

FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

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Qualified for Quakerism?

When I first started exploring Quakerism, one of my biggest fears was that I could never be “good” enough to become a Quaker. Let’s not concern ourselves with how “goodness” is defined in this context – suffice it to say that this fear has been allayed by Friends who explained that although Quakers constantly strive for goodness, complete success in achieving it is neither expected nor demanded.

However, now I have another concern that has been fuelled to some extent by my attendance at the last series of Quaker Quest: just how smart do you have to be to become a Quaker? I knew from the outset that Quakerism was an intellectual faith, but that didn’t prepare me for the panoply of intellect that characterises the Oxford Meeting. Maybe I shouldn’t be surprised; after all, this is Oxford and many Friends at the Meeting are associated with the university.

Nevertheless, I can’t help but feel in awe of those who can effortlessly reference the works and ideas of philosophers whose names I barely know, who can instantly call up apposite biblical passages for almost any occasion and who can readily draw upon their deep experiences of Christian and non-Christian religions, meditation techniques and other life skills that are far outside my experience.

In some ways, this is wonderful. Having access to this abundance of knowledge and talent is an

amazing resource, and who doesn’t enjoy the company and conversation of interesting, intelligent and well-informed people? And yet I can’t help feeling a little like a tea boy at a Mensa convention – I know I have an acceptable reason to be there, but I also know that I’m not going to be contributing to the main event. This is not intended, by the way, to demean tea boys, some of whom I’m sure are Mensa members, but hopefully the simile makes my point a little clearer.

Having pondered my intellectual limitations for a while, it occurs to me that the real question is whether they matter, at least in relation to Quakerism. I’ve decided the answer is no. After all,

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From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.

QF&P 26.70 Isaac Penington, 1661.

As quoted in the book Deepening the Life of the Spirit, now available in our Library.

Deadline for contributions to the July 2012 issue: noon, Friday 22 June

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

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I can make good use of a mobile phone without understanding the details of cellular wireless technology, so why shouldn't I be able to make good use of the Quaker faith without understanding its every ramification and wrinkle?

That doesn't mean I want or intend to stop learning about Quakerism – far from it – but it does mean that I am a little less concerned about whether I'll ever be smart enough to be a Quaker. Of course, I could still be proved wrong. For all I know, there's an item I've not yet come across in *Quaker Faith and Practice*, which specifies that only those with an IQ of 150 or more need apply for membership – but I hope not!

Keith Wilson



Friday with George and Arthur

On Sunday 13 June 1652 George Fox stood on Firbank Fell and spoke to the gathered multitude. They say there were over a thousand people. They say he spoke for three hours. They say people travelled from all over the North West of England to hear him. Quaker history was born.

On Friday 15 June 2012 Arthur Kincaid, actor, author and Elder of Oxford Meeting, will be talking about retracing George Fox's footsteps on that famous journey through what Quakers now call "1652 Country". Arthur is the author of a new guide published by Friends House called *The Cradle of Quakerism: Exploring Quaker Roots in North West England*.

Arthur faced a daunting task in rewriting and updating a well-known and loved handbook written in 1952 by Elfrida Vipont Foulds. He explains that he has mostly followed the original groupings of locations close to each other but has tried to relate them more closely to George Fox's travels from the time of his vision of a "great people to be gathered" on Pendle Hill to his arrival at Swarthmoor Hall. He has also included local places of interest on the way that are not linked to seventeenth-century Quakers.

I do not know the original handbook by Elfrida Vipont Foulds, but I do know that this new book bears the author's unmistakable stamp of meticulous research and clarity of thought and expression. It also reflects his love and knowledge of fell walking. Because of this the book works at a number of levels.

First and foremost it is a down-to-earth practical touring guide, complete with grid references and homely advice on stocking up with Kendal mint cake if you're going on foot, and suggested routes if you're going by car.

At another level we learn so much along the journey, about the history of the early Quakers and the social, political and religious turmoil of the period. Chapter 2, headed '1652: A Brief Summary of Events' is one of the shortest and clearest descriptions of what was happening at this time.

The guide is also a celebration of just walking and being in one of the most beautiful parts of England. The photographic illustrations by Martin Lawrence are outstanding.

Last but not least, the book concludes with a number of thought-provoking questions: What do 21st-century Quakers have in common with our charismatic forebears? What would George Fox think about Quakers going on pilgrimage today?

If you've got views on the above, want to share your experience of pilgrimage or simply want to ask Arthur which are the best places to visit, do come and join us for a "1652 country" Friday with Friends on Friday 15 June from 7:30-9:00 pm in the garden room or outside if weather permits. Refreshments possibly to include Kendal mint cake!

Jo Dobry

Introducing Young Adults at Oxford Meeting



Nadia Hilliard talking to
Tanya Garland

I go back and forth with Quakers. When I first came to Oxford I went to Meeting religiously every week for the first year and forged very important relationships. Sometimes I go months

without going to Meeting but I'm always in touch with Quakers. They make up my daily community more than my work colleagues do; I see them as friends, and go out with them for meals, coffees and walks; as family members – aunts, uncles, cousins – do; they are a big part of my life.

I was raised in Virginia, US, and was never overtly political but asked questions about human behaviour and how communities make us who we are. My father was American (a practising Catholic) and my mother from Algeria, having lived through the war there, with a Turkish father and Algerian mother. Two words I remember my grandmother saying: *seja*, meaning 'good girl'; and, to my brother, *jaiya*, which meant 'naughty rascal'. I have the utmost respect for his naughtiness. He is a rock musician in New York. He decided what he wanted to be at eleven and never wavered, while I change courses or where I live every two years or so. We are like night and day in many respects, but he has always been a very good brother and my biggest defender.

Seven years ago I was living in Paris with an English boyfriend, and we decided we wanted to work in a developing country helping in some way, so I came to Oxford five years ago with the idea of getting a qualification to do this. We parted ways but I discovered I had a deep love of academia. I had studied Philosophy and Literature as an undergraduate, and Politics for my Masters at St Hilda's. I'm now doing my D.Phil in Politics: the American Security State, anti-terrorism and immigration – that sort of thing.

I have had a very privileged, easy life and there was both an altruistic reason and a selfish one for wanting to work in a developing country. I have found that the limited times of hardship I have experienced have been the biggest growing curve

for me, so the selfish side was to seek an experience which would be hard, aware of the daily hardships of other people, but I have abandoned the idea now.

My father was an academic and I am naturally one too. I love sitting in the library all day playing with ideas. It's easy for me to be myself and I don't wear a lot of masks. However, my father was very eager for one of his children to be an academic, and had I not had a certain amount of pressure from him, I might have done something different, something quite intense. I practise the piano and guitar for hours and there was a time I wrote quite a bit of poetry. I would be happy doing a number of things if an academic career does not work out, but for me it is not so much about a career as relationships.

I was always interested in the spiritual side of life and was influenced by American fiction writers whose characters were interested in Buddhism and mysticism. I then thought that enlightenment and spiritual wellbeing came from one's own individual experience. I thought time spent on personal self-improvement, meditation on God, etc, would lead to enlightenment, but I have become critical of this and am now more fulfilled by putting the emphasis on community. Ideally it is not 'either-or' but I realised that the fullness of the spirit comes not when I am alone but when with friends and in community, even though I've also been drawn to the monk's life, the hermit (and the lone academic) – an internal contradiction! When I was in Chicago, teaching in a school, helping immigrants, and doing community work, I lived in a Catholic lay community with many priests around. It was another lesson that the way to God, for me, is not through the contemplative but via direct practical action. Every time one of these kids wrote a poem or was successfully kept from joining a gang, it had such significance; I could see God acting in it.

I've recently left a relationship with someone who lived a very uprooted life. He valued violent struggle as a means of survival. Living with him for a year challenged my pacifism and I came to recognise fighting as having value. I guess it is important to distinguish between agonistic actions and politics (life-preserving action as a force for good), and destruction with vengeance and negativity.


**Reflections from the
World Conference of Friends:
Kenya, April 2012**

“A traditional Quaker; thou comest to meeting as thou went from it, and goes from it as thou came to it but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?” (QF&P 19.60)

With this quote, delivered at the sixth World Conference of Friends, Noah Merrill Baker of New England Yearly Meeting challenged us to be transformed. After living, eating, drinking, worshipping, singing, discussing and praying with over 850 Friends from around the world and across the theological divisions, did we leave the conference as we came, or were we transformed?

Within Britain, we are comfortable with a diversity of theology but a unity of worship style: we discovered that in other countries one size does not fit all. Other Yearly Meetings are shaped not only by geography but also by style of worship and theology.

We experienced worship, in all the diversity in which it exists amongst Friends. We experienced joyful singing and dancing, including enthusiastic impromptu conga; programmed worship; silent waiting; and a ‘Meeting for Worship in Christ’. Within our home groups the diversity was personified. For example, pastors spoke at length often to the disquiet of more liberal Friends, whereas liberal Friends’ theological stances often concerned evangelical Friends. Some pastoral and evangelical Friends were not familiar with George Fox’s doings, whilst some liberal Friends were less familiar with the Bible. These differences challenged us: what does it mean to be a Friend?

As the conference progressed, we realised we knew less about each other than we thought. We thought we knew about Quakerism from Britain’s Quaker heritage, but we did not quite appreciate the vitality and number of Friends in Kenya – nine times the number of Friends in Britain. Before the conference, we visited Kaimosi, the site of the original Friends’ mission station in Kenya. Driving along the road from Kisumu, we were struck by the number of buildings emblazoned ‘Friends Church’ or ‘Friends school’ or ‘Friends hospital’.

With the diversity there were bound to be challenges. What do you do when a country’s former president arrives in the middle of a Quaker gathering? Do you stay seated, thus refusing to ‘doff your cap’ and uphold the value of equality; or do you stand, in keeping with the local culture and demonstrate respect to your hosts? Friends were divided. What do you do when an epistle from an LGBTQ committee is removed? Do you vocally condemn this act of intolerance, or do you try to understand local Friends’ fear in an environment where support of same-sex relationships could lead to violence?

So did we come away discouraged by our lack of unity? No, for what united us was our search to understand each other. Over dinner and in small groups, as friendships formed, we discussed our differences but also learned about our similarities. In unprogrammed ministry, one Friend gave a succinct offering: “What unites us is Christ”.

Katherine Talbot and Matthew Gee

Friends World Committee for Consultation is Oxford Meeting’s Quaker collection for June



‘Creating Change’

Sunday 17 June, 3 pm
Adderbury FMH,
Horn Hill Road,
Adderbury

The Adderbury Gathering is an annual lecture for Friends and other interested people, organised by Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting. It’s a free, public event. Sandra Berry, the Director of the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, will be speaking, followed by afternoon tea. This year’s theme is how to create an environment where people can change. For further information, phone Maria on 01869 347179 (evenings), and please get in contact if you need transport from Banbury Station or would like to join a five-mile walk to Adderbury from there.

Adderbury FMH was built in 1675 in north Oxfordshire, on the path to the Adderbury Cemetery. Meeting for Worship is held there on the third Sunday of every month at 2:30 pm.

Overseers?

Anyone new to Quaker Meetings may be puzzled by this word. The term 'Overseer' was first used in the eighteenth century to refer to those providing pastoral care as compared with the primarily spiritual role of Elders (QF&P 12.05). The main responsibility for pastoral care remains to this day that of Overseers.

However, it is not realistic, or for that matter desirable, that those appointed as Overseers should be the only ones to keep a watching eye on others within the Meeting. As a community we all aspire to be sensitive to noticing when others with whom we are friendly may be in need of support or would welcome the sharing of joy and congratulation. Also, where our own circumstances make it possible, we hope to keep in touch and offer practical or other forms of support when the need arises. Overseers are aware that many Friends do this as a matter of course and that much of the pastoral care within Meeting happens in this informal way.

Overseers realise too that in a Meeting as big as Oxford's they will not know everyone. Therefore, they are greatly helped in their overall task if each of us:

- lets an Overseer know about especially happy events in our lives *and* the situations where we would appreciate contact and/or need emotional or practical support;
- alerts Overseers to issues of concern about people, of which they may not otherwise be aware, always remembering first to seek the person's consent;
- keeps Overseers informed about others to whom we are giving support.

By means of such efforts on our part, Overseers can be assisted to carry out their task of building 'a community in which all members find acceptance, loving care and opportunities for service' (QF&P 12.10).

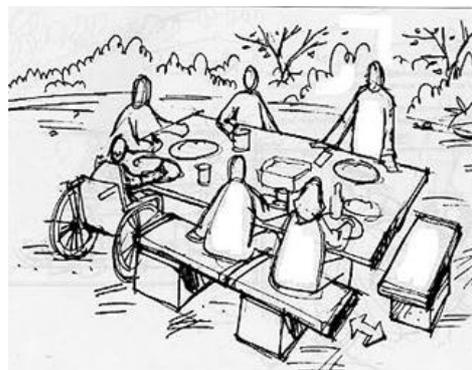


There is a list of the names of Overseers (with photos) on the Meeting's notice board in the front hall of the Meeting house.

Sally Wilkins, clerk of Overseers,
and Janet Toyne

Meetings and Notices

Olympicpicnic



Churches Together in Central Oxford (CTCO) is organising an Olympic Picnic, which will take place at the Iffley Road running track, from noon to 3 pm on **8 July**.

Apart from competitive events for adults, there will be activities and events for children. Members of Oxford Meeting's Children's and Young people's Committee hope to attend, with some of our children.

There is no charge for entry, and we are encouraged to bring a picnic. A van will be serving tea and coffee.

Peggy Heeks and Elisabeth Salisbury
(Quaker representatives on CTCO)

friendly eights

Friendly eights is an initiative where a group of eight people arrange to meet eight times, and decide on any activity chosen by the group. It is a good way of sharing ideas and linking up with other Friends. You are welcome to sign up on the board in the hall or send an email to chili-james@hotmail.co.uk. You may also find out more about friendly eights by talking to me or having a look at www.oxfordquakers.org.

Chili-James Sio, 07581 420315

The next meeting of the **Economic Justice Group** will take place on **Friday 1 June** in the Library at 7:30 pm. The subject under discussion will be 'Debt' with initial reference to *Payback and the shadow side of wealth* by Margaret Atwood.

Dennis Price

CALENDAR FOR JUNE 2012

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Friday 1	7:30 pm	Economic Justice Group — see page 5	Sunday 17	10:15— 1 pm	Fair Trade stall in the lobby
Sunday 3	11 am	Friendly Bible Study	Sunday 17	11 am	Friendly Bible Study
Sunday 3	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Sunday 17	3 pm	Creating Change (<i>in Adderbury</i>) — see page 4
Thursday 7	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults	Tuesday 19	6:30 pm	Friendship Walk (<i>around Oxford</i>) — see below
Saturday 9	11 am - 3 pm	Quilting — see May issue, page 2	Wednesday 20	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing
Sunday 10	11 am	Friendly Bible Study	Thursday 21	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults
Thursday 14	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults	Sunday 24	11 am	Friendly Bible Study
Friday 15	7 pm for 7:30 pm	Friday with Friends — see page 2	Sunday 24	12:30 pm	Bring-and-share lunch — see May issue, page 6
Friday 15	7 pm - 9:30 pm	Young Adult Friends Reading Group	Thursday 28	7:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Young Adults

5 June is
World Environment Day.
www.unep.org/wed

18-24 June is
Recycle Week.
www.recyclenow.com

2-6 July is
Oxfam Water Week.
[www.oxfam.org.uk/
waterweek](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/waterweek)



Oxford's annual Friendship Walk

Tuesday 19 June, 6:30 pm

Starting from the Oxford Synagogue and Jewish Centre, Richmond Road; walking via the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, High Street; and ending at the Central Oxford Mosque, Manzil Way.

There will be nice food at the mosque.

Elisabeth Salisbury

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.

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