



SWSF Newsletter - Autumn 2012

Ron Jarman passed away peacefully on Sunday 12th August 2012. With thanks to Kevin Avison for the following:

Ron was an enthusiast: an enthusiast as a teacher, an enthusiast for mathematics, an enthusiast for the inner work of teaching. Former students testify to Ron's ability to so carry a class that even the non-mathematicians felt they could do the complex operation he had presented to them. Many teachers too may have had the same experience in one of Ron's seminars. Colleagues who attended Fellowship Easter conferences when Ron was still active in the movement may remember another enthusiasm, with which he also regaled his classes, arias from Italian operas, sung in his own unique style.

I first met Ron when working in a small "independent" curative "home-school" at a conference in Michael Hall. Ron had taken a health break from teaching and he was sharing the research he had been engaged in. He gave a fascinating and enthusing lecture about the cosmic quality of trees accompanied by photographic slides taken by June Woodger. Around that time too, I heard him speak about the teacher meditations - at a time when few were brave enough to even mention their existence outside very limited circles. I asked him if he would visit the "home-school" and introduce them to us. He came very willingly and introduced each one speaking them in his light rolling baritone and with quietly reflective intimacy so clearly born of great depth and attention.

His association with, and work for, the Fellowship stretched back to its inauguration. He took over the chairmanship role from Francis Edmonds, guided it through its first phase largely on his own. Subsequently, as the work began to expand, Ron was joined by a Chairmanship Group (with Shirley Noakes, Brien Masters and Rob Henley). In that capacity he commissioned the Fellowship's first real organisational review, which laid the foundations for the more active association we have today. After he stepped down, he continued to support developments, writing a history of the Fellowship, contributing to in-service courses and an ever generous source of advice, counsel, and moral support to numerous colleagues, including members of the new SWSF "Steering Group" (as it was then called).

Ron was always his own person. He had a unique colour sense (usually a yellow shirt and green tie) and anyone who ever received one of his letters, written with a portable type-writer that filled in the "o"s and "a"s, recognised the author without needing to check his ample, flowing signature. He must have been one of a very small band who can find humour in mathematics as well as having the confidence to introduce humour into his teaching of it. His style of humour was often surreal, not always appreciated by those with more rigidly-seated constitutions, but he was a deeply intelligent, sensitive man, who dedicated his life to the Waldorf cause, made plenty of mistakes no doubt, but also contributed to our collective work, through his book on mathematics and in innumerable other ways. He deserves our gratitude and that of future generations.

News from Schools: Congratulations to all at the **Cardiff Steiner School** and the **Steiner Academy Frome**, both of which opened this September. The latter opened its doors with 3 kindergartens and Classes 1 - 3 filled. All the pupils from Meadow School who applied got places. For about two thirds of the pupils this is their first experience of Steiner education. These are early days to judge how things are going, but for those at the chalk-face it seems a lifetime ago (not just twelve months) since DfE approval. There is still much to do and systems to put in place so that the school can run smoothly, but there are now 130 happy children experiencing FREE Steiner education in all its glory. Everyone involved should be congratulated that so much has been achieved in such a short time.

There is also good news from **The Waldorf School of South West London** which has moved into new premises in Balham: a lovely Victorian building on four floors with plenty of light and space. After two years of virtual 'refugee' existence and a catastrophic fire that deprived of them of their old site this is a welcome sanctuary. If any of our colleagues deserve an award for dogged perseverance against all odds it is surely those at WSSWL. At the same time their close neighbours at the **St. Michael School** have also relocated, adjacent to Hanworth Park in West London.

The Steiner Academy Exeter will open next Sept with up to Class 2 and also a Class 6. The plan is eventually to provide parallel classes to Class 10. Several possible sites are being looked at. The Principal Designate has been appointed and will take up the post full time in April.

The recent **Moving Forward** seminar in Frome indicated that there is still an active interest in pursuing the Free School route to a Steiner Academy. The seminar was attended by representatives from Wynstones, the North London and SW London schools, and the Leeds, Stroud and Bristol new interest groups.

Admissions continue to be a challenge for the Academies. The new admission and appeals codes, designed to encourage popular schools to expand their provision, mean that at appeal the school now has to prove 'prejudice to the learning of the pupils already in the class' if another pupil is admitted. This issue and the detail of the law will be the subject of a conference on 21 Nov at the Steiner Academy Hereford.

European Waldorf Diploma: E-bac? A-bac? GCSE's or equivalent? Access to University for students who follow different routes? Questions around all these issues will become more and more pressing in the future and the European Waldorf Diploma may be one way in which our schools navigate the need for holistic assessment and responsible progression. A recent conference in Leuven, Belgium was attended by 53 people representing 19 different European Waldorf schools and the Waldorf teacher seminar in Kassel. The main aims of the conference were:

- * To support teachers and quality assurers to pilot sample units for the EWD, including assessment guidance and basic quality assurance;
- * To share and develop assessment methodologies for the EWD;
- * To offer opportunities for subject specialists to contribute to the EWD development process through sharing of best practice.

This conference was an important step in the EWD development work, bringing together for the second time a truly international group around the practical task of piloting units for the proposed EWD. Initial results from the pilot should be available towards the beginning of 2013. In the meantime the London Waldorf Seminars' Upper School Development Carrying Group is launching a number of initiatives to support the development of the EWD. These include the October Conference with Eugene Schwartz. It is also hoped that those involved in the EWD will be able to contribute to the Easter Conference at the Steiner Academy Hereford. There are also plans for an Upper School Whitsun Festival in June 2013 to be held at Rudolf Steiner House which will include a festival of performing arts in Steiner Waldorf Upper Schools in the RSH theatre.

Early Childhood: This has been a busy period for our schools and independent Kindergartens, with the introduction in September of the Government's new early years curriculum for Birth to Five, known as the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage). We have negotiated exemptions for all of our schools to those early learning goals which conflict with our ethos and practice, i.e. under the category of 'established principles,' and will be applying to the Minister in the hope that the exemptions will be granted to all schools and settings.

The conference which we organised on the EYFS and Inspection was well attended (thank you Kings Langley School for hosting) and the inspectors from Ofsted and the Schools Inspection Service gave very useful presentations, which were much appreciated by the teachers and administrators. The new North of England Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood (NESWEC) training course is starting in October, and their qualification as well as that awarded by the London Early Years training course will be included on the new accepted qualifications list held by the Teaching Agency (previously the TDA).

We will shortly be hosting a list of registered Steiner child-minders on our website, those included will also be able to obtain exemptions under our umbrella. If you wish to register as a child-minder please contact the office.

Three Years of SIS inspections: At the end of the last school year, the School Inspection Service completed its first three year cycle of inspections for member schools in England: all have now been inspected. This is an opportunity to review the way inspections serve to encourage and promote school development, which was why we asked SIS to take over the role from Ofsted's contractors. Schools have reported that they have found SIS to be more thorough and more supportive of improvement. By common agreement, the Lay-Inspectors have added much to the inspection process, commenting on aspects of school organisation which are outside the formal framework of regulations. Significantly, SIS inspectors have been able to pick up some oversights in the reports of earlier inspections and many schools have worked hard, reviewing policy in the light of experience and implementing development plans. Meanwhile, SIS has increased its inspection portfolio, undertaking formal inspections for the "Cognita" group of schools and also some Tier-4 inspections of Colleges under the auspices of Ofqual for the UK Border Agency in addition to their existing independent school inspections here and abroad. If you are in one of the schools inspected by SIS, please re-read your recent report and review your inspection. We will be asking SWSF reps. for their reflections and writing to schools about their preparation for the new inspection cycle.

20 years at Plymouth University: In May of this year, the last day of the university team, a ceremony took place to mark the closure of a BA programme in Steiner Waldorf education and to say farewell to John Burnett.

The external examiner, Iddo Oberski, included the following summary in his final report to the university: *'It has been a privilege to be involved in this programme and to see the changes made and the challenges encountered. This last year the level of some dissertations was outstanding. The dedication of the teaching team and the level of engagement, commitment and achievement of the majority of students have been impressive. Students indicated that the course had provided an inspirational foundation for the rest of their lives and had transformed their thinking about their role as teachers and their potential work with young people in general. There were strong indications of personal and professional growth, reflective practice and the development of a wide range of creative skills.'*

European Activity: The well-being of Steiner education in Slovakia, the Ukraine or Croatia may be far removed from our daily concerns and low on our list of priorities, but our collaboration with other Steiner educators through this important European forum is of benefit to thousands of children and to Steiner education generally. In the three countries mentioned the involvement of ECSWE has given added credibility and influence to those who are striving to develop Steiner education in very difficult circumstances. Another example of ECSWE's indirect benefit to us all through its advocacy work is to be found in the important document 'Ten Pillars of a Good Childhood'. This is being circulated very widely amongst the policy-makers of the EU and is a product of ECSWE's support for the Alliance for Childhood in Brussels. ECSWE's Quality of Childhood (QoC) book is referenced three times and the author, Lea Pulkkinen (a Waldorf grandmother) is now very active in the AfC and QoC groups. She was a speaker, along with Christopher Clouder, at the Washington 'Decade of Childhood' conference earlier this year.



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