



FORTY-THREE

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

NEWSLETTER

Number 433 (Online Version)

APRIL 2015

40 pence

Climate Action March in London

On Saturday 7 March a dozen Quakers joined a coach load of people from Oxford, heading for London to join the Climate Change March. It was the first warm day of spring, and in the parts of London that we walked through there were early spring flowers, and the well-kept old buildings sparkled in the sunshine. The police joined us after all, in spite of initial threats that their presence would not be funded. I had a nice chat with one about our respective solar panels and his electric car. I also explained to him about the Oxford 'big oil' dinosaur, sporting a hat in the shape of an oil rig, last seen in Radcliffe Square in February.



The Oxford contingent gathered in Red Lion Square. Some of us joined the 'Divest' campaign with its striking five foot by four foot orange banners carried high above people's heads, a magnet for photographers. (Every pedestrian is now a photographer, but there were some reporters there too. The Divest campaign is currently trying to get Oxford County Council to get rid of any investments in the big oil corporations such as Shell and BP.

Others accompanied the lovely gauzy banner designed by Jill Green and made by our children's

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From Quaker Faith and Practice

Do not assume that vocal ministry is never to be your part. Faithfulness and sincerity in speaking, even very briefly, may open the way to fuller ministry from others. When prompted to speak, wait patiently to know that the leading and the time are right, but do not let a sense of your own unworthiness hold you back. Pray that your ministry may arise from deep experience, and trust that words will be given to you. Try to speak audibly and distinctly, and with sensitivity to the needs of others. Beware of speaking predictably or too often, and of making additions towards the end of a meeting when it was well left before.

Advices and Queries 13

Deadline for contributions to the May 2015 issue: noon, Thursday 16 April

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 office@oxfordquakers.org. Paper copy can be left in the pigeonhole of any Editor.

For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org

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group, one of whom, Evie Cappleman, was there with her dad to help carry it. This banner attracted even more photographers!

We then walked to the starting point in Lincoln's Inn Fields. After a while the whole march set off, going along Kingsway, the Strand and Whitehall to Victoria Palace Gardens just opposite the Houses of Parliament, where we sat down to listen to speeches. We heard that there were 20,000 of us, not a record number but still a lot of people, and we made a lot of peaceful noise, including from a good contingent of drums. There were people from many different climate action groups there, including Grandparents Climate Action and some Quakers from other places. It was inspiring and enjoyable to meet up with old friends, make some new ones, and share news of what we are all doing in our local areas.

The speakers reminded us that we are only at the beginning and there will be a lot more to do, but it is up to us to rise to the challenge of demanding action to bring down our carbon emissions to a safe level quickly. With an election coming up, this is one topic we can ask candidates about, making them think about the issue and letting us see how effective they would be if elected. With a world-wide conference in Paris in December, this is a crucial year for action to prevent climate change.

Jeanne Warren

A Little Tale to Ponder

An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, hung on the ends of a pole that she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walks from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream.



"I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house."

The old woman smiled, "Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side?"

"That's because I have always known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."

Each of us has our own unique flaw. But it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. You've just got to take each person for what they are and look for the good in them.

So, to all of my cracked pot friends, have a great day and remember to smell the flowers on your side of the path!

Jill Green

Environmental and Economic Justice Group

Wednesday 22 April at 7:00 pm for 7:30 pm,
in the Garden Room

It should prove an interesting meeting with the main item under discussion being the General Election.

Preparation for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM)

A tested concern: housing

Elders and Oxford Friends Action on Poverty (OxFAP) invite all Friends and Attenders (whether you are going to BYM or not) to a meeting on **24 April** at 7:00 pm in the Garden Room, to consider housing. This is to prepare our Meeting for the tested concern to be considered at BYM. There will be input from Fran Ryan and Charlie Fisher about local issues, alternative forms of housing and land use.

Friends could think about:

- looking beyond short-term solutions and topics of immediate concern
- how to approach seemingly intractable problems constructively
- considering concerns tested collectively in our Meetings and communities

Suggested reading

- *Quaker faith & practice* – chapter 23, sections 1–23 and 32–52
- *Housing: our spiritual concern*, Quaker Housing Trust, 2015
- *Principles for a just housing policy*, Quaker Housing Trust, 2015

All suggested reading is available at www.quaker.org.uk/ym.

See www.quaker.org.uk/files/Spiritual-preparation-YM-2015.pdf for more information.

The Eldership Team and OxFAP

One Quaker's possibly controversial view of the Port Meadow debate

Every building obscures somebody's view of something. I am learning that my received beliefs about beauty in the built environment obscure my view of people and their lives. I have re-educated my aesthetic response to include the needs of people. Cowley Road is beautiful with its diversity, optimism, hope and resilience. Chocolate-box Cotswold villages speak to me of displaced rural families outpriced by absentee owners. All Souls College's decorated quad speaks of inequalities within the university and makes me wonder about numbers of employees on the living, or minimum, wage.

Currently, Oxford City Council is refurbishing tower blocks. These blocks are called 'home' by over 700 residents. In a time of desperate housing shortages, does it matter that they may appear ugly to a visual aesthetic sense? Does it matter now that, when first built, they obscured views for the people of Blackbird Leys and Wood Farm? Did it matter then?

It is with this frame of mind that I think about the new University housing on Port Meadow, and when I do so I cannot prioritise historic views over housing need. Students need to live somewhere, and if housing is not provided they put pressure on availability and rents in the private sector, already pressured due to a shortage of social housing. I know there were also arguments about the planning permission process, and people say it could be prettier, but I also know that nearly every new block of student accommodation is subject to complaints about views, amenities, loss of greensward and, for me, the only special thing about the Port Meadow complex is the high profile of the objections, rather than the high profile of the buildings. Maybe these arguments will continue, but I now know where I stand.

If Oxford is going to house its people and its students adequately, views will be lost as part of city growth. I believe it to be consonant with Quaker testimonies to try to put myself in the shoes of the least fortunate, whether it be students, Oxford residents, refugees or itinerants. We may need bread and roses, but we do not need roses instead of bread. The same applies to housing: we need housing and ancient views, but we do not need views instead of housing. You can build accommodation in my back yard.

Anne Watson (the education one)

Poems in the Library Everyone Welcome

Mondays, 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm, in the Library

27 April – Generations

18 May – Oxford

15 June – Travel

Everyone is welcome.

Stephen Yeo, stephen.yeo@phonecoop.coop

Letters from Oliver Kisaka Simiyu

Our Friend, until very recently Deputy General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), was invited to Burkina Faso in February, to make a one-hour presentation on how Churches in Kenya responded to the 2007 post-election violence. The meeting was arranged, in preparation for Burkina's approaching elections, by the local office of Diakonia (a Swedish Christian development organisation).



Oliver sent this message to his Friends in the UK and asked us to "please pray that it will be a fruitful effort of peace building."

Tina Leonard

Thursday 26 February

Greetings from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

I am sitting in day two of the meeting. The spirits of the Burkina Faso Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are very high. They are very excited that, with the support of Diakonia Sweden, they managed to organise the Burkina Faso public to mount a popular uprising against President Campaore, who had been serving as President for 27 years, and was trying to manipulate Parliament to remove the two-term limit that had been imposed by the constitution, in order to remain in power.

The uprising, in some ways similar to the Tunisian and Egyptian uprising, but more sober because it had a greater Christian presence, was successful, not just in blocking Parliament from voting to allow the change required by the President, but in causing both the Executive and Parliament to resign. They then, as a country, put in place a one-year transitional government and are now in serious discussions and preparations to have better elections. These, it is hoped, would harness the gains made through peaceful transition. I will be present this afternoon to share Kenya's experience of managing post-election conflict, alongside

friends from DR Congo, Zambia, Mozambique, Mali and Senegal.

One of the challenges we have is to help civil society sober up from their sense of victory in October 2014 so as to appreciate the realities of how society works. As the Chinese say, 'if you wish to move fast, go alone and if you wish to gain ground, move together.' Civil society groups get formed around particular issues, mostly crises. They need other structures that are more lasting, and that owe their existence to different bases and values, like the Churches. In my presentation I will be examining what I call seeds of violence, seeking to show that violence erupts because of many factors of past experience that exasperate the people and explode. I will then present some lessons from the Kenyan experience.

Thanks always for your prayers and interest.

Oliver.

Wednesday 4 March

I am now back in Kenya. Thanks for your prayers. The participants found my sharing very strong in informing them of the issues to think about. The Director of Diakonia Burkina Faso felt very strongly inclined to organise a meeting to bring the religious organisations on board, mainly because of the massive civic education required. You may appreciate that Churches in other countries are not always known to have the capacity for socio-political engagement. It took some insistence to get the CSOs to see the need to get the Churches on their side to help with capacity building. The Director intends to invite me to facilitate the next meeting with one or two other Consultants.

What I admired most about the Burkinabè (the people of Burkina Faso) is the calm, order and hope with which both the transitional government and the people are handling these historic events. May the Lord God Almighty grant them grace to realise a better government come election time.

Thank you all.

Footnote

Oliver has recently established Sola Gratia Associates, a consultancy promoting responsible citizenship in Africa and beyond. He will be in Oxford in April completing a doctoral dissertation on citizenship in Kenya.

Considerations on shopping and owning less

I'm discovering that the focus which comes after decluttering can be summed up in one simple idea – owning less. Although life is full of surprises, a good ambition is to stay decluttered and to continue along this path of owning less. Owning less also means continuing with a regular purge of stuff.

The truth is that owning less means a commitment to buying differently. It involves buying with more heart and buying experiences (holidays with loved ones, delicious food) instead of things (gadgets, accessories). Owning less needs to be a part of our inner credo, a kind of living adventurously amongst the ringing tills.

After a lot of decluttering in my own home, I know myself pretty well. I've found I have reached the point where if I put more stuff in my tiny flat, my unwelcome sense of the physical overcrowding that will arise overshadows the attractiveness of having more stuff. I may know I already own something like it and where it is. I know there's a certain kind of person that I am not, much as I wish I was.

We get prompted to consume lots of stuff. Once you have identified yourself as 'someone who has everything' the shopping rules change. Saying no to tempting 'must-haves' can be tough – a battle of wills between you and the marketing professionals – but mostly it is about knowing ourselves and realising we have what we need. Negotiating gift giving is a necessary social skill but actually a lot of people will recognise the interpersonal value in that negotiation, particularly when they are older.

Identifying unmet needs, as we note our shopping habits, can be a breakthrough. It might even help us find new ways of meeting our needs. However, I'd find it understandable if shopping tended to disguise them. I think it's very important to be kind to yourself about this.

As an ex-smoker, I've noticed that I find it at least as hard to resist the high of a new handbag as I did to turn down a cigarette when I first quit. A quality of crazed frustration hits me that is absolutely a parallel experience. I'm still thinking about the implications of this. I praise myself when I manage

to step away. I make rules so that the caving in is a little less awful ('handbags must be second hand'). I break my rules often but still hold them.

My instinct here is to be forgiving. Knowing yourself in a forgiving way makes some shopping dilemmas easier. Owning less can be so rewarding in itself that the experience of it can motivate you without the hectoring. Experiment on yourself through observation during your own shopping.

There are some lovely things to read online about this. The 'Becoming Minimalist' blog is a great place to start.

Trio Watson

trio@clearspaceforme.co.uk

Penny Dreadful?

Our Friend Penny Ormerod has asked us to report that she's both dreadfully absent-minded and dreadfully sorry – she's forgotten to tell us how much money was raised by the sale of white poppies. The exact amount was, in fact, £153.35. In order to avoid further delay, Penny made an executive decision, based on what people told her when they bought poppies, and split the proceeds between Trident Ploughshares and Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT). In fact, because she'd held the money rather longer than usual, Penny generously rounded the total up to £160. In this day and age, that's an excellent rate of interest!

Shortly after she'd despatched the funds, Penny received warm notes of thanks from both Trident Ploughshares and CAAT. The latter gave some details of its current work. There's no space here to quote these in full, but CAAT noted that it is a very busy and exciting time for the organisation at present, and gifts like ours allow it to have consistent presence and impact. Over the course of 2014, CAAT has continued to shut arms dealers out of our public institutions – including, for example, the Natural History Museum – sending a strong message that they are not welcome.

Editorial Team

Friend in Print

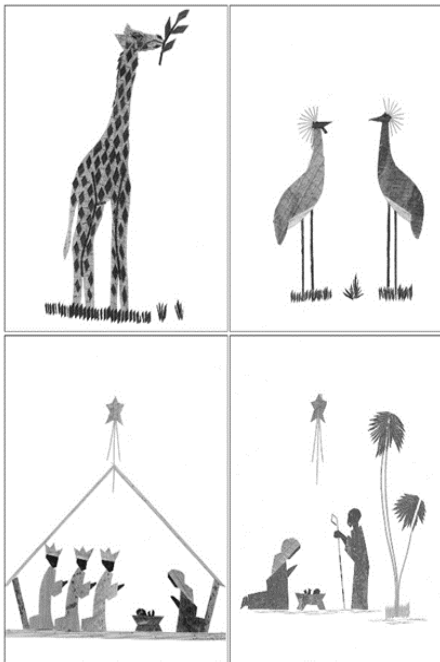
Peggy Heeks

'We have to take what we can get', *Quaker Voices*, Volume 6, No. 2, March.



'Bamporeze' – the people who make those cards

In November every year, a small group of us sells Christmas and greeting cards in the entrance hall of 43 St Giles. The cards, which are made from banana leaves glued to pieces of thin cardboard, are produced by a group called 'Bamporeze' (which means 'to comfort them') in Rwanda. The members of the Bamporeze group are mostly



women and children. All are either HIV-positive or have family members living with HIV. The Quaker charity Healing and Rebuilding our communities (HROC) pays the Bamporeze card-makers from the funds we send them from the sale of the cards. In addition,

some of the funds have been used to buy basic foodstuffs and medical supplies, to repair houses and to buy school exercise books, pens and pencils. More recently, some funds have been used to buy twelve months of health insurance in government hospitals for all 132 members of the 26 families who belong to Bamporeze.

HROC also visits Bamporeze once a week to run training courses and to advise the members on issues such as how to run savings schemes. The members make weekly payments into a joint account, from which they can take out small loans. HROC also runs training courses to help the members of the Bamporeze group to cope with trauma, which has two sources – first, the genocide of 800,000 mainly Tutsi people in 1994, and more recently, the HIV epidemic. HROC programme officer, Hubert Hirwa, recalls:

“It was a joyful day. The participants kept saying that they now understood the meaning of the term ‘trauma’, and that it applied to them, whereas in the past they had thought it was something

affecting only genocide survivors. They appreciated the importance of being open because sharing is the only way to healing and building trust within their communities.”

Glen Williams

Celebration of the Bombed Kaki Tree Jr. of Nagasaki

On 9 August 1945, an atomic bomb devastated the Japanese city of Nagasaki. Amazingly, a Kaki Tree (*Diospyros kaki*) survived the blast, and its offspring have been planted around the world as symbols of peace.

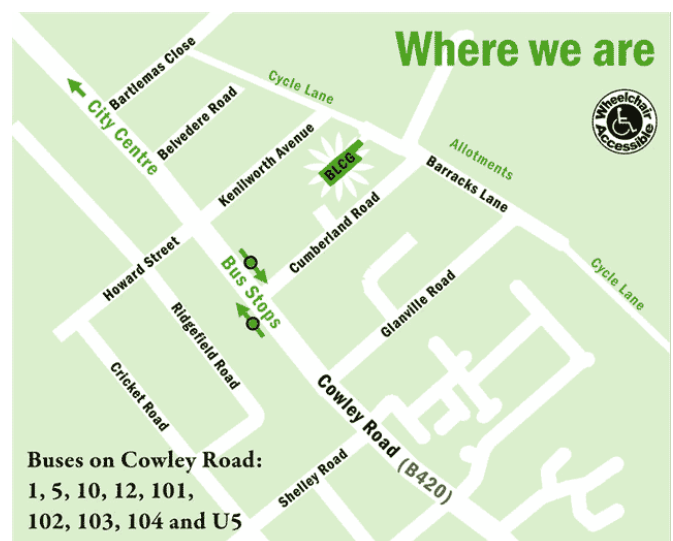
Nearly seventy years on, please join us as we celebrate our Bombed Kaki Tree Jr of Nagasaki.

Sunday 12 April at 2:00 pm, Barrack's Lane Community Garden, OX4 2AP
www.barrackslanegarden.org.uk

Special Guests: Hiroko Kato (Tokyo National Museum) and Joy Hendry (Professor Emerita in the Anthropology of Japan, Oxford Brookes University).

This is a community event and everyone, adults and children, are encouraged to participate in their own way! Want to read a poem or have another idea? Please contact project coordinator, Daniel Emlyn-Jones: daniel_ejnew@yahoo.co.uk, 07595 642288. For more information see: kakitreeproject.com/eng

Glen Williams



Introducing Our New Meeting House Manager



Deb Arrowsmith talking to Tanya Garland

I was brought up in a garden which happened to have a house in the middle of it. That's how it has always been. I've always been an outsider and always loved gardens. I earned my living at

gardening and garden designing for 20 years before I started time as warden at Norwich meeting in 2009. The Quaker Garden Project is something I created which exists to encourage Meetings all over the country to learn from (and develop) Quaker outside spaces, gardens and burial grounds. I think our outside spaces speak to, and speak of, our inner condition. (The website quakergardensproject.org.uk will give you loads of background and still features the garden we built with volunteers at Bath for the Britain Yearly Meeting.) I got to see a lot of different Meetings in this work and found wherever you are, what people wanted to know most was how to know each other in the things that are eternal and where people are in their faith.

I was brought up Church of England, took Religious Education A-level at school and wanted to read Theology. I wanted to learn about all faiths and the areas of sharing, what connects us and what separated us, but it was before the ordination of women and I didn't want to teach, so instead I went to Art School for Design which is still very central to me – it is about balancing the aesthetic and the functional. I went on to run my own printing business while working as a project designer. I designed gifts for Marks & Spencers, Boots etc. but when I became redundant, I went into designing gardens. It was while I was studying Fine Art at Art School that I attended my first Quaker Meeting but I didn't return for about 25 years. When I did come back, the only thing that kept me sitting inside the Meeting were the flowers on the table because I thought, if they can manage to put up with this, then I can. I still can only stay in Meeting by being able to focus on an outside view – something outside. Being connected to the natural world is crucial to my

wellbeing in all situations. I was really a non-attending attender. I created my own space in my own garden and gardens are deeply spiritual places of beauty and wonder and growth. But I realized I was avoiding people and needed community. For six weeks, I turned up at Norwich Meeting as far as the car park but couldn't go in. Then I realised I was having great difficulty facing up to a relationship with God. I had thought I could do it on my own, but you can't and you mustn't. I feel our work isn't valid before God unless it is for and with people. Otherwise it is selfish, isn't it?

I think people can feel very intimidated by all the good causes presented at a Meeting and feel pressured to be on a committee or organise 'good' works, but we need to protect those still spaces which need to be central to our own spiritual growth and there is a balance to be achieved between the two. What has made me the person I am now and where I am on my spiritual path are not two questions but one question. They are not separate. Whether it is answering the phone, cleaning the loos or answering the door, it is all practical ministry. There should not be a separate part to your spiritual life. There is a balance between the practical and the spiritual and Quakers is the most creative space I have ever found for this. I am a very keen cook too. It is my therapy really and we have the kitchen and ingredients here and I'd like to see more cooking and eating together after preparing the food together.

To be here (in Oxford Meeting) is a bit of a surprise. I honestly didn't think I would get the job but I relish the opportunity to try a new approach and open up the Meeting as I realise this Meeting has been through a difficult time. Here it is heaven. Two gardens for a start and some lovely people but there is an amazing work to do. I have been a gardener since I was five and the energy required for a new shoot to grow is phenomenal. When you think about it, you can't fail to be supported, sustained, and encouraged by the energy which I call God. The buds are now swelling on the bare branches – nothing static or dead in the natural world – for me that is a little glimpse of God.

We all have our own agendas but fundamentally we need to be aware of the Holy Spirit and to listen.

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CALENDAR FOR APRIL 2015

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Wednesday 8	11:00 am	Poetry Group	Monday 20	4:00 pm	Library Committee
Friday 10	7:00 pm	Elders' Meeting	Wednesday 22	7:00pm	Nominations Committee
Saturday 11	7:00 pm	Friday with Friends (see p. 2 of March Issue)		7:30 pm	Environmental & Economic Justice Group (see page 2)
Sunday 12	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Friday 24	7:00 pm	Preparation for BYM (see page 3)
	2:00 pm	Kaki Tree Celebration— Barracks Lane (see p. 6)	Sunday 26	12:30 pm	Bring-and-share-lunch
Wednesday 15	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing	Monday 27	4:00 pm	Poems in the Library (see page 3)
Saturday 18	9:30 am	Citizen Journalism— Northampton MH (see below)	Every Monday	7:00 pm	Young Adult Friends

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For me, it is increasingly seeking to listen to God. I have a stone on my desk which says 'listen.' It is there as a reminder but also as an instruction to us all. The gifts we can offer as Quakers are space, stillness and silence – and a home. A physical and spiritual home. What we absorb from the surroundings is important. The welcome, the garden, the warmth of the Meeting House, down to the coffee and the state of the loos. I strongly believe that eldership is shared by the whole Meeting. We can all enter in nourishing the spiritual development of the Meeting.

I am not a big activist. I am much more interested in the stillness and contemplative role and it is in that role where God becomes available to me. I feel God is present in this place and that is why I have turned up.

Nominating

Pity the man in failure,
Love the man who's mad,
Make music with the man that's happy,
Marvel at a lonesome child's hand;
Outstretched in those innocent fingers
Is a lively benediction's grace,
Make careful study, make mercy chime,
Love the tear, dry the face, watch the smile.

Christopher Nolan
(chosen by Yvonne Dixon)

Citizen Journalism

The Quakers and Business Group are running an event that we think will be of interest to your Meeting on Saturday **18 April** from 9:30am—5 pm at Northampton Quaker MH. Titled 'Citizen Journalism', it will be an opportunity to learn how to shoot video interviews and reports using smartphones. You can use such skills to promote almost anything: your project, your concern, your Meeting.

We all need to communicate effectively on subjects we're passionate about. A modern way to do this is using smartphones. It's the way communication is going: even the BBC is now using smartphones to record news and documentary items.

For more details including the day's programme, visit qandb.org/spring-gathering-2015

Elizabeth Redfern (Northamptonshire Area Meeting)

Volunteers needed!

Exclusive Roots, an African charity shop on Woodstock Road, is appealing for volunteers. The shop is the trading arm of the charity Tabeisa and all profits from its activities are used to support the development of poor communities in Africa. Exclusive Roots relies on volunteers to remain open, and currently needs more help. Volunteers can do a few hours a week, an afternoon, or a day – whatever is most convenient for them. If you're interested, Jane Conlon or Kate MacFarlane will be very pleased to hear from you. You can contact Jane at janeconlon@live.co.uk or by phoning 07720 681087. Kate can be contacted at katemacson@hotmail.co.uk or by phoning 07952 589866. Alternatively, you can simply call in at the shop.

Editorial Team