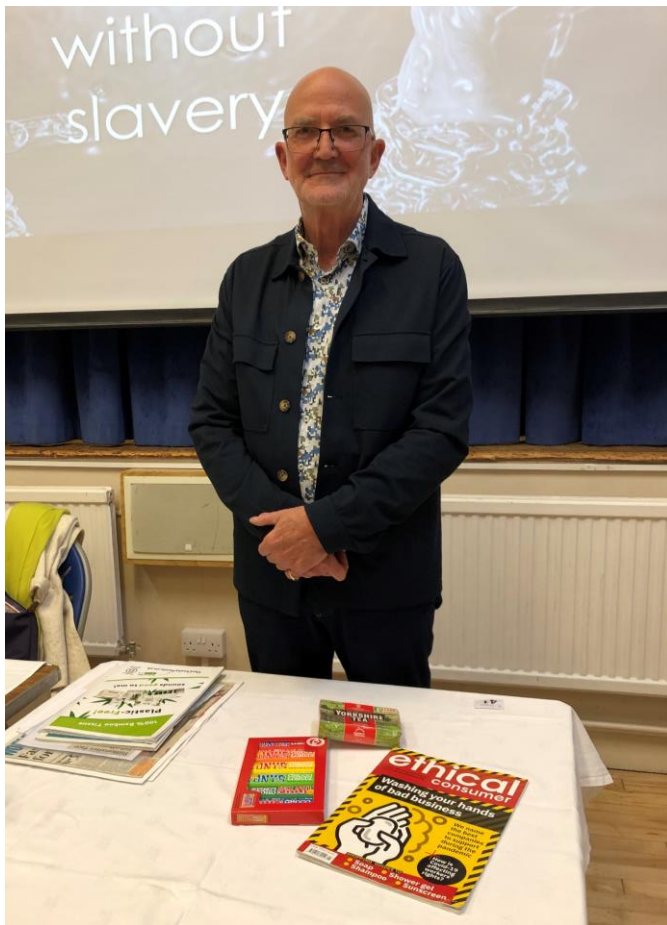


Modern Slavery – Presented by Phil Jesson for the Woodhouse Eaves WI

At our October meeting, the Woodhouse Eaves WI welcomed guest speaker Phil Jesson, who gave a powerful and eye-opening talk on the issue of modern slavery. Phil lives in Market Harborough and volunteers with Unseen, a charity based in Bristol that helps victims of exploitation. His presentation mixed real-life stories with practical tips on how ordinary people can help make a difference.



Phil started by explaining what modern slavery actually means — things like forced labour, domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, and even criminal exploitation such as drug trafficking or organized theft. He shared some shocking examples of people trapped in these situations here in the UK, from farm workers locked overnight in metal boxes to young people drawn into county lines drug operations.

The statistics were equally disturbing: there are thought to be over 40 million victims worldwide, and about 136,000 in the UK alone — double the number reported just a few years ago. Victims are often controlled through violence, threats, debt, or emotional manipulation, and many come from vulnerable groups such as migrants, homeless people, veterans, or those struggling with mental health issues.

Phil also drew attention to the uncomfortable link between modern slavery and many of the products we buy. Well-known brands like Cadbury, Mars, and Nestlé have all faced scrutiny for child labour in their supply chains. On a brighter note, he praised more ethical companies such as Tony's Chocolonely and Yorkshire Tea, which are working to eliminate exploitation. He encouraged us to shop more consciously and pointed us toward resources like Ethical Consumer magazine and the Slavery Footprint website, which can help identify slavery-free products. As a bonus, Phil brought along some Tony's chocolate for us to try — a sweet surprise!

He also talked about how companies can suffer serious reputation and legal damage if they ignore these issues, using the Boohoo scandal in Leicester as an example. On a more personal level, Phil shared how he once spotted signs of forced labour at a local car wash — a reminder that exploitation can happen right under our noses.

In closing, Phil urged everyone to stay alert, report any concerns to the Modern Slavery Helpline, and support charities like Unseen. Although his message was serious, he ended on a hopeful note: by making informed choices and spreading awareness, each of us can help in the fight against modern slavery.