



FORTY-THREE

OXFORD FRIENDS' MEETING
43 ST.GILES OXFORD OX1 3LW

NEWSLETTER

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Food for Thought

The Oxford Food Bank, which was officially launched in late October, is a beautifully simple concept. Every day at each of the city's supermarkets good, wholesome food is thrown away: the food bank wants to collect that food and distribute it to people in need. It's an easy idea to grasp – but a complex thing to achieve. In fact it has taken ten years to translate the original idea into reality.

The proposal came from Oxford's Community Caterers network, an umbrella group that represents food-providing charities in the city. They thought it would be marvellous if, instead of throwing food away, supermarkets could be persuaded to give it to them. But the practicalities proved daunting. For such an operation to succeed they discovered they would need vehicles and premises and would have to operate on a seven-day-a-week basis. It took a long time to get to the starting line.

But finally, in July this year, a trial began. One important breakthrough came when Sainsburys in Kidlington agreed to co-operate. The manager, Mr Vince Brimble, liked the idea and put a system in place to make it happen. Waste at supermarkets is a by-product of food safety regulations. In order to ensure that the food they sell is wholesome and safe the supermarkets put 'sell-by' and 'use-by' dates on the packaging. These are there to protect consumers and once a product reaches its 'sell-by' date it has

to be taken off the shelves, regardless of the fact that it's often in perfect condition. Mr Brimble and his staff now put all that food on one side and each morning food bank volunteers go to the store, pick it up and distribute it to charities in the city.

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From Quaker Faith and Practice

To Fox and the early Friends the whole of life seemed sacramental, and they refused to mark off any one particular practice or observance as more sacred than others. They took the same stand with regard to Sunday, or First Day; it was not in itself more holy than Saturday or Monday; every week-day should be a Lord's Day. Their whole attitude was gloriously positive, not negative. They were 'alive unto God' and sensed him everywhere.

We do not say that to observe the sacraments is wrong, but that such observance is not essential to wholehearted Christian discipleship and the full Christian experience. We do not judge our fellow Christians to whom the outward sacraments mean so much. Rather do we wish, by prayerful fellowship with them, to be led unitedly with them to a deeper understanding of what underlies those sacraments, and so to share a richer experience of the mind of Christ.

QF&P 27.39 Gerald K Hibbert, 1941

Deadline for contributions to the January 2010 issue: noon, Friday 18 December

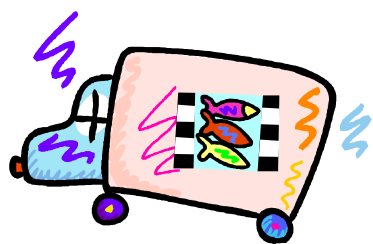
Contributions, of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated, preferably by email: newsletter@oxfordquakers.com. Paper copy can be left in the Forty-Three pigeonhole at Oxford Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373.

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So far, the food bank relies on this one Sainsbury's store but, even so, it is managing to distribute more than £1,000 worth of fruit, vegetables and baked goods a week. As soon as the charity acquires refrigeration at its premises it will begin taking meat and dairy products too. The scheme is only in its infancy but it's clear that if it got co-operation from all the big supermarkets in Oxford a huge amount of good food could be given to vulnerable people. Already food is going to projects which cater for the homeless, asylum seekers, people with mental health difficulties, young people lacking family support, and mother and toddler groups. There are many others the food bank could help if it had more resources, and the aim is to expand as quickly as possible to meet the need.

The next steps are to get more supermarkets involved – the Co-op store in Kidlington has just begun participating – and to start actively fundraising. The immediate need is for more volunteers – particularly people who are able-bodied and can drive a van – and money to keep the operation going. The potential is huge – not just in Oxford but across the country: if we can make it work here, it can work anywhere. If you would like more details about the food bank visit their website at www.re-plenish.org.

Robin Aitken

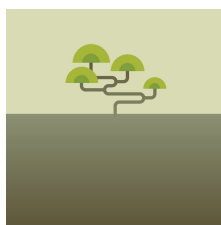


A Quiet Day for Oxford Friends?

A Quiet Day has been planned here in Oxford Meeting House for Saturday, 12 December. Amongst Friends, we haven't tended to include such days as part of our spiritual practice, but in this we have something to learn from other churches – and indeed other faiths, who know the value of a more extended time of quiet. We might accept that, at least in theory, there could be value in it for us too. But in December, at a time which tends to be frenetic, when there seems to be so much to do and so little time to do it in, will we be able to give ourselves permission to spend a

Saturday simply being quiet? You might ask whether this would be totally unrealistic, or perhaps too self-indulgent – we are needed for action elsewhere...

But 'stand still, and cease from thine own working,' said William Leddra (*QF&P* 2.19), echoing Fox, who tells us that by being still and cool, we can begin to feel the 'power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms'. We know how the quietness of Meeting for Worship can heal and restore us; to have longer in that quietness allows us to reach more deeply into the inner space, to find our centre and rest in it. A quiet day is '*reculer pour mieux sauter*', an opportunity to find this deeper stillness, a space in which we can be soul-centred, and prepare ourselves for a true celebration. It can give us the resources to meet those needs by which we are being bombarded from day to day.



One can of course have a quiet day alone, or completely unprogrammed; Friends are usually suspicious of anything which smacks of 'leadership', but knowing our own tendency to thrash about interiorly, to get distracted and waste the time, we can recognise the value of a little gentle facilitation, the offering of a 'way in'. So this day will be led by Jenifer Wates from Charlbury Meeting (a member of the Quaker Retreat Group and the Quaker Life Network), and will use the metaphor of the 'burning bush' as a theme. In the book of Exodus we learn how that deeply spiritual figure of Moses was called into his lifelong mission by a vision of the God whose name is '*I am*': a realisation of his own true being, which was to carry him through the trials and demands of the creation of Israel as a nation. Probably our paths will be less arduous, but the need for our own 'burning bush' is just as crucial.

The plan is that we will be mostly silent, so that we can each find our own way into interior stillness and make use of the time as seems best for us. But by way of a starter, Jenifer will give a brief introduction to the morning, and another few words after lunch, which will be optional. There will also be materials for us to use if we find them helpful: quotations and images which can work as jumping-off points; books to look at if we feel drawn; paper and crayons which we can use to explore our journeys. The most important thing is for each of us

needs, for us to find our own centre, the place of true being.

If we listen well enough, we will be able to hear what God said to Moses, addressed to each of us: 'The place where you are standing is holy ground'.

Tina Leonard and Jenifer Wates

Oxford Friends' Action on AIDS (OXFAA) – Could you help?

In October's *Forty-Three* I gave an update on the three main strands of Oxford Friends' Action on HIV & AIDS, involving support for (1) The Strategies for Hope Trust, based in Oxford; (2) The Quaker Initiative against AIDS in Rwanda; and (3) the Hope Institute in Kampala, Uganda. The third of these has been emphasised through our November Special Collection, especially as a number of Friends had the opportunity to meet Canon Gideon Byamugisha, the Hope Institute's founder and inspirer, in the middle of the month.

Each of these three strands could be seen as part of our response to the 2007 FWCC appeal to Friends worldwide 'to be more actively involved, with a message of hope, in the fight against HIV & AIDS'. Each strand so far has a very small number of known supporters within our Meeting and would benefit greatly from a few more, whether in the form of financial help or any offering of time and skills or simply interest shown and support through prayer.

I shall be very glad to hear from anyone (email: jpw1940@yahoo.co.uk) who would like to be involved in any part, small or large, of this concern (including the opportunity for gift-aided or CAF-cheque donations). But I especially hope to hear from anyone who could take on any part in promoting this concern (or any one strand), since I myself, for family reasons, have realised that I must greatly reduce the time I am able to devote to this in 2010 and 2011.

John Whitley

Friends might also be interested to read John's article published in *The Friend* (20 Nov. 2009, p.6) entitled 'Action on HIV & AIDS – a Quaker Concern?'

John would also like to remind us that 1 December is World AIDS Day.



Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting



Rhonda Riachi,
talking to
Tanya Garland

At present spirituality is eclipsing almost everything else for me. I never thought it would have the importance it has for me now. In the past I made sense of the

world through a rational perspective and it was that which, in my early teens, made me think I was an atheist. The Religious Education at school in Australia was tailored to whatever faith we declared when we enrolled. I had had Catholic instruction, although my family had long since stopped going to church. Facing the option of being confirmed I began to question what I really believed. The more I looked at Catholicism at that time, the less I liked it; ritual seemed to dominate at the expense of genuine spiritual experience.

My dad is Lebanese and had gone to Australia in the post-war years and married my mother who was third-generation Australian. My parents separated when I was four and we lived with our mother. She remarried in 1979, when we left Australia and we came to England via Greece. We stayed in Greece nine months when I was fourteen. Living in Greece opened my eyes to other religious possibilities. This was during my atheist stage (age twelve to fifteen) and I didn't believe there was any afterlife. There I was introduced to the Greek Orthodox Church: exotic, ornate gilded church interiors with lots of candles and their darkened mystery. We experienced an Easter midnight mass – the call of '*Christos Anesti!*' (Christ is Risen!) spilling into the streets and the spreading of the light by people in the crowd lighting their candles from the flame of those beside them.

Prayer was never a driving force for me, and even today I very rarely feel the need to pray. One spiritual experience in my childhood stands out for me. I attended the Salvation Army's Youth Club with two of my sisters (I am the youngest of five) and we sang in the choir and used to go with them on camps. We took part in one of their welcome ceremonies where they gave us a blessing. As we walked home together afterwards, we said to each other that we felt changed. We all felt it was a

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genuine spiritual experience. It did not feel like an empty ritual and I think of it now as a recognisable step on the spiritual path.

The relaxing of my spiritual outlook was reflected in the friends I made in my teenage years. My friends had intellectual interests as well as spiritual ones and that was important to me, as most of my interests were intellectual then. I was enjoying school – especially learning languages – and wanted to find a way of combining languages with science. I learnt German and Japanese while at school in Australia, then some Greek in Greece, and continued the German to A level in England.

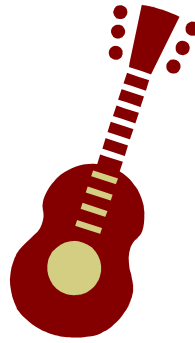


Using my mother's *Oxford Dictionary*, with its etymological analysis of each word, opened up a fascination for the development of languages. The fact that the dictionary came from Oxford meant that Oxford became a beacon of

learning for me as a child, and when we arrived in England it dawned on me that I could apply to go to Oxford. I wanted to salvage something for myself after all the changes I'd been through. When I started in the sixth form here with only four O-levels, a teacher told me I hadn't a hope in hell to get into Oxford. It became a motivating factor. I thought, 'I'll show her!' and I applied to study German and Greek. I was at St Hilda's for four years and took the third year out in Greece, which helped my Greek immensely.

I still think of Oxford as a magical place stemming from its long history of learning in the colleges, with their 'cloisters' and 'quads', originally built for the spiritual life and training of the clergy. By the time I got to Oxford I was agnostic, spiritually curious and fascinated by evensong and carols at the cathedral. The music lifted me but I was unable to sympathise with the creed or enter into the prayers. I'd made friends with Christian Socialists and I attended Quaker Meeting in my second year, having met Quakers in the Peace Movement when in the sixth form. I also attended Young Friends meetings here, but they had more of a social function for me.

A key event was meeting Rikky in 1994. I had organised a workshop on 'Change' with Sue Smith at the Meeting House. Rikky chose me as his partner for a longer conversation. We clicked at a deeper level. It was a genuine meeting of minds and hearts,



and I was aware that something else was present – in a spiritual sense. We married seven years ago in the Meeting House, and our intellectual, spiritual and emotional lives have reinforced each other and deepened as time has gone by. Rikky has been interested in spiritual perspectives since he was seventeen. One of the most important things we have in common is music. Rikky is a guitar teacher, music author and composer.

In 2001, the BBC programme on Near Death Experiences (NDEs) featuring Dr Peter Fenwick, inspired me to read more about NDEs and to try to understand consciousness in the light of reports from those who have experienced being conscious while thought to be clinically dead. These reports include amazing, verifiable details of what was going on around them while they were 'dead' and the life-changing effects that followed. They are ordinary people with nothing to gain by sharing their experience and often have much to lose through people's scepticism. The sincere telling of these experiences spoke to me more clearly than did any religious teaching I had received.

An interesting resonance for me was the description of the 'light' encountered in NDEs and its parallel with the Light we know of in Quaker practice. My understanding is that early Quakers chose silence as their form of worship because their feeling for God was so deep that language was not capable of expressing what they felt. The irony in our time is that some people see the lack of a creed and dogmas in Quakerism as a licence not to believe anything spiritual, and this can result in our losing sight of the Spirit as the ground and being of our Society.

In 2006 I joined the Alister Hardy Society which researches spiritual experiences and I became the chairperson for the Oxford and Cotswold group in 2008. The Society sincerely endeavours to bring scientific and spiritual knowledge together and that is important for me. I sense that if we want to progress as a species we need to find a way of integrating the spiritual with the intellectual and emotional sides of our lives – i.e. a spiritual evolution accompanying physical evolution in our time.

Over the years I have worked in publishing, as a local councillor and in educational technology (I helped to set up the Association for Learning Technology), and now I work as a staff trainer for the

Oxon & Bucks Mental Health Trust. The challenge for me now is to integrate my new spiritual knowledge in my work and daily living. It is all about God and love. We have a loving God who sustains us and our challenge is to love and evolve in Love, which I see as an active participation in creating the world we live in.

BC : AD

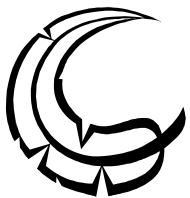
This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect.
Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.

U.A. Fanthorpe



On a blood red branch
A white feather, fluttering
Bells call on the wind

Ruth Kim

