

# The Guardian

# Grow with the flow

**A** short stroll down one stretch of the tidal reach of the Thames last Wednesday was illuminating. On the north foreshore, below the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, an eclectic group of people were gathered. Here, feet in the rising waters, keenly debating the need for land reform and the problems of the global and local environment, were the Queen's Asian chaplain, the bishop of Southwark, a Buddhist monk, a businessman, a journalist (myself), an artist, a Brazilian human rights worker, a baroness, a general and landowner, an MEP, a refugee, and the head of Amnesty International.

With ducks looking on and the tide rushing in, the gathering of these 12 "archetypal" characters — under the auspices of the String of Pearls festival — was billed as the "people's" riposte to the UN social summit in New York. It was, most participants agreed, bizarre, symbolic and uplifting.

