



THE LANCE

MARCH 2026



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Editorial

John Falconer Slater is one of the great seascape painters of the North East. Although he travelled as a young man to South Africa, seeking his fortune, he returned to his family milling business, right by Newcastle central station, and there began to paint seriously. He became known as the 'waterproof artist' because he insisted on painting 'en plein air'. He would dress in waterproofs, bought from the Barbour stall in south Shields, and wait for storms. While he painted the waterfronts at Shields, and all along the coast, his favourite subject was lashing waves during a sea storm. What he sought was a true, authentic representation of a feeling, an immediate impression, and not just a record.

We are in Lent. There are Lent courses running. The church is dark and we are asked to take this yearly opportunity, like in so many other religions, to stand back and examine our faith and our lives. to be more authentically Christian. Jesus asks a lot of us and it is our response to his challenge which makes our church what it is, in all its manifestations. From prayer and services to marmalade, cafes, singing groups, charity and the outreach to strangers, we strive to follow Jesus's teachings, not only the form but the feeling.

We have an account of a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the huge emotional response to standing in the actual steps of Jesus and seeing what he saw. There is a meditation on the role of retreats. We have cat rescue homes, tree planting and eco tips. And there is the PANTO. Have you recovered yet?

Margaret Vane



Clergy Letter



'Remember that **you are dust** and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ.'

These are the words of the priest who made the sign of the cross on my forehead in Wells Cathedral on Ash Wednesday. Lent had begun. Church flowers in Lent tend to be sparse. Lent is traditionally a season of fasting: I look at the seriousness with which Muslims observe Ramadan and wonder why Christians in general lack their discipline. On Maundy Thursday, the altars will be stripped.

Giving up something for Lent may have been superseded by dry January, Veganuary or Stoptober in popular secular culture. Anything that challenges our dependence on any product is welcome. Lent is an opportunity for us to reflect on what has wrapped its tentacles around us, seducing us to rely on anything other than God. It could be alcohol, meat or tobacco, but is actually likely to be the things that enrich us at much greater depth.

I may want to be popular with my peers. I may want a place on my cherished course at my chosen university. I may want a job that leads to my dream career. I may want a deep and meaningful relationship. I may want a perfect spouse with whom to share children or grandchildren. I may want to maintain physical fitness beyond my years. I may want to retain my memory and my cognitive abilities. None of these are eccentric or unworthy wishes, and I may have omitted your personal yearnings.

Lent is a time to explore all of these deeper desires and to weigh them against our desire for God. It's easy to prioritise our desire for God over our desire for chocolate, but much harder to weigh our desire for God over our desire for the wellbeing of our grandchildren. As long as we can take our physical or mental health for granted, it is easy to prioritise God. When either fail, it can be a challenge.

As a teenager I read 'Of Human Bondage' by Somerset Maugham. Philip Carey, the main character, has a club foot and prays earnestly to be healed. He wakes up next morning to find that he still has a club foot. In his mind, God had failed to answer his prayer and was therefore not worthy of his attention.

Whatever we give up, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, nothing can separate us from the love of God, whether it be a club foot, a much-loved person's debilitating illness or our own developing dementia. Of course, it's easy to say this at a point where life is going well for us. It can sound insensitive to those experiencing some devastating experience, to be told that losing God is even worse.

Lent is a time to reflect on our deepest priorities: It can be mortifying to find that God has slipped from first place when we inadvertently dropped the ball, but it's also a time to pray that we can recover our priorities. We can pray to join Paul in saying, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

My Ash Wednesday began in Wells Cathedral, but then moved to a small meeting room in Birmingham. On the wall was a quotation from Warren Buffet: "It's only when the tide goes out that you learn who was swimming naked". Lent is a time to make sure our swimwear is in good shape, so that we are ready for the tide to go out!

Rev'd Bryan Vernon



A Meditation on Retreats

A military retreat is often considered a bad idea, but the concept of withdrawing temporarily from something has become a useful religious concept. Ministers are often encouraged to make an annual retreat, but it can be helpful for “normal” people too!

Retreats can be individual or collective, and usually (but not always) involve going away somewhere to get a break. When considering a retreat, it can be useful to think about:

- What do I need to get away from for a bit? (this might be work, or even particular beloved individuals!)
- What sort of places help me relax and think? (e.g. rural, or perhaps not too rural?)
- What activities help me rest and reflect? (do you know, or want to explore a few new things?)
- What companionship and leadership might help? (“group” retreats are often best, unless/until you feel comfortable “flying solo”)
- What sort of time/money do you feel able to allocate?

Most dioceses have beautiful retreat houses in rural areas, with varying degrees of quietness, comfort and seclusion; and other denominations have these too. Each offers a programme of different retreats (e.g. 1-day, weekend or throughout a week), usually with a very affordable “full board” when compared to an equivalent hotel.

It can be hard to find a leader at whose feet one always wants to sit! Most retreat choices involve some element of compromise about programme, time and location. Exploring retreat ideas involves “dipping your toe in” a few different places and short activities, at first: most retreat houses are supportive of a brief daytime exploratory visit – this can also be useful for testing out their hospitality! I have been wonderfully supported at Shepherd’s Dene in the Tyne Valley, Whalley Abbey in Lancashire, Parcevall Hall, Scargill House and Ampleforth in Yorkshire, and my orchestra loves returning to Rydal in the Lake District – their websites all give lots of useful information, including programme details.



These days, one important factor may be communications – do you want a venue with no wifi or phone signal? It can be good to limit distractions (I found Ampleforth’s excellent wifi too much of a temptation after the stone-built seclusion of Parcevall!), but sometimes one needs emergency communication. Some groups choose to hand in mobiles to a leader for some time, or just use “Airplane” mode – turning this on can feel therapeutic.

It can be worthwhile setting out your hopes and aspirations for a retreat – these are often an unrealistically long list, and many finish a retreat wanting to stay longer. Life can be so busy that stopping the treadmill may feel traumatic, wonderful, or simply cause us to collapse with exhaustion – some sort of initial emotional “dumping” (e.g. by journal writing) and “phased return” to normal life afterwards can be helpful.



It can be good to balance periods of rest, reflection and activity – it is too easy to be very lazy at some remoter houses, amid much tempting food! I have sometimes structured individual retreats around the past and future of my life on which I need to reflect e.g. home and family, church and Cadets, music and friends, work etc.,

perhaps focussing on the past at the start of a retreat, and looking to the future when nearer the end. Reflecting on each aspect of life through each type of prayer can be useful, for example:

- What am I lamenting, mourning, needing to repent of, or lay down? (Penitence)
- What am I thankful to God for? (Thanksgiving)
- What am I crying out to God for, for those around me and the wider world? (Intercession)
- What am I needing to ask God for myself, where am I being led? (Petition)
- Where am I seeing God's glory, being (up)held, and resting in God's love? (Meditation, Contemplation, Adoration...)

I recently found Ampleforth an amazing contrast to my other retreats, in terms of my cohort from the RAF, the quantity and novelty of Catholic monastic worship, and the inspiring leadership of a very elderly (and deaf!) ordained monk. Parcevall Hall and Gardens have been a constant in my life for over thirty years now and, having given up my parents' house and garden in Liverpool, is one of the most homely places I know.



After a highly organised group retreat, I may look to an individual one again – providing I can put in place a robust enough exercise plan to manage the Parcevall cake trolley (they call them “biscuits”, but...) every morning and afternoon!

What's your experience of retreats? May God bless you in these, and in your exploration if this is all new to you.

Dr M Toft FIMechE

Reader and Air Cadet Chaplain

Spotlight on Scripture

Psalm 51 - Have mercy on me O God

This Lent, I am joining Dean Lee Batson of Newcastle Cathedral in a WhatsApp group open to anyone: '40 Cathedrals in 40 Days'. We are sent a link to watch a streamed sermon every day from a different part of the world, all Anglican, but vastly different.



Coincidentally, I also got myself a book for Lent called 'Dancing to the Heartbeat of God' edited by our new Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend and Right Honourable Sarah Mullally. The book is filled with lots of short reflections on discipleship from people working in the Anglican Communion. There are stories of exploration, reflecting on what it means to be a Christian in today's world.

These two things, both speaking about the wider Anglican Communion that we are part of, have made me think about our context here. Our history is complex because of missionary work and it is a really timely reminder, that we are a small part of a much bigger whole.

One of the sermons I listened to was given by Dean Winnie Varghese of New York Episcopal Cathedral. Reflecting on Psalm 51 on Ash Wednesday, she told a story about a man in Kerala, India collecting rubbish from a local canal. This canal was so clogged and filthy with rubbish that it did not flow any longer. Remembering in his childhood that he used to fish in the canal, he continued in his task. He was mocked for dealing with rubbish and told that his actions were futile due to the quantity of rubbish and size of the task. It felt hopeless to onlookers. He ignored the naysayers and continued. Around 6 months later, unseen, water began to flow below the surface, wells began to be restored to previous levels and wildlife began to appear. As people began to see changes, they joined in and helped him. Eventually the whole canal rose and flowed with clean water.

Sin is like that – trapped, dirty and hard to forget and impossible to face. It works its way into our very being, infecting us with a hopelessness that feels just too difficult. But if our Lenten journey is to teach us anything, it is that little by little, we can be healed. It's a timely reminder, like the Psalm says: 'You will cleanse me, and I shall be whiter than snow', and famously 'Create a pure heart within me O God, and renew an upright spirit within me'.

However we are feeling, the psalms are a wonderful place to see all of life reflected back at us. There is much comfort from seeing the psalmist's cry to God, feeling the embrace as sins are forgiven and we are given new life. I hope this Lent you can feel that, however large your task is before God, the effort you put in will never be in vain.

Izzy McDonald-Booth

Congratulations...

...to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dame Revd Sarah Mullally, who will be enthroned in Canterbury Cathedral on Wednesday 25th March on the Feast of the Annunciation. She will be the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury.





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St Aidan's Way: a New Pilgrimage

As part of our 'Year of Sharing', the Diocese of Newcastle is delighted to be launching its very own pilgrimage route, St Aidan's Way. From the 'first cathedral' on Holy Island, to the 'new cathedral' in Newcastle, we're looking forward to walking in the footsteps of St Aidan, with opportunities to reflect on his role as peacemaker. The journey will be split into eight stages, the first of which will take place on 7 March 2026.

- Stage One: 7 March | Holy Island to Belford (21km)
- Stage Two: 11 April | Belford to Seahouses (16km)
- Stage Three: 2 May | Seahouses to Craster (16km)
- Stage Four: 6 June | Craster to Warkworth (21km)
- Stage Five: 11 July | Warkworth to Cresswell (17km)
- Stage Six: 11 August | Cresswell to Ashington (24km)
- Stage Seven: 12 September | Blyth to Tynemouth (15km)
- Stage Eight: 31 October | Tynemouth to Newcastle (19km)

Details on where to meet etc are on the Diocese website

St George's Community Hub

£400,000 achieved!



Patron Sir Alan Craft

First of all a massive thanks to all who have contributed in so many ways to our local fundraising efforts. This was achieved through donations, through pledges and through graft as well as through the patronage of Hub fundraising events. We are delighted to report progress both financially and in terms of the vision.

The announcement of the Garfield Weston pledge of £50,000 last November gave an inspiring boost to our Hub Advent Appeal – which raised over £2,250 from individual donations across our many Advent and Christmas services. It is wonderful that we have now achieved £400,621 of the £596,000 required for the extension to upgrade facilities and increase access to the uniquely beautiful Arts and Crafts heritage with which we are entrusted.

We channel Geordie optimism that we shall hit the final target this summer – albeit that has become a somewhat more demanding timescale due to the loss of Listed Places of Worship grants, and the increase in building costs.

Rev Debbie has helped shape the vision for our improved Church resources and how they can best serve the community. The new church room and facilities will make possible: Messy Church, Sunday school, Lent and discussion groups; confidential clergy conversations, planning meetings for occasional offices; reception of those attending interment of ashes; school visits; visiting orchestra 'green room' access.

In the hall, repurposed as St George's Community Hub, we propose a social enterprise café on some sessions each week to build on our already existing dementia friendly Friday Cafe. We will address some of the issues of student loneliness and difficulty in accessing quiet learning spaces by using our upper hall room as a wireless enabled safe study space. We shall attract a wider range of community groups and achieve a financially self-sustaining Hub for Jesmond through increased hire income and footfall.

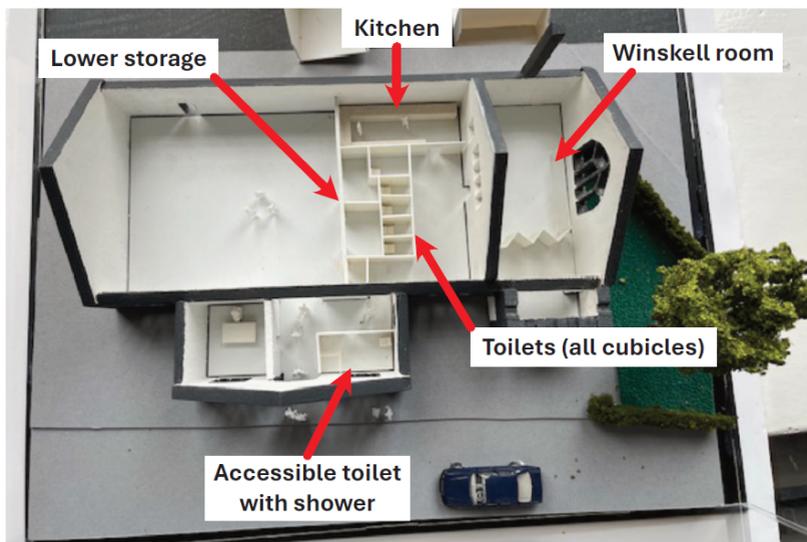
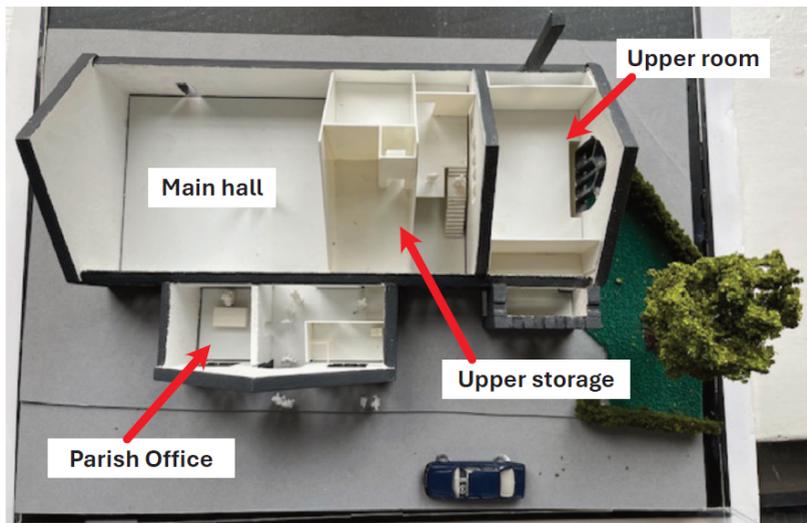
Readers might be interested to view the excellent model of the newly configured Hall which is currently in the Hall office. It really makes the potential of the exciting new space come alive.

Our next task for 2026 is to prepare our National Heritage Lottery Funding bid to support the church work. The proposal is to improve access to Heritage -both physical and

cultural. We are developing plans for a major fundraising event in which the entire community can participate. Watch this space!

We remain proud to help all ages enjoy their lives to the full - from preschool children to those with complex needs in their later years-. Thank you so much for your support.

Janet A Wilson on behalf of your Hub Steering Group



Eco Tips for March 2026

Give an Hour for Earth on Saturday **March 28th** at 8.30 p.m.



Earth Hour Is a “Lights Off” moment when supporters all around the globe switch off. It is a chance to walk out and enjoy the evening sky, to light a candle and have a romantic meal, or to have an hour of quiet meditation. It is an hour with no devices and no machines whirring away in your house (you will find that it is a challenge to achieve this and you can only do your best!). It is a brief time in solidarity with those whose livelihoods and safety are affected by climate change, and with those across our precious planet who work to save it. If you can, do join in. The website all about it can be found at:

www.earthhour.org

Eco Group News March 2026

Sustainable Clothing. The Eco group will be in the hall at Parish coffee on **March 8th** with some thoughts, questions and a few answers about choices we make when shopping for clothes. There will be displays, samples and a Quiz with a prize! Save the date!

A Message from the CEO of The Recruitment Junction

one of the recipients of St George's Charitable Donations

Thank you so much for St George's recent donation to The Recruitment Junction. Your partnership with us will help us see hundreds of lives transformed by the opportunity of work in 2026.

Things achieved this year:

- Outstanding Small Charity Award winners 2026
- Expanding our presence in Durham and opening a second office and delivering 'Inside Job' in HMP Durham
- Supporting over 40 employers to recruit our candidates
- 180+ supported into work this year. Each job represents a life and a family changed
- 75 hampers of Christmas goodies including a present for a child and a gospel of St Mark
- 56 in-custody interviews. Through taking employers into prisons and offering job release

"2 days after release, I met Molly for my first appointment, having worked with The Recruitment Junction in prison. She helped update my CV, open a bank account, rewrite my disclosure, first secure casual factory work, and then land a construction interview where I got the job – back doing what I love."

Chris – our first ever 'Inside Job' employment rep, now released and thriving

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Lenten thoughts on a pilgrimage to the Holy

Land

Lent can be a time for searching, for questioning and for discovering, a time often associated with the idea of pilgrimage. In 2011, I was able to take part in a week-long diocesan pilgrimage to the Holy Land led by the then Bishop of Newcastle, Martin Wharton. For me, this turned out to be a real journey of discovery. Well known events in the Gospels could be tied to real places and, even more importantly, Jesus himself became more real. Fifteen years later the memories still strengthen me. The informative, inspiring, consoling, confirming experiences were too numerous for all to be described here, so I shall concentrate on those which were most important for me.

Before departure we were prepared during four gatherings. Many of the sites we were to visit were identified around the year 300 AD by St Helena, mother of the first Christian Roman Emperor, Constantine. It is rarely possible to prove that the sites were correctly identified, but local tradition may have influenced their placing. Even if some were not in fact correct, events described in the Gospels have, as it were, become holy sites, being places where events have been celebrated for well over 1,500 years. One site which is assured is the now ruined fishing village of Capernaum at the northern end of the Lake Galilee where Jesus lived and taught, and where Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John are recorded as having been called from their boats by Jesus. The synagogue which Jesus knew collapsed during an earthquake and was later rebuilt over the original stone foundations. It was thrilling and inspiring to see the foundation stones and to reflect on the fact that they almost certainly heard Jesus teaching. The very stones spoke to me as powerful witnesses to the power of Christ's words.



The bedrock of our pilgrimage was, for me, the four celebrations of the Eucharist. On our first morning, Bishop Martin presided at a moving service at a site commemorating the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus on the shore of Lake Galilee at which Peter, having three times denied knowing Jesus after the arrest in Gethsemane, was given the opportunity three times to reaffirm his love for our Lord. We all fall short, but our Lord still loves us and forgives us. What a moving experience! I still have a small stone from that beach. Much later in our pilgrimage, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, we remembered Jesus's death and the empty tomb, so we started and ended with thoughts of the resurrection.

During our stay at the north end of Lake Galilee, we made a trip on a boat whose design was based on the fishing boats Jesus would have known, the remains of one of which are preserved nearby. We also visited the Garden of the Beatitudes on a hill overlooking Capernaum, pondering on the revolutionary teaching of the Beatitudes, and then the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth which was built over what was thought to be the home of Mary and Joseph and in which the child Jesus was brought up. The group spent for a moment of prayer and reflection in the nearby Anglican church.



After Galilee we moved on to Jericho, stopping by the River Jordan where Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. After swimming in the Dead Sea and seeing the area of desert where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found we left Jericho for Bethlehem, passing the

high desert region thought to have been where Jesus spent forty days being 'tempted in the wilderness'.

River Jordan (right), where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found (below) and the wilderness (below right)



We started the day in Bethlehem seeing tiny new-born babies in a maternity hospital run by nuns. From there we went to the site of our second Eucharist on a hill-top known as the Shepherds' Fields from which we looked across a valley to a grassy and rock-strewn hillside such as the shepherds must have known as they watched their flocks before being called to see the new-born baby Jesus.

One of our leaders, Audrey Elkington, preached a powerful and memorable sermon which linked the visit to the maternity hospital to Christ's birth, life and passion. We spent some time after the service in quiet thought and prayer, before going to the Church



of the Nativity. There were, of course, many people visiting the place where Jesus is thought to have been born, but I found a quiet area in the crypt where I was able to reflect on the amazing mystery of the Incarnation, God made Man. On leaving the church, we passed through an Armenian monastery of which



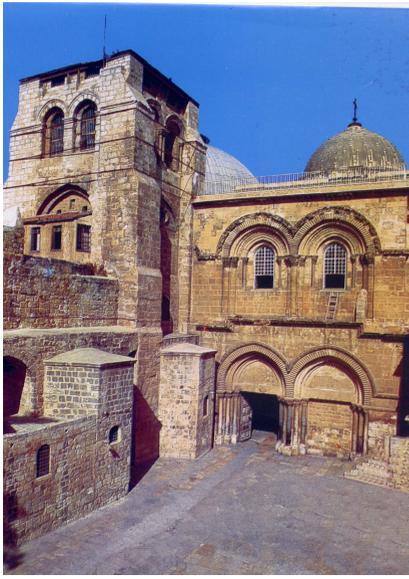
parts also date back to the C4th where St Jerome worked on translating what we know as the Bible into Latin. This amazing work became known as The Vulgate and it is still the basis of translations used by Roman Catholics today.

On our first day in Jerusalem, we visited Bethesda which overlooks the Mount of Olives, saw the church which was built to commemorate the Ascension, walked down the Mount of Olives to spend quiet time in the Garden of Gethsemane with its two-thousand-year-old olive trees. The third celebration of the Eucharist was next day in the courtyard of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, where we were staying. A powerful sermon by Geoff Miller, known to many of us at St George's, brought tears to many eyes and prepared us for the ensuing walk up the Via Dolorosa from Pilate's court (The Pavement) to the site of the Crucifixion at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a walk during which apart from prayers and readings we remained silent. The church

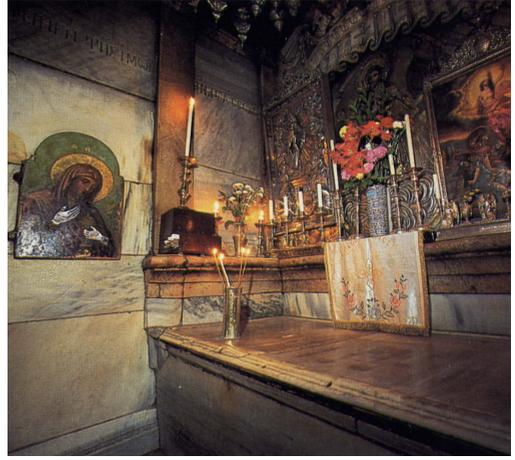


houses not only the presumed site of the





Crucifixion known as Golgotha but also the tomb in which Jesus was buried.



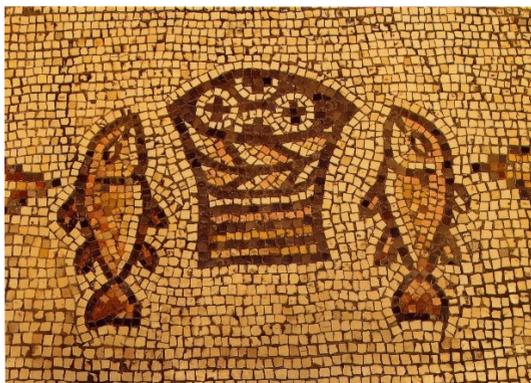
The church was, understandably, pretty crowded, but some of us made an early start the next day to return before the crowds arrived. While in Jerusalem, we visited another site also thought perhaps to be the tomb at Golgotha, and the church known as Petrus Gallicantu (Peter with the cock crowing) on the site of the High Priest's house to which Jesus was taken to await his trial and where Peter is said to have denied his beloved Lord three times.



And on our last day – a Sunday – we attended our final Eucharist at St George's Anglican Cathedral at which the Gospel reading was the account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand and the sermon expressed God's generosity, using the small gifts of bread and fishes and making them sufficient to feed the crowd. We may feel we can't do much to forward God's Kingdom, but what little we can offer God can use and magnify. This miracle is remembered at the site by Lake Galilee of what became known as the Church

of the Multiplication (!) with its 4th mosaic of the Bread and the Fishes, a church which we had visited on the first day of our pilgrimage. At the cathedral we shared the bilingual service with the Palestinian Christian congregation and were able to chat with them after the service. This service not only rounded off our trip thematically, but its strange familiarity prepared us for our return to our own churches.

Mike Oswald.



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St. George's has a stand at the Newcastle University Volunteering Fair

St. George's was really pleased to be invited to take part in the Volunteering Opportunities Fair at Newcastle University on Monday 26 January. It was a great opportunity to share something of who we are and the many different ways people can get involved in the life of the Church.



Debbie, James Parkin, Kay Plumley and Lana Y J Liu all helped across the day, making sure the stand was friendly, welcoming and well-staffed. It was particularly good to have Debbie there in her role as University Chaplain, James representing the student age group, and Lana as a University lecturer. Each of them brought a slightly different perspective, which really helped when chatting with students and answering questions.

We handed out flyers highlighting our volunteering opportunities, including the regular choir and community choir, bell ringing, the Tuesday Group, monthly Heritage cleaning sessions, and support for Joan's Anna Chaplaincy work in local care homes. We also shared information about our next Hub fundraiser, "Tales of Jesmond," as well as our "What's On" leaflets, so students could see the wider range of activities happening at St. George's.

The fair was well attended and there was a steady flow of interest throughout. For St. George's, events like this help raise our profile and build connections with other groups. Encouragingly, we have already been approached about hosting American exchange students who will be doing voluntary work in May — an encouraging sign of the connections made.

Friends of St George's Calendar of Events 2026



*Photo by Jonathan Richards,
17th January 2024*

Saturday 31st January	3pm	Darling Dollies and afternoon tea	Hall
Wednesday 22nd April	6pm	Annual General Meeting	Church
Saturday 9 th May	4pm	The Singers: Spring Concert	Church
Friday 5 th June	7pm	Annual Dinner	Hall
Sundays 19 th July to 16 th August	2.30- 4.30pm	Afternoon Teas on the Green	Green (or hall)
11 th -20 th September		Heritage Open Days Further details to come	Church
Saturday 17 th October	7pm	Quiz	Hall
Saturday 5 th December	7pm	Christmas with The Singers	Church



See website for updates and additional events:
friendsofstgeorgesjesmond.org.uk



Westgate Ark Cat Rescue and Re-homing: one man's passion and service

Pets of all sorts sometimes need re-homing during their lifetimes.

Their owners die. They move house and sometimes, they move country. They move to a pet-free housing development. They fall ill and cannot care for the pet. They can no longer afford to pay the vet bills, insurance and the food bills.

There may be a divorce, a new baby or mental health issues. They develop allergies to the pet. There are so many reasons.

Step forward the social enterprise, Westgate Ark, off Westgate Road, set up and run by Paul Black and an army of volunteers and specialising in re-homing cats. Paul purchased the building, once a dental surgery, in about 2012. This area had suffered a decline for decades approaching this period, with smashed buildings and property voids. It was the culmination of a role he had not really chosen, but which had chosen him. Having rescued some kittens from an abandoned house, word got out that he would look after other strays, and soon it escalated from using a spare room in his house, to fitting out a shed in the garden with plumbing and electricity so that he could accommodate more cats comfortably.

Paul had originally wanted to set up a low -cost neutering clinic. Queens [female cats] can have several litters a year of one to seven kittens, so the problem can grow exponentially. Paul couldn't find funds for this service and so it became a cat re-housing



service and, in 2012, he paid for improvements such as plumbing, lights, specialist floors and toilets for the building he had acquired.

Policies have developed as time has gone on and experience has honed the service. Cats, for instance, are no longer homed in a household which already has a cat. Too often, the re-homed cat was returned to the Ark when the other pets objected to their presence.

The new big initiative [TNR: trap, neuter and re-home] is the work with feral cats.

There are lots of feral cats in the city, living in people's back gardens, in abandoned buildings and in parks. If they have been on the street for a while, the cat retreats into itself and can't be touched. With feral kittens, if the kitten has not been exposed to socialising with



humans by the time it is 7 weeks old, it becomes a wild animal and cannot be taught to socialise.

Feral cats are often dirty, diseased and malnourished. They are also frightened and aggressive and can't be handled. The unneutered Toms will fight other cats. Their kittens have a brutal and often, short life. Paul has developed this new, inspired programme to help them. The cats are neutered, fed up and stabilised. They are then found a safe, outdoor place to live. One volunteer, Julie, has specialised in this new programme. She has been working with farms and factories, to find safe places where these wild cats can flourish. There needs to be outdoor space, sheds and shelter, no chemicals and not too much traffic. Julie has visited farms, stables and industrial places. Owners agree to feed the cat twice a day and the cats must be welcome. And they can turn into the best of ratters!

It can take a lot of time and patience to trap a feral cat and start the process of neutering and re-housing. Volunteers are alerted to feral cats by people emailing the Ark or by sightings reported to them from other FACEBOOK groups such as 'Cats of Heaton'. Volunteers take traps, food and warm clothes to where the cat was sighted and, baiting the trap with food, they wait for hours in their cars until the hungry cat reaches for the food and triggers the trap. Neutered cats often have a clip taken out of their left ear, which is helpful. They can also, sometimes be chipped. The rules say that a chipped cat must be retained for 14 days while the owner is contacted. It can be rehoused after this period. Catching a feral cat can sometimes take months of patient waiting.

The Ark has a comprehensive website and an active FACEBOOK presence, advertising cats and celebrating successes. Fundraising is a constant issue. The boiler, for instance, had to be replaced at Christmas. The website offers cat-sitting, logoed clothing and pet insurance where the Ark receives a small payment if you choose that insurance. Supporters hold coffee mornings in aid of the Ark. Recently, a supporter sold a collection of fine wines she had inherited in aid of the work. People donate and sometimes, a charge will be made for a cat which goes into general funds. Older cats are much more difficult to place as they often have expensive health problems. No cat, however, is destroyed. Paul would welcome a dedicated fund-raiser. The biggest expense is veterinary bills.

There are two types of volunteers. Firstly, there are regular volunteers who feed and check the cats, cleaning their cages and ministering to them. Secondly, there are 'cat cuddlers', who simply come to cuddle and play with the cats, helping to socialise them. Paul has lots of Chinese students who enjoy doing this. They have cats at home in China and miss them and they love their role. Donations of items can be helpful and they welcome dry cat food, kitchen paper, anti-worming kits and towels.



Paul is a little wary of using the press. A few years ago, the Ark was covered by an item on the BBC and suddenly, radio stations from all over the world got in touch for a story. He had coachloads of visitors, blocking the corridors. It was all very disruptive. He now prefers reaching out through FACEBOOK and relying on word of mouth.

From an act of charity towards a group of little kittens, the Ark has grown into a successful rescue service. On the day I visited, they had re-homed three cats as well as a further three cats the day before. There are many reasons why the need is there. As one grateful client said, on giving up her cat to be re-homed, 'thank you for helping me and for not judging me.'

Margaret Vane

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Who Stole the Ladybird's Spots?

Yet another masterful yet incomprehensible "Who Dun It?" from the devious minds of Rutt and Laidler, who have drawn young innocents Elisa and Iris into their dubious coterie. (Is this in tune with St George's Nurturing Young Minds policy? Please discuss.)

Hands up. This year I cheated. By cunning means, I gained access to the Sacred Script which I read under the shadows of darkness. Alas, I was none the wiser. It was like sneaking a peep at exam questions only to find that it was the wrong paper! The undisputed fact was that SOMEONE had stolen the Ladybird spots, which we all knew anyway.

I was at the Saturday matinee, which was rammed and positively buzzing. The first impression on entering the hall was a WOW for the scenery. A magnificent setting of scenic ladybird village, forest and dappled glade complete with the obligatory toadstools. This was all down to the amazing effort of Mr Tom Klenka who took his life in his hands teetering on ladders, all in the name of Art. NB. Graham. All future pantos must be written to fit in with this splendid scenery.



With trepidation, I sat poised ready to scribble and finished up with totally illegible notes adorned with doodles of desperation. This is what I gleaned.

It was reassuring at the start of the pantomime, to see stalwarts Joan and Donald, the Flower Pot men, in place at the side of the stage. Joan to prompt the cast should they lose their lines, and the audience should they lose the will to live. Donald wore lederhosen rather than a kilt, which indicated that there would be no repeat of wardrobe malfunction. Shame!

Action started in the Ladybird village. "The Goodies", Little Ladybirds, Bugsy and Dotty, floated around gracefully and phew, they still had their spots! Lord Ladybird, alias Sarah K, looked amazingly fresh in natty pink jacket, despite having travelled south over the border in atrocious weather so as not to disappoint her public. Just as well she made it as I swear, she had more lines to learn than anyone else. And on the commitment of the Klenka Acting Dynasty, an Oscar nomination for Tom Klenka, outrageously flamboyant in flaming red wig, Dame Edna specs and jiggling bosoms. St George's own Lily Savage with accent to match. The audience loved her!

Moving on, the peace that the ladybirds were all enjoying, since Foxy Loxy had become vegetarian, was shattered with the arrival of "Anne Other Ladybird". The winsome Eleanor, who swooned dramatically onto the ground (she was a southerner.) She brought the dreaded



news that The Black Spot Gang had been at work. Not to be underestimated, this ladybird was blessed with brains as well as beauty as she managed to hold on to her spots as follows.... "My name is Anne and I crept under the pudding pan." Such an eloquent statement could have been penned by Spike Milligan? I also have it on good authority, that Eleanor now has a fan club, winning over the heart of a little chap on the front row!

Lady Ladybird's mother, Elizabeth Blackshoe, was a real Goodie, and there were poignant reminders of our lovely Elizabeth Rhodes, who certainly wouldn't have lost her blackspots,

let alone her black shoes. She spent the entire show being eminently sensible and helpful.... "And Anne, come with me. Into the kitchen for a nice cup of tea!" (Weak, Earl Grey without milk if I remember rightly, Elizabeth?)



And so on to the other Goodies. The Royal Entourage. Bossy Boots the king, being royal, was obviously beyond reproach. (Happily, there were no princes loitering around to worry about.) Upstanding General Dogsboddy and Lieutenant Dogears, seasoned sleuths wearing Sherlock Holmes deer stalkers, had to be on the right side of the law although there was a slight whiff of corruption when they tried to recruit Foxy Loxy and co as informers?

There appeared to be way too many Baddies.

Foxy Loxy and his family of disgraced entrepreneurs were obvious suspects, especially having a history of offending, plus they were bored stiff with being vegetarians and were heard moaning loudly over pints in the Leaping Fox Pub. That Local Villain, Foxy Loxy, was on remand. You could tell that James was enjoying his new image as a "Wrong'Un" and who could blame him with lines like these... "Or err Hello. How could I help you? You're Offa, from Mercia, where land smells like poo!"





Elisa and Rosie as Veronica and Harmonica were eminently sensible in trying to dissuade Reynard and Bushy Tail, Graham and Tabitha from carrying out a cunning plan to steal the spots themselves.



Then to muddy the waters, along came the new Black Spot Gang. Offa and Scoffa, supposedly from Mercia, but in fact they were that dastardly lot from the vicarage. Scoffa, adjutant in charge of all sorts, clutched his signature clip board and goodness knows what deadly weapons were concealed beneath Offa's enormous black coat.



The plot thickened with a hair brained scheme to send the spots to Switzerland to be made into gold, a devious whiff of Elon Musk meets Goldfinger?

I finally lost the plot and gave up at the point at which Reynard wailed "Infamy, infamy, they've all got it in for me!" I was obviously at the wrong panto.

I surveyed the audience; the good news was that they were all still there and still alive. Indeed, a few children in the front row who were bright sparks, heckled and leapt off their seats with enthusiasm in true Pantomime spirit. The cast had been warned to make sure they did not intimidate youngsters. Methinks it was probably the other way round. I'm not

sure that some of the older members were quite as taken. A couple in wheelchairs had nodded off and apparently one old chap was told off for swearing. Happily, they all bucked up after tea and cake at the interval.



Note, cake consumption was at an all-time high. Not a crumb was left, and the script was possibly to blame with such phrases....

“Why are we here? Another hour of boredom. Bring on the cakes!”

The audience rallied well to the singing, as luckily, all the tunes were familiar. Just as well, as the words were somewhat obscure. Musical accompaniment was in the capable hands of the Cullingfords. Hilary on the ivories, had dressed for the occasion and was wearing stunning black lace tights which sadly the audience couldn't see. David, strumming his guitar, was resting his foot on Jenny Click's best cake tin which had mysteriously gone



missing. We will be kind and say it showed initiative. Sharing their pit was Shaun who, being young, skilfully managed the technology.

A final chorus of “Consider yourself panto'ed. Consider yourselves thoroughly entertained!” And it was all over, for another year. The cast who worked so hard will indeed need a year to recover. They were all magnificent and that script must have taken some learning. It is always great to see our young folk taking part. Iris, Floyd, Elisa, Tabitha, Amelia and Edith well done and thank you. Not forgetting the catering brigade

led by Margaret Vane and the Clark family, who kept the cast and audience sustained for the duration of this epic.

You all did very well. Oh yes you did!

Maggie Paczek



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OTHERS AND IN A
WELCOMING
ENVIRONMENT, WHY
NOT MAKE FRIDAY
CAFÉ WHAT YOU DO?**

Six Go Walking and then becomes Seven

There is a saying 'that the sun shines on the righteous' and so it was on Saturday 14th February that six doughty souls braved the slenderest of gaps in the month of St Swithin's-like-weather to explore the fields and byways that crisscross the area adjoining Beamish Museum and Tanfield railway.



Beginning at the busy Causey Arch carpark we set out, initially following the still icy roads, to join the woodland paths that follow the Beamish Burn through the Woods. We went along the long forgotten coal trackways that bypass the periphery of the Beamish Hall estate. The ice crackled underfoot as we skirted what had been the day before, large puddles of muddy water and flowing rivulets, going into the silent woodland ahead. Passing strangely twisted trees and Purple Jellydisc fungi attached to the bark of the tree trunks, we climbed upwards away from the burn side onto the trackways which form part of the C2C cycle route. We passed the time of day with the occasional dog walker, but the paths were quiet, a testament to the extent of the area's footpaths and the opportunity to explore this area further.

Descending Kip Hill we came out of the woods and soon reached civilisation once again, joining the busy main road near the Tanfield industrial estates. Looking backwards at the hill behind us we could see on the brow, the imposing spire of St Margaret of Antioch Church overlooking the valley below.

Leaving the roadway, we began the homeward stretch joining the path following the line of Tanfield railway stopping to look down into the valley at the historic Causey Arch and then back across the railway line to the welcome view of the carpark and café. Here we were joined by Jackie Spencer making the seventh member of our party. We found space in the busy cafe to re energise and enjoy our well- deserved lunch.



We would like to thank Neville Walker for organising the walk, making many recce trips to check for safety and most importantly, putting in a good word for sunny brisk walking weather.

Paul Taylor

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Tree Planting by the Town Moor

Rosemary and Kay signed up for the North East Community Forest public tree planting event on Saturday, January 31st, and got properly stuck in with the rest of the volunteers, children and adults alike. The photo shows Rosemary digging a hole for one of the saplings that will form part of a long new hedge along Hunters Moor. It was a muddy job, but everyone was dressed for the weather and the work.



The plan is to plant 12,000 hedgerow trees around the Moor over the next few years, including native varieties like hawthorn, blackthorn and holly. Bit by bit, the hedge will take shape and add more greenery to the area, as well as creating shelter and food for local wildlife.

It's all part of a longer-term project being delivered through the North East Community Forest. Rather than big promises, it's about steady, practical action – turning up, picking up a spade and planting something that will grow over time. A good way to spend a Saturday morning, and a simple reminder that local efforts can help with climate change and biodiversity loss.

Kay Plumley

The Flower Team

Alexis, our youngest and very talented recruit



The Burial of Alexander Rollo at Tynemouth

Tynemouth Priory and Castle was surrendered to the Crown in 1539. The nave of the church was then walled off from the quire and served as the parish church of Tynemouth until the middle of the 17th century. In 1665, what is now Christchurch, North Shields, was consecrated as the new parish church of Tynemouth. But the graveyard next to the former parish church in the castle continued in use until the 19th century. Many of the gravestones in the graveyard are no longer legible having been eroded by the weather, but one that can still be read is to an Alexander Rollo who died in 1856. It reads as follows:-



In Memory of

ALEXANDER ROLLO

Late Corporal Royal Artillery

Died May 26th 1856 Aged 82 Years

MARGARET

WIFE OF THE ABOVE

Died Oct 4th 1855 Aged 77 Years

**CORPORAL ROLLO HELD THE
LANTERN AT THE BURIAL OF**

Sir JOHN MOORE

AT CORUNNA ON

17th JANUARY 1809





The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna by George Jones RA

Older readers of the *Lance* will, of course, be familiar with the poem 'The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna' from their school days. The second stanza of that poem runs:-

We buried him darkly at dead of night ,
The sods with our bayonets turning;
By the struggling moonbeam's misty light,
And the lanthorn dimly burning.

Lanthorn is an archaic version of lantern. The poem suggests that the burial took place in the middle of the night. It is generally accepted that, although the grave was dug during the night, the actual burial took place at about 8.00 am the next morning. But, as the burial took place in mid-January, a lantern would on either view have been required for the burial as well as the digging of the grave. AI tells me that the sun will have risen at Corunna that day at about 9.00 am: Corunna is a long way to the west of Land's End. Alexander Rollo was born in Rathen near Peterhead in Aberdeenshire. We know his place of birth from the Register of Admissions to the Chelsea Hospital to which he was admitted in 1820. At that time there were both In-Pensioners who lived in the hospital and Out-Pensioners who lived outside. Alexander Rollo was an Out-Pensioner. The Register tells us that his total army service amounted to 26 years 202 days and that he was 5 foot 8 inches tall, had hazel eyes and had brown hair.

In October 1798 Alexander and Margaret were married at Christchurch, Tynemouth (now North Shields). The census return for 1851 shows that she was a native of Tynemouth. How did they come to meet? There were many children of the marriage.

In 1847 he was awarded a Military General Service Medal with three clasps indicating that he had been present at the battles of Roleia (17th August 1808) and Vimeiro (21st August 1808) in addition to that at Corunna. The census return for 1851 shows Alexander and Margaret Rollo living at 256 Percy Street, Tynemouth.

What is the origin of the surname Rollo? Not many British surnames end in an "o". Quite a few Scottish surnames, like Bruce, Fraser and Sinclair, are Norman in origin. Rollo is another such surname. King David I invited significant numbers of Anglo-Norman settlers to Scotland, whose descendants in due course became clan chiefs or lairds and whose surnames were adopted by their followers. There is a Clan Rollo. In the 10th century the first Duke of Normandy had been called Rollo. He was really a viking raider, although in due course he converted to Christianity.

The poem 'The Burial of Sir John Moore after Corunna' was written by Charles Wolfe (1791- 1823). Wolfe was an Irishman and wrote the poem in 1817 shortly before being ordained a Church of Ireland clergyman. He is remembered, if at all, almost solely for this poem which was admired by Lord Byron. Wolfe died aged 32 of consumption. It is suggested that this was brought on because the friends of the young lady, for whose sake he had abandoned an academic career at Trinity College, Dublin, declined to entrust her happiness to the keeping of one, whose worldly prospects were so poor as Wolfe's, and so refused to sanction their engagement. We are back in Jane Austen territory: see last month's Lance.

Christopher Vane



Church of England Calendar 2026

- 1 David, Bishop of Menevia, Patron of Wales, c.601
- 2 Chad, Bishop of Lichfield, Missionary, 672
- 7 Perpetua, Felicity and their Companions, Martyrs at Carthage, 203
- 8 Edward King, Bishop of Lincoln, 1910
- 8 Felix, Bishop, Apostle to the East Angles, 647
- 8 Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, Priest, Poet, 1929
- 17 Patrick, Bishop, Missionary, Patron of Ireland, c.460
- 18 Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, Teacher of the Faith, 386
- 19 **Joseph of Nazareth**
- 20 Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne, Missionary, 687
- 21 Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Reformation Martyr, 1556
- 24 Walter Hilton of Thurgarton, Augustinian Canon, Mystic, 1396
- 24 Paul Couturier, Priest, Ecumenist, 1953
- 24 Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, Martyr, 1980
- 25 **The Annunciation of Our Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary**
- 26 Harriet Monsell, Founder of the Community of St John the Baptist, 1883
- 29 **Palm Sunday**
- 31 John Donne, Priest, Poet, 1631

Understanding the Calendar:

Principal Feasts and other Principal Holy Days. Festivals.

Other Sundays & Lesser Festivals.

Commemorations in italics



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Reader & Air Cadet Chaplain

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<https://stgeorgesjesmond.org.uk/sunday-worship/>

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09.30 PARISH COMMUNION with
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18.00 Taize (2nd Sunday of month)

18.00 Choral Evensong (3rd Sunday)

WEEKDAY SERVICES

08.45 Thursday: Morning Prayer

09.30 Thursday: Holy Communion

Saints' Days as announced

Livestreaming of services. You can watch the 09:30 service live here, or later on our YouTube channel

