

Quaker Quest

Glasgow Local Meeting (through its minute 15/15) has offered its Quaker Quest programme more widely to Area Meeting, particularly to local meetings outwith Glasgow. Glasgow Outreach Committee would like to offer one or two Quaker Quest events to such meetings and ask local meetings wishing to host a Quaker Quest event to get in touch with Mark Coleman. The local meeting would choose a Quaker Quest topic, host the event, provide one or two speakers and publicise event locally. Glasgow Outreach Committee will then match other speakers to suit the topic, give Quaker Quest training (most probably in Glasgow) and help with wider publicity. Information on Quaker Quest may be found on the Britain Yearly Meeting website. Glasgow Friends are planning their first Quaker Quest in May in east Glasgow on the topic of Quakers and Social Justice.

Alas, our Editor, Bryan, has had a serious accident and is in hospital. I am sure you will all hold him in the Light. Meanwhile his apprentice has cobbled this Newsletter together and as you will see she hasn't finished her lessons. Please feel free to put in the page numbers yourself! Also, there were two nice photos submitted, one of Christine Davis' memorial service but I have not been able to put them in. I hope you will be able to get them on a website. The 'At Home - Getting to Know Folks' is a new venture which we hope will involve different meetings and people, if you like it. Open to offers.

Next Area Meeting is on 11th April in Wigton

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

The deadline for the next issue of West of Scotland Quaker News is

Copy should be sent to the editor Bryan Bowes preferably in Word or plain text.

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West Scotland

Quaker News

March 2015

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Clerk's Letter

Every year since 1668, Quakers in Britain have gathered for their annual assembly, Yearly Meeting. They wrote in that year: We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another's faces, and open our hearts one to another in the Truth of God once a year, as formerly it used to be. (Quaker faith & practice 6.02). Any of us can go, and it is the place where we make decisions that affect all of us. We have responsibility to ensure enough Friends attend. But even if we can't go we can help the Yearly Meeting by supporting those going and wrestling in our meetings with what is on the agenda. We trust those going to make the decisions in 'right order' – by listening to the Spirit.

The last few years, in preparation for Yearly Meeting, we have been thinking about 'what it means to be a Quaker today' and what membership means. For the next few years we go outwards to consider 'Living out our faith in the world', looking at the questions:

- How can we open ourselves fully to the pain of the world without despairing or turning away? Might allowing ourselves to be vulnerable to each other transform pain into compassion and kindle a passion to heal?
- How can meetings be places where individuals are both supported and challenged as they wrestle with the complex issues that face us?
- How are we committed to our Quaker values? How can we witness for a better social order? How can the testimonies of individuals bring more peace and economic justice?
- What can we do to help bring about justice and equality in the society in which we live?

At Yearly Meeting this year, 1-4 May at Friends House, London, we will be looking at the issue of housing in particular. Especially as it relates to inequality in our society.

Part of the information in advance puts this in context:

As we wrestle with the implications of our testimony to equality, Quakers feel called to act more radically to tackle the underlying causes. This calling requires spiritual struggle and real practical change. Our testimonies are moving us to work for very different ways of organising our common life. We are also moving towards spending and saving our own resources in ways that are more compatible with our values, and away from uses that diminish the lives of our fellow human beings and the rich variety of life forms with which we share our planet.

As we long for a society of deep compassion and loving kindness in which we 'help one another up with a tender hand', we must witness to a different way of living, and help build the world anew.

Look for information on Yearly Meeting on the Britain Yearly Meeting website: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/ym>

Michael Hutchinson, Glasgow Meeting

Glasgow Bible Study Group

Alastair Reid

This group meets on the fourth Sunday of each month after meeting with a shared lunch. We are exploring different aspects of the Bible and early Christianity, seeking to appreciate the diversity of beliefs then and how they affect our beliefs today.

We are currently doing this by finding out about some of the great Christian controversies and how early Friends understood them. A key approach we are taking is that there is no single correct way of reading and understanding the Bible and that the first Quakers did not have all the answers! We use short videos/audio to bring out the diversity in the Bible and to stimulate our discussions.

We have looked at a number of 'controversial' topics in the last few months including 'Did Jesus Expect to See the World's End?' 'Was Jesus Raised from the Dead?' 'Is the Book of Revelation about Our Future?' and 'Did Early Christians Accept the Trinity?' At the time of writing we have planned sessions on:

(1) Did the Jews Expect a Suffering Messiah? All agreed that Jesus had been crucified, but there were harsh disagreements between the Jews and the early Christians. Jews insisted, and, for the most part, continue to insist that Jesus was not the messiah, that the messiah was not supposed to suffer and die, that scripture did not predict a suffering messiah. The gospel accounts were written many years later by Christians who believed that Jesus fulfilled scripture. Naturally, they told their stories about Jesus in such a way as to reflect this belief. It has been argued, it was not that the events of Jesus's life that fulfilled what was predicted but that the stories told about his life were influenced by passages of scripture, so that later readers would see the echoes of scripture in these stories.

(2) Is Paul the Real Founder of Christianity? Many Quakers dislike Paul for his misogyny and his homophobia. However did he really write these passages or were they inserted later by more conservative Christians? It comes as a shock to most people to learn that some scholars do not think that Jesus was the founder of Christianity. For these scholars, Christianity is not the belief in Jesus's message about the coming of the Son of Man in judgment but the belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christianity is not the religion of Jesus but the religion about Jesus. In this view, it was the apostle Paul who first promoted the religion based on Jesus's death and resurrection rather than on his teachings, and for that reason, it is Paul, not Jesus, who is the founder of Christianity.

(3) Later sessions will look in more depth at the Book of Revelation and why it was so important to early Friends. Why is it seen as a book of liberation by oppressed people through the ages. However many portions of the New Testament, introduce a compassionate Jesus who turns the other cheek, loves his enemies, and shows grace to all. But the Jesus we find in Revelation and some portions of the Gospels leads an army of angels bent on earthly destruction. Which is the true revelation of the Messiah—and how can both be in the same Bible?

The Glasgow Bible Study group welcomes all those with an open mind to explore the diversity of beliefs that arose from both the Old and New Testament, how Quakers have been influenced by them over the years their relevance our own lives.

WHAT ELECTION?

Margaret Roy

Housing, sustainability, trident, equality, the list goes on.
And so where do we start? What are YOUR concerns?

There is something not right. Fundamentally, deep down, there is something not right. Certainly I have a profound sense of ill at ease, dis-ease.

Yes, we need to take action. We are part of the world so we own a degree of responsibility. The world is what we make of it. Is it God's Kingdom on Earth? Bonhoeffer talks about the church in the community. It was only after reading Robinson's Honest to God that I realised the obsession of today's Quakers with Action. If the Kingdom has to be here on Earth then each of us can influence its coming. Each can work towards it with whatever skills and talents we have.

The feeling of unease is of something missing.

In Robinson's dichotomy the other pole is Tillich's Ground of Being, that which links us to the Divine. In Buddhism this is the Ground of Emergence that gives rise to a sense of Self and of connection. It leads us to Bodhicitta, Great Mind, which is the Heart of Compassion. Surely the two need to go together?

The 'World' is not the Kingdom If we look around, it is Greed, Avarice, Self-aggrandisement, selfishness, etc. Much of this is defence. We need to survive so we scabble for our bit but here is lack of awareness and connection, no concept of consequences or ownership of actions. OK, that is an enormous generalisation but you know what I am talking about. In terms of nonviolence, we talk of increasing understanding, of being able to face people and talk with them. In retirement, I have been working in committees aghast at strategies to save face and/or dispel powerlessness. Quaker simplicity often leads to shock or open offence, or lack of engagement. On a grander scale powerlessness can describe what is happening in our World. Whilst our actions address much of this, much is more subtle and hidden.

Then, one defence to powerlessness is action. The relatives of the patient diagnosed with terminal cancer grasp at any hint of cure. The family of the aged mother fuss around her . . . anything to make it better. What they are grasping at is HOPE and while we cannot live without Hope, false hope hides reality. It is a false defence. Of course, that does not mean in an over-generalisation that there is no possibility of cure, or to fuss is not to love. What category do our Actions fit into?

Back to the World. What is fundamentally wrong in the human condition? I believe what is missing is principles, even vision. What is the connection to the grander scale that gets lost in fragmentation of all these actions? Previously this might have been the purpose of religion. Today many turn away from religious hope that promises an afterlife and a brave new world in heaven. It seems false, not real hope.

In a world where we turn against the anthropomorphic God OUT THERE – I call it the Newtonian Mind – have we dismissed the 'divine' rather than seeking a different relationship? Does Quaker practice have an answer to the great sense of loss and disconnection?

I think we have.

Take heed, dear Friends, to the prompting of love and truth in your hearts. trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life

A&Q 1

West of Scotland Area Meeting was held on 9th March, 2015 by Telephone Conference

Our Clerk, Michael Hutchinson had prepared a very useful set of draft minutes for us as it was, as he put it, a "keep the wheels turning" meeting. I know one is often sitting comfortably at home or in a small group in someone else's house but Telephone Conferences are always a bit of a strain, I find, and so anything that eases the business is a great help. I think it is the effort of concentrating and listening without the help of people's actual presence and body language that is demanding. To have the draft minutes in front of me enabled me to stay with it! Thank you, Michael.

There was the sorrow of recording the death of our Friend, Christine Davis followed by the approval of two Young Friends nominated to attend Yearly Meeting; the joy of a proposed Quaker Wedding in Glasgow in September; the acceptance into Membership of Susan Bhaumik; the application for membership by Rob Quin of Castle Douglas Meeting and the transfer into the area of Francesca Bennett to Glasgow Meeting. All these last items would have lifted Christine's heart as they did ours.

We learnt of the work of Mairi Campbell-Jack, our new Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer. She is working on:

- 1 The General Election 2015
- 2 Militarisation in Scottish Society
- 3 Trident Replacement
- 4 Economic Justice, sustainability and peace

We were encouraged to keep up to date with her concerns and to inform Elisabeth Allen, convener of the GM Parliamentary Liaison Function Group, which guides Mairi, if anything in which we have experience or expertise comes up.

The Communication Group of Glasgow LM has been considering the necessary development of the website and Social Media in the efforts to involve young people and to help keep us in this far flung Area in touch. There is obviously great potential here and much is owed to the groups tackling these developments.

Kate Gulliver's telephone connection was so poor that she was unable to speak to the Treasurer's Report. We were just able to hear her assent to a request for child care during the West Coast Gathering at Crianlarich on 20-21 March which is hosting a Woodbrooke on the Road. Kate's further comments will be included in the full Minutes of this Area Meeting which will be available soon.

Judith Baines

*If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.
Dalai Lama*

That which is morally wrong cannot be politically right”

Quaker Faith and Practice 23.25 (1822)

The quote from Quaker Faith and Practice struck home to all who attended the “detention, destitution and deportation” course held at Woodbrooke from 6-8 February. The course was organised by the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, QARN, to raise awareness about the current experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK and how Quakers can find ways to be active for change. I was nominated by West of Scotland area meeting to attend, partly because of my involvement with Scottish Detainee Visitors (SDV) and am very grateful to have taken part in such an inspiring event.

Over the generous mealtimes and in the lovely space of Woodbrooke I was able to listen to other Friends’ experiences of working with asylum seekers and refugees- there were people who visit the detention centres, volunteer at night shelters for destitute asylum seekers and supporting people to take charge of their asylum claim. There was particular concern over the destitution that many asylum seekers face at some point in their asylum process including needing to live on support of £35 a week, with the Azure card and no access to real money, to those who have had a claim refused and have no access to state support.

In sharing the experiences we were able to provide each other with support and the moments that keep us going- including when the people we support gain their status, develop the confidence to speak for themselves and the small victories in support for asylum seekers. We also met with Jerome from Detention Action and Mike from Still Human Still Here- speaking about their campaigns. Both were still very optimistic about the possibility for change, particular in the light of the up-coming general election.

Still Human, Still Here work to campaign for the rights of asylum seekers, raising awareness of the destitution that asylum seekers can experience. Still Human have also been working to improve decision making on granting asylum- many asylum seekers who are refused on their initial application are granted asylum on appeal and Still Human argue that this costs the government a huge amount of money as well as the impact it can have on the mental health of very vulnerable people who are applying for asylum. They are calling for the government to allow asylum seekers the right to work (after six months in the UK or if they have been refused asylum but are not able to be returned to their home country). This will enable asylum seekers to be able to support themselves- reducing their dependence on the state and helping them to integrate into British society. For more information about this campaign go to <https://stillhumanstillhere.wordpress.com/take-action/> .

There are numerous concerns about the use of detention for immigrants, from the treatment of vulnerable detainees to the lack of transparency that surrounds it- particularly as the majority of detention centres are run by multi-national companies like G4S. One area where Jerome from Detention Action believes there is a real opportunity for change is in the call for there to be a time limit on detention. The UK is the only country in Europe which does not have a time limit for how long they will hold people in immigration detention and this has led to hold people in immigration detention and this has led to cases where detainees are held for years before being released. As well as the devastating effect that this can have on their lives- living with the constant uncertainty about whether they will be deported or not- this is hugely expensive, £35,000 a year for each detainee. There is growing support for a time limit on

'General Election 2015 a guide for Quakers'

Malcolm Crosby

As with other Local Meeting Clerks, I received this publication from BYM with the February mailing and as I am a political animal, started to read it straightaway.

It spoke immediately to me as a very Quakerly publication, simple, direct, clear, relevant and informative. I liked the style:-

Issue with a brief explanation;

An extract from QF&P or other Quaker writings;

Questions for candidates; and

A person and/or website to ask for more information.

The Overview at the front is helpful and the Introduction sets out how to use the guide and what action we can take. The listed issues are a distillation of the collective discernment of BYM, but it does not stop there. We are encouraged to think beyond the questions offered and use them as inspiration for our own.

Appreciating that of God in all, we are asked to think what we are trying to achieve when asking a question.

I brought the publication to Meeting on the following Sunday and was pleased to find enthusiasm from Members and Attenders alike for me to obtain further copies from Friends House. Initially we ordered enough for the Meeting and I was able to pass them round when they arrived quickly from London.

We agreed at our MfW for Business that we should set a date to discuss what action to take on the publication soon, so that we could organise in time if required, which we did on 15th March. Actions from the discussion were:-

1. Find names parties and contact details of all the candidates. The majority of people in our Meeting live in the constituency of Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale, so we are confining our activity to that one at the moment.
2. Find out if other organisations in the area intend to hold a hustings, panel discussion or other activity, as we would wish to work with others if possible. This will include asking Tweeddale and Dumfries Local Meetings if they have plans.
3. Obtain further copies of the guide to hand out to others.
4. Although we do not have active involvement of children locally in our Meeting, to see if there are ways we can engage Biggar High School pupils, in particular on the subject of voter registration.

We discussed voter registration in particular, as there has been a change this year from household to individual registration and in many cases this has not been straightforward.

My wife took a considerable time to follow up the matter, when there were problems. This was done by the supposedly straightforward online method, so I wonder how many will have been put off, either given up or think they are registered when they are not. It is only recently that we have received confirmation that we are all registered.

Each of us took away an action from the meeting and will co-ordinate through the Clerk. There is nothing revolutionary about any of this, but it enthused me and I am grateful to BYM for production of this guide. I look forward to seeing this form of outreach spread wider and hope that many of you will find it beneficial.

What does the election look like from Scotland?

Blog posted on February 1, 2015 by Jessica Metherringham

Mairi Campbell-Jack is the Scottish Quaker Parliamentary Engagement Officer and is based in Edinburgh. She shares her thoughts on how the general election is seen in Scotland.

General elections in Scotland don't have the same importance as they once did. For example, party leaders talk about education issues, and Scots don't listen – because our education system is run by Holyrood. Spokespeople pontificate on promises to patients, and Scots turn off – health is controlled up here too. As well as justice, housing, environment, planning and local authorities. Even the bedroom tax, which is technically out of our control, had the Scottish Government coming up with solutions to mitigate the impact.

When leaders like Ed Miliband decide to focus on issues such as the NHS as a central plank of campaigning it cements in Scottish voters' minds the idea that Labour is a party that is not talking to them. There will be similar reactions to policy announcements from the Lib Dems and Conservatives that don't impinge on Scotland. Since devolution the Scottish arms of UK parties have struggled to make head offices understand that messages need to be packaged differently.

Of course, there are still many things which are reserved to Westminster, such as nuclear, EU matters, foreign policy. All of these concern the Scottish public, who have generally watched with alarm the lurch to the right and the rise of UKIP. Some fear that a further lurch could deepen the gap and grievances between England and Scotland, while Scotland looks set to elect more “alternative” representation. Many here have been delighted with the rise of membership of the SNP to the third biggest party in the UK, as well as the Green surge. Both help bring a tangibility to the General Election similar to that of the referendum.

The referendum ignited a political passion not seen for a long time – the ground is irrevocably shaking. This general election outcome will be one of the first places we see the results of these changes. Some political parties in Scotland are already gearing up to elect their candidates for Scottish Parliament elections of 2016, and you can expect the slightest tremor in a constituency majority to be analysed thoroughly.

Another potential factor is the proportion of the population who express distrust in the BBC and other major news outlets. There is already alternative print media launched, with alternative broadcast media in the planning stages. There could be a proportion of Scottish voters who stop getting their news from the same sources as the rest of the UK, which raises questions about access to news as well as news outlets representation of their audiences, implicit biases and the overall effect on engagement.

The one thing we can be sure of is a good turn-out. As one of my friends said, up here we no longer cross our fingers, we cross the ballot box.

Follow Mairi on Twitter at @ScotPolQuaker, or follow this website at @QuakerVote.

on detention- QARN have written a statement on the use of indefinite detention and ask that meetings read it and give it their support- <http://tinyurl.com/nm5e>. In this area Jerome was eager that Scottish Friends take action- Detention Action and other pressure groups have been in contact with the main political parties to urge them to include a time-limit to detention in their manifestoes. However there has been little contact with the SNP around this issue and, with the possibility that they will have a greater presence in Westminster after May this year, it is important that Friends raise this and ensure that it is an issue on the political radar. Again for more information about the campaign to end indefinite detention go to <http://detentionaction.org.uk/timelimit/indefinite-detention-in-detail>

The weekend brought Friends from across the UK together and I feel that the gathering helped to create a sense of hope and that we are able to work towards change. The last morning was gloriously sunny and seeing the budding snowdrops in the garden helped remind us of the joy that can spring up from the darkest places.

There was much more discussed at the weekend than I have space to cover here and I would be happy to speak to Friends further about this and the work of QARN.

If you would like to contact me my email is marionfairweather81@hotmail.co.uk

Marion Fairweather Glasgow Meeting

A BOOK THAT HAS INFLUENCED ME AS A QUAKER Michael Hutchison

A book that has influenced me considerably is "Beyond majority rule – voteless decisions in the Religious Society of Friends" by Michael Sheeran 1983. The author was a Jesuit who studied Quaker business methods in eastern USA. I found it gave me the key understanding as to the principles behind how we as a Quaker community come to reach decisions to allow us to live as a community in the world. Basically it is about listening, to the Presence and each other, however humble, and giving time for the community to get to the same place together. It can be mundane or reach amazing peaks, and it can fail when we are not following the process. His book explored it through following ordinary Quakers trying to follow these processes and was the more powerful for the ordinariness. We can do it. And it represents one of the most powerful expressions of regulating power in human groups too.

AT HOME - *Getting to know folks.*

A LOCAL MEETING - LANARK Margaret Roy

Come in, come in! And welcome. Meg our Elder has built up a roaring log fire but in winter still bring your coat because we are in the depths of the country. We meet in Wiston Lodge which is surrounded by trees - bluebells in the spring, always lots of birds singing and flying across the big windows in one of the three rooms that we use.

We are few in number, once it was often just 3 or 4 but now we usually get up to 10. Malcolm our Clerk works for the Forestry taking a special interest in renewables. We are all interested in sustainability, nature and gardening. Mark and Chrissy live in New Lanark on the banks of the Clyde. He is a professor working in housing. Chrissy has just completed her training in Alexander Technique but can be found down the field with her two garrons. We also have a strong interest in peace. Douglas works in the Justice and Peace offices in Edinburgh. His wife Jean is a member of the Iona Community who is a keen supporter of Faslane protests. Elisabeth works with children as a primary teacher. David, our newest member, lives in the retirement village of Auchlochan near Lesmahagow. Rachel, Margaret and Linda are part of the contingent from Biggar. Now Elizabeth Allen has left us for North Berwick to be nearer her family, almost half the Meeting comes from Biggar. Margaret is now the deputy editor of this newsletter.

We have lots of visitors. Muriel comes regularly from Milngavie. Others come from Peebles and West Linton. What a busy place. Young folk come from urban Glasgow and Edinburgh to learn woodcraft or simply to enjoy country life. The place often resounds to music from the many workshops. At other times it is a retreat for Sufis or Buddhists. Our most recent visitors en masse was Glasgow Meeting members planting trees.

ON BEING AN ELDER. Muriel Robertson

I had transferred my allegiance from Glasgow to Milngavie Local Meeting before a Friend from Nominations approached me to suggest a spell of eldership. I looked for guidance in Quaker Faith & Practice (usual reaction?) and was quickly reminded in Para 12.08 of the memorable line, "My dear, we have to take what we can get". I sought advice from other Friends and saw that all available members had been doing more than their fair share of necessary duties over the years. As one pointed out, "In a small Meeting, Buggins' turn comes round more often".

One great benefit of a small Meeting though, is that all members support and uphold each other and I feel we do take joint responsibility for the spiritual and pastoral care. Another feature of small Meetings is that quite frequently we have no vocal ministry but after shaking hands it is simple, in a small group, to ask Friends to share any thoughts that had not quite 'made it' during the worship. Our 'Afterword' can often lead to a deep and useful discussion.

I join the Glasgow elders for their regular Meetings, when I can, and appreciate their support. Occasionally I am therefore rostered for duty at Elmbank but I now find the experience of a large Meeting very different from when I was a regular attender there ten years ago.

NEW TO QUAKERS

Alison Rimmell

I have been asked to write about being a new Quaker in 200 words which is a difficult and challenging invitation to concise writing. I haven't quite managed it...

I started coming to Glasgow Meeting house as a new attender in October 2013 having arrived in the city in September to start a 2 year part time course at Strathclyde University.

I had four equally important reasons for coming listed here in no particular order of preference.

1. A fascination with circles and their potential for authentic connection and co creation of new systems of living
2. A need to experience my spiritual self amongst others in a non-directive environment
3. A desire to consciously and actively build in support into my life
4. A sense of a parallel with now and the social upheaval that early Quakers were dealing with - where the current social systems could not be trusted and the experience of self within became the barometer for living.

18 months on – my experience is somewhere in the following words.

Welcome, community, expression, holding, down to earth approach, cups of tea, packet soup, delicious homemade offerings, sharing, laughing, crying, saying what is on my mind, challenging and being challenged, frustration, a wonderful opportunity to be silent with others, consistency, stimulation, social justice, hard work, deepening

BEING WITH QUAKERS

Mary Kennedy

I am a Quaker in recovery from a life-threatening illness and have been very moved by the experience.

Quaker Friends have held me in the Light, and been active in a multitude of practical, personal and spiritual ways in helping me recover and sustain my recovery.

I have been moved beyond words by the individual compassion and Friendship I have experienced during this time.

As I have journeyed from incapacity back into being an active person again, I have noticed the tender way I have been helped to get back on my feet without knocking my 'pan oot' as we say here in Glasgow.

I am appreciating the sustained tenderness of the two interconnected communities I belong to the Glasgow Quaker community and the Alternatives to Violence Community, in new ways.

Both have provided me with purpose and re-connection to the people I have worked with all my working life. People from Glasgow, the ordinary, extraordinary people of this amazing and troubled city.

Thank you all!