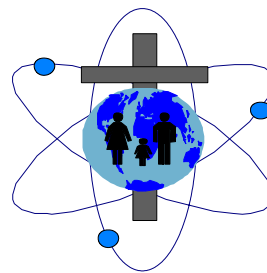


SRT BULLETIN

Society, Religion and Technology
Project

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Church of Scotland

SRT Moves to Edinburgh Science Campus

Temporary Relocation at SAC Site

On October 17 the SRT Project moved to temporary new premises on the Edinburgh University Science campus at Kings Buildings. This sudden change in SRT's location came as a surprise. For the last 12 years the SRT Project has been in the fifteen century John Knox House in the Royal Mile in a unique and much valued environment. But in April unexpected structural concerns emerged in the proposed Netherbow rebuilding scheme next door which meant SRT's offices would have to close for 18-20 months during the rebuild. On the short timescale we didn't find suitable premises in central Edinburgh but the Scottish Agricultural College enabled SRT to lease an ex-caretaker's cottage on its site till March 2005.

Honorary Fellowship for SRT Director

While this means more time spent travelling, it has plenty of space and it's at the heart of one of Britain's top science research campuses. We hope this will open up new opportunities for SRT with the university science departments and deepen existing links with SAC. Indeed at its July annual degree ceremony SRT Director Donald Bruce was made an Senior Honorary Fellow of SAC in recognition of a number of years work as ethical advisor to the College, an external assessor of animal experiments issues and a member of two committees of the SAC council.

More Churches gain Eco-Congregation Awards



Westray Kirk and its wind turbine

This autumn five more churches gained Eco-Congregation Awards, making 8 in Scotland. Torphichen was commended for its imaginative projects involving children and with the wider community. St Fergus church in Paisley became the first Roman Catholic church in Scotland to win an award. Their youth group has lead the way in environmental activities.

Awards for 3 Orkney Churches

Westray, Papa Westray & Kirkwall East all undertook very practical projects. Westray Kirk has had wide publicity for becoming completely self-sufficient in renewable energy, using a small wind turbine and a ground source heat pump, and with biodiesel fuelling a back-up

generator. This ground breaking example of how communities can benefit from renewable energy realises a vision begun in 1980 with SRT's Iona solar energy project. On Papa Westray, the natural environment is reflected in the worship, teaching and lifestyle of the church. Kirkwall East incorporated low energy lighting circuits, recycled materials and high insulation standards in renovation plans for their building, including creative uses for old pews. Minister Allan McCafferty said "I hope East Kirk's success may encourage others to take part in the programme because the whole process has been very beneficial".

Eco-Congregation Website

Active congregations are featured on the new Eco-CongregationScotland website at www.srtp.org.uk/ecocongs.htm, along with the resource modules, examples of what churches are doing and latest news and events. If your church is engaging with environmental issues but is not listed do contact us. Resource modules are also being rewritten to feature more church examples. Send us *your* stories!

The GM Debate Outcome

Trials, Reports and Debates

In 1999, public opposition forced the government to delay plans to introduce GM crops in the UK, while their effect on biodiversity was examined in more detail. This autumn saw most of the Farm Scale Trials complete, plus expert scientific and economic reports, and a brief but intense public consultation. SRT co-organised the first debate in Edinburgh and with the New Economics Foundation provided a GM Democs game as a resource enabling ordinary people to take part more easily.

Biodiversity Impact

As the Government considers its policy options what has all the evidence shown? The trials looked just at GM crops which aim to control weeds using less herbicide. For two crops the decrease in weeds would also mean some long term reduction in wildlife. This is caused by how the herbicide is used, not because it's GM as such. The impact would vary greatly with types of crop and farming practices. A case-by-case approach is needed. The underlying issue is what is the right balance between production and wildlife? SRT's 1999 General Assembly report criticised the commercial focus of these broad 'agronomic' GM traits which offer no consumer benefit, and urged that GM should focus on uses with clear human or environmental benefits. The trials underline the wisdom of that view.

The Public say Not yet for GM

The public debate results also agree. While many people are deeply against GM the broader view of the public seems to be sceptical rather than opposed. Most people do not support commercialisation of the current crops, but might consider more beneficial future applications of GM if *much* more is found out about environmental and health risks. There is deep suspicion of commercial influence and state sponsorship of GM, & a cry for independent and reliable information. SRT is helping to fulfil this role in its work with Democs & the Biotechnology Research Council. The message not to go ahead with current herbicide tolerant GM crops is clear. Will Government listen?

SRT work with European Churches

European Churches Bioethics Conference

SRT works closely with European churches on bioethics and environmental issues, via the Conference of European Churches (CEC) bioethics working group and the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN). Donald Bruce organised a hearing on bioethics at the July CEC General Assembly in Trondheim, to lay out some of the key issues the group has worked on in the past 5 years, including cloning and stem cells, genetic testing and predictive medicine. In November he spoke at a special conference in Strasbourg on bioethics for the European churches organised by the group. We look forward to the working group continuing, with its vital contacts with the European institutions and collaboration across the churches.

North Sea - Churches tackle Marine Environment issues

In June, Victoria Beale took part in a Church of Norway initiative to find ways to tackle the environmental issues of the North Sea. Delegates from churches in northern Europe sailed up the Norwegian coast to arrive in Trondheim for the CEC Assembly. En route they discussed a wide range of issues including fishing, sea-farming, oil and gas extraction, climate change and the petroleum industry, shipping, and marine biodiversity. They were aided by scientists, politicians, environmental activists and fishermen. One outcome was the 'Geiranger Declaration' (www.kirken.no/english), a statement challenging governments and churches to play their part in protecting both vulnerable ecosystems and coastal communities of the North Sea. Morag Mylne, vice-convenor of the Kirk's Church and Nation Committee, also took part in the conference, and SRT and Church and Nation continue to collaborate on fishing issues.

European Christian Environmental Network Working Groups

ECEN seeks to help European churches share and work together on environmental issues. SRT was one of its founders. Victoria has become the network's webmaster and is attending its planning meetings. Much of ECEN's work is done through its various active working groups - on Climate Change, Transport, Sustainable Development, Water, Church Eco-Management, Education and Creation Time. Each has specific projects for the next year and is looking for new members from across the European churches who are engaging with these issues. For more details, see the ECEN website www.ecen.org.

Climate Change Theme at Science Festival 2004

SRT's event at next year's Edinburgh Science Festival will explore the effects of climate change on Scotland's wildlife and environment. We have enjoyed the hot summer but global warming may not be good news for plants or animals that cannot adapt. Dr Noranne Ellis of Scottish Natural Heritage will talk about what's going on and what practical steps can be taken. It's at the Royal Museum of Scotland, **Monday 5 April 8.00-9.30 pm**. Details in our next SRT Bulletin.

SRT Associates

The SRT Trust exists to raise funds to help support SRT's core work and to expand into major new projects. The SRT Associates scheme enables people to be kept more closely in touch with SRT's ongoing work via regular mailings of our reports, papers, talks, etc. All SRT Associates should have received a letter and questionnaire about the Associates scheme over the summer. Thank you to all who completed & returned questionnaires. They are helping us to reshape the scheme and particularly to plan a day conference for Associates and other interested people, which will now take place in January/February next year. Details will be sent out shortly. To find out more contact SRT.

HFEA, MEP's and Stem Cells

Addressing HFEA

The SRT Director was invited to speak at a special conference of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority about its role as a regulator of embryo research & IVF clinics. He commended it for its response to public concerns in ruling that sex selection should only be done for medical reasons and for its high international respect for fair and strict regulation. He explored the ethical dilemmas in interpreting its wide powers on licensing embryo stem cell research.

Addressing MEP's in Strasbourg

Dr Bruce addressed a meeting of MEP's in Strasbourg laying out the range of Protestant views on the stem cells debate. He gave the Church of Scotland as an illustration of a diversity of views within Europe, as the Parliament debates EC legislation on human tissues. He attended the Medical Research Council's stem cell conference and raised various ethical issues in the emerging science. SRT is exploring collaboration with the Edinburgh University Innogen Centre for social science research in genomics.

Radioactive Waste

After several quiet years, radioactive waste will soon be in the news again. A new UK independent committee has been set up to explore long term options. We can't keep putting off a decision. A key element will be public participation. But how to get reasonable discussion and agree publicly acceptable solutions on such a famously controversial issue?

Democs Card Game

SRT & the New Economics Foundation are discussing with DEFRA, the Scottish Executive and the Science Museum about developing a Democs card game to help ordinary people explore the issues in their own local context. SRT has been playing an important part in this pioneering initiative in consultation. Democs aims to get beyond debates dominated by specific interest groups or stakeholders, and to sample the publics who don't always get heard. We helped create a Democs game on GM crops for the GM Nation debate. It was used in 35 games across the UK and the feedback from these was included in the official GM Nation report. We now hope to extend this to radioactive waste.

SRT and Your Needs

As well as being the Kirk's mission to the world of science and technology and on environment issues, SRT is an ecumenical resource for all the churches in Scotland and further afield. We aim to help you understand the issues raised by today's developments. The SRT Bulletin is one way to inform and also to provide thought provoking material for use in parish magazines or elsewhere. We just ask you to acknowledge SRT as the source. Tell us what you find useful!

For More Information ...

We also have a very extensive **Website** and **Information Sheets** on issues like cloning, stem cells, GM crops and their ecological risks, sustainable agriculture, GM animals, gene patents, our environmental work, Eco-Congregation and energy saving. We have more detailed **Reports** on these and other issues like climate change, gene therapy, God and science ... More are in preparation. Write fax, e-mail or phone for our publications list. If you know someone who'd like a copy of this newsletter let us know!

SRT is a Church of Scotland project of the Board of National Mission, a member of Action of Churches Together in Scotland, supported by the Scottish Episcopal, United Reformed & United Free Churches. Director: Donald Bruce; Assistant Director: Victoria Beale

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