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The views expressed in *De Numine* are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the Alister Hardy Society or the Religious Experience Research Centre.

*The Editor*



RERC has an overprinting of *The Divine Flame: an Essay towards a Natural History of Religion* by **Sir Alister Hardy** – one of his seminal works, first published in 1966. Copies are available to AHS members at the special price of £2.00 & p&p.

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**Information for contributors and contact details are shown on the inside back cover.**

## Editorial

May I remind local group organisers that the new AHS website has a section where talks and lectures can be posted – it is somewhat underused at the moment. Also please see Mike Rush's suggestion about posting future events online. I would like to draw members' attention to the proposed visit to the UK in June this year by Dr Robert Forman, founding Editor of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, to launch his new book. Details of the book are in the list of books for review. Dr Forman, who says he has long been a 'fan' of the Alister Hardy Society, has sent us a narrative of his spiritual journey called 'An Experience – and Disappointment – of the Soul'. It will appear in print in the Autumn issue of *De Numine*, but meanwhile it can be found on the AHS website (see WebNews, pages 34 - 35).

There is something about this issue of *De Numine* which defies comment and analysis, it seems so cohesive and complete in itself, almost as though there is a *deus ex libris* making the decisions, so I have allowed myself the following personal semantic ramble. I hope some readers may find it of interest:

The recently coined phrase 'secular spirituality' which seems to be appearing in print more and more often, is one that has certainly given me pause for thought. In her book *The Search for Spirituality* Professor Ursula King addresses the issue of spirituality in the wider human and planetary context (see my review in issue no. 47 p. 38). But is 'secular spirituality' not a contradiction in terms? Is there a confusion here between morality and ethics (which have always been part of a humanist frame of reference) and spirituality per se, which is surely a function of transcendent rather than mundane experience? Perhaps the laying of exclusive claim to spirituality by those with a religious faith can now legitimately be challenged, as the concept implied by the phrase 'secular spirituality' certainly does. Are we all not equipped with the same potential for transcendent experience? Just as people of different faiths can all lay claim to spirituality, why not those with no specific religious tradition? The theological conundrum implicit in this question could fuel a seminar series, but for now I will let it return me to the



natural world, which we all inhabit, and can take pleasure and inspiration from, and which we all have a responsibility to care for. Maybe this is the key to the seeming paradox of 'secular spirituality'; the sacredness of creation is non-denominational, and the mystery of life, the incarnation of Spirit is a gift freely given for all of us to experience.

I now find on a last read-through of this issue that there is a theme, and it is exactly the theme I touch on above – must have been my 'unconscious soul' (as Howard Jones puts it on page 6) that knew it all along. This issue abounds with references to modern spirituality: universal spirituality, numinous spirituality, eco-spirituality, the place of spirituality in healing and counselling, and the way we have segued from religious to spiritual in our attempts to define our experience of the sacred. This last debate seems to have come to rest, for now at least, at the point where 'spiritual' encompasses 'religious', but 'religious' does not define or confine 'spiritual'.

*Patricia Murphy*

*Photographs of Spring by Jean Matthews*



## A View from the Chair

'We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.' (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

This quotation made me think. It seems to me that if we can see life in this way, it makes spiritual experiences entirely natural; more natural, possibly, than those experiences we record through our physical senses. We all know that what we record through our senses is but a particular interpretation of reality – whatever 'reality' is! Genuine spiritual experiences are surely experiences of reality which we find ourselves struggling to put into words. They come from a deeper source than words, and therefore, we may argue, are more 'natural'.

A recent book which may be of interest is Rupert Sheldrake's *The Science Delusion* (Coronet, 2012). As 'one of the world's most innovative scientists, Rupert shows that science is being constricted by assumptions that have hardened into dogmas. The 'scientific world view' has become a belief system ... Consciousness is nothing but the physical activity of the brain.' (from the front cover). For many of us, however, consciousness precedes the physical universe, and what we record through our senses is about experience inadequately described through the constrictions of a space- and time-bound universe. Would it be fair to say that our *experience* of consciousness evolves as the living organism becomes more complex and interactive with the world around it? This is a question we could ponder and debate. What I do want to acknowledge is that there are a number of us within our Society who feel that the Society is itself going through an evolutionary process. I believe this is a healthy sign, for nothing can remain unchanging if it is to live and prosper.

We had an excellent interactive session at our Open Day last November, and it is clear that members feel there are issues which need to be addressed. See Marianne Rankin's report of Open Day on page 20 for an account of this discussion. We continue to value very much the recording of experiences and we also increasingly recognise the opportunities which Society meetings can give through providing a forum for reflection on particular experiences and their significance. We do not, however, offer a counselling or advice service, and are unable to do this. If people have questions regarding experiences or need advice, this is best sought through personal contacts, available literature or qualified professional organisations.\*

Consideration is being given to a new national appeal for – and study of – spiritual/religious experiences in the UK, to be initiated through the Religious Experience Research Centre and the University of Trinity St. David, Lampeter. The AHS committee strongly supports such an initiative.

Many of us seem to feel that the name 'Alister Hardy Society' needs to change, as it appears that people are finding it increasingly difficult to understand. (Who is Alister Hardy?) So the AHS committee is considering this, and it is becoming apparent that any new name should incorporate the words 'spiritual', 'study' and 'experience', with perhaps a sub-title to include the name of Sir Alister. Comments or suggestions are welcome, to Marianne Rankin or myself, in time for the Committee Meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> April. See below for contact details.

News in brief: We are considering a **Members' Forum** for our Society website. We value links with **schools**, and are encouraged by the role which religious experience plays in the 'A' level religious studies syllabus. We are also considering the possibility of a **Quiet Day** in a location which is fairly central to enable members to attend.

Wishing you well in 2012.

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*\* RERC responds to those sending in experiences to the archive, not the AHS. Anyone asking for help (which happens very rarely in this context) is referred to the AHS for like-minded support/discussion – at meetings, etc. – but is advised that neither the RERC nor the AHS can offer counselling or advice. Of interest in this context is Mike Rush's letter on page 36 to which he invites readers to reply. (Ed.)*

## **NDEs, OBEs and the Divine Spirit: a critique of the views of Professor Michael Marsh**

Michael Marsh, now a professor of theology at Oxford University but formerly an academic medical researcher, has written a book on these psychic experiences that essentially interprets them in a materialistic way as 'brain-state phenomena' rather than as 'glimpses of immortality'. Indeed, his interpretation of the data that Sir Alister Hardy used as the basis of his book *The Spiritual Nature of Man* (1979) leads Marsh to the conclusion (*De Numine* No. 50, Spring 2011) that they 'represent anomalous phenomenology engineered as subjects' brains recover from immediately preceding insults ... merely offering this-worldly bizarreness and banality'. From this it is obvious that Professor Marsh does not believe NDEs or OBEs give us any information whatever about the afterlife or divine spirit, however envisaged.

Dr Penny Sartori has already given us a highly critical but insightful review (*De Numine* No. 51, Autumn 2011) of Professor Marsh's book<sup>1</sup>. Unlike Dr Sartori or Professor Marsh I have only a limited background in medicine so my comments are derived from my experience in physical sciences and philosophy; but I think there are still other points that can be made critical of Marsh's dismissal of NDEs and OBEs as any kind of spiritual experience. Furthermore, my comments relate only to Marsh's AHS Open Day Address given in November 2010 and précised in the *De Numine* article, though this summarises the conclusions reached in the book.

First, even though he worked from accounts of NDEs rather than interviews with patients who have experienced them, Marsh is quite incorrect in stating that NDEs 'are due to mental activity taking place as brains rapidly recover during the waking process' after traumatic experiences. Many books on these experiences relate events and detailed conversations that occur throughout, say, serious operations where the patient is in a totally unconscious state as assessed by medical criteria for several hours. They certainly do not relate only to 'minutes or seconds ... only when subjects are awakening' from unconsciousness: 'memories are not made when subjects are "unconscious"' says Marsh – this is patently incorrect.

Cardiologist Pim van Lommel<sup>2</sup> cites examples of patients pronounced clinically dead, some for five minutes or more before being resuscitated. They are often able to give detailed accounts of the measures taken during that time to revive them. Cardiologist Michael Sabom has described similar experiences<sup>3</sup>. As this is the key point in Marsh's arguments and the premise is fundamentally flawed, the whole thesis constructed on this basis is without foundation. In recent years, Michael Tynn<sup>4</sup> and Lisa Williams<sup>5</sup> have given us mediumistic accounts of an afterlife whose characteristics correspond closely to those described by NDE subjects in this book.

Marsh claims: 'critical review of NDE language reveals its bizarreness and banality'. In fact, the language used in describing NDE states after a medical trauma is usually a layperson's account of medical procedures and equipment. Furthermore, many NDEs and OBEs reveal details of a spiritual state that often embraces visions of God or avatars or, in secular matters, precognition or clairvoyance of often traumatic events occurring to close relatives. Marsh says they are 'mere trivialities, worldly memories – from Hollywood or Sunday school.' As children as young as four or five can experience NDEs with some of the characteristics of adult experiences<sup>6,7</sup>, this spiritual devaluation of the experience is also quite unfounded. Most persons are spiritually uplifted by an NDE and live the rest of their lives in a more holistic way, so the experience is far from trivial.

There are documented cases from reliable subjects, often verified by other onlookers of integrity which provide further evidence that the events related are often of great significance. Swedenborg's clairvoyance of a fire in Stockholm when he was giving a dinner party many miles away was confirmed by the other party guests and is a well-known example. There are documented records of people who were intending to travel on the *Titanic's* fateful voyage who made written accounts in diaries of premonitions of impending disaster.

Marsh compares the brain state during these experiences as being like the 'double-aspect consciousness common to lucid dreaming and epilepsy'. My son suffered from epilepsy for several years and I have for many years been subject to lucid dreaming. The experiences that I and my son have had were nothing like those reported by NDE or OBE subjects. This is confirmed by van Lommel's study. There is no 'double-aspect consciousness' in NDEs: in anaesthesia or death, the conscious mind is stilled; only the unconscious soul is active. Furthermore, in OBEs or shared NDEs, subjects are usually fully conscious but may still experience some of these phenomena.

Professor Marsh refers to Dr. Raymond Moody's classic book *Life After Life* (1975) but not to *Glimpses of Eternity*<sup>8</sup> that describes shared death experiences. Here, groups of people who are physically close, and usually but not always emotionally close, to a dying individual, but who are all in a fully wide-awake state, individually report some of the phenomena described by NDE or OBE subjects.

'NDE phenomenology is culturally-determined, historically and geographically' says Marsh: why should this count against their validity as spiritual experiences? Would we not expect souls in the spiritual domain, especially if only temporarily, to relate to Jesus or Mary or Muhammad or even to pagan gods and goddesses as they did in earthly life?

Marsh's desire to replace what he calls 'Hardy's panentheism' interpretation of these phenomena by 'a more robust footing in the 'Otherness' of God, envisioned as triune hypostatic inter-relationships of Father, Son and Spirit' does nothing to support his case.

As indicated by several authors of books on the subject, while there are certainly culturally-influenced aspects of NDEs, there are certain features that are remarkably uniform between adherents of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic faiths in the west and the mystical religious philosophies of the east. 'The relationality of the Godhead to creation is exhibited through the dual nature of Jesus who is at once intrinsic to the Triune Godhead, but also incarnate Man, thereby bridging humanity and creation to the divine', says Marsh. Surely any role for Jesus in interpretation of these phenomena is an irrelevance to Jews, Islamists, Hindus and atheists who all report having similar NDEs. There is nothing whatever specifically Christian about NDEs or OBEs. The argument is confounded rather than illuminated by any interpretation in terms of a uniquely Christian viewpoint.

Humanity and the divine are bridged far more closely by the concept of a panentheistic divine cosmic spirit in which, as souls, we all participate than by invoking Jesus as intermediary. Hardy's process theology, in which human souls are regarded as part of the divine cosmic spirit – a concept so disparaged by Marsh – represents a far more coherent interpretation of these and other psychic events. Furthermore, it is one that is more compatible with modern theoretical science than with a biblical viewpoint which even many theologians now accept is largely allegorical man-made myth.

Professor Marsh has concentrated exclusively on NDEs and OBEs in his thesis. However, these are only one or two aspects of psychic phenomena. Certainly, because subjects claim to see 'Jesus in white robes' or 'the face of God' during the events, this cannot by itself be regarded as a 'glimpse of immortality.' What they do indicate clearly is that it is possible for people to undergo mental experiences that are inexplicable in the materialist world view of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century science.

To get a more balanced view of the phenomena we must surely take into account other psychic events in fully alert subjects, particularly those who claim to have some form of spiritual psychic vision. The consistency between the reports of an afterlife provided by mediums<sup>4,5</sup> and that of NDEs and OBEs is surely significant – it may not constitute proof, but it is certainly very persuasive evidence, for those who are open-minded and not ingrained materialists, of an eternal spiritual domain to which we are all apprenticed in mortal life.

Both Sabom and van Lommel, as well as Mark Fox<sup>9</sup>, and Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick<sup>10</sup> interpret NDEs and OBEs as having far more spiritual significance than Marsh attributes to them. The state of being during NDEs and OBEs cannot be satisfactorily explained in materialist physiological terms: it is certainly not confined to a few moments before full consciousness and its effects on the subjects are anything but bizarre and banal. The outstanding success of some spiritual healers, especially those who have no medical training themselves but claim to have medically qualified spirit guides<sup>11</sup>, is surely further evidence of a continuing existence of human souls in the afterlife, functioning as spiritual guides.

*Dr Howard A. Jones*

## **References**

<sup>1</sup> Michael N. Marsh, *Out-of-Body and Near-Death Experiences*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Pim van Lommel, *Consciousness Beyond Life*, HarperCollins, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Michael B. Sabom, *Recollections of Death*, Corgi, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Tymn, *The Articulate Dead: They brought the spirit world alive*, Galde Press, Lakeville, Minnesota, 2008.

- <sup>5</sup> Lisa Williams, *The Survival of the Soul*, Hay House, 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> M. Morse and P. Perry, *Closer to the Light*, Villard Books, New York, 1990.
- <sup>7</sup> P.M.H. Atwater, *The New Children and Near-Death Experiences*, Bear & Co., Rochester, VT, 2003.
- <sup>8</sup> Raymond Moody, *Glimpses of Eternity: An investigation into shared death experiences*, Rider, 2010.
- <sup>9</sup> Mark Fox, *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience*, Routledge, 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick, *The Truth in the Light: Investigation of over 300 near-death experiences*, Berkley Books, New York, 1995.
- <sup>11</sup> See the books by J. Bernard Hutton on the work of medium George Chapman working through ophthalmic surgeon Mr Wiliam Lang (*Healing Hands*, Virgin, 1995) and medium Mrs Leah Doctors working through a 15<sup>th</sup> century Chinese surgeon called Dr. Fu Lin Chang (*The Healing Power*, Leslie Frewin, 1975).

## After Thoughts

Recently I read how Einstein spent the last twenty five years of his life trying to unite the two fundamental forces of the universe, gravitation and electromagnetism. He called it his Unified Field Theory. Today the search for the 'Holy Grail' of physicists continues, now called the 'Grand Unified Theory', or a theory of everything. As early as 1926 the physicist Oscar Klein explained that such a theory would work only if the equation included five dimensions, not four. This extra dimension would have to be rolled up so tightly that it would not be seen.

If the aim of science is to 'explain' the Universe to us, it seems to me that with every step taken to try and pin down 'reality', this 'reality' moves a step further away. So the word 'explain' (a clearing up of obscurity) seems a questionable one to use. We cannot truly explain electricity, magnetism or gravitation. Science can measure their effect, but can it say anything about their ultimate nature?

These mysterious forces and the concepts of time and space are properties of our perceptions formed by our senses. They exist in our minds and we ascribe them to the external world. They are not the things themselves, for nothing which is intuited in space is a thing in itself, and space is not a form that belongs to the property of things. What we call 'objects' are nothing else but representations of our sensibility. Space has no objective reality except as an order of arrangement of objects we perceive in it, and time has no independent existence apart from the order of events by which we measure it.

I ask myself this: 'If nothing has existence save in its being perceived, can our senses (or our innermost mind) translate for us, or hint at, a deeper sense of reality? The individual consciousness and the observer's mental state will together form this reality, perhaps.' I cannot but believe we are spiritual beings and that this is an essential part of this reality. Further, there are boundaries beyond which science can never penetrate and there will always exist regions quite outside the sphere of the scientific method.

Today with such staggering advances in mathematical models and constructs, black holes, dark matter and dark energy etc., the gulf between man the observer and the objective world of scientific description grows ever greater. Through mathematics order 'appears' to be emerging from chaos. Yet I find the evolving picture becomes ever more remote and I am in

increasing darkness, where I feel there should be light. The sacredness of life is being overshadowed by these concepts of space and time.

If the world we can know is the world built up from our birth by the interplay of our senses, then a state of existence devoid of associations has no meaning. The cosmos, as constructed by cosmologists, which lies outside our perceptions is but a world of phantoms and symbols. This is my deepest concern with recent scientific claims. This knowledge does not, indeed cannot, bring us to an understanding of the cosmos. It brings us no nearer to the essence. The quest for scientific knowledge increases as spiritual knowledge decreases. Scientific discovery must not be confused with moral progress. The real question must be – knowledge for what?

Can we say that scientific theories based on observations which cannot directly be verified are only intellectual constructs? Is the scientific method, as applied to the cosmos, the one and only path to understanding? Is the quest for a Unified Theory of Everything a simplistic dream, although we sense that all natural phenomena are related to nature as a whole? Theories are not a representation of 'how things are', but often they come to be accepted as 'reality'.

There is no mystery of the physical world that does not point to a mystery beyond itself. We stand upon this earth and look out at the stars and into the deep and dazzling darkness with the realisation that we are both observer and the observed. All observation is self-observation. The mystery of our own being is deepened by our own perceptions of the heavens.

The universe and the individual are expressions of oneness. The outer world is within us; we are made aware of the outer world by our senses. Yet we fail to comprehend this unity and we fail to understand the mystery of our own nature. How then is it possible to comprehend this wonderful universe if we do not understand ourselves? Have we not failed to curb our own aggression? Today with the ever present threat of tribalism in the form of nationalism, of selfishness and greed can there be any realistic hope of true comprehension?

The same elements, particles and molecules make not only our own brains and bodies but also form the stars, the galaxies and the vast cold dust clouds of interstellar space. The very same. Our selfish notion of separateness must go. We and the universe are one. We cannot be divided. Indeed every tiny part, it can be said, contains the whole universe folded within it. The mysteries of nature dwell within us. Science will never 'explain' the extremes of reality and we must make do with the models that mathematics and the cosmologists are revealing to us. We must remember however that they are only models and that these models are constantly being manipulated and adjusted.

Our senses do bind us. Yet I strive for what Richard Jeffries desired: 'To live in the Eternal Now, a higher state of consciousness utterly beyond anything my own conception can imagine and deeper than all the wonders and greatness of the visible universe.'

I am reminded of what St. Paul said: 'The world was created by the word of God so that what is seen was made out of things *that do not appear*.'

I think that is worth pondering.

*Graham Arnold*

*Graham Arnold is an artist, a member of the Brotherhood of Ruralists and is much involved with the Offa's Dyke Astronomy Group in South Shropshire.*

## My Druid is Christ: Miracles of the Celtic Saints

An Irish legend tells how Saint Scothíne of Leinster was a man of 'great piety and of wondrous power', for he could travel from Ireland to Rome one day and return the next by walking on top of the sea. One day, as he was striding across the waves, he met Saint Findbarr of Cork who was rowing a boat.

'How come you are walking on the sea?' asked Findbarr.

'This is no sea, but a plain covered with clover,' replied Scothíne, and with that, he plucked a clover blossom and tossed it to the saint in the boat, saying,

'But how come your boat floats on a plain?'

In answer to which, Findbarr dipped his hand into the water, drew out a salmon, and threw it to Scothíne.

Although miracles and wonders in the lives of early Celtic saints were attributed to the grace of God, it is not difficult to detect the magical world of an earlier tradition in such tales. The above story, for example, closely echoes the saga known as 'The Voyage of Bran,' a type of narrative known as an *immram* that would have been recited by bards in their chieftains' halls. The hero, Bran mac Febal, sails across the sea in search of the Otherworld country known as the Isle of Women. On his journey he meets Manannán mac Lir, King of the Land-Under-Wave, riding his two-wheeled chariot over the waves. Manannan hails him, saying:

'Bran deems it a marvelous beauty  
In his coracle across the clear sea;  
While to me in my chariot from afar  
It is a flowery plain on which he rides.'<sup>1</sup>



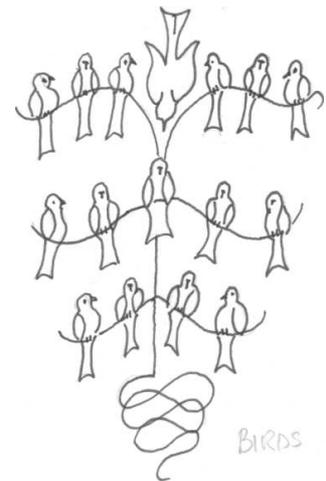
While Saint Scothíne appears to have the attributes of Manannan himself, Findbarr's swift response shows him to be a man of power, too. The salmon he effortlessly pulls out of the sea suggests he is a *fili* or poet-seer, who can access the Salmon of Wisdom from the depths of the Otherworld's waters. Findbarr, who was also known as *Barrfhind*, (white-tops), once rode a white horse over the water from Wales to Ireland, when the wind was not favorable for sailing. At this time the Irish Sea must have been full of saintly traffic, because as the horse went plunging over the towering waves 'as though on a level field', Findbarr came upon none other but the famous voyaging saint Brendan, riding on the back of a whale. They exchanged greetings and Brendan promised to visit Findbarr's mentor Saint David in Wales.

Saint Brendan's voyage overseas also parallels the *immrama* of Bran and other Celtic heroes. He sailed with a crew of monks in search of a mysterious island where the stones were jewels, and the trees full of fragrant blossoms and apples. Marvelous apple-trees, shining with silver flowers or laden with a perpetual harvest of ripe and delicious apples are a common feature of Otherworldly islands. To eat of their fruit is to stay young forever, for this is Tir na n'Og, the Land of Youth, or the Summerland. In the 10th century *Voyage of Saint Brendan* it is renamed the 'Land of Promise of the Saints,' but the biblical overtones only thinly mask the pre-Christian Fortunate Isles.

Every year on their lengthy voyage, Brendan and his monks celebrated Easter on an island known as 'The Paradise of Birds.' Here they came upon a huge tree so full of white birds that not a branch or leaf of it could be seen. One of the birds flew down, on wings that

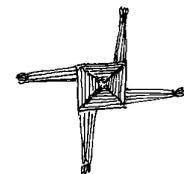
chimed like bells, and alighted on the saint's boat. He told Brendan that the flock was a host of fallen angels, exiled from their heavenly home and forced to wander the skies as messengers of God. On Sundays and holy days they took the shape of birds, to sing the praises of their Creator.

In *The Voyage of Bran* these birds are to be found on the great tree at the heart of the Isle of Women, and in much early literature and iconography, they belong to Celtic goddesses. The birds of Rhiannon have the power to wake the dead and lull the living to sleep; the song of Clíodna's three magic birds is of unsurpassed sweetness and has the power to heal. The feminine powers are banished from the Christian concept of the Otherworld, but their birds remain, albeit in the form of fallen angels.

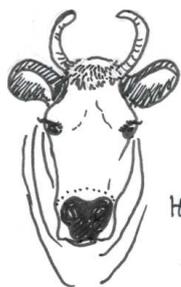


The lives of the Celtic saints are so clearly embedded within the numinous and mythical landscape of the primal world-view, it is not surprising that the saints themselves act more like pagan heroes and magicians than pious men of God. No doubt some of the hyperbole was consciously created by hagiographers to boost reputations and to demonstrate the superiority of Christ's miracles over druid magic. But it was not all fabricated by scribes, but rather grew organically out of the soil of a culture steeped in the experience of a sacramental universe. Moving in and out of marvelous worlds at will, the miracles they themselves perform often seem so much the stuff of the colorful tapestry of Celtic myth it may be truly said that 'to scratch a Celtic saint is to find a druid', or even – as in the case of Saint Brigid – a goddess.

Brigid is the only powerful Celtic feminine figure to be transformed into a saint, but her magical attributes and abilities are so thinly disguised as Christian miracles that Sir James Frazer called her a 'goddess in a threadbare cloak.' Her name means 'Exalted One,' probably from the Sanskrit word *brihati*, an epithet of the divine. A mother goddess of regeneration and abundance, she was greatly beloved as a provider of plenty who brought forth the bounties of the natural world for her people.



There is certainly little evidence of her as a historical figure: accounts of her life are steeped in Celtic magical tradition. She was born at sunrise while her mother was walking over a threshold, and so 'was neither within nor without'. Liminality, the state of being in between places and times, is a time when magical events frequently occur in Celtic lore. Her mother was carrying a pitcher of milk, with which she bathed her new-born, and as a child she was unable to eat ordinary food, but had to be reared on the milk of a special white red-eared cow. White animals with red ears are frequently found in Celtic mythology as beasts of the Otherworld.



The goddess Brigid owned two magical oxen, for in Celtic society, cattle were the most highly valued of all animals, revered as symbols of plenty, and Saint Brigid was very closely associated with dairy cows. As an adult, she was followed everywhere by a cow who supplied her with all the milk she needed, and when she became abbess of Kildare, she miraculously increased the milk and butter yield of the abbey cows; some accounts say that her cows produced a whole lake of milk three times a day, and one



churning filled hundreds of baskets with butter. She fed the poor, birds and beasts, and they all loved her for it. The bountiful mother goddess of the fruitful earth shines through the gentle Christian saint.

The goddess was closely associated with fire and the sun, and the arts of smithcraft and poetry. Early writers glossed her name as *breo-aigit*: 'fiery arrow': a false but somehow very fitting etymology for one who kindles the fires of creativity and regeneration. These associations carry into the traditions surrounding the Christian saint. In one version of her life, a druid prophesies that she will be 'a daughter conspicuous and radiant, who will shine like the sun among the stars of heaven.'<sup>2</sup> As a child, a fire was seen rising from the house where she and her mother were asleep. Yet it did not burn the house, but glowed like the burning bush of the Old Testament. When she first began to pray to God, a column of flame was seen rising from the house. She emerged unharmed, but 'full of the grace of the Holy Spirit', a reference to the Pentecostal flames. A charming legend tells that once Brigid came hurrying in from tending the sheep in a rain-shower to greet Saint Brendan, who had come to find out if all the stories about this young girl were true. In her eagerness to greet the famous man, she flung off her cloak and hung it on a sunbeam to dry, and to the old saint's astonishment, there it stayed.

Within her convent at Kildare burned a perennial flame which was known as one of the three inextinguishable fires of the Irish monasteries. Stories about the flame's miraculous properties told that it stayed alight through the grace of God and the ashes from the burnt wood never increased although it burned for a thousand years, from the 5th to the 16th centuries. Gerald of Wales wrote about it when he visited the convent sometime in the twelfth century. He tells that there used to be twenty nuns keeping watch over the flame during Brigid's lifetime; since her death, nineteen took turns, one each night, in guarding the fire. When the twentieth night came, the nineteenth nun put the logs beside the fire and said:

'Brigid, guard your fire. This is your night.'<sup>3</sup> In the morning, the wood was found burned and the fire still alight. It seems probable that Kildare was once a pagan sanctuary attended by priestesses, similar to the Vestal Virgins of Roman tradition.

Goddess of the Sun and Christian saint of the Eternal Fire are equally invoked in this beautiful invocation known as *Brigid's Arrow*:

Most Holy Brigid, Excellent Woman, Bright Arrow, Sudden Flame;  
May your bright fiery Sun take us swiftly to your lasting kingdom.



Saint Brigid was not the only saint to be associated with miracles of fire and light. Saint Flannan breathed on his fingers to make them emit light to help him work through the night. St. Ciaran prayed earnestly for warmth one cold winter when the monastery fire had been inadvertently put out, and a ball of fire fell into his lap. A great blaze of heavenly light was often seen around Saint Columcille, and a ball of light 'like a comet'<sup>4</sup> shone above his head and rose up to the heavens in a column as he celebrated Mass. Although fire mysteries are standard biblical symbolism, scholars believe such phenomena arose naturally out of pre-Christian magical traditions. One of these was known as *imbas forosnai*, which roughly translated as 'knowledge which illuminates/kindles.' Poet-seers who achieved states of ecstasy through this technique were often described as having a light or flame above the head. The great warrior and solar hero Cuchullain blazed with a supernatural heat in battle, and his head was surrounded by a halo of fire.

Since pagan magicians were masters of fire, it was important for hagiographers to show that Christian saints could literally outshine and so defeat their opponents of the old

religion. This is why biographies of Saint Patrick makes him appear as a kind of super-druid of all Ireland who demonstrated the superiority of the church through kindling a sacred fire at Tara, the seat of sacred power.

It was the ancient custom that no other fire should be lit in the land until the ritual fire at Tara had been kindled by either the king or his archdruid, so the saint's action was an extraordinary challenge that marked the death of the old ways. When King Laoghaire saw the fire blazing on a nearby hill, he consulted his druids who told him:

'Unless this fire is quenched the same night it was lit, it will never be quenched and the kindler of it will overpower us all and seduce all the people of your kingdom.'

The king and his druids climbed the hill, and, awed by the Christian's temerity, the druids warned him not to enter the circle of fires, or he would come under the strangers' power. Patrick consented to meet them outside the sacred ring, but when one of the druids poured scorn upon his faith, he invoked the power of God to lift his enemy into the air and dash him to pieces against a rock. Then he called down a thick darkness in which the king's warriors began fighting amongst themselves in the dark, and, for a final touch, threw in an earthquake to put the last of them to rout.

The defeated king pretended to submit and invited Patrick and his clerics to his palace, planning to set ambushes for them en route. But Patrick learned of this through God, and the little group of monks followed by their young servant-lad gained clear passage by passing in the shape of a herd of deer with a fawn at the rear.

To effect this miracle, Patrick was supposed to have chanted a hymn that has since come to be called, 'The Cry of the Deer.' Although much of it is standard liturgy, some verses read like a pagan invocation of the elements:

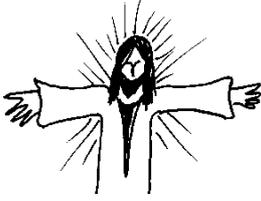
I arise today  
Through the strength of heaven;  
Light of sun,  
Radiance of moon,  
Splendor of fire,  
Speed of lightning,  
Swiftness of wind,  
Depth of sea,  
Stability of earth,  
Firmness of rock.<sup>5</sup>



The next day, Patrick and his companions materialized in the king's palace at Tara, although all doors were closed and guarded, then he and the king's chief druid, Lucetmael, entered into a contest of miracles. Outside on the plain, the druid cast a spell to make it snow, and it fell until it was waist-high. But when Patrick challenged him to remove it, Lucetmael said he could not for twenty-four hours. Patrick laughed, blessed the snow, and it melted away at his touch.

The saint then challenged the druid to an ordeal by fire in a hut that had one section built of green wood, and the other of dry. When it was set on fire, the druid was burned in the green part, while Patrick's companion in the dry half walked out unharmed. So Patrick defeated the druids by their own magic: shapeshifting, weather-witching, and the power of fire.

Patrick's druidical skills are only matched, if not surpassed, by Saint Columcille, who sailed to Scotland on a mission to convert the Picts. To him is attributed an ancient poem in which he refutes pagan ways:



I adore not the voice of birds,  
... nor a destiny on the earthly world,  
Nor a son, nor chance, nor woman,  
My Druid is Christ, the Son of God.<sup>6</sup>

Yet as is clear from Columcille's spiritual practices, the 'dove of the church' as his name means, was heir to the druid. He used a white stone – probably a lump of quartz crystal – that he took from a stream to heal the sick. The stone had the property of floating in water 'like an apple.'<sup>7</sup> Such 'charm-stones' were almost certainly used by druids, and also by Welsh witches in historical times. He was a renowned psychic in the tradition of the Scottish seers who had the gift of *an dá shealladh*, 'the two sights', (commonly known as 'second sight') which came in very useful at his monastery on Iona, for he was able to avert all sorts of domestic mishaps, such as finding a missing milk container, and even more important, foretell the weather conditions for boats at sea. If these proved hazardous, as is often the case in the Hebrides, he used his weather-working skills to make the winds drop and calm the waves.

Like many saints, Columcille was master of the element water as well as fire. He *sained*, or sanctified, hundreds of sacred springs all over Scotland, removing them from local tutelary spirits into the care of the church to become holy wells. Many wells bear his name and are still places of pilgrimage today, as indeed are healing wells dedicated to Patrick, Brigid and numerous local saints, including some that sound suspiciously like *genii loci* rather than men of the church. Many legends of holy wells explain how their divine origin was due to a saint's miraculous deed. Typically, the saint thrusts his wooden staff into the earth and it bursts into blossom, becoming a flowering tree, at the root of which rises a healing spring.

The staff that performed this miracle was the Christian version of the druid's 'rod of enchantment' made of wood from a sacred tree. What is clear is that the rod of both druid and saint come from the same source: the tree that stands at the heart of the Otherworld. Rooted in sacred ground, it is able to sustain more than one branch of belief.

Mara Freeman, ©

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- <sup>4</sup> Adomnán of Iona, trans. Richard Sharpe, *The Life of Saint Columba*. London: Penguin Books, 1975
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- <sup>7</sup> Adomnán of Iona, *ibid*



Drawings by Juliette Greenwood



Drawings by Juliet Greenwood

## Reports

### Taizé – Berlin 2011 Pilgrimage of Trust

Since 1974 and the 'Council of Youth' – set into motion by the Taizé Community – every year between the 28<sup>th</sup> December and the 1<sup>st</sup> January tens of thousands of young people gather in a big city, mostly in Europe, to spend the end of the year in prayer, communication and contemplation with each other and the brothers of Taizé<sup>1</sup>.



'The Pilgrimage of Trust', as the meetings are called, in 2011 made its way to my home town of Berlin – officially, this time: the actual first Taizé meeting in the city had taken place more or less secretly in East-Berlin in 1986. During the times of Germany's division Br. Roger and his community had always kept as closely in contact with the communist part of the country as they could, supporting the Christians there. This one meeting was granted by the regime only on the understanding that it would be kept quiet from the western parts of Germany. Now the reunited Berlin was to host a full gathering!

During my time at Lampeter University I had the great joy to take part in two week-long stays at Taizé through the chapel. Both times were special, inspiring and deeply touching experiences which will stay with me. The simple, meditative form of the daily prayers with their beautiful chants and long silences were a revelation to me and since then I have always looked out for Taizé prayers wherever I lived – happily you can usually locate at least one in most places around the world. It was very exciting to find out that the big annual Taizé Meeting was to be held here in Berlin, where I had only returned two years earlier with my husband.

The motto of this meeting was 'Towards a New Solidarity' – a call to search for the sources of trust in God and new ways to build solidarity among human beings in the face of economic difficulties, compartmentalized and fragmented societies with all their struggles and the continued strife among nations around the world (see *Letter from Taizé*, no. 274 Special Edition 2011). What an apt theme! Typical of Taizé to go right to the heart of matters in their engagement with society, meanwhile emphasizing the trust they place in the youth of the world just as much as in God. Holding the meeting in Berlin was a bit of a leap of faith in the first place, since actually this is very much secular territory nowadays with Christians being a definite minority. Would they really find support? Would it be possible to find quarters for the 30,000 – 40,000 young people usually expected?

From September onwards several Brothers and voluntary helpers from Taizé worked tirelessly to achieve this, visiting parishes, organizing the finding of private as well as group quarters, i.e. in schools or parish halls. Since we wanted to take in at least one guest (we live in a tiny flat) we got involved fairly early on with a parish close to us and knew that even up to the very last deadlines ca. 7,000 places were still missing! But with calm quietness and heaps of trust they ploughed on, preparing everything else. Then, on the day, private quarters for all but a third of visitors had been found, and there was more than enough room in the schools that had offered their help for the rest. The stories of people taking in more than the appointed number of guests in the end (sometimes as much as three times more!) are manifold and were a nice show of solidarity from the Berliners – Christians and non-Christians alike. We ended up with two young Croatian men camping out in our tiny living room, which was great fun.

And then the meeting was under way – 1,500 voluntary helpers from all over the world had come early to organize the hundreds of tasks needed to guarantee the smooth running of the

twice-daily meals and prayers in the giant halls of the Berliner Exhibition grounds, the *Messe Süd*, four of which were designated church, three used for giving out food and eating space and one, smaller one as Place of Silence.

It was an amazing, astounding and simply beautiful experience to be there! On arrival with the S-Bahn (a Berliner local transport) you found yourself, the entire platform around and way ahead of you, on the short way to the halls completely engulfed in, mostly young, people speaking all languages imaginable. Yet there was no real feeling of 'crowdedness', no rush, pressure or threat, just a happy *mêlée* of people talking, all walking in the same direction at whatever speed was adequate, a song suddenly rippling up somewhere or instruments being played and a general movement towards the halls where lunch was waiting before midday prayer. It was not in any way difficult to make your way through the many thousands swarming around as space was made happily and the mood was completely relaxed.

As we floated along with the hundreds and thousands moving towards the 'dining' halls I wondered how ever all these people would be given food in only 30 minutes (the allocated time which would allow for about 1 hour eating and moving to the 'church' halls)? In true Taizé manner we were now gently directed into several lines and received with friendly shouts of 'welcome', 'bon appetit' etc to several stations along which about 10 people each were giving out lunch: first a plastic bag, the next put a pack of water in, the next a couple of big rolls and so on finishing up with a heated tin of soup while everybody simply kept walking along holding open their bags. And in no time we were out the other end and on the way to the eating area. The continuous stream of diners was led and accompanied by cheering, singing or even at times dancing 'way-sign' bearers along the route to the two ground floor halls where we all had a generous picnic from our goodies, seated simply on the wooden floors. The requirement to bring your own spoon was now clear as we opened our warm tins of soup! Have you ever had an indoor picnic with 10,000 people? I can only recommend it – if it is as well organized and joyfully hosted as it was here!

A little later everybody made their way upstairs into one of the four huge halls that served as church. With a minimum of material – some pine trees, well-known Taizé icons and lengths of the familiar drapes of orange cloth along the front wall some simple stands with candles and otherwise soft orange light projected on four massive square pillars along the middle of the hall, the austere and sterile exhibition space turned into a gently lit imitation of the Church of Reconciliation. As in Taizé itself the brothers sat in two lines in the middle of the hall with everybody settling all around on the floors. Due to the numbers there were ushers making sure the halls were filled evenly from end to end. People unable to sit on the floor could find benches along all the walls.

Assuming that participants and visiting Berliners amounted to around 40,000 people taking part in the prayers, each hall would have been filled with up to 10,000 people. All the more amazing to experience the hush and the beginning of the first chant with everybody joining in, and to see just how quiet such a large group of people (mostly youngsters!) could be. Admittedly it wasn't quite as silent during the silences as at Taizé itself – but one has to allow for the very large numbers and remember not everybody was a seasoned 'silence-keeper' (really keeping still and silent for any length of time is not as easy as someone used to it may think!).



The peaceful and unified atmosphere created by singing together, and having prayers and short readings translated into many different languages, made me think how easy solidarity

across denominations and nations could be – this of course was always one of the expressed aims of Br. Roger and the Taizé community in developing this very simple yet distinct form of prayer. And it works most wonderfully I think! In the midst of chants I sometimes stopped singing simply to let the music of the thousands of voices wash over me, and with them the feeling of being connected.

At the end of the actual prayer Br. Alois<sup>2</sup> spoke some words each time about trust and solidarity, giving us food for thought, and subjects to carry into the various group discussions that followed. This does not usually happen at Taizé in this form, but of course the big yearly meeting is meant foremost as a forum for young people to get together and discuss their thoughts and feelings concerning the great theme of Trust, and to engender new ideas, new activities that will be carried back to the home-bases of all participants. I found that many of the things Br. Alois said were very inspiring for me myself and made me view the times through which we are living in a new, more hopeful light. Especially, it was beautiful to see all these young people around us who were obviously touched and sincere about their wish to work on helping to bring about more trust and solidarity among all peoples. The general atmosphere of any part of the meeting was always and everywhere peaceful, patient, friendly – in a city like Berlin nowadays a crowd of youngsters is unfortunately too often more likely to engender fear, hassle or even violence. It was simply *good* to see that things can be different, that there are so many young people who are NOT like that.

At the final prayer of thanks with the Brothers in mid-January we heard of the experiences of several parishes in Berlin during the meeting. I think, everybody agreed that it had been an exciting, sometimes exhausting but all in all joyful experience and, really, we all wished we could hold another event as soon as possible! The next morning the last of the Taizé Brothers left Berlin, as for the first time this winter, the town clothed itself in a white garment of fine snow ; almost as if to say ‘good bye’ and ‘thank you’ to them for bringing this chance for new discoveries of community, friendship and trust. This feeling will stay and grow here in Berlin as hopefully all over the world.

*Karen Asmuss, Berlin, Germany*

<sup>1</sup> Taizé is a small village in Burgundy, France, where Roger Schutz founded an ecumenical monastic community during WW II. For more information see [www.taize.fr](http://www.taize.fr)

<sup>2</sup> Since Br. Roger’s death in 2005, Br. Alois is the Prior of the community, and the role is not perceived in the traditional way; both he and Br. Roger are addressed as “Brother”.

*Taizé images from:* [www.sfx.internationalparish.org/2011/taize-service/](http://www.sfx.internationalparish.org/2011/taize-service/) ;  
<http://stedward.roath.org.uk/taize.html>

*If you are interested in photos, videos and texts about the Berlin Meeting, look online for Taize Berlin 2011*

## **Wrekin Trust Group, Penarth**

At the regular meeting of the Wrekin Group at Penarth on 16<sup>th</sup> October Howard Jones gave a talk on ‘The World As We Know It’. The talk aimed to show that a concept of a divine universal spirit is to be found in religions of both east and west, and that its secular counterpart has been suggested by psychologists, philosophers and, through the concepts of quantum physics, by scientists too.

Sir George Trevelyan, the founder of the Wrekin Trust, felt there was an increasing need to consider a New Age world view that is complementary to the scientific approach. Howard

Jones explained in accessible terms the aspects of materialism, determinism and reductionism of the classical scientific approach and the complementary idealism, indeterminism and holism of quantum science.

He expanded on the thesis of his book, *The World as Spirit*, that suggests, at its simplest, that everything is energy, including thought. He explained how electrons function and how the electronic fields in nature are, as far as we know, eternal and infinite. He helped the group to understand the connections we all have with this universal energy that allow a scientific explanation for psychic events such as telepathy, mediumship, spiritual healing, near-death experiences and a continuing existence for the human soul in the afterlife.

Members of the group found the talk fascinating and it stimulated a great deal of discussion afterwards.

*Jennifer Jones*

*The Wrekin Group is one of several groups around the country that get together to discuss spiritual issues and invite speakers who support the work of the Wrekin Trust.*

## **BASS: The British Association for the Study of Spirituality**

BASS is holding the second of its two-yearly Conferences in May 2012 (see 'Other Events' for details). Its overall theme is *Spirituality in a Fragmented World*. The wide-ranging subjects will include: 'spirituality, and humanity and social justice' (Paul Gilbert), 'spirituality and ecology' (Sister Jayanti), 'spirituality and politics' (Rose Hudson-Wilkins, the House of Commons Speaker's Chaplain), 'spirituality and health' (Christopher Cook), and 'spirituality and religion' (Grace Davie).

BASS's first Conference was held in May 2010 at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park. Holding it was a real test of faith (or wisdom – or a gamble: however you like to describe it); the small group who had for some years been looking towards such an event, to launch such an Association, had hoped that a hundred people would be interested. As it turned out, 200 were (mostly from the UK, but world-wide too) so many were disappointed.

An interest in 'spirituality' is, no doubt, somewhat distinct from an interest in 'religious experience'. As I understand it, the latter, as in the AHRC, is mostly concerned with individuals' subjective experiences, of a short-lived character, that appear to be unusual or transcendent (although, so far as I can see, there is no reason why that should not be extended to groups, and even whole societies, as such phenomena do seem to occur e.g. Chartres 1200s, Florence 1490s). Spirituality, as in BASS, on the other hand, usually refers to on-going expressions of personal attitudes and social climates of opinion that might be seen as an inevitable dimension of human (and animal?) life, in any sphere.

Personally, I've enjoyed watching the impressive increase of interest, which has been growing gradually but continuously since the 1970s, in such 'secular spirituality'. It is an element within that 'implicit [or secular] religiosity' that I started to study in 1968 – but in those days it was an overall dimension of human life that 'could not be named'; as perhaps, at that time, on a more individual level, was religious experience!

*Edward Bailey*

*President, BASS (British Association for the Study of Spirituality) [www.bassspirituality.org.uk](http://www.bassspirituality.org.uk)*

## AHS Open Day 2011

This year's AHS annual Open Day was held again at the Friends Meeting House in St. Giles, Oxford, on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November. Some 50 members and friends attended the meeting. The 2011 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, held in the morning, was given this year by Dr Gregory Barker under the title, *Jesus beyond Christianity: Unexpected Images from the World's Religions*. Some 30 members stayed on for the Society's AGM (see page 21). The afternoon was devoted to a discussion on the future of the Alister Hardy Society, as reported separately below.

*Jesus beyond Christianity: Unexpected Images from the World's Religions.*<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Barker took us on a journey he had made into interpretations of Jesus in the world's religions: a journey into a world of religious conflict, a world in which Jesus became the ground of controversy; a world as seen by artists and commentators. He said he found that each religion he examined raised questions which took him down new roads. He shared those questions with us, looking briefly at perceptions of Jesus in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism; aiming, he said, to bring it down to a question about how we interpret spirituality for ourselves.

In Judaism, he found questions relating to Christian concepts of Jews, the law and concepts of religion versus spirituality, with questions about Jesus being met with silence. He found himself asking here, whether we might not have to rethink our definition of spirituality in light of the joy and freedom some religious believers experience through law and ritual?

In Islam the central message is that there is one God, and a unity in all the prophets in proclaiming the reality of this One God; Jesus is seen as prophet of the heart and Muhammad prophet of both the head and the heart. His questions here were what did he think of Muhammad, and how should religion and society interact?

In Hinduism multiple manifestations of divinity are accepted and Jesus is seen as an avatar; in the more philosophical approach of Advaita, non-dualism, and asceticism are embraced. This raised for him the question, can spirituality exist without asceticism – and what forms of asceticism might best support one's own spirituality and a sense of connection with all life?

In Buddhism, Theravada Buddhists, placing high value on the original teaching and practices of Gautama Buddha, disregard Jesus whom they see as having only a very sketchy teaching record; Mahayana Buddhists, concerned with notions of the Buddha as a transcendent being, accept Jesus as a Bodhisattva for Christians; but all Buddhists find meaning in Jesus' attitude on the cross which they see as a sign of enlightenment. This led to the question, what could I be more aware of and less reactive to?

Dr. Barker said that suffering could take him to a state of self-concern which could divorce him from reality, seeing this as one of the ultimate challenges of spirituality, and that perhaps he should step back from his own reactions and simply be more aware. He said he wasn't looking for these questions when he embarked on his journey, but they turned his holiday into a life-changing adventure.

*John Franklin*

<sup>1</sup> *Transcript of the A.H. Memorial Lecture available, £4.00 incl. p&p: order from Jean Matthews, Archive Supervisor Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, The Library, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED. Cheques payable to 'The Alister Hardy Trust'. Overseas members may pay by credit card. Regretfully, no recording is available of this lecture.*

## **Open Day Afternoon Discussion on the Future of the AHS and Subsequent Reflection by the AHS Committee on Points Raised**

We had a most interesting afternoon led by Rhonda Riachi and me with plenty of time for interaction. Comments by members were noted and given full consideration at a meeting of the AHS Committee in January. We also included feed-back from people unable to join us on Open Day – notably from the AHS Local Groups and Group Leaders.

Much of the time was taken up by the proposal by Tigger Ramsay-Brown (who also produced a paper for further discussion) and John Gaynor (who was unable to attend) dealing with the response of the RERC & Society to people who send in accounts of spiritual experiences. On the whole there were objections to further engagement as this would inevitably be seen as counselling and involve liabilities. In 2009 we reached a decision to deal with those who send in accounts informally and that really hasn't changed.

However, the discussion did acknowledge that we all need to be aware of the sensitivities and needs of those who had had spiritual experiences. We plan to make sure that our letter of thanks offers an invitation to join the AHS, where more opportunities should be made available for people to share their experiences if they so wish. If they request further contact, people may be put in touch with AHS members in their locality and be given a list of other organizations, which might be of interest for further spiritual exploration or advice.

At the moment we do not receive many accounts but there was enthusiasm for a new national appeal, which we hope may be forthcoming as an initiative is being considered by Dr. Greg Barker.

Setting up a new organisation under the Alister Hardy Trust umbrella was rejected on grounds that this was not needed and there was enough scope (and complexity) offered by the AHT, AHS and AHRERC. The suggestion of a possible merger with another organization was rejected but there was enthusiasm for joint ventures with organizations such as the SMN, Wrekin Trust, BTA, SPR and CFPSS\*. The idea was mooted of holding a sort of 'fair' with representatives of those groups giving short presentations.

It was agreed that the Society needs to attract new members and that publicity is important. In that regard consideration is being given to a change of name for the Society. Many of us have found it a disadvantage that there is no mention of our focus in the name Alister Hardy Society and feel that while not ceasing to honour our founder, we would prefer something more explanatory. Discussions are ongoing and suggestions welcome.

In general members thought that a greater on-line presence would be essential in the future. There was interest in setting up a Members Forum page on our website and the idea of a Facebook page. There were suggestions for educational material to be put on-line as an aid to teachers and for the interest of students. As to making the Alister Hardy archive available online, this is a matter for the AHRERC, not for the Society, and careful consideration would have to be given to this by the Alister Hardy Trust in view of confidentiality and data protection issues. Perhaps, though, a selection of experiences of different types could be published online.

Suggestions for rehousing the archive and library in a more central and accessible location were noted but ruled out since they are an intrinsic part of the AHRERC at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David at Lampeter.

While there was enthusiasm for a new 'Quiet Day' format and the possibility of retreats and conferences, there was appreciation for the current activities of the AHS with its mix of talks,

experiential activities and discussion. The local groups are successful and differ in what they offer; perhaps more might be set up in the future.

Readers of *De Numine* are welcome to send views and suggestions to the AHS Chair Jonathan Robinson, to John Franklin, Rhonda Riachi or me.

*Marianne Rankin*

\* Scientific & Medical Network; Wrekin Trust; British Teilhard Association; Society for Psychical Research; Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies

## **AHS Annual General Meeting 2011**

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Friends Meeting House, St. Giles, Oxford, on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November, and attended by some 30 members and guests. The Revd Jonathan Robinson, Chair of the Society, welcomed all. Apologies were received from Sally Wilkinson and Dr Bettina Schmidt, Directors; Andy Burns, Roger Coward, Karl Gibbs, Mike Rush and Sheelah James, Committee members; from Prof. Leslie Francis, David Greenwood, Ruth Brinkman, Patricia Murphy, Jane Winship, Rt Revd Wyn Evans (Bishop of St. David's); and from David Hay, Neil Hancox, Shirley and David Firth and John Gaynor, members.

The Minutes of the AGM of 2010 were agreed and signed. Under Matters Arising, an update was given on links with other bodies; and the possibility of a weekend conference was being explored, but this would not be in 2012.

Jonathan Robinson, in his Chair's Report, reported on changes arising from the reorganisation at Lampeter, that we were having to look in new directions and new ways of achieving the Society's objectives, and on the need to attract new members. He advised on the position of Jean Matthews, who has to concentrate on her work as Archive Supervisor, and said that, without David Greenwood as Administrator, we have increasingly now to rely on voluntary help. He expressed appreciation of the quality and activities of the Society's Local Groups, the work being done by Patricia Murphy as editor of *De Numine*, Committee members, and the Trustees for their time, skills, energy and commitment – and thanked all concerned for the part they had played during the past year in the running of the Society.

The Chair of Trustees' Report was read by Dr Greg Barker in the absence of Prof Leslie Francis. Leslie spoke of his three priorities: custodianship and continuing refreshment of the AHRERC, the extension of Sir Alister's vision by expanding the range of research methods and theories, and the efficient management of the finances of the Trust. This last is a cause of some concern, as we had failed to capture follow-on funding from the Templeton Foundation for continuing the Global Project, and other funding is increasingly hard to obtain. We need to find new sources of money, and personal gifts and legacies are going to be increasingly crucial for our future; we also need to find committed and skilled volunteers to further the common causes and concerns of the Trust and Society. He outlined the achievements of the Trust during the past year, and thanked the Society's officers for their work and the membership for their support.

Dr. Barker, presenting the Directors' Report, reported that members of RERC played a leading role at the International Conference on the Comparative Study of Religious Experience in Contemporary Taiwan in June 2011, held following the China Study. Many regional secondary students have been visiting Lampeter to learn about religious experience

and the work of the AHRERC and Society; this has led to three conferences for schools in 2011/12. The Department of Theology, Religious Studies & Islamic Studies has again had a good intake of BA students, and the MA Degrees remain popular. He had spoken at the AHS/WCF joint one-day conference in June, and was impressed at the depth of questions, comments and support for the AHS. He thanked the co-Directors, Trustees, staff and the volunteers and active members for their dedication and contribution.

Jonathan Robinson, read the Hon. Treasurer's Report, David Greenwood reporting that the annual accounts were still being prepared by the External Examiner, but that receipts and expenditure were broadly in line with the planned situation set out in the Financial Appraisal for October 2009 approved by Trustees. Current total cash assets are approximately £92,000, against a forecast of £89,000 – a drop of approximately £20,000 during the financial year. There are three legacies from which it is hoped that the Trust will benefit, but these are currently being delayed due to disputes or awaiting completion of formalities. Efforts to settle outstanding charges owed to the University, and finalization of the Accounts are expected in time for the next meeting of the Trustees on 25<sup>th</sup> November. Some concern was expressed that the Accounts were not presented at this meeting, and it was agreed that they would be given at the AGM next year.

John Franklin read the Hon. Membership Secretary's report. Ruth Brinkman reported that after two years a review of the membership had been completed, this resulting in a weeding out of non-subscribing members, students who were no longer students, and organisations and people receiving complimentary copies of *De Numine* but who were no longer associated with the Trust and Society. This resulted in a drop in the number of names on the AHS database, but is saving money in printing and distribution costs. Currently we have 329 names on the database, this including 223 full members and 64 mailing list subscribers. A comment from the floor queried that five of the Trustees were not members of the Society, and wondered whether or not they might join. It was replied that there is no obligation at all for a Trustee to be a subscribing member of the Society, but this would be brought to their attention.

AHS Committee elections: the following were nominated, and elected unopposed:

- Andy Burns (Vice-Chair), for a further period of three years: proposed by Rowena Rudkin, seconded by Rhonda Riachi;
- Aled Thomas (Student Representative) for a period of three years: proposed by Tristram Jenkins, seconded by Jane Winship.

It was announced that Karl Gibbs, retiring Student Representative, had been invited and had accepted to stay on the AHS Committee as a co-opted member, and that Marianne Rankin had also been elected at the AHS Committee meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2011 to serve as a co-opted member.

Under Any Other Business, a question was raised concerning sale of books from the Alister Hardy collection: it was answered that all books received for the Library are catalogued and added to the collection, spare copies being set aside for lending out to borrowers – but where there are several copies of a book, of perhaps no intrinsic value, such are offered for sale to raise funds for the Centre. It was suggested that the Society be promoted on local radio or on television: and answered that all forms of publicity were actively being looked into, and this idea will be examined.

The date of the next Annual General Meeting: it was reported that this has not yet been fixed: the possibility of holding this a little earlier in the year was being examined.

*John Franklin, Hon. Secretary*

## The Alister Hardy Trust – Financial Affairs

At the last Trustees' meeting the Treasurer was able to confirm that expenditure and income were both broadly in line with the targets set in the *Financial Appraisal and Management Review* approved in 2009. In summary, the net deficit for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2011 was £21,649 which was funded out of the Trust reserves. After taking this deficit into account the Trust net current assets at 31<sup>st</sup> July 2011 were £91,597.

Apart from subscription income the Trust has benefitted from, and hopefully will continue to benefit from, legacies generously bequeathed to us by members and supporters. Currently we are awaiting the outcome of a couple of legacies, but they are held up for various legal reasons and the extent to which we shall eventually benefit is somewhat problematical. So, as mentioned above, in order to continue supporting research into religious experience the Trust is dependent upon continuing financial support. To this end gifts and legacies remain essential to ensure that the reserves on which we are drawing are replenished.

In addition, this period of financial stringency does, of course, mean that we are more reliant upon volunteers than in the past and the Trustees are very grateful to all those who are helping to support the Alister Hardy organisation in ways which enable the current level of activity to be maintained.

*David Greenwood, Hon. Treasurer and vice Chair of the Trustees*

### **Appeal for New Hon. Membership Secretary – and for help in administration**

1. Ruth Brinkman has indicated her wish to retire from the post of Hon. Membership Secretary. Whilst we are very sorry to lose her and are most grateful for the contribution she has made, and is still making, to the running of the Society, it is necessary for us to seek a replacement for her. We would very much welcome a volunteer from the membership of the Alister Hardy Society to take the post of Hon. Membership Secretary. The role is not onerous as the database is easy to maintain and update, and this work can easily be done from home. The work basically involves processing applications for membership; checking standing orders; passing on subscriptions to the Hon. Treasurer and subsequently sending out membership cards. Full instructions and guidance will be given, and out-of-pocket expenses paid. If you would like to discuss the role in detail, please contact the present Membership Secretary (address below)\*.

2. We have need, also, for help in the running of the Society's administration. This would involve help in the distribution of *De Numine* twice a year, answering requests made by members, including Committee members, for brochures, leaflets etc, and perhaps assisting at the Society's Open Day and the occasional conference. Living near or within easy reach of Lampeter would be an advantage here.

If you feel able to offer help in either of these two positions, or if you know anyone who might be interested, please write to me at the address below. Thank you.

Revd Jonathan Robinson, Chair, Alister Hardy Society  
The Liberty, Arthur's Gate, Montgomery, Powys, SY15 6QU (murrell.robinson@yahoo.com)

\* Ruth Brinkman, Hon. Membership Secretary, 1 Butterfield Court, Bishop's Cleeve, Cheltenham, Glos., GL52 8RZ. Tel: 01242 679632 e-mail: ruth\_brinkman@yahoo.co.uk

## Reports from the Local Groups

### Chesterfield Group

The highlight for the AHS Chesterfield Group in the second-half of last year was a double-bill by group member Joe Revill. Joe gave us a talk on 'Witchcraft: Ancient & Modern' and also honoured us with a book launch. His new novel 'A Case Of Witchcraft' is a Sherlock Holmes mystery set in Scotland and is available from bookshops and on [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) Joe did a book-signing at the local Waterstones and attended the book launch in full period costume! The painting here is also Joe's own work.



At our last meeting each member brought along an example of artwork that they felt inspired them spiritually. These included poems, fractal art, alchemical engravings, architecture and pictures of places.



We have also watched and discussed several interesting DVDs, including Lynn MacTaggart on *The Field*, Joseph Campbell on myths, and the feature film of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*.

We also discussed the questions about the future of the AHS which I reproduce here.

**Society Membership** None of the current attendees of the AHS Chesterfield Group have joined the Society (apart from myself) despite being told about it and given leaflets, etc. Reasons for this included: the cost of membership was perceived to be too high for the benefits of joining, people are often already paying for membership of similar organisations with overlapping interests, and some attendees only come to meetings when there is a topic of particular interest to them. It was also pointed out that many of the benefits of membership (meetings, conferences, library, archive, etc) are geographically inconvenient. They did suggest that they would be happy to give voluntary donations (to the local group or the AHS) at each meeting.

**Future Activities & Events** Suggestions included more emphasis on cross-cultural perspectives on spiritual experience (perhaps by networking with groups from different cultural backgrounds), a conference held at a pilgrimage site, and a residential for AHS group members.

**Responding to Experiencers** Suggestions included promoting the local groups to people who submit accounts, putting experiencers in contact with local group members and providing a proforma so that local group members can interview experiencers in more depth (at the same time giving them an opportunity to talk further about their experiences).

**How to Attract Younger People** It was pointed out that the name 'Alister Hardy Society' is meaningless to young people and perhaps should be changed to something more self-explanatory and relevant to them. Other suggestions were the formation of an 'AHS Youth Group' and the running of residential programmes that mix activities with reflection on spirituality (NB these ideas came from two members of the Chesterfield group who are both professional youth workers).

**Focus More on Sharing Experiences** It was pointed out that the current format of the Chesterfield group is more academic and critical in its approach, which may not be conducive to the sharing of deeply personal experiences. A separate 'self-help' style group could be started for this purpose with people in the local area who have submitted accounts to the RERC (there is already a 'spiritual crisis' group of this type in Sheffield).

**Online Forum** It was felt that this may appeal more to younger people, would help overcome the geographical separation of members and could be an added benefit of AHS membership.

All in all this gave rise to quite an interesting discussion in itself!

The AHS Chesterfield Group programme is available online at:

[www.esoteric-experience.org.uk](http://www.esoteric-experience.org.uk)

For any further info please contact me at [mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk](mailto:mike@esoteric-experience.org.uk) or on 07790 757955.

*Mike Rush*

## **Midlands Group**

On September 24<sup>th</sup> four of the group went to Warwick for the Annual Conference of the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies, held at the Warwick Unitarian Chapel.

The programme began with Dr Mark Fox, speaking on 'Spiritual Encounters with unusual light phenomena', and Mark gave us many examples from the archives of the RERC, based now at Trinity Saint David, Lampeter. Then we heard Anthony Peake on 'The Out-of Body Experience', and in the afternoon we had 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Life after Death' by Dr Roger Straughan. (Details of the Speakers' relevant publications are given below.)

On October 21<sup>st</sup> one of our members, Dr Clement Jewitt, a musician and composer, gave a presentation, 'Tuning, Resonance and Consciousness'. The amount of information, backed with scientific references, even just in the introduction was amazing, ranging from the effects of music, healing sounds of Nature and music therapies, including music thanatology, to the use of sound in warfare and martial arts. He asked us to consider the relationship between speech and music: 'the tone colours of speech vary with the words and syllables spoken, and generally change more rapidly than the tone colours of music. Is then music the slowed down [savoured] phonological aspects of speech? Is speech, in its phonological aspects, speeded up music – perhaps speeded up under the press of intellectual reasoning? Which was first?' Most helpful were the handouts illustrating the relationship between frequency and mass, the various resonances within the body, and in particular the brainwave frequencies in an electroencephalogram during 'ordinary' waking consciousness, hypnosis and channelling states, trance, and finally mystical states, and a diagram showing the feedback systems between body and mind. Clement further enriched the proceedings with recordings of the 'music of the spheres' and of DNA, linking the macrocosm with the microcosm. This brief account does not do justice to either the depth of the presentation, nor the intense discussion that went on until midnight.

On Sunday December 11<sup>th</sup> we had a pre-Christmas social, beginning with a bring-and-share lunch, followed by Clement showing a DVD 'From Science to God', featuring Peter Russell's exploration, as a physicist, into Consciousness.

January 20<sup>th</sup> 2012 was 'An Evening of Spiritual Poetry/Art/Music'. Clement played several pieces from 'The Bird Fancier's Delight' (published 1717) on a sopranino recorder. Each song imitated a bird (parrot, mynah, linnet, starling, canary and woodlark) and originally had been written to encourage the composer's caged bird to sing. Rodney had also brought along his sopranino recorder (neither of our musicians knew what the other had planned) and played an improvisation, a meditation in sound. Mandy read two of her poems, 'If any Preacher Says to Me' and 'The Carpenter's Hand'. The first poem contemplated the spiritual self as a spark of the Divine, and the second poem referred to the universal Christ as a lamp and a companion and an unfailing source of divine love. Clement read a poem 'Universal Spirit' by Rev Theresa Jones; this work meditates on the Divine Presence throughout human history, beginning 'When I was Ra', and ending with the often unrecognised Divine within the homeless person on the street in modern times. Clement also read two of his compositions, 'Evening Prayer' and 'Invocation to a Garden', the former drawing on quotes from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer and the latter evoking images of a paradise and Nature pantheism. 'The Seventh Angel' was read and will feature in our March 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. A few sombre verses from Sir Richard Burton's 'The Kasidah' were followed by the more light-hearted Haiku composed by Rodney, who explained that 17 Haiku, in his 'A Garland of Mandala' represented the macrocosm, and the single haiku consisting of 17 syllables the human microcosm.

My thanks to Rodney Reeves for his diligent notes on our meetings.

*Sheelah James*

#### **Speakers' Publications:**

Fox, Mark. (2003) *Religion, Spirituality and the Near Death Experience*. London, Routledge

Fox, Mark. (2008) *Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena: Lightforms*. Cardiff, University of Wales Press.

Peake, Anthony. DVD 'The Peake Experience'

Peake, Anthony. (2008) *The Daemon: A Guide to Your Extraordinary Secret Self*. London, Arcturus. (See details of other publications on [www.anthonypeake.com](http://www.anthonypeake.com))

Straughan, Roger. (2009) *A Study in Survival: Conan Doyle Solves the Final Problem*. Winchester, O Books.

Russell, Peter. 2003. *From Science to God; The Mystery of Consciousness and the Meaning of Light*. Yogi Impressions Books, Mumbai, India.

The Bird Fancier's Delight. 1717. Republished for recorder by Schott and Co Ltd.

Rev T M Jones 'Universal Spirit' is in the anthology *Writer's Cramp*, 2002.

#### **London Group**

Our 2011 programme continued with a talk by Prof. Gwyn Hocking on 6<sup>th</sup> October on *Remote Viewing & Unconventional Meditation Methods: new evidence for the existence of God?* Prof. Hocking claimed research into historical times was being amplified by 'remote viewing', which could be extended back in time by experienced practitioners. He claimed that it was used by ancient Egyptians 5,000 years ago, was evidenced in information released by the American CIA, and mentioned A. Besant & C.W. Leadbeater, Swedenborg and Goethe as having this ability. He discussed how 'remote viewing' could be achieved by meditational

methods, and various aids that might assist in such achievement. He mentioned 'lucid dreaming' as another way in which one can travel out of the body anywhere and back in time. He referred to the 'dream yogis' of Tibetan Buddhism – and discussed near-death-experiences and the arguments regarding the validity of these experiences. He then went on to touch on theology. The extreme range of personality types, he said, couldn't be explained by nature or nurture, and this, together with the aim to achieve higher states of consciousness, indicated to him that something more was going on here. This brought him to the title of his talk: he thought it possible to prove the existence of God through the fact that people can recall past lives, arguing that only an outside intelligence could cause someone to be born again in a different body; and how, otherwise, could a soul exist independently of the body that is destroyed on death? He touched on the Christian problem of 'suffering', and the Eastern belief in karma, saying that, for him, suffering in this world could only make sense in the light of karma and that recollection of past lives was a strong argument both for this and for the existence of God.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November, Revd. Amanda Keighley spoke to us on *Spirituality in the Counselling Room*. Amanda, a nurse, psychotherapist and Anglican priest, noted the growth of spirituality in the public consciousness as expressed in the press, in health care and in the counselling room. She did not attempt to define spirituality, but noted that whilst not everyone had a religious dimension in their lives, everyone had a spiritual dimension. She saw spirituality as involving not just a focus on oneself, but as being part of the complexity of humanity and relationships, and needing to be integrated into human life and experience. After referring to studies showing that a third of the population were likely to have had a spiritual experience, she said that people turned to counselling in an attempt to connect psychology and religion and perhaps through that connection to encounter the mystery some call God. She outlined a small study she had undertaken to illuminate what counsellors experienced of the spiritual dimension during the therapeutic relationship. This showed how therapeutic relationships moved into a spiritual relationship. She thought that the increasing interest in spirituality shown by many clients, and some counsellors, could indicate the way counselling might sustain the spirituality of an increasingly secularised society. The great challenge in counselling, she felt, was the need not to underestimate the importance of the mystical spiritual dimension – and that many people needed not a counsellor but a spiritual director with whom to explore this spirituality.

In the evening, we explored the topic given out at the afternoon discussion on Open Day (reported elsewhere, see page 20). The Group's views were reported to the special meeting of the AHS Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> February, together with all the other responses which had been received. Our own main comments were the need seen for more administrative support; rejection of any new parallel organisation as proposed on Open Day; support for a new survey of spirituality and religious experience in the UK as mooted by the Director, Dr. Greg Barker; and support for the idea that the Society should give more attention to responding to experiencers.

*John Franklin*

*[Full notes of the talks and evening meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> November, and CDs of the talks are available, from John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ, price £1.50 for the notes and £6.00 incl. p&p for CDs of the talk only (£8.00 for 2 CDs with talk and discussion or DVD with both) cheques payable to 'AHS London Group'.]*

## **Oxford and Cotswold Group**

Since my last report in August we have met twice. Our meeting on 24 September, hosted by Jane Skinner in her lovely home in Islip, featured a presentation by Edward Baldwin, entitled 'Turning a light on after-death communication'. Edward shared his interest in spiritual and psychic matters with his wife, Sally, who died eleven years ago. We were astounded by the sheer number of extraordinary electric light phenomena that Edward has experienced in two different houses since Sally died, often occurring when he was thinking about her. Edward hopes to publish this material so it can be studied by others.

On Saturday 3 December we enjoyed a bring-and-share lunch at June Knowles' lovely flat in Oxford to discuss activities for 2012. We developed the following list (which will last us well into 2013!):

1. Divination Day (could be combined with a divinatory experiment).
2. What is God to you?
3. Reincarnation.
4. Oneness and Goneness.
5. Healing Day.
6. Spiritual Experiences of the Mystics.

We did not discuss which order we wanted these events to happen; I am currently working on dates and presenters for numbers 1 and 6.

On 17 March 2012 we have again invited Jonathan Stedall, documentary film-maker, to speak and to present his new two-part film 'The Challenge of Rudolf Steiner' at Oxford Friends Meeting House. More about the film can be found on <http://www.rudolfsteinerfilm.co.uk>.

As it is costly to post items to all the members of this widely spread group, I use email to communicate efficiently. Please send me a message so I can include you on the list (and you need not live in the Oxford & Cotswold Area to join us). I also include news of events organised by cognate associations, such as the Wrekin Trust.  
email: [ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk](mailto:ahs@riachi.free-online.co.uk)

*Rhonda Riachi*

## **AHS Wales**

The Wales Group comprises the All Wales events such as the Spring and Autumn Lectures and the Annual Gathering, and Local Group activities – hence the shape of this report.

**All Wales:** We have had a break-through with the introduction of video-conferencing communications between Lampeter and Bangor University campuses for our Autumn Lecture. This was the brain-child of our new North Wales Convenor, Angela Burton, who we welcome and thank for her initiative. We plan to extend this to our group at Swansea University for the Spring Lecture and perhaps to South East Wales, where in Cwmbran there is a Volunteer Bureau with a Digital Hub with these facilities. On the technology side we are also exploring the possibility of having a Welsh Group Facebook page at the suggestion of the Swansea Group.

Video-conferencing was particularly appropriate for our Autumn Lecture in September as the speaker, Professor Densil Morgan, then the new Head of Theology, Religious & Islamic Studies at Lampeter, had been Dean of Theology at Bangor. He has now become Provost of Trinity St. David. He spoke on our theme of the year 'Spirituality and Sacred Place in Wales' and attracted an audience of fifty to the Old Hall, plus another fifteen in Bangor. He started from Brythonic Celtic times, tracing the history of religion and spirituality in Wales from the early Christian period to the present day. He pointed out that Howel Harris, a renowned Welsh preacher, had a religious experience which inspired his mission. A discussion followed on the topic of Welsh spirituality and it was noted that Wales has numerous pilgrimage sites, such as Bardsey, Inis Seiriol etc. which often attract more people than the churches and chapels. It was also remarked that Wales still needs an 'Iona spirituality'.

Just over a month later, at Halloween, the Wales Group gathered at Llantarnam Abbey for the Annual Retreat, also centering on the theme of 'Spirituality and Sacred Place in Wales' – the full report is on Page 31. It has been decided to change the name of this annual event to 'Annual Gathering' as the word 'Retreat' may have been misleading. The theme for this year's Annual Gathering will be 'Powers Spiritual and Psychic in Welsh Arthurian Legend', proposed as a continuation of the 2011 subject which proved very popular.

Marian MacPolin has been the most fantastic secretary of the Wales Group and we have very much appreciated all that she has done – which has been a great deal. Alas, from early April she will be travelling the world and then returning home to Ireland which means we will be looking for a new secretary. She has also been the Convenor of the West Wales Group which meets in Lampeter and so we will be also looking for her replacement there. Thank you Marian and God bless you in the future.

Roger Coward's three-year period as Chairman of the Wales Group comes to an end in October so we need nominations for the next three years. Please send to Roger Coward!

### **Local Group News:**

Patrick Walters has been both the initiator of the Swansea Group and its continuing Convenor for the past two years. Now, as a result of his University work-load he has stepped down but remains as Secretary. Thank you Patrick. We are very pleased that Dr Penny Sartori, the Near-death Experience specialist and author has taken over the role of Convenor of the Swansea Group.

We are also very pleased that Angela Burton has agreed to be the Convenor of the North Wales Group which meets at the University of Bangor. Angela has been associated with some of the marine biology on which Alister Hardy worked, in her case as a senior research associate at Liverpool University sponsored by the Sea Fish Authority. She is a Quaker Elder and is engaged in research for a PhD entitled 'Hiraethog: Place of longing and be-longing'. A Group Meeting will be announced soon. Contact: [angela@henblaslodge.co.uk](mailto:angela@henblaslodge.co.uk) 07817 633414

We are also very pleased that Jemma Paish from Newport, Pembrokeshire has agreed to be the new Convenor for the Pembrokeshire Group. Could members and friends in the South West please make contact with her to arrange a first meeting ([jems27@live.co.uk](mailto:jems27@live.co.uk) or 07966 003737). Jemma has a background as a teacher living in Cairo and in running her own business. She is currently studying yoga and the sutras of Patanjali, and has always been interested in personal growth and the ways in which we encounter religious or spiritual experience.

## **Local Group Reports:**

### **Swansea**

*Patrick Walters writes:* At the meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> September Roger Coward gave a talk on 'Mandalas Outer and Inner: A Way to Spiritual Experience'. He explained that Alister Hardy believed that religious experience was innate and natural and that mandalas were an aid to the natural and innate experience of 'enlightenment'. The Sanskrit meaning of mandala is circle, and this occurs in nature and architecture – for example the rose windows in the medieval cathedrals. It also has a symbolic meaning – Jungian interpretation and mandalas were discussed. The lecture was illustrated with a wealth of Mandalas and mandala-like images and Roger explained how to interpret the complex and detailed images of the Tankas in Buddhist Tibetan tradition. Barry Steven's mandala paintings used in the presentation can be seen at: <http://www.mandalas.co.uk>

The meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011 started with a general discussion and making of plans. The idea of a joint web or Facebook page as well as a joint video-conference for the All Wales group was welcomed. Interest was expressed in the Arthurian subject of the year 2012 and a range of possible ramifications of the topic were discussed – poetry, art, paganism, personal experience etc. It was agreed that the topic would be explored by the Swansea group. The TV programme 'The Search for Arthur' by Graham Phillips was mentioned, and the idea that Arthur was a Celtic warlord led to discussion of the tension between the historical and symbolic. Is the Holy Grail metaphorical i.e. finding yourself? Do the tangible things symbolize inner archetypes. The topic is rich in possibilities.

There was also a discussion of scientific method and its limitation to the realm that can be considered objective, but this does not mean that subjective knowledge cannot be relied on or be trustworthy. The role of the placebo effect was discussed in this context. The issue of power and implicit belief in the control of medicine was discussed. Herbal, spiritual healing and complementary medicine generally was considered in this context. Richard Weisman, Richard Dawkins, Peter Atkins etc. attitude to spirituality was considered. The limitation of a strict religious belief and its difference from spirituality were explored. The correlation between genius and madness was also considered – was the difference the effect of small factors or filters? R. D. Laing's work was mentioned and the relation of music and the spiritual or psychic realm was considered.

### **West Wales**

*Marian MacPolin writes:* On Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011 the West Wales AHS group met at Trinity Saint David, Lampeter campus, for a lecture by Mara Freeman, whose topic was 'The Sacred Feminine in the landscape of Wales, Ireland and Scotland'. Mara is an author, storyteller, psychotherapist and leading teacher of Celtic spirituality. This lecture was open to the public and there was an overflow attendance, indicating the keen interest in this topic. Mara shared her personal experiences of aspects of the sacred feminine in the landscape of Wales, Ireland and Scotland and her talk was beautifully illustrated with a Powerpoint presentation.

A lecture by Dr. Chris Tinsley, a member of the West Wales AHS group, on the topic of 'Some physiological effects of Qigong and other kinds of Meditation' was planned for November, but had to be cancelled owing to Chris' illness.

**Marian MacPolin will be leaving Lampeter in early April and so we are looking for a new West Wales Convenor. Anyone interested please contact Roger Coward.**

## Mid-Wales

The group continued in July and September with its exploration of Dorian Llewelyn's *Sacred Place, Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality*. He writes 'A search for roots and a "sense of place" are common experiences for late twentieth-century Westerners, a longing for a "pure place, a place of extraordinary import found among all that is common and profane" as an answer to existential crisis' – perhaps a search for spiritual experience?

In the second part of the book he considers the poets & thinkers who have built the notion that Wales is a sacred place and its people in some way 'chosen' (Gildas (495-540?); Charles Edwards (1628-91); J. E. Daniel (1902-62); and later in the Twentieth Century, J. R. Jones; Saunders Lewis; Gwennalt (1899-1968); and Waldo Williams d.1971). He quotes some marvellous Welsh poetry which he has translated for the first time:

The earth was once so near  
As near as a neighbour, and it spoke the dialects of Welsh ...  
In the inaccessible fastness of the mountains,  
We built a lodging place for angels between two worlds.  
The earth has been turned into a giant laboratory ...  
No longer does it speak the homely tongue of man.  
Pylons now where angels were,  
And concrete damming up the stream. (Gwennalt)

The people knelt  
At the sturdy bench of the yard of their neighbourhood farm,  
With easy generosity, it gave them  
A barn to shelter against bishops.  
The resolve of its children will not bend  
Neither to a lord nor all his machinery. (Waldo)

## Wales Group Annual Retreat 2011: Spirituality and Sacred Place in Wales



The 2011 Retreat: Alan Underwood, Mara Freeman, Roger Coward, Marian MacPolin, Louis Friedman, Patricia Murphy, Michelle-Anne Burgos-Thomas, Jonathan Morgan. (Missing: Mary Cook & Angela Burton).

We stood around the All Wales Round Table and found our bearings with the Universal Blessing of Buddhism, 'Peace to All Beings, North, South, East, West, Above, Below' and so on. As there was an outline map of Wales depicted on the table top, people gravitated to the side of the circle closest to their homes, making for some crowding in West Wales! In the centre of the table was a beautiful bunch of large leeks – traditional symbol of Wales – a theme explored further

during the weekend. Our introductory ritual ended with the Celtic sacred sound, the 'Awen' which is rather like intoning the 'OM' in the Hindu tradition, led by Mara Freeman.

After dinner, Angela Burton, from Anglesey, led us into our subject introducing the aspect of 'Hiraethog: place of longing and belonging'. Hiraethog is both a place on Denbigh Moor where there is an ancient settlement and the Bryn Du stone circle and also the adjective of the very Welsh word *hiraeth* meaning homesickness, grief or sadness after the lost or departed, longing, nostalgia for our homeland or place of origin. Drawing on Thomas Berry's 'Sacred Earth Story' she introduced the notion of Spiritual Ecology and his method of discovering the numinous in nature through landscape, myth, legend and language. After listening to some exquisite triple harp music by Robin Huw Bowen (Old Hearth CD) we were invited to draw or write about our own *hiraeth* and share that with the group.

Saturday morning started with Roger Coward reporting back from the Mid-Wales Group's reading of Dorian Llewelyn's *Sacred Place, Chosen People: Land and National Identity in Welsh Spirituality* (UW Press, 1999) in which some answers to the following questions were found:

- 1) Might one expect a Spiritual Experience from an established Sacred Place?
- 2) How do Sites become Sacred? How do they start?
- 3) Are some places inherently sacred? – does *God* or the earth (*Gaia*) or both, make them?
- 4) Are traditional historic sacred sites necessarily still alive with *spirit*? How can they be made alive?

The book also introduced neologisms for concepts relating to Sacred Place: *topophilia* – affective bond between people & place; *geopiety* – reverence & attachment to place, love of country and patriotism; *utopic* – no place; *locative* - relating to a location (Yi-Fu Tuan); *nemeton* – natural site made into Celtic ritual place like a sacred grove (J. T. Coch); and from Old Welsh, *brogarwch* – love of one's native area); *gwladgarwch* – love of one's country; and *bardd gwlad* – country's bard or local poet.

Llewelyn's book draws on many rich sources including Ellen Ross's *Diversities of Divine Presence*. She suggests we see '... land as sacred presence, in which the community's relationship with the divine happens through its interaction with geographical space as such, where the concept of land in general symbolizes God's presence'.

After coffee, Marian MacPolin gave us her Powerpoint presentation, based on her MA dissertation, on 'Holy Wells in the Landscape of Wales' in which she brought us on a visual journey, visiting, among others, St. Winefride's well in Holywell, and Ffynnon Fair in the north, Ffynnon Gybi in Ceredigion and St. Non's, Ffynnon Gapan and Gumfreston wells in the south. She described beliefs, reported healings and associated rituals, including her experience of taking part in annual rituals at several Irish and Welsh holy wells.

Immediately after lunch we gathered at the All Wales Round Table to place and introduce the objects we had brought from home which symbolized our relationship with the land. A very moving and profound session.

In the free time of the afternoon, some of the group went walking with Mary Cook to the Cwm within a cwm. She writes, 'some associate Cwmbran with Bran's cauldron of reincarnation for dead heroes. It is a unique natural feature, which may well have been the origin of the name of the close-by village marked Cwmbran on old maps, and now refers to the new town of Cwmbran. The accepted "translation" is "the valley of the Crow". but I prefer to think of the Bran of 'Cwmbran' as the giant warrior king from the Mabinogion'. There were some memorably beautiful beech trees in their autumnal splendour, but before long we found our way blocked by one of these fallen giants lying prostrate across the path,

preventing our further progress, and not exactly looking to be reincarnated! I was relieved, on our return to find that none of us was suffering from our exertions too badly, and that we carried with us memories of that very picturesque place’.

After dinner, as a divertissement, Roger showed us images from his forthcoming book about his home village Abbeycwmhir – the site of the Cistercian Abbey which reflects much of the history of Wales. The evening continued with creative contributions from others in the group and concluded with some very lively and unusual Celtic Breton circle dancing led by Mara Freeman.



Sunday morning started with Mara’s Powerpoint presentation, introducing us to the *thin places* of the Welsh landscape – the specific hills, lakes, caverns and islands traditionally associated with the Otherworld – the Gates of Annwn preserved through the ages in the medieval myths of Ceridwen, Myrddin and Rhiannon and the folk-tales of the faery race, Y Tylwyth Teg. Afterwards we followed a guided visualisation to The Gates of Annwn; the mood was set by Mara’s splendid replica of the Gundestrup Cauldron.

This was followed by a walk round the labyrinth, then Sunday lunch. To close, Roger led us in the All Wales Group Meditation. Then we stood around the Round Table for our final ritual with Roger closing as he began with the universal Blessing of Buddhism, and Patricia Murphy taking up the theme of the 4 directions and their correspondences in heaven and earth.



Gundestrup Cauldron, late La Tène, Denmark, dated between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D.

Feedback sheets, emails and cards showed much appreciation of this year’s event – thanks to our speakers and organisers and the lovely hospitality of the Sisters at Ty Croeso. We certainly explored our subject. Thanks especially to Mary Cook for co-ordinating the bookings and payments, the Creative Contributions and the walk; Marian MacPolin, our brilliant secretary, for helping with the setting up and general support; Mara Freeman, in addition to her presentation, running the excellent circle dancing and Patricia Murphy for bringing us to an end.

*Compiled by Roger Coward, Chair, All Wales Group*

## WebNews

### Alister Hardy Society Website

The Society now has its own website: [www.alisterhardysociety.org](http://www.alisterhardysociety.org)  
(The former AHT website, [www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk](http://www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk), has been taken offline and no longer exists.)

The new Society website, designed by Mike Rush, an IT professional and member of the Alister Hardy Society Committee, and who is acting as webmaster, contains up-to-date information about the Society and its Local Groups – including a downloadable membership application form – and web pages on events, contacts and AHRERC publications; this now includes some back issues of *De Numine*. The site also contains information about the Alister Hardy Trust, and Sir Alister Hardy himself – and a Lectures section, where a start has been made on making available online some of the interesting talks given to the Society.

Being a new site, it is under consideration for further development – and the views of members here would be welcome. In view of the confidential nature of religious experiences and relationship to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, we have not included a Facebook or Twitter page, but the prospect of a Members' section, where matters of interest might be raised, is under consideration.

Any comments or suggestions concerning the website, should be addressed to: John Franklin, Hon Secretary, Alister Hardy Society, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ e-mail: [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

### From the Editor

May I remind local group organisers that the new AHS website, as mentioned above, has a section where talks given during the year can be posted; there has been so much which would undoubtedly be of interest to other AHS members. At the moment this section of the website is underused, but I am sure this will change as we get used to having such an excellent resource for the Society.

I would also like to draw members' attention to the account of his spiritual journey by Dr Robert Forman on the website. Dr Foreman is the founder of the Journal of Consciousness Studies, and is coming from the USA in June to launch his new book (details in the list of books for review). He says he has 'been a fan of the Hardy Society for years and years' and has offered to give talks to AHS groups while he is here. See AHS events, page 57, for information.

### Website matters – update (from Mike Rush's report to the AHS committee 17.01.2011)

At the previous meeting a query was raised about whether or not events could be listed under each local group as well as on the main events page. This would mean additional work ... I don't have the time (myself) to pick out the relevant meetings and then copy them across to all the local group pages. However, if group leaders wanted to e-mail me a list of their meetings so that I could simply copy and paste them in, that might work (but see below under Delegate Editor Permissions).

Another query was with regard to website statistics. The screenshot below shows the statistics that are available from Weebly.

Top Pages – lists the most popular pages visited on our site.  
 Search Terms – lists the keywords that people have used when finding our site.  
 Referring Sites – lists where people visiting our site came from (mostly from Google)



Top Pages (this month)		Search Terms (this month)		Referring Sites (this month)	
Views	Page	Views	Keyword	Views	Referrer
505	/	3	alister hardy	222	www.alisterhardysociety.org
110	/publications.html	2	the relevance of bliss alister hardy	69	alisterhardysociety.org
89	/whats-it-about.html	2	evolution of religious awareness	29	www.google.com
82	/sir-alister-hardy.html	2	"alister hardy" paintings	19	www.google.co.uk
77	/events.html	1	the biology of god alister hardy date	5	www.google.de
73	/contacts.html	1	religious experiences stories	4	www.open-lectures.co.uk
64	/lectures1.html	1	hardy trust	4	www.google.com.au
57	/the-society.html	1	Hardy music webbly . com	2	www.google.ie
52	/links.html	1	david hay god experience	2	michael-marsh.seebyseeing.net
39	/personal-stories.html	1	COFFEE BREAK@hotmail.com 20	2	isearch.avg.com
37	/the-trust.html			1	www.google.sk
23	/past-events.html			1	www.google.com.br
21	/ahs-local-groups.html			1	www.google.co.in
20	/401/login.php			1	www.google.ci
18	/lectures.html			1	www.google.be
17	/hardys-art.html			1	www.google.at
16	/ahs-wales-group.html				
15	/guestbook.html				
14	/de-numine-48.html				
9	/membership.html				
9	/de-numine-47.html				
9	/ahs-chesterfield-group.html				
8	/ahs-london-group.html				
7	/ahs-midlands-group.html				

**Delegate Editor Permissions:**

Both of the above queries could be addressed by using a new Weebly feature whereby I can assign delegate permissions to people so that they can update their own group page(s). I would suggest that John Franklin has the ability to view the website statistics (as above), and that group leaders be given the ability to update their own local group pages. Group leaders could then upload their own group reports and add event listings themselves.

**Rolling Waves Insights website**

Watch for a transformed Rolling Wave Insights 6th edition website with a front end everyone who can read in English should study, digest and think about. The new front end includes HOME PAGE, URGENT and QUICK START. Visitors outside America also might want to copy URGENT to represent their own situations. If enough people outside America would show more interest in our efforts, we could add an URGENT UK, URGENT CANADA, URGENT AUSTRALIA or others. Long live the memory of Alister Hardy! *Ben Korgen*

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Paddy and Jean,

I write to congratulate you both on the very high quality of the Autumn edition of *De Numine*. You always do a good job but in that edition you excelled. At the last Trustees meeting there was a unanimous feeling of pride in the quality of our Journal and the excellent choice of material in it. It demonstrates the liveliness of the Centre and the manifold interests of our members as well as the high quality of the contributions. The Trustees asked me to write to thank you for all you do for the Journal and to send their warmest feeling of gratitude to you both.

With best wishes,

*Professor Paul Badham, Secretary to the Trust*

*If we still had a colour section, we could show our blushes! P & J*

*Dear Readers of De Numine,*

The question of how to respond to experiencers, who have submitted accounts to the RERC archive, is one that has been asked numerous times over the years within the AHS. It is a question that goes to the heart of the relationship between spiritual experience, psychological health, and personal development. At the AHS Open Day 2011 this question was asked again, and answers to it have been recently considered in local groups, and by the AHS committee.\* By a happy synchronicity (itself perhaps a mild example of the type of experience in question) this issue is also one that relates to my own particular cross-roads in life.

I have recently arrived at a point where my interest in spiritual (or more generally 'anomalous') experiences intersects with a new-found interest in transpersonal psychology and counselling. I am, therefore, considering whether to pursue a postgraduate training course in counselling or psychotherapy with an emphasis on spirituality. The principles of this approach would be along the following lines:

- The focus of the counselling would be on 'anomalous' experiences and their associated beliefs (to include both the more dramatic and more mundane types of experiences).
- The belief that spiritual experiences are intertwined with, and are an inseparable part of, a persons' life and cannot be properly understood out of that context, especially around life crises.
- The approach taken would, as far as is possible, be non-sectarian/non-denominational/non-partisan with no hidden agenda, no proselytization to prior beliefs, or evangelical aims.
- It would also espouse an unprejudiced, pro-natural perspective on such experiences in order to counteract the negativity that some experiencers encounter from others.
- The role of the counsellor would be one of fellow explorer, not as guru, teacher or leader.

- As far as possible it would be guided by, and based upon, empirical research into the need for, the effectiveness of, and the techniques used by, such counselling.
- Adhere to the ethical guidelines, standards, insurance, supervision and training requirements of a recognised professional body, e.g. the BACP or UKCP.

There are a number of questions that need to be answered and some members of the AHS may like to engage with these questions:

- 1) Is there a need for a counselling service that specialises in anomalous/spiritual experiences?
- 2) What psychological framework and methods should the service use?
- 3) What is the relationship between life crises, spiritual experiences, and mental health issues?
- 4) Do organisations and services already exist that meet these needs?
- 5) What kind of empirical research needs to be done and how can it be done?
- 6) What would be the relationship of the AHS, and similar organisations, to such a service?\*
- 7) What courses or training organisations would be appropriate?

I would be interested to hear from anyone who wishes to comment on any of the above. Please contact me at [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com) I have already posed similar questions on Steve Taylor's forum at <http://outofthedarkness.site50.net/index.php>, a website that may also be of interest to members of the AHS.

*Mike Rush*

*\*The decision has already been taken that neither the RERC nor AHS can offer a counselling service directly. However, links to professional counselling bodies could be offered, either on the Alister Hardy website or in the letter of acknowledgement sent by RERC to people who submit experiences if this seems appropriate. Contributors to the archive are also encouraged to join the AHS if they wish to share their experience(s). This opens the opportunity to share with other people in a local group or write to De Numine.*

Dear Editor,

re the recent *De Numine* [Issue no. 51, Autumn 2011]

The photo of the well at Mamhilad, the destination of the S.E. Wales AH group, was misleadingly placed; the impression given was that our well was the one described in the poem alongside it (St Cybi's in West Wales). Had the photo been captioned, there would have been no doubt.

Thank you

*Mary Cook*

*Sorry Mary, the picture of the well should have captioned, as you say, and ideally placed with your report, and not with the poem. (Ed.)*

Dear Paddy,

I am grateful for the letter from Mr. Franklin published in the Autumn 2011 *De Numine*, as it enables me correctly to state the position regarding the Trust's library. The library has been built up over many years and contains books donated by many members of the Alister Hardy Society and others. The list of donors includes Sir Alister of course, the late Bishop Edward Cannan, Charlotte Waterlow, Oliver Knowles, and Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok to name just a few.

Following a proposal last year the Trustees agreed that the Trust's library would be properly catalogued, classified and integrated into the main library at Lampeter with the safeguard that the books would be retained on deposit and thus remain in the ownership of the Trust. The benefits of this arrangement are 1) the books from the Trust Collection would be available to the students and staff of the University and 2) members of the Alister Hardy Society would be able to have access to, and borrow from, the whole of the University's two libraries – some 350,000 volumes in total.

With the books being classified using the Dewey Decimal system there is logic in locating the books with others of the same classification, so that when browsing the shelves the library user will find all books on a subject located together and will not have to remember to go to two or more locations to cover a particular topic.

Finally with regard to sales, it has always been the policy of the Trust to sell duplicated copies of books held in the collection and to sell those whose condition has deteriorated to the extent that they can no longer be loaned out to users. The exception to this is of course the case of any rare or particularly valuable books which would be retained in the closed stacks. Obviously the classification and cataloguing of the collection has enabled each book to be examined and for those where multiple copies exist and those which are in poor condition a decision can then be made to keep or sell. So far over 2000 books have been catalogued resulting in the sale of no more than approximately 40 volumes.

The archive of accounts of religious experience is, of course, still housed in a separate room in the library and is available to members of the Alister Hardy Society who may view both the hard copies and the indexed database.

Finally, I am not aware of any formal covenants relating to any of the donations received; indeed if there were attempts to impose conditions upon the Trust or University then, unless the book or books were truly exceptional, the donation would probably have to be refused as one would have to be very careful not to place undue restriction on future custodians of the collection.

Yours sincerely,

*David Greenwood*

*Treasurer and Vice-Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust.*

## **Gripped by God**

I wonder if I'm gripped by god  
not knowing what I mean.  
No music playing  
no rush of winds  
no angels wings  
no poniard ray  
blasting from the sky  
to pierce the inmost being:  
just that nagging doubt  
deep within  
and a nudge towards  
essential love  
not knowing what it is.

In testing this  
I teeter on the edge  
of prose and poetry  
and think it does not matter  
because words cannot deal  
with that which is fundamental in all this.

On the edge too between  
Knowing and not knowing  
other times, other places  
other realities.

Being on the edge  
keeps the tang of it.

## **Woman Praying**

She prayed for us.  
'May the road rise up before you  
may the wind be always at your back  
may the rain fall softly on you  
and may you be held  
in the hollow of the hand of God.'  
And it mattered not a toss  
whether there was an objective God.  
She prayed from her sorrow,  
her sense of being loved.  
And her humanity  
seeking to wrap us round  
with a benign world  
and a protecting power  
was enough.  
We did not need God  
or  
that was God.

*Mike Perks*

## Book Reviews

**Pim van Lommel, M.D. *Consciousness Beyond Life: The science of the near-death experience* New York, HarperOne, 2010, 464 pp. ISBN 978 0061777257 (hbk) £16.99**

Dr van Lommel is a Dutch scientist and physician who worked as a cardiologist in Holland from 1977 to 2003. It was George Richie's book *Return from Tomorrow*<sup>1</sup> that inspired van Lommel to undertake his study of NDEs, which began in 1986. Richie 'died' of double pneumonia in 1943 but was revived after more than nine minutes to relate and publish details of his own NDE. Raymond Moody heard of this experience as a medical student when he attended one of Richie's lectures and this inspired him to write *Life After Life*<sup>2</sup> after investigations of his own.

Van Lommel's studies came to world-wide attention in 2001 when he published the results of the first rigorous scientific study of NDEs in the medical journal *The Lancet*. This groundbreaking prospective study was called 'Near-Death Experience in Survivors of Cardiac Arrest' and it was based on reports from his patients in The Netherlands. This book is the English translation of the book originally published in Dutch in 2007 on this subject.

There are now several books on the market<sup>3-6</sup> dealing with NDEs and the closely related OBEs. Most of these present anecdotal accounts of visions from patients who undergo some medical trauma (often heart attacks or cardiac surgery or other potentially fatal diseases or incidents). The stories are verifiable in that they agree with the known facts surrounding the event. Most of these books interpret NDEs as indicating connection with some extra-corporeal spiritual energy, as related by the patients themselves. The subjects often regard this cosmic energy as divine because the vision involved images they interpret as being of God, Mary or Jesus – or their counterparts as avatars in other religions. People who were atheists at the time of the experience often develop an increased sense of numinous spirituality, as do others who were adherents of one particular religious faith. After an NDE, as statistics gathered by van Lommel show, there is a tendency to replace dogmatic religion with a more holistic interfaith spirituality.

Van Lommel's book is much more than just a catalogue of anecdotes. After a historical review of the subject and the books it has generated, the author describes twelve elements that seem to be characteristic of all NDEs, especially the life-affirming holistic attitude it inspires in the patients. The classification is based on that given by Moody<sup>2</sup>. Not all subjects experience all of the distinctive phenomena.

There are those who insist on interpreting NDEs in a materialistic way as pure physiological phenomena, devoid of any spiritual significance – most recently, by Michael Marsh<sup>7</sup>. But Melvin Morse<sup>8</sup> and P.M.H. Atwater<sup>9</sup> have found, through studies of children as young as four or five, that they too can experience NDEs with some of the characteristics of adult experiences. NDEs in childhood are reviewed in one of the chapters by van Lommel here. It is simply not feasible to dismiss these, as Marsh does, as 'mere trivialities, worldly memories – from Hollywood or Sunday school.'

NDEs and OBEs may not, in themselves, prove the existence of God or an afterlife. What can be stated with certainty is that NDEs and OBEs indicate an ability of the human mind to undergo experiences that are not explainable by traditional science. Van Lommel considers various explanations for NDEs and compares his results with those of studies in the UK and USA. This huge mass of data indicates quite clearly that there is an aspect of mind that cannot

be accounted for by materialist and deterministic science. The facts that patients may be assessed as clinically dead (and be aware of that fact), with no detectable heart or brain activity, for up to ten minutes, or may be fully anaesthetised for several hours, but can still recall events occurring in the hospital, conversations between medical staff and attempts being made if necessary to revive them during all of this period shows that there is a state of being that allows the mind or soul to function even in what would be described medically as mortal death.

Van Lommel's book is a convincing account of the study of over one hundred patients during more than twenty years practice who suffered cardiac arrest and were judged to be clinically dead (sometimes for five minutes or more) but who were resuscitated. This study therefore reaches the same conclusion as Michael Sabom<sup>3</sup>, Kenneth Ring<sup>4</sup>, Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick<sup>5</sup>, or Mark Fox<sup>6</sup>. NDEs give a true indication of a spiritual state of being that is beyond conscious mind function and which is not explainable by pre-20<sup>th</sup> century science. As van Lommel says here, these experiences 'cannot be attributed to imagination, psychosis or oxygen deprivation.'

The author then goes on to explore possible scientific explanations for NDEs, including 'concepts and insights from quantum physics that may contribute to a better understanding of consciousness'. He points out that the common NDE feeling of being 'in a timeless and placeless dimension' corresponds closely to the quantum physics property called non-locality. All life experience can be accessed in an instant as though the subject were viewing a pictorial panorama of their lives, with the added dimension that the subject glimpses events from the future and places they have never visited. This corresponds to the wave-particle continuum of quantum mechanics: 'it seems to be possible to have a non-local connection with other people's consciousness as well as with the thoughts and feelings of deceased friends and family'. This is a reflection of the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen property of instantaneous connection between subatomic particles, unconstrained by separation in space. It also provides a theoretical foundation for Rupert Sheldrake's morphic field and C.G. Jung's collective unconscious of which the NDE is a relatively common example.

The author discusses the physiology of brain function but concludes that there is nothing in such description that could account for NDEs in a materialistic way. The conventional biologist interprets the role of DNA also in a materialist way in that it is held to account for all behavioural characteristics of the individual. But, as van Lommel points out, recent research has shown that DNA might also be involved 'in the continuous changes to our bodies [by acting] as the interface between nonlocal consciousness and the body and plays a role in ... the organism as a whole.'

Van Lommel lists both the recurring features of an NDE and the changes in life-style or world-view that such an event produces subsequently. Subjects tend to be more spiritual and less devoted to dogmatic religion, with enhanced intuitive sensitivity. The joy of life is increased and fear of death diminished, accompanied by increased belief in the existence of an afterlife. The subject often displays increased interference with electrical equipment, and increased intolerance of pharmaceutical medicines but greater interest in and response to complementary therapies.

As van Lommel says, NDEs are not a new phenomenon. Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* presents 14,000 verses on Dante's own mystical journey through hell and purgatory to heaven. Even before that, in *The Republic*, Plato gives us an account, in the vision of Er, of the destiny of the human soul after mortal death.

This is the most comprehensive book on NDEs that I have read – quite detailed but very readable. The writing, even in translation, carries the reader forward. The book concludes with 35 pages of Notes, a 23-page Bibliography and a detailed Index.

*Reviewed by Dr Howard A Jones*

**References:**

- <sup>1</sup> G.G. Richie, *Return from Tomorrow*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 1978.
- <sup>2</sup> Raymond Moody, *Life After Life*, Mockingbird Books, Covington, GA, USA, 1975.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael B. Sabom, *Recollections of Death*, Corgi, 1982.
- <sup>4</sup> Kenneth Ring: *Heading Towards Omega: In search of the meaning of the near-death experience*, Quill William Morrow, New York, 1984.
- <sup>5</sup> Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick, *The Truth in the Light: Investigation of over 300 near-death experiences*, Berkley Books, New York, 1995.
- <sup>6</sup> Mark Fox, *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience*, Routledge, 2003.
- <sup>7</sup> Michael N. Marsh, *Out-of-Body and Near-Death Experiences*, Oxford University Press, 2010.
- <sup>8</sup> M. Morse and P. Perry, *Closer to the Light*, Villard Books, New York, 1990.
- <sup>9</sup> P. M. H. Atwater, *The New Children and Near-Death Experiences*, Bear and Co., Rochester, VT, 2003

**William Bloom, *The Power of Modern Spirituality, How to live a life of compassion and personal fulfilment***

**London, Piatkus, 2011. 274 pp. ISBN 978 0 7499 5285 3 (pbk) £13.99.**

This book will be of great interest to AHS members as it takes spiritual experience as the starting point for developing one's own spiritual practice. William Bloom is one the UK's foremost mind, body and spirit teachers and here he offers a distillation of forty years of personal practice and thirty years of teaching. He is the founder and co-director of The Foundation for Holistic Spirituality and the Spiritual Companions Project, and a prolific author. Running the Alternatives Programme at St James Piccadilly for ten years offered him the opportunity to invite spiritual teachers from all over the world and to learn from them. He also explored modern psychological approaches and techniques. On that basis William Bloom developed his courses, and ultimately this book.

Today we are very much aware of the tension between religion and spirituality, and we are in fact addressing the issue in the AHS as we consider a possible name change. Those who have had spiritual experiences so often long to strip the spiritual essence from religious traditions. They search for a personal spirituality, aware that some form of practice and structure is necessary for spiritual growth. It is this need which is answered by Modern Spirituality. Bloom suggests that in order to live a life of compassion and personal fulfillment we need to focus on Connection, Reflection and Service, and the text is interspersed with exercises offering readers the chance to develop their spirituality in this way.

Bloom locates Modern Spirituality firmly in today's global village, where people are in control of their lives and make their own choices, in contrast to past attitudes of bowing to religious authority. But the danger of personal selection degenerating into self-centred pick-and-mix New Age spirituality, without 'the hard bits' of moral standards, discipline and rigor is evident, and is frequently expressed by representatives of religious traditions.

Stung by criticism from Archbishop Trevor Huddleston, for whom he had the greatest respect, William Bloom decided to take on his critics and defend the movement from accusations of a lack of values. He suggests that we can learn from the great religious teachers of the past and meld their wisdom with modern insights to form a new holistic vision, with a benevolent attitude towards our fellow beings and the planet. Modern spirituality accepts mysticism and mystery and offers meditation as a key practice.

In the book William Bloom elaborates on the practice of Connection, Reflection and Service. In the RERC archive (to which he refers) we have many different accounts of what Bloom would categorise as instances of Connection, particularly accounts of a deep sense of wonder in nature. He stresses that it is a mistake to focus on extraordinary experiences and insists that everyone is able to connect, includes times such as playing football, cooking, dancing, being with animals or caring for others. The reader is encouraged to stop, appreciate and yield to those moments.

Reflection follows, in deep relaxation, leading to an awareness of thoughts and emotions, the aim is to calm 'the monkey mind' and, through self-management, transcend the vicissitudes of human experience.

Through this connection with the wonder and essential benevolence of creation, we will naturally begin to live a life in harmony with those around us and with our environment. Thus growing compassion leads to Service. Bloom sees this progression as the ethical impulse at the heart of Modern Spirituality.

For many, this is the way forward, while others will prefer the richness, history and moral structure of a religious tradition. Bloom encourages further exploration and suggests possible avenues. He also offers a grand narrative to stand beside the inspirational myths of religion. Rather than looking to a future, messianic individual, he envisages a communal avatar – a community of the enlightened, the spiritual, those practising mindful living. It is an ideal we might well bear in mind for ourselves and the AHS.

This book will be valuable to anyone at all interested in spirituality and is specially recommended for people who have had spiritual experiences but who are unaware of just how widespread and potentially enriching they are. It should definitely be on our own Recommended Reading List for those who send accounts of their experiences to the RERC.

*Reviewed by Marianne Rankin*

**Donald W Musser & Joseph L Price, *Tillich*  
Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2010, 95pp, ISBN 978 0 687 34344 7**

If you are a committed student or an enthusiastic amateur theologian this little book might be right up your street. The cover depicts the massive and ornate bulk of a Corinthian column and a banner heading across the pediment reads '*Abingdon Pillars of Theology*'. The back cover spells out that this 'is a series for the college and seminary classroom'. This is not a book for the Common Reader.

The brief preface announces a workmanlike volume: '... we aim to produce a readable yet theologically savvy rendering of (Tillich's) major works and ideas' but there is a warning

'... this goal does not presage an easier and simpler Tillich, because his work does not lend itself to simplification'

There is a brief opening chapter on Tillich's life and career; an even briefer closing chapter on his 'abiding contributions' to the discipline of theology. Sandwiched between the two are 8 chapters of a distillation of Tillich's theological method and thought, mainly derived from his major 3 volume *Systematic Theology* but supported by material from his other writing. Our student should be encouraged by the fact that the 'Questions for Reflection' at the end of each chapter are not simply an examination of delivered content but also an invitation to explore the relevant ideas more deeply. She will be helped by the substantial critical apparatus in the book which comprises extensive referencing of the text, a bibliography, a list of Tillich's major publications and a lexicon of 'salient words and phrases used by Tillich' She may, however, be disappointed to find little discussion of how Tillich's thinking was grounded in his life, times and culture, and sparse critical analysis of his theology. The first chapter opens with the strong statement '... all theology is autobiographical. ... Paul Tillich's theology ... was decisively shaped by his life's personal and cultural contexts ...' yet by the bottom of the next page his life story has been considered; his place in academic theology confirmed and the authors have nailed their colours to the mast: 'For some, like the authors of this text, Tillich is an iconic figure ... a brave and creative interpreter of the core of Christian belief'. They give a passing but stentorian indication of the existence of adverse criticism: 'For others, he is a representative of all that is wrong with theology. He is portrayed as a betrayer and denier of historic orthodoxy, a heretic, a relativist and even an atheist.' Then they quickly move on to consider Tillich's basic approach to theology. Critical analysis in the remainder of the book is sparse and hard to find.

The Common Reader wanting only the most casual acquaintance with Tillich's life and work might do well to confine himself to the opening and closing chapters, and the excellent lexicon in the appendices. But as for he who, like your reviewer, feels the call of duty (as one committed to lifelong learning) to read the whole of this short but highly compressed text – what impressions might he garner?

There are dire warnings in the preface: 'Readers must plunge into the sea of his thinking, flounder at first, immerse themselves in it, and then, we hope, get hooked by its structures and contents, by its vigor and rigor'. The reader might occasionally wonder whether the difficulty of some of the text is solely because of the complexity of the ideas expressed, or whether it might be because Tillich's explications and those of his particular interpreters are unnecessarily obtuse. He may think that some statements are circular: "whatever concerns a man ultimately becomes god for him and conversely, it means that a man can be concerned ultimately only about that which is god for him" and that some are platitudinous: "the time of the amoeba and the time of historical man are different". But he will find pools of lucidity amongst the technical complexity. There is the occasional aphorism: "The moment of our conception is the moment in which we begin not only to live but also to die". There are ideas which, while they no longer sound original, remain engaging in their potential for exploration and discussion by the non-specialist: 'In short, spirit pervades life in all its aspects'; "Although the Word reveals truth, the words of the Bible, creeds and sermons are not holy in themselves"; 'Tillich insists that certainty evinces idolatry, while doubt indicates faith'. There are occasions when the apparent boundaries of theology are broken down and thinking is applied directly to a wide variety of aspects of life: "All arts create symbols for a level of reality which cannot be reached in any other way"; 'Tillich's politics and his theology are of one foundation (Ronald H Stone, *Paul Tillich's Radical Social Thought*).'

If the reader has the stamina to read to the end, circumventing the difficulties, he is likely to come away with the impression of a serious and committed professional theologian, steeped in the complexities of his subject but not afraid to break down the boundaries between theology, philosophy, politics, aesthetics, sociology; a man comfortable working with paradox, symbols and myth; someone who bestrides the theoretical and the practical. A liberal: "Indifference towards the ultimate question is the only imaginable form of atheism" who retained a streak of conservatism: "... the revelation in Jesus as the Christ, is universally valid, because it includes the criterion of every revelation and is the finis ... of them all"

This is a well presented, challenging little book. If what is required is Tillich's theology summarised and compressed, presented by authors who are established academics, then this fits the bill. On the other hand, to find a broader overview of the man, sustained discussion and criticism of his theology and its relationship to the life events and to the cultures from which it emerged, the reader will need to look elsewhere.

*Quotations from Tillich are denoted by "....."*

*Quotations from the Musser/Price text are denoted by '.....'*

*Reviewed by Mike Perks*

**James Roose-Evans, *Finding Silence, 52 Meditations for Daily Living*  
Stroud, The History Press, 2009. 168pp. ISBN 978 0 7524 5405 4 (pbk), £8.99.**

In a recent article Professor Ervin Laszlo states that the malaise of the West is its 'one-sidedness'.<sup>1</sup> In his view, the separation of the physical 'world out there' and the 'thinking, feeling world within' arises from the very structure of the human brain with its right and left hemispheres, each of which 'sees the world in its own way'. While science, he says, made great progress dissecting the 'outside world' into parts, and the manipulation of those parts became the basis of the impersonalised, mechanised world of modern technology, the so-called 'real world', the 'inside world' of value, feeling and spirit was relegated to religion. The resulting schism created a fractured view of reality, dominated by left-brain thinking in which that separation has resulted in a competitive world where everyone is 'out for him- or herself'. In such an impersonal and uncaring world, says Prof. Laszlo, 'meaning, feeling and purpose' have become merely the projections of one's own subjective feelings onto 'objective reality'.

But this is not the whole story. Although the disease of Western Civilisation is its one-sidedness, the result of historical circumstance and our scientific heritage, there has also been an evolutionary growth in human consciousness in which the creative, organic experience of the right brain, and the pragmatic, analytical skills of the left brain, are becoming more unified in an holistic approach to living. In the long evolution of consciousness, this is the present stage in the development of the human soul, the stage that the Swiss philosopher, linguist, poet and mystic, Jean Gebser (1905-1973)<sup>2</sup> terms 'integral consciousness'.

The hallmark of this evolutionary stage is the wide-spread interest in spirituality, in 'spiritual technologies' as the philosopher Jacob Needleman<sup>3</sup> referred to them, the synthesis of experience and experiment evolved over centuries, 'the coherent mappings of highly disciplined skills of self-observation' and self-transformation known collectively in the West as *meditation*.

This book, *Finding Silence*, is a welcome addition to these mappings, and to our understanding of our inner, spiritual world. James Roose-Evans has not only decades of experience of the competitive outer world, as an actor, director, playwright and author, and as the founder of the Hampstead Theatre, but extensive experience of the inner world as an ordained Anglican priest and a facilitator of meditation groups, workshops and retreats.

The value of this book, therefore, is in its appeal to both novice meditators and seasoned practitioners. Although the sub-title, '52 Meditations for Daily Living', suggests a chronological series of steps or instructions, they are more like 52 reflections of life viewed through the practice of meditation and, as such, provide a grounded approach for those just setting out on the journey, while at the same time reminding those who have been long on the path that meditation is 'a journey that is long, full of adventure, full of knowledge.' As a glimpse into the world of spirit it is, at the very least, an enjoyable read, and an inspiration in seeking the deeper meaning at the centre of our lives. The book is a treasure trove of wisdom. It is richly strewn with gems from the great philosophers and mystics, from the wisdom teachings and sacred writings of both Eastern and Western cultures, as well as realisations from Roose-Evans' own spiritual experience. They give us insight into some of the greater truths, and many of them contain pointers to spiritual practice. For example, he points out how important it is to get our own house in order, that is to find the essence of practice, expressed in a saying of Lao Tzu (p.136) :

On the way to knowledge  
Many things are accumulated.  
On the way to wisdom  
Many things are discarded.  
Less and less effort is used  
Until things arrange themselves.

This would seem to sum up the whole process of meditation, but of course one has to acquire grounding, discipline and skills if one is to appreciate the inner meaning of this poem. Here Roose-Evans is skilful, first in identifying, then in conveying to his readers, how we recognise the blueprint, and so live out the person we are meant to become, the person we make of ourselves.

He also points out that truths can be discovered by ordinary people whose lives have been shaped and altered by meditation. For example, he quotes one friend who has observed that (p.122), 'One of the outcomes of meditation ... is that out of stillness and quietness an essential simplicity can emerge which feeds into everyday living and being.'

And he is extremely realistic about the ups and downs, the pitfalls, of meditation practice. Here we can see why this is not a book one can read at one sitting. Neither can one get the best from it by dipping into it at random. Making it part of one's daily spiritual reading, perhaps sitting in silence and reflecting on each section for a week, as the author seemed to intend, is the best way to find the essence of practice.

As he reminds us (p.68):

'... just as the most loving relationships can have their boring patches when we can feel even out of love with each other and want to end it all, so, too we can be tempted to give up the practice of meditation. However, we learn to take no notice of such patches, other than to register, in meditation, as in love, that we are moving through a dry season. We persevere in love, enduring the occasional pain and boredom, slowly building up a discipline that will

enable us to endure rougher weather and more violent storms. Thus, in time, as in those human relationships over which we have laboured, we become like a tree that has been battered by many storms but whose roots go deep.

We have to work at everything.'

*Reviewed by Dr Maureen Lockhart*

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**Gary Lachman, *The Quest for Hermes Trismegistus: From Ancient Egypt to the Modern World* Edinburgh, Floris Books, 2011. 247 pp. ISBN 978 086315 798 1 (pbk). £16.99**

Gary Lachman, a former member of rock group Blondie, has written numerous books on Western Esotericism and the occult including: *Jung the Mystic: The Esoteric Dimensions of Carl Jung's Life and Teachings*; *The Dedalus Book of the Occult: A Dark Muse*; and *Politics and the Occult: The Left, the Right, and the Radically Unseen*. He has also written on other esoteric teachers such as Rudolf Steiner, G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky.

Hermes Trismegistus (Hermes the thrice-great) is an influential figure in the history of Western Esotericism playing an important role in the development of ideas about magic, alchemy and astrology. Many believed him to be a contemporary of Moses who prefigured Christ. Hermes has been written about previously by other scholars of esotericism, such as Antoine Faivre in *The Eternal Hermes* and Garth Fowden in *The Egyptian Hermes*. Lachman's presentation differs from these works in two ways: his scope is grander and maps out Hermes' influence from the ancient period to the modern occult revival, and at the same time suggests that a common theme throughout is the role played by what R.M Bucke called 'cosmic consciousness'.

The bulk of *The Quest for Hermes* is concerned with tracing the history of Hermes Trismegistus' influence from its origins in the ancient world via the Mediaeval and Renaissance periods up to the modern occult revival of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lachman describes how the mythical gods Hermes and Thoth became the composite figure of Hermes Trismegistus. These characters were traditionally associated with speech, language, writing, magic, cosmology, and the afterlife. The texts associated with the name of Hermes Trismegistus are known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and were held in high esteem up until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Humanist scholar Isaac Casaubon dated them to late antiquity. These texts are now available in English translation by Salaman et al (1999) as *The Way of Hermes* and some also appear in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* edited by Robinson (1977). Lachman follows the chain of the *prisca theologia*, or Perennial Philosophy, from ancient Egypt through to Marsilio Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1463. He describes the way in which the Hermetica were interpreted by key thinkers such as Pico della Mirandola, who synthesised Hermetism with Christian Kabbalah; Giordano Bruno, who attempted to create a heliocentric religious revolution; and Paracelsus, who developed his own form of Natural Philosophy. Lachman then moves on to discuss the Art of Memory, the

last of the renaissance thinkers such as Robert Fludd, who wrote of a living cosmology ensouled by the Anima Mundi; and the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher who attempted to interpret Egyptian hieroglyphics prior to the discovery of the Rosetta Stone by Champollion.

Throughout this esoteric journey Lachman builds up a thesis, based largely on the ideas of Jean Gebser, suggesting that there has been an evolutionary shift in consciousness from an animistic way of experiencing the world to today's non-animistic perspective. The former is non-logical, acausal, and governed by an holistic, experiential connectivity, whilst the latter is logical, causal, and governed by reductive, conceptual grouping. He suggests that what the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and other esoteric thinkers, were talking about was something similar to what Richard Maurice Bucke called 'cosmic consciousness'. This experience, says Lachman, is a mode of being in the world that was superseded by the enlightenment and scientific revolution. Experiencing cosmic consciousness leads to 'gnosis, a sudden, direct, and transformative knowledge of reality'. He attempts to relate this thesis to recent findings from neuroscience and suggests that future evolution necessitates a return to this more naturalistic mode of consciousness, but this time synthesised with the benefits of our scientific worldview. Lachman sees this process as an evolutionary spiral and says that the 'Original creation myths, and Ra's defeat of Apophis, can be seen as an account of the rise of self-consciousness out of the darkness of the unconscious'. In fact, he suggests that the famous Emerald Tablet, containing the important esoteric concept 'as above, so below' actually refers to consciousness itself.

Unfortunately, as the book has such a wide historical scope, Lachman doesn't have the space to discuss some of the deeper aspects of his experiential hypothesis. It would have been interesting to see how Lachman deals with the complexities of performing a comparative study of subjective experience across such wide-ranging historical, cultural, and geographical periods. The experiential similarities that Lachman finds are: the necessity of a calm, peaceful, quiet state of mind; the feeling of being raised to a great height and given a boundless view; the powerful sense of knowing; and ineffability and joy. However, how confident can we be that the experience referred to in the *Corpus Hermeticum* is actually the same type of experience reported by the Renaissance magi, Bucke, William James, Ouspensky or Swedenborg? Other ideas that Lachman invokes in his thesis may sit more comfortably with holistic thinkers than with a modern scientific audience, for example that evolution is a teleological process, that consciousness can evolve over such a short time span, and the controversial idea that 'ontology recapitulates phylogeny'.

In summary, this book provides a very readable introduction to the history of Western Esotericism. However, the most exciting aspect of the book is Lachman's thesis that Hermeticism is grounded in a common spiritual or religious experience and that this experience can be grounded in recent neuropsychological research. This fascinating hypothesis invites further and more detailed investigation.

*Reviewed by Michael J. Rush*

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**Terry Welbourn, *T C Lethbridge, The Man Who Saw the Future*  
O Books, Winchester, UK, 2010. ISBN 978 1 84694 500 7 (pbk) £17.99**

Tom Lethbridge, who died about 40 years ago, was an original. His picture on the front cover of this book reminds me of Indiana Jones (it must be the hat). He came from a long line of eccentrics and on his mother's side he was related to Speke, who discovered the source of the Nile.

In 1921, having no Greek but passable Latin, he went to Cambridge University, rather than Oxford, to read geology and geography. Although he was not worried by the relevance of his studies, he was fortunate in having ample independent means. He loved exploring and archaeology, and rapidly became involved in expeditions to the Arctic and then in 'hands on' excavations around Cambridge. Later, despite having no formal qualifications, he became keeper of Anglo-Saxon antiquities in Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. He was a talented draughtsman and watercolourist and illustrated much of his work himself. He frequently experienced what he called 'The odd' or paranormal episodes. He believed that he was a receiver for the thoughts of others, for example the mother of a dead child projected or radiated her thoughts and memories of her child and he picked them up.

He had a very practical attitude to all that he studied and did not like second hand information; he wanted to experiment and enquire for himself. He felt, as I do, that we are on a watershed as technology takes over from craftsmanship and folk memory. There has always been change and development, but now the pace of change is so much faster. People of Tom Lethbridge's and my generation can actually span this gap (though I myself would not claim to understand much of modern technology). He believed that academics frequently rejected new ideas only for them to be proved correct later, when, of course, the originator of the idea receives no credit.

He didn't go into business, as he felt that the government would take most of the money he made (what's new?) and so he was happy to accept an invitation to carry out excavations in East Cambridgeshire. In addition to this local work he spent long periods exploring the Hebrides and their archaeology. In his middle twenties he married; unfortunately his wife and three children all suffered mental health problems, one son committing suicide, after what would now be known as a very severe episode of post traumatic stress. He and his first wife divorced in 1943 and he married his first wife's cousin a year later. They moved to an island off-shore from Oban and tried to be self-sufficient, but found it too much of a struggle and returned to Cambridge, where Tom was involved in excavations in the Gogmagog hills.

According to the book, Tom was associated with the discovery of the Mildenhall treasure, and the account of his doings reads like a detective story. His approach to archaeology was very unconventional and this frequently caused friction with other, more conventionally academic practitioners. One instance was the time in the mid 50s when Tom used a metal rod to probe an area of the Gogmagog hills to try and find a giant figure cut into the chalk and now buried; mainstream opinion was that what was found could be explained by natural inconsistencies in the soil. The situation was further exacerbated by the publicity he sought and gave to his work. Another source of disagreement was the 'imaginative' history books he began to write.

Eventually Tom and his second wife moved to Branscombe in Devon, where they remained for the rest of his life in a very old house with, at one time, a witch for a neighbour. It was here that Tom began to use a pendulum extensively in his paranormal investigations. He

found that the performance and sensitivity to various materials was a function of the length of the string. After a length of 40 inches (which he associated with death) results were consistent when repeated. He wrote eight books on his researches and thoughts about various phenomena and appeared on BBC TV programmes.

He had always had a tendency to be crude and sometimes unfeeling in his correspondence, and he was capable of playing unpleasant practical jokes. Latterly his books began to be punctuated with rants, having nothing to do with the main theme, and the author likens him at this stage in his life to Victor Meldrew! Sadly when he died his wife had to leave their house, which was owned by the Lethbridge Trust, and had to sell her husband's books and papers to an antiquarian bookseller to make ends meet. Fortunately for posterity they were eventually acquired and archived by John Gadd and are now housed in the Cambridge University library.

I enjoyed reading this book, though there was a tendency to say things twice and it would have benefited from editing in some places. I spotted a few misprints. For instance the American explorer Peary went to the North Pole in 1909 not 1809.

Some years ago I read one or two of Lethbridge's books and even tried experimenting (not very successfully) with a pendulum. This made the present biography particularly interesting and I would like to congratulate the author in bringing Tom Lethbridge and his work to life again. As I said at the beginning of this review, Tom Lethbridge was an original and they are unfortunately being squeezed out of the system now with our goals and targets and utilitarian attitudes.

*Reviewed by Neil Hancox*

**Andrew Dawson (ed.), *Summoning the Spirits: Possession and Invocation in Contemporary Religion***

**London, I. B. Taurus, 2011. x 230 pp. ISBN 978 1 84885 162 7 (pbk) £16.99**

This new academic volume is an anthropological and sociological examination of spirit possession in contemporary religious practices. Various academics have contributed chapters from their own anthropological studies. Each chapter is a fascinating examination of how belief in spirit possession is still alive and well in some current religious practices, although if you read this expecting something from 'The Exorcist' you will be disappointed. The scope of the book is illustrated by chapters with titles such as: 'Local Spirits/Multicultural Rituals: The Dynamics of Place and Identity in Vietnamese-American Spirit Possession Rituals' and 'The Ontology of Good and Evil: Spirit Possession in Contemporary Witchcraft and Paganism'. I would have liked to have seen less about ethnic religious practices (as interesting and important as studies of these are) and more about 'alternative' western belief systems, including Spiritualism and the UFO contactee movement, as Skultans did in the 1970's (Skultans, 1974). Even the chapter on witchcraft and paganism concerns these belief systems as practiced by pagans in Australia, so hardly in their natural setting!

Today when most of us think about being possessed by a discarnate intelligence we probably either conjure up images of the séance room (aka 'Night of the Demon') or a scene from 'The Exorcist'. Although these two examples are very different, they share common, stereotypical characteristics. However, apart from a spiritualist the next best person to have 'hands on' experience of spirit possession is the anthropologist. For the anthropologist, shamanic trance

is probably the best known form of possession they will encounter, either at first hand or in the academic literature, and there is much debate about how influential shamanism has been in shaping our understanding of trance and possession.

Possession by spirits has long been a contentious issue in anthropology. For Mercia Eliade there is a clear distinction between ritual possession and shamanism, though he acknowledged that possession does sometimes occur in the latter case. For Eliade the situation is clear-cut. The shaman controls the spirits, not the other way round. (Eliade, 1964)

Before Eliade, ethnographers had observed Siberian shamans becoming possessed. Debate about possession in shamanism began in earnest when Hans Findeisen (Findeisen, 1957) declared that possession by spirits is a main characteristic of shamanic ecstasy. He equates shamans with Western spiritualist mediums. This argument was countered by Paulson who observed that when a shaman becomes possessed he still retains his personality, he is still the master, not the slave, nor is he a passive instrument of the spirits which is usually the case in spiritualism.

In his classic study of possession and trance, Ioan M Lewis argues that total possession by spirits is an element of shamanic practices, but he goes on to consider these in light of psychiatric and psychoanalytical interpretations. In her study of shamanism and ecstatic states, Siikala observes what she calls 'the shaman's identification with a spirit role' (Siikala, 1982). Here she contends that for the most part shamanic ecstasy (and possession) does not involve any change in consciousness on the part of the subject and that what goes on during these states is often little more than play acting. Examples of this occur time and again in the historical literature.

My experience of trance and possession are, like most I imagine, fairly limited. I have witnessed at first hand mediums and psychic UFO contactees going into voluntary and involuntary trance. I was involved in investigating an usual case of possession/cursing quite a few years ago for ASSAP (The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena), but such cases must be considered the exception not the norm.

A worthwhile academic tome, although perhaps not for the general reader.

*Reviewed by David Taylor*

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**Michael Berman, *Shamanic Journeys, Shamanic Stories*  
Winchester: O Books, 2010. 167pp. ISBN 978 1 84694 402 4 (pbk) £10.99**

Most of us love to have stories read to us, even beyond childhood, and the more heroic they are the better. Shamanic stories can be very satisfying because not only are they feeding our thirst for fantasy and a 'good yarn' in many cases, they also offer us moral and common-sense guidance.

There are several stories in this book that fulfil that need and they are scattered amongst what is effectively a review of some of the writings about shamanism. The author explores the key attributes of the shamanic story, and relates them to the journeying of the shaman, who goes into a trance state to heal others by whatever means necessary.

The book offers a number of moral tales that contain a beginning, middle and end. There are other books on the market that offer illustrative stories, but often they leave the reader dissatisfied as there is no clear story line, perhaps because they are not as old or have not originated in such rich cultures as these. Some of these stories have layers of meaning that keep the reader interested and alert to what they can learn.

There are numerous quotes from writers on the subject, particularly from the writings of Mircea Eliade.\* In some ways, the information about the experiences of shamans is similar to the experiences related in the Alister Hardy archive, some of which may seem surreal but which are nevertheless valid. The author quotes Carlos Castaneda who defines such texts as 'conscious verbal constructions based on numinous experiences in non-ordinary reality'.

The author discusses the practices of shamans in times past and those in the current neo-shamanism. He explores shamans' different cultures in different parts of the world and their commonalities, which are many. There seems to be a basic path which all stories follow to take the shaman or the reader on a journey and a return to their current reality. There are various signs and numbers that have meaning and which recur throughout the history of shamanic practices and story-telling. He uses the stories to demonstrate these points chapter by chapter.

It is clear that, to a certain degree, the public have some difficulty in accepting modern-day shamans because they are largely self-styled. Shamans in earlier times were trained, formally or informally, from childhood or early teens. Today, courses are offered that consist of a few weekends of focused work with someone who may or may not have spent years following this path.

One of the reasons why the public may not be as keen to use the skills of genuine shamans becomes clear in the comment that our lack of self-belief in ourselves as scintillas of God cause some of us to 'bow down before false gods and thus religions are created'. Today, many people are suspicious of anything that has even the remotest hint of religious overtones and, as a result, they may perceive this in anything spiritual, particularly practices that are old and ritualistic. This too makes it difficult for shamanism to be accepted on a wider level.

It was good to read the author's views on charging clients. He makes the point that all spiritual work tends to be viewed as a service that should be offered free of charge, but that everyone who offers a service gives of their time, for which they can reasonably expect a fee.

This book does not go into great depth about shamanism; like most spiritual practices it is difficult to describe. He quotes Wallis (2003): 'the subject area resists "objective" analysis and

is sufficiently beyond mainstream research to foil ... writing [or talking] about it in a conventional academic way'. But it is a source of some references for further reading that can lead you into an exploration of the subject; it would have been helpful to have a bibliography at the end of the book to give us more detailed information about where we could find these.

This is an interesting book but my over-riding feeling throughout was that it had been put together hurriedly – paragraphs were repeated word for word in different parts of the book, which I found disconcerting and there are numerous punctuation errors that caused me to feel I needed to re-read sections to get the correct sense of what was written. Although these criticisms may seem trivial to some, if authors and publishers want the public to read their books, in the current market it would make sense to ensure the presentation is as near to perfect as they can get. These errors could have been avoided if the book had been professionally proof-read but it seems the publisher too might have been in a hurry to put it through the printing process.

*Reviewed by Jenny Jones, Spiritual Healer, West Wales. [www.spiritofoneness.co.uk](http://www.spiritofoneness.co.uk)*

*\*Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) was a leading interpreter of religious experience across cultures; he established paradigms in religious studies that persist to this day. Ed.*

**Marianne Rankin, *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*  
London, Continuum, 2008, 304 pp. ISBN 978 0826498212 (pbk) £24.99**

Marianne Rankin is the former Chair of the Alister Hardy Society (2002-10), which is affiliated to the Religious Experience Research Centre located at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David at Lampeter in Wales. The RERC was set up in 1969 at Oxford University by marine biologist Sir Alister Hardy F.R.S. but is now at Lampeter.

Marianne's book is not about religion itself, its beliefs and practices, but is rather an exploration of what it means to individuals to have various kinds of numinous experience. She begins by distinguishing between these different kinds of experience: religious, spiritual, mystical, transcendental, OBEs, NDEs, and other less well defined types of experience that cannot readily be described in physiological terms yet lead to a change in the psychological state of the individual. These experiences provide an important counter to those who argue that the material world is all there is.

There is usually one particular figurehead who is regarded as 'founder' of a religion but the author makes the point that the founder is really the Divine, in whatever form this is envisaged. She suggests a better term for the initiator of a new faith would be 'mediator' or 'messenger' of the divine inspiration. Rankin perceptively explores the origins and transmission of these messages, some of which are now regarded as scripture, but also discusses how this relationship with the numinous affects ordinary people. The discussion embraces religions of the East (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Confucianism, Sikhism) as well as the more familiar western faiths (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). There are fascinating accounts of several less well-known religions or those with fewer followers, like Baha'i, Quakers, Mormons, Scientology, Christian Science, Theosophy, Unitarianism and even what modern thinkers like Fritjof Capra, Eckhart Tolle and Neale Donald Walsch have to tell us.

The spiritual energy associated with sacred places has always fascinated me since I was a boy: Marianne covers this too, though only briefly. A rationalist would probably dismiss this as 'imagination', but I have always felt a sense of emotional uplift at such places, of which there are several in my homeland of Wales.

This is a clear, well researched and wide-ranging account of the significance of kinds of numinous experience, focussing on those associated with religious faith. It is at one and the same time a resource book of religious experience for students of the subject but also a highly readable account for those seeking a meaningful spirituality in their lives. I'm sure many readers will resonate with some of the experiences described in this book.

A deeper understanding of the nature of spirituality that this book provides should help us achieve a less materialistic and more cohesive and tolerant society. For those with an open mind it should also lessen the fear of mortal death. The many accounts taken from the archives of the RERC provide testimony of how such spiritual experiences have provided personal life-changing evidence of a cosmic spiritual energy that scientists are increasingly affirming.

There are extensive notes and bibliography at the end of the book with a detailed Index. Despite its wide coverage, this book is easy to read and is a worthy successor to *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James and *The Spiritual Nature of Man* by Alister Hardy.

*Reviewed by Dr Howard A. Jones*

## Books Received for Review

The following books have been received for review. If any of our current reviewers, or other interested readers would like to write a review of any of these, please contact Jean Matthews (j.matthews@tsd.ac.uk), who will arrange for a copy to be sent to you. When we receive your review, the book will become yours.

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Ogden, Steven                   | <i>Love Upside Down: Life, Love and the Subversive Jesus.</i> O Books, 2011                                      |
| Melissa Lowe                    | <i>The Apocalypse of the Mind: transforming ego into Stillness of Consciousness.</i> O Books, 2011               |
| Dick Sullivan                   | <i>Counter-Cosmos: the Mind of the Mystic.</i> Coracle, 2011   |
| Maureen Minnehan Jones          | <i>Wisdom to Wellness: Healing your Emotional Sufferings so the Physical Healing Can Follow.</i> O Books, 2011   |
| Sandie Gustus                   | <i>Less Incomplete: a guide to experiencing the human condition beyond the physical body.</i> O Books, 2011      |
| L. Cassidy & M. O'Connell, eds. | <i>Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation.</i> Orbis, 2011                                |
| Colin Stanley                   | <i>Around the Outsider: Essays presented to Colin Wilson on the occasion of his 80th birthday.</i> O Books, 2011 |
| Marion Browne                   | <i>Eccentrics, Truth-Seekers or Holy Fools? The Search for a Moral Universe.</i> Marion Browne, 2010             |
| Nevill Drury                    | <i>Wisdom Seekers: the rise of the new spirituality.</i> O Books, 2011   |
| Caroline Brazier                | <i>Acorns Among the Grass: Adventures in Eco-Therapy.</i> O Books, 2011  |

- Ilia Delio *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe.* Orbis, 2011
- Robert K C Forman *Enlightenment Ain't what it's Cracked Up to Be: a Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul.* O Books, 2011
- Agbonkhianmege E Orobator, ed. *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: the Second African Synod.* O Books, 2011
- Duane Olson *Issues in Contemporary Christian Thought.* Fortress Press, 2011
- Michael G Long, ed. *Christian Peace and Nonviolence.* Orbis, 2011
- David O. Woodyard *The Church in the Time of Empire: Resistance and Resources.* Circle Books 2011
- Mary Bowmaker *Leaning on the Invisible.* Courtenbede, 2012
- Carol O. Eckerman *Lessons in Simply Being: Finding the Peace within Tumult.* Circle Books, 2012
- Catherine G Lucas *In Case of Spiritual Emergency: moving successfully through your awakening.* Findhorn Press, 2011
- Paul Lenda *The Creation of a Consciousness Shift.* O Books, 2012
- Luke Eastwood *The Druid's Primer.* Moon Books, 2012

## AHS Events March to October 2012

### Saturday 24th March

- 1.30 pm AHS West Wales Group: Group meeting  
 Venue: Wolfson Room, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter
- 3.00 pm Talk by Dr Penny Sartori:  
*Near-death Experiences: Why they can no Longer be Dismissed by Science*  
 Venue: Founder's Library, University of Wales TSD, Lampeter

### Friday 6th April 2012

- 7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: *Matter of the Heart*. DVD about the ideas of psychologist Carl G. Jung, famous for the concepts of the collective unconscious, the anima and animus, the shadow and his work on mysticism and alchemy, various alternative health practices and complementary medicine  
 Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: mikerush@virginmedia.com)

### Thursday 26th April 2012

- 3.00 pm AHS London Group: Debate: *Personal Experience and Interpretation: Working Together for Better Understanding*. Speakers: Diamuid O'Murchu, *Evolving Spirituality Taking Shape in our Time*: and David Boulton, *Personal Experience and Interpretation: a Quaker Humanist Approach*
- 5.00 pm Buffet supper
- 6.00 pm Open contribution to the debate
- 7.00 pm Finish
- Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8 (£13 AHS members; £15 non-members): Details/booking; John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, London SE10 9LZ. johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

**Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2012**

- 2.00 pm AHS All Wales Group: Group Meeting, Founder's Library, TSD  
4.30 pm Spring Lecture: *The Difference between Psychic and Spiritual Experiences*  
by Davina Thomas  
Venue: Founders Library, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter  
(£5.00, Concessions, Students free. Details: Roger Coward: 01597 51021,  
e-mail: [roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk](mailto:roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk))

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

- 7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group: Talk: '*Christianity's Illegitimate Child*': A Witch Looks at  
*Marxism* by Joe Revill – presenting a witch's view of Marxism and its  
relationship to Christianity  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail:  
[mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com))

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

- 3.00 pm to AHS London Group: Topic; *Spirituality and the Three Faiths Forum*  
7.30 pm with Rabbi David Hulbert and Fiyaz Mughal OBE;  
Venue: Westminster Synagogue, Kent House, Rutland Gardens, SW7 1BX.  
(£15AHS members; £18 non-members; includes visit to the Synagogue's Museum  
of Scrolls and supper. Booking essential. Contact: John Franklin, 21 Park Vista,  
London SE10 9LZ. [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com))

**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> May 2012**

- 11.00 am AHS West Wales Group: Talk by Helene McMurtrie:  
*The Spirit of Arthur in the early tales of the Mabinogion*  
Venue: Founder's Library, University of Wales, Trinity St. David, Lampeter

**Friday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012**

- 7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group: Theme: *The Story of Rosslyn Chapel*. DVD telling the  
true, and fascinating, story of the Rosslyn Chapel  
Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail:  
[mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com))

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2012**

- 10.30 am Alister Hardy Society/Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies  
to conference: Theme – *Assisted Dying and the Afterlife*  
4.30 pm Speakers: Prof. Paul Badham, *Assisted Dying from a Christian perspective*;  
Very Revd Alex Wedderspoon, *Aspects of Belief in the Life after Death – the*  
*Centrality of Religious Experience*; Dr. Peter Fenwick, *Is there a Natural Metric to*  
*Dying?* Talks followed by open discussion  
Venue: Newman Room (OU Chaplaincy), Rose Place, St. Aldates, Oxford  
(Cost: AHS & CFPSS members £20.00; non-members £25.00; Students £12.  
Details/booking: John Franklin, 21 Park Vista, Greenwich, London, SE10 9LZ.  
e-mail: [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com))

### Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2012

7.30 pm AHS Chesterfield Group: Talk: *An Exploration of Psychic Awareness* by David Croft – about discovering one's psychic awareness (includes audience participation)

Venue: Whittington Moor, Chesterfield. (Contact: Mike Rush, e-mail: [mikerush@virginmedia.com](mailto:mikerush@virginmedia.com))

### Friday 6<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2012

AHS Wales Group: Centre Point Residential Annual Gathering  
Theme: *Sacred Place – Spiritual & Psychic Wonders in Arthurian Legend*

Venue: Llantarnam Abbey, Nr.Cwmbran  
(Details and booking, Roger Coward Tel: 01597 851021 e-mail: [roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk](mailto:roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk) )

### Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2012

3.00 pm AHS London Group: Talk: *Spiritual/Psychical Experience: a non-reductionist neurochemical perspective*, by Dr. David Luke

5.00 pm Shared supper (please bring finger food, tea/coffee provided)

6.00 pm Open contribution to the debate

7.00 pm Finish

Venue: Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Gardens Terrace, London, W8  
(Contact, John Franklin, e-mail: [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com))

### Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2012

10.00 am Alister Hardy Society Open Day 2012

to 4.30pm Details to be arranged: contact John Franklin: [johnfranklin35@hotmail.com](mailto:johnfranklin35@hotmail.com)

Venue: Friends Meeting House, 43 St. Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LW

### Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2012

2.00 pm AHS All Wales Group: Group Meeting, Founder's Library, TSD

4.30 pm Autumn Lecture: to be announced

Venue: Old Hall, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter  
(£5.00, Concessions, Students free. Details: Roger Coward: 01597 851021  
e-mail: [roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk](mailto:roger.coward@smartemail.co.uk))

### Dr Robert Forman

In June 2012 Dr Robert Forman, USA academic and founder in 1994 of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies: controversies in science and the humanities*, will be in the UK to launch his new book *Enlightenment Ain't What it's Cracked Up to Be: a Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul*. A once (and we hope future) member of AHS, Dr Forman is interested in re-establishing contact, so any local groups that would like to hear him speak, or just invite him along to a meeting, can contact him: [foreman@theforge.org](mailto:foreman@theforge.org)

He has also sent us a narrative of his spiritual journey 'An Experience – and Disappointment – of the Soul' which can be accessed on the AHS website. See [www.alistersociety.org](http://www.alistersociety.org) home page; link on the left in blue will take you there.

## Other Events

### Friday 20<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2012

Scientific & Medical Network Mystics & Scientists Conference:

*The Mystery of Consciousness and Western Meditation techniques*

Speakers: Rabbi Nilton Bonder, Prof Robert Freger, Laurence Freeman OSB,  
Dr Anne Runehov, Dr Raymond Tallis

Venue: University College, Sparkeford Road, Winchester

(Cost, £265 residential – £230 non-res. (£250 – £215 SMN members). For further information/booking contact Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical Network, PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF. Tel: 01608 652001, e-mail: [info@scimednet.org](mailto:info@scimednet.org) )

### Saturday April 28th 2012

10.30 am Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies Spring Conference

To 4.00 pm Speaker: Rhonda Riachi *Mapping the Afterlife and Navigating the Unknown Region*

Venue: Friends' House, Euston Road, London

(Details and booking forms from Angela Howard:

e-mail [Angela1@webbscottage.co.uk](mailto:Angela1@webbscottage.co.uk))

### Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012

British Association for the Study of Spirituality *Spirituality in a Fragmented*

*World*. Keynotes: Spirituality & Justice (Paul Gilbert), Health (Chris Cook),

Politics (Rose Hudson-Wilkin), Ecology (Sr. Jayanti) Religion (Grace Davie)

Venue: Highgate House, Creaton, Northants NN6 8NN

Details: [edward.bailey@implicitreligion.org](mailto:edward.bailey@implicitreligion.org)

### Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2012

9.00 am Contemplative Consciousness Network: Conference: *Buddhists and*  
to *Scientists Explore the Nature of Consciousness and its Practical Applications*

5.00 pm Speakers: Dr. B. Alan Wallace, Dr. Peter Malinowski, Dr. Harald  
Atmansbacher.

Venue: Regents College, Regents Park, London (Nearest Underground – Baker Street)  
(Cost: Early Bird Bookings: £50 per person until 15th May, 2012; thereafter £60.  
Concessionary rate Early Bird: £30 until 15th May, 2012; thereafter £35. A few  
lower concessions are available on request. All fees include three refreshment  
breaks. Further information: <http://alanwallaceinuk.weebly.com/buddhism-and-science-day.html> or postal bookings; Pamela Ford, 7 Beddington Manor,  
45 Eaton Road, Sutton, Surrey, SM2 5ED.)

### Friday 24<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2012

Scientific & Medical Network Body and Beyond 3, Conference: *Scientific and*  
*Spiritual Perspectives in the Subtle Body*. Speakers: Prof. Carlos Alvarado,

Dr Edi Bilimoria, Sandy Gustas, Prof. David Huffard, Prof. Geoffrey Samuel.

(Cost, £315 residential – £255 non-res (£295 – £235 before 31<sup>st</sup> March); £295 res –

£235 non-res. SMN members (£235 – £215 before 31 May). For further

information/booking contact Conference Administrator, Scientific & Medical

Network, PO Box 11, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos., GL56 0ZF. Tel: 01608 652001.

e-mail: [info@scimednet.org](mailto:info@scimednet.org))

Venue: Latimer Place, Chesham, Buckinghamshire.



### **Religious Experience MA at Lampeter**

The MA in Religious Experience was part of a broad range of MA programmes offered by the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Given the substantial changes in staffing over the last few years, developments in modes of distance learning and the increased requirements of quality assurance procedures, the University has decided to review and update substantially the provision in this area. The aim was also to reduce the number of MA programmes on offer, and so to increase the number of students on one programme. The outcome is that the MA Religious Experience is now closed for new students (the last students started in October 2011). However, the topic religious experience will continue. Instead of three separate pathways (Religious experience, Indian Religions and the World's Religions) the School will offer one programme, the MA Study of Religions, which draws on aspects of the previous programmes. The aim is to provide a coherent programme with a distinctive methodological emphasis while also seeking to deal with the beliefs and practices of specific contemporary religions.

The MA Study of Religions consists of a taught part (part 1) and the dissertation (part II). In part 1, students will complete a compulsory Study Skills module and two other core modules which will give them knowledge and understanding of key areas in the study of religions (Theory and Methodology in the Study of Religions) and an understanding of contemporary secularisation and spirituality (Religion, Spirituality and Secularisation). The other three modules will enable students to specialise on distinct aspects of religion and on distinct methodologies. And in this area religious experience will play a major role as students are offered the unique choice to study the phenomenon of religious experience in a module called Religious Experience Today. The School considers this subject important in particular given the location of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre on the Lampeter campus. But also the other modules will include aspects of religious experience. One module on offer gives students the choice to study in-depth one aspect of modern Indian religiosity (Modern Yoga and Ayurveda), which is also an important variation of religious experience. The other two modules enable students to learn research methods necessary for conducting empirical research in the dissertation (Fieldwork Methods in the Study of Religions) or a module on ritual and religions that allows them to apply theoretical approaches to the rituals of specific religious traditions (Ritual and Religions). We will continue to be highly committed to the study of religious experience, and we hope that students interested in religious experience will continue coming to Lampeter.

*Dr Bettina E. Schmidt*

*Director of Postgraduate Studies (Research, School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies)*

Man.  
Because he sacrifices his health to make money.  
Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health.  
And then he is so anxious about his future  
That he does not enjoy the present or the future;  
He lives as if he is never going to die,  
And then dies having never really lived.

*Attributed to the 14th Dalai Lama*

### ***Rubric***

From clever partisans to men of distinction,  
All peasants, artisans, face Man's extinction.  
**See** a world in constant rift,  
So-needed, now, a paradigm-shift !

Our way, with multi-faceted cube of Rubik,  
Needs to simplify our vital rubric:  
Another 'solution', one more 'twist',  
Brings us down by sleight of wrist,  
And what we do increases vexity –  
**Away with** such villainous complexity !

For this **is** the revolution:  
**Start with** not many, but **one**, resolution,  
Or Earth becomes our 'paradise lost',  
Ignore Her cries at perilous cost;  
Despoil Gaia for dubious thrills,  
Yet fail to address our basic ills.

**Hear**, at once, future ululation,  
From massively-expanded population ?  
**Feel not** pride with self-inflicted ailings,  
But humbly accept Mankind's utter failings.

**Forget**, for now, such grand elation,  
Even of which Olympic nation,  
To right **all** of our human wrong –  
Surely, our last chance to be 'on song'.

Piecemeal, why try to renew a world that's sick ?  
Be real, **start again, one view** – Earth's 'holistic' !

*E. A. Cook*

### **Postscript for the Arab Spring**

Mountains bow down to this grief  
But hope keeps singing from afar

*Anna Akhmatova (1899-1966)*