

What Happened with the Blake Cottage Appeal

Chapter XII



In the last chapters we saw how the Cottage appeal had managed to survive almost miraculously after the horrors we had gone through, and how ceaselessly Mr Heath and I had been working on it together, while the Big Blake Project did the same in West Sussex – Mr Heath still holding firm his policy of division between them and me. We also saw that the spirit of open collaboration between Mr Heath and myself came abruptly to an end, and how secrecy, bullying and lack of integrity reappeared, with Mr Eliot and Ms Morgan playing their part.

We saw too how the very survival of the Blake Society seemed wobbly when the Chair disappeared for a while, cutting communication off with all of us at yet another crucial moment, and were witness, in the behaviour of the Blake Society Committee, to some display of the abjectness of cowardice.

In any case, we kept working: we needed to get through the last stretch of my work in the Blake Society. We would have our AGM on 22 January, which would be followed by the last event in our year of activities. Then I'd stop being the Blake Society Secretary. I would continue, though, working on the Cottage appeal. The problem was that, once again, Mr Heath was withholding all information from me.

I still kept on receiving words of appreciation for my work from the Trustees. This, for instance, came from an email of the Treasurer, Mr Luis Garrido:

We would all like to keep in touch with you whether you are on the committee or not, and we have all learnt a great deal from your dedication and creative spirit and friendship.

As stated in chapter XI, I was not willing to endure another season in hell in our work for the Cottage. I wanted for Mr Heath, Mr Eliot and Ms Morgan to speak out, say exactly what their interest in the project was, open a door to all of them for transparent communication, so on 8 January I sent them an email titled "Our work":

Dear Tim, Henry and Paige,

As you know, we have now passed on to another stage of the Cottage appeal. People need to be appropriately informed about how things are standing, and if we still have the chance to purchase the Cottage, there is much work to be done.

For several weeks now I haven't had any information of what is happening. Though of course there must have been a lull during holidays, this lack of communication concerns me because of our previous experiences.

More than a week ago I wrote to Tim telling him that I believe firmly that if we go on keeping the atmosphere of secrecy, factions and division in this project that has caused to it such incredible damage in

the past, our work won't get anywhere: the project will simply disintegrate. We do not have the right to do that to all the people who have trusted us, with such generosity.

It is possible to leave all that behind and work with transparency, honesty and in peace. People are expecting that from us, and on the run to the AGM it is crucial that we all have clarity about how things are standing and present a united front.

This is the moment I think for each of us to say what is our legitimate interest in this project, what we can do, how the work we've already done can best be honoured so that we make the best of it, and work on a plan that is objective, appropriate, and with regard to truth.

If we care to look, for instance, at the messages people have been leaving in our Just Giving page, we will I'm sure remember what is our sole responsibility towards the Blake Cottage appeal.

So this is an invitation for of us to dissolve the secrecy for good and start working transparently on a project that demands our respect and that, as we all well know, does not belong to us, but to all those people out there who have supported us, believing in our aim to celebrate Blake's legacy.

With kind regards,

Adriana

Ms Morgan, as usual, didn't bother to respond. Mr Eliot, on the other hand, answered immediately:

Dear Adriana,

Thanks for your email. As I haven't been involved with the campaign for a while, I'm afraid I don't have any news. I have a great interest in the project and look forward to following its progress over 2015, but I'm afraid I'm not able to commit to being involved at the moment.

Warm regards,

Henry

He was repeating what we knew: that he hadn't been *officially* involved in the project nor had any time for it. He eschewed though to answer what exactly he had been doing visiting the lawyers with Mr Heath, or to explain his disgraceful behaviour at our latest meeting. I heard nothing from Mr Heath. I wrote to him again. I needed to make sure that he understood what was at stake:

We need to talk.

On the run up to the AGM, everything about the Cottage must be crystal clear. People will ask questions.

As you saw in [. . .]'s email in November, there are worrying rumours out there about the Society. However unfounded they may be, human nature being what it is, if we show conflict and division, people will want to believe those rumours.

The Cottage project is not a game.

You surely know how painful it is for me to leave the Blake Society like this, having been left no other option. I cannot take, on top of it all, the repetition of this Autumn's nightmare. I won't. I ask you to please become aware of the distress that you can cause to other human beings, and the harm that you are causing also to your own work.

If you believe my presence in the Cottage project now will trouble you, or be even painful in any way, we can talk about it and find a solution --I certainly am not keen on perpetuating pain and distress for any of us.

But whatever we do on this respect, I will make sure that everything is as it should be; I'll make sure that our project, its purpose, everything we have worked for, people's support to it, its integrity, are left in safe hands. I cannot let Blake's Cottage be held hostage to a person's private life. If you refuse to communicate, I will have to do what I can to make sure that our work is protected.

I know this is difficult for you. We know why, and you must be aware of how hard that knowing is for me as well. I know you may believe you cannot behave in any other way. But you can, and because this goes well beyond your private life, and you are accountable to others, you must.

What do you need Tim? What conditions do you need to feel safe with this, while keeping this project free from harm? I don't want to fight, but you need to talk to me. I am, again, under awful distress because of this. My health is not taking it anymore, nor is my mind, my soul. And we both have an enormous, shared responsibility towards many others.

We have also the AGM; it has to run well, we cannot soil it with conflict.

We can still sort things out and do things right, we ought to be able to end this cycle of our work together in the Blake Society with dignity and good will, knowing that it ends because it has to, because we need to stop the pain and harm, and yet still respect each other, know that we care, respect all the work done together and what we have learnt through it.

You are not trapped in this absurd situation. You are not trapped into ruining and betraying your work and that of others. It is an imaginary trap. You can still walk out of it. You have to.

Mr Heath's reaction was worrying. He called me, basically to bully and threaten me. He said that I was trying to "poison the campaign again" and that he wouldn't let me do that. I asked him why he said that, when all I was doing was ask for all of us to work together transparently. I called to his attention that neither he nor Ms Morgan had even deigned to respond to the previous email of a colleague. He said that *she had nothing to do with the Cottage appeal, that she was very busy and had no time for it*, which did not explain neither her rudeness in not responding nor the fact that she was talking about the Cottage in our social media. He said that the reason why I was leaving the Blake Society was that I couldn't work in a team and couldn't be trusted, which in his view I had proved by attending the meeting with the poet that I had invited for our last event. He then went for the threats: he said that he would "call my bluff". Since there was nothing in my actions to which such a statement could remotely apply, it was clear that he was threatening with slandering me... which is exactly what he's doing now, and so are his Committee minions, as I have been informed.

After the volley of aggression, he gave voice to another of his contradictory messages by saying, "I am very happy for you to work in the campaign with me, as long as you do as I say".

I knew I could take no more of that. It was clear to me that, through renewed bullying, I was being forced to leave the Cottage appeal. So on 9 January I wrote to Mr Antony and Mrs Christina Vinall:

Dear Antony and Christina,

I write because I am reaching the end of my endurance and I need support.

I am going to leave the Cottage appeal soon, because I cannot let my life be wrecked in honour of William Blake, but I need advice as to what's the best way and time to do it causing the least damage possible to the Society and the appeal itself.

For around a month I have been cut off the Cottage project again. The pattern has been very much the same than last time. This time I have restrained all anger and only contacted Tim when I am calm enough to simply ask what is happening. I have told him that with division and factions the project will fail, suggested he opened up communication and we all tried to define how our work is going to be together, but I've received no answer.

Yesterday I decided to write to all those members of the BS who have taken part in the appeal, to make things clear and bridge the damage done by the lack of communication, because I am worried that things are not crystal clear by the AGM. Only Henry answered to say he cannot be involved in the appeal anymore.

Early this evening I wrote to Tim and told him that if he found it too hard to work with me on the Cottage appeal we surely could talk about it and find a solution, but that if he went on refusing to communicate with me I would have to do what was needed to protect the integrity of our work.

Only then he called me. He said that I am leaving the Blake Society because I am incapable of working within an organisation and cannot be trusted. He said I am threatening to poison the campaign again and in turn threatened me, said he will not let me do that, that he will "call my bluff", etc.

Last month there was an incident with our next event's speaker, and I saw quite clearly that Tim was trying to use it as an excuse to cut me off the project again, it was very similar to how things started in the Autumn.. Sure enough, today he mentioned that incident to say that I cannot be trusted and repeated that the reason why I am leaving the Blake Society is my incapacity to work with other people.

He says he and Paige did not answer to my email of yesterday because she's not involved in the project. I do believe she's doing no work on it but she was giving information about it in our social media, at moments in a tone that I found inappropriate, as soon as Tim cut off communication with me. I then decided to stop looking at our Facebook page so as not to get angry and simply continue working. Today I looked at it again. I don't know very well how Facebook works, who deletes what; some of her twitter entries have disappeared (those in which she was using it rather as her personal account than that of the Cottage and BS), but there is instead in a more prominent space that article that she published precisely the day Tim and I signed our Agreement --a mockery of Antony's efforts as mediator and of my good will, an inappropriate piece that misrepresents the project and that presents an entirely false perspective of her involvement in it.

I could not find anymore the articles I have written myself for the campaign, which were about Blake, not about me --when you are truly working in something you believe in, when you are not trying to appropriate somebody else's work, you talk about the matter at hand, you do not need to draw attention to yourself.

With Tim it is always hard to know: Paige may not be doing anything now, yet he still can hand things over to her at any moment as he did earlier this year. I need the Blake Society to understand that the Cottage appeal must be protected from that to happen. This person has proved to lack the necessary probity for this work, and the whole story of her involvement in it, in which the work she's done is far surpassed by the damage, should be a warning, as well as the lack of probity and reliability she has shown before in her work within the Society. The harm done by her presence there is reflected in the current situation. That is not my business now, I am leaving the Society and have done my utmost to work for it with loyalty, but the Cottage appeal is my business, because it is my responsibility as well.

No one in the Committee has heard the degree of abuse I was exposed to earlier this year. No one in the Committee truly knows the extent of my work for this project, nor the degree of trust that Tim has put on me even after the past nightmare --the same trust that he has put on me during all these years of my work for the Society.

I need to be heard out. I am not sure that calling for an extraordinary Committee meeting before the AGM is right, I do not want to damage the Society or the AGM. Furthermore, Tim has already threatened me and if he feels threatened himself, I know already that he can be vicious and I would rather spare us all, including our guest speaker, something like that.

But I most definitely need to be heard out, I need the Committee to know what has happened here, the extent of the damage done, the lack of ethics, and the extent of my work that is now, once again, being trampled over. I need advice as to the best way to leave the Cottage appeal without causing damage to it, without damaging the Society's reputation, but making absolutely sure that the situation that has poisoned work within the Blake Society will not be replicated there: there simply should be no space in the Cottage project for Tim's private life, and his word is not enough. The Committee cannot force him into anything but it can remain vigilant, and if it hears me out, I am sure it will.

The Committee needs to know that although Tim is the leader of the Cottage appeal, and rightly so, it would simply not exist without me. I am sure that then the perception of this as a storm because of the emotions involved in personal relationships would change dramatically.

The situation is worrying. In November [. . .] sent me an email that mentioned rumours about the Society. I copy here:

"I've heard rumours that a key member of the Blake Society has embezzled funds for website work in the past long before you joined the Blake Society. I don't act on rumours but feel I need to be careful. I know Tim wants money for the Felpham House and wants to live there too."

However unfounded or malicious those rumours may be, they are worrying and they are out there. If the Blake Society and the Cottage appeal are seen to be working in any way that is not completely transparent, people will ask questions and both can be seriously damaged.

We cannot play games with people's generosity. Even if they have given us £1, we will need to show absolute transparency. And of course no one plays games with big donations from people like Philip Pullman and Neil Gaiman.

I don't know what to do. I am tired, I have a great deal of grief, I am scared, and my health is a wreck. All I know for sure is that I need for the Committee to hear me out, and see the evidence of all this. Then I can leave the Cottage appeal as well, for all the joy for it is now as dead as the joy for work in the Blake Society. But should I speak after the AGM or before? How can we find some degree of clarity and fairness without bringing about even more damage?

Would you both be free perhaps for a coffee so that we can think of what's the best route for me to take? I know for sure that I should not leave the Blake Society with its chairman accusing me of leaving because I cannot work with others and cannot be trusted.

I also know that a Blake Society should not condone a man's use, emotional abuse, and humiliation of women from a position of power.

Mrs Vinall responded thus:

Only just home and seen this. Really feel for you... It's such a difficult situation. You must be exhausted. Will try and think what's best.

But for tonight sending you many blessings and love - Christina Xx

I replied:

Hi Christina and Antony, and thank you so much for your email, Christina.

Yes, I am exhausted. This will land me in hospital if I'm not careful.

I know I must keep some perspective: I am fully aware that Tim is saying these things because he's angry that I'm leaving, and because he's scared, for he knows he's not doing things right and the appeal is such a huge thing. So I'm doing my best not to take it personally, it's just nonsense.

Yet, it is still bullying, and a line has to be drawn between understanding, forgiveness and not fighting and the acceptance of what's unethical. What is wrong and unethical here is very wrong indeed -- the kind of thing for which people can be sued in a workplace.

I have the impression that action before the AGM might be dangerous: he would feel cornered. When he feels cornered, he bites. That would be disastrous at an AGM, when people will also want to know about the Cottage.

But I do need to know that I will walk in there protected and that there are people who know what is happening. This morning I thought that if both of you and perhaps Rod can hear me out, if we can meet up for coffee and I can say what needs to be known, that knowledge will be some kind of protection not only for me but for a smooth transition in the weeks before I leave.

Then I can send to the rest of the Committee, who may not need to know all the details, a dossier with what I find more relevant regarding my work for the Cottage and the ideal behind it. That might also bring the project closer to the Committee, something that Tim has not been keen on doing; I believe his reluctance, that obeys again the whole noxious situation, has been wrong and the Society should have never been kept so distant from the appeal.

Meanwhile, I will try to negotiate my way out with Tim (exasperatingly, yesterday, even as he accused me of not being able to work with others or to be trusted, he said he was happy for me to be his assistant as long as I accept everything he does).

What I would like to be allowed to do before I leave is, first, to write the letters of thanks to those of my contacts who were more involved, some of them linked to rewards, explain to them what's the next stage, how will their work keep continuity with the project. I have told Tim for weeks that this needs to be done now that the more public stage of the appeal is probably ended; we need to show gratitude and keep those who help us properly informed. I do feel that responsibility towards these people, I drew them into the project.

Then I would want to write to the Barenboim-Said Foundation, to see if it can be involved in any way with the project now that a Board of Trustees is to be set up. This is another of my pet ideas that I think should be followed. Just a few days before the close up of communication I was talking to Tim about it on the phone, we got carried away: young composers from the conflict-torn Middle East finding respite to create their music in the Cottage. That would join the ideas of a sanctuary for the arts and a sanctuary for peace.

I would also like to write to ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network) to see how they could also work closer to the Cottage. The idea of part of the Cottage being used as a House of Refuge for persecuted writers was in fact how actual work on the project started in 2013, when there was still no appeal. As you know Tim has been thinking for years on how to protect the Cottage and SMS, that is all his merit. Since I joined the BS I showed my interest in this and we had discussed the general idea of people being able to stay there.

Then I thought of the House of Refuge, because there is one in Mexico City that does a wonderful work, and I had a contact in English PEN. We went to talk with English PEN and they were very enthusiastic. My contact in English PEN has been incredibly supportive to the Cottage Appeal and she put me in touch with someone who works for ICORN. He gave me advice for the last stages of the appeal in November, among them to insist on getting more concrete support from the big names endorsing us, and particularly Neil Gaiman, which I followed, with the £[. . .] donation as a result.

That is another of my ideals for the Cottage, one again that marries the arts to freedom, and I would not like the opportunity to do that, which could mean a wonderful welcome into Britain to authors who suffer persecution abroad, to be thrown down the drain simply because it was my idea and I am not wanted anymore.

Lastly, I would like to be the one who contacts again the [. . .] family, another contact of mine made through my contact in English PEN. They are potential donors, one of them generously gave me a lot of her time to explain the project to her. Tim was then at this retreat and ignored for several weeks what I believed was promising, I think an opportunity was wasted there, but we have been talking about contacting them again. Again, I feel responsible for this contact, and for how communication is established with them, because my conversation with [. . .] was a very human and enjoyable affair, but Tim has been somewhat dismissive about the whole thing, he knows her brother (who doesn't seem to believe the BS is very serious).

As you can see, I have no plans to poison the appeal, we've done so much already! I just want to make sure that what I have worked for will not be wasted, that it will be honoured.

Then I will be able to leave the Cottage appeal in some peace, and I think this could be achieved pretty soon after the AGM.

As for Paige, I gave her a last chance to respond to an offer for working in peace. I have given her many, hoping we could somehow see sense and learn something from this whole sorry affair: learn to work towards a common goal with transparency. She has not responded. I am not surprised, that has been the way she's functioned in the years I have been in the Society.

I am fully aware that the main responsible of this is Tim. Paige is more of a victim in being so misled into believing she can do as she wants, with no integrity whatsoever, simply because of her relationship to him. Still, her behaviour is unethical and she must truly stay away from the Cottage project from now on.

So if after I leave the appeal she gets near the Cottage project in any way, I will indeed warn the Board of Trustees.

Please let me know if my plan makes sense to you, and if we can meet up later, maybe next week. Today I will see Rod to start showing him the secrets of the profession and I'll see if I can tell him a bit about this.

Thank you again for the support.

Mr Vinall responded cautiously, yet acknowledging that the pattern was repeating itself:

It's very sad that things have turned out like this again. If you really think it would help, Christina and I would be happy to meet - perhaps together with Rod, it's up to you - to see if there's any further advice we can give in a difficult and delicate situation. Unfortunately we're both quite busy this week, but if you'd like to meet we're free on Wednesday evening.

Warmest best wishes,
Antony

And I replied:

Thank you so much for your kindness and willingness to meet up.

I would truly appreciate it. I know the situation is delicate, difficult and that no one can have a straightforward solution, but three heads will surely think better than (an exhausted) one.

Rod heard a bit yesterday though most of the time we concentrated on my passing him on details about the Secretarial role. I will ask him anyway in case he wants to join us.

I believe the main issues that need to be considered are, a) that the AGM runs well, without showing conflict to our members, and without disruptions to the lecture afterwards; b) that I can leave the Cottage appeal as smoothly as possible while guaranteeing its integrity, the BS and the campaign's reputation, and that the work I've done is not wasted; c) it may sound selfish, but I think my own wellbeing is very important too, I do need some sense of protection.

The meeting with Mr Tweedy that I referred to had been in fact a sad one. At some point while handing him over the Society's files, I burst into tears. No one in that spineless Committee ignored that I had been put through much more than could possibly be accepted in a workplace.

I also forwarded to the Vinalls the email I had sent to Mr Heath on 30 December, clearly expressing my need for witnesses and protection:

Dear Antony and Christina,

I forward you too the email I sent to Tim on 30 December.

I do need witnesses that I have not been threatening to poison the Cottage appeal; that in spite of everything that's happened, up to the last moment I have been trying for all of us involved to avoid fighting and learn to work together instead.

POOR WITNESSES

On 14 January, I met with Mr and Mrs Vinall. I explained to them in detail what had been happening in the past few months, including Mr Heath's bullying and games. Indeed, Mr Vinall then repeated something he had told me on the phone months earlier, when our "negotiations" for me to go on working for the appeal started. He said that Mr Heath "liked to play games". He repeated that to me a year later, when we realized that Mr Heath had purchased the Cottage for his own private Trust. I know Mr Vinall has always been extremely cautious to say what he thinks in writing (that is, it seems,

what being “responsible” means to him), yet I do have a text message he sent me during the process of negotiation between Mr Heath and myself in which he acted as intermediary. In it he said that Mr Heath’s response, though positive in some ways, “needed changes in tone and substance (no teasing or games)”.

Back to our meeting, Mr and Mrs Vinall saw not only how distressed I was, but how much I wanted for all of us to reach safely our AGM and last event, and for the integrity of the Cottage to be monitored. As I related to them everything Mr Heath had done from the beginning of our problems, Mr Vinall said (and he looked sincere), “this is so depressing”. I showed to them the pitiful article that Ms Morgan had published in our webpage the day we had signed our agreement, that he hadn’t bothered to see when I alerted him about it. He couldn’t hide his revolt at the whole thing, particularly where Ms Morgan makes herself pass as leader of the project, or how ridiculous he found that part where she claims the Cottage campaigners thought that works of art were “too static”.

I told them, as tactfully as possible, the reasons why I thought it would be very unwise to allow Mr Heath do as he wished with the Cottage. They both agreed there were reasons for concern. I left with them several documents, including an itemized list of everything I had done for the appeal, and my list of contacts. I also left them a document pointing at what Ms Morgan’s interference in the appeal had meant in terms of disruption and work agreements that were not honoured.

Mr and Mrs Vinall were unequivocally angry, unequivocally saddened, and more than unequivocally worried. I pleaded with them to keep an eye on what happened with the project in my absence. Mr Vinall repeated what he had said when we signed our ridiculous agreement: that all that “set a precedent”.

But a precedent for what, I wonder? It was happening all over again, and they didn’t take any action, didn’t raise the alarm with the Committee, didn’t challenge Mr Heath or cast a vote of no confidence against him. They just agreed on the terms I was proposing to leave the appeal. I asked them also to please be there at the AGM, I reiterated that I needed witnesses and needed to know I had some sort of protection. They said they’d be there for me.

I would like to ask Mr and Mrs Vinall, even now, what were they thinking of, not to take action then and there? How on earth did they think the Blake Society could survive with such dynamics? And what on earth is Mr Vinall thinking of *now*, to be colluding with gross dishonesty so actively?

In the meantime, the silly issue as to whether if we charged to non-members to our events or not was coming up again in regards to our impending event. We were all confused, since we had charged in our previous event. I tried to clarify things and Mr Heath tried to put me down again in an email with copy to the Committee:

<p>Dear Adriana,</p> <p>The policy for non-members at the AGM is clear and unambiguous:</p> <p>As announced on the Waterstones website, this event is free and everyone is welcome to attend.</p> <p>We may invite attenders to offer a donation to a Blakean cause, but this is entirely voluntary.</p>
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Since It was usually Mrs Vinall and I who stood at the door, she was angered by this email, but we were also laughing. It had become a kind of Monty Python sketch, with decisions overturned every month. However, I still tried to conciliate, so I wrote, with copy to the Committee:

It is precisely this wording in your email to [. . .] of Waterstones that made me think this issue was not yet clear enough, after our previous exchange of emails, in which we were reminded that we had agreed to charge (charge, not voluntary donation), as stated in the minutes.

What I want is for the AGM and talk to run in peace and be enjoyable for us all. Having clarity about what we're doing helps.

I needed to point at this because, as much as I do not want to contradict you or upset you, I do not want to contradict or upset either the rest of the Committee, those who believe that non-members should be charged, care about an agreement made after having gone round in circles for ages around this matter and may be worried that it would be too confusing for people (we charged in our November event, you may charge again this year if the Committee decides so, etc....).

Since I am leaving the Blake Society and it is not my business anymore what you decide, all I want is to know what *you all* are happier with for the 22nd. That's why I mentioned the matter.

I don't want to have any bickering before the AGM. If everybody's happy to do as Tim says next week I have no problem.

I think that it has become quite clear by now that no one in that Committee can pretend that I did not do my best for us to work in peace until my very last day in the Society.

My concerns about the Cottage appeal continued: so far, no one had ever seen a breakdown of the Cottage's finances. We were relying entirely on Mr Heath's word. Mr Garrido, the Treasurer, had told me of his concerns about this on the phone a few days before. We had supposedly raised £107,000, yet in Mr Garrido's accounts there was only one item related to the Cottage, "Held on trust for the Cottage Appeal", and all that appeared there was £6,402, after deducting £3,598 for "consultancy fees". This was one of the questions that I had recently asked Mr Heath and he had refused to even acknowledge. I was fearful to spark his irrationality if I asked him again, but I was determined not to leave the appeal without knowing that the money raised was safe, so on 15 January I wrote again to the Vinalls, with a draft of an email to Mr Heath, to ask if they found it appropriate:

Hi Antony and Christina,

Thank you so much for yesterday, I truly appreciate it....

I have seen Luis's accounts and I am worried about the Cottage amounts. This is something I asked Tim last month. I believe he had not answered because he answered to many other things in those emails, I am not thinking there is anything amiss but still, I don't know where is all the real money we're supposed to have (the rest as we know are pledges). We have paid some lawyers fees but that still wouldn't explain these figures.

I don't believe Tim will answer to me now or show me anything, but someone must see with their own eyes all the paper work regarding this, including a break down of all donations (how much from Just Giving, Indiegogo, Cheques, bank transfers); so far it is only Tim and Paige who have direct access to JustGiving and Indiegogo, only they know when or how is the money supposed to reach us.

Anyway I have drafted an email to ask him. I copy below, if you can advice as to whether it might incense him, something I don't want to do, I'd be grateful. As you saw earlier, even what I thought a carefully worded question about the doors next week elicited anger...

Thanks, and apologies for all the trouble.

Love,

Adriana x
(Below, draft)

Mr and Mrs Vinall didn't answer so I wrote directly to Mr Heath with the letter I had drafted, but asking some other questions as well:

I saw Luis's draft accounts and I am still confused regarding the Cottage account. I asked you on 1st December why is there so little money:

"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."

The same question goes for Indiegogo: Is that money already there?

Before Gaiman's donation I had understood we had around £30,000 in real money, the rest in pledges. Gaiman's donation would have made it around £40,000. I think a break down of how much money comes from where and where it is would be useful.

Also, I am interested to know what happened with the National Trust's recent communication. As you know I believe it is important for the project to have them on board and I'd be quite happy if I knew this is leading somewhere good.

This morning I did not mean to challenge you. I just see a contradiction and even though I suspected you might not like my mentioning it, I thought it was much better to ask beforehand so as to avoid any confusion on the day, because I don't believe the matter is truly clear for the Committee, as some recent shared emails showed.

I hope you are aware that it is difficult for me to know how to address any issue in the tension and lack of communication that rose out of the blue around our latest Committee meeting. It's been around a month now since again you don't answer to anything I ask or any proposal for better ways of working, you seem to be misreading what I say and it doesn't matter in what tone I write to you, you seem to find it at fault. I simply don't know how to approach you anymore without incurring your anger or annoyance.

This moment is hard for everybody, please let us bear that in mind and try to be more patient. I, for one, am not finding it easy, but I am doing my very best.

I received no answer. Mr Vinall then wrote to me:

I'm only slowly catching up with Luis' numbers, and I'm going to check various points with him... but closer examination has reminded me that the accounts for the AGM give the position on 31 October. I imagine quite a lot of the cottage funds have come in since then. I'll suggest Luis explains, and mentions some recent figures, in his presentation at the AGM.

With love,

Antony

I responded:

Thank you so much, Antony.

The last statement I saw was indeed from October (received until December for the bank does not issue frequent statements for that kind of account). But even then it seemed to me to be much less money than what we had by that date, that's why I asked Tim.

In any case, we all need to know how much money for the Cottage is there and where, I've asked Tim for a breakdown, but there's no answer.

I cannot tell him I'm leaving the Cottage until I know where the money is, so that I can go in peace... oh God, this is hell!

On 17 January Mrs Vinall had kindly asked me if I wanted to join some of the Trustees who were going to the Oxford festival (Mr Heath still hadn't uttered a word about it to the Committee, or an acknowledgement of Mrs Vinall's proposal for all of us to go together). I wrote to her:

Here I am, thinking of the wording to let Tim know I'm leaving the Cottage -- I will write to him to tell him over the weekend.

I have moments of calm, even joy planning for the future, a sense of relief. But of course there are the other moments, that resemble the sense of awful wait when my best friend Rita was dying in hospital.

Among my reasons for grief, anger and sense of betrayal there is the Ashmolean exhibition and Festival --being working so hard and well with Tim, urging him to ask Michael Phillips to promote our project during the exhibition, asking him about the Festival that he's helping organise, then not being even invited to the exhibition opening, not a word mentioned to me about the festival (with its Tyger for children...), or an invitation.

It hurts horribly and I have started to fear that Paige may be here and may be at the AGM too.

I am counting already with Parul's probable presence. One of Tim's favoured weapons as we have seen is that of humiliation, using for that the sad ghosts that hang around him, so I wanted to ask you that if tomorrow Paige is there please let me know so that I am prepared.

I am sorry to keep on asking for support. I just fear I may lose the strength I seem to have now and become too fragile on the day.

So please let me know if you see in Oxford tomorrow anything you think I should be on my guard against. And my apologies again, these last days will be hard, and this is a hellish situation a bit out of the ordinary I think, but after this whole thing is over I promise to stop talking about it, I am so looking forward to have it all away from my life!

Enjoy the day tomorrow, and thank you so much again for everything.

Mrs Vinall replied:

Thinking of you - and certainly will let you know if I see anything likely to distress you. Having said that, we as a committee weren't asked or invited to anything [even though I'd helped too towards to Tyger project]. And Rod and George wouldn't have been aware of it so early if I hadn't mentioned it. So I don't think there's anything - more than the way of things in that. But I know it must be so hard for you now.

Do take care of yourself and try not to worry - you have such a big heart... a true poet's heart. I do so hope your writing can help you through this in the end.

And I got back to her:

You are right, he didn't mention anything to the Committee at all, nor to the two of us in spite of using the Tyger idea, which was very unkind --and that is precisely why I worried. Sometimes when Tim doesn't communicate to the Committee it is simply his autistic self, which is as you know pronounced...

But other times, and that has been a pattern throughout these years, it means something's going on where he's yielding power of some kind over to Paige. That's how the awful story with the Cottage started, [. . .] It is a very sorry game. She's made surprise appearances like that often, and they seem to be designed to cause as much harm as possible (like my Angel walk in Peckham Rye, the day I found out about them.) Long, long sorry story...

I'm doing what I can to stay well, I am writing, preparing an application for a job, meditating. Overall I have been surprisingly calm, which on the one hand is great news, on the other I worry I may just be suppressing things, considering this whole story is one of the most painful, and traumatic, that I have faced in my life... I feel an undercurrent of grief deep there, so I'm just paying attention to it for if I ignore it then it can break me down at the worst moment.

Do enjoy a lot tomorrow, send my love to Josie and the boys. I am sorry I did not join, but at the moment everything Blake-related makes my stomach hurt.

AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY TO OXFORD

The following day I was just crying and staring at the ceiling. I knew that if I didn't leave the Cottage appeal I would end up in hospital. I knew it could ruin my life. But it felt so unfair to be pushed to

abandon that way a project for which I cared so much, in which I had believed steadfastly and sometimes against all odds. And I could simply not understand the pronounced states of error, to paraphrase Blake, that had made other people concentrate so much darkness against me, and ultimately against the project. I felt I was dying. Suddenly I realized I couldn't even write the email to tell Mr Heath that I was leaving the appeal. I just didn't have strength. I needed to tell him, right away. I called him. He didn't answer the phone so I left him a message saying why I had called.

He then called me. It was around noon. He said that he hadn't planned to go to Oxford but suddenly had changed his plans. Why didn't I go with him? We could talk about the Cottage on our way there. We had to rush though, the concert opening the festival would start fairly soon. To be entirely honest I didn't know if it was a good idea to embark on that journey, but he seemed to be opening a door for dialogue, after more than a month of hostilities, so I decided to trust the gesture.

The journey to Oxford was wretched. Mr Heath started the bullying all over again. He accused me of leaving the appeal because "I couldn't have my way". I asked him whether if he realized how he had behaved throughout the whole campaign, about all his unethical behaviour, and he said something ludicrous along the lines that he was "just trying to administrate resources". He didn't admit having done anything wrong at all. He accused me of having ruined the Blake Society Annual Lecture. He accused me of always wanting to have a pat on the back. He accused me of leaving the Blake Society because I was incapable to work with others. I told him it was not true and that he knew very well why I was leaving, and that the Blake Society Committee was a painful place for me. He said, in complete denial of the mess caused by the involvement of his personal life in the Committee, "why? It's not painful for others. It's not painful for Luis." He accused me of being leaving the appeal "because of things that happened in the past", so I had to remind him that the personal past history between us had nothing to do with the appalling way in which he had broken every single work agreement and incurred into bullying and secrecy. I told him that I would leave the Cottage for a year; then, if the appeal succeeded, we could talk again, for I did want to be part of its future. Then he made what was perhaps the worst accusation of all: he said that a project like that of the Cottage demanded our faith, and I was simply giving up.

The unfairness of saying such a thing was so enormous I didn't know anymore whether if Mr Heath realized what he was saying. I asked him to please look after the project, tried to start telling him of my recommendations to follow up our work after I left but I couldn't go on, I was choked with tears. I didn't want to outpour my grief there so I calmed down. And very calmly told him what I still hold to be true: that the Cottage project was one of the most beautiful things he had ever done in his life. Then I added that it was also the most vile. He shouted, "Adriana, stop!". And I did. I had nothing more to say.

I stared at the landscape, which was gorgeous. It was a bright winter day. We arrived to Oxford talking about the beauty of the light, then enjoyed the concert. Later we had a café with the other Blake Society Trustees that attended, who looked rather alarmed to see us suddenly there together. I'm sure I looked rather drained.

Our journey back to London was much calmer. I asked him whether if he had understood why I had had to be at the meeting with the poet I had invited for our event. He repeated what he had said before: that he had "ordered" me not to go, so how could he trust me if I didn't obey his orders? I told him that he knew very well he would hardly ever find another colleague whom he could trust as much as me. He kept silent. Then we changed the subject, started to catch up on our lives. And then, just as he was stopping the car for me to get off, he said something quite extraordinary: that Blake was all about "making a leap into the unexpected", so why didn't I re-join both the Blake Society Committee

and the Cottage appeal? He said that though nominations for the Committee were closed now, I could be co-opted. He said that “we could do it”. I could hardly believe my ears. I asked him whether if he hadn’t listened to everything I had told him on our journey to Oxford. By now I was getting off the car. He said he did hear, but he had waited to the last minute to propose this so that I thought about it, instead of answering “out of pride”. Then he drove away.

It was, of course, out of the question. I decided not to say anything to him just then. Our AGM was four days away, I didn’t want any more conflict. Surely he’d understand, through my silence, that the answer was “no”.

I did tell Mrs Vinall what had happened:

[. . .] One of the saddest things here is that I don't believe he's even cynical, or at least not all the time. I rather think he's not capable of understanding the harm he causes, how he hurts people and damages work, I truly don't think he is capable of facing the consequences of his actions, probably because if he did he'd feel awful.

So I am sad, very tired, feel sorry for him (for us all really) but I appreciate his effort at accepting my offer to get to the AGM in peace, for I think that's what his invitation today was... never mind that for a whole month he had not really spoken to me.

At least this will mean that the AGM will run in peace, that I don't have to fear him attacking me (or so I hope!, with Tim you never know).

Time will settle things:

THE LAST AGM

On the day of the AGM, Mr Garrido sent to the Committee his draft accounts. As was the case with the rest of the Committee, his only concern about the Cottage seemed to be that it remained as far away as possible from the Blake Society:

Initially I took the view that the reserve restricted account was a separate account belonging to the new trust yet to be formed and that there was no need to complicate our accounts and mix the two in order to keep matters separate, reflecting the point that the Cottage project is separate from the Blake Society. We could even have gone for totally separate sets of accounts. But after discussion with several committee members the feeling prevalent now is to present a single but fully comprehensive set of accounts.

Naturally in due time the cottage funds will be transferred out of Blake Society accounts into a new account bearing the name and belonging to the new Trust. By the way, the new Trust though not yet in existence formally, at least in Equity it already exists and we respected this reality by using restricted accounts and keeping the monies as separate as possible.

As for transparency we have electronic statements of all donations that reached us via Just Giving as well as a record of receipts kept by Adriana in relation to donations she received from members of the Blake Society. These records are available to all committee members at any time and will be in the file and available at the AGM as well.

I answered to him:

Thank you so much for the revised draft accounts, and also for the detailed explanation to the Committee about the Cottage financial situation.

I am assuming that we also have the electronic statements of donations made through Indiegogo. It is a really good idea to have all these records at the AGM...

I was looking forward to that transparency but it didn't materialize. The documents were not available at the AGM at all. I've never seen them. In fact Mr Garrido didn't even attend the AGM, he said he was unwell. By now the amount of donations for the Cottage that appeared in the accounts was £24,804, with expenditure on legal fees of £3598. I never saw a breakdown of these amounts.

Later that day Mr Vinall sent me an email:

[. . .] It's such a pity that you're leaving as Secretary. You'll be a hard act to follow, and be very much missed.

Love,
Antony



I wanted for the Blake Society to have a caring and dignified ending to what had been an extremely trying year. I wanted, again and again, for all of us to be safe. I wanted no wars, and I cared. Perhaps the following email, that I sent to Mr Garrido with copy to Mr Heath a few days before the AGM, will make clearer to the reader in which spirit I wanted to part ways with the Blake Society:

I'd like to check with you and Tim whether if you'd approve some budget for flowers for the AGM and talk.

It would be I think auspicious for a renewed cycle in the Blake Society and a fitting company for the talk of a Buddhist poet on Blake and the Imagination.

If you approve, around how much would you think is sensible?

The budget was approved. On the day, I collected the flowers, placed them next to our speaker's seat.

At the AGM, Mr Antony Vinall thanked publicly Mr Heath for his hard work for the Cottage. He didn't mention me at all, or the Big Blake Project. Nor did Mr Heath acknowledge their or my work either. What he did was inform us all that our deadline to purchase the Cottage had been extended again, this time to 27 February. He hadn't bothered to tell me that.

After the AGM our guest speaker gave a superb talk on Blake and the imagination. It was quite apposite for the Blake Society at that moment, as he talked about Blake's belief in the integration of all our energies for us to be able to inhabit the world with our true humanity. Perhaps it was apposite too that when the talk ended, just when people were starting to ask questions, the fire alarm went off in our venue. No one was sure whether if we should leave but the staff asked us to. A befitting way to end our year.

When the alarm ceased some of us regathered. Mr Heath was worried for not having been able to thank our speaker, who had now left. He kindly told me to take the flowers home with me. However, when we were outside and I said goodbye to him, he had become visibly angry. I told him that my leaving the Society would surely be for the best. I thanked him for all I had learnt from him in my years in the Society. The woman who the Blake Society Committee is accusing of acting with a thirst for revenge because she's a "woman scorned" gave a hug to Mr Heath, who remained still and rigid. I could tell he was just full of anger, so I left.



Throughout those harrowing days, I still hadn't managed to have Mr Heath answer to my questions about the final information regarding the appeal, so that I had something to tell to my contacts when they asked and when I informed them, as I wanted to do, that I was leaving. He still hadn't heard my

recommendations for the project. I still didn't know if the Cottage would be safe, whether if I would be allowed to leave with dignity, with things in their place, leaving a door open for me to contribute to the project in the future.

On 23 January I wrote to Mr Heath:

Hi Tim,

Firstly, and important: I did listen to your suggestion last Sunday before I got off the car --to 'take a leap into the unexpected' and rejoin both the Society and the Cottage appeal. I want you to know that I did not ignore it.

Regarding the Blake Society, I won't repeat what I have said before. There isn't really any other option but for me to leave. There is absolutely no pride involved in this decision: it is an extremely painful one, but we have to trust that it will be for the best.

Now to the Cottage:

We didn't finish talking about what I would like you to consider on my withdrawal, so I am attaching a list.

Last Sunday you said a few things that I found unfair. One that did hurt me was when you rightly stated that to marry vision to administration was a hard task and one had to fight, to then add that I was giving up. I found it a tremendously unfair thing to say, but I saw you angry too, and disappointed, so I was puzzled.

May you perhaps read again my letter to you of 30 December, and ask yourself whether if that is the voice of someone who's giving up on that fight? Or the voice of someone threatening to poison our work?

For nearly two months now, for no reason, with no explanation whatsoever, you've stopped all communication with me about a project to which I have devoted so much work, faith and indeed vision --the third time this happens since we started working on it. How can I help you see that it is not possible to work or sustain any common vision like this, and that I had reasons to dread another nightmare?

As I told you on Sunday, since we started work on it, the Cottage project has been as central a part of my work and my life as it has been for you. I have done everything in my power, in circumstances that at moments seemed frankly impossible, not to give up --and my resilience did bear fruits.

It seems to me that you resent my saying this: you mention the 22 years you have spent seeing how to preserve Blake's legacy in the Cottage and South Molton Street.

I need you to know that I've never tried to lessen your efforts, let alone appropriate the work of your lifetime. I know how devotedly, generously and courageously you have worked to guarantee that both properties are saved. I hope you have no doubts about how much I respect, admire and am grateful for your life's work devoted to this and to the Blake Society. That admiration, respect and gratitude I have expressed not only in words, but in the commitment of my work with you, sometimes against all odds.

If I do mention what we have done together, both in the conception and running of the concrete present project, it's because you seem to wish to negate it. I am not trying to add merits to myself: I just plead with you to remember the ideal with which we started work on this, the beauty in striving to articulate for the public what the actual purpose of the Cottage might be now that we had a chance to acquire it.

Since the project started, despite all the problems, and awfulness too, we have continuously invested all we have in inspiration, vision and hard practical work in it with a community of purpose because we believe in it; both our hearts are in that ideal without a doubt.

So I am not giving up at all. I just ask you what other option do I have, when I keep on being cut off the project for no reason over and over again, despite all the good, beautiful work we have done together on it.

Yesterday I heard for the first time the final deadline we have to purchase the Cottage: 27 February, little more than a month.

It would be stubborn to drop efforts now after so much work and so many obstacles overcome. How can I help from here till then? We may find a way to join efforts in a way that we're both comfortable with.

After that, if we are successful, I can withdraw, leaving you the list of considerations attached for you to bear in mind. Then let's leave time do it's thing --we need distance to see things clearly. Within a year, if we manage to purchase and the project is thriving, we can talk again and then we may find a way in which my own vision and work might be of use.

Regardless what happens, it is really important now that we both allow anger between us to dissolve. We should not hold on to it nor allow it to harden us: we have shared much that is beautiful, and a lot of that sharing has been expressed in the work we have done celebrating Blake, the work we have shared with others. That is I guess what was behind my hug last night: let us not harbour anger. If we have understood anything of Blake at all, we must let it go. This new distance between us may help in that.

Again, I am profoundly grateful to you for many things, far too many to enumerate here.

Let me know what you think of what I am proposing here, and have a beautiful weekend.

This is the document that I attached to my letter:

To leave Blake's Cottage

1. From here till the ultimate deadline (27 February) I offer my help in any way that may be useful, including tasks I had been involved in before. Since it is a different stage though, I am happy to do other things as well if they are helpful.
2. I need a detailed update of where we're standing and the progress that's been made in the different aspects of the campaign. Here I'd also want to know if the contact with the National Trust was followed up and is likely to bear fruits.
3. During this month I'd need to be kept informed on the progress being made, and of course I want to hear how we managed once the deadline's reached.
4. After the final deadline, when we know if we've succeeded or not, I want to thank the contacts I made who offered special support, for instance offering rewards (such as [. . .]), and if we're successful, let them know that as the project advances it will keep a connection with them, following up their creative ideas, honouring the offer we made to them to stay in the Cottage, etc.
5. I would leave much more at peace if I knew that some of the ideas I cared for and we thought would help make of the Cottage the place we conceived it to be were followed up. So, at the stage in the project that you consider appropriate, I would thank you if you did contact the Barenboim-Said Foundation and explore the chance to work with them so that the Cottage might offer respite to young composers from countries in conflict. I would also thank you if you got in touch with ICORN and not let the idea of the House of Refuge for persecuted writers die. If you'd like me to write draft letters to any of these I'll be happy to do so, and perhaps it would be better for me to contact [. . .] (ICORN) directly, since I established the initial contact, for you then to follow up.
6. We have elicited sympathy from many interesting people. Once the Cottage is open it might be a good idea to turn to contacts already established and think of links they may have with the project (if not partnerships, special events, festivals, etc.). Andrew Motion's Poetry Archive comes to mind. I can make a list of whom I think should be borne in mind in the

future from the contacts I made, with whom a creative connection may be established.

7. As a formal thing I want to say goodbye to Rachel, with whom we started work on the campaign.

8. Since I am responsible for money raised as well, I would like to know some details about the governance of the Cottage. For instance, if a Treasurer is being appointed, how will finances be administered, etc.

9. If all goes well and we succeed to buy, I propose we talk again within a year's time, and if we find that there are ways in which my own work and vision can be of help I may be able to engage in work on a different stage.

10. If during that time you feel there is some particular thing in which the project would really need my help you can of course contact me and I'd be happy to do what I can.

11. Finally, I ask you to remember, and honour as best you can, the care, hopes and ideals with which I too have contributed to this project; to remember that they have a share in the nobility and beauty that the people who support us are believing in.

Adriana

23 January 2015

He ignored my letter, so I wrote again on 28 January:

What have you thought about my proposal and the other points I made regarding the Cottage a few days ago?

I offered to help in what I can for this crucial extra month we have to secure it, then step out after that.

Independently of whether you accept my offer or not, before I leave "officially" I ask you to consider all the other points and let me know your views about them, and I do need an update. .

You know all the work I have put in here, and I am responsible for a lot as well so please let us communicate and find an agreement that is fair. To leave it all suspended in silence can only be harmful, and we don't need any more reasons for upset or anger, so please take a look at what I sent you last week.

I have a folder with some stuff regarding the campaign by the way, and the bank pay-in book. I can send that to you with Rod if you want.

This issue is no doubt difficult, and to me, very painful indeed, but again, let's trust it's for the best and that all our efforts will bear fruits, that that door will be open to all --then this dark season will truly and rightly be left behind.

Mr Heath answered:

Thank you for your letter.

I gave you the opportunity to speak for more than two hours on the drive to and from Oxford, and your position was fully explained and needs no further explication. My own offer was succinctly and clearly stated.

As you can imagine, I am now busy until the end of February but thereafter will give you an update.

Yes, please return any documentation or bank books through Rod to the Committee.

Hope your life is expanding into the Blakean void ... and beyond.

So I got back to him:

- No Tim, you didn't give me a chance to talk on the Oxford trip: you just repeated unfair accusations, without acknowledging anything you've done wrong in this sad story, which suggests you were not listening. You then accused me of giving up on the

Cottage appeal --*from which you cut me off* yet again at the start of December, with no explanation, after having been working so hard and well together. *I still don't know why you did that.*

- Your offer on our return showed you'd failed to hear and acknowledge that I am leaving the Blake Society and the Cottage appeal *because you have left me no other choice.* You seemed sincerely to believe that what you proposed might be possible --your confusion pained me, that you could not see that in the circumstances such an offer was, 'Why don't you return to work in a place where you and your work have been relentlessly abused, the latter actually snatched away from you?' Can't you really understand all this? Is it possible that you're truly not aware of what you have done?
- The appropriate thing now is for you to give me a full update of the campaign, respond to my list of suggestions and of course give me a final update after the February deadline. I know I can hardly expect a rational or fair response; that sense of impotence adds to everything that is so painful for me here, but I still must point out your duties, for this has been my work as much as yours.
- Did you actually read, or take in, the proposal I sent you last Friday, my efforts at clarity and the good faith in which it was written? It would be important if you did.
- My work, my commitment and passion for this project are everywhere in what has been achieved so far, and will be there in every single thing that you do for the Cottage now. There will also be the presence of the ways in which you have wronged me and my work. There is no way that you can obliterate the fact that we have created and sustained this together, because we have believed in it and we care, nor can you draw a veil upon the reality to which you have sacrificed so much that is of worth.

I sense in your email's ending a veiled aggression that I won't accept, because I don't deserve it. It is still your anger. I hope you will one day be able to face what is it that lies beneath it. You have done much harm Tim. If you ever gather the courage to face that fact, and why you've done it, you may still become responsible for the consequences of your actions, may still transform the rage, into freedom perhaps?

He of course didn't answer.

So in the end, it seems, so much mud was thrown at Blake's Cottage because of a gigantic tantrum of Mr Heath's – because he was not allowed to turn it into his private playground, and because I was leaving the Blake Society.



As days passed, I still didn't know what to say to my contacts, how to say goodbye to them, because the Chair still hadn't updated me about the present situation of the appeal. It was a draining, and very unfair situation. It was unfair on a professional level as well. Given Mr Heath's anger and irrationality, I didn't know what he'd tell my contacts if asked why I left the appeal. I had done an enormous amount of work on it but I felt it wasn't even safe to mention it on a professional level, for if anyone asked Mr Heath about my work I might be slandered (precisely what is happening now). I simply had no idea what was going through his head or whether if he was forcing Ms Morgan again into the appeal. On 1st February I wrote with a final update about the situation to Mr Tweedy and the Vinalls. I needed witnesses, protection. Sadly, it was misguided of me to think they could come from these people:

Yesterday Rod came to pick up all the Secretarial stuff, and I gave him my final update on my (dis) involvement with the Cottage appeal.

I would like you to have it as well --I need to know that somebody knows how I finally came out of the project, in case things go really wrong with the appeal, or I am accused of anything. So here's the summary:

- December, a few days after Neil Gaiman's donation came through, Tim stopped abruptly again all communication with me regarding the campaign --up till today.
- As you know, I invited those Trustees who have been involved to work together and stop the secrecy. Only Henry answered to say he was not involved anymore. When I told Tim my

misgivings about his and Paige's silence he got angry, accused me of trying to poison the campaign, threatened with "exposing" me, and said Paige was not involved at all because she didn't have time. Still refused to give me an update.

- I decided to leave the appeal. Two weeks ago we were supposed to discuss my terms for leaving. On our way to Oxford he didn't respond to any concrete thing I told him. He just accused me of not being able to work in an organisation, of having ruined the annual lecture last year, etc. When confronted with what he's done wrong he kept on repeating all he does is try to run a Committee. It was an exhausting, irrational exchange. He was very angry and finally accused me of giving up on the campaign. I told him I was not giving up, that I had been in fact pushed out of it again. He did not respond to that. None of my terms and suggestions for leaving was acknowledged.
- Back in London, the moment before I got off the car, he said that we could be like Blake and "take a leap into the unexpected", and proposed that I re-joined both the Blake Society and the Cottage appeal. He said it was not too late, that I could be co-opted by the Committee. I asked if he had been listening to what I had said at all. He told me just to think about his proposal, that "we could do it" (as if some supernatural force, and not his own actions, were stopping us from doing things together). I decided not to say anything before the AGM so as not to upset him.
- At the end of the AGM it was clear I was not going to return to the BS; he seemed very angry when we said goodbye.
- The next day I sent him in writing my terms and suggestions, that I shared with both of you before. At the AGM I found out the that final deadline to purchase is 27 February, so I made a final proposal:
- With just one month to go, I offered to help during that time if he wanted. Then at the end of February I would leave, trusting he'd look at my recommendations, and in a year's time, if all went well and the Cottage was purchased, we might talk again and see if there was any way in which I could work in the project again, after having had the necessary distance.
- In any case, whether if I left now or end-February, I asked him to give me a detailed update of what is happening, including the Board of Trustees, how money will be administered, etc. He didn't answer. Last week I wrote to remind him that it was my right to have a full update before I stepped out.
- He answered saying that his offer to me had been very clear and I had rejected it so he will only give me an update until the end of February.
- There's nothing else I can do so I will have to leave the campaign knowing nothing whatsoever of what is going on, not knowing what to say to my contacts if they ask me, etc. My work has indeed been snatched away from me, I have indeed been trampled on, but I can't go on banging my head against the wall.
- We had been keeping people updated painstakingly, almost on a daily basis, through our webpage. It has now been static, with no updates at all, for almost two months, since Tim stopped communicating with me. During this time I've repeatedly told him we need to update the webpage and to please share the information with me, to no avail. This is the state of affairs until today. I will not consult the webpage again because it is very painful for me, but I think it should be noted that for the public who's been following us, visits to the webpage may make them believe the whole thing has been abandoned.
- On the way to Oxford Tim also belittled my work for the appeal. Since in our last Committee meeting he seemed to want to negate my achievement in our latest big donation (Gaiman's), and Brand's promise to help us this year, I'd also want to make clear that I can prove that was my doing, it is all documented. It is awkward to call attention to one's own merits, but given the circumstances I believe it is important that it is known that my efforts have yielded concrete, substantial fruits, since Tim seems bent on denying that.

- Because of these sorry episodes, all in all around 4 months and a half of what could have been transparent team work have been wasted in lack of communication, secrecy and division. Everybody's work, good will and support have been betrayed. This includes Tim's own devoted work: it's as if with one hand he were trying to fill a bathtub with water while with the other he took the plug out. It is a very irrational and destructive way of working and I believe that the Blake Society should keep an eye on what is going on... if at all possible..

So this is it. I have no other option now but to accept that half or my work has been stolen, the other half, wasted. I know Tim is behaving like this because, paradoxically, he's angry that I did not stay in the Society, nor in the project from which he was pushing me out... There is simply no sense here, no logic. I am doing all I possibly can to let go and heal without bitterness... not easy, but I'm trying.

Tim's behaviour has been erratic and indeed vile. Yet I still would like to say, for whatever it's worth, that his devotion for the Cottage appeal is sincere. The destruction he's flung my way, the destruction of my work and of so much in this project is also destruction he's brought upon himself. I believe he's truly not fully responsible for his actions. Perhaps the saddest thing of all is this impotence, not being able to break through the barrier of irrationality and destructiveness. I am leaving so that it doesn't destroy me, and I indeed feel I still need witnesses, some kind of protection (for me, and for the Cottage project). But it is protection from someone who's not quite well, not from a bad man. There is a difference; Tim is in essence a very kind and generous soul, and I'll feel more at peace if I say this.

Later still, on 7 February, and on the verge of breakdown, I wrote to Mrs Vinall:

I am worried because I had been preparing for this moment for ages with as much strength as I could and I had expected that the relief of stepping out of harm's way would be a very good counterbalance to the pain.

So I'm a bit taken aback that I'm in this swamp of grief only... I do feel on the verge of breakdown and that's not what was supposed to happen. I walked out of all this mess in order to *avoid* breakdown!

I guess I'm letting my friends know because people, myself included, are so used to my resilience and my coping with everything and I am very scared now feeling that I may not cope after all. It's just an accumulation of far too many things for far too long, with no respite at all.

Mrs Vinall was very kind to me. I will always be grateful for that, and I know that the whole situation was just too horrible for everybody... and yet, why did she think that it should be tolerated in the Committee that a Trustee and work on a project went through such harm?

The nightmare simply didn't end. My contacts kept on asking me about the appeal, what had happened, why there wasn't any new information in our webpage. Had it all ended? It was humiliating not to be able to respond, since I had no updates from anyone. I could not possibly say, "I don't know, because the Chair has decided to withhold all information from me". Unless I disclosed the whole thing to them, which I didn't really want to do, it would throw a bad light on *me*. Mr Heath had said he'd update me after the 27 February deadline, but all he did was congratulate me for my birthday from his personal email address on the 28th:

A Happy Birthday to Adriana !

To which I had answered:

Thank you Tim. (It was on the 26th.)

People ask me about the Cottage, and I still know nothing.

So I wrote again to the Vinalls and Mr Tweedy on 3 March 2015.

Dear Antony, Christina, Rod,

I hope you are all well.

Unfortunately I am not. I'm breaking beneath an accumulation of [. . .] problems, plus of course the aftermath of my Blake Society experience. It's been many years of relentless harshness and I am closer and closer to a real nervous breakdown. I very much fear I may lose the battle, that my proverbial resilience may let me down this time and I may end up in hospital.

Added to all this, I still have to go through the humiliation of being asked about the Cottage and not having the tiniest bit of information about anything at all. As I told you before, I have stopped looking at the Blake Society webpage. It is too painful and I will never visit it again.

After the AGM Tim said he'd give me a full update at the end of February (the supposed final deadline). But he's still being his erratic self --on the weekend he sent me an email for my birthday but with no information about the Cottage. I replied reminding him people ask me about it and I have nothing to say. He has ignored my email and I am not going to write to him again.

I do not want to receive news or surprises through the Blake Society newsletter. I feel positively threatened at the idea of receiving such newsletters now, so I want to ask you, first, and urgently: please Rod, remove my address from our mailing lists. I don't remember well but I may still be both in the members and non-members lists. I may be there with 2 or even 3 different emails, please make sure to remove them all:

I haven't renewed membership to the Society of course, and I won't. I don't want to receive any brochures, journals, nothing whatsoever so please remove me from the database as well.

Finally, I ask you to please give me as fullest an update of the Cottage as you can yourselves. That will be I am sure much gentler than anything I can expect from Tim, whatever the news are. I am fully aware that you may not have enough information either, but whatever you know will be more than what I know: nothing at all.

I hope one day it will dawn on everybody at the Blake Society how unspeakable it is that I should be held in this situation, after all the devoted work I gave to the Society, and my expulsion of the Cottage project --not only as you know it was my creation as much as Tim's: while I was involved, that involvement was the one with integrity in the midst of an awful mess. Till the very end, up to the AGM I did all in my power to restore that integrity to it. I finished my term as Secretary because the Committee asked me to, hoping to help to prevent scandal and the destruction of both the Society and the project, I kept on working hard and devotedly despite all that had happened and I hope that in the routine of the new year, that won't be forgotten.

I hope everyone remembers I should not be sacrificed this way and that I deserve at least the consideration to find out what is going on with my project --for it was mine as well, something I too created--, that I do not deserve to be kept in ignorance, a wait that has been going on since early December.

And I hope that the Society may have the strength both to survive and to make sure that people there are accountable for their actions.

I thank you all again for all your support during this truly awful time. I will do my best to hold on, I know that if I end up in hospital things can only spiral down. But meanwhile I'll thank you if you help me be less of a scapegoat of the Blake Society, by giving me the information I need to be able to put a final stop to this episode in my life and close it for good.

Mrs Vinall responded:

Dearest Adriana,

Really feel for you, I know you've given so much to the Cottage Appeal and the BS.

At the moment, and Rod might know more, but my impression was that Tim was waiting to see if any of the big financial donors came back to him.

We have a meeting tonight and hopefully might learn more, and if there are any developments we'll definitely let you know. So sorry if this doesn't feel like much at the moment.

Do keep in touch, you're greatly missed - though I understand the memories might be too painful. Sending lots of healing blessings and love,

Mr Tweedy wrote too:

Sorry - this is just a very quick mail as I'm at work and snowed under - but I wanted to assure you that I will remove your address from the database (incredibly, we still haven't found a way of converting it - but that should also prevent any emails being sent out by mistake). I've also told Tim to remove any and all addresses from the other BS databases/mailings, so hopefully this should be an end to it. If for any reason you do get sent anything please let me know straight away and I'll find out how that happened.

Like Christina, I'm really sorry to hear of the situation and send you every good wish and lots of cosmic hugs!

Love,

Rod x

ps. I'm hoping Antony or Christina may be able to help with what's happening with the cottage, as they're a bit more in the loop than I am (though none of us are much in the loop!). But if you haven't heard anything in the next day or two let me know and I'll try and find out what the current situation is. xx

It was clear that no one in the Committee had any idea of what was going on with the Cottage appeal, which as we will see soon, has always been the case. I still want to hear a response from these three persons: what did they think they were doing, to remain passive in the midst of such a mess? What on earth did they think being a Trustee meant?

Then finally on 4 march 2015 Mr Heath wrote to me, with copy to Mr Vinall:

Dear Adriana,

The final extension to the legal option to purchase the Cottage expired on 27 February. The option was not exercised.

The legal advice remained as before - if we could not demonstrate an ability to complete the purchase in good faith, then we could be open to a claim for substantial damages.

A skeletal legal trust to vest the Cottage was approved by the Charity Commission on Monday.

No further major donors came forward, either with gifts or pledges.

A sum of £107k was raised in donations and contingent pledges of which £60k was received in cash, out of which legal, surveying and campaign costs will need to be paid.

An analysis of the donations shows that there were 697 donors from whom over £90k was contributed by just 15 donors.

The remaining funds will be transferred to The Blake Cottage Trust.

As you know, many avenues were pursued, and we thank you for your work and all your tireless efforts on behalf of the campaign.

The conclusion appears to be that there is not the appetite at present to put Blake's Cottage into trust.

[. . .]'s attitude was symptomatic - he declined categorically to support the project. His argument (perhaps a rationalisation) was threefold : he could not see the viability of a literary house on the south coast of England; there would be no possibility of corporate sponsorship; and Blake was not even happy in this residence!

There are a couple of possibilities that are still being pursued, but the likeliness of their success must be considered in the light of the total cost of the project - purchase, renovation and endowment - at around £1.5m

Finally, Antony observed that nearly all literary houses come into trust through private donation rather than public appeal.

with warmest regards

Tim

The amounts of money he mentioned are important because, sadly, as we will see in future chapters and as I've been documenting in this webpage, the finances of the Cottage are at the moment not transparent at all and there is money missing from the Blake Society and Blake Cottage Trust reports. I responded to Mr Heath:

Thank you, Tim, for the update.

You don't tell me what those other couple of possibilities that are still being pursued are, nor how The Blake Cottage Trust was set up.

Anyway...

It feels like a rather sad outcome for this endeavour, but I don't think it is surprising.

Time will help us assimilate what happened, what's been lost, and put it all in its right perspective.

Time does wonderful things, like bringing days like these --that I hope you're enjoying-- heralding springtime after so much darkness.



What followed for me was in fact a time of breakdown. What I had gone through at the core of the Blake Society took its toll as soon as I stepped out.

I never said goodbye to, or thanked, my contacts. I didn't contact the Big Blake Project either to thank them or tell them I had left the appeal, let alone why. I just didn't have the strength to do it, nor could I find the words. I had a meagre comfort from thinking that, now that the appeal had failed, it didn't matter that much. I didn't go to see the Blake exhibition at the Ashmolean: anything related to William Blake gave me pangs of grief. It also made me feel threatened; it was even a physical reaction, which can be explained I think if we consider the harm I had been exposed to working for an organisation that supposedly wanted to honour Blake yet allowed such abuse to happen in its midst. I felt as if someone had died. It was somehow true – it was a bit of me.

I wanted to recover. As the reader has seen, I had asked the Blake Society Committee, and in particular its new Secretary, Mr Rod Tweedy, to respect my need for recovery and keep me out of their mailing list, and not to send me their printed programme.

Yet very soon I received in the post the Blake Society printed programme precisely. It felt like being stabbed. I couldn't resist the temptation to read it and that's when I saw that the Tyger project I had conceived and coordinated, to take children from Kids Company to the zoo to read Blake's "The Tyger" to the tigers, was not even mentioned in the Chair's report. The programme went then straight to the bin.

Then one night at the beginning of May I went to bed early. I was ill, and continually exhausted after the sustained strain of the previous year. I was having a breakdown. Around midnight my mobile rang. I picked it up, disorientated, and saw that it was a call from Mr Tweedy. In the foggy state of mind that accompanies being woken by the phone in the middle of the night, my first thought was that something bad had happened. I even thought, alarmed, of Mr Heath, so I answered the phone.

But it was just Mr Tweedy in a pathetic state of panic, asking for my advice because he couldn't work with the Blake Society database...

That was the level of professionalism of the Blake Society Committee; that was the mindless way it functioned; that was the incapacity of them all to understand what respect for other human beings meant; that was the blindness they all shared to what had happened to me right under their nose.

I was furious and told Mr Tweedy to get a grip and leave me alone. On 9 May I received this apology:

I'm still kicking myself for disturbing you on Wednesday - I am really sorry. :(It was only due to my own extreme stressedness (and stupidity) that I called- a long story, but I'd been struggling badly with the new laptop that we'd only got on Monday to try and solve the Access/database problem, then spending hours frantically trying to update all the post-January membership information - in two days - , then on Wednesday - before calling you - I'd spent four hours checking the new Events Programme and trying to sort out the labelling...all because the next day the committee was meeting, to envelope all the Calendars so it all had to be done ... and I just couldn't work out what to do.

So please forgive me for my stupidity. How are you? Let's do meet up soon and have a proper catch-up. Things are all rather manic on many fronts - [...] - but it'd be lovely to see you again.

Cosmic hugs,

Rod x

Ladies and gentlemen: The Blake Society.



The Blake Society is supposed to honour William Blake. The Blake Cottage appeal started as an attempt to create something that might bring a bit of good to the world. I served both not only with steadfast, faultless work and great commitment, but, when things got ugly, with unerring good will and a fierce determination to work out conflicts openly, transparently and with mutual respect. Sure, I made mistakes, just like everybody else, but my good will and integrity were there, uncompromisingly, from the day I joined the Committee to the day I left four years later. I deserve nothing but gratitude and respect from both Mr Tim Heath and the Blake Society. It is an enormous debt of gratitude and respect what they owe to me.

Instead of that, I and my work were used and abused. My work was stolen. I was bullied. Great harm was done to me with the collusion, either active or passive, of the whole Committee. The collusion included being part to the deceit of their members and of the hundreds of people who generously supported the Cottage appeal. They are now slandering me, trying to justify the fact that I am speaking out with a lamentable sexist cliché, portraying me as "a woman scorned".

How can they justify people treating each other like this? And how on earth do they think they can honour an artist like William Blake if they're ignorant of the most elementary respect they owe to their fellow human beings?



I will never know what was the full extent of Ms Paige Morgan's involvement in the Cottage appeal. And I will never know because, as we have seen in this testimony, whatever she did was done surreptitiously. For as long as the campaign was running, of work she did none, but she did interfere, lied, tried to act as spokesperson of a project she didn't even understand, and tried to appropriate publicly other people's work. As this testimony also shows, I repeatedly made allowances for whatever

menial work she might have done hidden from everybody, and for the injustice she might feel, in her lack of understanding, if pushed out of the project. I therefore repeatedly opened the door for her to communicate openly, with honesty, and specify what her interest in the project was. She never answered but Mr Heath spoke for her, stating clearly that she was not part of the appeal because she didn't have time for it, even as she was talking about it in our social media. We will soon see how the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust have been ready to let her be scurried into Blake's Cottage again, and I wouldn't be surprised if she has been interfering behind scenes some way or another all this time.

IN THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS, that will bring my testimony to its end, we will see what happened after Mr Heath suddenly purchased Blake's Cottage and appropriated it with his own private little Trust, and how he elbowed out the Big Blake Project in Felpham. Mr Eliot and Mr Vinall will keep on reappearing in not too honourable ways. Then we will read how the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust spiralled down into becoming the thoroughly unscrupulous organisations they are now, who haven't stopped lying to the public for over three years, and whose finances are anything but clear.

