

CHELTENHAM QUAKER

NOVEMBER 2012

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Are on Sundays at 10.30 at Cheltenham Meeting House. There is usually a shared lunch on each fifth Sunday. Children are always welcome in our Sunday meetings for worship. If during the hour parents feel it is appropriate they can go with them to the children's room, where they will be joined by one of the children's meeting volunteers.

DIARY (All of these meetings are at the Meeting House unless otherwise stated)

October

Wednesday 31 2.00pm **Elders' Meeting**

November

Thursday 1 7.30pm **Pastoral Care Group** at Nina Odescalchi's – see below for request

Saturday 3 10.00am **Steven Heywood, QUNO** at Cirencester QMH see below

Sunday 4 12 noon **Local Meeting for Worship for Business**

Wednesday 7 2.00pm **Premises Committee**

Sunday 11 1.00pm **Area Meeting for Worship for Business**

Wednesday 14 2.30pm **Book Circle** at Margaret Cooper's

Sunday 18 12 noon **Meeting for Learning**

Thursday 22 2.30pm **Healing Meeting** at Maureen Steffen's new house

Request from pastoral Care Group: A particular responsibility of Pastoral Friends is to support all those in Meeting who wish to be supported. To help us do this, if you expect to be away from Sunday Meeting for some weeks, please would you let a Pastoral Friend know, so that we are not unnecessarily concerned. Thank you.

QUNO Geneva Programme Assistant Steven Heywood will be speaking about "*The Human Impact of Climate Change*" at Cirencester Meeting House, 10.00am, start 10.30am on Saturday 3 November.

Gloucester Meeting are currently holding their Meetings for Worship at 2.15pm on Sundays at Park Street Mission, 17 Park Lane, Gloucester GL1 2DA. They hope to be back having Meetings for Worship in Gloucester Meeting House very soon, but will not be able to use the full Meeting House for at least two months.

NOVEMBER COLLECTION is for Cheltenham Open Door, a local charity which supports vulnerable, disadvantaged and lonely people. They say "we are working to relieve poverty, hardship and social or emotional distress. Our guests are men and women who have been deprived of the comforts and security most of us take for granted and we offer them hospitality, warmth, food and somewhere to relax. Each year we run a **Christmas shelter** at St Luke's Church Hall, St Luke's Place, Cheltenham. Open to guests 24 hours a day from midday on Christmas Eve until after lunch on 27th December. All completely free".

More information can be found at www.cheltenhamopendoor.org.uk and donations can be sent to The Hon. Treasurer, 39 Grosvenor Street, Cheltenham, GL52 2SQ

Friends who are taxpayers are encouraged to send donations directly to the charity, using Gift Aid or a charity voucher (CAF, Charities Trust, etc), possibly adding a note to say that they belong to Cheltenham Quaker Meeting.

QUAKER WEEK 2012

The week was marked at Cheltenham by two evening meetings. Each evening began with a light supper and was followed by three Friends giving short talks about their own spiritual journey. Rowland Carson's is reprinted below. About ten visitors came to the evening on 4 October and about seven on 10 October. We felt that the organisation had been very good and the atmosphere generated pleasant and welcoming.

Items for inclusion in the next newsletter should be sent to the editorial email address or by post to the editor Janet Weyers
by **Monday 19 November** at the latest

NOTES FROM OCTOBER LOCAL MEETING

Quaker discipline: Our Clerk reminded Friends that it is our custom to stand to speak, and wait to be called from the table. Clerks also thanked Friends for their cooperation in preparing the agenda a week ahead of Meeting.

News of Friends: We are sad to record the death of our Friend Olive Betterton on 19.9.2012. Her funeral was at Cheltenham Crematorium at 12:00 noon on Thursday 4th October 2012 after the manner of Friends. Brian Robson has written a draft Testimony for Olive; our Clerk will contact Friends House so as to contribute to a fuller record, and also invites any other contributions, to be given either to him or Brian Robson.

Nominations and Appointments: We appointed Margaret Sheldrick and Pat Dannahy to serve on Nominations Committee.

We agreed that Bill Rowland's name should go forward as AM Trustee.

We thank Philip Paull and Margaret Sheldrick for their work as Trustees.

Julie Stubbs wishes to stand down from Children's Committee. We thank Julie for her work.

How does the truth prosper with Cheltenham Meeting? This will be presented to Area Meeting in November. Contributions from office holders and others are being edited by the Clerks to ensure a coherent whole.

NOTES FROM OCTOBER AREA MEETING

In the morning we had an inspiring presentation from Paul Parker, who has been in place as Recording Clerk (Senior Staff member at Friends House) for 15 months. He told us something of his background: he has been a Quaker since he was 13 or 14, when he chose to attend Quaker Meeting. After university he taught modern languages for about 20 years, and has run many youth activities.

He has been visiting Meetings around the country, as well as meeting with leaders of other churches, politicians and others. He said that he has found that Friends have a newly confident sense of what we are about and where we are going. He said there is a spiritual hunger in society. Quakers have something which is sorely needed in Britain – we don't **tell** people what they **should** believe, but **ask** them what they **do** believe. He said it is often hard to find a religious language that people can understand as there is less shared Christian understanding in society nowadays. Sometimes young people do not just not know the Lord's Prayer, they have no knowledge even of what prayer is.

Friends House staff run the work which we have asked them to do, and he talked about the breadth of Quaker work and how desperately it is needed, for example teaching people non violent solutions in Kenya. Financing the work is difficult, with only one third of the money coming from living Friends, and two thirds from legacies and Trusts set up in the past.

He hoped we would think of what kind of people **don't** come to our Meetings, and think of ways of encouraging them to come. This might mean giving people a "radical welcome" – not just welcoming those who are like us, but expecting those who are different to enrich our Meeting by changing us.

Paul is interested in learning what tools we might feel we need to become a lively creative meeting. After discussion in small groups we shared some of our ideas with him.

Quaker Life Network: This is an initiative which has been developed to enable people who would like to help with Friends' work but cannot commit to a three year term to offer ministry in the form of work for specific tasks. It might be at national level, or with another Meeting. Tasks such as proofreading, speaking, facilitating events, managing conflict are on offer.

For a full list contact our clerk, or Oliver Waterhouse, Quaker Life Development Officer at Friends House, www.quaker.org.uk/qlnetwork.

Nominations and Appointments: We appointed Juliet Chastney (Painswick) as Supporting Friend and Bill Rowland (Cheltenham) as Trustee from 1.1.2013

Quaker Camp: Martin Quick gave an account of the Quaker Camp on the Brecon Beacons which took place recently. Apart from some terrible weather, it sounds as though the 40 campers had a great time, lots of fun and friendship. Next year's camp will be the last week in August, so plenty of time to think about joining this lovely activity.

PEACE GROUP NEWS

An ongoing concern is the increasing use of drones in areas such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Gaza and we have gathered some sheets of petitions which have been sent to Chris Coles at the Drones Campaign, who will add them to others and pass them to the government. Gillian wrote to Martin Harwood MP on the subject and received a positive, well considered reply which was posted on the notice board.

Four members of the Peace Group have been to two Gloucester Peace Group vigils. On 9 August, in memory of Nagasaki/Hiroshima, 18 attended. Paul Henstock, organiser and inspirer, wrote "hopefully some people in Gloucester will be better informed about nuclear weapons and the Trident question as a result of our efforts"

On 21 September, the UN Day of Peace, about 20 people attended, including some new people.

On 3 October we had a very productive Peace Group meeting at which we were happy to welcome June Drummond as Elder and much appreciated her support and encouragement.

The minutes will be posted on the notice board as usual.

Cynthia Baron

CHELTENHAM QUAKER WALKING GROUP

After a difficult period the group is walking again. The walks are held on Saturdays in order to accommodate those in employment. The general pattern is one walk per month in November to April and two walks in the months of May to October. The distance is six to seven miles and the pace is moderate – or the pace of the slowest! If the weather forecast or the conditions are bad, the walks are cancelled.

If you are interested or would like further information, please contact Richard Lacock.

WHY I BECAME A QUAKER

The text of Rowland Carson's presentation at our Evening Public Meeting on 4 October 2012

I grew up in Northern Ireland, in a family where religious belief and practice were taken for granted. We attended the Reformed Presbyterian Church, commonly known as the Covenanters. I am grateful for the knowledge of the Bible that I acquired and the strong moral principles instilled in me. However, I am no longer comfortable with the view held in that church: "We may be small but we are following the only correct path; hence, everyone else must be wrong". For example, we ran 2 mission efforts; one in Ethiopia, for the heathens and one in Cork, for the Roman Catholics, who we believed were just as much in need of hearing the true gospel as those who had never heard of Jesus Christ.

I think my first encounter with cognitive dissonance was about the age of 11. I suddenly realised that on Sundays in church I was happy to accept the biblical story of creation but during the week at school I embraced evolution theory. Up until then these things had been in separate compartments and somehow not bothered me. The realisation seriously disturbed my faith in the Bible as the sole source of literal truth.

As a teenager I became a member of the church and took communion for the first time. This was not the transforming experience I had somehow hoped it might be. I wondered if I was somehow doing it wrong that prevented me getting to the joyful relationship with Jesus that others reported in books and sermons.

It occurs to me now that I never thought of talking about these deep questions with my family or friends or even with the minister — maybe that seems strange, but I guess I felt embarrassed to discuss personal feelings, particularly when I felt it would reveal my failings. I suppose I assumed everyone else was all sorted and I was the odd one out. There were plenty of organised discussions in the Sunday evening youth group, but mostly about Bible study, and correct beliefs and behaviour — no-one seemed to open their own vulnerabilities to the group.

I came to feel that maybe I was spiritually untalented. I already knew how my physical and mental skills were developing - I seemed to work better with machines than with people - so maybe I shouldn't worry and leave the deep religious stuff to the people who had an aptitude for it.

Moving to London at the age of 19 to work was a big change in my life. There were no Covenanter Churches there, but not going to church on Sunday seemed unthinkable. So, with somewhat mixed feelings I started attending the nearest Methodist Church. After the initial unfamiliarity wore off I became more involved, singing in the choir and attending the youth club. Later, while leading a Sunday School group I went through the process of membership along with the young people, but, as before, still felt there was something personal missing from my spiritual life. I had emotional reactions to the words of hymns or sermons but that was not quite it.

Still later when my job moved out of London I attended a United Reform Church for some time. Then, while away for a weekend, I was invited to attend a Quaker Meeting for Worship. I didn't know quite what to expect, but during and afterwards had the most profound sense of having found my place at last. I discovered, too, that the people I met there were happy to talk after Meeting about their own spiritual experiences in a relaxed and informal way I'd never come across before - there was no special "holy" jargon needed.

I came to realise that I'd had transcendent experiences but had not recognised them for what they were because they were outside of the religious sphere - walking in wonderful scenery, feeling and hearing a beautifully sharp plane shaving a piece of timber, being quietly alone on top of a hill, listening to a piece of music. Now in the silence of Quaker Meeting I was - just sometimes - able to experience something beyond the physical or the mental and have what I could describe as a personal experience of the divine.

The formal name for Quakers is The Religious Society of Friends - originally it was "Friends of the Truth". I find that Quakers are indeed a friendly lot. We believe that there is something of God (or of good) in every person, and try to seek out and respond to that good. It can be a difficult search and sometimes daunting even to contemplate but when it succeeds it's rewarding. I found that among Friends I could admit to my doubts and uncertainties without fear of criticism or rejection. I attended Quaker meetings for some time, and eventually applied for membership.

I am a Quaker because I believe that spirituality is a journey, not a place, and for me the Religious Society of Friends offers the opportunity to continue my spiritual journey. As physics has moved from the apparent certainty of Newton's laws of gravity to the uncertainty of quantum theory, I have moved from a certainty that nonetheless never quite felt comfortable to an uncertainty that encourages me to keep seeking.

Rowland Carson