Previous William Leech Research Fellowships 1998-2022

Between 1988 and 2009, Leech Fellowships were held for periods of up to five years at Durham and Newcastle universities. In that period, four distinguished theologians carried out work which has contributed significantly to the life of the Church, both regionally and nationally. All of them actively engaged with clergy and congregations of all denominations across the North East of England and played a leading role in training and in regional charitable trusts. More recently, the Trust has decided to use its resources to support a wider range of shorter-term fellowships and projects.

This document includes summaries of various completed fellowships up to 2022, as described by their respective authors, that are not listed elsewhere on the William Leech Research Fund website.

Alison Merritt-Smith, 'Shieling: a theology of art, land and economy in contested urban space'

Alison Merritt Smith's research (2019-2022) focused on the potential for artistic activism and theological reflection in the context of the politics of land, development and contested urban space. Podcasts produced based on Alison's work during her Leech Fellowships can be accessed for free on the Real / Symbol webpage.

Alison did this research whilst she was the Director of Methodist arts organisation Shieldfield Art Works (SAW), based on a Council Estate in Shieldfield, East Newcastle. Over the past decade, the estate has experienced a 467% increase in the development of luxury private and student accommodation and subsequent gentrification. This has caused increasing pressures on land and sense of place for long term residents. Moreover, there is now a real risk of demolition, displacement and social cleansing of the estate.

As an organisation focused on Art, Theology and Community Activism, SAW is responding to this context through the design and research project A Shieling for Shieldfield. Shieling is a symbol for reclaiming land in Shieldfield and bringing it back into community use. Over a year long process Alison will use 'A Shieling for Shieldfield' as a case study to examine the symbol of Shieling for theologically reflecting and actively responding to the urgent issues of land, housing, urban development and gentrification in our region. At such a critical time for the region there is a distinct need for churches and faith projects to offer alternative, hopeful and theologically rooted models for our communities directly affected by these issues.

Fred Robinson, 'Principles and pragmatism: how should Christian organisations in the North East respond to the problem of ‘tainted money’?

Christian organisations need and use money; like everyone else, they operate in a money-driven economy. How do they think about raising money for the church roof or in support of the local church school or the food bank – and how should they be thinking about all that? How vigilant should churches and other Christian organisations be about the provenance of money which they’ve received through donations, grants or from investments? When should they refuse ‘tainted money’ --- or even give it back? But what do we mean by ‘tainted money’? Isn’t all money tainted? For example, should churches accept Lottery money or money from foundations linked to fossil fuels? Surely, Christian organisations ought to be more vigilant than secular organisations. Maybe they should be pragmatic – and focus on the good that money can do in the future, rather than the bad it may have been associated with in the past. Can good works cleanse money – or even help redeem the sinner who donates? Shouldn’t we be encouraging more philanthropy rather than discouraging it?

Prof Robinson’s interest in this stems from practical involvement with philanthropy in the North East, as an evaluator of regeneration programmes and as Chair of a local voluntary sector organisation. At the time, he was undertaking an evaluation of The Auckland Project -- a major regeneration scheme funded primarily by a Christian financier/philanthropist and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The problem of tainted money isn’t going to go away; in fact, it is becoming more important. There is an increasing emphasis on private sector money to pay for things that the state is less able, or less willing, to do. There are also now lively debates (especially in the US) about the provenance of money. There is the contemporary example of arts patronage from the Sackler family, for instance – money derived from the promotion of opioids. And there are the huge moral questions about how to

deal with history: notably, the legacy of slavery. Christian organisations are likely to be held to account more and more, and asked to justify historic benefactions and current fund-raising. He wanted to help them to be able to respond to scrutiny, to exercise wisdom – and to welcome transparency.

The first phase of the research sought to establish the state of play nationally and regionally, across the denominations, reviewing policies on donations, grants and investments. Alongside that, he looked at theological underpinnings to those policies – the Bible has a lot to say about money (and other tainted objects).

The second phase sought to look at local case studies in the North East. How do individual churches and other Christian organisations think about money? Are they ready to answer questions about the connections they have had with donors or are seeking to have?

The third phase sought to develop and disseminate guidelines and practical responses to difficult and perhaps unsettling questions – so that churches and other Christian organisations can live the Gospel and have a right relationship with money -- as far as that is possible.

A copy of the final report from this 2020-2022 fellowship can be obtained here .

Andrew Byers, 'Developing Indigenous Missional Leaders among the Free Churches of the North East'

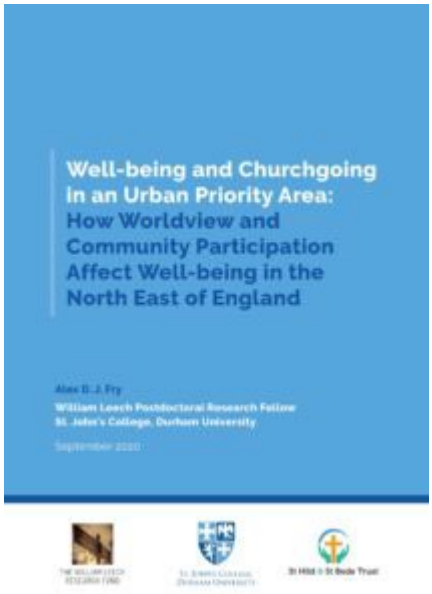
Societies thrive as churches thrive, embodying the ethics of Christ's kingdom and proclaiming a hopeful message of release through his Gospel. Since congregational resilience and flourishing are linked with healthy leadership, a region's well-being is strengthened by particular investments in leadership development. Yet key stakeholders among the free churches of the North East have identified that a leadership crisis is at hand.

Over six years prior to this research, which took place in 2020-2021, Andy Byers established at Cranmer Hall the "Free Church Track in Missional Leadership." The strapline of "forming missional leaders in the North East and for the North East" highlights the regional focus and implies a vision for developing church leaders who are not only committed to the North East but also indigenous to the area. Yet out of the forty students who joined the course, only half were reared locally, and less than half of that number were in a younger demographic. The research question he hoped to explore with the Leech Foundation is this: how might free churches effectively identify and train younger church leaders indigenous to the North East?

Three key areas require critical reflection. The first is theological. Less bound by ecclesial customs or anchored in a past increasingly viewed as irrelevant, free church leadership models may have appeal for younger Christians. Yet many younger believers within free church congregations are nonetheless decrying some leadership roles as too "traditional"; for such critics, the idea of the "pastor" is a managerial post committed to little more than maintaining a status quo unsustainable in a post-Christendom society. To what degree is free church leadership theology adequate for the missional task? Are younger Christians drawn to its standard models? How might churches and training institutions faithfully articulate the purpose and role of leadership for a new generation?

A second area is sociological. There are key cultural and social factors that may be limiting the recruitment of younger Christians into leadership trajectories. Drawing on Ruth Perrin's work on younger believers in the North East, he intended to investigate current trends, ideas, and values that have bearing on questions regarding vocation. What sociological realities in our cultural moment may be hindering the enlistment of potential leaders from those in the younger generation who remain in the pews?
A third area is missional. Though the study presupposes the advantage of raising up indigenous leaders from within the North East, this conviction begs close examination: do locals indeed possess a higher protentional for missional leadership than outsiders? Many free churches in the North East are thriving under leaders who have come from elsewhere. What challenges have these leaders faced, and how do their experiences inform a vision for indigenous leadership development? If regional flourishing is indeed bolstered by the flourishing of churches, then promoting healthy congregational leadership is an important venture aligned with the aims and values of the Leech Research Fund.

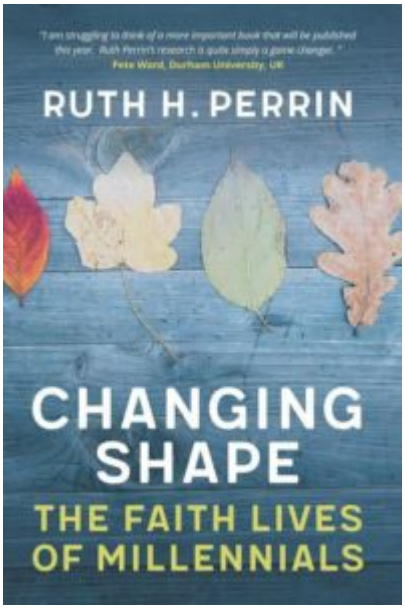
Alex Fry, 'Wellbeing and churchgoing: an exploration of the relationships between wellbeing, worldview and community participation in the North East of England'



The relationship between well-being and religion is well documented, with a plethora of studies affirming a positive relationship between the two, particularly within community-based faiths. These studies have concluded that there are a range of facets of religious belief and practice that can foster well-being. However, many of these have been quantitative in design, exploring statistical relationships between religion and well-being removed from the context of people's everyday lives. Such studies, therefore, do not readily account for the polyphony of ways in which people experience well-being and religiosity day-to-day. There is also a lack of research that explores the relationship between religion and well-being within areas of socio-economic deprivation where levels of well-being are typically lower.

This report (available here) explores the relationship between well-being and religious community participation in the North East of England in an area of socio-economic deprivation. It utilises a thematic narrative analysis of semi-structured interviews and structured observations to explore how members of two local churches experience well-being and the relationship between this and their participation in a local Christian community. By exploring how the relationship between the two manifests in situ, the report makes a series of tailor-made recommendations for how greater levels of well-being may be fostered within those communities. A further journal article on the role of spiritual capital and social capital in enabling resources for subjective well-being based on the research was published in the Journal of Spirituality and Mental Health, available open-access here. There is also a final journal article on wellbeing and religious community participation in areas of socio-economic deprivation here.

Ruth Perrin, ‘How faith changes: exploring the experiences of young adults in North East England’



It is well documented that young adults are a small demographic group within the UK church and that there are many social, economic, emotional and spiritual challenges for the generation known as Gen Y or Millennials. It is also widely recognised that the twenties are a period of identity formation and ‘meaning making’ which includes a consolidation or reformation of the religious beliefs of childhood and youth. This research project explored how young adults within the region, who had a faith at 20, have experienced the subsequent decade, and how that has affected their beliefs.

Ruth interviewed almost 50 young adults aged 29-37 about their experiences of life, church and faith during their twenties. Participants were recruited from a variety of churches (and snowball sampling used for those who no longer have a faith or are de-churched). Approximately a third were from Newcastle, a third from the Tees Valley and a third from Northumberland in order to provide a picture of experiences from across the region.

Changing Shape: The Faith Life of Millennials (London: SCM Press, 2020), which details the findings, is available here.

Chris Beales, ‘Building new communities in North East England: challenging church and society

Across the North East of England, large numbers of new homes are being built. Chris’ research identified significant new housing developments being built or planned in each of the 12 local authority areas across the region. The challenge for us all is how to “build good community” and my aim has been to lay the foundations for new strategic thinking and action by Churches and others, working with landowners, builders, planners, communities and all involved.

After a brief summary of the current housing situation across the country and in North East England – and the huge challenges facing Church and society – Chris surveyed the history of housing and communities in the region since the first half of the nineteenth century and then looked, in particular, at some significant developments since the Second World War. In exploring present and future trends and requirements, Chris described offsite construction and modular housing initiatives and also some innovative ideas to address housing need. He explored at some length what this all means for the Churches and for effective Christian engagement, before concluding: “If ‘Christian Hope’ is to have real meaning and substance in relation to housing and community – and especially new housing developments – it must be rooted, earthed, realised, incarnated in practical, purposeful action. The time has come to put community development (in all its meanings) at the heart of Christian life and witness.”

Two workshops were held, in Newcastle and Darlington, on the theme of *A House or a Home?* – and these are summarised in his report (available here).

Matt Wilson, ‘Common wealth: can Giving Circles energise churches in supporting their communities financially?’

Matt’s area of study was Money, and our relationship to it as Christian communities. Two parallel strands of work were involved…

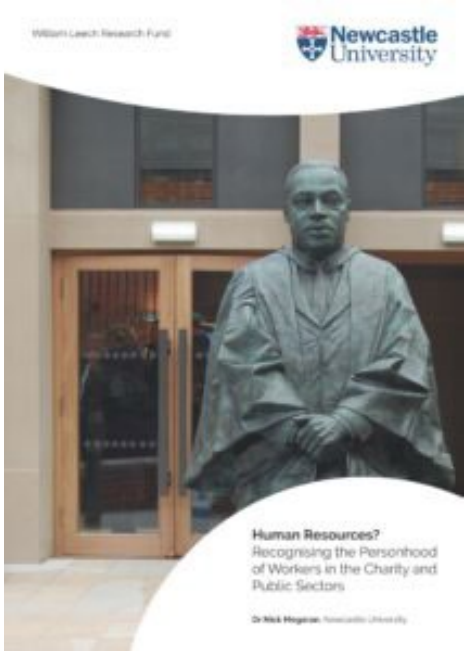
Strand A) Theology: Matt looked at the story that the Bible (especially the New Testament) is telling in relation to money – and how this contrasts with the story the world tells us. This involved considering visions of abundance vs scarcity, and looking at biblical patterns of giving and sharing, such as the early church in Jerusalem, which maintained a commitment to hold resources ‘in common’ so that ‘there was no needy person among them’ (Acts 4:34) .

Strand B) Praxis: Matt looked at emerging practices of ‘financial discipleship’ that the contemporary Christian community can be involved in, ways of giving and sharing that are consistent with the biblical narrative. In particular Matt looked at the possibilities afforded by the relatively new global phenomenon of ‘Giving Circles’ – groups of people who pool their giving to achieve greater impact. This included understanding the ethos and structure of various Giving Circle models, as well as their impact – upon the group members themselves, and also upon the communities and causes that benefit from their generosity.

A group of North East clergy from a range of Christian traditions were involved in the research, periodically offering feedback and challenge in order to ensure that the final publication will be of maximum benefit to local churches and local communities.

Nick Megoran, '"Image of God" or "human resource"? Work and personhood in the vocational sector in North East England'

Nick's William Leech Research Fellowship investigated how Human Resource Management conceptualises and treats 'the human' in the public and vocational sectors in the North East of England.

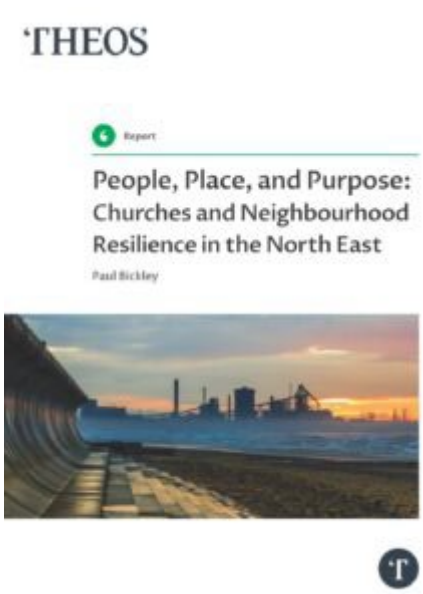


It asked how we can create more life-enhancing and humane workplaces. We may take for granted the existence of an 'HR' department, but Human Resource Management (HRM) was a controversial idea that rose to prominence only in the 1980s. Its goal was to align work practices with strategic goals set by managers, through the creation of a more compliant workforce.

Although specific practical and ethical aspects of HRM have come under increasing scrutiny, we still lack an understanding of how fundamental questions of what it means to be human are crucial to these debates about HRM and how staff can feel valued and work meaningfully in an organisation. 'Human resource' is an ambiguous term, implying either a positive image of the employee as a valuable resource, or their instrumentalization and thus dehumanisation. In this research, the idea of humans as a 'resource' is brought into conversation with the Biblical contention that humans are created *imago Dei*, in the image of God. This research develops the ethical implications of *imago Dei* in the workplace by drawing on the African-American theological tradition as articulated and deployed politically by William Douglass and Martin Luther King, which emphasises *dignity* and its political implications (Wills, 2009). Nick investigated churches, secondary schools, and higher education. He analysed HRM documents and practices, interviewing managers, and conducting visual career timeline interviews with employees. This is an important topic generally, but it matters particularly for the North East, because we are more dependent on public sector

employment that any other region in England. 20.2% of employees in our region [at the time of the study] work in the public sector: the figure for London is 14.5%.

Nick's report, *Human Resources? Recognising the Personhood of Workers in the Charity and Public Sectors* is available here.



Paul Bickley, 'The spirit of resilience'

The 2008 recession and the subsequent need to bear down on public spending have prompted many thinkers and policy makers to talk about the need for 'community resilience' – the ability to 'bounce back' in times of adversity. Many have critiqued the concept, arguing that it creates an expectation that communities must learn how to survive, without structurally addressing underlying vulnerabilities.

In resilience thinking there is often a strong emphasis on economic and financial dimensions, but some models have been extended beyond these, allowing for the significance of family, friendship, neighbourhood networks of support. On an individual level, it is also acknowledged that spirituality and religious beliefs can support resilience. However, there has been little consideration of how churches contribute to wider community resilience in the UK context.

The aim of the project was to examine the relationship between churches and community resilience. Do they contribute to it and, if so, how?

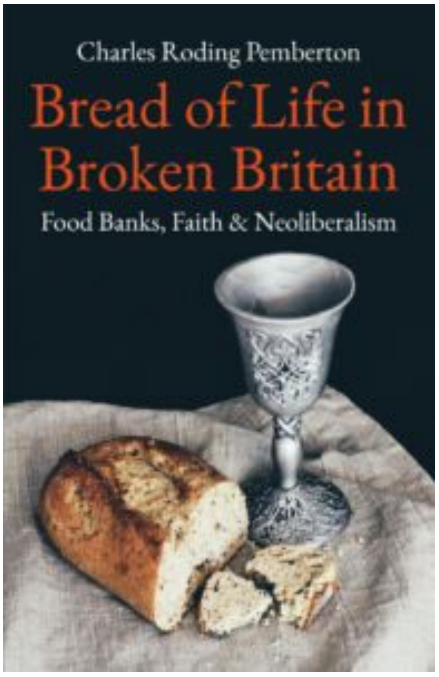
The research project:

- Brought the idea of community and neighbourhood resilience into dialogue with theological reflection around the ministry of local churches, looking to find both the resonances and dissonances;

- Considered how the Christian ideas of suffering, endurance and hope tangibly shape the ministry of churches in areas of high deprivation and contribute to a wider resilience in the community;
- Engaged a number of churches in the North East in a participative programme of research developed to uncover how congregations contribute to community resilience and to help them achieve greater understanding and traction in their ministry;
- Developed proposals on how churches and policy makers could think and act in ways which recognise the public significance of the ministry of churches.

Paul's report is available here.

Charles Pemberton, 'Foodbanks and theology: a study of County Durham Foodbanks'



Charles Pemberton held a research fellowship between 2016-2017. His research is concerned with the return of Christian social service to the centre of British political rhetoric and welfare through the emergence of the foodbank movement has elicited a range of ecclesial responses.

These church policy documents, from '*Hungry for More*' to '*Walking the Breadline*', give preliminary rationales lodged in theological anthropology, Christian ontology and ecclesiological praxis for the defence and supersession of contemporary foodbank practices. However, in their urgency and brevity these church responses fail to systematically integrate political theory and social analysis, nor do they undertake a sustained integration of the recent gains in political theology with the realities of our current 'mixed economy of welfare'. The Foodbanks and Theology project addressed

this current impasse by developing new resources for the North-East's foodbank network in the form of an advanced volunteer training program, by holding a national conference in the North-East on religious identity and food aid, and by collecting ethnographic data in the North-East which will be used in a forthcoming monograph.

Working with County Durham Foodbanks (a subsidiary of Durham Christian Partnership and affiliate of the Trussell Trust) between April 2016 and September 2017, this project drew on interviews with foodbank users and volunteers to defend and advance a Christian social vision beyond emergency food provision. In the interviews conducted with those using foodbanks across the North-East it was found that those accessing foodbank services not only face insecure working environments and starvation level benefits, they also disproportionately suffer from mental and physical ailments and social isolation. Politically and theologically the questions posed by British foodbanks include not only the just distribution or redistribution of resources but also the prevalence of loneliness in British society and the contemporary marginalisation of disabled people.

A recent journal article ('Between Ecclesiology and Ontology: A Response to Chris Allen on British Food Banks', in *Political Theology*) discusses these social trends, analyses their political ramifications and reads them in the light of contemporary 'radical orthodox' political theology and the historic resources of the Liberation Theology tradition. The full findings are discussed in *Bread of Life in Broken Britain: Foodbanks, Faith and Neoliberalism*, published by SCM Press in 2020 and available here.

David Barclay and Andrew Orton

‘Money Talks: Christian Responses to Debt in the North East and London’

David Barclay and Andrew Orton held a research fellowship from January 2015 – December 2016. Andrew is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at Durham University, and David is now a Partner in the Good Faith Partnership , having been working with the Centre for Theology and Community during the research.

Their research focused on theological understandings of everyday responses to money issues facing people in local church congregations in the North East (and some comparators in London), and those that they work with through their wider social engagement. The research widely engaged with local participants to support their reflection on these issues, and consider what action they might take in relation to them, as reflected in the final report which is available here. The research also resulted in a production of a shared guide for churches on the different forms of action that they can take, and the support available from national organisations to do this; this resource is available here.

The Revd Dr David Goodhew, 'New Churches in the North East'

David Goodhew held a Leech Fellowship between 2014 and 2015, researching new churches in the North East of England, with particular reference to black and minority ethnic Christians. This research was published in the form of the report, *New Churches in the North East*, which is available online, here.

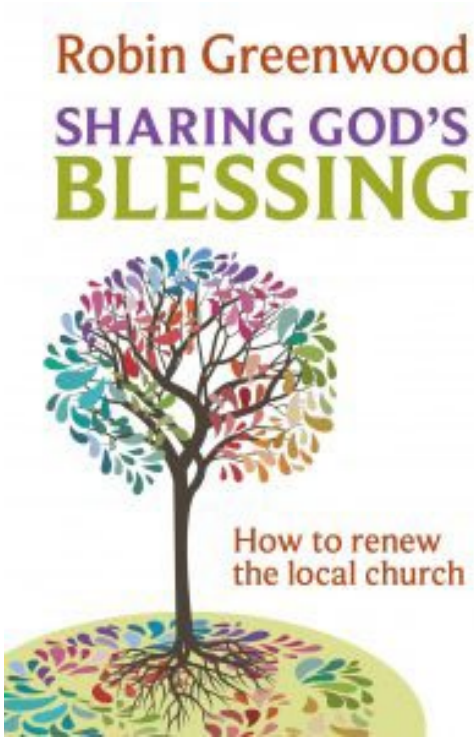
Using a strict definition of what counts as a 'new church', the research found that 125 new congregations were founded in the North East region between 1980 and 2015, whose combined usual Sunday attendance is 12,000 people. In two thirds of these new churches a significant proportion of worshippers come from black or minority ethnic communities. There has been considerable church decline in the North East in recent decades, but significant church growth is happening as well. The research shows that current thinking on secularisation tends to overstate decline and gives insights into how wider society and the Christian church in the North East have changed markedly in the recent decades.

The findings of New Churches in the North East have been used in a range of scholarly and popular publications commended by a range of senior scholars. Professor Grace Davie, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Exeter comments:
"'New churches' are an important element in the current debate about religion in Britain, a field in which the detail matters. *New Churches in the North East* is full of such detail, with respect to both the North East itself and to the very varied churches that have established themselves there in recent decades. I recommend it warmly to anyone with an interest in the religious life of the region and indeed the country as a whole."

The report was the focus of a conference at St Johns College, Durham late in 2015 and its findings have been presented to a range of meetings of lay and ordained church leaders in the region.

David Goodhew was Director of Ministerial Practice at Cranmer Hall, part of St Johns College, Durham University where he also oversaw the Centre for Church Growth Research. The Centre's publications include *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion, 1980 to the Present,* (Routledge 2017) and *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches, 1980 to the Present* (Routledge, 2018).

The Revd Canon Dr Robin Greenwood, 'How to renew the local church'



Dr Robin Greenwood held a Fellowship between 2013 and 2015 on the theme of 'Blessing and Conversation as Leading Themes in Renewing the Local Church'. The primary object of his research was to walk as "companion" with several local churches (ecumenically) primarily in the North East of England – though others (ecumenically) further afield joined in – to experiment with approaches to building confidence and capacity for being Church in transitional and challenging times. It was intended as an antidote to churches living with failure, nostalgia and pathos as a negative response to lost certainties and assumptions.

His approach centred on researching *with* rather than *on* churches, engaging churches in a participatory action research project that did not propose a blueprint for what churches should be and did not assume traditional models of 'strong leadership',

but trusted that people participate in the life of God. What emerged was the value not just of constant organizational change, but the more holistic and less clearly tangible values of living from blessing, companionship, journeying and conversation-based transformation.

A more detailed report is available here. The full results of the research were published by SPCK in 2016 as *Sharing God's Blessing: How to Renew the Local Church*.

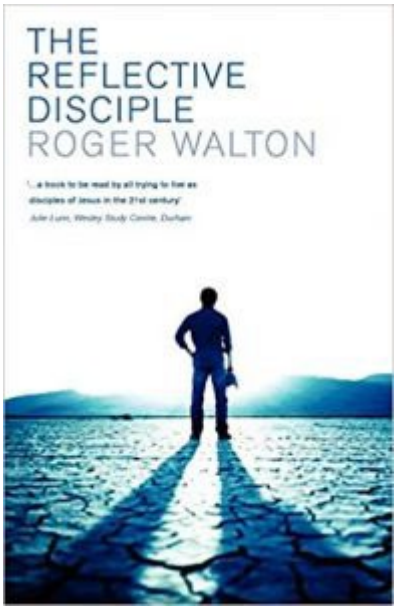
Dr Jamie Harrison, 'The Church and healing in the North East'

In 2012-13 the Fellowship was held by Dr Jamie Harrison. Jamie is a GP in Durham and formerly Deputy Director of the Postgraduate School of Primary Care, NHS Northern Deanery. He is married to Anne and they have three grown up children. He was previously a GP Advisor to the Department of Health and has been a Lay Member of the Church of England's General Synod since 1995.

The research is concerned with exploring perceptions of healing amongst church ministers in the North East. In conjunction with his research assistant Dr Rich Bregazzi, a series of in-depth interviews has taken place, involving a variety of clergy from across the denominations. In addition, Jamie has undertaken structured conversations with a number of senior church leaders and theologians. The aim is to explore how the ministry of healing is perceived within certain church traditions and to discuss with leaders how they see healing manifest and managed – to include matters of training, governance and instrumentality. Jamie is keen to reflect on current practices of healing in the light of New Testament patterns, as well as in relation to modern expressions of health care as seen in the NHS.

The report is available here. Jamie can be contacted via email at James.Harrison@durham.ac.uk.

The Revd Dr Roger Walton, ‘Reflective discipleship’



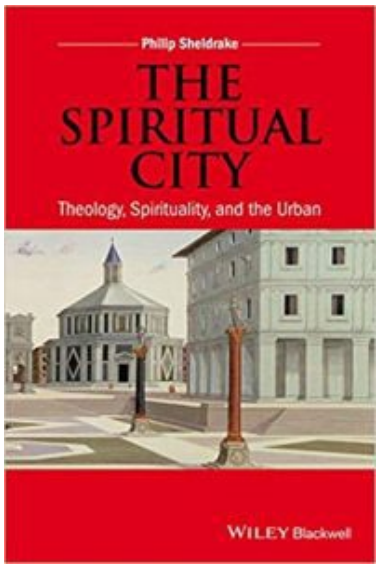
From 2010-2011 the Research Fellowship was carried out by the Revd Dr Roger Walton. Roger is a Methodist minister and former Director of the Wesley Study Centre, Durham. He is married to Marion and they have two grown up children. Before directing the Wesley Study Centre, he worked for the central offices of the Methodist Church with responsibility for Adult Learning and Training, having served three circuits, in Wolverhampton, Liverpool and St Albans areas.

The research was concerned with new patterns of discipleship nurture and support. Roger was particularly interested in groups that sustain and enable the individual discipleship of members. The aim was to explore what was happening across the Christian churches in the North East and to discuss with individuals and groups how they saw their discipleship and what structures helped and strengthened their Christian living, in home, community and employment. Roger heard from individuals, ministers and groups who were intentionally involved in groups seeking to strengthen the living out of Christian faith and the practice of being a follower of Jesus in today’s world.

Roger’s book *The Reflective Disciple* (Epworth Press) was published in 2009 and the investigation builds on this earlier work.

The research was carried out through Durham University and Roger was based in the Department of Theology and Religion. Roger was President of the Methodist Conference in 2016-17.

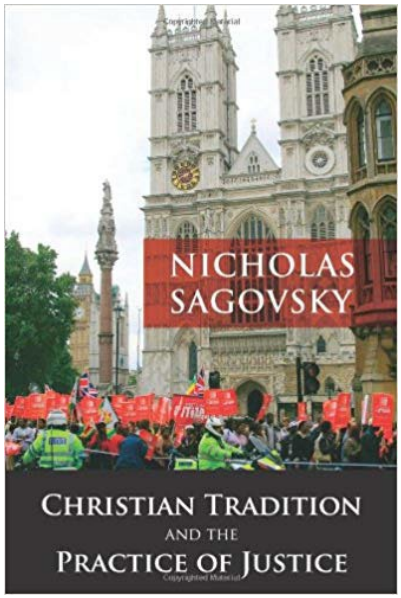
Professor Philip Sheldrake, ‘Spirituality and the city’



Professor Philip Sheldrake held the Leech chair from 2003-2008, based in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University. As part of his work he collaborated throughout with the Diocese of Newcastle’s Urban Theology Project in Byker, East Newcastle, and also with the Centre for the Study of Cities & Regions of the Dept of Geography, the Institute of Advanced Study and St Chad’s College in organizing the 2007 international colloquium on “Faith & Spirituality in the Postsecular City”.

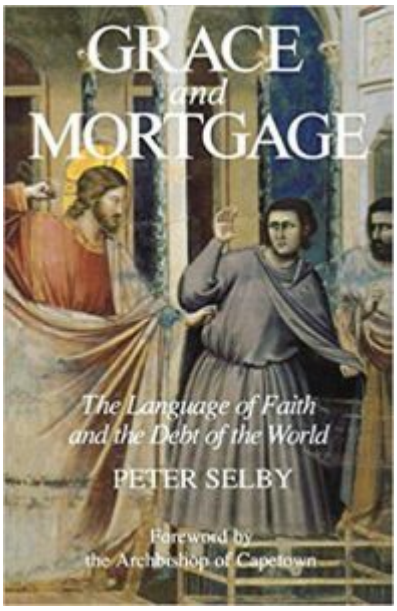
He describes his work as “focusing specially on the public dimensions of spirituality, and on spirituality in relation to cities, combining historical, theological and urban studies perspectives”. Philip’s Leech research contributed to some aspects of his book *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology & Social Practice* (Paulist Press, New York, 2010). However, the main book arising from the Leech Fellowship is *A Spiritual City: Theology, Spirituality & The Urban*. This was published by Wiley-Blackwell in April, 2014 and received very favourable reviews. After an introduction on why the meaning and future of cities is critically important, and on what the Christian tradition can contribute, the first part examines important examples of urban thought and practice in Christian tradition. The second part reflects on critical themes from a theological-spirituality perspective: Place & Identity; Community; Reconciliation & Hospitality and Urban Values. Philip became Senior Research Fellow in the Cambridge Theological Federation, and Senior Research Associate of the Von Hugel Institute at St Edmund’s College, which specialises in the Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic social thought. He is also part-time Professor of Christian Spirituality at the graduate Oblate School of Theology, San Antonio TX, and a Research Fellow in the multidisciplinary Global Cities Initiative at Georgetown University, Washington DC.

Professor Canon Nicholas Sagovsky, 'Christian Tradition and the Practice of Justice'



Canon Nicholas Sagovsky occupied the Fellowship from 1997-2002. He later became Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey and then Whitelands Professorial Fellow at Roehampton University. Following the fellowship, he wrote: 'The William Leech Fellowship gave me a chance to do theological research from a base in the North-East, and to be involved in the life of the churches regionally. Most of the research for *Christian Tradition and the Practice of Justice* (SPCK, 2008) was done in those years (1997-2002) and it is now the backdrop to any contribution I can make in theological reflection on issues in public life. The thinking I did at that time has enabled me to make a contribution at national level on a range of issues concerning justice: asylum, the banking crisis (I knew a good deal about Northern Rock!), human rights, inequality etc. As William Leech Professor, I was also responsible for the MA in Applied Christian Theology at Newcastle University, which gave me an opportunity to contribute to ministerial training regionally. I taught on the Durham MA, where I could make a contribution in an ecumenical context. I was also Chair of the West End Refugee Service, with which I keep continuing links as a Patron. All in all, it was a very rich time for me – a time of preparation for the exciting and demanding jobs I later had. When I celebrated the Eucharist in Westminster Abbey, I could look up at the great window in the South Transept, and there, at the bottom right hand corner, St Aidan would be looking down. I remain deeply thankful for all I learnt in the North East and am still a frequent visitor, since my wife and I have a home near Lindisfarne. There is just one more special link: I am now a Trustee of SPCK, for which William Leech made (as he did with the Fellowship) generous and continuing provision.'

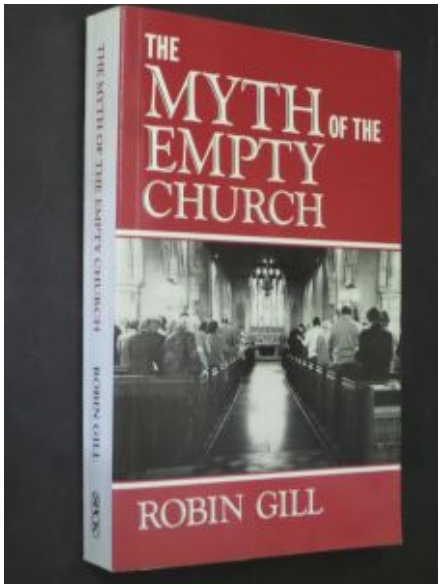
The Right Revd Dr Peter Selby, ‘Grace and mortgage: theological reflection on debt’



The Right Revd Dr Peter Selby held the Fellowship between 1992 and 1997 after a period as Area Bishop of Kingston on Thames.

He writes: ‘For someone like me who had had quite a demanding role in the Church as a suffragan bishop, the William Leech Fellowship was life-changing: it was the chance – indeed the task – of thinking deeply about faith in relation to an aspect of life, in my case debt and credit that was so nourishing. I could draw on practical examples of inner city experience in the north-east as well as the shared wisdom of the management committee and the Department of Theology at Durham; together these elements made for a type and depth of theological reflection that I could not have managed otherwise. My subsequent ministry has been deeply marked by those privileged years in the North East.”

Peter was Bishop of Worcester between 1997 and 2007. His work on debt and credit appeared as *Grace and Mortgage: Language of Faith and Debt of the World* (1997, re-issued in 2007) – a work which was influential in the Jubilee 2000 campaign which drew attention to the crisis of unrepayable debt facing the poorest nations. He is an Honorary Professor of Worcester University and an Honorary Visiting Professor in Religious Studies at King’s College London.



Professor Robin Gill, ‘The Myth of the Empty Church’

Professor Robin Gill was the first Fellow (1988-1992).

He writes: ‘During the four years I held the Fellowship I did extensive research on why local churches, first in the North East and then around the whole country, flourish or decline.

This led to the publication of *The Myth of the Empty Church* (SPCK 1993), subsequently revised as *The ‘Empty’ Church Revisited (*Ashgate 2003). Both of these books have had a significant impact upon the Church of England’s (and that of other denominations) current mission strategy.’ As well as establishing an M.A. at Newcastle, which usefully trained local clergy of all denominations, he also developed a strong interest in medical ethics, chairing the North East Medical Ethics Group (first established by Archbishop John Habgood), and reporting some its findings in *Christian Ethics in Secular Worlds* (T&T Clark 1991). This interest led directly to his chairmanship (1993-2006) of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Medical Ethics Advisory Group and his long-standing membership of the BMA Medical Ethics Committee. After his Leech Fellowship Robin became the first Michael Ramsey Professor of Modern Theology in the University of Kent.

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