

**Some events coming very soon:  
Big Green Day**

Transition MK will be exhibiting at this *Parks Trust* event on **Saturday April 18th** at the Stadium MK from 1.00-3.00pm.



For the Transition movement this marks the beginning of a week of events in our region organised by the Transition groups in Berkhamsted, Tring and Milton Keynes.

The main event will be in Berkhamsted on Sunday 19th – there will be workshops at various locations in the town in the morning, and in the afternoon, at the Centenary Theatre, the founder of the Transition Movement - Rob Hopkins - will be present.

The week culminates in an Eco fair at Tring on Saturday 25th April from 10.00-4.00 at the Victoria Hall in Akeman Street.

More details at:  
<http://transitionberkhamsted.org.uk/roadshow2015/>

**Contemplative Activists:  
living in God’s heart for justice today**

This is a CRES (Christian Rural and Environmental Studies) Day conference at Ripon College Cuddesdon nr. Oxford, on **Saturday 25th April 2015** from 10.00am-4.00pm.

The speakers are Greg and Ruth Valerio.  
Greg will begin the day by looking at spirituality, and particularly Monastic and Celtic spirituality. Ruth will then

explore an area that is one of her key interests - food and faith. Finally Greg will return after lunch to tell us about his work in Fairtrade gold and jewellery.

For more details and booking, download the details here:  
<http://www.jri.org.uk/events/contemplative-activists/>

**MK Smart**

**Workshop invitation: Environmental Monitoring**

The Open University is running a project as part of the 'MK:Smart Cities Initiative' to investigate the potential for using a range of 'sensor devices' to monitor the environment, for example the recording of temperature, soil moisture, sounds, light levels etc. Local residents, e.g. gardeners, conservationists and wildlife enthusiasts – are invited to help with this research project.

There will be a couple of workshops at the OU in Milton Keynes at which some of the technology will be demonstrated, and participants will be asked to provide feedback on the types of information of interest to them.

You are welcome to attend one or both of the workshops:  
Workshop 1: **30th April 10am-2.30 pm**. The Open University, Milton Keynes.

Workshop 2: June 2015 – date to be confirmed

The workshops will include brief presentations to explain the project background, demonstrations and the chance to try out some of the technology, and activities to develop ideas for further investigation. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

To join in you need to book in advance by completing the short registration form at:  
[www3.open.ac.uk/forms/environmentalmonitoring1/](http://www3.open.ac.uk/forms/environmentalmonitoring1/)

**Nature’s sights - the Severn Bore**

The River Severn has the second largest tidal range in the world. This, combined with the funnel-like narrowing of the river as it nears the sea, serves to create some spectacular tidal bores. There are 8 tidal bores occurring in the UK but none as large as that on the Severn.

Although there are up to 260 bores a year only a few are ‘5 star’ bores which attract surfers and spectators in considerable numbers, as we discovered at our arrival at Minsterworth church on the morning of February 21st.

We found a spot on the outer bend of the river and patiently waited for the bore to arrive (although times are given it can arrive early or late depending on weather conditions at sea). We watched the river wind its way gently towards the sea, straining our eyes and ears for the first sight of the bore. Suddenly the river seemed to bend, twist and rise in the distance which was quite disconcerting at first! Before our eyes the river simply began to flow in the opposite direction, headed up by a

bank of water around a metre high. As it rounded the bend a great wave swept up the outer bank splashing anyone standing too close.



At great speed the water rushed to us and beyond, swirling and churning up the bank and bringing with it a considerable amount of sticks and other debris carried in from the beach and banks further up the river. The river immediately began to increase in height and roots we'd been able to see clearly a minute before were soon well underwater.

The bore runs for around 33km (though not all at such speed or intensity) and we were told that at Minsterworth the river runs 'backwards' and at increased depth for about an hour.

It was an exciting spectacle as well as intriguing and is certainly a visit we'll look to repeat.

Lisa Pye

## Green Christian workshop

Members of Green Christian met in London on a late January Saturday for a workshop entitled: ***Housing and Energy – fairness for all.***

The guest speakers were Ann Morisy, PSALM<sup>1</sup> Development Officer, and Angus Hanton, co-founder of Intergenerational Justice Foundation.

<sup>1</sup>Project for Seniors and Lifelong Ministry

Ann described how she is now contributing to the housing crisis by remaining in a home much larger than she now needs and how she has become a beneficiary of the enormous increase in house values in the London area which now leaves her with a feeling of guilt.

Angus set us thinking about some different approaches to the way housing is managed in the UK, including what approaches might help younger people who are currently squeezed out of the housing market.

We had plenty of time in discussion groups chewing over a number of questions.

We also played an Intergenerational Game called *Born Again* in which we were invited to consider in which year we would like to have been born were we given the chance to have that choice! The last part of the afternoon consisted of a panel discussion with questions answered by the speakers.

It was really good having the chance to spend a day focusing on issues of intergenerational justice and listening to speakers who had expertise in this area. Poverty inequality and housing both appear in the top ten issues facing Britain in the run up to the election according to a recent Ipsos MORI poll.

A full report of the day is available at

<http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/archives/8555>

## Nature's sights - the Eclipse

Conditions were perfect in Bletchley for seeing this recent spectacle. It was one of those mornings when it looked as if the sun might burn off the cloud cover as it rose higher in the morning sky. And just as I was anticipating the possibility, I looked out of the window and there it was!

Shortly afterwards I was out walking the dog and was able to capture the second photo, hampered somewhat by my companion who didn't find anything of interest to sniff at that point and just wanted to carry on with his walk!



8.40am



8.55am

## Shale Gas and Fracking

This Future Learn course was provided by the University of Nottingham and ran for four weeks in February. I signed up for this to try and learn enough about the subject for myself to enable me to judge whether the opposition to the technology, particularly from environmentalists, was justified and, on the other hand, whether the government's "dash for gas" was wise.

In **Week 1** we learned how the process actually works and what the experiences of it have been in the USA.

In **Week 2** we explored likely future energy demand, the question of energy security, and the contribution shale gas may make to both of these. We also looked at the economics and whether the resulting gas is likely to prove more or less expensive than the gas we currently use.

In **Week 3** we looked at the environmental consequences of shale gas production, including the risks of earthquakes, water contamination, leakage of methane, the requirement to consume a large quantity of water in the process itself, and the overall impact on greenhouse gas emissions compared with the alternatives.

Finally in **Week 4** we learned about regulatory issues and the question of how to engage with the public and local communities affected by shale gas exploration.

## Is Shale Gas exploration a necessary solution for the UK in the medium term?

Some projections of energy requirements in the next 40 years are extremely challenging. Whereas we may find zero carbon energy solutions in the longer term it is quite difficult to believe that renewables alone could provide us with enough energy in the medium term, eg in the 2020s.

There is an interesting interactive tool, where you can investigate different options for reducing our emissions by 80% by 2050, at the following link:

<http://my2050.decc.gov.uk/>

Reducing the UK's dependence on imported energy would, however, be a positive benefit.

## What about the health and environmental risks?

It seemed to me that with the benefit of the UK's robust regulatory culture the risk of water contamination is low and I found myself wondering how some of the other risks (health and environmental) compare with the risks of other activities that we take for granted. For example one course participant commented that the health and environmental problems associated with the private motor car (pollution and accidents) are relatively high, but the benefits are judged by most to be worth it...

It was also pointed out that whilst fracking consumes a great deal of water, more is used for keeping golf courses looking nice (not sure whether that was in the UK or globally)!

## Could shale gas provide us with cheap energy?

It appears that we don't know how cheap or expensive the gas is likely to be until drilling commences. Experience in the USA has varied considerably from site to site and the geology in the UK isn't the same.

Of course, whilst cheap energy is seen by many as very desirable, a downside is that cheap energy reduces the imperative for being careful about how much we use... and, in any case, cheap energy isn't a human right.

## Did the course make me change my mind?

One participant, who started out opposed to fracking and was hoping to dispel their own NIMBYism and lack of critical thinking, commented that they had become more opposed as each week of the course had passed. That comment drew a large number of "likes" from other participants. However others found that they had become more favourably disposed towards the technology by the end of the course.

My position has not changed very much, remaining generally but not strongly against. For me the most important negatives are:

- 1) that the pursuit of fracking will distract attention and resources away from:
  - ◆ developing renewables (and the energy storage solutions that would make them more attractive);
  - ◆ the development of CCS technologies that would reduce the impact of continued fossil fuel burning;

- ◆ energy reduction measures;
- ◆ resolving the problem of nuclear waste.

- 2) that greenhouse gas emissions from the production of energy will be higher in the medium term as a result.

If anyone would like to experience this (free) course themselves, it is to be re-run in September. In the meantime a good summary of many of the issues are explored in a recent paper by the John Ray Initiative, which also provides some ethical and biblical perspectives as well:

<http://www.jri.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/Weaver-JRI-Briefing-30.pdf>

## East-west rail progress

Vegetation clearance has been taking place along the section westwards from Bletchley. The current work also includes drainage improvements and the drilling of boreholes for geotechnical surveys.



Clearance work at the old station near Swanbourne

The work at the western end of the line is progressing swiftly. A new Oxford Parkway station is under construction at Water Eaton, and the new spur at Bicester has had the rails laid. Train services from Oxford Parkway to Marylebone via Bicester are scheduled to commence in only six months time.

For the section between Bletchley and Bedford, public consultations on the 33 crossings are to take place between April and June.

Full details of recent developments are available in the recent newsletter which is available at the link below:

<http://www.eastwestrail.org.uk/sites/default/files/east-west-rail-march-2015.pdf>

## And finally...

A very happy Easter to everyone reading this!

David Miller  
2nd April 2015