

Blake's Cottage finances: the Blake Society's and Blake Cottage Trust's reports don't add up

On September 2016 I had already alerted the public about the inconsistencies in the Blake Society's and the Blake Cottage Trust's financial reports regarding Blake's Cottage. I also stated that they were misrepresenting whom some donations had been given to, since in their urge to make the public forget that the Cottage appeal was a Blake Society project, they were claiming that money given to the Blake Society was given to the Blake Cottage Trust.

One of the donations the Blake Cottage Trust claimed in its 2016 financial report as given to them is one of £10,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund. I alerted the public that I had a confirmation in writing from the HLF that this was a donation made to the Blake Society – **not only the Blake Cottage Trust did not even exist then, but this donation was actually the means through which the latter was set in place.**

Therefore, in an inaccurate document published early this year (2017) in the Blake Society's webpage, the Blake Society has surreptitiously corrected that inconsistency and marks the HLF's donation as one given to the BS. **So I ask, why did the Blake Cottage Trust lie about it in their report in the first place?**

There is more that needs to be corrected though: Donations from the Sainsbury's Monument Trust, Bircham Dyson Bell (their lawyers), and West Sussex County Council were also raised by the Blake Society, not the Blake Cottage Trust, yet the latter made a whole financial report claiming these were donations made to them rather than money received from the Blake Society. In the BS's new document, they send the donation by West Sussex County Council to the Blake Society but keep on claiming that those from the Sainsbury's Monument Trust and Bircham Dyson Bell were made to the Blake Cottage Trust, despite Mr Tim Heath, the Chair of both the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust, having claimed the contrary to the BS Treasurer, to me, who was the Secretary, and to the public.

This prestidigitation means that when they are claiming in their new document that the Blake Cottage Trust received £139,055 from the Blake Society, they are overlapping their information about donors and therefore fracturing the reading of where those £139,055 came from exactly.

We need a clear explanation as to why they are playing around with their claims about these donations.

It is an extremely murky thing they're doing. I have already tried to untie the knots in my blog post of 18 September 2016 (<https://blakecottage.com/2016/09/18/inconsistencies-in-blake-cottage-trusts-financial-report/>).

Mr Heath made very clear on an email of 20 January 2015 to me and the Blake Society Treasurer, Mr Luis Garrido, that the Blake Society had raised **£106,308**, though £42,500 was in pledges only. His Fundraising Summary was: **Heritage Lottery Fund** £10,000; **Sainsbury's Fund** £25,000 (pledge); **BDB lawyers** £17,500 (pledge); **West Sussex**

CC £10,000; Indiegogo crowdfunding £ 3,788; JustGiving £23,325; Patron £10,000; Cheques & Cash to Blake Society £ 6,695.

The amounts they now claim we got from Just Giving (£ 21,733 through the Blake Society and £ 3,611 through the Big Blake Project) are more than the £23,000 Mr Heath had told me and Mr Garrido that we had raised. **It is extremely important that all this is clarified**, because as I have stated in this blog and in my testimony in this webpage, Mr Heath never allowed me access to the administration of neither our Just Giving nor Indiegogo accounts, or to their records, so I only had his word to go by. Mr Garrido expressed the same concern until days before I left the Blake Society.

When the appeal originally failed, Mr Heath wrote to me in an email of 4 March 2015:

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.

These amounts reflected the summary copied above. **They did not reflect the £100,000 from the “anonymous Trust” (the Basil Larsen Charitable Trust) mentioned in their recent report, which was donated to the Blake Society much later**, and, summed to the £300,000 that this Trust donated afterwards, made possible the acquisition of the Cottage.

This is extremely important to bear in mind as well, because if the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust were not playing around with their information of how much money each donor gave to whom, **we would be summing £100,000 to the £107,000 that Mr Heath said we had raised earlier. That would mean that £207,000 raised by the Blake Society should have been passed to the Blake Cottage Trust when it opened its own bank account. If we deduct expenses, we’re talking about £177,296, and not the £139,055 they are claiming in their report.** Where are those £38,241 not accounted for? Even if we allowed that this are the donations they chose to say, with disregard to truth, that were made to the Blake Cottage Trust by the Sainsbury’s Fund and the DBD lawyers, that would be £40,260, so the figures are simply not adding up.

While I was in the appeal there had been some consistency in Mr Heath’s statements. The amount raised kept on rising from November 2014 till March 2015. (I have emails by him saying we had raised £85,188 on 24 November, then £94,000 in December, £96,000 a few days later, until we hit the £107,000). Mr Antony Vinall’s minutes of our Committee meeting on 9 December claim as well:

For information, Tim said the appeal has so far received cash and pledges of £107,000, including through crowdfunding, towards the target of £520,000 needed.

Around 13 December we also said in our webpage that we had raised £107,000, prior to the big £100,000 donation.

This was always money raised by the Blake Society and the Big Blake Project on its behalf, and prior to the £100,000 donation by the Basil Larsen Charitable Trust.

Mr Vinall also claimed in those minutes:

The committee noted that around £35,000 in donations is being held in a reserve account in the Society's name while the Trust sets up its own banking arrangements, a situation which should be rectified as soon as possible.

This came after I had raised concerns with both him and Mr Heath, because in the latest bank statement I had collected from the bank, from 17 October 2014, we seemed to have much less money than what should have been there by that date. How Mr Heath, Mr Garrido and Mr Vinall came up later with the £35,000 amount I do not know. They made their own accounts after I raised my concerns but I never saw the relevant documents, despite being at the moment co-responsible for the appeal and insisting on the need for transparency. All this is documented in my testimony in this webpage.



Let's try to clarify things a bit by summing up all those amounts they are moving around from the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust:

Heritage Lottery Fund	£ 10,000	
West Sussex County Council	£ 10,000	
Sainsbury's Monument Trust	£ 25,000	
Bircham Dyson Bell	£ 15,260	(lawyers. Slight discrepancy in BCT's report of £15,250).
Patron	£ 10,000	
Indiegogo crowdfunding	£ 3,333	(We raised £3788 . If the difference is due to Indiegogo fees, we want that amount itemized as expenses. They are itemizing Just Giving Fees but not Indiegogo)
JustGiving (Blake Society)	£ 21,733	(Put together the Just Giving raised by the BS and the
JustGiving (Big Blake Project)	£ 3,611	BBP it is more than the £23,325 the Chair told the Treasurer and me that we had raised. Let's assume more donations came after I left. We do want to see the Indiegogo and Just Giving records.)
Cheques and cash	£8,082	(More than what Mr Heath claimed in Jan. 2015. I assume there were more donations after I left. I expect they've corrected the mistake I marked earlier, of £1,182 missing. We want it confirmed. If they did, they got an extra £205 donation. We want to see records.)
All this makes a total of: £107,019		the amount the Chair has been claiming we raised all along before the new donations to Just Giving and cheques or cash stated above.

If we add to this the Basil Larsen Charitable Trust £400k, **we should have £507,019.**

But there is more. In the new document published by the Blake Society, a £2,000 donation by the Mercers' Company is mentioned (a donation that came through the Big Blake Project). This raises the total to **£509, 019. (Is this, by the way, the £2,020 donation mentioned in the Blake Society's financial statement for the period ended on 31 October 2016? If so, why don't the amounts coincide exactly?).**

If we deduct the expenses they claim, we are left with the **£477,346** represented in their figures.

The problem is that in the Blake Cottage Trust's financial report of 2016, to reach that figure, we had the following

summary:

Donations

Anonymous Trust £400,000

Sainsbury Monument Fund £25,000

Heritage Lottery Fund £10,000

West Sussex County Council £10,000 (a donation that came through the Big Blake Project)

BDB Lawyers £15,250

Various £19,065

Giving a total of £479,315

The “Various” (£19,065) doesn’t represent in any way the £46,759 of all the other items raised by the Blake Society and the Big Blake Project mentioned above (patron, Indiegogo, Just Giving, cheques and cash) that the Blake Cottage Trust’s report doesn’t even acknowledge.)

If they threw all that together in the “Various” after deducting expenses, they should have clarified that and shouldn’t have overlapped the BS and BCT finances.

Then again, that doesn’t seem to be the case, **because £46,759 minus the expenses the BS and BCT claim to have paid, that sum up the amount of £31,673, is £15,086, not £19,065.**

Since the “Donation”s item in the Blake Cottage Trust’s report is not mentioning any expenses deducted anyway, **it would seem that for some reason they are disregarding £46,759 raised by the BS and the BBP, while giving us a mysterious “Various” of £19,065 before expenses, something they confirm themselves as they claim their expenses as £1,969. We therefore reach the figure £477,346 represented in their report, but through an entirely different summary.**

To complicate things further, they then mention a loan of £19,250, and “Other creditors and accruals”: £2,284, **yet their final figure of £498,880 minus the outgoing resources (paying the loans I assume) becomes £498,565.** The “outgoing resources” doesn’t match either the sum of the two figures stated. **It seems they have manipulated those figures in order for them to match, again, the £477,346 figure.**

In any case, **the £19,250 and £2,284 amounts aren’t mentioned anywhere in the new Blake Society statement of “how the funds were raised”, and are not part of their expenditure or outgoing resources.**



I have already stated in my blog post that when the Cottage was purchased, Mr Heath wrote in the Blake Society webpage: **“Over half a million pounds was raised”**. He claimed the same in the Indiegogo page. At the AGM in January 2016 he said, **“It is indeed a miracle that the Blake Community raised over half a million pounds to buy Blake’s Cottage. . . . For those who enjoy numbers, the campaign raised £510,000;”**, and it was also stated in the Blake Society minutes (I have them, in case they decide to alter that document after I publish this).

Yet the Blake Cottage Trust’s financial report of last year claims that the money raised (claiming Blake Society’s donations as if they had been made to them) was £479,315.

In the Blake Cottage Trust's webpage, after the Cottage was purchased, Mr Heath claimed: **"With considerable assistance from the Blake Society the trust succeeded in raising £479,419 which together with a loan of £19,250 was enough to purchase Blake's Cottage..."**.

The figures given in their different documents and statements simply don't add up.

I urge the reader to look at this puzzle and go through all the inconsistencies pointed at in my blog post of last September as well. I don't want to repeat myself here, and the new inconsistencies added to the old ones are simply dizzying.

We need transparent accounts, from both the Blake Society and the Blake Cottage Trust, with no more overlapping. We need to know that every single pound donated is accounted for. We need clarity in a scrupulous report that answers to every single concern raised both in this document and in my blog post of September 2016. And we need the evidence of documents backing their reports.

I am not asking for them to go on playing games and patching up their finances every time I raise a concern. I am demanding absolute transparency and a pristine financial report. The Big Blake Project and I contributed to raise that money, so we have every right to know what exactly is going on. I feel responsible because I played a major role in this fund raising campaign and I have the utmost respect and gratitude for the over 700 generous donors that trusted the Cottage project.