



Meetings with remarkable men

Bernard Carr

In the last editorial Ioannis Syrigos described the exciting opportunities opened up by the internet age but I added a cautionary postscript, stressing that nothing can replace the benefits of attending physical meetings. In this editorial I will continue this theme by giving some examples of these benefits. One important point is that meetings involve direct contact with people, often remarkable people, and this can change one's life in unforeseen ways. Of course, both men and women can be remarkable, so my title is not intended to be sexist. It is taken from Gurdjieff's famous book, though with a twist on the use of the word 'meeting'.

A first example is provided by the fascinating account by Paul Kieniewicz in this issue of the crucial role of Canon Andrew Glazewski in the founding of the SMN. Andrew's name may not be so familiar to current members because he died shortly after attending the first SMN meeting at Exeter University in 1973. Nevertheless, he was an important catalyst in its creation because he put George Blaker (already in discussions with Peter Leggett and Sir Kelvin Spencer) in touch with Patrick Shackleton, whom he had just met at a Wrekin Trust meeting. Shackleton became the fourth founder, so Andrew was very much the 'fifth' man and the Wrekin Trust meeting was one of the nexus of events which led to the SMN's birth.

Paul first met Andrew when he led a Lent retreat at his school in 1963 and this inspired his interest in meditation and healing. They later became close friends, so this is another example of how a fortuitous meeting – this time at school – can have a profound effect on one's life. Paul has also paid tribute to Andrew by transcribing the tapes of some of his talks and then putting them together with a selection of his writings in an excellent new book *The Harmony of the Universe*. This is timely in view of the theme of our next Mystics & Scientists meeting, *Harmony in Cosmos, Nature and Self*.

I first met Paul myself when we were studying astronomy together at a student vacation course at the Royal Greenwich Observatory (Herstmonceux Castle) in the summer of 1971. I remember him well because he would attempt to dowse astronomical objects using a pendulum, which struck me as an ingenious (if unorthodox) way of merging his two scientific interests. I was also intrigued by the waves of energy which seemed to come from his hands when he practiced healing on me, although I could not decide whether this was my imagination or some new form of energy not covered in my undergraduate physics course. So these events stimulated my interest in matters psychical and altered the course of my life. After that we did not meet again for 40 years, when we both attended the Body & Beyond meeting in 2012.

There was no Body & Beyond conference this year because the Programme Committee opted for a *Sacred Site and Sound* meeting at Tintern Abbey instead. This was part of a musical and poetry festival directed by John Clarke (my predecessor as Chair) and Vanessa Dodd, which will be reported

on in the next issue. The festival ended with a moonlit concert at Tintern Abbey, the highlight of which was a performance of Sir John Tavener's *Towards Silence*. Originally Sir John was to have attended but sadly he died last November.

The SMN played a key role in the creation of this piece, since it arose out of an interview with Sir John by Paul Robertson at the Beyond the Brain meeting in 2007. Indeed, it was originally to have been performed by Paul's Medici String Quartet. So this is another example of the unexpected fruits of a meeting – this one involving two remarkable men. By a strange synchronicity both Paul and Sir John fell seriously ill shortly after *Towards Silence* was completed and both nearly died. Paul gave a moving account of his own near-death experience and its impact on his life at the Mystics & Scientists meeting in 2012. He has recently completed a book about NDEs and meaning in music. The repercussions of Sir John's NDE were the subject of a BBC documentary.

These episodes illustrate how chance encounters – especially during one's schooldays or through attendance at conferences – may have important consequences, albeit unintended and sometimes many decades later. I'm sure we can all recount similar stories. Indeed, chance and synchronicity seem to be important elements in creativity in general. Of course, this is not to disparage the internet, since doubtless a similar process occurs there, but my point is that we need both modes of interaction.

Sadly, both Andrew Glazewski and Sir John Tavener died at a relatively young age. By contrast, last June former SMN member and psychical researcher Alex Imich died at the age of 111, after becoming for a while the oldest man in the world. This distinction certainly qualified Alex as 'remarkable'. Although we never met, I was in contact with him occasionally because we were members of the same email discussion group. I recall a frisson of excitement a few months ago at realizing that I knew the oldest man on the planet. After all, there are many kings and queens and Presidents and rock stars but only one oldest man!

Alex attributed his long life to having no children, eating small meals and selecting his parents carefully rather than his SMN membership. Nevertheless, a surprising number of our members become centenarians. Edmee di Pauli, mother of our former secretary Rupert Stewart Smith and a very active member in her own right, reached 101, although sadly she died last July – just a few months after Rupert. A few years ago Sir Frederick Warner died at the age of 102, Mary Scott (the authority on Kundalini) reached 103 and Mary Swainson died on her 100th birthday. While we cannot guarantee all our members such longevity, the fraction becoming centenarians certainly far exceeds the national average. This may support the claim that people who join groups live longer, apparently being half as likely to die in the following year, so maybe we can use this argument in recruiting new members!

Let me now return to my main theme by switching attention from the very old to the very young. I have stressed the importance of meetings but this raises another issue. There is no doubt that our constituency is primarily middle-aged but we also have an obligation (through the Blaker grants and our role as an educational charity) towards younger people. So I will end by reporting two important initiatives involving schools.

The first is David Lorimer's immensely successful schools project, where a special poster template is used as a teaching resource to inspire young people to participate in a structured journey of self-reflection. Pupils use inspirational stories about remarkable people to promote future aspirations and visions of a better world. The project has been running for seven years and has held award ceremonies in Glasgow, Stormont, Swansea, Manchester and London. This year alone it has attracted 56,000 participants from 32 countries. Previously known as *Learning for Life* and then *Inspire>Aspire* (which involved Olympians and Paralympians keen to create a lasting Games legacy), the latest phase is called *Global Citizens in the Making* and uses learning opportunities from the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. The project has been supported by a grant from the Templeton Foundation and is managed jointly for Scotland by Character Education Scotland and for Northern Ireland, England and Wales by the SMN.

The second initiative is a 'schools speakers' project, which is being led by Edi Bilimoria. The idea is to pass on collective knowledge within the SMN to pupils at sixth form level by drawing upon the expertise of our members to stimulate dialogue and a greater sense of belonging to the community. As a background to this, it should be recalled that the vision of our founders was a profoundly holistic one. The SMN was to be an organisation unconstrained by compartmentalisation of thought and open to insights from every kind of human enquiry. Neither orthodox religion nor conventional science were deemed sufficient to answer the pressing questions of the age, so a new interdisciplinary approach was needed, encompassing science, medicine and spirituality. This remit still motivates most of our meetings and publications.

With this in mind, the SMN is launching a flagship educational project at a special day conference – entitled *The Frontiers of Science and Spirituality: The SMN Approach to Holistic Education* – in London on November 1st. A spectrum of speakers, highly knowledgeable in their subject area and also possessing the presentational skills required to broaden and stimulate young minds, has been selected to give short colourful presentations to an audience of students, Network members and the public on a wide range of topics, including science, medicine, economics, art, sociology and spirituality. The talks will be videoed and distributed to schools and colleges that might then invite speakers of their choice to make a more extended presentation. The SMN is uniquely equipped to host this initiative and Edi will be writing about it at greater length in the next editorial.