

West Scotland Quaker Newsletter

December 2016

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Clerk's Letter

Ladies and gentlemen.

Friends House staff in London once put up signs to newly refurbished toilets: 'Ladies' and 'Gentlemen'. They had to take them down again. Why? Well we don't have ladies or gentlemen, that's why. We have 'Men' and 'Women'. Nowadays we might add other gender, or lack of gender, types, but no ladies and gentlemen please, we're Quakers.

What am I on about? Well I am keen observer of social norms and have been struck by quite a rapid change in our Quaker culture – it is quite common now to hear Friends saying things like 'I met his lady and ..' or 'This lady said..' It is usually ladies. It goes with other things that have been changing, like clapping being heard in meeting houses, or the general handshake with everyone at the end of meeting (some years ago only the two elders shook hands).

'And your point is?' I hear you ask. I could be a fuddy duddy older Friend not liking changes to how it was in the good old days. ('How self-aware you are' I hear you mutter.) There may be some of that. But it could be something we need to think about. Quakers' insights stem from an awareness of 'that of God' in all, to which we can all be responsive – our inwards teacher. From this we derive ways of living that reflect the equality of all and how we relate to each other – our testimonies. The testimony to equality led us to not use titles, even mister or missus, or refer to status through 'ladies and gentlemen'. So we called each other by our given names and referred to others as men or women. Some of the testimonies became a straitjacket, though, as we obeyed outward forms instead of reflecting social change and adapting to new circumstances. So we kept the testimony to 'plain dress' and 'hat honour' (keeping our hats on and not doffing them to social superiors). We also kept calling each other 'thee' and 'thou', originally a mark of equality to all but increasingly became a badge of being different when the usage of 'thee and 'thou' had died out. In the nineteenth century we shed these and other fossil behaviour and as a result survived.

So does it matter if we adopt 'ladies and gentlemen' or address each other as Mr or Mrs when this has become a reflection of wider social equality? Or is it anything to do with how poorly we can communicate our Quaker faith to those coming in? You decide.

Michael Hutchinson, Glasgow

Area Meeting in Ayr, 5th October

No matter which route one took to Ayr last Saturday, it seemed roadworks were everywhere. I've never seen so many diversions on one day! But we made it, just in time for a quick, welcome, coffee.

The reading, A&Q 42, perfectly set the scene for the morning consideration of Climate Change, and how Quakers are implementing Minute 36: the Canterbury Commitment. But between the two came a moment which set me on edge. At roll call each of us was asked to identify ourselves (fine), and our membership status (uneasy), in a rather bureaucratic way that I didn't remember. Now, if I understand procedure correctly, any Attender's presence at Area Meeting is heralded by a message from their clerk to the AM clerk. Why, therefore, is it necessary to draw attention to everyone's membership status within a worshipping context? We have a book for the purpose, and I imagine anyone who ventures to an Area Meeting will already be sufficiently involved with their Local Meeting to be in the book. And in any case, if gender is now considered to be a fluid concept, why not membership too?

Martin Mansell, who sits on the BYM Sustainability Group, provided us with what looked like a comprehensive list of the current thinking on Climate Change within that group, and the position reached thus far on various aspects. Friends saw that Population (control of) had been omitted from the list – understandably in my view. It is such an intensely personal area of life, and one has only to think of the horrors perpetrated under the one-child policy in China, to be wary of raising the issue. I well remember the Duke of Edinburgh (sorry about the title – I don't know what else to call him) championing a 'two will do' campaign, back in the late 1960s I suppose it was. It was also noted that the defeatist view, that "..... it is already too late to do anything about climate change..." did not appear on Martin's list.

However, it appears that there is a reluctance to talk about Climate Change at all, never mind population, within society at large – and I would say within Meetings too. A combination of complexities and uncertainties around the issue itself, plus our own feelings of guilt and impotence in the face of it, may account for this reluctance.

Added to that are the much more immediate needs which demand our attention.

So, in any conversations/discussions that we do have about Climate Change, we should concentrate on positive messages, not criticising, threatening or lecturing.

Relating personal experiences is valuable. Grasping an opportunity – downsizing for instance – could allow us to display a living example of simplification of life. And crises, such as the increasing frequency of flooding, should lead to the development of individual and community resilience, and the designing of strategies to lessen the risks.

Human nature, though, decrees that we draw the boundaries of acceptable behaviour just a little bit beyond our own. So if we have grandchildren in Australia, of course we'll fly out for a visit; if we don't like coming home to a dark house, we'll leave plenty of lights on; if we live in the country, we need a car, perhaps two, because our work/commitments frequently take us in opposite directions. How do Quakers 'balance' the environmental cost of travelling to meet each other – AM, BYM, FWCC – against the benefits of personal contact? Should we make greater use of e-communication? Whatever we decide to do about Climate Change, we must remember that everything has a cost.

When I was back at home, I began to think about the success of the 5p carrier bag. To be honest, I thought this was doomed to failure – I thought bags would have to be 50p or £1 before folk would think twice. But I was wrong. Why did this scheme work? Perhaps it was because legislation, (on shopkeepers) and therefore government support, was involved? Or that attractive, long-lasting shopping bags became available in abundance? Did it become somehow shameful to have to ask for plastic bags? Whatever the reasons, how can they be replicated in other areas? (The only drawback of the loss of the flimsy carrier bag, is what on earth are we supposed to put inside our wellies now?!)

At BYM Gathering next year the focus will be on "...movement-building as a process for bringing about lasting change." Our deliberations about climate change, arising from Martin's presentation, should feed into this focus. This might include a visit to AM from George Marshall, the author of a book much used by Martin, and Martin himself is willing to visit Local Meetings to lead discussions on the topic. We were also each charged to bring up the subject of climate change with contacts at one non-Quaker organisation to which we belong.

Martin's presentation continued into the afternoon, so we had to be sure not to overrun. Happily routine business was not onerous. We learned from the Treasurer, Kate Gulliver, that our 'running costs' currently roughly balance with our annual income, and we have the legacies to support our work/activities. Nominations committee has requested job descriptions, from current post-holders, ahead of the next triennium, so folk should know what they are letting themselves in for! Details of nominations/releases are in the minutes. Likewise dates and venues for GM etc.

One death was recorded: Margaret Thomson Davis of Glasgow; and one termination of membership – Pauline Chitty once known at Castle Douglas, of whom no trace has been found. Michael Hutchinson recalled from his days at Friends House that members so terminated have a habit of springing up soon afterwards!

Grateful for the warm hospitality of Ayr Friends, we went our separate ways, hoping to avoid diversions and, in at least one case, joyfully anticipating a fish supper!

Jan Lethbridge, Dumfries

Area Meeting by Telephone, 5th December

A disappointingly small number of Friends took part in December's AM by phone. It was a shame that others from the remoter bits of the Area Meeting weren't able to join in on this occasion, as it is such a golden opportunity to take part in AM from the comfort of your own home, and without a ferry journey and a couple of overnights!

However, 17 or so Friends gathered in their own corners of West Scotland for worship and then phoned in at 7.30. After a caution from the Clerk against heavy breathing (too close to the phone!) we heard a short report about the Young People's Participation Day at Sufferings, which two of our young people, Charlene Dalton and Peter Tyler, had been able to attend, and then turned to membership issues. We were delighted to welcome back Jenny Meade (previously a member of Arran LM now returned from a sojourn south of the border); not so delighted to have to say goodbye to Susan Wood who has moved to Cornwall and is much missed in Islay and Jura LM.

Alastair Reid reported on the much-appreciated Elders and Overseers gathering held in Glasgow in November, and we also heard about the recent symposium on Creating a Just Scotland which was organised by the Parliamentary Liaison Function Group and our Parliamentary Engagement Officer, Mairi Campbell-Jack. We hope to hear more about this from Martin Mansell, our representative on the PLFG.

Following our lengthy reflections at August's AM on how we should take forward our concerns about truth and integrity in public affairs, the Clerk reported that Helen Drewery, Head of Worship and Witness for BYM, is coming to Area Meeting in Glasgow to explore this with us.

Perhaps the biggest item of the evening was the draft budget for 2017 presented by our treasurer, Kate Gulliver. We were presented with three options: to do the same as last year and run a deficit of nearly £4000, to do less but contribute the same and therefore have a balanced budget, or to achieve an alternative balanced budget by doing the same as last year but seeking more contributions from Friends and LMs. After quite a bit of reflection and clarification on various points we opted for the last of these three. So we all need to think creatively about ways in which Friends and attenders who are able can be encouraged to give a little more, whilst making it clear that the different contributions of other Friends and attenders are just as valued.

A number of appointments were made following Nominations Committee's report. In particular, Nominations Committee are still seeking Friends willing to organise an Enquirers' event in 2017. South East Scotland organised last year's – now it's our turn. Do get in touch with Gisela Creed for more information if you think this is something you could help with – newer Friends, with their more recent experience of encountering Quakers, are particularly welcome, but of course so too are "older hands".

The Clerk had indicated that we should be finished by 9.00. I don't know how he does it, but we finished with a few moments of silence and the signing of the minutes - on the dot!

Bronwen Currie, Islay & Jura Meeting

General Meeting, 12th and 13th November

An Impression

We met in Perth – frae a’ perts
North, South, East, West
The sum of us – a part of us
a Gaitherin’ of minds, hearts

The silence centred us
The words of Thomas Kelly
Light in a time of darkness
Hope as the gloom descends
but the flame is not extinguished

We discussed the future,
gatherings, plans, money.
an important project
A witness against creeping militarism
A voice in our Parliament.
Our structures, the layers of our Meetings
A Russian doll of sorts
for the moment each has its purpose
though open to change
In small groups we listened
we heard of a movement of Spirit
the importance of a voice from isolated Friends
feeling the need to be here , now
to be heard, to listen and be listened to,
for community.
the need to connect.

This is the essence of my thoughts.
the substance, the detail is in the reports,
the papers, the e mails.
I urge you to read them – if interested, concerned
but more to listen to the “still small voice” within
To attend
to witness
to learn
and in the silence – comprehend.

Derek Read, Glasgow

Sharing responsibility for our Quaker community

How can you help make our Meeting flourish? We know we all share responsibility for the Meeting for Worship. We all can share in the business of running the organisation through the “Meeting for Worship for Church Affairs”, our business meetings. We need people to offer to help with the various tasks which a well-run society needs to make it a genuine community. We don't advertise. Instead, we meet in worship in the Area Meeting Nominations Committee to discern whose gifts match the posts that become vacant.

You may have been taking part in group discussions of the various chapters of Quaker Faith & Practice which talk about service and the Society's structure. There are lots of opportunities, some small, some more significant, for you to contribute. We need to harness the enthusiasm and the gifts we can all bring.

We are seeking suggestions from Friends on the best way to let you become aware of these opportunities. How should your Nominations Committee communicate with the membership in the Area Meeting? We can alert you through email, the Newsletter (print or online), the Area and General Meeting web pages (work in hand currently), Facebook and other such tools. In the Committee we are preparing leaflets to explain the way all this can best operate, but print and electronic media can only take us so far. You really have to talk to someone. In your Local Meeting, why not find out who does what for our Society and ask them what is involved, and the rewards this service brings.

For example -

Me an overseer? I am not good enough - but wait, the Nominations Committee must think I have the gifts. Talk to an overseer in your Meeting.

Acting as representative to a conference in the spring. I'd love to go but... The meeting is looking for Friends to appoint to go, but will I find all those eager Friends a bit much? Again talk to those who may have gone on other occasions.

“Door duty” at your local meeting? Everyone loves to be welcomed as they arrive, and it is actually a very rewarding job - and we can all do it. Ask the door keeper!

Training is often available for many of the responsibilities we undertake - and not all involve a trip to Woodbrooke, though that does reward the time and effort going there. And don't forget that the meeting pays the expenses of those who work for it.

One important aspect of being a community is supporting those whom we ask to carry out the different roles. Even if you are unable to offer service at this moment in time, please uphold those who have volunteered. We want our Society to be a caring and friendly community. Can you help us realise this aim?

Robin Davis, Dunblane

Creating a Just Scotland: tax and land reform

Tax and land reform might not be the sexiest subject for a seminar but at 10 o'clock on a dreich Saturday morning a few weeks ago the hall at the Edinburgh Radical Book Fair was packed with over 180 people wanting to hear about and discuss ways we can create a fairer Scotland. Such was the crowd that the symposium, which was organised by the Quaker Scottish Parliamentary Liaison Function Group (PLFG), had to be relayed to the adjoining book fair so that others could hear the proceedings. Three excellent speakers – Leslie Riddoch, journalist and broadcaster, Richard Murphy, tax campaigner and Quaker, and Andy Wightman, a writer on land reform and Green MSP – came from different perspectives to give compelling arguments about how we can reach a fairer society.

Leslie Riddoch focussed on how we can learn from Nordic countries, where tax is more connected to community. Government collects tax from corporations and VAT but income tax is raised and spent locally which means citizens have greater trust in the system and that it is serving their interests. This results in greater social cohesion and less tax avoidance. Provision of services is a public responsibility, care homes and child care provision are well resourced and energy provision is by local companies. Scotland could learn from these models to connect and involve citizens in tax raising and trust local decision making.

Richard Murphy extolled the virtues of tax and that there is a need to change the narrative in Britain where tax is often considered something to be avoided and many are involved in finding ways to minimize their liability. To him it is a privilege to pay tax and we should all be emphasising the ways taxes enhance society and advocating this as widely as we can in discussions and on radio phone-ins. He talked about his campaign against tax cheats and promoting the Fair Tax Mark as a way to encourage companies to stop tax avoidance.

Andy Wightman pointed out that the advantage of land is that it does not move and cannot be hidden in tax havens. The law relating to land ownership was established by landowners themselves in their interests but how land is owned, used and governed is vital to the prosperity of everyone in the country. It is a finite resource and should be used in the public interest. Some of the reforms he advocated were about stopping the hoarding of land by large companies, taxing the rise in land value which comes with planning permission, taxing empty industrial properties and taxing landowners for the use of land and infrastructure which they enjoy at public expense.

Questions followed and the large audience remained engaged and attentive throughout this two hour event. We were left with some ideas and questions about what we can do as individuals and how Quakers can engage. In Scotland the SNP does not have an overall majority which means that engaging with all political parties can mean that issues get taken up through building coalition. Is Scotland a small enough nation where radical tax and land reforms could happen? Could Scotland be a test bed for such reforms for the whole of the UK?

The PLFG are considering how the enthusiasm generated at the symposium can be carried forward and has collected a list of those who would like to be involved. If you would like to be kept informed please contact Martin Mansell on mamansell69@gmail.com.

Joyce Taylor-Richards and Martin Mansell, Glasgow

Report on Quaker Life Representative Council.

I attended QLRC held at Woodbrooke in October. There were 94 Members and Attenders present, 70 representatives from Area Meetings. The theme for the weekend was “Becoming the Change We Want to See”. This related closely to the Canterbury Commitment: minute 36 Canterbury commitment. The Council concentrated therefore on the theme of sustainability.

For those of us who were attending QLRC for the first time there was an introductory and welcoming session where the work of QLRC and its place in BYM was outlined. Then followed a guided tour of Woodbrooke for first timers. Later there was a further welcome for all representatives.

Then came the very welcome evening meal following which were further introductions to members of QL Central Committee and to some QL staff. We were then asked to join our ‘Home Groups’ where we shared ‘news from meetings’. This related principally to sustainability in general. Points arising were then brought back and shared with other groups. The day ended with Epilogue.

Saturday began with a plenary session. We were addressed on the theme of the weekend by three keynote speakers; Alex Wildwood, Bryony Rowntree and Rachael Harrison. Alex Wildwood spoke in broad terms about sustainability. He asked what we as Quakers bring to what he termed as a ‘shift in consciousness’ a sort of ‘evolutionary shift’? He wondered what gifts, skills and talents we might be able to contribute? The other two speakers gave us moving and personal accounts of their respective concerns for sustainability.

Underpinning all three speakers was the suggestion that for Quakers sustainability is pervaded by spirituality, a love for the Earth and of all beings. For me this connection between sustainability and spirituality was perhaps the most meaningful aspect of the weekend.

After a break we returned to our home groups to discuss our responses to the speakers. A number of questions arose:

What can we as Quakers contribute to the ‘evolutionary shift’? How does our faith community support us in being part of the change we want to see? Might it be a mistake to see Quakers as separate from the general ‘green movement’?

Saturday afternoon brought some free time which was followed by a choice of two workshops. I attended “Food Sustainability” ably led by Darren Farnsworth, Head of Services at Woodbrooke. The second workshop I went to was “Sustainability – I do not need more” led by Steve Lock who is in charge of the garden at Woodbrooke. I chose it by the title as by then it reflected how I was feeling.

On Sunday morning we gathered in our home groups to ‘pull the threads together’ This task that was easier to set than to accomplish. A number of threads emerged. It was suggested that we as Quakers are ‘good at being awkward’ and could perhaps use this skill to heighten awareness of the need for sustainability. It was suggested this might be achieved by ‘seeking truth with power’. How exactly this might be done was not forthcoming immediately. The difficulties that can be encountered when discussing sustainability within and outwith meetings was considered. It was thought it might be beneficial to emphasise positive aspects rather than harping on about negative aspects. The concepts of the spiritual dimension and that of an evolutionary shift were considered important.

The Council concluded with a meeting for worship.

Howard Bartlem, Ayrshire

Radical Spirituality, an on line course from Woodbrooke.

Did you take part in this? 8000 from all over the world took part. It introduced the very early history of Quakers up to the times of Margaret Fell and the movement out from the centre at Swarthmoor Hall. Ben Pink Dandelion introduced various other Friends. He took us up Firbank Fell and Pendle Hill, traced Fox’s journey to Swarthmoor Hall and he introduced some of the characters Fox met by taking us into the library to read their words, e.g. Frances Howgill, Fox himself and Margret Fell.

A little group of us met to discuss the course. Here are some of our views on it:

Although I knew something of this period and have visited the “1652 country”, this course brought new insights into the origins of the Quaker movement, particularly the transformative power of the religious experience which impelled the earliest Quakers from the north-west to ‘travel in the spirit’ and take their message out to the rest of the country. When they described their experiences, they used biblical language and references with which all their contemporaries would be familiar; quite different from today’s Quakers who, in a culturally diverse and individualistic society, seem to be struggling with the terminology in which to express their beliefs. However, we had no such barriers in our lovely Glasgow discussion group, consisting of some newer to Quakers and long established Friends, where we reflected happily together on the spiritual awakening that was at the heart of the early Society of Friends. MM

The course allowed me to position the early days of Quakers. I find that knowing about how the movement grew and held fast in the politically turbulent times to be pertinent to now. Margaret Fell just getting “on her horse” and going down to Dover to meet the King for a “chat” about Quakers spoke to me about the importance of face to face communication. It reminded me that that is still how humans really work in spite of technology. We still grow best when we get together and talk. For me, the most important part of the course was the sharing that took place in our discussion group, where I had the challenge and joy of learning of that which is of God within others. AR

For the past year, I’ve been attending meetings and trying to figure out Quakerism. What is it that makes Quakers who they are? What lies beneath the surface? Why do I feel so at home? This short and enjoyable introduction to its historical roots has provided a clear framework which continues to be relevant. The central belief in inward spirituality is as challenging and exciting as it must have been then. There were surprises too, such as the authority, influence and tenaciousness of Margaret Fell, and the apparent tolerance and support of her husband, Thomas. However, it was the fireside discussions which really brought the material to life and left me wanting to know much more. TS

I enjoyed the whole experience of following the Course on Radical Spirituality, both the written material and the videos. I was impressed by the technical ease of accessing the three sessions, unlike my experience of other online courses which can often be

frustrating. Putting the emergence of Friends in the context of the Civil War helped me understand more how the immense social upheaval that touched so many lives was the backdrop to the Quaker movement. Our group discussions deepened and enlivened the learning experience not just of the Course and my understanding of the early days of Friends but radically of each other.' BR

'Radical Roots was probably the best on-line and indeed Quaker course I've taken part in. The history was both revision of and addition to knowledge, but most especially it had the unexpected effect of re-grounding my Quaker faith. It was a three week course whose materials I will revisit in order to absorb its contents better. As a present day Friend the one aspect that has stayed with me is the section on the 'itinerancy', that of early Quakers witnessing to Truth by walking and riding hundreds of miles and under great threat of persecution and imprisonment from say Lancashire to London or indeed sailing as far as Turkey. Moreover very young women, aged fifteen and sixteen, travelled in pairs and were no less bold in their endeavours. I wonder how that ministry of presence might speak to the loneliness of a fractured society now. I think it might. Our small discussion group was perhaps an example of how covering even short distances of a few miles can build bridges over many more.' NJ

I wanted to know what made early Quakerism so radical, to understand how we could become radical in our own time. It seems to be two things - as people turned to the Inward Light this brought down 'any kind of boundary between humanity and God, divine power can be found close by within the heart of every believer (unity) and the Inward Light shone within everyone, the potential for eternal life lay within everyone (universality) -Hilary Hinds. I hadn't quite realised how astonishingly different and freeing that was at that time... And still is. God is present now, in me, and potentially in everyone. It's life-changing. SS

I hesitated to sign on for this course as I had done two similar at Woodbrooke. However I was pleasantly surprised. There was a real feel of the atmosphere both in the scenes of Firbank Fell and Pendle Hill, and in the readings from the writings of significant Friends of the time. There was also an image of George Fox as a 19 year old setting out. I had not realized how young he was. The historical information put into perspective just how challenged Quakers were in those early days. But, most of all, I really enjoyed meeting with others to share and discuss the course. MR

There is a Pendle Hill online course starting in January called "Exploring the Quaker Way" January 9 through April 2, 2017 featuring Marcelle Martin, Steve Chase and others. It seems to be a more detailed and reflective course than Woodbrooke's courses although it is hard to say for certain. Alastair Reid comments.

Quaker Faith & Practice, Chap 24 – The Peace Testimony

As expected, this gave rise to much deep thought in our group. However, some of our thoughts were quite unexpected. How did the Peace Testimony arise? Does it mean the same to us today?

The Quakers of the past were amazing people. 24.11 spoke to many of us that the Peace testimony is about deeds, not creeds, although it is not just what we do but the way we do it. It is about rejecting fear and listening to hope. It is not only about individual witness, or deeds, as Quakerism is about community that is a way of living in relationship. We may focus on reconciliation and social justice, seeking that of God in everyone, but language can unite all humanity or if couched in ‘us and them’ it can divide.

We discussed the language differences in Barclay and Penn, 24.02 and 24.03 respectively. Some felt Barclay’s language was too deterministic, even confrontational especially to Arabs and Moslems. Others felt it was plain-speaking. Penn challenged us at our deepest level with “. . . . let us then try what love will do . . .”

We asked if the Quaker way as expressed in the Peace Testimony was Universalist or Christian. If we take out the Christian, it becomes like any other charter, e.g. Human Rights. There is something else that makes it more dynamic. One of our group had had a strange route to Quakers through the Communist Party and the Peace Movement moving into Quakers because they offered more than against war. The underlying cause of war might lead us to the right sharing of the world’s resources. We could go even further. Quakers won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 for their war work*. Back to what is peace now? Can we understand at a more profound level what creates war? What does it mean to live non-violently? Do we really understand the challenge that Jesus laid down for us?

Back to Barclay: to love enemies and go to war is irreconcilable. What is the key here? Today we get tied up in God language. If the core is love, what does it mean to love? Do all religions see those without as OTHER? If they are Other then they are not of God! What divides us except our fear and vulnerability? How do we hold each other accountable? We need to watch our language in the sense of what does it really mean. While seeking that which unifies us it is important also to own who we are as that is the starting point of negotiation. We need to hold dilemma in consciousness to share the struggle, to create a space where we can bring it all together.

* *You can still google the acceptance speech.*

BOOK REVIEW

ANAM CARA John O'Donohue, Bantam Books, 1997

This book has been beloved of the therapist community for many years. It picks up on one of the most central themes of Celtic Spirituality, the soul friend. It is a book that explores belonging, our relationship with our heart, with each other and with our environment – *the treasures that lie hidden within your own soul and the 'secret divinity' in your relationships.*

Celtic Christianity was overwhelmed by Augustine's import version from Rome which has since dominated our thinking style turning it outwards. The ancient Celtic culture of Scotland and Ireland retains that balance between inner and outer, between darkness and light. It is a rich heritage that reveres the spirit in all things. '*Where Christians worshipped one God, the Celts had many, and found divinity all around them: in the rivers, hills, sea and sky*'.

But the *anam cara* is special; *real intimacy is a sacred experience* whether found in another or in nature. There is so much in the beautiful language of the book. Here I have chosen some sample phrases that are worthy of meditation:

The human heart is never born complete. . . it is being birthed in every experience of your life. Everything that happens to you has the potential to deepen you. It brings to birth within you new territories of the heart. . .

Real intimacy is of the soul and the soul is reserved.

In the warmth of love the soul can find itself.

When we love and allow ourselves to be loved, we begin more and more to inhabit the kingdom of the eternal.

Sometimes it is easy to be generous outwardly, to give and give and give and yet remain ungenerous to yourself. You lose the balance of your soul if you do not learn to take care of yourself. . .

Love is absolutely vital for a human life. For love alone can awaken what is divine within you. In love you grow and come home to yourself. When you learn to love and let yourself be loved, you come home to the hearth of your own spirit. You are warm and sheltered. You are completely at home in the house of your own longing and belonging.

The Celtic Circle of Belonging

We are always on a journey from darkness into light. . . . Your birth was a first journey from darkness into light. All your life your mind lives within the darkness of your body. Every thought you have is a flint moment, a spark of light from your inner darkness. The miracle of thought is its presence in the night side of your soul; the brilliance of thought is born in darkness. . .

Ultimately, light is the mother is life.

Light is the secret presence of the divine. It keeps life awake. Light is a nurturing presence that calls forth warmth and colour in nature. The soul awakens and lives in light. It helps us glimpse the sacred depths within us. . . .

We come out of the night into the day. All creativity awakens at this primal threshold where light and darkness test and bless each other. You only discover balance in your life when you learn to trust the flow of this ancient rhythm.

For the Celts the visible and the invisible are one.

Margaret Roy, Lanark

NEW BOOKS IN GLASGOW MEETING LIBRARY

Maxwell, Edith *Delivering the truth: a Quaker midwife mystery.* Midnight Ink 2016
296p. L/MAXMombe,

Esther and Nyiramana, Cécile *Mending broken hearts, rebuilding shattered lives: Quaker peacebuilding in East and Central Africa.* [Swarthmore Lecture 2016]. Quaker Books
2016 62p. SL/MOM

Holloway, Richard *A little history of religion.* Yale U.P. 2016 244p. R/HOL

Librarian, Paul Burton will send books at cost of postage. paulburton@btinternet.com

Let's Make a Bee Line

The idea and the plan for LET'S MAKE A BEE LINE came after taking a walk on a warm and sunny afternoon in early June. David Somervell and I enjoyed passing flowering trees, seeing gardens full of flowers in Morningside and climbing up Blackford Hill. But something seemed wrong, and I asked David how many bees or butterflies or indeed any insects he had seen, and answer came; "none". This felt wrong and confirmed the changes I have seen in the past few years, in my garden plot and outside in the woods and fields round Wiston Lodge. In my daily life, I spend a lot of time outside, walking round the woods, tending my garden area and just being outside in the landscape; and though there are bees and butterflies and other insects, including midges, there are progressively far fewer.

After the walk through Morningside, I came home and contacted friends I know who garden and grow, from Shetland down to the south of England to ask for their observations. The only places I have heard with the BUZZ as usual, especially in the early pollinator season are the Western Islands, Shetland, the north coast of Scotland and from friends who garden carefully and organically further south. Here at Wiston Lodge we have bumble bees, honey bees when the wild raspberries are flowering, a few moths, but almost no butterflies.....and only one ladybird in the past three years. And one of my gardening neighbours who stays in Biggar, our small local town, reports the same, and even worse a complete lack of worms in her garden.

It is just over half a century since Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, published in 1962; this vital and important book changed the way a lot of us think, but in the time between then and now her message has gone dangerously un-heeded by much scientific, agricultural, and gardening practice and crucially by political decision makers; so I thought it is up to us all to make the change we need to make and spread the word because as Einstein predicted that “if the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe then man(sic) would only have four years left of life.

So between 30th August and September 6th, we, that is Ewan MacDonald Wiston Lodge cook, Paul Dear, musician and drum circle facilitator, Pollaidh my 9 year old Border Collie and I set off from the bee friendly student plots at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh and ended up on the eighth day back home at Wiston Lodge. At each starting point, we were joined by others interested in what we were doing and why; we were joined on our walk by a series of people including gardeners, beekeepers, and even friends from my CND campaigning past.

On the way, we visited gardens full of bee friendly plants, struggled to follow the routes changed by building plots and developments not featured on the maps. We were seen off by Friends, Jane and Roger Kelly whose work with the Lost Garden of Penicuik and Penicuik Storehouse are wonderful initiatives of ways forward; heard inspiring talks from Andrew Whitley and Veronica Burke on their pioneering work with Scotland The Bread, and in growing bread making grains in pollinator friendly ways at their farm at Mabie Hill; and the rainbows following us up Tinto Hill on the last day of the walk.

The most vital thing I bring away from this Bee Line walk is the need to join together and spread the word about better ways of taking care of the pollinators we must preserve. This may be in our gardens and allotments, as members of national campaigns like the Bumble Bee Trust and The Scottish Wildlife Trust and local

organisations and vitally to encourage all those we know to change lives and practice; try to get farmers, gardeners, garden centres and particularly local authorities to change their bee and pollinator threatening practices, whether it be excessive strimming and cutting of verges, trimming hedges and use of insecticides and weed-killers.

This is vitally important for all of us now, but particularly for our children and grandchildren and the future.

To find out more, see Paul Dear's photographs, and read our blogs look at <https://makeabeeline.org>

Meg Beresford, Lanark

Ferry Wood – part of the Celtic Rainforest

We (me and my wife Carina and son Peter) have brought a 43-acre wood and coastal meadow in West Scotland. The wood is part of the Celtic Rainforest of western seaboard of Scotland and Ireland, so-named because it has lots of rare lichens, fungi, mosses, liverwort and ferns, some of which are found nowhere else in the world.

The forest has been reduced to scattered woods like ours, which need to be near or on the Atlantic coast: they absolutely require an oceanic climate (largely frost-free, damp and humid most of the time). In Scotland the Celtic rainforest stretches from where we are (west of Glasgow, in South Knapdale) northwards all the way up the western seaboard.

Our wood is part of the Ardpatrik and Dunmore Site of Special Scientific Interest, itself a series of individual woodland blocks, lochans, meadows and mires strung along the northern shore of the West Loch, a sea loch stretching to the south-west of the fishing village of Tarbert (Loch Fyne).

Plantlife and Back from the Brink

Part of our reason for acquiring the wood is to further the work of Plantlife UK, which has a Back from the Brink species recovery programme. In the case of our wood, the rare species are threatened by invasive rhododendron, which shade out everything in their path. We have become flora guardians under the Plantlife scheme to encourage landowners to conserve and improve important habitats in their care.

Our future as a species is totally tied up with plants; yet, as is well known, we are facing a biodiversity crisis across the world, which applies to our plants as much as to our animals. Media coverage tends to focus on iconic biomes such as the Amazon

rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef, and it is easy to get the impression that Britain has a very limited number of species, few of which are rare. Well, this is not true! It just happens that many of the rare plants are of the non-flowering variety and small (in some cases, very small indeed). We also have many rare fungi, which remain hidden under the earth until conditions are right when they produce fruiting bodies. Carina and I have been keen gardeners all our lives, and I've undertaken a lot of conservation over the years. I've also got a qualification in countryside management, which I can now put to good use. We love plants!

Woodland composition and topography

The main trees in the wood are oaks, but birch is plentiful and there are also willow, alder, rowan and holly. However, it's the small, non-flowering plants that are particularly special: the trees are important because they provide a habitat in themselves for the plants to grow on or beside. In the case of the fungi, they form beneficial relationships by interacting with the trees' roots. When a tree dies, other fungi specialize in decomposing the hard woody material, breaking it down into available nutrients.

In Ferry Wood the rarities seem to be concentrating on the south-facing slopes, which are often steep and rocky, with ledges, overhangs and exposed faces as well as large individual boulders. These slopes are cut by ravines. All in all, this makes for a fascinating topography, with lots of niches for the so-called "lower plants". There is also a lot of standing and fallen dead timber, which is great for fungi and invertebrates.

At the top of the slope is an open area with amazing views to the island of Gigha (off the west coast of Kintyre) and, beyond, on a clear day, to Northern Ireland. You are even high enough to see over the landmass of Kintyre to the hills of Arran in the Firth of Clyde.

Meadow

The site also consists of a beautiful coastal meadow which lies at the foot of the rocky wood. We are just getting to know it. Most of it consists of tussocky grasses with loads of "thatch" (dead grass forming a mat) but there is also a substantial area of bracken beside the wood, plus areas of nettle (much of it near the shore, indicating that it has been feeding on washed up seaweed, but also a patch amongst the bracken). There's a lot of ground ivy amongst the bracken and some creeping thistle in the grass, indicating a sandy soil. When the Plantlife officer came (Davie Black) he recommended grazing: which brings us on to the complex subject: grazing management.

Location

It's in a beautiful location, at the mouth of the sea loch, and we'll be canoeing to it when the weather is suitable. A ferry used to ply across the loch, hence the Wood's name. Next to our meadow is an island: at spring low water a natural causeway forms and you can walk across it. Opposite is the dramatic hill of Dunskeig: "dun" means a hill and Gaelic; it also gives its name to prestige habitations dating from the Iron Age. There are two at the hill's summit.

The Islay ferry passes the wood a few times a day: so there's still a ferry, only it's going up and down the loch rather across it.

Volunteering

Volunteers are more than welcome. The two projects we have on the go at the moment are:

- Removing rhododendron, which is choking out the native trees and shrubs. Light work or heavy, depending on what you want to go for (seedlings up to mature shrubs).
- Surveying the Wood to find out the location of coppiced, multi-stemmed oaks, important concentrations of lower plants etc.

Come and stay with us for a holiday, short break, swim (it has its own beach), research, learning, training, art, bring a group, friends, family or yourself, generally have fun...!

Look up Ferry Wood on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/624046491087672/> , text us on 07799 898 369 and request to be on an email group to be informed of what we are up to. Come in search of badgers, sparrow hawks, great northern divers, otters, tree lungwort and scott's fork-moss, to name a few!

Ed Tyler, Argyll

There is always a limit to self-indulgence but none to self-restraint.

Mahatma Gandhi

It was said of George Fox that he was a Seeker, not a Finder.

A Friend from Glasgow Meeting Speaks

Back ground: A mixed identity, atheist and communist.

Born and raised in the middle east, educated and qualified in a socialist eastern European block and lived most adult life in the UK, her cultural identity is a mixture of all . In youth she believed in Socialism and that world wealth should be equally shared amongst people. She thought people should be treated equally regardless of class or wealth or belonging to a religious minority she felt that minority people, whether religious , social class, nationality, or language, should not be treated differently nor persecuted because of their beliefs. There was a lot of that in her country of origin. People are treated according to their family, the tribe they belong to, their social class and also their political beliefs so there is no political freedom for the individual. Religious minorities are persecuted socially, not legally. All of that had lead her to believe that the answer lies in Karl Marx Socialism .She become a member of the communist party in her youth and early adult life. It was part of a revolutionary force that, although illegal, was a big movement to push for a political and social justice in a country where British post colonial politics dominated the middle east.

However there was a military coup which changed all of that. Many people were persecuted and killed because of their political beliefs. As a result she was jailed for 5 years for her political activism. She was still at the university at the time which meant she could not finish her university degree. During her incarceration she was exposed to torture in order to publically denounce her political views which she refused to do.

While she was a prisoner of conscious she received many letters of support from people in the UK (maybe some were Friends but she does not know for sure). When she got out from prison the university refused to allow her back to finish her medical training. This was even a harder punishment. Therefore she was delighted to be offered a scholarship in a socialist country. There her views of Socialism started to change because she could see the corruption in that country as well. She found it was not the Nirvana she thought it was.

She moved to the UK after she qualified where she started her working life serving humanity as a doctor .

At that stage she was planning to go back to serve her country of origin as soon as the political situation changed but this opportunity never came as the country went from bad to worse .

This is where her search for a different meaning and purpose and beliefs in life started. The search took many years without an ethical perspective, a way to

look at things . Religion was not part of her way of thinking up to this stage. She was an atheist.

At this point she started to search for a more meaningful life than the socialist political outlook. While she was searching somehow she felt there was more to life than the materialist aspect. She started to feel there was a force/energy beyond ourselves that seems to guide you. She did not recognise it as a religion and she still objects to that word. This light/energy/mystery was beyond the earthly existence.

In her search she looked at religious teachings but was more interested in what was happening in our world today re justice, peace, equality. For 2-3 years she searched in literature for the qualities she shared especially the belief in a just world, a peaceful world, nonviolent ways to resolve conflict, and the good deeds that human do. She came across the anti-slavery work of the American Friends, their treatment of the Red Indians, pacifism during the first World War, and conscientious objectors and was attracted by the work of the Friends

Then the war came to her country and members of her family were forced to join the military in the front line. They did not have the luxury of conscientious objection as is given in the Western World. That made her believe that the qualities the Quakers hold were what she had been looking for, searching for, and seeking. She felt what the Quakers did was more revolutionary than socialists, to throw arms away and believe that of God in everyone. Political views and outlooks did not drive them. They were driven to find out the good things in the human being that would do no harm to other human beings and the environment.

She doesn't believe in organised religion, or reading one particular book, or one way of comprehending God. Each human has a unique way of ascertaining the truth to themselves. She could be of any of the other religions or none of them. She can understand Hinduism, Buddhism, monotheistic religions, and see the point that she could identify with in all of them. "Being a Quaker and a seeker allows you to do that". She comes to Meeting sometimes very disturbed and apprehensive about what is going on in the world around her. She sits in silence and gradually her mind becomes more and more peaceful in a loving way and a sense of calm acceptance, loving, hope gradually descends in her so when she comes out she feels in a way that her soul has been cleansed and she is much more accepting and at peace with the world. That is what Meeting gives her.

She is still on her search and still on the journey though she is getting older and the beauty of getting older is that she can now listen more creatively in what others tell her

rather than being wrapped up in her own emotions. Beautiful contact with Friends after Meeting taught her how to listen creatively. Human contact is beautiful. She learned that in Meetings – she wouldn't be the person she is at the moment if she had not attended Friends' Meetings

Through attending meetings she has witnessed many ministries that have had a great impact on her own spiritual journey. She applied the Quaker philosophy in her working and professional life . She would ask, what would Quakers have said and done in this situation. That has guided her ethically through difficult professional incidents at times and in social life.

The day-blind stars waiting for their light

Gisela ministered a few months ago. She was talking about how we sometimes feel overwhelmed by events in the world and she offered us a poem by Wendell Berry, 'The Peace of Wild Things'. In it the poet says that when he feels overwhelmed, he goes to where the 'wood drake rests in his beauty on the water and the great heron feeds'. He comes into the peace of wild things who do not tax themselves with 'forethought of grief'. And there he waits. Then he uses a striking phrase; while he waits, he feels above him, 'the day-blind stars waiting for their light'. The phrase has stuck with me.

Sometime later I was reminded of that ministry. We are refurbishing our new house and as part of this project we are removing a gas fire and replacing it with a multi-fuel stove. A friend of mine told me that when they were putting in an open fire, she had put her head into the empty fireplace and peered up the chimney. There in the darkness of the flue and way beyond the rim of the chimney pot, she said she could see the stars. It was daytime but the conditions were such that she could see the stars.

While in Meeting a few Sundays ago, a thought came to me that I felt I should share. Maybe one way of looking at what we do in Meeting for Worship is that we are creating the conditions where we can see the stars.

Pete Stuart, Glasgow

Islay & Jura

News from meetings

Spurred on by the arrival of a large tube of posters from Friends House, and by frequent queries from Islay acquaintances along the lines of “well, what are you Quakers then?”, Islay Friends turned their normal final-Sunday-of-the-month Meeting

in October into an Open Afternoon. By the time we had put up the posters, set out the leaflets that came from Friends House, set up two slide shows and powerpoint presentations of Quaker gatherings, events and worship, and blown up the balloons (which also came from Friends House) we had quite a useful and interesting display. We didn't get a lot of extra punters, but we had a good discussion with those who did come (as useful for us as them probably) followed by 15 minutes or so of worship. Oh – and lots of tea and cake! So it was well worth doing, and maybe we have raised our profile a little.

We continue to meet twice a month in Bowmore (on the second Monday morning of the month and the final Sunday afternoon), and whenever we get the opportunity (mostly in the summer months) in Craighouse in Jura.



DATES FOR DIARY

14th January Area Meeting in Glasgow. Helen Drewery, Head of Worship & Witness for Britain Yearly Meeting (which incorporates her former job title ‘General Secretary Quaker Peace & Social Witness’) has agreed to come and explore with us how we take forward the concern arising from the JRRT issue on truth and integrity in public affairs. This will be in the morning.

11th March General Meeting for Scotland in Edinburgh. Gretchen Castle, General Secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation will be the main speaker at General Meeting in the morning. She will help us consider or reflect on the nature of God, and how that is seen by Friends world-wide. We’re finding that there are a variety of views about the nature and existence of God, but that many of us don’t feel easy or have the opportunity of talking about our experiences and understandings in a safe way.

13th March Area Meeting by telephone.

17/18/19 March Westerly Friends Crianlarich Gathering. All welcome. We take over the Youth Hostel for the weekend but a range of accommodation is available on request. Book early.

Contact Bronwen Currie on bron.currie@g.mail.com

8th April Area Meeting in Wigtown.



HOLD IN THE LIGHT

David Harper of Mull & Iona Meeting

Margaret Peacock of Milngavie Meeting

Joyce Minnis of Glasgow.

Prayer, springing from a deep place in the heart, may bring healing and unity as nothing else can. A&Q 9