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**BOURNEMOUTH & CHRISTCHURCH**



## **A weekend with Krishnamurti**

**Bournemouth  
radio — then  
and now**

**Wisdom  
of the  
horseman**

**Wilder  
shore of  
Wight**



*Krishnamurti  
at Brockwood  
Park.*

# The Krishnamurti Centre

'TRUTH CANNOT BE GIVEN YOU BY SOMEBODY. YOU HAVE TO DISCOVER IT.' SO SAYS THE FAMED TEACHER, HAILED IN HIS YOUTH AS A MESSIAH; BUT DOES HIS SCHOOL IN THE HEART OF THE HAMPSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE REPRESENT A RETREAT FROM REALITY?

by SARAH COLES

**W**HAT happens at the Krishnamurti Centre near Alresford? I went for a weekend to find out.

Jiddu Krishnamurti is a remarkable teacher whose ideas have been studied and published throughout the world. He wants to liberate us from the bonds of ideology and organised religion, and his message is one of unity through understanding and love.

Krishnamurti's life has been unusual. He was born in 1895, the eighth child of Brahmin parents. One day as a boy, wandering with his brother along the beach of Madras, he met Charles Leadbitter, secretary of the Theosophical Society, a sect which disseminated various Hindu beliefs, and was "discovered".

Leadbitter was so impressed by the boys he took them to the Society's president, Dr. Annie Besant. She was in telepathic communion with spirits, and had messages of the imminent coming of a Teacher who, like Buddha or Christ, would show the way out of the world's confusions; she recognised Krishnamurti as this Messiah. She adopted, educated and groomed both brothers, and in 1911 she started the Order of the Star of the East, and

proclaimed Krishnamurti head. For many years he carried this role, the chosen vehicle through which the World Teacher was to manifest himself. The order was given, among other gifts, a castle and a 5000 acre estate in Holland. Then, after the shock of his brother's death, Krishnamurti had doubts. "I have prayed", he said, "I have worshipped, but the gods have remained silent."

In 1929, at a meeting at Ommen in Holland, attended by thousands of followers, came his renunciation. "The Truth is a pathless land", he said, "and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect." He dissolved the Order of the Star of the East, and gave back its lands. He could not allow others, he said, to make him a cage which would become a religion. The gentle leader became a stern moralist, castigating all forms of human escapism, idleness and self-deception. "The Coming has gone wrong", said Leadbitter.

Since then, he has offered his followers no easy message. He has no dogma, and presents himself without ceremony. There are no saffron robes, chanting, processions or mantras. He believes the apparatus of

organised religion usually leads to corruption and psychological coercion. "Truth cannot be given you by somebody. You have to discover it." By truth he means a constant awareness of life, and of the self-deception which can blind us to each other. He has devoted much energy to educating the young.

Now, there are eight Krishnamurti schools, five in India, one each in the U.S.A. and Canada, and the English one at Brockwood Park near Alresford. Brockwood is a co-educational boarding school with 60 students from 25 countries aged up to 26 years.

Brockwood Park is an early 19th century house and the grounds, sloping to the south, are magnificent with cedars and beeches on lawns reaching to a haha with distant hills beyond. The school's aim, apart from teaching skills required to earn a living, is to see whether Krishnamurti's teachings can be put into practice, to see whether it is possible for a community to run without rules, without competition, without a hierarchical framework and with general co-operation.

The school library holds all Krishnamurti's works, as well as the story of his early life by Mary Lutyens. It also holds a literary curiosity, the novels of Charlotte Smith, wife of Richard Smith who owned Brockwood in the eighteenth century. He farmed so badly he was threatened by bankruptcy, but at Brockwood she wrote *Emmeline, or the Orphan of the Castle* (1788) which became a best seller of its day, running to several editions. She saved Brockwood by writing Gothic romances with dilapidated mansions, deep woods, moonlight, secret passageways and long lost, rightful heirs.

Today, the most remarkable thing about the school at Brockwood Park is to find the thirty staff, gardening, cooking, cleaning

*Brockwood Park.*





*Masked mime at Brockwood Park.*

as well as teaching, are all paid the same salary, about a hundred pounds a month plus board. All the teaching staff are qualified, and Dorothy Simmonds, who used to be a sculptor and has been principal of the school since it was started in 1969, says they have never advertised for staff. People who are interested in Krishnamurti apply to come. In the dining room I found it difficult to distinguish students from gardeners, teachers and kitchen staff.

Another fact about Brockwood which surprises and even shocks outsiders, is that Saturday and Sunday are normal working days, and the days off are Tuesday and Wednesday. The reason is practical. On their days off, staff and students find week days easier for shopping.

The school is run on simple lines, and staying for a weekend was like going to a monastic retreat. My room, one of several facing a grass courtyard, was bare with whitewashed brick walls, and both hot and cold taps in the shower ran cold. At Brockwood there is no alcohol, no sex and no smoking. I saw leaflets for C.N.D., and against factory farming and field sports. All food is vegetarian, and this I found good; we had vegetable pie, lasagne, ratatouille, as well as salads with date and banana dressing, beanshoots and nuts with cottage cheese. I also found it rather filling. Hot drinks were infused from fruit teas and the dried roots of dandelion.

We had breakfast at seven thirty, and at nine everyone gathered in the octagonal Assembly Hall for ten minutes meditation. I did not achieve that communion with a timeless state which is, I think, its purpose, but it was pleasant, relaxing and I heard the birds sing with remarkable clarity.

During the morning, everyone was at lessons or working in the house or grounds. After lunch came an hour's break, then during the afternoon work parties tended bees, chopped wood and hoed in the walled garden. There, although they aim to grow food without

*Krishnamurti with some of the students.*



*Working in the walled garden.*

chemicals or pesticides, they do occasionally resort to Growmore fertiliser and aphid controls. One afternoon the students enacted a masked mime, and one evening we had folk dancing. Curfew was at ten o'clock, when everyone had to be in their rooms.

On the Sunday Krishnamurti, who spends the summer months at Brockwood, held a discussion in the Assembly Room. We sat in silence and waited, until the door was opened and in came Krishnamurti. He looks a very fit 88 year old. He is tiny, with white hair brushed up and over his head, and his eyes are huge and sad. He was simply dressed in jumper and corduroys. All his discussion, which lasted for nearly two hours, was filmed and taped. He talked, among other things, about the danger of reaching conclusions, which divide and make for dogmatic boundaries.

How far have the aims of the school been achieved, I later asked one of the staff. Probably not that much, he said. But there have been good effects. One has been the living and working together of so many nationalities have left students with a real sense of what global harmony might be. Another is that the gentle ambiance of the school makes it a haven for young people unable to cope elsewhere.

However, the school has been accused of retreating from reality in the depths of the Hampshire countryside, of protecting its students from the harsh world instead of fitting them to enter and even change it. One sixteen year old said the famed equality was only relative; when he was

told to address staff by their first names, it was as authoritative as being told to call them "Sir." "Co-ordinators" were in fact those in charge, and "agreements" were rules. He had broken most of the agreements — he had hitch-hiked, set off bangers, been to the pub, had midnight swims in the pool, and played his saxophone on top of the school tower at night and woken everyone up. He said he wished the school had punishments, because then people's irritation would have an outlet instead of his having to put up for days with their unexpressed disapproval.

Krishnamurti has said, "There is no authority to tell you what is or what should be — you are walking alone." Do what you like appears to be the message and it is not surprising that many followers take his words at their face value rather than seeking the more austere freedom he practices, achieved through the surrender of fear and desire. The result is that increasingly the discipline necessary for running a community is imposed by external pressure.

On Monday morning, after attending a group meeting with two staff members and three pupils, I left, with a present of comb honey from the school hives. I felt the school's aim, for a community of different ages, nationalities and qualifications to live as equals and without regulations, was admirable even if inevitably difficult to achieve. And it probably fostered an awareness rarely obtained elsewhere.

