



SOUTH EDINBURGH MEETING

December 2023



Alison's blanket for Alex and Richard

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Meetings usually **every Sunday 10.30-11.30 am**
Christmas changes in next column

Held at the Open Door, or remotely by Zoom (hybrid, except on the 4th Sunday each month).

New options for children – see back page.

Notices, late changes, and other info are sent by weekly email. Join the email list by clicking the link at <https://quakerscotland.org/south-edinburgh>

On the **First Thursday** of each month we meet for **30 min at 7.30 pm** by Zoom, followed by chat.

Other local meetings

Central Edinburgh and Portobello-Musselburgh are closest. Times are listed in SESAME, but for full info and a map, see <https://quakerscotland.org>

Several South Edinburgh Friends also attend Central Edinburgh's **Midweek Meeting on Wednesdays**, 12.30 for 30 mins at Victoria Terrace meeting house. Tea and coffee are available, and you can bring a packed lunch.

SPECIAL COLLECTION

Our collection in December is for **Aid and Abet**, which supports people in the criminal justice system in South Scotland. Practical work is led by ex-prisoners. Alastair Cameron will speak to this. More about their work at www.aidnabet.org
You can donate online via link in top menu.

QUAKER EVENTS

Meeting for business – will be held after Meeting for Worship on **Sun 3 Dec** – agenda circulated by email.

COP28 Global Day of Action – Friends are encouraged to join other churches and organisations at this event on **Sat 9 Dec** for Climate Justice. Outside the Scottish Parliament, 12.30 - 2 pm, Quaker banners encouraged.
<https://climatefringe.org/cop28-scotland>

Christmas Party – our party will be at Alison Chalmers' house (25 Greenbank Road) 4-6 pm on **Sat 16 Dec**. All age! Please bring something to eat and an idea for a game or song to share if you can.

Lanark Meeting are planning a **Christmas meeting at Wiston Lodge** on **Sun 17 Dec**, 11am, and South Edinburgh Friends are welcome. Please contact Deirdre Armstrong or David Somervell, who will liaise with Meg Beresford about numbers.

Holiday meetings – The Open Door is closed over Christmas and New Year. Plans for meetings:

24 Dec – Zoom only, 10.30 am for 1 hour.

31 Dec – at Alison Chalmers house (25 Greenbank Road EH10 5RX), 10.30 am for 30 mins, all-age. Please let Alison know if you can come: 0131 447 3387, a.chalmers@talktalk.net

AND (separate, not hybrid), a Zoom meeting for 1 hour from 10.30 am. Link in emails.

From Rachel Frith of Edinburgh Central:

Coffee at Rachel's house, from 10.15 am on first and third Thursdays. Please confirm with Rachel.

Singing group for December is **Carols and mince pies**, 7.30 pm at Victoria Terrace on **Tue 19 Dec**.

Book Group – No meeting in Dec, so next 28 Jan. (Usually 4th Sundays at 12.15 after Central MfW)



Book group preparation (Meditation, Madame Monet. Claude Monet 1871; Musee d'Orsay, Paris)

Children on 5th Sundays

On 29th October a dozen children from across the Area Meeting met with a similar number of adults as part of a plan for young people to meet up on 5th Sundays, hosted by different Meetings. They were welcomed at Mary Jane and Alastair's house on Portobello prom with an all age Meeting, lunch, and apple juicing from Portobello Community Orchard apples.

The small apple press was hard to turn but made good juice - Patrick and Ben from Porty and Central Meetings are shown having fun with it.

Though one of the smaller children suggested 'a water slide?', the adults looking out of the window and across the prom saw rough seas, lashing rain, and a very high tide. A lovely way to enjoy time together even if the weather was so unruly that a picnic and fun on the beach were impossible!



For new coordinated arrangements for Childrens Meetings, see back page.

What I do in the war

Amir Peter O'Loughlin (psychotherapist/musician in Vancouver with Sufi, Rumi, other interests) received wide attention after posting this poem on on Facebook on 17 October. He is a follower of Thich Nhat Nanh, the author of *Creating True Peace* (2004), previously recommended by Meg Beresford. *Via Margaret Anderson.*

Because I cannot carry your dead child,
I sweep the deck of my friend
and fling the dry pine needles
to the messenger breeze, and the strike
of my broom down the steps to the sea
is the shovel for digging the grave
and the birdsong is the keening
of your family and clinging companions

Instead of joining you to claw the rubble
in search of your buried mother,
I will bring bread to my neighbour
who will serve it to her children,
and I chant your name in rhythm
to the shouts and earth movers
with the warm loaf in my hand
and the autumn air gripping my chest

I will serve tea to this welcome company
and offer a fragrant, poignant
impotent wish for peace,
an as-salaam aleikum with each
touch of the cup to silent lips,
while you grip your phone for news
and prepare to sleep on dark roads,
upon carpets that once had homes

Nothing in me can help you know
if your daughter is alive or dead,
or which of those is worse,
so I will whisper b'shalom b'shalom
with each step up this mountain
from where my strength comes
and where my cries are left
and where the eagles loft and lift

You cannot bear witness to my sorrow
for those I love whom I do not know
so I will ring the Japanese garden bell
to reach all those unjustly taken away
I will listen to its resounding song
which ears hear for ten slow breaths
but which trees hear forever
and I pledge to each of you who suffers now
a place in its vibrating prayer

Getting to Know – Esther Shreeve

I was born in Edinburgh in the house that we now live in. My parents were based in the USA from 1953 but had this home in Edinburgh and visited it when they could, and I was born here in their summer holiday.

My early life moved between the two countries. I started primary school in London when my father was on sabbatical, then was schooled in the USA until we came back to Edinburgh when I was eight. I also had a spell in the International School in Rome when I was seven while my father was attending the second Vatican Council.

My father, Franz Hildebrandt, was a German refugee; he escaped from Germany in 1937 having had a spell in prison because of his role in the Confessing Church, which stood out against Hitler. His mother was a non-practising Jew and his father's stepmother had taken him to a Lutheran church where he became a Christian. He was the last pastor to be ordained in the German Lutheran Church before the Aryan clause prevented Jewish candidates. His family were very lucky - almost all survived the holocaust. His mother got out of Germany after him, following the death of his father, and as far as I know only one aunt died in a camp, but he suffered all the rest of his life from survivor's guilt which affected our family life. He was never comfortable in Germany and was happy to be British. I was born in 1955 and grew up in the shadow of these events but didn't appreciate the enormity of it all.

Being half German has always been important to me and after Brexit I obtained dual nationality under the German government's Restitution Scheme. I wonder what my father would think about this. He could not have predicted the way British politics would evolve; he died in 1985.

I spent several years in Durham University, studying history, doing teacher training and then a doctorate in Reformation History, which necessitated a six month stay in Switzerland. I studied the origins of non-conformity – a little group of protestant exiles who escaped from persecution under Henry VIII – and it was the basis of my Ph.D. I had the opportunity then to pursue an academic career, going to conferences and reading papers, but did not like the competitive atmosphere in the academic world and chose instead to teach history in a sixth form college in Scunthorpe for three years.

Instead of pursuing my teaching career further, I served with the Methodist Church Overseas Division and had three months preparation at Selly Oak where I met Chris. We were engaged six weeks later. The Methodists were not happy about an engaged couple working in different countries, but we persevered, and I was sent to Papua New Guinea for two years to train clergy while Chris worked in Sierra Leone. The postal service was complicated – we had to send letters via my aunt in London. I was unable to serve the whole two years because my father was taken ill and my mother broke her wrist; I returned to Edinburgh and cared for them until my father's death a few months later. After Chris completed his two years, we were married.

We went as a couple to our first Methodist circuit in Hawes in Wensleydale. We enjoyed a lovely rural life there from 1986 to 1993 and had three children. The manse was huge and cold and leaky with mould on the walls, and it was a stressful time with our daughter, Sarah, being ill; the loss of our second baby, Ben shortly after his birth in December 1988; and our third child, Nathan, being premature and very sick at the start. But we had wonderful neighbours and there were good times, too.

Methodist ministers are regularly moved on and our next church was in Wymondham in South Norfolk where we lived for eight years. We made some good friends there and were near Chris's mother in Norwich, but it was not our happiest chapter: the congregation was judgmental; there were high expectations of the minister's wife who was expected to stay at home and support her husband; offence was taken if Chris took a child to school or collected them.

We were pleased to move to the Norfolk Broads in 2001 and stayed there for twelve years in Martham, which is a village between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. The congregations were supportive and were proud of my work. I worked for the Cambridge Theological Federation, an ecumenical organisation, and trained Anglican, Methodist, URC, Roman Catholic and Orthodox candidates for various types of ministry. I started part time and ended up Director of one of the programmes. The work was challenging and fulfilling. The children had not been very happy at primary school – it can be hard being minister's children – but thrived at the Catholic secondary school in Norwich.

In 2013, Chris retired and we moved to Edinburgh to my parental home which I had inherited thanks to my sister's generosity. This was especially good for Nathan (by then a young adult and based already in the USA) who needed roots in the face of our various moves; he has always loved Edinburgh. I had already prepared for a new track whilst working with neuro diverse mature students in Cambridge and had acquired dyslexia



/literacy qualifications; I walked into a post at Napier University as a dyslexia advisor whilst running my own private dyslexia assessment practice from 2013 to 2021. Now, I am, like most retired people, very busy! Our daughter is in Portsmouth with her partner and our son is in New York with his husband. It takes as long to get to Sarah as it does to fly to New York.

I feel at home in Quakerism but am also immensely challenged by it – being a nominal Christian is not an option within the Quaker fold. The peace testimony is of paramount importance to me, as is simplicity. I find the issues of justice and climate pressing and have always believed that politics and the practice of Christianity are intertwined. Retirement might have looked like a respite, but these issues make a quiet life difficult. Right now I need a little space to work out how to live this new life.

Esther spoke to Alison Chalmers in November 2023

In other newsletters

The latest **SESAME** (number 250) is long, but deserves a close look. Including

- A wonderful illustration of the ‘Garden of Death’ from Tampere cathedral, with Mary Woodward’s account from Finland Yearly Meeting. (There are reports from 2 GMs and several other bodies also).
- Future of Edinburgh Meeting House – a short update on things being considered.
- Discussion of ‘Stop Ecocide’. While recognising the importance of the cause, GM did not feel able to sign up to a proposal to ‘criminalise’ Ecocide. The summary here does not detail the problems with the proposed direction, but does describe important issues.
- A lively report of the state of our prisons from the Scottish Quaker Community Justice working group
- An introduction to and report from our new Parliamentary Engagement Officer, Sarah Komashko. Includes an account of the peace event and exhibition held in the Scottish Parliament on 21 Sep.

Phil Lucas describes the Good Death of Pat Lucas. He later discovered a note that she left for him

*Don't mourn for me now I am gone
But remember me and I shall live on
Through you
And be content
To rest quietly here to the end of time
A part of this world that gave me so much*

ChatGPT meets Quaker biscuits

We asked the artificial intelligence engine ChatGPT 4 to write minutes for a Quaker meeting held to discern the best type of biscuits to serve with coffee after meeting for worship. A reply was returned in seconds:



ChatGPT

Certainly!



Date: [Insert Date]

Location: [Insert Meeting Location]

Attendees: [List of Attendees]

Clerk of the Meeting: [Clerk's Name]

Agenda Item: Discerning the Best Type of Biscuits for Coffee Time Post-Worship

Minutes:

1. **Opening:** The meeting began in silence, with Friends centring themselves in the Spirit.
2. **Introduction:** The Clerk introduced the agenda, emphasizing the significance of fellowship and hospitality in our community, particularly during coffee time following worship.
3. **Presentation of Options:** Various Friends presented their suggestions for biscuits. The options included:
 - o Traditional Digestive Biscuits
 - o Homemade Oatmeal Cookies
 - o Gluten-Free Almond Biscuits
 - o Vegan Chocolate Chip Cookies
 - o Lemon Drizzle Biscuits
4. **Sharing and Discernment:** The meeting entered into a period of reflective sharing. Friends spoke from their experience, considering factors such as inclusivity (dietary needs), tradition, and the joy of sharing homemade offerings.
5. **Sense of the Meeting:** After thoughtful consideration and listening to the Light within, the meeting found unity in choosing a variety of biscuits to cater to diverse tastes and dietary needs. A rotation system was suggested to include all the proposed types over different meetings.
6. **Action and Responsibility:** Volunteers stepped forward to coordinate the biscuit rotation. [Names of Volunteers] agreed to organize the schedule and communicate with those bringing biscuits each week.
7. **Closing:** The meeting concluded in silence, holding the decision in the Light and expressing gratitude for the community's commitment to fellowship and inclusion.

Next Meeting Date: [Insert Date]

Minutes Prepared By: [Recorder's Name]

Remember to customize date, location, attendees, names as per your meeting.

News and future events

Children at meeting – new arrangements

We don't have a regular children's group at present. We are always delighted to welcome children though, and can offer a separate session, joining the main meeting for the last 5-10 minutes. However there are now newly coordinated sessions for children at two other local meetings:

1st and 3rd Sundays each month at 11 am at **Edinburgh Central Meeting**, Victoria Terrace. 1st Sun is all-age worship with adults.

2nd and 4th Sundays each month at 11 am at **Portobello & Musselburgh Meeting** at Bellfield, 16B Bellfield St, Portobello.

5th Sundays arrangements will vary, details will be circulated.

The **Area Meeting Hardship Fund** can offer one-off grants to support Friends in financial difficulty. Its purpose is "to assist any Friend or regular attender who faces financial hardship which cannot be met, or met sufficiently quickly, from other sources". Contact the Pastoral Care team for more information.

Warm space at Edinburgh Meeting House – this scheme for those who are cold at home is running every Thursday afternoon (2-4) during January and February. Other organisations are covering other days. Volunteers to help please! Contact Kate Arnot or Lynne Barty.



Cramond, low tide (HSC-ANT)

SOMETHING ELSE



Lighthouse distribution in Africa (@TerribleMaps)

Turns out this is an even more terrible map than intended: Uganda has lighthouses on Lake Victoria.

*Our newsletter is published near the last Sunday of each month. Dark Month diaries to neilturn@gmail.com
Find this edition, plus archives of previous, at www.quakerscotland.org/south-edinburgh*



View from Calton Hill (Deirdre Armstrong)