

# CHELTENHAM QUAKER

FEBRUARY 2013

## 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.

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

### January

Wednesday 30 2.30pm **Quaker Book Review** at Margaret Cooper's see below for details  
Wednesday 30 7.30pm **Liaison Committee Meeting**

### February

Sunday 3 12 noon **Local Meeting for Worship for Business**  
Thursday 7 2.00pm **Premises Committee**  
Sunday 10 1.00pm **Area Meeting for Worship for Business** at Nailsworth QMH  
Monday 11 7.00pm **Area Meeting Elders**  
Wednesday 13 2.00pm **Meeting of Elders**  
Sunday 17 12 noon **Meeting for Learning**  
Wednesday 27 2.30pm **Quaker Book Review** at Margaret Cooper's see below for details

**Meeting for Learning: Who I am and how being a Quaker affects my life.** Margaret Sheldrick and Tim Howarth have agreed to speak. It is planned to continue with this topic until March. In April there will be no Meeting for Learning as this is the day after the Spiritual Adventure Day in the Forest of Dean.

**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.

**GLOUCESTER MEETING** are currently holding their Meetings for Worship at **2.15pm on Sundays** at Park Street Mission Hall, 17 Park Street, Gloucester GL1 2DA. They hope to be back having Meetings for Worship in Gloucester Meeting House soon.

**FEBRUARY COLLECTION** is for Carers Gloucestershire. This independent, Carer led charitable organisation supports around 8,000 carers in a variety of ways, tackling isolation and loneliness and, importantly, giving them a voice in the community. Each carer's needs are assessed independently of the needs of the cared for. More recent developments have included support for parent carers, and for those having to care in a country which is not their own. There are groups to support mental health, autism & Asperger's, Parkinson's and MS. Respite care and breaks for carers are an important part of the work.

The address for postal donations is Carers Gloucestershire, FREEPOST RRYK-KTCY-JCUB, GLOUCESTER, GL1 1HX. To donate online visit [www.carersgloucestershire.org.uk](http://www.carersgloucestershire.org.uk) and click 'DONATE NOW'.

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 BOOK REVIEW (Book Club)

The next meeting will be on January 30th at Margaret Cooper's at 2.30pm. The book will be "*Silence and Honey Cakes*" by Rowan Williams. The February meeting will be at the same address, same time, on the 27th, book to be decided. If any one would like further information please contact David Clayton.

**Items for inclusion in the next newsletter** should be sent to the editorial email address (link on Cheltenham Quaker newsletter web page at <http://www.cheltenhamquaker.org.uk/newsletter.php>)

or by post to the editor Janet Weyers by

**Monday 18 February** at the latest

Web address: [http://www.cheltenhamquaker.org.uk/current\\_cq.pdf](http://www.cheltenhamquaker.org.uk/current_cq.pdf)

### **SPIRITUAL ADVENTURE DAY**

Elders are planning a day at the ASHA Centre in the Forest of Dean on **April 20, 2013**. Details of the programme are still to be worked out and suggestions are invited. There is one Meeting room and several smaller rooms plus an eco-lodge in the garden which we can use and they will cater lunch in the dining-room for us and provide refreshments. The food is sourced from their biodynamic garden or other local sources. A list will be posted on the notice board soon for those who hope to go. Cost £28 per person. Details of the Centre can be found at [www.ashacentre.org](http://www.ashacentre.org).

### **REQUEST FROM PASTORAL CARE GROUP**

Pastoral Friends are compiling a list of groups associated with the Meeting, to inform Friends of our various activities. If you are the convener of a group, please would you contact Evelyn Shaw or Tim Howarth with details of when and where your group meets, whether it is currently open or closed to new members, and a short paragraph outlining what you do. Thank you.

**SPRINGBANK:** Paul Parker, in his talk to us, asked "Is your Meeting representative of the community in our area?" Pat Dannahey asked if she could take this forward, perhaps with other Friends, by exploring the possibility of having a Quaker presence in Springbank, a community centre in Hester's Way. We supported her in this. She will try to come back to Local Meeting with a clear proposal.

**DOES OUR MEETING HOUSE HAVE A MINISTRY?** We agreed at our last Local Meeting that our Meeting House offers space for a number of local groups to meet, and we would see whether the Springbank initiative would grow. We were reminded that our mission is to follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit. This will be an agenda item at our February LM to allow time for further reflection and discernment.

### **A Thought For The Day** By a member of our Meeting

It has been argued that opposites are characteristic of human beings. Of these the opposites of light and dark would seem to be universal. They appear in the earliest cultures of Egypt, Iran, Greece and Rome and they appear frequently in the Old and New Testaments.

The importance of the dark as well as the light was brought home to me when I was walking in beech woods this autumn. In the daylight the trees were incredibly beautiful, but when the sun came out the scene became breathtaking. The colours of the leaves were richly enhanced and the whole was transformed by the interaction of the light and the shade. The one seemed to enhance the other.

It struck me that sometimes we may yearn for constant blue skies, but our lives are not like that. They are light and shade. Perhaps it is the experience of the dark in our lives that enables us to appreciate the light more fully. When sharing this thought with a friend recently over a cup of tea, she replied, 'Yes, having recovered from a long and depressing illness, I now appreciate more fully the simple pleasure of this cup of tea with friends.' That set me thinking further. We may not like too much darkness, but perhaps it is this interaction of light and shade that partly defines our lives. Life is not about the pursuit of happiness (or waiting for happiness in the next life), but making the most of life as it is with the light and the shade.

## WHY AM I A QUAKER?

The text of Sal Drummond's presentation at our Meeting for Learning in November

Dad went to Friends School Saffron Walden. Mum is C of E. Mum is a great believer in "doing things properly" and so we were taken to Sunday school. I don't know where my parents went while we were at Sunday school - not church, certainly.

I didn't enjoy Sunday school, and felt very guilty about that. The imagery alarmed me - "sin washed clean with blood", "sacrifice of the lamb", and the stories seemed (still seem) very alien to me. They were set a long time ago, in a culture very strange to me, a hot country. Canaan, Galilee, palm trees, dates, washing dusty feet, travelling by foot or by donkey. All lot of the stories were about keeping sheep. I've never kept sheep. The stories started: "You know when you're keeping your sheep, and....?" and it seemed a really strange metaphor, because, aged 8, I had no shared experience of sheep-keeping to draw on.

Enthusiastic twenty-somethings would lead us in prayer, and tell us that if we opened our hearts, then god would speak to us. I screwed up my eyes and waited for god to speak, and felt I must be a very bad girl, because he did not.

In my late teens and early twenties I became very ill, and learned to doubt my senses. My memory would play tricks. I started to wonder, how would I distinguish imaginings from reality? All anyone has to go on are sensory data. I would focus completely on listening to sounds with my ears, detecting light through my eyes, and often I wondered about God and what I might have to focus on to detect signals on that frequency. I eventually figured it out, and the inadequate phrase "open your heart" suddenly made sense, in the context of "pin back your ears, keep your eyes open" Suddenly, the thing I had been straining so hard to sense, and without success, seemed as obvious as a chair or a table. Atheist friends ask me if I 'believe' in god, and I tell them yes, I do, but it seems an odd way to put it because for me it is like believing in the furniture. I know god is there, so belief seems an odd thing to attach to that.

I am an engineer, a scientist of sorts, and again atheist friends ask me if there isn't some tension there. Absolutely not. What an odd thing to think.

I am not a person who is often sure, nor a peaceful person. I do not pray often, I seem to be driven to prayer by desperation, but when I do, I do sometimes receive guidance and I know it is the right thing because I feel sure, and calm. This sensation doesn't always last, but the memory of it does. I come to Meeting for two reasons: First, to be alone with my thoughts in a safe environment. Sometimes I feel there is darkness my head, and I do not like to be left alone with it so I seek out company, but I find the constant bustle and movement very draining. Meeting gives me a safe place to experience silence and stillness without being overwhelmed by dark thoughts. Occasionally I will feel moved to pray, but not as often as I should. Sometimes I am aware of God when in Meeting, but not more often than anywhere else.

Secondly, I come because I value the shared experience of Meeting. In Meeting Quakers share and accept the real and concrete existence of something very important, very tangible, but almost impossible to put into words. To some extent we skip the words, but there are some words: ministry. For me ministry is a lot like a poem. What is a poem if not a way of nudging people to remember a shared experience? Without that shared experience to draw upon, the poem makes no sense. For me, that's where the Quaker emphasis on "doing" is great. We are involved in an activity when we are in Meeting, we are not just sitting still. We are doing something, and that something gives rise to shared experience. Through that shared experience we stand a chance of communicating the (almost) un-communicable, saying to one another "You know when...?" and feeling a flash of recognition of the unspoken part. There is so much that's different in **thought** between us, but the shared **experience** of Meeting gives us a shared vocabulary. So that's why I come, to share that experience and better understand the nudges that will appear in the most unlikely places.