

What Happened with the Blake Cottage Appeal

Chapter X



BEING BACK TO WORK at the Blake Society and the appeal was not the happiest of affairs. I had been left bruised and exhausted by the whole ordeal described in the previous chapters. On 19 October I wrote to fellow Trustee Mr Rod Tweedy, who was being supportive, since, as the following correspondence shows, he knew what had happened, had seen the harm done. His support though was invariably in private. He never once voiced his concerns to the Committee, which means that he not only saw what was going on: he also let it happen.

. . . Sorry I did not write about that [a project] yesterday... I have been catching up with all I was not allowed to do for the campaign for over a month, plus the BS Secretarial tasks that were in suspense... overwhelmed a bit by that [. . .].

I fear all this issue about the campaign, the Blake Society and Tim has left me very fragile, I truly feel in after-shock mood, very bruised. But I meditate, have great moments of poise and concentration, rocked a bit by anguish, a fear of I do not know what (I think just a reflection of the fear of all these weeks), grief... Oh well! Human life.

His response:

I'm sorry to hear that you're feeling so shell-shocked, although I guess that's only natural given the extraordinary things you've had to deal with and come through this year. [. . .] But I hope the worst is past - and the moments of poise will flower!

I wrote back on 21 October. I reproduce part of our correspondence because it shows not only that Mr Tweedy was fully aware of what was happening and that he found it wrong; it is also proof that I had gone back to work with absolute good will, and that Mr Tweedy could not have failed to notice:

. . . Shell-shocked is the word. It is far from being over, and the harm keeps on festering out there. If I look from outside I even laugh, it is as if someone were making a film about Blake and how within an hypothetical Blake Society the four Zoas are engaged in lethal battle, unable to integrate themselves, people's Spectres and states of error smearing everything they can with childish glee, and the trailer leaves us with the question, Will Albion ever awake? I just hope it's not a trilogy...

But I am back to work and I will concentrate on that, trying to make things happen. Having said that, I don't have much hopes for the War event anymore, that was another black hole, too much time was wasted at the beginning, there was little unity and it all came from similar I guess subconscious sources, so how can we save the event now, I don't know. It may end up being a rather more intimate affair, a conversation with [. . .], but I wanted very much for us to have Eternal Delight. I can't think of any musician, unless he/she were a very close friend, who would take us seriously if we invited them now.

The lessons to be learnt of course are vaster, deeper. These days I am taking things slowly (within, on the outside I have a gruelling deadline!) -- finding my pain, learning to stay with it, understanding that there are things that hurt, and things that anger me and both my anger and hurt are legitimate, yet the harm is not, I still can reject the harm, I still can refuse to accept the harm pointed in my direction. The Buddha again, his not accepting the gifts of aggression. [. . .] Human life is so very strange, and we tend to be such idiots, forgetting that we're all going to die, stubbornly believing this is a playground where we only play, break toys and have punch-ups.

Mr Tweedy responded:

[. . .]

Yes, you're right - those Four Zoas are everywhere, dissociated and struggling, even in the Blake Society. [. . .] A film about the Blake Society would be sort of wonderful! 'Part Three: The Return of Albion'!!

I know, the War event seems to be as far away as ever, even though its getting closer. [. . .] The Buddha sounds very helpful in managing the anger and the pain. Perhaps they should name a new level after you, after all the trials and tribulations this year! Maybe the one after Arahāt. [. . .] **It's a small miracle that you have got through all these dreadful things this year, and are still in the committee, and developing Blake's vision so ... as Luis said, perhaps miracles do happen, are happening.**

The conversation continued and on 23 October I let Mr Tweedy know that unethical actions had continued, referring to Ms Morgan's infamous article mentioned in previous chapters. I also told him just how threatened I felt:

When I am at my best, I believe the miracle can be worked in this awful situation in the Blake Society -- despite the harm still being done, even on the day we signed our "Treaty of Versailles". Then I can see that what is cunning and looks like sheer evil, is in fact rather pitiful, and the release of the moments when I manage not to get stuck there, go on working and caring for the work we do, to disentangle myself from the harm, is a blessing in itself.

But it is not easy, there are many moments of fear and grief, the sense of threat --that within the Blake Society there are people trying to harm me as much as they can. [. . .] Even having been able to stay in the Committee in spite of all this awfulness and being concentrated again in the campaign, hoping the whole project can still be picked up from the mire in which it has been submerged and returned to its original purpose of celebrating Blake, to create a space of respite and creation for others, with no thought of personal gain or intrigues, is as you say a small miracle.

But there also seems to be no end to the grief and exhaustion [. . .]. So can the miracle be worked in such a space? [. . .] Every single day I know that I am learning. But, I am learning the only way you can, and your email expresses it well: through getting through the suffering, staying with the grief and the fear when they are there and accompanying them into more luminous places, with infinite patience. Last night I could not sleep at all, so I just stayed very still, acknowledging the fear, the grief, then the anxiety with which I woke up this morning, trying to let it all dissolve into the day, into the knowledge that this too will pass [. . .] And yes, let's hope for that film where Albion says "I'll be back".

As for the war event, I hope that whatever we do it at least symbolically cleanses up some of our very enslaved energy within the BS, let's decide this week. What was your idea about music?

Mr Tweedy, who succeeded me as Secretary, did leave the Committee in 2016, because of his disapproval of how the Cottage appeal was handled, but has refused to speak out and is now very angry because I'm doing that myself. He says that he's "not an accuser"...

On 19 October I wrote to Mr Heath, to catch up both on secretarial and Cottage matters, as he continued ignoring the artists that I had contacted and had offered to create rewards for the crowdfunding appeal:

- Please let me know how we're to proceed about the rewards of [. . .]-they have the link but can write at any moment asking why their rewards are not mentioned, particularly as we're so close to the date we are announcing as the end of the campaign.

Mr Heath gave me instructions for my secretarial work but didn't answer that question, so on 20 October I updated him about my work (we were doing that now on a daily basis, given the pressure of time – ten days to gather the funds), then asked again:

I wait for your response then regarding the campaign.

He responded acknowledging the files I had sent, mentioned in a previous chapter, with my edits both to the Indiegogo page and the final version of our webpage, that he accepted:

I answered back:

Thank you for incorporating my suggestions and for amendments, it is reading well I think. I still find the engine of creativity and the artifacts rather Urizenic, but I abide by your decision...

I have tried to enter Wordpress to add the illustrations to the blog and upload the Tyger video but I can't access it. Has the password changed? [. . .] I'll try tomorrow again, too tired now but if there's a new password let me know.

So what do we do with [. . .] I don't know if I'm making myself clear, but they accepted an invitation to stay in the Cottage and offer what they do as rewards. They were invited after we'd agreed we'd invite artists for this. So if we have already rewards with named individuals, and rewards saying that we will invite an unnamed photographer and a designer, why not rewards with named individuals who have actually accepted to stay and create a reward?

I understand what you're saying in general but it does not answer my question, or theirs if they ask why they're not being mentioned. [. . .] has a big following among younger people and could spread the word a lot. [. . .] has his fans too. Let's make them £25 then but let's mention them, they are all talented people who know Blake and have offered their work quite enthusiastically, and we have been using their name.

[. . .] As I understand it, and that is genuinely at the core of this project since we conceived it, it is true generosity and cooperation of people who love Blake that will make it happen. Time is running so they should be included now.

Let's clarify tomorrow, I don't know what you mean by "a promise too far".

I asked him again on 21 October. The campaign would be over in 9 days and I found it rude not to mention people who had responded promptly and generously:

Please let me know your thoughts on the rewards issue, it is important.

By then, it was clear that our annual lecture, the "War is Energy Enslav'd" event, might not happen. Mr Heath had boycotted it at the beginning of the year, as stated in an earlier chapter, "forbidding" Mr Tweedy and me to work on it for a month, after Mr Eliot, who was not part of the team, had interfered. Now Mr Heath had continued on rejecting ideas Mr Tweedy and I proposed to save it, and on disparaging the speaker I had invited and who had promptly accepted (the whole Committee had agreed on my inviting him in an early meeting).

Around that time, Mrs Heather Howell generously extended our deadline to keep our legal option to buy the Cottage to 20 November.

On 26 October Mr Heath called me to announce that he had invited what I considered thoroughly inappropriate guests for the war event (a commercial band that often supported the military). It would have been I think quite disgraceful had it happened; he had been reckless in inviting them without consulting the team, and we had therefore another problem. I was at the time

organizing also the event to follow our AGM in January, with a Buddhist poet with a profound knowledge of Blake that I had invited. We had invited him to a conversation with us in South Molton Street prior to the event. I wrote to the Chair to update him on this and to consult about our ongoing work with the Cottage. The email, one among many, may be an example for the reader of the thoroughness and good will with which I was trying to follow up our work for the appeal:

• I saw [. . .] yesterday; he's keen on visiting SMS

Campaign

- I've tidied up the entry in our webpage about [. . .] as it was a bit dishevelled.
- I may be asking something very stupid, but have we kept [. . .] updated about the campaign? His advice with his crowdfunding experience might come handy at this stage.
- I hope the list of the older contacts you and Henry had was useful; follow-ups I think matter.
- Is [. . .] still totally unhelpful?
- Do you know anyone at the National Portrait Gallery? As they have Blake's portrait and mask, they might offer some help.
- Let me know your views about announcing these days the extension of the deadline, otherwise I fear people may feel discouraged to see we're not anywhere near so close to the first deadline.
- We need I think a boost from big names. What about more films with famous people supporting the campaign? I know [. . .] is not well... might it be inconsiderate to ask him to do this for us? I have sent the link to the Morgan Library and asked them to pass it on to Jeremy Irons and somehow explore if he'd be willing to support the campaign this way (as he has read Blake for them).
- Did [. . .] ever get back to you? She'd be a good avenue I think to contact Johnny Depp, Tilda Swinton, Jim Jarmusch...
- New rewards make news, so perhaps mid-week we could announce the Visionary Heads; if [. . .] has not confirmed by then we could add his name when/if he does; we might add the British Museum's books for the first 4 people to book for this. If not let's think of other ways to offer them. (I have them now.)
- Might it help if I prepare for the end of the first deadline on the 31st, and "launch" of the second one, a text around Blake's years in Felpham? (I've been making notes).
- Your views on the Thank you card?
- Finally, if there is anything urgent for me to do in the post you picked up, or if you want the HLF letter, I have an appointment at the Royal Free tomorrow at 12, they usually don't take that long so I can text you when I'm out.

Good night.

Adriana

PS. Meant no offense with my comments re the [. . .] band; we've all suggested unsuitable things as desperate solutions. I just thought they would really bring the level of whatever we do down. Sorry if my wording was tactless.

Mr Heath responded to a few points. I kept on updating him and asking him about what he hadn't answered. I had to keep on reminding him to update the Indiegogo page, since I still was denied access to its administration. (Ms Morgan had of course fled the scene ages before).

Let me know your thoughts about the other points when you have time, and what the strategy will be regarding the end of the first deadline. [. . .]

He didn't have time. As we have seen in Chapter VIII, he was busy setting up the Blake Cottage Trust all by himself, with his lawyers standing in for him, something he achieved on 30 October. He must have felt invigorated by it to start the low-intensity bullying that would follow in email discussions with the Committee. Ms Morgan and Mr Eliot, as we will see, picked on the opportunity with glee.

On 6 November, we didn't know if the guests he'd invited for the Annual Lecture had confirmed yet. I wrote to him about that and to tell him of my trip to Felpham with a journalist – the only time I ever visited Blake's Cottage:

It's worrying. What do we do now?

A decision should be made tomorrow really, so that we can send the newsletter. Even to cancel we cannot leave it for the last minute. Let me know tomorrow what would be the plan.

I'm quite tired, it's been a long day so I cannot think of other possible solutions now, apart perhaps from still trying to do something in December if this is cancelled...

As you know I was in the Cottage today.

I think I managed to convey to [. . .] the urgency of the piece, the importance that it is read in the USA, the importance of Blake not only for Britain but for the world. [. . .]

The taxi driver who took us to and from Felpham/Chichester was very keen on hearing the story about Blake, very moved. He has lived in Felpham for 20 years and says people call the Cottage "the fairy house" because everybody knows that Blake had visions, and he said everybody in Felpham would be delighted to know we're trying to keep it for the nation.

It is obvious that people in the area love Blake (even those who know him little), that what he represents is truly part of people's lives and history in the mysterious ways these things develop --you don't need to have read Blake in order to have already been touched by him. His art and poetry have brought transformation for many people and those people on their turn have transformed little by little their lives and world as well and suddenly you have a little house, a little village, like a centre of that power or energy, a centre for transformation --of human spirit, and of the way we see the landscape and everything around once touched by at least the awareness that such a thing is possible. And the way we see the world, as we know, transforms the world.

So I really hope we do succeed. When you have time let me know what you think about the points I mentioned in my email yesterday. [. . .]

So perhaps, now that we'll have a piece in the *New York Times*, we may offer another reward along the lines I had suggested earlier: a patch of wild flowers that bears the name of adonor, or some garden feature referring to Milton's spirit descending in the garden.

Let me know your views and how things are developing regarding the chances of bigger donations, what is there to be done. There isn't much time left so we should really join efforts and hope that we can make this possible --to leave the door between the Cottage and the world open, that's what really matters.

Rather than responding to me, with an answer about my specific points regarding the appeal, Mr Heath answered with copy to the Committee, suggesting we cancelled the annual lecture, disparaging once again my initial guest, who had committed himself from the outset, patiently waited through all our indecisions, and was the founder of an organisation of much more import than the Blake Society. Mr Tweedy and I had accompanied him some weeks earlier to visit the Blake rooms at the Tate and afterwards we held one of the most insightful conversations around Blake's art that I've ever had:

Thank you for your email.

The War event needs to be decided this morning, as you indicated.

Without the band [. . .], which would cost £2,000 in lighting and sound hire, without publicity, without musicians or a crowd-pulling name or an expert speaker on William Blake's interpretation of War, we are left with the support of the anti-war protest movement, which however noble, is a pale representation of Blake's vision, and so I believe it's difficult to justify holding an event in the Church of St James.

I am copying this to the committee, and then, if no miracle appears, I will send out the November newsletter cancelling the event at lunchtime. [. . .] My view from the Chair, is that we should not attempt to reinvent this event for December [. . .] However this is a decision for the Committee as a whole.

Everyone thanks You, Rod, Henry and George for your valiant effort.

A discussion followed among us all in the Committee. This was the first time that we heard again from Ms Morgan since the awful episode caused by her involvement in the Cottage appeal, and indeed the first I heard from her since I had sent her the document in which I had done for her what was supposed to be her job. She intervened with a couple of lines parroting the Chair. Incredibly, no one in the Committee said anything like “Oh there you are! We were wondering what had become of you. Do you have anything to say to us?”. Nothing whatsoever. Instead, they picked up the dialogue with her, as if nothing at all had happened. Of course, no one was asking me either how things were going, no one thought it necessary to monitor whether if the Chair was honouring the need for transparency. The Committee was all too happy that I had returned to work so that they could forget that there were any troubles. I felt dejected, and alone. That Committee of jellyfish Trustees had left again the weight of steering the Cottage into safety on my shoulders, while burying their little heads in the sand.

Mr Eliot appeared too on 7 November, of course backing the Chair’s decision and making some remarks about the lessons we had to learn that were entirely out of place, with a misguided sense of entitlement, given his previous interference in a project that he had nothing to do with in the first place. The discussion around the Annual Lecture was in fact bringing to the fore the functioning of the Chair’s exercise of power, and how Ms Morgan and Mr Eliot were all too ready to be the cogs in the machine.

His email made me angry. It also angered Mr Tweedy, who responded:

Hi Henry/All,

[. . .] Yes - what a pity the November event had to be cancelled, especially as it will deprive our members of engaging with [. . .], who are the most Blakean organisation I know. Perhaps there'll be an opportunity for a future event, as I think they're at the epicentre of the current awakening.

With regard to learning lessons, for me the main one is the need for far more communication and transparency, as indeed we were discussing at our last committee meeting.

Best wishes,
Rod

He did have some courage then: to remind the Committee that something serious had just happened since our last meeting, and that there were issues that the Committee needed to address. I wrote to Mr Tweedy:

[. . .] I was a bit incensed by Henry's email, his account of the lessons we had to learn. Maybe he really was never aware of the problems the project had from the beginning, the lack of communication, waste of time, etc. But perhaps I feel it deeper because I had conceived the project and what I was hoping for us to create mattered to me a lot.

I was about to answer expressing which were the real lessons I think we had to learn from this and then I thought... what for? What is there to be gained? I am leaving anyway, I'll soon be far away from all this frustration. So I did what I do when I receive emails that I consider are not worth my trouble: I deleted it.

[. . .] God, I am *still* so sad! I guess it's the onset of winter too.

I was wondering how did you take the cancellation, for you put so much of your heart yourself on this project.

But I think life has a kind of justice: the energy behind this project was all wrong almost from the beginning, so perhaps we had no right to do it at all.

He responded on 8 November. He clearly wasn't happy with the place that the Blake Society had become. His appreciation for what I was doing regarding the Cottage appeal is manifest in his comments about the article I had recently written for the blog:

Hi Adriana,

[. . .] It will be lovely to meet up tomorrow and perhaps we can discuss more of this in person. [. . .] I also wanted to say how much I enjoyed your 'The Gate is Open' piece. I thought it was absolutely terrific - by far the best account of Blake's time in Felpham that I've read. Ackroyd etc records the nuts and bolts of what happened there but you really reveal what it meant, and what it was like for him to be there - both, as you say, a place of trial and of sanctuary - and I thought there was so much of you in your writing, which was very moving.

I was looking at the 'analytics' of the BS website (how many visits etc) and apart from the Cottage Campaign page your piece was the most viewed of all.

[. . .]

I'm sorry you are feeling so sad, though I understand more and more why. [. . .] I'm also very sorry that the November event didn't happen as it was such a wonderful, beautiful, daring idea of yours, and it hurts me that we didn't manage to realise it this year. I do have thoughts about another event next year, perhaps with one of the people you put forward - [. . .] - but I'm not sure any more that I want the BS directly involved in it. Perhaps we can talk about this tomorrow. [. . .]

Maybe something good will happen unexpected!

He also asked me what the process for nomination for the following year was. It is important to note this, as Mr Tweedy's nomination as Secretary fairly soon would be everything but straightforward. This was my response:

Thank you for your email, and for what you say about my piece on Blake and Felpham. Yes, there is a lot of me in it, I do believe fiercely that Blake is not only the obvious genius he is as a poet and an artist, but also that his example lies in the way he lived his life, in the resilience and courage with which he held on to this vision and went through his trials.

[. . .] On Thursday at the Cottage with the journalist I felt this so powerfully, that that garden is really where Milton descended and his and Blake's and Los's spirits are still there, and that is why it is so important to keep the Cottage... and my heart breaks because I think that just as with the War event, only a miracle will do it now, and we could have avoided this, lots of precious time, energy, good will and generosity were wasted.

[. . .] As the end of my stay in the Blake Society comes near I feel more and more how everything I have done there has been squandered and sacrificed to rather dark, and/or pitiful forces indeed (after all they tend to be the same, and the line between evil and sheer stupidity and impotence tends to be rather thin); [. . .] Some of the things that have happened in the BS since I've known it are of the most unBlakean nature imaginable, Blake would be sickened, and we should be ashamed. [. . .]

But yes, the pain, the grief, is enormous. Last night I read the first emails I sent to Tim regarding the War event, the night he invited me to the Spencer exhibition... it was very sad to read them. Again, there was an ideal there that could have fructified.

I am grateful for the message you sent in response to Henry's: clear, firm, composed, and courageous because I gather by now most people in the Committee just want to pretend, believe, that what happened in our last meeting never happened. And I am glad you brought to the fore the importance of [. . .], that have been so unfairly dismissed in the Society. [. . .]

You ask me about when our year in the Committee ends. We have to nominate ourselves (in an email to me, copy to Tim if you want) in December before the holidays.[. . .]

Yes, let's talk about this tomorrow, I think it's important. I am very sad that there have been so many disappointments for the new Trustees this year --a year that had started full of energy and hope and wonderful projects. There are indeed things in the Society that are not right at all.

Then again, it does an enormous lot to keep Blake's legacy alive, our members love it, they *do* get things that are worth receiving and experiencing from the Society. Tim is responsible for most of the harm done, yet again, without him the Society would simply not exist and I am, still, full of admiration, respect and gratitude for the luminous side of his work and his enormous generosity. If anything, part of my grief in these past months, or most of my stay in the Society actually, has to do with seeing how senselessly he can destroy the very things he loves the most.

My leaving the Society will be a huge loss, I am aware of that, but it will also clear the air and will release tension. You have been on the receiving end of some injustice simply by being working in a project with me --that won't happen after I'm gone, and you are not likely to experience any more of Tim's Spectre because you are lucky enough not to be part of his love life, :) which is the problem here....

So do think about it, do bear in mind of course what has been painful and disappointing but don't let it be the only lens through which you see the Society, because there is much more to it than its dark side.

I don't think the above thoughts are those of someone embittered or trying to harm the Blake Society. All the while I tried to be fair and objective, and no one in the Committee, including those who, as Mr Tweedy, have now left, can pretend it was otherwise.

On 8 November I updated the Chair. We had 20 days to meet the second deadline to acquire the Cottage. We didn't believe the Howell family would extend it again if we missed it. There were many points, questions, issues that needed his approval. I won't tire the reader with all those points, but will keep some that are relevant:

- Do you know anyone at the Ashmolean to whom we can ask to add info about the Cottage appeal in their press releases and webpage prior to the opening of their exhibition? Michael Phillips could do that! I've sent them the link but I don't know anyone personally.
- I know also that Philip Pullman is not being responsive, but I wonder if you ever asked him directly about giving a donation. Or at least insist on a video supporting the project. We may gently let him know how important it is that our President endorses the project in a more visible way. A phone call rather than an email? [. . .] I don't know about you but, what with the Winter weather and the cancellation of the War event, it seems easy to be fearful. Yet we still have time and it is so obvious how much people want this to happen, just by reading their messages accompanying the donations, that we have to be confident.

I was trying for us to engage with Prof Phillips so that the exhibition at the Ashmolean and the accompanying festival supported the appeal. After all, he had been invited to be part of our consortium. Mr Heath never responded to this, and made sure, as mentioned in previous chapters, to exclude me from any communication that he had with Prof Phillips. Regarding our President, Mr Philip Pullman, he thought differently. He hadn't succeeded in engaging him to support our efforts more visibly, so he gave me his phone number and asked me to call him – one the many signs that show how much the Chair trusted me. This was his email:

Dear Adriana,

I have asked Philip three times in a subtle way to support the project. He just ignores the emails.

So please do phone him up and ask him directly to make a donation and show leadership as our President.

Thank you.

Tim

I called Mr Pullman and, as we will see later, it resulted in a generous donation and in a great deal of public support for the Cottage appeal. The reason why he hadn't been easy to contact was in

fact health related, so I was very grateful for his response. When I realized, a year later, what Mr Heath had done, appropriating the Cottage with such overwhelming lack of ethics, and that some people in Felpham were actually resenting Mr Pullman and Mr Gaiman regarding the injustice done to them, because they were being mentioned in the press, I was haunted by this donation and support, for which I felt in part responsible; I was distressed by the unfairness of betraying his generosity and risking his reputation because of Mr Heath's actions. In due time in this testimony we will see that I shouldn't have worried, since Mr Pullman doesn't seem to worry at all about whether if an organisation he publicly supports has any principles or not (I also refer the reader to my reflections on famous supporters in chapter V).

For the time being, Mr Heath and I kept on working on the appeal. The amount of work was enormous, impossible to enumerate here. And though in the correspondence exchanged with the whole Committee Mr Heath continued his low-intensity bullying, in keeping with his taste for contraries, our work for the appeal was at last running smoothly. The enthusiasm was simply too much to be dampened by whatever had happened before. We kept coordinating efforts on a daily basis. In one of my emails on 9 November I asked again:

- What have you thought about telling Michael Phillips to promote the campaign on the run to the Ashmolean exhibition? If he could engage the other curator in that sense as well it would be great.

He didn't respond to that. We had several phone conversations about the Cottage in which Mr Heath sounded happy, was kind and considerate, as if nothing of the hell we had gone through a couple of months before had taken place, yet at the very same time I could receive somewhat curt emails from him such as the following:

Dear Adriana,

Could I remind please to copy me into all letters that you write.

Since I was sending hundreds of emails, I responded:

Yes, I'll do that if you want. I have not been doing it simply because of the sheer amount of emails I'm sending --I can send you a list if you want, they are many and I thought I'd be overwhelming your inbox, which must be pretty jammed already. Many of the letters are quite similar of course with very little changes mentioning the name of the association addressed, a particular interest they may have, etc.

If you want to read past emails they are all here.

I can't possibly include here all the work emails that we were exchanging during those days. They reflected though the urgency, the enthusiasm and a rather smooth work dynamics. In one of them, on 13 November, I asked, since, as I have said before, he never allowed me access to the administration of the Indiegogo page:

I would like to see the comments people are leaving in Indiegogo. Only 3 can be read accessing it from outside.

Do they throw light on how the campaign is reaching people?

On 18 November I reminded him of the updates the Indiegogo needed, as I had been doing on a regular basis those days. I had been trying to tell him as gently as possible that I needed access to both

our Just Giving and Indiegogo pages. Not only was I lacking access to the records of all the money we received through online donations, since the webpage didn't show all the amounts: I had no way whatsoever to know what we had been receiving through mobile phones. I knew I had to be most tactful: since Ms Morgan had had access to those accounts, and that was probably still the case despite our "negotiation process" (I think it's most likely that is the case even now), I knew that if I challenged him directly he'd lock down, and the appeal would be plunged into hell again:

I don't know if once the Indiegogo campaign closes we have no more access to the page, so it would be important that before it's closed we change the heading saying how much we have raised but also that the campaign is still on and referring them to our webpage.

Not everybody will have the dates as clear as us, some people may still visit directly the indiegogo page and may be put off if they see it's finished, so it would be good to keep everybody informed on all fronts. What do you think?

And again:

. . . Also, have any of those who endorse us made any concrete £ contribution that we can trace in the Just Giving or Indiegogo records?

On 19 November, one of the several points in a work email was the following (its relevance will become clear later):

I've also been thinking that one of our problems is we never managed to reach the big names who would have made such a difference for the campaign, and if we could still get them now, for next week or even for the beginning of December, it would help as they'd not only spread the word but also might make donations themselves. We have a long list of people we could approach already. [. . .] I asked before if we have in our Indiegogo or Just Giving records any information that may us help track who of the big names who endorse us has actually given any money. I think we might approach our patron Neil Gaiman for instance, gently suggesting more support which might be either in £ or simply by being more vocal about this. Let me know if any help is needed with changes to the webpage tomorrow and any new strategy you think we can start now. Let's not lose hope.

By then, in a further gesture of patience and generosity, Mrs Howell had extended again the deadline for our legal option to buy to 12 December. We decided though to make it publicly 28 November (Blake's birthday), since December would find people too distracted with Christmas.

In a later email I asked again, regarding one of our patrons:

Would approaching Neil Gaiman again be advisable?

In a working email of 24 November, I kept on asking information about our Just Giving account. We were also preparing our Blake Society November event, on Blake's birthday precisely. We were aiming at spreading the word as much as possible so that the Cottage would be, so to speak, our birthday present. I got carried away and thought of ordering a "Blake cake", with an "Infant Joy" icing. I was happy again, focused on the appeal, working quite clearly with absolute good will:

- Donations through Just Giving are getting bigger! How are we doing? (There are some with the amount hidden so I can't see it).
- I've sent over 50 press releases. A few people have acknowledged receipt --few but enthusiastic. Have we started receiving anything over the mobile?
- We can repeat the operation tomorrow or Wednesday with the birthday idea. [. . .]
- Should I try to see if we're still on time to order a Blake cake?

On 24 November he responded to my question about Just Giving:

We have raised £85,188 - though this figure does not take into account the deductions to be made by the fundraising operators.

For all my questions about our Indiegogo and Just Giving accounts, I only had his word to go by. But I was trying to trust... or, more accurately, I was in fact trusting, again. We were clearly working in a spirit of cooperation, updating our webpage every single day, having fun with the press releases (they can be found in the Documents section in this webpage: <https://blakecottage.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/press-release-blake-cottage-21-11-14.pdf> and <https://blakecottage.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/press-release-blakes-birthday.pdf>), and excited about the chance for the appeal to succeed. During a phone call I proposed to him to invite to the consortium the Barenboim Said Foundation; he agreed that it was a good idea. We talked about young musicians and composers from war-torn countries finding respite in Blake's Cottage to create beauty, to spread further the message of music as peace. These were the standards of what I thought would be possible to do in the Cottage; the kind of ideal I had for it, and the Chair seemed to share it.

How could he go through the motions of so much work and enthusiasm and hope, when less than a month before he had already set up the Blake Cottage Trust hiding from all of us, I truly don't know.

Then on 26 November he sent me an email titled "PR list":

Dear Adriana,
Could you please send me the list of people who have been sent the Press Release.
Thank you
Tim

And there I did feel a twinge of mistrust. It was my contacts list that he was asking for. What did he want it for? Was it possible that he wanted my contacts because he'd try, again, to bully me out of the campaign? I decided, again, to trust. I thought that work without trust was poisoned work, in fact impossible. We were going ahead in such good spirits... so I sent him the wretched list, all six pages of it. As seen in a previous chapter, the Blake Society would make good use of it in the future.

Meanwhile, there were some reasons for confusion among the Trustees. Our dysfunctional Committee hadn't been able to respect any single agreement as to whether we should charge entrance to our events to non-members. The Chair kept on changing instructions every month. On 26 November Mrs Christina Vinall wrote to me:

I'll be there to see you and help if you need it... but am very confused over this. [. . .]
All I'd prefer is one position on this as lack of fairness upsets people. Plus what do we offer to members - and why should they pay their membership fee... But I really don't know the answer.

I responded:

[. . .] Yes, I agree with you entirely, we need consistency and also to offer something special to members. I'm sorry I cannot really go back to our minutes now to see what was our final decision, I am truly truly overwhelmed with work with the campaign and more, but maybe Antony remembers?

Mrs Vinall got back to me, in an email that shows just how aware she was of the harm that had been caused to a committed fellow Trustee:

Poor you this all sounds so petty by comparison with the money you're trying to raise for an organisation that's caused you so much grief.
Antony thinks we should charge - and Henry did for his walk... so lets try.

This was my answer:

Yes, let's charge!

If I think like that --trying to raise money for an organisation that has hurt me so much-- I'd just stop, and at the worst moments I've felt tempted.

But in the long run, I'm not doing this for the Blake Society; I do it for Blake and for all of us who love Blake or may grow to love him in the future; I do it because I want the Cottage to be what we want it to become, I believe in this project and that means I endorse with my whole heart and mind what we're saying publicly: that we want to open its doors as sanctuary for artists, authors, creators, thinkers, for future generations, so that Blake can be celebrated in a space that honours what he stood for: Creation, imagination, freedom of spirit.

Seen that way I'm very happy to do what I'm doing, wary of course knowing there may be more problems on the horizon, but satisfied and quite excited.

If we make it, then maybe that's why I had to pass through the Blake Society even if that meant being almost skinned alive. [. . .] To give something to others; something that is worth giving and worth working for.

The older I get the more I think that's the point in life, since our own lives are so fleeting and small, let's use them to sow seeds. Maybe I'm naive or sound like a hippie, but that's how I feel, more and more.

Anyway, I continue with even more press releases. Do you have it by the way? I've lost count of how many I've sent and to whom. It's been mentioned in Facebook but there's no harm I guess in posting it again, so it's attached.

So yes, let's charge on Friday, thank you! Being Blake's birthday and the end of the public appeal, maybe whatever we get we can use for the campaign, and of course we will keep in touch!

Mrs Vinall said:

You have such a wonderful generous heart! [. . .]

I'm sure Blake smiles down on you!

If she felt like that, and I'm sure she did, because we had many phone conversations in which she told me how much she was saddened by the awful things that were happening in the Blake Society, I still wonder why did she let it happen (what had happened already and what was to come), without a word of challenge to the Chair, a word of warning to the Committee.

In any case, it was decided that we kept the money from the event for the Cottage campaign. I was delighted, and I counted meticulously every single pound we got that evening, just as I had been counting and making deposits of everything we received through the post. And this is one of the reasons why I can't keep my mouth shut, when the Blake Society's and Blake Cottage Trust's finances are inconsistent, with significant amounts of money missing. Because no one has the right to betray generosity and good will like this.

BLAKE'S BIRTHDAY

AROUND THAT TIME, we started to receive messages from people who were not managing to donate to Just Giving through their mobile phones. Some could, but not everybody. I alerted the Chair and he called me to ask me to put it right. So I called Just Giving. The person there explained to me that we hadn't followed the rather simple instructions in their page, and therefore the wording of how we were asking people to donate was wrong. I went to their webpage and indeed, their instructions were very clear while ours were plainly wrong, so I had to reword them. So Ms Paige Morgan, whose major, or rather sole, contribution to the appeal according to Mr Heath in our last Committee meeting had been to set up our Just Giving account, had not even taken the trouble to read the simplest of instructions carefully, and therefore we were missing donations, until I corrected her mistake. Not even correcting her mistake, though, was reason enough for Mr Heath to grant me access to our records.

I told Mrs Vinall about this mistake on 27 November, when she wrote to tell us that the Bookseller (one of my contacts for the campaign) was promoting it:

Thanks a lot Christina!

They've been really helpful.

Just one thing, the JustGiving instructions for mobile donations have been a bit inconsistent so not everybody can donate without a £ sign. So the new instructions are:

Text FEET11 £1 (or any other amount you wish to donate from £1 to £5, or £10).

It's now amended in the webpage and in the press release (attached, please send it to everybody!) and the Bookseller magazine have received new instructions as well.

We had our Blake Society event on 28 November, Blake's birthday and the date we had chosen as deadline to urge the public to donate for the Cottage appeal. I had ordered the cake with the "Infant Joy" icing and it had been delivered to our venue, Waterstones Piccadilly. We were at the best moment of the campaign, very happy, very excited, receiving loads and loads of support. The Big Blake Project were also working frantically. That day in the morning, though, I was feeling ill. So I wrote to the Chair:

Do we know yet of anything significant from donations last night?

I'll buy *The Independent* to see if something came out, I can't find it in internet.

Will do my best to attend the event tonight. I'm feeling very unwell. I hope I'll be better after lunch. If not I'll let you know.

This was his response:

I spoke to Nick Clark of the Independent and also to Alison Flood of the Guardian, Philip Pullman has provided a good quote, and I have sent out a Birthday message to our email lists requesting a text-giving donation on his birthday.

We have received about £150 through SMS texting. Nothing else that is significant.

Hope you are better by this evening.

Happy Birthday Mr Blake !

Nothing seemed amiss.

In the evening, though still feeling unwell, I couldn't bear the idea of not being at our event; the excitement was just too big. It was a happy event. People were talking about the appeal, and we had hopes. Mr Heath was at his kindest, and showing me off to his friends because of a donation that I had managed to get. We had, as I've said, agreed that non Blake Society members would be charged

and that the money would go for the Cottage, so Mrs Vinall and I were at the door, scrupulously adding every single pound to the appeal effort.

Miss Parul Jani was also there. Remember her? That female friend of Mr Heath mentioned in a previous chapter, not a Blake Society member yet often interfering in our events? The one he had used to try to humiliate me at a public event that was related to our work for the campaign? Well, she was there that night, shadowing the Chair; she wouldn't move an inch from his side during the whole evening, with a painful, fixed smile on her face, constantly assenting through conversations that we were having with the public, and no one was having with her. Then, after our lecturer's talk, I took a moment to rest because I was still feeling unwell. Next thing I knew, Mr Heath was beside me handing me a slice of the Blakean cake. I thanked him, looked up and there she was, Miss Jani, exultantly cutting the cake and handing it out to our guests, as if it was *her* birthday party.

I had ordered that cake ("Infant Joy" beautifully reproduced) to celebrate Blake, and to make more poignant the fact that we were trying to get the Cottage as a birthday present. I also had wanted to bring beauty into our event, something to share. It was somehow a peace symbol, after the horrors we had just gone through, for us within the Committee, for the Blake Society as a whole. It was a gesture that had worth in it. However humble and tiny it was, it wasn't Ms Jani's place to go and paw it, trying to make herself a protagonist of an event that we, the Committee of an organisation of which she wasn't even a member, had organized, and it was an ugly sight. She was, I guess, doing her bodyguard act again.

I went back home with mixed feelings. Happy about the Cottage appeal and our event, but with the sense that the dignity that I had been trying to restore to the Blake Society had been soiled again. I was sad too, and angry. And worried. It was clear to me that Mr Heath had not heeded the lesson from the chaos the Society had just been through; that he kept on behaving as if the Blake Society was his private playground, and that he was completely incapable of keeping not only his various personal attachments out of it, but also the twisted games he played with them.

I didn't believe though that Ms Jani had in her the capacity of subtlety to understand that what she was doing was undignified, let alone an aggression. I had witnessed far too often the same sad dynamics. So I decided to let it pass, not to dwell on it, and just go ahead, focusing on our goal, the one thing that mattered at the moment: to get Blake's Cottage.

I was determined to focus on the good. The awful could still dissolve if we all managed to turn our eyes to the good that was happening, as many times as necessary. So before going to bed that night I wrote to Mr Heath:

We have had some increased activity in Just Giving (how is it on the mobile phones?), [. . .]
 (We should really ask again Michael Phillips to help having it mentioned in the publicity for the exhibition, someone asked me in an email today why it's not happening.)
 Anyway, let's discuss over the weekend what's the strategy now. Asking people directly should of course be part of it (that's also part of what [. . .] advised, and he mentioned Gaiman as I told you). I just wanted to say that I think on Blake's birthday things look hopeful.
 I'll go to bed now I hope for many hours. I'm glad though I managed to make it tonight. Thank you for bringing me a slice of Blake cake, it helped to revive me.



The positive spirit in which we were working wouldn't last much longer, but we still had some good days of work, with no animosity, seemingly no ill will.

Since we hadn't gathered as much as we had wished for the day before, we'd now make public our final deadline: 12 December. I had contacted the Today program a few days before, which resulted in an interview with Philip Pullman supporting the Cottage appeal.

On 29 November Mr Heath wrote to me:

I have amended both the JustGiving and the Cottage page to show the deadline as 12 December.

The Today programme phoned me late last night as well, and Philip spoke on the Radio this morning in support of the Cottage campaign.

The Cake Society thanks you for your valiant work in preparation for last night's Birthday tribute.

I responded:

Thank you Tim, that's exciting!

The Today programme is crucial, I'm very happy we managed to call their attention at last. [. . .] Ah, Tim, I think we're going to make it! And Blake would be so very pleased to see the way he's still touching people's lives.

I wanted to say something last night in the talk when people were talking about trees in Blake, the sacrifice and the dance, *Jerusalem's* plate 76, Golgonooza being both city and body. I wanted to say how in Blake every single meaning is manifold and how the courage in his own sacrifice, if you may call it so --all the sacrifice implied in creation, in faith in his vision and purpose against all odds-- was a dance indeed, and celebration, and how his own body, just as Albion's, was surrendered in it, how creation and a man's faith are embodied, things of the spirit in and of the world; as Pullman says in his article, "energy abounding", eternal delight.

All that energy is still buzzing around the Cottage now. People are believing in it. I read the messages in JustGiving, or some of the supportive emails received and it's clear that very few artists have ever been so loved. That such a loved artist is also one of the most radical there's ever been, who always refused to conform, is a source of hope, it reminds us that even our society is not as dead and dull, as greedy and tamed as it would seem on the surface, or at least not all of it.

I'm glad the cake materialised. The confectionery was still quite average but at least the icing was bespangled with stars - they stuck to your fingers.

We have £70 in cheques from this week plus £50 collected yesterday from non-members that I think should go to the Cottage. Christina and Antony agreed, do you as well? Then I can deposit them too on Monday.

Because people responded to the birthday, I think a thank you blog is called for. Let's wait and see what more happens over the weekend because I think we can still expect surprises, but if it's OK with you I'll start drafting a brief blog... Gratitude is Heaven itself.

More practical things later. Enjoy the day, I think we should be happy after the birthday effort.

It's hard to imagine what Mr Heath felt on reading this, knowing that he had already created the Blake Cottage Trust and was about to betray all donors, all his co-campaigners, and the Blake Society. But whatever he felt, he hid it very well, perhaps even from himself: those days we were working non-stop, sending emails, making phone calls, communicating with the press and more potential donors, thinking of artists to whom we could ask to publicly endorse the appeal, writing to institutions, contacting Trusts... It was endless work. And it was beautiful.

Among the more practical things I mentioned was the need to get more support from people interested in Blake with a high public profile, particularly after the advice I had received from one of my contacts with a vast experience in fund raising:

[. . .] Though I know [. . .] has not been responsive when contacted this year, the birthday effort seems to have worked in making the campaign more visible, and that is our strength when approaching new big names. So perhaps a letter to him might be timely now.

[. . .] We must think of a list of people from whom to ask money directly and, as we were advised, to whom we can also ask to please make a list of contacts of their own we might approach. I don't know how willing Stephen Fry would be to do this though of course we must try. Neil Gaiman can be a bit more approachable as he's our patron (and he could afford a donation too I think), [. . .].

The list of people to approach I proposed was much longer, but I highlight these names to the reader because they are relevant regarding the manoeuvres of "politics and power" that would start again very soon, when Mr Henry Eliot would make another of his surprise appearances.

I was not letting the enthusiasm wane. We might not make it, but I wanted us to try our utmost; it was of paramount importance for me to show gratitude to donors. I was scrupulously counting all the money... as far as I could, since I still didn't have access to the administration of Just Giving, meaning that I could only see what the general public saw. All this is reflected in my email to the Chair on 30 November:

I have just left a draft of a "thank you" blog on the webpage for your approval.

I think the birthday effort has been truly important. We may not have raised much more money yet, but on the one hand there was an increase of JustGiving activity and many moving messages of support and an obvious wish for this to happen, and on the other, the campaign became much more visible. People are mentioning Pullman's appearance in the Today programme, the Guardian article, etc.

I believe this will lead to more donations soon and it is important to follow it up.

The best way is I think with a "thank you" message tonight, not to let too much time pass.

So there's the draft, please feel free to improve it.

As you will see, I say we're in £94k now, thinking that with JustGiving donations, cheques and what we got on the event on Friday we have £520 more, we have another cheque promised and someone will give me another cheque on Tuesday. There are amounts in the JustGiving page that don't show but I think we must be really close to the £94, so if I'm right it would be encouraging to say so.

I have another couple of ideas for this week in which Waterstones may help, I'll write to you about that in a minute.

At some point, because of my insistence to ask directly for a donation to Stephen Fry, Neil Gaiman and Russell Brand, all of whom had supported the appeal by promoting it, Mr Heath told me:

I think we need to write to ask Fry and Brand to donate - these are Henry's leads, so you need to ask his advice and implicit approval, to do this.

He then wrote to thank me for the "thank you" blog, that he had "simplified, and published" (a light-hearted poem, in fact, that Mr Heath dismantled, so to speak).

I was still in great spirits. Didn't resent the rejection of the poem (maybe it was a silly one!). On reading this correspondence again, I do wonder about the ingratitude of the whole of the Blake Society Committee, to be slandering me now when I worked till the very end in such good faith despite all that had happened.

In my response to the Chair I also insisted on the donations I was bent on getting. My email also shows that I did have concerns about the lack of clarity regarding the total of donations, and that, without access to the administration of our Just Giving account, I was forced to rely on guesswork... or Mr Heath's word alone:

• Simplified! That was murder! My little poem that I had such fun making... Shame on you.

- I agree on Fry and Brand, I'll write to Henry, but we must include Gaiman in the plans too. [. . .]
- I've collected the Cottage latest bank statement but it's old, from 17 October (£6,451). Still, I'm confused, where is all the rest of the money? Will it go from Just Giving into the account until we close the campaign, or how does it work? I know some of what we have is pledges not actual money but still, we had much more than £6,451 by that date.
- Who keeps those statements? You, me or Luis?
- Talking of which, who's going to keep the accounts of the Cottage? It is a highly more complicated affair than the Blake Society.

When Mr Heath advised me to ask for Mr Henry Eliot's "approval" to ask the celebrities whose contacts he had got for a donation, it must have been around the time when they were planning to go and see Mr Heath's lawyers together. Of course I didn't know that, so I continued working in a spirit of trust. On 1 December I wrote to Mr Eliot:

Hi Henry,

[. . .] I write now because we have reached a point in the Cottage appeal when asking directly for donations to some people would be really helpful, and that seems to be too the general advice we are getting.

We're thinking it would be good to write to Stephen Fry, Russell Brand, and I believe Neil Gaiman too, asking for a donation, and also perhaps for them to think of what other people who might support the campaign they might direct us to. You have established the contact with them - would you be happy if we do this? If so, what would be your advice for the best way to approach them?

Mr Eliot was rather reluctant to do this. He had left the appeal long before and hadn't shown the slightest interest in it ever since. He didn't want to do any further work on it so he asked me to draft something for him to send to his contacts. His response of 2 December was this:

[. . .] I'm a little concerned about the best way to approach this. It's been a struggle to get Stephen Fry and Neil Gaiman to tweet - and we've asked them twice, which we said we wouldn't. I would feel a little awkward approaching them again. And Russell Brand has gone completely quiet - I have hassled him with a number of emails recently with no response.

I can't quite see how best to phrase a donation request. Do you have a style in mind? If you were able to draft something appropriate then I could send it out.

I insisted:

Hi Henry, and thank you.

I understand your concerns. We're thinking about it, what would be the best way to approach them, to appeal to their caring about Blake since they've gone as far as lending their name and helping... a bit.

We'll let you know what we come up with, it's indeed a tricky thing.

Then I consulted with the Chair:

What do you make of what Henry says? Can we still venture to ask for donations? I think that if we craft a letter really well, explaining the import of the project, the urgency, and ask for their help both in £ and advice of other possible donors, they may probably understand even if a bit annoyed... can we risk their annoyance for Blake's Cottage? I am not entirely sure but I think we may.

As for my other proposals of possible donors last night, or writing to [. . .] also for advice on possible donors etc., if any of those ideas you think may work and I can help with drafting letters let me know.

I am emphasizing this because my insistence resulted in a donation from Neil Gaiman, our patron, and a promise of help from Russell Brand (I don't know if it materialized after I left the Blake

Society), something that wouldn't have happened had I not been so determined. Soon we will see the treatment that my efforts received at the hands of Mr Heath and Mr Eliot.

On 2 December I reminded the Chair about the need to make a decision regarding these donors: we had 10 days more to go only before the final deadline:

[. . .] So I'd say, let's gently pester our celebrity friends. I'm still not sure how close Fry and Brand are to Blake. Neil Gaiman has claimed Blake's influence on him and wrote a short story inspired on 'Jerusalem' for the 250th anniversary.

What I'd wish so much we could convey to them, without being rude or ungrateful of course, just objective, is how much more important Blake's legacy is for all of us in England, and in the world, than their (or our own) very valuable work, how much what we do owes to Blake in so many ways --Fry can be approached on the libertarian angle, for example. [. . .]. We can apologise for the insistence but still stress the urgency of time, I think they would be perfectly able to understand that.

And on another work email that day I said, and asked:

[. . .] And has the Cottage been valued?

Very good luck in the meeting with the [. . .] trust tomorrow... I'm keeping candles lit on my shrine, where Glad Day shares place of honour with the Buddha. We are close, we really should be able to make it safely to the 12th, the world will be a better place if we do. So many people have *envisaged* the Cottage now! That surely must work on our side. Do let me know how it goes when you're finished. [. . .]

I'll get back to you in a moment with a draft letter to [. . .] but meanwhile if you can take a look at this one, we'd save time.

What have you thought about the Fry, Brand, Gaiman trio, and the other options I've suggested? Any help I can lend with drafting letters, I'm ready.

Still, Mr Heath didn't give his full approval to write those letters. I insisted yet again, on 4 December:

When I return from the Cervantes I'll try to see how may we tempt Fry/Gaiman/Brand, I'll draft something [. . .] and I hope Henry will be convinced to send them out. [. . .] This is so exciting! We'll get those keys.

I received no response, so I sent a letter to both the Chair and Mr Eliot titled "URGENT".

Hi Henry and Tim,

Below a draft for a letter to Neil Gaiman.

Henry, I know you're very busy but if you could take a look at it and let us know what you think as soon as possible it would be of enormous help, time being so short now.

I can say that you, my colleague, gave me his details, or you can simply send it yourself signed by you, whatever you're happier with (Tim, let us know too what you think is best). Please both of you edit it as you see fit.

Tomorrow I will draft something for Fry and Brand as well.

Mr Eliot answered on 5 December:

Thank you Adriana. I'm happy to send it / or to send you the email address of his assistant.

I think it reads very well. I might shorten it slightly if I was sending it; and I wonder if it would be worth including an explanation of the deadline, because from an outsider's point of view it has shifted. (Neil tweeted that the deadline was the end of October I believe - is that right?)

And this was Mr Heath's response:

Dear Adriana,

Neil Gaiman's partner/wife Amanda Palmer has just published a book called The Art of Asking and so it's important that your letter is to the point.

Your natural style is to be polite by being prolix. Gaiman has a busy mind. You just need to cover the essential points: thank him for being our patron, thank him for tweeting, the deadline has been crucially extended, will he give a financial donation to this beautiful project?

I responded:

Hi Henry and Tim,

Thank you for your emails. that I have just seen. I will shorten the letter a bit.

Though being prolix can be one of my shortcomings the balance is difficult --things have to be made clear if we ask people for money and because Gaiman is a busy man, he may not have had time to see into the details of the project, why it is beautiful, why we need the money. I'll do my best and send you both another draft a bit later.

Tim, what do you think, should Henry send it or myself? You know what's best here so we'll wait for your advice.

Later that evening I sent them the revised draft:

Hi Tim and Henry,

Below the new version. I kept the technical details of the loan because people look carefully where they put their money in, and if he sees £96k against a goal of £520k, he may want to know how are we planning to bridge the difference.

And I kept some highlighting of the relevance of the project and the outrageous fact that Blake does not have a home because again, if people are to give money they need to be convinced of the relevance of the project and why it is important that some successful artists may support it. Gaiman must receive loads of requests for help, must have different appeals to choose from - perhaps Syria, that he visited and has written about, so I think we can't simply fire "we want your money".

Anyway, I do struggle writing letters in a different cultural framework (the tone varies between Mexico and England); perhaps I get carried away by what I read in books rather than normal correspondence so advice and edits are welcome!

Tim, don't forget to tell us who you think should send it so that we do so right away.

Thank you both!

Adriana

Dear Neil,

I write to thank you again on behalf of the Blake Society for having accepted being our patron early this year, and for your support to our campaign to acquire Blake's Cottage in Felpham. Your mention of it through social media did a lot to spread the word.

Updates on our progress appear every day in our webpage (www.BlakeCottage.org).

We have received much support from hundreds of people in England and abroad and have raised £96,000, which is quite a concrete statement of people's wish for a place that celebrates Blake, but it is not enough yet to secure the Cottage. It is now a matter of urgency: though we managed to extend our deadline from the original date, we have until 12 December to get through.

We're working on a contingency plan to use the amount raised so far to leverage a loan mortgaged on the Cottage. This would give us the necessary time to apply to major grant-giving trusts that has been limited by the time constraints of the legal option to buy.

The sympathy this campaign has elicited is telling us how much we are all indebted to William Blake (a very early author of comic books!).

Success was denied to Blake during his lifetime. History has redressed that yet there is still no place in England or the world that celebrates his genius. We are determined to change that but we're running against time. Will you support the campaign further by giving a financial donation?

Another way to help us would be to think of philanthropists that you might point in our direction.

Thank you, and our deep gratitude again for the support you have already given to this project.

With great regards,

Adriana Díaz-Enciso

Blake Society Secretary

I received no response, so sent them the draft again on 6 December. I also sent them a very similar draft for Russell Brand:

and here's a draft for Russell Brand, a bit confused now as to how many times we have contacted him for what exactly and what his reactions have been. Have to go out now but will get back to you later with a draft for Fry.

A

And another for Stephen Fry:

Hi Tim and Henry,

Below the draft to Fry. I fear he may be the one we annoy the most as it seems we were not meant to ask for more, but I think Blake's Cottage is worth annoying some people a bit --they'll be reconciled when they see it open, even more so if they contribute to it.

Under that logic, what is stopping us from pestering [. . .] as well? Let me know your views.

Since I was receiving no answer, and we had only 6 days to get the funds, I wondered whether if Mr Eliot was being annoyed in any way because I was signing the letters. Then Mr Heath *instructed me on the phone to have Mr Eliot sign them, not me*, so on the same day I sent to both the three drafts signed as Mr Eliot, informing him:

Hi Henry,

Just a quick note to say Tim thinks it's best that you send the letters to our trio if you don't mind, as you were the initial contact, so I will send you the finalised drafts in a moment.

I usually send these letters with copy to Tim in case people want to talk directly to him.

Then Mr Eliot quite happily sent the letters I had written as if they were his own, regardless his initial reluctance to annoy these persons. I did have some misgivings, but decided, again, to trust. Why? Because you can't work without trust. Because unreliable persons who still have, nevertheless, some sense of dignity, can be humbled into honesty by trust. Only that neither Mr Heath nor Mr Eliot seemed to have much of that – only God knows how they interpreted my trust.

On 8 December Mr Heath texted me to say that Mr Neil Gaiman had promised to give us a generous donation. Later on he wrote to Mr Eliot and me, forwarding us the correspondence in which Mr Gaiman's assistant told Mr Eliot about the donation, and saying:

Dear Henry and Adriana,
Congratulations!

Mr Gaiman's assistant was also asking for our bank details, so I wrote to both:

Hi Tim and Henry.

This is wonderful news!

Thank you so much Henry for sending out the letters so promptly, and it is also great that Brand says he will help us.

I gather we've answered back to them already. In any case, transfer should be made to a HSBC account, number [. . .].

All this will fructify!
Warm (and happy) regards,

Mr Eliot responded to the Chair only, though with copy to me:

Indeed! Fantastic news! Thanks for getting back to [. . .], Tim - it looks like we need a SWIFT code and IBAN for the account... Do you know what that means?

Looking forward to seeing you later.

I wrote to Mr Eliot with copy to the Chair, to give him our SWIFT number. Mr Heath responded:

Please, let me deal with this, so there is one clear line of instruction. Thank you. Tim

The 2014 activities of the Blake Society had nearly ended, apart from our last Committee meeting of the year that would take place in a few days, then our AGM. Therefore Mr Eliot's "Looking forward to seeing you later" to the Chair might have well meant their impending meeting with the lawyers who had already set up the Blake Cottage Trust. At that point of course I had no idea that the Trust had already been set up, let alone that Mr Eliot should be accompanying Mr Heath to see the lawyers.

What I do know now is that that was the end of all the enthusiasm and the dynamics of collaborative work. We were about to enter into a further episode of bullying and secrecy.

How that came to happen, preceded by some signs other than that we were going downhill again, will be the subject of the following chapter.

