

# A CMS JOURNEY

September, 2009



A personal reflection  
7.5 years with CMS

## A new environment for mission and what CMS has been up to

By Jonny Baker

The huge changes in the cultural landscape of the UK are well documented. Call it postmodern, emerging or whatever but reality is certainly not what it used to be. This has been a challenge for the church, which in many places found herself wedded to a bygone era. This has been coupled with a pattern of decline in attendance and growing economic pressure. One of the pluses in this difficult climate has been a growing awareness that the UK (and Europe) is a mission context itself. Mission is not just something that happens overseas.

CMS has responded to this challenge and opportunity in a number of ways. The introduction of Mission Partners in Brit-

ain through Martin Thomas was a big area of investment and growth. And then the Impact Team was created within CMS both to help lead the way in Mission in Britain but also to help CMS adapt and change to the challenges of the new environment.

In the midst of a pattern of decline and pressure a surprising thing happened – new mission projects and patterns of worship and church began to emerge around the edges of the church. It's hard to pinpoint exactly where and how this happened but it has been a very hopeful area of newness and growth.

Fast forward 10 years or so and we are now in a situation

where the Church of England is ordaining pioneers and mission is on the agenda – its assumed in many places that mission is what the Church exists for. Legislation has changed to enable a mixed economy of church which includes new forms. There are networks of inspiring and creative leaders in and out of the denominations. There is renewed interest in community and missional communities. Training has begun to be addressed in different ways and there is a whole set of new permissions. In other words the environment has changed. Something significant has been happening, and CMS have been right at the heart of it in the mix.

It's not CMS' style or way to wave flags and shout from the rooftops preferring to work in partnership in an economy of gifts and generosity. But once in a while it's worth reflecting on what we have done.

I have worked with CMS for 7.5 years in this area. What has been and still is curious is that I still get asked the question 'what do you do?' by people in CMS. Somehow even through there has been huge change, it seems to be invisible to particular ways of seeing or looking? And perhaps we haven't been good at telling the story. I hope this paper will at least make some things visible. It seems a good moment to pause to do so as we come to the end of a season of investment to focus in new ways for the birth of the CMS community, pioneer leadership and discipleship. It is perhaps also by way of a note of personal thanks to CMS for taking the risk of participation in what then was far from obvious or safe or popular.

### Ahead of the Game

CMS's recognition of Britain and Europe as a mission context has been around for about 30 years. The shift to seeing mission as interchange of people, theologies and resources between different parts of the world was seen by the visionary CMS general secretary Max Warren. Post colonial guilt and sensibilities also helped. The history of Western missionaries is a complex mix of wonderful contextual mission sharing the gospel but also couched more than is healthy in Western cultural robes. Encouraging and empowering indigenous mission movements around the world became a new edge and emphasis. Michael Nazir Ali built on this idea



**A Gentle Approach**

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with the notion of mission from 'everywhere to everywhere'. In CMS we are now thinking in terms of network, contextual, transcultural and reciprocal mission. CMS has had at times as many mission partners in Britain as elsewhere. So while the current recovery of emphasis on being mission shaped in the church is recent, CMS has been taking this approach for 30 years or so and been ahead of the game. The logical outcome of this journey is now the development of CMS as a network of mission societies independently governed around the world with CMS Europe being one in the network rather than the power base.

### Making an Impact

CMS sensed the newness stirring around the edges of the church in Britain and commissioned Daniel Strange to research what was happening. This was published as the Strange Report in 2000, noting the emergence of new shapes of mission and church in Britain. The report concluded by recommending an investment of mission energy into this new emerging edge.

An opportunity arose for investment with the Charity Commission telling CMS she needed to spend some reserves (which seems remarkable now!). Tim Dakin pulled out a note from a meeting in the 1970s recommending such an experiment and that

persuaded trustees it was worth the risk. The impact Team was developed as an experimental team who would explore two things. The first was the challenge of Mission in Britain working both at the centre and the edge i.e with churches to help them become more mission shaped and with practitioners at the edges. The second was to help CMS to become more contextual herself. The team incorporated youth ministry which was a smart piece of thinking as in many places the developing edges were being birthed either out of youth ministry or by youth ministers who were working with young people outside of church but finding the challenge of integrating young people into churches a leap too far. Pete Ward in his book 'Youth Culture and the Gospel' had brought the notion of youth ministry as cross cultural mission into the youth ministry world and it was gradually becoming a new paradigm of thinking about relational or incarnational youth ministry as it was called then.

'Flying a kite' was one of impact team leader Paul Thaxter's catch phrases. This captured the mood of the team to dive into a number of projects and create things to be experimental, to exert influence, affect change, to see what worked, to fly a kite. This was uncharted territory then which is easy to forget now. The notions of cultural shift, cross cultural mission at home, emerging church out of that context,

and going on an adventure of the imagination (a John Taylor phrase in the Primal Vision) were simply not much on the horizon other than at the few edges of the UK churches. There were of course other travelers who were journeying a similar path, or asking similar questions. The Sheffield Centre with George Lings, Bob and Mary Hopkins of Anglican Church Planting Initiatives, Pete Ward and some others in youth ministry circles, alternative worship communities and networks who particularly took the post modern shift seriously, some individual writers and thinkers such as Graham Gray and Andrew Jones. But it was quite a small world in which fairly quickly everyone knew everyone, and most projects ended up in collaboration between at least some of the parties involved.

What was then called short term mission trips were also integrated in this team which meant that bringing the transformational encounter with the global body of Christ, which is now referred to in CMS as the Ephesian moment was also part of the mix. The Impact Team actually lasted only a few years before its themes and people were integrated across what was then called Mission Movement, a victim of its own success perhaps.

## The Emerging Church

My first day at CMS wasn't in the office. I got picked up by Paul Thaxter and went to a meeting to discuss the creation of a web site to try and capture some of the stories of what was emerging around the edges of the church. Because of the nature of its spontaneity, bottom up approach and connection with the emerging postmodern culture church 'emerging church' seemed a good name and was what was being used on blogs and in conversations with practitioners. Emergingchurch.info was born a year later and quickly became a buzz as stories were collected.

The Impact Team took on a dual almost a bi-lingual role. On the one hand networking, connecting, pioneering mission practice, training leaders and telling stories in the emerging scene. But an equal amount of time was being spent doing training days for dioceses, writing articles, leading workshops, answering emails, speaking at



theological college to interpret to the wider church what was happening. The lens or grid of cross cultural mission hopefully gave a way to tell this story in a way that was about mission and culture rather than stylistic changes to church. CMS has tried to work at both the centre and the edge.

Without practice there would be nothing to talk about! A lot of practice was already bubbling up and we simply joined in. I was part of Grace and connected in to the alternative worship movement, and the edges of relational youth ministry. We planted a mission leader, Mark Berry, to do mission and church in a new way in Telford, encouraged small communities (what we first called mission cells), led mission at new age fairs, developed a connection with entrepreneurship and mission through the likes of the Sorting room, connected with what people in mission were doing in tough contexts, partnered in a way of doing church with young

people outside the church (church on the edge), helped the 244 residential community get going and so on. Some of the team helped get this mission thinking in the midst of regular churches to see who to help shift them to be missional as well.

Once you are involved in practice, somehow others asking similar questions connect, whether online, through word of mouth, at events, or through visiting. Informal networks began to emerge (some already existed through the likes of Greenbelt). Part of the challenge for CMS is that these connections were not and are not in any sense owned by CMS. The outcomes are in the wider world rather than in CMS as an institution. The emerging culture with its hesitancy about institutions prefers to connect relationally. So we simply gave away what ever we could and created spaces for connections and conversations.

Almost by accident an event we ran at Partnership house, Blah..., went so well that people wanted more and we facilitated conversations on mission, faith and culture. These grew from London to begin hosted in Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Birmingham and Oxford and were indicative of the hunger to reflect on the emerging church and mission.



**Making Stuff Happen**  
Without practice there would be nothing to talk about...





#### Online Conversations

One of the factors in the new environment is the shift in communication technologies. Connecting and self publishing and networking is easier than ever. CMS found herself with some big hitters online.

As well as some teaching and conversations a growing network of practitioners was emerging. Two blah... tours gave us opportunity for some extended conversations with some of those people and a more intentional network of mission practitioners and communities was birthed. It now has around 100 people in it. It's a very creative and inspiring group.

Andrew Jones appeared on the scene, eventually joining the team, as did Bob and Mary Hopkins. They brought a whole host of connections and relationships into the mix - Andrew with the organic alternative edges, Bob and Mary through ACPI and church planting training. I was also co-ordinating the worship at Greenbelt and as well as CMS having her own venue, we helped launch New Forms in the festival which was a space for creative communities, worship and reflection in the.

It's significant that CMS was in the mix on this. There was some nervousness around how open to mission some communities especially alternative worship were - so Paul agreed I could continue to work with them as part of my

CMS role as long as the role included getting mission more on the agenda. This has been a remarkable and encouraging shift.

A hunch of Chris Neal's around the importance of entrepreneurship in the new environment led to the creation of the Network of Entrepreneurial Talent (NET) through Shannon Hopkins. It's an exciting new network and whole different approach to transformation through businesses that work for social good in and of themselves.

#### Communication

One of the factors in the new environment is the shift in communication technologies. Connecting and self publishing and networking is easier than ever. CMS found herself with some big hitters on line. Myself, Andrew, Mark, Richard but especially Andrew and I had blogs that were hubs in the movement. Emergingchurch.info quickly grew to google's number 1 on a search for emerging church and had 20 000 visitors a month. ACPI had their site. We tried launching a social network which would have been like Facebook ahead of its time - it failed because of

bugs. We published articles in newspapers, online, books, Yes magazine. It's probably an interesting piece of research to try and catch this but I'm not sure we'd remember all the things we've written. Some of us have written something nearly every day for 7 1/2 years. Andrew really led the way online and it was his persuasion that pulled the rest of us into the digital matrix. We still have a significant online presence, though the digital conversation is more crowded than the early days. A further report was published by Gill Poole researching what was happening.

I shifted to publishing resources online through proost.co.uk and Bob followed suit and has self published several books through lulu.com.

#### Training

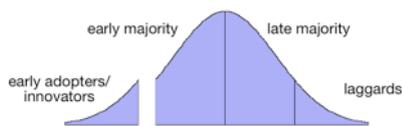
Mission education is a strength of CMS. The team have taught days and session all over the country with groups and dioceses and festivals. CMS joined in with two key training streams on mission and emerging culture. Resource was a course set up in partnership with other for leaders in church planning in the emerging culture. MSM (and related Courses) were developed through Fresh expressions. Resource has been through 4 years attracting 25 or so leaders each year mostly in 20s- 30s. Some have started something and others come with a desire to. As with lots of training, sharing the journey with others is as important as the teaching. Mission shaped Ministry is a year long course being rolled out across the country by Fresh Expressions. Bob and Mary Hopkins' wisdom and years of material formed the backbone of the course and together with Steven Croft they wrote the bulk of the material. This is now running in around 40 centres around the country. Whilst it is a Fresh Expressions course CMS is a national partner and Bob and Mary's time is given by CMS to Fresh Expressions. Bob and Mary have taught on and visited courses all round the country. Jonny Sartin and Mike Morris brought in to the mix their experience and course on discipleship which was good to add to the growing portfolio. The cross cultural team was also running lots of training.

## Mission Shaped Church

It's probably time to rewind slightly. In recognition of the new things bubbling up (or to catch up with them), the Church of England commissioned a report. Two members of CMS staff – Chris Neal and Gill Poole - were on the group writing the report which was published as *Mission Shaped Church* in 2004. Archbishop Rowan Williams wrote the foreword and coined the term 'mixed economy' and became a broker for this newness encouraging the Lambeth partners, a private group who funded the Archbishop's initiatives to support a Fresh Expressions Team. The report became a best seller and its recommendations were taken forward with Steve Croft appointed to lead the Fresh Expressions team. As noted above, Bob and Mary Hopkins joined the Fresh Expressions team and CMS supported them to do that work.

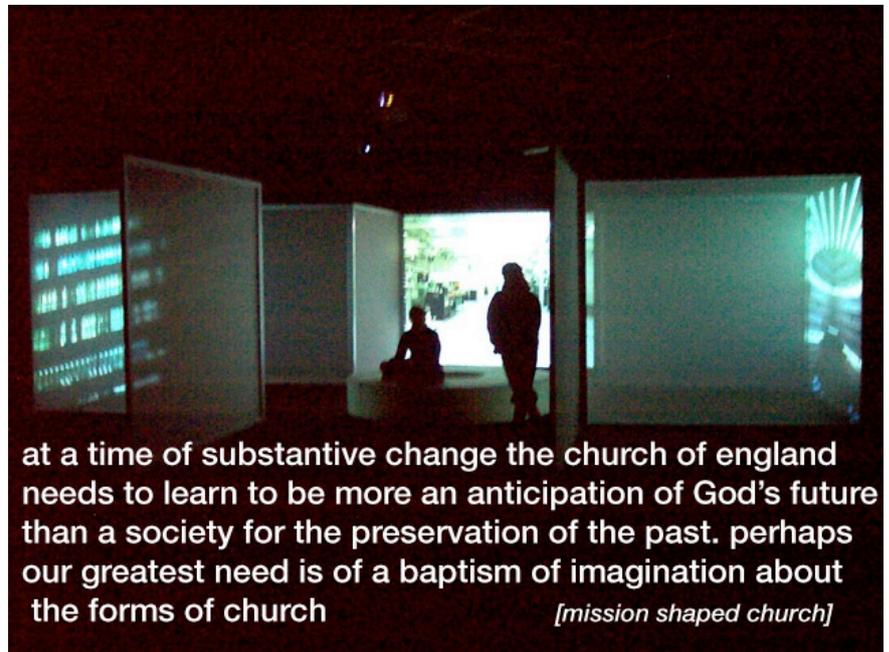
Steven Croft reflected on the relationship between Fresh Expressions and emerging church and alternative worship with me at Greenbelt one year. He drew a bell curve diagram of change on the back of an envelope.

In this diagram it suggests a process



of change whereby pioneers or early adopters make up 5 percent of people. Once they adopt something a much bigger group, the early majority, will change (around 40%). There is then a late majority and a group who tend to resist change no matter what who make up the rest. Steve suggested that alternative worship and emerging church leaders were the pioneering 5 percent and that Fresh Expressions was intentionally working with the early majority. This made lots of sense. In the same conversation Steve also said he admired CMS for appointing the like of Andrew Jones and me suggesting we were too risky for FE. I think it was a back handed compliment?!

Steven Croft with the team did a remarkable job. As well as Mission Shaped Ministry and speaking with every diocese, he also brokered a new



**at a time of substantive change the church of england needs to learn to be more an anticipation of God's future than a society for the preservation of the past. perhaps our greatest need is of a baptism of imagination about the forms of church**  
*[mission shaped church]*

pathway for ordaining pioneer ministers, the pastoral measure was changed (meaning churches could plant across parish boundaries) and created Bishop's Mission Orders to license the new forms of church to help the creation of a truly mixed economy church. Bob and Mary have been our main partner in FE with Paul Thaxter, Chris Neal and me having journeyed with the team in round table conferences and through friendship, whilst also continuing to catalyse and network with leaders and communities at the edges.

At the same time as this was happening in the UK, similar challenges and questions around church and mission in the emerging culture were also being asked elsewhere in the western world. So the conversation naturally took a more global turn. Bob and Mary, Andrew, Jonny, Richard, Mark have variously been and shared in Can-

ada, USA, Norway, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Australia, Poland, France, Ireland, Scotland to name a few. This has been a mix of catalysing, connecting, sharing stories and teaching a missional approach. A lot of the conversation has happened online. It would be easy to underestimate the significance of this online conversation and the growing wider relationships that have emerged through it. I am writing this as I sit in Poland at a gathering of around 50 leaders in alternative youth cultures hosted by Andrew Jones.

Through the communities we are part of most of us have hosted literally hundreds of visitors from around the world hungry to see what is happening and wanting to start new things in their own communities. Hospitality has had a big part to play (which maybe is why I sometimes get asked if I drink coffee for a job?!). CMS has also hosted conversations on emerging mission movements, mission amongst the Orthodox churches and so on. So the wider cultural shifts have been felt elsewhere in the post colonial world we are now in.

We have worked in partnership with Fresh Expressions, Church Army, CYM, RUN, Revelation Church, Fusion, Methodists, Anglicans, ACPI, Sheffield Centre, and a whole host of others. Any one of those groups could not have made the same impact alone. It has been a truly remarkable journey together, but CMS has had a huge part to play.



**A Global Conversation**  
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## A New World

The environment has changed. Mission is on the agenda of the church in Britain and certainly of the Church of England. There are inspiring leaders, networks, resources, training, and creativity. There is a culture of permission. Church exists for mission. There is lots to be done for sure but if you had predicted 10 years ago the new world no-one would have believed you.

It's time for more change. Resources are tight and we need to focus what we have. The journey has been painful for CMS. I have been part of several structural changes and cuts in that time. CMS herself has shifted radically her self understanding. But we stand poised to focus on mission and transformation of the world through a community of mission disciples contextually in Europe and transculturally with other CMSs. Most will be volunteers, some will either be People in Mission or sponsored to do what they do. The heart of the community will be fueled by a mission spirituality/DNA. There is a new opportunity to engage in the training of pioneer leaders, which will be my main focus for the next few years. CMS as an ecclesial community now finds herself uniquely poised as a Fresh Expression of church.

A CMS JOURNEY  
**Jonny Baker**



**Mission on the agenda**  
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We stand poised to focus on mission and transformation of the world through a community of mission disciples.