GOOD NEWS

FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK Winter 2025: FREE

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Big year for Norwich musician Alice-Lily

It has been a big, big year for Norwich singer-songwriter, church worship leader and medical student, Alice-Lily Nnene, who has performed at Latitude in Suffolk and the Big Church Festival. **Keith Morris** reports.



Alice-Lily Nnene performing at the Latitude Festival in August.

Alice-Lily, 22, grew up in Norwich and is now based in London while studying medicine at UCL. In August she performed at the well-known Latitude music festival.

"Performing at Latitude was such an exciting and surreal experience," Alice-Lily said. "Being on the BBC Stage and seeing the crowd respond to my songs was a moment I'll never forget – it showed me how far my music has reached and inspired me to keep going."

Music has always been a central part of Alice-Lily's life. Growing up in a highly musical household in Norwich, with both parents as church worship leaders and gospel artists, she was immersed in church music, songwriting, and performance from an early age. At just seven years old, she co-wrote a song with her father Ike which was later included on her mother Linda Nnene's debut album Moving On.

"I have family links with Norfolk and have been connected with local churches through family and friends," she said. "It's special to know that my music can resonate with communities here."

From making CDs for her school friends to releasing songs during lock-down, Alice-Lily has steadily honed her craft. Her debut single Normal Paradise on SoundCloud gained early support from BBC Introducing in Norfolk, who continue to champion her music. She has since released tracks such as Durag, Clocks (Radio Norfolk's Record of the Week and played on BBC Radio 1), and has performed at memorable venues including Ronnie Scott's, the Norfolk & Norwich Festival, and on the BBC Stage at Latitude for the last two years. In 2023, she was shortlisted for the BBC Radio 1 Introducing Live Lounge competition.

Alice-Lily also performed at the Big Church Festival in West Sussex at the end of August on the Illuminate stage with her band. She was also part of Martin Smith's team, singing and worshipping on the main stage to over 30,000 people.

Alongside her solo artistry, Alice-Lily is also part of the worship team at King's Cross Church (KXC) in London. She has featured on widely sung KXC songs including Jesus' Name Above All Names, Rock of Ages, and Who the Son Sets Free. Her worship leading reflects her desire to help people encounter God through music she says.

"Leading worship at KXC is one of the most rewarding parts of my life. It's such a privilege to stand with a community and point people towards Jesus through music," said Alice-Lily.

"My faith is at the centre of who I am and everything I create. I see music as a way of connecting people with hope, joy and encouragement, and I often draw inspiration from my personal walk with God."

Her debut EP Players, Parties & Platonic Love showcases her versatility as a songwriter and performer, while singles such as Peace No Problems, Sunshine Lullaby, Sentimental, and Stand Up continue to grow her audience on streaming platforms. She has also collaborated with other Christian artists.

There are plans for Alice-Lily to support a future tour with Martin Smith (formerly of the pioneering Christian band Delirious?), so watch out for dates.

Following in her GP father's footsteps, Alice-Lily is also studying to become a doctor at London's UCL. Balancing medicine and music is a unique opportunity for Alice-Lily, and she embraces both as part of her calling: medicine as a way of serving and healing, and music as a way of inspiring and encouraging others.

"It takes focus and dedication to balance my medical studies with music," she said. "But I see both as part of my calling to serve and inspire people. Music gives me a creative outlet, while medicine is about helping people in another way. They complement each other more than people might expect."

With her distinctive voice, honest lyrics, and deep-rooted faith, she is establishing herself as an artist to watch, bringing soulful sounds, heartfelt stories, and worship together in one journey.

- Spotify: Alice-Lily on Spotify
- Instagram: @alicelilynnene



Lady Dannatt, by Bill Smith.

Royal thanks to faith groups

Faith representatives from across Norfolk have been thanked by King Charles III, through HM Lord-Lieutenant, Lady Phillipa Dannatt, at an evening to celebrate their community work, held at County Hall in Norwich on November 17.

■ Addressing representatives from the many different faith communities across Norfolk, Lady Dannatt said: "Tonight we come together not only to celebrate diversity, but to affirm a truth that has shaped Norfolk for generations: when we stand together, we rise together. In a world too often fractured by fear and uncertainty, interfaith collaboration is not an optional extra – it is a lifeline. It is the golden thread that binds our communities into a fabric strong enough to withstand storms, compassionate enough to heal wounds, and resilient enough to offer hope when hope feels scarce.

"Faith communities are anchors of identity, sources of hope and pillars of social cohesion. In times of uncertainty, they remind us who we are and what we share. They offer sanctuary, solidarity and a sense of belonging that no policy or programme alone can provide," said Lady Dannatt.

"To my mind, it is absolutely essential we celebrate this good work – especially now, at a time when heightened tensions and divisive voices seek to exploit difference. We must stand firm against those who would turn diversity into division. Tonight is a declaration that in Norfolk difference is not a threat – it is a strength. Without a doubt, faith communities are at their best when they work together for the common good."

During the evening, which was led by Norwich Cathedral Dean, Dr Andrew Braddock, chair of Norfolk Lieutenancy Faith and Community Group, 60 representatives from Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Bahai and other faiths, shared stories of faith in action. They went on to discuss in small groups what community-enhancing work is already happening and how this might be built on and recognised further in the future.

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FOR NORWICH & NORFOLK

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When heaven's peace broke the silence



As Christmas approaches, Gorleston theology graduate, **Hannah Hammond**, offers advice for finding some peace in this increasingly busy and bustling time of year.

■ I often find the weeks before Christmas full of noise. In every shop, Andy Williams promises me it's the "most wonderful time of the year," while Wizzard insists it should be Christmas every day. Delivery vans rumble through streets, loaded with enough sugary delicacies to keep the nation in a festive frenzy for weeks.

Deadlines loom even as we juggle school concerts and work parties. My mind begins to hum with endless to-do lists and an uneasy feeling takes hold that perhaps Andy Williams wasn't quite right after all. Amid all the sparkle and bustle, peace seems like something only available on a greeting card.

Yet the first Christmas was anything but calm. Bethlehem was crowded and chaotic, and the stable where Jesus was born was no sedate nativity scene. It held the bleating of sheep, the stomp of hooves and the agonising cries of a woman in labour. But it was there, in that noisy, ordinary place, that heaven's peace broke the silence and entered the world – through the fragile cry of a newborn child.

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (John 14:27). His peace doesn't depend on quiet surroundings or perfect conditions. It's the deep stillness that comes from knowing we are loved and forgiven and not alone.

Perhaps this Christmas we can seek peace, not by shutting out the noise, but by noticing God's presence within it – in the ordinary moments of compassion, in the laughter that softens weariness, and the messy, dissonant rhythm of everyday life.

If the world feels loud this Christmas, take heart. The same God who brought peace to a noisy Bethlehem still draws near, gently offering His stillness, hope and love. **rootedtheology.com**

John marks remarkable 60 years of ministry

Pioneering Norfolk Christian leader **John Betts**, has marked a remarkable 60 years in ministry this autumn and his leadership has been far-reaching, impacting many different areas of the Christian community.



John Betts at the Forum in Norwich at a Celebrate Norfolk event.

John arrived in Norwich in July 1969, having been a Baptist minister for four years. He had completed a course at the London Bible College and was ordained in the autumn of 1965.

At the end of his ministry at the then Silver Road Baptist Church, John was one of a group of believers who began to meet as a small house church. This was in the early days of the charismatic renewal.

The group grew over the years and became a flourishing church fellowship known as Norwich Christian Fellowship. The church became affiliated to the Harvestime Apostolic Ministries.

John became a member of the leadership team and was involved in the Bible weeks of those years, also pioneering and ministering to churches in Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk.

At the end of that period, John's focus became centred upon Norwich. He was, together with others, involved in establishing Transforming Norwich (the former Churches Together in Greater Norwich and now called Connect Norwich).

As the chair of the team during those years he was responsible for pioneering several different ministries in the city. These included Street Pastors, Norwich Foodbank and Celebrate Norwich and Norfolk, the latter bringing together churches and ministries from across the city and county in an annual exhibition at the Forum, demonstrating the life and activity of the churches 24/7 throughout the year.

There was also a period of years in which John was involved in ministry in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Austria and southern Ireland. Together with Doreen, his wife of 55 years (sadly Doreen died four years ago) they spent months at a time in southern Africa preaching in churches, training leaders and experiencing many adventures.

John, now aged 88, is still active in ministry, as an elder in the Christian Fellowship Norwich where he is a frequent preacher and also as the leader of City Ministries a ministry which brings together churches and ministries for fellowship, prayer and corporate ministry.

Asked "What have you learned as you look back over the years" John said: "Above all the faithfulness of the Lord who called me to the ministry and whom I have had the privilege to serve over these many years. Through the highs and lows of my walk with the Lord, the success and failures He has kept me. Against all odds when at times all seemed lost He was there to save and keep, provide and sustain."

Looking forward, John said: "My hope and prayer for the work of the Lord in Norwich would be that we will see a renewal of vital faith and unity amongst the churches and the advancement of the Kingdom of God leading to the churches being once again a major influence within the city."

John celebrated his 60th anniversary with a Christian Leadership Conference at New Hope Christian Centre on November 8.

Picture of coastal church growth

Priest, painter, poet and photographer **Rev Ian Dyble** loves north Norfolk, and has a vision that our local communities will continue to grow in faith, and realise how much God loves them. **Tony Rothe** reports.



Rev Ian Dyble in his studio/ study in Weybourne with some of his paintings.

Ian and his wife Jo arrived in north Norfolk as newlyweds, with a new job each, in 1986. Ian trained and worked as a solicitor in and around Cromer, and then as a barrister, but alongside his legal career there was another strong sense of calling to full-time ministry, but he knew it wasn't to be immediate. He got involved in church leadership, planting and growth.

Twenty years later he was ordained, and served as a curate at Holy Trinity Brompton, famous as the home of the Alpha Course.

Knowing he was being called back to Norfolk, he became Vicar of the Mitre benefice in Norwich, before he and Jo, who are now grandparents, returned to north Norfolk.

For the past five years he has been Rector of the Weybourne Group, and walking in his coastal parishes meets God in the wind-and-water landscapes and seascapes of creek, saltmarsh, and big skies, which have inspired his artistic works.

But, his parish has also seen growth over the last five years, and he explains that growth in discipleship and a genuine loving community where love for God and love of neighbour really is at the centre of all they do in Weybourne.

Ian says, "It was a huge privilege to have 23 people making public declarations of faith on Weybourne beach (known locally as Weybourne Hope!) in August this year. 19 people were baptised/ reaffirmed their baptismal vows and many of these were also confirmed by the Bishop of Lynn whilst still in the water!

"Another four were also confirmed on the beach. It was a joyous occasion. New life is springing up across the benefice with a weekly 'Celtic' service at Salthouse growing healthily in that wonderfully light and creative space where God and creativity meet."

He began responding to the wonder of the scenery and wildlife all around him in paintings, photographs and poems – which this year were collected in his book A Moment Held.

In the book, he says: "As I walk out along this beautiful coast, in this corner of creation that is home for me, it really does feel like time has slowed down.

"It gives me the space to breathe and to simply be. And in this moment of grace a voice speaks".

Meanwhile, back in the parish, lots of midweek activities are going on, with homegroups, Bible studies, Alpha and discipleship courses.

Sunday services at Weybourne are broadcast live to YouTube @weybourne_group where anyone can also catch up with past sermon series on The Sermon on the Mount, Encounters with Jesus in Luke, The Acts of Jesus in Acts, Jonah and others.

Ian explains that his vision is that they continue to grow in faith and following, that through them communities might know that God loves them and that the church (the people) is for everyone and it's a good place to be – joyful, loving, welcoming, liberating.

He says: "People tell me that ministry in rural areas is declining and hopeless. Not in the book that I read or with the God that I believe in.

"We have the best message in the world, and we live at a time when people are searching and open to engaging with that message if we are clear about what the 'good news' actually is and we share it with joy, with passion and with integrity.

"I often say to our church - 'If you love Jesus and enjoy church - invite your friends'. Evangelism can be pretty straightforward. Andrew (the disciple) did it. He simply said to his brother Peter 'We have found the Messiah, come and see!' And we know what happens after that!

"I love the church, I love these people and I am confident that when others 'come and see' they will too".

"A Moment Held" by Ian Dyble is available from him (ian@weybourne.church)

See more of his poetry and pictures on Instagram @iandyble.

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Memorial plea for Norfolk martyr



Oliver Fellows Tomkins, courtesy of London Missionary Society.

The inspiring story of a Norfolk missionary who died violently 124 years ago at the hands of cannibals has been revealed after a church plaque dedicated to him was under threat after a redevelopment plan. **Keith Morris** reports.

Oliver Fellows Tomkins, who was born in Great Yarmouth, was ordained at the United Reformed Church (URC) in Princes Street, Norwich in 1899, and sent out to Papua New Guinea, through the London Missionary Society, to spread the Christian faith.

After he was martyred and eaten by the natives there in 1901, a plaque commemorating the 27-year-old was put up in the Norwich church after a packed-out memorial service was held.

With plans recently approved to convert the URC into a performing arts centre, the great-nephew of Oliver has made a heart-felt plea to developers to keep the plaque, as wants to make sure his memory continues to live on.

Stephen Tomkins, an Emeritus Fellow at Homerton College, Cambridge, said: "My great uncle Oliver's story is most unusual. It had quite an impact on my own father, who was named after him. My father was born of a Christian missionary family in China and became, later in the 20th century, one of the founders of the British Council of Churches and World Council of Churches.

"The impact that those pioneering Christian missions had was fantastic and the Papua New Guinea church considers Oliver Fellows Tomkins as one of its founders."

"I have asked the buyer of the URC church to please think carefully about any alterations inside the building as it is all part and parcel of that church building's history, and to keep the plaque where it is as it tells a unique story. We feel that that narrative, if better known, will be valued and attract visitors."

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The story of Oliver Fellows Tomkins



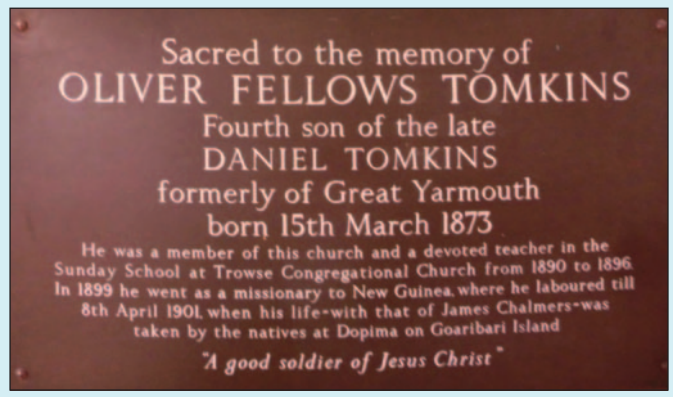
Right, the memorial cross for Oliver Fellows Tomkins in the cemetery on Kitchener Road in Great Yarmouth. Picture © Chris Thompson and, below the memorial plaque at Princes Street URC in Norwich.

■ Oliver Fellows Tomkins was born in March 1873 at Great Yarmouth, the son of a teacher Daniel Tomkins and Catherine Fellows.

Oliver was educated at his father's school in Yarmouth before travelling to Switzerland to finish his education. Returning to Britain, at the age of 17, he moved to Norwich, to take up a position at mustard makers Colman's, where he spent five years and was a member at the Congregational Church on Princes Street (which became the URC church) in the city.

From 1890 to 1896 he was a Sunday School teacher at Trowse Congregational Church in Norwich, as well as being active in the YMCA.

In 1895 he applied to become a missionary and became a student at the East London Missionary Training Institute, at Bromley-by-Bow in London and also attended Livingstone College, named after David Livingstone. The college provided a nine-month course in the elements of medicine for Christian missionaries going to tropical countries.



During holidays and half-terms, he would preach to the fishermen of the North Sea fleet and undertake mission work in English country villages, travelling to each in a caravan and camping at night.

At the end of his training, Oliver was ordained at Princes Street in 1899. He was appointed to work in the Torres Strait in New Guinea, and was selected by the Home Magazine Missionary Band. He sailed for New Guinea on December 8, 1899, with Rev Albert Pearse, celebrating the beginning of a new century at sea before joining the Scottish born missionary James Chalmers.

Chalmers said that Oliver had been: "A great help and a great comfort. No son could have treated me more kindly than he did."

Accompanied by Oliver, Chalmers arrived at the Aird River of Goaribari Island on board the mission vessel Niue on April 7, 1901. The last entry in Oliver's diary supplied some account of the first communications with the cannibals of Gulf Province.

"In the afternoon we were having a short service with the crew, when about 20 canoes were seen approaching. They hesitated as they got nearer to us, till we were able to assure them that we meant peace. Gradually one or two of the more daring ones came closer, and then alongside, till at last one ventured on board. Then, in a very few minutes, we were surrounded by canoes, and our vessel was covered with them.

On this, our first visit, we were able to do really nothing more than establish friendly relations with the people. They stayed on board about three hours, examining everything, from the ship's rigging to our shirt buttons. They tried hard to persuade us to come ashore in their canoes, but we preferred to spend the night afloat, and promised we would visit their village in the morning."

The following morning was Easter Sunday.

The missionaries, and twelve native Christians who accompanied them, landed at Risk Point on Goaribari Island and none were seen again.

A later report came from George Le Hunte, Lieutenant-Governor of the colony, who visited the Aird River, and heard the story from a captured prisoner.

Accompanying him was Rev Archibald Ernest Hunt, who wrote: "When they got ashore, the whole party were massacred and their heads cut off. All the bodies were distributed and eaten."

In 'Adventures of Missionary Heroism' by John C Lambert, the full horror is described.

"The first to be killed were the two missionaries, who were believed to have been knocked simultaneously on the head from behind with stone clubs.

"Both fell senseless at the first blow and their heads were immediately cut off. Their followers were then similarly killed and then beheaded. The heads were distributed as trophies among the murderers. The bodies were cut up and handed to the women to cook."

Oliver died aged 27, James Chalmers died aged 59. The news of Oliver's death did not reach his family for many months. The Congregational Church on Princes Street was packed for a memorial service.

A plaque was placed on the wall of the church and a memorial cross was erected in the cemetery on Kitchener Road in Great Yarmouth.

In 2001 there was a centenary commemoration and a reconciliation between the families of Tomkins and Chalmers, and the tribe from Papua New Guinea.

Tom's unique insight into disability

Engineer, website analyst and musician Thomas Harrison has a new role as the Bishop of Norwich's advisor for disability. **Keith Morris** reports.



Pictured is Thomas Harrison with his guide dog.

Thomas, who is blind, lives on a boat at Brundall with his family, and is the first person appointed to the new voluntary role and hopes to use it to help disabled people play a full part in church life.

Thomas and wife Hilary have lived aboard their boat, the Golden Mean, for the past 22 years. They worship with the Garden Church and East Church in Norwich and Thomas works for a national charity, analysing websites and apps to ensure they are accessible to blind and partially-sighted people.

Bishop Graham Usher said: "I am looking forward to working with Thomas and feel sure that his guidance and advice will be a blessing to many. People with disabilities and additional needs are as much a part of the Church as anyone else and we need to be committed to ensuring their welcome, inclusion and participation."

Thomas takes up the role after completing the Church of England's Enabling Leaders Programme, which helps disabled and neurodivergent people take on leadership positions.

"I want to encourage people with disabilities to get involved," said Thomas. "I would like to move away from thinking about disability as an 'us and them' mentality."

Brought up a Catholic, he recalls volunteering to help on a trip to Lourdes as a teenager, when he still had full sight. "I was a 19-year-old volunteer pushing a 95-year-old man in a wheelchair but as we talked, who was being helped? He'd done a lot of living already, I was trying to work out what I wanted to do with my life.

"The relationship between helper and those that are being helped, can be good for the helper as well as the person receiving help."

Thomas lost his sight due to a genetic condition while he was studying for an engineering degree.

"Asking 'Why me?' is a bit of a dead end," he said. "I have a feeling that God tends not to put things on you that you really can't cope with. Sometimes you might think you can't cope but my experience of blindness is that it's not a total disaster. To me, if you are in constant pain, that's far worse.

"Life is a bit of a muddle a lot of the time and you can only do your best."

He said he is looking forward to helping churches be hospitable to all, including disabled people. "I love the word 'hospitality,'" he said. "Jesus was hospitable. He met people where they were."

Thomas and Hilary met as volunteers for the Samaritans. She went on to train as a teacher and Thomas worked for London Underground.

Living in crowded city house-shares, they began to dream of setting up home in a boat. They found a sailing barge and lived first on the Thames and then the Waveney and Yare.

Hilary has written a book, called Rock the Boat, about their life on the Golden Mean, featuring their voyage through London and up the coast to Norfolk, where Hilary grew up.

An engineer by inclination and education, Thomas is in charge of boat maintenance, feeling his way around the inner workings of the Golden Mean to diagnose and repair any problems. He looks after the engine, mends the boiler, organises sails and ropes and sorts leaks – all by touch.

Thomas and Hilary brought up their children on board, including home-schooling them, and over the years the boat has also been home to a shifting roll-call of family pets and two Guide Dogs.

"It's lovely. You are very close to nature. You can move your home, and you don't have to go far to be completely away from everyone," said Thomas. "And I've never fallen in. I actually find big houses more difficult to navigate. Here I know where everything is."

Christian disability awareness charity Through the Roof held a recent Disability Inclusion and Belonging event in Norwich when local Christians were able to meet and share their passion for making the church in Norfolk (and East Anglia) more disability inclusive.

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Vision of a young Norfolk Christian story-teller



Keith back in 1990 with his two-day-old daughter in King's Lynn.

Some 35 years ago, an enthusiastic young Christian journalist moved to Norfolk with his wife, and a cherished but seemingly unattainable vision of providing a professional news service to highlight the work of the local Christian community and, in doing so, to help unite its different parts. **Keith Morris** reports.

■ The journo landed in King's Lynn with a job on the local daily newspaper – the Eastern Daily Press. His wife was a paediatric hospital doctor and soon the couple (well mostly the wife) produced a daughter in the same hospital in which she worked.

Soon after, the young journalist was offered a promotion to the bright lights of Norwich and, at the very same time, an opportunity and the means to give birth to his own vision – that of a regular newspaper to tell Good News stories about what the local churches and Christians were doing to establish and extend the Kingdom of God in the county.

So, it was that back in 1992, with the help of Peter Barnes, the Good News for Norwich newspaper was born, printed on the same presses as the EDP. It was published three times a year and, at Christmas, a remarkable 80,000 copies were printed and delivered to thousands of homes across the city by enthusiastic teams from many local churches.

Hundreds of personal stories of faith of local Christians, or those with a national profile but a local link, were found, researched, written and published by the multi-denominational team.

Over the last 33 years, more than 100 editions of the paper have been published and around 2 million copies printed and distributed – and it is still going strong.

I was that young hack and, by 2005, with the advent of the internet, I saw the ever greater opportunities for spreading that same Good News online. By then I was working as the Communications Manager for Archant, which owned the EDP, Evening News etc.

The vision – share by John Betts and Rev Nicholas Vesey – developed into the fledgling Network Norwich website (now Network Norfolk). It was launched in partnership with the Norwich Churches Together grouping – called Transforming Norwich, now Connect Norwich – and the local Christian seedbed charity Dreams & Visions.

I took a step of faith and went part-time from my Archant role to launch the website for two days a week and have not looked back since.

We now employ a team of four writers, all part-time, who, over the last 20 years have written and published over 10,000 stories of faith, read by literally millions of people. Many of those stories have gone on to also be told by other newspapers, radio and TV stations, multiplying the effect of that Good News. The real impact may only be truly known the other side of heaven – though there are lots of examples this side – connections, decisions, inspirations.

We have always had a focus on highlighting the work and lives of other Christians and hence, the recent Norfolk Christian Communications Awards which aimed to do just that.

The website itself has also given birth to similar Christian news sites in Great Yarmouth, Suffolk, Peterborough, Bristol and Leeds among others.

The work and vision continues and if you appreciate them both, then I would like to invite you to support them by keep reading the stories, answering the advert for jobs, events and businesses and, if you are able, to make a small monthly contribution to help to cover our costs.

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Inspiring and creative websites, social media channels, digital projects, pictures, newsletters and individuals were honoured at the Norfolk Christian Communications Awards, held at St John the Baptist Cathedral in Norwich on October 23. **Keith Morris** reports.



Staged by the Network Norfolk website, to help mark its 20th anniversary, the awards aimed to honour and celebrate innovative, creative and inspiring work in the world of communications by members of the Norfolk Christian community.

Among the winners were Norwich Foodbank, St John's Cathedral, UEA Christian Union, The Matthew Project, Hethersett Parish and St Mary Magdalene in Gorleston.

Website publisher, Keith Morris, told the audience: "The main reason we are here tonight is to honour all those of you who work so hard and creatively in the communications environment – a role that is very often hidden away behind the scenes, but is of vital importance to the work of all the churches, organisations and groups which you represent.

"We have had an amazing response to the whole idea of the awards with more than 100 entries, many of which were of exceptional quality. Our distinguished judging panel chose the best 42 as finalists. We then opened up the awards to a public vote, and the response was overwhelming, with more than 800 different people taking the time to cast over 2,000 votes."

Speaking at the event were the Rt Rev Peter Collins, Bishop of East Anglia and the Rt Rev Graham Usher, Bishop of Norwich.

Bishop Peter Collins said: "What Keith has contributed, through the establishment of the Good News newspaper first of all, and now the Network Norfolk website as we know it, has been a great service to the proclamation of the Gospel in this region and in this place.

"I would like to simply thank him for the work that he has done in service to the wider church, it has been invaluable."

Bishop Graham Usher said: "The Gospels remind us of two key things. Good communication isn't about talking more, it's about listening better. And sometimes the most powerful messages come from stories, not in sermons that lecture people.

"So may your communications help you to be makers of salt and generators of light. For God is not on mute. You are not on mute. Together we can make Christ known all the more."

municators are honoured





Pictured above are all the award winners, left, the team from the UEA Christian Union and, below, Network Norfolk publisher Keith Morris.

Pictures by Gareth Gabriel - Film and Photo.



The winners

■ **Best Norfolk Church Website - the Bishop of Norwich Award**
Winner - Cathedral of St John the Baptist - Judges said: "Beautiful and welcoming home page. Clear and easy to navigate. Up to date, with today's services on the home page and inviting links to find out more about visiting, worshipping, events etc.
Highly Commended
City Gates Church, Norwich; Servant's Church, Norwich.
Finalists
East Church, Norwich; Life Church, Sheringham; St Helen's & St Edmunds, Costessey

■ **Best Norfolk Christian Organisation Website**
Sponsored by Hubb Church

Winner - The Matthew Project - Judges said: "A well-structured website with essential information prominent on the home page. The Summer of Stories feature is really nice and clearly engages readers in the charity's vital work."
Highly Commended
YMCA Norfolk; Norwich Foodbank
Finalists
Churches Together in Norfolk & Waveney; Diocese of East Anglia; The Julian Shrine

■ **Best use of social media**
Sponsored by YMCA Norfolk
Winner - UEA Christian Union Instagram - Judges said: "Well-organised content that is engaging, along with amazing quality video. Very tuned into their audience and the needs of the platform. Comes across as genuine, honest and authentic."
Highly Commended
SOUL Church Instagram; St Mary Magdalene, Gorleston, Facebook; Norwich Citadel Facebook
Finalists
Nar Valley Benefice Facebook; Proclaimers Norwich Facebook

■ **Best newsletter – digital or print**
Sponsored by YMCA Norfolk
Winner - Hethersett United Benefice - Good News Magazine - Judges said: "A bright, engaging and ambitious publication, packed with news, stories and information. Inclusive and varied and has a great reach into the community. Shows a terrific team effort to get it to local people."
Highly Commended
Stalham Baptist, Community Scene; Benefice of Poringland - Contact
Finalists
Attleborough Baptist Church – ABC Times; Barnham Broom & Upper Yare Benefice – Group News; Holy Trinity, Norwich - The Day Death Died

■ **Best Digital Content – video or audio or visual**
Sponsored by Audio Electronic Design
Winner - Norwich Foodbank, The Foodbank Journey - Judges said: "From all the media content put forward, I'll remember this one most. It was clear and clever with the spotlight on the journey of a simple carton of milk. By the end, you had a really clear understanding and appreciation of the message.
Highly Commended
Servants Church, welcome video; SOUL Church, The Wonder highlights
Finalists
Diocese of Norwich - Creation Care Videos; Gateway Vineyard - Compassion project videos; Manna Productions – Animated Devotionals

■ **Best picture of the 'church in action'**
Sponsored by St John's Cathedral, Narthex
Winner - St Mary Magdalene, Gorleston, The Bridge Lunch Club - Judges said: "This picture is worth more than the proverbial thousand words, as the old adage goes. It needs no explanation and the broad inviting smiles tell the story of this hugely popular lunch club.
Highly Commended
Diocese of East Anglia, Maundy Thursday Washing of Feet; Operation Christmas Child at Bowthorpe Road Methodist; Manifest King's Lynn, Singing in the Rain
Finalists
Norwich Citadel - Hannah Carr Commissioning; Sheringham Beach Life - Soaking

NETWORK NORFOLK CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATIONS AWARDS 2025

■ **Best Christian communicator - the Peter Barnes Award**
Sponsored by YMCA Norfolk
Winner- Esther Heybourne from The Matthew Project - Judges said: "Our winner produces inspiring, powerful and creative work which highlights the brilliant mission of a vital Christian charity to a wide audience. The Summer of Stories to mark its 40th anniversary were incredibly engaging."
Highly Commended
Denise Gee from Attleborough Baptist Church; Christian writer Jane Walters.
Finalists
Rowan Mantell from the Diocese of Norwich; Suzi Ashcroft from St Peter Mancroft; Ian Watson from Norfolk & Waveney Churches Together.

James is new eco-chaplain

This summer 24-year-old James Lee became an eco-chaplain. He is one of the Diocese of Norwich's first four eco-chaplains – trained and commissioned to help parishes embed creation care in their mission and ministry.

■ James, who worships at East Church in Norwich, has just completed a masters degree in environmental science at the University of East Anglia. Last year he joined a new Creation Care team at his church and when he found out about the voluntary eco-chaplain role, he was immediately interested.

"I have been very passionate about the environment since I was about 18," said James. "Since then God has taken me on a profound journey of discovering the importance of all creation in God's plans for renewal. I was instantly interested in becoming an eco-chaplain, particularly as at the time I was praying to find a way to really get involved and help lead change in the church, so this opportunity came up as a real answer to prayer."

James hopes to work with new and existing church and community groups in the Norwich area, encouraging and supporting them as they take action on climate and ecological crises.

He said the work is vital. "Creation provides for us everything we need physically, through food, water, air and resources, and in return we are called to protect and allow it to flourish.

"Creation (including other people) – through its beauty, grandeur, peace and all other attributes – is also a key means through which we experience and commune with our Father. Therefore, this work is so important as it is connecting Christians to a core part of their being and faith, as well as leading wider change and connection to this identity in the communities churches are in."

James spent part of his childhood in the Philippines where his parents established a Christian ministry working with children and families in extreme poverty. He returned, with his family, for two years when he was 18.

"During that time God gave me a real passion for the environment and I was really drawn to the renowned environmental science course at UEA," he said. "Since moving here I've fallen in love with Norfolk so have decided to stay after uni."

He hopes to embark on a career in conservation, land management or the energy sector – and serve as an eco-chaplain in his spare time.



New eco-chaplain James Lee.

Exciting year for Christian shop

Green Pastures Christian Bookshop in Dereham looks back on an exciting year during which they have not only given encouragement to others but have also been encouraged in their ministry in Norfolk and Suffolk.

In early October a young man spent some time browsing the Bibles in the Norwich Street shop. After being guided by one of the managers, he made an appropriate choice and bought his own Bible. As he was leaving, he was asked why he wanted a Bible. He replied that he had been very low recently and only found peace when he talked with God: he wanted the Bible to find out more about God!

Other visitors also want to know more about Jesus and Bible sales are strong. Shop supporters make donations, specifically to help people obtain a Bible – either free or at reduced cost. Despite bleaker aspects of our national life, God is at work in the UK and Green Pastures counts it a privilege and joy to play a part in this.

At the 2025 Christian Resources Together Conference at Swanwick in September, managers Irene Humphrey and Helen Cockburn received the CRT Bookshop of the Year 2025 award. Helen said: "What an encouragement… This is the most fulfilling, wonderful, incredible job that we have ever done. We've been inspired, supported, blessed and encouraged."

The Encouraged by Encouragement theme has also found expression in the growth of Pop-up Shops. By prior invitation, Green Pastures takes a relevant selection of products from the Dereham shop to churches and events in Norfolk and Suffolk (and maybe Cambridge in 2026). Display stalls are set up and staffed free of charge.

Monthly Pop-ups are currently held at the Norwich Salvation Army Citadel, St Giles (last Thursday of month 10am–2pm), Cornerstone Baptist Church, King's Lynn (third Wednesdays, 10am – noon) and St Mary's Parish Church in Bury St Edmunds (first Wednesdays, 10am – 2pm).

St Mary's churchwarden, Rosie Perham, commented: "It's a joy to welcome the Green Pastures Team each month. As we set up for our mid-week service, they swiftly set up their wonderful Pop-Up Shop, professionally transforming a motley assortment of our tables to create a very attractive display of Christian books, cards and gifts, which would not otherwise be so readily accessible to our church and community."

To develop this aspect of the shop's ministry a Development Project 2025 runs to the end of the year. Gifts to the project have, among other things, enabled Green Pastures to order selected books at volume and pass on the savings to customers with attractive pricing.

As we approach the Christmas season we rejoice in the 'encouragement' that God gave us in the gift of His Son, Jesus. So many people come to Green Pastures – at the shop and at Pop-up Shops – and say how they value being able to buy Christian-themed cards and gifts which are rarely found in other retail outlets. And they often find unexpected encouragement: as manager Irene often says, "We are more than just a bookshop!"



Irene and Helen receive the award at the CRT Conference.



Julie's journey of faith

A double tragedy and a dramatic vision of Christ led to a change in direction for **Julie Rubidge** who is now a lay minister in Sheringham.



Julie Rubidge in St Peters, Sheringham. Picture (c) Diocese of Norwich.

For much of her early life, faith was little more than a distant idea for Julie. Growing up in a working-class family on a council estate in what is now Greater London, church was something her family only attended for christenings or weddings.

That began to change when a leaflet arrived through the letterbox advertising "Sunshine Corner," a Sunday school run by an independent church across town. Julie and her brother went along - mainly for the tea and biscuits – but found kindness and warmth that left a lasting impression. For over a year, they attended regularly before drifting away. "I had an idea that God did exist," Julie recalls, "and at bedtime I used to ask God to look after us. But that was the extent of my faith."

Life continued apace until, in her late forties, two devastating losses upended her world. First, her boss of 11 years, whom she describes as a friend with a great sense of humour, died suddenly after falling into a diabetic coma. Just two months later, her father also passed away. "It was more than a double whammy," she says. "I'd never lost anyone close before, and now there were two, one of them still young."

Julie left her job, taking time to grieve and to think. Questions about life and death – questions she had always pushed aside – came flooding in. "Where do people go when they die? Is there really a heaven or a hell?" she wondered.

Determined to find out for herself, she picked up an old Bible and began to read. The language was difficult, but she persevered, working her way through the New Testament. "At some point I started to pray to Jesus and asked him, if he existed, to help me find God," she says. "By the time I reached John's Gospel, I was convinced Jesus was real, but I still didn't think I'd found God."

Then came an experience that would change everything. Six months after leaving work, Julie was praying one day when she was suddenly overwhelmed by what she describes as a "vision of Christ in light like a bright diamond." A gentle voice asked, "Will you come to my house on Sunday?" She wrestled with the message for three days. "I didn't like churches – they gave me the shivers," she admits. "But how could I refuse such an invitation?"

That Sunday, she found herself walking into a small United Reformed Church. Only a handful of elderly ladies sat in the pews, and the service felt strange and unfamiliar. But the sermon that day, about the meaning of worship, spoke directly to her heart. "It was the answer to a question I'd been praying about," she says. "I knew then that I couldn't go it alone – I had to worship with others."

From that moment, church became a regular part of her life. Over the years she explored different denominations and took part in Alpha courses, deepening her understanding of the Christian faith. During one Alpha session focused on the Holy Spirit, she describes feeling "an unimaginable joy and love poured down from Heaven."

In 2004, she was baptised by full immersion – a moment she describes as "a profound experience, even more so than confirmation."

A year later, redundancy led to retirement, and she and her husband moved to Norfolk. During an earlier holiday, while visiting St Peter's Church in Sheringham, she had prayed and felt "a wonderful, profound sense of peace." It was, she says, clear confirmation that this church was where God wanted her to be.

As she settled into the church community, Julie began volunteering, helping with teas, visiting local care homes, and assisting with Holy Communion. Eventually, someone suggested she might train as a Reader – now known as a Licensed Lay Minister. At first, she dismissed the idea, but the words "Feed my sheep" kept coming to her in prayer. Attending a vocations day in Norwich, she listened as a speaker said: "If you are not called to preach and teach, don't be a Reader." Those words struck her deeply. "My spirit vibrated," she recalls. "I knew that this was my calling."

Despite doubts about her ability, Julie applied and was accepted onto the three-year part-time course. "It was a steep learning curve," she says. "But the fellowship was wonderful." In September 2011, in Norwich Cathedral, she was licensed as a Reader.

Today, Julie continues to serve full-time as a lay minister at St Peter's, preaching, teaching, leading funerals, running the church's social media, and helping with administration. She has also served as sub-warden for other Licensed Lay Ministers in the area.

Reflecting on her journey, she says she remains full of curiosity and gratitude. "I'm still learning, and I know I'll never have all the answers – only more questions," she says. "But I am ever more deeply convinced not only of God's existence, but of God's life in us and through us as we live day by day."

Modern slavery alive in Norfolk

■ Modern slavery is happening across Norfolk right under our noses, a conference held in a Norwich church has heard. **Simon John** reports.

The Modern Slavery Conference, held in the Salvation Army Citadel in Norwich in October, heard that there were more than 70 recent reported criminal cases of Modern Slavery in East Anglia.

The conference heard from author and TEDx speaker, Carol Metzker, from Pennsylvania, USA, who outlined an all too common story of one child she has worked with. She exhibited footwear from different periods in the child's early life. The first was a four-year-old child's sandals worn as she began to be sexually abused by a relative. The child didn't talk about the abuse: it was a "secret".

The seven-year-old's gumboots were worn as she was cutting herself to block out her psychological pain. Wearing the trainers as she was turning to drugs, hiding the layers of trauma she was suffering from. She wore the sparkling shoes in her teens with the "boyfriend" who abused her. By young adulthood she was reduced to tatty flip-flops in which she was being controlled by sex traffickers. She was eventually hospitalised, her story was gradually revealed and help and emotional support was finally found.

Andrew Wallis, CEO of Unseen, spoke about the difficulties facing those fighting Modern Slavery – including trying to tackle cheap goods in a consumer world.

Unseen provide a helpful smartphone app and also operate the national Helpline number 08000 121 700.

www.modernslaveryhelpline.org

The conference also heard from Major Heather Grinsted, the Deputy Director: Anti Trafficking and Modern Slavery Department of the Salvation Army; Karen Anstiss, a former Metropolitan police officer, who manages Caritas Bakhita House, a trafficking shelter in London; and Mark Little, Founder Chair of the Rotary Action Group Against Slavery. Simon John, a Norfolk volunteer at Anti-Slavery International, spoke about "Freedom Watcher" volunteers in East Anglia and highlighted some of the criminal cases reported in the regional media.

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Norfolk couple reach out in Ken



Alexander and Astrid Milne in Norfolk.

Norfolk couple **Alexander** and **Astrid Milne** moved to Kenya in September to share the Good News and work with indigenous churches to reach unreached people groups. **Peter Bending** reports.

From a young age Alexander felt drawn to East Africa, wanting to become a game warden there. A heart for mission eventually led him to London City Mission, where he met Astrid. From childhood, Astrid had developed a heart for Africa after hearing her father, a pastor, tell stories of missionaries making a difference in far flung places.

Astrid lived as a member of a German minority in Transylvania at the time, behind the Iron Curtain. Her family emigrated to West Germany after the collapse of Communism, but she didn't stop there for long, wanting to be involved in sharing the Good News abroad.

Astrid said: "I joined London City Mission on a gap year 30 years ago, where I met Alexander. It became clear that it was God's will for us to be married and so we've been on mission together ever since!"

After 18 years of outreach and ministry in East London, they relocated to rural Norfolk, near Dereham, where Alexander was born, raising their family, and continuing mission on the streets and in various locations, including with the House of Genesis. They worshipped at Fountain of Life church in Ashill.

Alexander said: "God began speaking to us about going to Kenya around six years ago. We went on a vision trip two years ago and now it is time to get out of the boat and go long-term."

Working in collaboration with an international team from the No Place Left (NPL) coalition, the couple touched down in Mombasa on September 5 and began to settle in, trying to get used to the tropical weather, the African way of life, the Swahili language, and the continual haggling for a fair price.

"We feel incredibly blessed and grateful to be able to rent the house of a pastor's family, who have been praying that God would use this property for His glory. Two weeks after our arrival we had the privilege of welcoming 30 people into our living room and, in partnership with other NPL practitioners helped train them in evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. From this group we have been able to form a Missionary Team that meets regularly at our house for fellowship, training and to reach out across Mombasa."

Alexander said: "We have found that there is dissatisfaction among

Jesus and Teen Challenge saved drug

A teenager who had overdosed on drugs 24 times by the age of 18 has turned his life around with the help of Jesus and **Teen Challenge** in Norwich. **Anna Heydon** reports.

At a recent Connect Norwich meeting Ryan Gearing, now 19, shared his story of growing up in an area where drugs, gangs and violence were present and visible everywhere. His early life was marked by fear and abuse, in spite of having a loving mother who did her best to protect him. Bullying at school exacerbated his suffering and led to social anxiety.

Although Ryan's mum was a Christian and had sent him to a Christian primary school, Ryan remembers questioning "if this is how life is, how can God be real?"

By the age of 12, Ryan was regularly running away from home and was addicted to cannabis. By 13 he was self-harming and suicidal. It wasn't long before Ryan was no longer going to school and had become involved with a gang and was using and selling hard drugs. He describes himself as inhabiting "a very deep, dark world" at that time.

Ryan did attempt to leave the gang and lifestyle at times, but this resulted in serious threats towards him and his family, leaving him feeling trapped and hopeless.

And so at the age of 14, Ryan explains that he "didn't care about life anymore" and took an overdose of 125 epilepsy tablets. This would have been the end of him, if it hadn't been for the fact that "by the grace of God" the police decided to raid his house for drugs on that very day. They found him and he was airlifted to hospital where he stayed for a month.

When Ryan came round from his suicide attempt he still didn't want to be alive and was angry that his attempt to end his life had failed. After he saw a psychiatrist at the hospital, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. However he was quickly drawn back to his cocaine addiction and dangerous lifestyle.

Trips to the hospital became a regular occurrence, and Ryan says that in total he overdosed around 24 times. By now he was also engaged with serious robberies, and although he knew his life was in danger he explains that: "I just had so much anger and hate for the world… I didn't care who said they were gonna stab me."

The final straw came when Ryan ended up in hospital once more, having overdosed in the back of a police car. On the ward, a woman with a young daughter asked to be moved so that they weren't near him. Ryan reports: "I didn't know who to go to. I felt rejected by my family, rejected by the school, rejected by the police when I needed help."

When he got out of hospital, his mum had found out about Teen Challenge from a relative and shared the information with Ryan. Ryan remembers: "I hadn't prayed since I was a young boy and I remember I was crying whilst intoxicated on drugs and I remember just saying, Lord if you're real, please just help me, get me well. And that's all I said. And then the next day I came to Teen Challenge."

Ryan's been at Teen Challenge for about a year now and he can see how God's at work in his life. He explains "I got baptized when I came here after I really encountered God… something's kept me here, something's kept me alive all them times I've overdosed. I should have been dead years ago. But by the grace of God, he has had his hand on me all my life. I didn't know God. But God had a plan for me to come here and get well."

If you would like to find out more or support the work of Teen Challenge, please contact vic@draytonhall.org.uk.

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yan mission

many with the established church, with its emphasis on money, and it is felt that they are run more like businesses. I have been pleasantly surprised by those who are prepared to explore having church in their home, which was the way it was in the New Testament."

As a result of the initial training, the couple, together with team members, have had the opportunity to provide training in four churches in Mombasa so far.

It hasn't all been good news from their first few months. A young man they invited into their home attempted to break into their locked bedroom. He was interrupted by the housekeeper, Jasmine, but took off with her laptop.

"Amazingly, Jasmine, who is from a Muslim background, has since expressed a desire to follow Jesus and read the Bible with us, so that has become a daily morning routine in our house," said Astrid.

"We thank God for the opportunities to share the Good News, train others, and for experiencing the joy of leading people to Christ. We also give thanks that the bad situations, where people took advantage of our well-meaning intentions, turned into a valuable lesson and nothing worse happened."

Alexander and Astrid continue to look ahead on this new adventure, seeking to build partnerships as they hope to reach unreached people groups in due time.

The climate, culture, and challenges they face now may be different to their life in Norfolk, but the message of the Good News is the same.

"Please join with us in asking God to send out more workers into his harvest field; for believers and churches to be equipped to make disciples who make disciples and for multiplication of disciples among unreached people groups," say the couple.

They are very grateful for the prayers and practical support of people back home as they know that God's kingdom work is a Gospel partnership.

If anyone feels led to be a part of this Gospel work, feel free to contact them through their Stewardship Partner page to find out more: www.stewardship.org.uk/partners/Alexander_Astrid

addict Ryan



Ryan Gearing speaking at the Connect Norwich meeting at Teen Challenge, Drayton. Picture by Rayne Black.



Ken Jeffrey with piles of Christian books in his Swaffham garage.

Ken's Gospel mission in his Swaffham garage

Swaffham man **Ken Jeffery** has found a new way to serve and share the gospel in retirement using his garage and his heart for people. **Peter Bending** reports.

At 79 years young, Ken Jeffery, and his wife Chris, have found a fresh way of meeting new people and sharing the Gospel whilst also supporting Book Aid's mission of sending second-hand Christian literature wherever it can be used for God's work.

For the last 38 years, Book Aid has been collecting books from supporters throughout the UK to supply Bibles and Christian literature to partners living in areas of the world where books are wanted but not easily available or afforded.

Ken said: "We first came across Book Aid because the church was clearing out books and we found a place in Norwich, and I forgot about it. Then it came up again and I wanted something to do now I'm retired.

"I've got a massive garage and when the church here cleared out some more books, I rang Book Aid."

Ken and Chris became the drop-off point for East Anglia in November 2023. In the two years since, they have collected over 200 boxes of books donated by churches and individuals. The books are collected, process and sent abroad to schools, colleges, and orphanages in Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and Burundi.

For Ken, it is also a chance to meet and encourage people.

"I meet so many people from around the area and it's very interesting to hear how the churches are doing. It varies from retired vicars to, unfortunately, a lot of house clearances. We've had the pleasure of praying for people when they come here, it's such a good avenue to talk to people."

Previously a milkman and a bus driver, Ken is familiar with interacting with people every day.

"I had a young man come from Lowestoft to bring 100 Gideon Bibles. I asked what church he goes to, he didn't, he was the maintenance man for Premier Inn. They were going to be thrown out, so he went online and found us. He was an ex-Jehovah's Witness, and he was so open. I haven't got to chase anyone around, people come to us."

Book Aid can accept donations of Bibles and Christian books in good condition, including study books, music books with score, children's books, devotionals and Bible commentaries.

"Don't worry how you bring them, carrier bags or boxes. I've seen a lot of good stuff come through," he says.

Ken repacks the books flat in boxes from Asda and stores them in his garage until he has enough for Book Aid to send a van. They are then processed, ready to be send abroad. The most recent overseas container left for Kenya at the end of September.

If you have books you would like to donate, please contact Ken by email and leave a phone number. He can then get in touch with you to arrange a suitable time to receive the books.

"We've been married 50 years and we're still going. We've said that whatever years we've got left, we want to be of use, so we got involved in this. Book Aid for us is about connections. Because you spread the Gospel in one shape or form and the rest follows."

Contact Ken: ken@spearhead-records.co.uk or to find out more about book aid visit: **book-aid.org**

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