



ST CHAD'S WAY / WAY OF LIFE PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT

March 2010

Dear friends,

On March 8th a very worthwhile meeting of some of the major project partners took place at the Ashley Centre at Staffordshire University. We are so grateful to Dr Teeranlall Ramgopal, the Pro Vice Chancellor for enabling this to happen at such an ideal venue. Basically the cathedrals, tourist boards and British Waterways reps were all very positive about the idea of setting up the new pilgrimage route. Out of this group a steering committee will be formed to initially produce a working document and Gantt chart to help to move the project forward.

A major issue now is that of the name for the project. The representatives from Chester Cathedral and tourism were not happy with the name St Chad's Way. St Chad is very much Staffordshire - he was buried in Lichfield and they felt it gave too much focus on Lichfield when the route can be walked either way and Chester is a great destination too. There's a neat symmetry to the fact that the other prominent saint of Mercia was the female St Werburgh who is buried at Chester and she is equally deserving of honour! However 'St Chad & St Werburgh's Way' would be far too long. Various other names have been put forward.

I suggested a name which was quite well received at the meeting. It is completely different from any walk route name that exists - The Way of Life. All other walking route names end with Way. It is as we say somewhat "outside the box", but it ties in with all the aspects of health and healing which are central to the project - we want people to have a life enhancing experience in body, mind and spirit. The NHS latest anti-obesity campaign is called Change4Life. The Way of Life appears to be quite acceptable to the wider public because of all these concerns about positive lifestyle choices, but is also quite a good name for a pilgrimage route without being too overtly religious.

I would very much value your responses to this name, The Way of Life. So far responses have been encouraging.

There is also a way in which the two saints could be retained while also solving what can sometimes be confusing for walkers when a trail can be travelled either way... When travelling south from Chester to Lichfield walkers could follow a disc with St Chad's Cross on and travelling north from Lichfield to Chester, they'd follow the goose which is

a symbol of St Werburgh! This could prove to be an innovative feature for the project. The cross and the goose are in their own way symbols of life and maybe there could even be an interlocking logo combining the cross & goose for The Way of Life badge.

The other aspect that I would like to report is that last month I had four days of exploring the route between Chester and Stoke. It was very good to meet various people who are well disposed towards the project. I received excellent hospitality on my journey. Highlights included the peace and quiet of the canals, the view from Beeston Castle, the warmth of welcome in Bunbury, Acton and Nantwich, the views of snow clad Staffordshire Hills after the relative flatness of Cheshire and enjoying the industrial heritage by the canal in Stoke - extra attractive after plenty snow!

In the light of the Staffordshire Hoard, I was especially interested in a unique collection of fine Anglo-Saxon stonework at St Mary's Acton and another Anglo-Saxon stone with a carving of Christ at Holy Trinity Chesterton - it had been used as a cattle trough till it was discovered some years ago! I have had conversations with tourism and the Potteries Museum about ways that the project might link with the Staffordshire Hoard in highlighting other Anglo-Saxon sites. There are plans for a Mercian Heritage Trail (not a footpath, but guiding tourists to various sites) and The Way of Life could be promoted alongside it as the healthy option for discovering Mercian heritage!

Many challenges remain, not least continuing to seek the necessary funding, but I am encouraged and am hopeful that we are on the right track.

With best wishes,

David Pott

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