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**LARGE PRINT** / Standard Print.Summer Schools and Events  

## Sidcot Summer School ‘The Century of Light’

SIDCOT SCHOOL was blessed in many ways. Not least by the touching faith shown by those who booked for the School despite rather sparse advance programme details. In any event, our hearts were touched in different ways by a variety of speakers throughout the week. Wendi Momen spoke about “Social Change in the Century of Light” whilst Moojan spoke on our “Change in Culture” and Kishan Manocher addressed “The Life and Legacy of the Guardian” and “Integration and Disintegration in the Century of Light”. Paddy O’Mara shared wonderful vignettes from the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whilst Shirin Tahzib shared valuable insights into the three World Order letters, and Chris Lee gave a most thought-provoking talk related to children, touching on the appalling plight of children involved in child labour, pornography, child-armies and other unbearable situations around the world as well as the challenges of training the Bahá'í children to carry forward the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and the usefulness of “Ruh Book 3” in this process.

There were question and answer sessions with the National Spiritual Assembly, and a session with members of the Bahá'í Council for England took place under the trees in the beautiful grounds of this Quaker School. Many informal gatherings took place in the grounds and around the lily pond. Whilst church and Cathedral bells tolled 59 times during Dr David Kelly’s funeral, the friends reflected in quiet groups.

Classes for youth, junior youth and children were all based upon “The Century of Light”. This was reflected beautifully in posters and performances from the junior youth. The youth had sessions with each of the main speakers as well as a “mystery guest speaker”, Dion Azordegan. Some of the youth also acted as mentors for the younger children as well as a visually impaired junior youth. The large numbers of youth were empowered, with a few exceptions, to enforce the 12.00 pm curfew, and the wonderful Task Force assisted them in this!

Individual initiative played a large part in the success of the school. On the hottest night of the year we were privileged to have a performance in the Friends’ Meeting House by a fully-suited Philip Hinton of his one-man show depicting Howard Colby Ives’ intimate account of his relationship with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1911 America, as immortalised in the book “Portals to Freedom”.

Geoff and Michaela Smith, fresh from the Swansea School, uplifted everyone with their music, creativity and generosity. Each event, including juggling, French karaoke and morning devotionals was enhanced by their sound equipment or musical accompaniment. They also created “spiritual journeys” – the first a hike to a disused railway tunnel, where candles were lit and the Siyáh-Chál recreated. The second was a journey of silence taken by 40 adults and children at dusk. So quiet was the group that they were able

to walk close to two deer wandering on the path before climbing to the top of a Somerset hill and singing “Blessed is the Spot” as the sun turned a dark red. Many of the friends were taken back to Mount Carmel in their thoughts.

A friend of the Faith, Nigel Whittle from “Life Force” spoke passionately about his concerns for the environment and the fragility of the ecosystem which supports our very

...enthusiasm for the environment and the fragility of the ecosystem which supports our very existence. He mentioned his conservation work with the Indian tigers and the importance of spirituality to his work, and his interest in the Faith.

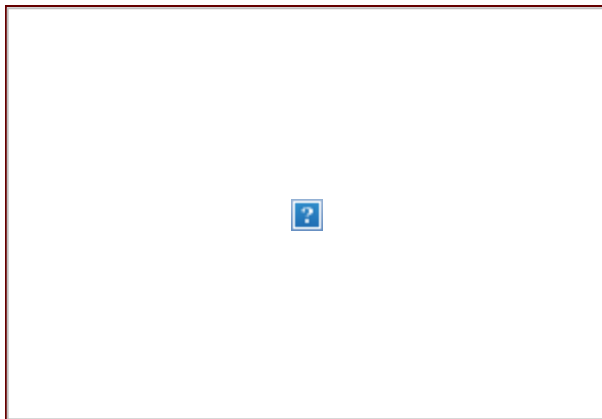
As always the last night talent show gave the intrepid an opportunity to share their hidden talents, and provided the opportunity to thank the teachers who gave unstintingly of their time throughout the week, especially Lesley Habibi who came from Cyprus, and Midge Ault who when not in the classroom was manning the bookshop!

Messages were sent from Sidcot to the Summer School at Greenacre, and carried to the 50th anniversary celebrations in the Shetland Islands.

Thanks are due to the Summer School Task Force, registrars, coordinators and everyone who worked so hard to bring the school about and to the friends who loyally supported it. Sidcot School has successfully made the transition from a Regional School to being under the auspices of the Bahá'í Council for England, and we look forward to its continuing growth in accordance with the Guardian's vision.

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## Summer School in Scotland



THE THEME of this year's school was "These Precious Days", the title fitting in very well with the overall presentation of the school which was largely based around the "World Order Letters" of Shoghi Effendi. In addition to this we were inspired to read, if we hadn't already, "The Century of Light" prepared by the Universal House of Justice. In my view this should be a must on every Bahá'í's reading list.

This was also a school of records: a record for something that in previous years has always been very precious, and that was the sunshine. A record for the highest quality of presentations. The very impressive record set by the always very precious youth who attended all the early morning sessions with enthusiasm and gusto and were still as lively at the very late night sessions!

One of my personal highlights concerned Wes Baker from Uganda, who honoured us with his God-given singing voice. One afternoon some of us, including Wes, visited the Botanical Gardens in Aberdeen, and there just happened to be a Jazz band playing. Little did they know they were to have a guest performer. Wes stepped forward and sang with the band's invitation "Amazing Grace" (including the special Bahá'í verse) – need I say, there was rapturous applause, what a man!

For me there were also many heart-warming experiences at the school. One of these was the dramatic presentation by Korosh and his band of talented players. The audience sat spellbound as Taied re-enacted, through drama, the Martyrdom of the Báb and his youthful companion, Anis. I hope many people will get the chance to see them at a later occasion.

A special thank-you to The Scottish Youth Committee, and particularly Sonia who gave a very interesting and ingenious session on relationships.

Hope to see you all next year – yes, there will be another Bahá'í Land Gathering; the Council For Scotland have requested the venue be booked again.

*(Reprinted from the Scottish Bahá'í Newsletter)*

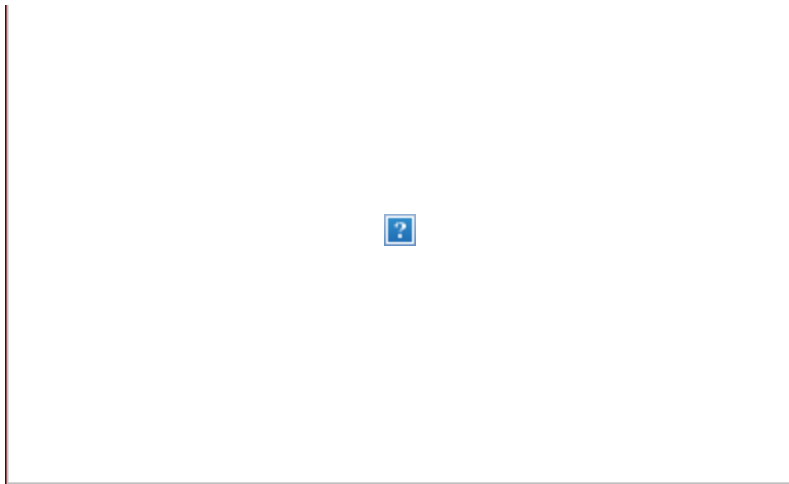
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## Ampleforth 2003 – A Promise Fulfilled!

IF SOMEONE had told

me a year ago that I would be staying in the grounds of a monastery in the middle of nowhere, having one of the best weeks of my life, I'm not sure I would have believed them. But then, that was before I became a Bahá'í!

I had been looking forward to the Summer School at Ampleforth for weeks, and as we parked outside St. Oswald's, something told me that this week was



Music and the arts were an integral part of the Ampleforth school

going to be special; full of spiritual promise. And it's not surprising, since, set against a back-drop of beautiful Yorkshire countryside, the monastery grounds and buildings seemed to take on a life all of their own. Yes, Ampleforth seemed the perfect place to generate the Bahá'í spirit, and deepen the bonds of unity and faith between both believers and non-believers alike.

The theme of the School was "The Century Of Light", the book published on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, and it was packed with talks and presentations on various aspects of the document. Among these was a presentation offered by Stephen Vickers, which, in addition to testing our historical knowledge, highlighted some of the main events of the last century, questioning how, in view of events such as the two world wars, the twentieth Century might nevertheless be referred to by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the "Century of light".

However, for me, one of the most memorable presentations was Steven Cleasby's exploration of the history of the Faith, which charted its growth and progress from the time of Bahá'u'lláh and the early believers, right up until the glorious moment which marked the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, leaving us with many positive reflections for future growth of the Faith.

While the programme gave the friends a lot to think about, it also inspired the heart with talks given on the Writings themselves, such as the one by John Parris on "The Seven Valleys", as well as a beautifully arranged power point presentation on the subject of "love", in which some very emotive passages from the Writings were read aloud to music by individual believers.

Although the afternoons at Ampleforth were more laid back, they were far from uneventful, offering a programme of various sports activities including swimming and Tai-Chi, which I thoroughly enjoyed. In addition, the friends were invited to sing their hearts out in the choir, kindly orchestrated by Matt McGrath, both in daily practises and in many of the devotionals.

On the other hand, if one just felt like relaxing or winding down, they could visit the Matthews Room for a coffee and an extensive bookshop. Alternatively, the friends could find spiritual refreshment on a daily basis in the Tranquillity Zone where, amongst beautiful flowers and candlelit surroundings, we found ourselves enthused by the power of the Writings.

Every evening at Ampleforth ended with group entertainment, ranging from a storytelling night, to a disconight for boogying, a ceilidh, and a completely mad and fun-filled talent show as the finale. The programme also included a really evocative play performed by youth, which was based on a commentary given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the stages of the soul. There was also a breath-taking slide show organised by Tom Fox showing scenes of societies and religions from around the globe.

On top of all of this, we were also provided with daily spiritual inspiration by way of some

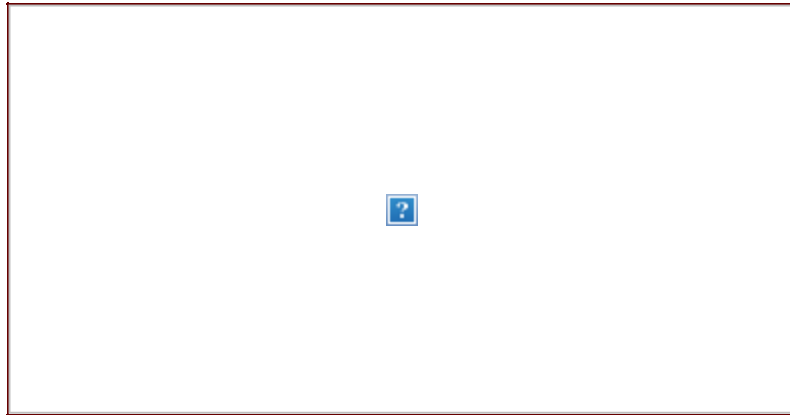
very unique devotionals; each of them inspiring. One of the most stirring of them was a devotional where the Writings and prayers were read out in several languages by friends of different nationalities; it was this which, for me, truly captured the sense of unity that first attracted me to the Faith, and as each prayer was read out, I couldn't help thinking: This is it. This is the beginning of the one world family we're all praying for! However, it wasn't just the Friends who were inspired that week, as a number of the non-Bahá'ís who were at the school commented on the atmosphere, admitting to feeling profoundly touched by the unity and spirit of the community. But then, why wouldn't they? Like I said before, from the beginning, the week was full of spiritual promise, and I think that whether participants were Bahá'ís or not, for the community at Ampleforth 2003, that promise was well and truly fulfilled!

Nadia O'Connell

## Summer School in Wales ‘Songs of the Spirit’

THE SECOND summer school at Swansea Student Village, organised by the Bahá'í Welsh Summer School Committee, more than lived up to expectations, as promised in the School's title, ‘Songs of the Spirit’.

The school was small and intimate, with approximately 100 participants including



Friends at the summer school in Wales

children and youth, which the Committee felt was one of the contributing factors to the success of the School. There were many joyous reunions as well as new friendships to be cemented as the friends gathered from far-flung places in search of their Bahá'í family – many of them faithful supporters of the Llandrindod Wells Schools more than 20 years ago.

We had two current members of the UK National Assembly, two European Bahá'í-Council members, friends from the Shetland Islands, Africa, the Holy Land, Switzerland, Lithuania, Denmark, China and all parts of the UK. Parents celebrating their children's recent graduations, blonde Welsh babies and elderly friends who all strengthened their bonds of love as the week progressed.

Thanks to the careful preparations of the School Committee the week proceeded in a seamless fashion, with each day bringing its own highlights. The morning devotionals were planned ahead by various families and the local study circle, the main hall filling up with art work from the children's classes and art workshops as the week progressed. The speakers and workshops were of a high calibre, and the youth speakers were particularly inspiring with their strict adherence to and knowledge of the Writings. Ryo Ragland, a 17 year old Bahá'í from Lithuania set the standard with the first talk. The morning workshops mainly related to the main talk, whilst the afternoon ones were based on the arts.

Lorna Silverstein and helpers trained the youth to take children's classes and all the youth were each rewarded with a certificate to place in their Record of Achievement portfolio. It was a unique way of teaching that proved to be very successful. The youth, junior youth and children's programmes took an exciting new direction: forty-five children and youth aged from three to twenty-one took part, as well as four class leaders. They studied different religions through the arts, firstly learning about progressive revelation, then experiencing each religion through art. The symbols and main message of each religion were incorporated i.e. detachment, love, submission and justice.

It was a new experience for the adults as well resulting in a team effort involving all ages. One huge and unexpected bonus was the social integration of ages during the rest of the

school. The musical contribution of Geoff and Michaela Smith and their family to the school was enormous and it weaved an important thread throughout the programme.

Although the school was self-catering this was not too arduous – the first night was barbecue night, followed by an Indian evening the next day. This was a riot of colour with a fine array of saris, and music and dance from professional Indian artistes. The caterers enjoyed the company of the Bahá'ís so much that they offered to return the next night with Chinese food!

The 19 Day Feast was one outstanding highlight, with an influx of day visitors joining us for the spiritual programme, which had an African theme celebrating 50 years of the Faith in Africa. This was followed by a dramatic production “The Ancient Beauty” written by Michael and Maureen Melville and Ali Afnan with the assistance of Sarah Monroe and performed by members of the drama workshops.

The following morning the children gave a wonderful drama presentation, with a remarkable talent night in the evening. A surprise “This is your Life” was sprung upon committee member, Roya Azordegan, at the talent night. MC Shahab Namvari took Roya through a hilarious series of photographs and memories, as well as some more poignant memories. Roya was speechless – for once!

During the school we were visited by the BBC’s Radio 4’s religious programmes team who conducted an interview with Rita Bartlett and Geoff Smith. They also made recordings at the school. Viv Craig, gave an inspiring talk on our last morning about teaching and individual initiative. She brought with her a new Bahá'í, who was one of many in her community who had declared whilst attending study circles using the Ruhi Books.

The school was rounded off by a feedback session, which gave the Committee suggestions for next year and comments regarding the success of this year’s school. The overall opinion was that it had been a great school!

Plans are already underway for next year’s school with many participants volunteering their services for workshops, talks and social events.

