

WEST SOMERSET AREA MEETING
QUAKER NEWSLETTER
FEBRUARY 2016



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THE OPENING OF THE REGENERATED TAUNTON MEETING HOUSE

Saturday, January 9th 2016

The long awaited re-opening of the beautiful Meeting House in Bath Place was a memorable event for an appreciative gathering of over a hundred and fifty Friends.

Zoe Ainsworth-Grigg's Youtube video captures the atmosphere of the event.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jNkad6iCgandfeature=youtu.be>

WEST SOMERSET AREA QUAKER MEETING
January 23rd 2016 at Taunton

Minutes

16/1 Advices and Queries

Advices and Queries number 15 has been read in our worship

16/2 Representatives

Bridgwater	Rosemary Dagley	
Burnham	Carinne Allinson	
Ilminster	Anna Mullett	Malcolm Elliott
Minehead	Chris Lawson	
Spiceland	Chris Jeffery	Pat Bell
Taunton	Angela Ayres	Peter Burgoine
Wellington	Marian Dawson	Brian Collingridge

Elder Fran Hicks

16/3 Membership

We record the death of Thomas Brookes on December 6th 2015. A Meeting for Worship was held at Taunton Crematorium on January 11th 2016.

We record the death of Bertram Sample of Minehead Meeting on January 10th 2016.

We have received a letter of application for membership. We ask Gillian Coe and Gilly Lee to visit and report back to Area Meeting in March.

We have received a certificate of transfer from Pickering and Hull regarding Sheila Whitlock. We are glad to accept her as a member of this Area Meeting and ask Jefferson Horsley to welcome her.

We have received a certificate of acceptance for Joe Burlington from Dorset and South Wiltshire Area Meeting. We wish Joe well in his new home.

16/4 John Melbourne -Testimony

We have heard the following minute from Minehead Meeting

Our Friend John Melbourne died, aged 77, on 7th November. His cremation in the morning of 17th November was followed in the afternoon by a memorial Meeting for Worship to celebrate his life, attended by over 120: family, Quakers from across the Area Meeting, his friends from his time in Zambia and local people representing his many interests and activities.

John and Louise came to Minehead Meeting on their removal to Dunster in 1996 following several years of being the wardens at Frenchay Meeting in Bristol. It sometimes seemed that John continued to be a warden for us. He was one of the first to welcome newcomers with a handshake and his ready smile, quietly and unobtrusively giving practical help, lifts to Meeting, moving furniture, washing up, taking home the recycling to be sorted. He served the Meeting as treasurer (briefly), as clerk for 6 years and then again as co-clerk for another three and as an Elder for two triennia. His spoken ministry was not frequent but was always from the heart and his contributions in study groups were appreciated.

Reticent to articulate his beliefs, he showed his faith in his manner of living and concern for others. His whole life had been one of service, as a teacher, working with the elderly and bereaved. He enriched our lives and we give thanks for his time with us.

Area meeting supports expanding this Minute into a testimony to the grace of God in the life of John Melbourne, and ask Minehead Meeting to take this forward

16/5 Tabular Statement

The WSAQM entry on the tabular statement for 2015 shows that we currently have 141 members and 87 attenders including children. This means that we have 1 more member than last year and 16 more attenders. A comparison with ten years ago shows that we have just 3 fewer members and 3 more attenders since 2005.

16/6 Life of Burnham Meeting

Burnham Meeting has reported on the life of the Meeting during 2015. Despite one new Member and two Friends transferring into Burnham, they remain a small meeting, with between three and six meeting together each month. More attended their all age worship in December. They have enjoyed social events together, some house groups, and a period of meeting for discussion and coffee. They keep in touch through a monthly newsletter and have continued to do most business. They also continue with shared Oversight and Eldership. They have made links with St Andrews church, and hope to increase these in 2016. They feel their strong Quaker Foundation has kept them going through the leaner times and is a solid base from which to grow.

16/7 Nominations and Appointments

John Ainsworth's term of service as a trustee ended on 31st December 2016 and he is willing to serve for a further 3 years to provide continuity particularly as he is one of the trustees members on the Meeting House Management Committee.

Jefferson Horsley's term of service ends on 30th June 2016 and he is willing to serve until 31st December 2018. We appoint these Friends for the stated period.

Margot Taylor wishes to lay down her lengthy service as trustee. We appoint Shirley Anthony to serve as trustee until 31st December 2018

Chris Jeffery wishes to lay down her role as co-clerk to trustees. We appoint Margaret Stocks as the new co-clerk.

Margaret Stenhouse and Anna Mullett are to stand down as elders. Ilminster Meeting has brought forward the names of John Gray and Eve Northey to serve as elders We appoint these Friends to serve until December 31st 2018.

We appoint Huw Morgan to serve as overseer until December 31st 2018.

Margaret Western wishes to lay down her role as Burials Officer. Nominations committee has brought forward the name of Anna Mullett to serve in this role. We appoint her to serve until December 31st 2018.

Spiceland Meeting has, over the last few months, been thinking deeply about how their Meeting may best be supported by eldership and oversight. They have met several times to discuss this matter and were eventually able to suggest names of Friends willing to serve in this way. They suggest a central group of elders, overseers and clerk to begin work but find that at the moment a prescribed term of office would not be helpful. The names

brought forward by Spiceland are:- Elders Katie Venner and Dawn Hampshire, Overseers Gillian Lord, Graham West and John Bell. We appoint these Friends. Their new clerk will be Pat Robertson. We look forward to hearing from Spiceland about where experience and further discernment take them.

Ilminster Meeting has appointed Margaret Stenhouse as their new clerk and Minehead Meeting has appointed Christina Lawson as their new clerk.

16/8 Report on Membership from Elders and Overseers

We have considered the report from Elders and Overseers concerning Membership.

Its main points and proposals are that:

The distinctions between Members and Attenders has become rather artificial.

Both the option to become a member or to remain an attender should be available in order to reflect personal leading.

With the exception of Trustees and other officers for whom there is a legal requirement to be members, all roles, or jobs should be open to Members and Attenders, with people being nominated on the basis of their gifts, calling, experience and suitability.

Whereas we are broadly accepting that the distinction between Members and Attenders is less important than finding people with appropriate experience and strengths, some felt that ideally, Elders should be members, to ensure that vital elements of Quaker belief are not diluted.

Friends are urged to avoid the use of divisive language and to refer to all Members and Attenders as Friends.

We are in agreement with each of these points.

16/9 Contact list

Elders and overseers, as part of their deliberations on membership, have suggested that in the new contact list the practice of identifying attenders with an "a" should be discontinued.

Our discernment of this matter has led us to agree that we should remove any distinction between members and attenders in the new list and that a separate list of members' names be kept and made available.

16/10 Reporting on Duties

We have heard the following reports from Local Meetings on the extent to which they have been able to carry out their duties, as described in Quaker Faith and Practice

Ilminster

Duties of Local Meetings

We have carried out our duties as laid down in QFandP Ch 4 to the best of our abilities.

Bridgwater

We have complied with the responsibilities of Local Meetings, fulfilling our duties as laid out in QFandP. In 15/5 we reported that action would be taken concerning 4.33(d). We have embarked on the 'Hearts and Minds' programme to ensure 'continuing religious education'.

Taunton

We have considered QFandP 4.33 and agree that we have fulfilled these duties. Particular points are:

(under i) Elders and Overseers need to consider keeping a book of minutes for future records

(under d) We take particular responsibility for children and parents in the meeting.

(under n) We are committed to studying Quaker Faith and Practice in 2 groups as suggested.

(under a/o/p) Some of our activities in the past year were constrained by our absence from the meeting house, but we welcomed the opportunity of forming links with the Temple Methodists. We invited other local churches to the celebration of our reopening yesterday, including the Anglican Bishop of Taunton. Our new building is physically more visible in the community.

Spiceland

ii) The Carrying out of our Local Meeting's responsibilities. We have considered the requirements for Local Meetings as set out in Quaker Faith and Practice 4.33. We feel that during the past year we have fulfilled our obligations to the best of our ability.

Minehead:15/80 Area Meeting

We are asked to report how well we have fulfilled our duties as in Quaker Faith and Practice 5th edition 4.33 - 4.36. We have considered these duties.

We have done reasonably well on them, taking into account our reduced numbers. Our Friday lunches for outreach are supported by a number of people from outside with existing membership of other churches. Our after Meeting for Worship sessions on a Sunday have been well attended.

Burnham

Our members have increased by three. We continue to meet monthly with occasional children's meetings and one all age meeting for worship.

We have a treasurer, also Trustee and correspondent, with shared Eldership and Oversight.

We have had 2 house groups this year, and Friends share experience of other events on line

We do not hold PM but cover business after Meeting for Worship, via a newsletter and online. The Correspondent does her best to represent Burnham at AM and to keep the LM informed. We are frequently unable to appoint to committees etc.

Our presence at the community centre is effective in raising our profile in the community. We place copies of the Friend outreach edition in the library and the community centre and are building links with St Andrews Church.

We easily meet our LM costs but are unable to contribute as much as we would like to AM and BYM. We were able to donate to the Taunton Meeting House renewal fund.

Wellington

Wellington Friends have advised us that they have carried out their duties to the best of their ability.

16/11 Meeting for Sufferings Report

We have had a report from our representative on Meeting for Sufferings concerning the progress of our minute on Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and an in depth consideration of how Northumbria AM has radically changed the way in which it does business.

Our minute gave rise to much discussion and the matter already rests with QCEA and QPSW. The Recording Clerk felt that BYM is fully committed to statements in other areas at present but that AMs, LMs and individuals should continue to lobby on the matter, particularly our MEPs.

Our representative added that two things remained with her from the last meeting:- that membership is a journey into service and a question- If Area Meeting did not exist would we have to invent it? She also requested that a Friend offers to attend the next meeting for Sufferings as neither of our representatives can attend.

16/12 Supporting the Swarthmore Lecture

This year's Swarthmore Lecture brings us two East African speakers, Esther Mombo and Cecile Nyiramana. Woodbrooke need to raise £15,450 towards the cost of this event and AMs are invited to contribute. We agree to send a donation of £200.

16/13 Topics for all day meetings

Minehead Friends have made the following suggestions regarding all day meetings:-

An invitation to Lynn Morris who performed the Elizabeth Hooton story to perform her new play, Red Flag over Bermondsey – the Ada Salter story.

An invitation to a representative at the FWCC meeting currently being held in Peru.

Bridgwater Friends have suggested the following topic:

The internet and magnetic frequency is of concern to some friends. Is internet usage at odds with our testimony of simplicity?

We have also considered whether we might:

spend half a day learning more about New Expressions (minute 15/93 refers)

consider more deeply the questions raised by the trustees survey

(minute 15/94 refers) What are the most important things for us to be concentrating on? and How can we best use our resources of people and money?

and whether we might spend time exploring "A Spirit Lead Church" the QCCIR drafted response to the World Council of Churches paper, Towards a Common Vision.

We decide to ask Carinne Allinson to prepare a session for the March Area Meeting using the Quaker Life New Expressions resource. We ask that Local Meetings try to find a couple of other Friends to work with Carinne.

We ask Jefferson Horsley to follow up the contact details for Ben Wood and Douglas Butterfield, two speakers on "A Spirit Lead Church" that he warmly recommended.

We believe that the suggestions about inviting Lynn Morris to perform her new play about Ada Salter and the concern about internet usage and Wifi would be of interest, but would perhaps be better arranged outside of the Area meeting timetable and fully opened to the public.

We ask Bridgwater Meeting to look into the possibility of arranging a meeting about internet usage.

16/14 Trustees Annual Report

Our Trustees have presented their annual report. They have had a change of clerkship and reorganised into two sub groups, property and finance, and policy and communications. The co-clerks have been grateful for the continued support of Chris Lawson, the outgoing clerk.

Currently there are 10 trustees and an additional observer from Wellington. Margot Taylor has stood down. Trustees have benefitted greatly from her work.

The year has been a challenging one with the Taunton Meeting House Project claiming much attention. It has been agreed to account for the Meeting House as a "cost centre" in its own right, an Area Centre managed by TMHMC, which itself is a sub-group of Trustees.

Trustees are appreciative of the work of many, our treasurer, and members of the development and management committees. They have needed to access professional advice and will continue to do so to ensure that risks are both understood and, where possible, limited.

During the year policy documents have been reviewed and created.

Our buildings continue to require upkeep and renovation, and funds have been depleted by the Taunton Project. From the recent survey it is clear that most LMs are facing difficulty, and Trustees are considering how they may help. They also wish to be in a position to provide financial support to any initiative which AM considers important.

We thank our trustees for their work.

16/15 Taunton Meeting House report

Faith Cartwright has reported on the latest work of the Taunton Meeting House Management Committee. The first Meeting for Worship in the new Meeting House took place on November 30th. She reported on the very successful and enjoyable opening and open day. About 150 people came during the day and the Bishop of

Taunton spoke, commending the vision of community and interchurch and interfaith building. One flat is now occupied and interviews for a warden are underway. The provision of facilities and furnishing continues. The challenge will continue to be combining prudent financial management with the vision of Quaker hospitality and principles.

Notices

We have been encouraged by Fran Hicks to use the material already available in Local Meetings to do the spiritual preparation for Yearly meeting 2016.

REPORT FROM SUFFERINGS 4th – 6th December 2015

The two items that most concern our AM are the progress of our Minute on TTIP and an in-depth look at how Northumbria AM has radically changed the way it does business.

Our Minute gave rise to quite a lot of discussion and harked back to Pickering and Hull's original Minute. The matter rests already with QCEA and QPSW and the Recording Clerk pointed out that BYM is already making public statements on housing and welfare, and the refugee crisis. We need to consider the impact each statement can have if there are too many and he felt that the work already being undertaken is as much as BYM can do at the moment. He did say however, that LMs, AMs and individuals should continue to lobby on the matter particularly to our MEPs as an European response is required. We may wish to repeat our contact with our MEP and our own MPs. MfS also offers:

- In June, Helen Drewery of Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) signed a joint letter about TTIP to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. QPSW is involved, with a coalition of NGOs, and through its membership of the Trade Justice Movement, in stakeholder meetings, with the department of Business, Innovation and Skills.
- There is an article on the BYM website by Tom Leimdorfer (North Somerset AM). There is also information on the Quaker General Election 2015 Guide
- Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) has produced material including a paper on TTIP and health.
- There are two British MEPs working on the issue of TTIP: Molly Scott Cato (Green Party) and Judith Kirton Darling who gave the 2015 Salter Lecture on this topic (also see the report in The Friend 7 May 2015 - available online to subscribers)
- BYM works closely with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT – formed of Baptists Together, Church of Scotland, Methodist Church and United Reform Church) which has also produced a briefing paper on TTIP.
- NGOs which have published information and analysis include Trade Justice Movement, Global Justice (formerly World Development Movement), 38 Degrees, Friends of the Earth and the European Consumer Association.
- Friends may also be interested in articles in The Telegraph, in The Independent the BBC, The Guardian (for example by George Monbiot), and the Wall Street Journal.

The paper from Northumbria AM is extensive and detailed. I have sent a copy to our co-clerks. It makes for fascinating reading which we may wish to consider further as an AM.

Kathy Gollin

REPORT ON THE LIFE OF BURNHAM-ON-SEA MEETING 2015

Once again, the year started well, with a shared lunch at Sue and Clive's house after Meeting for Worship, which was well attended. Sue provided things for the children to do and a lovely time was had by all.

During the year, we have been able to hold a couple of house groups, using the Being Friends Together resource, and also a walk and picnic after Meeting for Worship in June. Several Friends met together for coffee and discussion on Friday mornings for a few months in the middle of the year. This was found to be a friendly and informal way of keeping in contact with each other between our monthly Meetings for Worship, and also a means of keeping in touch with those who were unable to attend MfW for various reasons. However, in the latter half of the year attempts to hold house groups and coffee mornings have not been successful, due to Friends' very busy lives.

We have continued to do most business and keep in contact with a monthly newsletter, sent out by email after each MfW. The Correspondent monitors minutes from committees and AM and circulates information, minutes and other items of relevance to the meeting, as well as news of wider (BYM) events and courses that may be of interest to Friends. We continue to share eldership and oversight.

Although the number of people regularly attending Meeting for Worship is largely, unchanged the number of Members on our list has increased during the year, with Adrian being accepted into membership at AM in Minehead in March, and Celine and Christopher's transfer of their membership from Sidcot being accepted at AM in Burnham in September. At the end of the year, we were also joined by a new Enquirer and although she has not been able to join us in December or January, she has contacted Friends House for their enquirers' information pack.

Despite the increase in Members, we are still small in number and average between three and six at MfW most months, although more people (including several children) attended the all-age worship in December. Carinne has attempted to maintain a presence for Burnham at AM and EandO, and keep Burnham Friends informed, to prevent us becoming too isolated. Three Friends have taken on AM roles during the year, which is a very large proportion of our small LM. AM came to Burnham in September, and several Burnham Friends were able to help with setting up and attended AM. This was a precious opportunity for local Friends to become more involved with AM, and was greatly appreciated.

Towards the end of the year, Sue joined with St Andrew's church in a vigil for peace in Manor Gardens in the centre of Burnham, and made links with the church. Carinne subsequently attended the Solstice Service held by the church. It is hoped that this will lead to greater links and cooperation between St Andrews and Burnham Quakers in 2016.

We remain a small meeting unable to meet more than once a month or do more than hold the occasional house group. However, because we are small, and most of us have been Friends for over 20 years, we have a strong Quaker foundation. This has kept Burnham going through leaner times, and will be a solid base from which to grow.

LONG SUTTON MEETING MEMORABILIA

Dear Friends

Our small Quaker Meeting here in Long Sutton, Somerset, is to celebrate its Tercentenary over the weekend of 8th /9th July 2017.

We aim to hold various events; a Display of Memorabilia and a Commemorative Book. We are looking at Quakerism in Somerset and Long Sutton in particular.

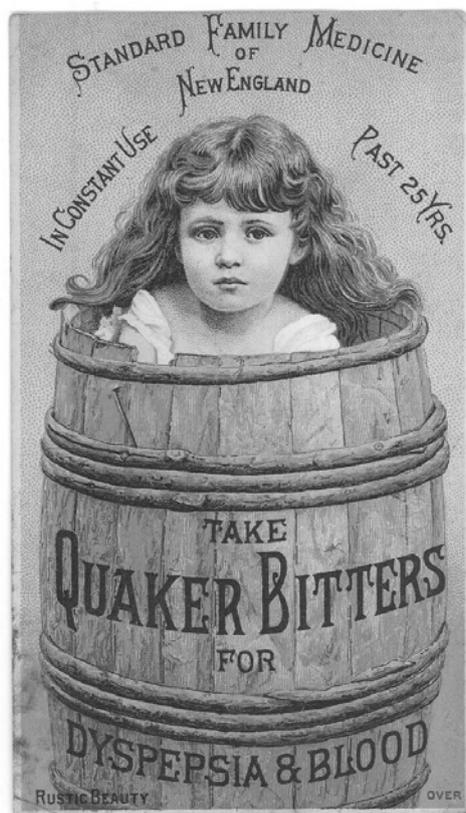
What we need to start collecting soon are any memories – letters, photos, pictures, accounts of events etc. If you have anything along these lines, we would be most grateful if you could share them with us. We will take great care of what you send and return items to you. However, if some things are precious, perhaps they could be photocopied? Please note that articles for inclusion in the Commemorative Book need to be received by the beginning of July 2016 at the latest.

Please send what you have to me, Maggie Davies at 6 Cherry Tree Court, Crewkerne, Somerset, TA18 7DH. Or email me at prmj.davies@haylingpages.co.uk

Looking forward to hearing from you.

In friendship

Maggie Davies (Convenor of Tercentenary Planning Committee).



FAITH IN ACTION
NEWS FROM THE GREEN ADVISORY GROUP

Three members of the group met in mid-January after the Christmas break to begin to think about the coming year. The feedback from the Area Meeting with Laurie Michaelis last year indicates that most Local Meetings and/or individuals in them were taking some sort of action over environmental or economic issues and our initial thoughts were that our group would be there to act as a resource for meetings and Friends when they needed some additional support. To this end we would again like to offer to come to local meetings to share thoughts about environmental issues. We are meeting again on Wednesday 24th February at 2.00 at the Taunton Meeting House and would very much welcome others to join us whether on a one-off or to become a regular member. We hope to firm up plans which may include:

- Compiling a list of local Friends who are well-informed to give advice on aspects of living ecologically, whether on an individual basis or by running a talk or workshop themselves or inviting those with specialist knowledge to do so. If you have something to offer let us know.
- Running further events ourselves 2 or 3 times a year. One matter that is of particular concern to one of our members is the dangers of wifi especially to children and we have identified a speaker, a GP, who is knowledgeable on this subject.
- We have invited a former QUNO programme assistant, David Elliott, to speak about his work on matters including the implications of human rights law on climate policy and developing links between agricultural trade and food security. This will take place on Sunday 10th April at Taunton Meeting House after Meeting for Worship. (see calendar below).

NEWS FROM QUAKER PEACE AND SOCIAL WITNESS

QPSW Sustainability and New Economics Grants for 2017. Details will follow shortly. Enabling projects to build low-carbon, sustainable communities and a different type of economic system in which Quaker values can flourish. More information from ellier@quaker.org.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday 20th February. Housing and Inequality; What canst thou do? Conference at Friends House, London

Monday 7th March. Wivey Action on Climate talk - Community Action for Sustainability at Wiveliscombe Community Centre 7 for 7.30pm

Saturday 12th March. Christian Aid and Children Society campaigning roadshow in Bristol (see CA website)

Friday to Sunday 18th to 20th March. Our Sustainability Commitment: being a transformational community at Swanwick. *We have 2 representatives going – Carinne Allinson and Huw Morgan and I hope we can have an opportunity for feedback from them.*

Monday 4th April. Wivey Action on Climate talk. Recycling in Somerset. At Wiveliscombe Community Centre. 7 for 7.30

Sunday 10th April. QUNO Programme Assistant David Elliott to talk about his placement. *Taunton MH 12.00*

Saturday 16th April. Peoples Assembly National Demonstration in London for Health, Homes, Jobs, Education.

NEWS FROM OTHER LOCAL GROUPS

Wivey Action on Climate are organising local talks in Taunton, Wellington and Wiveliscombe in the next 3 months and are interested in hearing suggestions for future topics. You can subscribe to the newsletter at www.wiveyaction.org.uk to get details (and see dates above)

STOP TRIDENT

Demonstration in London: 27th February. Assemble in Hyde Park at 12.00 to march to Trafalgar Square. At 11.00 there will be a brief interfaith service including some Quaker silent worship at Hine Street Methodist Church, 19 Thayer Street, London W1U2QJ. Quakers will be with other faith groups in the "No faith in Trident" bloc.

John Ainsworth

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

It's official: 2015 shattered global heat records. Just 10% of that excess heat was attributed to El Niño - and 90% to climate change.

It's Time to Act on climate change - here are some events coming up in February and beyond:

Solidarity with the Heathrow 13! These brave activists have been told that they are likely to face prison sentences for their protest last summer blocking Heathrow's north runway to protest against aviation expansion. If you are able, please join us on the morning of Wednesday 24th February when sentences will be announced. If you can't make it, send messages and pictures of solidarity via Twitter (#Heathrow13 @PlaneStupid), Facebook or email: press@planestupid.com

I know that a young man who is a member of a Quaker family in my old meeting at Ealing is one of the Heathrow 13 so you may wish to send a message of solidarity. John Ainsworth

Going Backwards on Climate Change - Protest 8th May. Help us raise awareness of the damage caused by the government's backtracking on climate change by joining us in a fun, creative protest - walking backwards down Whitehall on the one year anniversary of their election. There are obviously opportunities to mark this anniversary outside London too - we'll be producing resources to help groups elsewhere hold meetings, stalls or even their own 'backwards' stunt...

If you're in London and would like to help plan for this and other actions, you're welcome at our open meetings

There are other divestment events planned around the country. Why not mark the occasion by doing a bit of personal housekeeping: switching your bank account to an ethical option or your electricity provider to a renewable-powered option like Good Energy or Ecotricity? And by the way, we have a partnership arrangement with Good Energy - when you sign up as a new customer, using the link below, CCC gets £30!

http://www.goodenergy.co.uk/?utm_medium=referral&utm_source=Affilinet&utm_campaign=758510

CORRECTIONS TO CONTACT LIST 2016

Please note these corrections re. the new Contact List:

Judith Blaker: email should be judithdblaker@gmail.com

Anne Jackson: email should be jacks.wild20@gmail.com

Margaret Johnson: add name to Burnham-on-Sea list with Tel No 01278 781693

Huw Morgan: name should be spelt Huw and not Hugh

Please let Chris Lawson have any further errors that are found.

TAUNTON MEETING HOUSE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Report to Area Meeting
January 2016

The keys were finally returned to Taunton Meeting at the end of November and their first Meeting for Worship took place on 30th November. It was a very special occasion and all who have seen the building seem to have been delighted. It has surpassed all expectations.

The official opening ceremony and open day took place on 9th January 2016. The Bishop of Taunton was asked to officiate. She spoke warmly of how welcoming the space is and how she sees it as a great opportunity to forge good links between churches and faiths to work on those concerns that they and we have in common. She seemed to have a very good understanding of Quakers and took part in our short meeting for worship at 12 noon. The day went very well not least due to the excellent organisation of the Taunton Meeting who organised refreshments on a rota basis all day. In all it was estimated about 150 people came, some from Area meeting, and many visitors from Taunton. Local radio carried reports on the Saturday and the Sunday.

Letting agents Clem Woodward were asked to undertake responsibility for the two bedroomed flat. It says much about the agents and the accommodation that a tenant was found within three weeks of us returning to the building and took up residence immediately.

Interviews for the warden will take place on 26th January. Terms and conditions, employment contracts and arrangements for supervising the warden are ongoing. We're sure that all will give the new warden every support in this new and somewhat experimental role.

A budget has been drawn up and been presented to trustees for the first year of the project.

There is much left to do; blinds are about to be fitted, the AV system still to be installed, curtains, chairs and other equipment still to be obtained. Everything has to meet the exacting criteria of Friends; in particular is it ethical? is it sustainable? Members of the committee and of Taunton Meeting have worked hard to bear these in mind at all times. Are we meeting our legal requirements as a charity whilst retaining our Quaker values with regard to the use of the building, maximising its financial potential as well as the need for outreach and community use?

A later addition:

We're very pleased to say we have appointed a warden for the new Taunton Meeting House.

Lynn Shorthouse will be moving from Long Sutton where she has been living in the Quaker cottage. She has been a member for many years and has lots of valuable experience and good ideas.

She will be taking up the appointment on March 7th. We're sure everyone will make her very welcome and help her to settle in.

We had a difficult task as there were several candidates who would have fitted the role well but we feel sure Lynn will be an excellent warden.

Faith Cartwright and Peter Burgoine Co-clerks

ANNUAL REPORT OF TRUSTEES TO WSAQM FOR 2016

Trustees started the year with a change of clerkship and a new working structure for Trustees as a whole. With the decision to split Trustees into two sub-groups (property and finance and policy and communications), as well as maintaining the meetings for the full group, we have been able to focus on the details from many technical and legal challenges, which we do not have time to consider properly during our normal meetings. During the year the Taunton Management Committee (TMC) also became a sub-group of Trustees.

The co-clerks have been very grateful to the outgoing clerk, Chris Lawson, for continuing to support us and remaining as a Trustee and a constant source of help, advice and our link with the Charity Commission. Our first year would have been more difficult without him.

Trustees met four times during 2015. The property and finance sub-group met three times with some additional ad hoc meetings with representatives of the Taunton Management Committee (TMC). The policy and communications sub-group met twice during 2015. Margaret Stocks attended the Area Meeting Trustees' Conference, Walking Together, and reported back on how good working relationships build trust – and succession planning. We hope to take advantage of her experience and learning during 2016.

We started the year with 11 Trustees and finished it with 10. We had two Trustees from every meeting except Burnham and Wellington, where we have one Trustee and an Observer respectively; Trustees are glad to have a link person from Wellington. During the year Margot Taylor stepped down from Bridgwater, leaving us with only one Trustee from Bridgwater Meeting. Trustees have benefited greatly from Margot's handling of the sale of Bridgwater and work with the property and finance sub-group.

This past year has been a noteworthy and very challenging year for Trustees with the Taunton Meeting House project taking our main focus. The builders started work a little late in February 2015, completing the work in late November with the official opening on 9 January 2016.

On the way there has been increased fundraising, generous donations and a mortgage application; unfortunately we are still awaiting the results of the mortgage. The decision to have solar panels on the Taunton Meeting House roof will mean we lease the roof to Brendon Energy for 25 years. The mortgage and the leasing of the roof required WSAQ Trustees to indemnify the Custodian Trustees from any financial loss or poor management or practice.

Phil Parratt has done an excellent job of managing the funds for the project by moving money around to meet the challenges of cash flow. Trustees are grateful to Ilminster Meeting for allowing us to use their special donation as a contingency if there were problems with cash flow; we are pleased to report that so far this has not been required. During the year it was agreed to account for the Taunton Meeting House as a 'cost centre' in its own right, an Area Centre, managed by TMC, leaving Taunton Friends to concentrate on their spiritual purpose.

We are so appreciative of the work of the original committee, clerked by Martin Wall, which started the process some 5 years ago, and the smooth manner in which it has handed over the responsibilities to the new Taunton Management Committee (TMC), ably clerked by Faith Cartwright and Peter Burgoine.

There is no doubt Trustees have found much of the legal, funding, building and contractual responsibilities outside their expertise on many occasions and we have needed to access advice from professionals both inside and outside the Quaker community. As we enter the next phase and employ a warden, and oversee the implementation of the operational plan for the TMC, targets and performance, we will continue to rely on professional advice to ensure risks are understood, and where possible, limited.

During the year the Policy and Communications Group started to review the policy documents we hold and have also made new policy documents in several areas in which it is deemed to be good practice. Faith Cartwright became the Data Protection Officer for the Area and Judith Blaker has agreed to be our representative in relation to the Heritage Project.

With the refurbishment of Spiceland's meeting house under our belt, a survey of the cottage has highlighted the need for some major, and possibly very expensive, work to make the cottage safe and get it up to

a reasonable letting standard. Some emergency work was undertaken when the cottage failed its electrical inspection and issues around the insurance policy have been corrected.

The quinquennial survey on Wellington has been completed. The quinquennial reports are helpful and necessary for acquiring a professional overview of the state of the buildings and for indicating work to be done. Past Annual Reports to Area Meeting have focused only on the year just gone; however, it is pertinent on this occasion to comment briefly on the year/s to come. The analysis of the survey Trustees commissioned has been shared amongst Friends and we are grateful to Carinne Allinson for undertaking this on our behalf. The results indicate that most LMs are facing difficulties and we, as Trustees, will be considering how we can help.

The Taunton project has depleted the funds of WSAQM and while we are conscious that money is still needed to meet the outstanding debt we wish to be in a position to provide financial support to any initiative which Area Meeting considers important.

Jefferson Horsley and Chris Jeffery, Co-Clerks

SO, HOW'S IT GOING IN YOUR MEETING?

How is what going, please? Oh, following the "Reading *Quaker Faith and Practice*" calendar of course.

<http://qfp.quaker.org.uk/reading/calendar/>

Up and down the country meetings are getting together and getting to know *Quaker Faith and Practice* and each other. Groups are meeting early on Sunday mornings, later on Sunday mornings, on weekdays or evenings, in homes and in Meeting Houses. Some Meetings have had to arrange more than one session to cope with numbers, some groups are a faithful few.

In some Meetings Elders lead the group, in others an interested Friend, in some Friends just come together. It's easier than you might think to volunteer to facilitate a group; there is a step-by-step guide with suggested activities on the "Being Friends Together" website where the "Reading *Quaker Faith and Practice*" resources are free. <http://together.woodbrooke.org.uk/welcome.php>

For many Friends these reading sessions are a journey of exploration and a great joy. Some Meetings have used them to encourage Attenders to learn more and to ask questions, and some have discovered that ministry in Meeting for Worship has deepened.

It's not too late to join in; it's not too late to ask your Meeting to start a group or even to start one yourself. Your Meeting could also book a 'Woodbrooke on the Road' day to explore the book together. And if you find yourself far from your Meeting, you can just read alone or look at the "Being Friends Together" website. Did I mention that the "Reading *Quaker Faith and Practice*" resources are free? There you can find help to follow the reading programme as an individual.

Be a part of the conversation; discover how *Quaker Faith and Practice* speaks to you and to others. On the way we may learn from the stories that other Friends bring and find the love that binds us together in our faith.

QF&P Revision Preparation Group

MEMBERSHIP IN THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

An overview, with some comments, from Chris Lawson

Following the ongoing discussions in our AM about membership, this is a brief summary of the various stages that have occurred in the history of the Society as I look at them. My main source is the invaluable booklet by Hugh Doncaster 'Quaker Organisation and Business Meetings'.

When the Quaker movement began there was no formal act of joining it. You showed by your presence in Quaker gatherings, your eagerness to tell others what you had found (often with vigour) and your actions, including the very obvious ones of behaving without deference to anyone and willingness to go to prison for your convictions. Nor would you pay tithes to the Church or swear oaths in court. None of which was popular with the establishment.

Enthusiastic commitment was great but some order was clearly needed and in 1653 William Dewsbury proposed that each Meeting should appoint "one or two most grown in the Power and the Life, in the pure discerning of the Truth" to take care of the spiritual welfare of their members. Elders and Overseers have been around ever since. Likewise as the system of area and other meetings for business developed, the advice was that representatives should be chosen from the more experienced members of the local meeting. It was not long before such regional and national gatherings took on responsibility for defining what was or wasn't right behaviour and belief and for ensuring responses to written propaganda against Quakers. Meetings were good at supporting those of their membership in need but ready to criticise those bringing Friends into disrepute. "Disownments" took place without any formal lists of members!

By the early 18th century, things had settled down for the movement. The Toleration Act of 1679 had given Quakers the right to have Meeting Houses and to hold meetings for worship. Care for members was strong, including the needs of the elderly and widows. As some Friends developed businesses, they would take the children of members as apprentices. However, as Friends moved around there was a need for assurance that a newcomer in a meeting really was already a member in good standing. So certificates began to be issued (as we still do when a member moves from one AM to another). Lists were needed. In 1737 the Yearly Meeting decreed that everyone should be deemed as members of the Society who was accepted as such in each area at that time, together with their children, servants and apprentices. "Birthright membership" had arrived. New members could join by "convincement" if their area meetings thought that right, though there were cautions against haste and exhortations that existing members should not be "an occasion of stumbling".

Over the next century concern for what constituted right behaviour for Friends grew along with the attitude of being different from the rest of the community. So the exact kind of clothes that indicated simplicity and not "walking disorderly" were of great concern, especially to the elders and overseers. So was honesty in business. Going bankrupt by over-reaching your resources was a reason for disownment, so was marrying a non-Friend. For those who wanted to go to an English University the need to be a member of the Church of England meant voluntary withdrawal or disownment.

The titles of the Books of Discipline over the years reflect the changing views. The first, in 1738, was called 'Brotherly Advices ...', in 1783 and 1802 they became 'Extracts from the Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting', but in 1834 they were 'Rules of Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends'.

In retrospect, this was all a recipe for atrophy. Strangely, though, it went on at the same time as immense vigour was put into business and industrial work, and, increasingly, co-operating with others on causes of human betterment. By the mid-19th century the need for change was felt by many and the restrictions were eased. The evangelical influences then present led to concern that children of members should feel and show signs of inner conversion and not rest on their family background. Outreach became of more concern as did taking on board new developments in scientific understanding, such as evolution, and in Biblical criticism.

The great Manchester conference of 1895 symbolised a shift away from former attitudes and a move into the "liberal Christianity" that marked the Society for the first half of the 20th century. New members came in, often bringing with them the desire to see the Society developing in fresh ways. Many came during the world wars through the peace witness of Friends. Commitment to the testimonies, valuing the way of worship and accepting that Friends were "humble learners in the school of Christ" were what was sought in those applying for membership. Wanting to play a part, in so far as they could, in sustaining the organisational side of the Society was presumed.

In the second half of the 20th century, birthright members became fewer and the whole Society became made up largely of convinced members and a growing proportion of attenders. The variety of backgrounds became a strength and a challenge. As awareness of other faiths became more widespread so did a willingness to accept what they had to offer spiritually. Some applicants for membership were open about the sources on which they drew for nurture alongside finding the Quaker meeting for worship of value to them. Others were uncertain as to how far they could call themselves Christian. Many were the only Friend in their family and had other demands on them competing with traditional responsibilities of members. These are all part of the context in which we find ourselves considering membership today, not just locally but throughout the yearly meeting, and not just the processes by which people are accepted into membership but what it stands for.

The 'Books of Discipline', as they are still called, show these changes. In 1921 there were three volumes, 'Christian Life Faith and Thought in the Society of Friends', 'Christian Practice' And 'Church Government ...', in 1964 two, 'Christian faith and practice in the experience of the Society of Friends' and 'Church Government' and the 1995 revision (after some discussion) put everything into volume and called it 'Quaker Faith and Practice'.

QFP Chapter 11 gives the present understanding and guidance on the processes of membership. The book as a whole presumes that there are members and attenders but sees the core responsibilities for the maintenance of the Society falling to the members. As and when revision happens, no doubt fresh wordings will be found, perhaps taking more note of the strong commitment to their meetings and area meetings which so many attenders have and the significant part which they play in sustaining the life of their local groups.

Chris Lawson

WORK STUDY METHOD OF PROBLEM SOLVING

A personal view

Here is a suggested use of Work Study in problem solving:

The letters SREDIM, meaning Select, Record, Examine, Install, and Maintain, guide the order for approaching the subject. Firstly, SELECT the problem, and define what it really is, (not what you think it is).

This is the problem I have selected -- Survival of the Human Race on Planet Earth.

What is the cause of the problem? Here we try to tell the truth! It is the uncontrolled expansion of the entire Earth's population with strictly limited resources of food and saleable material.

This is the responsibility of the people concerned, who have bred so THEY survive regardless of their capability and resources for the future.

Now we come to RECORD the facts in the knowledge that Quakers approach problems with love and communion with the Spirit.

What is the Spirit's objective? What can we do now, as we would not, for example, rely on a World War to limit the number of people on the planet.

Quakers must show love, and be as truthful as they can and support equality (fairness).

Historically, Quakers tried to earn their living, giving employment and never borrowing money they would not be able to repay. They did not make money for money's sake and were very conscientious about the quality of their work.

In general, we are each responsible for ourselves and our children up to the age of 16 say. Youngsters should be prepared for jobs and being part of the community. Is it acceptable to expect the State to be responsible? Or is this Charity work? When employed, we all contribute to our pensions and health care for our benefit while we live. We make this the responsibility of the Civil Service. Our claims depend on the sum of our individual untaxed contributions.

All are free to take responsibility for others who have problems by way of charity. In general a fair exchange should be apparent. {Note; Good and faithful servant parable) What are the issues regarding those who have not contributed?

The next stage is modifying the above before tackling EXAMINE.

I am now examining the facts as truthfully as I can based on what the Spirit appears to desire and has already installed.

Apparently living creatures are formed from molecules working together ---- DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), RNA (ribonucleic acid) and proteins. These are not formed by chance and are very complex in their structure. Many of us, therefore, feel forced to conclude these combinations are engineered by the Spirit.

Now, what do we observe about our planet which allows us to live as we do?

Our solar system is within the Milky Way galaxy. It is not too close to the centre and not too far from it. This concentrates the chemical elements which support life. Farther out, the elements are too scarce; farther in, the surroundings are too dangerous because of lethal radiation.

When we consider our position with respect to the sun, we find we are in a habitable zone because life neither freezes nor fries wherever we are. The near circular path of the Earth keeps us at a fairly constant distance from the sun every year. Fortunately the sun emits a fairly constant amount of energy so we are very lucky to exist.

Furthermore, the size and position of the moon, a quarter of the Earth's diameter, is much larger than that of most known moons. Again we are very lucky as it is the principle cause of ocean tides and has a stabilising effect on the spin axis, preventing wobbles and turning on its side.

The tilt and spin of about 23.4 degrees causes the annual cycle of the seasons, controls temperature and allows different climate zones, The timing of day and night is perfect avoiding baking and freezing in certain regions. Faster rotation would create gales.

Space is a dangerous place to be in, with radiation and meteors all over the place. Our magnetic field around a spinning ball of iron inside protects us from cosmic radiation from the sun's solar winds and flares, as well as corona explosions blasting billions of tons of matter into space shown by the aurora near the magnetic poles.

The presence of our atmosphere itself appears to be an amazing coincidence besides allowing us to breath. The ozone in the stratosphere absorbs 99% of incoming ultraviolet radiation, thus protecting us humans and the plankton we depend on to produce our oxygen. In addition, debris from space burns up in our atmosphere as meteors. Fortunately heat and light are not blocked, and at night the atmosphere acts as a blanket, slowing down the escape of heat.

Now we should consider what happens on the surface to keep us healthy and the planet habitable. These factors depend on the natural cycles of water, oxygen and nitrogen.

Water is essential to life. Its recycling depends on solar power lifting water into the atmosphere by evaporation. Condensation produces clouds which, in turn, form rain, hail, sleet, or snow which fall to the ground ready to evaporate again.

In order to live we take in oxygen and emit carbon dioxide. Fortunately this is subject to photosynthesis using the sun's energy to produce carbohydrates and oxygen. This allows the production of oxygen and breathable air.

Nitrogen is needed to produce proteins and the gas is abundant in our atmosphere. Lightening converts nitrogen into compounds which plants can absorb and create organic molecules. Animals eat plants storing nitrogen. On death, the compounds are broken down by bacteria, releasing nitrogen.

In these processes it is interesting to observe how the Earth recycles all the waste produced naturally. This involves ingenious chemical engineering and did not arise by chance. We are not as successful in doing the same!

We do not know the number of species on our planet. They could number 100 million. A 100g of soil can host 10 000 species of bacteria and extra microbes. Some occur up to 3 Km underground! In the air there are birds, bats and insects as well as pollen seeds and microbes. In the water, the exact number of life forms has not been observed so far.

Did all these life forms arise by chance? Observation suggests the Spirit has engineered it. It is the product of purposeful design and needs careful maintenance if it is to continue supporting life as it does at the moment.

Apparently, to date, scientists worldwide have unearthed and catalogued some 200 million large fossils and billions of small ones. This record emphasises the fact that all the major groups of animals appeared suddenly and remained unchanged, with many species disappearing as suddenly as they arrived. Are we going to spoil this, or should we discern the rules for survival and live by them? In general life forms have become more complex with time.

Have we been installed on the planet to control survival for the good of all? In the past 540 million years there have been five mass extinctions. A mass extinction is when more than three-quarters of the world's species become extinct in a short frame of time. Total up the numbers in these five mass extinctions and we have lost 99 per cent of the Earth's species – and that's without human intervention. Now, experts are concerned that a sixth mass extinction has begun, and could take a mere 1,000 years to complete.

Whether we are in the midst of a mass extinction or not, it's clear that we are losing species at an alarming rate. Here are five recently extinct animals that left our world over the past decade:

The Javan Tiger; the Western Black Rhinoceros; the Southern Gastric Brooding Frog; the Pinta Island Tortoise and the Baiji River Dolphin. Is this what we are here for?

I shall now attempt to RECORD what we know about life in greater detail hoping a sensible solution suggests itself

When we observe how some animals are constructed, we are amazed by how sensibly they are designed. For example, we know why aircraft wings are designed to speed up airflow over the top, thus reducing pressure and lifting the aircraft. The Humpback whale weighs about 30 tons and has a large body and wing like flippers. Surprisingly it is very agile. This is due to the bumps on its wings called tubercles. These speed up airflow, increasing lift and reducing drag when moved quickly. Obviously we should have designed aircraft wings in this way.

A drone has been built which can hover like a seagull as it has similar wing control. Seagulls flex their wings at the elbow and shoulder joints in order to hover. Many good ideas come from nature and engineers crudely imitate systems which occur in nature to solve difficulties. All credit is due to the Master Engineer who did the designing. It could not just have happened by accident!

When we look at evolution, some 200 million large and billions of small fossils have been observed. The major groups appear suddenly and remain unchanged. Some just disappear when they don't fit in with the situation they are in.

In general, we believe the Earth is 4 billion years old, and the Universe 15 billion.

When I observe these facts, and how successful they were in prolonging life forms as the climate changed, I am forced to believe that the "survival of the fittest" concept appears to be true. Why, therefore, has the Spirit arranged "evolution" this way, and what should we believe is the objective? (Not what we think we should accept without systematic examination.)

Records show how some species have become more complex with time without changing basically. Apparently some were so successful they exterminated themselves...

The four recorded climate change cycles did not help. The one we are in now emphasises how the planet will warm up as it did in the past.

Further observation points out how, when species act in communities, individuals survive happily as each supports the other. Over population reduces resources available, then life becomes difficult even impossible.

In Jesus' time, over population was not a big problem, and the spiritual guidance He received was directed towards supporting "Good" against "Evil" communities.

When we attempt to put ourselves in the mind of the Spirit based on these observations, we can appreciate that we, the culmination of evolution, at the moment, could control all present day living species so that none would completely exploit another. The balance between predator and victim would be preserved. It is up to us to appreciate that, in general:

1) You do not receive something for nothing. Payback in some way, is essential. For instance, cows eat grass to survive - grass feeds on cow's excrement.

2) Each of us will eventually die. While alive we are responsible for ourselves and our shortcomings in many ways.

3) We must endeavour to support the Spirit's ideals as indicated above.

I could go on; but I end my remarks on RECORD here so that, in another issue of the Newsletter, I can consider EXAMINE, the next stage, where I really try to stick to simplicity, truth, justice, and equality, showing respect to the Natural World.

John Butcher



Out of Quiet...

Quaker Faith and Action

Wednesday March 2, 7.00 p.m.

ECONOMIC FAIRNESS and QUAKERS
Responses to poverty in society



Judith Moran, Director of Quaker Social Action and on the board of The Equality Trust, considers poverty in Britain in particular, bringing many years of practical experience of trying to help people in need.

Taunton Quaker Meeting House

13 Bath Place, off High Street, Taunton TA1 4EP

Soup and sandwiches available from 6.00 p.m.

All Welcome