

# Quiet Places

The Newsletter of The Quiet Garden Movement

Jesus said: "Come with me by yourselves and get some rest" (Mark 6.31)

Issue No. 33

Advent 2012

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**Please join us for our  
2013 Annual Gathering  
Guest speaker - Dr Denise Inge  
on Saturday 18th May 2013  
at The Old Bishop's Palace,  
Worcester**

**Details and booking form  
available from  
The Quiet Garden Trust Office  
(address at foot of page 4)**

## THE PATRONS OF THE QUIET GARDEN TRUST

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## Solitude, Welcome and Community

Our regular Praying Heart group has been meeting for many years in South Bucks (some 30 miles from London) to discern and pray for the work of the worldwide Quiet Garden Movement. With this and the prayer support of so many others around the world, it is clear that there is, and needs to be, prayer at the heart of the Movement and at the heart of each Quiet Garden. At local level and across the network, through prayer, conversation and stillness, there is being fostered an inter-connectedness, a weaving of different strands. Individual spiritual journeys become resourced by a growing sense of community.



Many people live on their own. Even when in a partnership or family, the reality of 'who am I when nobody else is around to see?' is ever present. The journey from loneliness to integral solitude calls for courage and resilience, imagination and love. Gathering regularly or occasionally in the warm welcome of a Quiet Garden – with others who sense a common call, a similar journey – can bring both solace and strength. Each of us can learn a great deal from the *sketes* or extended settlements of clusters of hermits in the first few centuries of our faith.

Abba Anthony of Egypt (251-356 AD) is known as 'father of the solitaries'. In his biography of St Anthony, Athanasius, the renowned 4<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of Alexandria, writes of the fruit of Anthony's twenty year period in the desert. He was greatly tested. He prayed and fasted and was formed in Christ. Eventually, people from the nearest town who knew of his existence on the edge, went out into the desert to see if he was surviving. They expected Anthony to be wasted and wizened (and we all know that sort of day!). Instead, as St Athanasius chronicled, Anthony 'now possessed a mysterious inner tranquillity, visible on his face. His presence was enough to work healings in some who were there'.

In his widely read book 'Reaching Out', Henri Nouwen highlights the three-in-one journey of being present to ourselves, present with and for others, and present to God. The simplicity of Quiet Garden ministry is that it seeks to provide contexts – homes, churches, school or hospital gardens etc – where coming home to oneself and to the close presence of God, is made possible in the gentle company of others who are also drawn to 'the beauty behind the beauty'. When Jesus invites: 'Come away to a quiet place', we find ourselves in focus, in flow, in community, in God.

*The Revd Philip Roderick  
Founder-Director of The Quiet Garden Movement*

*The primary vision of The Quiet Garden Trust is to initiate and resource a network of local opportunities for prayer, silence, reflection and the appreciation of beauty; for learning about Christian life and spirituality; for experiencing creativity and healing in the context of God's love.*



### What is the Secret of the Quiet Garden?

I've been designing gardens professionally for over 20 years. Many clients ask for a peaceful garden and I'm increasingly interested in how places can affect emotions and how I, as a designer, can help to create restorative gardens.

So last summer I spent time in a number of Quiet Gardens and talked to their owners and visitors to try to discover more about how they work. What qualities do these gardens possess and how do people interact with them? Here are a few of my discoveries.

First of all I had to take off my designer hat and leave it at the garden gate! I relaxed, quietened down and tuned in to what was there. The important thing was to look, listen, touch and smell. When I was quiet something in the garden would draw itself to my attention, be it birdsong, a spider spinning a web, the scent of damp earth or a slight breeze moving grasses and brushing against my cheek. The world fell away and I was connected to something else. The garden was doing its work.

This happened most easily when I reached a certain kind of place. It would be a secluded corner, usually out of sight of the house. There was a seat with something behind it providing safety and enclosure. I was usually near trees and was able to look out into the garden or countryside. Close by there was always something to focus on, plants or water or simply moss covered rocks.

A beautiful setting undoubtedly helps. I was bowled over by an exquisite garden nestling in a fold of the Cotswolds and I was spellbound by huge poplars rustling in the breeze by a fast flowing river. However, I also had a magical experience by a busy main road under the Heathrow flight path, walking a labyrinth in a London churchyard. The noise and the need to concentrate only intensified the sensation of quiet within the garden.

Talking to owners produced insights. It was universally agreed that some disorder is important, as a pristine garden is often intimidating. Perfection and symmetry are irritating because the eye is always searching out the mistake. Too much evidence of the controlling hand of man creates a barrier to the natural world. Unsurprisingly all the gardens I visited were quite informal.

Owners are important. One visitor told me firmly "You can't separate the place and the people. Without the people a place may be beautiful but it's the people that make it special." I certainly found I appreciated gardens better after I had spoken to the garden makers; they are half of the pact between man and nature.

Several people told moving stories about how gardening had helped them overcome a difficulty. They derive their Quiet Joy from the intimate connection that comes from working their plot. These are the gardeners who can 'let the work be the practice' as the Buddhists say. Others find it hard to be still in their own gardens. They prefer to go to another Quiet Garden where they can step out of their normal world for a few hours.

Many people regularly visit the same garden. The intention to visit a Quiet Garden and the memory of previous occasions fosters a receptive mood even before arrival, so finding the 'connection' is easier. A lady I met, who had attended many Quiet Mornings decided one day not to go outside at all. Knowing the garden was there was enough. It seems Quiet Gardens can sustain even at a distance.

With my designer hat back on I now wonder how my skills can help a garden to speak more clearly. The task must be to slow people down and draw attention to all that will intrigue, delight and transport us if only we can stop and look. We can create enclosures, open views and use the light to help the magic. We can choose and place plants for movement and scent; and we can build ponds that will teem with wildlife. We can blur the boundaries and draw the visitor towards the wider natural world by introducing wildflowers into the borders and letting grass grow long. What we are doing is helping people find something that was always there!

My thanks to all those Quiet Gardeners that I visited; I have spent memorable and enlightening hours with you and your gardens. I shall be continuing my investigations and would be very happy to hear from anyone who would like to contribute to the conversation.

*Kristina Fitzsimmons*  
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### Friends of The Quiet Garden Movement

Do you value and share our vision?  
 Would you like to deepen your links with us?  
 Friends support us in several ways such as  
 through prayer, finance and volunteering.

#### Leave a gift in your will

Any legacy to the Quiet Garden Trust would be  
 much appreciated and help secure its future.

**For more information** please contact the Quiet  
 Garden Trust Office - address below page 4



### Living, Laughing, Learning Together

St John's Primary School has a motto of Living, Laughing and Learning together and our Spiritual Garden has provided another outlet for children to do just that. It is a quiet space but one that also fills with the laughter and hope that children bring to it every day. The journey from an overgrown, unused space to an active outdoor classroom has been a challenging one but a most rewarding experience.

In 2010 the school experienced some difficult times with some challenging children whose needs seemed to far outweigh what we as a school could offer. There was a need to have a space where these children could go to switch off and take time out. In an overcrowded building, finding this space was difficult and the children would often ask to be outside rather than in.

After attending a Spiritual Garden workshop at our last Church Schools Conference, we decided to try this idea in our school. We have a large site but finding a small area that would be quiet enough and away from the bustle of the school was quite difficult. My classroom at the time backed on to a small area at the very back of the school which was so overgrown that the tree branches were touching the windows. I decided one day to explore this space and felt almost straight away that this was the place for our spiritual garden. I then faced an uphill battle to convince people that the wildlife that occupied the site wouldn't be affected. Eventually they agreed that the site and its wildlife would be okay.

We went to the School Governors to secure funding for the project; explaining the benefits to the school and particularly to the children, but also that we hoped to allow the church community of Ripley to use the area as well. After they agreed to fund the plan, to the tune of £3000, we began planning and designing. With the School Council involved from the start, the children said they wanted a seating area, hideaways and a pond!

In the summer of 2010 we began work and upon clearing the site realised that we had a much bigger plot than anticipated. We designed two seating areas, planned for two ponds and worked with a grandparent on building bird boxes for a wide variety of birds.

We wanted to emphasise the spiritual nature of the space so decided to have the Lord's Prayer carved into the benches; and to hang dream catchers and wind chimes. We then found room to create what we call an Alone Walk.

This is a little path through the bushes and trees, which has benches along it, that allows children to go to sit and be alone with the sounds of nature around them. The path leads up to the circular seating area with prayer benches and looks down over the pond inviting contemplation.

We have fish in one pond and frogs and newts in the other. The trees that bear fruit have been left in the garden to provide food for the birds: crows, blue tits and robins now nest annually. Throughout the garden there are owl, bat and bird boxes as well as toad houses and hedgehog homes.

The children use the garden during Science, PSHCE, RE, Literacy and Maths lessons. It is also a place for a story or just some time out. The children who find the school environment challenging are frequently guided to the space where they often feel calmer a lot quicker. These children are encouraged to use the area as a haven when they feel troubled and are also given opportunities to take on responsibilities in the garden.

Our Spiritual Garden is promoted locally for use by community groups. The local churches are aware of it as is the local Hayes Conference Centre.

Recently we created six murals of the children's favourite Bible stories and the children were involved with students from Derby University in painting them. We are very proud of the space we have created for the children and the balance we have between the natural world and our own. The need for peace and quiet in children's lives has never been greater and here at St John's we feel that, through our Spiritual Garden, we can now offer them that opportunity.

*Chris Howarth, Deputy Head,  
St John's Church of England Primary School  
Ripley, Derbyshire, UK*

### 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in South Africa

The Quiet Garden Movement's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in April was marked by a gathering at Worth Abbey in Sussex. The UK is a long way to travel from South Africa so Quiet Gardeners in Cape Province are holding their own celebrations at the beginning of November in Constantia, Cape Town. Cape Town has six Quiet Gardens all of whom are being represented.

Appropriately Quiet Gardeners will meet together at a conference centre with a beautiful seven acre garden. The walks in the gardens of Little Stream are one of its best loved attractions, and for the energetic these can lead right up into the vineyards of one of the neighbouring wine farms.

Sally Argent, a South African Retreat-giver will lead the morning. There will be space for stillness, time for fellowship and opportunity to meet old and new friends over a shared lunch. After a particularly wet winter, Cape Town is enjoying a wonderful Spring so we are really looking forward to a very special day.

*Jenny Frye  
Noordhoek Quiet Garden*



Photo:  
Nsambya Hospital  
Quiet Garden

### Quiet Gardens in Uganda – old and new

On a family visit to Uganda this summer I was delighted to meet Beatrice Lubega, Director of Ugandan charity AWOFS which provides support for Aids widows and orphans. In 1997, her predecessor Father Steve Collins initiated the creation of a Quiet Garden at Nsambya Hospital in Kampala where AWOFS was based. The charity has moved and the Quiet Garden is now maintained as part of the hospital grounds. It is a peaceful, green, space with brick shelter and benches – available for use by hospital visitors, staff and students training to be nurses or laboratory technicians. As it is near the nurses' accommodation block it provides a welcome serene place for study too!

After visiting the Quiet Garden, Beatrice took me to the new purpose-built AWOFS centre on a large two acre plot, which has been financed by Brasilien Uganda Hilfe in the Catholic Parish of St Paul, Burgwedel, Germany. AWOFS has deliberately relocated to a more rural area outside Kampala, where there is a lack of basic services and help for families affected by Aids. The health, social and economic effects of Aids touch not only the sufferer and their immediate family but the wider family and community too. I was impressed by the ethos at AWOFS; the four dedicated staff work closely and sensitively with the local communities.

The new centre - St Paul's Community Centre - is a base for social and educational activities. Young people chat informally, play games and are led in discussions about health issues and Aids prevention. Children who have lost a parent due to Aids are supported through school by AWOFS sponsorship programmes, linked with churches in Germany and USA. The Centre provides a small library of school books and a place to study. It also contributes to the local community in practical ways, such as sharing clean rainwater harvested from the roofs, and providing a toilet.

In addition AWOFS would like to offer a quiet place for people to come to pray, or simply sit. Women from the local churches would appreciate a tranquil place to meet for prayer and Bible study – away from their homes in

the village which are busy and noisy. There is land available at St Paul's Community Centre for the creation of a Quiet Garden. It would be modelled on the garden at Nsambya Hospital so finance is needed for the construction of fencing, hard pathways, a brick building for shelter and bench seats. The costs of the materials and labour for this would come to about £5,000. The plants would be donated locally and include herbs for medicinal use. Once created, AWOFS would run and maintain the Quiet Garden.

Donations towards the creation of this new Quiet Garden would be very welcome. Cheques made out to The Quiet Garden Trust can be sent to the Office (address at the bottom of page). Please enclose a note specifying that the funds are for St Paul's Quiet Garden, Uganda and we will transfer the money to AWOFS. I would welcome contact (through the Office) from anyone interested in this project and for offers of fundraising.

Mary-Anne Hall  
Administrator, Quiet Garden Trust

### Praying the Labyrinth in East Sussex

Penhurst Retreat Centre has recently opened a Labyrinth in its Quiet Garden. This prayer walk and other additions to Penhurst's peaceful orchard garden were officially opened in October with a service of blessing led by Sue Cash. Richard and Storm Hann, hosts at Penhurst, commented: "We have longed to be able to provide even better opportunities for prayer, worship and reflection in the fruitful surroundings of our orchard. We now have new seating, natural sculptures and a fire pit where groups can praise God and toast marshmallows. The opening of the labyrinth has been long awaited. We thank Sue for her prayerful and practical prodding and all who have joined with us to 'love' this beautiful garden into a new place".

Richard and Storm are particularly pleased with another 'new' feature. The most fruitful apple tree in the orchard was nearly 100 years old when it died last year. The trunk and branches now form a natural sculpture – a symbol of a life that bore much fruit. A rambling rose and passion flower are now being encouraged to cover the tree in new life. Situated right next to the Labyrinth, it is a stunning feature for all to experience.

Richard Hahn  
Penhurst  
Retreat  
Centre

