

## IRFF UK's Curious Charity Shop - Under New Management

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## Big changes at our curious charity shop

If you've never heard of our Tricycle shop, you're not alone. But actors from Midsomer Murders have.

So has a London wardrobe designer who pops in for top hats and fur coats. They all head straight to the back room – known locally as the “weird and wonderful” cave – where vintage treasures and theatrical oddities spill from every corner.

**It's not your average charity shop – and that's just the beginning.**

What most IRFF UK supporters may not know is that The Tricycle, based in the historic market town of Alton, southwest of London, is one of our most successful fundraising vehicles – supporting humanitarian projects in Africa, alongside national and local charities.



*From left to right: Markus Thonett, incoming Manager Nicole Avery, Tessa Thonett, and outgoing Manager Michelle Jackson.*

Founded in 2012 by Tessa and Markus Thonett, **the shop was built on a simple but powerful idea: three wheels, three charities**, every month. That model – international, national, and local – has supported everything from wheelchair-friendly home upgrades to humanitarian projects in Africa.



*Michelle guided The Tricycle with steady hands.*

This August marked the shop's 13th anniversary – and a major changing of the guard. Michelle Jackson, the founding manager and steady hand since day one, stepped down after years of building not just a business, but a community. Known for her warmth and fierce loyalty to her volunteers – many of whom live with disabilities – Michelle helped shape The Tricycle into a place where people felt valued.

Her farewell party was full of stories and laughter. She received a crystal plaque, a photo album titled Memories of The Tricycle, and – perhaps most memorably – a custom blue plaque to hang outside her home: **“Michelle Jackson, Manager of The Tricycle, 2012–2025, Lives Here.”**

Move over, English Heritage.



*Michelle (centre) with volunteers fundraising in front of The Tricycle shop on Red Nose Day, a unique fundraising campaign that uses comedy to solicit donations for great causes.*



*New Manager Nicole takes the handlebars at The Tricycle shop.*

Stepping into Michelle's shoes is Nicole Avery, although she's no stranger to the shop. Years ago, fresh from a difficult divorce and far from her native Australia, she found comfort in the charity shop across the road from her flat and visited twice a day.

**"It was the closest thing to family I had,"** she told founder Tessa Thonett.

Now, she's back as the manager. And she's bursting with ideas, energy, and gratitude.



Stepping away a little is **Pauline Johnson, long-time assistant manager and quiet powerhouse.** Her intelligence and willingness to do all kinds of extra things helps keep the shop humming.



*The Tricycle staff, volunteers and friends gather for a photograph at one of the charity's anniversary gatherings.*

Today, The Tricycle is more than a place to find a vintage golf club or a quirky lampshade. It's a community hub. And with Nicky at the helm, **the next chapter looks just as wonderful and wildly inspiring!**

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