



STAFFORDSHIRE QUAKER

WINTER ISSUE, FEBRUARY 2017

WOLVERHAMPTON: CITY OF SANCTUARY



Clun Valley Meeting hosted a day out for Wolverhampton asylum seekers who come mainly from West African countries. Rosemary and Mike Fox (near centre of picture) of Wolverhampton Meeting, along with Shropshire Friends and members at St Nicholas parish church in Codsall (where Mike is associate minister), accompanied the group. See page 8.

HOPE AND INSPIRATION IN STAFFORDSHIRE AM

Feelings of dismay, despondency and even desperation have often intensified since the EU referendum and the US presidential election. Our February Area Meeting will focus on what gives us hope - for peace, justice and the integrity of creation - and what inspires us to act.

Three Friends from Stafford Meeting (Maureen Alecock, and Gabi and Roger Oldfield) were inspired by a course at Woodbrooke in January entitled 'The Great Belonging', which helped us to think more positively.

DON'T ASK WHAT
THE WORLD NEEDS.
ASK WHAT MAKES
YOU COME ALIVE,
AND GO DO IT.
BECAUSE WHAT THE
WORLD NEEDS IS
PEOPLE WHO HAVE
COME ALIVE.

HOWARD THURMAN
1899-1981

African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader. His theology of radical nonviolence shaped a generation of civil rights activists. A key mentor to leaders, including Martin Luther King. He knew Rufus Jones and was influenced by Quakerism.

We were moved by the ideas of Howard Thurman (left) and were also reminded of the words of Mahatma Gandhi:

BE THE CHANGE THAT
YOU WISH TO SEE IN
THE WORLD.

What gives you hope?
What makes you and/or
your Meeting come alive?
What inspires you and/or
your Meeting to act? You
might like to follow up the
theme of Area Meeting
with some thoughts for the
next Staffordshire Quaker.

Roger Oldfield
Stafford Local Meeting

BEING THE CHANGE

- *supporting refugees*
- *campaigning on Palestine*
- *promoting fair trade*
- *opposing torture*
- *combating climate change*

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WELCOME AND CHOCOLATE IN LEEK

On Saturday 1 October Leek Quakers opened their historic meeting house to celebrate Quaker week.

As an added incentive, the theme: 'The Quaker link with chocolate', was liberally illustrated not only with printed information about the great Quaker chocolate families but also with varied examples of the culinary arts involving lots of chocolate.

In addition, the Co-op, which has recently moved to

new premises nearby, kindly donated a selection of Fairtrade chocolate products to sample. Fairtrade helps make cocoa farming in places like Ivory Coast and Ghana more sustainable, so farmers can invest in improving their communities. The 85,000 farmers in Ghana's Fairtrade-certified Kuapa Kokoo cooperative, for example, have built wells and toilets and invested in a mobile clinic to visit members' villages.

The open day attracted over

40 visitors. Most had a hot drink and a piece of cake or tiffin. Many stayed for some time, reading about the Cadbury, Rowntree and Fry families, picking up Quaker literature and talking to members of Meeting. We enjoyed welcoming people from far and wide and hope that we shall see some again in the future, though probably not the lady visiting family in Leek who lives in New Zealand!

Andy Collins, Leek LM



Getting to know the chocolate-makers

GLOBAL WARMING: UPDATE AND PLAN FOR ACTION

In 2007 Warwick Local Meeting held a meeting on how to adapt lifestyles to global warming. It was one of the best meetings on any topic which I had attended for several years, well worth travelling to the other side of Central England Area Meeting. Also a report was widely distributed to most of the local meetings of the former Quarterly Meeting.

But that was all of 10 years ago. Since then there have been many developments, some foreseen, some not. So it is high time there was an update!

From each of our local meetings I am making contact with at least one Friend who can speak to an aspect of global warming. So when we assemble such a panel this can stimulate questions, answers and discussion.

As an example I can speak about some of the basics behind global warming, specifically why carbon dioxide is such a villain when it is present as such a small trace in the atmosphere, merely a percentage of a percentage.

Other aspects can include:

- The acidification of ocean water and changes in marine life. Just as important as rising sea levels!
- As glaciers melt, major rivers (e.g. the Ganges, Indus and Yangtze) will shrink. Many people will lose water for drinking,

hygiene and irrigating crops.

- As arctic tundra melts it releases diseases and toxins from industrial effluent. Also it releases methane, the worst of the greenhouse gases as it is the slowest to be removed.

I envisage that this could provide an afternoon session at an area business meeting later this year. Possibly October at Stoke might be a suitable occasion. But naturally Area Meeting will advise on the best month and location.

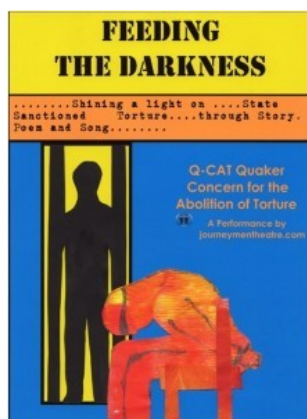
In the meantime I shall be glad to hear suggestions. Please do contact me.

John Nicholls,
Wolverhampton Meeting



FEEDING THE DARKNESS IN WOLVERHAMPTON

One September Friday evening, the Journeymen Theatre brought their latest production to Wolverhampton Meeting House. 'Feeding the Darkness' is the result of a commission from the Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture, Q-CAT.



The work involves eleven scenes each of which deals with different aspects of torture, including victims and perpetrators and covering examples of state torture from the 1930s to more recent, familiar examples. Sometimes extracts from verbatim accounts are used as the basis of the scene.

Quakers worldwide declared in 1976 that they were "utterly opposed to the use of torture and were determined to spare no effort to bring it to an end".

Q-CAT hope that this production will help publicise this concern. It was first shown at Yearly Meeting last year.

"Feeding the Darkness" is a work of art rather than just a sequence of dialogues about torture. The acting of Lynn and Dave Morris is highly accomplished. A range of simple props and judiciously chosen music enhance the action. The exploration of torture asks us to engage with those who train the torturers, the relatives of torturers and several accounts of torture from those who have been tortured – though thankfully the action on stage only implies the acts rather than showing any gory details. The sequence of

scenes leads to a moving conclusion which is accompanied by music from a late Beethoven string quartet (the Heiliger Dankgesang).

Watching "Feeding the Darkness" is not a comfortable experience and some might ask why they should bother as they are already convinced that torture is wrong. Q-CAT hope that the audience will be moved to act and the free programme includes a list of suggestions answering the question 'what can we do?'

Journeymen Theatre is the work of Lynn and Dave Morris, who are Quakers from Stourbridge. 'Feeding the Darkness' is one of several productions in their repertoire, each based on Quaker history or concerns.

John Babb,
Wolverhampton Local
Meeting



ANSWERING THE
QUESTION
'WHAT CAN WE
DO?'

VIVIANE WYATT

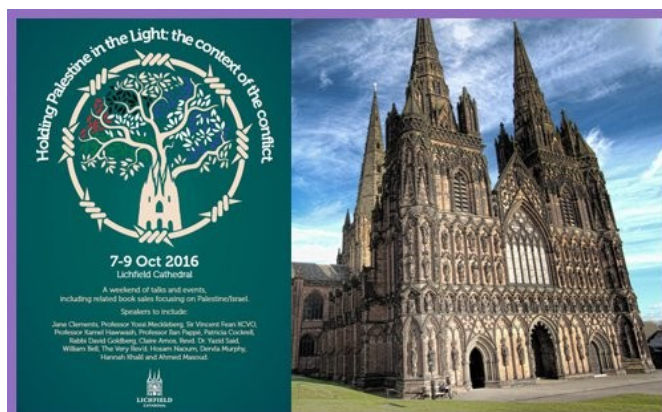


Viviane Wyatt, who attended Stafford Local Meeting for a time towards the end of her life, has died at the age of 86. After the service of thanksgiving for her life, members of her family spoke of how much attendance at Meeting had meant to her. She talked about it a lot.

Her granddaughter Vanessa read the following poem by David Harkins at the service.

You can shed tears that she is gone,
or you can smile because she has lived.
You can close your eyes and pray that she'll come back,
or you can open your eyes and see all she's left.
Your heart can be empty because you can't see her,
or you can be full of the love you shared.
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,
or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
You can remember her only that she is gone,
or you can cherish her memory and let it live on.
You can cry and close your mind,
be empty and turn your back.
Or you can do what she'd want:
smile, open your eyes, love and go on.

HOLDING PALESTINE IN THE LIGHT IN LICHFIELD



A HOPEFUL EVENT

In the last days of 2016 a hopeful event took place. A UN Security Council resolution which demanded an end to all Israeli Settlement in the occupied territories (including East Jerusalem), and which the UK supported, was passed. This resolution said quite clearly that the Israeli settlements are a 'flagrant violation of international law'. America which usually vetoes such resolutions, abstained, to the fury of the Israel lobby in America and the right wing government of Israel. A *Guardian* report states 'The US decision to abstain was immediately condemned by Netanyahu's office as 'shameful'.

The Obama administration defended this change to their usual practice of vetoing such resolutions, by saying that no progress had been made in the peace negotiations and that the continuing settlement building diminished any chance of a two state solution, the chances of which were rapidly disappearing.

Why have I given you this background? It is because these issues were in their different ways a key part of the Lichfield conference. Both the intransigence of the Government of Israel and viability of a two state solution were themes of the event. We started planning in 2014, the initiative came from the Lichfield Concern for Palestine group at present chaired by Paula Knight of Lichfield Meeting. At the time the initiative was mooted, Warren Bardsley, the retired Methodist minister who founded this group, still led it. I was deputed to approach Adrian Dorber the Dean of Lichfield who has led a number of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. It is clear that he feels what he sees there should be more widely shared and talked about. We set up an Ecumenical Planning group which included Quakers, Methodists and Anglicans. All members of the planning group came from the Concern for Palestine Group which considered it to be very important to provide the opportunity for people hear about what is happening in the occupied

territories of Palestine and of Israel's seemingly relentless land grab.

We faced some challenges especially as the Cathedral building, generously made available to us as the venue for the event, was going through a period of change to the building fabric and shut for a period. There were changes to the staffing structures. Commitment to ensuring that the realities of life and suffering in that region were known about, as a start to the work for justice and peace, kept us going through the ups and downs.

At the conference we had speakers as varied as Sir Vincent Fean, the British Consul General in Jerusalem from 2012 to 2014; Professor Kamel Hawwash, a British Palestinian who campaigns for justice for Palestinians; and Professor Ilan Pappé, a historian born in Israel who has written many books on the conflict. To read some of these talks go to: <http://lichfieldquakers.weebly.com/holding-palestine-in-the-light.html>

Not all the talks are available as some were a spontaneous response to what preceded them on the programme. A short video of some aspects of the conference is also available there on the Lichfield Meeting website or can be found at <https://youtu.be/-9tstsTVeP4>

HOLDING PALESTINE IN THE LIGHT (CONTINUED)

After most talks there was a question from an Israeli sympathiser, often persistent and not hearing or taking in the speaker's response but continuing with their own agenda. One member of the audience, who said she was supporting her Jewish friends, told us that the sort of event we were holding legitimised the low grade, soul destroying anti-Semitism found in some neighbourhoods in Birmingham and she seemed unable to hear that all the conference organisers deplored any anti-Semitism but that we thought what was happening to the Palestinians also needed to be heard.

Shortly before the conference the Dean of Lichfield circulated a message to the Planning Group to say that the Board of Deputies of British Jews were protesting about the conference and had reported him to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had supported the Dean.

The Board of Deputies demanded that we have a speaker nominated by them on our final panel and also they wanted to send an observer from the UK Zionist Federation and have posters making their case displayed. From the experience of some in the Planning Group it seemed wise to consider the matter of security and use of some additional

measures. In the event the BDBJ nominated speaker did not turn up and the young man observer from the UK Zionist Federation was pleasant enough though he noted carefully what was going on and made strong attempts to persuade individual members of the public afterwards of his case.

Many people said what a helpful conference it was and they felt it would have been much better attended had we got the publicity out sooner.

However after the conference the Cathedral was attacked on Facebook and the *Lichfield Mercury* devoted a front page spread to a blogger, David Collier, who said in his blog:

'If all they can bring to a conference at Lichfield are people who want the Jews to kneel, those that throw anti-Semitic slurs, those that wish Jews to disappear, then Israel needs to make the wall stronger, not to bring it down.' (*Lichfield Mercury* 13.10.16.)

He dubbed the event an

'anti-Semitic hate fest' which the Planning Group thought so far from the truth as to be actionable. How far this is from the truth you have only to look at the talks (see the link above) to decide for yourself.

We of course defended ourselves. Anthony Wilson (Lichfield Meeting and a member of the Ecumenical Planning Group) wrote to the *Lichfield Mercury* saying, 'Nowhere were anti-Semitic views expressed and our speakers set an impressive example of listening to each other as they presented their different perspectives on how a peaceful resolution could be achieved in the face of vigorous and violent confrontation.'

A letter signed by 25 people was sent to the *Lichfield Mercury* and individuals wrote to the *Lichfield Mercury* as well as to us, the Planning Group, to support us. It was very heartening to have letters from friendly Jewish people giving us support and recognising a pattern of abuse they had seen before when any-

AS A JEW, WHO
ACTIVELY
CAMPAIGNS FOR
PALESTINE, I
CAN ASSURE
YOU THAT THE
VEHEMENT
PEOPLE ARE A
MINORITY



Sumud Palestine, founded by Angela Glendenning (Stoke Local Meeting), held a stall at the event.

HOLDING PALESTINE IN THE LIGHT (CONTINUED)



one questioned Israeli Government policy on the occupied territories and the treatment of Palestinians.

One Jewish woman wrote, saying among other helpful remarks:

'I have just heard about attempts to brand your event as anti-Semitic and "hate-filled".... I am Jewish and brought up in Israel. My strongest feelings are revulsion from the lies, hysteria and twisting of truth that Israel and its apologists indulge in....'

Another wrote:

'...As a Jew, who actively campaigns for Palestine, I can assure you, that the vehement people are a minority, who annoyingly claim to speak for British Jewry.

'My sympathies that your excellent event has been accused of anti-Semitism and I trust it won't spoil your pleasure at the success of the festival. The scare tactics that this unpleasant minority use are very troubling and disgraceful. Please carry on doing what you are doing, it is the right thing...'

Others wrote in support to key church members. Below is part of a letter circulated by Sharen Green, who has links to EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel). She

has written to a number of Bishops and others in this vein:

'I would like to draw your attention to the dreadful torrent of abuse released online after Lichfield Cathedral staged an event called "Holding Palestine in the Light".'

'It was salutary to read this account of the event from a Palestinian contributor which convinced me for one that the whole event took place in a spirit of seeking for peace and reconciliation. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20161015-lichfield-cathedral-stands-strong-in-the-face-of-bullying-by-the-pro-israel-lobby/#.WAlhjDF0hGU.facebook>

'The vilification which can be seen on the cathedral's Facebook page comes from many who were not present (and I can't pretend that I was there either). It has been called totally biased, anti-Semitic and a hatefest.

'It seems to me there is a well-orchestrated campaign to silence those of us who criticise Israeli policies by hurling around the slur that we are anti-Semites. Good Jewish people who speak out against oppression are howled down as self-hating Jews. This is happening in many spheres but Lichfield was a microcosm and as an Anglican I am very concerned for my own freedom of speech.

'I hope you will use your voice in solidarity with your colleagues at Lichfield and all others within our church who hold such events in an attempt to break down barriers and who seek a just peace for all in the region.'

I conclude this account, with continuing hopes for a just peace in the region. The planning group started with the hope that our work would be a contribution to the work of justice and peace. We now also hope that there is a growing recognition that expressing alarm at the Israeli Government policy towards Palestinians is not anti-Semitic but anti brutality and anti the great injustice faced by the Palestinians. Many Jews support this position. They are our friends and supporters. America, under the Obama administration, has become so frustrated with the Israeli government's undermining of the peace process that acting as a friend to Israel it has allowed the International Community to censure the building of ever more Jewish settlements on Palestinian land. At such moments the fragile flower, hope, blossoms momentarily.

Berry Dicker
Lichfield Local Meeting
and The Ecumenical
Planning Group

BREAK DOWN
BARRIERS AND
SEEK A JUST
PEACE FOR ALL
IN THE REGION



ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES: INFORMATION AND ACTION

Although government rhetoric is hostile to asylum seekers and refugees, there are three schemes which apply to people who are seeking refugee status in this country. Only the SVPR scheme is exclusively for Syrians.

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement (SVPR) programme relates to people and families currently in refugee camps bordering Syria;

The Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) scheme covers children without guardians who have

made their own way to the UK; and the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), new since July, extends provision beyond the original local authority where the child first claimed asylum (often Kent).

None of these schemes apply to adult asylum seekers already in this country.

If we are engaging with our MP or local authority (Staffordshire County Council in the first instance) councillors or officers, specifying which channel we are referring to might help to

focus on a more positive response. Every indication of informed support for settlement in our Districts will serve as encouragement, especially if opposition is also expected.

The best way of keeping up with events around asylum and refugee status is through the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network: contact qarn@lists.riseup.net, or look at the www.qarn.org.uk website.

Anthony Wilson
Lichfield Local Meeting

STUDY TOUR OF THE WEST BANK AND ISRAEL

SUMUD PALESTINE (North Staffordshire) is pleased to respond to a request from the UK Palestine Mental Health Network to promote the next Study Tour of the West Bank and Israel in March 2017.

Experience Travel Tours
Spring Study Tour
7 - 16 March 2017

This ten-day tour is for those working within the field of mental health and is being offered in conjunction with

the UK-Palestine Mental Health Network. See www.experiencetraveltours.com

Angela Glendenning
Stoke Local Meeting

EUROPE WITHOUT BORDERS



Gabi and Roger Oldfield attend Stafford and Luxembourg Meetings. A local RE teacher created this exhibition, displayed on Luxembourg railway station, to illustrate attitudes to prayer in Luxembourg's faith groups. Roger is on the Quaker panel at the front. Western European Quakers gather annually at 'Border Meeting' - see right.



Gabi (centre of picture) during this year's Border Meeting gathering in Strasbourg.

SUPPORT FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN WOLVERHAMPTON, CITY OF SANCTUARY



Another moment during the day
out in Shropshire
(see page 1)

'IT IS IN THE
SHELTER OF
EACH OTHER
THAT PEOPLE
LIVE.'

We can't solve the refugee crisis but we can welcome and befriend people who arrive here from diverse countries and cultures with nothing, afraid and alone. Support for the City of Sanctuary movement is growing in Wolverhampton and there is much going on. We try to foster a culture of welcome and hospitality to asylum seekers and refugees who find themselves here, isolated and often at the mercy of harsh officialdom and a hostile press. Destitution and detention are ever present realities, and we have been surprised to discover that it is not uncommon for asylum applications to take many years to resolve.

Just over two years ago, I responded to an appeal from City of Sanctuary to support a pregnant asylum seeker recently "dispersed" to Wolverhampton on her own. Two other local women also responded and between us we formed a support team for this young woman from West Africa. Thus began a firm friendship between the four of us and her baby girl.

Since then, my husband Mike, associate minister at our local parish church in Codsall (and a Friend) has been instrumental in setting up a church asylum seeker support group, whose mem-

bers offer friendship and support to individual asylum seekers. We also arrange occasional social events, for example a lunch party in a member's home and a summer BBQ on church premises. These events have enabled local people and asylum seekers to meet each other in a relaxed and informal atmosphere and have led to friendships being formed.

Wolverhampton Friends give generous support both in time and money and we have started our own Asylum Seeker Fund which we use mainly for providing basic needs such as food, baby items and basic household goods not available through other channels. Our funds also help towards the tuition fees of an asylum seeker studying at Wolverhampton College, as she is not entitled to apply for student finance.

It has been encouraging to discover that despite some media reports there does indeed exist a pool of goodwill. People want to find ways to help. When last autumn we launched a Christmas shoebox appeal to give out as presents at a refugee Christmas party, we were overwhelmed with brightly wrapped shoeboxes filled with practical gifts from churches and community groups.

In October 2016, a memorable day out for a group of Wolverhampton asylum seekers was hosted by Clun Valley Quaker Meeting in Shropshire. The guests were entertained and looked after with great kindness and generosity; all the asylum seekers who took part enjoyed themselves and appreciated the rare opportunity to spend a day in the countryside. (A report of this visit appeared in *The Friend*, 16/12/16)

It is caring and friendship that seems to make the difference to those who are strangers in our midst. Just knowing that there are people nearby who care about them and who are willing to lend a listening ear and who may be able to offer some practical help when difficulties arise is tremendously important. In return we meet some brave and wonderful people who enrich our lives, and from whom we have much to learn. "It is in the shelter of each other that people live." (*Inderjit Bhogal, founder of City of Sanctuary, November 2016*).

For more information please go to: wolverhampton.cityofsanctuary.org

Rosemary Fox,
Wolverhampton Local
Meeting



City of Sanctuary

BECOMING EVERYDAY LIFE

I think of God as the Whole, and I wonder can we live as Wholeness? We are all separate individuals, we all see, hear, feel, think differently, to various degrees, not realizing we are also points of view from which Wholeness sees. The view is restricted by our individual form, yet we can be aware that we are that Wholeness restricted by our individual circumstances, conditioning, our story. This goes beyond the realisation of our interconnectedness, this is the realisation that we are the Whole within a point and space in time.

How can I develop so that I live from Wholeness, letting the divine source manifest in my everyday life? In Soto Zen it is said that practice is enlightenment, and enlightenment is practice. So how do I as a Quaker practice? We have Advices and Queries, Quaker Faith and Practice. How do they become the foundation of our life and not just words on a page? For me, it is about giving time and space to living spiritually. This means developing Awareness, becoming

ing Presence, allowing a sense of wonder, embracing otherness, accepting reality, surrendering myself, expressing gratitude, and offering love. There are many times when I fail, yet this not a sin, for I have realized my failure, and each recognition of that failure is then a success. I have seen where I am going wrong and I can correct that, or attempt to correct the damage I may have done. My intention is to keep moving towards Wholeness, yet it is a journey I will never complete. A dance with life that does not end until I can dance no more.

Perhaps the most useful "rule" to live by as an individual is, to let go of anything that separates me and God. What am I doing and who am I doing it for? It may not be "bad", but is it in control of me, is it actually an addiction, a distraction, an escape, and who is paying for it? What seeds are being watered? Who am I becoming, what am I manifesting, contributing to? Is it dividing me from the Whole, creating me and not

me, them and us? Is anyone suffering from my pleasure, am I actually suffering?

I find the real way for me to know is to return to stillness, to be the watcher of all that arises within and to then see in the Light of Presence. The mind soaks up all it is exposed to, and in the Light I can see what separates me from God, and I can let it go, if that is what I choose to do. I have a choice, and I may slip and slide because I cannot live as the Whole, but I can always return to stillness where it is all revealed, where I am not judged but am loved, nurtured and renewed, where the separation between me and God dissolves, where in Soto Zen it would be said that I can see my true face. Returning from the stillness I am able to be in the world of form refreshed and ready to start again. To take another step forward in this journey of becoming my True Self within everyday life.

Alex Thomson
Stone Local Meeting

THE REAL WAY
FOR ME TO
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SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Maggie Jeays of Stafford Local Meeting has recently completed a two-year course on Spiritual Direction, run by Southwark Anglican Diocese. If anyone is interested in finding out more, please contact her at:

mljeays@btinternet.com, or
telephone 01785 822718.

Spiritual direction is a way of meeting with someone - a spiritual director or guide - to share your thoughts and

reflections about your faith. You may experience spiritual direction while on retreat. You may also meet with a spiritual director regularly throughout the year.

WHO NEEDS AREA MEETING?



THERE IS A RESPONSIBILITY LAID ON EACH ONE OF US, NOT JUST 'INTERESTED FRIENDS', TO ENSURE THAT AREA MEETING THRIVES AS A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY.



Adamites, Behmenists, Fifth Monarchists, Grindletonians, Ranters... and, of course, Quakers. The seventeenth century was rife with Dissent of which these are only a small sample. Of all the radical, and often revolutionary, movements only a handful survive: among these are the Quakers. This, I believe, is in no small measure due to the fact that very early in the history of the Society a sound administrative structure was established which has served us well for over 350 years.

Until 2007 area meetings were known as monthly meetings. The change was made to give more emphasis to the area meeting as a spiritual community rather than a regular event, and in the interests of accuracy because many monthly meetings no longer met monthly.

Monthly meetings were an important part of the gospel order established by George Fox, which played a large part in ensuring the survival of the young Society of Friends. From 1659 onwards monthly meetings were set up, first for men only, then for women and finally joint; they combined business with social ties, caring for the poor and prisoners, education and ministry. By 1676 they were the unit of authority for membership, marriages, property, records, the recognition of ministers (until 1924) and the recognition and laying down of local

meetings; most of these functions continue today. So too does their formal responsibility, completed by 1789, for the appointment of elders and overseers. (Quaker Faith & Practice 4.01)

Sitting between the local Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings², Area Meeting still remains the heart of the Society. It is the primary meeting for church affairs in Britain Yearly Meeting.³ QFP lists twenty responsibilities of Area Meeting (4.10) which would need to be re-assigned if AMs ceased to exist. As well as Membership matters, these include finance and property management, the supervision and recording of marriages and deaths, and the enhancement of the spiritual life of the Society. Very importantly it provides the mechanism for the testing and channelling of grass-roots concerns.

Why therefore is Area Meeting in danger of becoming the Cinderella of the Quaker calendar? There is, I think, a perception – and not just among Staffordshire Quakers – that Area Meeting is 'boring' and the responsibility of a few interested Friends. This could not be further from the truth: as QFP says: 'Its role is to develop and maintain a community of Friends, a family of local meetings who gather for worship and spiritual enrichment. It should provide that balance between

worship, mutual support, administration, learning, deliberation and social life which can make its meetings enjoyable occasions and build up the spiritual life of its members.'⁴ Interestingly, QFP does not prescribe any format for the holding of Area Meetings allowing for a variety of possible models. Some Area Meetings, such as Northumbria, have radically rethought their traditional practice, entrusting routine business to smaller committees.

If indeed Meetings are boring, then it is up to all of us to find ways of ensuring that they are not. The Clerks have a role to play certainly, but they are only a part of the Meeting: time can often be used more efficiently if detailed matters can be prepared in advance. However, the whole meeting should deal with matters which are fundamental to its identity as a spiritual community.⁵ There is a responsibility laid on each one of us, not just 'interested Friends', to ensure that Area Meeting thrives as a spiritual community. It is YOUR Area Meeting, so give it a go: come along, get involved, let your ideas be known. You never know, you might actually enjoy it!

Brian Cleary
Utttoxeter Meeting and
Staffordshire AM Clerk

APPROACHING OLD AGE WITH COURAGE AND HOPE

Firstly let me explain I am a visitor to my local Quaker house, and receive the hospitality of the members. Always made to feel welcome and included in the worship and 'business' of the meeting.

When my stepdad retired out of his lump sum he decided to plan and pay for his funeral, he lived approximately 10 years after his decision. Believing it would reduce the stress when his death and funeral needed to be arranged. As he had been married before and felt he had two families with children, those with his first wife and us the children from his second marriage, to my mother. Indeed it helped greatly as he had been widowed from my mother, had married another lovely lady and had around 5 happy years with her. Needless to say the plan all clicked in at the appropriate time.

By a strange series of events my father died totally estranged from his children. His lifestyle choice was one of vagrancy; he was not homeless in the true sense of the word. He sought and lived a life on the 'open

road'. Despite the void, the mixture of feeling of abandonment and detachment from our lives. There was still love and my brothers and I came together contributed financial and reflective ideas to pay for and conduct his funeral.

My husband and I had discussed and considered our financial and social situation. We have an only child and have reached the stage of our life when some of the life trapping of mortgages and pension plans are in place, with other saving available for 'disposal', holidays a new kitchen? Etc.

The funeral plan we have in place, has allowed us to state our choices of service, music flowers and the like. There was a sense of peace as we walked away from the office of the funeral parlour, that even whilst the money had to clear to secure the agreement or the world might be in a different place when our time came. We had been able to express and acknowledge, our choices and feeling about this chapter of our lives.

My stepdad's actions, my father's situation and attending the Quakers all played a part in these plans. In particular Quakers Advice and Queries book fifth edition chapter 1. No 29 "Approach old age with courage and hope. As far as possible, make arrangements for your care in good time, so that an undue burden does not fall on others....". We are not fully prepared in any sense, we have not discussed if we needed adaptation to our living environment or physical care, what lifestyle choices we would seek or be able access. But have started with the end in sight.

"We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home."
Australian Aboriginal Proverb

If the views expressed do not resonate with Quakers beliefs and worship, I can only apologize.

In love
KBW-P
Stafford Local Meeting
Thank you



AS FAR AS
POSSIBLE, MAKE
ARRANGEMENTS
FOR YOUR CARE
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SO THAT AN
UNDUE BURDEN
DOES NOT FALL
ON OTHERS

FRIENDS' FUNERAL WISHES

A form is available which allows you to say what your funeral wishes are. See www.quaker.org.uk/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&query=funeral+wishes

It is suggested that if you fill in this form you could consult your partner or spouse, your closest relatives or friends, or other appropriate people who will be responsi-

ble for making decisions about your funeral. You are advised to lodge copies with them, and with the funeral coordinators at your Quaker meeting.

A POST-TRUTH TALE FOR OUR TIME

Post-truth politics (also called **post-factual politics**) is a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertion of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored.



The newly elected Prime Minister got into his chauffeur driven car and set off for a most important meeting with a visiting head of state who was staying in a hotel some two hundred miles away. Some fifty miles into the journey the car broke down and the Prime Minister had to be accommodated in a nearby inn.

The car was taken to a local garage where the mechanic started work immediately on fixing the car. The next day the journey was resumed but the car broke down almost immediately and the day before was repeated.

The chauffeur asked the mechanic what the problem was.

The mechanic replied 'The EFM conduit, the snoz-valve and the fuel interlocutor are all damaged and will need replacing.'

The day after the Prime Minister set off and was getting increasingly frustrated because he needed to negotiate an extremely tricky trade deal.

The car broke down immediately.

The Prime Minister strode into the garage and demanded to see the mechanic, who promptly appeared.

The Prime Minister asked angrily 'Why haven't you mended my car properly?'

The mechanic replied 'Remember your Party's election promise to reduce income tax, reduce the working week and put more into the State's health service?'

'Yes, but that was the election.'

'So you are saying that when the other Parties pointed out

that this couldn't be done because of the amount of debt the country had, you were not telling the truth.'

'You don't understand, that was an emotional appeal to get my Party elected. It is what we call "Post Truth".'

'Ah,' said the mechanic 'I was also using the expression "Post Truth", when I said I had mended your car.'

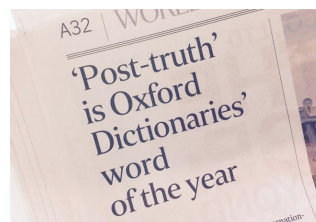
'You mean you did not mend my car?'

'That's right, I told a lie, just like your party did in the last election.'

'I can now fix your car, the bill will be large and that is not "Post Truth".'

The Prime Minister then used words that are best not written down.

Nigel Peckett
Stafford Local Meeting



A POLITICAL
CULTURE IN
WHICH DEBATE
IS FRAMED
LARGELY BY
APPEALS TO
EMOTION

**In a time of universal deceit—
telling the truth is a revolutionary act.**
George Orwell, novelist and journalist

CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE: MAY 28, BUT PLEASE START NOW!

ARTICLES ARE USUALLY A MAXIMUM OF ABOUT 620 WORDS LONG — ONE PAGE

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