



Forty-Three Newsletter

Number 545

September 2024



Oxford Friends Meeting

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Tas Cooper is at Friends House

Here's his Facebook Diary of Yearly Meeting 2024

Tas Cooper



26 July

Yearly Meeting! Nearly always the highlight of my year, except that this summer is filled with so many other highlights that it's tied at least for second. But this one is longer than usual - five days! - and involving some fairly major discernment (i.e. decisions to be worked out, to you, secular people).

Looking at our progress on anti-racism work, reparations for slavery and other historic injustice, and sustainability and climate justice work, and probably general peacemaking work at some point. And looking at how we can promote truth and integrity in public life (media, politics, social media) and debate and search for truth in kinder and less polarised ways.

Also, there will be a lecture on war and peace on Monday co-presented by Jeremy Corbyn, by a sister society across the road. Which I'm attending!

I have too many Quaker books already and promised myself/daemon I would get No More. So, naturally, I have a new one, and two magazines.

Also, overheard: "Where's the entrance to The Light?" (which is the brand name for our large meeting room but that's named for the Light [traditionally "the Light of Christ" viz gospel of John] which we worship) "In your heart 🙄"

Most Quaker things of the day: Nominations to the Nominating Group, and the Minute to appoint the Committee to Examine Minutes!



27 July

Groups Fair! Featuring Young Friends General Meeting, Quaker Concern for Animals, Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs, Quaker Concern over Population, Quaker Voices on Mental Health / Quaker Mental Health Forum, Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Quaker United Nations Office, Peacemakers, and many more.

We do a LOT of things. Bookshop, community hub craft table, more Groups Fair: Quaker Voluntary Action, Quaker International Educational Trust (i.e. Brummana High School

in Lebanon), Quaker Mental Health Fund, Quaker Disability Equality Group, Neurodivergent Friends Group, Talking Friends, Conflict Minerals Campaign, Quaker Universalist Group...



Notes from the Quaker United Nations Office session - "Connection and integrity: What helps people bring love to power?"

QFP 2.23: Integrity is about truth, but also about recognising the perspectives of others, and about Love: how are we connecting with the truths in 2.23 as well as acting in relation to the truth we perceive?

the truth about oneself, the truth about the world, deeper than the half-truths we see when we are busy in it about our own planning and scheming, the love in which we are held when we think of others more deeply than our ordinary relations with them, the love that at root holds us to the world.

There is a difference between disagreeing honestly, and action that is without integrity. Someone may be doing something you disagree with but that is based in truth. We may have shared concerns and different perspectives on how to move forward and respond.

Notes from the Bible Study session - "Testing the Spirits" on truth and integrity in 1 John 4:1-5

What gets in the way of integrity?

- Self-interest, the interest of your sponsor, needing to please power, money, a sense of superiority. Competing interests. Politics.
- Fear. Anger. Hate. Prejudice. Bad experiences.
- Pride. Greed. Gluttony. Lust. Sloth.
- Lack of time to prioritise or do due diligence.
- Lack of specific knowledge, or information about a process, or the impacts of a decision.
- Lack of access to money and resources.
- Knowing the truth and fearing to face it. Fear of losing face and of ridicule. Fear of loss (eg of position and income, or financial impact) and reprisal. Legislation, regulations. Fear of the outcome if you speak up against your institution or government. The need to obey an authority figure/fear of power. The need to hold onto power.
- Lack of empathy, the need to cling to your own worldview.
- Being overwhelmed by circumstances - unable to discern or focus on anything outside of the one thing that is overwhelming.
- The culture of a decision-making space.
- How can we perceive the limitations (those above and more) on others who we think are not acting with integrity, and overcome those to connect with them?

What can help us reconnect with our core values and live with integrity?

Honesty. Conscience. Reflection. Love. Valuing relationship. Desire to live with integrity, to be morally good. Being allowed to be wrong. A feeling of solidarity with other truth seekers. Facing and being willing to embrace and live with risk. Learning to live in more equitable ways. Kind reflection of their actions/words and their impact. Opening a dialogue with people from where they are, not where we would like them to be. Starting by sharing something personal and human that allows connection before opening negotiations. People recognising their interests are reflected in any invitations to dialogue.



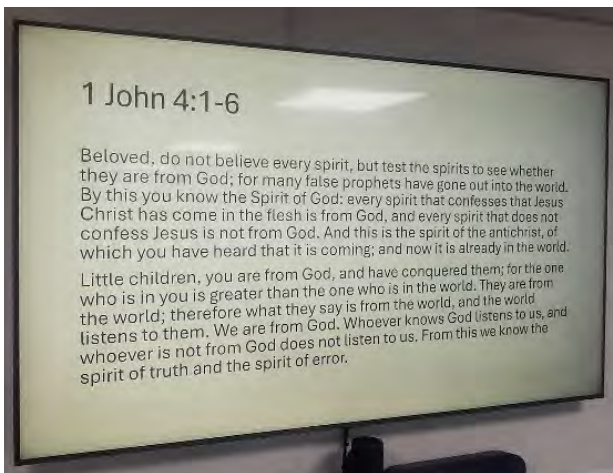
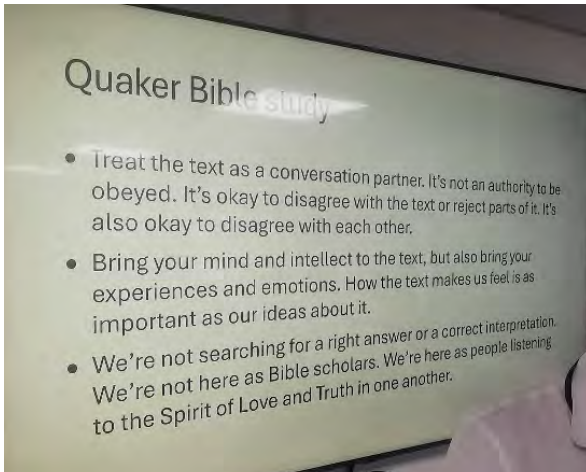
Image from Wikimedia Commons

Taking people out of the negotiating space (e.g. training, role play, one-to-one), listening. Being heard. Patient questioning of intentions, with a willingness to listen to the answer. Identifying commonalities and differences and explicitly accepting both.

Offers of support towards the common goal. A sense of your own and others' mortality and what really matters. Actively being faithful and hopeful that all shall be well and working for that. Planting seeds for others to see the fruits.

Quaker Bible Study on discernment, truth and integrity with the brilliant Mark Russ!

We have the Best Bible Study Method IMHO.



The Swarthmore Lecture

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/.../swarthmore-lecture-2024-to...> was INCREDIBLY interesting, and I'm eagerly waiting for the YouTube Premiere on Wednesday. It deserves at least one rewatch with taking notes this time. [You can watch the lecture here:



<https://youtu.be/vwqolkConn?si=PXXoFZxAh6y8l54v>]

28 July

Well, we failed to reach a decision yet concerning future structures. BUT we had a wonderful silent witness praying for/holding in the Light victims of conflict (and, in the case of several younger Friends, specifically Palestine - pictured below).



And then, WHAT an amazing George Fox 400 birthday celebration. Really fun quiz on Fox's life, crosswords, songs (pictured), circle dancing, CAKE.



This was followed by an absolutely grace-filled epilogue led by Junior Yearly Meeting, the 15–18-year-olds. They've been considering "how can we nurture love in our actions?" and led us in a guided meditation.

1. Breathe in for 4, hold for 2, out for 4, repeat many times.
2. The very slow body scan meditation: toes to heel to ankle to shin to knee to thigh to waist to belly then fingers to elbows to shoulders to chest to neck to head, that's always worked wonders for me.
3. Think of times when you've shown love and kindness to others and had love and kindness shown to you. How did that make you feel? Imagine that feeling as a little seed. Plant it in your mind, imagine it growing into a tree, now pick kindness fruits and imagine what they look like. Imagine yourself giving them to people you love. And then, for a challenge, people you really don't like.
4. Breathe in, envision white light flowing in through the top of your head. Breathe out, imagine the light filling your whole body. Breathe in again, imagine it shining brighter. Breathe out, imagine it flowing out from you to embrace everyone around you. Repeat.

This led to one of the most Gathered Meetings I've ever had*.

I last did that exact meditation sequence the first time I ever tried meditation. I was 14. It changed my life.



Image from Wikimedia Commons

This time was only the second time since that I've felt a similar feeling in a similar setting. A real joy. I thanked the elders profoundly at the end.

** In the Quaker practice of group worship on the basis of silence come special times when an electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steals over the worshippers. A blanket of divine covering comes over the room, and a quickening Presence pervades us, breaking down some part of the special privacy and isolation of our individual lives and bonding our spirits within a super-individual Life and Power—an objective, dynamic Presence which enfolds us all, nourishes our souls, speaks glad, unutterable comfort within us, and quickens in us depths that had before been slumbering. The Burning Bush has been kindled in our midst, and we stand together on holy ground. Such gathered meetings I take to be cases of group mysticism.*

Thomas Kelly

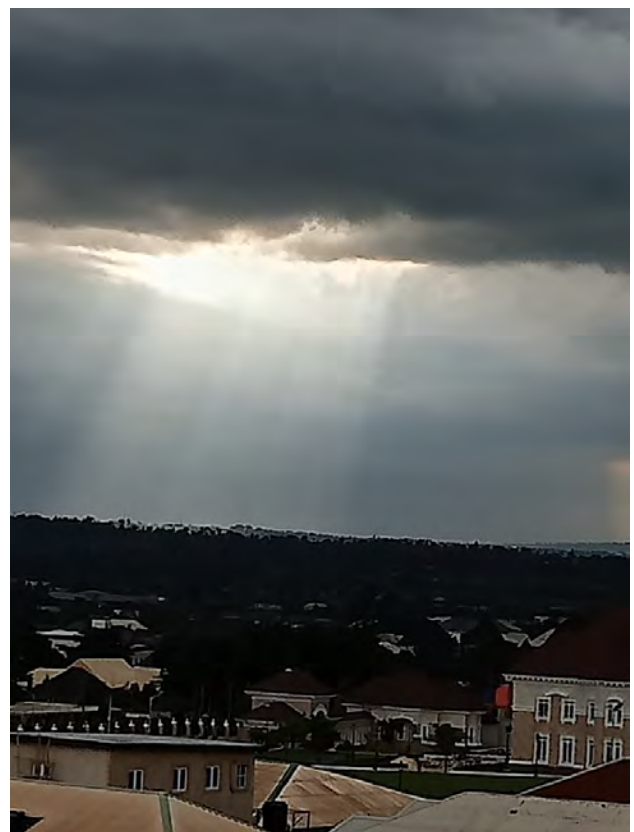
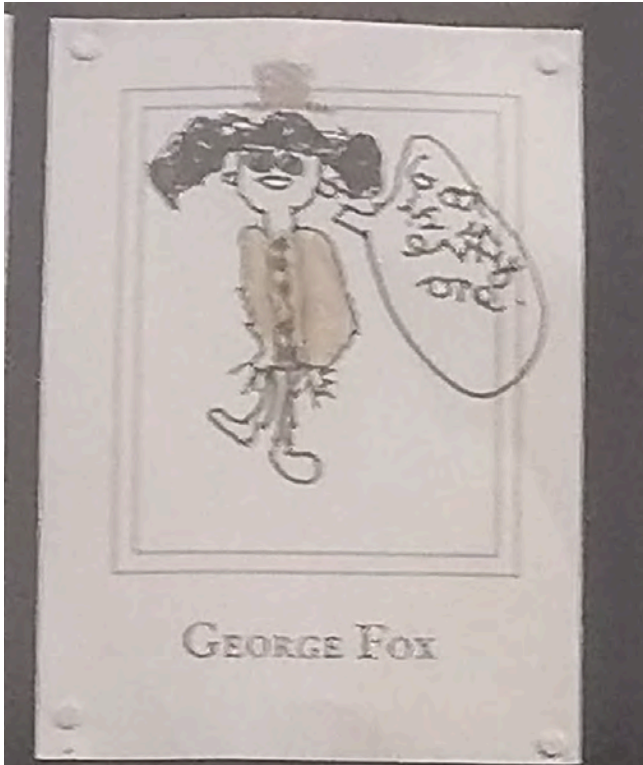


Image from Wikimedia Commons



29 July

I was there when they made Quaker-structural history 🙄

We hopesoed, subject to a bunch of caveats about financing bursaries and recognising the risks, moving from a Yearly Meeting to a "continuing Yearly Meeting" four times a year (replacing Meeting for Sufferings, which will sort of be folded into it, as area meetings will continue to have appointed representatives), as of I think it was 2026.

I do wonder what they will call it when Yearly Meeting meets more than yearly.

In and around Friends House. Planets the kids made, groups fair AGAIN, random bookshop-café:



Jeremy Corbyn



At the [Quaker Socialists](#) Society Salter Lecture on war and peace. Very very good. Will be on YouTube at some point. It's available here:

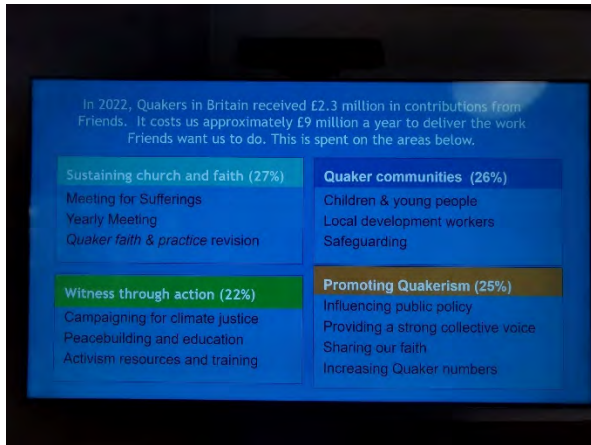


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBqfiwrs-HE>



30 July

Donate to help us 😊



Heading home from [Quakers in Britain](#) Yearly Meeting. I'm tired but with a sense of gratitude for the opportunity to gather with my faith community and for all the work and service (paid & voluntary) done by so many to make it possible.

And in four days, off to the [Friends World Committee for Consultation](#) World Plenary Meeting at last! For more of the same but much more international.

Tas Cooper

*Most Images in this article were provided by Taz Cooper.
A few were drawn from a related YouTube Posting or
Wikimedia Commons.*



Changing the way we do things?

The work of Nominations

Committee

Sue Smith

What is Nominations Committee and how does it work? It is a group of Friends chosen by Business Meeting, responsible for discerning names to fill gaps on committees and groups that carry out the Meeting's work.

Having discerned a name, Nominations approaches that person. They consider, and say yes or no. If it's a yes, their name goes back to Nominations committee, who put it forward for approval at Business Meeting. That person's name is then in the Minutes, with an agreed term of service – which may be a year, or longer. If the answer is no, or not currently, its back to the drawing board – or rather, discernment in the spirit of love to find ways for Friends to live their faith in serving the Meeting.

At least, that's been the traditional way that we find people to do what needs to be done. The method has its faults. It is slow. We find that it is increasingly difficult to find people to serve. Their lives are busy. Three years is a long time in lives full of change. People are understandably hesitant to take on service which they feel they can't do properly. There are also not enough of us. So many Friends have already served many times.

Here is an example.

This year Nominations was not able to find enough Friends to serve on the Pastoral Care Group (PCG). We asked ourselves: why are we not able to find people for PCG? Many Friends when approached, said no. The role seems too large, and too responsible. People are willing to keep an eye out for those they know are needing support, but being part of an 'official' group seemed more responsibility than many

could contemplate. That's not to say they don't care. In some ways Friends feel too responsible.



PCG graphic from Godalming Minster website

The PCG is critical to the Meeting's responsibility for looking after its people. In Noms, we looked at the PCG job profile and separated out the core role of care and support, from catering for social and Meeting events.

However, we seemed to be too late! Frustrated by our failure to find people, the current members of PCG put a message on the Meeting's general circulation, that Friends were needed, and invited them to join. They did their own version of the job profile. They had several responses.

This left Nominations in a quandary. There are risks involved in open recruitment like this. Nominations can be slow, but the method and process are clear. If committees or groups find their own members, various things need attention. Some roles need particular experience and knowledge, for example, safeguarding, and these have to be checked. A Friend may agree to serve, but putting their name forward to Business Meeting may get forgotten. And then the community does not know their name and the role.

In some ways recruitment via general circulation, or even personal approach, would seem quicker and more effective than the current system. And if names discerned by committees and groups are passed on to Nominations, there is still some central

coordination. So it may not be a bad thing – but we do ask that if committees and groups do it, they keep us informed. Otherwise people are going to feel confused, and undervalued, at the very least.



NOMINATIONS

Graphic from Wikimedia Commons

It's important to remember too, that Nominations isn't just about finding people to do jobs. It can step back and ask why the usual method is not working. It can look at what committees and groups we have, ask if they are still necessary, and propose different ways of meeting the same need (if it still exists).

For example:

The role of the correspondence clerk, in a digital age when most communications come in via email, has been subsumed under the co-clerk's role.

Some committees are going through big changes – such as OxFAP, which is now giving large grants to organisations that help people in poverty, rather than many small individual ones. That has meant a big reduction in administration for that committee.

The Funerals committee was felt to be no longer necessary – as mostly, families organise funerals in the care of the Meeting. But it

emerged that it was still important to have someone who knew what to do if there was a death – and so the role has been revised, and someone found to fill it.

Friends, our Meeting changes all the time. It is as much the role of Nominations, supported by Business Meeting and therefore all Friends – to consider how we can do things differently if that is necessary. Nominations will continue to discern suggestions about a way forward and take this to the Meeting.

In the meantime, please support us in our work. Nominations itself is going through changes, and a naming group has been asked to find new members on two occasions recently! The members of Nominations Committee at the moment are: Anthea Clarke, Denise Cullington, Bryony Insua-Summerhays, Sian Saul, Alex Smith, Sue Smith.

Hold Courage With Love

Catriona Watson

I was listening to Radio 4 before I left the house for work on Wednesday and heard an interview which set my heart pounding. The pissed-off facebook post I wrote to my echo chamber that day seemed to warrant a bit more effort. So here we go.

The radio discussion related to the response of a family to the practitioners and organisations who handled the care of an extremely unwell patient with paranoid schizophrenia, who later went on to kill three members of the public by stabbing them. There were revelations that he had not been compliant with his medication, had not kept appointments and that clinical teams had been possibly a bit too 'nice' in how they had talked about him. A family rep said, in essence, that being a schizophrenic is marked by utterly unpredictable changes. Do not trust

them. Do not allow them personhood. And they just have a shit attitude, obviously.

Paranoid schizophrenics bathe in the same moral water as everyone else. They probably know that killing is bad. They probably don't get out of bed with the desire to take a life.

On the radio there was absolutely no discussion of why someone would not be comfortable with an unpleasant medication routine. (Note, all psych medication routines are unpleasant. We haven't come very far since the 1950s). Or why it is difficult to trust people when you are diagnosed with schizophrenia in our country. It's perhaps not really my place to comment here but I just wanted to flag up that this is also an issue of race, as the diagnosis of schizophrenia is disproportionately applied to black men. Posh birds like me get diagnosed as bipolar.

And what does the effect of this Radio 4, responsible, newscast have on people with paranoid schizophrenia who are not a risk to the public, or indeed any person living with a mental health condition? What happens to those people, who hear themselves pilloried on a reputable news source and are still expected to try a bit harder to overcome their social anxiety and maintain healthy relationships with their own families and practitioner teams? And for whom, having language such as that used on R4 this morning, applied to them, is excruciatingly painful?

I completely agree that family members have a strong hand in campaigning for better outcomes in mental health care – their right to a voice in the public domain is undeniable. However, when one voice is promoted above others, the other voices are effectively muted and not given airtime. This is daily bread for many people living with mental illness.

I would ask friends to spare a thought for a much less celebrated manifestation of schizophrenia – someone for whom personal networks are extremely important, who has

high social anxiety, a strong ethical compass and is gentle as a lamb.

Extreme cases make bad laws. Sloppy language can kill. Please let our silence hold courageous people in love, not smother them.

You can read more of Catriona's work on her instagram account @banjubec

Our Lovely Quaker Garden An Invitation.

Denise Cullington

Our garden has been lovingly tended over the years by many, for short periods and for long ones.



- Stephen is a fount of wisdom – and foxgloves.
- Martin worked to restore our lawn.
- Ali and Sue tend the glorious dahlia corner.
- Virginia more the children's garden.
- Sylvia transplants cuttings to tempt the passer-by out front.
- Denise is a pruner.

- Barbara made a great crumble with the plums.
- George, our paid gardener, has done wonders in his half day – and we are hoping to have him in for longer hours.
- And we are held together by Jacqui’s enthusiasm – and all our contributions to lunch.

The conversation is not always as erudite as one I came in on, – on the nature of Sin! Still, you never know what you might discover and contribute to...

We meet on a Thursday 11ish onwards for a couple of hours, before shared lunch. Or the afternoon is good too. It is a moment to pay attention and to care for the garden – and is restorative and joyful for us.

As we are getting less active, there is room for others to join. You don’t have to be a knowledgeable gardener; we learn from each other. It could be a perfect break from working on a dissertation for example! And only if, and when, you want.



Apple Blossom image from Wikimedia Commons

Apple tree

Brigid Schroer

This apple tree against the fence,
 in leaf and coming into blossom,
 delicate, in the realm of light and air,
 would die if cut off from the dark below.
 No fruit.

Our Garden Benches

Sue Smith

A few months ago, a friend asked me if the garden bench dedicated to Joan Wright was still in the Oxford Meeting House garden. She was his much-valued Oxfam colleague.

I had never noticed it. But then, I have never paid much attention to the benches. Good to rest the weary body. On the whole, they are ageing. How long do benches survive? The Joan Wright bench was dedicated in the early 90s which makes it over thirty years ago.

I was not hopeful. But I started looking at the benches. And there it was! Hardly a legible inscription, but still a living, breathing bench. Joan Wright was an Oxfam field worker in Southern Africa. She was killed in a car accident in Namibia in 1990. She was a pioneer

of women's projects when they were not in the mainstream of development as they are now.



I wrote back to my friend...success! I found it! But why is it there? He doesn't know, and nor do I, how Joan came to have a named bench in our Quaker garden.

I found out that she was an attender for a while, and it could be that her Quaker connections through Oxfam through people like Jim Howard (Mavis's husband), and the manner of her death, were the reasons.

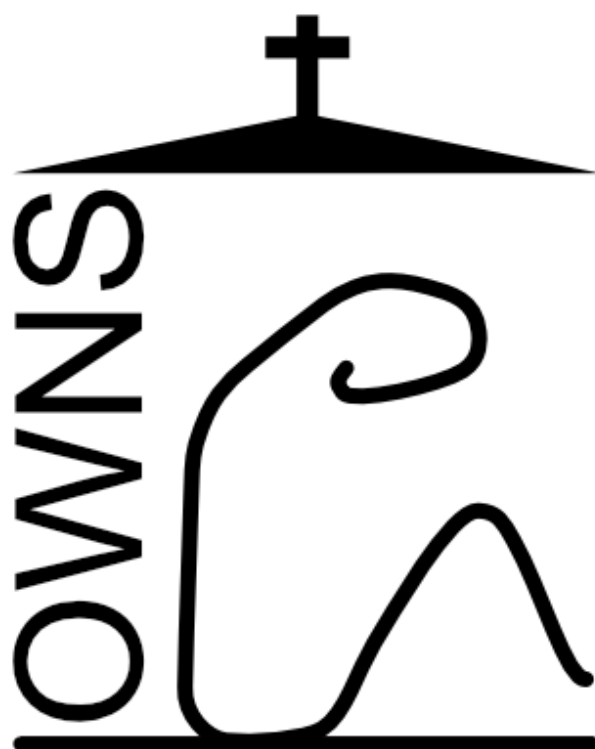
I never knew Joan, but when I joined Oxfam in 1990, she was universally mourned by my colleagues in the Gender and Development Unit. I had never seen a picture of her till my friend sent me one.

So then I became curious. I started looking at the other benches. They mostly have inscriptions. Gwen Lawrence. Dorothy Ellis. Mary Pendleton. Who were they? Why do they have benches?

I googled them to find out more (as you do). But they are a pre-internet generation, so I found nothing. They must all have stories, those dedicated benches. I started to reflect on how stories get lost and found. How people are remembered and forgotten. I would be very interested to know more. Can anyone tell me?

September Appeal Oxford Winter Night Shelter (OWNS)

OWNS supports people who are homeless in Oxford city, helping them to live a fuller life.



We were founded by Christian churches from many denominations, and we aim to serve Christ—or each of our guests—through the way we welcome and care for them.

We do this through Oxford Winter Night Shelter, and all year round through The Living Room.

OWNS supports the rough sleepers in Oxford each night during January through to March. The Night Shelter offers dormitory-style accommodation, which is typically in church halls.

Night Shelter guests:

- sleep in safety
- have a friendly chat
- use a safe, private toilet in the night
- have a hot drink and simple hot food made for them
- go to bed in fresh linen with a warm, dry sleeping bag and blanket
- can dry wet clothes
- can talk to a volunteer any time during the night



If you know anyone who might like to attend the Night Shelter—or would like to do so yourself—contact St Mungo’s to be referred. Access is only available to those who are rough sleeping when the shelter is open.

Even the simplest thing like remembering how I like my hot chocolate...or bringing in marshmallows for it, just makes me feel human.

A Night Shelter guest, winter 2022-23.

How to donate:

For details on ways of donating money, time or items, see

<https://www.ownsoxford.org.uk/donate>

You can donate here:

<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/19734#!/DonationDetails>

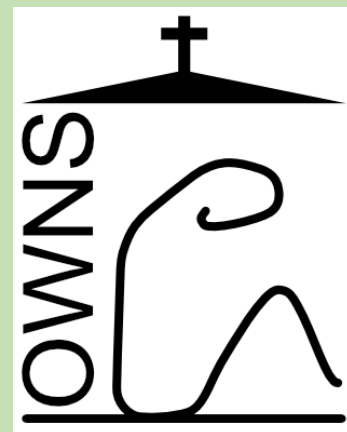
Giving by Cheque

Please make cheques out to “Oxford Winter Night Shelter” and send them to:

The Treasurer, OWNS,
c/o The Living Room,
57c St Clements Street,
Oxford, OX4 1AG, UK

Bank details for transfers:

Oxford Winter Night Shelter
Barclays, Cornmarket
S/C 20-65-20
A/N 83541320



Quaker Videos in this Month's Forty-Three A Vocal Ministry



This video is from the YouTube channel [Quake It Up](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQv8ZSCYuTE?si=cNOSH8Ewgnd2lvvm), which posts videos about Quaker history, faith and practice, focusing on liberal Quakerism in the UK. The aim of the channel is to introduce Quakerism to people who are wanting to know more about it and to encourage discussion amongst Quakers about the tradition.

38 Minutes

<https://youtu.be/PdpmZSCYuTE?si=cNOSH8Ewgnd2lvvm>

From Quaker Faith & Practice 10.20 Our Community

One of the unexpected things I have learnt in my life as a Quaker is that religion is basically about relationships between people. This was an unexpected discovery, because I had been brought up to believe that religion was essentially about our relationship with God.

If we are sensitive, we find that everything that happens to us, good or bad, can help us to build a vision of the meaning of life. We can be helped to be sensitive by reading the Bible and being open to experience of nature, music, books, painting, sport or whatever our particular interest may be. It is in and through all things that we hear God speaking to us. But I do not think I am alone in my certainty that it's in my relationships with people that the deepest religious truths are most vividly disclosed.

George Gorman, 1982

September 2024

Many meetings and events are held via Zoom. Link for all Oxford Meetings for Worship:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87383304611?pwd=Vkkya2ZweVVRZjRmOE1JVDBFdTdwUT09>

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 11:45-12:30 (in person & Zoom)

Friday:

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



Music in the Park by J Henderson

Forty-Three is available online at

<https://oxfordquaker.com/newsletter/>

and on the Oxford Quakers website,

<https://oxfordquaker.com/>

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

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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.quakermeeing.org/>

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