

The Northern Quaker

Autumn 2014

North Scotland Area Meeting



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Provisional Area Meetings for 2015

- 14th February 2015 Inverness
- 5th May 2015 Shetland
- 29th & 30th August 2015 at Pluscarden (if available)
- 31st October 2015 Aberdeen

General Meetings for Scotland in 2014 & 2015

- November 15th/16th 2014 Glasgow (residential)
- March 7th 2015 St Andrews

Comments [^contents](#)

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Northern Quaker. Much of this edition relates to membership which was a major topic at the Area Meeting in Pluscarden. I have re-printed two pieces which were part of the AM discussion – Pamela Affleck’s “Membership Wishlist”, and Martin Drummond’s “Being a Quaker”, both of which resonated with my own experience of exploring Quakers before finally plucking up courage to attend my first Meeting. Not being comfortable with other religious organisations, many years ago I requested and received the enquirers’ information pack from Friends House, which included the excellent short guide “a Light that is Shining” by Harvey Gillman. This was sufficiently reassuring to my innate scepticism but, because of its brevity, was also inconclusive and the suggested next step – of requesting a meeting with local Friends – was too threatening, and procrastination was more inviting.

My own next step, several years after the initial approach, was to attend a residential weekend for enquirers held in Crewe. Why Crewe and not somewhere more local? Primarily, it was because I wanted the comfort of anonymity to find out more, but also to be able to walk away if disappointed. In fact my expectations were disappointed; throughout the weekend I was waiting for “the catch” but, in the event, there was no hint of the hard sell or “sign here”, just “we’re here if you want to find out more” approach. Perhaps the organisers were employing reverse psychology, because the absence of proselytising led me to take the decisive step of actually attending the local Aberdeen Meeting. But still as an attender.....

Many of you will welcome the Northern Quaker in its printed edition. However, the email version now contains coloured photographs as well as a “clickable” contents list for easy navigation and hyperlinks in the various articles. Previous editions are available on the North Scotland website www.quakerscotland.org/north. If you wish your name to be transferred from the print to the email list, please send the address to harrydhorsley@gmail.com.

Announcements [^contents](#)

Membership

Jane Booth, Derek McLean and Oriole Hall are producing a brief leaflet on the membership process. We would be grateful if you could send thoughts and suggestions to us c/o@hotmail.com.

ForcesWatch

Owen Everett is an Education Campaign Worker for ForcesWatch which challenges the ethics of military recruitment and questions uncritical national pride in the armed forces. Owen reports that ForcesWatch have just launched a short film, 'Engage: the military and young people'. He asks if people are able to circulate it

widely, and get in touch if they can help get it into schools, colleges and youth groups. It's a well-balanced film but provokes, importantly, critical thinking. Owen is also trying to do as many workshops as possible for young people, based around the film. To watch it and find out more, go to <http://www.forceswatch.net/young-people-military> Owen can be contacted at owen@forceswatch.net, tel 004420 7837 2822

John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust (JWET)

For many years we have been in the happy situation of having a modest legacy to disburse. John directed that grants should be made “to 'deserving persons resident in Scotland who owing to straitened circumstances are unable to enjoy the usual pleasures of life, the purpose of such grants being to provide the recipients with some additional comfort or pleasure of an exceptional nature over and above the usual necessities of life”.

Funds have been distributed over the past nine years. The money now in hand is likely to run out during the next year unless further donations are forthcoming. We welcome applications from Quakers and non-Quakers resident anywhere in, for grants large or small. £500 will normally be the maximum. Applicants may obtain an application form and further information from: Audrey Sinton, 66/4 Willowbrae Road, Edinburgh, EH8 7HA, Tel: 0131 661 6051 Email: audrey_sinton@hotmail.co.uk

The completed form should be passed to a Quaker of long standing to countersign it and forward it to arrive by March 31st or September 30th. Applicants will hear the results of their application within 8 weeks.

Meeting for Sufferings 6th September 2014

Shortly before the Scottish referendum, I attended Meeting for Sufferings in London. Since then it has become clear that, for better or worse, the politics of Westminster will continue to provide a framework for life in Scotland as well as for the rest of the UK. This brings opportunities as well as challenges. As Friends heard in spoken ministry at General Meeting the following week, ‘Society is built on relationships, not on structures.’

Issues of economic justice and social attitudes, especially as seen in choices made by the UK government, have recently been brought, time after time, to Meeting for Sufferings by minutes from area meetings – often more than one. How will we respond, as a yearly meeting? Over the last three years, Yearly Meeting has reflected on ‘What it means to be a Quaker today’. And over the next three years, starting at Friends House, 1–4 May 2015, Yearly Meeting will reflect on ‘Living out our faith in the world’. The prospect of a general election, and of a new UK government, will be in the background. And the arrival of BYM’s new Long-Term Framework document will be on the agenda.

This autumn, we shall be asked as local and area meetings to contribute our own discernment to the Long-Term Framework document that will guide centrally managed Quaker work over the next five years (2015–20), and which may also be a resource for Friends and meetings more widely. I hope we will find the consultation a useful exercise, and one through which we can be heard.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (funding research and development) and Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRF/JRHT) are jointly governed and work together for social justice. The question of their relationship with BYM came onto Sufferings' agenda in September because of the need to end an unsatisfactory recent formal arrangement between BYM and JRF/JRHT for appointing trustees. There are in practice very strong links between BYM and JRF/JRHT, and shared concerns for social justice. Friends are keen to develop a more dynamic, co-operative working relationship. JRF/JRHT, for its part, 'not only needs to recruit trustees but also members of our governance, policy and other committees. ... We want to make sure that there is an opportunity for Quakers to become involved at different points within the organization as well as on the Board of Trustees'. I hope that this working together might help a distinctive Quaker voice to emerge for social justice.

If the department at Friends House known as Quaker Life is largely concerned with relationships and the Life among Friends and meetings, the focus of its counterpart, Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW), is in the wider world. At Sufferings, Friends heard a report on the work of QPSW and were able to meet members of QPSW central committee, who are responsible for strategic guidance of the work of that department. It is good to be aware of the tremendous breadth of the work undertaken through QPSW (employing 20), and with what care. It is hoped that communication between QPSW and Friends in the yearly meeting can be improved – How is this working for Friends in North Scotland?

In a surreal flight of perfection, while working through a pile of Terms of Reference, the Meeting minuted, 'We approve Terms of Reference for the Review Group for Terms of Reference of Central Nominations Committee ...' Coming down to earth, after a bout of Friends raising minor points of detail, we were encouraged in future to bring such queries to the attention of clerks, *before* the meeting. I do admire this capacity for faithfulness to the task, on the one hand, and mindfulness of the needs of the meeting, on the other.

If you are interested to join your representatives via a telephone link in advance of the next meeting (which will be on 6 December), please contact either Jane Booth or me. The agenda and papers are normally available about a fortnight in advance of each meeting.

David Sanders, Skye Local Meeting

North Scotland Area Meeting held in Pluscarden 30-31 August 2014 [^contents](#)

Thirty-seven members and attenders (no distinction was made in the minutes, a fact of relevance later) attended this business meeting held in the village hall at Pluscarden.

Most of the business was taken up with reflections on membership, prompted by articles in the Scottish Friend, the Friend, and sessions at the recent Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering.

Our reflections were mainly centred on the membership application process. After a lot of thoughtful contributions it took three attempts to draw up a minute which was finally accepted on Sunday morning. It is worth reproducing it in full:

5 Reflections on Membership.

Membership of the Society has a meaning and significance for many Friends. It has a legal significance and it also affirms the acceptance of Quaker values and practice. We recognise that not all committed Friends will wish to apply for membership. We value the contribution made by committed attenders, spiritually, practically and financially. We are happy for the Nominations Committee to put forward names of attenders for posts for which they are eligible.

We also recognise that for some Friends the process of application for membership has fallen short of their expectations. Quaker Faith and Practice allows Area Meetings flexibility in the way they consider applications. We have started a process of evaluation as to the way we consider applications. Applications should be considered in a way that is welcoming and transparent. We agree to the following changes in our current practice:

Attenders will be permitted to remain when Area Meeting considers membership matters, including the consideration of applications for membership. However if the applicant or the visitors are concerned about matters such as confidentiality, they may notify the Clerk and ask for the application to be considered only by the members of the Area Meeting. It would be at the discretion of the Clerk to make a final decision in consultation with the applicant and visitors.

When visitors are appointed, we will use the following paragraph in the minute:

We appoint Y and Z to visit X and ask them to support and help the applicant in preparation for this important step and for all three to report back to the Area Meeting when the time is right.

We hope that this change will allow the application to be seen as a process of preparation and discernment over a period of time leading to membership. We

also ask Local Meetings to identify a mentor usually an elder, to support the applicant during the application process.

We ask Elders and Overseers to monitor these changes. We also ask Elders and Overseers to identify resources that will help the preparation of applicants and inform the work of the visitors and mentors.

The proposed changes will be reviewed in Feb. 2016, but will soon be put to the test as we have already had two applications for membership at this AM.

After these substantive reflections it was back to more usual AM business. Juli Salt told us about discussions between representatives of our AM and the Northern Friends Peace Board. We felt that we wish to continue to support this body.

Nigel Dower, presently Clerk of both the North of Scotland Quaker Trust and Area Meeting Trustees, explained the difference between the two and the arguments for and against amalgamation. The two sets of trustees have had a joint meeting, but have not come to unity regarding this. Each body would have to agree independently. Nevertheless, it was suggested that it would be helpful meantime if there was an overlap of membership between the two bodies. The question of membership of the Society came up here too as Trustees have to be members and Nominations Committee have difficulty finding enough members to take on this task. We also wondered what other offices within the Society have *legally* to be filled by members, and clarification on this should be sought from Friends House.

Finally, we were pleased to accept the nomination of Phyllida Sayles as senior co-clerk of AM for 2 years from January 2015.

Many agenda items remained to be considered and it was agreed that this should be done by a telephone conference to be held on 30 September at 7 pm.

This was a very satisfying area meeting at which we considered matters of substance, but it was only possible because we had time the following, Sunday, morning and because of the postponement of the more routine matters to a later tele-conference. Let us hope that this experiment will work and enable more Friends from remote areas to participate in Area Meetings for Worship for Business.

Eva Deręowska, Aberdeen Local Meeting

North Scotland Area Meeting by telephone conference 30.9.14 [^contents](#)

1. Present David James, Jill Blackadder, Shetland Representative, Sandy McEwan representative Westray and Papa Westray, Nigel Dower, Representative Aberdeen, Jackie Ward Representative Orkney, Eleanor Fairclough Inverness Representative, Geoff Fairbairn Representative Lochaber and Lorn, Pamela Affleck, John Melling,

Marion Strachan, Derek McLean, Juli Salt, David Sanders, Phyllida Sayles, Mary Dower, Diana Brockbank, Peter Heald

Prevented Oriole Hall, Andrew Blackadder, Robert Wilson, Eva Deręowska, Ann Millar.

2. Affiliation with Eco-congregation Scotland. We agree to affiliate with Eco-congregation Scotland. This organisation is an ecumenical charity, providing local churches with support and advice on environmental issues. Joining Eco-congregation Scotland will help Local Meetings, if they so wish, work with other churches in their locality to promote awareness of environmental issues and undertake local projects.

3. Dates for North Scotland Area Meeting, 2015-16; May Meeting We agree to ask Jill Blackadder to do further research into the availability of accommodation in Shetland. Booking shared self-catering accommodation offers advantages and Friends have had positive experiences of this type of arrangement. We will also look at the cost of travel to the Islands and consider the matter further at our next Area Meeting. Please note the proposed change of date to 9.5.15. David James will also approach Carel Goodheir to sound out the possibility of an Area Meeting in Skye at a future date. David James will also check with Dave McRobie concerning the date of the Pluscarden Meeting next year.

4. The Nominating Group We agree that the Nominating Group will be responsible for bringing forward a name for the Convener of the Nominations Committee to Area Meeting. We also agree that the term of office for members of the Nominating group, which has not previously been determined, is for 4 years, but members can be released at an earlier time if this is expedient. Thirdly we agree if there is a vacancy amongst the Nominating Group, Local Meetings in the area where the vacancy occurs will be asked to collaborate to find a name to represent that particular geographical area. That name will then be forwarded to the clerking team who are responsible for bringing this name or another name forward to the Area Meeting.

5. The suggestion of the appointment of an assistant editor for the Northern Quaker will be discussed further with the current editor by David James

6. We appoint John Melling as our reporter of the Area Meeting in Aberdeen on November 8th 2014

7. We appoint Gillean Palmer to attend the Young Quakers Participation Day held alongside Meeting for Sufferings on 6th December 2014 at Friends House

8. We appoint Jackie Ward to attend the Bringing Friends Together Conference at

Woodbrooke 21-23rd November 2014

9. Proposed Testimony to the Grace of God in the life of Peter McCaffery; we ask a small group of Friends from Aberdeen Meeting to consider this matter, to seek contributions from other Friends and from people who knew Peter and to report back to a future Area Meeting.

10. Friends were pleased to hear of the progress being made in the work on the Meeting House at Aberdeen and the consideration being given to the use of the legacy from Avis Swarbrick

11. The report from Rosie Mason who attended Junior Yearly Meeting in Bath was read and will be attached to these minutes

12. Appointment of attenders to Area Posts. We had a helpful exchange of views on this matter which will be considered further at our next Area Meeting

13. Comments on telephone Conferencing It would be helpful if Friends who participated in this first North Scotland Area Meeting by telephone conference, pass comments as to their experience of the Meeting to David James who will collate them.

14. The next Area Meeting will be at Aberdeen on 8th November 2014

David James Lochaber and Lorn Local Meeting

Being a Quaker [^contents](#)

Eric Bramsted's reflections on cultureric Bramsted's reflections on culture, religion, identity and Israel (11 July) bear upon my own uneasy thoughts about what it means to be a member of the Religious Society of Friends today, and the unfortunate habit of excluding attenders from certain items of Area Meeting business.

Membership was not felt necessary in the early days of the Society, being introduced in the eighteenth century for the purposes of internal census and administering poor relief. Many Friends now rejoice in it but, while it may still be felt necessary for some practical purposes, I feel that a close eye needs to be kept on what it is thought to mean. The trouble is that it feeds far too easily into a Quaker sense of 'specialness' that is completely at odds with the testimonies that Friends profess. I find this so distasteful that, in spite of having Quaker antecedents going back to the seventeenth century, being brought up in a Quaker family and attending a Friends' school for seven years, I cannot bring myself to apply for membership.

Institutional narcissism

To see the danger of an insidious institutional narcissism one has only to consider the way in which monotheism, every variant of which preaches love of one's neighbour, has given rise to so many wars and persecutions, Christian against Jew, Muslim against Christian, Sunni against Shia, Catholic against Protestant – the list is endless and rightly attracts the scorn of militant atheists. Such conflict arises because it is human nature to form competing clubs and tribes of every kind, and shared faith, along with collective myth and partisan history, lends cohesion to the identity of many such groups.

The teaching of a common ethical standard and the shared feasts and rituals of a religious calendar help minimise internal dispute and crystallise a social identity that may be vital to the success of a group, to its very survival even. Consider the astonishing achievement of the Jews in surviving two millennia of diaspora then reassembling in a modern state. This feat was made possible through the cultivation of an extraordinarily potent sense of identity. But there is no existential threat to the Society of Friends, and we are entirely free to concentrate on the work of spirituality at the individual level, which is to un-draw boundaries, to realise one's connection with all that is not-self. Identity is the enemy of spirituality. Identity is constantly questioned and challenged in psychotherapeutic work, and dissolution of the self, of enlightenment or union with God, is the highest aim of our greatest saints and mystics.

Identity

I am not suggesting that the Society of Friends should not have an identity – that would be impossible – but it should not cling to it and celebrate it as a goal in its own right. Let us enjoy our traditions, our little turns of phrase and innocuous shibboleths, but let us never allow them to compromise our core testimonies, particularly truth, equality and peace. Anything that tends to foster the notion of an in-group and an out-group should be challenged, for here lie the seeds of war, in our own psyche.

This proves to be more difficult than you might think. A recent proposal (not mine) at our Area Meeting to abandon the custom of excluding attenders when applications for membership were being considered was not adopted. The clerk discerned, somewhat arbitrarily to my mind, that the mood of the Meeting was to support the status quo, later explaining that he had consulted with elders who felt that current practice should be continued. He could furnish no particular reason why it should be so, and there seems to be a good deal of muddled thinking on the matter. We find in Quaker faith & practice that membership means that you are 'one of the crew'. Really? There is no chore in my Local Meeting that is not, or has not been, carried out by attenders, save those such as eldership from which they are specifically excluded.

The label pleases.

Enthusiastic Friends claim that membership demonstrates that you are 'committed'. Is this really so? every Friends' Meeting that I have known has members who, though not prevented, have not attended in years, yet are reluctant to resign. What are they committed to? Identity! The label pleases them, but not the practice. Are we really to understand that members are possessed of some special quality that privileges them to hear 'sensitive personal matters' discussed at Area Meeting? What is this quality, and by what sudden act of grace is it acquired when a person is admitted into the Society? Or do we in fact believe that members comprise some sort of elite and secretly hanker after exclusiveness? What would that say about the sincerity of our testimony to equality?

I suspect that those who attend Area Meeting regularly do not realise how shocking the discrepancy between word and deed can be to those who encounter it for the first time. One member of my Local Meeting, then an attender, was told at Area Meeting that attenders were 'not to be trusted'. This is as silly as it is offensive. Any attender sufficiently interested in the workings of the Society to make the effort to go to Area Meeting is just as trustworthy as the average member, many of whom have never made such an effort. We should face these facts, if our testimony is to the truth. The ungracious practice of exclusion serves no useful purpose and it is reasonable that those considering membership should see for themselves what an application involves. Let us leave initiation mysteries to other cults and choose transparency.

Be on your guard

I wonder why I feel so strongly about the matter. Possibly it is the memory of my aunt, who rather liked calling the shots and took an extravagant delight in every conceivable Quaker quirk, 'thee-ing and thou-ing', the lot. Fifty years ago this led my father to compose a spoof advice: 'Be on your guard lest the love of seeming peculiar blind you to the reality of your witness.' My aunt is long dead, but the problem hasn't gone away and we should, perhaps, consider including my father's advice, couched in more contemporary language, in any forthcoming revision of Quaker faith & practice.

Martin Drummond, Wyomndham Local Meeting.

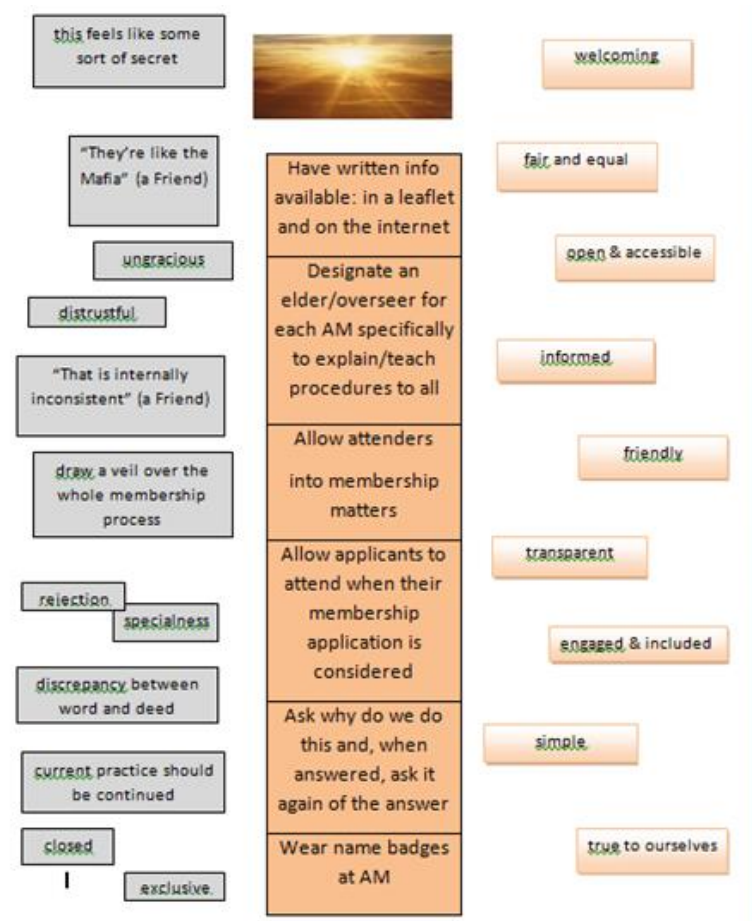
This article appeared in the 8th August 2014 edition of *the Friend* and is re-printed by kind permission of the author and *The Friend*

Pamela's Membership Wish List [^contents](#)

I would like Friends to see the process where someone joins the society as an opportunity to shine; to be Friends at their best, because at the moment I think it

falls far short of this. We call for more transparency from commercial organisations in their tax dealings, yet I find the Quaker membership process shrouded in a thick fog, so here are my ideas to burn off the fog and let the sunshine through. The words and comments on the left hand side of the page have been taken from my article in "The Scottish Friend"; and from an article in last week's "The Friend" entitled "Being a Quaker" by Martin Drummond. The two comments in inverted commas come from two Friends I've spoken with about our procedures.

The left hand side is where I feel we are at the moment. The middle strip of the page is my wish list, perhaps a bit idealistic but I hope some of the ideas are fairly uncontroversial. The right hand side is my hope for what we could achieve.



General meeting for Scotland, 13 September 2014, Inverness [^contents](#)

This was my first GM since moving to Orkney 3 years ago and it was a particular pleasure to meet up with Friends from the south as well as from NSAM.

During Meeting for Worship Christina De Luca's poem *The Morning After* was read to us. It speaks of the need for the people of Scotland to work together whatever the outcome of the referendum 'that each should work and play our several parts to bring about the best in Scotland, an open heart'. It felt important to acknowledge that we were on the threshold of a momentous opportunity and to think about how we dealt with the outcome. Later in the meeting we appointed 2 representatives to attend the service of reconciliation in St Giles in Edinburgh on 21st December.

Kascia and Erin Smith reported on their experiences of the Summer Shindig. Both have attended the Shindig from the age of 11 and this year Kascia was a junior staff member.

They told us that 40 young people attended the week at the end of August which gives an opportunity to make friends and learn what it means to be a Quaker. The programme included a talk about the food industry and the origins of where food comes from, a talk from Bronwen Currie about Gaza and Palestine, as well as games, discussion groups and entertainment in the evenings. It was heartwarming to hear such an enthusiastic account from our young Friends.

Elizabeth Allen and Robin Davis reported on the parliamentary engagement post. The post, based in Edinburgh, is currently being advertised as a three year fixed appointment at 17.5 hours per week and interviews will be held on 30th October. GM and BYM trustees will meet in November to draft a memorandum of understanding to clarify respective roles, and set the budget. The post holder will be a member of the BYM advocacy team which will provide support. They will have close links with the GM Parliamentary Liaison Function group which will set priorities focussing on the Scottish political scene. It was very pleasing to hear of this progress and to know that we will soon have a Quaker voice at the Scottish parliament.

Consultation on the implementation of Marriage and Civil Partnership Act 2014: 'The Clerk reported receiving a letter from the Scottish Government asking if we wished the Religious Society of Friends in Scotland to be prescribed under the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 as authorised to solemnise same sex marriages and civil partnerships, and whether we wished our existing authorisation to conduct opposite sex marriages to continue. As a response was required by 5th September, Central Committee consulted with Friends House and Registering Officers and agreed a formal response which was circulated with the GM agenda. We hope that from 2015 we will be able to conduct Quaker marriages

for same sex couples in Scotland on exactly the same basis as for opposite sex couples. In accordance with the decision taken by Meeting for Sufferings, we have not sought authorisation to conduct civil partnership ceremonies, believing that marriage is the appropriate option to offer', (GM minutes). There will be an administrative procedure to have Civil Partnership recognised as marriage and back dated to the date of the Civil Partnership. A religious ceremony will also be available.

This concludes what has been a remarkable achievement for our Society in living out our testimony to equality, a process begun at BYM in York in 2009, through the commitment of Friends in lobbying and making representation to both Scottish and UK governments in the consultation process. As direct beneficiaries of the new act, Mal and I will look forward to having our civil partnership recognised as marriage in 2015. As we had a Quaker meeting for affirmation and commitment of our relationship in the care of Edinburgh Central Friends in 1995 we won't need another wedding, but it will be wonderful to become legally 'married' in the year of our 20th anniversary.

The afternoon session was devoted to considering Meeting for Sufferings and its relationship to General Meeting and Area Meetings. It was led by Anne Ullathorne, Assistant Clerk to Sufferings and Juliet Prager, Deputy Recording Clerk.

Anne explained that Meeting for Sufferings is our national representative council which acts for BYM between annual meetings. It faces the challenge of establishing itself as a worshipping community and to be prophetic and visionary. The name 'Sufferings' describes its original function to support, lobby and work for Friends who were in prison. Its role is to test concerns, discern priorities e.g. slavery, prison reform, peace, equality in marriage, sustainability, and to foster communication. Its membership comprises 1 representative from each AM, trustees, as ex officio members, and representatives from central committees and staff. The new smaller structure is now fairly well grounded. Because trustees have responsibility for centrally managed work including finance and employment, this frees up Sufferings from those responsibilities. We had the opportunity to think about how communication works between Sufferings and Friends around the country, and the importance of the role of Sufferings, our AM representatives, and Friends who serve on central committees. It was good to have Anne and Juliet with us to bring alive the workings of our national representative council, and to have this experience in our AM which includes the most remote local meetings within BYM.

Inverness Friends provided a sumptuous lunch and tea. I was able to enjoy overnight hospitality and to attend Inverness meeting on the Sunday for the first time, along with four other visiting Friends. And we had an Indian summer of a weekend!

Derek McLean, Orkney Local Meeting

Jesus: a Quaker Approach - Inverness - Sat 5th July 2014 [^contents](#)

'Jesus: a Quaker Approach' was held at Ness Bank Presbyterian Church in Inverness. I like this steeple-house with its warm and comfortable liberal energy. Children's drawings hang on the walls and present ideas of a loving Jesus. The lower floor where Quakers have held Area Meeting continues with its extensive renovations. At the end of the day I had a chance to chat with the warden, who proudly showed me their huge main service hall. They have a woman minister with a congregation of around 800, and they do not seem to be caught up in the split over gay ministers in the Church of Scotland.

Tim Peat Ashworth from Woodbrooke on the Road led us through the day, starting with selected extracts from the gospels. One of us would volunteer to read a passage, and then Tim would expand upon it with the interpretations of modern biblical scholarship. I give here my own reflections of the day, not necessarily Tim's views. The Gospel of Mark, thought to be the earliest of the four, was written about 20 years after Jesus' death, and this was also after the letters of Paul to the churches of the new movement. Mark had particular influence on the two gospels written ten years later, Matthew and Luke, who also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. John followed with his gospel after another 20 years. It is likely that all four were in part political writings, written after Christianity had established, to persuade different audiences of the primacy of Jesus, that this new religion fulfilled the Jewish prophesies and was therefore better. It is very hard to know who Jesus really was, or what teaching can be directly attributed to him. There is only a tiny fragment of contemporaneous evidence from the historian Josephus that Jesus even existed in spite of his world changing influence.

To take a few examples, Mark introduces Jesus as a prophet - to speak on behalf of God. The Jews believed that after much suffering, eventually God would bless them and rule directly, but not as a human king. Curiously Jesus' family were concerned he might be mad, and others suggested he did his good works through the Devil. Jesus said, 'If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off...' No compromise here. Tim asked us to consider what areas of our own lives might we need to 'cut off'. I wondered how this violent language might inspire the self-righteous to punish their neighbours. Jesus said, 'Believe, and this mountain will be thrown into the sea'. Tim suggested 'this mountain' was Mt Zion on which stood the great temple. I wondered, if this temple was the centre of the ancient system that exchanged animal sacrifices for salvation, what new belief would it take to send this old system crashing into the sea?

Matthew sets Jesus into the Jewish story of Abraham and Moses, with Jesus as a kingly messiah like a new king David. Jesus said, 'Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.' Perfect can be seen as completion, wholeness, being in a state of all embracing love. Luke puts Jesus into Adam's lineage, links him to all

humanity through the original common ancestor to all people, and sets the context of God's spiritual plan for the whole of humanity. In Acts with the coming of the holy spirit, Isaiah's tongues of fire purified each individual, empowering them to speak for God, so that all could now prophesy in a prophetic community. They were given this power of speech to call the world to change through a spirit-led inspiration to act. This would create friction with the Jewish community who were seen as stiff-necked, but the gentiles would listen. Finally John promotes Jesus as God, as Spirit, as 'I Am', and this gospel has a very different feel from the others. Jesus said 'Very truly. I tell you, before Abraham was, I Am.' It was common practice amongst pagans of the time to deify humans, but not a Jewish one. It begs the question: Is or was Jesus human? This gospel is often a Quaker favourite, as the Holy Spirit seems to speak directly through Jesus.

Our tour of the gospels took up us to lunch and Tim asked us to write out questions, which he answered later in the afternoon. Lunch was the usual delicious spread of quiches and cakes etc., and for me there were two new experiences: sparkling lemon-grass cordial provided in abundance and the intense sweetness of passion fruit curd.

After lunch we split into three groups of six to encounter Jesus through reading the bible experientially. We used the passage from Luke that starts with, 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.' We meditated on the text and then shared our responses. To love my enemies at first seemed paradoxical, but then opened the possibility of liberation and empowerment, immunity from resentment and a sense of independence. 'Give and it will be given to you, a good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over will be put into your lap'. I imagined street vendors selling corn seed from measuring cups in a society where all people are honest and treat each other fairly, even generously, echoing the principle of sow your seeds and what you give is what you get. 'If anyone takes your coat, offer your shirt also' - George Fox was fond of this one, quoting it to the greedy power mongers of his time. This meditative approach to the bible can touch deep springs of love, fear and insecurity. One member of our group was upset by the recent stoning to death of a woman by her own family because of whom she had married. How is it possible to love people who commit such atrocities? For me the first step is to try to feel into and understand their point of view. I am reminded of Quakers from nineteenth century with their harsh responses to marrying out.

Continuing on the darker side, Tim included from Mark 'If your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.' I notice how the bible frequently contains this sort of language even from Jesus, with one passage beautifully loving, if sometimes challenging, and the next foaming with violent threats for the disobedient, and vague promises of paradise for the obedient. I find it a challenge when people claim

absolute authority for the bible. I wonder how these opposing energies found their way into the bible; as to me they portray schizophrenia and elements of a psychopathic God. I want to be open to the deeper archetypes that possibly underlie these passages, and look for the same magical good news I find in other places, but the loving wisdom seems to have become entangled with a fear-based legacy from some ancient civilization whose God represented their brutal and primitive aspirations of power and domination, suggesting an insecure and jealous God afraid that his people will go chasing after rival Gods.

One subject we did not mention was the resurrection. As a Quaker of the un-programmed variety, this issue differentiates me from the majority of professing Christians, who believe in the physical resurrection as the cornerstone of their salvation and righteousness. When I look through the bible, following the flimsy and fragmentary extracts that are offered to support the various interpretations, I notice there is as much support for the exotic and crazy, as for the sensible; so allowing the bible to be used to justify almost anything. Perhaps it's the combination of deep archetypes, those primordial impulses rooted in the human psyche, and the blurred boundaries between literal and metaphor, between history and poetry, that encourage interpretations that tend to infinite possibilities.

My choice is to be very selective with the text, and only take on the meanings that resonate with my sense of a loving wisdom. From a Quaker approach this wisdom is planted in everyone's heart as a potential. It is my responsibility to cultivate it through discernment, by living and testing my beliefs. This loving wisdom is in the ancient Jewish text and is inseparable from Jesus. For me as a Quaker, I think salvation would be about learning from Jesus to better discern my inward guidance and live my life more fruitfully.

The day was a fascinating exploration of ideas with a meditative session, but we did not pray as a group or invite the mystical experience of guidance through Christ in spirit. Travelling home on the train I felt some frustration with the uncertainty and ambiguity of the Jesus story, but also a growing excitement. I am inspired by the rich power and depth of the stories. For me the bible addresses life at a cosmic level, it maps the development of human civilization and provides pointers for the evolution of consciousness.

My inspiration from the day is that to love my enemies requires openness to the transforming power of love. How willing am I to sacrifice the attachments that obstruct my renewal and liberation?

Alex Page, Forres Local Meeting

Tea at the Mosque [^contents](#)

Just recently our local meeting, in conjunction with the inter-faith group in Inverness, were invited to "Tea at the Mosque". It took place on a Saturday afternoon in June just before the start of Ramadan. Quite a few Friends attended this afternoon "tea party". It was held in a lovely little garden in the grounds of the Mosque surrounded by trees on a bright sunny day. There was a wonderful array of food, tea, coffee, cakes and other goodies all homemade and served by the ladies of the Mosque. It was a feast that would equal one that we have at our own Quaker meetings and discussion groups. There were a lot of children present too, all enjoying the party fun.

The Mosque is housed at the Northern Meeting Park. It is a temporary meeting-place until they move into their new Mosque in Inverness. It was the first time I had ever been to a Mosque even though I have met many Muslims before. There was a presentation given by a senior member of the Mosque who explained the five pillars of the Muslim faith and their meaning, Shahadah, Salat, Zakat, Sawm and Hajj along with some myth-busting about Muslims that we all too often hear in the media today.

I met with a young Sunni Muslim woman called Soofia at the Mosque who was an American by birth but had come to live in Britain and then the Highlands with her husband and children. She was a delight to speak with and we exchanged emails and phone numbers with the intention of meeting again. Which we did! I was invited to her home for tea and met again with her and her lovely children who were very excited at a new visitor. I was plied with questions mainly from the older boy Ismael. Soofia and I discussed what our faiths meant to us. Soofia tells me that American Muslims are the most law-abiding. She was familiar with Quakers and in fact she told me she had spoken at a Quaker meeting in her home in the States.

We live in a multi-faith Britain. It has been important for Quakers to understand other faiths and to engage with them. Indeed, well-known Quakers such as George Fox, Mary Fisher and John Woolman all had encounters with other faith groups. Working with other faiths is part of the Quaker work for peace and justice. Indeed the need for inter-faith relations has greatly increased in recent years. Having an understanding of each other does enrich our lives without losing sight of our Quaker principles and values.

Sila Collins-Walden, Inverness Local Meeting

Hurt and Healing Conference, 11 to 13 July, 2014 [^contents](#)

This was my first visit to Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and a Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs (QAAD) event. I went with no preconceived ideas or expectations except my own experience of addiction. I live my life one day at a time and awake with apprehension but excitement for the coming day.

The introduction and theme 'Acceptance' was delivered by Tim James on the Friday evening and was followed by discussion before epilogue. It was already evident that there were attendees with deep concerns and pain – addicts (practicing & recovering), relatives, friends and professionals – psychologists, counsellors, therapists – who needed to unburden and/or find peace.

Saturday morning saw us gathered for three very interesting talks about alternative methods of treatments or therapies – "Self management & recovery therapy" (SMART), "Mindfulness" and "The 12 step programme". Although I only have experience of the AA 12 step programme I found the others, of which I had no previous knowledge, interesting and certainly worth investigating as an addition, if not a replacement to my own programme. These talks led to further discussion and also opened up the sharing to more knowledge of linked problems.

I was now beginning to understand more about the wider implications of addictions and difficulties faced by all individuals and agencies when faced with restraints of budgets and producing results. Addiction does not fit into our normally accepted ideas of illnesses or conditions when it comes to 'cures' and 'length of treatment periods'. Which is why we talk about 'recovery' and not 'recovered'. This is where I believe the Quaker qualities of love, compassion, respect and dignity - not to mention non-judgement and equality - come into their own. QAAD is working in an area where we can use our Quaker qualities to Light the Path – holding out our hand and 'Holding in the Light' – those that hurt. The result or solution may be beyond our comprehension but my experience tells me I must accept, let go and let the God of my understanding decide the outcome. This is very difficult when it comes to loved ones and frequently the course or solution is not the one chosen or wanted. This is the knowledge I have gained through the conference and my programme and is why we need to share our experience, strength and hope – that others may hear a message that helps them.

I possibly digress from reporting on the conference but I believe the message I heard is also relevant as this is my truth.

Saturday afternoon was followed by an 'open' AA and Al-Anon meeting which was well attended and also gave greater understanding to the 12 step programme and the serenity that can be found for those who are 'Seekers of Healing'.

Following on after refreshments were a choice of four groups exploring the themes; Poetry/Writing, Adventures in Meditation, Music (brought by participants) and Constellation Therapy. I attended the meditation group as this is an area I am only beginning to explore but know it will be beneficial to me. I was not disappointed and came away with a deep feeling of serenity and well being. Thank you.

Saturday evening saw light-hearted entertainment by some of our talented attendees – and what talent there was too. Thank you again to those who made the evening both enjoyable and memorable.

On Sunday morning the plenary session was worship sharing and it was lovely to hear the diverse experiences and wisdom that attendees had brought and/or gained.

By now our gathering was beginning to deplete; some had to go before lunch and others still earlier, before Meeting for Worship.

I came away with a sense of peace, serenity and hope; grateful for new friendships, help that I been able to offer and trust in a Power Greater than myself - that there is always hope when Faith overcomes Fear.

Robert Wilson. Orkney Local Meeting

Quakers call for military restraint [^contents](#)

Quakers in Britain sent the following open letter to the Prime Minister before Parliament was recalled to discuss the UK's possible involvement in air strikes against Islamic State (IS) in Iraq.

"Quakers acknowledge with sadness the recall of Parliament to consider British military action. As the tragedies in Syria and Iraq unfold, Quakers in Britain again ask for military restraint.

Quakers acknowledge and deplore the extreme criminal behaviour displayed in the region. We too, want the violence and suffering to end.

We remind those who make these decisions in Britain that it is often easier to start a war than to end it, and that additional violence itself fuels a bloody and destructive cycle. The bitterness and hatred created lasts for generations. Such violence threatens us all. We stress that diplomatic channels must be used at all times, but especially when considering violence and war, particularly through the good offices of the United Nations.

Britain is a wonderful living example of the potential of multi-faith peace-making. We have many British citizens of Iraqi and Syrian origin who are in active dialogue

with their families and friends in the region. It is those people who tell us how such criminality is created – by desperate people who feel they have lost everything to violence inflicted on them by the West, and that violence is their revenge. Desperation has a human face and humanity is what we share.

Quakers ask that Parliament discuss whether this is an opportunity for Britain to export peace in a way hitherto unexplored – through our multi-faith and multicultural connections which spread across the world.

Quakers again ask for Government to take a further critical look at the role that the arms trade plays in promoting and increasing the likelihood of war. We trust and pray that as Parliament make these difficult decisions on our behalf, they are guided by love of humanity and the desire for peace for everyone.“

signed Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, Quakers in Britain 25 Sept 2014

Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) Dunblane 27th September 2014 [^contents](#)

Yeah – a meeting I could get there and back to in one gloriously sunny day!! Loads of info – I have Googled the lot to make sure of accuracy!

Highlights:- we were asked to share our feelings post referendum, first 3 individuals, one a “NO”, one a “Yes”, and one a politician from England – after the NO Friend had declared total mistrust and disgust with all politicians (Oh dear – guess who!!) Then we were asked to pair off and continue in pairs. Ideal timing and I hope really helpful to all.

We were recommended the following book by the clerk of Ramallah AM- looks interesting.

Jean Zaru, the long-time activist and Quaker leader from Ramallah, here brings home the pain and central convictions that animate Christian nonviolence and activity today. Zaru vividly paints the complex realities faced by all parties in Palestine - Jews and Muslims and Christians, Israelis and Palestinians, women and men. Yet even as Zaru eloquently names the common misunderstandings of the history, present situation, and current policies of the parties there, she vividly articulates an alternative: a religiously motivated nonviolent path to peace and justice in the world's most troubled region.

A recent letter seen in The Daily Mail by Aubrey Bailey, Fleet, Hants was read out (it's gone viral so you can Google)- I share this with you since I find it helpful. The title was “As Clear as Mud”

“Are you confused by what is going on in the Middle-East? Let me explain. We support the Iraqi government in its fight against Islamic State (IS/ISIL/ISIS). We don't like IS, but IS is supported by Saudi Arabia whom we do like. We don't like President Assad in Syria. We support the fight against him, but not IS, which is also fighting against him.

“We don't like Iran, but the Iranian government supports the Iraqi gov't against IS. So, some of our friends support our enemies and some of our enemies are our friends, and some of our enemies are fighting our other enemies, whom we don't want to lose, but we don't our enemies who are fighting our enemies to win. “If the people we want to defeat are defeated, they might be replaced by people we like even less. And, all this was started by us invading a country to drive out terrorists who weren't actually there until we went in to drive them out – do you understand now?” Hmmm!

We were told about this DVD – “The Anatomy of a Great Deception”by Documentary filmmaker, David Hooper deals with the findings of his own investigation into several mysteries surrounding the controversies of the 9/11 official story. His commentary about the emotions involved in dealing with the emotions involved sets the film apart.

There is a website called openDemocracy- great for the very politically minded who are on the internet (I am waning at this point – can you tell)!?? And finally an interesting website “The *Global Peace Index*” (GPI) which is an attempt to measure the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness.

Philip Austin, co-ordinator reflected that “too much bad news damages our souls”

So I really appreciated a special ministry about healing, from a Friend who had worked as a doctor in Africa as well as UK – please go with the gist as I may get the technicalities wrong:-

“if someone has a clear wound incision, and the cut comes together with good stitching from the surgeon, then there is quick and good healing. But if the wound has ragged edges, and doesn't heal and has to be opened again, it may not heal, then the more the wound is opened up brought together it doesn't heal. So then the wound has to be left open, and dressed daily with pure water. This actually can be very painful, and takes a long time, but in the end it does heal”.

Juli Salt NFPB rep and Forres Local Meeting
(If you would like Peace Info, please contact Juli at juli@busybees.force9.co.uk)

Mindfully Together [^contents](#)

I have just returned from a course at Woodbrooke called “Mindfully Together”. This was a retreat guided by the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen Buddhist teacher from Vietnam. I was supported financially to go on this retreat by Northern Friends’ Quaker Trust, and would like to share the experience as much as I can.

The course began with a sitting meditation at 06:30 in the morning. It was led by two Buddhist nuns and there were about 50 participants. The first thing I noticed was the layout of the room; two long rows of chairs facing one wall, then a space in the middle with cushions and blankets for those who could sit in the lotus position, and two long rows of chairs facing the other wall. Not at all like a Quaker meeting!

We were taught to follow our breath; breathing in, breathing out. Whenever a thought appeared, we were to accept the thought and return our attention to our breath. This anchors us in the present moment. I found this brought a feeling of calm and peacefulness. Regardless of our internal weather, our thoughts, emotions and perceptions, our breathing is always with us like a faithful friend.

Whenever we feel carried away, caught in a strong emotion or scattered in worries and projects, we return to our breathing to anchor our minds. For someone like myself who is often anxious or distracted, this is a really good skill to learn. Every ten minutes or so, the person leading the meditation would recite a mantra;

“Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in
Breathing out, I know that I am breathing out”

or

“Breathing in, I am mountain

“Breathing out, I am solid”

or

“Breathing in, I am water

“Breathing out, I am reflection”

In the mornings after breakfast we had “Dharma talks” which were an introduction to Buddhist teachings and the Five Mindfulness Trainings. I was surprised to see how closely they related to “Advices and Queries”. I bought a small book - “the Five Mindfulness Trainings and Advices and Queries; a contemplation of shared insights”. Quaker Friends and Zen practitioners share a common path of silent practise, respect for one’s own experience and that of others, non-violence and a respect for all forms of life.

The practise I enjoyed the most was walking meditation. The weather was sunny and the grounds of Woodbrooke were rich with colour and wildlife. All we had to do was walk and breathe – something we all do all the time. Walking meditation is much slower than normal walking; you think very carefully about each foot as it

touches the earth, about the way the body moves, your knees, your hips, your back. There is a Buddhist saying “with every step a flower blooms”. You are aware of each in breath and each out breath as you take a new step. I have a vivid memory of standing beside the pool, watching the reflection of a weeping willow tree in the water and becoming completely lost in the reflections.

I was very conscious of walking as a body, what gets called “the Sangha”. I tried to match my footsteps to the person in front of me. There was a lovely moment when I got slightly out of step and the person beside me held out her hand to take mine, and smiled. One woman who had difficulty walking and was very bent with arthritis came with us in her electric buggy.

Before each walking meditation we gathered in a ring on the patio to sing some songs from Plum Village, the community in France that Thich Nhat Hanh founded. Here are the words of one of my favourites:

“Breathing in, breathing out; breathing in, breathing out
I am blooming as a flower, I am fresh as the dew
I am solid as the mountain; I am firm as the earth; I am free.

“Breathing in, breathing out; breathing in, breathing out
I am water reflecting what is real, what is true
And I feel there is a space deep inside of me;
I am free, I am free, I am free

I thought of what Friends describe as the inner light.

For an hour and a half each afternoon we met in the Dharma Sharing Group. This was a bit like a worship sharing group where we had the opportunity to listen deeply to one another and to discover how individual people were experiencing the practise. I felt quite close to some of the people in my Dharma group by the end of the week.

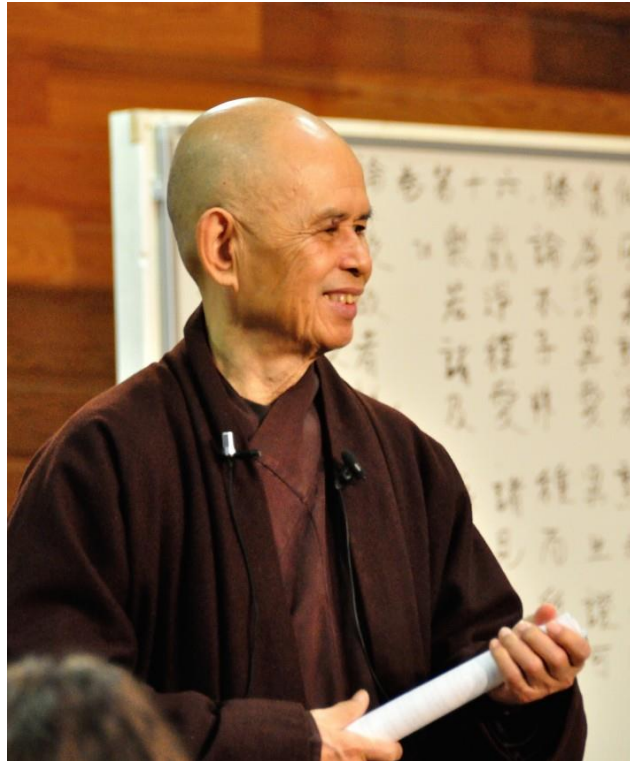
I cannot close without saying something about our silent meals. These were an opportunity to practise mindful eating, thinking about the food on your plate, the earth, the sun, the rain, and all the hard work that goes into producing it – and this made the food taste much better too, because when you eat and talk sometimes you eat your words, not the food.

The food was vegetarian, very imaginatively cooked and very delicious, and we were encouraged to eat slowly. I found myself sitting beside Sister Annabel, one of the course teachers. She had a small plate of salad and some grapes. I had a large plate of rice, beans, red cabbage, carrots, cheese, tomatoes and nuts. When I had

finished my plateful, she was still slowly eating hers. I thought “Ruth, how greedy you are!” It was a moment of insight.

As the course ended, I thought “am I a Buddhist, a Quaker or a Christian? Does it matter? Not at all! I am all three!” If you would like to find out more, here are some websites: www.interbeing.org.uk www.plumvillage.org

Ruth Goodheir, Skye Local Meeting



Thich Nhat Hanh (known as “Thay” (teacher))

And finally... [^contents](#)

This was spotted in Marks & Spencers in Inverness by Una Mills of Inverness Local Meeting. There have also been reports of others adding to it.....

