



STAFFORDSHIRE QUAKER

WINTER EDITION, FEBRUARY 2018

A DAY OUT OF THE WORLD AND IN THE WORLD: VISITING BAMFORD QUAKER COMMUNITY

Four members of Crewe and Nantwich and Leek Meetings joined to enjoy a day at the Community. Only one of us had visited before so it was something of an exploration for the other three Friends.

We'd come prepared for it's being a Working Saturday which the Community runs once a month through the year on the third Saturday. We'd also come ready for the weather which tended towards the damp side of things. Nevertheless we all had a great day each according to their need.

Two of us were allocated to re-roofing the gas meter housing near the front gate. With the meter serving the whole community's needs, it's a large one with a block built house about six feet by four feet and four feet six inches tall at the peak. We stripped off the old roofing felt and nails and ivy that had been desperate to get into the act. After that, it was relatively quick to lay and secure the felt. Despite not enjoying the dampness of the weather too much, it did prove useful when more rain came in the afternoon to be able to see the water dripping off the

lower side of the roof and not soaking any of the woodwork of the structure.

During this time the other two Friends were given a guided tour of the house and gardens by a member of the Community and then helped in laying out



the tables in the kitchen for lunch. It was a magnificent sight when we walked in out of the wet to see such a spread.

Around fifteen of us, visitors and Community members, enjoyed a lunch which began with a very hearty soup and continued through friendly conversation to apple crumble and custard.

After lunch, the four of us from Leek and C&N Meetings joined for Meeting for Worship, when two Friends had to leave.

The remaining two then helped to clear the driveway of overgrowing grass, moss and leaves, taking the detritus to one of the compost heaps in the garden.

We ended the day with afternoon tea which included gooey chocolate

cake, flapjack and scones, all of which raised discussion about vegan recipes leading their baker to rethink his strategy and to explore using vegan ingredients in the future.

If you've not yet been to visit the Bamford Quaker Community to join one of their courses or a working Saturday or simply to enjoy the peace of a personal retreat then a world of Friendship awaits!

Peter Moore
Leek Meeting

THE POWER OF WORDS

- *Ministry*
- *John Greenleaf Whittier*
- *Women prisoners of Ravensbrück concentration camp*
- *Martin Niemöller*
- *Francis of Assisi*
- *Poetry*
- *God, words and us*

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WORSHIP, MINISTRY AND MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP FOR BUSINESS

As Friends we believe in the possibility of direct personal encounter with the divine, whatever language we may use to define and describe the divine. We also practice silent worship, when we quietly wait for deeper understandings or revelations. The word worship is derived from the word 'worth' so we may also take time to reflect upon the worth within our lives, in the lives of those close to us and within the wider society, and to hold in the light issues of concern that arise from this? At times we feel impelled to share through ministry what has been revealed to us or the concerns that have arisen in the stillness of worship.

Both belief in direct personal encounter with the divine and silent worship underline the wider Quaker testimony to the integrity of each individual over and above hierarchy. The search for Truth is paramount. We do not question or challenge individual personal ministry. Instead we receive it in silence and with gratitude, even when it might not mean very much to us as an individual at the time.

In my experience these attributes of Quaker belief and practice are well upheld in Meetings for Worship and, in some meetings, in short periods of reflection held afterwards. It was listening to a reflection after worship that led me to further thought around this topic. Our meetings for worship are more often than not deeply spiritual and nurtur-

ing, but undoubtedly we find it harder to maintain a sense of worship and uphold personal and individual integrity at meetings for worship for business, and this inevitably distracts from our commitment to worshipful discernment. When business decisions are being made it is all too easy to move away from time-honoured Quaker practices and processes and slip into workplace related business modes. In a meeting for worship for business our silent reflection has the advantage of being directed by the agenda item under consideration. In other words if, having studied the written material provided in advance and reflected on it and heard what others have to say we still feel impelled to speak, we are ministering with a predetermined theme and from a position of knowledge as well as from personal revelation and understanding. It is therefore equally, if not more important, as in meeting for worship for everyone who speaks to be heard and when we feel that our personal knowledge supersedes that of others it is vital to listen even harder.

Quaker Faith & Practice, of course, gives plenty of guidance on processes tested by Friends over more than 300 years. For example: 3.05 *The right conduct of our meetings for church affairs depends upon all coming to them in an active, seeking spirit, not with minds already made up on a particular course of action But open minds are not empty minds, nor uncritically receptive: the service of the meeting calls for knowl-*

edge of facts, often painstakingly acquired, and the ability to estimate their relevance and importance. This demands that we shall be ready to listen to others carefully, without antagonism if they express opinions which are displeasing to us, but trying always to discern the truth in what they have to offer. It calls, above all, for spiritual sensitivity. If our meetings fail, the failure may well be in those who are ill-prepared to use the method rather than in the inadequacy of the method itself.

It is always to be recognised that, coming together with a variety of temperaments, of backgrounds, education and experience, we shall have differing contributions to make to any deliberation. It is no part of Friends' concern for truth that any should be expected to water down a strong conviction or be silent merely for the sake of easy agreement. Nevertheless we are called to honour our testimony that to every one is given a measure of the light, and that it is in the sharing of knowledge, experience and concern that the way towards unity will be found. There is need for understanding loyalty by the meeting as a whole when, after all sides of a subject have been considered, a minute is accepted as representing the discernment of the meeting.

Not all who attend a meeting for church affairs will necessarily speak: those who are silent can help to develop the sense of the meeting if they listen in a spirit of worship.

Rosemary Crawley
Lichfield Meeting

'THE RIGHT
CONDUCT OF
OUR MEETINGS
FOR CHURCH
AFFAIRS
DEPENDS UPON
ALL COMING TO
THEM IN AN
ACTIVE, SEEKING
SPIRIT'

GIFTS OF LOVE?

Visited 08.00 Quaker meeting midweek for a short service, needed to be across to the other side of town by 09.00. Discussed this with other attendees and it was felt at 08.30 when worship ended I would quietly get up and go, rather than stay and discuss any thoughts or feeling that had occurred during the worship. So quiet and calm had I become that the friends had to gently speak to me to make me aware the 'session' had ended.

Reflection on this incident later reminded me of an article in *The Friend* of 29 September 2017, about the Friends Ambulance Service in WW1. It talks about the soldiers and life at the Star and Garter home in Richmond. There were recreational huts for use when off duty, and each had worship/services on a Sunday: *'These men wanted no official jargon, no hackneyed phrases... They believe you when you tell them that Love is the mightiest force in all the world, that the Unseen is more real than the seen... that the 'still small Voice' is louder than the guns.'*

Then music came to my ears - 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind', a hymn learnt at school. Whilst looking up the full lyrics, my memory was juggling them up! I was to learn that there was a Quaker connection to it, this hymn is taken from a longer poem, *The Brewing of Soma* by the American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier. Soma is a drink with possible

hallucinogenic properties, used by Vedic priests in an attempt to experience divinity. The poem compares this to some Christians' use of 'music, incense, vigils drear, and trance, to bring the skies more near, or lift men up to heaven!' But all in vain - it is mere intoxication.



He ends his poem in 'describing the true method for contact with the divine, as practised by Quakers: sober lives dedicated to doing God's will, seeking silence and selflessness in order to hear the 'still, small voice', described in I Kings 19:11-13 as the authentic voice of God, rather than earthquake, wind or fire. The last verse of the hymn rang out to me: 'Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire'. Was this what I had experienced that morning at Quakers?

Maybe there had been other times 'sense had been dumb, flesh had retired'? Described to some one that I once felt I fallen 'asleep' in a Church service when in prayer, there were around 150 other

people in the room and a door was opened and I was suddenly aware of my surroundings. Another deep prayer session, eyes closed, I felt the light of the room had become more illuminated, yet when my eyes opened it was not so. Falling 'asleep' on sun bed on holiday and

being woken up by the sound of my own snoring! All these incidents left me with stillness and refreshment, an inner fleeting contentment.

Advices & Queries mentions such things as 'Seek to know an inward stillness' and 'do not be afraid to say what you have found and what you value'. So my purpose in this article is to state that I am unsure if you can 'force' an inner stillness when seeking 'spiritual refuge' but, at times of longing for peace, have my above experiences been gifts of love from God 'the mightiest force in all the world'?

K.B. W-P.
Stafford Meeting

AT TIMES OF
LONGING FOR
PEACE, HAVE MY
ABOVE
EXPERIENCES
BEEN GIFTS OF
LOVE FROM
GOD?

Painting by Veronica Aldous,
Purley Meeting

A QUAKER VOICE ON HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

'THE POWER OF WORDS'

This was the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day in 2018

How should Quakers respond to the Day?

Gabi Oldfield contributed to a service at St Mary's Church in Stafford.

She used the words of Ravensbrück prisoners, Martin Niemöller and Francis of Assisi

I am taking part in this service today as a representative of the Religious Society of Friends. We as Friends believe that there is 'that of God in everyone', and many of us are also drawn to the idea that there is that of God not just in human beings but in every other living thing too: the concept of genocide might also, therefore, be extended to ecocide.

We would try to seek 'that of God' even in the perpetrators of the Holocaust and other genocides, as well as in their victims. We utterly condemn all actions which lead to such atrocities, but feel that we still have to view the perpetrator as a fellow human being and to hope for a possible redemption. Our own strength of character has never been put to the test in circumstances similar to those who had to live, or still live, under oppressive regimes which terrorise their own population or groups of them. How confident do we feel about our own reactions under similar pressure - 'Let him without sin cast the first stone'? We are still in need of forgiveness and will hopefully find it in our hearts to forgive those who have wronged us.

A group of women who were sent as prisoners to the concentration camp in Ravensbrück set us a shining example. By praying for their torturers they showed strength of spirit and foresight which few of us would ever be capable of. They

TRANSLATION OF RAVENSBRÜCK PRAYER

*Peace to the people of evil spirit,
and an end to all feelings of revenge
and talk of punishment and scolding.*

*The cruelties committed here
make a mockery of all past atrocities
and go beyond the limits
of human understanding,
and the martyrs are numerous.*

*Henceforth, o God,
don't weigh their sufferings on the scales
of your justice,
don't ask for cruel retribution,
but weigh it in a different way.*

*Let our suffering pay for the sins of all executioners,
traitors and spies,
and all evil people,
and forgive them
for the sake of the courage and strength of spirit of the others.*

*All good shall be reckoned, but not the evil,
and in the memory of our enemies
we do not want to live as their victims,
not as their nightmares and terrifying spirits
but rather come to their rescue,
that they may abstain from their delusion.*

*Only this should be asked of them,
so that we, when all this is over,
may live as humans among humans,
and that peace may again reign on this poor earth
amongst all people of good will,
and that this peace may come to everybody.*

show that there is some light even in the darkest places, and they give us hope. This is their prayer (above:

of peace in our world, now and in the future, so that our children and grandchildren will have the chance to live.

We owe it to these women and to all other brave people who dared to resist in the past, and to those who still resist today, that we join together in the fight for justice and humanity, and save our environment for the sake

Martin Niemöller was a Protestant minister during the war, and as an opponent of the Nazi regime spent several years in prison. He once had anti-Semitic feelings, but deeply regretted this later and felt moved to



A QUAKER VOICE ON HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY (CONTINUED)

make a public apology. I would like to read you his most famous words, which are not just relevant to the past but speak powerfully of the here and now ...



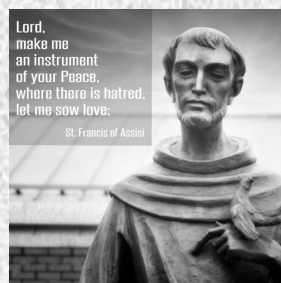
*First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak for me*

Martin Niemöller

... There is however so much that we could add....

*First thousands of refugees are traumatised or die
And I do not speak out
Because I am not a refugee
Then there are more slaves in Britain and the rest of the world
now than at the height of the slave trade
And I do not speak out
Because I am not a slave
Then we allow ever more people to sink into poverty
in Britain and the rest of the world
And I do not speak out
Because I am not poor
Then our arms trade destroys thousands of lives beyond our shores
And I do not speak out
Because they do not threaten my own life or home
And then we practise not just genocide but ecocide
We destroy habitats, thousands of species become extinct
And I do not speak out
Because I am not one of those creatures
Then we pollute and poison air, water and soil
And I do not change my life style
Because I live in the green suburbs seemingly far from the worst examples
Then we destroy forests, the earth's life-blood,
And I do not speak out
Because I still have trees in my own garden
Then I myself become ill both in body and in spirit
And the world is no longer a caring enough place
To comfort and sustain me
And allow me to find
The inner peace I crave*

... I would like to end with the prayer of St Francis.



*Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love.
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.*

*Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness, ever joy.*

*Oh, Master, grant that I may never seek,
So much to be consoled, as to console.
To be understood, as to understand,
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

*Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving of ourselves that we receive
And in dying that we're born to eternal life*

Gabi Oldfield
Stafford Meeting

THE POWER
OF WORDS

FROM OUR BORNEO CORRESPONDENT

'THE POWER OF WORDS'

The theme of brutality and reconciliation is continued in the first part of this article sent direct from Borneo by Anthony Wilson, Lichfield Meeting

Anne and I are in Borneo with our son and his extended family of Sabahan in-laws. The maternal line share a great grandfather from the Philippines who found himself effectively adopted by an early British administrator: 200 of his descendants gathered for a 3-day post Christmas reunion which took us to the heart of Sabah's identity as a multi-racial and -religious community. Now living across at least four continents, family members share an additional bond which provided the theme of the gathering: in the final months of the Japanese WW2 occupation, the family patriarch and six other leading males were wantonly executed leaving widows to raise families in conditions of near starvation. The gathering celebrated these matriarchs, whose descendants shared personal memories of them - with the added ingredient of first steps towards reconciliation with Japanese involved in these murders, which happened alongside the Sandakan deliberate death marches of Australian and British PoWs of whom only 6 out of 2,500 survived by escaping.

A link in the reconciliation trail was provided by Friends in Tokyo, who responded to my enquiry for contacts with a website including a link to Richard Braithwaite, son of a death march escaper. He had been researching the background to this event, trying to comprehend the motivations behind it; he was able to compile these into a book before he died,

leaving his brother John to spread its message of understanding before reconciliation. (John is quoted in an article on the Bhopal chemical disaster in *The Friend* of 8 December, promoting a restorative justice approach to compensation for victims.) Our son Ken and daughter-in-law Cynthia contacted John, who sent a moving video articulating the healing power of reconciliation once those involved are ready.

Just how ready was demonstrated in a further video recording the meeting between Cynthia and Sadaoki, the grandson of the Japanese General Baba who was posted to Borneo in December 1944 to effectively bear responsibility for the occupation in a war which he had opposed. He was convicted as a war criminal by the Australians, while his predecessor who had authorised the atrocities was not charged. He and Cynthia felt their way towards each other, both deeply aware of grandfathers executed by opposing sides and neither knowing what the outcome of this encounter might be. Sadaoki was visibly moved by this opportunity to repeat his grandfather's deliberate contrition and express his own remorse and positive desire for reconciliation - which if governments were not ready to pursue, individuals and families could initiate. Cynthia's family were scarcely prepared for this, as the meeting took place only a couple of weeks before the gathering. We are

hoping that John, Sadaoki and Cynthia with family can meet in Sabah this year.

Day to day, we live alongside Cynthia and Ken as they work through the LEAP Social organisation on projects which address the exploitative economy of oil palm plantations through enhancing the rights of small holders, employees and general population to a just, sustainable and circular economy which respects a uniquely rich natural environment. Gaining commitment to the precepts encapsulated within the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil offers the most effective way forward: agreement is voluntary and monitoring at all stages of the plantation and processing stages calls for constant awareness by management and staff. Wildlife petitions by western bodies play a very distant part which can easily turn negative ('eco-imperialism'), as the fate of orang utans is not in the hands of the people most immediately affected. There is an increasingly effective Sabah programme providing protection for threatened species, along with other forest creatures whose habitat is now coming under control through a network of protected forests still to be completed. This is not the case elsewhere in Indonesia or Sarawak.

Advice & Query 27 reminds us to be ready for the unexpected: this certainly applies to our experience here in Sabah, where we can see at first hand what the human spirit can achieve.



Anthony accompanying his son as he checked the dragonfly population as an indicator of water quality: 'Here it's pure: how much further down stream will these species persist as forest clearance and cultivation take place? All part of living sustainably in forest areas.'

CHANGING PERSPECTIVE: OUR TRUE PURPOSE IS LOVE

It suddenly hit me this morning what our true purpose is. To love. Love comes naturally when our constructed self is seen through. That's why the most important line in Quaker Advices and Queries is 'Attend to what love requires of you'. You being the constructed self and Love being who you truly are. Who you normally take yourself to be is constructed of thoughts, emotions, memories and desires, yet these all come and go, do you come and go? What is it that is constant? Love heals, both the pain within you and in those around you. Try it and see what happens. Don't leave it until it is too late, try it today. It maybe you have to wait until the conditions are right and love can be effective, love finds a way. When you meet resistance don't create a battle dividing

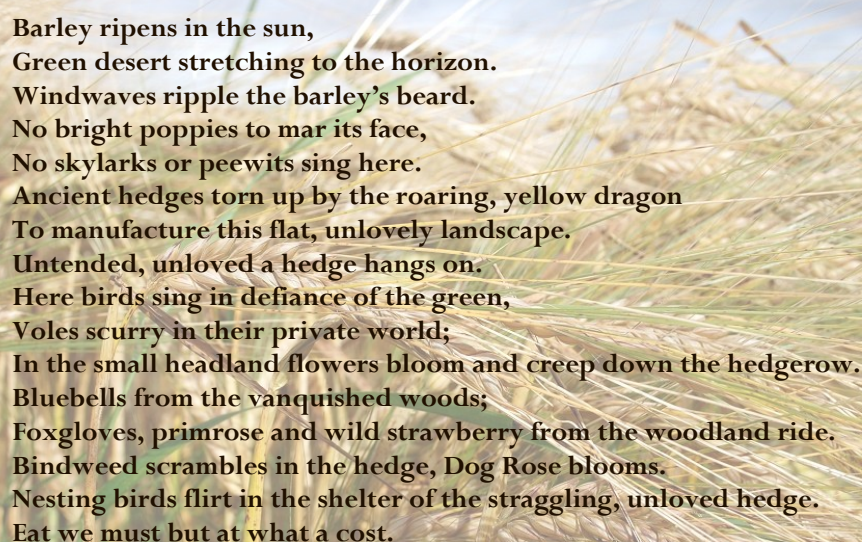
reality into two. Embrace it with love, transform it with love, whether it is within you or outside you. How can you change the conditions you find yourself in? The constructed self is created by these conditions, the constructed self has learned how to survive in a world of division, of pain, by creating a separate me from the perspective of a separate me, and so that constructed self grows, but it is a misperception that creates pain and suffering. When that perception is seen through what is seen? Seeing is from wholeness and completeness, and love arises naturally. The constructed self still exists, but that existence is from love not separation, and love is creating this self, not pain. Life is no longer lived from a self centre, but from wholeness, a manifestation of one-

ness as this body and mind, as are all bodies and minds. Everyone is you. Yet most are still caught by being a constructed separate self, so what does love require? To see through the separation, to help others see through it. To return to the ground of being and be aware of all the thoughts and emotions arising within you and others. What seeds are being watered, what is being created, separation and division, or harmony? What is in the way? What is love? Sense it, how do you love? How do you find it? Let go of everything that is in the way, let go of everything, especially yourself, and you will come to know it, and live from it, your true self, that of God within you and everyone.

Alex Thomson
Stoke Meeting

'ATTEND TO
WHAT LOVE
REQUIRES OF
YOU'

GREEN DESERT



Barley ripens in the sun,
Green desert stretching to the horizon.
Windwaves ripple the barley's beard.
No bright poppies to mar its face,
No skylarks or peewits sing here.
Ancient hedges torn up by the roaring, yellow dragon
To manufacture this flat, unlovely landscape.
Untended, unloved a hedge hangs on.
Here birds sing in defiance of the green,
Voles scurry in their private world;
In the small headland flowers bloom and creep down the hedgerow.
Bluebells from the vanquished woods;
Foxgloves, primrose and wild strawberry from the woodland ride.
Bindweed scrambles in the hedge, Dog Rose blooms.
Nesting birds flirt in the shelter of the straggling, unloved hedge.
Eat we must but at what a cost.

Nigel Peckett
Stafford Meeting

MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS IN DECEMBER:

STAFFORDSHIRE AM'S CONCERN AND MORE



At Easter members of Kendal and Sedbergh AM will be following the route of Margaret Fell's journey to London to present a declaration on the peaceable nature of Quakers to Charles II (centre of this Quaker tapestry panel).

Held in the Large Meeting House, Friends' House. It was the first time I had been since the large square window was installed in the ceiling revealing a blue sky and fluffy clouds - it was a beautiful day. The tapering walls leading up to it are reminiscent of a pyramid. It seemed to make the Large Meeting House smaller.

It was Young People's Participation Day. They joined us several times during the day, between their various activities. One young refugee spoke movingly and with much gratitude about the way his mother had been helped and supported.

Staffordshire AM concern regarding the poverty of the public services in the UK was early on the agenda. It was suggested that it be sent to Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee for advice to help MfS consider it again next year and how this concern might relate or add to what is already being done. Kendal and Sedbergh AM welcomed our concern and raised a similar one themselves. At Easter they plan to follow Margaret Fell's journey 358 years ago from Swarthmore Hall to London with a declaration to Charles II that 'we are a people that desire for the common good'. They will be passing by 12 Meeting Houses and want to harness enthusiasm throughout the country, not only amongst

Friends, to end the dismantling of the welfare state, ensuring a safety net for all and a commitment to act for equality and the common good. Devon AM supported by Sussex AM asked that Britain Yearly Meeting consider adding to their current list of exclusion for investment purposes any company profiting from the occupation of the West Bank.

The main topic was preparation for a possible review of the Book of Discipline which MfS will recommend to Yearly Meeting 2018. Our current book was updated in 1994. Minor changes have been made to the church government section. In order to familiarise Friends with the book a reading project was set up. Feedback from this project has hugely influenced the working group. About 20 people have been involved as part of the Theology Think Tank to explore our religious diversity. The resulting book *God, words and us* gives a full report and a copy will be sent to every Meeting in the Autumn. I have been inspired by the care, the attention to detail and the sensitivity with which this project has been approached. If approved at Yearly Meeting the whole book will be revised.

There has been a redrafting of the Sanctuary Everywhere manifesto. Through Quakers' longstanding work welcoming newcomers to

our shores, we have seen up close that the government creation of a hostile environment is increasingly embedding policies of discrimination into the practices of the British state. Quakers in Britain are working with others to change this.

Reports were presented by clerks of General Meeting in Scotland and Wales. Friends were appointed to attend Yearly Meetings in Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Nordic and Switzerland. Yearly Meeting in Germany was held in October and the report has not as yet been sent.

Seven bodies requested, and have been granted, recognition as they have met the criteria. They are: The Association of Talking Friends, Give Peace a Chance Trust, Glebe House, Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, Quaker Peace Studies Trust, Experiment with Light, and Quaker Service Memorial.

There was a report on our operational budget and as usual a deficit has been forecast this year and next. However there are more charitable projects planned. In order to finance these and prevent us slipping further into the red a professional fundraiser is to be employed.

Rosemary Barnett
Stone Meeting

*GOD, WORDS
AND US*

HOW DOES TRUTH PROSPER?

'How does Truth prosper among you?' was one of the first 'Queries' used in the Society of Friends. Our Area Meeting asked the question of Local Meetings in 2016. In our autumn issue we published responses by three Local Meetings. Here are the responses of the other four.

STONE

Stone Local Meeting meets once a week on a Sunday, with occasional mid-week Meetings for Worship at the homes/care homes of Members who, because of ill health, cannot otherwise attend Sunday Meeting regularly. Attendance has increased slightly this year and has averaged about 16 on Sundays. There is always an opportunity for tea/coffee, biscuits and a chat after Meeting for Worship. We feel the growing numbers of new Attenders to be evidence of a welcoming atmosphere and an opportunity to share and support each other.

Stone LM has run a Children's Meeting for many years though there are no children attending at present. We are ready to restart this, should the need arise, and several Friends keep their DBS certification up to date.

Monthly discussion meetings have taken place in Members' and Attenders' homes. The Friends House recom-

mended programme of study of "Quaker Faith & Practice" has been followed. Attendance has ranged from 4 to 10. A special study group, to work on the 'New Economy' booklets, was set up towards the end of 2016. The group has met 3-4 times so far and about 6 Friends are able to attend regularly. Feedback on the booklets has been sent to Friends House.

We continue to support local charities ASHA (African Social Health Association), Sanctus (a Stoke-based support group for refugees and asylum seekers) and "The Extra Guest" (raising money to provide food for the hungry in the UK and abroad). We have been able to donate gifts of money, from our tea and coffee subs, as well as some food and clothing. Members also regularly attend their fund-raising events. At Christmas, a donation of £400 was sent to Quaker Homeless Action.

In February, a weekend away at Charney Manor was organised and about 10 Friends attended. The trip offered opportunities for fellowship and exploring the Oxfordshire countryside. Other social events organised this year include a visit to an exhibition on homelessness in Stoke-on-Trent with a showing of 'Kathy come Home'; in November, a visit to a local arts cinema to see 'I, Daniel Blake' took place; at Christmas, a programmed Meeting for Worship was organised, followed by a shared lunch.

In May 2016, Stone Quakers saw their 10 years of hard work, to get a Peace Pole erected in Stone, come to fruition. Permission was finally granted by Stafford Borough Council to use Crown Meadow, a green space in a central position. A 'Whit Walk' on Crown Meadow was organised to look at suitable positions for the Pole on the Meadow. This was followed by a shared picnic. The inauguration ceremony (attended by about 80 people) gave an opportunity for 'outreach work', invitations were sent to local churches and organisations and Quaker leaflets were on display. An exceptionally fine day and delicious, home-made refreshments helped to make the occasion a memorable one. The Town Council now include the Peace Pole in the Stone Town Trail.

Recent Attenders have commented on the friendly and welcoming atmosphere of Stone Meeting, though one felt that a personal invitation from a regular attender at a chance meeting had sealed his decision to come along for the first time. Another, invited to attend the Peace Pole ceremony, had felt sufficiently moved to come to a Meeting for Worship where she was impressed by the 'wonderful welcome and peace of the Meeting'. A longstanding Friend feels her membership of Stone Meeting 'feels like my family'.

MEMBERSHIP OF
STONE MEETING
'FEELS LIKE MY
FAMILY'

HOW DOES TRUTH PROSPER? LICHFIELD

WE CONTINUE
TO SUPPORT
THE QUAKER
SERVICE
MEMORIAL
TRUST

Friends in Lichfield Local Quaker Meeting continue to meet for worship every Sunday at Martin Heath Hall. Meetings start at 9:45 for one hour, except on the first Sunday of the month when start time is 9:30. We hold regular business meetings mostly every month and host Area Meeting in December 2016.

Lichfield Local meeting (LM) is part of Staffordshire area meeting and more widely linked to Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). We make substantial contributions to these in order to support their administrative and charitable work of The Religious Society of Friends in the UK and worldwide.

Some of the activities within Lichfield LM which help to support and develop the meeting and which extend our influence in the local community are listed:

1. Discussion group after meeting every month. We have been working through sections of Quaker Faith and Practice (QFP) as suggested by BYM. Any relevant conclusions and possible alterations to QFP are reflected back to BYM.
2. The book group continues to meet to review a chosen book.
3. We continue to support the Quaker Service Memorial Trust (QSMT) and in the summer there was a meeting for worship at the memorial.
4. Three members are involved with the Quaker tapestry panel which continues to develop and will be completed in 2017.
5. We play an active role in Churches together in Lichfield, Hope project work and Lichfield Interfaith Forum.
6. We arranged a morning conference at Lichfield Methodist church to consider aspects around asylum drawing together the role of Hope project, the Lichfield council and others involved with all aspects relating to displaced people.
7. A proposed lunch with friends from the Mosque has been deferred till 2017.
8. We supported a Palestine-Israel conference weekend held at the Cathedral and made a contribution of £500 towards the hosting of this weekend as shown in accounts.
9. We continue to have a monthly collection for various charities as decided by the meeting. These can be seen under the heading of "acting as agent – special collections" in the accounts. We top up the collections to £60 - making a donation from LM funds.
10. We have contributed £884 to AM and £2250 to BYM. We have 15 contributing members and attenders and Friends House finance recommend that £150 per person per year is needed to fund continuing activities of BYM. We reclaimed £741.10 from gift aid tax relief. Some members contribute a specific amount to BYM via LM and the total of this is shown under "acting as agent".
11. We have approximately £1000 in the Fusion credit union account.
12. We are fortunate to be able to use rooms at Martin Heath Hall for worship and other meetings at a low rental without the responsibilities of building upkeep. We continue to enjoy good relations with members of Christchurch.



QUAKER PEACE SERVICE MEMORIAL,
ALREWAS, NEAR LICHFIELD

HOW DOES TRUTH PROSPER? WOLVERHAMPTON

There was an average attendance of 14 at our Meeting for Worship each Sunday.

A children's class was held on 7 Sunday mornings during the year.

The Wednesday evening Meeting for Worship, held on 2nd and 4th Wednesday evenings, continued, with an average attendance of 3.

Friends and attenders share responsibility for eldership, oversight, inspection and care of our meeting house and our presence at Area Meetings. Readings from Advices & Queries took place regularly during our Sunday morning Meetings.

Collections are held each week for organisations the

meeting has chosen to support. These are either Quaker initiatives or organisations which further our charitable aims.

Shared lunches were held on the 3rd Sunday. In August we again held a Family and Friends day and about 20 people attended.

We held 3 'Meetings for Learning' - one after 3rd Sunday shared lunch and two on a weekday evening. The topics were 'Pushed by the Spirit' (a preparation session for Britain Yearly Meeting), Vocal Ministry, and Sharing our Spiritual Journeys.

Following the completion of replacement work on the roof and installation of solar panels we invited those who

had contributed financially or carried out the work, to our shared lunch in June.

Our meeting house continued to be used by a wide range of groups including self-help groups for those with addictions, and several meditation groups. Our meeting supports Wolverhampton City of Sanctuary and gives practical help to a number of asylum seekers. Our Asylum Seekers Fund provided small sums for help.

The statement of financial activities for the year ending 31 December 2016 showed that income exceeded expenditure by £10,181. The total financial assets of the meeting fell in 2016 from £40,870 to £30,182.



HOW DOES TRUTH PROSPER? STAFFORD

Our Sunday morning Meeting for Worship averaged twelve Friends and one dog. We also held a Meeting for Worship at 8.00 am and 11.00 am on the first Wednesday of each month and at 11.00 am on the third Wednesday of each month. A small but faithful group of Friends attended the mid-week meetings.

On the third Sunday following Meeting for Worship we continued to read Quaker Faith & Practice. These sessions were well attended and valued by all. Helping us to widen our use and appreciation of Faith & Practice.

On the fourth Sunday of each month, following Meeting for Worship we met, usually at Milford, for a picnic lunch and a walk. This is a popular way of getting to know each other better while enjoying some fresh air and exercise. These walks will continue.

We had shared lunch on the fifth Sunday to which friends and relatives were invited. These are popular occasions where we share good food and fellowship with some lively and interesting conversation. These will also continue.

We have a special collection each month, usually for a local charity or one which a Friend has a connection to. In this way we have supported House of Bread and Cannock and District Food Bank.

Our premises have been used regularly by groups such as AA and U3A. We are glad that we are able to share our space in this way.

Our hope is that Stafford Quaker Meeting will grow and answer the need, spiritual and physical, of more people in the future.

ALFIE WALKS ON



Alfie has now decided to run a walk every fourth Sunday, even in winter!

Meet at the Milford Common car park, or the Barley Mow if it is wet, at 12.30 pm.

Bring sandwiches for a picnic ahead of a 1.00 pm-ish start.

Contact Alfie on 07565 350357

UNIVERSAL CREDIT: 'THE INSOLENT OF OFFICE AND THE LAW'S DELAY'

Officially the aim of Universal Credit is to merge all benefits into one. So an applicant needs to make only one application and then wait for just that assessment. But that is rationalisation.

Let us all be quite clear about one thing. Any government, regardless of their ideology, would be relieved if a substantial proportion of the population became ineligible for benefits and so no longer their responsibility.

When an application is successful, how is the Universal Credit paid? In advance, as soon as it might be needed?

Or in arrears, like wages and salaries.

The low-paid receive their wages one week in arrears. Those with the status of better jobs are paid their salaries at the end of the month. So this new benefit is paid one month in arrears.

There is a worse delay. How long can an assessment take? Nominally six weeks. But in practice the delay can be indefinite. The law has a claw which withholds!

In future, who will be eligible? And who will be ignored? At present Universal

Credit encourages workers to stay in jobs whose wages are less than essential living expenses. But will it in future be withheld from those 'between jobs', i.e. the long-term unemployed?

I am sure Friends will recognise the quotations in the article's title. At least Hamlet threatened himself only!

John Nicholls
Wolverhampton Meeting

*See page 8 for the response of
Meeting for Sufferings
to Staffordshire Area Meeting's
concern on the poverty of public
services*

QUAKER QUIRKS: THE JOYS OF AREA MEETING



STAFFORDSHIRE AREA MEETINGS, 2018

SUNDAY 15TH APRIL STONE*

SUNDAY 13TH MAY LEEK +

SATURDAY 7TH JULY UTTOXETER

SATURDAY 8TH SEPTEMBER WOLVERHAMPTON

SATURDAY 13TH OCTOBER STOKE

SATURDAY 8TH DECEMBER LICHFIELD

*THIS DATE HAS BEEN CHANGED FROM 8TH APRIL AT THE REQUEST OF STONE FRIENDS BECAUSE OF COINCIDENCE OF EASTER.

+ THIS MAY BE CHANGED TO 20TH MAY AS OUR CLERK IS PREVENTED ON THE 13TH.



Quakers
sometimes
shaken
often stirred

CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE: MONDAY 30 APRIL, BUT PLEASE START NOW!

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

GABI AND ROGER OLDFIELD

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