

FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

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Oxford Meeting as Friends of Maison Quaker de Congénies

Do you fancy a holiday in beautiful Quaker premises in the Languedoc?

At the suggestion of Richard Thompson, former warden in this Meeting, LMWB has agreed to a Friendship link between Oxford Friends and Congénies (see LMWB minute 26/10). Although there are Friends' Meetings in a number of parts of France (the largest being in Paris), Congénies is the only purpose-built Meeting House in the country. Having fallen into disrepair, it has fairly recently been restored with a generous grant to France Yearly Meeting and is used by Languedoc Friends for weekly Meeting for Worship. French Friends are very proud of the improvements, which include attractive holiday accommodation and the development of a library of Quaker writings.



LMWB didn't feel that it was right to commit one of our special collections to supporting Congénies, but we did agree to encourage Oxford Friends to consider giving individual support as far as they are able, perhaps by booking short holidays

there. Those Oxford Friends who have visited are very enthusiastic about the house and its setting, to

say nothing of the warm welcome from French Friends. French Quakers are not numerous, but they have a long and distinguished history, and in the seventeenth century referred to themselves as *les Amis du Silence*, long before they made contact with Anglophone Quakers. Having spent a year worshipping with Paris Friends, I know that contact with Friends from other countries is much appreciated.

Judith Atkinson

From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

True faith is not assurance, but the readiness to go forward experimentally, without assurance. It is a sensitivity to things not yet known. Quakerism should not claim to be a religion of certainty, but a religion of uncertainty; it is this which gives us our special affinity to the world of science. For what we apprehend of truth is limited and partial, and experience may set it all in a new light; if we too easily satisfy our urge for security by claiming that we have found certainty, we shall no longer be sensitive to new experiences of truth. For who seeks that which he believes that he has found? Who explores a territory which he claims already to know?

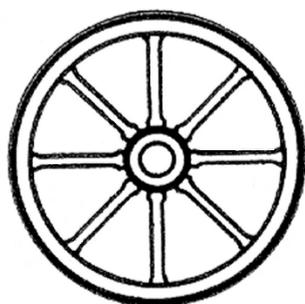
QF&P 26.39 Charles F Carter, 1971

Deadline for contributions to the July 2010 issue: noon, Thursday 17 June

Contributions, of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated, preferably by email to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org. Paper copy can be left in the Forty-Three pigeonhole at Oxford Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373.

Dear Friends,

For me the essence of Quakerism is Meeting for Worship, like the hub of a wheel with all the other aspects radiating from that centre.



Meeting for Worship has a double aspect; silence and ministry.

I experience these as a unity and I believe it is essential that both aspects are accessible to everyone in the Meeting House when we come together.

People do choose to sit in the gallery for various reasons but one disadvantage of this is that ministry can often not be heard.

Sometimes Friends do not speak clearly so their voices fail to carry. In addition, people who sit under the gallery are always much harder to hear.

I know that no Friend would willingly or knowingly deprive others of a full experience of Worship, so perhaps in future, when ministering, all Friends will bear this in mind and enable everyone to participate fully in Meeting for Worship.

Thank you.

MJG

Does anyone know this name?

The clerks have received a letter from Sherry Slater of Colorado, USA. She believes that a relative of hers, Samuel John Slater, had contact at one time (she doesn't say when) with Oxford Meeting and would be grateful for any information. If you can help, please let us know. Many thanks.

Judith Atkinson and Sandra Figgess 2

INACOS

How our support makes a difference

In August 2007, the FWCC in Dublin issued an appeal for Friends worldwide to be actively involved, with a message of hope, in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The prime mover of this appeal was our Friend Fidel Nsengiyumva, a Quaker leader from Rwanda, who has been living openly and positively with HIV since 2003. He is the founder/director of INACOS (*Initiative des Amis Combattant le SIDA*; the Friends' Initiative against AIDS in Rwanda).

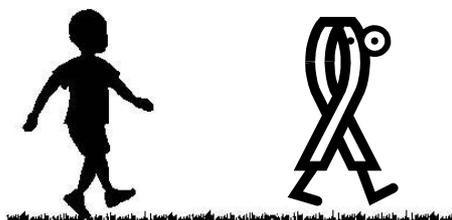
INACOS, a very rare example of a major Quaker initiative against AIDS, has been supported by Oxford Friends in various ways since 2007, including June collections and the sale of Christmas cards.

Fidel reports: 'This money served to support children living with HIV in their education, providing school materials and food supplements (for the balanced diet needed to cope with the effects of anti-retroviral treatment) and assistance with health insurance. The impact of this support is a great improvement in school attendance and performance, because of the improved situation of their families. This also contributed to reducing stigma and discrimination related to their HIV status at school and in the community.' Oxford funding is also being used to develop a flour-milling project to provide better nutrition for 500 children.

Our continued support is urgently needed for INACOS in its work of prevention, care & support, and stigma reduction.

Please give generously to this month's collection. Contact me (jpw1940@yahoo.co.uk, 01865 451827) if you would like to increase the value of your donation by using CAF cheques or gift-aided cheques made out to Strategies for Hope Trust – or for further information, including copies of Fidel's full report.

John Whitley



Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting



Dorothy Darke,
talking to Tanya Garland

– Part 1 of 2 –

I was born in Cologne in 1932 – not a brilliant time to be born in Germany, especially if your father is Jewish. He was a leather merchant and used to travel to London regularly to purchase whole fleeces. My father was a very extrovert, funny, good-humoured and extremely generous man with many friends in England, and he often invited business colleagues to share a meal with him at the end of the day. He met my mother on the train returning to Germany after one of his visits to England. She came from a family deeply rooted in the Stuttgart area of Germany. Her father's parents owned a farm estate, which had been in the family since the early fourteenth century and her mother's family owned the nearby mill, used by all the farms in the area – Lutheran communities. My father grew up in the city of Bielefeld, the eldest of three children, with a huge crowd of cousins. It was a happy family, proud of being German, in a highly civilised society to which the Jewish community had made an enormous intellectual and artistic contribution, especially to music, art and literature.

My mother fell head over heels in love with my father, but, by 1925 Nazi propaganda was already taking hold and although she begged her family to meet him, they utterly refused. She married him in 1927 without any of her family present, but when my sister was born in 1928, my grandmother went to Cologne, made amends with her daughter and met her new granddaughter. My Granny told me years later that it took only a few hours before she was as much in love with my Dad as my mother was! They became the closest of friends for the rest of her life.

In 1934, father's London friends persuaded him to leave Germany. At that time one was not allowed to take even one mark out but there were no problems with bringing one's own possessions. I was four and my mother left me with her 'Aryan' mother in Germany before going to England herself to join my father. His London friends had found him premises on Leathermarket Street in London – the centre of the leather trade. I stayed with my

Granny (for nearly a year) then, completely by surprise, on my fifth birthday, my mother arrived and two days later we left for England. I can remember only one incident when I was unable to speak English fluently, when I started school five weeks later. I can't remember any problems, but I was bitterly ashamed of being German and would lie through my teeth about it. Our next-door neighbours, Michael Flanders (well known at the time as a comic musician with Donald Swann) and his parents, Peter and Molly, became close friends with my family. My mother played the piano superbly well and Molly played the violin with her. Peter would come in the evening to encourage my parents to read Shaw with him out loud to improve their English, which they greatly enjoyed. During the War the families shared an allotment on Hampstead Heath. They were so kind to us all.

In 1940 my father became extremely concerned that he hadn't moved far enough away from Germany and was afraid for our security (my brother, Ray, and me) in the event of an invasion – so we were sent to The Abbey School in Malvern. Arrangements were made with the Head, that in the event of an invasion, all links with my parents were to be destroyed. An English family agreed to adopt us, though their names were never revealed to us. For our security during the War we never went back home for two years, but spent Christmas and Easter weeks together in small hotels and stayed on a working farm during the summer holidays. Rumours circulated that we had gone to America and our parents did not contradict them. I was in boarding school from the age of eight to eighteen and I loved it and joined in everything: sport, drama, music, chapel choir; I played the piano and was the science monitor. I went on to study Geography at Cambridge and my best friend was Emma, who lived in Jordans, the Quaker village. So every holiday, part of the time was there with her and then we went to Meeting on a Sunday. I'm certain that, if I had not met Michael during the summer after I left school, I would have become a Quaker then. Michael came from a deeply rooted, cathedral-type musical C of E background. His father was an organist, composer, conductor, and his mother a violinist.

Michael is nine years my senior. He flew Mustangs during the War and was sent to Canada to train in the prairies where he stayed on as an instructor. After the War, he became an architect. We married at the end of my second year at Cambridge, which

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was almost unheard of in those days (to get married and still do one's degree). I left Cambridge and for a couple of terms I taught Geography and Hockey at Skinners London School for Girls before our daughter, Val, was born in 1953. Graham was born eighteen months later, then Alison after another three years and, six years after Alison, Katrina was born. I thoroughly enjoyed being a full-time Mum in our home in Hampstead Garden Suburb within walking distance to both my parents and Michael's.

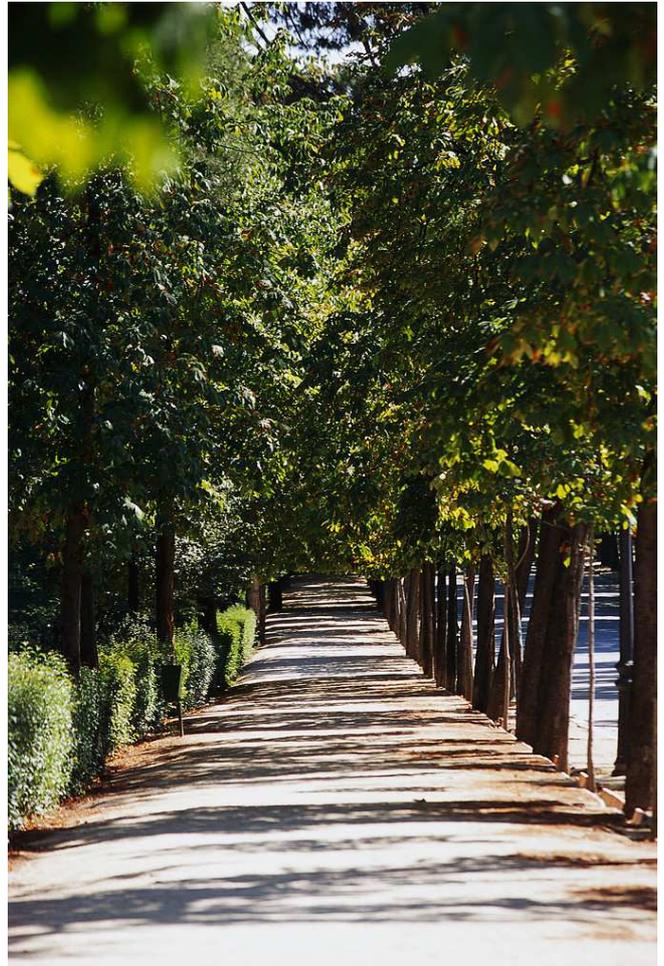
Michael taught at the Northern Poly, then became an assistant in the education department of the RIBA [Royal Institute of British Architects]. When, five years later, he became Head of the School of Architecture at the Manchester Poly, we all moved to Manchester and lived there for sixteen years. I taught Geography intermittently at Altrincham Grammar School depending on the availability of part-time work while raising the family, which was always my priority.

Valerie was the first in our family to become a Quaker. When she got married (to Nick Parker), she asked to have a Quaker wedding. I was so thrilled I started to go to Meeting again to support Valerie and make the spiritual side of her wedding really important. I very soon became a regular member at the Quaker Meeting in Chichester. What is important about Quakers for me is the fact that they are so open and welcoming and give so much space to allow people to develop their own ideas. It's like a personal pilgrimage in which one's experiences along the way can be absorbed and can enrich our lives with new ideas and perspectives without a straitjacket of creeds or other prescribed beliefs.

To be concluded in the July issue.

Safeguarding our Liberties

'Seven Quakers and Civil Liberties, Personal Liberty and the Authoritarian State' was published by the Quaker Civil Liberties Network in 2009 (see the March issue of *Forty-Three*). One of the seven essays was written by a member of Oxford Meeting. On Monday 28 June, a meeting will be held in the Garden Room from 7:30 to 9:00 to discuss the pamphlet and how we can further our work on this concern in Oxford.



Woodbrooke opportunities

Wondering how to 'get away from it all'? The answer lies just a train journey away at Woodbrooke, Birmingham.

Woodbrooke is a gracious ex-Cadbury mansion, set in acres of grounds with a lake. It has a study programme which offers both stimulus and recreation (copies are in the lobby) and is a good place to go just for a change. You'll find excellent food, a large library, congenial company and the pleasures of Birmingham a bus ride away.

That's only part of the story. Woodbrooke also provides day programmes in local Meetings and opportunities for individual study. Do see, phone or email me (peggy.heeks@regents.ox.ac.uk) if you would like to talk about options.