

Winter 2015

ISSUE 130



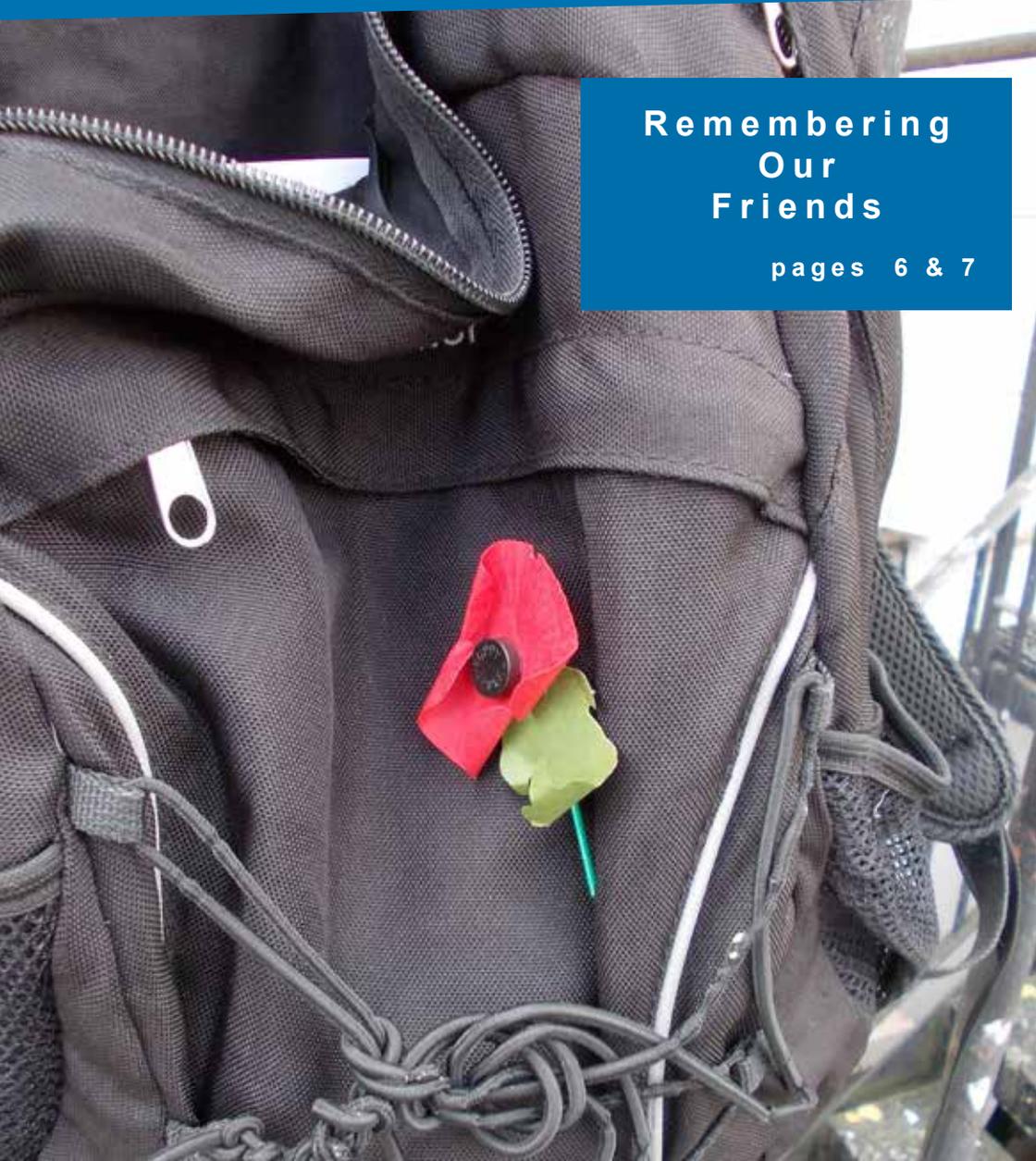
THE
Simon
STAR



www.simoncommunity.org.uk

Remembering
Our
Friends

pages 6 & 7





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THANK YOU

St Mark's Church Islington
Lush
The Pavement
The Swiss Church
Bloomsbury Baptist Church
Dylan's Bakery
Catherine & Ed for the sleeping
bags

All our individual donors and
supporters



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

Thank you to all the schools and churches that donated food to us during Harvest Festival. We have a well-stocked shed and store room now that will help carry us through the winter!

We look forward to sharing your donations with our homeless guests.

Many thanks

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WELCOME TO THE SIMON STAR

It is fitting that we use this remembrance issue to share some very sad news. Our long term resident and friend Bill Little passed away peacefully in his sleep in November. Bill would have been 93 in December. Bill will be fondly remembered by those that lived and worked with him in the Simon Community (more on p5).

As we move towards the Christmas period this is usually a time when most of us think about getting together with family and friends and celebrating.

For many of our guests this will be the hardest time of the year. The winter weather setting in and the warmth of spring feels such a long way off and the seasonal festivities only serve to remind people of what they are missing.

We would like to thank all our readers for your support, for taking the time to read about the Community and for your interest in what we do.

We wish you all a very peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year.



Celebrating Mexican Day of the Dead at the house

Thank you for all Your support this year

Director Jamie Nalton looks back on 2015 with gratitude for all the support we receive

The theme of this season's Simon star is around remembrance which is so very important for us to remember our friends who have passed away.

Very often the homeless and those living by themselves in hostels are anonymous, ignored, forgotten and estranged from society / family, but they are not forgotten by us – and certainly not by you who have chosen to support our work by reading this and helping us to remember the lives of those that have passed.

All of us at the Simon community give our thanks for your continued support whether that be volunteering, financial or in helping us raise awareness of the struggles many of our guests face on a daily basis.

Your support enables us to provide outreach and in-house services every day of the week from early morning until late in the evening.

As an independent charity we rely on support from everyone and we couldn't do the work without you. I wish you a happy Christmas and a peaceful 2016.

Jamie Nalton



Thank you to Dermot for providing Christmas Dinner to all our guests and to all the volunteers that came to serve the food.

Merry Christmas!

Rest in peace

Bill Little

It is with great sadness that I bring you the news that our long term resident and friend Bill Little has passed away.

Anyone who has lived with Bill, or worked with him, or even just met him in passing at the house is likely to remember him.

Bill loved to talk. I remember when I first met him, I was watching the Olympics on television at the vicarage. "Ah... the Olympics" he said, "I went to the Olympics in London... in 1932!" He then proceeded to regale me with tales about trips to pre-war Germany, drinking fresh coffee and how tidy Spain was under General Franco.

Bill was a natural story teller, it didn't seem to matter where you were going or from, Bill would probably have been there and would have a story to tell you. Bill often talked about living in Ealing as a young man, working for the Ministry of Defence and staying at a boarding house. These were happy memories that he enjoyed recounting.

I don't know how Bill became homeless, we never discussed it, he only mentioned that it happened when he was in his 60's. He did however tell me how he came to live with us.

Bill had been sleeping on the streets and staying in hostels when he was hospitalised in 2008. Volunteers who knew him from the soup run went to see him but found that he had already been discharged. They sent a message out to someone on the soup run who found Bill that night and brought him back to the house.

Bill remained with us until last month when he moved to a care home in St John's Wood. He passed away peacefully in his sleep in the early hours of the morning on the 17th November aged 92.

We went to see Bill just a few days before he died. He was telling me stories that I hadn't heard before about his mother who passed away when he was just a young boy. He remembered her as a sociable woman that people took to easily. He loved her very much. I imagine that he was very like her.

Bill, I hope that wherever you are there is freshly boiled water, no green cups or pasta and that dinner is served at a sensible time.

You truly were one of a kind. We will miss you very much.

REMEMBERING OUR FRIENDS

A week of remembrance at the Simon Community

During the week that included Remembrance Sunday, the homeless community in London remembered the friends that we had lost throughout the year.

Every year at St Martin-in-the-Fields there is a service to commemorate our homeless friends who have passed away during the year. The congregation is a touching mixture of homeless guests, those that work in homelessness and people who have experienced homelessness in their lives and want to pay their respects to those who haven't been so fortunate.

In between the songs and moving performances lists of names of those

that have passed are read. It seems to get longer every year. This year we listened in silence as 194 people were remembered.

There are certain platitudes that mourners at any funeral can use to comfort themselves and each other such as 'they had a good innings' or 'we can join together to celebrate the life they enjoyed'.

Tragically these rarely apply on the streets. There is no comfort here for the friends left behind on the street. We can only remember our losses with the quiet dignity and respect they deserve and hope that one day the lists will get shorter.



The Service of Commemoration at St Martin-in-the-Fields



Celebrating Mexican Day of the Dead at the house

Our discussions in the house about bereavement and remembrance let to some interesting conversations about our own experience of acknowledging loss and celebrating life.

Just a few days before the service at St Martin-in-the-Fields and our own Remembrance Sunday was Mexican Day of the Dead.

As we have a Mexican full time volunteer staying with us we asked her to share her cultural traditions and show us how to celebrate this Mexican holiday.

Gabriela explained to us that Dia de Muertos (Day of the Dead) is used for

family and friends to gather together to remember and connect with loved ones who have passed away. We celebrated with traditional foods and decorated sugar skulls to place on the altar as gifts for those we remember.

Everyone enjoyed the food and it was a fitting celebration for the house. Getting together gave us a bit of light during a sombre week of counting our losses in the homeless community.

Thank you to The Connection at St Martin's and Housing Justice for a moving service and to all those that came together to hear the names and remember those we have lost.

Welcome to Julie!

We are delighted to introduce you to our new Community Support Worker

We have an exciting new role at the Simon Community! The Community Support Worker is a new post that has been created to provide support with the day to day activities of the Community for staff, volunteers, residents and guests (well, everyone really!).

This is a training role that will last for a year. The Community Support Worker will learn 'on the job', provide vital support to the Community and then be able to take all those skills out into the world and into permanent employment in the homelessness sector.

Julie was appointed as our first Community Support Worker in October and she brings a great many personal attributes and life experience to the role.

Julie is well known and respected by the guests who use our services having already spent 6 months living and working in the community as a full time volunteer.

We wish you all the best in your new role Julie, thank you for all you have done so far and we all look forward to working with you in the coming year!



Julie in the office

Winter Shelter

Our Community Support Worker Julie tells us about the Winter Shelter

The Simon Community winter shelter will be opening again on 1st January 2016 until 31st March 2016 at St Martin's Church Gospel Oak.

We will have seven bed spaces and are already starting to take names for the waiting list.

Last year, two of our guests, Rob and Coomaren came into the Simon house directly from the shelter and have made tremendous progress living and working in the community alongside volunteers, other residents and staff.

Coomaren came into the shelter in January last year after having been referred to us. He proved to be a real asset in the shelter, always very hardworking, helpful and friendly. Since moving into the Simon house he has further proven himself to be very capable, always hardworking, friendly and polite.

This year Coomaren has agreed to become involved in co-ordinating the winter shelter for our guests and is taking names of people who are interested in coming in as well as giving out advice and information to people whom he feels may benefit.

For our guests, the winter shelter provides much needed respite and also allows them to think about moving on with the help and support of the volunteers if this is what they desire.

In October this year, Coomaren and myself attended a 4 day residential training course at Scargill Retreat in North Yorkshire where the focus was on shelter culture.

This training was extremely valuable in preparation for the winter shelters this season. The focus was on helping our guests to think about what they are good at and how they can put their skills into practice whilst thinking about their own dreams and aspirations for the future. This in turn creates a positive environment and a healthy outlook to carry forward once the shelter has closed. We look forward to another successful season this coming year working alongside our guests.

Our residents, full and part time volunteers, cooks and general helpers all do a tremendous job and we look forward to welcoming you all on board again this year!

Julie Hutchinson

WHAT'S GOING ON...

As the weather gets colder again our early morning tea runs continue to be a very well attended, essential service for our guests. In the last few years we have increased the tea runs from two days per week to the current 4 days per week. Thank you to the volunteers who get up so early to prepare and drive these services so that our guests can wake up to a hot drink and a friendly face after a night on the streets.

We have exciting news about a new outreach service that we are starting in January. We are working with Bloomsbury Baptist Church and will be opening an evening centre in Central London. This is a great space where we will be able to invite guests for hot food and a few valuable hours respite from the streets. Our own volunteers are looking forward to working with volunteers from the church on this exciting joint project. We will be bringing you more news about this in the spring issue when we are up and running.

Over the Christmas period it will be business as usual for us. The only thing that is different is we put on extra tea runs to cover two weeks over the Christmas period. People often get in touch and offer their services as volunteer for Christmas Day and ask if

we have a soup kitchen or somewhere they can help. We are very grateful that they consider giving up their time but there is nothing extraordinary going on here that day. We have our Christmas Dinner with the guests earlier in the month.

The time when we need more help is just after Christmas when we open our winter shelter. From January onwards we provide hot meals and beds every night. The efforts and support of the volunteers make it possible to run this service throughout the coldest months of the year. People come to help by sleeping over, serving food or just having a chat or a game of cards. If you are interested in getting involved we would be happy to hear from you.

If you are interested in volunteering and have a few hours to spare we would be happy to hear from you...

Please get in touch with us at the office on 0207 485 6639

RIP

Teresa McQuade

My mother embodied the principle of hospitality. She was interested in and would talk with everyone. My parents had an open house for family, friends and many other people from all over the world. Their guest book is like a league of nations. Mum would meet interesting people on the bus and bring them home to sleep on the floor.

After having five children she fostered new babies waiting for adoption. She was a problem solver and the go-to person when something went wrong.

When I joined the Simon Community and met Anton, she and my dad were unfailingly supportive. Mum was amused that she had a son-in-law older than herself. She was very fond of Anton and all my family visited and spent time in the Community, mum organising everyone and everything, giving her forthright advice to all, dad mending things.

With a group of friends who met regularly, she raised money for the Community over many years. She had become frail in the last few years, celebrating her 90th birthday earlier this year. She died peacefully in the summer leaving a worldwide legacy of people whose lives she had touched.

MT Gibson-Watt



HELLO & GOODBYE

Since our last issue we have welcomed a new resident to the house. Phil came to our door regularly for sandwiches and coffee and had got to know the residents and volunteers well. We invited him to come and stay in the house and he is settling in very well. Phil is a great help serving others at the door.

We have said goodbye to volunteer Giustino who has returned to Italy and welcomed Ivan from Scotland.

