Press release

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Northants man who once crossed the road to avoid leprosy-affected people is appointed Chairman of The Leprosy Mission England and Wales

The managing director of local joinery manufacturer Scotts of Thrapston once crossed the road to avoid people with leprosy while backpacking in India in the 1990s.

But now Peter Waddup, who was born and bred in Northampton attending Northampton School for Boys, has been appointed Chairman of The Leprosy Mission England and Wales.

After his backpacking experience, thoughts of this most marginalised group of people stuck in Peter’s memory. After he found out that the late National Director of The Leprosy Mission England and Wales, Rupert Haydock, attended his church, he would “corner him” every Sunday to ask more about the work of the mission.

In 2009, Peter was asked to join the Board of Trustees at The Leprosy Mission England and Wales and one year later became the treasurer and Chairman of the Finance and Planning committee.

On the day he became treasurer, Peter was advised by Rupert that he should visit one of The Leprosy Mission’s projects. Rupert suddenly died the following week and Peter, remembering his final words, arranged to visit projects in Kolkata and West Bengal, India, in February 2011. In December 2013 he travelled to Ethiopia with Ann Widdecombe, Vice-President of The Leprosy Mission England and Wales, to witness first-hand the Woreda 1 slum transformation project in Addis Ababa.

Peter, who lives in Oundle, said: “I had travelled as a backpacker through Rajastan in India back in 1993 and must confess to crossing the road to avoid people with leprosy. How little I knew then, and how fortunate for me to be able to compensate now for those actions that were so wrong and misguided.
“I was thrilled and humbled when the outgoing Chairman, Colin Osborne, asked if I would consider becoming the new Chairman. My hopes for the Board during my term is to see the passion for this amazing cause sustained by the trustees and to support and assist the new National Director, Peter Walker, in any way I can. I love to visit the offices in Peterborough and see the dedication of the staff for this amazing work.

“I have witnessed lives being transformed by The Leprosy Mission’s projects. Leprosy, whilst easily curable, is deeply disabling if left untreated and the stigma surrounding the disease in parts of the world today is just heartbreaking.

“People are abandoned by their families and sacked by their employees as a result of this deep-rooted stigma. But The Leprosy Mission acts as a springboard to empower these people to live a new life by providing healthcare, education, housing and livelihood opportunities to lift them out of extreme poverty.

“Some of the transformations the charity sees are just amazing but there is still so much work to do.”

While living in a busy life, Peter still finds time to support the Cobblers, as do his wife Helen and children, Elizabeth and Joshua, who are all season ticket holders. He also tries to see the Saints and the county cricket club as often as he can.

To interview Peter Waddup, please contact:

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About The Leprosy Mission England and Wales:

The Leprosy Mission is an international Christian development organisation, transforming the lives of people affected by leprosy. Our goal is to eradicate the causes and consequences of this disease.

We are currently focusing on 11 countries where leprosy remains both a chronic disease and a social challenge. These are: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Sudan and South Sudan. Issues centre on disease, disability and discrimination. They also include: neglected tropical disease; housing; poverty; social exclusion; micro-loans; education and employment opportunities.
About leprosy

- Leprosy is a mildly-infectious disease caused by a bacterium called Mycobacterium leprae (a relative of the tuberculosis bacterium or ‘TB’ germ). It can stay in the body for up to 20 years without showing symptoms.

- Leprosy causes nerve damage and, if left untreated, can lead to a loss of sensation in the hands and feet. This can lead to disability and the amputation of limbs. Leprosy also damages nerves in the face causing problems with blinking, eventually leading to blindness.

- It is not hereditary and it cannot be caught by touch.

- It is most common in places of poverty where overcrowding and poor nutrition and housing allow people to become more susceptible to leprosy infection.

- The last case of indigenous leprosy in the UK was diagnosed in 1798 and although it can no longer be contracted in this country, around 12 new cases are diagnosed in the UK each year.

- Leprosy is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT), which was developed in the 1980s. Within one day of starting MDT there is no risk of the disease spreading to anyone else. Lack of education, however, means that many people affected by leprosy are still stigmatised, even after they have been cured, especially if the disease has caused disability.

- There are around three million people worldwide disabled as a result of the late treatment of leprosy. In 2012 there were 232,857 new cases of leprosy diagnosed. That is approximately one every two minutes. More than half of these were found in India. (Source: World Health Organisation).

- In 2012, five countries where we work, which have more than 1,000 new cases of leprosy diagnosed each year, reported an increase in the number of new cases detected. These were India, Nepal, Nigeria, South Sudan and Sri Lanka.