

What Happened with the Blake Cottage Appeal

Chapter XIV



In our last chapter we saw how Mr Heath, the Chair of the Blake Society, had managed to appropriate Blake's Cottage after its purchase, elbowing out the Big Blake Project and keeping the Blake Society in the dark about his dealings; how Mr and Mrs Vinall, and the new BS Secretary, were seemingly very worried, and how I put them in touch with the Big Blake Project so that they could all reach a solution together.

The Vinalls and Mr Tweedy promised to Mrs Rachel Searle, from the Big Blake Project, that they would shortly hold a Blake Society Committee meeting and then would invite both the Big Blake Project and author Beryl Kingston, who had supported the appeal in Felpham and was also very angry, to a joint meeting with them.

Then I flew to Mexico for three weeks.

Though very busy there, I was expecting news from these BS Trustees, who had promised to get in touch.

By 13 October I started to worry because I had no news (the Committee was supposed to have met the previous weekend). This time the silence was entirely justified, due to a bereavement in Mr Heath's family, but I didn't know.

I was launching some books at the Mexico City International Book Fair and was meeting loads of friends and wonderfully creative people; I felt that it might be half-safe to talk a bit about the Cottage now that it had been purchased and, supposedly, the Blake Society Committee were committed to make sure things would be OK, so I started to get ideas of possible international collaborations with the Cottage's programme, but before talking too much I wanted to make sure that the Cottage was indeed safe and worth promoting. Clearly, and even though I had been expelled from it with such violence, I still wanted for it to flourish.

I wrote to Mr and Mrs Vinall and Mr Tweedy:

I hope that your meeting with the Committee last weekend wasn't too stormy and things have started to ease, and that all goes well when you meet the Big Blake Project.

I will probably have the chance to talk with the director of the Casa Refugio Citlaltépetl in Mexico City (<http://www.casarefugio.com/>), the model I had in mind when I thought of the House of Refuge for persecuted writers scheme for Blake Cottage. It was founded by Salman Rushdie and it is a wonderful place that has done much good for freedom of speech and for literature.

As you know the House of Refuge was the first step taken towards the Cottage campaign even before the campaign started, in 2013, and it had the enthusiastic backing of English PEN, who have invited me to join them later this year.

What I think I can do, given the fragility of the Cottage situation, is have an informal chat with the director, whom I have known for many years, tell him about the purpose of the Cottage as a centre for creation and see if they'd be interested in supporting it and engage with it somehow.

Then, if the Cottage problems are sorted out, I'd be very happy to put the Casa Refugio in touch with whoever is the right person to engage with them in the Cottage Trust.

It goes without saying that I'd only do that if the Cottage has returned to the right track, if the Trust, its programme and staff are completely transparent and accountable, for I would not risk any more damage and disappointment for these people.

So please let me know if things are working well, or at least are starting to go in that direction.

This is the kind of thing I was hoping for the Cottage to be. You also know I was very keen on contacting the Barenboim-Said Foundation, and when I saw recently the Ai Weiwei's exhibition at the RA I thought it would be really wonderful for the Cottage to establish a link with his studio.

Of course none of these things can happen under the constant threat of collapse and stupid scandals so... let's hope for the best, the Cottage can be a truly superb, necessary and happy space for loads of creative and courageous people.

Meanwhile I am enjoying the Book Fair in Mexico City very much indeed. The book launch of my fiction anthology went really well, with 3 or the British authors here who have been very happy. The book is being given gratuitously and there have been hundreds of people getting it already. There are loads of talks with the guest authors, and the poets of the Poetry anthology start arriving today. We'll launch that on Saturday plus my book of poetry and the Book Fair is a vibrant, wonderful, and rebellious thing right in the centre of Mexico City and facing the Palacio Nacional. I'll tell you about it when we meet, it's so exciting! And it has reinforced my feelings of hope for the Cottage, because when people work with such enthusiasm out of sheer love for literature and the arts, with such passion, the world can be transformed at least a tiny bit, and that tiny bit always counts.

Yes, my hopes for the Cottage were indeed being rekindled. A few days later I also talked with a Mexican publisher friend of mine who makes beautiful hand-made editions with a movable-type printing press and I couldn't refrain from mentioning Blake's Cottage – that the printing press that Prof Phillips had had made for the Ashmolean exhibition would be there; that projects of beautiful British-Mexican co-editions could be imagined, something that fired his enthusiasm as well. I was not looking for anything for myself; I was thinking of *simply putting all these people in touch with the Blake Cottage Trust...* if I had guarantees that it was accountable. I cared about the Cottage. I still do.



SPECTRES FOR A COMMITTEE

I didn't receive any response to my email, so on my return to London I called Mrs Christina Vinall.

My heart sank. She was obviously uncomfortable to talk. She didn't tell me anything of what had transpired in the Blake Society Committee meeting. She only said that they had "handed over" the issue to the Blake Cottage Trust. I couldn't believe my ears, since Mrs Vinall had been telling me all along that it was nonsense to pretend that the Cottage could be separated from the Blake Society. I realized then and there that a cover-up had been set in motion.

I asked her when would they have their meeting with the Big Blake Project. She didn't respond directly, but said that Mr Heath had explained to them that there had been conflicts with them in the appeal, and that "poor" Mr Heath had had to deal with Mrs Searle's anger. Poor Mr Heath! The man who had bullied me, and the Big Blake Project, out of the Cottage! I just couldn't recognize Mrs Vinall and I told her that I was failing to understand her. She then said something quite insulting: that, again,

“poor” Mr Heath had been under such stress the previous year, that she thought he had nearly had a breakdown.

It was really too much. Mrs Vinall was the person in the Committee closest to me during the whole ordeal. Previous chapters in this testimony show the extent to which she knew that I was being harmed by people in the Committee who were unscrupulous, Mr Heath being the main one. She had been witness of the effect the bullying was having on me. She had in fact witnessed how I was myself having a breakdown by the end of it all, with my health in tatters, and now was asking for commiseration for the bully as an excuse for what seemed to be the decision to ignore the concerns of the Big Blake Project. I found it sickening.

I think it’s possible that Mr Heath may have been close to a breakdown as well the previous year. But the heart of the matter was that the stress and the poisonous atmosphere of the appeal had been his doing. Talking with Mrs Vinall, I started to feel positively ill – ill with disappointment, and with fury. It sounded as if she wasn’t having the greatest of times herself.

When I challenged her about the way the Committee was handling the problem, she asked, suddenly exasperated, why I didn’t nominate myself as a Trustee again, that the door was open. Then she told me, to make things even more complicated, that Mr Heath’s mother had passed away while I was in Mexico.

I hang up in quite a state and, confusingly, also feeling grateful to Mrs Vinall despite my anger, for having given me the news about Mr Heath’s bereavement with much kindness.

I sent a brief email to Mr Heath with my condolences, that were wholehearted. He thanked me, briefly too. I responded to that with a truly caring email that has no place in this testimony, but that was certainly not the kind of thing that is written by a person trying to have “revenge” on someone.

And I was left, once again in the history of the wretched Cottage, with a horrid ethical dilemma. What was happening with the Cottage was all wrong, and incredibly unethical. But Mr Heath was grieving and I didn’t want for things to be too harsh for him at his most vulnerable. We’d have to thread even more carefully then...

Meanwhile I received an email from Mr Tweedy:

Mr Tweedy was the only one to respond to my email of 13 October... though he did so until 6 November:

[. . .] I don't know if you've been in touch with Antony or Christina, but we had the big BS meeting about the cottage to discuss all the concerns raised, and the Society formally wrote to Rachel to let her know what was discussed, to try and clarify some points, and to encourage of course greater communication and collaboration. I also spoke with Rachel and have been in email contact with her.

I'm hoping that all parties can get together and talk about this face to face, perhaps later this month. I've been working flat out [. . .] but am happy to be part of any meeting. I gather that Rachel, Beryl and others have now met with Peter Johns as well, and I'm going to encourage them to develop this connection as I think it could be key to the success of the project, and also makes sense as he's a local resident. I see from the last BS emailing that there's a new email address for the cottage: visions@blakecottage.org and that Tim/the trustees "are inviting people to submit their vision for the Cottage". This is at least a nominally collaborative gesture and I'm going to encourage everyone to take full advantage of it and to contact that email address with any ideas, issues, concerns, or suggestions. It's going to take a long time for the cottage to be converted from a residential property to a Blakean space - it took the Freud Museum three or four years - but I hope communication lines between the various parties are better now.

I would direct any enquiries you receive to the blakecottage.org address - both for practical reasons and also to make sure that any concerns are directed straight to them, to encourage all the trustees to take responsibility for sorting things out.

I found that invitation for submissions of a vision for the Cottage very worrying. There *was* a vision for the Cottage: the whole appeal had consisted in the development and promotion of that vision, which was what people had supported.

I wrote to Mrs Vinall first, with my concerns regarding our telephone conversation:

I want to thank you again for having told me about Tim's mother's death, and for your thoughtfulness in not telling me while I was away. [. . .] I slept little last night, what with the jetlag and the sadness about this news. [. . .] This, in the midst of the Cottage complexities, is very difficult indeed. After Tim's response I felt at freedom to be less on my guard, and I hope that my words help him soothe the complicated grieving process at least a bit.

At the same time, I don't see many reasons for hope or trust regarding the Cottage, after talking with you and after receiving an email from Rod, and I do wonder still what my position should be -- ethically, and a position that honours everybody's work, including my own.

To write words of comfort to Tim while mistrusting him regarding the Cottage makes me feel awful, but this situation simply reflects reality.

I can see that you and Rod and I'm sure Antony have been doing all you can to open up communication. At the same time, since some of the real causes of trouble were never addressed, not even after I spoke out in September last year, the situation remains one in which the BS and the BBP's name and work were used in order to yield full and almost exclusive control over what happens with the Cottage to Tim, and as long as there are no other accountable people in the Cottage Trust, the situation will remain the same.

The two other Trustees know nothing about the campaign and project but what Tim chooses to tell them. I was never allowed contact with Michael Phillips even when Tim and I were running the campaign last year and even when I was suggesting Tim how Phillips, and the Oxford exhibition, might help the project. In fact only very late did Tim casually let me know that he was helping organise the Oxford festival, and simply ignored my comment about wishing to take part in it and having the BS close to the festival as well. So even during the campaign Tim dealt with Phillips' involvement in secrecy and with the logic of division rather than union.

From October 2014 till January this year (3 days before the AGM and my leaving the BS) Tim and the lawyer who set up the whole thing were the Cottage Trust. As soon as Peter Johns and Michael Phillips joined the lawyer resigned, though the Trust still keeps their address, so this rather sounds like the lawyer's being a trustee for such a brief time was only a strategy to make it seem as if a Trust was being set up, when in fact it was all in Tim's control all that time, then he appointed who he wanted -- people who had been kept apart from the campaign altogether. All this seems to me still rather manipulative, and worrying.

I was very concerned last year about how the crowdfunding page seemed to turn around Tim's person. I told him of my concerns and he ignored them. Now he's in fact the only real power over a project for which he has refused access to anyone who has cared about it.

Rod advises me to direct any enquiries I receive about the Cottage to the Blake Cottage address... it's a bit ridiculous that up till now if you click on blakecottage.org you are directed to the Blake Society's webpage, in its Cottage section, and in fact most of it still very much my own work. It just doesn't hold up, that the BS is disengaged from the project, and as you rightly said yesterday, it will never be completely disengaged. Even congratulation messages still go addressed to the Blake Society.

I may respond to the invitation to "submit our vision for the Cottage" to the email set up by Tim (an odd thing to do, when the whole project started with a rather clear vision that was the reason why it was supported by so many people). And yet, who can guarantee that those emails will ever reach *all* the trustees? And who will guarantee that those emails do not go to people who have no reason, or probity at all, to deal with them?

When Tim and I were in charge of the campaign and we had an email address to which people should address us, out of the blue, in secrecy and in an underhand way, he started bullying me and, without even

a warning, cut off that email address from mine and set it up instead linked to Paige Morgan, who had no business there. Who is there to stop that from happening again?

I have given the BS all the warnings that delicacy allows as to how very dangerous, and possible, this is, and as long as the danger is not faced and addressed, the Cottage, and the Blake Society, will remain in danger of corruption and scandal.

Around a year ago I helped defuse yet another potential scandal, when [. . .] wrote to me saying she had heard Tim wanted to buy the Cottage to live there, and that she'd "heard rumours that a key member of the Blake Society has embezzled funds for website work in the past". I immediately answered back to her asking her not to be led by rumours, trying to defuse her suspicions and anger (successfully) and I let Tim know what was going on. He was grateful.

But the rumours have obviously been there for a long time, and no amount of good will will ever do more than full transparency and inclusiveness can do.

So I will think about it, and if I do conclude that I can still encourage the people who ask me about it to support the project and direct them to the Cottage Trust, instead of washing my hands off it, which would indeed surprise them, I will also send my ideas (all in documents that Tim has already, and that were in a great deal a basis of our work together) to the Cottage Trust but also with copy to Rod, Antony and you at least in the Committee, and with copy to Michael Phillips' address.

The people who ask me are either friends or acquaintances to whom evasive answers about why I know nothing at all won't sound convincing, and all of them people deserving of all respect because of the seriousness of the work they do. I'd still love, for instance, the Spanish editors of Blake, with all their contacts, and knowing of the enthusiasm with which they supported the campaign, to support the project further, but I don't want to be responsible for misleading people who have done so much for knowledge and literature into a mess that is not transparent and so mined with the potential of getting even messier.

If everybody decides to go on relying on what Tim says and leaving him in full control of the whole thing, as he is now, the project, and everyone involved. will be no closer to averting disaster than we were this time last year.

I will share these concerns with Rod, and please feel free to share them with Antony as well.

It is, believe me, very hard to voice my concerns while sad, and worried, about Tim's recent bereavement. [. . .]

I do feel it my duty though to voice those concerns, for this is a project in which I invested as much of my work, care and passion as he did, and I care for it very much indeed: as you know, I didn't leave because I wanted to, but because I was bullied out of it.

While things settle, if at all possible do keep an eye on Tim; I hope that you can have a meeting soon not only for the BS's sake but so that he's in touch with people who, even if at times angry, care for him. [. . .]

This is all incredibly convoluted and painful, but I do hope we'll all manage to find the right answers and be all able to sleep in peace, while the Cottage slowly flourishes.

Thank you so much again for all your support, for your thoughtfulness. We all seem to have been dragged into so much turmoil... Let's hope for the best.

I then let Mr Tweedy know of my concerns as well, and told him that I'd get back soon to all of them with my definite position: I had realized that I needed to clarify that position pretty soon to the Committee of the Blake Society. If they, as I suspected, were ready to wash their hands off Blake's Cottage, I wasn't going to do the same. I was going to act, and I wanted them to know.

Meanwhile, on 20 October, Mr Tweedy had written to Mrs Searle and Mrs Beryl Kingston an email polite in tone but that, nevertheless, contained quite a few lies, trying to "clarify the background" to them. How exactly he thought he could do that, when by his own admission he'd been ignorant about everything regarding the Cottage appeal, I truly don't know. What he did was just

repeat the official version of the Chair and his timorous Trustees. One rather serious lie though was to say that:

the BCT had barely started the process of establishing itself when the appeal for funds needed to be launched urgently, so the Society was happy to hold the funds raised on its behalf, and for the Society's website and social media to play a leading role in the campaign. This was all necessary and useful, but may have led to some confusion over the Society's role.

This testimony has proved that that was not the case at all, and when the Cottage appeal was taking place, no process whatsoever for establishing the BCT had started, apart from inviting people who might join the Consortium if we succeeded, and who were kicked out in the process anyway. To say that the Society "was happy to raise funds on its behalf" was a rather extreme distortion of truth, and I wonder the extent to which Mr Tweedy was aware that he was making a fraudulent statement. He went on to say that the BCT Trustees

felt that at this stage a Felpham-based celebration where everyone involved could meet and exchange ideas in a convivial and informal setting might be more appropriate and constructive than a formal meeting of the three organisations involved. There is, after all, a lot to celebrate.

My idea of having the three bodies organize a celebration *together*, which had elicited such enthusiasm from Mr Tweedy when I first suggested it to him, had become this travesty. It was also a serious insult to Mrs Searle and the Big Blake Project, to pretend that a party was "more appropriate and constructive than a formal meeting of the three organisations involved". With what seriousness could they possibly discuss the very serious issues at hand *in a party*?

He then warned Mrs Searle:

It's essential for the realisation of this vision that we go on working together to support the BCT, which - with the help of the Big Blake Project - has made it possible for the cottage to be placed in trust.

He was demanding support for an illegitimate Trust and lying again, because the BCT had not made possible for the Cottage to be placed in trust. It was the Blake Society and the Big Blake Project who had ran the appeal. The letter is too long to trouble the reader with in this already long chapter, and one particularly revolting example of obsequious prose, riddled with void promises and very serious, blatant lies – the kind of letter one expects from bureaucrats at the service of autocratic regimes of whatever size and kind, and even more offensive since we all knew that Mr Tweedy didn't have the slightest idea of what he was talking about.

In any case, I explained what my position was to Mr and Mrs Vinall and Mr Tweedy in the following letter of 7 November:

Dear Rod, Antony, Christina,

On risk of exhausting your patience, I write to tell you what my position is regarding Blake's Cottage as of today – I think it is important for you to know because you have been my interlocutors for more than a year and the ones whom I've trusted with my knowledge of the risks we are facing. I am very grateful for all your support and willingness to help sort things out, and I wouldn't like my actions to take you by surprise.

I also think it is important to devote thought and time to this because we are talking about William Blake's legacy, on a critical moment that can either be the beginning of a great project, or go so wrong it would damage that legacy, and the name of everybody involved, for many years to come.

Finally, it is important because we are talking about around half a million pounds and a collective project, the power and control over which is now virtually in the hands of a single individual who has

not proved to be transparent or accountable for his actions in the past.

I think you may have at least a glimpse of how very difficult my position keeps on being regarding all this, and of how alone I am in it. I do appreciate your love and support immensely and there have been moments when I would have been rather broken without them, but because I was forced out of the Blake Society, if things took a bad turn and my right to have a say in this were denied, I would be entirely on my own. I am aware of that. It is a scary place to be, but I am not so afraid anymore. I have spoken with truth from the beginning, have done my very best to find the almost impossible balance of what is right in such a convoluted situation, and in that truth I find my strength.

All this time I have been wondering what is the ethical thing to do, which is ultimately all that really matters—even more so when we're all supposed to try to honour Blake. I have thought at length of the right balance between the personal and the professional, and where my loyalty should lie.

We all know that Tim is in a fragile space now: the Cottage has proven to be too big a beast to handle. People are angry at him. His mother has just died. Furthermore, he has done wrong, and he knows some of us know. I certainly do not want to contribute to corner someone who's grieving, let alone someone I have loved so much. [. . .] I won't be the one to push him down the precipice. [. . .]

But not hurting someone who is already fragile does not mean to protect him in doing wrong. Compassion does not go well with lack of ethics or turning a blind eye to breaches of trust. The seemingly inexhaustible sources of compassion I have had for Tim in the past didn't help one bit in making him honour his position neither in the Blake Society nor in the Blake Cottage project. At moments I was too scared and tried not to expose him. Concern about our work as a literary society and for his well-being has been for years an exhausting dilemma. When I've tried to protect him, it only made the problems worse. So my loyalty, it is clear to me, has to be above all towards truth, towards the work of others, and my own work.

On communicating with you on my return from Mexico I have sensed a risk—and please forgive me, and put me right if I'm wrong—of having gone back to Tim being able to manipulate and have his own way, accountable to no-one, again. I also sense a risk that, because of my past personal relationship with him, I may be judged as not being objective and allowing my emotions to interfere in this. So I would like to remind you that, though you have seen or heard me very distressed, all the proof I have put at your disposal of what has been so wrong, my arguments and the wrong-doing I have reported are related to the way his actions affect the Society's work. My own personal feelings did not interfere in my giving both Tim and Paige Morgan the benefit of the doubt when she joined a project she did not care about, nor in my welcoming her and being willing to work with her. All that is recorded.

Even after the horrors a year ago, after Antony's efforts at helping us reach some point from which going on working together was possible—efforts that both of them mocked on the very day that we signed our supposed “agreement”—I kept on working and trying to make both the Cottage and the Society work, in unity. When I saw the problems had started all over again in December I made a last call to them both to make their intentions clear, be transparent and willing to work in a team. Paige did not even deign to answer. Tim bullied and threatened me. I gave to all of you copy of that email of mine, among other material. All that correspondence, and the huge “dossier” I have to back me, are work-related. So if anyone ever feels tempted to blame my emotions for this awful mess, I think it is not only the unfairness of it that should be borne in mind, but the very real danger of having an even bigger mess exploding in everybody's face if the truth goes on being averted.

I told the Blake Society Committee last year what was going on and warned you all. You asked me to stay and contribute to trying to hold things together. I did. We did wonderful work together both in

the Society and the Cottage Campaign even after I had been subject to really unspeakable bullying. And after that I was bullied again, until forced out of the whole thing. I've found out now about the ongoing problems, the anger of the local people in Felpham and a very dangerous, potentially explosive situation there. I have warned you of what I know and the extreme seriousness of what is at stake and have tried to help open up communication. I have proof of everything I've said. I have left with you many documents that support it. I would have thought the Committee has seen and heard enough to really worry, and act.

I'm sure the three of you are doing that as much as you can. But I do wonder whether if in spite of that Tim is not being allowed again to wriggle his way into a position that is not only ethically disgraceful, but can entail legal action too. My conscience is clear in that respect: I have said as much as delicacy allows, in a rather delicate mess. I have warned the BS of the danger everybody's in. If the BS decides to leave things as they are and not to challenge Tim, forcefully and with absolute clarity, there is nothing else I can do for a Society I have cared a lot for and for which I have worked with full commitment and passion, as I'm sure you all know.

There is a point where all of us have to ponder on the respect we owe to our own work and that of others and on how far we are willing to allow someone in a position of power to abuse that power, and use and manipulate us for his own means. As for myself, I have pondered with as much honesty as I am capable of on how much of my anger and grief over all this is just my ego (or, in Blakean terms, my "selfhood") and how much is legitimate pain over the betrayal of everybody's work, good will and projects that are worthy of respect.

I am stronger now; I've gone through so much that I have learnt a few things in the way. I do not fear anymore that Tim and some people around him may trample over me. No one can do that. My work and its worth are not "trampable", and I know that the Blake Society has been lucky to have in its Committee capable, talented and very serious, professional people among whom I do count myself. So I am not defending my "self" here. But I do honour the work I did so painstakingly and caringly both for the Blake Society and the Cottage project.

The supposed disengagement between the Blake Society and the Cottage is not working: it cannot work. The campaign was started as a Blake Society project and it was the Blake Society, not Tim Heath, who people trusted. Even if Tim was clever enough to get a £300,000 donation, that doesn't give him any moral rights over Blake's Cottage, a place we meant to buy for the nation and to be open to all, nor the right to betray everybody involved.

So how do I reconcile my growing concerns about what is going on with the Cottage, everything that is ethically wrong there, my determination to honour my own work, and my equally big concern not to gang up against someone who is already very fragile and vulnerable and whom, on top of it all, I have loved?

Let's suppose I give him, and the Cottage Trust (that is, for all practical purposes, him alone for reasons I have already exposed rather clearly before) the benefit of the doubt and take on his invitation to submit our "vision" for the Cottage. It is a bit ridiculous, I know: we worked so hard on defining that vision from way before the campaign started. I know because I am responsible for a great deal of the working documents in which that vision was stated and the way it was presented both in Parliament and to the press. But let's be forgiving with the ridiculous part and play the game: I will forward my vision for the Cottage, what we meant it to be, what I believe it still can be.

But no amount of good will can make me so naive again as to send that proposal to the email address Tim has put forward alone. It will be sent too to all the Cottage Trustees, to the Blake Society Trustees

(those who in my view are worthy of that name; I won't include Paige Morgan. She was given plenty of chances to speak out and redress the harm done, yet she didn't. All she did was put in the Blake Society's webpage a pitiful document, riddled with lies, that mocked all our joint efforts at setting things right –something that no one challenged). I'll also send the document to the Big Blake Project.

I will send my proposals before the year ends –to avoid it being lost in the rush towards Christmas, or further manipulation in regards to the links between the BS and the Cottage Project as a new working year begins.

On the seriousness of the response I get, on the proof I can glean of a real commitment to transparency, inclusiveness and absolute honesty, will depend whether if, when asked about the project in the future, I encourage people to support it further or I say that I left because I do not agree with the way things are being done. I won't prompt conversations about the project, but I will not lie if someone asks. I will send my proposal and get on with my life, but I will not by any means defend the inexcusable.

I have been suggested that I may return to the Blake Society if I wished to. I hope you will understand that I can have no interest in doing so when the poison that started all these troubles, even before the Campaign started, and that is a source of corruption (corruption doesn't have to do with money only) is still there. To me the Blake Society became a place where I and my work were abused beyond words and where my work and commitment were repaid very badly indeed.

However, I am fully aware of the potentially difficult position in which I leave you if I communicate with the three of you but not with the other people involved. That is one of the reasons why I will send my proposal to all the other people I mention, and why I state now that I am willing to attend any meeting that is held with the purpose to find a solution to the present problems.

Blake's Cottage is a project very dear to my heart and its outcome cannot but matter to me.

You can rest assured that I will do everything in my power to hold the right balance in my actions and decisions regarding this situation. The Blake Society, the Cottage project and the deadly mixture of fragility and abusive behaviour personified in the person chairing both —a person I have cared for a lot— have brought into my life a deluge of grief and harm that few people can even imagine, and it has been hard to survive. But I have survived and I can see now with even more clarity what it is that really matters here, and it is the Cottage, Blake's legacy, our moral duty to honour what we set up to do when the project started, which is what people trusted and prompted their generosity.

So regarding this whole sad issue, this is my mental fight.

Thank you again for your patience and support. I do hope with all my heart that one day the Cottage really becomes the sanctuary and space for creation we envisioned, and that we all are safe, and proud of what we've done.

It was not a letter that the Vinalls were willing, or perhaps even capable, to respond to.

I therefore set out to work on my "vision" for the Cottage, to submit to the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust. In it, I did not only reiterate the original vision, but reminded the Blake Society, and informed the BCT, as tactfully but also forcefully as I could, that there were problems, that the Big Blake Project had been wronged, and that the Cottage didn't belong to them to do as they wished.



I didn't want this document, that I would send to all the Trustees of the Blake Society, the Blake Cottage Trust, and to the Big Blake Project, to take Mr Heath by surprise either, even less so after his bereavement, so on 9 November I wrote to let him know. It was an incredibly painful trial for me, to be in the position I was:

I wish there was a translucent way to tell you, unequivocally, that I care; that I am deeply sorry for what you must be going through - that I cared for her, and care for you.

Perhaps the greatest transparency is straightforward truth: that I want you to know this (in case you don't already), that I fear you'll lash back if I say it yet I do because I think it's important.

It is a difficult moment, probably volatile, in many ways. I know you've asked for submissions of "visions" for the Cottage. I think it's a strange circle, for we started with no money, but plenty of vision... Anyway, I will submit my vision, the one I still believe in.

At this stage I have no idea of how will you take it. But I prefer to let you know than it taking you by surprise.

Can each thing stand in its own place? What I said in my former email stands, with or without Cottage: I have full awareness of the enormous distance between us, but if there is anything I can do at any point in this time of your mourning, I will be there.

I probably shouldn't have worried that much about how Mr Heath would take things while mourning, or his supposed fragility. He didn't respond, and I didn't expect him to, but he did react: two days later he would call Mr Henry Eliot. What for will become clear pretty soon.



In any case, on 11 November Mr Tweedy responded to my email of some days back, saying:

With regard to the proposal you sent though i think it all sounds good - I think you mentioned that you would be sending something both to the BCT and also to other parties (including BBP and some BS trustees) and were hoping to have it ready before Christmas - which I think's a really good plan, and am looking forward to reading it. I imagine that theBBP might also suggest some ideas, as well as it being open to everyone to submit proposals - I'm not sure what the timeline is but I imagine a couple of months, to give everyone time to submit something if they want to, and then there'll be a discussion and evaluation in the new year.

His happy acceptance of this submission of proposals, which showed how little knowledge he had of the history of the Cottage appeal, exasperated me, so I answered:

Yes, I'll send my "proposal" hopefully by the weekend, to get it too out of the way. To be honest, and as I said clearly in my letter, I am just giving Tim the benefit of the doubt by accepting to play the game... for that is what it seems to be. Thoroughly absurd to be asking about a "vision" now, for we did have a vision that people supported, and it seems absurd to wipe it off to start from scratch; it sounds empty to me and I only hope it doesn't mean a further waste of time and mockery of people's good will. But since apparently there is no other way of trying to set things at least a tiny bit close to any sort of common sense or ethical procedures, I will try my best.

One thing is very clear: that whatever happened in that Blake Society Committee meeting, the *only one ever* to talk about the Cottage, long after the Cottage appeal had ended, the collusion of the

whole Committee into deceiving the public and abuse of power started there. Neither I nor the Big Blake Project were there to express our views. I, who had been, apart from Mr Heath, the other key figure within the Committee running the appeal, was *never* allowed to tell the Committee what had happened; not even in the meeting in which I had originally resigned and from which Mrs Morgan and Mr Eliot had been conspicuously absent.

As seen in my letter of 7 November, I offered the Committee to attend any meeting they deemed necessary to clarify things. I would repeat that offer many times, and up till now it has been ignored. The Blake Society, who had promised Mrs Searle from the Big Blake Project that they would meet up with them soon, *never* honoured that promise either. Whatever decisions they made, whatever fantasy Mr Heath, Ms Morgan and probably Mr Eliot, if they were there, concocted to justify the appalling state of affairs, was swallowed by the Committee without giving the Big Blake Project or myself any chance to state our view, or our position.

A VISION FOR BLAKE’S COTTAGE

On 15 November 2015 I submitted my vision for Blake’s Cottage, attached to the following email:

Dear Trustees of the Blake Cottage Trust, the Blake Society and the Big Blake Project,

As some of you know, I was a Trustee of the Blake Society from 2011 until January 2015. I was also its Secretary from 2013 until I left the Society, and I was extensively involved in the campaign to acquire William Blake’s Cottage in Felpham.

Since you have been asking for submissions of people’s vision for the Cottage, I am attaching mine in a document that is divided in several sections: Introduction, Original Vision, The Dissenting Imagination, Strengthening Links, Inclusion and Transparency Concerns, plus a few appendixes.

The said Document is in the Documents section in this webpage, titled “A Vision for Blake’s Cottage”. You can read it clicking on the following link <https://blakecottage.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/1-a-vision-for-blakes-cottage.pdf>), and it is reproduced below as well. It is a document I worked on with great seriousness and care, and it deserved to be received with equal seriousness, yet no one cared to answer to it. Mr Tweedy acknowledged it and that was all. No one cared.

Anyone accusing me now of being speaking out because I’m “resentful” should remember that document, then think twice and have some shame before continuing with their slandering.

The document read thus:

A Vision for Blake’s Cottage Submitted by Adriana Díaz-Enciso

15 November 2015

INTRODUCTION

I WAS A TRUSTEE of the Blake Society from 2011 until January 2015. I was also its Secretary from 2013 until I left the Society, and I was extensively involved in the project to acquire William Blake’s Cottage in Felpham from its conception in 2013 and throughout its campaign up to the moment I left both the BS and the Cottage project.

When I heard that the Blake Cottage Trust was asking for submissions of a vision of what the Cottage should be I was surprised, and worried. Much careful thought, work and time were devoted to defining that vision prior to and throughout the campaign, and it was because of that vision that so many people supported it in a variety of ways. I know this because I am responsible for a great deal in the campaign’s working documents, and for how it was presented to the public, to the press, to potential donors and at the campaign’s launch in Parliament in July 2014.

I am therefore submitting this document for your consideration. It is comprised of what those of us who started the Cottage project agreed that Blake's Cottage should be, an account of some of the recommendations for the continuation of the project that I sent to Tim Heath, the Blake Society's Chairman, when I left in January 2015, and some practical considerations. The present document also includes some new ideas that have come to my mind in the intervening time, a section on my concerns regarding the future of Blake's Cottage, and a series of appendixes that I think you may find useful.

ORIGINAL VISION

In this section I am quoting from both inner and public documents prepared for the campaign by those of us who conceived it. In the Appendixes section you will be able to access some other documents in full.

What the Blake Cottage campaign aimed at achieving was to acquire the Cottage in Felpham to turn it into "a centre that celebrates Blake, and welcomes visitors, poets, artists and universities to continue his legacy, creating new work in the spirit of his irrepressible imagination. The Cottage will be a refuge for everyone who asks great questions – the outsiders, the prophets and the visionaries. People will be able to visit & stay in the Cottage and in turn the Cottage will emanate their creativity back into the world." Our aim was also for the Cottage to "belong to everyone for the benefit of the nation – and the only nation is the *imagination*". The long-term plan was to join it to Blake's house in South Molton Street in London.

We stated that the Cottage wouldn't be a museum, for we didn't "want people to simply come in, look around then leave, but rather for it to be a place where people think, project and create. It would have an open door, but the emphasis would shift from a door open to draw in, to one open to give out".

The concrete ways in which we thought this could be achieved were (I quote again): “Open one or two days a week for day visitors, the rest of the week its rooms will be at the disposal of individuals and groups (i.e. artists, authors, thinkers, philosophers and scientists) invited to work on creative projects. One possible use of part of the building would be a house of refuge for persecuted writers. Each month the Cottage would host a public event: for instance, a conversation of Blakean interest with an artist or scholar, an exhibition, a talk or book launch, or an intimate concert. Ideally these events would be hosted by those who are currently working in the Cottage, and would be a chance to display the fruits of their work. So the Cottage would be a place for conception and creation, whose core values are imagination and dissent. It would also provide a flexible collaborative space for artists and minds where they could produce work that reaches local galleries, universities and other institutions. We want to create a space where people can take their projects off the ground, and therefore a space of renewal, including renewal of the world outside, even if in a humble measure.” Our vision was also stated as follows: “The Cottage is to be an exemplar of a way to live a life through courage and creativity. We are inviting support from everyone who is strengthened by the knowledge that somewhere in the world such a place exists; a home for the dissenting imagination.”

Such a statement is no mean thing, and the commitment behind it is not the kind of thing one can take lightly. That vision is what we worked for. Furthermore, that is the one vision that inspired people to support the Cottage campaign and prompted their generosity. Not only do I fail to understand why it might change; I don’t believe in fact that anyone has the right to change it now, so my proposals in this document are merely an account of some of the ideas of that original project, and some other new ones that I believe follow the initial vision.

THE DISSENTING IMAGINATION

As seen above, we said in our campaign that we wanted to create, in Blake’s spirit, “a home for the dissenting imagination”.

I know that it will take at least a couple of years for Blake’s Cottage to reach a stage in which its programme can be fully developed, and that more funding will be urgently needed to make this possible, but I think it is crucial that while the fundraising continues solid liaisons are established with the people and organisations that can contribute to ensure that the Cottage keeps alive Blake’s legacy of questioning and dissent through literature and the arts.

Here are some ideas. I am aware of the fact that the organisations I mention cannot give money and often need funding themselves, but if Blake’s Cottage gets to be inspiring to them for collaborative work, much of what the original project aimed at could be achieved. It could also lead to access to these organisations’ networks, from which further funding and support could be derived.

The House of Refuge for Persecuted Writers

The first step towards the actual Cottage campaign was taken in 2013, when the Blake Society’s Chairman and myself visited the direction of English PEN, in order to find out how much we could do together so that part of the Cottage’s programme included a House of Refuge for persecuted writers. I was inspired to propose this by the work of the Citlaltépetl House of Refuge in Mexico City, inaugurated by Salman Rushdie (<http://www.casarefugio.com/>).

The idea was to allocate some space in the Cottage to receive persecuted authors from other countries during a period in which they could find a safe haven and get adapted to a new country, get to meet and work with other colleagues and do their work in safety. The authors would engage with other features in the Cottage's programme, including literary workshops, lectures, conferences and other events that would take their work beyond the Cottage's boundaries into cultural venues, universities, etc. across the UK, but the Cottage would also host smaller events as the living space we envisioned, and would be a strong presence for the defence of freedom of speech – something we thought meaningful, as it was in Felpham that Blake was arrested for sedition.

English PEN was very enthusiastic about the project and helped a lot in promoting the Cottage campaign and spreading the word in social media; they also facilitated useful advice and support from organisations such as the Writers' Centre in Norwich and The Bookseller.

I know that English PEN is now delighted to know that the Cottage has been bought and I believe that a House of Refuge scheme within the broader project for the Cottage would be a most apposite use for this space that would truly honour Blake's legacy.

The way to go forward would be by taking up the links already established with English PEN (and through them with Free Word, <https://www.freewordcentre.com/>), the Writers' Centre in Norwich, and engaging with ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network, <http://icorn.org/>) so that ideas, work and perhaps some resources could be shared. Felpham could then become a Village of Refuge!

The Barenboim-Said Foundation

I believe that the work done by this Foundation, including the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (<http://www.barenboim-said.org/en/inicio/index.html>) is an inspiring example of how human potential can be put at the service of creation rather than destruction. Blake rightfully said that "war is energy Enslavd". The Barenboim-Said Foundation's work is all for the liberation of that energy. I thought of the possibility of Blake's Cottage working with them towards the end of the campaign in 2014 and the Blake Society's Chairman was enthusiastic about it. This would give a chance to young composers from war-torn regions to find some respite to do their work in peace in Felpham. The fruits of their work could then be performed in the UK and beyond. It would also open the door for enriching exchanges with musicians from other countries regarding the importance of the arts in society (something that was a paramount concern of Blake's), and of music's place in times of war and peace.

Ai Weiwei's Studio

Chinese artist Ai Weiwei is an outstanding example of the dissenting imagination in our times. He creates original, challenging and often collective projects across different media –his own versions of the kind of lucidity that made Blake create works such as *The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan*, or *The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth*. On seeing his exhibition recently at the Royal Academy it occurred to me that a collaboration of Blake's Cottage and Weiwei's Studio would be worth exploring.

IF BLAKE'S COTTAGE started seeking links with these organisations and, when possible, organising joint events at this early stage of its foundation, a lot of support could come to the project and it would be visible on an international scale.

The same can be done of course with national people and organisations. I have recently come across, for instance, **The Dark Mountain Project** (<http://dark-mountain.net/>), that might be another ideal partner for joint ventures of dissent.

It seems to me that in engaging with projects and organisations as the above mentioned, Blake's Cottage would become a meaningful centre for creation within the context of the dissenting tradition that Blake represents. By opening its doors to artists and authors in need of a safe place where to bring their visions to fruition the Cottage would honour its original purpose of becoming sanctuary for dissenting spirits, a centre for the pursuit of truth, freedom and beauty opening up to the world from the village of Felpham – the grain of sand expanding.

STRENGTHENING LINKS

Many people and organisations supported Blake's Cottage campaign to a greater or lesser degree. The support of some was minor at that early stage, yet now that the Cottage has been purchased the project's credibility should be bigger, and therefore there could be better opportunities for joint work that could result both in further funding and in establishing links of collaboration for creative projects in the future.

In my opinion, imaginative fund-raising events could be organised with them in different venues that would keep the spirit of the campaign alive in the public's mind while the necessary structural work is carried out in the building. They could also contribute to setting up a clear programme for the Cottage.

Strengthening these links is one of the recommendations I made to the Blake Society's Chairman last January. Some of the contacts I think worth pursuing are those of Sir Andrew Motion (one of the first persons to publicly endorse our campaign) and the **Poetry Archive**, the **British Museum**, the **British Library**, the **Arvon Foundation**, the **Poetry Society**, **Foyles**, the **National Portrait Gallery**, **Strandlines**, **Keats House**, **Dr Johnson's House**.

Advice and possible useful links abroad for the programme of resident artists and authors could be pursued as well by following up the contact already established with places such as **Ledig House** in upstate New York (<http://artomi.org/writers>).

Links with collections with Blake's work

All museums, galleries and institutions that hold works by Blake in their collections were contacted during the campaign. In some cases, due to the urgency to meet some of our several deadlines, there was no chance to get to the right person and not much support came from them. However, now that the success of the campaign is a reality and the Cottage has been purchased, that situation is bound to change and both creative exchanges and support could result from getting in touch with all these organisations again.

Other Creative Links

A very exciting feature of the Cottage project was - and I suppose and hope still is - to make of it the home of the printing press that was built to recreate Blake's Lambeth studio for the *Apprentice and Master* exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford curated by Professor Michael Phillips. Wonderful projects could arise from making of it a living printing press and it could also inspire artists and authors to create new illuminated books in the tradition of Blake, for whom the marriage of word and image was imperative.

Taking up links already established with some publishing houses and the **Ashmolean** itself, the **Tate Britain** and other galleries that hold Blake's work, could be a gate of distribution for the resulting works. There is also **Bloodaxe Books**, who supported our campaign, and so did **Enitharmon Press**, whose artistic director Stephen Stuart-Smith attended the first formal meeting held for the initiation of the Cottage campaign. Poet Jeremy Reed supported the campaign as well and was keen to create a book specially to support the project.

Collaborative projects could go beyond the UK's borders. I talked about the Cottage project to **Taller Ditoria** in Mexico (<http://tallerditoria.com.mx/>), who create exquisite poetry and art books with a movable-type press, and they thought that bilingual joint editions could be a very exciting venture. Their catalogue includes many of the world's main contemporary poets. A link was also established with Spain's **Atalanta** (<http://www.edicionesatalanta.com/>), who published the first edition in Spanish of Blake's full Prophetic Poems (illustrations included) and Kathleen Raine's essays on Blake. Its director Jacobo Siruela is one of the most important editors in the Spanish speaking world. Atalanta was hugely enthusiastic about Blake's Cottage campaign, helped to spread the word and provided us with some contacts that resulted in further support. Several well-established authors and artists supported the campaign and it would be worthwhile to strengthen links with them. And of course, the Cottage's doors should be open too to younger generations and to artists who may not have an established reputation yet but present projects with true vision.

The National Trust

Another of my recommendations to the Blake Society's Chairman when I left the campaign was to develop the relationship with the National Trust.

During the campaign the NT's former Chairman Simon Jenkins showed much enthusiasm about the project. Unfortunately, he sent to the campaign's launch at Parliament a representative who had just joined the Trust and didn't follow up the work we were doing; then shortly before I left the BS the NT got a new Chairman, Tim Parker.

Still, I believe that a lot of good for the Cottage could be derived by building a relationship with the NT. They knew from the beginning that Blake's Cottage would be ran by a different trust and that whatever kind of engagement we had with the NT, they would not own the building, and still they showed interest. As you know, they run a diversity of projects in the conservation of national heritage and natural environment and that means that they have enormous expertise in working in flexible ways, since the nature of the sites, buildings and

problems they deal with is very diverse. Even if the Blake's Cottage project is different from what they usually do, that doesn't necessarily preclude that they could engage with the Cottage Trust on a different level nor other forms of collaborative work, and their advice could be of enormous use for the many complex matters that the Cottage Trust will have to face in the future. The BCT could organise joint events with them, including fund-raising events in their own sites, which would help enormously to spread the word about the project. It might be worthwhile also to visit some of the places they run and see what they do (including the printing demonstrations at Cherryburn).

I would also recommend strongly to look at their Conservation Principles, as some of them would aptly apply to the nature of Blake Cottage Trust's work or echo those in the original campaign (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/documents/conservation-principles.pdf>). As I will point out later, their stance regarding accountability could also be a good example for the BCT. Finally, having a solid relationship with the National Trust could mean that if worse comes to worst and the BCT doesn't gather enough funding or a solid structure to run the Cottage, the NT might be interested to invest in it and both trusts could still work together in a dignified way that follows the original vision. As I am sure you must be bearing in mind, engaging with other organisations and sites (such as the Art Fund or Ditchling Museum), though time consuming, can result in much advice and learning for the administration of Blake's Cottage.

A COUPLE OF MONTHS BEFORE I LEFT the Cottage campaign and the Blake Society, the latter's Chairman asked for my list of contacts (six pages), which I sent to him. When I finally left in January I offered to point at those contacts that I'd suggest should be pursued, something I'd still be willing to do if the Cottage project walks along the lines of what it originally set up to do.

INCLUSION AND TRANSPARENCY CONCERNS

Representation

Blake's Cottage campaign started as a Blake Society initiative. It was understood from the beginning that a new entity would have to be created for legal and practical reasons, as the BS was too small a charity to administrate such an enormous project. This meant that the project was going to expand, reach out to many others, be inclusive.

However, the creation of a new organism never meant that Blake's Cottage would be severed from the origins of the project, nor that the enormous amount of work, good will and generosity of many people would be used to snatch their fruits, then transfer those fruits to an entirely disconnected organism with limited knowledge and representation of the campaign. It is a matter both of ethics, and of the most elementary common sense.

I am sure that the Blake Cottage Trust as it stands now has the best possible intentions, and I am certainly thrilled that Professor Michael Phillips, such a respected authority on Blake, who has done so much to preserve his legacy, is one of its members.

Yet the fact that the BCT is calling for submissions of a vision for Blake's Cottage, however inclusive the intentions behind it, doesn't seem to me to signal a smooth continuity of the project; it may rather become, inadvertently, a disowning of it and an invitation to chaos. The Blake Society's Committee knows why and how I left both the BS and the Cottage project. I think that it may recognise in the concerns arising from the handling of this campaign's success the serious problems of communication that we then faced. It would be a disservice to the Blake Cottage Trust and to everyone who contributed to make a success of the campaign not to give any warning about the dangers of such communication issues, and that is why I am submitting the present document.

The Blake Society

I am not sure of how aware the Blake Cottage Trust is of the extent to which the Cottage project is indissolubly linked in everybody's mind to the Blake Society, and of the enormous responsibility that entails. As stated above, the Cottage campaign was a Blake Society initiative; it drew on the Society's reputation for its work of 30 years, and it is the Society that people trusted and to whom they gave their support and money. As you know, the BCT was formed much later and therefore for a long time the BS actually held the money given to the project in one account put apart specifically for this purpose. Whereas not everybody in the BS Committee participated in the campaign, those of us who did, did so as representatives of the BS, and that is why people trusted us. The consequences of this cannot be taken lightly. Pretending it is otherwise would be as serious as accepting that people were wilfully deceived, something that I am sure the BCT would never endorse.

If we look, for instance, at the first leaflet we distributed for the campaign, we will read: **"This campaign is being led by the Blake Society that was founded in 1985 and is a registered charity. Our President is Philip Pullman."** I have no doubt whatsoever that this is why Mr Pullman endorsed the campaign publicly in such a brilliant way, made a personal donation to it and congratulated it for its success after the Cottage was bought. I am not sure what he would think if he knew that there are chances that the BCT disengages from any responsibility towards the BS and the trust people placed on it, but I'd imagine he would feel used and deceived himself, and much worried.

As of today, 15 November 2015, if you click on a link for blakecottage.org, you fall straight into a section of the Blake Society's webpage – the section we used, reviewing it constantly, throughout our campaign. It doesn't matter if the online contents change from now on: for the whole of the existence of the campaign, up to today, the Cottage project has stood publicly as a Blake Society endeavour.

If you keep on reading that webpage, you'll reach the Just Giving button. Click there and you'll find the project's Just Giving page, **to which people are actually still giving money**. I hope this is clear: for all practical purposes, people are giving money to the Blake Society, trusting that it will handle it appropriately. They know the Blake Cottage Trust had to be set up and that the money has been transferred to a new account there, but it seems rather unequivocal to me that the links between the two organisations are not severed at all, and that it is the Blake Society that people are trusting. They are also supporting our original vision of what we

thought the Cottage should be. So to change or betray those plans would be a rather serious breach of trust.

The heading of the Just Giving page is: **“The Blake Society at St James's. We have now raised £509k for Blake Cottage to create the first home for William Blake!”**, and further down, the BS invites further donations with **“Join the Blake Society at St James's Community”**. If you have time perhaps you would like to read some of the messages left by donors in that page. I copy here some that I find eloquent: **“I happily give my friendship to the Blake Society and to William Blake.”** **“Blake was a great visionary, and this project is equally visionary, which is why I'm supporting it.”** **“Congratulations on raising the money for the purchase of the cottage. The proposals for its future sound wonderful.”** **“The place of the greatest visions! But remember to leave the Gate open...”**.

I therefore suggest that the Blake Cottage Trust and the Blake Society consider in all seriousness the responsibility, ethical implications and consequences of this reality. In fact, the Blake Society is the most natural partner for the BCT and there can only be benefits for both organisations from working transparently together.

The Big Blake Project

Blake's Cottage campaign was a collective project. There were two organisations running it, and those were the Blake Society and the Big Blake Project. I was therefore surprised not to find the latter represented in the Blake Cottage Trust.

Collective projects will always have conflicting views about what should be done and how. At the beginning of the campaign there were some such differing perspectives between the Blake Society and the BBP, some of them serious. However, such differences don't turn people into enemies. They are bound to arise in any project and the thing to do is to sit together and talk; to join efforts instead of working divided, for division ultimately renders work for a common goal impossible.

Unfortunately, the lack of communication I mentioned before made it very difficult to know what was really going on between these two organisations. For instance, from early on I was unable to attend further meetings with the BBP because I was not even informed by the BS Chairman of when they were taking place. There was triangulation of communication and therefore we all ended up lacking information that was essential for us being able to do our work properly together. Then I left the project so I don't know how the relationship between the two organisations progressed.

However, I do know that from the outset the Blake Society invited the Big Blake Project to be part of Blake's Cottage campaign. I do know that the BBP worked extremely hard, did a lot to promote the campaign and to gather the local support that is of course essential for such a project to succeed.

They also raised a significant amount of money. They garnered the work of many enthusiastic individuals who believed all along on what we were saying in our campaign.

Differences between the Blake Society and the Big Blake Project were obviously never irreconcilable. And I say “obviously” because, had they been so, they would have stopped working together. They never did. If we look at the BBP's webpage, we read: **“Join us and help the Blake Society turn it [the Cottage] into a Radical Centre of the Imagination held in Trust for the nation.”** Their Just Giving button leads to donations **raised for The Blake Society at St James's**. The Blake Society encouraged the BBP to work for the Cottage campaign; it has allowed them to go on doing that even now. Yet the Big Blake Project has no representation in the Blake Cottage

Trust, which on its turn seems not to be very much aware of its indissoluble connections with the Blake Society. I must say I find all this very worrying.

Blake's Cottage project is a collective venture. Specific organisations (i.e., the Blake Society and the Big Blake Project) raised funds for a very precise objective. Even those donors who gave most money did —or should have done— so for a precise and already defined vision of what the Cottage should be. No organisation has the right to betray people's trust, work or money, and in that respect bigger donors have no more moral rights over the Cottage than those who gave what they could, even if it was one pound only. This is so because the campaign was not set up as a business undertaking. Part of what made it so original and appealing was precisely its encouraging everybody to give what they could so that the Cottage truly belonged to everybody. And we did believe in that when we started the campaign; it reflected Blake's spirit and was no vacuous publicity slogan. So it has to be respected.

Therefore, I believe that the BCT needs to have in it enough representatives that worked for the campaign, and understand it, and that is not the case now.

Because of everything stated above, I very much fear that the Blake Cottage Trust as it stands now is not representative of the campaign and its aims, and though I am sure that this is far from the BCT's intentions, from an outside and logical perspective it looks dangerously as if it used the work of others and took the money in order to follow another agenda, unknown to anybody else, including the very organisations that made the project possible.

Transparency

I have just said that even if the BCT is acting, as I'm sure it is, with the best intentions, the reading most people would have from an outside perspective is a different one. The only way to redress this problem is by a commitment to absolute transparency.

Transparency means, among other things, that the administration of Blake's Cottage cannot run on the basis of any individual holding all the information, nor on the divisions that such working methods necessarily create. Rather, and for everybody's sake, all parts involved should get together and talk openly as often as is necessary.

Transparency also entails that at all moments there must be absolute clarity regarding the people involved in the project, in any capacity and in any way, to guarantee that they are all of proved probity, honesty and competence, and therefore the BCT must be willing to disclose information regarding its direction, staff and volunteers and what work is being done whenever necessary. Transparency is, in short, the very opposite of secrecy.

Here is where I think that the example and expertise of the National Trust can come handy. I'll refer you in particular to their 6th Principle, Accountability. I quote: **"We will be transparent and accountable by recording our decisions and sharing knowledge to enable the best conservation decisions to be taken both today and by future generations. Our legacy to the future is formed by the record of our activities as much as by the places we preserve and pass on through our work. Only by recording and making accessible the decisions and actions both of ourselves and our predecessors can we be truly accountable to present and future generations."**

I think this position may be inspiring for the work of the Blake Cottage Trust.

My position

I invested in Blake's Cottage project much devoted work, time and commitment, as is acknowledged in unequivocal words by the Blake Society's Chairman in his email of 23 September this year informing me about the purchase of the Cottage, and thanking me for "all the work, time and passion" that I gave to it. As I said, the Blake Society's Committee knows why I had to leave, but of course I still would very much like to see the project flourish. Despite any conflict between any of those involved in its creation, the Cottage should become for future generations what we set out to create: a centre for the dissenting imagination that belongs to all.

Because of the pivotal part I played in the conception and development of the campaign, people ask me about it. Not for the first time, I don't know what to say, due to the lack of communication and transparency mentioned above. For the same reason I haven't yet thanked several of my contacts for their support, which is an uncomfortable position for me as I am really grateful. I would also be most happy to encourage my contacts and new people to contact the appropriate persons in the Blake Cottage Trust to support the project further, so that everyone can join efforts. But as I am sure you will understand, I cannot do that for a project that I can't guarantee is ran with absolute transparency, honouring our initial purpose.

In 2014, to give an example of my concerns, I was very enthusiastic about the ways in which Prof Phillips' Oxford exhibition and the accompanying festival could support the campaign, since the idea about having the exhibition's printing press in the Cottage had already been talked about and Prof Phillips was to become one of the Cottage's Trustees. The communication issues that I mention, however, prevented me from making my proposals known or having any information about how the Blake Society's Chairman was engaging in the festival's organisation, even when at the moment he and myself where the Blake Society Trustees running the campaign (while the Big Blake Project continued working very hard locally). I believe that because of this defective practice of division and withholding of information we may have lost the chance to gather a bigger support both at the exhibition and the festival. I also believe that this practice has prevented Prof Phillips from having all the information he needs as a Blake Cottage Trustee regarding the origins, nature and history of the campaign.

I am also concerned about all the people that any mismanagement of Blake's Cottage would affect, starting of course with all the donors, big or small, famous or anonymous. There are some very big names there and that might turn disappointment into a major problem for the BCT that would end up damaging the whole project. I think of the Howell family's generosity in giving us the legal right to purchase the Cottage and then extending our deadline several times so that our purpose could be achieved. I think of Philip Pullman, who as already stated, endorsed what he believed to be a Blake Society project; of St James's Church in Piccadilly, the BS's official address, and with whom the Society has solid and long-standing links. And of course I think the organisations running the campaign (the BS and the BBP) and the Cottage

Trust itself could be severely affected if things go wrong. All this can be easily avoided by the open discussion of any conflict and the above-mentioned transparency.

During the Cottage campaign we received many moving messages through email and post. You can view others equally moving in the Blake Society's Just Giving page, apart from those quoted above manifesting trust in the BS. I urge you to take a look at that page and read the messages of people giving money, for example, because of what Blake has meant in their lives, or in memory of dear departed ones.

All of us who have had a share in making this project possible have a moral, ethical responsibility of honouring these people's wishes and guaranteeing absolute transparency and coherence, making sure that the Cottage is not used for any other purpose and that there is no secrecy whatsoever involved in its management. If we really have understood Blake, we have the duty to open the material but also symbolic doors of the Cottage, engage in honest and fruitful conversation, exchange of ideas and harmonisation of contraries.

So far the Blake Cottage Trust does not seem to represent this attitude, and division seems to keep on prevailing over union of efforts. It doesn't seem to me that the Blake Society or the Big Blake Project are participants of the Cottage's success or its celebration and I can't find any public disclosure by the BCT of what they are planning to do.

Seeing this, I cannot keep silent. An atmosphere of secrecy, animadversion, mistrust and lack of communication is definitely not what people have been giving their work, support and money for.

These considerations are not about apportioning blame, but about highlighting the importance of being willing to talk, to open up and honour the work we all have done. Respect for others is ultimately respect for ourselves and the whole project will benefit if that is borne in mind.

William Blake challenged a world riddled with injustice, falsehood and enmity, and the integration of the Four Zoas wasn't to him a theory, but an essential necessity in the experience of human life. The world has not got any better. Projects like the one we envisioned are much needed. If the management of the Cottage is not open and inclusive it would be a great injury to everything Blake is admired and loved for. The Blake Society's Chairman has done an admirable and incredibly generous work and because of this I don't think anyone challenges his entitlement to lead this project. He has devoted decades of his life to further Blake's legacy; he established a link with the Howell family 22 years ago with Blake's legacy in view, and all of us who love Blake have much to be grateful for to him. That should never be forgotten. But leadership entails, and demands, communication and transparency and that cannot be forgotten either. Blake's Cottage project doesn't belong to any one particular person or legal entity. It belongs to all. That is what we wanted and what has been achieved. Nobody can appropriate it, and it would be wrong if the Blake Cottage Trust is led to inadvertently appropriate it for lack of information.

I will be very grateful to receive an answer to the points raised in this document and clarification as to how the Blake Cottage Trust plans to guarantee its transparency and accountability.

If in doubt or need of clarification about anything at all of what I am saying here, I will be happy to talk with any of you or attend any meeting it's deemed necessary. I have a wealth of material that should be enough to clarify any doubts you may have about the campaign, my involvement and work in it and I will gladly put it at your disposal if necessary. I am also willing to contribute in any way I can to the project's success.

William Blake wrote that *"Everything that lives, lives not alone, nor for itself"*, and his Cottage is no exception.

APPENDIXES

☐ The following are two articles that I wrote for the campaign and appeared in its section in the Blake Society's webpage:

<https://diazenciso.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/blakes-difficult-journey-through-this-world.pdf>

<https://diazenciso.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/the-gate-is-open.pdf>

☐ These are the notes I made for my participation in our presentation for the launch of the campaign in the Houses of Parliament in July 2014. They draw in part on the document I presented for the first formal working meeting we had for the campaign.

<https://diazenciso.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/presentation-launch-campaign.pdf>

☐ Should you need information about my professional skills, you can look at my CV in the following link:

<https://diazenciso.wordpress.com/cv/>

Mrs Searle answered to me, thanking me for having gone into so much detail and having honoured the role played in the appeal by the Big Blake Project, and expressing her hopes that the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust would take it seriously. She was still waiting for the promised appointment with them, that never materialized.

It was a delirious situation, because while I had every reason to distrust the BS and the BCT, I kept on having ideas about possible new avenues to explore for the functioning of the Cottage. For instance, in my response to Mrs Searle I said:

I hope too that it's taken seriously.

Until I had sent it I remembered another idea for a possible interesting link for exchanges, with the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid (<http://www.residencia.csic.es/en/info/history.htm>). So I keep on having ideas about the Cottage's possible future, but I'd better not get too excited just in case... I have not received a single acknowledgment of receipt from either the BS and the BCT.

Anyway, let's not lose hope. Someone somewhere out there must see that it's really much easier and productive to sit down and talk openly, however uncomfortable they may feel, than just throwing so much work down the drain.

In the following chapter we will see how, sadly, my document wasn't taken seriously at all, as Mr Henry Eliot made yet another surprise appearance.

