

Bookshop gets a new lease of life

A PORTSMOUTH Christian bookshop has been given a new lease of life.

The Acorn Book and Toy Shop in Southsea faced closure as the three people who worked there had a combined age of 235 and felt they couldn't carry on.

Now it has been re-born as the Acorn and the Vine, and is being run by Jenny Howard from the city's Vineyard Church.

The Palmerston Road shop has been completely refitted, with café-style tables in the window, Fairtrade gifts, new sofas and coffee served throughout the day. There are plans to open its basement too.

"We hope people will buy into the idea of having a Christian bookshop and discipleship centre, and that people from all churches in the city will use us," said Jenny. "They might be able to get books cheaper online, but perhaps they'll see that extra £1 or so as part of their commitment to keep a Christian bookshop in this area."

Jenny and her husband Denham came to Portsmouth from Moorlands Bible College last year to plant a Vineyard Church. They now have a congregation of 30 or so people, and are in the process of launching the LifeHouse on Albert Road for those facing addiction problems or homelessness.

They were inspired to revamp the bookshop after Jenny felt she had a vision from God in which



Jenny Howard (centre) with customers in the new Acorn and the Vine bookshop in Southsea

she was given an acorn that grew into an oak tree. Just a few days later, another Christian from St Simon's Church, Southsea, suggested their names had been given to her by God to take over the Acorn Bookshop – which they prayed about and felt was the right thing to do.

"We met Jean Pitts who owned and ran the shop, prayed and felt it was right to offer to take it over," said Jenny. "But our vision was bigger than just a Christian bookshop. We wanted to make it a meeting place for people, a place where they prayed and received healing.

"We've kept all the books and cards, but reorganised them a bit, and we'll be stocking up on more Christian best-sellers. We have Fairtrade gifts, cards and Bibles, and each time someone buys a Bible I pray about the person who will be reading it. And we're also ordering candles, wafers and resources for churches, as before.

"We'd like people from the LifeHouse to be able to do voluntary work here. We have Wifi as well, so we can help them with their CVs and get into paid jobs. And because we're the nearest place to Southsea Skate Park, I hope we can offer

smoothies to young people in the evenings. And we also hope to be able to put chairs and tables in front of the shop in the summer and in a small garden behind it.

"We want to thank the ladies who worked so diligently for nearly 25 years to keep the bookshop going, and hope all the churches in Portsmouth can unite as one body of Christ to support the bookshop further."

The team who now work in the shop includes volunteers from four churches. Anyone else who would like to volunteer can get in touch. See www.portsmouthvineyard.org or ring 023-9282 3925 for details.



The bottles and jars

Ancient bottles and jars on display

THE clearing of brambles and undergrowth just outside Blendworth Church led to some unusual discoveries.

An old brandy bottle was the first item to be discovered over the western wall from Holy Trinity churchyard. Churchwarden Richard Bradshaw did some research and realised it was at least 75 years old.

The next day, he found a beer bottle in the same place that dated from between 1840 and 1910. There was also a jar that he discovered was made between 1867 and 1929, and a meat paste jar that probably dates from the 1940s.

"What is fascinating is wondering how they got there," said Richard. "None of these bottles or jars got there without people. Real people, making real history."

The items are now on display at the back of the church.

Roger Jones musical will be staged

CHRISTIAN composer Roger Jones will visit the Isle of Wight this month to help singers perform one of his musicals.

Two Sisters and a Funeral tells the story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, as they see Lazarus raised from the tomb and then the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Roger Jones will bring some soloists to the island to present two shows, with the help of a local choir rehearsed by June Cox. It is staged on November 10 at 7.30pm at St John's Church, Newport, and on November 11, at 4pm at Freshwater Memorial Hall.

Island bookshop announces closure

THE trustees of the Isle of Wight's only Christian bookshop have announced it will close next spring.

Castlebooks, based in the High Street, Newport, will close its doors in March 2013 after 36 years in business.

The trustees have made the announcement now as they need to give six months' notice to their landlords. During that time, the shop will trade as normal.

But they said the current level of sales meant it was no longer possible for the shop to trade beyond that. Monthly sales are currently £3,000 less than they need to be to

cover rent, utilities, wages and re-stocking. This equates to 100 new customers each spending £30 every month.

Over the past few years, adjustments have been made to help cope with a decline in sales - reducing the number of staff, reducing opening times, reducing stock and other costs. The shop has also received generous donations, but the decline has continued.

The trustees said: "We have not come to this decision lightly, nor without much prayer and consideration.

"We realise this is very disappointing for our regular customers, including churches

who run bookstalls for Castlebooks. Disappointing too for many visitors to the island who are delighted to find a Christian bookshop. Without these visitors the decision to close would have been made earlier.

"This will be a difficult time for the staff team, some of whom have worked at Castlebooks for many years. Please pray for us and the staff team as we live through this process."

And shop manager Sue Young said: "There are lots of things that go on here that aren't to do with selling books - sitting down with someone

and explaining how the Bible works, or talking to someone whose relative has died.

"It has been a privilege to do this job, and I hope someone else picks up that kind of ministry.

"But we are going ahead with business as normal until March, and we'd ask the churches on the island to still use us in the same way as before, so that we can exit correctly."

Anyone with any questions or comments can write to the trustees on castlebooks@btconnect.com or at 82-83 High Street, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 1BH.