

Servas Britain Newsletter

Welcome to the Winter 2019 newsletter

Servas, as you know, is an international organisation - and in this newsletter our main focus is the recent SICOGA (Servas International Conference and General Assembly) which took place in South Korea in October 2018. We were fortunate in having several Servas Britain members present and we include some reports from Andrew Cluness, Ruth Allen and David Asher, as well as an overview of some of the main decisions - and a nice photograph of our International Committee!

This year is the 70th anniversary of the founding of Servas and we will be looking for ways to celebrate it throughout the year. If you haven't yet thought of registering for the AGM in May (see e-mail sent on 24th January), there is still time to do so! And please also let us know if you are interested in joining the Management Committee this year, next year, or in a couple of years' time!

We hope that our next newsletter will be sent out after the AGM in May so please send any contributions to newsletter@servas.org.uk, and please do also include your photos!

If you have any photos which you'd like to share on our Social Media pages, please send them to Travel Secretary [Vicki Edmunds](#).

We hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter!

[Barbara Forbes](#)

Joint National Secretary for Internal Affairs



Remember to check out our websites:

<https://servas.org> - the international website, where you can find other Servas members all over the world and read about what they are doing.

<https://www.servas.org.uk/> - our very own Servas Britain website, where you can find up-to-date information about all our activities.

Servas International SICOGA 2018

Andrew Cluness tells us about his experience at SICOGA

In October 2018, I went to Seoul for the Servas International Conference and General Assembly in South Korea. I was the Youth member of the Servas Britain delegation and worked as a minute taker at the General Assembly. After the conference was finished, I went on a 'Peace Riding' – cycling along the Han river from Seoul to Chuncheon with around 40 other Servas members.

On the opening night of the conference, we were treated to Korean food and traditional culture: music, dance and martial arts. This was really something, especially the martial artists, who were acrobatically smashing bits of wood with their limbs. The traditional music was very different, sort of atonal and arhythmic to ears accustomed to Western music, but very beautiful and moving nonetheless.

My general impression of Korean culture was that it was generous, kind and helpful. This is exemplified in the many friendships I made with Servas Korea members, such as Eunyoung. I had made friends with Vladimir from the Czech Republic on the flight to Seoul, and Eunyoung had come to pick him up from the airport as she was hosting him. She then took us, and also Leena from Finland and Mauro and Antonia from Italy, out for an amazing Korean lunch in her neighbourhood - a table covered in dishes, a real initiation into Korean cuisine and culture. When I left to meet the Youth members in another part of the city, Eunyoung helped me so much: lending me money for a train card and directing me. I couldn't have managed without her. I must also mention the Korean youth member Seokchang Kim. He is a great friend now and is was always gracious and helpful even though he was often in demand for translation and other tasks.

My main job at the conference was doing the minutes for the motions. I was helping Penny from Canada and her assistant Prossy from Uganda. We got on very well as a team and the work was relatively straightforward, thanks mostly to Penny and Prossy. As part of the Youth group, I took part in discussions about the new Youth and Families Committee, the development of an app, and how Servas should continue to engage with Youth projects, such as summer camps and Servas Youth Language Exchanges (SYLEs). Susana from Spain and Raffaella from Italy were the real energy behind this, and they are totally committed to rejuvenating Servas, and just amazing people in general: kind, caring and genuine.

Morning activities at the conference included yoga and cycle rides. I went to the yoga a few times and made good friends with Craig from Australia, with whom I shared a few breakfasts. The days were filled with General Assembly or workshops, except for the day of our excursion to the Demilitarized Zone. The evenings were made up with presentations, music and, often, a few bottles of Korean rice wine and rice spirit. Korean people, surprisingly, drink quite a lot and so that was a good means of cultural exchange.

The trip to the DMZ was very interesting. One of the most interesting aspects for me was that, thanks to the lack of development and the amount of landmines, the ecology of the DMZ was thriving. We saw huge caterpillars and spiders, which you just didn't see in the

urban areas. The villages which were in the area in the 1950s are still inhabited and people make their living producing a special fresh tofu. It hadn't even occurred to me that the DMZ would be populated by civilians, and it's very impressive how they continue their lives there.

After the conference was the 'Peace Riding' from Seoul to Chuncheon. This was a wonderful experience and I got to know many more members, especially Koreans (Mr Jeon, Mr Park, Mr Han, Mr Hong), and got to see some of the beautiful countryside. We cycled about 150 miles in total, along the Han river, which thankfully meant that it was mostly flat. I got to know Brigitte and Connie from Germany, Nancy from Canada and Demelza from Malawi better. I had a race with President, Jonny Saganger, but only he and I know who the winner was!

In general, my experience of the SICOGA was extremely positive. I had an amazing time and learned so much about Servas and how it works. I couldn't have asked to meet kinder people and I hope to see many of them again.

Ruth Allen, our National Secretary for International Affairs, was our delegate to SICOGA, and reports here. Her report has been written in collaboration with Jean Seymour, former Servas Britain National Secretary and SICOGA nominations committee member).

As a widely travelled Servas member, I have often experienced generous hospitality, but never so consistently as in South Korea. Andrew Cluness has already related the warm welcome we received at the conference, as well as his own personal experiences when he first arrived. I had memorable stays with two hosts in the Seoul area at the beginning and end of my month-long visit, as well as an 8-day post-conference trip with Jean Seymour to Daegu, the fourth largest city in the middle of the country, and Busan, the second city and busy port in the southeast.

Hosts wanted to show us the best of South Korea, whether it was tourist sites, food or cultural activities. When the hosts were unavailable, they enlisted their friends and relatives to accompany us. Left to our own devices in Busan, we gravely disappointed our host Mr. Ha by not dressing up in Korean national costume to participate in the traditional Korean tea service and returning with photographic evidence. At that museum, we spent too long at an English language historical account of the Korean War; and at the end of the day, we got lost because of my mis-reading his map. Next morning, he enlisted his son to make sure we were on correct metro train to reach a temple in the northern part of the city; and, subsequently, in the afternoon, he accompanied us to a scenic cultural village, the huge fish market, and a multi-story department store with a daily indoor musical water display and memorable view from the roof terrace. This excursion, like most of our other adventures, was well documented by numerous photos which we hope to show you at the AGM in May.



We stayed on the 26th floor of a 40-story block in Busan and were grateful that the lifts always seemed to work. Only my first host, Jaeyoun and her family, lived in a single-occupancy house, in the satellite town of Paju, near the DMZ; she said this was her dream after growing up in a tower block in Seoul. At an arboretum in that town, I also encountered a colourful scarecrow festival, with the scarecrows constructed of waste materials. Jaeyoun thought I was brave travelling alone as an “older” woman, and said that her mother, who was 2 years younger than me, had never used a mobile phone or computer - very surprising in the province where Samsung was founded

Jean’s favourite place was Daegu, and she returned there after I went off to the island of Jeju to stay with couch surfers. Our host Julia was in charge of logistics at the conference and had studied in the UK. She loved English-speaking people and invited us to her language class for conversation with her students. Not only did she cook delicious meals, she also treated us to several traditional meals at local restaurants. Daegu has an older character, and the fabric and tradition clothing and night food markets were indicative of older Korean traditions. With some of our hosts, fluent English was a problem, but Julia’s understanding was good enough to answer a few of our more complex questions. Her husband took to an old temple in the surrounding hills and ancient burial mounds near to the city. An artist friend showed us local galleries and a historic music quarter of the city. Another of her friends showered us with presents, including traditional Korean costumes for Jean’s grandchildren.

Everywhere we found a litter-free and clean country, with clear blue skies and trees turning autumnal yellow and red, which softened the harsh back-drop of multi-story concrete housing blocks, usually starting at 15 stories. Seoul’s population is now about 13 million (including Incheon) and there are two national parks within the city. Distances were often too great for comfortable walking, but the entire country can be reached with one T-money card, similar to our Oystercard. After our crumbling civic services in London we were impressed that nearly every metro stop was not only squeaky clean but also had well-maintained free public toilets.

So far I have written mostly of the superficial aspects we observed in everyday Korean life, the things which unite us worldwide as Servas members, the daily events in our lives that “connect people and cultures for peace”, which was the theme of the conference. As a delegate at the conference I spent most of the week, either in the main general assembly meeting or in sub-groups listening to others speaking about the various motions proposed to facilitate the continuation of Servas. Many of the 49 participating countries, including South Korea, did presentations, but all of these presented cultural rather than political content. Even for the visit to the DMZ, we were given little guidance. How the country has risen from an aid-receiving country 50 years ago to an aid-giving country now was left to private discussions.

David Asher attended as an observer, together with his wife, the outgoing International Vice-President Ann Greenhough. David had more opportunities to discuss the division of the country, as well as the historical relationship between Korea and Japan, and has made the following comments.

Both Andrew and Ruth have commented upon the warmth and generosity of the South Korean people that they came into contact with either during the conference or during their travels afterwards. That was certainly the experience of Ann and myself during SICOGA preparations beforehand, and in our three weeks of travel across the country subsequently. We spent a number of days walking in some of the beautiful forested national parks (there are 20!) gorgeously cloaked in autumn reds, purples and yellows, and almost every footpath encounter would involve a friendly 'An nyong haseyo' (hello), leading sometimes to an extended conversation about where we were from and where we had been to. But as Ruth indicates, having a more in depth conversation about the current political situation and the prospects for reunification with North Korea proved quite elusive, and therefore special when they did occur!

Staying with our host Julia and family in Daego provided a couple of examples of this, after Julia asked me to take two of her evening supplementary English classes for 12 /13 and 16/17 year olds. I heard first-hand about the extraordinarily long time most high school students spend away from home, with long school hours, evening sports coaching, supplementary education most evenings plus homework and snatched meals on the street. The drive for personal achievement seems relentless, with one 16 year old boy indicating he felt disappointed now he had been told that he was not going to get good enough grades to get to his favoured university in Seoul. I also talked about the future for Korea, with both groups saying they were pessimistic about reunification. One 16-year-old girl said it was a 100 years away; another boy thought there would be increased communication and trade, but that the two countries were now too far apart economically to ever come together. The older group said they had not been worried during the recent period of escalating threats between America and North Korea, as they thought North Korea was too keen to improve living standards through trade with the south and would not have put this at risk.

Similar comments were made by others, including someone we descended a mountain with. He said that although reunification would probably not happen in the foreseeable future if ever, reconciliation between the two countries was slowly beginning to take place. He cited the number of informal contacts being made by the two leaders, most of which were not reported upon in the media, which had helped create trust at government level, as well as the behind the scenes planning about how to improve business and cultural links. Apparently one such visit led to the two leaders walking alone to the top of North Korea's highest mountain (admittedly having driven most of the way up!). A return visit to South Korea's equivalent, Hallosan on Jeju Island, was allegedly promised. Given the experience Ann and I had when we undertook this, when the only time we were by ourselves was on the very late return trip at dusk, a similar solitary walk would be very hard to achieve!

The biggest personal insight, though, gleaned from very detailed descriptions at museums, palaces and other historic sites, was the massive impact that the 35 years of Japanese colonial rule up to 1945 had, and from which South (and presumably North) Korea still seems to be recovering from. The attempt to remove 1000 years of unified Korean identity and culture, for instance through forced change of name, punishment for using the Korean language, the enslavement of so many Koreans, including of course the many thousands of 'comfort women' taken to Japan, and the destruction of

so many beautiful and important buildings was vividly and painfully described on so many occasions. It was interesting also how many important collections of porcelain in the national museum had been donated by Japanese benefactors specifically as a contribution to repairing the damage caused to the Korean people. Comments by some of our hosts and contacts reinforced the continued ambivalence towards Japan (not evident of course during SICOGA when relationships were especially cordial and positive!). A reminder perhaps of the destructive and hostile nature of colonialism and its long term legacy (and shades of our own dubious colonial history).

Decisions made at SICOGA 2018

(these can be read in more detail in the [Servas International Newsletter](#))

An increased amount of Servas International expenditure will be spent during the next three years on the development of the Servas on-line platform.

A one-off contribution of 18,000 Swiss francs was approved to support the work of the Servas International Development Fund.

There will be an investigation into how Servas International can improve its use of the new generation of communication tools.

Servas International's statutes now have as the first fundamental principle the belief in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of all human beings as a foundation for a more peaceful world. The second fundamental principle is to respect and care for the Earth and to live within its capacity to support life.

The formula for the financial contribution made by member countries will be changed. During a trial period (2019-21) the contribution will be fixed, based on the average contribution paid for stamps in the previous three years. After that it will be based on a formula which uses a combination of (a) average contribution of last three years (b) number of members and (c) per capita income of country. This formula will be tested during the trial period.

A team should be appointed to explore methods for handling membership applications. This will be done in coordination with the national committees.

Servas International should be committed to the active pursuit of gender balance in all areas of its work and governance.

Servas International will raise the climate consciousness of its global community.

A team will be created to develop two main goals for the triannual Servas International Conference & General Assembly (SICOGA):
(a) measures to increase active and passive participation of the whole Servas community
(b) measures to minimise the environmental impact.

A commission will be set up to investigate options for a new global structure, including the exploration of a range of organisational models to meet the changing needs of Servas whilst retaining its core values as a peace organisation.

The Youth and Families Committee is encouraged to develop new and existing programmes.

The ServasOnline Developers will expand the use of electronic Letters of Introduction and e-stamps to more countries during 2019.

Executive Committee (SI Exco) for 2019-2021



(L-R): Andreas Becker, Membership & Technology Secretary; Carla Kristensen, Vice President; Radha B. Radhakrishna, SI Treasurer; Kiat Yun Tan, General Secretary; Jonny Sägänger, SI President; Paige LaCombe, SI Peace Secretary. Photo: A.L.

Support for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Our scheme to link asylum-seekers to Servas hosts is now underway! During the autumn half-term, an Ethiopian family currently resident in Birmingham visited Julia Maybury, a Servas host in Hebden Bridge. Julia generously offered to host a family, but there are also individual asylum-seekers who can benefit from Servas hospitality.

Julia reports:

There are so many treats when you watch young children's faces as they take in the river and canal, the vibrant colours of autumn filling the valley below, the stunning rainbow over the hill as we walk to the village playing field and the crimson and gold sunset slipping over the hill opposite the cottage. Three Ethiopian children aged 2,4 and 5 years with their parents arrived in the Upper Calder Valley. We had four sunny and balmy days for our adventures. Large containers were ready by the back door with trowels etc to plant snowdrops, anemones and tulips for the spring, logs to stack ready for the wood burning stove, Lego to create robots, sky ships and tractors with stories to read, crayons and pens for drawing and lots of cuddles when tired. Hebden Bridge playing-fields offered hours of climbing, swinging and sliding, and making new friends and then going on a bear hunt.

A friend arrived one evening with her lap-top with photos of her holiday in Ethiopia which created huge excitement, a hint of tears and lots of sharing experiences.

The local playgroup provided toys, a cot, high chair and bedding. We had such a great time. The days were long: calls from Halini and Michael at 7 o'clock for attention then nonstop activity until each dropped off to sleep in the evening. We shared cooking so that I could learn about Ethiopian foods. It was tiring, but so rewarding. I recommend other Servas members offering a break for families just to see the children's joy and to observe the parents begin to relax and get some respite from the anxieties of their uncertain situation.

Barbara Forbes adds: The family were still talking about their visit with great enthusiasm several weeks later! They were keen to share their photos and the stories of their trip, and the children were still talking about Julia and what a great time they all had.

In Scotland, Servas Members have also been welcoming asylum-seekers. Giles Waley has shared some of their recent experiences:

A. was a human rights lawyer in Darfur who fled to the UK and was hosted by various Servas members in Scotland. Travel costs were paid by Servas Britain. The lawyer was recently granted refugee status and said of Servas: "No words or actions can express what you have done for me".

B. is a stateless person from Kuwait whose claim for asylum has still not been resolved. S/he came for a visit to a Servas household and said: "I would love to thank Servas for their support and the money too. Thank you very much Servas". *The funding money for travel was welcome, but much more significant was the friendship offered in a hostile administrative environment.*

C. has had several experiences of Servas hosts and events and is now a day host with Servas. Some comments: "The most important thing is the warmth of your heart to welcome us and make us feel safe and secure". /"Thank you to make us feel human again"./ "Servas has saved my life".

Servas members in Scotland also helped to organise the visit of a group of refugees and asylum-seekers from Glasgow for a cultural exchange involving their local community.

Travelling with Servas

Across the USA with Servas

By Benjamin Felstead

Servas member Benjamin Felstead was awarded a Nottingham Roosevelt Travelling Scholarship in 2018 which he used to explore Community Art across the United States of America. Here, he tells us about some of his experiences, including visiting Servas hosts.

Travelling through the United States of America visiting 14 States, 34 organisations, 7 hosts and host families and everything that I did in-between definitely achieved my ambitions of seeing a diverse range of cultures, communities and environments. Throughout the scholarship, I explored all ranges of community arts and their application. I visited organisations that use music, visual arts, poetry, opera, digital arts, dance, theatre, photography and film, and I worked alongside organisations that delivered these art forms in a range of contexts, tackling a range of social, environmental, cultural and racial issues that affected people within their local communities.

I witnessed the artist as a great communicator, a vital medium that when placed in a community setting can have a profound effect on the mindset and wellbeing of the community they work within. Overall I was blown away at the level in which community arts were delivered, funded and evaluated across the States. The organisations I visited were at the forefront of tackling, raising awareness and breaking down barriers within political and social issues and this was honoured through the high level of private funders that support the arts and non-profit organisations throughout America.

The scholarship provided a new respect of America and the American people. I feel that America in the United Kingdom and possibly Europe has a distorted perspective and what we see and hear about is led by the stage-show politics, over-exaggerated celebrities and also the bad news stories focused on gun crime, gang violence and social and racial justice. Although these issues are huge issues in America, I learned that the United States of America is so much more this. There is so much natural beauty in the landscapes of each State and the country is rich in diverse cultures, creativity and innovation.

Overall, the scholarship has inspired me and opened up a new passion within local politics, something that on a national and global level I have always shied away from, as I didn't believe in one voice being able to make the change. I now see that with the work I deliver and the passion I have for supporting and working for various communities, local politics would be a great area for me to explore where we can make direct changes to issues right in front of us.

Throughout my travels, I used Servas to connect and find hosts within the United States. At first, I had never heard of Servas but the Nottingham Roosevelt Scholarship recommended using it. After I had gone through the official channels of registration I was blown away when I received a 547-page PDF of hosts in the United States of America. At first, it was pretty overwhelming.

Servas ended up being the glue that held my Scholarship and travels together. Throughout the trip, I stayed with 7 different Servas hosts. Every host was absolutely amazing and so hospitable to my visit. They not only hosted me but all of the hosts actively helped me in the planning of my scholarship, connecting with a range of local organisations. The beauty of Servas is you can match up yourself as a traveller with hosts that share similar interests as you. Throughout my searching of the host PDF, I was conscious to find people that had been and still were involved in community organisations and community work. It worked really well and doing this meant that my hosts were extremely well educated in the local community organisations and community work that was active in the places I visited.

There were times in the Scholarship where I was tired, times when I had been travelling long distances and times when I was homesick and missing my family and friends. Servas kept me going. All of my hosts really did treat me like family. They introduced me to local foods, introduced me to their friends and family and also took me to all the best local attractions, things to see and community events.

Staying with local people from the areas I visited really did immerse me in the American and local culture of the States and Cities I visited. I feel that the Servas experience is unique from any other. I not only got to know local cultures and customs but I also got to spend time in conversations about American politics, health care, State laws etc and I also got to discuss and debate the differences between the UK and the US.

I really enjoyed my experience with Servas and I want my fiancée to join as well so that we can travel and stay with hosts together. I have been championing Servas to everyone that I have spoken about my scholarship to and I also want to get more involved in Servas as an organisation.



Photo of Harley & Esther, US Servas hosts based in New Orleans. I stayed with them for five nights and they made me feel like family. They helped me out so much with my scholarship, introducing me to friends that work in the community sector. They also introduced me to some beautiful meals, one of which was the culinary New Orleans delicacy of Seafood Gumbo. Their house was beautiful with banana trees and bamboo in the garden. They really were the perfect hosts and they made my New Orleans trip even more special through their love, hospitality and wonderful souls.

For a full account of Benjamin's travels and experiences, go to <https://trekkahartist.blogspot.com/>

Crossing borders in former East Germany

By Alison Stancliffe

In Autumn 2018 I took a trip to eastern Germany. Brexit was looming and I'd decided to cross a few EU borders unhindered, as a personal protest at my own country's drawbridge raising. The former German Democratic Republic, whose frontier with the West had appeared and vanished in my lifetime, seemed the perfect location.

I travelled first to Zittau in south east Saxony, on the outskirts of which you can stand at a point called Dreiländereck (Three Countries Corner) where Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany meet, then criss-cross from one country to another. This sounded suitably symbolic and fun too.

I struck lucky finding hosts to stay with. One lived in the town itself and the others in a pretty hamlet overlooking the picturesque pastoral hill country of the Zittauer Gebirge.

My first host, Jean, was a globetrotting French man who'd settled on the town as his base. He walked me round the centre on a peaceful Sunday morning, leaving his favourite spot till last. This turned out to be mine too - not the pretty marketplaces, churches and Italianate town hall, untouched by any wartime ravages, but renovated communist era social housing. The former drab blocks of flats had been transformed in recent years into a colourful surrealist enclave, their walls

painted orange blue and yellow, out of which burst sculptures of angels, apples, zephyrs, blossom – a symbol for him, he said, of how creativity, so stifled in the GDR, had blossomed again.

My next hosts, Volker and Christa, had grown up quite contentedly in that same GDR. From the nostalgic memories they shared of their youth, I sensed they would have demurred at Jean's dismissive Western take on their past, though they knew the clock could not be turned back. Happily for me, they knew the borderland intimately. I'd arrived hoping for friendly advice on how to



potter by foot through three countries in one afternoon, but they insisted on putting themselves and their car at my disposal. So over two days we criss-crossed borders to my heart's content. We visited villages and towns well inside national frontiers, with no checkpoints to hinder us, just signs in the relevant language to announce we were now in Poland, or had entered a Czech village.

The complicated politics of central Europe has left a tangled linguistic and cultural legacy, reflected tellingly in the German names my hosts still used for Polish towns and villages that until 1945 were inside Germany. And crossing the Czech border, history followed us too – known as Sudetenland, this was the German speaking part of Czechoslovakia notoriously annexed from 1938 to 1945. After WW2 new borders were agreed by the Allies, shrinking and dividing Germany. Thousands of families now found themselves living in a foreign land. I heard how my hosts had been part of this human disaster. In fact they both still have family members living in Poland. They could recall vividly how in the Cold War years it was not just East West borders that restricted their movements but tensions between the GDR and Poland, making contact with relatives very difficult.

But thanks to the EU and Schengen, here we were in 2018 happily making the most of the extraordinary gift of free movement over borders. We stopped for a Polish ice cream treat at one point and ate that night in a Czech pub. Journeys went both ways, too, Zittau being the nearest market town for villages over the border.

Before I left we took a quaint steam train into the hill country to visit the pretty village of Oybin and its castle, a craggy eyrie dating back to the Holy Roman Empire, overlooking an idyllic pastoral landscape far below. "See," said Volker, pointing to a huge billboard detailing EU funded restoration, "your British money has helped us restore this castle." "Delighted to hear it," I said from my heart. "Though sadly there won't be any more of that coming your way..."

From Zittau it was an easy train ride north to Berlin, where I stayed with Servas hosts in Wannsee, at the watery edge of the city. German and British, Ulrike and Peter had benefited too from EU free movement, having met when Ulrike had worked in the UK for a few years. In the morning they waved me off to make one last symbolic crossing. Wannsee is not far from the site of the 1945 Potsdam Conference, where among many momentous decisions, the very borders I had walked and driven over days ago had been drawn up by the leaders of Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union. Wannsee was then in allied-controlled West Berlin, and Potsdam in the Soviet sector of occupied Germany, separated by physical as well as political barriers. As I crossed freely to Potsdam by the beautiful Glienicke Bridge, its chilling role in Cold War spy swaps now just a memory, it was brought home to me how Servas is a bridge too, representing all that is good about crossing borders freely. I couldn't have found a more fitting end to my journey....

Hosting with Servas

Eileen Caiger Gray and Ian Gray report from Doncaster:

Generally speaking, Doncaster is not a town that rides high on the bucket list of many (or any?) tourists, either nationally or internationally. So it's not too surprising that as *Servas* Hosts we're not exactly bombarded with requests to put people up. All the same, over the years, *Servas* visitors have come: three visits from Americans, three from Canadians, one couple from Japan, another from Budapest and a pair from Hereford, three of those visits happening in the past year alone. So it's worth being patient!

Admittedly, half our visitors are members we've met before on our own travels when they've hosted us - but that's all the nicer, because now they arrive as established friends. Some guests target specific attractions - an outing to nearby Conisborough Castle or Roche Abbey, a train trip to York, Sheffield or Lincoln or an excursion to somewhere a bit further away like the Peak District.



Amazingly, though, visitors often say that some of the best memories they take away are much less high profile. For a start, visitors from any part of the globe are all guaranteed to be in ecstasies of delight when we make a trip to our allotment, joy, surprise and envy bursting forth as we tour the produce. Strolls round local woods or small lake go down a treat, too, as do tours of Doncaster's unexpected period buildings (like its Mansion House, one of only three in the

country) which are incongruously dotted amongst the deserted shops of a formerly thriving town centre (where some visitors are dead keen to ferret through every charity shop they can possibly find!) All these activities give weary travellers a welcome chance to chill out and relax as we get to know one another better through sharing a special little corner of life they knew nothing about before. It's something we, too, are always thrilled to do when we travel.

All this goes to show that no one should turn down the idea of becoming a *Servas* host because they fear their area is too boring or unattractive. In fact, nowhere is.

Reports on Local events

Scottish Servas Gathering 2018

Following the pattern of recent years twenty-four Servas members met for the annual Scottish regional gathering in early October. On this occasion the venue chosen was Anstruther on the Fife coast, a picturesque town with a strong fishing tradition and ready access to an area popular with visitors to the “East Neuk”. Because of the distances travelled by participants, the Scottish regional gathering has developed into a “residential” week-end and began with a Friday evening meal at a local pub. It rained on Saturday, our day for local recreation and exploration. However people participated in a variety of outings and activities before we all met at the impressive Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther. Our visit was enhanced when the curator gave us insights into some intriguing aspects of life in a fishing community.



By Saturday evening the weather cleared and we had fine evening views across the Forth estuary. We shared a communal meal at our hostel, a splendid sea-front sandstone building that had recently been converted from its original use as a library. This was also the venue for a “business meeting” on Sunday morning at which members discussed their Servas experiences and ideas. It was pleasing to have a mixed attendance of host members from around Scotland, some visiting members from south of the border and two refugees who have recently forged a link with the Servas community in Scotland and who have become Servas day hosts,

Servas Meeting in Bristol

On Sunday 25 November, 11 local Servas hosts from Bristol and Somerset met at Marian Liebmann's house for a shared lunch and meeting. Hattie Lupton and Caroline Freeman also helped to prepare the occasion. As usual, the varied food contributions made for a splendid meal. After that we had a meeting led by Gill Self, coordinator of Region C. We shared experiences on many topics. All of us have found a drop in the number of Servas guests over the past year. A number of us have found guests expecting beds made up and towels provided, which can be difficult for those of us with bad backs. We have found asking people in advance to bring sheets and towels is a helpful way round this. We also discussed the 'two night' rule and how far we are prepared to be flexible with this.

Future events

Area F - London Monday 4th March

Natural Kitchen, 55 Baker Street, London W1U 8EW Beginning at 18.30

Coffee, a drink, or dinner. Bring any visitors you might have, and if you know anybody who might be interested, feel free to invite them along.

Area M - Merseyside, Greater Manchester, Lancashire

Gathering on Saturday 9th March at the home of Kate and John Clements

Lunch will be at 1 p.m. - please bring food to share.

There will be discussions of any issues arising and a walk in the woods - bring boots if it has been raining beforehand!

International events

Sweden - International Karneval 20th - 28th May (volunteering opportunities)

Turkey - Volunteer opportunities from 2nd- 5th July; Peace school from 6th-14th July; Youth cinema school 17th-21st July.

US Servas National Conference

US Servas is marking our 70th anniversary with its National Conference in California near San Francisco on 26th - 28th July 2019. Registrations will open in February - more information will be available at <https://usservas.org/>

Italy - Youth and families summer camp, 25th- 31st August

Spain - International youth environmental working camp from 2nd - 8th September

To find out more about any of the international events. please contact Ruth Allen ruthservas@gmail.com

If you are thinking of travelling to a particular country, remember to check out their websites for events - links to all our member countries can be found on the Servas.org main website. And don't forget to let us know about your travels for inclusion in the newsletter!

Peace News

Scottish Servas members at Faslane “Nae Nukes” demonstration in September 2018



Eileen Rawson reports:

On Saturday September 22nd, the day after World Peace Day, there was a CND Rally at Faslane, the nuclear submarine base in western Scotland. A coach set off from Leeds at 5.30 and arrived at Skipton at 7 o'clock. A group of us joined the coach, some Quakers, two of whom are members of Servas, some members of Grassington and Skipton Peace Group, and some long-standing members of CND. I was going as a Servas member. We had heard about the rally at the AGM in May and some people had visited the base at the end of that weekend.

We arrived at midday and were blessed with good weather. Along with a few hundred others, we assembled at the Peace Camp. Accompanied by a dinosaur, a giant Scot, various masked protesters and musicians including bagpipes, we walked to the North Gate with our banners and flags. Once there, we hung our decorated ring-pull lids and Hiroshima-inspired paper cranes on the perimeter fence, ate our picnics and listened to songs, poetry, and a talk about ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) which has won a Nobel Peace Prize. We then heard an impassioned speech by a Japanese man who knows all too well the devastating effects of nuclear attack, and who emphasised the waste of money which otherwise could be used to enhance the NHS in contrast making a wonderful difference to people's lives.

A bonus was meeting up with several Scottish Servas members who did not expect to see me. Some I had met at the AGM, so I was glad that I spotted them and their two visitors from Catalonia.

Armistice Day Centenary in Birmingham



Several Servas members attended the Quaker Meeting for Worship in the grounds of Birmingham Cathedral to mark the centenary of the end of the First World War. The mosaic White Poppy is one of three commissioned by the local Quaker Peace Committee and made by a Quaker artist.

Armistice Day in London

Our Peace Secretary Carol Allen reports:

Several Servas Britain members travelled to London for the Remembrance Day event in Tavistock Square and bear witness at 1pm to the memory of the Conscientious Objectors of World War 1. The poster encouraged *No More War - Let's Make Peace Happen* endorsed by Bruce Kent. A large crowd came with white poppies for serious remembrance of wars and the call for serious work for peace. Speeches were made and poems read, before wreaths or flowers were laid on this bright day, often silently.

Directly afterwards a "Peace Fair" took place at Friends House in Euston. This was the first event of its kind and was initiated and organised by a group led by Valerie Flessati. Servas Britain was delighted to be invited to participate, along with two dozen other groups with peace links.

One artistic item on the stairs of Friends House showed the enlistment numbers (mostly men) on khaki cards, but much information had gone missing causing the viewer to wonder as to what happened to the people who resisted. All promised to renounce war and promote peace 100 years after the First World War.

The event began with Ruth Allen, Joint National Secretary of Servas Britain, assisted by myself, as Peace Secretary, giving a talk about the many positive aspects of being a Servas member - travelling or hosting as an action bigger than just friendship, leading to peaceful encounters between often previously unknown associates. Leaflets and cards were given out to those attending. Next was a film by the Right to Refuse to Kill Group on Conscientious Objection and how COs were treated in differing situations, some very inhumanely, whilst others had been sent to work in specific areas - Scotland for example - a very long way from homes and families with no possibility of seeing relatives. Treated as prisoners, their day was long and hard, with minimum food and health problems. Some worked on farms whilst others lived in Nissen huts, which were basic and cold. It was suggested that COs could be sent abroad to work in hospitals assisting recovery so that enlisted men could go back to war, or that they were often shot because they were not willing to assist or went missing.

Downstairs several peace groups had stalls, for example a school education group concerned about the militarisation of education/drives to recruit young people for war within their own schools/curriculum, minimising the dangers whilst showing the skills that could be learned. Other groups included the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, Conscience (The Peace Tax Campaign), Fellowship of Reconciliation, Movement for the Abolition of War, Network for Peace, Pax Christi, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Peace News and the Peace Pledge Union plus the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

The event was enlightening and educational, and the organisers hope that it will become an annual alternative remembrance commemoration

News from the Committee

Report from Servas Management Committee meeting in London on 15th January 2019

Much of the meeting was devoted to feedback from the International Gathering (SICOGA) and preparations for the AGM.

IT WAS AGREED that we would produce Servas business cards to provide free to members.

IT WAS AGREED that we would continue to post on the Servas Britain website the minutes of the Annual General meeting and that a summary of the main decisions taken at Committee meetings would be contained in the newsletter.

IT WAS AGREED that we will start looking now for a Treasurer to replace Jim Clevenger in 2020, with a view to enabling the prospective future Treasurer to shadow the work for a year beforehand.

IT WAS AGREED that we would re-visit the criteria for awarding grants to asylum/refugee-supporting groups with which Servas members are involved.

IT WAS AGREED that the international conference would be a main focus at the AGM weekend.
