



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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Contents

Page 1. Reflections from the Unholy Holy Land.....	Dave Havard
Page 2. Moss Community Energy Project.....	Sandra Dutson
Page 4. A Passion for Kendal.....	Anne Pater
Page 5. On Sheep, Motorcars and Reconciliation.....	Donald Henderson
Page 7. News From Scotland.....	Eurig Scandrett
Page 8. Something About Us.....	Euan McPhee and Nona Wright
Page 9. Class War at Poor Doors.....	Peter Marshall
Page 10. Ashram Holiday in Silverdale.....	Linda Marshall
Page 12. Methodism Unbound and National library deposits.....	John Vincent
Page 13. Summer School 2015.....	Helen Davies
Page 13. Beth-el and Communion.....	Neville Whitehead
Page 14. Sheffield is Reading.....	Sarah Clayton
Page 14. Sheffield Inner City retreat.....	Sandra Dutson
Page 15. Community Information	

Reflections from the unholy Holy Land

A year has passed since the last Gaza War. I have to say things have not gone as badly in the West Bank as I had feared. In the absence of peace negotiations and with all the hype from the war I was expecting the extremist settlers to get completely out of hand and for the Israeli government to make unilateral moves to take control of more of the West Bank. Some of that has happened but not as much as I feared.

For Arwa's family things have been relatively quiet on their land. The settler "archaeologists" have not been back and it seems likely that they have nothing more to do here and won't be back. We had feared that they would start digging on other people's land but it seems not. There was another team building up on top of the remains that they found in order to protect them and make them look more exciting to visitors but they too left months ago and have not been back. A contractor came, supervised by a local settler who has all the keys to our land and to the containers on it. He put up guard rails around the two biggest Roman/Byzantine water cisterns. There have not been large scale organised tour groups yet. It seems there won't be any change of use on the land until the High Court makes it's decision which will be a long time coming at present progress. It is due back in court in December. The High Court is not interested in the question as to how come the Abu Haikals lost their tenancy even though it was a protected tenancy and they owned all the fruit trees. They are questioning how come the local settler organisation was given the tenancy in a secret deal which only came out in court 2 years later. Given that this is an Israeli court and they don't recognize the illegality of expanding settlements or confiscating Palestinian land I am not very hopeful of a good outcome but at least it is slowing the settlers down from taking over the land.



Arwa and her sister Samah in Jerusalem for the first time in 24 years

For those of us who long for peace in Israel and Palestine Netanyahu's re-election was an unexpected

shock and a big disappointment. All the polls for weeks predicted that he would lose. On election night he did a "war room" broadcast warning Jewish voters that, "Arabs are going to the polls in droves" so they better get out and vote. He also said that there is no chance of a Palestinian State being established while he is prime minister. He had to backtrack on both those statements after the election but the damage was done. He won the election narrowly and he upset many influential people in Europe and USA.

In response many of the groups who had previously supported Israel have had to revise their positions. Jewish groups like J-Street can no longer argue that although there are bad things happening it will all get sorted out in the peace negotiations to create 2 states if that is no longer an option.

The arson attack by extremist Jewish settlers on the Dawabshe family home that killed a baby boy at night and his parents weeks later in hospital was a big shock not only to Palestinians but to very many Israelis as well. There were demonstrations in protest and President Rivlin said he was "ashamed that some of his people had done such a terrible thing." I attended an open air prayer and protest called by rabbis in Etzyon, next to the settlement between Hebron and Bethlehem. There were calls for Israelis to report their neighbours to the police if they think they are involved in attacks on Palestinians. Influential politician Yair Lapid said that Shin Bet needs to put informers into the synagogues and arrest the rabbis who are inciting racial hatred and violence.

Shortly after an Orthodox extremist killed a young woman and injured others in a knife attack on the Jerusalem Gay Pride parade. Again Israelis were deeply shocked and there were many protests against racism and intolerance in Israel. The minister of Education ordered that all schools should teach tolerance and respect for diversity in the first week back to school. Hopefully Israelis have reached a turning point. For a long time they have tried to deny the deeply racist nature of many Israeli individuals and institutions. Now they are openly standing up to combat this racism.

This last week has seen renewed violence at al Aqsa. Once again Israeli police have been escorting extremist settlers and politicians visiting the al Aqsa compound to assert Israeli sovereignty and calling for Jews to be allowed to pray there. Some of them promote the destruction of al Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock and the building of a temple or synagogue on the site.

Given that the Abraham Mosque was closed by force and divided in two to create a Jewish synagogue, Muslims are understandably alarmed at Israeli intentions at the 3rd most important holy site for Muslims in the world. The plans to destroy al Aqsa and rebuild the Temple seem ludicrous to outsiders but they do have the support of Israeli cabinet members. There have been many international calls to the Israeli government to back down and Netanyahu has responded by promising to maintain the status quo agreement with Jordan not to allow Jewish prayer at al Aqsa. On Friday there were clashes in Hebron and across the West Bank to protest that so many Muslims have been denied access to pray in al Aqsa in order to facilitate extremist Jewish settler visits. We can only hope that Netanyahu will draw back from the brink of provoking a religious war and will indeed restore the status quo.

So life is very tense. Most Palestinians are in despair. They have lost hope that a just peace is possible. There is no peace plan on the table and on the ground things continue to deteriorate. There is talk of Mahmoud Abbas officially ending the Oslo agreement. No one knows what the consequences of that will be but for sure things will get much worse before they improve.

The only good news is that Daesh (ISIS) have almost no support in Palestine so at least we won't be drawn into that nightmare.

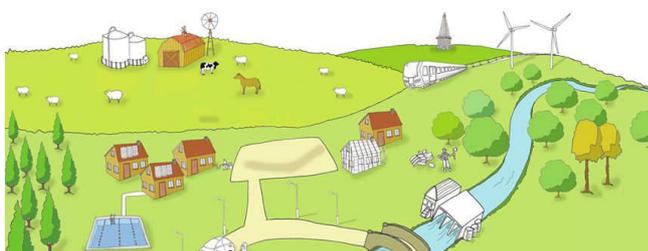
Outside of Palestine there have been many diplomatic successes for the State of Palestine and the BDS movement continues to grow and achieve notable successes. Public opinion across the world and in particular in the US and in Jewish communities is steadily moving to support justice for Palestinians and Israelis. Peace activists in Israel are a brave but small group and they are not capable of making the changes needed without serious pressure from outside Israel.



So do keep up the pressure in whatever way you can and pray for all the struggling people of this land and indeed this whole region.

With all best wishes. God bless you and all your work for peace and justice.

Deacon Dave, Hebron
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Moss Community Energy Project in Salford

It is nearly two years since I became involved in the protests at Barton Moss about the exploratory drilling for coal bed methane and shale gas by Igas. I wrote in a previous ACT Together of those experiences and the reasons I joined the protests.

There has been no subsequent application for further drilling but following the end of the exploratory drilling a group of people who had been involved decided to do as the people of Balcombe had done and set up a Community energy company. We have after several months finally achieved this and hope to issue the first shares and install our first community solar panels very soon. It has been a long, quite complex process and just as it was complete the Government changed the goalposts about encouraging renewable energy in various ways that are quite shocking. However the intention is still

to go ahead. Below is the Offer document, explaining how such schemes work and the various benefits.

'Moss Community Energy Ltd (MCE) is a community benefit society based in Salford. MCE is currently investigating potential sites within a ten mile radius of Eccles, Irlam and Cadishead to install community-owned solar panels. As a not-for-profit social enterprise, the benefits of MCE solar installations go back to the local community.

How the project works

MCE is looking to work with schools, libraries, leisure centres and other community spaces to install solar panels. MCE would lease roof space from the landowner and finance a solar installation through a community share offer. MCE would then receive an income from the feed-in-tariff and the sale of

electricity. This income would be used to pay back local investors, and put surplus profits into a Community Benefit Fund.

Community building benefits:

- A free solar installation for the community building.
- A reduced electricity bill.
- Potential gifting of the solar panels at the end of the lease agreement (approx. 20-25 years).

Environmental benefits:

- The generation of green electricity.

Education benefits

- An energy monitoring display that measures the energy generated by the panels will be fitted in the building, and can be used by building users for educational purposes.
- MCE will provide relevant educational materials on issues of renewable energy, energy efficiency and fuel poverty.

Community benefits:

- Local people will be invited to become members of the group to finance the panels and will benefit from an ethical investment opportunity that provides an attractive rate of return and qualifies for tax relief.
- The community users will have the opportunity to advise how the Community Benefit Fund is used for environmental projects and/or energy efficiency improvements. The Fund will be available for use to support local energy efficiency work/environmental projects.
- The installation will be an inspiration to the local community by showcasing the benefits of solar installations.

Partners

MCE is supported by:

- 10:10 - a national charity that promotes positive solutions to climate change. www.1010uk.org
- Sheffield Renewables – a community and a social enterprise that develops, funds, builds, owns and operates renewable energy schemes. www.sheffieldrenewables.org.uk
- Co-operatives UK – a network that works

to promote, develop and unite member-owned business. www.uk.coop

For more information contact

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www.mosscommunityenergy.org.uk

Our rather tortuous path to this point has at times been very discouraging but we have had a core group of very committed people and the support of two people from 10:10 who have spent a lot of time making sure the project did not grind to a halt by getting to grips with some of the legal and financial work needed. We have had some fun along the way as one Saturday a group of us made our own solar panels! These should soon provide a small amount of electricity to some local Allotments. We have spent a lot of time pondering which might be the first sites suitable for such Community installations.



Recently (27/08/15) DECC

(Department of energy and climate change) announced a proposed cut of the Solar Feed In Tariff by 87% by January 2016. A variety of recent cuts by government to support solar and renewable energy will cause a loss of affordable clean energy choices, taking away power from people and handing it back to big energy firms.

Subsidies for ALL renewables currently cost £3.5bn /yr compared to £26bn /yr in subsidies for fossil fuels. That's £400 per year per household to support the fossil fuel industry. There is/was a petition to request a review of this decision so please if possible consider signing. Sign the petition at:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/106791>

Once there is more to report I will share the news, maybe even ask for offers to buy community shares! So watch this space and the roofs in Salford!

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A Passion for Kendal

In 2011, a small and madcap group of us had the idea of performing a Passion Play in the streets of Kendal. Chris Taylor, drama teacher, youth drama leader and latterly Anglican Priest has been a friend for some time, and I had roped him into my ecumenical Walks of Witness which we now hold regularly each Good Friday. Caroline, his wife, has a literature and drama background and has just done a PhD in creative writing at Durham University. Guy Wilson was Curator of the Royal Armouries at Leeds and had put together the lyrics to 'The Armed Man' by Karl Jenkins. Roland Fudge is a local composer and also involved with the town's youth orchestra. And Kate Reid is a very talented designer. We were all very excited by the prospect, and happily wrapped up in our own creative bubble. The logistical nightmares were to come later!

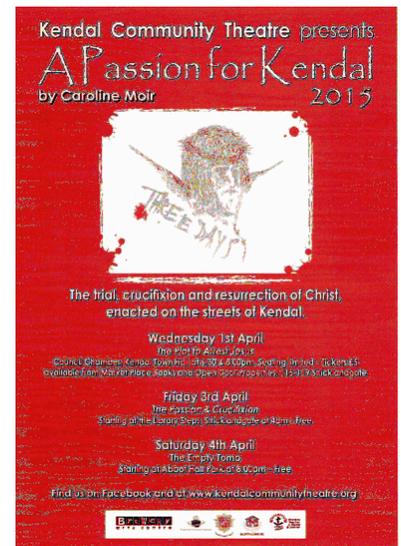
Caroline wrote a script, and the plan was to do it in modern dress. As Chris said, "It's about political corruption, an illegal trial and one person's response. It's also about how hope and love are more powerful. It's also timeless, so Caroline wanted to show the continuing significance of the story. To present the Passion script only as a transcription from the bible and set it in biblical costumes runs the risk of turning it into a historical drama rather than a story that is still important and deeply relevant in the context of what is still happening in much of the world".

The other important guiding principle to which we all agreed, was that the group should be as inclusive as possible. As Musical Director I involved an inter-schools drumming group, and brass group, an adult four part choir, a local award winning local girls' choir, instrumentalists from youth and adult orchestras, and a music group for young adults with learning disabilities. Our designer worked with Manna House (charity for the homeless) and their clients to make banners, which formed the scenery. Our drama group were all amateurs, and all comers were involved. They ranged in age from

12 to 80! We got a grant to employ an intern thereby offering work experience. And this year we videoed all the scenes and relayed them to a local church so those who could not walk could still see the performance. Invitations were issued to care homes nearby.

Of course it became a huge project. Knowing how many people would come to watch was just guesswork, but we needed road closures and all the attendant work that entails, publicity, sound and video recordists, staging, props etc etc.

We performed 'A Passion for Kendal' in 2012. You can see a video of the performance on youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzcJUVdSulM The plot to kill Jesus was acted out on the steps of the Library, the arrest in the market place, the trial outside the Town Hall, and the crucifixion on the stone steps in the garden of the Brewery Arts Centre. There were at least a thousand people walking from scene to scene following our drummers.



Once Jesus was attached to the cross beam, we walked along the high street singing a 'Threnody' which I had written, accompanied by a funereal drum beat and a solo violin. For most people this was the most moving part of the unfolding drama. The crucifixion itself was accompanied by a beautiful 'Mary's Lament' with the most powerful words. There were many in the large audience with tears in their eyes. On the Saturday we played the last, resurrection scene and ended with fire sculptures and a lively piece of choral music with drums, wind and brass.

This year we girded our loins to repeat the massive exercise. We added a superb Courthouse Scene which we performed in the council chamber of the town hall on the Wednesday. It made the whole



play seem even more political. This year it rained. The audience was smaller because of it. But it still had a tremendous power for performers and audience alike. Perhaps as a disciple follower of Jesus, walking along the road behind the cross, singing, as the rain fell soaking our clothes and dampening our hair, it meant even more.

Since the first Passion Play we have now formed 'Kendal Community Theatre', performing 'Lady Anne Clifford – A woman cast out' a drama of the young Lady Anne Clifford's struggle, to regain her inheritance – the Barony of Westmorland – against some the most powerful men of the 17th century. And in 2014, 'Oh What a Lovely War'. The newest project is a 'Kendal Yarns' with people encouraged to write short plays about Kendal for performance next summer. Workshops are being provided for schools and anyone who is interested starting this October. We have an arts project running alongside it with installations planned for the various yards in Kendal. Check out our website. www.kendalcommunitytheatre.org or the Kendal Community Theatre page on Facebook.

Anne Pater
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On Sheep, Motorcars and Reconciliation

We were very struck by David Mowal's article on reconciliation and by the bit in Dave and Arwa's update about Peter Yarrow singing freedom songs in a Palestinian field and Israeli and Palestinian peace matters. We have a book 'Réconciliez-vous' by Mark Halter. He is a Jew born in Poland just before the 2nd world war whose family fled to the Soviet Union, landing up in Uzbekistan and later moving to France whereby he has lived in proximity to Christians, Muslims and Jews. The book passionately urges reconciliation and it has a courageous interpretation of the holy books. But here, lost in rural France, the big issues of migration, homelessness and exclusion do not touch us (except marginally, due to the large number of British immigrants who have never managed to learn French).

We have a friend though who works in a nearby reception centre for immigrant children. He has told us the story of a Congolese girl whose father, an officer in the army, has been killed in the fighting there. Rejected by her family, her mother set off with her to Europe and crossing the Mediterranean the girl saw her mother drown. Arriving in France she contacted an aunt whose address she still had, but her aunt refused to take her in and so she is in this centre for lost children. They will be kept there until they reach their majority, when, if possible, they will be sent back to where they came from. We also have a very odd member of our parish who apparently was on the streets of Piegut on market day with a petition against the construction of mosques. The



Pope would hardly approve. It is quite a surprise and like a breath of fresh air at long last to have a Pope who seems to actually understand what is going on in the world. Or so we hope.

We still have the stall on the market sponsored by our association 'La Sauce Paysanne' distributing the magazine 'Silence' on alternatives, non-violence and ecology. It often mentions the trans-Atlantic deal TTIP, Jenny and Linda will be pleased to hear.

These things apart we live in a miniature world of organic vegetables, green woods, local conviviality, homemade wine, sounds like the paradise - it is.

But there are striking contrasts, perhaps unreconciled opulence. Cycling along the lanes, you'll be startled by speeding cars and vans. It's quite exciting and feels a trifle dangerous. Some cars are so BIG and black and impressive with smoked glass. Who is in them? I think it has to do with an infatuation for powerful and glamorous equipment including smart phones and stuff. There is an advertisement picturing a guy wearing ear muffs and sitting on a gleaming, spanking new lawn mower.. The caption is 'Matriser la Nature', I suppose 'Master nature, I think it should really say? Why should we not instead just sit in the meadow with the flowers and chirping crickets and be reconciled with nature?

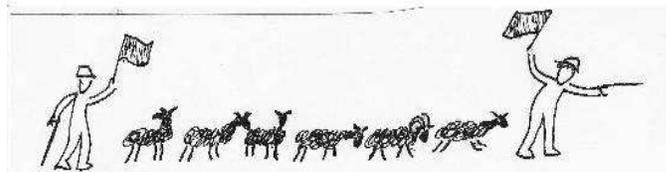
In Piegut too there is need. We have a 'Resto de Coeur' – a food bank. There is a trolley standing at the exit of the supermarket, reminding us and inviting us to deposit food. It has a photo of Coloche, the comedian founder of 'Resto de Coeur', it is immediately recognisable. To me there seems to be unreconciled conflict between this announcement of poverty and the unbridled consumerist culture of the supermarket. People are at once generous and at the same time pursuers of cheap deals, more shops, racing about in powerful machines, to shop, to consume.

In the good old days seemingly it was better. People used to amble along the lanes by donkey and cart to the Wednesday market. After market they had a meal then there was the ball until late. After this they were quite legless when they got into the cart. But the donkey took them safely home. Then in the '60's came progress and modernity and they bought a car, no doubt a Citroen 2CV. The car didn't take them home and so the afternoon gigs died out and the little restaurants closed. (This account must be true because it was told us by our neighbour, Paulette Villette, who saw it happen).

Some years back, we re-created the wayside cross on the corner of our lane, which had fallen, lost in the brambles. The



priest came with the locals, we rededicated it, planted roses, flowers and bushes to remind people of Jesus. But they go past at such speed. Only Paulette, who picks dandelions for her rabbits there sees the cross, and Solange who still walks to market and the handicapped Camut girl who bikes to the village every day for the newspaper. Pilou and nurse will see it as they walk past to gather mushrooms in the woods, but the others speed past, going somewhere more important.



We take the sheep past the cross on their way from one pasture to another. The sheep do notice the flowers planted there and try to eat them. We try our best to dissuade but they are wilful. The sudden arrival of a car creates instant panic in the driver and the flock. So we carry warning flags. We all feel safer that way.

On the whole we are on good terms with the sheep. They are not like us and do not have ambition nor plan for the future. Just before sunset they have keep-fit hour when they race round the field chasing and butting. Otherwise they graze, chew the cud and are always looking out, hoping for something good or alert to danger. They seem to be content just to be sheep.

Today Germany has imposed controls on its frontier with Austria and closed the railway line. Desperate people are massed in a Vienna railway station, but here in our undeserved paradise the lime tree has started to put on its autumn colours, the hay is safely stored in the loft, 200kg of our plums are fermenting in barrels to be distilled into eau-de vie next spring. Apples are falling and we are gathering them in sacks for juicing. It has been a good harvest. The ewes are in heat and Two Pack, the ram, is excited. Be careful, he can give you quite a knock. Soon we will slaughter this years male lambs (not our happiest day of the year). On Saint Catherine's day we will plant more fruit trees. We will get the wood in for the winter and light the stove again. In the long evenings, our work done, we will curl up by the hearth with a good book.

But on the same night desperate people with fearful hopes will be huddled in a fragile craft on a dark sea.

Hard to reconcile.

Donald Henderson

Cabaniers, 24360 Piegut-Pluviers, France



News from Scotland

Apologies for my repeated absence from Ashram weekends. There always seems to be something else going on. In the near future, that 'something else' is being a candidate in the Scottish Parliamentary elections for the Scottish Green Party. The electoral system in Scotland is an 'Additional Member' system, in which everyone has two votes - one for the constituency MSP and the other for a party list to top up the parliament and make it more proportional to the intentions of the electorate. I am number 2 on the Green list for the South of Scotland, which in previous years would be considered un-winnable.

But we are living in interesting times, with the emergence of grassroots politics around the referendum, the SNP rout at the Westminster election and the Corbyn Labour leadership victory. There is an appetite amongst many for radical change as Cameron shifts even further to the vindictive Right, and a few opinion polls have suggested the Scottish Greens could do well in May.

My day job as an academic continues, with a new undergraduate degree in Public Sociology (studying society from the real world in order to change it) – exciting, although a constant battle with bureaucracy and commercialisation. But a significant amount of my time is taken up with trade union work at the university. As a trade union activist, understanding my own exploitation and that of my colleagues is central to challenging its causes. So my 'extra-curricular' activism for justice comes from a position of solidarity, rather than sympathy, in the struggle against the same economics of violence: against the same Powers.

I spend a lot of time trying to tackle workplace bullying. The more Higher Education becomes a commodity in a marketplace, managed through Key Performance Indicators and quality standards, the more we experience

pressure from managers. Which means that professional academics, whose job is education, research and relevant scholarly activities, are pushed to increase 'productivity' and meet ever more demanding targets. Whilst there continue to be no student fees in Scottish Universities, the insistence of the UK government on charging fees mean that students from England do pay fees and the marketisation of Higher Education infects the system north of the border.

The Research Excellence Framework throughout the UK generates reductionist research and a competitive environment for researchers. Managers are under pressure to achieve higher productivity and the least 'productive' people (because they care about students, because their research is relevant to the local community, because they are ill, because they reject the pressure) are bullied - often until they are driven out.

My other current passion is Palestine solidarity, promoting the boycott of Israel and supporting good friends involved with the nonviolent anti-colonial struggle. Susan and I had a great holiday in Palestine in June: it's good when solidarity can include enjoying the place, relaxing with friends, seeing new sights and enjoying the Mediterranean sun.

However, on return we learned that one of our friends is trying to raise money for a friend's daughter, born prematurely and in need of surgery to enable her to walk, which is only available in the USA. She's asked if I can help. Raising money for individuals is not usually something I do but I'm hoping to help out as a friend. If anyone is willing to make a donation I'd be happy to provide more information and would be very grateful for any contributions.

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SOMETHING ABOUT US

We live about as far away as is possible from any Ashram group, so we are mostly “silent” members.

Euan is involved in The Friends of Tregonigge Woodland (more from him on this), the local Green Party, the diocesan Anglican Methodist Environment Group, the Campaign for Real Ale, and is on the road to becoming a local preacher in the Methodist Church. In his spare time he brings home, cuts up and stacks wood for the wood burner and makes excellent pumpkin pies.

I am in a people phase in my life; no longer commuting long distances, no longer looking after farm animals, no longer secretary to this or that group. I befriend a 92 year old lady, and have other friends I try to see every week. My gorgeous daughter and little grandson live a ten minute walk away.



I also play hand bells, sing in an occasional choir and write letters for Amnesty or other reasons especially related to climate change. I have recently joined the Churches Together Justice and Peace Group, which always includes time for persecuted Christians. There are also two book groups....

We both like to travel, and this year have spent five weeks going to Norway in our old campervan. Our latest adventure was to the Christians Aware summer school in Glastonbury where we led two sessions on living simply.

Euan McPhee and Nona Wright



Tregonigge Woodland

It all started with dog poo. I complained to Cornwall Council about the lack of dog poo bins in our local woodland, a wonderful haven from the busyness of surrounding housing and industry, and before I know it I am chair of the Friends of Tregonigge Woodland. The Friends meet twice a month to carry out general clearance work which the local council have cut back on over the years.

With the help of local primary schools, we have planted 700 native deciduous trees; we have also cut back brambles, planted wildflowers, installed bird boxes, given guided walks, harassed SW Water and the Environment Agency regarding poor streamwater quality and are about to install the first of our interpretation signboards. What is so exciting is the amount of community support we have had. And the local council appreciates it too!

So, having given up managing 9 acres of smallholding and its associated animals, I now help manage 20 acres of woodland and all the wonderful wildlife it supports! No rest for the wicked....

Oh and by the way, I plan to cycle from Falmouth to Paris (via Plymouth to Roscoff ferry) in support of the Climate Change talks in November. Wish me luck!

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Class War at Poor Doors

To get planning permission for new blocks, developers have to include some social housing, at least in theory. In practice developers are often able to promise some, then get their commitment reduced or even eliminated by claiming after having received permission that providing affordable or social housing would not be economic; some developers buy out of the commitment by payments to the local authority in lieu.

But some large blocks, such as that on the corner of Commercial St and Whitechapel High St, just to the east of the City of London have included some social housing. It's a prime site, including an entrance to Aldgate East tube, and very close to a Crossrail station due to open in a couple of years, a huge public investment that ramps up property values. The many overseas buyers who buy up much of properties like this in London, often 'off plan' before they are built, are promised at least a 35% increase in value in the next 3 years.

Wealthy residents who live here or more often visit occasionally (and those in their flats as expensive holiday lets) enter the building on the well-lit main road, going into a large airy lobby with comfortable seating and a 24 hour staffed concierge desk on the left.

The social housing tenants have their own door. It's a long way down a narrow alley at the side of the building. When I first visited it was dark, with little or no lighting, strewn with rubbish and a strong stench, the kind of alley that becomes a urinal after closing time. The 'poor door' has a card entry system, but it was broken and the door unlocked. It led into a long narrow corridor, empty apart from mail boxes on one side.

Inside each door leads to a separate lifts for the two areas of housing, both of which start on the 10th floor. On the corridors there was little difference between the two sides – just more expensive doors and a different shade of

flooring. The lifts were different too, most importantly over the response time to any faults. I was shown around the building by one of the 'rich' residents; the door between the two sides on the 10th floor (which she sometimes uses to take her dog down for a walk) was locked, but we were able to walk between the two lifts on the ground floor.

A social housing tenant told me he had been threatened with loss of his tenancy for taking the short cut through the 'rich' side to get to the tube station. The following week he didn't attend the protest, after having been told that he would be evicted if he came.

Anarchist group Class War, defiantly working class and rather punk, began protests against what they described as 'social apartheid' when they learnt about it at the end of July 2014. One Commercial St isn't the only building like this, but it is a prominent example of what was becoming a growing trend. I'd photographed Class War at some other events but didn't then know them well. This was the first of a long series of protests, mainly from 6-7pm on a weekday evening, of which I photographed all but two.

Class War protests are often lively, with a bit of theatre and a little direct action. They have deliberately provocative banners, which they sometimes dance around holding. They shout insults, make short and sometimes abusive speeches, plaster windows with stickers, try to push their way inside buildings, occasionally block roads, light smoke flares, hold flaming torches and on November 5th they burnt an effigy of London Mayor Boris Johnson on the pavement outside. Sometimes protests have partied with live music or a sound system and a couple of times they went and briefly blocked Tower Bridge. Highly political, they think that politics should be fun.

In November the building's new owner told Class War that he would consult with the building users and meet Class War to discuss resolution of the issue, and the weekly protests were suspended. But the meeting in

January lasted only 10 minutes when it was clear that the separate doors were to remain. But the alley has been cleaned up, resurfaced and proper lighting installed.

Protests restarted and continued until shortly before the general election, when Class War - a relatively small network of people with similar views around the country - diverted its attentions to supporting its seven candidates. One of these, Lisa Mackenzie, was standing against Iain Duncan Smith in Chingford, and it was perhaps not unconnected with this that police arrested her a few weeks earlier on a clearly false charge. The final protest outside One Commercial St (at least for the moment) was a loud party to celebrate May Day with a sound system and flares and a couple of hundred people taking part.

Police actions throughout have been inconsistent and sometimes seemed politically driven. Earlier cases from these protests have either been dropped for lack of evidence or have been thrown out of court with the police told they were legitimate political protest (you should feel free to burn the mayor in effigy on bonfire night!) Many arrests at protests are used as a simple short administrative detention.

You can read my accounts and see my pictures from almost 30 protests on my web site, *My London Diary* (arranged in date order.) I had no problems with police (or protesters) in taking photographs, other than occasionally being pushed out of the way by police rather more roughly than necessary - sometimes when I clearly was not in the way. Many of the pictures were made in very poor light. I recently put together a 48 page low quality full colour magazine-style publication with around 200 of them - available from me at £6 including UK postage.*

Class War's protests were aided by various other groups concerned with housing, whose protests Class War also support. These protests around London (and some in other cities) have brought many of the issues - including that of separate entrances - onto the public agenda. There have been small victories, particularly over individual evictions and in getting some Londoners rehoused in the capital rather than being forced to move to other areas of the country, and a much greater awareness of issues around investment properties, regeneration schemes, empty properties and the housing problem generally.

Currently Class War are leading protests against the new *Jack the Ripper* 'museum' in Cable St, as well as being involved with other groups and issues such as refugees, gentrification and housing generally.

Peter Marshall

*email me at petermarshall@cix.co.uk for details. Also available from Blurb.com
Image: *Class War briefly occupy the Rich lobby.*

Ashram Holiday at Silverdale

John Wesley rode across Morecambe Bay (on his horse) in 1759, but did not stop off at Silverdale which, according to a vintage notice at the railway station, is “the loveliest spot on Morecambe Bay”. Members and friends of the Ashram Community, on the other hand, failed to take up the Bay Crossing challenge, but did stay for a week in the aptly-named *Bay View* holiday let on the outskirts of the village of Silverdale, part way between Carnforth and Grange-over-Sands.

Holidays booked by David Dale are usually of geological interest, and this one was no exception. There were cliffs and rocky hillsides of carboniferous limestone, chunks of which had deposited themselves on the seashore; there were caves just as you imagine caves to be, though rather too high up the cliffs for most of us to risk entering; but more than that, there were vast expanses of sand, sometimes covered with water (at high tide) but more often exposed to view and criss-crossed by little channels and rivulets occupied by sea birds, or dogs out for a swim. The sand looked most inviting, but all along the shore were notices warning visitors of the danger of quicksand, some of them showing the number of people rescued by the coastguards in recent years. I can however report that we ended the holiday with the full complement of 14 members that we had started with.

The house we were staying in was on the side of a hill, its huge windows giving an extensive view over sea and sky, with ever-changing cloud formations and light patterns throughout the week. (The weather was much better than the early forecasts had promised, most of the rain falling in the early evening or overnight.)

Bay View was an extraordinary place. Frank Medhurst described it as “ionic, iconoclastic, ironic”; you could add “intriguing” and “incomprehensible”. From the outside it didn't look particularly old, but the rooms had embossed ceilings and coving, some with chandeliers, and art works galore, including life-size statues of a naked man and woman which had been modestly covered with black bin bags before we arrived. Some of the bedrooms had names: Peter and I were in the *Master Suite*, Janice in *Tasmania* and Sam Marshall and Ian Parker in *Ouban*. There was a hot tub and a jacuzzi and two enormous televisions, but the outer front door did not close properly and ivy was coming in through several of the bedroom windows. Most puzzling of all was the kitchen. It had an induction hob and two dishwashers, but only one kettle and one



teapot, big enough for about two mugs of tea. Worse still, there were no chopping boards, though plenty of knives, and no kitchen scales to help us measure out the right quantities for fourteen people; and when Josie was trying to prepare the evening meal on the first day the electricity kept going off. (In case anyone is tempted by this ironic property, it is currently on the market for £750,000.)

But enough of complaining – we weren't there to spend all day in the kitchen (except when it was our turn to do the dinner), we were there to explore the area and enjoy the company of friends. And this is where it gets difficult to report, because we didn't go out together on mass to take Cumbria by storm. There were some individual walkers who ventured out alone to commune with nature. There were one or two who stayed in the house to read or write, or sat at the table outside to draw the view. Helen and Grace both took advantage of the swimming pool in the nearby holiday park. Some took a trip to Windermere. A few visited the small art gallery in Silverdale on the Sunday, another group just used its coffee shop later in the week at the end of a walk along the coast.



Jenny Brown's Point

Looking back at the notes I made at the time, a few themes emerge, the first being “Methodism Unbound”. Five of us attended the service at Silverdale Methodist Church on the Sunday morning, where the preacher was one Rev. Dr J.J. Vincent, with a sermon based on his latest book. This was followed on Monday evening by a

meeting in the church hall where, in addition to window ledges full of jars of home-made jams and chutneys, a book was introduced and discussed and offered for sale. The discussion went on till late into the night, so that Josie and I, who had come on foot, had to grope our way back to Bay View, street lighting not being a major feature in Silverdale.

The second theme is railways. Silverdale is not far from Carnforth (of *Brief Encounters* fame), where there was a model railway exhibition on the Sunday, visited by a number of our group and reported on with enthusiasm on their return. The previous day some of us had walked to the village of Arnside and watched trains cross a viaduct that takes the track over the confusingly-named River Kent as it enters Morecambe Bay. When we heard that there was a second viaduct further up the line we set aside Tuesday for a trip to Ulverston, which rewarded us, in addition to the spectacular train journey, with a walk along what is claimed to be the country's shortest canal (1¼ miles long). The local *Lakeside & Haverthwaite* preserved railway was visited by others to top up their steam train levels for the year.

Theme three is walks up steep hills with something significant at the top (though never, alas, a tearoom or coffee shop such as would be the case in Germany and Austria). There was the trig point on Arnside Knott at 159 m above sea level. There was also an impressive ruined tower lower down the hill, one of the "pele towers" erected in the fifteenth century to keep out the Scots. Then there was the Pepperpot, at a mere 80m, on King William's Hill above Silverdale. Its official name was the Queen Victoria Jubilee Memorial, but who's going to be bothered with such a mouthful as that? Again, on the way down, we came by chance upon an ancient ruined cottage beside the woodland path. Lastly, there was the Lighthouse, at 133m, on Hoad Hill above Ulverston. Though modelled on the one at Eddystone, this is no more a lighthouse than the Pepperpot is a pepperpot; it's a memorial to Sir John Barrow of Ulverston, who was amongst other things second secretary to the Admiralty. His hill is very steep but, unlike the previous two, not wooded, so the views from the top were spectacular in all directions.

I guess theme four should be wildlife and nature. There is an RSPB nature reserve at Leighton Moss, just to the east of Silverdale, which was visited by several of the group at various times during the week. Jenny Medhurst spent some time scouring the cliff top for autumn lady's tresses, an orchid variety which is native to the area - but in vain. However, Jenny and the Marshall family were singled out for visits from the local ticks, a new

experience for all of us. The local pharmacy was able to provide advice, ointment and equipment, so the Ashram Community Trust is now in possession of a tick removal implement, in two sizes, which will be kept at the registered office address, but available for use free of charge by all Members and Associates.

Several of the group had vouchers entitling the bearer to free newspapers throughout the week, so Ian Parker, the earliest riser, took on the role of paper boy, delivering the news to us all in time for breakfast. Josie had organised a Sainsbury's delivery of basic foodstuffs on the first evening, so the amount of shopping required was much reduced, and most of us had done at least some preliminary work on the meal we had planned for our allotted day, which helped things to run a little more smoothly in the chopping-board-free kitchen. Unfortunately we were unable to enjoy the traditional bread & butter pudding on the last evening, because Chris Bullock had his arm in a sling.



Leighton Moss RSPB Reserve

We were very glad that two of the North West Ashram Branch were able to join us during the week. It was lovely for those of us from further afield to catch up with Ann Pater, who spent Wednesday with us, walking and talking and eating and sharing her knowledge of the area. On Thursday Sandra Dutson called in for dinner, fitting us in between a family holiday and a wedding. It gave Jenny a

chance to remind her of the imminent Act Together deadline!

Thanks, as ever, go to the organisers, to Josie for finding the accommodation in the first place and to David Dale for doing the booking and working out the finances and, in this instance, communicating with the local managers when the lights went out and subsequently trying to get working light bulbs into a variety of eccentric light fittings.

I can't tell whether this account will have encouraged you, the reader, to make a note in your diary to join next year's holiday, but I do need to make it clear that the opinions expressed above are those of the author alone, and in no way represent the views of the holidaymakers as a whole, or the official policy of the Ashram Community Trust.

Linda Marshall
lindam@inbox.com

A large selection of Peter Marshall's photographs from the holiday are at <http://mylondondiary.co.uk/2015/08/ashram2015-01.htm>

JOHN J. VINCENT

METHODISM UNBOUND

Summary

Methodism today faces a theological crisis. There are three aspects to this.

- The demises of theological work and debate
- The uncertainty of present theological education
- The dominance of one party, the Evangelical

The demise of theological work and debate is often commented upon by ministers today. 'Nobody ever discusses theology nowadays.' 'You can't get a decent theological discussion anywhere!' *The Time to Talk of God* report of 2006 says nobody talks of God – 'it's even worse now'. 'Nobody ever asks, but it's assumed we all go along with Evangelicalism.' 'Progressive Christianity has been written out.' 'There's very little faith in *Singing the Faith* to sing!' 'It's all just stuck-in-the-mud.' (Comments from Spectrum May 2014 Conference, the successor to the Fellowship of the Kingdom).

At the 2014 Conference of Spectrum, we asked: 'What future possibilities do you see for Methodism?' Some of the responses were:

- Being a movement that wants to grow and evolve to serve, worship and be Christ in Community for now.
- Having great courage in preaching the inclusivity of the Gospel, can we be as brave in acknowledging new insights into theology, e.g. the meaning of Crucifixion?
- A means of obeying Jesus' instructions to love God and love one another – without being hampered by so much 'organisation'. We seem to have lost our 'simplicity'.
- A discipleship movement – a ginger group for the poor and deprived.

The recent strap-line of Methodism as 'A Discipleship Movement Shaped for Mission' has obvious advantages.

So, I suggest lines for a Methodism for the Twenty-First Century, based equally on Christ and on Practice:

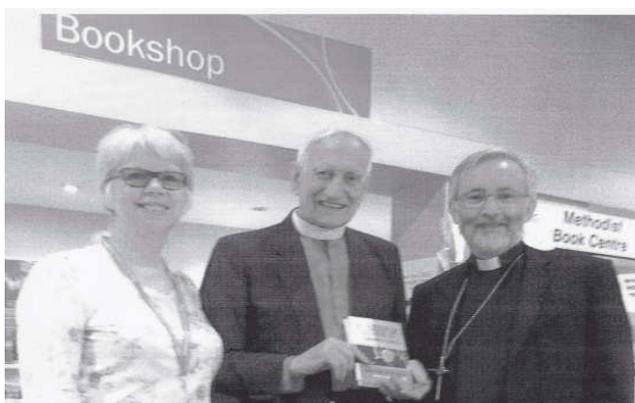
- School for Discipleship
- Intentional Community
- Street-Corner Project
- Movement

I argue that Christ as Centre, means work at Jesus the New Human, the Pioneer of a new ecological Humanity, the embodiment of a new Open and Deep Being, creating a dynamic central Christological focus for your devotion, lifestyle, disciplines, theology, and world view – your Christocentric, 'Practical Divinity'.

Practice as Centre, means work at a model of Seeing, Judging and Acting, based on the Jesus of Galilee, engaging in practice with disciplines and projects along the lines of the records of the Gospels, then building places to do them, and finally

creating a Theology of Experience based on it all – our 'Divinity in Practice', our 'Acted Parables', from which we then preach.

- As School for Disciples, move out of 'Worship Centres' and 'Sanctuaries' into Cafes, Reading Rooms, Libraries, Surgeries and 'Action Stations'. Change Sunday mornings, at least on alternative weeks, to Study, Discernment and Decision-making around Gospel Stories and Local Contexts. Develop Study Year models of action training and 'Rules' for Discipleship.
- As Intentional Community, work together on contemporary alternative ways of 'Being the Body of Christ'. Seek and visit non-Methodist Christian communities, congregations and organisations. Develop some experimental 'para church' models that some could move into, welcoming that all have to do the creative thing, not the same thing.
- As Street-Corner Project, get a map of your



Launch at Methodist Conference 2015

town or area and plot where and in what buildings and with which people you can set up a relevant experimental Mission/Church/Project. Get half a dozen people to be supported by the rest in starting to work with the 'target' group and area to initiate an appropriate Project. What and who will the 'Dual-Purpose' colleagues be?

- As a Movement, decide on what related to Setting up the Standard for the Kingdom of

God on Earth draws you. What is the real possibility for Kingdom Entrepreneurship, Journey Downwards, Being Alongside the Poor, Projecting Radical Alternatives? When you know where you want to go, launch a Public Meeting and get the Media there.

John J. Vincent, *Methodism Unbound: Christ and Methodism for the 21st Century*. (Price £9.99 incl. postage, from John).

From the Editor:

John was delighted to tell me that for the first time three Ashram Press titles-

- **Radical Jesus: the Way of Jesus then and now**
- **Community**
- **Christian Communities**

are now lodged at
the Bodleian Library, Oxford University,
Cambridge University Library
National Library of Scotland
National Library of Wales
Trinity College Dublin

Congratulations John!

Summer School 2015

Ashram Community Trust Study and Research Group has co-operated for a second year with the Urban Theology Unit to run a Summer School, 13-15 July 2015. A group of twenty people, including five ACT members, met at Burngreave Ashram and at UTU to hear a range of learned speakers (several of whom were drawing on their own recent publications), and to consider the implications for praxis. The theme was 'Discipleship' and it is hoped that some of the inputs will be pulled together from the combined years of study and practice to provide a resource for those sections of the Christian church for whom discipleship is a relatively new idea.

Helen Davies
hmdavies@ntlworld.com

Beth-el

Is this the place of worship
where I meet the Ancient of days,
the sustainer of all futures?
Or should I be content with trivial novelty
and shallow bonhomie?
Shouldn't I be looking for the ground of all being,
the depth beyond 20,000 fathoms,
mystery beyond reason; something human
and divine expressing the fullness of God
and the wholeness of humanity, met in Christ
but in which we already share
we who are manifestly human and marked
with God's image in every gene,
prey to every frailty and depraved motive
but, equally, capable of rising
to angelic magnificence?
Here, in the silence, my spirit calls
to that Spirit birthing and embracing stars
and is heard. The answer, no mere echo
from light years away, comes closer than
breathing, whispering, "Yes, I love you".
My leaping heart reassures a jaded mind
that all may be well, in time and beyond
and yes, this is the place of worship.

Neville Whitehead

"At Communion"

This breathtaking transaction,
uttermost self-giving
perfect goodness overwhelmed,
loving life quenched,
maker un-made....
The impossibility of restoring life
made possible;
The gift of life renewed
and offered to human kind
for the renewal of all creation
"I will not leave you bereft" he said,
and kept his promise.

Neville Whitehead
Sunday morning 29/12/14

Sheffield is reading . . .

The interfaith group that meets monthly at the Burngreave Ashram in Sheffield often has one person presenting a book that has inspired or been special to them.

This week the session differed in that everybody was invited to bring a book to talk about (much more briefly). We'd like to share the books more widely. I include publication details. Other editions do exist. The presenter's name and short comments are in italics

John Vincent (editor). **The farewell discourses in practice** Deo Publications, 2015. (available from the Urban Theology Unit.)
Contemporary readers' take on elements of John 13-15. Includes an essay on comparing the Buddha's farewell discourse to that of Jesus, by Nirmal Fernando. *John Vincent.*

John O'Donohue. **Anam Cara: spiritual wisdom from the Celtic world** Bantam Books, 1999.
Soul friend reflections on friendship, the senses, solitude, work, ageing and Death. Beautiful.
Grace Vincent.

E.V. Thompson. **The restless Sea** Pan, 1985 (out of print, but probably available second hand or from libraries.)
A novel set in Cornwall in 1810. Fascinating background of dissenting faiths, especially Methodism and attitudes to them. *Renate Fekete.*

Al-Ghazzali. **The alchemy of happiness** Cosimo 2010.

A small book by an 11th century Muslim philosopher, of value to all. How knowledge of the Self and of God, of this world and the next, are prerequisites of happiness. *Sara Clayton*

Philip Yancey. **Prayer, does it make any difference?** Hodder Faith Books, 2007.
An overview of historical and current meanings and possibilities in prayer. *Sam Humphrey.*

Dr Thynn Thynn. **Living meditation, living insight: A path of mindfulness in daily life** Toronto: Buddhist Association of Canada, 2012. (The full text of this is available and can be downloaded free at <http://www.buddhanet.net/imol/livingmd.htm>)
A useful guide to meditation. *Manju Ray.*

Sam Harris. **Waking up.** Black Swan 2015.
A guide for those seeking spirituality without religion.
John Alderton.

Stevenson. **The upper room.**
Teachings from the upper room. *Ralph Marshall.*

Yann Martell. **The life of Pi.** Canongate, 2012.
The book of the popular film. Shipwreck survivors, a boy, a hyena, an orang utan and a tiger The scene is set for one of the most extraordinary story. What is to be believed of the boy and the tiger?

Sarah Clayton
s.clayton42@btinternet.com

Sheffield Inner City Retreat

The next Ashram Inner City Retreat will be held in Sheffield from the eve of October 29th to the afternoon of November 1st. It will focus on the story of the feeding of the 5,000 with special emphasis on food, finding 'desert' places in the city and all the associated environmental concerns.

You are invited to join community members in community houses as we reflect on the life of Jesus, share food and insights around a table and walk together as Jesus did with his disciples and so discover what it means to live out his gospel. .

The costs will simply cover the costs of accommodation, food and materials used.

This works out at around £20 per day if an overnight stay is required.

If you wish to come for all or part of the retreat please email or phone Sandra Dutson:

smdutson@btinternet.com
Tel: 0161 707 3546.



Members and Associates

We invite anyone interested to request details about becoming a Member or Associate from the membership secretary, Sandra Dutson: smdutson@btinternet.com
Members and Associates are listed in the 7-day cycle Community Prayers

Projects and Commitments

Ashram Press – Radical Christianity, Gospel Study, Discipleship, Community Study and Research- projects on Community and related issues
Homeless and Asylum Seekers - Residence and Community for people in need
Multi-faith - mutual activities and projects open to all faiths

DATES

2015

29 Oct-1 Nov Inner City retreat

2016

27 Feb. General Meeting, Sheffield
7-10 April Inner City Retreat
13-15 May Community weekend, Middleton
2-5 June Inner City Retreat
9 July General meeting, Northwich
11-13 July Summer School, Urban theology Unit & Ashram
August Community Holiday
22-26 Sep Inner City retreat
7-9 October Community weekend Unstone Grange

COMMUNITY

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Ashram Press: As above
See Website www.ashram.org.uk for publications

Ashram Community Trust is a Registered Charity
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Charitable Company No: 477991
Website www.ashram.org.uk
administrator: kathclements@ymail.com)

Act Together editor: Jenny Medhurst
medhurst@phonecoop.coop

Articles for Spring 2016 edition needed by the end of April.

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

Burngreave Ashram Centre, Interfaith Chapel and Library
Burngreave Ashram: 80-86 Spital Hill Sheffield S4 7LG – Tel: 0114 270 0972

New Roots Shop, Basement Speakeasy and Residents' flat
347 Glossop Rd Sheffield S10 2HP
Tel: 0114 272 1971

Community Houses: 77 and 79 Rock St
Sheffield S3 9JB – Tel: 0114 272 7144

6 Andover Street Sheffield S3 9EG
Tel: 0791 092 2462 (Tamara)
27/29 Hallcar Street, Sheffield S4 7JY

BRANCHES

All Members and Associates are attached to one of five Regional Branches. Please contact Secretaries if you would like to know more about meeting or events. The Branch Secretaries are the local contact points for the Community.

SECRETARIES

Midlands – Chris & Lorraine Smedley
Tel: 0115 9288430 – Monthly Meetings

London – Linda Marshall – 01784 456 474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly

North-West – Josie Smith – 01706 841 532
Meetings as arranged.

Sheffield – Grace Vincent – 0114 243 6688
Gatherings fortnightly – Mons, 7 – 9:30pm

North-East – Jenny Medhurst
Tel: 01740 630475 – Meetings as arranged