

GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

Winter 2018: FREE

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Raising the roof to tell the Christmas story



A Gospel Christmas in one of the innovative, and sometimes spectacular, ways in which churches and Christian groups across Norwich are re-telling the Christmas story this year – see centre pages.

Acts of kindness for complete strangers

A violin for a refugee, clothes to attend a funeral, heating oil and a washing machine are just some of the things a **Norwich** church has been able to provide to needy and desperate people in the city, thanks to an award-winning Christian crowd-funding charity. **Jenny Seal reports.**

Acts 435 has developed an innovative way to bring joy and relief to thousands of people across the country, including dozens in Norwich, who are in desperate financial need. It uses its crowd-funding website to link them to kind-hearted donors who have the resources and desire to fund these simple acts of much-needed kindness for complete strangers.

To date, the Acts 435 website has helped over 16,000 people nationally with donations totalling £1.6m.

In Norwich's Catton Grove area, Carol Woodward from Oak Grove Community Church is an



Carol Woodward.

enthusiastic advocate of Acts 435. She has volunteered with the charity for over three years and describes it as "the best role in the church".

"We actually made our first appeal for a violin," said Carol. "The lady was a refugee and hadn't managed to bring her violin with her, but for her mental well-being she needed to play. It seems an odd one but actually in the circumstances it was very important that she had one."

Carol recalls another successful appeal for a weighted blanket. A local school identified the need for the blanket to help a child with special needs sleep better but the family couldn't afford to buy it.

"I left the weighted blanket in the school office," said Carol. "It was last Christmas and there were Carols on the Playground so I went to that. The mum actually sought me out and gave me this huge hug. She just couldn't express fully how much it would mean to her family if this child slept."

"It's a real joy," said Carol. "People think you're the most wonderful person in the world and I really am not! But it's because you are meeting that need when they didn't see how they could get it otherwise."

"Since 2015 we have had £3,270 given to local people funded by anonymous donors," she said. "And it's grown, with £1,300 given this year. It's just fantastic."

Carol works with two local schools that refer families in need to her. She also comes across people through Oak Grove Community Church's projects which include a charity shop, a parent and toddler group and a Money Advice Centre.

■ Story continues on page four

The wonder and mystery of Christmas

With a remote-controlled star, flame lights and a machine pumping out the aroma of frankincense, Andy Jones, founder of Raise Kids Work, is creating an unforgettable experience in Norfolk schools this advent for almost 1,200 children to discover 'The Wonder and Mystery of Christmas'. **Jenny Seal reports.**

■ In the month before Christmas, Andy Jones, from Wymondham, and a small team of volunteers, will take their creative energy, and a van loaded with props, to nine primary schools in Norfolk and give almost 1,200 children an immersive experience of the Christmas story.

Andy, 39, is the Founder of Raise Kids Work, a new charity that works with 5-11 year olds to advance the Christian faith. He leads RE experiences, assemblies and RE lessons in 28 schools across Norfolk – from Harpley in West Norfolk to Banham in Breckland.

In 'The Wonder and Mystery of Christmas Experience' children journey in groups through four zones, each zone exploring part of the Christmas story.

They start in a 'Wonder and Thank you' zone, where they hear the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah as an ultrasonic mist maker infuses the area with the scent of frankincense.

The children then encounter Mary and Joseph in the 'Mystery of the Birth and Journey' zone and are encouraged to sit in a cardboard box to think about people who are forced to leave their homes today. After a trip to the shepherds' zones, the experience culminates with the wise men. Andy said: "We have a blacked-out gazebo with a star curtain and a remote-controlled star. The story is read over music and then we stop and the children get to smell frankincense and myrrh and hold a gold brick."

Andy designs and uses a whole range of creative encounters like 'The Wonder and Mystery of Christmas Experience' to achieve

■ Story continues on page nine.



Andy Jones of Raise.



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FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

■ Good News for Norwich & Norfolk is published by Network Norwich & Norfolk part of Christian Community Trust for Norwich and Norfolk Ltd. Registered charity no 1105340.

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■ Printed by Archant Print.

■ Churches, Christian organisations and individuals from within Norwich and Norfolk are invited to send news, events and pictures which relate to the demonstration of the Gospel in social action, community care and evangelism.

■ The deadline for material for the Spring edition is Friday March 8. Distribution is from Thursday March 28.

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Where will Jesus be this Christmas?

■ Christmas is a special date in the Christian calendar. Like so many other special days where we choose a date to celebrate, to remember, to value, to honour. Father's Day, Mother's Day, Remembrance Day, and various others that vary depending on the culture.

I have to confess that I'm not much of a fan of these days. It seems that we celebrate the date in the calendar and present everything we feel, but then, for many people, think we have done our duty and we are free the other days of the year.

I'd rather spread some of that recognition and values across every day. This is very personal and I confess that I struggle a little with this thought, because I know how easy it is to forget, when we get involved in the rush of life, in the day to day of our existence. Even simple things like contacting those we love and are far away. So, although I do not like the special days very much, I try to value them.

Brazilian missionary Paulo Mussi, Church and Community Minister from Mousehold Hub, part of NCBC.



Christmas is the moment in which we celebrate the birth of Him who, being Almighty God, became man and dwelt among us, to give himself up on a cross, to die for our sins and to rescue us from the darkness to give us eternal life with Him. Yes, at Christmas we celebrate

the birth of Jesus Christ.

I think back to the true feeling and motivation that permeates our hearts on this date. One day in the year when we should be attentive and ready to share the wonderful message we have received in Jesus - the Good News of salvation. In fact, we should do this every day. For a few weeks now I have seen several shops ready for the party and with various objects of decoration for our houses, supermarkets with traditional food promotions, lights on the streets and on the trees, special prices for gifts and toys ... but ... in none of them did I see the name of Jesus, or any clue about His participation in this party.

Where will Jesus be this Christmas? I would like to get you thinking about how we could use this moment, on such a special date, to remind others of the true reason for the party - showing Jesus as the real meaning of Christmas.

Ben's fight for justice

Co-founder and CEO of Hope for Justice - Ben Cooley – fires-up huge global audiences with passion and vision as he dares to fight to end today's slavery – a message he recently brought to a Norfolk church's conference. Sandie Shirley reports.



This autumn Ben took to the stage at the annual Flourish conference for women run by Thetford's Liberty Church, sharing the work of the pioneering charity that began ten years ago. It has since become a multi-award-winning operation, unifying people across the world to make a gallant assault against modern-day slavery and trafficking.

The charity began in the UK but has offices and projects in seven more countries including the USA, Cambodia, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Norway. It has forged links with celebrities, foreign governments and established international organisations. An ever-growing team of specialists, detectives, senior investigators, lawyers, social workers and communications and policy experts, heighten the flame of restitution and justice. And scores of voluntary abolition groups contribute via fund-raising and campaigning.

Best estimates suggest there are 24.9m people in forced labour, sexual exploitation and domestic servitude around the world - greater than at any other point in history. And in the summer of 2017, the National Crime Agency suggested there are "tens of thousands of UK victims", including many across East Anglia.

Ben has a Christian faith that moves him to take action: "I want to live in a world where children are valued and free to be educated; where men can provide for their families and where women are valued and taught that they are princesses," he said.

Amid brokenness, terror and exploitation, Hope for Justice has become a recognised and respected instrument for change by creating hope and bringing life. To date hundreds have been freed, thousands have been trained and millions have been informed but the fight to rescue, restore, reform and prevent continues. Hope for Justice also owns and helps resource Slave-free Alliance - a unique membership of businesses wanting to be at the forefront of the anti-slavery movement.

"Every time a person is rescued and restored we take a padlock and write their name on it and post it on our wall of freedom - a token that freedom and change is possi-

ble," said Ben. "That person may have had a past with slavery, but now there is a bright and glorious future with freedom."

Anna is just one former victim. She was forced to work in a factory for six months without pay and lived in horrendous conditions. Today she is happily married and working, and her traffickers are in prison. She says: "Without Hope for Justice I don't know what would have happened to me or where I would be. Maybe, if you did not help me I would not be alive."

Ben has owned, shared and is continuing to promote a huge mission - a far cry from his former career as an opera singer who set up various performing arts companies. As a married man with two young daughters, his life took a dramatic turn, propelling him into action, when he was devastated to hear about human trafficking.

Today he knows the reality and importance of a vision as his

fervent message rallies support against what is thought to be the third biggest criminal enterprise in the world.

"Tried-and-tested experience also helps resource leaders and encourages us to grasp and grow our own vision by challenging apathy with action to change lives," he said.

His recent book: 'Impossible is a Dare', charts his fight for a world free of slavery from being one man with a wobbly desk to an international organisation and includes real-life stories of changed lives.

His story embraces risk and devotion - at 26 he booked Birmingham's NEC Arena without the know-how to stage a major event, but it drew a crowd of nearly 6,000 who were willing to get involved with his heart-cry for freedom.

He hopes his book will inspire readers to fight for their own vision and see the impossible for what it all is - a dare!

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The barefoot entrepreneur behind Norwich Mustard

Known as the **Barefoot Entrepreneur, Robert Ashton** has spent 2018 bringing a community-owned mustard company into existence. It is the latest in a long line of Norfolk initiatives that this Wymondham-based Quaker has helped to make happen. **Jenny Seal** reports.

Social entrepreneur and Norwich Quaker, Robert Ashton has a gift. He can see things as they could be and knows how to push and shove to make those things happen. When combined with his commitment to Quaker principles, it is a powerful gift for good.

Some 15 years ago, Robert became disillusioned running his own marketing agency, and decided to focus on social impact and enterprise instead. He set up office at his home, a two-acre farm near Wymondham, which he shares with his wife Belinda.

From there he has written 19 books and been instrumental in birthing positive initiatives such as the Norfolk Community Foundation, the Charles Burrell Centre in Thetford and Swarm Apprenticeships.

He became a Quaker a few years ago, but his life and work have always been directed by Quaker values. Calling himself the 'Barefoot Entrepreneur' he seeks to bring change with sensitivity and gentleness.

Now 63, his latest project is Norwich Mustard. Since January, when Unilever announced that Colman's was leaving Norwich, Robert has been on a quest to create a community-owned mustard company to replace it.

It started with a 90-second video of Robert, sat on his prized 1964 Fordson tractor, speaking to camera. "Rather than complaining about it, rather than throwing rocks at Unilever, I said 'why don't we create a community-owned mustard company to replace it?' 5,000 people watched the video over a weekend. It was amazing," he said.

After a successful crowdfunding campaign and match funding from the Lottery-funded Power to Change programme, Norwich Mustard launched a pilot batch of mustard for Norfolk Day. The 600 jars sold out over a weekend in July at a pop-up shop in House of Fraser.

The second batch, 200 kilos of wholegrain Norwich Mustard, has now been produced and the jars will be filled and labelled by inmates of Norwich Prison. The jars will be distributed by local company Crush Foods to retailers across the eastern region and London for Christmas.

The plan going forward is that Norwich Mustard, in a variety of flavours (one with local brewery Redwells), will be made in HMP Norwich once funding becomes available for

Robert Ashton with jars of Norwich Mustard.



equipment. "And as we make money," he explains, "we will put money in a fund to support these guys when they come out of prison." The fund will be there for ex-offenders to take up training, education and other needs to help them succeed outside prison.

Norwich Mustard will also set up a Heritage Centre in one of the disused medieval churches in the city, charting the history of mustard production in Norwich. The centre, whenever possible, will employ former prisoners.

In January 2019, just a year on from its inception, Norwich Mustard will offer the public the opportunity to buy community shares eligible for tax relief and membership benefits.

"People will get rewarded with mustard and stuff," said Robert. "And then when we open the Heritage Centre, hopefully at Easter, people will be able to have a sense of ownership that this is our place, it belongs to us. And we'll have member discounts in the café so you can enjoy a Norwich Mustard sausage roll and a coffee!"

"So it's all falling into place actually quite interestingly," he observes in his modest, laid back manner. "There is that concept that if you

set out to do the right thing for the right reasons, the right thing happens."

Norwich Mustard has now hired a CEO with funding from the Virgin Money Foundation so Robert can take a step back and no doubt focus on another venture before starting a full-time Masters in Creative Non-Fiction at UEA next year. "I never look back at what I've done and think that's fantastic. I always look at what needs to happen next," he said.

He is also involved in setting up a community shop, the Walled Garden, in Little Plumstead. As well as providing the village with a much-needed local shop, the driving force for Robert is that it will also create work experience opportunities for people detained in the neighbouring medium secure unit, the Broadland Clinic. During September and October the initiative raised £21,000 in a community share offer. With grants and sponsorship it is likely to open for business late next year.

"I guess I'm quite good at seeing things that could be," he said. "So many people just see what's there and if it isn't there they can't see it and don't get it but I can very clearly see what

could be."

Robert, who appeared on the front of MENSAs magazine last year, didn't fit with the education system. "I failed my eleven plus largely on purpose," he said. "I ricocheted around the secondary education system and didn't do any good at all. I was the classic bright kid who didn't fit in the system. Ever since that I've been around equality of opportunity. So finding people who are different but excluded because of their difference and putting them right in the centre, that's important to me."

Although he always looks to the next project it is clear that history and a sense of place is profoundly important to Robert, especially in relation to his faith.

When talking about Norwich Mustard he points to Norwich Quaker and social reformer Elizabeth Fry as his inspiration for taking the enterprise into prison. He was also struck by the historical link to Joseph Rowntree at the launch of Norwich Mustard.

"On Norfolk Day we launched on the site of Rowntrees," he said. "It just struck me that here am I standing, as a 21st century Quaker, launching a business to the public on the site where an 18th century Quaker made chocolate. It somehow seemed to be appropriate."

It was this interest in history and its connection to the present which led Robert to Quakerism a few years ago. His primary school headmistress, Florence Evans, was a Quaker and her commitment to including those at the margins had a lasting impression on him. "She wasn't overtly a Quaker evangelist, because they don't exist," he said. "But her gentleness and commitment to equality of opportunity has stayed with me."

Then, three years ago, he went to visit Ironbridge in Shropshire and happened to visit the house of 17th century innovator and Quaker Abraham Darby. The tour guide mentioned that the Telford Quakers met there once a month. "It made it real that they should meet there. And then I sort of felt compelled to find a meeting locally."

"So I went to Norwich [Quaker Meeting House], because Norwich is a large meeting and because the building is built by the Gurney family, who my grandmother's family worked for back into the mists of time. I just went there one Sunday morning; diffidently walked in and I've been there ever since. It just fitted me like a glove. I don't believe in being on the fence. I'm either in or out."

He clearly enjoys the non-traditional approach of Quakerism with its lack of doctrine, as well as its values of equality, peace, simplicity and truth.

"I love that Quakers don't make any assumptions about who or what God is," he said. "We keep looking."

"When I say I'm a social entrepreneur, I'm a writer and I'm a Quaker, people now get it and understand that's why I do what I do."

www.robertashton.co.uk

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Acts of kindness

■ Story continued from page one.

The needs of over 30 local people have successfully been met through Carol's Acts 435 advocacy. This has included the purchase of funeral clothes, stairgates, debt relief orders, a washing machine and oil for heating.

Carol said: "It's the church being awake to what they hear and giving practical help."

In November, Acts 435 was recognised when it won the national award for 'Best Replicable Project' at the Christian Funders Forum Awards in London.

Donors can select the geographical area they would like to give to and a category of giving, such as children or elderly people, white goods or ill health. They can then contribute anything from £5 to a maximum of the balance left to raise.

Acts 435 is dependent on volunteers within local churches who sign up as Advocates. These Acts 435 advocates identify people within their local community who genuinely need an item costing up to £120 (or £240 in exceptional circumstances) but who can't afford it. The advocate uploads a short description of the circumstances onto the website and then arranges for the item to be purchased if the money is successfully crowdfunded.

Carol is certain that any church could do it and would encourage more churches around Norwich and Norfolk to get involved. "There is no catch," she said. "It is just the church doing what the church is doing. It works because there are generous people out there."

www.acts435.org.uk

The grand opening of a newly-constructed building for **Norwich's Chinese Church** took place on November 26, giving the flourishing congregation space to grow as a West Norwich church serving the whole community. **Jenny Seal reports.**



Pastor Edmond Chi-Wai Tsui outside the new church building on Bowthorpe Road in Norwich.

Growing Chinese church

In late 2014, the growing Norwich Chinese Church moved into the Methodist church on Bowthorpe Road in West Norwich. They moved from Wroxham Road Methodist church to be closer to the UEA and to develop their ministry with overseas students.

Unfortunately, they soon discovered that the roof of the 1950s church hall was structurally unsound and would need major repair. The Methodist Circuit decided to invest in a new, larger building on the site rather than repair the old one.

"So that we could have the potential to develop," explains Pastor Edmond Chi-Wai Tsui, who leads the church. "Our congregation is already at 150 and the maximum of the existing church building was only 140."

Building began in August 2017 and was completed this month with the grand opening on Monday, November 26. The Lord Mayor of Norwich was due to attend along with guests from around the country and one of the original church founders flying in from America.

The occasion provided an opportunity to celebrate the congregation's 20th anniversary and its growth from seven people to 150.

"We are excited," said Pastor Edmond. "It is all the blessing of God and the work of the Holy Spirit."

The new building, which seamlessly links to the original

church building, is filled with light and generously proportioned. It includes a high ceilinged, glass-fronted foyer, new meeting rooms, a commercial grade kitchen and a large hall with capacity for 250 people.

This will be used as the sanctuary for the Mandarin and Chinese speaking service but is also designed as a multi-functional community space.

Pastor Edmond clearly takes pride in the detail of the architecture and design of the building. As he shows me around he points out the giant cross incorporated into the front window frames which lights up, the self-pumping and draining baptistry, the enlarged car park and the eco-friendly central heating system.

The Chinese Church had to raise £300k towards the cost of the building, supplemented by £600k from the Methodist Connexion, District and Circuit. "In one and a half years we already fulfilled that figure. It's amazing," said Pastor Edmond.

Pastor Edmond has overseen the project on behalf of the congregation and is clearly a highly capable and visionary leader.

Before moving to the UK in 1994 he was a director and general manager of a company listed on the Singapore Stock Market. He lives in Epsom but has worked in Norwich for 11 years clocking up thousands of miles in his commute.

"I love Norwich," he said.

"It is a privilege for me to serve the community of Norwich because this is where God has called me."

One of his primary aims with the new building is to transition from being a Chinese church to a church that serves the whole community. "My mission is community church," said Pastor Edmond.

"I don't want it to be just a Chinese church. And so here we will have an English-speaking service parallel with the Chinese speaking service for all the neighbours, all the international students and the British-born Chinese."

They plan to work with other local churches to extend their ministry with international students, run health-based classes and table tennis for the local community and give groups like the Guides and Brownies a place to meet.

"We are not just opening the door and waiting for people to come in," said Pastor Edmond. "We need to reach out." He particularly wants to address the isolation of elderly people both in the Chinese community and the wider community and so plans to open up the foyer for coffee mornings on a regular basis.

"We are open to everyone," he said. "They can come here to a place for them to spend time. They don't need to sit in their home. This is one of the social concerns we need to deal with. Just come for a cup of tea or coffee and you can speak to anyone."

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Journalist and adventurer

Tributes have been paid to gospel adventurer and former Fleet Street journalist, **Mike Wiltshire**, who died peacefully in Bart's Hospital in London on November 9, surrounded by his family, writes **Keith Morris**.

Mike's wife Lois and his four children were all around the hospital bed worshipping God and Mike was part of that and then he literally stopped breathing, said the family.

Mike, aged 81, from Norwich, helped to reach literally millions of people with the message of Christ thanks to his pioneering work with mission ship charity Operation Mobilisation. More recently he was heavily involved with the FGB both in Norwich and nationally, editing their magazine Voice and with East Anglia Friends of Israel.

In 2013, at the age of 75, Mike had a complex heart valves operation at Papworth Hospital: "The surgeon later smiled when he told me the outcome was 'a minor miracle'," said Mike in a 2015 article in Good News for Norwich. But true to form, Mike, showed very little sign of slowing down in his life's work to communicate the Gospel in as many ways as possible, continuing to write for local and national Christian publications.

Barrie Lawrence, president of Norwich FGB said: "I followed Mike as president of Norwich FGB, and then as director of the East Anglian region. It was a daunting prospect following such a godly, gifted and truly spiritual man, except that he was always there for me, advising, helping, inspiring, supporting, encouraging and showing such warm friendship. A truly remarkable and outstanding man of God. Already so greatly missed."

Jill Gower, from East Anglia Friends of Israel, said: "Mike was such a kind, humble man with an unwavering passion for the Lord. He helped set up East Anglia Friends of Israel, and became such an important part of our team. We felt so honoured to have him on board and his contribution to the group was invaluable. We knew we were in safe hands with Mike's great ability with accurately reporting our events and writing newsletters."

Keith Morris, editor of Good News for Norwich & Norfolk and [networknorfolk.co.uk](http://www.networknorfolk.co.uk), said: "Mike wrote for our publications over a number of years and was always very professional and accurate with his many articles which really brought people's stories of faith alive. For me he was a truly great man of God and an astonishing journalist, right to the end."

In 1963, as a young journalist and a church youth leader, Mike met George Verwer, founder of Operation



Mike and Lois Wiltshire.

Mobilisation, then a student movement working in 20 countries. It was the start of a 50-year friendship.

In his 20s, Mike, with others, drove 4,000 miles overland to India where the OM team set up a massive publishing programme and saw the distribution of 100 million pieces of Gospel literature in 12 different languages.

After five years in India and Nepal, Mike was sent to Scandinavia with a key mission - to look for a ship that OM could buy "by faith". In Norway he found and secured the Umanak, which was renamed Logos (which means 'Word' in Greek) by OM and became an iconic ocean-going mission ship.

The ship eventually set sail from London to India with 200 tons of literature and a volunteer staff and crew of 120 young people, comprising many nationalities. In 18 years, the ship visited 108 countries and more than 370,000 people attended conferences on board.

Mike was given the key role of pioneering line-up man, travelling ahead of the Logos and arranging programmes in dozens of ports, before the ship's arrival. On one day, 15,000 people queued up at an Indian port to go on board, and everyone received a packet of Christian

literature before they left.

The work took Mike to 50 countries across the world. Eventually, four

ships were purchased which, through scripture distribution and meetings, have shared the gospel with a

billion people.

While travelling the world, Mike also had the honour of meeting many well-known Christians. Mike recalled encounters with evangelist Billy Graham, China pioneer missionary Gladys Aylward, and Bible teachers such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Wimber, as well as Bakht Singh, who planted 400 churches in India.

While working with OM, Mike was also developing a career as a newspaper journalist. "I won my first job as a newspaper reporter after offering to sell papers on a street corner if the editor would just give me an interview! Cheeky, maybe, but I was offered several interviews," recalled Mike in a 2015 article for Network Norfolk.

"I started on weekly papers at the Kentish Times, moved to evening papers, such as the Lancashire Evening Post, became deputy editor of a group of London regional papers and finally worked with the Financial Times on Fleet Street for more than 20 years."

After "retiring" in London, Mike and Lois, moved to Norwich some 13 years ago. They had four children and nine grandchildren.

Inspired by the life of Billy Graham, Mike recalled a "crazy prayer moment" when, as a shy young Christian, he nevertheless asked God "to use him to reach millions for Christ - with no idea how that prayer would be answered."

There will be a celebration of Mike's life at St Andrew's Church, Eaton, Norwich, at 1pm on Saturday December 8, followed by interment at St Andrew's Cemetery and then light refreshments back at St Andrew's Church. All are welcome.



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Lucy Kemp, left,
and Mary Gray

Community spirit taskforce appeal

Two Christians working in adult social care are asking churches across Norfolk to join a new taskforce called **Community Spirit**, helping people who have no support network with one-off jobs that will enable them to return home from hospital. **Jenny Seal reports.**

Mary Gray and Lucy Kemp work at the recently opened Benjamin Court Reablement Unit in Cromer. Mary is the Social Worker and Lucy is an Occupational Therapist for the Adult Social Care Unit which provides reablement when someone has been in hospital or not managing at home.

In their work they often come across people who have no family or support network and no one to help them with the small jobs connected to going in or coming out of hospital or temporary respite care. Mary and Lucy have a vision to see the local church step into the gap.

"I had the idea that it would be really good to utilise the resources of local churches," Mary explains, "so that we could have almost like a little taskforce in each church with a nominated person, or maybe two, that adult social care could go to."

The Community Spirit network would simply be a database of Norfolk churches with willing volunteers happy to do one-off jobs for adult social care clients when needed. These tasks could include moving furniture, transporting a pet, getting some shopping in or fitting a key safe, for example.

"In themselves they are just very little

things. But if people don't have relatives nearby or anyone to support them there's no one to do it," said Mary. "So then that can delay everything and that person's at risk," added Lucy.

The pair, who admit they are 'throwing the net out', argue that it would bring benefits three ways – to their patients who are in need of help, to the Adult Social Care team in Norfolk which is facing enormous pressures and to churches which would have the opportunity to help and make contact with isolated people who may benefit from their ministry.

"It would be so wonderful. It would also be a witness to our colleagues in social care – it would show that the church is stepping up to do that stuff. At the end of the day that is what the church is about, isn't it?" says Mary with tears in her eyes.

"It's a good opportunity to show love in a very practical way and to open up that initial communication with people by doing something that needs to be done," Lucy agrees.

The pair recognise the safeguarding and insurance issues and are taking guidance from the Community Action Network around this. They also acknowledge that there are agencies like Age UK and Good Neighbours schemes but find it geographically patchy.

"There are a lot of places in Norfolk where volunteer agencies might not have volunteers in that area. But there probably is an active congregation and at the moment we can't tap into that," said Mary.

If your church would be interested in joining Community Spirit, Mary and Lucy would love to hear from you. They are also happy to visit local churches to introduce themselves and expand on the need and vision. To contact them please email Lucy Kemp at lucy_a_kemp@hotmail.com.

Telling the Chris

Churches across Norwich are pulling out all the stops this year to produce all-singing, all-dancing, professional standard stage productions to tell the Christmas story in innovative ways. **Helen Baldry reports.**



DRUMMER BOY
A Free Christmas Concert
15th & 16th December



www.proclaimers.com/Christmas



Christmas story on stage

In recent years local churches have put on full scale professional standard productions to entice people through the doors to hear the Christmas story and this year is no exception.

Norwich-based church Proclaimers – who describe themselves as ‘church without the boring bits’ – are holding a production of ‘Drummer Boy’, which they say will be filled with passion, power and total excitement.

“Never before has our church attempted such an audacious stage production”, says Pastor Tom Rawls. “People are going to be blown away by the excellence and professionalism as Proclaimers tells the Christmas story in a way that is anything but boring!”

The show will feature high quality sounds, singing and stage innovations to support an articulate and faithful presentation of the Christmas story. The show is free of charge and will be held at the church’s venue The Space on Roundtree Way in Norwich on Saturday December 15 at 5pm and Sunday December 16 at 3pm and 5pm.

Sam Cousins, Proclaimers’ executive producer for the performance, says: “This isn’t just for our church. We can’t state this enough. We want this to be for our city. Literally everyone in Norwich is invited. Bring people. Bring friends. Bring family. This is for Norwich.” He goes on to say: “If you have friends that would never attend church, invite them. They will hear a very contemporary, fun and clear presentation of the message about Christmas and be given an opportunity to respond to Jesus.”

All-singing, all-dancing Christmas spectacular The Wonder returns to Soul Church on Mason Road in Norwich on December 8 and 9, with a record nine performances this year to accommodate the thousands of people anticipated to come through the doors to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas.

The Wonder is a free Christmas spectacular filled with family fun, singing including favourites from The Greatest Showman, dancing, carols, plus much-loved Disney characters.

Pastor Chantel Norman said: “We love Norwich, and this is our gift to the city. We’re delighted to see people walk through the doors and discover the true wonder of Christmas, meeting Jesus for the first time, so bring your family, bring your friends, and we’ll celebrate together – everyone is welcome!”

Performances will take place on Saturday, December 8 and Sunday, December 9 at 10am, 12:30pm, 3pm, 5:30pm, with an extra performance at 8pm on Sunday.

The newly-formed Norwich Community Gospel Choir is holding A Gospel Christmas on Friday December 21 where there will be a retelling of the story of Christmas in poetry, scripture and Gospel music. Starts at 8pm, doors open at 7.30pm at Norwich Central Baptist Church. Suggested ticket donation is £5.

Choir director Megan Rawling said: “We’re so excited about our first big event together. It will be



Productions from last year, above Proclaimers, left Soul Church's The Wonder and, below, the Christmas Alive nativity in Ashill.



a retelling of the whole story of Christmas - right from before Jesus' birth while Israel was waiting for the Messiah, all the way through to Simeon, Anna and the escape to Egypt - in Gospel music! It should be a really fun, poignant and unique way to celebrate Christmas together - a great thing to bring friends to!”

Fountain of Life Church in Ashill will be putting on a living, breathing Christmas story using real animals and actors to recreate the village of Bethlehem on December 16 as well as two performances of a reworked version of Scrooge. Karen Gower from FOL Church said: “It’s been a great success the last three years and a great turn out of people - we’re running two performances of the play this year to fit everyone in, and of course, running the outdoor Bethlehem village with interactive stalls, animals, food tasting, crafts and activities.”

Performances of Scrooge are at 2.30pm and 6pm. Bethlehem village opens from 4 - 6pm.

NORWICH COMMUNITY GOSPEL CHOIR warmly invites you to

A Gospel Christmas

A retelling of the story of Christmas in poetry, scripture and Gospel music

21st December 8pm at Norwich Central Baptist Church

Norfolk lead for Police faith project

A Norfolk Christian police officer has been appointed to help drive forward a new multi-faith initiative designed to galvanise the support of faith groups to support the police and to help address problems and challenges within communities. Keith Morris reports.

■ Police Sergeant Marie Reavey has been seconded to the new Faith and Police Together initiative for the next year to help drive it forward.

Marie said: “Faith and Police together is aimed at building links between local police and their local faith communities. We believe that faith communities have a major role to play in bringing about community transformation and cohesion. When the police and faith communities work together to tackle some of the issues that the police are also facing, we believe that we will see lives and communities positively transformed.

“This, in turn can lead to reduced demand on police services, a valuable contribution to a service that has extensive demands placed upon it. Policing covers a vast range of issues within society and it is not always crime that is the problem.”

The project has identified four priority areas to concentrate on and to encourage faith communities to engage with over the next year. These priority areas include: addiction, homelessness, youth gangs and youth knife crime (youth related crime) and loneliness.

“We want to support the continued growth of strong and effective connections between the local police service, faith groups and local projects,” said Marie, “thereby building the Faith and Police network in support of local communities. There are many projects and evidence of good practice already in existence and we hope to utilise and work with some of those projects to help give faith communities templates and ideas to assist them locally to meet their needs.

“We will be promoting case studies and initiatives throughout the year. We want to see safer communities and the most vulnerable cared for and believe that this project will help deliver that ambition.

Deputy Chief Constable for Devon and Cornwall, Paul Netherton, who is part of the group, said: “My experience of working with groups and churches is that once you start the conversations you unlock massive social capital that can transform an area or make a real difference to a problem. This could be around Street Angels patrolling the night time economy, drop-in centres for young people or cafes where the homeless or lonely can find support. The benefit for the police and all the public sector is significant in terms of reducing demand and finding long term solutions.

www.faithandpolice.together.org.uk



Sgt Marie Reavey.

Norwich curry lunch aids flood victims

The Norwich Catholic Malayalee community has been rallying around to raise money and supplies to help rebuild their home region of Kerala in southern India which was devastated by once-in-a-lifetime floods in August. Keith Morris reports.

■ A Curry for Kerala lunch at St John's Cathedral in Norwich saw over 250 people enjoy an Indian feast cooked by families from across the city, raising over £1740.

It was the latest in a series of efforts to raise funds to help flood-stricken villages in Kerala, which have included sending emergency supplies by air, an Indian takeaway and church collections.

There are around 100 people from Kerala in Norwich, most of them Catholic, many working as doctors and nurses.

Antony James, who organised the curry lunch at the Cathedral, is a nurse practitioner at the N&N Hospital and has lived in Norwich since 2005 with his wife and children. He also has a family home in the village of Kuttanad, where his parents live.

"My parents have never seen floods like it, said Tony. "At first they thought it was the normal rain, but within 24 hours most



The Curry for Kerala lunch at St John's, including Tony James, centre.

houses were under water. My father was stuck on the first floor of his house for a day, which was terrifying for us as a family and 97% of the people in my village were evacuated to a camp. This then was flooded too, so they had to move to another camp for two weeks. Most of my neighbours lost their houses completely.

"The thing that really touched my heart was that three people were reported to have committed suicide when they returned from the camp to see their homes and everything in them destroyed. The majority of the people in Kerala

do not have home insurance, so people have lost everything, including livestock.

"I knew then that I had to do something about it. I thought I am from Kerala, I know a bit of cooking. I spoke to Fr Seelan at St John's and we got together around 25 people who have all cooked food for around 250 people. We will be distributing the money directly to affected families in our home village.

George Mathew, who has run a shop and Post Office in New Lakenham with his family since 2007, was in Kerala just days before the

floods.

"Three of my cousins were running small shops which were all washed away by the water," he said. "Some people nearby had their houses flooded up to roof level. The water stayed in the houses for up to five days so you can imagine all the rubbish that went through the houses.

"We did a collection through the Syro Malabar Catholic community across the UK which raised around £85,000 including £3,500 from Norwich. It will be distributed through the Catholic priests and Caritas organisation in Kerala.



Jas Mickleburgh speaking at the YMCA Norfolk Celebration evening. Picture by Julia Holland.

Jas fights back to be inspiration

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Norwich teenager Jas Mickleburgh has fought back from losing her mother and attempting suicide to become an inspirational speaker and be named YMCA Norfolk Volunteer of the Year at a Celebration Awards night in Norwich recently. Here Jas tells her own story.

never mind grab them. I have gone from feeling isolated to now being able to have a voice and being listened to. I have taken time to accept myself and I use my voice as a source of strength – it's like a new power.

"Since I moved into the YMCA in Norwich I've become more confident in everything I do. I have taken on the role as chair of the Norwich Youth Advisory Board and spoken about social mobility at a number of events. I have also been invited to speak soon at Westminster and at the Norfolk Governors Conference.

"I've recently been reminded of when I was young, I wanted to be an actor. I enjoyed playing different roles and I loved the challenge of playing new characters and re-creating myself.

"It almost feels like the YMCA has given me this platform to finally start using some of my potential. They have shown me so much, from practical steps to enjoying new positive experiences. I am starting to like and accept myself.

"I have just turned 18 and I am excited about it. My message to others like me is 'Don't be afraid, even if you don't believe it YMCA will and are there to support you'."

I was 12 when my mum passed away and my family unit quickly fell apart. I was trying to play the role of mum by looking after my dad and three brothers. The next five years were hell and they took their toll on me mentally, physically and emotionally.

"I attempted suicide earlier this year and, after this, I knew I needed to move out. That's when I was advised to contact YMCA.

That was six months ago and I now feel so different about things.

"The old me was too shy, too scared and in a bad emotional state to be able to take in opportunities,

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Hospital vigil as Jack's life hung in the balance

Jack W Gregory was skin and bones when he stopped breathing for three minutes as his life hung in the balance lying in his Norwich hospital bed. Sandie Shirley reports.

A traumatic past life of drinks, drugs, violence and homelessness had resulted in Jack's 'total mental and physical breakdown'. But members from his South Norfolk church mounted a vigil of love and prayer around his bed.

"They sat and prayed with me, cried with me, brought me food, and put up with my outbursts, showing me what the church family is like, which has been an absolute life saver from God," says Jack.

Within a month he had gained two stone and was able to leave hospital after a turnaround from double pneumonia, pleurisy, lung failure and the terrible psychological damage that dogged his mind.

Now, more than three years later, Jack has a purpose and a certain hope with a transformed persona and identity as a Christian. His new life encounter placed him on the recovery road as he continues to work through life's challenges and use his pen to help voice the stories of those broken by loss, pain and crime.

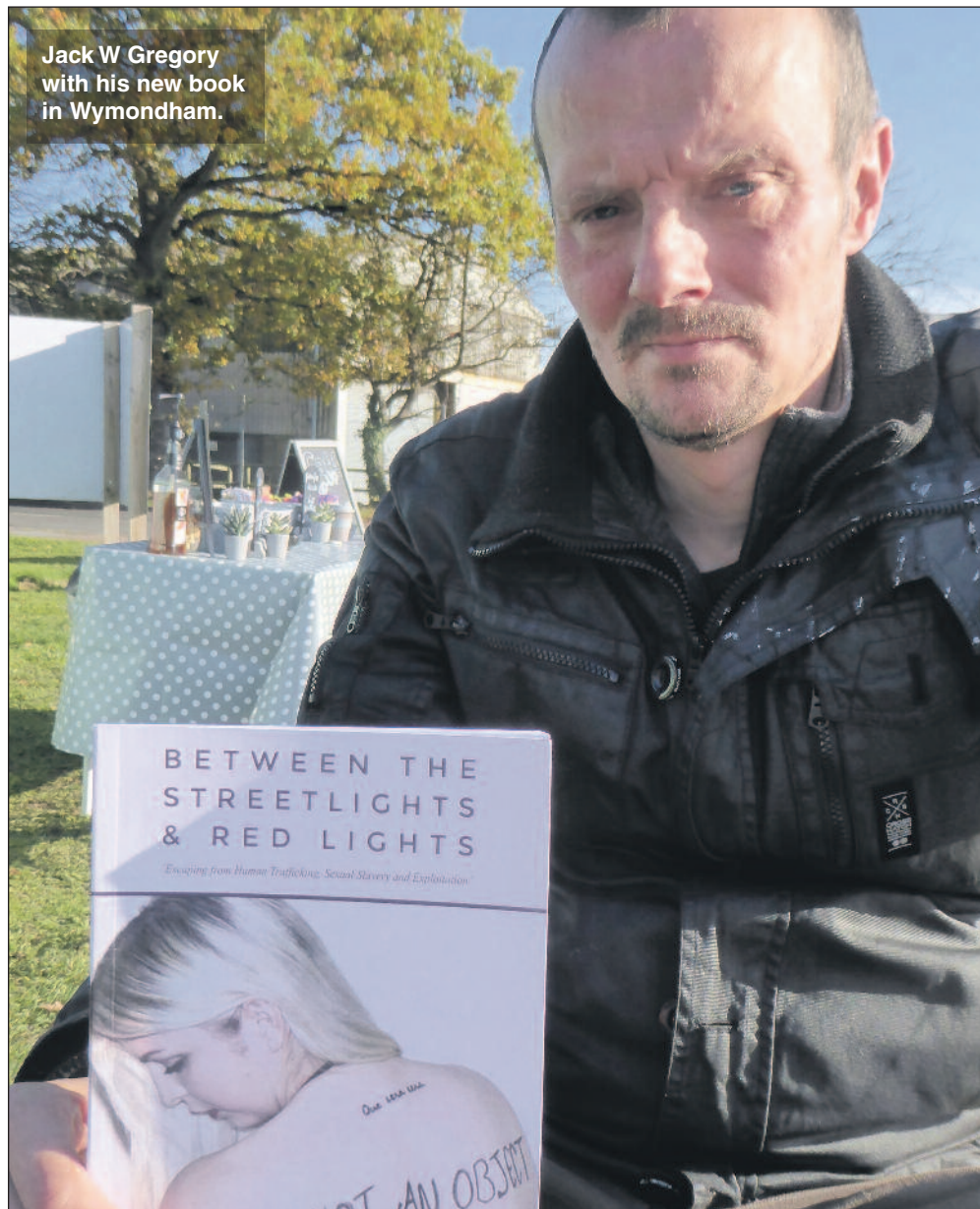
Despite being unable to read or write until early adulthood, Jack has authored two published books in the last year.

He tells the stories of those who have suffered from human trafficking and sexual exploitation – to assist the voiceless and vulnerable – and he has written his own life story.

"A Personal Apocalypse – the Poetic Ramblings of a Troubled Man" details Jack's former broken life and includes the recovery from the inner scars and self-destruction associated with mental illness.

"It took me 20 years to summon the courage to write but it has been very healing; it has put to bed some of the demons that had caused me a lot of nightmares. But looking back, I know there are people I have

Jack W Gregory with his new book in Wymondham.



hurt and caused damage to and I am truly sorry and there are amends I still have to make."

From his own experience, Jack believes there is no pit too deep for suffering souls.

"You are loved, respected, wanted and known by God. It may not feel like it and you may not be able to see it but no matter how broken you feel, how unloved and how unwanted you may feel, there is a way and that is Jesus and he brings healing to the broken, he did it for me."

Jack recalls the day that his life began to spiral downwards. "On my eighth birthday I was told I was adopted. Although I knew my adoptive parents loved me, it gave me a fear of loss and rejection.

"Coupled with learning difficulties because I had dyslexia that was not recognised in the classroom at the time, I felt I

was not good enough so I would act up and I was seen as a bit of naughty boy. I always had a good head for knowledge but I could not read, or write it down so I could not always express myself."

Those early hurts and frustrations caused a broken fault line across his life which continued to widen. Further losses led to spates of drinking, drugs, violence and a time in prison but there were long periods when Jack was sober and free from drugs.

In between, he moved to various parts of the country and trained in performance poetry; as a health practitioner and learnt the art of illusion and magic which he demonstrated at various clubs. Nearly 20 years ago the man who taught him magic died: "He was like my brother, father, best friend and mentor and he got me clean."

Jack's life was also seriously

getting flats and losing them and being made homeless for a long time. My mental health went downhill and I went on a self-destructive path. I did one or two jobs but I was unemployed for a long time which aggravated my mood.

"My life had turned before I got ill and I had a job writing policies for the disabled. But in the winter of 2015, I suffered from life-threatening lung failure and a total mental and physical breakdown when I was unable to eat and my weight dropped to six-and-a-half stone as my past came to a head. Until then I called myself a Christian for many years, but if I am honest I used church as a meal ticket."

After two years study as a student at the 'School of Supernatural Life' at Hope Community Church Wymondham, Jack is now helping new students to benefit. The course has helped take him into the deeper healing waters of God's loving acceptance and given him a new identity and a desire to help heal the broken-hearted using his love for writing and prose.

His latest book, published in the summer: "Between the Street Lights and the Red Lights – escaping from human trafficking, sexual slavery and exploitation" features victims' stories and letters to the abusers and traffickers.

Both books are published by Wacry Press and are available from Amazon as hard copies (£9.99) or e-books (99p). Between the Street Lights and Red Lights is also available from Revelation and The Book Hive – both in Norwich.

The wonder and the mystery of Christmas

■ **Story continues from page one**
what he calls the 'foot-drop'. "There is a distance of about a foot from the head to the heart," he said. "I don't want kids just to know Bible stories; I want them to really know what it means for them. It's not about head knowledge; it's helping them know what it means to be free and what it means for God to love them."

In July 2018, Raise Kids Work became an independent charity and in mid-November they held an official launch party. "I'm so excited to have the opportunity to really do what I'm meant to be doing," Andy said.

Andy's own experience of hearing from God in his life has clearly led him to want to give children the same opportunity. "I want to encourage children to understand that the supernatural is really the natural and where we are meant to be," he said. "Getting them to that place where hearing from God is natural is what I love to do."

As well as schools work, Raise also works with churches leading praise parties, helping to lead holiday clubs, running Prayer Spaces and Encounter Spaces and leading residential weekends.

Andy also runs training for churches giving fresh ideas for children's work and helping churches think through their vision for this age group.

To find out more visit: www.raisekidswork.org.uk

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New chapter in story of love

When **Jane Colman** “found the strength” to relaunch a popular Christian puppet ministry that had been originally created and directed in **Norwich** by her late husband, **David**, it marked a new chapter in an unfolding love story. **Mike Wiltshire** reports.

David, who died four years ago, was my hero,” says Jane. “The thing that most people remembered about him was his smile, despite a life-long crippling illness.”

David Colman was a gifted artist, designer and engineering draughtsman, mathematician and chess player.

He had experienced “a sudden and amazing conversion to Christ” while researching his former beliefs as an agnostic, after a life-long battle with progressive muscular dystrophy that confined him to a wheelchair.

As a young father, David had reluctantly agreed for his baby daughter, Beth, to be Christened, but he nevertheless wanted to vigorously question the faith of the Rev Ray Simpson, former minister of Bowthorpe Church, Norwich.

As David sat in his back garden, rocking the baby’s pram while reading John’s Gospel to find arguments to back-up his agnostic views, he was “suddenly aware of the presence of Jesus.” He had “a dramatic, amazing conversion with an on-fire conviction that the Gospel message was true after all.”

David spent the rest of his life, sharing the message of God’s love. To help do this, he visualised and directed a team ministry with puppets – hand-made by Jane – that performed in many churches, schools, holiday clubs and events at the Norwich Showground and Forum.

He and Jane – a former staff nurse in the baby unit at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital – had first met at an art class. Despite David’s crip-

pling illness, he had worked as a draughtsman for Laurence Scott, the famous Norwich engineering company which designed the engines for the Cunard liner, Queen Mary.

“David’s faith helped him persevere through enormous health challenges,” recalls Jane. “He was such a gifted person, although ‘imprisoned’ in a body that wouldn’t let him do all that he longed to do. From the age of 12, when he fell off his bicycle, it was evident that something was terribly wrong with his health.”

Even so, David’s creative gifts enabled him to design book covers, draw cartoons for the Daily Mirror and produce landscape paintings,” says Jane.

It took four friends to help lower him and his wheelchair into a pool for his unforgettable baptismal service at Bowthorpe in 1987.

As the illness drained David’s strength, he also knew there were many questions about his faith that he could not answer, “but he knew his questions would be answered in heaven”.

Towards the end of his life, David drew comfort from the 30 verses in the Bible that promise, ultimately, a new, resurrection body for all believers in Jesus. Jane, a lifelong Christian, recalls that as David’s heart and lungs weakened further, “he was ready to go...”

He died at 67, four years ago. He hadn’t been expected to live beyond his 40s.

David’s favourite inspirational song had been ‘You Raise Me Up’ by Irish songwriter, Brendan Graham. In a light-hearted moment, David had once dared Jane to sing it with a puppet at his funeral. Jane promised she would do it.

“I did it for him – and the Lord,” recalls Jane, who is now training up a new team of puppeteers to carry on the outreach ministry.

Most eyes were filled with tears as Jane carried out David’s final wish at his packed funeral in 2014. One family friend, Dr Louise Tailford, “just sobbed and sobbed” as Jane – with her puppet, Mack – sang the chorus:



Jane Colman with Mack the puppet and, right, her husband David.

“You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains. You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas. I am strong, when I am on your shoulders. You raise me up . . . to more than I can be.”

Urban goat farm dream

A Norwich couple have a dream to use their personal experience of addiction and recovery to set up an urban care goat farm, providing a therapeutic place for people who are on the margins to get their hands dirty and build self-esteem. Jenny Seal reports.

■ Don and Hester Irving had known each other for almost a decade through King’s Community Church in Norwich when they surprised their friends by getting together three and a half years ago.

Not long after, they discovered a shared passion for setting up a goat farm. Their dream is to run a small farm as a social enterprise, in or close to Norwich, which can provide work experience and a place of community for those in recovery, with mental health issues and people with special needs.

The couple got married in June 2016 but Hester recalls: “We had to discipline ourselves to talk about the practicalities of getting married rather than the goat farm - because we were

very excited about it. I felt like that excitement came from God.”

Both in their 50s, they bring a lifetime of experience and skills to the venture. Don is a drug addict who has been clean for 10½ years and Hester calls herself a ‘recovering grudge-bearer’. They both follow the 12-step programme.

“One of the main ethics of the 12-step programme is you only keep what you have by giving it away,” Don explains. “So I have to help other people, the way people helped me when I was first in recovery.”

“When I came out of rehab I found myself going to King’s Community Church. The guy who ran the coffee shop there – after I told him I was an addict just out of rehab – said to me: ‘do you want to come and help in the coffee shop?’ I thought, ‘that’s a bit odd, somebody giving me a chance’. Now I run that coffee shop and I’m employed by the church.

“When I was in drug treatment and people started talking about voluntary work, there was a lot in catering and pushing paper around. But if you didn’t want to do either of them you were stuffed. And a lot of people want to get their



Farm dream: Don and Hester Irving

Church in the marketplace

The church of **St Peter Mancroft**, neighbouring **Norwich** market, has a new vicar with an entrepreneurial spirit and an enthusiasm for finding out what brings people joy. **Jenny Seal** reports.

Rev Canon Edward Carter was inducted as the new Vicar of the Church of St Peter Mancroft, the city centre church that towers over The Forum, in October.

Edward, who is married with two grown-up sons, seems younger than his 51 years. He has the youthful enthusiasm of someone with lots of different interests, and a curiosity in people, the latest trends and how things work.

Since arriving in the city he has already joined the Norwich Spikers volleyball team and become a regular at Norwich Board Gamers' evenings as well as immersing himself in the history and surroundings of his new church.

It is the third time Edward and his wife Sarah have lived in Norwich. They first moved to Lakenham 25 years ago because of Sarah's job at Norwich Union. Edward started a small business where he had some success producing, selling and licensing board games, which are one of his passions. "It was fun and I learnt a lot," he said. "But it didn't turn into a proper business."

He became a member of St Mark's Church in Lakenham where he began to pray about what he should do with his life. "I had a strong sense that being involved in business, and small



Rev Canon Edward Carter inside the Forum, next to St Peter Mancroft.

companies, was part of my life," he said. "But on the other hand I knew that the church was as well. I talked to my parish priest and other people and gradually it became clear that I should offer myself for ministry in the church."

At age 27, he moved to Oxford to train and then came back in 1997 as Curate of St Matthew's Church in Thorpe Hamlet. Since then he has had a diverse ministry.

In 2000 he moved to Windsor where he was a Minor Canon in St

George's Chapel, living in Windsor Castle for four years. "I was there during the Queen's Golden Jubilee," he smiles. "I can tell you lots about exciting stuff I was part of in a small way." After he became a parish priest for a church on a Didcot housing estate and then Canon Theologian at Chelmsford Cathedral.

"And now, this year, the opportunity has arisen to come back to St Peter Mancroft, here in Norwich. So I'm delighted to be back," he said.

In his ministry he most enjoys

preaching and applying the Bible to life in the 21st century. "I love bringing the Scriptures and today – the newspaper, the radio, the city, the busyness of life – together, laying them alongside each other and seeing how they speak to each other," he said.

And although clearly impressed by the history and tradition of the 15th century church and the energy of its people, plus the 50,000 visitors it annually welcomes, Edward gets most animated about St Peter Man-

croft's location. "The thing that really excites me is geographical; it's quite literally next to the marketplace. I'm excited about the people who day-by-day do their stuff around it and that sense in which the church is part of the landscape. It's a real presence."

He is still passionate about enterprise and looks for ways to incorporate this into his ministry. "Because of what I've done in the past and just something about me," he said, "I love creative things and I think I'm some sort of entrepreneur in ministry now."

During his time in Chelmsford he was commissioned with finding a new way to help people pray and think about their faith in order to mark the centenary of the Diocese. He used his skills to manage a project that produced chunky wooden holding crosses from disused pews.

He said. "I found a workshop and we made in the end about 15,000 holding crosses. Some were made out in Africa. They have the great commandment laser etched in them as well. I love a project like that because it's a real thing, its tangible, you can feel it. And it actually touches people in different ways – they can hold onto something that is precious to them."

With all of his own passions it isn't surprising to discover he enjoys finding out what excites other people. "I love seeing people shine and glow in whatever they are doing," he said. "That's the first question I ask people – 'what brings you most joy?'"

"Entrepreneurs aren't just inventors who sit in a shed and fiddle away at something," he said. "They are people who network and try to work out what is catching people's imagination – what people will be excited by. So that's the kind of mind-set I'm bringing."

for path to recovery

hands dirty with animals and be outside."

Don grew up on a farm in Suffolk where he developed an understanding of animals and love for tractors and motorbikes. He has a degree in business and economics and now manages volunteers in the coffee shop. "It's great," he said. "You get people who actually want to come to work, not because they want to pay the bills. It's about feeling part of the family, its working, and it's giving people self-esteem."

Hester trained in social work and teaching but for the past 19 years has worked as a therapist at Hebron Trust, a female residential drug and alcohol rehab centre. Many years ago she visited an alpaca farm in Sheffield with a basic café and has since had the desire to start something similar.

"When we first started going out we were sharing our stories," Hester said, "and Don said, 'I could never go back to farming' and I said a bit despondently 'Oh, so you wouldn't want to start a goat farm?' and he said, 'Actually I would!'. He totally flipped. So I thought that was like a God moment really".

The couple have both completed CEVAS training in care farm management and share a

clear vision of the initiative.

"We've just got loads and loads of ideas," said Hester. Don adds, "There is just the slight issue of premises."

They would ideally like to rent or buy a piece of land covering 5-15 acres in Norwich or accessible by bus. As well as supporting a few goats and chickens, there would be space to grow vegetables and a kitchen garden. Mobile buildings and cabins would be used to set up a café hub, counselling pods, rentable meeting space and a workshop. They would also love woodland, an orchard and access to water.

Their search for land has been a struggle with several possibilities thwarted. "It's been quite frustrating to be honest with you," said Don. "I'm an addict and one of the characteristics of an addict is wanting everything now so the lack of premises has been quite a struggle."

"But I do believe when the time is right it will happen. You just have to put yourself forward and have faith that something will happen. I'm convinced something will happen."

If you would like to get involved and help Don and Hester realise their vision for City Goats, contact them at citygoats@outlook.com

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Norfolk love on India streets

Rev Pat Atkinson is an ordinary person with an extraordinary legacy of taking Norfolk love onto the streets of India over almost 30 years, helping transform the lives of thousands of street children, destitute elderly people and those facing cancer and leprosy. **Jenny Seal** reports.

Pat, from Brundall, is visiting India for the 54th time this month, almost 29 years since she made her first trip. Since that initial visit she has set up a charity, the Vidiyal Trust, which has saved lives and changed the future of thousands - but don't call her a hero!



Rev Pat Atkinson with some of the street elders in India.

In the 1990s, when Rev Canon Pat Atkinson first fell in

love with the people living on the streets of Madarai in

Southern India's Tamil Nadu, she encountered prejudice as a Christian. Because of her faith people regularly threw stones at her, abused her on the street and assumed her good deeds were a ruse.

Now 71, and looking forward to her 54th trip to the city, things are different. "Now, wherever we go we're welcome. In fact it's an overwhelming welcome really," she said.

"Now I know that for our part of the city, where we work, the word Christian is honoured. A lot of barriers have been broken down."

This was confirmed to her recently when the police brought a dying, old lady from the street to her charity's residential home. They said: "we knew to bring her to the Christians".

"This is one of my favourite things that have ever been said," Pat recalled, smiling.

The change, she believes, has come about simply by giving unconditionally and showing God's love. Over almost three decades her charity, the Vidiyal Trust (Vidiyal means new beginnings) has grown to encompass multiple projects enabling her and her team to show love to thousands living in abject poverty.

Pat's work in India started with street children. Today the charity's tuition centres provide 150 street children with extra tuition morning and evening, a good breakfast, evening snacks, weekend activities, clothes and the opportunity to go on to higher

education or vocational training.

Through this, 140 former street children have now gained university degrees including a dress designer, a global IT specialist and two of Vidiyal Trust's full-time staff who have Masters qualifications.

This alone is a massive achievement but the charity has also built its own 42-bed residential home for elderly people who would otherwise be living destitute and with health problems on the street. They run a lunch centre for street elders, a food bag scheme and look after a small colony of people with advanced leprosy.

They also work closely with a cancer charity in Kerala's Trivandrum, funding two ambulances with drivers that, along with doctors and nurses from a regional hospital, have made over 500,000 trips providing palliative care to adults in rural areas and more recently enabling 100 children with cancer to access treatment.

"It's just sort of all happened somehow," said Pat. "It's been quite amazing how it has."

She is quick to point out that it couldn't have happened without considerable support from Norfolk individuals and churches.

"We are a Norwich charity," she said. "We always have been and always will be and I'd say 95% of our support comes from Norfolk."

As she shows me photos of the projects, she points out the

water supply funded in memory of a lady from Meadow Way Chapel, the hall walls decorated by young people from Brundall, the new fridge donated by a Norfolk URC and a football team of street children who wear Blofield United's old strip. "See what I mean?" she said. "It's all Norfolk!"

"We can look after an elder or child for £12 a month. For elders that's food, clothes, medical care, outings, a bedroom everything. But that money doesn't come out of my pocket - it's come from someone's pocket in Norfolk and that to me is the key to it."

Pat has deliberately kept overheads very low and has funded her own travel and expenses personally and through the legacy of a good friend.

She has vowed that the charity will not take on further projects - she admits that everyone laughs when she says that - but will focus on the sustainability of existing projects to safeguard its future and its ability to provide care long-term.

As part of this strategy they recently set up a free-range, organic farm with solar panels and a growing number of cows and chickens. "Our chickens have gone from 250 to nearly 700," said Pat. "We've got enough eggs and chicken meat to feed all our elders and children. The next thing is we are trying to grow vegetables."

It is not such an easy task when the region suffers from intense drought. They are however finding creative ways around it, such as using a hydroponic system to grow grass to feed the cattle, a method Pat discovered on holiday in Disneyland.

As she heads off to India again, she will encounter slums experiencing an outbreak of swine flu and dengue fever. She is no stranger to disease having suffered from Stills Disease as a teenager, multiple episodes of dysentery and almost dying of malaria.

"It's not been easy," she said. "But I'm very, very lucky. I've had a fantastic life. Just please don't make me out to be some sort of hero, because I'm not. I'm just an ordinary person."

If you could sponsor a street child or elder for £12 a month please write to the Vidiyal Trust at 32 Berryfields, Brundall, NR13 5QE.

You can also donate online at <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/vidiyaltrust>

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