

THE NEEM TREE TRUST NEWSLETTER – NOVEMBER 2025

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 2024/25

John Kendall's Christmas 2024 Shop plus sales throughout the year amounted to £1825
Freda Ferne's Pop-Up Christmas 2024 Shops @ her Wednesday Group and Art Group raised £428
Pat Kinzett's Pop-up Christmas Shop £536
Kathy Miller's Pop-up Christmas Shop £425
Christina and Richard's Open Garden in June 2024 raised £2616

We received donations from the following organisations:

St Lazarus Charitable Trust £1,000
SFICE Foundation, Nottingham £3581
Ashton Mills Valuers & Property Clearance Specialists, Melksham £150
Oakley Holidays £180
Colerne Church £156

We claimed Gift Aid of £2697 from the Inland Revenue on donations from UK taxpayers.

We received interest of £3848 from our Charity Savings Accounts.

In November 2024 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 amounted in total to £24,556.



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 of Robin Cooke

NICK & HELEN'S VISIT TO THE SHT BOYS' HOME

Last January Nick and I had the privilege of visiting the boys' home whilst we were on holiday in Southern India. We have long supported the amazing work that Kathy does both for the boys' home and for the leprosy hospital and when we realised that we would be quite close to the boys' home we felt it would be wonderful if we could just stop by and meet everyone. Although we would miss Kathy's visit by just a couple of weeks, the staff warmly welcomed the idea of our visit and insisted we stay at the home rather than in Tirunelveli, as we had planned.

Nothing prepared us for the scale of the welcome we received. We were met on the train platform by Princess Chelliah and her team; we were draped in garlands and made to feel like royalty. We were driven by minibus to the home where the boys had all assembled in their Sunday best and applauded our arrival. A quick change out of our grubby travel clothes before it was time to take to the stage as guests of honour (!) and be treated to well-rehearsed dancing and singing performances from the boys.



What joy and delight was written all over their faces as they entertained us all. The local MP and her husband arrived with hand woven gifts for us and formal speeches ensued, including the expectation that BOTH Nick and I would speak. We had dinner with the team and then had the opportunity to chat informally with the boys - how happy and enthusiastic they all seemed although I think secretly, they were a bit disappointed our knowledge of cricket didn't match theirs! Given the difficult backgrounds these boys have come from I cannot overstate how kind hearted, polite and 'switched on' all of the boys were and how well prepared the boys have been made to go out into the wider world when they are 18. All credit must go to the staff and Wardens who achieve so much on very limited means.



In the morning, we said a sorry goodbye to the boys before they all left for their various schools. Before leaving the home we met more of the lovely staff and were given a tour of the buildings and grounds. We were humbled to realise quite how much of it has been as a result of the money that Kathy has raised. Originally some funds were donated from elsewhere and The Neem Tree Trust contribution tended to be used for specific projects, new buildings, minibuses etc. Now however the trust must cover all costs: salaries, food, clothing etc which is a daunting prospect.

Having seen firsthand the warmth of community that has been created, the education that is being provided and the opportunities that the NTT provides for these boys I can totally see why all Kathy's, and previously Ken's, hard work is so worthwhile. The love and respect that both staff and boys have for 'Mummy Kathy' is glaringly evident and with good reason.



As if everyone hadn't already done so much to make our trip memorable, we were escorted to our train and we left humbled but with an enormous bag of Halwa, a Tirunelveli speciality, the most delicious, most moreish of sticky sweetness you can imagine.

KATHY'S VISIT TO THE BOYS' HOME

I arrived at the boys' home on 29th January, a couple of weeks after Nick and Helen's visit, and it was heartwarming for me to hear how much the boys, staff and wardens had enjoyed their visit and how pleased they were to proudly show them around their home.

This being the 25th anniversary of my first visit to the home, a very special welcome ceremony was awaiting me which was quite overwhelming. I was humbled beyond words and made to feel very special indeed. It was everyone's way of expressing their appreciation of the support they receive from The Neem Tree Trust and to thank all those who have generously given their time and money to enrich the lives of the children and their families.



I am always touched when boys who have left the home come back to see me with their families whenever I visit. This is Ponraj with his wife, Shanthi, with their daughter and their new born baby girl. I have known Ponraj for over 25 years, as he joined the home in 1999 as a very small boy and left in 2011. Before he joined the home, when he was very small, he had a severe accident in his village and his left arm was amputated. In spite of this, and with the encouragement of Dr Karuna Chelliah, he blossomed into a talented cricketer and has played at national level. Thanks to the education he received whilst living at the home, he now has a good job as a salesman in a cement factory and is able to proudly support his young family.



Over 20 years ago I took out some Duplo for the boys and every year since then I am delighted to see that the younger boys still enjoy playing with it. Countless number of boys have enjoyed it over the years and, apart from a few broken pieces, it still looks as good as new! If any of our supporters have any Duplo that their children have outgrown please let me know; I will find a good home for it in India.



Prakash with his grandmother. Sadly, he lost both his parents during the pandemic.

All the boys at the home come from extremely poor backgrounds but at the home they have a good education and are given opportunities to thrive. They do not lose contact with their families; they return to their villages at holiday times and the families are encouraged to visit the boys whenever they can at weekends.



Muthukumar and Pavith with their mother. Their father left them when they were very young and their mother is a construction worker.



Silambam is an ancient Indian martial art originating from Tamil Nadu that combines power combat with graceful, fluid movements using bamboo staffs and is a vibrant expression of Tamil culture.

Sumith and Siva, two boys living at the home, proudly show off the trophies they won for Silambam at an inter-school competition.



Mrs Ramalakhmil, Mrs Arumugathammal and Mrs Thangam, the cooks, slicing the vegetables outside the kitchen for the delicious meals they prepare for everyone at the home. They are using an Aruvamani. It is a long-curved blade that cuts on a platform held down by the foot. Both hands are used to hold whatever is being cut and move it against the blade. The sharper side faces the user. It is designed for the cooks to sit comfortably on the floor and cut vegetables with one leg folded on the wooden base.



I would definitely be more of a hindrance than a help in the SCHAT kitchen but I do like to make an English trifle for the boys each year using the wonderful fruits available in India. The boys enjoy it very much and call it "Mummy's foreign food"!



RAISING FUNDS

Over the years my friend and neighbour, Freda, has made simply hundreds of jars of jams and chutneys for us to sell in aid of The Neem Tree Trust. Thank you so much, Freda! Here's what she has to say:



"For me September marks the beginning of the season. I really enjoy making jams and chutneys - jellies a little less so as it is a double process spread over two consecutive days. Oh, the delight when I see the jars all lined up - it's very satisfying - OK I'm stocked up and ready for winter. Somewhat akin to the satisfaction of having a good log pile but more delicious of course.

The fact that I can support Kathy and the Neem Tree Trust by doing something I enjoy so much is a real bonus. Kathy does the labels for me so all the ingredients are listed to help those who have allergies. As far as possible I use local produce grown 'organically' but not, of course, certified as such and always use Fair Trade sultanas and sugar.

We are often asked if we have any Marmalade. Regarding Marmalade. I do not eat marmalade so do not make it as I would have no idea if it was good or otherwise. If there is anyone out there who could make some for us it would be wonderful. Even a few jars would be much appreciated. We would be able to sell marmalade any time of year - not just autumn or pre-Christmas. Please consider. I'm off now to start prettying up the jars a bit."



When they returned from their visit to the home, Nick and Helen wanted to raise money for the boys so on 8th May they held a social evening in their garden in Turleigh and invited along their friends and neighbours. They are pictured here standing by their beautiful Wisteria wearing the garlands presented to them by the boys. I had a table selling Neem Tree Trust items and everyone was very interested to hear about their visit, look at their photographs and to learn more about life at the home and how The Neem Tree Trust supports them.

John Kendall continues to support us with his sales of small antiques and collectables. Since we first met in 2010 he has raised thousands of pounds for The Neem Tree Trust by buying really interesting items at boot sales and selling them in aid of our charity. You can visit John and Michael at their home in Seend where they will have their Christmas shop open and you will receive a warm welcome from them both. See details of our Christmas shops on page 8.



We are so grateful to Richard and Christina Cornish who have opened their beautiful garden in Corsham annually since 2017 in aid of our charity. We have a team of loyal supporters who serve teas, coffees and delicious home made cakes, and this year we used compostable cups adorned with our Neem Tree Trust logo, sponsored by our friends, Ashton Mill Valuers and Property Clearance Specialists in Melksham.



ST LUKE'S LEPROSARIUM

In my last newsletter I explained that the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) is India's law regulating the flow of foreign funding into the country. Indian non-profit organisations must have a valid FCRA Registration to be able to legally receive charitable funds from donors outside of India. I went on to explain that we had encountered problems transferring money to St Luke's and Dr Haebus, the Medical Superintendent, was doing his utmost to resolve this problem but in the meantime all donations for St Luke's were safely deposited into our Gold CAF Savings account where they are accruing interest.

I have recently heard from Dr Haebus that the FCRA account for a new trust, St Lukes Medical Trust, should be operational by March 2026. Since it's a new trust, they are following all the government orders and are fulfilling all the prerequisites. The work is slow but resolute but he has assured me that they will find a way to resolve the problem of donations to St Luke's.

Dr Haebus goes on to assure our supporters that they will soon be able to receive the funds earmarked for St Luke's Leprosarium and to thank everyone for their care and concern for their cause.

The Neem Tree Trust supporters of St Lukes have not lost faith and continue to send donations to us for the leprosy hospital. This includes the **Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in Wales**, who have given us a further £1,000. The Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in Wales is part of the Grand Priory of England and Wales and is a chivalric order dedicated to charitable works, particularly in the fight against leprosy and support for marginalised communities.

Dr Haebus wrote to me recently "The contributions from the Order of Lazarus through the Neem Tree Trust have been a boon to our medical mission. We have used their contributions for the X-ray machine at St Luke's Leprosarium and the renovation of the patient's kitchen. We have earmarked their 2024/2025 contribution for the orthopaedic correction surgeries undertaken for three of our leprosy patients. These patients had internal fixation of implants to correct their feet and thus help them walk unassisted. We deeply appreciate the support of the Order of Lazarus as well as all the other Neem Tree Trust supporters".



Mariyal is a permanent patient at St Lukes and helps other patients with their daily living activities

When I visited St Luke's in January 2025, I was given a tour of the men's and women's wards by the medical staff. The Neem Tree Trust sponsors several beds at the hospital and I was very pleased to meet the patients who were occupying two of our beds at the time.

It is humbling to visit the hospital and to see how the dedicated staff help to heal and care for these most marginalised of people who are often shunned by their families, friends and communities.



Murugan, though admitted as a patient, takes care of the gardening within the hospital campus.

SFiCE FOUNDATION (Support for Individuals in a Caring Environment) Charity Number 1155645

In February 2025 I was contacted by Chris Skelly who introduced himself as the treasurer and one of the trustees at a Nottingham based charity, SFiCE Foundation. He explained that the charity was originally founded by Parminder Dhanjal with the intention of alleviating poverty and supporting children's education in India. As it is no longer possible for Parminder to make regular trips to India to monitor the performance of charity projects, it was decided by the trustees to discontinue that work in India, and they were looking for charities which in their opinion carry out similar work. After a search on the Charity Commission website they selected The Neem Tree Trust as one of the charities to which they wished to make a grant of £3,581. I was surprised and delighted to receive this communication from Chris and after discussion with the staff at the boys' home it was decided that this generous grant from SFiCE would be spent on school uniforms for the boys, purchasing books to set up a good library in the home as well as paying the tuition fees for all the children who study at St. Joseph's High School and Cathedral Hr. Sec. School, Palayamkottai.

SFiCE Foundation is a non-profit charity that now concentrates on helping the homeless and vulnerable in Nottingham, providing various services and projects completely free of charge. They are very proud to say that they base their ethos on being non-religious, non-political and non-sectarian.

A huge part of their Mission is to fight food poverty, so three times a week they hold a Social Café at their offices at 75a Raleigh Street, Nottingham, where those in need can enjoy a three-course hot meal and where food parcels, clothes, toiletries, showering and laundry services and other necessities are provided free of charge. You can find out more about the work of SFiCE by visiting their website www.sfice.org.



On 21st August 2025 I travelled to Nottingham to meet Parminder and her SFiCE team of dedicated staff and volunteers to thank them personally for the generous grant they have given to The Neem Tree Trust. It was humbling to see the work they are carrying out to help reduce the effects of food poverty, isolation and ill health within the City of Nottingham. I hope to join them again in March 2026 when they will be celebrating a decade of transforming lives, with a fundraising lunch at the Mem Saab restaurant in Nottingham.



CHRISTMAS EVENTS

The Neem Tree Trust will again display our Christmas Tree at the Holy Trinity Christmas Tree Festival in Bradford on Avon which will run from 9th-14th December 10.30am - 6.00pm. Our tree will be No 20 to the left of the altar, so do come along to admire all the beautiful trees. As in previous years, local charities, clubs, organisations, businesses and individuals will have the opportunity each to stage a tree based on whatever theme they choose.

Proceeds go towards improvements to the fabric of the church and its upkeep, helping to make it warm, welcoming and available for community use. The church really does look magnificent during the festival with over 50 Christmas trees on display and it is well worth a visit. Teas, coffees, mulled wine and mince pies will also be on offer.



John Kendall will be selling his small antiques and collectables at his home in Seend and Pat Kinzett and Kathy Miller will have pop up Christmas shops selling Neem Tree Trust items such as cards, wrapping paper, pens & pencils, notepads, shawls, and bags as well as jams & chutneys lovingly made by Freda in aid of The Neem Tree Trust

If you would like to visit John's Christmas shop at Seend, Pat's Christmas shop at Dilton Marsh or my own Christmas shop at Avoncliff, please let us know by telephoning me on

01225 865789, messaging 07511 385861 or emailing me

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