

Dear Friend



Welcome to our now-weekly e-newsletter. Today there's good green news, a glimpse of our grounds, two spirituality treasure-houses and a recording of last week's One World Worship (held via Zoom). Oh, and a Good Shepherd joke. But first, will you join me in a spot of time travel?

Our first lockdown? Not quite...

Someone asked me if Othona had ever known anything like this lockdown. "Of course not" I said, but then thought a bit harder.

In one sense Othona was born from a lockdown! The very first time that our founder, **Norman Motley**, visited the Essex coast, intrigued to see the seventh century chapel St Peter's-on-the-Wall, was in March 1946. (This photo was taken *between* the wars - © Copyright Crown copyright.NMR [ref: cc72/00653](https://www.nmr.gov.uk/ref:cc72/00653))

Here's part of what Norman wrote about that memorable day. "We drove from [Bradwell] village church to the farm on which the chapel is situated... By coincidence that very day the area had been de-mined and the approach was safe and open for the first time in several years. The whole of that part of the east coast was open to invasion and defences had been installed at all strategic points."

So that was really the founding moment of our community - at the end of a lockdown which had kept people from the beach and the saltings (now a bird reserve) for years! And following all the other lockdowns of wartime. Norman goes on:

"On that vivid afternoon we came under the spell of that ancient building and of the whole area of the Blackwater Estuary... There were some tiles missing from the roof of the chapel and the windows were blocked by wooden boards and the earth floor was slightly damp, but the impact was incredible. The sense of thirteen centuries of prayer was almost overpowering. Numinous is a word which most adequately defines what we felt, and what innumerable visitors have felt since."

And now, once again, St Peter's (which Othona has used as its chapel since 1946 by Church of England permission) is locked and unvisited as it was in wartime.

Interesting history, but so what? Well, if the Othona Community was born out of that lockdown, what will we give birth to when we emerge from *this* dark valley? I confess I find this a question that motivates me - full of promise and of the unknown.

Both centres, by coincidence, will be inviting our returning visitors into a lot of new facilities. We're longing to have you try them! But I suspect that'll only be the half of it.

It's far too early to predict with certainty, even *when* we'll be able to re-open. But I feel increasingly convinced we'll find Othona exploring some new ways of being - and sharing - community. I don't mean practical changes forced on us by Covid precautions (though they will also be necessary). I'm thinking of changes we make as a positive choice after the reflection time of these 'fallow' months.

More of that, no doubt, at a later date. Here's how Norman described *his* sense of conviction that bright Saturday afternoon.

"The moment I entered the building I knew that we were home. There are times when one knows with a certitude deeper than purely rational processes and knowledge... The Roman fort on this site, from the stones of which St Cedd, Bishop of the East Saxons, built his church in AD 654, was called Othona. And so we took this ancient name for our new venture in community."

Support for Sustainability

We had some really excellent news this week. **Low Carbon Dorset** is helping to fund our new Four Seasons Studio to the tune of £13,500. This is in the form of a grant towards the extra costs of installing photovoltaic panels, an air source heat pump and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery. (Or as we renewables geeks like to say "PV, ASHP and MVHR"!)

In the longer run we aim to stop using fossil fuels at all on this site. Getting the new studio as carbon neutral as possible is a great step in that direction. Thank you Low Carbon Dorset, for your really helpful advice and for this targeted funding.

Spirituality for these Hard Times

I've shared a few online wisdom resources in earlier newsletters. It's time to mention two more. **Spirituality and Practice** is a "multifaith and interspiritual website... devoted to resources for spiritual journeys. The site's name reflects a basic understanding: *spirituality* and *practice* are the two places where all the world's religions and spiritual paths come together. While respecting the differences among traditions, we celebrate what they share in common."

If that description appeals, browsing their website you'll find gives you access to an unrivalled compendium. **Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat** who founded S&P have been researching and sharing inspirational material for almost 50 years. What they've built others are now helping take forward. This is unmistakably an American project, culturally rooted in the USA, but with global sympathies. [Here's the link.](#)

S&P's website existed long before coronavirus. **Alone Together** is a more focussed resource brought together especially for these challenging times. "A guide to isolation and social distancing from *those who know*... people who have lived this reality either intentionally like monks and nuns or against their will like hostages or the housebound."

The impetus came Million Minutes (resources for young people) and Abbot Christopher Jamison (Benedictine) and includes a beautifully diverse array of reflections, music, film - with something for all ages. You can [explore it here](#).

One World Worship Revisited

Last Sunday we held Othona's first online One World Worship in chapel. More than 70 individuals or households joined us by Zoom. We know some others would have liked to. Well, now you can hear what went on.

It's just an audio recording (for technical reasons we can't make it a video - maybe next time.) And the quality is not perfect, we know. Please forgive what sounds like a very quiet didgeridoo accompaniment at times!

The recording starts just after I'd introduced the five of us present in chapel: Tony, Liz, Robin, Kate and Gavin. If you listen, the two main voices you'll hear are mine and Liz's. It takes about 28 minutes and you can [listen here](#). We plan another OWW by Zoom on Sunday 7 June.

Just Joking

Thanks for this laugh to Bishop Karen of Sherborne:

A shepherd is looking after his sheep one day on the side of a deserted road, when suddenly a brand-new sports car screeches to a halt. The driver, dressed in a designer suit, designer shoes, designer sunglasses, designer watch, and a designer tie, gets out and asks the shepherd, 'If I can tell you how many sheep you have, will you give me one of them?'

The shepherd looks at the young man and then looks at the large flock of sheep grazing and replies 'Okay'. The young man parks the car, connects his laptop to his mobile, enters a NASA website, scans the ground using his GPS, opens a database with 60 excel tables with logarithms and pivot tables and then prints out a 150-page report on his high-tech mini-printer. He turns to the shepherd and says, 'You have exactly 1,586 sheep here.'

Rather surprised the shepherd says, 'That's correct, you can have your sheep.' The young man takes the animal and puts it in the back of his car. Just as he's about to drive off, the shepherd asks him: 'If I guess your profession, will you return my animal to me?'

The young man answers 'Yes, why not?'

The shepherd says, 'You are an IT consultant'. 'How did you know?' asks the young man.

'Very simple' answers the shepherd 'First, you came here without being called. Second, you charged me a fee to tell me something I already knew, and third, you don't understand anything about my business. Now please can I have my *dog* back?'

Around the Grounds

There's no 'virtual walk' this week but I promise another one for next weekend. If you'd been walking round our grounds today you might have noticed:

- evidence that the builders have returned to complete our Four Seasons Studio
- swallows swooping in and out to their nest under the stoep
- new raised beds promising everything from kale to rhubarb
- the first butterfly orchids coming into flower
- the very rare sight here (I've not seen one before) of a red kite

May you find picturing some of that in your imagination even better than my bumpy camerawork!

Tony - on behalf of all of us in lockdown at Othona: Robin, Liz, Kate, Gavin and Sean