

# Forty-Three Newsletter

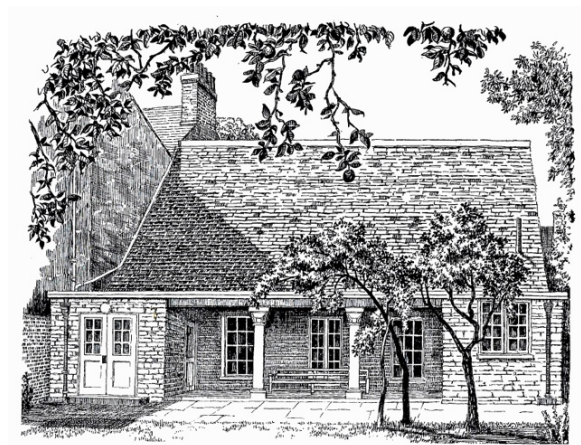
Number 539  
March 2024

## Oxford Friends Meeting

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## “Do Quakers Eat Cadbury’s Easter Eggs?” and Other Musings on Times and Seasons

Nicole Gilroy

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.



Detail of a marginal miniature of Geoffrey Chaucer pointing the text, with a caption reading 'Chauceris ymago'. Image taken from f. 93v of *The Regement of Princes*. British Library.

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.

## **Oxford Friends Action on Poverty**

We have often funded the purchase of reconditioned bikes particularly for young Asylum Seekers who have no money to pay for transport. A monthly bus pass in Oxford for an adult costs £63.00!



We will also pay for helmets, decent padlocks and lights. Unfortunately, these bikes do get stolen sometimes, or vandalised. We share a recent example.... An application from Asylum Welcome for a 19 year old from Senegal, who is extremely

vulnerable due to arriving in the UK only 6 months ago and being in-eligible for a Council funded Support Worker as he was just above the age where that would have been his right. He was given a bike 6 months ago so he could attend GP appointments, meetings for support from Asylum Welcome and College where he is learning English.

Unfortunately, the front suspension was vandalised and cut through by someone attempting to steal it in the town centre. Through your generous donations, OxFAP was able to give him £89.00 for the necessary repair.

## **Poems in the Library**

**Stephen Yeo**

For nearly twenty years now, F(f)riends have been meeting in the Library at 43 St Giles (and now on Zoom too) to read poems to each other and to talk about poetry and whatever matters arise. To talk about 'poems I like and why I like them', rather than our own writing. We've met once a month on a Monday, from 4 till 6 pm. Usually, we have a theme to help us choose what poems to bring, sometimes not. We drink tea and eat biscuits. We read what we're moved to read, whatever the theme. I've been convening these wonderful sessions all this time and they remain an enriching experience for many Friends and friends. From a wide, monthly, email circulation list, a group of about 15 to 20 of us get together every month - some long-standing members, some new; some regular, some intermittent. I've loved the sessions, our discussions and the connections we make. Now I need to let go of them. It's time for me to lay down (open

up) POEMS IN THE LIBRARY to someone else. Should it be at a different time of day, on a different day, in a different place, with a different 'feel'? Or just DIFFERENT ?? Get back to me if you will at [stephen.yeo@phonecoop.coop](mailto:stephen.yeo@phonecoop.coop) and say 'over to me'. I will of course pass on all contacts...

## Objector – Free Film Showing, March 8th



*“Like all Israeli youth, Atalya is obligated to become a soldier. Unlike most, she questions the practices of her country's military, and becomes determined to challenge this rite of passage. Despite her family's political disagreements and personal concerns, she refuses military duty and is imprisoned for her dissent. Her courage moves those around her to reconsider their own moral positions and personal power. OBJECTOR follows Atalya to prison and beyond, offering a unique window into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the perspective of a young*

*woman who seeks truth and takes a stand for justice.”* [objectorfilm.com](http://objectorfilm.com)

On Friday 8th March at 7.00pm in the Meeting House, we will be showing the acclaimed documentary feature film, “Objector”. It is a film about a young Jewish Israeli conscientious objector who refuses to serve in the Israeli military in protest of human rights violations committed against Palestinians under military occupation. The film will be followed by a discussion about the film’s themes of anti-militarism, conscientious objection, feminism, non-violence, solidarity and the power of youth leadership.

All are welcome, so please do spread the word! Entry is free but voluntary donations can be made to the Refuser Solidarity Network.

Gwithian Doswell, Sue Smith and Penny Ormerod

## Book review: *Divine Heretic* by Jaime Lee Moyer

Lee Moyer

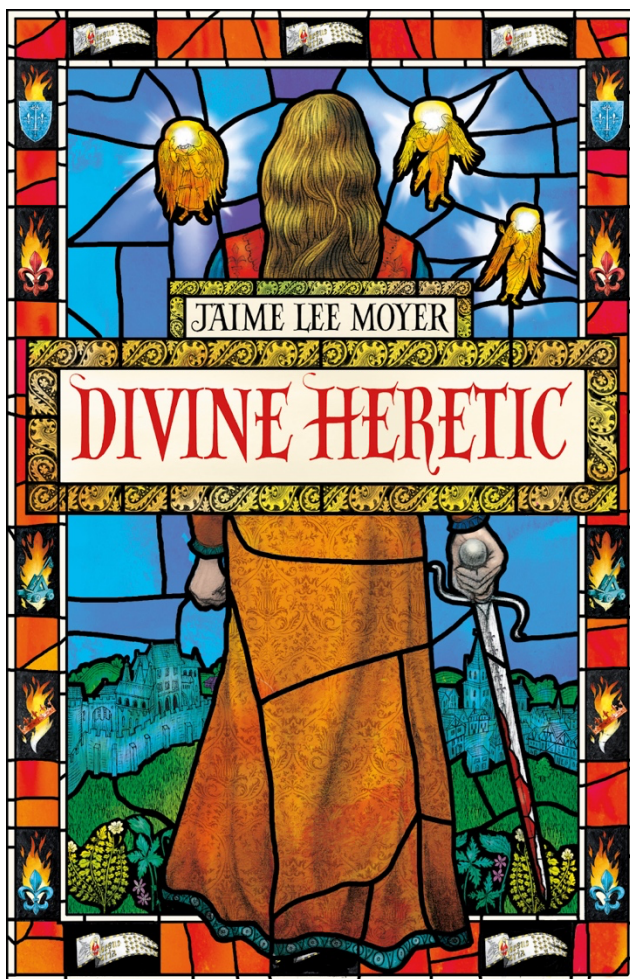
Continuing my vaguely related series of book reviews: semi-historical fiction based around medieval or early modern women and the interactions of their religious faith, societal oppression and mental struggles, particularly with regard to having visions or direct communication with the divine.

So who next but the Maid of Orleans, Jean d’Arc? Jaime Lee Moyer is listed as a fantasy writer, and one of her previous novels was a historical retelling of the story of Maid Marion (which I haven’t read yet, but intend to. Right after I tackle that teetering pile of things on my list...). So it will come as no huge surprise that the historical basis of the story is quite loosely



interpreted: so loosely in some respects that it is almost not the story we might expect at all, but I'll leave that for you to discover.

What was superb, and disturbing, was the realism with which Moyer conjured the world of a thirteenth-century shepherding family surrounded by war, poverty and superstition. This world is raw and brutal, but Moyer depicts the family into which Jean is born as loving and deeply moral, creating an unbearable contrast with the duplicitous, rapacious, self-serving normality of the surrounding world.



The angels which we recall appeared to Jean instructing her to lead the Dauphin to victory are not as we might imagine. Jean describes them in the opening lines of the book as “creatures that claimed to be angels” and we learn that they had previously appeared to Jean’s grandmother who both ignored them and

failed to warn Jean of their nature, power, and intent to control her in turn.

From the age of five, Jean hears these voices and even at such a tender age she is aware that they are not of god. She learns quickly to lie about them even when they lead her to find a lost lamb, in case she is accused of witchcraft or heresy. The rural society in which she lives is not fully Christian – there is visible if unspoken veneration of the “old spirits” and the church and its priest is more an institution of fear and oppression than of faith and worship. In today’s language Jean’s voices are guilty of coercive control, though we cannot be sure for what purpose and why the ends to which they strive matter to these spiritual figures of ambiguous nature.

The novel evokes the fickleness of political and military power and strategy well, as well as the relentless pursuit of “greatness” by those who are driven towards it. There is also the constant fear of being found out: as a fraud, as an outsider, as being on the wrong side, and the yearning to live a simple and safe life seems more than anyone could hope for.

I don’t know what a psychologist would make of Jean’s management of her visions and voices, and how she negotiates with them, tricks them, is punished by them. What are they and why are they using her for their own ends? Is it fate that she must fulfil the superstitious mythology created by and believed by frightened soldiers? In the end, what matters is love, and truth, such as it can be. It is an uncomfortable book, but a surprising one, in which the strength of the human spirit comes out as the moral winner, no matter what the church, the state, the history foretellers and after-tellers might want the outcome to be.

## **Book reviews – call for reviewers**

Collective Ink Books, who publish the ‘Quaker Quicks’ books, have offered us review copies of a number of recent books in the series. If any Friends would be interested in writing a review of around 250-700 words on any of the titles below, please let the editors know on the 43 email address ([newsletter@oxfordquakers.org](mailto:newsletter@oxfordquakers.org)), and we will arrange for a free copy to be sent to you.

### **The Promise of Right Relationship**

<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/christian-alternative-books/our-books/quaker-quicks-promise-right-relationship>

### **Open to New Light**

<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/christian-alternative-books/our-books/quaker-quicks-open-new-light>

### **Rufus Jones and the Presence of God**

<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/christian-alternative-books/our-books/quaker-quicks-rufus-jones-presence-god>

### **Do Quakers Pray?**

<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/christian-alternative-books/our-books/quaker-quicks-do-quakers-pray>

### **Inner Healing, Inner Peace**

<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/christian-alternative-books/our-books/quaker-quicks-inner-healing-inner-peace>

### **A Simple Faith in a Complicated World**

<https://www.collectiveinkbooks.com/christian-alternative-books/our-books/quaker-quicks-simple-faith-complicated-world>

## **Letter from Jill Green**

36 Southdale Road  
Oxford OX2 7SD  
07970902167  
Member of Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting

I am almost certainly extremely naive in asking this question, but I feel I must ask it anyway. Entirely non-politically and belonging to no particular tribe or party. Why do we not hear that world governments are working together to ask Egyptian leaders to allow safe passage to people still living in terror in Gaza via the Rafah crossing through Egypt to airports through the country to places across the world where they could be taken in as refugees to stop the carnage?

Perhaps then world leaders could unite (No, not a joke) to create a peaceful settlement of the very long term Israel/Palestine conflict that could result in a peaceful homeland where people who continued to wish to live in that area could return and live in peace alongside each other.

Too idealistic? Well, at least it could be tried, with intensive reconciliation support from peace-makers around the world to which I feel positive that Quakers and many others would be delighted to contribute.

In 1988 I came out as gay. I joined in with demonstrations across the country in the cause of allowing all people to love the person of their own choosing. As everyone knows, this movement was pretty successful, at least over much of Europe, the US, Australia and Canada. As a result I do believe in miracles, and I do believe that love can win.

## **MONTHLY APPEAL MARCH 2024: Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel**

**Gwithian Doswell**

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) supports ordinary people to live for three months as human rights monitors in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) witness life under military occupation and share the real-life stories of the Palestinians and Israelis they meet.



See <https://eyewitnessblogs.com>

EAs provide a protective presence, deterring soldier and armed settler violence towards civilians. They share human rights reports with the UN and other agencies. They engage with and support Palestinian and Israeli peace groups. On their return, EAs share their experiences and advocate for change – an end to the Israeli military occupation and a just and peaceful resolution based on international law.

EAPPI UK & Ireland is an international programme run by the World Council of Churches. In the UK and Ireland it is managed by Quakers in Britain. To find out more about EAPPI, visit the website

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/eappi>, read the EAPPI blogs <https://www.eyewitnessblogs.com> and sign up to receive the Action Alerts.

Please donate generously via:

<https://www.eyewitnessblogs.com/donate/>  
Or

Bank transfer:

Britain Yearly Meeting,  
Coop Bank, 1,  
Islington High St,  
London N1 9TR

Account number 50234651 Sort Code  
08-90-61

If you would like to donate by cheque or CAF voucher, please make payable to Britain Yearly Meeting (write EAPPI on the back) and send to



EAPPI

c/o Friends House

173, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

## Notices



### All-age Meeting for Worship

Our next all-age Meeting for Worship will be on Sunday March 3<sup>rd</sup> as part of the 10:30 single Meeting for Worship. It will be on a theme of 'Roots and Branches: Our Quaker Tree of Life'. Look out for more details in notices.

All-age Meetings for Worship are a chance for us to worship as a whole community, where children and adults come together to worship jointly. Oxford Meeting has a custom of holding three all-age Meetings for Worship each year, on the first Sundays of March, October and December. Find out more about all-age Meetings for Worship in Oxford at: <https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/all-age-mfw/>  
Eleanor Beswick

### World Day of Prayer

The central Oxford Service will be held at 12:30 on Friday 1 st March at the United Reform Church in Alfred Street Oxford. This is an ecumenical, women-led service, which this year has been planned by the Christian women of Palestine. We will be thinking especially of Palestine during the service. Oxford Local Meeting supports the World Day of Prayer, and Oxford Meeting's representative will be helping to lead the service. Please attend if you can.

### Supporting people with dementia and looking after ourselves

**Friday with Friends, 22 March 2024 at 7:15 for 7:30pm**

Facilitated by Rhonda Riachi

Are you concerned about how to help someone with dementia? Do you have experience of supporting someone with dementia that you'd like to share? In this meeting we will explore advice from carers who have walked this road before us, including what to avoid. We will also discuss how to care for ourselves when caring for someone else. There'll be a presentation, time for discussion and some information to take away.

Rhonda Riachi is a 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, and developed a course on Advance Care Planning in Dementia. She is a member of Headington Friends Meeting.

### Call for photos/images

If any Friends have art work they would like to share in the newsletter, we'd be glad to receive it! We'd be especially grateful for any images of the Meeting House garden as we move into spring, or of Oxford, or simply of anything that moved your Quakerly spirit. Please send them to the usual address - [newsletter@oxfordquakers.org](mailto:newsletter@oxfordquakers.org).



## Quaker Videos

### Quaker videos in this month's 43 What is discernment?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgjFbbs2x2o>

“How would I describe discernment? Discernment, on the most basic level is, about differentiating my will versus God's will. We try to do that within ourselves and also in our community.... The reason Quakers talk about discernment so much is because we don't have the clergy or the Creed or the book that we can refer to and say, Is this God's will or not? So we have to figure it out for ourselves.”

JT Dorr-Bremme

### Do Quakers Believe in Heaven?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMmkJ5kAgS4>

“I would like to say heaven is a large bookstore and where all the books are free. I think of Heaven as returning to a singular consciousness with the Creator, the Divine, and with my friends and family who had the mysteries of the universe unveiled to them before me.”

Rashid Darden

## From Quaker Faith & Practice 26.70:

### *The universal light*

*Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.*

- Isaac Penington, 1661

## March 2024

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

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Please contact the Office for more details:

Email: [office@oxfordquakers.org](mailto: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](mailto: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)



*Spring is arriving in Oxford*

*Photo by Tas Cooper*

### 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.

#### Editorial Team

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**Please send newsletter contributions by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, the submission deadline.**

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to [newsletter@oxfordquakers.org](mailto:newsletter@oxfordquakers.org) or a paper copy can be left in the office pigeonhole of any editor.

For more information: tel. +44 (0)1865 557373 or visit [www.oxfordquakers.org](http://www.oxfordquakers.org).