

Forty-Three Newsletter

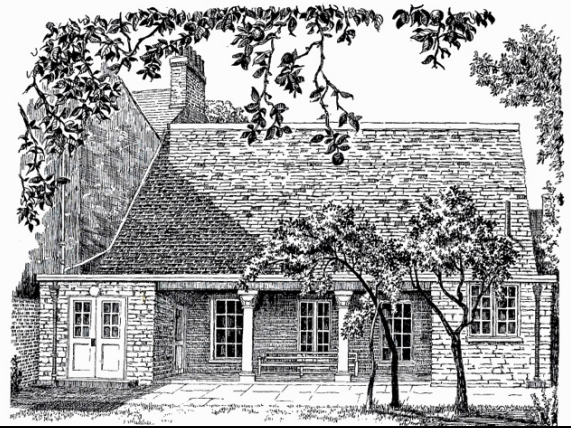
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Oxford Friends Meeting

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Ministry as a 'crag'

Anne Watson



Since the New Wave meeting on November the 25th I have been thinking about renewal. It seems to me that any attempt at renewal for the Meeting has to have Meeting for Worship at its heart. So I have been reading some of what Thomas Kelly wrote about 'the gathered meeting'. Thomas Kelly lived from 1893 to 1941 and experienced being "melted down by the love of God" four years before his death. His short *Testament of Devotion* (1941) gives wonderful guidance for living a worshipful life but is directed very much towards the devotional life of individuals, a lot like the writings of Brother Lawrence in *The Practice of the Presence of*

God. However, he also writes about group worship, describing a "blanket of divine covering" coming over the room. I often feel a wave like a soft blanket moving across the room and settling when Quakers worship together. I recognise what Thomas says: if I do not know others in an outward sense, I know others "from within" as we are all gathered in what he calls the Presence. In Quaker meetings there is no wait for a special moment, as in a Mass. Coming into Meeting is like coming to a shared experience of the Spirit that might have started before entering the room. Thomas says: "There must be some kindled hearts when the Meeting begins. In them and from them begins the work of worship. The spiritual devotion of a few persons, silently deep in active adoration, is needed to kindle the rest, to help those others who enter the service with tangled, harried, distraught thoughts to be melted and quieted and released and made pliant, ready for the work of God and his Real Presence". This language may not be your language, but notice that he uses the word 'work'. It is

effortful, intentional, given as a service to each other.

He goes on to talk about spoken ministry, saying that the word should rise like a “crag upthrust from the surface of silence under the pressure of river power and yearning, contrition, and wonder”. The word crag conjures up for me something unhewn, possibly disruptive, potentially magnificent. He says: “brevity, earnestness, sincerity - and frequently a lack of polish” characterises the “best” Quaker speaking. I might quibble about what is meant by ‘best’, but before becoming too enamoured with the image of the rocky crag he also says “but on the other hand the words should not rise up like a crag. They should not break the silence but continue it”. If the ministry is truly Spirit-led then that is the same Spirit that is acting through the silence. “When such words cease the uninterrupted silence and worship continue, for the silence and words have been of one texture, one piece.”

This apparent contradiction - that the spoken word should be like, but not like, a crag - reminds me of some of the questions some Friends use to discern whether to speak such as ‘this message that has come to me; is it for the meeting or is it only for me?’ How can you answer that question when you have to discern the answer individually, especially if the ministry appears to spring from an experience outside of the Meeting rather than from within the worshipping collective? While the value of ministry that comes from the same source as individual worship is inestimable, that does not mean that all ministry that is individual is necessarily for the whole Meeting. On the other hand the Meeting might be missing out on ministry that is valuable because it comes to individuals who do not discern its

worth, or who confuse the worth of their ministry with negative perceptions of their own worth as ministers.

The sense of a worshipful collective is central to Quaker practices. Rufus Jones, writing about the faith and practice of Quakers, points out that living a faithful life is not achieved by withdrawing from life. Doing that might mean that a spiritual self could “shrink and shrivel like a severed branch”. His plea is partly about changing the world for the better; the world changes for the better by carrying the “forces of spiritual life ... into the veins of society” as many do through work, service, advocacy and relationships with others.

Where am I going with this? I think I am seeing life in Oxford Quaker Meeting as a vein of society that needs the forces of spiritual life just as much as veins I may inhabit in the outside world. It might be a mistake to assume that because Oxford Meeting is a church, those veins are well supplied with the forces of spiritual life. The work of gathering the Meeting is to be done by everyone; the work of maintaining a silence that is uninterrupted by the spoken word, not because no one speaks, but because the spoken word comes from the same source as the silence, can be done by everyone. To these insights, I would add a third, that holding the silence and the spoken word are not the only kinds of ministry that carry the forces of spiritual life into the veins of our Meeting. So do also the care and stewardship that flow to and from, sustaining and being sustained by, the Meeting.

The first Quaker-named storm!



Storm Jocelyn - named after Jocelyn Bell Burnell in honour of her work in astrophysics - has caused serious damage to the meeting house roof* and had to be disciplined by elders. Nominations are now considering the role of Friend with Special Responsibility for Quaker Storms.

**An untruth. Possibly the second such ever to appear in 43, but only the first since we claimed Father Christmas had been spotted on the meeting house roof in our last issue.*

Memoria Indigena

Charles Worth

One Sunday in November after 9.30 meeting for worship I turned to the man sitting next to me who I didn't recognise and said hello. He was an American named Drew. In a conversation over coffee he told me he works for a small organisation working with indigenous Christian people in Latin America. Indigenous Christians often live with tension between two identities: their identity as indigenous people, and

their identity as Christians, especially as the missionaries brought the gospel within their Western culture, denying the existing experience of the divine already present in their own culture.

The following Sunday he returned with his colleague, Jocabed Solano, both of them staying for a couple of weeks to visit the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. Jocabed is a member of the Gunadule people in Panama and is Director of the organisation, Memoria Indigena. She says:

My work is to recognize Indigenous Christian leaders who have been working to tell their story, and in order to shape their community's identity, walk alongside them so that together we can tell their stories and learn together about how different Indigenous peoples express their experience with God.

Even though they were only here for a short time they graciously accepted our invitation to come and speak with our OX1 study group. We had a fascinating morning, including hearing about Jocabed's imminent visit to Dubai to add her voice to the indigenous people's caucus at the global climate summit, COP 28. As a poet herself Jocabed also joined us for Karima's presentation at the group for Friends who Write.

On Christmas Day, Jocabed sent me one of her poems and asked me to share it with our Quaker community. It is translated from Spanish. She also sent a link to her powerful reflection on COP 28, 'The Commodification of the Sacred'. Do read it:

<https://www.allcreation.org/commodification>. Here is the poem, entitled 'Jesus's Grandmothers'.

Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and Bathsheba.
Some wanted to erase their faces but
couldn't

With the birth of Jesus
The silenced, marginalized, foreign,
"suspect" women
Are named.

With the birth of Jesus, we are reminded of
The paradox of life
That what is weak is strong
That value lies in simplicity
That value lies in how God sees us.

Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, Bathsheba.
They will not be forgotten, because Jesus's
birth
Claims us all as his own, women and men
Including the foreign woman, the less-than
The despised woman, for whom Christmas
Eve dinner
Is not a good time

Without home, without lodging, without
food,
without land.
The birth of Jesus reminds us that
grandmothers
matter
Without them there is no life
Without them, no hope
Without Jesus's grandmothers, no
astonishment
Waiting for the unexpected.

Jesus's grandmothers remind us of the point
of Jesus.
For these women he is born
Bringing hope for the dispossessed.

- Jocabed R. Solano Miselis

To find out more about Memoria Indigena
follow this link:

<https://uwm.org/missionaries/31569/>

Two brief reflections:

1. We never know who will walk into our Meeting House and what stories they will bring
2. Always speak to the person sitting next to you after meeting for worship!

New Pastoral Care Group

Jane Mactaggart

We have a new and much smaller Pastoral Care Group (PCG) in Oxford. Only two people have been nominated for the next triennium, although a small number of experienced members have agreed to stay on for limited periods of time. The implications of this are that we must rethink how we deliver pastoral care in our meeting. We can no longer assign whole geographical groups of Friends to individual members of PCG to care for.

Looking at QF&P 12.11 for guidance, we find "The chief concern of overseers (PCG) is with the more outward aspects of pastoral care, with building a community in which all members find acceptance, loving care and opportunities for service." So we need to find ways to encourage more members to offer smaller services, without the burden of responsibility for all pastoral care resting on their shoulders. These could include offering to keep in touch with a couple of people in their neighbourhood, offering lifts to hospital appointments, helping with shopping for someone who lives nearby, volunteering to take minutes of PCG

meetings, helping organise Bring & Share lunches.

We welcome any offers of help, or from Friends who might consider joining the Committee. We hope to have our mugshots available at the meeting house soon, so you can recognise those of us you don't know to make it easier to contact us. Friends might see this as an opportunity to broaden their involvement with our community. Most of the retiring members have stressed to me how rewarding they have found their involvement with PCG, and how many new friends they have found through this work.

Joys, Community, and Belonging in Edinburgh

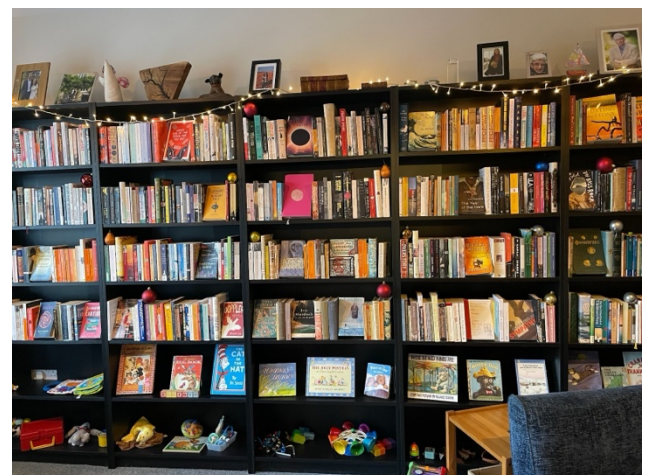
Juliet Henderson

Following my move to Edinburgh at the beginning of November 2023, I have not regretted it once. Since the moment I arrived, it has felt like the place I am now meant to be. A large part of this sense of belonging comes from my flat being right by the Firth of Forth, with a view from my balcony of the sea, beach, and Granton harbour that illuminates my spirit. It feels like a home that was waiting to welcome me. Having the vastness and light of a mixture of estuary and North Sea on my doorstep is a daily joy. Speaking of water, the tap water tastes fresher than in Oxford and is so soft there is no calcium that forms in the kettle. Council tax also includes payment for water and the water supply is regulated by the publicly owned Scottish Water. So the fresh taste of the water includes a zest of public utilities!

Some of the ways I am finding local community and belonging are with Friends in Central Edinburgh Meeting and a local community garden project set in the relatively deprived area close to my flat. True to Quaker spirit all are very welcoming at the Meeting, and there is a great opportunity to get to know friends better over the soup and cheese served after each Sunday meeting. Friends take it in turns to prepare the soup for anything between 30 to 40 people and the costs are covered by donations. There is a large, well-equipped kitchen and hall which make this a feasible, hearty form of community building.

[Granton Community Gardeners](#) was set up in 2010, and began with guerrilla vegetable plots on street corners by social housing tenements. It now has its own site thanks to [community buyout](#). Here all are welcome for a free lunch on Wednesdays that includes vegetables from the garden. There is also a help-yourself shop stocked by donations. The spirit and ethos of the place and people would warm any heart.

I'm discovering parts of the city I did not know bit by bit, and had the time to take one visit beyond Edinburgh to glorious Dunbar, to visit old Oxford Friends: Becky, Mark and baby Elliott. They have a magical home that includes bookshelves laid out in bookshop



style – inspired by Becky’s time at Blackwell’s. Amazing. Belhaven bay and beach are staggeringly beautiful and just a five-minute walk away. They have been welcomed with welcome arms by locals and love it there. I’m so glad to have old Oxford Quaker friends not far away.

While I am still the same old me, Edinburgh offers me rich soil and local ecology in which to grow and belong in different ways as a Quaker, artist and dancer. For me that’s a joy.

Ursula Franklin Reading Group

Anne Watson

Ursula Franklin was a Canadian Quaker, pacifist, feminist, social justice activist and scientist and some of her work has been collected in *The Ursula Franklin Reader: Pacifism as a Map*. A Reading Group has been set up and the first meeting will be on February 21st at 7 p.m. by zoom. The first paper to be considered is: 'Silence and the Notion of the Commons'. If you wish to join the group please contact Anne Watson: annewatson1089@gmail.com

Friday with Friends March 22nd - Supporting people living with dementia (and ourselves)

Rhonda Riachi

An advance notice for Friday with Friends on 22nd March; Rhonda Riachi, a member of Headington Meeting, will be talking about supporting people with dementia (and caring for ourselves). Rhonda has done

extensive research on dementia. She is a part-time Senior Lecturer at Oxford Brookes University and wrote her MSc dissertation on communication in dementia care. She has managed educational projects for dementia care and the care of older people. She is a member of Headington Friends Meeting.

What Is a Meeting for Worship For?

Liz Masterman

The following lines were shared at a Wednesday lunchtime Meeting at Oxford in the summer of 2021. They have sat in one of the editors’ collection of ‘potentially useful articles’ ever since, but the start of a new year seems an apposite time to reflect on why we come to Meeting, what we bring to it and what we hope to learn or take away from it. We believe the text may have been compiled by Burford Friends.

What is a Meeting for Worship For? It is a time:

To be still and aware of the Presence of God within us and around us, in other people and in the natural world.

To give thanks for so many blessings. To reflect on what has given us joy — today/this week.

To hold others in the light and in love — especially those who are stressed, depressed, ill, struggling and dying.

To bring our own vulnerability. To help us accept uncertainty.

To help us realise that pain is part of our condition and needs to be allowed.

To give us an opportunity to open ourselves up – to bring our whole self – all of it.
To visualise ourselves in a place of unconditional love, and soak ourselves in its healing power. To receive comfort and strength.
To pray for wisdom, patience, kindness, forgiveness and the grace to be forgiving to others and ourselves.
To be quiet and see what comes up.

To be aware of what is really important in our lives and sensitive to our own needs.

Reprinted with permission from Abingdon Meeting Newsletter 412 (Jan 2024)

News of Friends

Juliet's article set the editors wondering if Friends would welcome a section relaying news of Friends old and new, near and far. If you have any news you'd like to update the meeting with, please email it to us at newsletter@oxfordquakers.org!

Tasha Alden and Claire Pickard - we are happily settled in mid-Wales, where we moved from Oxford. Tasha has been very happy to reconnect with Oxford Meeting via zoom - a silver lining of the pandemic - and to be on the 43 editorial team again! Claire works from home writing and editing, and Tasha teaches at Aberystwyth University and attends Machynlleth Meeting.

Catherine Redford - Catherine Redford and her son Isaac are still happily living in Worcester. After being widowed in 2019, Catherine got remarried last year to a lovely man called Adam. Isaac's now in Year 1 at school and loves being outdoors, Lego, and animals (the cuter and fluffier, the better!).

From Quaker Faith & Practice 12.10 On Caring for One Another in Local Meeting

It is important to distinguish between everyone's need to be listened to with sympathetic acceptance, especially when faced with bereavement or other painful situations, and those whose need goes beyond the competence of members of the meeting. It should not be thought of as failure to enlist specialist help from outside the meeting when what is needed cannot otherwise be provided. In all advisory work it is important to recognise that much of it is confidential. If in doubt as to what is confidential and what is not, it is good practice always to check with those involved before passing on any information.

February 2024

Many meetings and events are held via Zoom. Link for all Oxford Meetings for Worship:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87383304611?pwd=VkkyY2ZweVVRZjRmOE1JVDBFdTdwUTo>

9

Please contact the Office for more details:

Email: office@oxfordquakers.org Telephone: +44 (0)1865 557373

OXFORD MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Meetings for worship are via Zoom and/or in person.

For more information, contact the Office at

office@oxfordquakers.org +44 (0)1865 557373

First Sunday of each month:

Meeting for Worship 10:30-11:30 (in person & Zoom)

MfW for Business 12:15 (in person & Zoom)

All other Sundays:

Meetings for Worship 09:30-10:15 (in person and Zoom)

11:00-12:00 (in person and Zoom)

Monday:

Young Adult Friends 19:00-21:00 (in person and Zoom)

Tuesday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (in person only)

Wednesday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (Zoom only)

Meeting for Worship 11:30-12:15 (in person & Zoom)

Friday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (Zoom only)



Photo by J Henderson

HEADINGTON MEETING FOR WORSHIP

Headington Meeting meets each Sunday at 10:00
at Old Headington Village Hall,
Dunstan Road, Headington, OX3 9BY

For full details see

<https://headington.quakermeeting.org/>

The views expressed in **Forty-Three**
do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

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Please send newsletter contributions by the 15th of the month, the submission deadline.

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