

# ***West Scotland***

## ***Quaker News***

***November 2015***

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## Clerk's Letter

Being caught up suddenly as an executor following the death of an old friend down South, I've been immersed in the life of someone as only the clearing up a house can show you. Lots of useful things to apply myself to myself too - making sure life can be made easier for those that inherit the situation. Not just wills, but instructions on what should be done.

Most moving, though, is the writings in the common place book that was left on the shelf. Lots from that superb classic, *Guests of my life* by our Friend Elizabeth Watson. That has a very special place in my house too. I think it is one of the most important books I ever read. And I remember meeting Elizabeth at some Yearly Meeting and 'getting a charge' as our American friends say. She quotes Emily Dickenson, who taught her that grief is a time to be lived through, to experience fully "the heavens will not fall if I give voice to my anger against God in such a time. When we accept the unacceptable, it has no more power over us. We can move through and beyond the experience". A lot of life is just that, finding courage, gained though the power that comes through rootedness, to move on. Life is a succession of giving things up, but also a succession of findings. The latter can inform the former if we are open.

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



*The Hermitage in autumn, BGB 2015*



## Report on Dunblane Area Meeting

Meeting again in the inspiring room at the Cathedral Halls in Dunblane a relatively small group of us considered a wide range of matters brought before us. First we sadly had to record the death of Isobel Fairweather a much loved Friend from Milngavie Meeting. She was fiercely independent and did not accept help easily but was genuinely concerned and supportive for Friends despite her lack of mobility and regularly took part in the telephone Area Meeting.

This item also related to a minute received from Dunblane LM asking for the preparation of a Testimony to the Grace of God in the life of three Friends from Dunblane who had died in the last year. This raised the difficult issue of if and when such a Testimony should be prepared and if and when it should be sent to Meeting for Sufferings. We were reminded of the difference between a Testimony and a biography and we decided to take up the offer from Dunblane to provide suitable text relating to all three Friends which could be used in WSQN and to encourage other Local Meetings to do the same.

We then turned to 'Our Faith in the Future' a grand sounding document which is to replace the Long Term Framework as our vision for the future. The document was based on a consultation using over 300 replies including 30 young people. It was described as a 'Word Picture' of what Quakers in Britain today would like the Society to be by 2020. It was presented in the form of an attractive leaflet with sections on The Meeting for Worship, Quaker Communities, Quaker Discipline, Quaker Values, Quaker Work and Outreach.

Inevitably we had to consider our finances and we found that although they are generally sound it looks as though we are heading for a deficit this year largely because our contributions are about 10% below what was expected. We heard that only a proportion of members contribute. One idea to raise income was for meetings to offer Bed and Breakfast to visiting Quakers as happens in Glasgow. Mary Alice Mansell offered to provide the coordination as she does already for Glasgow.

Safeguarding is an issue that we need to be increasingly aware of. Margaret Wadsley, our safeguarding officer, reminded us that safeguarding now includes vulnerable adults as well as children. Safeguarding is mainly the responsibility of overseers but each Local Meeting or group of Local Meetings is asked to bring forward the name of a person who can be a link with the AM safeguarding officer. Overseers should have a list of people who can be considered as vulnerable: they need to use their judgement and common sense in deciding who should be on the list.

We all enjoyed the hospitality of Dunblane, especially the soup and bread. I understand the cheese was also rather special but since I have a strong aversion to cheese I will take the addicts' word for it.

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

## Wisdom Schools

When you tell anyone that you have been on a retreat on Holy Isle in Scotland they usually assume that you have been to Iona. Some way south of Iona, however, just off the east coast of the Isle of Arran, there is a smaller island owned by a little-known Tibetan Buddhist organization. To reach it, you take the ferry from Ardrossan in Ayrshire to Brodick on Arran and then take a bus to Lamlash from where a much smaller ferry takes you to Holy Isle.

Cynthia Bourgeault - author of *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene*, amongst other books - led a five-day Wisdom School Retreat in both 2014 and 2015. Required reading for the first were two of her books entitled *The Wisdom Jesus* and *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*. If you put aside what you think you know about Jesus and approach the Gospels as though for the first time, something remarkable happens: Jesus emerges as a teacher of the transformation of consciousness. He is also seen as a wisdom teacher in a tradition older even than Judaism. Those two retreats have helped me to define wisdom much more clearly, partly by realizing what it is not. Wisdom as a state of consciousness is the opposite of angst and insecurity. In *The Wisdom Jesus*, Cynthia makes extensive use of *The Gospel of Thomas* which includes Jesus' use of paradox far more than do the four biblical Gospels. Wisdom helps us to embrace paradox as "both . . . and" rather than "either . . . or".

Most of our time was in silence, the evening meal being the only one at which conversation was acceptable. Each day started with two twenty-minute centering prayer sessions separated by a contemplative walk round the large meeting room. Breakfast followed and then the first teaching session of the day. We were a very attentive school but, if anyone put up a hand to ask a question, Cynthia almost always responded. The final morning session before lunch was voluntary work in the vegetable garden doing a variety of jobs which included weeding and harvesting leaf and root crops which provided our vegetarian meals. Afternoon and evening sessions were taken up with chanting, sometimes accompanied by a guitarist, and more teaching. Our last teaching session was devoted to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and we ended with a eucharist followed by a recitation of George Herbert's mystical poem entitled *Love*.

Although the midges were a pest, I am sorry that that we shall not be returning next year.

**David Rees**

## Imagine

I am from an Irish background and have lived in Lochwinnoch a small town about 20 miles from Glasgow for several generations. In 1967 the English annexed Scotland after a short war and subsequently encouraged English people to come and settle in Scotland on any land that did not appear to be occupied, especially the hilltops which gave some measure of security.

At first a few families would bring temporary portacabins and then a few more would come. Soon, some soldiers would be needed to defend them from the local Scots and then a base would be needed for the soldiers and more settlers would be attracted until there was a town of some 40,000 people in pleasant tree-lined housing estates.

In 1993 England agreed to recognise the SNP government and to pull out of Scotland - except for some areas (Area C) which they needed to keep under English control for 'security reasons' and some more areas (Area B) where they allowed the Scots to control health and education etc. but not security or planning. In the remaining areas (Area A) they allowed the Scots (nominally) to have full control.

If I want to go to Quaker Meeting or to do some shopping in Glasgow (Area C) I have to ask my local priest to arrange for a permit for me from the English authorities which, if I am lucky, I would get in two or three days. With my permit and my ID card (I have to have my ID card with me at all times otherwise I could face 6 months in jail) and my magnetic security card (to show I have no convictions) I get the bus to Glasgow. At the checkpoint in Paisley I get out and go through the check point on foot.

If I am lucky this only takes about 20 minutes or so. If I am unlucky the check point is closed so I have to find a taxi to take me to another check point in Bridge of Weir which adds another half an hour. If I am really unlucky I am refused permission to pass the check point because it is only those over 40 who can go through today or because the picture of my son does not match his appearance and I have to return home.

On the way I think of my brother who lives on a farm near the settlement of East Kilbride. Because they want to expand the settlement on to his land and therefore want him to leave, he cannot have electricity or running water (unlike the nearby settlers) and he has received many demolition orders. These orders are supposed to be served on him in person but are often just left on the ground. When he finds an order he has 45 days to appeal which means hiring a lawyer to fight the case in court.

So far the court has overturned the orders because, unusually, he has the papers which prove his family has owned the land for the past 100 years. However, on one occasion he found that 300 of his apple trees had been 'demolished' because he had not found the demolition order in time on his 100 acre farm. His latest demolition order is for one of his underground water tanks where he stores the rainwater he collects.

I also think of my parents who live in a small house in the east end of Glasgow now being increasingly populated by English people. They don't have any legal documents and have also received a demolition order inviting them to demolish their own house. If they don't, the English authorities will demolish it anyway and charge them for doing so. There is no date on the order so it could be next week or next year.

There will be no warning – a private contractor will turn up with the army, maybe in the morning or maybe in the middle of the night. No wonder my parents are distraught with worry and may just knock the house down to end the ordeal. I was recently asked to fly to Europe to talk about human rights in Scotland. But I am not allowed to use Glasgow or Edinburgh airports and have to fly from Manchester.

It should only take less than 4 hours to get to Manchester but as I am not allowed to use the M74 (it is reserved for English drivers), I have to travel on the small roads through Ayr and Dumfries and on the way have to pass through 5 check points, as well as the border post at Carlisle. So in all I would have to allow 12 hours and I would feel shattered even before I got on the plane.

You have probably guessed that the above is a fantasy – except that it is not a fantasy for Palestinians living in the West Bank. All the above scenarios were related to us by Palestinians we met on a recent Quaker Voluntary Action (QVA) work party/retreat to Israel/Palestine (or happened to ourselves). The trip was a mixture of meetings, reflection and practical work, mainly olive picking.

It is difficult to put in words the emotions of anger mixed with admiration for the determination of the many Palestinian and Israeli peace activists we met on the 2 week trip as well as the confident, open, articulate students at the Friends School in Ramallah. I even had a sneaking admiration for the affable, orthodox Jewish Settler we met for a few hours on a settlement, despite his dogmatic certainty about the religious basis of returning to the 'promised land' and his complete inability to see the Palestinians as anything other than a threat to their 'security'.

When you return from such a trip you have an immediate urge to talk to everyone you can find about the experience. I am aware that other Friends have talked about the situation in recent years but I would be happy to visit any meeting to provide an update on the current issues.

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

## ***Hypocrisy***

*You all spend your lives on spending,  
Drugs and caviar,  
You gotta keep up with the Jones'  
Get a brand new car.*

*You can feed a kid for 5p,  
in a third world town;  
But we spend thousands of millions,  
On razing this world to the ground.*

*All the things we take for granted,  
Like turning on the tap,  
Water for the thirst millions,  
It ain't as easy as that.*

*As we fight for money and status,  
They have to struggle for life;  
The more we drive towards our target,  
The more we drive in the knife*

*You can feed a kid ... etc.*

*Are you prepared to sacrifice a little,  
To save a lot of lives,  
Remember each is an individual,  
And has the right to survive.*

*(written by Gillian aged 14; she died  
aged 25)*

## ***En Prise***

*At a point  
where white slab  
of gable end  
meets terracotta chippings,  
a hint of earth, a speck  
sustains a flimsy stem,  
trembling corrola  
of recursive petals.  
En prise  
but such a plucky blue.*

**Pete Stuart (Glasgow Meeting)**



## Like a Butterfly

In September I swam 1km butterfly stroke in St Mary's Loch without a wetsuit. Reputed to be the coldest loch in Scotland (they're all cold as far as I'm concerned!) the simple question Why begs an answer! Friend Margaret Roy asked me to answer this in writing. And, as with everything, the answer is not so simple.

Last December I decided I needed to get back into life's groove and I wrote down seven things that I wanted to fit into 2016. Together with going to a world music festival and spending time with my family, swimming 1km butterfly was one of them.

I've always enjoyed butterfly, but have never been able to swim more than a few lengths of it. However, there is something about its exuberance and core power that really appealed. Swimming outdoors has little fear for me, but knowing that butterfly burns a lot of energy and I'll be doing it in cold water without a wetsuit did put the fear in me ... a little. So I soon set about making sure I'd succeed.

I convinced friends to train with me to help motivate, I booked lessons to improve my technique, and I committed to raising at least \$1000 for Butterfly Conservation. I even went to see a physiotherapist at the beginning of the year for a 'body MOT'. He asked, 'what's wrong?' 'Nothing yet!' I said. My intention was to swim the 1km without injury and to enjoy it. Fairly soon I knew I wouldn't injure myself, but learning to enjoy it was a much harder task!

There was one particular moment in training that was especially instructive. I was down in London training with friends and I just couldn't swim more than a few lengths. I felt immense pressure to perform and was failing and really not enjoying myself. So, when I came back to Glasgow I decided to let go of the fear and to stop taking on board other people's fears too. Everyone kept telling me how difficult it was! So, one Sunday morning before meeting I went to the marvellous Toll Cross 50m pool and just said to myself, 'just see how far you can go.' I didn't set myself any time or length target, just the thought 'give it a go.' And I'm proud to say I swam 700m non-stop! Then I knew I could do it, and the trick was to let go.

Setting myself this challenge was as much an emotional and spiritual journey as it was a physical challenge. In Greek the word for butterfly is Psyche, and as a symbol the butterfly can stand for both rebirth and the resurrection in Christo-centric logic. What I learnt about the physical stroke spoke well to my spirituality.

When I swim butterfly I imagine a bolt of energy that enters through the top of my head, flows fast through the body and then I use my feet to kick it powerfully out and away. In the first bit of the stroke the head bows down into the water in humility, then the arms enter and pull under lifting my chest up in pride, before the spirit kicks through, out and away.

Before I sign off I want to share with you a few more things. The first is this link to a some videos my mum made of our day at St Mary's Loch: [vimeo.com/petamoffat](https://vimeo.com/petamoffat). There's one before and one after where I'm smiling for Scotland! And the second is



this short piece. Over the nine months of physical and mental training I also spent time in contemplation with a few significant words - humility, power and pride being amongst them. Here is my contemplation on Grace:

Grace is a butterfly, spontaneity and beauty moved by the winds. It is action free from calculation and it happens when I let the spirit act through me, and in that moment, it becomes my action. It is when my action springs from trust in truth, commitment to love and the unwavering belief in the sacredness of all things. Grace makes my heart flutter, my legs tremble and beautifully kindles my core.

**Zem Moffat (Glasgow Meeting)**



## Thought for the Day\*

It's rare to see key figures from across Scotland's political spectrum unite behind the leader of the Scottish Conservative Party, but there's been widespread acclaim for Ruth Davidson's description of Westminster's treatment of the low paid, as - "not acceptable".

But, as the poor get further squeezed to pay for a banking crisis caused mainly by the rich, it isn't just tax credits, vigorously debated yesterday in the House of Lords, that's sending up the fireworks of austerity.

Let me give an example of what it's like at Ground Zero. My wife, Vèrène, does team leadership work with priority area parishes of the Church of Scotland. She wanted to get a better understanding of their ministry, so these past few Sundays, we've temporarily taken leave of our Quaker meeting. We've engaged, instead, in the dynamic new sport - of church surfing.

The fact is, it's often Presbyterian churches, and the Roman Catholic chapel round the corner, that are just about the only long-term anchor points in many poor communities.

Our surfing's introduced us to amazing unsung heroes. This week, in north-east Glasgow, I chatted with a couple whose whole thing is to collect, and deliver, food to the hungry. It's the feeding of the five thousand, and in the past two years, they've made delivery runs of thirty thousand pounds' worth of food, every can and bag of it donated in person by folks mostly from within the parish.

They told me that the single biggest driving factor of such hunger, is mental health. People are simply not coping, as they have to jump through complex hoops imposed these days by the benefits office. Typically they miss an appointment, get "sanctioned" (as the system calls punishment), and find themselves left high and dry.

"Give us this day our daily bread": and who'd ever have thought those words would have returned to challenge us, in the Scotland of today?

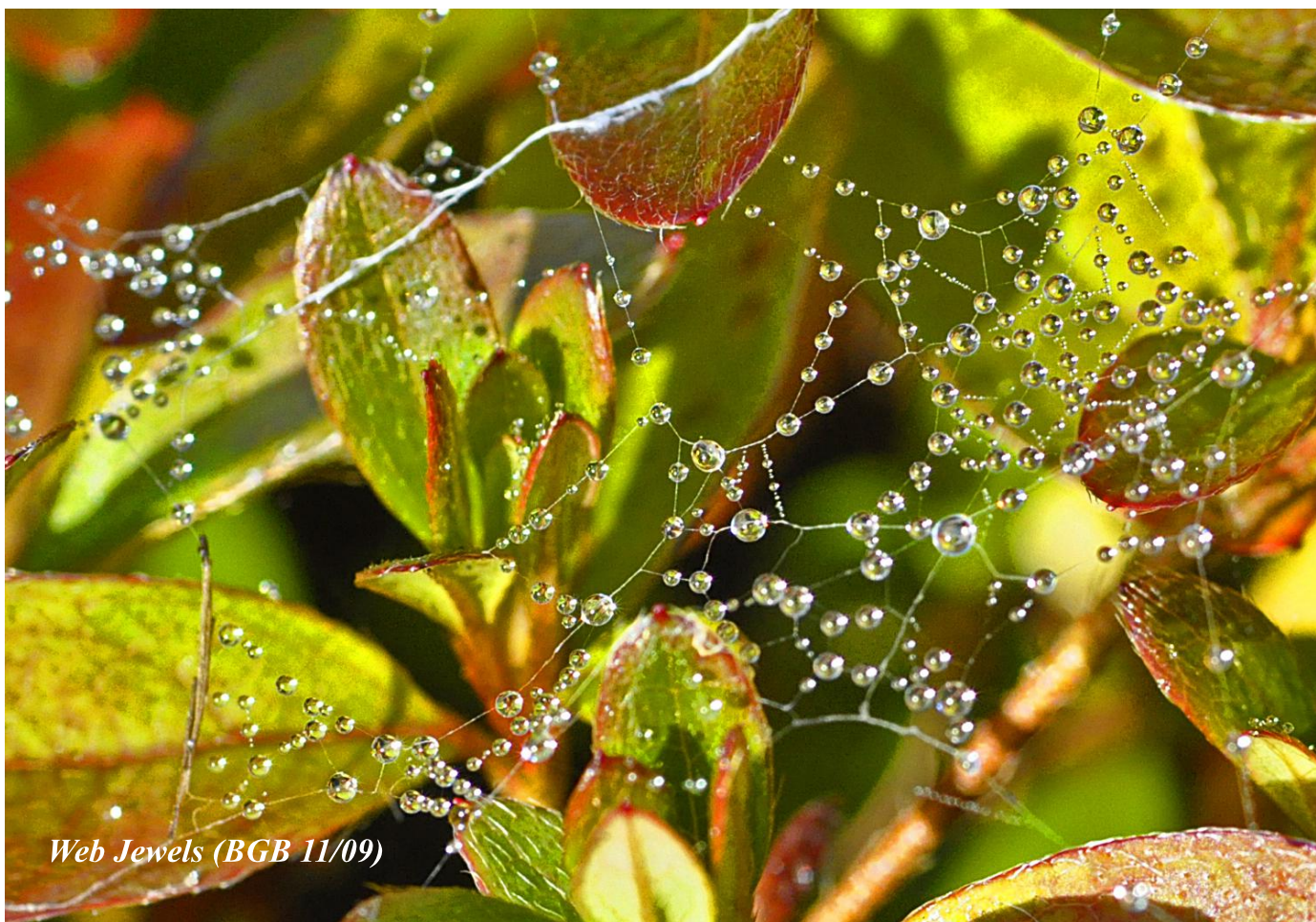
**Alastair McIntosh** (*Glasgow Meeting*)

*\* Shortened slightly from "Thought for the Day" given on Radio Scotland 27th October 2015*



## **Advance notice for Glasgow AM, 16th January 2016**

The afternoon session will be hearing Alastair McIntosh summarise his lectures this year to Ireland and Canadian Yearly Meetings. It will be followed by discussion. The full lecture entitled "To become the People of the Cross: Climate Change, Violence and some Meanings of Creation in Our Time" will be sent to friends in advance to read beforehand. Alastair McIntosh is a member of Glasgow Meeting. His work *The theology of climate change is currently part of his honorary remit at the School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, with the AHRC research programme: Caring for the Future Through Ancestral Time: Engaging the Cultural and Spiritual Presence of the Past to Promote a Sustainable Future.*



*Web Jewels (BGB 11/09)*

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***The deadlind for contributions for the next issue of WSQN is December 28th 2015 and should be sent in Word to the Editors Margaret Roy or Bryan Bowes.***