

OPUS – winding up with a sense of accomplishment

OPUS has been in existence as a charity for 13 years and as a campaigning/support group for even longer. It was 1996, at a public meeting at the Bishop Mascall Centre in Ludlow, when it was decided to establish a group to raise awareness of organo-phosphate poisoning, especially amongst members of the farming community, and campaign on behalf of those affected. Further public meetings were held and the next major step was to obtain charitable status, achieved in 2000, though the pattern of OPUS's work was already established: regular newsletters keeping people in touch, a public meeting once a year and much behind-the-scenes activity raising awareness, offering support and helping others understand the issues.

A website was established, leaflets printed and volunteers joined the cause. OPUS appointed its first patrons; Richard Livesey, Bishop Michael Hooper (an early supporter) and Professor Malcolm Hooper. We forged links with sister organisations campaigning for justice and raising awareness of chemical poisoning, including those representing Gulf War veterans and the aviation industry.

A series of high profile public meetings were hosted at locations across the Welsh Marches with speakers such as Mark Purdie, Professor Malcolm Hooper, Roger Timmis and Tony Grinall (two local members), Tristan Loraine and John Hoyte (airline pilots affected at work), Brenda Sutcliffe (a long-standing campaigner), Staff Sergeant Anthony Worthington (a Gulf War veteran) and our own Dr Sarah Myhill. And still the work continued behind the scenes, briefing MPs and MEPs, making contact with those researching the effects of OP poisoning and with journalists wishing to write about the issue, writing articles, speaking at conferences and seminars. We co-hosted a national conference with the Institute of Rural Health in 2002, "Organophosphate Poisoning – examining the evidence", involving national experts on health and the law relating to OPs.

Throughout this time OPUS was resourced through the generosity of people who gave time, talents and money. Annual General Meetings largely funded themselves via raffles whilst generous support, especially from the Southall Trust and many individual donations, enabled us to continue printing and posting newsletters. OPUS was never flush, but always had enough to do what was needed.

After seventeen years of activity the trustees have taken time to reflect on the future. Whilst the problem of organo-phosphate poisoning remains the situation is very different from 17 years ago; many of the products have been removed from the market place, the medical establishment is more receptive than it was (though there is always more to do) and the scientific evidence base is growing of the effect that chemicals are having on human health and well-being (especially from the United States). It was felt, therefore, that the role that OPUS could play in the future would be a diminishing one.

Consequently the trustees have decided to formally wind up the Charity. We do so with a sense of accomplishment rather than disappointment in that we hope it has made a real contribution towards bringing about the changes that we were needed and offering support to those affected.

As Chair I would like to thank all past and present committee members, volunteers and donors. Four of us have been trustees from the beginning (Sarah, Nick, Ian and myself) but we have been joined in the "OPUS journey" by other trustees including Bishop John Saxbee, Liz Charles, Glyn Morgan, Tony Grinall and John Hoyte. We are especially grateful to the care and support that (Dr) Sarah Myhill has

given to the cause and those whose health has been impaired. On behalf of the committee we want to say a big "thank you" to all of you for your participation and support over the years.

OPUS will cease to exist as a charity and its (limited) financial assets will be donated to a sister charity that is working amongst members of the farming community, in accordance with the provisions of our Constitution. Although the Charity will no longer exist the people involved are still working for those affected by OP poisoning, so please don't hesitate to contact them if you need further information or support.

Teresa Layton

Brenda Sutcliffe's Booklet

Brenda Sutcliffe has done a wonderful job campaigning and researching Ops over several years. Her Booklet, "Cause and Effect, Part IV" is available from the British Library, on the internet, or direct from her:

Brenda Sutcliffe, Sheep Bank Farm, Littleborough, Lancs OL15 0LH

Brenda would be grateful for any donations towards the cost of the booklet.

Thank You for all your support.
Will keep in touch.

Best Wishes
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