

grapevine

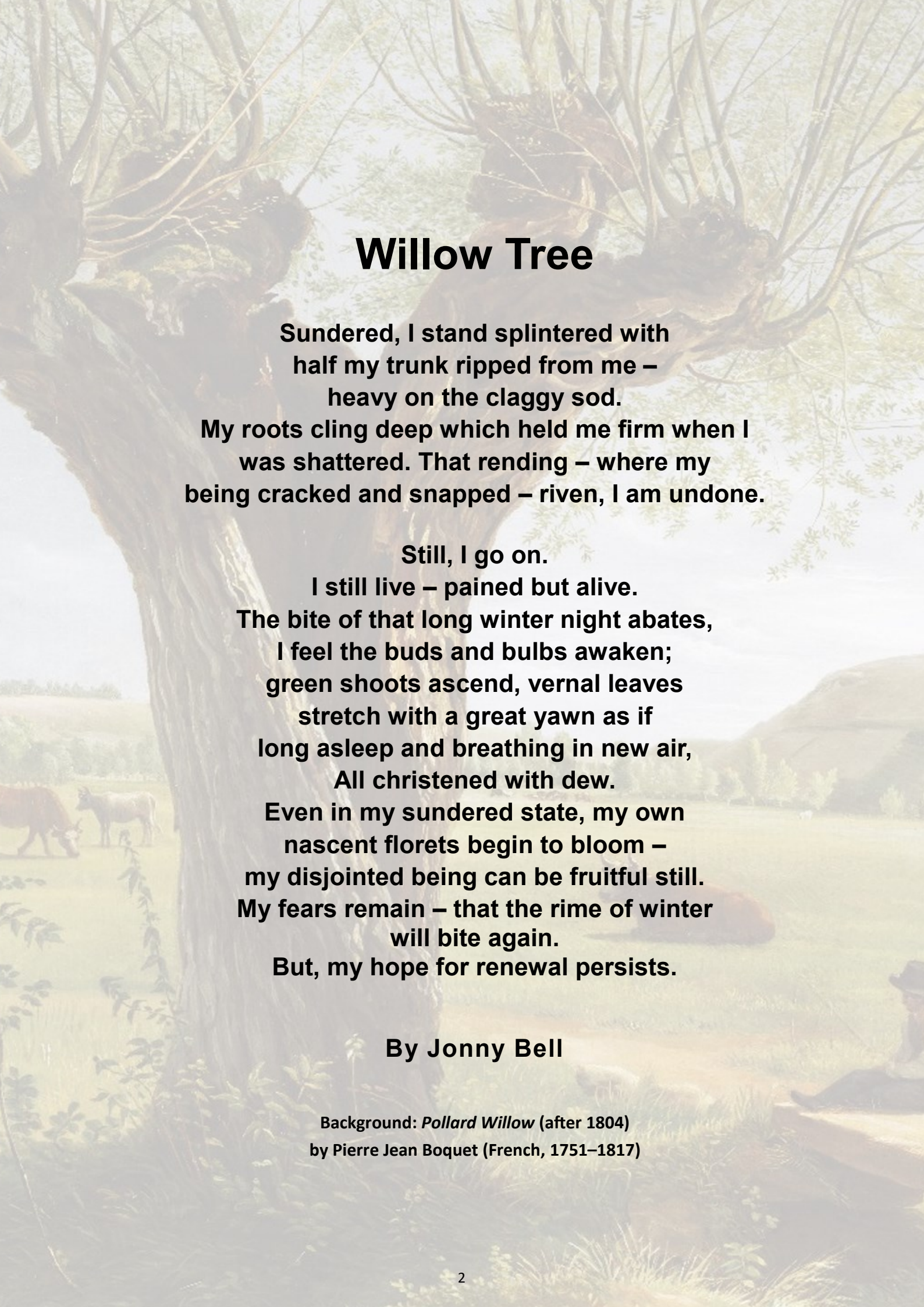
Autumn 2025
Issue Number 47

The **Methodist** Church 
EAST ANGLIA DISTRICT



From something small, something big can grow.

Our Story, Our Song



Willow Tree

Sundered, I stand splintered with
half my trunk ripped from me –
heavy on the claggy sod.
My roots cling deep which held me firm when I
was shattered. That rending – where my
being cracked and snapped – riven, I am undone.

Still, I go on.
I still live – pained but alive.
The bite of that long winter night abates,
I feel the buds and bulbs awaken;
green shoots ascend, vernal leaves
stretch with a great yawn as if
long asleep and breathing in new air,
All christened with dew.
Even in my sundered state, my own
nascent florets begin to bloom –
my disjointed being can be fruitful still.
My fears remain – that the rime of winter
will bite again.
But, my hope for renewal persists.

By Jonny Bell

Background: *Pollard Willow* (after 1804)
by Pierre Jean Boquet (French, 1751–1817)

Welcome to the Autumn 2025 edition of *grapevine* 'Our Story'.

We start this issue with a beautiful poem written by Revd Jonny Bell.

Steve Acklam shares his Faith Journey and Hilary Pegg shares her own journey with her health and how she is supporting the Stroke Association.

We hear how bracelets have been bringing comfort in this country and overseas.

Aileen Fox tells us her experiences of what it is to be a Pilgrim and we give exciting information about the opportunities to develop Pilgrimage in East Anglia.

Diane Tebbit shares some of Toft Methodist Church's fascinating history and its connection to her family.

Our very own Chair of the District, Helen, tells us about a summer encounter that left her with her own 'God-filled moment'.

Our District EDI Officer, Susan Eldridge, shares her EDI story with us and in our District News, we introduce you to the East Anglia aligned Learning Network Officers.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition!

Please remember this is your magazine. If there is something you would like included, we would love to hear from you.

grapevine

is available in large print and on
CD (audio)

**If you would like to request a copy,
please contact the District Office:**

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office@eangliamethodist.org.uk

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The Editorial Team:
Revd Helen Hollands, Susan Eldridge,
Danielle Gravestock and Aileen Fox

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All other images have been supplied by the authors of the articles.

Introduction

Revd Helen Hollands



Dear Friends,

Welcome to Grapevine.

In this edition we reflect on the theme chosen for the year by our President of Conference, the Revd Richard Andrew, and the Vice-President, Mr Matt Forsyth – ‘Our Story, Our Song’.

We invited people to share something of their story, perhaps something personal or to reflect on the journey of a particular church or circuit.

Thank you to all those who have contributed and we hope you enjoy reading the responses we received.

At the beginning of this new church year, we are delighted to welcome a number of ministers to new appointments in the district including three new superintendents.

We look forward to working with you all and will continue to pray for you.

St Neot's and Huntingdon: Revd Latika Singh

West Norfolk: Revd Judith Bell

Central Norfolk: Revd Neil Vels

Cambridge: Revd Kevin Highfield (superintendent)

Norwich: Revd Tom Osborne (superintendent)

Ipswich: Revd Vivienne Smith (superintendent) and Revd Paulson Devashayam

Norfolk Broads: Revd Steve Oliver

We have celebrated most of these new beginnings in Welcome Services already. During the services we explored verses from Isaiah 43, that we are each called by name, that God journeys with us through every joy and sorrow, and that we are all precious, honoured and loved, held in the loving sight of God.

East Anglia offered a very warm welcome with generous words, circuit congregations, visiting civic and ecumenical partners, fine singing and many sandwiches, cakes and copious amounts of tea!

Please note that the services for Revd Steve Oliver and Revd Kevin Highfield will take place in October, details will be circulated as soon as they are available. In the meantime, please enjoy these photos.

Every blessing,

Helen

Revd Helen Hollands
Chair of the East Anglia District



← Ipswich Circuit →
↓



← Norwich Circuit

St Neots & Huntingdon Circuit →



West Norfolk Circuit ↑



← Central Norfolk Circuit ↑ →



My Faith Journey

Steve Acklam

My faith journey began in the early 50s in South Yorkshire when my parents sent me to the local Methodist Sunday School. I have vivid memories from those days of tiered rows of children celebrating Harvest Festival surrounded by fresh produce. It was the most important of starting points.

From there my journey has taken innumerable twists and turns. During my teenage years in Shropshire, I recollect challenging sixth form discussions around religious matters with an equally challenging Anglican vicar. At the same time, I attended the Methodist chapel and youth club, and was in the audience for Methodist rallies that visited the county in those days.

In the late 60s my wife Veronica and I married in the relatively High Anglican setting of St Johns College Chapel in Cambridge. Two of our children were subsequently christened in small rural Anglican churches in Hertfordshire, and the third in a slightly larger Anglican church in Surrey. Veronica and I meanwhile attended the well supported

Methodist chapel in Wokingham where we experienced and enjoyed *Jerusalem Joy* for the first time.

When we moved to Camberley the ladies of the local Methodist Church provided extraordinarily loving care for Veronica as she recovered from her brain surgery. And when the Methodist and URC churches sold their individual premises to establish an ecumenical worship building, we both became members there. I became a Sunday service door steward and took the Alpha course. For me this was not the answer,

but I nevertheless was admitted to Membership during this time. The best services our Methodist Minister preached were on the Sundays after West Bromwich Albion won on the Saturday!



On our return to Cambridge, we tried both the Anglican and Baptist churches in Comberton. For different reasons neither suited us and we were blessed to be told of Toft Methodist chapel. It has been our spiritual home since the early 2000s. We could not have asked for a more special place in which to end this chapter of our spiritual

journey. It has not always been easy, but, as for Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, faith has undoubtedly grown through the challenges that have been faced.

It is from Toft Chapel that God first tapped me on the shoulder and I accepted the invitation to become a Circuit Steward. That, with my fellow worshipper David, and Veronica, I undertook the Disciple Course and God tapped me on the shoulder a second time when I hesitated about leading a further Disciple Course. That

I have now read the bible from start to finish twice; and that I came to realise what a dreadful "you'd better do it my way" St Paul could be.

The single highlight, being asked to read each element of the Good Friday narrative and the feeling it inspired in me. I have made and lost good friends here in Toft Chapel. I am so very glad we found it. It is so very sad it is closing. I will remain a Methodist transferring to Histon.

Steve Acklam
Cambridge Circuit

The History of Toft Methodist Chapel

Diane Tebbit

The Tebbit family name has been inextricably linked to Toft Methodist Chapel. The first Circuit mention of Toft is to be found in the minutes of the Quarterly Meeting dated 17th September, 1860. A John Tebbit, a farmer, came onto the plan for Sundays, and weekdays, and a Society which met in people's houses was formed under his leadership.

As numbers increased a Chapel was opened in the Autumn of 1862, at a cost of £136. In the late 1930's, the Chapel became inadequate to meet the needs of the growing congregation and Sunday School. So, in 1940, a school room, kitchen and other conveniences



were added to the old building. Inside, the pews were removed and chairs were installed. In 1958 the raised pulpit was moved from the centre to the side, a Communion table placed centrally and a Communion rail was installed.

Toft had no fatal casualties during the

First World War, and a plaque marks the village's status as one of only 53 'Thankful Villages' in the country. Three villagers were killed in the Second World War, including a member of the Tebbit family, and their names are recorded on the War Memorial installed in the outside wall of the chapel.

In 1950, replacing the Wednesday night service, regular meetings were held called, 'Toft Village Fireside'. These consisted of a hymn, a prayer and then an informative talk, followed by refreshments. Many of these meetings were organised by Mr Clifford Tebbit.

The Centenary celebrations for the Chapel in 1962 were held in Ken

Tebbit's barn. Apparently, 500 Methodists attended and Mr. Gumbrell, a local preacher, said it was very appropriate to celebrate in a barn as both John Wesley and John Bunyan had passed through Toft and preached in a barn.

In 1979, a quote from the Cambridge Evening news read: *'In the days of falling congregations, Toft Methodist Chapel has an unusual problem - it is full up.'*

An appeal was made for £20,000 to

enlarge the Chapel with a New Room, lobby, kitchen, and toilets, and these were dedicated on 9th September 1980.

In 1984 two Songs of Praise services were broadcast from the chapel. And a very important event for our Christian Mission in Toft was the signing of the Covenant with St. Andrew's Anglican Church on 2nd May 1999. On 30th November 2003 we became a formal Local Ecumenical Partnership, the Church in Toft. We celebrated the

150th anniversary of the opening of The Chapel on 17th June 2012, the service being led by Reverend Robert Dolman.

The Chapel has always played an important part in village life, hosting Sunday School, Guides, Brownies,

Rangers, Toft Choir, Children's Holiday Club, Sunday/Monday Club, Flower Festivals, the Warm Hub and many more events.

I have spoken long enough now, except to say that it is a sad day for we Tebbits, who have been involved all through the generations since the Chapel was built - and there are a lot of us here today. But our Christian Mission must go on, as we look to the future together.



Diana Tebbit

East Anglia Methodist Heritage Centre

Sarah Friswell

Telling the story of the development of the Methodist Church in East Anglia over the past 200+ years is at the core of the work of the East Anglia Methodist Heritage Centre at Wighton. Housed in the former Primitive Methodist at the centre of the village, for the past 3 years we have been welcoming visitors and sharing the stories of countless Methodist people who have played their part in supporting the communities they serve across East Anglia.

Through generous donations of individuals, the Heritage Centre is able to present interesting displays which show the importance and influence of the people called Methodists. For example we have a vast collection of certificates for scripture exams, Bible study and Mission collecting which have been treasured by their recipients. We have a growing collection of photos, programmes and banners showing the impact on so many young people who went from rural East Anglian churches to attend the annual 'London Weekend' event.

Our recently extended Library and Archive room houses collections of photos, personal letters and memorabilia from many local preachers, including, in one case, a diary detailing how many miles this local preacher travelled to deliver services.

Several items relating to well-known Methodist hymn writer Fred Pratt Green, who lived in Norfolk, are central to an area of the Heritage Centre dedicated to music and hymn singing. There is an extensive display of hymn books (many with dedication pages), which have been loved and used by so many faithful people over the years. The Heritage Centre also has the original American reed organ used for worship at Wighton for so many years, which current visitors enjoy playing.

Do come and visit (NR23 1PG). The Heritage Centre is open Tuesdays and Fridays from 11 am to 3 pm and will remain open until the end of October. Admission is free, donations welcome. There is parking, an accessible toilet and refreshments. Group visits are also welcome (please phone 07546 732092 or email eamethodistheritage@gmail.com to arrange).

A talk on the life of Fred Pratt Green will be the subject of a meeting of the Methodist Historical Society (East Anglia branch) at Thetford Methodist Church on 11 October at 3 pm. All welcome.

Sarah Friswell
West Norfolk
Circuit



My Story

Sue Hay



The Isaiah 55:11 Project is based on Isaiah 55: verses 9-11

v 10-11 “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower, and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it ...”

My story About four years or so ago, I met Donna when I was working on settling migrant communities into the region. Donna had been inspired by this passage from Isaiah to develop an outreach project, ‘Isaiah 55:11’, all about giving freely to see the giving flourish. Donna worked with a group called ‘Cherished’, for women who had experienced various forms of abuse. They eventually started to make small gifts to simply give away – beaded bracelets accompanied by bible verses, given in a spirit of Christian love, both to those who have faith and those who don’t, and to those who are unsure.



Accompanying a friend to radiotherapy, the receptionist gave Donna permission to hand out bracelets and cards to patients in the waiting areas. This was a great success, and the project grew.

So why is this ‘My Story’? In 2020, as Covid took hold, and we were unable to go to church, I decided to start buying batches of bracelets from Donna and posting them out to people. Post-Covid, the spirit has led me to people and

places I had never imagined and, inspired by Donna in that treatment centre with her friend, I have talked to people on trains, in cafes, in houses, over tea and lunch – basically just wherever and whenever people are in need of a boost.

Consequently, to date, I have given out just over 800 bracelets in this country and overseas.

A thank you note:

“My name is Jennie ... I just wanted to send a little thank you card to say a huge thank you for making the beautiful prayer bracelets. I have one of them with a feather on and it has really helped me through a few tough times recently. I have also had a number of close friends facing some really tough

life challenges and I have sent them one of your beautiful bracelets with a prayer card and they have all said how much it has helped them. Thank you so much for making them, your kindness is helping lots of people”.

My story is his story, so I pray WITH THANKS

“Thank you, Lord for the way your word can inspire us to share our faith with others in many different ways. The Isaiah 55:11 project is all about giving freely. Let us try to remember to do that as much as we can. Teach us also to receive your gifts with good grace” Amen.

Sue Hay,
Steward, Hilton Methodist Church, Cambridgeshire

My Story

Hilary Pegg



I became a local preacher in 2001. I stood up in church and said I felt called to be a preacher. This was in Trinity Dereham in the Mid Norfolk Circuit. This was in spite of recently being diagnosed with Bipolar Affective disorder. I was given the benefit of the doubt that it was a real calling.

I had stood up in church before. Once was when I was a young Methodist and an evangelist came to our church. The second was years later when I went to a charismatic service in a tent. I had rushed forward and fallen down. Not our sedate Methodist way, though early Methodists had been pronounced as ‘fit for Bedlam’ when John Wesley had preached outdoors.

Sadly, I had to retire when I had a stroke. I didn’t know it was a stroke, I just felt unwell and rang 111. A doctor came and advised driving to hospital to have a blood test. After a long wait I was admitted and taken to the stroke ward at 4.00am. I have since heard that

strokes are difficult to diagnose. I am on a Zoom meeting of stroke survivors in the East of England, we meet once a month. I have recently joined another group who are just for Norfolk and Waveney

I now use a walker and have the occasional epileptic seizure. My husband is my carer and drives me around Dereham or to hospital. This doesn’t stop me from having projects. I am involved with something we in our Circuit call ‘Big Sunday’. It is planned on Zoom and can be watched on Zoom. In this way I still occasionally preach.

Another challenge I am thinking of is raising money for the Stroke Association. If any churches feel they would like to raise money for the Stroke Association I can do a Zoom talk. My phone number is 01362 693183 and my email is hilarypegg@btinternet.com.

Hilary Pegg
Central Norfolk Circuit

Summer Encounter

Revd Helen Hollands



I was fortunate enough to spend a week away at Sheldon during August, a retreat centre nestled in the hills of Devon, a place of peace, quiet, worship and cake (which is always a bonus). Sheldon is a place that offers particular sanctuary to ministers, it is set in acres of woodland, orchards and they have a collection of rare breed sheep with whom you can become acquainted. I spent several days walking, reading and simply soaking up the deep peace of the place.



I took the opportunity each morning to get up quite early and walk and for the most part I only came across the sheep bleating from one corner of fields to one another. However, the day before I left, I wandered into some woodland on the edge of the site where the trails felt largely untrodden. As I went around a corner, I heard a crack in the bracken and there was a Doe standing just before me on the pathway. She didn't move for a few moments, and we simply looked at one another before she bounded up the hill and out of sight. It was a God-filled moment, a

few seconds which felt longer than they lasted a surprising encounter with a beautiful creature. It is a moment that has endured my mind.

George Macleod, the founder of the Iona Community, wrote extensively about the majesty of creation and how we inhabit the 'garden of God's creating'. We are now in the season of Creation time when we give thanks for the beauty of the world and the plentitude of our harvest. We reflect on how we care for and conserve the earth, each playing our small part. We

express sorrow for the harm that we do, praying that we will all do better. We are reminded to treat the earth lightly, remembering that all we enjoy is a gift.

Returning home I found this poem by the late Canadian poet, Mary Oliver which seemed so resonant with my own experience I share it with you here.

Every blessing,

Helen

Revd Helen Hollands
Chair of the District

“The Place I Want to Get Back To”

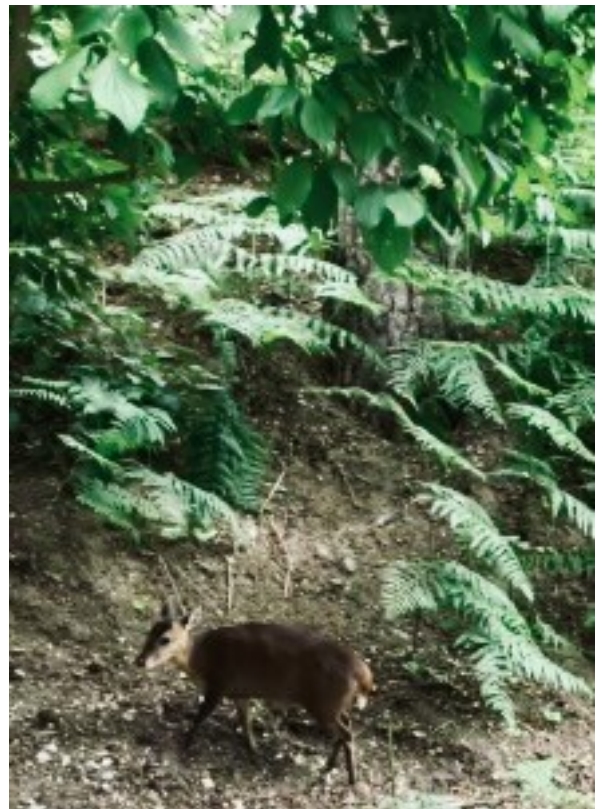
by Mary Oliver

The place I want to get back to
is where
in the pinewoods
in the moments between
the darkness
and first light
two deer
came walking down the hill
and when they saw me
they said to each other, okay,
this one is okay,
let's see who she is
and why she is sitting
on the ground like that,
so quiet, as if
asleep, or in a dream,
but, anyway, harmless;
and so they came
on their slender legs
and gazed upon me
not unlike the way
I go out to the dunes and look
and look and look
into the faces of the flowers;
and then one of them leaned forward
and nuzzled my hand, and what can my
life
bring to me that could exceed
that brief moment?
For twenty years
I have gone every day to the same

woods,
not waiting, exactly, just lingering.
Such gifts, bestowed,
can't be repeated.
If you want to talk about this
come to visit. I live in the house
near the corner, which I have named
Gratitude.

Mary Oliver

Thirst (Beacon Press, 2006)



To Be a Pilgrim

Aileen Fox



For some years I have been involved with Walsingham Methodist Chapel. One of my first outings being when 'On Note' as a preacher in 1992 with the Revd. Roy Coppack. However Pilgrim is, I think, part of my DNA. I was born in Bedford where John Bunyan the author of Pilgrims Progress was imprisoned and I worked in Bedford Public Library amongst the John Bunyan collection held there. I've also been on several retreats on Holy Island and walked the Pilgrim crossing.

Walsingham is a place of pilgrimage with the RC Shrine a mile from Little Walsingham and the Anglican Shrine in the village centre.

I had long before my move to Norfolk taken part in Rob Frost's production 'Pilgrims' which started and finished at the RC Shrine. I had no idea then that I would be living in Norfolk and involved at Walsingham Methodist Chapel in Little Walsingham. The Chapel receives requests for visits and services. The Catholic congregation from Wells-next-

the-Sea asked if they could use the Chapel as part of their ecumenical pilgrimage.

As part of the Year of Jubilee (every 25 years) they planned to walk from Wells-next-the-Sea to Walsingham, stopping 21 times to read a chapter of St John's Gospel. Walsingham Methodist would be stop no. 20. Agreeing to open the Chapel, I then received an invitation to join the walk.

On the last Saturday of August, 15 – 20 people gathered outside Wells

Methodist Chapel and Chapter 1 was read. On we went, inside some churches, outside at others, in the Quaker garden, 2 cemeteries, numerous Parish Churches and the Orthodox Church at Gt Walsingham, formerly a Methodist Chapel, where we received a blessing from the Priest. Our group consisted mainly of Catholic members - Parish priests, Sisters, some in their 90's, plus a couple from a nearby Village Parish Church and myself. Everyone was



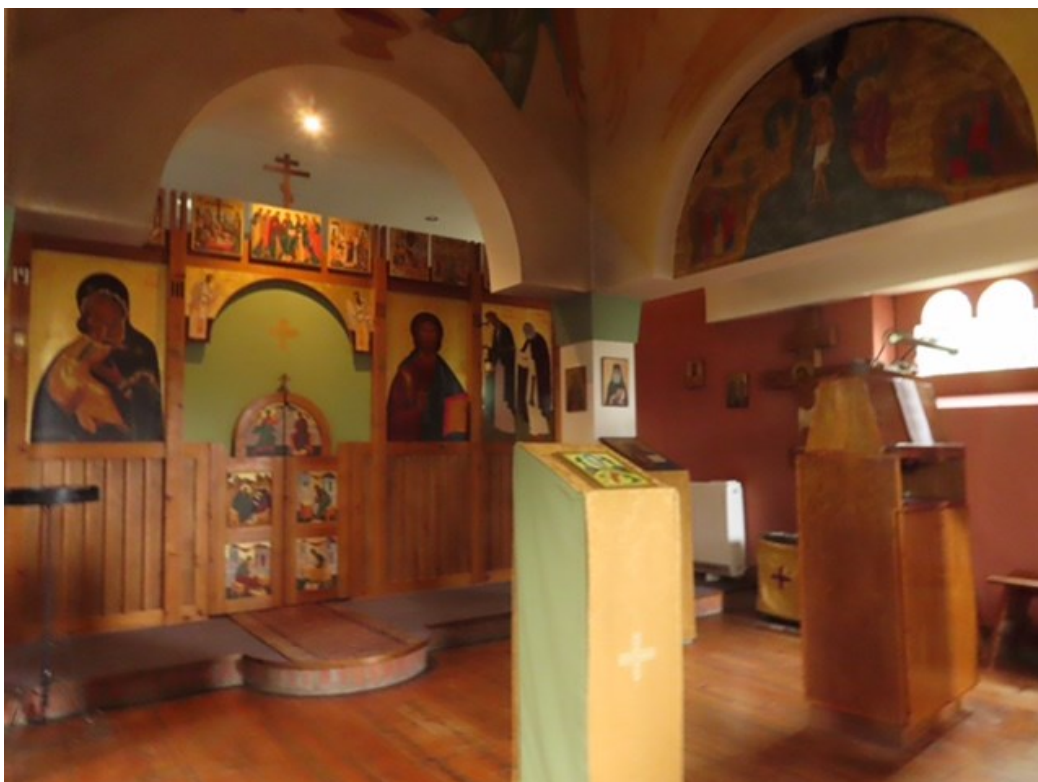
welcoming and chatty and there was lots of laughter and a great concern for the welfare of all.

At first it seemed a bit strange standing and listening but there became a rhythm and the gospel suddenly became very powerful, hearing familiar stories, but flowing with the different voices and the places we stopped at. Some managed only a little time walking because of age or other events, a few carried on with transport to take them further. People also joined for a mile or so. For those of us who did the entire journey (totalling 10 miles!), it had taken from 10am until 6pm. We finished in Friday Market, Little Walsingham outside the Chapel of the Annunciation. It was a privilege to read twice during the journey and of course the penultimate chapter (20)



was in Walsingham Chapel. It was a joyous day, some of us started as strangers but we ended up as friends all worshipping God. It is hoped that we can have more times together. We are indeed all one in Christ.

Aileen Fox
Central Norfolk Circuit



My EDI Story

Susan Eldridge



I am aware that some Methodists do not believe in the importance of the Justice, Dignity & Solidarity (JDS) Strategy and EDI as much as I do. Consequently, I have been thinking about my journey to becoming District EDI Officer and why I think the Strategy is so important.

For much of my school days I did not really seem to fit in. As a result I was bullied, particularly for one horrible year. In those days you tended to keep quiet and struggle on, focussing on the school work and “surviving” break times.

I was much happier when I started at Norwich Union (now Aviva). There were a few occasions when I felt unfairly treated (never because I was female) but these worked to my benefit in the end. Often when I felt unappreciated at work it was the Church that made me feel valued. At Aviva there was a focus on equality and diversity. International

Women’s Day was celebrated; as was Diwali (Aviva has a diverse workforce). We received EDI training and the faith network, towards the end of my career, gave an opportunity to learn about other faiths.



In a Church context I have worked with, or encountered, many people who are perhaps seen as “different” in some way and these have enriched my experience and often left me in awe of their gifts. This has included a blind Circuit Steward (who was excellent), people who are neuro-diverse (and often really creative), Ministers

from other cultures, Sign the Cross ministry (with the deaf) and those of various ages who have mobility challenges. Being on the Districts Probationers Committee has meant I have met a wide variety of diverse probationers, all of which are such a blessing to the Methodist Church. Delegates to Methodist Conference,

which I have attended many times, are also a very diverse group of people and this enables the conferring of the people of God.

I have also read a lot of books that have inspired me including by Joni Erikson-Tada (a Christian author who is a quadriplegic) and stories about the role a guide dog or a hearing dog plays in their owner's life and often that of the wider family.

I had the privilege of hearing Revd Dr Sonia Hicks, at the national Methodist Women in Britain weekend, talk about some of her life experiences which included racist behaviour towards her. It is a diverse group of women who

attend this weekend and the enthusiastic singing by the Africans can be amazing!

As I look back, I had led a sheltered life when I was younger, with little

experience outside white British, middle class and that probably still applies to a few people in our congregations today. I encourage everyone to broaden their horizons – read books, attend Zooms (there are some recordings of these on

our District website), watch television programmes (Rose Ayling-Ellis on Strictly inspired me), talk to people who are different to you – and try to see things from other people's points of view.

Susan Eldridge
District EDI Officer



MagWay Railings

The **Methodist** Church
is **called to be**

GROWING
INCLUSIVE
EVANGELISTIC
JUSTICE-SEEKING

District News

An introduction to East Anglia's two aligned Learning Network Officers, Jenna Thorne and Seb Bell...

East Anglia's two aligned Learning Network Officers are Seb Bell and Jenna Thorne. They are your main contacts for the full offerings of the Learning Network. Please contact either of them for any information you would like about Learning Network events or training opportunities as well as any questions, and feedback, or if you would just like a chat!



As well as working for the Learning Network, Jenna is also Executive & Artistic Director of therapeutic arts charity, Talitha

Arts and has an extensive background in creative arts ministry, theatre and community work. Her main areas of work are Church & Circuit Stewards, and Creative Worship (including local arrangements). She supports New Places for New People and

Safeguarding training within the District, as well as many other Learning and Development opportunities that emerge within the District.

Contact Jenna:

thornej@methodistchurch.org.uk



As well as being a part-time aligned officer for the East Anglia District, Seb is also a Local Preacher within the Methodist Church, and has a decade of

experience working in the Education Sector; teaching ages 3 - 19 during that time.

Seb joined the learning Network in May 2025, and has been getting to know everyone and starting to get involved in shared work around Worship Leading and Preaching, as well as other opportunities arising within the District.

Contact Seb:

bells@methodistchurch.org.uk

Developing pilgrimage in East Anglia

Pilgrimage is an ancient tradition which has had many meanings over the years. Often seen as an exclusively religious activity, it is now widely understood in the secular world too. Thousands of people undertake pilgrimage journeys each year, with the 'Camino' in Northern Spain being the most popular route. TV programmes follow groups of celebrities on pilgrimage. There are shelves full of books on the topic such as 'Britain's Pilgrim Places' from the [British Pilgrimage Trust](#) and 'On this Holy Island' by Oliver Smith.

The benefits of taking time out from our busy lives, surrounding ourselves with nature, having conversations with fellow pilgrims on the way and striding out and getting some

exercise are not to be underestimated. Pilgrimage is good for the body and the soul.

So what might a pilgrimage here in East Anglia, organised by a group of Methodists, look like? We have a



wealth of beautiful chapels dotted across the landscape. We have a heritage of inspirational people who have shared their faith with the communities in which they lived and worked. How might we use pilgrimage to share our story with others today?

We hope to offer some day pilgrimages in 2026 – but need a team to plan them. If this sounds interesting, and you have skills and experience to offer, please contact Sarah Friswell on sarah.friswell@btinternet.com or 07984 148769.

Contributions

**We hope you have been inspired by the articles
in this edition of *grapevine*.**

**If you would like to make a contribution to
the next edition, we would love to hear from you.**

**Please send any news items, letters and photographs,
which you would like to share with others in the
District to:**

office@eangliamethodist.org.uk

or post to 'grapevine'

**District Office,
Chapel Field Road Methodist Church
Norwich, NR2 1SD**

**For further information, please contact
the District Office on 07434 934182**

***Unfortunately we cannot guarantee
inclusion of all contributions.***

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