



Forty-Three Newsletter

Number 546

October 2024



Oxford Friends Meeting

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Content to Wonder

Anne Watson



Photo by John Powers, U.S. Army, through Wikimedia

I am content with my spiritual state.

I love how I experience awe and wonder. I experience the insights and kindness of others with awe – what a piece of work humans are!

My main source of gratefulness is the existence of others and my capacity to experience their actions and words. When I experience wonder I am grateful for my capacity to do some wondering. I love wondering.

A Mormon friend of mine warns of our capacity for 'bore and blunder' in place of 'awe and wonder' so I try to resist over-speaking and I have a strong image of the danger of trudging carelessly over the mental world of others. But by wondering out loud I learn so much from others.

I have been thinking about convincement.

Jeff Hammond, who spoke inspirationally at Area Meeting recently about his calling to work with prisoners, described how seeing a daisy growing through a crack in the asphalt of the exercise yard when he was a prisoner gave him a instantaneous feeling of love, and change, and spiritual awakening. So sudden; such a tiny thing; such a big thing.

There are so many stories around us of instant enlightenment. I ask: am I less of a spiritual being because I do not seek or yearn for such a moment and know, from the past, that I might be suspicious if I thought I had one?

A Friend recently said that they felt they might be judged as somehow less religious by not having a daily spiritual practice. Is there really a spiritual ladder, a hierarchy of holiness, among Quakers? In a recent issue of our newsletter Nicole Gilroy wrote powerfully about how getting along with love in the difficulties of daily life could be seen as a spiritual practice and, the whole of life being sacred, this is the Quaker way.

Similarly, living life in a state of wondering is also a Quaker way. I do not want to be certain. I enjoy wondering; I am grateful for the pleasure of wondering. I am happy in my uncertainties. I am grateful for my capacity to hold this place, to be content to wonder, to learn, to listen, to be open. There is no career progression or graduation process for spirituality. My spirituality is here, now, where I am. This is why the metaphor of 'spiritual journey' makes no sense for me. If 'journey' has

any meaning it is about time and life and change. I hold and accept where I am.



Photo by Caroline Worth

A Squirrel in the Meeting House

Charles Worth

Many people pass the front door of 43 St Giles' and may admire the greenery outside or wonder about the poster, but never actually step inside.

Open Doors encourages the inquisitive to take that step.

On Sunday 15 September about 150 people ventured into Quaker-land, most of them for the first time. They found a welcomer in the Seventeenth-Century hallway, a real live librarian in the library; a free cuppa in the garden room, and information about OxFAP. They discovered the beautiful, peaceful garden so close to the hubbub of the city centre. They found a Meeting House which many visitors told us has an aura of tranquillity, where some searching conversations took place.

Open Doors is perhaps a unique opportunity for the curious to find out as much (or as little) as they want about the people called Quakers. I loved the conversations I had that day and was impressed by the interest people showed in finding out about us and our place.

But I wasn't expecting to be the one finding out something new about our own Meeting House from a non-Quaker stranger. An elderly man (well, about my age) told me he used to attend meeting for worship here as a child.

'Are there still squirrels carved on the benches?' he asked.

'What? I've never noticed a squirrel, or any other animal, carved on one of our benches.'

My visitor smiled, put his phone on torch mode and squatted down behind the nearest bench.

'Ah yes, here it is,' he said.

There on the back of the central upright support is a neat little squirrel, bushy tail

curled over his back, looking pretty smug having played such a successful game of hide and seek for over half a century. And not just one squirrel, but one on each bench. The benches were apparently made by Jonathan Fison who had a shop in Burford High Street.

Now I'm wondering – what is the theological significance of squirrels? Answers to the next 43 please.



Carving by Jonathan Fison. Photo by Charles Worth

All-Age Meeting for Worship

Eleanor Beswick

Our next all-age meeting for worship will be on Sunday 6 October 2024 as part of the 10:30 single meeting for worship, on a theme of 'Foxes Footsteps'. 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/>

An Epistle from Jordans Young Adult Friends Gathering 2024

Matt, Julia, Katy, Eleanor, and Chris

To all Friends everywhere, in the Light and Love that draws us together, we send greetings.

From 21st-25th 8th Month, Oxford young adult Friends were joined by young adult Friends from London, Glasgow, Ireland, and different parts of the United States, as well as our accompanying elder from Pennsylvania, to experience Jesus teaching, helping, changing, and knitting us together in new ways. We began by considering James Doyle Penrose's widely circulated painting of *The Presence in the Midst*, which he had painted at Jordans, and his remarkable statement that, as he sat in the old meeting house:



"The Presence in the Midst" by James Doyle Penrose. Image from Facebook
(<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=5137911576220669&id=151577358187474&set=a.1452526164759247>)

'I pondered on what it was that gave [early Friends] all their power; for they had power in those bygone times, and then I realized that it was the presence of Christ amongst them – 'The Presence in the Midst'. And I felt there was a subject that I ought to paint; and I did feel that it was a very great undertaking. The sunlight streaming through the window threw the shadow of the casement mullion and transom on the wall, and, although I was not conscious of it at the time, it must have been an unconscious inspiration, for years afterwards, it was pointed out to me that this shadow was a cross – an empty cross. The work on the

cross was a finished work of redemption, and now He, who once hung there, was the risen, living Christ whose presence may be relied upon where two or three are gathered in His name.'

We came together to know the life-changing, earth-shaking power that early Friends had encountered, and to ask what it means for us to be a people gathered anew by that power. Friends came with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and concerns. Opening the gathering to Friends from all over the world meant that we could not rely on existing relationships of trust and support.

We were not all on the same page. Patience, openness, and care were needed to keep us together, in a unity that goes deeper than agreement. At times, our differences could have divided us. Yet with God's grace, we were helped to continue to travel together, to lift each other up with care and tenderness, to turn each other to the Light. Our experience of being drawn together, in full view of the challenges of community, showed us the unifying power of the Presence in the Midst. When our differences became clear, Christ yoked us together.

During our time together, we had six sessions centred on this experience of the Presence in the Midst.

On the morning of the 22nd, we shared what drew us to the gathering, and then Chris Stern spoke of his experience of Jesus's presence in meeting for worship. Quaker worship is not based on silence, which is neutral and depends on what it's filled with. Instead, we are brought together to wait on the Lord, and we expect Him to show up and lead us. That is a promise we found fulfilled in our time together. On the

afternoon of the 22nd, Matt Rosen shared his experience of hearing and yielding to Christ's voice of love and hope in his heart. He shared how this changed his understanding of Quaker worship, testimony, and community – all centred on the sufficiency and power of Jesus as a guide and friend. We discussed this experience for each of us and then studied passages from the journals of George Fox and Thomas Wilson. We focused on the experience of Christ in all his offices, the ground of Quaker worship and community.

On the morning of the 23rd, Julia Dallaway led us in Bible study, focused on Matthew 5:1-12. We waited on the Lord to open these words – familiar to some, new to others – to our understandings, and we found this a rich and helpful time. After Bible study, we met for worship in the historic burial ground, and a Friend was enabled to give a moving testimony of reliance on a power greater than herself.

On the afternoon of the 23rd, with the sun shining, we had a conversation outdoors about gospel order and gospel ministry. We heard stories of how the lives of early Friends were transformed by their encounter with the living Christ. We recognised that we are not called to replicate the 17th century but to turn to that Light and Guide that spoke so powerfully to 17th century Friends and can still speak to us with that power today, bringing us together in love and joy. We asked what a community centred on Jesus as a present teacher and Lord looks like, how we are being led to a liberating vision of Christ-centred community and Christ-centred ministry for our time.

On the morning of the 24th, Eleanor Beswick spoke about how Quaker testimony is rooted in witnessing Jesus to be the Christ. We are not called to be 'good Quakers' but are called to be changed by Christ's response to our need and brokenness. We then had a time of reflection on how our experience of God renews us and reorients our lives. This was a time blessed by the presence of the Comforter: hearts were

softened, and many Friends were able to speak vulnerably about God's leadings and work in their lives. On the afternoon of the 24th, Katy Jenkinson carried this forward with a session on how we can support each other to live faithfully, in obedience to God's promptings and guidance. We spent time in mini meetings for clearness, sharing concerns on our hearts, praying for each other, and seeking God's will. This drew us even closer together.

On our final morning together, we joined local Friends for First Day meeting for worship. In worship, 'our hearts were made glad and our tongues loosened', much as Edward Burrough experienced, and all present were pointed to Jesus's constant accompaniment, to how the Kingdom of God is found in little ways all around us, and to the need to hearken to the Lord's voice. It was a joy for us to share in worship with Jordans Friends, and the joy seemed mutual. After worship, we had lunch with local Friends and visitors from other meetings and were able to have some deep conversations before departing from Jordans.

Between our sessions, we went for walks in the countryside, enjoyed cooking for each other, worked on a formidable jigsaw puzzle of Penrose's painting, told stories and sang songs around the campfire, and felt the Divine hand forging new connections between us as the days went by. We even tried to recreate Penrose's painting:



Photo by Matt, Julia, Katy, Eleanor, and Chris

One afternoon, two of us were sitting in the 1688 meeting house, reflecting on the gathering, when sunlight came through the window at the right angle and suddenly a cross appeared illuminated on the wall, that empty cross that Penrose had seen. We reflected then that we too felt the risen Christ as a presence that can be relied on, as a companion and free teacher present with us as we are gathered in His name and power. We left Jordans changed and joined together by that encounter. There is still one, even Christ Jesus, who can knit us together in love – when our differences are stark, when we least expect it, when we're at the end of our rope.

in Christ's love,
Matt, Julia, Katy, Eleanor, and Chris
YAF Gathering Planning Group
29th 8th Month 2024

Quaker Writers Series 2024: Chris White on Crete, Archeology and the “Micros-Cosmos” of the Research Life

Jimin Kang

On Friday, August 30, Chris White took a tight-knit group of Quakers on a storied journey starting in 1995, when he, his father, and his son, Richard, visited the Greek island of Crete. What started as a few days of intergenerational bonding became, due to a serendipitous run-in with a Greek man who had participated in the Cretan resistance movement against the Germans in WW2, a decades-long fascination with the military history of the island. Returning to the island with his brother, Pete, in 2010, Chris charted a route across the island's craggy mountains. The two brothers came across, then documented, various sites that the resistance forces had traversed decades before, and soon this project blossomed into days spent in archives across the UK tracing memoirs, letters, and military material that

would help to enrich the story of what happened in Crete.

Chris, who most recently helped to compile Patrick Leigh Fermor's posthumous book 'Abducting a General', gave some human insights into the adventures he's had as a historian, archeologist, and Quaker. He talked about the “micros-cosmos”—small world—encounters he had on the island, including meeting a Friend via an Oxford acquaintance whose father was one of the British resistance fighters, and meeting shepherds on his travels who had met Leigh Fermor generations before.

He also introduced us to the concept of “philoxenia”—love of the stranger—and how the warm hospitality of the Greek people he met made his research all the more delightful. (One story that got the group laughing: when a shepherd ushered him hastily and without many words into an unknown house, on the terrace of which was a massive party to celebrate the end of sheep shearing season!)

The subsequent discussion centered around Chris's plans to write a book listing the various locales he has documented in his time exploring the island. We discussed how to fold in the human elements of his stories of "micros-cosmos" and "philoxenia" to enhance the geographical background of his project, and how these human stories are what unites us in our interest in histories that occur in faraway places.

To listen to Chris's talk, you can access the recording here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13ybIhgUweWjT1Ygw5piy6K1uoaCmJWZm/view?usp=sharing>.

To stay informed about future Quaker Writers Series events, get in touch with Jimin at jiminkang2021@gmail.com.

[Bonus: Anne Watson QWS Talk](#) (link to download the MP3 file)

October Appeal

Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC), Karongi, Rwanda

As many readers of 'Forty-Three' know, Quakers in Oxford have long-standing links with Friends in Rwanda. Many of us have bought Christmas cards made by members of the Rwandan women's group, ANERELA. In addition, we have developed a close working relationship with the Rwandan Quaker organisation, Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC).

With our financial support, HROC has organised training workshops to help groups of women, men and young people to cope with some of the enormous problems in their lives. A distinctive feature of these workshops is their focus on trauma as a huge factor in the extremely difficult lives of many people, especially the youth. With our financial support, HROC has been training young people to deal with trauma, but also to earn money and improve their lives by starting small savings-and-credit schemes.

The Director of HROC, Jean Nshimiyimana, explains how HROC gained a deeper understanding of the impact of youth involvement in drug addiction:

"We found that young people are affected by drug addiction in a great variety of ways, for example:

- Stealing on the street from women and teenagers
- Robbery from people's homes
- Jail terms for youth found guilty of theft, which makes them feel depressed
- Feeding of their own drug habits
- Prolonged trauma among the youth themselves
- Poverty among unemployed youth".

HROC would therefore like to organise two training workshops, with two main aims, namely:

- To help young people suffering from trauma to heal.
- To establish youth clubs and cooperatives to help young people discuss their own well-being and develop saving groups.

"We want to do this ministry of healing and wholeness," says Jean Nshimiyimana, "because it is an opportunity to meet the felt needs of many people, not only our young people, but also those of families and communities as a whole."



How to donate:

To support the work of Healing and Rebuilding our Communities, please make a BACS payment to:

G and A Williams Partners, a/c 50323628,
Sort Code 60 70 03

Alternatively, please send a cheque to:

G and A Williams Partners, 93 Divinity Road,
Oxford OX4 1LN.

Your donation will be acknowledged, and no charges will be made to cover administrative costs. You will also receive a report on the work of Healing and Rebuilding our Communities.

A Request from the Editors

What does the light mean to you? The editors of 43 invite all Friends to send musings on this (up to 500 words) to us at newsletter@oxfordquakers.org. Poems, pictures, etc, all most welcome!

Student Seeking Accommodation

A Palestinian student from Bethlehem is coming to Oxford at the beginning of October to do a MSc and is looking for accommodation in return for doing odd jobs, some cooking and contributions to costs. If anyone knows anyone who may be able to help, please email me and I'll put you in touch with his family friend in Coventry who will be able to tell you more. I understand the young man is from a Christian Palestinian family connected to Wi'am, the Conflict Transformation Centre in Bethlehem. The student's MSc is in evidence-based social intervention and policy evaluation.

In Friendship, Gwithian, Gwithian@btinternet.com

You are Invited

to a reading by David Constantine, supported by Stephen Yeo, at 7 pm for 7.30 till 9 pm on Tuesday, 22 October 2024, in Oxford Quaker Meeting House.

The reading is free, with a collection for GASA relief and reconstruction.

David's most recent book of poems is BELONGINGS (2020). His 'A BIRD CALLED ELAEUS', poems from the Greek Anthology, will be out in November. Both books from Bloodaxe.

Stephen's collection is LATELY (2023) from The Endless Bookcase:
<https://theendlessbookcase.com/>

Stephen Yeo

Quaker Videos in this Month's Forty-Three



Seven Quaker Approaches to Prayer

Friends speaking of their understanding and experiences of prayer.

6 Minutes

<https://youtu.be/KkGQ1mD7lhQ?si=juYijuG7d9UAfcna>

From Quaker Faith & Practice 10.02

Our Community

We know the power of God's Spirit at work in the lives of people within the community of our meetings. These people may have been drawn into the community by a sudden conviction, a long period of seeking, or have grown up within it from childhood. We also know that we are engaged in a life-long growth into faith and experience a continuing irruption of grace into our lives which demands and sustains a commitment to a life of discipleship. We recognise this power at work in people of all ages, races and creeds: a transforming power which can issue in lives of joy, humility and service.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

October 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)



Photo by Caroline Worth

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
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Dunstan Road, Headington, OX3 9BY

For full details see

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

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

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