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**40th ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS**

**ORGAN CONCERT &
PEACE-BUILDING
PRESENTATION**

**JOIN US ALL AT ST
JOHN'S CHURCH
(Midsomer Norton)
AT 3PM
ON 8 JUNE 2013**

100 Club

Recent 100 Club winners were Bridget de Salis (February 2013), D Alison (March 2013) and Beryl Shannon (April 2013). All received a £50 cheque, and Ammerdown received the same amount to help with its work.

A big THANK YOU

Thanks to your unfailing generosity, each of our guest bedrooms now has a brand new Bible for guests, and our library has gained new copies too. We also now have a small fund to buy new resources for the Chapel, such as hymn books, music and other resources for worship and prayer. We are very grateful indeed.

40th Anniversary Celebrations

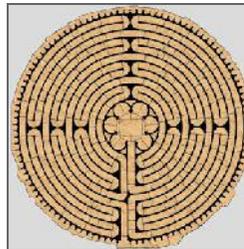
We so look forward to celebrating with many friends and supporters Ammerdown's 40th anniversary on 8 June. The organ concert and peace-building presentation by Revd Donald Reeves promises to be a unique and moving occasion, as will be the evening celebrations - including, of course, the special birthday cake which Ammerdown's kitchen is making for the occasion! (N.B. If you receive our newsletter by post, you should also have received a personal invite. If the invite did not reach you, please contact the office so that we can send you another one.)



Donald Reeves

Ammerdown's own Labyrinth!

As a way of celebrating 40 wonderful years during which Ammerdown has touched many people's lives, we are building a labyrinth at Ammerdown. We are very excited about it: labyrinths are known to be a great aid to contemplation and prayer, and we believe many of our guests will be blessed by this new offering. Building work is starting as I write, and should be, if not finished, at the very least nearly completed by June 8. We are raising the money for it from supporters, trusts and other sources. As always, many of you have already been very generous. All the same, we are still short of £1,500 on our target for money raised from Ammerdown's own supporters. If you are at all able to help, every gift, however small, will as always be very gratefully received!



The Ammerdown Centre
A Place of Hospitality, Spirituality and Growth

Newsletter
May 2013

What happens when young people from diverse backgrounds and different beliefs come together for four days to explore issues around religion, culture and identity? Quite simply, an extraordinary opening of minds and hearts!

This event took place at Ammerdown just before Easter, under the auspices of the Ammerdown Centre and of Salaam Shalom, a Bristol-based charity led by Muslims and Jews which aims to develop awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures and identities that shape the city.

The cultural and racial background of the group included Britain, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Israel. As for what they believed in, it varied from practising Christians and Muslims to someone brought up in a strict Muslim household but no longer practising, a non practising Jew and an atheist.



Some of the young people
who came...

They spent four intensive days together, engaging in a wide variety of activities which all had one common denominator: encouraging and helping members of the group to share in open and honest dialogue.

The feedback was extraordinary. The four days clearly touched everyone in a profound way. They agreed they were leaving as 'better people', who had benefited from feeling listened to, but also from learning themselves how to listen 'truly' to others and respect different opinions and perspectives.

I have witnessed similar 'life-changing' journeys many times at Ammerdown. It has made me ponder why enabling people to 'encounter the other' in a safe and open space never fails to have such a powerful impact. And I have come to the conclusion that this is because such experiences are rare in our world today: how often do we have the time and opportunity of genuinely, unhurriedly, engaging with people whom we do not usually mix with? Of listening 'deeply' to what they wish to tell us, and of being listened to 'deeply' in return? Of being gifted the chance of seeing the world through different eyes? Of becoming better people through the gentle touch of others?

What Ammerdown offers is clearly a rare and precious gift. I thank with all my heart Ammerdown's founders who, over 40 years ago, had the vision to see the need, in our pressurised and polarised world, for meeting places of a special kind, and who had the determination to make it happen. **Happy 40th Birthday, Ammerdown!**

With best wishes,

Benedicta

So good to see you, OASIS!

In 1990, Rabbi Lionel Blue and three others met to discuss the need to support the growing number of people being diagnosed with AIDS as well as their loved ones. They came up with the idea of 'away' residential retreats, to be called OASIS. Lionel approached Ammerdown, which he knew well, and the rest is history: OASIS has been coming to Ammerdown every March ever since. James, now a member of the organising committee, reminisces:

"In March I drove once again through the entrance gates to Ammerdown and wondered what changes I might find and how our weekend would work out. I have had this routine every March, except for one when the renovations took place, since 1995. When I came to my first Ammerdown weekend, I did not know what to expect. I had never been in a group with so many people I did not know. I had enrolled because I was looking after a friend who had HIV and was in need of some TLC. Little did I know that the weekend would change my life! I found myself starting to cry and, for the first time, opened up to people about myself. The feeling of peace and security enabled everybody there to find themselves. I certainly did.

Today Ammerdown still works its magic on me. I always look forward to my drive down the avenue of trees. The setting is so peaceful; the caring staff always at hand in the back ground; the food wonderful; and the accommodation excellent. When I walk through the front door it is like coming home. I look forward to meeting new people and seeing how they will change over the course of our weekend. And above all I look forward to seeing them leave with a smile on their face and new hope in their heart." We too love welcoming OASIS at Ammerdown each March. Regulars like James have by now become firm friends. And, for us, it is a joy to witness year after year the change in the people taking part: how they tend to relax, open up, and gain new strength and hope to help them on their journey.



Photo taken by James during one of his stays...

New crafts at Ammerdown

Those familiar with Ammerdown courses may have noticed that, this year, we have several new craft courses on offer (see photos of the outcome of two recent highly successful courses on stained glass window and in silver jewellery). One reason is that Urchfont Manor, a nearby centre specialising in art and craft, closed last year, and some of the tutors were looking for a new 'home'. But another reason is that, as guests keep reminding us, our creative/artistic side is an important part of who we are as human beings and deserves to be nurtured if we want to reach our full potential. We are therefore delighted that we can run more craft courses, whilst continuing to offer a wide range of courses on spiritual and personal development.



Saying goodbye to Euan

Euan Tait joined Ammerdown in September 2011 as a resident member. He has made a major contribution to the Centre - especially to its spiritual life. Euan has led Quiet Days, contributed to morning and evening prayers, run services for visiting groups, shared his passion for prayer and music, and generously offered his musical talents as a singer and instrumentalist. He tells us he loved his time at Ammerdown and the opportunity to develop his gifts. Sadly, though, he feels it is time to move on and, in September, is embarking on a teacher training course at Cardiff University. We will miss him greatly!



And very sad final goodbyes to ... our dear friend Judy Turner...



Judy was a much loved Ammerdown weekend volunteer for several years before being diagnosed with cancer in 2011. Sadly, Judy, after putting up a brave fight, succumbed in February. Judy made friend with everyone at Ammerdown, staff and guests. She was full of life and had a wicked sense of humour - we had such a laugh together! She was also genuinely interested in people and in their stories, and was therefore a natural 'host' for Ammerdown. We miss her so very much.

... and Sr Katherine Christopher nds

Sr Katherine nds is part and parcel of Ammerdown's early history. She and several other Sisters of Sion arrived a few weeks before Ammerdown opened in June 1973, to help run the Centre and also support the interfaith and dialogue work at the heart of its vision. Sr Katherine stayed at Ammerdown for no less than 15 years and played a major part in ensuring it ran smoothly from day one. Long standing guests remember her as a 'formidable' lady with very high standards but also a heart of gold. She was 79 years old when she passed away in December, but she kept in touch till near the end. Ammerdown has lost a very dear friend and a key figure in its history.



Do you know anyone suitable?

With Euan due to leave shortly, Judy no longer with us, and another one of our weekend volunteers, Fiona, currently incapacitated due to ill health, we are short of weekend volunteers. We are also looking for new resident members willing to live on site for at least six months and contribute to the life of Ammerdown. Know anyone who might be interested? For more information, please contact Benedicte.