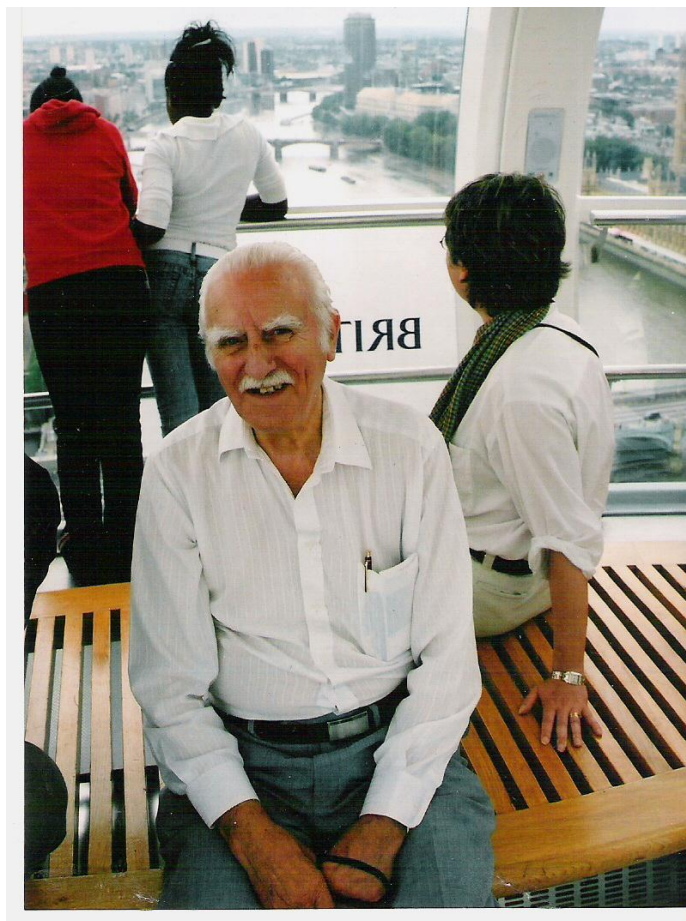


# BERT HYDE REMEMBERED

Tributes from  
Christian CARE Volunteers



Christian CARE Association  
Annual General Meeting  
14<sup>th</sup> October 2010

**BERT HYDE**  
**CHRISTIAN CARE ASSOCIATION FOUNDER**  
**CHAIRMAN 1967 - 2010**

**“one of God’s diamonds”**

It was just a year ago, as the Christian CARE Association 2009 AGM was drawing to a close, that the Chairman, Revd Gavin Murray, turned to Bert and said ‘You are one of God’s diamonds.’ In retrospect it was so right that he did that. I am so thankful that Bert was able to receive that special tribute and appreciation for the work that was his vision and to which he devoted so much of his later life. He was honoured by London Borough of Merton on several occasions:

- 1970’s - Cyril Black Prize
- 2000 - Queen’s Golden Jubilee Merton Award
- 2005 - Merton Excellence Award – Outstanding Contribution to the Community – Voluntary Sector

But ‘one of God’s diamonds’, that was special. We take that on tonight as we share memories and reflect on what Bert’s life of Christian caring has meant to us - the volunteers in the Christian CARE Association past and present.

I am delighted that we are joined by Bert’s wife Gwen, his son Tim, his daughter Liz, his son-in-law Steve and granddaughter Issy. We are also so pleased that Peggie Hunt is here. She worked alongside Bert in Christian CARE Association from 1969 – 2005 and is now a Friend. We wish her a very happy 94th birthday on Saturday!

I have invited 7 people to contribute tonight, people whose memories cover the 43 years of the Christian CARE Association.

**Joan Greig** was hoping to be with us but unfortunately John Hillier who was driving her is unwell. Joan is the widow of Leslie Greig, the first Secretary who served for 10 years, until he moved to St Albans. So her reflections take us right back to the beginning. She sent a letter last night to be read to you.

*My best memory of Bert is his smile and ready friendliness to all and his willingness to help those less fortunate than himself. That characterised his whole attitude to life and therefore he was a very real influence in the early days of Christian Care. I remember when my husband Les was asked by our minister at South Wimbledon to represent our Church at a meeting to organise a Christian Group with the express intention of helping those in need especially in the local area and he came home to say that he had met a really ideal chap to work with. This was the start of a very happy and caring committee in a group of Merton Churches whose aim was to serve under Bert’s chairmanship.*

*However when we moved to St Albans we were still included in what was going on with reports that came to us from the Committee and were able to support it with our prayers and occasionally some money. Since Les died soon after we came I have valued that contact and the invitations that have come to continue my interest and the contact with other members of the Committee – Peggy, Kath, Larry and their partners kept their*

*friendship alive and supported me with their hospitality and friendship over the years along with Bert.*

*I feel privileged to have known him and shall always remember him as a true Christian Gentleman. My prayers and good wishes go with Christian Care in all it's future dealings and I trust that God will help you all in your endeavours for Him and that Bert's fine example will always keep you on the right path*

**Jean Thompson** was the third and longest serving Secretary. She was such a gentle, calm, thoughtful and sensitive person and highly efficient. She cannot come up from Bristol today because her husband John needs 24 hour care, but Carol Pringle is going to bring her tribute.

*I can still clearly remember the day when Bert called round to see me in 1980 to ask if I would be willing to consider joining the Christian CARE Committee with a view to taking over as Secretary from Brenda Randall who was due to move to Canada following her forthcoming marriage. Quite why Bert thought of me I really don't remember but I know his request came just at a time when I was feeling that I wanted to get involved in some sort of Christian voluntary work, so obviously it was all part of God's perfect timing.*

*The next step was to have words with Brenda, who described the committee as one of the most harmonious she had ever served on and indeed this was just as true for me. It was a joy to attend our monthly meetings under Bert's leadership – a group of Christians who worshipped at various local churches of different denominations but were united in our love of Christ and a desire to help others who found themselves in need. Bert led by example, as he give himself unstintingly to the work. His heart was greatly touched when children were involved and parents under great stress, which is how the idea of providing holidays to such families came about. Sending some of the children to Christian Camps every year was another way in which families under strain could be given a break.*

*Two more highlights of the year were the annual Christmas/New Year Party in January and the annual Outing to Littlehampton every summer. It was a joy to see Bert on these occasions surrounded by children or with one of the little ones perched on his knee. They responded to his obvious love for them.*

*As the years went by, the emphasis of the work become more centred on the needs of the many refugee families who were making their way to this country, many with very tragic stories to tell of why they had had to flee their own land. Bert worked tirelessly for such families right up until his death, enlisting help from MPs, clergy, local councillors, lawyers etc., and fighting their corner with courtesy and grace.*

*The number of such families who have been touched and helped personally by Bert and the charity he helped to found so many years ago must be immense. It may be a small local, unknown work, but those who have been helped on their way will always remember dear Bert with great affection and gratitude.*

Before Christian CARE became a charity in its own right, it was under the umbrella of Welcare and our next 2 contributors take us back to that connection.

**Keith Uphill** has come up from Portsmouth tonight to be with us. He served on the Executive Committee from 1994 to 1995. We welcomed him here 3 years ago when he was the preacher at our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Service and are so glad that he can come and add his memories now.

*It is a great privilege to be asked to speak about our friend Bert. He was to me one of the most energetic of older men, whom I first met about twenty-four years ago.*

*I had just taken over the post of Honorary Chairman of Merton WelCare, which provides a Christian Social caring network across the Borough; part of the ministry of the Church throughout the whole Diocese of Southwark, in fact.*

*I found that an organisation called Christian Care was linked with WelCare, and that someone named Bert Hyde was its Chairman. I duly met Bert and was introduced to a very twinkly-eyed man who was to become a true friend, as he was already to so many other people. I was asked to join the Committee, and discovered that he had infected everybody with his good-humoured caring optimism.*

*I thought he must be a retired surveyor as he was doing so much in the community, but he was still working. I could not have known that he would continue working right up to the end of his long life - though after a little while seeing Bert in action I could certainly have predicted it!*

*Bert had a rare talent for making near-impossibilities seem quite straightforward if you worked at them, and he certainly inspired me to tackle problems which would formerly have defeated me. In fact I wish I'd met him years earlier!*

*He gathered around him a talented and enthusiastic Committee who achieved so much on behalf of people with varied needs of their ministry in Merton. Bert's chairmanship was so informal and yet somehow everyone contributed fully to the working of the wonderful team who cared for isolated people who were often strangers in a strange land.*

*The secret was his outgoing, genuine love and concern for those who lacked support and friends, those who were frightened and unable to cope with a new language and lack of understanding of our culture. Somehow or other Bert kept going from morning to night, and had the gift of empathy. He was practical, saw needs and gaps in social care which had to be met, and surrounded himself with folk who worked hard and faithfully with him to meet them. The original hands-on leader! His wife Gwen was incredibly unselfish throughout, and we all appreciated her role.*

*His silver hair and encouraging manner were such a comfort to people in despair! He often went personally to provide such basic necessities as blankets or a kettle to clients alone in houses or flats which lacked nearly all amenities to get by. A warm encouraging chat to the depressed or lonely was his hall-mark, as was his fight for people in the face of red tape or officialdom. And I saw Bert as a sharer of joy in families, too... He won over Merton Council and gained the respect and even funding from official bodies. Art sales in Wimbledon and the BBC's Children in Need were just two of the sources of income.*

*I was able sometimes to help with getting hold of furniture and effects, and even transporting these to clients through the furniture scheme van. I remember once calling*

*on an elderly lady who had ignored her daughter's advice and bought a new fridge - just three weeks before she had to move into a Care Home. At my request her daughter cancelled a firm who did house clearances, to give Christian Care the fridge and a number of other white goods and household items. I helped deliver them to a family who had been allocated a completely empty flat, and shared their joy. I felt at that point that I was "Bert's substitute" sharing his vision ...*

*He was always the magnetic "Mr Bert" to children of all ages. He and his Committee sent off hundreds of children on trips to the seaside at Littlehampton, and to enjoyable and character-building Summer Camps, with pocket money to spend. Huge Christmas Parties in Wimbledon URC Hall - at the end of January - were legendary. What wonderful events they were, with Gillian's Sixth-Formers and other volunteers helping Committee members to provide a memorable enjoyable oasis in a time of sadness and greyness for large numbers of children, each of whom received a personal worthwhile present. And presiding over it, Father Christmas himself, alias Bert, the genius of the fun. I almost said, the genie of the lamp ...*

*He inspired us all somehow, befriended all, and gave of himself totally.*

**Lynn Kyte** came to the Christian CARE Association to work in the office in 2007 and is a now a befriender and shopper. However she too has known Bert since Welcare days and has a more personal and individual perspective to share.

*Many people have good reason to remember Bert with great affection. His good-humoured approach to sorting out practical, emotional and financial problems was renowned.*

*In 1985 I joined the committee of Wel-Care, at which the Christian Care committee was represented by Bert, Kathleen and Marjorie. First impression of Bert was of a white-haired, rather distinguished looking gent, sporting a rather spiffing moustache – possibly ex-RAF I wondered. Second impression, after hearing him speak without condescension – indeed with warmth – about the underprivileged children and families that Christian Care helped, was of a special man. Bert was a Good Samaritan – seemingly someone whose own life could not have any connection with the people in difficult situations that he met through his commitment to Christ. And yet, he did have connection. Bert radiated love like an arc of sunlight wherever he went. Anyone who knew him could not help remarking upon it.*

*Bert had a way of being there when most needed. I spoke to a young lady who was a former client. She loved Bert like a favourite uncle. He had arranged to come and see her to help with a tenancy agreement, as she has mild learning difficulties. That evening there was a terrible storm. The rain was bucketing down and the wind was blowing a gale. She did not expect him to turn up in such weather, and was amazed when he knocked on the door – true to his word.*

*It wasn't just that he cared; he was calm in a crisis and his ability not to panic made him the person to contact in an emergency. One day at Wel-care the children of one of our families, whilst playing rather energetically, crashed into a hatstand which then crashed through the office's plate glass window – spreading glass and confusion, noisily, in every direction. As I gazed through the hole to the pavement outside, wondering whether a passing pedestrian might be sprawled under the shards of glass, a sense of calamity engulfed us, until I spoke on the phone to Bert (thank goodness he was there!) He calmly*

*took the details of our accident, not speculating on what lack of adult control might have led to the escapade, but merely ascertaining that nobody had been hurt. He appeared within a few minutes and took charge of the situation, arranging for the window to be boarded up temporarily and then ordering the new plate glass and sorting out the insurance claim.*

*He was a 'Knight in Shining Whiskers' one day when he helped me personally; back in the days when people shopped with cheques and guarantee cards. I had been doing the weekly shopping in what was then Somerfield supermarket. I came to the checkout and had omitted to bring my cheque guarantee card. Politely, but firmly, the checkout girl told me I could not write a cheque without the back-up of the cheque card. At this perplexing moment, with all my shopping about to be returned to the shelves, Bert suddenly appeared and, entirely on his say-so, I was to be trusted without further question. In fact, following that day my own esteem within the store was raised, simply through knowing Bert, and this association assured my being greeted in a friendly way anytime I stepped through the automatic door.*

*Bert would be too modest to devote any time wondering if he was a saint, but his life and work spoke of his deep commitment as a Christian, doing the Lord's work in this world, without any desire for reward. For me he was the personification of the Good Samaritan.*

In the late 1980's Bert was concerned that the Christian CARE Association was not reaching the neediest residents of the London Borough of Merton. He convened a series of meetings and a large number of additional volunteers came forward and were trained. A Sub-Committee for the Homeless was formed. An answerphone service was set up and leaflets were placed in the London Borough of Merton housing department offering our services. It was the time when many refugees and asylum seekers were coming into the borough and the work of the Christian CARE Association developed dramatically in new directions. The befrienders needed additional skills and expertise. This period saw the start of the Furniture Project, the introduction of Christmas hampers and Christmas lunches. Our last 3 contributors have joined the Christian CARE Association in this period – from the 1990's onwards.

**John Hillier** was the first secretary of Sub-Committee for the Homeless from 1989 to 1999 and worked very hard alongside Bert at this time of rapid change. John had hoped to be here from St Albans where he is an Anglican priest, to bring his own tribute but he is not well. His words will be read for us by Pat who followed him as Secretary on the Sub-Committee.

*I first met Bert at a Lent Group – this was in 1976 and it became rapidly apparent that he was deeply involved in working with those in need through Christian Care, of which I gradually became aware was his devouring passion.*

*I soon found myself invited to an introductory evening for potential befrienders and before long found myself secretary to the Homeless Committee.*

*As you will all know, Bert's sense of time was unlimited – he would often arrive late for meetings with bundles of papers falling from his arms or with bags of food that he had somehow collected en-route. Conventions about lengths of meetings were not a priority for Bert and even when an evening meeting came to a close – always with prayer – he would not be going home, but off to see a homeless family.*

*I accompanied Bert on many occasions to visit asylum seekers who were becoming far the greater part of Christian Care's needy....and found his ability to communicate even when language was not shared, quite remarkable.*

*Bert never gave up – his mission was always in clear focus – to help those in need especially the homeless who without assistance would have been completely lost. And Bert always made it clear to all who befriended those in need that we were not there to proselytize but that only through our active care would we demonstrate our Lord's injunction "to love one another as I have loved you". If those we cared for became interested in our faith then "Praise the Lord for their insight", but if this became our mission then the purpose of our work would be diverted. Although we represented Christian Care – we welcomed all people in need, of any faith and none.*

*Bert not only of course visited those in need and led volunteers in their work, but was relentless in engaging local and national politicians especially about the law as it changed with the increase in the 70's and 80's of refugees and asylum seekers.*

*Bert had a generosity of spirit that was evident in all he did and the firmness of a bulldog without its ferocity.....his tenacity and sensitivity in dealing with difficult situations was a model. Although Bert was not always subtle he always respected those in need and would often in his training sessions remind befrienders of the importance of accepting hospitality provided by those they were visiting. If you were offered food, which in our culture would require a knife and fork or at least a spoon, and none was offered then follow your host – eating with your hand – probably your right hand – if you were offered a cup of tea without milk in a mug that had not seen washing up liquid for some time, then accept it thankfully. He encouraged us always to listen – to really listen to those in need and to forget our own agenda because only in that way would we really be understand.*

*We all miss Bert enormously – he was a true example of what Christ wants of all of us – to serve and not to count the cost – and to be able to answer yes when asked "When I was hungry did you feed me and thirsty did you give me a drink – or naked did you clothe me, sick or in prison did you visit me – or a stranger did you welcome me. Bert did all of these and more.*

**Gwen Wildman** is one of our serving Executive Committee members and joined the Christian CARE Association in 2000. Like John she first met Bert through Churches Together in Merton Park which has been linked with the Christian CARE Association from the outset, as it was in an ecumenical Lent group studying *Christian Love and my neighbour* that the seeds of Christian CARE were sown.

*From the first day that I met with Bert at a Lent group meeting (in early 1996) and later when I joined the Churches Together committee which he chaired, it didn't take long for me to realise that this was a man who lived his faith and was committed to his Christian principles. The most striking aspect which stood out was his love and concern for the broken and needy people, those who were displaced and struggling, and his doing something about this.*

*The Lent groups which were organised by the Churches Together in Merton Park had been going many years before this and it was when one such group was discussing*

homelessness that it became known that there was a half way house for homeless people on the doorstep. From this Bert went to investigate and the vision for Christian CARE started. This to me is faith in action. Often, today when we talk of doing Church differently – here was a man who practised what he preached outside the Church building. It was through the Lent groups that I met Gwen who accompanied Bert and made sure he came on time.

For many years Bert was the Chairman of the Churches Together in Merton Park committee until May 2003 and he took this role very seriously. The idea of Christians working and coming together to worship ecumenically was something close to his heart and I can remember one such Service on Good Friday. It was here in his own Church that he said how good and appropriate it was that on this important day in the church calendar, Christians of all denominations can meet together at the foot of the cross.

When Michael and I were marvelling at the way Bert would try his hand at anything technical and used his electronic address book with such dexterity and ease, the phrases used were often 'putting us to shame' and Michael more than once used the word 'quintessential' in describing Bert. Well, I later looked this word up in my dictionary: 'the pure and concentrated essence of a substance and the most perfect embodiment of something. Also the fifth essence or element, either, supposed to be the constituent matter of the heavenly bodies'.

Sometimes other people can see what we cannot. Bert was always a friend and firm favourite with the children. Almost everywhere he went, like the Pied Piper, there would be a following. When, on an outing to Littlehampton, I had a conversation with another Church group member who had been observing us and asked me "Who is that gentleman with the silver hair, is he your Pastor"? "But I can discern" continued this lady "that he is a true man of God".

It was always difficult to say 'no' to Bert because I knew that whatever the request it was always to help and show love and compassion to those less fortunate than us. Even though I didn't feel or maybe not wanted to do the specific task, I knew that Bert would have no hesitation in doing it himself and to go the extra mile to help others.

So many people in all walks of life knew Bert. Even as I met this week at our Taize service and house group, Bert's name came up and he is remembered with love and affection. During the last months of his life as his health was failing and knowing, as he himself had said that he would not always be with us, it must have been hard for him to let go, as his primary concern right to the end was for the welfare of his clients and his desire for his vision for Christian CARE to continue. He is greatly missed for he has enriched our lives in many ways. As he had a personal relationship with God, so he possessed all the fruits of the spirit in good measure; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. For myself I thank God to have known him and for his example of what being a Christian and family man is all about.

**Geoff Coyne**, Chaplain of the Royal Hospital for Disability, served on the Sub-Committee from 1991 to 2002 and has moved to the Executive Committee. He will bring our tributes to a conclusion and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the life of Bert.



*Every one present will have their own special memories of Bert and what we have all said may only be a part of what you remember of him. But whether what we have said today reflects your memories or not – all the memories of him are special and real for Bert was important to you in different and real ways.*

*Somebody has said of Bert - "He epitomised the true Christian – a life lived constantly in love of God and neighbour."*

*And the more I thought about that comment – the more I realised that this was true because there were some qualities in Bert that reflected the Christian role model – their Saviour, Jesus Christ, Himself. And there are a few verses from the Bible that speak about the Christian's role model from Paul's letter to the Philippians:*

*Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

*It strikes me that there are two characteristics of Christ in these verses that are also reflected in Bert.*

*Love - what took Jesus to the cross was His love for a needy people – a people who needed salvation. In that Jesus was not looking out for his own interests but the interests of others.*

*And that attitude I saw in Bert. A love for people that meant he put others before himself. When there was a need whatever the time of day or night, whatever the season of the year and at times whatever his own health's state if Bert could be there to help those in need – he would.*

*But Bert's love wasn't just a general love for man-kind. He loved the individual which is why he remembered people's names, people's families and people's situations. Which is why there are so many photo's of Bert with families. This type of love and care made people feel special.*

*Commitment – when Jesus left heaven and came into this world he knew that it would end up with His death upon a cross. But such was His commitment to procuring our salvation and such was His commitment to His Father's will that he was prepared to give up divine privileges, take a humble position in this world and die on the cross.*

*And that attitude of commitment was seen in Bert. He knew that His God had given Him a task to do and he was fully committed to it. It was a commitment of years – for he has been there since Christian Care began. It was a commitment of resources – who knows how many times he paid for things of his own pocket. It was a commitment in energy – he wouldn't want to disappoint, he wouldn't want to let somebody down, he wouldn't want a need to go unmet. He would give his all. As one tribute for Bert said "He would attempt great things for God and many families"*

*There are so many of us – families, volunteers, committee members who have benefited from Bert's commitment.*

*And the example that Bert followed was Jesus Christ. He was the very centre of Bert's faith and Bert was never ashamed of Him – his Saviour.*

*Jesus Christ in His love and commitment procured our salvation and God honoured Him – this is a bit I didn't read – by elevating him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names,*

*And God has honoured Bert for a life lived in accordance with Christ's example for as the Paul said later in the letter there is the "heavenly prize." – the well done good and faithful servant, the crown. And Bert has received that.*

*How do I remember Bert? – as one who epitomised the true Christian. He did that because he followed the example of His Saviour both in love and commitment.*

We will conclude our meeting with an Act of Rededication for the volunteers, Friends and supporters of the Christian CARE Association. The words are only slightly altered from those that Bert shared with us here in 2007 at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. If you have joined us tonight from another church or organisation, please stand in silent solidarity with us as we make these promises.

But, before that, we will sing *Make me a channel of your peace*, the prayer of St Francis, which both reflects the life of Christian love and caring that Bert lived and our desire, inspired by his example, to continue that work.

Tributes introduced by Gillian Thick