



# ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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May Weekend 2022 at Cliff College

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Long ago when I was little you would see German soldiers being marched past the end of our little street. They were building prefabricated houses further down the road. One Saturday morning my dad took me for a walk round the prefabs to see how the work was progressing. Surprisingly there was a solitary prisoner working away all on his own. Dad went up to the fellow & started up a conversation.

I was shocked. The German was our enemy also I thought we weren't supposed to speak to them. But my dad & he looked like two ordinary blokes having a chat. Home again I told my mum that dad had been talking to a German at the prefabs. I could see that she was perturbed but it set me thinking.

In the late 1950s I went biking round Holland with my friend Mike from university. Everywhere we were not well received. We realised after a bit that they thought we were Germans & made sure to start the conversation with 'Excuse me, but do you speak English?' They always did & it completely changed their attitude.

We decided to make a detour into Germany. Firstly crossing the border the guards were very gruff. Then on the camp site near Wesel I was pushed out of the queue at the shop - "Aha! Engländer! Wir haben sehr gern Engländerer" (excuses for mistakes) Then Mike was spat upon. We didn't sleep expecting the tent to be attacked & at first light before anyone was up decamped & pedalled back to the safety of the Netherlands. But I could understand because I had seen earlier on a trip the destruction brought about by the Allies bombing of Munich.

I am now trying to work out why I am writing this. It's something to do with how mistrust then even hatred can arise between people & how it can be overcome. Blessed are the peacemakers. I'll try to plough on.

In 1992, Jackie & I drove to Moscow. The Soviet Union had just fallen & there was a kind of chaotic power vacuum. We had been told that the police were very corrupt & would fine you 10 dollars on some trivial pretext. It never happened. Rather we were helped out by the police when we got into a muddle as we do. I'm trying to say the reality was quite different from what we'd been told.

Our hosts told us to go to VDNKh - the big exhibition of the people's achievements with its central fountain with female figures representing the republics pouring water into a common basin. It was in fact in a shambolic state - some exhibits abandoned & the fountain wasn't working. We could see the disappointment, the sadness on the faces of Irina & Yuri when we told them. There's no Soviet Union & so no VDNKh they said. It was the passing of an ideal, a dream maybe.

But later on returning to Moscow, going about its streets freely, taking the metro, the trolleybus - we felt so free. There was such energy about, such optimism. Wonderful people we met working in projects for the deprived & handicapped. It was said that this was the 1<sup>st</sup> generation that had not known fear - the fear of the Gulag, the fear of the knock on the door at 3 o'clock in the morning. We thought freedom had come for ever.

But now disaster has befallen us. A friend, French, widow of a charming Russian friend has written 'Where is that Russia we came to know & love so much?'

Another friend wrote from Moscow 'we never imagined this could happen. We thought we could change but clearly we couldn't' Other friends who have had to leave Russia quote one of their number as saying 'All I want is to wake up in the morning back home'

But the mistrust that has arisen & the hatred in some hearts will not go away.

Did you see the Moscow t.v. journalist Marina Ovsyannikova holding up her placard - 'Don't believe the propaganda' behind the announcer. So brave.

Last week on tv, there was an interview with Michael Gorbachev. An old man in failing health who has suffered such disappointment. But still the old sparkle was there as he talked of his beloved Raisa. Raisa Maximova who died so long ago.

He showed no rancour over the setbacks & betrayals he has suffered & said we must not be discouraged but have patience & wait.

Michael Sergeevich sang the refrain from a song. 'The spring will return but my youth will not return.' Perhaps in future springs the forgotten ideals of our own youth will be fulfilled? Meanwhile, while we wait we will continue striving to establish the Kingdom.

But where has it gone, that Russia that we once loved?

## GREENBELT 2022 – a personal experience

Euan was involved in running a stall for Green Christian, so I was invited along to join him at the 49<sup>th</sup> Greenbelt at Boughton House near Kettering.

On the Green Christian stall

Day 1 - Climate grief (with a worship service of Lament),

Day 2 LOAF and other food issues

Day 3 "Joy in Enough", included tiny green donuts to represent donut economy

Day 4 Green Christian "Way of Life" with prayer bunting

This could be a whole other article but no time for that now!

The theme for this year was "WAKE UP", and there were many opportunities to learn more about climate change, refugees, racial injustice, Palestine, the rainbow nation and other things. There were also games including parachute games and Quidditch, crafts, three pubs (one non-alcoholic sponsored by the Methodist Church) and plenty of music – which the original festival was all about. Food stalls various, and charity stalls even more various. The URC sponsored a yoURCafe with hot food, lovely cakes, and worship morning and evening.

There was worship for every taste including loud Communion, Quiet Communion, a prayer tipi Godly Play and even an outdoor Goth worship.

Nearly everything was under canvas, and the variety of tents was astonishing – and useful as a marker since the site was so large. I would have done more things, but the distance from our camper to many events was so great, that I didn't have time or energy to do more.

So, I will describe what I did as a taster for others. I went to John Bell's "Big sing" and also heard him speak twice, once on looking back and once on "Inheritance Tracks" – for our children's children". Heard Caroline Lucas on "The power of one", a talk on migration which featured a Ukrainian family and a quiet time accompanied by a sitar-playing Sikh. Listened to an amazing jazz singer/cellist called Ayanna Witter-Johnson, went to quiet Communion and Taize worship, watched "Three men from the North" (circus, juggling).

Missed one or two things which were full to overflowing when I got there. Really wanted to learn more about Generation Z! Sometimes got blasted by the loud music coming from the Glade Stage, but didn't stop for long.

Would I go again? Five days in a campervan with minimal facilities and the long walk to the hub was very stressful for me personally. But I might be tempted by the opportunities that Greenbelt provides, especially hearing John Bell's wonderful storytelling.

Nona Wright

## The Conflict Mineral Campaign

### and the work of Joel and George in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

As you will remember the Day's Income 2021-2022 was to raise money for the Conflict Mineral Campaign I am involved in, whose vision is that "The People of the Democratic Republic of Congo benefit from their mineral wealth'. Our contribution helped fund a **workshop in Bukavu, South Kivu**, DRC involving political decision makers and economic actors in the mining sector and local people, to look at the problem of conflict minerals and find appropriate solutions.

This Workshop took place on March 29, 2022 in the conference room of the National Institute of Statistics in LABOTE in the city of Bukavu in South Kivu a workshop for consultation and official launch of the campaign on mining conflicts in the DRC which had brought together various key actors involved in this issue, including: state services in charge of mines, private sector actors (industrial companies, public sector entities mining cooperatives, the media, civil society and international organizations involved in the field. In total, the workshop had brought together 30 people, including 08 women and 22 men.

These are a few of the outcomes of the workshop which might be of interest. If you would like to see the whole report please contact me.

The final Recommendations were made to different sectors so politicians both provincial and national, cooperatives and mining companies, communities in the DRC and these of most interest to us:

#### **Actions to be taken and Recommendations to International organizations in the DRC and elsewhere involved in the field:**

1. To challenge the final operators (factories and companies) manufacturing the finished products of minerals from the DRC of the role they must play so that their factories or companies are not the basis of mining conflicts in the DRC,
2. Make the plea to the governments of the countries of the mining companies in the DRC to withdraw the licenses granted to them if it turns out that these companies are illegally exploiting the minerals of the DRC or their mining is a source of conflicts and or violence at the level of local communities in the DRC,
3. Advocate on behalf of mining companies in the DRC to create factories for the transformation of minerals into finished products at the local level,

4. Accompany and support civil society organizations in advocacy with the government and mining companies, in awareness-raising, training and warning activities on mining conflicts in the DRC.'

The next part of the plan was to have meetings in various mining sites in South Kivu, in different territories, to gather information about what is needed to improve the condition of the local population. Thus we will ensure that our campaigning is informed by the views of local people. We expect to hold forums where the local authorities and the mining operators will discuss with the local people the negative and positive impact of mining in their zones and how the living conditions of local people can be improved through changes in the way mining is organised and the mining companies act.

Joel who is the member of the group making visits to mines has now begun this phase of the work and will be writing up his findings soon.

I thought you might be interested to know a bit about George and Joel the two members in the DRC who are engaged in this work which can have dangers. The following were printed in our Quaker newsletter and are replies to questions from Elizabeth, the editor of Manchester and Warrington Area of Quakers in an interview and who was founder of the Conflict Mineral campaign.



**George Bani** lives in Uvira, South Kivu, DRC, with his wife and 9 children. Two of his older children are studying abroad, in Burundi and South Africa. He is a member of CEEACO, (Communaute des Eglises Evangeliques des Amis au Congo), the Quaker Yearly Meeting that works with Quaker Congo Partnership, running a small hospital and other

projects. He is an active member of Conflict Minerals Campaign, organising events in E Congo. He is co-ordinator of an NGO called INIREC (Initiatives pour la Réconciliation Communautaire), and Clerk of the Quaker Peace Network, Central Africa Region. As a freelance

consultant, he runs AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) workshops.

**How long have you been a Quaker?**

I have been a Quaker since 1983, when I was 11 years old. My mother and father were Methodist, so I was brought up in the Methodist church. I started attending the Quaker church when I was young. This was because many of my friends were Quakers.

**Have you always lived in Uvira?**

I've lived in Uvira since 1985, when I started secondary school. Before then, I lived in a village near Abeka, 35 kilometers from Uvira. I lived in Tanzania from 1998 for six years, because of the violence in South Kivu. I was in a refugee camp.

**What foreign countries have you visited or lived in, as well as Tanzania?**

Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda. I was in Kenya for six months to study English.

**I know that Quaker worship is different in DRC than in UK. Could you describe what happens at Sunday worship?**

Here we have preachers like myself. We sing and dance, we pray, and listen to readings and to preachers.

**Tell me about Quaker Congo Partnership. What effect do you think it is having locally in South Kivu?**

It is a partner of Congo Yearly Meeting (CEEACO). It has 4 programmes – supporting Abeka hospital, supporting the women's group, a water programme, and youth peace programme. Sometimes I support the youth peace programme by capacity building, and I support the management organisation through workshops and giving advice. All this is in collaboration with Quaker Congo Partnership UK.

**What do you think is the best thing that Quaker Congo Partnership has done?**

Peace building involving youth, because in our context, youth is a pillar of peace or of violence. This means that youth is a good target for peace work.

**Tell me about your involvement with Conflict Minerals Campaign.**

I am very happy to be involved in CMC because it's one of my goals and visions. As a Quaker, peace is an important value. We need to work hard and be engaged, as I believe that, through our campaign, we can work for peace in our country.

**Tell me about the AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) workshops that you run. Who takes part? What effect do you think they have? Do you think that they prevent armed violence?**

I worked with an international organisation (Christian Outreach for Relief and Development) for 20 years. After that I worked with MSF (Medecins Sans Frontieres). Then I worked with NRC (Norwegian Refugees Council). After that I was involved in a peace programme with CAP (Change Agent Peace Programme). CAP is a programme of Norwegian Quakers.

One of the programmes of CAP is AVP. I attended basic and second level training and training of trainers, and now I have become a trainer. I believe that AVP contributes to bringing peace, because one pillar of AVP is to teach people about positive confirmation and faith in the others. Another pillar is how we can communicate positively, another is collaboration. Another pillar is non-violence solutions for each conflict, because we believe in each person and transforming power which, when we are open to it, we have energy to answer positively all issues, and to change bad things and ideas and situations to good.



**Joel Amani** lives in Bukavu, South Kivu. He is a human rights lawyer. He is one of the youngest members of a family of 12 children and lives with a younger brother. Most of his older siblings have married and formed their own households. When the Conflict Minerals campaign started, Joel and George said that we should start with research in order to understand the problems. Funded by a £1,000 grant from Manchester and Warrington Area Quaker Meeting, Joel visited mining sites in North and

South Kivu, mainly where they mined gold, and produced reports for us.



Joel's other activities include visiting Bukavu prison as part of a group from his Catholic Church. Joel Amani has just returned from visiting

mining areas in South Kivu, East Congo. Elizabeth interviewed him about children working in mines.

### **What mining areas have you just visited?**

Luhihi, Luwindja and Walungu

### **What ores were mined?**

Gold, coltan and cassiterite

### **Were there children working on all the mining sites?**

Yes, on all sites. Indeed thousands of children are deprived of their childhood because they are forced to work in mining sites in South Kivu, next to the artisanal miners.

According to a recent UNICEF report, there are: Luhihi, 347 children in the mines, Numbi 112 children, Mission 541, Kitutu 74. Luwindja and Walungu are at 300 each.

Our Luhihi, Luwindja and Walungu surveys show that 80% of children don't go to school. The lack of provision of free education result in most of the children being in the mines or in the streets. On mining sites, where small-scale artisanal exploitation is carried out, at first glance, countless tunnels like labyrinths strike the eye with a tangle of pipes that facilitate breathing in the underground tunnels. Everywhere in these sites are small constructions made of blue tarpaulins where some diggers are relaxing or eating. Many children and adolescents carry heavy bags containing earth which they wash and sift in order to extract gold waste from it.

In Luhihi, I interviewed Ezekiel, an 11-year-old child who dropped out of school in 2nd primary. "I'm here to look for gold, it's not easy, because we work on the sly for fear of being arrested by the mine police, but we arrive at 6 o'clock to leave at 18 o'clock", he said.

### **What jobs did the children do?**

Some of them went with their parents to look for minerals. Some wash the minerals. Others sell goods such as food, sugar and alcohol to miners.

**Did they work with their parents?** Some work alone, others work with their parents or others who help introduce them to artisanal mining.

### **Why did the children work in the mines?**

First of all, poverty of families, while the Congolese state abandons its children to their sad fate. In fact there are many children living on the street, without supervision. There is increasing unemployment of young people, and juvenile delinquency, etc. The areas where minerals come from are the poorest areas. The extracted minerals do not benefit the local population but rather benefit the final operators. At the sites visited, poverty is a determining factor. There are children who both go to school and do the work in the mines. Others have definitely turned their backs on studies by developing a taste for having money constantly. Some are forced to work there because of

poverty, others work there because they're hoping to make money and get rich.

The convention on the fight against torture, although ratified by the DRC, remains ineffective and unapplied because children caught in sites are mistreated, handcuffed, tied up; in short, these children live without respect for their human dignity. Ezekiel reported to us that he was once caught by the police, he was placed directly in the cell, and he spent more than 48 hours there before being released after money was paid for his release.



### **Is it the children who chose to work in the mines, or did their families make them?**

For the most part families expect their children to work in the mine. At other sites, some of the children refused to go to school and have rather worked in the mines.

### **Were some of the children orphans without a family?**

There are children who work in the mines because their parents were dead, and have to work to earn money in order to feed and clothe themselves.

### **Were they both boys and girls? What ages?**

Most of them are boys. On two of the sites, I've only found boys, but on one of the sites there were two girls. I think the younger ones were about ten years old. A number said that they were twelve or fourteen years old. Most had lost their ID cards, so he wasn't possible to be sure of their age.

### **Do you think it's dangerous for them to work in the mines?**

Yes, it's dangerous. Some of the children stay in houses next to the mines, and when there is rain; there is danger of subsidence. Much more, the situation of children in mines is worrying, especially as regards morality, because they cannot develop or flourish. The materials they come into contact with inhibit the children's growth. It is deplorable this form of exploitation of children because this work destroys them slowly.

### **How do you think it'd be possible to end the practice of children working in the mines?**

One approach would be to raise awareness of the dangers that lie in wait for these children by working in the mines. Another would be to create more means for the families to earn money, because many of them are very poor. Even when they're working in the mines, they can't always afford school fees.

Another approach is to organize workshops at the site level for strengthening their capacity.

### **Is there anything else you would like to say?**

The Congolese mining code, as revised in 2018, doesn't allow that children work in the mines.

Children freed from mining could work in animal husbandry and agriculture.

**It would be good to identify all the children, for their safety. The cooperatives could help. They could re-issue ID cards.**

**We are running the "Conflict Minerals Campaign", so that the Congolese population benefits from its natural**

**resources, to fight against the worst forms of child exploitation in mining areas and for the respect of rights of the local population in the face of mining in the DRC. Indeed, the mining code provides that children are not allowed in mines but from the fact that poverty is increased, and lack of supervision, children are forced to take refuge clandestinely in the mines with all the related consequences: the sexual exploitation and abuse of girls, the worst forms children's work in mines and any other form of violation of the rights of the child in particular moral and physical torture. In short, around the mining areas, teenage girls are used in the trafficking of prostitution to satisfy the sexual needs of the miners once out of the tunnels with the precious minerals. Our campaign hopes to see better co-operation between the protection police, child social services, human rights organizations, the children and those working in the mining sector, to propose action-oriented alternatives to improve the mining sector in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.**

*Sandra Dutson*

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## **Did you know that your pension is powerful? and that greening it is 21 x more effective at cutting carbon than stopping flying, going vegetarian AND switching your energy supplier combined!**

I learned that on a recent "Costing the earth" programme on Radio 4 entitled "How green is my money" ([www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0017463](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0017463))

Right now, our pensions are making us accidental investors in the practices we avoid and the causes we fight against. This means we have vegans invested in factory farming, doctors invested in tobacco and climate campaigners supporting fossil fuels.

Our money in pensions, savings, ISAs, credit cards and bank accounts- is ours and we have some power over how it is used. As the green agenda becomes more powerful we have an unprecedented opportunity to use our money collectively for good, to help shape the world in positive and sustainable ways. And even if we don't currently have savings, wherever we exchange money for energy, food, or housing we have the opportunity to make a choice, or influence a supplier to help drive our hopes for a greener, cleaner and healthier future.

[www.switch-it.green](http://www.switch-it.green) is a great place to start - it lets you see how your current bank, energy provider and pension provider is performing under green and ethical criteria, and suggests a greener alternative with a facility to switch.

[www.makemymoneymatter.co.uk](http://www.makemymoneymatter.co.uk) has lots of useful information and a proforma email to your pension provider asking them to offer greener options.

Richard Curtis, spoke of the 35 yrs he spent raising £1.5billion for Comic Relief, and his excitement at being part of Makemymoneymatter which has seen £1.1trillion pounds transferred from destructive or neutral funds into positive opportunities in a much shorter time. His pension is now invested in green cement, reverse vending machines (empty plastic bottles returned for tokens) affordable housing and healthcare- and is showing better returns than before.

Our money is the most powerful tool we have to fight the climate crisis – let's use it!

*Jenny Medhurst*



## Conversation about the environmental impact of our food

### Cerys

Pushback against vegans by conservative media and dairy farmers gives the impression that vegans are causing massive environmental degradation, unlike those on a standard British diet, or standard American diet. Water consumption has become a particular part of the propaganda exercise. So the facts look different from the deliberate impression created. As can be seen from the middle of the statistics sheet, ([statista.com/1092652/volume-of-water-to-produce-a-liter-of-milk-by-type](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092652/volume-of-water-to-produce-a-liter-of-milk-by-type/)) over 600 litres of water are used to create 1 litre of milk, as a global average. In contrast less than 30 litres of water are needed to create 1 litre of soya liquid. That suggests that on average that vegans are eating and drinking in ways less environmentally pressuring than omnivores. It is quite easy to isolate particular items that some vegans consume, and give the impression that this is the norm, and demonstrate some extra environmental pressure. It is a cover-up for the less convenient truth that non vegan diets are usually much more detrimental for the environment.

### Jenny

Concern about water is a real issue I know -so it's good that our Fairtrade Palestinian almonds ( where the water supply is controlled by the occupying Israelis) are mainly rain fed  
I fear that the world's reliance on a very small number of highly intensively farmed crops isn't good for us or the planet- and we should be eating more varied diets and growing more of our own food - especially fruit and veg - here in Britain.

Did you see

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/07/secret-world-beneath-our-feet-mind-blowing-key-to-planets-future>

Not sure what I make of fermented foods but working with the amazing micro rhyzomes in the soil seems to offer amazing possibilities

### Cerys

Location of growing, and way of farming matters. I do use European grown soya products, many of them organic. Better labelling is needed, with environmental details included. Someone up in these far northern Highlands is growing hazelnuts, which have been growing wild and eaten in the Iron Age. So suited to the climate up here which is cooler usually than the southern Highlands, central Scotland, southern Scotland and England. George Monbiot has a link to what could be the future, precision fermented food proteins, mainly from plant cells. Quorn mushroom protein products are the first of such developments. A scientist at Aberdeen University has found a way of extracting protein from gorse bushes, which grow wild in profusion in Scotland. She thinks it could easily feed the population of Scotland, and more people besides. The present multiple crises point to a need to reduce some global trade, and produce environmentally friendly food near to where people live, and to use local green hydrogen + use ground source heat pumps and wind, solar and tidal energy to generate electricity. Fertilisers need to move away from artificially synthesised nitrogen ones, which use vast amounts of fossil fuel gas, to potassium sulfate fertilizers and other older types which use less energy. Turkey farmers complain about the doubling of feed costs which come from grains, and the uncertainty about avian flu. This is not a sensible way to make protein for human consumption. It is essential that people are aware of the full facts about their food and drink items. I am also aware of the risks of ultra processed foods which are metabolically dangerous. Thank you for your informative responses

*Cerys Brangwyn*

## FAIR TRADE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

What's the link? How can your everyday choices as a consumer affect the rate of climate change? Traidcraft's Mission and Transparency Lead, Robin Roth, explains all...

Image: Vandana Shiva

**H**ow often do you have a conversation with someone and come away with your entire understanding having been changed without you even realising it?

I had been working in Fairtrade for five years and was managing Europe's single biggest Fairtrade company, and I really thought I understood just how critical Fairtrade was to farmers. I was convinced that without it, farmers really didn't have much of a chance at all.

It was around then that I was lucky enough to meet Vandana Shiva, pictured above, who runs a small model farm, North of Delhi. On the farm she encourages farmers to take seeds from her seed bank, use them for free, sell the crop and return a certain percentage for storage and use the following year. By mixing seeds in neighbouring farms, new strains emerge naturally and Vandana's seed bank now hosts over 1,000 different strains of rice. This extraordinary diversity prevents large companies from decoding the

genetic sequence of a seed, registering it and patenting it (thereby enabling them to charge farmers to use it).

When I met Vandana Shiva for the first time she seemed kindly, thoughtful and sincere. I did not, at the time, know that she was an alternate Nobel Prize winner, a serial litigator against, (and frequent vanquisher of) Monsanto, a public crusader against corporate malpractice and the adored defender of small farmer rights across India. In comparison to her, I didn't really know anything.

"What is the most important thing for a small farmer - the thing he or she needs more than anything else to ensure survival?" I asked her. "Healthy soil." She replied quietly and looked out of the window.

"What about a secure income - or a good price for the crop - surely that's more important?"

"Healthy soil."

“

THERE ARE MORE LIVING ORGANISMS IN A HANDFUL OF EARTH THAN THERE ARE STARS IN THE UNIVERSE. IF YOU SPRAY THIS WITH PESTICIDE, YOU WILL KILL NEARLY ALL OF THEM. THEN YOU DON'T HAVE SOIL ANYMORE. YOU HAVE DUST.

"And then?"

"A contented wife."

"Seriously? Don't you get that with a secure income?"

"And next," she carried on, quite unperturbed, "Healthy children."

It has taken me years to unravel what she said, and more importantly, what she meant. I am not a farmer - but I have seen severely degraded soil. I have also seen simple communities of forest farmers living on just half an acre of land each, but living with such abundance of food that it felt almost Panglossian. It has become clear to me that if soil is not looked after,

crops, and the farming of them will not be sustainable for long, Fairtrade price or not. Healthy soil is the basis of all farming, of all growth, of all trade, of all nourishment and of all economic security. If the soil has gone, there isn't a crop to sell.

Fair trade in Britain is all about conscious choices: spending a bit more money to help farmers who are committed to nourishing the earth is the beginning of an extraordinary journey.

"There are more living organisms in a handful of earth than there are stars in the universe. If you spray this with pesticide, you will kill nearly all of them. Then you don't have soil anymore. You have dust."



We are increasingly concerned and worried about the killer effects climate change is having on us and our partners. Our commitment to the environment is just as important to us as social and trade justice. The needs of our planet are at the heart of every decision we make; from the ever-expanding range of Organic and sustainable products we have on offer, to the eco-credentials of the suppliers, couriers, printers and photographers we work with.

## How the world has changed!

As a teenager at secondary school I found that I was quite good at foreign languages and wondered whether this was a message from God that I should become a missionary to a country where something other than English was spoken. However, having gone off to university to study French and German to start with, I ended up doing a masters in Anglo-Norman – the version of French spoken in England after the Norman Conquest – not of much practical use in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe or Africa. However, a member of Staines Methodist Church of the next generation also studied the same languages at first and after working for some time as a librarian, as I did, then heard and responded to God’s call to take a job with the charity Wycliffe Bible Translators. She was posted to Uganda, where she met and married another Wycliffe employee, a Ugandan national, and set up home there with, in due course, their two sons and during Covid a number of teenage members of their extended family.

Around this time we had a member of the Ashram North-East Branch that many readers will remember - Enid Johnson, a retired missionary who had spent her working years in Nigeria, starting in the early nineteen-fifties. and I bought a copy of her book “Land of Dreams” about her time there. Here’s where the first *change* (see the title of this article) comes in. Kathryn from Staines had gone out to Uganda in an aeroplane, and would be able to contact her family in the UK by phone to tell of her safe arrival, whereas near the beginning of Enid’s book was the account of several weeks on a ship followed by writing a letter home that would also take some time to reach its destination. I passed the book on to Kathryn so she could consider which speed of travel she would prefer! Come Covid, Kathryn and her family were over in Surrey on the original sort of furlough and their stay had to be extended to over six months, but, another *change* here, their two boys could continue with their education in Uganda online, hardly possible in Enid’s day, although it did mean getting up at about 5.30 each weekday morning

Moving on now to Bible translation, I will start with the thirteenth century in England, because the basis of my research into Anglo-Norman was a work called, in modern English translation, “The Mirror” or “The Sunday Gospels”. It is a versified translation of the gospel passages designated for each Sunday of the liturgical year, each one followed by a sermon based on that Bible passage. It was written by Robert of Gretham, who seems to have been some sort of chaplain in Nottinghamshire, for “Lady Aline”, who Robert felt spent too much of her time reading secular

literature. She would obviously have been an aristocrat as her normal language was the local French dialect. The work has never been published, but it exists in four different manuscripts, two of them more or less complete, and of course each one copied by hand. About a century later a Middle English translation appeared, still in manuscript form, and in prose not verse, making at least these extracts of the Bible available for the native population. Soon afterwards, from 1382, John Wycliffe and colleagues completed a translation of the whole Bible into English, and we get another *change* by 1536 with the completion of the first printed version, by William Tyndale and colleagues.

So we have had the Bible available to English speakers, particularly those who could read, for almost 500 years; but what about those who don’t speak English? Well obviously that’s where the charity Wycliffe Bible Translators comes in, from 1953 to be precise, and if we’re looking for more *changes*, how about this quote from their website: “Our tools and methods have also changed over the years – while paper and pencil are still useful in very early stages for making notes on the sounds that make up a language, laptops, specialist translation software and high-speed internet that allows for real-time communication over long distances can make all the difference in today’s Bible translation projects.”

You might think that’s as far as we can go, but I will finish with what actually made me first think of how the world has changed when I received last month an appeal from the charity enclosing a cardboard model of a mobile phone for which they are seeking extra funding - and why? Well here’s their answer: “We’re aiming to give our brothers and sisters the Bible in their language on specially designed smartphone apps” The apps enable them to read the Bible in their own language, but they can be hidden on a smartphone to keep them safe from persecution and reprisals. One of their local translators in an area where it is dangerous to convert to Christianity says that when Lenthomi Christians travel to encourage other believers, they can’t take their Bible with them because it would be too dangerous. But they can carry their smartphone.

So I hope you’ll agree that there have been quite a few changes not only in travel but also in humanity’s access to the Bible in the last thousand years or so, from handwritten parchment manuscripts to the whole text mysteriously fitting into a tiny electronic device.

Linda Marshall



*Cardigan Bay view south from Bird Rock*

## Holiday in Wales

### The Journeys

Seven members of the Community were booked for a week in rural Wales, which had been postponed from September 2020 for obvious reasons. However, another uncertainty arose, with train strikes planned, (but) the two Fridays we were due to travel would not be affected, so Peter booked the tickets, leaving Staines at 10.53 and arriving at Aberystwyth in time to catch the last bus to Llanarth, the nearest village to our destination that has a bus service. Ian Parker had agreed to pick us up from there in time for David's evening meal.

The journey started well. At Staines Station we encountered a former neighbour and mother of our elder son's schoolfriend, so all the way to Reading we were able to catch up on what our two sons had done since they were at sixth-form college. The train to Birmingham was on time so we could eat our packed lunch and enjoy the changing scenery, but when we got off and looked on the departures board for Aberystwyth it was nowhere to be found. An information desk was finally located, (and) we discovered that there was a problem on the track to Aberystwyth – some sort of disused mine shaft had made its presence felt – and we should get the next train to Crewe and from there one to Shrewsbury. We eventually got to Shrewsbury at 4.15 and settled down in Starbuck's with a coffee and biscuit because the train for Aberystwyth wasn't due in till 5.30.

*(Linda)*

25 minutes before the train to Aber was due (we) found a seat on the platform it was supposed to run from, the train showing as 'On Time'. It was moved to an adjoining platform, and when it should have arrived it was

supposedly 10 minutes late. We still had a chance of getting (to Aber) for the last bus at 20.10. I tried to phone David Dale but he was still on the road and unable to take my call. He called back later and I told him the news. By now the train was around 30 minutes late, and still no sign of it, though annoyingly the line to Birmingham we should have been able to travel by now seemed to be working properly.

Eventually there was an announcement and a two car diesel came into sight. People cheered but I wondered if the large crowd on the platform would fit in now. I think we did, just. And then began a long journey into Wales. We were told (the train) would divide at Machynlleth, with the rear half making its way via a series of very long Welsh names to Pwllheli and our two coaches going on to Aber. But as we began to get closer to Mach the plans changed, and we were told we would have to detrain there, but were promised there would be another train only 20 minutes behind.

That following train turned out to be a ghost and the signs on the platform promised the next train would be around an hour and a half later. But those who had got off onto the platform further back were told by staff that there would instead be a bus to our destinations further down the line and we followed them into the station yard.

After we had been there some minutes Linda's phone rang. Ian had gone to pick us up from the bus stop at Llanarth and found we were not there. And although there was no phone signal at our holiday home, it had Wi-Fi, so we could contact him using Facebook Messenger.

By now it was clear we would not get to Aber in time for the last bus and I gave him a guess for our arrival time.

Linda had disappeared to the Ladies while I was talking to Ian, and before she returned I saw a double decker bus turn into the yard and had to ring off in a hurry and move hers and my luggage out of its path. The bus drove through, turned around and began to take on passengers, but still no sign of Linda. I moved forward and joined the queue with our two suitcases and two bags. Fortunately she joined me just before I reached the bus door and we were almost the last to make it on the bus before it was full - with another 50 or 60 still stranded at Machynlleth.

We were told it was full on top, and prepared to stand for the hour or so journey, then came a message there were two seats upstairs and we struggled up with our luggage. I had to sit with my feet in the gangway beside a very lively young lady going home to Aber with a very large suitcase, but despite my having to twist my head around to talk with her (no, she said, she didn't speak much Welsh) we had an animated and wide-ranging discussion which made the slightly uncomfortable journey much more pleasant. Linda had a Malaysian student to talk to as well.

As we neared Aber I was able to send Ian a message with our rough arrival time - around half an hour earlier than my guess when he called before. It was pretty dark when we arrived in Aber at around 9pm, the bus dropping us outside the station, now mainly a large Wetherspoons, and I found a phone message from Ian that David was on his way to pick us up and would be there in about half an hour. We had time for a drink; it's a very long time since I've bought a pint for £1.29 and Linda's tonic water was even cheaper. It stopped raining just after we arrived and we sat down to wait on one of the outside tables under the station porch.

After a long car journey of more than 7 hours we finally arrived at our destination at 7pm. One could tell we were travelling through Wales by the large number of Welsh flags and bunting I noticed on numerous houses and public buildings, the locals displaying their sense of national and cultural identity. The holiday villa we are staying in is called Pontfaen, which means in English, Stone Bridge. I was told this by a retired ecumenical officer during coffee after the morning service at St Thomas' Methodist Church in Lampeter. He explained that as the Welsh were much more of an agricultural and rural people than the English, this is reflected in their vocabulary eg there are five separate words meaning hedge! On a visit to New Quay, a small resort on the coast with strong literary connections to Dylan Thomas ( he lived there during

David and I found each other a bit later at the side of the station where I had walked just to check he was not parked there, and we were soon in his car driving along narrow winding roads in darkness. I think we were all surprised that he managed to get to Pontfaen Villa without getting lost, arriving just around four and a half hours later than we should have done. *(Peter)*

It was by now far too late to start cooking the evening meal that David had planned, and just as well, because Jenny from Stockton, with loads of Traidcraft supplies for our meals, had still not arrived, and of course we couldn't contact her by phone to see if she was in any difficulty. Fortunately she did not know at this point that there was no mobile phone signal at Pontfaen or she would have been even more anxious about the dark, narrow, winding roads, but she made it at the first attempt. What a relief to us all! So after a mug of coffee and a biscuit we all retired to our rooms. All we needed now was a good night's sleep. *(Linda)*

Our room was huge but rather empty apart from a superking-size bed with a built-in TV we never bothered to use, and despite like everyone else suffering from some sort of virus (I still am) we still managed to visit most of the places around, though I did have to collapse onto a chair a few times as we went around the elegant Nash villa at Llanerchaeron. (The day after we got home I tried to ride my bike and couldn't keep my balance!)

Our journey home went much more quickly than the outward one, though I could have done without our table being joined by a young woman with five children aged from around 2 to 20 from different partners, the youngest child an adorable looking two-year old who liked shouting, running around, and hiding under tables and between seats around the carriage. Two and a half hours of that along with some aggressive teenage squabbling was something of a strain - for us as well as their mother! But all's well that ends well. *(Peter)*



*Sunday morning worship and welcome at the Methodist Church, Lampeter*



*Dylan Thomas and his friends preferred to sing Wesley's hymn to Parry's tune Aberystwyth in the Castle pub around the corner from the church, on Lampeter High St.*

One of the high points of the holiday for me was the morning that I spent wandering around Aberaeron. At a time before railways, when the roads were very poor, this part of Wales was virtually cut off, until a local entrepreneur created a safe harbour and built a planned town. It prospered, and for a time was a centre of shipbuilding. Today it has reinvented itself as a tourist destination. Like Balamory each house is painted a different colour; not just the gracious Georgian houses around the harbour, but even the humble 20th-century semis in the back streets.



*Aberaeron back street*

I said I spent the morning wandering around the town, but in fact my perambulations were more purposeful as I was following the official town trail. It was very easy to locate most of the points of interest linked by the route which not only went round the harbour but alongside the river that tumbled into it and included the remaining toll houses constructed when the roads were finally improved. The morning proved to be the best time to visit; at the start there were few people about, but by lunchtime visitors were pouring into the town.

*Ian Parker*

the war) I was pleasantly surprised to discover there's another Rock Street! Unlike the street where I live, this has wonderful panoramic views over Cardigan Bay!

Walking a brief section of the coastal path to Bird Rock afforded us sight of Bardsey Island, Snowdon, and Cader Idris, but alas no sighting of sea birds, dolphins, or seals – much to Jenny's disappointment

As on most Ashram Holidays we've accomplished the usual obligatory requirements ie visiting a N.T. Property, inspecting local churches and patronising tearooms. Finally I've enjoyed watching the birds on the feeders through the kitchen window as well as seeing red kites.

*Chris Bullock*



*Rest at the top of a hill on the coastal path, New Quay*

Breathtaking views from the coastal path of the whole sweep of Cardigan Bay from Snowdonia and Bardsey Is. to Pembrokeshire, lovely Aberaeron, a jewel of a Fairtrade shop in Newcastle Emlyn, Keswick Codlings and Herrings Pippins apples from a local National Trust estate, wooded valleys and mystifying Welsh names- a good week with friends in Ceredigion ( I'll draw a veil over my hairy journeys there and back!). Each evening we celebrated Dylan Thomas with the inimitable Richard Burton reading 'Under Milk Wood' before supper- what a voice, and what a poem!

*Jenny*



*Our last evening, after supper*

## Our Orkney and Shetland dream trip

Brian and I recently travelled to Shetland and Orkney, fulfilling a dream I'd had for around 15 years. We enjoyed seeing some very different scenery, viewing amazing historic sites, learning some new words, e.g. "peerie" the Shetland word for small (the Orcadian word is "peedie") and eating and drinking far too much - but what are holidays for ?

The trip didn't go completely to plan. I had made an error in the bookings and we ended up having to spend an extra night in Aberdeen and to cut short our stay on Shetland by a day. However, this meant we explored more of Aberdeen than we would have done, our host at the B & B having directed us to Old Aberdeen and to the Botanic Gardens. We visited a former department store Esslemont and MacKintosh, which had been turned into a pub, keeping lots of the original fittings and using them in imaginative ways. There is a photo from the bar, which uses the original counter with storage drawers and the washroom area in the Ladies' has utilised more of the storage drawers to house the hand driers and soap dispensers. Upstairs was a pizza restaurant called Mac's with some unusual décor (we couldn't quite work out why there was a motor-scooter suspended from the ceiling) but the pizzas were good – and we found there was a special deal on the night we were there, with all pizzas at £8.00 each...

So, when things don't go the way we'd planned or hoped (whether through events outside of our control or because of an error of judgement on our part), something good can come in its place.

In Shetland, we spent one instead of two days in Lerwick. Then we headed off via the island of Yell, to Unst, the most northerly part of the UK.. The weather for the two days we were there was winter-like. Living where we do, we're use to rain and wind, but the temperature while we were on Unst was not more than 4 - 5°C (daytime!). So we didn't get out much – or for long. However, we made the most of our time and visited a Viking Longhouse, a local history museum, a boat museum and the most northerly bar in the UK! We also bought petrol from the most northerly petrol station, posted cards in the most northerly post box and visited the most northerly church (a Methodist Chapel).

On Yell we saw (but didn't patronise, the most northerly fish and chip shop. And we visited "Bobby's Bus Shelter". The most luxuriously furnished bus shelter ever (as far as we know) with curtains, an armchair, rugs, ornaments etc. Started by Bobby



Macleod when he was a schoolboy on the island and was fed-up of waiting in a cold, empty shelter, the shelter is now maintained by locals and has a different theme each year. This year it was the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and there were photos, memorabilia and flags.

We returned to Lerwick for another 3 nights, when the weather was much more summer-like and in fact for the rest of the trip there was very little rain, most of which fell overnight. We visited Jarlsof, which had remains of buildings from several different periods covering approx 7,000 years.. We were able to move through Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Viking settlements and finally a ruined 17<sup>th</sup> century house. A real journey through history. Another memorable day was a boat trip to Mousa to see the most complete Broch. We had a lovely boat trip run by father and son who provided an excellent commentary.



Once inside the Broch, I declined to ascend the VERY narrow, dark staircase within the double wall to the top but Brian was more adventurous and went up and took some photos. We were not able to go on the evening trip to watch the large colony of storm petrels returning to roost for the night but it sounded fantastic.

After 3 nights in Lerwick, we said goodbye to Shetland and boarded the evening ferry to Orkney, arriving at the Royal Oak Guest House in Kirkwall at 11.00 pm on 1<sup>st</sup> June. The following day, at breakfast I informed our hosts that it would be my birthday the following day and explained that my customary Birthday Breakfast is croissants and fresh Scottish strawberries, planning to purchase some and ask them to serve them next morning. They said they would be delighted to honour this tradition for me and provide the required fare and the next morning we went in to breakfast to be greeted by a "Happy Birthday" banner above our table and a large bowl of strawberries and 4

warm croissants. It was a lovely gesture and made a great start to the day.

For me, one of the most memorable places we visited was, beyond doubt, The Italian Chapel. (Fortunately this was one attraction that was not over-run with visitors and we were able to view it at our leisure.

The story of the Italian Chapel is an amazing one. Here's a very short summary:



During the Second World War, Britain sent a number of Italian prisoners to Orkney to work on building what became known as The Churchill Barriers, barriers in the sea at Scapa Flow to impede enemy ships. The men were held in a camp on a small island Lamb Holm. One of the prisoners, an artist Domenico Chionetti asked if he could create a Roman Catholic chapel and was given permission to convert one of the Nissan huts (subsequently 2 huts were welded together). With assistance from some of the other prisoners, Chionetti set about turning the inside into a chapel, painting the ceiling, walls and floor. Wrought iron gates were turned into an altar rail. Gold cloth for the altar curtains was purchased from the Prisoner's Welfare Fund. The front was created. When completed it was a work of art. After the end of the war, a team was sent to clear the camp site and return it to its former state. However, when looking inside the chapel one of the men said it would be a sin and a crime to destroy it and after reporting back, it was agreed it should be preserved. In the 1960s work was done to restore the chapel and Chionetti was flown across from Italy to help with the restoration.

So I ticked off one of the things on my list, a second was the Ring of Brodgar, again a few visitors but not too many. However, elsewhere on Orkney, it was a different story. We tried to visit some of the major tourist attractions I'd read about, including Maeshowe chambered cairn & Skara Brae, Neolithic settlement. However we soon discovered that Orkney gets a VERY large number of cruise ships calling, far more than we get on Mull and a lot bigger, so most popular places not only had large numbers visiting but were often fully booked (at least one place for over 2 weeks hence!). It was disappointing but we went in search of other, less publicised sites, which were just as good – perhaps better because they weren't over-populated and we could look round at our leisure.. Having seen it marked on a map, we went in search of The Gloup at Deerness..

Put briefly, this is a sea cave (caused by the erosion of the sea into the rock) where the roof has collapsed, resulting in a deep cavern with the sea at the bottom. The description doesn't do it justice. Finding this was a real gem, which we might not have come across if we hadn't looked for other places to go to. Not following the crowd will often bring unexpected blessings.



In his poem "The Road Not Taken" Robert Frost speaks about "the road less travelled". When faced with a choice in life, taking the path that is different from the one followed by the majority can often lead to a much more fulfilling experience. It may sometimes be a much harder path, although not necessarily. The two paths in the poem appear to be equally "as fair", in fact the speaker chooses one with the idea that he could perhaps return another time and take the other way, although realising it is unlikely because "way leads to way". While we may go back to the same spot geographically speaking, we are never at quite the same point twice in life.

Jesus did not follow the crowd, evidenced by his habit of socialising with tax collectors and other "undesirables", his insistence on treating women as of equal value to men and his blatant disregard for the laws of nature by walking on water. In fact Jesus didn't so much follow the path less-travelled as start a completely new path that no-one had trodden before – although at times that path overlaps with other paths before and since. And, in the closing words of the poem "...that has made all the difference".

So, if faced with a choice of two paths in life you are wondering which one to take, don't be afraid of the choice. Sometimes it might be right for you to follow the well-trodden path but the one "less travelled" could surprise you.

We spent 6 nights on Orkney, before getting the ferry to Scrabster, back on mainland Britain. Our return journey included overnight stops in Thurso, Inverness and Spean Bridge. We returned home on 11<sup>th</sup> June, having made a total of 13 boat trips (including to and from Mousa) and visited 10 different islands (although some were via causeways) and driven approx 1100 miles. All in all, despite some disappointments, it was a great trip and a dream come true for me. We have hundreds of photos and lots of memories.

*Lorraine Jones*



## Report from the London Ashram Group on themes discussed in 2022

During this year we have continued to alternate meetings on Zoom with in-person meetings, although public transport users as we are, the latter have been affected by train strikes and engineering works.

Our group has always had a wide geographical interpretation of 'London' and this has widened since we started meeting on Zoom. We now regularly include Bedford, Bristol and Falmouth and in August we went international.

Nirmal joined us from Sri Lanka to present his paper on 'Mandatory and Permissive Fluidity: A New Exegesis on Jesus and Sexual Expression' and at his suggestion I am producing this report.

This was a well-researched paper Nirmal had presented recently at the Scriptural Sexuality workshop and the summary of a chapter he is writing for a book with the same name. The paper was circulated to us beforehand. With its opening exploration of the lexical meanings of some words, for example *dabaq* in the Old Testament and *epithymesai* in the New Testament, it had at least one member reaching for their Greek New Testament and Hebrew Grammar.

Thanks to Nirmal I can provide this summary of the paper:

My argument, basically using legal methodology, reached the following conclusions:

- (i) The dictums on sexual expression and marital matters attributed to Jesus in the canonical narratives as given to Jews were fundamentally different from those given to his disciples, without the slightest implication of grading between them.
- (ii) Those given to Jews, was *halakhah* emphasising the mandatory continuance of the marriage bond which was the primary purpose of the union.
- (iii) Those relating to disciples were based on new jurisprudence where there were no restrictions on sexual expressions, or non-expression, provided they were beyond any concept of bonding or attachment, such as in marriage or partnership with long-term intent which amounts to bonding, but accompanied by selfless unconditional love, which however did not replace the primary purpose of discipleship which was

being in community and proclaiming Jesus' sole *euangélion* (proclamation); and,

(iv) By implication, the disciples were not advocated to follow any dictums of the Jewish law or prophets, unless expressly included in Jesus' dictums given to them.

This gave us much to consider and our meeting length was extended so that we were able to respond to Nirmal's paper which was, to quote one of those present intelligent and courteous debate'. I am unable, of course, to provide a London Ashram Group response as that is never our aim in our discussions. However, we all record a sentence or two after each meeting so I will share a couple with you:

'Nirmal's presentation left me wondering whether the instructions Jesus gave his disciples were meant to be adopted by all his followers in the future (i.e. us), or whether they just applied to his special group at that crucial time.'

'I see no reason to suppose that Jesus' teaching on these matters differed significantly from the Jewish understanding of his time.'

Now we will need to wait for the publication of the book to read Nirmal's chapter in full. *Liz Urben*

While my original plan was to report on our meeting with Nirmal in August, I have decided to mention contributions from two of our other members.

For five of our meetings earlier in the year, we discussed 'They have taken the Lord', a BRF resource in five chapters written by Stuart. While the starting point is the Resurrection, the material provides a wide range of information, including mention of activities undertaken when Stuart was living in the Rochdale Community House, and there are questions for consideration at the end of the sections. The material can be downloaded if you use the following link and scroll down to the bottom where you will find the invitation to download all 5 sections:

<https://www.brf.org.uk/product/they-have-taken-the-lord-part-1-easter-day>

We also discussed David's book: Jesus the Baker at one of our in-person meetings and considered the significance of bread in the Bible.

*Liz Urben*

## Letter from John Barnabas

To Ashram Posse. Hi from John Barnabas. I write to you as I reflect on my birthday on September 4th. I celebrated with a birthday cake and a meal at Newbigin House, and sitting in the pouring rain by the lake in Handsworth Park eating a K fibre Chocolate Delight. Then home to dry out and listen to music and read. The following week has been a momentous week. Old PM step down and new PM on Monday and Tuesday, and then Lizzie pops her clogs last Thursday and now we are in a period of mourning before funeral on Monday and then Coronation. Lots of candles lit in memory of Lizzie, beautiful heartfelt words written in books of condolence and flowers laid in Pigeon Park in city centre. So we have a new King and PM. and a cost of living crisis; A war in Ukraine, South Sudan, Tigray Ethiopia. and a truce in Yemen. Floods in Pakistan and Famine, Covid, in Afghanistan.

Please pray for me as I discern my future vocation and the future of Ashram. I think Ashram should sell its properties over the next couple of years and maybe set up a mother retreat house or use the Greenhouse at Barnes Close for retreats and community weekends, in the future. It should set up a scholarship or an awards scheme with Urban Theology Union for students in need and also a bursary scheme for John's Community Theologians Project working with Urban Theology Union and Newbigin Pioneering Hub, Seedbeds.

Shalom, John Barnabas the hermit. Being by the lake in Handsworth Park. Quo Vadis.

*(Transcribed by Ian Parker, with apologies to John for any inaccuracies.)*

### Following on from our May Weekend on Palestine -



*A roadside billboard in South Africa, Sep 2022*

It was shocking to learn yesterday that the new Prime Minister, is formally considering moving the British Embassy to Jerusalem, ignoring one of the few remaining red lines in the UK's Israel / Palestine policy, and in breach of two UN resolutions. How can she condemn Russia for its illegal occupation of Ukraine, and violation of the rights of Ukrainian people while supporting the illegal annexation of Jerusalem and the violation of Palestinian rights?

Read [www.palestinecampaign.org/liz-truss-embassy-statement](http://www.palestinecampaign.org/liz-truss-embassy-statement), and write to your MP at <https://mailchi.mp/palestinecampaign.org/noembassymove-456129> and please share this action as widely as you can.

23 children have been killed in September and October alone this year by Israeli forces. Learn what is happening and help take action at <https://www.dci-palestine.org/tags/news> and its No Way to Treat a Child campaign, and call for the UK to apply its arms export control policy to the military units responsible.

And there are ongoing campaigns to get Barclays Bank, which has shares in and provides loans to the arms companies behind Israel's armed violence against Palestinians, to stop profiting from Israeli apartheid; and to get Puma to end its sponsorship deal with the Israeli Football Assn which operates in illegal Israeli settlements.

*Jenny Medhurst*

## What shall we become?

Ashram is in the process of disposing of all the property it owns, as the buildings are no longer facilitating the kinds of projects for which we were established. This process may take a few more years, but at the end of it we (the charity!) will have quite a lot of money. The Charity Commission is all in favour of charities having adequate reserves, but it is completely against charities sitting on a lot of money which they don't know what to do with. So we shall need to decide what to spend, what to give away and what to retain.

Ashram is currently a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. This protects the trustees against certain possible liabilities arising from owning property and running projects, and is very tax effective for raising and spending money for charitable purposes. But it might not be necessary in future if we own no property and run no projects.

However, before either of these questions can be answered we need to decide what we are in business for. It is the first question. Once we know what we shall be doing, we can work out what funds we need to do it, and what the appropriate governance structure might be.

There follows a list of the ideas which I have heard so far. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive; we could adopt several. Neither is this the list of all possible ideas; there may be many more which will be suggested during or after the October weekend.

### 1 Social Investors

My suggestion is that while continuing to meet to support each other in our discipleship, we invest a significant part of the money in not-for-profit businesses which are involved in green energy, organic farming and gardening, social housing, community land trusts etc. There are lots of these opportunities available; see: <https://www.ethex.org.uk/>. The main problem with this is that I am not sure that it is a legal use of charitable funds. These investments are certainly not recommended for a charity's endowment fund, that is the capital that provides an income which enables the charity to do its work. This is because such investments are more risky than most, and some or all of the money invested could be lost. On the other hand, some of the projects invested in might repay the loan with interest, enabling further investments to be made. The only way to establish if this project is permissible would be to get legal advice from a specialist firm of solicitors. Such advice would need to be paid for, so I wouldn't want to take my idea any further unless there was considerable support for it.

### 2 Securing the legacy

Another suggestion is to secure the Ashram legacy by cataloguing all the items in our considerable archive amassed over 50 years, and finding a home for it in a suitable library. We would probably need to pay someone to do this for us.

### 3 Action Theologians

Some time ago it was suggested that Ashram becomes a Community of Action Theologians. It would be very useful in this case to retain sufficient funds to offer bursaries to those undertaking grassroots action to come and reflect with us theologically about what they are doing. Another way of doing this, would be to direct our funds towards assisting those wishing to study at UTU.

### 4 Working with or amalgamating with another organisation

More recently, a much closer association with Church Action on Poverty (<https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/>) has been suggested, as in so many ways this organisation seems to share much of our ethos. The next step would be to have a conversation with their trustees, but, again, there would be no point in taking steps in that direction unless there was a majority support for it from the community. Another organisation, with which Ashram Community has much in common, is the Iona community. (<https://iona.org.uk/>) But although we have much in common, there are very significant differences which were highlighted when a few of us spent a week there some time ago. These would need to be considered carefully before exploring the possibility of a merger.

If any other suggestions which people have made have been omitted from this list, I am sorry; it was entirely unintentional.

*Ian Parker 8th September 2022.*

*John Vincent hails...*

## **DIGNITY, AGENCY AND POWER**

This much to be welcomed book of stories, prayers and reflections from 40 years work of Church Action on Poverty, is edited by Niall Cooper, Chris Howson and Liam Purcell is published by Wild Goose Publications at £14.99.

It is the standard reference book for progressive Christians for the 2020's and will rightly be put to use by all of us.

Poverty robs people of their dignity. So here, a wide range of different partners show how dignity, agency and power each belong together and each together, build a new vision of a new future for society in which poverty is overcome, and all have fullness of life.

The sources used are often Church Action on Poverty publications and bulletins, though each has its own author or contributor - a list of over 40 of them. The sections include:

- Prayers, hymns and liturgies
- Stories of communities and individuals in their struggles against hope and transformation through, opposition and difficulty
- Poems, Drama and Bible Studies
- Theological Reflections

Many well known names are participants, and lesser known and previously unknown writers. CAP and the three editors are to be congratulated on an excellent production which will serve us all well.

And an encouragement to Ashram to keep inside the prayer business, with its own emphases.

### **What I Can Remember: Reminiscences from Seven Decades – review**

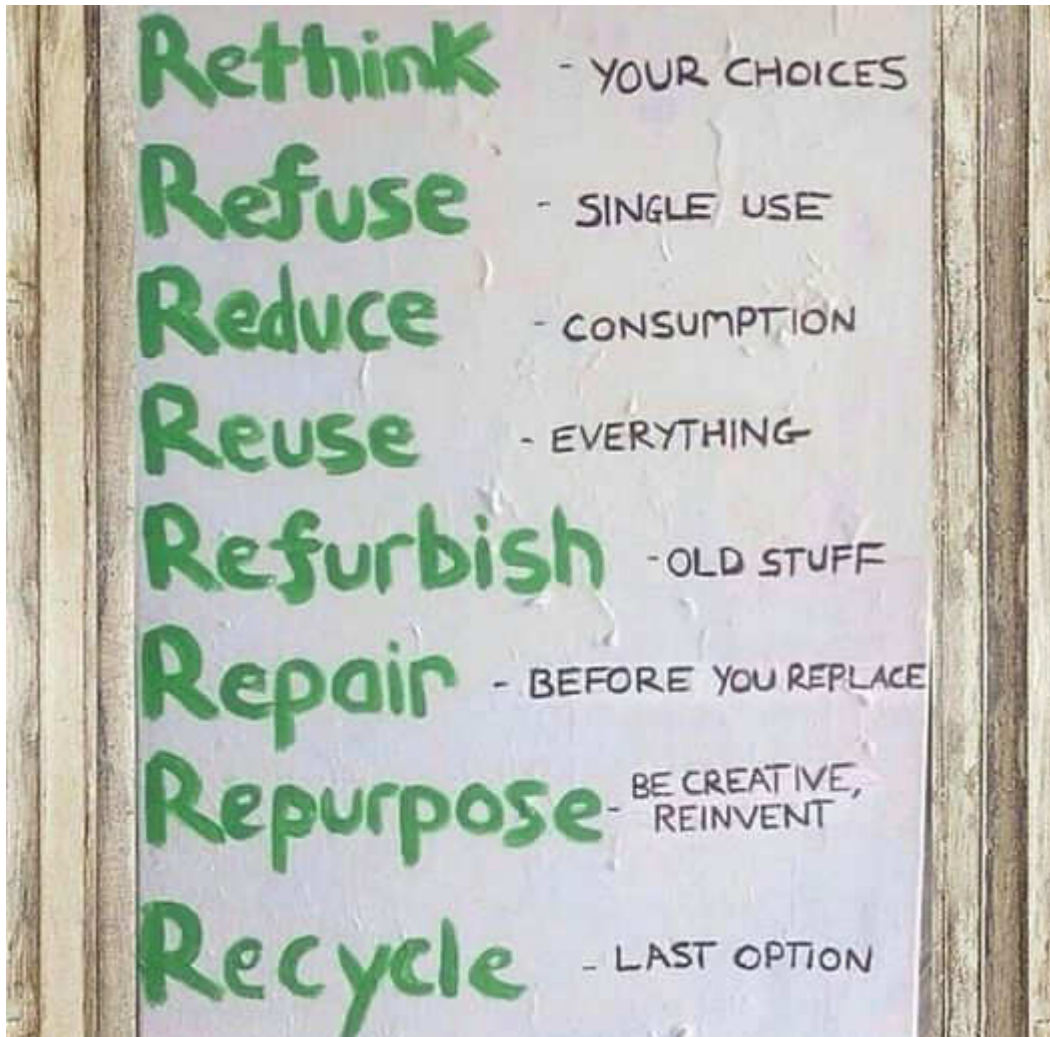
Welcome to Ian Parker's new book on sale at the Weekend! It is a book of reflections, linking people and places but linked with the author in some practical ways, as some scenes where important things happened. It begins with Marmite with potatoes or pieces of bread. But it reaches round the country in a gastronomic mixture.

So Ian's circuits consist of widely separated places up and down -and histories of people and places and above all of food. The book is a culinary guide, but it would be worth making your own index, to track down the goodies which are there. A fascinating read, and well worth delving into!

It's published by Church in the Marketplace Pubns at £4 from Ian at the Weekend, £5 inc p&p from Ian Parker, 5 Vicarage Lane, Ennerdale, CLEATOR CA23 3BE



*John Vincent*





## Members and Associates

We invite anyone interested to request details about becoming a Member or Associate from the membership secretary, Sandra Dutson: [smdutson@btinternet.com](mailto:smdutson@btinternet.com)

Members and Associates are listed in the 7-day cycle Community Prayers

## Projects and Commitments

Ashram Press – Radical Christianity, Gospel Study, Discipleship, Community Study and Research- projects on Community and related issues

Homeless and Asylum Seekers - Residence and Community for people in need

Multi-faith - mutual activities and projects open to all faiths

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## DATES

2023

5-7<sup>th</sup> May Weekend: Cliff College

## COMMUNITY

Community Office: John Vincent  
7 College Court, Sheffield S4 7FN  
T: 0114 243 6688  
E: [ashramcommunity@hotmail.com](mailto:ashramcommunity@hotmail.com)

Ashram Press: 7 College Court  
See Website [www.ashram.org.uk](http://www.ashram.org.uk) for publications

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Registered Charity No: 1099164  
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Website [www.ashram.org.uk](http://www.ashram.org.uk)

Act Together editor: Jenny Medhurst  
[medhurst@phonecoop.coop](mailto:medhurst@phonecoop.coop)  
Articles for the Spring 2023 edition needed by April 9th

Contributions from members / associates who do not attend national Community events are especially welcome!

## HOUSES AND PROJECTS

For current information about Houses and Projects in Sheffield please contact

John Vincent  
T: 0114 243 6688  
E: [ashramcommunity@hotmail.com](mailto:ashramcommunity@hotmail.com)

## MEETINGS/ZOOM GROUPS

Please contact the convenors if you would like to know more about meeting or events. They are the local contact points for the Community.

### Convenors

**London** – Linda Marshall – 01784 456 474  
Saturday Meetings – Monthly on Zoom or in person

**North-West** – Sandra Dutson  
[smdutson@btinternet.com](mailto:smdutson@btinternet.com)  
Meetings bi-monthly on Zoom or in person

**Community** Zoom meetings fortnightly – Pippa Thompson – 07918 757068.