

banner



Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Volume 19, No.6 – Nov/Dec, 2002 / 159BE

 LARGE PRINT / Standard Print.Summer schools in England

Summer schools in England

Sidcot Summer School



Youth presenting a morning devotional session at Sidcot

IF THERE EVER was an organised summer school venue, it was Sidcot this year, catering for almost three hundred of us Bahá'ís. For the entire week the sun shone and the refreshing sea air from Somerset's coast, just south of Bristol, wafted through the neatly laid out village of stone and school. There was an array of inspiring and much loved speakers; David Hofman, Betty Reed, Paddy O'Mara for starters, a choice of intensive workshops, swimming, table tennis, and basketball. Several quiet walks through footpaths and fields were right on the doorstep.

It was intimate but spacious and the rambling variety of accommodation from separate cottages to camping, family rooms in large Tudor-like houses, and single cubbyhole bedrooms stuck down intriguing passageways in the main building, created a maze of variety and surprise. But what really brought it all together were special spots like the lily pond surrounded by rosebushes and wooden benches offering a retreat of solitude and beauty or the flower-filled meditation room set amongst Victorian panelling and sturdy leather chairs, hosted within a huge traditional library. On top of that there were loving friends, loads of cute and happy children, smiling young adults (well, most the time), piping hot food, and tremendously inspirational ideas and words offered by Bahá'í elders and other learned spiritual adults.

The eclectic range of buildings and facilities normally operates as a Quaker boarding school. Not only was the food home-cooked, but the atrium feel of the large dining area encased within glass was welcoming and refreshing, enabling new and old friends comfortable conversation. It was a nice balance. Spiritual deepening coexisted alongside seriously good fun. And of course nobody slept in these circumstances, which was the only drawback – ok some accommodation was a bit strange, having the inside feel of a brown cardboard box! But, there was always life support at hand (as Stephen so well put it) rendered either by continually boiling water and another Styrofoam cup of coffee or, more seriously, the Faith, in messages delivered to guide and aid the difficult passing of life and its choices.

There were three main courses of study, besides a host of lectures. Running parallel during the entire week was a course on meditation personal development and Book 1 of the Rúhi

Institute study course. It wasn't possible for the day-tripper to just drop in and out of these, but for those attending the full week, a solid and well thought-out agenda given a long enough time period produced real benefits (so I was told and do believe). For those attending only a few days, a variety of optional lectures held in the beautifully proportioned lecture hall (complete with balcony and back door entrance) and tremendously insightful workshops were held throughout the premises. Topics (naming only a few) ranged from the importance and contributions of Shoghi Effendi, the tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, women and the continuing appalling treatment the female of our species still suffer, highlights of the new history Century of Light, and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

We witnessed the incredible juggling skills of young Mr Digby, talent night skits you'd previously only just heard of, and sang and listened to an array of songs, guitar, and piano to lift everyone's thoughts and inspirations. My own cluster of regular Bahá'í friends and I also managed to sneak away one evening to Weston-Super-Mare and catch the sunset along the beach. Uncontrollable, that's all I can say about the ride home. I've never laughed so hard and enjoyed my friends so much. As I left the following day and turned down the drive, along the grey stone wall, I thought about how saying goodbye and returning home from this good event were hard, despite coming away with so much more. P.S. I hope George found the suitcase, Robert's toothache subsided, and the numerous flu sufferers recovered.

Kishan Manocha and Betty Reid



Mr David Hofman

Ample for the friends in Ampleforth!

There was certainly ample in Ampleforth: ample food for both the soul and the body, ample good weather to appreciate the breathtaking surroundings and ample variety to satisfy the needs of all age groups. Ampleforth Abbey and College was celebrating its bicentennial year and had the spiritual bounty of hosting the second Bahá'í summer school there.

The overarching theme of the school was "Consciousness of the oneness of humankind". The theme was inspired by the release of the full translation of the Tablets to the Kings and Rulers and the message to the World's Religious Leaders.

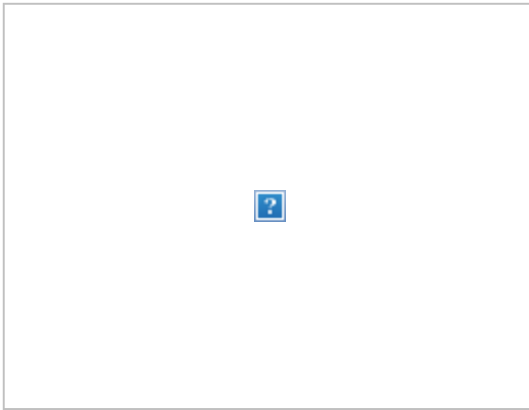
Music featured highly in the Ampleforth school

The main speakers, Barney Leith, John Parris (ably assisted by his son Iain) and Nazila Ghanea-Hercock, took the participants through an understanding of Inter-faith dialogue in relation to the message to religious leaders, the oneness of humanity and the need for justice as expressed in the "Summons to the Lord of Hosts" and the need for social cohesion, race harmony and human rights. Many other excellent speakers contributed to the theme of the school, including Auxiliary Board members Steven Cleasby and Farshid Taleb.

The musical entertainment was overseen by the Villiers-Stuart family which ensured that while varied and often toe-tapping there was always a spiritual thread, and talent was nurtured from every quarter. The Ampleforth Summer School Choir raced to stirring accompaniment by Matt McCraith and by Thomas, remarkable to perform at the public



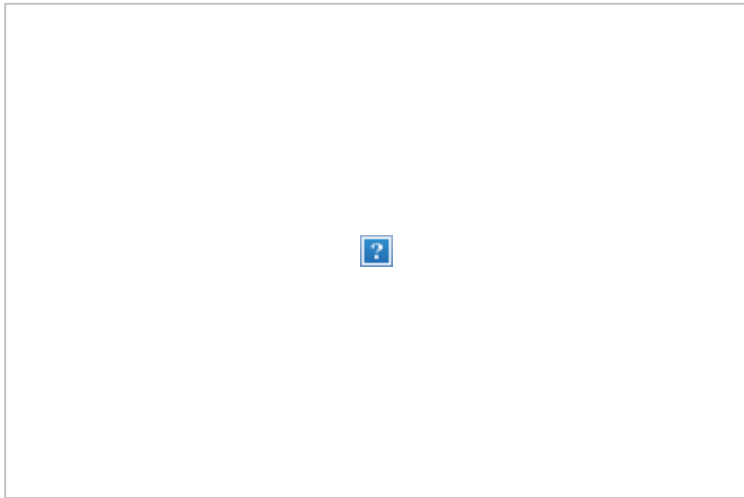
competence led by Matt McGrath and by Thursay was able to perform at the public meeting held twenty miles away in York. Indeed that meeting in the Central Methodist Hall rang to the joyous voices of the choir.



A musical devotional session

There were special spiritual overtones to the school remarked upon by many of the participants. This was because the venue is so steeped in spiritual tradition. Our liaison with Ampleforth was Brother Edwin, whose sense of humour and obvious spirituality endeared him to everyone. Many of those attending the school went to the various services in the church to hear the monks chanting, some attending regularly. But the Bahá'ís also had their spiritual nest in the shape of the Tranquillity Zone, beautifully set up by the Bahá'ís of Doncaster and later manned by junior youth who added a Ridván Garden.

Sitting comfortably on a spiritual mattress of two hundred years of monastic prayer and contemplation, the Bahá'ís and their friends bathed in fellowship enhanced with excellent lectures, stimulating workshops, late night discussions and moving devotionals. At the end of the week the children were able to show and tell from their busy and productive week, the highlight being a magnificent, illuminated temple with all its dependencies. The junior youth confidently gave talks on quotes they had studied for the week and adopted the Tranquillity Zone as a service project and a particular highlight of the school was the large and joyous youth group whose presence added so much to a feeling of optimism for the Faith's immediate future.



"... a splendid illuminated temple"

