



May  
2016

# Scottish Friend



Gargoyle on St. Vitus' cathedral, Prague

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❖ Contents ❖

Fifty Years of Women Elders	Eva Deregowska 3
Report of April Meeting for Sufferings	Jane Pearn 5
Invisible Women	Margaret Roy 7
United Reformed Church Spring Synod	Graham Morton 10
Report of March General Meeting	Jane Pearn 12
Warning about Queen Street Station	15
Invitation to June General Meeting	Martin Burnell 16

Please send material for next *Scottish Friend* by Friday 5 August to Margaret Peacock, 16 Drumlin Drive, Milngavie, G62 6LN, or [nmjpeacock@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nmjpeacock@yahoo.co.uk).

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FIFTY YEARS OF WOMEN ELDERS  
IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

<3>

An extract from *Life and Work*, contributed by Eva Deręgowska<sup>LS</sup>

The Very Rev Dr Finlay Macdonald looks back on the 35-year debate that led to women being admitted to the Eldership of the Church of Scotland in 1966.

"In May it will be fifty years since the General Assembly of 1966 finally opened the eldership to women. I say 'finally' because it took a while."

In 1931 the Assembly received a petition calling for eldership and ministry to be open to women. The petition asserted that 'the continued exclusion of women from these offices is contrary to the mind and teaching of Christ and limits the operation of the Spirit of God.'

This was referred to the intriguingly named Committee on the Place of Women in the Church. The Committee reported back in 1933 recommending eligibility for eldership but not ministry. The recommendation was referred to presbyteries but failed to secure the necessary support.

The following decade brought the Second World War and in 1940 the Assembly appointed a Special Commission, convened by Professor John Baillie, 'for the Interpretation of God's Will in the Present Crisis'. During those dark years the Commission presented a series of reports and the one brought in 1944 included a recommendation that eldership should be open to women. The proposal was referred to presbyteries and was approved by a margin of 39 to 27. However, the 1945 Assembly was persuaded to send the matter back to presbyteries with a specific instruction to consult with Kirk sessions and congregations. The outcome was a complete reversal of the vote with 44 presbyteries opposed and 22 in favour.

The focus of attention then shifted to women and the ministry, with

<4>

a petition brought before the General Assembly. This was remitted to the recently formed Panel on Doctrine. The following year the Panel reported that it reserved its position with regard to ministry but was strongly in favour of women elders.

It is interesting from today's perspective to hear some of the arguments advanced against women elders in that entirely male debate. One commissioner upbraided the 'fathers and brethren', suggesting that the men of the Church should be ashamed that women might need to take on the duties of eldership. Another suggested that it was no compliment to women to make them 'little imitation men'. A third asked if the Panel might not consider creating a new order for women, separate from the eldership; and someone with a long memory recalled what had happened in 1948 and moved an amendment to have the Overture sent also to Kirk sessions and congregations.

The terms of the General Assembly Act of 1966 could not be clearer: 'Women members of a congregation shall be eligible for election and admission as elders on the same terms and conditions as men members of a congregation'. However, right from the start, the interpretation of the new law became muddled. Given the division of opinion there was no expectation that every Kirk session would have women elders overnight. As a consequence an impression emerged that the legislation was entirely permissive.

It was only in 1991 that the General Assembly stated: 'The fact that a Kirk session has always chosen men from the total number of those available is not in itself a breach of the law. However, if as a matter of policy or principle a Kirk session deliberately restricted its choice to men, and denied the eligibility of women, the law has been contravened'.

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Nowadays women outnumber men as elders, and Alison Elliot, an elder, was elected Moderator of the General Assembly in 2004.

Report: Meeting for Sufferings 2nd April 2016

Jane Pearn, South East Scotland Area Meeting

By the time you read this, Yearly Meeting will have taken place. As I write, I wonder how the matters we considered at the beginning of April will have developed.

Yearly Meeting 2015 asked Meeting for Sufferings to coordinate the work of Local and Area Meetings on the 'Call to Equality' minute. Sufferings doesn't really have a mechanism for coordination. However, it can encourage, share information and provide networking opportunities. There is a section of the BYM website devoted to 'sharing our stories'. Have you have been involved in any form of witness? If so, this is an opportunity to share what you have done, and for us all to be inspired by stories from across our Yearly Meeting. [www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/our-stories](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/our-stories)

We were asked to take two matters back to our Area Meetings for further discernment. Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee commends the paper 'A vision for a criminal justice system'. Written in the style of Edward Burrough (QFP 23.11), it articulates what we are for and what we are against. For example, 'We are against the simplistic concept of good victims and bad criminals. We are for treating offenders as people who need help to take responsibility for themselves and their actions.' The other matter is related. For several years, Cornwall Area Meeting has been working on a concern about drugs, and has produced very thorough briefing papers. They ask that we consider their discerned view that possession of drugs, for personal use, should be decriminalised. This will come back to Sufferings in due course. It will be interesting to see if Friends in Scotland can reach a common mind on this matter.

A well-grounded session on testing concerns led to thoughtful and

<6>

deeply felt ministry. Friends spoke of their personal experience of acting under concern: 'unnerving, frightening.' Other ministry focused on the process of testing.

'It can be a bruising experience.'

'I have to be prepared to be vulnerable.'

Underlying most of the contributions was an insistence that we need to listen to the spirit first, and that Meeting for Worship is the source. We heard that many individual Friends feel that they are acting under concern, but it is rare for them to go to their meeting for testing and discernment. The result may be that concerns are less well tested and clarified, and that meetings at all levels lack experience in the process.

We received two minutes regarding British weapons sold to Saudi Arabia, and their use in Yemen. Unfortunately, reference to human rights clouded the issue. Friends are rightly worried about human rights in many countries, but it is the Foreign Office that links them to arms sales. The government may be in breach of its own guidelines: but I doubt that we want to say that the arms trade is perfectly acceptable – as long as it is between countries with adequate internal human rights records. If you are dismayed by Britain's role in fuelling conflict, I urge you to support Campaign Against Arms Trade. CAAT was set up in 1974 by a coalition of interests, including Quakers, to do this essential work. CAAT has well-informed staff, inventive and award winning campaigns, and is committed to non-violence. Quakers have a long history of helping to set up initiatives, for example Oxfam in 1942, and more recently Circles of Support and Accountability. It would be a pity if we then ask why Friends aren't doing anything!

Finally – Peter Ullathorne, BYM treasurer, reported that last year's target of £2 million in contributions was reached. However, he urged us to give more to ensure that the work that we want done in our name can continue, and be done better. £3 million is the new target.

## Invisible Women

Margaret Roy, Lanark Meeting

According to Radio 4, in 128 countries of the world women legally have lower status than men.

Does this surprise you? What does it mean?

I am writing this on the first Friday in March, the designated day of the Women's World Day of Prayer – except in Scotland it is the World Day of Prayer because, a female minister friend tells me, we also pray for the men. Good Oh! And there was me thinking the whole purpose was to identify issues and support women in 'third world' countries. It was also the week of International Women's Day.

Does it surprise you that there are 600 women in Scotland who are known to have been the subject of FGM? If the population of Scotland is 6 million that is 1:10,000. In a town the size of Airdrie that is 4 women; in a city the size of Glasgow it is 60. And given that Glasgow is more Multi-cultural than most towns/cities in Scotland, it is no doubt far higher there. So what is FGM you ask? Just so. Hilary Burrage's book on FGM donated to Glasgow Quaker Library has never been taken out, yet. And at 600, that is almost as many women as there are Quakers in Scotland, almost one each.

Representing General Meeting on World Day of Prayer, I have been amazed and appalled not at the stories of women's oppression and abuse but at the subtlety by which the condition of women is hidden. One of the 'authorities' commented, on the recent trials of men found guilty of grooming and sexual abuse of young girls in Rochdale, that . . . this was just the tip of the iceberg and that it was probably happening in a town near YOU. Sensational? There was a ballyhoo about women being groped in Germany – I believe one of the towns was Cologne. However, it just slips past that the German

<8>

police were 'not interfering' in the sexual abuse of women in the refugee camps, just as there is little spoken of the dangers to women in the refugee camps in Turkey, etc. A woman on her own, i.e. without a man, in many Moslem societies is free, so available. Yet, to insinuate such is to question the values of Islam, how racist! Having rejected the patriarchal nature of our own 'Christian' values all my life, I find the religion of Islam very difficult especially after listening to the life of Moslem women students.

I have reported to you before of the campaign Black Thursdays. This is not a white, Western-led initiative of concerned liberal-minded folks in the civilised, informed West. It is a campaign of the churches in Africa in response to the common phenomenon of the rape of women in the many military strives in that continent – a much more effective weapon than Trident and well-known to ISIS. And, have you the faintest clue of the situation in Europe that may have been WORSE after the WW2 than during it, especially for women. Who talks about it when we can glorify the military sacrifice and victory? Pacifism is not about anti-war; it is about establishing a quality of life based on the principles of Peace. Black Thursdays spoke to my heart and I wore black on Thursdays for several months till I realised it made very little impact here in Britain where black is a fashion colour of choice. Very different from the traditional dress of African women. And, Middle East women have no hope of standing out in black!

I have become aware of all sorts of ways in which women's story is hidden, or reduced to a by-word.

As a very active feminist in days of yore, I was strongly motivated by the theme 'when we enter in the game we're gonna change the goddamn rules'. The movement seemed to grow out of the Vietnam War and screamed PEACE. Quaker values expressed it for me. It was much much more than equal pay and sexual liberation, but



somehow that is what it has become. That and only that???

Look at the cult of celebrity and listen to the words of pop songs, and tell me what we have achieved. Pink the only colour? Free to open your legs and indulge in sex with anyone? Young girls don't have the experience to discriminate. Yes, we are more emotional, more feeling, and so more easily exploited. And that is not to dismiss young men who may also be feeling types and easily exploited in a world where sex, quick fixes and feel-good are the rules.

I've just watched a well-recommended TV series. One hour, the whole one hour, the couple were in bed indulging in all forms of sex, explicitly. Soft porn I thought, embarrassed I was watching it with my brothers. Thankfully, they weren't there for the last in the series that was vivid, explicit S & M laced throughout the hour so it could hardly be avoided or fast-forwarded . . . if you wanted to see how it all ended. Why watch it? I am not a voyeur. I used to like crime stories until I became sickened by the high proportion of women murdered, abused and raped. CHANGE THE RULES! What do we have to do?

How to change the world drastically. The biggest effect could be to change the attitude to half the population - women. I could drench you with examples. We are lucky as Quakers. Our way IS a bit more enlightened but . . . it is not what we DO but HOW we do it that has marked Quakers down the centuries. Our 'rules' are different. HOW? Well, we don't take sides but see the unity and preciousness of all life, and we treasure its uniqueness. That will do for starters. Mind you, have you noticed how we lose it a little when into the field of politics we decry and despise the Other? Got some growing to do.

<10>

Thanks for the Grace of God

Graham Morton, Perth Meeting

Thank you for the privilege of participating in the Synod of Scotland of the United Reformed Church (URC) in March 2016, as a representative of General Meeting.

What did I 'take from' or learn at the weekend?

- \* The warmth of the welcome extended to the 'ecumenical guests' - of whom I was one of (I think) five.
- \* Being regarded as an equal was refreshing (having become accustomed to the separation of sheep from goats). It was stressed that contributions to the deliberations from ecumenical guests would be welcomed, and that we were entitled to participate in votes too.
- \* Developing lay leadership is a priority, ministers being in short supply. Resources and ministers are increasingly being shared through 'clusters' - such as Tayside & Fife - or via local ecumenical partnerships with churches from other denominations. Many areas with substantial populations, such as Perth, lack any URC presence while Dunning and Newburgh (Fife) have small ones.
- \* As with many local Quaker meetings, collaborating with others to build or sustain community is often very important. In Selkirk, for example, people from different churches work together very effectively to enable older people to meet and support each other. The warmth of many relationships (individual and collective) across denominational boundaries was a theme I heard a number of times.
- \* It was lovely to meet and learn from people such as Mary, a nurse. Originally from Kenya, she lives in one of Edinburgh's more deprived areas. In one of the projects in which she is involved, Granton Community Gardeners, the gardens are

all shared, everyone works together and the produce is shared out – with enough for more than two hundred people to eat together. Vicky Allan has written about such projects in her Herald article *Croft Work*.

Most of the representatives were lay people, not clergy.

Why the title of this article? While it wasn't a specific theme (in a sermon, for example) and may not have been mentioned many times, 'grace' was the word which made most impact on me. The same applied several years ago when (at a Quaker meeting in Buckinghamshire) I heard a Member – a particularly lovely person! – speak of 'thanking God for his grace' as shown in the life of someone who had recently died.

The word doesn't appear in the subject index of my edition of *Quaker Faith & Practice* but this comes from 11.41:

The light of Christ, a universal light and known inwardly, is our guide. It is the grace of God which gives us the strength to follow. It is his forgiveness which restores us when we are oppressed by the sense of falling short.

Attracted by the title 'A compelling story of transforming grace' of a recent review by Rowan Williams, I must now try to read Marilynne Robinson's novel *Lila*.

Thank you, General Meeting and URC. Maybe I should add that a URC church has played a huge part in my life. It was there that I met Rosemary, my 'other half'.

<12>

General Meeting held on 5th March

Jane Pearn, Kelso Meeting

Thirty of us, from all four Area Meetings and from eleven of our thirty-six Local Meetings, received a warm welcome from Friends in St Andrews. We weren't many, but it was good to be worshipping and discerning with committed Friends. As we settled into worship the tone was set by a reading from Quaker Faith and Practice: 3.29 reminding us that our meetings should 'do us good'.

Our treasurer, John Phillips, took us through last year's accounts. To pay our share of the costs of our Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer we drew on our reserves as well as increasing the 'quota' contribution from each Area Meeting by a substantial amount. It seems to me that it's one way of showing that we own this work.

There was some discussion about our printed Book of Members and Attenders. Should it be electronic only? It would save expense and paper. But it would exclude Friends who don't use computers. What about security and confidentiality? And some of us like having the book by the phone. We asked for further thought to be given to this. With a couple of tweaks to the Trustees' report, we accepted both this and the accounts.

In giving my Meeting for Sufferings report I encouraged the meeting to look at the life of Friends in Scotland through the prism of Our Faith in the Future. 'Quaker values are active in Scotland and in the world.' 'Quakers are well known in Scotland and widely understood'. It led to thoughtful ministry. We are few in number and scattered: we have about 700 Friends in membership, fewer than the number of refugees Scotland has committed to welcoming. How can we be well known and widely understood? Wise counsel reminded us that we don't seek to be better known for its own sake, but to meet the needs of spiritual seekers who might find a home with us. We were encouraged to find opportunities to contribute to our schools' Religious, Moral & Philosophical Studies, which include the

themes of prisons and peace. Perhaps we could offer training so that every Local Meeting has someone to call on? It was good to hear that Polmont LM plans to mark its 30th anniversary with a Peace Pole in a prominent and well visited location.

Elizabeth Allen spoke about the work being done by Mairi Campbell-Jack, our Parliamentary Engagement Officer, who has been in post for just over a year. She is supported and advised by the Parliamentary Liaison Function Group. Our petition about the involvement of the Armed Forces in our schools, co-sponsored with ForcesWatch, is now with the Holyrood Petitions Committee. It calls for more transparency about the number and location of visits; that there is guidance about providing balance and honesty concerning the reality of military life; and that parents and guardians are consulted. By this time you read this, the petition will have closed, but as I write there are 878 signatures. Elizabeth asked about the group's communications with us in our meetings. Too much? Too little? Is Facebook useful? The GM website? She asked, 'Are we reaching you?'

By now we were running late but decided to postpone lunch despite rumblings and complete the morning's business. We've appointed Pamala McDougall and Joyce Taylor to travel to Brussels with a delegation from ACTS to learn about the European Union and reflect on the issues. Very timely, and I'm looking forward to hearing from them.

Our Clerk, Martin Burnell, told us about a meeting he'd had with the Recording Clerk of BYM and the Clerk to Meeting for Friends in Wales. It's good to hear that our Yearly Meeting is becoming more active in considering how to accommodate increasing political devolution - but just as importantly, differences in culture and priorities within the nations that make up the family of BYM. Marianne Butler, from my own LM, is working with the Quaker Meeting Houses Heritage project. She'll be involved with the seven

<14>

Meeting Houses owned by Friends in Scotland. Over lunch she told me, 'This is a wonderful opportunity to review our Meeting Houses as models of Quaker values.'

Phil Lucas, deputising for Jim Pym, went to Nicola Sturgeon's first 'interfaith summit'. Attended by Imams, Rabbis, leaders of the Christian denominations and others with roles in interfaith projects, Phil was impressed by the First Minister's knowledge of the faith traditions and the tone of the discussion. He was impressed too that they all seemed to know each other well, and that the FM was on first name terms with nearly all of them.

Elizabeth Allen brought us up to date with developments around prison ministry. She feels there might be opportunities to contribute something of Quaker process. A briefing paper is being prepared, and a 'taster session' of creative listening is to be offered at a meeting of the Scottish prison chaplaincy advisors.

As our Clerk said, 'there's a lot going on'. That leads to overruns for our business, as happened today. But also it seems that we're becoming less keen on our yearly weekend residentials. Last year's attracted particularly poor attendance especially on the Sunday morning. We agreed to circulate a survey of those who come, and those who don't, to find out what would help.

Lunch at last. But not before Assistant Clerk Adwoa Bittle, who also serves on the Book of Discipline Revision Preparation Group, had sternly reminded us to complete her questionnaire in the March edition of Scottish Friend – or else. I hope you have! A show of hands made it clear that the vast majority of us in the room are engaged in the Reading Quaker Faith and Practice project. It seems we agreed with her that 'it's massively important that we engage with our current book.'

The afternoon was devoted to silent worship and one topic –

affiliations and donations. A dry business? Not at all. It's about working with others and promoting Quaker values. It's about our witness in the world. John Philips presented us with a draft set of guidelines to help future discernment. The current system has grown piecemeal rather than being thought through from first principles, so this will be very helpful. He shared the pleasure he gets from reading the letters of thanks – the sense of enthusiasm, excitement and gratitude.

We moved into worship-sharing. We were clear that requests for financial support for non-Quaker groups must arise from personal engagement and reflect tested concern. We asked to hear more about how the money has been used, and for regular reviews. There were some reservations about details, but we were assured that this was not intended to be prescriptive. Exceptions could be made if the spirit moved us. We were content that our suggestions had been heard and asked the Trustees to finalise the document. We closed with a short period of stillness together. Then, fuelled by tea, cake and conversation, we took our leave.

### General Meeting for Scotland

Glasgow Meeting House will welcome Friends on 11 June. Queen Street station upper level will be closed till 8 August and trains from the north will go to Central. Trains from Edinburgh will go to Queen Street low level - and conveniently on to Charing Cross. Considerable googling is advised, for instance to

[https://www.scotrail.co.uk/sites/default/files/assets/download\\_ct/qs\\_z-fold\\_leaflet\\_web.pdf](https://www.scotrail.co.uk/sites/default/files/assets/download_ct/qs_z-fold_leaflet_web.pdf)

General Meeting for Scotland, 11th June 2016 at 11 am  
Glasgow Meeting House, 38 Elmbank Crescent, G2 4PS

*The challenge of ending displacement is inseparable from the challenge of establishing and maintaining peace. When wars end, farmers return to their fields; children return to school; violence against women declines; trade and economic activity resume; medical and other services become more accessible, and the international focus changes from relief to development and self-sufficiency. All this makes new wars less likely. It is a virtuous cycle that deserves nurture and support.*

*Kenneth H. Bacon (former president of Refugees International)*

Dear Friends and Attenders throughout Scotland,

General Meeting on 11th June will start with tea and coffee from 10.30, and then Meeting for Worship for Business from 11.00 am. We will welcome Bob Fyffe, General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, to our afternoon session. He will speak of his experience as a member of the CTBI fact-finding expedition to refugee camps in Macedonia and will update us on recent actions to influence Government policy on the refugee issue.

During the morning business session, we will consider the UK Government's decision to use money from fines on banks to extend the presence of cadet forces in our schools and will hear about other work undertaken by our Parliamentary Liaison Function Group. We hope Robin Davis will report on the work of Trustees and we will hear from Pamala McDougall and Joyce Taylor on their recent visit to Brussels as part of a delegation from ACTS. We will also consider a number of nominations and other more routine business.

This will be an informative and interesting meeting and an opportunity to meet other Friends from throughout Scotland.

I do encourage you to attend.

Martin Burnell, Clerk