

Forthcoming Festivals/Commemorations

23 April	St. George's Day	National
1 May	Beltane	Pagan
10 May	Wesak	Buddhist
13 - 19 May	Christian Aid Week	Christian
17 May	Ascension Day	Christian
23 May	Anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab	Bahai
25 May	Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji	Sikh
27 May	Pentecost/Whitsuntide	Christian
27 - 28 May	Shavuot	Jewish
17 June	The Prophet's Night Journey and Ascension	Muslim
21 June	Midsummer Solstice	Pagan/Druid/Wicca
21 June	World Humanist Day	Humanist
23 June	Dragon Boat Festival	Chinese
5 July	The Night of Forgiveness	Muslim
9 July	Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Bab	Bahai
20 July - 18 Aug	Ramadan	Muslim
2 August	Raksha Bandhan	Hindu
15 August	Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Christian
19 August	Eid-ul-Fitr	Muslim
31 August	Hungry Ghosts Festival	Chinese
11 September	Ethiopian New Year	Rastafarian
17 - 18 September	Rosh Hashanah	Jewish
20 - 27 Sept	Paryushana	Jain

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For further information, please see NASACRE newsletters at www.nasacre.org.uk

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Auschwitz and Holocaust Memorial Day 2012



We are very proud to publish below a quite exceptional article by Lauren Bruce, who studies at Astley High School. The article documents a trip to Auschwitz in Poland and highlights how Lauren and her friend, Georgia Bowman, followed this up to help mark Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) earlier this year. Lauren: in a very real sense, this is your contribution to the 2012 HMD theme of "Speak up, Speak Out". Many thanks.

It was dark and way too quiet, and that was just my bedroom at 3.00am in the morning, the time we had to wake up to go to Auschwitz. Georgia Bowman and me, two sixth form students at Astley High, were given the opportunity to visit the most notorious of concentration camps, the name most famous for being a direct relative to death, pain and the source of terrifying nightmares... Auschwitz. Before attending the visit, we were exposed to rumour after rumour that no birds sing around the concentration camp, that it would be constantly dark, gloomy and cold. However, contrary to these popular beliefs, our tour guide stressed that wildlife doesn't avoid the area, even though we didn't see any, and the sun did not avert its rays from the camp sites, although... there was a winter chill, which isn't exactly a surprise for an October day in Poland!

Our journey began days before the trip when we attended a seminar with the other hundred students participating in the project. We were given the honour of hearing a survivor's testimony, and that was when reality struck. Leslie Kleinman revealed to us his experiences in the camp. He had eight brothers and sisters torn away from him, witnessed the departure of his mother whom he would never see again, and had to march in the blistering cold or scorching heat on numerous death marches, in one of which he almost lost his life. Leslie weighed only three stones as a fifteen year-old boy. For food, if he was lucky, he was given mouldy bread, a small portion of butter and soup. He couldn't even begin to explain the vulgar taste.

Continued overleaf



Auschwitz and Holocaust Memorial Day 2012

The brutality began on the gruelling trip when hundreds were forced into cattle trucks for days on end with nothing but one bucket of water. Many didn't survive to see the camp, and perhaps they were the lucky ones. Children, men and women stepped from their "transportation" to the chorus of barking dogs viciously snapping at those who passed by, and an echo of thick German accents shouting demands: "Women and children to the left, men to the right." Those who were unfit, too old, too young or bearing children weren't given the opportunity to fight for their lives. They were instantly guided down the long path leading to the gas chambers. On our visit, we walked silently down the same path.

We were given full tours of both Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II. We were taken to each individual block and exposed to the inhumane monstrosity of cruelty. We saw cramped bunks made of crooked planks of wood where ten men would have slept, back to back, night after night. We faced the execution wall in the eerie chill of the punishment block, and stood in the courtyard where everything was equally disturbing. We were taken through the hallways to see exhibitions of confiscated glasses, shoes, pots, pans, pictures, keys, brushes, children's toys, labelled suitcases and, the most frightful of all, two tonnes of human hair. When the camp was liberated, seven tonnes of human hair were found packaged and ready to be sent to textile industries. The Germans had been using the hair to make carpets, rugs and other homely essentials. We



were told stories of deranged experiments by self-proclaimed scientists, and how one particular man focused his attention on twins as young as babies. The twins were forced to endure the barbarity of twisted acts such as amputations and mass blood transfusions with other sets of twins. This is just an example of some of the unspeakable acts of cruelty.

Moving through the camp, we were soon faced with the outside of the gas chamber and crematorium. Standing inside the enclosed space, with finger nail marks engraved from mass panic into the walls, was for me, by far, the most memorable part of the day. Auschwitz evidently wasn't just a museum, it was an expulsion to the reality of what happened at the core of the Holocaust. It put faces to the ghosts which are talked about but unknown; it gave names to the men, women and children who suffered at the hands of inhuman activities. Imagine being taken from your home, removed from your siblings and all those you love and cherish. Imagine being stripped of your identity and forced to work eleven-hour days through snow, ice, heat, rain and wind until you can no longer work. I couldn't. That was, until I'd walked the same path which

all those innocent people had been forced to travel.

It wasn't until the day had come to an end that the severity of the Holocaust really struck. To look back on the archway and the railway tracks of Auschwitz II, and to think about the "Work sets you free" sign "welcoming" its prisoners into Auschwitz I, brought the realisation that this place was a memorial to those who lost their lives. It is a constant reminder of the cruel capabilities of man, even though many still deny the existence of the Holocaust, despite the hundreds of witnesses, memoirs, documents and photographs found. It is also an immortalised haunting symbol of what should never be repeated.

To memorialise this ourselves, Georgia and me put together a presentation of our experience to be shown in honour of 2012's Holocaust Memorial Day. We did this to not just remind ourselves of what we have seen, but to remind others that this past should not be forgotten, for only by remembering our past can we prevent it from occurring again in the future.

Lauren Bruce (Year 13 student)
Astley High School, Sixth Form

A snapshot of what is going on in Northumberland in relation to RE/RS

This is merely a snapshot of what we know is going on in Northumberland - we hope it will inspire you to write in with news of what's working well for you!

In February, one of the middle schools in the Morpeth area organised no fewer than four visits for Year 6 pupils to the Islamic Society Mosque at Newcastle University, and on each occasion pupils observed the midday prayer before Mahmoud Kurdi took everyone on a tour of the premises. In March, two first schools, a middle school and a high school took pupils to the annual Islamic Society Cultural Exhibition, which, as usual, was a free event in a marquee erected on the grounds of the Newcastle University campus. During their visit to the exhibition, staff from one of the schools met the imam of one of Newcastle's mosques who, just two weeks' earlier, had travelled to Krakow in Poland to visit Auschwitz with a large group of Jews, Christians and people of no faith (young people included). All the school groups visiting the exhibition found that a calligrapher was present who could write children's names in Arabic, and every so often visitors were treated to short talks about different aspects of Islam and how Muslims are encouraged to relate to non-Muslims. Female pupils and students enjoyed having the most elaborate mehndi patterns applied to their hands.

Too many schools to list did innovative work last term about Holocaust Memorial Day, Chinese New Year, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pesach, Baisakhi

and International Women's Day, thereby making excellent use of the list of festivals and commemorations published every term in the SACRE Newsletter. Work relating to festivals and commemorations was often undertaken during enrichment, or collapsed curriculum, days so that the teaching and learning experiences had a more lasting impact on pupils and students. In fact, we heard of one first school that had a week-long focus on Sikhism. During the week, Harpal Singh, the Sikh representative on the SACRE, paid a visit and was delighted with the commitment he found from staff and pupils alike. One headteacher who escorted her Year 6 pupils on a visit to the Islamic Society Mosque was so inspired by the experience that she immediately returned to school and urged Years 4 and 5 teachers to arrange visits to the Hindu mandir and a Sikh gurdwara! It's wonderful how one thing leads naturally to another. A special school completely revised its RE long-term plans to take full account of the new agreed syllabus, and many schools accessed the syllabus (via the SACRE webpage on the NCC website) to make use of the units of work and guidance. The section of the syllabus entitled Resource List, which includes information about places to visit, seemed to be especially popular with teachers. Some teachers used the information about places to visit to identify visitors who could enrich the provision of school-based RE. An astute move! Despite the financial pressures that exist at the current time, a few schools have appointed RE/RS specialist teachers, thereby guaranteeing that the subject is taught in a structured but

challenging manner, and we heard of a few schools that sought advice about people in the wider community who could assist them with the delivery of assemblies and/or acts of collective worship reflecting a diverse range of religions and beliefs. We also heard that a few of the SACRE members have recently visited schools to help with workshops, lessons, assemblies and RE/RS enrichment, or collapsed curriculum, days.

A high school, and the three middle schools feeding into it, will soon have training to ensure that the new RE agreed syllabus is exploited to the full. Last term, a training session about the new syllabus took place in a first school. This was a particularly lively and instructive session, perhaps because all the staff were involved!

It is heartening that many schools have recognised that the emphasis currently placed on equality and diversity is helping to raise the profile of religion and belief. How? Because religion and belief is one of the 9 protected characteristics of which all public service providers must take account if they are to comply with the public sector equality duty dating from the 2010 Equality Act.

So: is there life in the RE/RS world? There is, and we'd love to hear more from you about how it is enriching educational provision in your school.

Do draft an article and we'll publish it in a future edition of the SACRE Newsletter.