



FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

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Enquirers' Meetings: Quakers in Focus

This is a series of six informal meetings held on Wednesday evenings in the Library of 43 St Giles for those who have started attending Quaker Meeting recently and all those seeking to know more about Quakers. Arrivals and refreshments at 7 pm, followed by meeting from 7:30 pm until around 9:30 pm.

13 November – Roots and Branches
Jenny Buffery and Val Ferguson

We consider who Quakers are, from our beginnings in seventeenth century England to the present day, and how our spiritual experiences relate to Quakerism around the globe today.

20 November – Meeting for Worship
Tina Leonard and Gwithian Doswell

What is happening in a Meeting for Worship based on silence? What does it mean to 'come with heart and mind prepared'? What is ministry? These and other questions will be explored.

27 November – Quaker Testimonies: Truth, Integrity and Equality, *Jocelyn Burnell and Jo Dobry*
Quaker testimonies are the outward expression of our faith. We consider how Quakers try to speak and act according to the deepest Truth we know. What does it mean to have integrity? How does recognition of the equal worth and unique nature of every person guide our attitudes and actions?

We hear from two Friends about what these testimonies mean to them, and how they have influenced their lives.

15 January – Quaker Testimonies: Peace
Katherine and Matthew Gee

The peace testimony has been a source of inspiration to Friends through the centuries. It points to a way of life which embraces all human

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From Quaker Faith and Practice

The Peace Testimony is probably the best known and best loved of the Quaker testimonies. Its roots lie in the personal experience of the love and power of Christ which marked the founders of the Quaker movement.... Theirs was a spontaneous and practical religion. They recognised the realities of evil and conflict, but it was contrary to the spirit of Christ to use war and violence as means to deal with them....

As a Society we have been faithful throughout in maintaining a corporate witness against all war and violence. However, ... we have not always all reached the same conclusions when dealing with the daunting complexities and moral dilemmas of society and its government.

Excerpts from the introduction to QF&P Chapter 24.

Deadline for contributions to the December 2013 issue: noon, Friday 22 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 newsletter pigeonhole at the Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org

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relationships. We hear from two Friends about what the peace testimony means to them and how it has influenced their lives.



22 January – Quaker Testimonies: Simplicity and Sustainability, *Alan Allport and Tom Thornton*

The heart of Quaker ethics is summed up in the word ‘simplicity’. In attempting to live out our testimonies, we are holding up an alternative vision of humanity and society. We hear from two Friends about what this testimony means to them and how it has influenced their lives.

29 January – Spiritual Journeys and membership, *Jon Brown, Susan Clarkson, Jeanne Warren and Katherine Wedell*

We hear from four Friends about their spiritual journeys and what led them to seek membership of the Religious Society of Friends.

Oxford Meeting Elders

British Quakers, religious freedom, and same-sex marriage

Since our Yearly Meeting decided in 2009 to recognize same-sex marriages in our Meetings, things have moved at astonishing speed. In March 2010 the ban on conducting civil partnerships on religious premises was lifted. In July this year, same-sex marriage was legalized in England & Wales, allowing religions to opt in if they wished, which Quakers of course do.

Parliament, which only in 1988 enacted ‘Section 28’ forbidding local authorities from upholding ‘the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’ in their schools, had completely reversed its stance by 2010. And the driving force came not from the elected House of Commons, but from the unelected Lords. The average Lord is 69 and male: the most socially conservative group in the population. But the Lords passed the 2010 ‘Alli amendment’ by 95 votes to 21. And in the key vote this year, on a proposal to deny the same-sex marriage bill a second reading, the Lords supported it by an even larger majority than the Commons: 390 to 148. The Bill was not seriously challenged from then until Royal Assent on 17 July 2013.

What made a group of (mostly) elderly white males swing so decisively? The answer is religious freedom. An effective alliance of the Quakers, Unitarians and Liberal Judaism (later joined by Reform Judaism) pressed this argument from the start. We insisted that this was a baseline matter of religious freedom for us. We did not want to impose it on other religions, only to be allowed to do it for ourselves. I drafted a letter to the *Times* in spring 2010 along these lines. A highly effective friend (not a Friend) got it signed by a swathe of senior Anglicans including several retired bishops and one serving bishop. I was gratified to hear my letter (also signed by Oxford Friends Jill Green and Stuart White) referred to in debate as “the bishops’ letter”. The *Times* published a thundering leader to go with it, insisting that it was a matter of religious freedom and that Parliament should do what our three small groups were requesting. It did – by a margin I had not anticipated in my wildest dreams.

Since then, I have repeated the argument in two conservative US universities: Brigham Young (Mormon) and Baylor (Southern Baptist). Pleasingly, academics in both places, personally hostile to same-sex marriage, recognised the force of the argument from religious freedom to allow people like Quakers to conduct same-sex marriages if anybody is allowed to.

The most disappointing response came from the serving Church of England bishops in the House of Lords (but not Richard Harries, the retired Bishop of Oxford, who spoke and voted on our side in both debates). They claimed that they had supported civil partnerships and that same-sex couples should be content with those. But it is easy to search *Hansard* online. I (and others) pointed out that they had actually proposed a wrecking amendment that would have destroyed the Civil Partnerships Act if it had not been reversed by the Commons.

This year, nine serving bishops, including Justin Welby, voted to deny the same-sex marriage bill a second reading. None supported it. In the words of my favourite *Advice*, I hope these nine now think it possible that they were mistaken. **Iain McLean**

16 November is the International Day for Tolerance

www.un.org/en/events/toleranceday

Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting



Margaret Webb-Johnson
talking to Tanya Garland

From the age of three to ten, I was abroad almost non-stop, so had rather an unsettled childhood. I was born in North Yorkshire, by the sea, but my father worked in Persia a lot of the time. I was a sickly child and couldn't travel, and only spent six months in Iran when I was three and then eighteen months when they brought in air-conditioning – otherwise I was in England with my mother and grandparents. However, when the war broke out, we were in Iran. My father had to stay in Persia to man the oil during wartime and the women and children had to get out. My mother took me and my older brother (with other women and children), travelling first across land, and then on a boat to India and eventually one to South Africa, where we stayed until the war was over. When we finally returned to England, my grandmother didn't recognise any of us: she had Alzheimer's. My grandparents lived with us, father returned after the war, and we didn't leave England again. I was ten and my brother Peter was thirteen. That was the nicest part of my childhood. I ran wild with the village children, and as long as we came in for meals, nobody worried. We played the most wonderful games and I liked being free. I went to a tiny school of about twenty children and learnt to read.

My mother was a perfectionist, she was super – the house shone and she was the most wonderful cook. I had never been so well fed. My parents had another son, Brian, eleven years younger than me. (Brian was a great kid but he sadly died at twenty after getting a type of jaundice.) My father tried running a small holding. He turned two air-raid shelters into pig sties and had a pig and chickens; he grew all our vegetables, and mushrooms. Then father went back to work with an oil company in London and we eventually moved to Surrey to be with him.

I left school at sixteen and went to Croydon's art school, studying for the foundation year. My

favourite subject was dress design, but before working in fashion, I did a secretarial course to please my parents and only then went into the dress trade. It was mostly work in the fashion wholesale business in Great Portland Street, for a while in furs and hats. I enjoyed it.

I met Stuart on holiday when he was at Cambridge and had a wonderful time going to the Cambridge balls and things. Then he announced he was going to Hong Kong for four years so we got married and lived in Hong Kong for thirteen years. We had our four children within the first seven years so I was a mum doing a lot of entertaining. After each four-year term, we had nine months' leave when we toured Europe, America, New Zealand or Australia. We had lots of adventures and I still feel a bit of a free spirit.

In my forties back in England, I took on a three-year City & Guilds Creative Studies Course (including Art). It was everything to do with flowers – botany, horticulture, the history of flower arrangement and Dutch flower paintings, garden design etc. and after that, I ran a little dried-flowers business. I grew the flowers and dried them in white sand for arrangements – selling locally or privately. Then, Stuart announced, "We're going to Brussels!" In Hong Kong he had worked as a civil servant, and in Brussels he was attached to the Foreign Office, representing Hong Kong. We stayed four years and had a wonderful time. We saw inside the lovely houses of all the embassies and I played bridge quite a lot, which introduced me to really interesting and international people.

I became a Quaker when I was 70, about seven years ago. My mother was a devout Anglican from a big Methodist family, and had a terrific faith. My Sunday school was in a Methodist Chapel in Yorkshire and an Anglican Church in Surrey where I was grounded in Christianity. Later, we married in church but I was pretty haphazard in my attendance. I liked the quietness of Communion but wished they wouldn't speak. I'd change the words in my head. I believe the 'miracles' and resurrection happened, but I consider the church is patriarchal and I didn't like phrases like, 'miserable offenders'! When a friend took me to Oxted Quaker Meeting I felt, 'this is where I belong.'

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There was just a very nice feeling of being accepted in a way I hadn't felt in churches. Oxted had talks on the testimonies and I read a lot about Quakers too. When I visited Oxford to see my daughter I would attend Oxford Meeting.

Where we lived was very isolated. In winter, if it snowed, we couldn't get out. I wanted to be nearer Amanda in Oxford who was a single mum needing more help and to be on a bus route. We moved to Oxford two years ago and are very happy. Apart from family, art has been the main interest in my life. I still go to life drawing classes and still paint or draw most days.

Euston, We Have a Problem!

Sorry about the title but I just couldn't resist, especially as it's not far wide of the mark. I'm fairly sure that we do have a problem, although I'm less sure that our friends from head office can provide the solution. What is the problem? Well, it's definitely not a main B bus undervolt (ignore that if you're not a space geek); it's to do with welcoming, but please don't let that stop you from reading on!

Welcoming was something we talked a lot about at a Woodbrooke training course I attended recently. The Friends House outreach team asked us to think not only about our initial welcome for newcomers, but also about our follow up. We didn't come to any firm conclusions – we're Quakers, after all – but I did conclude that this is an area where Oxford Meeting has a problem.

I was reminded of this when a newcomer to our meeting said they were finding it difficult to connect with what's going on, and to find someone with time to answer their questions. Everyone is so busy.

It's the 'sea of backs' problem again. When you go into the Garden Room after meeting, you see nothing but groups of people in huddles, all engrossed in conversation. And the noise level is oppressive, especially if, like me, you have poor hearing. This is not a criticism; those after-meeting conversations are undoubtedly

necessary and it's hard to imagine where else and when else they could take place.

Nevertheless, for some people, they make the Garden Room a daunting and unwelcoming environment. In fact, after more than two years attending Oxford Meeting, I still sometimes feel I can't face the Garden Room melee, and I have to slink off to find a quiet corner.

What's the solution? Perhaps it's not rocket science! (OK, enough NASA references, I'll stop now.) How about a friendly comfortable meeting in a less frenetic environment, like the library?

I suggest pitching it as a 'tranquil meeting', which is by no means limited to newcomers – anyone with a topic or question they'd like to discuss in a warm, relaxed environment would be welcome, irrespective of how long they'd been coming to meeting. The only proviso would be that tranquil meeting would be an informal discussion involving everyone, rather than the dozens of separate 'huddle discussions' that characterise the Garden Room.

At the tranquil meetings, we'd need at least one person who knew a little about Oxford Meeting to offer guidance and possibly a few answers. However, I see these persons as facilitators – people who may not know the answers, but usually know where to find them. In other words, they don't necessarily have to be elders or overseers. Who'd be crazy enough to volunteer though, especially as volunteering is apparently, very unquakerly? Hmm. I wonder...

Keith Wilson



University Lectures

Some of the below lectures are intended for specialists and some for a general audience. For details, do a text search on the lecture title in *The Gazette*: <http://tinyurl.com/LecturesAutumn>

- *The future: six drivers of global change* (Al Gore, 5:30 pm, Thursday **31 October**)
- *The future of press regulation in the United Kingdom* (David Hunt, 5 pm, Friday **1 November**)
- *Politics in action: Gandhi, the Gita and modern times* (5 pm, Monday **4 November**)
- *An agenda for peace in the "peace versus justice" debate* (5 pm, Tuesday **12 November**)
- *The Underground Railroad and the struggle against slavery* (5 pm, Tuesday **12 November**)
- *The women's movement – 30 years on: "Did the Earth move?"* (Helena Kennedy, 2:30 pm, Wednesday **13 November**)
- *War veterans: memory and storytelling* (5:30 pm, Wednesday **13 November**)
- *A global standard for reporting conflict* (Jake Lynch, 2 pm, Wednesday **20 November**)
- *Is it possible to have a good bank which is trusted by all in society and generates real value for the communities it serves?* (Hector Sants, 5:30 pm, Thurs **21 November**; booking required)
- *The political origins of global justice* (5 pm, Thursday **28 November**)
- *Before the democratic peace: racial utopianism, empire and the abolition of war* (5 pm, **29 Nov**)
- Title TBD (Simon Jenkins, 5 pm, Fri **6 December**)

Here are four seminar/lecture series:

- *Meditations from purgatory: Kant, Freedom and Happiness* (5 pm, **29/30 October** and **5/6/12/13 November**)
- Seminars on science and religion (8:30 pm, preceded by drinks; Thursday **7/21 Nov, 5 Dec**)
- Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture: *Truth and uncertainty* (5 pm, Tuesday **29 October, 5/12/19/26 November** and **3 December**)
- *Democracy and decision making: overcoming gridlock and short termism* (3:30 pm, Thursday **7/14/21/28 November** and **5 December**; registration required). Includes 'Reconciling human and planetary needs' and 'Developing effective and equitable global health systems'.

Friday with Friends

7 for 7:30 pm
in the Garden Room

1 November:

Cycling adventurously



Led by Becky and Roger Riddell. Come and hear about our recent 3,484-mile cycle trip across the USA from Los Angeles to Boston. Perhaps you will be inspired to "live adventurously" too.

22 November: *Carbon emissions*

Led by the Environment and Economic Justice Group, we'll be discussing carbon emissions as the next stage in Quaker action.

29 November: *Eckhart and 'Arabī*

Led by Rupert Booth. See October issue, p. 5

Christmas Lights Festival: Traffic closure

7 pm on Thursday **21 November**
to 6 am on Monday **25 November**

St Giles will be closed to traffic, as will Woodstock Rd up to Bevington Rd. **Ursula Howard**

Let your Light Shine!

Do you know what spirit-given gifts you have? There will be a day workshop, celebrating and exploring what makes us unique, led by Tina Leonard, Matthew Gee and Pam Roberts on **25 January** at FMH, from 10 am to 4 pm. Recent participants have found this to be a life affirming experience – do join us! Please pick up a leaflet from the entrance hall for more information and for a booking form. **Tina Leonard**

New website

www.oxfordquakers.org has a new look and feel as a consequence of recent efforts to improve its plumbing underneath (see LMWB minutes 101/09, 32/10, and 25/11, and their follow-through minutes). Many thanks to Rhonda Riachi, Sandra Figgess, Dave Dight, Alyn Still, Keith Wilson, and others for their help.

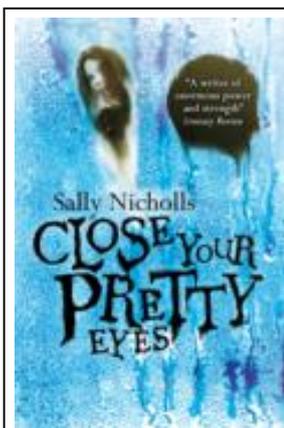
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Suggestions about the new site are welcome, as always. **Ruth Mason and Mark Ebdon**

CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER 2013

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Friday 1	7 for 7:30 pm	Friday with Friends — see page 5	Wednesday 20	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing
Sunday 3	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Wednesday 20	7:30 pm	Enquirers' Evening — see page 1
Saturday 9	7 pm	Sally's book party (<i>at Blackwell's</i>) — see below	Friday 22	7:30 pm	Friday with Friends — see page 5
Sunday 10	10:30 am	Area Meeting (<i>in Faringdon</i>)	Sunday 24	12:30 pm	Bring-and-share lunch
Sunday 10	10:30 - 11:30 am	Peace vigil in St Giles	Wednesday 27	7:30 pm	Enquirers' Evening — see page 1
Wednesday 13	7:30 pm	Enquirers' Evening — see page 1	Friday 29	7 for 7:30 pm	Friday with Friends — see page 5
Monday 18	4 - 6 pm	Poems in the Library — see October issue, p. 5	Plus: Friendly Bible Study on Sundays at 11 am, & Young Adult Friends on Mondays at 7:30 pm		



Book Launch

I am having a party for my latest book at 7 pm on Saturday **9 November** in Blackwell's. There will be wine, and cake, and local authors, and books. Children welcome.

Sally Nicholls

Interfaith week is 17 to 23 November

www.interfaithweek.org

Come to Tea: an Invitation to Friends in OX1

Sunday **1 December**: 3 to 5:30 pm

Mark Ebdon and **Peggy Heeks** invite all Friends living in OX1/OX12/OX13/OX14 to tea in Cloisters Lounge, Pegasus Grange. Pegasus Grange is in Whitehouse Road, OX1 4QQ. Please phone Mark (283391) or Peggy (727391) if you need directions. Cloisters Lounge is next to the swimming pool so, if in doubt, make for that.

Save the Date

On Saturday **1 February**, 6-9 pm, there will be a grand party at FMH to celebrate our newly refurbished and re-opened Meeting House and our shared witness to sustainability. Details to follow. **Val Ferguson** and **Alan Allport**

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.)

OPENING TIMES (43 ST GILES)

Wednesday - Friday, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

White Poppies for Remembrance

There is a box of these for sale on the piano in the lobby of FMH. Please leave donation/ payment in the box. During MfW times and office hours you have the option of giving money directly to the person on duty in the office, where more poppies are also available.

White (and red) poppies are also available at the main Blackwell's Bookshop. **Sue Smith**

Editorial Team: MARK EBDEN, PENNY ORMEROD, and BECKY RIDDELL (Joint Editing & Production); TINA LEONARD, DEBORAH FILGATE (Proofreaders); LUKE MARTIN (Distributor and Subscriptions)