

QUIET WAYS

SPRING 2020 EDITION

Along the paths of the imagination the artist and mystic make contact. The revelations of God are not all of one kind. Always the search in art, as in religion, is for the rhythms of relationships, for the unity, the urge, the mystery, the wonder of life that is presented in great art and true religion. [QF&P 21.32]

Editorial

Greetings Friends and welcome to the Spring 2020 edition of Quiet Ways. It has a (temporary) new look as co-editor Keith Harcourt has been much occupied with other priorities and I have offered to step in and publish this edition. I have tried to keep the layout simple in order to be able to send it out to you while the content remains fresh and relevant. I hope that this meets with your approval!

One of the topics that exercises us most at the moment (apart from COVID-19) is the Climate Emergency and there is a report on the thought-provoking Study Day led by Lesley Grahame from QPSW. Because it is, of necessity, quite long, this can be found in Part 2 of this edition, along with general information about all the Local Meetings in SEAQM and a new ‘News in Brief’ section as well as dates for your diary.

In Part 1, there is question and answer session entitled: ‘Going on a Retreat’; an illuminating Triennial Report from Hastings LM of their lively and busy Meeting events; an article on the Healing Ministry at Hastings LM; February’s Meeting for Sufferings report and a fascinating insight into the work of the Quaker Prison Chaplain. I have also added a contents page so that Friends can select individual items to read at their leisure.

The Summer Edition of Quiet Ways will be coming out in June/July so please do send in items – thought-provoking articles as well as reports would be great!

In Friendship, *Sally Aviss* (co-editor)

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PART 1

GOING ON A RETREAT

On 31st January 2020, Rye LM held a Study Day, led by Sonia Relf, exploring the subject and merits of Retreats. This is just a brief report to give a flavour of the afternoon.

The session began with Sonia reading from QFP 2.25 followed by a short period of silence. She then shared with us the personal considerations that had prompted her to go on a retreat, after which she opened the afternoon for discussion and questions which, she said, she would do her best to answer!

Question: What does ‘Retreat’ actually mean?

Answer: In battleground terms, it means retreating out of the fray in order to re-group or re-arm. (This, of course, is not an acceptable definition for Quakers!). In spiritual terms, it is a going somewhere quiet for a time of reflection and can lead to a change of direction in one’s life, be it small or great.

It might be to overcome a particular difficulty in one’s life or to leave behind issues that cloud the mind (eg the political situation in this country, bad government, XR, social injustice etc.) and stop one from doing the things one *needs* to do. As an artist who feels she has neglected her creativity over the years and allowed the demands of ‘life’ to take precedence (work, marriage, children), Sonia wanted to use the time to focus on colour and creativity so that she felt her artistic life hadn’t been wasted.

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For Sonia, her retreat was to be solitary, silent – and on a budget!

Q. Did the retreat fulfil your expectations?

A. Sonia found the silence to be a gift that deepened her personal relationship with God but, when venturing into the outside world, she found that everyone wanted to talk to her – on the bus and when encountering the many rural dog-walkers! She did no painting (as she had hoped) but she did do a little drawing and lots of writing.

From the discussion: There is a certain romance about going out into the desert. For a younger person, the question might be one of searching for their identity; for an older person, it can be a time of waiting, of stripping away accumulated layers; serving as an extended ‘waiting’ discipline.

Q. Did you have a structure, a discipline while on retreat to keep you on track?

A. Sonia said she had a regular routine that worked quite well and she filled two notebooks with what was achieved each day. There was much time for reflection, enabling her to leave behind her personal concerns, political disappointments and the demands of society that break up one’s focus and aims.

She found she particularly remembered individuals who had made a positive difference in her life. She felt that each one of us has the opportunity to be a light for someone else, even without knowing when we are being so and it can be a real surprise when we find out – it may be many years later! Being open to other people is a gift not to be underestimated.

While out in the rural surroundings, in her dog-walker encounters, Sonia considered the concept of being a ‘good dog’ rather than being a dog that runs off in all directions in an undisciplined way. After coming home, much to her amazement and wonder, she was given a copy of the book *Dog Psalms* which equates dogs and their owners to our relationship with God.

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Q. Were you seeking to come to a conclusion and if so, was 18 days long enough?

A. Sonia felt, if she were honest, that she didn't want to come back but felt very strongly that the point of challenge is in bringing the quality of what you find on retreat into your daily life – not living a life on a desert island with only eight records for company!

From the discussion: To retreat is not to escape permanently from obligations and society but to be alone and strive, in that solitude, to find an acceptance of oneself and one's humanity; feeling the joy and sadness of being alive and discovering holiness through being whole.

The afternoon ended with a short period of silence followed by tea, biscuits, delicious home-made cake and much conversation!

Sally Aviss, Rye LM

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THE HEALING MINISTRY

The following quotations are from a booklet entitled “George Fox and the Healing Ministry” by David Hodges, produced by the Friends Fellowship of Healing: “The material world as such is an imperfect appearance, and the only real world is the spiritual world, the only real values spiritual values.” quoted by Henry T. Gillett in *The Friend*, Oct. 17th, 1924.

David Hodges continues on from this by saying that: “If the universe can be interpreted as a vast structure of interacting fields and patterns of energy (or energies), then the traditional and still deeply seated belief in the separation between the material and spiritual worlds begins to break down. From the point of view of the scientist as well as that of the mystic we can see that there is no real separation here – all is essentially one in the divine Reality from which all proceeds – and healing has the unique property of acting as a bridge, of demonstrating a clear continuity between the two worlds.”

He suggests that any Friend who has a sincere interest in the subject, can study and practise healing. In fact there are spiritual healing courses available through the Friends Fellowship of Healing (FFH) at Claridge House, the Quaker Healing

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Centre near East Grinstead; details of which can be found on the website:

www.quaker-healing.org.uk

The FFH is one of the largest single interest groups within the Religious Society of Friends in Britain, with a membership of around 500 including some overseas members. It attracts a great deal of interest and support, in particular at Yearly Meeting where it offers a healing and counselling service and holds its annual general meeting, preceded by an address:

www.hastings-quakers.org.uk

The spiritual power of a group can far exceed the sum of the individual members, and so within the Fellowship there are groups who meet regularly to pray for those who are in need. These groups hold the needs of their Meeting and individual members in the loving, recreative power of God; to be a channel for healing and so deepen the spiritual life of the Meeting.

During our monthly healing group [*at Hastings*] we use silent worship or prayer or holding people and situations in the Light. We sometimes use other terminology than that of the FFH above, with the aim of being inclusive. It is like our Sunday Meetings, although some people appreciate the small group and its particular focus on healing. In this simple approach, anyone from our Meeting may take part and you are most welcome to come and try it out.

We meet on the second Wednesday of each month, in the main Meeting Room, and have just made the start time a little later than before, beginning at 3 p.m. and finishing with tea, biscuits and the usual friendly fellowship.

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Fiona Wright, Hastings LM

HASTINGS LOCAL MEETING TRIENNIAL REPORT 2020

Hastings Meeting continues to prosper, with 26 Friends in Membership (increased from 24 at the time of our last Triennial Report) and 38 listed Attenders. At Meetings for Worship these days there will typically be in the region of 30 to 35 people present, sometimes more.

Meeting for Worship has regularly been held at the Meeting House every Sunday at 10.30 am. In addition, there is almost always some further event or activity organised after Meeting for Worship. Meetings for Business are held on the first Sunday of each month and full minutes are kept. On alternate months a meeting for collective Oversight is held on the second Sunday. In addition, we hold a “sharing” or discussion group on topics of general interest to Quakers after Meeting for worship on the third Sunday of every month, and a “shared lunch” on the fourth Sunday.

When a month includes five Sundays – generally four times a year – we hold a “question and answer” session where newcomers and Attenders are invited to air any questions they may have about Quakerism in general or more specifically about the way things are done at our Local Meeting, and those Friends with more experience are invited to offer their responses to such questions, although we make it clear that such answers are personal to the experience of the people giving them.

Other activities are also organised at other times, generally on a monthly basis. These include a Reading Group which is currently studying “Quaker Faith and Practice”, a Healing Group, and a “circle group” which is basically a social occasion where Friends meet together on a Saturday afternoon to share items of interest.

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Elders are appointed for the care and guidance of the Meeting and of its Members. Oversight is currently provided through the bi-monthly meetings on the second Sundays of alternate months referred to above, to which all are invited.

One of the tasks regularly undertaken once a year in respect of Oversight is the decision which Members and Attenders should receive a Schedule inviting them to contribute financially to the support of the Meeting. The accounts of the Local meeting are meticulously kept by the local meeting Treasurer and in addition are scrutinised by an independent auditor before the accounts are finalised every year. Collections are taken throughout the year on a three-weekly cycle for a list of charities which are determined by agreement at our Meeting for Church Affairs.

We maintain a library at the Meeting House and Friends are specifically appointed on a triennial basis to monitor and organise this. We have set aside an annual budget of £150 for the acquisition of new titles when we become aware of any that are likely to be useful or of interest to Members, Attenders and Enquirers. The annual “Swarthmore Lecture” is regularly added to our stock.

Peter Bolwell, Clerk

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QUAKER PRISON CHAPLAIN'S REPORT 2020

Quaker Prison Chaplain, Medhina continues to visit weekly in HMP Lewes, to see two Quaker residents. They are not inclined to meet together for worship, but it can be offered if they wish to in the future. One resident has newly registered as a Quaker on prison records and as an Attender at Lewes LM.

On an additional day, Medhina supports the Chaplaincy team of many faiths, by offering pastoral support to notified vulnerable prisoners on all the wings. There is a list of those deemed in need of support, generated by the prison administration, and residents themselves can put in an application to see a chaplain.

For more than a year now she has raised awareness of the availability of a six-week distance learning course on 'Facing up to conflict', produced by Alternatives to Violence, for prisoners to work through independently in their cell. More than two dozen residents have worked through the six booklets, and returned them to AVP London for assessment, feedback and certification.

She is in the process of helping to establish a six-week course for 'Living with Loss' for small groups of residents to come together in a Chaplaincy room and deal with bereavement issues. A very common distress in the prison.

A Chaplain is providing an opportunity for staff to spend one lunch each week in recuperative silence, and non-denominational meditation. QPCs hope eventually be able to support it.

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A second Quaker chaplain from SEAQM is in the process of security vetting so that they can support each other, cover absences, and develop provision of worship and pastoral care.

Area Meeting has given financial support to attend the Quaker Prison Chaplains annual conference at Woodbrooke in October 2019, with the theme of Drugs in Prison. Mark Bitel gave a presentation on the Scottish project 'River Garden', a residential rehab programme that has astonishing results. Mark Johnson, an ex-offender, gave an insight into the use of the drug Spice in prison, and why prisoners resort to it.

Four workshops followed up the issues raised:

1. A Jungian psychotherapist examining self-care among chaplains
2. Human Givens theory and its light on mental health
3. 'Change Grow Live' Drug treatment support following release in Birmingham
4. Q&A with Mark Johnson, on insider experience.

In February this year Medhina attended the QICJ [Quakers in criminal Justice] conference, at Woodbrooke where the theme of 'Challenges and Helping Hands' was explored by key note speakers on the 'Magistracy, Learning Disability in the Criminal Justice System', and 'Specific Learning Difficulties'. Workshops included the Phoenix Trust, Modern Slavery, and a Chaplaincy initiative – Silence Inside. The Journeyman Theatre performed *Lock Down* - a very realistic portrayal of the lives of a lifer and a Quaker chaplain inside a prison.

I highly recommend inviting them to perform in our locality, for Quaker Meetings, or sponsored for the public [they take no fee /expenses only] More information available on request.

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At both Woodbrooke conferences the opportunity to meet and exchange support, information, and ideas with maybe 50 delegates goes well beyond the formal presentations held over the weekend.

It is a rewarding and valuable occupation to go into the prison and offer support to the residents and staff, both of a faith based and pastoral kind. The whole Chaplaincy team cooperate really well and work hard to meet the diverse needs of those inside the establishment, and recently had another very positive report from the Inspectors of Prisons.

Medhina, Quaker Prison Chaplain

MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS REPORT, FEBRUARY 2020

During the opening worship we remembered former representatives to MfS that had recently died. After some routine business including updating appointments of representatives and alternates for Sufferings and agreeing the agenda, we came to the first main item.

Prison & Court Register

To be added to the register was Heather Rostron, an attender at Sheffield Central LM, who was arrested during three separate Extinction Rebellion actions, and charged for each of them. Our Friend John Lynes of Hastings Meeting was found guilty at Folkestone Magistrates' Court on 5th December 2019 for breaching Section 14 of the public Order Act on 21 September, in the course of an Extinction Rebellion event. He was given a conditional discharge and ordered to pay court costs.

QCEA report

This was introduced by Joshua Habgood-Coote, BYM representative to Quaker Council for European Affairs. QCEA is based in Brussels in a building owned by BYM. It is supported financially by the yearly meetings of both EU

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members and non-member states, and works with the Council of Europe, NATO and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as the EU. There are two main areas of work, Peace Work and “rethinking security” and Human Rights.

Joshua pointed out that the peace in Europe did not lessen at 11:00 on 31st January. He talked of QCEA’s continuing advocacy of peace issues and human rights, especially for refugees outside of Europe. The use of *Quiet Diplomacy* in bringing together people in an informal, off-the-record setting to build common ground. The Quaker reputation for trustworthiness and integrity is vital for facilitating discussions that lead to change. QCEA is engaging with anti-migrant speech on social media with #ChooseRespect, as well as working on child immigration detention.

Friends were interested and concerned to hear about QCEA’s financial situation. QCEA is running at a deficit, and unless the financial situation changes, current work will have to be reduced. Legacies that QCEA relies on are dwindling and fluctuation of exchange rates do create difficulties in the fiscal year. There was some thought given to how we could continue to support QCEA during the coming year. Individuals, LMs and AMs can make contributions to the work of QCEA through their website www.qcea.org

Ireland YM statement

We had received a joint statement, in documents in advance, from Ireland Yearly Meeting and BYM reaffirming our shared friendship and unity in the face of Brexit. The following sentence is indicative of the tone of the statement: “All boundaries and divisions are human constructs; we seek to see beyond these and relate to each other as Children of God”. The statement was signed by clerks Denise Gabduzda (IYM) and Clare Scott Booth (BYM).

BYM Trustees – upcoming agenda items

As trustees hadn’t met since last MfS, Caroline Nursey (clerk of Trustees) talked about the broader agenda of trustees’ work over the coming months. She

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reflected on how MfS and trustees work together, pointing out that all 15 trustees are members of MfS, and that Trustees are appointed by BYM.

Caroline then went on to talk about the strategic priorities for BYM, some of which are: Our Faith in the future; Work for a sustainable world; Simple practices, including the revision of QF&P; and responding to the Vibrancy project – the testing of emerging thinking.

Trustees are thinking further about how we are going to become a Simple Church – what support do we need from staff at Friends House and Central Standing Committees to make things work better for Friends everywhere in BYM. [NB Regional Meeting at Eastbourne FMH on 28 March – Jonathan Carmichael and Carrie Comfort give a workshop on *Simpler Meetings*]. They are going to experiment with one hub this year, leading to the appointment of local development workers for each region within the next 3-5 years. This is a “When” rather than a “Whether”!

She went on to speak of fundraising – how can we raise funds to match Friends’ aspirations? Legacy funding has fulfilled a purpose, but trustees are not starting any more legacy funded projects. There was further talk of strategic priorities; in future, Legacy Funding will flow into normal running. However, we (BYM) are running a deficit budget this year as well as next year. We can do that OK for a number of years, but the number of years is finite. There is a need to get more income in. Communications and funding have been amalgamated to enable better communication of strategic decisions concerning funding.

Local Development workers – how do we balance part-time worker across several AMs in relation to specialist support centrally? Although some of the Development Workers will themselves be specialists, trustees can’t foresee a lack of specialist support in Friends House in the near future. Trustees and staff understand and are guided by the vision described in Faith in the Future.

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Speaking Out – being distinctively Quaker

Alex Fulton, Impact & Projects Officer, and David Loxton, Head of communications and Fundraising, gave a joint presentation about their work. They sought guidance on two questions:

- Where is the right balance between being compelled to witness and compelled to achieve change?
- Is it better to be distinctively Quaker or to voice all concerns equally?

They talked further about the need for monitoring valuation and learning that is rooted in Quaker values. Making sure that Quakers are seen, heard and understood. “A simple church supported by a simple charity, to reinvigorate Quakerism”.

The need to make choices – “compelled to witness or compelled to achieve change”? Where do we stand on that, or on being distinctively Quaker or should we voice all concerns?

They spoke about developing tools to evaluate how effective we have been. If we are compelled to witness, then we will work on that and achieve the necessary changes. We should practice right living - compelled to witness. What are the distinctions between being Quaker and doing Quaker? We are all affected by different stages of life, things change through time.

Reminders

Representatives were reminded that AMs have been asked to nominate a young person to take part in BYG, the deadline is 10 March.

We were also asked whether any LMs or AMs announced being fossil free?

Diversity and Inclusion

Sophie Bevan and Sam McNair represented us in the second Diversity and Inclusion gathering held at recently held at Woodbrooke. We split up into small groups to consider questions arising from the gathering.

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We need to go beyond thinking about issues of gender, race and disability. We have had a couple of years of threshing, now we need an epistle. Are we asking the right questions? If we are to change society, we need to change ourselves first.

Plans for Yearly Meeting Gathering

The theme of the gathering, discerned jointly with Junior Yearly Meeting Arrangements Committee, is: “Listening, Prophecy & Reconciliation”.

Sustainability will strongly feature with topics such as: climate of exclusion and the climate emergency; allyship – supportive relationship particularly with marginalised groups; prophecy in 1970s about climate change.

Bookings are open, we are asked to encourage Friends to apply by April and also to encourage LMs as well as AMs to prepare. Material is available at www.quaker.org.uk/ym

Peter Aviss, SEAQM Alternate, MfS