

**Councillor John Potts was Mayor 2017-2018**

**MAY**

**Thursday 10 May  End of term.**

The AGM of the Council is held to elect a new Mayor.

**Friday 4 May           Royal British Legion.**

We were invited to the launch of the new Blyth Branch of the British Legion by their secretary Ann Dobson. They will provide help and welfare to the serving and ex-Service community and their families. We met Gill their President and Gayle their Chair and all their other enthusiastic committee who all gave a talk on the work they do. There were also representatives from the Regional Committee. Their membership is open to all who want to help – “To the memories of the fallen and the future of the living”. They are busy making poppies and have a breakfast club at the Wallaw on alternate Sunday mornings from 8.30am. They are planning an event on 26 May in the Keel Row about guardsman Michael Sweeney and are hoping to erect some “Silent Soldier” silhouettes to commemorate the centenary of the end of the First World War. They are busy fundraising and the music for the event at The Eagle was provided free by “The Deputies”. An enjoyable evening.

**APRIL**

**Wednesday 4 April           Newcastle Scouts Gang Show.**

We were invited by the Newcastle Scouts to their Gang Show at the Peoples Theatre, Newcastle.

The weather was dreadful with some flooded roads, but the journey was well worth it. We were joined that night by the deputy mayor of Gateshead and Northumberland’s Civic Head. The theatre has been refurbished with a better foyer combined with seating around the bar area. We were met by Geoff Coulson the Gang Show Chairman and introduced to other invited guests. It goes without saying that the show was wonderful. There was a cast of 150 including Cubs, Scouts, Guides, Senior Section & Leaders, Explorers & Leaders and the Beavers, but because of their ages the Beavers can only take part in the Saturday matinee. The back-stage crew included Lighting, Sound, Costume and Stage. Organising 150 performers with multiple costume changes on the night must have been difficult to achieve. There were numerous really good sketches and we enjoyed “Salty Towers” with budding actors playing the parts of Mr Fawlty and Manuel. There was a slapstick act with some scouts playing multiple parts and their timing had to be perfect or they were hit with the frying pan. The singing was wonderful with some excellent individual performances. The finale “Time to say goodbye” with all the cast on stage came all to soon. I would urge everyone to make a visit to the next Gang Show to support a wonderful organisation.

**Friday 27 April to Wednesday 2 May Town Twinning meeting in Solingen.**

A group of 15 members of the Blyth & Solingen Citizens Exchange Group travelled to our twin town of Solingen in Germany at our own expenses. The Mayoress and I are members of the group and we flew to Dusseldorf. The German hospitality was excellent. On the Friday we visited the botanical gardens in Solingen and they had prepared a cake in the form of the union flag with red raspberries, white cream and blue bilberries. Saturday, we went to Cologne and visited the cathedral as well as the chocolate factory. Sunday, we went to Altenberg to visit another “cathedral” which is shared by Catholics and Protestants and after waffles and coffee we had a tour of the museum of paper. Monday, we did some shopping in the town centre and at their famous factory Zwilling’s which produces high quality cutlery. This was followed by a trip to the Mungsten Bridge which was the highest railway bridge in Germany. We then had a formal lunch with their Lord-Mayor Tim Kurzbach. Speeches were made and presents exchanged. They presented the council with a large blue pottery frog with their crest on it and a framed picture of the Mungsten bridge. We gave them a picture of a tall ship leaving the river Blyth and a glass “window” of our beach huts together with a copy of the Youth Clubs of Blyth booklet. We walked along the riverside to Schloss Burg castle. We got soaked in the rain but luckily the ”ski-lift” was working to take us up to the top of the hill. We had an early start on Tuesday to Koblenz and a Rhine boat trip to Bingen accompanied by the submariner’s organisation who we have met on many occasions. Everyday we were accompanied by members of their citizens group who all seem to speak perfect English. The food was very good, and we had discussions about exchanging bands to and from our music festival “Blyth and Northumberland Live” at the beach. The local newspaper published an article about our visit. All too soon it was time to return to Blyth on the Wednesday. The Citizens Exchange Group is open to any Blyth residents who are interested in making friendships between our two towns.

**MARCH**

**Wednesday 7 March**International Day at Buffalo Community Centre

We were met by the staff at the Buffalo Centre and introduced to Adeline, Robina, Ruth and a host of other ladies for their International Day event. The group meet here on a regular basis and it is for women only, mainly due to cultural reasons. It was a truly international event with members from various parts of Asia including India and Pakistan and other European countries such as Romania and others. Several members gave a talk on the traditional costumes they were wearing and their language. I replied, in English, about the mayor’s chains I was wearing and life on the council.

Dame Vera Baird QC, the Police and Crime Commissioner also attended and gave a report on her duties. She informed members that, unlike some other countries, the British police are very approachable and would listen to any concerns. She outlined some of her campaigns on neighbourhood policing, domestic violence and rape.

All the speeches were well received, and numerous photographs were taken. The members had also prepared their traditional lunch and we were able to sample numerous dishes – very different to the English/Indian takeaway. A very pleasant few hours and the group is open to new members.

**Thursday 8 March**International Women’s Day in Prudhoe.

Although the traditional Emily Davison event at Morpeth was still held on the same day, this was a change of venue for the NCC International Women’s Day. It was held in the Fuse Media centre, a fairly new venue near Prudhoe High School. Being a media centre, it lent itself to showing short films from Carol Malia of TV’s Look North and Alison Curbishley the 400metre runner.

There were four main speakers. Northumberland author Louise J Ross famous for “Holy Island”, “Sycamore Gap”, “Cragside” and the “DCI Ryan” series; Police Inspector Pam Bridges responsible for neighbourhood policing in the Tynedale area; Penni Blythe who is active in the Emily Inspires organisation and Kiz Crosbie a freelance Director and creative learning specialist who recently ran a theatrical project in a local shop.

The high school also had a trio of young speakers. They were all inspiring speakers. At one point the audience were invited to stand and strike a “power pose” and be assertive. The Civic Head, Councillor Anthony Murray, gave a vote of thanks and wound up the proceedings.

**Thursday 15 March**          “Northumbrian Hero” Tree sculpture dedication.

A tree on the corner of Hodgsons Road and Cowpen Road had been felled but the stump was purposefully left standing. The council asked local sculptor Tom Newstead to create a feature.

As this was close to the site of the former Bates Colliery it was decided that it should represent a pitman and so “Northumbrian Hero” was born. Tom had worked on it for two months and numerous people watched it being created. If you have not seen it, it is worth going to see just what can be created and how realistic it looks.

The opening event started with a few songs from Bees Wings and I gave a brief speech to dedicate the statue and spoke of the closure of the colliery in 1986 with the loss of over 1,700 jobs. Invited guest, Ronnie Campbell MP, who had worked at Bates, also gave a speech to the crowd which had gathered. Tom Newstead also spoke about his creation and his workshop in Seaton Sluice. We then went back to the council office for a warming coffee on a bitterly cold day.

**Saturday 17 March**            “Spring clean” volunteers litter pick.

Not an official Mayor’s event but I thought I would mention it. As part of a National Spring Clean initiative a litter pick was planned for the first Saturday in March. That was the weekend of the heavy snow and so the day was re-arranged.

There was a small group of us including councillors, officers, police, volunteers from St Cuthbert’s Church, Buffalo Community Centre and local residents. We were all kitted out in high viz jackets with picker-sticks. We worked our way from Plessey Road towards the town centre, ending in the Town Square with numerous bags of rubbish.

We made a small difference to help tidy-up the town, but all residents need to help to keep the town litter free. We had a few strange looks but many compliments and a cup of coffee and nibbles as Paul had invited us to end the session at his wine bar.

**Thursday 22 March**Fred Stoker Blue Plaque.

The council has an ongoing scheme to commemorate significant people, buildings, sites or events in Blyth with a Blue Plaque.

Fred Stoker lived at 13 Bath Terrace and as well as being a doctor and horticulturalist he was the first secretary of Blyth Spartans and is credited with naming them. The property in Bath Terrace is a listed building and we had to seek planning permission to erect the plaque. The owner, Mrs Joseph, welcomed us to the property and we unveiled the commemorative plaque together with a small speech. Spartans Club Chairman Tony Platten attended together with other officials and he remined us just how famous the Spartans were all over the world. Also present was Malcolm Muter and his mother who were descendants of Fred Stoker.

The unveiling was followed by a social meeting in the Council Chamber. All the property owners or tenants of the first twenty plaques had been invited. Everyone was asked to introduce themselves and say a few words about the part of the project they had been involved in. Ken Sproat, the Spartans Club historian, said that Fred Stoker had been a twenty-year-old medical student when he formed Blyth Spartans and could never have imagined how famous the club would become.

We were also pleased to welcome Geoff Fynes and his sister. He was a descendent of Richard “Dicky” Fynes a miner’s leader and founder of the local co-operative society. Local historian, Gordon Smith, had prepared a power point presentation of some of the historic buildings in Blyth.

The first plaque was unveiled last year at the beach and commemorated the nine Warwickshire Regiment soldiers who drowned there in 1917. All the other plaques are listed elsewhere on the website and the scheme is still open for other suggestions.

**Tuesday 27 March**Military Good Service awards.

We were invited to the Army Reserve Centre on Cowpen Road for the presentation of various certificates and awards. After a small reception attended by numerous high-ranking officers, we assembled in the main hall. Music was provided by the 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers as was the Guard of Honour.

After introductions by the chairman, Her Majesty’s Lord-Lieutenant of Northumberland The Duchess of Northumberland entered the hall escorted by Major Williamson, Battery Commander 203 Battery RA. The Duchess inspected the guard of honour.

There were various awards. Certificates for Meritorious Service 2017 were awarded to Sergeant S C G Greenwell 101st Regiment RA, Lieutenant D Jerdan Army Cadet Force and Reverend M H Wheelwright Royal Air Force Air Cadets.

Recipients of the Volunteer Reserve Service Medal were presented to Sergeants S C G Greenwell and S Philips both of 101st Regiment RA.

Certificates were awarded to four cadets. Staff Sergeant A Crowley (Bedlington); Sergeant H Murray (Bellingham); Sergeant O Railton (Hexham) and Corporal A Fisher (Newbiggin.

Four cadets were chosen for their outstanding performance to assist the Lord-Lieutenant in Royal and other official duties. They were Corporal Luke Tait of TS Tenacity Sea Cadet Corps; Corporal James Davies Alnwick Army Cadet Force; Flight Sergeant Alexander Forsythe (Blyth) Royal Air Force Cadets and Sergeant Jack Callender Combined Cadet Force.

Photographs were taken and after the ceremony, guests and recipients were invited into the Junior Ranks Club for a buffet.

**Saturday 31 March**Easter at Ridley Park.

The Easter Extravaganza was held at Ridley Park and we had been invited to attend. Sadly, the weather was not too good over the bank holiday weekend and the outdoor games had to be cancelled due to the wet conditions and concerns over safety. However, a heated marquee had been erected so many activities were under cover. Lots of families attended and there were many activities for the children including face painting, decorating 50 hard-boiled eggs, making an Easter hat, making models with play-dough and guessing the number of eggs in the bottle. All these activities were supervised. The King and Queen of Hearts welcomed us to their Wonderland Kingdom accompanied by Mad-Hatter the magician and balloon man and singing Alice. Little Mix was very popular. The youth ambassadors helped to facilitate all the games. There were four Easter eggs hunts where letters had been hidden in the park and the first three to answer the clues to the names of Wonderland characters won a large egg and all the runners up received a chocolate gift. The egg prizes had been kindly donated by Asda. Mr Ridley’s café was open all day and they had helped to organise the event and provided the children with free Jam sandwiches and jammy dodgers. The youth ambassadors also ran the free coconut shy with chocolate eggs instead of coconuts. The RNLI also took part in the event with a stall and safety advice for swimmers. The police and PCSO’s also took an active part and there were many “incriminating” photographs taken at the Punch and Judy wall. The mayor didn’t escape either! The macarena dance was popular. There were small children’s fairground rides, and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. I judged the hat competition and there was a traditional Easter-hat winner and Shep the sheepdog was runner-up. The hard-boiled decorated egg was won by a pirate and runner-up was a golden egg with goose/chicken. Another successful Blyth Town Council sponsored event.

**FEBRUARY**

**Tuesday 6 February.**Tom Woodhouse Funeral Directors**.**

We were invited to the dedication service of the relatively new funeral directors in Regent Street. We were welcomed by Dominic Appleby to the light and airy building and met company directors from their parent company Grenfell’s, other funeral directors, drivers and staff. The dedication of the office and chapel of rest was conducted by Reverend Tony Tooby, Revd Andrew Elder, Revd Ann Shepherdson, Father Philip Quinn and Mr Chris Haine a humanist. They had on display a wide variety of caskets from the traditional wooden ones, green baskets, and others with local photographs attached and slate chalk board lids. They want the office to be open and friendly and I think they have achieved that. An interesting visit.

**JANUARY**

**Saturday 27 January.**       Friends of Ridley Park.

The Mayoress and I were invited by the chair Fiona Gibson to unveil the bird viewing screen at Ridley Park on the Saturday afternoon. This was the weekend of the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. There had been a walk beforehand led by Lindsay McDougall, a RSPB member, to see what birds are using the grounds. There was a presentation of how the bird screen had been proposed, designed and built. The construction had been completed outdoors in some of the coldest weather. We unveiled the screen which has viewing panels set at different heights to suit all ages. The area behind the screen has been fenced off to provide a secluded area with various bird feeders with the food being donated. The footpath is temporary until a more permanent structure can be built. The park has a variety of birds. There were a number of other friends and local councillors present as funds had been donated to the park for the bird information board. It is well worth a visit.

**Saturday 27 January**.       Elswick (Blyth) All Arms Branch Burns Supper.

We had been invited by the President, Chairman and Members of the Elswick (Blyth) All Arms Branch of the Royal Artillery Association to a Burns Night supper at the Newsham Side Club. Dress for the evening was Tartan uniform and there were some splendid outfits. I managed to wear a tartan tie! The chairman Mrs Helen Fairbairn asked the reverend Anthony Tooby to say grace before the Haggis was paraded into the room with the bagpipes and drums and soldiers in full highland regalia. Major Ayton Parker said the address to a Haggis before using his large dirk to cut the Haggis. The meal with neeps and tatties was splendid, and thanks were given to Hartford Catering as this was one of their last hot catering functions. We were entertained by highland dancers of all ages, sword dancing and more music. Of course, we toasted the Haggis with a glass of whisky.

The President, Major (Rtd) Derek Fairbairn addressed the members and presented the Council with a cheque for £4,500. This was a contribution towards the refurbishment of the three cenotaphs in Blyth, in particular the stone soldier at Cowpen. On behalf of the council I thanked the members for their donation as the Council is engaged in major restoration work at New Delaval and Ridley Park in time for the centenary of the end of the first world war. A very pleasant evening.

**Tuesday 30 January**Book Launch – Youth Clubs of Blyth 1930-2017.

We were invited by the Silx Teen Bar organisation from Church Street, to the launch of their book “Youth Clubs of Blyth 1930s-2017.” The event was held in the Comrades Club. Jackie Long, senior youth worker opened the event. In June 2016 the Silx organisation received a £10,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant to do research into the history of youth organisations in Blyth. They joined with photographer Sharon Bailey and began the research. They purchased recording equipment which they learned to use, and they interviewed youth club organisers, members, family and friends. Part-way through the project the Big M, an inflatable space came to Blyth market where some of their work was displayed and more interviews took place. Gordon Smith, local historian was heavily involved. Gordon gave a presentation on the night and we took a trip down memory lane. The book is over 200 pages long and contains many photographs and stories from a host of people who have been involved in youth work – too many to mention. They also gathered more information than they could pack into one book and it took a lot of editing. There was a buffet and during the evening everyone was enthralled with the book pointing out people and places they remembered. Centre 64, The Barbarossa, Wright street Boys club (and girls club). I was reminded of my time in the Life Boys, the junior reserve of the Boys Brigade based in the Zion Methodist Church and the youth club at Newlands school. It’s a fascinating book and you will recognise many places and people and you may even see a photograph of yourself. It’s been a well worth while project and the book is excellent. There is more information on their website at www.silxteen.com/heritage/

**DECEMBER**

**Sunday 3 December**Blyth Lifeguard & Swimming Club**.**

The Christmas Meet is a huge swimming event held in Blyth Sports Centre with competitors from all over the North East. We were met by Aileen Robson who guided us and the Club Vice President into the swimming pool arena. There was a huge crowd with every seat filled and swimmers all around the pool. The event is run under the ASA laws and rules. As you will know, Blyth pool is 25 metres in length with six lanes. There was Swiss electronic timing with an electronic scoreboard and numerous time-keepers and officials. There were morning and afternoon competitions with 24 individual events. One of the events had 84 competitors split into heats. The male and female groups were also split into ages from 9 to 15 years of age. Medals were awarded to the first six places. It was an incredibly well organised event. Blyth is one of the few swimming pools in the North East capable of holding these events with a 25m pool and a large enough seated audience capacity and we must make sure we retain such a facility. We both enjoyed the event and send our congratulations to all.

**Monday 11 December** St Cuthbert’s Church Christmas trees competition.

For the last three years St Cuthbert’s Church has organised a Christmas tree festival in the first full week of December. The format is that local firms sponsor a tree and decorate it to reflect the nature of their business. For the first time Blyth Town Council entered the competition and staff made tree decorations from paper showing the council logo, minutes and councillors portraits. We were welcomed by Rev Tony Tooby and Cecil Smith. I had been asked to judge the tree competition – a certain way to lose friends. I had to declare an interest in the Council tree and disqualified them from winning. Blyth being a port I decided on a nautical theme. The winner was The Boathouse Restaurant. There is no formal prize just the honour of winning. That night the Jarrow Choral Society performed and there was a whole week of musical events, culminating with the Saturday morning “Big Sing” in the church hall.

**Tuesday 12th December**Port of Blyth.

We were invited to the Port of Blyth annual Christmas reception at their training centre. Martin Lawlor the chief executive of the trust board welcomed visitors and Geoff Hodgson, chair of the seven-person Board gave an overview. Having been involved in renewable energy for some years the Port now has a licence to enter the offshore decommissioning market.

The winner of the photographic competition, with a view of the sun setting over the port, was Anne Miller. If you did not manage to get a copy of the calendar, all the entries are on the port website. Next year’s competition is now open. For information, their website also has an interactive map showing all the vessels entering or leaving the Port with details of country and cargo.

**Wednesday 13 December** Churches together Carol Service at St Mary’s Church.

We were welcomed into the hall by Father Andrew Elder, George Robson and David Richardson, who is chair of the Churches Together. The ministers and dignitaries paraded into the packed church. After the lighting of the Unity Candle, various performances were given. The first was by Headway Theatre with their own rendition of the Twelve Days of Christmas with suitable actions and the congregation could not help but to join in. The Morpeth Road Primary Academy and the Bede Academy gave their customary excellent performances and the solo singer was terrific. Readings were given by St Wilfred’s, Central Methodists., United Reformed and St Mary’s. Father Elder conducted the service which was accompanied by the Salvation Army band. To finish of the evening mince pies and sherry were available in the hall.

**Thursday 14 December**. Radio Newcastle.

I was contacted by our Events Coordinator Mel Jackson, to advise me that Radio Newcastle were to broadcast on their breakfast show a piece about town centres that are struggling with out of town competition. They were framing the piece in terms of “Where are you doing your Christmas shopping – on your local high street or in a major shopping centre?” They were to use Blyth as an example and some local traders had already been interviewed who had adverse comments to make about Blyth. Did I want to take part in the broadcast? Although I didn’t have time to prepare as the recording was to be made NOW, I wanted to put forward the councils view and to promote the good things about Blyth. Ruth Holliday interviewed me but it’s always difficult when you have not heard what the other contributors have said. NCC had already been asked about their views and gave a statement mainly concerning investment in infrastructure and bringing old buildings back into use. The transformation of the quayside, a new riverside hotel, the Tall Ships and Tour of Britain cycle race. Together with Blyth Town Council, NCC has joined a £70,000 project to revitalise the Town Square and market. I also mentioned the 3,000 crowd we attracted to Blyth for the Christmas lights switch-on by Union-J and all the other events aimed at bringing people back into Blyth. Over 300 children had already visited Father Christmas in the Keel Row shopping centre. I was pleased that the radio also had a retail expert on who agreed with me that businesses also need to be more proactive in advertising themselves and increasing their customer base. A bit of a rushed performance but I hope those that listened to the broadcast on Friday morning at 7.00am welcomed the council’s comments.

**Friday 15 December** Operation Elf – food bank collection.

I welcomed one of the police PCSO’s, in the guise of Buddy the Elf, who visited the council offices at 9.00am on the Friday morning to collect the food parcels which we had been collecting over the previous weeks. The carrier bags of goodies were taken downstairs to the police station and added to the boxes of food which had already been collected and stored. All of the collected articles were to be taken to the Briardale Community Centre for later distribution to the needy. We thank all those Blyth people who have so generously donated to the food bank this Christmas.

**NOVEMBER**

**Friday 3 November**The Dales School celebration – building is 80 years old.

We were welcomed by the Deputy Head Mrs Helen Shaw and went into the hall which was already full of parents, friends and ex-pupils of the old Bebside School. She said that seven years ago the school had 24 pupils which had now grown to 86. There was an interesting film shown highlighting the history of the previous school and its current use. The children have been horse riding, trampolining and bike riding with visits to the beach and the countryside and have tried boxing and play football. There were pictures of the Olympic torch relay as it came down Cowpen Road past the school.

This was followed by one of the staff singing Vera Lynn songs, Bluebirds, Wish me luck and We’ll meet again with some audience participation. The school had also visited Woodhorn Museum to research the buildings history. The children were interested to see that in the olden days all the female teachers were single. This was because they had to sign a contract to say they would not marry, would not drink, smoke or loiter in ice-cream parlours and had to wear long dresses with at least two petticoats! The audience were asked if they could remember which room was for woodwork, domestic science and had the gym changed much.

Although the foundation stones of the school are dated 1937 it appears that the school did not open until 1939 due to some Blyth Town councillors objecting to it being a secondary modern school and boycotting it.

After trying our luck on the tombola and viewing the many photographs we went outside where the deputy head planted a beech tree. Instead of helium balloons the children were given bubble machines to make an effect which was much more environmentally friendly. We sang the new school song about special people and the children then had a picnic on the tables outside. We talked to a few more people about their time in the school and several had written down their memories and provided school photographs. The school had displays all over and the children and visitors all enjoyed the special day.

**Saturday 4 November** Fireworks display at the beach.

Although not a Civic Event we attended the fireworks display at the beach and what a wonderful 25-minute display it was. It was very colourful and not too loud, with a musical accompaniment. This was a change of venue from our usual quayside location, but it worked very well with thousands attending. It is much safer for everyone to attend a formal display rather than ad-hoc garden events. Most local people walked to the beach but there was a cheap return bus service on the 308 and X9 routes. There was some indiscriminate car parking despite the advertising stating that the car park would not be available. This was because the car park was used, not only to safely view the fireworks by the public, but also for the stage show, the food stalls and the fairground rides all of which were enjoyed by the public. Another successful event.

**Sunday 5 November** Submariners Remembrance Day outside St Mary’s Church.

As normal the submariner’s remembrance service is held outside St Mary’s Church in Elfin Walk, one week prior to the main Remembrance Day. More and more people are attending the annual service which I think is the only submariners event in the North East. This year Father Elder was also called on to bless a new memorial stone in the garden thanks to generous donations from the Elswick All Arms Branch of the R.A. Blyth Town Council and the people of Blyth. Lord Ridley, representing the Northumberland Lord Lieutenant, laid the first wreath followed by myself as Blyth Mayor and representatives of other services. The High Street club provided refreshments afterwards for the submariners. The Town Council was also presented with a plaque and photograph of HMS Elfin as a reminder of the war time submarine base in Blyth. The vessel is now renamed Nettle and sails in Amsterdam as a pleasure craft.

**Wednesday 8 November** Showman’s Guild lunch at Ramside Hall.

We were invited by John Houghton of Carnival Rides to the annual showman’s guild lunch held in Ramside Hall. The showman’s guild is a very well-respected organisation and all responsible showmen are members. They are the legal body of the showman and are responsible for regulating the entertainment and their safety codes. One of the speakers had responsibility for education. She explained that at the Newcastle Town Moor Hopping’s event the Newcastle Council used to fund the school for the showmen’s children on site for two weeks but this year the Freemen of Newcastle sponsored the event. Just one of the many things that happen in the background.

**Friday 10 November Blyth Academy**

Once again, the Blyth Academy at Chase Farm Drive held their annual service and invited the mayor and mayoress as guests. There had been some doubt about the event being held this year due to the re-organisation of the school board, but it was another successful event led by Mr Murphy the principal. The Reverend Ann Shepherdson of Blyth Central Methodist Church performed the service in the hall which was very respectful. The pupils were very well behaved with readings from the head girl Sharna Maddison and head boy Ryan Hunter. Amber Jessop was to have sung but was unwell but there were other songs. Wreaths were laid in the foyer followed by refreshments in the library. Thanks to all those who organised the occasion.

**Saturday 11 November** Remembrance Day at New Delaval Pavilion.

As is tradition in New Delaval and Newsham their service is held on the Saturday and was conducted by Father Pringle from St Bede’s Church with prayers and psalms. The service was accompanied by a pipe band, some armed service personnel and a large congregation. After the silence, wreaths were laid at the monument followed by refreshments in the pavilion.

**Sunday 12 November** Remembrance Day.

This Remembrance Day parade is mainly organised by Major (Rtd) Fairbairn. The parade set off from St Cuthbert’s Church with a band and marched to Ridley Park. Together with Commander A. S. Collier and Capt. S. Philips RA 203 we took the salute at the dais. The church parade was led by Rev A.Tooby. I wore the full mayoral regalia for this important ceremony. At the cenotaph after a song and the two-minute silence wreaths were laid. This was led by the Lord Lieutenant, Mayor, British Legion, Navy, Army Air Force and a host of other organisations. The whole service from the last post to the final march off was very moving. The crowd increases every year. Next year 2018 will be 100 years since the end of the first world war. Blyth Town Council will be making major improvements to all three of our memorials at Ridley Park, New Delaval and Cowpen for next year’s services.

**Monday 13 November** Mayoress at Inner Wheel.

The mayoress attended the annual meeting of the Inner Wheel which is the female part of the Rotary. After speeches there was a special party this year held in the Masonic Hall, with guests from around the North East. They enjoyed a delicious afternoon tea and were entertained by an excellent comedienne.

**Friday 17 November**. Christmas lights switch-on.

Together with the normal market traders there was a Teenager market which gives an opportunity for younger members to experience making goods, selling them and learning about setting up a business. The Town Council together with NCC have been running a regeneration project and incentive scheme with increased advertising to try and boost the number of market traders in Blyth.

Metro Radio conducted the entertainment on the stage. There was a school’s lantern parade from Headway Arts and St Mary’s Church to the Town Square. Various choirs and girl’s groups performed. I can never quite remember all the words to the twelve days of Christmas. There were estimated to be over 3,000 people waiting for Union J to perform and they didn’t disappoint. I had “needles and thread in my head”, “We live forever” and “You got it all” in my mind all night.

The switch on of the lights was a great finale to the night. The Christmas tree, the motifs on the lampposts, the lights in the live trees and the projection onto the church were all great and get better every year.

Santa and Mrs Claus are in the Keel Row every weekend 11.00am-3.30pm and some light entertainment will be on most market days Friday/Saturday.

**Wednesday 22 November**. RNLI Annual Dinner in Masonic Hall.

The Annual Dinner for the R.N.L.I. was held on Wednesday 22 November at the Masonic Hall. This was a social occasion and a fund-raising event for the Institution. The event had been organised by Mrs K Moore and the other volunteers and once again there was a good meal and a raffle. The guest speaker was Mr George Robson. He gave an interesting talk on the “true” origins of the names of various foods such as Sirloin steak, Mint imperials, M&M’s and a host of others. Or was it “true”. It turned out to be a competition to see which story was true and which was not. Obviously, our table won the competition!

**Wednesday 29 November**. NCC Civic Head at home in County Hall.

The Civic Head of Northumberland County Council, Councillor Anthony Murray MBE held his At Home on Wednesday 29 November in County Hall, Morpeth. Civic heads from all over the North East attended to give support to the event. We assembled in the restaurant before going into the foyer where there were a series of stalls with a variety of goods for sale – cards, bags, jewellery etc. We tried our luck on naming the teddy bear and hedged our bets on it being a boy or girl by saying Toby or Ellie. After refreshments in the restaurant and a welcome from Councillor Murray we swapped stories of our year in office so far. There was a welcome surprise when we were presented with a large teddy bear named Toby which we had won. It was an enjoyable afternoon and all the proceeds went in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support.

**OCTOBER.**

**Wednesday 11 October** Met the new vicar of St Cuthbert’s Church.

We attended the institution of Reverend Anthony Tooby as the new vicar of St. Cuthbert’s Church. The induction was quite a formal event conducted by the Bishop of Berwick Rt. Rev. Mark Tanner and the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne Ven. Peter Robinson, together with every vicar and father of all the Blyth Churches. The church was full. Whilst it was a formal occasion the Bishop was very down to earth. He said that Blyth, with a population of 30,000, might see 1,000 attending Sunday services which means that 29,000 do not. After signing the Deed of institution, the new vicar is given the keys to the church, a map of the Parish and a copy of the electoral roll. The church bell is tolled. Items such as an ewer of water, a candle, a bible, bread and wine are displayed each with their own significance. The vicar was welcomed to his Parish by various members of local organisations. In my welcome speech I agreed with the Bishop that we have too many meetings and not enough events in which to meet and speak to people. After the service we left the church and walked to the church hall, noting the scaffolding for the building works and the new toilet. There was a wonderful buffet. A lot of volunteers were needed to organise the whole event and there was a good community spirit. Best wishes to Revd Anthony Tooby and his wife.

**SEPTEMBER**

**Monday 4 September** Tour of Britain cycle race.

The race was organised by NCC but BTC were financial sponsors. The race started in Keilder and finished in Blyth, 211 kilometres later. It came through Blyth twice giving local residents a good chance to see the 120 riders. The velodrome was in High Street car park. The rider’s entourage, of about 40 vehicles, was in the Keel Row car park. The market place had a huge screen displaying the whole of the race. There were bicycle display tents, the podium and the OVO corporate marquee. BTC also had a small marquee where we entertained local businesses and other volunteers. Many local people had decorated the streets with painted bicycles and bunting although I wish a few more had been involved. We had our two cycle murals erected at Broadway field and they have received compliments. There were thousands lining the streets in Northumberland and I think everyone is always amazed at the speed the cyclists travel. There was a slight controversy at the end when Edvald Boasson Hagen crossed the line first but Elia Viviani was later declared the official winner from team Sky. The whole event was covered by TV and it gave a tremendous boost to tourism in Northumberland. It was a really enjoyable day.

**Saturday 9 September**. Beach Hut Radio relocated to the Steamboat Hotel.

All councillors had been invited to the opening of their headquarters and we were impressed by the two fully fitted studios. The other facilities that will be created will be a learning centre for budding radio broadcasters. Peter Jackson from County and I broadcast live on the community radio. Looking around the building brought back many memories of the Steamboat and the Star and Garter Hotel and we wish Richie and Chris and all the other volunteers good luck in their venture.

**Tuesday 12 September.**County Hall, N.C.C.

I had a meeting with Cllr Peter Jackson, the new Leader at NCC, and Cllr Richard Wearmouth where we discussed economic development. The Leader outlined his plans for Blyth and Northumberland and future Partnership agreements. A Parish conference is arranged for October.

**Wednesday 20 September.** We had entered Northumbria in Bloom where Ridley Park received a gold award plus silver awards in other categories but we had our own Blyth in Bloom awards ceremony in the Comrades Club. Councillor Kath Nisbet opened the event. The competition had been judged by Jimmy Reith, Bob Stephenson and Dave Clough. There were a number of entrants but the winners of the various categories were: -

Best Front Garden             Glen Brown

Best Back Garden               Robert & Beryl Cessford

Best Back Yard                    Isobel Hatcher

Best Community Group    Tynedale Residential Home

Best Allotment                    Stephen McMillan

Discretionary Award for Best new garden                 Jean Hayton

The awards were presented by Jimmy Reith and Adam Greenwood of Perennial Favourites had sponsored the competition. Everyone had a good evening and we are all looking forward to next year’s competition.

**Friday 22 – Sunday 24 September**. Solingen.

Over the weekend the Mayoress and I visited Solingen for their Town Twinning event. It’s called the festival of lights and they hold a huge fireworks display. They have several twin towns representing the Netherlands, Israel, France and east Germany. They also have twins in Africa but they are too far for a weekend visit. One of their old railway stations has been converted into an Arts Centre, with enough space for 16 artists to live in and a restaurant where the Bergermaster, Tim Kurzbach, welcomed guests to an evening of international exchange. As well as twin town representatives, civic guests and councillors there were a number of other politicians present. In response to the Bergermaster’s address I was asked to give a brief speech which I did, carefully not saying too much about Brexit.

**Wednesday 27 September.** Blyth and District Talking Newspaper.

We were invited to the annual social event held at the Seahorse. The officers, Mr Dickson, Mrs Lockhart and Ms Brown welcomed us to the event and explained the production process. The news and local stories are recorded at the Blyth Academy by volunteers and copied onto memory sticks for distribution to the listeners who have their own playback devices. It is a much-appreciated service.

**Thursday 28 September** Visit from Royal Navy Commodore.

We had a visit from Commodore Phil Waterhouse, who took over as Naval Regional Commander for Northern England in February. He is the Navy’s ambassador for the North East. He was accompanied by Charles Wood from Calliope, Newcastle. They are very keen to be involved in local events, when possible, to promote the naval service. They were very interested in our tall ship Williams II and its future voyage to the Antarctic and our June Maritime festival. We receive occasional reports from HMS Blyth but it is not possible for her to visit us in the near future.

**Friday 29 September**. Macmillan Coffee morning.

We attended one of the coffee mornings at the Blyth Academy at Cowpen, in the Open Learning Centre. The staff, sixth formers and other guests made us very welcome. It is such a worthwhile cause and it’s good to see the pupils involved in a community event to raise funds for this cancer charity.

**AUGUST 2017**

**Saturday 5 August**. This was Blyth’s RNLI open day and there was a good turnout from visitors. Adam Dixon was the event manager. There was a change this year as the event was split between two venues, the lifeboat station on Quay Road and Ridley Park. At the station, the shop and cafeteria were open and as well as the two Blyth inshore boats, lifeboats from neighbouring stations at Cullercoats and Tynemouth were on the river. The water safety posters were displayed in the café and the competition was won by Rihannah Langan. Ridley Park hosted the fundraising stalls and we tried our luck at various tombola’s including the Ladies Guild stall. The army cadets performed some music and Beach Hut Radio presented a show. As well as the police and other services on the adjoining road we spoke to Dave Lucas from the coastguards. We had not realised that the local coastguards were also located in Blyth.

I understand RNLI raised £4,000 on the day which was a great achievement.

**Sunday 6 August**. Teardrops family event at Blyth Rugby Club. This is a charity that supports bereaved parents and has been running for twenty years. We were met by Margaret and Terry Emm who helped organise the day. We opened the event which was compared by John and Simon and there were numerous really good performers on stage. Throughout the day there was a lot of activity in the field. We also met some of the Northern Ice Wheelchair curling team who were also raising funds for their charity. There are so many worthwhile charitable organisations who need our support. Congratulations on a really well organised fund-raising day.

**Saturday 12 August**. Although not a Blyth Town Council sponsored event we visited the local Food and Drink event at Ridley Park. It rained in the morning but that didn’t spoil the two-day event which was enjoyed by all. There was a variety of different cooked foods available. There is so much good local produce and we sampled (and bought) some cheese, bread, ginger wine, fudge and sausages.

**Tuesday 15 August**. Kai Schreiber, who represents the mixed choir ConBrio from Solingen, our twin town in Germany, had been in contact to say they would be visiting Blyth. On the Tuesday morning, we greeted them in the council chamber and they surprised us by performing some songs for us. You can see and hear this on the front page on this website. They presented us with a pair of butter knives made in Solingen and engraved with the name of their Bergermaster Tim Kurzbach. There were 22 singers, plus the conductor and some family members.

On Tuesday evening, there was a concert in St Paul’s Church, Seaton Sluice. Community choir singers from Seaton Valley, Cramlington and Blyth performed first. They practice and perform simply because they enjoy singing. After a short interval for tea and cake the German choir performed. The ConBrio choir had a wide repertoire from choral, folk and pop in both German and English. They are very professional, as you would expect, and everyone enjoyed the performances and they were asked for an encore.

**Thursday 17 August**. We attended evensong at St Cuthbert’s Church and the ConBrio choir joined in with the church choir for the service.

This was followed by a concert based on tales of Lark and Nightingale which again was excellent and they had to do another encore. Cecil Smith, who had organised this part of the concert and who knows a lot more about choirs than I do, informed me that the multi part harmonies would have been very difficult to learn and sing and they performed them in both German and English.

The German group also planned to visit Alnwick Castle and other coastal towns; have an Olympics fun sports day at the beach and of course shopping in Newcastle.

As an aside, we also visited the church grounds where the “Holy Weeds” group had decorated the garden with painted bicycles in readiness for the Tour of Britain cycle race which will pass by the church. We also saw the grave of Willy Carr, local strongman – perhaps the statue should be relocated here.

**Thursday 24 August**. Royal Warwickshire Regiment Memorial Dedication Service. This was the culmination of months of hard work. Blyth Town Council staff had collaborated with the Blyth Battery, the Regiments, NCC, Horton Church and others to organise this event.

At the beach, there is a circular bedding plant display which BTC & NCC created to coincide with the Tall ships event and which we will use next year to commemorate 100 years since the end of the 1914/18 war. Ex councillor Alisdair Gibbs-Barton floated the idea of using it this year to commemorate 100 years since nine soldiers were tragically drowned off Blyth beach. The Blyth Battery were coincidently researching the family history of the event. Via the Planning and Development Committee I was also proposing a scheme to commemorate historical Blyth buildings, sites, people and events of note by erecting blue plaques. The Warwickshire Regiment wanted to be involved. As one of the soldiers was buried at Horton Church we wanted them (Father John Swinhoe) to be involved and we needed a padre (Jon Whalley). As the soldiers had drowned we thought the RNLI lifeboat should be involved. At one stage HMS Severn was going to be involved but the ship was decommissioned. The Pipe Band from Ashington agreed to perform plus some other musicians and buglers. Through advertising on social media and by publishing in the Midlands press some relatives were located as was Wendy Shannon from Australia who we met in July. We needed and got a 25-pound gun to announce and end the minutes silence and to record each soldiers name. There was a lot of military protocol to consider but eventually a program was arranged.

The flower bed was laid, blue plaque and information board designed, ordered and erected. Programs printed. Invitations sent out. Flag pole and flags resourced, grass cut, bins emptied, audio system checked. Everything needed to be ready for 24th August.

Everything fell into place. The weather was reasonable. All the military personnel arrived together with everyone involved in the event. The public played a part. Best of all, several of the relatives arrived from various parts of the country. The service took place without a hitch. All of the nine soldiers were remembered individually. Wreaths were laid.

We revisited the flower bed with the relatives. Everyone was invited to visit the Battery and they had put on some refreshments for guests.

Some of the relatives then visited Horton Church.

We all headed back to the Council Chamber for some more refreshments and there was a lot of good conversation and friendships made. We were pleased that the soldier’s relatives visiting Blyth for the first time said that everyone had been so friendly and they would be visiting us again. Everything worked out well thanks to a lot of hard work.

**Friday 25 August**. I was asked to do an interview to advertise the Tour of Britain cycle race which finishes in Blyth on Monday 4 September. We tried to do a recording outside Frameworks shop but the traffic was too noisy. We moved to Broadway field next to the two cycle murals which BTC had recently erected. The recording will be used on social media together with quotes from other towns on the cycle route. I had also written some notes for use in advertising and an article for a souvenir programme.

**Saturday 26 August**. The Blyth Carnival organised by Headway Arts supported by Blyth Town Council took place. The traditional parade started at the Headway Arts Centre in Cypress Gardens and they walked down Waterloo Road to the Town Square. There was a model elephant and tiger, a live mermaid, Laurel and Hardy figures and a host of cowboys, cowgirls and costumed dancers. There was a good crowd on the route eager to see the parade accompanied by the Samba band. There were some small fairground attractions in the Town Square. With live music, dancers, Samba Band, an escapologist and other performers the crowd were entertained. The market stalls were back to their traditional places in Market Street and there were more traders than I have seen for a long time. We hope they will all return. On the Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday there were more fairground rides in the Town Square. With the charge set at only £1 for most rides on the Monday the children (and parents) were well pleased.

**JULY 2017**

**Thursday 6 July**. In the morning, we attended the swimming competition between the six Blyth primary schools at Blyth Sports Centre and together with Lee Paris we presented the prizes. In the afternoon, we moved to the sports hall which hosted the track and field events and again presented the medals and cup. This event has been sponsored by Blyth Town Council every year since the Olympic Torch relay came through Blyth in an effort to encourage children to aim high and go for the Olympics.

**Friday 7 July**. Again, we were at Blyth Sports Centre which was celebrating its 50th anniversary. They held a challenge to swimmers to swim 18,240 lengths, one for each day the baths have been opened. The 24-hour challenge was easily broken with 21,000 lengths and all participants were given a commemorative medal for their efforts. Swimmers of all abilities took part including Olympic medal winner Nick Gillingham. Neither of us got wet! I was asked if I had been there as a councillor when the baths were opened 50 years ago – I was still at school!

**Tuesday 25 July.** We presented a certificate and gift to five-year-old Oliver Jackson. He had been upset at the amount of litter left behind on the ground after the beach music event by thoughtless people and volunteered to collect it in bin bags. He was thanked for his spontaneous effort and civic pride, see him receiving his award [by clicking here!](https://www.blythtowncouncil.org.uk/widescope/resources/oliver-jackson-award.jpg)

**Monday 31 July.** In the council chamber, we greeted Wendy Shannon from Perth, Australia who was visiting Blyth. She was the great, great niece of Lt Ken Wallace Brown, one the nine Warwickshire soldiers drowned in Blyth 100 years ago. His grave is in Horton church yard. More of this later.

**JUNE 2017**

**Thursday 1st June.** I was invited to the Rotary club lunch at the Spartan hotel. The president Michael Jackson and Secretary Colin Baxter explained some of their fund-raising activities and charitable works and Colin Watson described their work over recent years in Africa on a water project. Dr Reginald Carr was recognised as citizen of the year. The chair uses his authority to fine members if they arrive late and fine others if they arrive too early, but it’s all for good causes.

**Friday 2nd June**. This was the Maritime Festival weekend and Friday was party night in the boat-shed. Entertainers, the tenth avenue band, were very good. On the Saturday Clive Gray had invited us to open the festival and there were many activities at the quayside. Although the weather was not too good on the Sunday the various river races took place and prizes were presented. Clive had explained the Williams II tall ship project and the proposed journey to Antarctica to celebrate Captain William Smiths discovery of the Southern Shetland Islands.

**Friday 9th June**. We attended the flower festival held at the Central Methodist church. We had been invited by Mrs Jennifer Cox, the committee secretary. Reverend Ann Shepherdson explained the many church activities. The Bede Academy children’s choir performed with some very entertaining songs and actions. After tea and cakes we viewed the flower arrangements again and toured the stalls in the upper rooms.

**Monday 19th June.**    Together with local councillors we opened the new BTC play park at Newsham Farm Estate and children from Newsham Primary School attended along with head teacher Mrs Anne Marie Armstrong. Kompan, the company which installed the equipment, worked with the school to provide the most suitable apparatus. The children enjoyed the new play area.

**Thursday 22 June**. We attended the Northumberland school’s sports day at Cramlington Learning village together with 1,000’s of children taking part in numerous sporting activities. Commonwealth, World and Olympic gymnast Craig Heap was there to support the young athletes. Wearing the mayor’s chains, one child asked which sports competition I had won them in! The Tour of Britain cycle race was officially announced and youngsters from Morpeth Road Academy were there in force riding their cycles around the track.

**Saturday 24 June.** BTC held the Northumberland Live all-day music event at Blyth beach with numerous entertainers headlined by the Undertones. The windy day meant that a parachute display could not be held, but 10,000 enjoyed the artists performing on stage. Various organisations helped to sponsor the event including BMW, Transped and Port of Blyth and we were interviewed on the radio to promote Blyth. Jan and Manu, two councillors from Solingen, came over from Germany to see the event with the hope of exchanging bands in the future. Take a look at the event [here!](http://www.blythtowncouncil.org.uk/gallery/towncouncil/album.php?s=northumberland-live-2017)

**Monday 26 June**. We were invited by Newcastle’s Bishop, the Right Reverend Christine Hardman and her husband Roger to afternoon tea in the grounds of their home. She is only the second female bishop to take a seat in the House of Lords. It was an enjoyable day at a venue near the Town Moor which neither of us had been to before. They are both keen cyclists so we may see them in Blyth in September.

**MAY 2017**

**On Thursday 18th May** I was elected as the Mayor of Blyth Town Council and my wife Olga became Mayoress. The main function of the Mayor is to chair the council meetings but there are other civic duties. I thought I would keep a log of monthly events throughout the year.

**Friday 19th May**. On the first day after being elected a party of 40 visitors from our twin town of Solingen in Germany arrived and we welcomed them to Blyth at Arms Evertyne House. The group had travelled by coach and ferry via Hull and stayed for three nights at our Commissioners Quay hotel. On the Friday evening, we joined them for a traditional English fish and chip supper at the Coastline restaurant.   On the Saturday, the group went to Amble and Bamburgh castle and as they had some spare places on their coach we joined them. On Saturday evening, there was a formal reception. I gave a welcome speech and Bernd Clemens and Councillor Jan Salewski replied on behalf of the visitors group and their council. Two of the group were journalists and we were interviewed several times over the weekend as they were very interested in Brexit and how it might affect our town-twinning friendship. On Sunday, the group went to Corbridge and Hexham and in the evening the local Town Twinning Group held a farewell supper at the Golf Club to which we were invited. On the Monday, the group had a guided tour around Newcastle and we said our farewell at the ferry terminal. A very hectic four days! Later we received copies of the various Solingen newspaper articles which were very favourable to Blyth as a place to visit.