

FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

Number 401

AUGUST 2012

40 pence

Britain Yearly Meeting

We gathered over the weekend of 25-27 May in perfect weather, when the courtyard of Friends House proved the favourite place to drink coffee, read a book, people-watch, or catch up with long-standing acquaintances. I was so pleased to see Friends House showing to such advantage, with its helpful staff, imaginative alterations and ingenious use of space. It gives out a positive message about Quakerism today.

Especially memorable to me was Rachel Brett's Swarthmore lecture on her efforts at the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva to promote human rights – a mixture of snakes and ladders. One message which can apply to all of us when things are tough is 'Keep going round the board'.

Friends House is full of secret places, as we discovered at the party organised by *The Friend*. At the top of the building, nestling among the roof spaces, we found not only a suite of rooms but a thriving garden, a pianist, fresh lemonade and home-baked cookies – as well as advice from the editor, Ian Kirk-Smith. The various interest groups witnessed to deep commitment on a range of issues. I went to a presentation on the growing co-operation and partnerships between denominations. There were ideas here which can inform our local body, Churches Together in Central Oxford, where I serve as a Quaker representative.

One of the most powerful plenary sessions was that opened by Geoffrey Durham on 'Being a Quaker today', which put some of our little niggles in their place. We are committed to the idea of sacramental living, living a life that is spirit-led, and that focus helps us to see what is important. As the Epistle for 2012 said: 'When we are inclusive, there is enough love for everyone'.

Peggy Heeks

Confessions of a BYM Newbie

This year was my first Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and I'm very glad I went – but it wasn't all plain sailing. In fact, I nearly didn't go. As an Attender, I needed a letter of permission from the clerk. Thanks to Gwithian, this was easily arranged, but when I received my letter I was a little taken aback.

Continued on page 2, column 1

From Quaker Faith and Practice

The intent and holy design of our annual assemblies, in their first constitution, were for a great and weighty oversight and Christian care of the affairs of the churches pertaining to our holy profession and Christian communion; that good order, true love, unity and concord may be faithfully followed and maintained among all of us.

QF&P 6.03 Yearly Meeting in London, 1718

Deadline for contributions to the September 2012 issue: noon, Friday 31 August

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, and items for the calendar on page 6 can be emailed to lukesamuelmartin@gmail.com. Paper copy can be left in one of the editors' pigeonholes at the Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org

Continued from page 1, column 2

It refers to *QF&P* 6.15, which advises that, if non-members are called on to speak, “they should be sensitive to the fact that they are not in membership, and should make this known”.

I’m sure there are good reasons for this, but it seems at odds with the usual Quaker practice of treating everyone equally, so I looked up *QF&P* 6.15 to check the context.

Here’s what I saw earlier in that paragraph: “Permission for the attendance of non-members ... may be given at the discretion of the clerk, if satisfied that their presence is likely to be of service to the Society.”

Hmm. I’m a very green Attender (and I don’t mean environmentally), and I have no special expertise that relates to any of the major concerns of the Society, so how would my presence at BYM be of service? I still don’t know, but I eventually decided to go, albeit with some misgivings.

BYM was impressive and almost overwhelming. So many Quakers, such a great atmosphere and, in the gallery, such uncomfortable seats! I won’t dwell on the prepared ministry, as it’s been reported elsewhere. I’ll just say that it was insightful and thought provoking.



Catherine Holland

Instead, I’ll mention two things that gave me food for thought. First, a Friend ministered in the economic justice session reminding us that very few people actually choose to live on benefits. He also said that those who have to live this way live in constant fear. Will government changes take away their only source of income? Could they have made a mistake in trying to comply with the benefit regulations that leaves them open to an unaffordable penalty? I don’t believe that anyone, let alone the most disadvantaged in society, should have to live with this sort of fear.

The second thing that particularly impressed me was a presentation by the Wave Trust, which works to stop the corporal punishment of children. I was astonished to discover that the attitude of children to violence, and the likelihood of them becoming involved with it, is largely determined before the age of two. Truly eye-opening stuff.

I could say more, but I’ll finish with a final reflection. I’m still not sure that my attendance at BYM was “of service to the Society”. In fact, after attending and noting the panoply of talent the Society already has, I find it hard to see how I’ll ever make a useful contribution. Nevertheless, as a source of inspiration and fellowship, BYM was like no other event I’ve ever attended and, as I said, I’m very glad I went.

Keith Wilson

Lessons from the Oncology Ward, 1: *Lessons or Blessings?*

It has been a rich experience, and, like other rich experiences I have had, it has left me with a shift in perception.

What was my rich experience: a spiritual retreat? An uplifting lecture? A powerful play? No – a twelve-day stay in the Oncology Ward of the Churchill Hospital because of kidney failure!

Oh, there was plenty of nasty stuff: blood, pee, not enough poo, plenty of vomit, incontinence, constipation, bedpans... but now and again something happened which led to one of those shifts in perception, shafts of enlightenment, call it what you will.

I think the latest statistic is that one in three of us will get cancer at some time in our lives. (I am not going to dignify it with a capital C.) I firmly believe that the more a scary thing is talked about, the less scary it becomes. Now that I have the luxury of convalescence while my poor old body is recuperating, I have ample

time for musing, pondering and reflecting, so I will try to distil my experiences in the Oncology Ward into useful insights, which may identify the lessons which turned out to be blessings.

I was admitted into hospital on a Friday night and was 'proper poorly' – in limp lettuce mode, with a sense of humour definitely not fit for purpose. The next day I was due for a scan. Now most of you will know that hospitals at weekends are eerie places: the Oncology Ward is always full and active, but elsewhere the place is empty with limited staff. The porters were a different set as well. I imagine they were the weekend skeleton shift. When they were duly summoned, one was a bit of a Cheeky Chappy (whom I saw chatting up the nurses the following Saturday) and the other was middle-European and spoke little English.

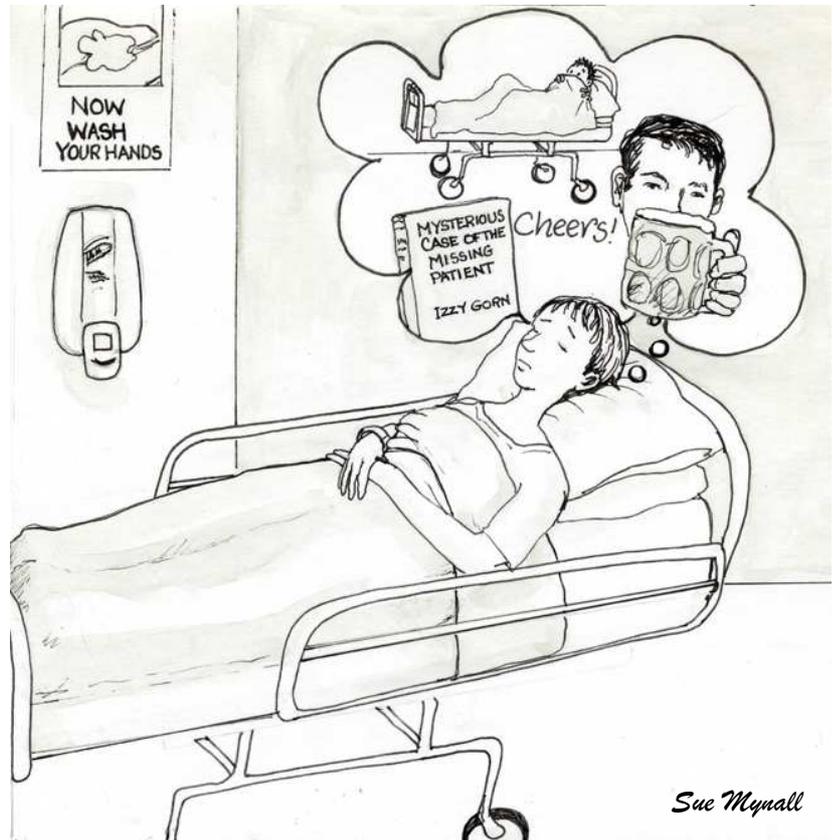
I was wheeled in my bed through a maze of empty, dimly lit corridors till we reached the radiography area, where I was left facing the wall. Cheeky Chappy said "You stay here," (as if I had any choice) "and we'll go and find the radiographer," And they left. I looked at the wall – I couldn't see down the corridor – and I waited... and I waited... and I waited... I started thinking that this could be the setting for a radio murder mystery play. Then I started thinking "Well, what *am* I going to do if no-one comes? It's a weekend, no-one knows where I am, except the porters, and I guess they've gone for a pint, and no-one will hear me if I shout." Then I noticed a loo and remembered that loos have red cords to summon help, so that eased my mind somewhat.

It must have been at least fifteen minutes before a very apologetic radiographer came running down the corridor. She had phoned the nurses' station in my ward to find out what had happened to her patient. She was very concerned about me and admitted that even she, who worked there, found the hospital spooky at the weekend. I assured her that fortunately I am not of a nervous disposition.

The point of this story is not that I was left alone – that did not worry me unduly – but it got me thinking that this is what it's like to be disabled: totally powerless and dependent on others who disregard your wishes. I wondered if this was to be my fate in the future and I shuddered. I knew that Dependence, for me, would be a very hard lesson indeed.

Any blessing? I resolved to be more aware of, and make an effort to communicate with, the person in the wheelchair or hospital bed, now that I know what it feels like.

Maretta Stark



**From
I Praise My Destroyer**

*I praise life's bright catastrophes,
and all the ceremonies of grief.
I praise our real estate — a shadow and a grave.
I praise my destroyer,
and will continue praising
until hours run like mercury
through my fingers, hope flares a final time
into the last throes of innocence,
and all the coins of sense are spent.*

Diane Ackerman

Selected by **Yvonne Dixon**

Introducing Young Adults at Oxford Meeting



Matthew Gee,
talking with Tanya Garland

My parents are Quakers, so as a child, Meeting was part of my normal world. I didn't view Quakers as a separate group. Most relatives and friends were Quakers, so I had no idea what other churches did or what others believed. When I was nine, my parents separated and looking back, I think I was confused and found it difficult. I stayed living with my mother and had less and less contact with my father. She remarried later, and I gained a step-father. I have one brother who is very extravert and sociable and now works for Friends of the Earth.

I was always a quiet, shy child with few friends. The adults at Meeting tried to draw me out a bit. I didn't enjoy the social side of school much but I did well academically, enjoyed singing in the choir and was quite involved with amateur dramatics where I could take on the persona of someone else's character. I became more and more aware of my spiritual life as a teenager, mainly through Meeting for Worship which I found transforming – I would lose myself, and felt changed and moved afterwards. I did more with Quakers, attending summer schools where teenagers lived together for a week, and I found it really rich having Meeting for Worship twice a day with them. Even when there was no ministry, afterwards people would say what was going on inside them, what they were thinking about during the Meeting, and it was the same, so I thought, something is going on here.

I loved DramaQuest, an event that explored Quaker history with other teenagers from across the country. We improvised plays to explore what had been said and to feel behind the words of George Fox and Margaret Fell in the actual places, trying to think about what they were thinking or what George Fox was preaching from the rock on Firbank Fell or Swarthmore Hall. This made it so real for me – stepping into the shoes of these people. The Bible was obviously so much a key to

understanding early Quakers. I hadn't much Bible knowledge so it led me to reading the Bible and exploring the New Testament. It was a gradual process, no specific time or place when I became a Christian, but I am definitely a Christian now. I really enjoy studying the Bible with others and experiencing Christ through his words and acting him and other characters in the same way as I did with the early Quakers. It is a way that makes me feel I'm relating to the real Biblical characters, by speaking their words and 'being' them in this way. It is so powerful, I feel as though I am really there in the Biblical story.

I went to St Andrews University, for four years. It's a small university with a rich history, where everybody lived in residential halls. It was an environment where I felt at ease; living a traditional communal life with meals together, miles away from anywhere else. I liked it. It could feel like being in a bubble, out-of-touch with the country around. I did medicine because I enjoy both science, and the arts which express emotions and spirituality, things that I think are really important for a doctor to have. The medical course was three years of theory and another year of research and medical humanities – medical ethics and looking at how doctors relate to their patients through the arts, using film and literature. Trying to understand how others feel appeals to me.

Then I spent three years doing clinical hospital training – officially at Manchester University, but actually based in Stoke-on-Trent. I worked in several different hospitals in the Midlands after qualifying, and met my fiancée, Katherine, while in Banbury.

When I finished medical training, I chose to specialise in general practice; however, I found that working in GP practices did not live up to my hopes, so I am now about to start postgraduate training in psychiatry, while working as a junior psychiatrist. I really loved the psychiatry part of my GP training – it was the subject I enjoyed most. I'm interested in what it's like to be in other people's minds. To some extent, GPs have glimpses of this, but in psychiatry, the doctor can enter more fully into their patient's mind. To some extent, this is as an observer, but an interested observer, and the doctor can participate in their lives too to a degree.

I'm someone who quietly observes other people, trying to put myself in their situation to understand where they are coming from. It is a way of understanding human nature, what it is to be human, and so ultimately understand myself – and perhaps to understand God better too.

"What did [ancient Mexican sorcerers] consider the sign that inner silence is working, don Juan?" I asked.

"Inner silence works from the moment you begin to accrue it," he replied.

"What the old sorcerers were after was the final, dramatic, end result of reaching that individual threshold of silence. Some very talented practitioners need only a few minutes of silence to reach that coveted goal. Others, less talented, need long periods of silence, perhaps more than one hour of complete quietude, before they reach the desired result. The desired result is what the old sorcerers called stopping the world; the moment when everything around us ceases to be what it's always been. This is the moment when sorcerers return to the true nature of man."

Carlos Castanada

suggested by **Rebecca Howard**

The Friends Quarterly

This is now on sale at Blackwell's. Please support your local bookshop and this excellent publication by buying the latest edition. It is being sold on a trial basis, and will only continue to be available if enough people buy it. This is a great opportunity for outreach as there are very few religious magazines sold at Blackwell's. Perhaps encourage a friend new to Friends to give it a go.

Becky Riddell

Goodbye and Greetings

Friends will be sad to hear that our assistant warden, Luke Martin, is leaving us on 1 September to take up a new job in Oxford. The good news is that his D.Phil colleague in Keble College, Alessandro Simari, will be joining us. We shall miss you, Luke; but we welcome Alessandro.

Elisabeth Salisbury

Hello everyone!

My name is Alessandro Simari and I have come to the Oxford Friends' Meeting by way of Toronto, Canada — a city that I have lovingly called home for twenty-three of my twenty-five years. Like many a young person, it is academia that has drawn me to Oxford. After spending five wonderful years studying English, History, and Political Science at the University of Toronto (and collecting Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees along the way, not to mention many valuable life lessons), I begun my research as a DPhil in English Literature at the University of Oxford as a proud member of Keble College. I spend most of my time reading Renaissance drama and using my research as an excuse to sneak off to a night at the theatre.



I look forward to introducing myself to everyone in the coming months. I have become good friends with my predecessor Luke in my time in Oxford, and I aim to do all I can to fill his shoes as I begin my tenure as Assistant Warden. Thank you for welcoming me into your community!

With best wishes,

Alessandro Simari

CALENDAR FOR AUGUST 2012

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Sunday 5	11 am	Friendly Bible Study	Monday 20	4-6 pm	Poetry Group
Sunday 5	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Thursday 23	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults
Thursday 9	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults	Sunday 26	11 am	Friendly Bible Study
Sunday 12	11 am	Friendly Bible Study	Sunday 26	12:30 pm	Bring-and-share lunch
Thursday 16	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults	Thursday 30	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults
Sunday 19	11 am	Friendly Bible Study			

Friends Fellowship of Healing in August

Oxford Friends Meeting House is closed in August, except for Meetings for Worship. The Oxford Friends Fellowship of Healing still continue support for all F/friends who



have asked to be Held in the Light. On 15 August we shall each set aside a time at home (or wherever we are) to be with each other in spirit and to continue this support. Any new requests can be placed in the 'F' pigeonhole or I can take messages.

Mary Fear

Area Meeting

The date and place of our next Area Meeting have changed. We'll meet at 7:30 pm on Wednesday 12 September at The Coach House, Headington, OX3 8NU. Six such meetings are held each year and everyone is welcome. More details are at:

www.oxfordquakers.org/areaMeeting

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Sundays at 9:30 and 11 a.m. at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Wednesdays at 12:15 p.m. at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Tuesdays and **Thursdays** at 7:30 a.m. at 43 St Giles
(followed by breakfast at 8 a.m.)

Sundays at 10 a.m. at The Priory,
85 Old High St, Headington

OPENING TIMES (43 ST GILES)

Wednesday - Friday, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Forty-Three is available online, at
www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter

If you are considering writing an article or notice but would prefer it not to go online, please don't hesitate to contribute it. Just indicate that the piece is not for inclusion in the internet version — no reason will be asked for.

*Editorial Team: MARK EBDEN, PENNY ORMEROD,
and BECKY RIDDELL (Joint Editing & Production);
TINA LEONARD, DEBORAH FILGATE (Proofreaders);
LUKE MARTIN (Distributor and Subscriptions)*