

West Scotland Quaker News

February 2014

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

From the Editor: The Referendum on Scottish Independence is fast approaching. In this edition of WSQN there is a plea on page 6 from one of our Members for a Quakerly approach to the issues of "Yes" or "No" - contributions on the Referendum, from all shades of Quakers, will be most warmly welcomed. On another subject, articles and other contributions to this edition of WSQN have been very sparse. To avoid blank pages the Newsletter must be printed in multiples of 4 and it is often difficult to fill the 12 pages.



Spring is near: BGB 2014

Clerk's Letter

It is said, hopefully apocryphally, that the American Quaker Earlham College football team chant was: "Hit 'em, smash 'em, beat 'em senseless, Hit 'em till they reach consensus!" Not quite what we do in Area Meeting, I trust.

Anyway, the 'sense of the meeting' we aim for in making decisions is not the same as consensus. It is an attempt to find the right way forward by deep listening to the Spirit speaking through any of us.

Is that clear to any observer? I was thinking of this when dwelling on our Recording Clerk, Paul Parker's, recent talk to Area Meeting in Glasgow. He told us that he wears the badge which says 'I'm a Quaker, ask me why' and suggested we might all benefit by practicing what we would say in reply to someone asking US why. An example was us entering a lift with our badge on and having to explain to someone why in the time it took to rise a few floors. I had visions of elders testing each of us by asking the question in the basement and marking our replies by the time we'd got to the first floor of Glasgow Meeting House.

It's quite difficult. One of the reason I'm a Quaker is the very fact that I think defining things often limits them, but perhaps that is what we need to say. 'Quakerism gives us the space to develop ourselves' was what others thought round the midweek post Meeting for Worship lunch table in Glasgow the other week.

It could be important for us to think about it. I found this diagram in Simon Best's article *Expressing the faith* in *The Friend* 22 November 2013. Simon is a tutor at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and drew it from feedback of non-Quakers saying what their impressions of Quakers were. The size of the words relates to the numbers of comments received back.



Now this is a fairly small sample from one area and may not be typical. But it gives some food for thought. Are we that rude to others? Perhaps to those not used to frankness and directness – we say what we mean and it could be that comes over in ways we might not wish for. 'Demanding' might be seen positively as well as negatively.

It could also be that some of the impressions we give result from not making it clear what we are and why. **Michael Hutchinson** (*Glasgow Meeting*)

Report from Area Meeting, January 25th 2014

This report is a personal reflection to be read in conjunction with the AM Minute. Even though it can be a bit of a drag sometimes to go to AM, it is often held in a beautiful part of the country, and there is always something stimulating in the Meeting for Worship for Business. The numbers attending are usually small, perhaps 30 or so Friends, but on this occasion there must have been about 60. Double the usual turnout, in spite of foul weather preventing some from coming.

As there were several Friends attending for the first time the Clerk gave brief explanations of procedures throughout the day, so no one felt out of their depth. We heard reports from a number of Friends who had represented AM at conferences, those on Economic Justice and Economic Myth Busting being of particular interest. Friends spoke of personal experiences as well as professional, in relation to poverty, and degrading treatment which can be associated with benefit receipt. Human Beings on Benefits (HBoBs) is a fledgling support group started by a Glasgow Friend. We were asked to be alert for disparaging language used around these issues, and to contact local media in response.

Paul Parker, BYM Recording Clerk, was the guest speaker for the afternoon, and the crowded room was not disappointed by his splendid presentation. He outlined the remit of his job: broad and varied, including the management of the 140+ staff at Friends House. The restaurant at FH received the London Sustainable Restaurant of 2013 Award. Elizabeth, the restaurant manager, has found a local source of fresh vegetables, delivered daily by bicycle!

Paul's deep faith and enthusiasm for Quakerism shone through all he said: he has become known as the Whoosh Man. He believes there is a large audience waiting to hear from Friends, they just don't know yet. We have a great deal to offer, but we tend to hide our Light under bushels. The Occupy Movement seemed to be seeking much of what we already stand for. Should we wear the badge that says "I'm a Quaker. Ask me why?" You may start some very interesting conversations. "There's no point in having a faith if you do nothing with it." We provide a "radical welcome" in our meetings (meaning we welcome you as you are, we'll absorb and change with you). Our meetings have a transformational power, but it begins within each one of us, and surges through our Silence. It's the power of love. Are we listening for it? Do we act on it?

Quaker Faith & Practice Ch 10:11 was the starting point for Paul's talk, and it would be a good place to read now. Woodbrooke are putting together a Package for us, and we are asked to contact the clerk or any elder or overseer with any topic suitable for inclusion. This type of work will deepen and strengthen our meetings.

MaryAlice Manson (*Glasgow Meeting*)

Faith: what's God got to do with it? Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, January Conference

This conference, clerked by Christine Davis, was attended by around 80, mainly representatives from most British Area Meetings, and aimed to establish a more formal dialogue between Theistic Quakers and those tending in their beliefs towards "Non-Theism". David Boulton, one of our speakers said at the beginning that we were heading for a day of discernment about faith – God and no God.

We united from the start in the notion that for Quakers it is essential to be true to ourselves and true to our times and the world we live in as well as paying attention to our past roots and enable them to flower in the present.

David Boulton, our first speaker, describes himself as a Quaker humanist and is author of: *The trouble with God* and editor of *Godless for God's sake: Non-theism in Contemporary Quakerism*. He spoke of our faith that must be reclaimed from old-time religion which means being faithful and trusting each other, faith as trust.

In his non-theistic understanding of spirituality he does not do away with God but understands God as the human projection of mercy, pity, peace and love ("The Divine Image" by William Blake), not as a disembodied spirit but as a symbol of the values of humanity and love in action. He believes in the attributes of God but not his existence.

Phillp Gross, whose book *The Water Table* was awarded the 2009 T.S. Eliot Poetry Prize, was our next speaker. He approached today's dialogue from his background as a poet: as someone who does not trust words easily, but who loves them. It is in his poetry (where head and heart are in closest communication and where God exists as metaphor) that enables him to express his deepest experiences. He believes, that we humans need metaphors and stories to try to understand and express what we cannot totally grasp.

He does not like the term non-theism, but has not found a better word to declare his personal understanding of his concept of God. He is deeply committed to Quakerism, which to him means to be part of a challenging Quaker way of being, community and creativity and the action arising out of this. For him it is most important that Quakers value all new experience. He feels upheld by the listening silence, ministry and creativity of Meeting for Worship as well as by our shared Quaker history of experience and words. He describes his experience of strong concurrence between art and religion where the best MfW becomes a kind of collaborative art work, out of which arise ever new experiments. He illustrated his talk with some of his poetry: Friends might like to read: "If God was old ...", and some of his other poems. (Other collections: *Deep Field* and *Later*)

Our last speaker was Rex Ambler, well known to Friends through his teaching of Quaker meditation, work with the experiment of light groups and his latest book: *The Quaker Way*. In his talk he was concerned with how we all Quakers must learn to resolve speaking through "different" languages. He concentrated on the fundamental questions all human beings, religious or not, have always asked: "Who am I?" "How can I make sense of myself and the world?" "How do I find what is worthwhile?"

Both theists and non-theists confront these questions in the silence of Meeting for Worship and construct answers that make sense to them. Expressed more generally, we construct concepts, religions and ideologies. The Quaker way of attempting to answer these questions is by sharing experience, discernment together to find what is right, and by our special ways of acting out our testimonies. He feels excited about the freedom Quakerism offers, but also reminded us that this must be followed with discipline and responsibility.

After lunch we met in small groups to give an opportunity to reflect on what we had heard and in preparation for the final plenary session. A few Friends expressed the conflict which arises from the importance we attach to words, our emotional attachment to words - versus the feeling that the deepest understanding of what is right and true is beyond words.

Unfortunately the final plenary session was far too short! Some of the burning questions were beginning to be aired and we were acutely aware that dialogue in a warm spirit of mutual respect and understanding between Friends committed to different views is vitally necessary and has to continue to break down barriers. Some Friends don't like the term "non-theism" to describe their "godless" relationship to Quakerism, as it may seem divisive and construct boundaries, but as yet no one has found a better word.

The question of how non-theists worship and pray was raised. Should it be talking to God or can it be talking with oneself. One of the last contributions from a non-theist Friend in answer to these questions seemed to concur with my personal experience: "In Quaker worship we open ourselves and reach within and without-out ourselves, we practice intense listening and try to see the world in a wider more embracing sense than our own and sometimes feel led. We pray by expressing awe and wonder and thankfulness, we focus on our concern for others and respond with love, and we examine ourselves without directing any of these thoughts to a Being in the Beyond."

I hope that I have been able to give a flavour of a very full and exciting day and that dialogue continues within our local Quaker communities in the West of Scotland. Transcripts of proceedings will be available later and I would love to share these with all who are interested. Thank you for letting me go to this conference as your representative.

Gisela Creed (*Glasgow Meeting*)

Friends and the Independence Referendum

Unlike some of my friends, I wouldn't describe myself as a political animal. I keep an eye on the news, and (Russell Brand notwithstanding) would never dream of not voting, but I've never joined a political party or been involved with campaigning for anything other than charitable causes. This year's referendum on Scottish independence, however, has got me interested. It's a huge decision we're going to make, and I care deeply about the outcome. I care enough to buy and read books about it, to follow both Yes Scotland and Better Together online in social media, and to do my best to keep abreast of what's being said in the papers and on television. I find it very depressing.

I find balanced assessments of the arguments, and properly nuanced debate, very difficult to come by. I see data interpreted to offer support to both sides, and I lack the knowledge and skills to sift through and see where the truth lies, if indeed there is an objective truth to be found. I am distressed at the way both campaigns seem to be run: the endless assertions that the other side has yet to put forward a single worthwhile argument, or that their own latest statement is completely unanswerable; the petty point-scoring, and the delight in jumping on any tiny flaw in anything the other side says; the setting up of exaggerated straw versions of their opponent's position, which can then of course be duly demolished; the tribalism of partisans who refuse to admit any issue may not be black-and-white; the personal denigration of anyone, politician, campaigner or not, who expresses a view publicly. Is politics always like this, and I just haven't been paying close enough attention to notice? Or are the passions aroused by the question of whether Scotland should go it alone so strong that this campaign is worse than usual?

My husband says he can't understand why I use Twitter when so much of what I read on it upsets me. The answer, of course, is that much of the rest of what I read on it is interesting, informative, or funny, or points me towards worthwhile things that I might otherwise have missed. I have, however, given up reading the comments posted below anything either campaign posts on (say) Facebook: for every sensible, well-informed comment, there will be dozens which add nothing but vitriol. Both sides have supporters who are guilty of this. Prominent figures regularly re-tweet particularly obnoxious examples of the kind of abuse they are obviously receiving all the time. So far I have not seen many allegations of abuse other than verbal, but there are occasional reports of violence and threats to both people and property. Have people forgotten that these are their neighbours, and they will still be living and working alongside them on September 19th and afterwards, whatever the result of the referendum? Are they so unable to grasp the idea that other people may in good faith think that the best thing for Scotland is to vote the way they themselves will not?

I came to Meeting for Worship recently with my head full of the latest #indyref nonsense. Meeting was Quaker worship at its best, almost entirely silent, gathered and deep. I fell to musing on how wonderful it would be if, instead of being presented with ballot papers, we could somehow hold a Scotland-wide Meeting for Worship for Business. We would not vote. We would not argue or insult each other. We would meet in a spirit of loving friendship and seek to discern, together, the best way forward for this wonderful country in which we are privileged to live.

Admittedly the minute of such a meeting would almost certainly record that we were not in unity on this matter. But I wonder whether Friends, with their vast experience of non-confrontational decision-making, have something to offer the referendum process? I am aware of one or two organisations - such as the University of Dundee with its "Five Million Questions" initiative, or the INSP street papers' organisation hosting interviews with leading campaigners - which are trying to raise awareness of the many issues involved in a non-partisan way. Could we, maybe in partnership with other churches or faith groups, consider doing likewise? What do Friends think?

Ruth Wilkinson (*Glasgow Meeting*) [*Ruth is a volunteer for Better Together. This does not mean she is, as she has been told, "either a traitor or a Tory", or that she necessarily agrees with everything in BT's campaign literature.*]



Called to the Colours

*Called to the colours, respond our young men,
Called to the colours, of Ypres, and Ardennes.
Called to the colours, by great Gods of War,
Called to the colours, grave-fields lie before.*

*Called to the colours, by trumpet's false blare,
Called to the colours, by men without care.
Called to the colours, lost sons of our past,
Called to the colours, how long does it last?*

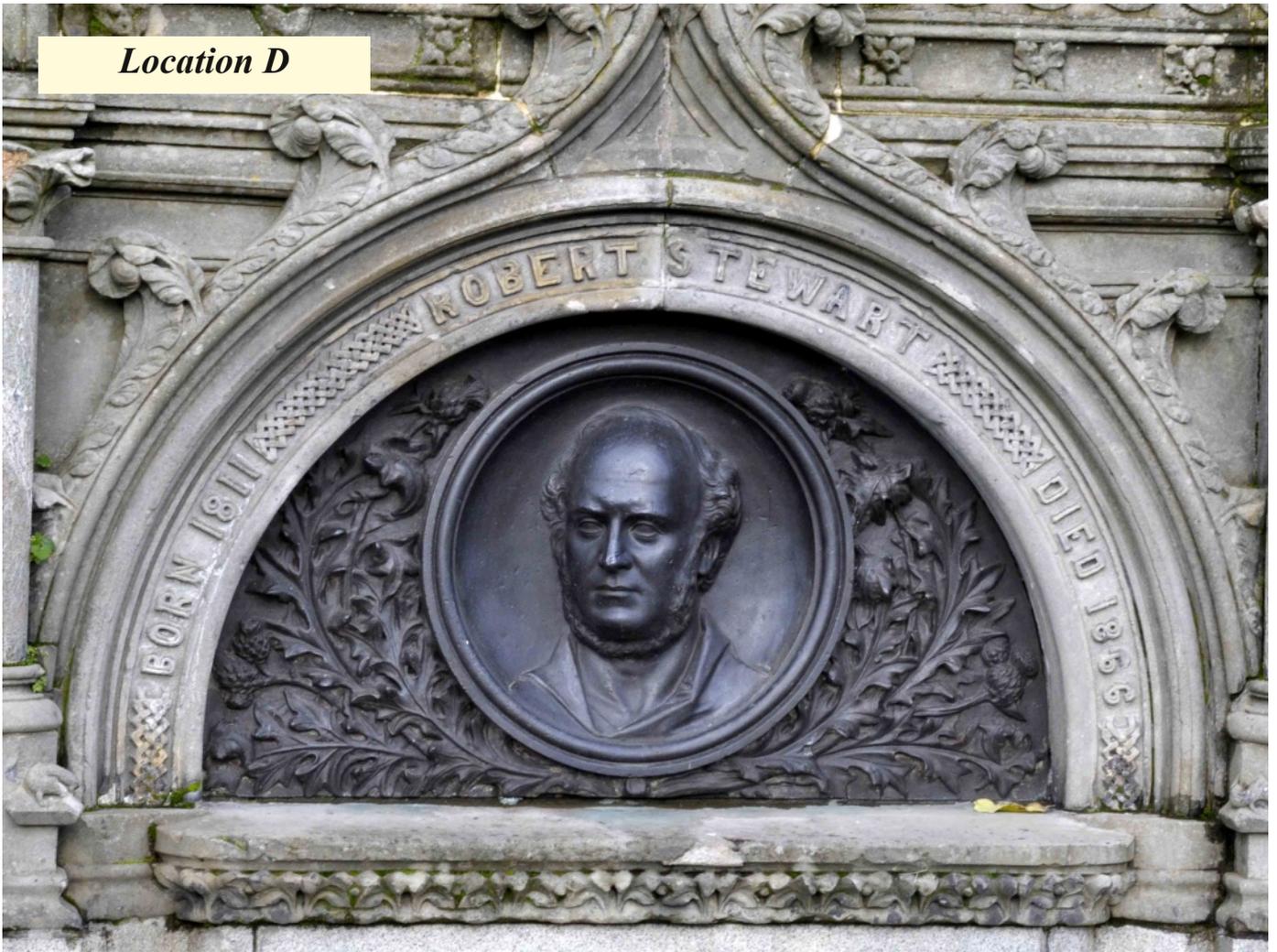
*Called to the colours, we sacrifice kids,
Called to the colours, vain authority bids.
Called to the colours, all thoughts lost to peace,
Called to the colours, when will carnage cease?*

*Called to the colours, since e're dawn of time,
Called to the colours, with banners sublime.
Called to the colours, both sinner and saint,
Called to the colours, a Gospel to taint.*

*Called to the colours, as brother meets brother,
Called to dark colours, of widow and mother.
Called to the colours, a crime without end,
Called to the colours, no son of mine send.*

Bill Bingham (Glasgow)

Location D



Location E



What is the Point of Economic Activity?

The last 30 years has seen a progressive domination of 'Free Market' in the economies of most countries to the point where society now seems to exist for the benefit of the markets. However the crisis of 2008 exposed weaknesses and instabilities of our current system and many on both the left and right are looking for new ways forward. In May 2012 the Church of Scotland produced a report 'The Right Relationship with Money' compiled by, among others, a businessman, a trade unionist and an academic. Much of what follows is taken from that report.

The starting point of the report was to ask what the economy is for. The question was answered with profound simplicity with the words 'The economy is for God, which means it is also for my neighbour; it is for my neighbour which means it is also for God'. This is very similar to our notion of seeing that of God in everyone. We might also think of economics as a way of enabling us to witness our testimonies of Peace, Equality, Simplicity, Truth and the Environment. All economies are underpinned by certain moral and ethical values; we seem to have been sleepwalking into an economic system which has its core value of creating wealth at an ever increasing rate.

The two fundamental values which, in my view, should underlie any economy are equality and sustainability. Market capitalism, while having many advantages for some as a way of organising economic activity, does nothing to guarantee an equitable distribution of income, and inequality has been increasing both within and between most countries. This inequality undermines the bonds which hold our society together, creating a sense of unfairness which diminishes us all. A more equal economy can be created when the freedoms people cherish in their economic life are held in balance with the values they cherish in their social and political life. It prizes the opportunities which material security gives to new generations and seeks to extend these to all children in our society. It is an economy which ensures that all members of society have a minimum income which allows them to live dignified and healthy lives. It is an economy which is inclusive of people with different physical and intellectual abilities.

A sustainable economy is one which exists in a healthy relationship with the earth's population and environment. It thrives without polluting the earth, poisoning the rivers and seas or destroying our climate; it thrives without impoverishing and depriving some, while others live by waste and excess. It recognises that we cannot increase economic activity indefinitely in a finite world and that economic growth does not necessarily lead to greater wellbeing and happiness. It plans for a future where energy is drawn mainly from renewable sources and where raw materials are either renewable or reusable. In other words it extends the principle of equality to people from the rest of the world and to people yet to be born.

A healthy economy is the product of a society which is clear about the common good and brave enough to shape its common life towards it. It grows by empowering the many, not the few, and by encouraging people to work and stand together in solidarity. It rewards those who share as well as those who speculate in shares, those who co-operate as well as those who compete. It promotes the tax system as a social **10**

obligation rather than something to be avoided and uses it to achieve a fairer distribution of the nation's resources. It promotes people into becoming participants rather than simply reducing them to consumers.

Economic injustice and the competition for resources together with climate change and global militarisation are now seen as part of the concept of 'sustainable security' which recognises that real security comes not from trying to control the actions of other countries and groups but from dealing with the underlying causes of insecurity. A 'poverty free' economy is both a hope and an imperative. Realism about the difficulties of achieving it should make us more determined rather than more cynical.

Martin Mansell (*Glasgow Meeting*)

Costa Rican Aspirations



Answers to Locations A-B in January 2014's WSQN

A = Site of Rough Castle Roman Camp and Valum, near Falkirk.

B = Remains of Timber Ponds in the Clyde, looking westwards towards Greenock.

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Area Meeting by Telephone

Area Meeting by Telephone will be on Monday 10 March and follow the same format and timing as in previous conferences.



The arms trade in Scotland: 10.30am-5pm, Saturday 15th March, Renfield Centre, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow

What's the link between Edinburgh and drones, or Ayrshire and the teargas turned on democracy protesters in the Middle East? What does Dundee have to do with the repression in Bahrain? Find out at an-info-and skills-sharing day in Glasgow on 15 March. Bringing together campaigners from across Scotland and Northern England, CAAT's Campaign Day is a great opportunity to pick up information and campaign skills. We've got an exciting agenda lined up - get in touch if you'd like to offer a talk or workshop too!

- Hear from Edinburgh CAAT about their inspiring campaign to end arms company sponsorship of the Edinburgh April Science Festival.
- Discuss how we can use the referendum debate to rethink the arms trade, whether in an independent Scotland or as part of the UK.
- Learn about CAAT's research into shifting resources away from the arms trade and creating green jobs.
- Explore useful skills for running campaigns and having an impact.
- Share news and information from the campaigns you care about.

With top-level arms dealers due to meet in Scotland a few weeks later and the opportunity to challenge Edinburgh Science Festival's support for a drones company, it's an important time to get involved!

Please let us know you plan to come! events@caat.org.uk

Northern Young Friends Summer Shindig 26 July-2 August.

The theme is "Journeys", and the Shindig at Ackworth School is open to all youngsters between the ages of 11 and 16 on 30th June. Priority is given to youngsters from Scotland and the north of England, but there is space for some from further away. The fees are £300 for the first child and £280 for each sibling and bursary help is available. Information and applications forms have been sent to all eligible youngsters on our GM database, and to LMs, but if you know of someone who hasn't received the information, please contact the Co-ordinator, Helen Robbie, at summershindig@gmail.com or 07818 614 626

The deadline for the next issue of West of Scotland Quaker News is 21 March. Copy should be sent to the editor Bryan Bowes preferably in word or plain text email to: botany64@waitrose.com or by post on paper or disc to: 3 West Chapelton Lane, Bearsden, Glasgow G61