

Comments

Several Friends commented in their replies to the questionnaire which Diana Brockbank, our Quaker Life representative, had sent out prior to her attendance at the Council meeting, on the importance of keeping in touch with Friends, not just in the local, but also in the wider Quaker community, including the Area Meeting. Various means are used now: emails, telephone conferences, meetings face to face at area meetings, and especially our annual residential meeting in August, or excursion to far flung meetings in May. Some mentioned this journal, the *Northern Quaker*. It is indeed an important source of information and illumination, of which I have been editor for two terms. It is therefore time to pass on the responsibility to someone else. In Quaker circles we do not, or should not, have jobs for life! So I am very pleased to pass the baton to Harry Horsley, and I ask all of you to ensure that he has plenty of “copy”, not just the obligatory, requested reports but also, and even better, the unsolicited contributions and comments on anything and everything that occupies your minds.

So any contributions from now on should go to:

**Harry Horsley, 11 Cottown of Balgownie,
Aberdeen AB23 8JQ
Tel. 01224 706989, harry.horsley@uk.bp.com**

I am sure he, like me, would prefer contributions as email Word doc. attachments, but also that if you are not able to use this format, any other paper form will do.

Eva Deręowska

North Scotland Area Meeting Nov 2011

Thirty Friends and attenders were welcomed by members of Inverness meeting at the Ness Bank Church Hall in Inverness, on 19 November. Although this was the last area meeting of the triennium, which can sometimes be the occasion of needing to make a lot of appointments, this time the burden was relatively light for three reasons: first, the AM nominations committee had already been thinking about this for nearly a year and so some appointments had been made at earlier area meetings; second, for some roles it is still proving difficult to find Friends willing to serve, including conveners for the AM eldership/oversight group; and third, several local meetings were not ready with the names of Friends willing to serve in eldership/oversight roles, so this will be revisited at the next area meeting.

Beginning next year, instead of the traditional Clerk and Assistant Clerk with distinct predefined roles, there will be a clerking team of three Friends, who will share most of the work between them as seems best. Of these three, Ann Millar has a depth of experience as clerk to the area meeting and to the general meeting, and of service to the yearly meeting, and she has agreed to be our 'named clerk', 'the Meeting's contact point, supported by a team taking on some of the roles inherent in the clerking task'. David James has served already for three years as assistant clerk and is familiar with much of the work that the team will be covering – AM correspondence; preparing the agenda for each AM, at the table with the clerk, sending out minutes, and other follow-up after the meeting; dealing with membership correspondence; and so on. Peter Heald, who will be serving as the third member of the team, is new to this work, and it is a good sign of life in the meeting that we are able to appoint Friends willing to learn and grow into new roles.

There were a number of reports, which are printed in this issue of the *Northern Quaker*. Peter McCaffery reported on Peterhead prison, which it seems is undergoing a change of role from a national to a regional and more general role. One effect of the change in the prison population from long-term to shorter-term stays is that the meeting for worship held there has become less settled and may even cease. Another question mark may hang over the status of other prisons in the region: will Inverness continue as it is, or might

even remand prisoners be sent to Peterhead, with the difficulties for individuals and their families that this could cause?

We heard that the theme for the residential area meeting in Pluscarden next August will be the Experiment with Light, which John and Diana Lampen will be facilitating. This distinctively Quaker initiative, which first arose about twenty years ago out of the work of Rex Ambler, and which is based on his insight into the spiritual practice of George Fox, now has a wide following in the UK and is undergoing a revival. We noted that at Pluscarden, the work with the Experiment with Light will be not only on Saturday afternoon, but spread over all three days.

Under membership matters, the meeting recorded that Joan Basford had died earlier in the year, whose funeral at New Deer was attended by a number of Friends. We heard that Derek McLean, who moved south some years ago, is transferring his membership back from West Scotland AM to North Scotland, where he will be welcomed especially by those who remember him from before. And Mary Law is transferring to Kendal and Sedbergh AM. We welcomed Ian Bonner-Evans into membership, and received three more applications, appointing visitors in each case.

Part of Ernle Beyts's bequest remains unused, and the meeting decided to explore how these funds could help with providing more events for children.

David Sanders, Skye

EXPERIMENT WITH LIGHT

The epistle from the conference held at Glenthorne May 2011

To Friends Everywhere

We have come together to discern how Experiment with Light might be integrated into Britain Yearly Meeting so that it can be supported and further developed, both within Britain Yearly Meeting and beyond.

Experiment with Light is a practice that was developed from early Friends' writings and that is best summed up in the words of

Advices and Queries Number 1: "Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life."

Paying attention to the Light; seeing what it reveals to us; accepting this reality; and acting upon it, are the four cornerstones of Experiment with Light. Rooted in a rediscovery of a process early Friends went through, it can help Friends today to reconnect to the power that inspired 17th century Quakers. Many of us can testify to the transformative power Experiment with Light has had and continues to have on our lives.

We sense that Experiment with Light is challenging our widespread reluctance to share our spiritual insights, tendency to hide deep emotions, and avoidance of openly and honestly addressing conflict. We feel that it is necessary to be challenged in this way and that Experiment with Light can help us live fuller and more faithful lives, as well as strengthen the spiritual lives of our Meetings throughout Britain Yearly Meeting and beyond. However, we shall not be afraid of changing our ways if we feel that our structures no longer allow us to grow in the Light.

As individuals, we commit ourselves to put our lives under the guidance of the Light as best we can and to support each other in this endeavour.

As a group, we have trusted the Spirit to reveal to us the best way of structuring and of communicating this ministry. While some questions in this respect still require a fuller answer, we have become clearer about the future direction of Experiment with Light.

We ask Friends everywhere to hold this ministry in the Light.

(Experiment with Light will be our subject at Pluscarden 2012)

Memories of Alison Munro Elliman nee Fraser (1938-2011)

Alison first visited the Quaker Meeting in Orkney around 2003 with the intention of retiring here. At that time she lived in St Albans and was very involved in the Meeting there. She fell in love with Orkney and bought a house in South Ronaldsay. Alison was active in our small Meeting and we valued her loving encouragement, support and sense of humour. Although officially retired she also worked as a Paediatrician for Orkney Health Board for a period supporting parents and children.

Alison became involved in the community both in South Ronaldsay and Orkney with pantomime, the interfaith group, the Buddhist group, and weaving and singing in the Festival Chorus. She had two adopted children David and Chantalle. Alison was a loving, supportive mother and grandmother to Cartel.

Alison is greatly missed by all of us. Our thought and prayers go to her family.

Orkney Friends

Questions for Area Meeting Representatives to the Woodbrooke seminar on Economic Justice, Nov 2011

The second part of this programme of events is the Woodbrooke seminar to which Area Meeting Representatives have been appointed. It might be helpful for representatives to gather some thoughts from their Area Meeting before coming to the seminar. Reflections on these issues will continue for some time and Friends and meetings will be in different places.

What do you see as the relationship between economics (production, consumption, marketing, financial institutions) and faith?

What helps and what hinders you in making these connections and act faithfully in relation to the economic system?

How do you feel influenced and constrained by the economic system? Do you think that our current economic system is broken? If so, how might it be ‘fixed’? Or, what can/should we put in its place?

Yearly Meeting asked us to move out of our comfort zone. How do you define your comfort zone and what might moving out of it mean for you?

How might we support one another as a Quaker community to engage more powerfully and faithfully with our economic system?

How do we “face our responsibility as one of the nations which has benefited at other’s expense, to redress inequalities”?

Yearly Meeting encouraged us to “practice speaking truth to power at local level” – what will this mean in practice? What truth will you be speaking? Can you see opportunities or merely obstacles?

(Lex Ryder, Aberdeen, represented us)

Economic Justice and a Global Sustainable Society

At the beginning of November 2011 I attended a weekend seminar at Woodbrooke which followed on from a day conference held in London in September. (*See the item **Questions for Area Meeting Representatives** elsewhere in this issue.*) The subject of both was “Economic Justice and a Global Sustainable Society”, which was timely given Minutes 23 and 36 from Yearly Meeting in Canterbury. We are currently in a time of discernment as to how to move forward regarding the situation we are currently in with regard to this, and the conference and seminar brought together information on some of the issues facing us, potential actions that could help, and things we may wish to consider in our own lives.

There was talk of the problems of food speculation driving up food prices both here and abroad, issues of privatisation where basic commodities such as water supplies become unobtainable for some, and tax havens that allow the avoidance of millions of pounds of tax each year.

Jonathan Dale spoke about how the current capitalist system is incompatible with all our testimonies, and that unless a change occurs there is a very real danger that spiritual life will, by necessity, become compartmentalised from public life. Challenging the status quo will be testing, and will impact on virtually every aspect of our lives, from what we eat, to how we travel, where we bank, and what we wear. The current system is faltering, as can be seen by, among other things, the recession, the situation in Greece, the status of the Euro, and this brings with it the opportunity for change, with various campaigns currently developing.

The Occupy movement in London, as well as other cities, is calling for change, and BYM has recently issued a statement of support to them.

Positive Money (www.positivemoney.org.uk) suggest changes that would make the banking system more robust, such as returning to full reserve banking where the bank needs permission of the saver to loan out their money, and when money is lent out, the lender and the bank share the risk. They also advocate for a greater transparency in how the banks use money stored with them, and want greater regulation of money creation which would be returned to a national bank.

The creation of a Robin Hood tax, where a small tax would be added to financial transactions and the money raised would be spent on tackling issues such as poverty and climate change was suggested. It is estimated that such a tax could generate £20 billion each year in just the UK, and would hopefully go some way towards discouraging money speculation. It also has support in a growing number of countries worldwide.

These things are macro level changes, which, while feasible, may seem beyond our individual control. There are things that we may wish to consider on an individual level, such as what we do with our money when we aren't using it? Are our investments and the banks we use ethical? Do we wish to be involved in the stock market? Are we keeping ourselves informed about what is happening economically in the world? Are we supporting relevant campaigns?

Can we reduce our carbon footprint, even in a small way? When making purchases do we consider what is right, not just what we need or can afford? Are we speaking to people about these issues? These things may not seem like much on their own, and problems may appear insurmountable, but put together any action, however small it may seem, can make a difference. Someone remarked that individually we were small snowflakes, but together we all know the impact that snow can have.

Lex Ryder, Aberdeen

Meeting for Sufferings, 1 October 2011

At Yearly Meeting in Canterbury, recommended changes to Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) were agreed, so that among other things, there will from YM 2012 be about 108 Friends instead of 170 attending each meeting. It is hoped that the smaller meeting will work better.

Most of the reductions are in the numbers of Friends representing area meetings: North Scotland AM, for example, will still appoint two Friends, a 'representative' and an 'alternate', both of whom will be fully supported by a process of induction and by mailings from Friends House, and so on; but instead of both attending each meeting as at present, only one will attend any particular meeting.

BYM trustees reported among other things that we are now committed to a programme of work on the Large Meeting House costing £4.25m.

The main business of the day was in two items of the agenda, the first about government cuts, and the second about strengthening our area meetings.

From various angles, and in common with other churches, Friends have already voiced concern about some harmful effects of government economic policy. There is now in the UK a greater disparity in incomes than at any time since the 1930s, and some other issues emerging are child poverty, lack of affordable housing, crime and anti-social behaviour, living with long-term disability on a low income (mobility elements of the Disability Living Allowance are being cut), low life expectancy, and access to health care.

While there are successes, the meeting was clear on a number of fronts: the need for more wise government spending and less unwise (for example on war); for fairer taxation, so that the burden is carried more proportionately by the wealthy; for spending cuts that are progressive (increasing the proportion of cuts carried by the rich) rather than regressive (increasing the proportion carried by those least able to bear them). We also each need to play our part: as taxpayers are we pulling our weight; and as employers, do we pay a living wage?

We are encouraged to lobby our MPs and to raise awareness more generally of the issues.

Sufferings turned again in the afternoon to Strengthening our Area Meetings, noting that the AM is a meeting for worship, whose purpose is to build a community living under the guidance of the Spirit. For it to flourish takes skill, care, warmth, and wisdom.

Paul Parker, who took up the post of recording clerk in May, has spent a lot of time since then in meeting with various committees, and with each individual working at Friends House. He offered to Meeting for Sufferings a paper on this subject, arising out of his awareness of the life of the yearly meeting as a whole, and especially out of his responsibility for centrally managed work in the service of the yearly meeting. His paper ends with three questions for an area meeting:

Is our Area Meeting clear about its purpose?

Is it fit for purpose?

What support and advice would our meeting welcome to help change the things which need changing?

This paper is available at the Quaker website, www.quaker.org.uk/suffs-oct-2011 and appears elsewhere in this issue.

The meeting commends to us a conference on this subject for AM clerks, to be held at Woodbrooke, 16–18 November 2012.

David Sanders

The Quaker nominations process: at the heart of Quaker community?

David James and I attended the Quaker Nominations Course at Woodbrooke from Monday 24th October to Wednesday 26th October. It was led by Roy Stephenson, Anna Sharman and Gill Pennington. Roy has led many of these courses before and his book *Freeing the Spirit* distils the wisdom he conveys. For instance one of the striking things he said early on to get us engaged was that we were not trying to find the best person for a job but the right person for the right job! (The best person might be too good and so be very difficult to replace!) The title of his book reveals the core message of the course: the nominations process is right at the heart of the Quaker community: it is the discernment of this committee that leads to the freeing of the spirit in our meetings. It is good to be reminded of this ideal when one struggles to find names for positions – a common enough experience up and down the country, one realises.

We need to be much more open about how Friends come to have the posts they have. It is, we were told (and certainly I recall being puzzled at first when I joined Friends), often mystifying to newcomers. After all it is a rather unusual (peculiar?) way of proceeding. Generally people either put themselves forward for posts and there are elections, or alternatively people apply for positions, provide CVs, have interviews and get appointed by an appointing committee! Our procedure is nothing like this. Like our business meetings, we wait to be guided over who should be approached. Of course getting the right person for the right job isn't a matter of sitting back and hoping for spiritual inspiration! It requires hard work in trying to understand what the posts require and, even more important, just what the gifts are of Friends who might serve. This is why being on the nominations committee is not a rather uninteresting but necessary task for some Friends to do, but a chance to know about a wide range for Friends and hence have a feel for the life of the meeting (area or local). Any committee of course has its limits of knowledge, which is why, especially in larger AMs, offers of service forms are used to find out what skills Friends can offer. It is now quite a number of years since this was done in our AM and so soon we will be issuing a new offers of service form for Friends to complete.

One of the sessions we had was on looking at all sorts of different kinds of forms and documents used by different meetings. This like many other aspects of the course illustrates how at meetings like these one can share best (or at least better) practice with one another. One thing for instance many Meetings do is have an annual report from the Nominations Committee presented to the Area Meeting. We have never done that in our Meeting. But there's always a first time, as you will see next year! Part of the value of an annual report is precisely this: it tells Friends what Noms does, and it celebrates rather than hides under a bushel an important aspect of the distinctive Quaker business method.

I thank North of Scotland Area Meeting for supporting my attendance at this course.

Nigel Dower

Prison Ministry

We have continued to hold a Meeting for Worship in Peterhead Prison once a month. There are always two of us from Aberdeen Meeting. Until about a year ago, there were generally eight to ten prisoners joining us on each occasion.

However, the Scottish Prison Service is in the process of drastically reorganising the allocation of prisoners to different establishments. Whereas Peterhead was for many years a central element in the provision of special treatment programmes for men convicted of sex offences, this has now ceased to be the case. Treatment for sex offenders will be concentrated elsewhere. Many of the buildings are going to be demolished, to be replaced by a large regional prison for all categories of inmates including women and young offenders. Aberdeen Prison (Craiginchies) will be demolished (to be replaced by housing estates), and its population will be transferred to Peterhead.

This has not yet happened. But in November 2010 about two-thirds of the Peterhead Prison population were moved elsewhere. The majority were sent to Glenochil (not far from Dunblane). Friends in Dunblane are aware that among those transferred there are several

who regularly attended Meeting in Peterhead, at least one of whom is very keen to have a similar opportunity for Quaker worship in Glenochil. Unfortunately, practical difficulties have as yet militated against this.

Meeting for Worship is now attended by two or three Peterhead prisoners. This is well worthwhile, and we shall continue for as long as they are held there. But they expect to be moved on some time during 2012, perhaps as early as February.

A few of us have also been going to see a prisoner in Craiginches whom we had come to know when he was in Peterhead. He had been released on parole but was recalled. Through him we also briefly made contact with a Burmese prisoner who had come to Britain on a false passport and subsequently appealed for asylum, having been the victim of mistreatment by the military in his home country. His appeal has been rejected, and he was deported on 19 November. But in the interval between his time in Aberdeen and his final interview before deportation, the UK Borders Agency housed him in Bradford, and we were able to put him in touch with a Quaker in Bradford Meeting who had formerly been with us in Aberdeen Meeting.

Peter McCaffery, Aberdeen

Strengthening our Area Meetings Quaker Life: report from your Council Representative

It started in the summer. I sent round a questionnaire to somebody in each Meeting, and waved them at the Pluscarden week-end. We were asked to say what is good in our Area meeting, and I put together the following.

Meeting in beautiful places.

Good at creating, nurturing, maintaining connection and community across a very wide area. Having local Meetings in lovely areas where we get to go for AM.

All the contact **Westray and Papa Westray** have had with AM has been positive, friendly practical and enriching, BUT as we are an outlying Meeting the contact has been limited in recent times. We value the tel. Conferences of Es and Os and even more since the May AM in Westray this year when we could put names to faces; all much easier now with email and web sites as well.

Skye I don't have an answer to this as I am still discovering it(AM). When our Meeting was set up we did not know about AM and that we were supposed to be a part of this (much) larger group.

Lochaber and Lorne I have enjoyed, for the past few years, making an effort to join in Quaker activities in my Area. It has been an effort because our local Meetings are very widespread and travelling to meet people takes a great deal of time and involves staying several nights away from home. However, the contacts and friendships I am making have been very rewarding. My local Quaker Meeting is small; however we are very conscious of the need to feel that we all belong.

Aberdeen Because we are scattered over a large area plus islands we actually enjoy having a residential. We enjoy our outlying visits (and sometimes tack on eg holidays or E/O retreat) and we enjoy only having AM 4 or 5 times a year, not the burden of 10 meetings p/a.

Orkney Travelling to AM does involve a bit of planning and time away from commitments. We are supported by AM in the following ways. Having a nurturing and caring AM, eg they arrange telephone confs for Es/Os and nominations cttee. If somebody is in hospital in Aberdeen a Ffriend will come to visit and offer support. In special circumstances they are a source of advice and support, eg when I was funeral co-ordinator recently. AM also travels around once a year to more remote areas so now have visited Orkney on 2 occasions. The retreat for Es/Os was uplifting and nurturing. AM encourages an understanding of business Mtg. in a Quakerly way. The needs of people with disabilities are taken into account and accommodated. AM facilitates good attendance by offering help with travel costs / accommodation when asked. The *Northern Quaker* also keeps us informed of the wider body of Friends in BYM, and other conferences and reports. Over, say, the last 5 years we are all much more used to emails etc. Although this is very effective it is very different from a phone call! It was good to get your hand written note.

Aberdeen A welcoming and inclusive community? I think so.
Encouraging Attenders and Friends not regulars to come to AM?
Residential ones are well attended.

The work of AM: Newsletter, emails, correspondents.

Keeping Friends informed ref. BYM? Reports from Meeting for Sufferings, and other reps and from those sent on conferences. Friends are encouraged, asked, supported financially to go to conferences, summer shindig etc.

Building community? Residential AMs help.

Nairn I have appreciated the opportunity to learn about the Quaker business method, which I find highly effective and inspiring. I would really appreciate a return to build up the attractiveness of residential AM to children and young people. This worked so well when we met at a place like Bonskeid and Alt-na-Criche but does not work at all well at Pluscarden, so would mean definitely leaving Pluscarden and finding a place where children's activities are part of the framework of the building/grounds. This would in turn mean enlivening local children's Meetings and would happen as children and young people would have more contact with their wider Quaker peers, for which now the only opportunity is every 3 years at YMG/SG. I realise the big implication of this is to find more money to fund a more equipped venue.

So to the **Quaker Life rep council meeting** in October

It was a busy, stimulating, and, for me, exciting week-end. We had updates from committee members so we can have an idea what is going on around Britain. "Do our AMs know what is available for support? Tell them". Hmmm. Well we were reminded that Quaker Life is "to nurture the spiritual life of Friends in their Meetings."

Discovering the best in, and strengthening our Area Meetings, was the core of the w/e. LOADS of lovely ideas, so I have picked out key quotes.

"The purpose of AMs is to build communities living under the guidance of the Spirit" said Linda. "My premise is that AMs are primarily Spiritual Communities: the business meeting is only a part of that: a key part, but only a part".

We were introduced to the method of "**Appreciative Inquiry** (AI). This (in a nutshell) is about:

A shared search for the best in Friends and their area meeting. Discovering what gives “life” to an area meeting community. Asking questions that strengthen an area meeting’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten its potential for doing things well”. Building on Friends’ awareness of capacities: achievements, opportunities, strengths, high point moments, insights and visions.” (building on our brilliance?)

AI looks for the positive. It is not a Pollyanna view that assumes everything is fine when it is not.

Let’s compare:

PROBLEM SOLVING and APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

What must we do to solve this problem? What is the smallest change that could have the biggest impact?”

AI is the co-operative search for the best in people, their organisations, and the world around them. What gives a system “life”? AI deliberately seeks to discover people’s exceptionality – their unique gifts, strengths and qualities. It actively searches and recognises people for their specialities – their essential contributions and achievements. Its assumption is simple. Every organisation has something that works right, things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful. For me, this is very much like being asked to recognise “that of God” in an organisation, in just the way we seek to do with each other. We look for the good first.

SO how can we enable our AMs to really come alive and fulfil their potential? The only answer I can give is: “With God’s help”. This is not a cop-out: it’s a serious answer. It will only happen if we truly try to make it happen: if we revisit the core purpose of our AMs, and invite God in to guide us. This process is what the Quaker way is about. Of course there are other things that will be helpful too, but we have to make the first Step.

4 STEPS : the 4 Ds:

1. DISCOVER 2. DREAM 3. DESIGN 4. DELIVER

This is not just management blurb, honest! In case anybody wonders. We were first asked to practice on ourselves. One suggestion was to think of, and tell a neighbour, 2 really positive things about our present age. You might like to have a go now!

Right, now for one example.

1. *Discover.* We have done this as an AM: see above.

2. *Dream.* What is our ideal for the future? e.g. That our AM becomes much more than just a business / information / decision making meeting, so that people really WANT to come.
3. *Design.* How could this happen? “Might it be helpful to vary the mode of working in business meetings? For example to include opportunities for threshing, worship sharing, or talking in pairs prior as part of our consideration. This might be energising and help develop everyone’s engagement in the process, particularly those who have difficulty sitting still and quietly for long periods” (that last definitely includes me)
4. *Deliver.* How will AM implement the change? (shrug) Put it on the agenda? Get committees talking about it? Visit other Meetings, get known, talk with excitement about AM ?

All ideas gratefully received!

One query we had was “Does you AM spend a right proportion of its time on:” included “testing and supporting concerns”. Please note a concern about children and young people that came up in our AM review.

And **Saturday evening FUN**. This is Quakers too!

Diana Brockbank

Strengthening our Area Meetings **Some queries offered to help focus our discernment**

The purpose of Area Meeting

How clear is your Area Meeting about its purposes as defined in *Quaker faith & practice*?

Does your Area Meeting spend a right proportion of its time on:

- Testing and supporting concerns, upholding Friends acting under concern, referring wider concerns to Meeting for Sufferings when appropriate?
- Managing membership matters, including welcoming new Friends into membership and releasing Friends whose connection with Quakers has faded away, and ensuring records are accurate?
- Encouraging and ensuring arrangements for eldership and oversight are in place?
- Ensuring the right holding of Meeting for Worship and Business Meeting across the Area Meeting?
- Appointing, working with and supporting Area Meeting trustees and treasurers to ensure appropriate stewardship of resources: financial, human and property?

The effectiveness of Area Meeting

How good is your Area Meeting at its job?

- How accessible are Area Meetings for Business – to older Friends, younger Friends, Friends in full-time employment, Friends with children?
- Is your Area Meeting for Business well attended? Is it a ‘must-attend’ event? Does your AM use agenda time creatively to allow the spirit to move?
- Does the conduct of your Area Meeting for Business enable Friends to gain understanding and experience of the Quaker business method?
- Does your AM use committees and trustees well to help it manage the volume of required business?
- How aware are Friends in your Area Meeting of the work of Britain Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, and of the centrally-managed work?
- Does your Area Meeting struggle to find suitable nominations? Is your AM the right size, or should it consider the adventurous step of joining with another?

- Is your Area Meeting a true worshipping community? What would help to foster this? Does your Area Meeting ever meet for purposes other than business?
- Are your Area Meeting, and its members, willing to shoulder responsibilities, or do they expect that 'someone else will do it'?

What support does your Area Meeting need to function well?

Is your Area Meeting aware of the support it can draw on, and what types of support does it make use of to strengthen and nurture itself and its membership?

- Support for treasurers and trustees from Quaker Stewardship Committee and Quaker Communications
- Support for Elders and Overseers from Quaker Life
- Support on property matters from Quaker Finance & Property
- Support and ideas for Outreach from Quaker Life and organisations such as Quaker Quest
- Support for archivists from Friends House Library
- Guidance for Registering Officers and advice on church governance from the Recording Clerk's Office
- Ideas and resources for work with Children & Young People from Quaker Life Children & Young People's Staff Team
- Books and resources from the Quaker Bookshop in the Quaker Centre
- Support for Local Initiatives via Quaker Peace & Social Witness
- Training in Quaker roles available from Woodbrooke
- Conferences and courses at Woodbrooke and other Quaker venues

What other support would your Area Meeting like to be made available?

To what extent should Britain Yearly Meeting's staff be proactive in offering support?

What is already happening to support the progress of this concern?

Quaker Life Representative Council in October 2011 will be on the theme of 'Appreciating Area Meeting: looking at our Area Meetings through the technique of Appreciative Inquiry'.

Appreciative Inquiry is a way of asking questions that strengthen a meeting's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. It has been the method underlying the successful programme of Quaker Life Explorations and it is hoped that members of Representative Council will be able to learn from each other's experience and be in a position to share the process of appreciative enquiry with their meetings.

The information gleaned from looking at Area Meetings in this way at Representative Council will help Quaker Life respond positively to the needs of Area Meetings and inform the planning of a conference for Area Meeting Clerks at Woodbrooke, over the weekend of Friday 16th – Sunday 18th November 2012, which is being arranged jointly by Woodbrooke and Quaker Life.

Meeting for Sufferings representatives may wish to work with Quaker Life Representatives and Area Meeting clerks to share ideas and help make the most of these events.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, Sept 2011

Scottish Government Consultation on same sex marriages

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/05153328/0>

This consultation paper seeks views on the possibility of allowing religious ceremonies for civil partnerships and the possible introduction of same sex marriage.

This Government believes in religious tolerance and the freedom to worship. We also believe in equality and diversity.

There are a variety of views on religious ceremonies for civil partnerships and on same sex marriage. We hope that everyone will use this consultation to express their views and opinions. However, as the debate unfolds, we also hope that everyone will treat those with different or opposing views with courtesy and respect, in accordance with the very highest standards of democratic discourse.

The Scottish Government is choosing to make its initial views clear at the outset of this consultation. We tend towards the view that religious ceremonies for civil partnerships should no longer be prohibited and that same sex marriage should be introduced so that same sex couples have the option of getting married if that is how they wish to demonstrate their commitment to each other. We also believe that no religious body or its celebrants should be required to carry out same sex marriages or civil partnership ceremonies.

(See the Scottish Friend Oct 2011 p17-19, for a general statement to accompany the response submitted on behalf of General Meeting for Scotland.)

Quaker Service – National Memorial Arboretum

The immediate purpose of a memorial will be remembrance of the service by the **Friends Ambulance Unit** and **Friends Relief Service** during World War II. For the Society today, it will also be an opportunity for outreach. Some 300,000 people visit the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas near Lichfield, each year. A site which is explicit in its statement of Friends' witness and commitment to peace may well find resonance, provided its message draws on our common humanity.

A reminder of our testimonies to **Peace, Simplicity, Truth** and **Equality** will be placed at the base of the four seats. There will be six texts, four carved on the backs of the stone seats and two on the front.

FRIENDS AMBULANCE UNIT: The Unit enabled conscientious objectors to serve in theatres of war. They cared for civilian and military casualties of any nation in both World Wars. Seventeen members lost their lives in World War II.

FRIENDS RELIEF SERVICE: The Service was set up in 1939 to relieve civilian distress. Its members worked in a spirit of peace at a time of war in the UK, Europe and farther afield.

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE: “It is the silent help from the nameless to the nameless which is the Quakers’ contribution to the promotion of brotherhood between nations.” Citation from the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Quakers in 1947.

On the front

“Let your life speak, answering that of God in everyone”
George Fox, 1624 – 1691, founder of Quakerism

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS): The Society emerged after the civil war of the 1640s with a commitment “to live by virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars”. Quakers continue to work worldwide for peace and reconciliation.

On the front

Quaker meetings for worship are often held in a circle, a symbol of unity and equality.

Quaker Service Memorial Trust
registered charity no. 1142335

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**This picture was made by young Friends
attending Junior Yearly Meeting
in Canterbury, July-August 2011**

A Picture of Christmas

I think it was Christmas 1935 when among the more childish presents I received a picture of the nativity, which hung for many years in my bedroom.

The picture was in three parts, with the nativity taking centre stage. On one side there was the heavenly host of angels, on the other were the shepherds and townsfolk together with a well-heeled Caucasian boy and girl standing in the foreground.

The main picture showed the stable with Mary and the baby Jesus. The baby lay in the central hay rack with an ox and an ass, both beasts of burden, looked on by Joseph. The scene was calm, clean and peaceful.

Isaiah's prophecy "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not", echoed in John's gospel, began to come to pass from the very moment of Jesus' conception. The New English Bible makes it clear that without divine guidance Joseph, believing the baby was not his, would have quietly set the marriage contract aside. Thus the baby started off life at a disadvantage.

In the eyes of the Jews how could a man so disadvantaged as to be conceived out of wedlock, born in a stable to a family of tradesmen, possibly be the long awaited Messiah? The Mighty One destined to save Israel from all its enemies. This people, who had for so long been under the yoke of foreign powers yearned for the return of the glories of Solomon, and were not and are not two thousand years later prepared to accept this itinerant preacher of non-violence as the long awaited one.

The life that began in the lowly cattle shed was destined to continue on its disadvantaged way. As Albert Schweitzer has pointed out in a somewhat different context, in his writings about the crucifixion, it was necessary when God was displayed in human form that He should be exposed to personal physical and psychological abuse from His own people. Hence

the prophecy of both David (Psalm 22) and Isaiah (Isaiah chapter 53) might be fulfilled, and that the Almighty by enduring some of the worst hardships to befall human kind could be seen to be truly human and truly divine.

No picture can illustrate either the smell of the stable or the risk of infection to both mother and child. Nor does this sanitised image of the nature of the nativity give any indication of the hazards faced by the young couple during their enforced ninety mile journey. This journey took them from the comparative safety of the Roman ruled Galilee to the territory ruled by the insecure Marshal Petain-like figure of Herod. Nor does one get any inkling of the distress suffered on finding that there was no room at the Inn. It cannot foretell further hardship endured as the family fled from the infanticide ordered by the despotic king.

At Christmas time we are reminded of these words of Isaiah, and also of the words from Mark's gospel "do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (Mark 8:18).

How true those words sound as we continue to fight wars in the name of religion hoping to create heaven on earth by imposing our own will, when in fact the True Way is already here if we know where to look.

Roger Quinn, Inverness