Diary Dates for March

Saturday February 27th to Friday March 11th Fairtrade Fortnight
Friday March 4th Colchester Farmers’ Market
Tuesday March 8th International Women’s Day http://www.internationalwomensday.com
Wednesday March 9th No Smoking Day Helping people who want to give up tobacco
Friday March 11th Anniversary of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear reactor failure
Sunday March 13th Area Meeting - Clacton
Saturday March 25th Clocks go forward one hour overnight
Saturday April 9th One Day Retreat Colchester FMH

Web Address: www.essexsuffolkquakers.org
e-mail address: AMClerk@essexsuffolkquakers.org
Meetings for Worship

**CLACTON**
Sunday at 10.30 am
1st Wednesday each month
1pm-2pm with Soup & Cheese

**Harwich**
2nd and 4th Sundays 10.30 am
Nicholas’ Church Hall, Stour Road, Bathside
Contact , Audrey Hind

**COLCHESTER**
Sunday 10.30 am
Wednesday 12.30 pm
(Soup and Cheese Lunch)

**EARLS COLNE**
1st, 3rd & 5th Sundays 10.30 am

**SUDBURY**
Sunday 10.30 am
Friars Street, Sudbury
Thursday 12.30 pm
(Bring Picnic,
  Tea/Coffee provided)

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**FIRST CONTACT**
FOR FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS
CLACTON……………………………Ray Attrill
COLCHESTER…………………………Carol Holding
SUDBURY…………………………Peter Whiteley

**Essex & Suffolk Regional Gathering**

John Hall
Bardfield FMH 27 February 2016

I am not keen on role playing. Yet, the most rewarding part of the Regional Gathering, taken by Catherine Henderson and Fred Ashmore of the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, was a role-playing exercise during the afternoon session.

Each of the five groups of five Friends and Attenders was given a description of a situation relating to the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers and those near to them. Our group considered an Egyptian political activist who had been tortured and denied work but who had escaped to England where he had become clinically depressed by being refused an entitlement to work here. We were asked what we could do as individuals and as a Meeting to support him.

Much more telling, however, was another group, who reported back to the plenary session through a member of the group who was a Friend working for a housing association. She acted the role of a mother in Middlesborough whose daughter, who had lived next-door and had been forced to quite her house by the bedroom tax and has had to move to another town. They could not afford the travel costs to meet any more.

Five young male refugees had been allocated the daughter’s former house by the council. They could speak very little English. They were not allowed to work and so were at a loose end; noisy, disruptive and unsociable.

The mother was extremely angry, arguing that the council could not afford her daughter’s rent but could afford to keep “five work-shy, unsociable layabouts” in her daughter’s home. She saw this as proof that ordinary hard-working English families were suffering at the hands of migrants.

We did not address this real concern, but the Gathering agreed a minute which asks Meeting for Sufferings to convene a conference to consider all aspects of the current refugee crisis and to set out a Quaker position and courses of action.

John Hall

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**Editorial**
Dear Friends,

We are well into the new year now and a very muddling time it is! One minute much too hot, and the next minute freezing cold. But if we can just hold our breath for a bit, we may slide safely into spring. (At my age I can remember many winters when it only started to be cold well into February and then the snow really started).

Quite a lot of good things are happening: we have some refugees happily settled, and a lot of activities planned and our Meeting is indulging in a lot of educational happenings that are going on. Sadly, some old friends have died, for instance Jane Carter and Opal Reeves, a very long-standing friend (but she was 94). I had known and worked with her for a long time and never knew she was a Quaker.

Olwen Titchmarsh is still with us, but she has moved to a care home now. Antony Johae, whose home is in Lebanon, wrote a poem about Opal, which is this month has appeared in the newsletter.

We don’t have the children we used to have: I remember when we had three big classes, but there is so much more that children can do now although those that we do have are very enthusiastic. I see a lot of my great-grandchildren, so I feel very fortunate, but I don’t nowadays take part in many Quaker activities now that I am old. Please send me any news by the middle of the month to Valerie Graves.
News from Harwich Meeting

Tony and Rosalie Eaton

We recently attended Area Meeting, where the first new Friend from Harwich Meeting was welcomed into membership. It occurred to us that perhaps it would be interesting for Friends to hear more news from our far flung outpost (At 21 miles, it is further from Colchester than any of the other meetings in our Area)

Harwich Meeting was started in 2009 by Audrey and Donald Hind. Realising that they would not always be able to drive to Clacton, and after talking to others who lived closer to Harwich, they started holding MFW at their house, once a month. After a year, as numbers grew, it became difficult to accommodate everyone. It was suggested that St Nicholas Church Hall, Bathside, may be a suitable venue, and also to consider meeting twice a month. The church was very happy to hire us the hall, so in late 2010 we held our first meeting there, and have continued to meet on the 2nd and 4th Sundays since. (This was decided so as not to clash with Clacton business meeting on the 1st Sunday). There are regularly up to 14 Friends, plus the occasional visitors, and we thank Cathy Offord, and Marion & Brian Heath for opening the hall and organising the tables/chairs, and of course coffee and biscuits.

Our collections go to Clacton meeting towards the cost of hire of the hall but recently we have also started to make regular collections in support of the local People’s Community Kitchen luncheon club charity, held in the Salvation Army Hall. We are also well represented by Simon Banks on the Churches Together in the Harwich Peninsula. We are sounding that still small Quaker voice in the local Harwich community.

Swami Veetamohananda has visited Harwich meeting, telling us of the Vedanta faith and the work of his group based near Paris.

In March 2012 we held the first Experiment with Light meeting at Woodcutters Cottage, our home in Stour Wood, Wrabness, and have continued to meet here at monthly intervals since then. There are 10 in our group.

In January 2015, we embarked on the Harwich Hearts and Minds course, facilitated by Hazel Jones and Simon Banks. When the course finished last year, it was decided to continue to meet as a monthly discussion group. In addition to Quaker topics, including the life of George Fox, we have looked at Buddhism, and also had a very valuable visit from Muslim friends, to give us some insight into the Islam faith. Our February meeting is a discussion about Quaker Ministry, based on the Swarthmore Lecture 1992. Our grateful thanks go to Marion and Brian Heath for hosting these meetings. It isn’t true that we only go for the delicious home made cake afterwards.

We would welcome visitors to Harwich Meeting, as indeed we did in 1683, when George Fox stayed with Friends on his way to and from Holland.
On Family
from Valerie Graves

I am often tempted to write about my numerous family, which can be very tedious for friends, but it is great to see them grow from crawling toddlers into schoolchildren and now they will soon be young adults with astonishing abilities. I told you that for Christmas I was given an astonishing gadget which you fill with your photos, and it shows them continuously and completely at random, so you never know what is coming next. Each picture stays in view for about an hour. Some are of people, from long ago or more recent, some of scenery or occasions, so you have a great time trying to work out whose baby that is, and which house they are in. There’s one of a volcano erupting, weird and wonderful creatures like an alpaca, lots of kangaroos, amazing insects and beautiful birds, and towns from all round the world. People keep giving me photos (I believe it can hold about eight thousand).

My favourites at the moment are a little steam train coming round a corner in a pretty country scene, Australia I think, but a lot of Tom’s pictures are from Portugal; and a group of four small children two aged four and two aged two, in the kitchen at my old house, in front of the Rayburn. They are making a pretend meal at the toy model Rayburn, which my husband made when our own children were tiny, a one in four model. It is still in continual use today by the children of today, thirty or forty years later.

The digital photographic machine turns itself off if there is nobody there.
Clerk’s Corner

Alison Parkes, Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting Clerk

Homecomings

Our daughter has just returned home after a year’s traveling in South East Asia, Australia and New Zealand. She has had some amazing adventures, done some extraordinary things which we (and she!) never imagined she would, and met people from many different backgrounds and cultures. For young people to be able to travel in this way is both a luxury of our modern western society and also a gift and investment for the future of the planet. There is no way of knowing how Lorna’s experiences will affect her future decisions, but inevitably her outlook has been transformed and her empathy for people from other cultures irrevocably deepened. Having Lorna home safe and sound has given me that warm feeling that “all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well”. Just for a few days, I shut out the problems of the world and enjoyed her homecoming.

Coming home to Yearly Meeting

This May gives Quakers the chance to experience their own homecoming, by attending Yearly Meeting at Friends House, London. YM 2016 will be held over the late May Bank Holiday weekend at Friends House, London, 27-30 May. The programme involves continuing to look at how we live out our faith in the world, starting through hearing one another’s stories. Listening to the stories of others can be inspirational and affirming. We will look at how we recognise and respond to the promptings of the spirit to act in the world, and how we know and use our gifts.

There will be opportunities to learn more about centrally managed work. There will be space for Friends coming alone to meet up, and Woodbrooke will run sessions for first-timers at YM. From my experience of YM, it’s helpful to go prepared to make the first overture to your neighbour; they may be glad to get to know you, and you are likely to learn something from them. YM is like a gathering of a huge extended family, some of whom we may relate to immediately and some of whom we may not necessarily like very much. Yet we have been drawn to the same meeting point. As Parker J Palmer says in Quaker faith and practice 10.19, “In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact, we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives!” I love that expression “given to us by grace”. What we do with what we are given is what matters.

You may wish to take part in spiritual preparation activities for YM through your Meeting. The Quakers in Britain website www.quaker.org.uk gives some suggestions for questions which can be used as the basis of discussion groups. Colchester Meeting is holding two or three of these sessions, so look out for details via your Meeting and on the AM website www.essexsuffolkquakers.org. Participating in these discussions can help you engage with YM, whether or not you are able to attend. You can register for YM online via the Quakers in Britain website, or there will be forms available through your Meeting.

Advises and Queries 27 seems appropriate here, whatever personal or spiritual journey we may be contemplating: “Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God’s guidance and offering counsel to one another?”

The next Area Meeting will be held on Sunday March 13, 2.15 pm at Clacton Quaker Meeting House, 26 Granville Road, Clacton CO15 6BX. For more details, please see the AM website Business page www.essexsuffolkquakers.org. All are welcome, though if you are not yet in membership, please ask the Clerk for permission to attend.
**Borough Council Elections on 5 May**

Robbie Spence

It is coming to that time of year, Friends, when those of us who wish to stand for election as Colchester Borough Councillors need signatures on nomination forms. Please could you let me know if you’d be willing to help out by signing a nomination form for me and others who I’m assisting in their attempt to get on the ballot? If so, do also let me know what part of town you live in and, if you know it, the name of the electoral ward.

The Borough Council elections this year are on 5 May and are unique. For once in a lifetime, all 51 seats are up for election simultaneously. As shown in the map below there will be 17 instead of 27 wards. There will be 3 councillors per ward, an overall reduction from 60 to 51 council seats, with all of them being contested at once. This is an important opportunity for us as Friends to influence the decision-making process in our local area in the hope of such decisions being more in line with our values.

Personally, I’ll be standing in either Highwoods or the new ‘super-ward’ of New Town and Christ Church – I haven’t decided which yet. I won’t say which party I support, having been Eldered on a previous occasion for mentioning its name in Notices after Meeting for Worship. But I can say it is the only party that fields a full slate of candidates and aligns itself with all of the following Quaker Testimonies, as set out at quaker.org.uk/category/tags/quaker-testimonies -Truth and integrity, Equality and community, Peace, Simplicity, The earth and environment.

**Police and Crime Commissioner Election**

There is also a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) election on the same day as the Borough Council elections. You get a separate vote for that. But the only candidates in Essex are: Conservative, English Democrat, UKIP and an Independent. (He is called Martin Terry and says things like “I don’t mind admitting I am old school on this. I believe in ‘bobbies on the beat’” and “One of the key initiatives I have led at Southend is the decision to keep our street lights on.”)

The Lib Dems, Labour and Greens have all decided not to field candidates. In my view all the candidates are traditionalist or right wing or both, and all as bad as each other. I wish there were a candidate standing on a more Quakerly platform. I nearly stood myself in order to be able to raise issues including the importance of restorative justice, nonviolent communication, alternatives to retributive justice and a genuine focus on rehabilitation. Turning the Tide - Quakers’ initiative, recognising how structural violence in society causes far more harm than the few and far between events of random stranger danger that get sensationalised in the media out of all proportion to their actual risk to your health and well-being.

At the time of last May’s General Election I posted a blog entitled Violent crime and its scapegoats where I reacted to the Colchester Gazette Hustings for prospective MPs’ debate about crime prevention, policing and personal safety.

I explained that death at the hands of violent strangers is statistically negligible compared to other causes and quoted some ONS statistics for deaths in 2012 in Colchester, based on the England and Wales stats:

- death by violent murder by strangers: 2
- premature death in cold homes due to fuel poverty: 15
- deaths attributable to poor air quality: 55
- other preventable deaths? (a lot more than 2, anyway)

As you can tell I find the whole debate about crime prevention, policing and personal safety to be toxic and obnoxious and starting from the wrong place. If you feel like me, I urge you when you vote to spoil your ballot paper. Don’t just abstain. When results are declared, they normally include the number of spoilt ballots and the more there are, the more it shows the public disgust with the election.

For more info see: www.apccs.police.uk/home/2016-police-crime-commissioner-elections

http://martin-terry.blogspot.co.uk

Turning the Tide at www.quakersintheworld.org/quakers-in-action/238

My blog on Violent crime and its scapegoats at http://roadlesstraveller.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/violent-crime.html

Don’t forget to register to vote

And finally – although I doubt this applies to Friends, but it may apply to people you know who’ve moved home, for example – the last day to register to vote is Monday 18 April and there are more details at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote.
**Meeting for Sufferings**

Robert Parkes  

The epistle of the 2016 Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), that had met recently in Peru, was read in the opening worship. Hearing this I felt really uplifted, to be part of a world-wide community of Friends, beyond the thirteen thousand or so in the UK. Then it was back to business. Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee (QPSWCC) sought our advice on possible Quaker involvement in a scheme to support the private sponsorship of refugees. I was able to outline some of the practical issues involved, based on our local experience of working with refugees. Overall, the reaction was mixed. To paraphrase the minute, QPSWCC was asked to “proceed with caution”.

Looking ahead, we were asked to encourage - which I’m doing now - as many Friends as possible to attend Yearly Meeting. This year it will be held over the late May Bank Holiday weekend in Friends House, London 27-30 May. And, Friends, if you are planning to go, please register your intention here [https://forms.quaker.org.uk/bym/](https://forms.quaker.org.uk/bym/). This helps the planners no end. And please look out for - and use - the spiritual preparation material.

In 2011 Quakers in Britain made a corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community and to support each other to live out this commitment. Five years on, MfS was dismayed to hear that so few Area Meetings had signed-up to the Sustainability Gathering in March. I felt I had to ‘fess-up’ that SEAQM had yet to nominate someone. Since then I am delighted to report that Rosemary Sturgiss will be our representative at this important event. Linked to this, we were asked to point out to Area Meetings that they need to make time for their representatives to report on this key issue.

As usual, a set of the papers, including the minutes, can be found on the Quaker.org website at [http://www.quaker.org.uk/organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/papers-and-minutes](http://www.quaker.org.uk/organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/papers-and-minutes). And there is a full some report in the 12th February edition of the Friend (Volume 174 No 07).

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**FWCC - Peru, Epistle from 2016**

Friends World Committee for Consultation, World Plenary (International Representatives Meeting).  
27 January 2016  
To all Friends Everywhere,

We send loving greetings to you from Pisac in the Sacred Valley of the Incas. We were blessed with both sunshine and rain. As we gathered together we lifted our eyes to the mountains and lifted our hearts to God.

From 19 to 27 January over 320 men and women from 37 countries, 77 Yearly Meetings, 8 independent Monthly Meetings, and 2 worship groups, speaking dozens of languages met to consider the theme “Living the transformation: creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God (Romans 8:19).”

Our time together started in sadness at those who were delayed in their journeys or prevented from joining us – we felt a gap in our gathering the shape of God. Later, as we were joined by Friends from Kenya and welcomed local Friends from Peru and Bolivia, we felt the full fellowship among us. We were complete.

Many of the messages shared in our worship, speaking to the theme of transformation were both moving and uplifting: we were challenged to be transformed in ways leaving us more faithful to God’s purposes individually, as meetings/churches and as a World Family of Friends.

Our speakers emphasised the process of transformation. One spoke of spiritual transformation using the image of a heart transplant and what it means to be given the heart of Jesus. In this transplant of the heart we become agents of change who show the love of Christ in the world. Another image we were given was that of a seed pod. Each pod contains the past, present and future, showing us how we remain connected to our past even as we look to the future, as God gathers us into one grand story.

We heard the message that we must be open and available to God, making space in our hearts, our communities and our churches/meetings. Transformation often finds us when we’re not seeking or expecting it. We must be willing to be vulnerable and open our hearts in order to undergo the change we want to see.

As we gathered we not only spoke of transformation, we invited it and created spaces for God to make it happen. Many of us experienced it while we were here. We found ourselves broken open and touched by the Living Spirit of Christ.

We are the children of God. We are who creation has been waiting for. We are called to reveal ourselves in our lives and in the work we do with our hearts and our hands. Although God can fill our hearts, God has no hands but ours to heal this broken world. We can
be salt and light shining to the world and declaring the love of God. As Quakers our faith is inseparable from our concern to care for all life on earth. We are reminded of the Kabarak call for Peace and Eco-Justice and the need to redouble our efforts now. We call on Friends everywhere to take practical actions to sustain life on Earth.

Listening together in our home groups, workshops, and consultations, where two or three languages were spoken, opened up countless opportunities to pray, sing, ask difficult questions, learn, cry and laugh together. We have hurt each other with our words when we have spoken without love but this is a human failing and we have also experienced the healing power of Christ’s love.

We learn from each other’s ways of connecting with God; each offering of worship held within it the opportunity for the Spirit to move and speak and sing. Sharing worship in this way enables us to recognise that we must both listen to, and speak to God.

The presence of so many young adult Friends among us has been a blessing. We heard their moving testimony and experienced their inspirational leadership. As we go back to our churches and meetings we must allow this ministry and leadership to flourish.

We are different. We came together as a diverse collection of Friends. We were challenged by our differences. This challenge is not always comfortable but it is one we welcome.

We are one. We are one in the spirit of God which does not wash away or hide our differences, but allows us to celebrate them and enables us to move beyond the spiritual boundaries that may separate us. We are able to do this by coming together in worship where, while its form may be unfamiliar, God was present throughout. Through listening deeply and tenderly to each other and to God we reached a place where we can hear and sense where the words come from even when we may not understand the tongue they are spoken in.

We are Friends. In making the choice to come together and be willing to share deeply, pray boldly, and listen lovingly together, we seek to move beyond our differences, see beyond our labels and find ways to connect with each other. The work of FWCC depends on us all. In order to continue it, we encourage Friends, meetings/churches and Yearly Meetings to contribute financially to and participate in building connections between Friends.

As we leave here we will carry the love we have received from each other and from God in our hearts.

**Wildspot**

from Valerie Graves

Wildlife, cultivated and wild, is feeling as confused as I am about what time of year it is. Some things are in full bloom again, such as my ceanothus and autumn flowering cherry, and we have foxgloves in bud, and leaves on rose-bushes. The frogs usually burst into full song and dance round about Valentine’s Day (so appropriate) and one of my greatgrandsons likes to come and watch (it is really quite spectacular), but this year only one frog took part and that quite halfheartedly, so I never got round to telling Ben to come. It was quite warm so I have no idea why the party was cancelled. Very disappointing.

But none of these things are set in stone. The ceanothus actually died one very cold winter ten or twelve years ago and I cut it right back it would have been quite a job to dig it out, and I planted a replacement which never did very well, and then last year it suddenly decided it was alive after all, and has flourished ever since. Similarly a much loved rose, a Moss Rose, William Lobb, which has purple flowers, and died the same year, reappeared last spring, several yards away from the original.