



Epping
Local Meeting

Epping Meeting

Newsletter October 2016

Editorial by Rebecca Fricker

The importance of friendship and close relationships can never be underestimated but even while I gave thanks in Meeting a few weeks ago for the time we had spent with Iris and Jeff Blay and their friends and family at a gathering at Wanstead Meeting House, the opportunity to share an apple crumble with a neighbour, and the chance to give a hug to someone going through a tough time, I can completely forget the importance of making connections. I recently started a counselling course and went to my first session armed with paper and pens, ready to learn from someone stood at the front imparting their knowledge, and was bemused to spend 3 hours talking and listening to fellow participants in a succession of ice-breakers. When discussing our expectations of the course at the end of the session, I mentioned this and then had the sudden realisation that we had, of course, been practising counselling – the art of sharing yourself and being listened to. One of my aims from the course is to improve my listening skills...we will see how that goes...

When ministering on the joy of friendship, I quoted the following from Quaker Faith and Practice:

Throughout life, rejoice in every aspect of friendship. Blessed indeed are those who enjoy a rich diversity of friends and who participate in many varying relationships. We all have the capacity of being sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, wives and husbands, metaphorically if not through blood-relationships. As well we are all both teachers and learners, both thinkers and workers, both employees and employers, nurses, parents and neighbours. We are most fortunate in being friends and lovers. True friendships grow in depth, understanding and mutual respect, as friends value 'that of God' in one another.

Elizabeth Seale Carnall, 1981 (22.04)



A Grand Day Out to the Quaker Tapestry by M.C.S.

On one of the last few days of August I joined Christine, Irene, Iris and Margaret at the Meeting House. The cab came spot on time and we were off. A very warm and sunny day, the white clouds idled in the sky, while we passed rich, dark brown fields; harvested, ploughed and fertilised, ready for winter sowing. We were en-route to Chelmsford to see another type of sewing. Twenty panels of the



Quaker Tapestry were on display at the Cathedral.

Created between 1981 and 1996 the tapestry totals seventy-seven panels. Taking fifteen years and 4,000 men, women and children in fifteen counties, the embroidered panels explore three centuries of Quaker history. The struggles, development and immense contribution that Quakers have made to the history of the UK and globally. A truly inspired creation, it was started by a remark from a young boy to his teacher [in Children's Meeting] "may we embroider today's lesson rather than do drawing?". His teacher, a very experienced embroiderer saw the potential of telling the Quaker story in this unique way.

I was familiar with the tapestry through post cards and books. However, in no way did that prepare me for the intricacy of detail, colour, and uniformity of stitching and beauty of the embroidery. It was hard to believe that the same panel may have been worked by two or three different people in as many counties.

Children were asked to draw for certain subjects and their drawings were translated into embroidery. Family members were asked to model so that the folds of clothing could be accurately portrayed in stitching. Each panel details Quaker individuals, events in Quaker history, or extracts from Quaker Faith & Practice. For example Elizabeth Fry's work with women awaiting deportation to Australia. She taught them to sew and provided a bag containing sewing things, a Bible, and many other useful items to help them start their new life with a skill that would support them.

A Quaker wedding panel was supplemented on the day we went with their Quaker marriage certificate from fifty years ago. Signed by the couple and the official witnesses, it was completed by all who had been present at the Meeting. Among the names was Margaret's, who I had come with.

There was an embroidery demonstration working with the stitches used in the tapestry. Six types in all. Including a new stitch, now officially recognised. A five minute film gave further insight into the work and the wide range of use it is put to.

The award winning tapestry now has the reputation of being among the six major tapestries of the world; alongside the Bayeux Tapestry and the Cluny Tapestries. Financial support is sought to ensure that exhibitions can continue to travel to new sites and that the Tapestry Museum can maintain its valuable educational work and to keep the panels in tip-top condition. A registered charity, the curators continue to look for ways in which the tapestry will long enable people to understand and experience the uniqueness of that the Quaker way offers.

Find out more from: www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk or info@quaker-tapestry.co.uk

Although I have written the above, without the four Friends named at the beginning of this article I would not have seen the exhibition. They too need to say what the tapestry exhibition meant to them:

Christine "I like the way the panels combine art in their design, skill in their stitching, history, education and spiritual and social messages. At the same time they are a demonstration of co-operative organisation and achievement. I think it is all these strands weaving together that make them such a powerful statement and metaphor. It was a privilege to see them, and in such lively company!"

Irene "Perfect"

Iris "I enjoyed sharing one another's company and greeting other Friends in the relaxing atmosphere of Chelmsford Cathedral"

Margaret "They are good outreach and brought back happy memories of seeing the full tapestry in Kendal"

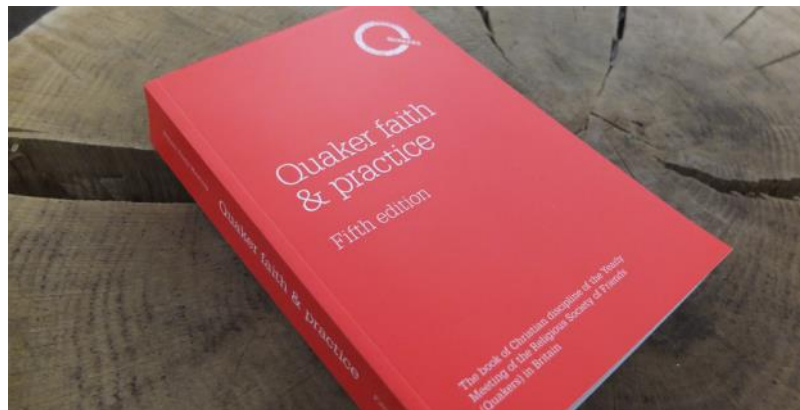
After a tasty interlude at the pop-up Quaker Café in the Cathedral, and some time and money spent in the shop, we declared it "a grand day out" and sped back by cab to Epping, sharing our responses to a remarkable experience.

A footnote:

The tapestry has outreach capabilities without being seen. Our cab driver asked (as cab drivers do) where we were going. On being told, he replied "Quakers? What are they? What do they do?" There followed a question and answer session, lasting from Epping to Chelmsford. His questions ranged from Quaker worship to capital punishment, housing shortages to same gender marriage, homelessness and mental health, conscientious objection and peace-work; how Quakers respond to these and other social needs.

Reader:

Irene gave him the little orange card "What Quakers Say". I assured him that Epping Meeting is worth checking out if he's free on Sundays at 10.30am. As you, dear reader, would also be.



Being Friends Together Study Session 7: Caring for One Another & Quaker Funerals (Chapters 12&17) - April 2016 by Rebecca Fricker

Six Friends were present.

The QF&P chapter on Quaker Funerals and Memorial Meetings was an opportunity to remember personal experiences and to compare them to other funerals we have attended. The paragraphs by Diana Lampen from 1979 spoke to all of us:

Quakers do have something very special to offer the dying and the bereaved, namely that we are at home in silence. Not only are we thoroughly used to it and unembarrassed by it, but we know something about sharing it, encountering others in its depths and, above all, letting ourselves be used in it...

People so often talk of someone 'getting over' a death. How could you ever fully get over a deep loss? Life has been changed profoundly and irrevocably. You don't get over sorrow; you work your way right to the centre of it. (17.06)

We found the Caring for One Another chapter informative and it gave us the opportunity to consider how Epping Meeting attended to all our needs. It was said that "we are a community, each contributing what they can". We discussed the need to be guided by the Spirit and not to approach tasks in a secular manner as outlined in 12.03, whilst also needing to acknowledge that "we have to take what we can get" (12.08) and that the gifts we have to offer are not the ones we think they are (12.04).

I was personally amused by 1851 Yearly Meeting in London describing Friends as "lively stones" and wish I could have heard the ministry which led to this!

Nor would we limit the performance of these duties to those who occupy such stations; we are all to watch over one another for good and to be mutually interested one for another, being united together as lively stones in the spiritual building of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the chief corner-stone. (12.18)

Being Friends Together Study Session 9: Varieties of Religious Service & Living Faithfully Today (Chapters 13&20) - June 2016 by Rebecca Fricker

Reminding ourselves, or in some case learning about, the varieties of religious service we may be called to do was a thoughtful process. Several Friends expressed the belief that, as we lose the experience of older members, we might also be losing the ability to truly discern and act on concerns as outlined in Chapter 13 and we feel this may need to be considered further in the future.

Several passages in Chapter 20 spoke to us, including Harvey Gillman's: "For a Quaker, religion is not an external activity, concerning a special 'holy' part of the self. It is an openness to the world in the here and now with the whole of the self" (20.20) and Kathleen Lonsdale's:

To me, being a Christian is a particular way of life, not the unquestioning acceptance of a particular system of theology, not belief in the literal truth of the Virgin birth, or the Resurrection and Ascension, but being the kind of person that Jesus wanted his followers to be and doing the things he told them to do... (20.26)

We considered the words of early Quakers which are still very relevant today. Friends at Yearly Meeting in London in 1692 might have been baffled by the expression 'conflict resolution' but we still understand the necessity of:

Where any have received offence from any other, first to speak privately to the party concerned, and endeavour reconciliation between themselves; and not to whisper or aggravate matters against them behind their backs, to the making parties, and the breach wider. (20.70)

And John Woolman's words in 1763 could offer the world a good starting point for a more just society today:

Were all superfluities and the desire of outward greatness laid aside, and the right use of things universally attended to, such a number of people might be employed in things useful, as that moderate labour with the blessing of Heaven would answer all good purposes relating to people and their animals, and a sufficient number have time to attend to proper affairs of civil society. (20.33)

Being Friends Together Study Session 10: Reflections (Chapter 26) - July 2016 by Christine Downes-Grainger

Eight Friends were present.

I began the session by suggesting this chapter was full of 'dog-ends', pieces that had ended up on the cutting room floor after the previous revision, but individuals then thought were too memorable to leave out. It contains five sub-sections – Experiences of God, Ways of Seeking, Perceptions of Truth, The Light that shines for all, and The Universal Light. Some of these, I mused, might easily have fitted into other chapter titles.

Members of the group were quick to say they thought it more cohesive than that! It contains contributions from scientists who need space to articulate their viewpoint within a religious society. It contains a deep response to the loss of a mother and baby near the beginning of the last century. The participant who noticed this one felt that would be a great comfort to anyone now in similar circumstances. Old favoured quotes, for example Isaac Pennington's "Give over thine own willing...." (1661, 26.70) were mingled with memories of some of the writers, e.g. Kathleen Lonsdale of Lewes Meeting in the 1960s.

Consciousness, godness, goodness, love, light, the challenges of failing health – this chapter combines reflections on these and more that are both older and modern. Do we need them all? Can we reduce our book and our viewpoint to the precepts of Thomas Paine - "The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren and to do good is my religion."

This session reinforced for me a truth I gradually understand more: that it is not events or words that shape our lives, but how we each perceive those events or words. We overlook the choice we are making to decide, imperceptibly, to see things a particular way. Listening to each other, and listening to voices old and new, in spoken and written form, is for me, invaluable in helping us create a peaceful community.

Being Friends Together Study Session 11: Meeting for Sufferings & Trusteeship (Chapters 7&15) - August 2016 by Rebecca Fricker

The general feeling on both of these chapters are that they while they are very necessary, they are perhaps a little dry. 7.02's outline of the functions of Meeting for Sufferings could examples of when it has successfully deliberated: "on how best to support the spiritual life of the yearly meeting and to further the development of its visionary and prophetic role" as outline in (g)!

A feature of our study groups has been the difference between the different editions we are all using – this sometimes causes confusion but also illustrates what an important step revising our red book is. For example, it transpires that the following passage, we felt to be important, has moved chapters between the editions:

A meeting house should not be regarded primarily in terms of bricks and mortar, or merely seen in relation to potential site value. Its real value derives from the worship and service of the meeting.

Even so, our meeting houses no less than our own homes deserve our care, attention and imaginative thought, so that they may be attractive both to ourselves and to others. Care of our premises is an important and sometimes exacting responsibility, which should be exercised by or on behalf of the meeting to which it belongs." (15.14, fourth edition / 14.25, fifth edition)



Being Friends Together Study Session 12: Centrally Managed Work & Sharing the Quaker Experience (Chapters 8&28) - September 2016 – by Rebecca Fricker

Again, it was noted how Chapter 8 had changed between the fourth and fifth editions – in some ways this can be seen as positive as it shows that the Religious Society of Friends can react quickly to changes – but again the loss of some passages were felt. For me it was a section responding to the complaint that some committees initiate policies and statements which some at local meeting level do not feel connected to:

If the complaint is even in part justified, what remedy is open to us? First, let us set our minds to see the committees not as some distant 'they' with documents emanating from an impersonal 'Friends House'. It is we who compose the committees and the document we dislike was, like as not, drafted by Friends in meetings not far from our own. (8.23, fourth edition)

What should have also been an easy chapter to consider actually exposed some of the tensions within our own meeting regarding the practical and emotional relationship between Friends House, Area Meetings and Local Meetings. Although study sessions are a more appropriate forum to consider these differences of opinion than Local Business Meetings, I think it was a reminder that personal opinions do sometimes need to be set aside to enable us to be more spirit led.

Chapter 28, thought by one Friend to be the chapter that needs to be overhauled the most out of the ones we have studied so far, saw us more united in the belief that it seems far too short and historical – with little needed reflection on how Friends share the Quaker experience today. Worryingly we concluded that the lack of recent writings could tell us that we are not sharing our experiences enough, either between ourselves or the wider world. This could be, as stated in 28.06, that we shrink from proclaiming the truth, fearing ourselves unready. Also perhaps a discomfort with the thought of imposing our beliefs on others – I personally have not felt led as Sarah Lynes Grub and Hannah Kilham did, as explained in 28.04 and 28.05.

We had an interesting discussion on what "Have you anything to declare" (28.07) meant and how the Religious Society of Friends still offers something different even in today's society. We concluded that the final few sentences should remain in any future editions:

We long to reach out to those who may find a spiritual home in the Society; we do not claim that ours is the only true way, yet we have a perception of truth that is relevant to all if, as we believe, the light to which we witness is a universal light. Each meeting must find its own way of sharing the Quaker experience, each Friend remember 'that we are each the epistle of Yearly Meeting'.

Dates for the Diary October – December 2016

Study Sessions:

Sunday 9th October: Advices and Queries & Area Meetings and Local Meetings (Ch. 1 & 4)

Sunday 13th November: Our Peace Testimony (Ch.24)

Sunday 11th December: Unity and Diversity (Ch.27)

Shared lunch:

Sunday 30th October

Sunday 27th November

Sunday 1st January

Next Local Business Meeting:

Sunday 6th November

Area Meetings:

Sunday 16th October 1.30pm Harlow

Saturday 12th November 1pm Wanstead (with bonfire to follow)

Other:

High Leigh 21st – 23rd April 2017

Yearly Meeting Gathering at Warwick Uni. 29 July – 5 August 2017

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

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