

The Northern Quaker

Autumn / Winter 2016

North Scotland Area Meeting



Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre

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North Scotland Area Meeting

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Area Meetings for 2017

- February 18th 2017 Inverness
- May 6th 2017 Kirkwall

General Meetings for Scotland in 2016

- March 11th 2017 South East
- June 10th 2017 West
- September 9th 2017 East
- November 18th /19th 2017 North residential

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Welcome to the latest edition of the Northern Quaker.

Due to circumstances, I apologise for only producing two editions this year. But what a difference six months make - Brexit and the US Presidential elections! No matter what our political inclinations, it's all too easy to forget that others may hold equally valid opposing views; a lesson I learned the hard way by some injudicious remarks on my part whilst delivering a daily start-of-shift brief in the mornings after both announcements to a group of offshore service hands (scaffolders, painters etc.). Happily, the only result of the (figurative) kickings was a bruised ego which served as a sanguine reminder to respect the views of others, no matter how different from one's own.

As well as reports on groups and meetings, we are pleased to include some welcome contributions on talks, books and plays. I've also included a message on Outreach as Quaker week was in October and Aberdeen Friends held a few events - a short talk and two drop-in sessions with lunch. One of the attractions of the Quakers for me was the absence of proselytising. However, there is a fine line between this, and becoming extinct. This was brought home to me last year during a (very satisfying) workparty in the Aberdeen Meeting House when we demolished the inner lather and plaster back wall. On reflection, I calculated that our combined age was 207 years. And we were only three in number.....

I hope you enjoy the edition; if you are receiving this in the printed edition, please consider if you might wish to switch to the email version which contains coloured photographs as well as a "clickable" contents list for easy navigation and hyperlinks in the

various articles. If you wish for your name to be transferred from the print to the email list, please send the address to harrydhorsley@gmail.com.

As usual, please send contributions for future editions in any form to myself: Harry Horsley, 11 Cottown of Balgownie, Aberdeen AB23 8JQ, harrydhorsley@gmail.com.

Announcements [return to top^](#)

Inverness change of venue

From Sunday 2nd October Inverness Meeting will be moving to L'Arche Workshop, 13, Drummond Crescent, IV2 4QR. Meeting for Worship will be held on Sundays at 11.00am and the children's meeting on 1st and 3rd Sundays.

L'Arche is about a 25 minute walk from the centre of town. It is a 5 minute drive from Inverness High Street, along the B861, Castle Road and B862 Island Bank Road, turning left into Drummond Crescent opposite the bus stop. L'Arche is signposted on the right hand side on the corner of Drummond Crescent and Stratherrick Road. The workshop lies behind the main house. There is plenty of parking and disabled access but no hearing loop. There is also a bus service from the centre of Inverness.

For further information telephone Clunie Conochie (078505639821) or email Oriole Hall (oriolehall@hotmail.com)

John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust

We are in the happy situation of having a modest legacy to disburse. John Wigham directed that grants should be made to 'deserving persons resident in Scotland who owing to straitened circumstances are unable to enjoy the usual pleasures of life, the purpose of such grants being to provide the recipients with some additional comfort

or pleasure of an exceptional nature over and above the usual necessities of life'.

We welcome applications from Quakers and non-Quakers resident anywhere in Scotland, for grants large or small. £500 will normally be the maximum. Applicants may obtain an application form from Mel Richards by telephoning her on 0131 225 1298 or emailing her via deusexmacintosh@yahoo.co.uk. Please note that grants cannot be made in retrospect for goods already purchased or events that have already taken place. The completed form should be passed to a Quaker of long-standing who is well-known to their meeting and to you, who will countersign it and forward it to the trustees. Applicants will normally hear the results of their application within eight weeks.

Creating a Just Scotland; Transforming our land and taxation policies

Scottish Quakers are committed to seeking a just society in which resources are shared more equitably. We are not alone; many others share this vision. The time seems right to join with others and call for change.

The Scottish Parliament has recently had devolved to it considerable autonomy with regard to taxation and economic affairs and is looking, especially in the circumstances following 'Brexit', for still greater powers, either through the development of greater federal devolution or, if that does not emerge, through independence. While there are radical elements within the Holyrood parliament and Scottish society at large calling for the creation of a more socially and economically just society, these are working against an instinctive conservatism and against those stakeholders with money, land and power who do not wish to see change. If such change is not initiated in Scotland at this critical time, when doors are wide open, there is the risk of traditional power bases uniting

with inertia and caution to prevent change.

On Oct 29th in Edinburgh Mairi Campbell-Jack, Scottish Quaker Parliamentary Engagement Officer and the General Meeting Parliamentary Liaison Function Group arranged a symposium on tackling inequalities in Scottish society which brought together a range of concerned parties including Scottish Quakers, other churches and faith communities, and local organisations working on economic justice.

We hope to have a summary of the proceedings in the next edition of Northern Quaker

Meeting for Sufferings July 2016 [return to top^](#)

We met in the wake of the decision to leave the EU, so although there are no specific items to bring back to AM, it was a very intense meeting and there was a change to the agenda to allow us to reflect on it. There is no Quaker view on Brexit, although various statements have been made, such as BYM's 'Building bridges after the referendum'. People described diverse views and votes in their meetings, and were concerned about the potential divisive effects. In Scotland, we have been in a similar position with the Independence referendum. Others expressed concerns about racism and xenophobia (a primary school teacher described the fears of Spanish and Polish pupils and parents). Others saw the vote as highlighting the division in our countries between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Certainly the result, which even the bookies got wrong, has elements of a howl of pain. Do Quakers really understand this? Many of us lead financially secure and comfortable lives. Is there something about lives not like ours we are not getting? Quakers can be intimidatingly cerebral and bookish. Are we able to listen to those 'who do not speak like we speak'?

This fed into our reflections about possible themes for next year's

Yearly Meeting, the second year of three based on living out our faith in the world and focussed on movement building. Maybe it should also be borne in mind when considering our own AM.

For over a year AMs have sent minutes to Sufferings concerned about what Quakers can do regarding the refugee crisis. Last year media attention was drawn to images of Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian refugee boy drowned on a Turkish beach. A year later, another Syrian boy, alive this time, dazed and bloody in an ambulance. No doubt there were many unrecorded horrors in between. What are we doing? QPSW has decided not to sign up to Citizens UK's private refugee sponsorship scheme but is initiating a project called 'Responding to Forced Migration'. BYM will be employing a full-time worker using legacy funding to build networks, share ideas and good practice and look for opportunities for Quakers to play a role. The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) and QCEA (Quaker Council for European Affairs) is planning a conference entitled 'Forced Migration; How can Quakers respond?' in February with ten places reserved for European Friends.

We had an update on action regarding UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia, in the light of possible breaches of International Humanitarian Law in Yemen, where there is evidence of UK arms being used against civilian targets. QPSW is supporting CAAT (Campaign against Arms Trade), which is bringing legal action against the government (specifically, the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills). The High Court has now given permission for a judicial review (before 1st February 2017) challenging the government's decision to continue allowing the export of arms to Saudi Arabia. Both the MOD and the Saudi-led coalition insist that civilians are not being targeted and the law has not been breached, but their denials are unravelling.

We also heard about progress of the Taxes for Peace Bill, a private

members' bill introduced by Quaker MP Ruth Cadbury and provisionally due to be heard on 19th July. This proposes the right of conscientious objection to military taxation into the tax system. It would involve self-certifying as a CO on your tax return so that the proportion of tax which would have been used for military purposes is directed into a fund for non-military security. Update: The Bill passed its first reading, but as it does not have the support of the government will not get a second reading. In the meantime, you can register as a CO here: <http://www.conscienceonline.org.uk/register-yourself-as-a-conscientious-objector/>

I will finish by mentioning that there will be a change in the structure of Quaker Management Meeting.

The roles of recording and deputy recording clerks remain, but the roles and titles of the rest of the senior management team are now based on themes and work rather than departments. Thus, Helen Drewery will be Head of Worship and Witness, Paul Grey Head of Operations and Lisa Kiew Head of Finance and Resources. This will have no effect on the structure of centrally managed work and is unlikely to have much impact in North Scotland, but it allows me to pass on a joke told to us by the Clerk of Trustees.

How many Quakers does it take to change a light bulb?

Answer: Change? Light bulb?????

Jane Booth, Banchory LM and Aberdeen LM

Meeting for Sufferings October 2016 [return to top^](#)

It seems we are not alone in considering how we can revitalise our meetings. October's MfS included information about BYM's Vibrancy in Meetings pilot project as well as an account of Paul Parker (our Recording Clerk) and Deborah Rowland's (YM Clerk) recent visit to the States, where they described Baltimore and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings' responses to similar challenges. Why are Quakers less diverse than the general population? Do our

structures work against, for example, younger Friends? Shorter term 'Collaboratives' and 'Sprints' have, in Philadelphia, replaced many committees leading to a fresh and lively approach. Informal care committees drawn together by the clerks can provide additional support, and different styles of clerking have been tried. For example, the Baltimore clerking team included three young adults as reading clerks, while Philadelphia YM had four alternate clerks. One reflection brought back should resonate with our AM following our residential meeting at Pluscarden - actually, there are some things we do quite well! A full account of their journey can be found in The Friend (2nd Sept. 2016).

The legacy-funded Vibrancy in Meetings project is being piloted in four areas for three years. After noting that 'vibrant' means 'full of life' but not necessarily 'busier', the four new local development workers introduced themselves and their areas. The locations were selected to trial the initiative in a variety of differing places. Perhaps the region most similar to ours is West Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, which is rural and poorly served by public transport. Some of the tasks undertaken by the development workers include responding to requests for information, helping meetings explore what might be of use to them, providing support for major projects, and acting as a link between meetings and Friends House and Woodbrooke with respect to gifts, skills, needs and requirements. It will be interesting to see whether any fresh ideas relevant to North Scotland come out of the pilot.

According to QF&P, MfS's roles include setting the priorities for the centrally managed work and reviewing and testing existing and new concerns. We spent time considering how, or even whether, MfS does this, especially with regard to setting priorities. We're supposed to be prophetic and visionary, but are priorities in fact thrust upon us? One Friend sees Sufferings more as a testing than a prioritising body, linking AMs and Central committees with trustees.

Obviously Sufferings cannot know everything about all our work and can only give 'broad brush answers to broad brush-questions', trusting the central committees and trustees with the detail. There was concern about appearing tardy and being reactive rather than pro-active ('How can the Methodists respond to things more quickly than we do?'); perhaps we need a change in our structures (what about the 'sprints' mentioned above?). However plus ça change; one Friend remembers much the same conversations happening in the 1980s.

I had never heard of the Ammerdown Group, much less been aware of its invitation. The group is a collection of people involved in peace building work (including Quakers) who are concerned about 'the future of peace and security in the UK and worldwide' and would like to begin a public conversation about this in the UK. Brighthouse West Yorkshire AM has engaged with this document and Sufferings encourages Friends to learn more about the work and possibly support it, perhaps by holding discussions. More information and the group's paper 'Rethinking Security' can be found at <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/> and <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/portfolio/policy-resources/> GM for Scotland sent a minute regarding the proposed introduction of cadet forces to Scottish state schools, funded via the UK government from banking Libor fines. This is not, as it might seem to be, solely a Scottish issue (the number of cadet forces in England and presumably Wales would be increased; at the moment there are none in Scottish state schools) and raises a number of issues. If the money had come from the treasury using the Barnett formula, the Scottish parliament would have had a say in how it was used. Thus the decision to allocate the money in this way has completely bypassed parliamentary scrutiny by either Holyrood or Westminster and Friends are not able to argue for, for example, a proportion of the money to go towards peace education. Furthermore, should money raised from fines be used to promote the military? George

Osborne stated that 'money from fines paid by those who represent the worst of British values' would be used to support 'those in uniform who demonstrate the best of British values'. Should the money not rather be used for things which improve community life? The GM Parliamentary Liaison Function Group has been involved with work on increased militarisation in our schools, including a joint petition with Forces Watch to the Scottish parliament calling for greater scrutiny of school visits from the military.

'The report is rather dry. The work isn't' was our introduction to QPSW's annual report, which describes changes in strategic direction and updates on its work. Grouping programmes together encourages links and synergies, and tends to be more efficient. Legacy funding has been useful and has enabled the creation of new posts, including a policy intern at the Housing Justice charity and a programme manager working on forced migration. Booklets about a new economy are in preparation (two are available now). Collaboration with non-Quaker groups is also being explored as part of QPSW's focus on 'movement building'. If anyone wants to read the report let me know and I will extract it from the Sufferings papers - if it's available on the website it is fairly well hidden!

As previously reported, the Friends World Committee for Consultation at its meeting in Pisac in February this year has asked all YMs to take at least two concrete actions on sustainability in the next 12 months. The first actions are always the easiest, and following the Canterbury Commitment in 2011, our yearly meeting, at Friends House, has already divested from fossil fuels, committed to fair trade products and switched to green energy suppliers. What next? We were asked whether our meetings are content to support another sustainability survey to find out the extent to which our own meetings had also made these commitments. However due to lack of time consideration of this was deferred. If anyone has any

opinion about this, either way, please get in touch with me!

Jane Booth, Banchory & Aberdeen Meetings.

North Scotland Area Meeting held at Pluscarden 26 - 28th August 2016; A Thriving Community [return to top^](#)

Our Residential Area Meeting started long before we arrived at Pluscarden, as Friends throughout the North of Scotland prepared the agenda, planned childcare and catering, and organised transport. As we arrived we were met with greetings and hugs and familiar faces smiling a welcome. In total we were over forty Friends, including four children.

Saturday morning started with Meeting for Worship for Business. Friends reported from Quaker Peace and Social Witness, and Meeting for Sufferings. Concerns ranged from the UK's sale of arms to Saudi Arabia to an "Assisted Dying" book. North Scotland Quaker Trustees reported on Kingswells and Kinmuck burial grounds, aiming to preserve our heritage and meet the wishes of Friends who would like to be buried at Kinmuck. As last year, I was struck by our care for our past and our future.

We discussed Cornwall Area Meeting's concern about the decriminalisation of possession of all drugs for personal use. Friends spoke from the heart, showing how it could affect someone to be criminalised for using drugs. We did not reach agreement as to how to effect change, but there was a shared sense of wanting to prevent harm and to support education, treatment and rehabilitation.

At lunchtime we were met with chalk patterns and the word "Welcome" on the path at the entrance to St. Scholastica's; the children had been busy preparing for us. While we ate a delicious lunch the village hall was decorated with bunting they had made. It

was hung in front of the picture of Robert Burns overlooking the Clerks' table, so that when we returned to the hall I had the wonderful and surreal experience of seeing the "immortal bard" gazing out over the Meeting through the word "LOVE" on a triangle of bunting. The children offered chocolate treats they had made and told a story they had heard during the morning. It was lovely to have them sharing with us.

In the afternoon workshop Michael Long from Northumbria spoke about revitalising our Area Meeting. He outlined the process his Area Meeting had followed, and in small groups we looked at what works, what we find less helpful, and what we could change. Some of us felt the Business Meeting could appear obscure to those less involved, particularly new enquirers, but there was agreement that our Meeting is already vital, and we did not want to make unnecessary changes. We explored dealing with some business items in other ways so that our gatherings could include an activity with a spiritual or creative focus; singing or circle dancing, a walking meditation, having fun together. We agreed to spend the Sunday morning session exploring further. Finally, we set up a working group to ask the views of as many people as possible.

One of the joys of Residential Meeting is the opportunity for conversations in twos and threes; while walking along the road, during meals, and over the washing up. There was a rota for jobs, but far more volunteers came spontaneously, enjoying working and talking together. The beautiful, tranquil Pluscarden valley made a lovely temporary home for our community, and several of us attended Compline at the abbey, sharing in the monks' different, but beautiful, form of worship.

The weekend ended as a mirror image of how it began, with Friends staying on after most people had gone; clearing up and leaving the place as well cared for as it was when we arrived. As we said

goodbye in warm August sunshine and set off for home I was grateful for time spent in such a generous group of people who care for each other as individuals and share some core values while respecting each other's differences and being carefully, thoughtfully, open to change. For me this is what characterises North Scotland Area Meeting; this is what makes us a thriving community.

Lynden Easterbrook, Forres LM

North Scotland Area Meeting held in Aberdeen on 5th November 2016 [return to top^](#)

Saturday 5th November and it was a horrible gale-driven morning with breath like Winter. Undeterred, some 32 Northern Friends and Attenders arrived at Crown Street Meeting House in Aberdeen, ready for the business of the day.

Meeting for Worship for Business was preceded by a welcome cup and biscuit/jam tart. By 10.50 a gathered silence was drawing nicely together. The clerk (Phyllida Sayles) was assisted by Robert Wilson from Orkney.

After acknowledging those prevented, the first main item held in the Light was a report from the Pluscarden Working Group. This had been set up at the previous Area Meeting as a listening group to consider the experiences and needs of members of North Scotland Area. Anthony Buxton explained how they had fulfilled the first task of co-ordinating responses from Pluscarden, but that the group wished for a year to complete their reporting. This would involve group members visiting Meetings in pairs, (perhaps including an elder from the Meeting being visited) as well as isolated individuals. There was an acknowledgment that the group itself had been hurriedly put together for expediency and some consideration was given to its make-up before 'hope so' closed the items discussion.

Next, David Saunders presented the Area Meeting Trustees Report, which explained various actions taken to ensure that there were reserves to cover possible future changes to income levels. There was still an anticipated surplus and the Trustees had suggestions of suitable recipients. Members were still encouraged to apply for funding for the purposes of Education and Conferences.

John Melling, along with others, is to stand down from the Nominations Committee and Search Group. He was thanked for his work. David James will take over as Convener from Jan 2017. A variety of appointments to the various committees were reported on with a mix of people some new to post others running for a second triennium.

Northern Friends Peace Board had been digging a spiritually deep well whilst considering issues of conflict over change. This involved a 'spectrum of approaches, rich in responsibilities' as conflict could occur at a personal, family or community level. For Friends and at Meeting level, mediation in a faith context often involved an 'additional layer of cotton wool' as people didn't wish to reveal feelings of hostility. My listening powers ebbed a bit at this point, as I have noted mention of the Peace Tax Bill, but can provide no further details. Hopefully our representative, Julie Salt will have more on this in her own report.

Having initially proposed lunch earlier than could be provided, Friends broke into a spontaneous mass of social activity ahead of nutritional replenishment - much to the amazement of the volunteers who had rushed to get a delicious repast of soups, breads, cheese, salad etc. onto the tables. One poor Friend who had been lulled by the heat of Meeting into thinking fresh air was a good idea, was soon put right after going outside without a jacket... Winters icy spittle was still 'out there'. Once refreshed, it was back to business.

Robert Wilson stood aside from the Table to speak to Orkney's minute - leading to Area Trustees agreeing, in the light of Quaker Disability and Equality Group guidelines, to investigate all premises and venue requirements throughout North Scotland.

Diana Brockbank provided an energised and enthusiastic report on the need to acknowledge grief, despair and anger at human responses to sustainability issues, as well as engagement with spiritually charged wonder at the ability of Nature to heal itself. She implored that we work to accept the different ways Friends (from activists to those less partisan) bear witness in the light. Connectivity is the key, 'When I am connected to the Earth, it follows that I will not want to hurt it.' Being the last report she will give, Diana was also thanked for her work as Quaker Life Rep.

Attempting to be as dynamic as Diana, Nigel Dower, NSQT (North Scotland Quaker Trust – historically 'Aberdeen 2 Month Meeting Trust') explained their role in managing the properties at Crown Street, Aberdeen and burial grounds at Kinmuck and Kingswells. As well as managing the income stream from premises looking after properties there was also an aim to support Friends especially education/attendance at conferences, those in need and travelling in ministry. He provided copies of detailed accounts. However, following surveys and revaluation of the Crown Street properties and a general reduction in the level of commercial rents it is anticipated that income available will be less than in previous years. The lease on 100 Crown Street has rolled over as a satisfactory renegotiation is yet to be concluded. Meanwhile take up of funds for training has been less this year and in spite of anticipated income reduction Nigel asks Friends to consider educational needs (e.g. online clerk training from Woodbrooke).....

Two changes to next year's AM calendar: 18th February in Inverness, 6th May in Kirkwall.

Silent worship concluded the Business.

Unfortunately, I missed a very welcome 'tea and cake' end to the afternoon. On the plus- side I managed to acquire a pair of boots that will hopefully keep rain and snow out of my feet. Travelling in the Ministry is better with dry feet. (Well one can always have aspirations!)

Lesley Reynolds, Aberdeen LM

Quaker Outreach [return to top^](#)

Do you remember why you first came to a Quaker Meeting?

One part of Outreach is about getting people to their first Quaker Meeting: making sure we tell people we exist; showing them how to find us and our Meeting places; explaining who we are and what we're about, in a language that is accessible to all, whether from a Christian background, another faith background, or, increasingly, from a background of no religion at all.

But, more importantly, Outreach is about getting people to their second Quaker Meeting, and their third...

Outreach is about what happens in our Meetings to make enquirers feel welcomed and heard, the sense of vibrancy and community they feel amongst us. Outreach is about us being willing to tell our stories of why we came to Friends and why we stayed, how we understand our relationship with God, how we wait and listen in our Quaker silence for the promptings of love and truth and the Spirit.

Outreach is about listening to people's experiences and valuing the new light they bring to our gatherings.

Outreach doesn't need to be about plans and programmes; it simply needs to spring from our own Quakerism. Outreach at its best it is

gentle, generous and spontaneous, open and responsive to the moment, and motivated by a desire to allow others to experience what has been so valuable to us.

Outreach is spiritually rewarding, exciting and fun.

It is us and our lives that speak most clearly about what Quakerism means and we share our Quakerism best when we do it unselfconsciously and spontaneously; what we have to offer as Quakers is something for which many people are searching, and all we are doing is holding the door open wide enough and for long enough for them to look inside; the most helpful thing we can do as Meetings is to offer a place of warmth and welcome to those who find us.

Alistair Fuller, Outreach Development Officer Quaker Life

Quaker Life Representative Council. April 2016 [return to top^](#)

(an error meant this missed the last NQ- ed)

First a reminder what this group is. The Red Book says it beautifully. "Quaker Life Central Committee works with Friends in their meetings and with other local and national committees to help deepen experience of God's grace and its consequent expression in our lives and in our meetings. It seeks to nurture the worshipping community of Quakers in Britain, developing it into an inclusive community."

The 3 main areas are:

- spiritual development, religious learning and pastoral care.
- support for the right holding of meetings for worship and for church affairs.
- membership matters and outreach.

We were given information about the members of staff present and they each gave us a lively, brief, rundown of their work. And "The

Central Committee has a representative council which provides a 2-way channel of communication with Friends in their meetings, the main purposes being educational, inspirational and consultative”.

The main theme of the week-end was sharing our end of life stories – discovering Quaker understandings of dying and death. Query no:30 says “Are you able to contemplate your death and the death of those closest to you? Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully. In bereavement give yourself time to grieve. When others mourn let your love embrace them.”

We were started off by 3 speakers, all talking from personal experience, in a worshipping atmosphere. I thought they were brilliant and will pick snippets I wrote down, to give a flavour.

Diana Lampen; what is living, what is dying, in the light? “Accepting the fact of death we are freed to live more fully”. Death is our only certainty in life. How will I die? The challenge is embracing uncertainty; maybe afraid of the process. She spoke to a woman who was wracked with pain and could hardly breathe, assuming it must be awful for her. The reply was “my dear, the happiness I am experiencing now is beyond any happiness I have ever known” Ooooh!

Assumptions! What unexpected death teaches us is not to take anything for granted.

Being alongside somebody who is grieving; just be. We may not need to say anything. A young man went to visit and said “I can't imagine what you are going through; I don't know what to say, but my feet brought me here”.

Iain Law; he talked strongly of his loss, many years ago, of a gay partner with AIDS. This was before it was legal to have a gay relationship and was fraught with almost unimaginable challenge.

He could not officially admit he was anything more than just a friend. Living with people who are dying takes a lot of time and is very tiring. It is expensive e.g. very late hospital appointments would give huge parking costs. Visiting. Hospital food!. Iain was upset because his partner did not want him to give him any personal care. Life is messy, fun, and it hurts. Death comes more messily, more painfully, to people who are poor. He was angry at religious people who thought they knew all the answers. (So important admitting ANGER). “Bethlehem and Calvary are about the messiness of everyday life. I want to bring some of that to other people”.

Barbara Davey; she talked of the very brief life, and the death, of her daughter Angelica, her third child. Barbara had unexpected pre-eclampsia, a caesarean, and Angelica just didn't thrive. “One nurse just sat with me through the night and held my hand. I think it was she who kept me alive”. Angelica was entrapped by technology. She was not strong enough to live without it: not weak enough to die: but she did. “Where can we turn when our worst fears are realised?” When we wonder what might be next. Questions. Why? Why? Why? No answers. Grief. We have to learn to live with all these bits, even to love them. “I will never lose the piercing desolation of being left” and “these experiences have given me a life's work; that they have accompanied me through my life; to work with the dark and life and light and struggles”.

On Saturday evening we were shown the film “What I did on my holiday”. I had seen it before, love it, and highly recommend it. Families! Death! Dealt with in an amusing, light hearted and humorous way, with understanding and love for us fallible humans, and the wisdom, often, of children.

We got lots of ideas in our home groups, a couple of workshops, and plenary sessions: ideas of how do Quakers i.e. us...think about

death, our own and of those close to us. There were ideas for bringing the subject home; making it more comfortable and open. Much more to say. How will we open it in our Area Meeting? WILL we? I may write more later. We had a list of 9 mini workshops from which to choose two. In one about emotions we were asked to quietly think back to a death which had closely affected us, then share with a partner what had helped us most at that time.

I also went to “family/partner bereavement” where we shared stories in a worship sharing format. I talked of the death, at 11, of my grandson who had been born with a brain defect. By this time he could do nothing and was getting heavy! He still enjoyed cuddles, being read to, music.

His younger sister had said “It's not fair”... that he should be like that; for his sake. And (e.g.) “everybody else can go abroad”. I had mixed feelings when he went, including a level of guilt for some. Probably the predominant one was a sense of relief; for his freedom; for so much more freedom for his family. And of course I grieved. I grieved for the might-have-beens: for the smiley, friendly lad he had been when he was younger. I grieved for his family. I grieved for my loss, that I had lived too far away to be there for them and to really get to know this much loved and loving being. I felt comforted by the funeral. It was a beautifully crafted event with some people travelling very long distances to be there.

Around 200 people attended. There was a happy atmosphere and a lovely sunny day. AND..... the lovely lady minister who officiated told me she had “seen” him; skipping off, playing with a football, waving good-bye. A friend told me she had, a day or so after his death, “seen” him undoing a body harness, freeing himself, saying now he could play like other children.

Diana Brockbank, Forres LM

Musings on Quaker Life Rep Council, October 2016; “We'll tell you what to do”. [return to top^](#)

I was walking the labyrinth at Woodbrooke, part of one of the (please choose) mini workshops “You may, or not, have a question”, we were advised. “See if one comes”. Soon after I started walking my question came. “What does the planet require of me? Interestingly I forgot the answer! but I vividly remember asking “how do I do that?” I got “just keep moving. We will tell you” “WE?”

Q.L.R.C. meets twice a year with representatives from every Area Meeting in Britain, together with the Quaker Life staff and often guest speakers. There is 2 way exchange. The reps get to hear what the central committee is doing and we take local news for central committee to hear what is going on around the countries. Reports from the A.M.s are put up on a board for all to see. We hear about outreach; children and young people's work; support for meetings; the central library etc. Did you know that besides books the library has Quakerly clothes, artefacts, letters.....?

As well as information exchange we have early morning opportunities such as yoga, singing, dancing, according to what is offered by participants. We meet and get to know each other at meals, out in the garden, in home groups and mini workshops. We have fun evenings (I brought out my clown again), and this time there was also a bonfire to sit around, look at the moon and hear people's stories. All this is, of course, supported and held in a worshipping framework.

Each week-end has a central theme. This time was connecting to the spiritual impulse of “our Society's Commitment to a sustainable future to our planet and its people which was expressed movingly and succinctly at Yearly Meeting in 2011 at Canterbury”.

In the final minute our clerks wrote: “ Becoming the Change we want to see”

Listening to Alex Wildwood, Bryony Rowntree and Rachael Harrison we were challenged to make a shift-change in our vision of the world and our place in it; placing sustainability and our responsibility to Nature, our fellow beings and the planet at the heart of our Quaker Spirituality.”

In my personal summing up I wrote . “Yes! Spirituality is well awake with Friends”.

How to pass on to you the beauty of the week-end? I am going to do it with snippets which meant something special to me....so, first (mostly) from Alex;

- Spiritual basis --- “treating earth as if we meant to stay”.
- Joanna Macey --- “Don't be afraid of the grief, despair and anger”.
- Continuity --- we need to get a sense of our ancestors on through to future generations,
- Spirituality is:
 - a vivid awareness of a life larger and more lasting than my own.
 - an ability to dream beyond what we know.
 - God is not your favourite uncle. God is a volcano. We are co-creators with that spirit.
 - God is the mystery that breathes wonder to all these things.

What might be the Quaker contribution to the evolutionary shift of consciousness that many prophetic voices believe we are called to in this time? What gifts, skills and talents can I personally bring to the transition to a just and sustainable future for all Beings? (mostly).

Bryony; she told us how, when she was a child, her grandfather

called her over to look at a seedling growing through tarmac. Wow! We are part of nature/the earth and it is part of us. Nature can heal itself. However this may mean humanity having to leave! Remembering ourselves as part of nature could change this. Being a mother connects her to her female ancestors and to the earth. Think where food (this that I am eating right now) comes from. However there are contradictions. She recently got a car so she could take her children out of the city; into nature; camping. “Do as much as I am able in my heart”. The brain might, for example, tell me I “should not” get a car. Everything comes back to love.

Rachael noted that she spends a lot of time inside. She (we) needs to make time to make contact with nature. Quakers have a practise and discipline of listening.

Big shifts in life; the unknown; uncertainty; often bring us closer to our spirituality.

Walking barefoot for an hour in woodland gave her a deeper connection to the outer landscape and to her inner landscape. “There is support even when I don't know where I am going”

Other bits and pieces:

- When I am connected to the earth it follows I will not want to hurt it – and – go with my heart and don't feel guilty if, for instance, I do decide to travel by plane. Go as far as my heart can.
- We need to balance patience and urgency; be aware of the process. There can be tension between panic/urgency and sitting in silence waiting in the light. Some people feel led to do something NOW. Activists in a meeting may be lonely. We need to accept different ways.
- “answering that of God in everyone”..
- “answering that of God in everything”.
- Spiritual underpinning.
- Imaginary hindsight. Imagine how I would like the world to be

in, say, 2050, as if it were today. Look back little by little to see the steps we took to get here.

“ Just keep on walking. We will tell you what to do”.

Diana Brockbank, Forres LM

Forces Watch News; Scottish petition makes headway [return to top^](#)

Rhianna Louise is a new staff member at Forces Watch, working on Education and Outreach, part of whose work is to engage with civil society and facilitate work to counter militarism at a local level. Rhianna made contact to alert us to a petition submitted to the Scottish Parliament on 24th November. Below is a summary taken from the Forces Watch website (www.forceswatch.net/blog/scottish-petition-makes-headway)

Members of the Scottish Parliament have agreed to seek further evidence on our joint petition – with Quakers in Scotland – calling for greater scrutiny and guidance around military visits to schools. The Public Petitions Committee met at Holyrood on Thursday 24 November after receiving responses from a number of interested parties and a further submission from ourselves in which we urged Members to consider the petition from a child welfare and rights perspective.

As a result the five MSPs will now obtain more views in order to give them a fully rounded picture on the issue. Parents, teachers, schools, child rights organisations, young peoples’ organisations, veterans and careers services are expected to contribute. There was strong support for the petition from SNP MSP, Rona Mckay, who told the hearing “to say it (the military) is a career like any other career is disingenuous because it has risks that other careers don’t have.”

Her party colleague, Angus MacDonald, referring to submissions by

the Children’s Commissioner for Scotland and the Scottish Government, said there “was clearly a suggestion that there may be undue or inappropriate influence being exerted” over visits.

The Convenor of the Committee, former Labour leader Johann Lamont, in summing up said the focus should be on whether the military were visiting schools on “a transparent basis and everyone has confidence that they are not targeting particular groups.”

The two Conservative members, Brian Whittle and Edward Mountain were less favourable to the aims of the petition. Whittle said “the army has as much right as anyone else to describe a career in schools.”

Footage of the hearing can be found here

www.scottishparliament.tv/Search?Keyword=petitions&keyword-submit=Search and begins at 40 minutes and 30 seconds.

After the session ForcesWatch coordinator, Emma Sangster, said "we welcome the decision of the Public Petitions Committee that this is an issue that needs serious consideration.

"Some of the committee were concerned that the armed forces are a legitimate career and should therefore be represented in schools. However, figures suggest that the armed forces have far greater access to schools than other career providers."

“Evidence submitted so far from young people suggests that information presented is often unbalanced, and sometimes not appropriate to a modern educational system.”

"Evidence submitted also suggests that it is not the case that parents across Scottish schools are properly consulted. There needs to be national guidance on this."

"While, as a society, we have become all too familiar with the dangers involved in an armed forces career, we can not assume that young people are adequately aware of the range of risks and

the long-term implications of them.”

“This is about putting a policy into place that recognises the welfare and rights of young people over the recruitment needs of the armed forces.”

In the days before, during and after the hearing in Edinburgh several major media outlets covered the story of the petition. No firm date has, as yet, been set by the Committee for a further hearing on the petition, However this is likely to be in the new year once those bodies being contacted have had a chance to respond.

You can read the full text of the petition and find all background information here:

www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/petitionPDF/PE01603.pdf

Northern Friends Peace Board Saturday 18th June 2016 at Central Edinburgh Meeting House [return to top^](#)

During the week leading up to this meeting the weather had been horrible. The Thursday after was to be the EU referendum. I absolutely love going to NFPB but perhaps it was the weather, or the consistently awful news, on this occasion I left home with a feeling of not caring about anything. Good job I’m used to going away so getting my travelling act together is automatic.

For my journey to Edinburgh everything which could go right went right, yet in spite of a lovely journey, meeting with family and friends on the Friday, brilliant sunshine on the Saturday, and passing through the fun and tourists on the Royal Mile, I still had the “why bother about anything”, what am I achieving, what is anyone achieving, what have I got to offer, feeling.

We always start with a wee around the room session to introduce ourselves. This time the topic was “something that was keeping our

spirits up”. Hmmmm! I discovered I wasn’t the only one feeling as I have just said. Well that was interesting.

Now by the time I get to AM to report back to you- all my stuff is out of date- NFPB and our AM are out of sync.

Much care and thought went into a statement about how to cope with the outcome of the EU referendum.

Always much info on Trident. Tim Wallis (QPSW) launched a book “The Truth about Trident” the evening before.

I have edited our minutes below – actually some really good stuff J

Chris Butler, part of NFPB small working group looking at the issues around Trident, particularly in relation to Barrow in Furness where Trident submarines are made. It’s no good just telling people that they shouldn’t be doing this work because trident is bad. Something has to be offered in place People in Barrow are understandably protective of their jobs in a town which is almost totally dependent on BAE systems. (previously known as Vickers)

The question was raised for us as to how the Scottish Government and people who do not support Trident might inform those who live in other parts of the UK.

Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre

Hilary Patrick of Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre spoke to us. My goodness what a lot is happening in Edinburgh! The Centre is becoming much wider in its work than just with its founding city. Edinburgh Council has agreed to a memorial to COs. Other activities she has told us about include adult education classes; encouraging disinvestment; militarisation of schools; renewables, not arms; storytelling aimed at 'paths for forgiveness; the creation of thousands of paper cranes; refugees; the bombing of Iraq.

It’s becoming a tradition since I started at NFPB for those who like to be activists, (as opposed to me who might be classed as a

hideivist), to rush out at lunch time and display banners against Trident. I have gritted my teeth in Leeds, even stood at the front, for a mob flash, but my mood hadn't lifted. I actually ended up talking with our Scottish Quaker Parliamentary Engagement Officer - Mairi Campbell Jack (we didn't have a deep conversation, but building relationships can also be about the personal). It's now her second year in post. Since she is our employee I enclose the whole and interesting, and important minute. Mairi has described recent work that she has been involved with in relation to military visits to schools. After freedom of information requests and considerable research, a gap was identified between what is said to be happening by the forces. Now this was interesting, because she realised no-one was being difficult or withholding information- basic misinterpretation of requests. A petition to the Scottish Parliament requests recording of activities so that parents will then know what is happening. The petition also asks for balance. The petition is arising in a time of some friction between parents, local authorities and the government. 1,027 have signed which is satisfactory. There has been good media coverage.

The petition PE 1603 is available on the Parliament website for viewing. We have been told that local Meetings are being asked to inform themselves and support the petition. The panel may recommend the petition to be referred to Parliament when further work will be done.

The Forces Watch website also has full information on the issue and that they and QPSW have information on the issues in England. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has established that 18 should be the minimum age for joining the forces and Scottish and UK Friends have both fed into a report on the issue. Mairi has made it clear that recruitment is a process, not something which happens at the moment of signing.

Cadet forces have received more funding for England and Wales which can be refused by Scotland, so the Scottish Government has been asked if the money could be used on Peace Education which led to a meeting with Education Scotland. As a result it has been discovered that cadet forces are being funded by Libor fines. (I googled this – bank fines- you check it out – beyond my brain cells!) Plans are being made as to what can be done about this, making the most of Scottish refusal to be told what to do on a devolved issue.

Ending on a positive note, Mairi has told us of plans for entries to material around Year of Heritage 2017 on COs and peace education in general and then in the following year is Year of the Child, where there could be good input, for example on kindertransport.

Building Positive Peace

Two strands of NFPB work seek to promote positive ways of building peace, from dialogue and community networking at the local level to promoting sustainability and economic justice at the global level. We have been invited to respond to questions in relation to what actions Quakers, on their own and with others, can take to contribute to building positive peace. What skills, approaches and resources do Quakers in general have that can make a contribution to building peace?

- What current opportunities, challenges and needs are there at the local and national level for Quakers to work, on our own and with others?
- From bringing people together to producing resources, how might NFPB support Friends and others in taking positive action? (this next bit really speaks to me – this discussion made the whole journey worthwhile and I felt useful)

We were reminded that Meetings receive many emails from a variety of sources, some of which can weigh down the spirit, but

Quakers are often capable of responding positively; this may well be a Quaker skill. Building bridges and brokering dialogues between people who have conflicting views is often an opportunity which Quakers can and do seize. Quaker commitment to seeing that of God in everyone is a resource and a gift for a Quaker and people they meet, and the groups they work with.

Our opportunities are in such meetings and in our daily actions and experiences. We have been asked to recognise that our practice in meetings of hearing each other and speaking openly can be taken out into the world outside the Meeting: our way of interacting with each other may be unique. We were reminded of the Advice: “think it possible that you may be mistaken.” A Friend has assured us that to continue to give us the opportunity to meet and interact with each other is the best thing that NFPB can do for us.

Our statement on the Referendum, and our lunchtime peace witness are examples of the opportunities and needs which we face and our responses. We were reminded of the vital need for patience and humour in the face of many pressures and horrors: our emphasis on silence and listening skills gives us a necessary resource for understanding.

And last but not least we always have a session of what is happening around other meetings. I love this – we – that is Quakers across the UK are so active somewhere, somehow, from individual meeting to Young Friends.

If you want to know more – please do look on the NFPB website.

You know what, I came away feeling really useful, and yet I had only contributed a few sentences. I wish I could put over to you the love and caring we experience there.

And what I realised was that we spend a lot of time when

appointing our reps to different Quaker groups looking at what we can get out of those groups. We ask at AM if we really want to afford the cost. Well Friends – it’s not just about what we can get out, but also what we can put in.

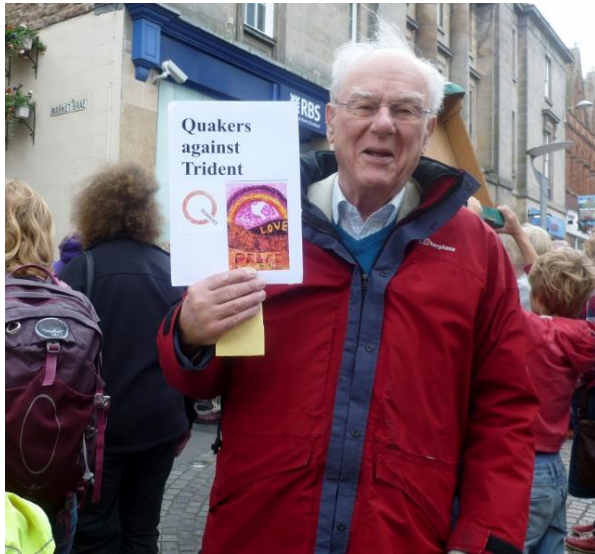
“The wise person’s cup is half empty, both ready to give and ready to receive”

Juli Salt NFPB, Forres LM

Trident NO More Demonstration [return to top^](#)

Members and Attenders from Inverness LM took part in Inverness town centre on Saturday July 16th at Market Brae Steps. This was part of the flash demonstrations happening across Britain campaigning against renewal of Trident. It was a nice peaceful and amicable demonstration, with a good turn-out, including local MP Drew Hendry.

Sila Collins-Walden Inverness LM



Making a Difference - QAAD conference, Woodbrooke Study Centre, 2016. [return to top^](#)

On the eve of my departure to this year's QAAD conference at Woodbrooke, just as I was preparing for an early night for the very early ferry the next morn, the 'phone rang. "Kirkwall Police here – don't worry – no great problem – just we have a friend of yours here who's going to prison in the morning and he'd like you to visit before he goes." In AA we have a Quakerly promise, "When anyone, anywhere reaches out, I want the hand of AA to be there and for that, I am responsible." I took chocolates, tobacco, a little money for the 'phone and stamps and a pocket version of Alcoholics Anonymous – the Big Book.

Ten years ago this visit would have been inconceivable; in fact I wouldn't have received the call in the first place. I certainly wouldn't have had any tolerance for a person who suffered from a condition that I also did but was in complete denial thereof. "I'm Robert and I'm an alcoholic", but a recovering one these days. How long and painful that journey has been but I wouldn't change it even if I could. The love, friendship, serenity and gratitude I have found on the way are immeasurable and I can only keep it by giving it away.

I travelled down to conference by car so that I could visit recovering friends in meetings in Oban and South Cumbria on the way. This for me, is also part of my personal recovery programme. I keep in contact with the people who have journeyed with me for part of my recovery. This sharing gives me hope, strength and gratitude – I must never forget the past or wish to close the door on it. This was my second QAAD conference so I had a good idea of the location and the friends who would be attending but there will always be the new friends I've yet to meet. The accommodation and food is first class and the facilities take care of my spiritual needs. The first evening after dinner was introductions in the Cadbury Room, familiarisation with the conference theme – Making a

Difference - and then epilogue before retiring.

Saturday morning – breakfast, followed by half hour MfW and into the keynote address by Professor Chris Cook of Durham University. Prof Cook’s words were enlightening. I have some knowledge of the history of the AA 12 Steps programme but this went through from the basics - “What is addiction?”; behaviours, dependence, compulsion; religion, addiction and spirituality; religious responses to addiction; as well as other religions attitudes to drinking/addiction. And a number of other sources of the 12 Step programme were referred to that are worth further research – we never stop learning and growing.

A number of points are worth mentioning:

- Christians (people with faith) are less likely to use drink or drugs.
- Spiritual treatments for many conditions are increasing, year on year.
- Those who ‘do’ the Steps tend to do better than those who don’t.
- Spirituality is important to addiction treatment.

The talk was followed by small group sessions to discuss and share our experience and knowledge so far.

The afternoon’s programme started with an optional AA meeting which I attended.

There had been greater interest in the subjects of the workshops that followed than had been anticipated, so additional sessions were arranged. I attended both “Women Only” and “Resistance to Spiritual Connection”. From previous experience and reading I have become aware of the patriarchal lilt of some recovery programmes and the lack of perceived confidentiality. This is very distressing and is not just a gender issue as it can deeply affect other individuals and minority groups who feel persecuted and isolated, especially if

they are in threatening, abusive and/or violent families or relationships.

The “16% of UK women known to have alcoholic disorders” was alarming but “most recover without treatment” was reassuring. But women do have different problems; the shaming is damaging and the shame worse than it is for men. And there are the linked problems, abuse and possibly vulnerable children and young adults at risk.

Both workshops addressed these issues to some extent and I was able to establish contacts over the weekend with individuals and groups whose details I may be able to pass on where appropriate. An interesting quotation that emerged twice for me over my week away and was related for the second time at the “Resistance to Spiritual Connections” workshop was: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience”. (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin). I found that comforting and reassuring.

After the evening meal we had an evening of informal entertainment supplied by the talents of our gathered friends. A useful time to laugh, applaud, relax and socialise, much needed by this point.

The plenary session after Sunday breakfast was mainly an introduction to the work of QAAD and how they can educate, advise and support. They are also available to attend area meetings – a thought for our future planning perhaps?

My thanks to friends for appointing and supporting my attendance at the QAAD conference.

“Believe more deeply. Hold your face up to the Light, even though for the moment you do not see”. – As Bill Sees It, letter 1950, p.3

Robert Wilson, Orkney LM

Talk by Chris Sadler [return to top^](#)

To an enthralled and appreciative gathering in Inverness late last year, Chris Sadler of Inverness Meeting shared many of the experiences and understandings that have shaped her life.

She began with the quotation that we are not human beings on a spiritual journey but spiritual beings on a human journey. We are invited to discover this spirituality through being human.

In her own journey childhood was not easy. Difficulties led to profound spiritual experiences and an absolute confidence in the presence of God. This has never left her. She described a spirit which is greater than anything we can imagine yet in the tiniest things. It is all loving, creating, encompassing and sustaining. Even the smallest seed is created, held and loved in God. So it's natural to respect every other human being as a child of God.

Ghandi was a powerful influence when she was young, and, needing to feel the truth of this, she travelled overland to India in her early 20's. So began a new stage of her life. Having from an early age devoured books, she let go of all these and went to live in an Indian village, not knowing what good she could do there. With burning clarity she realised that being in this sea of humanity brought a sense of joy, inclusiveness and compassion for all living things. In India she helped set up a farming community for people with learning disabilities. It was there that she began to understand the importance of weakness, suffering and imperfections. If you can accept your own vulnerability you can accept the vulnerability of others.

Learning much from the spirituality of the subcontinent, for Chris, Jesus is the person who shows most clearly what God's love is like. The idea that God sent Jesus to pay for our sins doesn't make sense. But Jesus dying of love, accepting and forgiving the whole of

humanity, past, present and future, she understands. He accepted and transformed through not wanting revenge, not resisting, just love to the end. The gospels are full of joy "I have come that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full". Jesus was the person who inhabited the Christ (the Anointed One). Many have lived that Christ, deeply spiritual and compassionate people.

As a young Quaker she was taught that everything is a sacrament, every meal, every encounter. She questions how many really live that. Quakerism has brought the comfortableness of silence, especially from the countryside and nature, the importance of peace and the values of truth and authenticity. Above all she believes that joy is the clearest sign of God's presence.
Kathleen Quinn, Inverness LM

Play review; This Evil Thing, Michael Mears [return to top^](#)

When the first World War broke out, army enlistment was voluntary: as the war progressed, and the number of men killed escalated [over 19,000 men lost their lives on the first day of the battle of the Somme] it became increasingly clear that conscription of some sort would have to be introduced: many people were strongly in favour of it, but a sizeable number of men were prompted by their consciences to oppose being involved in any way in killing their fellow men.

Using the verbatim reports of conscientious objectors and the words of Bertrand Russell and others, Michael Mears has written a horrifying clear account of the treatment meted out to people whose only crime was to say "you can't force a man to murder against his will!" Opposing viewpoints are stated by those who consider the 'conchies' to be vile, unpatriotic, cowardly or just plain mad: and against this background we see the heroic struggle of men who refused either to take part in any way in the 'war effort', and in doing so refused to use violence in word or deed and the appalling,

cruel and degrading treatment meted out to them.

Michael Mears' one-man show brings to life a host of characters: the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, the philosopher Bertrand Russell, Fenner Brockway and other founder members of the No-Conscription Fellowship - and people like Bert Brocklesby, a young teacher and Methodist lay preacher from Yorkshire, who suffer imprisonment, physical and mental abuse, and physical punishment - and still hold firmly to their beliefs that they will not take any part in the military machine. We see the civilians and military personnel who make hideously clear their contempt and hatred for these "cowards", their refusal to listen to any attempt to show the pointlessness of meeting violence with more violence, and the delight many of them take in making the 'conchies' suffer as much as they can, even to the point of threatening to kill them.

Michael Mears' re-enactment of a CO undergoing field punishment



While the conscientious objectors are in Britain, they are not subject to military discipline – but by moving them to France, they come under its rule, and so can be court-martialled and shot for disobeying any order given to them: many of them are prepared to face losing their own lives rather than play any part in taking someone else's.

Michael Mears' father and grandfather were both ardent pacifists, and Michael is one too. He is also an accomplished actor: with face, voice, gesture and a few simple props (hats, jackets, a pipe) he creates a staggering range of characters, bringing real people memorably to life, and asking us to consider what we might have done in their situation – it's relatively easy to be a pacifist in the UK in 2016, but would we be prepared to die for our principles?

The audience were moved and challenged by this magnificent tour de force of acting. I urge you to see it!

Mary Woodward, Portobello & Musselburgh LM

(Mary kindly made contact with this contribution after reading the review of "We will not fight" in the last edition of NQ, which featured Bert Brocklesby. The play was staged during this year's Edinburgh Festival, but according to his blog (<https://michaelmears.org/tag/this-evil-thing>) Michael Mears plans to repeat the show in 2017 – ed)

Volunteering for Quaker Service at Woodbrooke – FiRS [return to top^](#)

I had been to Woodbrooke in 2014 with my husband just to have a holiday and to have an opportunity to explore the lovely village of Bournville which I had always wanted to visit. It was a real treat staying at Woodbrooke - lovely gardens and the food was excellent.

I hoped I would return in the future, and so I did. I applied to become a Friend in Residence or FiRs as we are known. So in August this year plans were made to travel down to Woodbrooke by train to begin my two weeks as a Fir.

Just a few days before being due to leave I fell and fractured my fifth metatarsal! I was distraught. I had to go to hospital where they encased my foot in a boot! I wasn't going to get to Woodbrooke now I thought, but the consultant's advice was I could go ahead with my plans as the boot would protect the fracture and enable me to get around.

I phoned Sally the new Friends in Residence Coordinator to tell her of my accident in advance (just to forewarn her). As I was determined to get there it was agreed I could come. As my husband Brian could act as my "assistant" I would be able to perform my duties.

The train from Inverness lost time en-route arriving a little late at Edinburgh station. We had to hurry to get the connection to take us onto Birmingham New Street. There was a delay of approximately two hours in total due to a woman threatening to jump from a bridge up ahead. I didn't get to find out what happened to her. We arrived at Woodbrooke rather later than expected but Sally was there to greet us both and we had something to eat and retired to bed ready for my induction on Monday morning.

On the Monday morning I was introduced to the other FiRs and members of the staff. Armed with a tick list of duties and a map I orientated myself around the building and grounds with Brian's help. The list looked daunting; however once you get to know the routine it wasn't that difficult. At hand were two very experienced FiRs, Margaret and Faith, who were there in case of an emergency!!

This is a lovely old building with many nooks and crannies, steeped in history with some interesting features, a well-stocked library including the Quaker library which houses a historic collection of Quaker books. Woodbrooke also has some interesting works of art. I was particularly inspired by Elisabeth Holmgaard who was once a cook at Woodbroke. Her beautiful tapestries based on biblical themes hang in one of the corridors above the dining room.

Volunteering to do Quaker service is a form of ministry. The role of the FiR is concerned with welcome and worship. You become temporary "Elders" during your time in residence. You are partaking in MfW and Epilogue and you are responsible for greeting and closing the meeting. You have the opportunity to take Epilogue. I brought a little piece of the Highlands with me and I decided to show a short film of the "Flow Country" in Caithness, the largest blanket bog in Europe. It was edited by a Friend from LM and went down very well.

I did find it difficult sometimes with the boot on the end of my leg so Brian came in very handy doing some of the inaccessible places I couldn't reach. Among the other duties of a FiR are learning to make key cards, admin duties, locking the Quaker library, holding silence at mealtimes and generally giving support to tutors when needed. You do have ample rest periods as well as a day off each week, so I didn't feel overworked. I would spend my day off in the garden room or in the lovely grounds, reading and chatting to other Friends. I was invited to go along to the Bournville meeting on the Sunday. What a lovely meeting house - apparently the only Meeting House in the country with an organ.

The Eva Koch Presentation took place in the Cadbury Room while I was there and I was invited to attend. Four very inspiring topics were presented. Concern, Discernment, Simplicity and Afterword.

I met some very interesting people at Woodbrooke and had some fascinating conversations at the dining table as you do tend to get Friends and non-Quakers from the various courses asking if they may join you.

Woodbrooke for myself and Brian was a restful and peaceful place to be - no blaring TVs, radios or disturbance from mobile phones . I heard some very inspiring ministry at MfW while worshipping with other Friends. I found being at Woodbrooke life-enriching, spiritually nourishing. I suppose I could say I saw it as a “working holiday”. I would really recommend it. I am booked in next year for two weeks again along with Brian but – I hope – minus the boot!

Sila Collins-Walden, Inverness LM