



# FORTY-THREE

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

## NEWSLETTER

[www.oxfordquakers.org](http://www.oxfordquakers.org)

Number 363

JUNE 2009

40 pence

### To web or not to web?

When the editors presented their report at April's MfWfB, it became clear that there were anxieties that we had not anticipated – and perhaps we should take this opportunity to apologise for not having done so – about the decision to put our newsletter online. The issues are complex, and there were feelings equally strongly expressed on both sides: some felt that it would be a great loss if an electronic version of *Forty-Three* were *not* to be made available, some that it was not appropriate to put it online. Wisely, our clerks decided that more time was needed to think about the implications of both sides of the argument. Meanwhile, the newsletter has been taken off the web.

We felt that we had the perfect vehicle to encourage and broaden this debate, and this issue of *Forty-Three* sets out some views on both the advantages and anxieties of going online. While this matter can only be settled by MfWfB (it is hoped that it will be included on the July agenda), we would welcome any thoughts and reactions. And we would like to encourage as many of our readers as possible to attend July's MfWfB!

**The editors**

### Privacy, please!

The question has arisen of whether to put *Forty-Three*, our Meeting newsletter, on our website. I, and some others, have strong reservations about

doing so in the absence of any means of restricting access. I have been asked to spell out the reasons for this view.

Unlike publications such as *The Friend*, our Meeting newsletter is a fairly informal affair, more like a family newsletter. We know that visitors to the Meeting House can buy a copy, but we expect them to respect our privacy and not to misuse any information in it. Those of us who have written for it have done so thinking that we were addressing local Friends and those associated with them. This means we sometimes may say things that would be too personal or controversial even for *The Friend*, let alone the national press.

Putting the newsletter on the web is like publishing it in the national press, even the international press,

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### From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

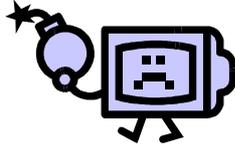
Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

### *Advices and Queries 22*

**Deadline for contributions to the July 2009 issue: noon, Friday 19 June**

*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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for 'www' in website addresses stands for 'World Wide Web'. Powerful search facilities help anyone who wishes to find content put on the web, even if they do not know the web address. Therefore we are saying, "This is for anyone, anywhere, anytime". I don't think that is what we mean the newsletter to be. People will write for it in a different way if they know it is available without restriction online. They will wish to exercise a prudent caution, and something of the character of the present newsletter may well be lost.

There are Quaker websites which let the world know about Quakerism and that is a good thing. We can add more about Quakers in Oxford to our website if we wish. That is not the purpose of the newsletter. Privacy is a valuable right, increasingly in need of protection. The Government has proposed making it a legal requirement to keep records of all destinations for phone calls and emails. I am not sure if the proposals include web searches, but they could. Personal details, opinions, past history, etc., could be taken up and misinterpreted by people of hostile intent. We know how the press sometimes does this, and the web is no different.

In sum, I would like to emphasise that our government is very snoopy, and some of our members are engaged in protests which the government increasingly regards as 'subversive'. It is also worth remembering that anything on the web can be looked for by the name of the person, and probably turned up. It does not have to be 'happened across'. I therefore hope that we continue to have only paper copies of the newsletter, or else have a secure password-protected area of the website in which to put it. I have not addressed questions about subscriptions, which might arise if the newsletter is on the web, as I think the privacy issue is of over-riding importance.

**Jeanne Warren**

### ***Forty-Three* online? Yes, please!**

The *Forty-Three* newsletter is the core publication from Oxford Friends and we would like to see it published electronically as well as on paper. We can see many good reasons for this. Here they are:

Quakers are an open organisation, relating to existing Members and Attenders and welcoming newcomers. A publication is one means of people finding out what is going on, what our organisation stands for and speaks out about – and the concerns and issues we reflect on. This is a wonderful opportunity to let more people know about our faith and practice.

We have committed ourselves to reaching out to new groups of people and inviting new people in – through Quaker Quest and 'inreach/outreach', for example. Electronic communication is now a – if not the – mainstream way of reaching people and engaging in dialogue. Publishing *Forty-Three* electronically would give us the opportunity for quick and clear communication inside and outside the organisation. We have lost the Quaker Centre for now and in that context, this would be one way of being active about relating to people and organisations externally.



A newsletter shows an organisation is alive and kicking – it not only shows events, but the thinking and activity behind those events. Electronic communication

offers the opportunity for interaction, dialogue and feedback – much more easily than on paper. We stand for this. Electronic feedback is another mainstream way of communication nowadays: readers can instantly interact, by means of clicking links and sending emails.

*Forty-Three* is available freely in our buildings, where the door is often open to enquirers and it is therefore already a 'publication' in the public domain. It is naive to assume that the print version somehow has a limited diffusion and is not monitored. QPSW staff member Anne Wilkinson reads local newsletters: it can be assumed that someone in the Quaker Communications Department does the same.

As Quakers, we are honest and outgoing about who we are, and we want to speak clearly and strongly about our beliefs. There is nothing to hide from a wider audience. Any concerns we have about a contribution to *Forty-Three* should reflect our values, whatever the medium of publication. For matters which are internal only, we have papers and minutes and spreadsheets for Meetings, and many

conversations which are between people and stay that way. Many less open organisations make many of these sorts of communications public in annual reports which are published. Charities, for example, routinely put publications, viewpoints, reviews and feedback as well as financial reports on websites.

It's a real opportunity to develop *Forty-Three* into something a bit broader in appeal, as well as to keep improving and developing it as we have been doing. That way it stays alive and keeps our and others' interest. The newsletter itself could have more links to web addresses and make more use of different media, such as YouTube videos, other video clips, voice files etc. It could have pretty (coloured) pictures – and a picture speaks more than a thousand words.

On the practical side, electronic publishing is low-cost and saves paper at the same time as it potentially reaches many more people. It would be a way for far-flung Friends (e.g. Eric and Lauren in California) to keep in touch with Meeting. For Members and Attenders (and the more casual browser) with visual impairment or dyslexia, an online newsletter, which can be read aloud by their own specialist software – or nowadays BrowseAloud or Microsoft Narrator – means real *inclusion*.

We believe any risks are minimal to non-existent. We are competing with trillions of pieces of information and millions of websites, and for all our optimism about reaching people, we aren't looking at huge numbers of visits to the website. We can't think what we risk compared with any other website which offers information and publications about an organisation. Not doing it in this electronic age risks someone not being able to find Friends when they really feel they want to engage.

Rhonda Riachi, expressing her hope that the newsletter will soon be back online, quotes George Fox: 'Be patterns, be examples'.

### **Ursula Howard and Karima Brooke**



## **Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting**



**Barnabas Palfrey,**  
talking to Tanya Garland

For my first year in Oxford, I was attached to Greyfriars, probably because I am studying a living Liberal Catholic theologian (David Tracy) for my D. Phil. I sometimes went to prayers with the friars. They finished prayers with fifteen minutes of silence. At the same time as looking for a church, I went to breakfast meetings at 43 and became assistant warden in June last year. My experience of Quakers goes back to when I lodged in London with an old Polish woman, the widow of a Methodist minister. She had met her husband in a Quaker re-construction camp in Warsaw after the War. I went with her to Streatham Meeting, while also partly going to the local Anglican church. Recently, when I was going through a difficult period I found the silence a refuge in comparison to the chatty family services in church. Both my parents are lay-readers in the Church of England and I was quite a religious teenager in a church with active youth groups. If I was to date my becoming a Christian, it would be when I was eleven, on a cliff-top in Norfolk, and attending one of the brilliantly named 'Varsity and Public Schools Camps' – amid the hiss of trolley-lamps in a marquee. It was then it became real and something I could take on myself – not just as the smart-arse who knew all the bible stories. I was brought into a strong focus on personal salvation.

However, this didn't seem to include discovering myself in relation to other people. It was just me and God. I have an anxiety that I am not very good at loving people. When I was nineteen, I worked in a factory in the holidays where I met a lovely Sikh man. I remember asking him, 'What is it you most want in life?' and he said, 'I want to be loved.' He was worried his father didn't love and accept him as he had a white English girlfriend – a non-Sikh. I remember I replied, 'That's interesting because what I want is to be able to love.' I've always known I was loved unconditionally by my parents, even when I disappointed them, and it has been a wonderful thing. I have come to see an ambiguity in the experience on the cliff-top: both good and

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bad. What was good was the impetus to prayer and a relationship with God and the sense that life was an adventure with God.

Also positively, I really do think that Christianity is a religion for shit people. (Perhaps you have to be good to be a Quaker?) There is a recurrent reminder that I needn't be 'good' in order to be loved and forgiven by God or by myself. What bothers me now about that cliff-top religion, though, is that although I experienced 'God', there didn't seem to be many connections between this and learning how to love other people.

My other religion has been drawing and painting – especially in nature – which is like praying. I'm never happier than when drawing or painting, particularly painting because I love colour – and I miss it. At the moment I only paint postcards on holiday. I've just come back from Belgrade and Serbia with my girlfriend, Mira, who is from Bosnia. I loved the Orthodox churches: the murals, icons and paintings. On the one hand, I was appalled by the dominance of the male priesthood, but there was a sense of the church as a meeting place for meeting the 'otherness of God'. They call them temples.

At one point in my mid-twenties I had a strong sense that a certain type of religious faith was over for me. There was a song by Blur, which spoke of a 'letting go' of a relationship and it was very meaningful for me in my relationship with God. There was a line '... I'm not going to kill myself to keep you in my life'. It was just after I had been working as a volunteer, mainly with asylum seekers, with an Anglican Church project in Byker, East Newcastle. I saw the local church of twelve people as dying and us trying to warm ourselves around dying embers. I was in a crisis. I'd started a Theology PhD. at Newcastle – after my first degree at Cambridge and after an MA at Durham – but I'd quit it very quickly. I was the wrong person in the wrong project, at the wrong time. After a few months, I moved away to London, and for four years I worked in a Community Centre on education and social projects aimed at people who were disadvantaged. It was there I met Mira.

Now, back to being in Oxford. I admire many Quakers though I am not one of them. I admire them for their hard work and concern for those in prison and their active ministry for peace, refugees and asylum seekers, etc. I'm less sure about being pacifist. I know that I'm not a Quaker. My fear is

that I am not good enough! Or perhaps Quakers are just different to me. The silence has always worked most for me when I've seen it as a 'communion service', but Quakers seem to dislike theology. They don't seem to want even to discuss different teachings around God. In fact, they appear to be embarrassed. For me, there is a danger of the silence becoming empty. That is my worry. At Meeting I feel I am not allowed God, and so my option is to want to take the silence back into the church. Rowan Williams concludes a brilliant essay, 'Good doctrine teaches silence', which is a very Eastern Orthodox thing to think and I think that silence is always informed by what we bring to it. The good desire to be tolerant in the presence of other people's ideas can mean Quakerism becomes intolerant of discussing doctrine or anything else 'religious'. I worry that Quakers might be left without a language in which to speak, if they are unable to have exploratory conversation, particularly around the subject of God. But I love the Quakers for all they have given to me.



## Notices After Meeting

Guidelines for notices are as follows:

- (a) Details of Meetings for Worship are not included but notice readers should draw attention to the post cards giving these details.
- (b) Details of committee meetings are not included.
- (c) Details of events which Friends wish to have included in the Notices should be given to the Warden in writing (preferably by email) by the preceding Saturday.
- (d) *Forty-Three* and perhaps, in future, the website can be used to draw Friends' attention to other events of interest.
- (e) Extracts from Area Meeting Minutes will appear regularly in *Forty-Three*, by arrangement with the editors.
- (f) We ask Friends to exercise self-restraint in the matter of spontaneous announcements and also to be open hearted about receiving those that are made.

**From Minute 39/09  
of Oxford Local Quaker MfWfB**

## Saying Hello in the Cornmarket

It's been suggested that on appropriately sunny Saturdays we might set up a place in the Cornmarket to introduce ourselves to members of the public. This would comprise the usual books, booklets, leaflets and information about Quakers, but we might also talk, informally, about who we are, what we do and believe, and where they can find us. If anyone has thoughts on this or would like to be involved in developing the idea, please contact me at [ianflintoff@aol.com](mailto:ianflintoff@aol.com) or on (01865) 715870 or write a note to 5 Orchard Court, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4HJ.

**Ian Flintoff**

