

***The Society for Ecumenical Studies
in association with the Iona Community***

Breaking Down Barriers in the Twenty-First Century

Second Ecumenical Week of Study and Prayer with the Iona Community, 8-14 September 2007

Reports from Jane Bradshaw, Hugh Ferguson and Simon Latham

Jane Bradshaw

The high spot of our week on Iona was probably being woken by an almighty noise at 3.40 am on our last morning. It wasn't the last trump. It was the fire alarm. Everyone piled out onto the grass in front of the Abbey (some more quickly than others: my dear husband insisted on putting on and fully lacing his boots, saying that he couldn't smell smoke). After a roll call the two young people in charge told us that it wasn't a practice ('we don't have fire practices in the middle of the night') and that we would have to wait for the fire brigade to come, find the cause of the problem and turn the alarm off.

The psalmist sings that 'the heavens proclaim the glory of God'. Usually, even in Oldbury village – though things may be different in Cowhill and Sheperdine – street and house lights make it difficult to see the full splendour of the stars. That night on Iona, with no street lights, the heavens certainly proclaimed the glory of God. Cassiopeia, the Pleiades, the Plough and, wonderfully, the Milky Way, all were clear 'amid their spangled sisters bright', as Milton says. And Orion was in the southern sky, visible for the winter.

The fire brigade came, declared the whole thing to be a false alarm and we were back in our beds by ten past four. I brought many good memories back

from Iona, but the night when the heavens proclaimed the glory of God will stay with me for a very long time.

Hugh Ferguson

I write to all the Community to say thank you so very much for a wonderful week at the Abbey. The whole experience will take some time to settle within us but the comments coming from the group express feelings of warmth, gratitude and surprise at the community life. For we didn't know what to expect! We have had an enjoyable time in so many ways and been challenged to think differently in some.

Iona is surely a lovely place to visit in its own right and no doubt will draw some of us back again to holiday. However the warmth and welcome of you all will be the biggest and abiding memory. To see the love of God expressed in young and old is a lovely thing bringing with it the knowledge that we are all bound together in Christ our Lord.

Simon Latham

The 'Breaking Down Barriers' gathering was so special, fruitful, worshipful and prayerful. This was the first ecumenical event I had attended, and to be able to spend time on Iona in fellowship and friendship has helped me immeasurably on my spiritual journey to conviction as a Quaker. The poet R.S. Thomas says: 'the point of travelling is not to arrive, but to return home, laden with pollen you shall work up into honey the mind feeds on....' and following Iona I am doing just that.