

West Scotland Quaker News

January 2014

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

From the Editor:

As often happens, I am short of material to fully fill this issue of WSQN; so Friends, please inundate me for the next issues! As a "space filler", I have included a couple of photos (A&B, pp. 2&12 respectively) of historical sites in Central Scotland. Can you identify them? (Answers in the March WSQN.)



Historical location A

The deadline for the next issue of West of Scotland Quaker News is 10th February.

Copy should be sent to the editor Bryan Bowes preferably in word or plain text email to: botany64@waitrose.com or by post to: 3 West Chapelon Lane, Bearsden, Glasgow G61 2DF.

Clerk's Letter

Paul Parker, our Recording Clerk, is coming to Area Meeting on 25 January 2014 at Glasgow. His theme is Why it's exciting to be a Quaker today! This should be a lively and interesting theme, very relevant to where we are now. So we encourage all Friends and attenders to come. Glasgow Friends have a bed and breakfast scheme if you need to stay. The agenda and papers will be sent out in January. The meeting runs from 11:00 to about 16:00 and Paul will speak to us after lunch at about 2 o'clock.



Paul has been Recording Clerk of Quakers in Britain since May 2011. Since his appointment, he has been travelling among Friends in Britain, listening for what unites us, and sharing his excitement about the future of Quakerism in our Yearly Meeting. In this session, he will reflect on what he sees as the opportunities and challenges for Quakers today, and invite us to join in a discussion about our meeting, what they are for, and how we can make them thriving, buzzing, vibrant communities of faith.

Friends may recall his involvement in something called WHOOSH! So what is WHOOSH! all about? It is summed up in an epistle sent from a conference under this title held at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre:

To all Friends in Britain,

"We are 57 Quakers who have gathered at Woodbrooke for the Quaker Life threshing event 'Whoosh!' - united by our determination to energise the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, and to help it build on the vitality of the past and present to create fresh fizz and purpose for the future. We discern a growing confidence within the Religious Society of Friends that our experience-based religion is increasingly what many people are looking for. Growing numbers of

absolute truth, but are hungry for a path of personal and social transformation. This could be a 'transition moment' for British Quakers, as we discover a new radicalism in response to turbulent times.

We have been reminded that at the end of the 17th Century Quakers made up 1% of the British population – the equivalent of 600,000 members today. We are convinced that the UK would be a better place with 600,000 Quakers in it. Our Meetings are facing many challenges from a changing world and the pressure of Quaker business. We need to give ourselves permission to think positively, so that we can recognise our gifts and potential, and be open to transformation. We have been asked to consider which parts of our lives bring us closer to God. We share a desire to build joyful communities, places that help us live faithfully, and recognise that vibrant Meetings are a channel for God's love.

Should we be more rigorous in testing what we gain from our Quaker roles, being ready to spring-clean our structures when they are not helping us? How can we use our premises to renew our sense of purpose and reach out to the people who live and work around us? Do we have the courage to speak with passion and conviction about our spiritual lives? Can we acquire the confidence to find our own words to express the ways in which we understand the divine? Can we encourage others as they reach for the language that is right for them? How can we share our collective experience and wisdom with and between Meetings? How can we become learning communities, which recognise and foster each others' gifts?

This conference has been characterised by a clear affirmation of the need for growth, vibrancy and the enrichment of faithful lives. We acknowledge our need for experimentation and openness to change. We have been inspired by the observation that 'Quakers are ready to take off', and by the insight that we do not do this only in our own strength. We ask all Friends to consider how we are led to respond to this challenge to participate in realising God's purposes for our Society in these times, when a confident Quaker voice is needed more than ever."

Signed in on behalf of the Whoosh! conference
Paul Parker & Helen Rowlands, July 2012

(A Recording Clerk, by the way, is our senior staff member, first appointed in the late 1600s, who acts as the secretary to Britain Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings and runs the Friends House operation for us.)

Michael Hutchinson, Clerk, West Scotland Area Meeting.

"If we met more often for worship in each other's homes, it would remind us that God is with us in every place, at the kitchen sink and at the table; we should get to know one another more intimately, and could break bread together; the home atmosphere might make it easier to invite our acquaintances to join us; and any increase in numbers would lead to multiplication by cell-division; and an expanding coverage of the community."

David W Robson, 1971. (Quaker Faith & Practice 2.84)

Report on Area Meeting by Telephone December 2013

There were 32 participants at this Area Meeting, phoning in from all parts of West Scotland. The Clerk, Michael Hutchinson, took us through the business with his usual efficiency and good humour. We had each read Quaker faith and practice paragraph 23.1 before dialling in and joining the rest of the group.

Michael reported that he had been to a day conference for clerks in which he had facilitated a session on telephone conferencing. Apparently we are the only Area Meeting to have adopted this method of conducting our business, but other clerks asked for a copy of our guidelines, so West Scotland leads the way. It was certainly encouraging that our meeting today had at least one participant from every constituent Local Meeting – which is seldom if ever the case when we meet in person.

On membership matters Dee and Peter Leach, who attend Mull and Iona meeting, were accepted into membership of West Scotland Area Meeting. There was also one application for membership and one transfer (Jenny Meade from Ayrshire to North Wales).

Our Treasurer, Kate Gulliver, spoke to the Treasurer's report and draft budget. We heard first that the legacy from Barbara Organ amounted to £60,560 and Friends were naturally very concerned that this generous gift should be put to the best possible use – not only from the financial point of view but also for the widest possible spiritual and social benefit now and in the long term. Suggestions and guidance had come from various sources under the main headings of spiritual development, strengthening community, local meeting projects and communication and transport. Finally we asked the Treasurer, with the Trustees, to draw up plans for use of the legacy, taking into account the ideas and concerns raised today.

These considerations also affected the proposed budget as it has to be decided which of the items in the budget should be paid for from general funds and which from the legacy. Again it was finally left to the Treasurer to revise the budget, but it was agreed that we should raise by a substantial amount our contributions to organisations that we traditionally support, such as Friends World Committee for Consultation and Northern Friends Peace Board, as well as to Britain Yearly Meeting itself.

Nominations business consisted of the appointment of Douglas Shaw (Lanark) as our representative to Northern Friends Peace Board and Mary Roslin (Glasgow) as a Trustee. Robin Davis (Dunblane) was released from his position as Clerk to Area Meeting Overseers. We were reminded again (and with good reason) to help Nominations committee by filling in the new offer of service form. I gather this should shortly be available on the website www.quakerscotland.org/west

Some time ago it was agreed that we should hold an Area Meeting community gathering. It has been suggested that this should take place on Saturday 11 October 2014 (the date already earmarked for Area Meeting) in Ayr. Jennifer Hodson

(Lanark) and Christine Davis (Dunblane) are on the planning group and Ayrshire Friends are asked to appoint a local Friend to join them.

Finally we were reminded that the next Area Meeting is to be held in Glasgow Meeting House on 25th January 2014 starting at 11.00 am (half an hour earlier than usual). Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting will be speaking to us after lunch.

Mary Latham (*Glasgow Meeting*)

General Meeting for Scotland

General Meeting for Scotland was held in Aberdeen 16-17 November 2013. A full report will be in the *Scottish Friend*, so I'll only comment on matters specific to West Scotland Friends. General Meeting is a whole Scotland event and hence opportunity to meet and get to know Friends elsewhere in the country. We can learn together on issues that affect us all – this time was a good example as we had very relevant sessions on taking action for economic justice led by Suzanne Ismail of Quaker Peace & Social Witness and Val Brown of Christian Aid Glasgow.

There are certain matters we all have in common and General Meeting has responsibility for relating to Scottish government and institutions. It runs function groups to look at matters like outreach and witness for all Scotland. Hence it is GM that speaks to the Scottish Government on the issue of equal marriage, for example. One issue we are asked to consider at our next Area Meeting on 25 January is the proposal to strengthen Quaker advocacy to government in Scotland. General Meeting has sent a paper to brief us (see p. 12).

The next General Meeting is on Saturday 8th March in Glasgow. Glasgow is also hosting the residential General Meeting 15-16 November. So there is opportunity for West Scotland Friends to come and take part. Please also see the Meeting for Sufferings report below for details of a special General Meeting in partnership with Meeting for Sufferings on 13 September in Aberdeen.

Michael Hutchinson (*Glasgow Meeting*)

Meetings for Sufferings, December 2013

The meeting covered topics ranging from Swarthmoor Hall, through Welfare Benefits, Sustainability to MfS Regional Gatherings, with the major topic being Education.

We heard from Ingrid Greenhow about the current plans for Swarthmoor Hall. This Quaker resource will be managed from Friends House. It will be used for holiday accommodation in summer months and for Quaker courses in spring and autumn. The Hall is heavily subsidised from central funds and therefore its future will be

kept under review. Friends are encouraged to attend courses there, and to book accommodation for summer breaks. It was felt that the Hall will better speak for Quakerism if Quakers do use it. (See: <http://www.swarthmoorhall.co.uk>)

The survey conducted by Friends House in the Summer found that many Friends were acting locally and this work continues. At the 'Gathering for Action', 25th-27th October 2013 at Woodbrooke, enthusiastic Friends echoed all the ways of working previously discerned in Meeting for Sufferings, and suggested ways of linking them effectively together. Quaker Peace & Social Witness will be working on this, and also hopes to provide early in 2014 a statement for MfS to consider, restating the testimonies and spiritual basis for this activism for Friends' use.

On Sustainability, the Canterbury Commitment Group is organising a conference, at The Hayes Conference Centre at Swanwick over the weekend of 7th-9th March 2014, on 'Transforming Ourselves: Transforming The System'. We are asked if we would send representatives. For the background and aims of the conference please check out <http://quaker.org.uk/sites/default/files/MfS-2013-12-09%20-Canterbury-Commitment-package.pdf>.

General Meeting for Scotland is scheduled to host a Meeting for Sufferings Regional Gathering on 13th September 2014 in Aberdeen. The aim of the gathering is to explore how GM for Scotland and Meeting for Sufferings work together. The core participants would be AM and LM clerks and MfS Representatives and Alternates, but any Friends can, of course, attend. For more information <http://www.quaker.org.uk/sites/default/files/MfS-2013-12-12-MfS-Regional-Events-update.pdf>.

The concern of Education has been resurrected after 10 to 15 years by a number of Area Meetings specifically related to some current developments in State Education, which are perceived as running contrary to Quaker values. We found that Quaker values in Education are not exclusive to ourselves and that these values are promoted by the majority of teachers across the Education System, or at least they are when the bureaucracy and politician allow them.

The resulting minute in part calls us to: "seek to be involved as School Governors bringing leadership, partnership and hope into the practical application of values in schools? Could we volunteer in some way, in order to contribute to thinking on Religious Education?" We were reminded that excellent resources are available from Quaker Peace & Social Witness and the Quaker Bookshop on Nonviolence and on Peace Education, and that Quaker Peace & Social Witness is already taking action about militarisation in schools.

The need for individual support for teachers in our Meetings was recognised, however, no specific format emerged for offering this. This might be discussed further in Area Meetings.

Peter Christy (*Ayrshire & Arran Meeting*)

A proposal to support Scottish Quaker parliamentary advocacy

As Quakers we have a spiritual imperative to live out our testimonies: this means taking social responsibility and, when appropriate, speaking truth to power. When we do this work together, speaking out on behalf of the whole Society, it strengthens both our worshipping community and our faith. Quakers in Britain have recognised this and the Advocacy Team at Friends House is helping Quakers to work with the Westminster Parliament. However, to take account of devolved matters and the differences between England and Scotland, we think there is a need to expand Quaker advocacy to include the Scottish Parliament and other institutions.

What about the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office? We are represented on their Advisory Group, which discusses Scottish parliamentary business and arranges an annual meeting with the First Minister. This gives us information about what is going on the Scottish Parliament; their briefings provide valuable backup for advocacy work by the churches. But the SCPO is focused on the needs of the Church of Scotland: sometimes we have to go it alone, as we did with the legislation for same-sex marriage.

Too often Quakers in Scotland have missed or nearly missed opportunities to contribute to consultations about issues of concern to Quakers. In 2011, when the Commission on Women Offenders was taking evidence on ways to improve outcomes for women in the criminal justice system, Quakers in Scotland were not approached. Although work had been done on Women in Prison by the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva, our lack of advocacy had failed to make it known in Scotland. By chance, an individual Friend had the opportunity to put the Commission in touch with QUNO Geneva: a good but haphazard outcome.

General Meeting set up the Parliamentary Liaison Function Group to take Quaker advocacy forward in Scotland. So far, we have made a submission on the Scottish Independence Referendum (Franchise) Bill, in favour of the right of prisoners to vote, and recently the GM clerk wrote to MPs and MSPs opposing the proposals to replace Trident. In both of these instances local Friends were encouraged to talk to their own MSPs and MPs about the issues, drawing on the Function Group's preliminary work.

However, our advocacy would be more effective if it was supported by a Quaker Advocacy Worker based in Scotland. The worker would establish effective communication with Local and Area Meetings and would help co-ordinate activity and facilitate the sharing of information. They would provide briefings on issues of concern to Scottish Quakers and give advice and guidance on how best to engage with MSPs.

We suggest that the post should be part time and that the appointment might initially be made for 18 months, with a review at 12 months. But to go ahead with this, it needs to be something that we all want and support. It is important to realise that it will have financial implications for our four Area Meetings, requiring our annual quota to General Meeting to be roughly doubled.

Robin Davis (*General Meeting for Scotland Trustees*) and **Elizabeth Allen** (*General Meeting for Scotland Parliamentary Liaison Function Group*)

Milngavie Meeting Venues

Our usual Meeting Place is the Fraser Centre, Milngavie



But sometimes we have meetings in Members' houses

Economic Justice - A New Challenge for Quakers

Peace and Justice have always been central to Quaker witness: we recognise that you cannot have one without the other. Quakers have been involved with campaigns about criminal justice and trade justice for many years. But there is now another form of injustice which is creeping up on us slowly in this country. This is the massive inequality between rich and poor which was the subject of a joint QCEA/QPSW conference which I recently attended.

Over the past 15 years the top 1% in the UK have seen their share of income increase by 7% while the bottom 50% have seen only a 1% rise and many have seen a decrease in real incomes. It is not difficult to see the reasons for this. The austerity policy, far from being our only option, is a deliberate political policy designed to reduce the role of government and promote the 'free market'.

It has led to cuts in benefits and a dire lack of employment prospects, especially for young people: at the same time there have been tax cuts for the wealthy and a programme of selling public assets to private companies, enriching the managers and shareholders.

The free market may be efficient in allocating resources in the right conditions but the right conditions rarely occur. Most privatisations transfer power to a small number of large multi-national companies so there is little competition. The free market also makes assumptions about selfish personal behaviour, for example, which are patently not valid.

A more recent outrageous example of the increasing power of large companies is the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership under which multinational companies will be able to sue democratic governments if they feel their national policies have reduced their profits (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/04/us-trade-deal-full-frontal-assault-on-democracy>).

A particular feature of the last 30 years has also been the deregulation and growth of the 'financial sector' – hedge funds and investment banks which borrow money to speculate. The lending by US banks to people who could not afford to pay back the loans led to an inflation in house prices and the collapse in 2008 which cost the UK government over £1,000bn.

In 2011, 90% of transactions were speculative i.e. not related to investment in productive industries. Behind all this economic activity has been the holy grail of 'economic growth'.

Even a growth of 2% is hailed as a major achievement, yet economists and politicians do not seem to realise the implications of growth in a finite planet. A growth rate of 2% means that within 35 years we would be producing twice our current production with the obvious implications for finite resources, energy requirement and the disposal of waste.

It is difficult not to feel angry but yet powerless in the face of this, but at the

conference we heard of many constructive options which could significantly reduce the inequality. For example:

- A separation of investment banking from retail banking
- Reduction in the size of banks so they are not too big to fail
- Development of more mutual building societies
- Country by country reporting of company profits
- Requirement to publish triple bottom line accounts (financial, social and environmental)
- Better pricing of CO₂
- A more progressive tax system
- A citizens' income
- GDP to be a by-product policy rather than a major policy
- Closure of tax havens

I am particularly attracted to the proposed citizen's income (see <http://www.citizensincome.org/>) which seems simple, fair and progressive, although intuitively it may seem rather perverse. It is basically a universal, unconditional income: in other words it does not depend on age, marital status, wealth, who you are living with or whether you are employed etc. This not only makes it hugely simpler to administer (like the child allowance and state pension) but removes the stigma of receiving 'benefits'. It also allows for a much flexible approach to work: each person could choose to work full-time or part-time, or not at all, according to their circumstances: they would, for example, be able to care for an elderly relative, follow a particular hobby or interest or do voluntary work, with the security of a basic income.

Can we afford it? This would obviously depend on the amount of the income. At a very minimum it could be revenue neutral i.e. simply replacing the current massively complex and expensive system of benefits and tax allowances. But if we aspire to an income which would be just enough to live on it would probably require some additional taxation, such as a financial transaction tax or the closure of tax loopholes (or the scrapping of Trident or HS2).

Would it not lead to people not working and wasting time? It would certainly mean less people working in paid jobs but with increased mechanisation we obviously don't need everyone to work 5 days a week. A few would laze around but most people, if given a choice, would prefer to do some productive work rather than do nothing. However it would mean that people would not be forced into menial, low paid, degrading jobs and these jobs would therefore have to be better paid or made more attractive.

It is sad that all three main UK political parties seem to share the obsession with economic growth and the free market, despite the evidence that it is not working and is causing massive problems. Perhaps the forthcoming Scottish referendum might be an opportunity for us to try and change the agenda. If any Meeting wishes to arrange a discussion around this topic I would be happy to help.

Martin Mansell (*Glasgow Meeting*)

Area Meeting in Glasgow 25th January

The next Area Meeting will be held in the Glasgow Meeting House commencing at 11.00hrs. The afternoon speaker will be Paul Parker (see Clerk's Letter in this issue).



Historical location B

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