

This publication is not yet complete, but a brief introduction is printed here

Alternative Spirituality
Organizations and Individuals in Glastonbury who represent and practice belief systems
other than mainstream Christianity.

Purpose of this booklet.

This booklet has been published to meet two needs.

Firstly, to offer to the general reader a snapshot of the range of alternative religious and spiritual belief systems present and practiced within the Glastonbury community and its immediate environs.

Secondly, to provide a 'first port of call' to students of alternative spiritualities. For those wishing to research the beliefs and practices of individuals or groups in greater depth, it is hoped that this booklet will help them overcome some of the difficulties in deciding where to start or who to contact.

General Introduction.

Glastonbury, as home to 'teachers and seekers', has a very long history. In geographical terms it is to be compared with Iona, Lindisfarne and St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall – to name just three - as an island that attracted spiritual communities both because of its isolation and its geographical peculiarities. By way of precise comparison Lindisfarne also has a strange rocky hill rising unnaturally out of an otherwise flat landscape and is a tidal island. Glastonbury, like Lindisfarne, would have been difficult to reach and at times entirely cut off from the outside world by the actions of rain and tide.

By the Middle Ages, Glastonbury was a pilgrimage centre of world renown, with a generally accepted claim to possessing the remains of the first building ever constructed as a Christian place of worship.

Christian pilgrimage continues to this day, but the association of Glastonbury with Arthurian legend (active since the Middle Ages), the Glastonbury Festival (late 1970s) and the whole 'New Age' movement, resulted in Glastonbury becoming a magnet for alternative lifestyles and belief systems since the early 70s.

Without doubt, Glastonbury's alternative scene is less visible than it was. Much of this is down to the fact that the biggest wave of 'New Age' pilgrims have matured, had children and generally settled into more mainstream lifestyles, whilst often retaining their old beliefs and values. Dress codes have also changed. Glastonbury still looked like a Woodstock Convention as late as the mid-nineties. Sadly, dress codes have changed and the 'alternative' nature of its cultural milieu is not so transparent.

Scratch the surface, however, and much that was still remains. Glastonbury is still a town of 'teachers and seekers' – they have become established, settled down, and do what they do in a manner that can survive the pressures of financial necessity and the whims of fashion.

In the past there has been no straightforward point of reference for anyone who wants an overview of Glastonbury's 'Alternative Spirituality'. The purpose of this booklet is to put before the general reader and student the range of beliefs and practices present within the Glastonbury community in the first decade of the twenty-first century.