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DISCOVER THE CONTEMPORARY QUAKER WAY

The Fox Report
from the North East

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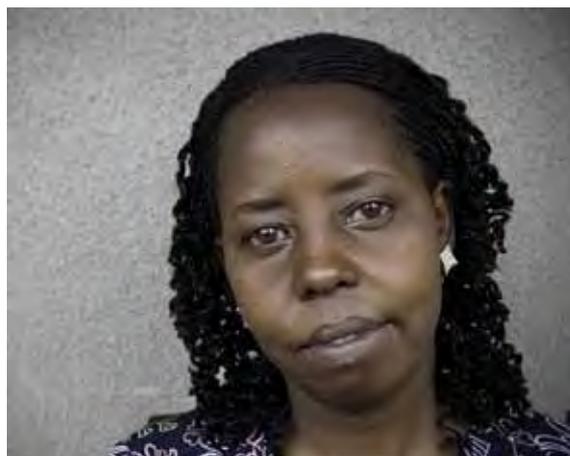


Photo: Nigel Downes 2013.

Cécile Nyiramana (Rwanda)

During Rwanda's 1994 genocide approximately 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in just 100 days. As the genocide was brought to a halt hundreds of thousands of Hutus fled Rwanda in fear of revenge killings. There were many intermarried couples and mixed families at that time.

Cécile was targeted by génocidaires and survived by spending most of the 100 days hiding in the house of some friends...

See the review on page 13.

Cover image:

Tyne bridges.

Photo: Chris Perriman / flickr CC.

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The Fox Report

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Thought for the Week

Change

I have watched the world become richer – and poorer.

Richer in wealth – but poorer in courtesy.
Richer in things – but poorer in values.
Richer in style – but poorer in substance.

Richer in variety – but poorer in meaning.
Richer in know-how – but poorer in care.
Richer in fantasy – but poorer in rootedness.

Richer in choice – but poorer in discrimination.
Richer in fun – but poorer in satisfaction.
Richer in communication – but poorer in intimacy.
Richer in diversity – but poorer in culture.

I have watched the limits expand, the boundaries dissolve,
The colours ever brighter, all faster and faster.
Then a mad final swirl into a muddy brown.
No rainbow world this, but a murky mess.

A tired old woman, my vision is clear,
My illusions stripped, my own agenda done.
Change is a part of life, inexorable, inevitable,
But which way, at what pace, and how?

We need something old, we need something new.
We need to acknowledge who and what we are,
The basic needs of our incarnation,
Our utter dependence on the natural world,
Ourselves as a part of an ongoing creation,
More strange, more beautiful, more terrifying
Than ever we can comprehend.

We need humility.
We need the Light to enter our souls.

Patricia Gosling
Bradford-on-Avon Meeting

Report

Cooperatives

Chris Kell reports on the Spring Gathering of the Quakers & Business Group

What comes to mind when you think of a cooperative? A small wholefood supplier? The Co-op Bank? Since the banking crisis of 2008, the number of cooperatives in the UK has grown from 4,820 to 6,169, with a turnover last year of £36.7 billion. In the world as a whole, there are over 1.4 million cooperative businesses.

Quakers and Business decided to focus its recent Spring Gathering on 'Cooperatives: how to set one up and how to get involved'. Many people are searching for more benign ways of doing business, disillusioned with structures set up only to create wealth for their directors and shareholders. Cooperatives are formed when people take an equal share (the membership) in creating an enterprise with an economic or social motivation, and are run and owned by the membership. Any profit is divided amongst the membership.

We were privileged to listen to Nick Matthews, chair of Co-operatives UK, who describes himself as 'a political Quaker still fighting the English civil war'. An articulate and amusing speaker, he described his experience of first giving a talk to Quakers thus: 'They look so benign... but my first talk to Quakers started with a sophisticated decapitation. Never judge a book by its cover.'

Nick described cooperatives as 'not philanthropy, but fair trade and mutual benefit through working together... and they can do well in market economies'. The earliest cooperatives started in the seventeenth century at a similar time to early Quakerism, and were supported by philosophers, business people and economists who wanted to 'change an economic system that left the owners of capital making the laws of the country' (William Thompson, 1775-1833) and wasted much of workers' capacities: 'when you don't own the business, you only give a part of yourself to the work' (Alfred Marshall, 1842-1924). Those comments seem to be as true today as they were then.

There are some downsides to cooperatives. They can be slow to change, and Nick thinks this is what happened to Co-op stores when they couldn't adapt as quickly as they needed to when faced with competition from larger organisations (a criticism currently levelled at the Co-op Bank). Quakers understand the need to take things slowly in their own processes, but sometimes in business there needs

to be greater flexibility and speed. Another criticism is that cooperatives can concentrate so much on their consumers that their staff feel under-involved. They also suffer from a prejudice that only private ownership is really effective. This was dispelled by many speakers during the day.

Olivia Birch is a non-executive director of Midcounties Co-operative – the first cooperative in the UK to have a turnover of over £1 billion. It has 240,000 voting members and a business that includes childcare nurseries, travel, food, pharmacy and energy companies. The directors concern themselves with the core values of democracy, openness, equality and social responsibility (DOES). 'You can't be too open in a cooperative.' Olivia's partner, Paul Birch, has recently set up his own cooperative selling fair trade coffee under the name Revolver World, where the coffee growers are members.

Anthony Woolhouse, of West Solent Solar Cooperative, is planning to install a 'solar array' (hundreds of solar panels) in a non-agricultural quarry near Lymington, Hampshire, to generate renewable energy for the local community. We also heard from James Mansfield who runs Gen Community, a mutually owned, for public benefit company, which aims to help people out of fuel poverty using solar panels. (see www.gen-community.co.uk). These are inspiring projects and Quakers and Business found themselves much in accord with the principles underlying the cooperative movement.

We ended the day being helped to think about how we might set up our own cooperatives. There is a Co-operative Development Agency in every region of the UK to help cooperatives develop.

We were reminded that 'the language of the spirit is more important than the language of self-interest' – whether we work in a cooperative or in a private limited company. Even a cooperative can be self-interest in disguise. Quakers seek a deeper meaning for the purpose of our work. We returned home renewed in our commitment to ethical business and shared endeavour.

Chris is a member of Hertford & Hitchin Area Meeting.

News will return next week.

Being poor – it's your own fault!

Judy Kirby asks: How can we explain the rise of food banks in modern Britain?

Government ministers claim there is public support for the welfare reforms that are currently having such a harsh effect on unemployed and low-paid people. They have been able to make this claim because public perceptions of the lives of poor people have hardened into a mistrustful resentment fuelled by the image of the 'idle scrounger'.

Over years, this picture of benefit claimants of all kinds has rekindled the Victorian concept of the 'undeserving' poor – those who have brought destitution on themselves through mismanagement and fecklessness and who do not deserve sympathy and help from more reliable members of society. How else can we explain public acceptance of queues for free food in a democratic, modern society?

Disdain for benefit claimants has been building over decades, according to social researchers. In the 2012 Ipsos MORI report *21st Century Welfare: Seventy Years Since the Beveridge Report* the authors noted that although public support for the welfare state was resilient, a change was taking place on where the public stands on the notion of a 'safety net'.

They wrote: 'We may be witnessing a generational shift in attitudes, with younger generations less supportive than their parents. The percentage of the population agreeing with the statement – *the government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes* – peaked in 1989 and has been on a broad, downward trajectory ever since.'

This might be a glimpse of the future, they said. Although conditionality is built into the benefits system, the public is disbelieving. They explained: 'Indeed, the tough talk by politicians from all parties about rights and responsibilities may have created the perception that the problem of people taking advantage of the benefits system is far more widespread than it actually is.'

But just twelve months later, the British Social Attitudes Survey – that annual taker of the nation's pulse – had picked up something on its radar. Negative attitudes to unemployment benefit had started to shift – downwards.

'The proportion saying that benefits for the unemployed were "too high and discourage work" fell by eleven percentage points to fifty-one per cent', announced the 2013 survey.

'This reflects the increase in support for extra spending on the unemployed and suggests that we may be seeing the start of a decline in negative attitudes towards this group of benefit recipients, likely to be driven by current experiences of economic hardship,' the survey states.

The Survey has more encouraging words: 'There is some evidence that we may be approaching a turning point... the 2012 data indicate that austerity and the experience of cuts to social security may be changing public attitudes towards a more sympathetic view of benefit claimants.'

This change may also be affecting those tasked with policing the strict new regime, and who bear the brunt of anger created by it.

According to the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), Jobcentre staff are showing signs of demoralisation at being forced to implement a system many of them see as cruel and counterproductive.

'It's designed not to get people back into work but, effectively, to punish them and drive them to sign off to reduce unemployment figures,' a PCS spokesman observed to *The Fox Report*. Instead of being a place to get help, he lamented, the Jobcentre was increasingly becoming an area of suspicion and conflict. 'This is no way to run an employment service in the twenty-first century,' he said.

The Fox Report headed North East to hear reflections on austerity from some who are living with it. We talked to Free Church minister Alan Dickinson, who has a Quakerly way of changing hearts. Hear what he has to say on page 9 and be glad.

The Fox Report was written and researched by Judy Kirby (Alnwick Meeting), Sam Gilchrist, coordinator of a food bank in the North East, and Faith Goodfellow (Newcastle Meeting).

The Fox Report: from the North East

Welfare Reform



Swan Hunter Ltd. Shipyard c. 1900.
Photo: The Municipal Archives of Trondheim / flickr CC.

Sam Gilchrist talks about a region feeling the burden of reform

The Association of North East Councils (ANEC) has warned that the impact of welfare reform on the people, economy and neighbourhoods of the region will be detrimental, substantial and profound.

In a research document commissioned by ANEC, it was shown that in 2012 there were 7.5 Jobseeker's Allowance claims for every unfilled Jobcentre vacancy across the region – far more than the national average. Unemployment, at 15.8 per cent, was also higher. Even before the recession and welfare reforms the region had the lowest rate of employment in England, at just sixty-six per cent.

The researchers also found that the North East has the highest rate of child poverty in the country, with more than a fifth of children living in workless households, again the highest proportion in the UK.

In some neighbourhoods more than two-thirds of children live in families who are out of work. Even those in work have the highest level of household debt and

twenty-six per cent of the region's working residents say they no longer have enough money to survive until next pay day.

The Trussell Trust has confirmed today that 913,138 people received a minimum of three days emergency food from its food banks in 2013-14... up from 26,000 in 2008-09

Since 2012 homelessness has sharply increased in the North East, as has demand from people in poverty needing advice on benefits and debt from Citizens Advice, who report the highest increase in demand for help than in any other region.

In September 2013 nearly 33,000 jobseekers (out of almost 80,000 on Jobseeker's Allowance) were deemed not to be 'playing by the rules' – not doing enough to find work and were considered for sanction. A sanction is the removal of benefits for four weeks to three years. This can mean no money, no food, no heating for weeks or months on end, and with very few places to go for help. In the North East more than 12,000 jobseekers are

sanctioned every month for 'offences' such as being late for appointments at the Jobcentre or not filling out forms correctly.

The people speak...

Ken Wilson says: I was one day away from homelessness. I couldn't have survived on the street.

Ken Wilson is the perfect antidote to a public perception of benefit claimants as idle.

He doesn't drink. He doesn't smoke. He can cook – 'I learned at school'. He has worked all his adult life. 'I'm the generation that sticks it out. I was taught that you had to work and not everyone can have a job they like.'

But now, at fifty-five, he has been swept into an uncaring system that was supposed to support him as he searches for work.

Ken started working life in the army, aged seventeen. He left in 1979 and lived for thirty-five years in Germany with his German wife, working for twelve years in a brickmaking factory and twenty-two years in a chemical production plant. After thirty-five years his marriage ended and, last autumn, he returned to the UK, back to his home town of Amble, Northumberland.

Amble is proud of being a supportive community and Ken has been treated with kindness and respect in his job search, which he contrasts with the indifference he has encountered officially. 'No one knows you, you're just a number; no one will go the extra mile for you. Jobcentres are supposed to help you but in my experience this year, that doesn't happen. You're second-class to them, and treated like dirt.'

Ken's job-hunt started from a bed and breakfast with a microwave in Amble, when he still had savings to tide him over. When the money ran out he arrived at the point when he could not pay his rent. He was one day away from homelessness. But Amble would not allow him to become homeless. He was invited to stay rent-free in his bed and breakfast until a solution was found. A local ex-army charity stepped in. The Amble Youth Project – now an all-age job club – offered Ken support in looking for work and navigating the benefit maze.

In November Anchor Housing Trust offered him a small flat. New friends gave him furniture and, finally, after seventeen weeks, he was able to access the benefits that he was eligible for.

Now Ken applies for up to fourteen jobs a week, 'ninety-nine per cent of the time without a reply', he says. Benefit claimants can be required to apply for up to twenty-five jobs weekly, whether they are qualified for the positions or not. 'I can see a time when employers will cease using Jobcentres because of all the inappropriate applications they have to wade through,' Ken says.

Ken is grateful for his laptop, bought in his working days, which allows him to check job websites continually and send CVs to employers. He knows of jobseekers whose only internet access is through libraries and job clubs, and who are

sanctioned when they don't email CVs on public holidays, such as Christmas day, when such places are closed.

Ken's housing benefit doesn't cover his rent fully and he has to top it up from his £72.40 Jobseeker's Allowance. After bills he has about £20 a week for food. He's an 'orange label' shopper – buying in supermarkets in the afternoon when perishables are reduced. He buys vegetables from a market and, with his slow cooker, can make enough stew to last over two days.

He does have a television – another cause of public resentment about unemployed people. He insists that it is an essential item: 'You need the information and to keep up with what's going on in the world. You can't just vegetate.' He needs to be reachable at all times for prospective employers so has a mobile phone on a pay as you go basis. He explains: 'A landline is £15 a month – I can't afford that.'

Ken Wilson is ready and willing to work, anything from security to maintenance jobs. The reality, however, is 'there just isn't any work'.

I was taught that you had to work and not everyone can have a job they like

The Fox Report: from the North East

Sam Gilchrist describes her role as a food bank coordinator

Sam Gilchrist coordinates a food bank in the North East. She outlined for *Fox* the reasons people are turning in desperation to food aid.

'We are a relatively small rural food bank but in ten months we have distributed over 1,400 bags of food throughout West Northumberland helping 222 adults and 168 children in 195 households who are experiencing food poverty. We give food to people who have no food in places like churches, children's centres and community centres. We give food out from the back of youth workers' and housing support workers' cars. We don't use vouchers. We do not make hungry people jump through hoops. Our motto is: *it can happen to anyone, but together we can make a difference.*

'People are turning to us for a number of reasons: being in low-paid work and struggling with rising living costs; particularly in outlying rural areas; victims of domestic abuse having to start again with nothing; homelessness. An issue for everyone is fuel poverty and we've seen an increase in middle-aged people stuck in cold, draughty houses with the kids having left home, having to choose between food, heating or paying the bedroom tax. I've met plenty of people who would love a smaller, warmer home but there aren't any.

'School holidays are a problem because low-income families won't get the free school meals. Then there are unexpected bills, rent arrears and debt. But the main reason why people turn to food banks is welfare reform.

'Cuts and delays to benefits, and sanctions, are the biggest issues. These are leaving people with little or no money for food and we are often their only safety net.

I recently spoke to a mother with four children under ten years old who was having all her benefits recalculated because her youngest had disabilities and had been awarded Disability Living Allowance. She texted us at 9pm on a Thursday. She had enough for breakfast but the gas

and electric was off. She lived outside our area but her local food bank required a voucher to be issued from a referral agent. She couldn't get one until the following Monday and then she would have to wait until Wednesday to redeem this voucher at her nearest food bank. We wouldn't make someone wait six days for food.

'We have seen a sharp increase in Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions since January as the new Claimant Commitment is rolled out with a far tougher sanction regime. These people are desperate as they are without money for four to six weeks and may need to use us repeatedly. And they are shocked people, because they had no idea they had been sanctioned until they sign on, try to withdraw cash or had their card declined at the till. They have not always been given written notice of the sanction, or had their rights of appeal explained. We do have a good relationship with our local Jobcentre and they make sure people know we are here, as we are the only accessible safety net.

'The devolved Social Fund arrangements at a local authority level are a useful and welcome measure. Some of them are doing a great job; but most of the 150 schemes across England do not give people money. They give poor people vouchers to swap for food, household items and furniture, much of which is donated by the public. And eligibility criteria make the schemes hard to access. It will become worse next year when the devolved funding ceases and there is another big cut in welfare spending. Local authorities will be inadequately resourced to meet the growing needs of the poorest in society.

'The "big society" is willing but not able to pick up responsibilities the government has discarded. It needs to bring an immediate end to sanctions – they are inhumane, serve no legitimate purpose and have no place in Britain today.'

The Just Fair Consortium of charities is calling on the government to:

- Draw up a national right to food strategy and action plan, including an assessment of the state of enjoyment of this right.
- Close the gap between income and food costs. This should include the introduction of employment legislation to ensure the minimum wage is a 'living wage' based on actual living costs.
- Review how benefit sanctions and welfare reforms are being implemented and reduce unnecessary hardship, hunger and distress.
- Reform, or abolish, the under-occupancy penalty to ensure people with disabilities are not forced to cut back on essential foodstuffs.
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'We'll turn into a nation of shoplifters,' says Ian Bickerton

Vera Baird, the Northumbria police and crime commissioner, caused a stir recently when she blamed welfare cuts for the rise in shoplifting in the region. Baird was castigated for her comments but, shortly after, a British Retail Consortium survey in the North East showed that customer theft accounted for eighty-two per cent of retail crime, the worst figures for nine years.

Ian Bickerton, an unemployed plasterer from Ashington, finds Baird's claim entirely plausible. After a sanction stopped his Jobseeker's Allowance at Christmas he was six weeks without money. At forty-nine years of age, he was reliant on his parents for a daily meal, and friends for small sums of money. In the last week of sanctioning he had no gas or electricity. 'It was freezing,' he says. A call to the local MP didn't bring much relief. He was told at the Jobcentre about food banks only a fortnight after being sanctioned.

Ian's experience of the sanction regime has a surreal quality. Placed on a work programme run by a private company, he was asked to send in his CV by email but was not given the address to send it to. He explains: 'So, I

asked them to email the address to me and I would send the CV by return.'

Two weeks passed without Ian receiving the address. He says: 'So, I took a copy of my CV to their office and handed it to an official. A week later when I signed on I was told I had been sanctioned and my benefit would be stopped for a month.' The explanation was that he had not emailed his CV as requested.

When he signed on again a month later he had to wait a further two weeks before receiving any money. Like so many caught up in this system, he finds the experience demeaning: 'You are treated like cattle in the field with a tag in your ear. The word "sanction" is in every sentence the staff speak.'

Ian has worked as a freelance plasterer and until three years ago was teaching his skills to students sent from the Jobcentre. When the welfare reforms were introduced, this came to an end. He says: 'There's no work about now. My friends are all in and out of work. The few jobs I've had only paid the minimum wage and after travelling expenses you have about £30 a week. I've never known it this bad before. We'll become a nation of shoplifters.'

Alan Dickinson invites people to 'Come and deliver with me.'

Alan Dickinson is a minister in the Bay Free Church in Whitley Bay. He chairs the Bay Foodbank, which operates from a spacious warehouse in North Tyneside, but which started humbly from a Whitley Bay flat donated by Methodists. Now, two years later, the food bank is feeding thousands of hungry people on Tyneside.

The bank is independent from the Trussell Trust, which runs many food banks around the country, and delivers food to clients. Local churches support the enterprise but no evangelical material is included in food boxes.

'The Trust model didn't quite fit us,' Alan explains. 'We didn't want people coming to us begging for food, they are having a hard enough time as it is. So we deliver

to them. We have a part-time driver. There are 120 agencies who handle the referrals and filtering and we deliver. We've delivered 50,000 meals over the past two years.'

Alan has a simple but effective way of dealing with judgemental attitudes from members of the public. He does not engage politically with them. 'Some folk do have different attitudes to us. Perhaps they are not quite as informed as they could be. I simply say to them – *come and deliver with me.*' And this, he says, is all it needs to change a heart.

Volunteering to help a food bank can open people's eyes it seems, and 'even giving an item of food will change you,' says the pastor who believes in the dignity of those in need.

Is 'Broken Britain' being mended?

THE WELFARE REFORM ACT 2012 was heralded as part of the government's long-term economic plan to fix a 'Broken Britain'.

Ministers talked about the unemployed staying in bed all day at the expense of hard-working taxpayers.

Welfare Reform would save billions and help cut the deficit. Support for this came from parts of the national press who waged a moral crusade against the unemployed, calling them 'scroungers' and 'cheats'.

The chancellor announced in the budget a further £25 billion cut in welfare spending. The rhetoric used supports the belief that cutting unemployment benefit makes sound economic sense.

But Jobseeker's Allowance accounts for just three per cent of the benefits bill.

Reflection

Felt and real needs

Derrick R Whitehouse argues for a radical change of thinking in Quaker organisation



Many Friends spend time considering where Quakerism in Britain is heading and how directions can unfold to be essentially more effective financially, with every Local Meeting growing and flourishing spiritually.

The time has come for penetrating and radical solutions. These should involve the rearrangement of organisational structures with more effective programmes for learning, development and participation at all levels. We need to have clear leadings that will not entail 'papering' over the cracks but open up radical thinking for change and effective development.

We struggle endlessly over the range of beliefs and how to come to some sense of unity and meaning. We grapple with our consciences over our powerlessness to witness in the world and, especially, how we can be more effective at local, national or international levels. On the other hand, and complementary to both these concerns, we are confused and unclear how to put more life and meaning into our below par Quaker communities that need to be refreshed at the heart. We need to work out how we can be more effective in developing our faith and social witness.

Felt and real needs

A proportion of my professional life was spent promoting community development with special reference to education. To help me understand how to steer communities forward in their development I frequently turned to the guidance offered by Trevor Batten and the techniques he developed from his work with village communities across Africa.

Batten's task was to enable folk from different communities to come together and cooperate for the development of projects of mutual interest and benefit. He discovered that it was essential to enable the folk concerned to determine their 'needs'. When difficulties emerged it was because communities were initially looking at 'felt' needs. Felt needs correspond in counselling to the problem that is presented. This is often not the 'real' concern but the first consideration, either because this is all that can be seen or it is a way of coping with the embarrassment of having to discover and declare the true nature of the problem.

In congregational work it is vital to discern the difference between 'felt' needs and 'real' needs in a

similar way. Counsellors have to help the client to understand the difference before progress can be made towards settlement of the concern. When it comes to progress in Quaker Meetings – be they local, area, regional or even at national level – we have to recognise what are disguised as felt needs may be obscuring consideration of real needs.

Taking responsibility

A current problem that British Quakers have to confront is a shortfall in the number of Friends available to undertake responsibilities to run Local Meetings or participate and take on tasks for the Area Meeting. There is a clear inconsistency. In some large Area Meetings there is no palpable difficulty finding Friends who are willing to be approached for service, whereas in smaller Area Meetings there is a struggle to find Friends to take on tasks. Some feel that the solution is to join up with a neighbouring Area Meeting.

To my mind, what this last statement describes is tantamount to a ‘felt’ need. We are failing to recognise the ‘real’ needs that relate to our operational structures. We need to cultivate Friends to develop the interest, confidence, commitment and skills to take on responsibilities to assist in the growth and nurture of our faith and practice.

Matthew Fox, the American theologian and former Catholic priest, called his autobiography *Confessions: The Making of a Post-Denominational Priest*. He suggests that, in our contemporary world, individuals no longer want to join or be committed to a particular faith and have no desire to take on responsibilities, which leaves only devotees who genuinely want to engage in support. Some would say that this state is manifest in the Religious Society of Friends in Britain.

A need for revision

There is clearly an enthusiasm and concern for progress amongst most Friends. However, those who have responsibilities – such as elders, overseers and clerks – are suppressed in their desire to be more effective due to lack of adequate training, especially for the tasks in hand and the structures that are imposed on the composition of Area Meetings. Throughout Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) there is a real need for revision in order to standardise size and function of Area Meetings along with a coherent culture through regional backing and cooperative structures. To meet the real needs of our Religious Society, we need a more meaningful and uniform structure to Area Meetings. This should be accompanied by robust nurturing, teaching and training programmes at area and regional levels.

It was our Friend Rosemary Moore who suggested that the model for Area Meetings should be for around six Local Meetings to cluster. This would provide proximity for physical gatherings and, hopefully, have the numerical potential to meet spiritual, administrative, caring and teaching needs. I feel our Friend got it about right. At the time, unfortunately, her forecast – that could propel BYM into a sustainable future for the next hundred years and more – fell on unresponsive ears. Nothing was done to make equal our structures. I think Area Meetings should have a membership of not less than 150 and no more than 200 Friends to meet the criteria outlined.

Time to take action

Now is the time to take action to carve out authentic area and regional boundaries for development. Many of us look back on the influence of early Friends with considerable nostalgia. The structures were appropriate boundaries for those times. These structures, alas, are not now harmonious with present communication and functional needs. This is particularly evident when we consider the number of Local Meetings that make up Area Meetings. They range from seventeen down to just three or four. These inconsistencies are, surely, not helpful for our future. Neither is the thought of neighbouring Area Meetings merging or having Friends with responsibilities in more than one Area Meeting helpful. This will only exacerbate and confuse the problem nationally.

We can sort this complexity out. All we need is understanding Friends using a good deal of common sense, appropriate discernment, skill to take action and unswerving commitment towards the best and most appropriate structures for the future of Quakers in Britain. There will be daunting problems over finance, trust funds, ownership of properties and sentimentality but these impediments need to be, and must be, addressed and overcome.

The real challenge is whether we stick to our tradition of being ‘innovators’ or simply become ‘adapters’, making do and mending, which appears to be the approach in the other world in which we have to live. Surely, augmentation of our beloved Society, enhancement of our faith and practice and best use of resources is vital? Everyone must have faith that we shall be spirit-led if we simply trust that imaginative, purposeful and sustainable developments will enable us to be increasingly rich spiritually and more socially active to witness in the wider world for the next century and beyond.

Derrick is a member of Northampton Meeting.

Making good citizens

Christopher Bagley is encouraged by British Muslim students' sense of civic responsibility

Following the recommendations of the *Crick Report* (QCA, 2000), the National Curriculum for British schools has developed a programme of Citizenship Education (CE) which aims to educate all students for roles in civic responsibility, understanding and tolerating others, and serving the community in which the student lives. David Cameron has endorsed this curriculum and proposed its expansion for sixteen to eighteen year olds in programmes of community participation.

Since children of Muslim parents in Britain tend to be concentrated in certain urban centres, there have been increasingly successful efforts to establish Muslim-run schools, some of them grant-aided. Nader Al-Refai and I have tried to evaluate how a sample of five of these Muslim secondary schools, and a comparable group of state schools with a high proportion of Muslim students, have implemented the CE curriculum, and the degree to which students have, according to their verbal responses, internalised various socialisation messages about being a 'good citizen'.

In a combined qualitative and statistical study, we interviewed several hundred students aged fourteen to sixteen, and a sample of their teachers, parents and school governors. For the majority of students, both Muslim and non-Muslim, the messages of CE had been successfully absorbed.

A Muslim student observed: 'A good citizen is someone who helps their community, people and the environment. He is someone who socialises with others and befriends others. A bad citizen would be someone who is reserved and doesn't take part in community activities.' A state school student observed that: 'Good citizens respect other people in the community and get involved in the community, such as through charity work. They help each other and are not prejudiced or racist. A bad citizen is someone who discriminates against people on their skin colour or religion.'

The research showed, too, that Muslim students in state schools had significantly higher levels of positive values regarding citizenship and community participation than their non-Muslim peers. We attributed this not only to their absorption of curriculum messages, but also to their home and community socialisation in Islamic values. Islam involves the teaching of the Qur'an and the wise sayings (the Hadith) of the prophet Muhammad. These offer numerous examples and practical guides to being a good citizen.

My favourite Hadith is this (in Ziauddin Sardar's translation): 'Charity is incumbent upon every human limb every day upon which the sun rises. To bring about reconciliation between two contestants is charity. Helping a person to mount his animal or to load his baggage onto it is charity. A good word is charity. To move obstacles in the street is charity. Smiling upon the face of your brother is charity.' I'd go as far to say that many Quaker values are also Muslim values. Since I believe that Jesus was a prophet and divinely-inspired teacher, but not the unique son of God, and that God's final word was revealed to Muhammad, I am at one with my Muslim colleagues, who regard me as a 'Christian Muslim' – an appellation I'm honoured to accept.

George Fox was the first British Christian to accept the Qur'an on its own terms as a work of divine wisdom. Fox and other Quakers also took Muslims in the Middle East to task concerning the treatment of captured prisoners, pointing to proper conduct required by the Qur'an. My own readings of the Qur'an and the Hadith convince me that there is nothing in these texts which could possibly support the idea of terrorism, or the actions of suicide bombers – just as there is nothing in Christian texts which could possibly justify Irish or Ulster paramilitaries in using violence for political ends.

Christopher is a member of Wilmslow Meeting.

This Light that Pushes Me

'If you really knew me and you really knew yourself, you would not have done this'.

Banner hanging at a genocide memorial site in Rwanda

Rowena Loverance reviews an exhibition telling the stories of African peacebuilders

A few years ago, the Library at Friends House put on an exhibition of silhouettes. Popular in the eighteenth century, this was the first visual art form which Quakers, with their stern views on vanity and 'exalting the creature', could countenance. It proved a revelation at how a particular pose or turn of the head could conjure up the feel of a character. In the latest Friends House exhibition, however, the photographer has had no such restraints. His portraits are close-up, taken, as he tells us, sitting knee-to-knee opposite his subject, able to hear them breathing. In terms of Quaker portraiture, we have come a long way.

The story these portraits tell is inspirational. It focuses on twenty-five people, from nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa, who have survived episodes of violence and turned their pain into a source of strength. They have become peacebuilders, working in their own local communities to build new relationships of healing and forgiveness. The exhibition and the accompanying book commemorate the genocide in Rwanda, twenty years ago.

The issues of representation raised by this use of portraiture is of interest beyond Quakers. As the first world war commemorations approach, we can expect a plethora of exhibitions trying to throw light on what kind of art can best represent horror. In a recent lecture, Yale art historian Jay Winter has argued that whereas in 1914-18 war still had a human face, since then we have witnessed the effacement of war. Partly as a response to artistic changes such as the growth of abstraction, and partly in the face of the changing nature of war itself, artists have preferred to use depersonalised images, avoiding any reference to the human face and form.

An example in support of Winter's thesis is an art installation commemorating the Rwandan genocide to be installed in the UN building in New York this summer. Will Snyder's *800,000 Acknowledge. Remember.*

Renew. consists of 100 boxes of books, one for each day of the civil war, together containing 800,000 pages, one for each victim. Visually restrained, no more than a wall of blank, beige spines, the power of the art lies in the gap between the image and what it represents.

Other artists, though, struggle to resist this depersonalisation. As a war artist in Iraq, Steve McQueen produced *Queen and Country*, 160 sheets of stamps, each commemorating, with a portrait photograph chosen by their family, a soldier who lost their life in the conflict. The artist's intention, so far resisted by the Royal Mail, was that using them as postage stamps would enable the sense of individual and national loss to be acknowledged in ordinary locations and everyday transactions.

Of course, *This Light that Pushes Me* is not primarily about the Rwandan genocide, or even about the acts of violence that its subjects have suffered; it is about how they have made use of their pain for good. To judge from the viewers' comments pinned up alongside the exhibition ('What courage! What wisdom! What example!'), the exhibition has been well received.

Personally, I found it hard not to feel a voyeur, into lives and circumstances that I could barely imagine. For me, among the most valuable storytellers were those who acknowledged the violence within themselves. Their stories offered a way in to explaining how the ultimate explosion of mindless hatred was anticipated in petty discriminations and small acts of domestic violence. In turn, one began to perceive how the small, brave acts of peacebuilding recorded here could have a wider transforming effect.

Rowena is arts editor of the Friend.

The exhibition at Friends House, London, runs until 8 May.

Population

I have read the correspondence about population growth with interest, have accessed the Population Matters site as suggested, and agree that this issue is linked to our commitment to sustainability.

I do hope, however, that the group set up under concern will not dwell solely on birth control. In Britain there is no evidence that it is excess births which are the problem: our current excess population arises from the other end, that people are living too long. The graphs produced by Population Matters confirm this. If we reduce births whilst allowing the elderly population to continue to increase, we are building up huge future problems for today's young people.

I am not suggesting euthanasia, but believe that there is a great difference between the deliberate ending of life and the preservation of life beyond that which is reasonable both for the individual and society. There seems to be an obsession in the medical profession to prolong life. Indeed, hospitals are downrated on the number of people who die in them! Almost all the reported medical research is measured by the extension of life.

As a religious body we could do much to counteract this. Whether we believe in an afterlife or not, we should not fear death. As I approach later life myself, I do not fear dying half as much as I fear being forced to live on and experience the discomfort and pain that come with extreme old age. Like most people, I fear the decaying of my mind even more.

*Judith Weeks
Sibford Meeting*

Politics and religion

The article (*21 March*) and the letter (*4 April*) on Tories and Quakers note some surface similarities but neither grasps the fundamental contradictions. All conservatism, whether the UK Tories or the continental kinds, are based on a hierarchy of authority from God at the top through the Bible or the pope to the state's ruler. Under the state, the hierarchy of secular and religious powers run down to the family head, which in the ideal version consists of a married man and woman with their children.

Many conservatives would agree with Quakers that humans are equal in the sight of God, but disagree with equality on earth: society's hierarchical integration of rank and status is more important. Hence the Quaker and Leveller forms of nonconformity in the seventeenth century differed not only from the Royalist conservatism of the time, but even from the conservative Puritans. Quakers have always believed the Inner Light is the ultimate authority; conservatives would not place that above obedience to the powers that be, which many of them

believe to be ordained by religious authority. That is why the two beliefs are incompatible.

Friends may be unaware of this well-known history and don't understand that the policies both Friends mention while presented as superficially benign are intended to reinforce social distinctions. While conservatives see the suffering caused as 'a price worth paying', as a Tory politician put it, Quakers respond by trying to relieve and even prevent such unnecessary policies.

*John Veit-Wilson
Newcastle upon Tyne Meeting*

As a gay man I have to say that the Tories have done a lot for my equality recently.

As a descendant of Thomas Lloyd of Dolobran and James Logan, William Penn's deputies in Pennsylvania, I have to say that William Penn owned slaves and asked my family to sell them for him from time to time. They too owned slaves. They were leading Quakers. It took John Woolman to change their children's views – by love and discourse, not derision and exclusion. They still counted themselves as Tories – faithful to Britain – and as Quakers, but no longer as slave holders.

I would hate to think that no Tory can be a Quaker. In history Tories have supported some Quaker testimonies and not others. And, sometimes, Quakers have had to change. Are we a religion or a political party?

*David F Hickok
Friends House Meeting, London*

Playing God

I have heard a rather different account of Árpád Pusztai's research (*21 March*). He attempted to introduce the gene for snowdrop lectin into the potatoes he fed to the rats, but failed, so simply mashed the lectin up with the potato and fed the rats with that. Lectin is a known poison, so it is not surprising the rats became ill; it had nothing to do with genetic engineering, they had been straightforwardly poisoned. This came to light when other scientists tried and failed to replicate his results, which were published without the usual peer-review process. He lost his job because he had proved himself an unreliable and untrustworthy scientist, not because of any conspiracy to silence him.

Genetically modified soya is widely used in America, and thousands of Americans have been eating modified soya for many years, without any obviously attributable ill effects. Besides this, genetic modification has been carried out for decades, possibly centuries, under the less emotive heading of 'Plant breeding and hybridisation'. Anyone who has grown F1 hybrid seeds in their garden is making use of genetic modification,

done by the cumbersome process of repeated selective breeding from plants with the desired characteristics such as taste, appearance, long shelf life and so forth.

Genetically engineered 'golden rice' supplies vitamin A, preventing childhood blindness in Asian countries.

We should certainly view any new technology with caution, but we should also be aware of its potential, and actual, benefits as well.

Keren A Butler

Cambridge Oast House Meeting, Cambridgeshire

Membership

On a purely practical level, without formal membership what would stop some unwelcome group of people appropriating the Society's funds and property?

Mike Brayshaw, clerk to trustees

Sussex West Area Meeting

Same sex marriage

I understand that Frank McManus (18 April) has problems with the idea of same-sex marriage. However he seems to use illogical arguments, ignore important facts and unfairly criticise Friends House staff to support his case.

If he believes that marriage is only for those who can procreate, then, logically, he would not want women past child-bearing age to be allowed to marry.

He ignores the fact that the decision to support same sex marriage was not taken at a Threshing Meeting, but at a properly gathered Meeting for Worship for Business at Yearly Meeting. I was there.

He then, outrageously, accuses Friends House staff, who are doing no more than trying to take forward this decision, of 'managing Friends' (which he equates to manipulation), a grossly unfair comment.

I am saddened that he does not like a decision, properly taken and actively supported by most of the Religious Society of Friends. I am sure that many found the decision to oppose slavery equally hard. But I hope that he can learn from his difficulties and that he will now talk to gay, lesbian and, particularly, younger friends and try to understand why their experience leads to their overwhelming and passionate support for same sex marriage.

Keith Walton

Kingston & Wandsworth Area Meeting

A plea for electoral emancipation of prisoners

Prisoners are currently denied the right to vote in elections; by law. It is proposed that the relevant Quaker groups consider campaigning for a reversal of that law. The stimulus for such a campaign is based on the testimony to equality.

A prisoner is confined in jail as a punishment for some crime; and denied many normal freedoms. But

that prisoner remains a human being, with the same need for basic dignity as the rest of society. To deprive a prisoner of the right to vote is to say 'We no longer consider you as a valid citizen; you are inferior as a human being.'

It is hoped that the prisoner, following release, will resume life in a law-abiding fashion. The ex-prisoner will return to a society to which he/she can feel a personal bond; within which he/she can strive towards feeling equal to the rest of society. But the chances of this happening must be severely damaged should an election have taken place during his/her incarceration.

The relevant Quaker groups are: Quakers in Criminal Justice(QICJ) and Crime, Community and Justice Group (CCJG).

Michael Oppenheim

Lancaster Meeting, Lancashire

Conscientious objectors

I am researching Quaker absolutist objectors of the first world war. People like Stephen Hobhouse, Corder Catchpool, Harry Stanton, Howard Marten, Cornelius Barritt and others who, rather than undertake alternative service such as the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) and Friends War Victims Relief Committee, held to their absolutist convictions.

Catchpool, of course, first served with FAU and then rejected alternative service altogether as he became convinced it facilitated the war. Howard Marten wasn't offered to join Friends War Relief Committee until 1917, which, when offered, he subsequently joined.

Any Friends with an interest and knowledge of, and/or resources relating to this period of Quaker history I would be most grateful to hear from.

Gerard Bane

gerardbane@rocketmail.com

**In essentials unity,
in non-essentials liberty,
in all things charity.**

The Friend welcomes your views. Please keep letters short (about 250 words) and include your full postal address, even when sending emails. Please specify whether you wish for your postal or email address or Meeting name to be used with your name, **otherwise we will print your post address or email address**. Letters are published at the editor's discretion and may be edited. Write to: *the Friend*, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ or email editorial@thefriend.org

Remember if you are online that you can also comment on all articles at www.thefriend.org



Robert being sheared.

ROBERT KEEBLE, of Carlton Hill Meeting, Leeds, had his first shave in twenty-five years on Sunday 13 April.

Robert's beard was initially trimmed with garden shears, before Friends got to work with the full shave.

However, this was not just an impulse over post-Meeting tea, Robert's facial fur was sacrificed in the name of sustainability.

The shave raised over £150 for the planned transformation of the Meeting's garden, to make it more sustainable – with new raised vegetable beds and fruit trees planned to replace some of the existing shrubs.

This is part of the Meeting's ongoing efforts to pursue Britain Yearly Meeting's 'Canterbury Commitment' to become a low carbon, sustainable community.

In recent years Friends in Leeds have installed solar panels on the roof, a new heating system and improved the insulation. These measures have helped to reduce

energy use by more than half and, in 2013, the Meeting house generated more electricity than it used.

After surviving the shears, Robert said: 'I was a bit worried that the shears were getting too close to my chin, but thankfully, no one made any mistakes. If I don't get used to being without a beard, I might let it grow back again and have my next shave in another twenty five years' time!'

In 1988 Robert was doing voluntary work at the Quaker Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa, where he met his future wife, Lea. When they first met Lea told him 'I like men who have beards' – Robert promptly grew one and hasn't shaved since.

Lea added: 'I only wanted Robert to tidy his beard, but he wanted to raise some money for the changes to the garden. Our son was really shocked to see Robert without the beard.'



Final snip by Lea Keeble.

Photos courtesy of Robert Keeble.

Pink Quaker creations

MANY QUAKERS have been busily wielding their knitting needles in the creation of pink shawls for use in the seven-mile Wool Against Weapons peace scarf.

The completed scarf will be unrolled during a direct action protest against nuclear weapons on 9 August, the anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing. It will stretch between the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) sites of Aldermaston and Burghfield in Berkshire (see *Eye*, 24 January).

Jaine Rose, the organiser of the campaign, recently said that the 'scarf parcels are coming in thick and fast'.

Sarah Lasenby, of Oxford Quaker

Knitters, met several Friends who have been enthusiastically purling their pieces at a recent Quaker Peace & Social Witness conference.

She has been asked to try to organise getting Quaker shawls, as well as lots of Friends, to the day of action.

'As many people as possible will need to come to help put up the immensely long scarf. All members of your families will be welcome...

'We are hoping to get five to fifty thousand people to come so as to show there really is a lot of support for getting rid of our nuclear weapons...

'By 12 o'clock people will have arrived and started putting out

the shawl. It will be all linked up by 1pm, with two minutes of respecting-the-dead silence, then breaking the silence with a great ringing of bells that will flow along from Aldermaston to Burghfield.

'Quakers have been given a milestone part way down the route so we shall need plenty of people.

'Afterwards, at home, we shall need to come together in groups to unpick and then sew up the shawls into blankets for needy people.'

Any Friends with questions or Meetings with contributions to the scarf are urged to contact Sarah at 0845 4588 366, or 01865 725991 or sarahllasenby@gmail.com.

Deaths

Dennis CRAIG-NICHOLS 18 April at Horton General Hospital. Member of Banbury Meeting. Aged 91. Burial and Meeting for Worship at Adderbury Quaker Meeting House. All enquiries c/o Edd Frost and Daughters Funeral Directors, telephone 01295 404004.

Margaret MORGAN 16 April at Trinity Hospice, Clapham, London. Wife of Tony Murphy, mother of Christian Murphy. Previously Resident Friend at Streatam FMH. Aged 70. Memorial Meeting to celebrate Margaret's life anticipated. Donations: Trinity Hospice.

Memorial meetings

Thurstan SHAW (died 8 March 2013) A Memorial Meeting in the manner of Friends will be held at Sidney Sussex College Chapel, Cambridge, 2.30pm Saturday 10 May. Details of other events being held at Cambridge University from 8-11 May to commemorate Thurstan's pioneering archaeological work in Africa may be obtained from Pamela Jane Smith at pjs1011@cam.ac.uk or 07976 919083.

Diary

CHILTERN QUAKER PROGRAMME Thursday 8 May, 7.30pm Jocelyn Bell Burnell - The Universe & Us: a Quaker astronomer reflects; collection for CQP. Saturday 10 May, An Introduction to Spiritual Healing, workshop with Kay Horsfield and Christina Strickland; £35 or what you can afford. Thursday 22 May, 7pm The Perfect City, a musical about William Penn's vision of utopia, Tickets £15/£10 concessions. Booking essential. All events at Jordans QMH, HP9 2SN. All welcome. Details/booking: 01295 876594 or email office@jordansquakercentre.org

Put your family notices in *the Friend!*

CHRIS DISKIN of Quaker Council for European Affairs will speak on his work on economic justice and the role of Quakers at the EU during this election year. 7.15pm, Wednesday 7 May, Cross Street Chapel, Manchester M2 1NL. All welcome. elizcol@dialstart.net / 07969 385080.

MEETING FOR WORSHIP AT RAF FYLINGDALES Saturday 3 May, 12 noon - 1pm under the care of Pickering and Hull AM. Followed by picnic at Pickering FMH. Contact 01751 432416 or 01751 472827. All welcome.

QUAKER ASYLUM AND REFUGEE NETWORK (QARN) Meeting at Bull Street FMH Birmingham, Saturday 26 April. AGM 12.00-13.00, followed by discussion with QARN members about asylum activities locally and nationally. All welcome.

QUAKER FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY (QFHS) Day Conference: "Manchester & Lancashire Quakers" at South Manchester FMH, Saturday 26 April (10.30 to 4.00). Speakers: Rosemary Mingins, David Blamires, Judith Mawer and Susan Hartshorne. All Welcome. Details: www.qfhs.co.uk

QUAKER VOLUNTARY ACTION WORKING RETREATS: Swarthmoor, Cumbria (12-16 May and 22-26 Sept); Palestine & Israel (17-28 and 20-31 Oct). Pilgrimage, friendship, activity and reflection. For full programme contact: jasmine@qva.org.uk / 07530 844611 / www.qva.org.uk

SATURDAY 26 APRIL, 7.30PM Theatre Mwldan, Cardigan. Commemorative War Poetry, Barddoniaeth. Free refreshments. Sponsored by Cardigan Quaker Meeting. Croeso bawb. Reading and discussion. Please bring a poem. Everybody welcome. Enquiries: 01239 811139.

Organising an event?

Make sure everyone knows about it with a Diary notice in *the Friend!*

Spirituality and Sexual Ethics for Today

A One-Day Conference
Saturday 17 May - 10.30am
Mount Street Meeting, Manchester

The Quaker Lesbian and Gay Fellowship (Stonewall Community Group of 2013) offers a timely opportunity to discuss Quaker and non-Quaker views of spirituality and sexual ethics in today's diverse society. Keynote speakers include Ruth Hunt (Stonewall), Rhodri Roberts (LGBT officer NUS Wales). Topics include "Equal Marriage - where now?", "Homophobia in 2014", "LGBT and transgender rights and faith groups" and more.

All welcome, of any sexual orientation, Quaker, spiritual or not.

Email Paul at gathering@qlgf.org.uk for registration

Quaker Life End of life issues



Quaker Life Central Committee will be spending a day in September reflecting on end of life issues and what Quaker Life might need to do to provide support for meetings in this area. We would welcome suggestions from Friends or meetings for topics and other information or ideas for consideration.

Please email information to RichardS@quaker.org.uk or post to Richard Summers, Quaker Life General Secretary, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

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Classified advertisements

For details of advertising in *The Friend* contact George Penaluna, details below.



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jobs

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for Quaker employers (and employees) is available at www.quaker.org.uk/employers or by phoning Richard Summers, Quaker Life general secretary, on 020 7663 1096.

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We are recruiting volunteers who can combine an empathetic approach with the ability to maintain firm boundaries and challenge inappropriate attitudes and behaviour. Volunteers should be able to commit to supporting one individual for a couple of hours a week for an eighteen month period. Volunteering opportunities are available across Hampshire, Thames Valley, Kent, Surrey and Sussex and across all services delivered.

We urgently need volunteers across Surrey and Sussex to support the development of the new Circles project. Training and supervision are provided and expenses are paid.

For more information contact Grace on info@htvcircles.org.uk or call the office on 01235 816050. Further details and an application pack can be found at www.circlesoutheast.org.uk

Circles South East is a registered charity, no. 1123361.

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Quaker Retreat Centre, Surrey

Deputy Manager (residential)

We are seeking a Deputy Manager, who must be a Quaker member or attender, to assist with the maintenance of high standards in the practical, spiritual and pastoral care of guests and to support the operation of Claridge House as a Quaker retreat centre.

Applicants need to be energetic, confident, hardworking, and able to multi-task, with strong communication, administrative and practical skills.

This is a full time residential post, living and working in a vegetarian house in Lingfield, Surrey.

For more details and to request an application pack please phone: 01342 832150 or email: welcome@claridgehousequaker.org.uk

Applications close Mon. 12 May.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness



Conciliation Support Co-ordinator

Salary: £30,081 per annum pro rata. Contract: 3 years fixed term.
Hours: part-time, 17.5 hrs pw. Location: Friends House, London, NW1

We are looking for a capable candidate to support the QPSW Conciliation Group. You will have experience in national and international reconciliation processes and have worked closely with groups of dedicated individuals.

The post requires a self-sufficient administrator able to work without close supervision, a person with strong problem solving skills and a demonstrable ability to analyse and work with complex political situations.

Closing date: Sunday 18 May 2014. Interviews: Thursday 5 June.

Further details and information on how to apply are available at www.quaker.org.uk/jobs



Registered charity no. 1127633

Young Adult Leadership Programme

A part-time 12-month programme for 19 to 28-year-olds that will reflect on what it means to be a Quaker today.

2014-15 programme starts in July

- Quaker history, testimony, concerns and processes
- Leadership within Quakerism and the wider world
- How to apply your faith to all aspects of your life

"A chance to be privileged by receiving great teaching, food for thought and spiritual exploration in stunning surroundings with the most amazing wonderful and special people. Priceless." Participant in 2012.

"It has meant love, frustration, kindness, grumpiness, insight and most importantly in my case, a renewal of faith in a Quaker approach to life with all its charms and difficulties." Participant in 2013.



Applications for the 2014-15 programme are now open.

For more information and how to apply, see www.woodbrooke.org.uk/youngadults
email michael.eccles@woodbrooke.org.uk or call 0121 415 6760.



Keep in touch

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