

Forty-Three newsletter

Number 484
August 2019



Oxford Friends Meeting
43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW

The Miracle of Mindfulness With the Buddhists at 43 St Giles, Oxford

Every Thursday evening a Zen Buddhist group, or *sangha*, meets in our premises at 43 St Giles. The group is named after a world-renowned Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, whose book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1975) has inspired millions of readers worldwide (see box).

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, author, poet and peace activist. His followers often refer to him as "Thay", meaning "teacher". Exiled from Vietnam in 1966 after speaking out against the Vietnam War, he founded a study and meditation centre, Plum Village, in southern France. He has written over 100 books, more than 40 of which have been translated into English. These include *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, and *Living Buddha, Living Christ*.

Two members of Oxford Friends Meeting, Hoonie Feltham and Hugh Palmer, are also active members of the Oxford Thich Nhat Hanh *sangha*. I accepted their invitation to attend their weekly meeting – 'an evening of mindfulness' – in our library at 43 St Giles.

As people enter the room they take off their shoes and leave them at the door. Apart from me, there are six people present – two women and four men. Hugh is leading the meeting this evening. He taps a small gong and invites everyone to introduce themselves. Everyone does so, using only their first names. Before people speak they place their hands in a lotus shape, and everyone else follows suit. Apart from myself, there is another newcomer, but he mentions that he has attended Buddhist meetings before. I introduce myself, and mention that I have never before attended a Buddhist meeting. However, I feel relaxed and welcome in the company of these people.

This is followed by a 'go-round', when everyone mentions something that has brought them joy recently. I mention that my son, who lives in London, has come to visit my wife and me for a few days.



Deadline for contributions to the September 2019 issue: noon, 22 August

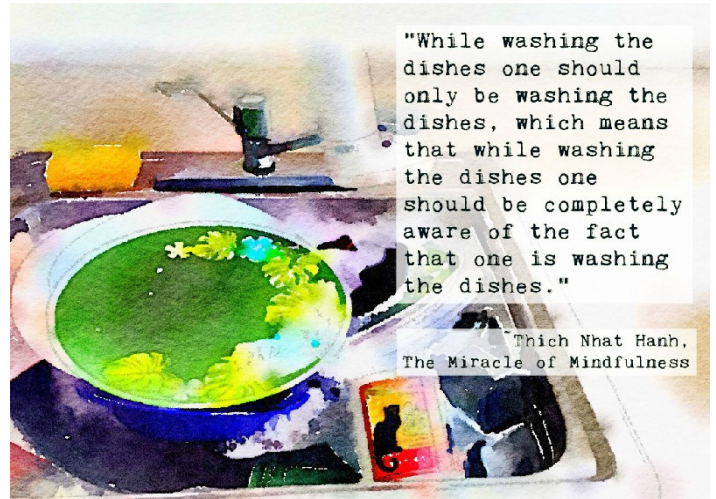
Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, or a paper copy can be left in the '43 news' pigeonhole. Items for the calendar (on the last page) can be emailed to office@oxfordquakers.org.

Hugh now leads a 'guided meditation', reading out short sections of a passage on the theme 'Looking deeply, healing' from Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *The Blooming of the Lotus*. This is combined with a breathing exercise, the aim of which is to help us be in touch with the feelings in our minds, pleasant or otherwise. Hugh pauses between reading out each short section, and taps the small gong. It's a long passage, but I find that it holds my attention from start to finish.

We then embark on a walking meditation. We put on our shoes and coats, and go outside into the garden. Led by Hoonie, we walk round the garden extremely slowly and purposefully, looking straight ahead but focussing our minds on the soles of our feet as our shoes touch the grass. I really like this ritual. I find it easy to walk in exactly the same way – and at the same slow speed - as everyone else: heel down first, then the instep, followed by the ball of my foot and finally my toes. This sort of meditation seems to be perfectly tailored for me. When we finish the walk I want to do it again, but we have to go back into the library.

Next we have a *dharma*, or 'teaching talk'. We take it in turns to read out loud a paragraph from one of Thich Nhat Hanh's books, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*. This is stimulating material. I want to get this book and read it from start to finish. It covers the topics of 'stopping, calming, resting and healing'. One paragraph describes how we are like a man riding a horse that is out of control and taking him at high speed to an unknown destination. We need to grasp the 'energy of mindfulness' which will allow us to regain control over our own lives (see box) . We also need to learn the art of resting, so our bodies and minds can heal and regenerate themselves.

Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that we should treat our activities as opportunities for being aware, or mindful. When walking, we should be fully aware of the steps we take. Breathing is another key aspect of mindfulness: from time to time we should focus our attention on consciously breathing in, then out, in, then out.



The meeting finishes with 10 minutes of silent meditation, which Hugh brings to a close by tapping his gong. He then passes round a collection box to which everyone contributes a small amount of money to cover the cost of hiring the library from Oxford Friends.

Next day I phone Hugh to thank him for the experience of sitting in on – or rather, participating in – the *sangha* meeting. I remark that the final 10 minutes of silence were very much like a Quaker meeting for worship. Hugh agrees. He says he finds no conflict between the *sangha* on Thursday evenings and the Quaker meeting for worship on Sunday mornings. "I actually find them both to be mutually supportive," he says. And yes, so do I.

Glen Williams

Farewell and Thanks

Many thanks to Sue Smith for all her contributions to the editorial team over the last several years. She steps down from the newsletter committee at the end of August to devote more time to her recent role as co- clerk.

Calling all Plant Growers

Sowing Larkspur, Sweet William, wallflowers...? The garden team are seeking plants for next year. If you are raising perennial plants for your garden please will you consider growing some extra for the gardens at the Meeting House. All plants welcome!

The Office

Oxford CND Needs Your Support

I am rather irritated when people express surprise and pleasure at seeing my CND badge, as if this were something archaic that takes them back to their youth...

The need to ban the bomb is as urgent as ever, and is just as urgent as climate change. Both – the bomb, and global warming – threaten extinction.

Oxford CND has some 100 members, mostly elderly, about twenty active, some attending its monthly meetings. Members participate in blockades at Atomic Weapons Establishments (AWE) at Aldermaston and Burghfield, and support Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp as well as various other peace camps. CND members also keep in regular contact with our MPs.

Some members (Nukewatchers) monitor the nuclear warhead convoys that travel through our county between the nuclear bomb factory at AWE Burghfield (near Reading) and Coulport (by the Faslane nuclear submarine base near Glasgow). The Nukewatchers tell local authorities and the press about these dangerous convoys.

We commemorate Hiroshima and Nagasaki's nuclear destruction on 6 and 9 August every year, and remind people that our nuclear weapons could inflict even worse destruction on any target in the world. We remember the Windscale, Chernobyl, and Fukushima nuclear meltdowns, and campaign against new nuclear power stations.

We are members of the Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space, and every year have a march and rally at USAF Croughton near Brackley, where the Pentagon is now spending £200m to turn the base into a major intelligence centre.

We will have a benefit concert on 7 September in the Friends' Meeting House at 43 St Giles, where the Oxford Classic Jazz band will be *Swingin' against the Bomb*. Doors open at 7pm, performance at 7:30pm, of jazz songs from the 1920s and 1930s performed by Nick Gill with 5 musicians and Holly the singer.

Some Quakers do belong to CND; holding vigils at Aldermaston and Croughton. Members get a bi-monthly newsletter full of news, reports, and

interesting articles relevant to the campaign, and regular email information. To join, send mail to oxfordcnd@phonecoop.coop. See also <http://www.oxfordcnd.org.uk>



Rene Gill

Meditations from Christian Bobin, Contemporary French Poet

I've just finished reading an anthology of work by the modern French poet Christian Bobin called *The Eighth Day*. It has provided me with meditations prior to attending Meeting for Worship. Here are a few that may inspire others too.

"All I know of heaven comes from the astonishment I feel at the inexplicable goodness of some person or other, shown in a word or gesture of such purity that it is suddenly obvious to me that nothing in this world can have inspired it."

"Now and then I see a thing so beautiful that I rejoice in knowing it isn't mine."

"It is because each of us strives at any cost to suffer as little as possible that life is hellish".

"Each day is a struggle with the angel of darkness, the one who slaps his freezing hands over our eyes to prevent us seeing the glory hidden in our wretchedness."

"A blackbird runs under the dark wood of the rosebush. The yellow of its beak sets my heart on fire. It is one of those prophets that the dictionaries of mysticism overlook."

Yvonne Dixon

Sacramental Living for Sustainability

Friday with Friends, 13 September, 19:00-21:00

This path bares the heart, connects concerns, and 'provokes one another to love'. The discussion explores 'a new and living way' brought to us by spiritual ancestors and modern Friends.

For more details see my website <http://femestiza.com>, and Facebook <http://facebook.com/sinkdownriseup>

Mey Hasbrook

Hosting

Sanctuary Hosting have told us that offers from the Oxford area for hosting people (mainly asylum seekers and refugees) have not increased for a while, but the need is always increasing. Those of us who do this find it rewarding, and we are supported well by the organisation. Contact <http://sanctuaryhosting.org/> and ask Anne Watson, John Mason, or Steve Brooke for more information.

Now a new organisation, Hope at Home, has started working with, and seeking hosts for, survivors of trafficking:



ASIOX (Anti Slavery Initiative Oxford) will be presenting an informative evening with Hope At Home on 17 September at 19:30 in St Andrew's Church, Linton Road, Oxford OX2 6UH. Do come and join us to find out practical ways you might support survivors and raise awareness. Refreshments and cake will be provided.

Watch a short video about the work of Hope At Home here <http://www.hopeathome.org.uk/>

Anne Watson

Quakerism and Christianity



On Sunday 4 August there will be one Meeting for Worship at 10:30. There will be no Business Meeting that day. Instead there will be an opportunity to stay in the Meeting House and/or garden and/or library to talk informally to each other about the aspects of Christianity that are integrated with our Quakerism. A myriad of views and experiences can be shared. We hope Friends will talk with people they do not yet know, as well as those they do. The informal conversations will be followed by a short period of worship-sharing at 12:30 in the Meeting House. Tea, coffee, and biscuits will be available.

Anne Watson and John Mason (supported by Elders)

Becoming a FOD

When I first heard references to FODs I immediately thought of a character ubiquitous in my youth (see below). But now I'm one of the Friends on Duty I see that a FOD is a gopher. In my brief time in this capacity I have: redirected Tai Chi performers, washed cups, shown visitors around, washed cups, talked to a young woman about Quakers, washed cups, tidied the library, washed cups, and shifted a gazebo (with help). It helps to grasp the multitude of day to day events in the Meeting House and it's all fodding good fun!

Susie Mayhew



Note from the Office: we have now inducted Susie into the mysteries of using the dishwasher! We do need more FODs including a list of people we can call on for particular events. Do get in touch with the Office if you feel you may be able to help.

Visit to Jordans on 1 July

Two car-loads of Oxford Friends from the south west side of Oxford visited Jordans Quaker Meeting House on the first day of July. It was a peaceful sunny weekday to have chosen for this lovely visit. A small group of us had been meeting for a few years to discuss several current books and articles on Quakerism. These had often taken us back to the meaning of Quaker concepts and the roots of the movement; hence our desire to visit Jordans to explore its history and significance to the origins of late seventeenth century Quakerism.



(Photo taken by Caroline Worth)

We had a very able guide for the day in Nina Liebenberg, the manager at the Jordans Quaker Centre. She gave us a warm welcome, much useful information, and a tour of the burial ground and the meeting house. We learnt that the burial ground dates back to 1671 and the meeting house had been built in 1688, twenty years after the local monthly meeting had been established. The Monthly Meeting covered 12 meetings on the 'upper side' of the Thames. George Fox had helped set up the monthly meeting, visiting friends at Jordans' farm several times in the early years. Before the meeting house had been built, the local worshippers had been gathering in each others' homes and farms.

Those local Friends included two names well-known to us: William Penn and Thomas Ellwood. Both men were instrumental in registering the new Jordans Meeting House under the provisions of the religious Act of Toleration of 1689 (in the new reign of William and Mary).

Persecution of the Quakers was then over. Penn went on to found the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the British North American colony that became the U.S. State of Pennsylvania. Democratic principles that Penn incorporated into the colony's frame of government influenced the actual constitution of the United States. Ellwood became the first editor of George Fox's *Journal*, and his home was used for male-only monthly business meetings for 40 years. The gravestones of Penn and Ellwood and their families can be seen in the lower burial ground facing the meeting house. It's inspiring and moving to stand in front of them in prayer.

Perhaps the highlights of the visit were the walk up the hill to soak up the atmosphere in the upper burial ground, identifying the graves of many familiar deceased Friends, and the short meeting for worship we held inside the meeting house, with some historical readings from *Quaker Faith & Practice*, the culmination of the day. Several Friends mentioned the feelings they had while in the burial ground, being amongst 'living spirits', and the power of the tranquillity up there.

Our visit was an experience to be treasured for long afterwards, and is highly recommended to other Oxford Friends.

Carol Saker

Annual Family Day 14 July 2019

'Simply the Best' was the theme for our annual Family Day on Sunday 14 July, exploring simplicity and sustainability through creative play. As the sun shone, we welcomed into the meeting house and garden fourteen children, their parents and grandparents, from Oxford, Abingdon, and Reading meetings. We started by getting to know one another over lunch, games, and an all-age sack race. The garden provided the perfect setting for an incredibly creative messy play for the little ones,

which explored climate change and plastic in the oceans.

Meantime, in the meeting house, we welcomed back Chris Michael to run a comedy workshop based around the idea of living simply for those aged 4 years and up. This was followed by sensory play for the little ones; an environmental story about dinosaurs, and reusing household waste for making models for those aged 3-6 years; and creating beautiful yet simple handcrafted notebooks from scratch for the older children. A treasure hunt took teams through the buildings and garden to the final prize of ... strawberries and cream! After the children shared what they had made, the day drew to a calming close as we sang 'Simple Gifts' and 'I Will Tread the Earth Lightly'.



Thank you to all the families who came, members of the Children's Committee for organising the activities, and also the incredible team in the kitchen who kept everyone fed and watered throughout! It was a truly wonderful day and we look forward to next year.

Anita Ghosh, Matthew Gee

Poems in the Quaker Meeting House

Dates for the diary for Autumn/early Winter

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, February 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.

Stephen Yeo

Review of the Mid-week Meeting at Charney Manor

20:00 to 20:30 on Wednesdays

Changed circumstances, both of the Friends who more regularly attend these Meetings and of those who come to Charney Manor as visitors, have prompted the writing of this review. It has been drawn up by those Friends who regularly attend, in order to submit it initially to Charney Manor Trustees and Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting.

When the mid-week meeting was first established, there were Friends in residence at Charney, and the meeting also later had strong support from members who attended East Garston Meeting – Jane Jackson, and Bridget and Jonathan Barman. Bridget has died and Jane and Jonathan have now moved away. The additional members attending the meetings have been local Friends attending Faringdon or Oxford Meetings. The number of local Friends attending in earlier times might vary between 6 and 10. Also, the visiting groups in mid-week were more likely to be Quaker groups or

others from comparable charitable organisations, some of whose members were perhaps more likely to come to the meetings on Wednesday evening. The need to maintain the viability of Charney has, it seems to us, made it considerably less likely that those now visiting will join the Wednesday meetings. The number who have come in the past 12 months could be counted on one hand. Nevertheless, we do appreciate the wish to maintain the Quaker ethos of Charney and do take this into account.

As there are now only 4 local Friends who attend regularly, and some of those are doubtful about driving in winter, it does not seem possible to continue to commit to holding the meeting advertised as held on every Wednesday of the year (except in August). To have, say, monthly meetings or occasional meetings would not, we feel, have the same effect as a regular weekly meeting.

The question is whether additional support might be available, or whether an alternative arrangement might be instituted, or failing these, whether the Wednesday meeting should be laid down.

John Cottis (on behalf of Friends regularly attending)

Review of the mid-week meeting for worship at Charney Manor

On 13 July Area Meeting minuted as follows: We have learnt that changed circumstances, both of the Friends who more regularly attend these mid-week meetings and of those who come to Charney as visitors, have prompted a review. Unless additional support is available, it does not seem possible to continue to commit to holding meetings each Wednesday evening as advertised. Charney Manor Trustees have been informed. With regret, we lay down the weekly meeting, but hope to find other ways of supporting and maintaining the Quaker ethos of Charney Manor, possibly including holding an area meeting there one evening next year.

Elsbeth Wollen, Clerk of Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting

Sunflowers

Friends will know that we have two children's meetings on Sundays. For several years, the group for babies and pre-school children has been called 'Beansprouts'. However, the group for school-aged children, who meet on Sundays in the long room, has not had its own distinct name. Following a suggestion from one of the young people in this group, we are enthusiastically adopting the name '**Sunflowers**' for them. It seems appropriate, as sunflowers start with a seed and grow towards the light!

Matthew Gee



Can't make it to the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) protest but want to support it?

There are things you can do! Roots of Resistance (organising the Quaker protest on 3 September) is creating a 'tapestry' from mini-banners. Using cross-stitch, appliqué, fabric pens, or any other method, we would like you to illustrate the impact of the arms trade, our resistance to it, or our vision for a peaceful world on a small piece of fabric with a message or an image. The mini-banners will be sewn together at DSEI to form a big tapestry.

Could you make one? Sue Smith can provide some materials. Each mini-banner should be around 15x20cm in size, and ideally backed onto another piece of fabric strong enough for eyelets (so we can attach pieces to lampposts, railings, etc.). You can use a combination of words or images, whatever feels appropriate.

Sue Smith sueandali@gmail.com

CALENDAR FOR AUGUST 2019

All at 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Date	Time	Event
Sun 4 August	10:30	Meeting for Worship NB NO BUSINESS MEETING IN AUGUST
Sun 4 August	12.00	Christianity and Quakerism—discussion
Sun 4 August	19:00	Film: Woman at War
Mon 12 August	16:00	Poems in the Library: Insects
Sun 18 August	19:00	Film: the times of Harvey Milk

From Quaker Faith and Practice

Unemployment is in truth an astonishing evil, and calm acquiescence therein is discreditable ...The stoic endurance of privation in times of shortage is noble, but poverty caused by enforced idleness, and in the presence of plenty, is so glaring and injustice that no man should accept it tamely.

Quaker Faith & Practice, Advices & Queries No. 23.69

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.

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