



Mindfulness Courses and Retreats

As well as caring for the land and the heritage of the Estate, the Trust continues to provide a successful programme of activities and events with the aim of connecting people with nature and fostering mindfulness and well-being. Our programme of interconnecting activities follows the four seasons and includes:

- Mindfulness courses and retreats
- The arts and heritage
- Environmental education and outdoor learning
- Open days and events

Retreat Programme

The promotion of mindfulness lies at the heart of the Trust's charitable activities and is the foundation on which our approach to caring for the land and each other is based. In August 2014 we began to develop a new programme of mindfulness based retreats which take place in Sharpham House as well as those offered at the well-established Barn Retreat Centre.

During this reporting period, we piloted a new programme of 4 Mindfulness for Beginners retreats, Christmas and New Year retreats, 2 yoga and 2 walking retreats. Take-up overall has been excellent and the feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive:

*"It would be difficult to find a more ideal setting for a retreat! The beautiful natural environment really provides the opportunity to connect at a deeper level"*

Retreat participant

We aim to continue to develop the programme of Sharpham House retreats as a key part of our strategic plans for 2015 and beyond – thereby increasing occupancy of the House through an activity which clearly fits with our overall mission and ethos.



Mindfulness Courses

Our programme of mindfulness courses has continued to remain popular with good levels of take-up. Over the past year we have delivered 16 separate mindfulness courses to approximately 190 participants. Our courses vary in length and style to enable as many people to benefit as possible. Courses for this year have included:

- Introduction to Mindfulness in Daily Life
- 8-week Mindfulness for Health and Well-Being
- Sustaining Ourselves retreat
- Outreach courses for staff from the Citizens Advice Bureau
- Outreach Course for Torbay Teachers
- Mindfulness practice drop-in sessions

We aim to continue to develop Sharpham as a leading centre for mindfulness nationally with the following 3 key strands of activity:

- Public programme of courses and retreats
- Targeted programmes for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups
- Bespoke and tailored programmes for external organisations and agencies



Barn Retreat Centre

The Barn's key purpose is to teach and support the development of mindfulness practice in everyday life, supported by Buddhist meditation methods. It is also a place where people re-connect with themselves and nature in a tranquil, supportive environment.

Ten retreatants stay at The Barn each week, supported by three residential volunteer coordinators and a non-residential part time manager. This year 523 people stayed at The Barn, some for extended periods.

Anyone is welcome at the Barn, including those in financial difficulty: 33 people were offered a 25% reduction supported rate; a further 37 people were offered a 62% bursary funded by donations from other retreatants.



*"Truly one of the best decisions I've made in my life."*

*These are the words of a retreatant who stayed one week at the Barn when I was a coordinator. Although we were in different roles, the words she used ring true for me too. As someone who had been replenished and nurtured many times over the years by a retreat at the Barn, to have the opportunity to put out the welcome mat and walk beside others coming to the Barn, often for the first time, was a precious and humbling gift.*

*It seemed to me that a job description that included 'three 40 minute meditation sittings every day' was pretty special from the go! Adding into the mix the opportunity to cultivate a mindful practice in the midst of working and living with other like-minded people, in a most beautiful setting, meant it sure had the potential to be an inward and outward adventure like no other.*

*At times my experience felt like the juiciest fire I had ever jumped into and at others the most searing one I could imagine; but a year showered with tears and much laughter that I shall always cherish. Thank-you to Sharpham Trust for providing me with such a life-affirming opportunity.*

Patti Summerville – retreat leader



Arts and Heritage

Parzival

In July we produced a highly successful promenade performance based on the ancient myth of Parzival, using the exceptional setting of Sharpham House and Gardens as the backdrop for the performance piece. Funded by an Arts Council England grant of £38k, Parzival explored our relationship to the natural world through the lens of an ancient myth. The project included a workshop programme engaging local schools and community groups, a creative writing residential programme and a sell-out performance run of 7 shows. The project engaged audiences of 1,200 people and 130 young people and adults engaged with the workshop programme.



*"I found Parzival at Sharpham one of the, if not the, most rewarding and fulfilling theatre experiences ever and everyone I know seems to have loved it also. I personally don't know now, where to find a living theatre like this, and my expectations are high when I do go to see something"*

Audience member

Company of Wolves



In partnership with Devon-based theatre company Burn the Curtain, in October Sharpham also hosted a unique performance for runners based on Angela Carter's 'A Company of Wolves'. The performances took audiences on a mysterious outdoor night-time hunt for a rogue wolf. As with Parzival, all 3 performances sold out, proving that there is an appetite and audiences locally and beyond for outdoor shows like this.

Artist Residency

For this, our third artist residency, we chose to commission a piece of public art for our newly created Natural Burial Ground, the Sharpham Meadow. Following an open call and highly competitive application procedure, we were delighted to appoint local artist Robin Lacey. Robin designed a surround for the fire hearth at Sharpham Meadow, with simple wooden post seating with bronze inlays as a place for remembrance and thought.



Heritage



The Heritage Group continues to meet and helped organise the Estate Archive which now has a permanent home. Members of the group are all volunteers and are actively involved in researching various aspects of the Estate's fascinating history.

Restoration projects this year have included: clearing an area around the large holm oak and sculpture in front of the House to create a sitting spot, the purchase of a range of antique furniture to improve furnishings and the redecoration of a number of bedrooms.

A considerable amount of time and effort was expended on a re-application to the Heritage Lottery Fund at the invite of their South West Committee for a project to restore the House, gardens and Capability Brown landscape.

Gardens & Volunteering

What a wonderful year: we continue to welcome new volunteers who give great energy and time to all of our activities. The open days have been a huge success and all thanks to the great commitment from our trustees and volunteers. Our mental health recovery programme – Spring to Life, has been supported by long term volunteers offering mentoring and support to the many young people engaging on this transformational programme.

The gardens are in full bloom and the produce tastes amazing. Our thanks to Jesse the gardener for his continued hard work and guidance to the volunteers, who help make all of this possible. He has also welcomed Jacqui, our garden apprentice, to his team. She started as a volunteer in November last year and became a huge asset as a full time apprentice in February of this year. She has a wonderful passion for gardening and helping people.

Last year in the annual report there was a picture of the second walled garden and the beginnings of the clearance work to create some new compost bays – these bays have now been finished, with huge input from one of our regular and seasoned volunteers Charles.

We have also welcomed some new sheep to the orchards at Sharpham. They are doing a great job at keeping down the grass on the steep, tricky-to-mow slopes. The sheep have now been bought as part of a CSA, community (mainly the staff!) supported agriculture scheme, and by Christmas everyone involved will have a hamper of delicious, orchard-fed lamb!



Sharpham Outdoors

Lower Sharpham Barton Farm

Ambios run the farm in partnership with Robert Owen Communities who provide opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

Lower Sharpham Barton Farm is primarily an organic beef and sheep farm, with 60 hens that also provide eggs for sale locally. The farm is under a higher level stewardship agreement that means it is farmed with wildlife and biodiversity firmly in mind.



Spring to Life

Thanks to generous funding from the Conscience Trust we were able to re-launch Spring to Life: our youth mental health and recovery programme in the outdoors. Evaluation of the programme found that 100% of participants enjoyed the course, 77% of participants experienced an increase in self-esteem and confidence as a direct result of attending Spring to Life and a further 90% of participants had progressed to either employment, volunteering, college and further training on completion of the 12 weeks.

*"This programme has really helped me regain my confidence. I now feel able to re-connect with my friends and feel much more positive about my future"*

Spring to Life participant

Outdoor Learning and Events

We have continued to deliver a rich and diverse programme of outdoor learning activities this year engaging with approximately 950 participants. Highlights have included a new winter tree planting and wassail event in our apple orchards, All Souls' Day at our natural burial ground, Birds and Breakfast – bird-watching events with expert Mike Langman and Nature's Bounty, our very popular seasonal family forage and feast events.

Spring Garden and Summer Open Days

Our open days were well attended this year with approximately 300-400 visitors per day. Activities for the Summer Open day included workshops in traditional arts and crafts, as well as a range of nature-based and conservation activities.

Sharpham Apple Pressing and Autumn Festival

Our Apple Pressing and Autumn festival continues to be a popular feature of our annual calendar of events. Following a bountiful apple harvest this year, the press was put into good use, with the community bringing their own apples to turn into delicious fresh juice. Other activities on the day included storytelling workshops and a host of apple-themed arts and crafts activities.



Ambios Ltd and their nature conservation trainees based at Lower Sharpham Farm are again vaccinating badgers across the Estate this year as part of an annual programme. Badger TB vaccination reduces the infectiousness of badgers and, over time, this should help reduce the potential for infection in cattle. A total of 22 badgers have now been vaccinated or re-vaccinated (including an entire family group in one part of the Estate). Over the coming year Ambios will try to estimate the total number of badgers on the Estate.

Sharpham Meadow

Sharpham Meadow has been open for burials for two years now, and is becoming increasingly appreciated by the local community. The meadow was farmed bio dynamically for the previous twenty years, so has a well-established flourishing and healthy ecosystem, which has generously accommodated this new but also timeless human activity.



Skylarks continue to proliferate across the field, nesting in the increasingly rare long grassland they need to raise their young. Deer pass through, badgers turn over the grass in search of succulent grubs, hares flatten themselves in divots and Barn Owls use the cob barn to launch their evening raids, returning to messily eat their prey in the rafters.

Over forty people have been buried here so far, while others choose to have their ashes interred here, or are scattered in the Ancestors' Fire. Some died at the end of long lives, rich with fulfilment, others died too soon, taken by tragedy or illness. Their stories and that of their families hang in the long grass like spiderwebs in dew, becoming part of this landscape of the heart. Just as no life is alike, no funeral is either and the ceremonies that have unfolded at Sharpham Meadow have all been different apart from one unifying factor: the simple sincerity of each.



One recent funeral stands out though:

*Maggie was approaching her ninth decade and had been blind since in her fifties. She lived in East Devon, a little distance from Sharpham and the Dart, but she had heard about this place, so got a friendly taxi driver to bring her. Together they walked the field, while he described everything that could be seen. Maggie sat on the grass and breathed it all in, feeling the hilltop breeze, hearing sheep, smelling the river and the sea on the horizon. She decided this was where she would lie.*

*When she died not long after, she was brought here by the funeral director she had known for thirty years, and with our help, simply lowered into her grave, but not before her coffin was lain in the long grass again, one last time. We all paused and looked out over the soft hills, bright and alive in the May sunshine, cloud shadows scudding across the landscape, the river sinking into the sea's embrace, drinking it all in for Maggie.*

Rupert and Claire Callender, Burial Site Managers

Our Tenants

Sharpham Wine & Cheese

The Sharpham Partnership's vineyard and cheese dairy have been producing wines and unpasteurised cheeses for over 30 years to local and national acclaim. By producing its own milk from its closed herd of 65 Jersey cows, about 70 tonnes of cheese a year are handmade in the purpose-built cheese dairy. The cheeses had a run of success in May, winning 15 awards in a three week period, with one cheese a finalist at the Taste of the West Award's 'Best Cheeses' judged at the end of July.

The ten-acre vineyard lies between 12m and 25m above sea-level on south-facing, well drained slopes – perfect for growing a range of carefully selected cool-climate grape varieties, from which 40,000 bottles of wine were made last year. New World and traditional winemaking techniques are used.

Both the wine and cheese is made from start to finish at Sharpham, giving a flavour that reflects its unique position in the South Hams area of Devon. In the regional and national competitions, Sharpham Wines have won trophies every year since 1992 and also never failed to win an international award every time their wines have been entered. So far in 2015 the wines have won the highest placed still English wine with a Gold Medal and a 'Critics Choice Trophy' at the Sommelier Wine awards, held in London. Also a Trophy for the 'Best Red Wine' at the UK national competition.



The Sharpham Vineyard Café is now being operated to high acclaim by the Anchorstone team from Dittisham. There is a fabulous selection of fresh fish dishes and of course delicious wines and cheese platters to complete the meal.

Upper Sharpham Barton

This holding of approximately 100 acres is being farmed by David Camp who keeps cattle and sheep and is certified organic.

Lower Sharpham Barton

This farm is tenanted by Ambios, a not for profit company which works in partnership with Robert Owen Communities and Sharpham Trust.

