



A slice of life becomes
a piece of cake
when you make your
home with us

THE
BEST OF

roof 'n' roots

VOLUME
ONE

Special edition of the newsletter of the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society

Join our journey

Come with us as we look back on six years of storytelling through our own news publication *Roof 'n' Roots* – and as we look forward to celebrating our 75th anniversary in 2023.

We want to start this pilgrimage with you, and together wander through the Society's archives. Join us as we trace the stories of just some of the retired ministers who have made their home with us.

Kathleen Richardson: from miners' welfare to House of Lords

While Westminster was rocked by anti-Brexit marchers, a teachers' demo, protests about the Chilcot Inquiry – and as the Queen attended the Somme centenary service – the launch edition of *Roof 'n' Roots* was presented quietly to attendees at the 2016 Methodist Conference in Westminster Central Hall.

Our first cover story was about the first woman President of Conference, first female Moderator of the Free Churches Council and a member of the House of Lords – MMHS resident Revd Kathleen Richardson.

Kathleen shared her story of being born and bred amid the coal and iron fields of wartime Derbyshire and playing darts at the miner's welfare. Later she'd face even greater challenges amid the clipped lawns and carpeted corridors of Westminster.

She became first woman President in 1992. 'It was quite something,' is how she humbly put it. Her presidency was 'a wonderful year'. She explained, 'I went to meet the Pope!'



COVER STORY: Baroness Richardson said MMHS were 'very, very kind'

When retirement came, she said she and husband Ian found themselves 'completely at the mercy' of the Society. 'They were very, very kind,' Kathleen recalled. Ian died in 2008. MMHS has been able to help Kathleen again when she recently moved nearer to her family. 🏠

Photo: Clive Price

NEW! Listen to *Roof 'n' Roots* at www.mmhs.org.uk/podcast

Eric Blennerhassett: minister who made the media his parish

Just as Jeremy Corbyn told Labour it could climb an 'electoral mountain' to success, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump clashed in the race to the White House and the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited Canada, the second issue of *Roof 'n' Roots* landed on residents' doormats in autumn 2016.

Our main feature was the story of Revd Eric Blennerhassett,

a presbyter who made the media his ministry. Eric told us how he was ordained as a Methodist minister – then swapped pulpit for production studios. TV and radio became his 'district' for more than 20 years.

A pioneer of religious broadcasting, Eric helped create BBC productions like discussion programme *Meeting Point*, hymns show *Sunday HalfHour*, news programme *Quest* and he contributed to *Songs Of Praise*. He worked with famous names – including the Dimblebys – Richard and sons David and Jonathan.

Eric was an army captain during World War II. When conflict ended, Eric became a minister because he wanted to help build a better world. He was ordained in 1950.

On retirement in 1989, Eric and wife Babs moved into an MMHS property at Chichester. 'I'm grateful,' he said of their home. 'It's worked very well in our case.' Sadly, both Babs and Eric have passed away now. But we shall always remember Eric's brilliant storytelling. 🟢



MEDIA MINISTER: The Society 'worked very well' for Revd Eric Blennerhassett

Neville Pugh: our own Time Lord



Photo: Clive Price

CLOCKING ON: Revd Neville Pugh could 'concentrate on ministry' because MMHS were there

Sabres were rattling over Gibraltar. Mary Poppins was being remade. Rising travel costs were shaking commuters. It was a mixed bag of news from the wider world in beautiful spring weather.

Thankfully, the spring 2017 edition of *Roof 'n' Roots* offered a fresh blend of people stories – like Society resident Revd Neville Pugh – who found that Methodist ministers don't completely retire. They just make time.

Dr Who was returning to the nation's screens. But MMHS already had its own 'time lord' in Neville. However, actor Peter Capaldi didn't have to worry. Nev's powers are strictly making grandfather clocks.

One of his creations became the MMHS clock that now stands proudly by the entrance to the Museum of Methodism in City Road, London.

On retiring, Nev and wife Muriel moved into a detached MMHS property in 2002. She died in 2013. Nev always found it reassuring to know the Society was there. 'I understood there would be a home provided for us when we retired, so I could concentrate on ministry,' he said. 'I could relax.' 🟡

Pat Billsborrow: she dared to cross the line

It was 'happy birthday' to *Roof 'n' Roots* – as the Society's official newsletter celebrated its first year! While the Methodist Conference was underway in Birmingham, the summer 2017 edition was reaching residents' homes.

It featured the story of Revd Pat Billsborrow, who was just eight when she heard the divine voice say, 'I want you'. She was standing in Durham Cathedral – by the black line at the back of the nave that marked the point women could not cross. But Pat eventually crossed that line.

In 1979, Pat found herself in religious broadcasting. She produced programmes for Radio Tees on big issues – from conscientious objectors in World War I to persecuted Christians behind the Iron Curtain.

On one of these weighty radio assignments, a Methodist minister challenged Pat with the question, 'What are you doing about your call to preach?' Her inner eight-year-old child must've woken up. Pat was accepted into the Methodist ministry and went to college in 1984.



Photo: Clive Price

DIVINE CALL: The Society serves 'ministers in need', says Revd Pat Billsborrow

On Pat's retirement 15 years ago, she and husband Bob moved into an MMHS property in Cheshire. Bob has since passed away. Pat continues to serve. 'Being able to help the community in its greatest need is important,' she said. 'That's exactly what the Society is doing for ministers in need.' 🟠

Joy Murphy: helping children out of poverty

Brexit loomed. Trump became *Time* magazine's 'Person Of The Year'. And the diminishing shape and size of *Toberone* threatened to haunt us forever. Yet *Roof 'n' Roots* retained the same generous dimensions.

The winter 2016 edition was produced for Christmas, and its warm and friendly contents included Joy Murphy's story. For the cost of a cup of coffee, bucketfuls of hope had been poured out for hundreds of children in Kenya – thanks to Joy's family. But the road to Africa was rocky for them.

She was a nurse and husband Bill was a Methodist minister. On holiday in France, a huge off-road vehicle smashed into their car. Joy had whiplash and bruised ribs, Bill had concussion and rib fractures, but their daughter Corinne suffered a severe head injury.

Recovery was slow. Later, compelled by a 'vision' of Kenyan children calling for help, 23-year-old Corinne went to a local bank with just £2.56. She told the bank manager her story. With that modest amount, he opened a charity account for her. That was in 1995 – and the charity Karibuni Children has grown since then.

Joy and Bill moved into an MMHS property in 2011. 'I don't know what we would've done if there wasn't the housing society,' said Joy. 'We wouldn't have been able to afford a house. So it's meant home and security.' Bill died a year later. Today, Karibuni Children raises £300,000 a year to support 14 projects for children in poverty. 🟡

GREAT JOY: MMHS meant 'home and security' for Joy Murphy



Photo: Clive Price

Barrie Tabraham: finding home in a semi-rural idyll

While storms lashed these islands – followed by the worst snowfall in seven years – *Roof 'n' Roots* fell on doormats across the country, offering comfort and encouragement to our residents with our heart-warming winter 2017 edition.

The front cover showed a happy and contented Revd Barrie Tabraham working with his model railway layout. Barrie and wife Joan have been Society residents since June 2010.

You may remember his name. He's written two major books – *The Making of Methodism* and *Brother Charles* – the former is

one of the most popular resources for those exploring Methodism.

However, it's not been a smooth ride to their retirement home in Surrey. Barrie had taught history for 12 years, and was a Methodist minister for 24. But cancer, two heart attacks and a series of surgical operations took their toll.

Barrie was given permission to retire at 61 in 2008. MMHS were delighted to help Barrie and Joan find a home they could call their own – down a quiet lane, tucked away from the city roar. Dragonflies dance on a pond full of ornamental fish in this semi-rural idyll. 'I've never lived anywhere as nice as this,' Barrie told us. 'I can't think of anywhere I'd rather live.' 🟡



TRAINED MIND: Revd Barrie Tabraham said of his MMHS home, 'I've never lived anywhere as nice as this'.

Photo: Clive Price

Alan Ashton: the last roller coaster ride

After what seemed like the longest winter in living memory, spring struggled to emerge. But one thing was for certain – the latest edition of *Roof 'n' Roots* was coming out – and we hoped it would arrive like a ray of sunshine.

Tragically, we had just lost one of our greatest champions, Revd Alan Ashton, who was not only a resident but also a board member. He died on his way travelling to the MMHS offices, just before Christmas 2017.

How could we pay tribute to him? We found out he had given a sermon on Passion Sunday 2017, and that his talk was available on the internet. So with his family's permission, we published an extract as a mark of our respect.

Alan's words could not have been more poignant. 'What was your most

frightening ride in a fairground?' he said. 'For me, the most frightening experience was riding the Big Dipper... There were instructions preparing us for the ride. It said, "Sit in the seat". I thought that was a foregone conclusion. "Hold onto the rail". Hold on to the rail? I thought my knuckles were going to come through the skin!

'Jesus provides a similar notice for us today. We can face an ending, physically, knowing that we can find new life when we have faith in Jesus. And the journey to Calvary isn't easy, but beyond it there is resurrection. Behind the tomb, like Lazarus, we can step out and find new life.'

Dear Alan, he was a gift to us – a great source of humour and advice. 🏠



PLAINTIVE PREACH: The late Revd Alan Ashton was a gift to MMHS.

Photo: Clive Price

William Farrell: he did a ton!

Summer came with a vengeance. People were enjoying warm weather – finally. We were celebrating our 70th anniversary in wild and wonderful ways – including a bumper eight-page summer 2018 edition of *Roof 'n' Roots*!

We found out Society resident Revd William Farrell of Gloucestershire was also celebrating a special moment – his 100th birthday – during our own 70th anniversary year! So we quizzed him about a century of experience. William has since passed away, but his short responses to our questions were simply perfect.

What is the secret to your longevity?

If I knew that, I'd write a book and without doubt be a millionaire!

What do you do to stay young?

An active life with plenty of walking and cycling – especially in the Lake District – has helped.

What do you eat for breakfast?

Cereal, toast and, of course, a cup of tea.

What's your favourite way to relax?

Sitting and listening to music.

What is your earliest childhood memory?

My first day of school at five.

What was your background before becoming a minister?

Left school and worked in an office at Bolton Town hall.

What have been the three most important inventions you have seen?

TV, computers and mobile phones.

How have you coped with such technological advances?

I think I am a long way behind where I should be.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Take life easy and enjoy the present.

What was your favourite decade?

1960s.

What would be the ideal 100th birthday present?

Another 100 would be a bonus! 🏠



HUNDRED YEARS: Rev William Farrell marked a major milestone during MMHS's 70th anniversary.



© 2022 Methodist Ministers' Housing Society.

Place of business and registered office: MMHS, 109 Baker Street, London W1U 6RP.

T 020 3848 6020 E admin@mmhs.org.uk W www.mmhs.org.uk Editor Clive Price Design Chris Gander

Methodist Ministers' Housing Society is a registered charity Nos 1186758 (England and Wales) and SC050661 (Scotland) and Company No 11929754.

