

Peggy the Tutor, Mentor, Colleague and Friend

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With this Festschrift we are honouring Peggy Morgan; a colleague and friend who has touched the lives of the editors and contributors of this volume, as well as guided and influenced their careers. The regard in which she is held is evidenced in the tender tributes, poems and the impressive academic articles submitted by colleagues with the express purpose of celebrating and thanking her, in the year of her 80th Birthday.

The three editors of this Festschrift represent elements of the wide field of Peggy's admirers. Professor Bettina Schmidt is Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre based at the University of Wales, Trinity St David in Lampeter, which owes its presence there to Peggy's singleness of purpose in securing Sir Alister Hardy's academic legacy. Dr Wendy Dossett lectures in Buddhism and Religious Studies at the University of Chester and owes to Peggy her time at the RERC a decade ago, and her involvement in the Shap Working Party for Religions in Education. Andrew Burns is former chair of the Alister Hardy Society and a graduate of the MA in Religious Experience, the unique MA programme devised by Peggy while she was at Westminster College, Oxford, and freely gifted by her to the University of Wales, Lampeter. These external facts about Peggy's mentorship, however, do not do justice to what she means to us. They fail to capture her remarkable empathy, her never-ending support, her friendship, her kindness and her hospitality. Along with the editors, most of the contributors to this volume have spent many happy hours in her house, enjoying her home-cooked meals and her lively conversations, and we have all benefitted from her advocacy of our work and her support of our personal lives beyond the professional realm. Peggy – we want to say thank you with this Festschrift, to show you how much you mean to us, and to reflect back to you just some of the many ways you have shaped us. Andrew Burns here speaks of Peggy as a teacher:

It is a privilege to be one of the editors of this tribute to Peggy. I (Andrew) along with Bettina and Wendy have known Peggy for many years and together with all of

the contributors to this Festschrift have some very personal and fond memories of our time with her. My own encounter began when I was an undergraduate in Oxford and Peggy was one of my tutors. Her enthusiasm for teaching religions was infectious, in particular the personal encounters and visits to synagogues, and temples. These personal meetings with those from faith communities was inspiring and so much more informative than simply using a textbook. Peggy's own interest in Buddhism proved very important when I came to research my dissertation and she was happy to share a number of contacts which was a huge help to me in what was then an unfamiliar field. I was later to join the MA programme which Peggy had established at Westminster College (later at the University of Wales). We remain in regular contact and I always value her thoughts and insights into current research and religious studies.

Wendy speaks of Peggy as a feminist advocate:

Soon after Peggy, singlehandedly, brought the contents of Sir Alister Hardy's study and the archive of more than 6000 letters to Lampeter at the turn of the millennium, I was appointed as an Associate Director. As a non-Oxbridge educated woman from a working-class background, I tended to be somewhat awed by the company I found myself in. However, Peggy showed me, through her incisive observations, that the machinations of class and gender politics were exactly that, machinations. She continuously encouraged me to keep looking for my own voice, as a woman and as a Religious Studies academic in a theology dominated environment.

Bettina too speaks of Peggy's ability to reach out and empower, and of her unique qualities as a friend:

My link to Peggy had a different origin. In 2004, I was offered a departmental lectureship in study of religions at Oxford. Shortly afterwards, I received an email from Peggy. Mentioning Michael Pye, the professor for study of religions at my alma mater, as a 'reference' Peggy offered her help and even a room if I wanted to come to Oxford looking for a place to live. Peggy became my (unofficial) mentor during my time at Oxford and helped me through the labyrinth of Oxford. She opened her home, introduced me to numerous colleagues and friends, showed me the town and explained how the university works (very different to any other

university I knew previously). She became a friend, the first one I made after moving to the UK.

Our stories are personal, of course, but Peggy also leaves a huge academic legacy. Peggy was a student of Ninian Smart's in at Lancaster University, where she embraced his ground-breaking (at that time) phenomenological approach. The many texts books that Peggy has written since then (for example, *Testing the Global Ethic* (with M. Braybrooke) (1998) *Six Religions in the Twenty First Century* (with W.O. Cole) (2000), *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (with C. Lawton) (2007) and *Get Set for Religious Studies* (with D. Corrywright) (2006) owe much to Smart's vision, shared by Peggy, of studying religious traditions for their own sake, and not for their relationship to a normative Christianity. Through these books, which are still widely used and cherished today, she has introduced new generations of religious studies students, not only to Smart's approach, but also to a focus on the authority of personal religious and spiritual experience, and an attentiveness to what these days might be called 'lived-religion', especially in the lives of women and children. Peggy has also written widely on Buddhism, and Wendy remembers the time in the 1990s, before Denise Cush's immense contributions to the field, when one of Peggy's work-packs was the literally the only substantial resource available to her for school students on Buddhist practices, as opposed to texts or teachings. The vision behind the focus on practices spoke volumes about Peggy's interest in religious people and their everyday lives.

In addition to her writings, Peggy also has been a truly community-minded member of the academy, taking various responsibilities in associations and centres. A notable feature of her style of engagement with such organisations is her care for their documentary histories. She is an avid collector of agendas, minutes, documents and ephemera, and because of this the organisations with which she has been involved have been able to retain a sense of their own history. This careful archiving is a highly significant form of academic service. So, too, is her commitment to the informal publication of essays and articles by scholars associated with these organisations, such as the splendid series of 'Occasional Papers' of the Religious Education Resources Centre. We cannot list all the organisations to which Peggy has offered both support and leadership but we want to highlight three: the Religious Experience Research Centre, the British Association for the Study of Religions and the Shap Working Party for World Religions in Education. Peggy was the Director of the Religious Experience Research Centre, first at Westminster College, and then, when Westminster closed and merged with Oxford Brookes University, she organised the move to Lampeter and set the Centre up in its new home. Peggy was involved in the Shap Working Party from very early on, served a

period as Chair, and, until its formal closure in 2019, was on the sub-committee which evaluated the Religious Education resources nominated annually for the much coveted Shap Award. Peggy's involvement in the British Association for Study of Religions over the years is not limited to her encouragement of young scholars, although that is now her major and much appreciated contribution. She also served as conference organiser, as secretary, and, lastly, as President 2000-2003. She has rarely, if ever, missed an annual conference since her presidency, and has always been on hand to support those leading the organisation through choppy disciplinary waters since that time. It is no coincidence that within the pages of this Festschrift are contributions from fellow BASR Presidents from recent decades; Ursula King 1991-1994; Brian Bocking, 1994-1997, James Cox, 2003-2006, Marion Bowman 2006-2009 as well as the current President, Bettina Schmidt.

Other contributions in this Festschrift reflect the wide range of people Peggy inspired with her friendship and generosity. Among the contributors are colleagues Peggy worked with in different institutions and former students that she supported as tutor or mentor over the years at Westminster, Oxford and Lampeter. As editors, we were delighted with the willingness of colleagues to contribute and with the truly excellent quality of the pieces submitted, and we would like to thank each contributor warmly. All the contributors were working under Covid-19 lockdowns and often without access to their academic libraries. We appreciate their efforts to express their regard for Peggy despite the challenges and anxieties many of them faced personally. We would also like to thank Dr. Jack Hunter, honorary research fellow with the RERC, for his work, care and attention to detail in typesetting this volume.

It is entirely appropriate that in a volume dedicated to Peggy that there should be poetry. All of us, we are certain, have received one of Peggy's trademark handmade cards, with a poem, either penned by Peggy herself, or one that caught her eye because of some intimate shared knowledge. Brian Bocking has so brilliantly put into words what so many of us feel about Peggy. Professor Eleanor Nesbitt's beautiful poetry on the other hand, perfectly captures both the kinds of quotidian moments we know move Peggy as much as they do Eleanor herself. It also reflects that curious and investigative attitude to the world around us that Peggy models. Professor Ursula King reflects on her long association with Peggy whom she has known since the early 1970s, through several key organisations and through long-lasting friendship. Professor Denise Cush, in her wonderful account of developments in teaching about Buddhism in schools, tracks and celebrates Peggy's influential part in both insisting that Buddhism was not 'too difficult' for young children, and actively resourcing teachers to teach about it. Denise speaks for many of us when she describes Peggy as 'an inspiring example of a woman not afraid to

trust the authority of their own experience, nor to speak about about it.’ Michael Pye’s piece is another one focused on Buddhism. It draws out themes from conversations he had with Peggy during a field visit in Kyoto, Japan, around the messages in, and everyday practices around, Buddhist texts about emptiness. Dominic Corrywright returns the Buddhist theme in the volume to that of pedagogy, and notes his good fortune of working in a certain parampara (tradition of passing teachings from guru to student), that of Peggy Morgan. He draws movingly on Buddhist ideas about the relationship between friendship and teaching inherent in the concept of metta/maitri, and which we see embodied in Peggy’s own attitude to both friendship and teaching. As if evincing the parampara to which he referred, his wonderful gender-inclusive analysis of Buddhist Awakening draws explicitly on Peggy’s own. Dr Naomi Appleton’s piece riffs on a theme resonant with Dominic’s first, that of the meaning of friendship in Buddhism, and she puts her redoubtable textual skills to work on examples of friendship in a Sanskrit collection of stories, the Avadānaśataka. She remarks aptly that friendship is ‘both an entirely “ordinary experience” and – at its best – an extraordinary and transformative experience.’ Later in the volume Elizabeth Harris’ reflexive account of her fieldwork in Sri Lanka, and of Peggy’s role in supporting her as she explored issues of standpoint, gender and postcolonial legacy, closes by naming Peggy as ‘a pioneer in religious studies, convinced that the discipline should be critical, outward facing and socially responsible, emphases that have not lost their potency.’ James Cox’s piece brings Peggy’s interest in ‘the ordinary’ and in ‘experience’ into conversation with his own work on the definition of religion. Jim contends that ‘for an experience to be religious, there is no requirement to posit a transcendental object as the focus or the alleged cause of the experience.’ He takes the reader on a journey through some of the fraught definitional and territorial debates in the study of religions, to settle finally on an approach which situates religious experience in socio-cultural terms, and in doing so references Peggy’s inaugural article in the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* which influenced his thinking.

Marcus Braybrooke, in his account of working with Peggy on the 1998 volume *Testing the Global Ethic*, records Peggy’s often behind-the-scenes efforts to facilitate and support the work of those committed to interfaith dialogue. Andrew Burns testifies to this too, in his personal account as a former student of Peggy’s involved in the Alister Hardy Society and in interfaith activities. Ann Watkins, as a former librarian at the RERC, writes an appreciation of Peggy’s ‘not for personal gain’ approach to networking. Dr Marion Bowman’s article, on the common sight of memorial benches as foci for the performance of love and loss, offered a perfect fit for a volume celebrating someone who has been alongside so many of us as we have faced losses. Dr Maria Jaschok’s splendid article on Chinese women’s mosques resonates strongly with Peggy’s own concern with women’s

agency. Maria has Peggy in mind as she reflects on ‘the role played by ordinary women in shaping lasting traditions to become conduits of knowledge, the stuff of history, that would otherwise remain unknown.’ Professor Bettina Schmidt’s piece challenging the nonordinary/ordinary binary with her own fieldwork on mediumship, offers a convincing close to the volume. Rather than re-framing the quotidian as special and meaningful as others have done in this volume, she takes experiences which from a western secular standpoint would naturally be categorised as ‘non-ordinary’, and considers the tendency to forget that these experiences are had by ordinary people in ordinary contexts. As Bettina acknowledges, with heartfelt gratitude, ordinary people in ordinary contexts have always been Peggy’s focus of concern.

In the year of Peggy’s eightieth birthday the editors and contributors to this volume seek to honour and recognise a career of significance and value and to do so from both personal and scholarly perspectives. We know we have failed to capture so many dimensions of Peggy’s life of academic service and personal friendship, and this collection cannot possibly do her justice. It is however, offered in gratitude and love.