

## THE NEEM TREE TRUST NEWSLETTER – DECEMBER 2023

Thank you very much for the support you have given us in raising funds for the Boys' Home in Tirunelveli and St Luke's Leprosy Hospital, Peikulam, south India.

### FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES 2022/23

John Kendall's Christmas 2022 Shop plus sales throughout the year amounted to an amazing £2423

Kathy Miller's Pop-Up Christmas 2022 Shop at Avoncliff raised £468

Freda Ferne's Pop-Up Christmas 2022 Shops raised £310

Christina and Richard's Open Garden in June 2022 raised £1875

During the 2022/23 Financial Year the following organisations generously made donations to The Neem Tree Trust amounting to £2322:

St Lazarus Trust

Medlock Trust

Ashton Mill Services, Melksham

Colerne Church

We claimed Gift Aid of £4,268 from the Inland Revenue on donations from UK taxpayers.



In November 2022 we sent out our annual newsletter by email to supporters giving them an update on the children's progress and inviting them to make a donation to The Neem Tree Trust for the benefit of the children at the boys' home and the patients and children at the Leprosy Hospital. Donations from individuals and organisations for both the Boys' Home and St Luke's, including regular standing orders plus an unexpected and simply astonishing bequeathment amounted in total to £82853.



On the 21<sup>st</sup> October 2023 we celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of The Neem Tree Trust with a coffee morning at Holy Trinity Church, Bradford on Avon. It was wonderful to see so many of our supporters there, many of whom had made delicious cakes. The event which was also in memory of my husband, Ken, raised £2,500. Over the past 20 years The Neem Tree Trust has made grants of £302,478 to St Lukes and £377,323 to the Boys' Home.

*Donations in memory of loved ones are very special gifts and are deeply appreciated by our charity. It is a wonderful way to celebrate someone's life and we would like to acknowledge donations to The Neem Tree Trust in memory Val Sargeant, Robin Cooke and Mrs Rosamund Pratt*

# SCHT BOYS' HOME

During our Financial Year 2022/2023 the Trust provided a grant of £20,000 to the SCHAT Boys' Home. This money is used for the daily running of the home including staff salaries, electricity, transport, clothing and food.



Families from the local area who wish to sponsor the home often provide special meals for the boys in memory of a loved one or to celebrate an anniversary or Birthday. These delicious meals are cooked on an open fire by a cook engaged from outside the home. One of the favourite dishes is Biryani followed by Payasam, a sweet dish made with vermicelli, milk, sweetener, ghee, dried fruit, cashew nuts and cardamom - delicious!



After four years away from the boys' home it was wonderful to be welcomed back by Mrs Princess Chelliah, the wardens and workers and to meet so many new boys. There are 39 boys at the home, studying 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Standard and 6 college students. They all come from very poor backgrounds, some of them are orphans and some semi-orphans, meaning they have lost one of their parents. The home was originally founded by Dr Karuna Chelliah to care for boys with Polio. The good news is that Polio has now been eradicated in India and there is only one differently abled boy at the home just now who has cerebral palsy; he is an orphan and is studying 12<sup>th</sup> Standard.



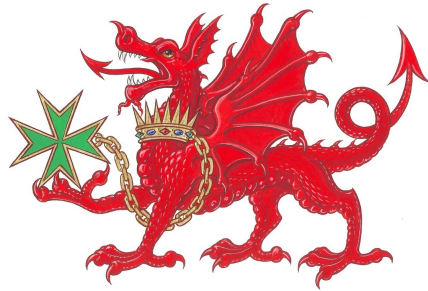
The boys were fascinated to read an article about themselves and The Neem Tree Trust which appeared in my local paper, The Wiltshire Times.



During my stay, Arumugam and I spent a lot of time together. He was affected by Polio as a child and grew up at the Boys' Home and I have known him since he was a very young boy. Because of the encouragement and care he received at the home he now has his own tailoring business and is married with a little boy. He has never forgotten the opportunities he was given and comes to the home whenever I am there to sew items that I can bring back home to sell to raise funds for The Neem Tree Trust. He is an inspiration not only to the other boys but to many others who know him.



# THE ORDER OF ST LAZARUS COMMANDERY OF WALES



I was first introduced to the Order of St Lazarus Commandery of Wales in 2022 by Haydn Rees at our Open Gardens in Corsham, who put me in touch with Dr David A Woolf, Commander of Wales, Order of St Lazarus. The Order is named in honour of St Lazarus, who is generally recognised as the patron saint of lepers.

The Order is heavily involved with the relief of leprosy, working in conjunction with other official organisations to provide care for leprosy patients. According to their website:

The World Health Organisation currently estimates that there are fifteen million sufferers of Leprosy today, of whom only three and a half million are receiving any form of treatment

The St Lazarus Charitable Trust is the charity arm of the Order of St Lazarus. They work closely with charities on a range of projects. Their Mission is:

To help and support those in need, especially those suffering from leprosy or similar diseases

To change the public perception of leprosy in England and Wales

We are proud to be associated with St Lazarus Commandery of Wales who, since our first introduction in 2022, have made generous donations of £2,000 to our charity for the benefit of St Luke's Leprosarium. This money has helped with the purchase of a new x-ray machine as well as the refurbishment of the kitchens and staff quarters at St Luke's.

# ST LUKE'S LEPROSARIUM

During our Financial Year 2022/2023 the Trust provided a grant of £30,000 to St Luke's Leprosarium.

During my visit to St Luke's in November I was taken on my usual tour of the wards to meet the patients and staff and I was delighted to see that the previous women's ward had been demolished and the women now have metal beds rather than their previous stone beds and are cared for in a light and airy ward just like the men.



It was with sadness I learnt that Miss Pushpam Amma, affectionately known as Teacher Amma, passed away on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Miss Pushpam joined the Peikulam family at a very young age. She was trained as a Nurse helper and was part of the medical team. She had been in service for more than 60 years. After her retirement she continued her service as a caretaker for the children's home. She has truly been an inspiration to everyone and was beloved by the children.



After COVID-19 St Luke's promoted "study from home" for most of their students. They supported all the educational needs of the children and at the same time, the children were able to be with their families. They also supported some of the families who could not care for their children.

Now all the children who receive St Luke's sponsorship for school education as well as scholarship for higher education are either studying with their families or are in college hostels.

# Dr G M JEYABALAN



Dr Jeyabalan, Chief Medical Superintendent at St Luke's Leprosarium for over 35 years, sadly passed away on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023.

I first met Dr Jeyabalan in 1999 on my very first trip to India. I was 51 years old, volunteering with an organisation called Teaching Abroad and staying at the Differently-abled Boys' Home near to Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. I had heard about St Luke's Leprosarium in Peikulam from a fellow volunteer and asked if I could visit.

My first and overriding impression of Dr Jeyabalan was one of total dedication and enthusiasm for the work carried out at his hospital. His charisma was tangible and he immediately made me feel relaxed as he personally showed me round the hospital, introducing me to his staff and the patients.

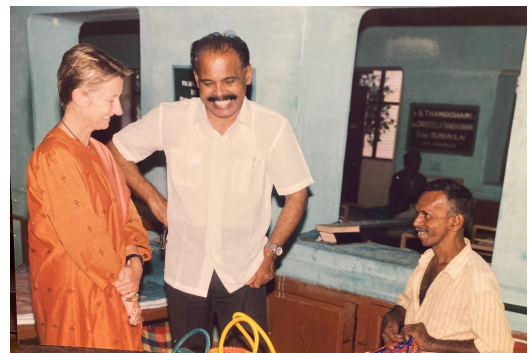
I am not medically trained and was totally ignorant about Leprosy, its causes and the treatment available. Dr Jeyabalan explained in words I could understand the history of the hospital, the stigma of leprosy and how St Luke's treats and helps rehabilitate the patients who come for treatment. This had a lasting impression on me and, as a reminder of my visit, before I left India Dr Jeyabalan presented me with a small album of photographs taken during my stay. I would never forget that first visit - Dr Jeyabalan was the face of St Luke's and an inspiration to me.

I returned home to my family in England determined to assist the wonderful work carried out both at St Luke's Leprosarium and the Differently-abled Boys' Home. In 2003 with the support of my husband Ken, we set up The Neem Tree Trust, a UK Registered Charity dedicated to support the work of both these institutions.

Over the last 25 years I have visited the boys' home and St Luke's almost every year and met Dr Jeyabalan on every occasion. Because of him I have been inspired to give numerous talks about Leprosy and the work of St Luke's to our supporters in the United Kingdom and in turn I have inspired them to donate money to assist the wonderful work that is undertaken at the hospital. In fact, over the past 20 years The Neem Tree Trust has contributed over £302,478 to St Luke's and I believe we are one of the hospital's major donors. None of this would have happened had Dr Jayabalan not taken the time to welcome me to his hospital on that first visit and to explain about the work they do. Indeed, I know I was not the exception; he treated all the visitors in a similar fashion and in turn spread the word far and wide across the globe.

I considered Dr Jeyabalan and his wife, Chandra, very special friends. We have comforted each other during times of deep sorrow and rejoiced together at times of joy and happiness.

Meeting Dr Jeyabalan had a profound effect on my life - he opened my eyes to the great suffering of some of the most neglected people on earth but at the same time I was overwhelmed with admiration for the compassion and sacrifice of a man such as him. I am a better person for having met him and feel eternally blessed.



My first visit to St Luke's in 1999

# ALEX RAISES £721 FOR THE NEEM TREE TRUST

In spite of looking after her three young daughters, Freya and twins Grace and Charlotte, and of course her husband Jimbo, my daughter Alex managed to put in many months of training and ran the Paris Half Marathon on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023 in aid of The Neem Tree Trust. Our family and friends are extremely proud of her achievement but she also received encouraging messages from the Differently Abled Boys Home as well as St Luke's Leprosy Hospital.

*"We are very happy and proud that Alex ran the half Marathan in Paris yesterday in 2 hours and three minutes. It is very good as well as memorable news for all us; as she had run to raise the funds for the boys Home. We all feel very proud of her and pray our God to give her very good health and bless her in all her initiatives. Convey our Prayerful wishes to Alex and her family.*

*Mrs Princess Chelliah  
SCHT Boys' Home"*

*"We are very happy to see your daughter Alex  
We appreciated her efforts for St.Luke's.  
Kindly convey our regards to your daughter.  
Thank you once again for all your care and concern for our  
cause.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Haebus S. Vethabothagam,  
Medical Superintendent  
St Luke's Leprosarium"*



**Our charity not only raises funds for the Boys' Home and St Luke's but also fosters deep and lasting friendships. Thank you to everyone who has supported us for so many years.**