



The ^{New} Link

News from Low Row and Keld
United Reformed Churches in Swaledale,
Part of the Tees Swale Pastorate.

October 2022 - November 2022

Swaledale Nostalgia! - *Gillian Figures Aug 2022*

After reading John Wadsworth's memories of his family's years at Low Row I thought I would explain why David and I, in Leeds, also appreciate receiving The Link.

My husband David's connections go back to 1949 when his father, Rev Joe Figures, was appointed as Secretary of the Yorkshire Congregational Union, based in Leeds. This was a complex role involving administrative and pastoral responsibility for the many churches belonging to the Union. Much was office based but there were many official invitations and regular preaching engagements far and wide. The Yorkshire Union covered a vast and very mixed area ranging from big cities and industrial towns to remote rural locations with everything in between. The Districts were organised so that each one included churches from different backgrounds. In this way the prosperous, large, town churches could support the small rural chapels in various ways. The Swaledale churches : Keld, Thwaite, Low Row & Reeth were in the Leeds & York District.

David sometimes accompanied his father on preaching engagements and it was in this way that he first visited Keld & Low Row, two very different chapels with very different histories: Low Row, as a continuation of the Smarber meeting of 1693, and Keld as a new initiative begun by the itinerant

preacher, Edward Stillman, in 1789, at the request of the local population.

Mr Figures was actively involved in the establishment of a Minister to the Dales Churches who would provide pastoral and ministerial support to the scattered congregations. The Rev George Curry was appointed in 1952 and he and his wife settled in Hawes. Mr Curry threw himself into the role with his characteristic enthusiasm and his car became instantly recognisable as he traversed the length and breadth of the Dales, often accompanied by his whippet, Jock. There will still be some who remember him with affection. Keld and Ravenstonedale held a particular place in his heart. We often heard news of the scattered chapel when we visited him in Hawes, where we rented a nearby cottage. After Mr Curry retired twelve years later his successor, Bert Jones, sadly died suddenly after only two years, and was not replaced. Somehow, many of the chapels survived, in spite of dwindling numbers and a lack of ministers, aided by lay preachers, and visiting ministers.

With the creation of the United Reformed Church in 1972 the Dales churches were transferred to the Northern Synod. This was a crucial period for Keld, particularly as the School closed the following year, leaving the group of listed buildings empty, apart from the Chapel. As John Wadsworth wrote, his father was instrumental in suggesting using the School and Institute as bunk barn accommodation for groups of youngsters from town churches in the north east to introduce them to some of the wonders of creation. This was an imaginative, new approach to rural mission which thrived, and it is very moving to be in Keld now and meet nostalgic, middle aged parents bringing their teenaged children to revisit the place where they enjoyed a unique and formative experience. This came to an end in 2001

when foot and mouth disease closed the countryside. Gradually, plans were made to refurbish the Keld Manse as a holiday cottage and convert the old stable into a Visitor Centre. The latter initiative was achieved with the help of a very generous legacy and was opened in 2011. Both the Northern and the Yorkshire Synods were involved in this and it was at this time that my husband was appointed as the Yorkshire Synod representative on the Keld Board, becoming the Chair shortly afterwards. He was delighted to renew his acquaintance with Keld and has worked tirelessly ever since on its behalf.

It is always a pleasure to worship in one of the rural chapels. The faithful witness of so many people, far from the complexities of city life, is a salutary reminder of the basic Gospel message. No frills, but heartfelt thanksgiving and praise. Long may it continue.

Now that we are no longer able to drive to Swaledale, and so can visit much less frequently, we are very pleased to receive news of the chapels via The Link.

This is the first time I have had too many articles for The Link but this one was too interesting not to include.

WORSHIP OCT - NOV 2022

Low Row (10.30 am)

Keld (2.00 pm)

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| Oct | 2 nd | Derek Jackson |
| | 9 th | Dot Thomson HARVEST |
| | 16 th | Maranny Jones |
| | 23 rd | Roland Dent |
| | 30 th | Harry & Wendy Bunting |
| Nov | 6 th | Meg Thomson |

13th At Keld War Memorial 10.50 am then to Chapel for remainder of service Preacher James Mawdesley

20th John & Rachel Hall

27th

Dec 1st Advent Service at Gunnerside

KELD: By the time this issue is printed the last Minister in Residence for 2022, Rev Peter Poulter will be in the Manse. It will be lovely welcoming Peter and Yvonne back to Swaledale.

LOW ROW: The external painting of the building is almost complete but the railings are still to do when the greenery is removed from the west end. Several members have celebrated 'special' birthdays this year (those with a 0 on the end) and the knee and hip-op patients are progressing well.

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