

newt

schools café church



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Goodbye ...art show p.12-13



The Hub: a café & more p.14

On the Move:

Caring

CHRISTMAS 2021

St John & St Stephen's, Newtown Community Magazine
stjohnandststephen.org.uk



Moving On - CARING

Welcome to NEWT 34

What makes us tick?

We've been thinking in our church about what makes us tick - which is another way of asking, 'what are we called to?' Three words have emerged that we aspire to - the first is Caring.

We hear a lot these days about taking care of ourselves, and that is right. Mental health problems have come to the fore and it's important to practice 'self-care'. If we cannot be compassionate towards ourselves it is doubtful we will have the energy to care for anyone else.

But more widely, there is the question of care for others. This is such an obvious value to most people in our society, but it wasn't a value in the Roman society into which Jesus was born. The Romans valued might and strength above all else, which is why the Christian story of a baby being born into poverty, who later died a criminal's death on a cross, was a very difficult message for the Roman empire to get hold of.

Caring for others, particularly when they're struggling, is something we all aspire to, but somehow the structures in society do not always contribute to this. It is harder to care for 'the stranger' who is not like us, than it is to care for those we already love. The Samaritans - who have a base in Newtown - are named after a story Jesus told about a man from Samaria

(that is, a stranger) who stopped to take care of a dying man because his heart was 'moved with compassion'. Jesus told the story in response to the profound question 'Who is my neighbour?' This is still our question. Is the desperate traveller crossing the Channel to get to the UK my neighbour? What responsibility do we have towards them?

Finally we are called to care for the earth. St John and St Stephen's is an Eco congregation and we constantly strive to minimise our carbon footprint. Care for the earth is foundational - as we are realising - to living well with each other. Climate breakdown affects disproportionately the poorest, who have done the least to contribute to it. And so care for each other is intimately connected to care for the earth.

May we live well in this interconnected globe and look for ways this Christmas to offer care where we see need; to be mindful of inequality and to receive into our own hearts the caring love that heals and saves us.

Wishing you Christmas blessings,

Claire.



Copy date for NEWT's Easter edition will be 18th March 2022

Please send contributions to the Parish Office office@stjohnandstephen.org.uk

or directly to the editor at chris@meunier.org.uk

THREE ways of CARING

at New Town Primary School

Our school values play an important part in all we do at New Town and our core values of love, kindness and inclusivity fit well with this edition's theme of caring. We ensure these values are recognised and celebrated throughout school life. Here are some of the ways we have shown them this term :

Caring for the Environment

In November our children from Lower Key Stage Two were invited to the University of Reading to take part in a 'Sounds of Nature' workshop in the beautiful Harris Gardens. We had the chance to explore the gardens, discovering plants and trees that we had never seen before and we created some art work inspired by our surroundings. The day focused on the importance of caring for our environment. We all had a brilliant time and can't wait to hear the audio trail which will be released to the public next Spring.



Caring for each other

We held a whole week in school focusing on anti-bullying. We launched this with children and staff coming to school wearing odd socks.

This was a chance for us to celebrate Anti-Bullying Week in a positive way. Pupils held surgeries at break and lunchtimes to support one another and to signpost where they should go or who they can talk to if they are struggling.

The theme for *Anti-Bullying Week* this year was 'One Kind Word' and in school we continue to show how with kind words we can support each other.



Caring for those in need

We also demonstrated New Town's extra caring ethos when all the children and staff came to school in their pyjamas for *BBC Children in Need*!



a caring *Christmas*

at St John's CE School

Christmas is always such a special time for all our children at St John's. It is a time where we can show just how much we care for each other as a school.

Children at St John's see Christmas as a real highlight of the year, where we celebrate through: decorating our school with hand-made decorations; writing about the nativity story; rehearsing and performing nativity productions for parents in our school's church; putting on Christmas Carol performances for each class's parents and families; celebrating our 'Christmas Jumper Day' and of course, a real highlight – our end of term Christmas Party Day.

Through all of these celebratory activities and events where we gather as a school, we remind ourselves of the true meaning of Christmas – focusing on thankfulness, togetherness, and celebrating the birth of Jesus.

This term has also featured many other celebrations and festivals

where we have shown care and unity as a school.

Diwali was celebrated with great pride this year as the beginning of the Hindu New Year, with fireworks and feasts galore. Our children took great delight in sharing their celebrations for Diwali, including the beautiful Divas that were created by different year groups to hold tealights, celebrating the 'Festival of Light' as Diwali is also known.



As a school, we also reverently marked Remembrance Day, with some beautifully moving work across the year groups, remembering the fallen, as well as showing care to those still alive and serving today. Our Year fives amazed us with their outstanding work on Remembrance! We were also honoured to be asked to contribute to the Poppy Project run by the British Legion where our poppies, made from recycled materials, adorned the Cemetery gates at the Junction.



Our Reception children, along with our wonderful Year 6 narrators, will be putting on our yearly magical Nativity performances in our church. These are always so beautifully moving and leave both families and teachers bursting with pride! They will be acting out the nativity story, focusing on the journey that Mary, Joseph, and the Three Wise Men made to Bethlehem leading up to the birth of Jesus. We are so excited to be able to share this very special moment with our whole school community again, after being unable to invite families last year.



Hope into Action - Reading is a charity that both houses the homeless and connects them with support from local churches.

Hope into Action (HIA) is a national charity with over 90 homes open in 30 different towns and cities across the country. Our work is growing - both nationally and locally in Reading! There has been a *Hope into Action* house for women and children in Newtown since 2017 which is supported by a dedicated church team from St John and St Stephen's. There is also an existing house in Reading for men, and now a third house is about to open this December in West Reading which will support 3 single males.

The new house will be supported by some of the Roman Catholic parishes - English Martyrs, St James and St William of York. Members of the church team have been busy helping to decorate and prepare the house and praying for the project. Once tenants have moved in, the church team will help them settle into the community, build positive and trusting relationships and use their time meaningfully. They will also help them gain life skills and will offer practical and emotional support.

Each HIA house also has an Empowerment Worker (EW) who deals with referrals and tenancies. The EW assists tenants with benefit applications, finding work or volunteering, and linking them with other professionals for their specific support needs. The kind of holistic support that HIA offers is invaluable to help tenants rebuild their lives.

For more information, please contact mary.lewis@hopeintoaction.org.uk and to donate please visit our *Just Giving* webpage www.justgiving.com/hopeintoaction



Preparing a new home for the HOMELESS



We are also enormously proud that you can hear our school choir singing at the Forbury Gardens Twilight Trail – please do visit if you can. We know they will forever remember the experience of recording their songs! St John's really is filled with 'angels'.

This year, the *Twilight Trail: Biscuit Town* returns to Reading's stunning Abbey Ruins and Forbury Gardens from 3-31 December 2021 with a biscuit-themed trail to celebrate Reading's link with the world-famous Huntley and Palmers biscuit factory.



Winter Crisis in AFGHANISTAN

Liz Bailey explores the needs and what we can do ...

The Afghans who have sought refuge from the Taliban by fleeing abroad have already endured many hardships and will have to confront many more. However, those who remain behind are facing a still more desperate situation. Even before the Taliban takeover last August, the country was facing terrible problems of drought, Covid 19, and a long-running conflict that left many homeless.

Now things have become even worse - much foreign aid has been cut off as other countries hesitate to help a regime that does not allow older girls to go to school. The banking system has collapsed, health care services are in crisis, unemployment is rife, many who have jobs haven't been paid for months and prices are spiralling out of control.

The situation is so bad that there are reports of families selling a child in order to feed the others. With the onset of winter things will only get worse - over 20 million Afghans could face starvation. The United Nations has warned that Afghanistan is soon likely to become the worst humanitarian disaster in the world.

Thankfully, there are still aid agencies working in the country, such as the International Rescue Committee, The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the United Nations' World Food Programme, Afghanaid, Islamic Relief and Muslim Hands.

To find out more about what they are doing and to donate, go to:



help.rescue-uk.org/afghanistan-donate

icrc.org/en/where-we-work/asia-pacific/afghanistan

wfp.org/countries/afghanistan

afghanaid.org.uk

islamic-relief.org.uk

muslimhands.org.uk



Photos taken from relief agency websites.



Making **READING** a City of **refuge**

Reading Refugee Support Group

Reading Refugee Support Group (RRSG) has been supporting refugees and people seeking asylum for over 27 years. We provide legal advice, practical support, education, social activities and promote integration through services we provide.

RRSG has an OISC-accredited solicitor and caseworker team who offer free, confidential advice and practical support with everything from immigration status, benefits, housing, mental health and more.

We run weekly Drop-ins that provide a safe space for refugees to socialise, make friends, learn English and access a caseworker. We also provide one-to-one Befriending and English sessions through *Reading City of Sanctuary*, along with a Homework Club for school children, and we run our own refugee football team, Sanctuary Strikers FC.

Our services are crucial to helping refugees grow in confidence, live independently, integrate into their new communities, and rebuild their lives here in Berkshire.

We all witnessed the recent, horrific events in Afghanistan, which were a stark reminder of the plight so many refugees face around the world.

RRSG are currently supporting more than 500 Afghan refugees who are being housed temporarily in local hotels and houses. These families are in dire conditions, extremely isolated and with nothing to fill their days. We are doing what we can to help these families. In addition to our regular activities, we're providing mental health support, wellbeing activities, creative writing workshops, welcome packs and internet access.

We are also supporting five Afghan families being permanently settled in Berkshire, helping with everything from furnishing houses, registering with schools and doctors, and helping them find work. We're expecting a further 20 families in the coming weeks - approximately 125 men, women and children.

We depend on donations to fund all of our activities and services, so please donate to help refugees in need in Reading and across Berkshire.

You can donate to RRSG at www.rrsg.org.uk/donate or follow them on social media @ReadingRefugees



(Graphic from homelessness charity *The Manna Society*)



Furniture to furnish a house for
an Afghan refugee family



Monday Drop-in Service



Sanctuary Strikers F.C.
Berkshire's refugee football team

On the Move ...

Caring for our planet: Rosie Croft writes:

The beginning of November saw the huge United Nations conference on Climate Change COP26 in Glasgow.

Lots and lots of people, lots of meetings, lots of discussions, lots of speeches and some decisions.

My husband and I were there, volunteering. Two really good things we noticed; one was that many if not most of those attending the civic 'people's meetings' were young. These debates, seminars and panels were not dominated by old fogeys but by those in their twenties and thirties – this gives us hope.

The second was that the climate change denying, evident at previous climate change meetings, seems to have disappeared – most of us now accept that we have a problem, and we are looking to our leaders to help get us through.

And we are moving forward. Climate change is complicated (if it were easy we might just have solved it by now), and there are many competing interests, some of which are valid while some are just profit motivated! But many steps in the right direction were taken – the main question that remains is, will we do enough, fast enough? I don't know the answer.



Left:



All three Reading climate march photos

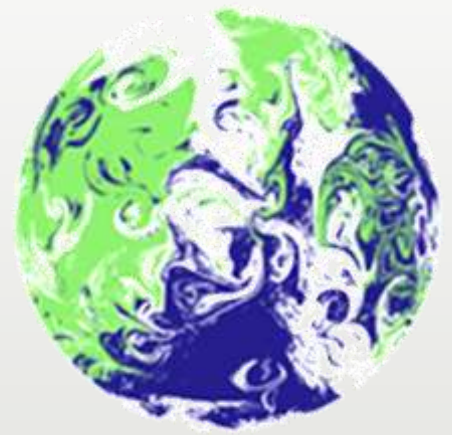
Somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000 people in Glasgow – and there were many other marches including in Reading and London.



- > reduce your food waste - did you know 6 recycled tea bags could generate enough electricity to boil the kettle for another cuppa!
- > walk, cycle or use public transport instead of driving
- > avoid 'fast fashion', look out for pre-loved bargains in charity shops rather than buying new
- > get clothes repaired and re-sole shoes rather than buying new ones

HOW YOU CAN DO YOUR BIT FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY





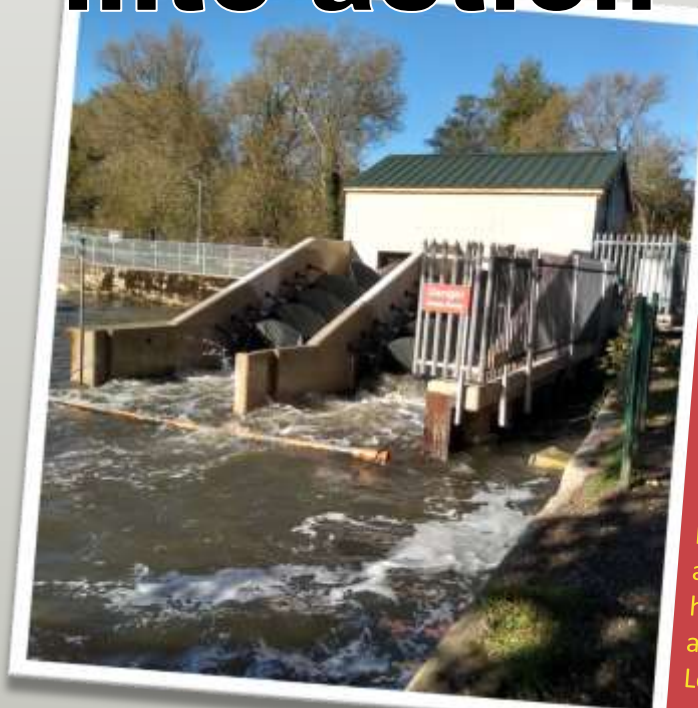
Glasgow COP26; Above and below: Reading

Reading Hydro moving into action



courtesy of Reading Today

people marched in
around the world



Implementing action on Climate Change takes time
That's why starting early is so important. *Reading Hydro Community Benefit Society* was set up in 2017. Now the two Archimedes screw turbines have been installed along with gearing and control equipment; a cable has been laid under the Thames to *Reading Lido*, who will buy most of the 320 MWh output each year - equivalent to about 90 homes' electricity; and when a few last technical issues have been solved it will be actually generating power. Learn more at:
www.readinghydro.org

FOR THE CLIMATE



Reading Borough Council's November newsletter (left) invited us all - residents, communities, businesses and organisations across Reading - to get involved.

There is lots to do together to meet the 2030 net zero target for Reading.

Do **you** belong to a club, or go to school, or work for a business?

What ideas do you have for making them 'greener' - for helping them make a contribution to fighting off climate disaster and the loss of nature and health?

Whom can you chat with, and where could you get those ideas circulating and developing?

... Moving On

Know your Newts

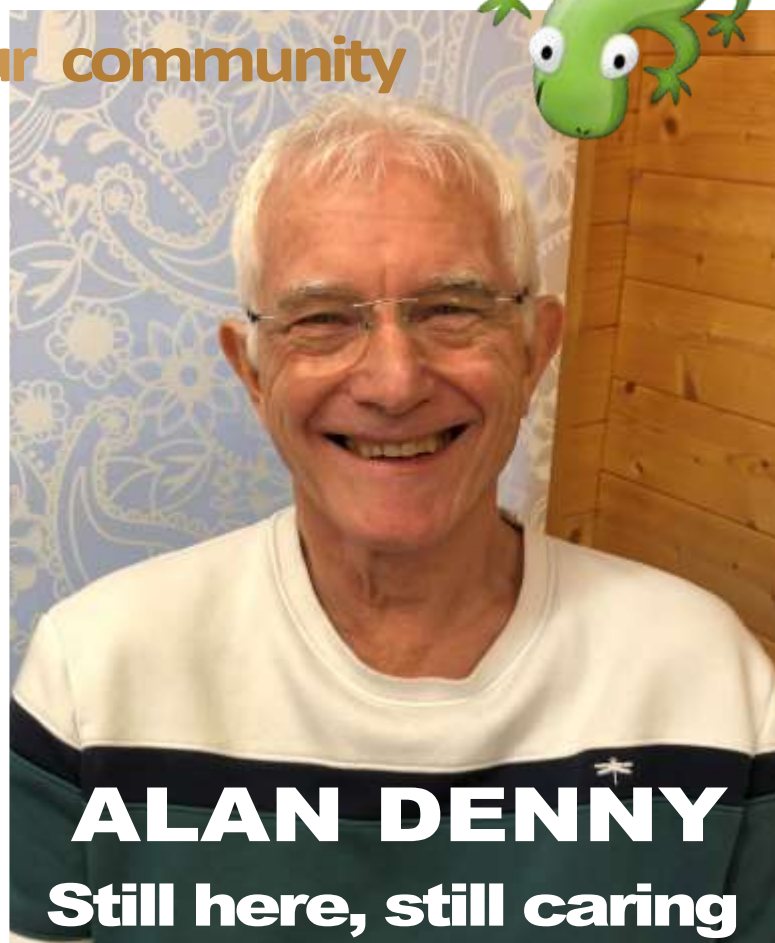
meeting the people in our community



Back in 1983 and 1984 many, many thousands prayed that the Christian evangelist and inspirational writer, David Watson, would be healed of his cancer but he succumbed. But sometimes others held up to God in prayer are healed. It's one of the big mysteries. On Tuesday September 14th, 71 year-old Alan Denny had a 'massive' heart attack and was dead for fifteen minutes...

What happened?

After a shower, following a routine session on my treadmill, I felt unwell and my heart was pounding. I said to my wife, Trish, 'I'm in trouble.' The ambulance arrived after only nine minutes but moments after the paramedics got to me, my heart stopped. They gave me medication, performed CPR for 15 minutes until my heart responded, and used seven electric shocks to correct the rhythm of my heartbeats. Soon an Air Ambulance team of three consultants arrived by car and took over. They diagnosed my problem and prepared me for hospital, using drugs to sedate and stabilise me, and fitted a tube in my throat to help me breathe. I was rushed to the Royal Berks and sent straight to theatre where they fitted a stent and broke up the blood clot that caused the attack. In the Intensive Care Unit, I arrested again but they brought me back, put me into an induced coma for three days, and used blood thinning drugs to get rid of other clots. I was also treated for pneumonia and kidney failure.



This must have been appalling for Trish!

Yes. She was told that my chances were 50-50 at best, that one side of my heart was damaged and that, if I did survive, I might not be the same. They couldn't tell how much brain damage I had suffered. But miraculously, when I came out of the coma, I was still me! After over two weeks in hospital, I was back home cooking, reading, going for walks and playing my guitar! My voice is slowly recovering from the tube that had kept me breathing, and there is hope that my weakened heart will improve - if I follow the lifestyle and exercise plans I have been given!

And this was a miracle?

I'm sure of it. All my friends at St John's were praying. Trish's brother's church and their

outreach church in India were praying, as were my daughter-in-law and her mother and grandmother's church in Colombia and Trish's sister's church in Maidenhead... But Trish's sister said, 'It's not his time.' and her brother 'phoned and said the vicar in India had told him, 'All is well.'

**"It's not his time"
"All is well."**

Amazing! But you have had your share of tragedy too ...

Yes. I have three boys from my first marriage, and the youngest, Thomas was diagnosed with cancer of the sinus when he was three. After extensive chemo and radiotherapy treatment at Great Ormond Street Hospital, Thomas sadly died at home in

Colchester when he was only 5 years old. My Dad was killed in a car crash that same year. It was a difficult time and after a job change and relocation to Cholsey, my first marriage failed. Initially, I had custody of the boys, but my ex-wife and I eventually shared looking after the boys. However, it was the community at the local church, where I was in the music group and treasurer, that mostly supported me.

Have you always been a Christian?

No. When I was 26, I had started to explore faith. A bit later, my family and I were living in Colchester and I had been to the local church a few times. Working for B.P., I was often flying out to the Middle East for up to six weeks at a time. For my Muslim colleagues the working day there was punctuated by prayer times - I was intrigued by their faith and read the Koran, but I also had a copy of the Bible. On one particular flight to Dubai, I was reading the Book of Proverbs. I came to chapter 3 verse 5 and words just leapt off the page and I burst into tears. *'Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Never rely on what you think you know.'* It was a game changer for me.

And how did you come to be involved at St John & St Stephen's?

Some years after my first marriage, I joined a Christian dating site and was sent Jane Norman's details. We started seeing each other and in 1996 she invited me to go with her to a St John's church weekend away. I was made very welcome, joined the church, and soon we were married! Sadly, our marriage didn't work out, but I've stayed at St John's and I'm still singing and playing my guitar in the church music group!



You're someone who enjoys helping other people?

Over the past 20 years or so, my technical and practical skills have enabled me to help the church establish the forecourt, help with I.T. and audio-visual systems, and help many church members with their computing and mobile phone problems. I also enjoy being the 'sound man' for our Scamping Rogues charity dance band, and our Twangers ukulele group which, in non-Covid times, plays in old people's homes to spread some cheer.

And in your working life?

With B.P., I started in computing, then retrained in finance, and worked my way up and into management. After 20 years, I moved on to Thames Water's Executive Team, until I retired from that in 1998. Initially I went freelance working on various projects. I then spent 13 years working in the NHS.

My NHS work included Practice Management, and also as a Management Consultant I assisted many Reading Practices with the new GP Contract. I established the Shinfield Medical Centre and also the West Berkshire Gastroscopy/ Sigmoidoscopy Service before retiring for good at the end of 2011.

What about at home?

Well, I met the love of my life, Trish, just before the millennium and we married a year later. We love travelling, gardening and motor-homing, but more than anything we love our grandchildren. Between us, we share 5 wonderful granddaughters. One of my granddaughters lives in the US, and during lockdown I started recording for her videos of me reading stories which I put onto *YouTube* to share them more widely. Trish and I also recorded a couple of videos singing children's songs.



Wow! And all your technical creativity started with your Dad in a council house near Southampton?

Indeed! It was my Dad who was my guide and inspiration. He was trained as a lathe turner and was a self-employed, mechanical engineer. From the age of 10 until I left school, I would earn pocket money at Dad's firm and he trained me to use his machines. He set me up for life with a belief that I could learn skills, use tools and make things without fear. He taught me to be self-reliant.

So, what's next, Alan?

Well, apart from following the exercise plan the occupational therapists have given me, top of my list is to arrange a return visit to the hospital and to the Air Ambulance Service so that I can meet and thank all the wonderful people that saved my life.

Saying Goodbye:

Community turns out for Gas Tower art exhibition

For one weekend, 30 professional and amateur artists transformed the church and café at St John's into an art gallery. The community art exhibition "Farewell to the Gas Tower" celebrated Reading's last gas tower, currently being demolished, in over 50 artworks.

Through paintings, collage, photography, digital art, poetry and film, a huge diversity of views and perspectives on the gas tower were presented. One visitor remarked that he had never been able to see the tower as a thing of beauty, but that seeing this exhibition had changed his mind!

The exhibition was curated by Mary Chambers and Leslee Barron and was opened by the Mayor of Reading - her first official engagement. Over 200 people visited during the two days it was open, and the exhibition raised more than £500 for *Reading Refugee Support Group* (see the article on page 7). As well as visitors' generous gifts, this included artists' donations from their commissions and match funding. The organisers are now exploring the possibility of exhibiting again in another gallery so that even more people can enjoy it.



Mayor Rachel Eden
opens the exhibition

Photos of the exhibition were taken by Steve Lewis, Karen Cripps and Leslee Barron





Stop Press: Picture gains national acclaim



This image by local artist Leslee Barron has just been shortlisted for 'Historic photographer of the year 2021' in a competition organised by Historic England.



The Hub

- caring for young people and the community

To sit with Nancy Magon, in the activity space below *The Hub* café on Newtown's Cholmeley Road and to hear about her vision and passion for young people is to be inspired and energised!
- writes Chris Jupp.

After ten years as a registered children's social worker for several local authorities including Reading, an expert in fostering and young people in care, Nancy and her partner, Marvin Carpenter, have established their own Community Interest Company, *The Aurora Family*, to change the narrative for vulnerable young people and inspire systemic change in children's lives. Whilst working part-time for the Fostering Network charity, she leads a team which, as the company name suggests, works to help 'looked after' children, and those struggling to flourish in mainstream schools, find a 'new dawn'.

They provide schools with opportunities to spend Pupil Premium Plus funding and money that comes with a child's Education Health and Care plan on tailor-made mentoring activities designed to help the child find themselves and their voice, know success and grow in confidence. Some activities happen at The Hub whilst others take place at a farm near Three Mile Cross.

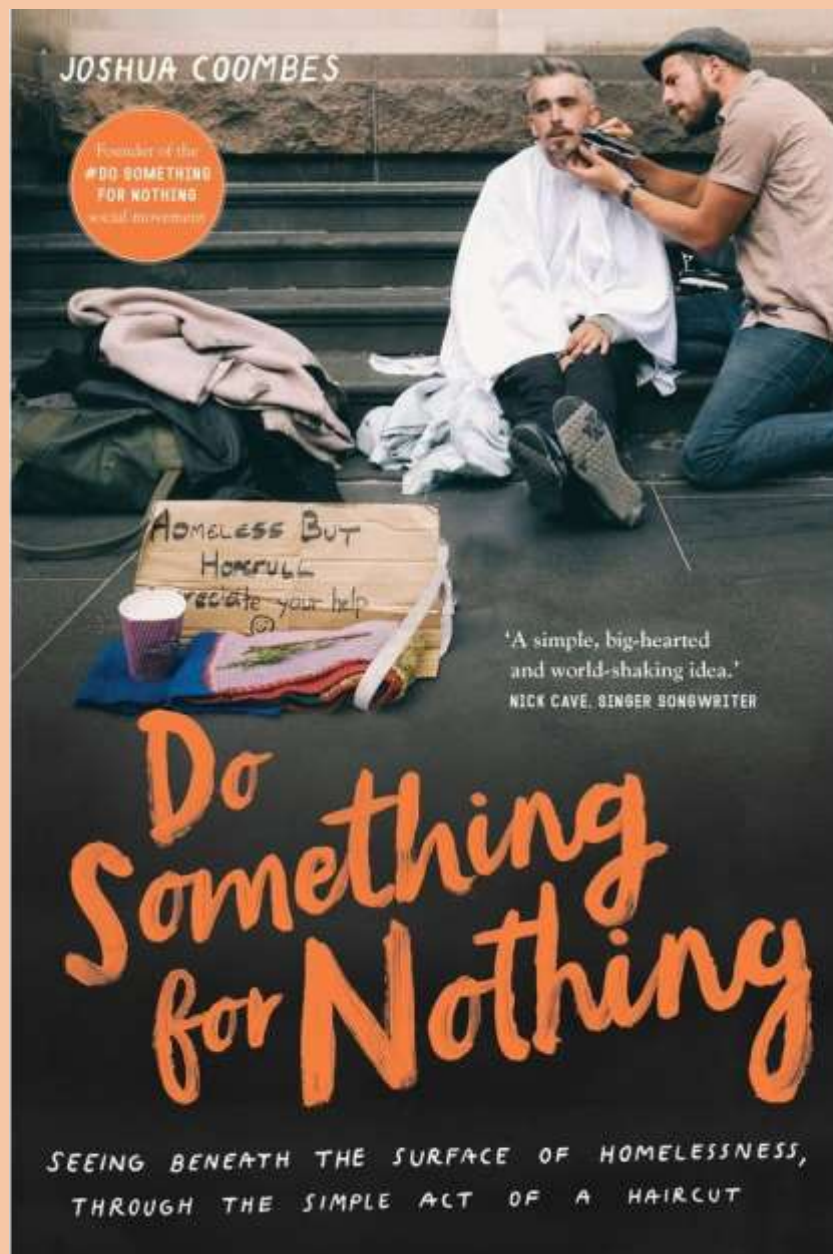


Above: Nancy and Marvin, welcoming hosts of The Hub.

At The Hub, on top of digital media and crafts, Marvin helps children use a music studio to explore music making and production (and participate in a radio station from January next year) whilst Wayne Husbands of the Reading School of Martial Arts, teaches Hungar, a form of Kung-Fu.

At The Farm, with the help of Nancy's sister, Sarah, children can experience nature walks to collect materials for outdoor craft activities which include tie-dyeing,





Book Review

**a book for
your
Christmas
list?**

How do you feel and react when you pass someone sitting on the pavement with a cup or pot in front of them and a sign saying something like 'HOMELESS BUT HOPEFUL. Appreciate Your Help'?

Josh Coombes is someone who cares; he wanted to know how and why that person came to be on the street so he introduced himself and listened to their story. He was a hairdresser in a London salon. One day he had the tools of his trade with him and, after a chat, asked the rough sleeper if they would like a free haircut and they were delighted. Since that year, 2015, that spur of the moment idea has become a regular commitment. With his kit in his bag, Josh has visited many cities across the globe, taking before and after photos and recording the people and their stories. Some of them he has revisited several times to find out how they've got on. This uplifting, inspiring and challenging book helps you meet them and gives you insights into their worlds. From this #DoSomethingForNothing was born -a movement that encourages people to contribute their skills and time to those who need it.

Hardback ISBN-13 : 978-1911632160

Paperback ISBN-13 : 978-1617759352

making collages and lanterns, and painting, as well as caring for ponies and growing and cooking food. This can also lead to discussions about what the young person might choose to do after they've left school.

The Hub also offers activity weeks during school holidays, a chess club on Saturdays (which is spilling over into the rest of the week!) and a whole range of day and evening activities



for anyone in the community to come along and try or join, such as a choir, toddler groups, women's self-defence, yoga (both 'women only' or 'mixed') and Capoeira, a Brazilian martial art that is actually pair dancing! So, why not pop in, have a chat, some coffee and cake, and see what you think ... ?

Celebrating Christmas in Newtown

Thur 16th
December

Lunch time: Christmas dinner at the *Pakistan Community Centre* who welcome members of the local community 12 noon-3 pm.

Evening: Christmas carol pub sing-along with the *Twangers*: starting 6:30 pm at *The Fisherman's Cottage* and later moving on to *The Jolly Anglers*

Sun 19th
December

10:30 am Holy Communion *St John & St Stephen's church**
6 pm Carols by Candlelight
- stay afterwards for mulled wine and mince pies

Mon 20th
December

5-6:30 pm - Carol Singing around the parish - All ages welcome
Meet 5 pm outside St John & St Stephen's church and then head off to spread some Christmas joy, returning to end with refreshments

Fri 24th
December

CHRISTMAS EVE
11 pm Midnight Mass *St John & St Stephen's church**

Sat 25th
December

CHRISTMAS DAY
10:30 am Family Communion *St John & St Stephen's church**

Sun 26th December BOXING DAY - no services

Sun 4th Jan 10:30 am Epiphany service *St John & St Stephen's church**

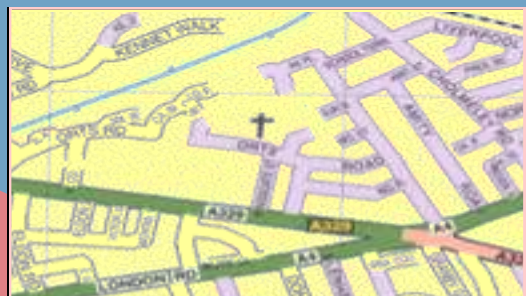
*Please take a lateral
flow Covid 19 test
before attending
services



Carols at Church or at Home:

If you can't join us in person, then, on *YouTube*, search for 'St John and St Stephens Reading' one day later.

Church Contacts



Vicar
Rev Claire
Alcock



Assoc. Priest
Christine
Bainbridge



Parish Centre
Manager
Tanya Penn



Churchwardens
Rosie Croft &
Ian Maynard

Sunday worship 10:30 am
- everyone welcome

For more details, please contact the Parish Office
0118 926 3633 email: office@stjohnandststephen.org.uk

School Contacts



Acting
Head Teacher
Kate
Hawkins



Acting Deputy
Head
Hollie
Appleton



Head Teacher
Martina
Parsons



Assistant
Head
Cameron
Purvis



Assistant
Head
Paula
Shuman



Assistant
Head
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