

West Scotland Quaker News

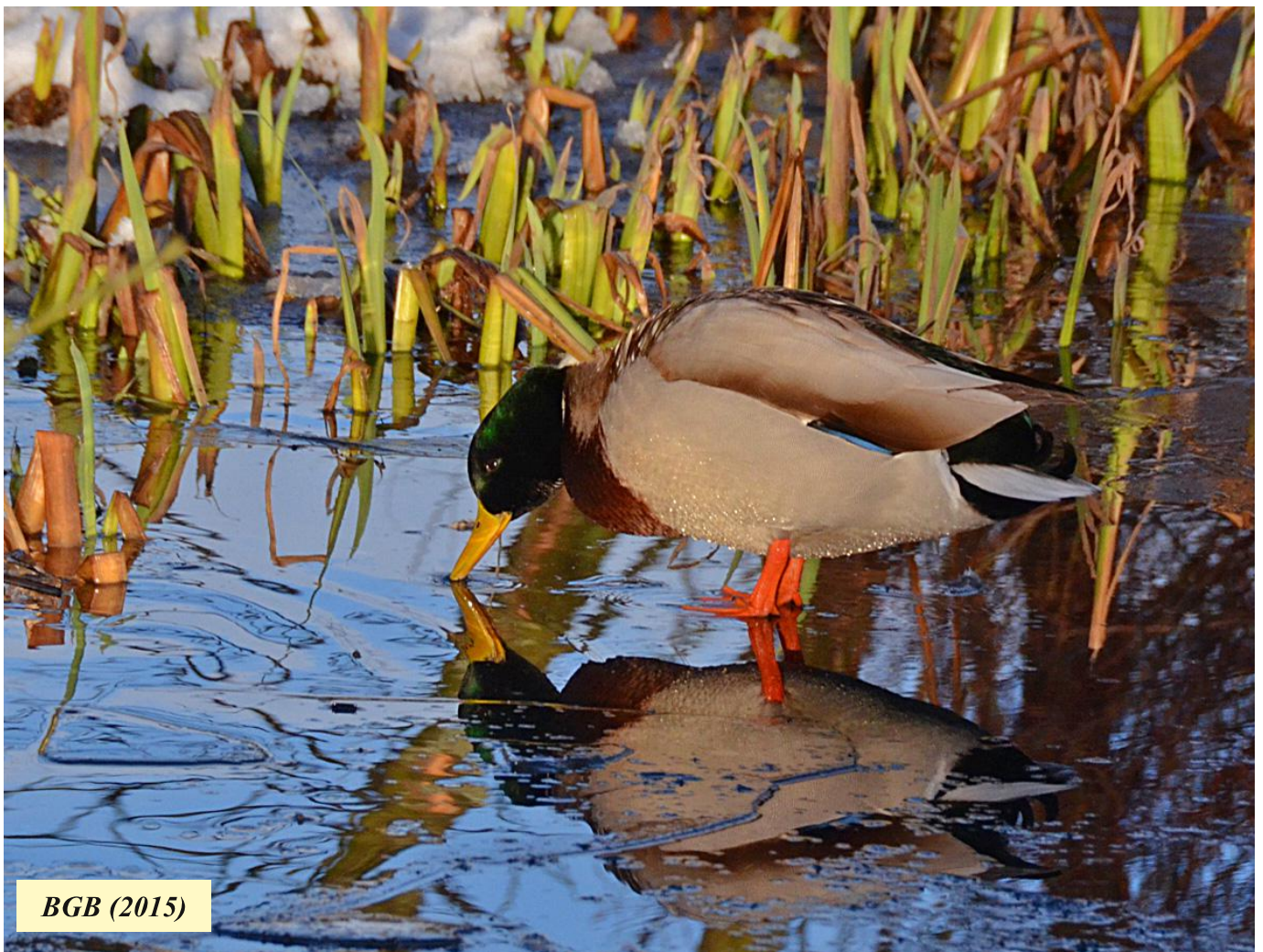
February 2015

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

From Bryan Bowes:

Welcome to Margaret Roy (Lanark Meeting) who has recently joined the Newsletter as Deputy Editor. At her suggestion, we have included (page 9) a small - at the moment - addition to the Newsletter entitled *Local Meeting News in Brief*. Margaret, apart from her other editing work, will be responsible for assembling/editing this section, so please send your items to her.



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The deadline for the next issue of WSQN is March 11th. Copy (preferably as a Word document) should be sent to the editor Bryan Bowes : botany64@waitrose.com or to the deputy editor Margaret Roy : margaret.roy@btinternet.com

Clerk's Letter

I'm on my way to be a guest clerk with Central England Area Meeting in Birmingham. They are having a threshing meeting and need a clerk external to the area, so muggins got roped in. Threshing Meeting? What's that? you might say. Quaker faith & practice, 12.26 tells us: "Threshing Meetings: This term currently denotes a meeting at which a variety of different, and sometimes controversial, opinions can be openly, and sometimes forcefully, expressed, often in order to defuse a situation before a later meeting for worship for business."

This one is about the number of local Quaker meetings in Birmingham – there seem to be too many to keep going properly but no-one wants to give up theirs. If I get back, I'll tell you about it.

Interestingly, this description of threshing meetings is to be found in chapter 12: "Caring for one another" and not, say, under chapter 3: "General counsel on church affairs", where you might expect it. A lot of thought went into where things go in the red book. So what's up here?

Decision making is part of our religious testimony, gained by experience over the centuries, on how to live together in the power of the Spirit. Our 'discipline' in deciding things involves a deep waiting and listening, but to allow that we need to be aware of human needs and foibles. If we are to move forward together as a community, in unity, we need to arrive there together and allow time to the process for this to happen. Unity does not mean uniformity, but a recognition of what is the right thing to do for and in the community at any one time. For difficult topics (ie potentially emotional ones or where it is difficult to see a way through) we may need to plan time where we can be cathartic - sound off, express our anxieties and doubts or whatever. We may then feel heard. Only then can we start surrendering ourselves to the listening and hearing needed to move forward. Good Quaker business, I've noticed, leaves this time for such a process. It may not always need a 'formal threshing', but without time to put everything into the pot of experience we can make decisions too soon, before we feel heard, before we've allowed ourselves to let go and listen and wait to hear the way forward.

Therefore it is caring for one another – allowing our decisions to be made properly. So we're all together at the end.

In Quaker terms, we 'eschew' lobbying (see Quaker faith & practice 3.04) and we see decision making as affirming where we go together, not how we 'get things through'. That means caring for the meeting so it's in the right place, with the right experience and knowledge, to make a decision properly. It is a thought I need to retain – our business process is based on caring for one another.

Michael Hutchinson (*Glasgow Meeting*)

New Year's Day Visitor to our garden



Report on January Area Meeting

It tells its own story that I have two pages of notes about meeting for worship for business and 10 pages from Bronwen's talk "Living under Occupation in a Divided Land" in the afternoon. For me this was the highlight of the day.

Our most "meaty" item for business was the discussion centring on revitalising AM when responses, from local meetings were considered, and various suggestions about the timing and format of AM were discussed. Michael, our clerk, suggested the planning group for AM which meets once a year could have a look at all of this, and bring back the ideas to another AM. We were reminded by two Friends that the way we come to a decision on business is unique and important, and discernment must remain uppermost.

Bronwen Currie spent three months from April to July as an Ecumenical Accompanier with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) in a village north of Jerusalem. This programme was initiated by the World Council of Churches. Ecumenical accompaniers in Palestine and Israel operate on the principle of impartiality and are on the side of international law and human rights. They witness to belief in justice, equality and nonviolence and what they witness leads to advocacy.

Bronwen pointed out that the West Bank (of the Jordan River) has since 1967 been under military occupation by Israel, with all that means in regards to arrests,

permits and restriction of movement for the Palestinian people. West Jerusalem itself was annexed by Israel and the pressure put on Palestinians to leave is tremendous. This has led to family homes being demolished, the reason given that the owner had no permit to build, although as 90% of applications are turned down families have virtually no option but build without a permit. Reports are sent by the Ecumenical Accompaniers to the UN Office and the Red Cross in Jerusalem, but even the emergency tents delivered are confiscated by the army.

More and more Palestinian land is being taken over to build settlements for Israeli settlers, and further planning of these will mean that the West Bank will be cut in two, making the prospect of a Palestinian state less and less viable. The Bedouin people are being driven to live in townships where there is no land for animals. Despite the fact that these settlements are illegal according to international law extremist settlers burn olive trees, attack Palestinians, and break up precious pipes carrying a limited supply of water. To make matters worse, an enormous security wall and checkpoints like cages add hours to any movement by Palestinians. This too is against international law, which lays down limits to the behaviour by occupying powers. These settlements are in fact seen as the biggest obstacle to finding a solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

On a more positive note, Bronwen emphasised the fact that not all Israelis support their government's policies. There are Israeli women who try to prevent abuse by young soldiers. There are Israeli groups who campaign for Palestinian rights and rebuild houses that have been demolished. There are Rabbis for Human Rights and Women in Black who keep up a vigil against the Occupation. In America, where there is a huge Jewish lobby, there is the strong sound and action of the Jewish Voice of Peace, which condemns what is being done in their name. All these people suffer greatly for daring to speak up for justice.

Finally Bronwen challenged us to action. We can write to MPs and MEPs (www.writetothem.com); we can boycott settlement products (www.quaker.org.uk/settlement-produce); we can write to newspapers; we can campaign to end repeated detention of Palestinian men, women and children without trial (www.addameer.info or www.amnesty.org.uk); we can try to establish a friendship or twinning link (www.twinningwithpalestine.net); we can explore the situation firsthand by taking part in a study tour or in a working retreat organised by Quaker Voluntary Action; we can become Ecumenical Accompaniers (www.quaker.org.uk/applyeappi) or donate to the work administered by QPSW of selecting, training and sending EAs (www.quaker.org.uk/eappi). We can hold the two peoples of Palestine, and Israel and all who are working for justice and peace there, in the Light. Act Palestine Forum has groups all over the world who pray for peace on the 24th of every month.

During the discussion afterwards fear and frustration were expressed at the intractable nature of the Israel/Palestine conflict, but we were reminded by a Friend at AM of the Power that has achieved astonishing breakthroughs in the past (viz in the fight against slavery), and the need for optimism and faith in that Power. Time for action based on that faith is now.

Witnessing in the West Bank

Between April and July 2014 I worked as an Ecumenical Accompanier (or EA) in the occupied West Bank, with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

EAPPI is an international programme initiated and overseen by the World Council of Churches. But UK and Irish volunteers are recruited, trained and supported by Britain Yearly Meeting. EAPPI in the UK forms a significant part of the work of QPSW, and we contribute to it in the funding we contribute to central work.

That's the official bit. But what do EAs actually do? How can 30-odd assorted international volunteers make any difference in a situation as long-standing, entrenched, intractable and vicious as the 48-year-long Israeli occupation of the West Bank? The same question could probably be asked of any work we undertake as Quakers. It doesn't stop us from witnessing to our belief in justice, equality and nonviolence.

This witness underlies the main strands of our work as EAs, which falls into four main categories as follows:

1. We are told that the simple nonviolent presence of international observers in certain situations can provide protection, or elicit better behaviour by soldiers or police. So, for instance, EAs accompany children on their way to school in places such as Hebron where they are threatened on a daily basis by settlers and where soldiers are stationed in a threatening manner outside the school gates. And EAs are present at checkpoints and agricultural gates at various points along the separation barrier, observing, intervening when asked, just "being alongside" – accompanying.
2. EAs observe, record and report on what we see. We witness violations of human rights and of International Humanitarian Law when people are prevented from getting to school or hospital, when a child is arrested without an adult being present, when a home is demolished by the Israeli army because there is no building permit, or when Palestinian olive trees are uprooted or burned by Israeli settlers. Our observations are reported to agencies such as the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs who collate the information and regularly publish it online.
3. We support and stand alongside those campaigning for justice and human rights, such as the regular weekly vigil held in West Jerusalem by Women in Black, a group of Israeli women (and a few men) who campaign for an end to the Occupation.
4. And we undertake advocacy, witnessing to what we have seen and heard. Time again I heard the following from Palestinians I met at the checkpoint, on the bus, in the street, at Meeting for Worship in Ramallah: "Welcome! Thank you for being here. Thank you for seeing. Please, when you go home, tell the people in your countries what you have seen - what is happening here."

This is what I have been doing, and continue to do, since I came home, both to

groups of people willing to listen, and to my MP, MEPs and other elected representatives. Will it make any difference? Who knows. But the witness is important; only when people are aware of injustice, inequality and violence, can these things be challenged.

Bronwen Currie



Bronwen (waving), friend & colleague together with happy children attending the Wadi-abu-Hindi School.

Northern Young Friends Summer Shindig 2014

This report is an overview of Northern Young Friends Summer Shindig, written from the clerk's point of view but taking into account the feedback that came from staff at the event.

The week went very well again with positive feedback from young people and parents about how much the event meant to those who attended and the friendships that have been formed. Thanks to the hard work of the working party prior to the training weekend and the enthusiasm and commitment of a staff team, with several first time members of staff and some who were staff for only the second time, the event was well planned. Tasks were assigned and everyone knew what was required and expected of them whilst ensuring they were supported and could turn to the clerking team for advice and assistance.

This year we trialled the use of co-ordinators for the day which meant that two different people took on the role of co-ordinator on the Sunday and Wednesday; this was intended to begin future proofing the event by ensuring that others could be prepared for the future role of co-ordinator. It addressed a comment from last year's event about the need to fully involve the staffing team in planning and organising the event.

The Weeks' programme.

This followed the previous years' format, with a good balance of free time and organised sessions, and again this year the balance appeared right. The community sessions were excellent, thanks to the engaging, enthusiastic and entertaining speakers. The topics were chosen by the Young Persons Working Group with scope for a range of subjects to be discussed.

The Wednesday trips also worked well - although the illness of a young person - may mean that we need to re-enforce in future the role of staff on the York trip and the number of available first aiders.

Group sizes were well balanced. It was good to see numbers maintained and to see new faces attending the event. The balance is certainly biased towards girls at present with only three junior boys attending. This may in future feed into the staff team where we currently struggle to appoint male members of staff to the event.

The main problem faced during the week was an accident involving one of the young people, with a broken arm, trips to hospitals and eventually in that young person going home early. Another young person had to leave due to an adverse reaction to eating a nut.

The Staff Team

The staff team were excellent with a good mix of experience and skills. But, as has been an issue for a few years now, there was a lower number of applications from men to be staff members. However, we again had a fresh injection of people new to the event, or people who had attended the event in the past, and this led to a well balanced, dedicated and enthusiastic team. Everyone on the team contributed to the

success of the event and that special Shindig feeling that is created during the week.

The earlier training weekend was again the key to starting the event on the right foot and allowing the staff team to bond. The commitment from the staff team was phenomenal and makes the role of clerk a pleasure. There were also good relations within the staff team with the over-riding approach being constructive and collaborative.

It would have been better to have an extra member of staff; however, the balance of male and female staff actually worked well due to the balance of young people.

The Young People

The young people were a great bunch who supported each other and built a supportive community and it was gratifying to see that there were no behavioural issues.

Concerns raised at the training weekend over specific young people did not materialise. For one young person we had received a long list of support he required; but he did not need this but instead participated fully in most activities and seemed to grow in confidence throughout the week.

The Site

We should certainly endeavour to keep using the present site as it ideal for our needs with great facilities and supportive staff.

Conclusion

Shindig 2014 was a great success; it was well supported, well organised and above all created that fantastic community with which Shindig is often associated. It has brought new people to the event, created lifelong friendships and has left a lasting impression on staff and young people. Trustees, staff and young people should be proud of the community they created.

I'm already looking forward to being back at Ackworth in 2015!

[Note from the Editor - this report has been considerably condensed but the full version can be obtained from Michael Hutchinson]

Local Meetings News in Brief

Christine Davis of Dunblane Meeting died on February 17th. The funeral of this much respected and weighty Quaker will be on February 28th.

Nuala Watts of Glasgow Meeting, has completed her PhD and will graduate in June from Glasgow University. Her fascinating subject is Poetics of Partial Sight.

Christina (Chrissy) Pritchard of Lanark Meeting, recently qualified from the Cumbria Alexander Training in Kendal and is now a Member of the Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (MSTAT).

Penington Co-Housing

This is planned to become an intentional community for those over 55 years of age, with homes designed for Lifetime Living, and low energy use. However, if we don't get enough over 55 year-old members by May 2015, we will widen prospective participation to become a multi-generational venture.

I was a Health Visitor and used to visit the elderly who were housebound. The quality of their lives was poor because of limited social interactions, some who had family in the area, still felt lonely and isolated from all that was happening around them.

I am now retired and live alone, my son and his family live a couple of hundred miles away from me, and may have to move again because of work commitments. Now I have had the opportunity to look at the types of accommodation that are available locally. I already knew that sheltered housing complexes that I had visited did not have good social community, even when they have a communal hall and a warden. Neighbours would not necessarily speak or know who was next door. I knew that I wanted to have a community around me that worked to encourage social interactions but allowed for privacy

I also wanted a home designed for when I was older and frailer, and maybe needed a walking aid, or assistance with daily living. I also was aware that my pension was fixed to Consumer Price index and will therefore decrease in value, just at the time in my life when I needed to be warm in my home. So the future home design needed to incorporate enough insulation and other adaptations that I could be warm at home, without too much cost and to provide a good environmentally friendly building.

When I heard about co-housing, and senior co-housing it answered all my priorities, but there was none near where I lived near Glasgow. I then joined others from Glasgow Quaker Meeting who were trying to get such housing built. The original idea was for it to be for both rent and for sale, and a company was formed to try and meet this vision. After several years, some possibilities had come and gone. We realised that the organisation and management were too complicated for us to be able to do this alone. We then laid down that company and began Penington Co-Housing as a company Limited by Guarantee.

I like the concept of co-housing two other reasons: firstly, the people in the community do the management and administration and retain the power to run the project as it suits them. Secondly, the relationships within the community are treated as just as important as the running of the buildings. If an internal group cannot work a compromise between members, then an outside mediator can be brought in. Relationship breakdown is treated seriously as part of overall planning and wellbeing of the community. We hope that Penington Co-Housing would enable us to buy homes in a new construction which would be built to meet our goals.

We decided that we wanted good public transport links and to be in Glasgow city area, if it were affordable. We were able to use a member's contacts with Glasgow City Councillors, to meet their very supportive and helpful planning and

development staff They advised using a Housing Association and were able to recommend which ones to approach. Southside HA, which is a small housing association and a charity, was one that was selected. It has been very supportive and offered us part of a site they are redeveloping in Pollockshields, on the edge of Maxwell Park, which is Britain's largest garden city.

The pressure is now on to find people who would like to join us, because Southside HA need to put in the final planning application for this part of the site by February 2016. If we miss this part of the development, we may be able to be in the third development phrase but the shape of this third phrase site is much more restricted.

I would describe myself as a practical person who is aware that what is on offer as housing for seniors does not give seniors social community, a good standard of build to provide low heating bills, or use designs which enable people to stay in their homes when they experience limitations or disabilities. I don't want to have to leave my home because I can't access the toilet, or get washed, or manage stairs. I don't want to be isolated and lonely; I know that would make me unhappy. In the past older people have felt that once they retired they just had to make the best of whatever housing they could get. But I feel fortunate that I have had the support of others who also feel they want to have housing that meets their future needs. We are a very fortunate generation; if you own property it has increased in value giving you a financial boost for your retirement.

I was diagnosed with Dyslexia in my thirties. At my assessment I discovered that I was using my abilities to the full. Part of learning how to live with Dyslexia has been the ability, as far as I am able, to say what I can't do, so that I don't set myself up for being responsible for an error. This awareness of how a disability makes me different from others has heightened my awareness of how those who are 'different' in some way, face a challenging life. This developed in me a powerful determination that equality matters, regardless of what the difference is between people. When I found Quakers it was both the spontaneity of Meeting for Worship, and the commitment to the Testimonies, that made me feel I could be part of this community. For further information: see www.cohousing.org.uk and www.pencohousing.org.uk or contact Ann at pencohousing@gmail.com

Ann MacInnes (*Glasgow Meeting*)



Some prospective Co-Housers

Quaker Yearly Meeting Statement on Israeli-Palestinian conflict

“At this time of sombre anniversaries, as we observe the centenary of the outbreak of World War I and the anniversaries of nuclear bombs dropped on the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki we find our Quaker testimonies to peace and equality again compel us to speak out. “The hostilities in Gaza are the latest eruption of the deep and long-running conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Root causes of this conflict, including the structural violence of occupation, must be addressed. Such violence damages all the people of the region. The present time, with its faltering ceasefires and talks, is a time of both crisis and opportunity.

“From our long-standing Quaker experience of working on this issue in Palestine, Israel and Britain, and from listening to the testimony of Quakers in Ramallah, we are convinced that the UK Government has a real role to play. A starting place would be for the UK to recognise Palestine as a nation state on the same basis as it recognises Israel. We note that 134 states have already recognised the State of Palestine. The UK Government should also play its part in creating a real opportunity for peace by drawing groups such as Hamas into the political process and thus away from violent resistance to the occupation. We have seen around the world how those once labelled as terrorists can come to be recognised for their statesmanship. It is our view that freeing elected Palestinian leaders now held as political prisoners would help Palestine to develop as a flourishing economic, political and civil society.

“The international community remains complicit in the conflict for as long as it fails to make full use of the mechanisms provided by international law, to hold all parties to account for their actions. Under international law, at all times, all parties should distinguish between civilians and combatants, though as Quakers we place equal value on every human life. The Israeli Government's ongoing blockade of Gaza and its apparent collective punishment of the people must end, as must indiscriminate fire by all sides.

“Amid the present crisis, we are reminded that the people of the West Bank, living under Israeli occupation face restrictions on movement; loss of land and water; demolitions; the continuing building of settlements; detention without trial and violence by settlers and the Israeli military. Such suffering often sows seeds of future violence.

“The anniversary of World War I reminds us how easily militarised societies can slide into armed conflict and become blind to the alternatives to war. At such times, the international community has a responsibility to avoid fuelling the conflict. We join others in asking for a comprehensive arms embargo on Israel, Hamas and armed Palestinian groups. Quakers in Britain ask the UK Government to take a lead on this by halting arms exports to Israel.

“As we, among other Nobel Peace Laureates, have said, 'The conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis will only be resolved when Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory is ended and the inherent equality, worth, and dignity of all is realised'. Peacebuilding is a long and demanding path to take, but an essential one.

“Quakers in Britain feel called to act alongside others to address the roots of violence. We continue to uphold Quakers in the region and those working nonviolently for peace and human rights within Israel and Palestine. Quakers will continue to challenge anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, as we oppose all forms of prejudice. We long for – and will work for – a time when the deep fear experienced on all sides is replaced by security and a just peace.

Chris Skidmore

Clerk of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain