

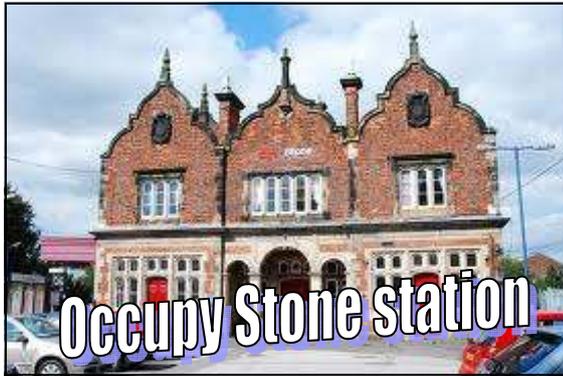


STAFFORDSHIRE QUAKER



WINTER EDITION, FEBRUARY 2012

FROM STONE TO LONDON AT CHRISTMAS



Stone Friends have been inspired by 'Occupy London' (p.8), and Alan Moss volunteered for Quaker Homeless Action in London at Christmas (p.9). What happened in Stone itself? Helen Lockwood reports.

We enjoyed an All Age Christmas Meeting for Worship at Stone followed by a shared lunch. It was a joyful occasion which brought us together to celebrate the coming Christmas in a simple way. Friends contributed special readings, poems and sang carols during the Meeting. The children and young people made "Occupying Stone Station" their theme and entered into the spirit of the occasion by erecting small tents in the entrance hall. They had each posed a question for Friends, written on placards, and then provided their own answer which included questions about inequality, the kind of people supporting the protestors and what Christmas means. Jenny Orme wrote two poems just before coming to Meeting and these are printed here. She read the one entitled "Together" during the Young Friends contribution and, towards the end of the All Age Meeting, read her other poem which reflects so clearly the Christmas message.

Together
In silent thought
And silent peace
We wish

Hope and love to each other
A circle so empty
Of sound
But full

To bursting of people

Together
In silent thought
And silent peace
We gather

Here, to be together
In our journeys
Forward

As far as we may go

Christmas is a time of giving
Of presents and cards
And lights

Extravagant displays
Abound
Sprawled across every roof
and lawn
Every tree ablaze

It is so hard to be
Simple
To keep to what is true
About Christmas

When every corner
Shouts
Look at me
Look at me

Demands your attention
Distraction
From the real reason
You give
Love
Of friends and family
To share in and celebrate
Your love
For each other
Calls you together
And shares a simple truth

You are loved

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

- Occupy Stone station
- Occupy London

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QUAKERS AND THE CHRISTIAN IDEAL OF PEACE



Extracts from an account of the Quaker Peace Testimony given by Rosemary Crawley and Anthony Wilson (Lichfield) to Churches Together in Lichfield.

350 years ago the commitment to Peace was written down and has remained the only written statement of belief of the Society. Quakers were under suspicion of plotting against the King and this declaration was the defence of a group of persecuted people. The following extract makes this clear- "A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God called Quakers against all plotters and fighters in the world. And also something in answer to that clause of the King's late Proclamation, which mentions the Quakers, to clear them from the Plot and Fighting, which therein is mentioned, and for the clearing their innocence."

However Quakers have remained committed to peace and have lived out their commitment sometimes quite heroically, to which our planned Memorial of those who served in the Friends Ambulance Unit and the Friends Relief Service will testify.

To stimulate us into thinking about this testimony we were asked to write a version which reflected how and why we are still committed to peace. Here in Lichfield we looked at the original testimony, a scripturally grounded document although it

highlights some of the apparent contradictions in teaching on matters of peace and war. We found it wanting for contemporary use because of its emphasis on fighting with weapons without acknowledgement of the violence that men and women wreak on each other in other ways, and also because it was written by a group of people who were on the defensive. We wanted to emphasise the idea of peace as a process. In the words of Martin Luther King *One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means.*

Having reflected in silence and talked through what we meant by peace, we committed our ideas to paper and subjected them to further reflection. The document you have is the outcome. We are concerned to remain true to our Quaker commitment to the experiential, and for that reason we did not start out with scriptural references as our founders did. Of course peace is a process that is everyone's business. It is a Christian ideal and in the words of GK Chesterton *the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.*

We cannot undertake a line by line analysis of what we have written. A current example relates to our commitment *to uphold and*

support those who are affected by armed conflict without compromising our commitment to peace: these strands are coming together as we construct a memorial to Quaker service during and after the Second World War in the National Memorial Arboretum, and consider the message which we intend to convey- through its wording and design, and through what we might say to visitors who come across it in walking round the site.

The memorial is to the service given by members of the FAU and FRS, almost all conscientious objectors to being conscripted into the armed forces (more than half actually not members of our Society). Each of the 2,500 people had to convince a tribunal that the personal command 'Thou shalt not kill' extends to the demands of the state at a time when its very existence was under military threat. Having endorsed this stand how do we relate to people whose visit may be prompted by the death of a family member or close friend in a more recent war? Answering their questions will be an expression of our deeply held conviction that we can do no other. Yet our shared humanity requires us to respond to seemingly impossible calls arising from the stand we take: our responses may be more effectively expressed in actions than in words, as the service we are commemorating demonstrates all these years later.

'TRUE TO OUR
QUAKER
COMMITMENT TO
THE EXPERIENTIAL'

THE STILL QUIET VOICE OF CALM

Peace is a quiet time
with no voices allowed.
It calms your spirit
from the outside world.

Peace is a helpful time
with your mind trying to
solve all worries. The
meeting house is peace.

Olivia Wilkes,
Stafford and Stone Meetings



MEMORIAL PROGRESS

Good progress is being made on the memorial project, but we have no wish to be complacent !

There is now enough money in the bank to cover the costs of construction. It took a long time to identify a stone which would be resistant to erosion. There are memorials at the Arboretum which are already showing signs of wear and whose lettering is fading. Eventually we found a limestone in the south of France which is very durable. Some stone has been cut and other stone identified in the quarry. When ready, this will be transported to a factory near Lille for shaping into high-backed seats and paving slabs. One lorry load will then be sufficient to take the stone to Wiltshire where 1000 or so letters will be hand-carved into the seats. (We felt that hand-carving would give a softer, more attractive appearance). The carver will also erect the memorial on site. He knows the Arboretum well having already installed several memorials there. We hope the installation will occur in April/May, but we are dependent on the weather. Heavy rainfall will make the ground too soft to bear weighty vehicles, so we hope for a dry spring.

We shall be having an exhi-

bition at the Arboretum during the first two weeks of June on the work of the Friends Ambulance Unit/ Friends Relief Service. It is being assembled by Jenny Carson of the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute of Manchester University. Her doctorate was on the settlement of displaced populations in post-war Europe, and the unique contribution made by Quaker relief teams. The ownership of the exhibition will then pass to the Trustees who will make it available for Meetings, etc. around the country. We are delaying the official inauguration of the Memorial to September 15, in case we are held up earlier. One of the bodies supporting the project is the Barrow Cadbury Trust; it is making available the services of a public relations company to help with planning for the exhibition and the inauguration.

We have set up a number of groups to take forward various aspects of the project. Some are mentioned above, while others include website development, family histories, education and training.

The project has been warmly welcomed by the staff and voluntary helpers at the Arboretum; while we could have expected some negative

reaction from the British Legion, which runs the NMA, we have been met by nothing but support and interest from everyone we've dealt with.

I wrote that we can cover the building costs. We do, however, need to raise more money for outreach, including the exhibition, contact with Meetings and schools, etc. The opportunities for relating the experiences of the FAU/FRS to our current treatment of asylum seekers as well as promoting a pacific approach to living are limitless.

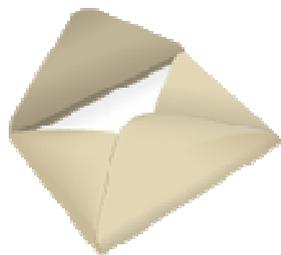
Finally we should let you know that the number of Trustees has increased from the original 4 (ie Paula Knight, Helen Lockwood, Anthony Wilson, Peter Holland), to 9. The new Trustees are John Babb, Treasurer, Carol Rowntree-Jones, Leicestershire AM, John Cockcroft and Tony Pegler, both from Sutton Coldfield LM, and Clare Collins from Stafford. Clare is not in membership, (as of course were many FAU/FRS members), but her father-in-law was a Quaker and a FAU member, while she has much relevant education experience.

Peter Holland, Stone, on behalf of the Trustees

'INAUGURATION
OF THE
MEMORIAL ...
SEPTEMBER 15'



MEDITATION ON AN ENVELOPE



‘TO USE MIND
AND HEART,
SPIRIT AND
BODY IN YOUR
SERVICE’

A plain ordinary envelope – that’s all you are, a folded piece of paper with a little glue. I hold you in my hand, I notice how flimsy you are, how you are shaped. And I wonder about you. You are empty, you are waiting. You are waiting to carry a message to someone, to be a link between people. That’s your only purpose. You yourself aren’t the message, you’re only the vehicle. Yet without you the message might not be sent at all, the communication might never be.

What a lot of questions I could ask you! What will you carry? A note of encouragement and friendship? An appeal for help? A business letter? A demand for money? A love letter? Or one of those family letters filled with tiny events and half utterances that can mean so much? And will your arrival be met with gladness, with indifference, or with apprehension?

I could multiply my questions and I’d never guess the answers. But I know one certain thing about you. Once you are addressed and stamped and sent on your way you become something more than a mere piece of cheap paper; you get a new dimension and dignity. And you get this through the stamp. So now you will be cared for on the railway, the roads or in the air until you finally fall through someone’s letter-box. After that you may be discarded, torn up and crushed. Or you may be lovingly preserved till you are dog-eared and grubby. Either way you will have achieved your purpose.

Here I am, Lord, often feeling as empty and useless as this envelope. But you created me for a purpose; you want me to carry a message in my life, to be a channel of your love, to be a bond of communication between people.

I ask myself what sort of message do I take to others, how genuine is it, how disinterested is it? I ask myself if I am really a bond of communication, or if I see only my emptiness and not the potential you have given me.

This envelope is passive, it can only wait. But you have called me to co-operate with you, you have stamped me with a new dignity. I am committed to carry your message, to use mind and heart, spirit and body in your service.

Lord, fill my emptiness with your love and strength so that I can communicate it to others.

Contributed by Sandra Chambers, Stafford

DANCING AT 90



In December Stafford Meeting helped Naomi Alexander celebrate her 90th birthday. As if she needed help: she had already had an open day at her house with 90 people! Naomi is Stafford Meeting’s longest-attending member. She is still very active on the folk dancing scene.



GEORGE FOX - THE MYSTIC

In need of inspiration, I found myself at Friends House recently for a day about George Fox, led by Rex Ambler – the noted Quaker authority on Fox. It was the first of a series “Early Quakers as Mystics” organised by The Kindlers, and appropriately about 50 of us gathered in the newly-refurbished “George Fox” room.

We spent time looking first at Fox’s Quest, then at his Vision. Rex started each topic with a talk, illustrated with quotes from “Truth of the Heart” – his anthology of Fox’s writings. We were able to ask questions before breaking into small groups for discussion, followed by feed-back to the whole group.

Rex spoke inspiringly and knowledgeably. We may be familiar with Fox’s search, his disillusion with the teachings of the churches, and his despair, until his “then, oh then, I heard a voice which said “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition...”, but as Quakers do we really understand what Fox discovered, and what he was talking about when he used words like “light” and “truth”? In Fox’s time “light” was a metaphor for seeing, being

aware of the situation; on the other side of the coin was “truth” which was reality. Light gives us the capacity to see truth. Light is in the conscience, but is not the same as the conscience, and Fox had discovered this to be true for himself – “this I knew experimentally” – or, as we now express it, “from experience”.

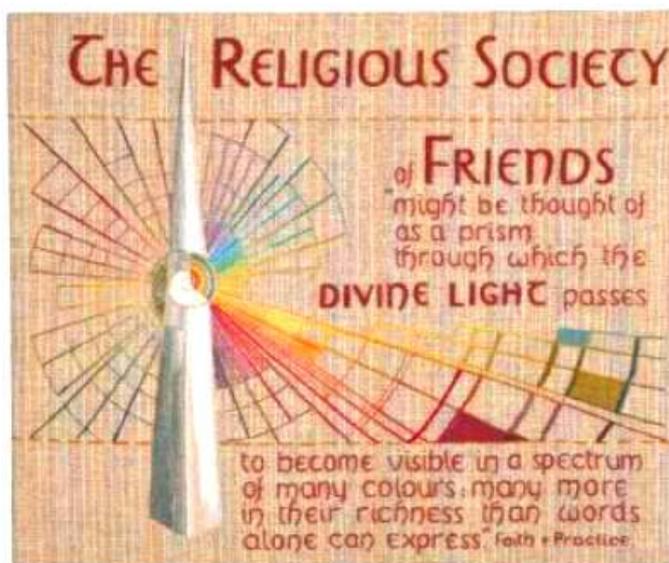
So George Fox offers us his vision. However much people are disillusioned with and destructive of the world, they have only to turn to the Light to see the reality – as simple as that. Alone, or with others, we can sit still and look at the situation in the Light. In our Business Meetings we can put aside our prejudices, sit in the light and wait for insight. Then we must act on the

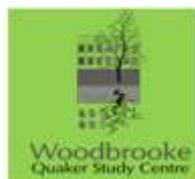
light we have, and more will be given us. The stress is on acting. If we don’t, we lose the insight.

So was George Fox a Mystic? Rex Ambler explained it thus – mystics have this sense of unity, they experience reality directly, unmediated by eternal authority. Believers, in contrast exist in a state of polarity, “told what to believe” by an authority. We “Friends of the Truth” in the 21st century are also mystics – we can look into the light, discover, and trust what is revealed, for we will know it “experimentally”.

Alison Samuels,
Wolverhampton

‘WE “FRIENDS OF THE TRUTH” IN THE 21ST CENTURY ARE ALSO MYSTICS’





'A SCARCELY-REGULATED INTERNATIONAL CAPITALIST SYSTEM IS CONGENITALLY INCAPABLE OF PRODUCING SOCIALLY JUST OUTCOMES'

ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND THE SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL SOCIETY- 1

This Woodbrooke, Northern Friends Peace Board and QPSW programme, last autumn, endeavoured to examine the centrality of economics and economic justice to the achievement of a sustainable peaceful global community and followed on from the Zero Growth economy events of 2009. Though arranged before Yearly Meeting Gathering 2011, an outcome of these new events could be to help take forward the commitment to become a low carbon sustainable community.

SEPTEMBER CONFERENCE

Anthony Wilson (Lichfield) summarises the first event, a day conference in Friends House last September:

The emphasis was on economic justice, or, rather, injustice. It came through clearly that a scarcely-

regulated international capitalist system is congenitally incapable of producing socially just outcomes: privatised public services will never reach consumers where profits cannot be reaped, unless there is a very strong regulatory framework - hard enough to achieve in countries with sophisticated legal and fiscal systems, quite unrealistic in developing countries and those where institutional corruption has taken a hold. Without this public infrastructure, fair access to material and social services has to be beyond our reach. And for those of us who find ourselves on the "haves" side of the line, it is extremely hard to disengage from an essentially exploitative system - not just ethically, but in practical terms. As our YM epistle says, we need to link our personal decisions with public politi-

cal statement and action: and bringing this into our daily lives is essentially a spiritual exercise.

Every day, we are exhorted to bring back growth as the solution to our public financial woes, at the same time as cuts are imposed which impact hardest on the most vulnerable. We are facing the disintegration, rather than the collapse, of an economic system which has relied on private and public debt to exploit Earth's finite resources.

A vision of a 'sustainable global society' incorporating 'zero growth' and taking account of the many living in poverty was scarcely addressed. Where is that vision which embraces living within our means as we start to re-construct a new global polity?

NOVEMBER SEMINAR

The second gathering of the programme was a November weekend seminar at Woodbrooke for AM representatives. I was Staffordshire AM representative.

We did not come up with a step-by-step programme or an overall vision that would move us to an equitable and sustainable global society, although I thought the expertise and knowledge of representatives could go a long way towards both. What we did do was accept the preponderant view expressed in Meetings' responses to the questions circulated after the September

Conference that the present system is wrong and that there must be a better way of organising economics. See page 7 of the last issue of *Staffordshire Quaker* for a flavour of this.

We expressed solidarity with the Occupy movement. Friends who had visited were impressed with their Quaker-like decision making processes, that homeless, angry and mentally ill people are made welcome and that their emphasis is on initiating a democratic process to change our economic system towards justice rather than on demanding particular answers or changes.

Options sessions over the weekend were Engaging with Power (our own, each others' and the powers that be), Economic Alternatives, Future Fears - Present Realities (young adult Friends), Church Action on Poverty's Close the Gap (between rich and poor) campaign (<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/closethegap>), Positive Money (www.positivemoney.org.uk), and about the idea of a pledge for mass civil disobedience about tax and (economic) justice. Worship sharing space was also available during each of the options sessions.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND THE SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL SOCIETY – 2

WHAT THEN CAN WE DO?

This section draws on Quaker social activist **Jonathan Dale's** presentation at the conference with additions prompted by other items. I recommend www.quaker.org.uk/economic-justice-and-sustainable-global-society-conference-papers and reading Jonathan's presentation.

Whether we believe everything will be all right with a

few adjustments or that any economic system is never going to protect the planet, lead to justice and build a low-carbon sustainable global community, the fact that the current system is undermining our testimonies minute by minute alters our whole sense of how we relate to the society we live in. This is spiritual work - because spirituality is inseparable from the search for right relationships to others and to

the planet, and these are mediated in large part by the social system.

Rather than unthinking accommodation to the norms of a system which scorns our testimonies, this search for right relationships releases us into the possibility of aligning our lives with our spiritual values in the myriad details of daily life, which can become a mode of prayer.



USING ECONOMIC GROWTH TO REDUCE POVERTY IS LIKE USING AN AEROPLANE TO PULL A PLOUGH

WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN?

It means uprooting the individualism which prevents us from honest, open mutual support and accountability to one another in the daily, and larger, choices we make and which inhibits our spiritual growth. The low-carbon, sustainable community minute calls us to this support and accountability.

It means swimming against the tide and against the spirit

of the age in every possible way. It means tearing up the conventional rule book and asking insistently whether it is right to use resources in particular ways because of their contribution to inequality, ecological harm and/or global warming, rather than deciding on grounds of cost alone.

In practical terms, it means withdrawing as much as we can of our resources of time and money

from institutions which undermine our testimonies, and putting them into others that are more compatible with the kingdom. Some of the following suggestions may be more difficult for those with ongoing health concerns or on basic pension or benefit levels of income, but mutual support could help here, as I am sure we will all want to do all we can, especially when we realise the 'enormity of the challenge we face' (YMG 2011 Minute 36).

'THE POSSIBILITY OF ALIGNING OUR LIVES WITH OUR SPIRITUAL VALUES IN THE MYRIAD DETAILS OF DAILY LIFE, WHICH CAN BECOME A MODE OF PRAYER'

SUGGESTIONS

Boycotting goods and services from certain firms and countries

If you really need something new, check Ethical Consumer (questions into whose hands you want to put your resources), alongside Which? (value and performance).

Ethical banks do not invest in speculation (Co-op for current accounts, Triodos for savings). The Ecology Building Society does not lend out more than it has in deposits, ie it does not create 'new' money out of thin air like many lenders. There are also

ethical investments, including non-profit ones such as Community Land Trusts.

Use as little as possible companies whose legal structure obliges them to prefer profits for shareholders over the public good. Use co-operatives, eg John Lewis, the Co-op and The Phone Co-op. Use social enterprises or local, small businesses.

Organic food is much friendlier to wildlife than 'conventional'. Buy local if you can. Some box schemes are national franchises. Grow organically yourself (or with others), or join a

Community Supported Agriculture scheme.

Walk, cycle, or use public transport. Do without a car. If that's not possible, share one with several others.

Have Meetings for Worship on Saturdays if public transport is better.

I will submit more suggestions for a future SQ, including information about engaging politically and communicating our developing vision of thriving with less.

Rob Horton, AM representative to the Economic Justice and the Sustainable Global Society events

OCCUPY LONDON: QUAKER SUPPORT



‘THE IDEA THAT ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE IS CRUCIAL FOR US TOO’

Helen Lockwood (Stone) included this statement in her report on Meeting for Sufferings at December AM.

“Quakers in Britain share the concern for global economic justice and sustainability expressed by the Occupy movement. We agree with the statement of Occupy London Stock Exchange that our current economic system is unsustainable. It is undemocratic and unjust. We need alternatives. We, too, “want structural change towards authentic global equality. The world’s resources must go towards caring for people and the planet, not the military, corporate profits or the rich,” (as stated in Occupy LSX initial statement). We are grateful to the various Occupy groups for raising these issues to passionately and respond to the deep spiritual

WE WERE THERE

Karen Wilkes, of Stafford and Stone Meetings, visited the Occupy London site and found it ‘wonderful’. There was hardly anybody there at the time as the protesters had gone on a march, but she was extremely impressed with how tidy and well-organised the whole area was. Someone was clearing up at the time, and there were bins for waste separation and recycling, There were even toilets for children. There was a lovely library, and what with the colourful and challenging banners she found the whole ethos of the site inspirational.



significance that we recognise in the movement.

“Those of us who have visited have been welcomed, and found the Occupy sites an exceptional learning experience. We honour the values and positive ways of working within Occupy communities: without hierarchy, based on care for others, open to the contribution of all and searching for the truth. These are in harmony with our Quaker practice and business methods.

“The idea that another world is possible is crucial for us too. We cannot accept the injustice and destructiveness of our economic system as it is. At the annual meeting of Quakers in Britain in August 2011 we wrote: “We need to ask the question whether this system is so broken that we must

urgently work with others of faith and good will to put in its place a different system in which our testimonies can flourish”. We support the process initiated by the Occupy movement to create a path towards a different future, and to develop it democratically.

“We hope that individual Quakers will continue to provide support, both moral and practical, to the movement. We greatly value its peaceful quality and we pray that this can be actively supported by all, including the civil and ecclesiastical authorities who have the difficult task of maintaining simultaneously both public order and the right of peaceful protest.”

Signed Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain

TRUE SIMPLICITY?

A *Guardian* report in January said that one of the ‘Occupy London’ protesters aims to have only 32 possessions - and that includes underpants! The journalist gave no more details than that.

Apart from consumables, from toothpaste to food, which possessions would you want if you decided to only have 32? Suggestions welcome for the next issue of Staffordshire Quaker!

Is this protester’s philosophy in line with the Quaker testimony to simplicity? Or is there more to simplicity than this?

Helen & Bill Lockwood (Stone) have been too. They sat on St Paul’s steps to listen to a camp meeting, conducted in a Quakerly way: people said how they felt about possible decisions and reported on various subcommittees. Bill said “Although the Corporation of London is maintaining that the Occupation detracts from St Paul’s Cathedral as a landmark Christian site, in fact for us it had the opposite effect. Its very presence and its very clear message actually gave the Cathedral and its surroundings a real sense of meaning and purpose in a very unequal world.”

HOMELESS IN LONDON: QUAKER ACTION

Over Christmas I volunteered for 5 shifts at the Quaker Homeless Action shelter in London. I reported to the Penn Club on Christmas Eve to take up my shared room on the top floor. Every time I climbed the stairs I was glad I wasn't a scullery maid carrying a bucket of coal. There were certain restrictions on our stay. The cooks only had 2 microwaves and a slow cooker to cook for about 15 people a night. No coffee percolator, no washing machine as we weren't trained on how to use them. The Cadbury room was locked, because it was *alleged* that some QHA members had stolen books from the library. Two days into our stay somebody suffering caffeine withdrawal symptoms, cranked up the percolator and we enjoyed fresh coffee for the rest of our stay. G*d bless American Quakers.

The actual night shelter was in the Union Chapel in Islington. The Chapel is a listed building, which has seen better days. My first shift started at 7 am on Christmas day. The first day was (very) hard. Out of an expected 11 volunteers only 5 turned up. Although only 26 people stop overnight the shelter serves about 75 breakfasts every day. A lot of washing up! The shelter also gives people the opportunity to shower, sometimes be reclothed and generally be entertained. We were asked to talk to our guests as much as we possibly could.

I took every job I was offered as some jobs were a new experience, and most only lasted for short periods. Soon I found myself on the door. For me it was volunteer heaven.

A doorkeeper at Union Chapel performs much the same function as the door person at Meeting. First impressions are important and being greeted warmly is a good start. Being doorkeeper was a 'cushy' job for me. It gave me the opportunity to talk to every guest in the shelter. I feel that respecting the guests is paramount in a shelter. I felt total respect for the guests very quickly.

Could I sleep rough? Probably one night, if I survived. Because I have been round the block a few times, speak with a regional accent, listen very carefully, and am well travelled in the UK it is very easy to initiate a conversation. I talked to guests about Cyril Burt, politics, with a guest who read the Guardian from cover to cover every day while keeping warm in the library, HMS Ganges, Ireland and George Osborne. I am now knowledgeable on how to steal a Mercedes. One conversation did bring home the precarious nature of sleeping rough. The man I shared a room with snored. This was inconvenient to me and I didn't sleep well. A guest, sleeping rough in the basement of an office block, was also disturbed by his friend snoring.

He was frightened the security man would hear him snoring and throw then out onto the street at 2.0am. A little more than inconvenient!

People who sleep rough are part of a tight knit caring community, who protect each other. On the last evening a giant of a man who spoke with a strong Irish accent came to me in tears and thanked me for volunteering. I told him that I had thoroughly enjoyed my short stay, I was grateful for the opportunity to help at Christmas, and I was the one who should be grateful.

Why did I volunteer? Part of my volunteering was to avoid the modern materialistic Christmas. Would I volunteer again or recommend the shelter to other Friends? Yes to both questions. All the volunteers I met were true Quakers, who were a delight to work with. The guests were appreciative. I think it is fair to say we made a difference. Every penny which had been donated to Quaker Homeless Action was spent wisely on the guests.

The Quakers did good.

Are you up for it next year? Donations or time both valuable.

Alan Moss, Stone



'COULD I SLEEP
ROUGH?
PROBABLY ONE
NIGHT, IF I
SURVIVED.'



THEN AND NOW: QUAKERS AND THE ARTS

This article was written for the Leek Churches Together magazine.

Over the centuries, Quakers have had a changeable relationship with music, and the arts in general. It has evolved from the very austere attitude adopted by the early Quakers, who were so devoted to their faith that they rejected distractions in any form, to the more open views held today, where participation in all forms of creative art is seen as part of a spiritual life.

In the early days of the Quaker movement the practice of music was frowned upon. In fact, George Fox said in his journal that he was “moved to cry also against all sorts of music”, as it “burdened the pure life, and stirred people’s minds to vanity”.

Solomon Eccles (1618-1682) who was originally a professional musician and composer, became a Quaker in 1660, and was so moved by this that he attempted to burn his musical instruments, as he professed that he could perceive a “difference between the harps of God and the harps of men”. Hampered by the locals, who were objecting to this, he then resorted to stamping on them – ensuring their destruction. Sadly, in

addition to this, a lot of his music was lost, as he also burned his books and compositions. In fact this was such an ingrained belief in the early Quaker movement that it was some time before Music was accepted.

Fortunately this situation is now reversed, and there is no better example of this than in the Quaker group known as the “Leaveners”, who are a Quaker Performing Arts Project. Founded in 1978 they organise around 35-40 projects a year, mainly for young people, on the subjects of Music Making, Creative Arts and Theatre & Performance. Its patrons include Judy Dench, Sheila Hancock and Ben Kingsley

With events both at home and abroad, the Leaveners welcome Quakers and non-Quakers alike, to experience the “power of the creative spirit” through the mediums of music and drama, exploring aspects of Quaker history, social issues (including social injustice and non-violence) and spirituality. It allows a forum to enable communication of Quaker values and beliefs, bringing them into the wider community.

The music making offers singing, instrumental and drumming workshops and projects, and involves much

Quaker material. The Quaker songbook “Sing in the Spirit” was put together by the Leaveners, and is widely used today in this country and beyond.

Events last year included “The Big Sing”, an informal singing weekend that was open to all singers and musicians over the age of 14 years, and The 24 Hour Panto Project, which was a residential theatre project for those 18 years and above.

This year there is a weekend of Choral and Chamber Music (for ages 14+), and a beginner singing weekend (for adults).

As a result of their work with young people, the Leaveners group is now a member of The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS).

For further information, go to: www.leaveners.org/events

Linda Skellam, Leek



‘MOVED TO CRY ALSO AGAINST ALL SORTS OF MUSIC’

MAKING THE MOST OF AREA MEETING

Area Meetings (AMs) are held to enable Friends from all our Local Meetings (LMs) to come together to discuss any issues affecting our Society either locally or nationally.

The full name is Meeting for Worship for Business, and Meetings should be held in the same spirit as any other Meeting for Worship. Friends should try not to speak more than once on any item and not to be confrontational.

There will be the Clerk at the table and an assistant Clerk who will help with writing the minutes and making sure Friends who wish to speak are not left out (among other things).

Items will be put before the Meeting and the Clerk will try(!) and discern the sense of the meeting and write a minute describing the course of action. This sometimes means no decision can be reached and the matter will be carried forward to the next Meeting. Although this sometimes seems a time consuming way of doing things experience has shown us that it is an effective way to get

the best decision.

In Staffordshire we have seven AMs a year, one for each LM. We try to agree the dates for these at the end of the preceding year but if during the course of the year a LM cannot stage AM they can usually swap with another LM or change the date to the following month.

LMs usually have the same months every year and AMs are on the second Saturday of the month to allow LMs to have their Preparative Meetings and forward any items for the agenda. These dates should be provisionally confirmed at October's AM.

Therefore 2013's meetings should run as shown below.

We have been trying to make AM more interesting and to attract more Friends. We have had speakers, courses and discussions, so if you have any ideas to help us or want to do a course let your LM Clerk know.

All Friends are Members of AM not just their LMs and we can all play a part in the life of our AM; it does not

have to be hosting a course or being Clerk, just being there is important.

This is a part of our Society which is often overlooked and dismissed as boring but I feel that this unique way of doing business is essential to the Society.

We have a new team of Clerks this year, made up of Margaret Crossland (Stafford), Rosemary Barnett (Stone) and myself, and we will be doing this until the end of 2013.

We will be trying to get names for a new team of Clerks at the end of next year so they can see what we do and get some training and advice before they have to take over officially. If you're interested or just want to ask a question please do not hesitate to contact one of the team.

I deal with correspondence and can be reached via email SAMQuakers@Hotmail.co.uk or phone 07926 37 64 95.

Gayle Yeomans, Stafford



Quaker clerk mug, with a herding of cats

MEETING FOR
WORSHIP FOR
BUSINESS
SHOULD BE HELD
IN THE SAME
SPIRIT AS ANY
OTHER MEETING
FOR WORSHIP

Date	9 March, 2013	11 May, 2013	13 July, 2013
Location	Stoke	Leek	Uttoxeter

Date	14 September, 2013	12 October, 2013	14 December, 2013
Location	Wolverhampton	Stone	Lichfield

WHY IS BEER BETTER THAN RELIGION?

1. No-one will kill you for not drinking beer.
2. Beer does not tell you how to have sex.
3. No-one ever went to war on behalf of their favourite beer.
4. They don't force beer on children who can't think for themselves.
5. When you have a beer you don't knock on doors and try to give it away.
6. No-one has been tortured or burnt at the stake for preferring a different brand of beer.
7. There are laws saying beer labels can't lie to you.
8. You can prove you have a beer.
9. If you've devoted your life to beer there are groups to help you stop.
10. You don't have to wait 2000 years for a second beer.

Believed to have been written by a distinguished theologian.

Contributed by Harold Yardley, Stoke.

THE CHURCH ON FIRE ... THE POWER OF COMMITTEES

I was amused by the recent article in Staffordshire Quaker, *CHURCH ON FIRE... THE POWER OF MINISTRY*, submitted by our old friend Anon.

I wonder though if the stereotypes light-heartedly presented might not need some modification in light of my own experience.

About ten years ago in Poland I was at the international gathering of the Quaker Esperanto Society. Wisely it had been so arranged that the gathering was held at the same venue as the folks from the Polish Esperanto Society held their own yearly gathering.

As a number of Friends were going home on the Sunday, on the Friday evening a meeting was held and it was decided that Meeting for Worship would be held on

Saturday.

Then, as a number of the Polish folks had expressed an interest in attending, a discussion ensued to decide in what language Meeting for Worship should be held.

Given that all of us were at least competent in Esperanto this raised some eyebrows. After a full three quarters of an hour (during which time a few of us were amused and exasperated in turn) it was seriously suggested that a committee be formed to consider the matter and then report back to the meeting with its conclusions for a final decision. At this point, the amused/exasperated of us pointed out that a) traditionally, Quaker meetings were said to be led by the Spirit and b) most of us were sufficiently competent in the language in which the conference was held, so PLEASE

could we not just let it happen?

In the event the Meeting for Worship was truly beautiful with not a single complaint about any ministry regardless of the language.

But I do think that it suggests that in the event of that apocryphal fire, it might be the Quakers who would be putting their heads together to form a committee, which would then decide what to do about the fire. The committee would then have to appoint a chair-person, who would write up a minute which would then report back to rest of the group for a final decision!

But I am very pleased that the joke worked well in Meeting for Worship for our dear Friend Anon.

Keith Wood, former editor, Staffordshire Quaker

FEBRUARY 21 IS
NIGH

We Quakers do not believe some days are more sacred than others. Unless pancakes are involved.



We are very reasonable.

CLOSING DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE: MAY 27, BUT PLEASE START NOW!

ONE PAGE TAKES ABOUT 620 WORDS

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