

Hello from the new warden at Airton Meeting House and Barn

The Dales have been familiar to me since childhood as a place of adventurous day trips with my Yorkshire grandparents (based near Barnsley) and escapes with rambling groups whilst at university in York. But although I always thought I would eventually move to Yorkshire, I imagined the move as a sideways step from my home city of Coventry into one of the region's metropolises – not through any particular love of cities but because that's what I knew and because statistically speaking, the chances of a 'Volunteer Resident Friend' position coming up in a small village in the heart of the landscape I'd grown up captivated by is much less likely than finding a job in Leeds or Sheffield.

I'm completely thrilled to be here. Never mind that I'll miss countless friends, my small suburban garden, the amateur orchestra that until last week I conducted, the choir of Holy Trinity in which I sang Bass, Coventry Quaker Meeting, the community farm at Ryton Organic Gardens from which I collected fresh vegetables every week, etc. That I decorated most of my house recently doesn't matter and that I've had to buy a car for the first time in seven years is incidental. That my work as a landscape architect and garden designer will now need to be built up from scratch really is a minor issue. Some of these things are significant; none of them outweigh the desire to move on, accept new challenges and begin life in a part of the world I've always been moved by and wanted to get to know in more depth.

As the VRF at Airton Barn I will enjoy welcoming visitors from far and wide. One of the attractions of the position was the opportunity to meet new people as they travel through. As well as residential visits the Barn is a great venue suited to a wide range of creative activities including courses, retreats, away days and exhibitions – a programme I hope to continue to facilitate, having been looked after so well by my predecessor Floe for four years. Although I'm used to living on my own, I enjoy company; being further from family and old friends could be a challenge but I've instructed (!) them to visit me and of course I hope many new friends from Malhamdale will drop by. In fact to the list of things I'll miss from life in Coventry, perhaps I should add a dining room table – inviting people for dinner is one enjoyable activity that I won't have space for in The Nook. It was that or the grand piano and, well...

It would be easy to quickly become very busy, signing up to activities and trying to make new things happen but rather than rushing into things I'm going to take my time. The one thing I now have access to that was unavailable in any city is the vast acreage of open space right on the doorstep. So perhaps the most important thing I need to remember is to allow the fresh air fill my lungs and let the stunning landscape inspire a new sense of perspective on the important things. There is busy-ness here but there's also space and stillness. Finding the right balance will be the key to making a success of life in Malhamdale.

I look forward to getting to know you over the coming months.

Simon Watkins

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