



FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

Number 417 (online version)

DECEMBER 2013

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Yearly Meeting Gathering 2014

YMG – just another Quaker abbreviation, or a fantastic event bringing together F/friends and families from around Britain for a week of joyful communion at a beautiful venue at the height of summer? YMG intends to deliver just that. The University of Bath, set on Claverton Down, which sits on the south-east hilltop edge of the city, provides the setting for our event. It's an opportunity for getting to know one another as we grow in community and spiritual learning: discovering the array of interests that make us such an eclectic group, learning about what we do in the world, and exploring spirituality through art and practical activities. Music, painting, gardening, being entertained and just relaxing are all part of the itinerary. And of course, we will be developing our understanding of what it means to be a Quaker today, a theme running through the previous two Yearly Meetings and culminating at Bath.

Inclusivity has been a major factor in all the planning. Families will find a full programme for children of all ages, from babies to Junior Meeting for 16- to 17-year-olds who will be sharing the campus and some of the time with us. Woodbrooke will be running sessions from a new programme for young adult friends throughout the week. And for those of us at the other end of the age range, needing a bit of help with mobility, or maybe sensory enhancement, we hope to have

learnt from previous events and facilities should be tip-top. The site has been chosen for ease of access to both accommodation and the events venue, with a flat walk between the two. For those of you who come alone there will be opportunities meet others, and local Friends have put together a most varied programme of activities on the Wednesday – an 'away-day' for those who want to get off campus.

Every effort has been made to provide for every purse. Accommodation ranges from full-board to self-catering, with en-suite or shared bathrooms. For campers there is a field some ten minutes' walk away, with toilets and hot showers planned. All area meetings should be making provision for Friends who want to come but need support, for transport and accommodation – do speak to your local overseer. Bursary support is an important part of ensuring this is truly a gathering for all, and we should all encourage one another to consider this option. Friend – is there anyone you know who could use a little help, and just needs a gentle prod?

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A reflection

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.

Rumi (1207-73)

Deadline for contributions to the January 2014 issue: noon, Friday 27 December

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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Come along and view our website: <http://groupspaces.com/QuakerYMG/> Online versions of the booking forms will be up and running soon, and paper versions sent to local meetings. And don't forget to tell all your F/friends!

Colin Billett, YMG Bath Planning Committee



Premises & Finance Updates

Wardenship: Many Friends will have met our temporary Warden, Sean Gibson. Supported by Luke and volunteers, Sean has been with us since the end of October and will stay at least until 10 December. Please do pop in and say hello.

Meeting House Handbook: Over recent months, several volunteers, the Wardenship team and the P&F committee have been developing a practical handbook to help all users and volunteers find essential information about how we manage our meeting houses and deal with emergencies. This will be ready in early December and we will leave copies in the library, the office and kitchens. It'll need regular updating, and we'll be looking to you to help us update and correct it.

Fire Risk Assessment: The Ethical Property Company has now conducted a full fire risk assessment for both buildings and left us with plenty to do – including some extra work on the Meeting House before it's ready – to ensure we meet all the safety standards needed. We'll keep you up to date.

The Garden: Stephen Yeo (Garden Manager) has formed a volunteer group, and they have started autumn/winter work on the garden: Virginia Allport, John Gould, Isobel Sutherland and Jill Green have already made a big difference. More from Stephen in another issue.

Our Meeting House – moving back in

All things being well, the Meeting House works will be completed in time for Christmas. There have been a few extra jobs to do, and the odd inevitable hiccup, but we are now on course to hold our first Sunday Meetings for Worship there before Christmas, on **22 December**.

We are asking Friends for help to move back in – everything we moved out on that sunny August afternoon. We shall be moving the benches back in on Thursday **19 December**, from 10 am onwards; if you can spare an hour or so then, that would be greatly welcomed! Then on Saturday **21 December**, 10:30 – 12:30, we need as many volunteers as possible to move the chairs back and polish all the benches. We hope this will be a joyful celebratory action, with hot soup for helpers!

In hope and anticipation,

Ursula Howard, Alan Allport, Val Ferguson,
and **Dennis Price** (P&F Premises Group)

Lunch on 25 December and Changes to Weekday Meetings for Worship

On Wednesday **25 December**, we'll hold Meeting for Worship (MfW) from 10:45 to 11:30 am. This will be followed by hot non-alcoholic punch provided by Anne H. Watson, and then by a bring-and-share lunch at about 12:15 pm. This will be a celebratory lunch, so Friends may like to bring a special dish. Would Friends planning to attend this occasion please contact Anne (01865 862995), or Matthew Gee (matthewdavidgee@gmail.com)?

Our usual Wednesday MfW at 12:15 will *not* take place on 25 December or 1 January. Our breakfast MfW on Thursdays will *not* take place on 26 December, but will be held as usual on 2 January.

Peggy Heeks, Matthew Gee and Anne H. Watson

1 December is
International Prisoners for Peace Day
and World Aids Day

Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting



Kathy Wedell talking to Tanya Garland

How I got to where I am now was primarily through art. As a child I was always drawing. That meant being still, observing things. Art was my primary spiritual education, although I would not have labelled it spiritual. I saw it as simply looking at things and absorbing what I was drawing. If I was looking at ducks, I was completely absorbed in the ducks. If I was drawing a tree, I was completely absorbed in the tree. I've always loved stealing away very early in the morning, going to streams or woods.

Through drawing I learnt important things. Continually observing when drawing taught me not to impose me onto it – it was not about me. It taught me to really look and really listen. It also taught me a kind of honesty – not to be afraid to tear it up and start again if it wasn't right.

I had a happy childhood in Birmingham and attended Selly Oak Meeting with my parents and brother Steve. I was influenced greatly as a child by my parents' backgrounds. My father came to England as a refugee from Nazi Germany and my mother was originally American. The UK was their adopted home. There was always a feeling that we were different, outsiders. At home we ate pumpernickel and pickled herring, Southern fried chicken and Tex-Mex.

At eighteen, I had got to the point where I knew I could draw anything. I then experienced a profound crisis of meaning. I could faithfully reproduce anything in front of me, but what was the point? What meaning did these pictures have? Should I now just go out and buy a camera? I stopped drawing.

The question of meaning simmered on the backburner as I went to university to study History of Art. One course I chose was 'Non-Western art'. I was asked to write an essay on 'The significance of the winter ceremonials of the Kwakiutl' (a cultural group on the Northwest coast of North

America). I thought, 'How can I possibly know the significance of the winter ceremonials if I am not Kwakiutl?'

I did very badly in the essay, but this was in fact the foundation of my subsequent career: a post-graduate course in museum studies at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, then a couple of years working in anthropological museums, before returning to Birmingham for teacher training, specialising in Religious Education. I taught in the city for three years, before moving back to teach in Oxfordshire. The questions I was exploring were: how can artefacts communicate meaning; what concepts are others using to make sense of the world; and what questions do I need to ask to bridge the gap between my ways of thinking and those of other people and cultures?

In my twenties I personally explored other cultures and religious traditions, including the Judaism of my grandfather's family. During this time I also returned to drawing. My answer to the question of meaning had begun to come: I choose and observe the subject; the choice of composition, materials, what to include and what to leave out, all serve to reflect what I feel the subject is saying to me.

In my thirties I returned to Quakers. I found the silence had important things in common with the art work: stillness, listening, what may emerge from the silence mysterious, evocative, resonant, sometimes elusive.

In 2000 I met my husband Stuart at Oxford Meeting and we set up home together in Marston in 2002. The birth of our son Isaac followed in 2003.

In August 2008 our world came crashing down when Isaac was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD), a severe, progressive, and currently incurable genetic muscle wasting condition. Something of the impact of the diagnosis is reflected for me in Roxy Music's version of 'A Hard Rain', to which I listened a lot at the time.

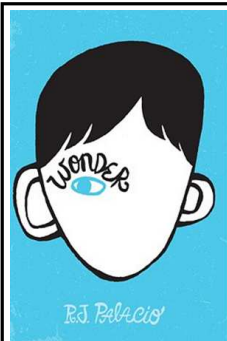
My first thought after getting the diagnosis was, 'Isaac can't have DMD because that happens to other people.' My next thought was, 'We are those other people. There is no us and them.' That was a road to Damascus moment. It was as though blinkers had suddenly been taken off.

Continued from page 3, column 2

After May 2010 Stuart and I became activists, opposing the present government's cuts to public services as unjust, divisive, and based on 'us and them' attitudes. But another lesson of DMD is that activism must co-exist with living life to the full here and now, richly, fully, and mindfully. Music, cooking, fireside evenings, books, films, laughs, and checking out woods and streams you can get to by wheelchair. In the words of Benny and Bjorn: 'Take it now or leave it, now is all we get, nothing promised, no regrets' (ABBA, 'Voulez-Vous').

Friends in Print

- Oliver Robertson** - *The Friend*, 25 October, 'A Place for Mediation'.
- Peggy Heeks** - *The Friend*, 1 November, Thought for the Week: 'Dead or Alive?'
- Maddy Ward** - *The Friend*, 1 November, 'Language and Meaning'
- Keith Wilson** - *Quaker Voices*, November issue, 'In the Silence'.
- Richard Seebohm** - *Quaker Voices*, November issue, 'A reflection'.



Book Review: *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio is the story of August Pullman who goes to school for the first time in his life at the age of ten. August has a very rare genetic abnormality, which has resulted in his face being grossly out of proportion. Intellectually he is very able. He starts the story off in his own words, and describes how his parents helped him make a brave decision to attend a regular school. August's story is then taken up by the friends he makes at school and his older sister Olivia and her boyfriend. The story is sad, funny, brutal and uplifting. It is a story for children and adults alike.

The friend who lent me the book is a school teacher. Her class are reading it because one of the members of her class was recently involved in a serious car accident, which left her with a facial disfigurement. Whilst it is an important tool in helping children to empathise with those who are so obviously different from themselves, it is also a story about love and acceptance. It is a timely reminder about how easy it is to fear someone who is not beautiful to look at, and the danger which lurks within us all of punishing them for doing so.

Kate MacFarlane

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In June, Gwithian Doswell talked about her experience as an

Ecumenical Accompanier (EA) in Palestine and Israel. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) brings internationals to the West Bank to experience life under occupation. EAs provide a protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitor and report human rights abuses, and support Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace. When they return home, EAs campaign for a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through an end to the occupation, respect for international law and implementation of UN resolutions.

All are welcome to a follow-up session on Sunday **8 December** at 5 pm in the short room at FMH. We aim to find ways to support Britain Yearly Meeting's statement of settlement goods. We will also investigate the idea of setting up an email/letter action group working to support other non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

Sue Smith (wishingchair@btinternet.com) and **Gwithian Doswell** (gwithian@btinternet.com)

Fellowship of Reconciliation Centenary Concert and Carol Service

Christ Church Cathedral, **2 December**, 8 pm

The service is the beginning of a programme over 4+ years organised by this multi-agency group.

www.ppu.org.uk/OpposingWorldWarOne.pdf

This year the Actors Company will be performing *Christmas 1914*, a nativity held in the trenches of the First World War. There will be two performances at St Philip & St James Church, Woodstock Road, OX2 6HR on **20 and 21 December** at 8 pm. For tickets and further information please contact me. The proceeds from both performances will go to the Special Baby Unit at the JR Hospital.
Kate MacFarlane
01865 351086, katemacson@hotmail.co.uk

2 December is the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

The focus is on eradicating contemporary forms of slavery, including trafficking, forced marriage, and the forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.

www.un.org/en/events/slaveryabolitionday

The Nayler Passion

James Nayler was one of the most controversial Quakers of the seventeenth century. What most of us know is that he entered Bristol on a horse, with followers singing 'Holy, Holy, Holy', acting out the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. We may also know that he was tried for blasphemy, found guilty, and cruelly punished. His previous history and later life are rarely told.

Now The Leaveners have helped us explore his life further in *The Nayler Passion*, a choral work performed at Birmingham Conservatoire on 3 November. Nayler was a charismatic preacher, a prolific writer of pamphlets and a leader with a reputation equal to that of George Fox. Perhaps he tried to fly too high, led astray by over-enthusiastic followers and so arousing Fox's jealousy. If so, he paid a dreadful price: branded, whipped, his tongue bored through with a hot iron, imprisoned in Bridewell. Yet this very suffering, 'The Passion', brought forth a new spirit, one of forgiveness for those who had ill-treated or abandoned him and a call for trust in God's mercies. This new work is so inspiring that one hopes for a future performance. In the meantime, do read the words of Nayler at the end of his life.

"There is a Spirit which I feel, that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end..."



Peggy Heeks

CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER 2013

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Sunday 1	11 am	Friendly Bible Study	Monday 9	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends
Sunday 1	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Saturday 14	10:30 am to 3 pm	Quaker Quilting
Sunday 1	3-5:30 pm	OX1 Tea <i>(at Pegasus Grange) — see November issue, p. 6</i>	Sunday 15	11 am	Friendly Bible Study
Monday 2	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends	Monday 16	4 - 6 pm	Poems in the Library
Monday 2	8 pm	For concert <i>(in the cathedral) — see p. 5</i>	Monday 16	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends
Sunday 8	11 am	Friendly Bible Study	Wednesday 18	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing
Sunday 8	5 pm	EAPPI session — see p. 5	Sat. 20 / Sunday 21	8 pm	WWI Nativity <i>(at Pip & Jim's) — see p. 5</i>

Wednesday 25 December, 10:45 am & 12:15 pm: MfW, hot fruit punch, and lunch — see p. 2

3 December is the International Day of Disabled Persons

10 December is Human Rights Day

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MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

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

Wednesdays at 12:15 pm at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Tuesdays and **Thursdays** at 7:30 am at 43 St Giles
(followed by breakfast at 8 am)

Sundays at 10 am at The Priory,
85 Old High St, Headington

OPENING TIMES (43 ST GILES)

Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday: 9:30 am - 1:30 pm

Soon we bid goodbye to 2013,
the year of the 1,700th anniversary of
the Edict of Milan. For twelve years
from 313 AD, for the first time in
the British Isles and elsewhere,
Christianity and all other religions were
formally recognised equally.

*Editorial Team: MARK EBDEN, PENNY ORMEROD,
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