

## THE WORLD OPEN FORUM, BRANTWOOD, 2012

The World Open Forum was conceived in 2010, at a meeting at Brantwood, as a way of reviving radical thought in the heart of the Lake District, very much in the tradition of Ruskin. Its initial distinctiveness was as a counter point to the narrow focus and general profligacy of the World Economic Forum in Davos. So we committed ourselves to a parallel meeting in early February, with limited likelihood of skiing. As an antithesis of the elitist Davos gravy train, the Open Forum is inclusive, open to all-comers who have an interest in discussing the broad problems that face us in terms that are not purely economic.

The Forum has now met on two occasions, in 2011 and 2012. At our first meeting we considered the idea of *Recivilization*, suggested and introduced by Howard Hull. In 2012 we asked 'What makes our common life?' — a theme that arose from my development of a new British Standard (BS8904) for sustainable communities.

One of the joys of the Open Forum is that we are a travelling circus. We have now established a pattern, starting with the first day at Brantwood, reconnecting with our Ruskinian roots, we then transferred to Grasmere and the Jerwood centre for day two, concluding with day three, in the Ambleside area, this time at the home of Thomas De Quincey in Rydal. So not for us, sitting in dreary conference halls trying to listen to a string of speakers, we are regularly on the move, continually challenging each other in different and always inspiring situations.

While the highlights are many, our ability to see and be in the presence of original documents at the Jerwood Centre, in the shadow of Dove Cottage, has brought a sparkle of realism and connection with past great thinkers. To see a fragment of a letter describing my own valley of Easedale allowed me a rare moment of seeing through the eyes of our predecessors.

We have laboured on the question of the future of the economy, possibly as much as others in snow-draped Davos, but our deliberations are much more rounded in terms of possible solutions and the role of community action. This has led us for two years now into a consideration, for our final session, of the role of the value of education, with a particular poignancy given the uncertain future of the long tradition of higher education at Ambleside, started by Charlotte Mason. We mulled over the idea of a 'Dartington of the North' and whether the forum had a role in making this happen. There is a good deal of support for this idea as a practical outcome of the forum — and any input or feedback would be welcome.

We are always hearing Ruskin's words *There is no wealth but life*, and exploring the intersection of ethics, sustainability, community and place. It is the difficulty of expressing what we feel, in words that are readily understood, and in practical actions that make a difference, that provides the challenge — and the reason why we will meet again in 2013. You are welcome to join us!

*David Jackman, The Ethical Space*

### WHO PAYS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?

An Account of the Symposium: 11 February, 2012, Art Workers Guild

The promotional material sent out for this event made a bold claim. 'The aim of this Symposium will be to look as fearlessly as possible at the real problems that confront us with the help of Ruskin's words and ideas.' This was our task on a bitterly cold day in February. We were warmed by four half-hour presentations, a keynote address and a discussion that involved the speakers, organisers and guests.

In introducing the day, *Clive Wilmer* explained that this symposium had arisen directly out of its predecessor that focused on 'Art and Economy' — the question of how we think about and treat the environment being of increasingly pressing concern. As Governments refuse to spend money on protecting our planet today in order to save it for tomorrow, it falls to the rest of us to spell out the multiple costs of inaction. Ruskin anticipated many of our contemporary concerns and articulated a narrative on which we can build. Tracing Ruskin's sense of crisis to *The Queen of the Air* (1869), Wilmer said that this work was fired by an anxiety that too many people never 'saw the sky or breathed fresh air' and that the world faced irrevocable damage as a consequence of human greed. The sober tone of *Queen* was replaced by the 'nearly hysterical' view of climate change expressed in *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* (1884). Wilmer demonstrated that Ruskin's ideas were informed by keen observation, couched in distinctively Christian terms. Justified by now widely-acknowledged developments Ruskin, he said, is 'a fit prophet for our present situation'. Ruskin's

relevance was the recurring theme of the day.

Companion *Mark Frost*, who is a plant breeder as well as a scholar and lecturer in English Literature at the University of Portsmouth, set the discussion on a firm footing with a vital summary of Ruskin's key ideas framed by the question of 'how we place a value on environment'. 'Ruskin's response to nature,' he said, 'can act as a lens through which to think about solutions, approaches, or simply ways of seeing that have contemporary resonance for us.' Frost was consistently alive to Ruskin's sources (Evangelicalism, Natural Theology, Romanticism, personal scientific observation) and the development of his ideas over time. He explained that Ruskin believed that by re-evaluating our relationship with the environment we would not only gain deeper pleasure from it but a profounder sense of our responsibilities to it. Frost described Ruskin's engagement with nature and the environment as 'combining the attributes of the scientist and the poet'. 'Go to nature,' Ruskin told artists. The 'innocence of the eye' is expressive of a childlike wonder at looking. In seeing nature, by leaning to draw, we are reminded of the duties of stewardship. Only as stewards are we able to transform ourselves, society and the environment. At the root of Ruskin's argument is his insistence on the interconnectedness of all things. Oxygen and iron, for example, are needful to existence, providing the 'vital energy' that breathes life into the lifeless. Ruskin saw beyond the banal. Without iron, he said, we cannot

even blush! Ruskin wished his audiences 'not only to see, but to embrace; not only to value, but to protect'. After the 1860s, when his thoughts became increasingly politicised, Ruskin focused on the Guild as the 'most ambitious response to the problems of modernity'. He supported campaigns for protecting landscapes and buildings. *Storm-Cloud* was his profoundest warning about man-made climate change. He linked his observation of weather patterns with the effect of factories: the darkening of the skies doubled as a symbol of the darkening of human souls in a society that had descended from reverence to greed, unable to understand the role and value of the environment. An ageing, beleaguered Ruskin saw that his childhood world had been overrun by the railways, tourism, architectural vandalism and agricultural revolution.

Frost was particularly strong in highlighting the contemporary resonances and enduring relevance of Ruskin's interventions in historical debates. In 1876, a successful campaign against the extension of the railway from Windermere to Keswick resulted in part from a pamphlet to which Ruskin contributed the preface. Although the attempt the following year to save Thirlmere from development as a reservoir by Manchester Corporation failed, Ruskin voiced concerns central to our contemporary debates. Individuals must become nature's representatives against the exploitation of the commercial interests of real estate. The cultural value of the environment — the enjoyment of natural scenery — must be fully realised, and the ecological effects of destroying complex eco-systems fully acknowledged. Framed by his Christian motivations, Ruskin's thesis is scientific, moral, cultural and spiritual.

We have a responsibility to protect the natural world. It cannot be separated from cultural and social associations, nor its complex interwoven history. The environment is a result of dynamic interactions between landscape, humans, plants and animals: conservation is a continuum. Ruskin was at the forefront of the argument that Nature is a multi-faceted resource. 'His insistence on stewardship and on finding a means to evaluate it that isn't founded purely on financial calculations is central to his work.' We are not merely to conserve and protect: 'nature itself can provide solutions to social, economical and ethical problems'. An eloquent and effective presentation was neatly summed up: 'In a world of carbon off-setting — cost-benefit calculations being made by some environmentalists in well-meaning attempts to protect natural resources — we may lose sight of Ruskin's simple point that while we can apply financial analysis to the environment we run the risk in doing so of buying into the very value-system that is the cause of so many ecological problems.'

The keynote address shifted the focus significantly to strategy. Our speaker was **Sara Parkin**, co-founder, director and trustee of Forum for the Future and an environmental campaigner of forty years' standing. In introducing her, **Stephen Wildman** noted that Ruskin had only the previous day been quoted in a *Times* leader on the national desire for beauty. Parkin's emphasis was on co-operation — forging a partnership between central and local government and business. She noted



Cartoon from The Spectator, 19 January 1991.

how the different questions one asks lead to different answers, demanding different logical responses to how we lead our lives. Ruskin, she said, thought in systems; he was trying to provide a framework for our thinking. Not the first to consider climate change and environmental damage, Ruskin's interventions were nevertheless powerful and significant. But why have we failed to do enough about these problems?

Only 20% of people (including Ruskin but few of today's leaders) think in outcomes — in terms of the consequences of decisions. We cannot pay for the environment! As human beings, we are no different from the environment. But there are actions we can take, by cooperating in communities to enhance our resilience. For example, debt amnesties were an opportunity to start again, going back to, or forward to, a sense of social obligation. It is here that Ruskin's concentration on human relationships is fruitful. His analysis of capital scrutinised the relationships between labourers, consumers, the production of goods and services. For Parkin, as for Ruskin, the meanings of words are crucial. Capital (from head (of cattle)) equates to resources; and wealth is not merely money, but about flourishing and prospering in a deeper sense. A sustainable environment might best be defined as when environmental, social and economic goals are achieved at the same time

It is not in nature that we will find solutions for ourselves, she said: it is down to us. The environment will be fine. It may be different. But it will get rid of us before we get rid of it. The environment is not fragile. We need to be humble. We need to change what we do and how we do it, not for the environment, but for ourselves! But there is perhaps a problem with the language here. The notion that the environment 'will take care of' or 'look after' itself, and 'will be fine' of itself, regardless of what we do (and this approvingly came up again later in the discussion) imbues the environment with what seems to me to be essentially human traits of well-being as opposed to mere survival (cf. pathetic fallacy). It seems somewhat at odds with the argument that we are responsible as humans for making the environment fit for us, because it is part of us and we are part of it. But Parkin insists that it's an unequal relationship, because the

environment will infinitely adapt, whereas our ability to adapt is restricted insofar as survival depends on certain vital elements.

‘Ruskin’s error,’ she insisted, was to hark back to something that was better before rather than to look forward to a brighter future. The future required us to stop dwindling down the stocks by constant spending of one sort of another, and instead to enhance the flow of benefits from capital of every kind. But (as Ruskin recognised) financial capital should facilitate our objectives, not *be* our objective. We need to (re-)design the economy to achieve new outcomes.

Ruskin, who believed in the interconnectedness of all things, helped to pioneer the argument that we must take our responsibilities to the environment seriously. As such, Forum for the Future employs some sensible and no doubt necessary strategies. It is not difficult to understand why politicians and businessmen are most effectively persuaded by a flow of diagrams, charts and graphs, and keenly-marketed, deceptively simple concepts. Parkin praised Ruskin’s ‘insight’ and the ‘essence of his leadership’: to be guided by our ends, as human beings, rather than to be blinded by means would surely have appealed to his sense of logic. He would have approved, too, of the notion that this is a moral question — that it is up to us.

In the lengthy, wide-ranging discussion that followed, Parkin likened the argument over the need for us to change to bringing up children (need *to* change, rather than *for* change, underlining our responsibility to act). In particular, behaviours can be encouraged with incentives (or benefits of outcome). Would we save the tree or the child, if forced to choose? You choose the child, yet the child ultimately needs the tree... Parkin spoke of an intellectual and even a criminal corruption of power endemic in the conspiracy of deals (it seems an apt collective noun) that underwrite the pact between big business and government. The challenge is to tell a story that brings about change by attracting rather than compelling, she said, and it was clear that her presentation was a realisation of that understanding. Self-reliance rather than self-sufficiency was a crucial distinction. We have human responsibilities as well as human rights. Parkin’s final comments ended on a positive note: seeing hope in the next generation to achieve the type of changes that are now widely recognised as not only necessary but desirable.

The next two presentations spoke of the practical applications of Ruskinian ideas.

**Michael Ramage**, Fellow in Architecture at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge and a prize-winning environmental architect, explained the Ruskinian context to some of his own work. Acknowledging that sustainable development is a slippery term, he argued that it is best defined as ‘a way of meeting the needs of our present generation without compromising the opportunities of future generations’ — and it has economic, social and environmental aspects. This requires buildings that sustain environment and economy in local communities with local materials. This is neither a vision of the future nor an historicist viewpoint, but should be seen as contemporary and viable today. His presentation benefitted from a series of stunning photographs and short video clips. To help demonstrate the value of craft, Ramage showed a film of an African brick-

carrier whose ingenious loading of bricks on his head to carry across a narrow bridge impressed the audience. The values of skills and economies should not be separate.

Sustainable buildings are low or zero-energy environments (heated by bio-mass, day-lit, and built from long-lasting materials; serving as human capital). King’s College Chapel, Cambridge (of which Ruskin was not an admirer!) and the hall of Sidney Sussex College were given as historical examples that can help to inform contemporary architecture and engineering. The challenge of sustainability is not, above all, scientific — but cultural. When we calculate who runs up the (high) bill for the environment, 30% of emissions are found to be from buildings (considerably more than from cars).

Selecting examples from his own work of how this can be combated, Ramage described the careful engineering of Crossway, Staplehurst (featured on *Grand Designs*): a passive (energy-efficient) house — see [crossway.tumblr.com](http://crossway.tumblr.com) The even weight-bearing across an arch stretching over the entire building enhances stability and the sun’s energy is captured by solar panels. With only slight alteration, very contemporary buildings (with, for example, super-efficient insulation) can be achieved.

In northernmost South Africa, Ramage described a building he had worked on that respects the significant cultural environment and natural landscape in which it is placed. Sympathy he defined as ‘not to blend in necessarily; nor to stand out unnecessarily’. Architects and engineers need to ask how buildings are constructed as well as what is to be constructed. We must build for the future to give our children equal, if not greater, opportunities than we have enjoyed. ‘There’s no reason,’ he said, ‘why we cannot do that with all of our buildings.’

**Clive Wilmer** absolutely captured the mood of the audience when he said how much the talk had invested us with hope and optimism, a feeling that was maintained after lunch with the presentation by Guild Director, **John Iles** (recently to be seen in *Escape to the Country*, tx. 26.01.12 BBC1) talking about Uncllys and the Guild’s presence in the Wyre Forest — see [www.uncllysblog.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.uncllysblog.blogspot.co.uk)

Companions will be familiar with the untiring efforts of John and Linda Iles — in the words of Clive Wilmer, ‘to breathe life’ back into this land identified with Ruskin since George Baker’s donations of the 1870s. Respect for nature is commensurate with hope for people, Iles said. Part of the environmental movement since 1976, an engineer in the electricity industry before that, Iles had been an early convert to the long-term benefits of insulation above nuclear power. Concluding that the only way forward is to ‘just get on and do it’ Iles exemplifies that spirit of ‘doing’ so central to Ruskin’s identity. Saved from ‘development’ partly by its poor quality, the land consists in 6000 acres. Ruskin spoke of the ‘beautiful, peaceful and fruitful’ — and whilst the Wyre Forest offers the foremost, the last is the challenge to which Iles has risen so successfully and inspiringly. Briefly summarising the Guild’s Bewdley history, he ended with the Ruskin Studio opened in 2010 and constructed from local oak.

With 100 acres of trees, the area includes wild flower meadows (orchids, cowslips) and an orchard boasting 120 different varieties of apple which had recently produced

10,000 bottles of juice from fruit that would otherwise have been wasted. The land remains mercifully un-'improved'. No chemicals are used, no mechanical ploughing is done. **Mark Cleaver**, the farm manager, described the cultural landscape and how cattle are used for grazing and biodiversity is respected. Uncllys is part of the Grazing Partnership that promotes traditional practices nationwide. 'It's all about people, it's about reengaging people back with the landscape and respecting it,' Iles said.

Visiting groups are welcomed and encouraged to respect nature's richness. This includes, for example, craft workers, and therapeutic work with recovering alcoholics and autistic people. Indeed, it was made clear that everyone is welcome and every effort is made to give all the opportunity to flourish. **Fran Fowkes** of the Small Woods Association explained how young people are being trained as forest apprentices. The Guild's lands are being used to make things (woolcraft, oak fencing, bread-making) but above all, one might say they are being used to promote wealth as Ruskin saw it: to nourish 'noble and happy human beings'. People are finding a 'new life in themselves' by fruitfully making things, building new communities, battling rural poverty and giving true meaning to the word 'asset'. It is the nearest the area has come to realising Ruskin's ambition, and the future promises a craft centre, accommodation and further wealth-creation of the Ruskinian kind.

**Tony Pinkney** from Lancaster University, William Morris blogger and at one time a Green Party councillor, marked a shift from the specific and practical to the literary and ideal. He surveyed the particular and personal visions of the future in recent green utopias, asking how they can help to inform our own sense of mission as green activities, environmentalists and so on. Acknowledging the rather slippery terms of his central question, he defined recent as 1970s onwards. Green utopias, he said, are often an ideal (or an extreme) of social simplicity: low-tech agricultural economies. Often mirror-images of utopia-dystopia characterise the developing literature; one man's utopia being another man's dystopia. Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* and Morris's *News from Nowhere* exemplify this phenomenon. Raymond Williams said that socialism was not about being simpler but infinitely more complex. It has a political and technological dimension: Power is centralised, issues are debated more — and more advanced technology is ubiquitous. Recovering the historical contexts to utopias, Pinkney argued that we do not need either one or the other but both Moore and Bacon; Bellamy and Morris. Aldous Huxley is a sound mix of dystopia and utopia, he said: *Brave New World* has its counterpart in *Island*, whose 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is celebrated this year.

Displaying maps of utopias from several different novels, Pinkney turned to Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), a novel focused on the organisation of science, technology and research. It is Future-primitive. It interrogates the problems with overall political structures and local detail. Six years later, in 1981, Callenbach released a prequel that like Morris's chapter, 'How the Change Came' describing the Civil War, scrutinises what made the utopia possible. Plausible accounts of how to get from A to B seem necessary; the vision of a future is not sufficient. If the model is one of revolution then perhaps the achievements of the sword must be defended by the sword.

Pinkney described Kim Stanley Robinson's trilogy — *Red Mars*, *Green Mars*, *Blue Mars* — as 'the science-fiction achievement of the 1990s'. An unusual ecotopia, it describes a double revolution; 'revolution and revolution reloaded'. The first was characterised by terror and bloodshed (red); the second was less-violent (green). Tiny, local details show the emergence of political awareness in what is an 'energising and politically-invigorating book'.

What emerged from Pinkney's talk was the fundamentally political nature of utopia. What we can learn from these post-Marxist imaginings of radical social change is perhaps how to mobilise ourselves towards green, social transformation. If we cannot rise to that challenge, we will never get there.

**Howard Hull** opened up a 45-minute general discussion by describing the recent World Open Forum (detailed elsewhere). Notions of Environment, he said, come back to human sentiment — what's in our hearts. How can we make the change happen? It is similar to the dilemma we face over the economy. We recognise the difficulties but the point is to move forward. Ruskin was keenly aware of bio-diversity — the interconnectedness (in his terms) of air, water and soil. Our focus must necessarily be at once global, because of the chain of influence, and Local, because it is at the local level that we as individuals and communities can respond. This latter point is exemplified in Brantwood, Uncllys and Michael Ramage's architecture. Ruskin saw social, political and community elements to wealth. Our capacity to change depends on our belief in ourselves.

With the discussion opened out to the floor, a dizzying array of points were made: about new social housing; the tradition of craft; the practicalities of making bricks from local clay in the Wyre Forest; the problem that square buildings are easiest to build but least efficient to run. **Brian Lewis** — publisher, artist and poet — remarked that the day had been quite 'brilliant': the Guild has grown from an intellectual institution dominated by university people to become a practical organisation, developing tools to push forward the wider debate. It does not have a bullet-point strategy but shows practical leadership. It is focusing on the vision, selling that vision and finding the real wealth in life.

**David Barrie**, not wishing, he said, 'to cast a pall' over that optimism said that most leaders of politics and economy would 'simply roll their eyes at what we have been talking about'. The current crisis opens up new possibilities, but how could we supplant or overthrow the colossal vested interests in the established model, he asked? Did it require civil war or a catastrophe? **Michael Ramage** responded powerfully: challenging engineers by getting them to think about designing the sharpest implement that you can get closest to a man's throat without cutting it was the way to recruit people to Gillette, rather than offering them work on men's cosmetics — a point that neatly encapsulates how to package the debate. **Tony Pinkney** recognised Barrie's challenge with an anecdote about how Lancaster's Occupy movement had been aggressively (if temporarily) closed down by a police operation despite the fact that they had made material improvements to a crumbling eyesore of a disused hotel whose owner had neglected it for years..

**Howard Hull** re-emphasised the combined need for individual action (attitudinal change) and systemic change (the provision of a government framework) and **John Iles** expressed faith in the resilience of humanity and our ability to adapt. Though, as **Barrie** said, governments were still wedded to economic growth, there are, **Stephen Wildman** thought, signs that governments had accepted the need to re-balance economies. And there is a sense of hope in the projects in which the Guild is engaged in partnership with others.

It was suggested that people might be minded to change by looking at their own children and considering their legacy. Hope, Redemption and Salvation — in their eternal, human sense, not any dogmatic sense — were beacons. Hull recounted how a former volunteer at Brantwood had given a rendition

of Ruskin's lecture 'Traffic' to members of the Occupy movement in Buffalo, NY. It is evidence of the power of ideas and language. **Clive Wilmer** responded that it was precisely Ruskin's language that had first gripped and inspired him, but it must be recognised as a block to many modern readers. The responsibility of the Guild, he said, is to reach out to those blocked from Ruskin's words. Endorsing Lewis's comment about the practical nature of the Guild today, he said that the symposium, though 'a small gesture,' was a part of that effort. 'You cannot care for Ruskin,' Wilmer had said in his speech opening the day's discussions, 'without caring for his message. And his message is as alive and urgent in 2012 as ever it was. More so, indeed.'

*Stuart Eagles*

## JOHN RUSKIN'S 'EYE FOR BEHOLDING' AND THE RISE OF 'NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER'

*Born in Gloucester, Aonghus Gordon spent his formative years in Venice. He completed a BA in Ceramics and Art History followed by teacher training, gaining a Post Graduate Certificate in Education at Breton Hall, Leeds in 1981. In 1982 Aonghus created the Ruskin Mill Arts and Crafts Centre, founded the Ruskin Mill Educational Trust in 1996, co-founded Hiram Trust in 1994 and co-founded Waldorf College in 1999 as well as establishing Glasshouse College, Stourbridge in 2000 and Freeman College, Sheffield in 2005.*

*He was awarded Entrepreneur of the Year in the UK in 2005 and went on to establish Clervaux Trust, Darlington, for excluded children in 2008, as well as the Biodynamic Farm provision Plas Dwbl, Wales in 2011, part of the newly inaugurated Living Earth Land Trust. He co-founded Brantwood Specialist School for children with learning difficulties, Sheffield in 2011 and is currently building a further and higher education centre to open in 2012. The Field Centre will be launching the MSc in Practical Skills Therapeutic Education in September 2012, delivered by the Crossfields Institute and validated by the University of the West of England. Aonghus lectures frequently in Russia, Saudi Arabia and the USA.*

One of John Ruskin's many braids of genius can be seen in his commitment to 'seeing' and 'nature'. His untiring endorsement of them both is, in short, one of his great legacies. In 2003, Howard Hull, Director of Brantwood, delivered a lecture at Ruskin Mill. This was a seminal moment for me personally, as Hull was able to bring to life the John Ruskin as 'seer' and activist. I felt a deep commitment to this remarkable man. The commitment was ignited from the perspective of what might be termed for Ruskin's time a 'counter-cultural' view of the world. He advocated values, not drawn from cultural tradition so much, but from his sourcing of life both aesthetically and scientifically perceived in the Natural World. Hull endorsed his commitment to what we might today call 'communities of practice'; the Murano lace makers of Venice, the Cutlers of Sheffield. He endowed honour into hand-skill. Hull of course had a captivated audience — it was riveting — artists, crafts people, tutors, storytellers and not least the eclectic community of Nailsworth and Stroud. His lecture still rings from the mosaic floor in the Trust's art gallery.

I have also been fortunate enough to have lived in Venice for seven years, and when you read Ruskin you can see Venice, not only from Ruskin's description but Ruskin writes as if viewing a canvas; it's not linear, it braids, it is as if light shimmers from the canals, it ricochets back and forth from the buildings. It could be said that Venice, herself a teacher of nature, offers sensory integration. I'd like to recall one of the many moving incidents of Ruskin's own life. At around the age of 14 he was given a small travel book (*Italy* by Rogers), which was illustrated by Turner. Due to his father's occupation as a merchant, the young Ruskin was able to visit a number of the sites depicted by Turner. Ruskin took this book of landscapes and indeed, from

these very same view-points from which Turner had painted, Ruskin discovered something remarkable, as Hull describes:

For Ruskin, Turner had captured something absolutely sublime, not just pretty but something actually almost fearfully beautiful, something that was profound and Ruskin was so moved by this ... that he felt that he had to understand how it was possible that a human being with just a ... pen could make a mark that could somehow capture something so deep and so profound about the experience of standing before nature that it was a spiritual ... almost God-like experience (Hull, 2003)

150 years on and the decline in the opportunity for our children to engage in full sensory development, of 'seeing' and 'doing' in nature, is increasingly being shown to be at the heart of many contemporary syndromes, exclusions and distress. The second half of the 20th century has seen a meteoric rise of what I would wish to call 'second-hand image-giving' through visual media, computer games and the 'virtual world'. The corresponding increase in preference in our culture and national curriculum for virtual and 'menu-based' learning (and entertainment) has been catastrophic, mirrored by a near-epidemic increase in Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and ADHD. By contrast, the growing recognition of 'Nature Deficit Disorder' (Louv, 2005) and issues of 'inclusionality' (Rayner, 2004) re-establish the importance of nature and relationships to the living world. John Ruskin was a visionary of his time: he saw the power of nature and the arts as a key in enabling young people towards fulfilling their potential. He is also a visionary for our contemporary need for visual aesthetic, practical, social and imaginal inclusionality.