

## MERYL BEATS LOCKDOWN BLUES

**MERYL BEDFORD IS ONE OF MILLIONS HIT BY LOCKDOWN LONELINESS. BUT SHE'S BEEN DEALING WITH IT.**

Meryl was desperate to do something to lift her spirits, being without her regular visits to husband Derek, who suffers from dementia. That's because his nursing home locked down on 11th March.

Praying about her isolation, Meryl had an idea. How were others coping with Corona life? She consulted her local church directory. Meryl started phoning every number – then became more strategic.

'I thought I should ring the people who are by themselves,' she said from her MMHS property by the Wales-England border. Meryl asked church friends how they were getting on.

They'd laugh about her stories of lockdown life – like trying to squeeze a big chair through a tiny loft hatch. 'It helps me,' Meryl told us about her phone-a-friend initiative, 'and I hope it helps them!'

She did the right thing. The Mental Health Foundation have warned that long-term loneliness can be hard on mental health – but we can counter it by



Photo: Ross-on-Wye Town Council

POLITICAL PARTNERS: Meryl and Derek as Mayor and Mayoress of Ross-on-Wye in 2008

connecting via phone or social media.

A busy and active 84 year-old, Meryl would spend as much time as possible with Derek before lockdown. Little wonder, then, that isolation brought a sense of uselessness. 'I used to go early to help Derek with his lunch,' she explained. 'Sometimes I'd leave late at night because he just didn't want me to go.'

As lockdown eased, Meryl enjoyed a brief visit with Derek. They met outside and Meryl had to wear a mask. It wasn't quite like the old days for this couple, who literally have made history together.

Lancashire born and bred, they married in 1962. Derek was eased

into Methodist ministry gently with his first church in the couple's hometown, Oldham. But his second appointment was more challenging.

He was asked to pioneer a new church on the edge of Manchester. It was on the Hattersley estate where Ian Brady and Myra Hindley had just been arrested for the Moors murders. The area offered a whole host of social issues.

With an Anglican vicar, Derek launched the nation's first ever 'shared' church, St Barnabas, in that needy community. According to Meryl, an Act of Parliament was passed to allow the joint venture, and Princess Margaret attended the opening in 1966. Both religious and secular press covered the event. One headline described the



photo: www.catholicpic.co.uk

PAPAL BLESSING: Pope Paul sent the gift of a crucifix to Derek's church in Hattersley

### GET GAS SAFE NOW!

While shielding or self-isolating, you may not have been comfortable receiving visitors – including engineers for Gas Safety Checks. Lockdown has created a backlog of such inspections.

Now restrictions are easing, please book your Gas Safety Check by calling Boiler Plan on 0800 612 2302 option 3. Contact our property team if you have questions or concerns.

- Ask Boiler Plan for your Gas Safety Check,
- Check engineers have ID and are wearing PPE,
- Transfer to another room while they work.

## A MESSAGE FROM MAIRI



boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing' (I Corinthians 13:1-3).

I think it was Albert Einstein who said amid every crisis lies great opportunity. From the early days of our present Coronavirus crisis, people began to seize all kinds of opportunities, not least technological and digital ones. The ingenuity all around has been truly awesome. Think of all those fully-equipped Nightingale hospitals, the 24/7 search for a vaccine, and digital church taking many congregations into new areas of mission. And much more, of course.

There's something powerful in those first few verses of I Corinthians 13. They remind us that love should be at the centre of all our actions. Let's not forget love as we continue to work through this crisis and seize all the opportunities before us.

● Mairi Johnstone CEO

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may

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Anglican-Methodist project as a 'daring experiment'.

By this point, the Bedfords had three children – Simon, David and Elizabeth. The couple moved on to run a church in Farnworth from 1971-78. Derek brought two Methodist churches – and a Congregational



GOOD LIFE: Meryl and Derek in 2006

church – together to create one new worshipping community. They called it Trinity.

Just like the 70s TV sitcom 'The Good Life', the couple bought a dilapidated farm in Wales to become self-sufficient. Derek was appointed to a church nearby in 1978 and became superintendent of the local circuit in 1982. He built a new church in Newtown.

'We had a cow, a pig, some sheep, rabbits, hens and a couple of geese – one of which was called Gregory Peck,' Meryl laughed. Twelve-year-old daughter Elizabeth milked the cow every morning before school.

Derek retired on health grounds in 1992. He and Meryl moved into an MMHS property. Ever the community activists, Derek and Meryl became Mayor and Mayoress of Ross-on-Wye in 2001 and 2007.

Derek's health worsened over the years. Now 88, he has been in a nursing home for six months. But the couple look back on a life of spiritual and social action. 'Some people say religion and politics don't mix,' said Meryl, 'but they have got to mix!' ●

## 'ON THE DOT' FITTERS FIX YOUR BOILER

### AMID CHILLING TIMES FOR THESE ISLANDS, A YOUNG HEATING COMPANY IS STARTING TO WARM OUR RESIDENTS' HEARTS AND HOMES.

Hailed as the UK's eighth highest fast-growth new business, Boiler Plan have scooped the servicing of central heating systems for Society properties. We're among the first faith-based charities to use their expertise.

Already, the company's engineers have been busy maintaining and replacing some of our boilers – impressing residents with their work and time-keeping. So far, our householders report that Boiler Plan operatives have turned up 'on the dot' in full PPE gear, sanitising surfaces after working on their homes.

The Newcastle-based company earned their MMHS contract after completing a four-month trial across 200 of our properties. 'That pilot scheme

was a success,' said our CEO Mairi Johnstone.

Boiler Plan will be responsible for all gas safety checks, boiler servicing and central heating breakdowns. They are installing Gas Tag – a system that records servicing via a small plastic tag with a barcode. Gas Tag builds up a bank of information for each property like an electronic logbook.



BOILER MAN: Baptised in a Methodist church, Ian Henderson now blesses other Methodists with central heating!

### 'I wanted to build a business that put the customer at the heart of everything'

The story of Boiler Plan started in 1977 with a young lad called Ian Henderson being Christened at West Avenue Methodist Church – now Trinity Church – in Gosforth. Growing up, Ian worked with his father, a self-employed gas engineer.

Ian's entrepreneurial spirit emerged as he launched his own company in 2002. He enjoyed much success until the banks crashed. From 2007 to 2009, while the world struggled, Ian studied – and earned a business degree.

He watched how established contractors operated – and decided to try to do better. 'I saw our industry doing everything badly,' said Ian, now aged 44. Boiler Plan launched in 2016 – 'with me, a laptop and a great idea' – as Ian told *The Northern Echo* newspaper.

Boiler Plan linked with Gas Tag, to give engineers a digital record of their work. 'I wanted to build a national business that put the customer at the heart of everything,' said Ian, 'like turning up on time and being well organised.'



SAFE AND SURE: Boiler Plan engineers arrive at MMHS properties in PPE gear.

Most recently, the Covid-19 outbreak presented even more challenges to Boiler Plan. They carried out a risk assessment. 'Our engineers are wearing masks and gloves,' said Ian, 'and have sanitisers and sprays.'

While Boiler Plan has offices in Northumbria and Yorkshire, their engineers are based across the UK – from Somerset to Stirlingshire. They aim to spend an average of one hour servicing your central heating.

'Boiler Plan and Gas Tag enable us to monitor servicing each day,' said MMHS Maintenance and Repair Manager Glenn Fry. 'We'll be able to see gas safety certificates within minutes of gas service completion. We should have all of our properties tagged by early next year.' ●

## COLOURING IS GOOD FOR YOU

### COLOUR YOUR BLUES AWAY. THAT'S THE MESSAGE FROM ARTISTS AS THEY OFFER SOME ESSENTIAL COMFORT DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS.

Artists Mary Fleson and Geoffrey Baines have both seen people's lives positively impacted by the simple act of colouring.



Mary runs a publishing business called Lindisfarne Scriptorium with husband Mark. They produced their first colouring book in 2005 – and have just published a new one called *The Flowing Tide*.

Their latest resource is aimed at encouraging people on an inner pilgrimage. 'Colouring makes you stop,' said Mary. 'You can't be rushing around. You have to focus on what you're doing. It's an opportunity for God to speak.'

Her parents are Methodists. She and Mark have designed resources for the Methodist Conference and for MMHS. They have produced a special edition of *The Flowing Tide* as the Society's contribution to this year's Conference.

Mary said when we colour, we can fill our minds with something focused and gentle. 'It's a big part of my work,' Mary added, 'it's very relaxing.'

ART FOR HEART'S SAKE: Mary Fleson with the MMHS edition of *The Flowing Tide*

Geoffrey Baines is a Methodist minister and university chaplain. He has produced a colouring book *Slow Journeys In The Same Direction* for Methodist Publishing.

The aim is to help people use colouring in their times of relaxation or daily devotions. 'Colouring makes me slow down,' said Geoffrey. He explained that even your breathing slows down when you start colouring.

We've all seen adult colouring books flood the market in recent years. The underlying message has been that such resources have therapeutic value.

That was proven by a study featured in the *Creativity Research Journal* back in 2017. The article *Sharpen Your Pencils* reveals preliminary evidence that adult colouring reduces depressive symptoms and anxiety.

Artists and scientists agree. Colouring is good for you – particularly in these uncertain times. You can obtain copies of *The Flowing Tide* from [www.lindisfarne-scriptorium.co.uk](http://www.lindisfarne-scriptorium.co.uk) and *Slow Journeys In The Same Direction* from [www.methodistpublishing.org.uk](http://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk). ●

## ESSENTIAL JOURNEYS THROUGH YOUR HOME

From gas pipes to gardens, doorways to drains, ponds to power points – all you need to know about your home can be found in one location.

That's the brand new MMHS Residents' Handbook. Our traditional bulky ring-bound folder crammed with cards has been replaced by a slim and slender publication packed with facts to help you manage your home.



The MMHS Residents' Handbook

This 28-page document deals with all the relevant subjects – from looking after your home to saving the environment – fully revised and updated to reduce the stress and increase the enjoyment of living in a Society property.

You'll find everything you need to help you make the most of your home. Download your free copy from the MMHS website. If you lack web access, apply for a paper version. ●

## HOW YOUR GARDEN HELPS YOU GROW

Nothing is normal anymore. But one resource remains to help our wellbeing. That's our garden – whether it's a veg planter, window box or big lawn.

### Balance

The variety of gardening tasks requiring physical movement means most muscle groups get a workout. Co-ordination and balance benefit, too.

Just being in sunlight offers an opportunity to top up vitamin D levels, while helping to lower blood pressure.

### Recovery

Being outdoors and connecting with nature, actively or passively, has proven advantages for our wellbeing.

Psychologists have long advocated that nature is a restorative environment offering recovery from mental fatigue.

### Control

Spending time growing vegetables, fruit or flowers offers a positive focus that can result in better mood, self-esteem and confidence, reinforcing personal status and identity.

Gardening can help us bring structure to our lives and give us a sense of control when so much is in flux.

*(This is an edited version of an article from Thrive, a national charity to enable those touched by disability to transform their lives using gardening – [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk)) ●*



Photo: Shutterstock

## HOME TRUTHS

### REFLECTION BY REVD DR BRENDA MOSEDALE

Walking is one of the joys of retirement. For us, serious walking began a number of years ago. We realised you could discover places in the UK and abroad in a different way when you walk.

In the early days we'd go on group walking holidays. Walking with other people gives the security that someone will know where you're going, but also new people to meet. Interestingly, as we were younger then, we realised most of our fellow adventurers were retired. That included some of the fittest.

*'There's something about having the sea always there, whether calm and peaceful or wind tossed and dramatic.'*

Before the Coronavirus crisis, we discovered self-guided walking holidays. Our two most recent walks of that kind have been round the coastal path of Anglesey and, at the beginning of 2020, on La Palma in the Canary Islands. Islands have something of a fascination – whether coastal walking or taking the mountain paths. There's something about having the sea always there, whether calm and peaceful or wind tossed and dramatic.

When we retired from active work (interesting term that) almost four years ago, we were fortunate to choose where we would live. Devon has the cliffs and sands of the South West and the stunning beauty of the moors and hills. But wherever you live, whether town or country, there are places to walk and secrets to discover. In La Palma earlier this year, we enjoyed discovering the hidden places you only find if you're prepared to walk a little round historic towns.

Not everyone can walk, or walk far, but it's surprising how much better you can get with practice. Since coming to Devon I have learnt the way to get up long hills is to walk slowly and keep going. I used to try to rush and found I needed to keep stopping. When planning a holiday



Revd Dr Brenda Mosedale is a supernumerary minister and retired GP. She and husband Stephen live near Exeter, with the moors and the coast near at hand.

with hills to climb, we spend as much time as we can practising so we don't struggle so much when we get there. Walking poles – for balance and taking the weight off your legs – have proved invaluable.

Walking gives time to think, reflect, sometimes just time and space, even if you need assistance of some kind. It's good to talk, but it's also good to walk alongside someone quietly, just knowing they are there or, if you are on your own, knowing others have walked that way before you.

*It's good to talk, but it's also good to walk alongside someone quietly*

Walking can improve your mood, even if you didn't want to go. Stephen Buckley, Head of Information at Mind, says for those who are able, outdoor exercise can be 'absolutely vital' for your mental health. Writing in *Public Service Executive on Protecting Your Mental Health During Coronavirus*, he recommends taking a walk as one of the ways to relax and release endorphins, which can have a positive effect on mood.

In our current circumstances, our movements may have become limited. But some people have found themselves walking when they never thought they would. However difficult, respect the Covid-19 regulations and give it a go. You might surprise yourself. ●