



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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Six Months in Hebron

As you know it has been a difficult 6 months for Palestine. The dramatic images of death and destruction in Gaza have shocked the world. Hundreds were arrested and dozens killed in the West Bank with less press coverage. Impossible to photograph was the destruction of hope in peace after the collapse of the "peace" negotiations and all that followed. Last weeks theft of another 400 hectares of land near Bethlehem seemed like a stab in the back to Mahmoud Abbas and all his efforts to find a just peace.

For Arwa's family the troubles began with the confiscation of one piece of rented land in January and another in February and the destruction of the almond orchard and cherry orchard.



Arwa and Feryal stop the bulldozer

This was particularly devastating to Arwa's mother who is very attached to her land and her trees, which were planted by her grandfather over 50 years ago. The Israeli government seized the land and began "archaeological" digs on it. Things got even more tense in May and June when they began digging on another piece of the family's owned land without permission. They destroyed several retaining walls and dug away a large chunk of the land. Only repeated protests by Arwa and her mother in front of the bulldozer protected a large 200 year old olive tree from threatened destruction.

In May large numbers of Palestinians mobilised to support the hunger strikers who were protesting conditions in Israeli prisons and in particular the 250 Palestinians being held in administrative detention: indefinite imprisonment without trial or charges. But then on 12 June 3 Jewish settler teens were kidnapped near Hebron. Even though they knew the boys were already dead Israeli authorities launched a huge operation to find

the boys and their kidnapers. Netanyahu seized the excuse for a major crackdown on Hamas in order to bring down the Unity government Hamas had just signed up to, even though no evidence has ever been offered that Hamas planned the operation. No Palestinian could go in or out of Hebron or out of the West Bank. 600 Hamas members were imprisoned, many of them MPs and the number in

administrative detention doubled. Thousands of homes were ransacked and damaged, large amounts of property was stolen. 12 Palestinians were shot dead at demonstrations across the West Bank in that time (and there are now 32 killed.) I was worried that all this would provoke Palestinians into another intafada especially when Israeli police began

escorting extremist right wing settlers into the al Aqsa Mosque which was the final straw that ignited the 2nd intafada in 2003.

Fortunately most Palestinians seemed to agree that another violent uprising would gain little and probably make conditions much worse, as the 2nd intafada did. Even when the Israelis broke the ceasefire and started shelling Gaza, Hamas did not respond and continued to uphold the ceasefire themselves and attempted to stop other groups responding, though some did. On 29th June however a 6 person Hamas patrol was killed by a rocket strike while trying to prevent another group from firing rockets.

At that point Hamas themselves began firing rockets at Israel and Israel responded with massive air strikes. When Hebron was closed it had a devastating effect on business and those who needed to travel to work. The plus side for my family though was that the Bedouin workers couldn't get in from Beersheva to work on our land so we were able to relax for a few weeks.

When they did come back they were close to the end of that contract and just did tidying up work on the digs they had already started. Another team of workers started building small stone walls around the fences, which was no threat to anyone.

It is only recently that Emmanuel Eisenberg and his team returned. Suddenly we discovered that they were again working on the land Arwa's family owns. They had destroyed another section of the retaining walls with the bulldozer and had started a team working by hand over the Canaanite walls and deep into the Abu Haikal land.

Arwa's mother Feryal called the police and the DCO (District Coordinating Office) but got no response. So she called a demonstration on the land and got representatives from Hebron Municipality, Hebron region Governor's office and the Hebron Rehabilitation committee to turn up. All the international human rights groups also supported the event; CPT, EAPPI and ISM. Emmanuel just ignored us at first. His deputy David Schlomo claimed he had written permission from Arwa's father to dig on the land which of course was not true. Eventually Feryal had to stand in front of the bulldozer to get them to stop work. The Israeli police arrived and an officer from the DCO. The police gave them a stop work order (the fourth so far !) and the DCO promised to meet and sort it out the following day. Next day however Emmanuel and his team were digging again on the same piece of land. The DCO did not return calls. Eventually however they did stop working and removed their shade covers and equipment. It seems the DCO sent them a written stop work order. I checked today and they have not started work again so hopefully it will hold for now.



Arwa 10 September 2014

The problem is that the Israeli government have promised Emmanuel 7 million shekels to create a "Biblical Archaeological Park" so we know he will keep coming back. What we don't know is where and when he will dig again. He has uncovered the Canaanite walls on both sides of Arwa's family land so where he really wants to dig is inside those walls and under their houses. Israeli authorities are reluctant to help us and Emmanuel does not always respect the law anyway. He has authority from the government to dig on the family's rented land but no authority to touch the land which is owned outright.

Where is all this heading for Palestine? There are no hopeful signs of the situation improving in Palestine and Israel in the near future. Netanyahu has stated categorically that he has no intention of letting go of the West Bank so the 2 state solution is dead. Hamas

claim that Israel only responds to violence; that Mahmoud Abbas has achieved nothing for 20 years of negotiations and security co-operation.

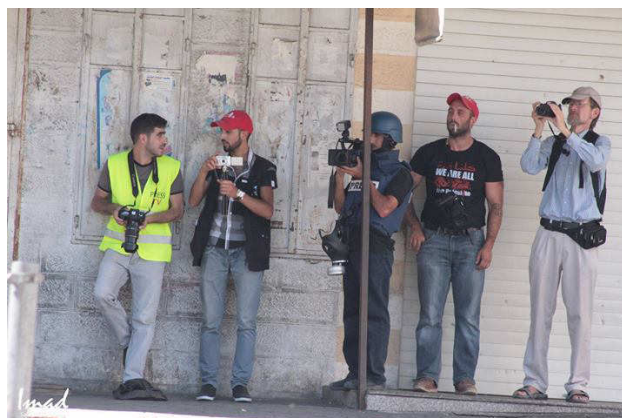
When the Gaza conflict was coming to an end I was hopeful that Israel would do a deal with Mahmoud Abbas in order for them not to have to make concessions to those supporting violence. They needed to give him some reward for supporting Israel and promoting non-violence. However almost as soon as the ceasefire was agreed Israel seized another 1,000 acres of Palestinian land near Bethlehem. Mahmoud Abbas has made himself very unpopular amongst Palestinians and is accused of being a puppet for Israel. Hamas on the other hand have gained popularity for resisting the occupation even though the human costs have been devastating.

Latest opinion polls across Palestine show 60% support for Hamas and only 30% for Fatah. Meanwhile the Zionist settlement project continues at speed; house demolitions, land

confiscations and settlement expansions are all at record levels. The peace movement in Israel has been marginalised and were being beaten in the streets during the Gaza campaign.

That's the bad news and it is very depressing. The good news is that international support for Palestine is surging. Social media had a big part to play in making more people aware than ever before of the tremendous suffering Palestinians are enduring. Media coverage was better this time than in previous attacks on Gaza. The BDS campaign (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) has taken off and is having notable successes. Diplomatically more and more countries are opening Palestine embassies. Palestine now has the opportunity of signing the Treaty of Rome and taking war crimes charges to the ICC.

Those who believe in violence can solve this problem are in strong leadership positions on



Dave filming clashes in Bab al Zawiya

both sides of the conflict. Those of us who believe in non violent solutions need to work hard to promote them. I think it will take international grassroots pressure to get Israel to

stop criminal activity and negotiate peace in good faith. We need to pray for Israelis and Palestinians now more than ever before. All the people here need to know that we support them in their desire for justice and peace for everyone.

Despite all the indications to the contrary I do believe that peace will

come to this region and it may come soon. Peace can only come from God and probably it will come in a totally unexpected way. God bless you all in your own efforts for peace.

We miss you.

Deacon Dave and Arwa

For regular updates join our Facebook group "Save Tel Rumeida" or see Hebron Voices on YouTube or <http://savetelrumeida.wordpress.com/>

Two years On.....

At the May 2014 weekend I was talking with Jenny Medhurst about one of my new volunteer activities and she suggested I wrote about it for Act Together. I agreed. However, as it is just over two years since I left paid work (I don't like the word 'retired') I thought I would write about what has changed for me since then.

When I joined the Ashram Community it was soon after I had left university and had just begun to work in Derbyshire as a social worker. Most of my working life I worked full-time, so going from very full-time employment in my last job to 'nothing' meant I needed to do some planning. Which, for

me, means making a list. On my to-do list was: explore volunteering opportunities, undertake training in mediation and become involved in local activities.

I started with the mediation training. I have been on the committee of my local mediation service for several years and, with my days now free, I undertook a six day course provided by another community mediation organisation. This not only included skills practice, i.e. role play with the final one assessed, but also several essays in order to be accredited as a mediator. (I can't remember when I last wrote an essay.) With this achieved I now

volunteer as a community mediator for both organisations. Referrals are from social housing landlords and the neighbour disputes are usually about noise. In many instances it is apparent that poor sound insulation exacerbates the problem, particularly when one person's living room is over the other person's bedroom.

Mediators work in pairs, visiting each party individually and then facilitating a joint meeting in a neutral environment where the aim is for the two parties to discuss the situation and reach an agreement how they will behave differently so that both can have a better quality of life. It is not the role of mediators to direct the discussion so when mediation works it is very powerful as the people reach their own solutions.

My next volunteer role came from looking at adverts and in an area that was totally unknown to me – the Coroners Court. At the beginning of last year I began my training to provide support to family members attending inquests at my local Coroner's Court and have now been doing so for over a year. Attending an inquest can be daunting for families both because it is a court proceeding and it is about the death of a family member, with all the emotions that can bring. Inquests are held for many reasons, for individuals of any age and families come from many backgrounds but what all have in common is to know the answer to the coroner's question: "How did the person die?"

My role as a volunteer is to be someone not associated with the process who can help people understand how the inquest is run and to provide practical and emotional support if needed. I find attending inquests a fascinating experience, seeing how much work can go into understanding how a person came to die – the reports written and the people called to speak to their reports. And I am rapidly increasing my understanding of medical terms!

My final regular volunteer role is being a member of the Meet and Greet team at my local Foodbank. I joined this organisation after helping them with a supermarket collection one Saturday and being

moved by how generous some people were in donating food. So once a fortnight I walk over the hill to West Norwood to support people who are referred to the Foodbank. Too often they are sent by the local Job Centre because their benefits have been sanctioned.

What is common to all these volunteering activities is the need to be a good listener, hence the training I have had for two of them, and to be non-judgemental. I have also realised I am volunteering with organisations where people are at a crisis or point of stress in their life but my contact with them is very fleeting and we will never know the longer term outcome of our support. Very different from when I started as a social worker.

But life has not been all about volunteering. Another item on my list was to go to the Sinai desert. So October 2013 found me visiting St Catherine's Monastery and seeing the site of the burning bush before a week's retreat sleeping in the open in the Sinai Desert. The desert really is barren with little vegetation or wildlife. I could quite understand why the Israelites wanted to return to Egypt. For me it was an incredible experience, spending all day and all night in the open, and being aware of how silent the desert is. Although one morning, awake at 5.0 am, contemplating the stars and how quiet it was with not even a bird singing at dawn the peace was shattered by the 5.20am flight to Sharm-el-Sheikh, flying even lower than the planes going into Heathrow fly over Streatham.

So two years on...from leaving full-time paid work as a manager at Head Office for a national organisation responding to people in crisis for two to three days each week I have returned to my roots of working directly with people and value the very different situations in which I am able to volunteer.

A constant throughout all the years of paid and now unpaid employment is the London Ashram Group which continues to provide me with challenge and support.

Liz Urban

Cleaners Campaign for London Living Wage

I started taking pictures at protests from the point of view of a protester back in the 1970s, but it was only in the 1990s that I began to work more seriously in the area and to contribute pictures to photographic libraries. Increasingly I began to find that there were many events on the streets of London that were not being recorded, including many involving members of London's growing ethnic communities, and set out to photograph these.



London depends on a huge army of low paid workers to keep it running, with an estimated 650,000 being paid below the London Living Wage, 21% of the workforce. For Black, Asian and minority ethnic workers the figure is higher at 29% (and higher still at 42% for lone parents.) The higher figures largely reflect the types of work that are open to these groups, including cleaning and catering staff and childminding. (The actual figures are probably worse than these reported, as there is still a considerable black economy where many undocumented workers are subject to extreme exploitation.)

I first got involved with cleaners in 2006 when I was at the launch of the London Citizens Workers' Association at Westminster Cathedral where the Justice For Cleaners campaign took a prominent part. The cleaners were then being supported by the T&G, which in the following year merged into Unite the Union. It turned out to be a not very active campaign, but I did photograph one or two street protests outside employers in the next couple of years, but by 2009 many of the cleaners had become disillusioned with Unite, feeling that its union officials had not stood up for them in negotiations with the employers, and particularly over the unfair dismissals of some staff, particularly where the union also represented staff at higher levels in the companies.

A group of cleaners, mainly of South American origin, decided they needed to form a grass roots union that would fight for their rights, and became a branch of the IWW (the International Workers of the World - or 'Wobblies!') Later the branch broke away from the IWW, wanting to be more practical and less political, forming The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), "a worker-run union organising the unorganised, the abandoned and the betrayed."

Most cleaners in London, including those in the University of London are not employed directly but through contracting firms. This is a scam that

enables less scrupulous organisations (and most are less scrupulous - including some surprising names - the University of London, John Lewis, the Royal Opera House, the Barbican, the Tower of London, banks and more) to wash their hands and say pay and conditions of the people who work in their buildings are nothing to do with them. Some other employers have made the Living wage and decent conditions a requirement on contractors.

Most of the contractors refuse to recognise the IWGB and refuse to negotiate with them until the union's actions force them to. Deliberately poorly drafted and weak trade union laws enable employers to get away with this. At quite a few workplaces now the employers have agreements with other unions who have no members in workplace - or none among the lower paid workers.

The IWGB pressure employers by high-profile protests outside and occasionally inside the premises. The workers wave the union flags, have banners and placards and make an incredible noise with whistles, drums and a powerful megaphone, usually when the streets are busy to get maximum visibility. I keep forgetting to take earplugs with me when photographing the protests.

John Lewis are proving a particularly hard case for the IWGB, despite considerable support for the cleaners from some of the 'partners' they actually work beside. Last August I got a phone call asking if I could meet the cleaners at Stratford Station at 4pm on the following Saturday. I got there for 4, they came around 4.30 and at 4.45 they sat down in the restaurant on the top floor of John Lewis in Stratford Westfield, got out banners and flags from their bags and began a noisy protest in the store, going down slowly towards the ground floor. A few weeks later (and a little to my surprise) they did a similar protest in John Lewis on Oxford St.

Last month I put together a set of images for an event celebrating the history of the cleaners protests (unfortunately I couldn't go as it was during the Ashram holiday) and was surprised to find that I have now photographed over 50 events involving the cleaners, including some of the '3 Cosas' campaign at London University - for sick pay, holiday pay and pensions - in which they are involved along with SOAS Unison and the University of London Union, ULU. The involvement of the ULU in campaigns such as this is undoubtedly why London University has now closed down the students' union.

The attitude of some other trade unions towards the cleaners and the IWGB and 3 Cosas reflects very poorly on the movement, but there are notable exceptions, in particular with the RMT who are also very much involved with cleaners on the tube, as well as some individual union branches who have shown support.

Quite a few are highly qualified but unable either to get their South American qualifications recognised here or get professional work in the UK. Most of the IWGB members are Spanish speaking, and the IWGB also organises English classes and other educational work. Some who hardly spoke English when they joined the union are now impressive public speakers in that language.

My photographs have helped the IWGB get publicity for their campaigns and I'm proud to have been able to support them in this way. As well as being used in some newspapers and magazines through my agency and direct sales, I also let the IWGB to use them in its publications and on the web without charge.

In January, the IWGB at London University went on strike for three days. I went on the first day to photograph the picket line - though not when it started before 6am! The second day they hired an open-top bus to take their protest around London - and the Branch Secretary grabbed my arm and told me I had to come - they were saving a seat for me. It meant getting up rather early, but it was a great day, ending with a noisy visit inside the Royal Opera House. Perhaps slightly less tuneful than some performances there!

You can see these pictures in colour and more of my pictures of the cleaners - and also of the other groups I've worked with and photographed on My London Diary, <http://mylondon diary.co.uk> - which also includes a wider range of cultural events, urban landscapes and even holidays.



Peter Marshall

MOVING TO MULL

Boxes, Bats and Birds

My love affair with the Hebrides began 20 years ago when I visited Iona with some members of The Alliance of Radical Methodists. Brian joined me on a second visit a few months later and he too was hooked. Most years since then, we have visited one or more islands in the Inner and Outer Hebrides and been many times to Mull, either on our way to or from Iona.

We fantasised often about living on one of the islands, but always talked ourselves out of it for various reasons.

However, August 2013, an increasing disenchantment with our business and the deaths of a number of friends and acquaintances, led us to decide to live out the rest of our days (however few or many they might prove to be) in this lovely part of the world. After considering a few islands, we settled on Mull as being less remote than some of the others and chose to focus on Tobermory because it has a nice-sized community with all the facilities available within walking distance.

We were able to sell our company to another accountant in York and officially finished work on 31 January 2014, although in reality we continued for nearly 4 more weeks, preparing everything to hand over to the new owner. Saying goodbye to some of our clients was a bit sad but we were touched by the messages of thanks and the good wishes that we received. Finally we were able to relinquish responsibility for it and we felt a tremendous sense of relief - no more dealings with HMRC!

We then turned our attention to the mammoth task of sorting through all the stuff we'd accumulated over the 28 years since we moved to York. Aware that the house we were buying had a lot less storage space than the house we were leaving, we had to trim-down quite a lot. The process of considering everything we owned and deciding if we really needed to keep it was a good exercise. We began to re-evaluate what is really important to us. Some of the sorting out was quite enjoyable, looking back through programmes from festivals and shows that we'd been to evoked fond memories. We gave away

numerous books - to Oxfam, the church library and to friends and neighbours. The bread-maker went to the neighbours' daughter, while various charity shops received sacks-full of clothes, bedding and kitchen items. A lot of office equipment and stationery went to help with the setting up of a new church office.

Certain items, although of no practical use are so important as part of our personal history and/or reminders of people who have died that they had to stay. We knew we would find a place for them.

Some things were a bit difficult to part with, but the reality was that there just wouldn't be room for them in our new house so we both had to make sacrifices. Brian sold his entire collection of around 5000 football programmes on E - Bay. I halved my large collection of fluffy toys of varying sizes by donating a total of around 50 to the local playgroup, a children's hospice and a sale in aid of an orphanage in Kenya.

This was symbolic of the beginning of a new life and a new approach to possessions. We now have a new rule that, before buying anything we must ask ourselves if we really need it and where we could store it. I have also made a rule that for every book purchased, one has to be got rid of (we'll have to see if I keep it!).



Eventually we had packed up all the things we had decided to retain and on Monday 28th April everything was loaded onto the lorry which duly departed, leaving us in the empty house. We spent that night with friends and set off the following morning for the first leg of our

journey, we were to stop in Stirling overnight and arrive at our new home on Wednesday.

The plan was for the lorry to do the same. However, on Tuesday, while on our way to Stirling, we received a call from one of the drivers to say that they had reached Oban early and could they deliver that day? A few phone calls to the previous owners (who had already moved out) and we arranged for the house to be unlocked for them. The result was that when we arrived on Wednesday, everything was in the house waiting. Unfortunately, due to a different interpretation of our instructions, most things were in the wrong place so we spent two or three days moving wardrobes and beds up and down stairs. During a telephone conversation about an item of furniture, one of the drivers said casually "by the way, we got the bat out of the sink"! (*see below*).

Not wanting to grapple with the wood-burning stove on our first evening, we switched on the immersion heater - which promptly blew all the fuses! As the person we were put in touch with was away on holiday for a week, we were forced to start learning the ways of the wood-burner but of course this didn't provide hot-water until it had been lit in the morning. Boiling a kettle and washing my hair over the sink with a jug (as I always did when I was younger) made me realise how lucky I really am and I thought of all those for whom even cold running water in the house would be a luxury. However, we did appreciate it when the immersion was fixed after 9 days.

Remember the bat? On the evening of our second day we returned from a walk to find a bat flying around the house! Fortunately Brian managed to trap it and release it. We had noticed an upstairs window was open on our arrival the first day so we assume it had got in during the week that the house was empty and had been hiding out somewhere waiting for a quiet night alone to venture out again. We haven't seen any more, although we have had two birds (on separate occasions) which, having found their way in through an open door, got very confused by the large windows and had to be helped to find the way out again.

We also had a family of starlings nesting in the roof space, just above our bedroom. We could hear them scrabbling about above us and they were quite vocal, especially in the early morning. Once they fledged we got a local builder to block the hole to prevent re-occupation. More welcome are the chaffinches that come to the bird-feeder each day and stay *outside* the house.

We are getting used to island ways and don't lock the door when we go out. When people are going away for a few days, they just let Tom, the postman, know and he keeps their letter for them until they return. Everyone is very friendly and people in shops and local tradesmen are keen to give a good service to their customers. Having breakfast each morning while looking out over the Sound of Mull is a wonderful start to the day. Even going to the shops is a delight as we can pause to watch the boats in the harbour.



The view at breakfast.

Neither of the churches in Tobermory serves Fairtrade tea and coffee, so I will be seeking to convert them before too long. I have already got the Arts Centre café to collect ring-pulls and will be approaching other cafes and the churches soon.

So that's the story of getting here. Space doesn't permit me to tell you more now but you'll be able to read more about our new life here in the next issue of ACT Together.

Lorraine Jones

Ashram Holiday 2014



Holidays in Dorset are taxing. For one thing, you keep finding yourself in Devon, and you need to know the difference in case you have to dial 999 for the fire brigade. Then there's the place names: we were staying in Rousdon (pronounced Rooze-...) and the nearest proper village – it had a couple of dozen houses and a church – was Combyne*. Despite this, an intrepid band of 18 members and friends managed to find the luxurious Orchard Country House from all over the world – well, the UK and Sri Lanka – accommodation that had been discovered for us by Josie and booked, in his usual laid-back way by David Dale who, at the time of writing hasn't yet sent us the bill. When I say luxurious, I mean en suite bathrooms, one of them reportedly big enough to contain an extra bed, enormous television screens all over the place, a dishwasher, dining tables each with two cloths on, continental style, and a Sainsbury's delivery of basic food on the first evening.

It was of course a group holiday, but not like a coach tour where you all go to the same places and do the same things., so I cannot give a comprehensive account of all our activities. Who knows where one member of the party went energetically by bike while others were having leisurely cups of coffee and cream teas at the seaside? (We do know, however, that s/he rode over some recently laid tarmac and came to regret it.) At least three of us risked swimming in the sea at Lyme Regis. Two car loads went to visit the Othona Community house at Burton Bradstock. Various small groups attempted the nearby parts of the coastal path that had

not yet fallen down the cliffs; some of us found this particularly challenging, so we didn't need to be reminded of it the next day by one of the hymns at the local church:

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.

Though we went our different ways during the day, we did eat together every evening, taking turns with the shopping and meal preparation. Ian Parker volunteered for the final evening, when the challenge is to use up everything left in the fridge. He rose to it admirably, even serving us with an "hors d'oeuvre". (You can tell he was brought up in Surrey.) Breakfast was a little more spread out, time wise, and I shall long treasure the memory of the expression on our son's face when he arrived in the dining room to find a discussion on Wittgenstein versus Cartesianism in full swing.

We went in various different directions on the Sunday morning. Five of us (we doubled the congregation) attended the service at the 13th century Combyne church, which was led by a priest who was also a fantastic pianist. Not only did he accompany the hymns, he also "improvised in the style of Debussy" (his own words) at the end. After the service one of the churchwardens told us that we had taken the communion wine from a pre-Reformation silver chalice, and brought it down to show us before it was safely

locked away. Some of the party had to have their weekly Methodist fix and went by car to Seaton, but one of the Methodist ministers amongst us sought out the nearest Quaker meeting, which uses Uplyme Village Hall for its worship and apparently offered very good biscuits with the coffee afterwards. And two of the party used the Sunday morning to make obeisance to an impressive viaduct on a nearby disused railway.

There were more churches to look at during the week. The Victorian St Pancras chapel, built to replace a derelict Saxon church, for the grandiose Rousdon Estate opposite our lodgings, was pronounced by Nirmal's son the prettiest he had seen, though it is now a holiday home. The parish church of Lyme Regis has a modest little stained glass window to commemorate Thomas Coram, born in the town but founder of the Foundling Hospital in London, where Handel often had his most famous oratorio performed. The Marshalls managed to find the window at their second attempt, with directions from David Dale, our resident geographer, geologist and historian. The ruined chapel of St Gabriel was worth a detour on our trek to Golden Cap, the highest point on the Dorset coast. It was in a tiny hamlet nestling in the hillside, now in the care of the National Trust, with its cottages used as holiday lets (maybe you see a pattern emerging here). But the chapel's particular distinction, apart from the lack of roof and windows, was its role as a store/hiding place for smuggled goods once it was no longer used for worship.



Photo: Samuel Marshall

Deserving of a paragraph to itself is the Loughwood Meeting House near Axminster, visited by five of us on the Tuesday morning. It's another chapel now in the care of the National Trust, though still used occasionally for worship, one of the earliest Baptist churches in England. Built in the second half of the sixteenth century, it served an amazingly large congregation who needed a secluded spot for their meetings to avoid the sometimes violent persecution they were subject to before the Toleration Act of 1688. The building seemed to be little changed from its original state, with a thatched roof and a well-populated burial ground surrounding it. Inside is a high central pulpit above a simple communion table above the baptistry, with a gallery at the back, and box pews everywhere else. There are two rooms with fireplaces (= cooking facilities) underneath the gallery, and stables in the burial ground, to respond to the needs of those who had to travel long distances to worship with others according to their beliefs, and needed sustenance before they set off on their return journey.

As I write this I'm realising that there was a lot of history on this holiday, though I did do a lot of wild flower spotting as well. But we've now reached the nineteenth century, when the 12-year-old Mary Anning discovered a huge fossilised "lizard", later to be named *Ichthyosaurus*, in the cliffs around Lyme Regis, which are still a fertile hunting ground for fossils. So a few of us, though somewhat sceptical, felt we must check it out before we came home. Surely there couldn't be any left by now? But there were, and we took a couple away with us, only to find that they were really too bulky to fit in our hand-held luggage. While we were scrabbling around on the shingle beach we witnessed a tiny landslip of gravel in a cloud of dust, reminding us of the fragility of this stretch of the coast.

Most of the group at some point visited the Lyme Regis Museum, which was crammed with objects and information impossible to take in during one short visit. Two of the displays in particular stick in my memory. There was the great landfall of 1839, when the farmer whose field landed half-way down the cliff arranged for some pretty young women with scythes to cut the corn when it was ripe and charged hundreds of visitors to come and watch. Cups of tea were also available. Meanwhile tracts were being published denying the claims of the godless scientists that this was a natural disaster; it was clearly a warning to the country to abandon its sinful ways and turn back to God. Then there was the display about the Civil War, when Lyme Regis was staunchly Parliamentary and suffered a lengthy siege by Royalist forces. Not so long ago I would have thought, "How primitive, thank goodness we've progressed beyond that sort of thing today." Alas, returning from a relaxing (well fairly!) and sociable holiday in a delightful part of the country was something of a rude awakening.

Linda Marshall

* A bar of Divine chocolate for the first reader who was *not* on the holiday to pronounce this name correctly.

Ashram: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

The aim of the May 2014 weekend was for us to reflect on the past, note the present and look to the future for the Ashram community. Members were asked to consider two questions before they came to the weekend or, if unable to attend, to include any comments on their apology form.

In the first session members divided into three groups based on length of involvement with Ashram. This demonstrated there were a group of people from the early years of Ashram (1960s - 80s) and then more recent members joining after the later years of the first decade of the 21st century. Approximately two decades, 1990 – 2000, are not represented in the current membership of the community.

Each group was asked to discuss their answers to the two questions. Individual responses to *What brought you into Ashram?* included:

- It was a damp day and foggy weekend in Huddersfield and I was suffering from lack of sleep after a night on a hard floor...had just left being a student, in SCM, wanted something that would keep me thinking... met JV in the breakfast queue
- I came into Ashram via UTU and the Study year. I was invited to my first weekend in May 1983 (I think) and felt at home with like-minded fellow disciples – it just seemed a natural progression
- Interfaith talk on Israel. People John, Grace, Nirmal. Chris

Individual responses to *What keeps you in Ashram?* included:

- There is no condemnation in Ashram (unlike church). No one judges others. Church is not enough. Ashram keeps me doing the Jesus stuff
- Being challenged by others to live simply and act justly

- Having a relatively local group of Christians who shared the same sort of concerns as I did

The groups were asked to identify common themes from the individual contributions.

Group1, where members had been with Ashram longest, identified:

- Challenge to action, putting faith into practice
- Community of like-minded people
- Concern for poverty, both at home and abroad, and a desire to live in mixed, multicultural areas

Group 2 listed:

- Our experience as a community of people who share and support – non-judgmental
- The challenge to be real Christians – feet first
- Doing the gospel

For Group 3, the newest members, the themes were:

- Community, shared values
- Ethics, environmental focus

For all three groups being part of a community of like-minded people with shared values was the common theme. How to live those values out in relation to poverty and the environment were the challenges noted by the groups.

For the second and third sessions, groups were divided randomly and were asked to consider the issues of today, how Ashram can respond as a community, what is Ashram's vision for the future and how do we make Ashram attractive to other people. Each group discussed these questions in slightly different ways and shared their responses in a final plenary session.

Only one group did exactly as they were asked! They listed some of the issues as:

- Ageing population – both nationally and in Ashram
- Generational inequality
- Ethics of capitalism
- Homelessness
- Rampart individualism

The group suggested possible responses from Ashram including:

- Provoking each other to take individual actions in response – sharing info
- Need positive alternatives e.g. Fair Trade beverage and choc are alternatives to Nestle but what about Amazon?

However, as a result of the different approaches to the discussion questions there were no clear visions for how Ashram could respond to the present and changing issues. The main theme that came from all groups was how to strengthen the

community by improving communication. Ashram is a mixture of people who live close together in Sheffield and others scattered across the UK, so how can we better support each other? Members were very positive about the last two editions of Act Together and we were encouraged to contribute to the next edition. There were proposals to look at how we use IT presence more effectively and it was agreed to revive the Ashram Facebook group.

The weekend may not have enabled Ashram to develop a sense of future direction. From the discussions it became clear Ashram issues and activities are informed by current members. What has remained constant, and needs to be celebrated, is Ashram provides a community of support and non-judgmental challenge for like-minded people as we try to live out the gospel.

Ian Parker, Linda Marshall, Liz Urben

2012 Day's Pay update- Mucaard- a Christian Muslim project in the Philippines

Exciting new project working with Muslim women in Marawi and Balindong

The two MuCAARD-Phil members are working with women's groups in 14 villages to gradually change society's perception of Maranaw women and enable them to become fully participating members of their communities. Cultural norms are seen as keeping women as second-class citizens. As the project highlights:

"They are assigned to do routine household roles and restricted on other activities dictated by Maranaw culture with no bases in the Holy Qu'ran and the Tradition of the Prophet Mohammad (SAW). As a result, Gender Inequality exists. Women are deprived of their rights to participate in planning and the decision making process of the community and village as a whole that affect their lives as women. Their participation in politics up to this moment in time remains controversial between the conservative religious leaders and the professionals.

This project is trying to address the rights of women to own property they are deprived of by our culture. It is also designed to upgrade the economic status and skills of women in different fields so that they will become active partners in development and ready to participate in community development, economic and political activities. Your support on this aspect will have a great impact on the lives of deprived, marginalized and voiceless women in these 14 barangays."

The women will also receive skills training in preparation for the implementation of the Peace Agreement between the Philippine Government and the Muslim Islamic Liberation Front. Negotiating and communication skills will be necessary for the officers to build up their confidence in meeting with LGU officials and Line Agencies who can help in the project under the new agreement.



MUSLIM CHRISTIAN ACTION FOR ADVOCACY RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT
MUCAARD-UK
 GROWING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Passing on the Gift with growing confidence and strength

In the past year the 38 local People’s Organisations (POs) we supported last year through BISAP and the Damulog Local Government Unit (LGU) have:

- Passed on 47 calves to other members of their groups increasing the number of beneficiaries by 30%
- Planted over 2200 coconut seedlings
- Planted 22 acres of rubber seedlings with the long-term aim of establishing a small rubber processing factory to produce motorbike tyres for the provincial market
- Over 80% of the POs also planted corn and with the profit bought farm equipment, buy back ‘pawnd’ land and household goods
- 2 POs are successfully planting organic vegetables and passion fruit for provincial markets.



Supporting new People's

Organisations In 2014 **MUCAARD UK** is supporting this programme to enable a further 38 new PO’s to receive project funds from the Community Fund for Agricultural Development (CFAD) which continues to be funded by the World Bank and the LGU. This will make a total of 76 People’s Organisations.



The new groups are very young organizations and BISAP will train them in transparent project management and financial accountability. They also need to be legally registered with the government.

They will then receive project funds for agricultural projects similar to those received by the first 36 groups.

Helping repair typhoon damage



In October 2013 a typhoon damaged the fishing project of the community in Zamboanga del Sur that we had given a small grant to in 2012. They had been able to repair the damage themselves but when in January 2014 three low pressure areas/ typhoons hit Mindanao again they had no more savings they could use. They requested us to help them buy bamboo poles and netting to repair the cages which we were able to do.





Fairtrade is 20 - and we still need you!!

It's 20 years since our supermarket till receipts persuaded the supermarkets to let in the first three Fairtrade

marked products. Now there are 4,500 products to choose from and our sales have grown to £1.8 billion/yr!

At Traidcraft's AGM this month I was inspired by meeting Tomy Mathew from the Fair Trade Alliance in Kerala (FTAK), S.India. His members produce Fairtrade coffee, coconuts and cashews. They are concerned by demography – the average age of farmers, (and his AGM audience!) is over 50 yrs, and they see monocrops as environmentally disastrous, so they want to farm sustainably. They have an exciting 'Fairtrade +3' agenda, where they promote food security, gender justice and biodiversity. Each 3 acre farm is helped to become a net food supplier, and, with intercropping of over 90 crops, a microcosm of a tropical rainforest. Land ownership is now family based, enhancing the role of women, and amazing seed and animal exchange festivals help to promote biodiversity and challenge the invasion of rubber estates, and disease vulnerable pepper. They have used the Fairtrade premium to install solar powered fencing to deter invading elephants, making our Fairtrade cashews elephant friendly too! With the Fairtrade price of coconuts now four times the market price of four years ago, dignified remunerative farming is a possibility for their children.

FTAK is also working with Traidcraft's development charity (Traidcraft Exchange) on a pilot project to address the poverty of the poorest people in their area – the tribal people in the hills whose cash crops were wiped out by disease. The men were bewildered and took to drink, some committing suicide. A revolving bank of tubers and seeds and animal loans to strong women's groups have helped to counter the despair.

Traidcraft Exchange is also working in Bangladesh, a country where 44% live on less than \$1.25/day. Farmers with plots of less than an acre are 20% poorer than the national average, and most have stunted growth because of malnutrition as children. They have been helped to set up democratically organised district and regional associations, and through these they can at last get help from the Government agricultural extension officers – with animal vaccinations and, farming advice, and cheaper supplies from local companies. They now test their soil, use indigenous seeds and their own compost and need less fertiliser, and so their yields have increased, their costs have decreased and they have a surplus to invest in their farms and to plan to send their children to university!

Last Saturday in Sunderland I heard Dhawal Mane from an Indian organic and Fairtrade cotton network explain how his 1537 registered farmers had benefitted from similar help. He went on to explain how the £350,000 Fairtrade premium that had been distributed over six

years to 80 villages had been spent:



That was good news- but it was only when we questioned him later we discovered that there are 30,000 cotton farmers in his region waiting for the improved incomes, health, education and toilets which Fairtrade could bring - but global Fairtrade cotton sales have plummeted, making it impossible.

And this was mirrored in the picture nationally. Only 1.2% of the cocoa we consume is Fairtrade, and less than 1% of the sugar, while overall only 6% of all that we buy that could be Fairtrade is. And that's despite the fact that the UK is the biggest Fairtrade market in the world – (It's good to hear that Fairtrade is starting in India, S. Africa, Brazil and Mexico). We are still only reaching 1.4 million people - and we don't have the advertising budget of the big companies to remind us all that the job has really only just begun.

Traidcraft has just launched a new range of cleaning products to help. It contains Fairtrade Kerala coconut oil and the world's first sustainable palm oil from Ghana which is enabling small holders to transform their lives (The palm oil present in half the packaged goods we buy (whether in foods or detergents) is from vast plantations in Malaysia and Indonesia which were once tropical rainforest with great biodiversity). Now thanks to our Clean and Fair range, people like Daniel in Ghana grow palm oil sustainably and he harvests more than his father on the same land. He hopes to be able to marry soon. Ruth has work processing 50 baskets of palm fruit a day "I get a hot meal every day and healthcare if I am sick. Life is good".. And the Fairtrade premium has provided housing for health workers and public toilets, school uniforms and books.



So please keep on spreading the message, and swapping your shopping - so that trade is just and people and communities can flourish!

Jenny Medhurst

Fingers and the Sacraments

based on words of Theresa of Avila "He has no hands but your hands now".

My interest in this subject began whilst I was working as a plastic surgery nurse in the nineteen sixties. After an operation was complete the doctors handed over the ongoing care to us, care which could be quite a long drawn out procedure. It was during this time that the patient would often begin to tell me their troubles and as the stress of their lives was released so, I noticed, the wound began to heal. In recent times the links between stress and healing have been recognised and many GPs are referring their patients to centres offering stress therapy as part of the process.

During this time I began to realise that many illnesses begin either from sudden shock or from bereavement, especially if these occasions have been badly handled, causing the patient to keep the issues bottled up rather than letting them go in some way. It became clear, after hearing of many examples of illness and even death caused by stressful situations, that there was a need for tender loving care to go alongside medical intervention to bring about healing. Such care would be expressed to the patients through the touch of fingers, fingers which told the person being touched that they were cared for and that someone understood.

When one of the ward sister's showed scepticism about my theories I encouraged her to attend a service being led by the rather controversial Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins. Although she had found the sermon somewhat over her head she commented that when she received the elements of Communion from him, she felt that she was being given something precious and was herself precious through the gift. Later I became involved in the

field of bereavement counselling and was impressed with the way Dr. Wilkes who headed up the group made a point of treating both patients and staff as being very precious. This reminded me of the fact that we were created by God to find the glory of heaven for ourselves and how his love was demonstrated by his son who embodied his love.

Some years ago I was privileged to be allowed to distribute the Eucharist around the local community and I found it a very special thing to do. Despite not being originally a low church tradition I found that people truly appreciated the opportunity to share. They often prepared a table with a lace cloth and a glass of water ready for the visit, and waited with anticipation for the visitor to arrive. When my mother and my friend were dying and receiving the Eucharist from the chaplain and visiting priests, we realised that in the coming together in this way we were celebrating life in the community.

I was reminded of a verse from Iona which reads "I am come that ye might have life and have it in abundance, right through death". I was reminded that the Lord also said "The bread that I will give is my flesh which is given for the life of the world. This do in remembrance of me." There are many dark places in our world created by loss, fear, depression, many places at the point of felt need which can be released by the touch of a hand, or the gift of the bread of life.

It has been in these later years, when I am no longer taking the sacrament out to people that I have discovered another secret of the broken bread. When I receive

the precious bread into my hands, I believe that it works its own miracle.

However I have also found that by taking a little cheerful plant to people in dark places, in nursing homes and hospitals at a moment of felt need works in the same way. The secret of this ministry, either of touching hands, receiving bread or the giving of a small gift is that it is reminiscent of how Jesus himself behaved. He was moved by compassion and his touch brought healing and wholeness to those who needed it most.

I would like to share two examples of healings told me by those who have presided at services of healing. The first was a young mother with Hodgkinson Disease. After the anointing she found new life and gave birth and is in Holland with 2 babies now.

Philip who was anointed after a car crash in which he was seriously injured, was called into the priesthood and was called the dancing vicar of Norfolk, held 5 parishes and ran pilgrimages.

Jesus told us, that with the help of the Holy Spirit we would be able to do more than he was able to do. In the multi-faith context we may not be able to share the sacraments together, but we are able to experience many ways of healing, the greatest of all is to do what Jesus himself did and be moved by compassion, to touch and to care. My prayer is that we do not harden our hearts to the greatest thing in life, but open our hearts and not be afraid to love one another as he has loved us. Fill us Lord with your compassion.

Ruth Bird

Radical Christianity Summer Schools and new books

The Radical Christianity Summer School in Sheffield was held on 8th -10th July 2014. The theme was “Relaunching Christian Radicalism”. The School was jointly sponsored by the Institute for Socio-Biblical Studies at the Urban Theology Unit, the Study and Research Group of the Ashram Community, and representatives of the St Mark’s Centre for Radical Christianity.

John Vincent is now editing a volume containing some of the contributions, plus a chapter by Christopher Rowland, who was unable to attend. Chris, and the book will be at the major Day Conference at St Mark’s Broomhill, Sheffield, on Saturday 4th July 2015, from 9.30am to 3.30pm, when the book will be launched, with other contributors, workshops and discussions.

There will also be a joint Ashram/UTU Summer School on Monday to Wednesday 13th – 15th July.

The theme will be a further volume in the Deo Publishing series of Practice Interpretation, notably The Servant of God. Meantime, the next volume in the series, on The Farewell Discourses, on John 13-17, will be published in the Autumn.

John Vincent

www.ashram.org.uk

Our website is gradually building up a good number of users, with 1238 visitors in the first six months of 2014, 169 of whom visit regularly. For users of Facebook, there's also a Facebook button to take you to an Ashram group started by Andrew Weeks.

What's missing on the website is news of events in the branches (apart from London) and also recent photographs. Photos of people actually doing things are best! You can send items for the website either directly to me at kathclements@ymail.com or via the Contact page of the website.

MEDITATION OF A GRANDMOTHER IN A WAR TORN LAND

I should be able to relax a little at my age. My children are grown up, happily married and with children of their own. Instead I live in a constant state of fear.

The bombardment is relentless. A constant blast of missiles all around us. Nowhere is safe any more. We are reduced to living in two rooms. The rest of the house has been destroyed. My youngest daughter, Miriam, was trapped under the rubble, and despite all our efforts to release her, she died. Painfully, slowly and screaming, "Mama! Mama!" She was beautiful, kind, caring.....and six months pregnant.

I don't know which is worse, daytime or night time. During the day I have to be strong, a rock for my children and grandchildren. It tears at my heart when the little ones are crying because they are hungry. There's not much food to go round. Few merchants are able to move around the country to re stock provisions.

The youngsters could end up scarred for life. Anna, she's six, hasn't spoken since the rocket landed on our house, killing her auntie. She just sits, rocking and hugging herself all the time. She doesn't cry. I wish she would, it would help. Her face is expressionless. She should be running around, playing and laughing with her friends. When you are just six years old, the only pain you should know is from a grazed knee.

Matthew, ten, worries me. He's trying to be all grown up and macho. He says he is going to be a fighter when he's older. He's going to kill the enemy. I pray so hard for him. As a family we have always been pacifists. We brought them all up to try to understand others, to negotiate, and now Matthews's thoughts are turning to war.

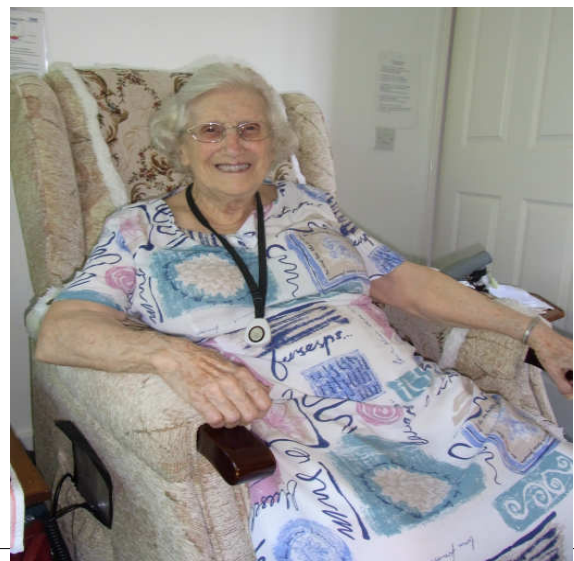
My children and their spouses work so hard trying to bring some semblance of normality into the children's lives. I have to admire them. Nina, bless her, can do so much with so little when it comes to preparing a meal, and Jonathan tries so hard to take the children's minds off the horror that is all around us.

Night time is bad, really bad. I lie on my makeshift bed listening. Listening to the explosive sounds echoing all around. Worse still listening to the screams of my grandchildren as they experience yet another nightmare. Listening to their parents sobbing quietly as they feel inadequate to protect their offspring from the terror of war.

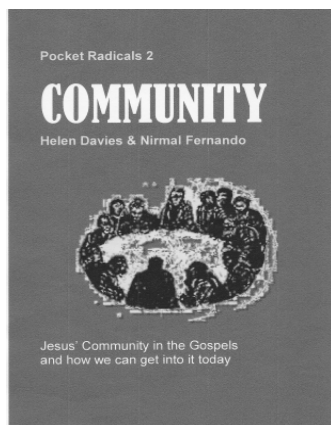
Listening to my inner voice. The voice that feels it cannot speak aloud. Screaming at God, at the world. "We never wanted this. Make it stop! Oh please, make it stop!"

Josie Smith

Greetings to Ashram members from Enid Johnson in Stockton !



Using the 'Community' booklet



Our new booklet came out of discussions in the Study and Research Group as to how we might help to provoke each other to study and develop ways to enrich our life together, both as a whole community and as branches and as small self-selected working groups.

Nirmal contributed detailed work on the gospels under eight headings. An index of the main passages used has been drawn up by John:

Kingdom practice.....	Mk. 1.14-15	p4
Call of disciples.....	Mk.1.14-20	p8
Rules for disciples.....	Mt. 5.1-20	p12
Healing mission.....	Lk. 7.20-22	p16
Dealing with reception.....	Lk. 10.1-11	p20
Exclusivity.....	Mk. 8.34-38	p24
Life together.....	Lk. 11.1-4	p28
Confirmation.....	Jn. 14.15-24	p32

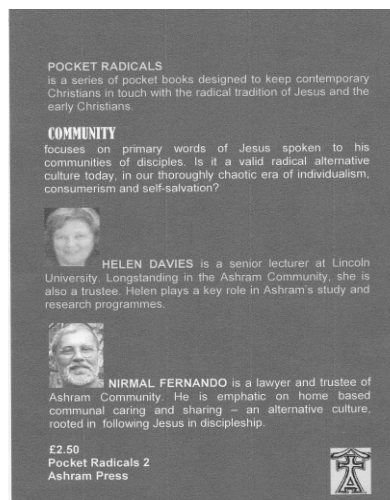
Helen linked these to contemporary questions or situations for which our Ashram models and the gospel models might provide lead-ins:

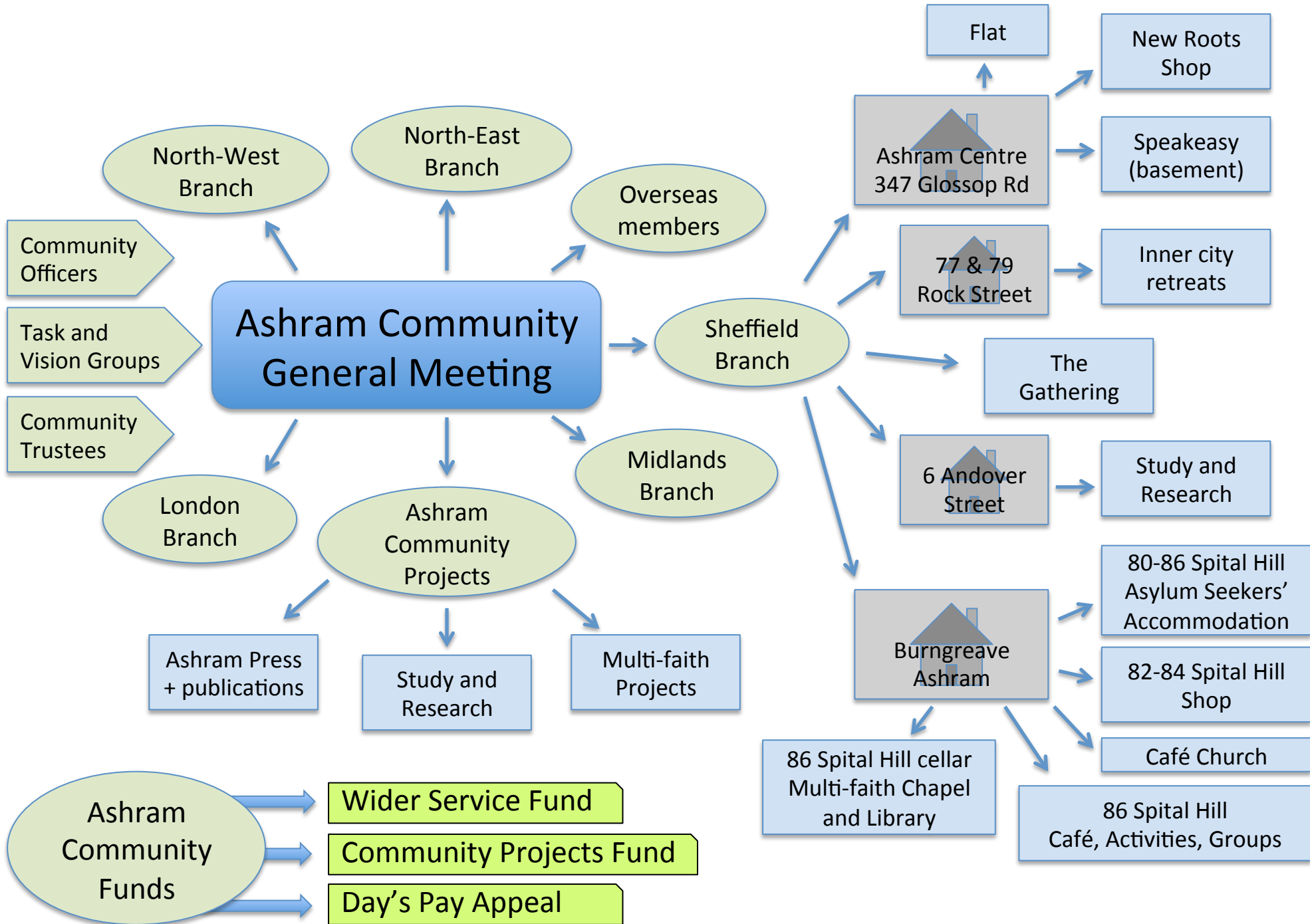
- Where can we see the gospel alternative being lived out?
- What are the practical implications of communal living for an individual?
- How do we respond when laws and cultural norms are incompatible with Jesus' commandments?
- How could living in community bring healing to individuals and groups?
- Who needs our hospitality? From whom do we need to receive hospitality?
- Does our sense of identity rest on belonging to particular groups?
- To what extent does our worship sustain our discipleship?
- How are we called to embody the gospel in collective action?

John contributed eight pieces from our contemporary Ashram Community life which were significant as useful elements or even models. They are:

Ashram cross.....	7
Ashram Community.....	11
Membership commitments.....	15
Living the membership commitment.....	19
House warming.....	23
Having things in common.....	27
Houses and projects.....	31
Rock Street community.....	35

We hope that you will find a use for the booklet – let us know how you get on.







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

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

DATES

2015

28 Feb General Meeting Sheffield
26-28 March Inner City Retreat
8-10 May Community Weekend
Middleton, Greater Manchester
4-6 June Inner City Retreat
4 July Radical Christianity Launch
14-15 July Ashram/UTU Summer School
25 July General Meeting- Sheffield if not elsewhere
August Community Holiday
Grange-over-Sands
9-11 Oct Community Weekend, Unstone
Grange

HOUSES AND PROJECTS

Burngreave Ashram Centre, Interfaith Chapel and Library
Burngreave Ashram: 80-86 Spital Hill Sheffield
S4 7LG – Tel: 0114 270 0972

New Roots Shop, Basement Speakeasy and Residents' flat
347 Glossop Rd Sheffield S10 2HP
Tel: 0114 272 1971

Community Houses: 77 and 79 Rock St
Sheffield S3 9JB – Tel: 0114 272 7144

Community House for members involved in Spital Hill
6 Andover Street Sheffield S3 9EG
Tel: 0791 092 2462 (Tamara)

COMMUNITY

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Ashram Press: As above
See Website www.ashram.org.uk for publications

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Articles for Spring 2015 edition needed by 15th
April

BRANCHES

All Members and Associates are attached to one of five Regional Branches. Please contact Secretaries if you would like to know more about meeting or events. The Branch Secretaries are the local contact points for the Community.

SECRETARIES

Midlands – Chris & Lorraine Smedley
Tel: 0115 9288430 – Monthly Meetings

London – Linda Marshall – 01784 456 474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly

North-West – Josie Smith – 01706 841 532
Meetings as arranged.

Sheffield – Grace Vincent – 0114 243 6688
Gatherings fortnightly – Mons, 7 – 9:30pm

North-East – Jenny Medhurst
Tel: 01740 630475 – Meetings as arranged