

**DECEMBER 2023 | Railway Housing Association**



## No resting on The Laurels

Page 4

**Photography  
competition**

Page 3

**Crafty  
residents**

Page 8

**Resident  
stories**

Page 10

**Festive  
recipe**

Page 12



## Stock condition survey

As part of future investment plans, we have asked a company called Pennington Choices to survey our entire housing stock between September 2023 and March 2024.

You will all receive, or already have received, a letter about this stock condition survey and some of you will have had this survey carried out.

For those still waiting, as per our letter, the survey includes a brief inspection of your home, looking at the external features and internal components such as the kitchen, bathroom, and boiler to understand future maintenance needs. The survey will take up to 30 minutes.

“

All our surveyors carry an identification card, which you should ask to see before giving anyone access to your home.

”

All our surveyors carry an identification card, which you should ask to see before giving anyone access to your home. The surveyor's identification can also be checked using the Freephone number on the letter you were sent.

We would be grateful if you would allow Pennington Choices access to your home in order for this important work which will help plan the type of works required for your home in the future. We thank you for your cooperation.

## On the right track

September marked my six-month anniversary as Railway Housing Association's Chief Executive and if I was asked to summarise what I have learned in this period is that we have a rich, unique legacy with much to be proud of, but with a lot still to do.

I have heard this directly from you, having visited many of our schemes/properties, and hearing about what life is like as a Railway Housing Association resident – and I have made a commitment to continue these visits every month.

One thing I have heard quite consistently is that you want investment in our existing homes so one of the key drivers is understanding where we are at in terms of these properties and the investment we need to make in the future.

As part of this, we started a full stock condition survey in September 2023 and will be visiting every single home between then and March 2024. This will give us a much stronger understanding of our homes and where we need to make future investment.

There's a separate article about the survey on the left, but please do cooperate with the company carrying out the survey on our behalf as it is very important.

There's also still work to do on how we engage with our residents and how we hear your voice, and that will be one of the key pillars of an improvement plan we are starting to put together, working with our Board.

We want to become even better on how we hear your thoughts, opinions and how we can make improvements, and that will become one of the main themes of our resident event in 2024 and lead to other opportunities for resident involvement.

“

We want to become even better on how we hear your thoughts, opinions and how we can make improvements

”

It's important to stress that this will not be a one-stop-shop but a continual process of us hearing, taking on board and acting upon what you are telling us are priorities for you in how we move forward as a business.

As we enter 2024, you will see a plan that will set out what our focus will be, what we hope to achieve and how we will achieve it – to ensure we remain on the right track going forward.

We will, of course, keep you fully updated on our progress and please do not hesitate to email me at [msugden@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:msugden@railwayha.co.uk) if you have any questions, thoughts or suggestions, as these are always welcome.

Have a lovely Christmas and New Year  
**Matt**



## Snapping up the prize

Caroline Hague's wintry picture of an iconic landmark in her home city has resulted in her winning our 2023/24 annual report photography competition.

This year's entries were of a very high quality, but Caroline's photography of snow swept York with the historic York Minster in the background was deemed to be the standout image by our resident judging panel.

This means Caroline's picture now adorns the front cover of our 2024 calendar (delivered with this newsletter) and is, aptly, the picture for the month of December. She has also received £100.

Caroline says: "I have one of the latest Samsung smartphones and am always taking pictures with it when I am out and about.

"I have lost track of the number of times I have photographed the Minster because it's always in view when I pick up my husband, who works as a bus driver in York.

“

I didn't enter expecting to win because there are so many good photographs taken for the calendar

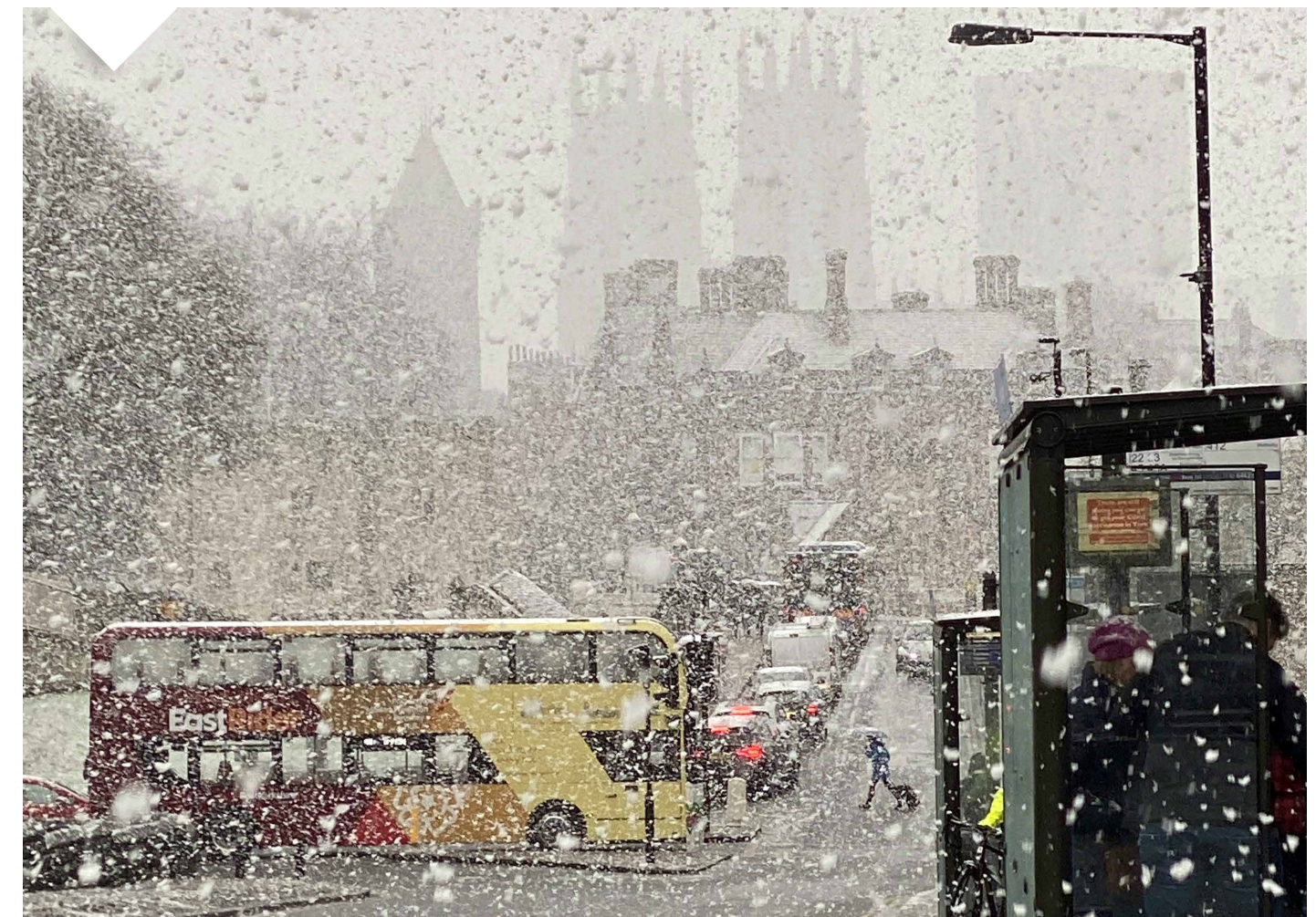
”

"That day in particular stood out because it's rare to see snow like that in York, so I was very happy with the result."

Caroline lives in one of our homes in York and works as an Audio Typist at York Hospital.

"I didn't enter expecting to win because there are so many good photographs taken for the calendar, so it was a really nice feeling when I discovered mine had been chosen."

Look out for details of our 2024/25 annual report photography competition in the spring edition of RHA News.





“

We are very proud of the development and it's fantastic to see the community spirit which has been established there.”

”

## A community hub

**We think comedy legend Stan Laurel would have approved of the way residents living in our new housing scheme on the site of his former school have come together to form a new community.**

People living in 'The Laurels' in Bishop Auckland recently held a coffee morning for Macmillan Cancer Support.

The event, which took place in the communal area of the main apartment building – the front of which was sympathetically restored to reflect its Grade 2 listed status – was well attended, with residents from the apartments and bungalows being joined by family, friends, and members of the local community.

Residents donated various prizes for a raffle and cakes were supplied free of charge by several local businesses – Longstaff's Family Bakers, Cooplands and The Auckland Cup Cake Co - and at the end of the morning a fantastic £370 had been raised for Macmillan.

This was just the latest social event organised by the residents living in the apartments, most of whom moved in earlier in 2023.

During that time, new friendships have been established, and the scheme has already become a real hub of the community.

Carole Valente, Ann Santon, and Pat Jenkinson have taken the lead on organising the social events on behalf of the residents at The Laurels.

“

It's become a real hub for everyone, and the Macmillan coffee morning was our biggest and best event yet.

”

Carole said: “We got to know each other because we moved in at the same and having the communal lounge meant we could hold events and activities which bring everyone together.

“It's become a real hub for everyone, and the Macmillan coffee morning was our biggest and best event yet.

“We had fantastic support from residents, families and friends and we were touched by the kind generosity of the local businesses.”



As well as new friendships, The Laurels has also brought together existing friends and family under one roof.

An example being 90-year-old Loretta Santon whose son Steven lives above her in the two-storey apartment block. Lauretta's friend Stan Guy also moved in at the same time as her.

Loretta said: “My family home in Bishop Auckland was getting too much for me to maintain so downsizing to a ground floor apartment in the centre of town has been perfect for me.

“I am surrounded by family and friends so couldn't be happier.”

Stan Laurel attended King James School as a boarder, between 1902 and 1903. The part of the building where the communal lounge is situated was known as The Laurel Building after the school's most famous pupil.



“

It's clear The Laurels has become a real hub and it's heartening to see new friendships being formed and existing friendships continuing to blossom

”





## Digital or print?

As part of our service improvement plan, we are looking closely at how we communicate with our residents to ensure you are receiving the very best value for your money.

Currently, we print and mail a copy of RHA News, along with other publications such as Maintenance Mail and our Annual Report, to every one of our near 1,700 homes. This has an obvious financial cost, as well as an environmental consideration in that it involves the use of ink and paper.

We currently hold around 900 email addresses for our residents and one potential idea for the future is that we could email a digital version of RHA News to residents on our database. This would be the same great content, but would deliver savings of at least £5,160 a year.

### Prefer a paper copy?

We will be more than happy to continue sending paper copies to those who would prefer this, but we would be grateful if you could email: [somar@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:somar@railwayha.co.uk) or call Sahar on Freephone 0800 028 7428 to confirm this as your preference.



“we want to capture as many voices as we can, to ensure we put resident engagement at the heart of everything we do.”

## Starting the conversation

By Sahar Omar, Resident Involvement & Performance Information Officer

**Although you may not be aware, in one way or another, all of you could be described as ‘involved’ residents of Railway Housing Association.**

That’s because whenever you call, text, or email us, that is a form of involvement, whether it’s to report a repair, answer a survey or simply ask us a question.

Resident involvement is about every single one of you and as part of our new ‘Big Conversation’ initiative, we want to capture as many voices as we can, to ensure we put resident engagement at the heart of everything we do.

One of the ways we can do this is through the increased use of digital technology, so it makes communicating with us as a quick, easy, and simple as possible. For example, we currently hold around 900 email addresses for our residents and are already experiencing much better responses when we communicate this way than the more traditional methods.

However, we do, of course, recognise that some of you prefer more traditional methods and we remain more than happy to write, call, or visit you if it ensures you remain engaged with us.

One of the new ‘conversations’ we are hoping to have with you is through the setting up of a new resident experience group. This won’t be a group where we refer to words such as agendas, meetings and terms and conditions, but taking more of a fluid, flexible approach and asking you to comment on issues which are particularly relevant to you and where you live.

We could do this, for example, digitally via an email survey, video call, or at a coffee morning or local drop-in event, the possibilities are endless.

Regardless of how we hold these conversations, we see them as a never-ending process aimed at helping us discover what makes you proud, what issues you are facing and ultimately how we can improve to make your experience with us the very best it can be.

If you would like to speak to me about any part of resident involvement/engagement, I would love to hear from you via email [somar@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:somar@railwayha.co.uk) or Freephone 0800 0287428.

## Everybody needs Good Neighbours

**A man has credited his neighbour with doing “wonders” for his mental health – one of the many reasons why she was the overwhelming choice of residents to receive this year’s good neighbour of the year award.**

The 2023 award has been made to Susan Outhwaite, who lives in one of our homes in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire.

The retired former local authority cook was nominated by her neighbour James Bland.

He said: “All of my neighbours have been friendly and welcoming since the day I moved in but I nominated Susan in particular for the extra care and effort she makes with me.

“I am sure she has no idea of the massive positive difference her efforts have made to me.”

”

“On many occasions she has gone out of her way to help me with, such as putting the bins out, grocery shopping and ordering & collecting my prescriptions, all things I often struggle with due to serious mobility issues.

“One of the most important and valuable things she does is engage in fun, friendly and easy conversation. This does wonders for my mental health, as without these interactions I would likely not speak, face to face, with anyone for weeks.

“I am sure she has no idea of the massive positive difference her efforts have made to me.”

Susan, who was selected by members of our Resident Forum from the many nominations made this year, receives a trophy and £100 worth of shopping vouchers.

“I was very surprised when I discovered I had won the award because helping people is just in my nature,” she says modestly.

“It was lovely of James to nominate me. He is a very nice person and his words about me mean a lot.”

Matt Sugden, Railway Housing Association Chief Executive, said: “It’s clear Susan has helped James in so many different ways and she is a perfect example of the kind-hearted people we have in our homes who go above and beyond to help others.”

Look out for details of our 2024 competition in the spring edition of RHA News.

### Previous winners

**We would also like to use this edition of RHA News to congratulate the winners of our 2021 and 2022 Good Neighbour of the Year award.**

In 2021, the award went to Pat Clarkson (below), who was nominated by several of her neighbours, including Eddie and Pat Flory, who said “we can’t say enough to sing her praises”.

In 2022, the award went to Ken Rollinson (right), of York, who was nominated by his neighbours Brenda Love and Miriam Bright, who described him as “one in a million”.





# Crafty residents

**Our first-ever residents' crafting competition was a huge success, with the quality of the entries so high it made the judges' job a very difficult one indeed.**

The competition was open to all our residents and we asked for examples of any kind of crafts, from portrait painting through to knitting and carpentry.

Judging was carried out by members of our Residents' Forum and first prize went to Charles Bainbridge (pictured below), who lives in Gateshead.

His acrylic painting of the steam locomotive Mallard wowed the judges, who felt he was the deserving winner of the top prize of £75 of Love to Shop vouchers.

Charles said: "You can see the East Coast mainline from my window and you often see enthusiasts on a bridge train spotting. The Flying Scotsman and Mallard have both used the line so that's where my inspiration came from."



Second prize (and a £50 voucher) went to Meena Kiru, from York, for her lovely patchwork quilt.

She said: "It's nice when people appreciate your work and I would like to say a big thank you to Railway Housing Association for organising this competition and encouraging their residents to carry on with their skills and hobbies."

Third prize (and a £25 voucher) went to Steve Summers, from York for his abstract acrylic painting.

He said: "It's the first time I've ever entered an art competition, so I was really pleased. My son says I can now call myself an award-winning artist!"

Thank you to everyone who entered this year's competition and please look out for details of our 2024 competition in the spring.

You can read more about our 'crafty' residents Charles, Meena and Steve over the following pages.

## Charles's story

**Having travelled the world with the Royal Navy, late-blooming artist Charles Bainbridge has plenty of memories to draw on for his paintings.**

And winning our first crafting competition was a remarkable achievement for Charles, 75, who only took up painting when he retired at 63.

"I was looking after my mum and the Gateshead Carers Association, who used to put on some respite events for carers, asked if I'd be interested in trying a new art class," recalls Charles.

“I hadn't painted since leaving school to join the navy at 15

"I hadn't painted since leaving school to join the navy at 15 but my motto has always been to give things a go and I'm glad I did."

During his time in the navy Charles served on the Ark Royal and HMS Hermes, visiting Singapore, Hong Kong, Fort Lauderdale US, Canada, Australia, and many other places, and the first painting he ever did was of a tall ship.

When he came out of the navy after 12 years he worked as a carpenter and then later in the oil storage industry in London and finally as a courier and driver.

Also a keen gardener, he's combined this with his carpentry skills to create a terraced garden with an artist's shed in a prime spot at his Railway Housing Association home.

"The front opens out so allows plenty of light and room to work in," said Charles whose work has sold locally and who is currently working on a commission of a Buddhist temple.

And he has also used his artistic skills to repaint the original plaque on his home with gold lettering to mark its 100th anniversary.



## Meena's story

**Meena Kiru first learned sewing skills as a girl growing up in Sri Lanka and readily admits she is a perfectionist when it comes to her needlework, undoing and starting again if ever she makes the slightest mistake.**

She became a teacher and would regularly make all the costumes for school plays as well as clothing for her family and friends.

In 1991 after her husband had sadly passed away in his fifties, Meena moved to the UK to be nearer her daughter Sashi in York. She also has a son Nithy in New Zealand. It was in York that she first tried her hand at a new skill – quilting.

"I used to go to a coffee morning and a friend there had heard I did needlework and suggested I have a go at quilting," said Meena. "It's something I found I really enjoyed. In 2018 I had both knees replaced so can't get out that much and I need to be doing something or I'd get bored."

“I always do things by hand, not a machine, and get a great sense of satisfaction when a piece is finished.

Word of Meena's skill as a quilter has spread and she often gets requests from people. Her daughter gives her ideas and encouragement and takes her out to buy any materials she needs for her hobby.

"Ever since I was a child I have enjoyed taking on a challenge," said Meena. "I always do things by hand, not a machine, and get a great sense of satisfaction when a piece is finished. It's nice when people appreciate your work."



## Steve's story

**When an ankle operation meant Steve Summers had to spend months in a wheelchair, he thought he'd put the time to good use and take up painting.**

Steve, 67, has always been interested in art and liked drawing at school but after his parents said he'd never make a living from it he decided against art college and instead studied building trades at college.

“it was only last year that I really took up painting

"I became a self-employed builder and when you are working and have a young family you just don't have time to devote to art," said Steve. "I used to draw pictures for the children and then grandchildren but it was only last year that I really took up painting."

Many years working on building sites and playing football took its toll on Steve's body and he developed rheumatoid arthritis which required surgery.

"My ankle had to be completely re-built and I've been told there's now £8,000 of titanium in there," said Steve.

"I was really grateful for my flat because it is on the ground floor with good amenities and big enough to allow me to get round in a wheelchair. There's also plenty of light so when I decided to get some paints to pass the time that was ideal," said Steve.



# Planting the seed

**When it comes to gardening, green fingered Railway Housing resident Susan Lynn Taylor is the pick of the crop.**

Extending for 170 metres behind her bungalow in South Milford, Leeds, her back garden is a horticultural heaven featuring an extensive fruit and vegetable patch, flower beds, bushes and small trees, patio, shed and greenhouse.

It's a love that dates back to when Sue was first old enough to pick up a trowel.

"My grandfather had the most beautiful garden full of flowers and vegetables and in particular, strawberries," said Sue.

“

He taught me to keep a garden right needs only half an hour in the morning and half an hour at night.

”

"I used to visit when I was four and he would show me how to plant seeds and to care for the plants. He taught me to keep a garden right needs only half an hour in the morning and half an hour at night."

Now 69, Sue still uses her grandad's tools, making sure they are sharpened and cleaned regularly and have linseed oil applied to the wood each year.

Sue says her garden was her saviour when she went through a period of depression after the death from lung cancer of her husband, former fireman Chris, followed by her mother passing five years ago.

"I suffered a breakdown, and the garden became my sanctuary and my safe space," said Sue. "I find I can go there and work and just switch off from everything else, it is so relaxing."



Originally a baker, Sue also worked for many years for the NHS before retiring and sees her garden as part of a daily well-being routine not only providing healthy food but also healthy exercise for body and mind. She suffers from osteoporosis but won't let that stop her tending to the garden and is planning some raised beds for next year.

“

I find I can go there and work and just switch off from everything else, it is so relaxing.

”



## Twinkle toes

**Sixties music fan Leslie Wrightson was well known in the Darlington area for his quick feet – both in road races and on the dance floor.**

Les, 78, joined Darlington Harriers 60 years ago and competed in numerous events including 11 Great North Runs and three London Marathons.

He worked as a fitter and turner at Shildon wagon works and kept fit by running the seven and a half miles to work and back every day from his Darlington home.

And he didn't ease up in his free time either – introduced to rock and roll music at the local youth club, he took to it instantly and taught himself to dance.

"The sixties was my era and I enjoyed most of the music, especially Lulu and The Beatles who I saw in concert in Birmingham," said Les.

"I picked up the moves watching other people and would then practice, I used to dance with two partners at a time."

Of course, fashion was as much a part of rock n roll as the music and Les travelled down to London to kit himself out with a mottled brown teddy boy outfit complete with beetle crushers.

“

I picked up the moves watching other people and would then practice, I used to dance with two partners at a time.

”

"It cost £8 which was a week and a half wages – but at least the train was half price because I had a job at the wagon works," recalls Les.

The attention to detail paid off as Les triumphed in the North-East dance championships of 1964 held in Durham.

Four years ago, Les was knocked over by a car and was grateful for the fitness his dancing and running had given him. As part of his recuperation, he moved into our Tempest Anderson sheltered housing scheme in Darlington and over three years later he's still there enjoying regular visits from his son Wayne, a Royal Navy Lt Commander, and his three grandchildren and great grandchild.

## Park life

**Joyce Snell is living proof that you're never too old to try something new.**

With the help of her son Nathaniel pushing her round the course in her wheelchair, Joyce took part in the Shildon park run.

"It was great and the best thing of all is that I didn't even break sweat – though I can't say the same for Nathaniel," said Joyce. "It's a great event for people of all ages and the volunteers who make it happen deserve great praise."

Joyce has been part of our Plevna Mews community in Shildon for over 14 years. She moved there at first to care for her father George, a former painter at Shildon wagon works, and stayed on following his death five years ago.

A cancer diagnosis meant Joyce had to step back from her active role in organising resident activities at Plevna, though she hopes to start getting involved again in the future.

She says: "It's so important that places have a community room which people can use to socialise. We have one at Plevna and it is a great spot to meet up with friends for a chatter and a coffee or enjoy bingo or a singer."

"We have a really good community at Plevna and it's so nice to be able to have family come and stay. I wouldn't want to move anywhere else."





## RECIPE

# Festive Mince Pies

### Ingredients

- 500g block shortcrust pastry
- 12 heaped tbsp Christmas mincemeat
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tbsp sugar

### Method

1. Preheat the oven to gas 6, 200°C, fan 180°C.
2. Grease a 12-hole muffin tin. Roll out the pastry to 3mm thick. Stamp out 12 x 10cm rounds and gently press into the holes of the tin. Stamp out 12 x 7cm rounds for the lids and set aside.
3. Add 1 heaped tbsp mincemeat to each pastry base. Brush the edges with egg, then top each with a lid and press to seal. Prick the lids. Lightly brush with egg and sprinkle over sugar. Bake for 15-20 mins.



 [www.twitter.com/railwayha](https://www.twitter.com/railwayha)  [www.facebook.com/railwayhousingassociation](https://www.facebook.com/railwayhousingassociation)

 [www.linkedin.com/company/railway-housing-association/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/railway-housing-association/)

Railway Housing Association, Maple House, 11 Tillage Green, Westpark Village, DL2 2GL.

Tel: 0800 0287428 | [info@railwayha.co.uk](mailto:info@railwayha.co.uk) | Web: [www.railwayha.co.uk](http://www.railwayha.co.uk)

Registered Social Landlord: A1855 | Registered Charity: 1188450 | Member of the Housing Ombudsman Service