

## FFWPU Wales, West Country and West Midlands UK: My Cleeve House's Vision

Simon Cooper  
March 28, 2023



Simon Cooper reflects on the gut decision he made just weeks earlier to move his family from London to a country property, sharing his vision for renovating it into a community gathering place.

How did I get here, and so suddenly? If I think back to just around Boxing Day, I had no idea - no plan at all - to be here. So how did that happen? For me, it's important to retrace the steps. Looking at what's gone before informs me about where I am, and helps me look into what's to come. I'm sure it's the same for you. By looking at the steps that brought you to where you are, you can see into tomorrow, and form a better plan. You understand what your wins are, and then work out what needs to happen next.

I say "wins" because that's not really my word. The boys have started a little family tradition: every night we sit around one of those round tables, and when we've finished eating, they get us all to share our wins for the day - what was my personal success today, what do I want to share with my family? Then we go around again and share our improvement for tomorrow, so you can wake up with something new you want to do differently.

Seven or eight weeks ago, I had no plan to be here. But every year between Boxing Day and the 31st of December, I go through a process of looking back at the year almost gone, and getting ready to face the year ahead. That little habit makes a big difference - it brings structure, order, and opportunities. I was sitting there asking myself: "if I try to imagine 2023, would I want it to be the same as last year? What should happen next in this story of my life?"

There's a great line Shakespeare gives Brutus in Julius Caesar: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, when taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows." If you don't take that high tide when it's there, you'll be stuck in the harbor. But when the tide is up, that's when you pull out your sails and head out to sea. So this decision to come here took 30 minutes. I was sitting at my desk on my own, up in the attic in my home office, thinking about 2023 - and it was basically a gut decision. Although it was a gut decision, I could trace it back. There were threads. We were here last April when we started the Easter Family Camp, and sat around a breakfast table with some people thinking, "wow, there's so much potential here." We made a proposal then, but the tide wasn't high. I spoke to the family, but the kids weren't up for it at that point, so we left it alone.

There's another thread. When I stepped down about 12 years ago from the roles I used to have working in the church, one of the reasons was that I had work to do on myself, with my wife, and with my kids. That's probably what's been happening over the last ten years. We had also moved into a new house, but it still had to become a home. Over those years, thanks to Chiko, thanks to my kids, and particularly thanks to their friends and their friends' parents, the house really did become a home. It became a place where we could be happy and comfortable, where people could come. I remember Alex's brother Ollie coming down in the morning, opening the fridge, pulling out a tray of eggs. He knew where everything was; he didn't have to ask. They just made their own food. That's the culture we want here too. If you ever come,

just go and open the fridge, and help yourself.

But like I said, I had work to do on myself. I sat there the day after Boxing Day, knowing that the home I was living in was cozy and comfortable - everything was kind of good. But I knew I was restless inside, that something else needed to come. I needed to get out from behind that desk every day, off my screen. I also knew this decision didn't need to depend on my wife or my children. They were all good in terms of where they were heading. Things had changed even since the summer: Eddie had got his football scholarship, and Mark had found his path. I felt I could go off, and we'd still be good as a couple. So there was no pressure on them - and that was pivotal to the fact that we're all here now. Even though I was happy to come by myself and just come back at weekends, luckily they all got on board, and they brought a couple of other people with them. We've had some good guests from Wales already over the last week. Thank God it wasn't just me coming, because they've all been central to what has played out over the last month.

If we make bold decisions in our life, it can be exciting. We were driving Amy to a football match yesterday, all the way into Somerset. She already has a team; one of the other girls is already in the England pathway, and two of them played for Swindon Town. We drove back picking up eggs from the farm on the road, getting used to the country lanes, going to the post office for a quiet coffee with Chiko - and realizing that in the country, you have to speak to the postmaster, Kate, for a good 25 minutes first.

As for the vision: when this house was bought, Ed lived here on his own for six months, trying to get it into some sort of shape. That was winter, and it was a bit bleak. It's pretty cold here in winter - even colder indoors right now. Physically, our vision is to seriously renovate the whole building, and utilize all six and a half acres. That means serious financial investment. So the proposal I put in to headquarters at Lancaster Gate, and to all the great minds there who make the big decisions, is really about being a client representative for them. I'll provide the information so they can make serious decisions. They can carry on as they have, they can sell the place, or they can invest seriously. They can't sell it - I think that would be the final nail in the coffin of our British community. They can't just carry on the way they have. So the only solution is for them to invest seriously, and my job is to help them - to show them how.

What's the vision spiritually, or culturally? In the end, we can only give what we have to give. Simply speaking, we want to share what we've been able to create in our family, as best we can, and also help everyone else build something - whether in Wales, the West Country, or Birmingham - to use this place to share what they're building and creating. One of the taglines we had when I was a pastor, which we put on our videos every week and on the front of Lancaster Gate, was: "Making it easier to connect." I'd like that to be something people feel when they come here. It doesn't matter what you believe, or where you are in your journey of faith; you can come here and find a place to be nourished, rejuvenated, and inspired.

Our movement can seem quite small. When someone asks me, "Are they still in the church?" that question makes our community smaller and smaller. But if we stop thinking of it as a church, and count people as friends, as family, we can be a much bigger community - and a much warmer one. True Mother is building a temple in Korea that a lot of people want to go and see. I hope we can build something here that people from Korea want to come and stay at, where we can show them some British culture. Something people can come from anywhere to see - not just for our church, but for people of all persuasions and backgrounds, to come and get in touch with something fundamental about their lives. Thank you for your time. Also, any of you staying to help this afternoon: Chiko has prepared lots of food, so hopefully we can share it together.