

MUSTARD SEED AGM, 17 NOVEMBER 2023

MANAGERS' REPORT

The shop was open all year, from 9am to 1pm Mondays to Saturdays, and in December we were also able to remain open until 4pm Tuesdays to Saturdays. Additionally, Ben Jukes has been able to help us out some summer afternoons during his holidays from university.

We miss Margaret Gutsell and Emily Smith, who have recently retired after many years of serving in the shop. Happily, Maureen Courtney has taken on "Emily's Tuesdays" and Ann White has joined the team, to cover a number of afternoons in December and other shifts ad hoc.

Our shop staff are wonderful and so reliable – as is Kath Thacker, who keeps us in clean towels each week. Our condolences to her, following David's death earlier this year.

We were very sad, too, to hear that Barbara Caldecourt, widow of Rev Dr Len Caldecourt, one of the founders of The Mustard Seed, died in May, and Bob Plumptre, widower of Joan Plumptre, another founder, died in September. They were both great supporters and regular customers.

It was a huge blow when Traidcraft, our main food supplier (in fact, our main supplier of all Fairtrade goods for over 35 years) went into administration at the end of January 2023. Fortunately Karen had already started getting craft items from different suppliers, and also opened various food accounts with PremCrest and other suppliers to try to minimise stock gaps in our favourite items. This has not been at all easy and she's done a great job!

Once again, turnover has been slower than usual though we are still in profit. Even Christmas 2022 sales were not as buoyant as in previous years, including Christmas postage stamps. Karen's Christmas Hamper orders, however, helped to boost the figures, although because of the unreliability of the different food suppliers, we very much regret that we will not be able to offer hampers this year.

Nevertheless, grants were given from the charity account to Faringdon Day Centre, Probus and Faringdon Food Bank. There is also a grant pending to All Saints' for 50% of the cost required for planting one or two new trees in the churchyard, but a decision is still awaited from the District Council/Town Council about this work.

Market stalls were run during Fair Trade Fortnight in March and on Faringdon's Big Green Days in October 2022 and June 2023. The Big Bali Bonanza earlier this month raised nearly £1,000, which should more than cover the profits we usually make from the hampers.

Karen Vogt gave a talk to the Women's Fellowship at the United Church last autumn, and she and Katie Foot both spoke at the Women's Breakfast in Stanford in the Vale in February this year. At both events, a small stall showed the range of products we sell and ultimately brought some new customers into the shop, as well as explaining the benefits of buying Fairtrade goods.

We remain deeply grateful to Malcolm and Val Swift for the very important contribution that Seekers' Light offers to making The Mustard Seed the successful Christian witness it is in Faringdon. Val comes over regularly to check the cards and Malcolm is always at the end of the phone for queries and orders of books. We are, however, aware that it is likely that The Lighthouse may have to close early in 2024 and we are therefore looking for a volunteer with a particular interest in Christian books who might take on responsibility for sourcing these, and another volunteer who would take responsibility for greetings cards. Please speak to Karen or Katie for more information.

We are also very appreciative of our window dressers for their attractive displays, and of Lois Chell for her hard work keeping the books in order and arranging for the accounts to be audited by Alder Demain Akers free of charge. Thank you all!

We remain very grateful for the support of all our volunteers and customers – long may that continue!

KMF/06.11.2023