

CHELTENHAM QUAKER

AUGUST 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.

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

July			
Tuesday	30	2pm	Meeting of Elders
Wednesday	31	2.30pm	Quaker Book Club at Margaret Cooper's see below
August			
Thursday	15	7.30pm	Meeting of Pastoral Friends at Nina Odescalchi's
Sunday	18-25		Area Meeting Camp
Sunday	25	9.30am	Meeting for Worship at Greenbelt Festival see below
Wednesday	28	2.30pm	Quaker Book Club at Margaret Cooper's

The next Local Meeting will be on 1 September and the next Area Meeting will be on Tuesday 10 September at 7pm at Nailsworth Meeting House.

Greenbelt Festival: as usual we have been invited to take part in a Meeting for Worship at the Greenbelt Festival, at the racecourse. It will be on Sunday 25 August at 9.30am. This year our Meeting has been organised by Area Meeting instead of Cheltenham LM. We are asked to let Geoff Kinns or Elyn Mitchell know if we intend to go. There will be 10 free passes.

AUGUST COLLECTION

Carers Gloucestershire support 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 and click 'DONATE NOW'. Unlike money given through the Meeting, money sent directly by individual Friends qualifies for Gift Aid.

Iain Main

AREA MEETING CAMP

This will be held Sunday 18 August to Sunday 25 August at Charmouth, Dorset. Further information in the folder in the Library.

SPIRITUAL ADVENTURE IN 2014

A weekend has been arranged to take place at Charney Manor 20-22 June 2014. More details in due course.

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.

When Pastoral friends meet we hold friends in the Light. If you feel you need support or you know of someone in Meeting who may need support, please tell one of the Pastoral Friends.

Items for inclusion in the next newsletter should be sent to the editorial email address or by post (please note the editor has a new postal address) to the editor Janet Weyers by

Monday 19 August at the latest

Web address: http://www.cheltenhamquaker.org.uk/current_cq.pdf

NOTES FROM JULY LOCAL MEETING

Treasurer/Pastoral Friends: Pastoral Friends have asked for clarification about the correct procedure to deal with requests in confidence for funding to attend courses or for other financial support. We agreed to an appropriate procedure. (see LM minutes for full details)

Premises Committee: 1. The Meeting House fire alarm system has been updated and we will be holding a fire drill one Sunday after Meeting for Worship.

2. It was agreed that we should ask Nigel Smith, as our publicity officer, to send press releases to local media, to the Friend, the BYM website and Area Meeting newsletter about our solar panels, both to encourage others to install these themselves and as Quaker outreach. We are also considering whether to install broadband in the Meeting House.

Peace Group: Gloucestershire United Nations Association have approached us to hold a joint meeting when there will be a talk by Vijay Mehta about his book "The Economics of Killing: How the West fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World". We agreed that our Meeting House be made available as a venue, and that the meeting be advertised throughout Gloucestershire Quakers as a joint event.

The Area Meeting Peace Group is organising venues for the Quaker Service Memorial Trust Exhibition which will be in Gloucestershire for the whole of May and June 2014. It will be in Gloucester Cathedral the first 2 weeks in May. We considered where in Cheltenham might be a suitable venue for the exhibition.

NOTES FROM JULY AREA MEETING:

Membership: The Certificate of Transfer has been received for Chris and Kate Robertson (Nailsworth) from Southern Marches Area Meeting.

The deaths were recorded of Geoffrey Baker (Gloucester), Jean Arnold (Wotton) and Hylda Wilson (Gloucester).

Government Cuts and Welfare reform: the report from Meetings for sufferings included a request that Local Meetings should complete an on-line survey about Local Meeting activities related to this. The survey can be found on www.surveymonkey.com/s/qwelfare.

Keeping of Records: A very helpful paper on this subject was presented by Sue Le Fleming, our Custodian of Records, which answered the questions "Why keep records?", "Which ones to keep" and "How to keep them?"

Area Meeting Link Group: This group of young Friends (11-18) reported on a very enjoyable weekend together which included a wonderful Meeting with all-age worship at Cirencester.

AM Peace Group: A workshop will take place before Area Meeting on Saturday 12 October at Cirencester on the issue of unmanned drones. It will be led by Alison Crane and Jane Mace.

AM Meeting for Learning Programme: A meeting called "Celebrating our Diversity" with an outside facilitator will be held in the autumn. Another meeting on "Plain Speaking" is planned.

QUAKER BOOK CLUB: meets on the last Wednesday of each month. At the meeting on 26 July we will be looking at Henri Nouwen's book "The Return of the Prodigal", published by Darton, Longman and Todd. The meeting is held at Margaret Coopers. It is a very informal gathering with a warm welcome. For more information please phone David Clayton.

David Clayton

HOW TO DO IT?

For those with computers a very good way of letting other Friends know your news is by putting it on Cheltenham NEWS OF FRIENDS. Your news is then sent out by **email** to all other Friends in our Local Meeting who have their name on the list. The address to send your information to is news_of_friends@cheltenhamquaker.org.uk.

If you haven't a computer, just tell Philip Paull who sends out the Cheltenham NEWS OF FRIENDS.

If you want to let the whole of AM have your news, send it to Eliot Walker (e-mail address in the AM List of Members)

This is not the same as the Cheltenham newsletter, the address for which (for sending something for inclusion) is newsletter@cheltenhamquaker.org.uk or by post to the editor. The newsletter is printed out for those who prefer to read it this way and is available at Meeting, or sent to those who cannot come. It can also be accessed on the Quaker website <http://www.cheltenhamquaker.org.uk/current_cq.pdf>. The webmaster (at present Rowland Carson) puts it on the website and sends a notice out to all those who receive the Cheltenham NEWS OF FRIENDS each month to tell them it is available.

Next month HOW TO DO IT will be on how to use the hearing aids. If you have any suggestions for other topics for HOW TO DO IT I would be pleased to receive them, especially if you would write the piece and send it to me.

Ed

WHO I AM AND WHY I COME TO MEETING

The text of Iain Main's presentation at our Meeting for Learning in June

I was the eldest of four children in a professional middle-class family. My school years were spent in Perth, Edinburgh and Dundee, and I went on to St Andrews University where I studied physics and maths and played quite a lot of music. Thereafter, postgraduate work and academic jobs took me to universities in Canada, Scotland and England, culminating in 27 years spent in Liverpool.

At St Andrews I also played a reasonably active but distinctly half-hearted part in the evangelical Christian Union: a natural progression within the religious tradition I had been born into, which was biblical fundamentalism. Words like *sin* and *atonement*, *conversion* and *saved* featured prominently and there was a heavy emphasis on believing the right things. By my late teens that position had become firmly cemented, so that the journey to where I find myself now has been quite a long one, and initially slow and bumpy. By the time I became a Quaker 29 years ago I was finding it difficult to give full loyalty to any one Christian denomination, and had become alienated by militaristic Remembrance Day services and so on. Quakerism, and individual Quakers I had come into contact with, had attracted me for some time before that.

So the biggest steps on my journey have occurred during that 29-year Quaker period. I have found most guidance in books: I have read popular theologians such as Karen Armstrong, from whom I have learnt not to treat myth and metaphor as literal truth, and the importance of compassion; some scientists (agnostics and unbelievers as well as 'believers'); a couple of Anglican bishops; and of course other Quakers. I shall just mention just two of these – one who provided insights in my early Quaker period, and one more recently.

The name of the first was John Macmurray. I had first heard of him indirectly when I was in St Andrews, and he was a professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh. His roots were in Calvinistic Presbyterianism. While serving in the first world war, an unpleasant reaction by the congregation of a church he had been invited to preach in led him to have nothing to do with any branch of the organised church for the next 40 years. He remained a convinced Christian but felt unable to sign on any denominational dotted line. When he retired in 1958 he moved from Edinburgh to Jordans, and a few years later became a Quaker. He was invited to give the Swarthmore Lecture in 1965. Its title was *Search for Reality in Religion*: it contains many insights, and I have read and re-read it several times. One of those insights is that Christianity took a wrong turning when it came under the influence of Greek philosophy, and particularly the Platonic dualism which separates contemplation from action, and gives higher importance to the former. This of course is the reverse of the Quaker position. Whereas I was originally taught that this world is merely a passing place on the way to a higher life to come, I now tend to believe we live in 'one world', without separate material and spiritual realms.

John Macmurray only became a Quaker in the later part of his life. The physicist Jocelyn Bell Burnell, by contrast, is a birthright Friend going back many generations. As a 24-year-old PhD student at the Mullard radio-telescope near Cambridge, she made a huge discovery of the first pulsars (rotating neutron stars) and has gone on to become a very distinguished scientist. Two or three years ago she was the subject of a programme in the BBC4 series *Beautiful Minds*. Interviewed in that programme she said something that resonated strongly with me, namely that in both her research and her Quakerism she is looking not for *truth*, but for *understanding*. She went on [verbatim] "I find that Quakerism and research science fit together very, very well. In Quakerism you're expected to develop your own understanding of God from your experience in the world. There isn't a creed, there isn't a dogma. There's an understanding but nothing as formal as a dogma or creed ... Nothing is static, nothing is final, everything is held provisionally." To me that is spot on – and a far cry from the insistence on doctrinal purity that had been instilled in my younger self.

Why do I come to Meeting? I sometimes like to think of Meeting for Worship as spiritual birdwatching. You wait quietly in one place hoping that something will come along. When it does, it isn't always your target species. In Meeting we are sharing the expectant waiting with others on the same quest. In short, Friends, you could say that I come to Meeting because you come to Meeting.