



North East Thames Area Meeting Newsletter October 2015



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Editorial by Rebecca Fricker

What amazing contributions Friends have shared with Epping – thank you. I have been joking that the quality and quantity of your offerings make this issue a journal rather than a newsletter. It illustrates the breadth and depth of our Area Meetings' concerns and faithfully reports our activities in our year of living adventurously.

It has often been asked at Epping what do people think when they enter our Meeting House? What would they assume of the small group of people sat in silence? This lovely piece from Quaker Faith & Practice reminds us to go deeper, to seek to know each other and remember that seemingly not very distinguished people will have gifts and experiences to share as seen in our newsletter.

Why, I ask myself, did I go to worship with those rather small and not very distinguished groups of people? Surely it was that sitting among these quite ordinary people, to most of whom I remained a stranger and a foreigner for some months, I sensed an experience of belonging – of community. A true Friends' meeting for worship drawing individuals with varieties of temperament, talent and background always manages to engender a climate of belonging, of community which is infectious and creative. This experience of 'belonging' has remained with me over the years and it has grown both in intensity and universality... The 'giving out' of such a sense of community is the natural witness of a Quaker meeting which has in it the seed of life and creative experience. Ranjit M Chetsingh, 1967

In seeking to know each other at Epping our newsletter has a regular "Meet the Meeting" feature. For our Area Meeting edition I thought we should "meet" Margaret Delves, who I thought had connections with two meetings in the NETAM. It turns out she actually has links with three, four if you count making jam to fund-raise for Walthamstow! It was a pleasure to learn more about her life – including a trip around the Yemen in a jeep with armed guards - living adventurously indeed!

Our Area Meeting Newsletter by Judith Roads (Epping)

We are coming to the end of the first round of our experimental approach for the production of an AM-wide newsletter and I wanted to write briefly to express my pleasure at the result. I was part of a little group tasked with finding a replacement for our previous excellent editor or for finding some other way of keeping the newsletter going. As part of the group's preparation, I did some research around the Area Meetings in Britain and found a wide variability in quality and existence of such material. The idea of rotating the editorship around the LMs had not occurred to me personally, but it was an inspired proposal. I won't embarrass the Friend whose idea it was by naming her here but the guidance and clear-sightedness she offered has enabled Friends and attenders to demonstrate their skills and creativity in what we have been given over the last few months.

The acceptance of different formats has meant that a freshness is maintained. The move to an online newsletter that can be printed off has enabled a greater variety of articles and visual offerings and also reduced the burden of one Friend having to create, print off and distribute each edition. This was a 20th century way of production – fine at the time and always appreciated – but our present approach works better for the 21st century.

I hope AM decides to continue the approach. I'm proud of our AM for what individuals and groups have produced and rather humbled. I truly didn't see it coming! I thought there might need to be a great deal of training and encouragement before the new newsletters could appear, but either that took place behind the scenes or we already have these gifts in each of our meetings. We are truly fortunate and I look forward to many future editions.

Meet the Meeting by Margaret Delves (Epping)

I was born into a Quaker family and so became a birthright Friend, and have attended Meeting for most of my life. My Quaker maternal grandparents helped establish Leigh on Sea Meeting after they moved there for my mother's health. My father was a Quaker by conviction who joined Barclay Hall Meeting in Forest Gate in his teens. I have very early memories of being taken to Wandsworth Meeting, where he was caretaker – sitting on a hard bench with a book with the Elders on a bench on a platform in front of me. It was about 1926.

At Friends' School, Saffron Walden (FSSW) the whole school had to attend Meeting in the town each Sunday. On the whole the hour seemed very long and boring. We must have been restless particularly in the earlier years.

On leaving school I attended Meetings either at Wanstead or Forest Gate but it was not an easy time as my school friends lived a long way away. I then also attended a Methodist Church where there were activities for teenagers. I became very involved in the Methodist Church for a while but realised that my spiritual home was with Quakers.



I felt the right way forward was to apply for Membership personally to show that I really was convinced and had come home. I continued to attend Wanstead Meeting although from time to time enjoyed visiting Epping. I moved to Epping in the 1980's. We lived at Wanstead during the period of demolition and rebuilding as my father was the warden. I remember taking the dog to look up on evenings when father was ill as it was a little scary.

It must have been a difficult time for my parents during my childhood – a time of high unemployment. I can remember my father telling me about dozens of dockers queuing in vain at dock gates hoping to be taken on. There were no social security benefits and we just had to manage. My father had a small family blacksmiths business in Forest Gate and he was called upon to repair ship's boilers and local authority kitchen stoves. A conscientious objector in the First World War he refused to repair anything war related in the Second WW. I remember working the bellows for him and trudging long walks with my mother to obtain payment my father was owed for the work he had done.

We moved house several times to the very different areas of Wandsworth, East

Ham and Forest Gate and I attended three different primary schools. A particular memory of the last one is that we seemed to spend each afternoon knitting communal thick men's socks – I have no idea where they went! At age ten when I started at FSSW (1934) I entered another world of constant companionship and happiness and certainly a more enlightened education.

I left FSSW, having matriculated, in 1939 at the outbreak of the Second WW. My aim then was to get a permanent job and earn money so needed at home. I took a short secretarial course, but this was not work I wanted to do, and I went to a local Juvenile Employment Bureau and obtained work at a local Inspector of Taxes Office. The hours were long and the work routine and monotonous. It was war time and I remember how my friend and I, both teenagers, were left alone to take our turn to do fire-watching duties! Nothing happened fortunately. It was a friendly and happy office. Staff were very helpful and taught us various areas of taxation to make our work more interesting. However, all that we did so laboriously would now be done electronically.

After several years I felt that I did not want to continue to do office work and applied initially to train as a physiotherapist but could not pursue this for financial reasons. I then applied for nurse training at the London Hospital. This was the start of my nursing and midwifery career which culminated in attending the University of Guildford and attending Royal College of Nursing courses enabling me to teach midwifery and community health to student nurses from all over the world at Whipps Cross, Leytonstone House and Claybury Hospitals until my retirement in 1983.

I have always enjoyed outdoor pursuits – walking locally, on holiday and in the countryside and swimming at the seaside. Now I still aim to take a walk each day and enjoy the much more limited green areas. I love gardening and learning from nature. Although I have no garden now I imagine I am involved when watching television. Making things is something I have always done – knitting and sewing, making gifts. I have made hundreds of pots of jam for fundraising – especially for Walthamstow and Epping Meetings.

As a member of the University of the Third Age, sharing knowledge, experience and learning is important to me. I went on two Woodbrooke Quaker study tours in the USA, covering the East and West coasts. We travelled to different Quaker Meetings on a greyhound bus, staying with local Quaker families. A friendship with school teachers interested in archaeology led to many trips to countries such as India, China and Sicily to look at antiquities found on digs. The accommodation was always basic but interesting – in the Yemen we travelled in jeeps with armed guards. Although I don't have any close family I have stayed in regular contact with school friends and have several very good local friends.

My faith has shown me all people, and all around, are precious and although you don't have to like people you can always love. Making yourself available, able to recognise need, and provide help as far as possible for both neighbours and people you meet form part of my faith in action.



Heritage Open Days (Sat. 12th September 2015) by Rebecca Fricker (Epping)

Epping Meeting House opened its doors as part of Heritage Open Weekend, an annual event where people are offered the chance to visit places of historical, architectural or cultural places of interest in England not usually open to the public. While anyone is welcome on a Sunday morning we thought it

would be an opportunity to celebrate the history of our building and enable people to visit the beautiful walled garden and burial ground.

We advertised our 10am – 4pm opening on the HOD website, through local papers and Resident Association's bulletins, Everything Epping Forest and other local organisations we have connections with. This was very successful and we can report that we had over 60 hits on our [web page](#) for the event. On the day both Alan and myself also [Tweeted](#) pictures from the Meeting House telling people we were open.

People had kindly baked lots of cakes and biscuits and we were able to offer visitors simple refreshments. We did not ask for donations but people had the option to donate to the Red Cross Refugee Appeal if they wished and we raised £36. In the end we had over 30 visitors who enjoyed looking at the small exhibition Christine set out on the history of Epping Meeting and wandering around the garden in the sunshine. Lots of questions were asked and interesting conversations held.

The Fricker family were also able to attend a "Refugees Welcome" demonstration being held outside the Epping Forest District Council offices where we were able to chat to members of the Epping Supporters of Women & Children of Calais charity which has been collecting needed items for refugees living in Calais. It was depressing how much abuse has been directed at the charity (indeed not everyone on Epping High Street was receptive to our message) and we hope to be able to support their work over the coming months.

Although the day was tiring it was immensely satisfying and it was wonderful to offer access to our wider community. Next year the weekend runs from 8th – 11th Sep (information can be located here <http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk>). I hope Epping agrees to open its doors again and perhaps other Meetings in our Area Meeting can consider doing the same? We would be happy to share our practical experience.



Open City Open House (19th and 20th September 2015) by Melvyn Freake (Wanstead)

This year Wanstead Meeting House participated in the Open City weekend by opening on the afternoon of September 20th between 1 and 5pm. The timing allowed our Saturday bookings and Meeting for Worship to go ahead as usual. Unfortunately it clashed with Area Meeting at Epping.

I coordinated the opening with Open City. Ray Muna arranged a history exhibition in the Library and Peter Ranken produced a leaflet on the building. There was information about the ongoing work in the front garden that Ray and Jo Law are coordinating. Jan's artwork was on display in the corridor. Cliff, Les and I did substantial work in tidying up the burial ground and the grounds beyond. Premises (Peter and Fiona) arranged a work day on the 19th and David, Ray, Maggie and I joined them. The main job involved weeding and filling the patios but there was also substantial work done on the front flower beds and tidying the kitchen.

On the afternoon we were open, Ray, Jo, Peter, Cliff, Les and I were ready to welcome visitors. We had 'scrumpers' plum jam and greetings cards for sale. We were able to welcome at least 44 adults and 8 children.(we were not sure we counted them all!) We were able to talk to all of them and it is a pleasure welcoming a group of people who were interested in what happens at our Meeting House and show them our premises. In additions to the items mentioned above, people delighted in the grounds with the sun shining on the purple habenas scabious; looked at Elizabeth Fry's gravestone and were interested that her daughter Katherine is buried nearby (gravestone indecipherable); were shown Richenda Harrison's grave (the 7 year old buried as our first burial); several did the walk to the very bottom of the grounds.



Comments included: 'It's so peaceful'; 'I came to see the building and never realised about the grounds'; 'The Meeting Room is a lovely space'. There was a lot of pleasurable surprise about what we had to offer. One woman said she was thinking of coming to meeting and a couple are making enquiries about a booking for a birthday party.

It made quite a long day and we were flagging by the end. But we had cleared away the banners and posters by 5.15 and left feeling we had done a worthwhile job. We aim to open again on September 18th 2016. We are thinking of theming the day to mark the centenary of conscription with stories of Quaker history and the lives of some of those buried in the graveyard to tell the story.

(Photo by Jo Law)

“Live Adventurously 2015” for children age 8 - 11 by Freddie Fricker (Epping)

Before High Leigh I did a child Quaker activity at the Scout Centre Gilwell Park. I arrived there on a coach with lots of other children. My first impression of the place we were staying in was that the boys had one corridor and the girls and cooks shared the other. I had three room-mates though one didn't arrive because he was poorly. That means I was down to two. Their names were Robin and Luke. The person who was poorly was called Max. When I went to the evening session (I forgot what it was about) my group leader's name was Cat. I found her name quite funny.

In the three days we had there we did three activities. On the day we arrived we did one session and Meeting for Worship. On the second day we did two activities. These were medium ropes and archery. Medium ropes was a rope you had to balance on while moving ropes with you as you went along. Archery was fun and relaxing. It also made us get a glimpse of my last activity. On the third day we had the last activity, and the leaving Meeting for Worship. The last activity was indoor climbing. When you went up the big one you were strapped to a harness. After that you could go on a long, but not that tall, climbing wall. On this wall you needed someone to help you. You had to get to the end of the strip.



I think Live Adventurously means go down to the park but it also means communicate with God. I also think it means do something you haven't done before. Pictures and a video at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/live-adventurously-2015>

Report of High Leigh All Age Gathering 11th to 13th April 2015 by Conor Dash (Wanstead)

Friends from all around Area Meeting gathered with Friends from North London Area Meeting for our annual gathering at High Leigh conference centre. The gathering included about 25 children and young people. The theme for High Leigh this year was 'modern slavery'. The adults had talks by Kevin Bale called things like, 'How Quakers invented human rights and NGOs from their belief that God can be found in every person' or 'How Quakers also invented eating chocolate and then got into trouble with slavery in cocoa'. Ask one of the many adults who went to High Leigh what they thought about the talks!

Meanwhile the children and young people also explored the theme of slavery by re-enacting what happens when someone is taken into slavery. We also talked about how people are being forced to do work in a mobile phone factory and mineral mines to produce our mobile phones today. When I did these sessions I felt worried for the people who had suffered by being a slave.

I really enjoyed seeing everybody again and particularly enjoyed the weather which meant we could play foot ball and go outside to do activities. Other things that were great were; helping yourself to free hot chocolate, young people only time in the games room, enjoying friends company, swimming with friends and hiding out of barn dancing.

In conclusion I think that High Leigh was great. Next year Is 'do it yourself' workshops I have already put my offer of a workshop in so if you want to find out what it is, you have to come to High Leigh next year!

High Leigh All Age Gathering “Friends Together” 2016 by Rebecca Fricker (Epping)

The High Leigh Committee are pleased to announce that the 2016 High Leigh, taking place on the 22nd to 24th April, is another Do It Yourself weekend. We hope that Friends who attend will find it a weekend where we can worship, play, reflect and create together.

It is hoped that booking forms will be available at November's Area Meeting (a copy will also be available on the AM website <http://northeastthamesquakers.org.uk/> – as will further information about the weekend). The deadline for applications (accepted on a first come, first served basis) is the 1st February 2016.

After the success of last year's High Leigh we are again offering 10 places to North London and hope they are able to take them up.

All we need now is for Friends to offer their gifts and lead sessions. We already have promises of an all age Olympics, comic making, healing, Experiment with the Light and another book club...what can you offer? Please put suggestions on your application forms and we will contact you for further information. Looking forward to seeing you in 2016!

“What Can We Do With What We've Got”: One Day Course at Friends House (20th June 2015)

This was a really effective course, allowing us to find our own way to solutions, prompted by succinct questions from the leader, Simon Best from Woodbrooke. How we use limited numbers of Friends to do the jobs, was addressed by considering what is essential, what can we do differently and what should we do more of - but only after considerable reflection on the nature of Quaker service - it is not a job, it is ministry. Rather than skills and time, it is about doing what we can with love.

We considered what love requires of us - individually, as a meeting (whether local or area) and in terms of what Quaker Faith and Practice says we have to do - which is less than we think! My small group summarised our considerations with - 'listen to each other; respect everyone, whether member or attender; and share the responsibilities we are nominated to do.' We heard examples of tiny meetings doing things differently - starting from scratch to look at what is really necessary, ensuring that everyone in a small meeting has a role.

In one group, we considered the particular situation with Bunhill Fields meeting and Bethnal Green meeting - both with precious few members, both attracting visitors and newcomers, both at the heart of diverse urban populations. For me, nurturing newcomers is important - to consider future Friends and future service. And realising the gifts and love that Friends may have to give that are not obvious. The day was great for completely avoiding the desperate tales of woe most attenders had come with, and sending us all away reflecting on serving joyfully and not being afraid to do things differently. **Roger Estop (Wanstead)**

This course involved taking stock, rather than trying to frantically work out solutions

to current problems in our local meetings. The 32 participants produced between them:

29 factors that nourish the life of our meetings

19 challenges to the life of our meetings

9 actions that love requires of us (in the context of roles and creating the community)

The questions we considered have been asked many times over the past four decades in the instant Quaker communities that spring up at conferences, courses and study sessions at national, area and local level. They are very useful for individual Quakers. They help us understand what is important and why we stay linked to a meeting. A sense of strength comes from sharing - from finding that other Quakers in other local meetings know the processes we use, support the same values, and share a similar sense of purpose.

The lists, plus further ones on our human, financial, spiritual and structural resources and what we have to do can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/WCWD-lists>

I give service because that is who I want to be. I receive joy and satisfaction from my choices. I need to check every so often I am still tuned to the Quaker framework illustrated in this course. Its form can change and evolve, but in its substance we are hopefully always working towards five attributes of god: joy, acceptance, gratitude, love and blessing. If I can bring these attitudes through me in giving them to others, they will stick to me and I will be living a life that I value.

Christine Downes-Grainger (Epping)



A new vision of the Quaker way – Woodbrooke course reflections by Alan Fricker (Epping)

I was very quick to sign up for this course last July attracted by the chance to continue to consider the 2014 Swarthmore Lecture by Ben Pink-Dandelion “Open for transformation”. Epping Meeting had used this as the basis for a series of study sessions (something of our discussions can be found in past newsletters on our website) and I was keen to go further. The course was run by Ben, Simon Best, Craig Barnett (see his blog for some of the course <http://transitionquaker.blogspot.co.uk>) and Rosie Carnall. We were asked to consider what a Quaker renewal might look like in our meetings and current times.

We started on Friday by sharing areas where we saw signs of renewal. I felt renewal would be from being challenged by living Quaker rather than just the necessities of keeping Quaker meetings alive.

On Saturday we considered the four features that Ben argues defines the experience of Quakers: Encounter / Worship / Discernment / Testimony

Each was handled by one of the speakers sharing stories and ideas. These were powerful talks that provoked many questions. How do we nurture our experience of encounter with the divine? Why not experiment with our worship? Could some meetings be semi programmed? Or three hours long? Do we arrive at our meetings for business prepared in mind but not in heart? How are we called to testify with our lives?

A tough session considered how we might repack our bags for the journey ahead – so what to keep and what to leave out. We cannot carry everything. The difficulties and hurt that can exist within meetings were very apparent. Many are struggling within their worshipping communities. A particular issue was sensitivities over language. This shows in people apologising for, or avoiding using, religious language. We wanted to have ministry without apology, vibrant youth programmes and new people participating from amongst those who say that Quakers are the religious group they would join if they went to any.

Through the evening we worked towards a set of themes that we could consider a route forward for Quaker renewal. These grew out of an initial set of swirling discussions, through small groups till we progressively came together. The final set of seven areas felt solid:

- Identity
- Commitment – individual & Corporate
- Worship & transformation
- Witness in the world
- A teaching ministry
- Community
- Change

There is more to add under these headings but it is beyond the scope of this article. We gathered again on Sunday and spent most of the morning in worship. There was powerful ministry.

We concluded by asking how we would take things forward. For my part I formed the intention to deepen my involvement in the things that matter. I committed to focusing on positive change for my meeting while releasing resentments at necessary tasks. I had planned to suggest Epping Meeting look at QF&P together and this has been welcomed (with timely wider initiatives around this in BYM). Belatedly I am writing this update and I hope to offer a discussion session at High Leigh All Age Gathering.

It was an inspiring and hopeful weekend I feel fortunate to have shared.

Visitors to Applicants for Membership – a suggested format with points that need to be made to the Applicant: A discussion paper by Audrey Regan (Leigh)

I had it in mind to write a discussion paper on Visitors to Applicants for Membership partly because my many years on AM and LM Nominations have shown me the need for people coming into membership to be aware of the joys AND responsibilities of joining a 'do-it-yourself' religion such as ours. Also, Leigh LM has begun the sensitive and difficult process of getting in touch with absent members.

This has put into sharp focus the need for applicants to realize that their relationship is with a LOCAL Meeting and that it is in right ordering, on moving away, to transfer their membership to the nearest Local Meeting to their new home.

It is my intention that Friends can use the following suggested format of a visit to agree, disagree, improve or pare down so that something could eventually be agreed by Area Meeting. Responses can be sent to me at regana2@btinternet.com.

Proposed visit:

Initial conversation about the Applicants' spiritual journey, how they found out about Quakerism, what drew them to Friends, what do they like about Sunday Meeting for Worship.

Points for them to understand:

Quakerism is a 'do-it-yourself' religion, Meetings having no paid clergy or other assistance it follows that every member has the joy and responsibility of serving the Meeting in a voluntary capacity.

There is also a responsibility to contribute, financially, according to each Friend's ability and other commitments.

Each Local Meeting is part of a wider Area Meeting that meets about eight times a year, and of Britain Yearly Meeting and it is hoped Friends will attend and participate as their circumstances permit

Quakerism is a 'broad church' and follows no creed except perhaps for an acceptance of George Fox's words about there being 'that of God in everyone.' Hence the inclusiveness of Quaker values towards all sorts and conditions of people both inside Quakerism and in the outside world.

Membership involves a living relationship with one's Local Meeting. When moving away, Friends transfer their membership to a Local Meeting in their new area.

Waiting on Images – and being amazed – and helped too! By Angela Greenwood (Leigh)

I expect some of you are aware that I have been involved with Experiment with Light for some time – indeed we have two Light groups in Leigh, which I value enormously. I also feel very heartened to have such a spiritual practice alive and growing in Friends, and I know from experience both locally and more generally in UK that such regular disciplines inevitably benefit the spiritual life of friends both individually and collectively, in subtle and indeed more practical ways.

I heard through the 'Experiment with Light Network' recently that someone had enquired about doing some research on 'images in the Experiment with Light', and it prompted me to write something of my recent experience in (and following on from) a Light meditation.

I thought Friends might be interested to share it with me:

Experiment with Light is a spiritual discipline and a meditational practice, when we open to the Light in an attitude of expectant waiting.

My experience is that what 'comes up' through the 'Experiment' is variable, always thought provoking, sometimes inspirational and enlightening, sometimes puzzling, and sometimes quite uncomfortable.

Sometimes an image, or a word, or even a challenge may come.

Or it may be that no particular inspirations come. Whatever happens it is important

to just accept, and be open to the Light.

Sometimes insights come after the guided meditation is over, during the 20 minutes 'time alone', when we find our own way to absorb and process our experience through drawing, writing, walking etc. as the inspiration takes us.

Sometimes thoughts or images or insights can continue to come as we walk, write or draw. And even after the meditation has ended, the process may well continue over the next few days or even weeks.

I have been aware of this for long time, but after the last Light group I had a particularly vivid example, which really affirmed the process for me, and also integrated with other practices and parts of my life.

Two things leading up to the experience may be relevant.

1. I have been practicing mindfulness meditation for years and have known of the importance of tuning into the 'gaps' in breathing for example, and of making little spaces during the day to tune in to the silence and stillness, but mostly I have not been able to remember to do this.
2. I was recently sent an email offering me free access to a talk by Pema Chodron, which I decided to take up because I remembered finding one of her books helpful a while ago. When she was asked to say three things which had really stayed with her from her teaching she was silent for a moment, and then she said without hesitation "The Gap", describing the importance and usefulness of stopping for a moment as I described above, every so often during the day. I remembered being 'struck' by this before, and vowed to try to remember to do it – to little avail!

Several days later during the Light meditation I suddenly had 3 vivid and puzzling images – 'fog', 'a treadmill' and 'a train'. I shared these with the group and wondered if I was doing too much, and needed to get off the treadmill or train, and go into the fog of not knowing – but it didn't really resonate. I was also aware of the definite difference between a treadmill and a train – but no resonance there either. I went home intrigued and then let it go.

In the night I suddenly wondered if the images applied to my daughter who is currently staying with us, having a break from her work and wanting to change her career, but not knowing which direction to take – in the fog and needing to find the right train perhaps? I shared it with her and she was open to the possibility, but somehow I still kept the images in the back of my mind.

Suddenly the next day I came up with an insight, which evoked a profound 'Yes'! The fog was about not really seeing clearly when I am caught up in the busyness of the day (the treadmill); and I needed to be on a train rather than a treadmill, because a train stops at stations!! – and therefore perhaps feels 'lighter', more inner directed and not onerous like a treadmill! It was about having little gaps during my busyness, which will perhaps enhance the quality of my presence both internally and in relation to those I am with!

This experience seemed to bring things together in an amazingly helpful and integrated way. Not only did I find myself remembering to take little silent 'gaps' during

the following day (and night!) – which is continuing (so far!); but I was personally amazed at the synchronicities, and how the different parts of my life were all part of a whole – something else which has also been on my mind over the last few weeks! I also felt a clear leading to write this down – particularly when Susie (from the Experiment with Light Network) emailed to say someone was wanting to do some research into Experiment with Light images!! – So here it is!

Thank you!! Thank you!!

Only yesterday at the U3A we had quite a high energy discussion about the value of gratitude – and here I am feeling profoundly grateful! How things are connected!

Researching early Quaker language by Judith Roads (Epping)

I've been quite busy over the last few years researching early Quaker language. I've just been awarded a degree from the University of Birmingham and can start to look back at how it all felt and what I've learnt.



What was my project about? My work is not primarily historical, nor theological, but is in the field of historical linguistics. I had previously created a body of machine-readable Quaker texts from the seventeenth century. The originals are all held at Friends House Library, which enabled me to check easily that I had captured in my text files the exact spelling, punctuation etc as found in each item. I should like to say this activity is harder than it sounds and I developed a mild form of repetitive strain injury (RSI) from keyboarding the material into about 200 text files. There's approximately 600,000 words of early modern (Quaker) English in all. I mostly excluded the famous Quaker writers: George Fox, Isaac Pennington, William Penn, James Nayler etc, because I was interested in what the majority of Friends were writing about – people like us, if you like. It was the everyday Quakers and their early form of blogging and campaigning that interested me.

Six years have gone by and I now know a lot more about the language early Friends used in how they prophesied the apocalypse, for example; how they argued in print with the establishment, with other dissenters and with each other about what conviction was and what it was to be a Quaker. I looked at some of the key Quaker words and phrases to see which ones were used frequently by that first generation – not always what you might expect compared with the extracts in Quaker Faith and Practice. For example, many of the occurrences of the word 'holy' were used in a sarcastic way: your 'holy' days (meaning Sundays / Christmas / Easter); 'holy' men (describing the priests as holy [so-called] when Friends saw them as no different from anyone else). The word peace in my corpus mostly occurs in the context of 'holding my peace' or 'Justice of the Peace' – the pacifist/non-violent meaning was not yet really in their minds in the mid-seventeenth century. That came later.

I've spent the last year writing and re-writing in order to analyse and interpret what I found, trying to answer that annoying question: 'so what?' At last it's done and the answers to that question seem to have pleased the examiners. I shan't bore you any

further now, but at least you know what I've been up to. I can recommend doing some studying in retirement even though I was probably one of the oldest people on campus.

Unboxing gender by S Fred Langridge (Wanstead)

[There's a brief glossary at the end of this article.]

Quaker Faith & Practice 23:62 reads:

"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

Almost all humans are put into one of two gender boxes – they're assigned a gender - as soon as they're born. I facilitated a workshop at Area Meeting in June, making an opportunity to reflect on what it's like for people who may have been put into the wrong box or who feel that they don't fit in either box.

Gender and how we articulate it are particularly relevant to British Quakers at the moment because our Recording Clerk has been asked to review how gender is



recorded in the tabular statement (our annual, national report of membership and attendance statistics).

Right from the very beginning

When a baby is born, a doctor labels them "male" or "female", usually based on external characteristics. Sometimes it's not clear which label is the best fit: the baby may have one of a number of intersex conditions. In these cases, a

doctor may surgically alter "ambiguous" genitals to conform to ideas of what male or female bodies look like.

This gender label, assigned by a doctor at birth, becomes your legal gender. In most places, it must be M or F at birth, even if you're intersex (your body or chromosomes are ambiguous).

We're surrounded by a lot of loud messages about gender and behaviour – starting when we're babies. Even in groups (like Quakers) that are trying really hard to see people as individuals and not to stereotype, we're influenced by wider society's messages about what girls and women are like and what boys and men are like.

What traits do you think of as “feminine” or “masculine”? What masculine and feminine traits do you have? Most of us have a mixture of traits we think of as masculine and traits we think of as feminine. Most of us also have a fairly firm idea of what our gender is, even if we’ve never needed to stop and think about it in detail. Some people have a lot of “traditionally masculine” traits but feel strongly that they’re a girl or a woman, and some a lot of “traditionally feminine” traits but feel strongly that they’re a boy or a man. For others there’s a different balance or mixture.

No one can tell you how to identify your gender - you get to decide that for yourself. A person's gender identity is their true gender, even if it doesn't seem to match their assigned gender or your understanding of their appearance.

Trans gender – making changes

Trans (transgender or transsexual) and gender non-conforming people might alter their bodies, hormones and/or appearance to treat dysphoria, the feeling that one’s body has the wrong shape or parts or gives the wrong message. We’re quite used to the “trapped in the wrong body” narrative that some trans people use to explain their need to change their body.



“Have you ever broken a limb and had it in plaster? And when you went to move it you couldn’t – when your brain told it to function it failed? When you looked down and expected something – preemptively felt it – your eyes contradicted you, the limitations of your embodied self clashed against the self that your brain expected to be there?

That’s how dysphoria has always felt to me.

It was stumbling with shock when my arms brushed against my breasts (and I struggle to write the word *my* next to *breasts* because they never were mine) – because I couldn’t feel them properly, couldn’t fit them into my body.” – CN Lester (<https://cnlester.wordpress.com/2014/08/12/this-is-what-dysphoria-feels-like/>)

Gender dysphoria can cause enormous distress, and trans people are almost always happier, healthier and more successful in work, studies and relationships if they’re given opportunities to make changes to relieve dysphoria.

Many countries, including the UK, allow a legal change of gender – processes for this vary. In most places, it cannot be changed to anything other than M or F. A few countries, including Australia and Nepal, now offer the option of X for no gender, third gender or non-binary gender (more on what this means later).

Stretching the boxes

There are other reasons than dysphoria to transgress gender roles. Any gender role system says there are things men get that women don’t get, and things that women get that men don’t get. For example, in our culture, women get to have very affectionate close friendships, while men get paid more for their work. So someone might stretch or step outside of their assigned gender role in order to access things that are usually forbidden to people of their gender.

The boxes of “man/male” and “woman/female” can be huge and inclusive. Individuals and communities can stretch the boxes to make them more comfortable for everyone: doing so doesn’t mean you’re transgender. Some gay and bisexual people take on gender-transgressive mannerisms or clothing as a way of exploring, displaying, or celebrating their orientation, but it’s not an intrinsic part of being gay or bi, and not everyone who steps outside gender norms is gay or bi.

Drag is a conscious, often humorous performance of gender for an audience. Traditionally, drag queens or kings present a caricature of femininity or masculinity. Drag queens are often men and drag kings often women. It’s not necessary to be transgender to perform in drag.

Some people just like refusing to conform!

Gender roles can and do change, and we can influence those changes by changing our own interactions with other people. British culture is becoming more tolerant of gender transgression, but binary thinking is still very strong, and conformity is still enforced.

Introducing non-binary identity

For some people, living **outside** of the boxes (male and female or man and woman) is as strong an imperative as moving to the other box is for a trans woman or a trans man.

Research shows that about 0.4% of the UK population defines as non-binary when given a 3-way choice in terms of female, male or another description. That’s about 1 in every 250 people. That means there could be ten times as many non-binary people in the UK as there are Quakers.

<http://practicalandrogyny.com/2014/12/16/how-many-people-in-the-uk-are-nonbinary/>

The personal bit

I am transgender: my gender doesn't match the 'girl'/'woman' label that society has assigned to me; I've been through transitions in my understanding and expression of my own gender and am continuing to transition. My change of name is part of this. My gender identity is non-binary (I also use the word “genderqueer”): I fit somewhere between “man” and “woman”, sort of both and sort of neither.

Obviously my history and my experiences of being treated as a girl and a woman are still important bits of what's made me me. Someone can look like me and behave like me and still be a woman. That’s really important too. I’m just... not.

My experience of transition is about integrity as well as freedom: not just integrity of "I'm telling the truth" (although there is that), but also "I am whole; I can be the whole of myself in the whole of my life" - structural integrity. Being a Quaker makes that a lot easier for me than for many people, because I know that my religious community welcomes integrity and welcomes me.

I am grateful for an upbringing that meant the boundaries of "woman" have always looked very broad to me and I could be who I am regardless. That gave me the

luxury of lots of time to think about this stuff at my own speed, so I'm really confident in my non-binary gender identity.

"...transgender is not all about changing ourselves. It is about being ourselves: in the first place being true to ourselves, true in our worship, living truthfully and, in time, being true to those close to us. In our Quaker way, we therefore might regard the T of LGBT as representing True gender. We may not understand it, and may not be able to name it, but know it to be so."

Yvonne Wood, *The Friend*

Tips for being welcoming in a diverse world

Use inclusive and gender-neutral language – Quakers have the advantage here: just call everybody "Friend"!

If gender isn't relevant, don't bring it up.

Don't assume someone's gender based on appearance: respect people's statements of identity and call them what they want to be called.

If you get someone's name or pronoun wrong, apologise briefly and sincerely, then move on.

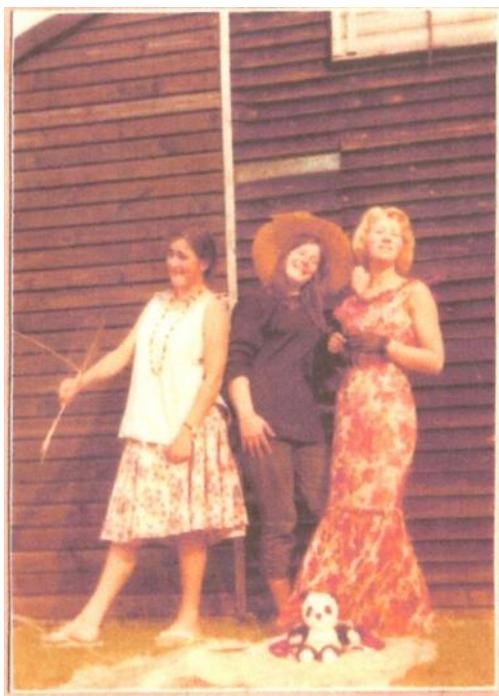
Advices & Queries 22:

"Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God."

Glossary

- Sex: A combination of features, including chromosomes, hormones, reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. Typically male or female, but a significant minority are intersex.
- Intersex: Having physical sex traits that are not distinctly male or female. A physical state, not a gender identity.
- Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from what is expected based on their sex characteristics at birth; includes non-binary people.
- Transsexual: A term sometimes used for people who are changing their sex characteristics to better match their gender identity.
- Transition: Changing aspects of one's life to present oneself in a way congruent with one's gender identity (could include various of name, body, pronouns, clothes, legal status).
- Trans: An umbrella term for transgender and transsexual people, and an adjective:
 - Trans man: A man who is trans (who has transitioned or is transitioning to be recognised as a man).
 - Trans woman: A woman who is trans (who has transitioned or is transitioning to be recognised as a woman).
 - Trans non-binary or genderqueer person: A person who is trans and doesn't identify exclusively as a man or as a woman (who has transitioned or is transitioning to be recognised in this identity).
- Nonbinary/non-binary; Genderqueer: Terms for people who identify as not exclusively a man or a woman, or as something outside of these two concepts.

- Cisgender: A term for people who identify with the gender that is typically associated with their assigned sex; i.e. not transgender.
- Agender: An absence of gender identification or expression.
- Gender fluid: Shifting between different gender identities or expressions.
- Androgynous/Androgyne: Having both traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics and/or identifying as between male and female.



Inspirations from Radio 4 and her garden by Shelia Beskine (Wanstead)

A Radio 4 programme about anemones and rock-pooling, where a young woman beautifully picked out the poetry of a Victorian writer – reminded Shelia of a father and son who made models of them in glass. It also brought back memories of her time at Corsham Art School with other Quakers, pictured, who did flower engravings.



Awareness of the devastation that the Rust conditions can cause in gardens, and the problems it

has given Shelia's cherry, Victoria Plum and self-sown green damson trees, led her to record the resulting damage in photographs. We thought that this photo shows that even in sadness there can still be joy.

Why population? By Roger Plenty (Quaker Concern Over Population (QCOP))

In 1800, the population of the world was about 1 billion. It is now (August 2015) 7.39 bn., and increasing by a billion every twelve years. A billion is a thousand thousand thousand. To give you some idea of the vastness of this number, a thousand seconds is just over a quarter of an hour, a million is 11 ½ days, and a billion is 31 ¾ years.

Will growth level out? No one really knows. UN projections are based on assumptions about future fertility, and a high, medium and low projection is made about each date. These projections are often updated, usually upwards. Thus, the current (2015) medium projection for 2050 is 9.7 bn., but could be anywhere between 8.3 and 10.9 bn., while 2100 medium projection is 11.2 bn., and somewhere between 6.7 and 16.6 bn. Thus, if the medium projection turns out to be right, there is no sight of a peak.

Why does this matter? There is a real question about whether the larger populations projected, or even the present one, are sustainable in the long run.

We at present consume about 1.5 times times the Earth's biocapacity; that is to say,

if this situation persists, we would need the resources of 1 ½ Earths. If the whole world lived at a level equal to the average in the developed world, we would need 3 ½ Earths. Thus, with our present population, we need our per capita consumption to be reduced to about two sevenths of the present average consumption of the developed world: in other words, we must countenance a reduction of our consumption, in the developed world, by 5/7: this also means that there is no possible hope of the world's poor ever approaching the developed world's present level of consumption. I wonder how any political party, advocating that we should reduce our consumption by 5/7, would present it to the voters? It is clear, therefore, that although we should seek to reduce consumption as much as possible, that will not be enough, not by a long chalk.



Any other problems? Yes, indeed. We are affecting the planet in ways that will be discernible in the geological record in millions of years' time. The markers of this will be the melting of ice from Antarctica, Greenland, and other icecaps, ice shelves and glaciers, and consequent rising of sea levels; the consequent flooding of low lying land, which includes much of our agricultural land and great cities, and where many people live; the acidification of the sea which has the potential to prevent small creatures that are at the bottom of the food chain to form their exoskeletons, and to severely damage or destroy coral reefs; unpredictable weather events, which may already be causing droughts, floods and wildfire; and on top of all that, we appear to be entering on the sixth great extinction.

Species are already going extinct at something like 1000 times the natural background rate (E.O.Wilson estimates between 1000 and 10,000 the background rate). The number of wild animals, it has recently been reported, has shrunk by 50% since 1970. Human beings and their animals account for 97% of vertebrates by mass: wildlife 3%. In April this year the Independent reported a statement by scientists that soil erosion and degradation is one of the most pressing issues facing human security.

Another way of looking at this is to consider that the world has resources to support a population living at the per capita rate of the present developed world of two billion (the same ratio, 2/7 of 7 billion). Several demographers arrive at very similar figures: for example, see this paper by Kenneth Smal, 'Confronting the inevitable: population reduction, voluntary or otherwise', on <http://www.culturechange.org/cms/content/view/168/2/> The world had a population of two billion very recently: that figure was passed in 1927.

As I have explained, reduction of consumption to appropriate levels is not likely to be possible, and is in any case countered by increase of population. Therefore we must take into account the growth of population. A recent paper issued by the Royal

Society, called 'Can the collapse of global civilization be avoided?', on <http://tinyurl.com/p74757v> states emphatically that ' The human predicament is driven by overpopulation, overconsumption of natural resources and ... [inappropriate] technology': in fact this article tells you what I am trying to tell you, but in much greater length, and I recommend that you read it.

I feel that this subject ought to be of interest to Friends, especially because of the potential for violence in this situation. In Burundi, for example, the average size of farms has shrunk from 9-12 acres in 1970 to just over one acre now, and the resulting tensions are revealed in this article on <http://tinyurl.com/pnekm3b> 'Blood cries out'. See also this Royal Society paper 'Considering population and war: a critical and neglected aspect of conflict studies' on <http://tinyurl.com/o3wn8bp>

Can we do anything about this? One of the problems is that there is a determined unwillingness to discuss this. A recent article in The Independent raises this point: 'Population growth is potentially as catastrophic as climate change- so why aren't we talking about it?' on <http://tinyurl.com/o87qsm3>

In fact, there is much that can be done, but it needs to have a basis of public opinion. People need to see that this is not a toxic subject: in fact, quite the contrary. There is a huge need for family planning world wide. A few more statistics, I'm afraid: the first is that there are 225 million women who have no access to modern contraception. To help you to visualise that, placed head to foot, and assuming an average height of five foot six, they would reach the moon. The next figure is that over forty per cent of all pregnancies are unintentional: this is true even in developed countries. It is no surprise, therefore, that there are 42 million abortions annually, of which 20 million are unsafe, leading to 68,000 deaths annually and over 200 million long term or permanent disabilities. As well as considering our own families and lifestyles, we, individually and collectively, should consider supporting Marie Stopes International, who, in 2012, provide contraception for 13.6 million people, prevented 5.3 million unplanned pregnancies and 2.1 million unsafe abortions, and saved 11,300 women's lives, both at home and abroad.

But mainly what is needed is to get this out into open discussion, and not to hide it away as 'not quite nice'. I would hope that in due course. Friends collectively would take a stance on this subject: if they did, it should have a significant effect on public opinion.

Do get in touch if there are any errors, or if you have contributions or suggestions for future Area Meeting Newsletters. Harlow will be producing the next issue in February 2016 with Leigh following in June.

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