



# Garry Ion

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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,

Thank you for your prayerful support as I continue to see the Community Shed develop and grow in Carlisle.

As you may know I have also been caring for and living with my parents in Penrith. Sadly my mother died in April after a long and courageous battle with cancer. Together with my father and sister, we are very grateful for your prayers down the years and kind words of support and condolence over the past few months. I also feel very blessed having received the same care and concern from friends in the shed too.

“What’s said in the shed remains in the shed!” is a phrase understood and observed as we build community together. With this in mind, I am selective what I share in my link letters. I hope you understand and still find them informative and a focus for prayer. Personal stories, comments and pictures are taken with permission. That said, there are some amazing and sometimes very sad stories I am not able mention in detail.

As we try to develop and maintain a safe space, it is nice to see and nurture healthy friendships. For those who find it more of a struggle, it is still encouraging to see tolerance between members so that everyone feels safe, valued and welcome. While having a cuppa, it is nice to share spontaneously about our troubles, joys, experiences, and faith. Often members relate to another’s situations and offer advice and empathy.

I have mentioned in previous link letters that on a Friday morning we start the day with Bible study and intercessory prayers, reflecting on the week’s highs and lows. It is a privilege to lead new friends in a time of open prayer, again being sensitive to confidentiality. One member recently gave thanks for their time in the shed, describing it as being more calming than any medication they had ever taken! Our hope is that through this friendship and fellowship we may share God’s love, pointing to the One who can offer a peace and calm which passes all understanding or medication!

Another member has allowed me to share their journey, so far in the shed:

“Before I came to the Community Shed I felt lost and confused, so much so I didn’t feel I belonged anymore in society. I learned about the Community Shed through my CPN (Community Psychiatric Nurse). I did take



*Creativity in and outside the shed*

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



some persuading to visit the shed with my CPN, as I hadn't really mixed since before the COVID-19 lockdowns.

"The first thing that hit me when I visited the shed was the smell of pine wood; it reminded me of my school days. Woodwork class was one of the only classes I enjoyed. As I was shown around the shed, I noticed big woodworking machines, which made me worried I hadn't the skills, confidence or experience to join in. But talking with Garry and Chris I realised there was no pressure or expectations. So at first I just listened and watched as the group interacted. I noticed there was a big age range in the groups. My group had about five men and one or two ladies in it.

"The hardest moment for me was when I came back the next week by myself, without my CPN. On that day I came early, standing a distance

from the shed, watching some of the others I met the week before go in.

One of the group noticed me and called me over. Entering through the door together it felt familiar. I think it was the smell of the wood, having a cup of tea and meeting the group again. They remembered my name, even if I couldn't remember theirs!

"It took a few more weeks before I decided to pick up a woodworking tool, motivated by the idea of feeding and watching birds outside my kitchen window. Although I don't have a garden, there was space for a bird table. So that's what I made. One of the other lads helped me on the shed computer to look for bird table designs. Once I had the picture and plan, and some more help choosing wood recycled from an old pine bed, I set to work making my bird table, with some help from Garry. It took a few weeks to put the bird table together as I only attend one morning a week.

"It is something I really look forward to, and wish I could come more often. I'm reminded of my time in the shed each time I look outside my kitchen window and see the birds on my bird table. And for my second project I am making a bird box!"

Sometimes groups come together to make a combined project. This recently led to us making a memorial bench for "Tommy" a much-missed friend in the shed. Tommy was a real character who passed away a few weeks before my mother. Also with help from members, I made my mother's cremation urn at the same time out of a recycled oak floorboard. Making the urn and memorial bench has been personally therapeutic and once again I feel blessed to have the support of these friends in the shed. While making these special projects, it was also an important time to talk about Good News in Jesus.

Thank you for reading my link letter once again, apologies it was a little late this time!

Garry



*Photos from top to bottom: Garry teaching a member how to use woodworking machine; A member making his bird table in the shed; Enjoying a cuppa and cake in the shed; Garry and friends at the shed with the memorial bench and urn.*



## Going further with Church Mission Society

**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/nevergiveup](https://churchmissionsociety.org/nevergiveup)

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

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