

Forty-Three newsletter

Number 485
September 2019

Oxford Friends Meeting
43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW



Giving and Receiving

It can be a bit daunting asking people for money - every homeless person on the street knows this. In our own world, anyone who has stood up on a Sunday and spoken to the special collection knows it. We are in the process of raising funds to rebuild and make more sustainable parts of our premises - the parts that we want everyone to reach. We are doing this for our group of meetings, for our partner groups, and for the public - who we hope will come in and see, feel, and experience something of our way of worship.

Still, it's daunting asking for dosh. George Cadbury had a good line about not being embarrassed to ask for money: "It will be given to you," he said. Here's hoping. George's implication was that if the Spirit gets what you are going to do with the cash, 'all shall be well'. (Mixing my mystics maybe, but we need all the help we can get!)

I was a bit dubious about making a national appeal in *The Friend* earlier in the summer as this was to cost us about £600 with printing and distribution. Since July this appeal alone has raised £16,500 - so I consider I was mistaken. It's not only the encouraging fact that Friends up and down the country from Dundee to Guernsey are willing to support our rebuild that warms the heart, it's also

the letters and stories that come along with the cheques and bank transfers. Anecdotes include donors' memories of Oxford Meeting, the welcome they received, the college they attended, and several marriages made in our department of heaven that are still going strong! We will certainly have a party to invite all the couples who ever married here and their registering officers when we are ready - what a great time that will be!

Amounts from £2 to £1000 have come in, and members of the garden group team have written back with thanks to each one. £5 came from a woman who lost her way and got help from the office to get her back on track. £20 came from a chap from Pennsylvania just passing who had tea and cake with us in the garden. Lots of £2 coins are coming in for the new greetings card ranges on sale in the hall. Pamela Hutchinson-Collins' range of Quaker phrases and testimonies shows a wonderful way of bringing that talent out from under its bushel.

We are working on T-shirts: watch this this space. Better still, I wonder what thou canst think up that might give of your talent and receive a blessing in the form of a donation to the garden room project? I recently cleaned a friend's carpets and got £40, a lovely chat, and some delicious homemade marmalade. Result!

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Deadline for contributions to the October 2019 issue: noon, Thursday 19 September

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.

We have raised over half the estimated total of £600,00 with reserves, donations, pledges, and gifts. There's a long way to go – lots of grant applications, visits, presentations to be made, letters to be written to people all around the world. Whatever comes back, I know now, much more than I did, the pivotal place that Oxford Meeting House has been, and still is, for so many people.

If you haven't contributed so far and wish to do so simply pick up a Greetings Postcard from Oxford Meeting from the lobby; all the details of giving are on there. Thank you!

Deb Arrowsmith

Protest about Nuclear Weapons at Downing Street Gates

For a number of years a few Trident Ploughshares members have gone to the Embankment Gardens behind the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in August to remember the 1945 dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This year is the 74th anniversary. Some of us went to fast for the four days and others went as support; I was a supporter. We all slept overnight at Westminster Friends Meeting House.

The most interesting action we took was to read aloud about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) – the treaty our Government has not yet signed and does not want us to know about. That is why you may not have heard about it.

This Treaty was passed by the UN General Assembly in July 2017, but to come into effect it needs to be ratified by 50 states. Already 25 countries have done so, with over 34 more working towards ratification. Although Britain has always said that it wanted multilateral nuclear disarmament, it – along with all NATO countries and those with nuclear arsenals – is refusing to engage with the Treaty. Originally, 122 UN countries approved the text.

Some of us dressed up as town criers and stood outside the gates of Downing Street with a loud

hailer. After each phrase about the Treaty there was a pause when the town criers shouted 'Oh Yea' and rang their bells. This is a great way to help people hear a message. (I am not in the photo because I was the photographer.)

The police turned up and asked us to move. They said that we were to go across to the other side of Whitehall to a cage made especially for protesters. When I resisted, the policeman said we must move because they need access to the gates. I assured him that if any vehicle turned up we would move immediately. This seemed to calm him and he stopped bothering us. In any case I did not see how any vehicle would try to enter Downing Street as behind the gates was a large yellow JCB.

This protest looked good and provided information to the passers by, most of whom were tourists. Some were obviously especially interested to learn that our Trident system costs £197m each week. We must try to get our towns and cities to acknowledge this vital multilateral Treaty and shame our country into signing it!

Sarah Lasenby



Religion

During a recent conversation the question arose as to what the word *religion* meant to each of us. I found myself proposing that the Religious Society of Friends is religious, but not a religion. Here I want to try to support my unexpected contention.

For me, the word *religion* refers to a collection of narratives that bind people together (hence *re-ligion*: medieval Latin from *ligere*, to bind). These narratives may be cosmological (for example the Australian aboriginal ‘dream time’, or the book of Genesis); they may be connected with the founding of the community (for example the virgin birth and the resurrection, or the life of the Buddha); they may underpin practices (for example, the last supper, the eating of fish on a Friday, or the eschewing of pork in a hot climate).



To belong you need to adhere to the narratives. The later sense of acting *religiously* extends the sense of binding to include simply maintaining particular beliefs, values, or actions where others might depart somewhat.

One of the many appealing features of Quakers for me is precisely that there is no central narrative. There are accounts written by, and stories about, George Fox, James Nayler, and many others, but these stories and accounts are offered as inspiration rather than as dogma.

Quaker writing contrasts with most of the Acts of the Apostles, where leaders such as Paul are interpreted as articulating necessary beliefs and practices, often leading to dispute. Later these were crystallised into creed by the seven councils that took place between the first in Nicaea in 325CE and the seventh, again in Nicaea, in 787CE.

Early Quakers wrote about emulating or reconstructing early Christianity prior to these councils. Early and current Quakers are seekers, suspicious of finders and dogmatists. Thus different Friends call upon different fragments of different narratives according to their current comprehension of effective ways of pursuing fundamental questions such as

- what is the sense and purpose of (my) life (if indeed there is one)?;
- what values underpin my behaviour?

or of approaching transcendent states such as marvelling mindfully at the wonder of existence.

In that sense, Quakers form a community bound together by their search, their compassion and tolerance, without commitment to particular narratives, and so can be considered to be religious, without actually being a religion.

John Mason
August 2019



World Quaker Day – Sunday 6 October

This year’s World Quaker Day theme is ‘Sustainability: Planting seeds of renewal for the world we love’. Meetings and Friends’ Churches from different theological traditions across the world will be engaging with this topic on that Sunday. Here in Oxford we will be marking World Quaker Day in an all-age meeting for worship in the single meeting at 10:30 on 6 October 2019. The children will present a short story about sustainability, followed by an opportunity for everyone to contribute in worship sharing on the theme of planting seeds of renewal for the world we love.

Matthew Gee, on behalf of Children & Young People’s Committee

Oxford Friends Fellowship of Healing

This local group of Friends Fellowship of Healing (FFH) was first started in 1959 by Friend Grace Sutton. Looking back at the archives, she was convenor of the group for nearly 30 years. A history of our local group was given in Forty Three in March 2007, but this article is to look at the current Oxford FFH.

Firstly to describe what we do. In monthly Meetings for Worship for Healing, as well as privately, we Hold in the Light those whose names have been given to us. These range from mothers and their unborn babies through to our most senior Friends. We seek wholeness, whether spiritual, emotional or physical – for them, for their families, their friends and carers; and for all living things on the earth. We also uphold those who live in danger from conflict and crime, also groups who seek non-violent ways to promote peace, healing and wholeness in society. This type of Worship is often known as ‘distant healing’, because we sit together quietly to think of both people and groups, upholding and praying for them.

There is a BUT here. Due to advancing years and other reasons, including falling numbers, at present we feel unable to continue in the current form. For the last two months we have been ‘At Home’. There we use our list to Hold in the Light all requests throughout the month. A reminder is given to Oxford Friends of our third Wednesday in each month. This enables Friends to add any requests or share news. It is also the day when Oxford FFH spend time to be together in spirit.

Although this ministry is unseen, and not easy to explain, many Friends appreciate the hidden support. We hope to continue this method for the next few months but are also aware that more support is needed if the Oxford FFH is to continue into its 61st year into 2020.

QF&P 21.73 encourages us, “As we open ourselves to become the channel of God’s healing grace we shall find that healing is given to those who pray as well as those for whom we are praying”.

Mary Fear

A Reparative Experience at Charney Manor

My wife encouraged me to go with her to a poetry workshop at Charney, led by the Quaker poet Philip Gross. I felt quite uncomfortable about going to this as I “don’t do poetry”, haven’t attempted to write a poem since I was twelve, and thought I would feel totally out of place. As a child I was once asked to “write a poem with help”. I made an attempt, asked for help, was brushed off with “that is fine” and later got the crushing comment from an external assessor that “It is no merit to eschew help when help is offered”!

Philip was an excellent facilitator and I enjoyed the first session where we were invited to connect to our own experiences of being “on the edge of silence” and then share something of that reflection with our neighbour, and that helped me to feel more at ease. During the workshop I did manage to put something on paper that looked as if it might be on the way to being a poem.

Near the end of the workshop there was an opportunity for someone to present a poem for the whole group to work with. I shared the story of my last failed attempt to get help and asked if the group were willing to work on my novice effort. I was very moved by their response and willingness to engage with me, and it felt very healing. What follows is a poem about healing sound, developed with the help of the group’s suggestions.

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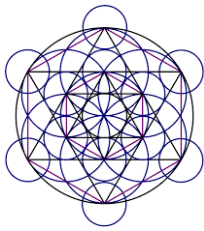
Singing the Merkaba Fields

The old year passes: one thousand and one times
the temple bell booms out.
One thousand and one harmful, wounded thoughts
dispelled, discharged, distilled into
the new.

I sound the singing bowl, crafted from bronze.
Air quivers around us and stills,
lingering into silence:
spacious, numinous, inviting
the new.

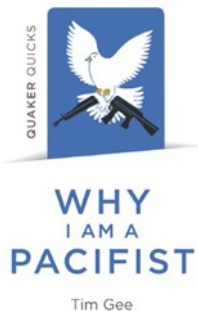
I open
my heart, my throat, my voice
to the unknown and discover -
swirling like Merkaba fields - sounds I do not own:
as rainbow showers, releasing, transforming,
dancing into the new.

Sandra Figgess



An interview with Tim Gee

Matthew interviews his brother Tim about his new book.



'Why I am a Pacifist', by Tim Gee. Published in the Quaker Quicks series, available from the Quaker Bookshop at Friends House, and from Blackwells. £6.99. ISBN: 978-1-78904-016-6

Why did you write this book?

I was asked to write a book about activism as part of a new series called 'Quaker Quicks'. I asked if I could write about peace and pacifism instead, because trying to undo the causes of war and violence is one of the major reasons why I engage in

campaigns.

Who is it aimed at?

For some people, the peace testimony is one of the hardest aspects of Quakerism. So this is, in part, a book for Quakers who are interested in exploring more about approaches to peace.

It is also written in the awareness that many people who are involved in movements for peace might be interested in knowing more about Quakers, so this book is also for them.

What did you learn whilst writing this book?

One major thing I learned was that the word 'pacifist' has only been around since the early twentieth century. That means that, by definition, the majority of Quakers that have ever lived have not been pacifists.

I also learnt that there is a lot more diversity and nuance in Quaker approaches to peace than many might at first assume. As well as the well-known actions of conscientious objectors and conflict mediators, there have been Quaker pacifists who have felt leadings to army chaplaincy work, to establish joint social projects with Black Panthers, and even in the case of South African activist Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge to the position of (now former) deputy Minister of Defence of her country. The spirit can lead us to unexpected places indeed.

Which of the peacemakers, whose stories you tell in the book, inspired you the most?

One of the central arguments of the book is that pacifism is about more than opposing war, but also to do with recognising and confronting the violence and injustice that comes with economic inequality, racism, sexism, oppression of LGBT+ people, and other forms of marginalisation.

Someone who inspires me is the civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, a Quaker who was lead organiser of the March for Jobs and Freedom where Martin Luther King gave his famous 'I Have a Dream' speech, and who is credited with popularising the phrase 'speak truth to power'. Rustin was also a socialist and was gay, for which reason his contribution to the struggle has been underplayed.

Continued next page ...

What do you think Quakers today can do to help create a more nonviolent world?

One of the things I love about being a Quaker is that you can go to a meeting anywhere, and someone will be doing something to make the world more nonviolent.

I think we could do more, though, to think about how our peace work is not only something done in isolation, or only with the traditional peace movement. My dream is that we help 'join the dots' and become part of a cross-sectional struggle for collective liberation from all forms of oppression.



Tim is a member of Peckham Quaker Meeting. He will be speaking at 'Picturing Peace', a talk and discussion at 18:00 on Friday 4 October at Peace House, 19 Paradise Street, Oxford. OX1 1LD.

Matthew Gee

Weapons of Minor Destruction

On the evening of 4 August, I sat with about 15 other Friends in the Garden Room at 43 to watch *Woman at War*, directed by Benedikt Erlingsson. Whilst it's a film about actively protecting the environment that offers multiple opportunities for appreciative critique and reviews, I shall leave that to the specialists. What I'd like to share is the main message I derived from the film on the beautiful usefulness of what I shall call 'two weapons of minor destruction'.

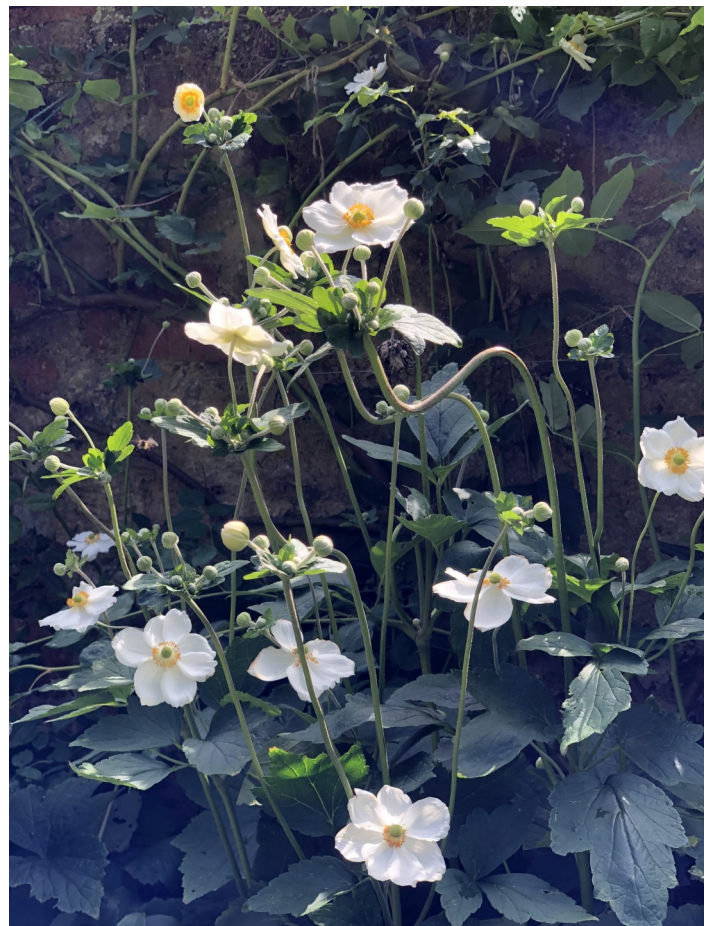
The first of these is the protagonist herself, Halla, also known by her alias of 'The Woman of the Mountain'. Halla is an energetic, determined fifty-year-old who wages a one-woman war against government plans to introduce a new aluminium smelter funded by a Chinese corporation. Her ally of

choice in staging this 'war' is a bow and arrow: the second weapon of minor destruction.

Using the latter with skills and intentions distinctly Robin Hoodesque, she succeeds in feats such as short-circuiting huge power cables to the existing aluminium smelter, and pulling down a drone like a resistant kite, as it filmed her wearing the camouflage of a cardboard Nelson Mandela mask. Both acts are filmed in such a way to make us both gasp with awe and chuckle at her audacity, talent, and inventiveness.

So far so good in terms of the 'good' overcoming the 'bad', all tinged with echoes of the struggle between David and Goliath. Yet, as I understand it, the latter of these weapons of minor destruction are at odds with Quaker ways of peaceful protest. With absolutely no intention to offend in saying this, the beautiful small usefulness of the bow and arrow, and the moral right of its user who harms no humans, only machines, leave me wondering whether training as an archer might not be a Quakerly way to speak back to power?

Juliet Henderson



You are invited to poems in the Quaker Meeting House 43 St Giles Oxford

free admission + a collection + refreshments
18:30 for 19:00 till 21:00 on:

Saturday 5 October when **Jenny Lewis** will cast new light on old texts, from her celebrated book *Gilgamesh Retold* (Carcanet, 2018). Jenny will share lively questions, evoke answers and – by means of her poems – discuss approaches to translation and much more.

Saturday 12 October when **Philip Gross** and **Lesley Saunders** will read from their book *A part of the main: a conversation* (Mulfran, 2019), a dialogue, even an improvisation, born of the difficult feelings and public discord arising from the events of 2016.

Saturday 16 November when **Fiona Sampson** will read from her forthcoming collection *Come Down* (Little, Brown, Feb 2020), an exploration of belonging to place and to a family.

Saturday 23 November when **Lucy Newlyn** will talk about creativity and read from her new collection, out this very November: *Vital Stream* (Carcanet, 2019).

Saturday 14 December when 43 St Giles' own **Poems in the Library group** will lead, and invite YOU to present a *Poem I like*, (not by yourself!) and *Why I like it*. Bring a poem to an open-mike-and-mincepies celebration of *poiesis*, or the 'making' of our own friendly passion.

MORE ABOUT THE POETS:

Jenny Lewis is an Anglo-Welsh poet, playwright, and translator who teaches poetry at Oxford University. In 2014, she read from her *Now as then: Mesopotamia-Iraq* (2013) in the Meeting House. This work was produced in association with the exiled Iraqi poet Adnan al-Sayeeh as part of an award-winning Arts-Council funded 'Writing Mesopotamia' project, aimed at strengthening the ties between English-speaking and Arabic-speaking communities. Jenny has now brought *Gilgamesh* to life for the 21st century: it's the oldest known piece of written literature in the world.

Philip Gross (a Quaker as well as a T.S. Eliot prize-winning poet, and author of twenty collections of poems) and **Lesley Saunders** (author of several books of poetry, most recently *Nominy-Dominy* (Two Rivers Press, 2018) and a creative collaborator with many other 'makers' of many kinds of art forms. Lesley and Philip first met through a collaborative poetry venture 'A Game of Consequences' in which 26 poets were invited to share their thoughts and feelings about living in a nuclear age. This was published in *Envoi III*.

Fiona Sampson has published in 35 languages including many books of poetry, studies of poetry and its many forms of making, and a critically acclaimed biography *In Search of Mary Shelley* (2018). This was a Radio 4 Book of the Week in January 2018. Fiona has won numerous awards. Her collections include *Common Prayer* (2007), *Rough Music* (2010), and *The Catch* (2016). She is a prolific broadcaster and critic, and now Professor of Poetry at the University of Roehampton.

Most recently, **Lucy Newlyn** published an extraordinary book of autobiography plus poetry called *Diary of a Bipolar Explorer* (Signal, 2018). She now lives in Cornwall, and is a fellow Emeritus of St Edmund Hall in Oxford. Her forthcoming *The Craft of Poetry* will be published by Yale University Press. Her *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: 'All in Each Other'* (OUP, 2013) and *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry. An anthology of contemporary poems and critical reflections on Edward Thomas* (Enitharmon, 2014) are riveting reads. Now we look forward to this year's book of poems, *Vital Stream*.

Stephen Yeo



CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER 2019

All at 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Date	Time	Event
Sun 1 Sept	12:00 - 14:00	Meeting for Worship for Business
Wed 4 Sept	19:00	First Tuesday Group (Wednesday for this month only)
Thurs 12 Sept	19:00	SEE Justice Group
Fri 13 Sept	19:00 for 19:30	Sacramental Living for Sustainability
Sat 14 Sept	10:00—18:00	Open Doors
Sat 14 Sept	10:00—18:00	Ride and Stride
Sun 15 Sept	14:00—17:00	Open Doors
Mon 16 Sept	16:00 - 18:00	Poems in the Library: Earth



From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

Great truths survive throughout history, clad in the clothes that are right for the times.

Jean West , 1988

Quaker Faith & Practice 26.20

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, JULIET HENDERSON,

ALEX SMITH, and SUE SMITH

(Joint Editing and Production);

DEB ARROWSMITH, JACQUI MANSFIELD, and MAX HOWELLS

(Calendar and Distribution)