



# Garry Ion

Link Letter no. 61 | April 2025

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**Location:** Cumbria, Britain



**What I do:** Supporting and connecting with people on the margins, especially men, through practical work in Community Shed groups.

Dear friends,

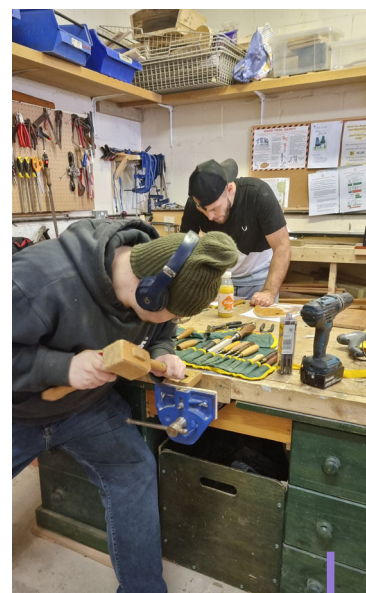
2025 marks 30 years of being a mission partner and writing link letters. I still remember my first Tearfund newsletters, which were handwritten on airmail paper. They could take weeks to arrive in the UK, if they made it there at all. After that, the letter had to be typed up, photocopied and then posted to supporters. Fortunately, less than a year later, the main post office in Kampala introduced a fax service, which made communication home much quicker. Only now I had to endure long, chaotic queues to the fax counter.

By 1999, internet cafes began popping up in Kampala and emails revolutionised the sending and receiving of news. It was now much easier for me to receive news, despite power outages, slow internet and the cost per minute while looking at the dreaded Blue Screen of Death. Although much more convenient and reliable today, communication technology continues to frustrate. I am now battling an uninvited AI tool which is suggesting how to write my link letter. Perhaps that's a hint and I can retire!

I truly appreciate you taking the time to read my link letters over the years. Your prayers and financial support have been invaluable as I have strived to serve communities in Africa and now back in Cumbria, while seeking God's direction. Thank you so much.

While I joke about my challenges with technology, some members of the Community Shed genuinely feel anxious about all things tech-related. This seems to affect our older members more, although it's not limited to them. These are the same friends who typically enjoy using and maintaining hand tools in the shed. For them, the shed evokes fond memories of their working years or school days. It's truly heart-warming to witness older members chatting with the "dotcom crowd" about the right tool for the job, while younger members attempt to explain the necessity of possessing a smartphone. Having a computer in the shed is also proving beneficial in bridging the gap between generations. Ian, one of our most productive older members, has recently conquered his IT fears by searching for woodworking ideas online. His latest creation is a cat planter made from recycled wood.

It is also good to hear about personal faith in everyday conversation in the shed. In my last link letter, I wrote about David, who introduced members of the shed to men's breakfast at Carlisle Cathedral. He is now preparing for Confirmation. Knowing his background and the struggles he has faced, it's really uplifting to hear him explain what he is acknowledging and learning about through Confirmation classes, chatting away



*Younger members of the shed using hand tools with headphones on, enjoying the beat to the dismay of the oldies*

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[churchmissionsociety.org/ion](https://churchmissionsociety.org/ion)

**With Jesus  
With each other  
To the edges**



through his dust mask while sanding a chest of drawers! We look forward to attending this special occasion in due course.

Since the start of the year, we've welcomed four new regular members to the shed, each facing their own mental health challenges. These new friends were encouraged to join through connections with existing members and various therapy and social groups they participate in. Our youngest member is especially good at promoting our activities among his peer group. Having previously

battled addiction and depression, he has gained confidence through time spent in the shed and has gone on to spend his time volunteering at a church-run food bank and canteen in the centre of Carlisle. He tells me his mission is to seek out other lads who might benefit from the shed community. His latest recruit has been co-opted in to make a shelving unit for the canteen. It's good to see them enjoy each other's company as they keep busy. As they completed the project, I was both amused and honoured to be invited to help them fix a cross on the top of the cupboard. I just hope they secure it to a wall in the canteen, as it's a bit top-heavy now!

We take a moment to appreciate what we have in the shed, supporting each other even though we don't always see eye to eye. I hope you understand that I can't share every detail, but it's important to note that some of our members are facing serious mental health issues and struggles with addiction that can resurface. Sadly, not all news is good. Just recently, we were devastated to learn that another dear friend and former member of our shed passed away at a young age.

You might be surprised to learn that for several years West Cumbria and Carlisle have consistently recorded some of the highest suicide rates in England and Wales. We have members who have attempted suicide in the past and some who struggle with suicidal thoughts now. We take care in the shed and make sure we have strong links with mental health services, signposting friends who are especially struggling. The reality is often that these professional bodies don't have time. Because of the vulnerability of members, I find myself dispelling misconceptions and explaining to the wider community what the Community Shed is really about. Although the TV programme *The Repair Shop* is inspiring, we are not set up as a business or hobbyist group to prioritise fixing up heirlooms. Instead, we are dealing with people living in our community who are feeling disconnected and alone, battling anxiety and depression. "Good to see you again, let me put the kettle on," is what we are about. The shed is a vehicle to connect people, encouraging them to share life. The creativity element is sometimes the attraction but often becomes secondary to why members keep coming. It is also vital to say what sets us apart is the opportunity to share God's love and Jesus' example.

Thank you again and happy Easter,

Garry



**Photos from top to bottom:** Ian surfing the net for ideas with Garry; Ian chuffed with his cat planter; Garry helping to fix a cross to the top of a cupboard with the lads who made it for a local church-run canteen; hospitality in the shed: our pioneer vicar Chris Harwood cutting cake and enjoying a cuppa with shed friends



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**Jesus never gives up. Neither should we.** We live in a fractured, hurting world. It can be tempting to give up: on hope, on people, on the idea that things can ever change. Yet, Jesus invites us to follow him on a journey to the edges. Find out more at [churchmissionsociety.org/jesus-never-gives-up](http://churchmissionsociety.org/jesus-never-gives-up)

Please note that opinions expressed in link letters are those of mission partners, not necessarily of Church Mission Society.

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