

The Othona Community in February 2023.

Fifty years ago – which seems like yesterday to some of us, but ancient history to others – Norman Motley, founder of the Othona Community, wrote a letter. This is now included in the book “Norman Motley – Letters to a Community 1970-1980.” That letter described the challenge of the time as: “to learn to *live*; to reject the philosophy of hopelessness; to counteract the hatred of our national and international life.” He was referring to the considerable improvements in the preceding 25 years, to ecumenical relations. Was he right to believe, as he wrote then, that Othona’s task in such relations was “nearly over?” Or are there other challenges in the life and worship of the many bodies of Christians, which are not yet resolved? Othona welcomes people of all faiths and none, yet as a Christian community we do rather lack that dynamic mix that might include more evangelical churches, people of Roman Catholic faith or of Orthodox practice. On top of that, and fifty years after Norman’s contemplating true ecumenism at Othona, we have seen such a change the relationship between Christianity and other faiths, as the ethnic and cultural diversity of our wider community has burgeoned, that Othona may barely dare to think that our Community is at the cutting edge of building God’s kingdom on earth. Still we seek to turn hopelessness to hope, hatred to love: right here and world-wide.

Communication is a vital aspect of the life of the Othona Community. We are a dispersed Community, with a few people living, working and managing each Centre, Essex and Dorset, many people who volunteer or visit regularly, and yet more whose lives have been touched by the spirit of Othona although they are rarely if ever able to visit a Centre, remaining connected as Members, Friends or through informal networks. But one aspect of modern living is instant communication. Words are spoken, sometimes with little thought – writing so often means a quick tap on the keyboard, lost by tomorrow – and quantities of pictures are taken with no prospect of sharing them in an album for the great grandchildren. What our founding members did for Othona is fairly well captured by word of mouth, writings and quantities of photographs, giving a sense of foundation to what we are now building. Looking back fuels discussions in the present, which give hope for the future.

Now, more than ever, Othona is welcoming a diverse range of people through our sense of the need to work – yes, actually do something – to promote global climate justice. From 28th April to 1st May Othona is hosting the second Essex Green Weekend, with activities for people of all ages, and a chance to connect with like-minded people making a difference which ripples from Essex in words, music and action. The Othona programme is on the Othona Essex website or available locally as a leaflet. There is something for everyone, from quieter retreats to that ever-lively February half-term. Many people who visit Othona are inspired to volunteer – if that is you, please do contact one of the team for a chat about what you have to offer on a one-off or regular basis: cleaning, cooking, gardening, maintenance, being there to welcome groups, a bit of admin or whatever skills you would like to share – while you enjoy a cuppa and a natter.

Local day visitors are welcome but best contact the team first, particularly if you would like a meal.

Othona is accessed through East Hall Farm, East End Road, Bradwell on Sea, through the wind-powered gate: don’t forget to collect your exit token from the office. The Manager/Wardens are Debbie and Richard Sanders, supported by team members Phil Martin, Peter and Chris. The Website is www.othonaessex.org.uk. Email bradwell@othona.org. Telephone 01621 776565.