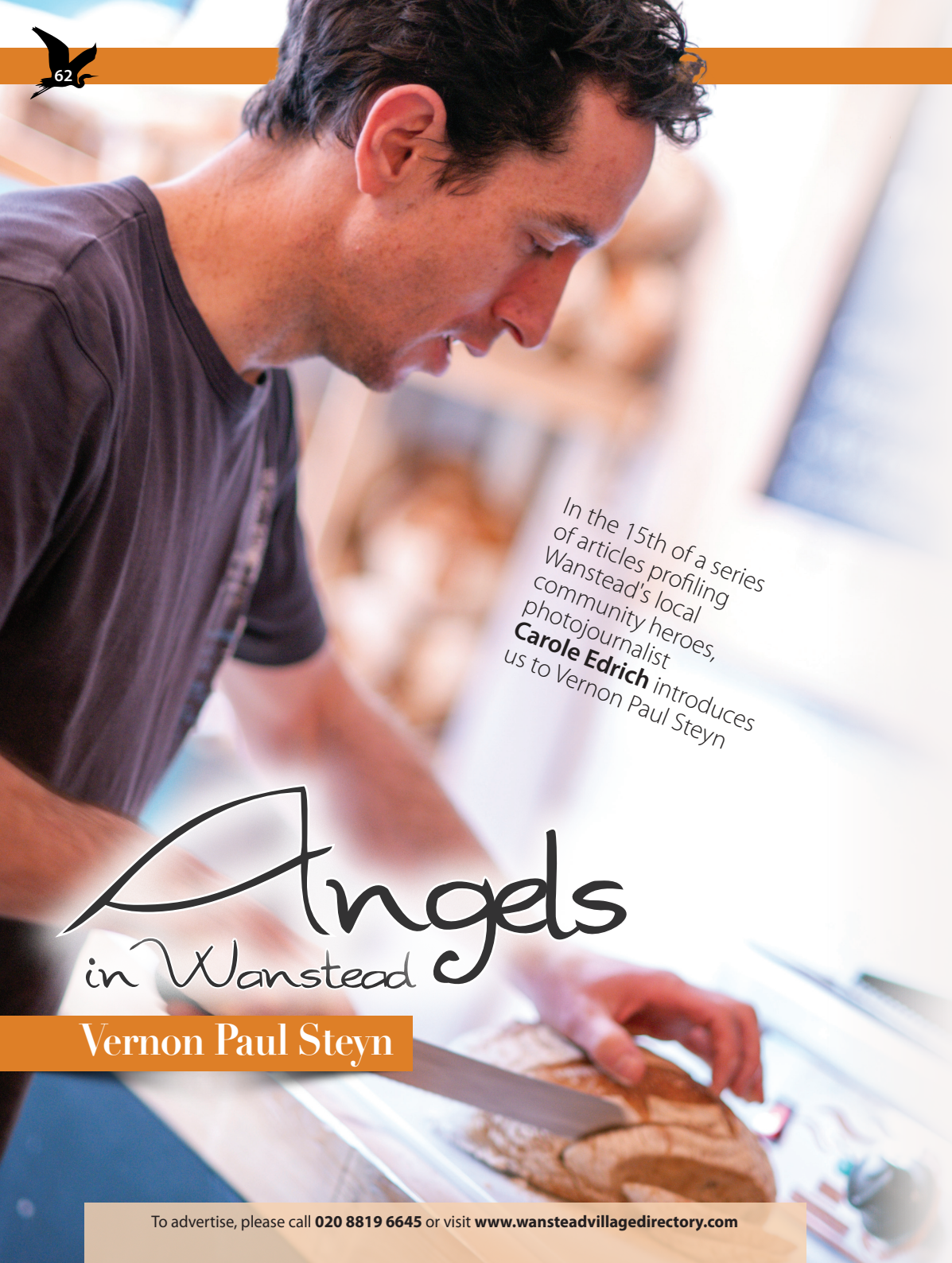


In the 15th of a series of articles profiling Wanstead's local community heroes, photojournalist **Carole Edrich** introduces us to Vernon Paul Steyn

Angels in Wanstead

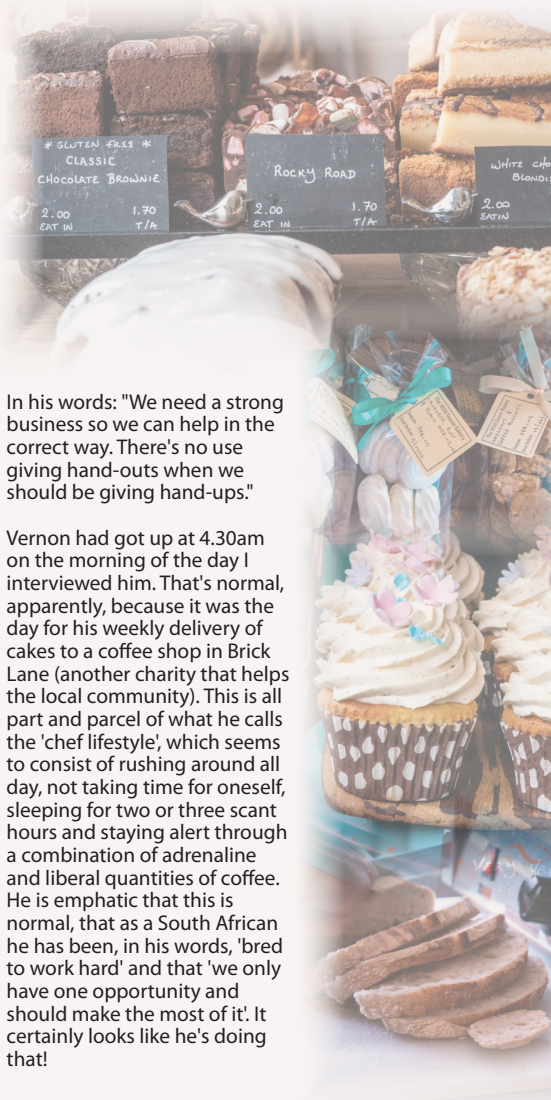
Vernon Paul Steyn

I've not known Vernon for long. That's not surprising because at the time of writing this, his shop, the Wild Goose Bakery in Leytonstone, is only six months old. But I wanted to write about him because, even though his business is in its infancy, he does so much for others in the local community.

Before we talk about that, though, here is a little of his background. He trained as a chef in his native South Africa before moving to London, where after a while he started training as a pastry chef under Fabien of Nice Croissant in Wanstead for about five years. They're still great friends and often pop into each others' shops. Vernon's bike was stolen from outside Nice Croissant just last month, but that's another story. He met his wife, Kirsten Kinlock-Steyn, at the same place. How that happened is a whole other story again. They've been married around three years and while Vernon has lived in the area for around seven years, Kirsten came here when she left her job to pursue their new business.

Vernon is very clear; they chose the business and the location because they wanted to plant their roots in this community. Their long term strategy is to build a strong enough business that they can help people in the community in whatever way they can. Their commitment to doing this and to helping others shapes everything they do. They're really careful with food contents, keeping the food halal wherever possible and clearly saying when it isn't. They get bread from a charity in Hackney, but Vernon is not happy about my writing its name, because he knows from experience that it is all too easy to put too much pressure on the people who make it. This is inappropriate because they all have disabilities and work hard at their jobs.

Despite its youth, the Wild Goose Bakery has already had three charity months. These are months dedicated to helping a local charity in some way. Although they were already involved with the local food banks (at the end of the day, bread and other food is dropped off), during the food bank charity month they asked people to drop off food, which they took along with their own donations. Another of their charity months was the classic Movember. They plan to do a lot more in terms of charity work through Reverend Dave of the church across the street. Vernon explains: "There are loads of community projects we want to get involved in. We want to make a difference to peoples' lives. We can't do that if we don't have the right foundations." They already are doing a lot, but Vernon's no soft touch either.



In his words: "We need a strong business so we can help in the correct way. There's no use giving hand-outs when we should be giving hand-ups."

Vernon had got up at 4.30am on the morning of the day I interviewed him. That's normal, apparently, because it was the day for his weekly delivery of cakes to a coffee shop in Brick Lane (another charity that helps the local community). This is all part and parcel of what he calls the 'chef lifestyle', which seems to consist of rushing around all day, not taking time for oneself, sleeping for two or three scant hours and staying alert through a combination of adrenaline and liberal quantities of coffee. He is emphatic that this is normal, that as a South African he has been, in his words, 'bred to work hard' and that 'we only have one opportunity and should make the most of it'. It certainly looks like he's doing that!

For more information on the Wild Goose Bakery, visit **wavidi.com/wgbakery**

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