

# LIVING WITH SACRED SPACE

A report by  
The Sacred Land Project to  
Community Action for Sacred Lands (CASL)



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# What is CASL?

**Community Action for Sacred Lands** (CASL) is collaboration between Shell Better Britain Campaign (SBBC) and The Sacred Land Project (hereafter Sacred Land).

Sacred Land helps community and faith groups to conserve, develop and create their sacred spaces according to their own definitions.

SBBC have long been working at the community level with all aspects of what is somewhat optimistically known as 'sustainable development'.

The partnership between these two organisations has come about because their work can be seen to be interactive in method and overlapping in objectives. The concepts of 'sustainable development' and 'sacred space' are both equally hard to define or agree upon, but both organisations recognise a common understanding that human diversity in both thought and action is precisely the quality that will assist in finding solutions to the many great issues confronting humanity. Both organisations recognise that a diversity of faith and spiritual understandings continue to impact upon our landscape and our concepts and use of nature.

Spaces set aside for spiritual nourishment, solitude, story telling, ritual, ceremony and remembrance and a whole host of other routines as mundane as walking the dog, have long been present in human culture. This publication therefore seeks to present an understanding of the importance of these places and the diversity with which they present themselves, reflecting equally diverse understandings of the environment and the development process.

The paper presented here is one of a number of outputs of CASL. For more information on this work please contact either Peter or Sarah at SBBC on +44 121 248 5000 or John at Sacred Land on +44 161 248 5731

# Summary and recommendations

In general, sacred space as an aspect of the environment receives very little attention from funding bodies or other agencies, and a concern with faith and spirituality has not often been seen as an important dynamic in our society. This can affect the co-operation and funding available from many environmental agencies and groups.

This report shows that faith does have far-reaching impacts, whether in the cherishing of an ancient churchyard or the building of a new Temple, Mosque or Gurdwara in an inner city area; it also shows that faith groups are sometimes treated differently because of a lack of understanding. This may arise not through prejudice, but from a desire for inclusivity and to avoid appearing to foster one particular spiritual outlook.

But people generally are able to take a fuller and more positive part in the development process if they see and feel that their needs and concerns are being met. This is a very important part of the concept of sustainable development. Sacred space is often an expression or an indicator of a move to meet some of those needs.

How might agencies better respond to these needs?

How can the faith and community groups themselves foster greater understanding?

Much of the research for this report was by way of a number of interviews (transcribed and given as appendixes to this report). The interviews recorded here show that:

- Sacred space is open and it need not be only for the benefit of believers, devotees or those sharing a common spiritual outlook
- The development can both benefit and

engage a variety of interested parties and be widely accepted as valid by a local community.

- The conservation of sites has largely been seen only from a narrow historic perspective.

Below we list a number of recommendations that we believe will assist in showing the importance of sacred space, its role beyond serving its own believers, and the wider implications for conservation and development. They are based upon the following principles:

- a) In a pluralistic society every major constituency of that society needs to be involved in the major issues confronting that society.
- b) Issues which any one of those constituencies regard as important and in need of address should be given full and fair hearing and actions arising from any dialogue respected and supported.
- c) All of these constituencies have to adopt a responsible and inclusive approach to maintaining their interests and by doing so will assist in creating a more sustainable future.

## CASL's recommendations

- i. The role of faith, religion and spirituality should be given a greater place in the ongoing dialogue to work towards a more sustainable future, since people's spirituality influences and guides their attitude and actions towards sustainable development.
- ii. The inclusion of the faith and spiritual dimension in actions and dialogue towards sustainable development should start from a local community level to help people act upon a wider understanding of sustainability and of environmental wellbeing.

iii. Environmental and development groups working in these fields should examine the role of faith and spirituality within their own activities and structures.

iv. Faith groups should also recognise the responsibilities they have towards the sustainability of the communities and environments in which they exist and should work towards broadening the use of their sacred spaces.

v. Sacred space is not an intangible and abstract concept, but manifests itself in a very practical and physical form in the landscape and this should be recognised by interest agencies.

vi. Sacred space should be recognised by planners, policy makers and other practitioners involved in environmental and community sustainability, as an important element of our landscape

vii. Guardians and stewards of sacred space should work together to draw up best practice guidelines for environmental wellbeing in these places, and should encourage their congregations to use these guidelines in their wider environments.

viii. In the multifaith context faiths should move beyond working to understand each other, towards developing practical measures that can be jointly supported that would make best use of their sacred spaces for both themselves and the wider community.

#### CASL initiatives to facilitate the above

- Shell Better Britain Campaign and Sacred Land Project through its joint initiative Community Action for Sacred Lands bring together a small group (up to twelve people) with an interest in sacred space and the over-

all place of faith and spirituality in sustainable development, to seek a higher profile within the issues of sustainable development and conservation. The group to meet no more than three times a year to discuss ways in which this can be done.

- The meetings of this group should be held initially in different regions of the country to assess that region and then to engage a wider group which will include local representatives with shared interests.

- These groups would then seek funds for appropriate activities to meet any particular objective sought (e.g. seminars, practical work etc)

- The CASL initiative organise in two years time a national two-day conference on the place of sacred space and faith/spirituality in our landscape and communities. The conference would review existing work and identify better practice and ways forward rather than an academic study of the subject, although it would welcome the participation of academic institutes.

# Discussion

The development and conservation of sacred space which is beyond a narrow historic perspective and has engaged more than just believers, is at present very patchy. There has, for example, been a recognition by both church users and conservation groups of the ecological value of many Christian Churchyards in Britain. But there needs to be a wider recognition of the values the sacred has given to the landscape quite apart from a specific belief perspective. The evidence of this need for a wider consideration is the way many local communities rally to conserve or create something that they determine as sacred.

The spiritual and religious map of Britain is changing, but looking at this change as a whole gives a better perspective than the commonly painted and well-publicised picture of decline and increasing irrelevance. Figures for churchgoers are only one part of a very much more complex pattern. They do not explain why people choose to walk for days on end on pilgrimage and yet declare themselves "not really religious" (see the interview with the Cistercian pilgrimage group) or that a homelessness case worker is happy to see the involvement, through the use of their space, of a faith he does not follow (see the Jamyang Buddhist Centre interview). Are we to believe that the majority of the 39 million people who annually visit Britain's churches and cathedrals do so simply in order to visit an old building? There is a spiritual dimension to all these things that is under-regarded. In the conservation of our landscape and its communities that dimension is often expressed through the marking and use of sacred space. While sacred space is

still highly regarded by believers in most traditions, it seems likely that its use today is just as much by non-believers or non-specific believers.

In the work undertaken with many local groups, some from specific religious traditions but many not, Sacred Land's unique perspective has found a common narrative and objectives. They have added diversity to our outlook and our landscapes just as we have added to theirs. But there are still many who see no place for a spiritual and religious involvement in planning and conservation except as a managing body, for example, in the conservation of an old church. Spiritual values are often not considered except as being of interest to individuals. This document shows that an outlook that sees and values the sacred can benefit a much wider group.

The interviews with the various groups show examples of how the conservation or creation of sacred spaces is an important dimension of the development process. If we are seeking sustainability in this process then sacred space must directly or indirectly be a positive or negative contributor. It will never be irrelevant.

The creation or conservation of sacred space can be contentious and add conflict to already difficult situations. The process may not be free from the conflict that occurs in the wider community. We believe however, that in Britain at least these are a small minority of cases and can with willingness be turned round to be positive contributions to the diversity of our landscape and communities. The Hindu Temple project, for example, sought from the outset to be of benefit to the

whole local community and not just the temple followers, and this was eventually recognised after initial refusal of planning permission.

We have sought to highlight diversity in the process which has brought these projects together but at the same time shown their uniqueness. Sue Clifford in her contribution talked about local distinctiveness in the physical environment, and we also need to recognise the spiritual diversity and distinctiveness of our landscape and community. Sue doesn't directly refer to faith and religion but her approach to the environment, and Common Ground's, has a distinct spiritual quality. The Jamyang Buddhist Centre, Balaji Temple and the Welsh Cistercian Projects show a faith-driven, but inclusive, approach to development and environmental understanding, either by way of a journey of understanding through sacred space or a creation of it. In the North Petherwin project one cannot easily separate heritage conservation from the faith that marked the landscape and which continues to give meaning today. While some conservation arises from historical interest a good deal is clearly grounded in present day beliefs and how those beliefs have made markers throughout history and continue to shape our lives. This is clearly expressed in the interview with the Cornish group, for example. Conservation is in this respect a way of marking belief.

The ideal model for sustainable development often quoted, is that of the three-legged stool where environment, economic and social legs make the sustainable stool. Spirituality (faith specific and non-specific) is not considered except possibly as an element

of the social.

Development by its very nature is a risky business. No matter how well controlled and what the state of our knowledge and understanding, it is, in part, a journey into the unknown. Any model for development if it is going to be a useful tool needs to consider how the risk element is dealt with. All the projects highlighted here have in part used their spiritual outlook to guide them through the risks inevitably presented by their projects, not just as a source of hope and encouragement, but as a guide to what is needed in the first place. The faith or spiritual outlook becomes a guide to the risk as well creating as the rationale for it.

Such a model may be more problematic to work with, but the successes of the projects outlined in this document are perhaps the best demonstration that it works.

Sustainable development, as both Ian Roberts and Sue Clifford indicate above, is as much process as it is product. There is no better example of this than the beauty of both process and product in sacred space. Recognising the need for a spiritual input into the development process and its relationship with perceptions of the environment may mean that sustainable development could gain wider understanding beyond planners and policy makers.

The projects reviewed here would suggest that the ideas and values of faith and spiritual inputs are gaining ground. If we look at the experience of North Petherwin, Jamyang and Balaji, relationships with local authorities are generally on a workable basis, and with Jamyang they are particularly good. These examples are important because of the gener-

ally accepted view that local authority is a major player in the process of sustainability. In view of these and other experiences there must be more highlighting of these success stories. It is still often the case, in Sacred Land's experience, that faith groups are not well-considered by local authorities and that these authorities do not reach out to these groups as they do to others.

Before Sacred Land began work, no scheme had attempted to bring together such a diverse range of groups, with a multitude of understandings and worldviews, for the specific task of care and development of sacred spaces in Britain. The models that have been created by Sacred Land through the experience of this work are now gaining interest on an international scale. It was thought therefore that even a small number of the experiences of these groups would be worth recounting for others to draw both inspiration and understanding from them. Drawing out the experiences of a small number of local groups working in some way with sacred space, their progress and achievements in this work, and the views of a number of professionals working in related areas of interest, became then the objective of this research project for CASL. It is hoped through this research and a number of other CASL initiatives, that a better understanding of sacred space in the context of community and environmental sustainability will be achieved.



# What is The Sacred Land Project?

Sacred Land works with local groups seeking to conserve and create what has been defined by those groups as sacred space. In practice many of the groups have easily recognised faith affiliation e.g. Buddhist, Christian, Hindu etc. but where this is so support is only given where inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness is the approach. So for example a site belonging to a church or temple of a particular faith group would need to open to all before Sacred Land was able to offer support to any proposed development (meaning to include conservation). In a number of cases that Sacred Land has been involved in groups, of a non specific spiritual outlook, have come together through a recognition that in their environment space need be set aside for what they define as spiritual needs be that quiet contemplation or community celebration. Sacred Land neither seeks communities to work with nor sites it may consider in need of conservation measures of one sort or another but is entirely reactive and merely responds to groups approaching them. Although much of the work involves site based considerations Sacred Land works with the groups to help them identify their needs in terms of their spiritual understandings and their expression in the landscape. It is sometimes the case that a group may feel a need for space but then be unsure as to why or what they wish to do within it. The support Sacred Land gives is primary through assistance in building partnerships with organisations and other groups who can give practical support to a project. It further seeks to build a wider network between these groups and organisations, as an important element in sustaining the achievements so far

made. Sacred Land was launched in 1997 by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) UK and Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). It was set up as a project of ARC, who have been working at the international level since 1995 with faith communities and traditions from, primarily eleven world faiths on environmental projects at all scales, in partnership with WWF, The World Bank, Global Environmental Forum, national and local governments among others.

## The Interviews

The major part of this report consists of interviews with groups and individuals who have been involved with Sacred Land. The reason this approach was chosen was to allow those actively involved in conserving and creating sacred space to speak for themselves. The people interviewed, in the case of the project group interviews, were only a small part of the groups they represented. There were logistical difficulties in bringing any full group together but this limited form of interview was still felt more appropriate than simply comment by the author upon those groups. Furthermore, the groups themselves are just a small number of those to whom Sacred Land has given support.

The particular groups chosen for the interview were selected because they were deemed to be success stories. This paper is not testing but expressing a particular view, that sacred space and spiritual and religious outlooks have a specific and valid role in what many describe as sustainable development and environmental wellbeing. The paper would hope to show that the groups' experiences and what they had to say would illustrate practical examples and give a better understanding of this view. It was not intended that they be a statistical demonstration of the validity or otherwise of the views expressed. We believe we have presented a thorough basis for that view, and it is left for others who may wish to do so to question and test its validity.

The research is intended to investigate particular issues and topics in the discussion on sustainability. It is felt that spirituality and the place of sacred space has to a degree been neglected by some of the major players in this

discussion. This paper is intended to assist in the redressing of this neglect as well as to show how others think and feel about the subject. It was thought that conducting interviews, as the major part of the exercise, would be valid for the following reasons:

- a) It allows a direct input into the research of the experience of groups who are working in the areas of interest.
- b) It was felt that the groups would be able to say as much as they wanted while at the same time be guided by the interests of the research objectives.
- c) The interviews with the professional workers in the field would contribute an important added dimension as many community project groups seek the support of such professionals.
- d) While not a new approach it was felt that this method would make a very readable, interesting and important document.

The selection of the groups was expected to be difficult: there were a great many to choose from, but the length of time needed for collecting the interviews and turning them into written text precluded both too wide a range or a lengthy selection process. The final selection was therefore an arbitrary one by the author on the basis of what he considered successful and mature ventures. It is hoped those chosen reflect a diversity that is representative of the work of Sacred Land.

What one might term 'mature' projects were chosen as it was thought real experience would be better than perceptions from new groups just entering the process. Unsuccessful or abandoned projects would it



was felt lead to a discussion on why they had failed rather than on the main topic under consideration. It could be argued that unsuccessful projects do question the validity of the views expressed and this point is noted. However it was felt successful undertakings do give support to one of the main contentions of this report namely that a diversity in response to the issues under review does exist and should be highlighted. Unsuccessful projects do not necessarily present an argument against this view just because they failed.

There have inevitably been other limitations on the selection of the groups and individuals who have taken part. While project groups move and progress at a pace they find comfortable (a process very much supported by Sacred Land) it was necessary to interview groups who have had a wide range of experiences as the result of their project. Sacred Land does not recognise success or failure by the length it takes one group to do something which another group may have done in half the time. What is important is that the groups should have control and ownership both of the nature of their project and of how they wish to proceed with it, including the timescale. Selecting project groups that are at a high stage of development almost inevitably means that they have some sort of success record to gain this maturity.

Because the nature of the research is dominated by the concept of diversity of approach and response, it was felt the list should reflect Sacred Land's multi-faith approach. The pilgrimage project was included specifically because it was dealing with pilgrimage and would therefore offer a different perspective

of both project type and relationships and use of sacred space.

The selection of the professionals was from a much narrower choice and was limited to a pool of people who it was felt had gone beyond supplying resources to groups but who had also dealt in varying degrees with the subjective values discussed.

While it is highly likely that any other set of interviewees (even within the selected projects) would have produced different responses, we uphold the value of what is offered here. Dealing with subjective views and world outlooks elicits subjective opinions, no matter how well considered or authoritative. This material is offered not as case studies from which major generalisations can be made but rather a diversity of outlooks with a shared theme from which some generalisations can arise. Just as sacred space can only be defined by example, so too can response to its need and the value of that need.

#### Please note:

The text of the interviews given here are edited versions of the full texts. It was necessary to do this for reasons of length and readability. While it is hoped the spirit and meaning of what was said is retained in the text in order to make reading easier, certain grammatical changes have also been made. Once again I would like to remind the reader these texts have been agreed by those involved in the interviews.

# Cistercian Pilgrimage group: Wales

Interviewees: The South Wales Pilgrim Group

*The group size, twelve people, made it impractical to use names from the recorded interview. The exceptions to this are Dr. Maddy Gray, because of her prominent role in the pilgrimage, and if anybody is asked to speak by name. Maddy, a historian from University College, Newport, was the main organiser and route planner for the pilgrimage, which went to all of the Welsh Cistercian houses, past and present.*

**M:** We are not really a group - we are totally inclusive, the group is anybody who wanted to be interested in getting involved at any stage of the project. The project was to work out and then walk a long distance footpath linking all the Cistercian Abbeys of Wales, medieval and modern. Men's and women's houses were included, as part of the celebrations of the nine hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Cistercian order which was celebrated in 1998. How about Peter telling us all how it got started. This will communicate what a totally ad hoc thing it is.

**Peter:** Well I've been accused of instigating it. I think the first thing was that Brother Gildas from Caldey rang Maddy or I or both early on really saying there's an anniversary what are we doing about it? I'm sure he did it to others as well and David Robinson from Cadw (*full title: Cadw Welsh Historic Monuments Executive Agency*) was interested in whether events could take place or not with the church and

Cadw. We sat and discussed this with John Guy and came up with a number of things including a concert and somewhere along this I said what about a Cistercian trail?

**M:** You used the word 'fun' and then everyone looked at me and they said 'you like that sort of thing'. So we all agreed it was totally impossible and I went home and got the maps out. That was how it got started and I think in the course of the project we were a core group of about twenty people who were researching and walking the route. There were a lot more people walking very short sections of it. I think we were getting on for a hundred on the day we walked up to Penrhys for example. There must have been forty or fifty other people who supported us by giving accommodation, doing bits of research, helping to organise church services and other commemorative events on the way. When we walked it in the summer of '98 we wanted to arrange some sort commemorative event at each Cistercian sites on the way and we did just about manage to do that.

**Can you explain the link between Cadw and the pilgrimage? With some heritage conservation bodies there has been a move away from linking historic sites, especially historically sacred sites, with religious perceptions and present day spiritual perceptions.**

**M:** They held services at Tintern, they held services at Strata Florida, and they were certainly very happy for us to hold services at the other places as well. I think their thinking tends to be architecture, archaeology rather than spirituality and you are always having to pull them in the direction of and reminding them the most important thing about a religious house is not its buildings and its architecture it's the thinking and the belief. They weren't in the driving seat as far as the spirituality side of it was concerned but they were certainly supportive weren't they? and David Robinson was very very keen that this should



happen he did push very hard for it

Was that policy or was that just an individual's approach? Wales is so much smaller than England and Cadw is so much smaller than English Heritage (EH) and one can know a fair number of people in it but equally I think they react one against another in different ways than English heritage does.

*M:* In a way I think there are more beliefs and values in Cadw than EH. You get that feeling, that the things they choose to commemorate, the things that they choose to focus on, perhaps because they are aware that among other things they have to think about what is distinctly Welsh. What it is they are doing and what is distinctively Welsh is often a matter of beliefs and values and a distinctive approach to religion.

Were the Cistercian Houses distinctly Welsh?

*M:* I think they were, yes we need to go into an awful lot of history explaining that one.

Basically they went native?

*M:* Yes they went native very very quickly even the ones that were founded from outside, even the ones that were founded by Norman Marcher Lords (apart I suppose from Tintern) went native very quickly. One of the reasons why we were so keen to celebrate the anniversary in Wales was that the Cistercians were not just tied up with Welsh spiritual life but with politics and cultural life. To that extent that they gave support to movements like Owain Glyndwr independence campaign so yes they were distinctive.

Did Cadw see this as a promotional possibility?

*M:* Well I think they more or less had to see it as a promotional opportunity because that is what they're there for. That was how they

were able to justify doing what they were doing but certainly for David there was a lot more to it than that.

Yes he was involved in a number of other projects to do with the Cistercians. He was quite happy to be involved in some of the things we were doing on the site.

On the group itself, how did you get to know about this? I know some of you did bits of it, some of you did big bits of it, and some of you did all of it and by the sound of it got very wet. What was the process?

*M:* We started working on the 98 pilgrimage in the autumn of 96. Peter came up with the idea and I suppose we had 14/15 months then.

*Peter:* The work we had done five or six years earlier preceded that.

*M:* Yes, there was already a core group in existence. For some years now we have been walking every year from Llantarnam which is a Cistercian Abbey site near Cwmbran in South Wales up to Penrhys in the Rhondda. In the middle ages this was a shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary and maintained by the Cistercian monks from Llantarnam. *M:* Alan, some others and I constructed the route from Llantarnam to Penrhys. It a route a medieval pilgrim could have taken and we walked that with a local ecumenical group over the past five or six years. So that was a sort of core group of people we could contact and a part of the route we eventually used. That was how we started off in 1998, walking those three days from Llantarnam up to Penrhys.

Other members of the group explain how they got involved:

My husband has done a course with Maddy and he got circulated in the post and he said oh this might interest you it's a Cistercian walk, he's interested in walking and I'm

interested in Cistercians so that was how we got involve. We did a week and said we have got to go back for some more!

I saw a press release in a magazine and thought this looks interesting and I wondered what I was going to do that summer

### What was the magazine?

It's *Retreat* (a magazine that advertises retreats and pilgrimage). I saw some of the people involved and thought cor that's an incredibly ambitious idea how on earth can you do that. Then I thought it would be quite nice to do that and I thought about it for a bit and so we decided we go.

There's a long history of maintaining old sites but what about the journey in between those sites? I know you tried to walk as well as you could the original routes but how important is it that people know they where the original routes and should they be maintained, especially when the landscape has changed so much?

I think you get something from it when you are walking from one site to the next, when you know the monks had done both routes. O.K, so the weather is wet, but you realised that the monks had to do this and you were doing something that someone else had done before you. They had done it with a greater sense of adventure and spirit than you could possibly bring to it. I mean Marlene was a brilliant on pilgrimage, oh she was a pilgrim in a thousand.

M: Marlene isn't here but I shall tell you how she got involved. Marlene is an intensive internal care nurse who works in Bath and it's a very tough job, you dig very deep into your spiritual reserves doing that kind of thing. It's 50% hard gruelling work and it's 50% holding their hands and watching them die and this is very tough. She's English but she is very very

keen on all thing Welsh and she subscribes to the *Heritage in Wales's* magazine in which David Robinson put quite a substantial article about what we were doing. She was so fired up with enthusiasm that she contacted me and asked for details and arranged to meet us at Whitland. We walked from Whitland up to Cwmystwyth and she was obviously having difficulty walking the first few days. She's not built like a walker - she's short and she's quite plump and she had these, well we were quite snooty about her boots because they weren't proper walking boots. She was having great difficulty going up the hill and you thought oh dear she's not fit. After about a week she finally plucked up the courage to tell us that that she thought she had been walking on a broken foot. She had slipped very badly two days before she set off and the foot had swollen up and the toenails had gone black. She couldn't wear her proper walking boots which is why she was wearing this pair of soft shoes but she was so determined to go on the pilgrimage. She said it wasn't a question of wanting to, she needed to and she needed that kind of spiritual recharging and there was no way she was not going to do it even if she had to do it with a broken foot and so she did it with a broken foot. She's a very inspiring person to walk with she's a very practical, very common-sensical, you know no spiritual airs and graces but obviously very dedicated to what she was doing and now I suppose has become a permanent member of the pilgrimage group. She walked on the Penrhys route last year and she's coming again this year - so that's Marlene.

What's the difference between pilgrimage and just going for a walk, even a six hundred mile walk?

I could say there probably isn't much difference because I haven't got any strong religious views at all. But to me it was a great walk and I have got to admit that there were places that we went to, and some of the sites



where we stopped, where there was a feeling about the place that you could sense people had been there before had lived there, even when we were in the middle of a field in Monmouth and unless someone told you there was a site under the ground you would think it was an ordinary field but you could still sense that history there.

Is the sense of the landscape that you are passing through part of the inspiration to do pilgrimage?

It's a general interest in history in what people had done before. It's quite amazing to see some of these places and try to imagine what they were like before they were ruins. Just to understand how people could have built them, how they could have organised religious or any sort of society in that location

What benefits do you think, if any that we gain today by understanding those processes?

Benefits for who?

Individually or for society more generally, at any level you care to think about?

I did enjoy it but it was just a walk. But I think I got more out of it because it was a pilgrimage. Some of the places were dead sites but Penrhys is such an active community and it still has connections with the Cistercians over on Caldey Island. There I didn't feel I was looking at historic sites but that they were present day sites and I felt the same too about Holywell. There's no way to describe that as a community in the past because it has remained so active in the present. So it was more than just a walk and more than a thing of the past.

M: We probably thought we were getting some sort of strength from the fact that the places where we were going had been spiri-

tually important to the past. There's that piece by T.S. Eliot where he talks about places where prayer has been valid and it was nice to feel what we were doing was helping to keep them alive. The places where we had services along the way, when we got to Basingwerk, for example, we sang Compline in the ruins and it was probably the first time it had been sung there since the dissolution of the monasteries.

We also went to places where in spite of the fact that the monastery had been dissolved the church was very active and Penrhys wasn't the only one. It was nice to be part of a continuum, of a spiritual tradition, it was nice to feel part of that strength, the strength of the past and also the strength of the surviving tradition nowadays. I think you're trying to reconstruct a bit, trying to walk where people have walked before and sometimes it is important that you walk where people have walked before and that strengthens you. But it is also a matter of creating something new in the way of sacredness in the landscape it's nice to do both really.

To know that people are going to do it in a different manner, people will continue to do it and people will do it for all kinds of different reasons. I think whether or not it's a pilgrimage will depend on the person who is doing it. You take your own sacred space with you on a pilgrimage in a way and it's a pilgrimage because it's a sacred journey to a sacred place and whatever's sacred for you is what makes it a pilgrimage.

I think that is true also of not necessarily just the Cistercian centres we visited but also of the religious places on route. I think particularly of a ruined church just south of west of St. Clears with the graves and the stones of the alleged pilgrims that were buried there.

M: Well that was a pilgrimage church This is the church of Llandeilo Abercywyn. There

are two churches either side of the Cywyn estuary between Carmarthen and Tenby and one is Llandeilo Abercywyn and the other is Llanfihangel Abercywyn. They are both in ruins. They were quite big churches in the late middle ages and they were quite important because they were on a pilgrimage route of St David's and one of them has medieval graves in the grave yard and they are traditionally said to be pilgrims that didn't make it. It was amazing, it was right out in the middle of nowhere on the mud flats overlooking the estuaries of the Cywyn and the Taf and it was a strange place, a very strange feeling yes.

Apart from the Cistercian houses did people feel because they were walking a pilgrimage that they were more sensitised to the whole landscape. Was there a sense that people were learning things about the landscape that they had not really thought about?

Are you suggesting that in the pilgrimage route people aren't interested in the scenery they were walking through but that they would have gone anywhere regardless but walkers would deliberately pick out things.

To some measure the original pilgrim routes were determined by the logistics places to stay, inns etc and of course there was the issue of safety in the middle ages.

If you think of the public footpaths now most of them are low down based on the historic need to get from A to B.

M: If you think of the way we consciously tried to avoid the heavy tarmac road and this was partly safety because of heavy lorries but it's also aesthetically we don't find it pleasant to walk on tarmac road. Similarly we are seriously thinking of doing some work on a section of the North Wales coastline that we did. Here we had six or seven miles of walking between the breakwater and the caravan sites and it was boring and we didn't like it. Some

would say you have to do these things because you have to take the spiritual into that environment. You cannot ignore this because you don't like the look of them and a pilgrimage has to go through these things. So there is going to be a difference - there's always going to be tension between the long distance walkers who head for the hills and the open ground or head for the pleasant places and those who say go through the difficult bits, do something with them.

Is there anything wrong with changing the route if it looks nothing like what it would have done?

M: If its not helping you spiritually, I mean, a pilgrimage has to help you spiritually or if you are being spiritual it has to help you.

Isn't it getting closer getting back to nature and so having a slightly different route?

M: The problem is we can't recreate a medieval pilgrimage. We are not medieval people, we haven't got all that emotional luggage, we cannot think or see things in the same way. Our values about landscape are totally different. They would have valued settled, cultivated, ordered land as we now value wilderness and isolation, bleakness even, because its what we haven't got much of any more.

Wilderness and bleakness to them was an ever present threat and that's what they had to fight against and they would not have wanted it. They for example wouldn't have looked ideally to go over the top of the mountain for example but to have stayed to the edges of cultivated land wherever they could. So we can't really create what it would have felt like the medieval pilgrim going for example from Strata Florida to Cwmystwyth and so to a certain extent we have got to work out for us what works as well. Part of the problem that we have become aware of is that different



things are going to work for different people, some would want to walk through the caravan park and some would want to head for the hills. I would dither.

So we need to incorporate both the caravan park into the spiritual because there is this great mass unknowing about God.

*M:* Yes but given that you are not walking across it with a banner you are just a group chatting among each other walking along the breakwater how do people know we are pilgrims anyway?

It doesn't matter - you're thinking of the situation anyway.

I think also the pilgrims of the past would not have had the emotion of a sickening modernity so I would have thought that the attraction of landscapes would have been a bit less.

*M:* If you would have had to fight your way through it, you would have gone for the easiest path and the landscape would have been a challenge.

Well it was a challenge to Marlene.

I think the walk we did was not followed by very many medieval travellers. You were crossing the North reverence from the south reverence and to some extent that is a different ball game. They probably walked shorter distances for a very specific reason either they were going across the North Welsh coast towards Bardsey Island or towards St. David's or the very short ones like we have done.

*M:* There are long routes leading to Strata Florida from a lot of Wales because Strata Florida had such important relics.

Again when you think of the population of

say Pembrokeshire as seen in medieval times the number of people who would have walked to those sections would have been very small. The chances are if it was important they would have been coming from the Midlands and eastern regions.

*M:* So what we were doing? we weren't really trying I suppose to reconstruct a medieval pilgrimage but we were trying to use parts of medieval pilgrimage routes to construct a pilgrimage of our own.

I felt we were walking in most parts for the spiritual experience anyway.

Someone was saying before how do other people know you're pilgrims, does it matter? Was there any publicity and if so what was the response?

I think a shock to us was when we got to Holy Well in Basingwerk. A motley crew of half a dozen individuals in shorts and slightly travel worn and to find that they had centred a whole day around us, I mean it was mind blowing really. It put a completely different perspective on the walking because all these people had come from different parts just to see us as pilgrims, and that was quite challenging to your thinking. You realise other people had come because these people had walked and they wanted to touch you and be near you gosh look these are the pilgrims and you think yes I'm nothing special I'm just an ordinary person who walked.

But did it make you feel special?

Yeah it went incredibly well and going to the walk when you left your hostel going to Holy Well was very spiritual. That was the first time really that I felt it was a spiritual experience, up until then it had been harrowing. It had been a social experience and a physical test and I didn't feel anything real about it. The services I felt were quite public, they

were events for the people and we were taking part because they knew about it in advance. I initially got into it from the Tenbyshire pilgrimage. I heard about this thing when I was in my second year and thought I would like to walk it during my holidays so I'll join in but as for a pilgrimage it really hadn't been me. I go to church and worship every Sunday anyway. On the first day we were involved in it, it was a Sunday anyway and the next day it involved a service and that seemed to tie in with the public side but when we got to Holy Well then it felt yeah it was spiritual then. Basingwerk to me that was a bit like a fete. I wouldn't say it was spiritual at all it was just a shock to have the thing they put on at the end, when we were expected to perform (*they were asked to take part in an historic re-enactment*). It was more historical to tell you the truth, the historical group who do re-enactments I didn't find them in their selves very Christian in there approach. It was quite an ordeal because it was very, very hot and the best part for me the realisation of anything or of everything was at Holy Well and the waters there.

When I came back I thought more on where I had been but at the time it had been quite arduous. It was good fun though and there was a tremendous sense of comradeship and friendship.

But not spiritual all the way through because it was so harrowing. But when you realised we had followed authentic routes, which we presumably did, and we had had the historical landmarks and things to authenticate it, but then how near to what the Cistercians were, were we?. We where trying to ape theM:

### How important was that to you?

Very important at the end and very important at different stages. Do you remember when we were looking for this farm and we went to

Thomas Stone's house, the historian, that was a wonderful house, a very very beautiful house we stayed in. Then we went onto the farm and I got my Bible, I found that very spiritual. That was very good because you were then in present day times and times had moved on and buildings were now being used for other things but there was that sense the buildings, although you were there today, there was that sense that they had been used for something else in the past. Like Gordon said when you went to places you felt that people had been there before you, it was a bit like that.

M: Do you think that was one of the things about Holywell? As well as the fact that it had been such an important place for so long and that so many people had gone there - would we had felt that way about somewhere that was new?

No there was definitely a feeling about the stones actually around the pool there and that serenity the water was giving, it was amazing. But what were we looking for when that farmer was shouting at us? where we knew we had gone the wrong way but we just pretended.

M: Oh yes we were on the right path because the stile was there and the way mark was there but he had put the drinking trough slap bang right across the stile so it was incredibly muddy so we were climbing over barbed wire and things to get round it. We were looking for a holy well.

That's Llanelian yn-Rhos where there was a very important Holy Well that had become a cursing well in the 19th century

### That's right what had happened?

M: It had taken an enormous amount of effort by the local non-conformist minister, and every body else, to get people to stop using

it. It had been used on a very regular basis for people who wanted to curse people they weren't getting on with. And then we discovered that the woman from the farm had actually made our tea from water from the well.

I think you hit upon an interesting point when you talk about Holywell in that you had to dress up and the group there who normally dress up in Cistercian robes. I think that was one of the problems we hit all the way along. It's the conception of people of what pilgrims are. I remember the first walk we did, a photographer turned up to photograph us and was terribly disappointed we were all in anoraks and walking boots. Luckily for him we had the monk with us and he was pushed into the foreground. People seem to think what we are trying to recreate is a fancy dress concept when in fact we are looking for something completely different.

They were interested because I think people are looking for something. People are looking for more spirituality, they are looking for something in their lives that's lacking. I think you got the impression that they thought you had got a little of that and that they were hoping that they might just get a crumb or two of it.

I felt the opposite of that - that the people who joined us were quite into what we were doing; obviously they had been warned in advance and they intended to join us.

Well the most obvious evidence of that were the people on the doors who came out to their doors from Llanwynno to Penrhys. They came out in the street and said "you're actually walking to Penrhys when there's a bus, oh its nine miles wow that's wonderful and you're on a pilgrimage, it's great, innit".

That was quite a different experience than I found. I felt that if you say you're a pilgrim you are sort of held at arms length but I felt

when going to Penrhys and particularly from Llanwynno as well, that that was open for everybody irrespective of whether they were doing it for religious reasons or whatever. I felt there was something unique about that. I can remember a couple of things particularly, one of them was when we were coming down from that church at Llanwynno and we veered off towards the forest, there were two girls and two disabled children there and they were all singing away beautifully. Later I think when we got down into Stanleytown, we climbed that steep bank from Stanleytown to Penrhys and we were all gasping and we got to the top and there was this large crowd. In that there were four or five children in wheelchairs and we got to the top and I thought they would have given their eye teeth to have been out of breath coming up that hill. To me it was a straightening out experience and it was a humbling experience. My own experience of that, I don't know how I can describe it, I'm not a religious person. It changed my view of Penrhys in another way. I left a pair of binoculars on the steps of the cross and they were there when I returned for them.

*M:* Anywhere else and they might not have been. That was on the steps of the statue wasn't it? That statue was a very very sacred place in Penrhys. Whatever the reputation of Penrhys and it has had appalling things said about it over the years, that statue has never been vandalised. There's graffiti on everything else but not on that statue because it's a statue of a woman and a child and you know they are not going to vandalise it.

The first time I walked, and I just love walking now, I think of all the places you can go to. I use to think there were roads and streets and now I know there is much more to Britain than that and that's just sort of stayed with me. I go walking now whenever I can.

I always valued the friendships because



when you walk with people for three or four days at a time you get to know people quite well. They talk their problems through, and you talk your problems through and at the end of it you come to some kind of consensus. We generated a common bond after the walk.

Some people you tend to walk with more than others because different people walk at different paces so there are probably two or three groups. Yes I found out a lot of information about people I don't know. Its one of those situations where you tend to open yourself up to other people and walking for several days is one of those situations.

*After you have finished is it something now you value?*

I personally don't think I ever discovered that. You know you work through a block of problems at a time and you come to some kind of satisfactory conclusion. All the people who helped you come to those conclusions are a special kind of friend.

The kind of friend you have on pilgrimage is a different quality because of the determination you both have. On pilgrimage it comes naturally that you think about your life and you discuss it with others. The friends you have are different because of that.

*What did you bring back?*

Well I suppose I always carried around lots of Wales with me depending upon my age. When I was young it was climbing Wales, I knew where every cliff was and I suppose then I had an industrial map of Wales and the former Wales and what it did to me was open up Wales in the middle ages. The medieval period had always seemed a mystery and vague and now I'm absolutely fascinated by it. So my image of Wales has changed. Wales is a palimpsest but some of the layers are richer than others.

I got a great sense of the beauty of Wales. It gave me an understanding of Welsh people and Welsh thinking as well as a strong sense of community. I don't just mean the local community but other religions have pilgrimage, it isn't exclusive to Christianity or to any religion but it's open to all and so there's a sense of fellowship.

*M:* Its probably about the sense of space inside of me. I was theoretically the organiser so there was quite a lot of negotiating and paper work and checking upon things as we went around. Sometimes it got very fraught and stressful and sometimes I got stressed with other people. I badgered and harassed them and got bad tempered but what I think I came away with was this feeling of space inside. Once you know it's there it's always going to be there. You can think, well I can always get back to that. I think the other thing you come away with, and it's to do with what Alan was talking about, about communicating to other people, because its easy to communicate with people when you are walking. You can get along with people who you would normally disagree with quite violently. If it gets too heavy you can walk for a bit and just let it cool off. It's a very inclusive community, a pilgrimage, and you have to get on with people who want to do things very differently. You have to learn patience and tolerance and you have to learn how to cope with people who walk a lot slower than you do, you have to learn have to cope with people who walk a lot faster than you do, and you have to cope with people who want to be so bloody awkward. I'm not very good at that so it was quite a challenge. I'm not very patient so I had to learn to be more patient. I don't think I'm learning very well but I try. This is obviously one of the important things about learning to live in a community, is learning that you have got to be patient with the way other people go about things. You try with that but the most important thing was the space you get inside yourself I think you

get that from going through the difficult bits as well as the pleasant bits.

I think walking for me has always been a therapy anyway. I could well believe that lots of people who don't do it very often find walking in itself takes you away from the normal pace in life. If you travel ten miles in ten minutes on a motor way and spend all day walking ten miles on a pilgrimage it really changes your outlook. You realise that you don't always have to be in a hurry and you can take it easy. I agree with what other people have said about the community spirit that develops. But equally within a pilgrimage group there is the opportunity you get for your own time and your own space. You change partnerships and get into small groups and it's quite easy to spend a whole hour not talking to anybody. One interesting thing to come out of for me was when I first saw the itinerary. I couldn't imagine anybody doing all this. I thought I could do reasonably big chunks of it here and there but I found it incredible that some people wanted to do the whole lot. It is quite humbling to think we can achieve an awful lot if you set out to do it.

I was amazed at what the land told me that it hadn't told me before. What was once a green field had now become a stage of history and drama and life that had gone on before which you quite innocently passed as a normal field. I was quite overawed by what the actual land and the walk revealed to me that I had been able to pass. Because I walked for ten days and then stopped and went back and walked again and stopped and went to walk again I found the relationships I made with people were quite lasting. It was a couple of days and then you met up again. It was like renewing old friendships and yet they were only a few days old.

I think there's a sense of inner sanctuary about finding out about your self. It's also an eye opening, making you aware of the world

out there and what you had not come across before. For me, as not a particularly Christian person, I think I have increased my spiritual awareness by coming across a side to life I had not really experienced before and getting to terms with that.

Quite seriously, something I have already mentioned, the beauty and the attraction of the countryside around us. I've been walking, to paraphrase, to parts of Wales that other methods of transport can't reach. I found that fascinating and it did leave me with a sense that I wanted to see a hell of a lot more of it. The other thing that did come out of it, not so much in a spiritual sense, because I'm not really pilgrim material, but one of the things that did come through very strongly when we were walking 8,10,12, 15 miles a day was that apart from the pilgrim side of it, that was the way that people moved around. They did those sort of distances, did a day's work and then they did the walk back again. And I reflected on this on the basis if we can't park our car outside our front door and park it again outside of our place of work we feel hard done by. So it did give me some sort of sense what had gone before in that respect.

*M:* Now Derek of course did an independent pilgrimage of his own as well because we had got across South Wales as far as Tenby and I had to go back to the day job. Derek walked on to St. David's. Now, why did you do this, Derek, other than your legs wouldn't stop?

*Derek:* I said early on that at my age there wasn't a chance of me trekking across Wales on my own. But one of the attractions of this was that it was organised, we didn't have to walk in a circle, where you have to come back to your car or catch a non-existent country bus. It was organised and you walked in a straight line from A to B and there was transport at each end and that to me was valuable. I said to myself I shall take advantage of this,

this isn't going to happen again in my lifetime. And then I felt I might as well go the whole hog and do the last three days and then I could say I had walked across the whole of South Wales. It was vanity for me - on top of that I lost a stone. I thought a walk from Llantarnam to St. David's was an appropriate journey, that was the real reason I did it.

Something I forgot to add that made the whole thing and that was Maddy's stories. She made everything so alive and so wonderful it was just a pleasure to walk with her and to soak up all the things she made it better than any story book, any film.

*M:* Robin is working on a route from St. David's as well. What is the thinking - is there any sense of pilgrimage with it?

*Robin:* Oh well because it was the original place to go, it was twice to St. David's and once to Rome. It grew out of the fact that my family had gone down there and I couldn't go and meet them and so I thought why don't I walk down there. Then I thought well you can't walk the they used to go because most of it is covered by motorway concrete now so lets work out something that takes in the Brecon Beacons that runs east west. So it was then how to work out how to get from one lot of mountains to the next. It's been three years now and I've walked chunks of it and I have now the line of a route. I'm hoping to do that in the next few months.

*M:* I would just like to add a few words about sustainability and tourism, green tourism as this is obviously something that has been very much in our minds as we planned the route. We hope this will become a permanent route so that people can share in the kind of experiences we've had as well of course of having new experiences. We have had to think about things like way marking, stiling, how we deal with local authorities who are reluctant to invest in extending their network of public rights of way. A couple of

authorities have got a particularly bad record in this respect while some authorities in Wales have got extremely good records. But even if you have got a good record frequently what it boils down to is tourism and sustainable tourism: The kind of tourism they want is people backpacking through the countryside and using resources locally rather driving in the people carrier with suitcases of stuff from the supermarket in Birmingham or wherever. So we feel that a pilgrimage as well as its religious spiritual connotations is also an aspect of green tourism, sustainable tourism to the extent that one of the ways we want to modify the route is to take it way from heavily walked footpaths and sensitive environmental areas. This is something that Steve and I were doing some work on last summer, trying to get the routes. We had originally taken the Offa's Dyke path along the Clwydian edge, a glorious walk but desperately over walked and very badly eroded so we don't feel happy about walking it. We are working on an alternative route going down the Vale of Clwyd. This route has got a lot going for it although it's not as spectacular scenically, but its still very beautiful. It goes along a medieval pilgrimage route which we found out by accident and it goes past some gorgeous old churches. It takes you down the valley of the River Clwyd along one of these footpaths which the Denbighshire County Council has been way marking because they think it's important to attract people to do that kind of walk.

*Is there a sense in which avoiding a stressed environment is easier in a group? When people are in dialogue with each other, as they walk, they demand perhaps less by way of a scenic setting.*

Well it's not that the Vale of Clwyd is not attractive but it's attractive in a different way. In many ways it makes a better pilgrimage route. The Clwydian Range is more or less pure scenery with a couple of iron age hill



forts and going down the Vale of Clwyd you are going down a much more intricate, a much more people-made landscape. Obviously the Clwydian Range is a people-made landscape but going down the Vale it is much easier to see how people have interacted with their landscape. You're going through a more settled area and you are going past some particularly spectacular medieval churches. You are partly on the pilgrimage route which took you from Holywell over to Gwytherin, where Winifred recovered from having her head cut off. She retired into the hills and founded a convent, it's in the hills south of Conway and there is a medieval pilgrimage route that goes from Holywell to Gwytherin. You would walk on that part of the way and then you would walk on the medieval or rather post medieval route which went down from Holy Well to St David's via Corwen. It takes you through a landscape and settlements which are of enormous interest where you have got a lot of religious history. That's what we have been focusing on with this particular route.

#### What about resources for the walkers?

We only got into double figures on the first few days when we were walking from Llantarnam up to Penrhys. We had a lot of hospitality from church groups and individual clergy on the way. We also stayed with friends and used bed and breakfast and some of the group used youth hostels. Some of the route is very well served by accommodation; some areas you would at the moment find it difficult to find b& b's sufficiently close together to make a day's walk feasible for a group. You may be talking about thirty to thirty five miles between suitable points. What we would hope if we can get this up and running as a long distance footpath is that it would generate a demand for accommodation. Again this feeds into the green tourism sustainability issues because some of the areas where the accommodation is most

scarce are some of the areas where the Welsh have been hit hardest by the agricultural depression. Putting up tourists is one of the ways out of the agricultural crisis and backpacking tourists are particularly useful because we can't carry stuff with us. We have to have sandwiches made for us for the next day etc. so there is more scope for catering for tourist needs if you are backpacking.

It is never going to be the bread - I don't think any local economy can sustain itself only on tourism except in very unusual cases. But it puts the jam on the bread and it means that local communities can survive whereas without it they would give up because there is simply not enough money in their agricultural economy at the moment. So again we think this could potentially be quite an important part of what we are doing, revitalising depressed areas and complementing other schemes in those areas.

# Holy Well restoration project group: North Petherwin, Cornwall

Interviewees: David Attwell (DA), North Cornwall District Council, Heritage coast and countryside service, Reverend Geoffrey Pengelly (RP) & Mr. Walter Polglaze (WP), Chairman of the North Petherwin Parish Council.

*Questions are presented in blue text while additions from the author will be given in italics. Additional notes at the end are from discussions with the local school headmistress Mrs. C. Williams who was unable to attend the interview session.*

## Introduction

This project was one of a number to conserve, through community based initiatives, the stone crosses and ancient wells of North Cornwall. These monuments represent a distinctive contribution to the landscape and are generally considered to be well regarded by the county's residents. Their condition in a number of cases, the North Petherwin Well being an example, offers the chance for a combination of conservation initiatives that express the interests of the community or parts of it. The crosses and wells also offer points of interest to the visitor.

## The Interview

*RP* The idea of the project to restore the village's Holy well, if I remember rightly, was first mooted around the parochial church council. Isabelle Stevens thought it would be a lovely idea to have the holy well restored for the millennium and from that I think remember rightly, David correct me, we then, in collaboration with Mr. Peter Luckin, who is one of the churchwardens who got in touch with you (*DA*). Meanwhile I had brought the matter up at Hampsel at their parish council meeting with Walter (*WP*), and that's how we got our first group of volunteers. The church contributed towards the work and then the Parish Council and the school. It's very much a community project. Involving all the parish, it was everybody from the village.

*Can you now describe the site itself and what is was like before the restoration?*

*WP* We have lived here for six years now and we knew there was a well because it was marked on the map.

When we first moved here we went down to look at it and we had gone down two or three times and we had never found it. It was so overgrown that nobody could ever find it if they went down there to have a look.

Of course people knew it was there before, people like Mr Hawk and the Danteons and Mr Gause and there are people in the parish who remember being baptised with water from the Holy well. But it was completely overgrown. So this meant digging down seven feet into the well metre by metre. This part of the project involved carrying out the excavation and the initial clearance with Mr. Gause from the farm who manages some of the land the well is on. Michelle James from English Heritage was also involved. Following that we applied for a grant from something called the Cornwall Landscape

Project for funding towards the physical restoration of the well and we were able to count as contributions in kind the labour and materials. We also had slate donated from the community and the landowner donated stone

DA We then applied for grants from the Sacred Land Project and some funding from the Parish Council some funding from the school and some funding from the Cornwall Rural Council which enabled us to involve the school and the wider community in the project. The funds help pay for Joanna Tagney who is a musician and storyteller who was involved in helping to make the banners (*these were used in the procession by school children when the well was blessed in a service on the completion of the restoration*) Joanna Mattingly, an expert on the medieval church in Cornwall, did an investigation into the church here in North Petherwin which helped us to formulate ideas through Reverend Pingelly for a service which would be a culmination of the work..

RP This service was actually close to the Pertronius festival service as this church is dedicated to Saint Pertronius and it was decided to hold it on the Saturday nearest to that. We had the Archdeacon of Bodmin come along to do the rededication, of course the school who made the banners for the procession, and we had a joyous service and then processed from the church to the Holy well for the rededication and the children did a little story about that followed by some prayers. After that we recessed to the village hall for refreshments and it involved the whole of the parish, everyone was there, there were over two hundred people there as well as several people came from outside the parish completely.

Can you explain what it was that gelled with the community that made them get up and do this project?

WP It is written in the history book here that it had been traditional for people to have been christened with water from the Holy Well. We said that's a marvellous tradition and that is what stuck in my mind. I think the idea to continue the tradition stirred in many people's minds particularly the older parishioners. The older families that have been here longer especially thought how lovely to revive an old tradition that sort of took them back to their North Petherwin roots. It gave the parish a focus which struck a cord in many peoples minds.

One day we walked down the path going down to the well, this was before we bought the land, (WP is part owner of the site) and said to ourselves 'you know that you can feel that people had walked down here before'. One of my nephews has investigated the lane as had a local countryside ranger and they both said the path has got to be at least a thousand years old due to the species present but only our part of the path is still there, the rest has been destroyed. It would have been beautiful if you could have gone right down that path.

RP I think because it involved the school so many people were bitten by the idea. Yes I think the school excited the parish.

Has the relationship between the site and the community now changed, is it more talked about and more regularly visited?

WP Well there are lots of people walking down who never walked down there before. There is always things Peter (*the farmer*) objects to, people leaving these ribbons in the bushes (*there was, still is, an old custom to leave parts of your clothing at a healing or holy well for a number of reason, usually these would be no more than small pieces of cloth*) so there are churchgoers and non-churchgoers who go down there who feel that this place has some significance to them.



*RP* We have also had a number of baptisms in church since the restoration of the well and we have always had water brought up from the well for them and that will continue.

*WP* The reason it had fallen into disrepair was just over change of hands I think because Gordon Snell (*a villager*) said it was his job to clean it out when he was a boy. His father said you have got to clean this out every year and he did. Whenever they sold it, it was a lot of years ago, the next people obviously didn't carry that tradition forward and that's how the well had disappeared. It had probably been silting for up 50 years.

*How if at all do you think this project aids the spiritual needs and sustainability of the community?*

*RP* Oh, I think conserving something from history and the well was a very important part of the history of the parish it wasn't just an isolated well.

*DA* I think it was bringing it back into the fabric of the church because it was so much a part of the church. It was bringing it back into the building of the church through the water although it is separated from the church in a field. Because the tradition had been neglected I think the parish re-discovered themselves. It was something that parents could pass on to their children, something that had been slipping out of view and they re-kindled by this project.

*How if at all do you think this project aids the spiritual needs and sustainability of the community?*

*DA* I think one of the things that came out of the exercise, and it's a spiritual thing, was that people came together regardless of religious beliefs. They all came to one place and had a fantastic day. I think arising out of the well project was a renewed interest in Parish Paths and other things of interest. The well

project brought people in the community together for a physical and spiritual event and it prompted people to look at other issues that before that they had not regarded as spiritual.

*WP* I had never thought of it that way. Now we have gone through five years with having the parish paths, which I had always been in favour of and then they accepted it, so maybe that could have been a contributory factor, I don't know - that people came together as a result of that project, because the parish Paths partnership is really good.

*Does the site have any relationship with the wider community - is it visited by tourists for example?*

*WP* If we give it a higher profile in the church - presently we've got reference to it - if we highlighted it people would go to see. Visitors do come to the church. Mind you it must be said we don't get a lot of tourists in this area.

We're not on the coast and so we don't get the tourists. We get a few.

*DA* There are a number of books and publications on Holy wells that list North Petherwin and I think if I'd looked in several guide books up until fairly recently, it would have proved damning of Petherwin Well as they would have arrived to find it derelict. I would hope now that those arriving can expect to find something that will be pleasantly surprising.

*What were the benefits of the project to the environment and to the community? As I understand there were two groups, one who did the work and the rest who celebrated that restoration?*

*DA* Speaking from my point of view it was a great deal of fun to re-discover the well and recruiting the group to do the work and to

celebrate that. There was a talk and a tour of the medieval church and everyone was fascinated by these. What I also thought was very important was that the group came together so well, there was a sense that they wanted to get it done.

*RP* One side to that, that's supplementary, is that the congregation wanted to have a celebration each year rather than just for the day of the restoration. This will help to keep it tidy, if you know people wanted a celebration each year.

**The service was the largest one you had in the Parish for some time wasn't it?**

*RP* Except for the Christingle service on Christmas eve, yes it probably would be, Oh I'm delighted, absolutely thrilled. It took people here back to the Christian roots, the belief we had in the Celtic Saints. St. Pertronius came here and established a small cell within the community. Quite likely they gathered around the well, it goes back centuries, it rekindled people's appreciation of history. Where we are now, why we are here, and so on and the importance of conserving that.

*WP* Before the present church was here, there was probably, and this is from the history I've read, a wooden church on the way down to the well. But on the experience of the project, you do the work with other people, how can you describe that, a rewarding experience.

*DA* When you think about it there was a community pulling together.

*WP* Yes, you were working together. That's why I enjoy living in North Petherwin, you could do something new with the community every day of the week.

**There have been lots of little initiatives like the well story occurring all over the county,**

**to conserve local distinctiveness, and collectively they add. Do you see doing these small projects, in your backyard so to speak, as having a wider significance than just what it may mean to your local community or to your local environment?**

*RP* I think, is it a part of the sort of overall need for greater awareness of the need of conservation both of the countryside and our heritage and so on? And I think it could be. Also, is it focusing attention on that and making people more aware of the importance of caring for these places and the significance of them in their lives? Again I think it could well be that.

I've been keen on conservation ever since I was a boy but today so many more people are keen on it as well.

*WP* It's local, that's why people get involved locally. If our economy changed for the worse, for instance, all the elements of sustainability are here, whether they are in cities I doubt, but certainly you wouldn't have any problem if the economy was in dire straits, people here can get together and put a meal on and house two hundred people in a minute, sort of thing. All of those elements are within the community. Its very close here, look how many people will be going down to Walter Hall today for example.

**Who is Walter?**

*WP* Walter should have been at this meeting but he was helping with digging a trench yesterday and the trench collapsed on him.

*RP* and people are going down to see him. I mean I'm sure it happens in many places in towns but I think it's more extenuated extended in these villages; we have retained that sense of community.

**Would you say that that your relationship**

with the physical environment has influenced that retention or is it just a question of scale, being a smaller community?

*RP* I think that these have something to do with it but I would say I think the Christian heritage of these places has something to do with it as well. OK you might say that 'you would say that, you're the vicar', but I do think it has, because a considerable number of people that do get involved do come from a Christian background. I think that has made a difference and it is a factor that has to be recognised.

I would also say that a factor is that it's a small community, people know a lot more people (*meaning as a percentage of the whole*) and through marriages. In a population of, what, 700 you are going to know people better than if you're in a population of 7000 or 70,000, that's obvious.

*DA* Underlining that is that land based industries have been the main industry although I think things are slightly changing now but it meant that things happened in and around North Petherwin, people haven't been going to other places for work so much.

I think if you spoke to most people they are very aware of their surroundings but it's because it's a place where people know each other - things like the WI are thriving. Walter Hall didn't stand on the top of his house and tell everybody he's got a cracked rib but everyone knows a trench fell in on him.

*RP* We are almost saying, aren't we, to a certain extent the rural community, particularly those connected with the land, are very much an important part in maintaining this community spirit with other people coming in but the core seems to be land-based.

*WP* But I'm not land-based am I, really?

*RP* No, but if you think of the things that have happened in the village and the percentage of the people who support them that have connections with the land they are high, but its not exclusive.

*WP* Most of the people are connected to what's going on except for the new estate. It's a funny thing but if you look at the way the houses are built, all the new houses are built in one place and we haven't had one thing from them.

*DA* Do you think that's because people feel self contained?

*RP* It's possible.

*WP* I don't know, but they never, with exceptions, with few exceptions. . . If we have an event we get a third of the village there but people from the new estates are never included. They are always in the two-thirds with the odd exception.

*RP* and it isn't just the church or the chapel activities it's also the case if there's a village hall event or a school event.

*WP* That is generally true. Of course the school is another huge connection.

*DA* Its interesting isn't it, because I know Mrs Hawks said when someone new came into the village the WI went and gave her a welcome pack and said 'these things are here, come along and join us, and this is where the play area is,' and they get a negative response from the people you are describing so its not that some of us are not going out there and trying.

*RP* We do try as well, as a church we take the magazine to them and welcome them and say 'well these are the things going on.'

*WP* It's got all the news that's happening



you don't have to go to the church. It's a very cheap method of finding out what's happening and yet there are some new people who have just come who are refusing the magazine. They will never be part of the community.

*DA* Why do you think that is? You just said about them being all in one area.

*WP* Well, I wonder if it's something to do with them all living in new houses. All these people live in new houses and other people live in old houses and if I go to an old house I get the feel of what's there before.

Are you saying new houses don't represent a tradition but they're just something that's just placed on the landscape but old houses have a history and that they're part of the landscape?

Obviously every house has to be new at some stage but if you're coming to it knowing it has a history as opposed to going to a house which is as new to the area as you are, is there a difference?

Is this related to what you were talking about being land-based, it may not be the case that everybody is economically attached to the land but the community operates around a land-based culture still?

*WP* We are living in what used to be a farmhouse, and there are other farmhouses that are now private houses and some that are still attached to the farms, all those people I would say are generally part of the community.

*RP* Are they?

*WP* Oh absolutely, against the new houses were people aren't. There's a feeling in the house we joined because we took it over from the Tippetts and in a way we carried on some

of the traditions when the Tippetts were there like coming along to the church.

What you appear to be saying is that if you move into an old house your response to your environment is going to be different than if you move into a new house that had not be an established part of that environment or community.

*WP* I think that's quite interesting. I developed ten houses in the area and of the new ones built nobody takes part in the community.

*RP* Other people take part in school events if they have children.

*DA* I think this is maybe why the idea to continue to celebrate the well each year will work because it gives people the opportunity to come along and take part.

*WP* I wonder if people get a feeling when they go into a house, whether they like it or not, you get a feeling when you go into a church, but when you go into a place that's newly built you may not get any feeling at all.

*RP* I doubt if that excuses you. After all places are what you make them to a certain extent, but also, to be fair, because one isn't trying to draw a distinction or a division between those that live in new houses and those that don't. We are just observing things but perhaps people are moving into the community who haven't had a connection or roots or particular interest, or work somewhere else. To be fair to them why should they necessarily come to the village hall, come to church whatever? Or they may have come from a place where there wasn't a great community so it's almost alien to them so it's not their fault.

I can think of one or two people, from we will say the new estates, who I have had con-

tact with and who made contact because they have an interest in an old building or architecture, not necessary as a Christian but because they have an interest in the old church building and that has been a point of connection.

**There may be an economic reason: I can afford the new house but I can't afford the old house.**

**DA That doesn't explain why people build when they get an opportunity to.**

Perhaps herein lies a challenge for the parish council and the like. For if you represent the parish how do you get people involved? It's very difficult, but how do you do it as a parish council?

**From what you have been saying here it would be a very good experience if the parish council do an appraisal or some sort of assessment of what people thought about the Parish.**

**WPI would love to do something like that but this is all new to me.**

*The conversation was left at this point and hopefully the Parish Council will look seriously at the appraisal idea. Two further people spoke, although were not recorded, these are given here as extra notes to this interview.*

**Discussions with Joanna Tagney, community artist and performer. She worked with children and adults on the banners for the celebration.**

Joanna Tagney lives in North Cornwall and works in the performance arts as both performer and prop/set producer which includes costume design. Her work involves her in the development and support of celebration events and activities with local communities. Her particular interests are based around the subjects of where you live and

how you are connected to those places. She believes these are especially interesting in the light of the experience of rural communities which are not in her view so dominated by the mass media culture that are readily identified with big urban landscapes. This is not to say that these landscapes do not have importance in these matters and she does, for example, believe that it is good for young people especially, to go off from their homes in the rural areas to university etc. but laments that often they do not return. Without that return and in and out migration she considers new ideas and experiences that could enhance both the environment and the life of the community are lacking.

She tries to combat what she would regard as a passive involvement with the environment through the promotion of much more positive schemes which demand a deeper involvement with them. For her, processes in place and celebration of these processes, can project culture into the landscape. Projects like the well scheme, she believes, give people a sense of identity and add to their sustainability and thus to a local and regional distinctiveness.

For Joanna 'sacred' goes beyond religion. It is about the full wonder of land and ourselves in it. This was the contribution she felt she made to the Well project, working with both school children and parents.

On a more personal basis she stated that she felt that the well has been regarded as a special place where the mundaneness of people's lives can take on the extraordinary. She sees the well as a marker of important places that connects the past with the present and it is this that makes up that extraordinariness.

She also stated, however, that people don't have to be aware of the past to celebrate the site and maybe that celebration could take place every year (an issue discussed in the full interview). By doing so the site and the celebration would become the sense of place in both past and present.

Finally she reminded us that although she had spoken of young people quite a lot it should be remembered that old people always knew it was there and this ensured its regeneration.

## Discussions with Chris Williams, Head Teacher, North Petherwin School.

Most of the discussion centred on the impact of involving children in projects. Although there was little discussion of specifically sacred land, as was true of the main interview, she made the point that this was a very religious community and it need be remembered that in such communities the sacred is often not seen as something beyond but a part of the everyday. A way of comprehending this is by way of a project which is seen as a special event in a special place by both the children and her.

She felt that children had an immediate input into the project. Adults might be planning something for months but the children need a very immediate and practical involvement and that this can add to the freshness and vitality for everyone. She thought children like being part of something bigger than just the thing which happens with other children or through school. They enjoyed working on the project with adults (children involved ranged from 4-11) and playing their role as part of a community. Overall the children, she thought, like doing something concrete, that's important but then so is celebrating what's been done. The children and community do gain beyond enjoying the event and especially the children gain from non-school activity or school activity in a non-school situation and environment.

Children, she stated, reduce a project to a simplified process and they can cut through overtly complex issues with simple solutions which brings about co-operation between the age groups. For example the banner-making was seen by them as a practical issue and that representing the 'Saints', who are special people, was a practical problem that needed to be overcome. The older children especially recognised the intangible values of the project. But equally practical problems give them an input into the tangible.

The project worked because the adults helped the children rather than directed them. The children recognised the holistic nature of the project and were especially fascinated by the medieval guilds. The story that each guild had an input into the land (i.e. owned land and livestock etc.) was espe-

cially interesting to them. It was also the children's input that ensured that they had the best service that the church has seen for years.

The talk by Joanna Mattingly, an expert in Cornish medieval churches, to the children was only partly successful but did help get the parents involved because their children were. There appeared to be general agreement that the process of celebration should carry on and become part of the life of the community.

Chris personally gained from the project because she felt it helped to keep the school and community together (the school is two miles outside the village). It is important for her and the children that the school does not become separated and isolated and that contact with the church as part of the community is maintained.

Finally she felt life should be about celebration in all sorts of forms and that the project had opened the prospect of a yearly celebration. This she felt could be restructured and be made to be part of the year's cycle just as with the seasons.

The school is always looking at these kind of themes.

These projects are a levelling process in the community. The difficulty today in the school is that there is not enough slack to be able to involve the school in extra activities and with no slack it's difficult to develop celebration of being human rather than acquiring human knowledge.



# Jamyang Buddhist Centre: Lambeth, London

*Jamyang Buddhist Centre is a Buddhist community in South London which offers a range of courses on Buddhist teachings and practice. The centre also leads retreats as well as offer its facilities for the benefit of the wider community. The community are from a Tibetan Buddhist tradition.*

*Sacred Land have in the past supported the centre by producing a design for a sacred garden as part of the centre and is currently supporting an arts project at the centre.*

Interviewees: Robin Bath (RB), Trustee of the centre; Alison Murdoch (AM), Director of the centre; Grant Osman (GO), Artist-in-Residence; Dave Benn (D), Bookshop Manager

Can one of you describe the group who works at the centre?

AM. There's actually hundreds of people who work at the centre. As Director I am responsible for fund-raising and overall development. We also have a lot of volunteers who help run the centre. We usually have three or four residential volunteers at any one time on a work programme basis. Then we have other people who come by for half a day or the hour or who come to one of our residential work schemes. Finally the legal responsibility of the centre rests with the trustees.

Can you describe the site and the projects around it?

RB. Perhaps Alison could give us an overall view of what it was like when she first discovered it because that's really quite an important aspect in how we saw the place initially. The vision of it being a potential centre for us as a Buddhist group developed from this. And as I understand it Alison it was you who cycled past it one day.

AM. Yes that's right and it had been unoccupied for five years before that.

Can you describe what it is?

AM. We are sitting here in a Victorian Courthouse, which is now a Tibetan Buddhist centre. Our group has existed for twenty one years, was first a group of meditators meeting in someone's house and then acquired a semi-detached house in Finsbury Park, North London. I think it was about 1992 when our spiritual director who is a Tibetan teacher called Lama Zopa Rinpoche said it was time to look for a larger centre. I was one of the people that he asked to do that and I live in South London near here and so one day I cycled past and saw the building. At the time Mother Teresa's group were trying to buy it but that fell through and we then got locked into a two and half year process to buy the building. Our Tibetan teacher, whose guidance I think we would all accept wholeheartedly, said he thought this was the perfect building for us, and so somehow we purchased it. So to some extent we were guided by him, and to some extent we were building because we had such a struggle acquiring the building versus various developers. All kinds of thing happened. We never really devised a business plan and hadn't looked around after we began the process to acquire the place. We simply knew: this is the building, and we are going to turn this building into a Buddhist facility.

From the very beginning there was a very passionate relationship with the building. In a

lot of ways the building itself, with the guidance from our teacher has shaped what actually happens within it. It wasn't a case of us looking for a courthouse to turn into a Buddhist centre, looking for a building with thirty two rooms, a cell block and a high security courtyard. It was a case of us having a connection with the building, and then once we actually acquired it, we devised a practical way of making it work.

Robin asked me to say something about the time when we first visited the building. When I spoke on the phone to the estate agent I said I know it's been sold to a developer, but tell me a little about it anyway. He said "Well, you come in through the lobby then there's a big central space, with rooms off the sides, and then there's a cell block. I said "It sounds perfect, exactly what we want", and he said "I'm really sorry but it is sold." So I asked him to phone me if anything changed, and it went from there. When we actually came into the building for the first time, I think there were three of us, and it had been empty for about two and a half years. It was completely boarded up, very wet, damp, dark, and unheated, but we walked into the central space, which was the courtroom and immediately got a sense of the potential. Jokes were made that this was built in 1869 but it had to wait a 130 years to find its true purpose; it has been such a good match from that point of view.

There was an architect in the early days who said "This is a wonderful building for volunteers. You'll find the more you strip back the more the better this building will be" and that's been our experience. The horrible grey paint, the barbed wire, the institutional glass partitioning of the thing could be stripped back to something that is very clean, clear, strong, practical, welcoming and everything else. Robin, you might like to add to that.

RB. Well, it leads my thoughts back to the party we had to celebrate the potential of

buying the building, a full year before it became ours.

AM. I always thought it was like blowing the trumpets outside the walls of Jericho. That's just what it felt like. There was an enormous amount of prayer, prayer ceremonies going on all over the world. We had so many people involved in the purchase. There was also a petition among the people that lived locally and every councillor on the planning committee was on our side, so if you wanted to look at it from the spiritual point of view, there was an enormous amount of preparation for our moving in here.

RB. Yes there was. In a fairly abstract way I've got another comment and this is a bit bizarre, but having been the maintenance person of the smaller property, my first thought when I came to see this building was absolute horror. It was partly the state of it being so damp. I looked at this vast place and thought there are enough jobs to do here for a century. I confess I had a completely sleepless night. I've never told you that, but after the first time I visited, I had nightmares the whole night. I don't know if our teacher might have picked up on this but the first task he gave me was to do a specific puja to bring about a new change of energy in the place. He gave me some specific tasks: to take a mirror I think it was one for the main entrance of the building, for the basement area, for all of the rooms. I was also to go into these spaces and offer prayers. For me, this changed my feeling, knowing the history of the building which we haven't mentioned yet. It had been a high security courtroom, a site for IRA trials.

AM. It was the last high security court of first instance for central London, so from 1980 to 1990 it had all the sort of terrorist committals, no not committals, but first hearings happening here. So the IRA, the UVF, the Rasta, everything; people remember the road being closed off, helicopters overhead, marksmen

on the roof. We've got a walkway on the roof, huge great metal gates to the courtyard, and anybody coming through, came in a metal cage and was encased in these tiny cells. The main courtroom was lined with lead against bombings, a generator outside in case of a power cuts and bullet proof glass, which we still have across the back of the building. So it was very intense, and in fact there were a few people, a couple of people I remember specifically, one of them was an ex-probation worker who came to me and said "Look this was a real mistake look I having terrible nightmares about this place we will not be able to turn the energy around." But I think it was the genius of John, the venerable John Feuille who was a resident monk at the time, who said that we should start with the cell block so where as the cell block could have become this pariah, the black hole of the whole thing, it actually started it off. Do you remember stripping those doors? Robin was very involved in that, there were nine layers of grey paint on the cell doors.

Another great powerful thing that happened is that within seven months of acquiring the building we hosted the Kalachakra initiation by a Lama called Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche.

[Can you explain what that is?](#)

AM Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche is one of the teachers of the Dalai Lama who is the leader of our particular type of our Buddhism. A Kalachakra initiation is a ceremony based around a very complex presentation on how time works. It's part of the Tibetan Tantra tradition (if I say that a lot of people might misunderstand because they think of the Indian Tantra - a ceremony based around a sacred text). This is a very rare and special ceremony that lasts two days and people came from all over the world to be a part of it and the huge aim, purpose, is to promote world peace. So we actually had a ceremony from the build-

ing and for me that was the turning point. I felt after that any remnants of the old atmosphere had gone.

DB I noticed a strange thing. There was a mandala (*a map/design of the universe, often created with coloured sands at ceremonies and then swept away symbolising the impermanence of everything*) at the exhibition which was swept up, called a Kalachakra mandala. A mandala is a palace in our terminology; there are many different interpretations of the word; a mandala is a pictorial representation. Afterwards the Kalachakra mandala was swept up and thrown into the river at Lambeth palace. Now two or three years later we got this building. Then another Tibetan group decided that they would make a peace garden just down the road and of course there's Samye Dzung (*another Buddhist Centre*). So I don't know if that mandala was the cause of it all Tibetan places springing up around here.

[You are one of a number of Buddhist centres in this area, is this becoming the centre of Tibetan Buddhism in the country?](#)

AM I wouldn't go so far as to say it's the centre in the country but there is a flourishing activity here that has no particular logic.

[You talked a little about the use of the building could you explain how different groups use or have access to it?](#)

AM Are you thinking of the Buddhist spiritual community or the local geographical community?

[Both, perhaps you would like to explain how the two relate.](#)

RB Leading on from what we said about the initial need and the impetus to try and get the building ready, we weren't ready to offer teachings for a while. Except we did have core teaching sessions which ran all the time

and from which there was never a break. There were things that went on all the time, but in a sense we held back, thinking that when the building was a bit tidier we could open our door to a greater number of people. That seems to have worked really wonderfully does it?

AM. We had a constantly increasing number of people coming here. We try various ways to be open to local people, and open to more people in general, through open days, and advertising in publications like Time Out and Hot Tickets. This always amuses me because it is much easier for us to do these types of things than a Christian organisation.

We run quite a complex education programme, there is usually events happening here a minimum of five or six days a week. We run evening classes at 7.30 and a lot of the time we have two running at the same time; then we run weekend events and workshops. We have a two year course on Tibetan Buddhism and have just finished the first one. It's in six modules and is designed to fit into western education systems. So we see very much as an educational organisation with a range of activity from very 'soft' stuff like Relaxation & Meditation, for which you don't need to be a Buddhist nor would you need to be involved in any religion to take part; right up to very complex philosophical studies. We do a nine day silent retreat, and about sixteen days of very intensive retreat over Christmas. We also look at cultural aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and have language courses; and then of course we have the library, bookshop and a video library.

RB. We are also trying to offer something for children so as to include every age group.

**Do you work with schools?**

RB. Yes, that been lovely.

AM. That's been grand, we had something like 250 school children visit the building in 1998, and we are involved with things like standing bodies for religious education. We also do a bit of teacher training.

RB. In some ways the uniqueness of the building must be fun for school children because they get the two things. They come to an original building and see the cells and things and then they have a presentation on Buddhism.

AM. Someone told me they took their school children to visit a project near here recently and the children said, "This is really boring can't we go back to the Buddhist Centre instead?" So that's the education side of Jamyang.

We share the building with different people, and want to keep the building open to the local community. We said right from the beginning when we were fighting the developers who wanted to turn the building into flats, that we wanted to keep this building as a community building with community use. For example last Sunday was the fourth anniversary of us buying the building. We had an open day and a Christmas Bazaar, with candle lit prayers for world peace, and Robin did a slide show about his recent trip to Ladakh. Events like that have always been a popular success, and we always have well over a hundred people come.

DB. In fact the interesting thing about Sunday was that the majority of people were newcomers. Probably they were local people as there weren't many of our regular members.

AM. About 20 or 30 people who came asked about opening hours and they were all newcomers. We have always said it will open to local people and one of the nice ways that happened, is that we opened a



meeting/training room right at the beginning. Here we thought, rather than attract other Buddhist groups, or offering yoga and Tai chi, activities people normally associate with as 'alternative', we actually gave them mainstream. The building is used 2 or 3 days a week by healthcare organisations, drug organisations, homelessness groups, the London Cycling Campaign and Water Aid; a whole range of groups that people wouldn't normally come to a Buddhist centre for. The trade seems to be that we can offer a personal, warm, friendly, non-institutional space and also a very peaceful atmosphere and that's extremely popular. For me one of the high-points this year, was when I was running a training course for homelessness workers in central London about six months ago. A young black lad said, "Oh yes, I went to a course a bit like this last year at some Buddhist centre in South London" and I was absolutely delighted that there had been that contact. The door is open. People realised this wasn't a closed or weird thing, that we don't have drugs, we don't have bear feet, so it's all very positive. We have a therapy room and overnight accommodation, and that's probably mainly it. In the future there will be the development of the café and the garden as well.

**Can you say a little bit about the intentions for the café and the garden?**

AM. At the moment we have a tea room and the wish has always been to open that up as a café for local people. It's something that's really lacking in this part of London. We feel this would be a very nice mix, of who we are and what we do, and what we could offer people, that is - a tranquil environment that's not commercial, a warm welcome, and a bit of peace and quiet.

This will help people in need, this kind of thing. In a lot of ways it will be our outreach, and it will have a separate entrance from the

street with wheelchair access so that people don't have to come through the rather scary door into the Buddhist Centre; but can benefit in the most general way from what Buddhism has to offer by using the café. We have explored it in a bit more detail now and we are also looking into whether we could offer a very low cost period during the afternoons, which would offer services to the elderly, isolated or vulnerable people. We are also looking at whether we could employ people who are mental health service users of the café and are also looking at food delivery. We have been asked if we could take up catering contracts. We already work with asylum seekers and the possibilities are very interesting. So its being set up now as a separate company that will rent this part of the building.

AM. The thing about the café is that activities here are slightly divided into education and health, which seems very appropriate for a Buddhist group. Suddenly we found, for example, we are a leading healthy living initiative, and we are bringing together about 20 local health care providers, who seem very happy for a Buddhist organisation to be doing so. It is seen as, very neutral, sensitive and listening, and bringing together new initiatives. We are involved in things like cycling, active transport and projects like that, so the health side of things is running ahead. These will link with the garden because the entrance to the café will be from this space which at the moment is a horrible concrete bard wire courtyard.

RB. When we had the smaller place in Finsbury Park, one of its advantages was that it had a small but well-used garden especially in the summer. People could go outside and sit down and relax. On the way here I was thinking how incredibly important a bit of open space is for people in London. A lot of us live in flats or in areas that are predominantly concrete. So in a sense, to offset the practice we do inside the building, being in

an enclosed room and meditating, its really good to have the contrast of being outside in the open air with tactile things around you, which puts you back in the real world. I think the garden in particular can be a focus of energy for people in the city. We've got people in the community who are gardeners, artists and sculptors; so with the guidance of our teacher and some reasonably good plans it can be, a delightful spot even though it's a small area.

AM. It will be of interest to local organisations. There are two garden projects with people with learning difficulties in close distance from here. We are also working with Lambeth College who use the building as a training site. I was even approached, last month, by an organisation working with day centres for homeless people who said they were looking for site to work on. Actually the local special school mentioned it as well so there's incredible potential for a real sense of ownership for the building of this place.

You have spoken a lot about all these various initiatives you have had and you must of been in contact with lots of outside agencies and you talk about being accepted by them because they feel that perhaps there is a neutrality there can you explain that a little more what you mean by that.

AM. Its difficult for me to second guess what's in other peoples heads but I can say in pursuing a fairly radical approach to community involvement, we have had nothing but encouragement. Nobody has ever turned round to me and said why is a Buddhist organisation coming to this meeting what are you doing here what have you got to contribute. For example, for over a year we have been involved in the Elephant Links Partnership (*the centre is in the Elephant and Castle area of London*).

DB. Were are actually just over the borough

borderline as far as that project goes, and I thought we would need a passport to attend.

AM. People just seemed to be comfortable with the fact that we have something valid to contribute and I think its fair to say we get warm responses from people all the time. This is complimented by their visits to the building. Grant, you have taken lots of visitors around; maybe you want to say something?

GO. Yes; people are always happy to have seen the building even if there just coming out of curiosity. Particularly when they see some of the major projects, and they're here in the large Buddhist room that's been completed, they immediately get filled with a sense of well-being and a joy of the space. Obviously they want to come back, and often feel surprised they haven't been here before. We have groups in the evening, and last night we had a large group. One of the ladies commented about how we all talk so nicely to each other, which made her wonder what happens here. Normally, she said, in meetings in other places you are trying to deal with other people, and she felt that here there is a great sense of release; people relax.

DB. From my point of view the most important thing about Jamyang is this harmony between members of the staff. There doesn't seem to be any abrasion at all. I've never noticed any.

AM. Well, the building work is in progress, but I suspect we're all work in progress. We're very open about that and to me that's one of the strengths and joys of working here. I'll come back from a meeting and say, "You know, I always want to be a model Buddhist at these meetings, especially for those that have never met a Buddhist before, but I really blew it this morning. Does anybody mind if I go and sit for half an hour and relax?" That fits in; its part of the atmosphere here.

GO. I think there's an acceptance, and it's through acceptance I think, that everyone's working towards something on a daily basis. Everyone accepts we're all human and we're all moving towards similar values or aims in life.

AM. It's quite funny; I remember Claire coming here recently. She'd been doing temporary work for the government and she said "Ah! What a relief to be here; it's so peaceful" and she looked forward to coming here as a kind of sanctuary; a place that would actually support her in her values and where she wanted to be. That's a kind of dream for me because its how can you help people find villages of like minded people in the city. You can help people to swim against the currents within. It's rare. One of my dreams is that people won't necessarily come here to go to a particular event, but will come simply because it's here. It's a space offering something they need, in a city where so many people are living in cramped spaces or living with people who don't actually share the same aspirations and energies.

RB. Or they're simply lonely too; it's a huge problem in a big city isn't it?

AM. Yes that's true, and many of the people who for example, will come and help during the work camp haven't got anything to do with Buddhism at all. People will take a weeks holiday to come and help on the building.

RB. We've had people who have had a full work day and have come here and worked until 11 at night.

AM. ...and then thanked us!

RB. Yes.

AM. I believe in the building very strongly

from that point of view. I know it can go to far the other way, and you get 'stuck' on a building and spend all your time destroying yourself. Churches can spend all their time raising money for the fabric, but in our particular case the fabric has been nothing but an advantage. For us just the experience itself of doing the meditation room....

GO. Yes, I think one thing that happens here, is that you end up in this enormous chain of events which become a pattern, like painting a room in an old Victorian courthouse in a traditional Tibetan style. I think of myself sitting up there, having been born in a very small town in Wales, and ending up working on this room in London, following a tradition that's thousands of years old, in a space that was never intended for it. It is interesting to think of these different places and my passage through them being linked together to enable me to reach the point where I could put the brush on the wall. It's quite phenomenal.

*You talked about like minded people but have you ever picked up on someone who has come through the door very reluctantly but actually stayed here very willingly?*

AM. We did, even last night one of the people coming to a meeting admitted she was a member of the Salvation Army. She's a real character. I said I think about 80% of what we both do is the same and she was obviously really shocked by this. Then she started saying Buddha a real person, and what had happened, and all sorts of things. Then she said "I've got to say something to you. I'm a bit nervous about saying this and hope you don't mind. Everything is so quiet and peaceful here and our meetings aren't always quiet and peaceful. Does it matter if we do some shouting at each other in the meeting room?" And I said, "Listen, we're not perfect." So that was just an example. And that sort of thing happens here. At first sight of the Buddha,

she was actually in panic, that kind of panic where people have been slightly indoctrinated that Buddha is a slightly scary, weird thing. She left with some very positive feelings.

I think nearly all the people who ask for the meeting room, are repeat bookings. We usually get a really positive response. If people had a negative response I think we would hear about it. We do sometimes get comments about the fact that the centre is all vegetarian. Definitely people have a problem with that, and also we are going to have to sort something out for the smokers. Grant have you ever had negative responses?

GO. No I haven't. I think because everybody puts a strong emphasis on the teachings, particularly if they are interpreted by the Dalai Lama's commentaries, people can accept difference, and you can have dialogue. I think a lot of people here are familiar with that idea. To a lot of people you say "Yes, we accept what your faith is and yes, dialogue is great; and isn't it great we can meet on this common ground." I think people soften to that idea but are not always familiar with that thought. We need to accept that people are very different and to enjoy that.

AM. If I had a criticism of this place it's that it isn't as peaceful as people expect. They think they are going to come into somewhere where there is always some one to listen, a very slow, quiet place, and I rush around most of the time at a rate of knots wearing a suit. But it's still a different way of getting things done; it's always about 'being', coming back to the being-ness of the centre. We have a trust that if we get that right, the action will flow out of that. We don't actually have to push; simply being here and practising here seems to be one of the greatest contributions we have got to make.

The Elephant and Castle area was always

known as a bit of a no-go area it could be a bit hard yet there is this Buddhist centre right in the heart of it, that creates a certain image. You seemed to have been accepted that there is no animosity or even cynical curiosity that you often get in derived areas.

AM. I think that works in our favour. It's much easier being here than say in the middle of the green belt to be honest, because I think people are already quite imaginative and radical. We are already accepted as a minority ethic group. That's one of the few things that can help us if we are looking for funding support from the council and so on. I'm not speaking for all the members who live in the community but certainly from the organisations that we work with, I think it helps that we're right in the centre of it.

DB. That traditional view of South London isn't the reality of the people who live here. You just go down the road into Battersea you'll find a Kurdish cultural centre, African churches and much more. I think people round here, in the main, have a multicultural outlook.

Are you part of the post-war inner city diversity? The vast majority of sacred sites, in this country are Christian Churches yet it is inner cities that you find diversity Sikh Gurudwaras, Hindu temples, Islamic Mosques and much more that you often don't see in rural areas.

AM. Our main charitable objective is to make the teaching of Tibetan Buddhism available to people in the UK, and we started with London. I think we are doing that and I think we are actually offering a very pure tradition. The Tibetan Lama that lives here has got an equivalent of a doctorate philosophy degree that took him eighteen years, and he speaks extremely good English. So the very traditional Tibetan Buddhism on offer is accessible and I'm terribly concerned that we maintain



that. That's our strength really - hard at the centre with this classic tradition. We are not rushing to turn it into English Buddhism because it's too early, we have got too much to learn before anything like that happens. We want to give people a pure undiluted tradition and that's at the centre, at the core. That's where our strength comes from, and then we are soft round the edges.

*It seems you are doing two things. You are a religious group with a specific religious text, which you wish to maintain and make more available. But you are using that text in an outreach way and through that you have an enormous audience. People that you don't ever expect to become Buddhist benefit because of your Buddhism.*

RB. Certainly it's our understanding that our teacher has always stressed that we are not here to push Buddhism in any sense we are here to be an open family for those who want to join in. All of us work from that principle and it's very important that that's understood when you come to the door.

Lama Yeshe, and the Dalai Lama, talk about one of the essences of Buddhism is really to be of service for humanity. That's really the whole of the outreach thing.

AM. We kind of explore how we can outreach to people based around here, even though I'm extremely concerned about things that are happening on the other side of the world. However, for me there's an innate gladness and good sense to be of service to people immediately around us, particularly where we are situated in an area where there are things we can offer. One of the extraordinary things about working here, for me, has been the lack of strategy, the lack of targets drawn up in advance. It's been very organic, very responsive; and it's all happened from the heart if not from the stomach. The instinct on how the place is going to develop, and as

you were saying, how people are going to help. Grant is an example, offering to come and paint, and then this wonderful project was born (*referring to Grant's project for the meditation room*). In the three months that he has been here a huge artist-in-residence project arose. But I didn't sit and think "Gosh, in 1999 we want to decorate the meditation room." Then it happened; somebody offered us a thousand pounds as an offering to do something nice with the building. We had a jumble sale that raised extra money, but even then I didn't worry about how it would get done. It's an unfolding miracle to use a term from another religious tradition. There's a sense that if we get the basic things right, and particularly if we get our own practice right, it will continue to happen.

Sometimes people say "Goodness, it's getting amazingly bigger and bigger, and more and more money is raised with fund raising schemes." It's so successful, then you fall back on another key Buddhist teaching: everything changes, everything's impermanent, and for all I know something awful could happen and this building won't exist when the new millennium starts. That's my practice as well; that's ok as well. So from that point of view there's an amazing lack of anxiety which has helped me to direct it for the last five years. Everything is grist for the mill. I can see people using the place to transform their minds, which in the end, is the only purpose of the entire thing. On that basis we can do what some people would think are incredible risks and you know or experiments and everything else just flows.

*On the question of grand strategies and targets, if you want to look at the issue of sustainability, sustainable development, at the moment it is dominated by that sort of agenda. But it's about organic process and growth. Does that give you problems in practice particularly in things like fund raising?*

AM. Well I think Buddhism is a very practical rational thing as well, very pragmatic, so if someone is offering us some money on the basis of us having targets and even god help having a time frame we usually rise to it. I have no problems writing that stuff if I need to. To be quite honest it's like the froth on a cappuccino; for me it's not the flavour of the coffee.

RB. Having said that it's good at this point to voice our gratitude to Alison who has been in the captain's seat, so to speak. Some of us as Buddhists are very much sitting on cushions inward thinking and not really practically gifted to communicate with the outside world. But fortunately with our manager, and someone like Alison, we have got people who can work in these areas as well. It's been lovely to see how more professionals have been drawn to us over the years; so little by little we have had the expertise to help society.

Its hasn't always been like that; there have been parts of our history where we've just muddled along in a very amateurish way.

[You almost seemed to be expressing a Buddhist definition of sustainability.](#)

AM. I think there is flexibility but the key thing is that the building is here to help you develop. My personal policy on employment is "How do we make it possible? How do we do the things they want to do here?" For example, the manager; it was necessary to pay a salary that enabled the manager to live out, not well paid, but not on the poverty line and that's always been the policy. Picking up Robin's point about amateurism I think it's very important he raised that because there's a very exciting juxtaposition of having this very relaxed approach to everything, but also being as professional as we can. For example, we have just got our first domain name, so I am now 'alison@jamyang.uk. We're network-

ing with computers. We have very sophisticated design programmes for all these kind of things. We have just done our first equal opportunities recruitment; we recruited a new manager, which is a key post, using things like the South London Press (*a local newspaper*) and it was very exciting. It drew Buddhists out of the woodwork we didn't even know about and non-Buddhists as well. We made two exciting appointments as a result of that. So it's certainly not about being wishy-washy in the way the place is run. We have raised £400,000 for the roof next year and none of our funders would have given us resources if they thought we were wishy-washy.

RB. We encourage volunteers and newcomers to find a level at which they feel they can work for us. They get an awful lot of comfort and contentment from other people in the team, and from seeing that other people around on a professional level can in fact elevate their own skills. For example, Grant had people working for him that weren't trained artists but who have contributed tremendously.

AM. We have an active programme of helping people to go on training courses, helping people to develop themselves in more ways than one.

DB. Buddha says test his teachings and the teachings are very interesting on this point. Say we need a computer expert basically the collective karma of everyone is that this person will appear. There's no point in me being around if the teachings don't work.

[Taking this point about the teacher and teachings, the teacher student relationship is about each making sure they are right for each other. Is there a sense in which you as a community are testing whether you are right for the wider community or indeed that they are right for you?](#)

AM. People definitely link up with us now not just because of the teacher or teachings but because of the style and atmosphere of the centre.

The garden is not yet in place and the building, at least from the exterior looks pretty much as it did when you first moved in and you are in the middle of one of the most densely and deprived populated areas of London, which is primary concrete in its nature. What are your aspirations for pursuing environmental initiatives, and what do you hope to create?

DB. I was at a meeting a little while ago and people were asked, what were their gripes about the area, what should be changed, and what they thought it would be like in twenty years time. Many wanted to see the Thames as a river you could swim in and have beaches alongside. It became quite apparent there were many like-minded people in tenants associations and things like that and once we make a beautiful garden it will act as an inspiration and many people will follow the example.

There is a Buddhist teaching that the lotus flower springs from the mud and the environment around here is like the mud. As we put our fingers into more social issues like homelessness, refugees, drugs and I can see people getting strength from that and helping to improve the rest of the environment.

RB. Its amazing how the energy is shooting up at a terrific rate. I think it would be wrong of us seeing that as the result of our energy in coming here but in the short time since we have been here, there have been many changes. The hospital at the back is undergoing changes and so there will be changes in the environment there. The fire station to the south of us was fairly derelict and that's in the process of being renovated. Fortunately it will

be kept in the same Victorian style and that will definitely impact on all the street and make it environmentally very strong. The pub to the north of us was fairly run down that's been renovated.

I distinctly remember Lama Zopa and our teacher Geshe Tashi Tsering gazing out of our front door towards the huge police station in front of them and saying isn't that shame that it isn't lower, so who knows even that might change in the future as well.

AM. There are some obvious things to say about the Buddha, respect for the environment and wise selfishness in looking after that, in tiny ways as well as in big ways. I don't think we need a big stretch of coastline here and we don't need a huge national park here. Every blade of grass becomes very precious, every plant and tree is precious. Every bit of picking up litter, every bit recycling is important. We can use the garden as a way of demonstrating good practice. That's sounds like a bit of jargon, but we can do it, and share that with school children and inspire ourselves. But I don't really know what's going to come out of that. It comes back to not really planning things. I think the garden will grow in its own way.

RB. It was lovely to share with people the joy we had when His Holiness The Dalai Lama came in May and planted the tree, and the garden got its initial boost. Also to express our delight in the Tibetan Peace Garden, which is within walking distance from here, we can all share in the pleasure of it.

AM. Its odd the way things mature. When we first got planning permission to make changes to the building our architect drew it with traditional Victorian railings. A few months ago I was having a look at the budget, and blow me, they had costed it at £50,000. That just got me thinking why on earth are we putting another barrier to the outside

world. So we got new designs drawn up and we are now having box hedges, cycle park and chairs, and tables between the hedges that will take us out of the building. We have got a lovely idea of having a seat for the public on one side and a sculpture in front of the building on the main axis. So that's an example of how things move along and I think if we made that very green statement right on to the pavement and also that gesture of welcoming, by offering people somewhere to sit without having to come into the centre. Well these are the sort of things we are doing.

DB. My overall impression is that as this place has grown, the teacher has now gone into a much bigger phase of the course. Now were getting up to Leeds, and Preston, and various places outside of London to do the teachings. But also seeing him here with a Kangal drill knocking out the toilets in the cells, and the dust and stuff...

RB. Well, it's been an inspiration for us hasn't it?

AM. Well he's the role model really, with this incredible sense of doing whatever needs to be done and he's gets straight on and does them. And that's the Tibetan role. He's the steady smiling welcoming presence around the building; the stable person around the building the whole time.

AM. A very simple way that it works is through motivation. Most organisations have to spend an enormous amount of time on the whole question of human motivation. Even, say in the homelessness world, people start off with the most marvellous motivation but it burns out, it's not sustainable, they're not given support and methods and help. And motivation is one of the key things in Buddhism. And what also gets mixed up with motivation is money, which there isn't a lot of around here.

RB. I saw a lovely film last night, a talk the

Dalai Lama gave. He ended it on the aspect of motivation. He said we should have a good kind heart and compassion, and let that be your motivation in the morning and a few quite minutes and then apply that to whatever you do in life teachers, lawyers whatever you do.



# Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple: Tividale, West Midlands

Interviewees: Tony Thapar (TT), Landscape Architect; S. Jegan Mohan (SJ), Temple Trustee and civil engineer.

*The Shri Venkateswara (Balaji) Temple project is developing a temple with grounds on an ex-industrial dumping site of approximately 12 acres. It is situated in the middle of an urban mix of light industry and residential development in the West Midlands. The temple devotees are largely from families originally from Southern India where the original temple is sited. It is planned that the temple and grounds should be as accessible to the wider community as possible. To meet this objective Tony, the landscape architect, has created many projects around the landscaping which bring together a wide variety of community and environmental groups from the area. The project has received national publicity due in part to the nature of these schemes.*

**Can you describe the groups that are working on the landscape projects?**

SJ. The majority of the people who are involved in this project are from India or Sri Lanka, that is where the families come from. But the project is from all communities in the area so we have people from all over India who originate from North and South India, South Africa and the UK, all taking part in the project.

TT. In the last year we have teamed up with various organisations: The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, British Waterways, and Sandwell Health Authority. They have been the main organisations as well as artists who have helped us a lot and there is a local project called Churches Link Project.

Schools are another group, the local special school and the secondary schools in the area along with primary schools, have all joined in "The trees of time and place" project we run.

The site is a former a landfill site about twelve and a half acres in size. Nothing was available so the Trust managed to buy the site from the Black Country Development Corporation in the early 90's. What we are trying to do is reclaim the whole site in three phases. The first phase is construction of the main temple buildings. After that we have the multi-cultural centre which is probably about nine acres, which combined with the landscape is about creating resources for the wider community as well as for ourselves. In developing those resources we are addressing three main themes and they are arts, health and environment.

**How do the different groups, either devotees or conservation volunteers and others, work and relate to each other?**

TT. Some of the devotees like doing conservation work. The BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) and the Health Authority are helping to develop the site into what is called a healthy living centre, for the locals. What we want to do is develop the site for people to come and use the resources, such as the proposed green gym, and we see that involvement as a way of helping to develop the landscape. Some of our colleagues who have recently joined us have started using the site as a resource for art and design students. We have a student, from

Sandwell College, with us today who is starting to do a sculpture for the site. It is a two-way thing: they see us as a source of inspiration and we like to use them to develop the site at the same time. This process also helps to get the younger generation involved. They see something positive coming out of it in terms of things like tree planting and it gets them involved because the younger generation doesn't necessarily get enthusiastic about the religious part of a temple but they understand what tree planting means, what it means to help the environment.

The landscape work pushes the religious side to the background. For example the local residents are helping with the litter picking along the canal and they have come on the site to see what is going on at the temple and on the land. It has helped cross those cultural gaps which exist in the community at the moment and it's made the project a lot more accessible to people.

**Can you explain how and why the project came about in the first place?**

SJ. Basically, back in 1974 there was a small group of three or four families who formed together to set up a religious group. They would meet in each other's houses. That gradually grew and it grew into a group in 1984 whose aim was to try and build a temple. They then spent about 8 to 10 years looking for a piece of land where they would be able to build a temple. They looked all over Birmingham and eventually they found this piece of land which was bought for a reasonable sum of money and planning permission was given. So the whole idea came from this small group of people who said that we must have a place of worship for ourselves.

Initially we were going to build a relatively small temple but then, like everything else, people have better ideas.

**So there was no specific association with this particular site prior to the purchase?**

SJ. Yes that's right. As you know it was extremely difficult to find a site with permission for this sort of activity and we were pleased to get this piece of land. From a religious point of view it was a very good piece of land because it has water next door to it and it has got a hill behind it so it has got all the features that you would normally associate with a piece of land as a temple. It is in a way ideal but we still would have taken it if it didn't have the canal and hill as it was the only land that came to us.

**Can you explain the significance of the canal and the hill?**

TT. The Balaji Temple in India is on top of a hill and it has seven hills around it, and that is basically the association. I don't fully understand all the religious association, but from the water point of view, Hindus have water and fire as an integral part of the religion and we tend to use running water for a lot of things.

**Can you tell me what are the main objectives of the project?**

SJ. The main object is obviously a temple and also to provide a service to the community. This will include a community centre for people to come along to and do some of the things that are currently lacking in the area. We are doing a study to find out what's needed. Essentially it is a project that will provide a service to the community in terms of activities, play areas for local schools to come and do nature studies. It was conceived as a joint thing but as a group we are relatively small so we see how it develops over the years at the moment we are constrained by finances.

**Bearing in mind your limited resources, what**

sort of needs do you think you will be able to address by having the project here?

TT. Well, from research and from talking to local people the most important thing is that there is a lack of clean green space in the area. The residents are all fighting to keep this area the way that it is (*most of the 12 acres is open land and adjoins another green area*) for their own recreation, and we support that. Following that, we are in an area that has suffered from industrial activity for many years. In terms of conservation and wildlife there isn't a lot of value here at the moment and as Hindus it is important for us to respect the earth and to heal the earth whenever we partake in activities. That is one of our objectives. The other fundamental thing about the project is for us to build relationships with other communities. Hopefully this is going to happen through projects like the green gym activities, the community centre, the schools coming in and taking part in activities on the site and for us to exchange cultures and traditions with each other. Overall we hope the whole community will respect the earth and pick up techniques which they can try at home and which will help to increase their environmental awareness.

Can you explain what is meant by a green gym?

TT. The Green gym was started by BTCV in Oxfordshire. GP's patients, instead of being told to go to a traditional type of gym for exercise, they may be elderly or with learning difficulties etc., were sent to an open site to take part in practical conservation work and get fresh air. That way they contribute and at the same time get their hearts working and benefit physically as well as mentally from coming to the site.

You talked about your faith which gives you certain responsibilities. How is that managed by the faithful and shared with the wider

community?

SJ. I think what we want people to do is to appreciate the culture and not to be daunted by it and for them to learn about us and for us to learn about them. We see it as a two-way thing. We will most probably get people to come and talk about our culture and understand what the religion is all about, particularly the children. We will try and get people to come in and talk every Sunday and that will be open to everybody to come along. Basically the temple will be open to everybody, it will not be restricted. The only thing that we will ask people is to abide by the simple rule of taking their shoes off. But essentially this temple is open to the public and there will be no restrictions. But the important thing is that young people can be switched off by sitting in a church or temple but the Sacred Land Project is demonstrating what their culture and religion is about. It is something practical and tangible for them to take part in. From there on they may be more interested in the more theoretical side and if not, that is fine, the thing is that they are involved actively in some way.

You mentioned that you are trying to increase the wildlife in the area. What other benefits are there for the wider community?

TT. For the wider community, when the site has been developed, it will be a place not just for recreation but for meditation as well, it won't just be a matter of coming to the temple but you will be able to sit on one of the hills and have a half hour to sit down quietly by yourself and escape from life and relax. That is what is lacking here, somewhere safe and beautiful to do that.

What benefits do you think you have gained by being involved in this?

SJ. Well, I am one of those people who has always been involved in some sort of charita-

ble work so it was something that interested me. I have never been in a situation where I have not done any charitable work in my life. Essentially I came to Birmingham and I happened to get involved in the group and I contributed to the group in my own way. Now I am not a particularly religious person by any means, but for me I enjoy doing work for nothing. Basically that is my objective. I get satisfaction from doing that and that's the benefit I get. I taught English to the Vietnamese boat people when they came in 1978 that was the beginning of my activities.

TT. The biggest benefit for me is seeing the youth group getting involved in the project. Seeing them getting enthusiastic about it, hopefully they will take the message on and they will stay interested in environmental issues. The Trustees of the temple generally tend to be of the older generation and there is definitely a gap of understanding between the Trustees and the management of the temple with regard to the younger group. We (*the groups involved in the landscape project*) to a certain extent fill in that gap but it's not working very well at the moment. Nevertheless that is the role we are playing in terms of being intermediaries to get the message across, because it is not always easy to get the message over to the youth.

**Do you have a full range of ages of people involved in the project?**

SJ. Yes, the Chairman of the organisation is about 63 or 64 and it goes from that age range down to my son for example who is 14. Another example is a youth camp we have in July. We have children down to the age of 8 who spend 3 days in the youth camp. On the religious side we are working to give them opportunities to get around and get the older generation involved and hopefully we can achieve this.

**This is a major project with the size of the site**

**and the funds needed to build the temple. It must involve to some degree the entire Hindu community of the country. What effect do you think it has had upon them to be involved?**

SJ. The main benefit is to provide them with a place to worship. The location is important because most of the Indian temples are in London and the northern population doesn't have many places to go and so we will provide a facility for them to come along. Also there is no recreation area in the other temples, such as ours will have, in the whole of the UK. All the other temples are temples without much by way of grounds. In modern times you don't get many opportunities to contribute to the building of a temple because not many temples are built as a general rule.

**You have pushed the environmental side of the project, with the landscaping. Do you feel people will come from around the country and take back some of that message and look at their own environments in a different way?**

SJ. It's definitely a long-term objective for people to take messages from this site and on how we run the activities here. Today people came to plant trees and they see this as a focus for the type of activity that they should be doing. If they start building their own temples in the future from wherever they come from they may take up the ideas we have developed here. It's a bit too early to expect them to take anything back at present. They haven't got round to the ideas that Tony has on temple landscapes, like greenhouses and doing all the sorts of various things that he has done. It needs to mature for another 2/3 years before the message gets across. At the moment all they see is barren land, grass growing and tree saplings which are hardly visible, so we can't expect significant messages to go back from people who come here at the moment. But later we will get the message across, it will take time.



# Sue Clifford, Director of Common Ground

I am Sue Clifford a founder Director of Common Ground.

My own background is as a Geographer, followed by a Planning Degree, followed by work in private consultancy up in Edinburgh, where I did mainly regional and rural planning followed by landscape work as well, as I worked with a Landscape Architect. Then having had a break and travelled for a while I began work in 1970 as a Lecturer in natural resources planning at the Polytechnic of Central London, and then moved on to University College London.

At the same time, around 1970 or 1971, I was casting around for help with ideas that were already beginning to formulate in my mind, about ecological connections within planning, and I became involved with an organisation which was trying to set itself up: that was Friends of the Earth, and at some point I became a member of the Board of Directors. So alongside my university teaching, instead of doing straightforward research I was always persuading the people who were my employers as a full-time Lecturer that action research related to this organisation was equally important.

So throughout the 1970's (it seems strange looking back at that time), Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and a lot of the other big organisations were involved in creating the environmental movement.

But towards the end of this time, by the

early 1980's, I believe that many of these organisations to a large extent had lost their own way and didn't quite know why they were doing things or what they should be pitching at. There were three of us who felt this, and we met through Friends of the Earth: myself and Angela King who was their very first wild life campaigner, and Roger Deacon who started doing odd bits and pieces for them in the latter part of the 1970's.

What was bothering us was that Friends of the Earth, which had grown out of passion, had become entrapped by more and more scientised, mechanistic, legalistic demands. For example, we were sitting for a hundred days in an enquiry about nuclear power in Windscale, employing QC's etc., etc., but what had been originally hugely important - helping people locally understand and stand up for things - was becoming more and more marginal

As we saw it, we had to invent the movement again. I'm sure this has to happen in every generation - it's happening all over the place now. We had to try and work out a way in which people could stand up for what they value in their own place, so having watched Friends of the Earth become over-scientised, we also recognised that so many other people were engaged in conservation of the 'specials', the 'spectacular', the 'endangered'. We had done it too, and we think it has to be done, but what we saw as much more important was the whole matrix, the whole thing about the everyday, the commonplace, the ordinary, and the importance of anybody and everybody becoming involved in the grand project of an ecological, ethical movement forward.

So we took on ideas which were going to be about the local - and by that we meant neighbourhood, parish, not the local authority. We wanted to take on the ordinary, we wanted to take on an idea that people can do it for themselves, that they know about it and all they need, in many cases, is some confidence in

themselves and some feeling that they can make their voice heard. If there were ways of converging, getting together to stand up for something, that would be very good.

As an organisation the first thing we realised was that we were going to have an uphill struggle. As soon as you step into all of these areas that we are talking about - the ordinary value-laden things, subjective and emotional - then we lose the easy, familiar foundation of being able to count it, cost it, put some kind of strait-jacket around it. We were swimming in a sea of intangibles of all kinds, and we said 'How are we going to make our voice heard, how is anybody going to listen, because everything is gravitating more and more towards the economic? How do we hold back some of that, how do we help create parallel languages?' I say 'parallel', because we need all of that measurement as well, we weren't saying 'that's all wrong', we were saying, 'it's not all right, because there is a whole lot of other stuff that has to go in here as well, which is getting left behind, evermore left behind.'

So here we were trying to think through an idea of bringing in more subjectivity and more passionate argument and it was at that point that we realised that we were going to need all kinds of help in all kinds of ways and we realised that poets, painters, writers and composers - people who deal from the inside outwards - would and could be, not only allies, but also could explore with us and be fellow-travellers in our new quest.

I think we would now describe it as being much more about story-telling and meanings, although we didn't perceive what we were doing as that back then. What we realised was that to some degree everybody brings something to the table, and what we wanted to do was create the circumstances for people to value their own values, while at the same time we were bringing a lot of baggage with us, we weren't simply coming in and saying, 'What do you all want?' We weren't doing that at all, we were coming in and saying 'We

feel that these are some of the right ways forward, where do you sit in relation to this?' and while we were willing to be pushed and pulled to some extent we obviously had our own centre which was very important. That always goes on the table and is very clear, but what we recognised in all that, is that if we can help people recognise that they were experts then we would be getting somewhere, and of course as soon as you ask someone what they value they start telling you the stories that are attached to the places, the customs, the food, whatever it might be that they value. Then they are the experts and they lean forward and start telling you, rather than leaning back and expecting you to do something for them, or in fear of what other people might do to them.

I think one of the things we were always certain about was that 'the community' was many-faceted and had all kinds of ways of communicating within itself. It means that every shared story would also be several different ways of telling the story. For some people that is one of the great complications of dealing with small places, small details and real localities: the same story may have lots of different strands of telling. But there may also be lots of different ways in which people are triggered into telling the story. Some of them might be just a few paving stones along the street, a time of year etc., etc., so it's a wonderfully multi-faceted beast.

Where do you think sacred space comes into it?

It has always been interesting to me that one of the first active state-promoted ideas of sacred space in this country was to do with National Parks. All of the earlier ones were mountains and I think that's very fascinating to speculate where that came from and why. It's very complicated and certainly on the face of it nothing to do with sacredness, but there is something of it there. In reaction to that we were standing up and saying, 'Putting a ring

round these things isn't good enough. What about all the rest?' Putting a ring around your idea of National Park by definition indicates that the rest is not worth so much effort, and we think that this is wrong. I think from the beginning what we all said to ourselves is that it is important that people define things for themselves. It could be sacred or purely historical, or just to do with butterflies or whatever it was that turned them on, but it was really important that they themselves defined that. They may disagree or agree with professionals from the outside, whether it be a whole band of vicars, or scientists who are interested in geology or whatever it might be. What we were trying to do was to get people to claim their place in such a way that they would stand up for it in the face of whoever came towards them saying, 'We want to develop this, we want to put a ring round that', because of each of these can be a dangerous way forward.

*But nevertheless you worked in areas with rings around them, the Parish map initiative was a case in point.*

We define Parish very differently. You see, what we were saying was 'We need a word that describes a small place,' and we looked at 'locality', 'neighbourhood' - we looked at all these words which are actually current but they are all very cold words, and the word that kept coming back to us was something that had a longevity and a sense of something significant about it - the word 'parish'. But we said 'you must define this for yourself - it doesn't have to be the ecclesiastical parish, it doesn't have to be the civil parish. It is a boundary of your choosing, if you want to choose a boundary at all.'

Within the Parish maps project a lot of people did choose a parish boundary. The idea behind the Parish maps was to encourage people to chart what they value in a place, in their own time, in their own way, and to regard it as a never-ending process which

nevertheless is a way of creating an agenda for action of many different kinds. Lots of people did choose the parish boundary because it means something to them, but lots of people didn't. At the same time we were also talking about the parish boundary as being a very significant place in natural history terms and history terms, and the idea of bringing people with lots different interests together to argue for something would make a stronger stand, and you would find, and you do find, that people have a lot of things to learn from each other once they start comparing and trusting, Parish hedge banks or whatever it might be. But by using the word 'parish', we were trying to help people to reassert it, to reclaim it as a way of describing a small patch. One of our major funders, The Countryside Commission, told us in no uncertain terms 'don't use it', and when we talked about Parish maps they were distinctly uneasy about it and they always hated it. Yet now of course it's used in lots of ways by all sorts of people in the way that we intended it .

*Was the unease because Parish is often seen as a religious term?*

Many people, especially funders, do have trouble with using terminology in a new and creative way. We discovered that when we first used the term 'parish'. So maybe, I think so. We discovered that we first mentioned it in  *Holding Your Ground*, so it does take us back to the very beginning, back to when we were writing that in 1983, and we were seeking even then, while we were writing that book, to encourage people to think about the incredible overlaying of richness that comes from nature and all of its work, and culture and all of its works. There's a real collision of those two things, and culture of course comes in lots of different guises, so in that book we only got as far saying, 'It's not just natural history but it's about building and it's also about history in the land and it's about how

to treat the land,' - all of these different convergences. Now we would add on, 'It's about the celebration of locality and so on as well.' We were talking about the way in which people feel at home in the land in some places and not in others, and things like that. So we were already sort of striding towards this thing which was a great melange as opposed to the compartmentalising. We still hadn't got it sorted out in our heads so the book is in little compartments, and anyway you have to write in a linear way, so you are always in a bit of mess as far as that is concerned. But the thing that was constantly coming back to us all the time was this idea of detail and this idea of accumulation and overlay and things that you can see and things that you can't see which have significance. And the words 'local distinctiveness' just sort of came up and they kept coming up and wouldn't go away. Again, major funders hated these words when we went back to them and said we wanted to explore this side of things. They tried in all sorts of ways and they still won't use the words themselves, the word 'character' keeps being used and it's not good enough for what we are trying to say. But we had already got on to the idea of 'local' as being really important, so it always is 'local distinctiveness' and it's very different to talking about regions. We want people to think in terms of a few streets, or a piece of land which you can walk around in an afternoon.

The thing that funders don't like is any way of using terms that is subjective, coming from people who live there. 'Character' is something you can see from the outside, and they think by not using it, we're being slippery. It is difficult because we all do look from the outside into all kinds of places and we all have our feelings about local distinctiveness but we were saying all the time that it should be defined from the inside out not from outside in and once again the Parish map idea was trying to make that come out.

[How does this idea work in areas that have](#)

[not been rural or cherished, such as a 1930's run-down housing estate in the middle of Manchester?](#)

Well I don't know if it does. I do know that in some instances similar to that, that it has worked. Of course you haven't seen those things because they have never got the money together to reproduce them and very often they were transient things, they were things that had a different kind of love, but they have certainly been done in those places. They have very often been done on the way through to something else, as it were, but I think that is what is hugely important about the idea of Parish mapping and distinctiveness. You can start from where you are. Whoever you are and wherever you are there are some things about you that are important to you and if you are given enough time to reflect and to feel comfortable in circumstances of exchange then all sorts of things start to come forward.

I don't know if you know of the group who call themselves Power Information who work a lot in Eastern Europe and Africa. They have used the Parish map a lot as an idea where they can sit around a table in a new place in Lithuania or Rumania and say to people 'What do you value in this place and how do we start putting this down?' The great thing about that is that you are not looking at each other but at this piece of paper on which you can write or put whatever you like and that is a novel way of liberating. You are not in the kind of formal circumstances where everybody is behaving and sitting upright - you have already started to play in some kind of way and liberate yourself into saying what you are feeling.

But reverting back to local distinctiveness so it doesn't get lost: one of the other things that people have constantly picked up is the idea of difference and so they are very happy to talk and what we encourage is if you want to talk about regional diversity then that is fine, but then talk about local distinctiveness



as a different layer or level of things. And of course distinctiveness is to some degree about difference, but it is much more about the extraordinary detail and extraordinary layering and accumulation and pattern of this place and that's what makes it different from the next, not just that its geology is different and therefore the buildings look different, but that at some point in this place's history these customs happened, and that jumbled its way in, and that got taken out. It's that recognition of the gradual building of a place which then takes you back to the idea that if you make a place quickly, you tend not to enter the place for quite a long while because it's been both forced upon the situation and it's also being implanted with people and it's too much to do all at once. One of the things that one recognises in places that seem to carry what could be described as a numinous quality, or something which gives you all the feeling of wanting to linger there (and that can be a town square or a small valley or whatever), very often the things that are going on there are to do with a muddle of different ages leaving their mark, and that muddle gives anybody who knows the place a chance to tell their stories from those little facets. It can be a small building or whatever else that gives you that feeling that this place embraces you and that you understand some little bits of it at least, and that therefore its cobwebs hold you in place. We have always emphatically made the distinction to between the word 'space' and the word 'site', which is very often used by people describing things from the outside: architects use the word 'space', archaeologists and you use the word 'site' quite a lot too. We annoy our funders like mad to talk about the word 'place' because 'place' carries with all the cultural baggage whereas 'site' especially where you have worked in architecture and development and all that kind of thing, implies you have the right to do something there - either to think about it and give it names and say 'this is what happened here' which is the archaeol-

ogy of it, or 'this site is right for development'. But as soon as you call it a place you know there is some realisation that there are other things happened here and maybe you should tread more carefully.

**How if at all does any of this fit into ideas about sustainable development?**

It bothers me, the coupling of the two words. I prefer to think about sustainability, and sustainability most pared down is about living together. It's about us all getting on with each other at whatever layer or however one cares to describe it: those who are poor in whatever way or those that are rich and all those complications. So it means living together in that kind of way with all our differences, whether that be religious tolerance or racial ethnocentricity or what else. And it also means living together with nature. One realises that these words are coming into being over the last ten years, they've been common currency at least since 1992.

The kinds of things we were trying to do when we set up the organisation were based on an argument that we were making around the idea that unless everybody joins in, everybody wants to live with nature and each other in certain ways, we are not going to manage it - we are not going to do it. If a few people as professionals are running round looking after special sites and that's all conservation is, we are not going to make it. So I think we have been there all along. It's just that now it has another name. Now, when you start talking about sustainable development as the big sop to those who believe that economics is the dominant force, I don't believe it is. That is why I uncouple the words. Sustainable development ought to be about creating the circumstances for the world to progress in a way which is benign for the people in the place, and all that nature has to offer insofar as we understand it. It is not about development being sustained. In the FT or whatever, you get this wonderful switch of the words so that

it means 'how can you keep development going?' That's not what I think sustainable development is at all.

You emphasise the personal and the subjective, but we do live in a very hard world where we rely on funding to get us through, and funders tend to demand specifics. How well do you manage those two worlds?

Well, we have a terrible time raising funds, and it's partly because I find it very difficult to compromise in the language I use in applications, which means that it's like ships passing in the night. They don't understand what you are trying to say or else they feel uneasy about it. They sense some kind of subversion there but they can't quite put their finger on it because it is soft - but it means the floor begins to wobble a little for them. So I would say that is a difficulty for us.

So what changes need to come about? You have a notion of sustainability but we don't live like that at the present time.

Well, I think what we have done is hold our ground and that is partly because we have been through the confrontational and the party politicals and all the rest of it, so we know what that felt like and we know that it can work and we know that there were people better at it than we were and we also saw this yawning gap that something else wasn't being done. Also one's own personality traits come into this. I am certainly not a very confrontational sort of person and hate to have to take on that type of role.

So all these things come into play, but I also think we created a difficulty in front of us. We didn't want to grow. That worries some, for the current model of life - growth is all and we have always believed it isn't but that organic, spontaneous combustion. I can't think of the word I want to use but that's important too. Throwing things out so others can develop them.

All of the work we have been trying to do is towards helping people to take on what they feel they can do, starting from where they are, with the idea if we can get lots of little spontaneous activities like that here and there, sooner or later they mesh; sooner or later strands begin to connect; sooner or later - they may be nowhere near one another but they may be internetted in our world wide webby kind of world. Suddenly people can communicate and give each other courage from a distance, and we couldn't have foreseen that at all when we started.

The idea of the thing you call softness, which I take as being about all the things you can't count, or the intangibles, or the things that are about feelings and values and the things that are about humanity and imagination, are things that we believe are the solid core of where we need to get to. If people regard them as being soft it's because they can't face up to them. Quite often with a journalist, say, you have a feeling they are not interested in you because you are not behaving in a 'small p' political way and not wanting to tell them of some conflict happening somewhere. Rather you are wanting to tell them about some good thing that's happening and some models for ways forward, which they are not interested in. Some of the time it's because of who they are and some of the time it's because they just don't know how to deal with it; they don't know how to hold onto something that is positive and yet needs words that are different from those they commonly work with. It often seems to me that when people say 'Oh, I'm sorry, I can't be dealing with soft issues,' my response to them is, 'It's too hard for you, isn't it? It's too hard for you to get your head round the layering of the arguments and the excitement that's at the centre of this if only you would care to grasp it.' 'Softness' is not about easy options but about softness of approach. It's the difference between clumping around in your Doc Martins as opposed to gently walking through in bare feet.

Is there any final comment you wish to make?

I think it's important that Common Ground has always worked at the edge of our own capacities in lots of different ways. Certainly one of those is philosophical: we jumped in where angels fear to tread and found some of them were in there with us, I think. What we have always tried to do is see what experimentally seems to work both in ideas and in working out ways of doing things. As you know we are not great thinkers but what we have tried to do is work out a language, and it's quite important to us how we use language now to work through ways of saying what we mean. We also have to work out ways of doing things, so we are not just doing what we are thinking, but we're also not doing without thinking. So when we're working through projects we have always tried something out, tried to push an edge somewhere to see where that would go, and then support it, but push it always out from ourselves. We're still doing that and testing ourselves to see whether or not this notion has any validity, and there are certainly lots of things we have dropped on the way that haven't got anywhere. It's fascinating always to see that some things that we tried to get funded a long time ago are now appearing elsewhere, not because we had anything to do with it but because the idea has come to its time, in a way, and that's really pleasing. We have always found it very difficult because, I suppose, in some way we have been an avant-garde of our own making and that has made it difficult in terms of funding and other things. Sometimes you look round and see lots of people doing all kinds of things that wouldn't have happened without us busying ourselves when we did.

We have survived but it's taken its toll, there are moments when you want to rage, there could be so much more you could be doing if only you didn't have to fit all the time.

In a sense you are at the cutting edge and that's challenging. There are lots of things you think you could do but if you weren't challenging they wouldn't be done anyway and although you don't do these things yourself you see things being funded that would not have been if you were not there challenging. You said earlier that you're not great thinkers, but clearly there has been a lot of thinking in what you have done and the quality of that, the genius of that, if you like, is now becoming a much more common language and that's to your credit. It's that softness again.

We have never looked out there for a grand plan and there's a bit of a problem with me about this 'visioning' thing. We have always talked about having a vision but it's now become this thing that you have to have. You have to build a utopia out there that you stride towards! We have always been willing to have a fog out there through which we can see some things, and sometimes some things become clearer and then recede again. I have to say that it doesn't always get clearer and clearer, but I suppose we have been lucky in that Angela and myself, who have done much of the work, are actually very different thinkers and very different doers and that helps enormously. It bounces back and forth and is a very positive force. Then having other people working with us for various amounts of time also enriches the mist and new things come out of that, and we have always worked with other bodies because we have always wanted to remain small and because we want other people to take on ideas. We are not depending on individuals or the bureaucracies of organisations, and that helps you think.

# Sue Cooper, Shropshire Hills Countryside Unit's Community Environmental Office

I'm Sue Cooper and I work for Shropshire Hills Countryside Unit as the Community Environmental Officer. Let me describe my job: I work with communities within The Shropshire Hills promoting, advising and assisting on conservation and interpretation projects of all kinds. This involves attending meetings, giving talks, organising community consultation, proving information and training sessions, keeping up to date with the latest grants and initiatives in countryside and keeping in touch with local groups and interested individuals. I also edit the Shropshire Hills bi-annual newsletter, inviting contributions on any subject relevant to countryside and community in The Shropshire Hills. I am also very involved with writing a community Environmental Strategy for The Shropshire Hills AONB at the present time.

My background is in teaching, and from teaching I moved into voluntary conservation work and was fortunate to become involved in conservation related training. The training covered conservation management and management practices, community development, events organising, interpretation and public-

ity and promotion. This training together with my science and teaching background was a good foundation to start working in the community on environmental projects. I believe that Teacher training can be a good background for many different careers.

The job of Community Environmental Officer is a full-time post and I work both in a pro-active way by promoting community projects through a variety of methods, then of course the role becomes re-active as groups begin to develop projects. In this role, for example, the first thing is to talk to people about their ideas and plans and to begin introducing ideas of networking and carrying out projects in a sustainable way. Such as, involving all sectors of the community in projects, use of people friendly methods of consultation, use of local materials and local craftspeople and businesses in projects

In a typical week I will give one slide talk to a group, either on a specific project such as the Church and Conservation Project, Caring for God's Acre, or the work of the Shropshire Hills Countryside Unit. This is an enjoyable and important part of the work. The numbers of people who I meet through going out to speak to groups is quite high and a good method of getting information out, raising people's awareness of issues and keeping myself informed of local interests and developments. In isolated rural areas, such as South Shropshire village halls are important social centres and occasions or events are usually well supported, so talks and workshops sessions are often popular.

I would say that on average I spend at least a third of my week working on sacred spaces, mostly churchyard projects, although occasionally other features such as ancient Holy Wells may inspire projects. I might add that projects are not necessarily practical nature conservation projects there is a huge diversity of different kinds of projects. A few examples include a local Mother's Union group embroidering church kneelers on the theme of the local landscape and its wildlife. A book,



mosaic and wall hanging recording the life in a rural community during the last 100 years and their hopes for the next century. New carved oak gate posts at the entrance to a village hall, repair of a war memorial, Parish Maps, village design statements – the list and variety is large.

One of the reasons that churchyards were targeted as potential subjects for projects was that the rural parish churchyard is important from both a social and an historic point of view and, of course, for nature conservation. They are areas which are under a management regime already, carried out by a well organised, interested and well established group, usually the local Parochial Church Council or PCC. It is not a question, therefore, of asking anyone or any group to do something new but just to change the way their Churchyard management is already carried out. This may only be a slight change, such as cutting the longer grass a couple of weeks later than usual, for example.

Within rural communities people and time is usually limited so churchyard management projects do not add to people's workload.

Churchyards are also interesting places for archaeology and history. Monuments, memorials, lych gates, preaching crosses, war memorials all tell a story of the people who lived and worked in the parish and may be architecturally interesting. We organised a Churchyard Heritage Day, which proved very popular to local people and it covered the archaeology and history of churchyards and how to conserve this interest and development of further community projects.

Interpreting churchyards for visitors has also featured as part of the Caring for God's Acre project. There have been display panels created, leaflets produced and flower festivals celebrating the flowers and grasses in the churchyard. This interpretation work is important and helps the ministry of the church and the church funds.

Local schools are encouraged to make use of their local churchyards for environmental

study and we promote The Living Churchyard's teachers pack Hunt the Daisy. I recently led a summer play scheme session in a local churchyard calling the event "Go Wild in your Churchyard – discover nature and history". A few of the parishioners were not in favour of such an event. I only wish that they could have joined the young people to see how interested they were in all they discovered and the respect and care that was shown throughout the afternoon. And most of these youngsters had had very little previous contact with the church. So there is work to be done here in changing attitudes.

I would personally also like to see churchyards recognised and valued by all members of the communities that they serve as real Sacred spaces. Other cultures link nature with the sacred and our local churchyards are wonderful places for nature as well as being the resting place of thousands of past parish inhabitants.

Sustainable development is about considering everything we do, how we do it and what effect it will have on others. It includes social and economic issues as well as the environment. At Shropshire Hills Countryside Unit we support the Shell sustainability checklist produced for the Shell Better Britain Campaign and use it with local groups when starting and carrying out projects. In thinking what a sustainable community would look like some of the things considered would for instance be enabling everyone to join in decision making, with the opportunity to become involved and have volunteer work recognised as having a value, recognising and valuing local distinctiveness and thoughtful use of resources. It is all common sense but every so often one does need to be reminded of these things in a sensitive and informed way.

# Rebecca Cotton, Landscape Architect

I am Rebecca Cotton and I am a landscape architect who has worked in the public and the private sector for the last ten years. I've worked on a very diverse range of projects but all have involved the community in some form or another, from urban parks down on Barrie island for the Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council in the 1980's to community forests in Mansfield in the 1990's and more recently garden projects that involve healing and sacred design.

I first thought about the idea of sacred space working on a community forest for Mansfield which was a Millennium Commission funded project. It was the restoration of a number of old mining areas including agricultural land and my involvement with the community started on day one of that project when I was asked to design a master plan. However, I wouldn't say it became a sacred space to me until I had become involved with the local community at a level which helped me begin to appreciate their feelings about the space. It's very important to get to that point because as an outsider, unless you have some particularly perceptive abilities, it is not always immediately apparent that a land has sacred value. I think it is largely through involvement with the community that you understand this, so on the forest project it took probably a year until I recognised that the landscape work we were doing really meant nothing unless people respected and responded to something in the land itself. This particular space was not

sacred in the sense it had some great religious significance, but it was a landscape with many layers of emotion. It was a landscape that was made sacred, if you like, by the closure of the pits. That's all happened in the last twenty years and so there was an awful lot of emotional investment in that landscape. People had died due to several mining explosions and later the land had been returned to farming. In fact a very interesting cycle of events happened there, for the land had been cleared for the mine and had then returned to agriculture. It had been forest initially, and was going back to being forest again through the creation of a community forest. Within each of those times I'm not sure whether you could say the land was sacred but the present-day landscape is sacred to the local community because to them it tells the story of what has happened to them.

In order to get to the bottom of all that Groundwork initiated an arts project, and I would say that it came a little late in the proceedings: it was after the master plan and after the major public consultation had taken place. But the arts project allowed these stories to come out as narrative and be published in the form of a book. This then led to a number of discrete projects which celebrate particular feelings about the place. How far you define that as sacredness is something I need to talk about in more detail.

In the first instance neither I as the outside advisor, nor the community involved, recognised the special nature of the place. The whole process took three years and is now ongoing as part of a national arts project for Groundwork. I think it did lead the community to recognise and understand their landscape, and perhaps an important part of that was the beginning of healing of scars within the community itself - because we are talking here about an economically depressed community with a number of social problems.

But I don't like the idea of giving a name and a label to something, as though saying it's 'sacred' then means that people under-

stand it or recognise it. I think the definition of 'sacred' is very difficult. I personally have some problems with the word 'sacred' and make a lot of use of Mircea Eliade's book "The Sacred and the Profane".

What I find very interesting about landscape is how a place or a space can be sacred one moment and profane another. I've written a paper about this in Landscape Design. The way children use space is like this because one moment it can be, if you like, a sacred space where something special has happened where the space takes on extraordinary values, and the next minute it can be a common or an ordinary part of a park or street. I do believe we have to think about the way we consider the word 'sacred' - it isn't necessarily something that's always there, it's very intangible and may be transient.

I am more aware of definitions of 'sacred' and work about the sacred by my visit to China thanks to a Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship and by working with groups there who are animists: they are worshippers of nature and it made it very clear to me that the way we regard sacred is very different from the way groups in developing countries regard the word sacred.

**I don't think we should get too worried about these definitions if we have this broad understanding that they can be ephemeral, they can change, and they are not universal. We are not looking for absolutes here.**

But I think public perception of the word 'sacred' is important because to some people it means a church or a historical monument with religious significance and that isn't at all how you and I understand sacred. It's a term that people aren't always comfortable with. It's a bit like the word 'healing', I don't usually use that. I tend to use the word 'therapeutic'.

When I went to China for a year I did a research project about sacred plants in 'sacred gardens' I was looking at the gardens of

Taoist and Buddhist Monasteries in the Sacred Mountains of China. It's much easier to define those spaces as sacred because they belong to an organisation, and what is in those spaces has some kind of significance that goes beyond the ordinary common and everyday. A marigold in a Buddhist temple is different from a marigold growing in somebody's back garden in Mansfield. So the context in which you consider something sacred is quite important.

**What is your interest in sacred spaces beyond your professional work?**

I suppose one of the things close to my heart is my own painting and drawing. I paint and draw landscapes. Sometimes I have a strong feeling about a landscape; perhaps something sacred is provoked in me. It might not be a natural landscape, it might be a coal mine. I did a lot of drawings in Wales of the way in which the landscape had been changed by the mining industry and they were full of very harsh lines, harsh contours. So I think that my painting helps me explore what 'sacred' actually means. I'm looking at bringing out certain values in the landscape through my painting. I would also have to consider the issue of spirituality. I think that I have become more and more conscious of health issues within my professional work but also my own personal health. My own approach to life tries to incorporate a holistic vision and I understand that in order for me to be happy and healthy I need certain sacred elements.

**Would you regard the area of spiritual values as a growing area of your work, or a growing area of work amongst other landscape architects and conservationists and other interested groups?**

Oh yes, there's a whole movement in society, in fashion, in design, in architecture, in everything, towards incorporating some kind of spiritual element. Now you can be someone

who belongs to the New Age camp and says it's part of this New Age, or you can be a landscape architect, who believe it's just part of good holistic design and you can't be a good holistic designer unless you embrace all the elements of the place and the people. These include sacred values. I do think there is an overall move towards acknowledging spiritual values in the landscape profession. I think it's happening at two levels: there's an underlying awareness now of values beyond the purely physical and there's a more superficial movement, where these things are being incorporated because they are market driven.

One of the things that has made it clearer to me that there is a need to deal with this element is one of the recent projects I've been involved with, the new privately owned non-denominational woodland burial site. There seems to be a need for non-denominational burial sites because people are feeling that the Church of England or the Christian and other faiths and the public services available aren't necessarily giving them a place where they wish to be buried, yet they're looking for some kind of spiritual meaning. They want to find another place and what they're looking to is a return to nature.

I went to the International Conference of Health, Culture and the Arts in April this year and the way in which the programme was devised, looked at health under various different criteria and one of them was spirit. That was a huge part of the programme and it encourages me because there were people from several countries from all levels; politicians to community arts practitioners and they were all embracing the spiritual part of the way we look at our environment and our health.

**Changing the subject completely, what do you consider to be sustainable development?**

Well I think there's a need for a holistic vision and there is very little work on the spiritual aspect of this. I would like to think that every

project I do comes under the broad umbrella of sustainable development because what I'm trying to do is think about things beyond the present, and not just in the immediate future but in the long, long, term future - maybe even beyond that. The spiritual component is vital. I don't actually think the current definition of sustainable development incorporates the spiritual dimension. If I look at a project in China I was involved in, which was setting up the bones of a cultural protection project for the Naxi people of Li Jiang which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site - that was about sacred sustainable development.

**But do you think it has to do with future generations or more to do with the present?**

It's a balance of both, well that's my interpretation of it. It's doing something which is important for this generation but which does not compromise the future hopes of generations beyond now. It's an investment in the future and I think it's also a holistic vision of the environment, and of the world we live in.

It is incredibly important that we don't just keep thinking of the future and disregard the present - maybe this is something that is happening too much. I think sometimes people involved in the environmental movement are caught up in this fear about the future, and maybe sometimes that fear drives too much consideration for the future and an inability to act in the present. I'm sure I've been guilty of that myself

The whole way in which society is working at the moment is consumer lead and not caring enough about the future. I think people are confused, there are two sets of values. If I look at when sustainable development became officially important in my work, it was actually when someone in the organisation I worked with was specifically appointed to deal with sustainable development. As a landscape architect it was not my role so even though subconsciously and consciously I thought about that issue in my design work it



wasn't actually me who addressed the issue of sustainable development within the community.

You, as a landscape architect, can have enormous influence over the landscape. In that process you have surely been involved in the process of sustainability. That's obviously part of your training: you want to make something that's durable, you want to make something of value.

If you're an 'ecologically-driven' and socially aware landscape architect, yes, but there are landscape architects who don't take that on board as one of the most important parts of their work. For example if you're a landscape architect and you're doing the landscaping around a supermarket, an out-of-town supermarket, you could ask yourself, 'Am I affecting the future of this whole region's economy by doing a landscape scheme for a car park for Tesco's?' when you consider that particular development could be helping to kill the smaller shops in the city centre. I've been very fortunate in that I have worked for organisations where I believe sustainable development is built into their philosophy, and perhaps quietly it has just been part of the way we work. If I had been a landscape architect in certain private practices I doubt whether this issue would have been at the top of our design agenda. When you ask me is it part of my training, it's a very good question I qualified in 1991, and we never had a single lecture about sustainable development. We were however quite well trained in ecology. My training in sustainable development comes from my degree in Geography where I took a number of options on development in the third world, where sustainable development issues are very important. That's one step, looking at the third world, but it's a very different thing looking at our community here in Britain. Perhaps I was better trained to understand the whole issue of sustainable development in the third world than I have

been in my own country. But I've applied the principles I've learned to the situation here. I'm influenced by sustainability and sustainable development issues in probably every aspect of my life. Well, we all are, aren't we?

# Ian Roberts, Environmental Consultant & Associate Director of Environ, Leicester

I'm Ian Roberts, a director of Environ, which is a charity established to promote sustainable development practically. In terms of my background, I am a civil engineer. I've worked with BP as a postgraduate, I got bored and went off to Manchester Business school and did an MBA. I then worked as a management consultant before going to head up a public company in New Zealand which I did for three years in the 1980's, then in 1990 I worked with Environ to try to apply some of my business skills to the environmental sector. That's what I've been doing for the last ten years. Environ's agenda has shifted from doing practical environmental projects in the early days to grappling with this notion of sustainable development.

My work is now far more focused than it was. Five or six years ago we got involved in anything to do with sustainable development and what we came to realise was that it was a very wide-ranging issue and the market's become segmented, if you like, and one had to identify a niche and realise you cannot do it all these days. What I do in Environ is I work particularly with large organisations in the public sector, large local authorities, cer-

tain government departments and also businesses in the private sector. Increasingly we work on issues about communication and training, facilitating discussion, trying to help organisations understand what sustainable development means to them practically, so I am not so involved in running practical projects although other members of the company still do that work.

I think what is particularly interesting at the moment is the work with local authorities. At the moment we work with seven or eight local authorities and we typically work with their senior teams, but what has become interesting is that we have moved away from trying to help people articulate what a sustainable Leicester or Derby requires, or whatever, and we have moved increasingly to help people figure out how to communicate with their communities to begin to create a collective view of what the city's communities would require. So in a sense the most effective work we do with these local authorities involves a huge amount of work with community groups.

I think what we have begun to understand, and I must say it's early days, this, and we're wrestling with this, but I think our definition of sustainable development is not at this stage about figuring how much energy we should generate, it's how we create generative environments, if you like, in which people can make a contribution to their decisions, in which people privately or collectively can have a realisation, make a breakthrough if you like. So for example we are working with lots of local authorities on community indicators projects which are designed to consult with community groups and help those groups in particular with their projects, and help local authorities think about how they might respond. It's all very simple really, but it's all the bits that tend to get overlooked.

[Tell me about your work with sacred space.](#)

I think what's interesting is that our work on

sacred spaces comes from such a range - work for example in India on the Friends of Vrindavan Project. Just this week we have had talks with a very senior civil servant from the Department of the Environment in Vrindavan. What we attempt to do there is raise money abroad and then send it to India and the local Friends of Vrindavan trustees then spend that money on improving the quality of the environment for the people who live in that very sacred town. We have really encouraged people to help and support the project. Many, many Indians in Leicester for example have a very heartfelt connection with India - it's very tangible. We talk about it, many of them work together and certainly they are very comfortable with the idea of making a contribution and donation for work that enhances Vrindavan.

Again we see the changes there. Friends of Vrindavan had an early corporate ideal of struggling with protecting the sacred forests, but eventually the work we did there was actually as much about cleaning the streets and dealing with issues of sanitation as it was about planting trees. What I think we recognised was that while it's important to plant trees in the town and the sacred groves, it's also particularly important to make sure that houses aren't full of sewage because garbage is blocking up their primitive sewage systems.

The second project we are busy with is a walking pilgrimage festival which will take place in August 2000 to mark the millennium in Cumbria. It's a project in its early stages but it's designed to take people to sacred places across the county and encourage people to reflect on what's gone on over a couple of thousand years and to enjoy the natural beauty of the place, and perhaps in a reflective mood to think about what's coming up in terms of the next millennium.

The third project is particularly interesting for me. Last June we worked on a training programme with the private sector which involved a number of companies (confiden-

tiality doesn't allow me to name them), one very large fruit company, the largest in the world of its type, and a high street eco-company which asked their staff to think about the future of their companies, which is about leadership and sustainable development. We decided to hold the meeting in Salisbury and we spent a great deal of time in Salisbury Cathedral. The purpose of that was to encourage people to think and reflect on the nature of the people who built the cathedral. Why did they do that? What drove them? What was in their hearts and minds? We also took people to Stonehenge to watch the sunrise. In a sense we used the sacred places as a venue to encourage people to be reflective and it had the most extraordinary effect on people. They thought it was the most profound programme they had ever had and it had the most profound effect on them and most were moved by the experience. Some time later I spoke to Peter Miller who was the warden of the Iona Community and he was talking about how Iona has an effect on people, even hardened business people, they were often deeply affected by the place. His view was that if we were doing this work with individuals in organisations and local authorities, effectively it is best to do it in sacred places because there is something about these places that encourages reflection. To give you an example, we went into Salisbury Cathedral and it was all arranged so we had a guide and as we went round we came across a wooden screen that had been carved, a beautiful screen that depicted the lives of the saints and so on. We met a fellow who was carving it, he was probably in his fifties and it had taken him several years to get as far as he had got. He said that it was now his life's work to finish the screen, and that was all he could hope to do because of the intricacy of the work, but he also knew that it would be around for hundreds if not thousands of years. Again that had such an impact on people, the notion of focusing in on activities that have a particular importance and value to them, which is not

so common these days. Those were the kinds of thing we came across in Salisbury and they affected the people we were working with although they weren't a group of committed Christians by any means. Also this idea of creating something, and the frame of mind you need to be in if you want to create something that's going to endure. If you want to build a building that's going to last a thousand years, what's your motivation, how would you do it? Of course the idea was to get people to reflect on what they were building in their own organisations.

**Going back to the work in Vrindavan and how tree planting led onto sanitation work. Was that an agenda the group realised it needed to address or did the people in Vrindavan lead it?**

Its interesting actually, it's this business about supply and demand. We are all sitting in Britain in a very comfortable middle class existence, raising money from people who have never seen sewage running down the streets, for example, and thinking how nice it would be to recreate forests and sacred groves around Vrindavan. We despatch that money to a group of people in Vrindavan who every year watch that place get ankle deep in sewage. It's pretty clear those people's agenda is not going to be the same as ours, and what's happened is that shift has been driven by them. It underlines the importance of having local structure to implement those projects. Now I think the idea of protecting and enhancing the sacred groves was absolutely right and nobody in Vrindavan disagreed with that but there were also other pressing issues. One of the reasons why we clean the streets for example is that there are lots of plastic bags and these are the principal cause of blocked drains and the principal cause of poor sanitation and poor sanitation is probably the biggest cause of infant mortality.

Is there an added sanitation problem

because Vrindavan is such a sacred place because of its association with Krishna and so it gets many pilgrims coming through?

I'm not sure about that but there definitely additional pressures It's also suffering a lot in a way you see all over India. It's interesting to see how the environmental agenda is viewed in Vrindavan. Very few people don't buy into that agenda and that message, because of the history and traditions of the Yamuna and Krishna on the banks and the forests and so on. So there is a very strong resonance there with the community in general but there is also the immediacy of the sewage and rubbish that people have to respond to and the shift in emphasis has come from there.

**Is your interest in sacred places because of your professional work or is it more personal than that?**

I think that's an impossible question because I don't think we do anything by chance. For me some of the happiest times in my life are when I've gone on what I call 'clumsy pilgrimage'. I've been to the source of the Ganges and Vrindavan and more recently particularly I been visiting sacred sites in Britain - Lindisfarne, Holy Island of Arran and of course holy places in Cumbria. They are great places to go to, often beautiful with wonderful stories of great souls who lived there and the whole occasion of pilgrimage is for me a moving experience. So for me my professional interests stand alongside my personal interests. Of course the more work we do around these places the more personally we become attached to them. It's a bit of a cycle but definitely, for me, I knew I would get a lot of energy and inspiration from them.

**Do you think that community initiatives on sacred places is a growing area of work in this country, which is often regarded as a very secular society?**

To be honest, I don't the answer to that. I



move within a certain group, I work with certain people and amongst those people the interest in the sacred is definitely on the increase. But I'm also conscious that that's maybe just my perception so it's difficult to gauge. But I do know that for example with the pilgrimage project we talked about in Cumbria - we haven't begun to promote it but there's a great deal of interest in it in local newspapers and local radio. Tourist Information and all the rest of it keep phoning up wanting to know more and the members of the public show an interest because I think people are intrigued. Now, whether that's a reflection of growing interest generally or not I don't know. But I have been surprised and fascinated by the way people relate to the idea of pilgrimage and making sacred places more available to people.

### What do you consider to be sustainable development?

There are definitely a range of views on what sustainable development is. If you look at our promotional material you see that sustainable development is about meeting our needs without jeopardising those of future generations. It's an integration of social, economic and environmental issues so we are well-versed in what traditional people typically regarded as sustainable development, hence all our applications have focused on that. But I think in addition we are beginning to realise that describing sustainable development as some kind of end state is in the end some sort of cultural value, and what is much more interesting is seeing sustainable development as a catalyst for change or a catalyst around which people can investigate new ways of working and better ways of making decisions which are more enlightening for communities, for example to meet their aspirations. So we are increasingly moving to the processes that allow companies, local authorities or local communities to express for themselves what they think sustainable development is,

and actually start the shift towards it. We are tending to be less prescriptive about what it might be. The main underlying reason for that is that the end state is changing all the time and is therefore difficult to determine with the companies we work with. Who the hell are we to determine what the sustainable future should be for them? It's impossible to fully understand people's context. So I think in part, yes, what we do would be recognised as mainstream thinking and understandings of sustainable development, but increasingly we are having to dig behind it and find out how can it be implemented and what are the processes that practically can be applied. Those are typically to do with different ways of encouraging individuals to reflect on what's important to them, what they are hoping to achieve within their jobs and their private lives, and then working with groups of people to allow those agendas to be collectively articulated. Then, particularly in the organisations with whom we work, we need to see how the new game if you like, the new view, can be expressed as practical projects and what we then have to do is set these projects up and watch, over time, how the organisation responds to that. We're trying to learn a few lessons on what's going on and what works within organisations. So I think behind the traditional definitions of sustainable development is a whole other thing that we do which is about cultural change.

People do consider the issue of sustainable development in projects, but the question is to what extent the words are ever understood. We go all over the place into different communities and do a project about a sustainable future for this neighbourhood, but so often it's just a phrase that's bandied around and it doesn't mean very much. So whilst it makes an appearance I don't think there's much mileage in it. You see that particularly in the private sector where the word 'sustainable' or 'sustainability' is applied to all and sundry - 'sustainable profits', 'sustainable growth' etc. So what we are trying to do is

draw a distinction between the use of sustainability as a word being applied in an ad hoc way to anything that's desirable: contentment and happiness, growth, and goodness knows what else, and on the other hand using the idea of sustainability to create a definition of it which is actually a process of change, a series of techniques that can be applied, a conceptual framework that people can sort through which will allow organisations and individuals to articulate where they want to get to and how they are going to get there. In the organisation in which we work we no longer go in and ask the question 'What is sustainable development?' Or 'What is sustainable development for this organisation or for this community?' We ask, 'How might their aspirations be articulated practically?' And if that's done properly and effectively, then what appears is as sustainable as it can be. I'm struggling a bit with the words but essentially I don't think we attempt to build a picture of sustainable development for an organisation or community.

The whole sustainable development agenda will only make sense to people when it moves away from the conceptual and intellectual into some sort of realisation of its possibilities. We did some interesting work recently with a couple of officers from an organisation in a workshop for their organisation. In the discussion they articulated a very practical example on how they would like to put this concept into practice which would be to create a sustainability checklist so when they assessed grant applications they can begin to build some of the issues they believe are important into the process, which is something that a number of organisations now do. When that happens, people see that it can be practical and they can take small steps to do something about it. I think in that sense one of the values of sustainable development that we have stumbled across is that it is actually quite a hopeful agenda. Lots of the organisations and communities we work in, if there is one thing they lack, it's

hope. We work in a lot of desperate organisations. A lot of clients might raise an eyebrow, but we work in a lot of organisations where the culture is perhaps not as hopeful as it might be. I think what sustainable development is for us, is creating a generative environment from where people can reflect and articulate what's important to them. Its extremely hopeful and positive where you get people reflecting not so much on the negative aspects of their day-to-day grinding culture within a massive organisation, as on what is possible for them. If that hope can then be articulated as a practical project that you can go away and do, it's very encouraging for people. I think that's something we have discovered pretty much by chance.

[Do you think that The Sacred Land Project has something to offer in the discussion and practice of sustainability?](#)

I remember being mauled a bit by you guys on the subject when I was drawing up principles and values of sustainable development and your response was that we were not in the business of selling principles but getting people to reflect on their own values and beliefs, because there is energy there and if people are going to adopt new approaches and new views they need to be grounded in their own views and experiences. We have had further discussions and what Sacred Land and ARC offer is access to traditions and cultures that go back thousands of years, and with that, a huge amount of collective wisdom and contact with people who work in organisations that are sensitive to what does and doesn't work well. So the approach from Sacred Land has a lot to offer organisations involved in promoting sustainable development. In terms of cross-fertilisation there is a lot of potential, for example on this issue of creating hope. We run programmes at the moment which adopt a festive, celebratory approach and I think that is true of Sacred Land. So there are those elements, and

I have talked about taking people out of their normal environments and taking them off to sacred sites. I think they create great opportunities. We work with business people, activity-oriented people that are always very busy, and we take them to a place and say 'Don't just do something - sit there and be reflective!' It creates a great opportunity. That's where I think people like ourselves, who are in the business of clarifying the agenda, clarifying the means of delivery, working in a labyrinth, can gain enormously from the Sacred Land Project and hopefully somewhere along the way this humble secular agenda of sustainable development can somehow support the Sacred Land Project.