

# RE Centres Southern Regional Group

[www.recentres.org.uk](http://www.recentres.org.uk)

Newsletter no. 20 Spring 2007

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Our November meeting in Abingdon was useful in many ways. It was fascinating to learn more about the use of persona dolls in the classroom from Carolyn Wright (Gloucester Diocesan RE Resource Centre). John Gay, Director of the Culham Institute, briefed us on the status of the RE Council, and the current situation of the National RE Centre at St Nicholas Cole Abbey (see more in this newsletter). Thanks to both of them for their contributions. Some of us revisited the Godly Play room. All of us benefited from the chance to meet and exchange news and views. Our thanks too to Gill for organising this meeting.



The summer conference this year will be based around the Wintershall Estate's open air play of *The Life of Christ*, [www.wintershall-estate.com/Life-of-Christ.htm](http://www.wintershall-estate.com/Life-of-Christ.htm). We plan to meet on Wednesday 27 June for a visit to Guildford Cathedral and Alison Hendy's resource centre there, stay overnight at St Columba's House in Woking and see the Wintershall play on Thursday 28 June. Tickets sell out for this event so in order to guarantee a place please book with Sue Bloomfield by 30 March 2007. I am really looking forward to the experience and hope to see lots of you there.

Gill Hunt is retiring from Banbury RE Centre in the summer and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for all her hard work and support of the group, in particular with her keen eye on our finances. Gill has been an absolute pleasure to work with, and will be missed. Ron Upton has kindly agreed to take over our accounts.

Our thanks must be expressed once more to those others who continue their work to support the group – to Sue Bloomfield for her management of membership and subscriptions, to Ian Knight for producing our newsletters and to Heather Collins for minuting our meetings. Their efficiency and generosity with their time makes my life much easier.

I look forward to seeing you in June at the conference in Surrey. Come rain or shine, it will definitely be a remarkable experience.

With best wishes  
Lydia



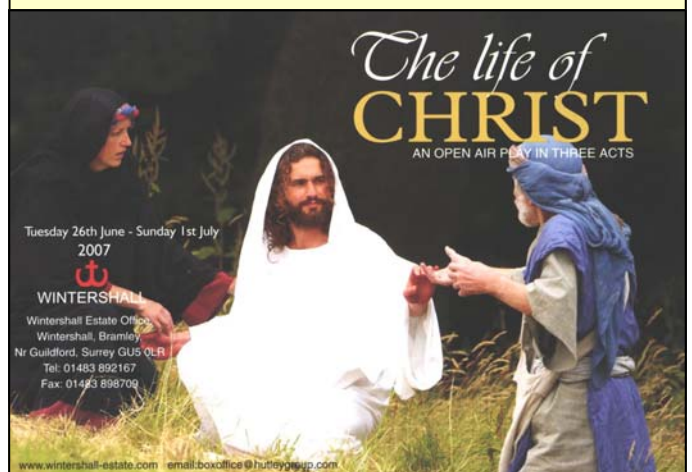
## 24th Annual Conference

Wednesday 27 – Thursday 28 June

**Guildford Resources Centre  
Guildford Cathedral  
St Columba's House, Woking  
Wintershall Life of Christ**

**£55.00**

**Please book by 30 March.**



Tuesday 26th June - Sunday 1st July  
2007  
WINTERSHALL  
Wintershall Estate Office  
Wintershall, Bramley  
Nr Guildford, Surrey GU5 0LR  
Tel: 01483 892167  
Fax: 01483 898709  
[www.wintershall-estate.com](http://www.wintershall-estate.com) [email:boxoffice@hutey.org.uk](mailto:email:boxoffice@hutey.org.uk)

Some notes from the talk at our November meeting by the Revd Dr John Gay, who is Treasurer of the RE Council as well as Director of the Culham Institute and the Church of England spokesman for RE.



### **RE Council**

The RE Council was founded in 1973 as an umbrella body to represent the collective interests of a wide variety of professional associations and faith communities in deepening and strengthening provision for RE. It now has some 50 member organisations, of which we are one, an annual budget of £3,000, two full council meetings a year and an executive committee. It aims to provide a comprehensive national view of RE. The RE Council is a voice for RE in the media and in meetings with government bodies. In earlier years when the government consulted about RE it tended to turn only to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster and the Chief Rabbi. Now faith communities, professional bodies representing teachers, advisors and consultants, and SACREs are all represented by the RE Council in such discussions.

### **Charles Clarke**

Two years ago when the RE Council started to think about fund raising, it became clear that it needed to become an incorporated body. Accordingly it has recently become a charitable trust and a company limited by guarantee. Charles Clarke as Secretary of State for Education took an interest in RE, the only subject without a national syllabus. He funded a feasibility study for a national framework for RE. Clarke hoped for a national syllabus and saw the non-statutory national framework as a first step towards it. Unfortunately he was transferred to the Home Office before any further work could be done.

### **National strategy for RE**

A preliminary National Strategy for RE was developed by the RE Council and presented to Lord Adonis in summer 2005. Subsequently the Council obtained a grant from the DFES to establish itself as the national body for RE and to refine and develop the outline plans for a national strategy to be presented to ministers in March 2007. The draft RE strategy is currently being worked on, particularly with regard to teacher training – in-service continuing professional development for the existing workforce and training for new primary and secondary teachers.

### **New website**

The Council has a new website:  
[www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk](http://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk)

## **St Nicholas Cole Abbey National RE Centre**

Following an article in our spring 2006 newsletter, you may be interested to know that a planning application has recently been submitted to convert the redundant Wren church of St Nicholas Cole Abbey near St Paul's Cathedral into a national centre for RE.

The new centre will be multifunctional, providing offices for the RE Council and one or two other RE organisations and pied-à-terre facilities for out of London RE bodies. Additionally there will be a large but divisible meeting hall for 135 theatre style, a small board room, a resource/work room and a café/restaurant. The centre's work and activities will be networked nationally through [www.reonline.org.uk/](http://www.reonline.org.uk/).

An Abrahamic garden representing Judaism, Christianity and Islam is planned next door to the centre.

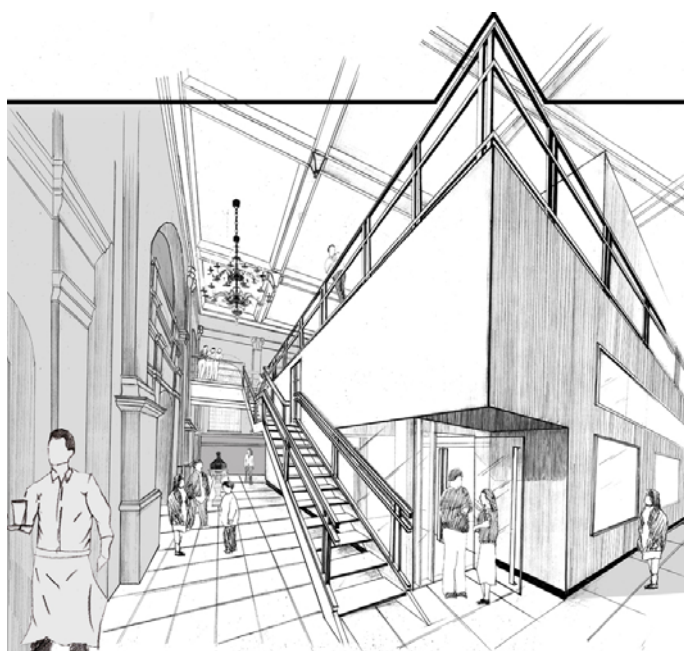
Culham is spearheading the plans on behalf of the RE Council. As an endowed educational trust, Culham has the capacity to see this project through and also to underwrite its ongoing development. A capital sum of £7 million needs to be raised to convert and equip the building and it is hoped that a good slice of this will come from heritage conservation sources.

Full details of the proposal, including rationale, plans and visualisations are available at [www.culham.ac.uk/coleabbey/](http://www.culham.ac.uk/coleabbey/).

Lydia Revett

An article on the proposed national RE Centre also appeared in the Church Times on 9 February, pages 22-24.

Editor



## RE Council Meeting 2 March

### RECSRG membership of the RE Council

Since the RE Council recently became a charity and company limited by guarantee with articles of association, members were required to apply for membership. These articles of association state that membership of the RE Council is open to national organisations interested in promoting religious education in England and Wales.

I can confirm that the RECSRG is now a member of the RE Council, but under the name of the Federation of National and Regional RE Centres. Chris Boxley is in the process of contacting other RE Centres, national and regional, to see whether it is practical to reform the Federation. In the meantime, we are the Federation's representation and the link from the RE Council's website is to ours.

### Proposal for a national strategy for RE

The RE Council meeting was held in order to discuss its proposed national strategy for RE, encompassing a report by its RE teaching and training commission, with a view to putting a proposal and funding request to Lord Adonis, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, by the end of March 2007. If anyone would like further information, please contact Chris boxley@talktalk.net or me - lydia.revelt@hants.gov.uk.

Lydia Revett

## Persona Dolls



This is Samuel, a Jewish boy, wearing his prayer shawl. In his backpack are some things for Passover. Carolyn Wright from Gloucester Diocesan RE Resource Centre brought him to meet us at the November Meeting in Abingdon.

## Bedfordshire Resource Centre



For some years there has been a small Resource Centre, mainly for teachers and Sunday School teachers, based at Alban Middle School at Great Barford near Bedford. This was only open by appointment with the Diocesan RE Adviser.

The centre has now been moved to St Mark's Church Community Centre in Calder Rise, Bedford, which is much more convenient for most users. It is open from 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday and is staffed by volunteers from St Mark's. Items can also be viewed via the Diocesan website, and ordered by telephone or e-mail from the Resources Secretary.

The Centre was opened by the Bishop of Bedford, the Rt Revd Richard Inwood, who said how pleased he was to have the new centre based at St Mark's, and how grateful he was to the Revd Charlie Royden and his volunteers for making it possible.

The resources (over 500 items) are housed in the chapel, in beautiful purpose-built cupboards which, when closed, enable the chapel to be used for services or other functions.

The main Diocesan Resource Centre and Bookshop is at the Diocesan Offices at Holywell Lodge in St Albans.

Ron Upton



## Bath & Wells Education Resource Centre



The 2006-7 school year marks the 25th year of operation of our Centre. It was officially opened in September 1981 and its remit then was the same as it is now: "to hold material for the education of both children and adults of the diocese from the cradle to the grave".

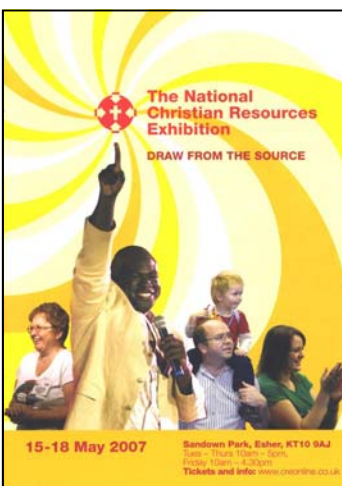
Things have moved on of course. I doubt whether those who set up the centre, visionary as they were, would have foreseen the advent of computers, online catalogues and DVDs, much less interactive whiteboards and attainment targets. But they did set up a core stock which has grown and developed to meet the needs of its users.

The Centre now brings people and resources together across a huge geographical area in creative and imaginative ways so that a parish 60 miles away can choose resources for their all-age worship online and collect them from their local library.

The Bishop of Bath and Wells will lead a short act of rededication of the work of the Centre on May 1st as we develop and expand our work to support the agenda for change in the Diocese: Changing Lives, Changing Churches for Changing Communities.

Here's to the next 25 years!

Sue Bloomfield



## Christian Resources Exhibition

15—18 May  
Tues—Thurs  
10am—5pm  
Friday 10 am—4.30 pm  
Sandown Park, Esher  
[www.creonline.co.uk](http://www.creonline.co.uk)

Holy shopping,  
dropping and collecting  
lots of carrier bags.  
See you there!

## Banbury Area RE Centre

Like so many other RE Centres, Banbury is rather restricted in what it can achieve by what it can afford. Each year sees expenditure rising whilst income fails to keep pace. It was all the more exciting then that we secured a Government Development Foundation Grant to cover our developing inter-faith work during 2006.

The inter-faith discussion group has continued to function well and I have written about it from time to time. Currently we are discussing "Hot Issues" - always topical though not always intentionally so!



In October 2006 we held a celebration evening to see if we could 'Celebrate Together'.

This had been a topic earlier in the year. The Town Hall was booked and my heart sank when I realized that what I had in mind didn't match what others had in their mind. My rather timid low key evening

for families and friends became an open invitation to all in the Banbury area to come along and celebrate.

We had a beautifully iced fruit cake depicting the Centre's logo to be cut by Tony Baldry MP and the Roman Catholic church promised a choir; the local town band would play quietly in the background and the Muslim community promised food. To be on the safe side we prepared plates of finger food (bagels with smoked salmon and cream cheese), plates of fresh fruit (all Fairtrade) and a delightful plate of Banbury cakes. The Muslim community arranged for dancers to entertain us.

Tables were set up, flowers arranged, food displayed, microphones tested, labels prepared and we waited with baited breath. Would they turn up?

As the doors opened, in streamed our visitors with vats of curry, rice, jalibebs (sweets), naan and plates of Thai foods. The colourful displays of food and clothing soon melted any misgivings and dispensed with any need for labels. The choir sang beautifully, not Polish as we had thought, but Filipino; the dancing was highly sophisticated and professional; the presentation on Islam and about the school promised to the Kashmir community in lieu of the one destroyed in the earthquake was heartening and the town band played on.

It was a wonderful evening, exhausting but so rewarding. Letters followed thanking us: "We must do this again", "Can we make this an annual event?"...

I will be sorry to be leaving all this behind but I do send Banbury and my successor every good wish.

I understand a grant application has been made to provide a bigger and better event this year.

Gillian Hunt