



Epping
Local Meeting

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Newsletter January 2013

Editorial by Rebecca Fricker

I had the pleasure of attending MfW at Romford last Sunday and two pieces of ministry have resonated with me this week. The first addressed the concept of the eternal life – the speaker said he saw it as a process of passing genes from one generation to the next, illustrated by family resemblances. Just before he spoke I had been thinking of my Nan whom I had visited in her nursing home in Devon over Christmas. We had been left alone for a few minutes and I stroked her hair, not normally something I would do, and she very clearly smiled, a rare occurrence as she suffers from Parkinson's. In her smile, and the shape it made under her nose, I instantly saw both my mother and my son which moved me greatly.

The second ministry which did not speak to me in the same way at the time, but which I thought about a great deal today, was about what made a "happy life". I found out this morning that my Gran had passed away following a stroke, it was sad news but a relief to know she was not going to suffer for long. It could be considered a "good death", she was at home until the day before, she was conscious of the presence of three of the four of her children in her last afternoon, and my father and mother were there to witness what was a peaceful passing. However, I was thinking about her life. It had been a hard one but Gran had remained fairly independent, despite



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being registered blind, until the end. She had done some much enjoyed travelling, although this was curtailed by the blindness. But I think she would have looked at me askance if I had asked her if she thought she had had a "happy life". The expectation for happiness in every part of our lives is so immense in today's society, to the extent that the government even want to measure our happiness, and yet is a permanent state of happiness a reasonable expectation? I am coming to realise that perhaps it is not and I am left with one of my Gran's favourite phrases "I am not one to complain" and she genuinely wasn't. Something her Granddaughter needs to learn.

Advices and Queries: 30

Are you able to contemplate your death and the death of those closest to you?

Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully. In bereavement, give yourself time to grieve. When others mourn, let your love embrace them.



Woodbrooke in December by Judith Roads

December is a good time to be in Woodbrooke. (There aren't any bad times.) This year when I was there, the new wood-burning stove was in use in the Garden Lounge. Very efficient and cosy and it smelled wonderful.

I was there the week before Christmas for a four-day course run by two Friends eminent in their professional fields but which was way out of my comfort zone. I had read the brochure blurb as a course that focused on how early Friends read and understood the Bible. This could have been useful for my doctoral work. However, it turned out that we were not to be in the 17th century but hopping between biblical times and the present day and: 'what can I say?' Not terribly my thing and I admit to bunking off one session. These were five-star lecture-type sessions followed by home group discussions so I didn't nip off lightly. I shall have to write the non-existent course myself!

I got an insight into how courses feel that aren't my habitual stamping ground (i.e. practical training courses on clerking, nominations work, Becoming Friends companion training – and sometimes central committee work). I was part of a large group (around 30 participants) a bit older than I'm used to. No, really. And very, very interesting to be with. Each break and lunchtime gave me a stimulating offering of lively minds. Several Friends had like me mixed feelings and previous experience of 'Bible study' and we were encouraged to speak freely and to listen with love. I'm glad I went.

That's the essence of life at Woodbrooke – a place of safety, retreat, challenge, fun, variety and new friends you haven't met yet. Long may the institution thrive.



Charney Manor by Christine Downes-Grainger

We filtered through
The flat, wide fields of Oxfordshire
Twenty-two souls
Committed, energetic
Apprehensive.

A walk before supper
Through the dark village
Passing headlights showed me
The way ahead
Was smooth and clear.

How did you sleep?
Were you cold or hot?
Animated,
Loving faces
Talking around the toaster.

The oak beams sheltered us
Turn to the person next to you:
In threes ...
Find someone you have not spoken to yet -
The simple structures nurtured us.

The stone walls whispered their strength
Battered, bemused and bruised,
We shared, listened,
Encouraged, wept.
We leant back and felt our past.

The grey Saturday dissolved into
The clear blue sky of a Sunday morning
Bare trees, sodden ground
I met the eastern sun
Where the hedge thinned.

Choose a text
And sit with it a while
Rise and speak, reflect and relax
The kaleidoscope shook again
And we were gone.

Inspired by Christine's first Quaker Retreat
"Letting Go: Steps in the Spiritual Life" with
Jennifer Kavanagh at Charney Manor.





Wanstead Bonfire by Rebecca Fricker quoting Christine Downes-Grainger

Stepping through the backdoor at Wanstead and down the stairs was a magical experience as you passed through two lines of candles guiding you like fairy lights towards the “dark cleared circle” surrounding the bonfire. The bonfire itself was an “aesthetically designed fire sculpture” with “glowing fragments ascending through the trees to the sky”. It was a beautiful sight which inspired and warmed the soul and body.

A shared supper was appreciated and we were well fed with seasonal treats including baked potatoes, a friendship cake baked by Charlie Dash, and bonfire sticks (a new recipe of mine which will definitely be a November staple in future).

There were many children showing the “customary exuberance of Quaker children” which Christine heard being meted out on the poor piano inside. My memory is of lines of different lights wending their way around the graveyard at different speeds accompanied by much squealing and laughter!

Finally, the 21st century did helpfully intrude on the evening in a slightly surreal way, an AA Milne poem was being quoted and when a line was forgotten, Anthony from Walthamstow just whipped out a smartphone and looked it up. A sight as helpful as it was incongruous with the otherworldly atmosphere set by the bonfire.

Dates for the diary (January - March)

Shared lunch (last Sunday of the month):

- Sunday 27th January
(simple one followed by Study Session)
- Sunday 24th February
(Romford are joining us)
- Sunday 24th or 31st March
(to be confirmed due to Easter)

Local Business Meeting:

- Sunday 3rd February
(essential business only)
- Sunday 3rd March

Study sessions

(Second Sunday of the month):

- Sunday 27th January: Meeting Review led by Eldership team
- Sunday 10th March: Sustainability

Area Meeting:

- Walthamstow: Saturday 26th January 2pm
- Epping: Saturday 23rd February 10.30am
Training Session aimed at Attenders and new Members (but all welcome):
“Quaker processes and spiritual underpinning of our decision making”
- Bethnal Green: Thursday 21st March 6pm

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

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Layout (and bonfire picture): Alan Fricker