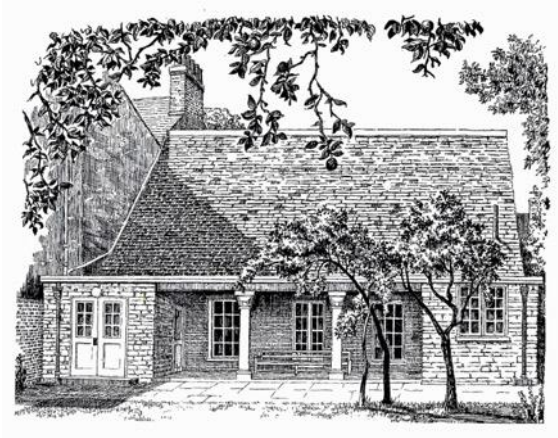
Forty-Three Newsletter

Number 558
October 2025



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Walking the Way of Council, Standing for Peace

Suzan Meryem Rosita

On the first weekend of September, I joined a Way of Council Training at Timberyard Farm with the Living Justice Project. At the heart of the Great Glemham Farms in Suffolk, Timberyard Farmhouse is managed as an eco-dwelling, surrounded by woodland and pasture (https://livingjustice.earth).

The training was led by Dave Bingham (True Circles), who lives in the Galloway Hills of South-West Scotland with his partner of more than 40 years, Lynne. A husband, father, grandfather, consultant, wilderness guide, and bus driver, Dave has worn many hats. Since first encountering Council in 2008, he has carried it into men's and women's groups, prisons, reconciliation retreats, community circles, and family life. He describes himself as "an ally, co-conspirator, and constructive trouble-maker"—committed to dissolving the walls of "othering" and inviting us to rediscover our shared humanity.

We were cared for and nourished throughout the training by Miche, a wonderful cook and maker of things (and connections) whose vocation interweaves art, ecology, food, and liberation. Born in Zimbabwe with French and Jewish heritage, Miche draws on therapeutic arts, ritual, and ecological practice to create convivial, nourishing spaces. To sit at her table was to feel the training held in yet another circle—one of food, ritual, and care.

This was my third time undertaking the Way of Council training (course information here), and each time I find have found it profoundly grounding and transformative. It grounds me in my ministry as College Chaplain at St Hilda's College, Oxford, where I often draw on inclusive listening in contexts of distress and conflict.

The following week, I joined Friends at the DSEI (Defence and Security Equipment International) arms fair protests in London, where one of the world's largest arms fairs trade exhibitions was opening. Quakers held a Meeting for Worship at midday, carried banners including "War Starts Here," and joined in multifaith witness with song and prayer and non-violent direct action (see picture).

> *"...to sit in circle, whether in Meeting or on the streets, is to resist division and destruction, and to affirm instead that peace is possible."*

I served as Quaker Roots pastoral care and contact person, offering a grounded presence and sometimes even the practical task of holding a Friend's place while they stepped away (see picture). Preparation for this role included

training in nonviolence, knowing our rights, and practising how to remain calm and centred in the presence of police and tension. The night before the fair opened, I found myself in conversation with members of the construction crews who were building the site and offered pastoral care when I saw their distress. On the day itself, I also spoke with arms dealers, listening and holding space for their humanity too. My languages came in useful, and I was able to converse in German and Turkish with various delegates.

What stood out most for me was an encounter with a delivery driver who had stopped to watch our witness. I explained to him what we were doing. Moved, he said: *"Thank you for doing this. I have fled from war and now I am here delivering food to those people who are giving my country weapons."*

Both experiences left me with the same conviction: that to sit in circle, whether in Meeting or on the streets, is to resist division and destruction, and to affirm instead that peace is possible.

I am grateful that my training was made possible through the support of St Hilda's College (covering the course fee) and the Oxford Meeting's Stoll Pendleton Warner Fund, which generously covered my travel and accommodation.

Photos: Suzan Meryem Rosita

Knowing each other in the things that are eternal

John Mason

At the Listening Session on Sunday Sept 21, we were invited to express our wishes, hopes and vision for Oxford Meeting.

At the time it did not seem necessary to add to the ministry that we heard, so the following was written on the card provided. Since then it occurred to me that it might be worth adding it to the ongoing conversation.

My hope and wish for Oxford Local Meeting is that members of the various component communities which comprise Oxford Meeting come to recognise, appreciate, and commit to the larger compound community, so that they feel moved to offer service to that larger community, to support that larger community financially, and thus reap benefits from participation in the larger community.

We heard a lot of ministry about being known in and to the Meeting. For me what is important is to get to know each other in the ***things that are eternal*** rather than focussing on knowing and remembering all the things that are ephemeral. We can recognise, acknowledge, attend to, and value each other on different levels.

The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) in Oxford

Richard Seebohm

The Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) in Oxford seems to be keeping its head above water while facing the vortex of conflict and destruction that we see in the wider world.

Its Zoom seminar on 10 September asked the question '[h]ow do we prepare rabbis and clergy for interfaith understanding?' The (rather sparky) speakers were Rabbi Debbi Young-Comers of the Leo Baeck College, London and Canon Dr Andrew Smith of The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham. Both taught interfaith matters to ordinands and had other roles. Debbi was of the Reform strand of Judaism and Andrew was evangelical; they both stressed the need to understand the variants of their own traditions but also the teachings of 'faiths not their own' (in the words of the event convenor the Rev Bruce Thompson). Both had lived and worked in communities where their own faiths had a minority presence. In their teaching, they had to reconcile the need to balance the spiritual and pastoral essences of their vocations, but ministers should feel for the souls of all in their parish. We saw the contrast between dialogue and evangelism.

Reflecting on Covid, with the losses of key people from amongst us, both commented that resorting to on-line events has had limited real relationships for some, but it has also widened contacts for others.

Politically, both recognised 7 October 2023 as a 'disaster no one had seen coming'. In the name of humanity, it enhanced the need for inter-faith understanding. The Hindu-Muslim confrontation in India was also having a troubling impact on the British communities of these faiths. Surely, separations couldn't be God's purpose.

As lessons for us, we should not be too anxious to search for common ground but rather to live comfortably with each other. We should avoid stressing our own perceptions of what others believe. We should avoid latching on to certainties, particularly in face of social media promoting those who shout loudest. I asked how Christians and Jews should regard the Qur'an's treatment of stories and individuals from our scriptures and traditions; it was reasonable to state our own readings but to respect other narratives, they suggested. Scriptural reasoning is valuable, also to take account of our own differences. Each of the world's faiths have survived because of the truths they contain.

World Quaker Day 2025 – Loving Our Neighbours Near and Far

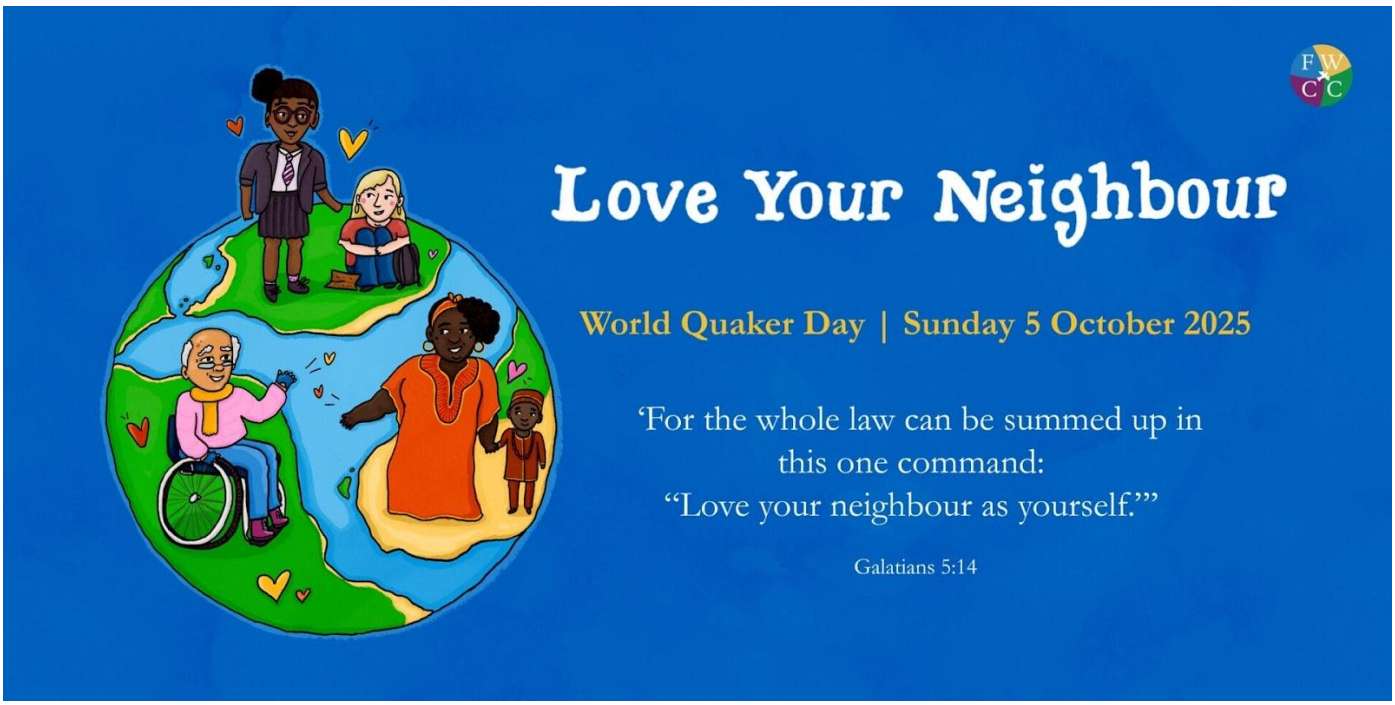
Matthew Gee

Since 2014, on the first Sunday of October, Friends Churches and Quaker Meetings from our diverse theological traditions across the globe have united in worship and fellowship through World Quaker Day, coordinated annually by Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). This year's World Quaker Day is on Sunday 5 October 2025, with the theme: "Love Your Neighbour", inspired by Galatians 5:14, "*For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.*"

Quakers around the world will be marking World Quaker Day in different ways, including Friends in Bohol (Philippines), visiting a family to share food, conversation, and worship; Friends Church Seoni Malwa (India), performing drama and songs on the theme of *Love Your Neighbour;* Swedish and Danish Friends meeting each other for shared worship and fellowship; a hymn-writing competition for Friends across Central and South America; and special children and family events for Friends in Guatemala.

Here in Oxford, we will be joining in through our all-age meeting for worship as part of the 10:30 single meeting for worship on Sunday 5th October. This will include a reading of *Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too* by Jennifer Grant, singing together in two simple rounds: "*Love, Love*" and "*This is My Commandment*", and an all-age worship-sharing activity, guided by a query, inviting each of us to reflect on how we live out the theme in our own lives.

World Quaker Day offers us a precious opportunity to connect both globally and locally, as we link both with the world family of Friends, experiencing the diverse ways Friends live out their faith across different cultures and contexts; as well as worshipping intergenerationally within our own meeting, as we come together as Friends from the children's meetings, 9:30 meeting and 11:00 meeting, to worship as one community: learning from one another and strengthening our bonds.



Book review: *Small Boat* by Vincent Delecroix, translated from the French by Helen Stevenson.

Nicole Gilroy

I bought this book because it was thin. It is in fact almost exactly 1cm, or 3/8 inch thick, which makes it a quick read. This is good for me because I have little energy for hard reads, so I'm subsisting on trashy detective fiction and thin books.

I hesitated because the subject matter was pretty obvious. The cover shows a vast stylized blueness with a tiny dinghy in the middle. We all know what this means and we know it isn't a holiday tale about playing in the sea. I wondered whether to read it because stories about this aren't really for people like me; people like me are "on the same side" as the occupants of the Small Boats and we wish them well and no one needs to persuade us that the small boats keep coming for valid if tragic reasons.

However, it turned out this book was for people like me. The story it tells, or rather the fictionalized account it tells, is based on an incident in 2021 when a small boat (one of probably dozens crossing the English Channel that night, due to what seemed to be calm waters) began to sink not long after leaving the French coast. It was, of course, overloaded, the outboard motor was too low in the water and flooded, not all the occupants were wearing buoyancy aids, none of them knew how to navigate or pilot a boat, none had navigation devices other than mobile phones which are not waterproof and have poor reception in the middle of the sea. One of the occupants put out a distress call to the French, who told them to call 999 as they were in English waters (they weren't). The English said they were 45 mins away, so to call the French again. The French said help was on its way, but it wasn't. They also told a ship which had spotted the dinghy in distress to carry on as help was coming. It wasn't and it didn't. The next afternoon 27 drowned migrants, including women and one young girl, were pulled out of the water after the bodies were seen by a French fishing boat. Two survived.

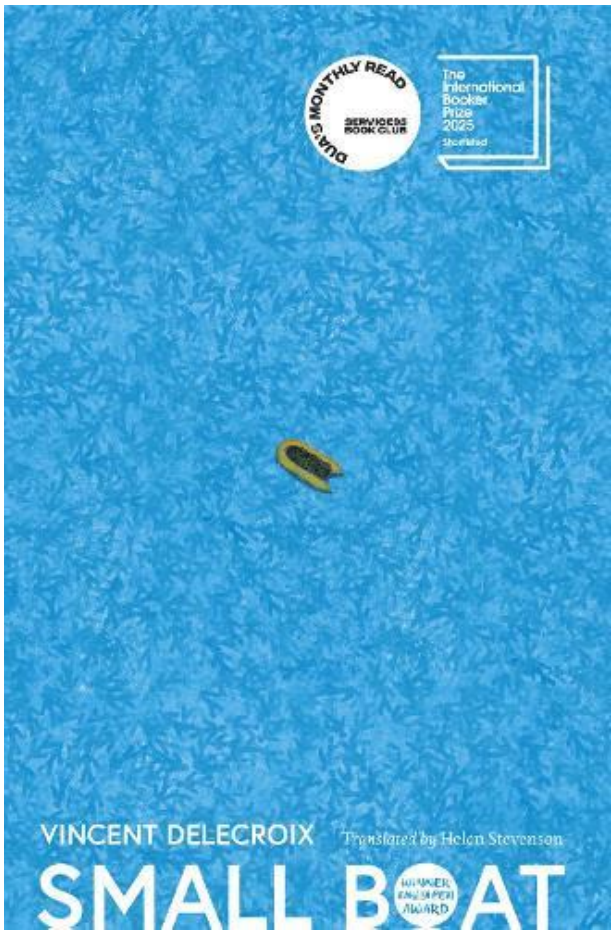
People like me condemn that call handler who worked for the French Navy, and to some extent the English call handlers too. Their inaccurate information and failure to act caused those deaths, we say. When we hear that there was a recording of the call handler saying "I didn't ask you to get in that boat" and "Don't you get it, no one is coming, you will not be saved?", we call her a monster.

I'm not here to make arguments. But this thin book made me consider it possible I could be mistaken. In fact, it shamed me into realising that, in fact, that French monster saves dozens of migrant lives every night she works a shift, and that I have never saved a life, ever. And that while she "failed to act" on that particular dinghy (in the same evening that she did send aid to a number of other small boats in distress, as did her English counterparts, saving far more migrants than drowned that night), I was lying asleep in my bed. The book contains the following chilling passage about corporate responsibility, about our duty as a society and about passing the buck: *"[y]ou are all there. If I turned round I would see you all, sunk into your sofas on the sand, in your deck chairs, in your offices, watching without watching, while I keep my vigil like an idiot, and afterwards, once the drama is over, lashing out, saying: It's a scandal, It's revolting. And yet that night I saw not one of them jump into the water to help, not one offering to reinflate the rubber dinghy with his own feeble lungs.*"

Maybe we should consider this corporate responsibility when we criticise our elected leaders for not doing enough, when we demonise healthcare managers for poor allocation of resources, when we curse the social workers for repeatedly failing to support the child who ends up murdered or dead of neglect. They didn't kill the child, cause the heart attack, drop the bomb. Only when we have stood for election, performed

the surgery with no sleep or staff, stepped in and supported the struggling family can we judge those who did it imperfectly. The French call handler did not tell those migrants to leave their war-torn homes, to travel across the world, to climb into a leaky boat. She did not kill them by not sending aid any more than you or I did.

9.5 out of ten, would recommend.



Communicating Truthfully, Equally and Effectively

Aled Vernon-Rees

Saturday 15 November, 9.30-16:30, Oxford Friends Meeting House

This in-person Woodbrooke day event offers the chance to learn how to better handle conflict of opinion or situations involving 'difficult personalities' in ways that support our testimony to truth and equality. It is an essential skill for Quakers, especially elders, and indeed for us all to co-exist in peace.

The course will focus on working with your own situations and real challenges in your communities, by learning and practising the skill of communicating effectively with truthfulness and equality at the centre. It is recommended for anyone who has wondered how to speak more openly and directly without causing offence or increasing tension. The opportunity is especially for Friends with eldership responsibilities who must gently challenge misunderstandings about Quaker practice or effectively address a lack of discipline to help restore right ordering in Meetings.

Please come with hearts and minds prepared to learn and practise new skills for communicating more honestly with others. We will endeavour to challenge old habits with plenty of practice in a confidential space.

You are also invited to hear the introduction to the theory online on Monday 3 November at 19:00, though you do not have to attend the evening session to sign up for the day.

Bookings are £35. To book your place visit: https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/courses/communicating-truthfully-equally-and-effectively/. If you have any questions or need further information to help promote the day please contact me at Aled.Vernon-Rees@woodbrooke.org.uk.

October appeal: Peace Works Zimbabwe (PWZ)

Peace Works Zimbabwe is a Quaker-led charity with over 55 years' experience in Matabeleland. They are introducing **Peace Clubs** and **Alternatives to Violence** training to adults and children in schools and in other communities. Oxford Quaker Meeting has always been very generous to this organisation and its predecessor (Friends of Hlekweni), the adopted concerns of Milton Keynes Meeting. They train new trainers as well as individuals.

There are many stories about impact – here are some comments from course participants:

- "I learnt to be more empathetic and understand who I am."
- "Violence is a choice and sometimes I do not choose the right decisions. "
- "To think about others and be patient with everyone in life."
- "Learnt from others, can forgive and move on with life."
- "I learnt that I am someone who can change the behavior for the better."
- "I learnt that I am capable of letting bygones be bygones."
- "I learnt that I am an ambassador for peace."
- "It leads me to create a school peace club and I now understand that for peace to prevail mindsets have to change."
- "[Alternatives to Violence] lessons equipped me in thinking in a positive way toward someone's behavior."
- "It made me be able to critically think about peaceful ways of handling conflict situations."
- "It changed my life, I learnt to forgive things that ruin my life."

Impact can go beyond individuals; Jeffrey Ncube was amongst the first teachers to run a Peace Club in Zimbabwe. He was so convinced of the value of this initiative, both for individual pupils and for the whole school, that when he became a head of his own primary school he immediately instigated a Peace Club and encouraged the school prefects to join. As he put it, *"[t]he introduction of Peace Clubs at Tjewondo Primary has resulted in a number of learners transforming from bullying tendencies and other deviant behaviours into responsible citizens. The learners have learnt to be friendly, to be good communicators, using appropriate registers .... There is now orderliness in the school as learners have learnt about their responsibilities."*

And on a smaller scale, a student, Nicole (in the picture), attended an Alternatives to Violence course and then decided to start a Peace Club in her school.

How to donate to Peace Works Zimbabwe

By bank transfer or Standing Order
Bank: Co-op Bank
Account name: Peace Works Zimbabwe
Sort code: 08 92 99;
Account no: 67345863
Please use reference 'PWZ'
Please contact us at peaceworkszim@gmail.com to confirm the donation and, ideally, request a Gift Aid form.

By cheque
Please make cheques payable to: *Peace Works Zimbabwe* and send to: *Peace Works Zimbabwe c/o The Quaker Centre, 1 Oakley Gardens, MILTON KEYNES. MK15 9BH*. **Please include a note with your name, address and email, making it clear that the donation is for Peace Works Zimbabwe.**

Diary

World Quaker Day
Theme: Love Your Neighbour (Galatians 5:14).
Sunday 5th October 2025.
https://fwcc.world/worldquakerday/

All-Age Meeting for Worship
Theme: Love Your Neighbour.
Sunday 5th October 2025, 10:30am, Meeting House.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/all-age-mfw/

Local Meeting for Worship for Business
Sunday 5th October, 12:00, Meeting House.

Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM)
National gathering for Young Adult Friends.
17th-19th October 2025
Liverpool Friends Meeting House
https://yfgm.quaker.org.uk/

Berks and Oxon Regional Meeting
Theme: The heart of the Quaker Way.
Speaker: Ben Pink Dandelion, Honorary Professor of Quaker Studies and Director of the Centre for Postgraduate Quaker Studies, University of Birmingham.
18th October 2025, Swindon Meeting House.
See flyer below for more details.

Bring and Share Lunch
Food and fellowship for all.
Sunday 26th October, 12:15pm, Garden Room.

Regular Events

Beansprouts Children's Meeting (under 4s)
Sundays – 10:30am (first Sunday), 11:00am (others), Long Room.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/beansprouts/

Sunflowers Children's Meeting (school-age)
Theme for October: Community
Sundays – 10:30am (first Sunday), 11:00am (others), Short Room.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/sunflowers/

Tea Cake and Play
Friendly stay-and-play for babies, toddlers and their grown-ups.
Tuesdays, 10:00am–12:00pm, Meeting House.
https://oxfordquakers.org/cyp/baby-and-toddler-group/

Looking further ahead

Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting (OSAM)
Saturday 8th November, 10:00am-3:00pm
Swindon Friends Meeting House
https://osamquakers.org.uk/about-osam/

Communicating Truthfully, Equally, and Effectively
Saturday 15th November 9:30am-4:30pm
Meeting House
https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/courses/communicating-truthfully-equally-and-effectively/

Britain Yearly Meeting
1st - 4th May 2026, Friends House, London, and via Zoom

Volunteer Service Opportunities

Children's Meeting Helpers
Support Beansprouts or Sunflowers at 11:00 meetings.
Speak to a CYPC member. DBS and references required.

Tea Cake and Play Volunteers
Help run Tuesday stay-and-play sessions.
Contact Sally Lawson:
playgroupsupport@oxfordquakers.org

Welcomers for Sunday 11:00 Meetings
Provide a warm welcome to all who worship with us.
Contact Paul Fine: paul.fine@lshtm.ac.uk / 07854 618146

WOODBROOKE
WHERE YOU ARE

Working with
Regional Meeting
at Swindon Meeting House

The Heart of the Quaker Way

with Ben Pink Dandelion

This day looks at the key elements of Quaker spirituality and outlines our shared assumptions as a faith group. We will celebrate the distinctive Quaker understanding of authority, worship, community life, and witness, and how we seek spiritual transformation in order to help transform wider society. There will be plenty of time for discussion and reflection. Ideally participants will gain a clearer understanding of Quakerism and a renewed energy to create vibrant Spirit-led Quaker community.

Ben Pink Dandelion is a Programme Leader with Woodbrooke Quaker Learning & Research. He has written and taught extensively about Quakerism.

Saturday 18 October 2025

10:30am for 11am start, until 4:30pm

at Swindon Quaker Meeting House 79 Eastcott Hill, Swindon,SN1 3JF
with online option, or if venue is at capacity.

To register email: elspethwollen@gmail.com, saying whether you intend to participate in person or online. Please let us know before 6 September if you will be bringing children, so provision can be made.

This free event is being organised for anyone from
Local Meetings within the following four Area Meetings:
Banbury & Evesham | Chilterns | Mid-Thames | Oxford & Swindon

Quaker Video of the Month

Quaker It Up: ‘THIS is how Quakers do Baptism and Communion!’

In this video, we look at how Quakers live sacramentally. Instead of outward sacraments like baptism and communion, we seek to be filled with the spiritual baptism of the Divine and commune with him within. I look at the reasons for this and aim to take on some of the criticisms of this approach that the Religious Society has faced over the years for this belief.

From Quaker Faith & Practice 23.62

The individual and the community

The attempt to identify and apply Christian values in practice is a struggle laid upon each generation. As new knowledge, new methods, new technologies arise, so is the condition for the operation of conscience altered and advanced.

To list the attributes of Christian quality would be to repeat much of the Sermon on the Mount. They can be summed up as personal integrity combined with compassion. Such quality can shine out in the work situation as in the social and religious life… It is characterised by the refusal to put up with the second best; a capacity to take infinite pains with other people; especially is it shown in the constant effort to seek higher standards beyond the traditional practices or those provided for in regulations.

Edward W Fox, 1969

October 2025

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 in person. Zoom connections are available only when indicated.
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 followed by breakfast	07:30-08:00

Wednesday:

Meeting for Worship followed by lunch	11:45-12:30

Thursday:

Meeting for Worship followed by breakfast	07:30-08:00

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/

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

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to 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.