

# Hull – “the pioneering city”

Famous for William Wilberforce, Amy Johnson and John Prescott.....



The best and worst, according to UK polls:

## Top:

- One of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy.
- One of the highest incidents of violent crime.
- One of the highest unemployment rates.

## Bottom:

- Low number of people bothering to vote.
- Usually of secondary school league tables.
- One of poorest church attendance rates.

Once with a thriving fishing industry and tight-knit communities, now with a remnant fishing industry and communities scattered and fragmented.

Once where jobs in a trade or industry were a given, now where trade and industry are in decline and unemployment is more often the given.

## **BUT!!! To turn things on their head.....**

- As one of the poorer cities, Hull has one of the lowest carbon footprints in the UK.
- With house prices being one of the lowest in the country, people aren't as crippled by mortgages.
- With the high rate of teenage pregnancies, the population at least is remaining stable in spite of the numbers leaving the city.
- Even though it's just sold off its own telephone system, Hull is the only UK city with its name on a mainline train and the only city with a first-class football ground owned by the people.
- Hull's low church attendance, rather than a sign of flailing spirituality, is arguably a sign of a desire for authenticity rather than religiosity.

In essence, Hull is a city of quirks and sorrows, of warmth and anger and of poverty and hope. In worldly terms it may not be much but in the topsy turvy, grace-full terms of the Kingdom, it's amazing.

## A story.....

Once upon a time, there was an evangelistic campaign where 100,000 booklets were delivered to households across Hull at a cost of 27p each. From this £27,000 endeavour, 2 dozen people made enquiries (some of which were hoaxes) and no one came to church. What was meant well missed the mark. Why? Because in a city where some people can't read and of the high proportion who can, many choose not to, booklets just don't communicate.



Traditionally Hull has an oral culture where stories figure more than books and spontaneity is valued more than formality. Maybe that's why the church just doesn't attract. And maybe that's where Unlock can help...

## Beginnings



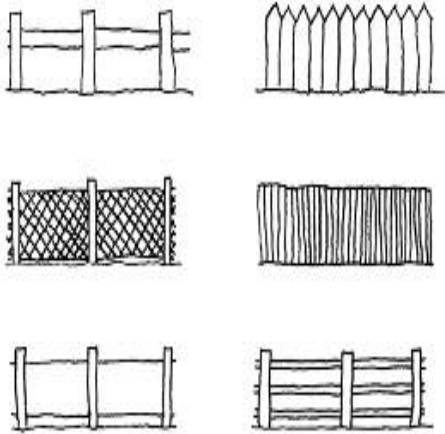
When Unlock (or Eutp at that time) came to town in the late 80s, things were already happening. The curate of St Aiden's at that time, Sue Sheriff, was already preaching and leading groups using "non-book" methods and Karoly Haasz, the then evangelist for East Hull, was leading Bible studies at St Hilda's along similar lines too. The ground was ripe then for a visit initially from Bill Bullen and with him, the article "How the other half learn" (co-written with Jim Hart) which defined much of what Sue, Karoly and others were doing, unbeknown to them. From this, Andy Dorton (the present chair of Unlock), drew together a group of like-minded people and Eutp in Hull was born.

## Experiments

Alongside Bible studies and training events, the group put on big creative events that aimed at introducing people – churched and unchurched - to Unlock methods. The first in '93, "Consider the brick", was based on the "Do not worry/Consider the lilies" passage in Matt 6:25-34. Why bricks you may ask? "We didn't have lilies but we had bricks!" said Andy. Obviously.....



CartoonChurch.com



CHURCH FENCES I HAVE KNOWN

Then in '94 came "Consider the go-cart" based on the Exodus story. This aimed particularly at getting men involved so the approach was more hands-on practical. Other events included "Making fences, building bridges" in '95 and then in '98 "It's curtains for you" which, according to Andy, was their "first disaster". Before this people just seemed to get it but for some reason this one went away. Lessons were learnt though and a time of re-focussing ensued with some training from Jenny Richardson.

## Sue's story

It was during one of the early EUTP Festivals when Stuart Robinson (then curate of St Martin's) led a Bible Study as part of his post-ordination training that I had a kind of Damascus experience. He gave us a passage and asked us "What do you feel?" It was the first time someone had related a Bible passage to our lives and it had a huge impact on me.

Some time later Andy Dorton had a meeting at his house where Bill Bullen came to speak with Jim Hart. As Bill spoke everything he said made complete sense. All the things I've felt instinctively had a grounding.



I'd struggled at theological college and often twagged off. I felt a square peg in a round hole. When Jenny came to do some training with us much later on, she made me feel much better about myself. All the things I did instinctively Jenny explained. She put the meat on the bones if you like.

Unlock did for me what, the theory is, we do for others. It helped my theological development. And what was the most exciting thing, above all, was watching people blossom and seeing them express themselves. It's a levelling thing. It's not the one with the degree who leads but the one with the story.

## Betty's story

"I remember an event about the Exodus and I didn't want to be involved. I wanted to stay in the kitchen instead cos I thought that was my place. Andy dragged me out though and told me it was time for me to get out of the kitchen! He asked me if I'd ever had an experience of moving or escaping from somewhere. I told my story of how I moved from Hesse Road to Preston Road when I was 7 and how it felt like entering the Promised Land.



I'd never seen hot running water before or so much green space, or had an indoor loo! One memory of my sister is very clear; of her perched on a lorry with tea cosy on her knee and a kitten sitting in it. She was only little and she had a big beam on her face. We ended up keeping the kitten.



It felt good and bad to tell this part of my story. It was something I hadn't thought of much. A forgotten memory. There was happiness in it but also some pain. It was the first time I realised that the Bible had anything to do with my life. Another woman talked about the time she left her husband. It was a healing thing for both of us."

## Liz's story

"One special memory was the Good Samaritan which we did as a small group. For me it encapsulated the Unlock technique. It started with questions like: Have you ever been mugged? Have you ever gone out of your way to help anyone? Have you ever turned a blind eye?"



This led to some amazing discussions and we ended up making puppets that were like walls with heads, arms and hands. One was the "stick yer neck" out wall and the other was the "keep yer head down" wall. Characters came knocking at the walls to ask for help.



The keep-yer-head down wall wouldn't get involved but the stick-yer-neck-out would and characters came out from behind it with things that could help (eg: time, money, practical help etc). In the end these characters (made of elastic) got stretched and stretched until they became exhausted. The session finished with Jesus coming into the scene as the door which could be opened or shut according to His wisdom.

Unlock has a way of thinking that can't be packaged. You just have to learn it by doing. The most powerful stuff in practice is the small intimate Bible study situations where your story comes first and then how it relates to the Bible. I found I got more from the Bible looking at it this way round. The stories become yours and there's lots of WOW moments. It's a magical thing really. It has affected my way of thinking. Stories are validated, even the smallest things."

## Fallow Fruit

Although it has been fairly quiet on the Unlock front for the past few years, some good things have come from the earlier days:



Betty's story was seen by Prince Andrew during the Hull 700 celebrations in 1999 as depicted in a drama presentation by Credo Arts Community.

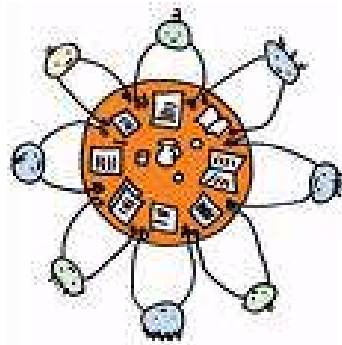
The formation of the Outer Estates group (otherwise known as the "Coming to some common understanding of what it means to be church on outer-housing estates group"):



"This has become a valued support mechanism to many in ministry in such areas of Hull. It is effective because it is real; people from extremely divergent theological streams have something in common; it's very difficult for everybody and that difficulty, frustration, sometimes joy and success can be shared without any sense of failure or triumphalism."

## Unlock revisited and revamped

With the regrouping of a support group and me as the development worker, new things are afoot for Unlock in Hull.....



We have discussed new ways of doing things as well as picking up on the successes of the past. Big creative events will still feature then and our first one is planned for mid September. To tie in with the current Wilberforce celebrations, it will be about freedom and draw from Freedom themes in the Bible. Also in September Andy has planned some training days for clergy who have recently moved to the city. Unlock will provide input for one of the sessions and hopefully there'll be some interest and support from that.



For us as a group here in Hull, there's a buzz in the air – a sense of Unlock coming into a new season here and reaping from all the efforts and experiments of years gone by. We are so grateful for all those who have sown into and invested in the work here. Here's hoping for exciting times ahead and new things springing up in surprising ways and places.

