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Ammerdown's 100 Club

Recent 100 Club winners were Beryl Gover (July), Pearl Simmons (August) and Sue Elliott (September). All received a £50 cheque and Ammerdown received the same amount to support its work.

Sad farewells to John



Our dear friend John Preston retired earlier this year following a diagnosis of terminal cancer. John has gone back to his family home to spend quality time with family and friends. He sends his best wishes and would like to thank everyone, staff and guests alike, for making his time at Ammerdown so enjoyable and enriching.

A big THANK YOU

In our last newsletter, we asked for your help to purchase special 'guest information folders' for our bedrooms.' There were too many loose pieces of paper lying around, making the bedrooms look rather untidy. As always, you responded marvellously and we now have the money we need to order smart specially designed folders with Ammerdown's name printed on them. Thank you so much.

Can you help?

Following the building of our beautiful labyrinth, which enhances our back lawn wonderfully, we are embarking on the next phase in the development of our garden: the creation of a 'Peace Corner' for quiet contemplation. We have the perfect spot for it: a small paved area by the gate leading to the Estate's gardens. The trouble is that the paving needs to be entirely re-done and the stone wall repointed before we can start clearing and planting. A stone mason friend has offered his labour for free but the material will cost money – as will the plants that we will eventually plant. As always, any gift, however small, will be gratefully received. THANK YOU!



The Ammerdown Centre Newsletter
A Place of Hospitality, Spirituality and Growth Sept. 2014

*"We swear by peace and love to stand, heart to heart and hand in hand.
Mark, O Spirit, and hear us now confirming this, our sacred vow."*

This was the beautiful blessing that a group of us said early one morning earlier this year in Ammerdown's woods. It was an unusual group: a mix of Christians and Pagans who had gathered for a weekend organised by Ammerdown to further dialogue between Christians and Pagans.

It all started two years earlier when Simon, the then Interfaith Officer for the Bath and Wells Diocese, aware of the Centre's special interest in interfaith dialogue, encouraged us to build stronger relationships with Pagans. After all, Ammerdown is located in Somerset, one of the world's centres of Paganism. And with modern Paganism growing at an exponential rate, here is a phenomenon which, Simon advised, could not and should not be ignored.

This is how 36 Pagans and Christians came together at Ammerdown for a weekend of discovery and dialogue. What an eye-opener it proved to be! Contrary to what many people believe, the Pagans I met do not worship trees, or the sun, or the moon. But they do have a deep spirituality rooted in communion with nature. They do believe in the divine and strive to see it and celebrate it wherever they are. There is reverence, but also joy in abundance. Pagans embrace deeply symbolic and meaningful rituals in their spiritual practice – an aspect that some consider may have been slightly lost in the institutional church.

The weekend was quite simply extraordinary for the richness of the encounters and the depth of the dialogue. My prejudices (yes, I will admit to having some!) that Paganism is a bit 'airy fairy' have been thoroughly dispelled. I for one will never forget the feelings of awe, fellowship and joy experienced during our joint worship on Sunday morning in Ammerdown's woods, when, together, we watched the sun rise. Our Pagan friends not only helped us experience a fresh and profound form of nature-based spirituality, they also inspired us to think about new ways of expressing our faith, and at bringing the divine out of our churches into wherever we are – including Ammerdown's woods!



Benedicte with three of the most eminent Pagan leaders in Britain

With best wishes,

Benedicte

SPOTLIGHT ON EXTERNAL GROUPS AT AMMERDOWN

We rarely mention the many external groups that hire out Ammerdown's facilities. They contribute so much more than money. Their work is often invaluable in supporting people in need or in tackling key issues of the day, as evidenced by these four new groups that came here earlier this year.

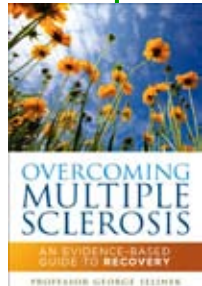
FAITH AND LIGHT

Faith and Light was founded in 1971 following the experience on the pilgrimage to Lourdes of a French couple and their two severely disabled sons, who were sadly made to feel very unwelcome. They approached Jean Vanier who suggested setting up a pilgrimage especially for people with learning disabilities and their families and friends. Three years later, the first ever pilgrimage of its kind attracted over 12,000 people from 15 countries, and Faith and Light was born. It now supports over 1500 ecumenical communities in 80 countries. Members of Faith and Light in UK South met at Ammerdown earlier this year for a weekend entitled "Called to Bear Fruit". Elizabeth, one of the organisers, says: "We wanted to show our gratitude to our volunteers who give so much of themselves, and felt that Ammerdown, with its comfortable facilities, excellent food, atmosphere of calm spirituality and beautiful surroundings would help to make our people feel cherished, nurtured and spiritually refreshed. It was the right choice, as the weekend was a huge success!"



OVERCOMING MS

Overcoming MS is a charity dedicated to improving the lives of people diagnosed with the condition. It advocates an evidence-based programme that incorporates carefully researched diet and exercise. It originated in Australia 17 years ago and has recently arrived in Britain. The charity chose Ammerdown to host one of its first retreats in the UK. Chief Executive Gary wrote afterwards: "A heartfelt 'Thank You' to ALL for making our first event at Ammerdown so special. Over the last 15 years, we have run 55 retreats across the world so we now have a good sense of the type of venue we need to create that special bit of magic where true warmth is found and profound healing can start. Put simply, the venue and its culture are the biggest single external factor that makes or breaks a retreat. We found at Ammerdown a truly professional, friendly and supportive team, for whom nothing was too much trouble. Our aim was of course to provide a group of people diagnosed with MS with a renewed sense of purpose and hope. For them, their week at Ammerdown was quite simply a life-changing experience. One of them wrote afterwards 'I'd like to echo the ultra positive things that others have already said. For me, it was just about the most extraordinarily profound and positive experience of my life.' Thank you, therefore, for taking such great care of us."



LIVING THEOLOGY

Living Theology, the Jesuit residential week-long summer school, ran for over 50 years. Initially intended to help Christians understand better the documents of Vatican II, it soon offered other opportunities to study a range of theological issues. Sadly, by 2011, the cost of the week had become prohibitive and the event was wound up. Good ideas don't go away that easily however, and this July Living Theology was reborn to become a residential weekend which took place at Ammerdown. The question 'Who is Jesus?' was explored with the help of Gerry J Hughes SJ, Nick King SJ, Valerie Quinlivan and Revd Vanessa Herrick. John Merrigan, one of the organisers, comments: "We chose Ammerdown because of its excellent facilities and also because its ethos is very much in line with Living Theology's ethos: both organisations were born out of a commitment to the vision of Vatican II, both are ecumenical and open, and both believe in the importance of learning from each other. The event was fully booked and went wonderfully well – so much so that we have already booked Ammerdown in 2015, from 26 to 29 June."



FODIP (Forum for the Discussion of Israel and Palestine)

FODIP was founded six years ago to enable Jews, Muslims and Christians – and those of other faiths and none – to talk positively and sensitively about Israel and Palestine. Founder Jane Clements explains: "Whenever the Israel/Palestine conflict gets worse, community relationships in this country are adversely affected. Tensions rise and sometimes particular groups are targeted for abuse. The methods of dialogue specially developed by FODIP do help encourage and facilitate the difficult conversations that need to be had and prevent the importation of the conflict into our own communities." FODIP and French partner Coexister brought 15 young Jews, Muslims and Christians to Ammerdown to discuss issues of European citizenship, faith and identity as well as the impact of global events. "Ammerdown was the obvious venue for these sensitive discussions", says Jane, "I have attended many events there and knew it would offer a very safe space. All the young people commented so positively on their experience and even asked whether there is any chance of coming back. I should add that the French guests were very impressed with the food they were served on English soil!"

