

# Sharing hope by sharing opportunity

*Gavin Oldham starts by recounting a story he read in his 20s which changed his life. On a 1930s train journey with poverty-stricken Polish migrants returning home from France, the author comes across a beautiful child whose life and talents will never be fulfilled. This inspired Gavin to found three linked organisations, The Share Centre, Share Radio and Share Foundation, which make direct participation in share ownership easier for ordinary people, including young people.*

Many people will have read *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry to their children: it is one of the best introductions to philosophy for both the young and not so young. Not so many will be familiar with his book *Wind, Sand and Stars* (*Terre des Hommes* in the French) and its extraordinary epilogue.

It is from those closing pages of *Wind, Sand and Stars* that I have drawn one of the strongest motivations for my working life, ever since my early 20s. They describe Saint-Exupéry's thoughts while travelling across Europe between the two world wars on a night train, filled with Polish migrants returning home after working in the French mines.

"A few years ago, in the course of a long railway journey, I was suddenly seized by a desire to make a tour of the little country in which I was locked up for three days, cradled in that rattle that is like the sound of pebbles rolled over and over by the waves; and I got up out of my berth. At one in the morning I went through the train in all its length. The sleeping cars were empty. The first-class carriages were empty. They put me in mind of the luxurious hotels on the Riviera that open in winter for a single guest, the last representative of an extinct fauna.

## **A sign of bitter times.**

But the third-class carriages were crowded with hundreds of Polish

workmen sent home from France. I made my way along those passages, stepping over sprawling bodies and peering into the carriages. In the dim glow cast by the night-lamps into these barren and comfortless compartments I saw a confused mass of people churned about by the swaying of the train, the whole thing looking and smelling like a barrack-room. A whole nation returning to its native poverty seemed to sprawl there in a sea of bad dreams. Great shaven heads rolled on the cushionless benches.

Men, women, and children were stirring in their sleep, tossing from left to right and back again as if attacked by all the noises and

