

*Exploration*  
*into*  
*Spirit:*

*A Power Greater than ...*

*The History of the first 50 years of the  
Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research  
Centres and Trust: origins, development  
and vision*



*3rd edition, 2020*

*by*

*John Franklin*

The Alister Hardy Trust

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The illustration on the title page is taken from the Megalithic Spirals in the Inner Chamber of Newgrange in the Boyne Valley to the west of Dublin. Three lines form three double spirals, two of them an S-scroll, each centre connected to the others by one path and exiting to either side of the other. This has been the logo of the Alister Hardy Trust since 1996.

Dedicated to the memory of  
Sir Alister Hardy FRS  
and to the work of the  
Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centres<sup>1</sup>

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1 At the time of publication, the AHRERCs are located at the University of Wales Trinity St David, Lampeter and at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln.

## Acknowledgements:

The first acknowledgement must be to Anne Watkins, the Alister Hardy Trust & Society's former Librarian, who first suggested the idea that a History of the early days of the Centre be compiled. It developed into a written history, which became more detailed – and the initial idea of something spontaneous and fresh perhaps might have been lost. If so, the fault lies entirely with the author. The idea, though, of personal memories and reflections, is a good one.

**Readers are invited to send the Trust any memories and reflections they may have of Sir Alister Hardy and of the RERU and later RERC/AHRERC.<sup>2</sup>**

Thanks to Anne Watkins again, and to David Greenwood in Lampeter for giving me access to early AHRERC archive material and to Jean Matthews for helping in the research; and thanks, also, to Peggy Morgan, Oliver Knowles and Marianne Rankin for their comments and encouragement. Thanks, too, to Bronwen Viscountess Astor, Prof Paul Badham, Dr Gregory Barker, Prof June Boyce-Tillman, Ruth Brinkman, Andy Burns, Michael Hardy, Dr David Hay, Belinda Farley, Prof Leslie Francis, Dr David Greenwood, Dr Crawford Knox, Marian MacPolin, Jean Matthews, Patricia Murphy, Edward Robinson, Jonathan Robinson, Mike Rush, Prof Bettina Schmidt, John Tomlinson, Robert Waite, Polly Wheway, Jane Winship and Wendy Xerri, for kindly looking through earlier editions and this edition incorporating the period 2014 to 2019: I am most grateful for their material, comments and corrections. My thanks, too, to Anne Watkins for proofreading the first edition and Marianne Rankin for editing all three editions of this book and proofreading the second and third editions, and to Prof Leslie Francis and Prof Jeff Astley for editing the last three chapters and Bibliography of this edition.

Thanks are due, also, to all who supplied photographs; including the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter; Anne Watkins; Michael Hardy for Sir Alister's sketch of 24 Holywell Street on p. 7; Hargave Hands for the cartoon of Sir Alister Hardy in the RERC archive, reproduced on p. 8; the Newsquest Oxfordshire/The Oxford Times for permission to reproduce the picture of Edward Robinson on p. 10; to the Prison Phoenix Trust for the picture of the sculpture of the sculpture 'Kenneth – being free', reproduced on p. 24; and Andy Burns, who provided the pictures celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the AHRERC and Trust and the cover picture of this book..

Last but not least, I would like to express my special thanks to my wife, Andrée, for putting up with long periods of neglect whilst I was engaged in researching, writing and updating this history.

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<sup>2</sup> Send to: Rhonda Riachi, Editor, *De Numine*, Alister Hardy Trust, The Library, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 7ED.



*Sir Alister Hardy, FRS.  
Founder of the Religious Experience Research Unit  
at Manchester College, Oxford*

**Objectives**

- *To Promote research into religious and spiritual experience and publish the useful results of such research for public benefit;*
- *To advance the education of the public in religious and spiritual experience, its nature, function, frequency and purpose.*



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## FORWARD

The patient and exacting work of the historian is important not only to curate the past, but also to help to shape the future. The work of Sir Alister Hardy has been of importance and significance to John Franklin over many years. John has served as a wise Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust, and as an inspirational and long-serving Secretary of the Alister Hardy Society which he helped to establish. In this third edition of his 'History of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre and Society', John has chronicled Sir Alister's achievements and legacy from the founding of the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1969 to the fiftieth celebration of this initiative in 2019. In this third edition John also offers his own vision for the future direction of Sir Alister's initiative.

Sir Alister Hardy transformed the landscape of scientific research within the field of religious and spiritual experience. The importance of Sir Alister Hardy's contribution was appropriately and properly recognised in 1985 by the award of the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. At the heart of Sir Alister Hardy's endeavour was the establishment of an Archive of Religious and Spiritual Experience promoted by response to what has become known as the 'Hardy Question', generally expressed in the form: Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?

A major achievement of the Alister Hardy Trust, together with the support of the Society, is that fifty years later Sir Alister Hardy's original accounts are safely preserved within the Archive, housed on the Lampeter campus of the University of Wales Trinity St David, and that this Archive is being routinely updated by new accounts.

Alongside Sir Alister Hardy's major initiative and legacy, John Franklin's work as historian provides a lasting legacy for future generations who wish to understand the trajectory of achievement over the past fifty years. In the foreword to the first edition of John Franklin's history, published in 2006, my good friend and colleague, Professor Paul Badham, then serving as Director of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre at Lampeter, wrote as follows:

I am delighted to commend this fascinating personal account of the history of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, Trust and Society. John Franklin, who has served the Society well ... has used both written records and his own personal knowledge to give a detailed and thorough account of our history.

In my foreword to the second edition of John Franklin's history, written in August 2014 in my capacity as Chair of the Trust, I wanted to echo and to reinforce Paul's words. I am now pleased to do so again six years later during August 2020. At the same time I want to express my personal thanks to John for all that he has done in his former role as Secretary of the Society, in his continuing contribution as a Trustee, in his unstinting support for the Research Centre in Lampeter, and here especially for his dedication to the exacting task of bringing to fruition his account of the 'first fifty years' of Sir Alister Hardy's initiative begun in Manchester College, Oxford in 1969. May this account of the first fifty years inspire the success of the next fifty years.

Leslie J. Francis  
Chair, The Alister Hardy Trust  
The Feast of the Transfiguration, 2020

## PREFACE

### What is religious, or spiritual, experience?

*"As far back as I can remember I have never had a sense of separation from the spiritual force I now choose to call God ... From the age of about 6 to 12 in places of quiet and desolation this feeling of 'oneness' often passed to a state of 'listening'. I mean by 'listening' that I was suddenly alerted to something that was going to happen. What followed was a feeling of tremendous exaltation in which time stood still." [0786]*

*"I heard nothing, yet it was as if I were surrounded by golden light and as if I only had to reach out my hand to touch God himself who was surrounding me with his compassion." [0183]*

*"It seemed to me that, in some way, I was extending into my surroundings and was becoming one with them. At the same time I felt a sense of lightness, exhilaration and power as if I was beginning to understand the true meaning of the whole Universe." [0712]*

*"One lovely sunny day I looked out of the window at a poplar tree in fresh green leaf. The wind sighed gently through the leaves, causing them to tremble. As I stood fascinated, I experienced the thought of old, that tree is old and I was identified with it. A sense of timelessness enveloped me, as though I had lived from the beginning...." [2505]*

*"I get this overwhelming feeling even when seeing trees and fronds on television. As though the aeons of time are all melted into Time itself." [2505]*

*"Another time I awoke from a sound sleep and had an overwhelming feeling of a presence in the room. The atmosphere felt very oppressive. I felt a strong sense of fear and forced myself to get up and put on the lights. I went from room to room and there was no living person there but this feeling persisted strongly. Again I resorted to prayer and gradually fell off to sleep with a rosary in my hand." [0038]*

*"I find it difficult to describe my experience, only to say that it seems to be outside of me and enormous and yet at the same time I am part of it, everything is. It is difficult to describe, but in some way because of this feeling I feel united to all people, to all living things. Of recent years the feeling has become so strong that I am now training to become a social worker because I find that I must help people in some way. I feel their unhappiness as my own." [0663]*

The term, 'religious experience' means different things for different people. For some it might be a very relevant term – a feeling, maybe, that they have had a deeply moving experience of God, reinforcing their faith, or transforming their thinking in a deeply religious way. For some it might mean an experience in association with a church or a formal 'religion'. For others, every experience might be a religious experience. Some people might feel that these experiences have nothing to do with God or religion. For some, again, the very words 'religion' and 'religious' might be anathema, though they may admit to having had a deeply 'spiritual experience' and see this as a matter of importance.

This has given rise to complications and a problem regarding the words 'Religious Experience' in the title of the Research Centre, and in the understanding of its work. Edward Robinson, a former Director of the Centre, was to complain that the term 'religious experience' had never been defined, finding this of some embarrassment (see p. 18, also p. 49).

Definitions are difficult and could be detrimental in that they might exclude possible relevant examples. Sir Alister Hardy, if not defining 'religious experience', offered a definition of the word 'religion' based on the Concise Oxford Dictionary (6<sup>th</sup> edition). The first, the common, definition, '*Particular system of faith and worship (the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, religion)*', he said he might use at times; but he mainly used the second definition, '*Human recognition of superhuman controlling power and esp. of a personal God or gods entitled to obedience and worship; effect of such recognition on conduct and mental attitude.*' For 'superhuman' he preferred the word 'transcendental' – as he preferred 'para-physical' to 'supernatural' – regarding "all these phenomena as part of the natural world."<sup>1</sup> Recognising that some people might be misled by the term 'religious experience', he qualified it, expressing his interest not only in the dramatic isolated experiences but also "in accounts of that continuing sense of spiritual awareness which many people feel makes a difference to their lives."<sup>2</sup> David Hay preferred the term 'spiritual' to 'religious', and Peggy Morgan gave as her definition, "religious experience is ordinary experience in depth." Peggy makes the important point that, in research terms, not using too tight a definition allows people to offer descriptions of what they count as religious experiences without being constrained.

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<sup>1</sup> Hardy, 1979, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hardy, 1979, p. 19.

Marianne Rankin in her Occasional Paper, *An Introduction to Religious Experience*,<sup>3</sup> says, “The experience may be thought of as being an experience which points beyond ordinary life, and which is taken by the experient to have spiritual or religious significance. Whatever form it takes, such an experience seems to give an indication of a greater reality underlying the physical world of the senses.”

In this book the terms ‘spiritual’, ‘transcendental’, ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual/religious’ experience are used to cover the whole range of this form of human experience. These can interconnect and may seem interchangeable one with the other, as well as offering important ‘differences’. The distinctions which different people put in their own understanding and interpretation of these words need to be recognised.

\* \* \*

Sir Alister was both a scientist and a deeply religious man – religious in the sense that he firmly believed in the existence of a “something” other, God, not “a deity with an anthropomorphic image, but an ‘extra-sensory’ contact with a Power which *is greater than, and in part lies beyond, the individual self...*” with which we can “have a feeling ... of a *personal* relationship, and we can call it God”.<sup>4</sup> He himself was for much of his life a Unitarian, whose members “do not base their church life on the acceptance of particular creeds” but follow a liberal path, free from dogma and based upon a progressive theology, which sees value in freedom “to seek new truth wherever it may be found.”<sup>5</sup> Hardy valued that freedom. As a scientist,

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<sup>3</sup> Rankin, 2005, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series of Occasional Papers, No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Hardy, 1966, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *A Free Religious Faith*, Part 1 - summary report of the Commission of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (Lindsey Press, London, 1945). For many years Sir Alister attended the services at Manchester College. However, at some point after the founding of the RERU certain disagreements with one or two people at the College over some of the research work being done led to him stopping going to the services there, and he preferred then to worship alone at St. Giles church in north Oxford or at Little Binsey Church in Port Meadow. In the postscript to *The Divine Flame*, Hardy mentions that he was a Unitarian, but that his heart was in the Church of England. In the last few years of his life he lived at Old Headington, and often visited the Anglican church of St. Andrews for private prayer there.

he believed in the need to apply a rational and objective approach in particular to the study of what he called “the spiritual nature of man”<sup>6</sup>

Humankind has been having spiritual or religious experiences since the dawn of history, and they have been recorded in most civilisations up to and including the present. Surveys have shown that nearly half the adult population of Britain today believe that they have had some sort of transcendent or religious experience, such as awareness of a supernatural or paranormal presence or power, meaningful patterning of events, extra-sensory perception, feeling of guidance or answer to prayer.<sup>7</sup>

Sir Alister himself had had such experiences, and vowed to devote his life to attempting a reconciliation between the theory of evolution and people’s spiritual nature. This led him to a belief in the development of a “natural theology”. He says at the beginning of *The Divine Flame*, the second of his series of Gifford Lectures published in 1966, “I should..., as a naturalist, look at religious phenomena to see, from such a systematic study, if there was a reasonable hope of eventually constructing a natural theology based upon a more scientific foundation than hitherto.”<sup>8</sup> He was writing out of a deep concern for the struggle between the religious and non-religious conception of human life and destiny, and against the background of the decline of formalised religion. He believed human beings to be spiritual animals. He ruled out as false, the idea that science points to evolution as an entirely mechanistic process and disagreed with the belief that Freudian psychology had explained away the Divinity by the concept of the super-ego. He saw the need to show that he was right by providing empirical evidence. He looked to the development of a true science of theology, a “natural theology built as strictly as a science, which would have the same spiritual features that can be seen in all the great religions and lead to an experimental faith acceptable to all the people in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The title of his 1979 book. Hardy uses the word ‘man’ to include all humankind. At the time he wrote, this was commonly accepted terminology. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of feminism and the changing role of women in society, ‘man’ is no longer considered suitable as an inclusive term.

<sup>7</sup> Hay, 1990, Appendix ,Table 1, p. 79 – figure of 48% positive response in Britain to Hay and Heald/Gallup survey, 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Hardy, 1966, p 10.

<sup>9</sup> Hardy, 1966, p. 240.

This vision remained with him all his life. In *The Biology of God* he devotes a whole chapter to the concept of “An experimental faith”<sup>10</sup> and in the last chapter of *The Spiritual Nature of Man* he includes a short section on this<sup>11</sup>. In his last book, *Darwin and the Spirit of Man*, he returns to it again. He liked to think “that our studies at the Religious Experience Research Unit are not only helping, however modestly, to build up an academic knowledge towards better understanding of the spiritual nature of man, but they are, as I have suggested, also providing the evidence which, as it accumulates further in the future, may induce others to make the act of faith which is expressed in the words of Jesus as reported in the Gospels (Mark 7:7 and Luke 11:9): ‘Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find.’”<sup>12</sup>

This is the concept that started the hard work in the late 1960s of collecting and analysing accounts of contemporary spiritual/religious experience. ‘Data’, has been collected from other parts of the world, and is still coming in. The vision may change or be modified in the light of the data and the circumstances of the time – but the author believes it is important that it should be there. These transcendent, spiritual or religious experiences that so many people have, seem to have a purpose. They can not only prove to be of great benefit to the people concerned, changing, even transforming, their lives, but they can also induce concern for others and for the environment, with consequences which could benefit the whole of society. In this, they are extremely important. So, what is it all about? And what should we be doing about it?

The first thing, of course, is to understand the phenomenon, which can only be done by continuing careful academic study. Sir Alister Hardy started this by appealing for and collecting around 4,000 accounts of contemporary spiritual/religious experiences and attempting a classification of them. The Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centres, named after him, and today located at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, and at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, is continuing the work. The objectives of the Alister Hardy Trust, which has come into being since his death, are: “To make a disciplined and as far as possible scientific investigation into the nature, function and frequency of reports of transcendent or religious experience and spirituality in the human species;

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<sup>10</sup> Hardy, 1975, pp. 224-233.

<sup>11</sup> Hardy, 1979, pp. 139-141.

<sup>12</sup> Hardy, 1984, p. 239.

to investigate their importance in what it means to be human and to disseminate its findings.” By ‘scientific’ is meant the collection, classification and comparison of material in a systematic manner.

This book traces the history of that endeavour from its inception to the present day. It is the story of the search and vision of a remarkable man, Sir Alister Hardy FRS, which was shared to varying degrees by others who joined him in his journey and venture. This third edition includes the material in the first two editions and takes the story forward.

Since then, more developments have taken place, including changes of staff; the demise of the Alister Hardy Society with its merger within a new constitution for the Alister Hardy Trust; all culminating, in 2019, in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the founding of Sir Alister’s Religious Experience Research Unit in 1969. The story, of course, goes on – continuing, interestingly, with Sir Alister Hardy’s original initiative being reimagined for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this book, the chapters have been reordered, the text revised and extended, and the bibliography, indexing and appendices have been brought up to date as at the time of publication.

This is the story of the people involved in the venture, of those who have given their stories to the Centre and of the researchers and academics with their various interpretations and perspectives have furthered our understanding of human spirituality. Such a ‘history’ cannot have a conclusion, nor an ending. The story will continue, there will inevitably be further administrative changes and new events recorded in the pages of the Alister Hardy Trust’s journal *De Numine*. Research will continue, with publication of books and papers, including in the online AHRERC *Journal for the Study of Spiritual and Religious Experience*. All this will be recorded in the papers and minutes of meetings of the Alister Hardy Trust.

One line of investigation which continues is into whether there might be a ‘common core’ to human spiritual/religious experience. Sir Alister referred to a “something – whether spiritual power, or God, working through us, or psychological motivation – here that would seem to be a very significant feature in the make-up of our species.” This he saw as “...the essence of what Aldous Huxley called *The Perennial Philosophy*.”<sup>13</sup> Robert Runcie, when Archbishop of Canterbury, in a Foreword to an Appeal launched by the Alister Hardy Research Centre in 1990, said, “If it can be shown that there is a ‘common core’ or ‘ultimate sameness’ to all religious experience, irrespective of creed, race or society, this could have profound

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<sup>13</sup> Hardy, 1975, p. 87.



implications for the evolution of common understanding across many of the current barriers which divide people in our world.”

This gives an interesting and important target at which to aim. Evidence from data gathered does seem to point this hypothesis: an exploration between 2002 and 2012 into the spiritual experience of people in a variety of countries and different cultures, outlined in Chapter 5 *Widening the Horizons*, embraced studies in China, Taiwan, Japan, Russia, Turkey India and Brazil, leading Prof Paul Badham to conclude, “It seems clear that there is indeed much common ground between religions at the experiential level... “What these various figures suggest is that a capacity for religious experience is part of humankind’s evolutionary heritage and represents a common human response to transcendent Reality.”<sup>14</sup> Might not this support the hypothesis that there could, indeed, be a ‘common core’ at the heart of human spirituality? Certainly it should help bring forward the better understanding that Robert Runcie hoped for – and contribute to the appreciation of the Global Ethic promulgated by Hans Küng, which affirms “a common set of core values found in the teachings of the religions” as forming “the basis of a global ethic”<sup>15</sup> – and maybe lead to the development of a natural theology and religion? We shall have to wait and see.

*John Franklin.*

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<sup>14</sup> Badham, 2012. ‘Researching Religious Experience from a Comparative Perspective: the Alister Hardy global project’, *Interreligious Insight*, Vol. 10 No. 2, December.

<sup>15</sup> See ‘The 1993 Declaration Towards a Global Ethic’, printed as the introduction to *A Global Ethic*, Ed. Hans Kung and Karl-Joseph Kuschel, SCM Press and Continuum 1993.



## 1. THE BEGINNING

It might be said that it all started in Alister Hardy's infancy and childhood. Stories of incidents in Hardy's early life; of encounters in nature, meaningful coincidences and synchronicities and the 'something' he felt influenced his life and to which he addressed thanks, faith and prayer are revealed in John Keeble's portrait of Sir Alister, *This Unnamed Something*,<sup>1</sup> and David Hay's more full, official, biography *God's Biologist: A Life of Alister Hardy*. In his autobiography, describing these experiences, Sir Alister wrote,

"From very early days I was a keen naturalist, and when out on country walks by myself looking for beetles and butterflies, I would sometimes feel a presence which seemed partly outside myself and curiously partly within myself. My God was never "an old gentleman" out there, but nevertheless was like a person I could talk to and in a loving prayer could thank him for the glories of nature that he let me experience."

Alister Clavering Hardy was born on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1896, the third son of a Nottingham architect. He was educated at Oundle where he specialised in science. Due to an eye defect, he was unable to participate in team sports, and was sent instead on long walks in the countryside to improve his natural history: and it was during these walks that he discovered that he was a naturalist and a nature mystic.<sup>2</sup>In 1914 he left Oundle, to go up to Exeter College at Oxford University to study Forestry, with a view to specialising in forest entomology. The outbreak of the First World War, however, interrupted his studies. Just before he left the university to join the army he made a vow that, if he lived through the war, he would do all he could to reconcile science and religion and to challenge the purely materialistic view of evolution with his own experience of what he could only call spirit. In his own words he wrote:

"During the term time I became more and more convinced of the importance of bringing about a reconciliation between evolution theory and the spiritual awareness of man. At the end of the term I made a most solemn vow; it wasn't actually in the form of a prayer, but I vowed to what I called God that if I should survive the war I would

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<sup>1</sup> Keeble, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Hardy, 1951.

devote my life to attempt to bring about such a reconciliation that would satisfy the intellectual world.”<sup>3</sup>

Alister spent his war years in the army, becoming an officer in the Northern Cyclist Battalion patrolling the coast of Lincolnshire on the lookout for espionage. After the war he took up his place at Oxford University, but this time changing to study Zoology, a course where he was able to study Darwinian evolutionary theory, an influential Oxford tutor at that time being Julian Huxley, whom he found particularly inspiring. It was here that he met his future wife, fellow student Silvia Garstang, daughter of the marine biologist Walter Garstang. Taking a Shortened Course with distinction (War Service Candidates), he graduated BA on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1920, and received his MA on 17<sup>th</sup> December 1921.

Following the advice of his future father-in-law, Walter Garstang, then Professor of Zoology at Leeds, to make a name for himself in orthodox science before pursuing the vow he had made, Alister devoted himself to a scientific career, achieving high distinction in the process. In 1920, he was awarded the Christopher Welch Biological Research Scholarship. He also won a scholarship to Naples to study marine biology, though cutting this short to take up the post of Assistant Naturalist in the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. In 1924 Alister became the Chief Zoologist on the Royal Research Ship *Discovery* expedition to cover the whaling grounds of the Antarctic in 1925-27 (pictures p. 5).

In September 1925 his attention was caught by a description of a religious experience in the press, and he wondered how often such reports occurred and went unnoticed. By use of a press-cutting agency in London he began to collect such material to study. The agency made a collection of about 2,000 letters, articles concerning faith, prayer and spiritual experience etc. from the daily newspapers. This collection is now lodged with the archives at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in Lampeter. Alister repeated this operation every ten years, until he could begin his real work of collecting personal experiences himself. He wrote that the possibility of investigating people’s transcendental experiences and building up a body of knowledge about them had been a lifelong interest.

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<sup>3</sup> Hay, 2011 p. 57.

On the return of the *Discovery*, Alister married Sylvia and, the next year, in 1928, he was appointed to the newly established Chair of Zoology and Oceanography at Hull University. In 1938 he gained an Oxford DSc., and later went on to receive the Scientific Medal of the Zoological Society in 1939 for his work on marine and aerial plankton. In 1940 he became a Fellow of the Royal Society; subsequently becoming a member of its Council and, from 1948 to 1949 a Vice-President. In 1942 he became Regius Professor of Natural History at the University of Aberdeen, going on from there to take up the post of Linacre Chair of Zoology and comparative Anatomy at Oxford University in 1946. In 1947 he was elected to the Council of the Royal Society; and in 1957, he received a knighthood for his services to the fishing industry. From 1959-75 he was Honorary President of Manchester College (now Harris Manchester College), Oxford. Recognised now as an eminent scientist, his association with Manchester College enabled him to launch his ideas relating to religious experience and to start the work that was to lead to the present Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre.

In 1951 Sir Alister gave the first indication of his plans for the eventual foundation of what was to become the Religious Experience Research Unit (RERU) and outlined the principles for the future research.<sup>4</sup> Three years later in an article published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*,<sup>5</sup> he reviewed the attempts to prove the existence of telepathy, including an account of some experiences in his own life during the First World War. He recalled meeting a local lady, when in Lincolnshire, who had demonstrated paranormal gifts, accurately describing what he had been doing that afternoon. A year later, meeting her again in London, she asked him what he had been doing, saying that she had 'seen' him with a large pink square in front of him – that afternoon he had been painting a sheet of cardboard with a vivid pink distemper.<sup>6</sup>

Sir Alister retired from the Linacre Chair in 1961, and in May of the following year, was invited by Aberdeen University to give the series of Gifford Lectures<sup>7</sup> for 1963 to 1965. The Gifford Lectureships were established at the end of the nineteenth century to 'promote and diffuse the study of Natural Theology in the widest sense of the term...' and to

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<sup>4</sup> *The Significance of Religious Experience* Hardy, Occasional Paper 12, 1997, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Hardy, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> Leytham 2004, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Lectures established by Lord Gifford, a Scottish Judge, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to promote Natural Theology.

enable distinguished scholars to contribute to the advancement of theological thought.

He devoted the first of this series of papers, later written up as *The Living Stream: A Restatement of Evolution Theory and its Relation to the Spirit of Man* [Hardy 1965], to the evolution of humankind in two streams, a physical stream of bio-chemical evolution, and a stream of “something more” which he believed linked natural theology to the biological system. Whilst *The Living Stream* is essentially a biological discussion, Sir Alister, who did not think that a materialistic concept of evolution was the last word on the subject, said that he introduced natural theology as “concerning a Theism derived empirically from the study of nature, man and human history.”<sup>8</sup>

In the second series of lectures, delivered in April and May of 1965 and published under the title, *The Divine Flame: An Essay Towards a Natural History of Religion*, Sir Alister argued further that the modern Darwinian position does not necessarily point to a materialistic interpretation of the process, but that evolution might also include the element of spiritual or religious experience. In this book he set out his hopes of setting up a unit at Manchester College to gather and study accounts of religious experience, in order to provide a scientific basis for a natural theology.

The origins of the study of spiritual and religious experience, however, go back, as Sir Alister acknowledged, to the work of Edwin Starbuck in America (*Psychology of Religion*, 1899); the Gifford Lectures of William James published in 1902 as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*; James H. Leuba, A. Paulain (*Des Grâces d’Oraison*, 1901 – translated as *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, 1910) and Evelyn Underhill (*Mysticism*, 1911).<sup>9</sup> The beginning, though, might be said to be the emergence of human-kind’s ‘spiritual’ awareness millennia ago, and the origin of religion.<sup>10</sup>

In 1963 Sir Alister retired as Director of the Department of Zoological Field Studies at Oxford, retaining the title of Emeritus Professor of Zoology, to commence his study of religious experience.

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<sup>8</sup> Hardy, 1965, pp. 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Hardy, 1979, pp. 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> David Hay a former Director of the AHRC, mentions discovery, in 1939 at Monte Circeo of evidence of a Neanderthal funeral in Northern Iraq 60,000 years ago indicated religious tenderness [Hay, 1990, p.6 & Hay 1982, p 12].



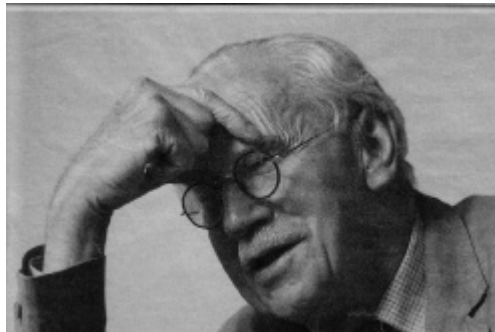
*RRS (Royal Research Ship) Discovery in the Antarctic*



*Crew of RRS Discovery, 1925-27 expedition (see p. 2) - Alister Hardy second from right, second row, facing the camera.*



*Sir Alister Hardy (second from left) on MRT  
(Marine Research Trawler) Explorer, 1956.  
Picture taken by David Hay (see p. 11)*



*Sir Alister Hardy, 1973 Reproduced by kind  
permission of the Radio Times (see p. 12)*



## 2. THE EARLY YEARS (1966-1985) AND FOUNDING OF RERU (1969)

In 1966 Sir Alister felt ready to inaugurate, with very little funding, the Religious Experience Research Unit (RERU). Its aims were the collection, classification and comparison of accounts of contemporary religious experiences. In 1968 he began to raise money with lecture tours in the United Kingdom and America, raising just over £10,000; and that summer he asked Manchester College, of whose Council he was a member, if he might have two rooms there in which to begin his researches. The College authorities placed at Sir Alister's disposal one of their houses in the centre of Oxford, 24 Holywell Street, on the corner with Mansfield Road, at an economic rent. Although the upper rooms were in rather a dilapidated state, Belinda, his daughter, remembers him proudly showing her around, very pleased with the colourful haircord carpets he had chosen, and which she thought very nice, too! (A plaque on a side door now names the corner property 'Alister Hardy House'.)



24 Holywell Street, Oxford  
sketch by Sir Alister Hardy

The initial research was based on appeals for accounts of religious experience, first in the religious press, which drew a poor response (200 replies), and then in 1969 in the national press, beginning with the *Guardian* and subsequently in *The Times*, *Observer* and *Daily Mail*, which was much more successful, leading to more than 3,000 replies. The question Sir Alister asked, and which has subsequently become known as

the 'Hardy question', was "Have you ever experienced a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" The Unit also printed and widely circulated its own special appeal entitled *Research into Religious Experience – How You Can Take Part*, which gave answers to certain queries and criticisms about what the Unit was doing and emphasised that the Unit was not concerned only with the more isolated exceptional experiences, but also with less dramatic, continuous awareness of a power or presence.

Geoffrey Leytham<sup>1</sup> records the holding of a two-day symposium in March 1969 organised by the Centre for Spiritual and Psychological Studies on the theme, *Is a scientific approach to the study of religious experience a possible or valid conception and could it lead to a new framework of belief?*

It was noted at the symposium that: "Professor Sir Alister Hardy in his Gifford Lectures has expressed the belief that Darwinian evolution is not contrary to the idea of the development of the spiritual side of man's nature and goes on to consider whether a systematic study of religious experience using the methods of both social anthropology and psychology could provide evidence for a transcendental reality." Sir Alister invited comments on his project. He described how the Unit would work, saying, "very humbly, I am trying to follow in the footsteps of William James."

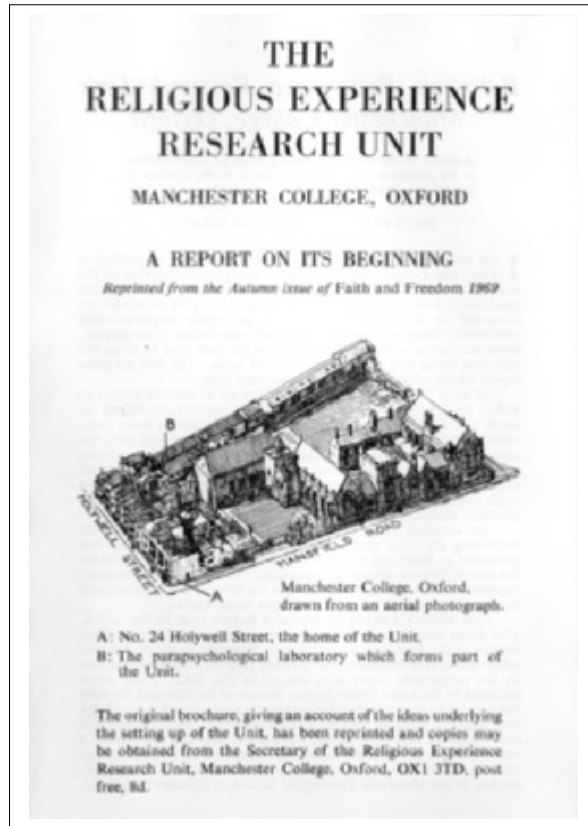


Shortly after the symposium, the Religious Experience Research Unit was formally established. Plans for the initial programme of research were outlined in a lecture Sir Alister gave at the Royal Institute in 1969. Reports on the progress of the work were published each year in *Faith & Freedom*,

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<sup>1</sup> Leytham, 2004, pp. 28-29. In his article, Leytham also recalls that at this symposium, Sir Alister, in his opening remarks, reviewing what he said in his Gifford Lectures, had pointed to the inquisitive nature of birds and mammals: "... if they find some way of life that seems advantageous to them, they may adopt it, and the new habit may spread by being copied, just as we have seen the tits opening the tops of milk bottles and seen this new practice spread right across Europe." His observation in this respect sparked the above cartoon.

a journal founded in 1947 by former theological students at Manchester College.<sup>2</sup>



Generous support came in from The Hon. Robert Wills, who had founded the Farmington Trust. He seconded from his staff and paid the salary of Timothy Beardsworth, who helped Sir Alister for a year to get the

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<sup>2</sup> Hardy, 1969-75, & Robinson, 1976-8 – Cover of first report above reproduced by kind permission of Harris Manchester College (note: 8d, pre1970s sterling currency: 12d = 1 shilling; 20 shillings = £1).

work started. Timothy had read Classics at University College, Oxford, taking a double first, and was concerned with the philosophy of religion. Subsequently, Robert Wills gave a grant of £2,500 for seven years from the Broadfield Trust. This was later increased – and other generous grants were received from the Dulverton, Hibbard, Instone Bloomfield, Moorgate, Phyllis and the Spalding Trusts. A large number of donations were also received from the general public, either as seven-year covenants or single donations, these averaging some £1,500 a year over the first eight years of operation. One early donor, Mrs Constance Ernest, who contributed an important account of her own religious experiences and had great faith in what was being attempted, left a legacy of £2,000 when she died during the first year of the Unit's work.

In 1970 Sir Alister appointed Edward Robinson, a botanist and educationalist, to be his deputy. Edward had read Classical Mods and Greats at Oxford, going on to hold a variety of educational posts in England and Africa. In a varied life, he had spent 15 years on botanical exploration in Zambia and other central African countries, and had published a number of studies and monographs on the Tropical African *Cyperocege* (a form of sedge).



*Edward Robinson. Mav 1977*

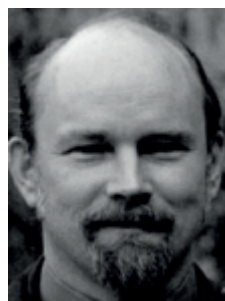
Edward came from a distinguished family. His maternal grandfather had been principal of St Edmund's Hall, Oxford and his father a canon of Canterbury Cathedral where he, and his older brother, the controversial theologian John A T Robinson (1919 –1983), Bishop of Woolwich and author of *Honest to God*, were born. Edward had worked on the *Flora of Tropical East Africa* as Senior Scientific Officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Sir Alister had met Edward the previous year, 1969, when visiting St. Mary's College at Cheltenham, to give a talk to publicise the RERU. Edward at the time was a lecturer in Divinity there. He recounts that Sir Alister mentioned to him that he was thinking of employing someone to work with him. Edward was not interested himself then as, he said, it seemed to him rather an eccentric idea to study human experiences in the same way as one studies plankton or plants. However, after some exchange of

correspondence and a visit to Oxford, he found himself making the decision to join Sir Alister, though still thinking it rather peculiar, and having doubts about the direction of the work. Sir Alister was particularly interested in the possibility of Edward making a 'scientific' taxonomy of collected experiences, but, as became apparent later, Edward was more interested in the qualitative, interview based style of research.

Also in 1970, Brian Carter, newly graduated from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster, joined the Unit for a year. He was followed in 1971, again for one year, by Michael Walker, who was a former Oxford Zoology student of Sir Alister and who combined a naturalist's approach with a keen interest in the study of religious experience. Later Timothy Beardsworth returned to examine certain kinds of visionary, ecstatic and sensory experiences (see page 14). In early 1971 Joan Crewdson, who had been interested in Sir Alister's research project from its inception in 1969, began work as Hibbert Trust Research Fellow linked to the Unit. Her project was an Oxford BD thesis (awarded in 1973) entitled *The meaning of transcendence for an understanding of personal being*. Other early researchers included Vita Toon, an Oxford graduate in theology who, from 1970 to 1975 did valuable work as Curator of Records, and Carolyn Wilde, a philosopher from Cambridge and London Universities. In November 1972 a second two-day symposium was held to report on the progress of the Unit and to invite comments.

Another researcher at this time was David Hay, lecturer in Biology in the Department of Education at Nottingham University. David, who was later to become Director of the Centre, had met Sir Alister when an undergraduate at the University of Aberdeen reading Zoology. During the summer of 1956, he had worked with Sir Alister on the Marine Research Trawler *Explorer* (picture, p. 6), and at that time they had discussed Hardy's ideas on the biological basis of religion.



David Hay 1985

A very interested visitor to RERU during this period was the Revd James Lawson. He had been ordained into the Canadian Presbyterian Church and was Senior Tutor and later Librarian at Emmanuel College, Toronto. James Lawson conducted a long correspondence with Sir Alister and Edward Robinson describing his mystical experiences and premonitions, discussing religious and philosophical matters and sending articles, slides and

paintings. He took great interest in the RERU and Sir Alister's publications, and was later to be the initiator of the recommendation of Sir Alister for the Templeton Prize (see page 23). Besides making several donations, he left RERU on his death, a handsome legacy of about £40,000.<sup>3</sup>

In August 1973 Sir Alister and the RERU were featured in a television programme entitled *A Scientist Looks at Religion*. The *Radio Times* issue of 2<sup>nd</sup> August, introducing the programme, included a one-and-a half page interview with Sir Alister at the RERU offices at 24 Holywell Street, headed, *The FRS who puts religion under his microscope* (picture p. 6). At that time, Sir Alister and his wife Sylvia were living happily in North Oxford, at 7 Capel Close, Summertown.



*7 Capel Close, Oxford, Sir Alister's home from 1964 to 1981*

It was a fruitful time academically. In 1973 Sir Alister, together with Robert Harvie and Arthur Koestler, published the book *The Challenge of Chance* (Random House, New York and Hutchinson, London), an account of an experiment in telepathy, which demonstrated support for the phenomenon that the thoughts of the participants are shared in a coincidental manner rather than by direct telepathy.

During 1974 David Hay began a study of the religious experience of post-graduate students in his department at the University of Nottingham, and following this he was invited to work with Sir Alister at the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College. David worked in co-

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<sup>3</sup> A portrait of Revd James Lawson, painted by his wife, Gracie Coombs, who was a distinguished painter of landscapes and impressionistic music interpretations, currently hangs in the Library at Lampeter.

operation with RERU on the national and in-depth survey work which provided initial empirical evidence in support of Sir Alister's hypothesis. In this he was supported by Ann Morisy, a sociologist and member of the staff of RERU, who later went to work for Hay in Nottingham.

Also in 1974, Fr Richard Woods, a Dominican from America completing a doctorate in religious studies at Loyola University, Chicago, joined the Unit for a while as a volunteer before resuming teaching at Loyola Institute of Pastoral Studies in 1978. In 1975 Sir Alister published *The Biology of God* (Jonathan Cape, London), in which he expressed his belief that a reconciliation of religion and the doctrine of natural selection could be achieved, and which covered the work of the first years of RERU's operation.

In the winter of 1975 the Unit mounted its first national survey of reports of religious experience in Great Britain, which David Hay directed from Nottingham University. Following Sir Alister's advocacy of the use of modern survey techniques to study the nature and frequency of these reports, David Hay and Ann Morisy in Nottingham carried out a survey of local residents on the streets of that city. In August 1976 a group of questions on religious experience was included in a National Opinion Poll (NOP) survey. David Hay later recorded that the Princeton Religion Research Centre, a subsidiary of Gallup Polls carried out a similar national survey in 1978. David was liaising, in the late 70s, with Andrew Greeley, William McCready and Norman Bradburn at the National Opinion Research Centre at the University of Chicago. Later, he liaised with George Gallup Jnr. and Gordon Heald of the Gallup organisation, to conduct surveys of spiritual and religious experience in Britain and America. Results showed that more than 36 per cent of the people approached by NOP in Britain attested to having had some kind of religious experience, compared with 35 percent in a similar poll in America in 1973.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Alister retired as Director of the Religious Experience Research Unit in February 1976, on his eightieth birthday, appointing Edward Robinson to take his place. An Advisory Research Council of eminent people from the academic world was established. Members included Prof Michael Argyle, Reader in Social Psychology and Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford University; Revd Prof P.R. Baelz; Revd Canon F.W. Dillistone; Revd Robert Silvey, founder and former Director of the BBC's Audience Research Unit; Prof Michael Findlow; Revd Prof J. Heywood Thomas and Edward Hulmes,

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<sup>4</sup> Hay, 1982, p. 123. See also Hay & Morisy, 1978.

with Sir Alister as Chairman and Edward Robinson as Secretary. It is to be noted that there were no women academics appointed at this time – a gender imbalance, which was to be corrected later on.

Mrs Pauline (Polly) Wheway was appointed as a part-time secretary at this time. Polly, after bringing up children for ten years, had learnt from an old colleague at New College just across the road from the Research Unit in Holywell Street, of this post being advertised. She applied and was appointed to work for Edward Robinson. She also worked with Sir Alister for a few months, for although he had retired as Director, he was still working on his projects and regularly coming into the Unit. She recalled with affection seeing him go off to the annual St Giles Fair in his panama hat and walking stick, to ride on the Ferris wheel, which he confided to her was his favourite fairground amusement.

Early under the Directorship of Edward Robinson a series of small volumes with the general heading '*Studies in Religious Experience*' were produced by the RERU. One of these was *The Original Vision* by Edward himself (1977), a study of the religious experiences of childhood, based on personal accounts and the use of a questionnaire. In 1977 Timothy Beardsworth published *A Sense of Presence: The phenomenology of certain kinds of visionary and ecstatic experience, based upon a thousand contemporary first-hand accounts*. This was a study of the first thousand accounts of religious experience to be collected by the Unit, under the headings of visual, auditory and tactile experiences, inward sensations and the sense of presence. The book was reprinted in 2006. 1977 also saw the publication of *This Time-Bound Ladder – Ten Dialogues on Religious Experience* edited by Edward Robinson; and the following year saw the appearance of *Living the Questions – Studies in the Childhood of Religious Experience* again edited by Edward Robinson, based on discussions with distinguished thinkers who themselves had had religious experiences; as well as *Tolerating the Paradoxical: A Scientific Approach to Religious Experience*, also by Edward Robinson. In addition, in 1978 Sir Alister Hardy's *The Divine Flame* was reprinted.

In 1978 Sir Alister visited a number of academic centres in the United States. He reported back in June that there had been a widespread and lively interest in the work of the Unit and his collection of experiences, particularly in Chicago, Boston and Princeton. He suggested very strongly the need for RERU to be associated more positively with some active centre of educational and/or theological study there.



The following year Sir Alister published *The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience* (Clarendon Press, 1979) based on the first eight years' work of the RERU. In this book Hardy pursued his earlier promise of developing a science of natural theology by a detailed examination of the first 3,000 accounts of spiritual and religious experience collected by the Unit. These he classified under 12 main headings and 85 sub-headings, looking at the common patterns of such experiences and their triggers, discussing the findings and their implications. Sir Alister stated that his endeavour here was "to explore the spiritual nature of man as systematically and objectively as possible", first "by building up a body of knowledge of actual experiences by collecting thousands of individual first-hand accounts ... looking at their dynamic patterns, antecedents, and consequences" and trying "to draw certain tentative conclusions."<sup>5</sup> The publication of this book gave rise to a certain amount of press interest, articles appearing in the *Oxford Times* (December 1979), the *Daily Mail* (December 1979) and early in 1980 two consecutive articles by Bernard Levin in the *Times*. The BBC broadcast an Everyman documentary on 16<sup>th</sup> December under the title, *It could happen to you*, which included interviews with Sir Alister, Edward Robinson, David Hay, and a number of members of the public who had sent in accounts of their experiences.

1979 also saw the publication of an in-depth report of the religious experiences of a group of post-graduate students at Nottingham University by David Hay (Hay 1979) and *The Common Experience* by J.M. Cohen and J-F Phipps (Rider, 1979). The latter compares some of the accounts in the RERU archive to similar mystical experiences recorded by ancient teachers of religion, mystical writers like William Blake and such thinkers as Aldous Huxley and Arthur Koestler.

However, despite these successes and the money brought in by Sir Alister, the useful assistance paid for by donors, and the very modest salaries of Edward Robinson and a secretary, there were worries over the financial viability of the Unit. Michael Hardy, Sir Alister's son, recalls such concerns right from the early years. By 1979 the financial standing of the RERU was so poor that concern was expressed by members of the Advisory Council over their liabilities should the Unit get into debt. Disappointed, Sir Alister dissolved the Council in April 1979, taking personal responsibility for any debts that might occur, although making it clear that he could not undertake to subsidise its future.

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<sup>5</sup> Hardy, 1979, p. 2.

A new Advisory Research Council was formed. It held its first meeting in February 1980 with Sir Alister as Chairman<sup>6</sup>, Edward Robinson, Secretary, and with Robert Silvey as the only other member of the old Council to retain his place. Other members included The Rt Revd George Appleton MA, former Archbishop of Jerusalem, Mrs Eileen Barker, Miss Thetis Blacker, Lord Bullock, David Hay from Nottingham and Miss Ann Morisy. Sir Alister was established as Chairman of Trustees and, as Vice-Chairman, Lord Bullock, who was Founding Master, St. Catherine's College, Oxford and Oxford University's first full-time Vice-Chancellor (1969-73). As David Hay was to recall later, Sir Alister and Lord Bullock, besides being fellow academics, were also fellow Unitarians, and a close friendship developed between the two men. Application was made to the Charity Commissioners for the registration of the Unit as an independent charity, and steps were taken to find a fundraiser. Projects under consideration then included 'The Religious Consciousness and the Secularisation of Religion' and 'Religious Education and the Visual Arts'.

The difficulties, however, continued. In June 1981 Sir Alister had asked Lord Bullock to take over the Chair. Unfortunately, his health was not good, and that year he moved from his home at Capel Close to Emden House, a retirement home in Headington, East Oxford.

In June of 1981 Dr Crawford Knox, an experienced administrator, was invited to join the Council. Crawford had worked in Whitehall for 26 years, retiring in 1976 from his post as Assistant Secretary at the then Department of the Environment. He had published a book on the philosophy of religion in 1956; and had an M.Phil in Philosophy. He was engaged in research at Oxford University in The Philosophy of Religion, for which he was awarded a D.Phil in 1983. After being introduced to Sir Alister and liking what the Religious Experience Research Unit was trying to do, he had volunteered his services.

The financial situation was worsening, and there was talk of finding an academic institute such as Westminster College, in Botley just outside Oxford, to take over the Unit, or for the Unit to cease operating and the records to be stored. Fortunately, there was a slight improvement in the financial position, helped by Edward Robinson volunteering to accept a 50% cut in salary and exploring other possibilities of payment. It was

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<sup>6</sup> The title 'Chairman' was used at this time, rather than the modern term 'Chair'. This changed around 1996 (noted on page 52).

resolved in September that, rather than being put on a strictly care-and-maintenance basis, the Unit should continue to operate for a further year on a much reduced budget with the Director (Edward Robinson) on half salary. Regretfully, the services of the secretary, Polly Whewey, who had worked for the Unit since 1976, had to be dispensed with. She left, she said, very sad at what was happening, but with memories of five very happy years at the Unit.

Edward Robinson, however, who was in negotiation with the Christian Education Movement (CEM) regarding a project for research into the religious experience of 16-19 year olds, managed to find funding for this project a year later, and it was agreed that he be seconded to CEM for three years whilst, at the same time, remaining as Director of the Unit.

But there were other difficulties and differences of opinion. June 1982 saw the resignation of Lord Bullock, and the resignation of Sir Alister as Chairman of the Advisory Research Council, his place being taken by Bishop Appleton. Edward Robinson recalls that even after Sir Alister had resigned as Director, he still continued to give suggestions, directions and criticism. There was a fundamental difference in their approaches to the study of religious experience. Sir Alister, a scientist, wanted all work to be quantitative, supported by figures and tables – Edward was more concerned with the qualitative aspects of the research and refused to say that everything should be done objectively and quantitatively. This led to friction between the two. Sir Alister agreed with Edward about the importance of studying the arts and the imagination and how creative activity was related to spiritual activity, with the growth of one being dependent on the growth of the other. Nonetheless, he insisted that figures were needed here, or else it was not valid research. This friction climaxed at the time Sir Alister was awarded the Templeton prize in 1985, and led eventually to Edward offering his resignation as Director in favour of David Hay, whom he thought was more in tune with Sir Alister's approach. Despite the friction, though, Edward wrote later, in a paper honouring the centenary of Sir Alister's birth (RERC Occasional Paper 10), "We may...have had our disagreements, but it is above all with great affection and gratitude that I look back on my association with Sir Alister – as must, I feel sure, all those who worked with him." He records the tremendous excitement that was felt when opening all the mail which came in as a result of the early appeals for accounts of religious experience.

Edward Robinson was also concerned over the title of *Religious Experience* for the Research Unit. Sir Alister had never defined the term

'religious experience', though he insisted that it was a valid term for a scientific research project. But how, Edward thought, can one conduct research into an area that had not been defined. He said he found this an embarrassment as, when asked, he could never give an answer. One of the first things he did as Director was to propose the dropping of the word 'Religious', suggesting instead the title of Alister Hardy Research Centre. Sir Alister, he recalls, did not demur at the new name – but he preferred to be known as the founder of the RERU and said that, if the name was to be changed, ideally it should be after his death. A criticism of the use of the word 'Religious' in the title of the Religious Experience Research Unit had been made earlier in December 1980, but the Research Council at that time agreed it should be retained, as any alternative, such as 'spiritual' would, in their opinion, be worse. The problem of name, and the question of definition of the word 'religious', were to crop up again later (see page 49).

In 1982 John Tomlinson, an ebullient Canadian, who himself had had a meaningful religious experience, joined the Unit as a full-time volunteer. John had first visited RERU in 1976 whilst on a trip from Cambridge and had been impressed at all the activity going on then, which had offered him the hope of learning more about religious experience. He, and people like him, he said, were very much in need of a framework within which to understand their experiences, which were not understood within the materialist worldview. He was disappointed to find only one member of staff, Edward Robinson, now working on his own in Oxford with the help of two volunteers, Joan Crewdson and Tanya Garland, a student of Theology, who assisted in reading, cataloguing and filing accounts under headings such as Health, Visions, Touch, etc. (this did not work all that well as many of the letters recorded multiple experiences, but it was the beginning and the main experience took the title). John Tomlinson was introduced to Sir Alister and with his agreement, threw himself into advancing the Centre and its work. Together with two other volunteers brought in at this time, Ann Wetherall and John Pullen, John worked on the analysis of accounts, whilst also starting research into charitable fundraising. He had worked in the New York Stock Exchange and as a merchant banker, but, whilst never having raised funds for charity before, considered it important to do so now on behalf of the Unit.

Meanwhile, David Hay in Nottingham was producing the fruits of his researches. Updating the work of Sir Alister, David published his study of reports of religious and spiritual experience, based on the National Opinion

Poll surveys, in the book *Exploring Inner Space – Is God still Possible in the Twentieth Century*.<sup>7</sup>

In 1983 Ann Wetherall, fascinated by what triggered religious experiences, and finding no clear pattern, came to the conclusion that possibly despair and a feeling of hopelessness might be seen as common causes. Feeling that imprisonment could well be a trigger for such events, Ann wrote to former hostages and to Jimmy Boyle, a well-known ex-prisoner. This led to a small notice being put into a newspaper circulated in prisons, which resulted in many replies from people who had never before shared such experiences for fear of being sent to a psychiatrist.

Ann felt that those who responded deserved a reply. The focus of the Unit, however, was not conducive to this, so she left in order to devote herself to such work and later, to founding the Prison Ashram Project.<sup>8</sup> This eventually led to her visiting prisons, at the prisoners' request, to share with them what she knew of meditation techniques to deepen their spiritual experience, transforming a negative life in a prison cell into a positive one.

RERU's application for charitable status was proceeding: Trust Deeds had been drawn up, and these were approved and executed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1983 by Bishop Appleton, Eileen Barker BSc (Soc), Sir Alister Hardy MA, DSc, FRS and David Hay BSc, MSc, as Trustees, with the such objectives, "a) to promote and undertake the study of religious and other

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<sup>7</sup> Hay, 1982 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1987).

<sup>8</sup> The name, Prison Ashram Project, a Trust registered as a charity in July 1988, was changed to the Prison Phoenix Trust in 1994 as the concept of an ashram was not readily understood in Britain. Half of its work is to continue to provide such opportunities, the other is to support prisoners in their spiritual practice within their cells through letters written by volunteers and by sending them books. Thus the PPT seeks to help prisoners turn their lives around. [Information given by Tigger Ramsay-Brown, Ann Wetherall's sister and from literature of The Prison Phoenix Trust, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF [[www.prisonphoenixtrust.org.uk](http://www.prisonphoenixtrust.org.uk)]. Links with the Prison Phoenix Trust were to continue: Sister Elaine MacInnes, OLM, who become Director of the Trust in 1992 at the invitation of Ann Wetherall, gave the 1997 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture under the title *Spirituality Imprisoned* (transcribed in Occasional Paper No. 16); and the former Director, Sandy Chubb, spoke to the AHS Oxford/Cotswold Group on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2006 on *Spirituality in Prison*. See also the Note at the end of the chapter, page 24, and page 38.

‘related areas of human experience, and b) to disseminate the findings of study.’ The Trust was set up with a capital of £9,749 with “power to appeal for, collect and receive donations” and with rules governing the duties of the Trustees. Edward Robinson was established as the first Director, whose role was to include that of secretary to the Trustees. His duties included determining and carrying out the programme of the Unit in consultation with the Council – which was also established in the Deeds to decide on matters of policy, receive an annual financial report, make staff appointments and elect new Trustees. The first Trustees included Bishop Appleton, Eileen Barker, Sir Alister Hardy and David Hay. The Trust was officially registered as a Charity on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1983. Dr Crawford Knox was invited to become Treasurer and took this up in June 1984. Under the Rules of the Trust the Chairman of Trustees was also to be Chairman of the Advisory Research Council – and the management of the Centre continued to be run by the Council. This year, 1983, Gerald Priestland, the author, was appointed a Patron.

At this time, the rooms occupied by the Unit were becoming even more dilapidated (the larger of the first-floor rooms, by February 1983, was unusable in cold weather owing to a hole in one outer wall). Manchester College was negotiating with a commercial firm the possibility of redeveloping the building as a shop with living accommodation above – saying though, that they might be able to find rooms elsewhere for the Unit. The negotiations dragged on with investigations being made into possible other venues, but with a desire to remain at Manchester College if at all possible. The possibility of a move to 30 Holywell Street, another building owned by Manchester College, was explored in June of 1984, but part of that building was occupied for residential use. The College made an application for change of use to the Oxford City Planning Authority, but objections were raised, and the matter dragged on into 1985 with eventually nothing coming of it.

The name ‘Alister Hardy Research Centre’ was put forward in July 1983, in a proposal under that name, for the future development of the Unit. There was much debate over the wording of the proposal document, its content, aims and objectives, and proposals for future development with an appeal for funds, which lasted the rest of the year and well on through the next.

A new element creeps in here in the discussion of that part of the proposal which suggested the Unit might be associated with the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) in America. John

Tomlinson believed that funds could be raised in the United States and advantageously channelled through IANDS, which had tax-deductible status there (and a branch in England). IANDS had a consultative centre and data-bank and also helped the dying to come to terms with terminal illness. It was suggested that a similar consultative centre and data-bank be developed at the RERU. Building up its fund of research material, and publishing its findings, might not only bring about a new understanding of religious experience, but also enable many individuals to reassess and benefit more from their own spiritual experiences. This would also facilitate a dialogue between those who had had such experiences and the Research Centre, thereby giving a great deal more evidence on the nature of religious experience. The view was expressed that there was no need for conflict between research and pastoral concern, though in principle the two elements should be kept separate. This was to be a recurring issue and later would assume more importance and generate more concern (see pages 41-42). John Tomlinson was elected to the Advisory Research Council in October 1983.

In early 1984 an attempt was made to include in the proposal for the Alister Hardy Research Centre a definition of 'religious experience', but this was subsequently dropped, the overall presentation being considered too long. The question of Patrons for the new Charitable Trust was also discussed: a number of names were suggested, and inquiries were put in hand. Finally, the Trust, under the new name Alister Hardy Research Centre, and a new appeal for experiences, was launched at a press conference on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1984. A great deal of work had been put into the re-launch and it was very successful in that most major newspapers attended, along with the TV cameras of Central News, and the resultant publicity was extensive. A follow-up questionnaire for respondents was also produced at this time.

In addition, 1984 saw the publication of Sir Alister's book, *Darwin and the Spirit of Man*, in which he reviewed his earlier work on evolution and reported on the forms of classification which he applied to the accounts of religious experience – the reported frequency of experiences being of particular interest (Hardy, 1984).

Meanwhile, John Tomlinson approached grant-giving trusts in both the United Kingdom and America, including the British School and the University Foundation in New York, regarding the channelling of financial support, but unfortunately without success. Indeed, sadly the Trust lost money in attempting to promote this project. Towards the end of 1984

contact was followed up with Fr Richard Woods, who had visited Oxford earlier and who had set up a research centre of his own in Chicago. Fr Woods had been awarded the Chair of Philosophy and Theology at St. Thomas College in St. Paul, Minnesota for the academic year 1984-85. Some concern was expressed as to whether his organisation, Blackfriars Associates, would be suitable as an organisation, to be the sole representative of the Research Centre in America, but the initiative of establishing a possible branch of the Centre in America was nevertheless pursued.

That year (1984) David Hay entered into discussions with Gordon Heald, Director of the Gallup Institution in London with a view to a partnership and carrying out large-scale surveys of spiritual/religious experience in the United Kingdom and America. David was also in touch with Dr Miriam Murphy, co-director of the Princeton Religious Research Centre, with a view to co-operation in research work there. A number of National Opinion Polls had already been carried out in Britain and America (see page 13) these indicating that slightly over a third of the adult populations in Britain and the United States might claim to have had some kind of spiritual or religious experience. A further survey carried out in Australia (1983) had given a 44 percent rate. Two more AHRC/Gallup Polls in Britain and America (1985) showed positive response rates of 33 and 43 percent respectively, and a later survey in Britain in 1987 showed a 48 percent positive response rate<sup>9</sup>. An analysis of the surveys is given in David Hay's *Exploring Inner Space*<sup>10</sup>.

1985 was a momentous year. Besides the activities in America, change was on its way in Oxford. Relationships with Manchester College were getting very difficult. Sir Alister was greatly disappointed that the College never regarded the research as part of College activities and had not given the Centre free accommodation. Now things got worse. Early in 1985 the College gave notice to the Centre to leave. There were problems, in that 24 Holywell Street was in need of structural repair. Also, the question of its use had been raised, and continuation of the Centre there was being opposed by the Oxford City Planning Authority.<sup>11</sup> Alternative

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<sup>9</sup> Hay, 1990, p. 79.

<sup>10</sup> Hay, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> The grounds being the deemed unauthorised use of 24 Holywell as 'offices' in an area zoned for 'residential' use. The City Planning Authority was prepared to commence enforcement action.



accommodation was offered, but only for one year, and just one room, allowing for just two people, the records and computer: and at a rental charge of twice that for the much larger existing accommodation. Bishop Appleton, Chairman of the Advisory Research Council, was unmoved, he himself feeling the AHRC's association with the College now to be a handicap. Sir Alister had wanted to keep the connection with Manchester College, but the College was giving Centre no favours.

The year 1985 also saw the publication of an in-depth survey by David Hay of reports of spiritual/religious experience in a random sample of the adult population of the city of Nottingham. Dr Geoffrey Ahern was appointed as Research Fellow in Oxford with responsibility for directing a computer-assisted content analysis of the now 5,000 accounts of spiritual/religious experiences in the files – the aim being to gain a reliable insight into and overview of the wide range of experiences reported. At the same time, Dr David Lewis was appointed as Research Fellow in Nottingham, to study the religious experiences of nurses at two large teaching hospitals in Leeds.

At this time Edward Robinson offered his resignation from the post of Director. Therefore, in April, Sir Alister determined that David Hay should succeed Edward as Director, that the Centre would move to Nottingham and that fundraising should be abandoned. However, this raised all sorts of problems. David was keen to accept but, in the light of the difficulties seen as inherent in this proposal, it was eventually decided that David would become Director in Nottingham and that the AHRC would remain in Oxford.

Famously, this year saw the award to Sir Alister Hardy of the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion for his work in starting the RERU. John Templeton arranged for the Award to be announced to him on his eighty-ninth birthday. The ceremonies were to be held in London, starting with a Reception at the College of Arms, hosted by the Duke of Norfolk on 13<sup>th</sup> May, and with a Presentation by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh at Buckingham Palace followed by a public ceremony at the Guildhall on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1985. Unfortunately, Sir Alister, who had been ill for some time, suffered a stroke in the early hours of the very day, Monday 13<sup>th</sup> May, on which he was due to go to London for these ceremonies. His daughter, Belinda Farley, went to Buckingham Palace to receive the Award in his place, and Dr Crawford Knox read Sir Alister's acceptance speech, which was published posthumously by the AHRC under the title, *The Significance of Religious Experience*.

In this speech, Sir Alister referred to his wartime vow that, if he survived the war, he would do all in his power to reconcile evolutionary theory with the spiritual nature of man. Sir Alister wrote, "I did survive, and I like to feel that the award of the Templeton Prize today rounds off a lifetime's attempt to make that reconciliation." Ten days later, on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1985 Sir Alister died. He had achieved the summit of a professional scientific career, and now the summit of recognition for his pioneering work in founding the Religious Experience Research Unit. During Sir Alister's dying moments, Lord Bullock promised him that he would, to the best of his ability, protect the future of the Centre,<sup>13</sup> and this was a promise that he was to keep faithfully. (Sir Alister was subsequently honoured with a plaque at the back of Harris-Manchester College chapel.)

On 26<sup>th</sup> October 1986, Sir Alister's widow, Lady Silvia gHardy, died. The Advisory Research Council conveyed to the family, Michael Hardy and his sister, Belinda Farley, its deepest sympathy, together with its appreciation and sincere gratitude for the balance of the Templeton Award, and for the gift of Sir Alister's library, collection of press cuttings, and donation of fifteen water-colour paintings of religious sites.

Endnote (see page 19):

A sculpture portraying a prisoner meditating in a half-lotus position, titled 'Kenneth – being free', was created and presented to the Prison Phoenix Trust in 1998 to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Trust by Ron Farquhar. Ron, a former prisoner who became a member of the Alister Hardy Society, was wrongfully imprisoned and, in the depths of despair, had a deep mystical experience which transformed his life. He went on to become a prison visitor leading meditation classes in prisons. The sculpture is housed in the Director of the Phoenix Trust's



office in Oxford and is featured on the Trust's website. It is reproduced here with the consent of the Trust. Ron subsequently gave the author a copy of the sculpture which he had retained for himself.

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<sup>13</sup> Recalled by David Hay in his Obituary of Lord Bullock, *De Numine*, September 2004 issue, p. 17.

### 3. CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT (1985-2000)

Following the death of Sir Alister Hardy things began to change, and this period saw the departure of the Alister Hardy Research Centre from Manchester College, first to premises at 29-31 George Street, Oxford, and then, later, to Westminster College (now Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brooks University) on the western outskirts of the city.

There had been problems regarding the £170,000 Templeton Prize money, which had been awarded to Sir Alister himself, but these had been resolved. Sir Alister had initially favoured this going to David Hay for his research work in Nottingham. David, though, pointed out that his work was for and under the auspices of the Centre, and eventually the Award (less £7,000 used to meet expenses), together with Sir Alister's extensive specialist library, was generously given as a legacy to the AHRC.

In June 1985 Dr Crawford Knox resigned as Hon. Treasurer and Trustee. Crawford had been becoming increasingly concerned over the difficulties of exercising financial control with the Director retaining day to day executive control yet away in Nottingham, and also with John Tomlinson dealing with fundraising.

Crawford's place as Hon Treasurer and Trustee, was taken in December by Oliver Knowles, OBE, who had recently retired from service at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNSTAD) in Geneva. Oliver had been educated at Mill Hill and Oriel College, Oxford, where he had obtained B.Litt and MA degrees. After war service in the Royal Indian Army Service Corps (Lt. Col.) in Burma, he had entered the Colonial Service as District Officer in Kenya, subsequently holding a number of other offices there, including that of Acting Permanent Secretary Ministry of Finance. He was awarded his OBE for work on Kenya Development and Aid Flows. From Kenya he had gone on to become Inter-Regional Adviser on Co-operation among Developing Countries at the United Nations Conference on Trade & Development in Geneva, before eventually retiring in 1982.

David Hay resigned in July 1985 as a Trustee, to become Director of the Research Centre. Edward Robinson retired "to take up a third career" as a full-time artist. Edward had had a lifelong interest in the visual arts, first as a painter and later as a sculptor and at that time was working on some woodcarvings of triptychs, a few exquisite examples which he had

displayed at his office at 24 Holywell Street<sup>1</sup>. John Franklin, who was later to join the team in an administrative capacity, remembers this well from his visit to Edward at the Centre in October the previous year in order to find out more about the work of the AHRC and spiritual/religious experience. John himself had had various such experiences during his life, and had just learned about the existence of the Centre from an article by Mick Brown in the *Sunday Times* that month. Later, in July 1986, a sherry party was given in honour of Edward and a presentation made to him in appreciation of his services as Director.

One result of the publicity arising from the Award of the Templeton Prize to Sir Alister was that George Gallup Jr. learnt of the Research Centre and became interested. He met with John Tomlinson, and the possibility of a Princeton branch of the Centre for the study of religious experience in America was discussed. Following a visit by George Gallup to the Centre, John was authorised to visit Princeton to investigate the situation and follow up the possibilities there. After conducting basic ground-work with the help of George Gallup for the setting up of a branch in Princeton and establishing processes for fundraising, a new organisation was formed under the name Alister Hardy Research Centre (USA) Inc., a charitable company with its address at the Gallup Building, 53 Bank Street in Princeton, New Jersey. David Hay was inaugurated as Chairman of the Board and John Tomlinson as President. Steps were then taken to have the Centre registered as a charity in a number of states in the U.S.A.

Meanwhile, it was agreed in September of 1985 that the RERC should now move out of Manchester College. More happily, later in 1985, a grant of £30,000 was received from a charitable trust, which wished to remain anonymous, followed by a further grant of £25,000 to sponsor the fund-raising activities of the Centre in the years 1985/86 and 1986/87.

Michael Hardy, Sir Alister's son, a lecturer in the Department of Pure and Applied Zoology, Reading University, joined as a Trustee at this time. Michael had been educated at Marlborough, and had gone on from there to read zoology at Exeter College, Oxford, his father's old college, where he had gained an honours degree. Dr Alan Gauld, a leading psychical

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<sup>1</sup> Edward has had one-man shows of his work in London, Oxford and other galleries in Britain. Examples of his sculpture are to be seen at the Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Wales, Lampeter, in Portsmouth and Southwark Cathedrals and at Kirkbridge Conference Centre, Pennsylvania, as well as in various collections in India, Canada and the USA

researcher at the Department of Psychology, Nottingham University, also joined as a Trustee at the same time.

Also in 1985, a Board of Advisors was formed, commencing with the appointment of Dr Gauld and going on later to include many distinguished names, including Dr Michael Argyle; Dr Eileen Barker, Professor of Sociology, London School of Economics and Founder of INFORM (Information Network Focus on New Religious Movements); Prof David Bohm, American quantum physicist, author of numerous books including *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*; Dr Peter Davies; Dr Peter Fenwick, Consultant Neuropsychiatrist at the Maudsley Hospital, London; Prof John Gager, Chairman of the Department of Religion at Princeton University; George Gallup Jnr.; Prof A.H. Halsey, Emeritus Professor, Nuffield College; Gordon Heald; Prof James Loder, Professor of Christian education on the Princeton Seminary faculty; Dr James McCord; Prof William McCready, Professor of History, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario; Prof Steven Preller; Sir William (later Lord) Rees-Mogg, former Editor of *The Times*; Dr Rupert Sheldrake, Research Fellow of the Royal Society; Dr Robert Towler; Dr Harold Turner; Rt Revd Stephen Verney, Bishop of Repton; Dr Bryan Wilson, Reader Emeritus in Sociology, University of Oxford and Prof Robert Wuthnow, scholar of religion at Princeton University. The first formal meeting of the Board of Trustees took place on 11 December 1985, with Dr Eileen Barker, who had taken over from Bishop Appleton, in the Chair. At this meeting it was decided that a lease be signed for accommodation at Victoria House, 29-31 George Street, Oxford, as the prospective new home for the Centre.

The Centre finally moved there on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March 1986. Although the Centre had removed from premises at Manchester College, it retained its links with the college, this being advantageous in enabling free use of the Oxford University computer. The appointment of a new Principal at Manchester College at this time, Dr Ralph Waller, led to a period of better relations. In May 1986 Lord Bullock joined the Board of Trustees, later that year taking over from Eileen Barker as Chairman (and Chairman of the new Advisory Research Council).

In view of this being a critical time for the Centre, the Advisory Research Council at its meeting in May 1986 approved reimbursement of £20,900 to Nottingham University to enable David Hay to take the academic year 1986/87 on leave of absence to devote himself fulltime to the Directorship. At this same meeting, Geoffrey Ahern was appointed as Deputy Director (UK) looking after research at Oxford.

An ambitious core programme of research was developed in June 1986 to explore the early findings. Research projects included, besides Edward Robinson's study of 16-19 year-olds, the computer analysis study by Geoffrey Ahern, then appointed to the role of Research Fellow, and Dr David Lewis' study of religious experience of nurses at two large teaching hospitals in Leeds. David Hay was appointed a Research Fellow at Nottingham University. Another research project was David's own overview of studies of religious experience in relation to religious education.

At the same time, John Tomlinson had invited David Hay to make some joint presentations with him, and David took the opportunity to develop academic links at Princeton, USA, where the headquarters of the Alister Hardy Research Centre (USA) Inc., had just been granted tax-exempt status in a number of strategic states under the American Inland Revenue Code. An Alister Hardy Research Fellowship was agreed for the Department of Religion at Princeton University.

The research programme developed, included gathering samples of religious experience in the United States; large-scale surveys of religious experience within a sub-population of the USA; and a study of Native American religious experience. The cost of the research programme, which was running at between £80,000 and £100,000 per annum, was funded by the Templeton Prize money. Certain misunderstandings and difficulties between David Hay and John Tomlinson also arose at this time.

The summer of 1986 saw the departure, in June, of John Tomlinson as full-time Development Consultant. The Research Council, owing to the uncertain financial situation of the RERU, regretfully felt unable to extend his contract. Tomlinson continued though, for a while, as a member of the Council, but eventually resigned, giving up, at the same time, his position in America. John was remembered as being gifted, with marvellous ideas for raising money, although it was sad that few of them had actually come to fruition. His great strength had been in opening up new contacts, raising the profile of the Centre and generating enthusiasm, but the lack of success in fundraising was probably due to the adverse market conditions appertaining at the time. Spending (on these initiatives) had been high and income low (approaches to 168 Charitable Trusts in 1985 produced a net return of only £3,000). Tomlinson had admitted, though, that he had had no professional training as a fundraiser and had come to the, then, RERU originally to promote its general development as a Research Centre. This was recognised, and tribute was paid to him for the hard effort he had put

in on behalf of the Centre, his excellent public relations work and the contacts that he had made in the USA.

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 1986 the Trust Deeds were amended to change the name from Religious Experience Research Unit to Alister Hardy Research Centre; and the opportunity was taken at the same time to review the financial arrangements. That year the Most Revd. & Rt. Hon. Robert Runcie Archbishop of Canterbury, and His Eminence Cardinal Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster agreed to become the first Patrons of the Centre. A proposal for a formal membership scheme and a newsletter was put to the Advisory Research Council by Oliver Knowles and agreed. Oliver noted in his Treasurer's report at the time that there had been a failure to keep in touch with interested supporters of the Centre, a number of covenants had lapsed and the number of individual subscribers had been falling steadily to only some 30. With the help of generous sponsorship by the Dulverton Trust, a major UK fund raising initiative was approved, and the appointment of an Appeals Secretary was agreed.

In August that year John Franklin was invited to join the AHRC team in Oxford in an administrative capacity. John was a chartered architect and town planner, member of the Royal Institute of British Architects and Royal Town Planning Institute, and former Assistant Borough Planning Officer at the London Borough of Greenwich. He had been offered an opportunity to take early retirement and, seriously interested in the work of the Centre, he had accepted and resigned from his position at Greenwich at the end of December 1985. Going to Nottingham to see David Hay, the Director, in February 1986, he had been warmly welcomed, and referred to Geoffrey Ahern at the Centre at Oxford. Geoffrey, though, was looking for research assistance. John felt that he could best make a contribution in areas of liaison between research and people who had had spiritual and religious experiences. Geoffrey was not interested in this and declined his services.

Later in August 1986, Oliver Knowles invited John to take the role of Hon. Appeals Secretary. Feeling he could make a positive contribution here, he accepted with enthusiasm. His initial task was to work with Louise Vause, who was secretary and receptionist at the time. John worked on reorganising the office, creating a proper filing system and regularising the handling of donations. Oliver had already, just previously, recovered six years arrears of tax refunds that had not been claimed. John trawled through past records, sending out circular letters in various mail-drops inviting support for the work of the AHRC. A membership scheme was

started in earnest later in 1986.<sup>2</sup> The first 'Director's Newsletter' was published in October that year, and soon an initial membership of over 100 from past donors and supporters was being built up. John was made Hon. Membership Secretary in June the following year, 1987.

Lord Bullock made a last attempt to secure the future of the Centre back at Manchester College through offering to use his influence in recommending the College for University status. There was talk of the possibility of the Centre moving into the Stable Block at Manchester College, which was at that time unoccupied. A sketch plan was drawn up to show how the Centre might be accommodated in the Stable Block, and an appeal to members raised £3,500 towards the costs of such a move. However, in the final event, this proposal was rejected by the College, which, further to being granted University status, developed other functions, and stated that they now required every inch of available space.

One of the earliest members of the AHRC was Bronwen Viscountess Astor, who was later to play an important part in the life of the Centre. Bronwen had been one of the first people to respond to Sir Alister's appeal, in the national press, for accounts of religious experience back in 1969. After sending in an account of her experiences in answer to the advertisement in *The Times* that year, she had later visited Sir Alister at the RERU offices in Holywell Street, Oxford – where she also met David Hay. In the summer of 1986 David went to visit her at her home and invited her to join the Advisory Research Council. She accepted and was later duly elected onto the Council. A major fundraising drive was planned for the autumn of 1986. An appeal brochure was produced setting out how the Centre was founded, what had been done, why the research was important, the programme for the Centre and how people could help. The plan was to gather a representative collection of accounts of experiences from a variety of cultures; classify the descriptions; conduct demographic surveys of reports of experiences over a range of cultures; direct in-depth studies of reports of experiences in sub-groups of specific societies; examine life-histories of selected individuals, and to explore conceptual implications.

In October 1986 Louise Vause departed to take up a new job in London, and her place was taken by Polly Wheway, who had had to leave

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<sup>2</sup> The very first 'member' of the Centre, however, Mrs D. Marston, is recorded as a prior supporter, giving a covenant to the Centre in March 1986.



in 1981 due to the financial situation of RERU at that time and who now happily rejoined the organisation as secretary/receptionist.

As a result of John Tomlinson's departure, the position of the American branch, AHRC (USA) Inc., was discussed. David Hay had visited the USA in June and had reported that there were good prospects of setting up a Fundraising Board there. It was agreed in December 1986 that the fundraising drive be extended to the USA and that links between the British and American branches be strengthened. The American Board was to be reorganised under the Chairmanship of Arthur Gray Jnr., President of the Dreyfus Personal Management Inc. N.Y., with a target of raising \$2m over the next two years. They would appoint a Treasurer, who would also be a Director and work closely with the Chairman and President and hopes ran high. Later, in 1987, George Gallup Jnr., Arthur Gray Jnr. and David Hay became Directors, and George Gallup, Chair of the Alister Hardy Research Centre (USA) Inc.

Following two informal Director's Newsletters to members in October 1986 and January 1987, a bi-annual members' newsletter, entitled *Numinis*, was started in July of 1987 under the editorship of Oliver Knowles, containing articles about spiritual and religious experience, news and details of forthcoming events.<sup>3</sup>

1987 saw the appointment of The Rt Revd John V. Taylor, formerly Bishop of Winchester to the Board of Trustees and Advisory Research Council; also the publication of Edward Robinson's study, *Religion and Values at 16+*. Edward had been assisted in this by Michael Jackson, a young researcher, who was studying for a D.Phil at Oxford University. 1987 also saw the institution of the Alister Hardy Memorial Lectures, the first being held on the same day as the first Annual General Meeting of members of the Centre, which took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> December at the Arlosh Hall, Manchester College, Oxford. This first Lecture was given by Dr Rupert Sheldrake, who delivered a powerful attack on the prevailing scientifically

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note in passing that, at this time, parallel studies were going on into near-death experiences (NDEs): IANDS (International Association for Near-Death Studies) held a conference on this subject this same year, 1987, at the University of Wales Lampeter – the University of which AHRC was later to become a part. The conference featured, amongst others, Dr Shirley Firth, Lecturer in World Religions, who was to join the AHRERCs Research Committee later in 2002 – and David Lorimer, then Director of the Scientific & Medical Network (SMN) with which the AHRERC was later to become associated.

mechanistic views of life. The pattern, which has continued to this day, was instigated of holding the Memorial Lecture at an Annual Members' Day during the latter part of the year, in Oxford.

On the research front, Michael Jackson had started a study of the relationship between religious experience, psychological well-being and 'schizotypy' (scale of tendency towards mysticism or schizophrenia), and in the spring of 1988 Geoffrey Ahern expanded to twelve a team of coders enrolled to assist in the analysis of the accounts of religious experience. These included Meg Maxwell, Tim Pearce and Jill Walford whose names were to appear again in other contexts. Meg had read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford. She subsequently took a Postgraduate Teaching Training Certificate at London University and taught in London comprehensive schools before returning to Oxford in 1984. She worked for four years at the Alister Hardy Research Centre helping to evolve the computer-assisted method of analysing accounts of spiritual experience.

A first attempt to parallel the work of the AHRERC in a non-European culture was started. Dr Gurdip Aurora, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Hyderabad University, India, came to the Centre in May 1988 on a three-month Visiting Fellowship to research current literature on transcendental experience in Oxford and London. He returned to Hyderabad in August to initiate surveys and gather more accounts in order to build up Indian files on spiritual/religious experience for the use of scholars working in the field there. Unfortunately, nothing came of this.

On Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1987 the first Annual General Meeting of the Centre was held at the Arlosh Hall, Manchester College, Oxford. John Franklin reported that membership had now risen to 300. It was suggested that local discussion groups should be formed. In February 1988 a London Group of members was started, organised and run by John Franklin from his home in Greenwich, with meetings taking place at the Maria Assumpta Centre in Kensington Square, London W8. At the same time an Oxford Members' Group came into being. This met for the first time at Upper Wolvercote, Oxford, with Jill Walford of Ramsdell, Basingstoke taking on the role of Group Organiser. An attempt was made to form a Reading/Newbury discussion group, but this, however, sadly proved abortive. In May 1988 a Bristol Group, later to be known as the Bristol & Wessex Group, was also formed, with Dr R.F. Barbour, who lived at Stoke Bishop, Bristol, as Facilitator.

At this time the Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd Richard Harries became a Patron of the Centre – to be followed shortly after by The Hon. Jonathon

Porritt, later Sir Jonathon, (1990); and His Holiness the Dalai Lama (1991). Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke, retiring from the Directorate of the Ian Ramsey Centre at Oxford, became a Trustee of the Centre and a member of the Advisory Research Council. Dr Ralph Waller, appointed Principal of Manchester College in 1986, also joined the Research Council. David Hay gained his Doctorate at Nottingham University, with a Ph.D. thesis on the subject, *The Bearing of Empirical Studies of Religious Experience on Education*.

Attempts were still being made to activate the American Branch of the Alister Hardy Research Centre, Alister Hardy Research Centre (U.S.A.) Inc. A new promotional brochure was produced outlining the work of the Centre and including a brief biography of Sir Alister, and efforts were made to find a President with time available to devote to the U.S. Centre on a voluntary basis. Eventually, on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1988, Dr John Hickey, a well-known sociologist of religion who had held a number of academic posts in the UK and USA with distinction, was appointed to this position; and George Gallup Jnr., Arthur Gray Jnr. and Dr David Hay were appointed as Directors. In 1989 Dr Hickey moved to Chicago, and the AHRC (USA) Inc. left Princeton for 901 Lake Street in Illinois (later moving to 302 N. Oak Park Avenue, Oak Park, Illinois). At that time, June 1989, Prof William McCready of Northern Illinois University joined the Board. Word was received that the US Revenue Authorities would allow until 31<sup>st</sup> December 1990 for the Centre to become operational without losing its charitable status.

Back in England, the future of the Centre was debated, the problem being that of accommodation, which at George Street was both restricted and expensive. The need was seen to relate to and work closely with a larger established institution which could help in the development of the Centre and in funding a research programme commensurate with the Centre's policy objectives. In June 1989 the Board of Trustees resolved that the most satisfactory option would be to integrate the Centre with Westminster College, Oxford. Preliminary discussions were held with the College on the basis of the Centre moving there, retaining a separate legal identity as a Registered Charity, but with the College offered the right to nominate a majority of the Board of Trustees. In July Dr Bernard Farr, Head of the Theology Department at Westminster College, was approached to see if he might be interested in sharing a split Directorship with Prof Laurence Brown as possible Director of Research. Laurence Brown was then Professor of Psychology at the University of New South Wales and a Joint Editor of the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. He

had met Sir Alister earlier and had kept in touch with him and the Centre – and was in England at the time.

At this time, January 1991, an Honorary Research Fellowship was offered to John Thomas, a young architect, for his proposed study of the part that buildings, places, objects, spaces and environments play in religious experience; and support was also given to Belinda Huddleston for the study of the role of religious experience in the management of illness and to Dr Mary Burton for the examination of the life histories of selected individuals.

By the end of its third year the membership scheme had reached 650. Mailing-list subscribers, a category of supporter who just paid for the Newsletter rather than for full membership of the Centre, had passed the 100 mark from its inception in May 1988. Under Bronwen Astor's energetic leadership various events and fundraising initiatives were organised. Buffet Concerts were held, with the kind support of the Centre's Patrons, Bishop Richard Harries and Archbishop Robert Runcie, at Dorchester Abbey in June 1989 and at Lambeth Palace in July 1989, and an Auction of Promises held on Members' Day in December 1989, itself raised £1,400 for the Centre. An AHRC Executive Committee was set up under the Advisory Research Council, to deal with the increasing amount of day-to-day administrative business, with Oliver Knowles being appointed Chairman and John Franklin Secretary. The Committee held its first meeting in November 1989 with Rev Dr Gordon S. Wakefield, a Methodist Minister and former Principal of the Queen's Ecumenical College, Birmingham, Michael Jackson and Meg Maxwell also in attendance. It continued to meet regularly until the end of 1994.

David Hay resigned as Director of the Centre at the end of the academic year 1988-89 and returned to his duties at Nottingham University. He retained his links with the Centre, however, becoming Deputy Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Research Council in October, eventually becoming its Chairman in January 1991. In Hay's place, Dr Ralph Waller, who was Principal of Manchester College and who also had links with Westminster College as a former member of staff there, was appointed as Acting Director pro-tem.

The question of counselling was raised in October 1989, as a result of members asking questions about their experiences. It was pointed out that the Centre was a research centre, and not a counselling centre, but that a list might be compiled of people knowledgeable about the subject, which might be sent to people seeking advice and wanting to discuss spiritual or

religious experience. It was also agreed that the advice of the Westminster Pastoral Centre be sought.<sup>4</sup>

A questionnaire was sent to members inviting their views, and the response was reported back to the Advisory Research Council in January the following year. This revealed strong support for what the Centre was doing, but also a call for a more participative response in the sharing of experiences and promotion of the Centre's findings and views. There was also a call for more concern over practical social problems, issues and follow-up regarding counselling advice and comments on people's experiences. In response it was decided that, whilst the Centre was not in a position to offer counselling advice, a correspondence system should be set up, to answer questions and give information concerning religious experience and the work of the Centre. Members of Geoffrey Ahern's coding team, including Meg Maxwell and Tim Pearce, volunteered to answer letters sent by Society members and members of the public. This was an informal arrangement, which lasted a little time and gave good service, but which gradually died out after a year or so.

At the beginning of 1990 Dr Gordon Wakefield took over as Director of the Centre. In the light of the poor financial situation of the AHRC he and succeeding Directors were appointed on a part-time basis. Dr Wakefield was well-known as an ecumenist, preacher, lecturer in liturgy, and author. His many publications included works on spirituality and editorship of *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (SCM Press 1993). This was an important and fortunate appointment, for he was also a Lambeth Doctor of Divinity. Through his good offices the Centre was offered the use of Lambeth Palace as the venue for a number of fundraising concerts, and support in recruiting new Patrons (including His Holiness the Dalai Lama). Dr Wakefield also had strong connections with Westminster College, at one time standing in as chaplain there.

At this time, it became clear that additional help was needed in the office in George Street. An advertisement was placed with REACH (Retired Executives Action Clearing House), this resulting in the appointment of Robert Waite. Robert (better known as 'Rob') had taken early retirement from an executive position within the Industrial Division of a national pharmaceutical company, and had decided, after a period engaged in personal pursuits ('long overdue', he said) to opt for a short return to a

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<sup>4</sup> The result here must have been negative, for there is no record of any decision regarding possible action being taken following on from this.

part-time administrative post offering 'minimum stress and maximum interest'. Rob lived close to Oxford and devoted two days a week in help; the 'short return' period extending to nearly twelve years, during which he gave loyal and dedicated service to the Centre, providing methodical and accurate record-keeping, and asking for only modest travelling expenses in return (Rob said later that, whilst he could write his own history of his involvement with the centre, he would probably sum it up in a few words, '*it was different*').

The move to Westminster College was pursued and negotiated by Dr Ralph Waller, Oliver Knowles and Dr Bernard Farr, who at the time was expanding the activities of the Faculty of Theology at Westminster College. Possible plans for new permanent accommodation at the College were drawn up and approved subject to availability of finance. These plans were costed at £155,000, and the project was incorporated into a major fundraising Appeal then being drawn up with a view to a formal launch by Dr Runcie at Lambeth Palace in October 1990. The Centre left George Street and moved, as an autonomous centre, into temporary accommodation at Westminster College on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1990. This move also bore further fruit in that, besides the academic and financial advantages, a series of annual residential weekend conferences were planned and held there during Gordon's Wakefield's Directorship (1990-92). These promoted public interest in the work of the AHRC – and boosted membership of the Centre. The first conference, in 1990, was entitled, *Interpreting Religious Experience*, the second, in 1991 was on *Mysticism*, the third, in 1992, on *Gender Issues in Spirituality*.

In April 1990 Dr Geoffrey Ahern's report *Spiritual/Religious Experience in Modern Society: A Pilot Study* was published.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately no funds were available to expand this into a book. Geoffrey had worked out an elaborate computer analysis methodology for use on accounts of spiritual/religious experience. The study used this system on an in-depth analysis of 60 accounts (selected from a 10% sample of the 5,000 accounts then in the Archive). The findings revealed that much spiritual/religious experience was shaped by cultural, and perhaps other, factors, but that the experiences were more than the sum of their parts. It was also found that the similarities within the accounts seemed to be more powerful than their differences. The report also raised the question: Are the historical

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<sup>5</sup> Ahern, 1990.

revelations, such as Christianity and Islam based on an ultimate sameness of experience?<sup>6</sup>

In May that year a Research Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke to devise a research programme and implement the future strategy for the Centre as formulated by the Advisory Research Council earlier in the month. Members of the Research Committee included Geoffrey Ahern, Bernard Farr, David Hay, Michael Jackson, Oliver Knowles, Meg Maxwell, Prof Vernon Reynolds, from the School of Anthropology, at Oxford University, and Gordon Wakefield as Secretary/Convenor. At that time, Michael Jackson was working on his Madness and Religious Experience project, this to be published as a thesis for his D.Phil. in 1991 under the title of *Religion and Schizophrenia*. David Hay was working on his study, *Religious Experience and the Unchurched*; Mary Burton on *A Taxonomy of Early Loss and Religious Experience*; Cassandra Eason, author and psychic analyst, on *The Spiritual and Creative Experiences of Children*; Belinda Huddleston on *The Role of Religious Experience in the Management of Illness*; and John Thomas was working for a PhD on his project, *Architecture and Religious Experience* (sadly, this last project, failed to materialise). Geoffrey Ahern resigned from the Centre in June, concerned over the way emphasis was seeming to be placed on the personal side of the Centre's activities rather on pure research<sup>7</sup>. The Research Committee regretted Geoffrey's departure. It remained exercised, however, over the importance of disseminating his Report, and was concerned to build on his computer methodology if possible, though finding it rather complex (there were 90 pages of guidelines). It was felt that a leading question was posed by Geoffrey's report, as to whether religious experience is *sui generis*, and natural, as William James and Alister Hardy believed, or altogether culturally and linguistically conditioned.

In 1990 John Keeble, an enthusiastic follower of Sir Alister Hardy and a leading member of the London Group, and its Chair for a time, proposed the setting up of an Alister Hardy Archive. This was approved in May 1990 with Keeble as Honorary Archivist, but the Advisory Research Council deemed that this was basically a matter between him and Sir Alister's family and did not concern the Council. John set about collecting information, papers, books, objects, etc. pertaining to Sir Alister's life and

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<sup>6</sup> Ahern, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> An attitude sadly to be taken by certain other academics later.

work. On John's death in 2000 his collection of papers and books was passed over to the Centre at Lampeter. Before that, though, one of Sir Alister Hardy's effects, his writing desk, was presented to Ann Wetherall as a gift in memory of Sir Alister. In 1994/5, the desk was given to the Prison Phoenix Trust. Bearing a plaque donated by Tigger Ramsay-Brown (Ann's sister) inscribed, "This desk belonging to Sir Alister Hardy was presented to the Prison Phoenix Trust in Memory of Ann Wetherall 1924-1992 (the Founder)", the desk is now proudly used by the Trust as an altar in the Meditation Room of its premises in Oxford.

At this time the decision was taken to separate the chairmanship of the Board of Trustees from that of the Advisory Research Council, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 1990. David Hay was appointed Chairman of the Council, Lord Bullock remaining as Chairman of Trustees.

The London Group at this time was expanding and holding regular talks and discussion evenings. With a large number of members living in the London and South-east England area, it quickly became possible to invite speakers, and the pattern emerged of holding five meetings a year at the Maria Assumpta Centre in Kensington, with speakers in the afternoon, a break for supper and informal discussion in the evening. This was a pattern which continued, though in a different venue, currently the Essex Unitarian Church, 112 Palace Garden Terrace, Kensington W8, right until the London Group was disbanded.

This period also saw the start of a series of annual lectures at Birkbeck College, London. In 1990 Viscount Combermere, then Head of the Extra Mural Department at Birkbeck College, and whose wife was a member of the AHRC, invited the Centre to give a series of six evening lectures at the College. Three series of lectures were given. The first of these in the autumn of 1990 was under the title, *The Nature of Religious Experience*. The first lecture was given by David Hay entitled *Religious Experience: Testing the Negative Hypothesis*. Other lecturers included Michael Jackson, Revd Dr Gordon Wakefield and Cassandra Eason. Next year, 1991, the title of the course was: *Religious Experience: Some Recent Research & Evaluations*, and the lecturers included Dr Bryan Wilson, Dr Peter Fenwick and Edward Robinson. The third series, *Religious Experience: Is it Universal and Common to All Faiths?*, held in 1992, had as speakers Peggy Morgan, a lecturer in the Study of Religions at both Westminster College and Mansfield College, Oxford, and Prof Nicholas Lash, Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, together with Jewish, Islamic and Hindu lecturers. A fourth series was given in 1993 by Prof Laurence Brown, who was to



succeed Gordon Wakefield as Director, under the title, *Issues in the Psychology of Religious Experience*.

Two further series were given by Peggy Morgan, who succeeded Laurence Brown as Director in 1996. The first in the autumn of 1999, entitled, *Spirituality and Religious Experience: a Century's Exploration*; the second, in the autumn of 2000 under the title, *An Introduction to Mysticism*. A series of lectures was also given in Oxford during the Hilary Term 1992 in conjunction with the Oxford University Centre for Postgraduate Studies and the Westminster College, School of Theology under the title, *The Nature of Religious Experience*.

Throughout this period fundraising activities continued under the leadership of Bronwen Astor. A buffet-concert was given at Lambeth Palace in October 1990, when the major fundraising Appeal referred to earlier was launched. This was followed by a 'sponsored slim' in 1991. Polly Whewy, admitting to being a little over-weight, kindly volunteering, to the great good humour of the office (other volunteers taking part included Cassandra Eason, Tanya Garland, Eileen Edwards and Pam Patterson). A further buffet-concert was given at Westminster Cathedral Hall in May 1993, with the kind support of Cardinal Basil Hume. In May 1996 a dinner-talk was arranged at Sudeley Castle in Gloucestershire, thanks to Lady Elizabeth Ashcombe, the owner and a member of the Society, who hosted the event. The guest speaker was the Centre's Patron, Jonathon Porritt, the title of his speech being, *Millennial Mindsets*. There was also a major fundraising concert held jointly with, and performed by, the Scola Gregoriana of Cambridge at the London Oratory in November 1996, and, finally, another buffet-concert, given at the Amigo Hall, St. George's Road, Lambeth in London in September 1998. All these events entailed a great deal of work. Together with the earlier fund-raising concerts; the Auction of Promises – and other, separate, donations to the Appeal – over £68,000 (£141,495 at today's prices) was raised in total for the Centre.

An important aspect of Dr Gordon Wakefield's period as Director was his work on and publication of a collection of occasional papers (Occasional Papers, Series 1 – AHRC 1992). This set the scene for further development in the form of a second series of occasional papers later under the Directorship of Peggy Morgan. Other works published during Gordon Wakefield's tenure in office were Geoffrey Ahern's report *Spiritual/Religious Experience in Modern Society* (Ahern, 1990); a study of environmental influences on the nature of religious experience (Ord, 1990);

and a study of mystical experiences of Dominican nuns in medieval Germany, to be published later (Occasional Papers (Series 2), No. 7, 1997).

A second book by David Hay, *Religious Experience Today: Studying the Facts* (Hay, 1990) was also published. In this Hay provides a summary of the thinking that inspired Sir Alister in his study of religious experience, a historical perspective on the attitudes to such experiences and a useful summary of research which updated his previous publications. This book also includes a useful table of international statistics compiled from national poll data collected in Britain, the United States and Australia from 1962 to 1987. That year also saw the publication of Cassandra Eason's *The Psychic Power of Children* [Eason, 1990], an investigation into children's psychic abilities; and *New Methods in Religious Education Teaching* (Hay & Hammond, 1990), a handbook for teachers resulting from the work of the Religious Experience and Education Project at the AHRC. At this time Prof Gurdip Aurora completed his report *Studying Religious Experience in India*, based on his collection of a set of accounts of religious experience in Andhra Pradesh, India.

1990 also saw the production of an anthology of spiritual/religious experiences drawn from accounts in the AHRC archives, researched and edited by Meg Maxwell and Verena Tschudin. Published under the title *Seeing the Invisible: Modern Religious and Other Transcendent Experiences*,<sup>8</sup> the book groups the selected accounts into: single experiences described as changing the life of the person; two or more experiences; and continuous experiences.

Verena Tschudin had earlier heard and responded to a radio appeal for accounts of religious experiences and, subsequently, had come to know about the Alister Hardy Society. Attending a meeting of the Society's London Group, she had learnt that an anthology of accounts was being proposed and had answered an invitation to work with Meg in the preparation of the book. Verena, who was later to become Editor of the Alister Hardy Society Newsletter *Numinis* (see page 45), had originally embarked on a career in nursing. Later also training as a counsellor, she moved into the field of ethics and subsequently obtained degrees, including a PhD, in nursing ethics. From the 1990s onward she moved into academic work at the University of East London. From 1992 to 2009 she was editor of the international journal *Nursing Ethics*, combining this with

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<sup>8</sup> Maxwell & Tschudin 1990, (reprinted 1996 & 2005).

part-time work as co-Director of the International Centre for Nursing Ethics at the University of Surrey, where she is still a Visiting Senior Fellow.

A most interesting programme of presentation and discussion of the books that had been produced during 1990 was planned for the Society's Members' Day on 8<sup>th</sup> December. Unfortunately, owing to extremely severe winter weather and a violent snowstorm that set in that day, only 50 members were able to attend. John Franklin, trying to get to Oxford from Cirencester, was involved in a car accident. Dr John Crook, a Psychologist and reader of Ethnology at Bristol University, who was to have given the 1990 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, was also unable to get to Oxford, and his lecture, *On Lending Your Body to the Gods: Approaches to the Indigenous Psychiatry of Ladakh*, had to be postponed until June 1991.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, things were not going well in America. Oliver Knowles met with Dr Hickey in Chicago in December 1990 to discuss the current position and prospects of AHRC (USA) Inc., and had further telephone discussions with him in January the following year. The facts were that there had been little or no progress, with fewer actual members than had originally been handed over from the Centre's membership list in Oxford. This was put down to insufficient backing and support from the American Directors, the absence of an institutional background, the high legal costs and administrative problems caused by the federal system in completing charitable status, as well as a muddle by the US Post Office which returned mail to sender when sent to the P.O. Box address. Attempts were made to develop an institutional link through an approach to Loyola University, Chicago, to which Fr Richard Woods was affiliated. Loyola, it was understood, was anxious to improve and develop its reputation as a research institution. It was thought that links between Loyola and the AHRC in Oxford might be of value, but this was not to be and, in view of the haemorrhaging financial situation, a decision was made in March 1991 to wind up the AHRC (USA) Inc. However, it was reported later in June that year that although the approach to Loyola University had fallen through, other possibilities were still being considered in conjunction with Fr Richard Woods.

The element of pastoral care foreseen in July 1984 had grown, and was giving rise to expressions of concern at Westminster College. The Director, Gordon Wakefield, was flatly asked one day, "Are you a body for serious

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<sup>9</sup> Reproduced in the 1<sup>st</sup> Series Occasional Papers, Wakefield, (Ed) (1992).

academic research or a religious club?” His answer was that the Centre “had to be both”. In a memorandum at that time, June 1991, Dr Bernard Farr, referring to a discussion with Gordon Wakefield, recorded as a suggestion “the separation of the AHRC as such from the ‘popular side’ of the AHRC – the latter perhaps being known as the ‘Friends of the AHRC’ in such a way as to secure the standing of AHRC scholarship.”<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the Advisory Research Council felt that the legitimate interests of the people who were supplying the data, and whose subscriptions and responses to appeals were contributing money to the Centre, did need to be taken into account.

In August the role of the Director was reassessed. Gordon Wakefield felt that the Director should be a ‘co-ordinator of the Centre’s work, concerned both with serious academic research and with the religious experiences of ordinary people. Being in need of both academic and non-academic support, he felt that it was necessary to have one person to unite these responsibilities, rather than one Director of Research and another of ‘the Club’. This was accepted, but the matter was to re-emerge and come to a head in an eventual reorganisation of the Centre, which was put into effect in 1994. The Advisory Research Council, however, did agree that the priority was serious academic research, and decided that the holding of an annual colloquium of research associates and advisors be investigated. The first of these was to precede the third week-end Conference, on *Gender Issues in Spirituality*, planned for the end of August 1992.

On the academic front in 1991, Dr Newton Maloney, Professor of Psychology at the Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, submitted a proposal for a study of the relation of functional theology to religious experience amongst charismatics and Dr Mary Burton was working on a project on early loss and religious experience. The following year saw the publication of a further book by Cassandra Eason, *A Mother’s Instinct; the Extraordinary Intuitions of Ordinary Women* (Eason, 1992). Tanya Garland, in a break from full-time teaching between 1990 and 1992, was working on a project of coding accounts in a system based on descriptive words such as ‘warmth’, ‘love’, ‘light’ etc which had been developed by Geoffrey Ahern. By then she was a qualified councillor, and had the role of being available if anyone wanted to discuss their spiritual experience.

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<sup>10</sup> Addendum to Director’s Report to the Advisory Research Committee, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1991.

This period saw some changes: Gerald Priestland, Patron, died in June 1991. The Centre was delighted to welcome as a Patron in January 1991 Chief Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks (later to become, in 2005, Sir Jonathan); and in March 1991 His Holiness the Dalai Lama kindly consented to become a Patron. At the beginning of 1992, the Most Revd George Carey, the new Archbishop of Canterbury also became a Patron of the Centre. Dr Ralph Waller and Dr Gordon Lawrence resigned from the Advisory Research Council in January 1991. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1992, Lord Bullock, who had steered the Centre through a difficult stage of its existence, resigned as a Trustee and Chairman of Trustees, his place being taken by Lord Rees-Mogg. Lord Bullock's resignation was accepted with great regret, deep gratitude and appreciation of his work for the Centre. Bronwen Astor; Viscount Michael Combermere, a former Chairman of the World Congress of Faiths; Prof Ursula King of the Department of Theology, Bristol University and Revd Dr Kenneth Wilson, Principal of Westminster College, joined as Trustees at this time, as did Peggy Morgan, who was later to become Director of the Centre. Ian Lewis, Dr Michael Argyle, Prof Derek Bryce-Smith, Professor of Chemistry at Reading University, and Verena Tschudin, co-editor of *Seeing the Invisible*, joined the Advisory Research Council. Also in 1993 Gordon Wakefield announced his wish to retire as Director.

Raising money was not going too well. The Gulf War was straining interfaith relationships and the fundraising climate was particularly difficult as Oxford University and Manchester College had also launched fundraising campaigns at this time. Moreover, the prospects for the building programme were not good. Possibilities of the Centre linking with the International Association of Religious Freedom (IARF), which was seeking to establish an Interfaith Centre in Oxford in conjunction with the World Congress of Faiths, were explored, though there were difficulties seen in this. Eventually, however, the IARF's ambitious building project failed to materialise. The AHRC Autumn 1990 Appeal had failed to bring in substantial new money, and extra efforts were needed for the Centre to fulfil its function as a research organisation. A further appeal went out to members of the Centre in October 1991, but again, sadly, with little response.

A word here, though, must be said about the support the Centre had from the Dulverton Trust, the Moorgate Trust and, earlier on, by the Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust (now Esmée Fairbairn Foundation). Much help was also given at this time by Lord Rees-Mogg through his role as a Trustee of the Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust. This amounted to £10,000

per year during this period of depression in the Centre's finances, and was vital for the continuation of its work. This help, and the regular sources of income from members' subscriptions and income tax relief covered all the Centre's office and staff expenses. Mention should also be made of the support given to the Centre by way of benefactions and other major donations, made both earlier, in response to the Autumn 1990 Appeal, and later, by Society members, including Revd Norman Hillyer, Lord and Lady Bullock and Oliver Knowles, whose quiet generosity over the years merits special mention.

In May 1992 Prof Arthur Peacocke resigned as Chairman of the Research Committee due to the pressures of preparing for the Gifford Lectures 1992/93. His place in the Chair was taken by Prof Michael Argyle. That month the appointment of Prof Laurence Brown as Director was confirmed with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993. Also that month a proposal was put forward for a video film to promote the Centre, its findings and the value of its research; and a further colloquium of research advisers was mooted for 1993.

The first Research Colloquium was held on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1992 at Westminster College. Mary Burton spoke of her research and William Ord impressed with an account of his Indian travels and proposed research project. It was thought that the Centre should undertake research on Prayer, though funds were a problem, and that an urgent task was to develop a research policy. In the event, however, the second Colloquium and the projected video film failed to materialise.

A last attempt was made in 1992 to salvage the Alister Hardy Research Centre presence in America. This was discussed at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the AHRC in March, with Dr Newton Maloney, Fr Richard Woods and Philip Healy. Dr Maloney was joint Editor of *The International Journal of the Psychology of Religions*, and had completed a sabbatical year at Westminster College (having been awarded a grant by the Centre for his research project). He undertook to investigate the possibilities of a re-launch of AHRC (USA) Inc. Things struggled on for a while until eventually, in April 1993, formalities were brought to a completion, and the American Branch, AHRC (USA) Inc., was finally dissolved. There were still hopes, however, that some formal links with the USA could be maintained, with, it was proposed, Dr John Hickey as 'Director (USA) of AHRC'. The need for a base was considered of prime importance. Options discussed included the Fuller Theological Centre, Pasadena, California (Dr Maloney's institution) or the possibility of the

University of Massachusetts linking with the Society for the Study of Religion and/or the Religious Research Association there. It was agreed that Dr Maloney would seek to set up a meeting at the Fuller Theological Centre in January 1993, when he would be present there, to promote the AHRC and prepare the ground for a visit later by Prof Laurence Brown, the new Director Designate. Unfortunately, nothing came of these initiatives, and the Alister Hardy Research Centre's presence in America finally died.

Gordon Wakefield, who had announced his intention to retire in the previous June, resigned in the autumn of 1992 after completing three years in office as Director. He had originally accepted the appointment on a short-term basis to assist with the establishment of the Centre at Westminster College. He remained in contact with the Centre, however, joining the Advisory Research Council as a member and in September 1994 becoming a Patron of the Centre. Professor Laurence (Laurie) B. Brown succeeded him at the beginning of 1993, taking up a joint appointment to the Centre as Director and to Westminster College, where he would also have teaching responsibilities. Hopes were raised that, with the further links with Westminster College, and as a distinguished psychologist with an international reputation, Laurie Brown might be able to attract more research funds, as well as raise the profile of the Centre and move the research programme into new directions.

Under Laurie's Directorship attempts were indeed made to increase the academic standing of the Research Centre. The new Director considered that too much emphasis was being given to membership matters and social activities, and on this issue he took a tougher stance than his predecessor. Whilst he accepted that people reporting spiritual/religious experiences might have personal interests, concerns and questions, he felt that these were detracting from the academic work of study and research, which were now to take greater priority.

In June 1993 Verena Tschudin took over editorship of *Numinis* from Oliver Knowles, the production of the newsletter being assisted by the compilation expertise of Rob Waite and the invaluable help of a very able 'out of house' temporary secretary/typist, Louise Johnson. A further change made at this time saw the newsletter, *Numinis*, renamed *De Numine*, the Director, Laurence Brown, saying, "We should get the Latin right"<sup>11</sup>The new name first appeared in Issue No. 14 of October 1993.

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<sup>11</sup> The original intention had been to call the newsletter *Numen*, but it was found that that title was already in use, and so the dog Latin name *Numinis* had been adopted.

An attempt was made by the new Director to start an academic journal to include essays, extended reports and similar material. It was hoped to find a commercial publisher who might produce the journal in conjunction with the AHRC and Westminster College. A transitional issue, No. 0, was announced in the October 1993 newsletter, and published at that same time under the title *Religious Experience*. In this issue, the Director records, in an editorial, that “Whatever else I may have discovered recently, it is clear that not only is the work of the Centre very widely known and respected, it is still thought to be important.” Unfortunately, though, nothing came of this venture, and No. 0 remained the only issue of the journal. This issue also contained, in a moving obituary, the news of the death of Bishop George Appleton, who died in August aged 91. In August that year, a fourth and final residential weekend conference was held, on the theme of *Music and Religious Experience*, this having been set up by Gordon Wakefield just before he retired.

In 1994, on seven consecutive Sunday mornings from 2<sup>nd</sup> January to 13<sup>th</sup> February, BBC1 Television broadcast a series of seven programmes under the title *Glimpses of God* in its series, *Mystical Experiences*. In these programmes, participants were drawn from RERC contacts. This stimulated much interest; and Laurie Brown chaired a Seminar on the television series in June. This focussed on a video viewing of each quarter hour episode and benefitted from the presence of two of the programme’s commentators, Peggy Morgan and Dr Oliver Davies, who contributed to the discussion - as did David Hay and Edward Robinson.<sup>12</sup>

The future of the Centre was again discussed, the initial three-year period of its alignment with Westminster College having now drawn to a close. It was agreed that closer academic ties with Westminster College be developed, and that the Centre should be associated with the College’s Academic Board and the Theology School’s Research Centres’ Consultative Committee. It was also now accepted and agreed by the Advisory Research Council that the membership side should be separated from the academic research side.

In February 1994 the Trustees formally resolved that the Alister Hardy Research Centre be renamed and reconstituted as the Alister Hardy Trust, under which would be the Religious Experience Research Centre, and the Alister Hardy Society, a new members/friends support body, which was to

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<sup>12</sup> Copies of the TV series (video and DVD) are in the Centre’s Library at Lampeter.



operate with its own Committee and Rules. The Advisory Research Council of the Alister Hardy Research Centre was wound up and the Board of Trustees took over the complete executive running of the Trust, Research Centre and Society. Lord Rees-Mogg stood down as Chairman of Trustees in November, but was invited to retain his connection with the Centre as a Patron, which he accepted. Bishop Taylor also retired at this time from the Board of Trustees, as did Prof Ursula King and Dr David Hay. The Revd Dr Kenneth Wilson (Westminster College) took over as Deputy Chairman of Trustees until the appointment of Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke the following year. Other Trustees included Prof Michael Argyle; Bronwen Astor; Viscount Michael Combermere; Dr Bernard Farr; Michael Hardy; Oliver Knowles; Professor Keith Ward, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University and the Revd Dr Kenneth Wilson.

In October Meg Maxwell stood down from the Research Committee due to illness, and her place was taken by Peggy Morgan, who was later to become Director of the Centre (see page 55). Research Advisers at this time included Dr Eileen Barker; Dr Gordon Claridge (now Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Oxford Brookes University); Dr Peter Fenwick; George Gallup Jnr.; Dr Alan Gauld; Gordon Heald; Dr Ralph Hood; Prof James Loder; Prof William McCready; Dr Robert Towler; the Rt Revd Stephen Verney and Revd Dr Ralph Waller. Lord Rees-Mogg, now a Patron of the Centre, gave the 1994 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture in November of that year entitled *What has Emerged from the Research Work*.

A sad outcome of Laurie Brown's drive for academic standing and lack of interest in the members' support and social side of the Centre's activities meant that this aspect was severely neglected. Laurie actively discouraged wider participation, and disparaged amateur involvement. The annual conferences and social activities ceased – and this period saw a decline in membership to below 400, with a consequent loss of financial support. Laurie acknowledged later (in a letter to the Chair of Trustees, Revd Dr Arthur R. Peacock, in December 1995), that he was aware of criticism, largely for neglecting the members of the AHS. In his defence he explained that this was due to his concentrating on building up studies of religious experience within a wide variety of contexts and initiating collaborative studies with other Centres at Westminster College.

In August 1994, after eight years in the post, John Franklin resigned as Membership Secretary, Robert Waite taking over this function. Whilst John was unhappy that the Society was being rather overlooked by Laurence Brown, the reason for his resignation was that Robert Waite was working

two days a week at the Centre; lived much closer to Oxford; was extremely able and was in a much better position to run the membership scheme. The Bristol & Wessex Group folded at this time, but a new group, the Amersham Group with Michael Wright OBE (a retired Civil Servant), as secretary, formed in September of that year. The London Group and the Oxford Group were still going strong, the latter at the time organised by Susan Lloyd, who had joined the Centre as a member in January 1990.

The Alister Hardy Society was formally launched at an Inaugural General Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1994 at Westminster College, with Bronwen Astor in the Chair. Its Committee comprised Robert Waite as Hon. Administrative Secretary, John Franklin (who was elected as Hon. Committee Secretary), Oliver Knowles as Treasurer and three elected representative members of the Society, Harold Copeman, David Beck and Verena Tschudin. Harold and David both lived in Oxford: they had become members of the Centre in 1989, Harold in March and David in July. Harold had retired from the post of Under Secretary at HM Treasury in 1972; and was a keen amateur musician, singer, conductor, cellist and viol player, also the author of two books on music and language.<sup>13</sup> At this time he was playing a prominent part in the activities of the Oxford Group, and shortly to take over from Susan Lloyd as organiser and Chairman of the Group.

The objects of the Society were, “to support the Alister Hardy Trust and its Religious Experience Research Centre in promoting and undertaking the study of religious and other related areas of human experience, and in disseminating the findings of such studies.” A Members’ List was produced with the aim of enabling members to know of and be able to contact other members of the Society if desired. The annual Members’ Day, with the annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture continued, being held on a Saturday in November at Westminster College, Oxford (and later, when the Centre had left Westminster College, at other venues in Oxford).

Rules for running the Trust and Society were drawn up and approved by the Board of Trustees in March 1995. These were codified in an amendment to the Trust Deeds effected on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1995, which formally established the title of the charity as the “Alister Hardy Trust”, with two

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<sup>13</sup> *Singing in Latin* Copeman, H. 1990 and *The Pocket ‘Singing in Latin’* Copeman, H. 1990 Oxford, Copeman. He was later to write *Singing the Meaning*, Copeman, H. 1996 Oxford, Copeman (reviewed in *De Numine* September 1997), a copy of which was presented to the RERC library in 2003.

operational branches, the “Religious Experience Research Centre” and “Alister Hardy Society”, with governing Rules. The new constitution of the organisation gave rise to criticism, which has never been satisfactorily met: the three titles of, ‘Alister Hardy Trust’, ‘Religious Experience Research Centre’ and the ‘Alister Hardy Society’, were very confusing to new members of the Society, and very difficult for those in the Society to explain. Also, the question kept on arising, ‘Who is/was Alister Hardy?’ The word ‘religious’ in the title was off-putting for many, who associated the term ‘religious’ with ‘organised religion’ to which they did not subscribe. Attempts were made to use or include the word ‘spiritual’ in the title, as this could be much more identified with by the general public. However, it was recognised that for many people it is ‘religious’ experience which is important – and the consensus of feeling also was that the word ‘religious’ should remain because of this and its historical connotations, and to include the word ‘spiritual’ would make the title too long and cumbersome. Later, a new publicity booklet outlining the work of the Trust, RERC and Society was to be produced (see page 60), this to be called *Religious Experience and Spirituality* in order to introduce the word ‘spiritual’ into a title – but this did not solve the problem, which remained until the Alister Hardy Society eventually changed its name to the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience in 2012.

Despite promises, this period saw little in the way of progress on the research side. Also, no new funding was being generated: the Trust’s resources were becoming depleted, and concern was being expressed at the direction the Centre was going.

Nevertheless, at this time, a start was made on placing the Centre’s archives on computer, the original idea being that it might ultimately be accessible on CD ROM to facilitate research and analysis and the study of religious experience. Whilst it soon became clear that this last was not feasible for reasons of confidentiality and loss of control by the Centre, having the accounts available on computer, came to prove of utmost value in facilitating ease of access by researchers. The original archive comprised accounts mainly written by hand, and these had all to be transferred into typescript. Polly Whewey spent considerable time starting on this work, scanning typed pages onto discs at the offices of the World Congress of Faiths, then in Market Street, Oxford, with their kind permission as the Centre did not have a suitable scanner. She also proofread the finished work. Assistance was needed, but funding was short for this work. Indeed, it was reported at Members’ Day in November 1995, that the financial position of the Trust was such that it would not be able to continue to

sustain full-time staff. Members' response to an appeal made then, succeeded in raising £2,340 towards the quoted £7,000 cost needed to complete the computerisation project. Oliver Knowles generously donated £10,000 to the Trust, for the computerisation project and contribution to the general funds.

The Amersham Group sadly proved short-lived, folding in 1997. However, a number of members living in the border area of Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire (who had originally come together to assist in the mounting of the dinner-talk at Sudeley Castle in May 1996) had been meeting at Sudeley and Cirencester, and were keen to form a group. There were difficulties, though, owing to the wide scatter of members, and numbers being too few to attract speakers along the lines of the London and Oxford Groups. However, 1997 saw their merger with the Oxford Group, which itself was struggling at the time, and the Oxford/Cotswold Group was formed. Harold Copeman, who was Chairman of the Oxford Group, retired and Marianne Rankin took over the running of the group, initially with Revd Stephen Parsons, the Vicar of St Lawrence's Church, Lechlade, Gloucestershire, as Chairman.

Marianne, an interpreter and translator, with a BA in Modern Languages, described herself as being an initial sceptic when she heard about the Centre in early 1984. She recalled, later, that her opinion was that people reporting religious experiences were either deluded or that they had experienced the most important thing in life: she came, she said, to believe the latter. Returning to England from Singapore, where she had been living, she became interested in interfaith work and more involved in the Alister Hardy Society. She subsequently took a Master of Studies in the Study of Religion at Oxford University. At the Annual General Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1997 she was elected onto the AHS Committee as a member representative. About then an informal Oxford/Cotswold study group was formed, which met regularly at the home of Revd Stephen Parsons, in Lechlade, Gloucestershire. Stephen, as Chair, ran the study group, until 2003, when he moved away to take up a new post in Edinburgh, and the group folded.

Unfortunately, in April 1996, cutbacks at the Religious Experience Research Centre in Westminster College led to part-time work, and Polly Wheway, secretary again for the previous ten years, and a well-loved figure, had to leave for full time employment. Polly had given invaluable service, not only with the computerisation of the archive, and in the typing, compositing and checking of the newsletter *De Numine*, but also in her

normal secretarial work, and she was much missed<sup>14</sup>. The outcome of this was that the administrative function was effectively reduced to just the Director and the Hon. Administrative Secretary, and it was to remain at this level until the Library and Office were removed to Lampeter.

Laurie Brown completed his term as Director on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1996. He was succeeded by Peggy Morgan on 1<sup>st</sup> September. Things were at very low ebb at that stage, Peggy recalls, and it was explained to her that if she refused the challenge of 'doing something with it' the Trust might in all probability have to fold. Peggy Morgan, besides lecturing at Westminster and Mansfield Colleges, Oxford, was also contributing, at that time, to the study of religions in various other capacities, 1996 seeing the publication of her *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*.<sup>15</sup> She remained Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at Westminster College until 2001. From 1997 to 1999, Peggy was Chair of the Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education, and President of the British Association for The Study of Religions from 2000 to 2003. She was a Patron of the International Interfaith Centre and an honorary life member of the British Association for the Study of Religions.

Following Peggy's succession, a change was seen in progress on the academic and research side and in the outlook and morale of the Society. Under her leadership and due to her industry, a new series of separate occasional papers on various aspects of spiritual/religious experience and associated areas was begun (Occasional Papers (Series 2), now Nos. 1 to 49); together with a reprint of *The Original Vision* by Edward Robinson. In her work as Director, Peggy focussed on adding to the archives and making research into the material more interfaith and multi-disciplinary in line with a rigorous study of religious approaches which was her background.

As 1996 was the centennial year of the birth of Sir Alister Hardy, a Centennial Dinner was held to celebrate his life and achievements on

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<sup>14</sup> Polly said later that her years at the Centre (fifteen in all, 1976-81 and 1986-6) proved to be the happiest of her working life, Edward Robinson, Gordon Wakefield and Laurence Brown being, she said, "three of the most kind and considerate bosses." One researcher working at the Centre in 1987 wrote, "I specially enjoyed my daily contact with Polly, who was very competent and always had something pleasant to say."

<sup>15</sup> *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions*, Peggy Morgan & Clive Lawton, (Edinburgh University Press, 1996). Further publications followed (see Bibliography).

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December at Westminster College. Guests included Michael Hardy and Belinda Farley, Sir Alister's son and daughter; Lord Bullock; Professor Peter Clarke, appointed Chair<sup>16</sup> of the Board of Trustees; and Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke, who was retiring from that office; Dr Michael Argyle, Chair of the Research Committee; Bronwen Astor, Chair of the Alister Hardy Society and Peggy Morgan, the new Director. The Society's Members' Day the next day continued the commemoration of Sir Alister's work; the AGM welcoming Peggy Morgan, and endorsing the Rules of the Society, following amendment and approval by the Trustees.

Professor Peter Clarke took over as Chair of Trustees at the end of 1996. He was Director of the Centre for New Religious Movements at Kings College, London at that time, and Editor of the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*. New Trustee appointees included Prof Paul Badham, Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter, a particularly fortunate appointment as will be seen later; Prof Mary Grey, Professor of Contemporary and Feminist Theology in the School of Theology and Religion at the University of Southampton; the Revd Dr Richard Ralph, Principal of Westminster College, taking the place of Revd Dr Kenneth Wilson, who was retiring, and Mrs Jill Walford, a member of the AHS who had initiated the Oxford/Cotswold Group.

The next year, 1997, saw the appointment of Dr Elizabeth Jay, a member of staff at Westminster College, and Prof Ninian Smart, founding Professor of Religious Studies at Lancaster University, as Trustees. In November of that year John Franklin was elected as a Trustee in recognition of his services to the Trust and Society. That month, too, Bronwen Astor retired as a Trustee and Chair of the Alister Hardy Society, her place being taken by the Revd Prebendary John Osborn. John Osborn had retired the year before as Director for Schools for the Diocese of London and had a particular interest in interfaith activity. He had earlier been Principal of the Anglican Church Schools in the oil belt of the Muslim state of Brunei in South-east Asia, and also found mixed faith/interfaith issues to be of importance in the schools he had looked after in London. He had served for five years on the English-ARC, the national version of the Anglican-Roman Catholic conversations.

Peggy Morgan taking up her role as Director was indefatigable. In addition to her duties directing research, she set about giving lectures throughout Great Britain, supporting the Alister Hardy Society and

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<sup>16</sup> Around this time the title 'Chairman' gave place to the preferred term 'Chair'.

encouraging and promoting the sale of the Centre's publications. In 1997 she organised a conference of the British Association for the Study of Religions in Oxford with the theme *Religious Experience*.

In 1997 the Research Committee was re-constituted and enlarged. Besides Dr Michael Argyle as Chair and Peggy Morgan (Director) as Secretary, members included Revd Dr Leslie J. Francis, Professor of Practical Theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Wales, Bangor; Dr Fiona Bowie Senior Lecturer in Anthropology from Lampeter; Dr June Boyce-Tillman Professor of Applied Music at King Alfred's College, Winchester<sup>17</sup>; Emeritus Professor Derek Bryce-Smith, Professor of Biochemistry at Reading University; Harold Copeman, who had joined as AHS Committee representative in 1996; Dr Mark Fox from Westminster College, Oxford and Prof Roland Littlewood, Professor of Medical Anthropology at University College Medical School, London.

Leslie Francis, who was later to become Chair of the Research Committee, and then Chair of Trustees, in addition to his position at Bangor, was Director of the Welsh National Centre for Religious Education. He had held this joint appointment since October 1999. He was also co-convenor of the Network for Psychological Type and Christian Faith. His main areas of research were empirical theology, religious education, and the psychology of religion. Prior to this appointment he was Director of the Centre for Theology and Education, Trinity College, Carmarthen. This position was held concurrently with the DJ James Chair in Pastoral Theology in the University of Wales, Lampeter. He is also an Anglican priest.

June Boyce-Tillman, later to take over the Chair of the Research Committee, read Music at St Hugh's College, Oxford. She pioneered work on introducing composing activities into the classroom and completed a PhD at the Institute of Education entitled *Towards a model of the musical development of children*, the results of which have been translated into Dutch, Japanese, Portuguese and Polish. She had lectured, given papers and led workshops in many parts of the world, and had a particular interest in Music and Theology including Religious Education and regularly writes and takes workshops linking these areas together. Her pioneering

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<sup>17</sup> Now University College, Winchester.

work in Interfaith dialogue, articles and talks on interfaith and intercultural links in Britain and abroad led to the establishment of the Field of World Musics at King Alfred's College, Winchester.

1997 also saw the award of a grant of £16,125 from the John Templeton Foundation for the computerisation of the Archive of accounts of spiritual/religious experience. On the strength of this, Diana Hasting, recommended by Peggy Morgan, was appointed to carry out this work. Diana had earlier been an adult student at Westminster College, taking a BA in Theology there, and Peggy had been one of her tutors. Her knowledge of the subject matter made her ideally suited to cope with what was really quite a difficult and sometimes stressful job, which required hours of evaluating, and at times interpreting, pages of hand-written accounts before transferring them onto computer. The number of completed discs eventually transferred to Lampeter bore witness to the work she did. Diana records that she had been enormously impressed by the numinous element coming through the recounting of the experiences, and said that she had felt very privileged to read the stories being told, which had strengthened her in her own personal faith. At this time a thesaurus of key words was developed for easier access and analysis of the accounts of spiritual/religious experience.

Also in 1997 Dr Merete Jakobson was awarded a grant for research into accounts of negative (disagreeable or evil) experiences.

The following year, on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1998, a successful one-day conference, was organised by Bronwen Astor and John Franklin. Held at St. James' Piccadilly, London, this focused on *Three Twentieth Century Visionaries*, Teilhard de Chardin, Carl Gustav Jung and Sir Alister Hardy. The speakers were: Prof Ursula King peaking on Teilhard de Chardin, *Cosmic, Human and Divine: the Spiritual Significance of the Epic of Evolution*; Mollie Tuby, President of the C.G. Jung Analytical Psychology Club, London, speaking on *Carl Jung and the Opposites*; and Dr David Hay, speaking on *Alister Hardy: Biologist of the Spirit*. Over 200 people attended the event, which was recorded on cassette tapes. David Hay's paper was published as an Occasional Paper<sup>18</sup> and Peggy Morgan arranged for a video to be made of a lecture he gave at Westminster College on *The Spirit of the Child*, with a preface giving a full overview of his life and work.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Occasional Papers Series 2, p. 131.

<sup>19</sup> *The Spirit of the Child* (1999), video, RERC.



Around this time, Peggy felt that the Centre should have a more modern logo than the current logo of the Centre's title arranged around a representation of the Chartres Cathedral maze. She had remained in touch with Edward Robinson who was very generous and came to spend time with her students at Westminster College. She asked him if he could design a new logo, in the form of a spiral, but he said he could not better the triple spiral motif from the Megalithic spirals in the inner chamber of Newgrange in the Boyne Valley to the east of Dublin. This was accepted, and has been used ever since, appearing on the front cover of all issues of *De Numine* from Spring 1999 onward.

In September 1998 Peggy Morgan created an MA distance-learning course in Religious Experience, validated by the University of Wales, Lampeter. She designed and supervised the principle core module and assisted in the design of further modules. She arranged student days at Westminster College, Oxford with lecturers speaking on a variety of topics, which could also be enjoyed by members of the AHS Oxford/Cotswold Group. The organising of joint MA student/AHS Group events proved to be of great value and of mutual benefit to both groups of people. Peggy was also involved with BASR (British Association for the Study of Religions) and, in the planning of BASR's Annual Conference, 'Religion and Innovation' at Lampeter in 1998, she worked with Anne Watkins, who was later to play an important part in the Centre's story.

That year, a review was held of the position of the Centre at Westminster College. It was decided that thought needed to be given to finding possible alternative premises, despite assurances from Westminster College regarding the security of the Centre's position at the College for the next three years. Through Prof Paul Badham, a preliminary approach was made to the University of Wales, Lampeter, and this was met with a warm affirmation of interest and welcome. Other possible venues were looked into, including Culham College, Oxford and Sutton Courtenay Abbey near Abingdon, in the interests of remaining in or near Oxford. Whilst there were great advantages seen in the removal of the Research Centre to Lampeter as it would become part of the University Department of Theology and Religious Studies, there would be administrative difficulties and changes needed in running the Trust and Society from Wales. In this year, too, an Alister Hardy Trust website was created.

In March 1999 Prof Leslie Francis became Chair of the Research Committee on the retirement of Prof Michael Argyle from that post. Work produced at this time included the publication of Dr Merete Jakobson's

study of the accounts of negative or evil religious experiences in the RERC archives (Jakobson, 1999)<sup>20</sup>. Work was also proceeding on the computerisation of the Archive and on the thesaurus of key words which was being developed. In that year, too, John Franklin, who had long thought that there was, somewhere, deep down, a common core to religious experience, offered the Trust £10,000 towards research into this area. This was accepted, and eventually the project was given to Dr Mark Fox who started work, in 2001, with the aim of concentrating on 'light' as a common feature of spiritual/religious experience. It was later agreed that further investigation should be made into such other common features as 'love' and 'sound', but that this would need further funding.

In January 2000 Dr Eileen Barker, who had had a long association with the AHRERC,<sup>21</sup> was re-appointed as a Trustee. On 12<sup>th</sup> July 2000 Lord Runcie, former Archbishop of Canterbury and a Patron of the Centre, died, an obituary being carried in the September issue of *De Numine*. A number of distinguished people agreed to become Patrons of the Centre this year: these included: the Archbishop of Wales, The Rt Revd Rowan Williams, later to become Archbishop of Canterbury; The Most Revd Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, later that year to be made a Cardinal, who took the place of Cardinal Basil Hume who had died in 1999; Prof Sayyed Hussein Nasr, a Professor at George Washington University in the U.S.A. and Swami Chidananda Saraswati from Benares Hindu University.

But once more change was in the air. It was learnt that Oxford Brookes University would be taking over Westminster College, and that, despite all representations, there would be no room for the Alister Hardy Research Centre to continue there.

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<sup>20</sup> Occasional Papers, Series 3. p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> By now Eileen Barker had been made an OBE in recognition of her work.

#### 4. 2000, A NEW HOME

Once again, the Centre and Alister Hardy Society were obliged to move to new premises. Oxford Brookes University took over Westminster College on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2000, and the Centre had to vacate the campus. Through Professor Badham and the University of Wales, Lampeter's good offices, the RERC, archives and library moved to a new home in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Lampeter. Interestingly, Lampeter was said to have the distinction of possessing the largest Theology and Religious Studies Department in the smallest public University in Europe.



*St David's College, University of Wales Lampeter*



*Sheikh Khalifa Building – home of the AH Religious Experience Research Centre and eventually the Society*

The Alister Hardy Society and administration of the Trust moved at the end of July 2000 to new accommodation in offices at 142 High Street, Watlington, just to the east of Oxford, which was convenient for Oliver

Knowles, the Treasurer, who lived in Watlington and for Robert Waite who lived at Chinnor just a few miles to the north.

The appointment of Prof Paul Badham and Dr Wendy Dossett, and the move of the Research Centre to the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at its home in the Sheikh Khalifa Building at the University of Wales Lampeter, triggered a number of other changes. It was obviously highly desirable that there should be a centralisation of administration, and that the Society should be more closely linked with the Centre. There were also financial advantages to be gained by running both the Society and Trust from Lampeter through savings in rental and other costs.

Edward Robinson made a generous gift to the Trust of a collection of ten original works of art which were collected for the Centre for the Study of Spirituality and the Arts (CSSA)<sup>1</sup> at The Regional Religious Research Centre at West London Institute from 1985 onwards. These including works by Hervey Adams, Peter Ball, Meinrad Craighead, Elizabeth Graham, Dennis Hawkins, Charlotte Mayer and Alba Taylor. Edward added one of his own works, a triptych made from disused railway sleepers in elm wood, titled Resurrection XXXIII. All the items were carefully stored at Lampeter awaiting proper display in the Theology and Religious Studies Department there. The collection was the focus of a video produced by Peggy Morgan earlier, at the beginning of 2000, entitled, *Spirituality and the Arts*, and was previewed by a survey of Edward's wider work and publications.

Peggy Morgan resigned her Senior Lectureship at the now Oxford Brookes University and moved, with the van of archive material and books, to spend the summer at Lampeter in West Wales sorting and shelving in order to relocate the Centre satisfactorily there. In this she was helped by Anne Watkins, who had been engaged that summer to assist the Centre in an administrative capacity. Peggy continued with a busy schedule, commuting from Oxford to Lampeter, out of Oxford University term-time to supervise researchers using the archive, and support the Centre's Lampeter life as well as running the MA weekends in Oxford and keeping in contact with the office in Watlington. The Trust and Society continued to operate in Watlington for two more years during which time Robert trained Anne Watkins in preparation for her taking over the administration, membership and book sales, before the final move to Lampeter in July 2002 to be reunited once again with the RERC.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Robinson was founding Director of the CSSC

John Keeble's personal portrait of the life of Sir Alister Hardy, *This Unnamed Something* was launched at the Society's annual Members' Day in November 2000. Sadly, John, a member of the AHS and one-time Chair of the London Group, died just before his text was published and he was unable to see it in print, but his wife, Naomi Kinnall-Keeble, and her son Jonathan were at the launch of the book, and were presented with a copy.

In 2000 the Centre launched a revamped website on the Internet, and 2001 saw further developments. The website was recast and expanded. New pages were drafted by John Franklin and, approved by the Trustees; a new site was created and launched under the domain name <http://www.alisterhardytrust.co.uk> by a firm of web designers in Watlington, Re3D. The site gave full details of the Alister Hardy Trust, RERC and Society, publications, events and the MA course in Religious Experience, together with sample accounts of spiritual and religious experience, and a Forum to enable discussion of spiritual/religious experience for members of the Society, which was run by Stephen Parsons as Facilitator.

In that year, too, the publicity booklet *Religious Experience and Spirituality* outlining the work of the Trust, RERC and Alister Hardy Society was produced. Bronwen Astor became a Patron of the Centre. Sadly, in October, Timothy Beardsworth, who had joined Sir Alister at the beginning in 1969 and was the author of *A Sense of Presence*, died. November saw Prof Michael Argyle's and Harold Copeman's resignations on health grounds from the Research Committee: Marianne Rankin took Harold's place as the AHS Committee Representative on that Committee the following year.

Sadly, in that year also, Gordon Wakefield died and the February 2001 issue of *De Numine* carried an obituary commemorating his period as Director of the Centre. February 2001 also saw the funeral of Prof Ninian Smart, a much respected Trustee, who died on 15<sup>th</sup> January; and in that year, too, The Rt Rev John Taylor who had joined the RERU's Board of Trustees in 1987, died. Obituaries were included in the September 2001 issue of *De Numine*.

The Trust and the Society began to wind down in Watlington. The Society Committee meeting there on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2002 was the last to be held at Watlington. It was also the last to be chaired by John Osborn, who was standing down as Chair of the Society, and the last to be attended by Peggy Morgan as Director. After the meeting, a bouquet of flowers was given to



*Oliver Knowles and Robert Waite  
At Watlington, 2002*



*Robert Waite and Anne Watkins  
Robert outgoing Secretary and Anne incoming  
Administrator, Watlington, March 2002  
(see page 65).*



*Revd. John Osborn, outgoing Chair of the AHS,  
with Marianne Rankin (who was to take over as Chair),  
Watlington, March 2002 (see page 72).*



*Peggy Morgan and Dr Wendy Dossett, Watlington, March  
2002. Peggy handing over to Wendy, (see page 61).*



Peggy by John Osborn on behalf of the Committee as a tribute of appreciation and thanks for her work for the Centre and Society.

Many tributes were paid to Peggy for her outstanding contribution to the work of the Trust and the Religious Experience Research Centre – and a warm welcome was given to Professor Paul Badham and Dr Wendy Dossett, who formed the new Directorate. Peggy continued as Director until the end of April 2002, when she handed over to Paul and Wendy.



*Paul Badham and Peggy Morgan  
at Peggy's retirement party*

Professor Paul Badham, as Director of Religious Studies at Lampeter was best positioned and able to retain the academic respect of the Research Centre. He brought many qualifications to the position. He had been a member of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Lampeter since 1973 and a Professor since 1991. He was Head of the Department from 1991-99 and Head of the School of Anthropology, Classics, Philosophy, Theology & Religious Studies from 1999 to 2002. He had been Chairman of the Federal University of Wales Subject Panel and University Subject Committee for Theology and Religious Studies Humanities Research Board and the Quality Assurance Agency. He is known for his publications on death and immortality in different religious traditions, and for his studies of Near-Death Experiences. *The Contemporary Challenge of Modernist Theology*<sup>2</sup> focused on the importance of religious experience to contemporary religion. He ran an MA course on Death and Immortality at the University of Wales Lampeter; and his research interests were in the global dimension of religious experiencing and the area of modern believing.

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<sup>2</sup> Badham, 1998.



Dr Wendy Dossett, at the beginning, acting for the Director, was instrumental in overseeing, with Peggy Morgan, the smooth transition of the Centre from Oxford to Lampeter. She was appointed by the University to take over responsibility for directing the MA in Religious Experience, and to assist the Director in expanding and developing the work of the Centre as Associate Director. Wendy studied English and Religious Studies at Lampeter and took a PhD in the Methodology of Religion with particular reference to Pure Land Buddhism in Japan in 1997. She was previously Head of the Religious Education Resource Centre and Lecturer in World Religions at Trinity College Carmarthen and has published widely in textbooks on World Religions. She returned to Lampeter to take over the MA course in Religious Experience from Peggy Morgan and to launch an MA in World Religions for Teachers. She was Secretary of the Shap Working Party for World Religions in Education, a lobby group of RE/RS professionals from all sectors and faith communities, founded in 1969 by Ninian Smart and others, to ensure that education in religions considered religions in general, and not only the religion of the British establishment..

In April 2002 Professor Leslie Francis stepped down as Chair of the Research Committee, and his place was taken by Professor June Boyce-Tillman, Lecturer, Director of Foundation Music, Director of Postgraduate Research and Professor of Applied Music at King Alfred's College, Winchester<sup>3</sup>. Nominated as new members of the Research Committee were Dr Shirley Firth,<sup>4</sup> who was lecturing an MA on *Death in the Indian Tradition* at Reading University and also at King Alfred's College, Winchester at the time; Dr Isabel Clarke, a clinical psychologist from the Southampton Health Authority; and Dr Graham Harvey of King Alfred's College, Winchester.

Michael Hardy stepped down that month as a Trustee, his place being taken, in November, by Jane Winship, a great-niece of Sir Alister Hardy, thus keeping the Hardy family connection. Jane Winship had retired as Head of Midwifery for the UK, and President of the European Union Advisory Committee on the Education of Midwives in 1996. She had completed an MA in Religion in 2001 at University College Winchester. Also joining as Trustees at this time were Prof June Boyce-Tillman, Prof Ursula King (Universities of Bristol and Oslo), who had previously served as

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<sup>3</sup> Now University College Winchester.

<sup>4</sup> The next year Dr Shirley Firth received the 2003 SGAP Award in recognition of her work in education health-care and social work professionals in issues around dying and bereavement.

a Trustee of the Centre from January 1992 to February 1994), Prof Frank Whaling (University of Edinburgh), Dr Michael York (Bath Spa University College) and Marianne Rankin, who was elected Chair of the Society in April 2002, taking over formally from Revd John Osborn who retired in March that year.

The final departure of the Trust and Society from Watlington at the end of June 2002 with the closure of the office there, marked the end of an era and the move saw the departure of Robert Waite. For over eleven years he had given sterling service to the Society and Trust as Membership Secretary, and had also been a great help to the Treasurer in keeping the accounts. Rob had already decided to retire, but Oliver Knowles had persuaded him to stay on until the move had been completed and the Watlington office closed down.

In other events in 2002, on 6<sup>th</sup> September Prof Michael Argyle died. His obituary appeared in the February 2003 issue of *De Numine*. His long association with the activities of the Centre extended from 1976, when he joined the first Advisory Research Council of RERU<sup>5</sup> and lasted to involvement in the Centre's accommodation at Lampeter, which he visited with Peggy Morgan just before the move in 2000 and his retirement in 2001. His wise counsel and sense of humour were much missed. The Trust and Society were represented at his funeral at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin in Oxford on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2002.

Also in September that year, a week-end conference was held from 19<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> at Lampeter on the theme, *Spirituality, Science and Religious Experience*, with a pre-conference workshop on *Spirituality and Creativity*. The speakers at the conference included Prof Paul Badham, Prof Keith Ward, Dr Peter Fenwick, Revd Alan Race and Peggy Morgan. In September, too, a local group of members was founded in Wales by Dr Pat Craig. Called the Lampeter/Carmarthen Group – later to be known as the Wales Group – it met at the University of Wales Lampeter to hold group discussions, sometimes with speakers and later held 'Dialogue Lunches' at the home of Revd Jonathan Robinson. Meetings at Lampeter were timed, if possible, to coincide with Residentials of the MA in Religious Experience there.

The Alister Hardy Society Members Day that year, held on 16<sup>th</sup> November featured Prof Ursula King, who gave the Alister Hardy Memorial

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<sup>5</sup> See page 13.

lecture on *One Planet, One Earth: Ecological and Mystical Spirituality from an Interfaith Perspective*.<sup>6</sup>

It was with sadness and amid expressions of deep gratitude that Rob left after tidying things up and handing over to his successor, Anne Watkins. The office was finally closed and vacated on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2002. On 31<sup>st</sup> July Oliver Knowles resigned as Treasurer, after 17 years in the post – and a warm tribute was paid to him in the September issue of *De Numine* that year, acknowledging his financial stewardship over the years, his tireless work in raising funds and his contacts with grant-giving trusts, as well as his personal generosity, which had kept the Trust firmly operational and in healthy surplus. Oliver Knowles stayed on as a Trustee, however, for one more year, from April 2002, and was appointed Chair of Trustees on the retirement of Prof Peter Clarke to oversee and smooth the handover to Lampeter. The Revd Prof Leslie Francis then took over as the new Chair of Trustees on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2003.

Oliver's place as Treasurer was taken by Dr Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Paul Badham's brother-in-law and former Research Fellow in Western Esotericism at the University of Wales, Lampeter. Nicholas was a Senior Member of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford and, from 1992, was Vice-Chair of Keston College, Oxford. He was also former Senior Campaign Executive for international fundraising in the Campaign for Oxford, 1988-1994. His responsibilities as Treasurer included control of the Trust's Income and Expenditure and presenting financial reports to the Trustees and the Society. Nicholas also became engaged in seeking out possibilities for fundraising.

At Lampeter under the new Directorate, the administration was streamlined. Anne Watkins was established as Librarian/Administrator to run the administrative side of the Centre. Later the post was divided into two roles: David Greenwood being appointed as Administrator, with Anne in the role of Librarian/Correspondent, both being part-time paid posts.

Anne Watkins had a diploma in Theology and Social Ethics from Plater College, Oxford. She took a BA in Religion and Ethics at Lampeter as a mature student and an MA in Interfaith Studies, taken partly at Lampeter and partly at the International Buddhist Study Centre in Tokyo. She also took a PGCE at Westminster College, Oxford. Her responsibilities included running the RERC Library and sending books out to members as requested, responding to correspondence, assisting people in the use of the Archive

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<sup>6</sup> Published as Occasional Paper no. 48.

and Library, taking the Minutes of Trustees meetings and Research Committee and sharing in the day to day running of the Centre.

David Greenwood, who was appointed in October 2002, had qualified with a BSc (Eng) from London and an MSc from Manchester. From 1970 to 1992 he was with the Property Services Agency responsible for multi-million-pound projects and a staff of 65. On retirement he took an Oxford degree in Theology at Westminster College, and became a Licensed Reader in the Church of England and, later, in the Church of Wales. He became responsible for running and maintaining the membership records of the Alister Hardy Society, liaising with the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), which he was ultimately able to supplant, and the Inland Revenue with respect to covenants and the Gift Aid scheme. His duties also included assistance in organising conferences; liaising with the Editor of *De Numine*, in the production of the newsletter; and keeping all accounts up to date, working closely with the Hon. Treasurer and the Librarian/Correspondent (later, in 2005, the title Correspondent was dropped).

In July 2003, Jean Matthews joined the team to assist in typing accounts into the Archive database. Jean, who has a BA in French and an MA in Fine Art and at the time was studying for an MA in Religious Experience, looked after the RERC office, the archive database, publications etc., and also assists in the production of the newsletter, *De Numine*. The administrative team at Lampeter was also supported by John Franklin as Committee Secretary of the Alister Hardy Society, who worked from his home in Greenwich, London.

The Centre's governing body remained the Board of Trustees, under the Chairmanship of Prof Leslie Francis. The Trustees were responsible for running the Trust and overseeing the work of the Research and Society Committees. Provision for a Finance Committee had been made earlier in April 2002; also, in April that year, the Rules of the Trust and Society were amended to reflect the Trust's new position at Lampeter.<sup>7</sup> At that time,

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<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, however, due to the award of a Templeton Foundation grant for a global project to explore world-wide religious/spiritual experience (see page80) the functions of the Finance Committee were subsumed by the Templeton Project Management Group., which met under the Chairmanship of Professor John Hedley Brooke, its membership consisting of Professor Keith Ward, Dr Nicholas Bunnin, Director: Philosophy Project Institute for Chinese Studies, Oxford University, and Dr Margaret Yee, Honorary Associate Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford, with the Directors in attendance. They received three monthly progress reports and a six-monthly Financial Report and Cost-benefit

Prof June Boyce-Tillman was the Chair of the Research Committee and Marianne Rankin was Chair of the Alister Hardy Society. Marianne took over the post of Chair formally on the retirement of John Osborn in April 2002. In this she was assisted by Tristram Jenkins in a new post of Vice-Chair, which was created at this time. Tristram was already a member of the Alister Hardy Society Committee. He had been Diocesan Director of Education for Hereford from 1982 to 2000, and had heard Sir Alister Hardy speak at several conferences. He had first linked up with RERU in the 1980s, eventually joining the Society as a member in 1990.

The former tradition of an annual conference to present and discuss aspects of spiritual/religious experience was resurrected. The first, an inaugural conference celebrating the re-launch of the Religious Experience Research Centre and Alister Hardy Society at Lampeter, was held there in September 2002 under the title, *Spirituality, Science and Religious Experience*. This event included, as an optional extra, a one-day pre-conference workshop on *Spirituality and Creativity* and two key-note lectures by Prof Keith Ward and Dr Peter Fenwick given in conjunction with the Scientific and Medical Network's *Science, Consciousness and Ultimate Reality* project sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation. Delegates arriving early also benefited from an address to the MA students on *Consciousness and the Mind-Brain Issue*, by Revd Professor John Hick, former Professor of Theology at Birmingham University, who was visiting Lampeter. It was at this conference that the idea of a Global Project, the study of spiritual/religious experience in countries across the globe, was first mentioned

A second conference was also held at Lampeter, in September 2003 under the title, *Spiritual Experience and the World's Religious Traditions*. This too offered an optional pre-conference workshop, on *Experiencing Spirituality*. These pre-conference workshops proved most successful: the sharing of individual creativity, thoughts and experiences bringing participants together and resulting in a very friendly, relaxed and interactive atmosphere. In addition to the main conference speakers, both have included papers given by students on the MA course in Religious Experience. Cassette recordings were made of all the main lectures given at these conferences, and at other events.

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Analysis, monitored the project and made recommendations for further funding applications.

The RERC Archive of accounts of spiritual/religious experiences held by the Centre had also steadily grown over the years, although there were no new major calls for accounts on the scale initially sought by Sir Alister Hardy. However, a donation of over 300 accounts of Near-Death Experiences was kindly given to the Centre in 2003 by Dr Peter Fenwick. Dr Fenwick, consultant neuro-physiologist at the Maudsley Hospital, London, and President of the Scientific & Medical Network and British Branch of the International Association for Near-Death Studies, had been conducting his own research into this phenomenon, and was the author, together with his wife Elizabeth, of a book on the subject, *The Truth in the Light*.<sup>8</sup>

At that time there were some 5,720 accounts of spiritual/religious experiences in the AHRERC Archive, which was recognised by the University as an extremely valuable research collection. It was visited regularly by the MA students and also by private researchers from all over the world coming to consult it for personal interest, research for publication or for print, television or radio journalism. Visitors have included an architect interested in the relationship between religious experience and building design and a TV researcher making a documentary. The Centre frequently received requests for information from the Archive – including requests as diverse as for information on religious experience and cerebral palsy from a training hospital, and on human levitation from a researcher at a University in Australia. The question of access to the Archive was raised in connection with confidentiality and availability. It was feared that the terms of confidentiality might hinder research because it prevented follow up research but the conditions of the confidentiality form were designed so that, whilst researchers could not contact donors of accounts directly, they could do so through the Director.

With the move to Lampeter in 2002, the production of Occasional Papers proceeded apace, with seven alone being produced in 2002 (O.P. Series 2, nos. 29 to 35). These were followed by a further three in 2003 with more in the pipeline, Marianne Rankin and Anne Watkins working together on preparing them for publication. Marianne, herself, produced a paper, *An Introduction to Religious Experience*, which was added to the Occasional papers Series 3<sup>9</sup>.

Edward Robinson's generously donated collection of works of art from the work of the Centre of Spirituality and the Arts (CSSA) to the Centre are

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<sup>8</sup> Fenwick P & E, *The Truth in the Light*, Berkley Publishing Group.

<sup>9</sup> Rankin, Marianne (2004) OP2. Third Series.

now on permanent display at the top staircase leading to the Centre's then premises in the Sheikh Khalifa Building. The exhibition benefits from the labelling and a catalogue that had kindly been prepared by Peggy Morgan before she retired. Sir Alister Hardy's beautiful water-colour paintings of religious buildings in South India, Lahore, Bangkok, Burma, Cambodia and Tokyo, fifteen in all, which had kindly been given to the Trust by his family, hang in a Seminar Room in the same building for all to enjoy. Also exhibited on the staircase are four colourful paintings on loan from the artist Caroline Mackenzie. She travelled to India and was influenced by the sense of the sacred, imagination and celebration she found in Hindu art, which was reflected in her images of Biblical narratives.

The RERC Library had grown from the legacy of Sir Alister Hardy's own personal specialist library. A number of other small libraries bequeathed to the RERC, as well as other books kindly given by members of the Society and bought for the MA course, at that time had increased its content to some 2,500 volumes. A large number of books are related to the Christian tradition, but there are also old and new texts relating to Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism, books about charismatic leaders, lay movements and paranormal activities, in addition to many of the classics of mystical and religious experience. A Catalogue was produced recording all the books, Occasional Papers, journals, videos and cassettes held by the Centre in the Library which were available to members of the Society on loan. A list of publications, Occasional Papers and cassettes available for purchase was also published at this time. First produced by Peggy Morgan, the list is kept updated by the present staff. Grants totalling £15,000 were received from the Bridge Trust, the Birthday House Trust and the Theoria to Theory Trust of the Scientific and Medical Network for a further research project, on Death-Bed Visions, to be conducted by Peter Fenwick and Sue Brayne, in collaboration with six hospitals. In January 2004, Peter was invited, and accepted, to join the Centre as a member of the Research Committee.

In 2003, Dr Mark Fox's *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience*<sup>10</sup> was published, which makes substantial reference to the work of the Religious Experience Research Centre. An important book, it includes a thorough survey of decades of study of NDEs, relating these to comparable religious and 'crisis experiences' and bridging a gap between conflicting approaches of science and spirituality.

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<sup>10</sup> Fox, 2003.

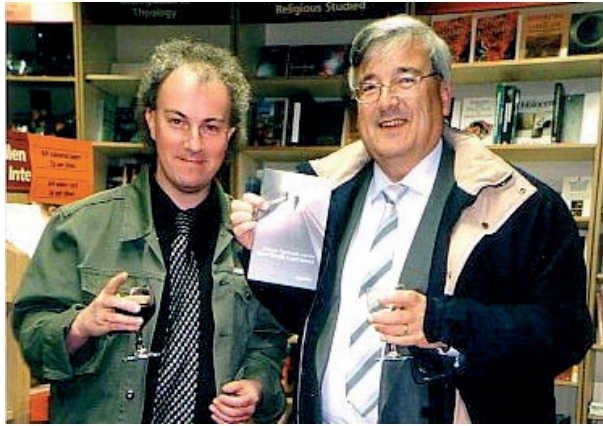


*Wendy Dossett and Anne Watkins learning about the Archive from Peggy Morgan – 10<sup>th</sup> April 2002*



*Edward Robinson with Peggy Morgan and Wendy Dossett restoring art exhibits in the RERC Archive room (housed in the main Library of UWL at that time) – 16<sup>th</sup> April 2002*





*Mark Fox and Paul Badham at the launch of Mark's book, Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience in the University Book Shop – 16 April 2002*



*Verena Tschudin receiving a presentation from Marianne Rankin on retiring as Editor of De Numine at Open Day in Oxford – 27<sup>th</sup> November 2004*

The Centre was attracting many visitors besides students on the MA. In February 2003, the Prince of Wales who was visiting Lampeter to celebrate its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the service of Higher Education, met the Directors of the RERC. He also met Penny Sartori,<sup>11</sup> a research student, as he had expressed interest in the study she was doing of near-death experiences in a busy intensive therapy unit. The Prince also spoke to Professor Yao about the Chinese Project – and was presented by the Centre with a copy of Dr Mark Fox’s book, *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience*.

In November 2003 a Vision Statement for the Centre was codified, this stating, “The AHT/RERC/AHS seeks through research and study to contribute to the understanding of transcendent consciousness and religious reflection as well as their impact on individual lives and on society.”

The Alister Hardy Society continued to thrive under Marianne Rankin as Chair. Marianne also continued to run the Oxford/ Cotswold Group with the help of Sue Barrance and Sister Mary McKeone, who were members of the Group. A new AHS Chesterfield Group was formed in November 2003 with Michael Rush as Organiser. A Canadian (Toronto) Chapter of the Society was started in June 2004 under the leadership of Steve Dawkins, which unfortunately lasted only a year. Membership of the Society at this time stood at around 450, apart from Patrons, Trustees and members on the Mailing List.

On 27<sup>th</sup> November 2003, Harold Copeman, who had played an important part in the life of the Oxford/Cotswold Group and who had served well on the Alister Hardy Society and Research Committees, died. It was with sadness that the Centre also learnt of the death of Meg Maxwell on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2003. In February 2004 Lord Bullock died. Lord Bullock had played a very important role in the early years of the Centre’s existence and for a number of years since his retirement as Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Research Advisory Council. He had been a Life Member of the Alister Hardy Society and had kept a keen interest in the Centre. Obituaries for both Lord Bullock and Meg Maxwell were included in the February 2004 and September 2004 issues of the Society newsletter,

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<sup>11</sup> Penny Sartori was a staff-nurse at Morrision Hospital in Swansea. Now Dr Penny Sartori, having gained a PhD at Lampeter on *NDEs in a Hospital Context*.

*De Numine*, respectively. The latter contained a moving tribute by David Hay, who had known Lord Bullock since the early days of RERU. Of course, as the years pass, many well-known faces pass away, and not all can be recorded. But perhaps here mention should be made of Joan Crewdson, one of the early researchers back in 1970. She became a Life Member of the Alister Hardy Society in January 1987, and a Benefactor with a donation of £2,500 under the Gift Aid scheme to the Centre in 2000, and she maintained a keen interest in the Centre until her death in May 2005, aged 88. A fine tribute to Joan by Peggy Morgan is contained in the Autumn 2005 issue of *De Numine*.

The Centre continued to prosper, assisted by continuing, much appreciated, support from the Esmée Fairburn Foundation and other Trusts, and from subscriptions and book sales. In August 2004 the Director, Paul Badham, delegated executive responsibility for the day-to-day running of the RERC and Society to David Greenwood. This left him free to concentrate on promotion of the academic and research work of the Centre. Later in 2004, David prepared for and took over the administration of the Gift Aid scheme from the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) giving, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005, a substantial saving to the Centre. In April 2005 another member of the Society, who wished to remain anonymous, kindly and most generously made a Gift Aid donation of £35,000 for the work of the Centre: with Gift Aid this brought £44,800 for the Centre.

Activities continued to flourish. In July 2004 the Centre ran a third conference, this time jointly with the Modern Churchpeople's Union, this from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> July at the High Leigh Conference Centre at Hoddesdon in Hertfordshire, the theme being, *The God Experience: Who has it and why?* The keynote speaker was His Eminence Koken Monnyo Otani, the 26<sup>th</sup> Supreme Primate of Jodo Shinshu (Japanese Pure Land) Buddhism, speaking on Experiencing 'Other Power' in Pure-land Buddhism, his talk revealing how, despite different terminologies, human experiencing could be surprisingly similar across very different religious traditions. His Eminence had visited Lampeter in June 2003 and accepted at that time to become a Patron of the Centre. It was at this conference that the Global Project, the study of spiritual/religious experience in countries across the globe, was launched.

On 2nd October 2004, a joint one-day Conference was held at St. John's Church, Waterloo, London with the British Teilhard Association under the title, *Pursuing a Vision*. Speakers included Dr Mark Fox, Prof Bill Cranston, the Honorary Treasurer of the British Teilhard Association, and

Prof Ursula King. The Conference explored the vision of Teilhard de Chardin and Sir Alister Hardy, and was intended as an introduction and foreword to a further, wider-ranging, joint conference, also with the British Teilhard Association, which was held later in September 2005 at Lampeter under the title *Revelation and Evolution: What are spiritual/religious experiences telling us today?* The September Conference in 2005 also included another pre-conference workshop, this year under the title *Coming Together*.

In October 2004, from 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>, an experiential weekend of workshops, talks and performance was mounted at Lampeter under the title, *Spirituality and the Creative Arts*. Organised by Patricia Murphy and Theolyn Cortens, this successfully attracted 75 participants. 2004's events ended with the annual Society Open Day in Oxford, Prof Keith Ward giving the 2004 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on, *Is There a Central Core of Religious Experience?*

Publicity and giving talks to other organisations continued to be an important part of the Centre's work, and in this regard Paul Badham made a major contribution. In 2003 he visited Japan, and he also spoke at conferences in Salzburg and Birmingham; and in 2004 he gave papers at Lampeter, Liverpool, Oxford, Inverness, Scarborough, and lectured on Near-Death Experiences to the Centre for Palliative Care at Mount Siôn Hospital in the University of Toronto. The publicity following the 2004 July Conference and October Creative Arts weekend, together with increasing awareness of religious experiences and Near-Death Experiences in newspapers, magazine articles, radio and television programmes, gave rise to many requests for information about the RERC, the MA course in Religious Experience and the Alister Hardy Society. That year general information about the Centre and Society was placed on the Centre's website,<sup>12</sup> which included details of current events. Also that year, Dr David Hay, former Director of the Centre, despite now suffering from Parkinson's disease, agreed to a request by Marianne Rankin to write a biography of Sir Alister Hardy. This was most warmly welcomed, and the Trustees agreed to pay costs, setting aside £1,000 to this end.

The end of 2004 saw the retirement of Verena Tschudin as Editor of the Society's newsletter, *De Numine*, due to her promotion to Reader at the University of Surrey and Director of the International Centre for

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<sup>12</sup> At that time, [www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk](http://www.alisterhardyreligiousexperience.co.uk)

Nursing Ethics there. The September 2004 issue of *De Numine* was the last under her editorship, and warm tribute was paid to her for her production of the newsletter over the previous eleven years.

Verena was succeeded by Patricia Murphy as the new Editor. Patricia has a BA Hons. degree in Psychology from University College, London. She is a Member of Cranfield Institute of Technology, where she undertook research into voluntary sector organisations under the auspices of the Department of Social Policy. She also worked as an outreach community education officer for the Open University, and from 1990 to 2004 was the director of Ceridwen, a residential centre built by her husband on the site of the old forge at their farm in West Wales, and which hosted and ran short courses and workshops for a wide variety of groups.

She contributed research on Judaic symbols to a dictionary of symbols (*1000 Symbols; What Shapes mean in Art and Myth*, eds. Rowena and Rupert Shepherd, Thames and Hudson, 2002.) Until 2019 she was engaged in postgraduate research into religious imagination at Trinity Saint David University of Wales, Lampeter, and active in organising events for the Alister Hardy Society. She co-organised a weekend at Lampeter on *Spirituality and the Creative Arts* in 2004 and helped organise the pre-conference workshops for the Alister Hardy Society annual conferences from 2002 to 2005.

Patricia was editor of *De Numine*, the Journal of the AHS from 2005 to 2019. The first issue under her editorship in February 2005 included for the first time a centre-spread of colour pictures. Subsequently she and her assistant editor Jean Matthews broadened the scope of *De Numine* to include a variety of articles, accounts of spiritual experience, and poetry as well as book reviews and AHS news and events. Her final two issues in 2019 were Golden Anniversary editions, celebrating the founding of the Religious Experience Research Centre 50 years previously. *De Numine* continues to attract a variety of articles on religious and spiritual experience, particularly the connection (if any!) between science and religion, and a wide range of excellent book reviews.

A further weekend conference took place on 15-16 September 2005 at Lampeter, held Jointly by the Alister Hardy Society and the British Teilhard Association on the theme *Revelation and evolution: What are spiritual/religious experiences telling us today?* Preceded by a Pre-Conference Workshop on *Coming Together*, the conference explored to nature of spirituality and essential vision of love expressed in the vision of Teilhard de Chardin and other religions today.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December that year Dr Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke resigned as Hon. Treasurer owing to commitments arising from his promotion to a new Chair in Western Esotericism at the University of Exeter. He was warmly thanked and congratulated on his appointment by both the Trustees and the Alister Hardy Society at its AGM the following day. Nicholas continued his links with the Centre as a Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust. His place as Treasurer was taken by Ruth Russell-Jones, who was appointed and welcomed by the Trustees at their meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> December. We were privileged to have Revd Professor John Hick to deliver the Annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture at the Society's Open Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, his subject, *Religious Experience and the Brain*.

Ruth Russell-Jones, the new Hon. Treasurer, had both banking and academic experience and qualifications. After serving with the Yorkshire Bank, the Co-operative Bank and Thomas Cook Ltd, she changed course and took a BA in Theology at the University of Wales, Lampeter. She was working for the University as the University Research Support Officer, and she also held the post of Administrator of the Research Institute for Contemporary Theology and Religious Studies. Ruth was warmly welcomed by the Trustees and by the Alister Hardy Society on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, and the Centre looked forward to a fresh impetus on the financial front.

The next year, at the end of March 2006, the Most Revd. George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been a Patron of the Centre since the beginning of 1992, retired, due to the need to cut back generally on his commitments. In his letter of resignation, he expressed how good it was to have been in contact with the Centre over the years. Also, on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2006, the Rt Revd Richard Harries retired as Bishop of Oxford and, at the same time, retired as Patron of the Centre. He had been a Patron since 1986, and his support was much appreciated.

Events that year included, on 10<sup>th</sup> June, a joint London Group Oxford and Cotswold Group one-day conference on *The Priest and the Medium: The interface between Spiritual and Psychic Experience*. This, held in Oxford, was to become the first of a series of annual June conferences hosted alternatively in Oxford and London – sometimes held also in conjunction with an associated interested organisation – which lasted until 2015, when taken over by the Alister Hardy Trust. In September, the Alister Hardy Society and the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual; Studies (CFPSS) held a *Joint Ecumenical Conference on Christian Parapsychology* at Exeter University, speakers including Prof Paul Badham and Prof Bernard Carr.

Sadly, Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke, long time strong supporter of the AHRERC, died on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2006, aged 81. A distinguished scientist and theologian, appointed MBE in 1993, and awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in May 2001, he played an important part in the history of the Centre. He was a Trustee, first Chairman of the RERC Research Committee (1990-1992) and Chair of Trustees (1995-1996). An obituary notice was included in the Spring 2007 issue of *De Numine*. He is remembered with great affection and appreciation for the great contribution he made to the AHRERC.

On a happier note, 2006 was the year in which David Hay, former Director of the Centre, brought out *Something There: The Biology of the Human Spirit*<sup>13</sup> a major contribution to the understanding of spirituality, religion and spiritual experience. Based on empirical research drawing on surveys in 1986 and 2000 it showed that despite a decline in church attendance, there had been a marked increase in reports of religious or spiritual experience and evidence to support the view that spirituality is hardwired into our biological make-up. This was followed up by his thoughtful *Why Spiritual Experience is Difficult for Westerners*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hay, 2006 Darton Longman & Todd.

<sup>14</sup> Hay, 2007 Societas Imprint Academic.

## 5. WIDENING THE HORIZONS (2002-2012)

A whole chapter really needs to be devoted to the development of the Centre's research at this period. In 2002 an opportunity had opened up to embark on a major new study of world-wide spiritual and religious experience, in particular in China and the former Soviet Union, where religion had been suppressed, and also in India. Up to then the data collected had been mainly from the western culture of Protestant Christianity, and it was considered of interest to see how this might compare with data from very different cultures and backgrounds.

Consideration was also being given to what the accounts of spiritual and religious experiences were telling us. They have been found to be generally of great benefit to the experiencer and so, obliquely, to society. They also seem to exhibit many common characteristics, including reports of 'light', of overwhelming 'love', 'peace' and 'unity', and sense of 'oneness' with everything and of a transcendent 'reality' more vivid than that experienced in everyday life. Might there be a 'common core' or 'ultimate sameness' to these experiences?

Sir Alister Hardy writing after analysing the first 3,000 accounts of spiritual and religious experiences, agreed with the suggestion that there are two main kinds of religious experience, the *numinous*, the awareness of the holy, and the *mystical*, the merging of the self with a divine reality. He himself believed that it is the feeling of a transcendent reality that is the more important, as it forms not only part of the two main kinds above, but is also the essential element in so many other kinds of spiritual experience.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Mark Fox, since completing his first investigation, the detailed study of Near-Death Experiences which formed the largest chapter of his book *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience*, went on to investigate the phenomena of 'light' and 'love' as amongst the most commonly reported elements of contemporary spiritual/religious experience. The project, funded by a donation of £5,000 given to the Centre in July 2004, led to the publication of *Spiritual Encounters with Unusual Light Phenomena: Lightforms* (University of Wales Press, 2008).

Sir Alister Hardy had enjoined in *The Spiritual Nature of Man* that "The studies must be applied to other cultures – to other faiths."<sup>2</sup> – as it "was

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<sup>1</sup> Hardy, 1979, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Hardy, 1979, pp. 141-2.



vital”, he believed, that we should establish whether the characteristics of spiritual/religious experience, “are indeed applicable to mankind as a whole.”<sup>3</sup> He referred to Aldous Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy* as suggesting that they are. So too did J.M. Cohen and J-F. Phipps, who used RERC records in their book, *The Common Experience*.<sup>4</sup>

On becoming Director, Professor Paul Badham sought, as his main priority, to undertake a global study of spiritual/religious experience – and an opportunity to widen the research came in 2002, when the Templeton Foundation invited Keith Ward, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University, to recommend a project for funding. It was decided that the study should begin with China as its religious traditions are so very different from those of the West (Christian Missionaries were puzzled as to how to refer to ‘God’ in Chinese!), and a Co-director at the time, Prof Xinzhong Yao, was a professor of Chinese religions with good links with colleagues in universities across China. Paul Badham took the opportunity of a lecture visit to the Renmin University of China in Beijing in April 2002, to talk with staff there about the need to explore religious experiencing in contemporary China, meeting with a gratifying response of interest. At the September inaugural conference that year (see page 67), the goal of a Global Project to explore world-wide religious/spiritual experience was outlined, following which Prof Keith Ward undertook to speak to the Templeton Foundation about the proposal for such a project. The Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Lampeter agreed to adopt, as its principal research priority, “a research project which will investigate the religious experience of members of different faith communities in different parts of the world,”<sup>5</sup> and Paul Badham, as Director of the RERC, commenced liaison with the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at Oxford.

In November of that year Dr Mikhail Rosschin, Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Comparative Studies in the Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow and Alexander Gorbenko, Lecturer in Mysticism at the Open University in Moscow, visited Prof Badham. They expressed enthusiasm in joining in such a project. The AHT funded a studentship for Alexander Gorbenko to take the MA in Religious Experience in Lampeter with a view to a subsequent research project in

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<sup>3</sup> Hardy, 1979, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Cohen & Phipps, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Director’s Report to Trustees, April 2003.

Russia. He completed his MA, which was on the contemporary usage of key words in English and Russian relating to religious experience.

Professor Xinzhong Yao, Director of the Centre for Chinese Studies, Professor of Chinese Religions at Lampeter and Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, joined Paul Badham to formulate the bid. Prof Yao had a PhD in Philosophy and Ethics from Beijing and a PhD in Confucian and Christian Thought from Lampeter. He was Head of the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies in Lampeter from 1999 to 2002, had held Visiting Fellowships in Beijing, Hunan and Donghan, and had published widely in both Chinese and English including *Confucianism and Christianity* (Sussex Academic Press, 1992) and *An Introduction to Confucianism* (CUP, 2000). He was also Editor of a new two-volume *Encyclopaedia of Confucianism* (Routledge, 2003).

Prof Jaio Guocheng, Head of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the Renmin University of China at Beijing, paid a return visit to Lampeter the following year, spending a month working with Prof Yao on details of how the work might be carried out in China. In February the next year, a bid for £672,000 was submitted to the Templeton Foundation for a study of spiritual/religious experiencing in China and Russia. This, however, proved to be more than the Foundation was prepared to support, and they suggested instead the submission of a revised bid focusing on China alone. For the new bid Professor Xinzhong Yao was appointed primary researcher and at the same time was also appointed Associate Director of RERC. The bid was submitted through the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at Oxford in the names of Prof Keith Ward, Emeritus Regius Professor of Divinity; Prof John Hedley Brooke, Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre; and Professors Xinzhong Yao and Paul Badham from RERC, who became also Senior Research Fellows of the Ian Ramsey Centre. The School of Theology and Religious Studies and Islamic Studies agreed to provide matching support by releasing Profs Yao and Badham from most of their under-graduate teaching and by agreeing to fund the part time posts of David Greenwood and Anne Watkins for the duration of the project. The revised bid was successful, and the Templeton Foundation agreed to support the research project with a grant of £335,000 for the study of religious experience among the Han Chinese, spread over four years from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007.

The Global Project was launched at the July 2004 conference (see page 73), at which His Eminence Koken Otani had been the key-note speaker, and which Dr Cafer Yaran, Professor of Islamic Theology at the University

of Istanbul, also attended. Dr Yaran agreed to combine with Dr David Hay on a comparative study of religious experience in Turkey. In September 2005 he returned to Lampeter for discussions with David Hay, Prof Yao and Prof Badham concerning how the Chinese questionnaire could be adapted for use in Turkey. Together with Turkish professors of Sociology, Psychology and Religious Education he secured a grant from the University of Istanbul to explore *Religious Experience in Contemporary Turkey*. The Chinese questionnaire was adapted to the Turkish situation and, with the help of a team of research students 1,236 valid questionnaires were collected from seven areas across Turkey. The Turkey study was completed in 2007.<sup>6</sup>

In another development, His Eminence Koken Otani invited Dr Yaran to speak in Tokyo. The Revd Prof Taira Sato, Director of the Three Wheels Pure Land Buddhist Temple and Visiting Professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, agreed to collaborate with Dr Wendy Dossett, with the Chinese questionnaire adapted for use in Japan. Through His Eminence Koken Otani, Wendy established links with Japanese scholars, Prof Masahiro Shimoda and Prof Masayuki Ito, to orchestrate the project in Japan.

Prof Badham and Dr Maya Warriar adapted the Chinese questionnaire for use among English-speaking Hindus in Southern India. Revd Jonathan Robinson, together with the help of an Indian colleague, Revd Dr Peter Ravikumar and his assistants at the Tamilnadu Theological College further adapted the Chinese questionnaire to use in a pilot study in the State of Tamilnadu, Southern India. (The project involved 206 random interviews in urban, slum and rural districts amongst people of predominantly Hindu background, but also of Christian and Muslim faiths).<sup>7</sup> Also, in 2004, Anne Watkins, who undertook annual voluntary teaching in Kerala, South India, was invited to participate. She met up with Dr Celine Joseph from St. Thomas' College in Palai, who showed great interest in the Global Project.

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<sup>6</sup> Full accounts of the Turkish Research were published in Turkish in Cafer Sadık Yaran, *Dini Tecrübe ve Meunet: Sıradan İnsanların Sıradışı Dini Deneyimleri [Religious Experience (Maunet): Extraordinary Religious Experiences of Ordinary People]*, (İstanbul: Ragbet Yayınları, 2009). A summary account was published in English as Cafer Yaran, 'Religious Experience in Contemporary Turkey' *Modern Believing* Vol 51. 4 October 2010 p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> The pilot study in India was published as Jonathan Robinson, 'Religious Experience in Tamilnadu, South India' *Modern Believing* Vol 50. 2 April 2009.

A plan was formed to collect further religious experiences from Indian Christians in the Syro Malabar tradition in Kerala. Marianne's Occasional Paper *An Introduction to Religious Experience* was translated into Tamil as part of this initiative. However, it was not until December 2006 that the survey got under way, the target group selected being changed to 'Educated Young Indians in the Syro Malabar tradition'. Again, just over 200 accounts and completed questionnaires were collected, eventually to be sent to the RERC archive at Lampeter.

The China research project was carried out at Renmin University, Beijing under the direction of Professor Yao. Renmin University appointed four senior staff; Prof Jiao Guocheng; Dr Wei Dedong, Associate Professor of Religious Studies; Dr Feng Shizheng, Lecturer in Sociology; Dr Hong Bo, Administrator of the Project, and 10 postgraduate research fellows for the project. Two other Chinese universities were also involved. In preparing the questionnaire some considerable difficulty was found in translation between Chinese and English concepts to ensure that the realities of Chinese thought and experience could be adequately ascertained in such a way as to help illuminate the global dimension of human religious experience. During the first months a team of seven academics and five research students worked with Prof Yao developing and trying out pilot questionnaires. The full survey commenced in January 2005. In all, a total of 3,196 questionnaires were returned from 13 sites in 10 provinces from the Eastern, Central and Western Region of Mainland China, including one metropolitan city, 5 big or medium cities and 7 rural counties. When the data is translated, it is hoped that the questionnaires, and accounts gathered, will form an important addition to the RERC archive.

The findings of the Chinese project were presented at the Annual Conference of the British Association for the Study of Religion (BASR) in Edinburgh in 2007 and published in a book entitled *Religious Experience in Contemporary China (Religion Education and Culture)* (University of Wales Press. 2007) by Professors Yao and Badham, with nine Chinese academics contributing chapters. Electronic copies of the data collected through the Chinese questionnaire have been deposited in the University library together with copies of the book *Religious Experience in Contemporary China*. Some ten per cent of responses to the questionnaire contained individual reports of religious experience. These are in Chinese, and are with Prof Xinzhong Yao at King's College London, it being recognized that he was the best qualified person to work on this data. Prof Yao, however, was asked if he would be willing to give the Centre a report on his findings and Dr Thomas Jansen of the Chinese Centre in Lampeter confirmed that

he would be able and willing to direct further research on the Chinese scriptures should they be transferred there.

The research attracted great interest in China. Prof Yao was invited to present the findings to universities across China. More significantly the Central School of the Chinese Communist Party (Beijing) invited him to speak, and subsequently their professor of ethics Dr Yuli Liu wrote a paper responding to our findings. This was presented along with Prof Badham and Prof Yao's own papers at the 2007 annual conference of the BASR. Dr Lio's paper confirmed one of the China study's main findings, which was that religions had grown significantly in both membership and influence over the past ten years. The most fascinating response was to the Chinese equivalent of the Hardy question, 'Some people have experienced that they were once/or are frequently influenced by a power that ordinary people cannot control and explain properly. Have you had such an experience?' The biggest surprise was that the overall response rate was 56.7%.<sup>8</sup>

The BASR conference in Edinburgh in September 2007 was entitled *Religious Experience in Global Contexts*. Paul Badham gave a plenary lecture and fifteen papers were presented by researchers participating in the Templeton project including reports from the Chinese researchers and researchers from Russia, India, America, Japan, Brazil and Turkey sponsored by the Centre, including Rev Peter Ravikumar of the Tamilnadu Theological Seminary. In addition, Dr Bettina Schmidt, who was later to become a Co-Director and then Director of the RERC at Lampeter, organised a panel with five papers about spirit possession and trance, which were later published by the BASR in their on-line journal DISKUS.

Most significantly following the conclusion of the China project in 2007, the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies in Chengchi University, Taiwan sought major funding to take forward its own research project on *Religious Experience in Contemporary Taiwan* based on the questionnaire used in China – this to be led by Prof Yen-zen Tsai.

Thus the dramatic success of the China project encouraged further research, and the preparation of a further submission to the Templeton Foundation was put in hand, this extending the coverage of the study to include other countries. Discussions had continued with regard to possible

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<sup>8</sup> Report, *Researching Religious Experience from a Comparative Perspective: The Alister Hardy Global Project* (Badham 2012).

parallel studies of religious experience in Russia; in Japan where His Eminence Supreme Primate Koken Otani in 2003 stated an interest in Japan participating in the Global Project; and in Turkey – at that time, two former Lampeter doctoral students, Dr Cafer Yaran, of the University of Istanbul, and Dr Muhsin Akbas, who also taught in a University in Turkey, were at Lampeter and keen to research religious experience there in collaboration with the Centre.

A new project was prepared outlining what had been achieved and the need for a global study, and putting forward proposals for Japan, Russia, India, Brazil and the USA. This was supported by leading scholars in those countries, who had expressed great interest, most raising matching funding from their universities. Prof Cafer Yaran had managed to secure a grant of \$62,922 to ‘duplicate’ the China research across seven representative sites in Turkey; and Prof Yen-zen Tsai, Director of the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at the National Chengchi University in Taipei secured a grant of \$304,000 to undertake 2,000 interviews across Taiwan using an adopted form of the Chinese Questionnaire. In Russia the aim was research in ‘The Heartlands of European Russia’, focusing on six sites there including Moscow, St. Petersburg, two smaller towns and two villages deemed to be typical of the area. In India the aim was to collect 1,000 questionnaires in Tamilnadu and explore religious experience in a variety of sites in the largely Sikh province of the Punjab; and in Brazil Prof Maria Amelia Dickie, Professor of Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Santa Catarina and Falvio Wiik, Director of the institute for Studies on Religion in Rio de Janeiro, had secured the promise of matching funding of \$191,250. There were hopes at this time that the Project would be able to compare spiritual/religious experiencing in these countries with the British experience, and, in due course, that of other countries with which the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Lampeter has links.

The proposal was submitted in 2008 to the Templeton Foundation, which had indicated interest, but the bid came up against certain criticism from reviewers concerning its research methodology and a relative lack of experience in social survey research. This was addressed and the project team strengthened in this respect, and a revised proposal, this time the bid again failed at a time when the Foundation had lost \$800 million in the banking crisis of 2007 and, consequently, in 2009, they were able to fund 25% of the bids that they had invited. However, the Foundation invited the Centre to consider applying again for a grant in the following year.

An alternative research project suggested at this time was the possibility of replicating the China project in England or throughout the UK, where support might be sought from such sources as the Arts and Humanities Research Panel and the Economic and Social Panel. This was to be considered again later.

Meanwhile, research on religious experience in China continued, with two further books in the pipeline; and the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at the National Chengchi University Taipei, supported by a 305,000 US dollar grant from the Taiwanese Science Council, was conducting a three year research project to compare religious experience in Taiwan with the findings from the China study, Prof Yen-zen Tsai being particularly supportive of the Global Project of a comparative survey. Progress on the Taiwan study was reported at a conference in Taiwan from 23-26 June 2010 at which Prof Xinzhong Yao, Prof Paul Badham and Marianne Rankin, invited by Chengchi University, gave papers. The Centre was subsequently given bound copies of the conference papers and the results of the Taiwanese questionnaire.

In May 2010, it was reported that the Taiwanese research project had been completed and that Prof Yen-zen Tsai and eight colleagues had completed a book on the project, *Religious Experience in Contemporary Taiwan*<sup>9</sup>. Prof Tsai and a colleague, Yi-jia Tsai, from the Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan, came to Lampeter in October that year to present a lecture on the results of the Taiwan project, and to work in the RERC archive. They invited Paul Badham, Dr Gregory Barker and Dr Bettina Schmidt to a major international conference on Comparative Study of Religious Experience being proposed for the following year, for which they had obtained funding, and which they hoped would lead to a further book.

The 2011 Taiwan conference was again hosted by the National Chengchi University, and held in Hualian from 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> June, with the purpose of evaluating the significance of important new data on religious experience emerging from the Taiwan study. Delegates and contributors included Prof Paul Badham; Dr Bettina Schmidt; Dr Gregory Barker; Prof Leslie Francis (who was unable to be at the conference, but who sent a

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<sup>9</sup> Subsequently extended to include a comparison with Chinese spiritual experience and published later in a book edited by Prof Yen-Zen Tsai entitled *Religious Experience in Contemporary Taiwan and China* (Tsai 2013).



*Prof Tsai's visit to Lampeter, October 2010: dinner in a restaurant in Aberaeron. Together with Paul Badham, on left, are Yi-Jia Tsai, Linda Badham, Bettina Schmidt, Prof Yen-Zen Tsai, and Greg Barker (see page 83).*



*Jonathan Robinson thanking Paul Badham following his retirement as Director, AHS Open Day 2010)*





*Taiwan Conference, June 2011*  
*From left to right: Cafer Yaran, Xinzhong Yao, Greg Barker, Paul Badham, Bettina Schmidt, Yen-Zen Tsai, conference host, and Liudmyla Fylypovych*



*Taiwan Conference, June 2011 – Relaxing:*  
*Paul Badham, Bettina Schmidt and Greg Barker*

paper); Prof Xinzhong Yao; Prof Eileen Barker; Prof David Voas and, from other countries: Prof Lynn Bridgers from the USA; Prof Cafer Yaran from Turkey and Prof Liudmyla Fylypovych from the Ukraine who, were also engaged on the Global Project. Copies of the Taiwan conference papers of both 2010 and 2011 have been deposited in the University of Wales Trinity Saint David library. The results of these surveys and the new data emerging are most interesting and encouraging.

In a talk entitled *Religious Experience, a Comparative Approach*, presented to the Leicester Theological Society, 9<sup>th</sup> March 2012, Paul Badham suggested,

“The pluralist hypothesis set forward by John Hick and Sir Alister Hardy predicts that religious experiencing as a human response to a transcendent Reality tends to be more comparable across different traditions and cultures than doctrinal systems and religious institutions. It predicts that the latter would tend to be more culturally conditioned and would vary more from society to society. The research findings of the global project offered an opportunity to test this prediction and what we learnt does seem to support Hick’s hypothesis.

“It seems clear that there is indeed much common ground between religions at the experiential level ...

“What these various figures suggest is that a capacity for religious experience is part of humankind’s evolutionary heritage and represents a common human response to transcendent Reality. As such the experiences are likely to be broadly similar across different cultures. By contrast institutional religion and doctrinal ways of thinking are more likely to be affected by political cultural and philosophical world views. This also seems to be supported by our findings ...”.

The accounts of spiritual and religious experiences recorded reveal common features and characteristics, taking into account cultural differences, with those already held in the archive of the RERC at Lampeter recorded from earlier surveys carried out in Great Britain. This also appears to support the hypothesis that there is a common core to religious experience, and that this is a human universal as originally predicted by Alister Hardy in his Gifford Lectures, *The Living Stream* (1965) and *The Divine Flame* (1966).

Paul Badham observed in his talk to the Leicester Theological Society, and again in an article *Researching Religious Experience from a Comparative Perspective*, published in the World Congress of Faith’s journal, *Interreligious Insight* (Badham 2012) that, whilst at the level of

religious experiencing there is much common ground between the religions, at the level of belief systems there are many different and incompatible 'truth claims', and that one cannot pass from a commonality in experience to a commonality in belief. This is so true, but perhaps future 'widening of horizons might detect through the eye of spiritual discernment less incompatibility here, too: maybe for future research?

## 6. ADMINISTRATION – CHANGES AND OTHER EVENTS (2006-2012)

In December 2006, in order to meet current requirements of the Charity Commission, it was resolved to redraft, update and simplify the Trust's constitution. In March the following year this became more imperative, as the Trust was faced with a problem regarding the RERC at Lampeter. Up to then the Centre, which moved to Lampeter in 2000 as one of the Research Centres of the then School of Theology, Religious and Islamic Studies, had operated within the University on an informal basis, but now, under the rules of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the need arose for a formalisation of the position. To deal with this, and embrace the requirements of the Charity Commission, a new Supplemental Deed was drafted – this codifying, in Appendix 1, the relationship of the Trust, the RERC, now renamed AHRERC, and the Society to the University. The draft, drawn up by David Greenwood heading a small sub-committee, and with the help of Prof Andrew Prescott, who had come to Lampeter as Head of Library Services in November 2007, was approved by the Trustees in September 2007. Andrew Prescott was subsequently appointed Director in charge of administration of RERC, the Library and Archive in April 2008. The new Supplementary Deed, with amendments and also registering other changes, was formally ratified on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009. Under the revised constitution the AHRERC was confirmed as part of the University, responsible to the University's School of Theology, Religious and Islamic Studies and to the Department's research committee, with its Archive and Library, whilst remaining the property of Trust, on long term loan to the University Library.

The Trust's role remained as before, to safeguard the inherited assets of the Trust, raise further funding for research in religious experience, and offer advice, help and funding to the RERC at Lampeter. The Alister Hardy Society remained as a self-governing body under the Alister Hardy Trust, existing to encourage the dissemination of interest in spiritual and religious experience. The Short Objects & Rules of the Trust, and the Rules of the Alister Hardy Society, were finally agreed and ratified in May 2009.

With the RERC responsible to the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies research committee, however, the need for the Trust's Research Committee disappeared, and that Committee was, with sadness and some feeling, disbanded following its last meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007. This was the end of the independent research projects sponsored

and encouraged by, first, the old Advisory Research Committee, and later by the Alister Hardy Trust.

September 2007 saw the important Edinburgh conference in which the Research Centre joined BASR (British Association for the Study of Religions) to discuss *Religious Experience in a Global Context* (see p. 82).

At the Trustees meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November, it was agreed that the best place for the AHRERC Archive and Library would be the University Archive and Library, after an extension to the library there had been completed. Thus, in August the following year the Centre moved from the Sheikh Khalifa Building to a large room in the University Library, accommodating the AHRERC library, work space for David Greenwood, Anne Watkins and Jean Matthews, and a desk also for researchers using the database of accounts of spiritual/religious experience. The Centre's AHT archive was moved at the same time temporarily into the new Roderic Bowen Library, part of the University Library, before being transferred to join the archive of accounts of spiritual and religious experiences, which had been transferred to a room on the lower floor.

The next year, 2008, saw the passing of two distinguished figures in the history of the Centre: on 11<sup>th</sup> July Dr Crawford Knox, the first Treasurer of the Alister Hardy Trust, who had been associated with the Centre since its earliest days, died; followed, on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2008, by Oliver Knowles, Treasurer from 1985 to 2002. Oliver's lasting legacy was his rescue of the Centre from near financial collapse when he joined and later with the transformation of the scene during Peggy Morgan's time as Director. He effected this through gaining the valuable support of Lord Rees-Mogg and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, rescuing the Centre from a worrying situation in the 1996/97 period. From his retirement from active involvement in the affairs of the Alister Hardy Trust in April 2003 to the very end, Oliver maintained a close interest in the activities of the Centre and AH Society, coming to most of its meetings with his wife June, particularly those of the Oxford/Cotswold and London Groups. A generous benefactor, his final gesture, was to leave a significant financial legacy to the Centre in his Will, which was greatly appreciated.

That year also saw the publication of Dr Mark Fox's *Spiritual Encounters with unusual Light Phenomena: Lightforms*<sup>1</sup>, looking at some 400 accounts of experiences of unusual 'light', a significant number of which display common characteristics suggesting a possible 'common core'. At the same

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<sup>1</sup> Fox, 2008.

time, Mark was also looking into the parallel phenomenon of experiences of unusual 'love', the two often going together.

Events that year included a joint conference in June with the World Congress of Faiths and, on 21<sup>st</sup> September with Parasearch<sup>2</sup> on *Worlds Apart, Worlds Together*. At the Society's Annual General Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2008, Marianne Rankin stood down as Chair of the Society. A warm tribute was paid to her for all she had done for the Society in her six years' service in the post. Marianne had also served on the now defunct Research Committee, and, as Chair of the Society, was also as a Trustee of the AH Trust.

She was succeeded as Chair of the Society by the Revd Jonathan Robinson, who took her place on the Board of Trustees. Jonathan had just taken the MA in Religious Experience at Lampeter. An Anglican priest, author of *The Grail Liturgies* and *The Grail Celebrations*, at the time he was involved in charitable work in India – and was running the pilot study of religious experience in the State of Tamilnadu, Southern India.

Marianne that year had also stood down as Chair of the Oxford Group, her place being taken by Rhonda Riachi. Rhonda has lived in Oxford since 1983, when she arrived to read Modern Languages at St Hilda's College. Since graduating she has worked in the fields of publishing, charity management, local government and healthcare.

At the Trustees meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> December 2008 Prof Frank Whaling, a Trustee for a number of years, stepped down – and the following year Prof Eileen Barker also resigned as a Trustee. With the University in charge of the RERC, Dr Rob Warner, Head of the Theology and Religious Studies Department, was invited and elected onto the Board of Trustees – and Marianne Rankin was invited to remain on the Board in recognition of her continuing contribution to the Centre.

That year, too, Dr David Hay, who was working on a biography of Sir Alister Hardy (see page 74) and who shortly before been appointed to an Honorary Research Fellowship in Theology and Religious Studies at Lampeter, was made an Honorary Life Member of the AH Society.

Major changes were taking place at this time with regard to the University itself. In May 2009 it was announced that the University of Wales Lampeter would be merging with Trinity University College

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<sup>2</sup> An organisation founded 1986 to study anomalous phenomena in the Midlands - ceased operating 2016.

Carmarthen. This had been under discussion for some time with small universities finding it hard to provide the range of services now expected of all universities. The move was backed by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly government. Dr, later Professor Medwyn Hughes, former Vice Chancellor of Trinity, was appointed Vice Chancellor of the new University of Wales Trinity Saint David at Lampeter on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2009<sup>3</sup>. The merger with Trinity was welcomed, as it was a Church College with a Theology Department particularly strong in the area of interfaith dialogue. Prof Badham had written to Dr Hughes to acquaint him of the work of the Centre and expressing the possibilities seen for the development of the RERC within the framework of the new University. Dr Hughes<sup>4</sup>, on taking up his post, responded by expressing strong support for Religious Studies, Distance Learning MAs and for the work of the AHRERC.

Following this, a formal Agreement between the Alister Hardy Trust and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, was drafted by Professor Prescott.<sup>5</sup> The Agreement, based on the earlier Agreement drawn up between the AHRERC and the University of Wales Lampeter, was to define the position of the AHRERC within the new University of Trinity Saint David and to clarify the position regarding the loan of its archive and library to the new University. This, gratifyingly referring to its position as the premier international centre for the study of religious experiences recognised both by religious leaders and examination boards, was approved in draft in July 2010 and agreed by the Trust on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2010 as a formal Memorandum for ratification by the University.

As might be expected, there was a large turn-over of staff at the University at this time, some changes affecting the Centre. In June 2009, Prof Yao left Lampeter to go to King's College London, having been offered the post of Director of King's China Institute. He resigned as Associate Director of AHRERC, but was invited to remain on the Board of the Trust as principal investigator with regard to the ongoing work on the China study. In July 2009 Dr Rob Warner (Trustee) left Lampeter to become Dean of Humanities, heading the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at

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<sup>3</sup> The new University received the Royal Assent on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010 and came into being on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Dr Medwyn Hughes, 29 April 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Initially prepared by Prof Andrew Prescott, it was continued by the new Director of Learning Resources, Sally Wilkinson, working closely with the Administrator, David Greenwood.

Chester University. His place was taken, in December 2009 by Dr Jonathan Wooding, Senior Lecturer in Religious History and Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion in Celtic Societies, who had joined the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in 1998.

A pleasant social interlude occurred in April 2010 when, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Prof Paul Badham, Jonathan Wooding, Marianne Rankin, and Jonathan Robinson attended a reception in Lambeth Palace for groups of which the Archbishop is Patron. Archbishop Rowan Williams was given copies of *Religious Experience in Contemporary China* by Xinzhong Yao and Paul Badham; Marianne Rankin's *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*, and Jonathan Robinson's Grail liturgy. Dr Williams expressed enthusiasm and support for the work of the Centre.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 2010 Paul Badham retired as Professor of Religious Studies, and resigned as Director of Research for the AHRERC. Prof Badham, who had taken over from Peggy Morgan at the end of April 2002, is gratefully remembered for his eight years as Director and, particularly for his work in promoting the expansion of the Centre's horizons through the advancement of the Global Project, and steering the Centre through the difficult period of the changeover to the new University of Wales Trinity Saint David. His place as Director was taken by Dr Gregory Barker – but Professor Badham retained his links with the Centre, to the great pleasure of all, accepting to become a Trustee, and taking on the role of Hon. Secretary to the Trust.

Greg Barker was former Head of Theology and Religious Studies at Trinity University College, Carmarthen, lecturing there at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He became a Senior Lecturer at the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. He had gained a PhD at Lampeter in 2008; and his background in Religious Studies, Biblical Studies, and Theology gave him the ability to teach a wide area of studies relating to the world's religious traditions: his stated academic interests were the perceptions of Jesus in the world religions, the quest for the historical Jesus and interfaith dialogue.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Greg Barker, together with Stephen Greg, Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at Trinity St. David, as co-editor published this year *Jesus beyond Christianity: The Classic Texts* (OUP 2010).



Prof Andrew Prescott, too, left Lampeter at this time. Although he had recently been appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor at the new University of Wales Trinity Saint David on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2009, he resigned his post here to take up an appointment as Director of Research of the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII) at Glasgow University. He resigned as Assistant Director of the RERC, and his place as Assistant Director of RERC with responsibility for looking after its administration and its library and archives was taken over by Sally Wilkinson. Sally had been former Head of Learning Resources at Trinity, Carmarthen, and was now appointed Head of Learning Resources, at Trinity Saint David.

Also at this time Dr Wendy Dossett left Lampeter, resigning as Co-Director of RERC in charge of the MA course in Religious Experience, to take up a new post as Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Chester. The new Programme Director for the MA Religious Experience was Dr Bettina Schmidt, Senior Lecturer in Study of Religions, who came from the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bangor University. She was appointed a Co-Director of the AHRERC in September 2010. She then lectured at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, including research degrees. She had gained a Doctorate in Philosophy in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Marburg (in 1995) and has published extensively in the area of anthropology of religion, specialising in the study of religions, the anthropology of religion and identity. Her most recent publications include *Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, co-edited with Lucy Huskinson, London, Continuum, 2010. A new book, under the title *Anthropology of Trance and Ecstasy: Varieties of Religious Experiences in Brazil*, is to be published later in 2014.

Bettina is Honorary Secretary of the British Association for Study of Religions (2009-2015) and Vice-President of TRS UK which represents university departments in theology and religious studies in the UK. She is also a member of several international editorial boards and, at the time, was working on a monograph about spirit possession and trance in Brazil.

In the midst of these changes, however, the Centre celebrated two anniversaries. On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2009, on the occasion of the Society's Open Day, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford, in 1969 was celebrated. Members of the Hardy family attended including Jane Winship, Sir Alister's great-niece; Belinda Farley, Sir Alister's daughter, together with Tom Farley and Julia Latimer, Sir Alister's grandson and granddaughter. A

special luncheon was held in the College's Arlosh Hall following the 2009 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture given by Prof Cafer Yaran on *Religious Experience in Contemporary Turkey*. After lunch the afternoon was devoted to reminiscences of Sir Alister and the early day of the Centre, with contributions being given by Jane Winship, Prof. Ursula King and Peggy Morgan.



*Tom Farley, Julia Latimer, Belinda Farley and Jane Winship  
at the Anniversary lunch, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2009*

The second celebration was that of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Centre's arrival in Lampeter. This was commemorated at the University on Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2010, organised by Dr Jonathan Wooding, then Joint Acting Head of the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies, and David Greenwood, Administrator of the Alister Hardy Trust, RERC and Society, and was hosted by the University. Guests included the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Dr Medwyn Hughes; Trustees John Franklin; Marianne Rankin with her husband John; Revd. Jonathan Robinson; Jane Winship and her partner Nancy Lawing; Dr Jonathan Wooding; the retiring Director, Prof Paul Badham and new Directors, Dr Greg Barker and Sally Wilkinson; past Director, Dr David Hay with his wife, Jane; and staff, David Greenwood, Anne Watkins and Jean Matthews. At a celebratory dinner that night, David Hay presented the Centre with a sketch of Sir Alister Hardy drawn by the artist Hans Schwartz as a study for a painting of Sir Alister and two other eminent Oxford scientists, John Baker and E.C. (Henry) Ford (1972), which now hangs in the Zoology Department at Oxford. The sketch was framed, and now hangs in a prominent position in the Lampeter Library. It was nice that Anne Watkins was able to attend this anniversary celebration, as she had been very much involved from the very moment the move from Westminster College, Oxford to Lampeter had been agreed.

The following day at a meeting of the Board of Trustees, approval was given for the setting up of a separate AH Society website. For some time the Society had been tied to the Trust's website, which had come under the control of the University, and was out of date, no longer reflecting the current situation at Lampeter. Now, with University launching its own website, which embraced the AHRERC, the opportunity arose for the Society to broadcast independently online. Designed by Michael Rush a member of the AHS Committee and an IT specialist, the site was launched in October 2010 under the url [www.alisterhardysociety.org](http://www.alisterhardysociety.org), this being later changed to [www.studyspiritualexperiences.org](http://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org).

Around this time, the AHRERC library was merged with the main University Library at Lampeter in a major re-organisation including a re-cataloguing of the books in accordance with the Dewey Decimal Classification system. This gave the advantage that all books on religious experience would be found together – though with a distinction made in the cataloguing to enable a list of the AHRERC books to be printed if required. The Centre's books, held on the open shelves and listed on the library catalogue, remain the property of the AH Trust. Whilst there was some demur that the AHRERC library was losing its unique separate status and own room, with its space for private browsing, there was now great advantage for students and researchers in having a much wider volume of reference in one place. Also, a major attraction of this move was that AHS members became University library members, with access to the whole University collection of some 300,000 books at both Lampeter and Carmarthen. Books can now be consulted during university library opening hours and the postal loans service is now available for all university books.

With this move, care of the Library passed to the University Librarian and the post of Librarian of the Centre's library became redundant. In October Anne Watkin's contract ended and, sadly, she left the Centre's employ on 20<sup>th</sup> October. Warm appreciation of Anne's services to the Centre and Society over the years since 2000 was expressed at the Society's AGM at Open Day on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2010. Anne's place for inquiries concerning the AHRERC books passed to Kathy Miles of the University Library – with inquiries regarding the RERC, the Archive and the Society passing to Jean Matthews, who remained as the Centre's Archive Supervisor.

Further changes affecting the Centre took place at the end of the year. On 14<sup>th</sup> December Ruth Russell-Jones retired as Hon Treasurer; and it was announced that Prof Ursula King had retired as a Trustee. At this time

David Greenwood's contract as Administrator of the AHRERC, Trust and Society ended. The Administrator's post was abolished, as there were now insufficient funds to keep this post going and a number of efficiencies had been applied which, together with the move of the Centre to the library, meant that the RERC could manage without a paid administrator. At the same time, it was considered that the voluntarily run parts of the organisation – the Trust and the Society – should rely much more on volunteer support. The Centre was delighted that David offered to take over the post of Hon. Treasurer of the AH Trust. At Trustee's meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2010 David was nominated and elected a Trustee, following which he was appointed Hon. Treasurer.; and, at the same time, appointed Vice-Chair of the Trust.

The former post of Administrator, however, included the duties of membership secretary and it was necessary, before David went, to find someone who would be able to take on this work. The post of Hon. Membership Secretary was created and advertised, and the Centre was fortunate in finding and appointing Ruth Brinkman, who was able to take up her duties before David left. Ruth had read Theology at Kent as a mature student in 1983, subsequently taking a Postgraduate Certificate of Education at Westminster College, Oxford and going on to teach Religious Education in a comprehensive school in Norfolk for ten years. On retiring in 2002 she studied full time for the MA in Religious Experience at Lampeter. She was warmly welcomed and, working from her home near Cheltenham, quickly started to make her mark.

There was a growing recognition generally of the importance of studying religious experience, reflected in the inclusion of a module on the subject in GCE A Level Religious Studies, defined as a 'core subject' in the 1996 Education Act.<sup>7</sup> Marianne Rankin was playing a part in promoting the subject and the contribution of the work of the RERC, through production first of an Occasional Paper, *An Introduction to Religious Experience*,<sup>8</sup> and subsequently her book *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*<sup>9</sup>, which is now being used by schools in connection with the A-Level Religious Experience module and in colleges and universities. From 2002 Marianne had been visiting schools giving talks to 6<sup>th</sup> Forms on spiritual and religious experience highlighting the work of the Research

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<sup>7</sup> GCE 'Religious Studies', Topic III, 'Religious Experience', A2 Unit 4 'Religion and Human Experience'

<sup>8</sup> Rankin, 2005 OP 2, Third Series.

<sup>9</sup> Rankin, 2008.

Centre. She also spoke at conferences and to other spiritual and interfaith groups.

With the encouragement of Dr Greg Barker, quite a number of regional secondary students came to visit Lampeter to learn about religious experience and the work of the AHS and AHRERC. This led to two conferences being planned in 2011 with a third planned for 2012. A successful one day 6<sup>th</sup> form conference was held at Lampeter in February 2011 on *Religious Experience Today* with the entire 6<sup>th</sup> form RE of Hereford School attending, and with Dr Barker and Prof Paul Badham as principal speakers. This was followed up with a similar event on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012, this time with over 100 sixth formers from five schools attending, and with Marianne Rankin joining Dr Barker and Prof Badham as speakers. On both occasions, students were invited to offer their evaluations of religious experiences based on anonymous excerpts from the archives. Several Society members attended the 2012 conference and there was a positive interaction between Trust and Society members and area teachers at lunch on that day. The Alister Hardy Society responded to this initiative by adding to its membership scheme a special reduced-rate subscription for school students interested in the subject.

On the research front, Dr Greg Barker launched his idea for a major new survey of religious and spiritual experience in the United Kingdom, based on a replication of the China project for the purposes of comparison (see page 82). Research commenced by looking into the appropriate terminology for describing 'religious'; or 'spiritual' experiences, a necessary first step in the face of changing understandings and usage of those words. This could lead to some revision and updating of the Hardy question (see pp. 7-8) in the projected survey. This new survey generated great interest when announced at the Alister Hardy Society's AGM in October 2011; one member being enthused to offer £5,000 in support of the project. Hope was expressed that the survey and attendant publicity might generate public interest and awareness of the meaning and value of spiritual experience, along the lines of publicity regarding reports of and research into near-death experiences.

Another major change was pending. On 21<sup>st</sup> October 2011 it was announced that agreement had been reached on the merger of Swansea Metropolitan University with Trinity Saint David, with this to come into effect the following September. The governing bodies of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea Metropolitan University and the University of Wales in deciding to merge, brought together the two oldest

Royal Charters granted to universities in Wales. The unified institution was merged under a Supplementary Charter of the Royal Charter of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David first established in 1828, the Swansea Metropolitan as a brand, however, being maintained and developed, with all assets being ring-fenced for investment for the benefit of education in and for Swansea. The merger received Privy Council assent on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012, with it being envisaged that the three institutions should be integrated by 1 August 2012. It was announced that the Prince of Wales, as Chancellor of the University of Wales, had graciously agreed to serve as Royal Patron of the new University arising from this merger.

This announcement came just before news broke on 22<sup>nd</sup> October that the University of Wales (UoW) was to cease to exist after mounting pressure due to a series of damaging revelations concerning a scam in which overseas students were being helped to cheat their way to University of Wales-validated degrees and visas.<sup>10</sup> In the face of this, the Chair of UoW, Hugh Thomas, resigned, and the University, as then established, was abolished, with its constituent parts, Cardiff, Bangor, Newport, Aberystwyth and Glyndŵr, going their separate ways as independent universities. The Vice-Chancellor of Trinity Saint David, Prof Medwyn Hughes, however, successfully managed to negotiate the retention of the name 'University of Wales' for the validation of the Trinity Saint David courses, as the College was free of any taint of scandal, and thus it became the only University in Wales able to bear this title. In November of 2011 Prof Medwyn Hughes was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the new combined universities operating under the name, University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) Lampeter.

As part of the continuing reorganisation at the University, within the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies, it was learnt, to some dismay and concern, that the MA in Religious Experience was to be discontinued in 2011 for new students as a separate MA course. The course was to continue, however, redesigned as an essential module entitled Religious Experience Today, linked to a more comprehensive MA

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<sup>10</sup> The revelations followed the scandal, which broke the previous year, when the university was forced to cut all ties with a college in Malaysia which awarded UoW degrees on it being revealed that its Director had bogus qualifications. The findings led to a damning report from the Quality Assurance Agency which found serious shortcomings in the way the university worked with some of its 130 associated colleges around the world. Vice-chancellors of other Welsh universities had led calls for the scrapping of the UoW.

in the Study of Religions. Dr Bettina Schmidt, who was directing the former MA in Religious Experience, continued supervising students working on religious experience in this module and on the dissertation, while Dr Maya Warrier was appointed Programme Director for the new MA. The study of religious experience was also now part of the undergraduate module on Religion, Society and Culture for the BA in Religious Studies – and the use of the AHRERC archive was also encouraged in the teaching of ‘Research Skills’.

On the domestic side, further administrative changes included the departure of Prof Ursula King and Prof Michael York, the Board of Trustees appointing in their place Revd Prof June Boyce-Tillman<sup>11</sup>, who had been Chair of the former Research Committee, and Dr Jonathan Wooding as the representative of the University School of Theology Religious Studies & Islamic Studies. In December 2010 Dr Thomas Jansen, Director of the Confucius Institute and Lecture of Chinese Studies at the University, was appointed by the University, his co-edited book *Chinese Religions in the Age of Globalization (1800 to the present)* being particularly relevant to the continuation of research into religious experience in China. In November 2011 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke resigned as a Trustee. On 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012 Prof David Voas, Professor of Population Studies at the University of Essex, National Programme Director in Britain for the European Values Study and co-director of British Religion in Numbers (an online centre for British data on religion), was welcomed as a new Trustee. At the same time, Wendy Xerri, who had been appointed Director of Knowledge and Information at Trinity University College in January 2010, was welcomed as Director of the AHRERC responsible for looking after the Centre’s administration, library and archives in the University’s Roderic Bowen Library in place of Sally Wilkinson, who resigned to take up a post at Cranfield University. Finally, in 2012, Dr Andrew Village, a Reader in Practical and Empirical Theology and Head of Postgraduate Programmes in Theology at York St. John University, was appointed to the Board of Trustees.

One of the consequences of the changes taking place at this time rapidly became apparent early in 2011. With the departure of Anne Watkins, there was now no administrative help for the Society at Lampeter, apart from the answering of e-mail and telephone queries, etc.,

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<sup>11</sup> Prof June Boyce-Tillman was ordained a deacon of the Church of England in 2006 and later ordained priest in 2007. In 2009 she was awarded an MBE for services to Music and Spirituality.

by the RERC Archive Supervisor, Jean Matthews, whose three-day-a-week contract with the University had been renewed for a further four years in December 2010 with the consent of the Trust. It was clear that there was need for help in administration. Engagement of a possible volunteer administrator for the Society was considered by the Trustees at their meeting in May but deferred pending an improvement in the financial situation. At that time, owing to a declining membership and a fall in investment income due to current market conditions, the Trust's reserves could only support the payment of one part time member of staff.

This left the Society dependent on occasional support by volunteer members so fresh thinking was needed with regard to administrative help. New ideas for the future of the Society were solicited in an interactive session on Open Day, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Ideas put forward included: a more comprehensive response to experiencers; developing an internet forum for the exchange and discussion of spiritual experiences; creating opportunities for members to discuss spiritual experiences at meetings; the inclusion of more inter-active and experiential elements at conferences; organising lectures and disseminating information on research; publicising accounts of experiences – and giving more publicity to the work of the Centre and existence of the Society.

However, the Society's Local Groups continued to thrive. In 2009 the Lampeter/Carmarthen Group was reformed under the leadership of Roger Coward with the title of Wales Group – following which, owing to the scatter of the membership and difficulties in getting to Lampeter, a number of mini-groups meeting in members' houses were set up in various parts of Wales.

On Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> June that year the AHS London and Oxford/Cotswold Groups combined to join with the Scientific and Medical Network's London Group to present a one-day conference in London on the theme, *Understanding Consciousness and Spiritual Experience*. This proved a great success, with Dr Rupert Sheldrake, Prof Ursula King and Prof Chris French as speakers – and led to the mounting of other June one-day conferences, which became a regular feature of the Society's programme.

In April 2010, the Society was invited to join with the British Teilhard Association in a one-day conference that they were organising on the theme, *Future of Humanity: A Cosmological Vision*, with Prof Ursula King, Dr Christopher Knight and Prof Bernard Carr being the speakers. In June 2010, the Society joined with the Wrekin Trust in Oxford, with Martin Palmer, Lord Harries and David Lorimer speaking on the theme, *Finding the*



*Spirit in a Secular Age* – and the pattern of June one-day conferences continued, in June 2011, with the World Congress of Faiths, in London, with Revd. Dr Marcus Braybrooke, Dr Gregory Barker and Eley McAinsh on the theme, *Spirituality: How might spiritual/religious experience help towards understanding and Compassion?*

In 2011 Dr David Hay's long-awaited biography, *God's Biologist: A Life of Alister Hardy* was published. This told the full story of this remarkable man, the founder of the Religious Experience Research Centre, and described the early years of RERU. As Marianne Rankin wrote in a review of this book<sup>12</sup>, "Indeed, this is more than the story of a life. It is also a window onto the worlds of science, academia and religion as Hardy encountered them and a clear expression of his thought and work." David Hay was warmly congratulated on such a comprehensive and most valuable work. The book includes a Postscript in which David discusses the growth of European Individualism which has had, and still has, such an effect on perception of religion and spiritual/religious experience.

Also on a happy note, around this time the Centre became the beneficiary of three legacies from former members of the Society, Mr and Mrs Buckmaster, Mrs Banks and Mr John Meldrum. The major legacy from Mr and Mrs Buckmaster, was under dispute, but in May 2012 it was announced that clearance had come through for the considerable sum of £188,045. This was very much appreciated and allowed consideration to be given to the appointment of a qualified archivist on a part-time basis for two years. The work required was to complete the cataloguing of the AHRERC collection of books and journals; to arrange in useful order the archive of the RERC and Society and to detail the paintings and artefacts held by the Trust. It also allowed the Trust to reward volunteers who worked so hard for the Trust and the Society with appropriate honoraria. Consideration was also given to acquiring some administrative support for the Society.<sup>13</sup>

At this time Dr Nicholas Gibson, Programme Officer of the John Templeton Foundation, approached the Alister Hardy Trust through the AHRERC with the suggestion of investing generously in the re-digitization of the archive in a way that would make it more relevant for current research in a variety of academic fields. In assessing capacity with the Director, Greg Barker, he made it clear that Templeton would not wish to

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<sup>12</sup> *De Numine*, Autumn 2011 issue No. 51, p. 43 – together with a further review of the book by Ben Korgen.

<sup>13</sup> Trustees' meeting, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012, and subsequent developments.

invest in the current method of data collection but speculated about how Sir Alister may have done things differently in the 21st Century. This was warmly welcomed by the Trustees at their meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2012, as the proposed 'Portal arrangement' discussed would allow access to the accounts at a distance while ensuring that the Research Centre retained control of the data and its use. It had long been a criticism that researchers and members of the AH Society had to travel to Lampeter to access the archive. Following this, active dialogue was pursued between Leslie Francis and Nicholas Gibson, with the result that in November it was reported that Prof David Voas would be meeting Nicholas Gibson at a conference in the USA on behalf of Prof Leslie Francis.

With regard to the Society, consideration was again given to its name, 'Alister Hardy Society'. Whilst this name was getting known, people were still asking, 'What is the Alister Hardy Society for and, who is Alister Hardy?' It was felt that the Society's name should spell out what it was actually all about – similar to that of an associated organisation, the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies. After much discussion, it was eventually agreed by the AHS committee that the Society be renamed, *The Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience* (AHSSSE – or SSSE for short); this was agreed by the AH Trustees in May 2012, and ratified at the Society's AGM on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2012. Letter headings and the Society's website url were amended accordingly, the latter now reading, [www.studyspiritualexperiences.org](http://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org).

On Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2012 the now customary one-day conference was held in the Newman Room, Catholic Chaplaincy in Rose Place, St. Aldates, Oxford, jointly with the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies on the theme, *Assisted Dying and the Afterlife*. Prof Paul Badham spoke on *Assisted Dying from a Christian Perspective* arguing strongly for its legitimacy in certain cases. The Very Revd Alex Wedderspoon in *Aspects of Belief in the Life after Death* discussed Christian belief in an afterlife as supported though near-death experience studies and quantum physics; and Dr Peter Fenwick, in his talk *Is there a Natural Metric to Dying?*, argued that research into near-death experiences did not militate against assisted dying.

During 2012, problems arose within the Wales Group. At one time five area 'mini-groups' had been formed, but of these only three were operating – two survive to the present day. Attempts to co-ordinate the mini-groups under the umbrella of an 'all Wales Group' failed due to personality clashes and, with mounting friction, it was decided at a

meeting of the Wales Group on 23<sup>rd</sup> October to abolish the existing Group as presently constituted in favour of the separate development of the three surviving 'mini-groups'. At the end of 2012, these were reconstituted as autonomous Local Groups of the Society in their own right, as the West Wales Group, the South-East Wales Group and the Swansea Group, under the leadership respectively of Eric Franklin, Mary Cook and Penny Sartori. Tribute was paid to Roger Coward for what he had initiated and done for the Society in Wales.

At the Society's AGM on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012, Jonathan Robinson stood down as Chair of the Society, resigning for personal reasons. Much appreciation was expressed for his valuable contribution to the Society and its membership. Jonathan was replaced by Andrew (Andy) Burns, Vice-Chair and a long-time member of the Society. With a life-long interest in faith and religious matters, Andy had gained a BTh (Oxon) and later an MA in the study of World Religions from the University of Wales Lampeter. He accepted the position of Chair on a pro-tem basis subject to commitments in his professional career as a serving Police Officer with the Metropolitan Police in London. His appointment was warmly welcomed, and confirmed at the Trustees meeting of 31<sup>st</sup> October, where he automatically became a member of the Board of Trustees.

The year saw the departure, too, of Ruth Brinkman, Hon Membership Secretary, who resigned for health reasons. Ruth was replaced by Marian MacPolin, who took over after her election at the Society's AGM on 6<sup>th</sup> October. Marian was a native of Northern Ireland: she graduated from Queen's University, Belfast in Geography and Social Anthropology and, after spending a number of years teaching overseas, came to Wales, where she studied World Religions: Religious Experience at the University of Wales, Lampeter, obtaining an MA in 2007. She has been involved with the AHSSSE since 2003; and assisted Roger Coward as secretary of the Wales Group, until returning in the summer of 2012 to Northern Ireland. In view of the friction in Wales, the due re-election of Roger on the Committee was deferred.

The elevation of Andy Burns to the Chair of the Society (a Trustee appointment) created a vacancy in the member representation on the AHS Committee, and this was filled by Marianne Rankin, former Chair of the Society.<sup>14</sup> Marianne had been co-opted onto the Committee in 2011, and

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<sup>14</sup> See p. 64.

she was formally elected as a member of the Committee at the AGM on 6<sup>th</sup> October. In view of her work speaking in schools about the work of the Research Centre and publicising the Society, Marianne was appointed Hon. Director of Communications for the Trust and Society in November, and immediately threw herself into the work of liaising with associated bodies in promoting links and joint events and dealing with publicity. At the same time, Mike Rush, Committee member, was appointed Vice-Chair of the Society. Mike continues in his role of website manager and moderator, and was engaged in setting up a Members' Area to allow members of the Society to air their views online, put forward their ideas and contribute to discussions relating to the subject spiritual/religious experiences.

At the following Trustees' meeting, the Trustees gave consideration to difficulties concerning the Society's administration. This was necessarily dependant on the help of Jean Matthews, the Archive Supervisor, who now had only minimal time in her working hours to spend on Society matters. Although Jean had given every assurance that she had little trouble over this arrangement, and was happy and willing to help voluntarily in her own time – which the Trust warmly recognised – it nevertheless was considered that the time had now come to put the administration of the Society on a different, more formal, footing. The Trustees agreed that an outside organization should be engaged to give administrative support for the needs of the Trust and Society – this to take on work currently being undertaken by the University and work generated through Trust and Society activities. Various options and arrangements were examined, with the firm Rankin Associates eventually being selected. Single tender action was taken, after checking with the Charity Commission, as the rate to be charged by the Principals of Rankin Associates was extremely low and well below normal commercial rates; the Principals of Rankin Associates had a detailed knowledge of the work of the Society; and it would be to the advantage of the Trust that this firm be commissioned. It was agreed that Marianne Rankin, as Director of Communications, would act as intermediary in liaison between the Society and Trust and Rankin Associates.

It was hoped that at this meeting the Trust would be able finally to ratify the Memorandum of Agreement with the University. The draft had been agreed by the Trust on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2010, but delays and revisions meant that the document was still not ready for signing. Recent revisions to clarify the status of the collection belonging to the Trust had been made, but these left inconsistencies in the document. Concern was expressed over the Trust's status within the University being still

technically informal and provisional and that it was important for the Agreement to be finalised as quickly as possible. The hope was expressed that a resolution would be reached by 31 March 2013.

Tributes were paid to Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, former Hon. Treasurer and Trustee, who had died on 29<sup>th</sup> August 2012 – and to June Knowles, the wife of Oliver Knowles, who had preceded Nicholas as Treasurer. June, an anthropologist, writer and stalwart member of the Society had passed away peacefully on 14<sup>th</sup> October. A moment of silence was held, recognising the valuable contribution both Nicholas and June had made to the Centre. Marianne Rankin and John Franklin were among the mourners who had attended June's funeral at Watlington on 29<sup>th</sup> October.

In a move initiated by John Franklin, the Society began to explore with the Wrekin Trust and other religious and spiritual organisations, possible areas of connection and co-operation. There was a common interest in promotion of spirituality as a universal reality and much needed in today's society. At an exploratory meeting in September, on 16<sup>th</sup> October it was agreed to arrange a meeting in London with representatives of associated interested organisations early in the New Year<sup>15</sup>.

At the end of 2012, on 29<sup>th</sup> December, Lord Rees Mogg died aged 84. A Patron of the Centre, he had long been a friend, helping the Centre on a number of occasions through his association with the Esmée Fairbairn Trust, and from serving on the Board of the Advisory Research Council in 1985 to his being Chair of Trustees from 1992 to 1994. Also at the end of the year, Rowan Williams, Patron of the Centre, stood down as Archbishop of Canterbury on 31<sup>st</sup> December – taking up the role of Master of Magdalene College at Cambridge University in January and, subsequently, the title the Right Revd and the Right Honorable the Lord Williams of Oystermouth. As such, on invitation, he kindly consented to stay on as a Patron – to be joined at the beginning of January the following year by The Right Revd Wyn Evans, Bishop of St Davids, who joined as a Patron of the Centre

The year ended on a note of optimism. Thanks to the legacies that had been received, the Trust was financially in a secure position which, it was hoped, would enable the Centre to be a little more adventurous in supporting possible research projects, whilst ensuring solvency for the next five years. A start had already been made with respect to the new major research project being planned for the United Kingdom which opened up

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<sup>15</sup> See page 116.

new exciting possibilities. A team started to be formed under the direction of Dr Greg Barker to evaluate the use of current language with respect to religion and religious experience – this to feed into plans to bring the Hardy Question to public attention. A sample survey focusing on identifying experiences people would assess as meaningful and the kinds of language used for these experiences had been drafted and was ready for use at Centre conferences. The AHSSSE was being invited to be involved in this exercise – and with a new team in place and with assured administrative backup, the Society was heartened and looking forward to continuing to play its part in the promotion of the study of spiritual/religious experience. Thus the scene was set for 2013.

However, dark clouds were gathering. In November 2012 university staff were informed that, due to financial cuts made by the Welsh Assembly and a drop in student numbers, the university had a deficit. The University Council had selected certain schools for restructuring – the reason being given for the selection was lack of recruitment of undergraduates and the desire to concentrate on undergraduate education at the expense of post-graduate courses. This did not come out of the blue; strategies had been put in place for a number of years to increase student numbers, though with mixed success. During December, however, staff were told that they had to reapply for their jobs and, with the option of voluntary redundancy being offered. As the Memorandum of Agreement with the AHT had still not been signed, the position at the end of the year was very unclear.

## 7. 2013, A MOMENTOUS YEAR

The blow fell in January 2013. The School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies was one of the schools selected for restructuring, and it was learnt that it was to be reduced by half. As part of this restructuring, several members of staff including Dr Greg Barker and Dr Jonathan Wooding lost their jobs

This information came as a great shock to the Centre as well as to Greg Barker, Jonathan Wooding and other university staff, and led to immediate urgent action to review the situation. Greg, through the RERC and with the full support of the Trust, was engaged in important research involving the study of religious experience and use of the database. He was a University appointed Director of the AHRERC, a position that would go on the termination of his contract with the University. It was however claimed that the changes should not affect the relationship of the University with the Centre. Consideration was being given within the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies to suggesting a replacement for Greg, this wholeheartedly supported by the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Finance– and, with regard to the appointment of a new cataloguer, the reason given for the delay was that redundant staff were being offered the first opportunity to apply for this post.

In the light of the loss of Greg Barker, however, and the feeling of a growing ambivalent attitude of the university towards the Centre as witnessed in the delays to finalising the Memorandum of Agreement, a special meeting of the Trustees was called for the second week in February to discuss the situation.

That Trustees meeting was held on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> February in St. Pancras Hotel and was attended by Prof Leslie Francis (Chair), Revd Prof June Boyce-Tillman<sup>1</sup>, Dr Andrew Village and Prof David Voas, Andy Burns and Marianne Rankin. The present situation was explained, and a possible way forward was proposed – this being that the Alister Hardy Trust, RERC and Society, along with the Hardy archives, library and artefacts, should leave Lampeter to go as an associated Centre linked to the St. Mary's and St. Giles' Centre (an organisation that includes concern with children's religious experiences), which is linked to Glyndŵr University in Wrexham. Leslie Francis indicated that Prof Christopher Alan Lewis, Head of the

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<sup>1</sup> See page 101.

Department of Psychology there, which includes the Division of Pastoral Sciences, would be interested in supporting such a move. It was agreed that the quickest way of proceeding would be through a formal proposal to transfer the AHRERC to Glyndŵr with a codicil relating to the work of the Centre attached to an agreement between Glyndŵr and the St. Mary's and St. Giles' Centre.

It was also suggested that, to help retain the important link with Greg Barker and his work, the offer of a six-month Research Fellowship be considered. These moves were supported, and it was agreed that Leslie Francis should make further inquiries with a view to papers being circulated to all Trustees for discussion and a vote.

Jonathan Wooding resigned as a Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust with effect from 18<sup>th</sup> February; and in March Greg Barker tendered his resignation as Director of Research. In a letter to the AHSSSE expressing appreciation of the work of the Trust and Society, Greg wrote, "After some consideration, I feel that it is best for the Trust that I resign from my role as Director of Research. Holding on to this position is untenable in the light of my departure from the University of Wales." In his letter Greg said that he had given thought to continuing in his role as Director for a few more months in order to provide some stability, but had considered that it would be better "to clear the decks" for appointment of someone else who would further the research agenda. He went on to say, however, that he would continue to promote the work of the Trust and offered what further assistance he could give if invited in the future. Indeed, he had already accepted to be a principal speaker at a one-day conference organised for June 2013.

At a meeting of the Trustees on 28<sup>th</sup> May it was agreed that Prof Leslie Francis, as Chair of Trustees, should be the Centre's contact in working closely with the John Templeton Foundation. Their representative, Prof Nicholas Gibson agreed that the leadership of Leslie Francis and Christopher Lewis provided a creditable base on which Templeton's invitation to develop new work with the AHRERC could be developed. Also at that meeting, the Trustees ratified the decision to pursue linking the Trust with Glyndŵr University in association with St. Mary's and St. Giles' Centre. It was noted that the codicil had been added to the documents at Glyndŵr. Questions were raised as to the viability and future of the AH Library and artefacts – and, subsequently, on learning that St. Mary's Centre was situated between Conwy and Bangor, a long way away from



the University in Wrexham, a visit to the University was arranged to see and assess the question of accommodation.

The visit took place on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, when Trustees Prof Leslie Francis, John Franklin, David Greenwood, Revd Prof June Boyce-Tillman, Jane Winship and Marianne Rankin met the Vice Chancellor, Prof Michael Scott and Prof Christopher Alan Lewis, Dean of Research and Head of the Department of Psychology to discuss possible relocation of the archive and resources from Lampeter to Glyndŵr, later going on to meet Tania ap Sion, who was Executive Director of the St Mary's Centre and Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader of the BA (Hons) Theology for Discipleship and Ministry and the DMin in Religion and Education at Glyndŵr University. The welcome was warm and friendly and on being shown around the campus, the advantages of Glyndŵr University were readily appreciated, with certain fears being allayed and, apart from some question regarding the housing of the library, the accommodation was found very attractive.

However, just shortly before the visit, it was learnt that the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), concerned at this development, had put forward a counter proposal for a continuing partnership between the University and the Trust. This included an ambitious programme for the AHRERC including the immediate appointment of a Director responsible for research (a post awarded to Dr Bettina Schmidt); priority to be given to the digitalisation of the database of accounts of experience, with provision of a secure portal arrangement enabling its access online to individual researchers or universities; and the offer of international Alister Hardy Research Fellowships, an online Master by Research in Religious Experience, and the involvement of the Centre in a number of changes to the University's education and research programme with regard to religious and spiritual experience.

The Trustees were now faced with having to consider certain options – a move to Glyndŵr, staying on at Lampeter, or possibly developing a presence at both Universities. A Steering Committee comprising David Greenwood (Chair), Leslie Francis, Jane Winship and Marianne Rankin, was set up to study the issues and to seek answers to questions now raised by both proposals. They were to consider all the options and to report with findings and recommendations to an extra-ordinary meeting of Trustees. The Steering Committee held various meetings to evaluate the situation and reported to the Trustees on 25<sup>th</sup> September. A motion that the Centre should pursue the possibilities of both staying at Lampeter, working with UWTSD, and also developing a presence at Glyndŵr University, was

approved (subsequently endorsed at the Trustees annual general meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013).

Immediate steps were taken to achieve this end. Agreements were drawn up and signed between the Trust and the two Universities. A letter was sent to Glyndŵr setting out certain desiderata and to establish formal liaison arrangements. The suggestion was that Prof Christopher Lewis, an established scholar in the field of religion and religious experience, should become AHRERC Director of Research, Glyndŵr) (in addition to Dr Bettina Schmidt as AHRERC Director of Research, UWTSU). The Vice-Chancellor of Glyndŵr University confirmed the appointment of Christopher Lewis as Director of the AHRERC at Glyndŵr University in November.

Prof Christopher Lewis was Founding Chair and Head of the Department of Psychology and Dean of Research in the Institute of Health, Medical Sciences and Society at Glyndŵr University. He holds degrees in Psychology (BSc, MPhil, DPhil) and Education (MSc, Med) from the University of Ulster, and also Religious Studies (MA) from Bangor University. He is a Fellow of the Psychological Society of Ireland, the Higher Education Academy, the College of Teachers, and the Royal Society for Public Health, a Chartered Health Psychologist, a Chartered Scientist of the British Psychological Society and a Registered Psychologist of the Psychological Society of Ireland. Prior to moving to Glyndŵr University in 2009, he worked at the University of Ulster (Northern Ireland) for 22 years. He is Founding Co-Editor of the journal *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* since its inception in 1998, and is currently Founding Editor of the *Welsh Journal of Psychology*. His research and teaching interests include: psychology of religion; health psychology; psychology of peace, conflict and violence; positive psychology. He teaches on the MSc Psychology of Religion (Mental Health, Religion and Culture; Positive Psychology of Religion) the DMin in Religion and Education at Glyndŵr University, and is the author of a large number of books and articles in the area of the Psychology of Religion.

At Lampeter a working party was set up to monitor progress. The first meeting took place on 15<sup>th</sup> October between Dr Mirjam Plantinga, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities; Dr Bettina Schmidt AHRERC Director of Research; David Greenwood, AHT Vice-Chair and Treasurer and Marianne Rankin, AHT&SSSE Director of Communications. A new Master by Research (MRes) in Religious Experience degree was approved by UWTSU on 9<sup>th</sup> October and was awaiting validation with a view for the first intake of students in 2014. At the same time work was proceeding on the

development of online access to the AHRERC database of accounts of spiritual/religious experience, with the hope of it being made public in January 2014, when the University's new website was scheduled to be put online.

Later, in November an extension of development of research strategy was discussed. An initial meeting took place in Boston, USA between Prof Leslie Francis, Prof David Voas and Prof Andrew Village with Prof Wesley Wildman of Boston University and Dr Nicholas Gibson.

Other moves, discussed and agreed by the AH Trustees for investigation and development at their meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013, were the setting up of a Research Committee for the RERC; the production of a reader in Religious Experience, a publication collecting primary material to resource a Masters programme; the possible establishment of an annual Alister Hardy Lecture at Lampeter; and the translation of the Centre's Occasional Papers into pdf format for reproduction on the UWTST website, with good links to the Society's website. Finally, it was agreed to investigate the production of an academic journal of, initially, one issue a year, containing some major full-length articles, overseen by an editorial board comprising the new Research Committee.

With regard to other matters, this year saw the publication of the Taiwan Study carried out between 2008 and 2011<sup>2</sup>. Led by Prof Yen-zen Tsai, this includes important comparisons and discussion of the similarities and differences between Taiwan and China.

The Trust was in a much healthier financial situation thanks to the three legacies received from former members of the Society referred to on page 101, which finally amounted, altogether, to some £298,560. With net current assets now standing at £333,019<sup>3</sup> the Trust, expressing its appreciation and gratitude to contributing Society members, was in a much better position to fund further research and attract visiting professors and speakers.

On the Society front, a new venture was being pursued. Following on from the Society's meeting with Janice Dolley, Development Director of the Wrekin Trust, in October the previous year<sup>4</sup>, a meeting of interested associated organisations was arranged. Representatives from the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies; the British Teilhard

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<sup>2</sup> Tsai, 2013 – see also p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> AHT financial accounts, 31 July 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See p. 107.

Association; the Anthroposophical Movement; the World Congress of Faiths; The Study Society; the Scientific and Medical Network; EnlightenNext<sup>5</sup> as well as the Wrekin Trust and AHSSSE met in London on 18<sup>th</sup> February with apologies received from the Brahma Kumaris; the Society for Psychical Research and the International Association for Religious Freedom, British Chapter. At this meeting there was agreement on the suggestion of developing better links in promoting understanding of spirituality in its many forms – also, that a one-day conference should be held in June on the topic of ‘*Spirituality for a World in Crisis*’, and that the possible forming of a ‘Federation’ or ‘Alliance’ of spiritual organisations should be investigated – this later becoming known as One Spirit Alliance.

The conference, organised by the Society and the Wrekin Trust, was eventually held on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June 2013 under the title, *Spirituality for a World in Crisis: A Gathering to Seek a Co-creative Approach to a New Era* at the Essex Unitarian Church in Kensington, London. The principal speakers were David Lorimer and Dr Greg Barker. Sister Maureen of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University opened and closed the day with meditation. There were tables for the twelve main organisations and others to display their publicity material and in all time for about twenty different groups to speak about their activities.

Over 100 people attended the conference, and it produced a momentum for further development on the theme of a co-creative approach to the awareness and promotion of spiritual understanding. It was decided that further conferences should be organised the following year, in Sheffield in March and London in June, to carry forward this initiative. Most of the above associated organisations wished to continue co-operation under the suggested title *One Spirit Alliance*. The aim was to enable fuller co-operation to speak with a combined, therefore stronger, voice in the public sphere with regard to spiritual matters. A steering group of representatives of the associated organisations was established, with a further meeting arranged for November to develop and progress this initiative.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of June word came through of the death of Edward Robinson at the age of 92. Edward had followed Sir Alister Hardy in 1972 as Director of the then RERU at Manchester College, Oxford. After his

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<sup>5</sup> Re-named, Emergence Foundation, June 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Now firmly established, One Spirit Alliance “works to promote and provide a forum for spiritually-minded people, organisations and networks to foster connection and collaboration between them”: see [www.onespiritalliance.net](http://www.onespiritalliance.net)

retirement, he devoted his life to his art as a sculptor and writer. He had many one-man shows of his work; the last entitled *Forms of Silence*, accompanied by a book of the same name. A memorial service was held at St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey, London, in the Spring of 2013. His funeral took place at the Quaker Friends Meeting House in Exeter on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> June, and tributes and letters of condolence were sent to Edward's widow, Wendy, on behalf of both the Trust and the Society.



*Edward Robinson, Exeter Cathedral, 2007*

In other happenings during 2013, a Members Forum was added to the Society's website, and a Facebook page established. An 'Annual Gathering', instituted by the Wales Groups, this year was opened up to all members of the Society. Held from 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> July at Llantarnam Abbey, it proved a great success; and it was agreed that this should become an annual fixture for the AHSSSE. However, problems arose with regard to running of the West Wales Group, which, at the time of writing, is currently without a leader.

At the Society's Open Day on 5<sup>th</sup> October, Prof Leslie Francis, Chair of Trustees, gave the 2013 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture under the title, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, and David Greenwood, AHT Vice-Chair and Hon. Treasurer, and Marianne Rankin, Director of Communications, gave linked presentations on art and spirituality in the afternoon, making it an interesting in-house programme. Two former Directors, Dr David Hay and Peggy Morgan, attended the meeting.

Inquiries were made at the AGM following the Memorial Lecture about Dr Greg Barker<sup>7</sup>, and tributes were paid to him with respect to his former contribution to the Society and AHRERC. At the meeting Marianne Rankin,

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Greg Barker was then a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Winchester, teaching there on occasions. He was also running a private Consultancy (educational and life coaching) practice.

along with Tanya Garland and Averil French<sup>8</sup>, were elected onto the AHSSSE Committee. It was also announced at the meeting that Wendy Xerri would be leaving Lampeter and had resigned as a Director of the AHRERC, and that James Cale, Executive Director of IT and Systems at UWTSO, would be replacing her temporarily (later this was clarified to explain that James would be overseeing the arrangements for placing the RERC database online, with Emma Harvey-Woodason, Campus Librarian for Lampeter, supervising the work of Jean Matthews). At the AGM it was also reported that the upgrading of the database of accounts of spiritual and religious experience was now complete and ready to roll out as the online version in the New Year. In December 2013 Alison Harding became the Head of the library in Lampeter and Carmarthen and the official supervisor of Jean Matthews.

Amendments to the Rules of the Society tightening up procedures with regard to the running of the Society's Local Groups, which had been approved by the AHSSSE Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> September and the Trustees on 25<sup>th</sup> September, were endorsed by the membership at the meeting.

The meeting of the Steering Group of representatives of the co-operating organisations, referred to on page 107 above, was held at Colet House in London on 8<sup>th</sup> November, Marianne Rankin for the AHSSSE playing a leading role, chairing the meeting. At the meeting it was agreed to adopt the name 'One Spirit Alliance' as the title of the new grouping, with its object, "To enable spiritually minded people and organisations both national and regional to come together, and to foster collaboration between them."

Ideas were developed at this meeting for the two conferences agreed for 2014. The first, in Sheffield, organised jointly by Robert Chamberlain of the Anthroposophical movement and Marianne Rankin to be held in March under the title, '*Deeper Dimensions in Education*' The second, in London, on 28<sup>th</sup> June to be organised in conjunction with One Spirit Alliance under the title, '*Spirit in Action*. Within the Alliance, a sub-group was set up to develop an organisational framework to link with other organisations interested in joining. A further meeting was arranged for 14<sup>th</sup> February 2014 with participating organisations invited to consider the steering group's suggestions and ways in which they could contribute to the Alliance, an invitation readily accepted by the AHSSSE.

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<sup>8</sup> Sadly, Averil died shortly after her election.

The year ended on an optimistic note for the Trust, Society and the AHRERCs, with promise of developments to come – and an intimation of a change through a proposed new constitution for the Trust to give it Charitable Incorporation (CIO) status,<sup>9</sup> which, though, was to have a major impact on the running of the Trust and Society.

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<sup>9</sup> Report to AHT Trustees, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013.

## 8. 2014, SETTLING DOWN

The year started with a freshly energised relationship with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) at Lampeter, and opportunities opening up at Glyndŵr University – and, with the development of wider network linking for the AHSSSE, a new era had dawned.

Whilst work on the Global Project had come to a temporary standstill, the research work described in chapter 5, *Widening the Horizons* (pp. 78-89 above), continued, with the researchers working individually on their separate projects. It might be hoped that the project could be expanded into other countries as and when opportunity occurs. Attempts were made to recover for the AHRERC archive the accounts of spiritual/religious experience collected as part of the China Study,<sup>1</sup> which had been left behind in London on Prof Xinzhong Yao's return to China and which had apparently been destroyed. The projected major new survey of religious experience in Great Britain by the AHRERC<sup>2</sup> had been temporarily put on hold following the departure of Dr Greg Barker. Meanwhile, other research projects were under consideration.

At Glyndŵr University, Wrexham, the AHRERC was established in the Department of Psychology (recognised as the leading unit in the psychology of religion in the UK<sup>3</sup>), which was located within the Institute for Health, Medical Sciences and Society. Efforts concentrated on developing research capacity, postgraduate teaching and undergraduate teaching in the field of religious and spiritual experience; with postgraduate teaching developed at MA and DMin level to include a route concerned with religious and spiritual experience – this was planned to be available to students in October 2014. The main strategy, at the beginning of the year, was directed to linking Glyndŵr with Boston University in the USA and Warwick (Prof Leslie Francis). An initial meeting had been held in November in Boston USA, when Profs Leslie Francis and Andrew Village met Dr Nicholas Gibson and Prof Wesley Wiidman of Boston University to explore the potential within the current archive, and to capture a new generation of religious and spiritual experiences through an online portal. In March Nicholas Gibson visited Christopher Lewis at Glyndŵr to discuss an on-line funding bid to submit to the Templeton Foundation, this being reported to the Trustees at their meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> May 2014. It was explained that the proposal would be for

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<sup>1</sup> See above (pp. 79-83)

<sup>2</sup> See above (p. 99)

<sup>3</sup> RERC Glyndŵr Director's report to AHT Trustees, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2014.



the capture of new data to be managed by Boston University; and development of capacity and conceptual frameworks to enable the existing archive to analyse the USA-collected data – the funding bid for the UK project being for three postdoctoral research fellows, two research assistants and three research students.

An Alister Hardy Research Chair in Religious and Spiritual Experience was established, initially at Glyndŵr University, with Revd Professor Jeff Astley as the first appointee, and the MA and DMin level courses came on-stream in October 2014. Prof Astley had taught and supervised at Durham University since 1981, where he was now an honorary professor, as well as a visiting professor at both Glyndŵr University and York St. John University. He had been Founding Director of the North of England Institute for Christian Education from 1981 until 2013, and had previously worked in parish ministry, university chaplaincy and higher education. He is the author or editor of over forty books on Christian education, practical theology or religious faith. Prof Astley took responsibility for preparing for publication a reader on *Research in Religious and Spiritual Experience*, and establishing a programme which would support the MA and DMin programme at Glyndŵr as well as promoting the work of the Alister Hardy Trust more widely.

A module in religious and spiritual experience within the MSc course in the psychology of religion was also planned at that time, with this aimed to be available to students also in October this year – and an invitation was extended to the Trustees to bring forward proposals for research and courses to be run at Glyndŵr University in conjunction with the St. Mary's and St. Giles Centre. Finally, a dedicated website was planned to be developed to promote the AHRERC and AHT at Glyndŵr more widely, together with a publication strategy to disseminate the work undertaken by the Centre, and related work from elsewhere, on religious and spiritual experience.

At Lampeter, the computerisation of the database of accounts of spiritual experiences and re-digitization of the archive<sup>4</sup> was completed, with access available through the online portal on AHRERC's website. This enabled accredited personnel, on becoming members of the Society, to access the database from their own computers through the secure portal arrangement wherever in the world they might happen to be, making the

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<sup>4</sup> Mentioned on p. 103.

AHRERC archive far more accessible and well-known, to the great benefit to all concerned. There have already been expressions of interest from researchers in UK and Germany and universities in the US and Canada. Access to the original accounts themselves at Lampeter remained available to researchers/members of the AHSSSE. Several research applications had been submitted since September 2013, including two post-doc applications to the British Academy, and a research network application about mediumistic wellbeing embracing UK and Brazilian scholars had been developed in cooperation with the Afterlife Research Centre. After a first panel at the 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Manchester 2013, applications for funding further meetings were submitted to the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust. Further funding applications in this and other areas were in preparation.

The official relaunch of the AHRERC at Lampeter took place there on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014 at a special one-day conference on the topic 'The Study of Religious Experience', organised by Dr Bettina Schmidt. Dr Fiona Bowie gave the first annual Lampeter Alister Hardy Lecture on 'How to Study Religious Experience: Methodological Reflections on the Study of the Afterlife'. Other speakers included Dr Robert Pope, Dr Gary Bunt, Dr Catrin Williams and Dr Thomas Jansen, with Dr Bettina Schmidt speaking on anthropological reflection on the study of religious experience. About 70 people attended the event, a warm welcome being extended by Dr Mirjam Plantinga, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. Then, on 14<sup>th</sup> July welcome news came through of the promotion of Dr Bettina Schmidt, the RERC Director at Lampeter, to the status of Professor by the Senate of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

The MA course in Religious Experience at Lampeter finally come to an end this year, the remaining students being expected to receive their degrees (one part-time student in 2015). From 2012 onwards, new students have been enrolled in the MA course Study of Religions which includes a module on Religious Experience Today based on the former Core Module in Religious Experience of the old MA Religious Experience programme, originally developed by former Director, Peggy Morgan, revised by Dr Gregory Shushan and later updated by Dr Bettina Schmidt. Altogether, 25 students had by then graduated, or were expected to graduate, from the MA course in Religious Experience since its inception, several of them with distinction. Some of the MA students continued with a research degree afterwards and work on Near Death Experience, Spirituality and other aspects of Religious Experience. A new Master by Research (MRes) in

Religious Experience was validated, with the first entry coming on-stream in October 2014<sup>5</sup>.

Regular residential course sessions were advertised at Lampeter for distant learning students on the MA courses and research degrees, and use of the AHRERC archive encouraged in the teaching of 'Research Skills'. Use of the archive required enrolment as members of the AHSSSE: at a reduced rate for students. Student members were warmly invited to participate in the activities of the Society through contributing to its journal, *De Numine*, and offering comments and ideas through the Student Representative who sat on the AHSSSE governing Committee – and attention was drawn to the presence and meetings of the local AHSSSE groups of members in Wales. Members of the Society were welcome to sit in on the lectures of the residential sessions should they wish. Joint MA (and BA) and AHSSSE Wales group meetings were encouraged whenever possible when lectures or talks on aspects pertaining to spiritual/religious experience were to be given. At the end of December 2013, there were just four student members enrolled in the Society, with this number expected to increase with next year's intake of new students.

The AHRERC Lampeter website, <http://uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre>, part of the UWTSD website, came live in April 2014. Copies of the Centre's Occasional Papers were being prepared for inclusion on the website, which also had links to the online portal of the archive, and to the Society's website. Access to the online portal was given to every member of the Society who submitted a request and signed a confidentiality form. The intention was to make possible the inclusion of new accounts in the online archive and, eventually, to develop a new online Student journal. The aim was to make the AHRERC Occasional Papers available to everyone via the Centre's website whilst at the same time continuing to make available hard copies of the papers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Series of Occasional Papers came on-stream in October that year.

The AHRERC archive of accounts of spiritual and religious experience continued to grow. There are over 6,600 accounts of spiritual and religious experiences in the archive; these include 357 accounts of near-death experiences given by Dr Peter Fenwick, and accounts donated by the author Emma Heathcote-James on angelic and post-death experiences. The majority had by now been transferred onto the RERC database. The number of actual experiences in fact, though, is much greater, as many accounts

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<sup>5</sup> RERC Lampeter Director's report to AHT Trustees, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2014.

refer to more than one experience, some to many experiences. The original accounts are housed in a room on the lower floor of the University library, with the accounts being held in strictest confidence. The thesaurus of key words and phrases, written for use with the computer database referred to earlier, which proved a useful tool in the access and analysis of specific accounts or subject matter, was now superseded by the 'search' facility on the database. The archive was open to researchers and members of the AHSSSE for use in person at Lampeter, as well as now being online<sup>6</sup>, with access to the original documents possible on request – overnight accommodation available at the Lampeter campus<sup>7</sup>, and bed-and-breakfast or hotel also available nearby.

Jean Matthews, the Archive Supervisor, was joined there in September of that year by the new archivist, Thomas Pitchford, sponsored by the AHT. He was appointed to this part-time post with the job title Collections Librarian (Alister Hardy Research Centre). Thomas has a BA in English Education, with special interest in Religious Education, from Louisiana College, USA with Library qualifications from Louisiana State University – and was former Librarian at Hitchin Boys School in Hertfordshire. His first undertaking, as top priority, was the cataloguing of the remaining books of the AHRERC library before going on to catalogue the historic documents relating to the Alister Hardy Trust and Society on file. He worked alongside Jean in the AHRERC office at Lampeter, which could also be used by researchers, and the Hon. Membership Secretary when necessary. Books for review, extra copies of the journal and books to be catalogued were all stored there. The Centre's cassettes, CDs and DVDs remained available for purchase or on loan, application through the Archive Supervisor. The position, though, was shortly to change: Jean announced her intention to retire – and stopped working for the RERC at the end of 2014. She remained, however, involved in the Society helping in the production of the journal, *De Numine*. She was warmly thanked for all her work for the AHRERC, and a tribute was paid to her at the Society's AGM on 4<sup>th</sup> October. Her work was taken over in part by Marian MacPolin, the Hon. Membership Secretary at the time; but her post of Archive Supervisor was not immediately replaced.

The Society continued its activities through links with bodies whose area of interest overlapped with that of the Centre; and in exploring opportunities to promote the work of the Centre in recognition of

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<sup>6</sup> Coming on-stream in May 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Via the Facilities office at the Lampeter campus.

spirituality as a universal reality and need in today's society. On 15<sup>th</sup> March, a one-day conference was held with the Anthropological Society on the theme of *Deeper Dimensions in Education*, with Marianne Rankin, Dr Greg Barker, who was now Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Winchester, and Aonghus Gordon as principal speakers. It also continued to play an important part as a founder member within One Spirit Alliance, the group of like-minded organisations referred to on page 114 above, in both its development and the organisation of the conference held on 28<sup>th</sup> June at Colet House, Baron's Court, by the kind invitation of the Study Society, on the theme, *Spirit in Action*, with Serge Beddington-Behrens and Dr Anthony Russell as principal speakers: the day included a meditation at the start and the end as a key part of the programme to give opportunity to meet others as well as to find out what different groups within the Alliance were doing. Taking place over the weekend of 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July 2014, the South East Wales Group opened up this year its 4<sup>th</sup> annual Llantarnam Abbey Gathering to all members of the Society, with the theme, *Pilgrim Paths*. The event was enjoyed by all who participated, and it was agreed that this open event be repeated in subsequent years.



Cover of *A Cotswold Sketchbook*

The Society's Open Day that year was held in the afternoon of Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October at the University Catholic Chaplaincy, Oxford. Dr Christopher Lewis, the Director of the new AHRERC at Glyndŵr University, gave the 2014 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on 'Religious Experience, Psychological Well-being, and Culture' – with this being followed by an illustrated talk by Andy Burns on Sir Alister Hardy's *A Cotswold Sketchbook revisited in photographs*. This revealed a not-so-well-known aspect of Sir Alister's artistic accomplishments. At the AGM in the morning, which contained a review of the past year's activities, announcement was made of the launch of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *History of the AHRERC and Society* by John Franklin, which came out in September.

Sadly, the news came through this year of the death of Dr David Hay, Director of the AHRERC from 1985 to 1989, and author of *Exploring Inner Space*, *Religious Experience Today* and *God's Biologist*, the seminal biography of Sir Alister Hardy, published in 2011. David, who had contributed so enormously to the AHRERC, suffered from Parkinson's disease in his last years, and died peacefully on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2014: a Burial Mass was held on 28<sup>th</sup> November in St. Barnabas Cathedral, Nottingham, attended by over a 150 people, including John Franklin representing the AHT, AHRERCs and Society. David was a much-loved character and continued a staunch supporter of the AHT, AHRERCs and Society to the end – an obituary, and the warm tributes paid to him, were included in the following issue of the journal, *De Numine*.<sup>9</sup>

On the administrative side, Dr Thomas Jansen resigned as Trustee: Bettina Schmidt had been promoted to professor, and Alison Harding became the new RERC Director of Administration at UWTSD. Alison had a BA (Hons) in Humanities, and was Executive Head of Library and Learning Resources at the university. She was also Head of the Swansea campus libraries. At the same time, Dr Mark Fox and Dr Fiona Bowie, both members of the former Research Committee<sup>10</sup>, were elected Trustees. The Trust's finances were in good shape with total assets less current liabilities at the end of the year standing at £386,697<sup>11</sup>. With regard to the proposed new constitution for the Trust to give it Charitable Incorporation (CIO)<sup>12</sup> status, it was reported at the AHT's AGM on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014 that, due to changes at the Charity Commission, they now required answers to a range of questions; and a steering committee was set up to look into the matter. The story is told in the next chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> *De Numine*, Spring 2015 issue, no. 58 (pp. 28-29).

<sup>10</sup> See p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> AHT financial accounts, as at 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

<sup>12</sup> See p. 117.

## 9. 2015, NEW CONSITUTION AND DEMISE OF THE SOCIETY

A separate chapter needs to be devoted to discussion of the AHT's application for Charitable Incorporation status, and resultant reorganisation of the Trust. Encouraged by the Charity Commission the Trust along with many other charities decided to apply to the commission to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), the main benefit of which would leave the trustees no longer personally financially responsible in the event of the Trust being involved in litigation. In order to ensure compliance with the legal requirements of the Charity Commission, the Trust employed a firm of solicitors versed in charity law. During the fairly lengthy negotiations (with the Commission) it was realised by the Commission that it was incorrect for the Commission to have approved the Trust's 2009 Supplementary Deed. In an apology to the Trust, reported to the Board of Trustees in April 2015, they explained that in fact this was wrong as it stated that the AH Society was independent, but also that it was under the control of the Trust – an arrangement that had been working perfectly well due to the good will of all concerned.

However, under the CIO application the Trust was informed, that this arrangement would be unacceptable on legal grounds, and therefore would not be able to be approved. There were two options: either for the Society to become part of the Trust; or, for the Society to become a separate Registered Charity, or CIO, with a friendly arrangement with the Trust. After close consultation and deliberation, by both the Society Committee and the Trust, it was felt that the Society did not really have sufficient strength to stand on its own. The number of members had declined since the early days, and was now standing at just 230, with a further 40 people on the Society's mailing list. Therefore, in the light of this, a resolution was passed at the Trust's meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015 to opt for the Society becoming part of the Trust. It was agreed, however, that arrangements would need to be made to run the membership and social side, as a sub-committee of the Trust. Steps were taken, accordingly, to put the resolution into effect, including notifying the membership.

The position was explained to members at the Society's AGM (to be its last) which was held at The Friends Meeting House in St Giles, Oxford on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015. The two options and the views and the recommendations of the Society Committee were spelt out and how this arose under the necessary reorganisation for CIO approval. It was explained how absorption of the Society into the Alister Hardy Trust would work. The posts of Chair,

Vice-Chair and Secretary of the Society would be abolished, and the membership of the Society would become members of the Trust under the management of the Chair and Secretary of the Trust. After much discussion and assurances being given, including continuation of the journal, *De Numine*, and the website, this was accepted and, rather sadly, a resolution was passed to wind up the Society and to make over the balance of its funds to the Alister Hardy Trust for the benefit of future membership activities. Warm thanks of appreciation were expressed to Andy Burns and John Franklin for all their work as outgoing Chair and Hon. Secretary of the Society.

Other changes included the retirement in September of the Membership Secretary, Marian MacPolin – this was announced at the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015 AGM. Marian was warmly thanked and applauded for her work during her period of office. Dr Sarah Boss was formally appointed at the same time to take Marian's place as Membership Secretary – this post to continue as the membership of the AHSSSE would be absorbed into the AHT. Sarah is a theologian and former Lecturer in the Theology Department at Lampeter and runs a study centre concerned with theology, art, history, pilgrimage etc relating to the Virgin Mary, whose library is located at Roehampton University. She had published widely on the theology and cult of the Virgin Mary and, to a lesser extent, on the theology of creation and the natural world.

It had been a shock to the Society to realise it would lose its independence, and cease to exist. The Society was well known, and it had played a dynamic role in supporting the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre in its early days. Oliver Knowles, the outgoing Treasurer, wrote in his hand-over article in *De Numine* recognising this, that:

without the Society, I do not think that the Religious Experience Research Centre and the Trust would have survived financially. Not only has the Society provided valuable underpinning for (the Trust's) recurrent budget, but donations, legacies and fundraising events organised by members have played a major role in enabling the Trust to remain solvent and still have a useful balance in reserve.<sup>2</sup>

The Trust's position now, however, was financially secure, and the AHRERCs firmly established within the sure foundation of two well-known

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<sup>2</sup> Oliver Knowles, 'The Treasurer Hands Over', *De Numine*, Issue No. 33, September 2002.



universities. The Society's financial function had diminished. The contribution of the membership, though, was very much recognised and appreciated as an important factor, with a valuable part to play in the continuing work of the Trust.

John Franklin, who had joined the AHRERC and had founded the Society 29 years ago in 1986, and who now was in his eighties, felt that the planned change was an appropriate time for him to retire. This was also announced at the Society's AGM on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015, to take effect as from the completion of the minutes of the meeting. To his surprise and a little embarrassment, many tributes were forthcoming to thank him for all his work on behalf the Society, the AHRERCs and Trust over the years, including a handsome donation together with cards and other gifts – and a charming bouquet of flowers was presented to his wife, Andrée, for her years of support. After the meeting a 'retirement' party was held in John's honour, a member of the Oxford Group, Tanya Garland, appearing with a large cake, which was enjoyed by all.



*John Franklin handing over the Society Minute book to the Chair of Trustees, Leslie Francis.*

A little later that year, because he was planning to leave London for the country, John also resigned from the London Group – again being given a warm send-off by the London Group members with best wishes for his retirement. This did not mean, however, that John had given up all his interests: he remained a Life member, and had been invited and happily agreed to continue being a Trustee of the Alister Hardy Trust as chronicler of its 'history' and that of the Research Centres.

At its meeting in November 2015 the Trustees ratified the decision of the AHSSE membership, and the Society was formally dissolved and the committee roles of Chair, Vice-Chair and Honorary Secretary terminated. At the same time the new status of Charitable Incorporated Organisation was endorsed by the Trustees and was formally accepted by the Charity

Commission. The core objectives stated in the Trust's Incorporation document are 'to advance the education of the public in religious and spiritual experience, its nature, function, frequency and purport' and 'to promote research into religious and spiritual experience and to publish the results of such research for public benefit'.

A new membership administrative body was established, with the title of the Membership and Activities Group (MAG), with a remit to run events including the annual Members' Day to be held in Oxford; to maintain the membership database; to continue the production of the journal, *De Numine* and website (to be renamed the AHT website); and to act as liaison between members, the Local Groups and the Trustees. The management team comprised the Honorary Membership Secretary, Dr Sarah Boss; Andy Burns, former Chair of the Society; and Marianne Rankin, Director of Communications – working with Patricia Murphy, who continued as editor of the journal supported by Jean Matthews, and Michael Rush, who continued to run the former Society, now the Alister Hardy Trust, website.

## 10. CONTINUATION (2015-2018)

Apart from the above, much else happened in 2015. At Lampeter, Dr Jeff Leonardi, working with Prof Bettina Schmidt, set up a research seminar series on the topic of Spirituality and Health, bringing together scholars across the University – and Jeff proceeded to start his own research project in Spiritual Experience in the context of counselling and psychotherapy. The module on religious experience, part of the MA Study of Religion and MA Philosophy of Religion, was attracting a growing number of students; interest was being expressed in starting a PhD course on religious experience; the online database of accounts of spiritual/religious experience was attracting a growing interest in the UK and abroad; the Occasional Papers, Series 2 and 3 were now available online via the AHRERC Lampeter website; and Dr David Hay's collection of books and papers (lecture notes and articles) had been received and was being sorted by the Archivist. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July, the second RERC Lampeter Conference took place in the Founders Library at Lampeter on the theme of the Study of Angels – how angels are perceived in different traditions, and how this phenomenon is studied through different academic approaches. Prof June Boyce-Tillman gave the Annual Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture on 'Crystallising the Angels – a methodological proposal for the study of angels'. The day, which was well attended, included investigations into angels in art, ancient Judaism and Jewish mysticism, Buddhism and Islam. Finally, at the end of December the first issue of the new *Journal of the Study of Religious Experience* was published online, with articles able to be downloaded from the website.

At Glyndŵr University, the AHRERC website was evolving, containing material specific to the Centre's activity there as well as mirroring much of the material on the RERC Lampeter website. Research concentrated on a Russian study of young people and religious diversity in Bashkortostan – a joint project between Prof Christopher Lewis and the Department of Psychology at Bashkir State University; whilst teaching activity continued at undergraduate and postgraduate level on the BSc Psychology (Psychology of Religion), MSc Psychology of Religion, the MRes, DMin and MSc Pastoral Sciences courses. A symposium on Religious Experience was held on 12<sup>th</sup> September as part of the Fourth Annual Conference of the Welsh Branch of the British Psychological Society, with the papers appearing in a Special Issue of the journal *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* the following year.

In May it was confirmed that the questionnaires and raw data from the China Study had definitely been lost, due to the unfortunate hurried departure of Prof Xinzhong Yao from King's College London who left without

time to dispose of his possessions there. Whilst the quantitative data had been retained, the qualitative data, the accounts of spiritual experiences collected, sadly, had not, which was a great loss to the AHRERC archive.

Administrative changes that year saw the appointment in early summer of Revd Prebendary Dr Jeff Leonardi as Honorary Research Fellow of UWTSd Lampeter linked to the AHRERC. Jeff had come with a distinguished academic record, including a doctorate specialising in the person-centred approach to Spirituality. He was formerly the Bishop's Advisor for Pastoral Care and Counselling in the Diocese of Lichfield. Jean Matthews, the Archivist Supervisor and Assistant Editor, left in September 2015, a party being held in her honour at the AHRERC offices at Lampeter. She was warmly thanked for all her work for the Trust in looking after the archive of accounts, as well as her work for the Society. Marianne Rankin presented her with a bouquet of flowers and a present of books. Jean announced, though, that she would be staying on as Assistant Editor of the journal, *De Numine*, which was much appreciated. She was succeeded as Archive Supervisor by Jonathan Andrew, who took up this part-time post in December, sponsored by the AHT. Jonathan had a BA in War and Society and an MA in Medieval Studies, and was currently studying for an MA in Heritage Practice. His work included responsibility for typing the archive of accounts of religious and spiritual experiences onto the online database, and for cataloguing and dealing with requests concerning the AHRERC archive. He commenced with the priority work of incorporating new accounts onto the database, including the collection of accounts donated by Jonathan Robinson gathered in India as part of the Centre's Global Project, and the collection of accounts of angels donated by Emma Heathcote-James. Finally, Dr Fiona Bowie and Marianne Rankin retired as Trustees, Marianne continuing to attend the Board of Trustees in her capacity as Director of Communications.

Financially, the Trust was in good shape, thanks to several generous legacies from former members of the Alister Hardy Society. At the end of November the signed accounts for the year showed a net balance in the Trust's funds of £210,105 – to which a sum £155,000 was added at the last minute, the legacy from the estate of Mrs Margaret Fryer, a former member<sup>1</sup>.

On the members' front, the Midland, South-East Wales, North Wales and London Groups continued with an active programme of talks and other events. Notable events that year included a joint AHSSSE/SMN one-day

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<sup>1</sup> Minutes of Trustees' meeting of 30<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

conference mounted on 27<sup>th</sup> June by the Oxford and Cotswold Group and the London Group on the topic 'Science, Religion and Spirituality – moving towards a Post-Materialist Paradigm?' Prof Jeff Astley was a principal speaker, his talk, 'Beyond Science and Nature? Beyond Belief?' explored the new frontiers of religion and science, with Prof Bernard Carr, Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Queen Mary University and Chair of the Scientific & Medical Network, the second principal speaker, speaking under the title, 'Can Science Accommodate Mind and Spirituality?', arguing that it can. The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Llantarnam Abbey Gathering of the South-East Wales Group, open this year to all members of the AHSSE, was held on the last week-end in July. The theme, *Crossing Boundaries*, was taken from the recent book of the same name by Revd Jonathan Robinson, former Chair of the Society. Jonathan, himself, gave an address, and the proceedings included a talk by Dr Natalie Tobert, a member, on her research on mental health in India. The other main event that year was the Annual Members' Open Day and AGM of 17<sup>th</sup> October, briefly referred to on pages 124-5 above. The Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, held in the afternoon, following the AGM, was given by Prof Bettina Schmidt under the title 'Seeing is Believing', in which she spoke of her work on spirit possession and trance in Brazil. This was followed by a talk by Dr Penny Sartori on 'The Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences', the title of her new book, in which, speaking of her own hospital work, she mentioned the Golden Rule, with a linking of the two lectures, both stressing the authenticity of the subjective experience as key to understanding spiritual experience. At the AGM Bettina Schmidt, in presenting her report on the work of RERC Lampeter, announced the launching of the online *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*.

In other events and happenings this year, the summer saw the award of a PhD to David Greenwood, the Hon. Treasurer, who was warmly congratulated on his achievement that added to his esteem. The subject of his thesis was 'The numinous in art: a philosophical, art, historical and theological study'. In 2018 the subject matter of this dissertation was subsequently published by Dr Greenwood in his book, *Art and Spiritual Experience: Exploring the Romantic Period*. In other events, the Supreme Primate Otani Koken, a Patron of the AHT, came to visit Chester University in October to share knowledge and promote possible future partnerships there – meeting up again with Dr Wendy Dossett, former Joint Director at Lampeter<sup>2</sup>, now Senior Lecturer at Chester.

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<sup>2</sup> See p. 81.

2016 was an active year for the AHRERC at UWTSD. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July, the Centre there mounted its third one-day conference, this on the topic of *Spirituality and Health*, the speakers including Revd Canon Dr Joanna Collicut, Dr Penny Sartori and Revd Dr Jeff Leonardi. Also, following the success of last year's seminar series, which finished on 20<sup>th</sup> April, a new series of four seminars was planned for the period 2016/2017. Under the same heading as the conference, *Spirituality and Health*, the seminars took as their subjects, *Body* (13<sup>th</sup> October), *Shamanism* (30<sup>th</sup> November), and, extending into 2017, *Spirituality and Trauma*, and *Mindfulness, Spirituality and the Medical Profession*. That year also, Prof Bettina Schmidt, the Director, published two books, *Spirits and Trance in Brazil: An Anthropological Study of Religious Experience*, and *The Study of Religious Experience: Approaches and Methodologies*, which she had edited.

At Glyndŵr University, work this year was primarily focussed on publications and building research material, including developing the reader of previously published research and conference papers relating to religious and spiritual experience. Publications included a number of research papers and a special Issue of the journal, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*,<sup>3</sup> building on the symposium on religious and spiritual experience held in 2015. The Director, Prof Christopher Lewis, continued to visit and work with colleagues in Russia with a view to the study of religion and religious diversity of young 13- to 15- year-old children. Teaching continued in the psychology of religion and spiritual experience at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. At this time, collaboration was taking place between Glyndŵr and Warwick universities, postgraduates from both being taught alongside each other to their mutual benefit. Developments in Warwick in the area of the social and public significance of religion had allowed two new appointments to be made in the psychology of religion, and interest in religious experience at Warwick was growing, complementing the existing research at Glyndŵr and UWTSD<sup>4</sup>.

On other fronts, the news came through in May that Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, A Patron of the AHRERCs and Trust, had been awarded the 2016 Templeton Prize for progress in religion, the same prize that Sir Alister Hardy had been awarded in 1985. Sadly, though, that year Michael Hardy, Sir Alister's son, died. Michael had been a Trustee of the AHRERC since its

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<sup>3</sup> An interdisciplinary peer-reviewed academic journal published by Routledge: it publishes original articles that deal with mental health in relation to religion and spirituality of all kinds.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of AHT Trustees' meeting, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

inception in 1985, retiring in 2002, when his place was taken by Jane Winship, Sir Alister's great-niece, as family member of the Board of Trustees. An obituary appeared in the Spring 2016 issue of *De Numine*. This particular issue also raised the question, 'What is it (spiritual/religious experience) all about and what should we be doing about it?', which sparked an interesting discussion in the following Autumn issue, and further discussion on Members' Day later in October.

The exploration of the meaning and implications of spiritual and religious experience had been discussed earlier by the Trustees<sup>5</sup> when it was agreed that Marianne Rankin should write a book on the subject (this, later, to become the topic of a PhD application, to be undertaken with a grant from the AHT). Marianne, as Director of Communications, had been active during the year speaking to Cheltenham Interfaith, and at the World Congress of Faiths conference at Winchester, the annual conference of the Guild of Psychology, the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, and leading a retreat at Ammerdown in November.

Events in 2016 mounted by the AHT included a one-day conference held jointly with the Scientific and Medical Network at the Essex Unitarian Church in West Kensington, London on 18<sup>th</sup> June. Organised by the Membership and Activities Group (MAG), the topic of the conference picked up on the planned work of the RERC at Lampeter, which was *Health and Spirituality*. The key-note speakers were Dr Jeff Leonardi on 'Counselling, Health and Spirituality', and Dr Peter Fenwick on 'The Significance of Meditation Practice in our Understanding of Spirituality: A new thrust towards health'. The talks were followed by an Open Panel discussion in which the speakers were joined by Dr Natalie Tobert and Dr Dagma Corry. This year's annual Gathering at Llantarnam Abbey, again open to all AHT members, was held on the weekend of 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> October. Organised by the South East Wales Group, the theme this year was *Boundaries and Beyond*. One of the highlights of the weekend was a presentation by Dr Jeff Leonardi on 'Relational Spirituality'. Members Day this year was held again at the Quaker Meeting House in Oxford, on 15<sup>th</sup> October. The 2016 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture was given there by Prof Jeff Astley, Alister Hardy Professor of Religious and Spiritual Experience, his subject being 'Taming the Spirit: Religion Versus Religious Experience?' This was followed by an Open Panel discussion, in which Jeff was joined by Dr Mark Fox and Marianne Rankin on a question raised by a former member of the AHSSSE, 'What is it all about,

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<sup>5</sup> Trustees' meeting May 2015.

and what should we be doing about it?', which had prompted earlier interest and debate.

At the AHT AGM, held on 7<sup>th</sup> November, the year's events were reported. The transfer of the Alister Hardy Professor to the University of Warwick was explained as being in recognition of that university's commitment to psychology and religion and its capacity to attract funding. At this meeting Michael Rush, the AHT website administrator, was appointed a Trustee as a member representative under the provisions of the newly created CIO status of the Alister Hardy Trust and it was reported that the current membership stood at 279. A question was raised at Members' Day regarding the lateness in the year of the AGM and its being held in Birmingham with no other attraction offered (which drew only two members); could it not be held earlier in the year, say, in conjunction with Members' Day? It was explained that the timing of the AGM needs to relate to the publication of the annual accounts, the date of which is set at the end of the academic year, which means that it is not possible to get all the requisite documents to the accountant until September, leading to mid-November being the earliest account date – but it was agreed that this matter would be looked into.

A word here needs to be said about the AHT local groups at this time. For some while there had been a slight falling off in membership – due to changes in circumstances, age, and possibly to a rise in social networking, a desire to move on and a reluctance to engage in active involvement. Of the eight active local groups in 2014, the Chesterfield Group, which had been running for 11 years, faded out that year; this was followed by the Swansea, West Wales and the Midlands Group the following year. The London Group finally succumbed this year. It had perhaps been the most active group in arranging talks by well-known speakers and, with the Oxford and Cotswold Group, organising the AHSSE/AHT annual joint one-day conferences with other associated organisations in London and Oxford. Numbers here attending meetings had been declining for some time and it proved no longer viable to continue meeting at the Group's venue, the Essex Unitarian Church, West Kensington, as before. An alternative venue was found but it eventually became impracticable to continue inviting speakers. Finally, with John Franklin, the group's organiser, announcing his retirement and planning to leave London in the New Year, and with exhaustive but unsuccessful attempts to find another organiser, the London Group itself finally disbanded on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2016. This left just the North Wales and South East Wales Groups and the Oxford and Cotswold Group operating. It was resolved, however, that the AHT annual one-day joint conferences with



other associated organisations, which had proved so successful should continue, with the organisation of these events to be taken over by the AHT's Membership and Activities Group.

The next year, 2017, the AHRERC at Lampeter, saw the series of four seminars planned for the period 2016/17, under the headings *Spirituality and Health*, continued with *Spirituality and Trauma* in February, and *Mindfulness, Spirituality and the Medical Profession* in March. New students were being attracted to the MRes Religious Experience course, and the Module in Religious Experience was attracting much interest in MA students within the faculty at Lampeter. Dr Jeff Leonardi was developing his research into the part played by spirituality in counselling and psychotherapy, of note being the reported extent to which the significance of spirituality was being recognised by practitioners and students involved. On the administrative side, the Centre was looking more of a home for research with the boxes of donated material, including the 1,400 books donated by David Hay, now recorded and on the Library shelves. All accounts of religious and spiritual experience were now in the online database, and work was proceeding on sorting the non-published material in the AHT archive. The main event at Lampeter this year was the annual conference; held on 16<sup>th</sup> July under the title *Spirituality, Health and Wellbeing*, with Dr Wendy Dossett from Chester University, former Director of the Centre at Lampeter, giving the annual Alister Hardy Lampeter Lecture on '*Spiritus contra spiritum: Spirituality and recovery from alcohol use disorder*'. Other lectures included, 'Spirituality within a Therapeutic Context' by Prof Bettina Schmidt and Dr Jeff Leonardi; 'Spirituality in Therapy' by Dr Lynmarie Rodriguez; 'Religion, Food and Wellbeing' by Patricia Sousa, PUC SP, Brazil; and 'Embodied Spirituality: Food and fasting in Chinese Buddhism' by Dr Thomas Jansen. A selection of the papers from the two annual conferences of 2016 and 2017 and the research seminar series of those years was planned to form the foundation of a book on the topic of 'Spirituality and Wellbeing'. This year, too, saw the publication of the third issue of the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*.

In January 2017, Prof Jeff Astley was appointed to the post of Alister Hardy Professor at Warwick University on a two-year, part-time contract funded by the AHT with the aim of advancing spiritual experience research there. At the time, he was working on an undergraduate-level textbook exploring the area of empirical and theoretical study of spiritual and religious experience. A publisher had been secured, SCM Press, who commissioned a paperback under the title, *SCM Studyguide on Religious and Spiritual Experience*. Royalty costs having proved to be prohibitive for the

publication of the earlier proposed Reader of journal articles on the study of spiritual and religious experience, this project went online. An online version of his reader, to include the readings, was being prepared in conjunction with the University Library at Warwick; and another version, without the readings, was being considered as a more generally available version. Jeff was also engaged in preparing an online version of a bibliography of journal articles on the study of spiritual and religious experience. On expressing a view concerning the possibility of enhanced provision of the search and analysis facility of the AHRERC online database, he was authorised by the Trustees to investigate the possible achievement of this<sup>6</sup>.

At Glyndŵr University, Prof Christopher Lewis was completing the Russia study, 'Young people and religious diversity in Bashkortostan', working with the Department of Psychology at Bashkir State University. A study in the area of psychology of religion with regard to religious experience of Moslem, Hindu and Christians students in Pakistan was launched in 2017 – and Chris Lewis had also been invited to undertake a study of the religious experience of students in Poland, with data collection planned to start in April/May 2018. In April 2017 a Special Issue of the journal *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* was published containing ten papers presented at the symposium on Religious Experience held in September 2015. The major event of the year at Glyndŵr was the second bi-annual Glyndŵr University symposium on Religious Experience, held on 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017 at Noddfa Penmaenmawr, North Wales.

Administratively, the problem identified at the AGM last year (p. 131 above) was discussed by the Trustees at their meeting in May. Possible options of a) combining the AGM with Members' Day, b) having the AGM with a speaker and, c) holding a separate AGM in Oxford, were considered, but there were problems with all three options. It was eventually decided to keep to the present arrangements, but to monitor the situation and invite comments at this year's Members' Day.

On the social side, the Membership and Activities Group (MAG) on 3<sup>rd</sup> June mounted a joint one-day conference with the British Teilhard Association in London on the topic *Ecology, Science and Spirituality – Friends or Enemies? Building on the Legacy of Teilhard de Chardin and Alister Hardy*, with Prof Keith Ward speaking on *Deep Ecology and Theistic Evolution*, and Prof Ursula King speaking on 'A Greater Love for all the Earth and all its People: Ecology and Spirituality in Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry'.

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<sup>6</sup> Trustees' meeting, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017.

Sadly, this was the last time that the AHT would meet with the BTA for, immediately following this conference, the BTA went on to hold what was to prove its last AGM, it having to close down due to falling membership. But the conference provided a good end. Earlier it had been reported that the Wrekin Trust, another of the Centre's associated organisations had been dissolved, this at the end of March, also due to falling membership. The annual Gathering at Llantarnam Abbey, organised by the South East Wales Group and open to all AHT members, was held this year on the weekend of 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> September, the theme being *From our own Experiences*, with talks given by Mary Cook, organiser of the South East Wales Group and the Llantarnam Gatherings, together with Alan Underwood, Val Evans and Annarita Ressa.

Sadly, in September, we learnt of the death of our Patron, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster Cathedral, who died of cancer on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017. Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor had been a Patron since February 2000, succeeding Cardinal Basil Hume: he had retired as Archbishop of Westminster in April 2009 on reaching the age of 75, being succeeded by Cardinal Vincent Nichols<sup>7</sup>.

Members' Day this year was held on 14<sup>th</sup> October at the usual venue of the Oxford Quaker Meeting House in St Giles. The Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, given that year by Revd Prof June Boyce-Tillman on 'Religionless Spirituality and the Spiritual Experience in Music', illustrated with excerpts of John Tavener's music, was inspirational and moving. At discussion time, the concern of members over the date and location of the Trust's AGM was raised again – the Trust's position and the difficulties here were explained, but it was accepted that this remained a vexed question. A question also arose as to how we might attract young people.

At the Trust's second Annual General Meeting, following shortly after on 23<sup>rd</sup> November in Birmingham, reports were given on the year's work and events of the two Research Centres, and MAG. This year, Andrew Village retired as Hon. Secretary of the Trust, with great appreciation expressed for his many years' service, but he was happy to stay on as a Trustee. His place as Hon Secretary was taken over by Andrew Burns, co-organiser (with Marianne Rankin) of MAG. Andy was welcomed and warmly thanked for taking on this position. Amongst other changes that year, at the AGM on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, Tanya Garland joined Michael Rush as elected second (of

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<sup>7</sup> An obituary was included in the Autumn 2017 issue of *De Numine*.

three) member representative Trustees. Tanya had a long connection with the Centre, dating back to the early days when she had worked for RERU under Edward Robinson<sup>8</sup>: a long-time member living in Oxford, she was also a member and, more recently, previous leader of the Oxford and Cotswold Group. It was reported that financially, the Trust remained secure, with much activity able to be supported owing largely to the legacies which had been so generously given: total assets at the end of the financial year standing at £473,799<sup>9</sup>. Membership numbers had increased from 279 the previous year to 300 this year, It was observed, however, that most new members join the Trust only to use the database of accounts of spiritual experience, and that people, in general, do not join voluntary organisations in the numbers that they used to. This was the last membership report to the AGM by Dr Sarah Boss, the Honorary Membership Secretary, as she announced at the meeting her wish to retire as from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 in order to take up a course of study. Sarah was warmly thanked for all her work for the Trust during her time as Membership Secretary during a period of great change. The appointment of a new Membership Secretary was referred to the next Trustees' meeting, to take place later that day.

At the Trustees' meeting, it was explained that no nominations had been forthcoming for the post of Membership Secretary and that, in this event, Prof Leslie Francis said he would approach Margaret West, who worked for him at the St Mary's Centre, to see if she would help as a short-term measure. Later it was learnt that Margaret had kindly agreed to look after the membership records, starting on 1<sup>st</sup> January, until a permanent Membership Secretary could be found.

The next year, 2018, saw much activity, with consideration being given to celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of the founding of the RERU by Sir Alister Hardy at Manchester College, Oxford in 1969.

At the end of February Prof Christopher Lewis' tenure as Professor of Psychology at Glyndŵr University came to an end and, leaving the university, he handed in his resignation as Director of the AHRERC, Glyndŵr. He had achieved a great deal there through his pioneering work on religious and spiritual experience in Russia and Pakistan – and, understanding that he would be continuing this study, though elsewhere, he was invited to report progress on the work to the Trust. At the same time, since Glyndŵr University did not have the infra-structure to maintain the Alister Hardy

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<sup>8</sup> See p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Hon. Treasurer's report to AGM, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017

Centre there, the Trust agreed to explore the possibility of creating another Centre in a different university, to continue to complement the work at Lampeter.

Meanwhile, Prof Jeff Astley continued his work as Alister Hardy Professor at the University of Warwick, enhancing the profile of the Trust through publications and presentations at academic conferences. For much of the time he was engaged in reading for and writing his textbook for undergraduate students, and developing the online annotated bibliography of journal articles and other online resources to support research into spiritual and religious experience. Together with Prof Leslie Francis, he had this year drafted a bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council to enable work on an original overview of the nature of religious and spiritual experience to be carried forward. Jeff Astley's contract at the University of Warwick finished at the end of December. He was offered a Professorial appointment at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln, where he hoped to be able to continue advancing research on spiritual and religious experience in liaison with the Trust and RERC Lampeter.

At AHRERC Lampeter, Prof Bettina Schmidt was conducting qualitative ethnographic research interviewing people about their experiences from a personal perspective, this leading to several publications including a monograph subtitled *Anthropology of Religious Experience* and an edited volume about the *Study of Religious Experience*. She was also supervising several postgraduate students in areas of religious experience; students on the MRes Religious Experience course; and research by PhD students. Otherwise, the work at Lampeter centred on the July conference; on unpublished material in the archive; on accommodating the David Hay collection, where a further 170 books were now catalogued and added to the Library; and on teaching and publications. The Lampeter conference this year held on 18<sup>th</sup> June under the title, *Spirituality and Wellbeing: interreligious perspectives*, was embedded in a wider interfaith conference focussing on spirituality. Prof William West, Visiting Professor at the University of Chester, was keynote speaker; other speakers included Mark Steed, AHT member, who spoke about his work on spiritual health of children, and Dr Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, who spoke about wellbeing and disability. Other work undertaken by the Centre included the publication, shortly after the conference, of the fourth issue of the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*, and on the next edited volume of the Centre, *Spirituality and Wellbeing: interdisciplinary approaches to the study of religious experience and health* (editors, Bettina Schmidt and Jeff Leonardi).

Work on the archive at Lampeter included insertion of a number of accounts of spiritual experiences dating back to around 1994 that had not been logged on the online database – these including accounts sent to Prof Laurence Brown in response to the BBC1 Television Series, *Glimpses of God* in February, 1994, which had recently been discovered stored in cardboard boxes, and some new accounts recently received. The number of accounts of spiritual and religious experience on the online database, at the end of the year, now totalled 6,660. Exhibitions mounted at Lampeter included material on Sir Alister Hardy's scientific career; and, in November, on his work during the First World War as part of a WW1 centenary exhibition. A major exhibition was also planned as part of the forthcoming AHRERC 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.

A research project by Leslie Francis on the attitudes of a sample of students from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland with respect to the Christian and post-Christian cultures of those countries, showed fruit in revealing that those students having and acknowledging religious experiences held a more positive view of the Christian tradition and living happier lives.

With regard to events this year, in April a joint conference, organised by the Trust's Membership and Activities Group (MAG) with the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies, was held in Oxford, on the theme, *Meditation, Stillness and Spiritual Experience*. Speakers included Dr Serena Roney-Dougal and Revd Prof June Boyce-Tillman. Although the speakers were excellent, this year the event attracted fewer than 40 people, resulting in a loss to both organisations, which gave rise to reflection as to the possible future of such events.

On the weekend of 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> September, the South East Wales Group held their joint AHT Llantarnam Abbey Gathering, on the theme this year, *Back to Basics*. Talks were given by Mary Cook, Rev Jonathan Robinson, Alan Underwood, Trudy Porter and Ken Rees, the event attracting 13 members and stimulating lively discussion. Since the beginning of this year the Group has been meeting quarterly at Llantarnam Abbey, the September meeting annually open to all AHT members. The other local groups meet regularly, the Oxford and Cotswold Group once a month at a member's house, the Bangor and North Wales Group more informally, casually, once a week in the Bangor University's Botanic Gardens.

Members' Day, this year, also attracting some 40 people, was held on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> October, the 2018 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture being given by the Revd Dr Marcus Braybooke, joint President of the World Congress of

Faiths on the subject, 'Meeting in the Cave of the Heart: The importance of Religious Experience to theology and interspirituality'.<sup>10</sup> In the afternoon a Discussion Panel comprising Revd Prof June Boyce Tillman, Prof Bettina Schmidt, and Revd Canon Prof Leslie Francis was held on the subject, *Current Research into Religious Experience and what this is telling us*. Three very different aspects of research were presented – an article on June Boyce-Tillman's talk later appearing in the Autumn 2019 issue of *De Numine*. The Panel gave members an opportunity to hear about the research being carried out and question the speakers, giving rise to a lively general discussion.

Administratively, in June 2018, Prof David Voas stood down as a Trustee. An international well-respected academic he had done much for the Trust, witnessing to its intellectual energy and establishing credibility with potential future sponsors. Critical at the amount of time the Trust spent on membership/publicity aspects, however, he felt that this was at the expense of concentrating on pure academic research – a resurgence of the old dichotomy and perceived conflict between pure research and the more personal side of spiritual experiencing (see pages 41-2 and 45). It was reported that the Trust's finances were secure, with current total assets standing at £406,000 thanks to the generous legacies that had been received, but expenditure was currently exceeding income from subscriptions and interest from investments, this to the tune of some £30,000 a year. In the light of this it was agreed that Jonathan Andrew's contract would not be renewed; and a grant application, submitted at that time for a research project, was deferred. Margaret West's employment by St Mary's Centre ended at the end of July: and at that point, with the agreement of the Trustees, she took over as permanent Hon. Membership Secretary. Margaret has a mathematics-based BA from the Open University, which she took in 1987, and subsequently qualified as an Accountant in 2003.

The Trust's AGM was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2018 at the Macdonald Burlington Hotel in Birmingham. Reports were received from the Chair and Vice-Chair of Trustees, the Hon. Treasurer, the Alister Hardy Professor at Warwick University, the Director of Communications, the Hon. Membership Secretary and the Editor of *De Numine*. It was stated that, with regret, the Research Centre at Glyndŵr University would be closing down – but there

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<sup>10</sup> Published in the RERC Lampeter online open access *Journal for Study of Religious Experience* in 2019.

was hope that Prof Jeff Astley's move to Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln might allow for the development of a new Centre there. With regard to Trustee appointments, Jane Winship, the Hardy family representative on the Board of Trustees, stood down and was replaced by Dr Tom Farley, Sir Alister's grandson, a recently retired physicist. At the same time, Trustees appointments included Prof John Harper, replacing Prof David Voas, Dr David Rousseau as new Membership Representative, and Dr David Greenwood, who was re-elected for a further three years. Dr Rousseau's background was in engineering, but in 2011 he completed a PhD in Religious Studies at the University of Wales Lampeter. Membership of the Trust at that time stood at 256. Finally, of note, it was announced that Prof Paul Badham, former Director and Secretary to the Trust Board, had donated his complete personal and academic library of over 2,500 books to the AHRERC Library.

At the AHT Trustees' meeting immediately following the AGM, the founding of an AHRERC at Bishop Grosseteste University was proposed. With the University offering a generic Masters degree which could accommodate a religious and spiritual experience component, and, with its Religious Studies Department welcoming the move, and this being at no cost to the Trust, the setting up of a new Centre there was formally approved. Agreement was also given for the possible grant application to the John Templeton Foundation with respect to collaboration with Boston University, USA on a research and development proposal. The grant proposal would be to fund an 18-month pilot exploration of how the current best international expertise in the field would have advised Sir Alister on the collection and analysis of data if he had been alive today.



## 11. 2019, 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY YEAR

The year started off quietly enough on both the research and administrative fronts. Sadly, though, news came in at the beginning of the year of the death of Robert Waite, former Membership Secretary of the AHS, who died on October 18<sup>th</sup> 2018. 'Rob', as he was commonly known, had joined the Centre in an administrative capacity 'for a short time' in 1990, and stayed for twelve years embracing the period including the AHRERC's move to Westminster College, and then its departure to the University of Wales Lampeter in 2002. Rob became Membership Secretary in 1994, at the same time helping the Treasurer, Oliver Knowles, with the Trust's accounts. A colourful character, his obituary appeared in the Spring 2019 issue of *De Numine*.<sup>1</sup>

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated in a bumper 90 page Spring issue of the AHT journal *De Numine*, containing a special supplement of Reminiscences of Sir Alister Hardy and his legacy, with contributions from family, friends, and colleagues, including past and present Directors of the AHRERC, and members of the AHT. The journal also contained, besides the usual reports and news of members and events, short biographies of the new Trustees, Dr Tom Farley, the Hardy family Representative, and Dr David Rousseau, the new Members' Representative – and notes about the contributors to the Reminiscences.

At Lampeter, work centred on preparations for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference in July; the publication of the next issue of the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experiences*; dealing with the Prof Paul Badham collection of books, of which some 700 were selected for inclusion in the RERC Library; teaching; preparation for other publications; and continuing the online insertion of the 120 or so accounts found in the Laurence Brown papers. Work was also proceeding on an edited volume of the Centre, featuring papers from the recent Spirituality and Wellbeing conference. More accounts for the archive had also been received from the study carried out in Kerala, India, by Anne Watkins.

Prof Jeff Astley, now on a five-year visiting professorship at Bishop Grosseteste University, was bringing his *SCM Studyguide to Spiritual and Religious Experience*, a wide-ranging textbook aimed primarily at undergraduates to a conclusion. In June the manuscript was sent to the publishers. Work continued on extending the online *Annotated Bibliography*

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<sup>1</sup> No. 66, p. 66.

*of Journal Articles* and other resources for the study of spiritual and religious experience – this, together with other research material sources to be found on a dedicated Religious and Spiritual webpage of the University of Warwick. Jeff was also working on other research presentations and publications and engaged on the bid for funding to the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Jeff was also engaged, together with Prof Leslie Francis and Prof Wesley Wildman, Professor of Philosophy, Theology and Ethics at Boston University, and Dr Nick Gibson of the Templeton Foundation in meetings with regard to securing the grant from the John Templeton Foundation mentioned above<sup>2</sup>. At the Trustees' meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> June it was explained that back in 2013 the Templeton Foundation had invited the AHT to explore with Boston University the potential for pioneering a way in which Sir Alister Hardy's original initiative could be reimagined for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and how he might have designed his archive, in the light of the current state of the art computer technology. The idea was to explore a more comprehensive framework for capturing and interrogating the variety and significance of people's spiritual and religious experiences involving a new up-to-date data storage and analysis system. It was explained that this would in no way threaten or modify the existing AHRERC Archive database at Lampeter, but on the contrary would increase its profile. Following the Trustees' meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2018, steps had been taken to draw together an international Expert Advisory Board of 50 or so scholars from various academic back-grounds and a three-day consultation workshop of 15 people took place in May 2019, organised by Jeff Astley and hosted at Liverpool Cathedral, to discuss the project: the results being fed back to the Advisory Board.

Also at the June 6<sup>th</sup> Trustees' meeting it was reported that the second AHRERC had now been established at Bishop Grosseteste University<sup>3</sup> Lincoln, replacing the Centre at Glyndŵr University, which closed when Prof Chris Lewis ceased to serve as Professor of Psychology there. It was announced that Jonathan Andrew's contact had been extended for a further three months to enable further cataloguing of the accounts of spiritual/religious experiences. By the end of that period (30<sup>th</sup> September 2019) there still remained some 150 accounts left by former Director, Prof Laurence Brown, in an unmarked box, which needing to be added to the database; together with some 200 accounts from Anne Watkins' Kerala

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<sup>2</sup> See pp. 142 and 118-9 above.

<sup>3</sup> Formally signed 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019 by Prof Leslie Francis for the AHT and Revd Canon Prof Peter Neil, the Vice-Chancellor of BGU.

study that had been handed in late. Attempts were made, including the offer of a donation to help cover the costs to bring back Jonathan for a further six months – but no action had been taken by UWTSD administration by the end of the year to facilitate this.

The AHRERC 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference was held at UWTSD Lampeter from Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July to Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, entitled *The Future of the Study of Religious Experience*. Fifty years ago Sir Alister Hardy had invited scholars at a two-day symposium in Oxford to discuss whether a scientific approach to the study of religious experience was a possible and valid conception – going on from then to found the Religious Experience Research Centre (then RERU). This anniversary conference, organised by Prof Bettina Schmidt, and sponsored by the AHT, was designed to look back at the work of the Centre over the past five decades, and look forward to the future.



*Organisers and principal speakers at the conference,  
from left to right: Jeff Leonardi, Jeremy Carrette, Sneha Roy,  
Bettina Schmidt, Ann Taves, Tom Farley, Peggy Morgan,  
Wendy Dossett, Leslie Francis.*

A special exhibition was held during the week of the conference in the University Library showing Sir Alister Hardy memorabilia, including many personal items and a number of his paintings and sketches kindly lent by members of his family. His humour and his humanity come out in the cartoons he drew, one of which is pictured overleaf. Starting the conference itself, the first keynote presentation was the 2019 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture, given by Prof Ann Taves, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and former President of the American Academy of Religion, on *'What Counts as Religious/Spiritual Experience? contextualizing the Hardy Data in the light of a five-culture*



*Top left: Sir Alister Hardy on bicycle.*

*Top right: Christmas card, "Passing through Hong Kong", sent to me of Hardy's WW1 Cyclist Battalion (see p. 2 above).*

*Above: Exhibition of Sir Alister Hardy memorabilia, RERC, July 2019.*



Above: RERC Conference, July 2019: Panel discussion; Dr Wendy Dossett speaking in the Old Hall, UWTSd Lampeter.



Top: RERC Conference, July 2019: Panel discussion; Dr Wendy Dossett speaking in the Old Hall, UWTSd Lampeter.

Above: Prof Bettina Schmidt, RERC Director at Lampeter, with Panel Speakers, from left to right, Anne Morgan, Marianne Rankin, Bettina Schmidt and Wendy Dossett.

study of nonordinary experiences'.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by the first of the Panels, in which presentations were given by Dr Wendy Dossett, former co-Director of the AHRERC with Prof Paul Badham, Marianne Rankin, Director of Communications, and Anne Morgan. In the evening, a Celebratory Dinner Reception was held, guest speakers including the Vice-Chancellor UWTSD, Prof Medwyn Hughes; Peggy Morgan, former Director of the RERC, who spoke about Sir Alister Hardy and his legacy and Dr Tom Farley, Sir Alister Hardy's grandson and a Trustee. The second and third days of the conference comprised a further eight Panel discussions, each Panel comprising presentations by three scholars on current research into spiritual/religious experience. The second keynote lecture was given by Prof Jeremy Carrette, Professor of Philosophy, Religion and Culture and Dean for Europe at Kent University on 'The Mystical Kiss: William James, Love and Attentive Consciousness'. The conference concluded on the third day with the final keynote lecture given by Prof Leslie Francis, Professor of Religions and Education at Warwick University and Chair of the Alister Hardy Trust, who spoke on 'Exploring the Fruit of Religious Experience within the Greer Tradition: Effects on personal affect and on religious affect'. In his lecture, Leslie also looked to the future and a new relationship with Boston University, who were together seeking funding from the John Templeton Foundation to explore the future development of Hardy's work<sup>5</sup>. Some 80 people attended the conference.

Meanwhile, on the academic front, work was proceeding on the John Templeton Foundation's project to investigate the issues involved in the collection, management and analysis of data on the religious and spiritual experience. In the light of studies so far, the aim now was to make application for funding the development of an up-to-date portal and associated database referred to on p. 142 above. Besides being involved in this work, Prof Jeff Astley, the Alister Hardy Professor of Religious and Spiritual Experiences at Bishop Grosseteste University, was also working on the online resources for the study of spiritual and religious experience, currently held at the University of Warwick and his undergraduate textbook, as well as the publication of a number of articles on related subjects.

At Lampeter, Prof Bettina Schmidt, shortly after the July 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference, published the next issue of the online *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* (Vol 5 No 1) containing four articles, the first being the

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<sup>4</sup> A review of this lecture, and of the other conference events, is reported in the Autumn 2019 issue of *De Numine*, No. 67.

<sup>5</sup> See pp. 7 and 8 above.



2018 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture delivered in Oxford on Members' Day by Revd Dr Marcus Braybooke. Her teaching work continued with students on the MRes (Master by Research) course. The module Religious Experience Today was continuing to be popular for students on a range of MA programmes in the Faculty – and it was reported in November that a new module on spiritual and religious experience for undergraduate students, started in January, was also very successful.

With regard to Local Group activities throughout the year, the Bangor and North Wales Group with its small membership had been teaming up with other interested local groups but it was reported that recently this had failed, activities now shrinking to just regular informal meetings on a casual basis. With the departure of its leader, Dr Keith Beasley, later in the year, there will be no more reports forthcoming from the Group. The Oxford and Cotswold Group led by Rhonda Riachi, however, continues to thrive. Meeting in the houses of members mainly in Kidlington, on the first Saturday of the month, members take it in turns to present on topics of interest. The South East Wales Group continues to meet four times a year now, since the beginning of 2019, at Llantarnam Abbey, besides an annual outing, which this year was to Dewstow Gardens at Caerwent. Talks included, 'The Bushman's Spiritual Nature' by Mary Cook, 'Beyond Science' by Ken Davies, and 'Synchronicity' by Lynne-Ann Thomas: and the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Llantarnam Gathering was held this year from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> October on the theme *Discovering Connections*. Organised by the Group's leader, Mary Cook, the residential weekend included talks by Ken Price on 'Building Bridges between Consciousnesses'; Mary, speaking on 'Minefields and Stepping Stones'; Ken Davies on 'Shamanic Science and the Cell'; and Alan Underwood on 'Jung and Pauli – two branches, one tree'; and 'The Labyrinth, a talk and a walk' presented by Trudy Porter; and two workshop/discussions, the first, 'Towards connections and wholeness', led by Revd Jonathan Robinson. This year's Llantarnam Gathering, the seventh open to all AHT members and friends, was considered by participants to be the best that they had attended so far.

The Autumn 2019, *De Numine* No. 67, the second of this year's two commemorative issues, was the last to be produced by Patricia Murphy before retiring as Editor. It was announced that she would be succeeded by Rhonda Riachi, who would take over as Editor on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020. This issue contained a further special supplement of Reminiscences of Sir Alister Hardy and his legacy, with contributions from friends and colleagues. It also included an unpublished posthumous article by Revd John Osborn, former Chair of the Alister Hardy Society (1997-2002), on Near-Death Experiences,

which had been sent in by his daughter. John died in July this year, and this issue also contained an obituary in remembrance of him. Other articles included the text of Prof June Boyce-Tillman's Members' Day presentation last year, this ending with a tribute to Sir Alister in the form of a musical composition entitled *Alister Lord's Prayer*. In a review of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Lampeter July conference, Mark Seed, an international educator and long-time member of the AHT, presented some thoughtful questions regarding future research well worthy of note in *De Numine*, Autumn 2019, p. 46.

Members' Day this year was held on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October as a celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of RERU by Sir Alister Hardy in 1969. The celebration was held again at the Oxford Quaker Meeting House in St Giles. Over 80 people attended the event, the audience spreading into the gallery at the back of the Meeting Room. Guests included Prof Ursula King; Peggy Morgan, past Director of the AHRERC; Prof Bettina Schmidt, current Director; Prof Leslie Francis, Chair of Trustees; Revd Dr Marcus Braybooke, Joint President of the World Congress of Faiths (who gave the 2018 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture), together with his wife, Mary; and members of the Hardy family, including Belinda Farley, Sir Alister's daughter; Jane Winship, his great niece; and his grandchildren, Dr Tom Farley, Nicholas Hardy and Dr Julia Latimer. Dr Rupert Sheldrake gave the 2019 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture on the subject 'Ways to Beyond and Why They Work', talking of the study of consciousness, as well as spiritual practices, covering both approaches of atheists and people of religious or spiritual views. In the afternoon, Dr Mark Fox, a researcher, author and Trustee, gave a talk on 'Researching in the RERC Archive'. This was followed by a series of personal contributions under the title 'Memories of Sir Alister Hardy' given by Jane Winship, and Dr Tom Farley, who gave a magnificent presentation by slides and film showing scenes from the life of Sir Alister. Other contributions came from Prof Bettina Schmidt and Peggy Morgan, who also read a contribution from Dr Wendy Dossett who was unable to come due to illness; and from Prof Ursula King and Dr Mark Fox. The day ended with a Celebratory Reception with soft drinks, tea and coffee and sandwiches and cakes. All in all, it was a happy and successful day, thanks to good weather and the organisation by MAG (the Trust's Membership and Activities Group) and assistance of members of the Oxford Group.

The Trust's AGM on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019 took place again at the Macdonald Burlington Hotel in Birmingham, with reports from the Chair and Vice Chair, Alister Hardy Professor at Bishop Grosseteste University, the Director of





*Top & bottom: AHT 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration 19<sup>th</sup> October 2019: Dr Rupert Sheldrake delivering the 2019 Alister Hardy Memorial Lecture.*



*Dr Mark Fox delivering the Anniversary Celebration afternoon talk.*



*The Hardy family: front, from left to right; Jane Winship, Sir Alister Hardy's great niece; Tom Farley, his grandson; Belinda Farley, Sir Alister's daughter; Nicholas Hardy and Julia Latimer, Sir Alister's other grandchildren.*

Communications, Director of AHRERC (UWTSD), Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Membership Secretary and Website Manager. The main Objects of the Alister Hardy Trust were re-iterated, viz. ‘to promote research into religious and spiritual experience and to publish the useful results of such research for public benefit’; and, ‘to advance the education of the public in religious and spiritual experience, its nature, function, frequency and purpose’. Prof Bettina Schmidt, Marianne Rankin and Andy Burns were congratulated for their work on organising the excellent 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference at Lampeter and celebrations on Members’ Day; and Patricia (Paddy) Murphy and Jean Matthews for their work on the special, lavishly illustrated, issues of *Dr Numine* this year. Paddy was warmly thanked for her work as editor over the past fifteen years, and a welcome given to Rhonda Riachi, as her successor. The report outlining exploration of a new archive in partnership with the John Templeton Foundation and Boston University, and an opportunity to re-imagine the Hardy Initiative, gave rise to questions regarding the proposals and the relationship between Boston, Lampeter and the Alister Hardy Trust – agreement being given that these would be taken into account in the planning discussions currently taking place.

It was considered that the main work of the Membership and Activities Group (MAG) had now been done and the time had come to disband it as a formal group – from now on there would be just informal co-operation between Andy Burns, Hon. Secretary, and Marianne Rankin, Director of Communications, in arranging events, and liaison with the Membership Secretary. The Trust’s total financial assets currently stand at £401,455, down slightly from the previous year; expenditure exceeding income necessitating a draw on reserves. Membership now numbers 258, up slightly from last year. With regard to Trustee appointments, Revd Prof June Boyce-Tillman resigned this year and Revd Dr Tania ap Siôn was appointed in her place for a term of three years. Michael Rush was re-appointed for a further term of three years, and John Franklin was re-appointed for a term of two years. Dr ap Siôn is Reader of Religions, Humanities and Education at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln and Co-Director of the St Mary’s Centre for Religion and Education in Wales. Her research areas include the study of prayer and sacred place, religious experience and education, faith schools, and young people’s attitudes to religious diversity.

At the Trustees’ meeting immediately following the AGM, it was agreed that the AHT Local Group Guidelines proposed earlier in June by Tanya Garland, be added to the AHT constitution and discussed with the Chair before referral to the AHT AGM next year for formal adoption. It was also agreed that, following the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, there be an overview of what

had been learned from studies of the Archive; what further research is needed with regard to the 'nature, function and purpose' of spiritual experience in the context of Alister Hardy's wider vision of benefit to society for the future; and what might be the Trust's vision for the future. Also, a Strategic Working Group was set up to form a financial strategy, reserve policy and business plan. Its members were to include Prof John Harper, Dr Tom Farley and Dr David Greenwood, and initiatives to be discussed to include, amongst other things, the possible advantage of a future 'Boston link', and future strategic issues, which were to include safeguarding more environmentally friendly communications.

All in all, this was a most fulfilling and illuminating year, exhibiting a wealth of research, action and interest expressed in the study of spiritual and religious experience that bodes well for the future. It was evident at the Anniversary conference in Lampeter that the fifty years since Sir Alister Hardy had founded the Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College in Oxford had seen a growth of interest in the study of spiritual and religious experience, and in research into the related subjects of near-death experiences and consciousness studies. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Centre had been well celebrated at the Lampeter conference and at the Oxford Members' Day meeting in October. The scene is well set for the next 50 years, with interesting developments being planned for improving the interrogation of the current Alister Hardy online archive of spiritual and religious experiences, and in development of the proposed new Hardy initiative being led by Boston University in collaboration with Bishop Grosseteste University.

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## POSTSCRIPTUM

### and Author's Concluding Reflections

It just remains to update a few issues as at this present moment, October 2020. At the end of March Prof Jeff Astley's book, the *SCM Studyguide to Religious and Spiritual Experience* was published by SCM Press to acclaim. In May plans were announced with regard to the collaboration with Boston University on the new Hardy initiative. These revealed that the Templeton/Boston project<sup>1</sup> is to be carried out in two possible phases; a 'Planning Phase', this being the current 18-month initial exploration into how the best international expertise in the field would have advised Sir Alister if he had been alive today – this phase (due to be completed by the end of December 2020) is to include a further proposal to the John Templeton Foundation to support an 'Implementation Phase'. This second phase would be to undertake the pilot development of a database with up-to-date data collection and processing technologies, which if approved would also be carried out by Boston University as a body having the requisite skills. Currently, there is no intention, infrastructure or funding to sustain a longer term project in Boston, and reassurances have been given that nothing would threaten the existing database arrangements at AHRERC Lampeter, which remains the central focus for the AH Trust's activities.

The hope had been to have revealed, and end with, a review of what had been learned to-date from the study of accounts of religious and spiritual experience in the Alister Hardy Archive, and the vision and objectives of the Trust to guide future research. This had been agreed at the Trustees' meeting last November and was planned for May but has been delayed due to the outbreak of a world-wide coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19)<sup>2</sup>. No date has yet been able to be arranged for the publication of the review; however, history doesn't stop and the planned review could provide a perfect start to the next chapter in the continuing story of the research into spiritual and religious experience. Meanwhile, however, work continued, with reports on progress being scheduled for the Trust's AGM and Trustees meeting on 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Covid-19 led in March to a lock-down of schools and universities, the shutting of shops and businesses, cancellation of public meetings and events, including RERC Lampeter and Trust events. Causing widespread hardship socially and economically, it has also affected financial markets and investment portfolios, which could affect future action.

November – this to be held via the medium of a Zoom conference as meetings of more than six people had been banned by the Government due to the continuing Covid-19 restrictions.

This ends the 3rd and final edition of *Exploration into Spirit*, the history of the first 50 years of the Alister Hardy Research Centres and Trust. The Centres and Trust's work and activities, however, will continue to be recorded and be available to see, from the Director and Officer Reports and minutes of the Trust's Annual General Meetings and from the Trust's Journal, *De Numine*. Other available sources for obtaining information include the Alister Hardy Trust's and the AHRERC's websites at [www.studyspiritualexperience.org](http://www.studyspiritualexperience.org), and [www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/](http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/), and from Prof Jeff Astley's website at <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/wreru/research/current/religiousandspiritualexperience.org>. Other sources include agenda papers and minutes of the meetings of the Alister Hardy Trust, which might also be made available by special request; and, of course, research papers and publications by the research centres and Trust.

Much is now known about the nature, function and frequency of spiritual or religious experiences, but what of their purpose? What is the meaning behind these experiences? This is a most fascinating area awaiting further study. The question of the meaning and implications of spiritual and religious experience had been raised earlier in 2015, with agreement that this be the topic of a PhD application to be undertaken by Marianne Rankin<sup>3</sup>. The question, 'What's it all about, and what should we be doing about it?' was raised and discussed in the pages of *De Numine*<sup>4</sup> and at Members' Day 2016. The accounts sent in to the Centre reveal evidence of a consciousness of distinct contact with another, higher, spiritual reality whether they call it God or whatever. Within this, certain patterns can be discerned. One such seems to be a pattern of 'call' and 'response' – for instance, a desperate cry to God for help at a time of breakdown, being responded to in experience of light and love and assurance that all will be well – or as in 'answer to prayer'. On the other hand, experiences of a transcendent or psychic nature can come out of the blue: moments when one becomes conscious of something that is different and 'more than' ordinary day-to-day experience, such as a sudden sense of presence, a light or overwhelming love, a stirring moment in nature, art, music – a call to respond; or even in the form of a

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<sup>3</sup> See p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> Issues 60 and 6, Spring and Autumn 2016.

direct instruction for action<sup>5</sup>. Also important is the reported experience, on reflection, of a sense of one's life having been, or being, 'directed', by God or by some external, higher, Mind, or agency. The accounts speak of such events as experiences of synchronicity, 'patterning of events', happenings in our lives that seem to have been 'meant', to fulfil, in retrospect, a larger purpose. The 'purpose' of spiritual experience, therefore, seems to be to bring us to the awareness of a reality that transcends the boundaries of life familiar to us – part of continuing evolution, here in the realm of mind and spirit. A salient feature is that all these experiences are felt by people who have them as very real and meaningful.

All such experiences can be criticised as being, and are indeed, 'subjective', i.e. incapable of replication and verification. There are only the written accounts of these experiences available for objective scrutiny and analysis. Nevertheless, Sir Alister Hardy thought it important to study people's actual experiences themselves "in an objective and as far as possible scientific manner." Surely, the sheer weight of accumulative data now held by the AHRERC, together with the data gathered from studies of near-death and psychic experiences and consciousness, must eventually carry conviction of verisimilitude against the present continuing scientific materialist paradigm that says only the observable material world is real, and that consciousness is just an epiphenomenon of the brain which ceases when the brain dies.

Evidence shows that a common stream of spirituality runs through all humanity regardless of race, culture, religion, belief or non-belief. This same stream of spirituality which gave rise to the development and codification in all the world's religions, varying in accordance with evolution of culture, appears very much alive and active today, seeking expression wherever opportunity occurs. David Hay drew attention to the 'current outburst of free-floating spirituality in the West'<sup>6</sup>. Prof Paul Badham wrote that the findings of the Global project "suggest that a capacity for religious experience is part of humankind's evolutionary heritage and represents a common human response to the transcendent."<sup>7</sup> Dr Peter Kevern, Professor of Values in Care, Staffordshire University, in an article 'Is there a Spirituality

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<sup>5</sup> As in the case of Margaret Torrie, the founder of CRUSE, who was told, 'Do something for widows' (Torrie, *My life with CRUSE*, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Hay (2007, p. 92)

<sup>7</sup> Badham (2012). See also Badham (2003), *Religious Experience as the Common core of the World's Religions*.

Across Faiths', concluded that there *is* increasing evidence that there is a shared spirituality across all faiths and none.<sup>8</sup>

There is a need today to tap into this shared spirituality – for a new metaphysic that might embrace all humanity, atheists, humanists and agnostics as well as those who subscribe to a religion. There is a growing need for a new world view, recognition of a common spiritual core to humanity, empathetic, tolerant, syncretic, and working across all boundaries – this out of necessity for our own and the common good. At times of crisis people come together and differences are forgotten. A global crisis of climate change is upon us and the ramifications of population explosion, consumption and over-consumption of natural resources is coming to the fore. This necessitates a change in political attitude, a change from a way of life of domination, exploitation and greed to one of partnership, co-operation and harmony – in fact, a metanoia.

The 'spiritual nature of man' (Hardy) has long been suppressed and ignored. Much is already being achieved, through the Parliament of The World's Religions, the United Nations, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and through Ecumenical and Interfaith movements and the Global Ethic Foundation. The Rome and Florence conference in October 2012 on *Spirituality: the Awakened World 2012 – Engaged Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* had as its purpose, "to explore the evolution of religion and spirituality in the 21st Century as a significant challenge and opportunity for the world." More recently the Scientific and Medical Network set up the Galileo Commission, a project with the principal aim of challenging the adequacy of scientific materialism or scientism as an exclusive basis for knowledge and values<sup>9</sup>. Today, we need, as never before, to pull together to meet the challenges facing us, and to harness the creative energies of intellect and spirit in practical action with the aid of a common metaphysic (development of Sir Alister Hardy's 'natural theology'<sup>10</sup>?). We share a common humanity and common human values, as expressed in the Golden Rule, 'Do to others as you would have done to you', the essential core of the Global Ethic. Surely this is a common ground

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<sup>8</sup> *Interreligious Insight*, Vol.15 No. 2 Dec 2017.

<sup>9</sup> The Galileo Commission Report (2019) seeks to open up public discourse and to find ways to expand the scope of science so that it is no longer constrained by an outmoded view of matter and physical reality, and can openly explore and accommodate significant human experiences.

<sup>10</sup> Hardy, *Biology of God* (1975, pp. 232-233).



on which to build a new metaphysic that might recognise spirituality as the basis of religion and civilisation.

This is where the work of the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centres perhaps can make a useful contribution – by continuing to point to the growing evidence of personal testimony and by showing and sharing with other disciplines the ways in which this relates to ordinary human life and religion. Appreciating the use of symbolism and metaphor to relate revelation to human understanding becomes important. It becomes ever more necessary to recognise the importance of the core teaching of the world religions, over and above their scriptures and creeds taken literally. This might, indeed, be a way to help “bind all people together in a universal recognition” that Sir Alister Hardy envisioned, a step towards the natural theology he advocated – a new global metaphysic.

Dissemination of knowledge concerning spiritual/religious experience, its universality and common features – as well as its differences – is not only important for research and analysis but as a contribution to wider understanding of this universal aspect of common human experience. Publicising the established facts and relevance of contemporary human spiritual experiencing, and the stories that people have submitted in all truth and honesty, can make a significant contribution. Whilst the proper function of the AHRERCs is data collection and research, it is to be hoped that the wider questions, implications and possible end-goals linking spiritual and religious experience to theology, psychology and other disciplines, will continue to be pursued and yield good fruit.

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#### E) **Library Videos**

<i>It could happen to you</i>	Documentary	BBC Everyman, 16/12/79
<i>Glimpses of God</i>	RERC contacts	BBC Series, Mystical Experiences, 1994
<i>Revelations:</i>	Sheila Cassidy	Border Television, 1985
<i>Revelations</i>	Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens)	Border Television, 1985
<i>Revelations:</i>	P.J. Kavanagh	Border Television, 1985
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<i>New Research Project</i>	(Westminster College Seminar)	RERC, 1998
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## **APPENDICES**

Patrons of the Alister Hardy Trust

Roll of Directors, Treasurers, Chairs of Committees

Board of Trustees, June 2020

The Administration, June 2020

Rules of the Alister Hardy Trust

List of Alister Hardy Memorial Lectures

**Patrons of the Alister Hardy Trust**

His Holiness the Dalai Lama  
His Eminence the Supreme Primate Koken Monnyo Otani,  
The Right Revd and the Right Honorable the Lord Williams of  
Oystermouth  
Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr  
Jonathon Porritt CBE  
H. H. Swami Chidanand Saraswati  
Right Revd Wyn Evans

\* \* \* \*

## Roll of Directors, Treasurers, Chairs of Committees

### Directors

1969 – 1976	Prof Sir Alister Hardy FRS
1976 – 1985	Edward Robinson
1985 – 1989	David Hay
1989 – 1990	Dr Ralph Waller (Acting Director)
1990 – 1992	Revd Dr Gordon S. Wakefield
1993 – 1996	Prof Laurence Brown
1996 – 2002	Peggy Morgan
2002 – 2010	Prof Paul Badham, Dr Wendy Dossett & Prof Xinzhong Yao (2004) (replaced by Prof Andrew Prescott, 2008)
2010 – 2013	Dr Gregory Barker, Dr Bettina Schmidt & Sally Wilkinson (replaced by Wendy Xerri (2012)
2013 – 2018	Prof Christopher Alan Lewis
2013 –	Prof Bettina Schmidt
2014 –	Alison Harding (Administration)

### Treasurers

1976 – 1978	Manchester College
1978 – 1979	Edward Hulmes/Manchester College
1979 – 1983	Manchester College
1983 – 1985	Dr William Crawford Knox
1985 – 2002	Oliver Knowles OBE
2002 – 2005	Dr Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke
2005 – 2010	Ruth Russell-Jones
2010 –	Dr David Greenwood

### Chairs

#### 1<sup>st</sup> RERU Advisory Research Council

1976 – 1979	Sir Alister Hardy FRS
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#### 2<sup>nd</sup> RERU Advisory Research Council (dissolved in 1994)

1980 – 1980	Sir Alister Hardy FRS
1980 – 1982	Lord Bullock
1983 – 1985	Bishop George Appleton
1985 – 1986	Dr Eileen Barker
1986 – 1990	Lord Bullock
1990 – 1994	Dr David Hay

### **Chairs of Trustees**

1983 Bishop George Appleton (1<sup>st</sup> Chair)

*[from 1983 until 1991 the Chairs of Trustees were also the Chairs of the Advisory Council, above.]*

1992 – 1994	Lord Rees-Mogg
1994 – 1995	Revd Dr Kenneth Wilson (Deputy Chair)
1995 – 1996	Revd Dr Arthur R. Peacocke
1997 – 2002	Professor Peter Clarke
2002 – 2003	Oliver Knowles OBE
2003 –	Revd Professor Leslie Francis

\* \* \*

### **Chairs of A.H. Research Committee**

1990 – 1992	Professor Arthur Peacocke
1992 – 1999	Professor Michael Argyle
1999 – 2002	Revd Professor Leslie Francis
2002 – 2007	Professor June Boyce-Tillman

[The Research Committee was dissolved in November 2007]

\* \* \*

### **Chairs of the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience**

1994 – 1997	Bronwen, Viscountess Astor
1997 – 2002	Revd John Osborn
2002 – 2008	Marianne Rankin
2008 – 2012	Revd. Jonathan Robinson
2012 – 2015	Andy Burns

(In October 2015, the AHSSSE became amalgamated into the AHT)



### **Board of Trustees, June 2020**

Revd Professor Leslie Francis (Chair)  
Revd Professor Andrew Village (Vice Chair)  
Dr David Greenwood (Hon Treasurer)  
Andy Burns (Hon Secretary)  
Tanya Garland  
Dr Tom Farley  
Dr Mark Fox  
John Franklin  
Professor John Harper  
Dr David Rousseau  
Michael Rush  
Revd Dr Tania ap Siôn

Professor Bettina Schmidt (Director, UWTSD, *ex officio*)  
Professor Jeff Astley (Alister Hardy Professor at Bishop Grossesteste  
University, *ex officio*)  
Marianne Rankin (Director of Communications, *ex officio*)  
Margaret West (Hon. Membership Secretary, *ex officio*)

\* \* \*

### **Member/Trust activities**

Andy Burns (Hon Secretary)  
Marianne Rankin (Director of Communications)

\* \* \* \* \*

## Profiles of Current Administration, June 2020

### **Prof Bettina Schmidt Director of Research, UWTSD**

Bettina is Senior Lecturer in the study of religions at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David – and Programme Director for the MA course in Religious Experience. She has a Doctorate in Philosophy in cultural anthropology, and lectures at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, including research degrees.



### **Prof Jeff Astley, RERC Bishop Grosseteste University**

Jeff is Alister Hardy Professor of Religious and Spiritual Experience, formerly at Warwick University. He was Founding Director of the North of England Institute for Christian Education from 1981 until 2013 and has taught at under-graduate and postgraduate level in Durham University since 1981.

### **Alison Harding, Director of Administration, UWTSD**

Alison has a BA (Hons) in Humanities, her qualifications including M. Librarianship and MCLIP. She is Executive Head of Library and Learning Resources at the university. Her professional interests are library and learning space design, opening up access to resources and services, and library collaboration and partnerships.



### **Prof Leslie J. Francis – Chair of Trustees**

Leslie is Professor of Religions and Education at the Institute of Education, Warwick University, Canon Theologian at Liverpool Cathedral, and co-convenor of the Network for Psychological Type and Christian Faith. His main areas of research are in empirical theology, religious education and the psychology of religion.



**Dr David Greenwood – Vice-Chair and Hon. Treasurer of AHT**

David has a BSc (Eng) from London and an MSc from Manchester. On retirement he took an Oxford degree in Theology at Westminster College. Former Administrator responsible for all day to day activities within the Centre, he became Treasurer on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010 following the retirement of Ruth Russell-Jones.

**Andy Burns – Hon Secretary of AHT**

Andy, former Chair of the then Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience, is a retired Police Officer from the Metropolitan Police in London and a photographer. He has a BTh Oxon and MA in the study of World Religions from the University of Wales Lampeter.



**Margaret West – Membership Secretary**

Margaret obtained a BA based on mathematics from the Open University in 1987 and qualified as an Accountant in 2003. She came to the AHT through her work at St Mary's Centre – when, in 2018, she kindly took on responsibility for maintaining the membership records of the Trust.

**Marianne Rankin – Director of Communications**

Marianne has a BA in Modern Languages in French and German. She is a former Chair of the Alister Hardy Society. She has a Master of Studies in the Study of Religion at Oxford University and is currently studying for a Doctorate at Warwick University. She is author of *An Introduction to Religious and Spiritual Experience*, widely used by students and teachers.



**Rhonda Riachi – Editor of *De Numine***

Rhonda came to Oxford in 1983 to read Modern Languages at St Hilda's College; and, in 2014, gained an MSc at Oxford Brookes with a dissertation on communication in dementia care. She has edited and produced newsletters for various organisations over the years, including the Association for Learning Technology (1993-2007). A member of the JISC Scholarly Communications Committee (2005-07), she has served on steering groups for academic journals, and as a reviewer.



**Thomas Pitchford – Collections Librarian (Alister Hardy Research Centre)**

Thomas has a BA in English Education, with special interest in Religious Education, at Louisiana College, USA and Library qualifications from Louisiana State University. He is responsible for the historic archive of the Alister Hardy Trust containing the records of the AHRERC and AHSSE, and artefacts held by the trust. He is also responsible for typing the archive of accounts of religious and spiritual experiences onto the online database and for cataloguing and dealing with requests concerning the Sir Alister Hardy Trust archive.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Rules of the Alister Hardy Trust

*Rules of the Alister Hardy Trust, as approved by the Trustees and created under the authority of the Constitution of the Alister Hardy Trust, 2016.*

The object of the Alister Hardy Trust is to advance the education of the public in religious and spiritual experience, its nature, function, frequency and purport. It will promote research into religious and spiritual experience and publish the useful results of such research for the public benefit.

1. Membership of the Alister Hardy Trust is open to all those in sympathy with its aims and objectives. All subscribing members must abide by the rules of the Trust and support its aims and objectives. An official complaints procedure exists to protect members and officers and agreement to abide by this procedure is a requirement of membership. Membership will cease if subscriptions are unpaid. In addition, membership may be terminated if rules are breached. Members may vote at any General Meeting of the Trust.
2. Subject to the approval of the Trustees, local groups may be formed. Such groups must be self-financing and set up and maintain their own bank or building society accounts, and shall maintain close links with the Trust. Group leaders (or conveners) may be elected democratically by members of their groups. Candidates for group leaders (or conveners) must be members in good standing with a minimum of 1 year's membership of the Trust. The Trust may offer assistance in the setting up of such groups and assist in making contact between members. Funding to start new groups of the Trust *may* be available at the discretion of the Trustees and following an application submitted via the committee.
3. The Trust must ensure that a register is kept of names and addresses of the members, subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act, 1998.
4. The Membership and Activities Group (a sub committee of the Trust) will conduct the day to day business of the Trust and shall consist of at least one Trustee.<sup>1</sup> In any dispute the decision of the Chair of

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<sup>1</sup> The disbandment of the Membership and Activities Group is to be discussed at the Trust's AGM in November 2020 (see p. 153).

Trustees (and any appointed sub committee of officers) is final and binding.

5. The day to day business of the Trust shall be carried out by its officers. These shall include, an Honorary Secretary, who shall be responsible for convening the meetings of the Trust and for preparing agenda and minutes of meetings and a Membership Secretary who shall be responsible for maintaining membership and subscription records and filing systems.
6. All elected officers of the Trust shall be honorary appointments, though appropriate expenses may be reimbursed with the agreement of the Trustees.
7. If any local, regional or national groups of the Trust depart from the aims of the Society, the Trustees may withdraw their use of the name, 'The Alister Hardy Trust'. Any remaining group funds must be returned to the Honorary Treasurer.
8. These rules may be amended by resolutions of the Alister Hardy Trust at an Annual General Meeting or a specially convened meeting.
9. Annual General Meetings - The first AGM under the CIO must be held within 18 months of its creation and thereafter at intervals not exceeding 15 months. Notice of an AGM must be given with 14 clear days notice and must include the date, time and place where the AGM will be held. The AGM should be chaired by the elected Chair or in his/her absence another officer agreed by the Trustees. The AGM can proceed if a quorum numbering 5% (or 3 members) is in attendance. Voting at the AGM can be by a show of hands. A poll can be by postal or electronic means.
10. In addition an AGM must be called if 10% of the membership request it. The Trustees must call that meeting within 21 days of such a request and hold it within 28 days of the call.
11. Appointment of Trustees - The Trust shall number at least 4 Trustees, but no more than 12 in total. Three Trustees shall be elected by the membership (ie: 1 per year in rotation) One Trustee shall be a member of the Hardy family. A further eight Trustees may be appointed subject to the criteria determined by the Trust under paragraph 12 (2) of the CIO. At every AGM one third of Trustees shall stand down in rotation.

Postal Votes and electronic (email) votes in relation to the election of Trustees must be supervised independently of the CIO.

- 12 The rules should be read in conjunction with the Constitution of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation called 'The Alister Hardy Trust' and do not affect any clauses in that document.

### List of the Annual Alister Hardy Memorial Lectures

<u>Date</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
2.12.1987	<i>Religious Experience in a Living World</i>	Dr Rupert Sheldrake
10.12.1988	Clutching at Glimpses: A Sociologist's Attempts to Understand the Inexplicable	Prof Eileen Barker
16.12.1989	<i>The Kindling of the Divine Flame</i>	Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke
1990, given 1.6.1991	<i>On Lending Your Body to the Gods: Approaches to the Indigenous Psychiatry of Ladakh</i> <sup>1</sup>	Dr John Crook
7.12.1991	<i>Psychology and the Varieties of Religious Experience</i>	Prof L.B. Brown
5.12.1992	<i>What Kinds of Things There Are</i>	Prof Nicholas Lash
4.11.1993	<i>Religious Experience and the Religious Community</i>	Prof Michael Argyle
26.11.1994	<i>What has Emerged from the Research Work</i> <sup>2</sup>	Lord Rees-Mogg
18.11.1995	<i>How Does God Communicate With Us?</i>	Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke
7.12.1996	<i>A Personal Account &amp; The Early Days</i> [Vol. 1] <i>The Religion of Religious Experience &amp; The Future</i> [Vol. 2]	Michael Hardy & Edward Robinson Bishop J. Taylor & Peggy Morgan
8.10.1997	<i>Spirituality Imprisoned</i> <sup>3</sup>	Sister Elaine MacInnes
7.11.1998	The Experience of Passion in Creation <sup>4</sup>	Prof John Rodwell
6.11.1999	Religious Experience in Global Perspective	Prof Peter Clarke
4.11.2000	<i>Can Scientific Discovery be a Religious Experience?</i> <sup>5</sup>	Prof Hedley-Brooke
10.11.2001	<i>Creative Inspiration, Madness &amp; Spiritual Experience</i>	Dr Michael Jackson
16.11.2002	One Planet, One Spirit: Ecological & <i>Mystical Spirituality from an Interfaith</i>	Prof Ursula King

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<sup>1</sup> Transcript in First Series Occasional Papers, Wakefield, G (Ed.) (1992)

<sup>2</sup> Transcript in AHS newsletter *De Numine*, No. 18, March 1995

<sup>3</sup> Transcript in Occasional Paper No. 16

<sup>4</sup> Transcript in Occasional Paper No. 21

<sup>5</sup> Transcript in Occasional Paper No. 38



	<i>Perspective</i>	
22.11.2003	<i>Consciousness and the Imagination</i>	Peggy Morgan
27.11.2004	<i>Is There a Central Core of Religious Experience?</i>	Prof Keith Ward
3.12.2005	<i>Religious Experience and the Brain</i>	Prof John Hick
2.12.2006	<i>'Magistra Experienta': Experience is the Teacher. How Meditation, Faith and Experience become One</i>	Dom Laurence Freeman OSB
1.12.2007	<i>Religion Under Siege: A Scientific Response</i>	Dr David Hay
13.12.2008	<i>The Changing Shape of Religion in Britain</i>	Prof Linda Woodhead
7.11.2009	<i>Religious Experience in Contemporary Turkey</i>	Prof Cafer Yaran
7.11.2010	<i>Life after Death without God: unconventional Religion or Gothic romanticism?</i>	Prof David Voas
5.11.2011	<i>Jesus beyond Christianity: Unexpected Images from the World's Religions</i>	Dr Gregory Barker
6.10.2012	<i>Deconstructing the Elitism of Religious Experience</i>	Dr William Bloom
1.12.2007	<i>Religion Under Siege: A Scientific Response</i>	Dr David Hay
13.12.2008	<i>The Changing shape of Religion in Britain</i>	Prof Linda Woodhead
7.11.2009	<i>Religious Experience in Contemporary Turkey</i>	Prof Cafer S. Yaran
6.11.2010	<i>Life after Death without God: unconventional religion or Gothic romanticism?</i>	Prof David Voas
5.11.2011	<i>Jesus beyond Christianity: Unexpected images from the World's Religions</i>	Dr Gregory Barker
6.10.2012	<i>Deconstructing the Elitism of Religious<sup>6</sup> Experience</i>	Dr William Bloom
5.10.2013	<i>The Piper at the Gates of Dawn</i>	Prof Leslie Francis
4.10.2014	<i>Religious Experience, Psychological Well-being and Culture</i>	Prof Christopher Lewis
17.11.2015	<i>Seeing is Believing? Spirit Possession and Other Forms of Religious Experiencing in Brazil</i>	Prof Bettina Schmidt

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<sup>6</sup> Transcript available

15.11.2016	<i>Taming the Spirit: Religion versus Religious Experience?</i>	Prof Jeff Astley
14.10.2017	<i>Religionless Spirituality and the spiritual Experience in music</i>	Prof June Boyce-Tillman
20.18.2018	<i>Meeting in the Cave of the Heart: The importance of Religious Experience to theology and interspirituality</i>	Revd Dr Marcus Braybooke
19.10.2019	<i>Ways to Go Beyond and Why They Work: Science and Spiritual Practice</i>	Dr Rupert Sheldrake