



FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

Number 392

NOVEMBER 2011

40 pence

What will you be doing on Remembrance Day?

After a valuable discernment process in recent Local Business Meetings, Oxford Quakers affirmed the continuing importance of the peace vigil held outside the Meeting House on Remembrance Sunday. All are welcome on Sunday 13 November, from 10:30 am until the end of the service and parade in St Giles. Penny Ormerod and Sue Smith will sell poppies after Meeting for Worship on Sundays between now and then, along with copies of the statement agreed at LMWB in October on why Quakers continue with this witness. It is hoped that people from other churches and peace groups will join our witness. White poppies can also be bought as usual from the warden's office every day until 13 November (suggested donation: 50 pence). For more information:



[www.quaker.org.uk/
working-peace](http://www.quaker.org.uk/working-peace)

Sue Smith

Last month the editors asked you two questions: what, as a Quaker, will you be doing on Remembrance Sunday? What would you like us as a Meeting to do on that day? We wish to thank everyone for their responses. **BPM**

"After listening to the thoughtful discussion at Business Meeting at the beginning of October, I

have decided I will probably stand out in front of the Meeting House with the group of Quakers witnessing for peace. In the past I have left this to others, but I do want our opposition to war to be seen. If we don't stand up, who will? There may be others who feel the same, so we do not speak just for ourselves as an isolated group, but for the many people looking for ways to avoid war."

Jeanne Warren

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From Quaker Faith and Practice

The peace testimony is about deeds not creeds; not a form of words but a way of living. It is the cumulative lived witness of generations of Quakers... The peace testimony is not about being nice to people and living so that everyone likes us. It will remain a stumbling block and will itself cause conflict and disagreement. The peace testimony is a tough demand that we should not automatically accept the categories, definitions and priorities of the world. We look to the Spirit, rather than to prescriptive hypothetical statements. The peace testimony, today, is seen in what we do, severally and together, with our lives. We pray for the involvement of the Spirit with us, that we may work for a more just world. We need to train to wage peace.

QF&P 24.11 London Yearly Meeting, 1993

Deadline for contributions to the December 2011 issue: noon, Friday 18 November

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 the Forty-Three pigeonhole at the Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org

Continued from page 1, column 2

“The idea that Quakers are people who walk cheerfully over the world putting everyone else right may be a fiction, but it seems to me we often do our best to make it appear to be true. It is only a geographical accident that our front door in St Giles faces the Armistice Day procession (as it was called in ‘my day’) and I think our response to its being held there should be no more than it would be if our front door were tucked away in a small side-street some distance from it. We might pin up an announcement about our sadness and sympathy for all whose loved-ones had been killed in warfare or in the destructive effects of war. Nothing, please, about ourselves, except a plain identification.”

Dennis Compton

“I’ll be with Quakers, hoping hard for a more peaceful world. But for me the day is to support people grieving for the victims of war. There will be uncomfortable shared feelings in my family — grandfathers fought on opposite sides in the Second World War.”

Ursula Howard

“If someone says ‘Remembrance Sunday’ to me, my first image is of men in military uniforms, menacingly marching with guns through quiet streets and into peaceful places of worship, to glorify the killing of foreigners by the British military. I’m usually relieved to be able to escape to a Meeting House, where I can give thanks that I live somewhere where soldiers on the street are not an everyday reality. I can see that for people who have been personally affected by war, an annual time for remembrance can be useful. However, for me, Remembrance Sunday is simply a display of military might to celebrate victory in a war which ended decades before I was born. It is something of which I have never been a part and in which I never want any part.”

Matthew Gee

“On Remembrance Sunday I will be standing outside with the Quaker group – with great trepidation, because so many people have expressed unhappiness about what we’re doing. I’ll join in the hymns and the worship, and will remember my grandfather.”

Jenny Buffery

“This year I face a dilemma. As a new local councillor I want to avoid any action that appears

disrespectful to the memory of members of the local community who lost their lives in conflict. My quarrel is not with those who were sent to fight but with those who sent them. This year I expect to wear a white poppy and attend a wreath-laying ceremony for the first time.”

Diana Biddlestone

“I’m thinking to go up to London to the Cenotaph. I’ve never done it and think I should once. My feeling of gratitude to two generations who gave their lives for the peace and freedom in which I live is overwhelming.”

Daphne Hampson

“Elisabeth Salisbury and I, since we represent Oxford Friends on Churches Together in Central Oxford, plan to continue in that role on Remembrance Sunday by going to stand during the service in front of St. Giles Church with our CTCO friends. We feel this is the Friendly thing to do.”

Marigold Best



“On Armistice Day, I am painfully aware of the grotesque loss of life and the grief that results. The 11th of November rarely passes without me weeping for the mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, husbands, wives and friends that sustained the unbearable loss of a loved one.”

Ellen Bassani

“I’ll attend our city’s service but *QF&P* 24.19 puts me off the red poppy appeal. I’ll wear the symbol of the Peace Pledge Union instead, and pray for the power of all acts testifying towards pacifism.”

Mark Ebdon

“If I am honestly witnessing my belief about peace, and someone is upset, maybe they need to be. Being upset is not so bad. I have learnt some of my most important lessons in life by having my cherished beliefs upset. It may have been uncomfortable at the time — so what? Someone loved me enough to tell me the truth. I can only be offended by a truth I don’t want to accept.”

“It is impossible to banish offence from our lives. Someone is always going to be offended by something; that is their right and privilege. If I try to avoid all possible offence, I shall eventually say nothing.”

Alan Mynall

“On Remembrance Sunday I will probably go to 9:30 Meeting and then stand quietly outside the Meeting House just as we used to do. It seems

perfectly fitting to me that we should remember with compassion all those who have died and suffered as a result of war and that we should pray for peace in silence.

“Is it essential that we have a ‘policy’ on what to do on Remembrance Sunday? Should we perhaps recognise and respect the strongly felt difference of opinion within the Meeting and simply each one of us try to ‘live that life which takes away the occasion for all war’ in our own individual way?”

Jo Dobry

“I shall probably do what I’ve done in the past which is to stand outside the Meeting House, together with other Friends. We have usually had a banner or sign of some sort. We have a very clearly stated Peace Testimony. It is, and always has been, up to each of us to interpret it in our own individual way. Moreover, while we may not be in complete unity with the way each Friend interprets the Testimony, we assume that their interpretation is a matter of conscience based on careful thought.”

Deborah Filgate



Illustration by Diane Browning

Oxford Quaker Quilters

A number of Oxford Friends have been meeting in the Garden Room (sometimes in the Long Room) for some hours on about eight occasions each year since about 1999, creating patchwork quilts. Each takes about two years to complete. It starts as a

pile of fabric pieces of assorted colours and prints, but all of the same type of pure cotton fabric, of medium weight, prewashed to avoid shrinkage and ‘colour run’. It finishes up as a light warm quilt of single-bed size. The fun is in choosing an overall design, cutting up the fabric into numerous pieces and reassembling them in a distinctive pattern, playing with colours and shapes. Then there is the stitching together, making up the quilt with a lining and soft-filling, and after that hand-stitching the three layers together, and stitching ornamental borders. It is a slow and elaborate process, but truly creative, since it brings a special order out of chaos, so there is philosophical meaning and charm, as well as fostering of firm friendships among the participants.

The Quilting Group has made about ten quilts altogether, and most have been given away. One was given to the Luther Street Medical Centre and hangs on the wall over the reception desk. It has an abstract pattern composed of several hundred two-inch squares of many colours: its intention is to cheer, and to express affection for homeless people coming in to the Centre.

We now have two finished quilts which need good homes. This time we are planning to sell them to raise funds for Oxford Meeting to help to pay for the recent work to improve comfort and appearance of the Meeting House, for example new decoration and tiles in the toilets and kitchen, and insulation on the walls, ceiling and floor of the Library. You may have noticed the work going on. Do take some time to appreciate these improvements, which will of course help greatly to reduce our carbon footprint, as well as to increase our comfort. Help in meeting their cost from the sale of quilts would be welcome.

Quakers do not gamble so we would not consider a raffle, but we suggest that we have a *sealed bid* for each of the two quilts. They will be on display several times (perhaps in the Library on some Sundays; this will be announced), and you could see them on 3 December when ‘QQuilters’ next meet and then judge for yourself what each quilt is worth. Bids in sealed envelopes can be made, on a date to be announced, and the two highest bids will be accepted.

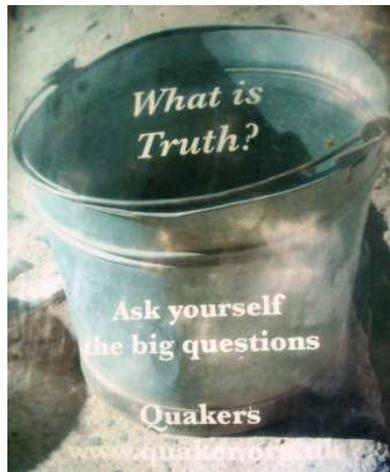
Kate Joyce and Dinah Lintott

Reflections on truths and Truth

A poster formerly outside '43' exhorted us to investigate the nature of truth; the university motto equates the light of truth with Christian religion. We're told that Quakers believe that truth or its perception is always provisional (*QF&P* 26.39). Going further, one could say that truth is functional: it's what works. What works is what solves problems. Problems, by definition, are contextual. Thus truth is contextual – which is *not* to say that it's flexible or contrived – our context being our environment, both social and physical, and this determines our beliefs and so our behaviour.

An important take-home message of Christianity (and all humane religions, shorn of their sometimes rococo trappings) is that we should be nice to each other. Being good makes sense: the biggest problems facing us, as ever, concern how we live with each other and with finite resources. Thus, if Christianity or any other belief system, rather than any parochial version, effectively addresses these issues, then accordingly it's true – there's nothing metaphysical in this – and the rest is froth, with intellectual and behavioural accretions ranging from the quaint to the grotesque.

Our brains, like all biological entities, have evolved to adapt their possessors to survive in a changing environment in order to spread their genes. This is nature. Prayer, like various other similar techniques, especially if disciplined and systematic, may give access to brain biochemistry and neural structures, promoting their rewiring and reconfiguration, so altering brain function. By challenging the existing mind-set (an often stultifying product of early programming), prayer can facilitate receptivity and expand awareness. Ideally, this tunes the mind and adapts the pray-er to circumstances that would otherwise adversely affect the mind/brain and so the wellbeing of the entire organism. Hence praying for guidance and for relief from personal suffering may work (i.e. embody truth); praying for rain etc doesn't work – even if we comfortingly delude ourselves that it does: it might solve the problem of needing to feel good, but it won't solve the problem of drought.



Our truths are not out there, fixed and absolute and which, in our conceit and insecurity, we fondly imagine we can access. Truth develops as we do, as our experience increases; it's not to be discovered or even created: we grow into truth. Beliefs that work (i.e. are true) when we're four, e.g. in response to the need for simplicity and consistency, don't (usually) work when we're forty.

It might sound postmodern and circular, but any truth in the above is only such if it fits with existing conditions, such as our increasing understanding of what we are and how our brains work as problem-solving organs, generating beliefs in response to environmental stimuli.

However, we may have 'experiences' (for want of a better word) that are beyond belief, beyond all our relative, partial truths. This Truth deeper than truth, with facets of love and beauty and wonder and so on, is beyond anything that can be conceived or articulated, no matter how clever or sublime we try to be, for it is non-cerebral.

Searching for Truth is hazardous – and claims to possess it are

dangerous delusions. The search itself is Truth, for it's said that Truth is life, (John 14:6). This Truth is to be lived – and radical surrender in prayer without fixed beliefs, as in Quaker Meetings, can be a valuable tool to help us realise this – but the hard part is the ensuing integration of our truths with Truth, the rational with the mystical, the aim being integrity.

Dave Dight

OXFAP, Islam, and Poverty

Earlier this year, Oxford Friends Action on Poverty (OXFAP) organised a Friday with Friends to learn about the Islamic approach to tackling poverty.

Councillor Mohamed Altaf Khan was able to speak from his experience as a Lib Dem City and County Councillor, with knowledge of the Muslim community here in Oxfordshire, as well as drawing on his childhood memories of growing up in Kashmir. He explained the concept of the *zakāt* tax, which in Islam must be paid on accumulated wealth and given to the poor and needy. The Arabic word *zakāt* means both "purification" and "growth". One of the most important principles of Islam is that all

things belong to Allah and that wealth is therefore held by human beings on trust. Wealth is purified by setting aside a proportion for those in need, and, like the pruning of plants, this cutting back balances and encourages new growth in our wealth, both spiritual and earthly. In addition to the destitute and the poor, those eligible to receive the *zakāt* include those who are in debt and having difficulty repaying it, the traveller who does not have enough money to complete his journey, those who are new to Islam, and any project which helps Muslims or an Islamic cause.

It was good to have an opportunity to talk to Councillor Khan about the needs of the Muslim community here in Oxford and to explain the work that OXFAP tries to do in reaching out to the “hidden” people who fall through the system. Since May, when Councillor Khan gave his talk, we have received and granted over twenty requests to help individuals. These range from £10 to get a duplicate birth certificate (needed to register for housing and employment) to £100 for winter clothes and boots for an elderly couple sleeping rough. The most moving ‘thank you’ we have had was from the social worker who had managed to get funding for a family recovering from abuse proceedings to have a week at the seaside. We provided some spending money for the children.

For the first time since OXFAP was set up, Oxford Meeting has allocated us a second slot in the collection calendar and so OXFAP is the special collection for this month. The OXFAP Committee have been genuinely moved by the generosity with which people have contributed to our funds already this year, both at special events and through the schedule. Nonetheless, we must urge those who may not have been able to contribute so far to do so because we honestly know just how big a difference every penny can make. Christmas is always a challenging period for us as we want to be as generous as we can with the annual donations to organisations such as the Women’s Refuge and the Porch Steppin’ Stone Centre, while keeping enough in the kitty for emergency hardship requests. If you would like to know more about OXFAP and who we give to, or know of any initiatives you think we could be supporting, do please contact anyone on the committee. And *thank you* for all your support so far this year.

Ursula Howard (convenor), **Jo Dobry**, **Matt Godwin**, **Elizabeth Salisbury**, and **Sue Smith**

Meetings and Notices

Is it something we didn't say?

Please come and sit at the front with Elders at Meeting. We are feeling lonely in our splendid isolation!



Illustration by Catherine Holland

Meetings for Young Adults

We currently meet every Thursday evening at 8 pm for a half-hour Meeting for Worship, followed by discussion or worship-sharing. There are usually six to ten young adults each week, and occasionally up to fifteen. Everyone from age 18 to early 30s is very welcome to join us.

Matthew Gee

Friday with Friends

7:30 pm in the Garden Room, finishing by 9:30 pm. Refreshments from 7 pm.

4 November

Oxford Homeless Pathways
— *much more than a night shelter*
Lesley Dewhurst, OHP Chief Executive
(link Ursula Howard, OXFAP)

2 December and **6 January**
Becoming a Sustainable Community
Alan Allport

9 December
Poverty: local and national perspectives from the Salvation Army
Helen Cameron, Salvation Army
(link Ursula Howard, OXFAP)

CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER 2011

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Thursday 3	8 pm	Young Friends (see page 5)	Wednesday 16	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship for Healing
Friday 4	7 for 7:30 pm	Friday with Friends (see page 5)	Thursday 17	8 pm	Young Friends (see page 5)
Sunday 6	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Saturday 19	11 am - 3 pm	Extended Meeting for Worship
Monday 7	6:45 for 7 pm	Quaker Quest: 'Quakers and Silence'	Monday 21	6:45 for 7 pm	Quaker Quest: 'Quakers, God and Christianity'
Thursday 10	8 pm	Young Friends (see page 5)	Tuesday 22	6:30 - 9:30 pm	OX4 film night at Fiona's house (see below)
Saturday 12	2 - 5 pm	Area Meeting (in Witney)	Thursday 24	8 pm	Young Friends (see page 5)
Sunday 13	4 pm	'Palestinian voices' (see October issue, p. 3)	Sunday 27	12:30 pm	Bring-and-share lunch
Monday 14	6:45 for 7 pm	Quaker Quest: 'Quakers and Peace' (see October issue, p. 5)	Monday 28	6:45 for 7 pm	Quaker Quest: 'Quaker Faith in Action' (see October issue)

Interfaith week: 20-26 November
www.interfaithweek.org

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. Articles and notices are very welcome to appear in the print edition only, and the same applies to calendar items.

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

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

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

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.

LMWB on **6 November** will consider proposals for next year's Collections. Please send your suggestions for ongoing or new causes (see page 2 of the October 2010 issue – www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter) to **Christopher Watson**

OX4 Events For Your Diaries

Thursday 27 October 7:30 to 9:30 pm:
'Pivotal Moments – those key times in our life and spiritual growth' at the home of Jackie Chandler-Oatts (63 White Road, OX4 2JL).
RSVP: 01865 402 929, jchandleroatts@gmail.com

Tuesday 22 November 6:30 to 9:30 pm:
The film *Of Gods and Men* (2 hrs) will be shown and discussed at the home of Fiona Mullins (17 Havelock Road, OX4 3EP)
RSVP: 07731 395593, fionamullins@btinternet.com

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