

FULL CIRCLE
THE OTHONA COMMUNITY
NEWSLETTER



Winter 2017

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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.

Registered Charity No. 277843

Editorial

Paul and Ruth Gilman

Dear friends

This is likely to be the last time we have a chance to write to you because, despite what may have been said at the AGM (see below), the trustees have decided to stop *Full Circle*, both the paper copies and the online version. Please read the reasons for this in Colin Hodgetts article below, and also Paul's article "Closing The Circle" - and Ruth's article "Community Matters - Or Does It?".

This edition also contains Jonney Aldridge's article expressing his views about what is important for Bradwell's future. It helped to inspire Ruth's article. Two contributions explain why Othona has been so valued in the past and how it is still appreciated by newcomers for the wonderful welcome it provides.

Here is our "Goodbye" wish for you:

"May the long time sun shine upon you
All love surround you
And the pure light within you
Guide you all the way on".

Our grateful thanks to all of you who have contributed so much of value to *Full Circle* over the years.

Our love to you all.

Ruth and Paul

A Fond Farewell to Full Circle

Colin Hodgetts

This summer the Small School, Hartland, an alternative secondary school, closed. I had been Head, initially for eleven and then for a further two years. A number of people assumed that I would be sad at this. I wasn't. I realised that its day had passed and the world moves on: a parent-initiated free school has emerged.

We decided to sell our house. In the 1980s we converted two barns and have cultivated two acres in an idyllic spot at the end of a lane with little noise, no light pollution and a view of the sea. How can you give up something into which you have put so much effort? we are being asked. As it says in Ecclesiastes, "To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." We move on with no regrets.

I have often felt behind the times. When a recording of my folk group, the Common Round, was made it was in mono just when stereo was emerging. The first recording of the Othona Psalms was made on tape just as CDs was the up-and-coming format. I set my heart on a CD recording of the psalms but have had to abandon that in favour of putting the psalms on YouTube. I wasn't keeping up with the changes that technological developments demand of us. I have learnt a lesson.

Now the trustees have decided that this magazine, that has fed the Community for so many years, and into which many people have poured their love and devotion, is no longer the most appropriate way of communicating with members. We have been investing a lot of time, effort and money into developing our websites. That is where the future lies.

There are a number of advantages to using the internet. There need be no time delay in the circulation of news – articles can appear as soon as they are written. Anyone, anywhere can access our sites

without cost, and they can pass on to friends something that may interest them at the press of a button. There is no restriction on the number of photos that can appear and, as we know, an image can be worth a thousand words.

Of course, there are known negatives. Some of our members are not internet savvy and may not have, or want, access to the world-wide-web. The trustees are very concerned that their needs should not be ignored and they are left behind. So we are trying to identify the best way of responding to them, and we won't give up until we have hit on a viable solution to this problem. To start with, is there anyone who could do a roundup of news every six months to send to those with no computer/email? It would be helpful if those Community members unable to access information from the Community's websites would write to either of the centres stating this. That will help us decide on a viable alternative method of communicating with them.

Meanwhile we are saying 'goodbye' to this splendid little magazine that has served the Community so well, for this is the last issue. We cannot adequately express our gratitude to those, including Ruth and her husband Paul, the present editors, who have given hours by the hundred and sweat by the bucket to making it a success. Its demise implies no criticism of them. "For everything there is a time and a season" and now its time to leave the stage has come.

Some people think that longevity is a mark of success. That is an error. It is not. A better measure is that, during the time for which it existed, a project met the needs for which it was created. And that is what *Full Circle* has done. So do not mourn its loss. Celebrate its achievements.

EDITORS' NOTE:

The contact details of the Chair of Trustees and Secretary to the Trustees and the Othona Centres are to be found in WHO'S WHO on the back cover of this magazine.

Community Matters – Or Does It?

Ruth Gilman

When I was in my early thirties, following his retirement from the civil service, my father was asked to return part time to research and write a white paper entitled "Marriage Matters". The government was alarmed at the startling rise in the number of divorces and wanted to help families to stay together when possible. A family is a little community. Living in a community is not easy. It requires effort. For success it is essential that all of the members are loved, valued and heard.

Why do people pay to stay at The Othona Community? I think there are several reasons, and one of them is to find a sense of community, which can be lacking in today's society.

The Othona Community has always aimed to love and value its members/visitors – ALL of them. It is that recognition that all people are worthy to be loved and valued, a message taught by Jesus in the Gospels, that has always, for me, been one of the reasons that I found Othona to be a special place. The word community has the same root as communicate, and a good way of loving and valuing a person is to communicate with them and to listen to them. Presumably, when in 2012 people were encouraged to give up their paper copies of *Full Circle* and instead to read it on line, there were reasons why two hundred plus people still asked to receive a paper copy. Those who have spoken to me say that they are upset and angry that they will no longer be receiving it. Not to communicate this decision to (or any other important decision) to the members before making it may appear to suggest that Othona no longer loves and values them.

I don't think expecting all our members to "move on" is a good reason to stop *Full Circle*. Whilst some people have "moved on" to computers and social media as their main form of communication, others have chosen not to, or cannot afford to, or don't know how to. Just as each individual is free to choose his own faith, friends etc., each has a right to choose her/his preferred means of communication. Whichever choice people make they are still worthy to be loved and valued. Lack

of enthusiasm for *Full Circle* amongst the readers would be a good reason to stop it, but the enthusiasm for it cannot be gauged unless people are consulted.

Like many Othona members I am not a fan of social media. With the demise of *Full Circle*, it feels to me as if one of the very last voices of Othona members has been taken away. The lack of a voice (and of communication) was a main cause of concern amongst members at the Bradwell target setting meeting which Paul and I attended in March. Possibly it is because Othona members appear to have lost their right to have a say that many of them have lost their enthusiasm for going to the A.G.M.

Whilst some people come to Othona to find a sense of community others may have other priorities. Many people, I am sure, value Othona as a retreat centre to "simply be", to have some respite from our frenetic and stressful world. Others may dream of a luxurious, modern conference centre with the latest facilities. I would love this, partly because another reason I found Othona special was the many vibrant discussions about how we can improve our world, which is one of Othona's aims. Perhaps a larger, more modern centre with more people in attendance would help to facilitate this. And for me a comfortable ensuite bedroom would make an enormous difference. It makes sense to me that "moving on" in ways such as this might be a greater priority to some than retaining a long term sense of community.

I believe, however, that Othona should be inclusive (another of its aims) and try to love and value both those whose priority is to maintain a sense of community, and also those who have other priorities. The motto of Braintree Interfaith Forum is "Unity in Diversity" and I think that our diversity should be accepted and celebrated because it makes us all the richer.

Closing the Circle

Paul Gilman

As this is the last issue of *Full Circle*, it is appropriate to provide a brief history of the Othona newsletter. We are grateful to Jan Marshall who provided the following summary:

“The first Bulletin of the Othona Community came out in April 1950. Before and after this there were a few leaflets giving information about dates and programmes at the centre. The first newsletter in my possession which was no.3 came out in August 1957 edited by John Cross and after this they came out regularly several times a year until now. Grace Taylor was editor for some years and then Audrey Day took over the editorship. She remained editor for many years until the advent of desk top publishing and Ali Tebbs took over in October 1993 and the old typed A4 version became the compact colourful *Full Circle* with Circle of Friends logo on the front which we have today. It has until recently been a vital means of communication between the Trustees and committees and the membership so that they knew what was going on and had some means of voicing their opinion.”

Although I am a keen user of computers and like some aspects of the digital age we are in, I can't help but have some misgivings that a publication that has served the community well for decades has been brought abruptly to an end. In his article above, our chairman, Colin Hodgetts, explains the rationale behind the Trustees' decision.

However, for me this raises more questions than it answers. For example, why is the community unable to provide printed communications alongside digital media. What form will the future communications take, and will members and friends be able to express their views, as they can now with *Full Circle*. A particular concern has to be the needs of those without internet access and it seems unfair to suggest that they should be limited to a summary of the news every six months. Another question is whether the community will maintain an archive of past issues. This is important as the newsletter reflects the development of the community over many years and past issues may well be of interest to future community members.

As the receipt of the Othona newsletter is one of the benefits of membership, will these terms be recast now that the newsletter is no more? In fact, I found it difficult to find out anything about membership on the current websites. This brings me to another point, as I hope that the new websites will be better maintained than the current ones. I,

and others, pointed out some months ago that they contained obsolete material but this has not been removed.

Although it is suggested that Othona should move with the times and technical progress, I do feel that the death of printed material has been much exaggerated (as happened with vinyl records as well). I am a member of various organisations and many of them have retained printed newsletters. Of those that have gone over to digital means, I know that I very rarely actually go online to look at their news, whereas when the printed versions arrived I read them cover to cover. Against the advantages of digital, there are also pluses that could be said for print. Readers may find print more engaging and a more direct connection with the originating organisation. Some users find reading digital screens to be a strain on the eyes, and can find it difficult to search large websites. Finally, organisations can seem more remote, to be hiding behind their websites rather than genuinely seeking to promote two way communication with their members. I hope that this does not happen with Othona and that the Trustees use the Othona websites to communicate more effectively with the membership. Our previous Trustee Chair, Sheila Maxey, always provided a regular article, "From the Trustees" for *Full Circle* and perhaps this could be revived for the websites.

Othona Bradwell Strategic Plan, 2017–2020: Jonney's view

Jonney Aldridge

I appreciate that lots of work has gone into preparing the plan but I seem to see things so differently that I feel I must comment. My ideas may not even fall into the 5, 6 or 7 key themes. The Committee took for its starting point the mission statement. Now a mission statement by its very nature is open to interpretation. It by no means defines the Community, nor does it express many Community members' view of what the Community is. Importantly, for me, it in no way expresses the balance that we have between our need to "balance the books" and our need to "form a Community". Of course I agree that we have to

cover our costs or make a surplus in order to be able to continue... but not at the expense of making “Community”. My idea of making a community is where everyone is felt valued and the feeling that we are “all in the same boat” and pulling together. At Bradwell, 75% of our income comes from what are called “outside groups”. These groups are catered for by a minimum of staff (note “staff” not “core Community”) doing as much as possible, in order to keep costs low so that we can keep our charges low, so as not to deter the less well off (a very important issue for our increasingly unequal society). I think there is a conflict here and one that needs to be kept in balance. It needs to be addressed before we can finalise any strategy. It is so fundamental it affects everything else.

My next point revolves much around what we believe and so I will try to explain. For me, part of God is in each one of us and this is part of the reason that we care for each other. This too is why we try to treat each other equally no matter who we are OR WHAT WE BELIEVE. Sure, it is difficult and we all fall short from time to time. If we care for others we must also care for their environment, so it is everyone’s responsibility to care for the whole world’s environment (not just our bit nor just the Christian’s bit). What is more, God as our creator also created all the plants and animals and us as their stewards so we have an added responsibility to care for the planet. So, to say we care about people but not the planet is a nonsense, and even to say we care more about the people than the planet is equally nonsense. A logical extension of this is that we are part of nature and not separate from it and thus anything that separates us from nature is bad or evil and what brings us closer to nature is good.

Now, a lot of people opt out. “Yeah, yeah”, they say, “but what can I do about it and what difference will it make?” One answer, that is within most people’s ability, is to “grow your own food”. This is a triple whammy. It is better for our health, it is better for food growers across the world (they too can grow their own food) and it brings us closer to nature and in turn to God. Much of the food we eat in this country comes from deprived areas of the world where the growers are underpaid. (Please don’t say they need our trade when we know how badly trade agreements are loaded against the poor and deprived.) I

am not going to say much more except that this is so fundamental that the Community should do more.

A lot of what we do in caring for the environment and people is tied up in what we call sustainability. It seems dismissive to say that sustainability runs though everything. What we need to do is to put it so high on the list that it has to be considered at every moment of our development. I think we need to develop a sustainability strategy and then use it to gauge every strategic development by, otherwise you “rob Peter to pay Paul”. If we could do more for the environment and sustainability, there would be a great future for us. Many gap year experiences are aimed at helping the environment and making use of this resource would benefit us. Let’s have the stewardship of God’s creation high on our priorities.

Reconciliation?

Reconciliation is a key role for the Community but it is born out of differences and conflict and I believe that the Community has a key role to play in avoiding conflict and reducing the feelings of difference that separate us. When Jesus told us to love one another there were no caveats. Of course, we are all different, all individuals, but we are all equal and we all belong (children of God). The Community has a very good track record of engendering a sense of belonging and for me this ought to be very high on our list of goals.

I also feel we must look long and hard at our ability to provide before we look at what we want to provide or else what we provide becomes of poorer and poorer quality. I could go on but I think you will be able to get the idea of what I am mean.

You will know that I continue to pray for the Community and ask that you do the same. And especially at 9 o’clock on Thursday when I keep our tradition as best as I can

Annual General Meeting 2017

Here are the minutes from the 2017 AGM, as posted on the Othona West Dorset website.

Minutes of the Othona Community AGM, held on 23rd September 2017 at St Andrews, Waterloo.

Colin Hodgetts welcomed 27 members of the Community to the AGM. Apologies were received from another 13 people.

Colin began by explaining that Roger Neville, the community's Treasure has been ill and hospitalised so there is no Annual Report and accounts to share at this meeting. There is time for this to be finalised and submitted before the deadline with the Charity Commissioners and Companies House. The firm of Alwyns has taken on the day to day accounting role and Colin H and Colin B from Bradwell will meet with a partner from Alwyns to agree the work and responsibilities as appropriate. A new Trustee Treasurer, with appropriate experience, is urgently needed to oversee the work and community investments.

Colin added that we owe a great debt of gratitude to Roger who took over the accounts when it was left in disarray after Martin Morris, the Finance Manager, died. Roger has worked over and above the call of duty to put everything on a secure footing.

The minutes of the last AGM, held during the Othona 70th birthday celebrations, were approved by the meeting. It was agreed that it had been a good do!

Colin introduced Liz Johnson who will be taking on a central role on the Trustee Body. Angela Mutum will be coming on board as a Bradwell Trustee but was unable to be with us at this meeting.

This year Alan Hounsham and Janet Aldridge have resigned as Trustees. Janet was also Chair of the OWD committee. Thanks were given for all their work for the Community. Fran Jones is on maternity leave, having had a baby girl on March 4th.

There were questions from the floor from Kate Portal and Jonney Aldridge as to who is on the committees and what the level of information recorded on the websites should be as some has been very out of date. Tim said the Bradwell site has been updated to give committee names etc. Trustees reaffirmed their intention for these to be kept up to date – new websites are coming on stream – OWD now has a working new site and Bradwell will use the template for the structure to populate their own version. The new site will work well on any device and will enable live booking and payments as appropriate.

The future of *Full Circle* is still to be determined. Colin asked for feedback from people so the level of need for printed material can be assessed. What do people want to see and how do they need to receive it. Brenda Motley said she preferred to read thoughtful articles in print, whereas straight information is fine on screen. Kate Portal asked for documents to be in docx format as well as pdf. This should be possible on the websites.

Bradwell report

Tim covered the changes in the way the centre is staffed. An Erasmus bid provided a group of 4 young people who were now in place working at Bradwell for a year. Bradwell also uses the 'Workaway' website for temporary workers which had worked well.

The VAPs weeks were found to work better with smaller numbers so this year there had been three groups of 8 over the summer. Tim thanked Paul Winter and his team for their help with all things VAP! Dave and Sandra will be leaving in April next year after nearly three years on the Core. Tim wants to say a big thank you to them and is hopeful that he will be able to fill the vacant posts.

Almost all weekends during the year have a programmed activity including school groups, churches and supporting those who need a holiday. Reconciliation is becoming a major theme at Bradwell again with some really good activities. This will figure largely in the ongoing strategy work and will be inviting people to contribute to that and other themes. Tim has tried to broaden out consultation with others in the

community and thanks all who give their time as volunteers without whom the work wouldn't be done.

OWD Report

Tony was away for three months on sabbatical last year and the community was ably led by Caroline Cameron who has now officially been given the post of Deputy Warden.

Stand out moments include a Core trip to Bradwell, and a Celtic Easter weekend with Tess Ward. Living with Dying is a new theme which was successfully launched and will hopefully be repeated in due course. New Horizons in Islam gave a different slant to the way it is often portrayed and was led by a couple within the progressive wing of Islam.

Antje, our housekeeper, married Noel, our beekeeper, and they have moved to the Franciscan Friary at Hilfield to start their married life.

A Gala concert was arranged to celebrate the homecoming of our grand piano with 7 pianists and 3 singers from Bradwell, Germany and North Devon and lots in between. It was a fundraiser for the new Four Seasons Studio which will replace the old Art Block – now that planning permission has successfully been applied for.

Strategy is also on the agenda for the OWD committee with a meeting dedicated to it coming up shortly.

Tony finished off with an imaginary tour of the new Studio giving an idea of its size and facilities. We hope it will be built in time for the bi-annual Dorset Art Weeks in May 2018 and that it will enable more events to run simultaneously alongside the usual programme.

Colin finished to meeting by saying that the Trustees were there to ensure that the work of the centres complies with the mission of Othona and with legislation. The real work determining how that is carried out lies with the Centres, their staff, committee, volunteers and visitors.

We concluded the AGM with a shared act of Worship.

Christianity and Islam – Parallel Faiths?

Paul Winter

It is heartening to find that all over the country there are interfaith meetings and discussions that engage many of the various religions represented within society. That is very much to the good but all too often there is, on both sides, a misconception of one another's religion when Christians and Muslims come together.

At first sight the two religions are very similar. Both are monotheistic and Abrahamic. Both look to a great leader. For Christians it is Jesus Christ; for Muslims it is Muhammad, the last of the prophets, with respect given to Jesus as the penultimate and second greatest of the prophets. Both have sacred writings, a holy book they refer to as "The Word of God"; for Christians it is the Bible while for Muslims it is the Qu'ran. Surely these parallels are a good basis for understanding between followers of the two faiths?

Not really. And there is no better time for Christians to think about this than Advent when we specially give thanks and praise to God for the mystery of the incarnation, God's supreme gift to mankind of himself in the person of Jesus. Ask a Muslim of any and every tradition to identify the most perfect revelation of God that is accessible to all mankind and unequivocally the reply comes, "The Holy Qu'ran". Reading the Qu'ran it is immediately striking that it is written as the direct voice of God speaking in much the same way as the ten commandments are presented to us in the Bible's Exodus and Deuteronomy.

If the correct equivalence of God's most perfect revelation to man is between Jesus and the Qu'ran, where does everything else fit in? Muslims hold Muhammad in the highest respect and reverence because he was a mortal human specially chosen by God to be his messenger, the mouthpiece through which the authentic Word of God would be delivered. Perhaps the best equivalent for Christians is in the person of Mary, Jesus' mother specially chosen as God's instrument through which he would take earthly form. Interestingly in both

religions' narratives the Angel Gabriel has a vital role in guiding and explaining to Mary and to Muhammad what is being revealed.

Back in July together with a largely Christian group I attended a weekend course at Othona West Dorset entitled New Horizons in Islam. Led by a husband and wife team they presented a peaceful religion. When it came to comparing the two religions and seeing to what extent they might be conflated, the diagram described God's most complete revelation to man as "The Word". And for me the penny dropped. Right at the opening of John's gospel Jesus is identified as the Word that was God before the time of creation, yet had become "a human being, (who), full of grace and truth, lived among us". For Christians the Word encompasses the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

So if in Islam the Word is the Qu'ran and in Christianity the Word is Jesus, where does that leave the Bible? I must first say something about the Qu'ran. The text, written in classical Arabic, is accepted without change by each and every Muslim tradition. However in addition to the Qu'ran there is a body of writings, the Hadith. This gathers together many strands, including the personal teachings of Mohammad, the story of the early growth and spread of Islam, and commentaries and sayings. It is in the content and interpretation of the Hadith that differences may be found, for example between Sunni and Shia. At Othona it was suggested that for Christians the Bible is the equivalent of the Hadith. But doesn't that undervalue or even belittle the significance of the Bible?

Not at all. A Muslim has the "advantage" that once classical Arabic has been mastered immediate access is gained to the Word by reading the Qu'ran. What possibility does a Christian have to come to know the Word as Jesus Christ? While I can't discount the possibility of the kind of direct revelation that was given to St Paul, and tradition, teaching, prayer and meditation all have their part, they need to be firmly based on what we can find in our Bibles. Yes, it is a collection of writings through the ages by various people with diverse attitudes and purposes. We read in translation and much may be lost (or gained!) in translation. Yet our forefathers struggled to claim and reclaim the Bible

knowing it is the most effective and perhaps virtually the only way an individual has to come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

All this was delightfully depicted in Maxine Ridout Prime's play, "Let There be Light – The Bible in a Flash" seen at Glastonbury early last November. There was humour extracted from the different approaches, and details of the story each gospel writer has to tell. However Act 2, covering The New Testament, opened with a pulpit declaration from the beginning of John's gospel chapter one. Though it did seem that Matthew found difficulty in comprehending its significance!

Approaching Christmas it does help for a moment to forget the Christmas cards and glitter and read the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke exactly as you find them written. How many "wise" men does Matthew have visiting from the East? Does Luke say that the birth happened in a stable? (In the Middle East mangers with fodder are found in fields, open spaces and even in streets, so the Islamic tradition that Jesus was born in the open does not contradict our Bible story.) But do not omit to then turn to chapter one of John's gospel to find an account of the incarnation that places all else in context.

This article first appeared in the December 2017 edition of Link, the magazine for the Mid-Somerset group of United Reformed Churches.

The Kindness of Strangers – A Letter

Chris O'Grady

Dear Sandra, Mick and Dave

It was exactly two weeks ago today that I walked from Maldon where I has been camping on the estuary and finished my day, to my great delight, at the Othona Community.

I am writing properly having only left a note previously to thank you for the great kindness and trust you gave me.

When the “wind blew me in” I honestly had little idea what to expect. Having walked since 8 a.m. and not seen much “civilisation” for a good part of the day, seeing on my map the word “community” and some buildings indicated, it did cross my mind that with luck there might be somewhere out of the wind I might shelter.

To find myself suddenly involved in a performance of Vivaldi’s Spring violin concerto, and being asked to video the event on a stranger’s phone was quite a surprise. Then to be allowed to join you for a meal of soup and bread - again such a great pleasure from quite a small gift.

And then when you kindly said that I could spend the night in the warm, on a bedwell I cannot express the pleasure that you gave me.

I often am told and often think that walking along the coast of England and Wales is slightly extreme. I make it harder by “roughing it” camping rather than staying at B and Bs. All I can say though is that by depriving myself of some of life’s simple comforts, when I am “gifted” a kindness, as I was by you, the pleasure and joy I receive is multiplied many times over.

I am lucky to have, as you know, made a walking pilgrimage to Rome from England. Enclosed is a postcard that I use to promote the talks that I do for various organisations, when I present stories about the people I met on my walk. Oftentimes I will present my story to a Women’s Institute. At the end of the slide show people will always come up to me almost “shocked” by both my solitary undertaking, and also by just how many times I have received extraordinary kindness from complete strangers. Frequently I was treated with trust by people I met on my “way”. People listening to my stories find them hard to “accept”.

My message to them is always the same. No man is an island. We are all members of the World —“planet Earth”. of course one should be careful and inquisitive before engaging with a stranger, but please assume that they are normal, trustworthy and good ... as most of us are!!

Thank you all once again for your gifts of kindness to a stranger. I hope to visit Othona again before too long.

Much love

Chris O'Grady (12th March 2017)

A Loner at Othona

David Birdseye

It was 30th August 2003 and we were at a loose end. We being self, partner Sarah and daughter Rachel. Something had been tentatively planned but, for some forgotten reason, had been aborted. Sarah urged "Well, let's go out SOMEWHERE". So I checked my diary. "I dunno. There's some sort of open day on, this afternoon". "Where?" "At the Othona Community". "Where's that?" "Near Bridport". "Where?" You get the drift. I got out my O.S. map. We were in Exeter at that time, but were soon driving to Dorset. Well, I was. Sarah never did learn. This place was 35 miles due East, on the coast, and we arrived a little late, so missed out on the cream tea, whatever. And we never discovered the "Heebeegebee Experience".

So that was my introduction to Othona. I had been seeking some sort of spiritual fellowship for some time. Nothing too pious, formal, dogmatic or solemn. I was feeling somewhat penitent, having been something of a shoplifter in my youth. I had heard that God helps those who help themselves, but, unfortunately, had misconstrued the meaning. I felt God was cross with me and I needed to get back into His good books. Before departing B.B. I found myself signing up for, and signing a cheque for an upcoming event"New Horizons". And so it began!

Eventually I booked in with Sarah and Rachel. Being an only child it was healthy for her. And Sarah needed a sympathetic ear concerning her relationship with me. At Othona she encountered ears galore, eagerly flapping. In time we ventured to Bradwell. A long drive of 260 miles.

Pastures new, and useful ones. My stepfather died in late February 2005, on his son Jim's birthday. My mother was distraught. I wrote, trying to persuade her to come to Bradwell for Easter. She had been losing the plot to some degree and had developed, seemingly, the hazardous habit of confusing the smoke alarm for the food timer. Surprisingly, she agreed, so I booked us in. This was the troubled period when Bradwell was undergoing problems I never really understood.

Othona did not meet my mother's expectations. I suspect she had anticipated something monastic, Bible readings, devout pilgrims on their knees, a whiff of incense, and so forth. What she DIDN'T prepare for was a fellow resident with a peculiar choice of headgear - a saucepan. But Rachel loved Bradwell. Another resident would take her badger-watching, at dusk. They would put fruit out and stand by the little bridge, waiting, in hope. My daughter referred to Bradwell as "Othona-Long-Way". The last time I was there, some of her old toys were still in the old sandpit. Being recently bereaved, however, the break did my mother good. She needed to get out of the house.

Since those early days, Sarah and I have separated, my mum has passed, as has the lady with the saucepan-fixation, wardens have come and gone (at least, at Bradwell), and I have become something of a loner, now living in a small flat in London. But Othona has remained a lifeline over the years, and continues to be out there as an option and a haven.

This is how I came across Mr Motley's vision — initially via an ad. in an Exeter newspaper. I would be intrigued to hear the accounts of how others first came to the community.

May Othona remain a beacon of light in a sometimes dark and worrying world. If my mother had been let loose in the kitchen, it surely, long ago, WOULD have been.

Book Review

Constance Marie Paterson

Down to Bedrock by Eric Condingly is told through the “Diary and Secret notes” of an Army Chaplain as a Far East prisoner of war between 1942 and 45. *Down to Bedrock* is an inspiring story of endurance and resourcefulness. During his first two years as a Chaplain Eric Condingly had “always felt a little in the way in the army”, and it was only when his battalion became prisoners of the Japanese, at Changi Camp in Singapore, that this changed. The restrictions of captivity began to create a close community where questions about faith and life could be asked and where church life began to flourish alongside a “university” with several “faculties”. Stumbling across a Mosque, used by the Indian troops who had previously been billeted at Changi, Condingly set about converting it into a church, dedicating it to St George, with men soon volunteering their time and talents in beautifying and serving this church. The regular discussion meetings with Eric resulted in some expressing a desire to be confirmed, and others a call to ordination; and classes were taught accordingly. Things began to get much grimmer when some were sent to work on the Burma railway, but on joining them, Eric Condingly established another St George’s and church life continued despite the worsened conditions. For despite, or maybe because of these conditions, it became a time of getting “down to bedrock” as the author recalled years later: “. . . for three and a half years, the thin veneer of civilization, or reticence had been stripped from men. . . One saw people as they were”.

Two Poems

Judy Fox

What I Believe - Or Not

With Thanks to Pooh

On Monday when the sky is blue
I wonder is God What or is He Who
And think I'll stick with what I've got
Perhaps He is or, maybe not.

On Tuesday when there is not much to do
I tell God what He ought to do
And how to run this how d'you do
To make it better for me and you.

On Wednesday when the sun comes out
I laugh and sing and dance and shout
And tell God I think He's got it right
And I'll sing His praise with all my might.

On Thursday when He makes it snow
I almost tell him where to go
But feeling warm and quite well fed
Give thanks for all His care instead.

On Friday when it starts to rain
I really cannot stand the strain
And wonder if He's in control
Or if this is just some black hole.

On Saturday I become aware
Of all the suffering out there
And wonder if He is or if He's not
And if He's going to sort this lot.

On Sunday I say my prayers
God has caught me unawares
For if He is or if He's not
He's all that you and I have got.

In the Chapel

In the Chapel complete silence
more eloquent than any words
The love, peace and fellowship
fill our hearts and minds.
The differences felt in debate
are now seen to be pointless,

a mere pecking over crumbs.
For however long we talk,
debate, discuss
We are still the same us,
each showing a different face,
each living at a different pace,
all aiming at the same place.
Each struggling, striving for
Peace of Mind
having to learn that in the
Silence we will find that
which we so desperately seek
For then can we hear God speak.

Editors' Note: The first of these two has appeared some years ago in Full Circle but Judy has received several requests from Othona members for it to be re-published.

From the Terrace at Othona

Louise Heatley

Jump, hop, skip, Othona bunny,
Play in the sunshine,
The wind in your fur.
Watch out for Otto!!*

It can be dangerous round here.
You might find yourself soul-naked
To yourself, to God, or to another.
A shared vulnerability.

Swoop, Othona bird, swoop,
Let's be free and fly
In the wide blue sky,
I might even learn your name, or mine.

And you, dear macrocarpa tree,
Standing tall, and proud.
Thank you for your witnessing
Of all the conversations on this terrace.

Hi, treehouse!
Let's play, free of iambic pentameter and all other constraints of mind
and body.
Let's swing on your swing, slide down your slide,
And look from your heights to the vast horizon, and beyond.

*Otto the Othona cat

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

Paul Fox

When I was in Palestine/Israel I met some EAPPI volunteers, and heard about some of the brave work they do. One Lloyd Auchard came to our Church to tell of his time out there. Also Pat Price-Tomes, served with EAPPI and has added some information to this article.

About EAPPI

The **Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)** is coordinated by the World Council of Churches in response to a call from the heads of churches in Jerusalem. In the UK and Ireland it is coordinated by the Quakers. The project brings internationals from about 20 different countries to the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Since 2002, over 1,500 volunteers have come for 3 months to be Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs). For most of them this is a life changing experience.

EAs offer a protective presence to vulnerable communities and monitor and report human rights abuses. They join Palestinians and Israelis who work in nonviolent ways for peace and support the local churches. When they return home, EAs use their first-hand experiences to open the eyes of the world to the realities of occupation and campaign for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli/

Palestinian conflict based on international law. EAs range in age from 25 to 70 years old and are of many different backgrounds, but what they all share is a deep dedication to justice and human rights. EAs do not take sides in the conflict but practise 'principled impartiality'. As a result of the amount of care which goes into promoting this stance and into accurate reporting, their work is widely respected by NGOs such as The Red Cross and Save The Children as well as by the UN and politicians both nationally and at the EU.

For more information or to support the work visit www.quaker.org.uk/eappi

This is by EA Elizabeth, just returned from the Southern West Bank

The Village of Um-al-Kher

Mleha is a wife, a mother and a grandmother. She has lived all her life in this village, a small Bedouin community of about 130 people deep in the South Hebron Hills. Life in this part of occupied Palestine is hard. Winters are cold, summers are hot, and the rocky hills, briefly green in spring, swiftly turn to grey in summer becoming a dry and dusty wilderness.

Mleha's community now lives on land bought in the 1950s from the nearby Palestinian town of Yatta, having been forcibly removed by the Israeli authorities from lands in the Negev desert in southern Israel. The people of Mleha's community depend on simple farming for their livelihood. When they first moved here life continued much as it had before, but in the 1980s, Israelis came and began building on land adjacent to Um-al-Kher. The settlement of Karmel had arrived. The building of settlements is illegal under Article 49 (6) of the 4th Geneva Convention which states that, "the Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies".

With the settlers came the infrastructure for modern living — electricity, water and sewage was provided by the Israeli authorities. At least it was for Karmel. It did not come for Um-al-Kher where electricity is from solar panels provided by Germany and water from a cistern via a small

plastic pipe. What the people of Um-al-Kher did receive was a heavy shower of demolition or stop-work orders for almost every structure in the community because the Israeli authorities and settlers do not want them to live here.

Um-al-Kher, like many other Bedouin settlements in the South Hebron Hills, is in Area C of occupied Palestine, an area comprising 62% of the West Bank and home to about 300,000 Palestinians, but where the Palestinian Authority has no authority following the Oslo Accords of the 1990s.

Area C is under full Israeli civil and security control. If Palestinians wish to build they must obtain permits from the Israeli authorities. Less than 10% of the requested permits are granted. Consequently they build without them, then live in the certain knowledge that the buildings can be demolished by Israel at any time and with scant notice. This arbitrary demolition of Palestinian homes is forbidden under international humanitarian law (Article 53 of the 4th Geneva Convention) but continues to take place. Consequently as Karmel grows, Um-al-Kher suffers.

Some of the homes in Um-al-Kher have been demolished as many as five times, even those originally built before Israel began its occupation of the West Bank in 1967. The impact is devastating. Mleha showed us her son's home, or all that is left of it — the concrete base and a small section of one wall. Her son has a one year old daughter – Sara. Demolitions take place whether children are involved or not. The Bedouin of Um-al-Kher also suffer from settler violence towards their property and themselves. Even their taboun (bread oven) has been destroyed by settlers on a regular basis. Yesh Din, an Israeli volunteer organisation working to defend the human rights of the Palestinian civilian population, supports the Bedouin, urging them to report all incidents to the Israeli authorities who must, one day, stand accountable.

Looking across the barbed wire at the neat, modern houses in Karmel, Mleha's husband Sulieman says, "I implode with anger at this situation". He points out how quickly Israel responds to international disasters such as the earthquake in Nepal, ensuring it receives

maximum press coverage for its humanitarian aid while creating humanitarian issues in the land it illegally occupies.

Mleha asks for her basic human rights to be observed: “We want to survive, to live in dignity, safety and security. I want to live in the shade in the summer and in the warmth in the winter.” Mleha appreciates the temporary metal structure in which she now lives, donated by international aid agencies, but it is like an oven at present as temperatures exceed 40o, and is bitterly cold in the winter. “I just want to live in peace with my family, in my home, in my village.”

The Village of Susiya

Dawn in Susiya is magic. The bright stars disappear as streaks of light disperse the rich velvet of night and the hills start to reveal their shapes. Shepherds release their dogs and, on foot or donkey, take their sheep out to graze in the cool of early morning. However, for villages like Susiya, under threat of demolition, dawn can be a tragic time; it's when the bulldozers are most likely to come. Over recent months EAs have been present at Susiya, taking their turn around dawn to watch the road at the edge of the village, listening for the sound of heavy vehicles. Should bulldozers be seen or heard, EAs can raise the alarm and be ready to witness events. Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states, “Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons ... is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations”. There is no military necessity to demolish Susiya. The reason given by the Israeli authorities — the occupying power in this case — is the lack of building permits, permits almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain. Palestinians have done much to publicise the plight of Susiya at international level and many international delegations have visited. Haneen Zoabi, the first Palestinian-Israeli woman elected to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), came and spoke with the people, encouraging them to continue their “samud” which roughly translates as “steadfastness”. Haneen told the EAs that Israel uses security concerns to justify many of its violations of international law and human rights, but added that expanding the settlements, condoning the violence of the settlers, preventing the Palestinians from farming,

from using their own water, “this is not a fight to defend yourself, this is to defeat and to control the Palestinians and to oppress the Palestinians, so this is why the work you [EAs] do is so very important.” She urged EAs to tell the world what is happening and to ask the world “not to be silent”. This July many Israelis joined Palestinians and international activists to protest against the proposed demolition. Zelda, a Jewish Israeli from Tel Aviv, told me, “This land is magic; it’s also tragic. Many Israelis live in denial about events in the West Bank or are unaware of what’s being done in the name of Israel”. Zelda wants to see Israelis recognising the truth and, as Haneen said, not remaining silent. Thanks to national and international pressure Susiya has been given a slight temporary reprieve from demolition. Dawn is not quite so dangerous now but the dead of night still is. The illegal settlers around Susiya are angry that the village has not been demolished, so people in Susiya fear settlers will use violence, especially since the recent incendiary attack at Duma, which resulted in two deaths.

Now people in Susiya, with help from other Palestinians, watch and listen during the night hours for settler actions that could prove deadly. EAs take their turn standing under the spotlight so all can see they are present, ready to record any violent acts and, as urged by Haneen Zoabi, not keep silent about them. The EAs’ presence can deter or lessen the severity of violence, so it is very necessary for EAPPI to continue to send out new volunteers to continue work.

Obituaries

Grace Vincent

We were sad to hear of the death of Grace Vincent on 25th May 2017 aged 83. Grace with her husband John were founders of the Ashram Community in 1967. They were part of a movement that asserted the importance of following the radical example of Jesus in living a full Christian life with the aim of making a significant difference in the world. Through the Ashram Community Grace helped to nourish and support generations of the poor and disadvantaged. She ran the New Roots whole food shop and taught English as a second language as well as helping to provide food and accommodation for the destitute and homeless at the Burngreave Ashram in Sheffield. She was always

a most “hands on” worker and in that multi faith and multiculturally diverse area worked tirelessly for understanding and reconciliation. On several occasions we enjoyed the vivacious and inspirational company of Grace and John and other members of the Ashram Community at Bradwell and we shall miss her.

Jan Marshall

Robin Stallard (1937 to 2017)

I first met Robin in 1971 in Farnborough, Hants, where we were both working at The Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE); Robin held a senior position and travelled the world for the RAE. However, it was at Farnborough Old Parish Church (St Peter’s) that we met. Robin was a deeply committed Christian and very active in Church Life. Robin and I were both assistant leaders of the Boy Pathfinders Group (11 to 14 year olds) and Robin subsequently became overall leader. I suggested we take a group of Pathfinders to Burton Bradstock for a weekend, which we did in about 1975. Robin came with his family, his wife Doris, Julian who was a pathfinder, and younger children, Nigel and Fiona. The family subsequently stayed at Burton Bradstock several times.

Robin appreciated the ethos of Othona and enthusiastically supported the community. He joined the House Committee where his opinion and advice were always thoughtful and wise. Committee weekends were not solely concerned with business and Robin was ever happy to be involved in practical projects around the grounds and house, where his electrical expertise proved invaluable. He always had time for people; he was a good listener and confidant. Robin served as chair of the Burton Bradstock House Committee; later he was made a Trustee and, for a while, he was Link Trustee for Burton Bradstock.

I have lost a good friend and Othona has lost a valuable member. I and many others, I am sure, will miss Robin; and our thoughts and prayers go out to Doris and their children and grand-children.

David Forgan

A.G.M.

Notice of the 2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

of

The Othona Community

**To be held at 2.00pm in the Lower Hall, St Andrews
Church, Short Street, Waterloo SE1 8LJ**

on

Saturday 22nd September

www.stjohnswaterloo.org

Fully accessible

1.30pm: arrival with tea or coffee

2.00pm: AGM

Followed by service and a bring and share tea

Please note that we must vacate the hall by 5.00 pm

LOCATION: Between Waterloo and Southwark Stations. From Waterloo walk down Waterloo Rd., and turn left up “The Cut”. From Southwark Station turn right down “The Cut”. Short St. turning is almost opposite the Young Vic Theatre. Buses 63 and 45 to Blackfriars Rd.

Full Circle Comes Full Course

David Birdseye

And so Full Circle comes full course
At least, in paper form
I guess you're feeling some remorse
– Online is now the norm

But it had a long and fruitful run
It had a beating heart
My thanks to you and everyone
Who strove to play a part

Yet all good things must come to pass
No need to be rueful
It's down to how you view your glass
– Half empty, or half full!

December Evening Sky, Bradwell-on-Sea

Paul Gilman



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