

The Religious Society of Friends Abergavenny Meeting Newsletter

April 2018

Dear Friends

Spring has arrived. Many renowned poets have over the years celebrated the season.

Here's a special poem by Tony who is a regular attender at MfW in HMP Usk and has written this poem for "the Quakers "...



Quakers, a circle of Friends join together in the presence of God
Quakers have no need for a church to worship in,
Quakers meet in a house or even a hall.
Depending on the group, if large or small.
Whether you are single or husband and spouse,
even the kids go to the Meeting house.
Sometimes we sit in a circle or a square,
All sitting together in silent prayer.
Only to be broken if you are inspired to say,
what your thoughts are of the day.
Quakers faith and beliefs,
campaigning against slavery,
capital punishment and prison reform.
Equality, community and simplicity,
Peace and saving the Earth.
So come along and sit and pray.

Tony Ash

Sanctuary Meeting

Our testimonies arise from our way of worship. Our way of worship evokes from deep within us at once an affirmation and a celebration, an affirmation of the reality of that Light which illumines the spiritual longing of humanity, and a celebration of the continual resurrection within us of the springs of hope and love; a sense that each of us, if we will, a channel for a power that is both within us and beyond us.

Lorna M Marsden, 1968

Quaker Faith and Practice 20.16

Writing in the Friend recently Craig Barnett likens the practice of sanctuary to that celebration, and that friendship with people seeking sanctuary reminds us that at the heart of the Quaker way is a spirituality of hospitality.

Abergavenny Local Meeting has now become a Sanctuary Meeting, joining with others throughout Britain Yearly Meeting to challenge the government's strategy of creating a 'hostile environment' for some newcomers to Britain. At present there are 53 Meetings signed up to this initiative, this means there will be considerable variation in the activities undertaken as actions are based on local circumstances. Several Friends are already part of Abergavenny Town of Sanctuary, helping to support the Syrian families now housed in our community and our Meeting has a long history of supporting the Welsh Refugee Council, and continues to do so. We do not have a detention centre in our locality but we can still challenge the use of imprisonment by writing to our MP, signing petitions and holding in the Light all those affected and those who seek to overturn this inhumane system.

The Sanctuary Meeting initiative sends out regular emails on the type of activity we can join with and provides an opportunity for Friends to share with, and learn from, others and their experiences via regular teleconferences and an annual retreat. It is hoped that regional training can be offered in the future.

Friends let us celebrate the diversity in our community and continue with the Quaker heritage of helping refugees as we feel led.

Linda Green

Friends' Experiences

MfW in the snow I

On Sunday 4th March Friends experienced the aftermath of the elements (storm Emma and the 'Beast from the East') and many were snowed in their homes.

But that did not deter us from conducting Meeting for Worship.

Some Friends lived adventurously and walked in the snow to Llanfoist to our usual meeting place.

Some sat in solo domestic quietude and upheld our Quaker community.

And Hazel held a satellite meeting in her home where she was joined by Val and Simon Burch.

Hazel describes that experience

Snowy Silence



Rather than calling out 'come in' I put out my hand, clasped Val's and then Simon's hand and said 'welcome'. This hadn't been thought out in advance but just seemed the right thing to do as this was not just a visit.

Due to the snow it was difficult for many of us to get Llanfoist so I had offered my home as a satellite Meeting place.

I had given some thought to seating arrangements, sofas in the lounge or upright chairs round the kitchen table? Upright chairs in a circle would have perhaps been best, but round the table? Perhaps not.

My little lounge then particularly as we were only expecting it to be us three. Of the others who lived nearby and might not be able to make it to Llanfoist, Glenys had a cold, Hilary was away, and perhaps Usha is still away.

I haven't been to any of the Meetings for worship in people's homes so was a little unsure as to procedure but everything just fell into place. We three moved through into the lounge and, apart from deciding who sat where, didn't speak. Already this felt like something special, set apart. Some concerns had come to my mind as I was tidying up, removing the things that can be useful but also look like clutter. There was a candle in the hearth which I decided to light. There was a brief anxious moment as a memory from years ago came to me. I had recently moved to East Yorkshire when I was still very much in Methodist circles, a local preacher in fact. I had mentioned that I had lit a candle to make myself feel more at home. Incredibly, a complaint was received that I 'was inclined to popery'. So this suddenly came back to me and when Val or Simon noted the candle I said, rather foolishly, that I hadn't been sure it was 'allowed'. Reassuringly, Val said that they too liked candles.

We moved into silence which, for me, very quickly became profound. We remembered the Meeting at Llanfoist and Glenys with her cold and Angela high up in Wattsville. Val spoke of how in silence, thoughts can 'bubble up' and gave a memorable example of homemade wine quietly bubbling away as it matured, and of bulbs and roots needing the darkness to grow into healthy plants.

I was briefly disturbed by the thought that I hadn't unplugged the phone, and had intended to look and see where I should disconnect it, but forgot it as being too late to do anything anyway.

As so often, I was surprised when the hour was up and Val leant forward to shake my hand. I said that the only 'notice' I knew of was that Glenys had asked me to draw attention to an application form for Quaker camp. I had printed off a copy so I had the information to hand, and a form for anyone who needed it. Was it serendipity? Simon and Val had been wondering about going and were pleased to have the information.

A cup of tea and some interesting conversation in which I found I got to know my neighbours better.

Afterwards, I and my home felt very blest by this brief time of fellowship and silence.

Hazel Anderson

Postscript

Friends experienced an action replay of being snowed in just a fortnight later on Sunday 18th March. Again intrepid Friends braved the icy conditions and a triumphant trio walked to Llanfoist Village Hall...

Morag via Abergavenny Quakers wrote:

"Three of us made it to Llanfoist this morning for Meeting, so had a cosy little circle".

Here they are:



And from France, Stevie wrote:

"The great thing about a virtual meeting was that I was able to join you from snowy Normandy".

Exploring Eldership

As I write it's Wednesday 7th March and I've received a most unusual postcard. The usual clack of the letterbox beckoned me straight upstairs ... well I never know what joy might be awaiting me ... unexpected joys do happen!

Well today it was just one postcard and I picked it up thinking 'but I'm sure no-one who might send me a postcard is away ... uhmm'. I didn't have my specs on but could just about make out a bird, yes maybe a bird. I put it on the table downstairs, the phone rang, and the washing machine announced it had finished its cycle, before I knew it I was making a lunchtime sandwich.

The card called me after lunch, I put my glasses on and saw a beautiful wren, surrounded by ivy, close to its nest which housed two hungry offspring. 'Gosh' I thought 'someone must know me well to send such a card.' I turned it over and found that it opened, in upper case letters, with these words - 'OUR DEAR TRUSTWORTHY AND STEADFAST ELDER PENNY'. I put the card down in puzzlement, I didn't remember writing this to Penny. I looked at the address and sure enough it was addressed to me. Aha... then I remembered that nearly eight weeks ago I'd written this card to myself. Whilst at Woodbrooke on an 'Exploring Eldership' course it had been suggested that we might like to write a postcard to ourselves, a synopsis of our current thinking, which would be sent to us 'soon'. There were many postcards to choose from but the wren chirruped to me and here are the words that followed the upper case words - '... is the full-grown wren elder. Me and my Ffriend Hazel are in the nest but we've been well nurtured and will begin to fly. I will look after the right holding of the meeting, have a tender hand and recognise and nurture the gifts of others.'

It was great to meet other newly-appointed elders, the oldest of whom was 92, a refugee from the Nazis decades ago. Westminster, a very large meeting, had nine new elders in attendance. Stories abounded of all kinds of challenges, not the least of which was having no ministry at MfW whatsoever for well over a year. For me personally, the words on the card best tell the story of the Woodbrooke weekend. The leaders did a marvellous job, the games were challenging and fun, the Friends were such a pleasure to meet, the hours were exhausting and the outcome was loving commitment.

Angela Cheetham Wilkinson

Our Quaker Roots - AM Residential Weekend February 2018

We had a lovely weekend at the Pioneer Centre near Cleobury Mortimer at the beginning of February. It was the third time the Area Meeting Residential weekend had been held there, and about 60 Friends, including 14 children, came together from all corners of the Southern Marches.

The planning group had put together a great programme, interspersing worship with talks, workshops, home groups, free time and entertainment. There were talks on where Quakerism had come from, Experiment with Light sessions, outdoor activities for the young people and anyone who wanted to join them, a table for exhibiting roots we had brought with us (mostly carrots), and lots of opportunities for chatting over meals.

In one exercise we drew trees and filled the roots with what sustains us, the trunk with what we are doing now and the branches with what we would like to do in future. My tree was far too full, but I can quite clearly see how the future builds on the past and present and I hope it will help me sort out what is important if I try a bit of gentle pruning.

On Saturday evening we had an improvised play where Quakers from down the centuries visited George Fox's dreams. I don't think it went quite as Jan Arriens had intended but we learned a lot about various characters from Quaker history.

As part of the entertainment I introduced a dance that I had been keen to try out. I couldn't persuade the boys to take part but I did find some other willing volunteers and I think everyone enjoyed it. Many thanks to Glenys, who accompanied us on the melodeon.

On Sunday morning we worked in groups to design elements of a new religion to involve everyone in the world in ensuring we value our planet and give ourselves a future. My group looked at the written word of the new religion, and I think our 'bible' was perhaps a lot like Quaker Faith and Practice.

Overall it was an enjoyable and thought-provoking weekend. For the children it was an opportunity to meet up with other Quaker youngsters, and all of us were able to get to know members of our Area Meeting community better. I can certainly recommend attending the next one in two years' time if you can.

Morag Sinton

Forward Planning...

5th Sunday Speakers

If you have ideas for speakers who could address us at shared lunch on the 5th Sundays i.e. 29th April, 29th July, 30th September, 30th December please let myself or members of our pastoral care group know.

Yearly Meeting – Friends House, London 4th – 7th May 2018

Registration is now open at www.quaker.org/ym.

Yearly Meeting is for everyone, whether or not they have been before, and those unable to attend can still support the discernment of Yearly Meeting.

This year we will be asking ourselves how *Quaker Faith & Practice* should look for the next generation. The first set of Yearly Meeting documents: *Preparing for Yearly Meeting, Agenda and Notes* and *Epistles and Testimonies* are available. Please ask if you would like to see them. Friends should find *Preparing for Yearly Meeting* helpful in terms of both practical and spiritual preparation.

Quaker Week 2018

This will be held from 29th September to 7th October 2018. If you are willing to volunteer to be part of a group for planning Abergavenny Meeting activities during this week please let me know.

Exploring Quaker Spirituality - Penarth 13th October 2018

Here is (very) advance notice of a Woodbrooke on the Road spiritual nurture day to which South Wales Friends are kindly inviting us. It's rather a long way for us - but not impossibly far.

"Exploring Quaker Spirituality" will be held in Penarth on Saturday 13th October 2018. Additional information will be available nearer the date.

Stevie Krayner

Stevie has also provided a further very advance notice from Jane Harries of the Wales for Peace team regarding an initiative that Abergavenny Friends may wish to support...

Hereford Peace Council Peace Train - October 2018

The Wales for Peace team have received an email from Hereford Peace Council about the Peace Train they are organising in October of this year to put pressure on the UK government to sign the Nuclear Treaty Ban.

As the train will travel through parts of Wales, they would like as much support from peace groups in Wales as possible. This is such an important initiative that hopefully as many peace-minded people will join it as possible!

If you are interested in taking part, please contact Kim Holroyd email. kimholroyd@hotmail.com

If you are in Wales, the Wales for Peace team may be able to help you to get out blogs, Facebook posts and Tweets to publicise this. Do let us know if you would like any support - within reason.

A note from the Editor:

I finished collating this newsletter on the Spring Equinox (20th March). Everything in nature is becoming alive. The sun is gaining strength and the days are longer and (hopefully) warmer. It is the time to throw off the restraints of winter, reach out and journey forth.

And a one-liner reminder from Linda:

A reminder Friends to walk cheerfully with a lower carbon footprint.

As always your contributions, comments, thoughts or suggestions for the Newsletter are very welcome.

Please send them to glenys.phelpstead@cooptel.net by 16th August 2018.