

West Scotland Quaker News

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This newsletter is available
in other formats.

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

I am grateful to Jan Lethbridge for proof reading this issue. Any remaining errors are of course my responsibility.

Editor



The deadline for the next edition of *West Scotland Quaker News* is
Wednesday, 1 October.

Copy should be sent to the editor, Jane Mitchell, either on paper or disk, by post to

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in plain text (.txt), Word (up to 2003, i.e., .doc – not .docx please) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf) by email to:

wsqn@phoncoop.coop.

Telephone 0845 345 7196 or 01700 811229.

Clerk's Letter

The Trust of backward-facing Members

Having a group of six young Quaker Pilgrims staying with you is always an opportunity to do a bit of living adventurously — in this case a rather unique cycle ride around Cumbrae. The cycle shop persuaded us to try their new 'conference bike', which they assured us would seat seven people. I tried to imagine the length of three and a half tandems or perhaps three in parallel. The bike turned out to have seven saddles arranged in a circle each with a set of pedals. There were two widely spaced front wheels and two closer together at the back which made it very stable. The circular arrangement meant that two people faced backwards, which was quite disconcerting for regular cyclists, although it did allow them to warn of overtaking cars. Two more faced sideways, which was almost as unnerving. The one person facing forward had the responsibility for steering and for braking.

As we pedalled around Cumbrae, I was quite struck by the analogy with Quakerism. Apart from moving forward in a circle, rather like a Meeting for Worship on wheels, there was the silence of the energy source and the fact that everyone contributed according to their strength and anyone could have a rest whenever they wanted. You could even get a drink out of your bag as we moved along. We rotated our positions so everyone experienced the different positions, even managing to do this while on the move. There was also the need for trust in the steerer by the backward facing members, who were able to contribute in different ways. Even the large basket in the centre of the circle where you could put your baggage had a certain symbolism.

Nevertheless, it was the power of the single individual steering and braking which did not fit the Quaker analogy. I am conscious as Clerk that my power is limited to deciding the order of the agenda. I may do a bit of steering now and again and perhaps a bit of braking, but I am glad that I do not have the power to control the destiny of the meeting in the way that the cycle master does.

Martin Mansell

PS Regarding the steering of the agenda for the next Area Meeting on 23 August, we are planning a talk and discussion on the situation in Palestine.

Reports

Area Meeting (AM): Dumfries, 22 June What is Non Violent Communication? *Report by David Thorpe*

No early train to catch this time, just a brisk fifteen-minute walk to the Community Centre after a decent breakfast. “Anything I can do to help prepare?” Just a couple of little jobs.

Four applications for membership, two from Glasgow, two from Newton Stewart, double the AM membership in less than three years at this rate; who said there was a membership crisis? It can't go on like this, of course, something like Quaker Quest might make a difference but double in three years is a bit rich!

Lovely to see someone at AM for the first time, very enthusiastic and keen for the right things to be put in the right way. So refreshing for passion to be found in a business meeting. A gently restraining hand was seen, quite right but not to stop one being keen again in the future; conviction is everything.

The spiritual item was on Non Violent Communication (NVC) and beautifully done. I hadn't really seen the point before. Each person in communication has needs and wants. Recognize this and seek to identify the needs and

wants and positive, win-win communication becomes possible. Identify these for yourself! Failing this you are into ‘hidden agenda’ territory and a lose-lose scenario. Did I get that right? Are we not talking about negotiation here?

‘Take it or leave it’ was always the end of negotiations for me, I had a decision to make: my policy was to ‘leave it’. Then I came into conflict with a friend who thought I should ‘take it’ even if I was not satisfied with the deal on the table. I had to be missing a trick here. My friend, it seems, had needs and wants that I was not seeing but so had I. ‘Take it or leave it’ makes no concession to my needs and wants and says ‘I am not interested, I have more important things to do’. OK, that is up to you. Should I have probed? How could I? I need to study NVC further and deeper, I think.

Lunch was too soon after breakfast so I just had a cup of something, tea was too close to a pre-arranged dinner so I just had the same again. Shame, it was a lovely tea as ever, and a great temptation. Time was when I

could eat anything and it made no difference, now I have to be careful or I have too much weight to carry around. Those were the days ...!

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS): 5 July

The Retreat, Long Term Framework

Report by Peter Christy

Having been brought up in a Quaker household I can remember the name of The Retreat at York being mentioned. But it wasn't until last MfS that I really found out what went on at The Retreat and how it was moving with the times to provide an up-to-date service adding to and supporting the National Health Service. The key points of this continuous improvement include the following:

- the continuing positive witness to the living out of our unique Quaker values;
- the establishment of a Spirituality Working Group and creation of a multifaith room;
- the upgrading of a unit at a cost slightly over £1m;
- the increasing access to the extensive grounds for all patients, staff and visitors;
- an outstanding Investors In People report;
- various completed and planned developments to the fabric of the buildings.

They were keen to emphasize that (a) The Retreat was not simply a backwater for elderly people (they do have an active

role in rehabilitation), and (b) they are not in a state of continuing financial difficulty.

There was much interest in this topic but sadly the Clerk had to move us on due to time pressure. This act on its own shows that the society has a long way to go in establishing who does what, when and where.

There was discussion as to how many Meetings for Sufferings there should be in a year. With much of the day-to-day work now resting with the trustees there was a proposal that there should be only four MfSs a year thus saving a not inconsiderable sum of money (circa £8000 per meeting); on the other hand the meeting felt that, for example, it had not been able to give the work of The Retreat a reasonable hearing.

Then there was the question of a residential MfS at the start of the next triennium to welcome the many new members that join the Meeting at that time.

Then there is the role of MfS. It could be summarized as the keeper of the Long Term Framework (LTF) and the spiritual and

moral health of the Society, or is it simply the link between the worshipping groups and the central support organization?

This leads us into the next topic, the integration of the Long Term Framework into our Society. The LTF has been accepted at Britain Yearly Meeting with some particular comments on a few specific statements, which have been worked on and have now been accepted by MfS. But the issue now is how to integrate the potential of this structure into the Society and to get the members to realize and be happy with the fact that it represents a sea change in the potential of the Society through the shift from a pyramid structure to a web of networks, making it easier for Friends to follow their spiritual journey and their specific concerns and to join

with others with like minds but not necessarily in their local or area meetings. Then, with the use of the LTF, to bring resources to support these concerns while maintaining the integrity of the Society as a whole while maintaining our basic Quaker spiritual grounding.

Questions for us all are, given that the central resource is planning to organize itself to support the LTF;

- Which of our local activities and concerns align themselves with the LTF?
- Does the LTF prompt local activity?
- Which of our existing concerns can be readjusted to line up with the LTF?

If any or all of these apply then we can expect to benefit from central work.

Woodbooke, 2–4 June

Committed Relationships Conference

Report by Martha Hatch

Many of you will recall that Quaker Life took soundings in 2006–7 on same-sex partnerships and we considered their questions at the October 2006 MM in Wigtown. I felt that the minute we produced then made the point about equality but acknowledged that perhaps such an emotive subject should not be rushed. We were told at this Woodbrooke conference that there have never been so many responses to a non-peace issue. Quaker Life Central Committee has now set up a Working Group to report back by September. It is hoped to have a statement ready for the consideration of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) in 2009.

The Working Group called this conference to take further soundings and planned to select a wide mix of participants. The applicants were so varied that they decided selection was not required. Quaker Life asked

the Working Group to consider the following six topics in its report back in September:

1. the variety of partnerships that could be recognised by Friends and how;
2. the theology of marriage and other partnerships;
3. the terminology to be used;
4. the role of registering officers;
5. the implications for revision of Chapter 16 of *Quaker Faith & Practice*;
6. to what degree and when to press for legislative change on legal registration of partnerships under Quaker auspices.

Christine Trevett (a member of the Working Group) gave a very informative but quick introduction to the history of the Christian theology of marriage. We then broke into small groups to address questions related to the six issues above, and there was a member of the Working Group in each to take notes and report back.

It was obvious that there is a great diversity of opinion among Friends irrespective of sexual orientation or gender. The small groups I was in were intense and at times emotional but remained amicable. It became obvious when we gathered together to share our insights that our diversity of opinion had caused painful exchanges of views in some of the small groups.

With such an emotive subject to consider, this Conference seemed to be in a league of its own. It was certainly the most emotional Quaker event I have ever attended. The two contrasting views appearing in the Friend on 13 and 27 June emphasise how differently participants reacted to the event. My personal impression was that, while the emotional content of the Conference was high, so was the intellectual and spiritual input. I was very impressed with the Working Group and have confidence that they will give full consideration to all the factors involved without being unduly swayed by emotion.

The Working Group, Quaker Life and Meeting for Sufferings have a formidable task ahead in preparing a statement for BYM 2009.

Features

1652 Pilgrimage

Swarthmoor Hall is a 16th century manor house, near Ulverston on the northern shores of Morecambe Bay. George Fox came to this remote spot for the first time in 1652, bringing his message of Christian simplicity “across the sands” from Lancaster. The rest of his life was spent in

constant travel around Britain and in the New World — preaching, confronting authority, incarcerated in prison — but there was always a haven at Swarthmoor.

The Hall is now owned by a Quaker trust and offers accommodation and short courses. Because of its association with the early days of Quakerism, it is truly a fascinating place to visit, as a group of us did from Glasgow Meeting. We were charmed by the peaceful garden, the fledgling swallows taking their first hesitant flights across the courtyard from their nest under the eaves, the comfortable parlour where we all met in the evening and the hospitality of Bill, the warden, and David, the resident Friend. Every day we met for worship in the Great Hall, with its flagstone floor and heavy oak furniture, a place where Margaret Fell, her family and early Friends had worshipped 350 years ago. Some of the other main rooms in the Hall are open to the public and we were able to have a leisurely guided tour one evening.

We were taking part in a three day “1652 Pilgrimage”, following in the footsteps of George Fox and the early converts to Quakerism. There was a busy programme, climbing Pendle Hill and Firbank Fell and visiting the 17th century meeting houses at Settle, Brigflatts and Ulverston. Along the way, we heard about the significance of these places in the early history of the Religious Society of Friends. We were inspired by the strength of conviction of those early Friends, who were willing to face the physical hardships of prison, financial ruin and forced expulsion to the colonies as indentured labour for the sake of their beliefs.

Our stay at Swarthmoor also revealed to us the singular position of Margaret Fell, whose home it had been. Margaret Fell, assisted by her seven daughters, was a prolific letter writer, who kept in touch with itinerant preachers and believers the length and breadth of the land. She organised a trust fund to support the persecuted, lobbied people of power on behalf of religious liberty and organised gatherings of Friends. At a time when there were many religious sects with their own itinerant preachers, none of which has had a permanent influence, she provided the secretariat and organisational structure which helped the Religious Society of Friends to take root and flourish for nearly four centuries. In keeping with the beliefs of simplicity, she is buried in an unmarked grave in the Friends Burial Ground at Sunbrick, a plain walled field, grazed by sheep, overlooking the sea.

This wasn't just a history tour. Certainly we learned a lot about the beginnings of Quakerism, but we also felt our faith deepened and reinvigorated by this experience.

Margaret Morton, Glasgow

Gospel of Thomas Seminar: 6-8 June, 2008 A Way to Life

Rosemary Gascoyne again hosted our seminar to ‘share and savour the uniqueness’ of this gospel in St Johns Town of Dalry. Thirteen of us assembled, including two welcome newcomers, Margaret Roy of Lanark Meeting and Felicity Cox visiting from south of the Border. Our introductions included something of how we came to the study of *Thomas*. These varied from contact with Hugh McGregor Ross, either in person or through his book *Untouched by the Church*, to a progression from the Nag Hammadi findings.

We then slipped easily into a structured sharing of our individual experiences of the Gospel since our last gathering. The discussion ranged over questions of sin, fasting, the Mosaic Law, our evolutionary heritage, eternal life and the application of *Thomas* to our present life. The teaching is very optimistic — no mention of sin let alone the Day of Judgment.

After coffee break, Bob Mandeville presented two most comprehensive papers: (a) on Logion 12 (...*you are to go to James the righteous...*) with Biblical and other Church history references to James and (b) Edessa, the Syriac church and Aramaic.

The first dealt with the Gospel evidence; the Epistle of James; Paul, Luke and the Acts; Eusebius; Clement and Josephus; Nag Hammadi; Acts of Thomas and the Gospel of Thomas. The second paper dealt with Robert Eisenman’s thesis that James was an Essene; the importance of Edessa and the Aramaic language, explaining the word play which shows the connection of one logion to another. Finally we were reminded that Logion 12 bids us look to James for inspiration.

Next, we took over Rosemary’s garden for an alfresco lunch then returned for her presentation on Logion 14, with reference to the questions posed in Logion 6. She had given us copies of the Metanoia commentaries and she further developed the theme of Jesus’ advice to the disciples contradicting Mosaic law. Indeed, what he said was punishable by the law at that time. She suggested a meditation on the end direction in the two logia. The ensuing discussion covered many topics on the connections between them.

After tea, Mary Harris spoke on the theme of the ‘Real Self’ and gave us much food for thought. Perhaps to start the search, we should look for our ‘Unreal Self’. She posed an exercise where one must write a list of words defining oneself. Usually what we can happily write does not adequately describe us. It is hard to try to express what is obviously

beyond words and the more words we use the further we get from the fundamental thing. Mary finds it helpful to draw diagrams when reading *Thomas*. More discussion followed on the probings of Jesus into us, whether suffering is necessary to find our true self and a source of all energy/ love/ light.

Ten of us dined at the Lochinver on Saturday evening. The hotel is under new management and the dining room is now separately run as a Bangladeshi restaurant. We can recommend it. At 3 am on Sunday, I surprised Rosemary in her kitchen, assembling a right royal feast for our lunch. Seven hours later, we all gathered once more in her living-room for Meeting for Worship, after which Rosemary read the letter from Hugh McGregor Ross. He is now 91 but still takes a keen interest in the *Thomas* groups and never fails to send a contribution for our discussions.

The final session, sharing the logia, gave each of us the opportunity to raise points from sayings which have particular meaning for us, or others where we are still searching for clarification. Lunch, mentioned above, was a magnificent repast but we have imposed upon Rosemary for long enough. She is happy to continue to arrange and clerk the meetings but not to do the catering. She will be a hard act to follow in that line but all will be well. The autumn seminar will be held on Sunday 26 October.

Muriel Robertson, Glasgow

Prayers for Hope and Assurance

A small Taizé group meets monthly, a gathering from most of the churches in Arran, and recently I was asked to lead the short ‘prayer’ section. My first thought was, “Quakers don’t say prepared prayers!” but as I started to think about the theme I was given – Hope & Assurance – a quotation from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, imprisoned in Berlin towards the end of the war, kept coming into my mind. “I believe that God both can and will bring good out of evil. For that purpose he needs people who will make the best of everything. ... I believe God is not just timeless fate, but that he answers sincere prayer and responsible action.”*

Gradually words came, were given, which I put in the form asked for, of intercession and response. I realised this was making me explore and bring into words the roots of my Quaker faith and the importance to me of Bonhoeffer’s words:

God will bring good out of evil,
which I used as the response after each intercession.

Let us hold in the Light of God's love all who are ill, or are trapped in addiction, be they in hospital or at home, all who are facing pain and fear.

And all who mourn, who struggle with the loss of loved ones, be it recent or long ago.

Let us hold in God's Light those who are torn apart by suspicion or greed or anger within the home, our community or our country.

Help us not to feel overwhelmed by all the violence within and between nations, and the suffering of so many people around the world.

May we keep in our hearts the example of love and healing that Jesus gave us during his life. We have the assurance that through his terrible death the certainty of his Presence afterwards liberated those first disciples, and that spirit is with us all now.

May we open our hearts in thankfulness for the God-given hope that God is as surely with us when we must face the darkness, as in our joys.

Jeny Faulkner, Arran

* *Letters and Papers in Prison*

Book Review

Hell and High Water: Climate change, hope and the human condition *by Alastair McIntosh*

This book, published by Birlinn at £8.99 was launched at the Scottish Parliament on 25 June. The author is a Glasgow Friend. (You may have seen his earlier book Soil and Soul published in 2001.) Editor

We have here a serious book, and it is not flat facts. The reader may be shocked to find that the whole person is needed. Intellect lives with emotion, data with imagination, fear with humour. The reader has to be flexible to see what is happening, has to change gear to cope with the terrain, has to hear beauty in the gales. It is not allowed that the reader be a desiccated computer, for understanding is sensitivity. And sensitivity is not always comfortable. Prepare to step out of the comfort zone.

The author is seriously knowledgeable and qualified, with academic recognition demonstrated by Strathclyde University giving him the wonderful honorary Professorship of Human Ecology. His reading and references range from prehistory to the present, and from Noah to Burns to Djinni of Scoraig. The facts he parades range from personal anecdotes about psychic events to heavy scientific and Government reports. And who is to say where lies the greatest truth?

So, dear reader, be warned! This book is different. It is an interactive process, suited to this interactive age. I remember a friend picking up Punch and saying, "Ah, Punch! Prepare to laugh!" Our conditioned reflexes make for tunnel vision. We may be used to finding the serious book is flat and factual, trying to

build an unanswerable case; as Burns said, "facts are chieils that winna ding, and daurna be denied." Flights of fancy and flashes of beauty are not expected. However, Burns, being a poet, also glowed with feeling—"like the snowflake on the river, a moment there, then gone forever."

McIntosh has the poetic, Gaelic, earthy touch of the Hebridean. Can you, in your reading, play with the scientific coldness and the warmth of love? Can you apply the searching laser light—and wonder at the Northern Lights?

If you are with me so far, then clearly the book is for you. On the other hand, if you are wriggling with distaste, then the book is certainly for you. The human condition has been stifled and corrupted by manipulation. Our comfort zone is fraudulent, and we have to stop using our habitual mindset and release our essence. Shed the armour which protects us from being human—if you have the courage, for it takes great courage to risk being a whole human.

This may seem a lot from a book on climate change, but I do not exaggerate. Climate change is here, and we are in an unprecedented situation. Alastair McIntosh considers this in the first part of his book, and invites us to skip it because we may be familiar with it. For myself, it indeed confirmed

what I knew, and extended it richly. It also provides the jolt: this is not a book to be skimmed, this demands a dialogue to meet the challenges.

“The Human Condition” is the second part of the book. There is a temptation to adapt a health warning from it — this work can seriously damage your complacency and cause growth of your humanity.

The title itself makes it clear that the content is not to be conveniently expressed in a review. The importance of it is beyond what Alastair McIntosh has to say, erudite and sensitive though he is. The questions he faces and examines are the key questions that face us as Quakers facing the end of the human race.

Can we answer them?

Bill Agnew, Dumfries

Short note — two recent publications on the human condition

On 21 July the **new economics foundation** published a 48-page paper *A Green New Deal*. This describes what they call the “triple crunch” – financial; greenhouse gases increasing towards a tipping point; and the coming shortage of oil.

It calls for stringent controls on the international money market, lower interest rates, massive investment in improvements in the insulation of buildings, local small-scale energy schemes which don’t use fossil carbon.

This can be downloaded as a .pdf file from www.neweconomics.org.

Unjust Rewards by Polly Toynbee and David Walker published by Granta on 1 August. I haven’t seen the whole book yet, but an extract I have read dealt with extended interviews they held with representatives of senior international lawyers and merchant bankers. It was clear that these people had no idea at all about how the lower-paid half of the British population lives, and didn’t seem to care.

Where is equality? Where is fairness? What hope is there of a few Quakers trying to live more simply being noticed?

Jane Mitchell, Argyll

Notices

International Decade of Peace 2001-2010

The Committee of the Network of Ecumenical Women in Scotland (NEWS) has put together an Order of Service for use on International Peace Day (the third Tuesday in September). The material will be placed on ACTS' web site www.acts-scotland.org during August and will be freely downloadable.

The Co-Convener of NEWS, Charmian Paterson, said, "The women of NEWS are conscious of the need for prayer for world peace and wanted to contribute to the International Decade of Culture of Peace. The material they have produced is a resource designed to help Christians in Scotland and beyond to mark the annual International Day of Peace but is flexible enough to be adapted to local needs at any appropriate time. We particularly hope that people will get together locally to arrange services to mark this year's International Day of Peace on 16 September."

Tom Moyes, Network Director
Action of Churches Together in Scotland
(of which Quakers in Scotland are a part)

Perhaps there will be an event near you.

Appointments for Triennium (2009–2011)

Forms on which Friends can offer to serve the Meeting have been issued, and their return was requested by 1 August. If you would like to contribute to the work of the Meeting, please return your form even now; there are plenty of jobs that can be filled later.

Ian Macdonald (Clerk to Trustees)
Benvoir, Wigtown, Newton Stewart, DG8 9EE
Telephone, 01988 403364: email, weebooks@globalnet.co.uk

Post of Administrator (8 hours weekly)

Applications are invited for the post of Administrator for General Meeting for Scotland (GM). The function of the post is to provide administrative support to GM and its appointed officers, including provision of information to Friends and members of the public, maintenance of records and production of the *Book of Members and Attenders*.

We are looking for someone who has familiarity with Quakers, is well-organised and self-motivated, has interpersonal skills and has some experience and proficiency in the efficient use of IT (Microsoft Office or similar).

The work will be done mainly from home, with all necessary equipment being provided. It will average 8 hours per week with occasional evening and weekend work. Some flexibility of hours will be needed since workload varies throughout the year.

Remuneration will be £3800 per year initially, plus pension contribution, and an allowance for home working. All expenses will be paid.

Further details may be obtained from the GM Clerk,
Robin Waterston, 128 North St, St Andrews KY16 9AF.
Email: robin.waterston128@gmail.com.

Closing date for applications: 1 September 2008

Data Protection

The Area Meeting (AM) in March asked me to inform readers of the requirements of the Data Protection Act as they affect the AM.

In order to function the Society needs to keep a record of contact details of its Members and of Attenders who wish to be involved. This is done at the level of the AM.

The Act requires that data should be used only for the purposes for which it is collected and be kept securely. The AM shares data on Members with the Yearly Meeting (YM). Members have the option of requesting that only their names are passed on to YM. Everyone can request not to be listed in the *Book of Members and Attenders*.

People not in membership should consent in writing the first time their details are recorded. Those under 18 require the written consent of a parent or guardian.

If other information is held (for example in connection with nominations work) the subjects should know that the information is held, and they may ask to see and approve it.

For more details see www.quaker.org.uk/friends and follow links to **Support for Meetings, Clerks Local and Area Meetings.**

Editor

August Area Meeting

The Meeting will take place at the Meeting house in Glasgow on Saturday 23 August at 11 for 11.30.

The following AM will be in Dunblane on 18 October.

Copy for the next *West Scotland Quaker News* should be sent by Wednesday 1 October to the editor at the address on page 2.

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