

# Special 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

## THE *Sylvia Wright* TRUST

REGISTERED CHARITY NO. 326139

### Supporting

Hospital with 220 beds  
Outpatient Clinics treating 80,000 patients a year  
2 Day Centres for 80 severely disabled children  
Residential School for 210 profoundly deaf children  
New Nursing College with up to 80 students

## Newsletter **Easter 2012**

[www.sylviawright.org](http://www.sylviawright.org)

### *Sylvia Reflects on 30 Years*



Dear Friends

In 1982 at the age of 44 when most people are beginning to consolidate their lives, I embarked on an entirely new one – in a country thousands of miles away with a different climate, language, religion, social values and life style.

If I look back on it I ask myself: “Why on earth did you do it?”  
The simple answer is the true one – God only knows.

Over 30 years, we have had our ups and downs, challenges and triumphs, heart break and joy – the common stuff of all our lives wherever and however we lead them. My strong faith in God, the financial and personal support of my many friends and well-wishers over the years have sustained me; I am sincerely grateful to you all.

People talk about my ‘achievements’ but I do not think they amount to anything very extraordinary. Yet I can say in common with millions of others, I have tried. I have done my best, often failing but never actually giving up.

To all those who have touched my life in some way or vice versa, to all those whose hearts are moved by the suffering and hardship of others and wish to alleviate it – I can say: ‘May God bless you. In your own ways you make the world a better place.’

So what of the future? Another 30 years? Well it is possible, but not so likely! With God’s grace I am hoping for at least another 25. After all, 99 is not such a great age in these days!

Much love and may God be with us all. *Sylvia*

## **2,000 celebrate Sylvia’s 30 years in India**

On 6 January, the anniversary of Sylvia’s arrival in India in 1982, 2,000 guests, including the District Governor, assembled in the hospital grounds to celebrate with her. Christian, Hindu and Muslim ceremonies were shared and everyone enjoyed a simple meal and an evening of entertainment. The children danced brilliantly and gave a *This is Your Life* presentation for Sylvia.

## UK Celebrations

Sylvia has just completed 30 years of dedicated service to thousands of poor, sick and disabled people in Tamil Nadu, South India. The inside pages of this special Newsletter look back at her remarkable story ....so far. Sylvia will be with us in April and we will be marking her wonderful achievement in many other ways during 2012.

The main event will be

### *A Service of Celebration & Thanksgiving*

**in St Anne’s Cathedral  
Great George Street, Leeds at 2.30 pm.  
on Sunday 22 April**

Sylvia would be delighted if you could join her along with any of your friends and family. The renowned Cathedral Choir directed by Benjamin Saunders will be leading the music and the Lord Mayor of Leeds, several Church leaders and other dignitaries will be attending. There will be tea and cakes in the attached Wheeler Hall from 3.45pm. We look forward to seeing as many supporters as possible on this special occasion.



# The story so far .....

## Early Years

Sylvia was born in 1938 and brought up on the family farm near East Keswick. She later won a scholarship to Lawnswood High School. She loved animals and her ambition was to be a vet. This was discouraged at school where she was doing well in History. Oxbridge beckoned.

However, after her father's sudden death, Sylvia changed her plans and trained as a nurse at Leeds General Infirmary. She became a midwife, health visitor and Sister Tutor.

She then worked as a Senior Nursing Officer, coordinating Leeds inner-city community health services before becoming Senior Lecturer on the B.Sc Hons. Nursing Course at what is now Leeds Metropolitan University.



## The Big Decision

Sylvia's mother died in 1980. After much heart-searching about her vocation, Sylvia spoke to close friends, her parish priest, Fr Tony Pearson, and Bishop Wheeler. She also consulted Mother Teresa.

Once her mind was made up in 1982, she sold her house, furniture and car, drew out her savings, cashed in her pension and went alone to India. Sylvia landed in Madras on 6 January 1982 and travelled to Thiruvannamalai, a 6 hour journey on very poor roads.

## Thiruvannamalai Clinics

Sylvia was given accommodation by the Sisters of Grace and Compassion. The culture shock, climate, language, food and loneliness were major challenges.

She said: "Nothing could have prepared me for the shock of moving from the UK to a totally different life of poverty and deprivation. Health provision was totally inadequate and often non-existent."

She bought a van, equipped it with medical items and drugs, trained five staff – none of whom had any medical or nursing experience - and developed her original six village clinics.



There was a limited electricity supply, the water came from open wells and there were many superstitious beliefs about the cause and treatment of illness.

The infant mortality rate was high and life expectancy low.



## Hospital

The first small hospital was opened in 1985 and replaced in 2002. This has 220 beds and treats 80,000 outpatients a year. It is busy, clean and efficient with high standards of patient care; hospital acquired infections are virtually unknown. Busy clinics treat TB, Diabetes, Cardiac and many other problems and there is a major Dialysis Unit and HIV/Aids Centre for the local 1.7 million population.



## Sylvia Wright Trust Formed

Sylvia's money soon ran out and the Sylvia Wright Trust was formed on 19 July 1982. The first trustees were John Maury (Chairman), Rev Henry Pickard, Michael O'Donnell (Secretary), Frank Bowe and Denis Macauley (Treasurer).

## Rangammal School for Hearing Impaired

The free boarding school for profoundly deaf children was started in 1992, at the request of the District Collector; there was no educational provision for such children and the incidence of deafness in the district was very high. It now has 210 children described by a visiting trustee, Michael Lydon, as 'the happiest children in the world'. Almost all the children are sponsored which enables the Sylvia Wright Trust to pay the running costs helped by some small government grants.



## Day Care Centres

The local administration also requested work with severely mentally and physically disabled children, so in 2004 Sylvia opened two Day Care Centres. Staff care for 80 children and provide opportunities for play, physiotherapy and respite for the parents. The cost is small but the results are astonishing and humbling. 3 of the children are now sponsored.



Three of her 'originals', Mr. Vijayan, Mr. Jayaraj and Ms Mary Rajam are still working with her 30 years on.



## The Florence Nightingale School of Nursing

Finally (!) in 2009 Sylvia opened a Nursing College for 80 students, leading to the Nursing Council of India Diploma. It is flourishing and highly regarded. The student nurses, mostly from deprived local backgrounds, are trained to provide high quality nursing care in the hospital and community. The Trust paid for the buildings and the College is now self-financing.



*"Without you I can do nothing"*

Sylvia said recently: "Obviously all this work has kept me out of mischief for the past thirty years and thereby hangs many a tale." Something of an understatement! She frequently says to her supporters: "Without you I can do nothing."

**OBE** Sylvia was awarded the OBE in 2008. This recognised her clear vision, unremitting work rate and determination to overcome every obstacle. She has made tremendous personal sacrifices and is a real leader, not just a figurehead. In all this Sylvia is modest and unassuming about her achievements. The rest of us are simply amazed.

## Personal Memories from some friends:

- "In the mid 1970s Sylvia joined our prayer group. She read to the group several times: 'Sell what you own and give the money to the poor' (Matt. 19 v.21) and realising that God was calling her she acted in total obedience."
- "We met each week to pray; she was always very attractively dressed with beautiful long hair - quite a catch for someone, I used to think. The same words would keep coming up. 'Leave everything and follow me'. This made us all feel a bit edgy. What a relief it was when Sylvia announced to us that she felt called by God to do just that. .... What shines through it all is her humanity and down to earth attitude. Once she came round to tea and was worried about finance. My 7 year old daughter said: "Buy a lottery ticket." To my surprise Sylvia went with her to the shop to buy one. It was only my daughter who had the problem with God when the numbers did not come up!"
- "Sylvia's modest beauty and her gentle spirituality was a real gift to us all. We gasped when she revealed what the Lord had said to her, but we knew it was really Him. I have rejoiced to see the developments and how the support here has been consistent and well organised. Sylvia's mission has touched countless thousands here and in India".
- "In those days ladies wore headscarves in church. Having an eye for style, I always checked out Sylvia's and thought it was always posh! I remember her faithfulness and constancy. Many evenings I could see she was dead tired after work but she was always there. No excuses. This and her teaching on the importance of growing in prayer - as well as the headscarves!"
- "On the morning she left, a friend took her to the station. She gave me her keys, her bank book and instructions to sell her car and all that was in her flat. The money from everything was to go in the bank book for the India project. Her mother had given her a new bible so I was able to keep her old one. It was well used!"
- "Sylvia is one of those rare people, like Mother Teresa and Jean Vanier, who have not only changed the lives of many individuals but have helped to change for the better the attitude of the whole community."

## Big 30 thanks to:

- Everybody who has set out to do something special for Sylvia in this 30th anniversary year, including those who have increased their donations to reflect inflation
- Headingley Rotary who are fund raising in 2012 to provide good quality hearing aids and audiological support for the deaf children
- Lidgett Park Methodist Church who are over half way to their target of replacing the 32 year old school bus. So far they have raised about £5,500 from coffee mornings, book stalls, lunches, dinner parties and quizzes
- The Essex Group, led by Dr Sathanandan, who have completed their fund raising for our first fully equipped new ambulance which will take to the bumpy roads of Tiruvannamalai this month
- Angela and Denis Clark, whose management of our sponsorship scheme has grown so much over the years, delighted the children and their sponsors as well as giving significant income to the Trust
- The walking group who have donated £30 per couple as part of our Big 30 challenge in 2012

## New Trustees

We are pleased to welcome two new trustees: Santha Menon is a recently retired GP and member of the Hindu Temple. John Howley has worked in steel, banking and information technology industries.



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## More Dialysis Machines

The Dialysis Unit opened in 2007 with 8 machines to treat patients with severe kidney problems. The unit is still supervised by Dr Raj Mahesh, a Consultant Nephrologist, who holds a weekly clinic and trains our technicians, offering his services entirely free of charge. The unit has grown steadily and two more machines have recently been added, bringing the total to 16. The unit literally saves lives and is the only one within 100 miles, currently giving almost 10,000 treatments a year.



## St. John's Pancake Race

St John's C of E Primary School in Roundhay, Leeds, began to support Sylvia two years ago. Their latest project was a sponsored pancake race, with teams of children, parents and staff. The school holds the British Council's International School Award and hopes to twin with Rangammal School in the near future.



## Open Meeting & Radio Interview

Sylvia will speak at an Open Meeting, organized by the Otley Support Group, at 10.00 am on Thursday 19 April at Otley Methodist Church Hall. All welcome.

In the afternoon, Sylvia will be interviewed live on BBC Radio Leeds (92.4 FM and DAB) by Liz Green - 'One on One' - from 2.00 pm till 3.00 pm. What will she say and what music will she choose? Well worth a listen!

## SWAG on 12<sup>th</sup> April

Our Action Group continues to thrive and provide much needed practical support. Recent mailings (and this Newsletter) have been collated and posted to over 1000 supporters by volunteers. The next SWAG meeting will be at 12.00 midday (for 1.00 pm) on 12 April at Holy Name Parish Centre, LS16 6HW; we look forward to Sylvia joining us in her old parish. New members are always welcome. See our website. Contact Tony Hartigan.