



VERSATILE STEVE TAKES OVER

BY DAVID HALL

After more than 30 years as its press officer Steve Goddard could not contemplate the end of Europe's largest annual exhibition for churches – so he bought it.

The 64-year-old journalist who runs a PR agency from St Helen's, Merseyside, was in charge of his first Christian Resources Exhibition (CRE) at Sandown Park, Surrey, when 1970 Eurovision winner, Dana, opened the show.

She sat and watched as a 55-strong girls' choir from Notre Dame School, Cobham sang a new version of her song, 'All Kinds of Everything.' It was re-written by Steve to demonstrate the wide range of products and services covered in the exhibition, ending with the words, "All kinds of everything, for your church and you."

"You were wonderful," said Dana. "Had you been singing at Eurovision I would not have won."

It was typical of Steve's adventurous spirit to surprise Dana with a new version of her most famous song. Over the years he has kept CRE as a must-visit for churches of all denominations – taking the exhibition to Manchester, Harrogate and other northern centres.

At the same time he has won enviable coverage in national newspapers, radio and TV – persuading many a vicar to strut the catwalk to display the latest in clerical clothing. Several years ago he erected a 47'-high inflatable church (complete with inflatable pulpit and pews) 'for outreach at summer shows' and even created a special Return to Sender zone for churches' work with the death care industry. At one exhibition, aided by Oldham's most famous comedian Bobby Ball, he helped six vicars learn how to tell jokes to brighten up their sermons.

So when the exhibition, often dubbed 'the ideal church show', was on the brink of closure last year he 'did a Victor Kiam' and bought it – along with wife, Allison, a sixth-form teacher at Runshaw College in Leyland.

For their first show they decided to take CRE back to the popular Sandown Park, Esher, Surrey, for three days. The event attracted 4,061 visitors

who toured almost 200 exhibitors, displaying everything from pulpits to puppets, sound systems to stained glass, charities to children's work.

Among the speakers was popular Northern Life columnist Terry Waite whose visit was made more emotional by the presence of 59-year-old Andrew

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Coleman, son of the late Canon John Coleman. Terry negotiated the Colemans' freedom in Iran prior to his own capture in Lebanon.

"It was wonderful to meet Terry again after all he did for my parents,"



Dana with the choir

said Mr Coleman. "I am well aware of the fact that he freed them within 12 months but was incarcerated himself for almost five years."

Seminars at CRE covered subjects such as evangelism, social media,

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sound systems and church building projects. Special speakers, such as mission-veteran George Verwer, talked on Christian work all over the world.

Most denominations were represented with 43 per cent of visitors belonging to Anglican churches and 16 per cent to Baptist churches.

"We attract people from all over the country, and from all denominations," said Steve. "That is why I believe it

must continue to serve churches far and wide."

The exhibitors were so enthusiastic that more than 50 have already booked their stands when it returns to Sandown Park next year (October 16th-18th).

Steve, from Croydon, Surrey, started life in an estate agents' office but soon switched to his first love – music. He recorded an LP of his own songs Waiting for Goddard before changing to journalism. He edited youth magazine Buzz before moving to St Helens where he worked on the sports pages of the Liverpool Echo. He has also been director of communications for the Anglican diocese of Manchester.

In his spare time, he has written a couple of novels - Rattles and Rosettes, in which he highlights Burnley's only

FA Cup win 100 years ago, contrasting it with the plight of his own team, Crystal Palace, in 2010. His second novel Whatever happened to Billy Shears? suggests what happened next to characters like Lucy, Mr Kite and Lovely Rita, who feature on the Beatles' Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

He has also brought a lighter touch to CRE with his own performances as Beltin' John - covering Elton John's hits like 'Crocodile Rock' and 'Your Song', wearing expensive spectacles and glittering outfits.

He now wants to bring CRE back to the north - particularly to Manchester in 2019.

"CRE can help revitalise churches in the north of England," said the exhibition's versatile new leader.

"I want to bring CRE back to the north to give church leaders and members some great ideas for the future. We have provisionally booked Manchester's Event City for a two-day exhibition in March 13-14, 2019.

"The event will be launched a year ahead on February 28, 2018, at Rochdale Football Club with the Bishop of Manchester attending and church leaders invited to see what we will provide." 

For more information on CRE visit www.creonline.co.uk