

A SKILL YOU CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON

HE once auctioned the chance to wash Wendy the elephant at Bristol Zoo, and an invitation to sit on the throne of a Pope in Rome.

Andrew Morgan earns his living selling property in and around Bristol, but for decades he has been in demand for charity auctions – and now he plans to take this honorary sideline a step further.

Aged 64 and after more than 40 years in the business, he has gone into partnership with a colleague near the beginning of his career, Ollie Hollis, to set up a new estate agency in Waterloo Street, Clifton.

It's a serious enterprise – but alongside it, he plans to devote more of his time to helping charities in their fundraising, with advice about auctions and other means of pulling in the punters.

And it's a service he's offering free of charge, even if he ends up at the event wielding his gavel and raising maybe tens of thousands of pounds for the good cause.

Apart from his charity auctioneering, Andrew has been central in helping All Saints Arts get off the ground at the church he attends, All Saints in Pembroke Road, Clifton.

Saturday, July 24, saw an Opera Picnic in the church's gardens, featuring four singers from Welsh National Opera.

An upstairs room at his Waterloo Street office is where the All Saints organisers meet – and he hopes it will become a gathering place for all who are looking to swell their funds through charitable events.

There is also space for local artists to display their work. Andrew says it takes skill to conduct a charity auction in a way that ensures the guests

JOHN HUDSON talks to charity auctioneer Andrew Morgan as he pledges to do more work for good causes



Partnership: Ollie Hollis

are happy and the lots on offer make top dollar.

"People love an auction at fundraising evenings," he says.

"But you do need quite a bit of know-how to make them go well. The first thing is to give the guests a good time, get them well oiled but still waiting for their dinner.

"After that it's a case of persuading, cajoling, making them laugh – and encouraging a state of healthy competition among the men, so that suddenly it seems terribly important to them to land that weekend for two in Paris.

"You've got to keep it all snappy and zipping along – an hour long, 50 lots or so, that's the absolute maximum.

"Ollie is also going to get

into this side of what we are doing, and we see it as our contribution to society.

"We can't afford to give money away, but we can certainly use our skills to help the community."

Wendy the elephant was always a great favourite at Bristol Zoo, and when it became known that she loved to be hosed down, it seemed a good idea to allow people to do the job – at a fee.

"There was brisk bidding for it, but one man went the extra mile as his wife was called Wendy," Andrew recalls.

One of his most memorable charity auctions was in Italy. He and his wife Elisabeth got to know the then recently retired Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, after he had bought a house in Clifton, and they were invited to join him on a trip to the Anglican church in Rome.

"There was a charity event at the British ambassador's house organised by the diplomats' wives in aid of Alzheimer's charities over there, and I found myself running the auction," he says.

"Needless to say, there were some fabulous prizes.

"The rare opportunity to sit on an ancient papal throne was the most unusual, but there was also a flight over the mountains and a visit to some great aristocratic home."

St Peter's Hospice, Macmillan Cancer Support and the suddenly ubiquitous Help for Heroes frequently benefit from Andrew's skills.

But the Bristol Muslim Society, the Orthodox church in Romania, the Anglican Church in Uganda and the Gurkha Welfare Trust are among other organisations he has helped along the way.

Ten years ago, a lot at an auction for St Alban's, Westbury Park's repair fund was a trip around Southmead police station and a tour of the cells, while last year Banksy gave the voluntary group Young Bristol a limited edition print that Andrew transformed into £15,000.

A visit to Malmesbury's

Photograph: Dan Regan



Gift of the gavel: Seasoned auctioneer Andrew Morgan is offering his services to more charities



Sold: Mr Morgan, left, and Young Bristol chairman Andrew Nisbet with the limited edition Banksy bought for £15,000 by Alan and Pamela Lewis, both right

Naked Gardeners, Ian and Barbara Pollard, was a popular lot at another auction, but history does not record how much the lucky winners saw for their money.

The Bristol-based Soil Association was boosted when Andrew worked his magic on a purebred Dorset Down sheep donated by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall – and a pair of TV chef Antony Worrall Thompson's trousers.

And everyone was cheered up one evening when a local solicitor gave them the chance to bid for his services in writing their will.

Andrew's biggest sale on behalf of a church was the £1,010,000 scooped by the

trustees of St Mary Redcliffe Vestry early in 2007 when they disposed of four Victorian houses in Colston Parade.

But that, of course, was a conventional property auction, where nobody was playing it for laughs.

He started his career with Lalonde Brothers and Parham in Queen's Road, Clifton, and went into business with Peter Beddoe to found Morgan Beddoe in Whiteladies Road in 1991.

His new partner, ex-Clifton College schoolboy Ollie Hollis, has five years in the business and is a family friend.

"He found his wife at one of my charity auctions," Andrew claims.

"It was at a dinner party where I was playing the butler – and that's where the two of them met."

An unusual kind of auctioneer and estate agent, then, Andrew Morgan – though then again, maybe not quite as unusual as all that.

"Not long ago I was up in Stow-on-the-Wold, in one of those posh country clothes shops," he grumbles.

"I tried on a pair of cord trousers I didn't feel were quite right, and I said to the woman 'What I really want is a corn-coloured pair.'

"Oh no you don't, Sir," she said very definitely.

"They're the ones all the estate agents wear."



In action: Raising funds with the Bristol Muslim Society in 2005