

NORTH TODAY

CHURCH THEFT

Cash stolen

BURGLARS have stolen a collection box from a church in Gateshead.

The incident happened at St John the Evangelist in Derwent Street, Chopwell, and was discovered on October 12 by the vicar.

Thieves forced their way through the back door, damaging it in the process, and ransacked cupboards before making off with cash from the collection box.

Inspector Jamie Pitt said: "I would urge anyone who may have information to come forward as soon as possible."

METRO WORK

Route suspended

METRO services will be suspended between Pelaw, South Hylton and South Shields on Sunday to allow for maintenance work. Replacement bus services will be in operation.

EVENT



Comic signing

NORTH comedian Vic Reeves will be meeting fans and signing copies of his new book *Vic Reeves' Vast Book Of World Knowledge* today. The Darlington-born funnyman will be at the HMV store on Newcastle's Northumberland Street from 1.30pm.

COMMUNITY

New warden

THE first Teesdale neighbourhood warden has taken up his position.

Gus Fleming will be working with residents to help tackle low level anti-social behaviour.

ROADWORKS

Road closure

A MAIN road in Gateshead will be closed on Sunday. The A692 Consett Road at Watergate Bank will be closed all traffic between the Ravensdene Lodge Hotel and the Rose And Crown pub from 6am to 6pm.

EXHIBITION

Pupils' artworks

THE *Wonders of the Orient*, an exhibition of artwork by students from Spennymoor School opens at Durham University's Oriental Museum on Saturday.

lotto ▶▶▶▶

LOTTO:
5 11 24 32 35 42 Bonus 20

THUNDERBALL:
1 4 17 25 33 Thunderball 6

YOUNGSTERS PROVE THEY'RE SMOOTH OPERATORS

SCHOOLCHILDREN have been using pedal power to work up a healthy thirst for this weekend's Wallington Food and Craft Festival.

The Real Food Works, one of the companies that will be attending the festival, has been demonstrating the power of its smoothie bike to pupils from nearby Cambo First School, in Northumberland.

As the bike travels, refreshing fruit drinks are prepared on the back, teaching children about the importance of eating a healthy and balanced diet.

Paula Cummings, headteacher of Cambo First School, said: "The Wallington Food and Craft Festival is a great event for the local community that does a huge amount to promote quality regional produce."

"Cambo is the only first school in Northumberland to have been awarded flagship status under the Food in Schools programme and we take food education extremely seriously."

"All our children know the route of their food from field and animal and are taught about the importance of healthy local produce in the classroom and in our new allotment."

"The Real Food Works does a fantastic job educating young people throughout the region in the importance of eating healthy food and I urge everyone to come to the event to find out more."

The Wallington Festival will offer visitors the chance to try delicious produce from more than 50 exhibitors from the North East and



Cumbria. Entry to the Wallington Food and Craft Festival, which is taking place in the gardens and

grounds of the National Trust property Wallington House in Cambo, is free.

PULP FRICTION Pupils from Cambo First School trying out the Real Food Works' smoothie bike.

MP is furious over mortgage tick-off

Clelland is asked to repay expense claim

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A TYNESIDE MP has blasted moves to force him to repay expense claims linked to his second home as an "outrage".

Tyne Bridge's David Clelland spoke out yesterday after receiving a letter from independent auditor Sir Thomas Legg, who has been investigating MPs' expenses, querying his claims.

Sir Thomas has also written to Berwick MP Sir Alan Beith about a mortgage the Liberal Democrat has never had - although he will abide by the conclusions Sir Thomas makes after the matter is resolved. Earlier this year, Mr Clelland

rejected any suggestion of wrongdoing for buying his partner's share of their London flat with a taxpayer-backed mortgage after its value rose "substantially".

She put in a £25,000 deposit but got an additional £20,000 when she pulled out three years later amid fears her personal details could be compromised when information on expenses was released under Freedom of Information rules.

Mr Clelland said he and his now wife Brenda acted in good faith and on advice of the Commons authorities.

He added taxpayers' money had been saved and the couple still had to pay the mortgage, which rose by £198.67.

Speaking yesterday, the Labour MP said: "Legg has not suggested that my arrangement was outside the rules at the time. He is only suggesting that it didn't comply with the rules that he has now made up and backdated to 2004."

"I don't think it has been very well handled. I think members have a legitimate right to complain about this idea of retrospection."

The MP confirmed Sir Thomas Legg had raised the issue of "conflicted transactions" over his second home in London, but declined to say how much cash he was asked to return.

Sir Thomas has warned MPs about buying or renting a second home from a close relative, a company in which the MP held shares, or a close associate such an

MP'S LETTER

BERWICK MP Sir Alan Beith yesterday said questions about his expense claims raised by an independent inquiry are based on "inaccurate" information.

The senior Liberal Democrat said: "The letter I have received from Sir Thomas Legg refers to a mortgage I have never had, and raises questions based on very inaccurate information about the rent of my London flat and the proportion of that rent which I claimed back from the allowance, roughly 55%."

"He has also asked for documentation which the Fees Office already holds. I am providing him with all the documents and

details he needs and am ready to abide by whatever conclusion is reached when he has had the opportunity to consider the matter on the basis of accurate information."

Fraser Kemp, Labour MP for Houghton and Washington East said: "I have one query raised by the inquiry and I am in the process of responding."

But other MPs have not responded to The Journal's queries including North Tyneside MP Stephen Byers, Jarrow's Stephen Hepburn, Sunderland South's Chris Mullin and Wansbeck MP Denis Murphy.

employee. He said: "The transaction will be regarded as tainted, and the whole payment accordingly invalid."

"This will be so even if the MP can show that it was effected at arms-length or that the public purse has not suffered."

Mr Clelland said: "He is saying this is a conflicted transaction. I am not going to go into how much he has asked me to pay. It is a catch-22. I recognised at some stage this would happen and so got my flat in my sole name. It is an outrage. It is

not a defence to say that the fees office agreed at the time, but where else would we go to at the time?"

He said it was not wrong for MPs to repay cash if claims were unacceptable under the rules of the time, but added: "That does not apply to my case because it was allowed at the time."

"All of the leaders are jockeying for position who can throw themselves on the broken glass first. It is outrageous. They are playing politics with this."

I don't think it has been very well handled. I think members have a right to complain