

Botton Village

...a special way of life



Lying in the heart of the beautiful North York Moors National Park, Botton Village is home to over 110 adults with special needs, all of us living together in shared households as extended families. We lead full and fulfilling lives, with everyone contributing the best of his or her skills to the work of the community as a whole. And (surprisingly perhaps), without being paid for it! Genuine care and concern for each other makes for a unique atmosphere that always inspires — and prompts visitors to ask us many questions.

We hope to answer some of them here.



What's it like today?

From its humble beginnings, Botton has grown into a thriving village offering all kinds of opportunities for work, social life and personal development to anyone who chooses its less pressured but uniquely active way of life. These days, adults with special needs come from all over Britain. They live with co-workers from around the world and together all combine their talents to create a caring, extended family home, which is the bedrock of our way of life.

Like any village, Botton is essentially a varied collection of families, each with a character all its own. There are over thirty shared houses, roughly grouped in five neighbourhoods and ranging in size from three to twelve people, making a population of around 270.

A typical household is a couple acting as home makers who, with the help of other colleagues, work with a group of adults with special needs, as well as their own children. But there is no hierarchy; we all work together to make the house *our* home.

Who runs it?

We do! The village is largely self-governing and is responsible for its own running and development. Overall accountability rests with our Local Management Committee, but deciding the practicalities of everyday life lies firmly in the hands of those who live here.

Beyond this, however, Botton is one of eleven communities within the Camphill Village Trust Ltd., a registered charity and non-profit making company, and is one of over forty members of the Association of Camphill Communities in the British Isles.

How did it all start?

Back in the early 1950s, a village like Botton was no more than a vague longing for many parents. It took the dream of a visionary — Karl König, an Austrian doctor with an international reputation for his work with children with learning difficulties — to give it shape.

After founding schools dedicated to the special needs of such children (the first was at Camphill, near Aberdeen), it became an increasing worry to Dr König and their parents that they would leave school only to end up in institutions, or return to their home, wasting the talents brought to light during the course of their inspiring education.

So in 1955, with his guidance and the help of parents and like-minded benefactors, the Botton Hall estate was purchased in Danby Dale, seventeen miles from Whitby and fifty miles from York. This provided the land on which to create an entirely new kind of village – one in which adults with special needs could live a normal life in an open yet sheltered, fully supportive community, where each could make a real contribution according to their potential.



Unusually in today's world, the village has no top-down management structure. Anyone may join a particular group, such as the building or land groups, according to their skills or interests, and help with decisions made on behalf of the whole community. Nor is this restricted to co-workers, of course; everyone may participate in Botton meetings to decide major issues.

How is it supported?

Life in Botton is made possible through funding from a variety of sources.

Much of this comes through North Yorkshire's 'Supporting People' budget, with a smaller amount from Social Services departments around the country. 'Housing Benefit' contributes towards the cost of accommodation for most people, while a variety of other benefits cover their personal living expenses. And importantly, we also generate income from the sale of our crafts and produce.

However, all money for improvements, new buildings and development in Botton has to come from fundraising and legacies. Without these the growth of the village would have been impossible.

Altogether there are five farms, several gardens and a dozen workshops in Botton, which allow us to produce everything from bio-dynamic dairy products to fine, hand-crafted toys. We have an excellent reputation for quality in our toys and gifts, one that is reflected in our sales both in this country and abroad.

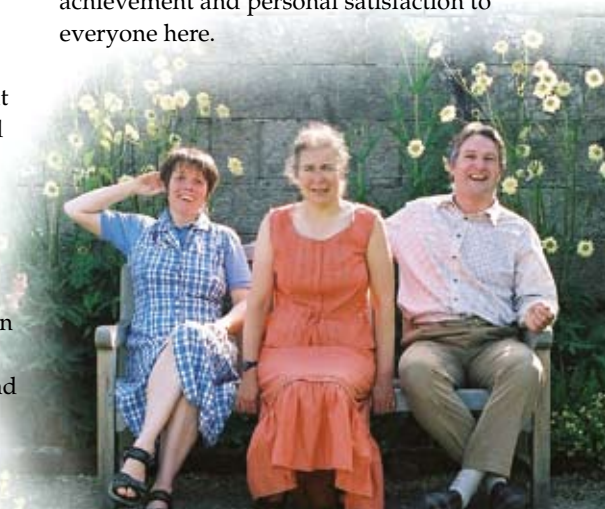
Does anyone get paid?

No, neither co-workers nor villagers receive a wage here. Only non-resident employees are paid. Instead we work because the work needs doing, and its reward is the satisfaction of meeting someone else's need. Every job is an important contribution to the upkeep of the community — whether helping to run a home, tending the garden, milking the cows or doing the accounts — and we do not value one person's work above another's: each task is essential and enhances personal dignity. The wellbeing of the village depends on this attitude of giving one's best, and each person's individual needs are met, not from their own work, but from the work of all.

Has it a special philosophy?

Yes, definitely. The way of life here and in other Camphill communities is based on the teachings of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), whose ideas provide the basis for much practical work throughout the world in education, agriculture, medicine, economics and social life.

Work is just one of the fundamental tenets of our philosophy; another is the opportunity to learn through creative activities. Both give a huge sense of achievement and personal satisfaction to everyone here.



Crucially, being able to work makes Botton a valuable alternative for adults with special needs; an important option in their freedom to choose a meaningful way of life.

What about social activities?

In harmony with the Camphill philosophy, we are a practising Christian community with services on Sunday and during the week, though of course everyone is completely free to observe their own religion as they choose. We have a very rich cultural and social life, especially at the main Christian festivals, as well as a varied programme of adult education courses throughout the year.

Among other things, there's a course on bio-dynamic agriculture (an enhanced form of organic husbandry), a Waldorf school which caters both for the children of co-workers and those from the surrounding area, and a eurythmy school. Eurythmy is a new art of movement (not to be confused with eurythmics), whose movements and gestures to both music and the spoken word follow very definite principles. Its least visible but most potent form practised here is curative or therapeutic eurythmy, which is conducted on a one-to-one basis with a trained therapist under the guidance of a doctor.

However, most spare time is spent simply, at home and amongst friends.



**BOTTON VILLAGE,
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What has Botton achieved?

It almost goes without saying that our way of life is not the answer to everyone's needs, but for the many vulnerable adults who live here now, or who could benefit in the future, it offers a fulfilling and happy life – for however long they choose to stay.

Botton is still an inspiration for dozens of villages in Britain and abroad. Indeed, there are now over ninety Camphill communities in twenty countries, all sharing similar values even if their settings are very different.

Perhaps most important of all is that thousands of visitors pass through Botton every year, as do dozens of young international volunteers working alongside us, each taking away with them a new understanding – that people with a learning disability are especially deserving of our love and concern. Like anyone else, they have their own abilities and their own needs, but what they inspire in us is a greater empathy for our fellow human beings.

