

Ploughshare February/March 1998 (scanned version from the original)

From the Curate Pete Wilkinson

A few weeks ago I nearly succumbed - I let someone try and talk me into buying a computer. For nearly half an hour I listened to the sales patter, most of which went straight over my head. I was shocked though at the answer he gave to one question.

I asked him what the life expectancy was of the kind of machine he was trying to persuade me to buy. He said it would probably be obsolete in five to eight years' time. It seemed like a lot of money down the tube. It was a vivid example of just how fast our world is changing, and how short lived most things are before they need replacing or updating. It made me think of some words of Jesus, "*Heaven cued earth wilt pass away. but my words will never pass*" Mark 13:31

Compared to computers, our world seems to have hung around for quite a long time, but Jesus says even it will one day pass away. He makes the extraordinary claim. though, that his words will remain. They will stand for all time, eternally true, always relevant, never in need of revision or updating or improvement. They have no sell by date. In a fast changing world they speak of unchanging truth.

I may never master computers, but all of us can endeavour to master or should that be mastered by? -His word.

Pete Wilkinson

Face to Face with Jack Hemmings

Jack Hemmings is a sidesman at St Thomas' and one of our "senior members", a former teacher and ex-service man, very involved in the world of football and cricket locally.

Jack, where were you brought up?

In Chesterfield, near St Augustine's. Father Mudford, the Vicar of St Augustine's was one of the most influential people in my life. He used to go round in his little Austin 7 and I used to help him collecting for the building of the new church back in 1932/3. I was in the choir there and a server. Both my parents died when I was very young and there were seven of us. My elder sister, Edith, who was born with only one arm, brought us up.

I went to William Rhodes School and the Headmaster, Mr Greenhough, used to go to St Thomas'. He was the other really influential man to me. He made me Head Boy. It wasn't possible to obtain academic qualifications; we had to leave at 14 and start earning.

What jobs did you do?

I started at Markham's Engineering, but after a bit I went on the buses with Chesterfield Transport Department. But the war came in 1939.

What did you do in the war?

I went in the Army. I was a prisoner of war in Poland for 5 years. I managed to pick up some German and became useful as an interpreter. I escaped three times. After the first time I had 28 days solitary confinement, and 58 the second time. Then it was third time lucky and I met with the Americans who used me as an interpreter. In 1945 I was back in England for 9 weeks -repatriation leave -but then I was sent to Germany to work of the Military Government in Dusseldorf "de-Nazifying" people before they could be employed. We had to search for SS members, easily identified by a tattoo in their armpits. They had to renounce it and have skin grafts. I had a graft too because my prison number had been tattooed on my arm.

How optimistic were you during the war?

We never ever gave up hope or thought we might lose.

How did you get into teaching?

Well, I was involved in education in Germany. On my return I met Mr Greenhough again. He had become Director of Education and he supported me as I applied to Sheffield College of Education where I trained for three years.

Where did you teach?

I started at Old Hall Primary. Bob Wilson was in my football team and he went on to keep goal for Arsenal and Scotland. I'm still in touch with him. I was 5 years there and then I went back to Sheffield for secondary training. I taught English and Drama at William Rhodes and then was Careers Teacher at Manor School, where in time, I became Senior Master. But, I've been retired for 17 years now!

You were a football referee too, weren't you? What were the highlights of your refereeing career?

I reffed three schoolboy internationals, one at Wembley, and in the first year of the European Cup I was a linesman in Bulgaria for Sofia v Barcelona. It was a great experience.

When did you join St Thomas'?

When I met Mary in 1947. She was a Sunday School Teacher. I used to help her with little concerts in the School Rooms. Canon Hooley married us in 1951 and we've been part of St Thomas' ever since.

What has been the most striking thing for you about being a Christian?

It has been the way in which God has always been there. I've always felt His presence. I suppose that was especially so back in war time. He has always looked after me.

Jack Hemmings

No Excuse Sunday

To make it possible for everyone to attend church next week, we are planning a special 'No excuse Sunday'.

1. Beds will be placed in the aisles for those who say, 'Sunday is my only day for sleeping-in'.
2. Eye drops will be available for those whose eyes are tired from watching TV too late on Saturday night.
3. We will have steel helmets for those who believe the roof will cave in if they show up for in Church.
4. Blankets will be on hand for those for whom the 'church is too cold'. Fans, for those for whom it's too hot.
5. We will have hearing aids for the parishioners who say 'the priest doesn't talk loud enough', and cotton wool for those who say 'the priest talks too loud'.
6. Score cards will be available for those who wish to count the hypocrites.
7. We guarantee that some relatives will be present for those who like to go visiting on Sunday.
8. There will be TV dinners for those who claim they can't go to church and cook dinner too.
9. A section of the church will have trees and grass for those who see God in nature, especially on the golf course.
10. The Altar will be decorated with a Christmas Crib and Easter Lilies, to create a familiar environment for those who have never seen the church without them.

See you in church!

(from a Tenerife Anglican Church Magazine)

Operation Christmas Child –All the Year Round

Carol Woodward spent many weeks during October, November and early December in an unheated warehouse for up to 14 hours a day preparing the 'shoeboxes' so many of you and your children had put together. They were bound for various Eastern European Countries under 'Operation Christmas Child' She received a quite unexpected reward and memories that will stay with her for life... here is her moving story:

"God, please don't let me miss the rainbows"

This has become my prayer as my family has passed from one sad event to another. Life often has its downside but the last twelve months have been very bleak. God, however, always sends us rainbows if we look up long enough to spot them.

The invitation to go to Romania came out of the blue -just days after my passport arrived. I knew it was a gift. It was still a big decision to leave my family and step out into the unknown. I had few expectations and a lot of fears but in the end I took hold of God's hand and went.

Some snapshots of Romania

- overwhelming poverty -poor, hungry people begging a few lei to buy a slice of bread.
- stepping back in time -haystacks, woodpiles, horse drawn carts, few real roads,
- no hot water and few proper toilets (Ugh!)
- prayer is as natural as breathing and the churches are full the people are generous -they go without to give to you. a street child -who shares his mars bar and 'dreams' of shoes.
- God's Mountain (the Children's Home where I stayed) -an oasis of light, love and warmth in a cold dark land.

I spent 3 wonderful days with 10 children, all with a sad story to tell. Here's one:

He is nine. He arrived very thin and very sick. His family is poor. He has Hepatitis B. I played with him, laughed with him, taught him songs. He sat on my knee, hugged and kissed me and told me that he loved me. When I looked across at him he was always smiling at me. He was so beautiful it made me cry. His name was Adrian.

Sometimes rainbows look like small boys : or are they angels?

Carol Woodward

Hope for Eastern Europe, 1997 update

New Year's greetings to everyone in the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and a very big thank you for all the love, encouragement and positive help this mission work has received through you his people, especially this last year.

The response to Dr Nicolae's visit last March for help for his impoverished hospital on the Black Sea Coast was truly amazing materially and financially. The medical supplies and equipment were finally transported out in July 1997 via 'Link European'. Our wonderful God then opened the way for our own 7.5 tonne vehicle to transport the extra supplies at the last minute due to a very generous donation being given. 'hank you Lord'. With very little time to focus on the August mission, I prayed for help - the supplies just kept flowing in. A mission centre was opened at the rear of St Thomas' church - this has proved to be an immense blessing. A small team of dedicated ladies set to work. Amazing things happened as banana box after banana box was lovingly packed sorted and transported to our base in Sutton Spring Wood.

God answered prayer very swiftly for the leper community at Tichilesti too. A 'Joy bag' containing lots of small personal items was given with love to each of our dear friends and lots of useful medical supplies were donated to help the doctor and medical team at the community. It was a true blessing to have more time to draw along side some of them and listen to their heart-rending stories. They especially asked that we keep on visiting them. It gives them hope and encouragement to know they are not forgotten.

On our return journey we spent a few days in Bucharest linking up with Emmanuel Mission. Exciting plans are now underway for the first phase of the building work to erect a feeding/outreach centre to support many children - even families - living in the squalid underground sewer system and on the street of this very large city. These children and families have never experienced the security of a warm and loving home. Dirty and undernourished they are begging and stealing their daily bread.

We really felt the call of God to be part of his wonderful plan and purpose for this project, especially to help renovate a small derelict building recently purchased by the church very close to the mission centre. 'Ibis will eventually house a homeless family who are prepared to care for the street children, when the feeding centre is eventually opened.

On our return home last September we felt led to step out in faith and make plans for a large vehicle to travel out for the November journey, as there was such a great need for extra supplies before winter. There had been an urgent request especially for warm coats, winter shoes and boots, food and toiletries on this journey. It was originally planned to convey Christmas presents, sweets and shoe-box gifts for the poor children of the Constanta region. A record number of 850 shoe-boxes were eventually collected and packed throughout the Derbyshire Dales by various groups and individuals. This was organized by Margaret Leighton and her team of dedicated ladies. Hasland Baptist Church also supported this work through Florence Sutton and we are very grateful for the commitment shown by so many caring people.

God then made a way for our own vehicle to be available to convey some new double-glazed windows (supported by a church in Chorley) for the first phase of the feeding centre project. Many large items of useful furniture and carpets needed by the Chirlac family and others were also able to travel out. This blessing made it possible to help the mission work in Bucharest by supporting them with food, toiletries, blankets, shoes and one hundred and fifty shoe boxes for the poor children.

Due to very generous people responding to this journey, we were able to release a large gift of money to begin the work on the derelict building for the homeless family as well - All the glory to you Lord!

Pastor John Buchan shared with me how this was a wonderful blessing and a great encouragement to them at a time of great need. He wishes to personally thank everyone who feels led to reach out with compassionate love to help fulfil God's vision. This November journey proved to be a very challenging mission right from the start. No matter what difficulty arose our wonderful God was always there to answer our prayers and sustain us. A young driver called Jonathan Allsop from Zion church was a true blessing on this journey and the response to our visit was extremely encouraging. We travelled over 4000 miles.

We again visited the leper community at Tichilesti where we received a very warm welcome. Everyone was so thrilled to receive their 'gift of love' parcel. The community now has a new lady doctor who was very eager to share her experience of the enormous challenge and to guide us to the house bound patients now under her care. Personal communication is so important and it means so much to our dear friends to share their situations and pray for them.

Medical supplies, a wheelchair, food and toiletries were left on this journey to support the community. 'The Baptist missionary in Tulcea, named Adrian, helped arrange this visit and acted as our interpreter. He has really encouraged our work and has also requested help for the poor villages in their region, and the 'Prison Ministry'.

The Constanta region received a very large proportion of the aid from this journey to help Paster Ritichan's church out-reach to very poor remote villages in the area. The quality of supplies was a true blessing and everyone sends their love and grateful thanks especially to God who worked through us his people to respond to their prayers.

Progress on the mission centre in Bucharest was truly remarkable. There were approximately ten gifted volunteers daily, working eagerly in faith (one is a lady plasterer) to complete this project. Also a small group of ladies committed daily to preparing the food to sustain them and the poor and homeless.

Do you feel challenged to respond in compassionate love to the cry of these homeless children - some still living in the squalid sewer system? If you do then this is how you can show love in action. 'Hope for Eastern Europe' have been approached to help deliver new windows and doors for the second phase of this project. We need help to fill the vehicle with dried food, toiletries and many other items. We also need help financially for bibles and emergency funds. Remember the words of our Lord Jesus - *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* May God bless you all.

Pam Gratton