



NORTH EAST THAMES AREA MEETING

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2019



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Area Meeting Retreat: Saturday September 28th Wanstead Meeting House.
Working theme: Truth and Post Truth. Please keep this date in your diaries.

A Riddle: Thieves tried to steal a Cat from a Car. The result was that the Car was sold. Why? and where's the Cat? - For answers, read 'Cats, Cars and Consequences'.

My father was a Dunera Boy

I am always looking for more clues into the young life of my father, Gotthold (later known as John) Forell. Although he was not Jewish (although this is questionable), he came from a German Christian clergy family. He was in Vienna with his father - Pastor Frederick Forell - and his mother - Madeleine Forell - when the SAS came looking for them in 1938. Pastor Forell was the pastor at the only Protestant Church in central Vienna. John's older brother was already safe in the US, studying for the Lutheran ministry.

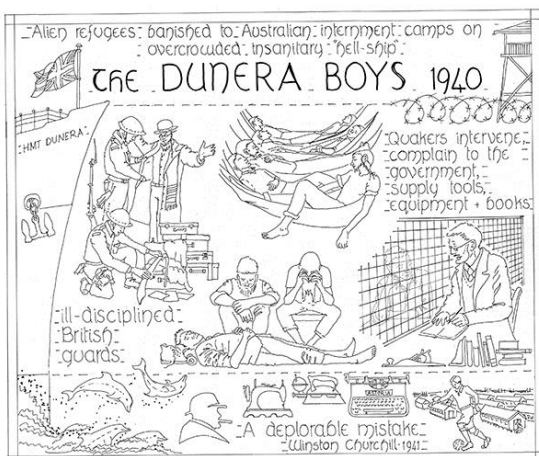
My father was sent to England, under the care of the personal friend of his parents, Bishop George Bell. His parents had formed a deep friendship with Bishop Bell and sent their younger son to him. They remained in Europe, until they were arrested, imprisoned, released, and they ultimately travelled on to the US.

'Collar the lot' was the clarion call of Churchill at the outbreak of war with Germany and Italy, and all 'undesirable enemy aliens' (males from the age of 16 onwards from Germany, Austria and Italy) were 'collared' and sent away. These men and boys were mostly Jewish, and all opposed to Hitler's Third Reich. They were largely highly qualified in their chosen careers. The treatment of the men on The Dunera is now infamous. Their 'guards' were requisitioned from military prisons. The unspoken aim, as The Dunera was never expected to finish its sea voyage, was to rid 'undesirables' efficiently. The Andorra Star, which took Italians away from Britain, was torpedoed, and many lives were lost. Notably, surviving Italians were on The Dunera.



My father survived imprisonment in Australia, and went on to serve in the Munitions Corp after the Japanese attacks on Australia (see photograph). After the War he studied Divinity in Melbourne. He was reunited with his family and came to the US in 1949. In 1950, my mother - a nurse from Tasmania whom he met and courted whilst in Australia - travelled to be with John. They married in Canada and moved to the US (New Jersey), where my father began his ministry as an Episcopalian minister. There they had their four children (including me). My father committed suicide in December 1961. My mother took her four orphans to Australia in 1964, and raised us in the sunshine.

I now discover that there is a panel devoted to The Dunera Boys in the Quaker Tapestry. <https://www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk/embroidery/dunera-boys-story/>



Life is, indeed, a rich tapestry.

Peggy Forell

Of Cats, Cars and Consequences

Jan Sellers, Wanstead Meeting

Many Friends gave up their cars long ago in the interests of sustainability and a wish to reduce their carbon footprint. I was not amongst them. With frail relatives, and a car boot that often held heavy luggage for work, I felt justified - to some extent. I switched to driving a hybrid car in 2007, and as the years went by I never quite managed to persuade myself to let go of being a car owner. There was always a good reason to put off the decision. Our car is - was - jointly owned, but Sue does not drive, so this is my story.

Sometimes, I am so set in my ways that it takes a metaphorical jolt, a clap of thunder perhaps, to make me pay attention. This happened in December when, in a mini crime wave in our neighbourhood, thieves were systematically stealing Cats from hybrid cars. The Cat in question is a catalytic converter (known in the trade as a Cat) and it is part of a hybrid car's exhaust system. It's worth around £100 on the black market for rare metal recycling, and takes about 20 minutes to remove, simply by jacking up the car and using a hacksaw. This needs repair... and another catalytic converter... and so it goes.

These attempts at theft don't always work; sometimes it's too awkward a job, sometimes people are interrupted. In mid-December, a garage mechanic found three bits of broken hacksaw embedded in our car exhaust pipe. "I've never seen anything like it," he remarked, expertly welding everything together again - the exhaust, that is, not the hacksaw. In the next few weeks, there were two more attempts to remove the Cat from our car, the third time being New Years' Day. This last effort was foiled by our next door neighbours, who spotted someone doing the deed. The explanation "I'm a mechanic" was met with a robust East End reply and the get-away car was photographed. All this has livened up conversation at the corner shop no end. But by this time, everyone was getting twitchy. It was tiring, and depressing, to be always suspicious of street noises, day and night. I felt no confidence that the car would be working when we wanted to use it.

What to do? Later on New Year's Day, Sue and I went for a short walk around the boating lake at our end of Epping Forest, and made our decision: enough was enough. We had been struggling with the ethics of car ownership; we would use this as a signal for change. Quick action was needed, as the car seemed so vulnerable to theft. We sold the car to a dealer and waved goodbye on January 3rd. We have no plans to get another. I cancelled everything from insurance to resident parking permits, resulting in a pleasant trickle of refunds. On the same day, in an exhilarating burst of energy, I applied for a Waltham Forest Bike Hangar for our street: I don't have a bike yet, and I don't know if we'll be one of the lucky streets to get a Bike Hangar, but we have space for it now, outside our house! We have joined a car club (Zip Car) which has cars nearby, including hybrids. This will help with the occasional heavy duty luggage trip, and for visiting my aunt in her rural nursing home.

How does it feel to get to this point at last, to be car-free, give or take the occasional car hire? Pleasing and disconcerting in equal measure. It's an interesting process of adjustment, not least in how I think about time: my habit of leaving departure to the last minute does not work for public transport purposes. One step at a time. I have not become a provider of Cats for the black market. I know my neighbours better, and appreciate their kindness. So far this year, I have walked further than usual on a day-to-day basis, have missed two classes because I got the timing wrong, and have been unusually punctual for other appointments. I have hired a Zip Car once, which was trouble-free. I have had a very peaceful trip to Waltham Abbey by bus, with glorious, wide views of Epping Forest and the sight of a deer, probably a muntjac, in the early twilight on the way back. I have begun to daydream about beautiful bicycles ... just dreaming ... carbon fibre, folding bike, a work of art and useful tool (Faith and Practice 21.37). I am still thinking "I could just pop up to..." and realising that the car is no longer there. But after only 11 days, I do feel a sense of change, of a different relationship to where I want and need to be. There is room now for me to live life a little more lightly, to begin to fit in differently to this place, this neighbourhood, where I love to belong. There are more breathing spaces, and for that I am grateful. I can't quite say thank you to the Cat collectors; but I appreciate the 'red flag' signal for change, and it has had results.

Sowing Seeds of Peace

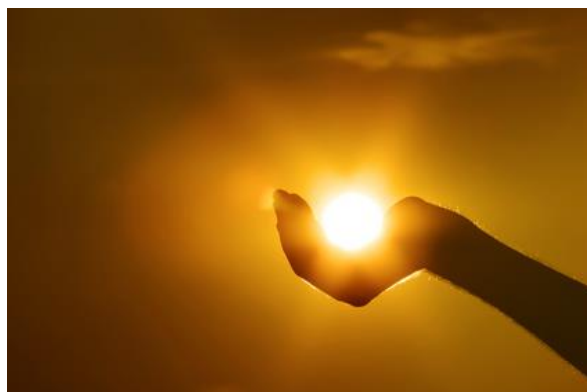
(Debbie – Romford Meeting)

Plant goodness, harvest the fruit of loyalty, and plough the new ground of knowledge.
(Hosea 10:12)

Want to see a miracle? Plant a work of love heart-deep in a person's life. Nurture it with a smile and a prayer, and watch what happens.

An employee gets a compliment. A wife receives a bouquet of flowers. A cake is baked and carried next door. A widow is hugged. A shop assistant is honoured. A preacher is praised.

Sowing seeds of peace is like sowing beans. You don't know why it works; you just know it does. Seeds are planted and top soils of hurt are shoved away. Never underestimate the power of a seed. – *The Applause of Heaven*



Quaker Membership Retreat

I attended my first Quaker retreat, the Quaker Membership Weekend at Charney Manor, in October of 2018. Having been an attender at Bethnal Green meeting for a year and a half, I was curious to find out more about what it might mean to become a Quaker member and what the process might look like.



Set in the picturesque Oxfordshire countryside setting in the 13th century manor (with a welcoming committee that included three staff and one very vocal cat) I joined around twenty other attenders alongside three warm and friendly facilitators who guided us through the weekend. We were given talks by the facilitators, who explained in plain English the (sometimes baffling) structure of Quakers and Quaker meetings, as well as demystifying the process of becoming a member.

In groups, we sat in silence with and discussed topics around being a Quaker such as testimonies and the nature of commitment, including any fears and concerns we may have, which were often shared. We ate all our meals together and quickly bonded with people who were strangers only a day or two before. We were kindly given Geoffrey Durham's down-to-earth book, *Becoming a Quaker*, as well as practical advice on how we might come to a decision about membership, such as visiting other meetings and taking a more active role in your own meeting.

I left with a much clearer understanding of what Quakerism is, how it is structured, and the process of becoming a member. The weekend was set up to help us explore the idea of becoming a member without ever pressurising us one way or the other. I was reassured that membership was not an award for spiritually perfect people, but simply requires "a sincerity of purpose and commitment to Quaker values and practices" (QF&P 11.01) and could look as diverse in practice as the people undertaking membership. At the same time, they did not shy away from the more difficult aspects that membership could bring, the challenges and costs that were likely to come up.

I was especially moved by the insights offered on commitment, and the sense that Quaker membership could be a place where I could set down deep roots and have room to grow. The following passage was shared by the facilitators and has stayed with me:

"Commitments take the static out of life. By committing ourselves to one thing instead of another, we get standard to steer by and the space to become.

Having chosen for one thing, we are free then to allow it to test us and stretch us and bring us to our best selves. Commitments show us a way, they focus us, they constrain us from a confusion of choices, all equally good, perhaps, but all with conflicting expectations. Commitments keeps us in places, in other words, until our souls, tried by fire and fired by life, expand to their full measure." (*Joan Chittister, The fire in these ashes*)

With thanks to area meeting for funding my place - Catriona Nicholson

A Tribute to Beryl Spence 13th May 1927 to 15th February 2018

I write this tribute to Beryl, having been her partner, (and latterly carer), and having lived with her for 28 years; though we had known each other since we met as university students nearly 70 years ago, and, always kept in touch as good friends.



Beryl was born in Cornwall on the Isles of Scilly, and had a deep devotion to her birthplace. Nothing annoyed her more than having Cornwall described as an 'English County'; she felt that as indigenous Celts, the Cornish should have the same status as the Welsh and the Scots and be accorded statehood within the union; to which I fully concurred.

The Quakers had attracted her since the days of her youth in London, and as far as I know, she had been a member of the Romford Meeting since she moved to the area in the 1960s. She had a busy lifestyle, but always attended meetings as often as she could.

Being an English graduate of the University of London, she had a great passion for the correct usage and teaching of English, and had worked for many years as a teacher of English to foreign students. After her retirement, she set up a local group for poetry and drama which she ran until her health began to fail. She also had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Shakespeare's plays. All this while she was raising three children and running a home; (her marriage eventually broke down in a divorce).

Another of her great causes was the love of animals and Animals' Rights; she was often involved in campaigns and demonstrations against animal abuse, and frequently provided sanctuary for homeless animals, especially dogs, which she either kept or rehomed. She imbued her children with this same passion for animals, and her youngest daughter is now carrying the beacon with incredible industry!

Finally, I feel I must mention one other cause. She had a clear perception of the inequality and injustice of society, and it led to her becoming a long time member of the Labour party, which she always supported even in its most turbulent days; (I remember leafletting with her soon after I came to live with her). She felt that her socialism collated with her Quaker Christianity.

To conclude, I would say she was a truly lovely person, with unlimited warmth and empathy for her friends and causes she cared about; and for which her diligence and energy were unflagging. I cannot put into words how much I loved her and will always miss her. But a great consolation is that she had an unwavering belief in an after-life, and with her great friend Angela Howard, was a founder member of the Quaker Fellowship for After-life studies. She also left me a letter in which she wrote, "This is only au revoir and we shall meet again." Her passionate conviction finally overcame my initial scepticism, and I now believe this may well be true.

William Tapp

A Philadelphia Meeting for Worship

Last autumn we spent 3 months as Friends in Residence at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat and conference centre on the outskirts of Philadelphia. We contributed to the life of their community in various ways – welcoming visitors, supporting the daily Meeting for Worship, working in the grounds, sharing our knowledge of Quakerism in Britain. We decided also to visit local meetings to see how they operated and share their worship.

One Sunday we attended Providence Monthly Meeting. (A Monthly Meeting in Philadelphia is the same level as a Local Meeting here i.e. holds a weekly Meeting for Worship, but it carries out many of the functions carried out in Britain by an Area Meeting.) In discussion after Meeting, we were told that some Friends supported Middletown Preparative Meeting, a smaller meeting that met on a Thursday morning. We asked to join them and a date was arranged in early November.

We were told that the Meeting was held in an isolated early 18th century building and that we could be collected and taken there. As we arrived we were shown a building at the far end of two Quaker graveyards; Middletown Monthly Meeting is at the other end. Meetings in close proximity are not unusual for Philadelphia and reflect the long schism between conservative and evangelical Friends that lasted well into the 20th century.

Middletown Preparative Meeting was a family meeting but the only local member of the family had recently died, leaving members who all lived some distance from the Meeting House. The Meeting House was dated 1702 and was a detached building in what resembled a farm. Certainly there were barns to the rear, in one of which was a horse.

The Meeting House had no electricity or gas. The meeting room was heated by a central pot-bellied stove. Each Thursday a local caretaker lit the stove before going to work and a meeting member came early to refresh the fire. We entered a toasty room where everything seemed to be wooden – benches, wall coverings and floor. I was asked to carry in a container of water. Our chauffeur carried a large pot. She took the lid off the pot and removed a number of mugs and arranged them on the shelf around the stove, poured the water in the pot, replaced the lid and set it to boil whilst we settled to Meeting for Worship.

The meeting comprised 8 people and a dog. Once we had settled, the dog - clearly a regular - climbed up next to its person and settled itself. For more than half an hour we had deep worship that was only punctuated by the occasional grunt from the dog. There then followed a series of ministries that were very personal, spiritual and emotional. The dog licked his person's fingers for the whole time his person ministered.

At the close of Meeting we greeted each other by shaking hands. The lid of the pot was then removed to reveal boiling water and this was used to make tea or coffee. Maggie wondered whether the water boiled and spoken ministry came to the surface at the same time. After meeting there was an exchange of home-grown vegetables and we were taken home, our chauffeur musing about applying for membership of that Meeting to help with decisions about its management and future.

A very interesting visit and one of a number of experiences we shared. We hope to speak at an area meeting and share writings we have done about our time at Pendle Hill.

Melvyn and Maggie Freake

High Leigh Weekend 12th April – 14th April

The annual High Leigh weekend is approaching, and I am honoured to be this year's facilitator. Having not attended before, I am excited by what I've heard, and looking forward to a special experience. A few Friends have asked me what I have to offer over those three days, from April 12th to 14th.

At present it is not clear how the Brexit situation will pan out, but it seems likely that we may all be in need of some nurturing space to relax, assimilate and communicate by April.

The Virtues of Compassion is an introduction to two growing global movements committed to creating a better world: an antithesis to the division and destruction that have been too prevalent in recent years. The Virtues Project is a UN-endorsed character education programme used in over 100 countries worldwide, and Charter for Compassion International is a network of networks practicing compassionate action across many sectors and countries.



Over the weekend we will explore the meaning of compassion, and how we can embrace it to live more proactively, starting with self-compassion – essential and too often overlooked by compassion activists. Using discussion, reflection and creative exercises we will identify virtues that contribute to a compassionate lifestyle, such as empathy, responsibility, justice, caring, respect and unity. We will recognise how a conscious focus on virtues and compassion can positively impact our world-view in challenging times.

My aim is to provide a workshop that will be informative, explorative, creative and fun. Some sessions will bring together participants of all ages, others will see adults and children united in separate but closely connected activities that can be continued beyond the weekend. I hope you will come along, and look forward to meeting many new Friends.

Tam Martin Fowles - www.hopeintheheart.org



Gratitude Garden – a recommendation.



I was recommended a mobile phone app last March that I think is doing some deep personal good, the moving of tectonic plates sort of thing! I read the first couple of chapters of Karen Armstrong's book on Compassion a few years back, and along with other reading and listening, knew about the importance of gratitude and its link with compassion. But I stumbled and stalled on being able to follow the practical steps Karen offered.

The Gratitude Garden App is just a simple format of recording three gratitudes a day. It has beautiful graphics and you earn points each day to be able to place animals in the Gratitude Garden! There's a pack of Gratitude cards to choose from each day. There's a little bird Harry that gives tips on what sort of things you may want to appreciate that day. And you can click through to read the old entries or email the whole thing to yourself as a record.

Although my brother was seriously ill and died within the first few months of starting it, I am finding myself continually more joyful. I'm glad to have taken up this spiritual discipline and can't see myself stopping.

Just as an example, I was walking to Wanstead Meeting from Ilford a few weeks back and found myself mulling over a frustration with a work colleague. Having recognised it, I stopped myself and decided that I would try 10 gratitudes about her as a discipline. I did not think I would manage it. I got to 10, and then thought, I would try 20, not thinking that would be possible either. Then 30, then 40, then 50. As I walked through the Meeting House doors I had reached 60! What a change had happened in my body – it felt like there was loads of space and fresh air in my chest rather than the tight and haughty jaw. My mind was freer – happy, appreciative, light. I was led to give a Ministry on it.

I am delighted to report that over the last 2 weeks, the working relationship between my colleague and I has been amazingly positive, transformed even, and our work is more productive. The effort I put in on the 60 gratitudes bore fruit for the both us.

From this experience, and my Ministry, I realised that going forwards I would try and change: to stop thinking about perceived faults (never a good idea!), but to put my focus on being appreciative of the positive. That's well over 60 things now! How joyful that is.



Ros Southern

Wanstead Meeting.

Walk to Palestine



Harlow Meeting House hosted an impressive speaker in January. The MH had been booked for Benjamin Ladraa, a 25-year-old Swedish activist who was to talk about his walk from Gothenburg in Sweden to Palestine – a walk of 5,800 km that took him one year and three days.

Benjamin started his talk with the question 'Why walk?' a question he is asked most often. He chose to go on foot because he wanted to walk alone and not in an organised group or on behalf of an organisation. He wanted to feel some solidarity with refugees and migrants who walk across continents to seek the security and stability of Europe. He pointed out that with his Swedish passport he had so many privileges unlike refugees and migrants who are often detained for months and then sent back to the place of entry after they have travelled across half of Europe. Ladraa was of course walking in the other direction.

Benjamin pushed a buggy that carried his huge back pack and a Palestine flag. He is a tall man with black hair, a beard and a dark weather-beaten complexion. He was often taken for a refugee or a terrorist. Police often followed him. With a wry smile he said he thought something was amiss if there was no Police car behind him.

I thought I knew about the suffering of the Palestinian people; over the years I have read several books and talked to a Palestinian about his reasons for leaving but I was not prepared for what I heard. Palestinians in the Gaza e.g. dare not leave their home empty even for a short time for fear of finding it occupied on their return and all their belongings burnt. It is unthinkable that governments and the UN are unable to resolve this situation. Palestinians fear for their lives daily; they are prisoners in their own country. It is a conflict between David and Goliath.

Listening to Benjamin Ladraa telling us about his long trek, about Police and security officials interrogating him I was struck by the equanimity with which he handled these situations. His attitude seemed to be that the authorities were doing their job and his was to co-operate. When he refused to hand over his passport to the Israeli bomb squad in Prague it was because they have no legal right to inspect a passport from

another national. He handed his passport to the Czech Police and when they passed it to the Israelis, he let it happen. When they asked him where his knife was he said he had none and let them search his luggage without complaining. In the Lebanon he was asked whether he was Jewish or Muslim or Christian or any other religion and he patiently explained that he was without religion like most Swedes.

There were light-hearted moments too. On his way through Turkey he had a very special dinner. The local Police officers saw him coming with his buggy and asked if he was hungry. 'No', he replied cautiously. 'You must be. We watched you walking for hours. We are just eating, come and join us' they urged. When he still hesitated they said 'We are very sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.' So he joined them and had a memorable meal courtesy of a local Police station in Turkey. Benjamin talked of the hardships and the joys of this walk, he started in the heat of summer and walked through the bitter cold winter. He walked mostly alone but made good friends. He didn't quite make it into Palestine because the Israelis who control the border didn't allow him to cross it.

His talk gave food for thought. As Quakers we have our Peace Testimony to help us understand war and conflict and find a way forward. The arguments for accepting war as a way to peace are as plentiful as they are persuasive. The Quaker message of pacifism is important because it shows an alternative way of resolving conflicts. The peace testimony teaches a method based on dialogue, understanding, compromise, negotiation and mutual respect.

Listening to Benjamin Ladraa made me think of the importance of our testimony of equality. A creative way of thinking about conflict is to regard the other as an equal. If we accept that the opinions and values of each side are based on history, on the experiences of past and present events, on community and on a desire to shape one's own future then we can see the other side as equal partners. (*see Helen Adison in the Friend, 1 Feb 2019*). Regarding the other as equal means we 'can walk in their shoes' that is get a sense of what it is like from their point of view. The hope is that this makes it possible to work out a common ground and find a way forward. We must never lose hope.

The talk ended on a note of hope and creativity: Benjamin Ladraa is planning a walk to Palestine in which people from all nations will take part. His vision is that a march of thousands of people will make nations and governments listen and that they will have to take action to bring about peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

Margarete Briggs, Harlow Meeting



Quaker Remembrance Service

On Sunday 11 November 2018, at 3pm, Friends gathered at Wanstead Meeting House and were joined by others for a well-attended Quaker Remembrance Service.



We organized the meeting because we felt that, in the midst of so many remembrance events, Quakers have something to say about war and about peace. The meeting was not like our weekly Meeting for Worship. We had prepared six extracts from Quaker writings, read by different Wanstead Friends. We wanted to share the universality of the Quaker witness to peace, so the extracts came from different times and places, from seventeenth century England to mid-twentieth century Australia; they included a Quaker conscientious objector sentenced to death in 1916 as well as a 16 year old Quaker recently expressing her hopes for peace.

We placed copies of the 1660 Peace Testimony on every chair. On the reverse, there was a list of organizations currently working for peace, so that the link between worship and action was clear.

About 50 Friends, attenders and visitors (including some Friends from the Area Meeting, and some visitors from other faith groups) came to the meeting. Thanks to the generosity of Friends, we shared tea and cakes together afterwards.



We felt grateful for the depth of worship and for the companionship in the time of remembering. We are listening to see where we are led for the future.

The leaflet we used, with the Peace Testimony and peace organisations, is available from our LM Clerk.

Kate Green and David Irwin



The beautiful flower arrangement is by Mary Wauer, and the quilt and white poppies were made by members and attenders of Wanstead Meeting.