



FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

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40 pence

Exploring the Early Quaker Vision: contemplative, charismatic and prophetic

We attended a course at Woodbrooke with this title, tutored by Stuart Masters, during the last weekend of May. We are interested in the spiritual roots of Quakerism and also its relationship with other strands of religious and political dissent. This was an intensive course over four days, and we came away with about 100 pages of detailed notes drawing on the writings, journals and letters of early Friends as well as biblical sources for many of their beliefs.

First we looked at the dissenting forerunners of Quakerism across Europe and saw how Fox's ideas were closely related to many other movements, such as Anabaptism, starting in the late fifteenth century. We had recently visited Cathar country in France and had also seen similarities in this and other heretical movements three centuries earlier. We found it affirming to think that, since the early days of Christendom, there has been an almost constant tension between those who try to follow the teachings of Jesus through personal spiritual experience and those who try to live by the scriptural letter, interpreted by others. Stuart drew our attention, again and again, to the writings of Paul as a source of insight for the former. Paul was a strong advocate for the idea of having a direct relationship with God, and can be read as guiding early Christians towards communal spiritual life in

which all can experience a personal sense of enlightenment, crucifixion and resurrection (even if women have to do it with their heads covered!). Early Friends would have interpreted persecution, ridicule, rejection and martyrdom as their self-crucifixions.

During the weekend we had to get to grips with

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From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

I have valued most during my time at Woodbrooke the opportunities to participate in worship-sharing groups. I believe that these are of fundamental importance to one's individual spiritual growth and well-being and to the health of the community of which one is an active member. I am developing a capacity to listen more attentively to disclosures of sorrow and joy as others recount to me their spiritual journeys. Tenuous at first is the hope that we will receive understanding in response to our awkward efforts to communicate. Courage grows though as we experience the concern of others touching us where we feel the pain most deeply. Compassionate listening involves the total engagement of the heart. It is through strength and grace that we are enabled to achieve trust and spiritual intimacy.

Kathy Tweet, 1993

QF&P 2.80

Deadline for contributions to the September 2014 issue: noon, Friday 22 August

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, and items for the calendar on page 6 can be emailed to lukesamuelmartin@gmail.com. Paper copy can be left in the newsletter pigeonhole at the Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org

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some quite difficult ideas such as 'celestial inhabitation' as in 2 Corinthians 4:10 "... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies." This sense that one had become inhabited, through Pentecostal experience, after which one's self would be totally drenched in the Spirit implies that overwhelming, enlightening, events were more obvious, sought-after, and celebrated among early Friends than is perhaps the case now. The internal, still, small voice we wait to hear during our Meetings for Worship might seem rather faded and shy when compared to, for example, James Nayler's revelations.

Another difficult idea with which we grappled was the relationship between good and evil, and how this would be seen among early Quakers. Without seeing evil as a natural human state, as with the doctrine of original sin, it still seemed necessary to associate many things about the outward, physical, worldly life with the notion of evil that in some sense had to be defeated. It is here that the idea of answering that of God in others becomes so important, because our claim is that all can appeal to 'the Spirit working within them' rather than having to be made good through some external event.

On a more familiar note, we also learnt about the ups and downs of the role of women among Friends, starting with an assumption of spiritual equality which was shared by many other dissenting communities, but going through a bit of the doldrums when the Society had to become more organised in its business affairs. Also, it was interesting to find out that one key difference between Friends and Anabaptists was that Quakers, from the earliest years, did not choose to follow the suggestions made by Paul of communal living, shared ownership of land and renunciation of personal property.

We have been to many courses at Woodbrooke and mostly these have been about developing our own spiritual experiences through some outward structuring based on readings, exercises, or creative work. This was the first one we had attended that required hard intellectual effort to try to appreciate the ideas of others. However, it was as uplifting and challenging as any of the others because, even allowing for the historical context, the ideas seemed as fresh and current as any ministry in Meeting for Worship, and as any grappings with meaning that we undertake in Afterword or in the meetings of West Oxford Friends.

Anne Watson and John Mason



Marigold Best

A regular feature of *Forty-Three* is a section on 'Friends in Print'. I would like to draw your attention to a more substantial work, a memoir by Marigold Best, called *The Life-cycle of a Marigold*. This tells of Marigold's very varied and interesting career, some of it in the service of Friends. One thing which struck me particularly was the kindness which Marigold met wherever she went – something which was no accident but a response to the affection felt for everyone she met. What a lesson about accepting and rejoicing in diversity! Marigold has given a copy of her book to our library. I do encourage you to read this fascinating history both of her life and of Quaker involvement in Latin America.

Peggy Heeks

Oxford Peace Trail

City Peace Trails are a way of discovering, on foot, some of the people and places associated with national and international peacemaking. Inspired by the success of the London Peace Trails, one person in Cambridge took on the small personal project of putting together a Cambridge Peace Trail. This is now published and available, joining other such trails like Manchester's, Bradford's and Leeds'. Is there someone out there in Oxford who would be interested in drawing together a Peace Trail round Oxford? The Peace Plaque in Bonn Square would be a good starting point. Please contact me for further information about the Peace Trails in Cambridge and London – and also for copies of the Trails (£2 each).

Anne Dodd
peteranne@aol.com, 01235 525997

Quakerism's One-stop Shop

Hungry? In need of intellectual stimulation? Seeking spiritual sustenance? If you've answered yes to one or more of these questions, I know where you can find what you're looking for: Woodbrooke, Quakerism's very own one-stop-shop for body, mind and soul.

Kath and I have both been fortunate enough to attend several courses at Woodbrooke over the last three years, and we've also spent a quiet unprogrammed week there just enjoying Woodbrooke's excellent hospitality. On each occasion we've come away calmed, inspired and rejuvenated.

Most recently, we attended the weekend course 'What does it mean to be a Quaker?' The tutors, whom many of you may know, were Simon Best and Mary Meeks. I can only tell you about my own experience of this course, but I do know from talking to Kath that her experience was equally positive.

Having said that, I must confess that by Saturday lunchtime (the course started Friday evening), I was starting to think the course was a dud; it seemed to be playing with the theme rather than providing answers. Then, quite suddenly, the penny dropped – the course wasn't intended to provide answers: it was intended to give us space and encouragement to develop our own.

From that point on, the experience was amazing. I don't want to spoil things for others who may attend this course by saying too much about the exercises, but I will mention that some of the things we explored were how we would answer if someone asked us to tell them a little about Quakers, what distinguishes Quakers from non-Quakers now and historically, and whether certain jobs would be difficult for Quakers to do.

Car salesperson, possibly? Would a Quaker really be comfortable selling and promoting one of the world's most significant causes of pollution? And yet cars provide the only practical form of mobility for many. Discuss! We had to!

Our final exercise, unsurprisingly, was for each of us to formulate a short statement saying what we personally thought being a Quaker meant. There was no compulsion to share these statements, although some in the group decided they would



like to. Mine, for what it's worth, was, "For me, being a Quaker means being part of a supportive community that helps me to devise a framework for my life."

The course has had a deep and lasting effect on me. I left Woodbrooke feeling peaceful and spiritually energised. These feelings have, until now at least, stayed with me.

I also left having enjoyed many interesting informal conversations in the beautiful new Garden Lounge and having eaten far too much food. In fact, the food at Woodbrooke is so good and so plentiful that I'm starting to wonder whether it's a cunningly disguised training exercise to help us explore the limits of our self-control!

If you've already been to Woodbrooke, you won't need my encouragement to go back. And, if you haven't been yet, don't delay, book today!

Keith Wilson

Oxford Credit Union

Do you want your savings to do benefit others? Do you want people to have access to affordable loans? If the answer is 'yes', then think of joining the Oxford Credit Union. This is an ethical bank, owned and controlled by its members. It makes loans to local people who need to borrow. Your money is safe and may be eligible for a dividend from any profits made. The interest charged on loans is low, and the directors are all volunteers. An Oxford Friend made me aware of the Oxford Credit Union about six years ago, and I've been a depositor ever since. This year's AGM explained the steps taken to stay within budget and mentioned hopes for new premises. You can put some savings to good effect by getting in touch with the Union at 01865 777 757 or info@oxfordcreditunion.co.uk.

Peggy Heeks

Dear Friends,

Back in the spring of 1997, I came from Ottawa Monthly Meeting in Canada to live in North Leigh for three months on a research grant, and rapidly got to know Oxford Friends. The Thursday morning group became a special home base, as I would make that day my Bodleian Library day, begun with worship and breakfast at 43 St Giles. I joined forces with the Allports and Roger Cullen to have two or three Quaker ceilidhs too, where I remember wonderful singing and sharing. I told some of my first stories about seeing great blue herons and feeling as if I were in contact with something very spiritually grounding.



I returned for a shorter stay in the spring of 1998 and Oxford Friends were very helpful as I contacted the different Friends schools in Britain with a view to sojourning. In the end I came for a third spring (and summer, too) in 1999, working and writing at Sibford School, where an

early draft of my now newly published book, *The Heron Spirals: A Commonplace Book*, was completed.

Since then there have been many rewritings and several visits to Oxford, but this July I came with the final product in hand and have been pleased by the interest Friends have shown in it. Not only did my book get a good review in *Quaker Voices*, but also in the *USA's Friends Journal*, and I am happy to say it is being stocked at the Quaker Bookshop at Friends House, and also at Blackwell's Bookshop, here in Oxford.

I want to convey my greetings to any who remember me and also to say profound thanks to the Meeting for its support. There will be a copy of *The Heron Spirals* in the library for borrowing.

For more information and copies of the reviews, please see my website:

www.carolinebalderstonparry.com. You may also contact me at carolinebparry@gmail.com

Thanks, Friends!

Caroline Balderston Parry

Good Heavens – We're Humans!

Before I came to my first Quaker Meeting, dear Friends, I'd read a lot about Quakers and Quakerism, and my reading had created high expectations. In particular, I was expecting to find people who were honest, straightforward, thoughtful and compassionate. And that's exactly what I did find. I was made very welcome and I was hugely impressed – and not a little daunted – by the virtuous natures of the Friends I met.

After I'd attended a few Meetings, however, a Friend spoke to me in a way that was, in my opinion at least, needlessly abrasive. My first reaction was one of disappointment and shock. Then I remembered Quakers are supposed to be plain speaking, so I decided that plain speaking was what I'd experienced and I'd have to learn to live with it if I wanted to follow the Quaker way.

You probably won't be surprised to hear that, over time, I had further experiences of a similar kind. I also heard others at our Meeting commenting that they'd been upset and hurt by what they felt to be unnecessary and unhelpful criticism and 'advice'. Some also mentioned that when they were hoping for tenderness and understanding, they received instead comments and suggestions that added to their problems.

It was clearly time for me to reconsider; perhaps Quakers weren't quite so virtuous after all! This was a matter of no little importance to me as by then I'd become a Quaker myself. I gave the matter much thought. Much more thought, in fact, than was justified because when I finally worked out the answer, it was incredibly simple: Quakers aren't just Quakers, they're also humans!

Yes, shocking as this may seem, every Quaker is a human being and has a full set of the foibles, prejudices and predispositions to ill humour that are integral to the human condition. Put simply, I'd expected too much of Quakers. I'd expected perfection when, in reality, the most I should have hoped for was to find a group of people committed to striving for perfection. As indeed I believe I have!

Realising I'd expected too much led to other important conclusions. I've come to understand that, when someone says something to me that

stings, I need to think very carefully. Despite my first impression, is it possible I might be mistaken? Were the words kindly meant but ill chosen? Is the person who spoke to me perhaps reflecting their own problems rather than deliberately criticising me?

I also know now that I must choose my own words carefully, in case I am the one who inadvertently causes offence. I won't always get it right, dear Friends, because I'm only human, but I definitely think it's worth the effort of trying. Oxford Meeting is made up of wonderful people and I for one don't intend to let a few little quibbles and misunderstandings taint the support, guidance and pleasure I get from this amazing community. What about you?

Keith Wilson

First World War Commemorations Autumn Events at the Meeting House

Exhibition

The Friends Ambulance Unit and the Friends Relief Service gave alternatives to those who would not fight. Oxford Open Doors in the Meeting House on 13 and 14 September.

Commemorating Peacemakers: 1914 and 2014 Speakers, films, songs, concert

November 15 - 10:30 am to 9:30 pm

Those who tried to prevent the First World War, and those who resisted it – in the peace, labour and feminist movements. For more information, email: commemoration@quaker.org.

Poetry - War (and Peace)

All are welcome!

Refreshments will be served from 7:00pm. There will be no charge for entry, but a collection will be taken in aid of Oxford Friends Action on Poverty, which supports organisations in Oxford working with people in poverty.

Monday 22 September

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|-----------------|--|
| 4:00 to 6:00pm | Poems in the Library |
| 6:00 to 7:00pm | Bring-and-share picnic |
| 7:00 for 7:30pm | Jon Stallworthy , poet and editor of the new <i>Oxford Book of War Poetry</i> will read and talk about war poems, including his own work. |

Monday 3 November, 7:00 for 7:30pm

Philip Gross will read from and talk about his latest volume, *Later* (2013) – with our theme in mind. Philip is a Friend and a winner of the T.S. Eliot poetry prize.

Monday 24 November, 7:00 for 7:30pm

Jenny Lewis will read from her new book, *Taking Mesopotamia* (2014), which explores the First World War and the Iraq war, using soldiers' diaries, including her father's. She is well-known as an Oxford teacher and writer of poetry.

CALENDAR FOR AUGUST 2014

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Saturday 9	10 am	Quaker Quilting	Wednesday 20		Friends Fellowship of Healing (held in own homes)
Monday 11	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends	Monday 25	4-6pm	Poems in the Library
Monday 18	7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends		7:30 pm	Young Adult Friends



‘All Quiet on the Western Front’ A Musically Accompanied Reading

Thursday 21 August at 7:30 to 9:00 pm

Commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, musicians Black Fox are presenting *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Passages of text from Erich Maria Remarque's anti-war classic will be read by members of the Thame Youth Theatre, interwoven with narrative extracts from Mick Jones' play 'The Soldiers Have Taken our Horses Away', first performed in Oxford in 1984. The readings will be interspersed with songs, including original musical settings to poems written by Philip Larkin, Siegfried Sassoon and Cicely Fox-Smith.

This event contains a full band and will take place in the Norrington room. Tickets cost £6 / £3 concession and can be obtained by visiting the Customer Service Department at Blackwell's Bookshop, Broad Street. Alternatively, phone 01865 333623 or email events.oxford@blackwell.co.uk

19 August is World Humanitarian Day, an opportunity “to advance a powerful and proactive idea: People Helping People”, according to Ban Ki-moon.

www.un.org/en/events/humanitarianday

The world of dew
is only a world of dew,
and yet...and yet...

Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828)

*He wrote this haiku after his daughter
Sato died of smallpox*

Chosen by **Yvonne Dixon**

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Sundays at 9:30 and 11 am at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Tuesdays and **Thursdays** at 7:30 am at 43 St Giles
(followed by breakfast at 8 am)

Wednesdays at 12:15 pm at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Headington LM worships on Sundays at 10 am
at The Priory, 85 Old High Street, OX3 9HT

OPENING TIMES (43 ST GILES)

Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday, 9:30 am - 1:30 pm

Forty-Three is available online, at
www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter

If you are considering writing an article or notice but would prefer it not to go online, please don't hesitate to contribute it. Just indicate that the piece is not for inclusion in the internet version — no reason will be asked for. Articles and notices are very welcome to appear in the print edition only, and the same applies to calendar items.

*Editorial Team: MARK EBDEN, PENNY ORMEROD,
and BECKY RIDDELL (Joint Editing & Production);
TINA LEONARD, DEBORAH FILGATE (Proofreaders);
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