Pugwash & Peace

For most people, 'Pugwash' is the name of a mythical ship's captain, much beloved of a 1950s' generation of schoolchildren. However, the name is much older than that: the village of Pugwash in Nova Scotia began as a Mi'kmaq Indian settlement called Pagwe'ak, which was colonised in the 18th century by waves of European immigrants who anglicised its name to Pugwash. In the early 20th century it was the birthplace of Cyrus Eaton, an eccentric American millionaire industrialist who made it his home in 1929, and hosted there, in 1957, the first 'Pugwash Conference': a gathering of eminent scientists from all over the world to discuss problems of peace and international relations. The meeting was inspired by the publication in 1955 of the famous Russell-Einstein Memorandum, in which Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein called upon humankind to step back from the threat posed to civilisation by the advent of thermonuclear weapons. They ended with the memorable words: "We appeal as human beings to human beings: remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death."

The participants in the first Pugwash Conference included Max Born, Percy Bridgman, Leopold Infeld, Frederic Joliot-Curie, Mark Oliphant, Linus Pauling, Cecil Powell, Joseph Rotblat, Dmitri Skobeltsin, Leon Szilard, Shinichiro Tomonaga, Alexander Topchiev, Victor Weisskopf, and Hideki Yukawa – a galaxy of talent from the world of nuclear science. They met at the height of the Cold War, when there were few opportunities for scientists from the two sides of the Iron Curtain to communicate, let alone to develop arguments jointly with which to convince the political leadership in their countries to draw back from the nuclear brink. This meeting was to be the first of a series which has continued to this day, and the 'Pugwash Movement' has grown from the initial 20 or so participants to a group of several thousand. Several hundred of them meet at a different location each year for a 'plenary' conference. In addition, several workshops are held on specific topics (e.g. the weaponisation of space, or trends in biological weapons) each year, and there are national Pugwash groups, such as the very active British group, which feed ideas into their national governments.

The common thread throughout all Pugwash activities is a commitment to the use of rational

From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

I told [the Commonwealth Commissioners] I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars... I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were.

QF&P **24.01, George Fox, 1651**

Deadline for contributions to the June 2009 issue: noon, Friday 22 May

Contributions, of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated, preferably by email: oxfordpm@yahoo.co.uk. Paper copy can be left in the 43 pigeonhole at Oxford Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373.

discussion, based (where appropriate) on sound scientific arguments. The use of emotional appeals, or political spin, is eschewed, and there is much emphasis on listening to different national perceptions, and trying to find mutually acceptable solutions to problems where political confrontation has polarised public positions. Although the general outlook of all the participants is the same as that of Russell and Einstein, it is recognised that the path to peace may involve taking slow steps, often well outside the public limelight, and creating confidence in the process through mutually acceptable concrete measures. Because of this, the Pugwash meetings (including the annual conference proceedings) are often not open to the public, though a mutually-agreed press release is often made after the meeting. Even the process of agreeing that is often quite arduous! The strength of the process lies very much in the strength of the arguments which are generated, and disseminated within the various national government machines. The evidence that this works is not easy to assemble, but there are enough cases where the record has shown that Pugwash ideas have influenced the outcome – the nuclear test-ban treaty, the weapons-in-space treaty, the chemical weapons convention, the development of anti-ballistic missiles etc. Pugwash has also been active in promoting dialogue in regional conflicts – most recently in the North Korean and Iran nuclear crises – and tries to play the role of 'honest broker' in resolving the disputes.

On a personal note, I became involved in the Pugwash movement in the 1960s, and was invited to become a member by Professor Peierls (a highly influential Pugwashite) and to participate in the Annual Conference at Sochi in 1967. Since then I have attended both International and British meetings regularly, and have recently become Deputy Chairman of the British Pugwash Group. I have been interested in problems of nuclear terrorism, the question of the need for the British independent nuclear deterrent, and the problem of the UK stockpile of separated plutonium. I am about to get involved in the debate over the so-called 'nuclear renaissance'. I have never had any problem in reconciling my Pugwash activities with my Quaker beliefs, though from time to time, I find that my approach to peace differs from that of some of my Quaker colleagues.

Christopher Watson

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Creating Community, Creating Connections

Introductory session Friday, 8 May in the Garden Room. All welcome. 7.00 p.m. refreshments, 7.30 p.m. prompt start of the meeting.

What does it mean to be involved in a Quaker Meeting? What does it imply for the way we live our values, make decisions, share responsibility for tasks in the meeting, and address conflict? How can we renew our vision for our life and witness as a spiritual community?

We are planning to run a series of sessions in Oxford Meeting to address these questions over the next few months, using a study pack from Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre. Whether you have been attending Meeting for Worship for a few weeks or 70 years, we hope the course will offer spiritual nourishment and new perspectives. It will also help us to get to know one another better.

Everyone who attends Oxford Meeting will be welcome at the introductory session. This will be an opportunity to hear about the course contents, talk about our hopes for the meeting and needs from the course, and to get involved if you wish.

If you'd like to be involved but can't come on 8 May, please let me know (Tel. 01865 725244, laurie@livingwitness.org.uk).

Laurie Michaelis

Gather us in, Thou love that fillest all;
Gather our rival faiths within thy fold.
Rend each man's temple-veil and bid it fall,
That we may know that thou hast been of old,
Gather us in.

Gather us in: we worship only thee;
In varied names we stretch a common hand;
In diverse forms a common soul we see;
In diverse ships we seek one spirit-land;
Gather us in.

Each sees one colour of thy rainbow-light,
Each looks upon one tint and calls it heaven;
Thou art the fullness of our partial sight;
We are not perfect till we find the seven;
Gather us in.

G.D. Matheson
Selected by Dorothy Darke

Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting

Mark Ebden, talking to Tanya Garland

My parents are from the UK but emigrated to Canada in 1968. I was born in 1977, in Toronto, between two sisters. My family have always been close and even today we stay in touch regularly. I have lots of extended family in the UK, with whom I'm also in touch. I've been a British citizen from birth and I travelled back and forth for summer holidays, but I still felt different when I came here to study. However, with each year I'm here I feel more integrated. Now when I go back to Canada, I feel a little more different there as well.

I first applied to Oxford in 1999 in my final year of doing Engineering Science at the University of Toronto, and I also applied to microchip companies for work in digital logic. Although I accepted a job in March 2000, I negotiated to start in October so I could take a break. The day after my graduation, I went to India for three months' walking and trekking in the Himalayas. Because of a bad monsoon, I spent the last month in Rajasthan and Bombay. (I lost my wallet in Bombay, and it was returned to me!) The new job was in California in Silicon Valley in San Jose and I loved it. It was like being on holiday: sunny and very exciting.

I came to Oxford in 2002 to do a D.Phil in medical signal processing at Wolfson College. I was working with clinicians at the Radcliffe Infirmary, which has since moved to the JR Hospital. My research involved looking at patients who suffered from a particular type of fainting. We would hook them up to equipment measuring blood pressure, brain activity, and a few other things, and they then lay on a bed that could be tilted to an upright position. We would tilt them and in many cases this would cause them to faint, sometimes immediately, but sometimes it might take up to an hour. Because the tilting was done in a controlled environment, it helped doctors with their final diagnosis.

I've been a postdoctoral researcher in the University's Engineering Department since 2006, working on artificial intelligence. Obviously a computer can't think as we can, but its memory, accuracy and patience are far superior to our own. For example, pattern recognition is a huge part of artificial intelligence as the computer can point out patterns in data that humans could miss (e.g. fingerprint analysis), and they don't complain about how tedious the task is. We do the fun part, coming up with programs the computer will run. Recently, I've been looking into multi-agent systems: this is when you have a group of computers interacting and communicating to achieve something more efficiently than one computer could do on its own. There is so much to learn. I really enjoy doing this job. I do some teaching as well, partly in the department but also at Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall.

A recent hobby is working with young offenders each week, teaching them basic skills: literacy, numeracy, how to write a CV, etc. I found out about it on a website for 'volunteers needed' in the city. It's amazing how many places in Oxford are in need of volunteers. There is an unmet demand. I have also started another project at the Natural History Museum, sorting fossils. Geology is one of my passions.

While I was growing up, religion wasn't discussed much in the house. As a teenager I was agnostic and eventually an atheist as I became more interested in science and naturalism. Then, as an undergraduate interested in neuroscience, I took a course on the philosophy of the mind. I had this quixotic idea that the world's problems might be solved and conflicts would cease if people could just understand each other, for example through artificial telepathy. I gave up on this ambition of transmitting one person's brain waves into another's brain when I learnt what a cyborg was – the nasty creatures from science fiction. Anyway, in this course, I saw that philosophers talked a lot about God even when they didn't have to – and this was one of the things that awakened a sense of spirituality in me. Another thing which helped was when, preparing for my trip to India, I took lessons in yoga and meditation. I was generally unsuccessful in meditation but there were a few moments, one in particular maybe lasting about three quarters of a second, that I view as a spiritual experience. It is difficult to describe and words do not do it justice. I felt a blackness; not empty but a fullness in the blackness, a connection, a union with something more than myself, an energy, which felt familiar and a sense of Presence. I was

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definitely in it and open to receive it. Peace, harmony, communication, beauty – all those things, and I felt changed afterwards. Today I would call it God but I went through a period after that when I called myself spiritual but not religious and was hesitant to use religious vocabulary. In that time I intentionally visited a variety of churches and places of worship, not wanting to adopt any particular doctrine; and then, just over two years ago, Quakers quite naturally fell into place. In the summer of 2007, I felt in touch with that energy again. I felt that God was communicating with me, not in words, but a sort of calling – not in the same sense as when a minister is called by God, but not far different from it; a calling to be spiritual and to share it.

My conception of our relationship with God is similar to Spinoza's. He was a monist and a pantheist (God is nature and all is of the same substance). Some people think of the world as a sponge and God as water permeating the sponge. I see God as an ocean and the sea sponge within it is the ocean in another form, like a solidified form of the ocean. I think God is more solid than the universe even though the metaphor of ocean and sponge suggests the other way round. But I like the dynamism in the metaphor, as the sea sponge changes over time and the world changes between solid and liquid, and this can map onto our own spiritual journeys. So that's a very visual concept of God and has many limitations, for instance the personal aspects of God. God is who I pray to and is the foundation of my being. Like the Irish bishop George Berkeley, I am more sure of God's Being than I am of my own.

A School for Peace

The vast majority of Jewish and Palestinian youngsters in Israel live apart and are educated separately. It is difficult for the young people of the two communities to meet informally in the course of everyday life. This lack of contact means that many Jewish Israelis are ignorant of, or indifferent to, the inequalities in society and the injustices in the law. They need to talk about these issues because ignorance about each other's lives can lead to prejudice and fear, so that hostility and even hatred develop all too easily.

For the more than 25,000 Jewish and Arab youngsters who have travelled to the Israeli village of Neve Shalom - Wahat al Salam, to take part in a School for Peace (SFP) encounter, it is often their first opportunity to sit down and talk to somebody from 'the other side'. The workshops are geared towards 16- to 17-year-old students and are organised in co-operation with their high schools. These encounters, which give the students an experience of a working model of co-operation, are powerful, tense and emotional. However, by living together, even for only a few days, the students get to know each other, learn to see one another in a new light, and it is hoped, generalise from what they have learned in the encounter to the reality at large. What follows was written by students following a game of negotiation:

Today we felt that we, the participants, the two peoples, were like two children who had got together to play. They wanted to play the game of 'Peace', a nice, naive game demonstrating their sincere attempt to bridge the gap between the two peoples. However, this was the game of 'Arab and Jewish Reality'.

'The two children came to stay at the Oasis of Peace to live in peace. First they became good friends, getting to know the best side of each other. So everything went well until the stage when they were asked to outline the rules of the game. And the game was the game of reality; and reality, being tough and ugly, the two kids, who had joined up to do something pure, naive and reconciliatory, had to cope with the complexities of their attempt to bridge the gap. They found themselves in a dead end. The kids who had wished to play together suddenly realised that in order to play together they must sacrifice a lot - and they were not always ready to do so.'

So we saw that it was difficult for us - the two children - to play the game. Although we were supposed to be able to make the rules of the game it was in fact very hard for us to change the existing rules (which had already been dictated by the history of the conflict) and thereby to create a new game.

(Taken from "Dealing with Conflict", a citizenship project edited by Dorothy Darke and Barbara Rustin for 14- to 18-year-old UK students based on ideas developed at the SFP.)

Dorothy Darke