

West Scotland Quaker Newsletter

August 2016

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Clerk's Letter August 2016

In the spring of 480 the inhabitants of a settlement on the Swedish island of Öland were attacked. They had time to hide their valuables under the floorboards but were overwhelmed and all – men, women, children – were killed by people who left the bodies where they fell and sealed the place off. Even in living memory children were warned not to go near that site as a place of badness, although all knowledge of the event itself had died and was only uncovered by recent excavations. It is thought the killers were their neighbours who must have had some dreadful grievance against them to perpetuate the hatred in a way that lasted through centuries. We don't know exactly what the grievance was but it might have something to do with the inhabitants' wealth and prestige.

In 5000 BC near Frankfurt in Germany a village of 26 people were attacked at dawn and all killed and dumped in a mass grave. The motive is not clear but evidence suggests a problem of resources caused by drought or environmental changes. Archaeologists speculate that without leadership structures beyond the group, conflicts in those days were intensely personal and hard to defuse. "There were probably codes of honour, respect and revenge that structured interactions, with the result being that things could get nasty quickly."

We still get surprised when humans are horrible to each other, and the temptation to cynicism about humanity is great. We are all too aware of how the targeting of one group by others can destabilise whole regions and leave us in Europe with a sense that all is crumbling. It is no surprise that there is a rise of ways of thinking, whether it from far right political groups or military strategists, that seeks to dehumanise those blamed for the problems and to publicise quick easy 'solutions' that depend on the way some are shown negatively.

We can't pretend, should not pretend, that human behaviour is not deeply rooted in ways that can cause our own downfall. But we can understand it and find ways by which it can be channeled differently. Quaker – and other- experience stresses the benefits to all when we treat all with integrity and respect, even those whom we don't agree with. And we have numerous examples of transformation of potentially harmful situations as a result; by showing positive leadership. William Penn reminded us that 'Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity; but for that reason, it should be the most our care to learn it.' Quaker faith & practice 22.01. And we can.

Michael Hutchinson, Glasgow Meeting

Taking care of one another

Only 16 people from eight of our local meetings took part in this AM.

Most of the matters were routine and notices.

The main substantive item of business was a request by a Friend to resign her membership. We accepted the resignation but hope to keep in touch with her.

We discussed the need for face-to-face interactions where practicable when it came to *taking care of one another*. Modern communication although extremely useful can come across in a way that was not intended even on the telephone. Similarly, those communicating by email need to take time to reread what they have written before pressing the Send button.

Those who had attended Yearly Meeting spoke about how well the clerking team there had worked, and that successful provision had been made for children with mobility difficulties.

Friends and attenders, even those who have never taken part in a GM, are urged to complete the questionnaire about the General Meeting for Scotland to be found at [http://bit.ly.quakerq](http://bit.ly/quakerq) .

Jane Mitchell, Argyll

Martin Luther King Jr

Never succumb to the temptation of becoming bitter. As you press for justice, be sure to move with dignity and discipline, using only the instruments of love.

Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA)

Statement on UK referendum decision 27th June 2016

Andrew Lane QCEA representative has commented on the result of the UK's EU membership referendum.

“The UK has decided to step away from an organisation which acts as a mechanism for dialogue, and which is a pillar of peace in Europe and the world. More effort is now needed find ways to keep peace in Europe and to preserve the positive. In particular we should endeavour to ensure that the UK does not withdraw from the European Convention of Human Rights”,

“Europe, including the UK, will be in greater need of Quaker values as an antidote to an emboldened far-right and to increased division and volatility that will be felt worst by the most vulnerable.”

“The UK has voted to leave the EU, but cannot leave Europe, and nor can it walk away from very real global challenges. Without the EU, the UK needs to find other ways to work in an integrated way with countries in Europe and beyond to address war, poverty and climate change”,

Reflection at Quaker House Brussels

Immediately after the result was announced QCEA opened the doors of Quaker House Brussels for anyone affected or worried about the UK leaving the EU. QCEA recognised that many UK nationals working within the EU institutions will have the course of their, and their family's, lives and careers changed by the referendum result. QCEA set aside space for quiet reflection, but also welcomed visitors who wanted to share their shock and sadness.

The Quaker Council for European Affairs brings a Quaker vision of just relationships to the 28 member European Union and to the 47 member Council of Europe.

Perhaps I myself am the enemy who must be loved – Carl Jung

William Penn Wrote

From *The Peace of Europe*

The sovereign princes of Europe, including the Muscovite and the Turk, should agree to meet by stated deputies in a General Diet, and there establish international rules of justice, afterwards meeting at intervals to adjust all differences that could not be made up by diplomacy. . . . The office of president circulating, the room round, with divers doors for entrance and exit to avoid quarrels for precedency, the voting by ballot and a three-fourths majority. The only restraints will be that the great fish can no longer eat up the little and that each will be equally defended from injuries and disabled from committing them.

He also wrote . . .

Avoid occasion of misunderstanding, allow for weaknesses and variety of constitution and disposition, and take care of showing the least disgust or misunderstanding to others – especially your children.

. . . and . . .

A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it . . . It is as great presumption to send our passions upon God's errands, as it is to palliate them with God's name . . . We are too ready to retaliate rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did once see we love them, we would soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel. *QF&P 24.03*

True Godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it: not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick. *QF&P 21.17*

On Early Friends . . .

They were change men themselves before they went about to change others. Their hearts were rent as well as their garments, and they knew the power and work of God upon them . . . *QF&P 19.48*

Outreach, Witness and Community Course at Woodbrooke 1-3 July 16

Liz Anderton and I recently attended this course at Woodbrooke on behalf of West Scotland Area Meeting. There were 23 participants, including friends from Brussels, Prague and Oslo. I got a strong sense of Quakers' presence across Europe and the world.

The thought-provoking course looked at philosophical approaches to outreach, as well as practical steps to engage with local communities. We thought about what had first brought us to Friends, and why we chose to stay.

On Saturday morning we did a session on Quaker theology. This surprised me. "Theology" makes me think of the entrance to the Faculty of Divinity at St Andrews. There are letters carved over the gate – IN PRINCIPIO ERAT VERBUM – "In the beginning was the Word". This seems at odds with the diversity of belief that attracted me to Quakers. However it's helpful to clarify what we believe, individually and as a community. Before we invite people in, we need to know what's in the house.

In common with Quakerism's practical emphasis we discussed strategies for successful outreach events. Friends on the course came from meetings of various sizes, so we considered how to adapt events to a meeting's circumstances. There was a presentation on Manchester Local Meeting's strong links with Manchester Pride. Westminster Meeting runs a weekly drop-in silence. The silence has no overt Quaker content but it may encourage visitors to attend Meeting for Worship at a later date. Members of a smaller meeting made plans to hold a Meeting for Worship in a local station. We also thought about how a small and perhaps ageing meeting could manage outreach. We acknowledged the central role of cake in attracting people to our meetings. Shared meals make people feel welcome. They also strengthen friendships between a meeting's existing members.

In order to reach out a meeting needs to be a strong community that people want to join. We practised using Quaker processes to deepen relationships. One exercise was a meeting for clearness, in which we each raised an issue and then worked together to imagine possible solutions. I found this very helpful. Just before trains on Sunday morning we explored the varied resources available from Friends House. These are available to all meetings free. Finally we held a Meeting for Worship. Sharing the silence was very moving. One piece of ministry was "Why should people care what we know unless they know that we care?"

Outreach is about showing people that we care. When I first came to Friends Quakers welcomed and cared for me when I was bereaved. Over time I found that

I care very much what Friends know and that I know it too, after my own fashion. I used to think that religion was the words over the Faculty of Divinity's gate. That is one of its forms. But Frederick Parker Rhodes says, "What is my religion? My friends". Friendship, to people we know and people we don't, is successful outreach.

Nuala Watt, Glasgow Meeting

My First Meeting for Sufferings

Ed Tyler

My first experience in Friends House, London, was for Meeting for Sufferings (standing in for Barbara Robinson who has been attending as our Representative for the past year or so) was enriching for me on a number of levels.

The long-distance effort of getting there and back by bus and train was amply rewarded. I feel now that I:

- understand a lot more about how the British Quaker movement "works".
- am now a messenger with a useful role, assisting flow between different levels, between my local/area meeting and bodies acting nationally.
- feel strengthened. Representatives of all of Britain's Area Meetings (bar three) were there and as we worshipped together I felt a deep sense of gatheredness. It was a "responsive" meeting in that we made time to reflect on the recent European Referendum result.
- am getting to know members of staff (including those at QPSW), BYM trustees and clerks.
- am getting a UK perspective on my own concern of Sustainability (I was able to talk to QPSW about the latest Quaker work on a New Economy)

Simply visiting Friends House on the busy Euston Road, with its excellent café and restaurant, provided me with fresh "leadings". I am aware of Glasgow Friends' plans for a new/refurbished Meeting House and hope that they will include a café to provide an informal, convivial, social space.

It also spurred me on in my role as Young Person's Coordinator for BYM. Coming up in December, Meeting for Sufferings will be holding a parallel event for young people. If there is a young person out there who'd like to come along, do get in touch with me (text on 07799 898 369 or email tyleward@gmail.com).

After Meeting I called in to the British Library and saw an exhibition on Punk. Forty years ago young people were making provocative, fast, deafening music, wearing outrageous clothes and giving outrageous TV interviews. They felt the Establishment was totally failing and wanted to make their voice heard.

The parallels with the present are uncanny. Disillusionment with politicians is at an all-time high, especially at the moment given the dramatic Referendum result. Voters on both sides feel that MPs in Westminster are not listening.

How do we, as Quakers, respond? A café in Glasgow that provided a space for debate, discussion, hanging out and a general airing of views would be a good start.

No Man Is An Island - Poem by John Donne

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

Books New to Glasgow Meeting Library

- Timmon Milne Wallis *The Truth about Trident, disarming the nuclear argument*
Luath Press 2016
- Alastair McIntosh *Poacher's Pilgrimage, an island journey* Birrlin 2016
- Kevin Clement *Honouring the Other* 2010 Quaker Lecture, RSoF New Zealand
- Ed. Hazel Croall et al *Crime, Justice and Society* Routledge 2016
- Ed. Young Friends with Graham Ralph *Living Our Beliefs* Friends House 2016
- Diana Francis *From Pacification to Peacebuilding* Pluto Press 2010
- Ron Stansell *Missions by the Spirit* Barclay Press 2009
- William A Pelz *A People's History of Modern Europe* Pluto Press 2016
- Smith, Dan. *The state of the world atlas*. 9th ed. New Internationalist, 2013.
- Librarian, Paul Burton will send books at cost of postage. paulfburton@btinternet.com**

Diagram 4.1 Two World Views

<i>Peace building</i>	NOTION OF PEACE	<i>Pacification</i>
Just relationships, mutual care. Shared economic and political power and responsibility.		Stability and hegemony. Top-down control, political and economic.
Demilitarised world. Constructive conflict culture and systems.		Strong military as guarantor of control.
Planet as home.		Planet as resource to exploit.

APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL REGULATION

Principled and democratic.		Conditional and instrumental.
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APPROACH TO CONFLICT AND CHANGE

Multi-levelled, bottom-up, work of and in support of local actors.		Top-down, hegemonic, interventionalist.
Nonviolent, constructive, achieving just outcome for all.		Military pacification ‘if necessary’ in own interest. Win-lose.
CR to address human needs.		CR to avoid destabilisation.

**APPROACH TO POWER, REALITY
PROCESS/OUTCOME, PEOPLE**

Power as capacity to achieve things co-operatively.		Power as ability to dominate.
Process and outcome inseparable.		Process and outcome separate.
All people are subjects , and no one is expendable.		Some people are instruments and may be expendable.

VALUES

Common good.		Own success.
Respect and care for all.		Respect for power. ‘Us’ and ‘Them’.

NOTION OF SECURITY

Interdependence.		Eat-or-be-eaten.
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SOME KEY CONCEPTS IN HER BOOK

Diana sees 'two very different orientations to life and the systems and policies that they produce. . . (peacebuilding and pacification) 'although everywhere entwined and one will never replace the other, the balance between them and the ways they are expressed will need to change if we are to make any major and lasting impact on the violence currently besetting the peoples of the world, and to achieve real progress in building positive peace.'

- Here lies the heart of the dilemma: How can a value system that wishes to avoid domination avoid being dominated? How can inclusiveness avoid non-inclusive?
- Militarisation of this kind results from the embedded structures and culture of militarism, which is first and foremost the militarisation of the mind. . .
- The word 'human' has usefully been added to 'security' to counter this militarised notion of it.
- . . . (*Military intervention for human security*) this kind of approach should be seen not as peace-building but as pacification and that it arises from a radically different worldview – see Diagram 4.1.
- . . . the interdependence model brings with it a sense of reality as complex and shifting, as a matter of relationships and processes in which an 'outcome' is simply a moment in something that continues, rather than something fixed. On the other side reality is something to try and fix, or at least control, and is therefore viewed hierarchically, in the sense of 'being on top' of things.
- Violence goes against the value of inclusive respect for people and for life . . .
- . . . what Adam Curle calls 'peaceful relationships: those characterized by justice, mutual care and co-operative exercise of power and responsibility. And from this standpoint, a peaceful society would be informed by a 'constructive conflict culture' that was translated into customs and institutions, and that excluded the use of violence.
- The issue of gender (like that of militarism itself) is so huge, pervasive and complex that, paradoxically, it easily becomes invisible. But until its profound importance is taken for granted and incorporated at the heart of our theory, and until it is addressed in serious and radical ways, we shall be unable to move from pacification to peacebuilding.

- Economic dominance and injustice not only mitigate against peacebuilding, but cause immense resentment and perpetual instability that no amount of pacification can begin to address.
- Both those engaged in pacification and those who work for true peacebuilding are confronted with the dilemma of uncontrollable violence and situations in which they fail to find any effective response. And the lack of any kind of positive peace (the goal of peacebuilders) is often the ground for the kind of escalating disturbances that both pacifiers and peacebuilders fear, and that need to be addressed. This may involve conflict, if only of a nonviolent kind. At the same time, conflict is a disruptive and risky business, and is sometimes wrong-headed and unnecessary. Most of us dislike it for a good reason.
- . . . pacifiers hate conflict but embrace war, while peacemakers . . . hate war but embrace conflict.
- . . . conflict transformation is concerned with addressing the causes of conflict, actual and potential, which may mean bringing hidden conflict into the open when it is only latent, confronting oppression and injustice nonviolently.
- In situations brought about by violent intervention, ‘peacebuilding’ becomes a post-violence exercise, rather than a step in the process of conflict transformation.
- Although, by definition, nonviolence does not inflict violence in any direct way, given that it carries real power, it is essential to its nature and necessary to peacebuilding that it is harnessed for purposes that are respectful, caring and inclusive, and that it is employed in a manner that is assertive rather than aggressive.
- Perhaps the knowledge of our own vulnerability and mortality lies at the root of all our struggles for identity and control.
- One of the dangers of clear moral thinking and strong moral views is that they can lead to self-righteousness and intolerance.
- We need to wrestle with the relationship between ethical judgement and the tolerance of difference, knowing that reconciliation may in practice involve living gracefully and creatively with tension and disagreement.

This book is in the Glasgow Quaker Library but as you can see it is a must for all potential activists to study thoroughly. It gives much food for thought and reassessment of our activities – Editor. See Pluto Press at www.plutopress.com

Northern Friends Peace Board: report by Mary Alice Mansell

Northern Friends Peace Board has met twice so far this year, in Nottingham and in Edinburgh. As with most of our meetings, the meetings in March and June respectively brought together Friends from across the North to engage in worship and discussion on current peace concerns. On both occasions some Friends also took the opportunity during their lunch break to have short acts of witness, focussing particularly on Trident renewal, in the city centres.

On Trident, the base at Faslane and the shipyards at Barrow in Furness in Cumbria have been a particular focus, though NFPB members have also been involved at the national and international level in working for nuclear disarmament. NFPB heard in March of plans for a workshop at Swarthmoor Hall, with Friends from the South Cumbria area, looking at how to engage with the wider community, in which the jobs issue can make conversations about Trident particularly challenging. The workshop took place in April, as was reported at the June NFPB in Edinburgh. Scottish NFPB members' involvement in the Scrap Trident coalition and wider networks and Friends' participation in witness and action – from letter-writing to blockading bases – has formed a significant part of our meeting. Ahead of the Trident vote at Westminster, NFPB also published a short play, written by NFPB member Jo Alberti, exploring the ethical aspects of the political decision. This had a public reading outside Burghfield in late June.

Broader concerns about militarism were addressed at our June meeting, and Mairi Campbell Jack shared information about her work on the specific question of military visits to schools in Scotland. Friends from England reported on activities to promote peace-oriented career choices at school's career fairs.

The EU Referendum campaigning was only just beginning when NFPB met in March. From a brief consideration at that meeting it was clear that there was not a united view on whether the UK should remain in the EU. By the time of our June meeting, the campaigning had become particularly unpleasant, with Jo Cox MP having been killed just two days before our meeting. Friends in the area around her constituency in West Yorkshire had known her and held special Meetings for worship in the period after her death. NFPB members united with a statement, in the week before the final vote that read, in part:

'we can unite in affirming the importance of equality, respect, integrity in public life, and environmental sustainability as key foundations for peace. We can also

affirm our commitment to internationalism and to cooperation between nations and peoples, the basis on which the EU was founded. Global challenges require responses at all levels, from local to international. Cooperation is not always easy or straightforward, but in linking across cultures, national boundaries and languages, violent conflict is made less likely.

'We aspire to a Europe whose security is based on mutuality and care for the marginalised and vulnerable, rather than on militarism and fear of the other. Whatever the outcome, we as Quakers want and need to be ready to engage with our neighbours, in our communities, between nations and across Europe as a whole in challenging policies, practices and structures that work against the building of peace, and in promoting those which sustain and nurture it.

“Let us then try what love will do.” William Penn'

In reflecting further on forthcoming challenges, NFPB members affirmed the important role that Friends may have in providing spaces for listening, for people to be heard, alongside our readiness to speak out and take action with others.

Libor fines and the cadet forces.

Mairi Campbell-Jack

With the Parliamentary Liaison Function Group I have been looking more closely at the expansion of Cadet Forces into schools. George Osborne announced £50m for the expansion to cadet forces in England and Wales in 2015. Of course the immediate question was, what about Scotland?

Due to Barnett consequential any funding for England and Wales has to be matched for Scotland (roughly by population) and is part of the block grant given to the Scottish Government to dispose of as they will.

However we found that in the announcement the money to fund the cadet force expansion was not coming from the Treasury, but rather, from Libor fines. The fines levied on banks for committing fraud.

The monies from these fines will go straight to the Chancellor, and in turn he passes them on to the Ministry of Defence. This means that the use of these monies, which are essentially proceeds of crime, is not scrutinised. It also means that the expansion of cadet forces in Scotland is foisted on the Scottish Government, by a Westminster department, in an area of devolved responsibility. Because this is a UK issue, albeit with a Scottish dimension, General Meeting for Scotland has sent a minute to Meeting for Sufferings, along with a PLFG briefing, and we currently await their response to this issue.

Revision of Quaker Faith & Practice Chap 26

notes from Glasgow Wednesday afternoon group

Our group found this very difficult to prepare for. Indeed, our gathering was the smallest yet. Why could this be? What happens when we go inside or when we tackle 'the Divine'?

26.16,17,18 set us up, that we were explorers.

There is such a diverse view of 'God' and more recently that concept is changing especially viewed from a scientific angle.

The thorny question that prods our quest: How do you reconcile a loving God with all the awfulness in the world? We don't know Jesus so can't ask him anymore. He taught the sun rises on the good and bad. The more we probe the more we don't understand, and this allows spiritual depth. Stepping stones to new knowledge and new life. Although darkened by negativity, in the chaos there is still Light and that gives hope.

Communication is not aided by the different language we use, especially when that language is old. If we do not see Jesus as a god, are we Christians? What speaks to our condition? How do you come to an experience of God? As we grow older the language does not upset so much.

We looked at and were inspired by the quotations from John MacMurray, Isaac Pennington and John Woolman. There was all sorts of language for the experience. We had to take hold of and take the blame on ourselves for all the bad in the world. We thought not to judge others but to examine ourselves deeply and continually, and our contribution to the 'world'. The line through good and evil goes through each one of us – Solzhenitsyn.

We looked at how we affected others; in a position of power, we had to watch what we said as we did not always know how it would be taken up.

We spoke of our work experiencing others pain, being with it, and holding it in our hearts. Our term *upholding* means a lot to us but not necessarily to others outside Quakers. We were moved by Thomas Kelly in 26.62.

We looked at learning how to pray, how to communicate with God, or connect with spirit.

26.45 Jesus was an example. Forgiving sins/ or being saved was not an excuse. Looking historically, Christianity was a safety blanket. What now?

Book Review: The Man that Looks on Glass: Standing Up for God in the Religious Society of Friends by Derek Guiton

This is a timely book. The Non-Theist Friends Network (NTFN) held their 2016 conference recently, bringing to light the strengthening secularisation of the Religious Society of Friends. Much has been written on this subject in the past, including the 1968 Swarthmore lecture by William H Thorpe entitled 'Quakers and Humanists'. Indeed it has been a very tender subject for Friends for decades and one that goes to the root of what it means to be a Quaker.

Derek Guiton writes in an accessible manner about complex subject matter. It is an erudite work, well referenced and researched. Standing Up for God is an appropriate sub- title for perhaps it will speak to convinced Friends and encourage them to be more vocal.

It is the expressed desire of the NTFN to be able to discuss their views and explain what it means to them to be a Non-Theist Quaker. In order for this to happen in a Quakerly and loving manner, it behoves us all to become more aware of what the issues are about and their roots. And so, in order to prepare for writing this review I have also read books by Don Cupitt, a leading figure in the NTFN.

Many Friends, including myself, do not have a traditional concept of God. I therefore have difficulty with religious language that has originated in a past era. This is not to say that, for these Friends, the power that 'passeth all understanding' is not unknown. 'Knows' is the key word. Whatever name we use for God, and we have many- 'the light', 'the source of all being'- It's not a question of intellectual debate but one of knowing through personal experience. I am a convinced Friend, but I was beginning to think that perhaps I was a Non Theist. Derek Guiton's book has persuaded me otherwise. His view is that many Non-Theist Quakers are similar to me and their real place is in the Quaker community as seekers and explorers, as we all are.

I unreservedly recommend this book to all Friends and attenders alike. I would also like to thank Derek Guiton for writing it. It was a difficult task but very thoroughly and well undertaken.

Mary Roslin, Glasgow Meeting

A Non -Theist Quaker----- What is that? -

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Gisela Creed in conversation with Margaret Roy

Now 75, Gisela has been associated with Quakers for more than 50 years. She spent her early years living with grandparents and wider family in a village in West Germany while her father was a soldier and later killed in the war. Her grandfather was the protestant minister in the village.

Surrounded by a large and loving family, she had a happy childhood, with activities of church life and the wider village community being an integral part. She remembers particularly how lots of people, particularly refugees from the east, found hospitality and generosity in the grandparent's house and made life exciting.

Her mother remarried when she was 8 and the family moved to bombed out Kassel, a town in Hessen, and later to Hanover. The church remained a central feature in family life.

As a teenager she started to question conventional religion during confirmation classes but went along with it because she enjoyed being part of this community, for example the church choir and sailing weekends! Her first encounter with Quakers came while still at school through participating in several international workcamps that brought young people of many nations and backgrounds together while giving practical service. This experience strengthened her belief that we are personally responsible to make the world better and that actions and behaviours matter more than rhetoric. It was through such work she met her future husband, John. A couple of years later she gave up her Medical studies in Germany to move to Britain where she trained as a physiotherapist in the 1960s.

She has always hesitated to express herself in words that do not feel authentic and are not her own, i.e. clichés or even the traditional Christian language. It felt liberating to join Quakers in the 70s for their openness, lack of dogma and insistence on the value of listening, and “to let our lives speak” by putting Quaker testimonies into practice.

Throughout a busy life she continues to read widely for enjoyment and to explore what might grandly be called “the meaning of life”. One of the books that impressed her was David Boulton's “*Godless for God's Sake*” published in 2006. Here she found someone, who speaks clearly of his beliefs as a Quaker humanist and of religion as a man-made construction. The book contains stories of 27 Quakers who tell how they combine

committed membership of the Religious Society of Friends with rejection of traditional beliefs in a transcendent, personal and supernatural God. It so much echoed with her developing concept of what other people might call “God”, which is an essential, literal and constant reality of being human in the real world, where we are part of everything

This prompted the start of connecting with the emerging “Non-theist” Quaker network in the UK, a small BYM recognised group of Friends who are discussing different concepts of “God” and support each other. The “non-theist” label is not perfect but has emerged as the least disliked option embracing Quaker atheists, agnostics, naturalists and humanists to accommodate their considerable diversity of views. Some have done away with “God language”, altogether and some are happy to continue to use it as poetic and historical metaphor. It doesn’t mean doing away with the concept of God in the history of Christianity or Quakers. For her, in the right context “God” remains a useful shorthand for expressing goodness and love and as a moral framework for a meaningful human life. The best God language is poetic and beautiful.

During Meeting for Worship she is at ease and totally accepts those who express their spirituality, insights and beliefs in “God language” but feels a need for sensitivity to recognise that there may be different ways in experiencing and expressing true moments of clarity and depth

Gisela sees the current preparation towards a possible review of Quaker Faith & Practice as a good opportunity to add more diverse insights to the experiential sections of the book. For a living document it is vital to acknowledge and express developments in thought and practice

She loves the openness of Quakers, people on a journey, where nothing is set in stone but always open to new experience, Quakers as a community of people with a deep capacity to sensitive listening within and outwards to others. Most crucial for her are the Quaker commitments to peace, international understanding and social justice based on humility and sincere reflection. For her these priorities seem to be more important than doctrinal beliefs

“Please be patient, those of you who have found a rock to stand on, with those of us who are not even looking for one. We live on the wave’s edge, where sea, san, and sky are all mixed up together; we are tossed head over heels in the surf, catching only occasional glimpses of any fixed horizon. Some stay there from choice because it feels exciting and the right place to be. (Philip Rack 1979, QF&P, 20.06)

Story Time

with Alastair McIver

Sometimes, creating fairytales can be hard. Sometimes I find ways, like using playing cards, to give myself a small list of random fairytale elements to work from. Here is one of my card-stories:

Hidden world

Creation Story

Things coming alive

Jester

Talking tree

Jasper the Jester was very excited to start Jester School.

He was kitted out with his jester's hat with its multi-coloured banana-bits, his motley shirt that was five sizes too large for him, and his upturned boots with bells on them.

His first lesson was on pulling funny faces. At this, he excelled.

His next lesson was on basic circus skills. At this, he did not excel. He crashed his unicycle and somehow ended up with a juggling ball jammed up his left nostril.

His next lesson was in making inanimate objects come to life. He didn't like this much, as his underwear tried to eat him, and he had to drown them.

His next lesson was on things a jester may say about a king that others may not, provided they are said in a silly voice. This was by far his favourite lesson of the day.

He retired to his room tired but happy, and removed his jester's hat. The hat said "Hey! Do you want to visit another world

The jester, remembering that a synonym for "jester" is "fool", felt obliged to answer "yes".

Suddenly the hat became a portal which swirled and grew and swallowed him up!

He found himself in a world whose sky was blue instead of purple, and whose hills were wider at the bottom than the top, and whose clouds were shaped like clouds instead of triangles. Strangest of all, it had no trees. This world was not at all like Jasper's world, but quite a lot like ours, because it was ours.

Again, Jasper's hat spoke. It said "Hey! This crazy world has no trees in it yet. Do you want to be its first tree?"

And Jasper, with commendable commitment to the ethic of foolishness, said "Yes."

And a tree he was, and I'm glad he was, for if it weren't for him, there would be no trees in our world.

I met a talking tree the other day, and it transpired to be none other than Jasper The Jester, for this is the very story it told me!

Meeting for Worship on Iona

In perfect weather, it felt very much like being on pilgrimage as we crossed on the ferry to Iona on Saturday 30th July.

A small group of 7 gathered in the Oratory of the Catholic House of Prayer, for a Meeting for Worship. It is in a lovely serene setting overlooking the Sound of Iona with its bobbing boats.

The central burning candle initiated reflections on “Light”, and on “It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness”; important in these times.

This led to the memory, and celebration of, the life of Helen Steven; a Quaker, an Iona Community member, and the 2004 Gandhi Peace Award co-winner; very appropriate for the occasion.

Hopefully this exploratory Meeting for Worship will become a regular feature, but the challenge is: will the Meetings for Worship on Iona be sustaining?

Castle Douglas

The meeting has written to the Regional Council expressing concern about a local councillor’s promotion of the Armed Forces Covenant of which Dumfries and Galloway Council are one of the earliest signatories.

Whilst agreeing with some aspects (such as local housing needs and facilities for retired military personnel, some of whom may have on-going medical needs) it was felt that that the recruitment aspect presented a picture of the soldier’s life that was a bit too ‘rosy’ and unbalanced. This concern was particularly appropriate given the high young unemployment in the area and the encouragement to ‘join up’.

Glasgow

is looking for a new Warden -

A reliable, sensible and friendly person is required from September/ October 2016 to be Warden of Glasgow Meeting House.

Salary £14,157 (subject to review in accordance with the Scottish Living Wage) for 30 hour week. One year appointment in the first instance.

For application form and details, email glasgowquakers@yahoo.com or write to The Clerk, Wardenship & Lettings Committee, Glasgow Quaker Meeting, 38 Elmbank Crescent, Glasgow G2 4PS.

Closing date for application: 26 August 2016

Next Area Meeting Tarbert, Argyll Saturday 27th August

Area Meeting is to be held at Tarbert, Argyll (the Loch Fyne Tarbert) on Saturday 27th August 2016. The venue is a new one for us: the Youth Facility beside the Village Hall. Details will be sent out to all meetings nearer the time. It is a good chance for those outwith Argyll to see the area, perhaps even to stay to make a weekend of it! A bus is possible from Glasgow, or Meetings can arrange shared cars.

The main items of business are to decide on how we use the substantial bequest from Jean Laurie, following suggestions from Meetings; the concern about the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust's (JRRT) decision to provide financial assistance to Alastair Carmichael MP's court case costs; and website development. We will also take the Trustees' annual report and accounts.

Michael Hutchinson, Clerk

HOLD IN THE LIGHT

No takers this issue. Sounds good but . . . there is an on-going Healing Meeting on the last Monday evening of the month. If anyone wants included there is a book in Library at Glasgow Meeting - need be forename only.

West Scotland Quaker News is published by West Scotland Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), 38 Elmbank Street, Glasgow G2 4PS.
Telephone 0141 248 84 93

The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of individuals, They do not necessarily present the views of the religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

The deadline for contributions for the next issue of WSQN is 30th September 2016

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