

Diwali: Festival of Light

Central Scotland Conservancy



1. Protected Characteristic category

Race, Religion and belief

2. Partner organisations/participants

Central Scotland Conservancy

Artists Lucy Iredale and Joanna Boyce

Alasdair Taylor, freelance environmental educator, storyteller and performer

Ghurkha Association Scotland

Nepalese Association Scotland

Arabic Family Group

Independent Living Champions (BME Disability group)

Gill Hamilton of Newbattle Abbey College

Scott Jones, photographer

Mumtaz Mahal restaurant

Tika Limbu and Kishor Dangol of the Nepalese community

3. Project title and details of Initiative

Diwali festival of light - The project was to connect people with Scottish Woodlands, and reflect on the interfaith message of Diwali (festival of light): that the many lights of our world, each residing in an individual or collectively as a community, have their origin in the One Light, which unites us all.

The Forestry Commission, on behalf of Newbattle Abbey College managed the event. It took place at Lord Ancrum Wood, with sections taking place in the College grounds. Guests came from Edinburgh, Central Belt and Glasgow. Among them numbered Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and people of a Christian background and born in countries such as Scotland, England, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Participants from the Independent Champions project attended along with two participants in wheelchairs who appreciated the opportunity to experience and access the woodlands at night, and share their experiences.

4. Initiative/Project aims and background

Proceedings opened in the 15th century crypt, found in the college grounds, and decorated by artists Lucy Iredale and Joanna Boyce, using materials such as holly, spruce, maple, beech, birch and rose hips, all gathered from Lord Ancrum wood. Guests made lanterns with paper, wire and woodland materials under the guidance of artist Joanna Boyce.

Everyone then gathered at the front of the building, lit paraffin torches and stood in a circle with their lanterns, sharing tales of traditions and customs celebrated by their faith communities and in their countries of origin. A torch-lit procession led by Alasdair Taylor, assisted by Alice Greenacre FC warden and Tika Limbu, proceeded to the open-roofed Icehouse for the first Diwali story. The torch-lit procession proceeded to the 'outdoor classroom' space where a small wood fire was established. Alasdair proceeded to tell two more tales:

- A Diwali-related tale of Lord Krishna helping the Braj people whose land had been flooded by the jealous Lord Indra, and
- an ancient Celtic seasonal tale of Cuchulainn, who had to stay awake on his own from one Samhainn (Halloween) to the next to defend his kingdom from attack by a huge army.

The procession returned to the college crypt to enjoy a feast of Asian food and have an opportunity to meet and share experiences with people of different faiths and cultures.

5. Future plans

Encourage groups to apply for Community Seedcorn funding to celebrate Diwali, for example, The Ghurkha Association were successful in obtaining funding to celebrate Diwali again on 5th November 2011 in Lord Ancrum, taking on board the opportunity to celebrate festivals in the woodlands without assistance.