

SUMMER SCHOOL REVIEWS

If you have never attended any theosophical events, you may be curious to know what goes on or wonder what everyone gets up to. Here are some reviews from participants and from the Director of the Summer School.

SUMMER SCHOOL 2015

This was my wife's and my first attendance of the T.S Summer School, although I have been an unattached member of T.S England over many years – my "Mother Lodge" being in Nakuru, Kenya, where my father was the founder member just before I was born. Theosophy is the real "Religion" we have known. I felt that the Venue, Hillscourt, in the leafy South Birmingham, near Lickey Hills was an excellent choice, as it was reasonably central for all the delegates to get to, with good transport links and easy access.

Hillscourt House was built in 1897, it was originally the home of a wealthy Victorian businessman, before becoming a preparatory school. In 1971 it was purchased by the National Association of School Masters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) who continue to own and manage Hillscourt. It certainly had excellent Conferencing facility and accommodation with the bonus of excellent catering and the staff looked after us very well.

This year's Summer School's opening day was on 31st July 2015 and according to the Hindu calendar, and as my brother Ramesh pointed out at one of the meditation session, it was "Guru Purnima" day. (Guru: Teacher; Purnima: Full Moon in Sanskrit). A day when the shishya pays homage to his Guru for the guidance given to him (In the context of yoga and the spiritual path a shishya is someone who approaches a guru or a teacher with an open mind and heart, ready and willing to learn). So what a wonderful day for us to start the Summer School! The theme being "The Relevance of Theosophy – Spirituality in Daily Living".

To me the Summer School, reminded of my childhood days when my brother and I used to accompany my parents, to what was in East Africa, called "The Convention" (equivalent to our Summer School) – except that we have modern transport & communication tools compared to East Africa in the 1960's! This year at the Summer School we were very fortunate that we had our International President – Tim Boyd (accompanied by his wife and daughter) in residence with us. One certainly felt, in Tim's company, that there was certainly a tremendous Aura about him. The greatness of the man, was that he was so informal and easy of address with a great sense of humour too.

My wife and I felt that the Programme was well laid out, enough to fill the day but not to be too exhausting. The day started at 7:00 a.m. with Jenny's Yoga session, although my wife and I used the opportunity to explore and walk in the Lickey Hills and be with the wonderful world of nature surrounding the venue. There were nine lectures by individual speakers on various Theosophical related subjects – all of which the speakers had researched in depth and had gained a good understanding of their individual subjects and were able to deliver them with a great passion. To me though the highlight was the three Lectures delivered by our International President Mr Tim Boyd i.e. "Theosophy in Daily Life" – The Blavatsky Lecture ; "The Habit of Dying" – The Public Lecture and "The Future of Theosophy" – all of which were delivered off-the-cuff and with great deal of passion & simplicity and all with such profound messages.

Each morning there were four study groups to choose from and similarly four workshops to choose from in the afternoon. All the workshops and study classes were also very interesting, giving the participants a

choice, to choose one which particularly draws their interest or increase their knowledge and understanding – although given the choice it was a difficult decision to make, as all the workshops & study groups I found of immense interest. The Speakers, Workshop and Study Group Leaders' enthusiasm was very infectious and meal times and tea breaks became "talking workshops" not only to discuss the lectures, workshops and study groups that the others had attended, but also a time to make new friendships and renew old ones.

It certainly reminded me of my childhood days of the East African Theosophical Conventions – the Love, Warmth and Friendship of one & all – friends & "strangers" – giving it a sense that we are One Global Family. Certainly such an event does not take place so successfully without a lot of hard work and I like to take the opportunity to thank one & all who were involved in the organisation of this very useful and successful Summer School. (*BNK Wisbech*).

Adorned in comfortable attire, with a heavy rucksack on my back, I boarded the train at Durham Railway Station, setting off on a direct route for New Street Station in Birmingham. I travelled alone but knew instinctively that I would meet people along the way and at the Hillscourt Conference Centre where the 2015 Summer School was held. I met up with Martin in Birmingham and we travelled together to Rednall, from where we shared a taxi to Hillscourt. The buildings and grounds were picturesque and I was quickly directed to my room for the week by very friendly staff.

After settling in my room I ventured out to see who else was there. I made my way up to the Conference Hall where I was met by Veda on her jewellery stall and Maureen and Cynthia adding finishing touches to the many goods for sale for the Theosophical Order of Service. I purchased several items and then entered my name on the daily schedule sheets for the study groups and workshops across the week.

Following dinner at 6pm that evening, which provided an excellent opportunity to see who was there, was a welcome evening for everyone at 7:30pm. The following morning I began the week of Yoga with Jenny our President, we began quite gently building up throughout the week. Breakfast was at 8 am, an excellent choice of cereals and vegetarian food. There was a meditation session at 9:30 am just prior to the morning lecture the first of which was given by Gary Kidgell, 'Soul Personality and the Rainbow Bridge' a talk that drew on Theosophical writings, mythological symbolism and Transpersonal Psychology. The week was very well organised and daily notices followed each morning lecture. We were told exactly where we needed to be for the study groups to follow.

Each day we were spoilt for choice, the hardest thing to do was to make a choice from the wealth of spiritual teachings by the group leaders. The idea was to stick with the chosen topic for half the week then change for the second half. The studies were chosen to compliment the title of the school's endeavour, 'The relevance of Theosophy: Spirituality in Daily Living'. Susan Bayliss took a group on 'Dragons and Serpents: Signposts to Esoteric Wisdom' and Ted Capstick, 'The Essential Tools of Practical Theosophy for Today'. Each day there were workshops such as Chi Kung, led by Mike Hall and Reflexology for Health and Well Being, led by Dana Eaton. There were morning and afternoon snack breaks, tea and biscuits, where people gathered socially, getting to know one another and discussed what they had just heard or done. Meal times were a delight, good food, attentive service and another opportunity to talk things over with lecturers, colleagues and friends.

There was an afternoon lecture each day where Theosophical issues such as magic and science and practical Theosophy were highlighted. Tim Boyd the International President gave the renowned 'Blavatsky Lecture' on Sunday: 'Theosophy in Daily Life'. He gave a talk on 'The Habit of Dying' (practising 'dying' while still alive)

on Wednesday and the following day summed up the theme of the School by talking on 'The Future of the Theosophical Society', which included a guided tour around the grounds of the International Headquarters at Adyar and future plans for repair and expansion. The key point that he made that day was that there is only one Theosophical Society, regardless of where our branch is or in which country we live, we are One. The entertainment provided each night, with Damon at the hub, added to the highly successful week. Barry mobilised the book shop and provided a wealth of spiritual books for sale, Pam promoted Brotherhood through the Peace Mala, Linda provided DVD's for sale from some of the European School speakers and Colyn provided snap-shots of the week. All in all, it was a fantastic week and many thanks to all those who made it happen. *(JM Durham)*.

This year the School was held from July 31st to August 6th at Hillscourt, the conference Centre of the NASUWT, at Rednall near Birmingham. This was the first time we had used this venue with its excellent conference facilities and accommodation and it was liked by a majority of the people attending. The staff were very friendly and helpful and the vegetarian food plentiful.

The School, which is open to both members and non-members of the Theosophical Society, attracts people from all over the world. This year we had delegates from Wales, Scotland, Brazil and New Zealand.

The title of the School was "The Relevance of Theosophy: Spirituality in Daily Living" and the talks included "Soul, Personality and the Rainbow Bridge", "Living in the Presence of the Soul", "Being a Theosophist in Principle", "Embracing the Dragon of Wisdom" and "Living the Mystical Heart of Theosophy". We also held eight three day Study Courses with titles such as "The Essential Tools of Practical Theosophy", "Theosophy for Beginners", "The Secret Doctrine" and "Meditation".

Of course the big attraction for many of us was the presence of the International President Tim Boyd and his wife, Lily and their daughter Angelique. Tim gave three talks, the first was the Blavatsky Lecture entitled "Theosophy in Daily Life". Later Tim gave a Public lecture called "The Habit of Dying" and he finished the week with talk on the future of the Theosophical Society in which he showed some slides of the Adyar Estate. The Blavatsky Lecture was recorded and should be available soon as a booklet. All the lectures were recorded and videoed and are available from Headquarters.

The School is not all study and head-learning. In the afternoons participants had free time to do their own thing or to take part in healing, reflexology or Chi Kung sessions. There were also two sessions on how to give a public talk. The mornings started with yoga and the evenings were for relaxing with audio-visual presentations. On one evening there was a quiz which everyone enjoyed including our President who was on the winning team. The evenings ended with a longer meditation. Half way through the week there was an outing to nearby attractive Winterbourne House and Gardens. When not listening to talks, studying or attending workshops delegates could rummage through the numerous books for sale. The Theosophical Order of Service and The Round Table had stalls with many and varied items for sale. Including the raffle the TOS raised over £800.

The School was attended by one hundred and twenty people both, residential and day delegates and had something for everyone whether new to Theosophy or of many years' experience. The mood was convivial and uplifting as is usually the case when like-minded spiritual seekers gather together. We certainly enjoyed the company of Tim and his family and hope that he will come again to our Summer School. I must thank all who helped to make the School a success; the speakers; the study and workshop leaders and many others too.

Jenny Baker Director of Summer School