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Editor: Ian Wylie (ian.wylie@btconnect.com)

CORBRIDGE MATTERS

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www.corbridge.ukpc.net

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Most photos from Ian Wylie



River rainbow pebble heart under the bridge

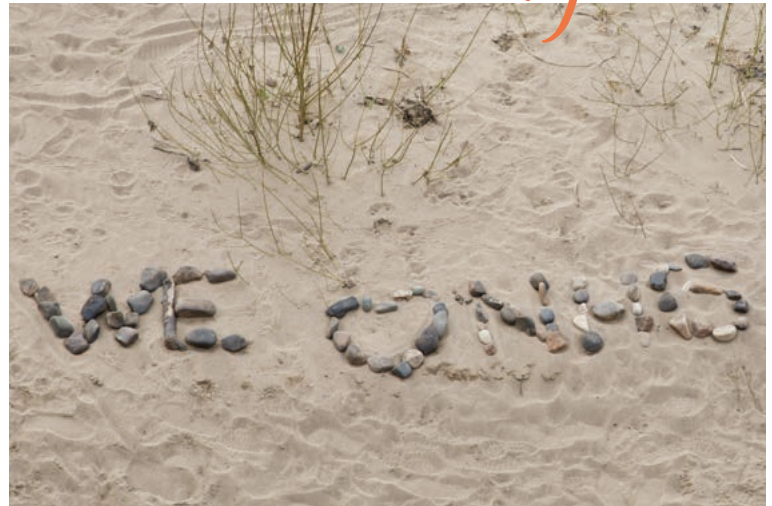
Parish Council **INFORMATION**

Clerk of the Council: Mrs Mandy Senior
Tel: 07950 297634

www.corbridge.ukpc.net

Corbridge Parish Council is currently using videoconferencing to hold its meetings. Dates of forthcoming meetings will be published on the web site

Corbridge in



Lockdown



All Things Must Pass

A curious historian may one day come to regard the last - April 2020 - edition of Corbridge Matters as a collector's item. Capturing a snapshot in time of a Northumberland community on the verge of major changes to its way of life.

Corbridge Matters is printed six times a year - every other month. With a delay of a number of weeks from finalising the content to it being delivered and read. Allowing for the time it takes to print and distribute. In the March days before the presses rolled to produce the April issue it was clear our world was about to change. Even though, incredible as it now seems, at that stage all of the items listed in the magazine were still due to take place.

But with UK and world events moving very quickly, it seemed wise to place a 'Coronavirus' message on the front cover. Followed by my 'Message from the editor' inside, written just before the edition went to the printer. Including a web link to the online Corbridge Coronavirus Community Support Group page which was subsequently activated.

That front cover warning did, of course, prove necessary in those fast moving times. With all of the events, meetings and groups listed in the April issue eventually postponed or cancelled, including public acts of worship.


As events accelerated, changing almost hour by hour, we were able to include a postcard-sized card giving the very latest detailed information about the Corbridge support group, including a Helpline telephone number for those not online. This was inserted by (plastic gloved) hand into every single printed copy of Corbridge Matters - over 2100 - just before they were delivered to homes and businesses across the village. I would like to thank designer Peter Rodger for his usual skill and attention, Robson Print for ensuring the issue was printed and delivered as soon as possible. And our volunteer delivery team who distributed copies across Corbridge in record time as the village began to close down.

For practical reasons, the next - June - edition of Corbridge Matters was cancelled. So this August issue is the first since our world went into lockdown and appears now as the village is emerging into, hopefully, a better tomorrow.

You can read more from some of those mentioned below inside this special edition. But, for now, I'm sure we would all wish to also thank the many people who have helped us through these past months. Not least all of the staff at the Corbridge Health Centre along with other local NHS workers.

Plus those involved with the Corbridge Coronavirus Community Support Group, including the over 130 people who volunteered to help others. Not all have been needed but they were there waiting and ready. Just in case. With Corbridge Parish Council clerk Mandy Senior playing a crucial role at the heart of the support group. Together with, among others, Parish Council chairman Will Clouston, our county councillor Nick Oliver and Visit Corbridge chairman David Crompton.





Corbridge Parish Council eventually continued monthly meetings via Zoom videolink as did other village organisations, including a weekly Visit Corbridge committee meeting to help traders and others through enforced closures and then reopenings. Our church communities - both at St Andrew's and Corbridge Methodist - did a huge amount of work. Not least in keeping in touch with the more vulnerable, including those who were shielding.

The staff, managers and trustees at Charlotte Straker and other care homes in the area worked tirelessly to protect their residents while trying to provide them with as near normal a life as possible under lockdown. Our thanks also to the teachers and other staff at our schools - Corbridge Middle and Corbridge First - which remained open for the children of key workers and others.

Then there are the people involved in the essential businesses that stayed open throughout providing a crucial service to Corbridge. It's a long list - and apologies if anyone is missed out - but they include Boots the chemist, the Co-op, Post Office and Paper Shop, Stobo's, The Corbridge Larder, J D Hall Butcher, Bishops Garage / SPAR and Grant's. Joined when they were allowed by the likes of The Corbridge Tandoori, and Il Piccolo. Together with volunteers from Corbridge In Bloom hard at work in the village early in the mornings or in the evenings.

At the time of writing this most shops, cafes, pubs, restaurants and other businesses in Corbridge have reopened, albeit in a new world of social distancing and Covid-19 restrictions. Having opened its doors for private prayer, St Andrew's Church has resumed public acts of worship. With visitors returning to our streets and other activities resuming, including at some local sports clubs, including Corbridge Tennis and Cricket clubs.

But Coronavirus has not gone away and we must all play our part in ensuring everyone stays safe.

2020 has been a year of cancelled events. Including our big Midsummer's Evening in Corbridge. Added to a very long list is the Village Show in September which will not take place. Decisions about the Christmas In Corbridge event and the St Andrew's Church Christmas Tree Festival have yet to be taken.

For obvious reasons, Visit Corbridge social media and marketing was left all but dormant since before the lockdown and has only recently been reactivated. Conscious of the fact that life in Corbridge today is a balance between both keeping people safe, allaying fears and anxieties and ensuring our many acclaimed independent businesses have the very best chance of surviving the economic storm brought by a pandemic.

We all have different tolerance levels to risk and judge the balance of possible harms and benefits from different perspectives. There will be some who would rather visitors didn't come to Corbridge at all. And others who want as many people to visit as possible and support our local economy.

As we saw back in March and also recently in other parts of the country, things can change very rapidly. Yet again, there will be a number of weeks between me typing these words and you reading them. Hopefully every day since writing this will have been another step forwards and not back.

But whatever happens, as I wrote at the outset of the pandemic: All things must pass...onward to that better tomorrow.

Ian Wylie, Editor Corbridge Matters

Council Notes

The April issue of Corbridge Matters went to press before the pandemic became a national emergency and the wave of health, social and economic effects had actually hit us. That now seems a long time ago. The Parish Council's first reaction was to convene a Community Support group with the help of local churches, Visit Corbridge and helpers to act as a 'safety net' for anyone needing food, prescriptions or other urgent supplies. We were overwhelmed with volunteers - a testament to community spirit in Corbridge. The scheme organised the village into six 'sectors' and seems to have served residents well in this time of need and participating in the volunteer network has brought many of us closer together.

It was sad to see our shops, pubs and community facilities close and to witness the streets fall silent. Livelihoods have been affected and being physically separated from friends and loved ones has been hard. Among other things, I've certainly missed the civilised convention of meeting friends for a quiet drink on Friday nights. You never miss the water until the well runs dry. However, it has been impressive to see that almost everyone understood the necessity of the lockdown and accepted it to protect public health in the knowledge that, ultimately, all pandemics are transitory. The crisis will pass and, indeed, at the time of writing this, appears to be passing. Whilst we can't underestimate the sacrifices made here in Corbridge it's been worth reflecting throughout the lockdown that we're fortunate to live in one of the world's most beautiful places. A daily walk by the Tyne or a cycle ride up to Sandhoe proves the point. That birdsong became more audible was a consolation.

On a further positive note, the lockdown has given us the opportunity to give the Parish Hall a much needed spring clean and refurbishment. Cupboards have been constructed, rooms have been painted, new flooring has been put down and clutter has been removed. In particular, the sight of piles of tables and chairs and other apparatus as you arrive in the entrance corridor of the building should be a thing of the past. Once the pattern of normal use re-emerges in the coming months I'm sure users will recognise and appreciate the difference caretaker Chris Urwin's careful work has made. The Parish Hall is truly a gem of the village.

In order to keep business going Parish Council meetings have been held online. This is an unnatural format for meetings, lacking the humanity of a face to face meeting. However, residents are welcome to attend and observe these meetings online and details of how to do so are on the Parish Council's website. I hope we'll be able to resume normal parish meetings - at a safe social distance - in the autumn. We will endeavour to reopen community facilities as soon as we can safely do so. Car parks, public toilets and play areas have already been reopened in accordance with national advice. Inevitably, things will take place stage by stage and use of the Parish Hall is likely to re-start gradually.



A few days before the lockdown, Nick Oliver, Dr Mark Egan and I planted a 3m lime tree on the Chains on an area of ground next to the play area as part of the Parish Council's efforts to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Due to dry weather conditions in April and May the tree needed additional water on a daily basis but it appears to be thriving. Planted during a crisis, the tree will one day be a mighty specimen, reminding us of the sacrifices of a previous generation.

William Clouston (Parish Council Chairman)

Corbridge Coronavirus Community Support Helpline:
07519 599474
www.visitcorbridge.co.uk/coronavirus
Facebook: @CorbridgeCommunity

Council Notes

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a terrible experience for many - people separated from their families, already lonely and often elderly people forced to isolate and businesses devastated by the shutdown. We all have friends and family affected. That said, I am going to highlight the positives and how we might recover.

The Corbridge community was quick to respond – the churches, parish, traders and others mobilising immediately and volunteers came forward in such large numbers that we didn't need to call upon most. Thank you to everybody. We are fortunate to live in such a tight community and in such beautiful surroundings. Mandy Senior has coordinated the volunteer response each day and deserves special mention as does Chris Urwin who has got stuck in to refurbishing the Parish Hall.

As I write it's great to see our local businesses reopening. Our local economy is heavily reliant on retail, hospitality and tourism – all hard hit. I am sensing that although many people have learned to shop online they will also value local businesses. And in an era when people are nervous about travelling overseas Northumberland will be a desirable destination.

Five years ago I had little idea about what local authorities did but I have now seen first hand how they touch upon our daily lives. There was a swift and decisive response from Northumberland County Council. As cabinet members we were in daily contact with senior officers and we continue to meet weekly to agree policy response and operational priorities. We set up a Community Hub to support local responses (not really called upon in Corbridge because of our local support group) and a Business Hub to provide advice on local and national support. We distributed over £85m in grants to over 7,600 businesses – the fourth fastest authority in the country.

Attention has now turned to recovery and our NCC Economic Recovery Board meets every two weeks to agree priorities and monitor progress. We are focusing on key sectors including renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, forestry and tourism. Every effort is being made to lobby government for major funding for capital projects – directly and through the Borderlands Growth Deal and North of Tyne authority. We have just received another £1.5m for flood projects in the Tyne Valley and over £12m in funding for digital connectivity – two projects I have been involved in.

I am happy to report that progress has continued at pace on building the new Queen Elizabeth High School in Hexham. It is going to be a magnificent facility worthy of the best performing high school in the county. While mentioning schools, it's also worth noting the hard work that teachers and governors have done in reacting to the virus in our local schools and keeping open for as many pupils as possible. One of the longest lasting impacts of the Covid-19 will be upon the education of our children.



I sit on the council's Climate Change Steering Group which brings together officers, external experts and councillors and there is an impressive range of work going on to reduce the carbon imprint of Northumberland – hydro electric schemes, solar energy, an innovative mine water energy scheme, electrification of the council fleet, higher standards for public buildings, addressing energy use of the council housing stock and much more. Investment into the Port of Blyth as a world centre of excellence for the offshore wind sector will create green jobs and more prosperity. While council officers are also looking at how we can connect Corbridge 'off-road' for cycling and walking.

We have some interesting local projects in Corbridge and I will keep everybody posted as they develop. In the meantime I'm always happy to speak to Corbridge residents and can be contacted on 07779 983742 or at nick.oliver24@outlook.com. Stay safe.

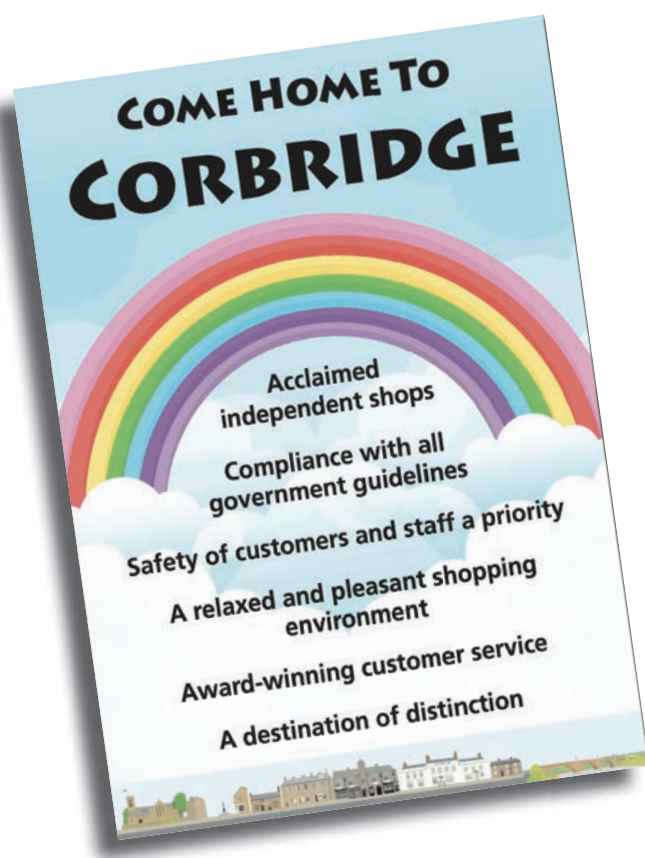
Nick Oliver (Northumberland County Councillor)

Corbridge Larder

Louise Ross is a local author who writes under the name LJ Ross. Louise is a regular at the Corbridge Larder and when the pandemic hit she reached out with a very kind offer of support, asking the Larder to provide groceries for the most vulnerable in our community. This quickly expanded out to cover doctors and nurses who were unable to get hold of shopping (remember the empty shelves in supermarkets right at the start?), key workers at local care homes, including Charlotte Straker in Corbridge, disadvantaged families who were unable to afford a weekly shop and families affected by domestic abuse.

Louise's selfless support not only helped the Larder through some tough weeks, it also meant the most vulnerable were able to get groceries at a time when they were unable to get to shops, basics were not available or they were unable to afford to shop. We are overwhelmed by Louise's generosity and the number of times people broke down in tears of gratitude when they received their shopping was humbling. In difficult times like these, people like Louise make you realise there is a lot of good in the world. I and my staff can't thank her enough.

Jennifer Horton, owner of The Corbridge Larder



Lauri and Christine



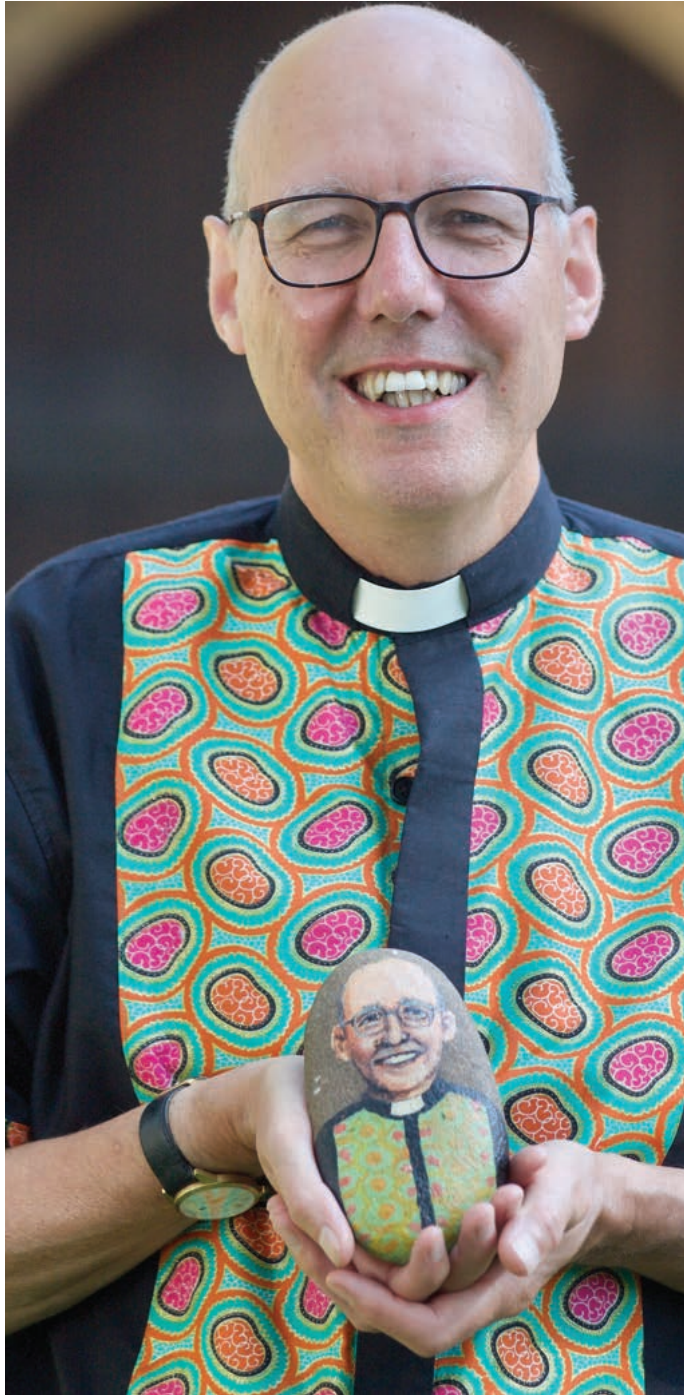
Louise Ross



Jennifer Horton



St Andrew's Church



I still remember the knot in my stomach as I locked the church doors at St Andrew's on March 24. Having the church open every day for members of our village community and visitors is so important to us. And closing for worship was equally hard. As well as our regular congregation, we had to support couples who had booked weddings and Christenings, nearly all of which have had to be postponed, and support the bereaved, many of whom would have brought their loved ones to church so that as a community we could give thanks and celebrate their lives in God's house.

It was hard not to be able to visit the sick and hold our regular services at Charlotte Straker House, Burn Brae Lodge and Abbeyfield, or take assemblies at our Church School. It was so strange having the church closed during Holy Week and Easter when it would have been thronged with people. We had to cancel eagerly awaited concerts, the 2020 Chamber Music Festival and an Eco Festival we were planning for the village Midsummer celebration.

But just as our village is a community, so the church is a community. We were delighted to be part of the Corbridge Coronavirus Community Support Hub. And we set up our own church pastoral network, contacting around 400 people each week by phone and offering help and support. We were able to keep the church clock running, move online for worship services and send out weekly emails or post information to those who needed it. The lovely spring weather meant that we had many chats over garden gates, keeping social distance, on daily exercise walks, and trips to the village shops that were open.

And then, bit by bit we began to emerge. We could ring the bells to support the Thursday evening clapping for the NHS, carers and essential workers. We also rang them for VE Day. As Vicar, in June I was allowed to go into church on my own to pray. We rejoiced with and prayed for our village businesses as they reopened. And on Sunday July 5 public worship began again – with limitations on numbers, no singing, careful protocols, but joy that the building was living again.

And now we can also celebrate small weddings, funerals and Christenings in church. We hope that Lynn our Curate will be ordained priest and Sam, our new Curate, will be ordained deacon in October (both services were postponed from July 4). But things are far from what they were. We will try to make wise decisions and make tentative plans, depending on how Coronavirus progresses over the coming months.

One day, we will be through this, the bells will ring, the choir will practice and sing again, Messy Church, all-age worship, our vibrant concert and events programme will resume. Meanwhile, thank you all for your support and expressions of concern. Coronavirus has taught us how much we need each other and must support each other.

Rev David Kennedy (Pictured with his twin from the Messy Church Pebble Fish)



Corbridge is Open again!



To Make A Difference

Corbridge care home Charlotte Straker House moved quickly to protect its residents and staff from Coronavirus when the pandemic first emerged in the UK. Setting up a new Isolation Unit to keep the home free from Covid-19. The independent charity recently launched an appeal to raise the £70,000 it needs to keep the unit open and running, having had no cases of infection.

The special unit has been used to isolate any unwell resident and any with suspected Coronavirus infection. It will also be used to quarantine any new resident who joins the home or any residents returning after a hospital admission. It has specific staffing arrangements to stop any potential spread of the virus to the rest of the care home, which has access to testing. All staff and residents have to date tested negative.

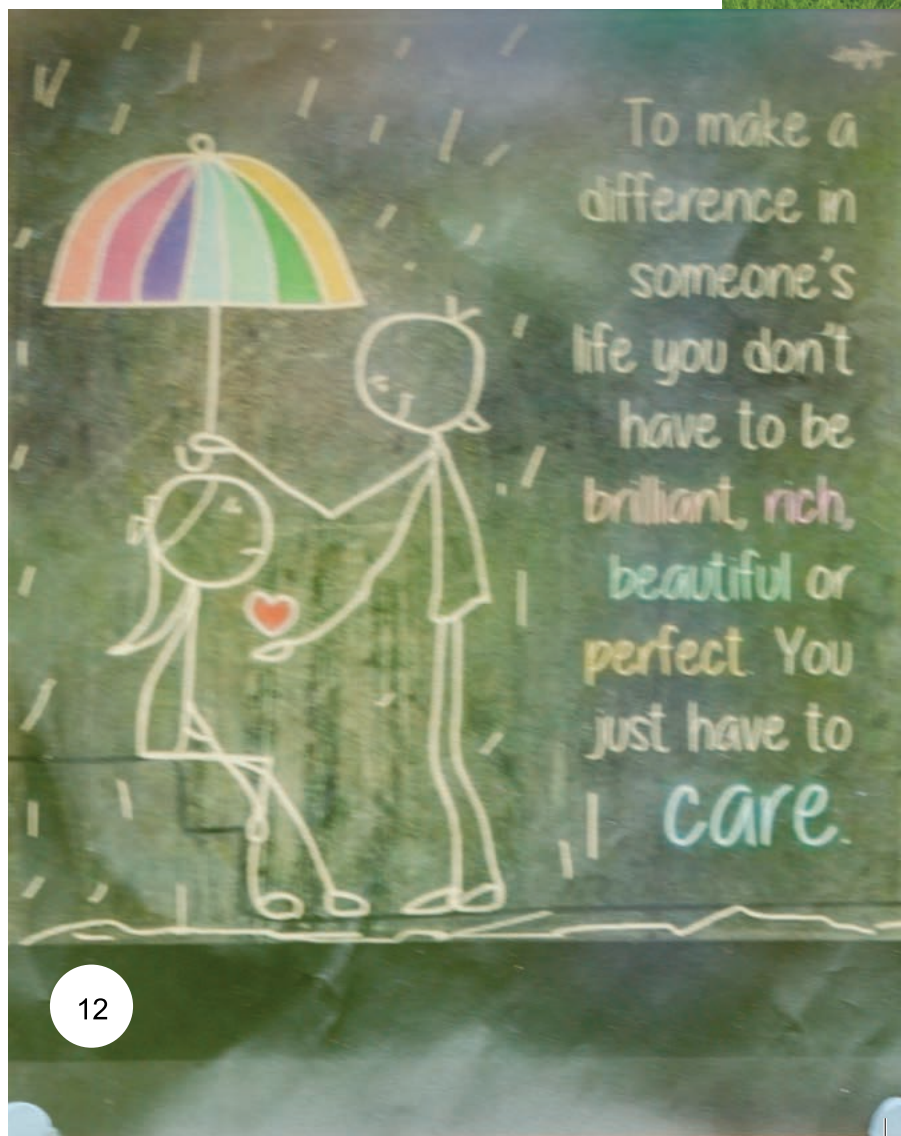
The Isolation Unit will continue to operate until the threat of Covid-19 infection has passed for care homes with the charity paying the direct costs of setting aside the rooms involved. "There is, unfortunately, a considerable additional cost to our charity of providing this Isolation Unit," said Berenice Groves, chair of the Charlotte Straker Trustees. "It comprises of four adjacent rooms in the east wing of our home, separate from the rest of the building. We have sacrificed the income we would normally receive from these rooms to keep everyone safe."

The charity explain that the government Coronavirus support grant will only cover a fraction of the cost of the Isolation Unit, providing some help with additional staffing costs. "There is a continuing need in our local community for the residential and nursing care provided at Charlotte Straker House. But people have been reluctant to be admitted due to the perceived risk of Covid-19 infection," added Berenice. Our isolation unit not only protects those already in our care and reassures their families but it also provides reassurance for those who need to be admitted to care."

Charlotte Straker House - a former cottage hospital - provides residential, nursing and respite care. Added Berenice: "People have been fantastic in their support in the past and we are asking for their help again. We have made a good start since launching the appeal but £70,000 is a lot of money to raise. Having done everything in our power to keep those in our care safe during this awful pandemic, we must continue to do that."

More from the Charlotte Straker Project: Our dedicated staff, the senior management team and the new volunteers helping with new socially distanced activities have tried to keep life as normal as possible for the ladies and gentlemen in our care during this Coronavirus crisis. We look after those who are frail, elderly, and disabled. We normally have 32 residents in a mixture of nursing and residential rooms. Most of these residents have families in Corbridge or wider Tynedale and many come from the local area.

In the face of the initial serious difficulties in sourcing PPE, our community rose to the challenge and those in the village who could sew, produced much needed washable scrubs and gowns. Others donated masks, hand sanitizer and gloves or donated funds to help us buy the quantities we needed. Some even knitted and crocheted tiny hearts so that we could give one to each resident and one to a family member to let them know we were still thinking about them. The community of Corbridge was still there, no matter what was going on in the world outside. We set up an external handwashing station, our care home was closed to the outside world and any staff member who was in a 'high risk' group was told to stay at home to keep them safe and those who were unwell told to self-isolate. But what about our residents? How would they cope with the lack of activities and hairdressing





L-R: Registered Manager Marilyn Hunter, Registered Nurse Ian Duthie and Chair of Trustees Berenice Grove

appointments and visits to our local church and all the other little things that go into making our care home, their home away from home?

We asked for younger volunteers to help fill in the gaps of missing staff (up to 20 per cent of all staff at one point) and to arrange new 'socially-distanced' activities. As a result many people came forward.

Our staff also went the extra mile to ensure that life continues as normal, with one member of the housekeeping staff staying behind after her shift to use her hairdressing skills to set perms and cut hair. Some volunteers simply phoned each resident for a regular chat, as a 'befriending' call, to talk through their week and provide some friendly conversation. One lovely lady organised a video call to play the piano and sing songs to our residents, we've had a VE day with cream teas (and plenty of Union Jack banners and bunting), and our local church has come up trumps with a video version of their services, which is so important to many of our residents.

The families of our residents have helped set up Zoom and Skype video calls and our staff have patiently sat and explained this new technology to those who wanted to see and hear their loved ones. We are doing our very best to ensure all our residents are connected with their family members as we progress through this difficult time.

We were delighted that the children in the village joined in and sent a huge number of wonderful pictures, letters and rainbows that now decorate our windows, corridors, and entrance area. We have printed out and displayed every single work of art that has been sent to us.

Our remaining staff soldiered on, adapting to every new challenge that we have thrown at them. They still find time, amongst the extra cleaning and monitoring, to chat and laugh with our residents and to show them the love and reassurance they need during this uncertain time.

For more information about the appeal go to: <https://charlottestraker.org.uk/isolationunit>

Chamber Music Festival



Robert Plane



The Gould Piano Trio

The 2020 Corbridge Chamber Music Festival due to be held at St Andrew's Church last month (July) was staged online instead to wide acclaim. Six concerts were streamed in real time on the festival's YouTube channel with recordings made in the homes of the performers billed as: "From our homes to yours."

A long list of artists took part including artistic directors the Gould Piano Trio and Robert Plane. Together with musicians Richard Lester, Benjamin Frith, Florence Plane, the Elias String Quartet, Heidi Rolfe, Kate Gould, David Stark, composer-in-residence Piers Hellowell, dancer Kenji Wilkie and poet Sinead Morrissey.

Other highlights included specially recorded talks and an online Historic Corbridge walk featuring local historian David Waugh. He had been due to lead a festival walk around the village but instead filmed one for inclusion in the virtual event. Standing outside St Andrew's Church, David told his Internet audience: "Hopefully this will encourage you to take the real walk during the 2021 Corbridge Chamber Music Festival."

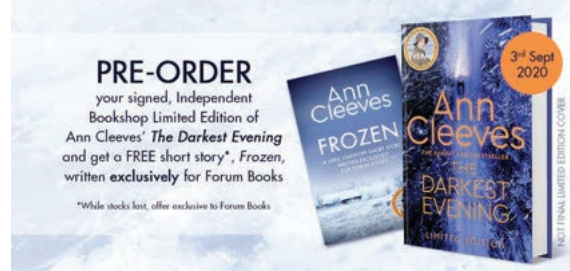
Festival director Robert Plane is a soloist and principal clarinettist with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. He said the aim of this 22nd event was to provide a flavour of the real annual Corbridge festival. "We were very excited about the live programme. But then became equally excited about the online programme.

"There is no charge to access these concerts but we would be hugely grateful for donations to contribute towards the cost of producing this event and to ensure a secure future for our festival."

You can view the now archived event online for a short period of time via:

<https://corbridgefestival.co.uk>

Forum Books



Dear readers...as we emerge from lockdown I hope you're all well and have had the chance to read a good book or two over the last few months. Reading has been a wonderful escape for many of us - it gives us the opportunity to travel when we have nowhere to go!

And now, we have some very exciting news we can share with you that brings us right back home: Ann Cleeves has written an exclusive Vera Stanhope short story called **Frozen**, based around our bookshop. I actually feature as a character in it. It's a brilliant read and Ann's publisher Pan Macmillan has produced 500 copies for us to give away free to customers pre-ordering the new Vera novel - **The Darkest Evening** - out on September 3.

As ever, Ann says it best: "Forum Books in the small Northumberland town of Corbridge has supported me since they set up shop many years ago. A couple of years ago, they changed premises and moved into an empty chapel in the heart of the town. When the builders were renovating the building, they discovered an enormous baptismal font just below the pulpit; the pulpit is still there and used as a stage for events. Now, I'm a crime writer, so when Helen, showed me the coffin sized hole in the floor, I was already imagining a body...the germ of an idea for a Vera short story developed and the result is Frozen."

Ann has always been good to us, and we've loved supporting her at book events all over the North East. And then she does this! It's a brilliantly evocative short story featuring Vera popping into our bookshop after a bracing walk and a coffee in one of Corbridge's cafes. It genuinely gave me goosebumps reading this unguessable wee whodunnit, and I just can't wait to share it.

Happy reading!

Helen Stanton

A Helping Hand: Many readers will remember Joyce Anderson's jewellery and clothes shop which she had on Hill Street for 14 years and where she also sold homemade ice cream. In the four years before retiring from her shop in 2018 you may recall seeing Joyce on crutches and in plaster as she had four major operations on her legs. This involved a lot of leg rest and her consultant advised choosing a sitting down hobby. So she took to writing. Something Joyce has always been interested in.

She had started a number of novels through her working life but *A Helping Hand* is the first one to be finished and published. It's the story of a 13-year-old girl called Stella who is exhausted by trying to look after her mother while her father is away. One evening when she is walking their chocolate labrador Lucy she makes a wish on a shooting star. Stella wishes for a helping hand and her wish has very unexpected consequences. Local artist Alex Clark painted the delightful original illustration for the cover. Available from Forum Books at £4.99

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First School

I am so proud of all of Corbridge First School. We have dedicated time, energy and commitment to do the best for our families, while personally living through the challenges and fears during this pandemic too. We opened to 104 children when schools began reopening in June but not having capacity to create spaces for all of our children to be in school together was very sad.

Families have worked so hard to juggle home learning and their own work and ensuring their children remain happy and loved. We will be taking some time during this summer to recharge and have some rest time but we very much look forward to having all children return in September. We are dedicated to ensure all preparations are made to make this as safe as possible and we are set for a positive autumn term to continue at Corbridge First School to be the best we can be!

Head Teacher Jennifer Ainsley



Norma James, the ladies' fashion store in Middle Street, is to close its doors for the final time by September. Founded in 1970 by Norma and Alan Foster, it has been an important destination store in the village. Noreen and David Crompton took over in 2008 and for the last twelve years it has changed dramatically reflecting the way fashion has moved on from the very formal occasions to a more relaxed approach to dressing.

"The first time we spoke about retirement was the day of the Brexit vote in 2016, which was also the Midsummer late shopping night in Corbridge," explained David. "Our first grandchild was born that night and we realised we wanted to spend more time with our family and less at work. That first grandchild is due to start Corbridge First School in September and we now have two more grandchildren."

David sold his own business in 2018 and the couple then put the Norma James business and property

up for sale. "In 2019 we advertised the business and there was quite a lot of interest and we soon found a buyer. Unfortunately the buyer came to see us at the end of February and felt they could not go through with the buy just as Coronavirus kicked in. We intended to come back after lockdown and continue on but another business in the village wanted the shop so we have now sold the property and another business is planning to move in at the end of August.

"We have been truly overwhelmed by the kindness and support we have received from the many friends, customers and suppliers we have met over the years and we have found it an absolute joy to work with you. We have especially been touched by the way our fellow Corbridge traders have responded by saying how much they will miss us, although we will still be living in the village and running Bridge House Cottages and David is still chairman of Visit Corbridge."



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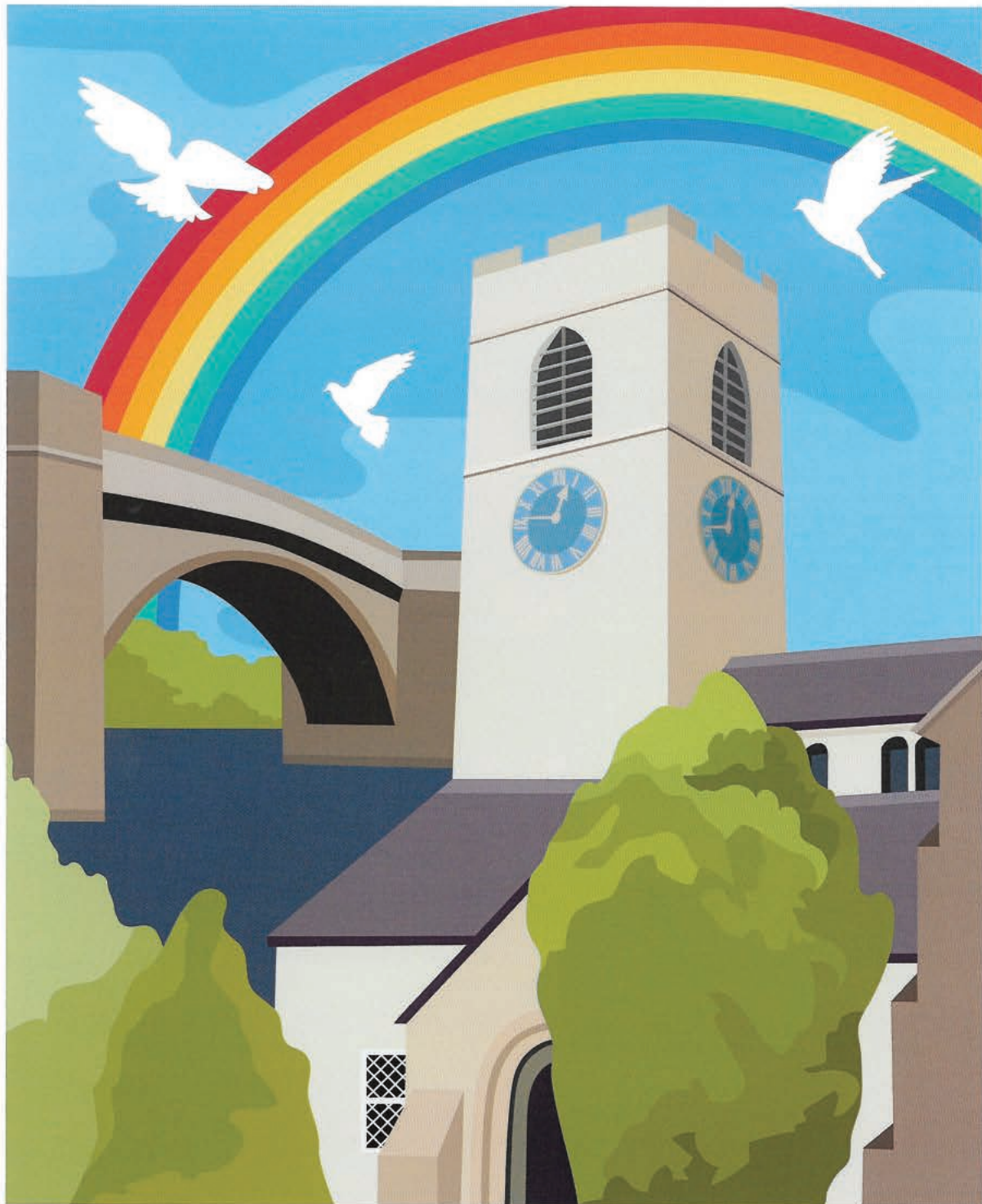
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