



ACT TOGETHER

Ashram Community Trust

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The new normal
wildflower verges rather than green grass deserts in Stockton-on-Tees – bee friendly and heart gladdening

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BLACK LIVES MATTER

On the evening of Friday August 14 the poster outside my church proclaiming that Black Lives Matter alongside a picture of George Floyd was defaced. This was reported on the Sunday morning at our Zoom service. Not surprisingly the congregation was angry. A decision was made to paint the outside wall of the church garden black with the words Black Lives Matter in white. Fortunately one of our members is the calligraphy artist, Stephen Raw. In under two days the “new wall” was finished and everyone passing through the busy main road junction could read it. However that is not the end of the story.



At the end of the same service it was decided to form a Black Lives matter discussion/reading group. Since then we have looked at the following books:-

- Eddo-Lodge, Reni, Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race
- Akala, Natives: Race & class in the ruins of empire
- Lindsay, Ben, We need to talk about race: Understanding the black experience in white majority churches.

All three books have been informative and most interesting provoking much discussion.

Last night we were supposed to be looking at the questions at the end of each of the first three chapters of Lindsay's book. By the end of the session we had covered half of the questions at the end of chapter one!

In addition to reading and discussing books we are having talks from black people. The other week Professor Dawn Edge of the University of Manchester gave an informative talk on the inequalities in health care of the BAME community. Sometime in the next few weeks we will have the pleasure of hearing the black theologian, Anthony Reddie.

As we are getting so much from this discussion group, I doubt it is going to end soon. Little does the man (we know it was a man, he was seen) who daubed our poster know what he started.

Josie Smith

DRC and conflict minerals

This is a piece of news you may not have heard. You might ask why? At Kambuga in South Kivu in the DRC on Friday September 11th 50 people were killed as 3 gold mines were engulfed in a landslide. Thousands of informal miners operate in and around mines in DRC, which produces more than half of the world's cobalt, a key component in electric car batteries. Mining accidents are common, with dozens of deaths every year in mines where often ill-equipped diggers burrow deep underground in search for ore. Last year, a landslide at a disused gold mine killed 16 people in October, while 43 people died in another landslide at a copper and cobalt mine in June. Unsafe working conditions and also impacts of climate change on rainfall are likely to be major causes.

I heard of this via members of a small Quaker group which we have formed locally to address the whole issue of so called conflict minerals. Conflicts, particularly in the DRC, have been linked to the high demand for many minerals of high and growing value because of the increased demand for electronic gadgets which require quite a range of these minerals.

The reasons for the setting up of this group were initially that one of our members has acted as a host for several years to people seeking asylum including people from the DRC and over the years has got to know several Congolese, many now with their leave to remain. She asked several of them if there was anything that might prevent further conflict and improve things within the country. They had much to say about the need for better government but also explained something about the links between mining and conflict. The group consists of some of her Congolese friends and two Quakers who have involvement with a small Quaker charity called Quaker Congo Partnership which works within South and North Kivu, two of the 26 provinces in the DRC. We also have two men in the group still within the DRC, one in South Kivu and one in North Kivu and they are attempting to do some research into the conditions of the miners.

My attention was drawn to the issue of blood or conflict minerals some years ago, possibly originally through Christian Aid. I have been a subscriber to Ethical Consumer for many years and their ethiscore for all the electronic gadgets includes a mark for the use of conflict minerals. In 2012 in the US the Dodds – Frank Act came into force which requires all publicly, listed companies to check their supply chains for tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold (known as the 3TG minerals) that may be sourced from the DRC or surrounding countries. The check is to ensure that the minerals concerned have not been involved in contributing to the financing of conflict in the region. In 2017 the EU passed legislation which will require EU businesses to ensure these 3TG minerals are sourced responsibly. This is due to come into force in 2021. The position of the UK needs to be clarified in the light of EU withdrawal and it too should uphold this legislation.

There seems indeed to have been a lot of agreement for several years that if local people are to benefit from the evident mineral wealth almost exclusive to the DRC and extraction is to be done in such a way that is least damaging to the environment that there needs to be regulation at an international level, and enforcement by the state.

These are some of the international initiatives which have already taken place to try to regulate the extractive industries. They were listed by Ethical consumer in response to a question I asked.

1. Voluntary principles.(2000). About how to conduct security operations while respecting human rights for extractive industries in 'difficult areas'. UK/ USA initiative.
2. UN guiding principles on business and human rights. (2011).
3. Responsible Minerals initiative.

In April 2020 RCS global developed a partnership to scale continual improvements in production of artisanal and small scale mining of cobalt in DRC where there were to be monthly corrective action plans for responsible minerals trade, specific to DRC and Great Lakes region.

4. JEITA (2018).
5. KEMET.
6. ITSCI. Supply chain focus on Burundi, DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. Members are able to access the international market at competitive prices.
7. Solutions for hope. (2011). This was about responsible sourcing of tantalum in particular by companies making mobile phones. There is a process for verifying materials are conflict free and from the DRC.

Companies involved include Fairphone, Motorola, Nokia, and Cooperative des artisanux miniers de Congo.

8. European partnership.

Have done case studies including Alphamin at Bisie, and Fairphone.

The early research by our group and others reveals a very complex set of issues. These include:

- The supply chain is long and tracking to conditions in mines by electronic and car companies is not straightforward. Some of the minerals may find their way from DRC mines to Rwanda and then appear to have been mined there. There are other minerals, notably, cobalt not included in present monitoring arrangements,

There was originally a nationalised industry, then encouragement by the government to small artisanal miners to dig for the minerals. This has often led to poor working conditions, the use of child labour and the growth of paramilitary groups fighting for control. In some provinces there is still a plethora of artisanal mines, in others larger mining companies have now taken control. In North Kivu Alphamine is one such mine. Their own reports (alphaminresources.com) suggest they have engaged with local communities and attempt to run a well organised, ethical business. However our little bit of research suggests there have been land disputes and some displacement of local people and some of claims may not be true. There seem different kinds of potentially damaging impacts from both the larger mining companies and the small artisanal mines.

- It is clear there is some reluctance maybe based on fear of reprisals to be involved in research. A recent report by Afreewatch which included a conference for a whole range of groups only named one miner and though 35 women were invited only two came.

- One of the recommendations of the AfreWatch report was the need to diversify the economy so it was not so highly dependent on the minerals. Tourism was one suggestion and certainly the Virunga reserve where you can, like David Attenborough, view families of gorillas is very attractive. However it can only be accessed from Rwanda as it is too dangerous from the DRC side. Rangers employed to protect the reserve from those who would like to exploit the mining opportunities are sometimes killed and there is a dedicated charity to support their widows.

As you can see there is a lot of work to be done and issues to be grappled with.

My own current thinking about things I can do includes:

1. When choosing gadgets try to do some sort of research and choose as far as possible gadgets that only use responsibly sourced minerals.
2. Bear in mind there are sustainability issues around our love of technology. Mining is often exploitative, both of people and the environment. We need to think clearly about long term sustainability and opportunities for recycling minerals which is not easy.
3. Continue with this group to understand the issues more clearly and share with others.
4. Write to my MP initially about the UK position on the EU legislation coming into force soon.

I will try to keep you informed about the progress of our group and would also welcome information anyone else has that might be helpful to us.

If you are interested in some of the existing reports highlighting the issues and possible improvements I found these two very useful:

1. May 2020 GoodElectronics partner AfreWatch [published a report](#) detailing issues and recommendations pertaining to artisanal mining. Generated through a two-day workshop held in Kolwezi, DRC, the report focuses on three key themes: 1. Artisanal Exploitation Zones (ZEAs) and cooperatives; 2. children's rights and working conditions for women; and 3. conflict management between mining companies and communities.

The report provides a detailed overview of issues within each theme as well as extensive recommendations for how to move forward. Some issues highlighted include the lack of enforcement of existing regulations; increased poverty surrounding sites of extraction; and failure of mining companies to relocate impacted communities.

Recommendations include appropriate government enforcement and regulation; government facilitation of the diversification of local economies around sites of extraction; and numerous recommendations for how the government can support the development of cooperatives, in addition to many others.

2. Information from Jenny about the Fair Cobalt alliance. This contains a link to a report in 2016 by Amnesty called 'This is what we die for'. As you see fairphone is one of the companies very much at the forefront of ensuring conflict free minerals are used in their phones. Their focus is on minerals mined by the smaller artisanal miners.

<https://www.fairphone.com/en/2020/08/24/be-part-of-the-change-join-the-fair-cobalt-alliance/>

Sandra Dutson

Ashram the future – LEGACY

I attended the February meeting in Sheffield where the issues around Ashram finances and the ongoing responsibilities of managing and maintaining the buildings were the topic. It is clear this has become burdensome to those members left to sort it out. This was discussed and I concluded the October weekend needs to focus us on writing a Policy for the future which becomes the **Ashram Vincent Legacy**.

This is important as the majority of work is falling on a few willing? or coerced volunteers. This group is ageing with disabilities creeping in and it doesn't seem fair that they have to carry on regardless because the matter keeps getting pushed to the bottom of an agenda. Now is the time for ACT to act. I hear they are struggling, and telling us we need to relieve them of these stressful responsibilities.

These may be issues to give thought to and discuss.

1. Does Ashram want to be Landlords or Action Theologians?
2. What Resilience is there in the Community to sustain its current or past profile? Tenants are dependent on members for health and safety, wellbeing and security. There is also legislation to be adhered to, and day to day maintenance.
3. Has Ashram as landlord had it's day with no current on the ground project.
4. There is an urgent need to develop a strategy, and an action plan that can be completed quickly within three years, no more, to relieve the pressure on current volunteers and give tenants a sense of security for their future. Or rumour and speculation may make them feel insecure. Because being a Landlord involves being responsible for people's lives.
5. So sell? Join with another group? Create a study centre? Change focus?
Would it be useful for volunteers to write a list of their jobs relating to managing buildings so members are able to know exactly what is involved in being landlords?

Pippa Thompson



Pippa was in and out of the Hallamshire Hospital for three weeks in the summer, and took this picture of the sunrise over Burngreave and Wincobank. August 2020

How We Came to have our Buildings

No one with their head on straight would choose to have buildings as a main part of their work. So how did a people-centred Community, end up with buildings?

The Past

It comes not from the long history of Christian monasteries and residential communities, but from the short history of modern experimental communities. George MacLeod led the way with the Iona Community, started in 1933. And Iona had a residential study year in the Abbey, and also inner city community houses in Glasgow and elsewhere, to house a Christian family of men (initially!) working together on the projects of re-building the abbey and training for urban ministry.

Our chance to do similar came when we started the Champness Hall Community in Rochdale in 1965, and then the first Ashram House in King Street South, Rochdale in 1969. Other houses followed in the 1970's – Sheffield, Middlesbrough, London, Birmingham (2), Glasgow and Sheffield (3) – Details are in [A Lifestyle of Sharing](#) pp. 69-70.

Where we landed in 2008 is in [A Lifestyle of Sharing](#) pp. 96-97:

“The basics are clear. A House comes as a proposal for the use of the Community Projects Fund and the Seed Fund money. The proposal needs:

- A local Branch of at least four members proposing it.
- Offer of residents and /or activity/works and /or volunteers.
- “Mission Statement” in line with Ashram’s aims and Ethos,” (p. 97).

6 Andover Street was the last house to be bought, on those terms in 2013.

As I said in [ACT Together](#), Spring 2020, each house or building was seen as:

“ part of our mission in particular times and circumstances. 347 Glossop Rd was an attempt to challenge the West of Sheffield with the ethos and news from the East of Sheffield in 1987. 80-86 Spital Hill was bought in 2000 because we wanted a base to do a 1995 New Roots type of project in Burngreave. 75 and later 77 and 79 Rock Street were bought, to provide housing for people involved in the Furnival project. And 6 Andover St was bought in 2013 to provide residence for members / workers involved in Burngreave Ashram.”

The Future

Now, in 2020, we look to the future.

“ Are we at present in a time when we ought to be asking the basic questions? Like: What do we as a Community want to do that requires a building to house it? What kinds of people or members do we want to be providing houses and home for? What project(s) are we doing or could be doing that need a building? What members and people are looking to join us? Whose hopes and ambitions fit with ours? Like some of the present residents in 6 Andover Street and 77&79 Rock Street?”

“Beyond that, ought we to be thinking of a Community Mother House? Margaret Mackley threw out the idea at this meeting and I immediately said it was something we should consider.”

“I also said that all Christian Communities go through basic self questionings like these – and that it's a sign of health and a feature of hope- and also a way to find new people who might be called to join.

John J Vincent Sep 2020

People Who Have Influenced Me

John Vincent

I was brought to Methodist Sunday School at aged 5. because I was living near to the church. Their member, Miss Mildred Wood, lived opposite to us, and asked whether she could take the three boys, Gordon, John and Peter with her to Sunday School. My mother, a Baptist, readily agreed.

At ten I was teaching "Beginners" in the Sunday School, and helping out in the Morning school. A man, 4 yrs older, John Anthony Stocks, had me in a group of Sunday School lads and got us to go round to his home for what became the Young Men's Fellowship. There in (my) early teens I was lent Christian books and given some. There too I began preparing talks and putting together sermons.

Often, doubtless, it was Tony's model which came over in my own efforts. He was the first of many who inspired me over the many decades! But without him I might never have found my way into Christian life and Methodism.

Pippa Thompson

I have chosen my Grandfather, Anthony William Wall, who was a very exciting person to know. From being a small child right up to his 100th Birthday he inspired me. Firstly it was his story telling and walks around Devon Lanes in the village where he lived. His stories of Roman settlements and showing us places, hillocks and walls and weaving their way of life into the landscape. Then his imagination for stories of Devon Pixies which we all knew about, pointing out the fairy rings in fungi in the meadows.

Then as I grew older we heard about his escapades as a founder member of the Royal Flying Corps flying in flimsy aircraft and fights with the Red Baron – the enemy (which is documented) His medals for this and how proud he was. Then his second world war in SOE in France, and him teaching me French. There was the cylinder gramophone with a huge trumpet with my grandma singing on it as she was a music hall act.

The stories of the history of the cottage he lived in from the doomsday book. And the pigs

(ghosts) heard in the night. As they used to keep animals downstairs in previous generations.

He was a writer and journalist on The Mail and fired my thirst for knowledge and unleashed my imagination. He was enthusiastic for life and a very positive person. And definitely not a "God botherer" as he put it. On his 100th birthday I asked him what he would have liked to have changed about his life. He said "not living as long as nothing interesting happens to him anymore"!!



Pippa's grandfather between the wars

Sandra Dutson

As I was making my decision as to who to choose I initially was thinking of some of my secondary school teachers. The first who came to mind was my music teacher who taught me to play the organ and inspired a life-long love of music for which I have been very grateful during lockdown. Then also my biology teacher who was also led the Sunday school at the parish church I attended. Both teachers also became friends and I am still in touch. Both are I think now 90 years old.

However as I reflected other teachers came to mind and I realised the whole ethos of the school I attended was in fact created by the vision for it of our headteacher. His influence even though I did not realise it at the time was immense. He loved learning himself and had no fewer than seven

degrees in a variety of subjects, was an Anglican lay reader and loved music. He was quiet and thoughtful with no obvious charismatic presence. However the school was only four years old when I started and he was the first head teacher so clearly had a strong guiding influence, including no doubt on the choice of our teachers. Many did have a Christian faith but more important were not only wonderful in inspiring interest in their subjects but clearly interested in us as people, not just pupils.

He had strong views on competition which he discouraged as much as possible. This led to a rather funny situation on sports day which the PE department insisted on. We were divided into teams A, B and C just for sports day and if you can imagine yelling come on A or B or C from the sidelines you realise this rather undermined part of the incentive to win! He wanted people to choose their A level subjects on the basis only of their interest and enjoyment in them so did not tell us our marks for our then 'O' levels. He encouraged the parent/teacher association to buy a two manual electronic organ as he realised the need for more organists for the churches in the area, hence my learning of the instrument.

His assemblies were a wonderful prayerful, thoughtful start to the day and I still value whatever is my current early morning spiritual practice because of this influence I think. A few years after I left he became Principal of a teacher training college in Belfast. This speaks volumes about his Christian commitment and belief in the value of a good and principled education. Attendance at that school gave me a love of learning, love of music and a valuing of caring relationships. It also gave me a sense of what Christian commitment was about. I owe more to Mr Pomfret not just individual teachers than I realised.

Neville Witehead

We were discussing people who have been influential in our lives and, at first, I felt I should choose someone suitably impressive- like Paul Tillich; for his theological insights, for sure, but mostly for his sermon 'You are accepted' in 'Shaking of the foundations'. I read this in my teens. No-one had addressed me as accepted and the impact was, and still is, enormous. Then there was Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his notion of religionless Christianity which I'd been flitting

around until he coined and crystallised the idea for me. Further back, there was a teacher in primary school, Mr. Wright, who was perfectly right for me. I still have a copy of 'The observer book of wild flowers' which he presented to me for attaining 98% in the end of year exam - best in year - and his class was the B stream!

Impressive as these examples felt it seemed to me I was missing the blindingly obvious - my Dad! He was the most influential person in my life. One of my earliest memories is of his lifting me into the kitchen sink and washing me down in preparation for bed. As Christmas approached, the cellar became a hive of activity and as I became aware of what that was about (one year I got a castle and my sister, Marjorie, a doll's house) when someone enquired, And what is Father Christmas bringing? I didn't have to wrestle with the reality or otherwise of that mythical figure. I just knew that whatever arrived, the bulk of it came from Dad's hands.

Often, as he made ready to go out, Dad would ask, 'Are you coming, Squeak?' This last title he gave me in infancy for more or less obvious reasons. Then we would set out on an adventure that others might have called a shopping trip. Highlights would include various parts of the open market. On one vegetable stall we might chat to the holder who was the mother of a girl in my class at school. On occasion she would be there helping her Mum. I was warmly impressed by the way we youngsters were included in the conversation. We might then have trawled round Woolworth's and finished by choosing a selection of sweets.

Other outings might have been prefaced by a consultation over a map before catching a bus out of town to where we might walk through woods and over hills to another main road where we could bus back into town - a real expedition that others might have held to be just a walk was accurate for many of our afternoon excursions. Dad seemed to have an endless supply of information about where we were and what we were looking at. We spent a lot of time on our haunches examining flora and fauna - tiny flowers, ants and beetles and, wonder of wonders, butterflies! One time, we stopped to look at one of those huge, black slugs, about four inches long, laboriously crawling across the path. It's ridged surface was striking and 'Those are its eyes!' Dad

remarked as he pointed with a tiny twig at the stalks on the creature's head; And that's how it breathes ☹️, drawing my attention to the hole in its side.

At that moment, several young men came along the path. One stepped out of the laughing group, between us, crushing the amazing creature before striding on, braying like a donkey. I don't know what we did next. That's been obliterated by that casual, callous and destructive act. I do know that later and on reflection I chose Dad's gentle warmth with its shades of Dr. Doolittle and St. Francis over that version of masculinity expressed by many men in their competitive, testosterone fuelled and sometimes brutal activities. On some issues, Dad was passionate but on all he was thoughtful, reasonable and considerate. He was one of the widest ranging people I've known. He introduced me to many kinds of music, arts, crafts and science. In his way, he was a renaissance man. For many, perhaps, that was obscured by his cloth cap but for us to whom he was close there was no obscuring the range and depth of this gifted, warm and caring man (who was happy to be called just Les.). Thanks, Dad!

Josie Smith

The person who influenced me most was my second husband, Frank. I was abused in my first marriage and Frank taught me that you could not truly love again until you stopped hating. He also taught me how to compromise. I still miss him twenty-five years after he died.

Linda Marshall

When Sandra sent round her idea that those of us intending to join in the Monday evening national gathering on 14 September might like to be ready to talk about a person who had influenced us in some way I realised that it was not something I had ever given conscious attention to, so I would need to trawl around my memory and see what I came up with. Was it my mother, with her firmly held belief that education was a good thing in and for itself, nothing to do with making money; she was still going to a French conversation group in her late eighties till the venue where it met was closed. Was it my French teacher who bounced into a class of 11 year old girls for their first lesson, addressing

us from day one in some strange language, the like of which we had never encountered before? After all, in Hull in the late fifties the only other language we were aware of was BBC English. Mrs Griffiths (yes, it doesn't have an 'h' in it) taught me throughout my seven years at the grammar school, towards the end of that time arranging for us to join in with the activities of the French Society at the Hull University, right next door to the school. Was it perhaps Ian Mackrill, member of the London Ashram branch, but also a native of Hull, with his calm and soothing empathy and willingness to listen?

All these clearly made an impression upon me in one way or another, but I came to realise that it was my father whose quiet presence had influenced my attitudes and beliefs and view of life and the world to the greatest extent. I'll start with WWII, just a bit before my time, when my father was a conscientious objector, though not an absolutist, so he did go into the army when called up at the age of 29 or 30 and was put on a ship for an unknown destination. He had left school at 14 because his mother was a widow with quite a few children, so he had to get a job to contribute to the household income, but he had attended evening school and managed to pay for violin lessons as well as doing the training in basic accountancy for his job. When he was told that he and his fellow COs were to be put on a ship to an unknown destination he decided it was time he learned a foreign language and tried to buy a book to teach himself French to pass the time at sea. However, the bookshop was out of French text books so he went with German instead. Little did he know that he would eventually learn to read and speak Urdu after they found their destination was India. I still have his Urdu New Testament safely tucked away in my Family History folder.

So "What did you do in the war, Daddy?" turned out to be a photograph of my father standing next to an Indian Christian, Brother Brave, in front of an enormous Sunday School class of little Indian boys in Meerut. (As a side-line he worked out the pay of the soldiers who were actually fighting somewhere in the Far East.) Throughout my childhood we received a Christmas card from Brother Brave, in an envelope with an Indian stamp on – very exciting in those days!

My father had made the connection with the church in India by joining the Royal Army Pay Corps' Meerut Christian Fellowship. The members seemed to be mainly Plymouth Brethren and my

father was Anglican. They kept in contact with each other at least once a year for the rest of their lives, gathering for a day at one or other of their homes, but after he got back home in 1945 he felt he must sort out which version of Christianity was the right one and managed to find the time, when I was a baby, to do a course for external students at Hull University. I have the Bible he used at the time, full of red under-linings and notes in the margin.

In due course he became the Superintendent of the Sunday School my brother and I attended, in the days when Sunday Schools had a hundred or more children on the register, and he continued in that role, with my mother's help, after he lost his sight at age 50. Mum read the notes from the lesson book onto a tape recorder every Thursday evening and he listened as often as necessary to get all the details into his head.

My other particular memory is of seeing him, if I was passing by their bedroom first thing in the morning, kneeling by the bed praying, when my mother would be bustling around doing more practical things.

So what effect did all this have on me? Well I think there are two aspects. From the conscientious objector side, I joined CND quite early on and later also discovered an organisation now called

Conscience, but originally the Peace Tax Campaign, which campaigns for the right to have the portion of your income tax that would go to the defence budget allocated instead to non-military purposes. From the other aspect, leaving school early but becoming well-read and self-educated, having a strong faith that was not affected by the huge changes required when he became blind – change of job, reduction in income, no more cycling, walking with a white stick, learning to read Braille – all this is still an inspiration, but also more of a challenge to me.

Jenny

My husband Frank(lin) was my greatest influence too. Political corruption had led to his very public sacking from a job that mattered greatly to him and the same year he lost the family he loved, and then nearly his life. But he was never bitter or resentful, keeping his postwar idealism and his hopes of building a better Britain and a better world. I thought that was amazing, as was the love and support he gave me in my work. And, long before David Attenborough, he had set up a local Environment centre and was encouraging us all to put environmental issues up the agenda. Below I've filled a space with a letter he wrote to the Guardian in the early 80's

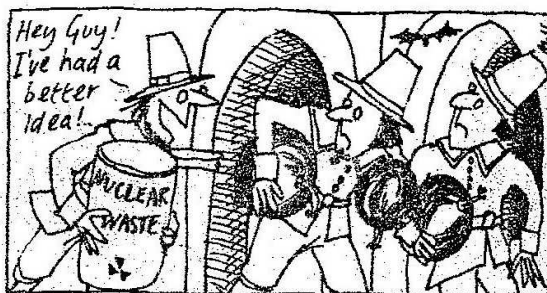
Take a nuclear tip from the Teessiders!

Sir,—It is in this most economically depressed area of mainland Britain, below a town of 40,000 people, and part of a conurbation approaching half-a-million that the Government is proposing to dump its lethal nuclear detritus.

The raw wealth of the nation is produced here but exported elsewhere before money value is added and yet Teesside has the highest unemployment rate in the country. The depressed state of the area is chronic. For decades it has sought help to develop manufactures from the basic industrial inputs it produces locally. This has not been forthcoming.

To deposit here the most perilous rubbish man has devised; the wastes of wealth produced elsewhere; and below a township, knowing that for the next half-a-million years there is a potential dragon far more lethal than Seveso lurking in the subterranean caves, would be the height of inhumanity and injustice to a part of the nation who have suffered enough from neglect.

I know this is a remote corner of the British Isles and the smouldering hazard would trouble few living in



the greener arcadian reaches of this land. So suppose we take the proposal nearer home.

Below the streets of London there lies a network of disused railway tunnels more extensive than the anhydrite mines of Teesside. Moreover these are lined with brick and concrete manufactured from that most desirable of materials for containing nuclear waste; London blue clay. Furthermore these conduits are surrounded by billions of cubic metres of London clay — and a more suitable depository for nuclear waste would be hard to find, underground, anywhere.

Should there be a seepage of the enduringly toxic wastes, these would be sufficiently close to the seats of

power to maintain the funds for half-a-million years of monitoring.

I do not expect the powers to entertain such a logical and reasonable proposal. Not, let it be noted, for fear of the risk to the health of 20,000 generations of Londoners, but because of the catastrophic slump in property values that would arise at the suggestion of such a proposal.

So a highly technological nation with, so I am told, some of the world's most advanced scientists, must look for a hole in the ground to bury the nation's rubbish. And Teesside with it. Frank Medhurst. Carlton. Stockton-on-Tees.

Isolating in Brinnington, Stockport

A strange time for us all. Ian, Richard and I isolated in our house, physically comfortable in our own home and garden, but so disturbed hearing of the suffering of others across the country and the world. We live next to Reddish Vale Country Park, we enjoy frequent walks down to Harrison's Weir, and more recently through the park into Stockport centre.

Richard has continued to volunteer with FareShare, travelling into Manchester once a week on his bicycle. Ian and I have supported our parish in their involvement with providing food and clothing for those in need through local schools.

Twice, we drove to Leamington Spa to meet up with Chris and our two-year-old grandson Leon, coming up from London, for a few hours. Then last week, they came to stay for a couple of nights in Brinnington, which was wonderful.

We have joined the weekly United Stockport Circuit zoom service and for the past month have attended St Luke's Sunday Eucharist, fully masked and socially distanced, of course! NW Ashram and Family zoom meetings are a source of joy and mutual support.

As I go into a time of further treatment for breast cancer, I pray that we can all work together to help in God's creation of a green and just world.

Pat Hamilton

Gary's Covid Story (more or less)

Recently I've really had to face the question 'What am I for?!?' I'm going to stick my neck out a bit with this one and say that I reckon people who know me would say I like to be involved, to be getting things done. (Pause to check if there's any dissenting voices.....) But a complicated interplay of events has meant I just can't fill that role right now, and it doesn't sit easily.

I'll start with a bit of background. I'm here in Jordan with my wife, Fiona, which explains that nagging feeling that you might have had for a year or two now that 'something's missing' in the UK - it's me(!) She's studying Arabic at Exeter Uni, and part of her course is a year's placement here studying at a local language institute. The original plan was for us to return in May 2019, but she was quite ill for a goodly amount of the year, so we decided to stay a bit longer so she could try and get a bit more learning under her belt. That 'bit' became several months, and by the time it ended Covid-19 was among us. In no time restrictions, including the closure of Jordan's borders were in place, so we were stuck!

When Fiona was well, I would occupy most of my time volunteering on a date farm in the Jordan Valley. However, since Christmas 2019 she hasn't been well enough for me to be further away than the length of the world record paper-cup-and-string-telephone - she was doing another (short) course, and the combination of the teaching and the homework, coupled with her disability, pretty much filled her days. This meant if she was going to eat - and eat off clean plates - have clean clothes etc., that was going to be down to me. Not so very arduous, to be honest. But then there was the cats.

About two and a half years ago we were adopted by a pregnant cat* who appeared to have been kicked out of her house, and who proceeded to have five (5) kittens, in our kitchen cupboard(!) We couldn't see them out on the street, and having them around brought Fiona truck fulls of joy. So tending to their needs, and trying to find them Jordanian homes, became an addition to the list of Things To Do - which since Christmas has been my list. In addition a street cat (of which

there are many many many many in Jordan), who Fiona had been feeding, decided our garden was The Place to have her kittens, adding further to the daily round of tasks!

But in a way that was fine. It gave me plenty to do, and plenty that I considered helpful, which is how I like it. However, over the months that followed a couple of the cats died, and we found new homes for a couple more, and at some point the Corona clampdown kicked in, so although Fiona's still really struggling, my jobs list has reduced somewhat, like one of them sauces you make that starts too runny so you leave it simmering gently on the hob.

On one level it's freed up a bunch of time, so I can surf the 'net and practice my mouth organ and write my blog (and things like this). But it's really quite unfulfilling.

In the UK so much of my time was spent supporting and helping and generally trying to Make Things Better, and that was great. But I can't do that actively with a lot of my time, now, and it's left me floundering about. I'm perfectly happy being there for Fiona. But there's a lot of extra space right now, which I haven't got 'important activities' to fill, and it's slightly uncomfortable. I imagine Life under Lockdown would be similar even without my 'caring

responsibilities', too.

There's so much need, and I can do very little about it at the mo, so I'm having to leave it to other people and to trust that the world will be OK without quite so much Gary in it for now. Let me know if it is, please.....

*Nope, that's not a mistake, cats adopt us, not the other way round(!)

PS Gary later e-mailed

It looks like getting back to the UK might be a step nearer. The airport's reopened, and although initially there's not many flights and it's fairly unpredictable as to which ones advertised actually happen, I'm sure it will settle down before much longer and we can book to come home optimistic it'll actually happen(!)

(It's brought the whole thing about flying home. We both hate plans and flying and make a lot of effort to go places without getting airborne. But it's literally impossible to do this trip any other way with the current Covid restrictions in place!?)

So we're hopeful the Long Wait will be over before too much longer.....Hope all's well with you and yours, Gary

Real life condenses into virtual life. Church online, active group by letter, coffee morning by weekly email to the team...and our grandsons "on screen" BUT I now communicate with my siblings weekly by Jit-si, and have become more active in Ashram and other groups by Zoom. Took a course on "Radical Presence" with Green Christians and will be helping to lead another, starting in early October. Some real life hangs on. Me vs slugs and snails in garden, and Euan doing some building work.

We will miss the Ashram annual weekend in October as it clashes with the Green Christian "Festival" Sorry, folks.

Nona and Euan

I am writing to say sorry to hear of the passing of Ruth, Bob, Valerie and Howard. May they rest in peace. Ruth was a Pearl of Great Price and lovely to be around. We agreed to disagree well. Brilliant letter from Nirmal about Ruth. Bob I knew from Study Year at UTU in the 90s. He was incorrigible and like me a left field; i.e. off the wall sense of humour. He was a deep thinker and was matter of fact. Valerie, I never knew her well but she will be missed. So will Howard. SHALOM.

I am living the life of a semi-detached Hermit about to go into lockdown again. I am just about coping and I still think I am sane and not losing my sense of humour and my marbles. I pray, read and listen to Radio 3. I hear birds singing and sirens. Spend most of my time in Handsworth parked in my flat.

SHALOM, JOHN BARNABAS

The Other Side

When night is done
And the shadows have departed
And the blackest blue
Is pieced by golden rays

When day has come
The only trace of darkness
Are memories
That quickly drift away

*I will see you there
On the other side*

When we have walked
And the valley is behind us
When we have climbed
And reached the mountains' crown

When we are free
From all the days of struggle
And reach a place
To lay our burdens down

*I will see you there
On the other side*

When storms have passed
And all our fear subsided
And heaven's sun
Shines brightly on our face

When battle's gone
And we are done with fighting
And we have come
Into love's embrace

Rob Halligan

The song, written during Lockdown, has been released as a single (unfortunately only available as a digital download but if you want to listen to it maybe you can find someone with the technology who can play it to you) and all proceeds are being donated to the charity Global Care, which works with vulnerable children all over the world.

<https://robhalligan.co.uk/main/2020/06/03/the-other-side/>

Lorraine Jones

News from the (wider) London Group

Since the London Agape Group has been meeting on Zoom we have been delighted to be joined by Nona and Euan from Cornwall, and before that we had adopted Donald and Jacque Henderson in France as part of our group, though this by letter and occasional phone call. Donald has gradually become very involved in their local Parish Church, which is of course Catholic, but their current priest seems perfectly happy with a Methodist getting things ready for mass and baptisms! His background sounds interesting; Donald describes him as “some sort of artisan, militant CGT and communist voter” before training for the priesthood. He sent me a copy of the priest’s editorial for the June Parish Newsletter and I translated it into English so that we might look at it together at our July meeting. I also sent a copy to our Leader, whose comment was, “We’ve been saying that for the last 40 years”. So here it is, and let’s see what you think.

A CHURCH OPEN TO THE WORLD

I would like to continue my reflections on my firm belief that the Church can only be a missionary church when it is totally open to the world.

The Church is a sign of Christ’s Salvation for the world. It is its sacrament. A lot of you may be asking yourselves: “Why is the priest making this affirmation when we are already convinced of it.” I’ve noticed in the profusion of messages sent around on the internet, most of them noteworthy and leading to reflection and meditation, there are some that express a certain fear in relation to the world and a withdrawal into the Church. I’ve been able to refine my reflection by looking back at one or two texts from the Bible.

The book of Genesis from chapter 1 to chapter 3 makes clear the relationship between God and man: 1:27 “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, man and woman he created them”. (*I’ve just translated the French text literally rather than trying to decide which English version of the Bible to use.*) This relationship is of the type creator to the created.

In verse 28, with his blessing he gives responsibility to the man and the woman and by that also to their descendants. This confidence in humanity is made quite clear. In the second account of Creation 3: 1-24, this confidence will be marred by original sin which expresses the arrogance of the man and the woman and the breakdown of the relationship between the creator and his created, but he does not lock them away in their sin, cf verse 14, where we see that God is stronger than evil. Re-reading this passage from a Christian viewpoint, we understand the coming of Christ as the one who is to save humanity. There we have the proof of a God who is not only creator but also Father. What father worthy of this name does not give his all for his children? Our relationship with God is a relationship of love which gives us back our human responsibility which is based on building the KINGDOM of GOD.

Luke in 20:25, with the sentence: “Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God” makes clear the autonomy between the engagement of the believer and society.

We recognise that we are not in a theocracy. As Pope Francis says, Faith does not disengage from temporal realities, whether social or economic. On the contrary, the Christian is called to get involved in a practical way in human and social reality without putting up God against Caesar, but by clarifying them with the light that comes from God and from the gospel. So engaging with and playing a part, in a responsible way, in the building up of society with the aim of making it fairer and more humane is, for the believer, giving to God what belongs to God and opening oneself up to his will, dedicating our life to him and cooperating in his Kingdom of mercy, love and peace. Here again we can see how much God puts his confidence in the believers to announce this KINGDOM OF MERCY.

In my last editorial I expressed a dream of a Church that will meditate and contemplate on what is beautiful in our world and offer it to God, which will call us to look on the world with love and not with judgement. I said it in the form of a dream but I am convinced that the Church is living it already.

In the letter from Pope Francis to popular movements it says, I want us to think about the plan for complete human development to which we are aspiring.....keep on fighting and taking care of each other like brothers and sisters. I am praying for you and I ask God, our Father, to bless you, to fill you with his love and to protect you on this road, giving you the strength which enables us to keep going and which does not disappoint us: hope.

So Francis is placing humanity at the heart of God’s plan, but this does not prevent us from taking nourishment from the Faith passed down to us by the Church and at this difficult time keeping in our heart the joy we will have when we can gather together as soon as possible to do Church.

I have put a capital at the beginning of certain words because that is what the writer did! LM

Ruth Bird Left Her Anchorage!

Quite recently, our dear Ruthy reached the only inevitability, rest assured for us all.

Apart off course from remembering that her home's name was "Anchorage", I will also remember, for as long as my memory is well, three qualities that my discipleship partner in our Community consistently expressed over some twelve years of close, loving, sharing and caring mutual friendship.

The first is devotion. Ruthy was not only committed to, but also unfailingly kept to the daily office or liturgy of the hours, of the monastic Community of St Mary the Virgin, an Anglo-Catholic religious order based at Wantage in Oxfordshire, of which she was a longstanding lay member. Knowing that the similar of the Roman Catholic Benedictines was familiar to me, we were in the habit of contemplatively reading together from both those texts, at her initiative in the early mornings at our Multifaith Chapel & Library, Burngreave Ashram.

Ruthy's second quality was in effect to 'agree to disagree', something ingrained in Jewish rabbinic tradition. Sadly, it's rare to find that these days among us humans. She knew not to 'hold her tongue', often passionately disagreeing, but without tainting her feelings towards the other, which also enabled the other to do likewise. These situations were not few and far between, between us. Just to recall one instance, among many. In June last year, I read a paper at a Multifaith Chapel & Library session, arguing that Mary, a Jewish woman self-determined her right to both 'perpetual virginity' and 'unmarried pregnancy' in ancient times; the former being also a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Ruthy, vehemently opposed those views, arguing the Anglo-Catholic position that there is a lack of evidence in the Bible to consider it as dogma, but thereafter accompanied me to our 77 Ashram House on Rock Street, and had a good laugh over coffee.

Thirdly, and most importantly Ruthy could easily give without counting cost. She was a woman who had been blessed with, or had cultivated the ability to obey the one commandment, as known to us, that Jesus gave to his disciples, referring to it as a "commandment", while emphasising that it is also the sure sign of discipleship. (Recorded at John 13:34-35 and 15:12). Without extra-sensory capabilities, none of us can rightly sense what is in another's mind or emotions, but often actions reflect that which is non-sensed. In that respect, Ruthy "fed the sheep and lambs" as Jesus asked Peter to do, if he loved him as in the new commandment. At my first meeting with her in 2008, she brought along several boxes of books from her personal library and left them at our leader John's 'feet', to start off the library in our chapel, being 'spiritual' food for readers. Throughout the years of us relating closely, Ruthy never came to Rock Street empty handed; further, her purse was often empty before her next pension arrived. Why? She had opened it freely to others.

Unlike me she knew of 'heaven', and so refused to accumulate on earth. So, may Jesus' words as Ruthy understood be fulfilled; may she now be blessed with 'treasures'!



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Tribute: Remembering Valerie with love.

Family memories and stories

Born on 10 February 1933 in Manchester to Doris and Lawrence Drinkwater. She was their only child yet found herself at the heart of the wider family as the first-born niece or nephew. She talked with great fondness of a happy childhood in Moston where her uncles, aunts, grandparents and cousins lived close by and with whom she spent lots of time. A favourite memory was the weekly trip to the cinema on Saturday afternoons with her mum and dad as well as day trips to North Wales, Blackpool and Macclesfield.

Valerie was a bright student and loved books from a young age. She got into trouble for reading under the bedclothes with a torch – which became more serious when she was caught using a candle!

Her father bought her a piano and she began to have lessons, which was the start of a life-long love of playing the piano which gave her such pleasure. Her teacher used to let her play the grand pianos in Forsyth's music shop in Manchester after opening hours – a real treat.

The family attended St Mary's Road Methodist Church where Valerie played the pipe organ - sometimes having to pump the bellows too when her Uncle Ernest played. Valerie was involved in church activities as she grew up including the tennis club and amateur dramatic performances and it was at church where she met Ian who she was to later marry.

As teenagers, the young people from the church would go on rambles into the countryside which sparked another life-long love of hiking and particularly climbing the mountains of the Lake District; this was where she and Ian spent their honeymoon and many holidays to come in later years with family.

She attended North Manchester High School for Girls and kept in touch with friends she made from church and school all her life in particular Ruth, Gordon, Lilian, Ken, Graham and Jean.

On leaving school, Valerie trained at Miss Wilkinson's Secretarial College for Young Gentlewomen in Manchester and became a shorthand typist. Her first jobs were in the prestigious Manchester Town Hall where she was secretary to the City Architect and she also worked in the Children's Adoption Department. Valerie also trained to become a Methodist local preacher.

Following her marriage to Ian in 1959, Valerie moved to Sunderland, and they began attending Ewesley Road Methodist Church, which was a central part of their and their children's lives. Over many years Valerie was involved in many things often related to music and youth work: the church choir, setting up a Junior choir and in more recent years the singing group; playing the piano and organ at Ewesley Road, more amateur dramatic plays, she was a Sunday School and Junior Church teacher in the young people's class and she ran the Sunday evening Youth Fellowship with the ministers of the day.

The New Year's Eve fancy-dress party for the young people of the church at our home was a highlight for all. Many of the young people from this time kept in touch with Valerie and told how she was a big influence in their lives especially in their faith and thinking.

Valerie compiled the Church magazine 'The Greeting' for many years and also helped to organise church socials, as well as being a regular speaker at church events, instigator of a Traidcraft stall and supplier to churches across Sunderland as well as continuing her local preaching. Valerie also co-directed several Roger Jones' Christian musicals with George Sanderson across the Sunderland Circuit which she loved doing.

Having four children – Alan, Alison, Jeanette and John between 1963 and 1972 - Valerie was kept very busy on the home front. She was a wonderful home-maker and created a warm and loving family home at No 7 Humbledon Park. She was a good cook and baker and made imaginative meals as well as decorating stunning birthday cakes in the shape of trains, butterflies, cowboy forts and desert islands to name but a few.

Family holidays were a highlight of the year and we enjoyed CHA walking holidays and later travels in our family motor caravan from Cornwall to Scotland. Mum kept on driving her large motor caravan around Sunderland until she was 80 and it gave her independence as well as it being useful for transporting her fairtrade stock and for her weekly day trips out with friends Jennifer and Myroon as they visited garden centres, national trust properties and the sea front – sharing a lot of fun and laughter together.

Mum was always busy and involved with church activities and following her own interests and passions. She was a born organiser and leader and believed in 16

getting things done – which often meant doing it herself. She held high standards for herself and others, had a strong moral code and sense of social justice which stemmed from her Christian faith. Many of these values were passed down to us as children and I think show in the work and activities that we have all gone on to be involved in.

Mum was a passionate fairtrader and began running Traidcraft stalls in Sunderland as well as taking over the management of the Traidcraft shop in Sunderland Minster, gathering a supportive group of volunteers to help her. The shop ran for many years until they were forced to close due to the room being needed by the church.

Another passion for mum was vegetarianism when she became a vegetarian in her mid-fifties. She found it difficult at times when the north-east did not seem so forward thinking in that department. The opening of a veggie café in Sunderland – the Good Apple – became a popular destination for all of us in recent years.

When her children were older, Valerie took an educational qualification and started working again, teaching typewriting, office practice and word-processing at schools and colleges in Sunderland. Pupils to this day talk about how learning to touch-type from Mrs. Boyd was one of the most useful skills they ever learnt at school.

She loved having all the family together around her and looked forward to Christmas especially as a time when often the whole family came together. We also enjoyed family holidays in cottages and a fabulous family trip to Kenya to attend John and Vicky's wedding which was a wonderful experience for Valerie and us all – celebrating the marriage, going on safari and meeting Vicky and Mumbi's family and friends. This new African connection also saw Valerie being known as Mama John in the Kenyan fashion.

She loved her trips to Manchester and especially staying for a week each year with Alan and Yvonne, spending time with Lawrence and Richard as they grew up and when she could no longer travel there, got great enjoyment from talking to them on the phone and delighted in hearing about all their interests especially their prowess on the piano and in football – being a Manchester United fan herself! She was also thrilled to gain Mumbi as a grand-daughter and they shared special talks and memories together from when Mumbi came to live in Sunderland.

Valerie had a lovely contralto singing voice and was a founder member of the Albyn Quartet in which she sang alongside friends Joan, John, Gordon and Trevor

accompanying them on piano. They performed across the North East at events and raised money for charities with a repertoire of Gilbert and Sullivan songs, traditional north east and Scottish songs, comic numbers and Trevor and Valerie would play piano duets. The weekly rehearsals brought a lot of fun and laughter into our home.

Valerie was a friend to many and was able to build relationships wherever she went with people from all walks of life. Even when in living in St Mark's home she made new friends with some of the carers, many confiding in her their own troubles, and with Father Skelton who visited her weekly for holy communion and with whom she had lots of interesting conversations about faith and family.

As well as a life-long member of the Methodist Church she was a member of the Ashram Christian Community – a group of people spread across Britain who are committed to the radical Jesus – she could draw and had handwriting that was often admired. She held high standards, for herself and others, and wanted to 'get things done' and she did. She worked hard at whatever she did – whether it was supporting campaigns against the arms trade, arranging events for Fair Trade Fortnight, choosing songs for the church music group.

She also had a tremendous sense of fun. Her Snoopy and Peanuts calendar was an endless source of delight with its daily cartoon strip which often had her laughing. She loved quizzes and word games and was competitive and loved to win!

She wrote regular articles for the church magazine and the Sunderland Echo – something which she was still able to do while living in the care home. She didn't let her physical incapacity stop her doing things and she continued to run her church Bible study group from her room, planned the songs for the church music group and continued to run Fairtrade stalls – all with the help and support of John and Jennifer. She kept her independence booking and travelling by taxi to church and other events.

Valerie faced some difficult challenges throughout her life - her separation from Ian, her 7 month-long hospital stay which ended in her leg amputation and the leaving of her home to live at St Mark's, dealing with ongoing chronic pain in her leg and foot and most recently the death of Alison. She faced these life-blows with courage and her faith, family and friends were a source of comfort and strength. And the last time we were all together as a family was just this February in Sunderland when we remembered Alison together by spreading her ashes – and mum found it a very moving and special

event.

One of the positive things she found when she had to move into St Mark's Nursing Home was that it gave her more time for reading, something she did every day; and also time to develop her writing which she did by writing regular articles for the church magazine, Ashram Community newsletter and the Sunderland Echo where she contributed to the 'Tomorrow's Sunday' column. She also really valued her many regular visitors coming to chat and bringing books, fruit and newspaper cuttings.

Valerie was to us, first and foremost, our dear mum, mother-in-law and grandma and she remained at the centre and heart of our lives for the whole of her life. There was nothing she loved more than spending time with family - her children, daughters-in-law Yvonne and Vicky; son-in-law Adam and her grandchildren Mumbi, Lawrence and Richard. She built special individual relationships and bonds with all of us and was very proud of all our lives and achievements.

She really found her unique talents over her lifetime and she used them well: she was kind, thoughtful and caring and used her organisational and leadership skills, being a music-maker and encouraging others to make music, as a youth worker, a fair-trader, a loyal friend. She wasn't afraid to speak her mind and speak out on issues that she was passionate about.

She had a thirst for knowledge and learning and had an extensive theological knowledge, loved reading and writing and trying to draw attention to the causes that she believed in e.g. fair trade, campaigning against the arms trade, recycling and environmental issues.

Around 7 years ago, when mum was in hospital and recovering from life-threatening sepsis, she said that she had had a wonderful life and that she only wished she could live it all again, and if she could she would want to live it exactly the same – with both the good and the bad.

We felt loved by Valerie and we loved her – and that is the most important thing.

From Jenny: I have many happy memories of our North-East Ashram meetings at her home in Sunderland, (especially the Easter Monday when we walked on the seashore and couldn't see the sea for a fret!), and going with Enid Johnson down to Cliff College Weekends in Valerie's 'bus', coming back to scones and jam while she chose items from my shop for hers. Her commitment to Traidcraft even when she was turned out of her church shop, and later moved into a home, was amazing. Then we'd visit after Frank's eye hospital appts- when he would try to encourage her to move back home. A good



Upper two photos of N.East Ashram meetings at Greystone with Bob. Bottom photo of July meeting at Bob & Pat's home in Birkenhead.



Castleton weekend walk with Donna and Stuart

friend and a steadfast campaigner for Fairtrade.
RIP Valerie

Francis Robert (Bob) Billsborrow

Francis Robert Billsborrow, known to us as Bob was born in the village of Thorne near Doncaster where his father had travelled during the depression to find work. His earliest memories were of the market garden part of his dad's activities there but he was only around 3 years old, when war was looming and work was available back in the North East the family moved back to West Hartlepool where they lived until Bob was around 7 or 8 years old before moving to the house he knew most as a child in Norton on the edge of Stockton on Tees, a terraced house with a long garden across the back lane which there were chickens, and pigs, and Bob began his own love of gardening which stayed with him until his was struck down by the stroke 10 years ago.

Scouting became a big part of his life then, he joined the local cub pack and met his mate John who stayed his mate throughout his life, after cubs into scouts becoming a King's Scout, and attending the Jamboree held in France after the war.....and eventually becoming a Scout Leader himself. His sporting days began in his teens as he joined the local Rugby Club becoming Hooker for Stockton Rugby Club for many years interrupted by National Service. Having been an apprentice engineer he was 21 when he joined the Royal Engineers and was sent off to Egypt (rather than Korea) to serve for 2 years, as it happens his mate John was also in Egypt with a different regiment and they were able to meet when leave permitted whilst they were there. In 1953 he arrived back in Stockton and back into scouting where he met Pat who was a Ranger Guide, he was accused, being 23 at the time, she being 17, of baby snatching, but the relationship continued and they were married in 1956 with John Hughes his oldest friend being Best Man at the wedding.

28 years living in Stockton on Tees and the birth of 3 daughters and a little later a son, seemed a very settled existence.

He became very involved in the local Methodist Church looking after the gardens and the property but in a wider sense when he found out about the Ashram Community, begun in Sheffield by Rev. John Vincent, and for many years he was active in their work for social justice and overseas development.

Then came the time when his wife was challenged to change her life and offer to become a Methodist Minister and he and Pat, and John who was still quite young began the moves which eventually brought them here to Northwich. When Pat became a Minister Bob had taken up his first love and become a teacher, having been made redundant by ICI, it was a role he loved and fulfilled until he reached retirement age as they moved around the country as a family.

Wherever he lived gardening was his passion and many an allotment saw the work of his hands again until his health precluded it.Change happened just after his 80th birthday when he had the stroke which was to lead to increasing immobility and his final illness. Ever a peaceful soul he accepted his fate and was a joy to those who cared for him first at home and then in Overdene where he has been so well cared for.

I haven't mentioned his local church life in these years of travelling.....however wherever we lived he was involved, usually as the property steward until as we were about to move from Birkenhead to our final home here in Northwich he said to me "I am not going to be property steward any more"and so he became a part of the congregation in the local church, never following his wife around but making his home amongst the people there. A long life and a productive life, man who sought to help his neighbour through too many things to mention here we commend him to God.



A N East Ashram breakfast agape at Greystone

Bob and Ashram

I remember Bob confronting a scary mountain of vegetables and quietly peeling, chopping and turning the mountain into an enormous vat of soup. Enough to feed the Five Thousand

Irene McDonald

Bob certainly catered and cooked for us at Weekends for a long time. He came on Ashram holidays - I have many memories of sitting in cafes with him when we went out, and of him being one of the first up and putting the kettle on.

Bob was a practical person - from fixing the felt on my shed roof after an Ashram meeting at my house to knowing how to turn the ovens on at Ashram weekends or on the Ashram holidays. We had a shared interest in garden ponds. At an Ashram meeting at my house, he showed a great interest in mine, and when Bob and Pat moved to Birkenhead he was able to create his own.

Bob took on various roles over the years - Wider Service Fund and becoming a Trustee. You could rely on Bob to bring the meetings back down to earth when totally impractical ideas were being discussed.

Margaret Mackley

Many happy memories from N. East Ashram - driving down to a Weekend together the autumn I'd met Frank. Later asking his advice about marrying a man with a big house - (he didn't give it!), Bob stewarding our wedding in the village chapel and putting two late comers in the pulpit(!), meetings in Pat & Bob's homes in Stockton and Hebburn, and memorably a weekend in their Gunnerside cottage in Swaledale.

Jenny Medhurst

Sadly it is some years since Bob was able to be active in the Community but he was always pleased to receive the newsletter and in particular the visits which helped to keep him in touch. The most interesting link though came at his funeral when Chris Pritchard the Superintendent Minister in his address told the story of how he had met Bob countless years ago when he was living in Sheffield and was part of the community there. It had been a delight to him to find when he was appointed here, that it was not me that he knew, but Bob and was able to catch up on their shared experience. A highlight of Bob's year was going off to the Weekend and sharing fellowship with everyone, including providing them with the food they ate, he always until he was ill, enjoyed cooking and we both learned a lot about vegetarian cooking through those experiences.

The last year of his life was difficult, it became clear that he could no longer be at home so moved into a local Nursing Home, where for nine months he was in bed being lovingly cared for by the staff. In many ways the virus which was the declared reason for his death, was good news for him as it shortened what could well have been a very long journey. We can only be thankful for the care he received, and the ongoing prayers of the people during this time. I thank Ashram for all the joy they gave him, and the support over the last 10 years or so.

Pat Billsborrow

One Observer's Actions Would Affect Another's Results Even Across Great Distances

You would have heard from dear Sandra that I am now living in community in this remote, rural village, which perhaps I am now part of. My life here, is now approaching its seventh month, with travel outside being few and far between. That's not due to the risk of any infection, but given the entire setup's strong influence on my intentionality. This serene setting has also enabled me to study new subject areas, contemplate, and write with a heightened degree of quantity. But, more importantly, I hope the quality is similar! Whatever, I feel most content.

I was recently introduced to George, a 'retired' quantum physicist in Vienna, who emails me some discoveries in his discipline, enquiring if there are any similarities in life experiences and the narratives on the Buddha. One such recent discovery was that "one observer's actions would affect another's results even across great distances", which was demonstrated in experiments done by Časlav Brukner (Chair of Quantum Information Theory and Fundamentals of Quantum Physics in the group Quantum Optics, Quantum Nanophysics and Quantum Information at the University of Vienna), and a team of his colleagues, some located as far as Buenos Aires, Brisbane, and Arizona, who had developed the famous "thought experiment" of Nobel laureate quantum physicist, the late Eugene Wigner done some sixty years ago. A publication about the new finding was carried under the title: "Quantum paradox points to shaky foundations of reality", in *Science*, the leading journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, on 17th August 2020. One of the findings was that "one observer's actions would affect another's results even across great distances". (See: https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/08/quantum-paradox-points-shaky-foundations-reality?utm_campaign=news_daily_2020-08_17&et rid=16746845&et cid=3449494).

It was indeed a pleasure for me to undertake the challenging task of rightly understanding the scientific discovery, but George in Vienna the quantum physicist who had sent me the information, patiently and painstakingly,

answered my many questions to the extent that he says I now know more than something about quantum physics, kindling in me a longing to get to know more!

So, I re-researched original resources of what I guessed to be similarities in the life and teachings attributed to the Buddha, and got positive results, which I emailed to George. However, my mind also returned to instances in the narratives on Jesus where the phrase, "one observer's actions would affect another's results even across great distances", seems to have occurred. So, in my reply to George, I also wrote: "Similarly, there are several such instances recorded in the narratives on Jesus. For example, Matthew 8:5-13 records that a Roman centurion's servant who is paralysed is healed due to the "*tosautēn pistin*" (exceptional quantity of confidence) of the centurion. Here, the centurion ('observer') was not in the proximity of his dying servant but speaking to Jesus elsewhere. His exceptional psychological confidence (action) heals his servant (results across a 'long' distance). The narratives attribute to Jesus the phrase: "*sou hē pistis sesōken*" (your confidence has healed you) on many instances. This may depict the potency of "one observer's actions" affecting "another's results even across 'great' distances".

I cannot be certain if any of my actions of observation have affected another's results across great distances, since I have no proof of the connectivity. However, when others have occasionally assumed that I have done so in similar situations of thought actions, I have consistently put it down to 'coincidence'. For example, a few days ago I (the observer by thought action) based in Sri Lanka was deeply concerned of the wellbeing of a friend in England to whom I had sent emails for some time, all of which reported "undeliverable", and the mobile number I had repeatedly reported "switched off" or "not in a service area". Shortly, after I felt this deep concern, she emailed me (another's results across a great distance)!

It has been common for some of us to dismiss the extraordinary as myth, particularly because

we cannot understand it as relative 'reality'. However, is that the correct approach? In every era, there are limits of what can be scientifically explained, while they also reveal anew a mythological dimension to human knowledge, by leaving unexplained that which is extraordinary. In the last century, the eminent German theologian and New Testament scholar, Rudolf Bultmann coined the term "*entmythologisierung*", meaning 'demythologisation', for conscious efforts people make to purify a

However, one must be most cautious when applying an approach of demythologisation to any myth. In my view, the only conclusion that a rational mind can reach is that the particular extraordinary (myth) in question cannot be explained scientifically using a scientific approach at that particular time in history. That is because, science incessantly explores the unknown, and incessantly explains the unknown processually from time to time. Accordingly, what science cannot explain cannot be classed as a perpetual myth, but only as extra-ordinary in relation to available knowledge at a particular time and place.

Therefore, it is my view, that what is extraordinary, unexplained, and not understood, should be not dismissed as unreal or untrue, but

religious tradition of its mythological elements, which he strongly advocated. To quote: "We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament" (Bultmann, Rudolf K, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, Fortress Press, 1941, and 1984 at p. 4).

referred to as "valid myth", since there is every possibility that it may be proven otherwise by science or some such other discipline in time. It would be most welcome to me, to start an 'email group' within Ashram to share and discuss in-depth matters with each other, particularly at this time where there are barriers to meet up. I personally much prefer electronic written communication over and above that audio-visual, since adequate room entails for reflection and research before expression in the former. If possible, please let me know your thoughts on this, and on my proposal.

Nirmal Fernando
September 2020

Ambagahawatte, Thundola, Ittakanda,
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Thundola¹ Village in Ittakanda² - Sabaragamuwa³ Province Sri Lanka
(Approx. Elevation: 3,500 Feet above Sea Level)



Track of the Village Valley as Seen from a Hilltop



On a Walk; L to R: Nirmal, Premasiri (self-sufficing elderly village farmer), and Anura (lawyer from Colombo)

CHANGING THE WORLD?

When asked by a correspondent what made him tick, J. R. R. Tolkien replied, "You'll have to ask the Maker!" A tall order.

Understandably he did not add the next best thing – read an autobiography. So it was that when I read John Lenton's review of John and Grace Vincent's *Inner City Testament* in the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, my interest (curiosity?) was alerted and I had to know more! And I wasn't disappointed. I read things that both surprised me and demonstrated how easy it is to assume how a person 'ticks' when you've probably met them no more than twice in a lifetime!

Completing his education at Manchester Grammar School by dint of parental sacrifice, John Vincent developed an interest in Religious Education and while still a teenager knew that he 'had to become an inner city minister.' He was seriously influenced by the likes of Reinhold Niebuhr and later by Karl Barth – names the average teenager probably wouldn't even have heard of. Incredibly, he set out on the local preaching path at just fourteen, immersed himself in the life of Hale Methodist Church, and even National Service didn't change his mind.

So, 'From whence does one find one's way?' he asks. For him it began with contacts in Hartley Victoria College when he was still only fifteen and continued unabated through a pre-collegiate year in Newent and on to Richmond College. Then he got a Fulbright grant to go and study at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. His specialist subject was 'Discipleship.' His studies then took him to Basel in Switzerland. He was already meeting the great and the good in theology and this could have led to a glittering academic career as a university professor in the States. But when asked what type of ministry he was offering for he had replied, "City Mission" – and he never once wavered from that intent.

He began his ministry on a new housing estate at Wythenshawe. In 1958 he married Grace Stafford and they set up home in a council house on the estate. Thus began their life's work as disciples of Jesus Christ in church, community and ultimately in much more of the country.

But John wasn't content just to be a minister. He wanted to change the world. He had already joined Donald Soper's Order of Christian Witness and once settled in his first church they began new projects – 'Start-ups' he called them. He also became a passionate supporter of CND.

In 1962 the family moved to Rochdale and began founding residential/intentional discipleship communities which became known as Ashrams, with branches eventually springing up throughout the country. Then there was the

Methodist Renewal Group followed by the Alliance of Radical Methodists, probably the most controversial of his 'start-ups'. The ARM Newsletters produced at Conference each year were not only controversial but entertaining and informative – and I personally felt something was missing during my last time at Conference in 2005! More importantly came the establishment of the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield, but their involvement ranged much wider than either Church or academia.

I have been involved in organising many groups of one sort or another, but seldom more than one at a time, so reading the list of multiple enterprises from setting up community eco-shops, campaigning for justice and equality, anti-nuclear groups, community enterprises, as well as church projects John and Grace were involved in left me standing. John was also writing books about these and other issues. (42 titles are listed in the Bibliography alone!) He has been described as a man with a passion for justice – but that passion clearly extended to everything he put his hand to. Not so much a ticking clock but a time-bomb! It is said that some people are born great while others have greatness thrust upon them, and these words came to mind when I read how he was the one left to carry the burden of the battle with the TSB trustees. Thinking of the proverbial onion, I wasn't sure whether the layers were being peeled off or piled on!

I ended the read thoroughly impressed by the man, and realising that from all I had read and seen of him previously I had completely misread him, not least in the realm of politics. I admired him for exercising the courage of his convictions when Christian Socialism changed its name! He wasn't afraid to admit to making mistakes or to put an end to those 'start-ups' that didn't seem to go very far.

The book is, of course, written by two people, each with their own chapters, yet the narrative moves seamlessly with a single voice as their story unfolds, and the bridge between Grace's final words and John's continuation is a poignant moment not to be glossed over. The book is an almost unique example of teamwork, the intensity of which could have damaged the relationship of lesser people. Grace was clearly a saint among wives.

Towards the end of the book, summing up his life, the writer quotes from Ghandi, "Be the change you want to see in the world." Maybe we all want to do that at some time in our lives, but here was a man who may not wholly have succeeded – but he certainly made an impressive difference. As he advises in his conclusion, "Go for what is going for you, not what is not going for you. Get Heaven on earth going for you, and go for your bit towards it!" John and Grace Vincent's 'bit' was a very sizeable one indeed.

Patricia Batstone
June 2020

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Fairtrade Update

Nestle has ditched Fairtrade in its popular Kitkat bars, and will in future make them with sugar from European sugar beet and the lesser certification Rainforest Alliance cocoa. Sugar and cocoa farmers are set to lose £1.95 million/yr in Fairtrade premium and the safety net of the guaranteed Fairtrade Minimum price to cover their costs. (W. African cocoa farmers earn on average 74p/day; Nestle's profits were £10billion in 2019). Cocoa farmers from the Ivory Coast are clear that Fairtrade is the best deal for them offering the "Democracy! Transparency! Participation!" that no other system offers. .

A petition "Keep Kitkat Fairtrade" attracted over 280,000 signatures, Nestle were asked questions by the All Party Parliamentary group on

Fairtrade and lobbied by unions worried about a boycott .Representatives from Fairtrade Yorkshire (Kitkats are made in York) met Nestle to encourage them to delay any action until the Covid pandemic was over, as the farmers were using the Premium to protect and educate their communities. Nestle wouldn't budge, but at the last minute agreed to pay the guaranteed minimum price for cocoa for the next two years, to pay an extra \$120/tonne (half the Fairtrade premium) to the farmers, and they are now in discussions with the farmers and have agreed to be more transparent about their plans. The farmers are still Fairtrade certified, and have cocoa they'd love to sell on Fairtrade terms- they just need more customers. So please make sure the the chocolate you buy IS Fairtrade!

"As Fairtrade producers, our voice is heard and taken into account. We are treated with the respect and dignity we deserve. Stopping the relationship with Fairtrade is to silence our voices... This is a devastating blow for some of the world's poorest producers, many of whom live on less than a dollar a day." Atse Ossey Francis, President Ivorian Fair Trade Administrative Committee .



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
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

DATES

2020/2021

23-25 October Ashram Weekend, Cliff College tbc
February 20 Houses & Projects Meeting Sheffield
May 7-9 Ashram Weekend Middleton
October 8-10 Ashram Weekend Frodsham
July Day meeting tba

COMMUNITY

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Ashram Press: 7 College Court
See Website www.ashram.org.uk for publications

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Website www.ashram.org.uk
administrator: kathclements@ymail.com

Act Together editor: Jenny Medhurst
medhurst@phonecoop.coop
Articles for the Spring 2021 edition needed by April 20th .

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

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 – Meetings temporarily suspended.

East – A46- Twice Yearly meetings

London – Linda Marshall –01784 456 474
Saturday Meetings – Monthly currently on Zoom

North-West – Josie Smith -
ashram1967js@gmail.com
Meetings bi-monthly on Zoom

Sheffield – Tamara Donaldson – 0791 092 2462

North-East – Jenny Medhurst Tel: 01740 630475

Community Zoom meetings fortnightly – Pippa Thompson – 07918 757068.