

The Northern Quaker



**Summer
2012**

North Scotland Area Meeting

Contents

Comments	page 3
North Scotland Area Meeting May 2012	page 4
Sixth World Conference report 1	page 5
Sixth World Conference report 2	page 8
Reflection on sixth World Conference	page 10
Report on Meeting for Suffering March 2012	page 10
QPSW Spring Conference	page 13
Country traditions	page 14
Central European Gathering, Poland, May 2012	page 15
Chat from Quaker Life Rep Council	page 16

News

Area Meetings for 2012

- **24-26 August, Pluscarden**
- **10 November, Inverness**

Next General Meetings for Scotland:

- **September 8th in Nairn**
- **November 17th/18th (residential) in St Andrews**

Online newsletters available at www.quakerscotland.org:

- *Tayside Quaker*
- *West of Scotland Quaker News*
- *Northern Quaker*
- *Scottish Friend*

Remember North of Scotland Quaker Trust has funds for attendance at courses and conferences; check the Woodbrooke catalogue at www.woodbrooke.org.uk

Comments

Firstly, my apologies again for the delay in producing my second edition of the Quaker News. At least the editions are not being “lapped” by the Area Meetings.

I was fortunate to be able to attend the last Area Meeting in Elgin and the speakers have kindly provided summaries for this edition. Of particular interest are two reports from Chris Staplehurst and John Melling who attended the sixth Friends World Conference in Kenya in April 2012. We thank all Friends in Elgin who made the day so comfortable, especially the lavish spread of food which was provided for us.

The drawing on the front cover is of Pluscarden Abbey, the venue of the residential Area Meeting to be held on 24th-26th August, for which a booking form is enclosed in this edition. Unfortunately my work prevents my attendance, but I have very fond memories of previous meetings, and would encourage you to attend if possible.

However, unlike the Spring edition, I have had no shortage of “copy”, and thanks to all contributors. Due to space restrictions, I have held back some material for future editions but, as usual, contributions are always welcome in any form to myself: Harry Horsley, 11 Cottown of Balgownie, Aberdeen AB23 8JQ Tel. 01224 706989
harry.horsley@uk.bp.com or harrydhorsley@gmail.com

Advance notice

Inverness Meeting are hosting Woodbrookes on the Road on Saturday 20th October when Tim Peat Ashworth, Biblical Studies Lecturer, will lead a Study Day on “Quakerism – Early Christianity revived?”

Further details will be available at Pluscarden in August and the next edition of the Northern Quaker

Area Meeting in Elgin 12 May 2012

There was a good turnout of about thirty Friends and Attenders at this Area Meeting, and we were splendidly catered for by the small number of Friends in Elgin.

The way the agenda was arranged, with printed minutes of routine matters on each seat, left maximum time for the very interesting reports in the afternoon. Noteworthy of these less exciting, but essential matters were: *Data protection* – we are assured by the Treasurer that we are properly registered. *Safeguarding policy*: Trustees have agreed a policy, which was duly received by AM. The procedures have still to be finalised and when this is done we shall turn to implementation. The North of Scotland Quaker Trust has finally, after many years' effort, not least on the part of Michael Baker, had its *Governing Document* approved by OSCR. This means that the Trust is now able to act under contemporary rules. In practice this means that it is better able to meet the needs of Friends and Attenders, for example by giving grants for travel and conference participation. So, *please* make use of it by applying to the Treasurer, Marion Strachan, if there is a course or a conference you would like to attend.

Another agenda favourite has now moved a step forward – some of the remaining money from *Ernle Beyts's bequest* will now be used to organise an event for children aged between 8 and 11.

We will return to the matter of our regular donations once Trustees have had time to consider it, but we did decide to make a donation of £500 towards the extension to *Woodbrooke College*, the unique Quaker education establishment where so many of us have enjoyed stays.

Mary Dower has attended her last Meeting for Sufferings as our representative, but David Sanders will continue as the main rep, while we nominated Jane Palmer to be his alternate (it is a MfS appointment). This new arrangement, which is being implemented throughout BYM, will reduced MfS considerably and hopefully make it more manageable.

While on nominations, we were reminded of the need to take account of our large geographical spread when we consider nominations committee appointments. We urged all meetings to try to nominate Es/Os, or E/O representatives as we do not have a full complement.

After lunch we heard several reports. As these will be printed elsewhere in this issue I shan't attempt to summarise them. Suffice it to say that they were all very interesting, as you will see. Diana Brockbank presented her "alternative" report on the Quaker Life Representative Council meeting with "audience participation". The meeting was based on the booklet, a copy of which was sent to all meetings, called "Deepening the Light of the Spirit: Resources for Spiritual Practice". Then Mary Dower described the Meeting for Sufferings in March, her last. Some of the subjects were Speaking out/Advocacy. Pamela Affleck and Ruby Hicks both gave lively and very different accounts of their attendance at the

QPSW Spring Conference. Finally, Chris Stapenhurst gave us impressions of his participation in the Friends World Conference held in Kenya in April. While the Young Friends, who came from diametrically opposed Quaker traditions, could not agree on an Epistle, once they gave up the attempt were able to let their hair down and dance, sing and play the night away. Chris concluded that if you can't do something with joy maybe you shouldn't do it at all. Both evangelism and activism are forms of service.

Friends – we meet again in Pluscarden on 24 August – make sure you fill in the form (included with this issue) now! John and Diana Lampen will be leading us in an Experiment with Light.

Eva Deręowska Aberdeen Meeting

Sixth World Conference report 1.

I went to the Sixth World Conference hoping to learn something more about Friends internationally, and to see how geography affects the manifestation of our Society. I came prepared for sights of bigoted evangelisation and doctrination, but also for spirit-centredness and perhaps a greater adherence to christian discipline. What I witnessed was a gathering of a globally sparse Society nourished by the Spirit, looking inwardly for unity and Friendship, but mostly just happy to be together.

Racially we were divided almost equally between black (mostly Kenyan) and white, with small groups of South Americans and far-east Asians – this roughly describes the range of cultures and traditions present at the World Conference. I thought of the history of hostility between us nationally, and even amongst Friends, so I think it meant a lot that people far from home and in a strange place were able to feel so at home and relaxed as I feel we did. The atmosphere throughout was patient and attentive.

For me, the most important programmed elements of the conference were the morning worship sessions, and the 'home group' sessions. The first were two hours long and led by a different geographic region each day – East Africa, the Americas, Asia and West Pacific, Europe and Middle East, and Africa respectively. These included prayer, singing, a message and worship, and did a lot to teach us about the culture and theology of Friends around the world.

The home group is supposed to provide a more intimate and structured setting for people to meet, so we were divided into ethnically diverse groups of about 10 which met daily. My group encompassed Kenyan, British, American, Dutch, South African, Philippine, programmed, unprogrammed, semi-programmed liberal, evangelical, rich and poor Friends. Together we sang, prayed and played games, but most of the (and the most interesting) time we spent discussing our various cultures, society and experiences. I was touched to learn about gender relations in Kenya which at present prove very stressful and generally hostile to women – I think this might be one area where we might have something to contribute to the betterment of a foreign region. It was also a very good way to learn about the work being done by friends to mend the broken world. This sort of contact is import because it helps us to discriminate amongst the huge number of organisations and agencies doing this sort of work in favour of

those whose values we share and with whom we have personal connections, and also because it encourages a more mutual exchange of ideas and energy than the donor-recipient relationship allows for.

I doubt if anyone attending the conference was able to avoid contemplating and question our Quaker identity. We all came expecting to see peculiar manifestations of the Quaker traditions. Some friends are certainly and unambiguously bible-orientated and have, what may appear to us to be, narrow conceptions of what the Truth is; just as, I expect, we appear to them. From my experience these differences only caused tension when we allowed them to, though other friends at the conference felt otherwise. In particular, many homosexual friends felt excluded and rejected by those who testify against homosexual practices. Young Friends (i.e. my peers and I) were unable to produce an epistle, to put it simply as I see it, on account of two dynamics – around an emphasis on expansionist evangelism against a modest activism, and around a commitment to Christian unity against an embracing of human diversity.

For myself, I've come to feel that our various Quaker traditions cannot and ought not really to be compared. We share a common history, a commitment to peace and to bettering this world, and call ourselves by the same name but otherwise any outsider would think we are quite distinct religious communities. And understandably so – god maybe one but we are many, and as a number of speakers reminded us throughout the week, religious is not god's way of reaching down to us, but our way of reaching up to god, so I'd expect the church to be as diverse as we are, adapting to the needs of each respective community. Whereas in Scotland we seek in the Society of Friends a spiritual fulfilment which is lacking in our society, in Kenya there is greater need for community atonement and the church facilitates this accordingly. Evangelism and political campaigning are really both forms of service to others.

More fundamentally, I've struggled with the spiritual arrogance associated with religious organisations. It is often supposed that we who participate in religious practices, do so because we feel it somehow betters us, and that we must therefore consider ourselves better than those who do not participate. This association is particularly strong with the exclusivity of 'the chosen' and the moral elements of the christian traditions. Only a little empirical observation is necessary to see that religious adherents are neither morally superior nor more spiritually enlightened than anyone else. Nor can I testify that the righteous hermit is any better off than the unrefined manual labourer, or the 'feral youth of the ghetto'. I hold political activists and campaigners in high regard, but these seems as often to be motivated by non-theist humanitarian concern as by religious conviction.

So I am attracted to Jesus' comparison of his message to the doctor's medicine which is not for the righteous but for the sinful. Similarly, I'm uneasy with the division between Quaker and non-Quaker. Sometimes I'm asked 'is such and such a Quaker?' and often feel compelled to reply 'yes, but s/he doesn't know it yet', which illuminates the artificiality of this categorisation. I've become increasingly uneasy with identifying myself as 'a Quaker', which is as much an outward form as those which early friends sought to make obsolete, and prefer to see the Society of Friends as a spiritual support and worship (and social) community. I can't deny that the history and practices of the people called Quakers speaks to me. In this sense, I feel I am a quaker in the same way as I am a native English speaker.

If our global quaker identity is tenuous it is of no consequence, since even a completely arbitrary characteristic which brings people together in friendly communion is worth celebrating. In bringing us together physically, the World Conference fostered a safe environment for sharing spiritual and

deeply emotion experiences, discussing political issues, learning about and from foreign cultures, exploring our respective identities and generally and most importantly enjoying one another's company. Young Friends' failure to produce an epistle was negative and painful for some, but the process of trying was also positive for these reasons. Indeed, on nights when we did not meet to discern our epistle, young friends met to play and have fun together – we taught each other songs and dances, played games, and on one occasion formed a massage circle such that those in it could simultaneously give and receive a back massage, and devised a systematic two hug algorithm to ensure that everyone involved would receive exactly two hugs from each other participant!

These experiences have convinced me that business and service more generally, is better neglected than done grudgingly.

Many evangelical friends expressed appreciation for silent worship and the unprogrammed business method, just as unprogrammed friends admired and valued the discipline and sincerity of evangelical friends and their lively worship. There was what appeared to be a largely informal Kenyan music group who played, unprogrammed, a number of times during the conference, usually during meal times. As people heard the noise, they'd come to investigate then gradually break into dance. The African youth were the first to start dancing, then the youth from other regions and cultures, then the older Africans, until all people were dancing. These were some of my favourite moments of the conference, partly because I was kept proportionately well fed and poorly exercised otherwise, and partly because it people put aside differences and inhibitions to enjoy being together.

A few final notes of what inspired me. Friends in New Zealand refer to their country by its Maori name, Aoteroa, and the Maori refer the the Quaker community as Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri, the faith community that stands shaking in the winds of the Spirit. The Korean Friends Service Committee in presently campaigning against militarisation of the west pacific seas. And the words of a Nepalese Friend:

I do not understand God, but I know God loves me;
 I do not understand Trinity, but I know God loves me;
 I do not understand saltiness, but I know I must be salty;
 I do not understand light, but I know I must shine;
 I do not understand love but I know I must love;
 I do not understand programmed Friends, but I know they are my Friends;
 I do not understand unprogrammed Friends, but I know they are my Friends;
 I do not understand evangelical Friends, but I know they are my Friends;
 I do not understand liberal Friends, but I know they are my Friends;

I hope Friends will ask me further questions of my experiences at the conference.

Chris Staplethurst. Aberdeen Meeting

Sixth World Conference report 2.

Friends World Conference, Kenya, April 2012

The Friends World Committee for Consultation was founded in 1937 to promote contact between Yearly Meetings. The geographical distribution of Friends was very different then, being largely confined to the Northern Hemisphere. Today there are an estimated 370,000 adult Friends in Kenya*, and growing numbers in Latin America. FWCC works through four sections, one covering each of the Americas, Europe including the Middle East, Africa, and the Pacific from India eastwards. In Europe it supports the life of small developing Yearly Meetings.

After a lapse of 21 Years FWCC convened a sixth World Conference which gathered from 17-25 April 2012 at Kabarak University high in the rich agricultural Rift Valley of Kenya. Its theme is "Salt and Light: Friends living the Kingdom of God in a Broken World". Some 850 Friends came from 112 Yearly Meetings and Groups. Kenyans together with those from other African countries made up nearly half the Friends present. Northern and Latin America, including Bolivia, were well represented. Around 100 Friends travelled from Europe, most of whom were from Britain Yearly Meeting. Friends from many of the smaller Yearly Meetings in the Asia Pacific region were present in small numbers. We were a rich mix of Programmed, Unprogrammed and Evangelical Friends together with a few from the small Conservative Branch. The world distribution of the branches of Quakerism is complex – Kenyan Friends have Programmed Worship: Latin Americans are Evangelical.

Conference opened up the opportunity to both respect each others belief positions and value each others worship practices in the knowledge of the life of Jesus, The Light of God, our common Quaker origin, the peace witness and our shared form of church government. The daily 1 1/2 hour morning Worship and the daily meetings of the Home Groups were to be the heart of the experience. From arrival on campus an underlying atmosphere of loving mutual respect prevailed, aided not least by the many happy Welcomes from Kenyan Friends.

In her keynote, Kenyan Quaker theologian, Esther Mombo, said that unlike early Christians and early Quakers we are failing to live up to being Salt and Light. She reflected on the many qualities of both salt and light. Gandhi had once said that the greatest deterrent to Christianity was Christians themselves. It was encouraging to hear her speak of the commitment among Kenyan Friends to economic, social and political concerns as expressions of religion.

Each morning Worship was led by Friends from a (sub) continent. It was inclusive of strands of Quakerism in that part of the world. The most impressive singing was to the rhythm of Latin American music! Each of these Worship sessions included Testimony. I particularly remember those from a young Southern African Friend who had escaped from the land of her birth at the age of four, and from a Guatemalan who believed it was through the grace of God that she had escaped murder in a restaurant when all around had been killed. Then there was the young New Zealander who spoke on what Quakerism means in Life. But perhaps the most impressive was a call to examine our own brokenness by a Friend from our own continent, who sharing a personal tragedy, then listed other possible forms of brokenness which we might have experienced, before concluding by asking Friends to stand if they had experienced such limitations themselves. I am not aware of anyone within my sight who did not stand. Thus the theme of brokenness in the world became both personal as well as generic.

The Home Group to which I was allotted was unusual – there were no North Americans. We were

drawn from Kenya, Rwanda, Southern Africa and Indonesia with one from each from England Scotland and Ireland. Each quietly brought out their own strengths. Sometimes we waited on helpful translation!

I had approached the World Conference hoping to offer some small bridge building. In any international setting differences of outlook can be expected. For Friends gathered from 52 lands, the developments in the branches of Quakerism were in the background. Whilst Worship, Home Groups and developing friendships strengthened the Wholeness of the occasion, unity over priorities in sustainability was more difficult. Preparatory work back home was reflected into 'Thread Groups' each one convened to study a sustainability topic. The weaving of these threads into a firm fabric was a lot to ask over a short time. The conference developed a spiritual empowered call for Peace and Ecojustice.

Within the overall sense of settled harmony there were some difficulties. In plenary Donald Thomas, an octogenarian of British background and long time resident in Kenya raised Over Population, saying that when he came to Kenya the population had been 5 million whereas today it is 45 million in a country now having to import food. He regretted that Population had not been included as an issue to be faced. Two northern hemisphere Friends took a contrary view. Friends, this is a subject the world cannot avoid!

Another difficulty was that experienced by Young Friends, when following from their discussions, they concluded that they were not in sufficient unity to agree an Epistle.

A third centred on a Greeting from Gay Friends which had been removed from a Notice Board leading to a heartfelt plea for its return. Subsequent to the conference a British Friend, Douglas Rennie in a letter to the Friend (11th May) wrote that his understanding is that the letter was removed to protect African Friends and those of us gathered at Kabarak adding that Friends and their churches are at serious risk of persecution including killing over this matter.

That problems were in the open is indicative of the underlying supportive atmosphere which was sustained throughout the conference. At an individual level contacts blossomed whether through the daily barrage of happy voices across the Dining Room, or quietly, as when I encountered a serene local young Kenyan Friend at a junction of paths where she stood waiting to give me a copy of her pamphlet on Praise and Worship.

This conference provided the opportunity to get to know Friends from across the world. Understanding within the family of the Religious Society of Friends/ the Friends Church should be a prerequisite for Quaker work in building understanding out there in the struggling world. Given the diversity of Quaker belief, and of cultural backgrounds, this conference achieved all that could be expected of it. The international organising committee, staff and volunteers deserve credit. The Epistle (the Friend 4th May) conveys the depth and richness of the occasion.

John Melling. Inverness

* Malenge, Zablon, 2012. Early Christianity Revived in the Perspective of Friends in Kenya, Nairobi: Star Printers.

Reflection on sixth World Conference

At this moment the sixth World Conference of Friends is gathered at Kenya University, with the theme of “Being salt and Light”. I have looked at the study pamphlet for the gathering, and it has made me think, with joy, about the diversity of experience among Quakers.

A sentence in Advices and Queries no. 17 says “Each of us has a particular experience of God and must find the way to be true to it”.

So I have been focussing on the Practice and Presence of God. A line from the a hymn that is sung at our local church I have found helpful; “be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here”

I have also found various ideas from different sources that seem to express what I experience myself. Here are some of them:

“We need time to dream; time to remember, and time to reach the infinite. Time to be”

The American Indian believes profoundly in silence. The sign of perfect equilibrium”

“Silence is the absolute peace, or balance, of body, mind and spirit”

“I surround myself with silence. The silence is within me, it permeates my house beyond the surface of the outer walls, and into the bordering woods. It is one silence, continuous from within me, and outwards in all directions” (Alice Koller). My comment – and the silence is there, no matter what external noise can be heard.

My favourite verse from J.G Whittiers’ hymn “ Dear Lord and father of mankind”:

“O Sabbath rest by Galilee! O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee,
The silence of eternity, interpreted by love.

Mary Barnes, Lochaber and Lorne Meeting

Report on Meeting for Suffering March 2012

This is my last report on M for S as my term has come to an end. The system of representation of AMs is changing. From now on only one rep will travel to London for each meeting. The other is will be the alternate, receiving papers, keeping up to date and attending when the first is unable to do so. For North of Scotland this will normally be David Sanders with Jane Palmer as alternate.

Our clerk noted that "It was encouraging to receive so many A M minutes” and she asked we mention this in our reports since this dynamic two-way communication is so important. Though I don’t think North of Scotland Area Meeting has ever felt moved to send one.

In the morning we continued our consideration of Speaking out and Advocacy. We recognised that Public Statements should not be too frequent, but have to be timely and they have to relate to issues in which Friends are actively engaged. However given the way Friends do business we

often miss the moment so we've agreed a change of practice. In future if delay would mean we missed an opportunity we will put our trust in the Recording Clerk and Central Staff to issue statements on our behalf. They will still endeavour to consult the clerks of M for S, Trustees, YM and relevant Central Committees with before issuing statements.

Our minute continued “our weightiest statements will be effective if rare. We recognise the impact of statements:

- on the public through the internet and other media;
- as guidance to Friends for discussion and clarification;
- and as information to seekers who want to understand where we stand.

We want the words we speak to reflect the way our lives speak. When we do make a public statement we want it to be relevant to public events and timely, so that people are listening.

We know that for our statements to be useful we have to speed up our response.”

Strengthening Advocacy

By Advocacy we mean the unseen process, building up relationships with appropriate public servants, ministers and elected representatives, and representing our values as well as the voices of those who are losing power in society.

When we select an issue as our target for change, we need to increase our knowledge on it, and then relate to the ministers, members of parliament and civil servants dealing with that issue.

This does not just happen but springs from our experience and knowledge. It cannot happen in isolation, but needs to come from many concerned Friends centrally and locally.

This was supported in particular minutes from four AM's. I am not aware that North Scotland has ever forwarded a minute to Meeting for Sufferings. It is wonderful to see how similar topics are on the minds of several meetings at once. Naturally when incidents occur on the political scene or in the news we should expect that if Friends are aware of the needs of the world and the promptings of what Love requires of us then they will take these concerns to their local and Area Meetings. Our clerk particularly asked us to report back to you the increase in number of minutes arriving. They both initiate and support the work done by M for S and confirm we are responsive to the Spirit. (I remember an earlier occasion when it was apparent that friends in one Area Meeting had corresponded with another in a way that seemed manipulative rather than the result of prayerful attention to the Spirit. The difference was apparent and confirmed that when truly gathered we do recognise the promptings of the spirit. It demonstrated to me yet again how we need to be aware of the will of God in all our business, not just a consensus.)

Meeting for Sufferings has consistently looked for more contact with political decision makers. So we are asking Area Meetings to support us in asking Trustees to give greater priority to advocacy with political decision-makers. If we give priority to one area of work this necessitates acceptance that other Quaker work may have to be curtailed, to release resources to achieve this. This is particularly relevant in view of the Y M Treasurer's verbal report in the afternoon. Our positive hopes of the morning met financial realism.

We have reported to Area Meeting before on the decline in the level of individual contributions

to central work. We have to remind you once again that our work is currently sustained by the legacies of past Quakers and income from the Hospitality Company at Friends House not by our contributions which are not adequate. And looking round those of us attending Area Meeting in Elgin I didn't see any likelihood that there are any among us who are likely to be able to leave legacies of a million or more, the size of those of Friends who died in the recent past.

Indefinite Detention of Migrants and Asylum Seekers

A minute from QPSW Central Committee supports the work of QARN, the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network & we received minutes from three Area Meetings in 2012 on the indefinite detention of migrants and people seeking asylum which endorses the Statement.

We have expressed our outrage at this disgraceful practice. We ask Quaker Peace & Social Witness to produce a statement on our behalf, based on the QARN statement, and reflecting the strong feelings we have expressed, calling for the immediate end of indefinite detention. Meanwhile, all of us in our Local Meetings area asked to write to MPs using the background information in the QARN statement.

Meeting for Sufferings has expressed both supportive and critical views concerning the Large Meeting House refurbishment, which the Trustees heard in our March meeting. We shared the wide spectrum of views about the offer of the James Turrell skyspace installation. The Trustees acknowledged that within their terms of reference they informed Meeting for Sufferings rather than consulted but were clear that they have acted in the case of the Large Meeting House development within their terms of reference.

We still heard some disquiet about how the relationship between Meeting for Sufferings and Trustees feels, but were reminded that we should recall all the work on RECAST, Trustees' Terms of Reference, and the Review Group of Meeting for Sufferings and Trustees - all work which has appeared in our agendas over many years. Perhaps we are still discovering by experiencing. Trustees recognise the need to make clear to us when they are seeking direct guidance from Meeting for Sufferings and when consultation is indirect or informal. We your reps acknowledged the need to give good attention to Trustees reports. To sum up we got it right in the morning, but in the afternoon it was not so good. More formally this was minuted as "In the morning the roles related well; in the afternoon there was doubt. "

Other requests we were asked to report to Area Meetings:

- to take immediate action to advocate through MPs for the end of indefinite detention of migrants and asylum seekers
- to write individually to the Foreign Secretary for the UK to oppose any attack on Iran and uphold peaceful means of resolving conflict
- to support the October 2012 March for Justice (Jansatyagraha) in India
- to review the Area Meeting financial contribution to central work.

There is a new project entitled 'Sustaining vibrancy in our meetings'. This idea arose as a result of discussions between Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke. It is designed to help area meetings to become 'vibrant, dynamic places, responsive to the promptings of the Spirit' and the research phase of the project is now beginning.

Addendum

Before Sufferings discussed revising our procedure on making public statements Paul Parker our Recording Clerk suggested the following questions to help us in our considerations. Maybe Friends at home would like to consider them too

- What is the purpose of our making public statements – are they for us, or for the world?
- How can we use modern communications well to make our voice heard? What opportunities may we be missing, and what are the risks of this approach?
- Given the changes to how we communicate, how responsive are we ready to be, and what implications does this have for how we decide what to say? What guidance does Meeting for Sufferings have to offer BYM Trustees on appropriate governance of this function?
- Whom does M for Ss trust to speak out on its behalf, and in what circumstances? What checks need to be in place? The more checks, the slower the response.
- How proactive should staff and committees be in looking for opportunities to make our voice heard?
- Does our current policy sufficiently reflect our current practice, or the practice Meeting for Sufferings would aspire to see?

QPSW Spring Conference

For me there were 3 themes to this conference: the original one, “Faith in Action. Exploring the work of QPSW”, then an underlying theme of “sustainability” which ran through many of the activities and lastly the theme of “prophets” and “wrestlers.” This was adopted by attendees from the talk by Susan Seymour who is a Quaker with a varied CV including working for the DTI and the voluntary sector, working in Macedonia and working with the Joseph Rowntree Trust. In her talk she contrasted two sides of her Quaker character, that of prophet (dissenter) and that of wrestler. Both these ideas came from Swarthmoor lectures : “Beyond the Spirit of the Age” by Jonathan Dale (1996) and “Wrestling with the Angel” by Tony Stoller (2001), which I now intend to read. During the conference many people adopted these expressions to describe their experiences. At one point someone summarised it as a withdrawing and an engaging. The prophet/dissenter recognises what is wrong and disapproves, withdraws, although may ofcourse speak out e.g. moving one’s bank account to a more ethical institution, while the wrestler engages with the people, the issues, takes risks e.g. the Occupy movement. We were asked to think about which one we felt was most like us and what we could do to enhance the other one. I think this gave us two new ways to look at our experiences and to inspire us to new experiences.

My first workshop was about the QPSW Turning the Tide (TTT) programme which is training people in non-violent direct action both in the UK and further afield. *They offer workshops resources and advice in a range of areas including: non-violence, power and change; spirituality and activism; campaigning and organising; working together; direct action and building an alternative society.* They have worked with many varied groups including Occupy London stock exchange, the UK Peace Education Network and Disability Wales and are building an impressive track record. Its success is I think in focusing people and enabling them to work towards a goal, as a group, consistently, persistently and above all non-violently.

My second workshop on Sunday morning was also related to TTT, but its adaptation to nonviolent campaigning skills for social change in Kenya. We had a fun workshop with Laura Shipler Chico, Programme Manager for East Africa which conveyed the TTT method to me much more

readily. We had to look at two real life case studies, given two of the “tools” used in training. My group worked on a campaign where farmers in a rural part of Western Kenya took on a bank whose loan terms were unrealistic and inequitable. We were all surprised at how difficult it was to determine what we actually wanted to achieve as a group. After we’d shared our attempts Laura shared with us how the scenarios played out in real life. Both had positive outcomes (the farmers forced the bank to come to the table and negotiate) and Laura is heartened and surprised by the level of success so far. There were 24 new people starting their training in Kenya, the weekend we were at the conference, and all the training is being done by Kenyans, as there is only 1 person from the UK involved with this intake.

In between these sessions we had the opportunity to “Meet the Staff”. This was so well organised that it ran very smoothly, giving a great opportunity to put questions to, and get information from, the staff whose workshops I wasn’t attending. It was good to put a face and a bit of personality to most of the names.

QPSW want us to feel that their work is our work which is sometimes difficult when they are so far away, but I hope now to stay more aware of what they are doing and to support them in their work. There are various ways to show support, for example, by holding their work in the Light at Meeting for Worship, by giving financial support and by writing to MPs, MSPs or whoever, expressing our concerns. I think they really do appreciate support of all kinds from the community of Quakers.

Pamela Affleck Aberdeen Meeting

Country traditions

That great Sussex writer Richard Jeffries once wrote “one is nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth”. The finding of the Divine in “special places” was I think the unstated message of Alistair Simmons’ recent beautifully crafted article in the Northern Quaker.

Although Friends tend to shy away from anything or time of year as “special”, one is left in no doubt as to the specialness of the 1652 Country. For it was here that, like the prophets old and new, George Fox received his inspiration which carried him on for the rest of his life. And where Friends continue to make pilgrimage to the birthplace of their faith.

It is both a fact and a pity that our Society has become so urbanised within the compass of our Yearly Meeting. But then the very word civilisation means life in towns. For it is within the great modern sprawl of our towns and cities that most Friends live.

Did not the Master himself seek the peace of a garden or the solitude of a barren hillside, when he needed to confer with his Maker? In the Sermon on the Mount we are told to go alone when we would speak with God. Does not the Old Testament warn of dire consequences if we neglect to walk closely with our God?

One of the things I miss most about the Society of Friends is the lack of a definite thanksgiving at harvest time. A time when the organ really lets itself go as we “plough the fields and scatter” and are invited to “raise the Song of Harvest Home”. A time when wheelbarrows trundle their way churchwards, each filled with the best produce of garden and allotment. And the local baker bakes the harvest loaf, in the form of a wheat sheaf with a little mouse at its base!

There are other country religious traditions, many of which have fallen by the wayside, or are still kept by local enthusiasts. Where is Plough Sunday still celebrated? The day early in the year when the plough was brought into the church to be blessed. Or where does the Minister still cut the first sheaf of corn? Within the Merry Month of May there is a period known as Ro-

gationtide (rogo rogare = to ask) when special prayers are said to ask God's blessing on the crops and livestock. Without which we would all starve.

Sixty years ago one of the oldest Young Farmers; Clubs in the country decided to revive the traditional Rogationtide service. The service began in the church then, led by the processional cross the choir and vicar, the congregation processed through the nearby lanes stopping at various points for prayer and Bible readings.

The most memorable part of the service came at the end of the service. The procession returning to the churchyard where "each in his cell forever laid the..... forefathers of the hamlet sleep". There as the evening sunlight filters through the trees before the final blessing, the hymn "the King of love my shepherd is" is sung. The singing of this hymn being made more beautiful by the lovely voice of the girl standing next to me. This was truly a time to remember.

Roger H Quinn.

Historical note. Lewes Calf club started c 1927. By 1932 it had become Rinmer and Lewes District Young farmers Club. YFCs have a wide age range of 14-25 with some members running their own businesses. In my day great emphasis was laid on public speaking and efficiency of club business. This latter used to be the envy of visiting speakers. Lewes is the county town of East Sussex and not to be confused with the Isle of Lewis.

Central European Gathering, Poland, 24th-27th May 2012

About 30 Friends and attenders travelled from Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic, the Ukraine, England, Eire and USA, as well as other parts of Poland, for this annual gathering.

Our CEG, which this year coincided with BYM in London, was held in a hotel (also used for teacher training courses) in a remote village near Lake Turawskie in south west Poland, near Opole. The Polish food, with its lavish use of fresh herbs, was delicious, but very salty for my taste. How many Quaker gatherings provide homemade cakes at both coffee and tea breaks? Maybe this delicious cuisine explained the high number of overweight Poles in our midst?

Stuart Masters from Woodbrooke was our tutor over the two days in session. He was excellent, and spoke slowly and clearly and allowed frequent pauses for translation into Polish. Most other delegates could cope with English, or a whispered translation into Czech. He covered a wide range of Quakerism, some sessions aimed at attenders and new members, with plenty of small group discussion and the fun Bull's Eye game which had people arguing about walking our talk.

Richard Waldmeyer (formerly of FWCC, Europe and Middle East section) gave us a lively account of the World Conference in Kenya. This reminded me of our residential AM in Pluscarden, when some of us were shocked by the hellfire and damnation sermon of our Kenyan Friend. In such diverse ways of worship, we have three threads in common: direct connection with God through the spirit, our business method without voting, and our testimonies.

There was little free time in our busy programme, but I managed to get out before breakfast and hear cuckoos and golden orioles, as well as spot a deer and her tiny fawn. The

wonderful rural scenes made up for the many hours of travel most of us endured.

New friendships were forged, and it's good to know some of my new Friends hope to visit Prague, and I to explore their countries.

If you would like a holiday based in this beautiful city, my friends Vrata and Jitka Gregr have two self-catering flats at a fraction of hotel prices: see www.gre-co.cz

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Chat from Quaker Life Rep Council: Deepening the life of the Spirit.

I had another fascinating week-end in Woodbrooke. QLRC is "charged with nurturing the spiritual life of Friends", so we can be "spiritually enlivened communities". We were asked to encourage you all to read the magazine that Quaker Life produces: "Quaker Voices". It is about, or for, Spiritual nurture, and is very readable.

The main theme of the week-end was deepening the life of the Spirit, with mini taster workshops for us to experience 3 (of 9) ideas we might bring back and introduce. One of them was "Experiment with Light" which we will be introduced to at Pluscarden residential AM in August. A book of these 9 tasters has just gone out to Local Meetings in this month's mailing. It is called "Deepening the life of the Spirit". Do find it and give it a look. It is well done and user friendly! Ginny Wall, a tutor at Woodbrooke, introduced the week-end and the book. I quote her first paragraph as it sets the tone.

"Living in the Spirit is like breathing. Spiritual practice is the in-breath while our loving action in the world is the out-breath. One flows from the other. So what happens when we do not attend to the in-breath? We begin to become short of breath, ill even. We may not notice that we are less than fully alive but we have no puff left for the out-breath of our witness to the world".

She told us she has gained a reputation for being passionate about prayer, which her 17 year old daughter found hilarious! However if, like some, you have never heard Quakers speak about prayer, she reassured us that there are many ways to connect with this Oneness we share, and we need to re-learn to BE. Early Friend Isaac Pennington urges us:

"Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running,
Give over thine own desiring to know or be anything,
And sink down to the seed which God sows in thy heart..."
(Quaker Faith and Practice 26.70)

I was drawn to the workshop on Spiritual Friendship as I am experimenting with this with a Friend in our AM who lives way away from me. However the workshop was about meeting together in groups, 3-6 an ideal number. I suppose we could follow some of the ideas anyway; maybe all listen to a piece of music and share our thoughts and feelings later by phone or letter. Hmmm! I need to think about this. In the workshop we first threw out ideas of what we might want from a spiritual friendship, like:

- looking out for each other.
- Nurturing/enabling/enriching/creative
- Commonality of our experience of God, especially if we don't use God language.

The book gives suggestions for activities. I rather fancied experimenting with plasticene ministry ! the activity we were given was to choose one natural object from a table, reflect on it and record in some way. I chose to write and it was fascinating what my hand wrote with very little thought. Some drew, and one made a pattern on his paper with written thoughts and quotes. We ended by sharing anything or nothing as we wished. Two of us chose a shell; both wrote, and the 2 pieces beautifully complemented each other, which is what can happen in a gathered Meeting for Worship.

Another experience for me was “Spiritual Journalling”. This was different from any other writing I have done. We started by centring down; considered the NOW of our lives; wrote; read it slowly; commented for ourselves; and went on like that.

P21 in the book talks about privacy.

“We all have a great ability to deceive ourselves, to gloss over our actions and responses, to be selective or economical with the truth. Privacy in journal writing removes the external audience for whom we might (consciously or unconsciously) shape our reflections. We still have our own inner audience to contend with - how truthful are we being with ourselves?”

Writing a journal for one’s own spiritual growth and discipline is most effective when kept utterly private- no playing to the gallery, no censoring, no subtle shifts of emphasis. We can write spontaneously and without artifice”.

This is essentially a private exercise done in company. At the end we shared our experiences; not our writing or the content. I have the instructions if anybody is intrigued, and I would love to share it.

In my 3rd workshop we explored sound and light. It was all too quiet for me to “get” sound...! I did better with a “holding in the light” practice. (See p32.of the book). In Advices and Queries no:3 it says:

“Hold yourself and others in the light, knowing that all are cherished by God”.

We started with some relaxation and focussing activities then went on to the main exercise. We were invited to bring light, for several minutes, first to ourselves (very important); then to someone whom we know only a little, like, maybe, a shop assistant; and finally somebody whom we find it harder to warm to or have a challenge with. In the last one I came to feel peace, with worry dropping away, and that lovely phrase came into my mind “Let go and let God”

Diane Brockbank

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**Contributions will be most welcome to
future issues of *The Northern Quaker***

The deadline is two weeks after Area Meeting

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