire. It is that of fellow retailer and "Bridge Street Crew" member Rutherford & Co who are marking an incredible 180 years.

When George Rutherford first opened the doors to his draper shop in 1846 Queen Victoria had spent less than 10 years on the throne.

In Westminster, Sir Robert Peel had just resigned as Prime Minister after repealing the Corn Laws, and in sport, the Oval Cricket Ground held its first ever 1st class cricket match.

Within retail circles, 1846 saw the name WH Smith and Sons appear for the first time as a brand, and Mr Marks and Mr Spencer were still 38 years away from opening their first penny bazaar in Leeds. Compared to Rutherfords, that makes M&S just a bairn!

The store has witnessed two world wars, a moon landing, a pandemic, and Scott and Charlene's wedding in Neighbours (a truly historical moment I think you'll agree). It is testament to the Rutherford's five generations and its current ownership that they have steered this Morpethian institution through some dramatic changes in the retail environment - whilst keeping its authenticity and charm.

In its 180th year, Rutherfords still manages to be a central part of the town's fabric with its fantastic Christmas window, diverse selection of products, and its engaging social media content - the latter which we regularly share to our customers on our platforms.

In reply, Rutherford's kindly shares our content too! It's deeply humbling to witness fellow businesses helping each other out, whether on social media,



Rutherfords shop window display of its 180th anniversary

hosting joint-events, or by providing regular custom to each other.

Over the years we've teamed up with Tallantyre, Osborne Jewellers, The Office pub, Lateral Art, the Morpeth Apartment, the Jewellers Guild, and many more (sorry if I've left anyone out!). It all forms a patchwork that enables Morpeth's high street to be such a unique and special place to be.

However, as a high street we can't just rely on the past to keep going. We've got to make new history by giving you reasons to keep on supporting us rather than going online or travelling elsewhere.

We must keep on giving you unique face-to-face customer service, exciting new products, and very importantly, deliver them at a fair price.

I know at G&G we'll keep on doing our bit, and the more I see from other indies in the town, the more I'm convinced that they'll keep their end of the bargain too. Whether we'll get to celebrate our 180 years, I doubt it.

At the moment in this current environment, lasting 18 months can be seen as an achievement!

Talking of legacies, it got me thinking about some of our products which can claim to last the test of time. Port is always a good one.

On a trip to Portugal a few years ago I visited one of our Port producers Royal Oporto. The owner kindly poured us a 1908 Tawny port to try.

How did it taste? Well, fresh as a daisy!

Sadly, we don't sell that, but we do sell the rather aptly named Invincible 10 Year Tawny for £36.00.

The creation of legendary winemaker Marc Kent (the bloke behind the Chocolate Block wine), this is a rich and indulgent port with plenty of dried fruit. Once opened, it can last a few weeks if re-sealed and refrigerated.

Whisk(e)y is another drink that has a good life expectancy once opened. Okay, it all depends how much air gets to it, but if well stored it can last for months on end in its prime condition.

We have a new addition to our ranks in the form of Titanic Distillers from Belfast. The five-year-old Pot Still (£42.00) is fruity, more-ish, and mellow...and yes we've heard all the jokes already. "I bet it goes down well" and "not a good one to mix with ice" etc etc.

Lastly, sherry is another drink that can keep well once opened. Most notably the sweeter, nuttier styles classed between Amontillado and PX. We'll settle on somewhere in between with Barbadillo Oloroso Sherry for £16.50 which has flavours of hazelnut, raisin, and slight toffee notes. Yet again, as with port, reseal it and refrigerate to keep it is the best condition for the longest amount of time.

Of course, if something doesn't taste right, then it probably has passed it. If you're unsure, pour it down the sink and buy another bottle!

All Available at G&G now and perfect for the autumn season. Cheers!

# TOWN CRYER!

The latest News from Morpeth Town Council

## British Heart Foundation charity fund-raising total is already standing at more than £5,000



**It's been an extremely busy first few months as Mayor and I have met some wonderful people, welcomed new businesses to Morpeth and made new relationships with organisations. The summer weather has been glorious, and we have had extremely successful public events, including Morpeth Fair Day and Picnic in the Park, which saw the town absolutely thriving.**

I had the pleasure of meeting the Bellringers when they played the annual peal for the incoming Mayor, which is a wonderful tradition.

I was invited to open Morpeth's only independent bookshop, House of Stories, and met the fabulous owners, James and Sharon.

I attended the Millennium Green summer fete, Wings and Wheels event at Eshott airfield and met some of the Air Cadets.

This was followed by a great night of comedy at Morpeth AFC with the Geordie comic Steffen Peddie and Alfie Joey, Morpeth Rotary honorary members evening and I am looking forward to meeting many more people over the next few months.

I have started the fundraising journey for my chosen charity, The British Heart Foundation. I'd like to make a special



Morpeth's Mayor Councillor Wendy Fail

mention and a huge thank you to Holly Brind who organised an afternoon tea, baking an array of delicious cakes and scones, and hosted an event for over 40 ladies, raising £1250 for the charity.

A remarkable achievement. I then held my first fundraising evening at Lollo Rosso. Thank you to over 100 people who came along to support me, including the Lord Lieutenant, Dr Caroline Pryer accompanied by her husband David, and the Chair of Northumberland County Council, Cllr John Beynon.

We had a wonderful evening and danced the night away to music from Jason King.

Including donations taken at the summer events and donations made by St James's Church, David Auld & Co, the Nutty Natters and Picnic in the Park, we have raised over £5000 already, which is incredible.

My next fundraising event was a Back to School quiz on 8th September, followed by the annual Mayor's Ball on 20th November.

Alongside my fellow town councillors, I will be at the Heritage Open Day in September and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the Town Hall.

November will see the Christmas lights being switched on following an afternoon of entertainment on Saturday 14th November, which marks the start of Christmas in Morpeth.

For the little ones there will be an opportunity to enter a competition to join Santa and myself on the stage to switch on the lights.

Information on how to enter will be shared with schools and on the Town Council website and Facebook page.

If you see me about, please say hello and stop for a chat. Bye for now

**Wendy Fail**  
Mayor of Morpeth



Morpeth Town Council, Morpeth Town Hall, Market Place, Morpeth NE61 1LZ  
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# Morpeth Free Family Fun



New play equipment at Church Walk

**Another great Summer in Morpeth with plenty of sunshine to be had. School holidays went by in a flash with the help of the free children's activities.**

These activities were part funded by Morpeth Town Council, working in partnership with Barnabas Safe & Sound. There has been a range of activities including the ever-popular paddle sports on the river, visits to the new climbing wall, a chance to try bowling with Morpeth Bowls Club, arts and crafts, yoga, drama workshops and more. I'm sure you'll agree there was something for everyone and we hope it brought a smile to your little ones face!

Again, the Town Council hosted the third Free Family Fun Day on Storey Park field. Plenty was on offer with an inflatable assault course, bouncy castles, axe throwing, archery, face painting, fun fair rides, climbing wall, football with Newcastle United Foundation coaches, animals, music and vintage cars.

The paddling pool and play area in Carlisle Park were both super busy throughout the Summer, many families enjoyed picnics but thankfully didn't extend to using disposable BBQs which are understandably prohibited in the park.

Church Walk play area received a little face lift, later than hoped but still in time to enjoy before the schools went back, a new spider web climber and multi bay swing set was installed in the older children section in the bottom part of the park.

The Pavilion Tipi was also back for the summer providing a place to relax on those warm evenings and watch the world go by. There were themed weekends with something for everyone both young and old(er).

The Christmas Lights Switch On event on will take place on Saturday 14th November. This will be a fun filled family day out with lots of free activities to keep all the family entertained!

The day will include a jam-packed programme of entertainment on the main stage, face painting, photo opportunities in a snow globe, kiddies fairground attractions, a visit from a very special man in red and a host of food and drink vendors on the Market Place. The Pavilion Tipi will also be back, opening the same day, running right through to the New Year.

For more information on what can be expected on the big day, keep an eye on the Town Council and More in Morpeth websites and social media feeds.

We hope the Christmas Lights Switch-On event will be the start of a magical run up to Christmas in Morpeth!



## Remembrance Services

**On Sunday 8th November the Town Council's Remembrance Sunday Service and Parade will take place.**

The Parade, led by Morpeth Pipe Band, will be leaving New Market at approximately 10.35 am to march to the Cenotaph where the traditional Remembrance Service will be held.

Any organisation wishing to lay a wreath, please contact the Town Council office.

The Mayor, Councillor Wendy Fail and Morpeth Town Council, will be supporting the Royal British Legion's Two Minute Silence at 11.00am on Wednesday 11th November. A short service of remembrance will take place outside of Morpeth Town Hall commencing at 10.55 am.

## COUNCIL MEETING TIMETABLE

### SEE NOTICEBOARDS AND WEBSITE

Meeting Timetable for October, November and December. All meetings will be held in the Corn Exchange of the Town Hall, unless otherwise stated on the agenda. All Committee meetings commence at 6pm, unless otherwise stated on the posters or website.

#### Planning and Transport Committee

14th October 2026  
11th November 2026  
9th December 2026

#### Finance and General Purposes Committee

7th October 2026  
4th November 2026  
2nd December 2026

# Maximize Education students off to university or college

**At the start of another academic year tutors at Morpeth-based Maximize Education are extending their congratulations to all their Year 13 students from last term who have secured university places to study a wider range of degree subjects.**

At the same time, they have also congratulated Year 11 students at their Morpeth Education Centre, on their successful GCSE examination results which have enabled many of them to opt to continue their studies further afield at colleges throughout the region or to pursue apprenticeships.

As Chief Executive Officer and Maximize Education founder Christine Jamieson, says: "It is reassuring to see that the post-16 pathway continues to expand opportunities for this age group."

The Morpeth Maximize centre at Loansdean, registers students from both

state and public schools across the region, seeking additional support for National Curriculum subjects and examination specifications for all UK examination boards.

The centre offers bespoke support for Key stage 1 and 2, functional skills and GCSE subjects up to A-Level covering a wide range of subjects in addition to maths, English and science, all delivered by a team of exceptionally qualified tutors.

Tuition can be either one-to-one in person at the Morpeth Centre, or online. Further information and discussions are available either by calling 079834 25115 or logging on to [www.maximizeeducation.com](http://www.maximizeeducation.com)

Earlier this year Maximize Education launched its own literacy project to help get more young children reading by inviting authors to submit 500-word children's stories as part of a competition it ran in conjunction with Morpeth Book Festival.

Now, Christine can announce that 2,500 copies of the winning entry 'The Seed Who Wanted to Sprout' by author Fiona

Powell, have been donated to local primary schools and other organisations working with young children.

At the same time, more than 4,000 children's books were donated in response to an appeal by Maximize Education as part of its literacy project, through collection points in local schools, libraries and supermarkets.

"The response was phenomenal and as a result many children are enjoy reading books that they might not otherwise have had access to," said Christine.

The first of a series of narrated stories created by up-and-coming authors, has also been uploaded to the Maximize website together with a free reaching resource pack.

Now, plans are underway for the 2027 Maximize Education literacy project and as Christine told Inside Morpeth: "We welcome and would encourage primary schools to get in touch with us if they would like to be involved, or to watch out for further updates on our website and social media sites."

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# Register and book now for 2026-2027 academic year

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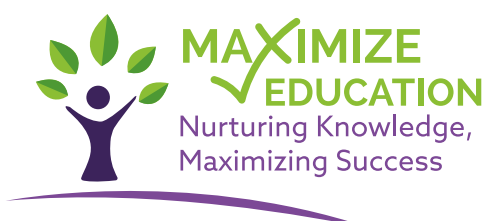
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Sarah Beth Briggs. Photo Fritz Curzon



Fibonacci Quartet. Photo Kaupo Kikkas

# New season of very best chamber music

**Louise Freeman** previews the forthcoming Morpeth concerts

**Our member-run Morpeth Music Society will this autumn begin celebrating our 81st season of presenting professional chamber music in the warm and comfortable surroundings of Morpeth Methodist Church.**

Over the past decades we have seen such musical superstars as singer Kathleen Ferrier, cellist Julian Lloyd Webber, the Lindsays and oboist Leon Goossens perform at the Society's concerts, and this coming season we will continue to bring the best of established chamber musicians as well as rising stars, to entertain our Morpeth audiences.

Our new season begins on Thursday October 15th, with a concert featuring popular North East pianist Sarah Briggs. Sarah first came to public notice at the age of 11 as a finalist in the BBC Young Musician of the Year competition.

She will open her Morpeth programme with six bagatelles by Beethoven which were written in the same period as his iconic symphony. In a similar classical vein her next piece will be a Haydn sonata followed by three dreamy preludes by the Austrian composer Hans Gal.

The second half of her concert will continue with Debussy's Bergamasque suite which includes the famous Clair de lune. The final works of Sarah's

programme will be in a romantic mood with a Chopin berceuse or lullaby and Mendelssohn's Variations Serieuses.

A critically acclaimed ensemble the Fibonacci Quartet will perform at Morpeth on November 12th, with a diverse programme of Mozart, Bridge and Debussy. The Quartet are rising stars of the chamber music scene, building a flourishing performing career across Europe.

Our Christmas Concert will feature the Corvus Consort with harpist Louise Thomson on December 17th. This exciting young choir will bring their 'Welcome Joy' programme of works celebrating women's voices concluding with Britten's beautiful Ceremony of Carols.

A highlight of our season will be a recital by pianist Tom Poster on January 14th (2027). Tom is well known for his eclectic programming and has been described as 'a marvel who can play anything in any style.'

His Morpeth programme will start with classical Schumann and Schubert, followed by favourite gems from the Great American Songbooks interspersed with nocturnes.

The next concert on March 11th will be by the Piatti string quartet with pianist Simon Callaghan when the musicians will explore music by Vaughan Williams, Schumann and Dvorak.

The season will then conclude in baroque style with our first visit by the popular London Handel Players on April 15th, when the celebrated ensemble will perform a programme to include Bach, Vivaldi, Handel and Telemann.

A season ticket for all six concerts is amazing value at only £80, costing less than £13.50 per concert and saving £40 compared to buying separate adult tickets. Apply now via the JOIN page on the website.

Buying your season ticket helps MMS support our local young musicians through free tickets for under 18s; an annual scholarship for an outstanding music student; and free workshops for local schools. Last year, more than 70 pupils from local schools enjoyed a brilliant workshop by musicians from the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

Individual adult concert tickets are now on sale priced at £20. Students aged 18 years and under are warmly invited to attend for free as are tickets for essential carers enabling another person to attend. All concerts begin at 7.30pm.

Buy your single tickets via the society secretary – email [enquiries@morpeth-musoc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@morpeth-musoc.org.uk) or from Morpeth Tourist Information Centre as well as online from the MMS website [morpeth-musoc.org.uk](http://morpeth-musoc.org.uk)

Facebook @**MusicMorpeth**  
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Threads @**morpethmusoc**

# Post early for Christmas with Morpeth's scouts

**The 4th Morpeth Scouts have been running a local Christmas Post scheme in and around the town for more than 20 years as one of their largest annual fundraisers involving the majority of their squirrels, beavers, cubs and scouts who are each given a 'round' to deliver.**

A rise in the trend for digital greetings has, however, seen a fall in the number of cards sent. In 2017 the scouts sorted and delivered around 5,000 cards, but by last Christmas the number fell to 2,314 cards.

"This year we are asking for the support of local residents for our postal service which helps us to continue to provide scouting opportunities on 14 occasions each week for around 280 young people supported by 40 regular adult volunteers," said Ellen Glynn.

She said they do recognise that in this digitised age it is easy to send a round-robin social media message as well as declaring a charitable donation in lieu of the cost of buying and posting Christmas cards.

As Ellen said however: "There's still something rather lovely about receiving a card. It's personal, someone has thought of you, has taken the time to write a note and perhaps chosen a card they know you will like.

"We really appreciate the support of local residents for our fundraising and we are sure someone you know would appreciate a card."

For a suggested donation of 40p a card, the scouts will deliver to homes across Morpeth, as well as in Mitford, Pegswood and Hepscott.

There will be scouts' postal boxes in the Health Hut (Kirkhill), Sainsburys (Stobhill), Co-ops at Loansdean and Pegswood, Morrisons (Morpeth), Central Bean (Sanderson Arcade) and Morpeth Leisure Centre.

The 4th Morpeth Scouts' Postal Service will be open from Friday November 27th to Friday December 18th. All cards sent via the service will be delivered before Christmas Day.

## How to age well!

**An Ageing Well free information fair will be held on Wednesday October 14th at Morpeth Town Hall.**

Organised by former Morpeth Mayor Councillor Alison Byard, the fair is aimed at helping senior citizens to lead healthy, safe and socially connected lives.

Different groups and organisations committed to helping older people do just that in Morpeth, will be available with information and guidance at the fair day, from 10am to 2pm.

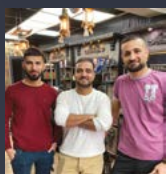
## Books for £1

**Morpeth Lions' Club will hold another its second-hand books sales for three days beginning Thursday September 24th at the Town Hall.**

Hundreds of books covering all aspects of reading, will be on sale cost only £1 each. All the proceeds will be used to buy gifts for children at local special schools.

Each day, the doors will be open from 9am to 4pm.

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# Cádiz: A city bathed in sun, sea and ancient stone

On the south coast of Spain, where the Atlantic sparkles beneath a blaze of Andalusian light, the city of Cádiz rises from the sea like an ancient tale passed down through the generations. Perched on a narrow peninsula and almost entirely surrounded by water, Cádiz is one of those rare places where history, beauty and atmosphere blend so naturally that every street feels cinematic **writes Miles W. Hewitt** our roving travel reporter.

Often regarded as the oldest continuously inhabited city in Western Europe, its roots stretch back more than 3,000 years to the Phoenicians, who first founded it as Gadir. Yet Cádiz never feels like a museum. It is vibrantly alive.

The sun in Cádiz has a remarkable quality, bouncing from the white façades and limestone walls before scattering across the sea in silver flashes. It is this luminous brilliance that earned the city its affectionate nickname, La Tacita de Plata — the Little Silver Cup. In the late afternoon, when the Atlantic breeze softens the heat and the stone buildings begin to glow gold, the city seems almost suspended between land and water, past and present.

The old quarter, el Casco Antiguo, is a delightful maze of narrow streets, flower-filled balconies and hidden squares where everyday life flows at a meandering pace. Laundry sways above cobbled alleyways, church bells echo through medieval passages and tapas bars spill laughter into the streets. There is no need for a rigid itinerary in Cádiz, best discover its charm through a relaxing ramble.

One moment you may find yourself standing before the magnificent golden dome of Cádiz Cathedral, its baroque and neoclassical elegance dominating the skyline. The next, you might emerge into a tiny plaza where elderly locals chat in the shade while children chase pigeons around a fountain. This sense of intimacy is one of Cádiz's greatest treasures. Though rich in history, it remains wonderfully human in scale.

For panoramic views, Torre Tavira is essential, formerly one of the many



watchtowers used by merchants to scan the horizon for approaching ships. It now offers sweeping vistas over rooftops, church towers and beyond to the endless Atlantic. From above, the geography of Cádiz becomes clear... a city embraced by the sea, where water is never far from sight, smell or sound.

And then there are the beaches.

Unlike many historic European cities, Cádiz seamlessly combines culture with coastal relaxation. La Caleta, perhaps its most beloved beach, lies between two old fortresses and radiates with extraordinary beauty at sunset. Here, locals gather in the evening to swim, saunter and watch the sun sink slowly into the Atlantic. The mood is pure poetry. Fishermen casting lines from the rocks, the silhouettes of castles against the sky, and the gentle hum of conversation carried on the sea breeze.

Food, naturally, is central to the Cádiz experience. This is a city where the Atlantic arrives directly on the plate. Red tuna, prawns, clams and seafood stews are staples, served in bustling taverns that often feel as old as the streets themselves. A paper cone of pescaito frito, deep-

fried fish, eaten while strolling near the market is one of life's simplest pleasures. Pair it with a crisp local sherry from nearby Jerez, and you have the flavour of southern Spain distilled into a single moment.

However, what makes Cádiz especially memorable is its spirit.

This is a city known across Spain for its wit, humour and fiercely independent personality. That character is nowhere more visible than during its legendary Carnival of Cádiz. We arrived just as the streets exploded with a musical Mardi Gras of satire and joyful chaos. A bonanza of brilliant colours and outlandish costumes. People cheering, clapping and whistling. Dressed as pot plants, fish and monkeys. Mops of hair in fluorescent pink, yellow and purple. One particular group of elderly men emptied their lungs into kazoos generating a high-pitched racket. While an everlasting string of ladies with blue faces and red costumes, like superwomen, weaved through the horde with vigour.

Even outside of the festival season, that same playful energy permeates the conversations, the music drifting from taverns and the easy warmth of the Gaditano people.

Cádiz may not clamour for attention in the same way as Seville or Barcelona, but that is precisely its magic. It seduces rather than dazzles, inviting visitors into a world of sea air, unforgettable sunsets and the sound of footsteps on old stone. Where the golden light lingers long after the sun has gone down in the timeless rhythm of Andalusian life.

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# The garden has had enough



There comes a point in every long, hot summer when even the garden starts looking at you as if to say, "Is this going to stop at some point?" This year, it has had every reason to ask. We've had extraordinary heat, exceptionally dry conditions and records tumbling about the place as though somebody had left them on a trampoline. Our Gardening Expert **Ross Pearson** reports.

The garden has coped remarkably well, although some plants have clearly reconsidered their career choices. Lawns have taken on the colour and texture of old toast, hydrangeas look knackered and the vegetable plot has occasionally looked less like a productive allotment and more like the set of a post-apocalyptic film.

Now autumn is here, and the garden needs a little understanding. Plants that have spent months trying to survive the drought will most likely be stressed, even if they look perfectly respectable. The soil can be surprisingly dry beneath the surface, and plants may be heading into winter with less in the tank than usual.

So, this autumn is about helping everything recover, rather than marching around with a leaf blower and declaring the garden "sorted". There will be leaves, mud, the occasional slug and probably a wheelbarrow with a flat tyre. In other words, normal service is nearly resumed.

## Give trees a helping hand

Newly planted trees and shrubs are particularly vulnerable after such a dry summer. Check the soil around them and, if it is still dry beneath the surface, give them a thorough drink before winter arrives. A mulch of compost or well-rotted organic matter will help retain moisture and protect the roots.

## Plant something for the future

Autumn is an excellent time to plant deciduous trees, shrubs and hedging. The soil is still warm while cooler weather reduces stress. Dig a decent hole, improve the soil if necessary and firm everything in properly. Just remember that the charming little tree you plant today may eventually become an enormous tree that blocks the kitchen window.

## Move the unhappy ones

If a shrub or perennial has spent the summer looking miserable

in the wrong place, autumn is a good time to move it. Lift carefully with as much root as possible and replant promptly. After this summer, you may find the plant is surprisingly keen on the idea.

## Plant garlic and onions

Get autumn garlic and onion sets into well-prepared ground now. They will quietly establish roots through winter before getting going again in spring. They are wonderfully undemanding vegetables and ideal for anyone whose enthusiasm has been slightly battered by the summer, i.e. me.

## Feed the soil

Once crops have finished, clear away spent plants and anything diseased, then spread compost or well-rotted manure over empty beds. There is no need to dig everything into oblivion. Let worms and weather do some of the work. Gardening occasionally rewards laziness disguised as good technique.

## Make friends with fallen leaves

Gather leaves from lawns and paths, but leave some in less formal areas for wildlife. Collect the rest into a separate pile or bags to make leaf mould. It takes patience, but then so does gardening. It's a lazy and perfectly acceptable way to make your own compost.

## Give the greenhouse a scrub

Before winter properly settles in, clean the glass, clear away old plant debris and wash pots and trays. Check panes, doors and vents while you're there. Winter has a remarkable ability to discover weaknesses in buildings, usually during a gale and preferably at three in the morning.

After the summer we've had, the best thing we can give the garden is time, compost and a little common sense. And perhaps a cup of tea. For the gardener, obviously. The plants can fend for themselves.

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