

Jersey Evening Post

Saturday 14 February 2026

The Weekend

Anthropologist. Technologist.
Social innovator. Author.

Ken Banks discusses his latest work,
The Little Book of Mindful Social Change,
and how to remain positive in a world filled with negativity



Competition

Win Cineworld Jersey tickets to watch a
Hollywood classic on the big-screen

The Weekend *Big Read*

'The problems feel insurmountable – but nobody wins if we all give up'

The latest book from Ken Banks sees the Jersey-born social entrepreneur offering advice on how to keep calm and enact social change. He spoke to **Tom Ogg**



■ Ken pictured with David Attenborough

THE search to discover the meaning of life is something that has enthralled great minds for centuries, from the philosophers of Ancient Greece and the celebrated Austrian psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl to Monty Python's Flying Circus ("What's it all about then?").

And it is a subject about which award-winning social entrepreneur, anthropologist, explorer, social innovator and global conservation and development expert Ken Banks has often sought answers.

When we last spoke in 2022, Jersey-born Ken – who devised and developed the revolutionary text messaging system FrontlineSMS – had published a book titled "The Pursuit of Purpose: Part Memoir, Part Study – A Book About Finding Your Way in the World".

The 384-page volume saw Ken – who at the time was running a "social purpose programme" at Yoti Ltd – revisiting his Jersey childhood and discussing his

subsequent globetrotting career in order to find purpose in life and to impart advice and wisdom to readers in the process.

"Since 2022, I have moved on from Yoti," says Ken, chatting from his home in the UK earlier this week.

"After a brief spell out of work, I took on a senior directorship role at Macmillan Cancer Support, working on issues around technology and how we can use it better to support people living with cancer. I was only there on a contract, which ended just over a year later, but working for a large national charity in that type of role drove home how unsuited I am for full-time, regimented work in

larger organisations. I feel much more at home working with my nose closer to the ground, getting stuck into things and making decisions – and acting on them – quickly. I don't have much tolerance for bureaucracy so going back to self-employment – something I'd done for 15 years prior to Yoti, and something where I can be the master of my own destiny – felt like the best move for me."

At present, Ken is coaching "45 young innovators from around the world" who are developing "planet-friendly solutions as part of a Mercedes Benz-funded initiative". In addition, Ken is working with a Cambridge-based charity who offer scholarships to students who otherwise

wouldn't be able to attend the University of Cambridge.

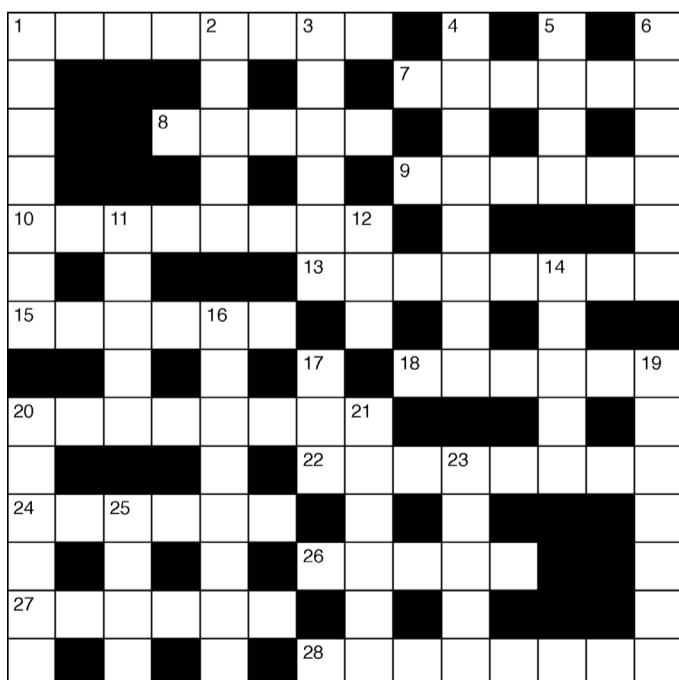
"One of the better known scholarships they manage is supported by British rapper Stormzy," says Ken. "I like variety in my work – I get bored easily – and I particularly like having the time and opportunity to develop my own ideas when they arise."

And now, to add to his ever-expanding CV, Ken has released his latest – and fifth – book: *The Little Book of Mindful Social Change*.

As its title suggests, the book once again finds Ken seeking – and finding – meaning and purpose in an increasingly polarising world.

The Weekend Crossword

Put your general knowledge to the test



ACROSS

- 1. Underground stems, like those of irises (8)
- 7. A reddish-brown colour of a horse, etc. (6)
- 8. See 10
- 9. A kind of black China tea (6)
- 10 and 8. Foolish or superstitious traditions or stories (3,5,5)
- 13. Poisonous alkaloid contained in tobacco (8)
- 15. River on which Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade stand (6)
- 18. An immense number (6)
- 20. See 1 Down
- 22. An underground cemetery (8)
- 24. The wife of Leofric, earl of Mercia (6)
- 26. See 14
- 27. Supplementary item performed in response to applause (6)
- 28. Infinite time (8)

DOWN

- 1 and 20 Across. Thriller writer who wrote *The Big Sleep*, *Farewell, My Lovely* etc. (7,8)
- 2. Rare relative of the giraffe (5)
- 3. A cricket side (6)
- 4. The art of clockmaking (8)
- 5. Card game similar to poker (4)
- 6 and 19. Composer whose works include *Clair de lune* (6,7)
- 11. An Italian lady (5)
- 12 and 16. In *Morte d'Arthur*, a knight who threw Excalibur into the lake (3,8)
- 14 and 26. Architect whose masterpiece is the banqueting room, Whitehall (5,5)
- 16. See 12
- 17. Of wines, French word meaning "dry" (3)
- 19. See 6
- 20. Surname of a film star famous for his "tough guy" roles (6)
- 21. A highly seasoned stew (6)
- 23. A Muslim ruler (variant spelling) (5)
- 25. Small freshwater fish (4)

Last Saturday's solutions

ACROSS. 1. Sward 5. Sabot 8. Eocene 9. Edgar 10. Pluto 11. Bonsai 13. Avery 15. Cannon 18. Trot 19. Onyx 20. Loofah 24. Masai 26. Retina 27. Nitre 28. Frond 29. Nilgai 30. Yucca 31. Alder
 DOWN. 1. Shelagh Delaney 2. Algae 3. Derby 4. Scone 5. Sepia 6. Bruin 7. Thornton Wilder 12. Acorns 14. Rudolf 16. Nutria 17. Psyche 21. Optic 22. Arena 23. Bilge 24. Mafia 25. Snood

'The book is for people who want to make the world a better place without losing themselves in the process'

"I think this new book is a great example of how I like to work, and how being creatively free to make decisions and act on them quickly suits me," he says.

"In the middle of last month, I was sitting at my desk at home, and out of nowhere came the idea for this book. I'd already been spending a lot of time thinking about the role of spirituality in humanitarian work, and how much of our drive and desire to end suffering and help others comes from within. I'd been blogging and posting about how my own work over the years seemed to echo Buddhist philosophy, and the idea of writing a small book of deep, personal reflections felt like a natural way of connecting with others who might feel the same, or who might benefit from thinking more deeply about their motivations for doing the work they do.

"Social change is tough, and it's even tougher if we do it without looking after ourselves."

In short, *The Little Book of Mindful Social Change* is a book for "people who want to make the world a better place without losing themselves in the process".

"It invites them to reimagine activism and social change – not as a battle driven by anger or exhaustion, but as a grounded, compassionate and sustainable practice rooted in presence, care and clarity."

The book comprises 24 short reflections, all of which explore how "inner transformation and social transformation" are connected, and with Ken discussing how to meet the world with "wisdom, resilience and compassion".

"In the book, I make the point that *The Little Book of Mindful Social Change* is not a manual, a manifesto or a call to arms," he says. "There are already plenty of other books out there that do that. My book is designed to be more of a quiet companion for people who don't want to just build, fix or improve something, but who are willing to look inward as much as outward as part of the process.

"Now felt like a good time to write and share something like this given the growing interest in mindfulness and looking after our mental health. I hadn't seen anyone try and write a book

like this before from a social change or humanitarian angle. It felt important."

Indeed, Ken repeatedly describes the book – which took him just three weeks to conceive, write and publish ("I don't like to hang around when I get an idea") – as "the most important thing I've ever written". Why does he feel this is the case?

"Just look around you. In our increasingly online and interconnected world, the impact of global crises such as climate change, humanitarian disasters, inequality, war and systemic injustice are more visible to us than ever. It's hard to escape the bad news, and too much exposure is not only challenging to our mental health but it also grinds us down and makes us apathetic. The problems feel so huge and insurmountable that we end up trying to block them out, or pretend they're not there. In reality, this is the worst thing we can do.

"Through my research into human behaviour and how our minds work, a lot of this makes sense. Evolution has taught us to dwell on the negatives, in most part because being worried that a rustle in the bush might be a lion, or that stick on the path might be a snake, has helped us develop behaviours that make us alert to danger, which in turn helps us survive.

"But 'sweating the bad stuff' all the time can crowd out more positive feelings, and if we want to solve some of the bigger problems facing the planet we need to do it with a clear mind. Stepping back, sitting quietly and reflecting on how we feel, and why we feel that way, and how we can be more positive and enjoy better mental health, is a starting point for doing better work.

"I believe there are many people out there who would like to do good in the world, but have nowhere obvious to start. The reason I've said that I think this book is the most important thing I've written is because it's my attempt to help people unlock that passion for change. It's for those people who want to see a better world on the outside without tearing themselves up on the inside. I can't think of anything more important than that, particularly with everything going on in the world right now."

Asked who Ken envisages as the target audience for the book, he replies: "Well,



■ Ken Banks: 'The book is an invitation to slow down, stay human and practice change in a way that feels as kind to you as the world you're trying to create'

when I wrote this book I didn't have any particular audience in mind, but one did begin to emerge as the book came to life. And now that it's finished, and as I read it back, I'd say it's probably perfect for activists, community organisers, educators, leaders, caregivers and anyone who feels called to make a difference.

"The book is an invitation to slow down, stay human and practice change in a way that feels as kind to you as the world you're trying to create. I think that kind of approach, and that kind of message, will appeal to many different kinds of people."

In addition to his many other activities, Ken works with organisations supporting humanitarian relief in Gaza. How does he feel about the overall state of the world at present?

"Given my work, people are often surprised to hear that I'm not that optimistic for the future, particularly now," he says. "I think we're witnessing a perfect storm of huge global problems and it all feeling impossible to do anything about. Climate change is accelerating faster than our political systems can respond, while social media fractures our shared reality and erodes the democratic institutions we'd need to address it.

"Add in rising authoritarianism, widening inequality and biodiversity collapse, and you have this perfect storm where each problem makes the others harder to solve.

"Despite my negativity, I'm still focused on doing what I can to make a difference. Nobody wins if we all just give up."

Ken also makes reference to "AI disruption racing ahead of regulation" as a potentially disruptive element. How does he feel about the rise of Artificial Intelligence?

"As with most technology, I think AI is broadly neutral. On the one hand it can be used for incredibly positive things – medical diagnosis and drug discovery,

early detection of natural disasters and climate patterns, personalised education for students with different learning needs, accessibility tools for people with disabilities, conservation efforts through wildlife monitoring, mental health support and crisis intervention, and so on.

"But then it can also be used to create 'deep fakes' and misinformation at huge scale, it can power autonomous weapons systems, allow for mass surveillance and erosion of privacy, create algorithmic bias in hiring and criminal justice and support social media manipulation and addiction. The list goes on.

"My biggest concern is its role in the erosion of democracy. It's becoming impossible to tell whether an audio recording, or video, is real or fake.

And it's also becoming increasingly impossible to hold power to account because of it. Watergate would never happen today. And what it leads to is a breakdown of ethics in public life, with politicians in particular shrugging their shoulders and carrying on, when years ago something far less serious would have ended their careers.

"The thing I find most amazing is that I was a part of the early movement which promoted technology as the answer to global problems. It was only 20 years ago during my time at Stanford that I was speaking to students about how technology could support democracy building. In no time at all, all that optimism has turned to worry, fear and despair.

"If you're not paying attention to what's going on, then you need to."

■ *The Little Book of Mindful Social Change* by Ken Banks is available from Amazon UK, on Kindle and in paperback, with an audiobook being released this weekend. For more on *Apathy to Action*, visit kiwanja.net/apathytoaction



■ Ken: 'This is a photo I took in Burma (Myanmar) in February 2013. I was always interested in the overlap between tradition and modern technology. And I always thought a photo of a Buddhist monk on a phone would be the perfect representation of that. In 2013 I had the chance to get the photo – I was in the right place at the right time'