



Promising future for House

Danus Skene, Chair of the Interim Management Group, writes about the ACTS Forum decision on 8th May...

THIS DATE WAS a big day for Scottish Churches House. We can now assure our many friends and supporters of a promising future for this special place. The asset of this House, held by the churches together in Scotland cannot be sustained unless it has the support of those churches acting together. The meeting of the ACTS Forum on 8th May gave that backing, deciding by an overwhelming majority to support the implementation of the Business Plan drawn up by the IMG, and to authorise appointment of a new Warden or 'Director'.

This decision was made in the light of the achievement of raising some £380,000 – short of the £500,000 that the IMG had been challenged to raise – a point of concern to some at the Forum meeting. But the appeal is now authorised to continue until March 2009. The basic requirements of the Business Plan for financial sustainability can be implemented for the amount of money already raised.

To make major improvements to the conference and social areas of the House, substantially more will be needed. The aim is to provide a building of beauty, fit for the purpose and able to sustain the vision of the House for the 21st century.

It is a privilege to chair the talented group who compose the IMG. I am deeply grateful for their contributions, and proud that as a group we are able to report gathering success in our campaign to assure the future of the House – not least in welcoming Bruce and Elaine Cameron as interim co-wardens, until the new appointment is made.

From the new interim Co-Wardens, Bruce and Elaine Cameron:

Two years ago we looked out of the window of our new Perthshire home – Bruce dreaming of a vegetable patch, Elaine of her herb garden. Becoming interim Co-Wardens of Scottish



Churches House was way beyond our thinking! It is both a great challenge and a privilege to be at SCH at this time: to make real the future vision of this House, and its contribution to the life of Scotland. Already we enjoy working with staff, friends, volunteers, supporters and others, and warmly invite you to share with us in that exciting adventure which is Scottish Churches House. ■

Scottish Friends of Ecumenism

(Supporting Scottish Churches House and ACTS)

Climate Change

Autumn Conference

Wednesday 17th September 2008

Gavin McClelland from Christian Aid Scotland will discuss essential 'campaign issues' and there will also be an in-depth exploration of 'more practical action at local level'.

Information & booking:

Scottish Churches House

Tel. 01786 823588 or email:

reservations@scottishchurcheshouse.org

For more information about Friends and membership details contact: SFOE, SCH, Kirk Street, Dunblane FK15 0AJ

A warden with many gifts – Elizabeth Templeton

ALASTAIR HULBERT, who retired as Warden of Scottish Churches House in April, brought a distinguished set of gifts to this work. His lifetime of ecumenical experience, mostly in continental Europe, meant that he had live contact with the giants of the World Council of Churches and the World Student Christian Federation, and a sense of the vitality of the ecumenical impulse which gave birth to the House. That generated several powerful events at the House, like the



2007 International Summer School, and the Promise Conference in honour of Milan Opočenský. These helped raise awareness among UK participants of the range of ecumenical vision, not often open

to even active, lively Scottish Christians. It also rediscovered the potential of international volunteers in the House's work, and the virtue of the summer Work Camp – a lively ecumenical experience for students, as well as creative practical work. The other major gift Alastair made was to the quality of the visual experience within the house. Photographs, maps, paintings, prints now blossom in every room. The physical appearance of the place has been transformed: the new chapel window, wonderful recovered photos, new chairs, flashes of colour and vitality, apples in a bowl on the corridor.

It took more than his statutory duty hours to combine the surge in creative programming with the routine management tasks. Moreover, most of Alastair's time, the House was under threat. That he could function creatively under such stress is remarkable. That we are now able to anticipate a future is in no small part due to all the energy he and Liz gave to cherishing the ecumenical vision the House represents.

Our best appreciation of his work will be sustaining a viable lively future for the House, extending its use in church and society, and keeping it a place of hospitality, beauty, vision and challenge. ■

House Events

Summer Retreats with the Epiphany Group
4-15 August & 22-26 September

Day Seminars

Russian Orthodox – 11th September

Jesus and other Faiths – 25th September

Quakers – 2nd October

Music for an autumn evening with festive dinner – 23rd October

For more information:

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Big John

– Richard Holloway

I DID NOT OFTEN coincide with John Fitzsimmons at SCH, but I have a strong and representative memory of an occasion when we did. I was hosting a meeting of bishops from Scotland, Ireland and Wales – otherwise known as the Celtic Fringe – and I was musing over how to give them a good time. The obvious bit was whisky in the evening when work was over for the day, but they were a bright bunch and I knew they would want some intellectual stimulation before we uncorked the bottles.

Knowing he was a member of the international commission working on the Catholic liturgy, I decided to send for Big John to tell us what they were up to. He did not disappoint. Without a note, he held us spellbound for 80 minutes, then answered our questions for a further 40. The session captured the essence of this remarkable man: he combined profound erudition with the timing and wit of the best stand-up comedian;

more importantly, his love for the great Roman Catholic shone through everything he said, but it was an honest and critical love that was not afraid to acknowledge the shortcomings as well as the glories of the church that bred him.

He was born in Paisley in 1939, the son of a Catholic father and Protestant mother of Huguenot stock, so we could say that ecumenism was in his spiritual DNA. Certainly, he was always warmly regarded by all the Christian communities of Scotland, and his frequent visits to Dunblane were testimony to his commitment to the larger unity SCH has always represented and tried to express. Like many of us, I think he grew disillusioned with the way the ecumenical movement in Scotland allowed itself to become a factory for the endless iteration of entrenched theologies. He simply ignored the fixed positions and ganged his ain gait among them all. Sounds a bit like Jesus to me. ■

‘The centre is the Hinge...’

– Alastair Hulbert

MILAN OPOČENSKÝ, the Czech theologian, died in 2007, leaving his mark on the 20th century ecumenical movement and on many friends, the world over. He first visited Scottish Churches House in 1967, when he was Assistant to Professor Josek Hromadka, the great theologian in Prague.

In Opočenský's honour, a four-day conference entitled *Promise* was held here at Easter – fifty-five participants from five continents, twenty countries and many churches. It was organised with the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), of which Opočenský was respectively European Secretary and President, and General Secretary.

The first day examined the theological concept of *status confessionis* – the conviction that faith and ethics cannot but go together – e.g. when WARC refused to allow churches in South Africa to stay within their communion if they practised Apartheid. Now, issues of global justice and environment are treated in the same way.

The second day “the Meaning of Ecumenism in the 21st Century” raised questions about mission and unity, very relevant to the centenary celebrations of the Edinburgh 1910 Conference. And “Promises made to be broken, made to last” (from Jackie Kay's poem *Promise*) allowed each participant to contribute Memory – Reflection – Hope about ecumenism through story-telling – Milan's “autobiographical theology”.

The ecumenical movement is a place where Christians come together to understand what the mission of the church is, and to carry out that mission, often against the odds. It has to do with persons, but it doesn't depend on us – it depends on history, and on what is offered to us by God. Scottish Churches House is such a place.

“I was studying yet once more the contours of my map of the region..., when it dawned as slowly and certainly as the sun itself upon me that the town was there, between the creeks, under my feet the whole time... What I had taken for the gate was the bridge across the meeting of the creeks. And the sacred buildings and the dancing place not in the centre of town, for the centre is the Hinge... And so it is, and so it is.” (Ursula LeGuin, ‘Always Coming Home’) ■

Our Sri Lankan volunteer

INTERVIEW – Brian Baker

Sakila Saparamadu arrived in April to spend a year at SCH.

Brian: *We are so pleased also that our Scottish weather has been good to you in your early days. It may not always be like this! How do you find our weather?*

Sakila: *I find it much cooler than I am used to in Sri Lanka. I have to wrap up well.*

Brian: *You're not well wrapped up this evening. Tell us more about your gorgeous sari.*

Sakila: *I use this dress for special occasions in Sri Lanka such as weddings. My brother who is a beautician helps me to look my best in it. My father manages a hotel and my mother works in a batik shop in Greece. My home is in Kandy, in the middle of the country. After I left school I completed a beauty culture course followed by courses in computing and in English.*

Brian: *You had good tutors – your English is excellent. And then?*

Sakila: *I joined Service Civil International, a volunteer organisation, and worked with different ethnic groups – Tamil, Moslem and Sinhalese – along with other international volunteers. This was followed by work in a school for children with special needs.*



Brian: *We were all shocked by the devastation caused by the tsunami in 2004. Were you affected?*

Sakila: *Yes! A few days after it struck we were ready to go to badly affected areas to bring relief to the victims. It was a distressing time. I was there for a year, cleaning public buildings and providing programmes for children and young people. A moving experience was to see the local people so pleased to be able to worship once again in a Tamil Temple which we had helped to rebuild.*

Brian: *Your duties are quite different here but we hopefully rewarding. Enjoy yourself and be sure to get some warm and waterproof clothing!* ■

Farewell thanks from our long-term American volunteer, Caitlin Squires...

THIS PAST YEAR I have called Scottish Churches House ‘home’. It's where I cooked, cleaned, ate and slept. It's where I plotted my castle adventures!

Most importantly, it's where I've met incredible people who made possible wonderful opportunities. It's due to everyone who took time with me, offering help and encouragement, that

I've really gotten to know this wonderful country. Thank you for taking me to places I'd never seen or heard about! Thank you for the shared meals, discussions and laughter. You have all shaped my experience, making a positive and lasting impression. This has been a year of growth and discovery for me – I've truly had the time of my life! I've seen the best of Scotland because of you and your kindness. Thanks to everyone! ■