

Spring 2014

ISSUE 125



THE  
*Simon*  
STAR



[www.simoncommunity.org.uk](http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk)

ST JOSEPH'S  
HOUSE OF  
HOSPITALITY

page 4 & 5





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THANK YOU

Pret a Manger  
Euphorium Bakery  
Gail's Bakery  
St Giles In The Fields  
St Martin's Church, Gospel Oak  
Tikun  
Davenport Lyons  
Chris Hocking at Pilates Body  
Awareness for holding a class and a raffle to raise money

All our individual donors and supporters



Thank you for reading the Simon Star and for supporting the Community. We use this newsletter to let you know what is going on here and invite you to share your stories.

In this spring issue we look back to 1964 as MT talks about how we came to own the house in Malden Road that has been home to so many.

A special thanks to the Davenport Lyons, a law firm that have made us their charity of the year after seeing the van parked outside their office on the early morning tea run!

They have already had several fundraising events and we are looking forward to seeing some of their staff join us out on services.

Thank you for choosing us as your charity and we look forward to working with you.

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# WELCOME TO THE SIMON STAR

In the last few issues of the Simon Star we have focused particularly on the 50th Anniversary and telling you about celebratory events that are coming up.

Now in spring we are well into our 50th year and many of the events planned have now happened.

The concert at St Giles went ahead and was enjoyed by many (more on page 9) and there was an exhibition in the Royal Festival Hall.

One great success (thanks to Karen Barker, Bob Baker and Alexei Sayle) was the BBC Radio 4 Charity Appeal. We received donations far above our expectations and gained some new support. If you are one of our new friends who heard about us on the radio - then welcome!

However, it has not all been daffodils and sunshine lately, As you will read on page 10, we have had to leave our day centre and as you will hear from one of our trustees on page 6, rough sleeping is on the increase and things are getting worse. We hope to find another space for our day centre in the near future, meanwhile we have moved a few of our groups and they are still going well.

Meanwhile we are doing what we can to reach those who are living outside and need our help. Our volunteers have recently been focusing on streetwork. This is where we go out in pairs or small groups with a flask and a few sandwiches and talk to people. As MT says in her article on page 4, it's not about the food - it's the human contact that makes the difference. Thanks to everyone (volunteers and supporters) for making this possible.



**Music Tuesday looking at home in St Martin's - more on page 10**

# HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY

Palm Sunday 1964 was a momentous day for the Simon Community. After seven months of low key campaigning it was decided that a major event was needed to spearhead the campaign and bring the plight of the homeless to more widespread public attention.

The result was a Rally to be held in Trafalgar Square. The speakers all had one thing in common as Anton wrote, “a burning concern for the men and women sleeping rough in our cities, whose cause was unrecognised.” The tannoys boomed, the speakers pleaded – the crowd listened, and for the first time since General Booth the voice of the inarticulate was heard. “

“Without the Rally it is unlikely that Miss Margaret Handel would have offered us the house at 129 Malden Road, London NW5.

This she did by calling us at St Leonards and telling us that due to age and health she was contemplating closing it. Influenced years previously by Dorothy Day, and always acting on her own, with a strong sense of vocation. This remarkable woman had established in St Joseph’s (already, by the time she acquired it, a house with a tradition unbroken since the early Catholic Worker days of the thirties) an experiment in tender love and care unparalleled in London.

Quietly and without publicity she had served, and now she offered us her house. And so it was that after six weeks of negotiating between the Trust’s solicitors and her own, we bought it on very generous and extended terms, and were able to open it as Simon’s first caring house on the feast of St Joseph the Worker, 1st May 1964. St Joseph’s has survived all along as our permanent London base; it is still open.”

St Joseph’s did not come as an empty house. One of Miss Handel’s guests, an elderly lady and her numerous cats continued to live in the basement for many years. She was largely nocturnal and generations of volunteers remember hearing ‘Whiskers, darling’ floating up the stairs as she called her cats to feed them.

50 years later it is still the heart of the Community. The kitchen has an endless procession of sacks of vegetables and volunteers, making nourishing soup, sandwiches, urns and thermos flasks filled with tea and coffee to take to those who are still outside. Though, as always, the food is less important than the human contact and concern.

One of our volunteers was told recently how much our work was appreciated

on the street because we talk and listen as one human being to another. We talk about football and the news and the small everyday things, not why people are homeless and what that is like for them. They told her how good it is to be able to be 'normal' and not a case or a cause to be solved.

St Joseph's has been a 'House of Hospitality' for nearly eighty years. Thousands of people have found it a refuge, a place to heal and recover from the misery of being homeless and

the misery that made them so. It is the generosity of you, our supporters that continue to make this possible. On behalf of the Community and all those whose lives you have helped change, thank you.

MT Gibson-Watt  
Lent 2014

All quotes from No Fixed Abode by  
Anton Wallich-Clifford



129 Malden Road

# HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTERITY TIMES

**A Simon Community Trustee talks about the harsh reality of homelessness today**

Rough sleeping has shot up a staggering 37% in England since 2010. This number, published earlier this year, is by no means isolated. It is instead merely indicative of the consequences of a whole range of policies and legislation changes in recent years; effects that are becoming increasingly more tangible. Here are just a few examples:

**“Rough sleeping has increased by 37% since 2010”**

New and much stricter rules about Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) mean that many more people experience benefit sanctions, leaving them destitute for often weeks on end and becoming at risk of losing their accommodation. Moreover, research in 2013 showed that homeless people tend to be sanctioned disproportionately more frequently than other claimants. This not only seems unfair – it can also be totally counterproductive because such sanctions tend to trigger high levels of stress and poor (mental) health.

**“Research shows that homeless people are sanctioned more frequently than other claimants”**

The so-called 'bedroom tax', the cut in housing benefit for those deemed to have a spare room, is starting to get households into significant rent arrears and at risk of homelessness. A special UN report on UK housing recently called for the bedroom tax to be abolished because it "impacts on the right to adequate housing and general wellbeing of many vulnerable individuals and households".

In a buoyant private rental market, many landlords terminate existing tenancies in order to get a higher rent from the next tenant. Families and single people therefore become suddenly homeless without any fault of their own, which has turned into a significant problem: in the last three months of 2013, it was the reason for nearly a quarter of the accepted homelessness applications by local authorities.

So austerity has started to bite. Hard. It has chewed off huge chunks of essential provisions, services and support – particularly for those who are most vulnerable, such as homeless people. And the link between cuts and homelessness is undeniable.

**“Austerity has started to bite. Hard.”**

One of the clearest, and most depressing, examples of this can be found in the Midlands. Derby slashed its support of homelessness services, such as hostel accommodation, with a nauseating 82%. Not surprisingly, at the end of 2013 rough sleeping had increased by 95% in that city. With more cuts in local authority budgets pending, we fear that that this might become an ongoing trend.

It also raises the question how the money still available would best be invested to prevent homeless and support those without homes or accommodation.

On this note, but taking a little side step, the Simon Community is concerned about the decision of six London boroughs to direct funds to so-called 'Operation Encompass'. A cooperation of the Metropolitan Police, the UK Border Agency and local councils, Operation

Encompass aims to tackle begging and rough sleeping via, for instance, the use of anti-social behaviour orders. Not only does it wrongly imply that rough sleepers are beggars and vice versa, it effectively means the criminalisation of street homeless people. It's a very old tune for those familiar with, for instance, George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933).

**“As an independent charity, the Simon Community aims to speak out and campaign where it can”**

These are all extremely worrying numbers and trends. So what is to be done? A grass roots campaign has been busy organising protests against Operation Encompass – check 'Homes Not Jails' on Facebook for more details. It is furthermore absolutely crucial to protect the services and funds for homeless people.

The Pay It Forward campaign by Homeless Link offers a quick way to tell your local council to do precisely that, so why not have a look at that [www.endhomelessness.org.uk](http://www.endhomelessness.org.uk)?

As an independent charity working and living with the street homeless, the Simon Community aims to speak out and campaign where it can. Although not directly affected by any government funding cuts, as we have never sought any, it is also important for us to remain acutely aware of all these slashed budgets, changes and their effects. After all, they impact precisely on the lives of the people for whom we exist and who we will continue to support.

If you are interested in current issues regarding homelessness please have a look at our twitter feed. You can find us @SimonComLondon

## GOODBYE AND THANKS TO BOB BAKER

Bob Baker has recently left the Simon Community.

Bob joined the Community as the Director in November 2010 with a wealth of experience in the voluntary sector. During his time with the Simon Community Bob worked extremely hard to build relationships with other homelessness organisations. He was a great representative.

Bob was never too busy to talk to people - residents, guests and volunteers, or any other person who just wandered in off the street and appeared to need some help.

Bob was a brilliant campaigner and strong voice for the community and those it serves.

His letters, articles and speeches were clear, moving and hugely inspirational. He believed in Community, not just here but everywhere.

During my time working for Bob I grew to respect him a great deal. For him this was not a job, it was the means to make a difference. And he did just that.

I miss Bob in the office, but I'm sure that elsewhere other people will benefit from his insight, wit, honesty and support.

Rachel Cullen

# WINTER NIGHT SHELTER

Our winter shelter has now come to an end after supporting a group of guests through the colder months.

Thank you to St Martin's Church in Gospel Oak where our guests have been able to sleep safely and store their belongings. Also thank you to Highgate United Reform Church for lending us mattresses that made such a huge difference!

Thank you to all the volunteers who helped out with sleeping over, cooking food and raising money in support of the winter shelter.

But especially thank you to our resident Philip for working so hard to coordinate the shelter, you have done a fantastic job!



# REST IN PEACE ROBERT McNEILL

We were extremely sad to receive the news that Robert McNeill has passed away.

Robert had long been a community member, our chess master and had also served as a trustee. He was living in his own place in south London but still regularly met with residents for chess and remained an occasional visitor at 129.

A sad day... but with happy memories of all Robert was and what he meant to the community. We keep his family closely in our thoughts.

We do not yet have any funeral details but will update facebook and the website as soon as we do.



# MIKE WESTBROOK CONCERT

On the 8th of February we had a great event to celebrate our 50th Anniversary year.

The Mike Westbrook Band came to St Giles in the Fields to perform Glad Day, a beautiful concert that set Blake's poetry to jazz.

St Giles's in the Fields is a venue well known to the Simon Community, we hold our street cafe there at weekends. Every weekend the courtyard becomes a cafe for homeless guests to get a few hours away from the street, to have a rest and get some food and chat to a friendly volunteer. Thank you to St Giles for their ongoing support of our work and for providing such a great venue for the concert.

Thanks to the Mike Westbrook Band and their supporters, the evening was a great success. We hope that we have made a few new friends from the audience. Thank you to the band and all the volunteers for your hard work. The concert was a fantastic ending to the 50th celebrations.



**Guests take their seats for the concert**



**Volunteers grab a quick bite before the concert starts!**



**Mike Westbrook Band**

If you would like to know more about the Mike Westbrook band and choir, their website is:

<http://www.westbrookjazz.co.uk/>

# NEWS FROM THE FRONT LINE



## Music Tuesday looking at home in St Martin's!

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you about the closing of our day centre. On the 10th of March we closed our door to guests for the last time. In just over two years we had roughly 20,000 visits with many guests washing their clothes, having a hot shower and all being fed.

However the day centre was much more than this. It was also place where guests could come and relax, socialise play a game of chess have access to computers, watch a film and be sign-posted to appropriate services, be it health or housing, it also gave the volunteers a fantastic opportunity to do some in-depth and ongoing work. This was a great venture and we have all learned a lot to carry in to the future. We are currently looking for a replacement venue and will keep you posted.

I am please to say that we have managed to relocate some of the services we ran from the day centre such as the womens group and Music Tuesday to St Martin's church hall with no disruption. Thanks to St Martin's for making our groups welcome at the church.

The soup and tea runs are both going well with the new Wednesday tea run truly established. We are currently looking at how we can improve our outreach services to see that do the best we can for the people that need us most.

The night shelter is going very well, we are in the process of meeting the guests currently staying with us in the shelter with a view to the ongoing work we do with them once we close. The shelter

continues to be well coordinated and managed by resident Phil who has done a fantastic job this year with the help of volunteer William.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers along with the residents for their effort in keeping up the great work Simon community does.

Thanks,

Phil



# LETTERS

## RIP Ann Furse

A community member and friend recently wrote to us to tell us this sad news.

Ann Furse died in Brighton on 16th March 2013 aged 69 years. She was a valued member of her church parish of St Mary Magdalen (same parish that Bernard Huggins was also a member of).

Having been able to take strength from her time within the Simon Community in the 1970s she went on to live a contended and fruitful life. Despite her own challenges of poor health she remained ever sensitive to the plight of others who had fallen on difficult times and would often be engaged in meaningful conversation with 'gentlemen of the road,' whilst out and about on her mobility scooter!

Ann regularly baked cakes and helped with her church soup kitchen where she will be greatly missed.

Ann is pictured here (opposite right) catching up with another old Simonite and dear friend Lynn Rose shortly before Lynn's death in 2008.



Lynn Rose and Ann

## My Mate Pete

I miss my mate, Pete.

We were like brothers. I went everywhere with him. I did the tea runs with him. I went to MT's with him. Went all over the country. That Simon's van has been from Lands End to John O'Groats.

He was a good person, one of the best. He would do anything for you. If you wanted to go somewhere, he would take you. He's been around the world, across the equator about 6 or 7 times.

Peter was one brilliant guy, that's all I can say about him. I love him. I'll stop now or I'll start crying.

Jon C.



Peter Morris and Jon C

If you have some news to share, good or sad, or have someone you would like to remember, or say thank you to... please get in touch. You can write to us at:  
129 Malden Road  
London NW5 4HS

