



# THE SIBYLS

*Christian Spirituality Group for Transgendered People*

**BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX**

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## **Newsletter No. 51 - Autumn 2009**

Thank you very much to Helen Mather for her very interesting report on the Whaley Hall weekend in May 2009. Thank you also to Jay for sending a copy of her Eulogy for Michelle le Morvan.

Please send me articles and other contributions; please also let me have up-to-date information about events.

Very many thanks to those who do write or send me items for publication. If you can send e-mail, MS word, most other word processors or even just typed (with a decent ribbon!), it is very much appreciated. Newspaper cuttings can often give a different slant on things and can usually be scanned.

Please don't worry if you have no technology; I can copy-type if necessary.

**BUT... please bear in mind that I am Severely Visually Impaired so, if you must send me hand-written contributions, please make sure that I will be able to read them! If you have something handwritten and it runs to several pages, please think about (a) having a friend type it for you, or (b) telephoning me, and I will audio-type it straight into the newsletter.**

A few lines or enough to fill a few pages, I shall be grateful for anything you send.

**Please send items to:**  
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**97 Bedford Street**  
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**Tel: 01270-250207**

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Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editor or Sibyls in general.

### **OUR MISSION**

The Sibyls is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, and their supporters, offering companionship along the journey, and information/advocacy to churches. Sibyls pray, eat, and talk together, and seek to fulfil Christ's command to love one another.

## PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for David in ongoing illness, Ruby in hospital, Rosie's upcoming surgery, all those who cannot for whatever reason take the course of action their heart desires, and for all those known to us who are in need, and those with disabilities or who are in pain.

## LISTENERS

People prepared to listen to others are worth their weight in gold. Jenny, Jane, Carol and Jenny-Anne are happy to be available for you to call. If you would like to join the list, please let me know. Do remember that they are not trained to give advice – but a problem shared in confidence often seems less of a burden. If you need someone to talk to, choose which one and give them a ring: -

Jenny Bond 01623-836662

Jane Bowles 01492-660147

Carol Moore 01625-858487

Jenny-Anne Bishop 01745-337144

The listening system works. There are a number of Sibyls who use this service. If you want someone with whom to talk it over, why not give it a try?

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Regular Meetings

**LONDON;** usually the second Thursday of every second month at 5.30 - Service at St Anne's, Dean Street, Soho, followed by a meal together – next meetings October 8, December 10 and February 11.

**MANCHESTER;** Jenny-Anne and Elen organise events in the North-West and North Wales. There is a regular monthly meeting of TransForum (Manchester Trans Discussion & Support group), 3:30 pm Fourth Saturday, at the Metropolitan Community Church in Manchester MCCM) – **please see below**.

MCC is a friendly, welcoming, inclusive church. JennyAnne can be contacted on 01745-337144, mobile 07500-741955 or e-mail [jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk)

The TransForum group web page is [www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm](http://www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm) , there are also directions to the group venue on this website.

You are also most welcome to attend our Sunday communion service at 4:00 pm every Sunday at Metropolitan Community Church , Manchester(MCCM). see [www.mccmanchester.co.UK](http://www.mccmanchester.co.UK)

**NOTE: Please do check the website, or with Jenny-Anne, as arrangements for MCC and the TransForum may change in the near future.**

### JAY'S GARDEN PARTY

January 9. Please ring to confirm attendance 020-8763-0146.

### ROSIE'S MEETING - DORSET

Every four months between 12 Noon and 4 o'clock at Rosie's house. The next meetings are due to be held at noon on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2009, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2010,

12<sup>th</sup> June 2010 – all Saturdays. Please ring to confirm these dates and also to let her know that you plan to attend (necessary for catering). Please also ring for directions. **01425-270540**. No charge, thank you Rosie, but donations to Sibyls (if you wish) would be greatly appreciated.

### **WEEKENDS**

**2009 Friday 13 to Sunday 15 November - St Deiniol's Library. See below.**

**2010 Friday 21 to Sunday 23 May - Windermere**

**2010 Friday 17 to Sunday 19 September - St Columba's, Woking**

**2011 Friday 15 to Sunday 17 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire**

**Help can usually be made available if you would like to go to a weekend but have financial constraints; please talk to Jay in confidence (0208-763-0146).**

### **OTHER INCLUSIVE CHURCHES**

City United Reform Church, Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 2BZ, 029 2022 5190. You'll find its website at [www.cityurc.org.uk](http://www.cityurc.org.uk). Revd. Monica Mills has written to tell us that this church welcomes all to their Sunday service at 1030am.

Please let me know of any others and I will include details in the Newsletter.

**There are a number of churches who welcome trans-people. The Metropolitan Community Church embraces diversity. I've been to East London, Manchester and Bournemouth and was welcomed like the prodigal. If you have access to the Internet, a church's mission statement should give you a clue. You could try calling the pastor to ask about their attitude. If I find out any more I'll try to include details in the Newsletter.**

### **LONDON EVENING MEETINGS**

**Jay**

The June meeting was bedevilled by the Tube strike. However an intrepid three met to enjoy a good service and a splendid meal together. These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, followed by a good meal in a peaceful restaurant with a nice atmosphere. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. The Rector at St Anne's, the Rev'd David Gilmore, makes us very welcome and takes the service.

We still haven't decided on a restaurant and so we will wait at the church until about 6.15 and then go to the restaurant of our choice. That creates a problem if you are late. I will switch on my mobile 07719 726933 and you can ring and get directions.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1 D 6AF, 40 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it says so and is), and from about 6.15 a meal at a local restaurant. Next meetings - Thursday 8 January, 10 December, 11 February. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't. No need to book - just come.

## **EULOGY FOR MICHELLE**

Michelle was a teacher and she taught with authority.

Michelle was born and bred a Roman Catholic. Nothing was more natural than that the boy should become a priest and a priest Michelle duly became. She also trained to be a teacher and found her true vocation.

Like all transsexual people the deep rooted feeling of what she was gnawed away inside. These feelings were contrary to all that she had been led to believe and were resisted. Help was not available, support was not to hand and information desperately difficult to find. Nevertheless the feelings do not go away and their reality is ultimately stronger than belief systems that do not accommodate them. As with so many, her search for truth and peace sometimes led up blind alleys.

Thus late in life, Michelle was looking hard for who she really was. From a Christian background, Jackie Brookfield was running the Oasis Group counselling and helping transsexual people and she gave Michelle help and the encouragement of others. Oasis came within the orbit of Sibyls and there Michelle and I met. Sibyls could provide wider support and love. Befriended within a supportive community, and thanks to the generosity of Russell Reid, Michelle was able to transition and undergo surgery. She was enabled to live exactly as she wanted. The last few years of her life were a time of much contentment for her. The sadness is that they were so few but she did find that peace and satisfaction of being who she truly was.

Michelle blossomed in Sibyls. Everyone's image of a benevolent granny, she looked the part and in many ways she was. Her counsel was kindly and wise; I for one am grateful. Much more importantly, many hesitant newcomers or those in trouble were taken under her wing, and, as good grannies do, she dusted them down, set them on their feet and sent them on their way better equipped to face their problems. She thoroughly enjoyed the Sibyls weekends and meetings, and everyone enjoyed Michelle's company. I have received many messages of sadness at her passing and she will be deeply missed.

However it was as a teacher that I remember her best. It was a delight to sit in chapel and listen to her speak. She would talk eloquently of the need to shut out the noise of church, to seek for the immensity and majesty and love of God to be found in all things from the farthest star to the tiniest atom, of the meaning and example of Christ, of the gospels, and of the need to sit quietly, look inside, and seek the God within.

Michelle was a teacher and she taught with authority.

## **WEEKEND AT St. DEINIOL'S LIBRARY - NOVEMBER 2008**

We are organising this at the moment and I recently went to 'case the joint'. A booking form is at the end of this Newsletter.

**Please bear in mind that THIS IS NOT AN EXCLUSIVE HIRING.** We will necessarily be sharing the premises with up to a couple of dozen other people. It is, however, an inclusive venue and has hosted LGBT groups. The Metropolitan Community Church in Manchester have held events there and, judging by the friendliness of the Warden, his wife and all the staff, we will have a great time.

**If you do join us, please be prepared to share at least mealtimes and refreshment breaks with people outside our group. You may also bump into them at other times in our travels around the premises. Please look upon this, firstly, as an opportunity to make new friendships and, secondly, to help to explode the myth that we are 'not normal'.**

God and His creation revel in diversity; 'Different' equals 'Normal'. Let us take the opportunity to continue the spread of this message far and wide.

Internet users can obtain further details from [www.st-deiniols.org](http://www.st-deiniols.org)

St Deiniol's is at Harwarden, in Flintshire. A beautiful building, well over 100 years old, the inside has been refurbished to include three en-suite rooms (the two ground floor rooms plus one other), which will be allocated according to need.

We have been thinking along the lines of 'The Image of God' and, knowing how this group takes a topic and runs with it, we are anticipating some very productive and thought-provoking workshops.

I have some brochures; I can send you a copy if you are interested.

~ O ~

## **WHALEY HALL 2009 REMEMBERED**

**Helen Mather**

*Whaley Hall -  
first impressions*



It was two years since I'd been on a Sibyls weekend and I was looking forward to this one. But time management doesn't work for me, and I hit the rush hour traffic in Derby. There's no way I was going to make it for dinner – again! Have I **ever** been in time for Friday dinner?

I didn't expect that there would be anything left after three-quarters of an hour. There wasn't really: just a few vegetables and several chicken carcasses; but I quickly dissected out a surprising amount of meat which Jay, unperturbed as ever, offered to reheat. Well, it's a meal – **and** with wine... While I ate, took time to look around the table. The regulars were there; some I expected hadn't come, and there were new faces. They look friendly enough. *Hi folks, I'm back!*

After dinner Elen showed me my room; in the annexe: go out of the back door, across the courtyard and up the steps. A torch is a very handy thing to have in your

handbag! The annexe is very basic; in fact rather shabby. I think it rarely gets used for guests. But the rooms are big. Mine has a fine view down to the house; I chose the bed right under the window. I've a desk too (although I never found any time to use it). And a resident cuddly toy: a big bear. There are bears all over the house, it seems...

Some Sibyls weekends are social get-togethers; this was very much a working weekend. We'd invited Peterson Toscano: "*Actor, Blogger, Stand-up Comedian & Gay Activist*" to take time out from his current British tour to share in our weekend.

Tomorrow he'll be leading drama workshops (he calls them "Bibliodramas"; I wonder what they're going to be like...), and tomorrow evening we get a rest: no home-grown entertainments this year. Peterson will be presenting his latest play: *Transfigurations - Transgressing Gender in the Bible*. Tonight he gave us an extended introduction to himself and his work through excerpts from his plays.

Christina Beardsley introduced Peterson, explaining how she first heard his *Transfigurations* last year; and included a commendation from his home church (The Religious Society of Friends, West Hartford, Connecticut). Peterson's visit, Tina explained, has been jointly sponsored by the LGBT Clergy Consultation and the Sibyls.

Peterson then took over. This was intimate theatre: a one-man show to a small audience. He covered a whole range of sexuality, gender and diversity issues, taken chiefly from his semi-autobiographical *Doin' time in the Homo No Mo' Halfway House*, but also including a thoughtful look at minority groups from *The Re-education of George W Bush (No President left behind...)*. We met such memorable characters as the outrageously effeminate Chad and his Slavic friend Vlad, and the thoughtful Tex; and who could forget the Revd. Dr. Meadows? (just love that English accent!) Peterson even found a place for an affectionate picture of his parents. But what came over, quite apart from the entertainment, was a surprising amount about Peterson himself; his spiritual journey; his struggles; his concerns...

No presentation is complete without advertising. Peterson finished off with a special offer on his DVD of a live performance of *Doin' time in the Homo No Mo' Halfway House*. He'd also assorted promotional literature to take away and keep or share... Nice...

Wow! Now follow that! Well, that task fell to Susie who presented tonight's Night Office. We decided to remain in the lounge: why move when you're comfortable? Elen read the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:28-46), then Susie led us through a series of questions raised by the passage, and invited our opinions and ideas:

- ▶ What did it mean to be a eunuch? **He** was a high-status official; what does it mean now?
- ▶ What did the Jewish Scriptures say about eunuchs? What did **Jesus** say about eunuchs?
  - How many people had access to a copy of the Scriptures?
- ▶ How did Philip know what he was thinking? Why was Philip there at all? Would **we** have spoken to him?

Peterson wouldn't be drawn; "*I'm going to save my thoughts for tomorrow night.*" Wait and see...

Susie concluded that God knows all about us: where we are, what we are; just as he knew about the Ethiopian.

Friday evening is the first real opportunity to unwind; to renew friendships and catch up on all the latest news. And this being a Sibyls' weekend, there's always wine on hand (at least for now!) Rosie provided her own amusement. It seems that Whaley Hall is short on modern technology; she had planned to use a CD in her Morning Office, but there's no CD player here! A trip to Tesco had secured the essential CD player in a large box, which she proceeded to unpack and set up...

We stayed talking until about 2300 then drifted off to bed. I'd still to sort out my things, so no sleep for me yet. But it's cold in here tonight, and the bed's **freezing!** Thank goodness for my radio and headphones. It makes things a bit more bearable... Still, mustn't complain; Philippa, in the next room, lost her entire curtain rail! I never heard it fall off...

I woke late: I'd missed all my usual early Saturday radio programmes, so I must have been tired.

I'd not as much time as I would have liked; just enough to sort out a few bits, then suss out the shower. It's as basic as the rest of the house, and rather scruffy, but it works, there's a dry place to put my clothes, and the water's **hot!** But oh, for the luxury of the main house!...

I'd just enough time left to get ready; but then disaster: no makeup! Big hunt; panic: **It's all at home!**...

I arrived ten minutes late to breakfast, in tears. Still, they'd left enough for me: something of everything. The only missing item was the orange juice...

And Elen took pity on me, and offered to lend me her makeup. Properly dressed again!

Rosie led today's Morning Office in the Chapel. It had to be the big chapel; she needs power (for her CD player, that is!) It's much as I remember it (but has the organ acquired a bit more ironmongery? It has certainly acquired a resident bear!) I rather like the small Chapel though: it can be really intimate, as it was on our last weekend here.

Rosie brought greetings from the late Michelle le Morvan. I remember her from past weekends as a wise, gracious woman; a deep thinker, and a thought-provoking speaker. She's much missed.

Rosie started by confessing: *"Well, when Jenny-Anne told me the theme: 'gender and the Bible', I thought 'hmm, fine, OK...' then I thought about it, and did something completely different!"*

She suggested that each one of us is different, but as transgendered people we do have many shared experiences. One common experience is rejection, even from fellow Christians, for being different. Yet diversity is part of God's creation.

She explained that the Bible is a vast resource of human experience, but chose just one passage, the account of Elijah's encounter with God, in 1 Kings 19.

A strange passage, maybe? Rosie asked herself, and us, the recurrent question: *"what am I doing here?"*; God's question to Elijah. So this passage gives an insight into God's purposes for all of us. After a resounding victory, Elijah's faith had evaporated, and he

fled. And so God spoke to him. But the real miracle wasn't in the signs and wonders, but in the gentle whisper: *"what are you doing here, Elijah?"*

And, she explained, that whisper is the prophetic Word of God. Something **we** need to find: the whisper of reassurance. Years later, she reminded us, Jesus suffered the same highs and lows.

Remember: the Living God journeys with us, and has already experienced all our pains and all our sorrows.

Rosie played a song to finish (hence the CD player!): *"I never said that I would give you silver or gold..."*

The song ends with the words: *"This is the promise: I've made you you..."*

And, said Rosie, that's the best promise of all.

Now the pace quickened up a bit: next item, Peterson's drama workshop.

But first, coffee. The coffee area at Whaley Hall is no more than a table in an alcove at the foot of the back staircase! But for all that, it's a popular meeting place, and coffee's always welcome. Coffee? Yes, please!

The Chapel gave Peterson an ideal space in which to outline his plans. For his first workshop he had planned an extended drama. He chose the double story of Jairus's daughter and the woman with chronic bleeding (Mark 5: 21-42).

The way he tackled it was rather like making a film. He started by looking at the characters in the passage, but without elaborating on the plot. That would come out in the drama, he said. After a short overview he invited volunteers for the key players, with one exception: Jesus, for whom he chose Tina, to her great surprise... As the action would be largely spontaneous, he invited photographers to record the drama, and appointed two recorders with unlimited access to make written notes for later debriefing: **anything** of interest; subtle gestures, conversations no-one else could hear...

The initial plan was to hold an open air drama in the courtyard behind the house, but as the weather had been changeable this was abandoned, and the drama took place around the main stairway of the house. Although Peterson acted as director – in this respect it **was** rather like making a film – the main action was entirely developed by the actors themselves. The only concession was the use of simple costumes (a shawl, a headscarf...) to define the key players. Once under way, the drama was a movement in time and space, using the whole of the large space from the hallway to the upstairs landing.

I'd chosen to watch from the edge of the action and photograph rather than play a part – a pity. Because of the fluid movement of the drama I missed the central scene which took place upstairs. It just didn't seem appropriate to follow (maybe I **was** taking part after all...) But I'd like to have been a part of the action and I'd somehow been a mere observer. Story of my life...

After the drama had finished, we moved back into the Chapel for an extended debriefing; in a way, rather like viewing the first prints of the finished film. Peterson invited comments from the actors and the two reporters; who brought out intimate



interactions others hadn't noticed. There had been many surprising and unexpected spontaneous reactions; most of which might have gone unnoticed.

This was reality drama: the players had reacted as themselves rather than as actors; a real revelation.

Everyone had found the workshop very satisfying and rewarding.

Janet wasn't so sure. As a dog, she'd been preoccupied with a flea and had missed most of the action...

*the courtyard:*

*the bit at the back!*



Now: lunch. That's unusual. Saturday afternoon is normally minibus-trip time, with a prompt getaway. But today there's the choice of a free afternoon or a second workshop.

After lunch I found Peterson on his own in the lounge and spoke quietly to him as he was preparing for his second drama workshop: I'd like to take part; I really missed out this morning.

*"Yes, you're welcome; do join in - this will be more low-key."*

Then he totally floored me! *"I'd like you to play Jesus..."* **Me?**

We looked at the scene of the woman in Simon's house (Luke 7:35-50) using the modern version *Good as New*. Yes, the drama **was** rather static compared with this morning; a dozen or so of us in the smaller setting of the lounge, where we were in competition with workmen outside who seemed determined to hack down all the shrubs between the house and the lake!

I'd have liked a little time to prepare, and looking back, I could have made much more of the part.

But even in this more formal, more constrained setting I felt that I was being drawn into the drama. To my own surprise, I had reacted as myself, spontaneously...

Peterson admitted later that he had deliberately cast *trans*-women as Jesus in both dramas to bring out his feminine side. I think Jesus's femininity is something we all suspect; transgendered people more than most, but few admit to.

After the workshop, we'd a free afternoon. I spent the time downloading this morning's pictures to my laptop and talking. Later, I had an invitation to go for a short walk. I'd have loved to, but I'd no footwear. I wish I'd put my boots in the car...

So I carried on working while people moved furniture around me in preparation for tonight's presentation. I was still working as people drifted back in. I finished by 6: time to get ready. Half an hour to dinner...

Saturday evening's traditionally "if you've brought a posh frock, wear it..." time, though it's not compulsory! I tried to look my best (and succeeded), wearing a last-minute addition to my bag and borrowed makeup! Tonight's meal was much better for me than last night's – I arrived in time, and didn't have to do-it-myself. One advantage of being at the end of the table is that you end up with all the food; extra helpings on hand. Rosie thought she'd repeat this with the dessert and brought over a large bowl of unclaimed rice pudding. I think **she** stopped at two helpings – I had three! And there was still some left! Diet, what diet?

Christina introduced *Transfigurations*, briefly describing her impressions (she's seen it five times!), then handed over to Peterson. He first described the background to *Transfigurations* (a synthesis of interviews with gender-variant people and stories of possible gender-variant characters in the Scriptures), and explained his use of the *Gospel of Thomas* as a linking narrative.

Then, after a few words of introduction, music played, and he began...

Peterson achieved his characterisations by the use of voice and gesture using just the simple props, the shawl and scarves, that he used this morning... I liked his narrator: a gentle, androgynous figure "Not male, not female; something in the middle or altogether different", dressed in white, who introduced himself as the apostles' scribe, and friend of Thomas. He carried a document: a translation of the *Gospel of Thomas*, from which he quoted from time to time.

He presented a catalogue of well-known Biblical characters, but seen in a very different light:

- ▶ the mannish Deborah boasting about her part in the downfall of General Sisera.
- ▶ King Xerxes' chief eunuch Hegai telling Queen Esther's story from a harem's-eye viewpoint.
- ▶ Esau showing disdain for his "girly" brother Jacob and undisguised contempt for Jacob's favourite, Joseph, a pretty boy "who wore a princess dress" and "wept like a girl" when reunited with his brothers many years later. Yet, said Esau ruefully, "that girly boy Joseph... saved us all."
- ▶ how Queen Candace's chief eunuch, banned from Temple worship, found acceptance in the new faith. (And so he recalled Susie's Night Office yesterday.)
- ▶ the young man who showed Jesus's disciples to the upper room where they would celebrate Passover, offering to help with his parents' preparations by unashamedly doing the women's work and offending everyone...

Peterson finished with a final transformation: a startling *Coup de Théâtre*.

His narrator quoted from *the Gospel of Thomas* again, reading from the very last verse.

He seemed to be referring to himself. Mary? just **who** was the narrator?

In silence, he started to take off the white clothes he'd been wearing; under the loose tunic, a vest, and under the vest... bound breasts!

Changing into a man's shirt and trousers, he completed the transformation.

*"I'm sorry; I didn't introduce myself properly. I used to be Mary; I'm Marcus now..."*

Shouldering his pack, he left *"to join Thomas in India..."*

As he'd done on his DVD, Peterson returned to share some of the background to his play and invited our comments and reactions. Several of us confessed how moved we'd been.

Although Peterson's use of the *Gospel of Thomas* might seem controversial, his characters were taken straight from Scripture. These accounts were imagined, yes, yet they were so close to our own experience. They were more than *"what if"*; they could very well be true.

They certainly gave me a lot to think about. Recently, I heard a series of talks on Joseph's story, and this time I saw it through very different eyes...

Mercia McMahon led tonight's Night Office, in the Chapel. She presented a series of readings interspersed with short meditations; *"enough time to bring your reflections before God, but not enough to nod off to sleep..."*

Continuing the theme of gender variance in the Bible, she looked at the "beloved Disciple" John.

From scenes at the foot of the cross (John 19:25b-27), at the last Supper (John 13:21-26), and in the garden after the Resurrection (John 20:1-8), where he seems to stand a little apart from his fellow disciples and more, perhaps, with the women, she looked at acceptance as a family member, acceptance by others in society, and acceptance of our own gender role.

Mercia finished with a blessing:

*"... we are blessed to have insight into both male and female aspects of a humanity that is created in the image of God.*

*May the God who created gender and who is in, above and beyond gender, bless you this night and for evermore. Amen."*

Traditionally, there's an opportunity to stay and meditate in silence after Saturday's Night Office, but tonight everyone left quietly, and returned to the lounge. I stayed in the empty Chapel for about ten minutes then left...

The lounge was full this evening; plenty of choices for conversation. I moved over to a quiet space, and started to talk to Mercia. I'd meant to get myself a glass of wine but by the time I got round to it there was none left. They'd drunk the lot! Rosie thought there might be some in the kitchen, and a search turned up what might well have been the last bottle! So I got my wine after all. But by the time we'd found it nearly everybody had gone to bed; they'd drifted off while we were looking, and it was only half-past eleven! There were just four others left by now. Tina recalled a similar occasion (St Katharine's, October 2002) when four of us had talked into the small hours, but that time there had been wine left... Those were the days! But I decided it was time for my bed too: I need to be up very early to pick up a friend in Nottingham and return in time for breakfast!

No sleep yet though. Tidy up and get things ready for the journey. After sorting out things it was 0100! Half-an-hour with Debussy on Radio 3 then sleep: sleep well; wake early (if I can!)

Early up! I woke suddenly at 0450: spot on! I'd arranged an alarm call at 5, but I was wide awake when it came. I dressed quickly and got away at 0530 – a relaxed

drive on empty roads, watching the low early morning cloud lift as the sun pierced through. We arrived together at my flat at 7: what timing! There was just time for a coffee (there's **always** time for a coffee) and off again at 0715...

The sun was out when we returned to Whaley Hall at 0845.

The dining room was full for once; not usual on Sunday morning. And there was actually food left! The breakfasters greeted the two latecomers: they're used to me by now!

"Good Morning" I said, "meet Amy..."

Sunday's always a busy day: breakfast over, we moved straight into the Chapel for Morning Office, led today by Elaine Sommers. She began: "*I should warn you, we're going to get hot. We're going into the desert...*"

Elaine explained that though it's a place that can spell death, the desert is also a place of great beauty. She learned about personal deserts when supporting her partner through a long time of deep depression. In a time away together they looked at "desert" passages in the Scriptures and found that God actually brings water into the desert, allowing shoots to come up; and that he will help us through those experiences. They learned through their shared experience to be able to rejoice **in** that situation: something which they might not have learned any other way.

Rosie read one of their favourite passages, from Isaiah 35:

*"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom..."*

Elaine discovered another desert when she decided to come out several years ago; they knew that God would go with them again. And he did.

She read the *Footsteps* poem to us, as a beautiful description of what going through hard times is, and as an encouragement to us all; and finished quietly with a song she had written in that first desert time: "*As I walk through the desert...*"

Now we moved back into the lounge for Sibyls Together. Amy had made friends with a gorilla she found hiding behind the organ: there aren't only bears here, it seems. Bring it along for the photo!

After a slow start, Peter took the chair. This is the first Sibyls Together I've been to under the new committee. Today's was a very thorough meeting: in a session lasting over an hour, we covered topics as diverse as future weekends, the Sibyls' book (work-in-progress) and outreach (educating the public!) If Sibyls Together isn't quite so laid-back now, it certainly has a sort of ruthless enthusiasm about it. Although it was very ably run, it somehow seemed to lack the informal warmth of Jay's "benign dictatorship". Maybe it's just me...

11 o'clock. Time to wind up our deliberations.

It's coffee time now, but there'll be none for me! I need to sort out the last bits in my room then change: I'm still in my travelling clothes from first thing this morning. It's Sunday after all, and deserves Sunday best!

Our Communion this weekend was a traditional Anglican Common Worship service led by the Rev'd John Foulds, who has presided for us before: welcome back!

There was more music than usual: four hymns, including *To God be the Glory*, *When I survey* and *Make me a channel of your Peace*. But no-one volunteered to play the organ this year (again!)

So Elaine provided the accompaniment on guitar, and later sang us another of her songs, a hymn to Creation: "*In the Beginning...*".

Elen and Peter read us a spirited dialogue from *The Song of Songs*, chapter 2. I remember reading this at my own church, both "his" and "hers" roles: challenging! But then, I've seen both sides...

We didn't have a sermon this time, but we were invited to share our own reminiscences of the weekend. And we had prayers with candles: a Sibyls tradition; an extended Peace where everyone usually manages to greet everyone else: big hugs all round; and of course we finished with *Guide me O thou Great Jehovah*: another Sibyls tradition...

The weather, fine at breakfast-time, had turned changeable. It's dry and bright at the moment. Shall we take the group photograph now? They'll hold up lunch for us won't they?

It was the usual haphazard affair: anyone who wants a photo, get it now! There didn't seem to be as many photos as in previous years. Was there an actual official photo? Is there ever?

Lunch did wait for us. It was a generous salad lunch; very informal: get your own; find a seat. Most people moved into the lounge: plenty of room to spread out. While we ate and talked I finished off sorting out my photographs...

Everyone seemed to be eager to get away, and drifted off quite soon. The house was empty by 1430. And I'd planned not to be the last to leave this time. No matter; Amy wanted to stay and explore.

We finally left at 1530 to the first rain - it had held off just long enough.

I enjoyed this weekend. It was different, certainly: reminiscent of my first few weekends. There was a lot to do; a lot of activity; but there had been some very moving moments too. And I've introduced a friend to some of the Sibyls members: she's got an insight into how we work together, and can put faces and personalities to names now.

She'll be back; I certainly shall...

### **further information**

*Transfigurations - Transgressing Gender in the Bible*

<http://www.petersontoscano.com/transfigurations>

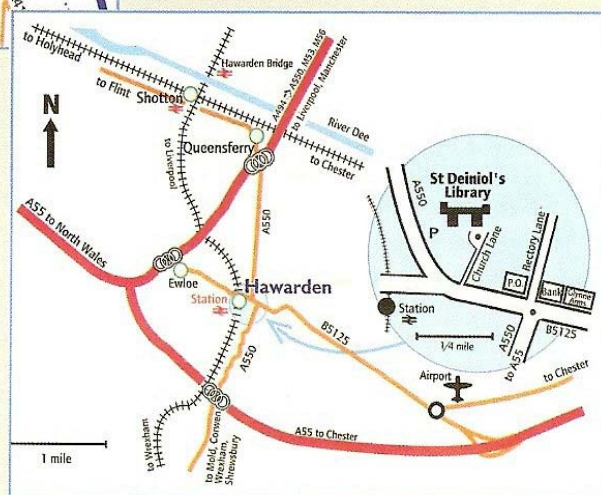
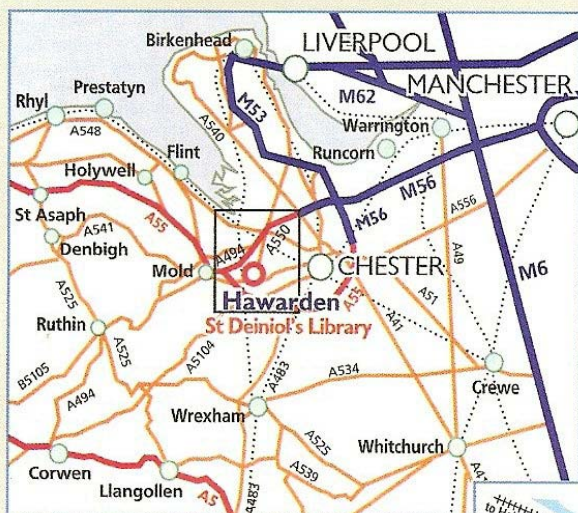
*Good as New*

John Henson, ed., *Good as New: A Radical Retelling of the Scriptures*, O Books, 2004, ISBN 1 903816 73 4

*The Gospel of Thomas*

<http://www.gospels.net/thomas>





XX

## Directions to St Deiniols' Library

This is in Hawarden (pronounced 'Harden') in Flintshire. A bus service (to Mold) operates from Chester City Centre or from the Train Station, and stops in Hawarden village. If you have an England bus pass, your journey is free because it starts and ends in England (Chester). The bus drops you in the middle of Hawarden village and it is only a few minutes walk to the Library, which is signposted.

It is possible to arrive by train, but it does involve more changes. In addition, Hawarden rail station is further from the library than is the bus stop. Taxis may be available from the station, but I wouldn't think it likely.

XX



## THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group  
for transgendered people

Mrs Susan Withers  
97 Bedford Street  
Crewe  
CW2 6JB  
Tel: 01270-250207

### WEEKEND AT St Deiniol's Library, Harwarden, near Chester 13-15 November 2009

Name .....

Required - Single/twin room (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant in room .....

Willing to share with .....

Address .....

.....

Phone No. ....

Email address .....

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Dinner, bed and breakfast (2 nights) £ 70.00 .....

Saturday including lunch and refreshments £ 30.00 .....

Sunday including lunch and refreshments £ 20.00 .....

Saturday dinner (if not staying the weekend) £ 9.50 .....

**Cheque payable to "Miss J Walmsley – The Sibyls" for =====.**

(For example: the full weekend in a standard room would cost £120.00)

If you are not planning to be at the full weekend please specify the days/times for which you are booking

.....

Any special dietary requirements? .....

Any other special needs? .....

Do you need help with transport? .....

Can you offer a lift to someone? .....

**Please send this form with your cheque to Susan Withers, address above, as soon as possible.**

**Please note that there are no en-suite rooms left.**