

John Godolphin Bennett

A student of G. I. Gurdjieff, John Bennett began to teach the Work in 1930, but did not consider himself a teacher until he inaugurated his own school named “The International Academy for Continuous Education”, at Sherborne House, Gloucestershire, England, in October, 1971. From then until his death in December 1974, Bennett worked full-time with an annual intake of 90 – 100 students.

Prospectus introduction from the first Sherborne course

“This prospectus is addressed to those who care about the future—their own and that of mankind—especially those who have already searched and experimented with politics, social service, those who have looked for new experience in travel, in sex, or in drugs, for those who have tried religion or plunged into one of the many ‘isms’ and movements that promise a new world, and have found them all lacking in an essential ingredient: that is, practicality. On every hand there are people to tell us what we ought to do, but few indeed have any idea how to do it. the basic course of the International Academy for Continuous Education is designed primarily for the purpose of teaching men and women of all ages how to live their lives in the way they themselves wish. It is particularly directed to those who are acutely aware of an unrealized self, of energies squandered, and of time wasted—who are prepared to go through hard training in order to change. It is, above all, for those who have realized that the first step in helping the world is to help oneself, that ‘inner change must come before outer change.’”

Many of those in the Camp Caravan community attended a course at Sherborne. The school was strictly experimental in curriculum, and Mr. Bennett taught what he had learned from his own various teachers and also from his own researches and observations.

Writings of J.G. Bennett

As a writer, Bennett is best known for his commentaries on Gurdjieff, but *The Dramatic Universe*, begun in the 1940s, is considered to be his most important work. The fourth and final volume was published in 1966, but he did not consider it a complete work, and encouraged others to continue to develop the ideas contained in it. A lot of the other material in print today is composed of transcriptions of lectures he gave to both public and private audiences. Bennett’s autobiography, *Witness: The Story of a Search* tells the story of his outward life, of his meetings with various significant men and women, and includes many personal insights and teaching stories. The first edition was published in 1960, and he re-wrote the last chapters in 1974 to include the events of the last 14 years of his life.

Coombe Springs

Bennett’s early career was in the British Army, and later in Military Intelligence. After some attempts as a financial entrepreneur ended in failure in 1929, he entered on what was to be his main and most successful profession as a research scientist in the fuel industry.

In 1946 Bennett purchased Coombe Springs, a seven-acre estate in Surrey in the UK to create a center for exploring and working with the ideas and practices of Gurdjieff. Hundreds of people engaged in outer and inner work there, including the Gurdjieff Movements, psychology and spiritual explorations, and practical physical work. His book *Sunday Talks* includes lectures and themes presented there. Practical work including the design and construction of the *Djamatunatra*. Built in the 1960s, it was intended as a sacred space for meditation and Movements. Bennett gave Coombe Springs to Indries Shah in 1966.

Between that time and the opening of the Academy, he engaged mostly in writing, travel, lecturing, study and, in the late 1960s, in education research and business management.

Bennett met Gurdjieff in 1919 in Istanbul, and in 1922 visited him at the Gurdjieff Institute, which was then at the Prieuré in Fontainebleau, near Paris, France. The following year he spent thirty-three days at the Institute, after which he did not meet Gurdjieff again for 25 years. In August 1948, he met Gurdjieff again in Paris on the advice of Mme. Ouspensky. From then until Gurdjieff's death on October 29, 1949, Bennett spent as much time with him as possible, including meetings with Gurdjieff in New York in 1949.

Bennett brought as many as he was able of his own pupils and friends to meet Gurdjieff, including his second wife Polly, and Elizabeth Mayall, whom he married after Polly's death in 1958.

Bennett trained many students in the use of the practical inner exercises that were taught to him by Gurdjieff. This body of techniques is passed from one individual to others by personal transmission, and formed an important part of the curriculum of his Academy.

J.G. Bennett died during the Fourth Course at Sherborne. Read David Patrick's recounting of that day and Gavin Perry's and Rise Richardson's memoirs of Sherborne at the Writings page at the Camp Caravan website at www.campcaravan.org.
