

West Scotland Quaker News

March 2013

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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).

News from Bronwen Currie

A repeat of last year's very successful gathering of "westerly" Friends at Inveraray Youth Hostel, takes place in the middle of March. We have an almost full hostel with Friends coming from Lismore, Islay, Arran, Bute and Mull in addition to points on the mainland stretching from Oban down to Ayr and Campbeltown and are looking forward a weekend of fun and fellowship and (we hope) a repeat of last year's stunning weather.

If you know of a youngster aged between 10 and 12 who has not been to Northern Young Friends Summer Shindig, there is still time to book on the fun-and-getting-to-know-each-other weekend for this age group (plus a parent) which is being held at Nethy Bridge from 31 May to 2 June. More information on both events from *Bronwen Currie* (01496 850006 or scotfriends@gmail.com).



Photo BGB 2013

The deadline for the next issue of West of Scotland Quaker News is March 31st.

Copy should be sent to the editor Bryan Bowes in word or plain text email to: botany64@waitrose.com or by post on paper to:
3 West Chapelton Lane, Bearsden, Glasgow G61 2DF.

Clerk's Letter

The competent-sounding young man on the train south looked very pleased with himself. He'd just landed an interview for the job he wanted in Tunbridge Wells, where he was moving from Preston to be with his girl friend. She'd already moved there for a new job herself. All of us knew this as his phone conversation was so very public. I expect the carriage was cheering under its breath. A die had been cast, and new world of relationship and experience beckoned, following their decision to follow change.

There was change in the air for me too; this was my last commute to work at Friends House: I was to retire at the end of the week. I've been reflecting on decisions in my life too. When I was 18 (it now feels as if it were in the Carboniferous) I made decision about faith. I'd found out about the small print of my then church on accepting scriptural authority. Didn't like that. At the same time I read a novel featuring Quaker conscientious objectors and their faith sounded as if it was on to something. I knew there was meeting house in my town and went along - and stayed. I got about and made friends at Yearly Meeting and other events. One was Friend in residence at the Glasgow meeting house in Newton terrace and I came to visit.

Concerned about the state of the world, I was walking home after meeting once thinking about what I could do about it - where to put my energies in life? Should it be politics or Quakers? Looking at myself I felt being with Friends was a better bet for my personality and gifts. I valued the Society and it felt important that it should continue to be there – what would the world be like without Quakers? So I said 'yes' to nominations committees and built up experience. Eventually I joined the staff at Friends House in London.

In 1992 staff were sent out to visit meetings so we could all be improved, and local Friends get to know us. Yours truly took the opportunity to find out more about Scottish Friends by picking West Scotland Monthly (now Area) Meeting. Friends kindly organised 2 weeks of visits: 1 week for Argyll and 1 week to cover everyone else. Clearing out my office, I came across the paperwork – letters from a wide range of Friends from almost all the local meetings. What a to do for the poor monthly meeting. Apart from learning how to pronounce 'Milngavie', the visiting and travelling gave me very helpful insights into the lives of small meetings in wide geographic areas; it was humbling to see how Friends just got on with things and provided a focus for newcomers. Since then I've worked with West Scotland Friends, as on the disability equality concern, and when planning the Summer Gathering at Stirling. Years on, things fell into place: the threads of my life had weaved a pattern and direction. An opportunity came with a place to live in Glasgow. I moved.

So decisions create new situations and opportunities beyond what we might imagine. And the biggest discovery was the importance of having community; a people to be with. Community doesn't just happen – it results from what we all put in to it, sharing the work. I often reflect on Quaker faith & practice 10.20.

Our January Community Gathering emphasised that being a living community was

central to a living Area Meeting, which depends on the service of those Friends giving to it. Their threads are the same: giving means strengthening the community and also gaining from it: the wealth of friendships and support that forms a living network of community. How are the threads weaving in your life?

You'll have a new clerking team for next Area Meeting – ('if spared' as the old Quaker saying goes) We now have two assistant clerks to draw on – Margaret Morton and Janette Walkinshaw – and Margaret will be with me at the telephone receiver for 11th March evening meeting. If you've never done a telephone conference meeting, neither have I, so it could be interesting.

Michael Hutchinson (*Glasgow Meeting*)

W. Penn - Chief Scamp of Heretic and Malignant Quakers

Sept. 15, 1682

To ye aged and Beloved, Mr. John Higginson:

There be now at sea a ship called Welcome, which has on board one hundred or more of the heretics and malignants called Quakers, with W. Penn, who is the chief scamp, at the head of them. The General Court [Governing Body of Massachusetts, BGB] has accordingly given secret orders to Master Malachi Huscott, of the brig Porpoise, to waylay the said Welcome slyly as near the Cape of Cod as may be, and make captive the said Penn and his ungodly crew, so that the Lord may be glorified and not mocked on the soil of this new country with the heathen worship of these people. Much spoil can be made by selling the whole lot to Barbadoes, where slaves fetch good prices in rum and sugar, and we shall not only do the Lord great service by punishing the wicked, but we shall make great good for His Minister and people.

Yours in the bowels of Christ,

Cotton Mather

Published in : The Powell House Cook Book (A collection of recipes from Quaker cooks, to share with all Friends and friends of Friends), 1974. Elsie K. Powell House, Inc. Old Chatham, New York. (According to its website Powell House is "The Quaker Conference and retreat Center of New York").

Many thanks to **Helen Macdonald** (Wigtown Meeting) for this extract from a cookbook she bought in the USA some years back.

Note from Editor: Cotton Mather (1663-1728) was a Puritan minister who both criticised and defended the judges presiding at the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692 in which 20 people were convicted of witchcraft and hanged. (Between 1659 and 1661 three Quakers had been executed after returning - on pain of death - to Massachusetts following their earlier banishment.) John Higginson (1616-1708) was a Puritan minister and an active opponent of the Quakers.

Area Meeting: Glasgow January 2013

Quaker Get-together – more than an Area Meeting

There was a fairly good attendance, though the three people who attended from the more distant meetings had all stayed in Glasgow the previous night. Others were prevented by illness, weather or ferry disruption. Perhaps January isn't the best month for a partly social event.

Trustee Kate Philbrick acted very ably as clerk for the business part of the day.

The best news was that we appointed a clerking team; Michael Hutchinson (Clerk) and Margaret Morton (Assistant Clerk) join Janette Walkinshaw who was appointed in December. At the end of the day the old clerks were able to hand over to the new ones in a face-to-face session. Gisela Creed was appointed to convene the Nominations Committee temporarily until a new convenor is found.

We welcomed Zem Moffat into membership, despite what was reported last month. (In December it was Phillida Ball who was welcomed.)

For the time being, Martin Mansell is the person to contact if you wish to communicate with Overseers.

The formal business almost over, Kate Gulliver told the entertaining story of "Penny & the Q-fish". Before and after the lunch break, there was a session in which a panel consisting of present or former office-holders described what their work was like. Almost all of them mentioned how rewarding (in a spiritual way) they had found the work. There is a need for the nominations committee to know who would be interested in and available for service. So speak to any committee member; there is one in each local meeting. Ask your clerk.

We felt that the introduction of some telephone AMs had been successful at involving more Friends. But it wouldn't be suitable for every AM.

The children present had their own activities, but they appeared from time to time. Everyone who wanted could help with an ongoing jigsaw map, a Quaker Quiz (won by the new Clerk), Quaker personality bingo (won, appropriately enough, by the acting Nominations Convenor).

Everyone seemed to enjoy the event; thanks to Glasgow Hospitality Committee for their contribution and to Kate Gulliver and Peter Christy for their work arranging the non-business part of it. I hear they plan to repeat parts of it later for the southern meetings.

Jane Mitchell (*Argyll & Islay Meeting*)

Next Area Meeting by Telephone Monday March 11th

Don't forget at 7.30pm! Arrangements as previously (see WSN May 2012, p.12) - but if in doubt contact Asst. Clerk Margaret Morton at 0141 889 2865.

Scotland's Future

I've been dipping into 'Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence', edited by Scott Hames and published by World Power Books (Edinburgh). Twenty-seven writers provide short essays or poems on the subject in this 200-page volume.

In it Friend Margaret Elphinstone writes:

"I'm not sure that an independent Scotland will offer better solutions for living in the end times ... Maybe we could accept that the economy cannot grow for ever, and that capitalism is a fraud. Maybe we could learn to consume less, and share more ..."

Scotland has a rare opportunity to work out its own future if it wants too. Will it rise to the challenge? If the voters say Yes, then the SNP will have fulfilled its mission. How might politics proceed from there? Could there be a new breed of government less in thrall to bankers and the US? Could a small country emerge that was content to care for all its people, and not be concerned about strutting on the international stage?

In the last century William Charles Braithwaite (1919) had written:

"Evils which have struck their roots deep in the fabric of human society are often accepted, even by the best minds, as part of the providential ordering of life. They lurk unsuspected in the system of things until men of keen vision and heroic heart drag them into the light, or until their insolent power visibly threatens human welfare." Quaker Faith & Practice 23.05

I hope that Scottish Friends may wish to address these issues in the next eighteen months.

Action of Churches Together in Scotland is supporting

<http://www.futureofscotland.org/>

where more information and views may be found.

Jane Mitchell (Argyll & Islay Meeting)

Yearly Meeting 2013, Friends House, London 24-27 May

Yearly Meeting is the annual business assembly of Friends in Britain (see Quaker Faith & Practice chapter 6). Information about attending this year's event can be found on the Britain Yearly Meeting website - <http://www.quaker.org.uk> - click on the picture 'YM 2013' on the front page.

Friends at the earliest Yearly Meetings were asked to respond to the questions: *Friends, How has the Truth prospered amongst you?* [since the last Yearly Meeting], and *How Friends are in peace and unity?* These were practical questions to ascertain how the Society was doing in the early days, but they were also reflective. We find questions – as in Advices and Queries – a helpful way of getting down to matters of real importance.

We can still ask ourselves questions – what makes us Quaker? What makes us distinctive? What unites us? This year, to help prepare for Yearly Meeting you might like to reflect on and respond to the queries below and to share your responses.

1. How have you discerned the right way forward in your own life?
2. What experiences have you had of Quaker meetings being guided by the spirit when making decisions?
3. What do you value about the ways in which Friends work together?

You can respond in the following ways:

Webforum: www.quaker.boards.net (more information can be found at: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/yearly-meeting-forum>)

Email: ym@quaker.org.uk

Post: Yearly Meeting, Events & Committee Services, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW12BJ

During the first session of Yearly Meeting, on Friday evening, we will hear a distillation of any responses received. If you, or your meeting, want to contribute, please send your thoughts by 7 May

Michael Hutchinson (*Glasgow Meeting*)

When does the service start?

The visitor enquired “When does the service start?” The Quaker replied “When the Meeting is over”.

An old joke that makes the point that Quakers’ lives are beyond sitting in silence. Our Quakerism is about daily living. So when considering the State of the Meeting, we thought we should ask Friends “What do you do outside the Meeting for Worship?”

Like many a good question, it is simple but very complex. Does it mean “at work”? Is it a confessional? Isn’t it boasting? Boasting is what we want! Of course, boasting is normally restricted to politicians and such like, but self-effacing humility hides our best selves under the proverbial bushel.

What do Quakers do outside the Meeting? Our question is asking us to share the best side, the interesting stuff. What it is that makes changes for the better – in ourselves and for others? It may be OK to be humble and self-effacing about some things and some times, but not to respond to this question!

There is a tale about the great baseball player, Joe di Maggio. An unassuming man. As a witness in court, he was challenged : “You are a basepall player? Are you any good?” He answered “I’m the best in the world.” His friends quizzed him later

about “boasting”. He explained – “ I was on oath.”

Like Joe Di Maggio in court, you are “ on oath”. You are being asked to share your truth as a Quaker, however embarrassing . Shyness is not a help, and confessions are uninspiring! What do you want to share?

So we decided to give it a try. And found that indeed the question is more complicated than we thought. This turns out to be beneficial. Even the first step created the need to examine the clash between sharing and privacy. Then what goes into the list? How detailed? Who is it for? Many questions! It turns out to be important to give some explanation, i.e. “Birds” might mean eating them, when you might mean “Feeding Peanuts to Chaffinches”.

In a small Meeting, we know each other pretty well. And yet, the lists reveal a richness in our friends which is rewarding and stimulating. Reading them provokes exclamations - “ Oh, I do that, too”. “ That’s really interesting!” “ I could ask her advice about that”.

The task certainly promoted useful discussion topics. “ I do that because I’m interested in it, not because I’m a Quaker”. How can you distinguish between what you do as a person, as a Quaker, as a Scot?

So our simple question has promoted our self-awareness, our valuation of our friends, our understanding of our Quakerness. And promises to give more in the coming months.

How about you trying it?

Bill Agnew (*Dumfries Meeting*)

Dundrennan Military Site

The dates for Meeting for Worship at the main gate of Dundrennan Camp, near Kirkcudbright, are as follows:

31st March 9th June 11th August 22nd September 10th November.

All Meetings are on a Sunday and start at 11.am.

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