

North East Thames Quakers Newsletter (November 2010)



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Printed and published on behalf of NE Thames Area Quaker Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) by Daphne Stedman (tel: 020 8534 2224, email: djstedman@o2.co.uk). The contents of this newsletter do not necessarily represent the views of the Religious Society of Friends, Britain Yearly Meeting or NE Thames Area Quaker Meeting or of the Editor.

Editor's Ramblings

We have a bumper issue this time round. We have a testimony and several reports, including LM reports and a very helpful summary of the Interim Report on Meeting for Sufferings (the summary is by one of our AM members) as well as reports from Meetings for Sufferings. Read on...

I am also delighted to include articles of a more "spontaneous" type including a review of a Quaker-themed play at Leigh; reflections from a non-theist Quaker, as well as a very helpful write-up on one member's experience of the "Becoming Friends Companion Course." Thank you to all contributors.

Now I'd like to share with you my dilemmas on advertising in our newsletter.

Advertising in the AM Newsletter

What advertising is appropriate in this newsletter? When I first became Editor, I was fairly clear in my mind that it was only appropriate to publicise Quaker activities and events. This has meant that up until now, I have not included, for example, arts events that are not specifically Quaker, even if a member of our AM has been taking part. Was this the right decision? I note that I previously included an advert for B&B in Paris, and in this edition have included two adverts for pantomime (see Notices). I think that possibly it is not helpful to have a rigid and fixed approach to this, but what do others feel? After all, if the whole of life is sacred, then surely nothing is barred? Speaking pragmatically, the availability of space is likely to be one factor when deciding which adverts/notices to include. Please contact me if you have any strong views – I would value your feedback on this.

Related to the above, I was contacted recently by a commercial business seeking to advertise in the newsletter. I advised that this would not be useful to them, as the newsletter is not particularly local to the area where they operate. However, my own view is that it is also not very relevant to the newsletter to include advertising for services that have no connection with the Religious Society of Friends. Secondly, arising from this, please can I ask that my contact details are not given to people outside BYM without first having asked my permission?

Daphne Stedman, Editor

Deadline for Next Issue

Brief Guidelines for Articles: Articles for the newsletter should be linked in some way to our spiritual lives or to any aspect of Quakerism. If in doubt, please ring me to discuss a possible subject for an article first.

Deadline for submissions for the next newsletter (Mar 2011) is: **28 Feb 2011**. Please submit to Daphne Stedman (tel: 020 8534 2224, email: djstedman@o2.co.uk). Please publicise this in your meetings.

Clerks' Tales

As the year draws to a close, it feels appropriate to have a brief retrospective on the events that come immediately to mind for us in the Area Meeting.

As we talk over the events of the year – it's the people and F/friends that top the list. We have been aware of many losses to families and friends in the meeting this year. So many members and attenders continue to do their Quaker work amidst major losses. We want to mention particularly the sad death of Phillipa O'Neill after a return of her illness. We remember her gifts of friendship, service and humour. She was so full of life in her contribution as Clerk of Walthamstow meeting. We have been impressed with the way Walthamstow Friends have continued with Quaker Quest. We've had the pleasure of several applications for membership and the sadness of several transfers out to other Area Meetings. There are other personal events too. The wedding of Rex and Lenalisa was a delightful event that spread its joy across the Area Meeting.

For us in our job as Clerks this year – the minutes that we need prior to Area Meetings are now more prompt – and this is a great help – thank you to Local Meeting Clerks.

The yearly tabular statement is coming up – carefully prepared by our local meeting overseers and Melvyn - we anticipate fewer numbers and need to remind and encourage ourselves of our unique and enriching way of worship. We both feel that this is what we need to hold in mind with our current financial headaches – both within and in the wider world outside Quakers.

Friends are again reminded that this is the time of year to apply for next year's courses, Yearly Meeting Gathering, High Leigh conference. Do get the kids at your meeting on board too – they are the future and they just glow both at and after Quaker events! In Friendship

In Friendship

Rose John and Pat Thompson
Co Clerks, Area Meeting

Report on the Life of Romford LM - July 2010

Our Meeting is one of the smallest of those in the North East Thames Area but quite a lively one. We have about 30 Members and Attenders in total and around 15 are usually at Meeting on Sundays. We continue to rely heavily on a small core who have been with us for many years and carry out the appointed positions of Clerk, Elder, Overseer and Clerk of Premises and Finance Committee. We do however seem to continue attracting new attenders. Information provided by Friends House has helped with this as well as our own web-site though the latter needs updating. We are pleased that we have continued to have one or two families with children who come to our Meeting.

We try hard to greet and welcome visitors and new attenders. We always offer tea or coffee after Meeting and run a regular monthly coffee morning or bring and share lunch.

We are aware that our spiritual growth needs strengthening and we are hoping to take advantage of the Quaker Life offer of 2 Quakers coming to talk with us on how to develop this.

Romford Meeting has a hard working Premises Committee. The building is well used during the week with a regular morning play group letting and afternoon and evening use for such activities as yoga, pilates and a healing group. Two years ago we received a substantial legacy from a former mem-

ber. We have donated some of this to Area Meeting but are using a substantial amount on our Premises. Some replacement trees have been acquired and curtains have been ordered for this Meeting Room to improve its appearance and conserve heat. We are establishing a garden in the grounds to be known as Beryl's garden. It is hoped that the whole Meeting from children to Elders will become involved in the planning, planting, maintenance and enjoyment of the garden. It is planned to include areas for quiet contemplation, outdoor worship and opportunities for the children's meeting to practice caring for the environment and recycling.

Phil Laurence

Report on the Life of Leigh LM - September 2010

Leigh Meeting Report 2010

Looking back over the year since our last report we can see how much has taken place in our Meeting, mostly good but we have also faced difficulties.

One of our elderly Friends, Grace Gibson, who could no longer attend Meeting for Worship died in February and our Friend Pat Eyers died in June.

Numbers attending Meeting for Worship are fairly stable and we have several regular attenders who play a full

part in the life of the Meeting. We have been delighted to welcome Helen Thornton into membership, Helen's son Javan is also a regular part of Meeting life.

We have been tested as a Meeting by a most disruptive attender, who we believe to be suffering from a mental illness, and has caused much trouble at Quaker Meetings throughout East Anglia for many years. Unfortunately we were unable to help him find peace with us. After much thought, Elders sent him a letter asking him not to minister. He wrote in reply that he would never visit us again and he has not come back. I think that we all feel a sense of failure that we were unable to help him, but some problems are too large for us to tackle and this was one.

Our mid-week Meeting, held on the first Tuesday in the month, is still popular with some of our more elderly members who find Sunday travel difficult, and we enjoy our 'Singletons lunch' on most third Sundays after Meeting for Worship. We also now have an active Spiritual Healing Group which provides great comfort for those in need.

We hold regular music and poetry evenings which are well attended. Other evening events have been a talk by Otto Deutch, who came to Britain through Kinder transport, and was the sole survivor of his family, and a talk by Mavis Timms on John Woolman's part in the abolition of the slave trade.

In late September we held a most successful Reunion lunch for those who

had been Young Friends in our Area Meeting. It was lovely to see so many meeting each other again and catching up with all their news and we will think about holding a similar event in the future.

We held an Arts and Crafts Exhibition held to mark Quaker Week in October. Our many exhibits showed the range of interesting talents that we have and were much admired by our visitors. Our musical talents were also much enjoyed at our usual Carol Concert in December.

We again had a Quaker stall at The Big Event, a local multicultural gathering which proved popular with children and also were represented at the Southend 'Stay Safe' event on 26th August, the only church to be there and attracting much interest.. This year we had a shared lunch in August, fortunately the weather allowed us to use the garden and it was a lovely relaxed occasion.

We have taken to heart the present financial difficulties experienced by Six Weeks Meeting and our own Area Meeting and are currently looking at ways to try and help, also to use our Meeting House as efficiently as we can..

David Jeffery

Report on the Life of Wanstead LM - October 2010

We are fortunate to have a purpose built easy-access building in a large piece of Forest land in Outer London. However, the state of our Meeting House continues to give us cause for concern and thought. We are having difficulties with the drainage system and plan to replace the waste sewage pipe at great cost (because it extends to the road at the rear of the building). The heating system gives problems as it does not give sufficient heat to the building, leading to extensive use of heaters and bookers and Friends being uncomfortable. The solution to this is by no means clear at present but we are wondering whether simpler heating controls might solve the problem.

What we do know is that heating our Meeting House is wasteful, mainly because of the 1960's design of the building. SWM are not contributing towards greening work but we have raised several thousand pounds within the Meeting and hope to install cavity wall insulation this year as a first greening step once various preparations have been done.

The 2009 quinquennial survey was finally completed this summer. It estimated that work costing £280,000 (excluding the drains and the grounds) was needed. Assuming we do a proportion of the work ourselves (a leap of faith in itself), and dealing only with priority work, we still hope that SWM can make available something in the region of £50,000. This is also the ap-

proximate amount we have contributed to SWM over the last 5 years from lettings and the quota.

Our bookings are very healthy and have shown an incremental increase this year over last year. Most of the bookers are regular users of the building and we need to be aware of this when wanting to use the premises ourselves at times other than a Sunday. For example, we have had to cancel bookings on three Saturdays for Rex Regan's wedding, a writing workshop, and the Saturday of Open House weekend. We are likely to have more cancellations for essential works and decoration. Despite the improvement in bookings, we believe we might do better and LM has encouraged Premises to consider whether some adaptation of the Sheffield model could be used. We were pleased that the Muslim group who meet regularly at Wanstead booked the MH for the late evenings throughout Ramadan for their prayers.

Increased booking, the state of the premises and the heating system, and ensuring a good fit of bookers, puts a lot pressure on our wardens who have now been with us for 15 years and hope to stay for several more years, and on the Premises Committee. We have increased our cleaning hours and transferred to a firm of cleaners on an experimental basis, and there has been an improvement. We still expect bookers to clean up after their use of the building and again this needs some monitoring.

Our challenge is to convert these difficulties into opportunities for us to grow together and become a stronger worshipping community. Meeting for worship continues to attract a healthy attendance. This year we have had a number of applications for membership accepted by Area Meeting. We look as though we will be losing Alan Pearmain as he moves to Oxfordshire, and John Pippard as he moves to Hampshire, both significant losses as they have been regular and wise servants of the meeting for many years.

This month's local business meeting was something of an experiment. We encouraged those who had never been, or rarely attend business meetings, to come along by handing out invitations with an explanation of the Quaker Business method. This seemed to work well as we had a total of 20 people coming to the meeting, 7 of whom were attenders, including 2 of the older children, to consider how to make our Meeting as welcoming as possible.

We hold a midweek Meeting for Worship at 8pm on the second Wednesday of the month attracting a small number of worshippers. On the third Sunday of the month our Elders lead us in an 'afterword' or explorations session for 20 minutes after Meeting. On the fourth Sunday we have a Living Witness group. More recently an Arts and Spirituality group has started up and is proving popular. The long standing healing group continues to run. A women's group and a dream group met regularly. There are plans

for a 'Becoming Friends' course this winter. We are pleased to continue to provide premises for Spare Room.

We participated in the Leytonstone Festival this year offering an event entitled "Arts, Crafts and Greenspace at the Quaker Meeting House", and also opened the Meeting House on the Saturday of 'Open London', both providing the Meeting with good Outreach opportunities.

Our children's meeting is flourishing. Many of the children are under 10 but we also have some fairly regular young people of secondary school age and a teenagers group meets about once a month. The Children's committee encourages us to follow a theme in the meetings and the new theme is 'stories from world religions'. A small group had an outing to Maldon over the summer.

Melvyn Freake

Quaker Life Report March 2010

In March I attended my second Quaker Life Representative Council, which this time was held at Woodbrooke. When I arrived after a long journey I was initially a little disappointed to find that because there were so many of us, a small group of representatives had to be accommodated a few minutes away in Fircroft College and one of them was me. But as it happened it was a lovely opportunity to really get to know some other representatives over breakfast (which was nowhere as good I must admit) and during the walk back to Woodbrooke for the sessions.

I was allocated to a home group, this time I was beginning to feel more comfortable as I knew some people from the previous council and I did not feel like the "new girl". Most representatives had ended their Triennium at the end of last year, which meant a major change; in fact this Council was the largest ever gathering of Quaker Life representatives with over 100 participants and as such was a very different experience from my first time in October.

Our first Session on the Friday evening reflected the needs of these new representatives, acting as an induction session with an introduction to Quaker Life and to our roles and responsibilities as Area Meeting Representatives. I found this session especially useful as it helped me to really understand about Quaker Life and the responsi-

bilities and processes involved for me personally.

The next speaker was Barbara Windle who fed back to the council on the group work we had undertaken on Testimonies last October. The essence of our discussion indicated that QLRC welcomed having been asked to think about Testimonies, that Friends had discovered positives and riches in them that had not been previously considered. It also emerged that there were conflicting feelings about testimonies within individuals as well as within meetings and as a result what was needed was greater guidance than is currently available in Faith and Practice. The findings will be taken to Quaker Life Consultative Council.

Saturday morning had us Exploring Meeting for Worship for Business, which was led by Young Friends General Meeting. They performed a humorous but gentle role-play of a meeting that contained incidents, not in right ordering, that we all may have experienced at one time or another. This was a thought provoking and fun little drama causing much laughter and a little squirming as well. The role-play was followed by questions and then ideas and thoughts were explored further. Too often it was felt that Business Meetings are not held in the spirit of worship. Friends were concerned that there was sometimes a lack of respect for structure. Some felt that clerking sometimes happened in advance and some of our time was spent on the issues of whether minutes should be written in advance.

Other concerns were raised that Friends often had personal agendas and that whilst it was OK to bring a problem to meeting, Friends should not bring the solution as well; that was for the meeting to discern. Other points raised included speaking more than once, not listening to each other and importantly the clerk not being upheld and sometimes feeling unsupported and not fully trained.

Beth Allen, when she had spoken the previous evening to the Council, made the point that whilst other churches invest in buildings, Quakers invest in relationships; that “we (Quakers) spend a lot of time, effort and resources moving people to be together”. So the question for the home group session which followed was how do we create a “God filled space” in which to conduct our business meetings and how is our understanding of the business method passed on to newcomers? It was generally acknowledged that preparation was needed, so how do we judge how much? The importance of Eldering was raised, as was the special responsibility of nominations in ensuring the right person for each service. It was also felt that business meetings needed to be and I quote “spirited up a bit”, that we need to build as a community in our decision making and take positive steps to ensure that business meetings become more positively viewed by more Friends.

In the afternoon Michael Hutchinson asked the question how does Quaker Life fit into Quaker structures? He started with a simple diagram, which

basically had Friends House and the top and YL (you lot) underneath, which he thought was the way some Friends viewed how things were. He asked how does your meeting look to someone entering for the first time? Could we draw a diagram of how Quakers work? Is Friends House a servant or a director? He acknowledged that Quaker structures are complicated and get in the way sometimes, but stressed that the principles behind them are so important. Area meetings work through Quaker Life and back again and feed into central committees. The need to listen so we can act empowered by the spirit, ensuring that not only all people can be heard but also that we genuinely give time, for people to be heard. He acknowledged that sometimes Friends expect Quakers to behave as other organisations, which do not recognise the authority of the gathered group. However, our decisions are grounded in a gathered discernment and a formal minute is made so there is no dispute. He stressed our structures are important, they need to be about relationships, open and accessible - we **are** the area meeting.

Hazel Ward

Interim Report of the Review Group for Sufferings and BYM Trustees (June 2010)

Summary

The present structure of our Society was laid down by Yearly Meeting in 2005, and began to function in 2007 (* see end for a brief overview). The major change was that a new group of “managers” – the Trustees – was established. A review group has been appointed, to make a report on how this new structure is working to Yearly Meeting in 2011. This report is an interim one, half- way to the 2011 report.

The review group was appointed to observe the meetings of the Trustees and others who are responsible for our work at the centre, and to consult widely to see where the new structure is working well and where it could be improved.

If the Society of Friends were a garden, the 2005 reorganisation could be seen as a pruning back of overgrown areas together with some new planting so that the garden might flourish as well as possible. You only see the effects of the major work, and the changed - and changing - relationships within the garden, as the years pass. And there always has to be a continuing process of balancing the different needs. Every passing gardener, and any casual visitor, would have an opinion on the ongoing work but, to have any value, an opinion needs to be well -informed.

It's rather hard to summarise this Interim Report. It assumes a good un-

derstanding of the current structure of the Society and then covers a range of complex issues in its 7 pages. I have just tried to extract the most important matters.

Overall, they report that they have found that the various groups are “growing into” their new roles and that the process of being observed by the Review Group is inspiring reflection amongst their members. They identify some major questions that will need to be answered in due course. These include:

- Could each of these groups work more effectively and cheaply (nb. especially the cost of Meeting for Sufferings)?
- Could the authority/responsibility of each group be more clearly defined?
- Are there some unnecessary overlaps, especially among the various groups responsible for money? Do we need a clearer strategy for communications between the centre and all Friends?

Studying the report, I felt very grateful to the review group, and all Friends who work in the centre, for all they do for us.

Now we come to what I think is the most important thing for us at this time. The interim report identifies a need for AMs to “consider their engagement with Meeting for Sufferings and the involvement of Friends generally in the

centrally managed work of the Yearly Meeting". That is, I think, what we need to begin to think about.

We should ask ourselves, individually and corporately, about our relation to the central working of our Society

For example:

Do we trust the discernment in Meetings for Worship for Business of those whom we appoint to work on our behalf?

Do we know enough to discern answers to the questions about structure? Do we care enough to find out?

We recognise that our representatives to the central bodies do their best to engage us in the processes, but are we often too involved with local issues?

Would we like to find ways for more of us in NE Thames AQM to become more involved in the central work so that we could help its growth? If so, how should we go about this?

** This is roughly how BYM is organised at present:*

Final authority, and a "visionary and prophetic" role = Britain Yearly Meeting (all Friends), and Meeting for Sufferings (about 170 representatives from AMs and central committees) which carries these responsibilities between yearly meetings.

"Overall strategy and resources": BYM Trustees (20 Friends appointed by Meeting for Sufferings) who are the employers of all staff, and custodians of BYM resources. This new group was the result of the 2005 restructuring.

Operational responsibility: Management Meeting (senior staff)

(The "things" which have to be managed are the "church" and the charity, and the subsidiary business which helps pay for them.)

NB: This summary was written by Kate Green and read at Area Meeting Sept 2010

Report on Meeting for Sufferings: July 2010

- Chapter 16 draft from Church Gvt Advisory Cttee
- A huge number of administrative changes are proposed and a few substantive ones that Sufferings was asked to advise on; we hope that the “time and place” of weddings could be as wide as possible – at present there are differences between England & Wales and Scotland. We hoped that couples could be allowed to choose the terms for describing the traditional words *husband* and *wife*. *Spouse* was not much liked. The next draft will come back to Sufferings in October and a final draft will come to Yearly Meeting next summer.
- Trustees' report
- Headlines: a) the offices in Friends House to be “reconfigured” in order to create the optimum effect from the space. In other words to raise more money from lettings within the building. This we are told will also improve staff working conditions.
b) no decision yet taken on major refurbishment of the Large Meeting House to bring it up to the standard that central London hirers require; however preparation work is being authorised so that in the next five years such work could go ahead if funds permit.
- Next Sufferings clerk (2011)
- ... is to be the current assistant clerk, Christine Cannon. AM Friends may be interested in the local angle here – as a member of the Committee on Clerks I was involved in the nominating process for this role and also for the soon to be vacant post of assistant clerk.
- Stewardship Cttee
- There is a terrific collection of responses from local and area meetings about “using our resources well” It’s 10 pages long and is being seen as a resource in itself for meetings to use with situations they might be grappling with. It’s also available for download at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/priorityg>
- National Memorial Arboretum
- Staffordshire AM are very willing to be a steering group to enable a memorial to the Friends Ambulance Unit and the Friends Relief Service to be set up in this site. Our peace testimony too might reach a new sector of the public – because of the memorials there not only to service personnel who have been killed but also to civilian lives lost in war. If any meeting in our area would like to offer support to this proposal, could they be directly in touch with Staffordshire AM.

Priority D: We heard about QPSW's programme which offers practical support to Quakers "to live as patterns and examples, living sustainably together to build peace" (quote from our minute). This project works together with Woodbrooke and with the Living Witness Quaker charity. In preparation for YM in 2011; for working locally on this priority we have been given three queries for meetings to consider:

How are we supporting each other to live simple, joyful and spirit-led lives that sustain the world we live in?

To what extent do you see your Meeting's response on this issue to be driven by guilt and fear and to what extent by love and joy?

How has your meeting engaged with this priority as a faith community? How do our testimonies shape our response?

Criminal Justice Project This is a new initiative from QPSW called *Learning from Experience*. Friends are asked to participate by contributing and collecting stories from anyone affected in any way by the criminal justice system in the UK – this can include the person convicted, their family and friends; the victim and their family and friends and also the wider community. The project is hoping to learn more about the real effect of sentences. A leaflet has been produced and more information can be found at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/qn75-learning-from-experience>

Interim review of MfS and Trustees Sufferings was glad to hear Peter Eccles speak to this report and learn what the group's recommendations were at this stage. Responses in the session included comment on a) the size of Meeting for Sufferings (normally about 200 Friends – the group suggests reducing this by about half); b) dropping the present requirement that the assistant clerk to Sufferings is also to be a trustee – this is seen as no longer necessary and a huge burden on the role-holder; and c) on Sufferings' core *raison d'être* – which ought to be more visionary in the opinion of the review group. Please take soundings on these points and let me know in time for the fuller consideration of the report at the next meeting of Sufferings in October. What do you think Sufferings should be for?

Judith Roads

Notes on Meeting for Sufferings 2 October 2010

1. After the usual preliminaries Jonathan Fox, Clerk of BYM Trustees spoke in three parts to minutes of four of their meetings.

a. Routine matters of their July and September meetings

i. They have responded to REVIEW GROUP on working of MfS & BYM Trustees

ii. They will shortly announce the architects chosen for refurb of Friends Hs.

b. Trustee's response to RESIGNATION OF GILLIAN ASHMORE as Recording Clerk &c:

i. It inappropriate to add to statement agreed with GA or comment further.

ii. Previously Gillian Palmer (finance head) left. This was with goodwill.

iii. Great relief that Michael Hutchinson is appointed Acting Recording Clerk.

iv. If any other implications Trustees will tell MfS.

c. On recruiting a NEW RECORDING CLERK

i. Ad to appear shortly, they hope to appoint in December.

d. Then discussion. In response JF said there has been no impropriety.

2. Draft Budget and Operational Plan

a. First, latter introduced by Acting Recording Clerk. It is a 'route map'

b. Then budget. In 2011 it does not (yet) balance. Giving is down especially in London.

c. In discussion queried why there is not a national quota – there was, it didn't work.

3. Review of Meeting for Sufferings and BYM Trustees required by BYM

a. Janet Quilley spoke on a MfS response to the REVIEW GROUP. On how MfS works now that its trusteeship role is hived off; of it being possibly reduced in size; is it a 'visioning' body, if so how?

b. The name 'Meeting for Sufferings' is still to be considered.

After lunch came appointments etc then

4. Consideration of Quaker Marriage - draft Chapter 16. Following the BYM 2009 decision to allow same-sex marriage Micheal Phipps of the drafting committee spoke to this with follow-up to earlier MfS questions including:

a. Time and place - wide possibilities as appropriate now allowed for

b. 'Spouse' to be a term for the declaration along with wife, husband and partner in marriage.

c. 'Through the assistance of the Light' thought an inappropriate phrase. Divine guidance and God's help to remain.

d. In general Friends wholeheartedly

welcomed the draft.

5. Minutes received

a. from Area Meetings against HMG proposed cuts. Said that time is short so best to respond by writing to one's MP, eg that one is prepare to suffer more so that others suffer less; cancel Trident; use fewer prisons; international aid should not be cut; a 'Robin Hood' tax on financial transactions.

b. from Committees.

6. The Lettings Policy at Friends House was discussed to general satisfaction. Support on principles and methods to be available for local use.

7. A Report from Quaker World Relations Committee spoken to by Mary Waldemar. Our type of Quakerism represents 6% of world Quakerism!

Jeffery Smith

Woolman Comes To Leigh

Leigh on Sea Meeting House played host to "On Human Folly" on Saturday evening 2nd October 2010 as part of National Quaker Week.

Plain Quakers aka Mike Casey and Arthur Pritchard is a theatrical partnership formed in 2007. They tour the country raising awareness of Quaker concerns and traditions through plays that are relevant and accessible, and that encourage an active engagement with Quaker testimonies on peace, simplicity and ethical living in the context of con-

temporary global capitalism.

On Human Folly recounts the 1772 journey to England of John Woolman, the eighteenth century American Quaker, and his death in York that year. The play raises important issues of slavery (of which Woolman worked tirelessly to abolish) and arms manufacturing. A contemporary parallel to Woolman's story is provided by two mature present-day gents who imagine that re-cycling plastic bags will save the planet.

The story moves steadily between 1772 and today. Interesting conversations are played out between the two characters, gradually bringing to light the striking parallels between Woolman's day and the global issues confronting us in this modern world.

A thought provoking and lively discussion was opened up for audience participation encouraging us all to look at our role that we play in the world around us today. How consumerism drives us on to wanting to own more, thus by working and earning we spend, so becoming slaves to materialism in the throw away society that we have helped to create. Multi national companies riding roughshod over the small businessman who just cannot afford to sell goods at the same cut down prices that the big companies can afford, so fair trade goes out of the window.

This was a very enjoyable evening and the hard work that was put in to publicising the event paid off with visitors attending our meeting house for their first time.

David Manclark

A Testimony to the Grace of God as Shown in the Life of Grace Gibson

Grace was born before the first World War – the eldest child of a large family. Her parents owned a grocery, and her education was somewhat interrupted by the necessity of looking after her siblings and helping with the shop – for which latter purpose, she learned book-keeping and secretarial skills.

She had always wanted to work with and for needy children and, once released from family duties, she trained – first in the National Children's Homes, and later as a teacher at Westhill College in Bourneville. Although from a Methodist background she had been drawn to Friends at that time. Her career was cut short when her father died, and she moved with her mother to Leigh, to make a home and look after her here. That was when we got to know her.

In retirement, Grace was always active in some way – whether in forming a recorder group, encouraging musical talent, or making beautiful soft toys to sell in aid of UNICEF. She was still having clarinet lessons until shortly before her death, and, forthright and determined as ever, writing to national and local politicians letters of criticism and advice about children's education. Speaking her truth to power!

With the infirmities of old age increasing, Grace had been unable to attend Sunday Meetings for many years, and she appreciated the recently-started

shorter afternoon.

Meeting, with transport provided. She also gained much pleasure and support from a young West Indian occupational therapy student who had been her lodger and later came, with his wife and two small children, to visit her as their "adopted" English grandmother. Her life reminds us of the opening words of Advices and Queries 19: Re-joice in the presence of children and young people.....and recognise the gifts they bring.

Signed on behalf of Leigh-on-Sea Local Meeting by Gillian Jeffery, Clerk.

Outreach – Reaching Out

Leigh Friends have twice, this year been involved in outreach within their local community.

The first occasion was when we had a stand at the Community in Harmony – Big Event, on the 20th June.

This was the second year we had participated. We gave out lots of leaflets and information as well as talked to people. There was a rota of people who helped to run the stall, which was brilliant because it spread the load. The Big Event, has run for about 7 years, and it involves groups from all over the Southend area. The group include religious organisations, voluntary groups, dancers (of different nationalities), groups like 'Turning Tides' which are funded by the local authority, and work in the most deprived areas in Southend.

By participating in the Big Event, Leigh Friends are hoping to raise the profile of 'Quakers' locally.

Then on 26th August, Leigh Friends had a stand at 'Stay Safe'. This is another community fun day, arranged at Southchurch Park by 'Turning Tides'. On this occasion, Leigh Friends were the only religious group in attendance. There were the usual Bouncy Castles for the children, and food/drinks. There was a cycle track, made from wood, which undulated, twisted and turned. It proved very popular with the children. The Police and the Fire Brigade were present. The Police Horses were much feted. Dial's wheelchair obsta-

cle course around cones, was also quite a learning curve. Javan (Helen's young son) told how difficult it was to manoeuvre around the cones just using his arms.

On this occasion, just three of us ran the stall from 11 until 3. We made bracelets with the children, and also offered colouring, gluing, and word searches. Again, we gave out lots of leaflets, talked to people, and this time we had a 'Dream catcher'. People were encouraged to write down their dream and attach it to the Dream catcher. It proved to be quite popular as well as arousing the interest of two women from the local authority, who photographed it, and made no secret of the fact that they intended to use the idea.

Whilst lots of people, wrote that their dream was to win the lottery, some dreams were amusing like the lady who wanted to meet Richard Gere. Although, the little girl who wrote 'To see my Daddy again' tugged at my heart strings. There were various other dreams which we could identify with, for example the young mother with a new baby, who dreams of a night's sleep.

These are our attempts at 'Outreach'. Before we can expect people to join us, they need to know that we are there: That we are worth further investigation. So reaching out to the local community seems like a positive thing to do.

Helen Thornton/David Manclark/
Brenda Phillips

Becoming Friends Companion Course

In mid-July I was fortunate enough to go to the above course at Woodbrooke. Going to Woodbrooke is always a special spiritual experience for me, and this time was no exception. Ginny Wall and Felicity Kaal led the course, which was specially offered because of high demand. Some of you will be familiar with the book 'Becoming Friends', others may have used it on-line. Some of you will remember the controversial readers' letters in The Friend about the course.

I find the book excellent, a detailed and non-descriptive guide that can be used in many different ways. I heard first about the course when I became a Companion to one of our Attenders at Harlow.

The course at Woodbrooke was both very structured and spiritual, a delicate balance to achieve. We spent the first evening looking at the course, at what one could learn from it both spiritually and in terms of facts, and what was available on-line. A very large number of Enquirers follow the course on-line and learn about Quakers in this way. We discussed the aims of the course, which are to be interactive, practical and accessible. The course is planned in such a way that people from different backgrounds and with differing experience can follow it. The journey, the potential Friend and the Companion would be on together would need to be one of discovery and exploration. Both the

book and the course take this into account.

During the course we covered the course book in a fairly structured way. However, there was plenty of time for experiential exercises and in depth conversations. These allowed us to get to know each other. In the three days at Woodbrooke we had the opportunity for self-exploration and become more aware of ourselves and in the process become more aware of the need of others. We looked at the qualities we ourselves would look for in a 'Becoming Friends Companion'. I found this a particularly helpful exercise as it allowed me to step back and look in on myself. We also practised spiritual listening, holding someone in the Light. One important aspect we discussed and one easily overlooked was how we would find support for ourselves to be a good Companion. We all had some anxiety about being good enough.

One of the last exercises we did was to write our own Advices & Queries for Companions. Ginny circulated everybody's 'Advices and Queries for Companions' to us after the course.

I would like to thank AM for enabling me to have such an enriching experience.

Margarete Briggs
Elder at Harlow LM

From a Non-Theist Quaker...

I brought away from High Leigh this year, the following quote:

'I sometimes think of a Meeting for Worship as a time when nobody speaks, but everybody listens. Sometimes a person is moved to listen aloud and this is transformed into spoken ministry.'

For many Friends the 'listening' is for the voice, leadings, promptings, call it what you will of their God be that within themselves - the seed, the light - or of a God existing outside of themselves. But there are humanist Friends who also listen in Meeting for the promptings of love and truth in their own hearts and minds. I wonder if the end result, from whatever standpoint, is much different - to develop as much sensitivity as we are capable of so as to nurture others in the Meeting and in the wider community of our species and at times to reflect on life and receive the balm that comes to a troubled mind in the loving, accommodating space that is Friends' Sunday morning Meeting. And the ripples go further to encompass the interplay of all living things and the planet itself.

With God or without, human beings are social animals, and the most important decision they make is about how they want to live their lives in relation to the rest of humanity. I have every respect for the faith of those who believe in a personal God and a life after death. But, as there are Jewish Friends, Catholic and Church of Eng-

land Friends and Buddhist Friends, I know I am not alone in the Society in finding my spiritual journey has led me to my humanist position. I think of the debate my late husband, Dan Regan instigated at Senior Conference for young people in the Seventies between a young woman who had just left the Society because she no longer believed in God and the then head of the Humanist Society who had just joined the Society despite having no concept of God. And I remember Friends met during my 47 years in the Society of Friends, who shared my humanist approach to life.

I hope these thoughts may go some way to helping Friends to a loving understanding and acceptance each of the other so that Quaker love and tolerance, shown to all manner and conditions of people, continues to be a beacon of light in our world.

Footnote: Friends may be interested in the interview with Don Cupitt on Jesus the Humanist and potential Quaker at:

<http://cdn4.libsyn.com/philosophybites/CupittJesus.mp3>

Audrey Regan

Notices

Ratcliff Meeting has moved. From April 2010 onwards we meet at Quaker Social Action, 17 Bethnal Green Road, London E2 9PJ. (QSA is five minutes' walk from Bethnal Green Tube.) MfW Sunday 10.30am.

Light Group at Wanstead Meeting House Please look out for Light Group Meetings in 2010 and contact Pat Broadbent 020 8318 1253 for details.

Tues 23rd Nov: Arts & Spirituality Group - an informal gathering where Friends are invited to share music, poetry, pictures, performance they have found inspiring. Contact Roger Estop for more info. Venue: Wanstead MH, 7.00pm.

Tues 23rd Nov: Quaker history meeting - Geoffrey Carnall speaking on Horace Alexander and Agatha Harrison as peacemakers: a contract in style. Free event but please register at www.quaker.org.uk/quakerhistory or tel 020 7663 1030/31. 6.30-8.00pm, **Friends House**, 173 Euston Road, NW1 2BJ.

London List of Members: London Quakers Committee agreed that for 2011, Friends in London would make do with the existing 2010 list. (This follows the death of the compiler, Allan Phillips.) They hoped this will not make our communications with each other in and around London more difficult.

Sat 11 Dec: Kindlers Workshop 10.00am (10.30am start) – 4.30pm **Friends House**, 173 Euston Road, NW1 2BJ. Cost £10.00, pay at the door. Theme: Quakers as natural mystics – Roswitha Jarman.

Fri 15th Apr – Sun 17th April: Area Meeting All Age Conference at High Leigh. More details to follow soon. If you need financial help to come please see you overseer as soon as possible.

Quaker Faith and Practice - new (purple) edition available. Hardback and large print copies are £14 and soft back editions are £7.

Parkside Players Panto 2-5 Dec: Babes in the Wood, starring Melvyn Freake as Dame Katie Karioke. Please contact Melvyn for further details.

Hackney Empire Panto: This year's production, Jack & the Beanstalk, will be one of the best in London, and a North London AM Friend living in Hackney, Molly Porter, has bought a set of tickets for the 1pm matinee on Saturday 8th January which she hopes may be of interest to north/east London Quakers. The cost is £19.50@, and she has 10-15 available upon request. Her contact details are 020 7254 4699; msporter@mac.com. Please let her know if you'd like a ticket or two or more...