



Something About a “New” Bike

I got a new bike! I feel like a kid saying that but it’s true. Of course, my bike is a grown-up version of the one in the picture: mine is super fast, silver-grey, road-ready, all-carbon. And it’s not technically speaking a “new” bike. It had been donated by a “rich person” to a local charity shop with all proceeds from its sale going to support their



charitable work, which includes “recycling cycles” for people who might otherwise struggle to purchase one. Think of the voluntary poverty of college students, or people recently released from prison, asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants, or kids — basically anyone for whom a bike is the key to autonomy, employment, and yes the joy of a good spin.

Walk into their shop and it just feels different, like the human concern goes ahead of the market economy.

... This was a shop not only about “recycling” bicycles, but repairing our broken economy within a local community of compassion, relationship, dignity, and patience.

One of the bike shop’s employees, a young person, helped me as I thought about whether this was the bike for me or not. I also learned that this young person comes from a background of multiple deprivations. The owner of the shop takes the view that every human being can play an important part. His sales skills are a work in progress but his honesty, love of cycling, and transparency all contributed to the sense that this was a shop not only about “recycling” bicycles, but repairing our broken economy within a local community of compassion, relationship, dignity, and patience.

Maybe we think of UTU. John Vincent, founder of UTU, has often said that theological education is in the thrall of a financial system. It’s as true of theological

education as it is true of the church. John doesn't mince words:

We have deserted the poor. We deserted the working-class areas and took our chapels, along with our money, into the suburbs ...We sold off our downtown, inner-city, and street corner chapels, and used the proceeds for ministry to ourselves. We silenced our prophets and wrote statements of political correctness rather than prophecy ...

UTU is a “provocation” for some and a “tide pool” for others. The first, provocation, is a term sometimes used to describe John's method, i.e. provocative, edgy. It questions the status quo with the gospel story. The tide pool is my own sense of things, that gospel shaped provocation contributes to the formation of space for biodiversity. Or as Jesus puts it: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

UTU exists to provoke and foster life-giving communities. We do so mostly through a mixed economy of learning communities, including the PhD, the Certificate in Theology and Discipleship for Mission (CTDM), City Wires Forums, Kingdom Evangelism Project and our UTU podcast, where we share space with thought leaders and distinguished practitioners of the faith.

That's the stuff, the “product” line. But it's the story, isn't it? Maybe that's what we're really about when we do that UTU thing. [Listen to Heather](https://www.buzzsprout.com/2038362/episodes/11241918) (or copy and paste the address to your browser <https://www.buzzsprout.com/2038362/episodes/11241918>), one of our recent CTDM graduates, talk about how UTU was a kind of repair shop for her. She tells a beautiful story — and I'm glad you and I are part of it.

Rob Hoch



Thank you, Patsy Wheeler for over 23-years of volunteer service!!

Patsy Wheeler retired during the summer after over 23-years of dedicated volunteer work. We had a formal 'send-off' for her on 26 September, with refreshments, where she was presented with a selection of gifts ranging from a picture of kingfishers to jigsaws, a bag, book, a coffee shop gift voucher and some tasty treats. Thank you to all who contributed to her gifts. She will be greatly missed at UTU.

Welcoming Enquiries to a PhD with **Urban Theology Union**

If you're looking to do a study in contextual theology, a PhD could be for you

About Our Research Programme

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The postgraduate research programme at the Luther King Centre — and at UTU as a constituent college of LKC — is

validated by York St John University.

Alongside your individual study, we create

many opportunities for those on our

programme to come together for learning, support and encouragement.

There is opportunity to discuss and present research findings, to share best

practice, and to develop the skills needed for intensive research. These are

rich occasions of community and friendship, as well as enabling new

learning to take place. More information? Contact

office@utusheffield.org.uk for more information.



UTU Podcasts

Looking for easy access to fresh theological insight and perspective? Please

click <https://www.buzzsprout.com/2038362/episodes> for interviews,

meditations, and forums. Miss the City Wires forum? Listen to our

September interview with Lord David Blunkett, Baltimore Maryland City

Council member Kristerfer Burnett, and Rev. Zaidie Orr. Visit the site

and see what's on offer.

Certificate in Theology and Discipleship for Mission

We are delighted to welcome five new students into our Certificate in Theology and Discipleship for Mission course. Our students hail from around the world, including Sheffield, New Jersey, Leeds, and Sri Lanka. They include ordained and lay leaders within Episcopal (USA), URC, as well as other denominational groups. We're happy to introduce three of our cohort members, Julie Savage, Rev. Geoff Curtis, and Obeth Thevanesan:

Julie Savage

I live in Sheffield. I taught History and Politics for 35 years in 3 very different secondary schools in Sheffield and Rotherham. I retired from teaching 5 years ago but I still do scribe and reader invigilation in my last school. In recent years I've become involved in the children's work at my local Anglican church where I'm a PCC member and I've taken on the role of 'speaker finder' for the community based local history group. I was encouraged to embark on the Certificate in Theology and Discipleship for Mission by an ordained minister at my church who works as a hospital chaplain in the city.

Rev. Geoff Curtis

Retired Episcopal priest

I first encountered UTU in 1978 when John Vincent and Ed Kessler were leading a two year Community Ministry Course in Philadelphia, Pa. As a young urban minister in Newark, NJ the UTU praxis that I learned became central when I began my ministry in Hoboken, NJ. I used the learnings to create five gospel projects. The first was a Food Cooperative that had 150 members who transformed Hoboken's Food Desert. The second was a Shelter for the Homeless that responded to the gentrification and displacement among former railroad and dock workers. The third was an early childhood centre designed to serve the newer residents in the city. The fourth was a Jubilee Center that served the children of 100 families in public housing. All during this time John and I worked on creating UTU North America. Since my retirement in 2003 I have remained engaged in community organising efforts with NJ Together, I also am working with a re-entry program for ex-offenders. I have several hobbies; golf, vinyl 45's collecting and baseball card collecting along with two book reading groups. My wife and I live at the "Jersey shore".

Obeth Thevanesan

I come from a traditionally strong Methodist background, fifth in generation, as a result of the early missionary work in Sri Lanka. Trained and served as a close protection officer, later an Evangelist, seminary teacher, Journalist and a College Chaplain in Sri Lanka, before coming to the UK with my family for research in 2017. Unfortunately, the research got interrupted due to the nature of my topic, which was quite risky to my life and my family's life. When we arrived in the UK (Liverpool), I began a worshipping community among the Tamil speakers and officially incorporated it with the Liverpool South Circuit / Elm Hall Drive Methodist Church. I am currently in the process of applying to become a Presbyterian in the Methodist Church, while taking the valuable Diploma course offered through UTU and delivered by Rev. Dr. Rob Hoch and Rev. Dr. John Vincent, and working full-time as a night receptionist in a hotel.

Doctoral Dissertations in Process

Read on to see what UTU PhD candidates are researching.

“The Use of Social Exchange Theory in the Interpretation of Acts”

REVD MICHAEL JOHN GILLINGHAM

As part of my ministry, I qualified as a full-time Youth and Community Worker. The diploma at Swansea University included a large element of Social Psychology, which has to do with human behaviour, both individual and in groups. When I returned to full-time parochial ministry, I found my training was useful in praxis but also I found my Bible reading resonating with many of the concepts from Social Psychology.

Social Exchange Theory considers why people/ groups chose particular courses of action as well as how they interact. The book of Acts contains many examples of people interacting and also choosing to witness to Christ even when it put them in danger. My research is to assess the usefulness of Social Exchange Theory in interpreting Acts. As part of this, I have examined the development of Social Exchange Theory.

I have also researched hermeneutics, exegesis, and interpretation and Social Science Biblical Criticism and Psychological Biblical Criticism.

“Child Maltreatment, Theology, and the Church of England”

DR PETER SIDEBOTHAM

Child maltreatment, in its various manifestations, is a problem that besets all cultures. While much progress has been made in the wellbeing of children and recognition of children’s rights over the past century, many children continue to live in homes characterised by violence, abuse and neglect. As an institution, the church is not immune from this reality. Individuals within church families may experience abuse and neglect, and, sadly, many suffer abuse even within the supposedly safe confines of the church family. Recognition of this has led the church, including the Church of England, to develop policies and procedures to safeguard children and to respond to allegations of abuse. Safeguarding children, however, is not just a matter of following procedures; it is a deeply theological issue, precisely because ‘it concerns how we speak about the God of Jesus Christ in relation to the practical challenges the church faces’ (*Church of England Faith and Order Commission, 2016*). Yet while it is recognised as being a theological issue, little work has been done to explore and expound what that theology is. My research is exploring the phenomenon of child maltreatment and safeguarding within the framework of Child Theology to see whether this can help develop a theological framework for safeguarding within the Church of England within which it can better understand the phenomenon of child maltreatment and how to respond to it.

A Review of **Joseph Forde, *Before and Beyond the ‘Big Society’: John Milbank and the Church of England’s Approach to Welfare*** (James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 2022), by Ian K. Duffield

Full Disclosure

As one of Joe’s supervisors for his PhD and advisors for the writing of this book, you will not be surprised that I think it is good and worth reading. But don’t take my word for it. The Professor of the History of Modern Theology at Oxford (Mark Chapman) declares it to be: “a profound reflection on the Church’s response to the reshaping of the Welfare State after the financial crash of 2008.” And the Professor of Applied Theology at Manchester (Peter Scott) says: “Anyone interested in ... the contribution of theology to public life will benefit from reading this book”. The book is a thorough going examination of the Church of England’s approach to welfare, historically and, more specifically, since 2010.

Trigger Warning

Fans of the radical orthodox theologian John Milbank, or the revolutionary Christian socialism of Ken Leech, or are supporters of Blue Labour or Red Tory, or who are well disposed to a communitarian approach or a pietistic one, or fans of the ‘Big Society’ or Burke’s ‘little platoons’ will find much to disagree with in this book. But they can’t ignore the strong historical and evidential argument that Joe mounts.

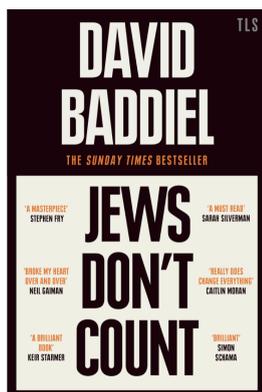
Contemporary Relevance

When Joe was writing his PhD he was always worried that it would be out-of-date by the time he’d finished and developed it into a book. Thankfully, he was wrong. The new



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Conservative government under Liz Truss, in emphasising economic growth, has once again raised the issue of welfare and how it is paid for. Simon Clarke, the levelling up secretary, recently said: “My big concern in politics is that western Europe is just living in a fools’ paradise whereby we can be ever less productive relative to our peers, and yet still enjoy a very large welfare state and persist in thinking that the two are somehow compatible over the medium to long term. They’re not.” He clearly thinks that the state is too large (The Saturday Interview, *The Times* October 1 2022). So, Joe’s argument for the welfare state in this book has a timely relevance, as is indicated by his recent article for the *ABC Religion & Ethics* site: “Liz Truss’ Radical Free Market Agenda for the UK: What should be the Church of England’s Response?” The imminent arrival of a paperback version of the book is therefore auspiciously timed.



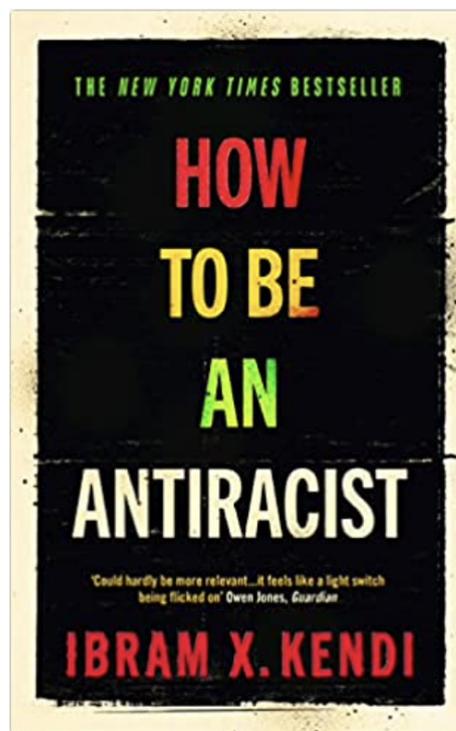
David Baddiel, *Jews Don't Count: How Identity Politics Failed One Particular Identity* (TLS, London, 2021)

In this book, comedian, writer, Spurs fan, left-leaning citizen, and Jew, David Baddiel — with characteristic touches of humour — demonstrates that despite the importance of identity politics and concern for minorities of all kinds in our culture, Jews don't count. That those who see themselves as on the right side of history by fighting against homophobia, disablism, transphobia and, in particular, racism have a blind spot: they don't see Jews. Is this a case of anti-Semitism? Or simply that Jews are regarded as White and therefore not a minority? Baddiel helpfully introduces us to this remarkable phenomenon given that anti-Semitism was the original racism. But whether it's in politics or culture or Twitter or journalism or acting, he shows how Jews, literally, do not count. They are either not noticed or not treated as though they were a minority. So, given the special concern for minorities and sensitivity to different identities, the way Jews don't count is manifested. David Baddiel must be congratulated for pointing this out with élan and flair in *Jews Don't Count: How Identity Politics Failed One Particular Identity* (TLS, 2021). If you're not convinced, then read this book; and note that recent events make the point for him. When Rushi Sunak became Prime Minister in October it was claimed by some that he was the first minority ethnic PM, conveniently forgetting Disraeli. Just as when Sajid Javid became Chancellor of the Exchequer it was said that he was the first minority ethnic holder of the post, thereby ignoring Nigel Lawson.

Ian K Duffield

Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (Penguin Random House, London, 2019).

In our day, racism is at the centre of attention, reminiscent of the days of Dr King and Malcolm X (for those of us who can remember those times), but in a somewhat different key. However, what they would make of current Black speakers in the public arena is a matter of conjecture, although I guess Dr King would think them not peaceable or Christian enough, and Malcolm not sufficiently radical. It's certainly hard to see anyone of their stature today. Although Black Lives Matter has raised the profile of racism as a problem world-wide, concern about their gross misuse of donations and their ties to Marxism and the violent activities of Antifa have been problematic, to say the least. Along with concern about racism, though, has come the assertion that it's not good enough to be a non-racist, one must become an active anti-racist. To this, *How to be an Antiracist* (Bodley Head, 2019) by Henry Rogers who, affectatiously, self-identifies as



Ibram X. Kendi (a la Malcolm X), constitutes something of a handbook. This New York Times Bestseller by a Professor now at Boston University has become de rigour in activist quarters.

It's a cleverly designed book that weaves in and out of his personal 'lived experience' (is there any other kind?). However, his (over) neat and methodical set of "basic definitions" to articulate his polarising theory of antiracism (pp. 17ff), which dominates and structures the chapters of his book, seems to require everyone (and I mean everyone) to become an anti-racism activist, with his definitions functioning in effect as an ideological commitment and activist formula.

Now, it's quite reasonable for him and others to take up this cause (even vocation) — and it's vital that some people explore what anti-racism means — but it's another thing to lay this burden on everyone as if there are no other battles to fight after the everyday business of surviving and living. As it is, Kendi is making a successful career out of it; he is currently Director of Antiracism Research and Policy Center which has transferred (with him) from Washington to Boston; and has also published another book with a 9-step (re)program on how to bring up your child to be an anti-racist: *Antiracist Baby* (Penguin, 2020), with another book, *How to Raise an Antiracist*, forthcoming.

... Anyone sensitive to the complexities and inconsistencies and ambiguities of existence will find his imposition of an ultra consistent anti-integrationist, anti-assimilationist and anti-racist framework on life not only unsatisfying but also disabling, if only because this seems to spell the end of Dr King's 'dream'.

Underpinning Kendi's ideological definitions of racism and antiracism is the fundamentally utopian notion that's become a current moral buzzword: 'equity'. This means that whatever antiracist policies one adopts or actions one takes, racism is with us forever. Equity in dynamic societies, in this transitory world is not a stable state, i.e. even if it were achieved somewhere, sometime, then, very quickly, it would undo. It's an abstract ideal and cannot function as a regulative principle and is thereby morally hazardous. In other words, by measuring against an unrealistic (however worthy) moral goal, equity, he traps everyone into an endlessly frustrating campaign, generative of ceaseless conflict. In doing this, Kendi seems to think that all disproportions and disparities in life are evidence of racial policies, inequities, and discrimination. Again, this is a counsel of despair. However we organise ourselves socially — as society after society down the centuries testifies — there will be disparities for numerous reasons, and certainly not necessarily linked to the problem of race, unless of course you make it the fundamental, original sin, which some do.

Kendi's book has the imprimatur of Owen Jones of the Guardian, so many will want to read it; but unfortunately, especially for a professor, there are many non sequiturs (i.e. it doesn't follow) or dubious assertions or sleights of hand as he propounds his tendentious theory, so care is required on virtually every page — even when he is conjuring with his childhood memories, where it's wise to keep one's feet on the ground (with the ability to spot molehills essential). But there's no doubt that Kendi is currently very influential in certain circles even though not all fellow Black academics are convinced, e.g. John McWhorter of Columbia

University (see his ‘The Limits of Antiracism’ on YouTube); and anyone sensitive to the complexities and inconsistencies and ambiguities of existence will find his imposition of an ultra consistent anti-integrationist, anti-assimilationist and anti-racist framework on life not only unsatisfying but also disabling, if only because this seems to spell the end of Dr King’s ‘dream’.

Ian K Duffiel

AGM Meeting of 12 November 2022

We held our annual AGM meeting in hybrid form on Saturday, 12 November 2022. Here are a few of the highlights from the AGM report and conversation:



Rob Hoch began the afternoon’s scheduled business with a talk on “[Bearing Witness in an Age of Shock and Trauma](https://utusheffield.org.uk)” (click on the link or see full text at utusheffield.org.uk). Rob explored the question of shock-trauma in the present day and considered how we might respond to “fear” inducing stimuli as people of faith.

Andrew Crowley, our Treasurer, has overseen the very involved process of **sale of 240 Abbeyfield**, which included his attending to the minutest of details. His report gives us a tiny glimpse of the complexity of this journey: “To say the least it has been exceptional year for UTU’s finances. At the beginning of the year (August 2021) we were on the point of putting 240 Abbeyfield Road on the market in the anticipation of a quick sale. We had the quick sale but after many last minute setbacks and unforeseen events we eventually received our share of the property sale in August 2022! This meant that we were able to repay all the loans that were generously made to ensure that UTU was able to function throughout the year. The sale of the house has given us the security to develop new ways of being UTU, and to continue to adapt to an ever-changing environment.” We are incredibly grateful for Andrew’s faithful stewardship of our finances and his dedication to this important event in the life of UTU.

As you may have heard, the University of Manchester will no longer validate the PhD programme through Luther King Centre (LKC), of which we are a constituent college. Our current PhD students will of course complete their degree through Manchester — nothing will change for them. However, going forward, as a constituent college of LKC, **UTU will now offer the PhD through York St. John University**. After months of conversation and negotiation, we concluded that York St. John would offer UTU (1) flexibility in

admissions and administration; (2) a kindred spirit since they are an organisation we have worked with in the past; (3) as a small university they bring flexibility; (3) and they offer a more economical model for UTU. We are already in conversation with potential PhD candidates. If you or someone you know is interested in a PhD with UTU, please email Jill Wagg at office@utusheffield.org.uk.

We now have a nearly complete Festschrift for **John Vincent**. The working title is RADICAL DISCIPLE: THE INFLUENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN J. VINCENT: FESTSCHRIFT AND TESTAMENT (anticipated 2023). It includes a rich selection of those who, in their present vocations, have been deeply influenced by John's work at UTU. We expect to send it to a publisher in the spring. We will keep you posted!

We are thrilled to welcome **Rev. Zaidie Orr as a new trustee**. Zaidie has been minister in the United Reformed Church in Sheffield for the past 7 years. The churches in Sheffield are served by Team Ministry which consists of three ministers. Before answering the call to ministry Zaidie worked in Health and Social Care. As a qualified nurse for people with learning disability she worked with various agencies to commission and provide services in the community. In her free time she enjoys photography and walking in the beautiful areas around the City.

We would like to bring **new trustees to the UTU board** — if this is something you feel called to, please reach out to Jill Wagg at office@utusheffield.org.uk.

Thank you for your generous support of UTU, financially and through volunteering. Please remember that this year's membership fees are as follows: £16.50 low income, £45 full.

In Memoriam

Rev'd Dr Alan Powers: An Appreciation

Alan, who passed away in August, had been a long time supporter and encourager of UTU. We first met him when we were both members of the '81 Doctor of Ministry cohort which was being run by UTU in conjunction with New York Theological Seminary (NYTS). Having been associated with UTU previous to this, Alan had an aura of authority about him which we all respected. We looked forward to his turn to share his progress at the quarterly meetings of the group in Sheffield, as Alan would bring us up to date with his back home Site Team activities with the "Meanwood Situation" in Leeds where he was the Methodist minister. These sessions were given, felt tip pen in hand and white board at hand, in his characteristic Black Country accent and was a delight to listen to. His DMin thesis was "More Bricks in the Wall" (1984).

Part of the course requirements was a two week residence at NYTS. On the first evening we went to a local fast food outlet and ordered a "Family Bucket of Chicken" which seemed about right. Unfortunately nobody told us the size of the family the meal was designed for and even with Alan's help we found it hard going to do it justice. This meal became somewhat prophetic for us as one of the assignments we had received was to memorise the OT verses which tells how the people complained about having to eat a never ending supply of quails. Like the people of Israel we were also punished, or at least humbled when we attended the session which dealt with biblical text and the requirement to recite it from memory. None of us dreamed that memorising *meant* memorising and were left somewhat embarrassed by our incompetence. Embarrassment however was not one of Alan's usual responses and on one occasion when it was felt by our group that it had been short changed in some way, it was Alan who saw to it that things were put straight by challenging the appropriate faculty member.

During this time in New York we were given the addresses of Black churches to attend on the Sunday and on the Monday we shared our experiences with one another and of these it was Alan's that became most memorable, it became almost a benediction which we would share on parting over the years together. Seemingly the preacher on this occasion was less than confident and began to stumble and stutter his way through his sermon when from the depths of the congregation came the encouraging words, "Keep it goin' Pastor!"

Having completed our Doctorates we naturally were keen to share our findings with others and a weekend away session for the United Reformed Church ministers in Wales were persuaded to give us a hearing, Alan included. On our way Alan picked us up in his car, drove at a steady speed which was as well for us as on approaching a narrow (very rural Welsh) bridge we were suddenly confronted by an enormous vehicle. Alan's careful driving saved us all. Of the presentations made it was probably Alan's that made the most impression as he divided the group into two teams who competed to to build a wall down the middle of the meeting room to the sounds of Pink Floyd's singing "Another brick in the wall."

Over the years Alan has kept in touch with and supported UTU from his various distant places of ministry around the country and his unflagging support has been an inspiration to all of us who have been part of the Urban Theology Union. Thanks Alan.

We offer our condolences to his wife Sheila and their lads: Conrad and Kingsley.

Robin Pagan & Ian K Duffield

The Revd Dr Eric Wright



Eric Wright trained at Hartley Victoria College in Manchester and offered for Overseas work. In 1953 he was stationed to Sierra Leone as Education Secretary, often travelling through swamps to reach remote Methodist schools. Afterwards, Eric served in a number of Circuits around Britain, including being Chair of Shetland District.

Although he tended to keep his light under a bushel, Eric was academically able with two doctorates including doing the DMin at UTU (his action-research project being on the rejuvenation of a small church in Hexham: "An Ageing Church—Towards a Second Childhood"), followed by a PhD in Peace Studies at Bradford. Eric was a committed member of UTU along with the Fellowship of the

Kingdom (Spectrum), the Methodist Peace Fellowship, the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, the Christian Socialist Movement, and served as a County Councillor whilst in Hexham.

Aged 92, Eric died on 18 November 2021. He will be well remembered by those at UTU whom he tutored. Students could be confident that they got all the help they needed with his organised mind and wide academic interests. His commitment was also not in doubt as he undertook long car journeys, as a volunteer, to be at UTU alongside a busy pastoral ministry.

We ran the Urban Ministry Course for a number of years along with Big John (John Oliver of Scripture Union); and he also assisted in supervising students on the MMinTheol and PhD. As one former colleague put it: He was "a lovely and modest man, you feel privileged to have known"; he was "generous to everyone" and went "the second mile". Or as a former student put it: "He was a great mentor ... being very down to earth and level headed. He would help me to see through an issue when I was a bit confused! He was a very particular person. On reading through my final draft of my thesis he made several detailed corrections such that ... the examiner said that he had never read a thesis so free of grammatical errors.

Eric was faithful, pleasant, endlessly cheerful with a keen sense of humour and wit, and a committed colleague and friend of UTU — the kind of volunteer upon whom UTU has relied for its provision of courses. Our condolences go to his wife Beryl and their children.

Ian K Duffield