

March 2010

Hello!

This newsletter includes a wonderful letter (and an appeal for help) from Holland House in the Vale of Evesham, a question of bees and food sourcing (ready for a major press initiative) eco-news from the place where Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote his most famous poems, and details of a season of eco workshops at Emmaus House in Bristol. In the next newsletter we will talk about the possibility of extending The Green Tourism Business Scheme Certification:

www.green-business.co.uk to retreat centres, so do let us know who on this list has any relevant experience.

But first:

1. Holland House

Last week I received an inspiring email from Rev Ian Spencer at Holland House, which I'd like to show you. Here it is, forwarded with his blessing.

Hi Victoria,

It's been quite a while since we spoke (2008 I think - I'd just become Warden here at Holland House) and you were here with Martin Palmer and others. During an email conversation with you I suggested Holland House should try to be in harmony with Creation, and you said it would make a good strap-line - and it has! So our logo is Holland House - in harmony with Creation, and is on our web site and all our paperwork.

I tried to get our Seven Year Plan sorted before November last year, but unfortunately too many other issues got in the way. But I've started now, and it's going well.

We have for some time been sourcing local ingredients for our kitchen, growing our own, and sourcing local drinks (ciders, beers, juices - even wine).

We've introduced a glow-worm colony into the garden, and now have two beehives. I got a botanist (superb chap - Dr Paul Smith) to write a natural history of the gardens which revealed some fascinating stuff - we have a colony of white legged damselfly (*platycnemis pennipes*) near the river, which are "uncommon", as well as the more common "banded demoiselle" variety. Kingfishers and slow-worms are here too.

I'm keen on establishing the House on an increasingly sustainable footing, and looking at the way permaculture operates to see if we can echo some

of that fine ethos. I've also created a building that schools can use, and am in touch with headteachers to bring their children here to learn about ecology, sustainability, growing their own food (here in a special plot), harvesting, preparing and cooking it.

I wanted you and everyone at ARC to know that I'm still inspired by our first meeting, and we are now working towards that Seven Year Plan, and a House in Harmony with Creation.

Kind Regards, Ian

I can't tell you how pleased I was to receive this. The background from our side is that in 2008 the ARC team chose the tranquility of Holland House to give us the space and time needed to finalise the eco-faith programme we were preparing with the UN and nine major faiths. (We originally called it Seven Year Plans though later, when some faiths said "we prefer Eight" and others liked Nine and Five, it all had to change.)

And there we met Ian, in his first days on the job as warden. He was fascinated by the notion of looking at Christianising Holland House's food sourcing and adding environment education. While there, I bought the Bible of Faith Retreats (also known as "Rereats 2008" by the Retreat Association) and because of that list and Ian's keenness, the idea for this eco-retreat network (ie the letters you've been receiving for the past 20 months) was born. I love the idea of glow-worms and the natural history of the garden – and the beehive idea is one that I think could be fantastic for other retreat centres. You can see the new logo here:

<http://hollandhouse.org/index.html>



Views of Holland House from their glorious gardens.



Ian's colleague, Lucy Hardwick, was very keen on picking everybody's brains about commercial size cleaning products which are as eco-friendly as, say, Method. She's also struggling with finding local fruit, vegetable and meat

suppliers “that are not nearly four times the cost of what we use now”. Please let her know your experiences (enquiries@hollandhouse.org), and she’s promised to pass on what she learns to us, so we can advertise the recommendations in a later newsletter. I would imagine that the cleaning product question is one that anybody might have an answer to, but even though the second question is much more local, it would be good to hear what other people have learned.

2. Food sourcing

Leading neatly from our last question, one of the bigger faith-run hospitality centres on our list is hoping to make a major announcement about its food sourcing in the next few months. I’d like to support them with a press release, and it would be excellent to have as many examples as possible of retreat centres that are making real efforts to have food that is local, fresh, organic. The guidelines that we have adapted from the Soil Association is: 70 percent fresh/unprocessed, 50 percent local and 30 percent organic (with 100 percent free-range eggs, as we feel after talking to most of you that very few faith-run retreat centres feel they can justify battery eggs as being consistent with their beliefs.) So please, send us your stories (through Nicki: info@arcworld.org and we’ll let the media know.

3. St Beuno’s in Wales

We’ve also heard from St Beuno’s Ignatian Spirituality Centre in North Wales, which has been facing boiler issues. Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Jesuit priest and poet, stayed there for three years, between 1874 and 1877 and produced some of his best work there, including “God’s Grandeur”, “The Starlight Night”, “The Sea and the Skylark”.

It is in a 19th Century Grade 2 star listed college building, and providing heating for the building is challenging due to the large corridors, ornate single glass windows and high ceilings. Apparently a heating exchange system operated in the nineteenth century, using heat from the greenhouses to warm the main house. A lot of open fires were used as well, during Hopkin’s time, followed by the installation of oil fired central heating.

St Beuno’s is taking steps to reduce its energy. In 1984 double glazing was installed; more recently, carpeting and energy saving light bulbs have been placed in the corridors. A thermostat has been attached to the heating system and accessible roof space in the main house has been insulated. St Beuno’s had an energy audit commissioned by the Carbon Trust in 2007. By rewiring parts of the house, the Centre has been able to replace old lamps with energy saving ones.

Ponds are fed by natural groundwater and contain plants, fish and tadpoles supplied by a local pond which was filled in. Banking has been established with

pine trees and a pathway. A recent donation provided two bench seats. This new natural water habitat is visited by dragonflies and a heron, and offers a tranquil respite.



The delightful labyrinth at St Bueno's where retreatants can pray.

Old tennis courts are being transformed into formal gardens with raised beds intended for herbs and fragrant plants. A new greenhouse has been installed for flowering seedlings, though we understand it will not be used to heat the house this time round.

As the great poet wrote: "Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver".

The contact at St Beuno's is the Director, Father David Birchall SJ at info@beunos.com and the website details: <http://www.beunos.com/index.htm>

4. Emmaus House Workshops

And finally a posting from Emmaus House in Clifton, Bristol, which is organizing an extensive series of workshops on environment and ecology this year. Here's the list, but do get in touch with them, either to sign up, or to ask for advice on how you can set up your own workshops in your own part of the country. Or indeed to do both. Our colleague Mary Colwell was there for the February workshop and she said it was wonderful.

Environment and Ecology
Workshops 2010

Seasonal Gatherings

10 March/9 June/8 September/8 December

Seasonal Retreat Workshops

1-2 February/4-5 May/6-7 September/1-2 November

Are You Ready for a Quantum Leap?

Spiritual Maturity in a Global Era

19-21 March



Finding God in Nature
10-12 May

Caring for the Planet
24-26 September

Has Carl Gustav Jung anything to say to the present Environmental Crisis?
29-31 October



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Best wishes,

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