

July 2023

FOCUS

Issue 278



Parish Magazine of St Stephen's, Hightown



***"I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;"***

Sea Fever by John Masefield



Editor's Letter

This month, in the Focus magazine, we welcome our new vicar. Revd Keith arrived in June and has moved into St Stephen's Vicarage with his son, Matthew, daughter, Grace and little Jack Russell, Oscar. We are delighted to welcome them into our community and hope they will settle in quickly and love living in Hightown.

The month of June saw the ordination of our very own, Julie Butcher. Julie and her husband, Martin, have lived in Hightown for very many years and brought up their family here. Julie was an active member of St Stephen's Church, before going to train for the priesthood, and still lends a hand with the brass cleaning in our church. She, along with her husband and others, was also a founder of the Focus magazine. We offer our warmest congratulations to our lovely friend, Revd Julie. May God bless you on your journey.

On pages 9 and 10 you can read all about Colin Goodyear's tree spotting walk around Hightown. Why not see if you can follow the same route and spot the trees? Or, during the school summer holidays, do the suggested tree activity on the same page.

If you are a talented musician and you've ever wanted to join a band, then you simply must read Tony Cooke's article, '*Playing Music*', on pages 11 and 12.

Revd Canon Dr Rod Garner, has once again written a fascinating article. This time, it's about the universe, aliens and bad news. Look at page 15 to give you food for thought.

On page 13, you can take a peek at what some of the residents in Mark Road get up to on hot sunny afternoons!

At this point, on behalf of St Stephen's Church, I have to say a big thank-you to Beryl Howard and Brian Taylor, who have worked tirelessly during our interregnum period, (period without a priest). Beryl has ensured that St Stephen's has had a visiting member of the clergy most Sundays, to take our Eucharistic celebrations and officiate on other special occasions. She has done this, and much more besides. We have all pulled together during this difficult period to keep our church and its presence in the community alive. What's more.....we are still on talking terms!

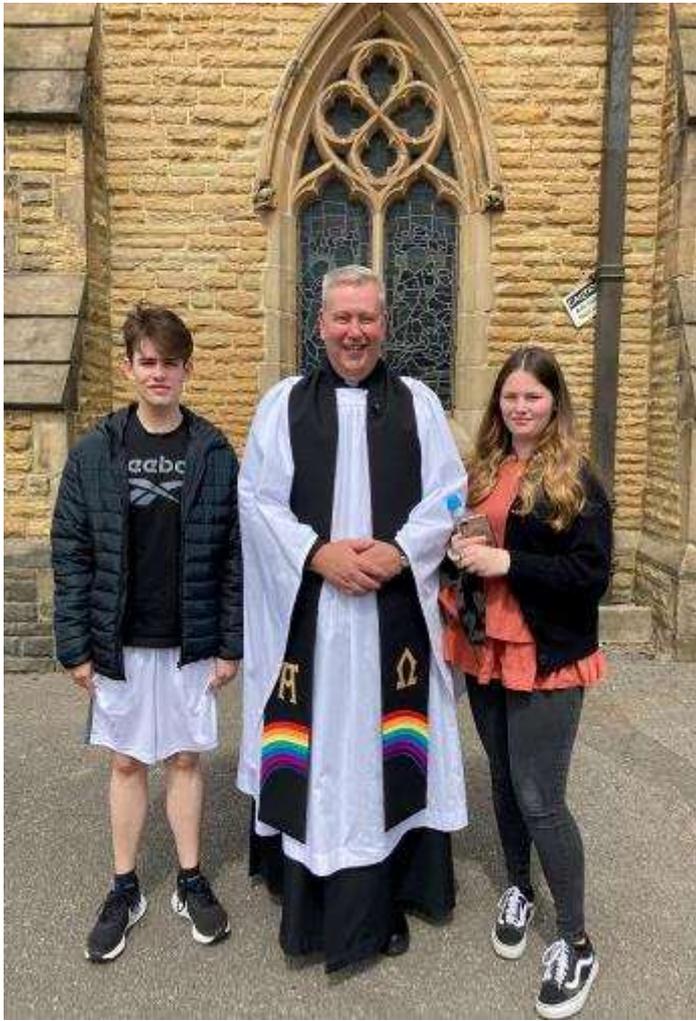
Yours in Christ,
Colette



Entries for future issues of Focus to be sent to
Focus.Mag.2023@StStephensHightown.org.uk

Please Note New Email Address

Please submit before the last day of the month.



Welcome to Reverend Keith Thornborough

Revd Keith trained for ordained ministry with All Saints Centre for Mission and Ministry on a part time basis whilst continuing to work full time as a specialist diabetes nurse at Alder Hey Children's Hospital.

Prior to commencing this role in 2010, he was a ward manager for fifteen years.

After serving his curacy at St Nicholas' Blundellsands, he was licensed as SSM Associate Priest there, where he has continued to serve. 2023 sees the fifth anniversary of his ordination as Deacon. He has been instrumental in coordinating and developing the leadership team for Church@School, a Fresh Expression of Church meeting monthly in St. Nicholas' School. He also founded and led Sanctuary at Seven, held monthly, a very gentle reflective service of Holy Communion, taking time out of busy lives to dwell, to receive, restore and refresh. Being the only licensed priest there

due to interregnum during the pandemic, he live streamed weekly Morning Prayer on a Sunday from home, and a monthly Toddler Church service. He has continued to live stream Evening Prayer every Wednesday and Night Prayer, Compline every Sunday evening.

Keith was a leader, Akela, with the Cub Scouts for over thirty years and very much enjoys working with children and young people, professionally and in the church setting, assisting with an after-school club for juniors, The Bridge Youth Club and Toddler Church. He has two grown up children of his own.

Sadly, he lost his wife, after a very brave fight with lung cancer, in December 2011.

Keith enjoys listening to music of many genres. He enjoys playing the organ and piano. He was recently made a Fellow of the Guild of Musicians and Singers. He loves to cook and the ministry of hospitality. He has coordinated, along with the Shared Ministry Team several afternoon teas: a time of singing, food, fellowship, and fun together.

Keith and his family, Matthew and Grace, are very much looking forward to living amongst us in Hightown and seeing how God will use us all to grow His church here.

Thank you, Elaine!

St Stephen's Church would like to send a massive thank you to our new cleaner, Elaine. She tells us that she gets a huge amount of satisfaction out of doing the job and, as ever, our church is gleaming.

St Stephen's Church

Sunday Rota for July 2023

Sunday 2nd	10.30	Eucharist	Rev Keith Thornborough
	6.00	Evening Prayer	John Gibson
Wed 5th	10.30	Morning Prayer	Judith Welch
Sunday 9th	10.30	Eucharist	Rev Keith Thornborough
	6.00	Evening Prayer	Rev Keith Thornborough
Wed 12th	10.30	Eucharist	Rev Keith Thornborough
Sunday 16th	10.30	Eucharist	Rev Keith Thornborough
	6.00	Evening Prayer	Colin Goodyear
Wed 19th	10.30	Morning Prayer	Hazel Roberts
Sunday 23rd	10.30	Eucharist	Rev Keith Thornborough
	6.00	Evening Prayer	Rev Keith Thornborough
Wed 26th	10.30	Eucharist	Rev Keith Thornborough

Christian Aid Week

Thank you , Hightown, for raising £690 and thanks to Jackie and John at The Village Store for acting as a collection point.

Who's Who at St. Stephen's

Vicar	Revd. Keith Thornborough
Reader	Mr. John Gibson
Wardens	Mr. Geoff Bailey
PCC Secretary	Mrs. Beryl Howard
PCC Treasurer	Mr. Keith Aldis
Gift Aid Secretary	Mr. Brian Taylor
Safeguarding	Mrs. Sonia Bunyard
Wills and Legacies	<i>To be appointed</i>
Electoral Roll Officer	Mrs. Beth Cresswell
Sacristan Team	Miss Hazel Roberts
Health and Safety	Mr. Stanley Alty
Flower Rota	Mrs. Hilary Munro
CMS Secretary	Mrs. Beryl Howard
St. Stephen's Youth Club	Jane Croxton
Church Hall Bookings	Mrs. Sally Fraser
Focus Editor	Colette Grove
Focus Advertisements	Colette Grove
Focus Distribution	Mr. and Mrs. K Bradshaw
St. Stephen's Church Website	StStephensHightown.org.uk

Prayer Prompts For July



- 1st. For the victims of crime.
For the people of Mark Road.
- 2nd. Fourth Sunday after Trinity. For those working to avert cruelty to animals.
For the people of North End Lane.
- 3rd. **Thomas the Apostle** For all who bear the burden of privilege and leadership.
For the people of Tudor Gardens and Rathbone Road.
- 4th. For those overcome by doubt, that their faith may be strengthened.
For the people of Langley Close and Richmond Close.
- 5th. For those whose homes have been overcome by natural disasters.
For the people of Whitefield Close and Oakfield Road.
- 6th. **Thomas Moore, Scholar** Pray for those receiving exam results. May they gain the results to fulfil their plans.
For the people of Thornbeck Avenue and Mayfair Close.
- 7th. For those who strive for lasting peace between nations.
For the people of School Road and Gorsey Lane.
- 8th. For those who suffer distressing pain.
For the people of Elvington Road.
- 9th. Fifth Sunday after Trinity. For the conservation and protection of endangered species of living creatures.
For the people of Moorhouses and Bankside.
- 10th. For those involved in missionary work overseas.
For the people of Blundell Road.
- 11th. For farmers and others who work in agriculture.
For the people of Marston Crescent and Larkhill Grove.
- 12th. For those countries who suffer famine and a lack of clean water in times of drought
For the people of Blundell Avenue and Alton Close.
- 13th. For our sand dunes and pinewoods, that we may treasure and maintain them for the enjoyment of generations to come.
For the people of St George's Road and Sandy Lane.
- 14th. For the bereaved and those who carry great sadness.
For the people of North Dunes.
- 15th. For the continued growth and vitality of St Stephen's Church.
For the people of Westway and Thistledown Drive.
- 16th. Sixth Sunday after Trinity. For orphaned or neglected children, forced to survive on the streets or work long hours.
For the people of Withins Field.

Prayer Prompts For July [ctd.]



- 17th. For those responsible for the upkeep of our cathedrals and churches.
For the people of Riverside.
- 18th. For those who serve in the armed forces and the loved ones who have lost their lives in the service of their country.
For the people of Village Way and The Roundway.
- 19th. **Gregory, Bishop, Teacher For teachers**, that they may receive the respect of the children they teach, their parents and society.
For the people of Sandhills and Sandilands Grove.
- 20th. That we change our ways and learn to care for our world.
For the people of Elmcroft Lane and Emerson Close.
- 21st. For musicians, artists and poets who enrich mind and spirit.
For the people of Briary Croft and Brentwood Close.
- 22nd. **Mary Magdalene** For the sick, and their loved ones and carers.
For the people of Alt Road.
- 23rd. Seventh Sunday after Trinity. We pray that in our relationship with the community, we can fulfil the mission of St Stephen's church to be integral to community life, accessible; caring and supportive to all.
For the people of The Ranges and Altcar Camp.
- 24th. Lord, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
For the people of Moss Lane and farms in the area.
- 25th. **James the Apostle** For those who are persecuted and have died for their faith.
For the people of St Stephen's Road and Hester Close.
- 26th. **Anne and Joachim** For parents that they may bring up their children with love to respect the morals and conventions of society.
For the people of Thirlmere Road.
- 27th. For the Hightown Tuesday group and for the friendships forged in this and other organisations which meet in Hightown.
For the people of Windermere Road.
- 28th. For those who are lonely in our community, that they may find companionship.
For the people of Blundell Grove.
- 29th. **Mary, Martha and Lazarus** For the love and support of family and friends
For the people of Wignalls Meadow.
- 30th. Eighth Sunday after Trinity. For suppressed peoples, that they may obtain freedom from oppression.
For the people of Old Acre.
- 31st. Our Father, who art in heaven...
For the people of Lower Alt Road



Hightown Street Trees



The ramblings of a tree spotter

by Colin Goodyear of Mark Road

Older translations of the New Testament call the tree which Zacchaeus climbed, to get a better view as Jesus passed by, a sycamore tree (Luke 19.4). Most of Hightown's street trees are sycamores and are certainly not easy to climb. Zacchaeus may not have needed to be so athletic, however, since modern versions translate the word as 'sycomore', which is a fruit tree yielding a kind of fig. I have read that the 'sycamore' is still abundant in parts of the Middle East, though I have never seen either the tree or its fruit, and would be interested to know if any reader has.

Most Hightown street trees, as I say, are sycamores, best known for their two-winged seeds which rotate as they descend, so that they come down rather slowly and can be carried some distance from the parent tree before landing. They are not a native British species, having been introduced from central Europe in the 16th century as ornamental trees in the parks and gardens of large houses, but are now thoroughly naturalised and may even be a troublesome weed of cleared and open woodland. The wood is hard and strong, useful for furniture and fine joinery, and it turns well for bowls or, in the old cotton mills, for rollers which did not stain the cloth. Even so, sycamores are not thought of these days as being particularly special or ornamental. Perhaps we would if they were rare, but they are so common that we don't usually give the sycamore a second glance.

But Hightown does have a number of street trees that are not sycamores. I tried the exercise recently of walking around the village to see what we have that are not sycamores. Come with me and see what I was able to find.

Outside the church hall stands a whitebeam with the typically white underside of its leaves. This is *Sorbus aria* with large pale leaves and large red fruit in autumn and is related to the rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) which has pinnate leaves. It was planted by Hightown Gardening Club to mark the millennium.

Walking towards the station we cross Kerslake Way and notice two cherry trees near the corner, then pass a birch by the old bank. The triangle of the village green has London planes at the corners nearest the bus stop. Their leaves are maple-like but are not paired, as in maples, and at most times of the year the black bobble-cones of the previous season can be seen. Near the seats on the green a larch and a spruce may be seen. Opposite the Post Office is the cherry that brightens up the green each spring. Two large grey poplars stand outside the Village Pharmacy, close relatives of the much smaller and wind battered poplars that are common on Hightown dunes.

Proceeding along School Road a white bark birch stands at the corner of Tudor Gardens and School Road while along Blundell Road, more of Hightown's whitebeams may be found: one on either corner with Village Way and another further along where the road zigzags. A few more lie much further along Blundell Road, both before and beyond the junction with Elvington Road. Blundell Road also has an ash tree near the corner with Blundell Grove while further down there are also *Sorbus* near the junction with Elvington. Past this junction, on the right, are Swedish whitebeams, which are also a species of *Sorbus*.

Taking the short cut along the footpath to Alton Close we can walk north along Thornbeck Avenue and see white poplar at the children's play area along with willow and cherry. A whitebeam is to be seen near the junction with Briary Croft. A lime and another rowan stand opposite the junction with Old Acre with another rowan near the corner with Sandhills. A cherry stands opposite the entrance to Bankside while a little way down Riverside on the right hand side stands a particularly fine example of whitebeam. Back on Thornbeck, on the corner at Riverside, is what seems to be an elm (possibly *Ulmus x hollandica* 'Dampierii'), if so this is certainly one of Hightown's more unusual trees, since elms have been little planted since the outbreak of Dutch Elm disease in the 1970's. The little copse on the green at the end of North Dunes has mainly young pine.

Reaching the war memorial and turning towards the river, down Lower Alt Road, there are recently planted elms, *Ulmus* 'Lobel', a Dutch hybrid with upswept branches, which is reputed to be resistant to Dutch Elm disease. Turning back, another Swedish whitebeam stands not far from the corner on the south side. On the opposite side of the war memorial from St. Stephen's Hall a red flowering hawthorn and a cherry can be found.

Crossing the railway footbridge to Our Lady of Victories Church, two more whitebeams stand near the church, while opposite, in the field, a horse chestnut and what seems to be a crack willow stand close to one another. Proceeding along Sandy Lane we find, sadly, no elms in Elmcroft Lane, though there are a few mature ash trees and some cherries towards the bottom end. Returning to the station, a short detour into St. George's Road brings us to a fine mature ash, just beyond the surgery, while further along there is Hightown's fourth and somewhat uncommon species of Sorbus, this time Sorbus thuringiaca or Finnish service tree. It stands on the right just before the flyover.

Back over the railway footbridge, on the left of the road into the range, is a stand of tall grey poplar which might almost be aspen, which I often watch quivering in our Hightown zephyrs as I wait for the train to Liverpool. Two apple trees can be found on the right, one close to the flyover, presumably the result of passengers' discarded apple cores.

I hope I have not missed any reader's favourite or got any of my identifications wrong - let me know if I have. My list gives a total species count of 20, not counting any in private gardens, so a modern day Zacchaeus would have quite a good choice!

Can you identify these trees by their leaves?

Colin certainly knows his trees but how many trees can you identify? Tree spotting and sketching is a great summer holiday activity for all members of the family, without having to travel far or break the bank. Paper, a book to lean on, plus a few pencils and a rubber are all the equipment required. Why don't you have a go?



Holiday at Home 14th – 25th August 2023

FOR OLDER ADULTS IN FORMBY, HIGHTOWN and INCE BLUNDELL

Formby Befriending Scheme, with support from Churches Together and other community groups and individuals, is once again offering a 'Holiday at Home' for older adults in the Formby, Hightown and Ince Blundell area during the last 2 weeks in August. The main aim of the fortnight is to give people who are no longer able to go away on holiday, the opportunity to have a 'holiday experience' in their own community.

Last year, we had a wonderful time, with many people enjoying social activities for the first time since the covid pandemic. Many events were fully booked with some of the larger ones having 100+ people attending. And so, once again, we are delighted to offer a packed programme and are confident that it will be another fortnight of friendship and fun which will be enjoyed by all who participate.

The printed programme will be available early in July and can be picked up from Churches and other locations in Formby, Hightown and Ince Blundell. Bookings this year will open on Tuesday 25th July when there will be a special afternoon at Formby Methodist Church with members of the Holiday at Home Team taking your bookings and serving refreshments. Telephone bookings will open on Wednesday 26th and there will be 2 further face-to-face opportunities to book and pay for events that require pre-payment. Details will be included in the programmes.

Transport will be available for those who need assistance in order to attend. Please take the time to read the guidelines on transport and booking options which are in the programme.

Our sincere thanks go to all those who are hosting a special event for Holiday at Home 2023.
We look forward to another great holiday experience!

The Holiday at Home Team.

Baptisms

Chloe Wormald



Birthdays

Abigail Edisbury
Charlotte Harrison



St Stephen's Church Hall

TODDLER GROUP

Term time

Every Friday 9.30 to 11.30am

Sanctuary Flowers

2nd Colette Grove
9th Beryl Howard
16th Val Bailey
23rd Sue Taylor
30th Hilary Munro

Prices for advertising per annum:

Full page: £550

Half page: £275

Quarter page: £135

One eighth page: £70

Contact:

Focus.Mag.2023@StStephensHightown.org.uk

Brass Cleaning

Shirley Burns

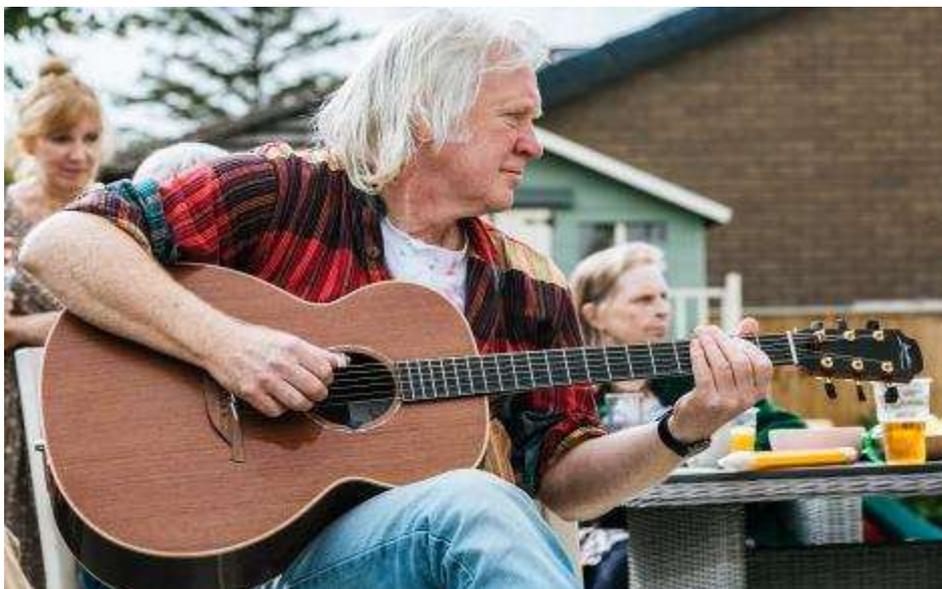
Sunday Coffee Rota

2nd Shirley Burns
9th Gaylyn Edwards
16th Jan Williams
23rd Di Aldis
30th TBA

Playing Music

By Tony Cooke

When I was eight years old, or so, I started having piano lessons. I enjoyed them a lot, but after a few years, tired of the practice that was necessary, they went by the board. Nevertheless, at the age of ten, me and my great friend, Graham, played a piano duet at the school end-of-year concert. This was in July 1965 at Crosby Road Junior School. We performed another duet at the following year's concert.



Thereafter, Graham and I attended different schools but stayed friends and in 1970/71 formed a blues-based rock band with three other friends John, Rob and Rod. The band was called **Blind Worm** and made it's debut performance at Christ Church, Waterloo, in July 1971. I was singing, playing a little harmonica and smashing tambourines. Graham and John played guitar, Rod bass guitar and Rob drums – no pianos at all. We played many of our own compositions as well as rock'n'roll and blues covers. **Blind Worm** lasted until 1974, by which time we were all at different universities.

I attended Lancaster University from October 1973. In my first term I ate very little (although drank a fair amount) and tried to save some money to buy a guitar. I was desperate for a guitar. The only thing I had was a borrowed ancient instrument that had a crack in the top and only 3 tuners. The other 3 strings were rusted in place and virtually untuneable. Fortunately, with the help of a pair of pliers and an old Meccano cog-wheel I managed to get them working. Eventually, I was able to buy a new one from Frank Hessey's in January 1974, (an Eko Ranger VI which was a mistake 'cos it was awful), and set about learning to play it.

I teamed up with fellow students, Martin Bleach and Nic Wells, and played a few student gigs and by early 1977 Martin and I were playing every Monday in The Brown Cow, Lancaster. Wow! A regular gig and for money too! This lasted a year or so before Martin completed his MSc and moved darn sarf. I was working full time as a child care officer with learning disabled children and later commenced work for Lancaster University Student Union.

From 1977–1985, I was employed as the Community Action Officer by LUSU and Lancaster University, encouraging and developing students' participation in local voluntary work via community organisations. I ending up with a team of 450+ students and staff, engaged in such activities. This was a multi-faceted role which ,amongst other things, led me to become an instigator and organiser of **KTS Roadshow** taking entertainment (music and comedy) to local residential establishments and also to pubs and clubs, as a fund-raiser for various charities. At the same time my own musical activities and development continued. I played in local pubs, and on many, many occasions, for local charities and community groups.

I was, voluntarily, an active member of the organising committee of our local folk festival, Lancaster Clocks Back Festival, for the 25 years of its existence from 1978–2003. Towards the end, I was just about THE active member!).

I co-founded **Free Reed Band** – a ceilidh band – in 1981 and this continued for the next 32 years, performing two or three times a week, mainly throughout Lancashire and Cumbria.. We were rehearsing assiduously, promoting traditional music and dance and also contributing our services to local community groups and organisations every year. If we had no gig on a Saturday, we would all attend the folk session at The Crown pub. Such sessions are the foundation of folk music, are immensely enjoyable and a great way of learning. For many years, **Free Reed Band** had a two week summer Busking Tour, busking up our suppers and petrol- and beer- money in smaller towns, from Lancashire to the south coast and back. We organised an annual mid-summer music/picnic/party for friends and co-musicians. We also held our own ceilidhs and sessions and generally busied ourselves making a noise whenever we could. For example, in 1985 we were invited to play at Yn Chruinnaght, (the Isle of Man folk festival). The ferry was late arriving at Heysham so, naturally, we held a 45-minute ceilidh in the ferry terminal whilst we waited).

In 1985 I was appointed as the Organiser of Elm House Day Centre in Lancaster, catering for the needs of those with severe and enduring mental illness. This was a new venture, and was able only to employ a very few staff. It

therefore necessitated long hours and some weekend work. In spite of these restrictions, most evenings were free for musical activities.

In December 1983, I helped found The Gregson Community Centre in Lancaster. During the late 80s and throughout the 90s, I worked with my friend, Brian, voluntarily running Folkal Point. We promoted and presented monthly folk music concerts at the centre, employing both national, international and local artists at every gig.

These activities led me to work for several years as a sound engineer and sometimes consultant with Lancaster City Council, WOMAD, Clitheroe Great Days of Folk, Warwick Folk Festival and similar organisations.

In 1992, I was asked to join **Shake A Leg**. This was an interesting folk dance band based in the Ribble Valley, fronted by brass rather than the more usual strings or reeds and involving a very loud drummer and me playing electric rather than acoustic guitar. I continued as a member for 20 years.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, I engaged in various short-lived, but mostly very musically satisfying, projects such as: **Left Hand Drive** – a basic rock'n'roll band formed to provide dance music for particular groups of people with special needs; **The Hop** – a five piece 60's band with 4-part harmonies and very LOUD!; **Bright Phoebus** – a four piece harmony band singing folk songs inspired by the work of Mike and Lal Waterson; **Rimu** – two of us singing songs from UK, Eire and New Zealand; **Last Orders** – a duo with guitar, mandolin, whistles, and voice, performing traditional music from UK and Europe; and **Trio Rat** – guitar, mandolin and clarinet playing UK and Scandinavian folk music.

I also found time to run a weekly folk night every Thursday at local pubs: 1992–2008 at The John O'Gaunt and 2008–2012 at The Robert Gillow, which featured both local and touring national acts.

In 1997/98 I spent some time in New Zealand. I was helping to write a book on adult literacy and did a little work with disabled students at Auckland's Unitech, but also managed, somehow, to open Auckland Folk Festival as part of **Rimu** in January 1998 and then close the festival, accompanying comedian and traditional singer, Terry Free, a few days later. My stay was a short one, 9 months or so, but I also managed to perform gigs at Titirangi, Auckland and Walkworth Folk Clubs, Hamilton Folk Festival and organise a couple of ceilidhs in Papatoetoe.

2001 saw the birth of **The Duo – from folk to Floyd**. This is me and my mate Dave using our guitars, effects pedals and harmony-singing to perform nice songs. Our name probably says enough about the band: 18th century folk ballads leading to 'Dark Side Of The Moon' or 'Comfortably Numb' via other trad, pop, rock, blues and/or reggae numbers. We still perform, nearly always in the Lancaster District, whenever we get the chance. [Reasonable rates, please enquire within.....]

I had a short spell in Bridport, Dorset in 2012/13/14 and whilst there joined a country band **Branded Men**. That was a larf, a colourful bunch of excellent musicians with their west country accents, being well-suited to all the requisite Americanisms. We made no money though!

Somewhere in the early 21st century, I formed another ceilidh band, **Moorgate**, with my friends, Simon and Richard. Our slightly unusual line-up of clarinet, melodeon, harmonica and guitar gives the band a definitely different sound and it's lovely to play for dancing with these two hugely talented musos. That said, we have done nothing since the dark days of Covid.

Similarly, I have spent many a Friday or Saturday night since 2015 playing as dep guitarist with **Union Street**, a Blackburn-based folk dance band fronted by the excellent fiddler Julian Taylor. All good fun, well-organised and playing some quite complex English tunes. This band also had to call it a day when Covid closed everything down.

So here we all are 2023, Hightown. My musical adventures are now either with **The Duo – from folk to Floyd** at our rehearsals and gigs in Lancaster or at local singarounds and sessions. Luckily there are many singarounds that my lovely wife Carol and I can attend: every Monday in Hightown, every Tuesday in Bootle, the first Monday in the month in Southport, the first and second Wednesdays in Formby, the third Wednesday in Hillside, and others in Southport and elsewhere. There is an excellent session in Southport, c/o the Bothy Folk Club, on the third Monday of each month and the Bothy FC itself every Sunday in Southport. I have also performed a few solo spots (i.e. a set of songs for 20 minutes or so as opposed to just singing one when it's your turn) at some local venues from time to time and will continue to do so if they'll have me back.



Merry-Making in Mark Road

The season of afternoon teas is upon us again. Take a peek at some of the residents of Mark Rd, having fun courtesy of Angela and Margaret, who kindly organised this jolly tea party on a warm, sunny afternoon in early June.

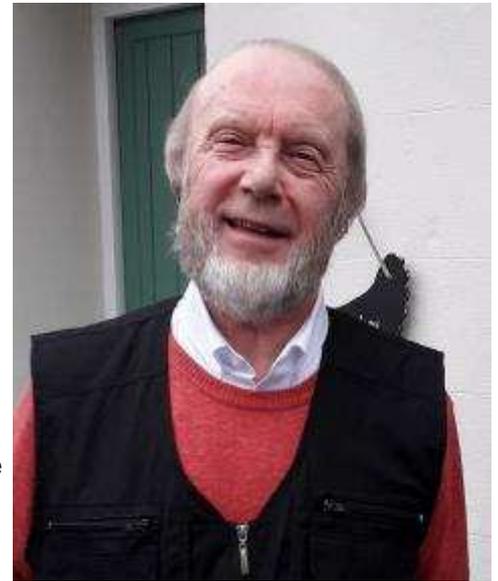


Village Organisations and Activities

Tuesday Group, St Stephen's Hall Tuesday morning 10am	Beryl Howard Jan Branigan
Hightown Friendship Group 2nd Wednesday at 8pm, St Stephen's Hall	Margaret Wear
Gardening Club 2nd Monday St Stephen's Hall 8pm	Hilary Munro
Bowling Club, Sandy Lane	Diana Killen
Hightown Club	Chris Scrine
Blundellsands Sailing Club	Rohan Pickard—rohan.pickard@gmail.com Chris Williams—Cwill1951@virginmedia.com
Yoga Classes, Hightown Club	Rose Billinge
Flower Show	Ian Wear
Open Mic Poetry Group 3rd Thursday 7.30pm, St Stephen's Church Hall	Tony Higginson—tonythebook@live.co.uk Sally Anne - tapiabowes@gmail.com
'Drop In', Thursdays, 1.30—3.30pm St Stephen's Hall	Sue Taylor
Village Singers, Our Lady of Victories Hall, Mondays 1.30—3pm	Chris Payne—payne-c@sky.com
Hightown Parish Council	Jenny Farrar clerk@hightownparishcouncil.uk www.hightownparishcouncil.uk
Community Library, Alt Centre, Lower Alt Rd, Mon 12-2, Tues 1-3, Weds 1- 4, Fri 10 -12	Linda Munro—lindamunro@hotmail.com
Zumba Gold, Dance for all aged 55+, Mondays 9.45-10.30 St Stephen's Hall	Nicky Garsforth
Creo Dance Co, Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs, Sat Children 3-18 years	Georgia Gaudie

A Better Purpose

By Revd Canon Dr Rod Garner



Sometimes it's necessary to put aside the regular diet of misery, tragedy, and grief that makes up the daily news. One solution is to allow the imagination to roam a bit or, better still, pay closer attention to the natural world around us. My imagination has been engaged by two articles I read recently – in both cases written by distinguished scientists. The first came from a Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Exeter University, who spends an awful lot of time investigating the universe for new planets and signs of intelligent life. Approaching fifty, she confidently expects evidence of new life forms to emerge during her lifetime. Quite what they will look like remains a mystery but she is in no doubt that we are emphatically not alone in the vastness of space. Watch out then for odd or unrecognisable figures at the supermarket checkout and make sure you allow them to be served first. It doesn't pay to be pushy when it comes to aliens.

With regard to stars and planets, many already known and documented, but millions more awaiting detection and classification, she makes the astonishing claim that there are more of them out there beyond our galaxy than the all the grains of sand existing on all the beaches in the world. Think about that next time you have an ice cream on Ainsdale beach. The sheer scale and immense age of the cosmos in which humans come and go in a flash can make us feel the burden of our insignificance. No less though, it can also induce wonder and even encourage us to think again about personal priorities, even in the middle of a cost of living crisis. When it's our turn to say a final farewell to the daffodils and lilacs, very few of us will be wishing that we had spent more time in the office or vacuuming the carpets. But we may regret the attention we failed to pay to the sound of birdsong, the overwhelming beauty and resilience of trees, the night sky in all its dazzling darkness, or the abject loneliness of the solitary figure on the park bench as we hurried by clutching our cappuccino.

The second article I came across was by Professor Michio Kaku, a renowned theoretical physicist who investigates the nature of matter at the scale of subatomic particles. It turns that he too is enthralled by the complexity and structures of the material world. I'm not aware of his religious beliefs but was intrigued by the following remark. When asked if he believed in God, he replied, 'like Einstein, I believe the universe was not an accident; that it is not chaotic; that there really is a rhyme or reason to the universe'. Despite less than half the nation now believing there is no God out there or underpinning how the world works, a very significant number of respected scientists working in different fields of human enquiry come to different conclusions. The universe they spend their days exploring appears more and more remarkable and prompts the questions that philosophers raised well before the time of Jesus. How did all this stuff that we call the cosmos come into being? If space and time are a result of the Big Bang, what caused the Big Bang, and what existed before it? How can we begin to think about a universe that has no edge and simply extends infinitely into unknown regions?

As we walk the dog, make the evening meal, or settle down to a soap or a movie, a baffling universe hovers above us, around us, and beneath us. Is it just possible that its very existence is telling us something that can take us away from the headlines that however sad will be gone tomorrow? And if there is a force and benign purpose behind it all inviting our attention, what might that mean in terms of fixing our lives to a better purpose?





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