



The Caux Experience



AS WE MOVE TOWARDS CORRYMEELA'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY, we are reminded that Ray Davey was committed to exploring other communities to see how they lived and worked for peace and reconciliation. With this in mind, we signed up for the International Peace-Builders' Forum organised by Initiatives of Change at their centre in Caux, Switzerland. As Corrymeela has recently created a role regarding social enterprise, our aim was to experience another Centre and to create new links in the International Peace Building world.

We could never have imagined the outstanding beauty of the venue. Set in the mountains at the head of Lake Geneva, this place really has to be seen to be believed. The building

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was built to be the crème de la crème of hotels at the height of La Belle Époque. It boasted over 300 bedrooms, but only six bathrooms - at that time it seems hygiene was seen a little differently! It has the 'downtonesque' flourish and you can still imagine the sharp intake of excitement as people arrived on the mountain train to a place full of glorious expectation.

As a hotel, Caux Palace never recovered from the economic slump of the 1920's and had closed before the outbreak of WW2. However, during the war it provided sanctuary for

British Service Personnel who had escaped POW camps into Switzerland, as well as Jewish refugees. When peace was declared in 1945, it seemed likely that Caux Palace would be resigned to the annals of history. And then something magical happened...

Ninety-eight Swiss families purchased the building for around one million Swiss Francs and began to renovate it. It is a very familiar story to that of Corrymeela where the founders literally built the beds. It was lovingly restored and by 1947 they began to implement the

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core task of peace building by inviting a German deputation along with key members of the French resistance to a private meeting. A safe space was provided for hard conversations, and the healing process began.

At one of the first gatherings, the Alsatian wartime resistance leader and French deputy Joseph Wasmer asked for forgiveness for his hatred of the German people. “I hated the Germans with everything in my power for what they did to my friends and my country..... I rejoiced to see Berlin in flames. At Caux this hatred has left my heart. I ask forgiveness from the Germans. I want to make restitution to them.” *

The core community ethos predates the establishment of Caux and emanates from the thoughts of Frank Buchman, an American Lutheran Minister of the early 20th century. The ‘Oxford Group’ grew out of Buchman’s ideals and were committed to working with people of all faiths. The concept was that moral compromise destroys human character and so there was a focus on the relationship between faith and society. By the 1930’s, this was known as Moral Re-armament (MRA), a movement which strove towards a “hate free, guilt free and greed free” world.

Recognising that the term Moral Re-armament no longer held the same resonance as it did in the 1930s, MRA was renamed as ‘Initiatives of Change’ in 2001. During the summer months, Initiatives of Change

run conferences, in the winter they sublet the building to a Hotel Management College, this provides sufficient funding to maintain the building and enable them to continue their project based peace building work.

The MRA movement inspired Ray and other community members and is therefore also woven into the Corrymeela story. Corrymeela Members Brendan and Elizabeth McAllister have a long involvement with Caux, this led to John and Mary Bond from Initiatives of Change visiting Corrymeela in 2012 and Corrymeela’s former leader Inderjit Bhogal addressing their annual conference in 2013. The relationship with Caux is one we would like to build on and develop further.



With 33 countries represented, the International Peace-Builders’ Forum was an excellent opportunity for Peace Building agencies to get together to engage with one another on the current conflicts throughout the world. This was highlighted to us as we prepared the lunch with three young women, from Columbia, Russia and Zambia. The conversations were vibrant and full of insight. Barry Hart from the Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia spoke about Compassion Fatigue, a very relevant subject for anyone working in the Charity, Community and Voluntary sector.

Our visit to Caux fuelled many

conversations about what we offer in Corrymeela. It also helped us imagine what we could offer the international context.

Watch this space as we continue to develop our links beyond Northern Ireland.

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*Read more at: <http://www.michaelhenderson.org.uk/the-spirit-of-caux#sthash.aAQf4zEE.dpuf>

