

West Scotland Quaker News

October 2008

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This newsletter is available
in other formats.

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

I am grateful to Jan Lethbridge for proofreading this issue. Editor

Haiku

Before you came to help us
grow your luxuries
we grew our own food.

John Gibbs

Reproduced by permission from *The Creation was open to me*,
published by Quaker Green Concern.
See also the article on page 12.

The deadline for the next edition of *West Scotland Quaker News* is
Wednesday, 29 October.

Copy should be sent to the editor, Jane Mitchell, either on paper or
disk, by post to

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Clerk's Letter

Words and Phrases

There are times when the words and phrases we often use suddenly come to life. I was recently asked to speak to a small multi-faith group on the 'Quaker View of the Messiah'. I pointed out, as I had a few months ago when I had spoken to them on the subject of 'Quakers and the Meaning of Life', that Quakers do not have spokespersons who can neatly give a Quaker view on any subject, especially these subjects. However, I talked about how we see Jesus as an example rather than a saviour and how we see something of God in everyone, even our enemies and that God's ministry can come from all sorts of people. The small audience listened politely, but I didn't feel there was any real engagement with myself or the other two speakers.

A few days later I was attending the Annual Gathering of the Alternatives to Violence Project and was listening to Camilla Carr. Camilla went to Chechnya in 1997 with her partner (later husband) Jon to run art workshops for children who were traumatised by the violence in that region. A few months after they started, they were kidnapped by local Chechen fighters and held under horrific conditions for nearly a year. At times they were kept in a basement with no outside light and hardly any water and Camilla was raped several times. All through this time they sought to behave not as victims but as human beings and to try to see the humanity in their captors. At times the humanity in their captors broke through, but then it would disappear. She told her amazing story with such calmness, compassion and at times humour that we were all deeply moved. Camilla now works for the Forgiveness Project bringing together victims and offenders. Forgiveness, she said, was about seeing first the humanity in yourself and then seeing it in your enemy. I felt that if my small audience had heard her they would have understood the real meaning of my words.

Martin Mansell

Reports

Area Meeting: Glasgow, 23 August Experiences in Israel/ Palestine *Report by Norman Peacock*

I believe that in Glaswegian ‘the Area’ is the front yard, but this meeting was held in the Meeting Room even though it was an unusually fine day.

Having persevered in her attempts to visit Israel/ Palestine and being finally successful in joining a study tour earlier in the year, Anne Rado introduced a discussion on the present state of that troubled country as the afternoon highlight of our meeting. She saw the situation as crazy as the Israeli government tried to create a state the size of Wales for Jewish people only, although about a quarter of the population was Palestinian. In addition to the more well-known and prominent building of an 8-metre-high wall around the West Bank there was wholesale demolition of Palestinian houses (mostly in Israel) and even in the desert areas Bedouins were being displaced. To a Christian, most poignant was the crowding of refugee Moslems into Bethlehem. Yet the Palestinians had succeeded in creating a university in Hebron in 1994 and Quakers did maintain their school in

Ramallah. Sadly, although some Israelis realise the need for reconciliation, armed force prevails and it would need great effort to bring peace and tranquillity to the country.

By contrast our normal business may seem mundane but it took us more than the morning session. Meeting for Sufferings has a new role in monitoring the spiritual health of the Society guided by the findings of the Long-Term Framework working group which will now be laid down. This new role results from the appointment of Trustees to oversee financial affairs and at a local level we saw this change when we had the first report from the Area Trustees, which included the annual accounts.

Sadly, we recorded the death of two of our Friends, Olga Wood and Alex McGinty, who in their own ways both “walked cheerfully over the world” and thereby added to the spiritual life of the Meeting. We welcomed Patrick Bealey, who comes appropriately from Ramallah, and wished Amanda and Jim Howson well in moving to Brackley. Our Regist-

ering Officer is being kept busy with two weddings in two months, that of Ruth Burton and Brian Taylor already past and of Stefan Gibson yet to come, and we are assured that there would be plenty of Quakers there to bring our support and good wishes.

News is not always good: our concern for disability is progressing but slowly with Meeting for Sufferings, and we heard from Dunblane Meeting that our Newsletter is no longer being recorded for visually impaired people. The former must be a

matter for our representatives on Sufferings but, since the latter affects all Scottish Meetings, it will be brought to the attention of General Meeting.

Oh yes! We do have errors of omission. We forgot to appoint representatives to General Meeting (in Glasgow on 20 September), and earlier we had to 'homologate' (that is a lovely legal word – it is not in my computer's dictionary) a decision to support Ruth McQuaid's participation in an important Woodbrooke course on children.

Appendix: Books on Israel/ Palestine

The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, Ilan Pappé (ISBN 978-1-85168-555-4): detailed, thoroughly researched history of the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, by an eminent Israeli historian.

Blood Brothers, Elias Chacour (ISBN 0-8007-9321-8): the same story told by a Palestinian Christian (now Archbishop of Galilee) who lived through it, and tells the story with deep insight and compassion.

The Other Side of Israel, Susan Nathan (ISBN 0-00-719511-7): the situation today. The author is a British Jew who went to Israel full of hope and idealism, became an Israeli citizen, gradually saw that things weren't what they had seemed to be and now lives in an Arab village and shares the life of the Arabs in Israel. If you have time to read only one, make it this one!

If you would like to be kept up-to-date about the situation in Israel/ Palestine, just email me and I will add you to my mailing list: annerado2@tiscali.co.uk.

Anne Rado, Milngavie

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS): 6 September, 2008

Friends & other Christians

Report by Margaret Peacock

Long Term Framework

The document was written by two committees – a self-selected number in Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and a small writing group, so it is in many ways just a Highest Common Factor. However, the vision was and is about connecting Meetings with each other and with Central Committees and Friends House. Whatever the omissions in the Framework, we can use it to get nearer to that vision. The text is now as good as it will ever get, and this was acknowledged in MfS so, much adorned with photographs, it will soon appear in our Meetings as a booklet. *The Friend* notes that I introduced the business item “nervously”. I wouldn’t put it like that, but I was fervently hoping that no awkward Friend would insist on sending the matter back to the writers for yet more consideration at MfS.

World Council of Churches (WCC)

Sending it back is just what Friends did for the item on the WCC. Do you remember, a long, long time ago – in 1982 they tell me – a document called *To Lima, with love*, and in 1986 another one called *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*? These explained to the Christian world our Quaker point of view on the things that most churches think essential. We have now to consider a response to the current edition of the worldwide consultation. I am very grateful to our theologian Friend Janet Scott, who took a large part in writing the 18-page document. We need Quaker theologians to translate between Quaker language and churchy language. We are not full members of the WCC (unlike Churches Together in Britain & Ireland), although they obviously need us to help them along the road to simplicity. Friends’ contributions ranged from “Anglican attenders thought it a breath of fresh air for the churches” to “If we send this we are telling lies about ourselves”. Unfortunately some Friends are so uncomfortable thinking about subjects that even the most Christian of us rarely consider, that they do not wish to let the document in its present form go forward in the name of BYM. It will go back to the Quaker Committee on Christian and Interfaith Relationships, possibly for an introductory paragraph explaining our diversity.

Torture

The other two items were no less interesting. QCAT is 'Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture'. This is a group with a longish up-and-down history. Members of QCAT have been travelling to Meetings in search of support, and Friends have always been pleased to give it, but no effective group has grown up. One small step forward might be to link QCAT closely to Campaign for the Abolition of the Arms Trade, so as to campaign against the sale of instruments of torture. One Friend said she had heard a suggestion that it would be realistic to acknowledge the existence of torture but that each separate instance would require to be licensed by a judge.

Heart of our faith

Lastly I come to the first item of the day – the report of Quaker Life (QL) on their inspiring conference at Woodbrooke entitled *Quaker Identity and the Heart of our Faith*. Its purpose was to study two aspects of the current state of Quakerism in BYM: the polarisation into theists and non-theists, and the high proportion in many Meetings of convinced Friends and attenders who have not had a chance fully to absorb Friends' way of doing things.

Apparently Rex Ambler's lecture was so absorbing that his hearers refused to break for coffee! Anyway, QL have produced a study booklet from the conference, with a CD of Rex Ambler's lecture, and sections written by him and the other speakers: Alex Wildwood on the variety of Friends, David Boulton on his non-theist point of view, Deborah Rowlands on her traditional perspective, and Beth Allen on worship. I bought a copy which I can lend at times when Milngavie Meeting isn't studying it.

Features

Epistle of Quaker Youth Pilgrimage 2008

To Friends everywhere,

We are rising up like a phoenix from a fire. So brothers and sisters, spread your wings and fly higher.

The 2008 Quaker Youth Pilgrimage combined 25 youth and four adults, representing seven different countries, travelling around the United Kingdom and Ireland.

As we reflect on our month-long adventure, we continually seek to delve into our experience by using questions to explore ourselves, this community of pilgrims and this area of the world. This pilgrimage's theme was a journey through conflict to peace. On every level we have started our journey with dialogue and with cultivating an awareness of listening. This consciousness and intent has guided us as we examine how world, communal, and personal conflict has changed us.

Beginning our time in 1652 country, we were impressed with the accounts of early Quakers' committed faith in the face of trials and tribulations. We held Meeting in the same space where early Quakers worshipped despite the threat of harassment and imprisonment for living their convictions. Such stories provided incentive and a powerful backdrop for our own testing of our faith and convictions.

We moved to Northern Ireland and began to learn about the historical and current political situation. Our consciousness of early Quakers provided a foundation with which to approach the Troubles with empathy and recognize the truth in the struggle of people to maintain their convictions of faith in the face of violence and politics. Through the efforts of Quakers to create a safe place for people to meet, we were again reminded of the importance of dialogue.

As we began this pilgrimage, some of us faced internal conflict as we questioned our spirituality and identity as Quakers. In gathering together, we were able to explore our own doubts and ideas in a community. While building connections with each other we dipped our toes in the water, testing the level of trust in the community. Individuals were struggling to find truth and wanted a supportive community and a safe place to express themselves. As our shared experiences deepened we grew bolder with our experiments. We were more willing to let ourselves go, put ourselves out there, and trust that people would catch

us. This transformed the community into a family who would strive together towards truth and deeper exploration. We cultivated an awareness of listening to each other and striking a balance of holding one's own centre yet not overbearing another's perspective.

With the miracles and jives of all our time together we felt God's presence working and moving within the group. Through our dialogues we have created a vibrant and invigorated community. We part ways, in love and ready to continue.

The Pilgrimage worshipped with Glasgow Meeting one Sunday at the start of their journey, and later this inspirational Epistle was read there.

When Ministry is not Ministry

I met an old friend some time ago. Ian is a Church of Scotland minister. He is an intelligent man, and before entering the ministry, was a chartered accountant. We have known each other since our Sunday-school days (55+ years ago).

During our conversation the inevitable question arose, "And what church are you attending these days, Bill?" When I explained my membership of the Society of Friends, his eyebrows raised perceptibly. On further prompting, I explained a little more about my leaving the church of my childhood, and about our Quaker Testimonies. I could see that all of this was not registering well with Ian. Finally he said (actually he blurted it out), "The trouble with you Bill is that you've never really been a Christian, because you haven't yet been baptised in the Holy Spirit; what are you doing in this obscure little sect?" I smiled inwardly, imagining some ancient Jewish

rabbi asking Peter, James and John a similar sort of question!

Not being one to turn my back on religious pomposity, I decided to pursue the conversation a little further. "You may well be right, Ian, but can I ask you a question?" He nodded, and I began, "The earth's human population is estimated at six billion souls; agreed?" He again nodded. "This is also the estimated number of people who lived, suffered, and died on this tiny planet before Jesus was born." He nodded again, but this time his acknowledgment was more hesitant, "R-i-i-ght?" (He was wondering where this discussion was leading.) I continued, "Can you tell me what happened to those six billion people?" His eyes lit up in a triumphant smile, and without hesitation he declared with great authority, "When Jesus was in the tomb, he descended into hell and preached the Gospel to them. By this act they were

given a further opportunity to be saved!" I could see that he actually believed every single word of what he was saying to me. The logic of course is that (according to Ian's reckoning) Jesus preached to more people on one weekend than he did during his entire time on earth! I decided to discontinue the conversation at this point. My old Sunday-school colleague seemed confident that his theology was sound. "I will pray for you Bill," he said. "I will hold you in the Light," I replied. A quizzical look from Ian was my parting inheritance as we shook hands and took our leave of each other.

One of the great dangers with religion is that, as humans, we each have a great talent for fantasy, and some in Glasgow Meeting use this gift harmlessly but creatively to write books of entertaining fiction. When we are tempted, however, to misuse this talent to engage in one-to-one dialogue with God, we can develop some very strange ideas. All of our Quaker authors would acknowledge that if the dark side of our personalities did not exist, there would be very little for them to write about.

Within the Society opinions vary about the authenticity of belief, but it cannot be denied that many atrocities have been carried out in the name of God, e.g., Oliver Cromwell was a very delusional

'Servant of The Lord', who quite happily traumatised and slaughtered the terrified inhabitants (men, women, children, pigs and and pets) of the Irish town of Drogheda during the Civil Wars of the 17th century. Cromwell, it appears, was a less than enthusiastic supporter of Peace, Justice and Truth. He was, however, a very devout and Bible-based Christian. The great tragedy is that so was his adversary King Charles, whose own fantasies led him to the belief that kings have a divine right to rule. These two polarised and ignorant men initiated the needless slaughter of thousands of their fellow beings because of their misguided religious perspectives. The truth however was beginning to take root in the fertile mind of George Fox, who saw warfare and violence as the antithesis of all Jesus' teaching.

How then do we guard against the religious, delusional, fantasies such as those experienced by Oliver and Charles? I would venture to suggest that we achieve this by applying our basic, and given, good common sense. This is something (incidentally) which the Book of Proverbs largely encourages us to do. That is of course assuming like Ian, Oliver and Charles, you have a fundamental need in your life for Scriptural authority. The influence of Yahweh on the mindset of

ignorant people is, however, a matter of deep concern to me. It currently fuels American foreign policy in the Middle East. The American evangelist John Hagee leads a very strong Christian lobby which is even now encouraging George Bush & Co to attack Iraq in a preemptive nuclear

strike. Without the Christian Right Bush would not have been elected into office TWICE! Should we as Quakers remain silent whilst such madness and injustice prevails?

Bill Bingham, Glasgow

Quaker Worship on Islay

The beautifully simple church at Kilmeny, near Ballygrant, on Islay, was the sylvan setting of a Meeting for Worship on 10 August. The venue was arranged by Bronwen Currie (who has recently moved to the island from Edinburgh) at the kind invitation of the church minister, Steve Fulcher. His attendance with his wife and three other parishioners swelled the meeting to fourteen participants; including Friends from as far away as Fife, Glasgow, Oban and two cyclists from Tighnabruaich and Tarbert.

The ministry from Friends was well received, leading after the Meeting for Worship to searching questions from both the minister and his flock, for all of whom Quaker worship was a new experience. Surprise was evinced that Quakers “knew their Bibles so well” (following a passage read out as part of ministry!).

Discussions followed during tea before some of us had to depart reluctantly for our calm and sunny crossing back to the mainland. The minister expressed the hope that Quakers would return to his church again, and we look forward to doing so.

Footnote: The QUAKERS FOR PEACE emblazoned on the T-shirt worn by one of our members attracted the attention of two holidaying Dutchmen on the outward ferry crossing. This led to many questions about Quakerism, so their curiosity enabled a bit of informal and spontaneous outreach during the two-hour crossing. Thanks! Been there; got the T-shirt! ... so keep wearing it!!!

Bobby Locke and others, Argyll.

Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP)

Ever since Europeans started settling in other parts of the world 400 years ago, many of them have done what simply comes naturally to those in power and exploited the new countries for their own ends. Nowadays it may not require a gunboat; a few clicks of the computer mouse will shunt money around from one country to another.

Millennium Goals

In 2000 leaders of 189 countries approved eight Millennium Goals to be achieved by 2015; the first one is to reduce by half the number of people who have to live on less than \$1 (or 56p) per day. Imagine the impact on such people of the recent increases in the prices of staple foods.

There has been progress, but in some countries, especially in Africa, the pace so far has been far too slow. The website www.endpoverty2015.org/goals estimates that investment of about \$50 billion per year would be sufficient to achieve the goals.

On 25 September there was a high-level meeting at the UN in New York. Many countries and other bodies made new pledges. The 'major commitments' highlighted were over \$4.5 billion for education and \$3 billion for fighting malaria. Contrast these sums with the **\$700 billion** being

proposed as I write in Bush's rescue plan for the US economy. And **\$900 billion** was invested globally in arms in 2003.

Debt Relief

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank approved projects, made loans (much of the money finding its way back to developed countries) and now impose tough repayment plans.

"I encourage you in your advocacy for total debt cancellation for poor countries because, frankly, it is a scandal that we are forced to choose between basic health and education for our people and repaying historical debt." — President Mkapa of Tanzania, 2005 (quoted from www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk).

Trade Justice

Theologian and film-maker Robert Beckford describes in christianaid.co.uk/actnow/opinion how a part of Ghana that used to grow rice successfully with local subsidies was devastated when its market was flooded with cheap imports. Villages were thereby impoverished. He calls for economic independence for poor countries.

GCAP

The campaign 50 Global Days of Action against Poverty & Inequal-

ity, which finishes on 20 October, is concerned with the three issues of debt cancellation, trade justice and climate change.

People are asked to stand up together and make a declaration. This is a small part of the longer version: "...We stand up now because we do not wish, years

from now, to stand in front of the next generation and say 'we knew that millions of people were dying unnecessarily every year – and we stood by, doing nothing.'"

I'm planning to make a presentation at the October Area Meeting.

Jane Mitchell, Argyll

Silence

At Quaker meetings, the silence of the assembly is unruffled by sounds of chairs, clothes or the noises of cars and children.

Away, silence is different.
The studied silence of libraries.
The meaningful silence of accord.
The angry silence of confrontation.

We speak to communicate
but the noiseless lattices
between words and people
carries messages too,
like our lives — not quite clear.

© Fleming Carswell, Glasgow

From *Inspirations from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales*, Anchor Books

A Quiet Day for Scotland

Action of Churches Together in Scotland proposes an annual 'Quiet Day' to be held on the weekend nearest to St Andrew's Day (30 November). What they suggest is that churches organise what sounds quite like a short period of Quaker worship. Resources are available on the website www.acts-scotland.org.

A Quaker on Hiroshima day*

One minute before the start
my dirty hand shaken at the door.
Silence.

Silence for fifteen minutes.
Stand to speak on garden paradox:
“Last chore this morning’s gardening
— traffic-composted weeds
thrown into community garden.
Is the rubbish good or bad?”

The Friends debated it
this Hiroshima day.
No verdict.

No person is simply good or evil
but mixtures in varying proportions
on different subjects
— at least so I believe.

Meeting’s silent profundity
broken by entering wave of children
not subdued by adult silence.

After sixty minutes
multiple handshakes,
quiet words.

*The atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August, 1945.

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Published in October Newsletter of Horfield Quakers (2001).
Published in *Inspirations from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales*,
Anchor Books.

Notices

Quaker Quest Preparation for 2009

We have decided to use National Quaker Week 2009 to publicise a Quaker Quest programme that we are going to run in Glasgow. Each programme is a series of public meetings (between 3 to 6 meetings) on Quaker themes

If it is successful, we would hope to run the programme on other occasions and in other locations within our Area Meeting (and possibly further afield). We will need a core team to run the programme (facilitators and 'support staff') which is why we are giving ourselves a good year to prepare for it. Later on we will need to ensure that members of the core team receive training in facilitation of the programme, publicising it, etc.

To start the ball rolling we have organised a 'Motivation and Inspiration Workshop' next month on Saturday, 18 October, 10.30 to 4.30 in the Meeting House. Two experienced facilitators David Bowgett (Leeds) and Michael Hennessy (Runcorn) are coming to share with us some of the experiences of successful Quaker Quest programmes in England. I am hoping that some of you will have heard of the programme and will be enthusiastic about getting it off the ground in Scotland.

Pete Stuart, Outreach Committee, Glasgow

Gospel of Thomas Group – Short Seminar 2008

We will be meeting on Sunday 26 October at Dalry and intend to discuss Logion (Saying) 11. Please let us know as soon as possible if you intend to come.

Further details from Rosemary Gascoyne, 57 Main St, Dalry, DG7 3UP, telephone 01644 430468, or by email from Jack Squires at cummertrees@btinternet.com.

August AM Minutes – Trustees' Report

The Trustees' Report mentioned in the Minutes is not attached to them because it is quite long.

Copies are available on request from Margaret Morton, tel. 0141 889 2865, email margaretmorton@btopenworld.com.

October Area Meeting

The meeting will be held in Dunblane in the Annexe to Scottish Churches House (not Leighton House!) on Saturday 18 October at 11 for 11.30. This is the northern-most building shown on the map, and is behind the main building.

A train leaves Glasgow Queen Street at 1011 arriving in Dunblane at 1048, and a bus (destination Dundee) leaves Glasgow Buchanan Bus Station at 1000 arriving at Dunblane Police Station at 1056. Cross to the east side at the railway station and take Stirling Road towards High Street. From the Police Station (bus stop) take Beech Road down to High Street. In either case continue north along High Street and then past the Cathedral.

Cars can turn into High Street from Perth Road B8033 (roundabout) and may be parked at Haining, north of the Cathedral or in the Braeport Centre carpark off Kirk Street from which there is level access to the Annexe. (The access direct from Kirk Street has a steep path with steps.)



The following Area Meeting will be in Glasgow on 15 November.

Copy for the next *West Scotland Quaker News* should be sent by Wednesday 29 October to the editor at the address on page 2.

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