



# FORTY-THREE

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

## NEWSLETTER

Number 437 (Online Version)

SEPTEMBER 2015

40 pence

### If God were a woman

*(Si Dios fuera una mujer)*

'So, what if God were a woman?'  
Juan asked in his usual forthright way.  
Well, alright if God were a woman  
It's possible that we unbelievers  
Wouldn't say 'No' with our heads  
But would say 'Yes' with our hearts.

Perhaps we'd approach Her divine nakedness  
To kiss Her feet – feet not of bronze  
Her contours not of stone  
Her breasts not of marble  
Her lips not of plaster.

If God were a woman, we'd embrace Her  
And grab Her from the far distance.  
There would be no need to swear  
That we'd be faithful unto death  
Since we would all be Gods immortal.  
And, instead of giving us AIDS or panic  
She'd pass on Her immortality to us.

If God were a woman, she wouldn't set Herself up  
Far off in the kingdom of heaven.  
Instead, she'd be there at the threshold of hell  
Waiting for us, Her arms wide open to us  
No plastic roses for Her  
And a love not that of angels.

Oh God, oh God of mine  
If you were and would be  
Forever and ever, a Woman  
What a lovely commotion there would be!  
What exciting, splendid, impossible,  
Prodigious blasphemy!

Mario Benedetti

(Original Spanish version available at: [www.musica.com/letras](http://www.musica.com/letras))

Mario Orlando Hardy Hamlet Brenno Benedetti Farrugia – known as Mario Benedetti, was born in Paso de Los Torros, Uruguay on 14 September 1920 to a family of Italian descent. His early schooling was at a German language school, and he was the first published translator of Kafka's work in Latin America. At 14, he had to leave school and go out to work and was fortunate to get into journalism, first in Uruguay then in Argentina. He was one of Latin America's most prolific writers,

*Continued on page 2, column 1*

### From Quaker Faith and Practice

Do you recognise the needs and gifts of each member of your family and household, not forgetting your own? Try to make your home a place of loving friendship and enjoyment, where all who live or visit may find the peace and refreshment of God's presence.

Advices and Queries, 26

**Deadline for contributions to the October 2015 issue: noon, Wednesday 23 September**

*Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated to [newsletter@oxfordquakers.org](mailto:newsletter@oxfordquakers.org), and items for the calendar on page 6 can be emailed to [office@oxfordquakers.org](mailto:office@oxfordquakers.org). Paper copy can be left in the pigeonhole of any Editor.*

*For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit [www.oxfordquakers.org](http://www.oxfordquakers.org)*

*Continued from page 1, column 2*

with over 80 books published, and is best known for his poetry, although he also wrote novels, essays and a book on Cuba. Following the military coup in Uruguay in 1973, he spent 12 years in exile in Argentina, Peru, Cuba and Spain, much of this time separated from his wife who stayed behind to look after their parents. On his return to Uruguay, with the establishment of democracy, he became a minister in the Frente Amplio alliance with the Marxist 26 March Movement. He died on 17 May 2009, aged 88 and continued writing poetry right up to the end.

I am not sure when this poem was written – it may have been when he lived in Cuba. He was a lifelong agnostic, who famously said “If I were God, I wouldn’t waste time having doubts about whether I existed!” The Juan who asks the question “What if God were a woman?” was his friend and fellow poet the Argentinian Juan Gelman.

I just love his work. There are YouTube videos of his poems recited, some set to music and all with interesting graphics. Do explore!

**Karima Brooke**



## **A Visit to the Hope Institute in Kampala, Uganda**

Many Oxford Friends have met Canon Gideon Byamugisha, a priest in the Church of Uganda, who in 1993 became the first faith leader in Africa to publicly declare his HIV-positive status. This was the start of a remarkable ministry, which has brought hope, comfort, inspiration, self-confidence and commitment into the lives of literally millions of people, not only in Uganda but also in many other parts of the world.

One of the outcomes of Gideon’s ministry is the Hope Institute, which began in 2003 in a low-income suburb of Kampala as a reflection of Gideon’s desire to do something practical to help the many children and young people who were affected by the HIV epidemic – either directly or indirectly. The Institute trains young people in life skills, healthy living and also in practical vocational skills: vehicle maintenance, catering and hotel management, electrical installation, hairdressing, fashion and design, and carpentry.

Since 2003, a total of 1,222 students attending the Hope Institute have passed nationally recognised vocational exams. Of the 76 students currently studying at the Hope Institute, 43 are girls and 33 are boys. Twenty students board at the Institute in very basic quarters, without access to running water.

Several Oxford Friends have supported the Hope Institute financially for the past ten years. Earlier this month I visited the Institute, together with friends from Singapore who have been generous supporters of the Institute for the past fifteen years. It was a very moving experience. We were able to meet and talk with students and staff members, and also to witness the induction of the newly elected members of the students’ Guild Council. The Council represents students in areas such as academic work, citizenship, social activities, sport and health. It is a practical expression of the commitment of the Hope Institute to promoting democratic values and a sense of social responsibility among students. The new President of the Guild Council is herself an orphan.

During the past two years, for reasons completely outside its control, the Hope Institute has struggled with serious reductions in its budget. It has therefore been extremely difficult for the Institute to admit many students who are unable to pay the tuition fees: only eight of the current 76 students pay no fees. Several students hold down part-time or even full-time jobs (e.g. as minibus drivers and security guards) to pay their fees.

The Institute also faces several other daunting challenges, for example, funds to cover staff salaries, water supplies, and lack of equipment such as electric ovens for the catering course and the electrical installation course.



Can the Oxford Friends who currently make regular contributions to the Hope Institute please consider increasing their contributions? Can Friends who currently do not support the Institute please consider doing so?

Finally, a few words about Canon Gideon Byamugisha. A week before my visit he underwent an operation for colon cancer, which resulted in the removal of his rectum. He has since been in considerable pain and has been re-hospitalised twice – on the second occasion suffering from anaemia and malaria. He is now about to be discharged again, but faces a long period of recuperation and of financial hardship. Nevertheless, he remains calm, gracious and optimistic about the future.

For more information please contact me.

**Glen Williams**

01865 727612, [g.and.a.williams@ntlworld.com](mailto:g.and.a.williams@ntlworld.com)

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## **Quaker belief in action: conscientious objectors in the First and Second World Wars – coming soon!**

It all started with a Friday with Friends on a fine evening in May 2014, the centenary of the start of the First World War. We shared memories of our relatives who had been conscientious objectors, or workers for peace, in both World Wars. This was a project of the First World War Commemoration Planning Group, which helped organise a number of events in the Meeting House last year.

Of course, you never ask enough questions of your family at the time, do you? Life just rolls on, and it's rarely the right moment. I certainly didn't ask my father enough about why he did what he did, and now I really want to know. He was a conscientious objector in the Second World War. He worked in the Friends Ambulance Unit doing humanitarian relief work in Bengal.

I have a powerful sense of how important it is to put down those memories, so that we understand

the shape of the past struggles for peace and justice. We might wonder what we would do ourselves, in their position, if things had been different. Understanding what other Quakers have done to put their faith into action helps us to think about our own faith, and where it leads us. That's why I wanted to write down the stories told on that May evening. The booklet will be published in September, and I am very grateful for all the help with editing, proof reading, design and production from people in Meeting.

The stories in the booklet record a mixture of experiences. By the Second World War, the military tribunals that heard the COs testify to their opposition to war, were more understanding of those who refused to fight. My father, protected from social disapproval and isolation by his Quaker family, had a pretty good war. But many, especially the 'absolutists' who refused to take any part in what they saw as the war effort, lost their jobs, their houses, and their friends. Sometimes there were implications for the future of family members. But in those stories there are almost always people in the background, often Quakers, helping out in so many ways.

Reading these stories really makes you think about the consequences of standing up for what you believe in, and most of the storytellers in the booklet were ultimately proud of their relatives. Kathleen Lonsdale, in *Quaker Faith and Practice* 24.15, says

"I...knew beyond all doubt that I *must* refuse to register...and that I and mine must take the consequences. The 'and mine' made it more difficult, but I question whether children ever really suffer loss in the long run through having parents who are willing to stand by principles; many a soldier had to leave his family and thought it his duty to do so."

If you would like a copy of the booklet, please get in touch with me, Marieke Clarke, or Deb Arrowsmith in the office. We don't have a fixed charge, but a donation of £5 will help towards production costs, and a bit over for peace charities

**Sue Smith**

07799 133241, [sueandali@gmail.com](mailto:sueandali@gmail.com)

## Les Quakers de France à Nantes



If you've been coming to Oxford Meeting for some time and have good eyesight you may recognise the two figures on the right of this photograph from the Nantes local paper – Sylvette Thompson, Clerk of France Yearly Meeting and Richard Thompson. The Thompsons were Resident Wardens of Oxford Meeting from about 1995 to 2005. Getting such amazing publicity in an important local paper was a coup for Richard especially as the theme of this year's YM was "What does it mean to be a Quaker in France today?" with the emphasis on outreach and getting the message of Quakerism across in a country where members and attenders are measured in scant hundreds rather than our thousands.

The beautiful French word for outreach used in Quaker circles is *rayonnement* which to English ears at least has something of the light in it. The work of YM this year was focused on this theme with workshops and sessions on publicity, publications, peace work and cooperation, and joint endeavours with other European Quaker groups. We had a very jolly hands-on session designing book marks with a picture or logo on one side and a telling phrase from their *Quaker Faith & Practice* book on the other, intended to make the French general public think. Even the totally inartistic had fun thinking up what message in a few words we would want to get across to a public for whom the word Quaker has no resonance at all – not even oats.

All our sessions were interspersed with regular meetings for worship, a rare treat for those who have to make a two and a half hour journey each way once a month to meet two or three other like

minded *sympathisants* to worship together. Their commitment and faithfulness is impressive and humbling.

John and I have been attending France Yearly Meeting for many years now and always find it a rewarding and thought provoking experience. How would I survive as a Friend if the only four Quakers in my Area Meeting lived in Slough, Swindon, Stratford and a tiny village in Buckinghamshire? The answer for many Friends in France is technology, and Skyping and emailing obviously play an increasing role. But nothing approaches the joy of worshipping and eating and socialising with Friends in person and that is what their *Assemblée Annuelle* brings to Friends in France.

**Elisabeth Salisbury**

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### Friday with Friends

#### The Spirit of the Margins

Friday 18 September, 7:30 to 9:30 pm

Margins are places where differences meet. On the margins, we can feel forgotten or set aside, powerless and beyond our comfort zone. Margins can be places of change, diversity and fertility. Jesus lived on the margins, as did the prophets and many Bible characters. Societies – and we ourselves – are renewed from the margins.

The evening will be experiential and participative, drawing on our own lives and the lives of others, individual reflection, collective discussion, prose and poetry. We will look at how the spirit works in the margins of our own lives and the world in which we live.

The evening will be facilitated by Chris Bemrose. He has been a member of L'Arche – communities based around the needs and gifts of people with learning disabilities – for 20 years. He is currently studying Social Sculpture at Oxford Brookes. He is a Quaker and led a session on 'crosses and noughts' at Yearly Meeting Gathering in Bath last year – exploring pre and post Christian meanings of the cross.

The evening will start with tea and coffee from 7:00 pm. The session itself will be from 7:30 until 9:00 pm.

**Val Ferguson**

## Friday with Friends Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Oxford

Friday 25 September, 7:30 to 9:30 pm

The media storm around the camp in Calais, and the situation it highlights, is putting a spotlight on the difficulties faced by asylum seekers coming to Europe. Kate Smart of Asylum Welcome, and Sushila Dhall of Refugee Resource, will present the work of their organisations in helping asylum seekers and refugees in Oxford.

Asylum seekers come to the UK fleeing persecution, conflict and violence, including rape, in their own countries. They flee, sometimes having lost their family and all their possessions, because they have nowhere else to go. They come to the UK to seek sanctuary.

Asylum Welcome makes a difference through a range of high quality, practical services, such as providing advice and education, visiting detainees, promoting rights and running events. For more information: [www.asylum-welcome.org](http://www.asylum-welcome.org).

Refugee Resource aims to relieve distress, improve well-being and facilitate the integration of refugees and asylum seekers – mainly in Oxfordshire – by providing psychological, social and practical support. For more information: [www.refugeeresource.org.uk](http://www.refugeeresource.org.uk).

Sue Smith

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### The Garden at 43, from front to back: a thank you and an appeal

Connor Slamon, Deb Arrowsmith and Stephen Yeo would like to thank friends and users of our rooms for their continuing appreciation of the garden through the summer. As the autumn approaches you may be dividing the perennials in your own garden, to make sure they grow stronger next year. If so, can you think of the garden at 43 for the pieces you can spare? This spring we had a Great Spring Re-planting, and with the financial and material help of some Friends we bought many new shrubs, roses, peonies, perennials etc. The results will be more evident in the future than they have been this year: some things grow slowly. There are still gaps: we would particularly welcome ordinary as well as imaginative perennials, especially in the darker ranges of



colour. For instance our Michaelmas Daisies have reverted now to the nondescript thin, pale blue. More vivid ones? We have enough Golden Rod. We are short of interesting Phloxes. Scabious? etc. etc.

We are working in the garden on Thursday mornings from around 8:30 am till about 12:30 at the moment: so leave anything you think would look good (and please don't mind if we disagree!) by the shed, clearly labelled with Thursdays in mind. And if you like potting up annuals and biennials like Sweet Williams, Foxgloves, Canterbury Bells, Wallflowers at this time of year for next year, please keep 43 in mind too. And bulbs? Colour, colour, colour!

Stephen Yeo, Garden Manager  
[stephen.yeo@phoncoop.coop](mailto:stephen.yeo@phoncoop.coop)

### Greetings from Tasmania

We visited Hobart Meeting while in Tasmania recently and found several links with Oxford. We bring back greetings from: Barbara Wilde, the daughter of Irene Curry who was resident warden at Oxford a long time ago; Peter Jones who convened Oxford Young Friends, we estimate that must be about 35 years ago; and Madeleine Ball who was a member at Oxford 30 years ago and recalls the other Anne Watson.

John Mason and Anne Watson

# CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER 2015

All 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Sunday 6	12:30 pm	Meeting for Worship for Business	Friday 18	7:30 pm	Friday with Friends (see page 4)
Wednesday 9	11:00 am	Poetry Group	Friday 25	7:30 pm	Friday with Friends (see page 5)
Monday 14	4:00 pm	Poems in the Library	Sunday 27	12:30 pm	Bring-and-share lunch
Wednesday 16	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing	Every Monday	7:00 pm	Young Adult Friends

## Office News

### Welcome to a new space for the Office Team to share our ongoing work in 43!

We are holding a Friends On Duty (FOD) training and development session on Monday 7 September 4:00 to 6:00 pm with refreshments, in the Garden Room.

New Sunday Office staffing hours will be trialled as of September. Please find us in the office between 10:00 am and 1:00 pm on Sundays.

As part of operation 'Clean and Light', we have been taking part in some DIY improvements for 43. You might have noticed:

- The Short Room has received a new coat of paint, and a new quilt cover for the sofa. We cleaned out the windowsill cupboard, and discovered newspapers dating from 1965!
- The Long Room is in the process of being re-painted white.

- The upstairs landing has been re-carpeted.
- The disabled bathroom has received a deep clean and a fresh coat of paint.
- The Office ceiling is still a work in progress! It has received one layer of plaster, and is currently drying. We are waiting for one final layer of plaster!

Many thanks to everyone who has helped us over the last month. **Deb, Cecilia and Anbara**

### Contributions Earnestly Sought!

Currently, our repository of material for future issues of *Forty-Three* is empty. We need your help to replenish it. Please consider writing an article for us. It can be about any topic of interest to Oxford Quakers. If you have an idea and would like to discuss it, please come talk to Becky or Keith.

### 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](http://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: BECKY RIDDELL and KEITH WILSON (Joint Editing & Production); ANBARA KHALIDI and DEB ARROWSMITH (Distributor and Subscriptions)*