

After more than 25 years on the road, travelling and speaking at home and abroad, Adrian and Bridget paused for breath. "We wanted," Bridget said, "to open up the future for God to get a word in edgeways." Adrian added, "We sensed there might be something new for us, and we were free to go anywhere." So they cleared their diaries for the whole of 2010.

That was in 2008. At the same time, unknown to them, Scargill House, a Christian conference and retreat centre in

the Yorkshire Dales, closed its doors. The end of the road after nearly 50 years of successful ministry.

Enter Rev Phil Stone, a vicar in the City of London. Adrian and Bridget had known him since he was 14, when he was in their youth group. "Had you heard Scargill had closed?" he asked them. Bridget: "We'd been there a couple of times in the 90s but without any personal or spiritual investment in it." Phil went on to tell them that there was a group of people involved in getting Scargill open again. And that he was thinking of applying for the post of

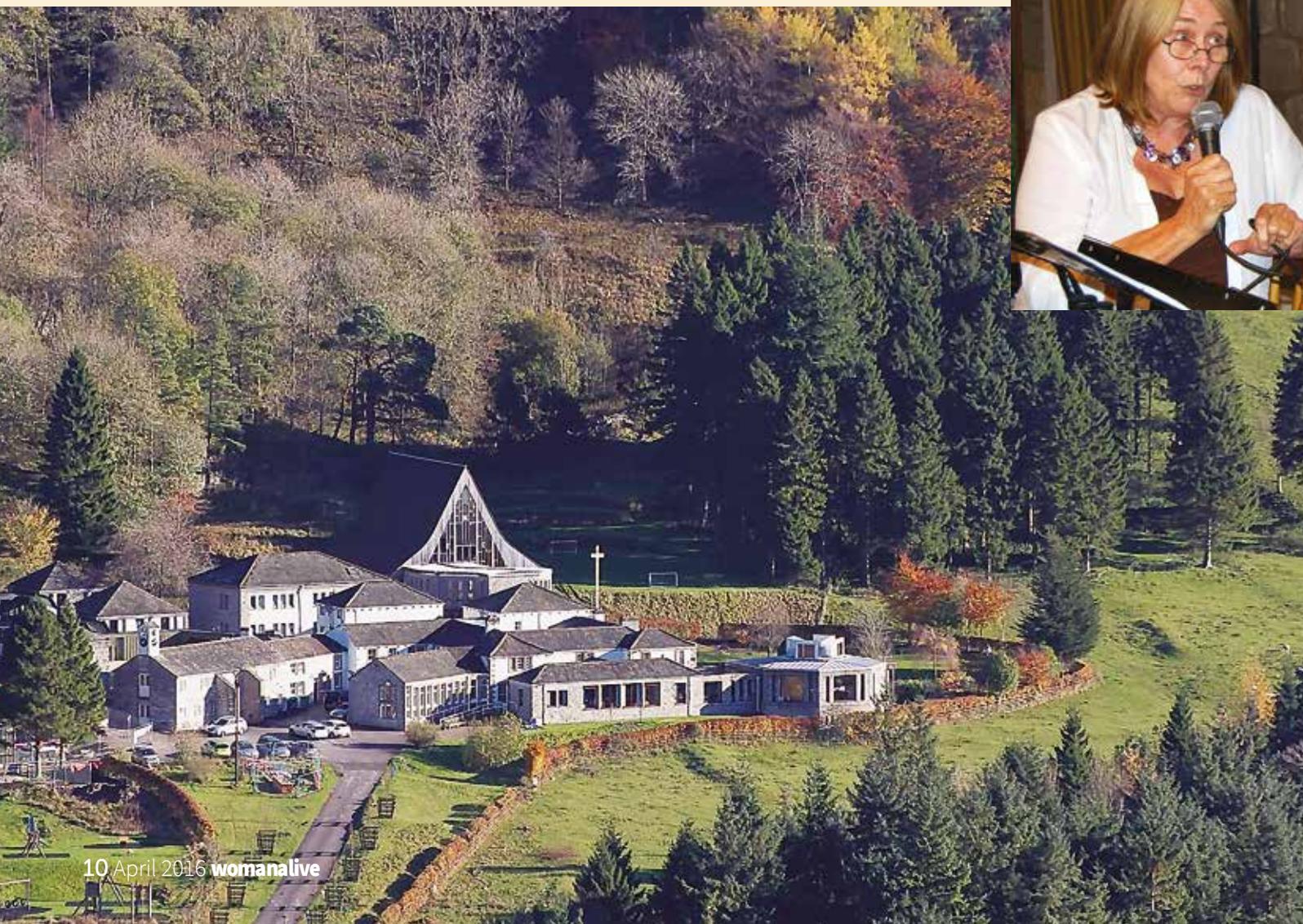
director if Scargill was resurrected.

That wasn't certain yet. But why not go and take a look? Adrian and Bridget, together with Phil and his wife Di, rented a property nearby and walked the five miles to Scargill. The gates were closed but the security guards allowed them to go in. Bridget: "We sat in the walled garden, which was a wilderness, and prayed. Then we let the idea sit with us." Adrian: "There was quite a fierce drive in me. It seemed inevitable, almost a certainty."

By a miracle, Scargill was resurrected. Bridget: "Years earlier, Bishop Chris

Our *resurrection* years

Bridget and Adrian Plass talk to **Patrick Baker** about their involvement in bringing Scargill House back to life



Edmondson, then warden of Lee Abbey, Scargill's sister retreat centre in Devon, had asked us if we were interested in community. It seemed that now was the right time."

Adrian: "We'd seen the state of the buildings and the thought of DIY horrified me. So I offered to be Writer in Residence. We were asked if we would still go if Phil was not appointed. Yes. Although we were convinced that Phil and Di were, and have proved to be, the best people for the job, we agreed to go whoever was appointed. Our first job was to get the programme going, so everywhere we went, we talked about Scargill and acted as ambassadors. And, partly through those contacts, people started to come."

Bridget: "We moved in August 2009. Phil was appointed as the new director, and Scargill re-opened its doors in 2010 – the year we had kept free."

about seeing other members of the community arriving, perhaps tired and bedraggled. There's a buzz to being part of a community. You may be exhausted, you make the effort to go, and suddenly you're buzzing too. It's about belonging, not quite like a family but the nearest thing to it. Love moves from the superficial to the real. It's the same with the guests. You get tangled into people's lives, understand the stresses they face as they talk to you from the middle of their lives. We hadn't understood that people come through the doors at Scargill and feel they've arrived home. You get so fond of them."

Adrian and Bridget's role was to support Phil and an important part of that was caring for the community. Adrian: "The greatest tension is between the corporate identity and the identity of individuals. You need somewhere where you can

writing. We've also got back into what we did before: speaking at churches, running weekends, touring with Searchlight and World Vision. We're due to be Australia for two months in February, then leading a tour to the Holy Land with the Mothers' Union later in the year – we can't wait!"

Adrian: "The word 'resurrection' when Scargill re-opened was inspired. When you look back on an experience, everything can seem rosy – the Christian church is often neurotically positive in that way – but when you're in the thick of it, it's a struggle. Being a Christian is not about being a wonderful person; we're all failures in one way or another. It's about being who you are, and being obedient. It's about talking to the funny little woman on the bus. Valuing individuals. Jesus died to make that possible."

Bridget: "When Scargill closed, people said there was no need for retreats any



So how was their first experience of community? Adrian: "Our beginning at Scargill was tumultuous and difficult. When we walked into our house for the first time, I switched on the light and got an electric shock. It was such a rundown and abandoned situation, like the Mary Celeste." Bridget: "It was more intense than we could have imagined. We were now living with people, not just performing and coming away again." Adrian again: "It was never tidy, never easy. There were times when it was just plain awful."

"But," Bridget added, "the joys were and are immense. Ironically one of the things people say they miss most when they leave community is daily, early morning prayers. When you walk up through the snow, there's something

say what you need to say without any comeback." Bridget: "Another difficulty of living in community is that you can actually end up reading the Bible less, praying less and struggling with your private devotions because you're living it. You're trying to give away something that's important to you."

Adrian and Bridget ended up staying on site for two-and-a-half years. Then they moved a mile or so into the village of Kettlewell. Now they live near Darlington, an hour-and-a-half away, but they're still technically members of community. Bridget: "I always think of the chapel as my home church. It's very hard not being there so much. We loved being a part of it." Adrian: "We're still connected to Scargill in all sorts of ways, but I now have time for

more. But there is a huge need for places where people can get patched up in order to go on. We meet them everywhere, hurting people. What they need, as someone said to us, is 'a good listening to!'"

So how has their time at Scargill affected them? Adrian: "After years of travelling and speaking, popping in and out of people's lives, I often wondered how it would be if people really got to know me, so for me it has been the acceptance, support and affection from community and guests that have reached and helped to heal parts of me that have been under cover for many years."

Bridget: "For me, above all, it has been the chance to belong. Having strained all my life to reach some unstated mark, I ►

realised very early on that I could only be me; faults all too visible, but also enjoying the discovery that I have ingredients which, added to the Scargill soup, can be used to feed people."

And so Adrian and Bridget travel on. They carry Scargill in their hearts, much as Scargill continues to reflect the impact they and many others have made there. It's 'a thin place'. A safe place to say dangerous things. A place which not only shares a recipe, but serves the food. With lashings of love and laughter. It's a funny old business. ■

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Blessed is Scargill

Adrian and Bridget captured the essence of their experience of living in community with this poem

Blessed are the puzzled barns, the frowning scars, the gills,
The endless over-arching sky, the rain tormented hills.
Blessed are the toddling, tombstone sheep,
Counted by the shepherds in their waking hours,
As well as in their sleep.

Blessed are the swallows and the martins and the bats,
The weasels and the foxes and the pheasants and the rats.
Blessed are the partridges, the curlews and the voles,
The buzzards and the blue tits and the blessed, blinking moles.

Blessed are the rabbits,
Blessed are their overactive reproductive habits
Blessed are the farmers, who adore the bunnies too,
Under pie-crust, or with dumplings in an unforgiving stew.

Blessed are our neighbours and our churches and our pubs,
Our singers and our ringers, all our cafés and our clubs.
Blessed are the buses and twice blessed when they stop,
Blessings upon blessings on our local village shop.

Blessed are the garden walls,
Where morning peach and evening purple falls,
Upon the soft seclusion of that magical retreat,
So secret, so sweet.

Blessed is this house of peace, each brick and tile and slate,
Each cup and bowl and jug and spoon, each knife and fork and plate.
Blessed is the altar, blessed are the pews,
Blessed are the bedrooms, thrice, quadruple blessed are the loos
Blessed are the doors, the floors, the never-ending daily chores,
The mains, the drains, the window panes.

Blessed is the bravely futile chapel damp-defier, someone's tiny,
optimistic dehumidifier.

Blessed are the visitors,
The short, the tall, the sensitive, the numb,
The ones who sadly shake their heads and wonder if their turn will
ever come

Blessed are the blighted, blessed nuisances,
The ones who make us tear our hair,
And swear, and punch our pillows in the middle of the night,
Blessed is the sane and gentle light that warms the heart of true
responsibility.

Blessed are the fat, the thin, the straight, the bowed, the bent,
Blessed are the ones who book, and blessed are the ones who
reach our doors by some strange accident.

Blessed are the lost, the bossed about,
Tired, fired, wild and wired, bullied, disappointed, uninspired,
Blessed is the child inside, lying low, but still wide-eyed,
And ready for a fairground ride with Jesus.

Blessed are the ones who built and loved and toiled within this
little world of work and prayer,
Blessed is the future they have placed into our care.

Blessed are the loyal volunteers,
Who cried hot tears because they feared this home from home
had died,
But found there was a space for them,
A necessary place for them to love it back to life.

Blessed is the playground, and the laughter that at last,
Will ripple through this valley like an echo of the past.

Blessed – all our hopes and dreams, the planning and the visions,
Blessed are the difficult decisions.
Blessed – this community,
Resurrected, newly born, restored.
Blessed are the Yorkshire Dales
Blessed is the Lord.