



## 100 Club

Recent winners were Beryl Shannon (July), Margaret Guard (August), Peter Ellis (September), Jennifer Wilson (October) and Angela Singleton (November). All received £50, and Ammerdown received the same amount to support its valuable work.

## New breakfast lay-out

One of this year's many improvements has been to upgrade what we offer for breakfast and smarten up the way it is presented. Guests now walking into the dining room in the morning see an impressive array of food - from boiled eggs, cheese and pastries to a large selection of fruit and cereals, all attractively displayed in a 'help yourself' fashion. We are delighted to report that guests' feedback has been excellent!



## A Big THANK YOU

In our last newsletter, we mentioned that we were hoping to enhance our guests' sleeping experience by putting mattress toppers on our beds. You responded very generously, as always, and a total of £1,300 has been raised (including Gift Aid). We have since been doing some market research to try and find toppers that are effective without costing the earth (more of a challenge than we realised!). Hopefully it will not be long now. THANK YOU to all who sent a donation.

## Can you help?

One of the most important items of equipment at Ammerdown is the dishwasher/steriliser. Ours is in constant use, given that we serve three meals a day seven days a week. It was installed in 2005, when the Centre was refurbished, and has done remarkably well to last over 10 years. It is, however, showing definite signs of being on its last legs. We would love to be in a position to have it replaced before it totally falls to pieces, but have not gone ahead yet because a new one will cost over £4,000. Do you think you could help get the ball rolling by contributing to a 'dishwasher' fund? As always, every gift, however small, will be gratefully received. Many thanks in advance.

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The Ammerdown Centre Newsletter  
A Place of Hospitality, Spirituality and Growth  
Nov 2015

Utter disbelief quickly followed by, in equal measure, horror at the scale of the carnage, outrage at the total disregard for human life, and a deep sense of foreboding. Our world seems to have gone mad. Where will it all end? These were my initial reactions to the attacks in Paris, the city where I was born and where most of my family lives.

It also made me feel very despondent. I asked myself: 'Could it be that our work is rather futile? Realistically, what can the likes of Ammerdown hope to achieve in the face of so much evil?'. When the attacks took place, we were preparing to host a three day course on 'Understanding Islam'. 12 people had booked. The expression 'a drop in the ocean' came to mind...



I am hugely grateful to two people who helped shine a light into the darkness. The first one is Chris Hewer, the leader of our 'Understanding Islam' courses. I shared with him my sense of helplessness. He reminded me of the biblical parable of the mustard seed, and told me that the only way forward is to continue to do what we are doing as best we can. Ammerdown is sowing seeds of change. They may only be tiny seeds, but they could well grow into huge trees. Our task is to keep promoting a positive message of understanding, dialogue and reconciliation. The rest is out of our hands.

The second person is someone I have never met. Antoine Leiris is a French journalist who lost his wife at the concert venue targeted by the terrorists. He wrote an open letter to the killers. It is an extraordinary piece of writing which I have reproduced in full overleaf. He tells the men who killed his wife in cold blood: **"I will not give you the gift of hating you. You are asking for it, but responding to hatred with anger would be giving in to the same ignorance that made you what you are."**

If he, of all people, can write that he will not let hatred and fear rule his life, then we owe it to him to respond in the same way.

An Ammerdown friend kindly emailed me after the Paris events to express sympathy, adding: "These tragic events show how much Ammerdown and all it stands for are more than ever needed in today's world." He is right. This is no time for doubt. Onwards we go.

With best wishes,

*Benedicte*

## Antoine Leiris' open letter to the Paris terrorists

Antoine's letter is reproduced here because it epitomises our belief that hatred should not be met with hatred, and that we, as men and women of goodwill, irrespective of age, creed or race, can conquer evil if we stay united.

*"On Friday night you stole the life of an exceptional being, the love of my life, the mother of my son, but you won't have my hatred. I don't know who you are and I don't want to know - you are dead souls. If this God for which you kill indiscriminately made us in his own image, every bullet in the body of my wife will have been a wound in his heart.*

*So no, I don't give you the gift of hating you. You are asking for it but responding to hatred with anger would be giving in to the same ignorance that made you what you are. You want me to be afraid, to view my fellow countrymen with mistrust, to sacrifice my freedom for security. You have lost. I saw her this morning. Finally, after nights and days of waiting. She was just as beautiful as when she left on Friday night, just as beautiful as when I fell hopelessly in love over twelve years ago.*

*Of course I'm devastated with grief, I admit this small victory, but it will be short-lived. I know she will accompany us every day and that we will find ourselves in this paradise of free souls to which you'll never have access.*

*We are two, my son and I, but we are stronger than all the armies of the world. ... My seventeen month old boy will threaten you for his whole life by being happy and free. Because no, you will not have his hatred either."*



## A heartfelt Thank You from a private guest

"As someone with a long-term chronic illness, M.E., the short breaks I occasionally have at Ammerdown are wonderful opportunities to recharge in stunningly beautiful and peaceful surroundings. I return to London with a fresh perspective, a little stiller and a little quieter inside, but having often met some interesting people along the way too.

Ammerdown is run impeccably with the high standards of a five star hotel – spotlessly clean rooms, excellent, far, far too delicious food and professional, friendly staff – but with the extra dimension that, unlike a hotel, it is underpinned with the spiritual, caring ethos of a retreat centre. As a Roman Catholic, I value the unobtrusively Christian background of the Centre but also like very much its openness to visitors and groups of all religious faiths and none. There is no underlying pressure to do or be anything at all - and that makes for a very relaxing place to attend to one's inner self; whether it is reading a novel, going for a walk, chatting with a fellow visitor or member of staff or, should one so choose, being more or less silent for the entire length of one's stay.



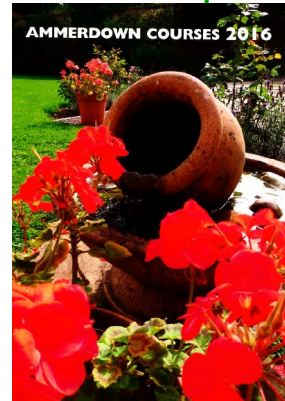
I could not come, however, if Ammerdown did not give me a substantial discount on its normal rates, as I am dependent on state benefits as a result of my illness. I am therefore deeply grateful to Ammerdown and all who support it financially for making it possible for people like me to get a proper break in lovely surroundings."

## 2016 programme now available!

Have you received your copy of the 2016 brochure? (If you have not, please let us know).

We have once again worked hard to put together a programme which, we hope, will have something for everyone. There is the usual mix of spiritual and/or personal development courses, and craft, art or leisure activities. And we have well-established retreat/course leaders who are regulars at Ammerdown (people such as John Bell, Margaret Silf or Daniel O'Leary) alongside others who have never been before and who will therefore bring a new dimension to the Centre. All very exciting!

We would value your help in making more people aware of the wide range of courses we offer, and the excellent hospitality that goes with it. We know from experience that our very best ambassadors are the people who have been to Ammerdown before. So why not request additional brochures to hand out to relatives or friends (see response form)? We are also happy to send copies on your behalf if you provide us with names and addresses.



## New Face at Ammerdown

Kitchen Assistant Eve left our employment in August after securing a place at university to study Sports Therapy. We wish her the very best. We have appointed another 6th form student to replace her. Rowan studies History, Science and Media at our local secondary school and will take his A levels next year.



## Take a virtual tour of Ammerdown

Another recent exciting development has involved having a professional from Google taking photographs and filming both inside and outside the Centre. The aim was to offer a virtual tour of our facilities on our website. This is a very useful marketing tool, particularly for groups or individuals who have never been before. They now can, from the comfort of their office or home, get a much better feel for what Ammerdown has to offer - and they will hopefully like what they see. Why not visit our website and take the virtual tour yourself (easily accessible via the home page)? If you are familiar with Ammerdown but have not been in recent months, see whether you can spot the many changes we have made to give the facilities a fresher and smarter look. Look for the large modern wall clock in the dining room and the improvements in the coffee area, and see for yourself the result of the comprehensive make-over of our bedrooms and en-suite bathrooms...