

West Scotland

Quaker News

November 2009

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This newsletter is available in printed form in two sizes and at www.quakerscotland.org/west in pdf format.

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'm saying goodbye with this issue. I have very much enjoyed the past seven years as your editor, but it's time now for some new thinking.

Being at the centre passing information to the Friends and attenders in West Scotland and also learning how to use the technology has been very interesting and enjoyable; I've learned a lot on both fronts. Thank you for giving me the opportunity. I have to admit though to feeling a bit out of my depth on occasion, when controversial material has been submitted.

As with all jobs where one person simply has to 'get on with it', I've felt a little isolated at times. (See the article by Roy Stephenson in *the Friend* 6 November and the article on page 11 for more on this.) I have however had great support from many Friends, and I would like to record this. Thanks are especially due to Mike Brown (the previous editor), the clerks, Elizabeth Allen and Martin Mansell, for their regular contributions, many other contributors, Jan Lethbridge and Janette Walkinshaw for occasional proofreading, and Mary Latham who organises the distribution so efficiently and finally to the assistant editor, Bryan Bowes, for his help during 2009. Bryan has done much of the editing on this occasion and has proofread it. I look forward with interest to seeing where the publication goes from here.

Jane Mitchell, retiring editor

The deadline for the next issue of *West Scotland Quaker News* is
Tuesday, 13 January 2010.

Copy should be sent to the new editor Bryan Bowes preferably in
Word or plain text by email to: botany64@waitrose.com
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Telephone 0141 942 3346

Clerk's Letter

Sustainable Living

At Area Meeting we have a duty to deal faithfully with the business matters which allow our Meeting to function efficiently but we also have a duty to be sensitive to the promptings of the spirit and to do what these leadings require of us.

As Clerk, I am aware that Area Meeting is being 'shaken', push by push, on environmental issues. Last November, Alastair McIntosh spoke to Area Meeting in Milngavie about the spiritual aspects of climate change and the need to provide the spiritual eldership essential in dealing with the grave problems facing us. In the spring there was enthusiasm for the Quaker Peace & Social Witness *Zero-Growth Economy?* events to be held later in the year and Area Meeting sent Martin Mansell (page 7). At the August meeting in Dunblane, Malcolm Crosby asked what Area Meeting might do to take forward Friends' concerns on energy issues related to sustainable living. In October, Milngavie Meeting requested Quaker support at a national level for the 10:10 Campaign, which commits individuals and organisations to make a 10% cut in energy consumption by the end of 2010. Throughout the year articles on environmental issues were published in this newsletter.

It seems appropriate, therefore, that at our last Area Meeting of this year we make time to look further at the issue of sustainability and the environment, at our responses and at how Quaker testimony guides our individual and collective approach. What is the role of our Quaker witness to simplicity? How do our Quaker testimonies help us to question the materialism and competitive individualism of the consumer culture?

Martin Mansell and Malcolm Crosby are going to lead the session. Martin will tell us more about the ideas and concepts presented at the conference: *A Zero-Growth Economy? What would it mean to us all?* He has suggested that in preparation for this session Friends could bring to the meeting information about any initiatives on sustainability, e.g. energy audits, which are happening in their Local Meeting or town/ community.

Malcolm will be helping us to think about energy issues and sustainable living. He has said that the more he is involved with the renewables sector and those who have concerns about energy, the more he realises that although a lot of people take action and campaign hard, the vast majority take no interest, or make cosmetic gestures. It is his experience that many of the businesses involved are interested only in making money, the renewables are incidental! Malcolm suggests that we need to be going out to the rest of the world on this issue, given the urgency.

Sustainability is a tremendously complex challenge. Professor David MacKay, who is now the Government Chief Scientific Adviser on Climate Change, has written, 'If everyone does a little, we'll achieve only a little.' In considering what we in West Scotland Area Meeting can do, perhaps we need to bear his words in mind.

Elizabeth Allen

Reports

Area Meeting: Castle Douglas, 21 October

Managing our Affairs

Report by Janette Walkinshaw

The morning dawned bright and clear. When I drew back my curtains the only movement was a heron drifting with slow wingbeats across the frosted marshland towards the river. The sun was newly risen above the hills on the far side of the bay and a parhelion (mock sun) was also visible which only occurs when conditions are just right: hexagonal ice crystals form in the cold air, and when they are parallel with the sun, light is refracted through them to create a rainbow patch in the sky. A scientific explanation for something to wonder at. (I could wish I wasn't going to Area Meeting (AM), but needs must.)

The morning at AM was spent dealing with the things that matter: life, death and new beginnings. There were warm words for a Friend who had died. Our Registering Officer described a meeting of worship for marriage held in a Catholic church (believed to be a first), followed by a Catholic blessing. This sounds as if it was a joyful occasion for everyone involved, introducing both Catholics and Quakers to new experiences.

Modern Friends don't "do" property and money well. Somewhere in the journey from the edge of society into the mainstream we've lost the sure confidence of early Quakers when it comes to business. But finance always lurks in the background and has to be dealt with.

We heard that Britain Yearly Meeting is short of funds, again. Some of the programme of work scheduled for 2011 will have to be abandoned. Browning's words came to my mind:

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

It seems a contradiction to say that AM is short of money when we have just bought a new meeting house. But the money came from different sources, and the general funds of AM as well as the pot of money set aside for future maintenance, particularly of the meeting house in Glasgow, are both too low for comfort.

The purchase of a new meeting house has jolted us into examining questions of management which were taken for granted before. I doubt if many members give much thought to how a meeting house is maintained and financed, preferring to leave it to a few Friends who are prepared to shoulder the work and the anxiety.

It is important that the whole Area Meeting, who have ownership of the property, and our trustees who are responsible in law, can be confident that our property is being looked after as well as, if not better than, we would look after our own houses.

Ambiguity in the wording of AM's earlier minutes about what the term "maintenance" encompasses led to an attempt to clarify the wording. There are two

problems which need to be disentangled. One is the procedure for determining what work should be done on the buildings, both short and long term. The second is how work is to be financed, whether by AM or local meetings.

The matters were too big for Area Meeting to cope with. The trustees have therefore been asked to form a working party of representatives, including treasurers, of all our local meetings to examine this in detail. The clerk spoke for us all when she commented that this process has not been easy but it is good that we hear and understand that it is not easy.

The meeting ended with a reminder of harsh reality a long way away. Patrick Bealey made an appeal on behalf of Colthouse Meeting in Cumbria who are raising funds to send an ambulance and medical equipment to Gaza. Donations were gladly given. (Details from rap.milling@talktalk.net.)

As we travelled home through the gloaming, Jupiter was rising in the southern sky. I believe that still herons will be flying and ice crystals will go on making patterns of colour in cold blue skies, long after we and our meeting house problems are even a memory.

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS): October BYM's Reserves have run out

Report by Margaret Peacock

This being the first meeting after Yearly Meeting (YM), we welcomed a lot of new people and missed a similar number of old friends, especially John Melling from Inverness, who has been very active during his time.

It is up to us to take forward and facilitate the decisions of YM. Therefore the decision about same-sex relationships is now our business, and is being pursued in four ways: devising interim instructions for registering officers; rewriting the section in *Quaker Faith & Practice*; seeking to introduce an amendment to the equality bill, namely removing the veto on religious place and religious language (apparently we have friends in parliament); and doing what we can to inform and care for those Friends who were not at YM or who felt steamrollered in the YM session.

The other business that came

directly from YM was the question of whether to invite journalists other than from *the Friend* to our sessions. MfS wants all Friends to engage in this discussion and representatives to bring their thoughts to December's meeting.

Several letters to *the Friend* have set out the pros and cons. The pro is the chance of Friends' views and principles being better known – warts and all – there is no such thing as bad publicity! We do have “speaking out” as one of our priorities in the Framework for Action. The con is that journalists would not be part of the prayerful exploration and might disturb it, even silently. (Remember that we already have sound technicians and signers present, and don't think anything of it.)

We were reintroduced to the work of Britain YM trustees – the ultimate staff employers, responsible for buildings and for the conduct of the Society as a

charity. Quite early in their novitiate they were confronted by a query about one of Friends activities being consistent with status as a charity.

As part of their responsibility for finance they have had to put refurbishment of the Large Meeting House on hold, for lack of money. The last I heard, we could not afford not to do this (it would greatly increase letting income), but if the capital is not there, we just can't. In fact we cannot maintain even existing commitments for 2010 without using up our reserves. You can only do that once. This was made very clear to us by Ron Barden, clerk of Quaker Finance & Property, in his introduction of the budget. Normally he is a bundle of laughs, even when giving bad news but not this time. He says he has always avoided crying chicken, because you can only do that once. Now he is doing it. He said he had heard with incredulity that in some meetings there were Friends and attenders who had never even been asked for contributions: the treasurers are apparently embarrassed to ask. Other charities contact members direct in the post, but Friends have never done that. Yet.

The operational plan for central work for 2010–2012 was presented to us. It is now directly linked to the Framework for Action, and each section has a list of possible evidence for success. It seems to me likely that the plan will have to be modified for 2011 in view of our financial difficulties. Quaker Life gave us a list of its

planned projects for 2010 which will have to be abandoned because there can be no extra staff taken on.

We had a minute from Devon AM urging the meeting to support the 10:10 campaign. Unfortunately this was given to us on arrival, and not all Friends read *the Guardian*, so many of us felt this was too sudden, and in spite of the urgency of putting our weight behind the Copenhagen summit we took shelter behind the excuse that we could not speak for the Society.

Finally – not part of the business – at lunchtime we had a grand opening of the new Quaker Centre, which used to be the three rooms on the NE corner of Friends House. There was too big a crowd for me to see the café, which now occupies the corner where the bookshop was. From the café you progress to the next big room, which is now both a bookshop and a reference library. From there you reach the third room, the worship room, which is circular with a sliding curved door. It is lit both by concealed uprights near the ceiling and by two tangential-facing diffused-light panels giving on to hip-high ledges that taper to nothing. This explains the bright patches on the photograph on the cover of *The Friend* for Quaker week, which puzzled me completely. The central table is a section of oak tree that fell down naturally. It must weigh half a ton! The effect is minimalist and much admired, though it will not replace the Scottish Churches House chapel in my affection.

Zero-Growth Workshop: Woodbrooke, 3/10–1/11

Reflections — Midwives or Hospice Workers?

Report by Martin Mansell

Despite the title, the workshop which followed the one day conference in London did not discuss exactly what we meant by the term Zero-Growth, which for some is a contradiction in terms. Instead, it focused on what we as Quakers can do in the face of the problems of climate change.

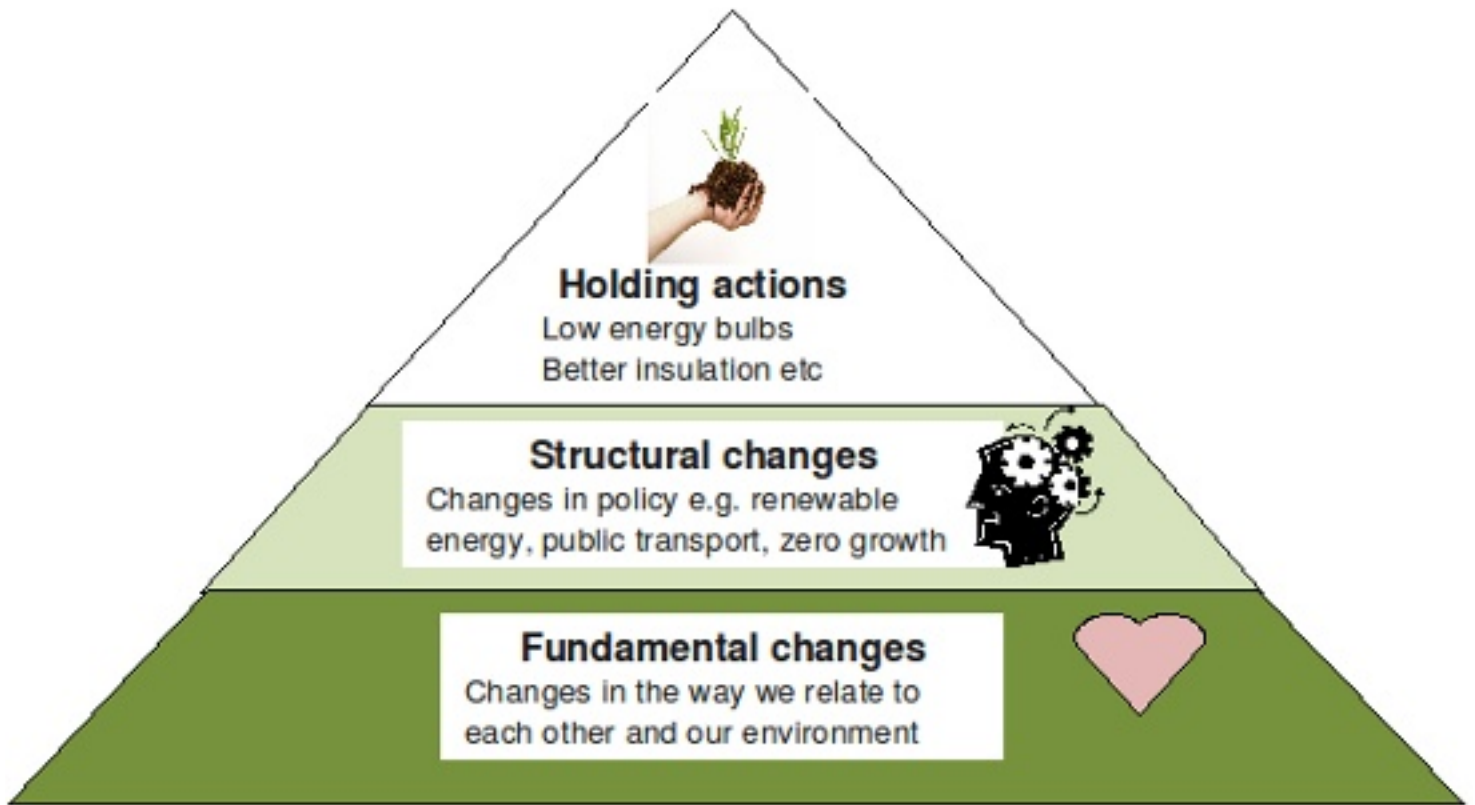
We started by looking at what could be and what is being done now. Gwen Prince from Llanidloes, for example, described the Transition Town movement which helps communities move to a sustainable way of life – helping people to understand their carbon footprint by carrying out audits and supplying energy meters and developing gardens to supply local food. Later, an excellent DVD showed how Cuba has adjusted to the sudden loss of their oil supply from the USSR. Their answer was to turn over almost completely to small-scale organic cooperative gardens and small-holdings, decentralise their universities and government services and expand public transport. Their infant mortality and life expectancy is now about the same as the United States! It was a useful model of what we will need to do but I am not sure the British public or the media will show the same cheerful acceptance of what is needed as the Cubans did. There are some advantages in a centrally planned economy.

Laurie Michaelis, from Living Witness Project (www.livingwitness.org.uk) looked at the unique Quaker perspective

and the dilemmas we face. We tend to do things after a lengthy period of discernment but do we have time for this? We are reluctant to tell people to adopt a sustainable life style without having perfected our own lifestyle — but can we wait? We need to reduce our long-distance travel, but how do we organise and energise ourselves without meetings such as this one?

Throughout the workshop I was alternating between optimism and despair. On the one hand there were the countless small initiatives in meetings which are helping to raise awareness of the problem: on the other there was the inescapable fact that we will all have to reduce our carbon emissions to about 20% of our present levels within a few years and that so few people are really prepared to do anything about it. As Alastair McIntosh once said, there are the ‘planetary hospice workers’ who feel that we cannot do much and see their role as looking after a dying human world and there are the ‘planetary midwives’ who want to assist in the birth of a new sustainable order.

The irony for the latter is that most of what needs to be done does not need vast new technologies or even great sums of money. What is needed more than anything is a change of values. Joanna Macey, who founded the Deep Ecology movement, speaks of the three types of action which are needed. There are the ‘holding actions’ which are the practical things we can



all do such as recycling, using low energy light bulbs, etc. Then there are the more difficult tasks of changing the structures of our society such as changing our energy and transport policies. Finally, there is the most challenging job of all which is changing ourselves and the way we relate to our environment and to other people. Joanna regards them as separate but I prefer to see them as a hierarchy as in the diagram. Most of us are already doing a lot of the first type of actions (which might be equated to ‘the hands’), but we probably feel we can’t do much more unless changes also happen in the structures of our society

(‘the mind’). There is some progress in this area but again progress will be limited unless we are willing to change ourselves (‘the heart’).

Alastair McIntosh has spoken of the prophetic role of Quakers in the past in relation to slavery, prison reform, peace and other issues and suggests that this could be our real role in climate change. As was said at the conference, a prophet is someone who talks to future generations and at the same time makes themselves a real nuisance with the current generation. Do we want to be nuisances?

Martin Mansell

Quaker Life Representative Council: Swanwick, October Birth, Marriage, Death — all covered here

Report by Margaret Munro

My first experience of a QLRC was a vibrant one. The Spirit seemed to be moving less through the still small voice than as a mighty rushing wind, chiming with the autumnal gales outside...

The two main themes were our tradition of testimonies to the grace of God in the life of a deceased Friend and questions arising from the decision of Yearly Meeting (YM) 2009 on same-sex marriage.

Testimonies

Janet Scott and Barbara Windle led our deliberations.

Janet suggested that in the absence of creed, liturgy and sacraments there are two main ways of learning how to live grace-filled lives; listening to the inward teacher, and studying the lives of inspired Friends who have travelled with us on our spiritual journey. While we are all “originals” and “no man’s copy”, we can be strengthened, comforted and encouraged by these testimonies. Janet stressed the need when composing such testimonies to be truthful and describe the struggles as well as the achievements.

Barbara read us extracts from testimonies over the years, some moving, some humorous, a few sad, but all “telling stories, like parables, of the good life.” The discussion in small groups that followed was personal and revealing. One young Friend had recently had the shocking experience of a young attender at her meeting being brutally murdered. Could this friend have a testimony written about her although she was only in her twenties and “only” an attender?

Other questions we discussed were as follows;

1. In your meeting when a Friend dies is a testimony always written, and how is this decision discerned?
2. Is a memorial minute made?
3. Do you keep a book of memories?
4. Is a member treated differently from an attender?
5. Does the testimony focus on the Friend’s gifts and spiritual journey rather than read like an obituary?
6. Is the phrase “the grace of God” a meaningful one for you?
7. And, finally and perhaps most importantly, Do you feel you know one another well enough “in the things that are eternal” to be able to contribute to such a testimony?

There was a wide variety of views expressed, and the suggestion was that each local meeting should examine their own approach to these issues.

Same-sex marriage

The session on questions arising from the decision of YM 2009 on same-sex marriage was led by Dugan Cummings from QL Advisory Group on Committed Relationships.

Dugan claimed that what makes a relationship “committed” is the inner worth and quality of selfless love within that relationship. He outlined the history of marriage, demonstrating how the essential ingredient of a marriage union is the consent of each partner and how others attending the ceremony, including the priest, are simply witnesses to the gift of love that has already been received by the couple and the commitment to each other that has already taken place. Again, as in the session devoted to testimonies, our getting to know the Friends in meeting who have same-sex relationships is crucial to our attitude to and understanding of these issues. These Friends are now finally free to be open and honest for the first time in their lives.

We were then reminded of the YM minute recording the decision on same-sex marriages:

“We have heard dissenting voices during the threshing process which has led us to this decision, and we have been reminded of the need for tenderness to those who are not with us who will find this change difficult.”

Friends, we are asked as meetings to use the following questions to report back to Suze Lidbury in Quaker Life (suzel@quaker.org.uk). (An electronic copy of the complete four page document on *Questions arising...* is on the YM website at www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-life-representative-council-october-2009-papers).

1. How has the decision of YM been viewed in your meetings by those who could not be part of its discernment?
2. Has there been any subsequent discussion at local or area business meetings?
3. What difficulties or doubts have been expressed or possibly unexpressed?
4. Have there been any resignations or withdrawals of membership applications?
5. Is there need for support which local and area Friends cannot meet?
6. Are there any ways in which QL or others outside the area meeting could assist?

So where does birth fit into all of the above? During meeting for worship one Friend gave truly visionary ministry, based on the painting, *Annunciation*, by Fra Angelico. She saw Mary as representing all of us, in that we all have had a seed planted within us that can give birth to the divine. She saw Mary’s virginity as symbolic of the purity within us which is needed to give birth to something of God. And how do we know when that is happening? When we have a sense of ‘tasting’ God in our lives.

Treasurers' Day 2009

On 7 November, ten treasurers, including eight local meeting (LM) treasurers, met in Glasgow. Some had travelled as far as 100 miles!

We were a bit nervous on the day. As far as we can tell, there has never been such a meeting in West Scotland before. Would the LM treasurers find the day useful and enjoyable enough? Would they feel it had been worth the effort of giving up a Saturday and travelling long distances? We were relieved to find, after our brief opening silence, that we had greatly underestimated the hunger amongst them for just such a day.

In the morning we managed to cover the more practical topics of:

- Quaker resources for treasurers,
- annual report and consolidation,
- need to hold reserves and how much,
- constructing a budget,
- encouraging giving and tax effective giving.

Each topic was given a brief introduction which was soon expanded upon by questions and comments from all present. This gave a wonderful chance to learn from each others' experiences. We did pause for a 40-minute lunch break but there was a buzz all through lunch about how valuable the morning had been.

In the afternoon we tackled the more managerial and legal topics:

- role of trustees,
- accounting practice and financial controls,
- authorising expenditure,
- donations to outside bodies and special collections.

Very few Friends think of accounts and keeping them as fun. This was a fun day of sharing ideas and difficulties and getting to know each other better. After our closing silence we asked if we should do this again and there was a resounding yes.

Martha Hatch (AM Assistant Treasurer), Margaret Morton (AM Treasurer)

Features

A Quaker Passport?

James A. Michener (1907–1997), the famous author and politician, was born in New York City. Abandoned at birth, he was adopted by Mabel Michener of Doylestown in Pennsylvania. and educated at Swarthmore College and St Andrews University in Scotland.

As a young teenager I was enthralled in the 1950s by black and white television adaptations from his *Tales of the South Pacific* — could these have been my first introduction to Quaker wisdom? For me, his writing and television productions always had a special flavour of excitement and reality, as it did for others!

On coming across a piece written by James in 1947 (*Daily Readings from Quaker Writings Ancient & Modern*, Vol. 2), I felt a need to share my feelings about it in ministry at meeting a few weeks ago, and Beverley Mathias, our local meeting newsletter editor, suggested I might share James's pen with more Friends:

'I have travelled with many different kinds of passports, but none commanded more respect than the single word Quaker. It is a word which carries its own currency throughout the world. In Australia, in Italy, the word has won long and lasting respect.

'This naturally caused me some concern, for obviously I am not the man whom the word – in its world-wide connotation – applies. There is some over-Quaker who is referred to in the world's mind when the word is used. He is peaceful, honest, quiet, sincere, trustworthy, helpful, generous and progressive...In religious matters he is unassuming, cooperative and uncontentious...he is reported to spend more than the usual portion of his income on the education of his own and others' children. In politics he is sane, liberal, trustworthy, and hard working. In his daily life he is a friend to all men.

'Now this picture of Quakerism was so often thrust upon me that I can cast among all my memories of all my Quaker friends and found no one who lived up to the pattern...

'I therefore decided that Quakerism must be a symbol whose living reality is fed by many men, and religion is indeed fortunate that it is the best of our best that is remembered with affection and it is from this best that we all take our color...The word Friend is bolstered up by the good deeds of all, so that wherever one goes he takes with him a little more than actually is. He borrows upon the deposits made by others. In a very real sense I feel that I have been fairly exclusively a borrower from the joint account, and I am glad to take this opportunity to pay my deepest respects to those Friends who have been making the contributions.'

Ian Macdonald, Newton Stewart

Quaker/ Buddhist Synergy?

Our Friend Bryan Bowes is right to draw our attention to Buddhist thought and history and to the elements of harmonious spirituality between Buddhists and Quakers (October issue). We have much in common with Buddhist religious discipline and our testimonies compare favourably with the “noble truths” of Buddhism. We should also reflect on the fact that in 2600 years of Buddhism, no one has been crucified, garrotted, burnt at the stake, threatened with hellfire and damnation, subjected to inquisitions and no armies have been raised in the name of its founder. No women have been debased or discounted whilst no children have been prematurely indoctrinated into belief systems that they cannot fully comprehend.

All of these are forms of violence, but in place of such inhuman practices Buddhists have developed “schools of thought”; the basic tenet of these is to do no harm to man or beast. Many contemporary Quakers would endorse this philosophy of a comprehensive reverence for life. In his book *The Parallel Sayings* Jack Kornfield compares the sayings of Jesus and the Buddha and demonstrates that most of what Yeshua of Nazareth (the Christ) said had already been spoken by Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) six hundred years earlier. In the words of Siddhartha, “Your true nature is already within you, it is like a hidden jewel,” whilst Yeshua says: “The kingdom of heaven is within you – it is a pearl of great price”. Both of these statements point to the same spiritual truths which Quakers endorse when declaring

“There is that of God in every man” (and every woman too, of course). There is perhaps, an even more important synergy to be assimilated. Yeshua says: “Take my yoke upon you, for my burden is easy and my yoke is light.” (However, many people would object that their lives are far from easy and the stresses of their personal problems are very heavy indeed!) But here again, Yeshua and Siddhartha offer us the same solution: “Take no thought for the morrow, sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.” (Yeshua) “What is, is. It is your resistance to what is, that is the cause of your suffering.” (Siddhartha)

It seems that God knows what he’s doing and we are encouraged to relax, allow the processes of creation to unfold, to be in the moment and still. But what if he chooses to make a mountain explode? Then so be it; let your life speak that condition! But a Quaker would say: “Oh, but God doesn’t make a mountain blow up, Bill – that is a natural disaster!” You are certainly correct here Friend, but unfortunately early Christian believers thought that He did such things, because the scriptures nowhere pointed them towards natural catastrophes. Even today, the exploits of Moses are taught as historical facts.

The behaviour of a benign and non-violent Creator are not reflected in the biblical accounts of the actions of Yahweh, the ancient deity of Judaism, who parts the seas and drowns people in order to demonstrate his awesome and most terrifying power. When bolts of lightning fell from the skies, ancient

peoples cowered in terror and assumed that the gods were angry about something. But today electricity is the main tool of human communication across the planet. Who does not have a computer or a mobile phone?

As Friends, perhaps most of us have put our Bibles quietly to one side and frequently quote instead from the beautiful *Quaker Faith & Practice* (QF&P) and the beloved *Advices and Queries*. Both of these wonderful documents have evolved over time and define (in a gentle way) our Quaker beliefs and practice. QF&P “cuts to the chase” and so we can forget about demon-possessed pigs jumping off cliff-tops, etc., and get on with the business of living our authentic lives of peace, justice and truth.

In recent times many of us have shown an interest in the gospel of Thomas, but my favourite gospel is that of Luke (the beloved physician), for only Luke tells us the wonderful parables of The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son. In these two famous stories, we get a dependable insight into the mind of Yeshua, the carpenter from Nazareth.

Two things emerge from these parables. The first is that Yeshua condemns false religious practitioners who show no compassion to those who do not share their belief systems (the Jews despised the Samaritans). The second is that he also condemns gods who show no compassion for their children. Yeshua then completely blows the minds of his listeners – even today – by introducing them, unexpectedly, to “The Father” (unconditional love). The old and worn-out wineskins of rigid Judaism

are burst wide open by this unique spiritual insight.

Remarkably and regrettably, Luke misses Yeshua’s point when, in another part of the narrative, he endorses Yahweh’s cruel murder of Lot’s wife by turning her into a pillar of salt!(ch. 17). But, of course, he never actually met Yeshua and that is a very great pity.* Yeshua offered his people (the Jews) a new way of thinking about God, but they refused to listen and he was then judicially murdered.

You may not agree with what I have to say here Friends, but I feel perfectly safe in your company and know that my life is not in danger. Now I wonder why that should be? Could it be that the God who inhabits your hearts and minds, is a non-violent entity also ?

Bill Bingham, Glasgow

***Footnote:** Bible historians tell us that Luke never met Yeshua, but that he “interviewed” people who had been with the Christ. Luke is also attributed with writing the book of Acts where Luke also tells us that Judas (Judah) “fell to his death and his bowels exploded.” Matthew, however, tells us that Judah “hanged himself.” Which of these two authors are we to believe? Because the name Judah was given to the betrayer of Christ, the Jewish people have endured centuries of persecution and pogroms, culminating in the 20th century Nazi holocaust. There are still those among us who are intent upon causing pain and suffering to prevail. But God himself can never be included in that most cruel company.

Gospel of Thomas seminar: 7–8 November

A complete copy of the Gospel of Thomas was discovered in the Nile Valley in 1945. Written in the Coptic language the text is virtually intact. Prior to that we only had a few Greek fragments. The opening lines are:

‘these are the hidden logia which the living Jesus spoke
and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote’

The text which follows has been divided by scholars into 114 *logia* (or sayings) many of which are not recorded elsewhere hence the widespread interest in *Thomas*. Several scholars have now concluded that these are the earliest record we have of Jesus and his teaching.



Photo by Margaret Gladden

The Northern Thomas Study Group has around thirty members and at the moment we hold twice yearly seminars. Fourteen people attended on this occasion at Wiston Lodge near Biggar in Lanarkshire. As always it was an informal group where all are encouraged to make contributions in their own way.

Three speakers made presentations. Andrew Redpath on his ongoing translation of the Metanoia Groups commentaries (an early French commentary) on *Thomas* into English. These are an extensive and valuable resource highly regarded by scholars and a reliable English translation would be invaluable. During the talk we read out *logia* and Andrew replied with his translation of the commentary. After a coffee break we further discussed the Metanoia interpretations of *Thomas*, once again very ably led by Andrew.

Following lunch I introduced the web sites and books I have found useful when studying *Thomas*. I can send you a copy of the list if you'd like one.

Margaret Gladden's presentation followed on *Thomas and the divinity of Jesus*. This prompted a discussion which ranged from Isaiah chapter 53 to the Gospel of John. Both Margaret and Andrew gave ample opportunity for others to speak.

Sunday morning commenced with a half hour Quaker Meeting for Worship. The ministry was a quote from Shri Neem Karoli Baba: "worldly people go outward but you must go inward like the tortoise withdrawing within your shell," and a reading from the Gospel of John 15:16, which I hope you will read in your own favourite translation.

Andrew Redpath then talked on *The Gospel of Thomas and Indian spiritual traditions* with his theme being any possible resonances between them. Members of our group have a wide range of interests and Buddhism, Christianity, meditation, the Upanishads and Vedanta all got a mention in the lively discussion which followed Andrew's talk. The ideas and varied experiences put forward certainly held everyone's interest. We ended the seminar with a written contribution from Hugh McGregor Ross read by Rosemary Gascoyne. The letter covered some aspects of Hugh's own spiritual journey – he is author of a range of books on *The Gospel of Thomas*. I trust this report will give you an idea of the range of discussion and enjoyable atmosphere which prevailed throughout the seminar. If you yourself have any interest in the *Gospel of Thomas* or the various subjects mentioned please contact Rosemary Gascoyne Tel:01644-430468 or myself. We welcome new members and their input.

Jack Squires, Dumfries, email cummertrees@btinternet.com

Contribution Schedule for 2010

The new contribution schedule for 2010 is now available from your local meeting treasurer. The new schedule is also posted on the Scottish Friends website www.quakerscotland.org/west as **Contribution Schedule 2010** and may be printed out from there.

I am sure we are all aware that, with interest rates so low, many charities are finding a valuable source of income has been greatly diminished. I hope you will consider the financial needs for the work of Friends carefully when considering your charitable giving for 2010. We have had requests from several Friends for more explicit guidance as to these needs so have given the average amount of donation required from each member of Area Meeting to meet the required income of Area Meeting and of Britain Yearly Meeting. Remember that averages are an indication of the middle level of donation with many Friends giving less and many giving more. We certainly do not expect each of you to give these exact amounts but rather to adjust your giving according to your circumstances.

Even small donations are very welcome and if you are a tax payer, you may wish to consider giving by Gift Aid or by CAF voucher. Giving by Gift Aid increases your contribution by a quarter and diverts a corresponding amount of your tax money to the work of Friends. When giving by CAF voucher the tax back is already included in the amount you specify on your voucher. If you are not a tax payer you should not sign up to these methods of giving as you could be asked by HM Revenue & Customs to pay back any reclaimed tax.

If you would like more advice or have any questions about filling in the schedule please feel free to contact me (tel: 01465 841 277 or email: hatch.glenburnie@btinternet.com).

You may also wish to talk to your local meeting treasurer.

Martha Hatch, Assistant Treasurer

Notices

Britain in Afghanistan

The Northern Friends Peace Board Executive committee met last weekend and agreed the following statement about the UK's continuing military involvement in Afghanistan.

We unite with others in expressing our deep distress and disquiet at the continuing loss of life, amongst Afghans and NATO personnel, in Afghanistan. The displacement of people and the social and psychological harm – on top of physical injury - that arises from armed conflict such as this will have long-term damaging consequences for all concerned.

We urge the UK government to do all it can to bring to a cessation its involvement in this violent conflict; a conflict which many analysts now conclude is unwinnable and is worsening – rather than contributing to – global peace and security. We recognise that the UK does have a commitment to supporting reconstruction in the region and support this intent. The security needed to allow such reconstruction, however, can surely only be sustainable when it has come from dialogue and reconciliation rather than from the barrel of a gun.

We know that our government now faces very great dilemmas in finding a way forward and that this will not be easy or simple. We call for the urgent withdrawal of British and other foreign troops from Afghanistan, allowing the people of that country to find their own way of building a peaceful, just and secure society.

24 October 2009

We also heard a suggestion that people should light a candle and display it in their front window each evening between 8 and 9 pm, as a symbol of our wish for peacebuilding rather than further violence. Friends may wish to take this up.

Philip Austin, Co-ordinator, Northern Friends Peace Board

Climate Change Rally in Glasgow

The Wave

Those who prefer to be outside in Glasgow on 5 December, rather than attending the Area Meeting, might be interested in taking part in the rally organised by Stop Climate Chaos. Assemble at 10.30 in Bellahouston Park. For more information and to register visit this website:

<http://www.stopclimatechaos.org/thewavescotland>

The rally is timed just before the Copenhagen talks, and it should be fun.

Children & Young People in Central Scotland

More dates for 2009–10 academic year:

Winter 31 January 2010

Spring 22 May 2010

All take place on Sundays at 10.30 am, and are held at:

Holmehill Annexe, Scottish Churches House, Kirk Street, Dunblane FK15 OAJ

A trial Outreach meeting in late August was a great success and Dunblane Quaker Meeting has now agreed three more dates, including the two above. As with the first Outreach meeting, it will be an all-age Worship approach.

This will involve silent reflection as well as noisier activities. Children, young people, students and parents can join in workshops which may include Quaker values and history, arts & crafts, seasonal explores of the local woodland, and songs and music. Some may prefer to stay with the adults and older young people for silent reflection. We all meet up to share our experiences at the end of worship. The meeting finishes with light refreshments, home baking, fruit, teas, coffees, juice and squash.

Our aim is to support families and young people in the areas of Stirlingshire, Falkirk, west Fife, south Perthshire and west West Lothian. We also have occasional potluck lunches, picnics and other outings. We hope to send a group from Central Scotland to the Scottish young Quakers summer gathering.

We hold regular meetings for worship every Sunday and have a small, dedicated group of attending families, which welcome visitors.

For map to Scottish Churches House visit www.quakerscotland.org/west and follow the link to Dunblane Meeting. Car-sharing is encouraged so please phone if you need a lift.

For further information please phone/ text:

Sarah d’Auvergne Collings, Linlithgow M: 07796/ 147 - 991

Mary Scott Watson, Dunblane M: 07960/ 856 - 1213

[Elaine Millar, Crieff – Childrens and Young Peoples Co-ordinator]

[Peter Hancock, Bridge of Allan – Clerk to Meeting]

Sing carols!

Eat mince pies!

At 7.30 pm on Wednesday 23 December

at the Peacocks'

16 Drumlin Drive

Milngavie

Tel. 0141 956 1183

December Area Meeting

The Meeting will be held at the meeting house in Glasgow on Saturday, 5 December, at 11 for 11.30.

The next AM will be in St Andrew's Church Hall, Stewart St, Milngavie on 30 January 2010.

Dates for 2010 Business meetings

30 January	AM	Milngavie	6 March	AM	Dunblane
13 March	GM	Glasgow	24 April	AM	Lanark
28–31 May	BYM	London	5 June	GM	Inverness
19 June	AM	Newton Stewart	28 August	AM	Argyll
11 September	GM	SE Scotland	16 October	AM	Dumfries
13–14 November	GM	Dunblane	4 December	AM	Glasgow

Meetings for worship at Faslane

7 February, 4 April, 20 June, 29 August, 26 September, 14 November, all Sundays at 11.

For more information contact Mary Alice Mansell, tel. 01505 842 380.

Copy for the next issue should be sent by 13 January 2010 to the Editor at the address on page 2.

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 8493

Charity registered in Scotland No SC011234

Paper edition printed by Glasgow pdc, 130 Douglas Street, G2 4HF