

## An update from The Grange

Dear friends,

We have been at the Grange for nearly 3 months now and thought it was high time for an update on what we are up to. This is going to friends who have not had the opportunity to come out and visit (yet!) and have indicated they were interested in being kept in touch with what we are doing. We might do the odd update now and again as we go so do let us know if you would prefer not to receive them – we won't be offended! We have toyed with the idea of a blog several times but for various reasons have decided not to go down that route – for now at least.

As you (probably) know, a long period of existential angst and deep internal reflection led me to making the decision to leave the 'NGO sector' behind and move out here to The Grange in Great Cressingham, Norfolk. Sophie and I are hugely blessed to have been bequeathed this amazing house with 10 acres of land by Soph's parents who lived here until 1986 and have been renting it out since. It is simply an amazing place with history oozing out of the cracks in the walls and fresh air rushing around the trees, plants and meadows.

The house was built in around 1750 as the rectory for the vicar who took the services at St. Michael's Church across the road. A wall around the garden was added in 1794 as we know from the original plaque that still sits in the end of the wall. The land is roughly divided into two meadows – one of around three acres that sits behind a short row of houses on the only road in the village (wonderfully named The Street), and the other of around four acres which is bordered at the far end by the River Wissey and provides a home for at least one heron, a barn owl and a multitude of other flora and fauna.



Surrounding the house is a large walled garden which is mainly lawn with herbaceous and shrub borders, and on the other side of the wall is a large area which we are developing into a vegetable patch, compost area and so on. At the front of the house is a large paddock, a small area of woodland, and the old village school which Sophie's Mum now runs as a Victoria education centre ([www.victorianschool.com](http://www.victorianschool.com)).

Since moving in we have spent a lot of time observing the land (first rule of permaculture!), making local connections, and developing a long-term plan. This planning will probably go on for a long time but we are definitely making progress. We have had two really successful work weekends where we have cleared large overgrown areas, made bonfires, cleared the herb garden, built a bridge and so on. There have been around 20 wonderful people at each who have filled the house with music, laughter, food and fun.



We have also run a permaculture induction day with nearly 20 people attending, run by the amazing Hannah Thorogood, which was just fabulous. I am now heading off on my permaculture pathway, and through doing the design course in Norfolk this year have somehow ended up organizing next years Norfolk permaculture design course and will be

helping to teach on it as well. It is a route I am keen to explore in more detail and potentially to run some courses here at The Grange in the future.

The main reason we made the decision to move to this very large, very cold in the winter house in the middle of nowhere (!) was to set up a retreat for vulnerable communities. We have been overwhelmed by the support and interest we have had in this project and are starting to believe it could be a viable plan. We have nearly finalized a plan for one organisations to come for a week in the spring of 2012 with a group of 10-12 victims of torture as part of their ongoing group therapy. This could develop in to a long-term relationship. We have interest from Norfolk County Council in some funding for us to set up as a care farm for people with mental health problems and a Zen Buddhism meditation retreat planned to go ahead here late next year. Many other organisations, and particularly those working with asylum seekers and victims of torture, have expressed an interest in working with us. We are both extremely excited about the potential for this.

Livestock is part of the plan for the Grange. So far we are only joined by some ducks and chickens but we hope to get some goats soon and possibly some sheep as well. The chickens seem to have happily settled in to their new 'chicken tractor' I knocked up recently.



Last Sunday we invited all of our neighbours for mulled wine and mince pies by knocking on doors and leaving flyers for those who weren't in. We were overwhelmed when nearly 30 people came down and had an amazing afternoon meeting all the neighbours and watching lots of children running around the garden. We hope this is the start of our house becoming a real hub in the village and being used in various ways by the local community. Me thinks a community orchard should be in the works.

Talking of kids in the garden, we have also run a couple of days with Soph's Mum where schools have come for the day to do a 'Victorian day' and we have split them between the school and the house and garden. It has been a great experience and the letters we have had since from the kids suggest they had an amazing time.

So, lots going on and I haven't even mentioned the plans for a forest garden, the local transition stuff we are involved in, the crazy times on the farm in a 1956 tractor hauling trees out of the river, other visits from family and friends, playing the organ in the church and the Watton table-tennis club but more of that later!

Oh, and the small matter of planning a wedding for May ☺.

Do keep in touch – and do come and visit!

With lots of love

Ben

And Sophie

And the chickens and ducks