

FULL CIRCLE  
THE OTHONA COMMUNITY  
NEWSLETTER



Autumn 2013

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*The Othona Community is an open Christian Community, whose purpose is to provide, mainly through its two centres in Essex and Dorset, a welcoming, accepting place with a pattern of work, worship, study and play where people of different beliefs, cultures, classes, abilities and ages can discover how to live together, learn from each other, explore together the relationship between faith and life with a view to more positive action in the world, and encourage one another in caring for the world and its people.*

**Deadline for Spring Full Circle**  
**1st March 2014**

# Editorial

**Paul and Ruth Gilman**

Dear friends

Interestingly on our recent holiday we visited a number of the places on the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela, which is described in Anthony Scott's article on p14.

During our trip we went to the monastery of Monserrat which is perched high on a mountain in North Eastern Spain (accessed by a steep rack railway). Paul conceived the desire to go there when on a business trip, after being astonished by the sight of Monserrat's extraordinary high spiky ridge like a row of black dragon's teeth sticking up way above the surrounding hills. It's loftiness and dramatic beauty have caused people over the ages to believe that it is very close to heaven, so a monastery was built there; a place near to God. Our founder members had similar feelings when they discovered the site at Bradwell with its big skies, sea and chapel; they felt a sense of spirituality there, and many of us still do today.

Our interest in going to Monserrat was compounded when we read in Full Circle that Othona had been listed amongst the eight communities in Europe that were most worth visiting, along with the community of Monserrat.

A highlight of our visit to Monserrat was attending a service in the stunning chapel of the monastery. The chapel was packed with, perhaps, a thousand people, including a lot of children, all singing and celebrating. There was lively modern music and the choirboys did some of the readings - a bit like an Othona chapel service. In this atmosphere sharing "The Peace" was infectious, and we could not resist partaking in the Communion, although it was Roman Catholic and we are C of E. Afterwards a monk read out a Bible reading in several languages. It said, "Love one another as I have first loved you". We felt justified in joining in the communion because we felt that God's love would like us to have no divisions.

This is a principle that has always been a part of Othona's mission statement. The Bible reading used by Colin Hodgetts at the A.G.M. (see

below) reminded us again of this principle ... “live together in harmony and love as though you had only one mind and one spirit”.

Marie Lydamore’s article (p 21) challenges us to try to bring something of this spirit to our local churches and local communities. Colin’s article goes even further and asks how we can do something to bring the spirit of Jesus to an ever increasingly broken and divided world. He calls upon us to spend the next year “listening” without judgement and considering what we “little people” at Othona can do. Positive action in the world and caring for our world and its people are part of our mission statement (page 2). We suggest that the issues which Colin has raised would make a very good theme for a week/event of exploration at one or ideally both of our centres. Our mission statement says that Othona is a place where we can encourage each other by working together. Are we ready to take up the challenge?

Many thanks are due once again to our loyal contributors for a number of interesting, thought provoking and controversial articles in this edition.

Our love to you all

Ruth and Paul

## **From The Chair of Trustees**

**Colin Hodgetts**

*Editor’s note: The article that follows is a summary of Colin’s talk during our worship at the A.G.M.*

"Now if your experience of Christ's encouragement and love means anything to you, if you have known something of the fellowship of his Spirit, and all that it means in kindness and deep sympathy, do make my best hopes for you come true! Live together in harmony, live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you. Never act from motives of rivalry or personal vanity, but in humility think more of each other than you do of yourselves. None of you should think only of his own affairs, but should learn to see things from other people's point of view... “

"Do all you have to do without grumbling or arguing, so that you may be God's children, blameless, sincere and wholesome, living in a warped and diseased world, shining there like lights in a dark place. For you hold in your hands the very word of life." (Letter of Paul to the Christians at Philippi, from Chapter 2, JB Phillips' translation.)

When I was Warden of Bradwell in the Seventies I never expected to be addressing an AGM of the Othona Community as your Chair. For me this is an honour and a privilege, though it probably also involves a bit of hard work.

In those days Norman made it clear that the Community was not an alternative church, or an alternative to church. It was to help church members refresh themselves, get new ideas perhaps, and return to their churches with a renewed vision.

In those days there was still a reasonable amount of churchgoing, a very different situation from that in which we now find ourselves. Though there are many still willing to label themselves Christian, or at least admit to a spiritual life, they do not have a strong commitment to a local congregation. This contemporary situation is a challenge for us.

This divorce from the churches is not because of our self-confidence, knowing who we are, where we are and where we are going (nor even where we have come from) but the reverse: many of us, like the society in which we live, have lost our bearings.

Because we live in a secular society where gambling and the consumption of pornography are everyday realities we easily become defensive about commitment to a faith. That defensiveness can easily lead to closed-shop religion, to exclusive companies of the elect, some of whom may express their frustrations through acts of violence.

Our secular society faces problems of a high order. Climate change can no longer be denied. There is, however, no consensus as to how we should respond to it. Can there be an alternative to a reduction in consumption?

Recent attempts by our government to play world policeman and attempt to impose order in Iraq and Afghanistan have spectacularly backfired, and the last state promises to be worse than the first. Modern warfare has moved a long way from what Christianity has traditionally defined as "just".

When the victims of oppression knock at our gates asking for asylum compassion flies out of the window and the gates open a mere fraction. We fear a dilution of our economic wellbeing.

That wellbeing is based on an unsustainable economic model: it is not possible to have continuous economic growth. A few people get progressively richer: bankers and footballers. But the gap between rich and poor is wider than it ever was in the 20th century.

What can the Othona Community do in the face of such profound questions and issues? Burying our heads in the mud is not an option. Nor can we toss off a few easy agony aunt type answers.

First of all we need a deep analysis and understanding. And so I would ask the Community to spend the next year 'listening', and not just listening to pundits favoured by the media, nor of the keeping an ear open for the milkman type, but a deep listening that leads to understanding, a listening without judging.

I am not expecting this to lead to a grand political stand. We need global thought that leads to local action.

Let us see what a difference little people can make when they take the teaching of Jesus seriously.

## **The Othona Community Annual General Meeting 28th September 2013 at St Andrews Church, Waterloo.**

**Ali Tebbs**

About 35 members and friends of the Community were present with another 16 apologies from members.

Colin Hodgetts, chair of trustees, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Alison Garnham, our newest Trustee, who is one of the three Trustees who sit on the Bradwell Centre Committee. Tony Jaques led the opening prayer.

The business of the meeting began with the signing of the minutes for last year, proposed by Dave Bull and seconded by Kate Portal.

The Annual Report and Accounts have been approved by the Trustees and were received by the meeting, approval proposed by Tony Sinden, and seconded by Jan Marshall.

Roger Neville introduced himself as Treasurer of the Community – a Trustee role, and Martin Morris who is now the Finance Officer, dealing with the day to day accounting. Questions and comments included ‘why are the accounts presented in such a complex form?’ Roger responded that this is due to government requirements and we have no choice in the matter. The community made a surplus overall and the investment instructions have been altered to protect the capital sum in real terms while still providing income to be divided between the two centres. The centres are responsible, through their committees, for their own financial strategies in order to achieve a break even position.

Jan Marshall gave a vote of thanks to the three Trustees who have retired since the last AGM – Bob Whorton, Louise Heatley and Rupert Bragg. All of them contributed greatly to the “2012 and Beyond” process and deserve the thanks of the Community. Colin gave a vote of thanks to all the Trustees for their energy in tackling the issues arising over the year.

Colin reported on the progress of the change to a Company Limited by Guarantee. We have now approved objects in line with the Charity Commission requirements and the process can move forward – hopefully quite fast. *(In fact since the meeting the Charity Commission has approved charitable status for the new company which will become operational at the start of the new financial year.)* The benefits of the new arrangements are protection of the Trustees from financial liability and the ability of the new company to legally enter into contracts for goods and services in its own right. It makes no difference to our overall way of working.

## **Election of officers.**

Ruth Bull was re-elected a Community Secretary. This was proposed by Pat Price Tomes, seconded by Janet Marshall and carried. This post will remain until the new company becomes operational. It was proposed that Tiffin and Green remain as Auditors, proposed by Roger Neville, seconded by Martin Morris and carried.

## **Centre Reports**

Tony Jaques from Othona West Dorset and Matthew Dell from Bradwell treated us to photo presentations of the year at the centres. It was lovely to see pictures of the centres over the last year.

Ali Tebbs presented the progress on the new Community Database, clarifying why, what and how we have moved forward on the project. We have covered three objectives – the collection of accurate data, changes to membership arrangements and the renewal of Gift Aid forms in line with Government policy. Ali thanked everyone for their patience and co-operation and Fran thanked Ali and the Communications team for their hard work. Communications will be a major topic for the Trustee residential weekend in January and it is expected that we will be revisiting arrangements which may not be as good as they could be. In the meantime data collection and input is on-going.

## **Reflections from the Chair of Trustees**

Colin shared his wish that the community enter into a listening period over the next year, reflecting on the changes going on in the world and how the Community should respond to them (see his article on p 4). The Community needs to face outwards as well as inwards and there are many possibilities made available due to the development of the Internet.

This was followed by a short worship session which concluded the meeting leading in to bring and share refreshments and conversation.

Next year's AGM will be held on September 27th 2014 at the same venue so put it in your diary now.

## **Calling All Friends and Members**

### **The Communications Team**

Unless you've been on the International Space Station for the past year – or possibly not reading every word of your Full Circle? – you'll know we are in the middle of a major change. How people stay in contact with Othona, how we keep our records, the cost of being a subscribing Member, how you can Gift Aid donations and subscriptions... it's all been



changing. (By the way, in an earlier article mentioning former membership secretaries the name of Rosina Godfrey was left out by mistake. Rosina with her daughter Heather pioneered our first digital membership records and they deserve our thanks too.)

## **Large numbers**

With so much change to handle, we tried to contact more than 2,000 people by email and another 800 by letter. We did our best to keep the details clear and the forms to fill in, simple. And the good news is that so many of you have read and responded. Thank you. And thanks to the many who commented on how user-friendly they found the whole process. There were a few who found it confusing or frustrating, and we've been contacting them to try and sort out any difficulties.

Just to give you some raw data, at the time of writing (1st November) we have had:

- 600 responses by online data form
- 109 responses by letter (another 70 envelopes came back to us because the addressee had died or gone away)
- 90 contacted us to say they wanted no further contact initiated by Othona (some intend to keep checking our websites)

Many email addresses, as we expected, were out of date, so during the process hundreds registered as Failed or Delayed Delivery

## **Good News**

There's a lot to encourage us in these responses:

- 282 subscribed as individual Members (whether new members or old ones renewing, and we have many new members including some Othona children who are now old enough to sign on for themselves.)
- 412 signed on as Friends
- 235 have made new gift aid declarations in Othona's favour (some but not all of these had done so before)

## **Not So Good**

Simple maths will tell you there are still a lot of Othona contacts – including a number of previous Members – who we've not got through to or who have not yet got round to replying. We know some people have found our emails in their Spam or Junk folders! We also know how easy it

is for busy individuals to overlook letters or emails. If this is you, we'd still love to hear from you.

We wouldn't want anyone to drop off our mailing lists by accident or without realising. So we will be doing our best to re-contact and remind everyone we can. It would really help if you could make the first move yourself. Put this web address into your browser to take you straight to the online form: <http://fs16.formsite.com/Othona/form1/index.html>. Alternatively email [membership@othona.org](mailto:membership@othona.org).

If you don't use a computer please write to Othona Communications Team, Othona West Dorset, Coast Road, Bridport, Dorset DT6 4RN and we'll resend the information on paper. Of course you can still pay your membership subscription at either centre when you visit, or send a cheque (£12 minimum for the year beginning 1st October 2013) to Martin Morris at the address on the back cover.

## **Work in Progress**

As a result of all this, our new database is rapidly coming into its own. It will be an immense help for the community. Of course we recognise there are issues which in due course it will be worth taking a second look at. Some people have queried the move from family/household membership to individual membership only. We've also been asked if and when you'll be able to log onto the new database and update your own personal details. These are the sort of things the trustees intend to review once the database is fully up and running.

As you can imagine, the numbers involved mean it is taking time to process all the responses. Please forgive us if you don't receive stuff in the way you have asked for it – it may not have made it into the system yet. Make sure you let us know as soon as your details change. In future we expect to ask people when they are staying at either of the centres to update their information if need be.

A training session is scheduled for early December so we can make sure key people know how to make use of the clever things the new system will do. Then we can really start to use it to everyone's advantage.

# **Great News from Bradwell**

## **Gail and Matthew Dell**

WE ARE LISTENING to what members say and you say you don't want prices to go up.....

.....so we have taken a bold decision to freeze the rates for Community Members for the forthcoming year.

We don't want to put the rates up even though food and fuel costs are rising – certain fixed costs are incurred regardless of how many visitors are here. To spread the impact of these costs we need to increase the number of people staying. We hope that keener prices will result in more visitors.

Its simple economics – support this decision – show that you want to keep Othona thriving – commit to coming at least once in 2014.

IF LOTS OF VISITORS COME, WE CAN KEEP THE PRICES DOWN

## **Special offers to keep your costs down**

Family Rates Available This Summer

We are offering special family rates for two of our summer weeks: Art week, 16-23 August and All the fun of the fair, 23-30 August. A discount of 15% is available for families booking for either of these weeks. The booking should be for the whole week and is for up to two adults (this could be parents or grandparents) and their own dependant children only.

10% Discount for Early & Fully Paid Bookings

To encourage early bookings by members we are pleased to offer to members the opportunity to receive a 10% reduction in the price of their summer stay. This offer is for full week stays between 20<sup>th</sup> July and 4<sup>th</sup> September. To obtain this discount we must receive your booking and full payment before the end of April. This offer cannot be used in conjunction with the discount available for the two special offer family weeks.

# **Burton Bradstock Report - One Woman Two Centres**

**Corrina Taylor**

So I joined the Burton Bradstock team in mid March, having come from my second stint as core member with the ace Bradwell team, and well (yes Gail you were right!) it does suit me here. I initially came as short term core but soon took on the role of maintenance supervisor (what can I say? I enjoy fixing things!)

It's interesting the difference between being a general all round member of the team who does a bit of everything, bit of a dogsbody really, and actually having an area that I'm responsible for, the first time for me in the 3 years I've been working in communities. I feel more rooted somehow, more committed.

Sure living in any community you have to be able to turn your hand to most things, it comes with the territory, but there is something of a difference in having an area that you are solely responsible for. The sense that unless you do your job properly things are, quite literally in my case now, going to fall apart. It's made me step up and play my part more rather than constantly deferring to colleagues or the warden.

Being one of very few people in recent years to have worked on the core team in both centres, I often get asked 'so what's the difference between the two' and I really struggle to give an adequate answer. There are differences of course, obvious and less so, but dare I put them into words? At the risk of offending long term Othonarites and possibly even the wardens, both of whom I hugely love and respect by the way!, I'll give it a go.

There are so many things that define and shape the distinct characters of the Burton Bradstock and Bradwell centres, that I won't go into them all but share just a few of my general observations. It is also worth bearing in mind that the mood and energy of both centres changes quite dramatically depending on the time of year, the team and visitors.

Our history shapes us, moulds us and defines us and so it is with Othona. You can't visit either centre without being aware of their amazing story;

from the dining tables at Bradwell laminated with photos of guests who have visited throughout the years, some right from when it started in 1946, to the plaques in the Chapel at Burton Bradstock commemorating The White Ladies.

The White Ladies continue to have a big influence on Othona Burton Bradstock. There is something of their contemplative nature that resonates around this place and that definitely affects the type of people who are attracted here, the type of work that goes on and the programme that is offered. Inward adventures, personal growth and connectedness come naturally.

The comfort and intimacy of space that you find at BB can be conducive to this deeper thought and self growth. Something of the bounded and ordered nature that can feel safer when connecting with often difficult inner stuff. I feel the continuity in leadership has definitely added positively to this.

Bradwell continues to maintain Norman Motley's very active and pioneering spirit. There is something in having more all year round younger influence that keeps the place alive, keeps it moving on and searching for the new. The energy of spontaneity, chaos and get up and go is quite infectious!

For these things you need space, which Bradwell has in spades, you need to be able to forge ahead without dampening the momentum by over discussion or over thinking. Being relaxed and not too precious allows experimentation and risk without fear of mistakes. This energy enables big projects such as the solar building to go ahead.

Although there can be quite a different feel to both centres, there are many similarities too. Several of the events offered are the same or similar for instance, i.e. enneagram, circle dance, and astronomy events, but it is more than that. Both are centres run for the wider Othona community, not just those who live and work here, and many members visit both regularly. Centres run by people who are always welcoming visitors into their home, centres that feel like a second home to many. Even those visiting for the first time often comment on this. Both still hold onto and express that amazing healing ethos of Peace and Reconciliation that Norman Motley started out with.

Is it perhaps that the differences there are between the two could be seen as strengths? That perhaps because of the diversity we appeal to a wider scope of visitors? Maybe each centre can learn from the other in the things they are getting right.

For me personally Bradwell will always hold a very special place in my heart. It was the start of a significant journey for me, both inner and outer, and they have welcomed me with open arms on more than one occasion. Now I'm at Burton Bradstock I do feel more at home than in any of the other communities I've lived and worked in. There is something about the way they are doing things here that works for me personally. It's not everyone's cup of tea I know, but I like it. How long I'll stay for we'll have to see. Watch this space!

## **In Search of Community**

**Anthony and Susan Scott**

I am writing this after we have been living at Othona (Bradwell-on-Sea) for just over two months; the time I have to say has flown by. Although when sitting on the Stoep in the Autumn sunshine talking to fellow core members or guests there is a sense that we have been here much longer and that we are in 'Othona time', a well known phenomenon experienced by all those who journey to find and enjoy the peace and timelessness of the community at Othona, many returning again and again over a period of many years.

Looking back and reflecting now over the last two years these have been the unique qualities myself and Sue have been seeking on a journey that began overseas after retiring from long careers in teaching and social work. Leading up to our decision to leave our careers, we had felt led to move to Brittany in France to set up a Christian retreat in our own home. The basis of which would have been to have both long and short term guests living with us and sharing our lives with links to both UK and France as well as guests from across Europe.

After spending a year refurbishing and another year advertising and making final preparations for this venture, it became apparent for a number of reasons, notably the economic downturn that it was going to

be difficult to attract and sustain the bookings required for the venture to be viable. So early in 2013 we reluctantly put the house on the market with a view to returning to the UK and seeking membership of an already established Christian Community which had a style and ethos similar to that we had sought to establish on a small scale in France.

As part of this decision to leave France, we decided to undertake a time of reflection and prayerful seeking as to the direction to take. This led us to the idea of undertaking a 'pilgrimage', which has traditionally always been something done when seeking direction and clarity during times of decision making in life. It became clear at this point that as we were based in France that it would make sense to pursue the pilgrimage to Santiago or 'The Camino Francais' so with little planning, but believing that we were both fit and healthy, we set off in faith. We began in northern France, on the train to Tours, one of the traditional starting points of the medieval pilgrimage.

As we started to walk it became apparent that this starting point was not well marked, so we made the decision to travel by train to the main modern starting point, of St Jean Pied du Port, a beautiful small town, set in the French Pyrenees. From here, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May after a delayed start due to bad weather we began our journey. We wanted to use a variety of accommodation which eventually meant we camped, using traditional Albergues, as well as staying in convents and monasteries. The journey began in France on the mountains in sunshine but surprisingly turned to snow as we descended into Spain. This continued for three days. During our three month journey we covered nine hundred kilometres on the outward journey to Santiago, proudly receiving our 'Compostela' certificates and then onward to Finistere and Muxia, two traditional endings of 'The Way of St Jacques' for medieval pilgrims.

From the outset we knew that the 'Camino' would be far more than just a long walk. It was a journey which had some low points (like two weeks of rain!!) but very few by comparison to the exceptional high points (like reaching the sea at Finistere after six weeks of Spanish heat and seeing sunsets on mountain tops, early morning mists obscuring steep valleys, eucalyptus and chestnut forests along with being part of a huge moving community of pilgrims, with whom we shared hopes, dreams and laughter. We found so much more than we expected which confirmed to us that people are at their best when living together in community.

Our journey ended, we travelled back to our home in France by foot and train, having finally covered a distance on foot of over 1000km. One final high point on the return journey was staying for one night in the Basilica of St Martin of Tours, where our pilgrimage had begun three months earlier. On arriving home we closed up the house and returned to the UK in search of a community in which to live and work. After a short stay at the Darvell Bruderhof Community, we were directed to the Bradwell Othona Community, a place where we have been warmly welcomed as part of the core team since September. Othona has offered us and many others a 'place to simply be' and allows us to share in the daily rhythm of work, learning, worship and play.

## **A Response to a Response to “Mum, Me and Theology”**

**David Forgan**

When I read the quotation in Tony Sinden's article "... there is not a single word in that sermon (on the mount) about what to BELIEVE, only words about what to DO. It is a behavioural manifesto, not a propositional one, yet three centuries later when the Nicene Creed became the official oath of Christendom there was not a single word about what to do, only words about what to believe" my first reaction was "of course it's about what to believe!" After all the word creed is derived from the Latin word Credo meaning 'to believe, trust, commit, trust in, rely on, think' and one definition of a creed is 'a formal statement of religious belief; a confession of faith.' So I would not expect a creed to contain words about what to do.

Although that's not to say that action is not important; however, I believe it's not a case of belief/faith or behaviour but of both – our behaviour should reflect our faith. As Jesus said, quoting the OT Law, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." <sup>1</sup> So love for God comes first and then love for one's neighbour. As St James wrote "... faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith. ... for just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead." <sup>2</sup>



There seemed to be an implication in the quotation that the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ was the sum total of Jesus teaching. However, it only makes up about 10% of Matthew’s gospel and if he had believed it contained all of Jesus teaching his gospel could have been a great deal shorter than it is! The ‘Sermon on the Mount’ occurs near the beginning of the gospel, before Jesus had chosen all of his 12 disciples, and when most, if not all, of his hearers would have been Jews who probably attended the synagogue regularly, as did Jesus himself<sup>3</sup>, and would have had a deep faith; so there was no need to preach to them about belief.

In today’s culture there is a trend towards a ‘pick and mix’ approach to reading the Bible, selecting those passages that we find acceptable and ignoring others that challenge our own pre-conceived ideas. We’re probably all guilty of it to some extent, myself included. But there is a danger in being too selective in ending up with a God who is made in our image, of what we believe he should be, rather than the biblical view that it is mankind who is made in God’s image! I think it’s necessary to take a broad view of the whole of the New Testament to arrive at a balanced view of what it means to be a Christian and not just consider one gospel. Some of Paul’s letters, most of which were written before Matthew’s gospel, contain rudimentary creeds, which appear to have been in circulation within a few years of Jesus’ death; e.g.:

“For I [Paul] handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received:  
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,  
and that he was buried,  
and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,  
and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve.”<sup>4</sup>

Othona has never required acceptance of a particular creed or statement of belief, nor would I want it to, but Othona has always been a place to explore one’s faith. Worship is the first of the four strands of Othona Community life: worship, work, study and play; doesn’t worship imply faith and belief? In conclusion, I would endorse what Mary Boone wrote, “The Christian message that was conveyed by Norman in the early years is still central to both centres. Long may it be the main focus to strengthen so many lives and give them a purpose from God.”

<sup>1</sup> *Matthew 22:36-40 – see: Deuteronomy 6:5 & Leviticus 19:18.*

<sup>2</sup> *James 2:17,18,26*

<sup>3</sup> Luke 4:16: “When he [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read ...”

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 – “Even radical scholars like Gerd Lüdemann think that ‘the elements in the tradition are to be dated to the first two years after the crucifixion ... no later than three years after the death of Jesus.’ *Tracing Jesus’ Resurrection to Its Earliest Eyewitness Accounts*, Gary R Habermas in *God is Great, God is Good*, W L Craig & C Meister (Eds), IVP, 2009.

## **A Bolivian Journey**

**Chris Stotesbury**

If you had asked me two years ago about my aspirations, the idea of travelling to Bolivia and Peru would not have crossed my mind. It is true that travel was on my agenda – Margaret and I share an affinity for Africa; during the 70’s (long before we met) we worked for a period in Ethiopia and South Africa respectively, and during recent years we have had pleasure in renewing our acquaintance with that continent.

The seed for this different course stemmed from my (low-key) support for a small charity, Quaker Bolivia Link (QBL). I first heard of QBL when I was Treasurer of our Quaker Meeting, and we decided to give our surplus to QBL. It appealed because it is a small charity (turnover ~£30k), providing direct funding for rural development projects within small communities – furthermore it spent nothing on marketing! When I read in QBL’s first (annual) newsletter that someone was organising annual “Quaker Study Visits”, the die was cast, and in July 2013 we joined a set of 7 Quakers from UK, USA and Canada on a trip led by the redoubtable Barbara Flynn that included visits to QBL projects and teaching some students English, as well as tourism.

Bolivia is a multi-ethnic country of some 10 million people, of whom 60% identify themselves as indigenous. The two largest groups, the Aymara and the Quecha, make up about 45% of the population. One of the interests is that Bolivia has its first indigenous president, Evo Morales,

who is Aymara (who are descended from the Tiwanaku people, who preceded the Incas). Unlike previous (Spanish) presidents, he is trying to develop the country for the benefit of the people rather than the benefit of his own pocket. He visited Sorata when we were there. He arrived on foot, and was only 3 metres from me when I took this picture.



You may be wondering why there are Quakers in Bolivia – in fact there are 30,000, rather more than in the UK. Well, for better or worse, some Quakers from the USA evangelised the Aymaras in 1925. Their style of worship, like those at programmed Meetings in the USA, involves pastors, hymns and sermons; this is very different from the quiet worship generally followed

by Quakers in the UK. At the same time the acceptance of Quakerism is not so surprising. The Ayamara have a long tradition of cooperation and democracy that chime with Quaker Values. Feliza in the picture is the chairperson of her community (Pallcapampa) for this year. At the end of our visit she went into a field and cut fresh food for us. I find it amazing that a woman from a tiny village of very modest means should bear such gifts for us wealthy westerners. What an honour!

In all we visited 3 QBL projects, the water/irrigation project at Pallacampa, a project that funded greenhouses in another remote village, and a weaving project in El Alto near La Paz (who entertained us with the best lunch of the entire trip).



We also had contact with another organisation, Bolivia Quaker Education Fund (BQEF), which sponsors students to go to university. We spent an enjoyable if exhausting weekend trying to provide an intensive English course to a group of BQEF students.



Magaly, the quiet and unassuming young woman on the very left of the photo, is a BQEF graduate. She was drawn to running Alternatives to Violence courses in Bolivia's (Dickensian) prisons. One of our party, who has a particular interest in prisons, somehow ended up visiting a high security

prison with her, and spending 2 hours alone with a group of murderers! Magaly has been asked by Evo Morales to be on a committee working on prison reform in Bolivia.

A list of highlights of the tourist aspects of the trip would be long: the garden in the hotel in Sorata, the hat shop in La Paz, the temple at Tiwanaku, the bleak majesty of the Altiplano, the tranquility of Lake Titicaca, the amazing Inca terraces and stonework, the wonder of Machu Picchu, ping-pong at 12,500 ft, the extraordinary variety of potatoes, the glimpses of the higher world via our 3rd eye.... The down sides were few, really only the continuous pan-pipe renditions of Simon & Garfunkel and Beatles songs in Peru! If you have time, you can follow the story

pictorially at <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/cstotesbury>; look for the 11 albums with names starting with Bolivia or Peru.



Links: <http://qbl.org/>  
<http://www.bqef.org/>

## **Othona Memories**

**(Marie Paterson - nee Lydamore)**

It was nice to hear Othona on BBC radio 4's Sunday Worship on the 18th August. And that, coupled with Mary Boone's (née Robson) article in the latest Full Circle, brought back happy memories, making me feel quite nostalgic. I have fond memories of her parents too; John was the Warden and Norrie the cook when I first stayed there. My memories may not go back as far as Mary's but the Othona I first experienced from 1963 onwards was very much as she describes. Maybe it was the simplicity coupled with the freedom of living mostly in the outdoors, under those wide Essex skies, plus the unsentimental way all present were made to feel cared for and welcome, that made those days seem so special. Then the collection of huts and tents were in the field closer to the sea wall than the new centre is now, and was more exposed. I also seemed incredibly lucky every time I stayed, as the weather was usually hot and sunny – not everyone's experience I have been told! It is some years since I have stayed in the Community (the last time in the newer buildings), and was

interested to hear about the custom of singing out those who are about to leave for home, not a tradition that was practised in the ten years or so when I regularly visited the Community. However the one I do remember was the lovely practice of reading out the names of everyone who happened to be staying at the time, during the Thursday evening service in Chapel.

It was good to hear that Othona still exudes that feeling of peace that I remember so well. The new facilities certainly make the centre more comfortable for a community catering for all ages, than the more austere conditions, which I rather enjoyed as an eighteen year all those years ago. Excepting perhaps those nocturnal trips across the 'rabbits bridge' to the loo before bedtime! But I am always slightly worried that increasing levels of comfort can sometimes militate against that close feeling of community that seem to burgeon when facilities are more basic. But perhaps I am being too nostalgic, and longing for those magical evenings when we sat in the Common Room hut in the fading light, with the hiss of the Tilley lamps above our heads. However, the most important thing that all of us must have taken away from our immersion in the atmosphere of Othona is that we at least have experienced community life at its most sublime, and that is something that we can all attempt to bring to our own local and church communities.

## **Creative Tension?**

**Michael Young**

A string needs tension if to sing  
There's tension - between root and wing:  
My roots are in the unseen ground,  
My thoughts take wing, by earth unbound.  
How can I be one person so,  
If I my Centre do not know?

## Praise For Full Circle

### **Editors' note:**

*We have received an exceptional amount of praise for the last edition of Full Circle.*

*This I am sure was partly due to its professional and glossy appearance, including colour photographs, which was provided by our new publisher, and arranged by Gail and Matthew at Bradwell. Thank you.*

*One of the letters of praise is published below.*

*The praise was mainly for the high quality of the articles provided by you, our contributors. To produce a high quality newsletter we rely on your contributions. Almost all of what we publish is written by you. Without you we would not have a newsletter.  
So keep the contributions coming!*

## A Letter and a Hymn

Tony Sinden

Dear Ruth and Paul,

Lovely to hear from you Paul, about archaeology; from Inken of the next generation; and for me especially Fiona's book recommendation. But Tony Jaques' article was the tops. This amazing hymn (quite old now) is another expression of "rethinking our sacred cows" - Othona's essential function.

The LORD be with you

Tony

**Editors' note:** *The hymn Tony sent is "SING, ONE AND ALL, A SONG OF CELEBRATION" and was written by Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000). It is number 581 in REJOICE AND SING OUP/URC 1991.*

*Because of copyright Stainer and Bell Ltd., the publishers of the hymn, would normally only allow one or two lines of it to be quoted in a*

*publication, but because they believe that we are using it for a good purpose they have given us permission to quote about half the hymn, so here are some notable lines, which echo a part of what Tony said in his article.*

Sing, one and all, a song of celebration,  
of love's renewal and of hope restored  
as custom yields to ferment of creation  
and we, his Church, obey our living Lord

... ask no longer what is worth defending,  
but how to make effective God's good news

We need not now take refuge in tradition ...  
But use it as a springboard of decision

Creative spirit, let your word be spoken!

## **On Hearing**

**Colin Hodgetts**

“The goal of fasting is inner unity. This means hearing, but not with the ear; hearing, but not with the understanding; hearing with the spirit, with your whole being. The hearing that is only in the ears is one thing. The hearing of the understanding is another. But the hearing of the spirit is not limited to any one faculty, to the ear, or to the mind. Hence it demands the emptiness of all faculties. And when the faculties are empty, then the whole being listens.”

(Chuang Tzu, trans. Thomas Merton)

This 'fasting' will be more than abstention from food. It is abstention from all those things with which we divert ourselves: books, newspapers, radio, TV, mobile phones, computers, games etc.



# Mum, Me and Christianity - Part 3

David Birdseye

DAVE Cough! Hack! Wheeze!

MUM Oh Dave, I do wish you'd cut down on that smoking. You'll never get rid of that chest infection at this rate.

DAVE Splutter! I have cut down, and it's not easy.

MUM But you never used to smoke .... I mean, when did you start?

DAVE I dunno ... a long time ago. Probably the 80s.

MUM I know your Dad used to smoke, and so did his Dad. And your Nan. How long have people been doing it I wonder. Do they know?

DAVE Well, since the dawn of time, apparently. It's even mentioned in the Bible.

MUM No! Surely not?

DAVE Hang on. Here you are - read that. No, there - Genesis 24, verse 64.

MUM "And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel".

DAVE So - there you are. They shared a fag.

MUM Well I don't get it. What's this got to do with smoking?

DAVE (Groan) Never mind Mum. It's too complicated.

MUM I'm surprised you're still reading that book after all this time. Don't you get bored with it?

DAVE Mum, it's not a novel; I just refer to it at times.

MUM Well, I never could make head nor tail of it. I mean, take that story of the prodigal's son for instance ...

DAVE Yeah - it's in Luke. What about it?

MUM Well, naturally, I always assumed it was about the son of the prodigal.

DAVE Oh. And what did you assume a prodigal was?

MUM Well, back in Bible times ... like a shepherd, only with pigs.

DAVE So then, someone who's a swineherd?

MUM I suppose so, yes. Someone who prods pigs for a living.

DAVE So who do you suppose was the prodigal son?

MUM Well ... he would have been the assistant pig-prodder who followed in his father's footsteps, learning the trade, so to speak.

DAVE But why on Earth would people spend their time prodding pigs?

MUM Well, presumably they were following the example of Jesus.

DAVE What the hell are you babbling about?

MUM Well, YOU read the Bible. You know that story, surely? The one where the pigs come over all peculiar, for some reason?

DAVE Yes, I know the one you're referring to. In Mark, I believe.

MUM Well, anyway - Jesus supposedly saves the day by prodding the pigs over a cliff and into the sea. No, he wasn't so meek and mild that Jesus. Nor gentle, neither.

DAVE Oh, for God's sake - this is beyond belief.

MUM I mean to say ... I know the Jews have got something against pork. Always have. Nonetheless ... can pigs swim?

DAVE Mum, I really don't know. But maybe you missed the point of the story.

MUM Well, as I say, it was all a bit confusing for me. But I also remember that story about the fig tree.

DAVE Go on then - remind me.

MUM Alright. So, apparently, Jesus was feeling peckish. But they've polished off all the loaves and fishes already. So he goes up to this fig tree. But it's the wrong season. So there's no fruit. So Jesus kills it, just like that. Dead.

DAVE And so what's the message there, then?

MUM Well, it's that Jesus had a right old temper on him. You weren't safe with him around, not if you were a pig. Or a fig. Or a money-changer for that matter ....

DAVE Mum - have you ever considered re-reading the New Testament, perhaps with a commentary?

MUM Not likely! Anyway, I couldn't concentrate on reading with somebody chattering away in the background.

DAVE No, Mum - a commentary is a book of Biblical explanation.

MUM Well, I can't read two books at once.

DAVE So you don't fancy reading the Gospels again?

MUM No thank you! All that Lo! ing. And Behold! ing. Let alone all that Begetting. I mean to say ...

DAVE Well Mum, it's never too late to return to the faith.

MUM At MY age it probably is. But anyway, let's face it ... was Jesus a Christian?

DAVE Um ... Er ... Well, no ... But then Buddha probably wasn't a Buddhist.

MUM Well, was HE a Christian?

DAVE Mum, Christ wasn't around at the time of Buddha.

MUM Well, he's not around now, neither. Not that I'VE noticed. But if Christianity wasn't good enough for that pair, Then why should I go along with it.?

DAVE (Groan!)

MUM And another thing ...  
DAVE Oh God ...what now?  
MUM Well - something that's always confused me about the Jesus story.  
DAVE You? Confused? Never! Tell me.  
MUM Well, what was it he said to the thief on the cross?  
DAVE " Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise".  
MUM That's it. And that was on the Friday as far as I remember.  
DAVE The first Good Friday, yes. It's recorded in Luke.  
MUM Well, okay. But what was it he said to Mary Magdalene on the Sunday he reappeared, when she thought he was the gardener?  
DAVE Hang on, I'll look it up. Here it is - John 20.  
MUM The bit when he says not to touch.  
DAVE Yeah, I know. "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father ..."  
MUM There you are. And that was on the Sunday.  
DAVE So ... what about it?  
MUM Well if what he said to her was true, then what about his promise to the thief? I mean, you can't have it both ways.  
DAVE Whoa!! My God, Mum! You've got a very valid point, there.  
MUM Have I?  
DAVE Well I never thought of it. You could become a Christian theologian.  
MUM A Christian what?  
DAVE Theologian. Literally, someone who studies God.  
MUM Not on your Nellie! Why should I? As I say, he never studies ME. And I'm certainly not wading through that b\*\*\*\* book again. Anyhow, I'm dead on me legs, so I'll say goodnight.  
DAVE Goodnight Mum. (thinks). God, I need a drink. And a smoke.

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