



Summer 2016

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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 Summer Full Circle

March 1st 2017

Registered Charity No. 277843

Editorial

Dear friends

In the last Full Circle, Paul's editorial described an exhibition about radical communities in Essex, and asked why Othona has survived much longer than most of the other communities which once existed in the county. We have received several replies (see below) and many thanks to those who have contributed. If others are stimulated by these, please do send your thoughts for the next issue.

Thanks to Janet Marshall who told us where we could find what Norman Motley had to say about this. We think what he says is a revelation. In fact the feeling of being wanted and necessary must surely be essential to all good relationships. And how could a person feel wanted when he is being indoctrinated and, by implication, told that what he thinks at the moment is incorrect?

As for the tyranny of time, whilst being able to have one's porridge at Bradwell at whatever time one wants it (but not being allowed into the kitchen to cook it) would seem like a freedom from time pressure, I (Ruth) feel that I am now under pressure to get up extra early (at no defined time) to ensure that my porridge will be warm and creamy and not cold and lumpy! To me this seems like a tyranny!!! Any other views about time pressure or lack of it in the community? I remember someone putting a poem into Full Circle once about the tyranny of 'the bell'! I'm not sure how much Othona has changed over the years in this respect.....

Since writing the above we have had a referendum, and some of us are in a state of shock. There is something important that Paul and I had planned to say about this in our editorial, but Tony Jacques has sent us an article which expresses all that we wanted to say most eloquently, so this is published immediately below.

With our love to you all

Ruth and Paul

A European Community?

Tony Jaques – Othona West Dorset warden

Othona came into being – yes all of 70 years ago – at a time when Britain and Europe were still reeling from a devastating world war. As I write this (on 30th June, the day Boris gave up trying for PM) Britain and Europe are staggering after one of the two greatest subsequent upheavals that we have seen (the other being the fall of the Berlin Wall).

I don't intend to re-visit any of the arguments about the merits or dangers of Brexit. Things are changing incredibly fast this week, but when you read this I take it the UK will still be on its way out! Some of us may relish that, some of us regret it. None of us really knows what it will mean in practice. For our community, I suggest there is one statement of principle that deserves to be spelt out.

Othona has always had a sense of European brotherhood/sisterhood close to its heart. We grew out of the experience of war and the determination to reconcile those who had been enemies. (The EU grew partly out of that same concern.) Our very first summer at Bradwell in 1946 included Germans on site as valued community members; that particular link has never been broken. Later Bradwell developed connections behind what was then the Iron Curtain.

Here in Dorset we have one German core member right now, while former core members from Poland have recently opened their own environmental and spiritual centre back in their home country. These are just a few examples of Othona's pan-European links.

So the statement of principle, as I see it, is that we in the Othona Community affirm Jesus' teaching of love for our neighbour – and recognise especially our near neighbours on the continent of Europe. To fear or smear people just because they come from 'abroad' is alien to our whole ethos. This is not, of course, to prescribe what policies or parties Othona people do or should support. It's a matter of principle and motivation, on which I hope we can all unite. "Dear Continental Europeans: we're still your friends!"

Of course Jesus went further than the love of our neighbours as ourselves. I've heard it said that his single most innovative teaching – not to be found anywhere in earlier scriptures or rabbis' teachings – is the love of enemies. This is incomparably challenging stuff. How do we do it?

Perhaps the tiny beginning we can make – in this turmoil of our national and international life – is simply to hesitate about branding people as enemies in the first place. Whenever I'm tempted to condemn a politician, or rubbish a campaign, or stereotype a group of people... I could choose instead to remember how sifting the world into 'us and them', 'in and out', 'right and wrong', however tempting and enjoyable, is always less than the full picture. Always an obscuring of our common humanity. Always a clouding of the divine image.

How to Love your Enemy

Ruth Gilman

From October 6th-10th there will be an autumn retreat at Bradwell on the very relevant subject mentioned by Tony above, entitled 'How to Love Your Enemy'. Paul and I are going to this retreat and hope to see some of you there.

Fulfilling our Purpose

discussion at Trustees meeting 24th Jan 2016.

Roo opened the session by reading out the paper "Othona –fulfilling our purpose: a brief look forward," followed by a time of reflection, then contributions and discussion.

All trustees and wardens shared views on their vision for Othona's move forward for the next 70 years. The following notes aim to capture some of the points, and the spirit of the discussion. We agreed that the intention is for everyone to continue thinking and developing ideas and contacts. For those on Centre Committees, this is an opportunity to share the trustees' vision, developing a picture of the future that feels right for each Centre, and make long-term plans for action to go out from Othona and grow community.

- Muslim people are often marginalised in our society. Othona welcomes people of all faiths and none and has an opportunity to show a welcome either at the Centres or through use of existing channels linking with Muslim people, and with those prejudiced against them, in the Othona spirit of reconciliation.
- Othona offers meeting places, places of hope and reconciliation, for people caught in in conflicts such as between faith groups, asylum seekers and local people, and those facing extremism. Each Centre is a place for balance, responding to different needs.
- There is enormous financial inequality between the super-rich and comfortably off people, and people in extreme financial hardship. Othona has a tradition of bringing such people together. Financially we could seek donations from richer people who share our mission, funding bursaries or projects; we could ask richer people to buy an additional place to enable a poorer person to stay.....how else could we help rich/poor to meet and share in community?
- Money is not everything; we seek to offer people from all walks of life the same opportunity to experience Othona. But money is important in protecting, developing and eventually replacing our buildings for future generations. We need to explore ways of reaching potential donors of money – and givers of volunteering time.
- There is huge stress on “caring professions” from teaching, nursing, social care etc. Othona should cast the net wider to seek out those in need of our community, reaching not only people broken by stress but those needing a safe haven for a while, before things become intolerable.
- Many organisations are already finding people in need: carers, people damaged by war, people in conflict – for example the Salvation Army, YMCA, Help for Heroes. Othona has Centres of beauty, tranquility and peace to offer those in need, and their carers, via such organisations. They find people, we have the place.
- Inviting people who are a challenge leads us to challenge our own assumptions and prejudices, our enjoyment of like-minded company which is not always fully enriching for community-building. Othona never was comfortable.
- Othona offers a way of life to be shared: everyday caring and awareness of others, conversations and friendships that transcend age, religion or place in society, a real spirit of community, in our wonderful inheritance of work, worship, study and play.

The session closed with quiet and thankful, hopeful prayer for the future of Othona.

Othona West Dorset Report

Caroline Cameron

If you had told me this time last year that I would have left my job, friends and home in order to go and live in a small community in the West of Dorset (a place I had never previously visited, never mind lived), I would not have believed you. And yet... nearly three years ago after my first 'encounter' with Othona via the 'Diggers and Dreamers' website, here I am!

As I write this, the rain is drumming down on my skylight window after a day of cold and wet, which led to the fire being lit in the living room and visitors unearthing the blankets and hot water bottles in the evening for warmth. After such a positive start to the summer (days of glorious sunshine and cream teas on the lawn), who would have thought that the end of June would usher in such inclement weather? Wellies and walking boots may have replaced sandals and flip-flops (for the time being, at least) but as our four baby swallows take their first tentative forays out of the nest, testing their manoeuvrability and agility on the wing, we, like them, hope for better days to come...

Since I have been here, I have had the good fortune to witness and experience a variety of events and retreats from an Easter spent walking a cloth labyrinth in our candle-lit chapel and making bespoke hot-cross buns to games-playing ('capture the flag', or 'listen to the whistle' anyone??) and fireside story-telling on the family weekend break, as well as a gentle encouragement to 'wake up' our poetry-writing skills by Graham Fawcett, renowned scholar, writer and poetry lecturer.

And who amongst us could ever forget the sight of a pod of dolphins breaching the waves off Portland during our regular Springwatching event or the gargantuan cooked breakfast ably prepared by our warden Tony as just reward for those brave-hardy souls who sacrificed a full night of slumber in order to greet the dawn and its chorus?

Then there was the story of an abandoned pair of size eight Dunlop boots and the walk up a mud-lined Hell Lane on our Walking Week followed by an invitation to 'open up' to our creativity using the Appleseed Method led by a feminist theologian whose unerring capacity to invent new words was matched only by her enthusiasm!

What else? Well, the biennial event that is Dorset Art Weeks took place from the end of May to mid-June. The theme this year was 'Seeing it differently' and five artists presented a dazzling display of disparate pieces, which was seen by over 800 people. Pat Osborne, our kitchen 'kween', pulled off repeated feats of culinary genius, producing a variety of delicious cakes and scones over the two weeks, supported by a willing band of volunteers.

Of course, the past three months have not been all work, work, work! On my days off, I am often to be found walking the coastal path or one of the many inland routes nearby. I am determined to discover as much of this beautiful county as I can while I am here and am rapidly becoming known as 'The Explorer of Othona' for my ability to find out 'what's on' and when.

To conclude: I came to Othona with a desire to experience a different way of life - in community - and feeling called to serve, in whatever way I could. I found: a warm and welcoming place where I, along with so many others before me, could *really* be myself and accepted for who I am. The journey has not always been easy – there have been times when I have been challenged and tested to the limits of my endurance, but, in the words of that immortal Disney character: "Here I stand, and here I'll stay"!

The Peace Garden Bradwell

with new willow fence, labyrinth and aromatic herbs

Photo: Kevin Bruce



Why Has Othona Survived So Long?

David Forgan

Here are some ideas as to why the Othona Community has survived for seventy years when similar communities have had a much shorter life.

Firstly though, consider another question, why have other communities not survived? One reason is that in many cases they have relied on a charismatic founder / leader and there has been a leadership vacuum when that leader has died. Indeed some feared that this would be true of Othona and that it would not survive without Norman Motley, who was undoubtedly a charismatic, even autocratic, leader. Othona was very much his “baby”. However, I believe Norman had the foresight to recognise that Othona might not survive when he was not around to lead it, which is why he set up a democratic committee structure for the Community and identified a team who would be able to handle the transition when he was gone. Although there have been changes in the management structure over the years, I believe the continuing democratic involvement of all members of the community, or as many members who wish to be involved, has helped ensure Othona’s survival.

Another reason why some communities have failed to survive is that they have not had as wide a membership appeal as Othona. Othona has aimed to be affordable by all and right from the outset it has been open to those of all faiths or none, whereas some other communities have targeted a particular belief group. Consequently they have had a more limited potential membership and so have not survived changes when that group has diminished. Othona has also adapted and changed to maintain its appeal; a stay at either centre is a very different experience today compared to fifty five years ago when I first stayed at Bradwell. The changes have not only been physical; Norman Motley’s original trust deed, and its subsequent revisions, has permitted development of Othona’s religious ethos, another example of his brilliant foresight.

I believe a third reason why Othona has survived is the importance of place. George MacLeod, founder of the Iona Community, once described Iona as “a ‘Thin Place’ - only a tissue paper separating the material from the spiritual”. I feel that this is also true of St Peter’s Chapel and that the chapel at Burton Bradstock is truly a spiritual place too. I recognise that not everyone may feel the same way as I do but for many members these chapels hold a special place in their spiritual life. The landscape at both centres, although very different, also contributes to a feeling of peace and tranquillity, at least most of the time – I am not so naive to be unaware of tensions, to put it mildly, that have occurred from time to time but Othona has had the resilience to

survive such conflicts. Some people may only visit Othona once but others return and I believe that one reason they do so is because of the ambience they experience during their stay.

To conclude, I believe that Othona will continue to adapt and change to meet the needs of the day and survive for another seventy years, at least.

Linda Clover

I would say that Othona has lasted due to the friendship and camaraderie amongst the members. However long I have been away I am always remembered and made to feel welcome and at home. I have been known to refer to Othona as my holiday home by the sea, with the emphasis on the home more than the holiday. It is that nice warm, cosy feeling I have when I turn the corner of the track and see the Othona buildings, a feeling of relief, because here is a place where I can be myself and just relax.

Martin Riemer

Othona is based on the principal option of unconditional communication and deep personal relationships for anyone, who dares visiting and becoming a member. For many it works even beyond the obvious member's face to face interaction, like sharing an extraordinary spiritual dimension in a Chapel or anywhere around Othona. In recent years this communication persisted even more by having more options using telecommunication all the year round, which is not as intense and fulfilling as the REAL one at Othona and other places where members meet face to face - but I believe it is the second best and a lot better than no communication at all - even if (at times) it breaks down and then causes some people to give up, as I experienced in our recent Brexit discussions on Facebook.

The vision of even overcoming a terrible World War II by simply working, worshipping, studying and playing together is still valid. One of my highlights has been performing in the musical "Oh, What a Lovely War" in 1989 at Othona Bradwell - just 50 years after WW II had started, including young and even old, who'd been in the war.

Richard Marshall

Why Has Othona Lasted for 70 Years?

Half those 70 years (between the devastation of WW2 and the founder's death in 1980) were made up of 20 years on the one Bradwell site for just an international summer 'camp' for all classes, followed by 15 years developing the year-round second centre far away in West Dorset. He held both these together with his dynamism and contacts, but not easily. Since he died in 1980 there have been 35 more years with diverse managements in each place, and no longer a central base in London.

A bishop of Chelmsford in the 1970's described Othona as "idiosyncratic"; I take that to mean dependent on one man's inspiration, somewhat eccentric, and on its own out there at a frontier of Christian evolution in a changing world.

How did Othona survive those 35 further years? I suggest there were heritages of four kinds which derive from the founder:-

- 1) **Philosophy**; an ethos of humour, informality and humanity, in which all humans are welcome to express different ideas, words and songs, and explore wonders about God, nature and the universe, while accepting the humanistic variety of Christians, and having no single cause or theological imperative or style,
- 2) **Land**; the scope to enjoy amenity land on remote coastal sites,
- 3) **People**; having continuity and loyalty from generations descended from those who knew the founder, plus a continuing flow of new people.
- 4) **Community**; this can be a puzzling word - Othona differs from 'closed' communities as in reality it is more like a study or holiday 'club' which people can visit or join as a change from their own local community, offering collegiate friendship among a wider range of people than usual, who nowadays also form social networks, including internationals, particularly Germans.

My observations over 52 years are fairly accidental and detached. I married the founder's daughter (then a medical student) in 1967, and knew him well when we shared some of his home life during his last 15 years until 1980. He always seemed a very human and well read person, who grew out of East End socialism to find a niche for 25

years as a City Rector (which role gave him knowledge to help buy the farmland adjoining the original 'squatters patch').

Unlike the 'Tolstoy community' of 1910 near Maldon, which worked the land, Othona has managed to remain in Essex as a place for visitors to stay a few days 'in community'. There is a different cultural style in West Dorset, which arrived in 1965 thanks to the Charity Commission's offer of land and a farmhouse (built for a by then defunct community on an attractive piece of coast. The Essex and West Dorset centres are complementary, and depend on distinctive styles of local leadership. What does Othona offer now? I see the centres as "spiritual rebooting camps", whether for dissenting or humanistic Christians or free-thinkers, or for those more traditionally inclined.

Norman Motley (*from Letters to a Community page 37 - 1970-1980*)

It is difficult to select one principal factor above another another which has given in spite of so many obstacles, the Community staying power. But I would put first and foremost the feeling of wantedness - of being welcome and even necessary which newcomers - and even old stagers so often feel. With very few exceptions those who have had responsibility for leading at both centres have been people of a sensitive and caring disposition, accepting that one of the first and critically important needs of human beings is to be "necessary" and loved - and thus to be able to reciprocate. This is the first quality we have to offer - or should have. It must mean that the atmosphere is totally different from that of even the best hotels or boarding houses. No matter how late when visitors arrive it should be our responsibility to ensure that a resident member is there to welcome them - to see if they have eaten and to ensure that they have somewhere to sleep in comfort.

I am convinced that no matter how stimulating maybe the intellectual qualities displayed by speakers and other visitors, and how good the food, and meaningful the services - none of these factors can compensate for a failure at the level of the first which I have named.

Another factor in the survival value of Othona, I think, is that the tyranny of time is kept to a minimum...

Another factor is that those who come feel they are at home, without being indoctrinated in anything. It is hoped that what is of real value will communicate itself through the quality of living which is experienced.

What's behind the Hedge at Othona?

Ali Tebbs

What's behind the Hedge at Othona? – Ali Tebbs

This was the headline I used for a press release which made it into the Bridport News a week before we opened the doors for 16 days of art exhibition and cream teas. Lots of people take the opportunity of a non-threatening, legitimate visit during Dorset Art Weeks so it is a win/win situation. The artists get seen, Othona sells cream teas and, more importantly, shows itself off in a really good light. Many people took the chance to explore the grounds as well as talking with the artists, stewards and cream tea helpers about Othona and what it does. We had getting on for 800 visitors this year.



The exhibition was very well received. As in 2014 Mart Tebbs, Elizabeth Sayers, Emma C Tabor and Robin Shaw showed their work, and this year I joined them - my very first exhibition. I found it incredibly wonderful – deliberately setting out to develop from making pretty

crafty things into pictures on walls was a great process, and where the work ended up was not at all where I had expected it to be. A new start to be continued...

This kind of community effort is always a good experience and although we all happily welcomed back our real lives, we were also sad when it ended. Our visitors book had lots of comments about inspiring and diverse work and we all made sales. All in all we raised over £1500 from commission, a prize draw of original work (ongoing until August) and cream tea profits which will go towards our new multi-purpose studio space.



Tony has made a 6 minute video tour of the exhibition which is on YouTube – Look for ‘Dorset Art Weeks 2016 at Othona’. The link is also on Othona West Dorset’s Facebook page and Twitter together with lots of photos. It will give you a flavour of how it was.



Thank you to all who made it possible – the Core and the two Pats, Catherine Siddall, our Steward in chief (one of us needed to be able to add up!), the cream tea volunteers and everyone who came to visit. We look forward to the next one.

MA Sculptural Practice Degree Show

Angenita Teekens

The culmination of two years' research by Colchester Institute's graduating MA students. At the Minories Galleries, 74 High Street, Colchester CO1 1UE, www.theminories.org.uk, 01206 712437.

Being There

MA Sculptural Practice Degree Show

Angenita Hardy-Teekens
Anne-Marie Jacobs
Billie Bond
Sally Horne

exhibition preview
Friday 22 July 6 to 9pm

exhibition open
Saturday 23 July to Saturday 6 August
Monday to Saturday 10am to 5pm

open to the public admission free



Colchester
School of Art

THE MINORIES
GALLERIES



Portrait of a Man of Vision

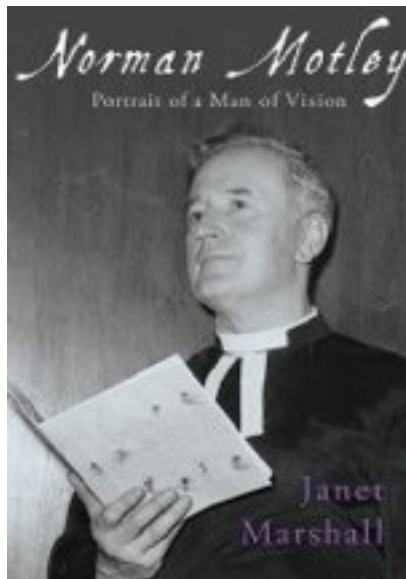
Jan Marshall

My new book, published by Troubadour, is a short biography - 80 pages, in two halves, called "Portrait of a Man of Vision". This is the title Barbara Dyer suggested many years ago.

The first section is about Norman's life and the second consists of extracts from letters people sent me about him.

Much of the information came from Norman's copious papers, letters written while he was alive and also from research at the Lambeth Palace Library and of course from my own recollections. Although there is some overlap with his own book *Much Ado about Something*, this book is much more personal, about Norman himself and his life as a whole, and not just Othona.

Initially a hundred copies, priced at £6.50, will be for sale. I am hoping they will be ready in time for purchase at our festival, and you will be able to buy them at the centres or you can buy them directly from Jan - phone 01932 849513 or email <janmarshall@supanet.com>



Life in the Psalms

Ruth Gilman

At the moment our weekly house group are using a lovely book for our studies and meditations: *Life in The Psalms - Contemporary Meaning Ancient Texts* by Patrick Woodhouse ISBN 978-1-4729-2314-1. It is The Mowbray Lent Book 2016.

After an informative introduction the book is divided into five sections: Pilgrimage, Prayer, Wonder, The Way, Hope and Suffering. Five of the Psalms of David have been chosen to illustrate each of these subjects, and each Psalm is followed by a thought-provoking reflection.

Many of the psalms chosen for this book are the same ones as Colin Hodgetts chose to include in his book 'Othona Psalms'; they are some of the best. Each session we are usually able to listen to one or two of the Othona Psalms on CD, sung by professional soprano Evelyn Tubb. People are finding this medium of communicating their message to be very inspiring.

I think 'Life in the Psalms' will appeal to many Othona members. The author's approach to spirituality is broad minded and non judgemental, and the ideas expressed are similar to those I have experienced mainly at Othona. Some remind me of the statement of beliefs on my Othona West Dorset bookmark (and I think outside its chapel). Others I gleaned from a retreat at Bradwell led by Sheila Maxey based on the psalms, where we wrote our own psalms.

Here are a few quotations from the first two reflections on the theme of Pilgrimage, to whet your appetite:

'The idea of making a journey beyond the boundaries of your familiar world to a place of spiritual promise where you hope to glimpse more of the purpose of life, takes us back to the essence of what religion is ...'

'Pilgrimage can also be understood as a journey into deeper understanding even if you do not travel physically.'

'Beautiful buildings have their own silent ministry. Simply through their integrity as buildings, their very stones can point beyond themselves to an order an integration at the heart of creation which is healing for the disordered human mind.'

'Whatever faith tradition we may belong to, every person's spiritual journey will have its own route map, its own unique geography.'

'In the church we have been schooled too long in guilt and shame and self-denigration. As you allow the words (How lovely is your dwelling place O Lord of hosts!) to sink into your consciousness, it will slowly transform your self-understanding. And when you go out and meet others it needs to be repeated in your heart with them in mind too, for however much they may not grasp it, they too are a dwelling place of the divine life. They too are LOVELY.'

Live Hard **David Birdseye**

From womb to tomb death's shadows loom
And in between - we muddle by
Our claim we stake, our journey make
For life is hard, and then you die

Some journey on a longer road
For threescore years and ten, or more
Whilst others, having just set out
Soon find themselves at death's dark door

Each life disjoined, discrete, distinct
Disorganised or sprucely spry
We struggle to make sense of it
Yet life is hard, and then we die

It's said it's not longevity
But **how** we live that really count
- So quality, not quantity ...
Christ would agree, by all accounts

So journey on and struggle on
It's not win or lose, but how you try
And live, laugh, love along the way
For life is hard and then you die.

The Landscape of the Dengie Peninsula

Michael Leach

Michael Leach is a friend of Paul's and former chairperson of the Essex Archaeology and History Society. The fascinating article below was first published in a recent edition of the Society Newsletter (EAHS News), of which Paul was once the editor. A big thank you to Michael for allowing us to publish his article for the delectation of our members.

Any observant visitor to the Dengie peninsula will notice its distinctive character. One of the most obvious being the endless sequence of right angled turns made by the roads crossing its largely flat landscape. Another noticeable feature is the paucity of substantial gentry homes in the area.

Nevertheless, the agricultural land was highly valued and this justified the heavy expenditure in maintaining the sea walls. Like all landscapes, the Dengie has been moulded by a combination of its geology and the activities of its human settlers.

The earliest written glimpse of the Dengie is found in an eighth-century charter. The evidence suggests that it then covered a larger area, extending westwards into Danbury. Its name may derive from the lost forest of Danegriss, or a resident tribe called the Daenningas, meaning 'dwellers in the woodland'.

The Domesday survey of 1086 revealed that there was a north-south belt of woodland running from Hatfield Peverel to Woodham Ferrers, with an extension running east through Purleigh into Latchingdon. Geologically, the Dengie west of Southminster is composed of heavy London Clay overlain by bands of shingle which were deposited as the Thames estuary was forced south and east by the advancing ice cap during the Ice Ages. To the east, there are the alluvial deposits of

former saltmarsh. Both soil types were fertile, though the London Clay was hard to work and traditionally referred to as 'three horse land'. The alluvial deposits would have only required one horse to plough them.

By the early Iron Age, the Dengie had a population important enough to justify the construction of a small fort on a gravel hillock at Asheldham. Pollen evidence shows that the area was already open grassland, with little evidence of tree cover. The rectilinear field system, orientated north-south, was probably laid out during the Iron Age (or, less likely, during the Roman period). This field pattern has survived largely unaltered to the present day, and the present road system respects this layout and crosses it in a series of right angled bends. Planned landscape on this scale suggests a significant level of organisation and control, notably absent in the Essex boulder clay uplands where the field pattern is anything but regular. The low-lying parts have been grazed by sheep since at least the Roman period when a contemporary noted 'an innumerable multitude of gentle beasts...laden with fleeces'. There were good reasons for rearing sheep here - salt marsh pasture makes excellent grazing, being less vulnerable to drought over the summer months. Also, the salt content of the ground reduces the problems of foot rot and liver fluke, and was claimed to give the meat a superior flavour. As flooding was an ever present risk, raised sheep walks were constructed from wattles and earth to provide a necessary refuge for the sheep, and traces of these structures have survived in the Tollesbury and Langenhoe marshes. During the Iron Age and the Roman period, the salt industry was established on the coastal margins of the Dengie. Sea water was evaporated in clay vessels, the pulverised remains of which survive as shallow mounds or 'red hills'. These sites now lie well inland, but would have been close to the sea shore before the coast was pushed outwards by later reclamation of the salt marshes. This method of salt production was replaced by more efficient methods after the Roman period but the mounds provided useful refuges for sheep - and perhaps shepherds - in times of flood.

In the second half of the third century AD, the Romans built a substantial fort on the north-east tip of the Dengie to protect the Blackwater from Saxon pirates. It ceased to be garrisoned after the Roman withdrawal, but the town and port continued to be of importance throughout the Anglo-Saxon period until its destruction by the sea in 1099. It was referred to by the Venerable Bede as 'the city

which the Saxons call Ythancaestir', suggesting that it remained a place of some importance. It was here that St Cedd, on his mission to convert the East Saxons in the mid-seventh century, chose to build the chapel which still stands on the foundations of the west wall of the Roman fort.

In the middle Saxon period, massive fish traps - up to a mile long - were constructed in the shallow waters of the Blackwater estuary. The sides of these 'V' shaped tidal traps were made with withies woven between stakes driven into the mud. The stumps of these stakes are still visible at very low tides. Though this substantial fishing industry has left no traces on dry land, the size of these traps (known locally as 'kiddles') indicates that there must have been a considerable degree of organisation to harvest, process and distribute the substantial catches which they must have yielded. For reasons that have not yet been explained, these large structures were abandoned in the course of the eighth century, and perhaps replaced by fishing from boats.

There is other evidence to suggest that the area once had greater importance than now. North and South Fambridge face each other across a quarter mile wide stretch of the tidal River Crouch. Though there must have been a bridge here, not even the earliest written sources contain any reference to such a structure. Three miles upstream, the bridge at Hullbridge collapsed in the seventeenth century and has never been replaced; the modern traveller has to go a further two miles upstream to cross at Battlesbridge. There would be no justification today for such long bridges over tidal waters, so it must be assumed that, in earlier times, the area supported a larger and more affluent population, supported by the fertile soil, by the fish and fowl from the coastal margins, and by maritime trade with other parts of the country.

By the thirteenth century, sea levels were rising and legislation was required to compel each marshland owner to repair – and periodically to heighten – their own length of sea wall. This was a costly requirement; by the nineteenth century the Mildmays were spending £90 per year per mile on the section for which they were responsible. The marshes were grazed by sheep which, as well as meat and fleeces, provided large quantities of cheese, and the numerous 'wick' place-names indicate sites where the milk was processed.

From the eighteenth century on, salt marsh was regarded as unimproved, and progressive landowners pushed back the sea with a series of new walls, a process known as 'inching'. Traces of these earlier walls - now marooned inland - can still be seen, and formed a useful second line of defence during the disastrous 1953 floods. Most of the inchings were relatively small scale, though an Act of Parliament in 1852 authorised a plan (never realised) to reclaim 30,500 acres in the Blackwater estuary. Small blind lanes, running due east towards the former coastline, are a characteristic feature of inchings.

Wildfowling has always been an important occupation with vast numbers of birds nesting on the poorly drained coastal margins. The introduction of decoy ponds (probably from Holland in the seventeenth century) left its mark on the landscape. These star shaped ponds (up to a couple of acres in size and protected by reeds and scrub) were equipped with curved netted tunnels down which the fowl were driven by specially trained dogs, partly concealed by screens, into trapping nets at the end. The Dengie was the site of over half of Essex's decoys and two (both in the parish of Tillingham) were still being worked in the first decade of the twentieth century. Traces of the ponds can still be found, though their distinctive outline is best seen on aerial photographs. The shooting of wildfowl was also a popular sport for Londoners who ventured into the marshes with their guns, though Daniel Defoe noted that they often returned with 'an Essex ague on their backs, which they find a heavier load than the fowls they had shot'.

Another local natural harvest has left a more tangible mark on the landscape. Norden noted, in the late sixteenth century, that the Wallfleet oyster from the River Blackwater was particularly prized, "a little full oyster with a verie greene fynn" and cultivation still occurs in the estuary. Though this takes place in the tidal waters, groups of circular pits are found on the edge of the salt marsh. These were used for storage, as well as for 'greening' the oysters, a change caused by algae which tinted their 'beard' and was thought to improve their flavour.

Up to the mid-nineteenth century, the low-lying areas of Essex, and their salt marshes, were widely regarded as unhealthy due to the prevalence of marsh ague. Norden, when visiting the low-lying parts of the county in the late sixteenth century, caught 'a moste cruell

quarterne fever'. This was probably malaria which can be transmitted by a species of English mosquito which breeds in brackish water. Though Norden noted that "manie and sweete comodeties countervayle the daunger" of the marsh ague, most clergy and minor gentry, fearful for their health, avoided living in these parishes. As late as the early nineteenth century Arthur Young regarded these parts of Essex as unhealthy but by the middle of the century the mosquitos' breeding grounds had been drained and marsh ague had been largely eradicated.

Sea levels have continued to rise and, in spite of improved sea walls, flooding has occurred at times of exceptionally high tides and strong wind. There were major incursions in 1825, 1874 and 1897, each necessitating further strengthening and raising of the walls. A major breach at North Fambridge in 1897 required much toil and eight years to repair, after several failed attempts. There were further incursions in 1928, 1938 and 1949. In 1953, the combination of a very high tide, a depression and a strong northeast wind caused numerous breaches all around the Dengie, with the flooding of hundreds of acres of farm land. The resulting increase in the salt content reduced the soil fertility for arable crops, and there were much reduced yields for several years. The risk of flood has continued to increase, with rising sea levels and the gradual sinking of southern England. At some point it will become uneconomic to maintain adequate defences around the entire coast line, and managed retreat - the breaching of sections of wall to re-establish protective salt marsh - will become necessary. This has already been implemented in the Rochford Hundred to the south of Dengie, and these areas will quickly revert to their appearance before reclamation.

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Obituary

John Bendy 1919 – 2016 R.I.P.

John Bendy died in March this year, on the morning of his 97th birthday. Farewell, old friend. John was a remarkable living link to the first community (the White Ladies) who lived at our West Dorset centre before Othona came in 1965. As a child he visited that community in the 1930s; his aunt Evelyn was one of the sisters. His elder brother Alan, a keen student of the white ladies' founder Adela Curtis, lived here and helped them with their heavier gardening, but he joined the RAF and died in the war.

Many years later John discovered Othona on the same site. He had recently become a widower, decided to re-visit an important place in his younger life, and took the step of becoming an Othona member. For years he was the mainstay of our vegetable gardening. He would often drive from Bristol, stop overnight, swim in the sea before breakfast and then toil in the (then) walled garden.

He was influenced all his life by the teachings of Miss Curtis and he practised silent prayer, belonging to two Julian Groups in Bristol. But he didn't just sit quietly. As an engineer he had worked on the prototype wings for Concorde and perhaps he had an affinity with the sky. On his 90th birthday he fulfilled an ambition to go sky-diving! John's daughter Alison and grandchildren Oli and Layla are very well known in Othona. Our sympathies to them, and thanksgiving for a long and good life. On the plaque in our chapel that commemorates his aunt and his brother, John chose words from a Psalm: "Be still and know..."

Tony Jaques

At Peace in the Peace Garden



(Photo by Kevin Bruce)

OTHONA 70TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

on Saturday 24th September

THANKSGIVING SERVICE

led by Sheila Maxey and other Othona members. Speaker
Rev, Nicholas Henshall, Dean of Chelmsford Cathedral

in St Michael's Church, Cornhill

(where our founder, Norman Motley, was rector from 1956-1980)

2.30 p.m. arrival for 3.00 p.m. start

followed by from 5.00 - 6.00 p.m.

a short AGM focusing on reports from our two centres

and PARTY from 6.00 - 9.00 p.m.

at St Botolph's Hall (without Bishopsgate)

Both venues are accessible and are close to Liverpool St. Station. Buffet food and soft drinks will be provided during the evening. Please bring a bottle (wine or beer, not spirits) to share if you would like to drink alcohol

Volunteers are welcome to form a choir for the service. Singers are needed who can read music and who can attend a rehearsal at 1.30 on the day. Volunteers are also needed for an Othona-style entertainment during the party: songs, stories, reminiscences, jokes, instrumental pieces (about 5 minutes each)

For further information contact one of the planning group: Colin Hodgetts, Jan Marshall (01932 849513), Rosie Sinden-Evans, Ali Tebbs or either of the wardens: Tony Jaques or Tim Fox. Contact details under Who's Who. Volunteers for the choir or evening cabaret should contact Rosie on 0208 886 5542 or

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