



# ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

Issue 65

May 2008

Editor - Philippa Thompson - Community Office, 178 Abbeyfield Rd. Sheffield S4 7AY



## NEW ROOTS - 20 YEARS

Welcome to this Spring Edition of ACT Together,  
[www.ashram.org.uk](http://www.ashram.org.uk)

If there are issues you wish to be included please email me via ACT address, [ashramcommunity@hotmail.com](mailto:ashramcommunity@hotmail.com)  
Next Issue OCT 2008 Contributions via email or post by SEP 1<sup>st</sup> 2008  
Editor - Pippa Thompson

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In September 2007 New Roots was 20 years old! We all find it a bit amazing. Except for one short period when we employed someone, everyone has been a volunteer. And what a succession of wonderful people we've had!

It has been such a worthwhile project and so enormously rewarding for me. We are so much a part of that area and so much respected by so many people for what we stand for and represent. On Saturday the 1<sup>st</sup> of December we had a special birthday meal at which there were 45 people, a number of them past volunteers. And we shared

together thoughts about those years and what New  
Roots has meant to us. Grace Vincet

## **COMMUNITY DATES 2008/9**

Unstone Grange

### 2008

28 JUNE – Saturday  
Community General Meeting  
Nottingham.

*The June quarterly meeting will be in  
Nottingham, on Saturday 28th  
June, beginning at 10am. It will be  
held at Chris and Lorraine  
Smedley's, 25 Sydney Road, Wollaton,  
Nottingham NG8 1LH.*

FRIDAY 8 AUGUST to  
FRIDAY 15 AUGUST  
Ashram Holiday at Iona Community

3 – 5 OCTOBER  
Community Weekend

### 2009

24 FEB - Saturday  
Community General Meeting  
Burngreave Ashram

8 – 10 MAY  
Community Weekend  
Cliff College

27 JUNE  
Community General Meeting  
Location TBA

2 – 4 OCTOBER  
Community Weekend  
Unstone Grange

For further information on any of these Tel. John Vincent 0114 2436688 or email  
[ashramcommunity@hotmail.com](mailto:ashramcommunity@hotmail.com) which is Pippa Thompson

## **BRANCHES**

CONTACTS- please contact these people if you would like to know more about these groups and meetings.

E Midlands – Chris & Lorraine Smedley 0115 9288430. Evening meetings monthly.

Lincoln – Mark Chater 01522 532734. Monthly Meal at Ashram House

London – Linda Marshall 01784 456474. Saturday meetings 6- weekly

Manchester – Alastair Clark 0161 4323600

North East – Jenny and Frank Medhurst  
01740 630475

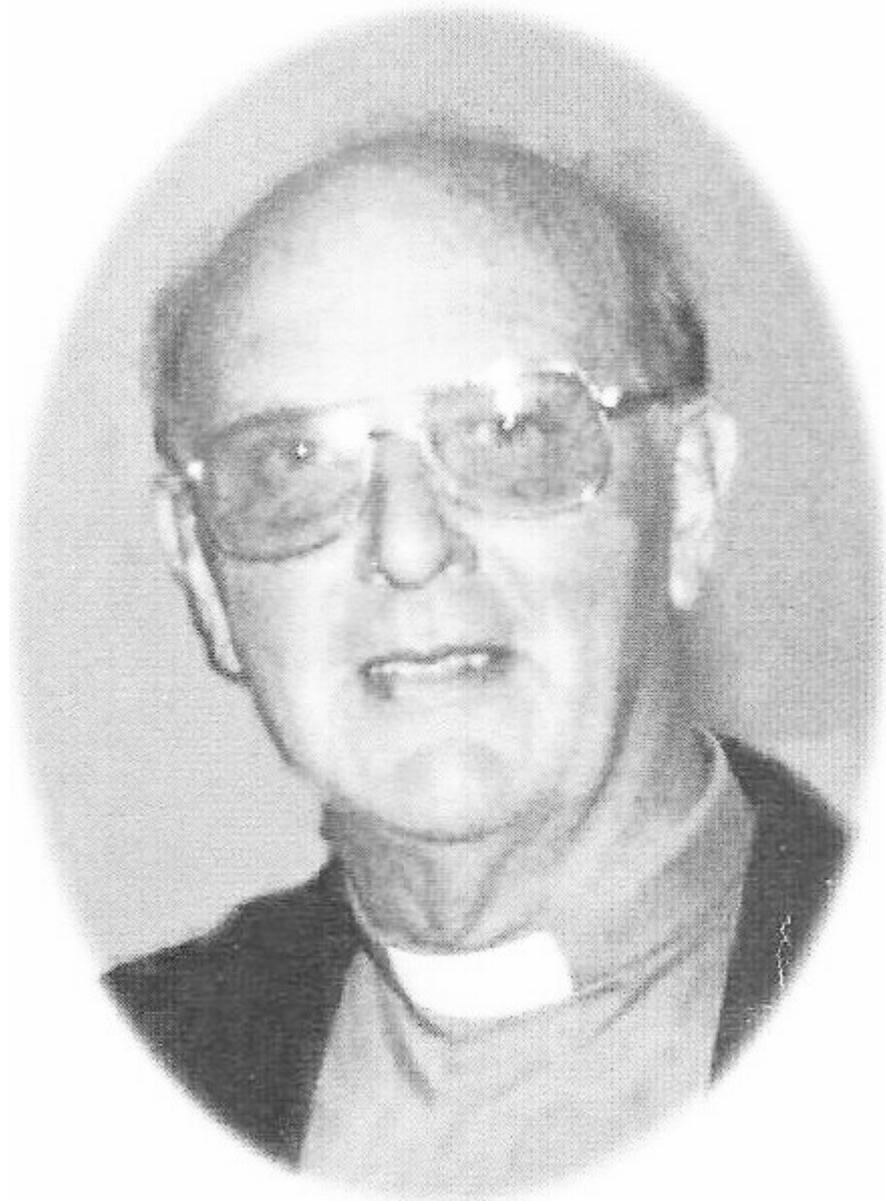
SE Lancs – Josie Smith 01706 841532. Thursday Lunch meeting Monthly.

Sheffield – Ana Maria Gonzalez 0114 2434013  
. Gathering fortnightly, Mon7-9.30pm

### **COMMUNITY OFFICE**

Setting up the Community Office at 84 Spital Hill, still in progress, meanwhile continue to use  
178 Abbeyfield Road, Sheffield S4 7AY. Tel nos John 0114 2436688 or Caroline 2700972  
(11.30-3.30pm) Ashram Mobile 07934 68578.

## COMMUNITY NEWS



### **MIKE TURNER**

Mike and Liz Turner were among the first to join the Ashram Community in the 1960's, and have been firm friends and stalwart supporters ever since.

When Mike died suddenly a wide circle of friends and Ashram members crowded into Hazel Grove Methodist Church on 14 February for a truly memorable thanksgiving and celebration.

Michael was profound, original, deeply sensitive and incurably self-authentic, even stubborn at times. He made decisive decisions with impeccable honesty. He supported myriads of groups and individuals. He stood out. And he had a remarkable family of Liz, David and Judith.

We in Ashram salute a true disciple and a much missed friend.

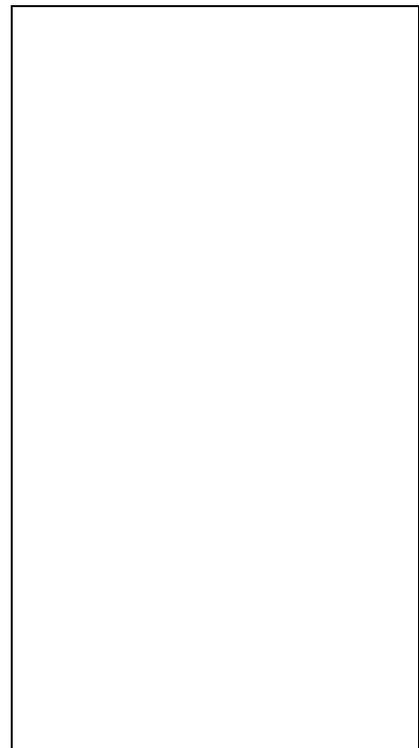
John Vincent.

## **Ashram Projects for the Future**

At the Ashram general meeting in February it was suggested that opinion be canvassed as to future projects to be undertaken by Ashram. A considerable amount of money has now been liquidated through the sale of the Ashram House in Stockton, and this gives us the opportunity to look ahead. It was agreed that the Officers would meet to discuss ideas, and try to formulate a policy. Effectively it was felt that a view needs to be formulated for the medium to long term, and some ideas identified that could be discussed by the community at the May meeting. The process would tackle questions like:

- are community houses still the way we wish to go?
- are we up to running them any more?
- are there other visions that we want explore?
- where does Burngreave fit in to all this?
- what should we spend and what should we keep in reserve?
- should we have a large number of smaller projects or a small number of large?
- should we concentrate on one project at a time - ie consecutive versus concurrent?
- and so on!

Members and Associates were all asked for suggestions in March. Hopefully, by the time you read this some will have been forthcoming, and the Officers will have met. This could be an important discussion in May!



# NEWS FROM THE BRANCHES and Members

## LONDON BRANCH

A recent London Group meeting at which we began discussing the book on Christian Communities by Alison Norman, aided by JV's questions.

"The discussion brought out differences in viewpoint between those of us who have been connected with Ashram for decades and those who have joined the group more recently."

"A very interesting discussion, perhaps because we moved beyond the narrow confines of Christian communities to talk about discipleship in general."

"As for the discussion on 'community', I think that I did not contribute much as I had not read the booklet yet. I will read it by next time, promise! What I did realise from the discussion is that there are many different kinds of community, which might be more diverse than I had thought so far. "Alison Norman's survey of Christian lay communities provided an excellent summary of the present position and formed the basis of a good discussion."

"We spoke of St Francis and the fact that he invented the Third Order so that some could stay at home rather than join him on his travels in community. I think we lost our way on the whole subject of community, but that may be because community is not relevant to most of us.

However I do remember my promise to suggest that next time we relate it to what we commit ourselves to in the liturgy:

To offer the Kingdom in personal, political and economic witness,  
To work for the new community of all humanity,  
And to risk ourselves in a lifestyle of sharing.

LINDA MARSHAL

## **SHEFFIELD BRANCH**

Sheffield Members meet in the fortnightly Gathering, in members' homes, with a bring and share meal. We have a theme for talks and discussions and from January to April has been varied with contributions from people covering members experiences. Grace talked about her visit to India, Dave discussed being a Christian and a Muslim, and Nick talked about what evangelism means to him. Other theme contributors were John – Jesus in Jerusalem and Sara – SCM. In May-July we are following parts of the “Journey programme”

### **Film of Burngreave Ashram**

From 20-22 February, our old friend Fr. Russ Carmichael came with Gerry and Jessica Corneau from New London USA to make a film of John and Ashram. They were a great

inspiration to us all, and we will keep members informed of developments. All three joined Ashram as Associate Members, which is great. Gerry writes:

*“We sent our Associate Member application and are thrilled to be part of the Community. I hope that you all know how much our time in Sheffield meant to us. It has taken me hours of hard thinking and praying to get it all in a context that fits my life and walk (actually love to do that thinking!!!). I guess that what I find fits best is that the "Contextual Theology" approach makes not just the words come alive for me from time to time, but that it gets Jesus into my life at a level approaching my DNA. I keep finding things about me that I used to think were apart from my Walk, some parallel, "less than" self. Now that I have a personal, contextual relationship to His life and the lives of his Disciples, it's sort of brought the two streams of my life together. No longer a "faithful" self and some "other" self”*

## **A PROJECT FOR US TO SUPPORT**

In October last year, during our time in The West Bank, Margaret and I visited the Aida Refugee Camp in Bethlehem. During our time there we also saw the work of The Lajee Centre. “It was established in 2001 by a group of volunteers in the camp who wanted to ensure that future generations had greater opportunities and facilities open to them than they themselves had whilst growing up in Aida.” It is a registered Palestinian NGO Lajee works with creativity and art forms of self-expression, youth-empowerment, creative education and trauma management. It serves children from 4 years old to young people of 15/20 years. Lajee runs projects and courses in arts, human rights and democracy, photography, Dabka dancing, music, English, Palestinian culture & History, Refugee Rights etc.

Since 2005 Lajee has been working with artist Rich Wiles on a series of photography projects. The Palestinian Cultural Centre in London and some UK schools have invited Lajee to bring a group of 15 children and 5 adults to the UK in June. This would coincide with Refugee Week. The party would include the young people's dance troupe and photographic artists. They would run workshops and show film and mount exhibitions of their work, visiting schools and holding other gatherings. The visit is expected to commence on June 15<sup>th</sup> and last for some 16days. In addition to London, invitations have been received from Leicester and Hull so far, to share their skills and work.

Rich Wiles is busy arranging the itinerary and funds for the visit. It occurred to me that Ashram may like to consider contributing to this project. Lajee do have other projects of course, but this is their current priority. I intend to raise this at our Community Meeting in May at Castleton and hope that you will give it your careful consideration leading to your support for my proposal.

Thank you for considering this.

Graham Hawley

## News from Rob Cloke and Familia

### Ram Prasad's Story

Ram Prasad was born in Nepal, youngest of 5 children. His family was quite well off and well educated. He recalls the luxuries he took for granted as he stumbled his way lazily and mischievously through his primary school years (Grinning, he exclaims "I was so bad").

When he was about ten years old everything changed overnight for Ram Prasad. His parents were killed in a road accident. He was devastated and, too young to cope with his feelings, he ran away. He took to wandering in the hills, scavenging what food he could. Eventually he inhabited one of many caves in a hillside. He was discovered there by a Hindu holy man who, on hearing his story, asked him to be his attendant. Ram Prasad lived in this cave for 7 years, attending to the needs of his guardian who he grew to respect greatly. The holy man used to give him spiritual advice but was unable to provide him with an education that would prepare him for life in the world.

Ram Prasad's life changed dramatically again when a Canadian traveller, visiting the caves, got talking to him. He asked him if he would like to go back to school. Ram Prasad jumped at the chance and the traveller got him admitted in a good school in the Himalayan foothills. There was a big drawback however. The language spoken by the teachers was English and all his classmates, as well as being several years younger than Ram Prasad, spoke Bengali. He spoke neither of these languages. (Imagine how you would cope in this situation).

So there he was, a real misfit, in a foreign country, back in a classroom after 7 years, unable to communicate, still grieving. He struggled to adjust and would get frustrated and angry when his teachers scolded him for his mistakes. In his half-yearly exams he averaged less than 10% across all subjects. On top of all his other obstacles he now felt ashamed of being "stupid". At this point he could well have headed back to his dark cave in the hills but instead he remembered the kindness of his sponsor and galvanised himself to do better. Determined to do better, he studied day and night ("I worked so very hard"). In his end of year exams Ram Prasad averaged just short of 90%.

These days, within 2 years of college, Ram Prasad is in his early twenties. He is smart-looking, a fluent English speaker, respectful and fun-loving. He is the captain of his school, popular with his mates and pride of his teachers. He remains dependent on the support of his sponsor. He is still fiercely determined to make something of his life. When I talked to Ram Prasad about Familia tears came to his eyes. I asked him if he was sad because this reminded him of his own loss. He said he wasn't sad, he was very happy to think that such a place existed for children in his situation.

As I have reflected on the inspirational story of Ram Prasad, I marvel at the **courage** and tenacity he has shown in the face of great misfortune and desperation, to take the opportunity to transform his life so that he can be of benefit to society. I also reflect on the open handed generosity and **compassion** of those who have supported him. I rejoice in the acts of those who are prepared to step outside their own concerns (their own network, social status, nationality, religion) in order to respond to those in need. If we are really to be followers of a spiritual path, surely we sometimes have to rise above social conventions and embrace more noble values - love, compassion, patience, humility, understanding. And sometimes this will set us at odds with the status quo. Maybe this is a measure of progress. Jesus, the Buddha and others, in teaching such qualities, inevitably became a thorn in the side of the established rulers - priests, kings, politicians, emperors. Often the most political action we can take is to do nothing in order to avoid controversy, bury our heads, keep things comfortable.

If a Ram Prasad was to turn up at our front door or in our church hall, how would we respond? (You never know it might just happen.) May we have the **courage** to truly follow the examples of those we worship rather than allow our responses to be dictated by the norms of the world. May we have the **compassion** that is needed to transform suffering in ourselves, our neighbours, our churches, our communities, our world.

Rob

**Book Review by Graham Hawley**

This is a collection of daily readings for a four month period from a wide range of contributors within The Iona Community, including: John L. Bell, Ian M. Fraser, Kathy Galloway, and Jan Sutch Pickard et al. The purpose of the book is said to be that: “*These prayers, poems, articles and liturgies can be used for group or individual reflection and are intended to inspire positive action and change in our lives.*” The subjects covered, to name but some, are: Justice & Peace, Poverty, Social Action, Worship, Healing, Community, Women, Pilgrimage, Commitment, Liturgies, Sexuality, and Hospitality. All issues that engage us in Ashram in varying ways.

Gradual  
 build up of  
 personal  
 network  
 links

What I appreciate about the book is its adaptability. You can use it systematically or dip into it at will for reflection on particular subjects. The

• • •  
 Working with different  
 faiths  
 • • •

quality of the material rarely fails to stimulate and focus on critical questions. It is a useful resource for those of us in Ashram to promote interaction with the material and encourage and challenge us as we journey on our pilgrimage. I am happy to commend this book and encourage you to buy it.

## COMMUNITY VISIONING

### WHAT ASHRAM COULD BE

– From the October 2008 Weekend

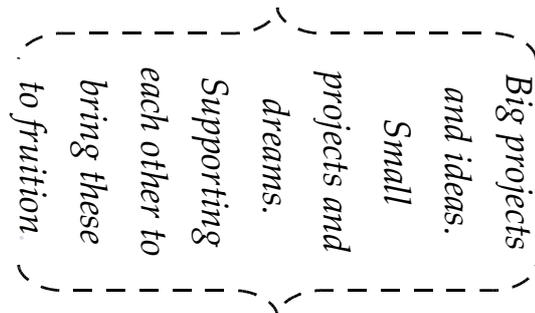
*Any Ashram member should be able to ask the Ashram Community to support any political or social action in which he/she is involved.*

### Community

1. Fragility of the Ashram -what makes it what it is? Vulnerability, hanging on the edge.
2. Mutuality rather than big projects -support our own or a small projects. If we grew too big would want to split but we’re also getting older -do we need to replace folk?
3. Does it matter if Ashram were to come to an end? - It doesn’t have to last for ever. We don’t want to be a ‘facebook’ community. Ashram might provide a structure for inspiration or catalyst for energising. Discernment role for Ashram. We can’t control what people are inspired to do - we can only offer it.

4. Can we be a community with out a project? Do we have a project? Do we need one to remind us what we're about? Is mutuality enough? Cf. Ashram and Iona, which has music and romantic island as radical roots! well as

5. Ashram spirituality rooted in English cities. Difficult to understand what is going on in English cities.



Radical changes in the English cities

- Poverty is differently distributed
- Loss of mass working class industry
- Transience

6. Differences from 60's and 70's -but also similarities. Stories of community houses have many resonances today. Big industries are closed down. Where would you put community houses now? Couldn't impose community houses from the top -originally grew from below.

7. Without a project you don't have a shop window -Burngreave is a shop window. Cf. music and romantic island!

8. Projects emerge from Ashram at local branches. New projects might not be property based. It might be something we haven't imagined yet. What holder us together isn't a project but acting out in our various places the embodiment of Jesus.

(Quotes from Postit notes during session)

## “VISION” CONTRIBUTION FROM FRANK MEDHURST

*Ashram could be a growing alliance of local projects/shops/centres with residence geared to local “Branches” missions and members.*

Here are some

There are four worldwide problems that have to be considered, they are war, poverty, resources and global heat. They could form four sessions at the weekend. Here are brief notes on each.

thoughts on the weekend meeting on 'Vision', arising from my work on a book I am writing, 'Exploring the Future'

WAR. The world has reached a stage where war is no longer effective in achieving the rewards intended by the war-maker. (Rupert Smith. 'The Utility of Force'). One aspect of this is the impossibility of force or arms against a comparatively weak nation. (Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine). The resort by the weak to guerrilla warfare can defeat the mightiest state machine. Further, war today is set to kill non-combatants, especially women and children. War does not solve problems. It creates more wars, which interact on world resources and city infrastructures to create devastation and destroy cultures.

POVERTY. This includes population growth, which is increasing (with poverty) and is out of control. In turn this causes forced immigration where land cannot support more people, with impacts on the land to where the immigrants move. There is mounting poverty too, in developed countries, as the gap between rich and poor grows larger. The answer to the first is not aid, but fair trade, and more importantly, the education of women to at least further education levels, and the free supply of birth control methods. World poverty arises from low living standards with no way of raising them. Note that Iran has reduced its fertility rate from 6.5 children per woman in 1975-80, to 2.1 in 2000-05. (New Internationalist, March 07).

RESOURCES. The Club of Rome first alerted the world to the exhaustion of the world's resources in 1972 (The Limits of Growth), with 3 or 4 updates since. The rich world is able to monopolise the resources it wants, so denying them to the poor world. Oil is the most obvious resource which is responsible for war to control the oil deposits, (Iraq, Iran), but other resources such as land and water are already the cause of tension, leading to conflict. Food is another essential which is likely to become scarcer as oil, which sustains agriculture in its supply of fertilisers and weed suppressants, becomes too expensive, thereby requiring more land for post-industrialisation ('One Planet Agriculture' Soil Association).

GLOBAL HEAT. Whatever its causes whether it be from human production of carbon or a natural phenomenon (as it has in the past), is a different category from the others because we know it is happening, we cannot stop its progress but we can prepare for its consequences. The present majority assumption that it is a product of industrialisation means that we shall have better insulated housing, alternative means of energy production with restraint on the use of carbon. The consequence is a world of different climates, some never before experienced in human history, with different plant and animal environments. It is expected to mean drought and famine, raised sea levels and inundation of low lying land, accelerating immigration.

These are what I see as the problems. The vision might be to accommodate these threats in a culture, which is an advance of what we have. My entity for considering this is the regional city, which is growing worldwide without a concept of its future. Some points.

- \* The city must contract.
- \* Motorcar transport must be reduced in favour of a fine public transport system.
- \* Land freed from motorcar use should be given over to food production.
- \* Non-industrial agriculture will replace the present oil-dependant agriculture. This will be around and filter through cities as in city farms.
- \* Non-industrial agriculture is labour intensive. The present 1% of working population involved may increase up to 20% in future, living in small towns in the Countryside.
- \* The form of the city will change as a result of this, consisting of a number of clusters of high density, mixed uses, well insulated and self-powered, constructed like a cruise ship (but not in that form) connected to other clusters by rapid transport.
- \* The clusters will be traversed by bicycles, foot, moving pathways, lifts, escalators etc, but excluding the motorcar.
- \* The transformation will be gradual over the century, leading to the sustainable city.

Ditto in the poor world with provision for aided self-build by the deprived.

All this assumes a change in human cultures. This is another subject, the major factors of which are:

There must be a shift to political participation that is a wider involvement of the public in decision-making.

Women will be acknowledged as the force for peace and change because of their inherent initiative for caring. They will participate in all fields as equals in every way to men,

The culture of learning will supersede that of the accumulation of wealth.

These are very brief thoughts, which may give you starting points. Or you may have some very different ideas. For the organisation of the weekend it might be suitable to hold four sessions by different people to outline the problems, with the whole meeting in session to formulate the vision. It might be useful to get the views of other members.



New Roots cake baked by Janice

## MISSION IN INDIA

This January I went back to India with my brother and his wife for the first time since leaving in 1948 – 59 years ago. I was 14 and had lived there from birth (apart from a spell back in Ireland) as Dad was a Methodist missionary.

It was absolutely thrilling. Much has changed but even more remains the same – the churches, the house where I lived.

The churches are quite something they built huge English Cathedral type buildings but in two different small towns where we had been they were now getting 3000 on a Sunday and building another huge church alongside! And Dad's photo as a young man was in 2 vestries! So some legacy!

This photograph is of a project which thrilled us where they are creating a hostel for orphan girls – and have a long way to go. So our Wider Service Fund has agreed to support that. The girls sang and danced for me and I sang a Telegu hymn for them, and all joined in!

Then we also went south to the Niligri Hills where I had been at Boarding School. Also little changed and thrilling to me.

Enough – no room to write of my reaction to wider India. I have a diary with lots of photographs which I will bring to Castleton weekend.



Thanks Methodist Recorder also to Diggers and Dreamers for the pieces on pages 11 and 12, by kind permission



Since its first edition in 1989, Diggers and Dreamers has had a page on Ashram, plus several issues on Ashram Sparkbrook.

The latest book edition is the 08/09 one just published. It's £14.50 plus £1 p+p from Edge of Time Ltd, BCM Edge, London WC1N 3XX. From now on, we and it are on [www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk](http://www.diggersanddreamers.org.uk).

Below is the 08/09 entry.