

Research Communications 26



KERAN JAMES · HOLLYWOOD(LAND) · OPEN OUT FOR FULL PICTURE

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EDITORIAL

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There are photographs from the Braziers International Artists' Workshop over the years on pp 12–13, 34 and 38–9.

Editorial Board: Sandra Cooper, Colum Hayward and Woody Wood

WHEN THIS ISSUE first went to press, Braziers was somewhat clouded in dispute and difficulty. We lost, in the process, our Chair, Bryan Harrison, who has given untold service to Braziers. Yet at a very dire moment in the November 2009 AGM (the second AGM in a year was an administrative nicety, not a part of the dispute and difficulty), one of our own Editorial Board put forward a proposal that the Committee of Management (CoM) take on, as a time-limited experiment, an all-female composition. This seemed wholly consonant with the experimentation embedded in Brazierian philosophy, and the proposal won the day. It has not been entirely possible to implement it: it would be improper to ask Trustees to resign, and we retain our male Treasurer. Nonetheless, the Amazonian CoM has taken up its duties with gusto, and has managed already to give a hint that Braziers is moving into a new era as it starts upon its Sixtieth Anniversary Year. Our next issue will celebrate precisely that.

The difficulties also contrasted rather strangely with the generally upbeat feeling of this issue. It was good then, in the autumn and amid the storms, to be able to work on something whose vibration was altogether the opposite. We are also as editors secretly proud to be presenting a second issue within a year, which we think is almost unheard-of. Braziers is represented both by the sunshine and the storms, and I was a little comforted by a remark from one of the founding family of Braziers in the autumn, that the then problems were more or less cyclical.

It is not for me to make this record a newspaper, though, so we can happily concentrate on what it contains. Woody Wood's report on **Governance** in many ways represents the tip of the iceberg of a very crucial debate about the future of Braziers and how it manages itself. The very word 'governance' is somewhat unBrazierian, but it is technically

correct and is the best we can do for now. The governance of Braziers is itself part of the experiment, and although our Rules seem to set it in stone it would be quite uncharacteristic of us all to regard anything as impossible to change. May the debate continue, but harmoniously.

Veronica Wallace's contribution on **Reaffirming and Renewing Braziers** is long, but really is worth a read. When she gave this talk, to the 2008 Members' Weekend, it felt as though the whole focus of Braziers had been brought into some new clarity. Veronica's ideas are useful and practical notes of directions in which we might move.

Ruth Garwood obligingly takes us out of our heads and into the rich soil of Braziers, though her piece **Up to Earth** is also a reminder of the continuous plod. 'Sheer plod makes plough down sillion shine', I am reminded. We are sure that her cartoons, which we have headed **Familiar Scenes**, will give just that reminder. No one is entirely missed out from this issue if they live at Braziers, I think: their soundbites will be either hidden in Woody's piece, or in one of the 'fillers' dotted around the magazine, such as Nonny's on p. 6. I have tried to write from memory and notes obligingly provided by the artists themselves about their **2009 Glaister Lecture** from last May, which they called 'The Ripple Effect'. It was a real moment of truth for me, and a realisation anew of what Braziers was all about. Bernie Moloney had her actual script from May, and it says what it has to say much better than ever I could. She rather nicely calls it **What Braziers Means to Me**, reminding us that part of what keeps us all going, regardless of what is going on, is sheer affection for Braziers.

The artists look like being at the forefront of our Celebrations for 2010, which is our Sixtieth Birthday year. Having missed a year, they come back redoubled in their enthusiasm. So August looks to be an exciting time to be around. So will May be, and Easter before it. So will November. And the New Year has already come, while we were still dithering.

Enjoy RC26—on behalf of the three of us, Sandra Cooper, Woody Wood and myself.

Colum Hayward

November 5th, 2009, and then January 13th, 2010—ouch!

GOVERNANCE AT BRAZIERIS

A Selection of Viewpoints

This attempt to gather some impression of the range of views on the 'governance issue' at Braziers was never intended to be scientific, objective or even comprehensive. My original idea of a series of 'fireside chats' with people involved in different ways – to get a real feel of the issues and their concerns – proved to be wildly unrealistic, not least because of my limited times of being there. So the questions sheet with 'this or that' answers was very much a second best approach, especially as I had to trust 'admin' to decide whom it should reach.

Despite this, some of the range of views that came in were interesting enough to take note of as contributions to our ongoing dialogue. Apart from single comments about a dozen people had a real go at the questions, some of them preferring to stay anonymous.

The first question was an example of the limitations of asking for 'this or that' responses. Yet it also seemed to me the most important: – without some consensus on what objectives we are all trying to support (whether living on site or not) it will still be possible to carry on with the various tasks but may not be possible to create the endorsed governance structure that will further those objectives. [Hence the little story of the three stonemasons.] A majority of respondents did support some agreed interpretation of the founding thinking (maybe not rigidly what JNG and others said then, rather where they would expect us to be sixty years on? – an unasked question). Some indicated that the notion of a social/ecological platform that has gradually evolved at Braziers might be able to achieve broader consensus. Two replies implied that both were worth striving for.

Everyone (except one!) thought that governance could be improved. No surprise here. A big majority felt that the biggest issue was around personalities/attitudes (the question had said "maybe arising

from different aims/perspectives on commitment/participation” – see above) although about half also thought that the structure should be improved and that failure to implement decisions was also a factor.

Most respondents thought that the governance issue could/should be separated from the economic issues (a minority felt this was not possible) although there were several comments that the question was not very clear. Again, most felt that power balance along the old internal/external fault line was not right [changes now in process may be addressing this] although there was plenty of vigorous comment ranging from a plea for very gradual change to “sack them all”. It was also argued in one case that tensions and power inequalities among internal residents/workers was now a more serious issue.

Question six was badly worded. Sorry. However, almost all replies had dealing with our annual losses as the top concern, regardless of the remedy chosen. Most replies wanted an enhanced role for SUBEX, although there was a minority view that it already had the powers that it needed.

Question eight (again not well worded) threw light on basic non-communication at Braziers with quite a few workers feeling “we are just not being heard” while others thought that mechanisms were already in place and others that democracy was about members’ rights.

General comments included the dominant personality syndrome, damaging e-mail squabbles, loss of the education focus, and (of course) our lack of an agreed purpose. Constructive suggestions included rotating the COM chair, reducing the role to meetings only, better factual information flows, more people involved and “justice seen to be done”.

Woody Wood, October 2009

ON INTEGRATION

The short answer on integration is that you can achieve it the way Glynn (Faithfull) did, but I think at too high a price. Everybody had to do everything, so it was fair, and, as it was the same for all who stayed, people didn't complain much, but it's such a waste of people's gifts and wishes. It should be possible to integrate and specialise (secondary school staff, as I well know, are all specialists, but in a decent school they manage.) Nonny McLaren

REAFFIRMING AND RENEWING BRAZIERS – AN OUTLINE

An edited version of a lecture given at the Members' Weekend in 2008

Introduction

This evaluation of what was attempted at Braziers, and of how relevant those ideas and objectives are now, almost 60 years later, was originally a talk given at the Braziers Members Weekend, January 2009. That text has been re-arranged, and a little improved, to make it more accessible to visitors and newcomers. Members and Associates, however, may wish to turn directly to the section on **The Objective**.

What is Braziers?

Braziers Park opened in 1950, as a ‘School of Integrative Social Research’, where a group of dedicated people, led by Norman Glaister, worked towards social reform, following ideas propounded by Wilfred Trotter in 1908-9. However, since evolution and social reform are so fundamental to Braziers, it is important to see it within its historical context. Originally a constructively elitist theory, aiming to provide better leadership to humanity through the integration of complementary types of ‘thinkers’, it was influenced by the ferment of ideas in the early part of the Twentieth Century that was part of the centuries-long struggle towards egalitarianism and social justice.

The Historic Context

So, we begin with a brief historical survey. (The timeline chart of social change presented at the talk is now available from me on request as an appendix to this essay.)

Parliamentary democracy had existed in Great Britain since before the Civil War between Royalists and Parliamentarians 1642 – 1651, but the working classes were almost entirely excluded from the vote until 1867,

and women until 1918. The British Labour Party was formed in 1900, in office in 1924 (and, as New Labour, is now perhaps more concerned with promoting business than with human values and social justice?).

Class differences were still extreme, but changing. Literacy had been diffusing into the general population since at least the Fourteenth Century, with privately printed and distributed woodcut broadsheets. The Bible was first translated into English in 1535, and in 1611 the Authorized (King James) Version was published, but even the Bible was not generally available to the poor until distributed by Bible Societies. A weekly newspaper was first published in London in 1622. The first daily newspaper in England – subsidized and pro-government – appeared in 1702, while arrests, seizure of papers and prosecution were employed against opposition publications, and taxes and restrictions were imposed from 1700-1820 against radical opinion. The first documented free public library was established in Manchester in 1852, after the 1850 Public Library Act.

Elementary education for the poor, sporadically provided through the ages by some religious institutions and wealthy local beneficiaries, was boosted by:

- i. The first Factories Act, 'Health and Morals of Apprentices' – it limited a child's working day to 12 hours, provided for some education and a new suit of clothes annually;
- ii. The British and Foreign Schools Society of 1808;
- iii. The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church in 1811.

In 1862 government grants became available for schools with pupils up to 12 years old. In 1870 the Elementary Education Act established school boards nation-wide to provide elementary education for those not yet in school (not necessarily free – my grandmother had to take in her school penny, I think daily, but there weren't always pennies enough for her and her sister and 2 brothers, so they took turns to claim they had 'lost it'). Secondary education for all had to wait until the Education Act of 1944. Working men's clubs were first set up in the Nineteenth Century, to cater for the education and recreation of working

men – mainly conforming to the requirements of the factory owners and wealthy benefactors who founded them. The Workers' Educational Association, providing democratically controlled education for working people, was founded in 1903, first received government grants in 1907, but remained independent.

Note the 1842 Act, forbidding the employment of women and children underground in mines. Women and children were paid less than men, but in the mines employing children also saved expenses, because profits came only from the extraction of minerals, not from extracting rock to make room for full-grown men to work and for ores and wastes to be carted out (pulled by women and the larger children, often bent double). Child-sized tunnels following narrow seams meant less extraction of waste material, so less wages paid for extracting it. Some mine-owners went so far as to decide that the younger a child was and the longer hours it spent working in cramped conditions, the more likely that it would grow deformed into the best shape to fit it to spend its whole life working there. It was probably this cynical extreme that persuaded Parliament to pass the Act.

William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army, was originally a pawnbroker – he understood poverty. Sunday clothes were commonly pawned on Monday, reclaimed on Friday – payday – to be worn over the weekend, and then pawned again to buy food for the week. People were living on borrowed money, even then. As for Dickens – it seems he knew about poverty and hardship from personal experience.

I include the Irish potato blight of 1845-50, because of the political response to it: according to Malthus, population increases at a faster rate than the increase of crops to feed it. Population is naturally controlled by starvation, disease, predation and war, so famine is a natural – thus acceptable – way to control excess population: let it run its course. Deaths from unrelieved starvation, and emigration to escape it, caused a 20% drop in the population of Ireland.

The Long Struggle ... and A New Task

So there has been a long struggle for egalitarianism and true democracy

– ‘a form of government in which sovereign power resides in the people as a whole’. It was part of the background to the lives of Norman Glaister and his contemporaries. Gaining the vote took long enough as well as gaining education, information and understanding enough for everyone to use the vote wisely – is that process now complete, even in the UK, let alone globally? Here, even secondary education has been compulsory since 1944; further education at colleges and universities has increased enormously – for the minority, still, or the majority? And does it identify and challenge errors in the existing system, or perpetuate them?

Braziers was founded as part of a general awareness that there was something wrong with the way humanity manages its affairs, born of a desire to understand what’s wrong so that it could be put right. Not in any one specific area, piecemeal, like education, or health, justice, conservation – all covered by other groups – but in our whole understanding of our nature, our world, the groups into which we are divided, and the misunderstandings and conflict between many of those groups. But let’s get back to Norman Glaister...

J. Norman Glaister – his Social Context...

Norman Glaister was born 1882, to middle-class Northern parents during the reign of Queen Victoria and the continuing expansion of the British Empire. He was educated at the Merchant Taylor’s School – except for a significant year in his teens – spent reading books and developing confidence in his own judgement while recovering from a back problem. His father, a doctor, with a London practice, died in 1900. Norman was only 18, and studying Medicine at University College, London (where he met Wilfred Trotter, a surgeon there). He entered his late father’s partnership after qualifying, but insisted on joining the RAMC during WW1, serving in the Middle East, against the wishes of Dr Evan Jones, his father’s partner and trustee.

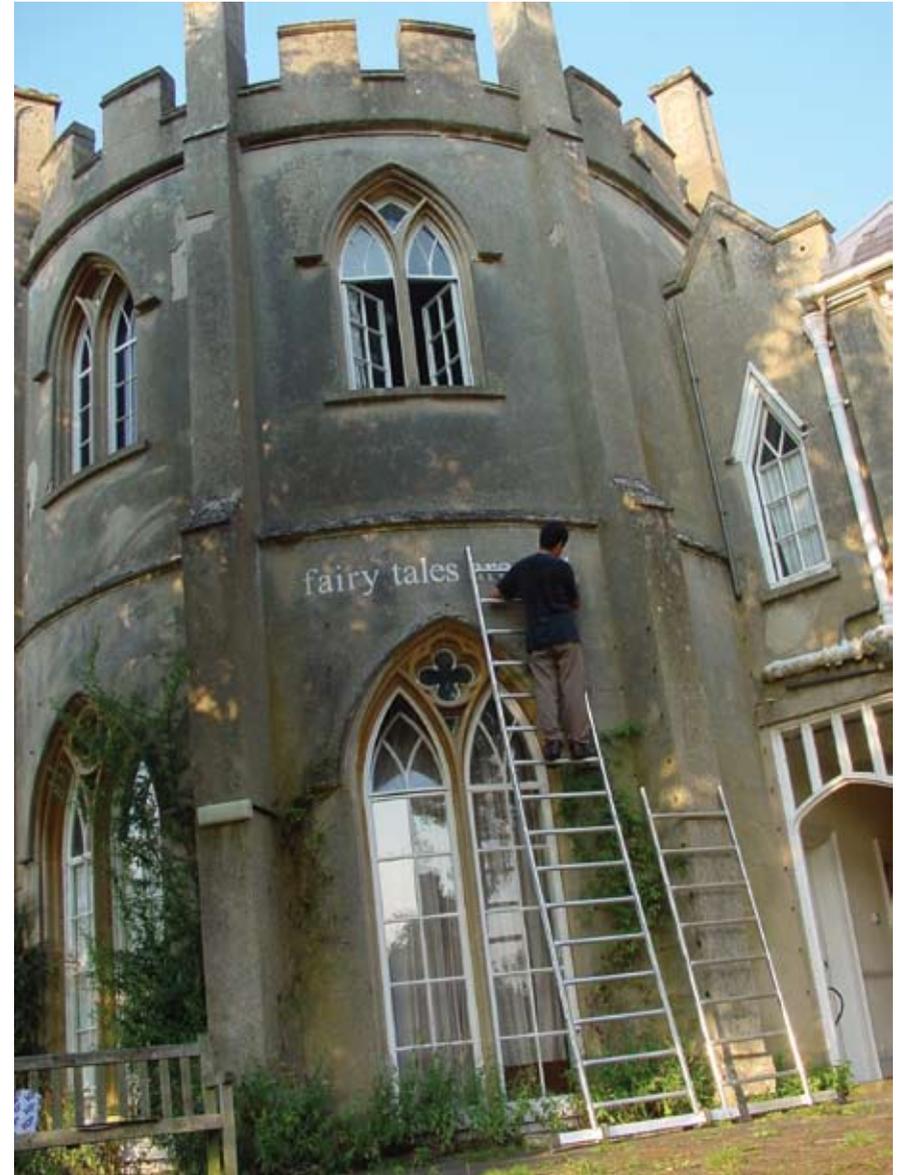
The world was in a ferment of political change, expanding trade, new scientific discoveries and philosophic perspectives, with information and ideas beginning to circulate worldwide through books, journalism and telegraphy. Society was still Hierarchic, although the power

of the old aristocratic classes was increasingly challenged by the wealth of the manufacturers, bankers and international traders, and Egalitarian principles were gaining ground.

... and his Personal Evolution

JNG inherited a strong sense of social responsibility: a duty to use the privileges his greater education conferred upon him in the service of others. Through WW1, he mingled with people of all classes and many different nationalities, and observed first-hand the mental trauma as well as the physical injuries incurred in battle. Travelling to the front, he viewed archaeological remains of ancient civilizations, read about the history of Europe and, in 1919 (when in Haifa he heard of his wife’s death in the flu epidemic) found in the Officer’s Mess and read Wilfred Trotter’s book “Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War”. This was a government-instigated reworking and distribution of two articles, written by Trotter in 1908 and 1909, representing the UK ‘herd’ as sheep, the German as wolves, but suggesting the communal behaviour of bees – communication, division of labour, efficiency, social responsibility even to self-sacrifice – as a better example for human society. For Glaister, devastated by the loss of his wife, this work gave significance to life, and he immediately wrote to Trotter, volunteering support for the practical group development of his social theories. Trotter declined, but Glaister was determined to put the theories into practice, in some suitable and willing group.

On his return to England, as a single parent, his interests extended to child development and alternative education, especially the ideas of Theodore Faithfull and his school (which is how he met Glynn Faithfull, who ran Braziers after Norman’s death). In this Glaister was encouraged and supported by his second wife, Dorothy Revell, a teacher. He and his brother-in-law joined the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry for family camping holidays (and, especially during the depression, provided practical training and guidance for impoverished young men at the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry’s Grith Fyrd rural camps). As a doctor, he dedicated himself to mental health, worked in various hospitals (includ-



*Images from Braziers' Artists' Workshops (see pp. 35ff):
Yingmei's four-hour motionless study (top left);
Coster Mkoki's 'Hands' and Jorge's 'fairy tales'*

ing as a volunteer in the new Free Hospital), ran a private practice and opened a nursing home, contributed letters and articles to professional journals, undertook legal consultation in the defence of men suffering shell-shock or mental impairment, and of conscientious objectors. However, his interest in the human condition and its improvement – social theory and experiment – and all related subjects, including the evolution of consciousness, were always his priority. He introduced a form of Sensory/Resistive process into the OWC, then to a short-lived liberal political party, and eventually to Common Wealth, which ran the first few Sensory Summer Schools that led to the foundation of Braziers Park. By then, through his involvement in many academic and professional organisations, especially OWC and Common Wealth, he had the support of many people willing to be part of Braziers' research and its social experiment – people who shared the belief that there really was a need for change in the way the world was run. (It was, for instance, only 5 years after a world war in which the USA had dropped 2 atomic bombs on Japan, and well into the Cold War and nuclear arms race with Russia.)

The Braziers Experiment

What was the experiment? In general terms: as a psychiatrist, Glaister was involved with the mental health and development of individuals, but was even more concerned about the mental health and development of groups, and especially of nations – the 'human herds', already evolved from the animal, yet seemingly still motivated more by herd instinct than by reason. Could the formation of groups of socially responsible, educated, well-informed individuals, committed to consciousness of the process of which they were a part, making joint decisions based upon adequate information, clear understanding and the sound judgement born of the integration of objective reasoning with subjective experience and knowledge ... contribute to the evolution of group consciousness from that instinctive 'herd' mentality? Could such people provide the 'leadership' needed as others became educated, better informed, forming the electorate in the increasing number of de-

mocracies worldwide, able in principle to shape the fate of nations and the world? Or would unopposed 'herd instinct' commit humanity to increased conflict with increasingly destructive weapons? (Or, nowadays, to such increased exploitation of the natural world that the biosphere is irretrievably damaged?)

But now the experiment in detail – that had its origin in the ideas of Wilfred Trotter – variously explored and developed by Glaister, in discussion with other founding Braziers members...

The Objective

The table below is what I think Braziers was about. Not what you might expect, perhaps, because familiar phrases are missing. But I see this as the underlying structure of what was, and what still could be.

<i>UNDERSTANDING</i>	<i>THE HUMAN CONDITION</i>	<i>AND IMPROVING IT</i>
<i>Gathering, Assessing and Comparing all essential information, beliefs, opinions and ideas... ...but from what perspective and within what model?</i>	<i>Human Nature and Situation: Nature of Individuals, Groups and Societies? Economic and Political Realities? Nature of Humanity within a Planetary Web of Life? So: a Local and Global Ecological Situation. Within this, the Nature and Behaviour of Societies. Within these, the Nature and Behaviour of Individuals.</i>	<i>Mutual Self-improvement through learning and commitment to a socially (and now ecologically) responsible life and group. Better Understanding, spread beyond Braziers through contact, courses, conferences, publications, the internet and influence on other groups. An effect upon the general ethos or group mind?</i>

'Understanding' is our imperative: 'gathering, assessing and comparing all essential information, beliefs, opinions and ideas' – taking

nothing for granted. Then, of paramount importance, 'From what perspective and within what model?' An egalitarian or hierarchic perspective, religious or scientific, socio-economic or humanitarian, or from the new perspective – that of humanity as a complex, minor but influential part of a planet-wide ecological inter-relationship that should maintain all life, but has become severely imbalanced by our actions? The perspective we select will affect the model we produce, as I have indicated within 'Human Condition'.

But what of the existing models we rely on, when assessing information? Scientific materialism, for instance, that assumes consciousness, emotions, the mind, to be observably and only generated by matter – does it allow for the existence of group-mind, or what Rupert Sheldrake terms morphic resonance and causative formation? What of Cartesian dualism – the belief that we are an integration of both physical body and the immaterial mind... or spirit, soul? What of vitalism – the belief that living things are essentially different from both dead things and inanimate matter, that they may derive their characteristic properties from a universal life force? A new paradigm is emerging within science, a new model that may replace materialism. When we attempt to preserve the credibility and influence of an existing, possibly traditional, model (a fundamentalist objective, as powerful within science as it can be within religion), we limit the information and ideas we are prepared to accept, rather than reassess, adapt and develop the model to include and explain what is newly discovered. So, what model have we inherited here at Braziers – or should it be: what model are we still developing, from those we have inherited from Trotter, through Norman Glaister, Glynn Faithfull, Teilhard de Chardin, John Woodcock, and others? How inclusive is it, how accurate, and what potential does it have for helping to improve the state of our world?

Models and Perspectives

It's over 100 years since Trotter wrote the first of the two articles that became "Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War", 90 years since Glaister read it, 59 years since Braziers was founded. How much more infor-

mation do you suppose we have now, how much more understanding? How complex do we believe an individual person is, and how much more complex the nature, attitudes and behaviour of groups of people, let alone of nations and humanity as a single species?

If Glaister was interested in understanding and improving the human condition – human nature and situation, and the relationships between them – then the approach used (the underlying beliefs and assumptions) had to be accurate enough for the emerging model of how society and humanity worked, to explain not just the information available a century ago, but all the information discovered since.

I believe his approach was mainly an accurate one, but too simple. Trotter had based it on herd instinct, with leadership by two kinds of personality, one sensitive to the need to rethink, the other resistive to that need and able to act decisively. Both types were thought to be necessary to achieve an effective balance, whereas the herd were assumed to be undifferentiated, possibly unthinking, acting purely on animal instincts. What instincts? Those of large herds of grazing animals – cattle or sheep? Or of the smaller groups of the ape and monkey family – their behaviour too little understood one hundred years ago?

I think the perspective used – the beliefs and underlying assumptions – was also, originally, more hierarchic than egalitarian. Keith Thomas, in "Man & the Natural World – England 1500-1800", explained that rigid class structure had always been bolstered by contempt for classes lower than one's own, with the lowest reserving their contempt for foreigners and animals. Those who worked the land and tended animals had been considered little better than (or where animal breeding was an imperative, inferior to) animals, and the original assumptions about our early ancestors – the people who invented language, developed and discovered for themselves so much of what we know today – were that they had been no more than brute beasts. This was the perspective in use 100 years ago. Elaine Morgan, in her book, "The Descent of Woman" 1972 – where a woman's perspective on evolutionary theory challenges the male perspective – suggests that human hierarchic social systems may have their origin in the Alpha-Male Dominance social systems of pre-

human ancestral apes. A more detailed and comprehensive model than Trotter's, but an 'Elephant in the Room' that we considerately chose to ignore when the subject was raised some years back. If we want to understand human society, why reject a later model that explains the evolution of politics and even war, in favour of an earlier model, that assumes us to be more sheep than anthropoid?

A Great Advance

For its day, Trotter's theory was a great advance, as Glaister recognised. But too simple. I suspect it may still have assumed that 'consciousness' only began when Humanity evolved – a hangover from Descartes' adaptation of the early Christian model that assumed only man has a soul. Relate the evolution of consciousness to the evolution through ancestral animal species of the structure of the brain, as Carl Sagan did in "The Dragons of Eden", 1977, or even to the need in earlier species to interpret accurately and respond effectively to the information that evolving senses collected – and the model of 'consciousness' becomes more detailed and accurate, and extends much further back.

This quote from Dr Rhamachandaran, a neurologist, presenting a TV documentary about stroke victims, not only affirms the existence of personal models, but makes a further interesting claim about the brain:

"The left hemisphere is specialised for language, the right hemisphere is thought to be specialised for seeing faces, seeing facial expression and to some extent for emotions. But I think there's an even more fundamental distinction between the cerebral hemispheres... each one of us needs to create a coherent belief system, to maintain a sense of continuity to our own lives, and this is done largely by the left hemisphere... when there are new experiences, the left hemisphere folds these new experiences into the pre-existing belief system. If something doesn't quite fit, the strategy of the left hemisphere is to deny the anomaly, to pretend it doesn't exist. Counterbalancing this ... the right hemisphere ... has the opposite tendency. Whereas the left hemisphere tries to preserve the model, preserve the belief system, preserve status quo, the right hemisphere is your devil's advocate, constantly challeng-

ing the status quo and when the discrepancy or anomaly becomes unbearably large ... then the right hemisphere forces a complete revision in your world-view, in your belief system."

Our Personal Models

So, we all have a personal model of our world and our place in it, and we have two conflicting monitoring systems: one sensitive to the need for change, and one resistive to that need. Trotter was right, except that he assumed that only some – the potential leaders – could be either sensitive or resistive to the need for change, while others were undifferentiated, possibly unthinking. Why? Personal models may be limited by our estimation of our place and influence within the world: there may be things we assume to be beyond our means to change, so we take no interest in them, learning instead how to endure, avoid, or ignore them. But this is Braziers – we believe that individuals can change the world, working together. And we are sensitive to the need for change in the ways our world is managed. So, we need to understand significant existing models, in order to improve upon them – possibly by integration: finding the common ground in conflicting theories and beliefs and developing it into a better, more comprehensive and inclusive model.

Two other points before we move on. First, I believe I have heard – perhaps, again from Rhamachandaran, otherwise some other documentary – that the left, logical side of the brain, is also 'atomist' and 'isolationist': able to study something in minute detail, but in isolation from its context, while the right has a wholist perspective: it sees the whole context, and being subjective rather than objective, can include emotions, ethics, spiritual values in its perspective on what the left hemisphere may limit to factual data. (Which is why I spell holism 'wholism' to mean both viewing things within the whole context and through the integration of subjective and objective appreciation of information and ideas.)

Unfortunately, it seems to be the left hemisphere that has easiest access to language, so the right may usually only make itself felt through a sensation of unease or anxiety. It verbalises that unease, only when the

left-brain has stopped monopolising the language centre... or communicates it in dreams, or during sleep. Unfortunately, again, since Rationalism became the intellectual fashion, we have tended to develop and use the left hemisphere of the brain, to the detriment of the right, instead of developing both hemispheres and the ability to integrate them. Artists, of course, may have increased right hemisphere development – but is it also in effective integration with the left? And why should we take pride in developing and using only half a brain, when the whole brain could be so much more effective? Or is there conflict between them? We also need to understand the whole relationship between how we think, how our brains are constructed, how they evolved, how they are developed and used within different aspects of our society, how we are formed by what we are made to learn as well as by our childhood experiences. A course, perhaps, integrating neurology, psychology and evolutionary theory? This seems to be the province of the Scientific and Medical Network, which can provide speakers, possibly free of charge.

Then, why do we need to commit ourselves to be “conscious of the process of which we are a part”? What prevents us being ‘conscious’ at all times, of what we are doing and why? Fully aware of everything around us, involved in it? Surely the evolution of consciousness has been paralleled and facilitated by an evolution of a-consciousness: parts of the brain and nervous system taking various basic functions out of our conscious control, freeing the mind from distractions to concentrate on single issues, perhaps unconnected with our current surroundings? There is a flood of sensory information entering our minds at all times, through all our senses – innumerable electrical impulses travelling through optical, auditory and other nerves, all needing to be organised into pictures and impressions of the world around us.

Blocking Out

All? Every electrical impulse registered, interpreted, its information transmitted immediately to our consciousness? The shape and movement of every leaf and blade of grass, the sound of every footstep, car, voice or birdsong? Or is there a filter in there, somewhere, that has a model of what

is our normal background, compares new information with that model, and only passes on to our consciousness any significant changes...

...a monitoring system that generally reports “situation normal, take no notice”, until something of interest or significance occurs? This could create blank spots in our consciousness, to add to the anomalies our left-brain rejects because they don’t fit into our existing model of reality and our place in it. Even our behaviour is patterned to respond to normal background situations and events, so that we can move almost automatically through familiar places, carry out familiar tasks, with our conscious minds elsewhere. I have heard of people leaving work at the end of the day, as usual, getting into the car, as usual, driving as usual through familiar streets, to arrive at last – at the house they moved out of last month... Our brains allow us not to think, to run on automatic, using patterns of ‘normal’ behavioural response to carry us through ‘normal’ situations and events. Is the same true of the models we rely on, as groups, or even as nations? Do we commonly ignore much of the information about the way society works, taking its irrelevance, its insignificance, for granted – until what we have ignored culminates, predictably, in ‘unforeseen’ disaster?

Take the present economic collapse, for instance, or global warming. The economic crisis is being analysed only within an economic model, but it is really a social crisis. What if we analysed it in social terms, with the economy seen merely as a way of balancing the contribution individuals make to the community against the benefits they receive? The people and their skills are still there, and their needs are the same; it’s the economic system which links abilities to needs that has failed. Could there be other and better ways to link them? And why does the established economic system go from boom to bust? Is it flawed? It developed within the hierarchic social system – is it only successful while impoverishing some to make others rich? And what of profit: the difference between the price that people pay for goods and services, and what it cost to provide them? Shouldn’t the price be no more than the cost of production, let alone the extreme amount more some ‘providers’ charge for their services and corporations demand? The economy

needs to be seen and understood within its proper context (society, national and global, and even the local and global ecology) and the model of normal (acceptable and beneficial) socio-economic structures and systems re-examined. Courses, perhaps, in collaboration with The New Economic Foundation, the Co-operative Movement and possibly others? (Not Communism, as was structured in Russia and China, which is hierarchic rather than egalitarian.)

Limits to Growth

Before this economic crisis, the world was just beginning to accept the need to limit production, transport and energy use, to cope with the threat of global warming. Now, our government, to ensure increased employment and make more money out of air transport, is willing to enlarge Heathrow and increase flights, even though that will mean a massive increase in the carbon dioxide pollution of the upper layers of the atmosphere – where it will presumably do most harm. The conservationist model and our present socio-economic model conflict – could we together devise a model that integrates both of them? A socio-economic model that fits within an accurate model of local and global ecology – aiming at local ecological self-sufficiency, plus some surplus to share or trade between localities? Or would that interfere too much with the ‘march of progress’ and the ‘civilisation’ of our world?

Civilisation originally meant citification: city walls to barricade the citizens against the dirt and disorder of the natural world beyond... More agricultural and wilderness areas becoming more and bigger cities, containing more and more people, the poorest impoverished, disaffected, prone to violence and crime, possibly addicted to alcohol and drugs. Is citification intentional? From a schools Geography TV program: countries are defined as either More or Less Economically Developed, using statistics that denote quality of life, including what proportion of the population works in agriculture – More Economically Developed Countries have more people working in industry and a rich diversity of other jobs. They also seem to need more and more people, working at more and more jobs and paying more and more taxes – until

the economic system fails, unemployment sets in and the unemployed become both a burden and a political embarrassment.

Population

Another elephant in the room here: in a finite world, with finite natural resources, shouldn't population growth be limited to what the planet can sustain? Not by governments, but democratically, with people sufficiently well educated and informed to accept the need to limit the size of their families, and enabled by their governments? And what of progress? Progress in technology, in weapons, things to buy and use and do, by means that lock innumerable people into long hours of work, still in some countries under conditions that affect their physical and mental health? Or should it be a form of evolutionary progress – all people becoming happier, wiser, more talented, co-operative, creative, using traditional skills and craftsmanship in harmony with new inventions and ideas?

Models divide us. But a model is only the way that a mind organises all available information about its situation, so that it can find effective ways to survive and prosper, in accordance with its own perspective and objectives. (A leopard and a deer could view the same vista, but understand it from two different perspectives, those of hunter and potential prey.) Groups use different models, but what of group minds – multi-mentalities? Is it enough that we share the same model, the same perspectives, objectives, values? Or, by being conscious of the process of which we are a part – of all the processes of which all people are a part, understanding them, understanding all flaws and inadequacies – do we contribute to the evolution of consciousness? And if so, how do we contribute? Courses, conferences, books, the Internet – but is that all? What does it mean to say that a group mind can exist, linking the thoughts and feelings, values and understanding, of individuals – even over distance?

Group Minds – Ancient and Modern

Trotter and Glaister believed so, but they also believed that the existing group minds were un-evolved, still primitive, still that of the ‘brute

beast' – the hierarchic perspective. The evolution of the conscious group mind would supposedly only happen if a close-knit group of intelligent, educated, well-informed people were continually conscious of the process of which they were a part – conscious of increasing the consciousness of the group, and of the group-mind that would emerge amongst them and spread its influence beyond them. So, the group mind emerges from the integration of individuals into a group, but group-minds may be the latest life-forms in the evolutionary process, primitive at first, instinctive, emotional: the kind of mind that can unite a group in chaos and mob violence. Norman Glaister – and other founders – believed in an extension of recapitulation theory: Haeckel's theory that the development of the embryo in the womb passes through the evolutionary stages of the development of its species. I believe it was adapted, and used at OWC and perhaps also at Braziers, to a theory that children and young people need to grow through the intellectual and social stages of humanity's evolution and prehistory, recapitulating the evolution of consciousness. (The reawakening of interest in early forms of religion and ritual behaviour may be associated with this.) I'm not sure that the young need to pass through those stages, but I am sure they need to pass beyond them, not to become trapped within them – to mature, not "hope to die before I get old", electing to remain immature and irresponsible well into old age. Spending so much of their formative years in school peer groups, with the media and marketing executives focussing on their immature values and objectives, are we alienating the young from the adult world, or helping them to mature with a better understanding of how it should be managed? Doubts have arisen about Haeckel's theory, so this area is still speculative – another area for research, courses or conference?

TV documentaries on swarms, shoals and flocks speak of them being controlled by a group-mind, which in flocks of birds could absorb information from individual members about the availability of food, and head there as a group. Studies of identical twins separated at birth and brought up at a distance from one another have reported similarities in their lives that could not be attributed to their identical genetic make-up.

Rupert Sheldrake in his "New Science of Life", 1981, describes the ability of dogs to sense their owner's approach at an unexpected time, the ability of groups of termites in boxes that exclude all known means of sensory information, to determine whether their box is on the inside or the edges of the whole group of boxes, and busy themselves in termite exterior-wall or internal – tunnel construction, appropriate to the position of their box – how do they know? Sheldrake's Morphic resonance and causative formation assume the existence of some form of group mind guiding development and behaviour. Quantum physics claims that at the level of subatomic particles, one particle may split into two identical parts that go in opposite directions, yet, whatever change one makes is mirrored by the other. It has been proposed that all the information from our radios, TV's, the Internet – and perhaps some not transmitted only by us – forms a world brain...

What if every species has its own group mind – becoming distinct group minds as groups divide, evolving in slightly different directions? What if all species – except possibly us – are in tune with one another, operating as the Web of Life Fritjof Capra and others have described? What if Gaia is actually a global all-encompassing group mind, needing our recognition of its existence and the importance of the survival of all the species it incorporates? What if Nature is not "red in tooth and claw", a desperate struggle for survival, but a co-ordinated attempt to maintain a global interdependence of all species, benefiting all life? Speculation? Perhaps, but if this is so, at Braziers we tap into that global mind, are committed to the needs of our planet as well as the needs of humanity. And, learning more about our world, working for an effective integration of all human systems and models into one inclusive whole that maintains local and planetary ecological systems, the energy of our group consciousness becomes a part of a global network, supporting, encouraging and linking other groups and individuals, worldwide.

Back to The Task

So, coming back to the objective, 'Gathering, Assessing and Comparing All Essential Information, Beliefs, Opinions and Ideas' is essential, but

we have to watch the model we use, the perspective we use. We can't take it for granted that the way we've structured our ideas in the past is still adequate or was ever complete – what was missed? Was there any bias? Is it a (w)holistic model, or of limited scope and depth? Would it fit into a model based upon humanity's place within a thriving global ecological system? Or only within the present mainly anti-ecological socio-economic model?

Then, how to 'Improve'? Mutual self-improvement through learning and commitment to a socially and now ecologically responsible life and group; better understanding spread beyond Braziers, through courses, conferences, publications, contact and influence upon other groups and now on the internet, and if group minds do exist, it possibly spreads from our minds – from our group mind – to others. It certainly will if we contact other groups and are working with them...

As to 'Human Condition'... I actually prefer 'Understanding and Improving the Human Predicament' because it is one; it's difficult and dangerous! It comprises human nature and situation, at both individual and group level. Each one of us grows up in one situation that influences the way we grow. We may grow beyond that situation, particularly if we have access to other groups, other people who improve our situation and our understanding of who and what we can be. Then there's the nature not just of individuals, but also of groups, of society as a whole. And what about the economic and political situation – how we are governed? Are we truly a democracy? Do we understand how our world ought to work, and are we promoting that, making our government our servants instead of our masters? And should we ever consider the nature of humanity in isolation from the Web of Life – the interdependence of all terrestrial species that produces and maintains both ourselves and the biosphere that houses and feeds us?

Being Part of a Wider Project

I would like to be part of developing a model of human society within its local and global ecological situation, integrating the best of every-

thing we have ever been, are and...

...hope to be. It's a huge undertaking, and no one could possibly do it alone, but what of groups? And groups of groups – networks of groups? I think there are many out there, moving that way already, and I believe we – Braziers – ought to be a really significant part of it.

And yes, I've left out so much of what we do here, and what we have done, what we believed and thought, because there was no time to include it all. I do, however, need to mention Alan Clark's recommendation of "Thank God for Evolution", 2009, a book about the integration of a scientific perspective on evolution with Christianity. Is it written only from the perspective of Christians who need to feel happy about evolution – about a scientific assumption that it is basically random and un-purposed, merely acted upon by natural selection, as proposed by Darwin in 1859 – one hundred and fifty years ago? That assumption doesn't explain the human desire for progress, challenge, novelty – or boredom: the frustration of that desire. What if we assumed instead that evolution was always purposed, that the basic instinct to survive – an awareness and appreciation of being alive and a desire and will to go on living – included an awareness that life is tough and that organisms need to develop further to improve the chances of survival? An evolutionary instinct, perhaps co-ordinated at the level of what Braziers calls the group mind, and Rupert Sheldrake the morphogenetic field of formative causation? This assumption would supply a common ground to religion and science, that includes a basic desire not just to live, but to become better at living, better able, better people within better societies in a better world...

Integration

Braziers has always been about integration – integration of people within a group, yes, but especially the integration of ideas, and I've tried to show the ways we could be encouraging integration between a great many ideas. But it isn't complete and it's up to all of us to see where we can take it now.

It does mean re-examining what we mean by Braziers' terms, like

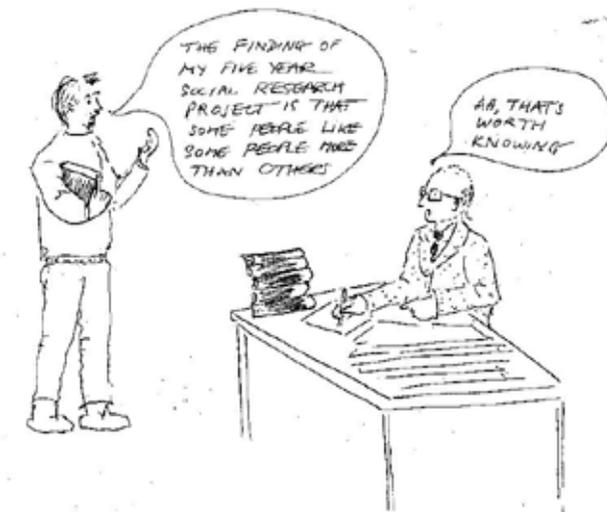
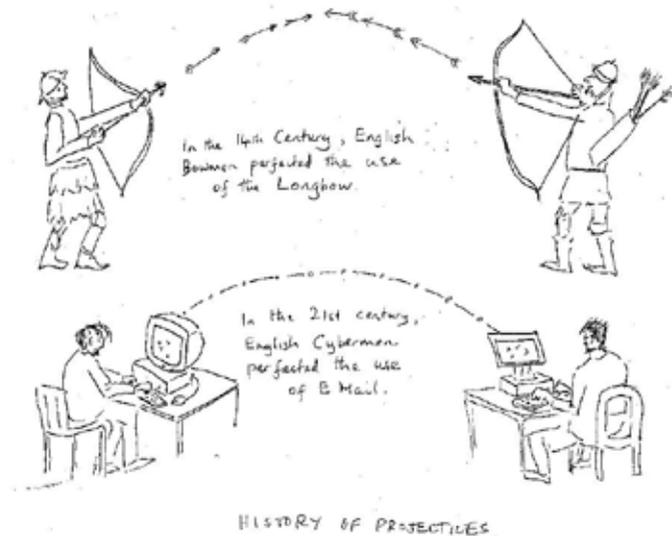
group-mind or multimentality. Like sensitive or resistive to the need for change of approach (which, abbreviated to just 'sensitive or resistive' had a different meaning so were replaced by sensory and executive). N.B. Sensory meant information gathering and discussion, but was at one time misinterpreted as a 'feelings' session. Also unitary thinking, rather than dualism (being able to see opposites as merely extremes at either end of a continuum that actually unites them e.g. 'hot' and 'cold' within a range of possible temperatures which include the specific points necessary for air conditioning, freezing food, bathing, baking, roasting, melting glass, arc welding, processing steel, etc.). In a unitary model, all religions are part of a common understanding of life and social living, with humans as spiritual as well as physical beings – while science and religion are both part of a common attempt to understand humanity and its relationship to life and the universe.

So unitary thinking is a way of looking for the unity, rather than concentrating on what divides and alienates us from one another. Then there is "being conscious of the process of which we are a part" – or should it be "processes"? Those processes identified as how we live each day, relate to others and develop. Not only play a part within our families, community, our local ecology and economy – and Braziers – but a developing and developmental part.

Society, as defined by the state, business interests and other top down structures, is even more fractured, alienated and damaging to human and natural life than when Norman Glaister wrote: "It is obvious that ... Society cannot give a decisive lead to the individual..." Yet within our communities, the move towards the formation of a better, more caring and responsible egalitarian world goes on, as it has done for centuries, and this is possibly – hopefully – accelerating. Braziers was founded to play a significant part in it. It still can.

Veronica A. Wallace

11 August 2009



Comment from visitor surveying the Braziers scene:
 'Wow! What a fantastic place. It'd make a great gold club/health spa.
 Where's the bar?'



DECISION MAKING AT BRAZIER'S



MORNING ROTA

Familiar Scenes

Life at Braziers: In the kitchen with pig's head brawn and soggy bananas – trying to keep the events separate in my mind ... and the drains are blocked.

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Tom Glaister, grandson of our founder Norman Glaister, is not unlikely to circulate a passage from *Greater Things*, the classic 'text' behind the foundation of Braziers. Sometimes it is good to spell things out from their source, so here is Norman Glaister's analysis of the 'leadership team' within a Resistive-Sensory Community, sent by Tom and appreciated by the editors. Glaister explains his own abbreviations, three-quarters of the way through this very long paragraph!

THE R-S LEADERSHIP Team comprising both resistives and sensitives is the new social organism and the integrative centre for both deliberative thought and decisive action. The inward facing Sensory part of the R-S Social Organism (RSSO) is responsible for the whole of its conduct and attainment of its objectives, taking action to secure the close cohesion of both inward looking sensitive and outward looking resistive personnel through social intercourse and common activities, and the common enjoyment of emotional and aesthetic experiences. The Sensory group is concerned for the quality of the lives of all individuals both resistive and sensitive within the social organism and asks for help as necessary from the Executive group who likewise ask for help when necessary from the Sensory group. Some members of the Sensory group are concerned more with the internal activities of the Sensory group, ultimate truth, creative thought, plans for the far-distant future and are relatively sensitive (S-sensitive), and others concerned more with their opposite numbers among the resistives, and through them with the immediate problems of the resistives and the affairs of the world outside the RSSO are relatively resistive (R-sensitive). The outward facing Executive part of the RSSO organises itself with a full sense of direct responsibility for the whole conduct and integrity of itself in relationship with all that is outside itself, especially with its human environment, and erects such barriers as necessary to prevent its disintegration by any external processes. Some of its members are con-

cerned more to make contact with and understand the processes in action outside the RSSO and with the direction and use of the Sensory group and are relatively sensitive (S-resistive) and others concerned more with the direction of external action on behalf of the whole RSSO are relatively resistive (R-resistive). The team thus comprises two groups, Sensory and Executive; and four sub-groups: S-Sensitive, R-Sensitive, S-Resistive, and R-Resistive. Every mind in the RSSO, whether resistive or sensitive, is kept fully informed of both resistive and sensitive activities and plans, and is able to function both as sensitive and resistive in its ordinary contacts with minds outside itself; but the development of the thought of all members is stimulated by the Sensory group, while the influence they exert upon their contacts is made confident and effective by the support of the Executive group. Although the fully differentiated person functioning as such in the RSSO is to his colleagues very obviously resistive or sensitive, to the undifferentiated and partially differentiated people, who provide most of his domestic and social contacts, he is a person of superior attainment with a balanced understanding of most modern theories and an outstanding capacity for getting things done. This is equally true whether his function in the RSSO is resistive or sensitive, and many of his acquaintances don't know to which of these groups he belongs. The eloquent resistive who expounds with brilliance and evident understanding the knowledge which he has acquired in the RSSO under the guidance of sensitive experts often appears more sensitive than the real sensitive; while the sensitive who assumes control of an excited crowd in a moment of crisis appears to be more resistive than many resistives, since there is nothing about him to indicate that he draws the self-confidence that enables him to act decisively from his identification of himself with his resistive colleagues. Social control isn't negative, restrictive and coercive, as it used to be, otherwise the resistive-sensitive co-operation fails; resistives aren't discouraged from thinking for themselves or sensitives discouraged from taking decisive and responsible action. Sensitives encourage their Resistive colleagues to face in their imaginative thinking possibilities hitherto unimagined by them and gain strength from the example of their resistive colleagues to act as boldly and decisively as circumstances may require.

UP TO EARTH

Every few weeks for the last four years or so there has been an estate working party staying at Braziers – usually over a weekend, sometimes for longer. These occasions are popular. We have built quite a loyal following of regulars who have got to know us and each other fairly well and follow our developments quite closely. Indeed, they are a sort of 'alternative membership' for Braziers.

We have a great time. After breakfast there's a large gathering in the hall to describe and sort jobs. Then a short warm-up for our muscles. Then a quick safety talk. Then a scramble for boots and gloves and tools and those elusive wheelbarrows. Then we disappear in groups to the furthest corners of the estate. Over the seasons we have planted hedges (it feels like miles of them), groups of trees, sown seeds, transplanted seedlings, weeded, pruned, cut firewood, cleared rubbish developed watering systems, fixed fences, heaved muck, harvested the crops.

In the evenings we sit round the fire and play silly games or tell stories and jokes or do our party pieces. We are often entertained by the musical skills of our participants. We exchange lots of information. These are rich times indeed.

Food is central to our sense of community and connection. Working alongside one another, digging potatoes in the field, preparing them in the kitchen, then eating them, brings people together in a way that meeting, just talking meetings, don't seem to. Why?

These are times when we can be freed to feel the healing power of outdoors. And there is something about the sharing of physical work that encourages co-operation rather than competition. We sense the obvious purposefulness of the activity with its direct connection between earth, food and the resulting meal. Our conversations are woven with activity and quiet. Very different from the quick fire of intense discussion when there is no room for reflection between words.

Here's to working in the woods, discussion with digging, and partying among the parsnips.

Ruth Garwood



BRAZIER'S INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS' WORKSHOP: 'THE RIPPLE EFFECT'

Memories of the Glaister Lecture for 2009

In a break with tradition, there was not one Glaister Lecturer at the AGM Weekend in May, but five. They were Bernadette Moloney, Gill Ord, Nicola Gray, Nick Davies and Kieran James, and their names are not unfamiliar at Braziers – at least not to any Brazierian who steps our way in August. Any August that is, between 1995 and 2008, for 2009 was a rest year for the Braziers International Artists' Workshop. In 2010 the artists will be back, as part of our Sixtieth Anniversary Celebrations, with an augmented event, and while we celebrate being sixty, they will celebrate being fifteen. It promises to be a rich August in a rich year.

Why 'the Ripple Effect'? At the lecture on 17 May, it soon became clear. In a word (though the artists are too modest to say so), BIAW is *influential*. Artists queue up to be part of it, and yet the selection of participants is not necessarily based on a 'best first' system. The largest number ever included was 35, but a better balance is just under 20: in 2008, 20 artists were invited and 16 exhibited. Rather, the workshop seeks to create a complement: nationalities thrown together, artists of very different styles using very different forms. There is no edging of the balance towards one medium or school, and though there is a lot of the 'conceptual', there is a lot of the visual as well. Not to mention the experiential. Braziers, as any visitor discovers, is full of vestiges of previous artists' workshops: the philosophical quotations etched into the greenhouse, odd corners of the barn that spout messages, and further surprises around the estate. My own favourites are the perfectly copied drawings and quotations from Saint-Exupéry's *Petit Prince* in the cellar; yet while no-one can tell me the origin of these, they seem to predate BIAW – maybe they are part of the creativity out of which it was born, rather than part of the child itself.

Each artist spoke, and each brought a sense of increasing diversity. Nicola, for instance, spoke extempore, describing the weird sense of coming home that hit her when she came here. It reminded her pleasantly of boarding school: the big building, for instance, and, as she put it with a twinkle in her eye, lots of space and lots of foreigners! For her, the ripple effect was perhaps ripples of memory, reaching back into her past, and out through the world too. BIAW and the other artists led her to Palestine, and to an involvement, artistically, with conflict and peace in that region, and it thus changed her work irreversibly.

It was clear that Gill's most memorable project was a stepped wooden bridge built over both hedges and driveway, so that in crossing the road you also lifted yourself up from one world and came down into another. She tells me, 'The bridge allowed for a different orientation around the grounds, a different perspective and a bird's eye view from the top of the yew hedge. A brief possibility to see things in a new way. I built it from scaffold planks, CAD-designed for structural safety. The planks were then recycled, being used on several projects around Braziers Park'. It's one of the things many visitors remember too, though by the sound of it, it dominated demands on the workforce that year (2004) too!

Keran James, whose 'Hollywood(land)' is shown on the cover along with 'Car Dealer (*et in arcadia*)' on p. 38, demonstrates that art can combine with wry humour. In the lecture, he represented also the impact artists can have on another frontier besides international consciousness, with slides illustrating the work of students of the 'Rural Studio' in Alabama, who in a parallel community live with and help creatively renovate the homes of extremely low-income families. He and his colleague have a studio in Redchurch St, Shoreditch, of which the very door is a piece of art, allowing as it does an entire community to spread their graffiti there—whereupon it is painstakingly re-painted in blue, unified into one whole visual poem by Nick Davies.

Said Nick Davies has recently been at Braziers again for an extended visit. He spoke of his long-distance walking and canoeing projects, exploring new ways of physical and mental travel. Right now, he intends

to return from Braziers to east London by kayak using the Thames and the Grand Union Canal. This art is conceptual indeed, and is well explained by the exchange between Bernadette and Maurice Roth which Bernadette details herself in what is a slightly shortened version of her contribution to the Glaister lecture, reproduced after this article.

One year, a Canadian artist called David Grenier made his contribution one of simply making himself a member of the house team: 'total immersion' as a work of art in itself. Utterly concentrated and committed to what he was doing, the edges of his canvas never frayed.

And it was actually on that example that my lasting impression of the 2010 Glaister Lecture most depends. Never having properly visited Braziers during the workshop (I had a tiny glimpse in 2007, but no more than that), the common enterprise suddenly came into the light. Maybe we understand Braziers best when we see it as a work of art in itself, and speculate as to whether that was not precisely what J. Norman wanted. Artists' canvases are not sweetness entirely; they are rarely comfortable but they are always extending the consciousness, always reclaiming experience in a way that suggests there is beauty to be found in things the most lost. Suddenly, I appreciated the exact complementarity – almost the identity – of BPSISR and BIAW. Long live that connection! – it brings a tremendous fertility to an experiment that occasionally seems more painful than creative. Creativity is painful, often. From scepticism about the choice of lecturer, I suddenly moved to see 2009 as a golden year for the lecture.

Colum Hayward
October 2009



More images from Braziers' Artists' Workshops. On p. 34, Gill Ord's steps, mentioned in the article, along with (p. 36) Keran James's 'Car Dealer'. Below left, David Grenier in Braziers kitchen while, above, Nick Davies repaints the studio door—again

WHAT BRAZIERS MEANS TO ME

My relationship with Braziers runs deeper than the fact of holding the workshop here. I first came to Braziers in 1990 with Simon Faithfull, my then partner, and my experience and passion for the workshop and for Braziers itself is very much bound up with my personal relationship with the place and its community. It's in this context that I want to talk about my experience of being involved with the workshop. I've seen lots of changes, and of course I remember with deep affection and love many people no longer with us. I was lucky enough to know Glynn and Margaret, and I remember very well our first meeting, when Simon brought me here. They met us off the train and any expectations or rather preconceptions I had of them as Bohemians were immediately dashed as we were approached by an elderly but sprightly man in a trilby hat and a sensibly dressed and smiling Margaret.

I was surprised further to find that the community was made up of such people as retired English teachers and engineers – Nonny, and Maurice of course, as well as a strange and rotund man in a bobble hat: Glynn's brother Bernie, living among a young, lively and engaged group of overseas volunteers. At that time, Bernie refused to live in the house, preferring to stay in the potting shed end of the greenhouse. I will never forget the vision of Bernie through the window, asleep atop the bench, on a mattress of bundles of newspapers and wrapped in several blankets, his bobble hat still on, as I walked past very early one morning after helping Margaret milk the cows. Over the winter I thought Bernie a much larger man than he actually was, as Bernie was always swaddled in layers of thick sweaters and several bobble hats at once. I got a shock the first time I saw him without all his layers in the summer and in fact asked Simon if he was ill, he had shrunk so much.

In 1994, Simon started his MA at Reading, which meant he would be living most of the time at Braziers. On the weekends that he didn't

come to London I would come to Braziers. We had a dog, and couldn't stay in the house, so we began the project of clearing out the space that is now known as Courtyard Cottage, working with Jonas, a regular volunteer at Braziers, to build the mezzanine floor and installing the wood-burning fire. It was while he was at Reading that Simon had the idea of inviting his fellow art students and friends to create work in response to Braziers, as part of Oxfordshire Art Weeks. Around the same time, he and I – along with Gill and another artist, Andy Cohen – had begun to talk about the possibility of organising a residential workshop for artists. Gill was very much the moving force behind this, having participated in the Triangle Workshop in upstate New York, which had had a profound impact on her and her work. We realised that Braziers could be the ideal location. The Art Weeks exhibition was a great success and it was clear how excited artists were by the place and what a rich environment it provided.

Our first workshop in 1995 consisted of a number of our artist friends and colleagues. We needed to see if a workshop could work in this context before opening it up to artists to apply from anywhere. That first one was idyllic. The weather was extraordinarily good the whole time: we could work late into the night in shorts and vests. Not once did we have to make a fire at night to keep warm. Braziers had worked its magic and we were completely sold on making it happen again. At the outset we were very much wedded to the conventional wisdom of such projects, that the group of artists we brought together should operate as a discrete entity. In other words Braziers was simply the venue, and what was paramount was our focus on each other as a group of artists coming together for this short intense period of time to live and work alongside each other.

Additionally, there was a natural and mutual wariness between us and the community as no-one was quite sure about what boundaries there should be. As a group, but as artists, we needed very much to feel that we had the freedom to pursue our ideas and recognise too that we had to be sensitive to those who were welcoming us into their home. The residents needed to feel that they would not be overwhelmed by a

large group of artists and their crazy ideas. This meant there could be tension at times. Whenever problems arose, though, it was instructive how hard the community worked with us to resolve them. We have become more and more at ease with each other and part of what now makes the workshop so memorable and unique for the participants is the engagement we have with the community and its ideals. Over the years this has provided a rich seam for artists to mine, both through projects involving and collaborating with residents, and also work developing out of Braziers' history and philosophy.

It has taken us time to understand the complexities and workings of the community here and we have experienced its highs and lows over the years. After the death of Glynn and Margaret it was in crisis, and this had a profound effect personally. For a time we did wonder if in fact the workshop should continue, but remembering the support that Margaret in particular had given us, and our strong desire that Braziers' original principles should not be lost, we could not walk away. Even in deciding to carry on, we had no idea that we would still be here ten years later.

This in no doubt is due in large part to the support and welcome Braziers has given the artists year after year. We hope that once again Maurice will join us on the Open Day in 2010. If he doesn't mind, I would like to read something out that he wrote about the workshop.

'When the Workshop first came to Braziers I was very puzzled by it. I couldn't relate what they were doing to "art". To me at the time, "Art" meant painting and sculpture. But they were doing all kind of peculiar things that didn't seem to me to be art. 'Enlightenment came when I found Simon Faithfull piling chairs on top of one another to see how tall a pile he could get. (He got to thirteen). I asked him what this had to do with art, and said that anyone could do this.

"Ah!", he replied. "But only an artist would think of doing it". 'From then on, I began to make sense of the funny things that went on. This was confirmed the first time I went to the Tate Modern. It was just like the Artist's Workshop and I could see what the artists were getting at.'

One of the most exciting things about the workshop is that people come from all over the world. It must be the only gathering of its type, and this is important in itself. This year, for instance, there was an Israeli participant, a Palestinian and a Lebanese – at a time when their countries were at war. I can't remember all the wonderful things that were done, but I do remember having three beautiful white horses in the field, and two rabbits in the drawing room. There was the time when someone made a map of all the molehills, and was delighted when one appeared inside his tent. Another good one was the girl who listed all the nails, etc., in the garden wall. And the one who made a cube of all the junk in the coachhouse, and listed each piece. I was sorry to see this dismantled. But I think the one that I liked best was the tape of all the artists giving a drunken rendering of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" in the Dutch Barn. It must have taken quite an effort to teach the words to all the foreigners.

Well, I'd like to thank Maurice for his comment, as that piece was one of mine, and it allows me to introduce you to Sid, a character who made a surprise appearance at the 2006 workshop. I wanted to say a little bit about Sid because aside from the privilege of our working together in hosting a wide array of international artists over the years, the workshop has had a certain impact on me and my work. I am a painter, but the great thing about the workshop is that it gives you room to play and try out new ways of working. I am not a natural public speaker and in fact hate having to do things like this. In 2006 I was thrown into a spin by the fact that Gill, who has a natural talent for this kind of thing, could not be here for the entire workshop. The mantle fell on my shoulders to take charge of the social and public announcements that are part and parcel of it. Luckily for me, Sid appeared and took over. As Sid, I could be someone else entirely. I'm not sure where Sid came from, but he gave me a voice and proved to be so popular that he was invited back for the Open Day. There, his louche behaviour raised a few eyebrows, but in the main he was well received and tolerated. Thank you, Braziers, for letting me find my inner Sid.

Bernie Moloney

October 2009

Research Communications 26



KERAN JAMES · HOLLYWOOD(LAND) · OPEN OUT FOR FULL PICTURE

