

# WEST SOMERSET AREA QUAKER MEETING NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2020



## **International Day of Commemoration**

### **in memory of the victims of the Holocaust 2020**

A group of fifteen (mostly Quakers) stood in silence in Taunton High Street for an hour. A dozen or so people made positive comments as they walked past.

**MINUTES OF WEST SOMERSET AREA QUAKER MEETING**  
**January 25<sup>th</sup> 2020**  
**Taunton Meeting House**

**Clerks:** Martin Wall Anna Mullett

**01/20** Advices and Queries 10 was read in our opening worship today.

**02/20** Local Meeting Representatives:

Bridgwater	Rosemary Dagley	
Burnham on Sea	Carinne Allinson	
Iminster	Huw Morgan	Miranda Ball
Minehead	Faith Cartwright	
Spiceland	Sheila Whitlock	Pat Robertson
Taunton	Pat Bazley	Fran Hicks
Wellington	Marian Dawson	
Elder for the Meeting	John Ainsworth	

**03/20 Membership Matters**

(a) We have heard the report of a visit to Sarah Bovey by Sheila Whitlock and Phil Parratt and are happy to welcome Sarah into our Area Meeting. We appoint John Ainsworth and Ali Dominy to visit Sarah and welcome her.

b) We record the transfer of membership of Valda Dagnell from Sheffield and Balby AM to WSAQM and welcome her to Iminster meeting.

**04/20 Minutes of Record**

(a) We record that the ashes of Marion Skinner were interred with those of her husband at Spiceland Burial Ground on December 7<sup>th</sup> 2019.

(b) We record that the ashes of David Muir were scattered on the grave of his mother, Mary Muir, at Spiceland Burial Ground on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2020.

**05/20 Nominations**

(a) We appoint Fran Hicks and Jefferson Horsley to serve on the Taunton Meeting House Management Committee for the triennium ending 2022.

(b) We appoint Anna Mullett to serve as Quaker Life representative for the triennium ending 2022.

(c) We appoint Jenny Gateau as elder to Minehead meeting, her appointment to run until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 in the first instance.

**06/20 Reports**

**a) Burnham Meeting progress report.**

We have heard from Carinne Allinson regarding the proposed transfer of Burnham on Sea Local Meeting to North Somerset Area Meeting.

We ask Elders and Overseers to respond to North Somerset AM regarding the pastoral and spiritual care of Burnham Sea Friends who wish to remain members of West Somerset Area Meeting.

We believe the spirit will guide us to the right conclusion.

### **(b) AM Custodian of Records Report**

We have heard from Richard Salter on the historical roots of record keeping in our AM. Our records are stored and looked after by the Somerset Heritage Centre in Norton Fitzwarren. Richard recommends that LM and AM minutes are transferred via Richard to the Heritage Centre every fifteen years. We discussed how records should be stored, whether digitally or on paper and agreed that the Heritage Centre should advise on this. Richard has produced a schedule listing documents that are stored at the Heritage Centre, a copy for each LM. We thank Richard for his report.

### **c) Meeting for Sufferings**

We have heard from Fran Hicks, our representative on MfS 7<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

Minutes and accompanying papers are available online at:

[Agenda and papers for December 2019 \(PDF\)](#)

[Follow up letter and minutes from December 2019 \(PDF\)](#)

This is a report on Fran's personal experience of the meeting. The main business of the meeting was to hear and discuss reports from the Central Committees.

Considering each committee in turn.

- The merger of Central Nominations and the Committee on Clerks in support of the commitment for simpler meetings.
- Quaker Life is continuing its discernment on matters of diversity and inclusion. This is a challenging area and Local Meeting Friends are asked to inform themselves of the issues involved to support the committee. Statements about this concern brought by QL to Sufferings, [will be attached to this report](#). Kathy Gollin has been asked to visit LMs to acquaint Friends with the ongoing debate. QL is also further discerning the use of the title 'overseer' and its negative association with slavery.
- Quaker Peace and Social Witness. Fran had a revealing conversation with a committee member on the influence of Big Data and its potential threat to our civil liberties. Other projects covered were Sanctuary Everywhere, Olive Branches and Razor Wire, and Turning the Tide, all of which are flourishing.
- World Relations Committee. Asks us to be better informed about how our larger family worship and witness and to be aware of how the media affects our perceptions of each other. In a conversation with a committee member Fran had an insightful conversation concerning 'church planting' and how it might help us to be more inclusive.
- Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations. Reported on the rejection of Hannah Bock Womack by Churches Together in Britain and Northern Ireland to serve as a Quaker representative.

In conclusion, the presence of Young Friends on the day brought a refreshing energy and enthusiasm to the meeting.

### **07/20 Tabular Statement.**

We have received the tabular statement for 2019 with explanatory notes which has been circulated to LMs. Burnham meeting has queried the number of members listed for Burnham and Carinne will contact the Membership clerk to clarify this.

We thank our membership clerk for her work on the statement.

### **08/20 Local Meeting Responsibilities (in response to QFP 4.33)**

We thank local meetings for their reports and note that the value of the exercise is in the doing of it.

It is hoped sustainability is added to the list of responsibilities when the new Book of Discipline is published.

### 09/20 Notices

(a) Representatives are invited to attend Leighton Park General Meeting on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Any interested Friends are asked to contact Anna Mullett for more information.

(b) Sunday March 1<sup>st</sup> Worshipping Together at Burnham

(c) March 16-17<sup>th</sup> 'Facing Up to Race Power and Privilege' leadership retreat.

(d) March 28<sup>th</sup> E.s and O's at Spiceland

(e) Earth Action Group – a report will appear in the newsletter.

### 10/20 Closing Minute

We thank Taunton meeting for their hospitality and hope to meet again at Wellington on Sat, April 18<sup>th</sup>.

## REPORT BY RICHARD SALTER, CUSTODIAN OF RECORDS, TO WSQM 25<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2020

The task of the Custodian of Records is mainly to know where our records and archives are.

I have had this rôle since 2003; my predecessors were Henry Rowntree and, before him, Macdonald Wigfield. As a career History teacher and lecturer I enjoy the rôle very much.

Quakers have been habitually good record-keepers since their earliest days, for a range of historical reasons including responses to persecution and economic hardship and a desire to testify about issues and the lives of faithful Friends.

It is our practice to deposit records completed more than about fifteen years ago at Somerset Heritage Centre near Taunton. The deposition is on the basis of permanent loan. The Heritage Centre are very welcoming and helpful and our records are readily accessible there.

I maintain a schedule of our records, including the index of records in the Heritage Centre, a brief note of records of other Somerset area meetings, books relating to Quakerism in Somerset at the Local History Library at the same site, and records still held by area meeting and local meetings.

The archives include minute books, records relating to meeting houses and burial grounds, correspondence, records of membership and much else. The schedule is not confidential and I readily provide it for people enquiring into Quaker history or family tree research, or Friends in our meetings.

I periodically ask clerks of local meetings to check my record of what archives they hold, and suggest to me items which are due for deposition at the Heritage Centre. I would like to make this enquiry at this point, and extend it to Area Meeting also. I have provided a paper copy of the schedule for each local meeting, and can provide an electronic copy on request. ***I do hope that clerks would like to contact me on [saltertaunton@btinternet.com](mailto:saltertaunton@btinternet.com) to discuss the records currently held by their meeting.***



Richard Salter

## EXPERIENCES OF DISCERNMENT

### From Quaker Life Central Committee Members 2019

I am a member of a meeting that is experiencing division over issues related to gender identity. One organization that uses our meeting house has been criticized by some young-adult Friends as being trans-exclusionary, and they feel so strongly about the matter that they will not meet in the meeting house so long as that group remains, although it does not violate any of the criteria the Area Meeting has established for lettings.

I fear that we shall lose contact with a very important part of our Quaker community if the rift is not healed. I hope that the young-adult Friends will come to Area Meeting and persuade it to change the letting criteria in the way they wish. We are a broad-minded and loving community, happily including trans and non-binary Friends, and I trust our business method will allow us to find unity over this matter.

I am 21 and non-binary, with a very masculine outward presentation and my pronouns are they/them\*. I first began to question my gender as a teenager and, with the support of many friends and Friends alike, I first felt truly myself at JYM a few years ago.

I fear that fear and hate will consume us; I fear that I will lose the precious community and home I have here, as a Quaker. I hope that I have the endurance to stay on Quaker Life CC, because the work matters deeply to me. I hope that we will accept all of our trans siblings, whether Friends or not, and that it will not take us half a century. Sometimes it is good to be reminded that gender diversity is not exclusively an 'issue' or an academic discussion, but this is the reality of my life.

\*The use of singular *they* has precedent that dates back to the 14th century and is grammatically correct, if uncomfortable to say in the beginning.

I am the mother of three daughters. When the youngest was seven, she decided that she wanted to be a boy. We supported her in this. Her Primary school coped; her Secondary school made her time there very difficult, but she persevered. Her sisters accepted her choice and called her their little brother. To everyone's surprise at fifteen she gradually reverted to being a girl.

My fear is about the medicalisation of gender diversity. That intervening in children's lives with irreversible medication or surgery will take away their choices. My hope is that we become less binary as a society so that young people can experiment and express themselves as what is most comfortable for them without being pigeon-holed.

My final thought is that I am proud to be a member of The Religious Society of Friends where we are prepared to struggle with our different experiences and perspectives, to find ways forward that recognise that of God in everyone and welcome all to our Meetings.

I am in a same sex marriage. I have lived with dysmorphia and gender non-conformity all my life and cope with it much better since my 30s and 40s. I am continually surprised that some of my challenge to others in similar positions are viewed as transphobic and perhaps irrelevant rather than being from lived experience.

My fears are that increasingly right-wing views across wider society will threaten the protections we have achieved. I also worry about the mental health of our younger generations and how communities like ours provide support, wisdom and structure that helps. Our Quaker communities all strive to be welcoming spaces but they should never be expected to be without challenge: we are all naked before God and a spiritual life asks deep questions of us all.

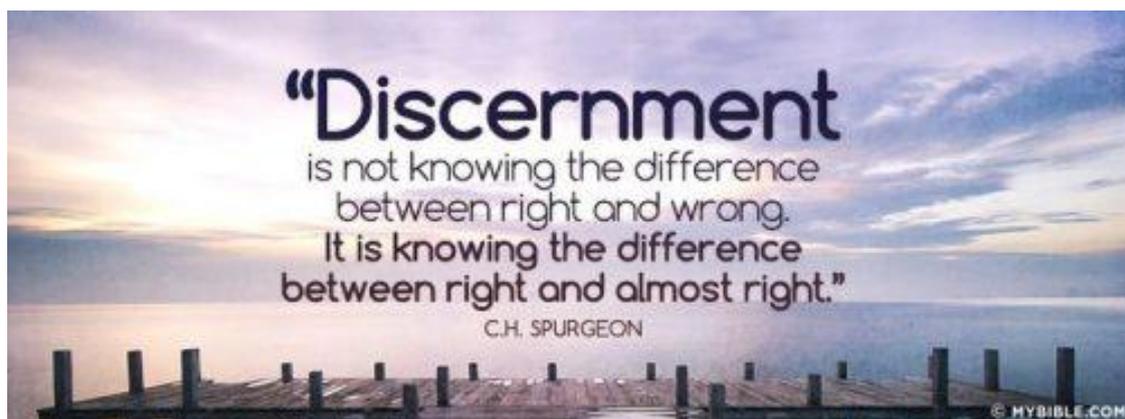
I hope that Friends can model holding various views on gender non-conformity and feminism in a way that is tolerant, slow to take offence and shows deep concern for each other.

I am a gay man with adult children, now happily married to my husband. When younger I found gender nonconformity disturbing but now enjoy exploring it in myself. I am in meeting where there is deep division on gender issues among Friends I love.

I fear for the people involved, and for meeting; I fear for myself as I find it hard to worship in meeting. I fear for a world where discussion can quickly become insult and threat. I hope I have the strength to remain friends and be a Friend; I hope Quakers can find a way to love each other with the difference and pain; I hope neither my granddaughter nor anyone else has to suffer the pain I have seen in my Friends.

I am a retired married man with no direct experience of gender diversity myself or in my family. As a Quaker my first experience of gender diversity was in visiting an applicant for membership of our Area Meeting who is transgender, and who was accepted into membership. It started me considering the implications of our commitment to finding that of God in each one of us. Our sexuality is an integral part of our humanity and a strong and important part of our sense of identity, which can change and grow over a lifetime. When we are able to accept the leadings of the Spirit in our lives we can be more accepting of how others change and develop in their lives.

It has been eye opening and sad for me to hear from the experience of others as QLCC has explored this issue together. Where I have come across trans and non- binary people in Quakers, my experience has been that they have been welcomed and accepted and I have been surprised to hear that some feel rejected. I have some sympathies with older women who fear the loss of female-only spaces and see that it is possible to retain this as well as providing other gender-neutral spaces and facilities. I hope that Quakers can find a way to come together rather than be divided over this issue as I am sure we are all committed to seeing the inner person rather than the outward appearance of others.



## SUFFERINGS REPORT JANUARY 2020

The main business for MFS in December was to hear the reports from the Central Committees, and to give us an opportunity to have dialogue directly with members. We also heard from Central Yorkshire AM on the use of the word “Overseer”, and considered the revision of the terms of reference for the Central Nominations Committee, on its relation to the Committee on Clerks.

Paul Parker spoke to the item on the review of the work of both YM and YMG, both of which were last reviewed in 2006. (Reviews are regular items for all committees but they are particularly relevant at this time, both with the simpler meetings initiative, to meet the changing and anticipated need of our society and the wider world, and to be relevant for the new book of discipline.)

There was the usual report from Trustees, and farewell to Anne Ullathorne who has been such a skilled, thoughtful and warm clerk.

It was also a day for young people to participate in the deliberations and discernment, which they reported on positively.

Being on Central Nominations, as is John Ainsworth, I was familiar with the recommendation to merge the two nominating committees, as part of a new way of working for Central Nominations, and a move to simpler meetings. Given the time and thoughtful deliberation from both Sufferings and the two committees, it will I am sure, get the blessing of Yearly Meeting when it comes to the gathering in August. Both committees have much to learn from each other and it was helpful to hear from a member of the Committee on Clerks at the Central Nominations meeting, that John and I attended this last weekend.

The general response to the word ‘Overseer’, was that, given the negative connotations with slavery, it was necessary to take a further look at its use: the matter was referred to Quaker Life for further discernment.

Of the four Central committees, Quaker Life, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Quaker World Relations Committee, and Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, particular areas noted were:

- For QLCC - the ongoing and difficult deliberations exploring Diversity and Inclusion, a subject that will be revisited again at next month’s Sufferings which Kathy is covering. As asked for previously, I know that meetings have and continue to, deliberate on this matter, and sufferings thought it might be helpful for meetings to have sight of some of the statements that QL brought to us. I am sure Kathy would welcome any thoughts you have before the next meeting which is in a fortnight.
- I took the opportunity to have a conversation with a member of QPSW and shared with them my concern about the influence of Big Data in our lives and how this might threaten civil liberties. I noted that this had been raised at Ireland Yearly Meeting, in the report we had had from this yearly meeting: one of a number of reports on other yearly meetings which make very interesting reading and can be accessed on the Sufferings website.

Other matters highlighted were the success of the Sanctuary Everywhere initiative which has been extended for a further year. It has strengthened meetings and provided excellent outreach and collaboration with other organisations; the peace education resource *Razor Wire and Olive Branches*, a joint project with the Quaker Council for European Affairs, which was independently evaluated as “pioneering” in shifting the culture of education towards peace and justice and “applying and developing a



genuinely radical peace pedagogy, which so far has proved very effective". Also the great success of *Turning the Tide*, in Kenya, Burundi and Rawanda.



*Peace activists at the first Turning the Tide East Africa gathering. Image: Tobias Wellner*

What excited me in the report from the World Relations committee, was the plea for us to be better informed about how our larger family worships and witness especially about the climate crisis which unites us all. I was particularly struck by the statement from the trustee body on the themes of diversity, inclusion and climate justice

*"We have taken up a concern ... for how FWCC's work in every part of the globe is affected by a history of colonialism and inequality and by media distortions that influence perceptions of people in other parts of the world. Too often, Friends in wealthier countries only see images of people elsewhere in situation of poverty, misery and need, while Friends in poorer countries see media images as if all people in wealthier countries were prosperous and successful.*

*We too often hurt each other by assumptions we make, stories we tell, misunderstanding, ... When we know each other more fully in our homes, families and meetings we can better understand the full person, not just the cosmetics or stereotypes. Much work has been done.... but more remains to be done".*

I also discussed with a member of this committee, the interesting item about the success, in Africa, of 'church planting' and how the committee noted that this might have lessons for us in BYM. Something it seems to me that Friends have done in the past - the Salters in East London, John Dale in Ordsall, inner city Salford,- living and working with those in most need, a witness to their Quaker faith.

The main issue highlighted by QCCIR was of course the rejection by the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland of our representative Hannah Bock Womack, because of her same sex marriage. This has been covered extensively both by Quakers and others.

Fran Hicks

**EARTH ACTION GROUP REPORT TO AREA MEETING 25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2020**  
**(with some additional information)**

Our first meeting of the new decade was on 24<sup>th</sup> January. Five Friends were present from Taunton, Ilminster and Spiceland Meetings.

***We would love to have representation from all the Local Meetings –  
we next meet on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March at 2 p.m. at Taunton Meeting House***

We heard updates on Extinction Rebellion Taunton and Tiverton, Ilminster Tree Planting group, the planned Repair Café in Taunton (18<sup>th</sup> April in Glass Box in library) and a recent supper at Long Sutton for mid-Somerset Friends which one of our number attended.

We have made a link with Mid-Somerset Area Meeting prompted by the Climate Emergency Strategy from Somerset County Council as the county council area covers both our Area Meetings. We hope there may be opportunities to meet together over our responses to this and it may be possible for one or two of our members to go to a QPSW workshop they are organising (see below).

***National and Regional Events***

The next global climate summit (COP 26) takes place in Glasgow in November this year and we expect Quakers to have a presence in the events running up to that. In advance of that the Campaign against Climate Change has organised meetings countrywide, including the Bristol Climate Summit to discuss where we are at. Full details are yet to be organised, but we hope that this event - with plenaries and workshops will allow serious discussion about jobs, climate justice, the Green New Deal and future climate strikes. It is on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> February from 1.00 to 5.00 at Tony Benn House, Unite, Victoria Street, Bristol (not far from Temple Meads station!)

***Somerset County Council and District Councils Climate Emergency Strategies***

SCC has produced a draft framework document which is available on their website ([www.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.somerset.gov.uk)) and is open for consultation. It is hoped as many people as possible will respond to this either by completing the questionnaire on the website (by 25<sup>th</sup> February) or by going to one of the drop-in sessions. That at Taunton was last week but there are others at Bridgwater on 8<sup>th</sup> February, Shepton Mallet on 15<sup>th</sup> February and Yeovil on 22<sup>nd</sup> February. **Quakers have been at the forefront of taking action on the climate and this is your opportunity to have your say on action by our local councils. If you have missed the consultation meetings, please complete the questionnaire.**

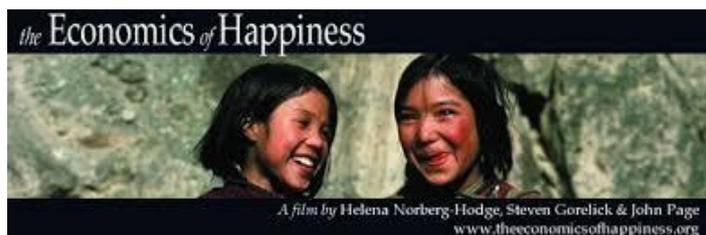
Each of the four district councils is producing their own climate emergency strategy so look out on their websites. Somerset West and Taunton Council have consultation days on their local development plan over the next few weeks at various venues.

Ilminster Town Council has now declared a climate emergency.

***Other Events in Our Area***

Mid-Somerset Area Meeting is holding a workshop by QPSW on climate justice at Long Sutton on 18<sup>th</sup> April and would welcome any WSAM Friends. This does clash with our next Area Meeting but especially if you missed the QPSW workshop at Spiceland in the autumn you might like to go to this. I will have further details nearer the time.

## Films



We are looking into showing *The Economics of Happiness* at Taunton Meeting House on 28<sup>th</sup> February. This film makes an eloquent case for a more localised economic system that forgoes ceaseless increases in GDP and delivers higher levels of

wellbeing and even happiness. However, its failure to engage with defenders of GDP, big business and globalisation leave the viewer with a sense of unbalance. We will let Local Meeting clerks know details nearer the time.

We would also like to show "2040: The Regeneration" which looks at how the future could look like if we embraced the best solutions available to us. It has been shown at some local cinemas but the nearest in the next few weeks are in Bristol and Plymouth.



## From The Diocese of Bath and Wells Newsletter

**14<sup>th</sup> March** – ‘The Scripture of Hope in a Season of Climate Emergency’ – a day conference organised by Café BANES, an ecumenical group of Christians in the Bath area. The keynote speaker will be Rev Mark Siddall from Chippenham and formerly an environmental scientist. Venue - Southdown Methodist Centre, Bath. More details about booking etc. to follow.

**21<sup>st</sup> March** - ‘Biodiversity in the Churchyard’ morning of talks and workshops at St James Taunton. Details to follow and on Facebook.



<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/biodiversity>

**If you want to know more about us or have ideas for future action/events contact**

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Fran Hicks [franricks@phonecoop.coop](mailto:franricks@phonecoop.coop) Huw Morgan [arwelhuwmorgan@hotmail.com](mailto:arwelhuwmorgan@hotmail.com)

Pat Bell [patbell17@gmail.com](mailto:patbell17@gmail.com)

## WSAQM Meeting Statistics as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019

*The membership totals have been taken from our Area Meeting membership records. The figures for the number of adult and child attenders have been supplied by Local Meetings.*

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Adult Attenders</b>	<b>Children Under 16</b>
Bridgwater	15	6	0
Burnham on Sea	10	5	1
Ilminster	21	16	0
Minehead	14	9	1
Spiceland	26	16	5
Taunton	19	22	1
Wellington	19	14	10
Unattached	1	-	-
<b>Totals</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>18</b>

A decrease has been recorded for the number of Friends in membership this year; we now have 125 members, 12 fewer than the 137 recorded at the end of 2018. We have recorded the deaths of seven Friends, four Friends have transferred their membership to other area meetings and one person resigned their membership of the Society of Friends. No additions to the Area Meeting membership have occurred in 2019.

There has been an increase in the number of regular adult attenders in the Area Meeting from 73 during 2018 to 88 in 2019. There has been a reduction in the number of children under 16, from 24 in 2018 to 18 at the end of this year; this is partially, but not entirely due to a very small number of children having been recorded in the totals of more than one meeting in 2018.

The tabular statement for West Somerset Area Meeting was received at Friends House on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

*Judith Blaker*  
Membership Clerk  
3<sup>rd</sup> January 2020

## FAMILY RESIDENTIAL AT OTHONA

Elders and Overseers are in the process of planning a family residential at Othona on the theme of *Caring for Each Other*. Area Meeting has agreed to fund the weekend, which is wonderful! We have been offered the weekend of 4-6<sup>th</sup> September. There is space for about thirty people at Othona. Some people might like to stay locally and join the group for meals. Some could sleep in camper vans in the Othona car park. Please let me know if you are interested in being a part of this glorious opportunity and do suggest activities you would enjoy.

<https://www.othonawestdorset.org.uk/>



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