



Epping Meeting House Newsletter January 2012

Editorial

Welcome to 2012 Friends and apologies for the untimeliness of our fourth newsletter. I fully intended for it to come out at the beginning of January but our youngest attender's health dictated otherwise and we have been 'battling' the chicken pox instead – you may have been lucky enough to see the scars!

I hope this newsletter offers some sense of the past few months of the life of Epping Meeting. A reminder that on February 5th we will be calculating the benchmark Meeting carbon footprint using the Sustainability Toolkit that follows on from the concern raised at Yearly Meeting Gathering last summer.

I would also like to encourage you to think about coming to the "Living Adventurously" gathering for the North East Thames Area Meeting, being held at the High Leigh Conference Centre April 20th – 22nd 2012. We won't be making people physically climb trees, unless they want to of course – why should the children get all the fun of the amazing grounds at High Leigh, but hope to inspire people to lead adventurous and fulfilling lives. Funding is available for those who would like financial assistance with the cost.

Where can you find the most Quakerly atmosphere on the internet? By Christine Downes-Grainger

Users of the online Quaker forum believe it is at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/forum> which is where you can find an Internet forum set up by Britain Yearly Meeting about four years ago as a place where people who were new to the Society could talk to Friends and become engaged in discussions about Quakerism.

Newcomers are warmly welcomed and it is often their enquiries that generate fascinating and often lengthy conversations. These have included: the history of the Society and its meeting houses; what Quakers 'believe', stand for, or do; spiritual and theological discussions; reactions to world events; and problems from life such as bullying in the workplace and care for elderly relatives with dementia.

As with Quaker Meetings, there is often much thoughtful contemplation before anyone posts a contribution. Disagreements occur but the forum moderators advise in their comprehensive guidelines that: "contributions on this forum need to be polite, calm and empathetic toward others." This results in topic threads that are at various times deep, insightful, lively, engaging and humorous. The back pages of conversations are also there for people to browse.

You need to register to both read and post, and it may take a few days for acceptance of your registration to come back to your email address from the Quaker Communications Web Team at Friends House. You may also need to learn how to navigate your way through the framework, how to write, save and post your ideas, and how to use the private message facility. You will become a valued member of another Quaker community.



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Review of the Quaker Quests held at Epping and Harlow

Two jointly-run days were held last autumn with Harlow Meeting. In October, Epping looked at 'Quakers and how we worship' and Harlow offered the theme of 'Quakers and how we live' in November. Both events were well supported by Friends from the Area Meeting and it was felt that the in-reach benefits were positive. Several enquirers attended and contacts have been maintained in a few cases. It was agreed that we would be happy to work again jointly with Harlow Meeting, perhaps on an annual basis.

Review of London Quakers – Creating a Vision of our Future

On Saturday November 5th London Quakers asked: “how can all of us Quakers in London release and channel our energy, our money and our time – which all seem to be in short supply just now?” in a popular meeting held at Friends House, attended by both Christine and Jeffrey. Christine felt that people were enthused by the morning session and dismayed by the afternoon one! An overview from the London Quaker’s Clerk can be located [here](#) (PDF) and the issues will be addressed again at the AGM of the London Quakers in March 2012.



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Review of the Churches Together in Epping and District (CTED) Peace service by Judith Roads

I attended the 2011 CTED Peace service in October on behalf of Epping Quakers, who have ‘observer’ status within CTED. The focus of the service was ‘Peace in the Community’, following on from the August riots in England. The emphasis was local (the ‘broken community’ angle) rather than the wider focus and the peace activism angle that Friends might be more familiar with. But the service was very acceptable – full of positive but also realistic aspects to the work of building a peaceful community.

It broadly took the form of a hymn sandwich interspersed with some brief but heartfelt addresses by members of CTED. This felt quite close to vocal ministry in the Quaker sense, although prepared beforehand. There was good participation and leadership from a number of women, including priests, as well as young people. I knew the tunes of all the hymns – including Dear Lord and father, written by a Quaker. So I could join in, sitting as it turned out, just behind the local ecumenical choir that is called ECCA.

I was welcomed by several members of CTED and we even managed very short theological discussions. My sense is that there is a lot that we all have in common even though the language and the outward observances are not by and large part of our Quaker experience. I was glad to be there.

Do we need a Society of Friends? (Study Group: Sunday September 11th) by Christine Downes-Grainger

Eight people met for the September study group and engaged with the question: “Do we need a Society of Friends, and if so, what form should it take?”. The topic was selected and led by Christine who felt it followed on naturally from the August consideration of whether we need a meeting house. It also allowed us to study the George Gorman lecture given by Simon Best at Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) at Canterbury this year.

The following summary of Simon’s lecture, and his work in the Society of Friends, was written by Christine in advance of the study group for people who were not at YMG. If you have a computer or MP3 player you can listen to Audio from Sunday’s George Gorman Lecture (see <http://www.quaker.org.uk/ymg>)

Who is Simon Best?

People who had been to YM Gathering, or who had listened to the talk on the Internet, were discussing it on a Quaker Internet forum, a member from Peterborough said: “I felt Simon had important things to say to us all. His work with the Children and Young People and BYM in general over the last few years has been awesome! My daughter had a wonderful experience at this year’s gathering in the Young People’s group. I’m sorry to see him move on to a post at Woodbrooke this September before my children have been through their teens in Young People’s Programme”

Radical, sustainable Quakerism: A faith for the twenty-first century

Summary of Simon’s introduction

Simon said the beliefs and practices of Quakers have always been radical, far removed from the ordinary. He specified: “Priesthood of all believers; Pacifism; Belief of that of God in everyone; Making decisions by trying to discern the will of god – not going by the majority or an individual’s view”. He said these were not the ways of the present world, which is increasingly secular, they were radical. But a desperate search for more members means we have slid into ordinariness. It started with wanting to be open and inclusive but we have become nothing distinctive to anyone. Early Friends worshipped when, where and how they wanted. Sadly the way we say things now rarely has an impact on today’s world because we want it to be agreeable to everyone, so the message loses its radicalness. Having a “theology” so open it means anyone can believe anything, and join, shows we are scared of remaining connected to our tradition, we have become spiritually grounded, we are not acknowledging that our ways are based on faith. We need to relate to how people live, work and have faith today. If we don’t change our ways we will continue to slide into ordinariness. Simon thinks we can be as vibrant as in the 1640s and 1650s.

* by theology he says he means beliefs and practices and values that are derived from those beliefs

The study group first considered the context in which early Friends were radical and agreed there was a strong political element in people wanting to break free of the church’s requirement that they attend services

and pay tithes. In a modern situation this would be considered a human rights issue. As regards their degree of faith and in what way they were a millennial sect, it was suggested they saw it as their opportunity to create a better world. One person said they did not like the word "radical" – it seemed too busy and active, and felt that meeting for worship was an opportunity for insights and solutions to arise in a peaceful way. Another said that knowing the dictionary definitions of "radical" would be useful. Simon had explored meanings of "sustainable" in his lecture but had assumed his audience understood what he meant by "radical".

No one seemed to agree with Simon that welcoming a diversity of beliefs had resulted in us "sliding into ordinariness". In regard to whether what we say now has much impact, we learned that compared to the previous century, there were no Quakers or Unitarians (who held similar principles) who were owners or editors of national newspapers, or who had important positions in television. We felt that we persisted with the same messages, but realised they were no longer being heard. A lack of boldness in offering ministry was touched on. This related to whether people described themselves as "a Quaker", even when affirming in a court, and how using the term created an image for the public. Two people did not like the Quaker approach to life being described as an "ism".

Should we have a more faith based organisation as he wanted? Those present generally did not want the Religious Society of Friends to be anything but a combination of all four of the elements he pinpointed in his lecture – faith, support for individual spiritual journeys, a social club and activism. One person quoted Thomas Paine as his philosophy of life: "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good." A summary of the Society was given as follows: we host a "minimalist" public space that supports people's individual spiritual journeys/faith experiences. Members and attenders could join in the community/social club aspect as much as they wanted. Because many of us held it to be almost our humanitarian or spiritual mission in life to help those less fortunate, we could not help but become activists.

It was wisely pointed out at the end that Simon may well have set out these positions to encourage discussion. Members of the group felt it was an interesting session, and one said we were leaving it "with a twinkle in our eye", in other words refreshed, perhaps invigorated.



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Advices and Queries (Sunday October 9th: Study Group) by Rebecca Fricker

As part of the Woodbrooke 'Becoming Friends' course I am, slowly, undertaking I spent a long time considering the role of the Advices and Queries in my life. Judith, my official mentor, suggested it might be useful hear the opinions of different Quakers on the role of the A&Q in their lives and so it was decided I would lead a study group on the topic.

The questions I posed were:

- Which A&Q have been important to people at particular stages of their lives?
- Do people find any of them difficult?
- Are we challenging ourselves enough with them?

My sense is that the early Quakers were far more radical than we are now and that people do not, and are not expected to, hold themselves to account with regard to the A&Q in the way that Quakers used to.

Unfortunately I had not prepared people for this study group by asking them to spend some time beforehand looking at the A&Q in relation to my questions. This meant, understandably, responses were muted and I think people felt rather put on the spot.

So I started the discussion with three of the A&Q I struggle with:

- 35: Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply...
- 17: Do you respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or be difficult to discern...
- 41: Try to live simply...

With 35 I feel I should be making much more of a stand against the Government and wish I had the courage to have not filled out the census last year in protest against Lockheed Martin's involvement with the process, or withhold a portion of my tax bill in protest against Trident. But then I always reason I cannot go to jail and deprive my young son and husband of a mother and wife. I try with 17 but find anger at certain kinds of behaviour and ideologies much quicker to come (and be expressed) than the ability to stop, think and reason about why a person might behave the way they do. 41 initially seems to be easy as we try very hard as a family to live sustainably but there is always so much more we can do and I am not sure I challenge myself enough with this. My honesty drew considered responses from people and there was a thoughtful discussion. With regard to 35, Allan stated that mass action can lead to civil unrest which is not so good for society and Jeffrey reminded us that even when people do take to the streets and protest, it can be ignored by the Government anyway as happened with the Stop the War demonstration against the invasion of Iraq. Referring to my personal questioning, Christine kindly reminded me that I had carried out the spirit of 35 and had searched my conscience and decided on the best course of action for my present situation. This gave me

some consolation.

Cathy agreed that 17 could be hard but, to much agreement, posited the view that although it is better to think about the reason for people's behaviour than not, sometimes your instinct can be right. Christine put forward the interesting suggestion that it would be helpful to replace the truth testimony with the word tolerance.

The discussion about 41 was the liveliest. Jim put forward the pessimistic view that we will have polluted ourselves to death in thirty years time... this was greeted with dismay but it was agreed that he had a point. Cathy stated that we needed to live more like our grandparents, a view people agreed with although Jeffrey reminded us about the role gadgets had played in the liberation of women! Margaret reminded us to think carefully about where our food and clothing had come from.

Jeffrey ended with "what sayest thou" which seemed like a fitting finish to the hour.

The future of our Meeting House (Sunday November 13th: Study Group) by Christine Downes-Grainger
Thirteen friends took part in our continuing discussion on Greening the Meeting House, started in the August Study Group. We concentrated on practical steps we could take.

Regarding heating, the gas boiler is only three years old and so should be efficient. Some of the radiators are in dire need of (costly) repainting. It was accepted that replacements would be better, so we could consider new positions for them. There would also be a return from the sale of the old ones. The idea of a false ceiling, and a silent fan designed to push heat back downwards were suggested. Information needs to be collected on whether we are a listed building or simply in a conservation area, whether there is insulation in the roof and our present running costs. An inspection to assess our viability for solar panels and a heat loss survey would be arranged.

Curtains and blinds for the windows was one idea. £3,500 was the general figure obtained for double glazing all but the two arched units. However Jeff said that Six Weeks Meeting used to stipulate that replacement windows could only be in wood. This would allow triple glazing, but the costs would be much higher. If wood is still the only option, we might have to think of only doing certain doors or windows. The single glazed large roof light could be replaced with a triple layer polycarbonate version for a general figure of £2,500. This would greatly improve insulation, but the effect of rain falling on it would be loud. If the internal window was double glazed it would provide better sound insulation for the meeting room when groups are using the three side rooms, for example if the Sunday school class was busy. The Meeting House is not on a water meter, but some water could be saved by putting a brick/hippo in the toilet tanks. This will be trialled to see that it does not affect their efficiency. Automatic taps were also possible. Options for a different method of heating large

amounts of water for hot drinks were discussed, and will be researched.

All these matters will be considered at the next premises committee and information and recommendations brought back to another study group in February or March. The comment was also made that if there is to be progress, Six Weeks Meeting need to be much more forthcoming with information on costs, proposals and the results of the Quinquennial survey.

At the end of the session we moved the two solid backed benches away from the long radiators in the meeting room so their heat spreads further.

Dates for the diary (January - March)

Shared lunch (last Sunday of the month): January 29th, February 26th, March 25th

Local Business Meetings (First Sunday of the month): March 4th

Study sessions (Second Sunday of the month):

- January 22nd: Strengthening our Area Meeting
- February 12th: World Gathering of Friends in Kenya
- March 11th: (Topic and facilitator to be decided)

Area Meeting:

March 15th 6pm: Bethnal Green (formerly Ratcliff)

Finally, do get in touch if there are any errors, or you have any contributions or suggestions!

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