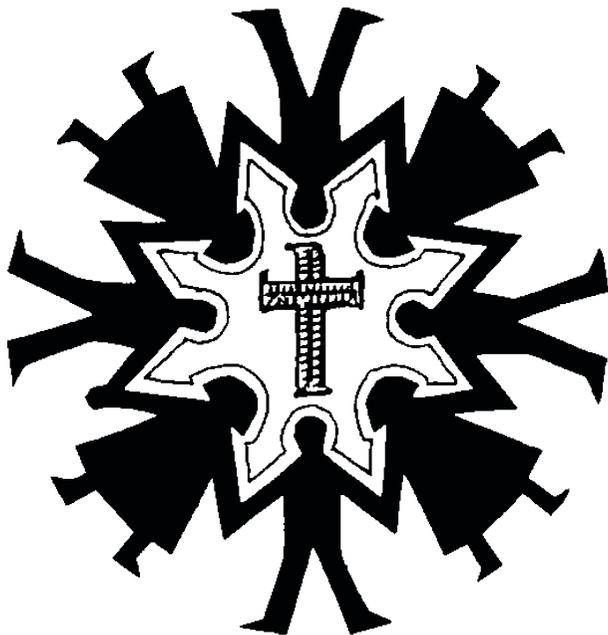




**the Othona  
Community**

**At Burton Bradstock, Dorset  
and Bradwell on Sea, Essex**



**Annual Report  
for the year ended  
31st March 2011**

Registered Charity no. 277843

## **REGISTERED OFFICE**

The registered office of the Community is  
Othona Community House, Coast Road  
Burton Bradstock, Bridport, Dorset, DT6 4RN

## **TRUST DEED**

The Community is governed by a Trust Deed dated 23 June 2008

## **TRUSTEES**

Mr Rupert Bragg	appointed January 2009
Ms Louise Heatley	appointed January 2008
Dr Janet Marshall	appointed February 1996
Revd Sheila Maxey (chair)	appointed November 2003
Mr Philip Melling	appointed September 2009
Ms Frances Jones	appointed January 2011
Ms Patricia Price-Tomes	appointed May 2006
Mrs Alison Tebbs	appointed March 2010
Mr John Watters	appointed January 2009
Revd Robert Whorton	appointed April 2008

## **OFFICERS**

Community Secretary: Ruth Bull  
Community Treasurer: Stephen Mortimer

Auditors : Tiffin Green Chartered Certified Accountants  
Brentwood, Essex  
Bankers : Barclays Bank PLC, Charities Official  
Investment Fund  
Epworth Investment Management Ltd  
Solicitors : Hunt and Hunt of Romford, Essex

## **The Othona Community is glad to have the following patrons:**

Rt. Revd Laurie Green, Bishop of Bradwell (until January 2011)  
Dr Janet Marshall Mr Michael Morigo  
Rt. Revd Thomas McMahon, Bishop of Brentwood  
Revd Dr Frances M Young OBE  
Rt. Revd Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford

## **The Annual Report of the Othona Community** **for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011**

### **The Trustees' year.**

In 2007 the Othona Community adopted the following mission statement:

*The Othona Community is an open Christian community, whose purpose is to provide, mainly through its two centres in Essex and Dorset, a welcoming, accepting place with a pattern of work, worship, study and play where people of different beliefs, cultures, classes, abilities, and ages can discover how to live together, learn from each other, explore together the relationship between faith and life with a view to more positive action in the world, and encourage one another in caring for the world and its people.*

Although most of that purpose is worked out, lived out at the two centres the Trustees also have an important role in stewardship of the finances to support this purpose and in oversight of the life and direction of the Community and its two centres.

In June 2010 the Trustees accepted the offer of £1,050,000 from Strutt and Parker Farms for East Hall Farm. Throughout the rest of this financial year we negotiated the terms, having listened carefully to the concerns of members. We retained ownership of the access track and kept the right, if rising sea levels require it, to erect a sea defence on a 60 metre strip of field to the west of the Bradwell centre. Completion took place just after the end of this financial year, on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2011.

During the summer of 2010 the Trustees set up a small investment strategy group consisting of two trustees and a representative from each centre. The group brought a report and recommendations to the September Trustees meeting where it was agreed that all the money from the sale should be invested using Epworth Financial Services and following agreed ethical guidelines. We hope to get an annual return of between £35,000 and £40,000 to provide a more secure cushion for both the operational finances of the centres and their ongoing development.

Our excellent treasurer, Steve Mortimer, provides us with monthly reports so that we are able to monitor each centre's financial position against budget. Both centres worked hard and were careful about expenditure but both had a disappointing take up of some weeks in their programmes. In broad terms, the operating results for the year are that BB made a slight surplus of £3K, Bradwell had a loss of £6K and Othona central funds showed a surplus of £15K, giving an overall operating surplus of £12k for the Community as a whole. From our reserves transfers out were made totalling £67K to cover underfunding of projects at Burton Bradstock thus reducing the above £12k overall surplus to a deficit of £55K. However, the Trustees recognise that if the centres are to be true to their mission and purpose and truly welcoming to all they will never reliably break even in spite of their staff working for love and very little money. Hence the need for a larger annual cushion and for financial support from members.

In June the Trustees arranged a meeting of people from across the Community to try to find agreement on both the present meaning of membership and what its future shape might be. The meeting was inconclusive. Our membership secretary, Christine Cox, continues to faithfully keep the list, deal with annual subscriptions and with gift aid, and arrange the mailing of the Community newsletter *Full Circle*. Ruth and Paul Gilman edit this three times a year and its articles, reports and poems give expression to the life of the Community. Ruth Bull, the Community Secretary, arranges the annual elections for the two committees and makes sure our returns to the Charity Commission go in on time. She also keeps an eye on new developments and new regulations on the CC website. Margaret Lydamore, although she has retired from the board of Trustees, continues to issue the contracts to core staff at the two centres. Since September our insurance manager has been Julian Clover. The Community owes a debt of gratitude to all these 'behind the scenes' members who support the Community in these particular roles.

As part of the ongoing discernment process "Othona 2010: taking stock and moving forward" the Trustees have experimented with different ways of working. In June, a Burton Bradstock Collaborative Group was set up to give BB greater autonomy. The group consisted of four trustees, the Warden and three BB members and its remit, in the first place, was to undertake strategic planning. In November the Trustees spent a whole weekend with the Bradwell Committee at the Bradwell centre, seeking to affirm Bradwell's strengths and discover how best to support any necessary

changes. As one result, a Bradwell Staffing Group was set up involving trustees, the Warden and local members. In January 2011 the Trustees and representatives from each centre spent a weekend, with a facilitator, exploring the difficulties and challenges of 'moving forward'.

In September the Annual General Meeting was attended by over 60 people. Lively presentations were given by both Wardens of the exciting building developments at each centre – both environmentally friendly, both depending, as well as on grants, on the generosity of members in terms of time and money. One trustee facilitated round table discussions on the Community and its future and another led worship in which we each planted a seed and took it home. Mine has produced a fragile, wispy grass which nevertheless refuses to die!

In June Alison Tebbs became a trustee and also secretary to the Trustees Meeting. In January Frances Jones became a trustee, reducing our average age considerably. One of our patrons, the Bishop of Bradwell, retired in January and the new Bishop of Chelmsford, Stephen Cottrell agreed to take his place. In late March Michael Morpurgo, well-known writer of children's books and former Children's Laureate accepted our invitation to become a patron.

The Trustees are all volunteers, half of them in full-time employment. The Community is very fortunate in having a group of Trustees with such varied skills and from such a range of age. During this period of discernment and experimentation the demands on their time and energy has increased. Expectations of our two outstanding Wardens and of the Centre Committees have also increased as the process has required extra reflection and consultation time. During this coming year some conclusions will have to be drawn about the best sustainable way forward.

## **The year at Othona, Bradwell**

The first part of the year was dominated by the construction of the Solar Building, our new eco – block with its 5 bedrooms, toilets and showers, and lovely small meeting room with a view of St Peter's Chapel. Once the builders had put up the frame, volunteers were recruited. They came with various skills and for various reasons but those interested in new forms of eco-building were particularly thrilled to find a place where they could

actually make rammed earth walls and cob bricks to complete them. Under Matthew Dell's tireless supervision the walls rose, the straw bale layer was added, the outer walls rendered and mortared. Professionals were used as necessary – for the electrics, the plumbing and the internal walls and to lay the granite slab floors (recycled from London Underground!). Every effort was made to use local or recycled materials. During May and June the site was buzzing with people in hard hats and fluorescent jackets and Wellington boots. We estimated that 11562 hours (or 1927 days) were given in volunteer labour.



All these hungry workers had to be fed while the Centre continued to be open as usual – weekend groups, Springwatch, Community time over the Bank Holiday, school groups. This put a great strain on Gail and the core community as well as on the budget. However, it was also a very fruitful time during which the volunteers discovered Othona was so much more than buildings, and 'normal' Othona people caught some of the cutting-edge buzz of this project. Once the main body of building volunteers had gone, a very long list of smaller, yet vital jobs remained to be done by regular, faithful Othona volunteers over the months ahead.

At the end of August, although the Solar Building was not yet ready for use, we held a great day of celebration, with a service of thanksgiving in Chapel,

a splendid buffet lunch with tours of the new building, and then an open-air blessing of not only the Solar Building, but also of the renamed Motley Building (the main building) and the Hut, a store lovingly created out of the recycled Men's Hut. More than a hundred people came from far and wide. However, it was 2011 before the Solar Building was finally signed off as fit for public use – just in time for another sort of celebration, the wedding of Gail's daughter to a long-standing Othona member.

The summer season, not surprisingly, was down in numbers. Gail and Matthew were well supported by a good team of short-term volunteers but by October they were once more alone – and yet the Centre was booked for most weekends and sometimes during the week. Local cleaning and administrative help was brought in for two days a week. By the end of November Clare Gillott, with her passion for and experience of environmental issues had been recruited as deputy warden which allowed Gail and Matthew to take much-needed holidays.



The other big story of this year was a renewal of our core community. Some key members stepped up in responsibility, others left and new faces were recruited. At last we have not only a caterer but also a housekeeper, not only a facilities co-ordinator (part-time) but also a deputy warden, all bringing new energy to these roles. We finish the year with the fullest core team we have known, supported as ever by the informal network of local supporters and helpers which is so vital for our continued existence

The Trustees came twice, as a body, to Bradwell during this year. Firstly, in November to spend time with the Committee and other members in order to listen to Bradwell's hopes and concerns. (The designer for Bradwell's new web-site came too to get the 'feel' of the place: the site is still 'work in progress'.) Secondly, they came in January, to meet with six representatives from both Bradwell and Burton Bradstock as part of the *taking stock and moving forward* process. Bradwell's major concern was clearly how to recruit a long-term effective staff team. One outcome was the setting up of a Bradwell Staffing Group which involved four trustees and three local members. The Bradwell Committee has continued to work on Bradwell's particular vision and purpose and on the place of Christianity within that.

Meanwhile, new visiting groups were discovering Bradwell, including the Jesuits, Herbcraft, St Leonards and St Giles churches, and returning groups (schools, church groups, singing groups, YMCA, cub scouts, etc) had booked again, seeing the Centre as their regular 'place to just be'. Thanks to the programme committee's hard work the Community programme flier for 2011 came out in July 2010 in time for the Bradwell Pilgrimage. By the end of March, with the Solar Building in use and the site cleared, and at least one new staff member on the horizon, Othona Bradwell had emerged from a very testing, if exhilarating year, and was looking forward to a good year ahead.

## **The year at Othona, West Dorset**

It was most reassuring to finish this year in financial surplus and slightly better than the budgeted outcome. Sadly, however, levels of bookings and income were not as good as we'd forecast. Our 'accurate' outcome against budget was in good part due to our not having had a full team for part of the

year, with resultant reduced payroll costs. So there is no reason to rest on our laurels. Appropriate, effective marketing – through print, internet and personal recommendation – remains an urgent priority.

Presumably many people had to be more discriminating in their 'discretionary spending'. We noticed a greater variation between events that attracted healthy numbers and the few that were seriously undersubscribed. Programme planning is always a fascinating challenge; these economic conditions make it even more so.



During the year we began approaching matters of strategic planning through a specially constituted Collaborative Group. It consists of four trustees and four representatives of this centre. The Group came into being as an experiment in granting this West Dorset centre a greater measure of autonomy. Its meetings focused first on high level purpose: how do we see our raison d'etre, 65 years after Othona began and 46 years after the establishment of this centre? Among other subjects, the Group will also examine capital spending and organisational structure.

Our major capital project this year was the new warden's house "Largesse". The contractors finished principal construction and fitting during July 2010. After this a large number of finishing tasks remained for the community to do as economically as possible using DIY, volunteer help and small contracts with local tradesmen. Designed as a three bedrooomed property suitable for wardens with families, the new house just uphill from Community House is currently home to a married couple and the warden and his partner, occupying separate floors. They moved in during November and January respectively and have been instrumental in completing various outstanding jobs – everything from painting walls to laying paths.



"Largesse" has proved to be a dwelling with a bit of a 'wow factor' – with a distinctive sense of space in the main room, and stunning views over woodlands, fields and Lyme Bay. It should support wardens particularly, in work and leisure, for many years to come. Its name reflects not just the Christian principle of giving and abundance, but also the great practical generosity of so many people who lent or donated money specifically for this project, without whom it would never have come about. We owe especial thanks to our builder Graham Paget and his team, as well as our architect John Wratten and his colleague Liz James.

## **An overview of our finances**

During the year, in financial terms, the Trustees focused on two main areas – the performance of the daily operations of the two centres and monitoring the capital projects underway at both centres particularly the Solar building at Bradwell and Largesse (the new Warden accommodation) at Burton Bradstock.

The operating performance came out with a surplus of £12K, £6K less than the budgeted £18K. The £12K surplus was comprised of Bradwell's deficit of £6K, Burton Bradstock's surplus of £3k and the General Fund's surplus of £15k. The £12K overall surplus was then reduced by £67K to a deficit of £55K following the Trustees' agreement that General Fund Reserves should cover underfunded project expenditure at Burton Bradstock. This consisted of £56K to support the Largesse project and £11K for the Chapel Wall repairs.

It can be seen that Othona's centres operate on very tight surplus margins and that it only takes a small downturn in performance to prevent the achievement of budgets. It is unlikely within the current operational format that large surpluses will regularly be possible and thus ongoing viability will always be a concern. Othona normally only has around £100K free cash not tied into Restricted Funds, for covering operational shortfalls or unexpected costs. This was the rationale for selling the Farm so as to give a better buffer for long term financial stability. When the sale of the Farm became imminent, the Trustees agreed that the centres could access £30K each for any agreed capital project. To date these monies have not yet been drawn down but the funds have been set aside. In the light of the farm sale, the Trustees agreed to modify the reserves policy and decided that keeping £40K would suffice for covering daily operational needs.

The Farm was sold shortly after year end and realised a surplus of £1,009,826 after related costs. The value of the Farm as held in these accounts has therefore been adjusted to recognise this material post year end event. The monies have been invested to secure capital growth and to provide better returns to support daily operations than the current Farm rents were able to offer.

There was much activity on capital projects as seen in Note 15 to these

accounts. By the year end the Solar Building and Largesse were getting close to completion, with around £10K forecast still to be spent on the Solar Building and £9k on Largesse. The remaining £19K interest free loans made to support the Largesse project were repaid shortly after year end. These loans gave the Trustees a degree of reassurance when agreeing to the replacement of Littleness with Largesse at a time when the financial position of Othona was very tight. These lenders are most warmly thanked for their help.