

The Northern Quaker

Winter 2014/15

North Scotland Area Meeting



Contents (click on the link below)

[Comments](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Meeting for Sufferings October 2014](#)

[North Scotland Area Meeting November 2014](#)

[All-age worship, Inverness LM November 30th](#)

[Quaker Life Rep Council October 2014](#)

[A North Scotland Sustainability Network?](#)

[Submission to the Smith Commission](#)

[Replacement for HMP Cornton Vale](#)

[The York Mystery Plays](#)

[The centenary of World War 1](#)

Area Meetings for 2015 & 2016

- 14th February 2015 Inverness
- 9th May 2015 TBC
- 21st-23rd August 2015 at Pluscarden
- 31st October 2015 Aberdeen
- 20th February 2016 Inverness.

General Meetings for Scotland in 2015

- March 7th 2015 St Andrews
- June 6th 2015: Aberdeen
- September 12th 2015: Glasgow
- November 14th/15th 2015: Edinburgh (Residential)

Comments [^contents](#)

Welcome to the winter edition of the Northern Quaker. Apologies that it is appearing slightly later than normal (my defence, M'lud, is that in the Northern Hemisphere Winter does not begin until 21st December).

As well as the usual reports, including an innovative "dialogue" between Pamela and Diana as Quaker Life Reps, I have reproduced in full a carefully crafted letter from the Scottish Quakers Community Justice Network which summarises the issues surrounding the replacement for Scotland's women's prison HMP Cornton Vale. A day after the print version of NQ went to press, the Justice Secretary announced the scrapping of the planned HMP Inverclyde; a rare success for penal reformers

Two articles are included from Inverness Friends about their commemoration of the anniversary of the start of the First World War. I have just finished re-reading Siegfried Sassoon's "Memoirs of an infantry officer", his fictionalised autobiographical account of his wartime experiences, including his denouncement of the war in his "Soldier's Declaration". One small episode especially resonated with me; not the blood and gore of the trenches, but the realisation by the narrator whilst pondering his protest that "our (war) Aims were essentially acquisitive, what we were fighting for was the Mesopotamian Oil Wells". Some things have not changed over the last 100 years.

Finally, please excuse me for including a piece by myself about the York Mystery Plays; the weekend in July was so memorable, I would like others to know about this event and have the chance to experience it themselves (although you'll have to wait until 2018).

As usual, I am always grateful for "copy", and please feel free to send me articles you think might be of interest to Friends; please send to harrydhorsley@gmail.com.

Announcements [^contents](#)

Deaths

Margette French, a staunch supporter of Elgin Meeting passed away on 20th Nov after a short illness. Margette French's funeral was held on Saturday 29th October at Inverness Crematorium. Margette asked that people wear bright colours, not black (even shoes) and perhaps some tartan. There was a short period of Quaker silence during the funeral. She will be very much missed by her Meeting and her many friends from Nairn and further afield.

The Clerk reported the sad loss of Audrey Hebborn, an active Member of Lochaber and Lorn LM for many years until her health declined. A funeral in the manner of Friends took place at Inverness Crematorium on 29th September 2014 attended by Friends from Lochaber and Lorn and Inverness Meetings and the family and friends of Audrey.

Meeting for Sufferings, 4th October 2014 - A time for reflection [^contents](#)

'What has Meeting for Sufferings ever done for us?' Those of you who were at September's GM in Inverness will recall this question from the afternoon's session, and will I hope have had your appetites whetted for news of what Britain Yearly Meeting does between yearly meetings through MfS. October's gathering, coming so soon after MfS in September, was used to provide us with a time for reflection on the role of MfS and its effectiveness.

We are now well into first triennium of new, leaner MfS, where each AM has a representative and an alternate, but only one attends each meeting. How well is this working? The results of a survey of reps and alternates suggest it works better for some AMs than others. Benefits include smaller meetings and the potential for sharing and support between AM reps; drawbacks include problems getting to know other representatives because of the shifting attendance and in some cases (not ours) of a poor relationship between representative and alternate. One challenge for MfS is balancing the demands of the agenda with the leadings of the spirit. As well as discerning priorities for BYM, it also has a prophetic and visionary role, but

how can it be pro-active rather than just reactive when much of the agenda comprises receiving reports from Central Committees and AM minutes, and there is relatively little time for reflection?

During the morning, as usually happens, we received minutes from Area Meetings, one of which expressed its trust in the discernment process at MfS (a good start, then). The other was from Devon AM asking MfS to adopt its 'Courage to Save the Planet' initiative. Sustainability has obviously been a long-standing concern of Devon AM, and this well-tested and discerned concern was prompted by a Friend who, after taking an online course about climate change had become increasingly concerned about the possibility of approaching several tipping points leading to runaway climate change, a mass extinction event and maybe also boiling off the planet's water. This led her, in the run-up to the Paris Climate Summit in November 2015, to suggest the adopting a 'Blue Marble Minute'. At nine pm daily we are asked to hold politicians in the light for a minute, 'seeking to influence them to have the courage and leadership to take necessary actions to address climate change'. Detailed consideration of this, we were told, would take time - did we want to do this, or should Sufferings just encourage us to take it back to our meetings? The ensuing silence resulted in a minute noting the initiative and suggesting that we might want to share it locally. (Of which more later. My own feelings about a daily minute's silence are somewhat complicated and I struggle to remember at 9.00pm).

Before lunch, we split up into smaller groups to reflect on our 'efficiency and effectiveness' by considering what we are doing well, what we could do differently and what we should be doing that we are not doing now. I attended the clerked session. The feeling was that the smaller meetings are an improvement in terms of discipline, worship and engagement, and that MfS was finding its way and becoming more courageous. There is a lot of routine business that is tempting to focus on if confidence is lacking. We should be prepared to let go of this and allow creative spaces to enable us to be more outward looking and involved with the future. We should also not lose sight of our Christian roots. One comment that particularly struck me was that representatives and alternates have been given authority by their

AMs to be discerning Friends for BYM, and should encourage their AMs to get engaged with this. I hadn't quite thought of it in terms of authority, and it's more exciting, and scarier, than just being a channel of communication.

After lunch things got lively and the Blue Marble bounced back. Frustrated by the way the sustainability minute had been squeezed out due to time, Friends spoke passionately of their concern for the planet and of other concerns brought before MfS that had, they felt, been 'disposed of'. Many said 'I did not speak before, but.....'. Perhaps that was not in right ordering, but to me it did feel like the spirit was moving. The Blue Marble Minute (!) is of course unchanged, but I think some of us at Sufferings have been emboldened and the agenda is likely to be loosened in future to give the spirit a bit more room.

Other items that may be of interest:

Quaker Values in Education - Following the threshing conference on education at Woodbrooke in August, a statement entitled 'Every Person is precious - a foundation for Quaker action on education' has been issued and a Quaker Life Network cluster is being established to support interested Friends.

BYM Finances - finances are stable but contributions from individuals and Meetings are down significantly compared with this time last year. Yearly Meeting Gathering 2017 will be held at the University of Warwick 29th July to 5th August.

Heads up:

The next MfS is on December 6th and will be running alongside a Young Peoples' participation day for 14 to 18 year olds. We will be holding Meeting for Worship in 'The Light' for the first time (or, if you prefer, we will be meeting in the newly renovated Large Meeting house for the first time ;) We will receive a briefing paper from the Trustees about the Transparency of Lobbying Act and will consider matters of underlying principle. The Act restricts the amount of money that can be spent in the time before an

election on an activity that could influence how someone votes, and may require organisations to register with the Electoral Commission.

Please contact me or look on the Meeting for Sufferings section of the BYM website for minutes and more information.

Jane Booth, Aberdeen and Banchory Local Meetings

North Scotland Area Meeting [^contents](#)

Area Meeting Aberdeen 8th of November 2015

Eighteen members and three attenders drawn from six of the Local Meetings gathered in Aberdeen for the November Area Meeting. In settled silent worship a reading from the works of William Penn on the relationship between Liberty and spiritual life was offered. By the end of the day the meeting had welcomed two new members; Sila Collins-Walden of Inverness and Lex Rider of Aberdeen.

On a less happy note, Inverness Local Meeting had advised that over a prolonged period of time two Friends had ceased to show any interest in the life of the society and there seemed no likelihood of renewed participation by either. The Clerk would write to each inviting a reply.

Earlier, the meeting had appointed Diana Brockbank as Reporter to the "Scottish Friend" for General Meeting for Scotland to be held in Glasgow later in November and Eva Deregowska as Reporter to the Northern Quaker for the Area Meeting in Inverness on 14th February 2015.

Meeting for Sufferings had met twice since our Pluscarden gathering in August. Their September Meeting had worked towards a successor document to "Framework for Action" (see below), while that in October had endorsed a minute from Devon Area Meeting asking that Friends daily hold in the light those politicians engaged in the negotiations at the 2015 Summit on Climate Change.

Juli Salt gave a succinct report on peace-related activity. Northern Friends Peace Board had met at Dunblane in September when time was given to consider reconciliation for those who had been engaged in the Scottish referendum. Inverness Friends had laid a wreath of red and white poppies at the War memorial, marking the sacrifices of conscientious objectors and other non-combatants in the First World War. Juli spoke of a film "Joyeux Noel" which describes the Christmas Eve truce on the Western front in 1914.

Diana Brockbank and Pamela Affleck told us of a new Quaker Life on-line resource, "Being Friends Together" through which meetings can access study material on subjects from the Bible to Quaker Spirituality to Sustainability, all for the annual subscription of £35. Quaker Life has also established an "Islands Cluster", enabling those Friends and Meetings in islands to share experience.

The Search Group for membership of the Nominations Committee brought forward the names of David James to serve as Convenor for one further year to the end of 2015, and Andrew Marsden and Lynda Mitchell to serve for the triennium from 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2017. These Friends were appointed.

The Nominations Committee itself brought forward a carefully discerned list of names to serve, including David Sanders as Clerk to Area Meeting Trustees, and Tom Sayles as Area Meeting Trustee, each for a first triennium to the end of 2017; together with Derek McLean as Area Meeting Treasurer and Eva Deregowska as Area Meeting Trustee, each for a second triennium. These Friends, together with many others, some subject to consent, were appointed to serve in key roles furthering the life of the Area Meeting. The committee brought forward the name of Andrew Blackadder to serve for a second term of five years as trustee of the property-focussed North of Scotland Quaker Trust.

Nominations Committee had experienced difficulty over support for the clerkship. We asked our present co-clerks to continue pro-tem. David James,

together with his immediate predecessor Eva Deregowska are to meet with the incoming Clerk, Phylida Sayles, to review future arrangements.

The Treasurer reported that Area Meeting Trustees had reduced the reserves policy. This will now be 30% of the cost of only the activities of Area Meeting itself. This decision in turn assisted a recommendation from Trustees that for 2014 donations be made to BYM of £2,000, to NFPB of £500, and to Woodbrooke of £500, to which the meeting agreed.

In relation to the letter addressed to Meetings from the Long Term Framework working party of Meeting for Sufferings on developing a new document "The Way Ahead" our Sufferings representatives introduced a short discussion on four key questions around which Friends present were invited to contribute in writing.

Dates and places for several future Areas Meetings have been amended. The list now reads:

14th February 2015 at Inverness
9th May 2015 location to be advised
21-23rd August 2015 at Pluscarden
31st October 2015 at Aberdeen
20th February 2016 at Inverness

Thank you Aberdeen Friends for their hospitality. It was good to see the restorative work completed on the back wall of the Meeting Room.

John Melling Inverness Local Meeting

All-Age Worship. Inverness LM. Sunday November 30th. [^contents](#)

The theme again this year for our All-Age Worship was Peace.

The Peace Testimony is the foundation of Quakerism. For many Quakers going to war was a dilemma, along with other people of faith who were

opposed to war and of whom some spent time in prison or helped in non-combatant roles. I am the daughter of a conscientious objector myself whose father spent time in prison for opposing war as he chose not to fight.

All-Age Worship was well planned and involved a lot of teamwork with the peace theme in mind and with the construction of a large *papier-mâché* dove, white paper feathers, crayons, pens, poems and lots of glorious food.

Meeting was well attended with a total of twenty-six, nine of whom were children.

The meeting began with silent worship which was a little shorter than usual. A collection of poems from Friends were read out by both adults and children. It was most impressive how articulate and clear the children were.

There is a wonderful story written in 1926, LV Hodgkin's "Fierce Feathers". For some time every child knew this story. An aggressive tribe of Native Americans in rural New York in 1775 entered a Meeting House while Friends were worshipping. Though the group was frightened and nervous they remained calm and silent. The Native Americans, seeing the Quakers had no intention of fighting, set down their weapons and sat silently. The chief spoke saying that they had come to kill but saw the white man sitting. The Chief took a white feather from his arrow and stuck it up on the doorway. This was to indicate that Quakers would be unharmed and were safe. This was a dramatic moment in Quaker history.

After worship each one of us was given a white paper feather on which we all wrote a message of peace. They were then secured in place on the dove which was propped up on the stage. There were many very meaningful words of peace and hope. The ones that spoke to me most were "*Healing and Love*", "*Peace belongs with me*" and "*What most people want but the few take it away.*" "*Peace I give unto you....Jesus*"

Each one of us wrote messages on rice paper feathers (bio-degradable!) and then we all went off along the road in a procession across to the RNI bridge

where the feathers were allowed to float off in the wind and down the river carrying messages of peace and hope. Very exciting for the children!

Then back to the chapel for the most important thing of all, food glorious food, the usual Quaker feast! Most of it was made by Friends. A very enjoyable time was had by everyone.

It was a joy watching children engaging in activities alongside adults and all in one room! Normally our children are “squeezed” into a rather small vestry on Sundays and so it was a nice change to be all together.

All-Age Worship can bring many benefits for all. The sense of being together and sharing in activities all held in one room, an opportunity for all ages to worship together. Children learn about worship through coming to All-Age Worship. I'm looking forward to the next one!

“Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone , but when we join others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of god's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of god's love drawing us together and leading us.” QFP 1..2.8

“Journeys in the Spirit” a special children's work edition can be found on-line at Special Issues Quakers in Britain which is published occasionally. It has lots of information including the White Feather Stories and on ways to introduce our children to explore the dilemmas faced not just by Quakers but others who oppose war. Where should we start? – Surely with the education of our children.

Sila Collins-Walden, Inverness LM

Quaker Life Rep Council 17th-19th October. [^contents](#)

We'd like you to imagine this conversation taking place between your Quaker Life reps Diana (Brockbank) and Pamela (Affleck) as they travelled home on the train from Quaker Life Representative Council (Rep Council for short) at Woodbrooke in Birmingham.

Diana: So Pamela what did you think of your second Rep Council?

Pamela: Well it wasn't as overwhelming as the first one. I managed to go to the entertainment on the Saturday evening instead of going straight to bed like the last time. There are so many Friends from Area Meetings all over the country to meet and speak to, it's quite tiring.

Diana: Yes there was someone from The Channel Islands... Guernsey I think. So us from the north and her from the south. What a spread! She was very interested in the new “Islands Cluster” that the Quaker Life Network has set up.

Pamela: Yes we should mention that at Area Meeting (AM). Goodness, North of Scotland does have a good few islands. It was good that so many Friends from the islands managed to come to Pluscarden.

Diana: Well some of the other Reps were very interested in the fact that we have a residential meeting every year. Mind you it wasn't relevant for all the AMs. Apparently there are moans from some Friends when they have to drive 20 miles to get to their Area Meeting.

Pamela: They wouldn't last long up here.

Diana: No we're made of sterner stuff in the North of Scotland.

Pamela: Did anyone ask you about our telephone conference AM because Quaker Life sent us a copy of their leaflet on it.

Diana: Yes quite a few Friends did. They think it might work in their AMs too.

Pamela: That's good.

Diana: So how do you think the new online learning resource will go down?

Pamela: Being Friends Together? I don't know. The online bit might cause a few doubts.

Diana: Well yes it is online, but that's just the way to find what you want, then you can download it as a pdf and print it out. So it's not like you all have to sit round a computer. On Saturday afternoon I did a really good workshop using materials from the website.

Pamela: Well that's encouraging. I suppose it's a bit like a library with this fantastic index system that helps you to find the exact "book" you're looking for. I imagine a sort of Hogwarts library with shelves of books 3 storeys high right up to the ceiling and passageways and staircases leading you to more books. Apparently there's over a thousand learning resources on it.

Diana: Really? I imagined it as a garden because the way the website is set up you can follow pre-set pathways on a particular theme which lead you to a number of steps or you can just make your own way through it.

Pamela: Yes I like that idea. But do we have to pay to maintain this garden?

Diana: Each local meeting has to pay £35 per year. Like a subscription to a magazine or a library.

Pamela: So what do we get for our money?

Diana: Well it means that the web-site is maintained and kept up-to-date with new resources. Like buying new books for a library or new plants for the garden.

Pamela: Oh I remember there's a password too isn't there. It's like a library card or the key for the door into the garden. You need the password to download most of the stuff so you can print it off. Although you can go in and browse without it.

Diana: How do you get the password?

Pamela: Well a few of the reps were talking about taking out a subscription themselves so they could get to grips with the site. So you could do that but if your local meeting signs up then you can get the password from there. The idea is that the password is available for all those interested. One suggestion was that if you had a Local Meeting newsletter you could put it in there every time to remind people. It's like letting people borrow books from the library.

Diana: There's a lot of stuff on the website. It would be handy to have some guidance about how to use it as a learning tool for meetings.

Pamela: Well the materials do include guidance on this but some people thought it might be a good idea to have a learning group in their meeting to look into it or a meeting could book a visit.

Diana: Oh that's right! They're training facilitators to come for a day to your meeting to help you work through this discernment process that they've prepared. You can book them now for a slot from January onwards or there's also a do-it-yourself one on the website that you could do.

Pamela: My goodness there's a lot to tell Friends isn't there.

Just to fill in a bit about the Islands Cluster. It's part of the Quaker Life Network (QLN) and "is intended to enable Friends on the outlying islands from Shetland to Jersey and all in between to be in contact with each other so that they can share the special experience of living on a small island." To be part of the cluster you need to join the QLN via www.quaker.org.uk/qln-enews stating on the last line that you wish to join the Island Cluster.

After we did this at AM Diana led us in a thoughtful mini workshop based on the workshop she did at Rep Council.

Pamela Affleck, Aberdeen Local Meeting

Quaker Life Rep. Council; Diana's contribution [^contents](#)

We were divided into 8 groups, 2 each with the subjects "Exploring Quaker Spirituality"; "Being Community"; "Exploring our living tradition"; and "Being in the world together". We were given a section from the resource to work with. Our 2 spirituality groups had a piece written about the Quaker Way and a long poem talking to God. It started:

"Oh God, we thank you for the great depth of the Quaker tradition.
...You have met us throughout our history, very deeply,
both as individuals and corporately."

When we had listened to these we had a period of quiet then shared with a neighbour. After this we were invited to write or draw. I was very deeply moved and wrote the following:

" Oh God we thank you" — but I no longer believe in a God out there to talk to. Ah! And I use the picture.

It gives me something to relate to: to talk with; to argue with; to get mad at. Are you hearing me God? I wrote a poem recently. "Oh God I am falling to pieces. Do you hear me God? I am falling to pieces...." Is this what you want? That I fall to pieces? That the parts of me which have become solidified, stuck, are shaken up so hard that something new can emerge? And the something new is not new at all is it? It is the beautiful me who is, always has been and always will be."

Diana Brockbank Forres Local Meeting

A North Scotland Sustainability Network? [^contents](#)

Many of us in North Scotland are concerned about environmental issues and sustainability, but might feel a little isolated and unsure how to act on that concern as Quakers. As individuals, a lot of us are quietly making lifestyle changes in response to our own concern and the Canterbury Commitment, but our geography and numbers present particular challenges for corporate action.

There is a lot of Quaker support out there for greening meeting houses, but this is not relevant for most of our meetings, free as they are from the burden of premises. On the other hand there are few solutions to our problems with transport (probably responsible for the vast majority of the carbon emissions of our meetings) and we may struggle with guilt about using our cars to get to meeting - even when there is no alternative and any cutting back would weaken the life of the meeting.

What can meetings in North Scotland do? Nationally, the 2014 Canterbury Commitment report addresses four key areas in its recommendations for action: strengthening our community, changing our lifestyles, making our Quaker core activities and property low-carbon and sustainable, and working for systemic and policy change. Perhaps one way forward for our LMs is to join forces with like-minded groups. AM recently decided to affiliate with Eco-Congregation Scotland, an ecumenical charity providing support to local churches which will help LMs work with other churches in their locality to promote awareness of environmental issues and undertake local projects. They have a website at <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org> where you can find resources, sign up for their newsletter and find out which churches locally are involved.

How can we strengthen our Quaker community? Lynda Mitchell and I would like to start a network of people in NSAM interested in or wrestling with environmental issues. Initially it would take the form of an email group to share our stories and struggles, consider the spiritual aspects of sustainability, provide information, ideas and mutual support, or whatever

comes up! Lynda has a background in earth sciences and climate change research and now works for a charitable organisation focussing on carbon reduction through sustainable energy use and renewable energy generation. I have a long-standing passion for natural history, a background in biological sciences and a growing interest in political action. We don't want it to be an apocalyptic doom-and-guilt-fest.

Yes, we want to hear about the problems, but there are things we can do, and there are successes to celebrate. Let's hear about them too! Anyone interested can send me and/or Lynda an email (ghlo@live.co.uk lynda_mckenzie@hotmail.com). Those who do not have access to email can contact me on 019755 63980 and we'll try and find a way to keep you informed.

Jane Booth, Banchory & Aberdeen Meetings

The following was published by the General Meeting for Scotland 15th-16th November 2014 at Glasgow

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Submission to the Smith Commission

[^contents](#)

General Meeting for Scotland is part of Britain Yearly Meeting, which unites Quakers in Scotland, England, and Wales. Our submission includes five proposals for increasing devolved power, all of which reflect areas of concern in which Quakers have historically been involved and in which we are currently active. There has been an active Quaker presence in Scotland since the birth of Quakerism in the mid-seventeenth century.

PEACE

Quakers are best known for their peace testimony, which derives from the conviction that love is at the heart of existence and all human beings are equal in the eyes of God, and that we must live in a way that reflects this. Quakers are involved in a wide range of peace activities from practical reconciliation work in areas affected by violent conflict to the development of alternatives to violence at all levels from personal to international.

Proposal 1: Process for Approving Military Action

The requirement for parliamentary approval before the government commits to military action is currently a Westminster prerogative. No consideration of the views of other national parliaments and assemblies or exploration of peaceful alternatives, currently need to be taken into account. We consider it would greatly strengthen the constitutional settlement if approval were to come from all national parliaments and assemblies in the United Kingdom. We also request that, when deciding on military action, ways of 'exporting peace' must also be identified and considered.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Quakers recognise the equal worth and unique nature of every person. Our longstanding work on human rights is rooted in our testimony to Equality and Peace and dates back to our work with refugees and prison reform over three hundred years ago. Quakers in Britain work at all levels from the grassroots with local organisations to the international with the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva and New York to support the promotion and protection of human rights. We have frequent dialogue with the United Kingdom and other governments on ways that human rights can be appropriately embedded in legislation and practice.

Proposal 2: Consistent Application of Human Rights Legislation

A key requirement for devolved powers should be that human rights are maintained or even enhanced. If the Human Rights Act were to be abolished by the United Kingdom government, public bodies operating under the UK government in Scotland would not have to respect it. If the Scottish Government tried to maintain or extend human rights legislation as it exists at the moment there would be a fragmented application of these important laws between public bodies. We ask that Human Rights legislation passed by the Scottish parliament should apply to all public bodies operating in Scotland to ensure consistency of application and to give the Scottish Government freedom to enhance human rights.

Proposal 3: Additional Assistance for Asylum Seekers

Quakers have campaigned for better conditions and rights for asylum seekers for many years. In our submission to the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Asylum we expressed concern that the findings of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, that the Government is practising a deliberate policy of destitution, have not been remedied. At the moment in Scotland, the Scottish Government has limited powers to prevent the risk of destitution for asylum seekers. We ask for powers to be transferred to Scotland that would allow for improvements in living conditions of asylum seekers. For instance these could include ensuring that asylum support rates are adequate for needs and that applicants for asylum are allowed to work pending the resolution of their case.

EQUALITY

The Quaker vision of equality springs from our profound sense of the worth of every human being. Every person's life is sacred and in this we are all equal. Nor can wealth be true riches if it is based on unlimited personal enrichment.

Proposal 4: Tailoring Equality Laws to fit Scottish Circumstances

In our 2014 Statement on inequality we expressed concern about the growing inequality of wealth and income in our country. Devolution of powers offers an opportunity to adjust actions to tackle inequality in Scotland more closely to local circumstances.

We ask (in common with a number of equality organisations) for the devolution of equality laws, which would allow them to be tailored more closely with already devolved areas like housing, health etc. We note that Northern Ireland already has this legislation, which has been beneficial in creating a more equal society. Providing minimum standards are met, a Scottish government should be able to create additional protection and so promote the more equal society that we would like to see.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Quaker recognise our moral duty to cherish creation for future generations. We understand that climate change due to human activities is a symptom of

the greater challenge of how to live sustainably and justly on this Earth and have committed ourselves to work towards being a low carbon community.

Proposal 5: Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by matching performance standards with fossil fuel industry regulation

Quakers in Britain have committed themselves to working to combat the effects of climate change on both the United Kingdom and the world. We recognise that current and unprecedented rates of greenhouse gas emissions, if left unchecked, are predicted to lead to global mean temperature rises of extreme detriment to human beings. At the moment the Scottish government can set emission performance standards but the regulation of fossil fuel industries has not been devolved. For instance we currently have no right to object to fracking underneath our homes. We ask for powers of regulation of fossil fuel industries operating on Scottish soil and in Scottish territorial waters to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. Having the competence to limit the increased extraction and use of fossil fuels, would increase our ability to combat climate change.

HMP Inverclyde [^contents](#)

Quakers have traditionally been involved in penal reform and this involvement continues today in the debate surrounding HMP Inverclyde, the planned new 300-bed replacement for HMP Cornton Vale women's prison which was severely criticised by the Angiolini Commission report.

The Howard League Scotland and the Women for Independence has maintained their campaign against the creation of a new 300 bed prison for women. Other faith groups have now expressed concern at this departure from the agenda of the Angiolini commission on women offenders. Some attention was given to the issue at a Holyrood conference on female offenders on 14th January, at which Mike Nellis spoke, standing in for the scheduled speaker Jean Corston, who had been taken ill. The Justice Secretary confirmed at this meeting that he was indeed reviewing the decision to build HMP Inverclyde, without indicating which way he would go.

A cross party (SNP, Labour, Green - but not Conservative) summit meeting took place to the 21st January to put further pressure on him. The outcome remains uncertain at the time of writing.

A summary of the issues can be found in the following letter sent on 5th January 2015 from the Scottish Quakers Community Justice Network, a group of Quakers involved and interested in work with offenders and victims and in processes of penal policy-making.

“ To: Michael Matheson MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Christine Grahame MSP, Convener, Justice Committee, Scottish Parliament

Commissioning HMP Inverclyde – a new 300-bed prison for women; a response from the Scottish Quakers Community Justice Network

1. We are writing to support the Howard League Scotland’s call for a reversal of the decision to proceed with HMP Inverclyde as a 300-bed replacement for HMP Cornton Vale. We note that the Scottish Prison Service’s (SPS’s) ill-omened proposal to build a new women’s prison of the same capacity as the much criticised existing one has also been publicly opposed by Women for Independence and indeed by the former Justice Secretary, Mr. MacAskill, himself. We are happy to share our firm conviction that this course of action in respect of women offenders should not be taken when something better is both feasible and desirable.

2. The Commission on Women Offenders, prestigiously chaired by Dame Elish Angiolini in 2012, made a clear and convincing case for a much smaller women’s prison to house offenders whose offences are so grave and/or whose risk to others is so great that they cannot but be incarcerated, while simultaneously addressing the social and psychological needs which typically underpin the behaviour of even the most difficult and dangerous female offenders. The plausibility of such a minimalist approach to the imprisonment of women was premised on the Commission’s confidence that Scotland could and should deal effectively with the great majority of women offenders via existing forms of community supervision together with a new

network of community-based support services, akin in intention and ethos to Turning Point’s renowned 218 Centre in Glasgow. We are disappointed that the Scottish Government, which was bold enough to establish the Commission on Women Offenders in the first place, and then (seemingly) to endorse its broad conclusions, apparently does not share its confidence that a better and safer way of dealing with offenders is within its grasp. It seems to us that the original vision of the Angiolini Report is more deeply in accord with the UN Bangkok Rules on the treatment of women offenders, in whose making the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva played a strong part, than the diluted version now being considered by the Scottish Government.

3. The practical feasibility of replicating, varying and improving upon the 218 Centre model across Scotland is not in doubt. There is ample accumulated evidence in Scotland, and Britain as a whole, of “what works best” with women offenders. A combined cadre of people in local authority social work, the voluntary sector and indeed the SPS itself would be more than capable of rising to the challenge of implementing it, if only high-level leadership is forthcoming. It seems, to any concerned outsider, as if the energy for change that initially grew around the Commission on Women Offenders is being stifled before any serious effort can be put into galvanising the kind of innovation it had in mind. SPS have already indicated that the case for a new 300-bed prison is largely based on what present and future sentencers will expect to be available to them, but it is precisely the current mindset of some sheriffs and judges – and the prison population projections which are extrapolated from it – which needs to be constructively challenged if progress towards a more evidence-based approach towards women offenders is to be realised.

4. We broadly welcome the SPS’s commitment to new forms of imprisonment which will stimulate and support desistance during and after a period of custody. However, too much focus on this obscures the logically prior question of who really *needs* – in terms of rehabilitative potential and public safety – to be in prison in the first place. This question has been at the heart of debate on women offenders in Scotland since its social work and prison inspectorates, in *A Safer Way*, in 1998, jointly recommended the

halving of the then women's population, but since then *progress* – a word which acquires a certain irony in this context – has been negligible: the number of women in prison actually doubled and the endemic problems of incarcerating low-risk but high-need women in a place that, despite its staff's best efforts, was not truly designed to help them lead offence-free lives upon release.

5. The fanfare and optimism with which HMP Cornton Vale was itself opened in 1975 – the anticipation that it would offer something more therapeutic for women prisoners than its more overtly punitive predecessors – lies within living memory. For those with a sense of history this inevitably generates skepticism towards present-day claims that HMP Inverclyde will somehow be a different kind of institution, breaking the mould and accomplishing something new. There are, in truth, no grounds for thinking it will: imprisonment is notoriously prone to having its official aims re-invented, and the “desistance-orientation” envisaged by SPS is simply the latest of many “repurposings”. The commissioning of HMP Inverclyde is, in terms of Scottish penal practice, so obviously more of the same – an especially dismal and dispiriting prospect when what the Commission on Women Offenders boldly proposed so obviously wasn't.

6. The plan to create a 300-bed prison for women not only flies in the face of evidence-based best practice and the spirit of the Angiolini Commission, it also represents a deep failure of moral imagination, which is strikingly at odds with the Scottish Government's more general claim that Scotland can and should become a better country than it has been. Reducing the use of imprisonment for women, once and for all – and replacing it with 218-type centres – would be an admirable place to start on this national agenda, given that it has been wisely said, many times, that the quality of a nation's civic life can be judged by the state of its prisons and its response to its most damaged and vulnerable citizens, among whom many offending women can invariably be counted. As Quakers, we hope that restorative justice might be a more prominent feature of these new centres, because we recognize that even damaged and vulnerable people can – indeed, almost certainly will – do harm to others. Many of them, we believe, would benefit from the empathy

and strengthened sense of solidarity that (alongside tireless efforts to rehabilitate them) restorative approaches can foster.

7. The current redesign of community justice, itself stimulated by the Commission on Women Offenders, means that this is a singularly auspicious moment to think innovatively, to break decisively with the tried, tested and failed. Several decades ago, Baroness Vivian Stern, a renowned penal reformer, called the gratuitous and ill-advised building of new prisons “a sin against the future” because they lock upcoming generations of policymakers into rigid patterns of response to offenders, absorbing energy and resources which might be better deployed on other ways of reducing crime and criminality, (or even on schools and hospitals). Perhaps the worst foreseeable consequences of HMP Inverclyde will be the ways in which it so effortlessly gives renewed legitimacy to the sentencing status quo, actively invites continuity rather than long overdue change and (by default, if nothing else) inhibits the creation of viable alternatives to prison that are more in keeping with the progressive, civilised image that Scotland seeks to portray.”

Letter coo-ordinated by Mike Nellis, Scottish Quakers Community Justice Network. The full report “The Commission on Women Offenders” can be found on the Scottish government website:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Review/commissiononwomenoffenders/finalreport-2012>

The York Mystery Plays [^][contents](#)

This Summer I was privileged for the second time to be able to watch a re-enactment of the medieval York Mystery Plays which are performed every four years. I was first introduced to them by a sister and her husband who met whilst at college in Wakefield and themselves performed in the Wakefield Mystery Plays.

As well as a religious truth or rite, the word 'mystery' means a 'trade' or 'craft' in medieval English ("mastery"), hence the plays are sponsored by the York Guilds and Companies.

Dating to medieval times, traditionally, the plays were played on the feast day of Corpus Christi, which was a holiday and it was a means of bringing the biblical story to the masses in a meaningful way. The plays are in (Yorkshire) dialect, and were written down; the solitary surviving manuscript of the York plays, dating from around 1463-77, is now kept at the British Library.

Although the Corpus Christi festival was abolished in 1548, the plays continued (without the episodes honouring the Virgin to appease anti-Catholic opponents) until 1569. They were revived in the last century and are now performed over two weekends in July every four years.

There are 48 plays in total, but nowadays 12 are performed, always starting with the Creation, and ending with the Last Judgement, but with some variation between cycles. The 2014 selection was:

- Creation of the World to the Fifth Day – The Guild of Building
- The Fall of Man – The Gild of Freeman in partnership with Canon Lee School
- The Shepherds – The Guild of Scriveners
- Slaughter of the Innocents – Heslington Church
- The Baptism – HIDden Theatre
- The Woman taken in Adultery and The Raising of Lazarus– York St John University
- Entry into Jerusalem – York Mystery Plays Supporter's Trust.
- Christ before Annas and Caiaphas – The Company of Cordwainers
- The Crucifixion and The Death of Christ– The Company of Butchers in partnership with Parish Church of St Chad on the Knavesmire
- The Harrowing of Hell – Parish Church of St Luke the Evangelist
- The Resurrection – The Company of Merchant Taylors

- The Last Judgement – The Company of Merchant Adventurers in partnership with Pocklington School

The plays are staged on waggons which are manually hauled through the streets of York preceded by medieval musicians, and the performances take place at four venues, starting in the grounds of York Minster, where the audiences are gathered.

Although the originals scripts are followed, much imagination is used in the staging; the play Christ before Annas and Caiaphas was in modern dress with one scene ending in a tableau replicating the infamous Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse photo



. Previous stagings of “the Harrowing of Hell” have involved eight-foot tall demons on blades bounding through the audience, whereas this year’s production included a troupe of gothic Morris dancers.....

The overall effect is a mixture of street theatre, biblical story telling, medieval re-enactment and much more. The opening play involves a large green-turbaned “God” describing in broad Yorkshire how he created the universe using curtain backdrops and puppets, occasionally stopping for a drink from his flask of tea (after all, it was staged by the Guild of Builders).



The next staging is in 2018; do make a note in your diary.

Harry Horsley, Aberdeen Local Meeting

The Centenary of World War 1- What do We Learn? [^contents](#)

On learning that the Inverness commemoration of the outbreak of the First World War was to include a march of cadets between the Old High Church and the cathedral of Inverness, Friends decided not to take part in the commemoration. However, a written invitation to the church services prompted further reflection in our Local business Meeting. In the event, three Friends attended individually. We were to be surprised.

While the television screen showed the pomp of official commemorations elsewhere, in Inverness, Peter Nimmo, the Old High Church Minister led a service centred on human frailty in face of the Christian ideal. The gospel reading was Matthew 5.v 38- 48, a theme which Friends at our own recent Woodbrooke on the Road Study Day had struggled with for its expectations on us to “go the extra mile”. A group of handbell ringers sensitively played a quiet tune “In Flanders Fields”. Peter Nimmo himself reflected on our ability to learn from experience in developing peace in a world in which war rages in so many countries. At the outset, the City of Inverness Provost lit a candle which is to remain alight in the cathedral up to the centenary of the Armistice Day in 2018.

Having been granted permission by the British Legion, a wreath of red and white poppies and white feathers, created by Sila, Roger and Kathleen, was laid at the Cavell Memorial in Inverness on 26th September. Thirteen Friends attended. The message which was attached to the wreath read:

“Laid by Inverness Quaker Meeting to commemorate the sacrifices made by conscientious objectors and other non-combatants in World War1 and other wars.”

Eleanor introduced a short silence with these words :

“Friends, we come together to day to lay this wreath to remember all those all over the world who have died in war or because of war.

We pray that we, men, women and children may become true makers of peace.

May we see the people of the world as our brothers and sisters, as one community.

May all injustice, violence and oppression give way to fairness, mercy and goodwill.”

John Melling & Oriole Hall, Inverness Local Meeting

