

# ***West Scotland Quaker News***

## **November 2013**

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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).***

## ***Important From the Editor***

Dear Friends, in the November 2012 issue of this Newsletter I addressed the following message to readers of WSQN: "At a recent Area Meeting, the Task Force reported on several proposed AM reforms. Meeting agreed that future issues of WSQN should include an Events Calendar to cover the whole of AM. However, in order to be effective, this will require: coordination with Lindesey Burton's online calendar, which deals with Glasgow LM events". ***Notifications of future events within Area Meeting, should be sent to WSQN well in advance of each edition of the Newsletter. It would be helpful if Friends could designate someone in their LM to compile a list of such events. Thanks!***

It was also suggested that a section of the Newsletter might be reserved for Brief News Items & Local Events, as is now appearing in the current issue of WSQN. What do you think about this? Please let me know if you have something to communicate!



***Reconstruction of a Faslane Anti-Trident Caravan's interior. (Glasgow Transport Museum. Photo: DMB)***

## Clerk's Letter

The New English Bible has Jesus saying:

“And I say this to you: You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall never conquer it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; what you forbid on earth shall be forbidden in heaven, and what you allow on earth shall be allowed in heaven.” (Matthew chapter 16, verses 18-19).

These verses are often used to justify the authority of the Church with a capital C, and the successors of Peter, the popes. Not something we Quakers normally identify with. So I was fascinated when I heard Beth Allen, a former Swarthmore Lecturer, reflect on these words in a different light.

We can think of ‘Peter’ as representing all of us – that we are all individually the hands God needs to use in the world and a potential rock on which the community of love can be shared. She said that the second sentence indicated in related fashion that we all individually have the power to lock up or open doors for people through our thoughts, words and actions.

This is a powerful metaphor and is quite a challenge to live up to. It reminded me of what a Quaker prison chaplain said in talking to a new prisoner. Asked to summarise Quakerism, the Friend said it was “about peace, justice and respect”. To which the prisoner replied “You’ve got that wrong – it should be respect, justice and peace.”

Life is learning how to be that rock so we can be in a place to respect others and work for a just world – opening doors. Only then can peace, in all its manifestations, follow. We need each to other to do this and all have our part.

**Michael Hutchinson** (*Glasgow Meeting*)

## Report on Dunblane Area Meeting October 2013

What is the purpose of Quaker faith & practice, and who is it for?

About twenty five Friends met on a beautiful day in Dunblane. The Mull Rally had closed the roads on Mull and Mike Shilson, who had intended to be there to represent Mull & Iona, had to make do with a message of greeting. Only six of the eleven local meetings were represented.

The reading during the opening worship was: "We are seekers but we are also the holders of a precious heritage of discoveries. We, like every generation, must find the Light and Life again for ourselves. Only what we have valued and truly made our own, not by assertion but by lives of faithful commitment, can we hand on to the future. Even then, we must humbly acknowledge that our vision of the truth will, again and again, be amended.



"In the Religious Society of Friends we commit ourselves not to words but to a way." (Quaker faith & practice - introduction)

In the morning session, we considered whether it was time to revise Quaker faith & practice. The Clerk had brought along several very old versions of the book(s) for us to look at, and also a few recent versions from other countries. We felt that before embarking on a revision we had to know what the book is for. How inward-looking should it be? The current consideration of what it means to be a Quaker today needs to run its course first. There are however sections in the current version that need to be updated soon, and some gaps.

We might now also be considering the format of the document; perhaps an app is required for the present time.

Peter Christy, reporting on the October Meeting for Sufferings, said how inspiring he had found the presence at its start of 38 teenagers. They too had gone off to consider whether it is time for the revision of Quaker faith & practice. He recommended that everyone should see the video of the Yearly Meeting Trustees' Report for 2012. It is available at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/film2012> (It even includes a clip showing our own smaller meeting house at Wigtown, and how those scattered Quaker communities got together.)

Paul Parker, the recording Clerk will come to the AM in Glasgow on 25 January on the topic of what it means to be a Quaker today.

Paper Offers of Service forms were distributed for those local meetings that were represented, and they have been circulated with the minutes. We do need volunteers to take part running the Area Meeting and will need many new people for the start of 2015 when the next triennium begins. If you fill in a form, the Nominations Committee will know about you when they seek to discern new nominations. It is planned that a copy of the form should be available on the website <http://www.quakerscotland.org/west> also, though it was not yet there at the time of writing.

**Jane Mitchell** (*Argyll & Islay Meeting*)

## **Report on Gathering for Action - Welfare Cuts and Inequality: Woodbrooke 25-27 October 2013.**

Imagine you were walking by the river in your village one day and noticed a baby floating downstream. I am sure your immediate reaction would be to jump in and save the baby. Then imagine that another baby was found drifting downstream the next day, then more babies the day after, until everyday saw many babies being rescued from the icy water. Would you simply care for these abandoned ones or would you head upstream to ask the city elders why the babies were being cast adrift and abandoned to the care - or not- of their rescuers in the first place?

This was the first of many illustrative allegories shared at Woodbrooke during the 5

weekend of October 25th, used as a tool for those Friends gathered there to consider if action being taken by local meetings is an appropriate response to the current welfare cuts or if the Society as a whole should call for a joined up action and/or statement of some form from the Society to our Government.

The Gathering commenced shortly after my arrival on Friday evening with a talk by Judith Moran from Quaker Social Action, from whom I drew the opening allegory. This impassioned dialogue helped me to understand the good work currently undertaken both locally by friends and national by the Society but also made me question even more if our Government should be tasked with reviewing and revising their current welfare cuts in light of the incredible hardship these "reforms" have brought to so many of our United Kingdom. We closed with a short period of silence and epilogue.

On Saturday and Sunday, after excellent and hearty breakfasts, we gathered together for Meeting for Worship before joining together to share our personal experiences of welfare cuts as well as sharing what some local meetings represented at Woodbrooke are doing to aid those affected by the same. Food banks and gifting to them featured largely in these reports. We were then given the opportunity to ask any questions we had of each other and our stories, all of which were inspirational. As convinced as I am that these acts of individual kindness come from a Spirit led base, I also have to question why our government allows corporate tax evasion to amount to billions of pounds whilst leaving an increasingly large number of individuals in need of food banks because of, unemployment due to lack of available work, zero hours irregular work contracts with no financial security, cuts or sanctions to all benefits for nearly all claimants plus, of course, the bedroom tax.

Are Friends aware that for the first time since World War 2 the Red Cross will be giving out food parcels this winter in our country? That, to me, is quite a statement of need. Other forms of aid being undertaken by local meetings were; going to ATOS appeals with the person appealing, helping with form filling and emotional support for benefit claimants and asylum seekers, gathering a minimum of 50 signatures to forward to their local MEP via their Area Meeting about their concerns( apparently if more than 50 signatures are gained, their concern must be heard in the European Parliament). Another meeting, which had their offer to return their winter fuel payments rejected by the government, started a relief for poverty fund instead, donating £2,000 to their local CAB, which like many others, remains under threat of closure, thus taking away access to free and impartial advice. The most novel Local Meeting action which came to light was Bath Meeting's successful campaign to save the public toilets!

Whilst that might seem somewhat off topic, the lack of public facilities caused by cuts to local authority budgets from central government can cause discomfort of some sort to everyone, rich or poor ! Too many ideas were shared to be recorded here but I remain utterly inspired by the varied forms of help and huge amount of time so freely given by Friends and will share these with my Meeting here on Islay. That evening, we chose discussion groups to attend in order to clarify our thoughts as to what further action, if any , should be taken on both local and national levels as Friends.

On Saturday afternoon we were asked to choose a workshop to attend, on Sunday, **6**

the choices being Street School Economics, True to Our Values, or Promoting an inclusive society - a toolkit for Friends. All sounded informative, pertinent to our gathering and of great value to my Quaker journey but after much deliberation, I chose the latter, which proved to be an interesting and lively discussion on what makes someone feel either included or excluded within our society. My personal view was in order to feel included within our society; I need to feel valued, and can be of service to others. How excluded so many people must feel due to their ethnic origins, employment status or health problems! We all drew our own personal conclusions from this excellent discussion. Later that evening, Friends came forward with topics they felt would be helpful to discuss, such as direct action backed by the Society and the feasibility of a Citizens Income. We were invited to drop in and out of these discussions as we felt led to.

We finished the weekend after an emotional Meeting for Worship by meeting together with the clerks to try to reach consensus on what we felt as a group should be carried forward as possible action as a Society. A minute was recorded, which will be sent for consideration to QPSW for discussion at their next central meeting November 22-24th.

This was my first time at a large Quaker gathering and I find it hard to explain by just what an amazing experience it was. From the thoughtful way the weekend was structured to the inspirational talks from people who work for Friends to the opportunity to meet and share with so many interesting people - I will never forget my time at Woodbrooke and will remain inspired by it for a very long time to come and hope I can pass some of what I learned onto Friends locally. Thanks go to my nominee for suggesting my attendance and to Area Meeting for supporting my ability to go. I really cannot adequately describe all which occurred at this gathering so will leave you with the link where you can read in more detail: [www.quaker.org.uk/cuts-oct-2013](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cuts-oct-2013)

**Susan Wood** (*Argyll and Islay Meeting*)

## **Report on MfS on 5th Oct 2013**

At the Meeting for Sufferings on 5th Oct 2013 we welcomed some thirty-eight Young Friends (between 13 to 18 year-old) when they attended our opening Meeting for Worship. They then left to consider their input to the revision of Quaker Faith and Practice. I haven't seen any outcome to this process but when it comes I'm sure it will be interesting. West Scotland AM had looked for a suitable young person but we were unable to find anyone.

The Meeting then went on to consider three major topics, the boycott of Israeli settlement goods, welfare benefit cuts and what to do with our funds invested in fossil fuel extraction. The boycott of settlement goods continues, as do the experiences many Friends now have of participating in dialogue within their local Jewish communities. MfS was clear that to extend the boycott would not be right. This discernment will remove the anxiety provoked by too frequent return to this subject, and will protect our work on the ground (EAPPI, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel) and in international advocacy 7



(QPSW in Europe). see also <http://www.quaker.org.uk/news/quakers-continueboycott-settlement-produce>. MfS moved onto a discussion of the welfare benefit cuts which revealed clearly that there is a groundswell of active concern among Friends – almost a Quaker movement. It is evident at all levels but particularly at local level. The results of the MfS survey of Friends involvement in this concern heartened us, and off-set the frustration some feel that a precisely identifiable project has not been found. The third issue is the decision to divest our YM investments from fossil fuel extraction. BYM trustees were looking to MfS for guidance on this. The struggle between 'head realism' (that our daily lives are dependent on fossil fuel) and 'heart conviction' (that our spiritual concern is to minimise damage to the planet) was difficult. Spiritual conviction prevailed and we indicated our wish for the Trustees to divest BYM of any investments in fossil fuel extraction. see also <http://www.quaker.org.uk/news/quakers-disinvest-fossilfuels>

As part of the Trustees report we were encouraged to promote the video summarising the work of the Society. It can be found at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/film2012> and is highly recommended viewing.

**Peter Christy** (*Ayrshire & Arran Meeting*)

## Remembrance Day at Faslane Trident Base



*Photo: Martin Mansell*

About 30 Friends, including friends from the Peace Camp, met on Remembrance Day in bright sunshine on the verge outside the South Gate to Faslane Trident base. We had our usual visits from (and photographs taken) by the MoD police, but they were quite friendly and almost apologetic to us afterwards.

**Martin Mansell** (*Glasgow Meeting*)



## **Yours Faithfully, *Milngavie & Bearsden Herald*, 11/2013**

At this time of Remembrance we are also thinking of the 100th anniversary of WW1 next year and this may be a good time for us to consider the way we remember it. As pacifists Quakers will want a commemoration without celebration or glorification of war. Not many of us have family or friends who were living in 1914 -1918. But the poetry of the 1st world war poets, like Wilfred Owen, still brings the horror and futility of that war alive to young people in schools and colleges. John McCrea, a Canadian poet of Scottish grandparents, was a soldier, physician and field surgeon. In 1915 he wrote 'In Flanders Fields', in a field centre in Ypres on the death of his friend:

We are the dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

How will we remember the centenary? Shall we make a peace garden? Hold a children's poetry competition? Plant trees?

Jesus said: Blessed are the Peacemakers for they will be the children of God [Matthew 5.9].

Recent peace initiatives have come from surprising sources and we should welcome them. It was Vladimir Putin who proposed removing the chemical weapons from Syria thus averting an imminent war. And it is the newly elected Iranian leader, President Rouhani who has proposed that ALL chemical weapons are banned worldwide. This is not a time to be cynical about these peace initiatives: Communist or Muslim, we are all children of God.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [OPCW] has just been awarded the Nobel Peace prize for their difficult and dangerous work in removing all the chemical weapons in Syria - still a war zone. Russia and Italy have already signed up to abolish chemical weapons

We must also prohibit nuclear weapons. Quakers Scotland are opposed to the renewal of Trident and have written a letter which has been sent to all MSPs and MPs: "As part of our ongoing peace testimony Quakers have a long-held belief that Britain's possession of nuclear weapons is untenable because their use is unconscionable: they have the potential to kill hundreds of thousands of innocent people and to cause environmental catastrophe"... and that "nuclear 'deterrents' encourage proliferation". We believe that genuine security comes not from deterrence but from the recognition of the inherent worth of every person in a society free from the threat of violence, where human needs are met.

Remembrance is a poignant history and memorial ceremonies should not deafen us to those voices from the past shouting to us not to repeat it.

**Diane Bowes (*on behalf of Milngavie Meeting*)**



## WW1: Myth and Reality



*Happy Volunteer Cambridge Memorial ( BGB)*



*One of 11,954 Graves at Tyne Cot, near Passendale, Belgium (Paul Burton)*



*Photo: Paul Burton*

*Some of the 11,954 Commonwealth graves at Tyne Cot. "We can truly say that the whole circuit of the Earth is girdled with the graves of our dead. In the course of my pilgrimage, I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon Earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war." — King George V, 1922*



# Genesis and Catastrophe: 1914 in the Mirror of the Present

There are essentially two dominant explanations of WW1:

1. Thus for instance Gary Sheffield (2013a) writes "Britain went to war with Germany in August 1914 for similar reasons to those for which the country fought Hitler's Germany in the Second World War: to prevent an authoritarian, militarist, expansionist enemy achieving hegemony in Europe and thus imperilling British security and there were distinct continuities between the policy and strategy of imperial Germany and its Nazi successor."

But was there nothing authoritarian, militarist or expansionist in British behaviour then? Before the war Britain had allowed the death from starvation of 5 million inhabitants of Madras and --- invented the concentration camp in South Africa. During the war Britain was allied with the feudal-absolutist Russian autocracy and engaged in violently suppressing the national aspirations of the Irish. By the end of the war Britain had 'acquired' several more oil-producing territories in the Middle East and helped establish the Zionist colony in Palestine.

2. From another perspective, Christopher Clark (2013b) considers there are too many agencies involved for any ultimate cause to be identified and the war was "a tragedy, not a crime --- the protagonists of 1914 were sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world".

However, neither scapegoating (of Germany) nor absolution (of the Great Powers more generally) are adequate here. But nor is merely criticising the conduct of the war. In Britain, for example, it has long been acceptable to rail at the leaders of the British Expeditionary Force. We should beware the easy satisfactions of denouncing Haig and Co as 'donkeys' for their stupidity. They were not lacking in intelligence, nor necessarily unfeeling. They chose to send thousands over the top to their deaths because the military options were relatively limited and an ineradicable risk of being a soldier is to die in the pursuit of strategic objectives. After all, would the war have been acceptable if the levels of death and mutilation had been lower?

In fact, the generals, like the politicians and state managers, were trapped within a structural logic which first led to war and then determined their conduct of it. We recognise that the main players were established or aspirant imperial powers; but this fact is rarely given any explanatory power, so long as 'imperialism' is simply regarded as coextensive with colonialism. It does not simply involve relationships of domination by the metropolitan powers over the colonial and semi-colonial world, but also relationships of rivalry between the metropolitan powers themselves, a rivalry which fused economic and geopolitical competition.

The example of the First World War is important because it illustrates both the inherently warlike nature of capitalism and the way in which seemingly irrational decisions were in fact inescapable given the compulsions of competitive accumulation. All the major participating states were either already capitalist or in the process of completing the transition. Their empires were important to the metropolitan centres for economic reasons; principally as captive markets, less so



as a source of raw materials (except in the case of Britain) and least of all as the destination of investments.

In some cases the diplomatic alliances which eventually plunged the world into catastrophe had direct economic origins. In Russia grain exports and raw material imports for industry passed through the straits between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara or the Dardanelles and the Aegean. Early in 1914 Russia and her allies forced the Ottoman Empire to grant autonomy to the partly Armenian provinces of eastern Anatolia in order to pull the Christian Armenians under Russian influence. As a result the Turks began to form an alliance with Germany in order to protect the integrity of their empire.

In the case of Britain, economic specialisation and the consequent lack of self-sufficiency in food and raw materials, made her dependent on these being constantly available from overseas, which in turn required the Royal Navy to protect the merchant marine. Challenged by the other European Powers, above all Germany, in the naval arms race from the 1890s, Britain began to create the continental system of alliances that would pull her into war.

The key participants had already been engaged in conflict-at-one-remove before 1914. The Boer War can be seen as a proxy war between Britain and Germany who backed, encouraged, trained and supplied the Boers. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, Germany supported Russia and Britain supported Japan.

Since the end of the Cold War we have once again seen war ‘by proxy’ where different sides were supported by France, Germany and the USA during the disintegration of Yugoslavia; and the conflict between NATO and Russia over Georgia (and the divisions within the NATO member states over attitudes to Russia) is the most recent; but similar alignments are beginning in Central Africa where France is already in the dominant position among the Western powers, but where China is rapidly extending its influence.

In conclusion we may be entering a world situation which resembles in several important ways that of 1914. The moment of maximum danger for humanity will come when the contemporary capitalist great powers no longer express their different competitive interests by proxy in the Global South, or assert their interests over lesser states in the developed world itself, but directly confront each other on the geopolitical stage.

In this perspective the origins of the First World War are not a matter for academic dispute, but a warning of what may await us, with different participants but even greater destructive capacity. In that sense we commemorate those who opposed WW1, not simply because they were right, but because we may have cause to emulate them.

2013a. *The First World War was far from Futile*, **The Guardian**, 17 June 2013.

2013b. *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, **Harmondsworth: Penguin Books**, 2013 p. 562.

## Holding a Container in the Light.

Quakers don't go in for ornate meeting houses, believing that the spirit is more important than the surroundings. I have spent many worshipful hours on a roadside verge or on the middle of a roundabout at Faslane but a few weeks ago I took part in my first Meeting for Worship in a warehouse.

Mary's Meals is a charity which provides daily cooked meals for thousands of children in six developing countries. It also periodically sends out containers of school equipment to Malawi and other countries. These are usually school bags containing exercise books, pencils etc – one for each child. Being a religious charity they like to have these containers blessed before they leave and in an ecumenical spirit they ask all churches to carry out a blessing in turn. For most churches this would be a fairly routine job for a minister but when it came to the turn of Quakers I had to explain that Quakers do not have ministers and do not normally do blessings, certainly not of objects. However they were keen for us to take part and after some negotiation we agreed that we would have a reading followed by a short period of silence.

So last month a few Glasgow Friends assembled in a chilly warehouse in an industrial estate in the north of Glasgow. A team of about a dozen volunteers were in the middle of loading 8000 bags onto a large shipping container, which they have to complete in 4 hours. We were asked to arrive at their tea break and so there was a natural pause. After a short introduction to Quakers and a reading from Quaker Faith and Practice we stood for a brief period of silent worship and then adjourned to their tea room where we found out more about the charity and also did some outreach ourselves.

**Martin Mansell** (*Glasgow Meeting*)

## Local News & Events

### *Ayrshire Meeting*

Following a very encouraging response to the Quaker Week events Ayrshire Meeting has decided to extend its availability and accessibility. It is now holding Meeting for Worship four times per month and using additional venues to make worship more accessible to members and attenders in the north and south of Ayrshire. They continue to meet in Ayr on the first and third Sunday and now also meet in Ardrossan on the second Sunday and in Girvan on the fourth Sunday. Meeting for Worship on the third Sunday in Ayr is followed by a shared lunch and a discussion. They hope to join with other meetings on months when there is a fifth Sunday.

Do come and join us if you are able.

**Kate Gulliver** (*Ayrshire Meeting*)

## ***Mull & Iona Meeting and Iona Housing Partnership***

For a few years now, Quaker Meeting for Worship has been taking place in Tobermory, up in the north of the Isle of Mull. Due to growing numbers of interested folk in the south of Mull, and on Iona, a monthly Meeting has also been taking place on the Ross of Mull since March 2013. This is great news and those of us in the south are extremely grateful to those in Tobermory for taking up and supporting the idea so enthusiastically, and, with two carloads of people, travelling the not-inconsiderable distance to support the Ross Meeting every month.

With beautiful timing, another interesting development on Mull and Iona has emerged which also involves Quakers. Many of you reading this will be aware of the significance and beauty of Iona as a place of pilgrimage, peace and renewal, but did you know about the deep-rooted housing crisis on the island? The directors of a local charity, Iona Housing Partnership, enjoyed a recent visit from Bob Williamson who came to Iona to find out more about their application to the Quaker Housing Trust. Thousands of visitors are welcomed to Iona each year, and many of the resident population rely on tourism in some way for their livelihood. The island's iconic status also means, however, that many of the houses on Iona are now used for holiday letting or are holiday homes, and few are available for sale or rent to people living on the island. The Iona Housing Partnership aims to build five houses for long term let to fulfil the local need for affordable homes. This project will involve a huge amount of fund-raising and we will await the progress of the application to the Quaker Housing Trust with interest.

Current details of our Meetings for Worship are:

North - Tobermory

1st Wednesday of the month, 12.30pm

3rd Sunday of the month, 11am

Both these Meetings are held in the board room, Taigh Solais Harbour Building, Ledaig car park, Tobermory

South - Fionnphort

2nd Wednesday of the month, 12.30pm

Held at Staffa House, Fionnphort

All are welcome to join us for any Meeting for Worship, followed by a light bring-and-share lunch and a cuppa. If you would like more information please see [www.islandquakers.org.uk](http://www.islandquakers.org.uk) or contact Robin Naumann, clerk of Mull and Iona Quakers, on 01681 700 003.

If you would like to hear more about the Iona Housing Partnership, please see [www.ionahousing.org.uk](http://www.ionahousing.org.uk).

**Gillian Cummins and Robin Naumann (*Mull & Iona Quaker Meeting*) and Dot Stewart (*Iona Housing Partnership*)**



## ***Items wanted for Faslane Peace Camp***

Mary Alice writes: I asked the peace camp people what they were most in need of at present, and the reply was "warm bedding and candles". Something I have been trying to get for them for several months is a swing, etc for the children. I thought that Friends might have some of these items lying unused, and would be happy to donate them to support young people keeping a continued witness at the Peace Camp started over 30 years ago, by a former member of our Meeting. I can co-ordinate the collection of stuff, and get them delivered, but I am away for a week from 15th to 22nd November. Thank you Friends."

**Mary Alice Mansell (*Glasgow Meeting*)**

## **Area Meeting by Telephone Conference**

***Area Meeting by telephone will be on Monday evening 2nd December and follow the same format and timing as for previous conferences.***



***The deadline for the next issue of West of Scotland Quaker News is 20th December 2013.***

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

West Scotland Quaker News is published by  
West Scotland Area Meeting  
of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers),  
38 Elmbank Street, Glasgow G2 4PS.