



Forty-Three newsletter

Number 478
February 2019



Oxford Friends Meeting
43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW

Quakers and Sustainability

Awareness of ongoing mass extinctions, and of impending climate breakdown, has grown enormously in the past year or so. The latest IPCC report showed us that to have a habitable planet we have little more than a decade for the whole world to shift towards a low-carbon economy. In December, David Attenborough told the UN Climate Conference in Katowice (COP 24) that "*collapse of our civilization is on the horizon*".

Despite that, COP 24 postponed the setting of new, legally-binding targets for carbon reduction until 2020 or beyond. And our world is still heading towards a global temperature rise of 3 centigrade degrees, or possibly much higher.

Where are Quakers in all this?

Back in October, 150 Friends from Meetings across Britain got together for the third 'Sustainability Gathering', to pursue our Canterbury commitment to becoming a 'low-carbon, sustainable community'. It was convened by Lis Burch and Laurie Michaelis, who had assembled some wonderfully inspiring and challenging speakers. I'd like to share some of the key messages that resonated with me.

One message was: Beware of 'exceptionalism'. Exceptionalism is the denial of equality: the

unspoken belief that the rights and privileges we assume for ourselves do not apply to others. Not, that is, to others in faraway lands, or in future generations - or indeed to other (non-human) species. Curing ourselves of these exceptionalisms, which run so deep in our culture, calls for a radical shift of consciousness. Including the shift from seeing ourselves (human beings) as distinct from, and superior to, all the rest of nature - the shift to recognising that everything that lives is holy.

Another message was: Get active politically. Many of the changes we so urgently need, like carbon taxes and other measures to promote a low-carbon economy, can only be provided by government. We must make ourselves heard. Many Quakers are joining **Extinction Rebellion**, a rapidly growing movement of mass non-violent civil disobedience, as practised by Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and others. There's a thriving Oxford group. Contact xroxford@gmail.com

Other guiding themes from the Sustainability Gathering included: To act not from fear or anger, but always and only from love. To be joyful – walking cheerfully, not guilt-tripping. To seek to engage spiritually with others. To recognise the sacred. To share our stories: stories of what we and others are doing; stories to inspire and encourage both ourselves and others. And to work towards that radical shift of consciousness.

Alan Allport

Deadline for contributions to the March 2019 issue: 12:00 noon, Wednesday 20 February

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, or a paper copy can be left in the pigeonhole of any editor. Items for the calendar (on the last page) can be emailed to office@oxfordquakers.org. For information: tel. 01865 557373 or visit www.oxfordquakers.org

Physicists and Funerals

You want a physicist to speak at your funeral. You want the physicist to talk to your grieving family about the conservation of energy, so they will understand that your energy has not died. You want the physicist to remind your sobbing mother about the first law of thermodynamics: that no energy gets created in the universe, and none is destroyed. You want your mother to know that all your energy, every vibration, every BTU of heat, every wave of every particle that was her beloved child remains with her in this world. You want the physicist to tell your weeping father that amid energies of the cosmos, you gave as good as you got.

And at one point you'd hope that the physicist would step down from the pulpit and walk to your broken-hearted spouse there in the pew and tell him that all the photons that ever bounced off your face, all the particles whose paths were interrupted by your smile, by the touch of your hair, hundreds of trillions of particles, have raced off like children, their ways forever changed by you. And as your widow rocks in the arms of a loving family, may the physicist let her know that all the photons that bounced from you were gathered in the particle detectors that are her eyes, that those photons created within her constellations of electromagnetically charged neurons whose energy will go on forever.

And the physicist will remind the congregation of how much of all our energy is given off as heat. There may be a few fanning themselves with their programs as he says it. And he will tell them that the warmth that flowed through you in life is still here, still part of all that we are, even as we who mourn continue the heat of our own lives.

And you'll want the physicist to explain to those who loved you that they need not have faith; indeed, they should not have faith. Let them know that they can measure, that scientists have measured precisely the conservation of energy and found it accurate, verifiable and consistent across space and time. You can hope your family will examine the evidence and satisfy themselves

that the science is sound and that they'll be comforted to know your energy's still around. According to the law of the conservation of energy, not a bit of you is gone; you're just less orderly. Amen.

Words from **Aaron Freeman**, commentator on US National Public Radio, read by the grandson of Ruth Baker, member of Abingdon Meeting, at her funeral.

Contributed by **Gwithian Doswell**



On the same theme...

Einstein wrote to the sister of a friend and fellow physicist who had died "*Michele has left this strange world a little before me. This means nothing. People like us who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is nothing more than a persistent stubborn illusion.*"

Carlo Rovelli (2014, translation 2015), Penguin Random House. *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, p58.

Contributed by **Sandra Figgess**



Are We But Servants?

In this article, I'm going to examine the Quaker way of service. I will argue that what distinguishes us from many other faith groups is how we organise ourselves.

I served for over six years on Oxford Meeting's Nominations Committee, which finds people to serve on other committees, and to serve in a single role such as the organiser of the rota for providing teas and coffees after Meeting for Worship. So I think I have a good understanding of how the Meeting functions as a worshipping community, and how it follows the guidelines as set out in Quaker Faith and Practice.

At 43 St Giles we provide rooms and facilities for groups that are part of the wider community, and whose activities are good for the wellbeing and enlightenment of their participants. We employ a full-time manager of our premises, and a number of part-time staff, who serve us well, but are not necessarily Quakers.

Assisting the paid staff are a number of Quaker 'friends on duty', who volunteer on weekdays. From January there will be an 'employee on duty' during our Sunday morning worship, and I expect that in time the total hours of our paid staff will increase.

Is this not all rather complicated? It seems to me that as a worshipping community we have not properly discussed the balance we would like between what we offer as volunteer service provided by Friends and Attenders, and what we would like as paid assistance provided by employees.

The tasks that need to be done on a Sunday include:

- opening up the premises,
- checking that the heaters are on,
- checking the toilets,

- arranging seating (the Elders who will keep worship in Right Ordering do this),
- welcoming, guiding and advising newcomers,
- holding the Children's Meetings,
- providing security, keeping troublesome or noisy people away from the worship,
- serving coffee, tea, and biscuits after MfW,
- washing up, cleaning surfaces, using the vacuum,
- putting out recycling and food waste for collection,
- turning off lights and heaters,
- and finally, locking up!

As you can see, there's a whole variety of things that need to be done to ensure the smooth running of Sunday MfW. If you have only done one of these tasks before, consider doing two, or three!

I think that we should talk about how we are willing to serve the Meeting, both in official roles, or stepping in spontaneously to serve appropriately. The next 18 months might be particularly challenging to our self-organising in a Quaker way, during the inevitable disturbance caused by the rebuilding of the Garden Room.

In his hymn *Teach me, my God and King* (*The Elixir*, published 1633), George Herbert says:

All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture -"for Thy sake"-
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.

I understand Herbert as urging us to consider: Is every action and conversation you engage in for God's sake? Or (if you're not a theist) for a better World?

Steve Brooke

Burnt Potatoes

A sudden siren from the kitchen.
My first thought: *fake news*;
that show-off smoke alarm,
always irritatingly over-zealous.
I wave away this assault
on my preoccupations
with the blinkered certainty
of a climate change denier.
But it's been enough to spoil the mood
for my hesitant Muse,
always far from sure we're a good idea.
Another potential poem ruined.
It might have been that great
breakthrough one. Isn't a world
teeming like a malignant river
with e-mails, texts,
cold-calls from kindly companies
concerned I don't miss out,
enough, without macho devices
muscling in to impress?

Then I smell it, that chastening
acidic burnt smoke smell.
My world does a Rorschach flip.
Reluctant Muse transforms to
All Too Willing Old Crone with the ease
and tease of a squirrel's tail
disappearing up a tree.
Those potatoes I knew I had turned down,
knew so tightly
there was no room left even for belief,
had decided to go jazz,
were boiling up John Lennon's maxim:
*Life is what happens while you're busy
making other plans.*

I know it well, used it only recently
watching footage of just before
the First World War -
the world going on,
in its old, jerky, habitual way,
blindly confident in the future of its past,
right up to that slowly nearing
cliff-edge moment.

One day soon people
may look back at us like this,
see mostly everyone going on
in their old preoccupations,
certain that somehow
despite the statistics,
the melting ice, the wild fires,
it would all come right;
time would be on the side
of their known world,
so smart, rational,
technologically advanced .

In my smoke-filled kitchen
a *Eureka* moment.
You can question a belief,
but not knowledge.
This is time's trick,
the danger moment,
when a world becomes
so known, so tightly held,
it leaves no room for doubt.

Chris Gaal



A Warm Gift on a Cold Day

This is our gardener Connor, with garden team members on a sunny Thursday in January.



We are putting our old stock of garden tools together with those gifted by Anita Ghosh from her late Mum's and Dad's house. Thank you Anita! A generous gift with which to remember a much-loved, good-gardener mother and all her family. Now we have enough good tools for any number of Thursday volunteers! And this provides us with an excuse to clear and rearrange the garden shed, ready for the spring.

Come and see it one Thursday 12:00 noon (lunch) through to 4:30 pm – but not in February because the garden and the team will be resting until Thursday 7 March. See you then. Keep...planting! Ideas and help always welcome, to stephen.yeo@phonecoop.coop, and to Jacqui in the Office.

Stephen Yeo

Energy Psychotherapy Introduction

A few Friends have regretted not being able to come to the Friday with Friends I gave on this subject. I am running a free morning workshop on the same topic on 16 March in the Garden Room at 43, from 9:30 am to 1:00 pm. Friends are welcome, but please email therapy@greenfig.org.uk to book a place. Donations to MEET in Oxford.

Sandra Figgess

Friday with Friends

Friday 8 February, Madeleine Ward:
Intellectual context for the development of Quaker Theology 1656-1700.

Friday 1 March, Extra Friday with Friends:
Presenting to Friends our Quaker Centre and New Garden Room plans. Come and review our progress and get involved in the fundraising programme.

Enquirer Evenings

Get to know Friends across five evenings in spring:
Wednesday 6 March, Wednesday 3 April,
Wednesday 1 May, Monday 3 June, Monday 1 July.
Share the experience of being a Quaker and discover more.

Poems in the Library

Our monthly gatherings of words, with tea and sometimes a theme ...

Monday 18 February 4:00 to 6:00 pm – no theme yet.

Monday 18 March 4:00 to 6:00 pm – no theme yet.

Interview with James P, Alcoholics Anonymous

This article is the first in an occasional series introducing some of our partner groups who have made their 'home' at 43 St Giles. Such articles tell us about aspects of our Meeting House life that we may not know, and, with permission of the group, will be used for our fundraising applications.

James P has 13 years of sobriety thanks to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and was one of the founding members of the Oxford Men's AA Group, which meets every Wednesday evening in the Oxford Quaker Garden Room at 43 St Giles. "There are two types of AA groups", he explains. "The closed type consists only of people who admit to having an alcohol problem and want to do something serious about it. There is also the open type, which includes not only people with an alcohol problem but also some of their family members and friends."

The AA group that meets on Wednesday evenings in the Garden Room at 43 St Giles is the closed type. It began meeting in November 2017, and now meets at 5:30 pm every Wednesday, for about an hour. At first its meetings were attended by just five or six people, but now it's not unusual for 20 people to attend. There are 19 AA groups in Oxford, and members of one group often attend meetings of other groups as well.

"The aim of AA", says James, "is to support people who have alcohol problems." James himself decided to join AA in 2005, and since then has not touched a drop of alcohol. He feels that there are affinities between Quakerism and AA. Each gathering of the AA group that meets in our Garden Room starts with three minutes of silent meditation, something that James feels connects AA with the Quaker tradition of silent worship. The fact that alcohol is not consumed on Quaker premises is another link between AA and Quakerism.

Every meeting of the AA group features a talk of about 20 minutes, followed by a discussion, when members of the group can also discuss other issues related to alcohol. Anonymity is key to the

effective functioning – even survival – of every AA group. To protect everyone's privacy, individuals are known only by their first names, and no records are kept of members' names and addresses.

Each AA group is expected to be self-supporting from the contributions of its members, collected every time they meet. These contributions pay for the rent of the room small snacks such as biscuits. Oxford Friends Meeting supplies tea, coffee, milk, and sugar as part of its charge for the use of the Garden Room. Although higher than many other premises, such as church halls, this charge is still acceptable to the group, especially bearing in mind the conveniently central location of 43 St Giles and the availability of helpful Oxford Quaker staff members. "The only real drawback of the Garden Room", says James, "is the lack of privacy. This is because there is no door to the room, only a folding screen, which can never be properly closed. This means that noise from people talking outside can sometimes be heard, and can be disruptive."

At every AA meeting in the Garden Room, the "Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous" are prominently displayed on the wall. These summarise the phases which an alcoholic typically passes through on the road to recovery from alcohol addiction. Newcomers are not expected to accept every one of these 12 steps if they do not feel willing or able to do so. They are simply asked to keep an open mind, to attend AA meetings where recovered alcoholics describe their experiences, and to read AA literature describing the AA approach.

The success of the AA approach, according to James, is due to the fact that an alcoholic who no longer drinks has a unique ability to communicate with a problem drinker. This is the basis of 'sponsorship', a process through which an alcoholic who has achieved sobriety supports someone who is still in the early stage of giving up drinking. Some people communicate with each other by phone in between AA meetings. "The more you're involved, the more likely you are to stay sober. And staying sober", he says, "can change people's lives completely."

Letters from America, 1865: An English Quaker and the 'Emancipated Negroes'

A talk by Ben Simpson
Thursday 14 February 2019

*"Was there ever a grander field for our sympathy,
and our active, personal, immediate help?"*
1:30 pm in the Leonard Wolfson Auditorium
Wolfson College, Linton Road, OX2 6UD
All are welcome by courtesy of the College
No charge – no booking needed.

"The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) played a major role in the abolition movement against slavery in both the United Kingdom and in the United States of America. Quakers were among the first white people to denounce slavery in the American colonies and Europe..."

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Quakers_in_the_abolition_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quakers_in_the_abolition_movement)

Ben Simpson has written a family history* and the talk includes details of some of the letters, subsequently discovered, written by his great grandfather, who toured parts of North America on behalf of the Society of Friends for four months after his arrival in 1865, investigating the 'condition of the negroes at the end of the civil war'. His arrival coincided with the assassination of President Lincoln.

Ben was on the administrative staff of Wolfson College from 1987 to 2009. First employed as Development Officer, he retired in 2009 and is an honorary Member of Common Room. He is descended from a long line of Quaker ancestors, originating in Westmoreland, the last of whom was Grace Sutton, a member of the Oxford Meeting.

Ben was a magistrate for 40 years, 20 of which were also as a member of Thames Valley Police Authority.

**The Generations In Between* – Graffiti Press, Oxford, 2014

Notice from Wolfson College Oxford

Launching Our Garden Room and Quaker Centre Fundraising

Telling our story and opening up our home.
Come along to our Vision Day!
Saturday 23 March 11:00 am - 2:00 pm.
Meet Friends, discover more about Quakers.
Watch a presentation of our future plans.
View our fundraising film.
Meet the groups – our partners.
Share lovely food!



Quiet Please – We're Making a Film!

Remember we had a go at film-making on our phones at our Discovery Day in the summer? Well now we want to make a film about our Meeting and we again need your help! We have an outline script – but we need Friends who would be prepared to be filmed about faith, activism, our Meeting House, and why we enjoy being part of Oxford Quakers. All ages and abilities are needed. If interested, please contact Deb in the office as soon as you can (or is that Cannes?).

CALENDAR FOR FEBRUARY 2019

All at 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Sunday 3 February	10:30 am	Combined Meeting for Worship
	12:00 noon	Meeting for Worship for Business
Tuesday 5 February	7:00 pm	First Tuesday Group
Friday 8 February	7:00 pm for 7:30 pm	Friday with Friends, Madeleine Ward, Early Quaker Theology
Monday 28 February	4:00 pm	Poems in the Library - no theme yet.
Wednesday 20 February	1:45 pm	Friends Fellowship of Healing
Sunday 24 February	12:30 pm	Bring and Share Lunch for whole Meeting
Friday 1 March	7:00 pm for 7:30 pm	Extra Friday with Friends: Garden Room update and Q&A.

From Quaker Faith and Practice

Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?

Quaker Faith & Practice, Advices & Queries No. 41

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

1st Sunday of each month

10:30am at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

2nd 3rd & 4th Sunday of each month

9:30am & 11:00am at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Monday

7:00pm Young Adult Friends at 43 St Giles
(followed by baked potato supper)

Tuesday & Thursday

7:30am at 43 St Giles
(followed by breakfast at 8:00am)

Wednesday

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

Headington LM worship on Sunday

10:00am at The Priory,
85 Old High Street, OX3 9HT

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.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

Editorial Team:

*SHERRY GRANUM, ALEX SMITH, and SUE SMITH
(Joint Editing and Production);*

*DEB ARROWSMITH, JACQUI MANSFIELD, and
MAX HOWELLS (Calendar and Distribution)*