



# FORTY-THREE

OXFORD FRIENDS' MEETING  
43 ST. GILES OXFORD OX1 3LW

## NEWSLETTER

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### Cuba Yearly Meeting 2009

Cuba Yearly Meeting's General Assembly (19-22 February) was held in the pretty fishing port of Gibara. Gibara was partially devastated by Hurricane Ike last September. The seafront and many houses near it were ripped to rubble, hundreds of roofs blown off and trees uprooted, the hospital destroyed and a sizeable ship flung on to the shore in three pieces. The Quaker church lost part of its roof, but they were able to repair it quite quickly. All the Quaker churches helped to shelter and care for people who had lost their homes. The authorities are reconstructing as quickly as they can, but the numbers needing rehousing are enormous, and in Gibara 73 families are still living in caves outside the town.

But at the Yearly Meeting, spirits were high. Next to the large Quaker church (Cuban Friends, like the majority of Friends throughout the world, are evangelical with churches and pastors) was plentiful accommodation for the representatives from all the other Monthly Meetings and their daughter Missions. A team of hard-working volunteers produced three solid meals a day for about 100 Friends.

The theme for the Assembly was, 'If God is for us, who is against us?' (Romans 8:31). At the morning service on Friday, the first full day, Rosario, the wife of Ramón González Longoria, the YM Clerk who has often visited us in Oxford, shared the very

relevant story of how Nehemiah and all the local Jewish families, with God's support, rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem after its destruction by fire. She reminded us, though, that walls which divide and separate us need pulling down. The rest of the morning and afternoon was for business sessions: familiar things, such as nominating the Epistle Committee, and all the usual reports.

The Saturday programme was similar but the young preacher in the morning's session was given an extra stimulus by a misprint in the programme which turned 'How is it made clear today *that* ...' into 'How is it made clear today *what* God is on our side?' This resulted in one of the best sermons I've

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#### **From *Quaker Faith and Practice***

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 is, if we will, a channel for a power that is both within us and beyond us.

***QF&P* 20.16, Lorna M Marsden, 1986**

**Deadline for contributions to the May 2009 issue: noon, Friday 17 April**

*Contributions, of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated, preferably by email: [oxfordpm@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:oxfordpm@yahoo.co.uk). Paper copy can be left in the 43 pigeonhole at Oxford Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373.*

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heard for ages! We then had interesting reports from each of the Monthly Meetings, which, except for the one in Havana, are all located near the eastern end of the island.

Cuba YM is twinned in a Bridge of Love with New England YM, and each Monthly Meeting is twinned with a New England one. Havana MM, a lively and adventurous group of 26 Friends, is new and not yet twinned, and has expressed a strong wish to be twinned with Oxford Meeting! Cuba Yearly Meeting gave its blessing to this wish, and the proposal will be discussed at Oxford's next Meeting for Worship for Business on 5 April.

In their Epistle, the Cuban Friends write: 'The God who is for us is not the God who supports power but the God who reveals himself in crises, the God who opposes inactivity, who allows us to break the mould in order to move forward and experience his presence.'

**Marigold Best**



## **Your Views on Peace and Social Witness**

As your Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) Correspondent I see my role as one of communicating the work of this Central Committee to our Oxford Meeting, and also telling QPSW about our own Peace and Social Witness work. Out of a mutual understanding of what we are doing, both at local and central levels, we are more likely to make a greater impact in the area of Peace and Social Witness and to develop more effective initiatives.

The areas addressed by QPSW are extremely wide and diverse. There is a determination to address causes of violence, locally, nationally and globally, by engaging in nonviolent peacemaking in areas affected by armed conflict, and working for a culture of peace and justice based on non violent change. QPSW also works towards a society where

diversity is appreciated and all people can fulfil their potential for fullness of life in harmony with others. They work to promote social justice, the reduction of prejudice and the equal treatment of all people, and they work against unjust systems. Their work also includes the promotion of changes that will help us to live responsibly and in harmony with all life and the Earth itself.

This is an enormous area. I have been asked initially to publicise the Peaceworkers' Appeal. Local Meetings are being asked to support eight Peacemaker placements in three different parts of the Peace movement, four in organisations in the UK, two at the Geneva Quaker United Nations office, and two in Burundi. They suggest choosing one or more groups to support and learn about, considering booking a speaker to talk about the work, and making donations. There are three short pamphlets describing these three placement areas which will be displayed over the next few weeks in the entrance hall to No. 43. Oxford LM will have three QPSW collections this year. One I think should go to the work of QPSW as a whole. I would like the views of the Meeting as to where the other two collections should go.

I would also like to know from Friends and Attenders which areas of central QPSW work they would like me to keep them informed about. I would prefer at this stage that the area be limited and priorities set out, as I could not cope with keeping up with everything.

Meanwhile I would also like to know the areas of Peace and Social Witness that Oxford Meeting is involved in, that I should be communicating to QPSW. I would hope from this dialogue that initiatives on both sides can be more effectively developed. I am going to leave a questionnaire asking for this information in the entrance hall or I would be glad to receive an email.

I would like to speak personally to everybody especially interested in this. I will also have been to the QPSW Annual Spring Conference on Diversity, Difference and Division at the end of March. I will then report back on the outcome of all this to the May or June Business Meeting for Worship, and make recommendations about the general direction I shall be taking as QPSW Correspondent.

**Judy Chipchase**

## Creating Community, Creating Connections

This summer, Quakers in Britain will assemble for a residential Yearly Meeting Gathering in York. The event is an experiment, bringing together Yearly Meeting business sessions with the family and community focus of a summer gathering. Fittingly, the theme is 'Creating Community, Creating Connections'.

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre has produced a pack of materials for local Meetings, to prepare for the Gathering and to explore the theme in depth. We are planning to make use of it in Oxford with a series of study group sessions, probably starting in late April.

Developing stronger communities – moving beyond individualism – is one of the key social challenges of our time. Quakers don't talk much about our testimony on community, but we do have a distinctive approach, centred on listening and answering that of God in the other. Our understanding of community is well articulated in *Advices and Queries* and elsewhere in *Quaker Faith and Practice*.

I can't give you any more details of the study sessions at present – we're expecting the pack at the end of March – but do let me know if you're interested, and listen out for notices in April.

**Laurie Michaelis**

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## Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting



**Kate Joyce (Miller),**  
talking to Tanya Garland

I was born in Ulverston (Lancashire) in sight of Swarthmoor Hall. I've felt rather proud of that. The Hall is recognised as the birthplace of Quakerism partly because it was where George Fox met his wife, Margaret Fell. It is a fine, rather dour, oak-beamed 16<sup>th</sup> Century manor house, still used for Quaker courses and conferences.

My mother joined the Society of Friends shortly after I was born. My father had already joined, as a pacifist while an undergraduate at Cambridge. He was already married when he went to university, and my mother had to work as a nanny while he studied. Both their parents had known each other where they grew up in Letchworth. It was the first Garden City, attracting very interesting people, and was a freethinking and exciting place to live.

My mother's father had been a conscientious objector in the First World War and was imprisoned for over three years. The effect on my mother, a very bright and sensitive girl, and the eldest of three, was that she was discriminated against and not allowed to take her place at the grammar school in Letchworth. It affected her self-confidence, and her whole life, very badly. Her father was extremely angry about the war and was very outspoken. He wasn't a Quaker but was a passionate socialist, and he was disgusted at the loss of life. My grandmother was fully behind him, and we still have the letters they wrote to each other. Quakers supported the family while my grandfather was in prison. I knew him quite well, and remember arguing with him when I was thirteen about being a Quaker. My other grandfather became a Quaker a short time after my parents did.

We moved to Cambridge when I was three for my father's work, teaching Biology at the Grammar School for Boys, and my two younger sisters were born there. We weren't quite birthright members (our names weren't registered at birth) but we grew up in Cambridge, as members of Jesus Lane Meeting. We didn't go to the local Quaker School in Saffron Walden as my parents were very hard up during our childhood and really couldn't afford it. Instead, we went to good Cambridge schools travelling on the bus everyday. I went on to do my degree in Botany and Zoology at the University in Cambridge, and then completed my Diploma in Teaching. I met Peter Miller, another zoologist undergraduate, and we married in 1959. For our first job we went to Makerere College in Uganda. At that stage London University had overseas colleges, which gave London University degrees and Makerere College was one of them. The experience of being in Uganda was very exciting and interesting. Our first child was born there in early 1962 but we moved to Oxford nine months later, as Peter was offered a post as lecturer in the University Department of Zoology. He was later

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made a Fellow of The Queen's College. I have been in Oxford ever since, and have been coming to Oxford Meeting since 1962. Our son was born here in 1964. For 24 years, I taught Biology at Headington School for Girls. I loved it, and insisted on everyone taking the O-level course.

Peter died in 1996 quite suddenly of cancer. It was a great shock. We had both just retired. He was never a Quaker, and was shy about expressing his own ideas, but he had a huge respect for us. Peter had an international reputation for his work on dragonflies; he published many research papers and wrote several books. I was totally shattered by losing him. One of the things that kept me going was to continue writing and publishing a book, which he had begun, on East African dragonflies, and I included in it observations which we had made together on our many visits to Kenya and Uganda. It was a miracle I achieved it. I think it is helpful to have a project like that to work on when one has been bereaved. I felt very close to him. There was one incident when I needed a certain diagram and had no idea where to find it. I picked a book off the shelf and opened it at the exact page. I had a strong sense of his presence while I was doing this. Whenever my children, even today, see a dragonfly, we feel his presence again.

I had known Tony Joyce for about eight years as a fellow member of the Oxford Civic Society, before we married in 2006 at 43 St Giles. We have much in common, for instance experience in teaching: he has been a school headmaster. We feel we are immensely fortunate, and are thankful to have found each other. Tony is very involved in City Council projects. I am Secretary of the Planning sub-committee of the Oxford Civic Society, and Tony has been Chairman for eight years. My job is to look at lots of planning applications with a small group of others, and I write letters with our comments, and many objections. We are trying to conserve the city and make it a better place in which to live. So Tony and I work together all the time and are now involved with computer emailing, etc. It is really very enjoyable.

I find I have a deep faith. It's got stronger over my lifetime and I can't take credit for it – it is just there. When I was young and needed guidance as to which college to go to, I went to wait in a church for an answer. When I closed my eyes I saw one gate open and another shut. It was a very simple

experience – almost matter of fact – but I felt very strongly that God was there, showing me the way. My other concept of God is that *God is the Universe*, especially the natural world. I feel that the natural world and God are one, and this includes us, that of God in everyone and that of God in oneself, in tune with the Universe. We must care for the natural world. It is a duty as well as a fact of life. The longer I live, the more significant Jesus's teaching becomes for me, especially the parable of the Good Samaritan. His messages are very simple: love God, and love your enemies; love your neighbour – and your neighbour is all the living nature around you. It is becoming more and more obvious that we are not going to survive unless we follow his instructions given 2,000 years ago, and I wonder why we have taken so long about it? I want to love the moon as well – as did St. Francis: I had his song the 'Canticle of the Sun' on my wall as a child, and I think he was so right.

*The full text of the poem is at the end of this issue.*

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## Quakers: names and acronyms



If you are fairly new to Quaker Meeting (or even if you are not), you may be confused, not only because we have so many names and acronyms, but also because we have recently changed many of them to make them more accessible. Good perhaps in the long run, but adding to the confusion for now.

So let's start from the top (not of course that Quakers are hierarchical!):

**Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM)** is the collective name for the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain\*. As the name implies, BYM meets in session once a year for an event known as Yearly Meeting. This normally takes place over a long weekend in May, with Residential YMs held every fourth year in July/August. However, this year, Yearly Meeting is taking place in July as part of a larger event called *Yearly Meeting Gathering*, which will last for a week from 25 July. For the rest of the year, BYM business is undertaken by

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\* There is a separate YM in the island of Ireland, which includes Friends in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

representatives from the Area Meetings (see below), who gather several times a year for a meeting still bearing the archaic title 'Meeting for Sufferings'. This comes from the time when there was great concern at Meetings with the suffering of Friends, and for their families, imprisoned for their testimonies. BYM also has numerous committees. These include:

- **Trustees of BYM**
- **Quaker Life (QL)**, which supports the life of our Local Quaker Meetings
- **Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW)**, which supports work in Britain and internationally in peace, human rights and social reform, in accordance with our testimonies.

These committees, and Meeting for Sufferings, are supported by paid staff at Friends House (the YM offices in London).

**Regional Meeting (RM)** is the new name for **General Meeting (GM)**. RM meets twice a year for a study day, and Oxford belongs to the Bucks, Berks and Oxon region.

**Area Meetings (AM)** were, until recently, known as **Monthly Meetings (MM)** and traditionally met once a month, but now often meet less frequently. Oxford belongs to Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting (OSAM), which meets bimonthly and includes Abingdon, Burford, Charlbury, Faringdon, Headington, Marlborough, Swindon and Witney. AMs meet to consider membership matters and other business, and for study days. AM also appoints Trustees who ensure we look after our Meetings' properties and finances wisely. All our Elders and Overseers are appointed by AM.

**Local Quaker Meeting (LM)** used to be known as a Preparative Meeting (PM) because it prepared the business for the monthly Area Meeting. LMs regularly hold Meetings for Worship (MfW) and also hold monthly Meetings for Worship for Business. We used to call these business meetings PM. Perhaps by analogy we should simply be using the acronym LM now. Some people have been calling them BM (to distinguish the business meeting from LM meeting for MfW), others are wanting to emphasise that these business meeting are firstly meetings for worship and so are using the fuller name and acronym Local Meeting for Worship for Business (LMWB). The Clerks suggest that we use **LMWB** in formal documents such as minutes and **LM** in speech and email.

## Oxford Friends Action on Poverty (OXFAP)

In April, one of the two collections will be for OXFAP. This supplement is to remind everyone about what we do on behalf of LM – and how you can help. 'We' are Jo Dobry, Elisabeth Salisbury, Patricia Wright, Rebecca Howard and Ursula Howard (convenor). OXFAP is one of many activities in and around Oxford Meeting which address poverty and social injustice in Oxford. Individual Quakers volunteer with many different organisations: Asylum Welcome, The Gatehouse, Oxford Poverty Action Trust (OPAT), the (Porch) Steppin' Stone Centre, and the Oxford Credit Union to name a few. There is also a food collection for asylum seekers and a sandwich run for the homeless.

### What does OXFAP do?

OXFAP distributes money raised from the Meeting to organisations in Oxford which support people who are living with poverty, and visits them to find out more about their work. This is the last of three years in which we have had a £5,000 grant from LM. This funding has been used for a substantial, regular grant to two excellent organisations – Asylum Welcome and the Elmore Team. We support other voluntary groups, for instance with Christmas presents for children in financial hardship.

OXFAP also responds to one-off needs as they arise. Sometimes a tiny amount will help someone reach a turning point – a pram for a young family, piano lessons for a talented young person trying to stabilize his life, an outing for a family dealing with the aftermath of sexual abuse. We've also started a series of evenings in co-operation with Friday with Friends – a chance to hear about what other Oxford-based organisations are doing.

### Poverty in the UK – what is the issue?

According to government statistics and to the national Get Fair campaign, which aims to eradicate UK poverty by 2020, 22 per cent of people in the UK – more than one in five – live below the poverty line. Oxford has an unfair share of that poverty. It is a paradoxical place – a rich city which is also the 40<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority in England. The statistics are stark, and child poverty in Oxford mirrors the national picture: 22 per cent of under-16s live in low-income households. There is plenty of research to show that poverty is intergenerational and goes with a whole range of other problems: homelessness and poor housing, mental and physical health problems, and the ingredients of a 'chaotic life', including drug dependency. Low literacy and numeracy make unemployment and low job prospects more likely. In some parts of Oxford – Blackbird Leys is an example – life expectancy is 5.5 years less than for people living in the most affluent areas. Poverty reduces the chances of a healthy, fulfilling life.

### What can Friends do? Plenty!

Give generously and come to our **bring and share lunch, 26 April**.

Come to our **next meeting on 8 June at 5 p.m.** We'd welcome you, whether for one meeting or a longer-term commitment.

Come to the **OXFAP Friday with Friends on 19 June with Andrew Smith of The Gatehouse**, focusing on homelessness in Oxford.

**Buy a lovely painting or print** (framed or unframed) of Oxford by Peter Winchester, who kindly donated them to support OXFAP's work.

To find out more about OXFAP, email: [Ursula.Howard@pop3.poptel.org.uk](mailto:Ursula.Howard@pop3.poptel.org.uk) or put a note in her pigeonhole.

## The poverty that knocks at the door of 43

Ursula Howard, in conversation with Dave Dight



No. 43 St Giles is at the centre of a diverse community, which includes people living in poverty and the homeless. Social problems in the area are increasing and the recession is likely to result in greater hardship.

Wardens are at the forefront of the Quaker relationship with homeless people in and around the Meeting House. Who does come in and ask for help? Mainly men, mainly in their 20s, 30s and 40s. The wardens sometimes see homeless women around St Giles, but they don't come in to the Meeting House. So what happens when someone 'knocks at the door of 43'? It's mostly a very practical matter. But there is an informal policy – what is best to do and what is best not to do. For example, the approach is not to give money. This has been learned from experience and from professional advice – the money is most likely to be spent on things that contribute to the problem rather than to any solution, such as drugs and alcohol, and the same people come back and back. Another point is to be clear about the 'ground rules'. There are some lively stories from the past about people falling asleep in the Long Room, with cans of alcohol and cigarettes, and using up food in the kitchen. And there are sad stories, because many people have multiple problems, including physical and mental illness, as well as dependencies and homelessness. Not long ago, a young woman was found asleep with her dog under a blanket in the Quaker car park. She was offered a cup of tea and it emerged she was seriously ill. Listening to people's stories is part of the wardens' everyday life.

### **Vouchers for the Night Shelter**

An important way Quakers can help people who come to us is by selling vouchers for the Night Shelter. They cost £3 per night. Dave administers the system: buying them from the Meeting's funds, and selling them to the public and to fellow Quakers – one person recently bought a book of ten. Dave wants to publicise the system and encourage Friends to buy them. It's good practice always to write the name of the person on the voucher, which stops them from becoming currency.

### **Compassion with realism**

Dave and Barney listen and talk with people. Their aim and instinct is to be compassionate and to help as much as they possibly can. They can also suggest contact with other agencies which may be able to help. There is a balance to be struck among practical support and empathy for people in need, making sure that the Meeting House is protected as a safe and secure environment for all who use it, and making sure that the facilities are not used inappropriately. There's a grapevine on the street, and if expectations are raised they could lead to demands which cannot be met at 43. The wardens' sense of responsibility to the Meeting means knowing that getting things wrong could affect a lot of people. Working with homeless visitors is about learning that compassion and realism go hand in hand.

## The Canticle of the Sun

(See page 4, column 2)

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!  
All praise is yours, all glory, all honour, and all blessing.

To you, alone, Most High, do they belong.  
No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,  
especially through my lord Brother Sun,  
who brings the day; and you give light through him.  
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;  
in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,  
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,  
through which you give your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water;  
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you brighten the night.  
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,  
who feeds us and rules us,  
and produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you;  
through those who endure sickness and trial.

Happy those who endure in peace,  
for by you, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,  
from whose embrace no living person can escape.  
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!  
Happy those she finds doing your most holy will.  
The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks,  
and serve him with great humility.

Saint Francis of Assisi