



The welcoming sign

Create Space VI Retreat

Mill Retreat Centre, 19th to 22nd May 2011 – Report from Tony

What is it about the Mill Retreat Centre? You arrive and within minutes feel like you have been on holiday for a week. It has an ability to make you relax.



Mill leet and The Mill

Heather, Kevan and I went over on the Wednesday as usual so we could get everything set up before everybody else arrived.

We had a foggy crossing to Calais and arrived to a miserable damp morning. It will clear up when we get to Aumale, we agreed. And of course it did, it always does, bright blue skies and the wonderful stillness of the Bresle Valley. The drive from Calais had been easy as French motorways have far less traffic than their English equivalents.

We were greeted by Otta, the Lurcher, who quickly recognised us and shortly afterwards, by Pawel, the multi-talented keeper of the Centre.



Otta the Lurcher

Setting up the Yoga room is now a well-oiled process: 'put Buddha on the table in the window with Krishna to one side and Ganesh on the other, bronze Aum in front, attach Aum cloth to the cross beam (staple gun much more effective than last year's Blue-tack), Bose speakers & iPod plugged in, gong and Tibetan singing bowl in front of the Eagle, lay out all the mats in a circle with cushions etc – job done'.



Yoga room - before

We had a bit of an innovation for the workshop room this year. Having some time on my hands, I had transferred all Heather's notes from flipcharts to PowerPoint on our laptop. All I had to do now was



Yoga room after we'd set it up

connect it to the projector, set it up, re-direct the cables without causing a Health & Safety hazard whilst making sure everybody could still sit comfortably and see the screen – sorted, now time to stock up on a few provisions from Inter Marche before a relaxing dinner in town.



Julie our wonderful Chef

Meanwhile, Julie our wonderful cook had arrived and was getting the kitchen sorted at a well organised but incredible speed – is it a bird, is it a plane....no it's Julie 'lollipop'.

As darkness fell we were all out by the lake, Pawel had a couple of fishing lines out and Kevan gave the rest of us an impromptu fly-fishing lesson. We didn't catch anything but I realise that that is not the point anyway.



Pawel relaxing by the lake

Folks started to arrive mid-afternoon on the Thursday. At one point I looked out and saw Gloria sat on a bench beside the Bresle. Just from her body language, I guessed what she was doing. She later confirmed that she had taken her book out to read, but didn't get to open it. Sitting beside the babbling river she just dropped into a wonderful relaxing meditation and 30 minutes had gone by without her noticing it. Yep, that's what the Mill Retreat Centre does for you. Others were exploring the beauty of the Mill and its 30 acre grounds whilst Heather warmed up.



Heather on 'The Island'



River Bresle (right) and Mill Leet (left) rejoin



Julie in the Dining Room

As everybody had been traveling since the early hours, Thursday evening is a gentle transition from daily life to life on the retreat. First Heather and I gave an introduction about the centre and our schedule, followed by a gentle Yoga class. Heather asked us all to think about what we wanted to get out of this Retreat and asked us over the next few days if we were 'getting this'. We then sampled the delights of the first of Julie's superb vegetarian meals of the retreat. After dinner we went back to the studio for a very focusing Yoga Nidra and

meditation.

Friday morning started at 05:30 as I walked around the mill banging the gong – well it’s our tradition. It was a bit misty as we started our meditation but as we moved into satsang, chanting some well-loved mantras, the sun started to do its work. By the time we were ready for Yoga the sun was flooding in.



Dawn in the Yoga Room

The Yoga room is at the top of the mill facing north east with skylights on both sides. Hence in the morning in gets the sun from one side and in the evening, the other. We concluded our Yoga class by chanting “Aham Prema” which means “I am divine love”

108 times. There are said to be 72,000 nadis (energy channels) in the body and 108 main ones. Hence the chant clears them all, and Heather had her mala beads (108 beads on a mala) so we could keep count. David totally got the wrong idea and was thinking of breakfast and chanted “A ham Parma” !!! But it’s a



Morning Yoga



Morning Yoga

vegetarian weekend ☺

After breakfast we had another innovation based on the feedback from the previous retreat. Some people wanted more Yoga during the weekend. So Heather ran a stronger Yoga class whilst I took the others on a gentle local walk. Then it was back for a workshop on Meditation. I went through the benefits and described 7 different types of meditation (Empty Mind, Breath Watching, Meditation on an Object (Yantra), Mindfulness Meditation, Transcendental Meditation, and Meditation on Loving Kindness and Walking Meditation). Then Heather led us through examples of these.



Aumale



The Patisserie in Aumale

Lunch was followed by a walk from Aumale & a look around the town including the popular patisserie!



David and Marion in an 'Embrace'

After more Yoga and dinner we had a surprise treat. Two of our group David and Marion gave us a fabulous workshop. At home they run a club for Argentinian Tango - this is not the flashy stuff you see on 'Britain comes strictly x-factored dancing talent' or whatever it's called. Oh no, this is deep and personal. David told us that the essence of Tango is 'The Embrace' between two people with two heads, four legs but one heart (ahhh!). David's workshop explored the parallels between Tango and Meditation. Both are based on developing deep awareness at a physical, emotional and spiritual level. David and Marion then did a short demonstration before we all had a go - a wonderful evening - Isobel has since started lessons.

Saturday was our usual early morning meditation, Yoga, breakfast and then for some more Yoga followed by a walk which took in a disused railway line through some local woods. It was glorious with the birds singing, sun shining through a bright green canopy, the occasional glimpses of deer (and possibly a wild boar) and some beautiful wild flowers including a Lady Orchid.



Marion, David, Andy, Tony, Eva, Gloria, Lana, Graham and Sue



Walking along a disused railway line



Lady Orchid



Muskrat on the lake

In the afternoon we did a walking meditation around the lake. Being so relaxed the locals came out to see us including the mallards, coots, great crested grebe, swans, white egret and otters. One animal had us a bit perplexed as we only got occasional glimpses (until Kevan spotted one in



Muskrat

open ground). Some thought they

were voles. So we turned to the expert, Pawel, who informed us they were Pizmaks. After a few tries with different Polish to English translators on the internet, I found that this means Muskrat. These are South American natives (same family as voles but not rats) introduced to France in the last century to be farmed for their skin and meat. Some escaped and as prolific breeders now inhabit many streams, lakes and wetlands without having many of their natural predators (eg snakes, alligators, eagles and lynx) around to control them. They live in burrows in the banks. On one stretch of the Bresle through the Mill property, their burrows caused the bank to collapse and become eroded. Pawel has had to undertake a major reconstruction to repair it. They are now considered to be a pest in France because of this sort of damage.



Artichoke

At dinner were greeted by the site of a complete artichoke on each plate. For many of us this was a new experience so Julie along with Isobel had to provide a demonstration of how to eat these vegetables. They taste lovely with Julie's accompanying dressing, and possibly challenge celery with regards to calories burned in the eating process exceeding calories consumed. They certainly must have the lowest percentage of edible material. It's a good job that what was left went in the compost. Those who have been to one of our retreats before were all looking forward to Julie's vegetarian food. There were comments from some non-vegetarian new attendees, that they hadn't realised how varied and tasty vegetarian food could be. Maybe Julie has got some converts 😊

After dinner we met up on the island where the Mill leet re-joins the Bresle for a bonfire.



The bonfire site on 'The Island'



Tony lighting the bonfire

Yet another treat was in-store as Eva had brought her guitar. She serenaded us with traditional Polish folk songs, much to the delight of Pawel and his wife Malgosia. This was followed by some of her own material and a few old favourites in which she was joined by Heather. Their voices harmonised beautifully over Eva's skilled guitar playing. David also did a few numbers on the guitar. "Is there nothing this man cannot do"? The evening was rounded off (for most of us) by the release of some Chinese lanterns with our messages written on them.



Eva and Heather harmonising



Enjoying a chat around the bonfire



Releasing a Chinese lantern

We always start Sunday morning meditation and Yoga a little later. After breakfast Heather delivered a workshop on "The Rainbow Bridge – a Journey through the Chakras". She described the chakra system, its history, how it relates to the mind, nervous & endocrine systems and physical bodies, its associates and role of each chakra. Heather then led us through a visualisation & meditation addressing each chakra in turn.



Marion, Sue, Isobel, Graham and David in Andy's Tai Chi class

Another Create Space tradition is Tai Chi. This year Andy led a class on the Sunday morning. It was not long before Marion, Sue, Isobel, Graham and David joined in. His willing students were able to complete a sequence. David started Tai Chi lessons when we got back.

Sadly it was then time to pack, have lunch, group photo and say our goodbyes amid the tears. Of course the weather waited until we were heading home before turning for the worse. It is always kind to us. Lana, Eva, Kevan and Heather went to take some last photos before saying the last goodbyes.



Back row: Marion, Julie, David, Isobel, Lana, Gloria, Andy. Front row: Graham, Sue, Eva, Heather, Tony, Kevan

Thank you to Julie, Pawel and Malgosia for looking after us so well and to Kolinka (owner) and Barbara of Stillness Retreats for giving us the opportunity to experience another unforgettable Create Space retreat at the beautiful Mill Retreat Centre. Thanks also to Andy for his Tai Chi class, David and Marion for the Tango workshop, Kevan and Eva for additional photographs and everybody for bringing such positive and loving energy.



Heather says farewell to Julie, Pawel and Malgosia

"To See a World in a Grain of Sand And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand And Eternity in an hour."
— William Blake (Auguries of Innocence)

Namaste

Tony

Create Space VI