

'Three Score and Ten'

We were stuck! After hours of preparation and now just getting the 70th birthday cake out of our house was proving difficult. The hall was just too narrow! Two ex-scholars paused, looked across the all too familiar form of Michael House School and grimaced. There were always challenges to be met here. Manoeuvring gingerly through the backdoor, we took the long way round. Nothing new there either, we had solved the problem in the end. As Ron Jarman, a former Michael House teacher, cut the cake at break-time, the whole school gathered in the playground and a rainbow of balloons racing heavenwards the 70th Celebrations Group breathed again and smiled. All was well. That evening Ron Jarman gave a wonderful, informal, talk weaving together his memories of the early Michael House with his rich understanding of Rudolf Steiner philosophy.

Michael House School's past is littered with crisis and heroic actions. The school has faced closure on several occasions and even now struggles to survive financially. Whatever the future holds, the past has been a rich one, and one which we chose to celebrate. Social events dominated the early Autumn term, with a ramble through the Staffordshire countryside at Back Dane, the return to the school of a Ukrainian dance troop, the "On The Spot" choir and a Barn Dance. This social element within the school is vitally important for its functioning, but is one that can so easily be lost amongst everyday business. These events were a chance for everyone to see each other and relate to each other in a different way. Through experiencing the 'other' we learn to appreciate, and ultimately, to understand.

Communication was a key word throughout the 70th year. During the Spring Term parents raised many questions surrounding how the school communicated, internally and with the wider school community. Whilst emails and phone calls can be useful, nothing replaces the 'face to face' meeting.

The Spring Term also heralded a frantic time of organisation on the part of the 70th Group as the final Preparations for the two Reunions were put in place. Class 8 had taken on the catering for both evenings and were shocked as numbers rocketed in the week before the first event. The banquet was sumptuous, the company entertaining, at times astonishing and sometimes nerve-racking. Past differences melted into amusing reminiscences and old friendships were renewed. Both evenings proved very successful. As the Summer Term dawned the 70th Group meetings became focussed, The May Day Pageant. Last autumn a massive larch was felled. In the following months Mark Butler and Iain Swanson, parents at the school, had taken on the task of carving the faces of a man and woman into the colossal trunk. During the last week of April this sturdy Maypole was planted in the ground in front of the school and a small posse of astounded teachers hurried out to gaze, awestruck at the beauty and bravery of the project. This very masculine impulse was dedicated on 1st May to Francis

Henshaw, who, though he was too old to join the very first class at Michael House in 1934, supported the school throughout his life, with love and pennies. His crooked figure will be carved into the base of the larch pole in the future, fittingly bringing with it a connection to Saturn. This planet, which has been linked with the larch, was seen as the old man representing a feeling of 'responsibility for the need of the times' by Steiner. On the morning of the May Day Pageant as the costumed classes assembled to dance around the Maypole, all the doors of the school were wide open and the whole community flowed through and around the building.

July arrived with great anticipation. The school's archivist, Alan Clayton, created an exhaustive exhibition of the school's past history, which was viewed over the final weekend of term. Christopher Clouder, also an ex-Michael House teacher, gave an insightful talk that same weekend, which focussed on the salient issues of childhood and the future of Waldorf education. With these thoughts fresh in our minds we launched into the final week of term. This "Activities Week" gave classes the chance to do things that were usually not possible, either because of time, or due to lack of expertise. Whilst the older classes, from Class 5 upwards, had some choice in what they did, the younger classes had set activities. Everyone in the school had the chance to participate in singing workshops. The cross-class activities worked well, developing relationships and tolerance throughout the middle and upper school classes and the positive effects are still being felt in this new school year. On the final evening everyone was invited to join pupils and teachers in celebrating the products of the week from plant-dyed wools to handmade books. It proved a memorable end to a challenging, but rewarding, year.

Hester Machin, Class Eight Teacher. Michael House School.



Michael House School Prospectus © Freya James

Starting the Journey - preparation conference for teachers beginning Class 1

Every journey starts with a first step and over the weekend of August nearly two dozen new class 1 teachers gathered at the Hereford Steiner School before stepping into their respective classrooms for the first time. In a way, we became a class 1, as we were actively taken through the circle-time and rhythmical work of a morning main lesson. We also learnt more about the art of writing and telling stories and verses. For me the most significant part of the weekend were the insights into some of the underlying principles embedded into this manifest work of genius which is the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, so that we began to understand a little of why we do what we do in the classroom, and not just the content itself.

Michael Hallam, Lancaster Steiner School

News in Brief

Greenwich - Unfortunately the Greenwich Steiner School lost its bid for the 150 year lease on an eminently suitable site in the borough. It all looked very hopeful but at the last moment they lost out to the London School of Musical Theatre. There is much disappointment because both parents and teachers believe the criteria on which the decision was based, that the project should enhance the borough's reputation as a centre for art and culture, was more than adequately fulfilled by their school. The school has outgrown its present accommodation in St George's church and a new home is now desperately needed. Finding a fitting site that will allow expansion has been a perennial problem for our London schools.

New Orleans - Hurricane Katrina has wrought much damage to the Hill School of New Orleans which in its sixth year had just managed to unite the school in one campus. Three classrooms were flooded up to a depth of three feet of water and most of the equipment was destroyed as well as the furnishings and puppets etc in the Kindergarten. Many school families have lost everything and the community was dispersed far and wide. It will take much effort to reunite the school and also to make the building habitable once more. ASWNA www.awsna.org has opened an account for those wishing to make donations to assist the school regenerate itself.

Budapest - Last year Class 12 of the Pesthidegút Waldorf School won the Hungarian World Language Competition. 700 classes from

secondary schools across the country participated in the competition which was run entirely in a foreign language and after submitting a five minute film on the importance of learning foreign languages in the third and final round the class won a trip to Brussels.

Innovative Upper Schools - In Leuven (Belgium) in May the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education (ECSWE) together with Federation of Steiner Schools in Flanders held a short conference on innovative Upper School work. We heard reports of various initiatives that bring new ideas into the work with the students and some preliminary evaluation regarding their outcomes. Colleagues reported on the Regionalen Oberstufe Jurasüdfuss (Switzerland), the Oslo By Steinerskole (Norway), the cultural stream "De Spreng" in Zutphen (Netherlands), general new approaches in Germany, and the upper schools in Klagenfurt (Austria) and in Leuven itself. These gave a fascinating picture of the possibilities that lie within the Waldorf approach and now this networking has been set up we hope to extend its range and develop such exchanges in the future. The report on this conference is available on www.ecswe.net. This work also is also linked to our European-wide cooperation in trying to obtain recognition for new assessment modes for our students' work that could take the place of traditional examinations as is already the case in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Flanders.

Christopher Clouder. SWSF

Winter
2005

NEWSPAPER



Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship
(The Association of Steiner Waldorf Schools in the UK and Ireland)
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A New Steiner School for Norwich

Steiner education in Norwich originated with a small group of parents and their 'toddlers' meeting in their own homes in 1998 and a founding 'Initiative Group' of parents and teachers wishing to create a thriving school. Within a year the group had moved to a centrally located Community Centre, where the toddler groups still run, fully subscribed, on five mornings a week, with about 65 families regularly attending. These groups have gone from strength to strength, with hundreds of Norfolk's young children having attended the group since those early days. In our initiative's own 'early years', we also become a registered charitable company in preparation for the founding of our school.

Our Norwich Steiner Kindergarten first opened part-time in a church hall in April 2001, and in January 2003 we achieved Ofsted registration. From its initial one morning session a week, the Kindergarten has grown steadily to offer daily morning provision to about 25 children, with further places pre-booked.

Our School Founding Committee (later to become the Steering Group) was formed in 2002 with a remit to find premises for, and set up, a local Steiner school. We successfully negotiated to rent a little-used Methodist Church Hall in Norwich, as the location for both our Kindergarten and the early classes of our new lower school. In September 2004, our Kindergarten duly moved to these present - now completely refurbished - premises. This spring the Kindergarten received an outstanding Ofsted report, and also achieved

fully-recognised Kindergarten status with the Steiner Schools Fellowship.

The Norwich Steiner School, with its first small class 1, opened as a provisionally sponsored school in a room next to the Kindergarten on 12th September, with an experienced Austrian class teacher to take the class. We are also now offering 'wrap-around' day care on the Kindergarten premises in a considered response to local demand. The setting up of a new school is an extraordinarily involved process, and the selfless dedication of the people involved in our growing school community cannot be praised too highly.

Enquiries: Valentina Monguzzi on 01603 623971 info@norwichsteinerschool.co.uk

Richard House. Norwich



Young Norwich pupils finding a creative way of building their new school.

Working with Inspections

How our schools are inspected may not appear immediately as the most scintillating subject. However, major changes are taking place that will vitally affect our schools. Those of you who follow such things may have noticed that the government is engaged in one of its many "consultations" (responses by the beginning of November) aimed at reorganising inspections for all children's services. This could lead to a mammoth, and probably renamed Ofsted, serving as an umbrella for the inspection of everything from early childhood care facilities (nannies beware!) to Further Education.

Joined-up thinking might better take place in a joined up organisation, but a monolithic body "for children & learners" has its dangers both in the light of Civil Service cutbacks and the common failure of all government departments to differentiate their functions sufficiently. We need to be aware of this because our good working relationship with the HMI, who are the retained inspectors with Ofsted, is also being eroded. Maintained school inspections are carried out by a number of "franchised companies". Now the inspection of independent Steiner Waldorf schools will be conducted by Cambridge Associates, supervised by HMI but not with their invariable involvement. Cambridge Associates are one of the large education consultancies who hold a number of government contracts. The effect of this change is likely to show in the medium and long term. Although inspections must still be conducted in terms of the aims and ethos of the schools inspected, we will have to watch and see how the new arrangements work out in practice.

We may find that inspectors are increasingly less aware of Waldorf pedagogy and that "educating the inspectors" becomes more important. Schools so far inspected since the new inspection procedures were introduced, Michael Hall, Meadow, Ringwood and Canterbury, have done well & found the experience valuable (if not worth the cost!). From now on we may have find answers to that ancient Latin question, "quis custodiat...." (Who guards those who do the guarding?)

Kevin Avison. SWSF

First Comprehensive Report on English Steiner schools

What follows is the press release that accompanied the University of the West of England (UWE) research report when it was published in June 2005. This was a seminal event in the history of the school movement in England and further afield. We are therefore grateful for all who put work and effort into producing it. The study covered many areas including leadership, curriculum, teaching style and methods, educational philosophy, the approach to special educational needs and national tests as well as links with parents and staffing.

There was much interest from the media over the summer and it was all overwhelmingly positive. Although the DfES commissioned it with public funding in mind, its recommendations and conclusions have a much greater reach and help to put all our schools and settings firmly into the educational environment in which we live and yet endorses our approach and what we stand for. It also highlights areas in which we should continue to work ourselves as a growing and evolving school movement and underlines the potential that resides in our schools to give many more children a genuinely spiritually based education that can enable them to face the challenges of the future creatively, courageously and to the best of their ability.

Christopher Clouder. SWSF

Education in Steiner schools is based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, known as anthroposophy, and the schools provide an alternative approach to mainstream education in the UK and many other countries. The schools have distinctive practices which emphasise the development of the whole child and in particular the spiritual aspects of their development.

In England there are 23 Steiner schools and the research covered 21 of these - 15 were visited and a number of case studies carried out, as well as a survey of Steiner teachers and a review of existing research studies. The study aimed to identify good practice, find differences and common ground with mainstream education, and to find out how the two sectors might learn from each other. Current education policy is to broaden choice for parents through diversity of provision as well as promoting the freedom for schools to excel through innovation, collaboration and sharing. The report also makes recommendations should Steiner schools enter the maintained sector.

Professor Philip Woods who led the research says the report identified a number of strengths in Steiner schools, "There was a striking consistency between the schools, despite a large variation in the size and resources available. Overall we found areas of good practice such as the early introduction and approach to modern foreign languages, development of speaking and listening through oral work and the

WOW - Waldorf One World 2005/06

WOW-day is now entering its 11th year and in those years we have managed to raise more than 900,000 euros. Altogether 214 schools have participated and we are hoping that this effort will continue to grow so we can cross the million euro mark and for the first time schools in the USA intend to take part as well. During this time we have helped a 150 street children in Bogot  and built a small village and community centre for them (a moving DVD made by Austrian upper school students who went to help there is available form the SWSF office). A hundred blind children in St Petersburg now have a flat where they can do eurythmy in their own dedicated therapy centre. Two hundred abused children in Thailand have been helped into secure accommodation and care. Forty children in Sierra Leone and hundreds in the townships of South Africa have a much better start in life with a suitable and inspired education. We have also assisted the first Waldorf School in China to begin. Now we are additionally working to help distressed children caught up in the war in Chechnya, abandoned HIV positive children and deprived indigenous children in Andhra Pradesh, India.

The original concept was that this was not just another appeal for money but was something that could be included into the Waldorf curriculum as a pedagogical activity for all classes and many teachers have taken up this creative challenge. The newsletter available on our website and from the SWSF office is written in a style that makes it suitable for EFL teaching and we

combination of class and subject teaching for younger children. In addition the development of good pace in lessons through an emphasis on rhythm, the emphasis on child development in guiding the curriculum, and Steiner schools' approach to art and creativity were all distinctive strengths. We also found that the emphasis given to teachers reflective activity and heightened awareness as well as the non-hierarchical, collegial form of running schools, offers a contrast to current practice in the maintained sector and may prove relevant for mainstream schools."

While the report cautions about the difficulties of transferring practices from schools with differing philosophies, it says there is considerable scope for many aspects of the good practice of Steiner schools to inform what goes on in state schools, and vice versa, and it suggests LEAs, government and Steiner schools should promote opportunities for professional dialogue between the two sectors.

Professor Woods says, "We see a great potential benefit from mutual dialogue and professional interaction between Steiner and mainstream educators. As well as the good practices we have identified from Steiner schools there are also areas in which Steiner schools could benefit from maintained sector practices such as management skills, organisational and administrative efficiency, classroom management, working with older secondary school children and record keeping and assessment."

The report also identifies the challenges facing Steiner schools, if they were to become part of the state-funded sector and offers a series of recommendations to meet these challenges, "Governments, LEAs and Steiner Schools need to promote a wider understanding of the philosophy behind the schools, and there needs to be a greater understanding amongst assessment bodies of the ways in which Steiner schools assess progress and facilitate pupils' learning. We also recommend that, if Steiner schools became part of the state sector, the Government would need to enable Steiner schools to opt out of the National Curriculum. There would also be challenges to be met in the way the schools are managed and the training of teachers." The report recommends further research into the relative effectiveness of Steiner and mainstream school practices to strengthen the evidence base of Steiner schools.

The research team: Professor Philip Woods, Dr Glenys Woods and Dr Martin Ashley from the Faculty of Education, UWE www.uwe.ac.uk

Copies of this Research Brief (RB645) can also be accessed at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR645.pdf>



Children of an indigenous community school. Andhra Pradesh

update our website www.ecswe.net with news from our projects as it arrives. Therefore we encourage everyone to join us in this worthwhile and necessary effort to improve the lives of the many children in the world who do not have our good fortune.

Christopher Clouder. ECSWE



Children of an indigenous community school. Andhra Pradesh

News from the Public Funding Front

It has been a very busy summer on the work-towards-public-funding front, largely as a result of:

- the UWE report and in particular its recommendation (Recommendation 27) that LEAs should provide support in finding and obtaining suitable sites accommodation where appropriate
- the Hereford Steiner Academy Project going to feasibility. This underlines the unequivocal message that the Government is serious about its commitment to funding Steiner education
- Toni Blair's re-stated commitment to the Academy programme, made clear at a meeting with sponsors of new academies (including us) at a meeting at Downing Street in July

It was because of the difficulties associated with acquiring city sites that we were advised to try and realise a first project where the site issues are less complex - hence the first project is in a rural setting. This advice was based on the anticipation that a first project, irrespective of where it was, would give a clear and positive signal. This is now happening and that our negotiations for sites in cities are benefiting from Hereford having gone to feasibility.

Schools that have been working for some time towards public funding will confirm that they are feeling the positive affect of increased activity. For these schools, sites remain the single most crucial factor in securing the future of that school. Site factors are the key to the sequence of events leading to public funding, because without a suitable site the process of establishing a publicly funded Steiner school cannot begin. Since summer several new Local Authority sites have been identified for us to consider and this has generated a flurry of activity and even the possibility of new projects.

A Final Meeting and Farewells

A three-year, EU-funded, Comenius Project to design a programme of study at Masters level for colleagues in Steiner Waldorf schools in Europe has completed its work. In early September, representatives of the five partner-institutions from Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK represented by John Burnett, Christopher Clouder of European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education and myself met in Devon for their last meeting. Practical details relevant to UK teachers and staff are outlined below.

As the Project comes to an end, the hope and intention is to give birth to a Programme - a programme that is flexible, accessible and suited to working teachers and school staff who are interested in exploring their work with fresh and enquiring minds, with their pens or keyboards at the ready.

As Project members gathered in Exmouth in the late summer sun, we experienced a sense of friendship and achievement that we had accomplished our task, and an expectation that a new Programme is ready to be launched under its own sails. As the meeting progressed, we were informed that the University of Plymouth has appointed a European Masters Project Manager - an indication of the potential which the University recognises in this work. A highlight of the meeting came when the University's Academic Committee approved two new modules in special educational needs, presented by Nico de Bruin, our Dutch colleague from Helicon Hogeschool. The members of the academic committee were treated to a profound and inspiring presentation of the four-fold picture of the human being, which offers a pathway for medical practitioners and the three-fold picture of the human being, which provides a basis for educational work and practice. It was stressed that these pictures offer fundamental perspectives which contribute to a living knowledge and understanding of children who face difficulties in their health and development.

Shortly after the presentation and with the modules having received formal University approval, Nico de Bruin was taken ill and rushed to hospital in Exeter. To our great sadness and dismay, our Dutch friend and colleague, a man who showed a tender and warm heart in everything he did, died of heart failure the following day.

On the final day of our meeting, Project members travelled into Cornwall. In thick mist and heavy clouds, we made our way to the very edge of the country. As the grey evening light faded, we came to Merlin's cave at Tintagel, where we able to walk on the shore and watch the waves crashing into the rocks as we tried to grasp the precious qualities of life and friendship, in the midst of the natural power of the elements and the majesty of life's rhythms. And so this first part of a European Waldorf endeavour ended at one of the mystery centres of Western Europe and we said our farewells to each other across more divides than any of us had imagined at the week's beginning. Simultaneously we re-affirmed our determination to continue evolving the programme that has emerged from our cooperation and that has now been established in order to serve the further development of Steiner Waldorf education.

Trevor Mephram. Comenius Project Coordinator. SWSF

The Hereford Steiner Academy feasibility stage is going ahead well with a full-time Project Manager, Lara Newman, co-ordinating progress. She is very experienced, energetic and enthusiastic and determined to ensure a successful journey through the bureaucratic process that lies ahead. After her appointment was made, we had an introductory day, facilitated by Steve Briault. It was attended by Lara and two colleagues from the Project Management Company as well as all the teachers, all members of School Council, the DfES team and the Academy Focus Group. Eurythmy and Bothmer gym for participants added to the enjoyment of the day and the sense of common purpose in the effort to try and resolve all the issues so that we can progress to the Implementation Stage. This work during feasibility will aim to achieve generic outcomes that could be adopted by other Steiner academies that wish to follow.

There is a real sense of things moving now. This contrasts with the end of last term when things seemed to have sailed into the doldrums a bit, due to delay caused by government review of the procedures for appointing project management companies. However, the enforced delay gave us time to reflect on some new, but important, next steps. In particular, the nature of the Project Steering Group that oversees the feasibility stage. Normally the predecessor school is not represented there. However, we have now made the case that for a Steiner Academy project, the Project Steering Group should have teacher and parent representatives from the 'predecessor school' because of the implicit interrelatedness between school and sponsor. It is too early to indicate what other projects are in the pipeline, but the ball is rolling.

Sylvie Sklan. SWSF

Study Scholarships for Staff in Waldorf Schools

We are pleased to be able to announce an offer of full funding (tuition costs) for teachers who would like join an exciting new, school-based, Masters programme in education. Waldorf teachers in the UK are invited to take part in a programme of study, professional development and practice-based reflection at Masters Level. Designed for full-time teachers and therefore offering a manageable timetable of study, all tuition costs would be covered by a generous new offer of scholarships.

As you may have heard or read, over the past couple of years, in conjunction with partners in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Hungary and the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, the Steiner Waldorf team at the University of Plymouth has been developing, a school-based, Masters programme for Waldorf teachers - the *European Masters Programme for Steiner Waldorf Educators* (EPMSWE).

In the course of the design phase, we began a pilot programme at Cotswold Chine School in Gloucestershire. Over the last 18 months, we have been working with 14 teachers from Cotswold Chine in a programme of staff development at Masters Level. The feedback from the pilot is positive; the monthly taught sessions take place on Friday afternoons, when questions of pedagogy and practice are introduced and discussed. Teachers from the school prepare and discuss assignments for submission.

Recognising the value of this programme of professional development, the trustees of Cotswold Chine School have decided to extend opportunities to take part in EMPSWE to other full-time teachers working in Steiner Waldorf schools in the UK. The trustees of Cotswold Chine have proposed a number of scholarships for individual teachers who are ready to embark on a programme of independent study and practice-based reflection at Masters Level. The scholarships will cover tuition costs for the whole course, based on an assumption that a teacher working in a school will be able to undertake one module and one assignment in the course of a year.

A number of scholarships are available and prospective student-teachers are eligible to apply for funding in successive years. If you are interested in exploring this opportunity to study your work and your practice at Masters level, please contact: John Burnett: jburnett@plymouth.ac.uk Tel: 01395 255475.

Trevor Mephram,. Comenius Project Coordinator. SWSF