

During the project we have been provided with reflection from the Ferry-Crew: the Ferry-Women & the Ferry-Men.

Presumably they, being called such, were the ones steering the Good Ship 'Common Ground', as made its way through the varied waters of the project.

We, those who participated, but were not members of the crew, were then, the passengers.

The crew - a strange bunch of people:

they do not just tug & pull at oars... no, no, not this crew.

This crew, with their reflections broadcast to the whole company on board the ferry, are as voices in a mist on a still autumn river... the boat glides along, we are seeing nothing not even our fellow passengers, for it is too misty, & all we hear is the noise of oars splashing in the water - but also some rather faint words which, if attended to very carefully, tell stories.... It is the crew quietly telling their stories.

The following reflection is just a series of thoughts & 'jottings' created by one of the passengers on the ferry - who has become aware of the musings of the varied members of the crew & joins 'the telling'.

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My immediate response to the term 'Ferry' is to imagine a small boat, rowed by maybe only one person and crossing a comparatively short stretch of water. I guess, for a Western European, the most powerful image is that from Ancient Greece: Charon, rowing the passengers, the souls of the recent dead, across the River Styx to Hades. Failure to have the payment leads to a form of banishment - the requirement to wander aimlessly for many years.

En route to Hannover for the final meeting I travel, between the UK &

The Netherlands... by ferry.

This ferry is proudly advertised as the 'largest of its kind in the World'. It has space for 1400 passengers and a very large number of extremely large trucks. On the night of my travel at least two of these contain Irish 'Sporting Horses' (as I stare down at the wagons reversing into position on the boat I wonder, cynically, if the name is but a cover for a trade in horse meat.)

So - no oars, no whispered voices, no mist - but certainly payment. The boat however is of such size, that it simply glides across the sea for 6 hours.

Such is the ferry to the last Common Ground meeting, not a vessels for dead souls - but a wining and dining & a very comfortable en-suite cabin ferry - all part of the experience.

In Hannover - and the final morning of the final meeting of the Common Ground Project. As the group gather, I detach and wander into a shell of a church, one filled with the sound of the bells.... Deep ('sonorous' would be the correct term) & reverberating.... Not from this ruin but from another some distance away. I assume, from a significant church in the Old Centre.... Doubtless a 'cathedral'. Oh, Yes, such sound can only be allowed from an important High and Mighty building - one such is sufficient. The noise fills the quiet of the city.... The Sunday quiet, the lie-a-bed quiet, a noise to 'waken the dead'.... Or maybe one to 'fill the soul', to produce an awareness of our mortality.

Bells are regarded as a 'call to Church', 'call to Worship', a means of cleansing & driving out unwanted devils. Not these bells, these bells induce fear dread & a sense, standing in a shell of a building created through the horror of war, of death and departure (and I later discover & hear - with its own Hiroshima bell)

The last morning, of the last day, of the last meeting.

No doubt, if I wander the streets & find the river there will be mist & whispering and a small boat ready to carry me away.

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Fortunately I have been allowed time before having to take my departure. Time to consider this attempt at creating 'Common Ground'.

Have we found any? Has the ferry on which we travel brought us to any place which we could regard as space which is 'Common' to us all.

What exactly does the term imply? Where is an answer to be found?.... Why, of course, these days, 'on the web'! And, sure enough, after consulting Dr Google, I find (inevitably) the Wikipedia article http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_Ground

But then, I realise, the answer I receive is not necessarily that which would be provided by Dr Google, or Nurse Wikipedia when they are consulted in another language or another country. We may each think we have a Common Answer to a Common Question about Common Ground - but discover that in different places the providers, wishing to maintain a truly local style and presence (and sometimes subject to various forms of censorship) provide different answers.

Similarly we, the passengers on the ferry, may each think, as we step ashore, that we have arrived in a Common Ground but in fact, without knowing it, may be seeing and feeling a place very different to that of those we think we are 'at one with'.

We become caught in our own deceit, incapable of recognising that what we believe to be truth is but misrepresentation & even damned lies, for the person standing next to us (who is also engaged in a similar

process).

The only 'common' aspect may therefore be, the misrepresentation of truth - which itself is a misrepresentation, in that the wakened mind, ceasing its mutterings, quietly realises that there is no truth.

As for the 'Ground' (which would somehow be the place of sharing), it shifts and changes, moves and shakes & may only create fear and distaste, for, whilst we may be very polite to our fellow passengers, we may not wish to be thrown physically against them - close proximity is not to be desired.

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These 'jottings' have not, thus far, been greatly encouraging. Forget the sharing, disembark from the ferry and stay at home.

One of the elements in the Chronicles was a a sense of 'home', 'traveller', 'stranger' - not maybe in those words - but read the comments produced in Konya to understand my point.

So - I stay at home..... but I have always been unsure where that is.

The journey then is that taken in the writing of this reflection - and so, regarding this writing as travel I will simply write and try and record, in the process, what occurs.

The start of the journey was not profitable - but provided a mild and unexpected diversion:

'Home is where the heart is'.

I considered it worthwhile (or maybe not worthwhile) Googling this phrase.

I went nowhere in performing this task - except that along side the google result was an advert stating 'How Older men are increasing testosterone' - which produced the following statement:
with the help of a regular strength training routine, within a short amount of time, men who had taken [Test X180 Ignite](#) reported feeling:

- Skyrocketed Libido
- Insane Boost in Energy
- Enhanced Performance
- Incredible Lean Muscle and Endurance Gains

Stay at home and become horny..... What a wonderful phrase is 'enhanced performance' (at playing the piano? - Maybe 'making music with a significant other!').

This was an unexpected diversion....
Returning to the intended route

Where is home?

I'm writing personally - alongside the Ferry Boat 'Chronicle-leers'.

The Common Ground project, has the aim of creating *activities in which host and migrant groups develop new social connections, focusing on both Europeans' and non-Europeans' ability to live together whatever their origins and social or educational levels, in activities that improve self esteem and the capacity to manage their lives effectively, to learn, to integrate and to be more active members of the local and European community.*

In so doing it stirred an internal reflection - stirred.... as with water in a still pond.... reflection disturbed, moved, changed.

My guess is that for most of us who have been engaged in the project there has been, in each of our lives, a variety of changes. Even if we have not physically moved far we have witnessed a change in the scenery - physical, social, emotional.

For one such as me, though not subject to a major physical international movement, the constant changes in early years have had their impact.

In reading the Chronicles the stories of others evoke my own:

‘The furniture...now looked a bit ascetic, yet it made me feel at home... my stay there [*a first visit to Romania*] can only be expressed in a single word: HOME” (‘Meeting Friends’ Volume 3).

But this was not ‘home’ neither was the ‘home’ referred to, the present ‘home’ (that is now, in a physical sense, Hannover)

Maybe we all live with longing.... Longing for a place that has no real existence. It may have a physical reality, Mine is a green meadow set alongside the fast flowing River Teifi in West Wales - a good river for fishing salmon and sewin (sea- trout). Aged 15 I caught one there - just beyond the ancient stone bridge to which the meadow leads.

But I can never walk the meadow of my mind. I am left with nostalgia for a time that has become imprisoned by my false memory. Yes, I caught the sewin (& we enjoyed the eating of it) - but I was not simply the successful fisher.... I was, more than that, a complex and uncertain teenager.

There is no going back. That was no home, for desires filled the body & desire for movement, change, adulthood, independence - all were part of who I was.

Forever moving - so many times (13) before I was aged 28 - but once since then.

Yet - now I have many places I can call home - I can wander the countries of England, Scotland and Wales and be 'local'. I am born a Scot (most importantly, of a Scottish mother - they make sure you never escape) - from Killie (Kilmarnock),

I lived in many varied parts of England's largest county - Yorkshire & the city I know best is at its centre - York... is this home, it feels so.... (but I am never, ever a Yorkshireman).

I was a child in Lancashire (bitter north-western rivals of Yorkshire - and thus proud of the Red Rose County (Yorkshire is the White Rose County.... Yes, for those of you with a somewhat over-simplified image of English history - 'The Wars of the Roses').

Further to that, chance took me school in Stratford on Avon. Yes... that Stratford & 'yes' the same (awful) school (but a profoundly weird set of post-war teachers - some quite inspiring) as the man known as "the Bard of Avon" - 450 years old this year.

In Stratford I suffered school but learned, well away from the institution, to fish.

Is that 'home'?

One feature of the child wanderer is that they become used to losing friends - maybe they never quite trust 'friendship', 'commitment' & learn to disdain such things, wearing, in order to maintain some form of social connection, a mask of sincerity.

Chronicles, printed version page 23:

'A motley union between my old and new Self'

Which of those above was my 'old' self - which (or how many times) is

there a 'new' self?

'But where is the happiness to be found' (p.23)

This is our Life Purpose? - The pursuit of happiness?

So - where does this wanderer settle?

He 'settles' but only as an interloper. The village has its culture and its ways and means - but they are not his.

"Fremd bin ich eingezogen, Fremd zieh' ich wieder aus."

Schubert in Sarn?

But a settler may be a coloniser - one of those, now a common species in rural Europe, who are not of a place but find, through all the advantages that technology & affluence provide, that they can occupy communities that are culturally & professionally, utterly different. They can occupy and being articulate and 'well-connected' (in senses), can control.

Nun merk' ich erst wie müd' ich bin,
Da ich zur Ruh' mich lege;
Das Wandern hielt mich munter hin
Auf unwirtbarem Wege.

*[Only now that I lie down to rest,
I notice how tired I am;
Walking kept up my spirits
On the inhospitable path.]*

The urban Being - who probably shares more with the so called 'immigrants' in a city than with the long term residents of a largely

agricultural village.

“Eine Krähe war mit mir
Aus der Stadt gezogen,
Ist bis heute für und für
Um mein Haupt geflogen.....

*[A crow came with me
Out of the town,
And has been steadily flying Above my head until today.*

*And how true - the house of this settler has ravens regularly circling. Ravens
croak & sometimes fly upside down!]*

..... Krähe, wunderliches Tier,
Willst mich nicht verlassen ?
Meinst wohl, bald als Beute hier Meinen Leib zu fassen ?
Nun, es wird nicht weit mehr geh'n
An dem Wanderstabe.
Krähe, laß mich endlich seh'n

*[Crow, you strange creature
will you not forsake me?
Do you hope for prey here soon,
hope to seize my body?
Well, there is not far to go on this journey.
You, crow let me at last see constancy to the grave.]*

Enough. This description of a journey to a place of settlement with its disturbing sense of being forever a stranger (which I rather enjoy) is reaching a level of excessive romantic pretentiousness & is completed.

I enjoy our local ravens, long may they croak.....

- but before departing to another dream, it is worth noting that for some, the writing of Chronicles is a 'vital' matter - and in doing so we sometimes able to assist and encourage others.

So: to all the Ferry People: 'Thank you',

And to our Common Ground co-ordinator I finish by quoting a song I sang during physics lessons (I was a disruptive student)

'Michael, Row the boat Ashore

Alleluia'.