

BRISTOL AREA MEETING NEWSLETTER QUAKER NEWS

No 325

HAPPY NEW YEAR

JANUARY 2012



Donations from all LMs of food items for Occupy Bristol (see p)

Dates for your Diary

Tuesday, 17th January 7.30 Redland LMH Bristol Kindlers? (see November issue for details)

Tuesday, 17th January World Development Movement (see p 10)

Tuesday, 24th January Non Violence for a Change (see p 10)

Thursday 26 January. Area Meeting at Horfield Quaker Meeting at 7pm

Horfield Friends will be serving soup at 6.15pm - please contact Judi Brill on 0117 942 9142 or horfieldquakers@eclipse.co.uk by Monday 24 January to reserve a place."

Saturday, 3rd March Talk and slide presentation on the History of Horfield MH and its Immediate Environs (see p 9)

***N.B. Copy for the February issue (number 326) should be sent to CANDIA BARMAN
WHITE WILLOWS, LITTLETON ON SEVERN, BRISTOL BS35 1NR email bencandia@waitrose.com
to arrive by the first Friday in February ie Friday 3rd February 2012***

Bristol Area Quaker Meeting and related charities – Registration Number 249725

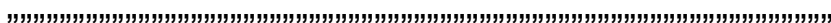
AM website address: www.bristolquakers.org.uk

Provisional agenda for Area Meeting on 26th January.

- Membership matters
- Report on the life of Thornbury Meeting
- Meeting for Sufferings Report (December)
- Tabular statement
- Report from Occupy Bristol Working Group
- Nominations
- Report from Central Meeting House Vision Group
- Unattached members of Area Meeting
- Supporting international delegates to World Conference of Friends
- Area Meeting as a spiritual community
- Funding for Housing Benefit Poverty Hearing

J. Max Greenwood. Clerk.

Will everyone who will be attending Area Meeting on 27th January please bring copies of any reports in the January Newsletter that are to be discussed.



Thornbury LM Report for 2011

During the spring Thornbury LM held a series of discussion groups which were designed to strengthen the spiritual life of the Meeting. The topics were: February "Growth through Challenge": March "Meditation": April "Learning from Life", (led by our oldest member aged 97). The groups were well attended and prompted much discussion.

Later in the year we decided to investigate the possibility of inviting Woodbrooke on the Road to hold a day course on "Inspiring Small Meetings" but to make it worthwhile we asked our clerk to investigate joining up with other Small Meetings, not only in Bristol Area Meeting, but also in Gloucester and Nailsworth Area Meeting. This has taken a considerable time owing to the geographical spread, and we are clear that if arrangements can be made it would be well into 2012 before dates, a venue and costs can be agreed.

It is said that before knowing a person spiritually one often needs to know them socially, and so besides our monthly shared lunch in our homes, Thornbury try to

arrange a social outing each year, so in August we visited Ross on Wye Meeting. We were well received by Julia and Norman Richardson, the retired Meeting House wardens and previously members of Bristol Area Meeting.

At Meeting for Worship there are on average 13 or 14, and Advices and Queries are often read. To assist us to keep warm in winter one of our members donated a Halogen Heater as a contribution toward lessening our Carbon footprint.

We delayed our outreach week until November when we had a special Meeting for Worship widely advertised and devised for enquirers. 5 attended and seemed very interested. Hopefully some (or all) will come again.

Thornbury has two Members on Meeting for Sufferings, also the clerk to the AM Trustees and representatives on AM QPSW and QL groups.

As the Meeting advances in years Members find travel to Bristol more difficult, particularly during darkness,

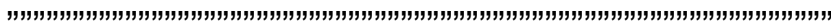
and so there is more concentration on local affairs. Even so, finding people to carry out tasks is not easy, and when we hosted Area Meeting the numbers of helpers were depleted.

The Meeting took part in Thornbury Churches Together (TCT) events including: the Fraternal, a steward for the Good Friday March, the TCT tea tent at the Carnival, the Volunteer Fair, an Ecumenical service and participation in the Holiday at Home scheme. The Meeting also has a representative on the town Fair Trade organization and LM appoints helpers for the

Fair Trade stall rota. The arrangements and staffing for both the 'Women to Women for Peace' 30th anniversary exhibition, which ran from 11th-16th April, with a special meeting on 12th April, and the 'Women's World Day of Prayer' were also part of the Meeting's work.

As in most aging groups there are many who find life hard either through bereavement or ill health, and the Meeting as a whole gives support.

Thornbury Local Meeting



Meeting for Sufferings Report 3rd December 2011

The Retreat Triennial Report Rob Griffiths (clerk of Retreat General Meeting) reported briefly that there had been small but important changes, mainly focussing on the volunteer governors' roles to revitalise the Quaker ethos of the Retreat. Governors who live nearby can be more involved through frequent visits, and email contact is being developed for those living further away. We also heard short reports from Chris Holman (medical director) and Jenny McAleese (chief executive). Volunteer governors are now renamed as 'Members of the Retreat General Meeting'.

During the question and answer session we learnt that government cuts would be unlikely to affect the staff, but savings would be made by shortening the midday take over period from 3 to 2 hours. The NHS refers their more difficult cases to the Retreat because they are often more successful in solving problems, largely because staff put the humane approach to the patient before the actual problem, and stress that similarities between all people are more important than the differences. The post of lay chaplain is shortly to be laid down in favour of the resident Friend, who is making the staff more aware of Quaker principles and testimonies and is also making the work more widely known. The Retreat is becoming greener through growing more vegetables etc in the extensive grounds and hopes to update the antiquated heating systems.

Sustainability Responding to YM minute 36 and QPSW Central Committee minute 11/88. – *"The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community."*

This was the most important item of the day, it over ran allotted time by an hour. AMs and LMs are asked to follow the suggestions made in 'The Sustainability Toolkit' (which has already been sent to AMs and LMs). This applies both to Meeting Houses and to individuals. A new 'Minute 36 Commitment Group' is to be appointed which will do the detailed thinking on sustainability and will also have an advisory role. To provide evidence of progress all meetings are asked to report to the Recording Clerk's office by 31st March 2012

Taking these steps is also part of our spiritual growth and fulfils some of our testimonies. Those who rent premises rather than owning meeting houses can ask the owners of the premises also to make appropriate changes. We were encouraged to send our stories to Sunniva Taylor at Friends House sunnivat@quaker.org.uk to be shared on the Quaker website. We can all take steps, however small. We were told that even if we recycle all our rubbish for one year, and then fly to New York, we will have cancelled out all our recycling! It was pointed out that the environmental crisis and economic justice and sustainability are closely linked. Are countries and individuals now plundering the earth for our own greed?

'Climate Impact Calculators for Quaker Meetings' is available on www.quaker.org.uk/climate-impact-calculators. A useful book called 'Sustainable Energy without the Hot Air' is available on the internet.

Advice from the Assistant Recording Clerk, Britain YM, 6 June 2011

Our advice has been that whilst it is helpful on occasion to have a category of 'unattached' membership for Tabular Statement purposes, this should be used carefully and not be a generally available status. Sometimes Friends may unavoidably be unable to associate with a particular meeting.

Generally, if we accept membership we accept the discipline of being within a community of Friends and accept the eldership/oversight that incurs. We cannot just decide to withdraw from community because of personal reasons – these need to be exceptional to warrant unattached status, or we have a loss of discipline and unhelpful precedent. Modern life does bring difficulties Nonetheless, the object should be for all Friends to be within the compass of a local meeting and under its eldership and oversight. Hence our advice is to have unattached status only as a signal exception and only allowed by AM overseer or elders – perhaps even to be confirmed by AM.

CONTEXT

Membership is described in Qfp as discipleship, and the discipline of being part of a community to which the member contributes. This is usually reflected in attendance at a local meeting for worship and a commitment to the community of a local meeting and its area meeting.

There is a range of circumstances in which a Friend may become detached from a local meeting, some of which overlap. Our local meetings have on their lists a number of Friends they never see. That may be because:

- 1 they are unable to attend meeting for reasons of health, family commitments or distance; in such cases the Friend would normally stay under the care of the LM, the responsibility of overseers and elders in that meeting;
- 2 living locally or having moved away, they have lost interest in the life of the Society; in such cases it is the responsibility of overseers to question their commitment to membership;
- 3 they have moved away from the area and are in touch with another meeting; they would normally be encouraged to transfer their membership to the other meeting; it is the responsibility of overseers to pursue that and deal with the administration if the Friend agrees to transfer. If the absence is temporary, the Friend may wish to retain their membership of the original meeting; sojourning membership of the other meeting, especially if it is outside Britain YM, may be appropriate.
- 4 they have moved away to an area where there is no meeting or to a part of the world where there is no meeting or community of Friends within our tradition (liberal unprogrammed); if there is no meeting, the options are to remain under the care of the local meeting or transfer to international membership (under the care of Friends World Committee for Consultation); international membership is not normally available if a Friend lives in the area of an existing yearly meeting of any tradition, but there can be some flexibility in some parts of the world.

The circumstances referred to in AM minute 53/11 do not fall into any of these categories, though there is one case of an unattached Friend in this AM living in the area of another yearly meeting in our tradition but who has shown no interest in attending meeting there.

CASES

1. Friends who have asked to be listed as unattached.
 - a AS was accepted into membership, attached to Redland but was unhappy with the circumstances of the membership process as they applied to her, feeling that a degree of racism was evident in it. She ceased attending but continues to live in Bristol and is active in wider Quaker groupings. Her practice of worship is not known.
 - b CE transferred his membership into Bristol AM and attended Redland meeting, over two periods. During both periods a number of Friends in Redland felt uncomfortable with the style of his ministry. Some Friends did not find its orthodox Christian theology congenial but the main problem was the perception of the manner of his ministry being too overbearing and "preachy". When attempts to resolve the differences between CE and the Meeting failed, he ceased to attend. He still considers himself a Quaker and has asked to be listed as unattached. He worships in another Christian community.

2. Friends who have been asked to withdraw from a local meeting

In January 2010 a Friend was asked by Area Meeting to withdraw from Portishead meeting. He and his wife were encouraged to attend another meeting within Bristol AM but they live in the area of another AM and have been attending a meeting outside Bristol AM but they are active in the affairs of Bristol AM. It has not been appropriate to raise with them the possibility of them transferring to that area meeting since the issues surrounding the request to them to withdraw from Portishead have not yet been resolved. However, there is a real possibility that they will seek to attach themselves to another meeting within Bristol AM. One of them has spoken in AM of the unsatisfactory position of unattached Friends and he continued as an elder of Bristol AM until 31 December 2011.

3. A Friend living abroad whose local meeting no longer exists.

A former member of Keynsham meeting has lived abroad (France and Switzerland) since before the closure of that meeting. He has made no contact, as far as we are aware, with Friends in either country, but as a birthright Friend feels himself to be a Quaker and correspondence with him over the years has not led to any change in his position.

PRINCIPLES

There are two issues:

1 In what circumstances, if any, is it right for the AM to allow a Friend to be recorded as unattached.

2 If a Friend is recorded as unattached, how is the AM to ensure eldership and oversight of the Friend

The response from the Assistant Recording Clerk makes it clear that the AM should only allow recording as unattached in very rare circumstances. Membership is of a community centred on a meeting for worship. It implies a commitment to that community and also responsibility of the community to the member for eldership and oversight.

Some Friends find it difficult to identify with a particular meeting because they live a peripatetic existence. That knotty question is for BYM to consider and is raised by Young Friends General Meeting; it is not the issue here.

DISCUSSION

1 Friends might agree that the case of the Friend overseas could be addressed by AM overseers in the way that LM overseers would act if he were still on the list of a local meeting; it is to be hoped that his status as a member not attending meeting either here or elsewhere and not playing any part in the life of a Quaker community would be temporary.

2 The situation of the two Friends formerly at Portishead is also temporary, and provided AM elders and overseers are able to provide care for them, it should be allowed to continue for the time being, with the expectation that they will either settle with a LM in Bristol AM or choose to transfer their membership to another AM.

3 The difficult question is whether AM should accede to the requests from AS and CE to be recorded as unattached. The advice from the Assistant Recording Clerk seems clearly against it.

The options appear to be:

a Accept the request and make appropriate arrangements for eldership and oversight, perhaps by appointing a team of an elder and an overseer to work with each of them.

b Reject their request, in which case responsibility for eldership and oversight would remain with Redland Elders with Oversight.

c Discuss with them their understanding of membership and their future intentions, and consider what further action is appropriate.

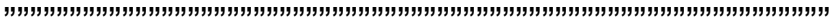
4 If AM agrees to accept the request to remain unattached, the meeting might feel the need to establish a policy on unattachment, the conditions under which it is accepted and arrangements for eldership and oversight.

Roger Sturge December 2011

This is not a new idea. Church Action on Poverty has been promoting the idea of poverty hearings as a way of empowering people living in poverty and speaking truth to power. In the 1990s a Poverty Hearing was held in Bristol in the main hall of the Council House. Six people got up and spoke for about 3 – 5 minutes each on how their lives had been affected by poverty. As a group they had previously attended three evening sessions of voice and life coaching, which helped to give them the courage to speak out. The Hearing was extremely moving, especially as one of the speakers had learning difficulties but still managed to say what she wanted to. The audience (about 250 people) were not allowed to question the speakers but were encouraged to discuss what they had said and to consider ways of alleviating poverty and inequality.

We are aiming to do something similar, hopefully on a Friday evening in May again at the Council House. This time, however, the focus will be specifically on the Housing Benefit cuts, which are likely to force hundreds of thousands of people into abject poverty or homelessness. At this stage we are not sure how much it will cost to provide voice and life coaching for the claimants or if we will be able to use the main hall in the Council House for free. We would also like to be able to provide some refreshments at the beginning of the Hearing.

We would be very grateful if Business Meeting could make a decision in principle on whether to provide some funding to assist with the costs of organising the Housing Benefit Poverty Hearing. We are happy to provide a detailed budget as soon as the information is available.



SHORT TERM JOB WORKING IN OWN TIME

During the war I was evacuated to Canada at the age of nine, and my parents in the UK saved many interesting letters received from Canada. I have copied them out using Dragon Dictate, but they may contain errors. My younger brother, a professional historian, tells me that they are historically valuable.

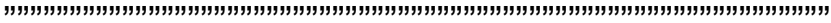
I am therefore looking for someone who will:-

1. Carefully check the transcript against the original letters.
2. Add relevant historical descriptions of the war. (I have downloaded from the web the important war dates and have also outlined some of the bare facts).
3. Interview me to gain extra information where needed.

I would like someone who preferably holds a degree in history and is good at writing. You will need to log your time so that I can pay at a rate agreed beforehand.

If you are interested, please contact me.

Ben Barman 01454 412603 bencandia@waitrose.com



Talk and slide presentation on the History of Horfield Quaker Meeting House and its Immediate Environs

7.30pm on Saturday 3rd March at Horfield Meeting House.

Suggested donation £5 in aid of the redevelopment of Horfield's back garden

Nonviolence for a Change

Bristol Green Party is organizing a public meeting on:

Tuesday 24 Jan. at 7-30 p.m. at Central Meeting House, Champion Square, BS2 9DB

At which the film 'Nonviolence for a Change' will be shown as the introduction to a discussion. The film was made by the Quaker Training Team – Turning the Tide. All welcome.

Graham Davey

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World Development Movement (Bristol Group)

The Bristol WDM Group launches - Global Justice Cinema – an opportunity to watch short documentaries (or segments of longer ones) to inspire discussion and action.

The first of our monthly series is on Social Movements

Where: The Arts House - 108a Stokes Croft When 17th Jan - 7:30pm Cost: free - donate if you can

Social movements come in all shapes and sizes; from the Arab spring, to Occupy Wall Street, to climate campaigning and anti-globalisation protests. What is a social movement and what makes them so powerful? Why are some successful whilst others are thrown into the dustbin of history. Join Bristol WDM for a series of short films on social movements across the world interspersed by lively and relevant discussion.

- Documentaries will be about:
- The Bolivian water wars
 - The Iranian resistance movement
 - Copenhagen and the climate justice movement
 - Occupy movement

Graham Davey

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BRISTOL REFUGEE RIGHTS' CLOTHES COLLECTION

Dear All,

The following is a request from Param Berg, a volunteer at Bristol Refugee Right's, regarding their clothes collections. Anything you can donate would be greatly appreciated during these cold months.

"I recently started volunteering with Bristol Refugee Rights' Welcome Centre. It's located in a church hall in Easton, and offers local refugees and asylum-seekers a safe place to socialise, get advice, begin to integrate, and get a snack and a hot drink. And, I discovered - last but not least – the chance to get some decent "new" clothes for nothing.

This is thanks to the "Free Shop" initiative. The men and women who are members of the Centre are often dealing with pretty extreme financial difficulties on top of everything else, and unable to go shopping even in charity shops. So there's a corner of the hall where some tables get unfolded and a couple of rails rolled out, and whatever has come in is put out on offer to whoever needs it. FFI bristol@cityofsanctuary.org

Sent in by Helen Watts, Warden Frenchay Meeting House