

# Community Building in Britain Newsletter

Number 57

October 1997

*The newsletter is issued by a growing network of people in Britain who are committed to developing community building beyond that originally described in Dr. M. Scott Peck's book, 'The Different Drum', and as further developed by the Foundation for Community Encouragement in the USA (FCE).*

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# From the Editor

Thank you to those of you who have expressed your concern for my health, or helped me in other ways, in recent months. You will be glad to hear that I am now back to work full-time, and have enjoyed my first three full weeks. It has left me rather tired, and this edition has taken longer to put together than recently. Fortunately I am starting a new project, and doing a job I enjoy, and I can even work at home two days a week. (If you want to call me at home I am usually there on Wednesdays and Fridays.) Although my foot is still sore, and I have to do quite a few exercises, it is gradually getting better.

## Quakers

Three editions ago there were several items around the 12 step schemes, including Alcoholics Anonymous. This was largely because I had noticed Scott Peck's praise for them and thought that perhaps there are things we could learn from them, but it was also because others were moved to write about their experiences of AA etc.

This time I have included an article that caught my eye from a publication of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). I must own up to the fact that I am currently exploring the Quakers as a possible next home along my own personal spiritual journey. There is a lot in common between them and community building, and it is quite a challenge to try to distinguish exactly what are the differences (particularly bearing in mind how vague the official Quaker publications seem to be about what members need to believe).

## Sponsors

At the end of what in some ways has been a slightly disappointing year for event attendances, I want to say a special thank you to people who have been brave enough to sponsor a CB event. I understand it can be a very stressful role, especially when you do it by yourself, or when it seems there are not going to be enough numbers for it to go ahead. Peter Laxton's articles (both in this edition and before) give some insights into the pressures.

However I have been encouraged to hear that the two events this month have been full or nearly full, and Peter and Tëan are encouraged enough to sponsor another event in December. I believe that next year could be a very interesting one for CBiB, with lots of interest. If you want to explore the possibility of sponsoring an event do contact a member of the holding group and see what it involves.

## Thanks

I also want to say thanks to those who have contributed to this edition. Especially to Mike Roth who not only wrote up the decisions from the last Holding group, but also at the last minute volunteered to write up his own reactions to the recent meeting of the Facilitators Training Group. Thanks Mike - and how about the others of you who there sharing something of your own experiences of the meetings? I think it is good to have personal reflections, as well as 'official' records.

I am planning to include, as space allows, some historical items and the first one appears in this edition. Let me know what you think.

## Share Wider?

Would you be prepared to share with a wider audience how your experiences of community building have affected your life? Have you any stories to tell about the effect that Scott Peck or his books have had on you?

If you would be willing to tell something of your story, please contact me and I will tell you more about what I am thinking of.

## Contributions

I am still planning to have the special edition on how community building fits into other types of experience, but unfortunately I have had to postpone it until next year. Do please let me know if you have ideas for it.

Please make sure your articles, poems, letters, drawings, dreams etc for the next edition are with me by **22<sup>nd</sup> November 1997**. Thank you.

*Peter Cooper (details on back page)*

## Scheduled Community Building Events

<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Contact</u>	<u>Fee</u>	<u>Notes</u>
11/14 Dec (Thurs-Sun)	Leicestershire	Peter Laxton 01446 711569 Tëan Stuttaford 0121 429 8947	£165 (Residential)	CBW "for Church-going Christians"
1998 6/8 Feb	Nr Lyme Regis Dorset	Monkton Wyld 01297 560342	£TBA (Residential)	CBE
April	Lampeter West Wales	Shared Earth Trust 01570 493358	£TBA	CBE

Note: - **CBE** stands for "Community Building Experience", which provides an opportunity to build community in a large group over two days. In a "Community Building Workshop", or **CBW**, a third day is added so that not only can participants experience the building of community but they can also learn about the process through discussion and reflection.

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**Do you have any ideas about our publicity?**

**What works, and what does not work?**

**What is the best way of telling people about community building?**

Please call Peter (01438 813765) if you have any thoughts on this.

*Thanks.*

# On-Going Groups Page

You will probably realise by now that I have a picture of community building developing through there being a whole network of small on-going groups throughout the country. It was therefore particularly sad for me to have to drop details of some of the groups from the back page a few months ago when I realised they were no longer functioning. It is also why it is particularly delightful for me now to be able to add new groups to the back page.

Welcome to the Central and North London group, who were added last edition; and to the Malvern Hills group who are added this edition.

## Groups Page

I have also decided to dedicate a "Groups Page" in each edition of the newsletter especially for the on-going groups within CBiB. So if you would like to share something about your group, want to invite others to join you in a new group, or if you feel you have an insight or experience that is of particular interest to groups, do feel free to send it to me for inclusion on this page.

A new group hopes to start up in the Manchester area soon. If you are interested please contact Tania Nolan on 0161 736 1157

In addition I would like to find a way of including regular articles of encouragement or challenge to groups. It need not be every edition, but if you might be interested please give me call.

## 'Task-Process Groups'

I have quite often heard the term 'task/process' used for the groups that exist to perform some function - like the holding group, facilitators' training group, learning opportunities group, and the groups that organise events in various parts of the country. I think it means that they

are trying to achieve a task at the same time as paying attention to the processes in the group, but perhaps some of you could explain it for me?

I would like to include these groups somehow in this 'groups page' too, because they face some of the same

issues and problems as the on-going groups that do not have a specific task. I know you will find reports and reflections from them elsewhere in the newsletter, but I do not want to forget them here.

## Booklet for Sale

### Ongoing Community

(Small Share/Support Groups)

### Formation and Maintenance

Fourth edition June 1994 By Jerry L. Hampton - 48 pages

Includes

How to start an ongoing group, Model Meetings, Guidelines for meeting conduct, Ideas for group starters, Group maintenance, Ongoing groups and their characteristics, Why some groups fail, Forming groups in a workshop, What now? - After the CBW, Books on community, Study Guide - 'The Different Drum'

Copies available from Peter Cooper (address on back page) for only £5 in p&p.



# Facilitating v Participating

11<sup>th</sup> September 1997

Dear Peter

Anthony's thoughts on p6 of *Newsletter no 56* stirred up some memories of the T-group training I experienced some 30 years ago. He asked for "suggestions", so here goes.

## Process and Content

One of the key things which we learned was that people normally pay attention to content rather than process; and that it is often helpful if members of the group try to attend to the process, and to comment on what they observe. Indeed, if the aim is to learn "how to be a good group", the whole group is urged to make the process of the group into the content. (One constantly slips back into discussing *past* process, and ignoring the here-and-now, until one makes a fresh effort.) The behaviour of the trainer/facilitator is a model for the group.

However, if the facilitator is looked at as a leader or authority figure (a role which he doesn't want, but is often thrust upon him), anyone else making process comments may get a "Who-do-you-think-you-are?" response from others in the group.

So, I should want to defend Anthony against any criticism about "facilitating" the group (if he took it as an accusation), but I should disagree with him that there should be a clear distinction between facilitating and "participating".

There may, though, be more to it than that.

## Here and Now

Anthony admits to being anxious about the *future* of the group. I was taught that it is helpful to keep one's attention as near to the here-and-now as one can.

He also admits to being critical of the function, in the process, of "certain contributions". Scott Peck, speaking of "leaders" (*The Different Drum, p118*), says: "They usually need not concern themselves with the problems or personalities of individual members. In fact, such concern is likely to interfere with community

development." (And read on from there.) I suspect that this applies to any process comment. I am often tempted myself to make personal and judgmental comments, but another part of me says that this is inconsistent with "loving my neighbour", which I believe is necessary for community.

## Confusion

But, above all, Anthony's report does convey a sense of confusion – in FCE, not in Anthony – about the relationship between community building and community task. We all know of conferences run by other organisations which have been stimulating and helpful, without any deliberate community building; but what does it mean "to use CB principles" "in the course of deliberations" about diversity?

I think I would have shared Anthony's hope of community building *followed* by study of a topic – with, of course, a loving look at diversity in the community so built.

## To facilitate or not?

Going back for a moment to that question of facilitating/participating: yesterday I was talking to a friend who is a member of a group (following in a Carl Rogers tradition, I am told) who have had for some years an annual get-together with experienced facilitators. They are questioning the need for (highly-paid!) facilitators at every event, on the two grounds

- that experienced members of an ongoing group should be able to make enough helpful process comments; and
- that this would enable them to run much cheaper events which could include a much greater *diversity* of members.

I have a lot of sympathy with that.

Yours

Arthur French  
3 Dornafeld Road, Ipplepen,  
Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 5SH  
Tel 01803 812612

(Any reactions to this, or anything else in the newsletter - send them to the editor.)

# Reflections upon the Community Building Workshop for "Church-going" Christians held at Hothorpe Hall in September 1997.

Nine intending participants gathered at the venue during the evening of Sunday 31st August, at the end of the day on which the death of the Princess of Wales had been announced. I think the death of the Princess and the earliest responses and reactions to it from around the world contributed an additional significant element to the less than usual circumstances of the groups creation, life and death. The tenth and final participant arrived as scheduled at 5.30pm on the Monday afternoon, introducing a further interesting and challenging dynamic to what was an already less than usual beginning for a community building event.

## Too Small?

As the group size failed to attain a desired minimum number to warrant the provision of a team of (or even one) FCE/CBiB-trained and discerned facilitators, the likelihood was, for what would have been the fourth time this year that the event would again have to be cancelled. This disappointing and undesirable situation confronted me on the evening of the fifth day prior to the scheduled gathering of participants.

In individual consultation with two of the prospective facilitators, the CBiB coordinator and my fellow workshop-sponsor it was agreed and decided to proceed with an event bearing in mind the specific provisos that a clear indication be made to each of the participants that this was not an event sponsored or facilitated by CBiB or its facilitator/Leader Group. And also that, bearing in mind my knowledge and experience of Scott Peck's model of community building and my attendance during this past year at a Community Building Skills Seminar and Level One of the Leadership Education Program conducted by The Foundation for Community Encouragement, Inc. in the USA, that every effort be maintained to follow Peck's model through the days of the event.

## Clarifying

These two points were made to nearly all participants (those that it had been possible to contact) prior to their departure from their various locations for Leicestershire. Some took up the invitation to speak directly to two of the potential facilitators and to the CBiB coordinator to clarify their own thinking before making a firm decision to be present in what to some may have appeared unusual circumstances. With one exception, everyone who had originally booked to attend maintained their decision to attend, arrived and worked through each of the twelve one-and-a-half hour sessions which comprised the workshop time.

Just prior to the beginning on Monday morning the participants were invited to read a copy of the letter, suitably modified, which had been furnished to the group which gathered for a similar event last year at the same venue, to the better prepare themselves for what was to follow.

## Starting off

In the light of the unusual circumstances of this event the two sponsors offered themselves to the group at the outset of the first session to adopt the role of leadership to help the group work to Peck's model of "building community from emptiness", for the first two sessions scheduled that morning. This seemed not an easy situation for some who had previous experience of such more formally facilitated events to accept, and provided an interesting and challenging dynamic throughout the event. The point was made at the beginning that we were a 'group of all-leaders' and that we each had an equal responsibility to facilitate the groups progress into authentic community.

My hope had been throughout that ultimately, from a position of strength and confidence achieved in a sense of genuine community, the group would grow ready to

move from the process of community building to the *task* of reflecting upon its shared experience and thereby assisting one another to grasp important learnings that could usefully be taken back to our own homes, workplaces and especially our churches.

I'm disappointed to report that this was not achieved, perhaps because any sense of community experienced was of too fleeting and fragile a nature to sustain such a switch of emphasis. However I can honestly say that a distinctive and palpable sense of community was experienced by me, especially during a period late on the morning of the third day - I felt this was an experience shared by more than one other.

## Reflection

Some of the expressions of appreciation shared during the days that have followed the event have reflected a clear measure of value on the part of several individuals, e.g., "I'm not exaggerating when I say it was one of the most valuable experiences of my life". A telling Christian scripture text that arose more than once during the event and has surfaced again since in other's reflections upon their experience is worth sharing here: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked". Luke. 12:48

I wish to recall and record my admiration for a brave group of people who on the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> September stepped out into the unknown and persevered through three exhausting days of sustained "Peck-process"

to, eventually, a less than easy conclusion. I especially want to express my appreciation of one group member who, upon my statement of being "stuck" late on towards the end of the final session, was moved to introduce a closing ritual which allowed us to move, very helpfully and less uncomfortably than might otherwise have been the case, from our intense process and out into the world once more.

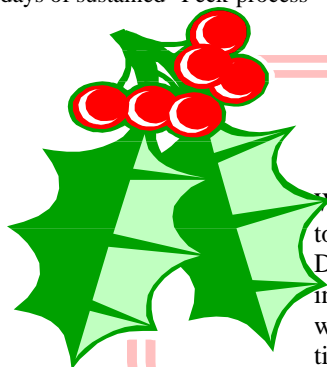
I hope these reflections will be recognized by my nine other companions as a description of the event *they* attended! - and that the reading of them may prompt them in turn to share their own experience of this unusual event with a wider audience.

## Looking to the future?

It is worth recalling the comment of one member who expressed satisfaction that the group was of such a small number, representing a size more akin to the group-size most familiarly encountered in the work-place, and therefore the more valuable for that reason. My hope is that we in CBiB may find a way to develop more opportunities for working with smaller groups, thereby lifting some of the sometimes intolerable pressure upon event-sponsors due to lack of early or "sufficient" bookings.

*Peter Laxton  
12th September 1997*

*(Editor's note: Peter and Tëan are sponsoring another similar event in December, hoping for 30 participants this time. For details see page 3.)*



## Christmas Escape for CB'ers

We are planning a relaxed alternative to Christmas from 26<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup> December 1997 for a few days, maybe including New Year. We will share walks and food, maybe some circle time. If interested contact Ruth Goffe on 0181 675 4388.

## To An English Friend in Africa

Be grateful for the freedom  
To see others dreams  
Bless your loneliness as much as you drank  
Of your former companionships  
All that you are experiencing now  
Will become moods for future joys  
So bless it all.  
Do not think your way superior  
To another's  
Do not venture to judge  
But see things with fresh and open eyes  
Do not condemn  
But praise when you can  
And when you can't, be silent.

Time now is a gift for you  
A gift of freedom  
To think and remember and understand  
The ever perplexing past  
And to re-create yourself anew  
In order to transform time.



Live while you are alive.  
Learn the ways of silence and wisdom  
Learn to act, learn a new speech  
Learn to be what you are in the seed of your spirit  
Learn to free yourself from all things  
That have moulded you  
And which limit your secret and undiscovered road.

Remember that all things that happen  
To you are raw materials  
Endlessly fertile  
Endlessly yielding of thoughts that could change  
Your life and go on doing so for ever.

Never forget to pray and be thankful  
For all things good and bad on the rich road  
For everything is changeable  
So long as you live while you are alive.

Fear not, but be full of light and love;  
Fear not, but be alert and receptive;  
Fear not, but act decisively when you should;  
Fear not, but know when to stop;  
Fear not, for you are loved by me;  
Fear not, for death is not the real terror,  
But life - magically - is.

*(Sent in by Ian Davidson)*

# Holding Group (H.G.) Meeting - 5<sup>th</sup> September 1997

The newly invigorated Holding Group (nine extra provisional members having arrived since the General Meeting) met at Douai Abbey on the weekend 5th to 7th September. There was a packed agenda of things that need to be sorted and organised before too long, but there needed to be a lot of learning to be together and this turned out to take priority over much of the CBiB work. The only task that needed to be done urgently was continuing event support - which will be done.

My job was to record decisions, and this report is mostly going to be confined to this.

## Smaller Groups?

We put in a request to the Facilitator Training Group to please consider providing facilitators for smaller groups than we have been accustomed to. This request was in the light of increasing requests for facilitation of smaller groups

We did not inaugurate a Publicity Group at this weekend (two of those who have expressed interest in taking part were not able to get to Douai on this occasion). Peter is going to contact some people to try to collate information about publicity up to this time, what it's been like, and what impact it has had.

Tëan is going to collect information and comments about the last General Meeting, and

also suggestions for the next one. (Unstone Grange has been booked again, for a date in September 1998, but there are no concrete plans beyond this as yet, and no group has emerged to make active preparation.)

## Constitution

We explored a little bit around the issue of a formal constitution. There is a desire to move this forward, and some work has already been done in researching various possibilities - but there is currently no volunteer to take it on at present. Yvonne is going to contact the Quakers and gather some information about Friendly Societies, however.

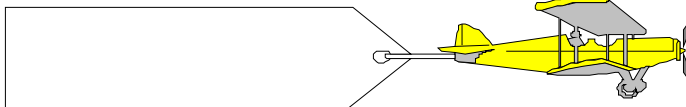
## Contacts

We talked about "Community Building in Europe". Tëan has energy for this and will stay in contact with Regina Haß in Hamburg, who has expressed strong interest.

Susie Adderley is going to contact all the people who expressed interest in joining the Holding Group, to find out how they feel and let them know they are welcome to attend the next meeting.

The date of the next meeting will be 21-23<sup>rd</sup> November.

*This report written by Mike Roth*



## Late Flash

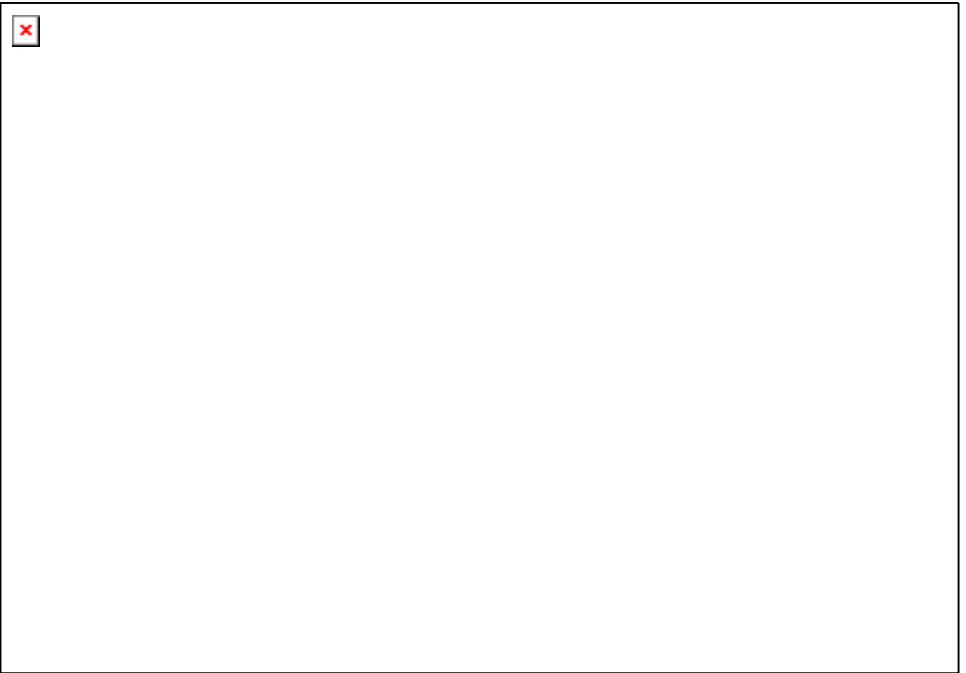
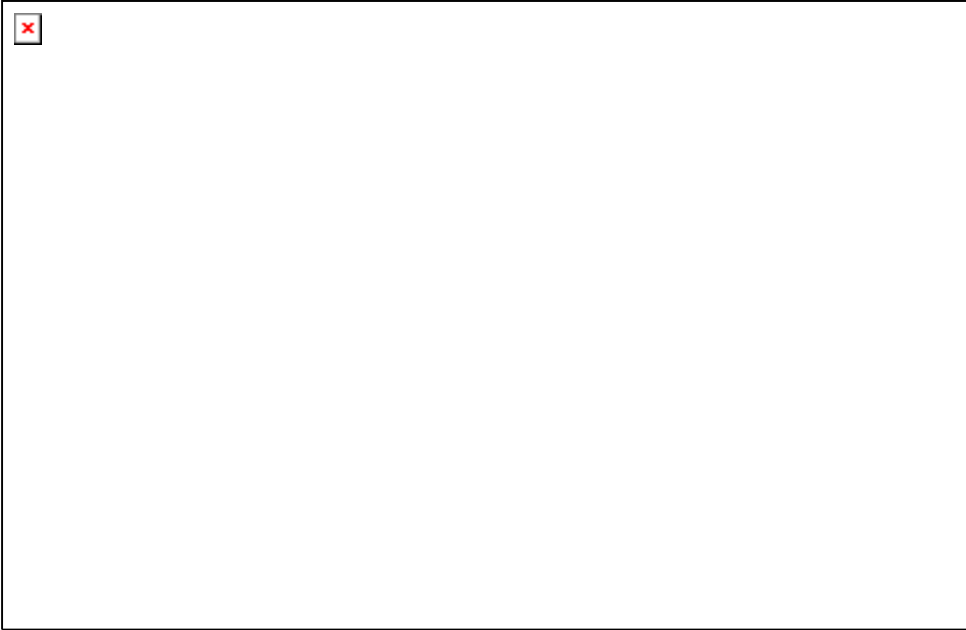
The Learning Opportunities Group (aka Ongoing Learning Group) met in Llanberis on October 4th/5th as planned. We will present a report on the meeting in the next newsletter. For the moment put in your diaries that the next meeting will take place on February 7th/8th at Douai Abbey (in the area between Newbury and Reading). More details to follow.

*Armando Magnino*

## New address

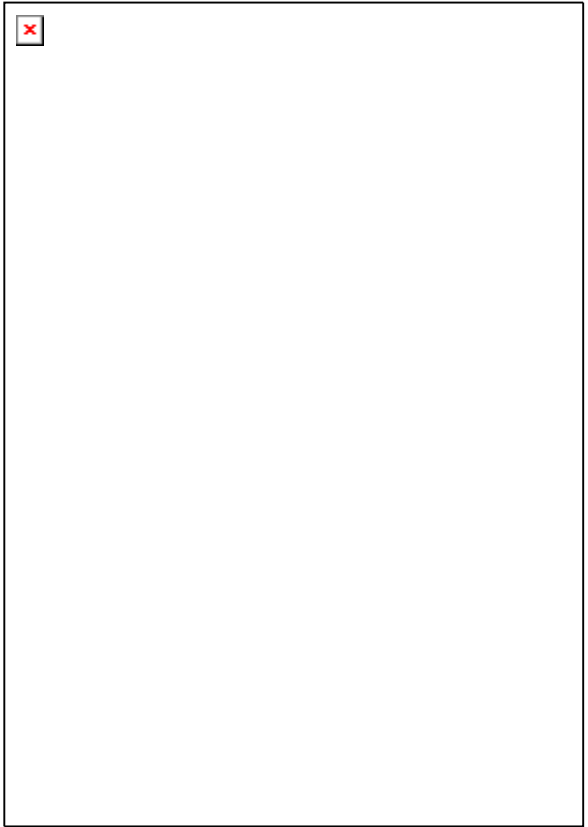
Colin Harrison  
2 Sunnynook  
North Street  
Mere  
Wiltshire  
BA12 6HH

Tel: 01747 861473



# Images from the General Meeting

*(with thanks to Suzy)*



# Chaotic reminiscences (and ramblings), from the Facilitator Training Group Meeting, September 19 -21

I was one of two facilitators of this meeting, and I took this to be a major challenge to me in all sorts of ways. The question of how to welcome, discern and assimilate new members to a 4 year old group who has a scarred and muddled history, is not one which the Community Building Guidelines have prepared us for.

The starkest problem has to do with two conflicting sets of values: the one about “professional standards” (also about getting the job done with some degree of clarity and integrity, whether as an amateur or as a professional) and the one about being welcoming and inclusive, and responding to diversity in creative ways. Somewhere underneath this for me is another question: can we really learn to tell the truth to one another - and is there really room for *everybody's* truth?

## Tumultuous

I do not know if I could evoke a flavour of this tumultuous weekend, given that I was so caught up emotionally with the task of facilitating it. One of my major concerns came from a conviction that “we” needed to learn to mix in small groups and share some close, direct discussion, argument and relationship such as is unlikely to happen in a large circle. The Leader Education Program strongly emphasises that potential leaders and facilitators must be able to adapt to the changing needs of a complex situation - and must not fall into the trap of “clinging to the large circle”. The trainers gave us to believe that addiction to the circle is one of the worst things that could happen to a group which wants to evolve into a learning community.

For the facilitators of this meeting there was a powerful dilemma - could we give the group the space and support it needed to make its own decision, at the same time as we clearly communicated our belief about what is the right direction to go? On this count, anyway, I judge the weekend as an important success. We spent some very painful, difficult and (I trust it will prove in the long term)

productive time in the large circle, and we managed to do some committed discussion and getting to know one another in small groups too.

## Meet-ings

The impact of newcomers on oldcomers, and the impact of oldcomers on newcomers, must be huge and of at least as many dimensions as there are individuals. I believe that there was a great deal of meeting, and a great deal of impact, on both individual and collective levels, during this weekend. So in this way, too, I count it as a success. I think it was an amazingly committed and energetic start to a difficult process which - we know very well - still has a long way to go.

We had no time for rampant fun, which is a great pity, and we did not really manage to “settle” anything... we came away with an outline for a discernment process which had been “agreed” by the oldstanding members but not exactly embraced joyfully by newcoming members. I don't think we have real agreement about what we believe is going to work.

## Diversity

Most of what follows are my own questions, arising from my reflections on this meeting and the challenges it represents. I have realized I have been short-sighted, in the weight I have given to *my own sense* of what is needed. I did not create enough space in my mind for the sheer diversity of reactions, feelings and concerns carried by all these different people. I hope to express here, some of that diversity.

## Questions

Some new members find it extremely painful to be “in question” as to whether they will eventually be accepted as members of this group. I have wondered about how I myself would react to being in this situation. I strongly suspect that I would be one of the minority who do not find this issue to be a

problem personally - recognizing and accepting that a decision *has to emerge* from some deep place in the group, hopefully a wise decision, but when the chips are finally down, some sort of decision - wise or otherwise - has to emerge. I also believe that I would not be so concerned (as some people appear to be) about the consistency and clarity with which “the process of induction” was implemented. We are fallible creatures, and we are forced into making difficult practical decisions at some times in our lives. This is one of them, and I don’t think we are “ready” for it. Why should we expect ourselves to be?

As someone “waiting to be discerned” I would be most concerned - I believe - with the sense that the people who were weighing and measuring me (as all human beings must do, in our attempts to “measure up” to one another) were trying to be honest and responsible in what they were doing; also that they *cared* about the effects of their behaviour upon me, in my relatively vulnerable position.

## Process

Thinking about this some more, I realise that honesty and caring are not in themselves sufficient conditions for sane decision making, such as will create outcomes which we can live with. If we are seriously divided, within ourselves or amongst ourselves, then our decision making will be chaotic - and we will suffer from the results. As a facilitator of this FTG meeting, I judged our decision making process to be hovering uneasily between chaos and emptiness, for most of the time.

Behind the chaos, and the inability to reach community, I believed we were bedevilled by a diversity of genuine concerns (*Can we honestly cope with 10 new members? Have we tried hard enough to find people who look like seriously good potential facilitators? Are we in danger of “accepting” people which the group as a whole are likely to fail to cope with in practice? How many people have to find one individual to be “difficult” or “distressing” to be with, before that individual*

*should be asked to not be in the group? .....Or, in this last scenario, is there another way to approach the whole thing - could we put a different kind of effort into the serious building of community; which must surely entail laying our real feelings and concerns on the line and trusting that we will find a resolution somewhere on the other side of the flames? Is there a danger of “rejecting” someone who actually has astonishing gifts like brother Elred and brother Thomas, gifts which we are just too self-absorbed to recognize? Could we be in the process of giving birth to poisonous schisms within Community Building? Could we, on the other hand, be about to commit suicide as a committed working group by inviting chaotic inter-personal conflict into the situation, beyond our capacity to manage?.*



For me the range of concerns is so diverse, and the conflicts between them so far from being resolved, that I find “crisis” to be the only word that does justice to the situation. More than one oldstanding member of the group has expressed serious doubts to me about their ability to stay in the group if the outcome of our present process went far enough

away from what they felt they could “live with”.... this could mean a group which threw away some of its best communicational resources, so I got really worried....

## Double Messages

The point about the chaos and the emptiness, is that a person hungry for a response *from the group* is likely to get double-messages, distressingly incongruent messages, or just an empty “I .....just .....don’t .....know”.

## Where from here?

As to what would be a good way to proceed from here, I myself change my mind about every 4 days about this - depending quite alarmingly upon who it is I have spoken with most recently. Most lately, I have felt the most affinity with the version that says “everyone who applied must come into a new, transitional group - *all of whose* members should now consider themselves to be to some

extent “on the line”, and in need of being “discerned”.

This is quite useful as a “thought experiment” anyway - though it has not proved to be very popular amongst some oldstanding members of the group. If it were taken as the definition of our process, it points to a need for extraordinary sensitivity, intelligence, commitment and respect, in order for us to achieve a truthful and workable self- and mutual- discernment. It could also lead to stark choices.

We might have to decide as individuals whether to apply ourselves seriously to “improving our act” (*some of our members are very bad at “bracketing” - but then it is sometimes difficult to say when is the right time for a person to bracket something, and when should they bravely stand their ground and thrash it out? I myself have very often felt “gagged” at CB task-process meetings because my feelings - feelings which to me were immediate and directly relevant to the process of the group - seemed to be felt by others to be completely intolerable or un-*

*process-able. The “message” I have received on these occasions is “we do not think we should have to put up with your personal shit, Mike!” So: am I supposed to put up, shut up, or get out?)* or we might, on the other hand, have to recognize that this group is not a place where our particular “unique gifts” are appreciated or wanted.

## Choices

What this seems to say, is that a more genuinely “inclusive” attitude - if followed with discipline and sensitivity, leads to a more stark set of choices about what we personally can stand, and what we cannot stand - and to a requirement for clarity and honesty between one another which *may* be beyond what we are capable of at the present time. (Clarity and honesty is the fast route to chaos - unless we also succeed in finding the capacity to *hear one another* in proportion to the clarity and honesty that is being expressed.) How can these difficult issues be resolved? Answers, on a postcard, please....

*Mike Roth*

Did you attend the recent General Meeting?

Have you been to a Network Gathering?

Do you have any comments about what happened, or what did not happen?

Perhaps you did not attend, and would like to offer a suggestion?

Whatever your thoughts, Tëan would like to hear them. She is collecting peoples' responses, suggestions and ideas ready for group to organise the next General Meeting (or whatever we call it!). Call her on 0121 429 8947.

The tentative date for next year is 18-20th September 1998

From the editor - I thought this might be of some interest ....

## The Space Within

"WALK CHEERFULLY OVER THE WORLD ANSWERING THAT OF GOD IN EVERY ONE"

George Fox, founder of The Society of Friends (Quakers), 1656

Quakers have a distinctive, but certainly not uniform, view of community. Here, Deborah Padfield, Editor of the Friend, an independent Quaker journal, talks with Helen Rowlands, Head of Community at Woodbrooke, the Quaker study centre in Birmingham.

'Community' is a well-used word; in Helen Rowlands' eyes it maybe overused, in danger of losing its meaning. And it is a perilous word, Helen knows, for it promises a lot and disappointment can be damaging. What, then, does 'community' mean to her?

### Early Experiences

Layers of meaning, built up through her experience over time. Her first conscious encounter with 'it' was the university chaplaincy 'my first experience of working with a group with a strong sense of calling, of purpose'. Though not residential, 'it was a strong thing, a group of people who could bring their faith to bear on a situation and see what they could do in it - see what we could do together.' Discovering an active role for itself, the group formed something which Helen, now, calls 'community.'

So 'community' is about a common purpose, common 'calling' - a word Helen uses several times. Born into a strong Quaker family, she loosened her links with that world as a student. Now, she can see that 'I grew up with the sense that Quakers were part of a minority, not mainstream ... Belonging to a strong group that's on the fringes gives you a strong identity' even though, in her childhood, 'I didn't know what the minority was standing out against.' Community is, perhaps, partly defined by being set over against the surrounding world.

### Boundaries

That 'over against' is, in a sense, logically necessary for community. Any group can only exist by virtue of its boundaries. Yet as we talk, Helen both affirms and resists this 'otherness'. For her, it is powerfully about learning how to be part of the whole.

'People who set out to share things with each other founder on the smaller things,' she says. After university, Helen was one of a residential community. As always, crunch points were kitchen sink and encounter of larks with owls. But what is trivial, and what important? She, a Quaker, could not understand why breaking bread together was a problem -yet for others, it was.

### Learning

What defined this group? Its aim was not to live within boundaries, but to build understanding across them. People learning to live with people, learning to accept the give and take, the tensions, the niggling irritations ... A small group of people being the world and its tensions in miniature: what could be more important? In spite of unwashed coffee mugs, it was for Helen a time of 'realising how much we could joyfully share.' and of learning to distinguish between the real and the trivial.

So, I think to myself, perhaps community is defined over against its surroundings, for it is about learning to live creatively -- and happily -with diversity, in a world which devalues and pulls against such mutuality

### Going Out

As we talked, I began to hear how Helen's understanding of community had changed over time. From the focus of that first chaplaincy, where the aim had been to discover what, out of their faith, participants could do together, the vision shifted towards one of being together in a way which gave people strength to go out and use their particular skills, their talents.

Community can, Helen stressed, be made from all kinds of ingredients: it can be

geographical or can form around a shared view of life - maybe political, or religious. This grouping gives a sense of common identity such that two Quakers in a roomful of Anglicans will greet each other as friends, even though they have not met before and are very different people.

## Woodbrooke

But 'though we talk about Woodbrooke as a community,' says Helen, there's no such thing as "the community of Woodbrooke". There are all kinds of groups within groups. Yet there's also something which is the totality.' 'A few years ago I might have had aspirations to create one big happy group in order to "be community". That's gone. It's great when it happens- but it's not what it's about. Woodbrooke's all sorts of shifting groups.' Students have different timescales, agendas, responsibilities and all these variables bring different subgroups together at different times. 'Yet when it works well, the totality is so much more than the sum of the parts.'

## When it Works

In what way? 'It's hard to be tangible. ... There's a sense of recognition that people are here for different purposes, and that those purposes complement each other rather than compete. That learning is to be had from all the agendas.' People learn from one another in a way which 'neither would have expected when they came.' My mind goes to the Tao. 'Shape clay into a vessel; it is the space within that makes it useful.' People coming together for their individual purposes - more or less specific; but finding that much of their richest learning lies in the unforeseen, 'the unintended the meeting of unlike with unlike. In the empty space ...

It is not possible, says Helen, deliberately to 'create community' in this sense. 'You can provide an environment in which it can happen; you can't make it happen .... The things that we do - study, meals, worship, shared tasks - it's the basic monastic

discipline,' tried and tested, providing the space within which learning can grow.

## Taking it Home

Woodbrooke is lucky: it has the resources, the staff willing to work at making such a space possible. Yet this is 'not about community-building for its own sake'. Woodbrooke is a place in which people have time to encounter and develop both different models of living and their own strengths, their selves - which they can then take home. This isn't easy. Staff recognise the importance of working with students on how to transfer back to their homes and Meetings what they have learned.

It doesn't always work for people; but 'at best', says Helen, it does. 'It's not all about sweetness and light "Part of the cost of discipleship is living with the other disciples,"' she quotes. Even strong friendships do not always survive the reality of living together. Woodbrooke has gone through storms in the last months, 'and for all the goodwill, there have been some hurdles which we haven't been able to cross.' That's a fact with which Woodbrooke has to come to terms and on which it has to build. Cracked and broken relationships are part of the many-layered creature called community: the hope has to be that they are not an end, but a part- painful and formative - of the journey.

## Working on it

'We can't expect "community" to happen just because we use the label.' That is, of course, why 'it' an issue to be talked about, worked on; why Woodbrooke is a residential study centre: because without endless effort, endless experiment - difficult and full of fun - human beings cannot live in peace.

*Woodbrooke, 1046 Bristol Road,*

*Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LJ*

*Tel: 01214725171*

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Do you want to borrow *Diggers and Dreamers*, or *Places to Be*,  
or *The Power of Acceptance*, or one of Scott Peck's books?  
Call Peter to see if it is available.

## Resources Available

All via Peter Cooper (see back page), cheques payable to CBiB  
Most can also be borrowed

Book: "The Power of Acceptance" by Doug Shadel & Bill Thatcher (£11 inc. p&p)  
Book: "Ongoing Community" by Jerry Hampton (£5 inc. p&p)  
Past copies of the CBiB newsletter, with binder and index (1-32 £10, 33-49 £10 inc. p&p)  
Binder and index for newsletters (£2 inc. p&p)

World-wide web page (<http://members.aol.com/petercbib>)  
"mv2spk" on-line community  
"NGCB" on-line discussion on Next Generation Community Building  
"ukcb" mailing list for discussion by UK Community Builders  
FCE and ACE newsletters  
Paper: "Adventure Education: Two Approaches" by Armando Magnino

### UKCB Mailing list

Do you have access to email?

Do you want to be part of a discussion about community building in the UK?

I have set up an experimental online mailing list called "ukcb" for doing this.

To join "ukcb", send an email message to "**majordomo@eejit.com**" (without the quotes), containing the single line "**subscribe ukcb**" (without the quotes) in the message body. To find out more before you join send an email message to "majordomo@eejit.com" containing the message body "**info ukcb**", or email me at PeterCBiB@aol.com (*editor*).

### Book for Sale

#### "The Power of Acceptance"

By Doug Shadel and Bill Thatcher

published 1997 price£11 inc. p&p

Forward and Epilogue by M.Scott Peck, M.D.

Using in-depth interviews and scientific research this book addresses the questions: -

What happens at a community building workshop?

How does it happen?

Will it result in lasting changes?

It also places the community building model within the context of the encounter group movement of the last 50 years.

Now available from Peter Cooper (see back page)

Doug and Bill have been involved with Community Building in the USA, and FCE, for many years.

## The 1991 CCC Conference in Knoxville USA

(Editor's note: this is reprinted here for interest - it was not published widely at the time. The Community Continuity Conference is held about once a year, and in 1991 it happen to just follow FCE's painful decision to 'down-size' from 13 full-time staff to 3.)

There were five main presenters at the conference. The sixth (and only woman), Anne Wilson Schaefer, was not able to attend due to poor health at the time of the conference.

### 1) M. Scott Peck

Best known for his written works which include *The Road Less Traveled* - on the best-seller list for more than six years - and *The Different Drum*, Dr Peck is a psychiatrist, lecturer and one of the founders of FCE.

After Dent had introduced the original format of the weekend, he introduced Scotty.

### Community Continuation

Scotty explained that Community Continuation is long term community. His emphasis seemed to be on this at present rather than community building.

He talked of organisational reformation and the need to exorcise our institutions. An organisation had to first develop a mission statement, second state its task and thirdly, clarify its structure.

He claimed that community appears loose but is compatible with the hierarchical mode of organisation. Structure facilitates the shift between community and hierarchy, and back again. He talked of the evolution of communities and asked if there were stages in the long term. He compared this with the peeling of an onion. He said, "FCE goes deeper... the hidden shall become known ... level of honesty (candour) gets deeper and deeper (frightening) ...

He finished with "what we can't tell you". He stressed the ambiguity of this statement, but went on to clarify only one side of this:

- How this group will build this community?
- About the mystery of community?
- Why community is a gift of the spirit?

### 2) James A. Autry

James is President of Meredith Corporation's (a diversified media company) Magazine Group and author of the recently published *For Love and Profit*. He has an extensive background in business and journalism.

He was presented as an expert on community and business. This is probably the subject of his recent book. He is also a well published poet. His talk was sprinkled with a delightful selection of his own poetry. He came over as a likeable businessman who has a great sensitivity for the people who work for him.

### Management

He pointed out how the towers and spires of churches and castles had dominated the townscapes in the past - now it is dominated by the towers of business. Now we must build the community of work. Management is an art; management is a trust. Managers have the opportunity to lead. Managers lead, build relationships and build community. There is a need for open honesty (especially of feelings) and trust (in others to do a good job). The problem with systems is that they communicate distrust. It is necessary to give everyone special treatment. However, he emphasised the need for each person to "care about yourself". He was hearing that the biggest need expressed within businesses is for community and connection.

He completed his presentation with some very moving poems from his book of collected poetry *Threads*.

### 3) Keith Miller

Keith is a nationally (in the USA) known lecturer and author of *The Taste of New Wine*, *The Dream* and *Please Love Me* as well as *Facing Co-dependence*. With degrees in business administration, theology and

psychology/counselling, he offers a rich background of experiences and profound insights.

He was the speaker who touched me the most. I was so spellbound that I took no notes. He was energetic and amusing. He was a welcome break after our struggle to reach community.

## Co-dependence

He displayed the "open honesty of feelings" that Autry referred to. He talked about the struggle he had with his own alcohol addiction, the breakdown of his marriage due to issues of co-dependence, and his struggle over the addictions of his children. (God save me if I have remembered badly.) Apparently, in a relationship between an addict and a co-dependant, if the addict is no longer an addict, the co-dependant may have to face up to their own problems for a change.

He told how the twelve step programme had helped him to "taste new wine" - a different way of living. How the same twelve steps had helped him and so many others with their co-dependency needs.

## My Insights

As he shared his life so openly I began to have insights into my own life that was to continue for a few days after the conference. I was profoundly astonished to discover my own co-dependency on needy and irritable women who all appeared to suffer more than average depression. I had thrived in those relationships on fixing things for those women, never fixing things for myself. I felt needed and allowed myself to be used, until I was all used up, and could give nothing else because I had lost myself. As Autry had said, "care about yourself".

This presentation was one that I shared with strangers on Greyhound busses. One woman on a bus shared her and her partners struggle with alcoholism - they were both from alcoholic parents. My parents were not alcoholic. But something she shared awakened my childhood experiences. She told how she had to be sensitive to her father at home as if

walking on eggshells. And that was how I perceived my father - I was trained to tolerate irritable people, and I was good at it. I had based my relationships on that art. Now my eyes are open.

The most incredible thing was that Keith Miller was exactly the same person off the podium as on it. That is unusual. He gave away love and trust. Thank you, Keith Miller.

## 4) Fran McKendree and Martin Bell

Fran McKendree is a musician, singer, composer, and lay theologian. He creates an artistic environment where people of all ages are able to grow. Martin Bell is an author, educator, lecturer, musician and composer. He has also been an Episcopal priest for over twenty years, and has impacted the lives of thousands of people. Bell is the author of *Wolf* and *The Way of the Wolf*.

Together they did a joint presentation of poetry, music and song.

## My Feelings

We had finished our two mornings of community building by the time we had this presentation. I was feeling antisocial and did not want a hug from anyone. I felt a long way from community.

During this presentation I reached community. It upset some other people - and the same thing had irritated me at first.

Two or three people felt it had the feel of a religious revival - and some of them left in disgust. Many of Fran's songs had a religious emphasis as they wove in and out of Martin's poetic -and dramatic - translation of the bible. I have a strong feeling that he emphasised the co-dependency of Adam and Eve, but I am unsure of this. I was busy flying high with a community spirit flowing with the tonal qualities of light (it was combined with a light show) and sound. A most enjoyable and sensual experience. I managed to filter out the religious overtones.

*Ian Fallows*

## Local Ongoing Community Building Groups

*Some groups are open to anyone interested in experiencing Community Building, some are open to you only if you have already attended a CB event, some are open all the time to new members, some may not be open to newcomers just now; some build community as in the CB events, some are support groups based on The Road Less Travelled... Check with the local contact person.*

**Leamington Spa:** First Monday in the month, 8pm. New members welcome. Prior attendance at a CB event is necessary. Contact Debbie or Armando on 01926 337 409.

**Malvern Hills:** Meets fortnightly on Thursday evenings. Contact Susie on 01684 540138

**Central & North London:** Meets on the third Sunday of the month 2-6pm. New members very welcome. Please call Fanny Calder on 0171 700 1134 if you are interested in coming along.

**Sheffield:** Meets monthly. Contact Alison 0114 2301739.

*Other groups exist but are not currently publicised. If you are interested in joining, or forming, a group please feel free to contact Peter Cooper (address below) for information and help.*



## General Enquiries

*.... about Community Building in Britain or Community Building events:*

*Anthony Kirke, 125 Greenham Road, Newbury, Berks, RG14 7JE Tel/Fax: 01635 47377*

## Newsletter

*Subscription rate [UK]: (Apr-Mar) £8; (Jul-Mar) £6; (Oct-Mar) £4; (Jan-Mar) £2.*

*Please make cheques payable to "Community Building in Britain" and send to the newsletter editor:-*

*Peter Cooper, 1 Evergreen Close, Woolmer Green, Herts SG3 6JN Tel: 01438 813765; Fax (telephone first): 01438 814986; e-mail: PeterCBIB@aol.com; Web page: <http://members.aol.com/petercbib>.*

*Please send items for inclusion in the next issue to the same address by **22<sup>nd</sup> November 1997**.*

*For convenience of personal contact, the address and telephone number of letter-writers will normally be published, unless other instructions are given. Contributions of any sort (articles, pictures, poems, letters etc.), and of any length, are welcome from all involved in any way with the CBiB network. While every effort will be made to reproduce items in full, please realise that the editor may have to shorten or alter them for publication*