

SageWords

The newsletter of Sage, Oxford's Christian environmental group

September 2010

www.sageoxford.org.uk

20 years of Sage

The first edition of Sage Words I edited, in 2000, contained an article by Dave Steel on the first 10 years of Sage. It's hard to believe that we are now 10 years on, and that on 3 September 2010 Sage was 20 years old.

Our vision when we started Sage was twofold: to promote care of creation to Christians and churches locally, and to be a Christian voice in the wider environmental movement. In his article, Dave mentioned a number of ways we tried to do this, which have remained part of Sage's activity in the years since, such as leading walks, taking church services, prayer, practical conservation work, and our regular presence at the Oxford Green Fair.

Our second decade has also seen some new developments. The Sage website draws hits from all over the world and is regularly archived by the British Library. (Take a trip down memory lane at www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/target/111881!). We have developed closer links with A Rocha, who share a similar vision with us but work on an international level.

Several Sage members are involved in education and research on Christian environmental issues. We have actively collaborated with other local environmental groups, for example in the Oxfordshire Climate Alliance. Perhaps most obviously, we have a higher public profile, not least due to the Hodsons' book *Cherishing the Earth*, and through



of you"

"Hi Sage - good to see its still going strong and doing great work. Still think of you and miss you. Recognise a few faces in the group....hi to all! "

Jessica Ferguson (née Hicks)

Messages from friends

"Congratulations on Sage's 20th birthday!"

Dave Bookless (Director, A Rocha UK)

"Many congratulations and best wishes to all

George Marshall (COIN)

appearances on the local and national media.

The last of these highlights how much has changed since Sage's beginnings, when environmental concerns were regarded

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20 years of Sage *continued*

with suspicion if not outright hostility in many Christian circles. Churches are generally much more sympathetic now, although there is still plenty to be done.

Of course there have also been sad times. We have lost some good friends in the last 10 years: Maggie Stevens, Edith Clift and particularly Dave Steel, who with Caroline took the first initiative to set up Sage and whose death in 2006 hit us hard.

Dave ended his article in 2000 by

looking forward to Sage's silver jubilee. Well, we're not quite there yet and we haven't been organised enough to have a 20th anniversary party (Sage has never been hot on formal structures or timetables!), but we can announce a "coming of age" celebration for our 21st birthday, at St Clement's Church, Oxford on Sunday 4 September 2011. Let's thank God for all that Sage has meant over the last 20 years, and look to Him to guide us on the way ahead.

Karl Wallendzszus

Sage's Martin Hodson speaks on GM crops at House of Commons

I have the Church of Scotland to blame for me speaking at the House of Commons on GM Crops! The Associate Parliamentary Food & Health Forum (FHF) found the "balanced" material on the Church of Scotland web site when searching speakers. As they are based a long way from London they contacted me, and so it was that I ended up speaking on "Are GM crops necessary to secure global food supplies at affordable prices?" at the summer conference *GM Crops and Food Security 2010-2050* put on by the FHF at the House of Commons on 21 July.

Having negotiated the House of Commons security we all met up at the Jubilee Room just off Westminster Hall where all the tourists were queuing to go in and see the debates. The meeting was chaired by Lord Rea with five speakers, the first of whom, Dr Michael Antoniou (King's College, London), said that he was in favour of GM technology, but was not at all in favour of releasing GM organisms to the environment: "it is now technically and conceptually flawed". He was also concerned that the crops already released were causing problems in the human diet. This was a controversial start to put it mildly!

I was the second speaker, and was specifically asked to give a balanced presentation on my topic. You can judge whether I achieved this at

www.agriculture-theology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/GMcropsFHF2010.pdf

Following me was Professor Brian Wynne (University of Lancaster) who had recently made the newspapers for resigning from the Food Standards Agency as he "felt it focused too much on GM and not enough on food security". Another GM sceptic! Hilary Benn MP, the former Minister at DEFRA, was next up, and attempted a balanced presentation - being a non-scientist he had to rely on what his advisors told him. Finally, Sir Gordon Conway (Imperial College, London) gave the only really pro-GM presentation of the afternoon "If GM crops are so awful, why are so many farmers growing them?"

I was quite surprised by the afternoon as it was far less positive about the use of GM crops than I had expected. Meanwhile in the European Parliament it looks like decisions on growing GM crops will soon be devolved down to individual member states. GM grape vines in France have been trashed by environmental activists. And one of the worst fears of growing GM crops, the escape of genes into related weeds, has been confirmed in the States. I have a feeling that this topic is about to rise up the UK agenda again.

Full reports and PowerPoints from the meeting are available at www.fhf.org.uk/meet

Martin Hodson

New nature trail at Aston Rowant

Discover the first signs of autumn on Aston Rowant NNR's new self guided nature trail! The trail changes seasonally and with the first signs of autumn on the way, now is a great time to try it out! Be



the first to spot blackberries and take the challenge of finding your way around the exciting 3km route. Watch Red Kites soar and Kestrels hover as you look for evidence of mice and voles left on this year's hazel nuts.

The trail is a great adventure for adults and children alike, with lots of information about what can be seen on this stunning wildlife site, as well as Children's Challenges at every stopping point. The start can be found at the entrance to the site on the south side of the nature reserve, opposite Cowleaze Wood Car Park. For more information, lantern walk bookings, or to give us feedback call the reserve office on 01844 351833 or email jenny.crook@naturalengland.org.uk.

Groups unite for Big Climate Connection



The Stop Climate Chaos Coalition is calling for people across the UK to connect with others in their communities on 5-6 November to lobby their MPs. With supporters from more than 100 organisations coming together for the Big Climate Connection, the event aims to show MPs that people from all walks of life are calling for action on climate change.

Lobbying simply means meeting your MP, explaining your views, and asking him or her to act on them. MPs often say that face to face meetings with their constituents is one of the things that has the most impact on them.

The lobby happens three weeks before the UN Climate Talks in Cancun, Mexico, and a new UK Energy Bill will be before Parliament in November, so it will be a key time for climate politics.

It is also a great opportunity to raise local climate-related issues, and local groups in the Oxfordshire Climate Alliance are planning to take part. You can find out more at www.stopclimatechaos.org.

Hello and goodbyes at Sage barbecues

There were two Sage barbecues over the summer, both at the Hodsons' house in Haddenham. The first was rain affected, but we had a nice vegetarian indoor barbecue. Sadly, we said goodbye to Susie,



who has moved to Scotland, and Kaihsu, who with Anna has moved to Helsinki, Finland.

Kaihsu has just started his new job at the European Chemicals Agency, and they are enjoying sauna, rye bread, and trams in Helsinki. They will return to Oxford briefly next year to get married.

For the second and larger event, the British weather relented, and we were able to have an outside barbecue. We had four of the original members who were present at the first Sage meeting in September 1990, and welcomed a new member, Clare's dog Daisy. As well as enjoying food and fellowship, we started planning for the autumn and further ahead.

Sage Diary

- Saturday 9 October:** Sage circular walk, Swinbrook. Approximately 1 - 2 hours, followed by refreshments at the Swan Inn. A beautiful walk in the Cotswolds with views across the Windrush Valley. Meet at the Village Green in Swinbrook at 2.00pm. Please contact Caroline Steel (01865 432600 or caroline.steel@ntlworld.com) if you need a lift.
- Tuesday 12 October:** Sage prayer meeting, 2.00 - 3.30pm, 42 Morrell Avenue. Contact Clare Newgass on 01865 242588 or clarenewgass@5frogs.eclipse.co.uk.
- Friday 5 - Saturday 6 November:** Big Climate Connection organised by Stop Climate Chaos. See article inside and www.stopclimatechaos.org.
- Tuesday 9 November:** Sage prayer meeting, 2.00 - 3.30pm, 150 Leiden Road. Contact Caroline Steel on 01865 432600 or caroline.steel@ntlworld.com.
- Friday 26 November:** Sage Winter Social, from 6.30pm, 42 Morrell Avenue. Bring & share meal (a piece of wood for the burner also welcome). Contact: Clare Newgass on 01865 242588 or clarenewgass@5frogs.eclipse.co.uk.
- Saturday 11 December:** Winter Green Fair, 10.30am - 4.30pm, Oxford Town Hall. As usual, volunteers for the Sage stall are needed. If you can help, please contact info@sageoxford.org.uk.
- Tuesday 14 December:** Sage prayer meeting, 2.00 - 3.30pm, 70 St Leonard's Road, Headington. Contact Averil Stedeford on 01865 762383.
- Saturday 1 January 2011:** Sage New Year Day walk. Meet at 150 Leiden Road for hot drinks at 11.00am, followed by a circular walk around Denton and Cuddesdon. Please bring a packed lunch. Back to Leiden Road for an early hot supper. Contact Caroline Steel (01865 432600 or caroline.steel@ntlworld.com) or Clare Newgass (01865 242588 or clarenewgass@5frogs.eclipse.co.uk).
- Tuesday 11 January:** Sage prayer meeting, 2.00 - 3.30pm, 17 Cameron Avenue, Abingdon (off Radley Road). Contact Richard Riggs on 01235 521931 or richard.riggs@physics.org.
- Sunday 4 September 2011:** Sage 21st birthday service, 6.30pm, St Clement's Church, Oxford. More details a little nearer the time!

Sage relies on donations from supporters to fund its work.

If you would like to contribute, please send a cheque payable to Sage to:
Karl Wallendszus, Sage Treasurer, 44 Campbell Road, Oxford OX4 3PG.
