

Happy Birthday Stapleford!

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN WORK IN EDUCATION

Dreams and visions

Back in 1980, Charles Martin was not just an ACT Director and the Head of Bilborough College in Nottingham. He was a man with a growing sense of anticipation because a new chapter in ACT's ministry in Christian education was about to begin in a disused Wesleyan Chapel in Stapleford, just outside Nottingham.

Charles Martin and Brian Monks (ACT Chairman) shared a vision. They wanted the Association of Christian Teachers to do more to encourage Christian teachers to adopt what we might describe today as a 'Christian worldview'.

The challenge for ACT was how to help Christian teachers – working in every kind of school and phase of education – to see that 'being a Christian



Visitors to Stapleford House had access to a unique library of resources

'Stapleford House was established to focus on encouraging Christian teachers to apply their convictions about truth, value and purpose to the education system in which they worked.'

Charles Martin, former ACT Director

teacher' meant going beyond the running of extra-curricular Christian clubs and activities. Charles and Brian wanted ACT to help Christian teachers to see that their faith should impact on their class, their school and the education system as a whole.

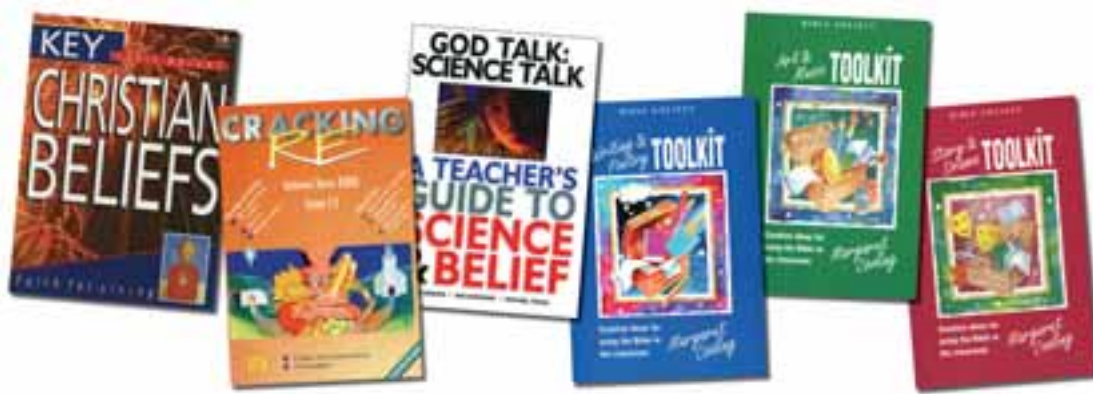


Teachers' course in the mid 1980s

Time, energy and money

Great sacrifices of time, energy and money were made to establish Stapleford House. The purchase and refurbishment of the chapel building cost £125,000. Approximately a third of this came from ACT members; another third came from the Manpower Services Commission; with the final third coming from church congregations and individual benefactors.

Since that tentative beginning 25 years ago, staff at Stapleford House and, subsequently, The Stapleford Centre have worked tirelessly to change the lives of thousands of teachers and, through them, to change the lives of tens of thousands of children across the UK.



All courses and resources can be ordered online at www.stapleford-centre.org

Residential weekends

The tiny staff, with an army of voluntary supporters, was led by the first Director, Fred Hughes. Over the years, hundreds of Christian teachers came to Stapleford for weekend courses with titles like: 'How to be a Christian teacher', 'Teach overseas – what me?', 'Using the creative arts in primary RE' and 'Making maths fun'. Teachers went home challenged, refreshed and encouraged, having learned a great deal within the supportive Christian fellowship. Fred and his team established what was to grow into a very influential Christian ministry.

In 1985, Fred Hughes handed on the baton to Trevor and Margaret Cooling and the weekend courses for teachers continued to develop. They touched the lives of a growing number of Christian teachers who enjoyed the fellowship and Christian professional support.

Gradually new facets of this ministry were initiated. During the week, schools brought pupils to Stapleford House to explore Robin Hood country. Teachers and pupils alike had their lives enriched and challenged during their stay. Weekends specifically for teachers' pastoral support were popular at one stage; other courses concentrated on devel-

'The Stapleford Centre has produced really practical resources which help teachers get beneath the surface in RE. They make RE accessible, encouraging RE teachers to be creative, imaginative and innovative!'

Ian McNiff, Deputy Director of Education, Portsmouth (RC) Diocese

'Stapleford's distance learning MA allowed me to undertake in-depth study with high academic standards, delivered through excellent materials and understanding, individual support. It enabled me to consider some of the challenges of modern RE, and left me better equipped to face the exciting opportunities this study has opened for me.'

Rosemary Woodward, RE Co-ordinator at Danetree Junior School, Epsom

oping Christian approaches to teaching a variety of subjects; RE became a speciality.

Courses and resources

Recognising the RE expertise of the staff at Stapleford House, in 1990 a substantial grant was made by a Christian trust fund to begin to develop new Christian resources which would begin to 'put the Gospel back into RE'. *Concept Cracking* was born! Margaret Cooling developed this new approach to teaching RE, demonstrating that it was possible to introduce theology to primary school pupils. A whole new pedagogy developed. This was later adopted as part of the SCAA Model RE Syllabuses in 1994, and subsequently influenced many LEA Agreed Syllabuses.

As a result of The Stapleford Project, as this new initiative was called, numerous publications for RE and collective worship were produced including the primary school magazine *Cracking RE*. Some of the developmental work also included exploration of science and religion.

Distance learning

Another initiative at Stapleford during that period was the development of distance learning courses in RE Policy and Practice, in partnership with St John's College and validated by the University of Nottingham. To date, over 150 students have graduated from these courses; the contribution they have made to improving RE teaching in the UK is incalculable!

John Shortt joined the Stapleford staff in 1991 to direct the overall work at Stapleford House, while Trevor directed The Stapleford Project. Part of John's remit was to develop an annual conference to explore Christian belief and education practice. A growing fellowship of Christian teachers, thinkers and academics met each January to encourage research and exchange ideas about Christian education. The January conference was supported by the publication of ACT's academic



Stapleford's work has touched the lives of tens of thousands of children



No lesson is value free!

journal, *Spectrum*, which John edited as part of his Stapleford work.

The Charis Project

In 1994, the Charis Project began. John Shortt took on the challenging task of developing Christian resources to promote the spiritual and moral development of pupils in mainstream state schools. Working with groups of Christian teachers who met at Stapleford at weekends, Charis resources for secondary school maths, science, English, French and German were developed. These unique resources highlighted the fact that no lesson is value-free, and modelled how lessons in any subject could contribute to a pupil's spiritual and moral development.

A grant from a Christian trust fund made this work possible, and enabled Stapleford House to bring David Pepper onto the staff as the Centre Manager. Collaboration between ACT and CARE for Education (CfE) also meant that CfE seconded Alison Farnell to work with John Shortt on the project.

'When I was Adviser for RE in Cornwall, a teacher went on a Stapleford RE course. 'It was the best thing since sliced bread for me and my RE', she said, and she was right. While at the QCA, I found Stapleford to be a most helpful and reliable organisation to consult, concerning RE and the SMSC development of pupils.'

John Keast, RE Officer,
QCA 1996–2003

'I am indebted to the Stapleford Centre for the unique character and quality of its in-service training for Christian teachers.'

Richard Parrish, Headteacher
at Archbishop Tenison's CE
High School, Croydon

Meanwhile, development of RE resources continued. Weekend courses at Stapleford House attracted smaller numbers as the demands on teachers changed. However, there was a growing demand for INSET in RE, and later in spiritual and moral development, from LEAs, Dioceses and individual schools. The training courses took to the road, taking the courses and resources to teachers, rather than expecting teachers to come to Stapleford.

A parting of the ways

During 1996, the ACT Board agreed that there should be a parting of the ways for ACT and Stapleford House. It was decided that each should be free to concentrate on its core aims and to remain obedient to its calling from God.

For ACT this meant serving, supporting, inspiring and uniting Christians working in – and concerned about – education in England. It also meant redoubling efforts to engage with the media, policy makers and politicians by speaking prophetically on a range of issues. ACT continued to run its national network of local groups and to give financial and prayerful support to Christian teacher organisations overseas.



Stapleford resources support improved teaching and learning

In September 1997, with George Oliver as its Chairman, the newly independent Stapleford Centre began concentrating its efforts on educational research, curriculum development and teacher training. The new staff team was led by Trevor Cooling, Alison Farnell, David Pepper, John Shortt and David Smith.

Fellowship and synergy

In 2000, John Shortt moved to become Development Officer for EurECA (European Educators' Christian Association). The subsequent impact of John's extensive ministry to Christian teachers across Europe is immeasurable. He has



been a great source of blessing and encouragement to Christians across the continent.

Thankfully, despite the changes in personnel over the years, ACT and Stapleford have remained close partners. Together with other Christian organisations, ACT and Stapleford support the annual National Christian Headteachers' Conference each February and run the annual National Christian Teachers' Conference each September. Similarly, ACT and Stapleford now co-publish *The Journal of Education and Christian Belief* (formerly *Spectrum*) with The Kuyers Institute at Calvin College, USA.

Whilst such close collaboration and fellowship has generated many synergies and economies over the years, ACT and Stapleford have continued to build their own distinctive networks and partnerships. For example, The Stapleford Centre is now collaborating with the Christianity and Culture project and the Bible Society to resource teachers of English literature with 'Biblical literacy'. Meanwhile, ACT is working closely with other Christian workplace associations, networks and fellowships, the Christian Workplace Forum and UCCF (the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship) to promote Christian vocation in the workplace to young – and not so young – adults across the UK.



Stapleford resources enter the age of ICT

Past, present and future

Over the last eight years The Stapleford Centre has produced over 100 publications to help teachers to better lead collective worship, teach RE and develop spiritual and moral development in other subjects. INSET is offered across the UK; the RE Distance Learning courses continue to be developed; and new Distance Learning courses in Faith and Education are being established with the University of Wales, Bangor, for Christian Schools workers and teachers.



Spiritual and moral development happens even in science lessons!

'I have been greatly impressed by the professional reputation built up by Stapleford whereby it has been able to represent a robustly Christian position within the educational world. It has become a highly respected centre for the production of curriculum material, for the support and development of Christian teachers and for the provision of RE In-service training.'

John Gay, Director of the Culham Institute and The Church of England's National Spokesperson for RE

'The three *Theory in Education* conferences organised by The Stapleford Centre that I have attended have left a deep impression on me – of a wonderful blend of inspiring worship, sharing a faith perspective on education with Christians from across the spectrum (in church terms) and from many different educational sectors and roles (and countries), plus probing and challenging high level thinking.'

John Sullivan, Professor of Christian Education, Liverpool Hope University College

This autumn, 25 years after Fred Hughes became Stapleford's founding Director, Ben Jones takes on that role. The vision God has given to those who lead this work today is as clear as that given to those who began it a quarter of a century ago. Under God's guidance, The Stapleford Centre continues its ministry to equip today's Christian teachers to apply their faith to transform education for the benefit of the children in school.

Today, The Stapleford Centre still depends on an army of volunteers and the gifts from church congregations, individual benefactors and grant making trusts. A huge amount has been achieved through the sacrificial work of many who have given to support and enable the work at Stapleford. We remember especially all those ACT members and Stapleford supporters who have so generously contributed to this ministry. We are indeed standing on the shoulders of giants!

■ Alison Farnell and Rupert Kaye

You are cordially invited...

On Saturday 15 October 2005 there will be a special event to celebrate 25 years of Christian work in education. If you would like to join the celebration in Nottingham, please contact The Stapleford Centre to book a place, or register on the *Supporters* section of the website.

More information

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