

FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

www.oxfordquakers.org

Number 372

MARCH 2010

40 pence

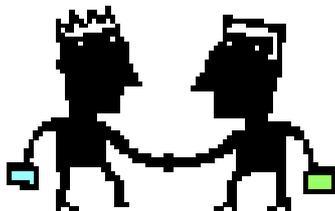
Meeting for Meeting

On Saturday, 15 May 2010, we will have a Meeting for Meeting Day, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., in St Margaret's Community Institute, Polstead Road, OX2 6TW.

The day is designed to help us all to get to know one another better within both Oxford and Headington Meetings; to give us spiritual inspiration; to build our community and deepen our Friendship; and simply to enjoy being together on a Spring day.

There will be several opportunities for discussion, and for getting acquainted in small groups and, at mid-morning, a short talk about the meaning of 'meeting' (in its many forms). In the afternoon there will be a choice of shared activities, including artwork, singing, a deep conversation group, and a guided birdsong walk. This will be followed by a period of worship-sharing on the themes of the day; and we will end with circle dancing.

Do you wish you knew people in your Meeting better? Here's a great opportunity to do so, while enjoying a variety of activities together! All



Members and Attenders of Oxford and Headington Meetings are warmly welcomed. We hope *everyone* will come!

Please bring a festive dish to share over lunch. There will be games for children under six at Virginia Allport's house, 21 Lathbury Road, just a block away, so that the children can join their parents at lunch time.

If you would like to offer any kind of help with the day, please email alan.allport@psy.ox.ac.uk. For further information you may also contact Bridget Walker, Naomi Morris, or Tanya Garland.

Alan Allport

From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

The life of a religious society consists in something more than the body of principles it professes and the outer garments of organisation which it wears. These things have their own importance: they embody the society to the world, and protect it from the chance and change of circumstance; but the springs of life lie deeper, and often escape recognition. They are to be found in the vital union of the members of the society with God and with one another, a union which allows the free flowing through the society of the spiritual life which is its strength.

From *QF&P 10.04*,
William Charles Braithwaite, 1905

Deadline for contributions to the April 2010 issue: noon, Friday 19 March

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

Equipping for Ministry – an Update

It's now just over a year since I started the two-year Equipping for Ministry course at Woodbrooke. One of my reasons for doing this course was to deepen my spiritual life, and hopefully that of Oxford Meeting. At the Friday with Friends evening last June, where we looked at 'What do I do in Meeting?', Naomi Morris and I discovered that we were both interested in experiencing longer Meetings for Worship (MfW), perhaps as Early Friends may have held them. We have now held four extended MfW, at which clocks and watches are removed and lunch is eaten in silence, before having a time for sharing our experiences and a further period of silent worship, lasting about four hours in total. We have found these days deeply enriching.

I am also interested in holding Quiet Days during which we can experiment with other ways of deepening our spirituality. In December Jenifer Wates led a Quiet Day on the theme of the Burning Bush. As Jenifer said in her article about the day: *'To have longer in that quietness allows us to reach more deeply into the inner space, to find our centre and rest in it.'*

I have booked five dates for 2010 for extended MfW and Quiet Days (*see notice p. 5 or Quaker notice board*). I hope to alternate extended MfW with themed Quiet Days, led by different people. If you have suggestions for themes for a Quiet Day, please let me know. I hope to be able to offer a day of Ignatian exercises. More details will follow.

During the autumn I enjoyed reading a book of essays on 'The Quaker vision of Gospel Order' by Lloyd Lee Wilson, a Conservative Quaker from North Carolina. He wears plain dress and uses the traditional "thee" and "thou" address, and each essay addresses a facet of the faith and practice of Conservative Friends. OX2 Friends held a discussion on one of the essays in his book in which he describes the characteristics of the Quaker *gestalt*, and discusses the differences between it and the gestalt of the mainstream culture. I plan to attend a Woodbrooke course on Spiritual gifts in May, led by Thomas Swain of Philadelphia YM.

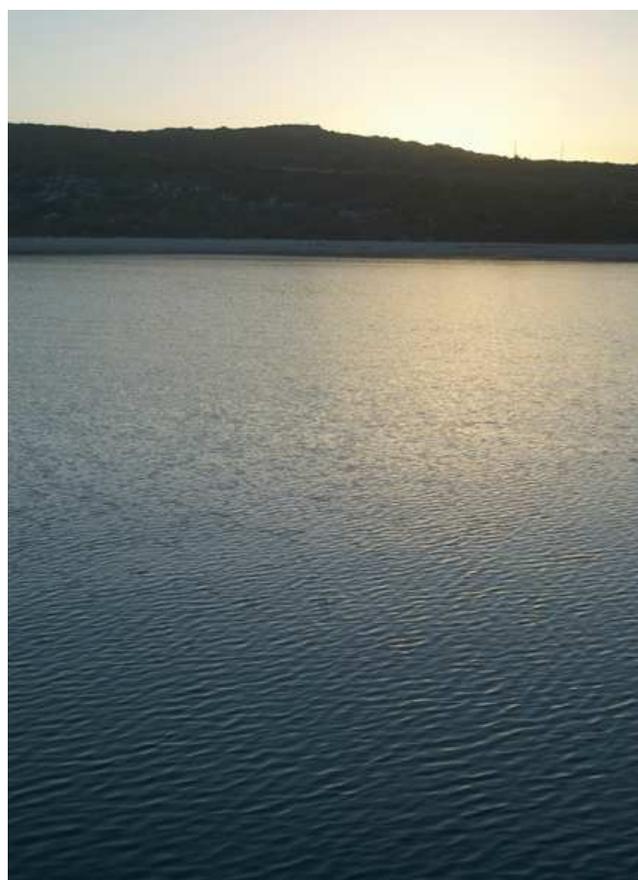
I am now reading a wonderful book by an American rabbi, Marcia Prager, called *The Path of Blessing*.

'A simple Hebrew blessing is a powerful thing – a one-minute, deeply meditative exercise exploring

the nature of the Creative Force we call God and the dynamic relationship between God, human consciousness, and the unfolding universe ... Through the practice of blessing we develop an ever deepening receptivity to the abundant love and joy flowing through Creation. We learn to accept that love, absorb it into our souls, and offer it back to the source with joy.'

In June I will attend a Woodbrooke course on Jewish Spirituality and I'm reading a book by one of the tutors, Howard Cooper, called *The Alphabet of Paradise*. One or two people have said they would like to read some of the same books that I am reading and then to discuss them. If anyone else would like to join us please let me know.

Tina Leonard



Seven Quakers and civil liberties

There is growing concern about the erosion of civic liberties in our increasingly authoritarian state. Now we have a specific Quaker view from seven Friends from a variety of backgrounds. While the focus is on Britain – for example, on the rights of asylum seekers in this country, or of the Moslem population of the London Borough of Newham – other contributors set their comments in a global context. John Lampen writes of community development in Western Uganda and the former Yugoslavia, and Peter Bolwell considers the sinister constitutional changes which have taken place in the name of ‘protecting our citizens against terrorism’.

Roger Iredale identifies three major engines of change: a highly authoritarian government, facilities for massive storage of personal data, and the privatisation of many services previously provided by the state – with resultant lack of accountability.

These are carefully argued essays, with writers making the case for action now. They emphasise Quakers’ testimony to equality and their history of opposing injustice, yet it is admitted that, on some issues, we may be more effective by joining one of the existing pressure groups.

This booklet is – as intended – disturbing to read. It also presents a challenge: ‘How much further will we allow things to slide?’ So far, Britain Yearly Meeting has been reluctant to see this as a ‘fully-fledged Quaker concern’. Perhaps wider support is needed from members. Up to the present, claims Janet Toye, ‘little has been done to make the Quaker voice heard’. It is for us now, in local and area meetings, to address the fears expressed here.

Peggy Heeks

Seven Quakers and civil liberties: personal liberty and the authoritarian state. Quaker Civil Liberties Network, 2009.

Copies of the booklet priced £2 are available from Janet Toye. There is already a copy in the library.



Friday with Friends

These are held in the Garden Room at FMH. The sessions run from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. For further information please contact: Ellen Bassani (01865 724567 contessabassani@talktalk.net) or Diana Biddlestone (01865 858810 diana.biddlestone@btinternet.com). The next four are as follows:

5 March: *Asylum Welcome and Human Rights*, Janet Toye.

An opportunity to meet Sarah Parkinson, the senior chaplain at Campsfield House.

26 March: *Talking Money – We are Banking on your Attendance!*

Jenny Buffery and Sarah Lasenby with Ruth Kim. A space to explore our attitudes to talking about money and how this affects the choices we make in giving financial support to what we value.

9 April: *What makes a meeting Quake?* Derrick Whitehouse.

Many Quaker meetings are struggling to survive, develop and grow spiritually. By focussing on ways of diagnosing cultural difficulties, on developing the interactive skills needed to deal with contingencies that emerge, and then on meaningful worship and discernment, a truly covenanted community and collective social witness will be inspired and meetings will flourish.

23 April: *Belonging to the Society of Friends – Does membership matter?* Leslie Durham.

Many people grow into the Society of Friends by taking responsibilities in Local and Area Meeting but never apply for formal membership. This is a space to look more closely at the various reasons for this and the implications for the Society.

