



Experiment with Light

Photographs by Robbie Spense

NEWSLETTER

SOUTHERN EAST ANGLIA AREA QUAKER MEETING
May 2016

Diary Dates for May

Thursday May 5th Borough Council and Police Commissioner Elections

Friday May 6th Colchester Farmers' Market

Sunday May 8th Area Meeting - Sudbury

Sunday May 15th International Conscientious Objectors Day <http://www.ppu.org.uk/coday>

Friday May 27th to Monday 30th Yearly Meeting weekend <http://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/ym>

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)

Clerk to Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting: Alison Parkes
c/o Colchester Quaker Meeting House

6 Church Street, Colchester CO1 1NF;

Web Address: www.essexsuffolkquakers.org

email 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)

<p>FIRST CONTACT FOR FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS CLACTON.....Ray Attrill COLCHESTER.....Carol Holding SUDBURY.....Peter Whiteley</p>
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Clacton News

Margaret Ahmed

The five people from Clacton Meeting who had been following the Hearts and Minds course agreed to amalgamate the contents of the last three sessions into one as it was felt that the topics were closely related. The last session on 18th March was ably led by the Clerk, Hazel Jones and it was very much an opportunity to 'seek to know one another in the things which are eternal'.

Margaret Purrett, one of the participants, writes of her experience of the course: "Now who's doing the next one?" Every meet-

Editorial

Dear Friends,

Spring is here! well, sort of. It is still remarkably cold and windy, and all sorts of things are flowering at the wrong time—but with great enthusiasm, I have never seen such enormous daffodils.

Our Meeting is flourishing, we had about fifty people last Sunday, with quite a few visitors. We have, I think, five families of emigrants settled with us and they seem to be happy. I hope you will come to our Heritage Day, we do have things laid on but for instance there is a cycling event that day which includes visiting churches and they particularly like to see

Email List

John Kay

If you have recently started attending one of our area meetings and you have an email address you may find it useful for me to include you on the monthly list of subscribers who receive the Newsletter each month by email.

The main advantage is that you don't have to pick up a

ordinary Quakers and talk to them. (Help is always welcome in the way of washing up and bringing cakes, of course).

The summer holidays are always fun as our teenagers are home from college and perhaps work abroad, but their own Young Friends often have more claim. Our Schedules are now being handed out, and although ours is a prosperous Meeting there is always need for money, especially for central expenses.

News, please, by the middle of the month, to Valerie Graves.

printed copy although you still do so if you wish. Additionally of course the email version is in colour.

All you have to do is send me an email to john@millrind.co.uk from your preferred email address asking me to include you and you will be included in the next monthly mailing.

ing of our small Clacton Hearts and Minds group, just five of us, brought us closer as we took turns at presenting and leading sessions. There was a powerful and even humorous atmosphere as we revealed doubts and beliefs that could never have been guessed at in normal weekly contact. There was also a touching confidence in the group and a willingness to accept every shade of belief and doubt. It drew us together and made us aware of the variety of life experience that adds to the richness of older peoples' groups. The biscuits, served with a hot drink at the end of each session, were a big highlight. Our thanks to Hazel Jones for

them, and for setting the group up, as well as providing each presenter with guidelines which gave us all simple ways to conduct the sessions.

Another person commented, "Having known Friends and attended Meetings occasionally over many years, it was good to have time to think about what drew me to Quakers. I found the material in the course and the contributions of all the other participants very relevant and it has brought new depth to Meetings for Worship and helped me greatly in other aspects of daily life."

A number of friends from Clacton and Harwich Meetings

attended the 'Experiment with Light' Silent Retreat at Colchester Meeting House on April 9th. Janet Thomas sums up her experience of this event:

'Words and Pictures' - Surrealist artists, we were told, used various means, not all recommended, to achieve altered states of consciousness. We were to use Meditation. After Helen's deeply Guided Meditation we went on to produce art work in a similar

way to that of automatic writing. Our pictures would, sooner or later, release their meanings to us ... It was a programmed, time tabled day, somewhat at odds with the contemplative quiet but as intriguing as it was unexpected.

It is anticipated that the exterior walls of the Meeting House

will be repaired and repainted as soon as there are a few continuous days of fine weather.



Conversation in a cable car

Ernest Hall

Many years ago when our two sons were in their early teens (they are now in their sixties!) my wife Heather and I took them to Austria on a camping holiday. Austria is a picturesque country full of friendly welcoming people and I was pleased to be able to exercise the very ungrammatical German I had learnt as a P.O.W.

One day we took a cable car to the summit of the Muttersberg. We shared the cable car with a German family who were the mirror image of ourselves; mum and dad in middle age and two early teenage children. I think that they had a boy and girl. We conversed and I congratulated the father on his excellent English. 'Ah yes', he said. 'I was a POW in England for three years. I worked on a farm. That's where I learned to speak English'.

I told him, 'I too was a POW for three years but I only spent 18 months in a working camp (Arbeitskommando) in Germany. My first eighteen

months as a POW were spent in a large concentration camp in Italy'. That was why his English was a lot better than my German'

'Where were you captured?' I asked him. 'Tobruk', he replied adding in case I'd never heard of it, 'that's in Libya in North Africa'. It's a small world! I had been captured in Tobruk in June 1942 and he just a few months later the same year!

That's not all that we had in common. Like me, he had been a gunner (Kannonier) on a German mobile heavy gun (mine was a 6 in howitzer, his a 155mm gun). Between January and May 1942 (when Rommel launched his major offensive) we had served on opposite sides of the Gazala line. Like me he had gone with his gun and gun-team into the miles-wide 'operational area' that separated the two armies. Like us, they had fired at unseen targets under the command of a Gun Position officer who was informed by an Observation Officer and his team who could see the target! At the end of the day a posh voice over the radio would assure us that, 'Our mobile artillery has been active in the

Libyan desert today. There have been several artillery duels and an enemy battery has been silenced'. The 'silencing' of a battery usually meant no more than that they had used up their quota of ammunition or had been ordered to be back at base at 6.00 pm, 7.00 pm or whatever. No doubt the German troops were hearing much the same rubbish on their radio.

The realisation that a few years earlier, in a desert land far from either of our homes, this friendly and likeable middle aged family-man and I had been trying (unsuccessfully thank goodness!) to kill each other, reinforced my conviction of the value of our Peace Testimony, far more than any impassioned speeches I had ever heard in Meeting Houses or elsewhere.

Cable car on the Muttersberg





Experiment with Light

Robbie Spence

My reflections on the one-day Quaker retreat on Saturday 9 April at Colchester Meeting House, convened by Ellen Cohen, and facilitated by Helen Meads and Andrea, the artist with the pink hair.

Well, it wasn't billed as "Experiment with Light" but rather, as in the terms below, as a day of silent mediation:

"To wait in the Light is an invitation to all and of benefit to all regardless of lack of experience. During the day we shall have periods of silence including lunch and also time to reflect, express and share our retreat experience."

In fact, it was more like Experiment with Paint, which, again, seemed to take a number of retreatants by surprise.

I enjoyed it hugely and am proud of my painting. The most valuable part of the day, for me, was the contemplation period of silence followed by the opportunity for visual self-expression.

As was said during the concluding remarks:

1. Many of us appreciated the way the meditation was 'led', in that Helen Meads punctuated the silence every few minutes with a sentence or phrase taken from George Fox's writings about The Light. This gave the meditation, which was under an hour long, some shape and direction and even purpose. (I'd love to see the script.)

2. Sitting in one large circle throughout the plenary sessions was a refreshing change from our standard Sunday worship practice of sitting in rows.

3. The preparatory period before the silence to practise with the pastels and inks was important in that it enabled people to familiarise themselves with the oil-resist technique and loosen up their painting skills.

4. It was remarkable that there were so few men: 20 women and 3 men.

To these remarks I'd add the following:

1. It would have been better during the 'worship sharing' sessions (see QF&P 12:21 for the initiated) to have actually had our paintings in the session when we talked about them.

2. It was a shame that the flip-chart with the timetable on it was rarely in the same room as the people who wanted to refer to it and find out what was happening when. A minor grumble and easily solvable next time, I hope.

3. The session after the meditation and before lunch, about 20 minutes, was a bit weird and aimless in my opinion, and I wandered around the Meeting House feeling a bit like a spare part and wondering if others felt the same.

4. As someone who has led art workshops in the past, I have great admiration for the ease with which Andrea prepared us and the James Parnell room and laid out the space and materials for a score of people to work on quite a large scale (A2 size paintings) without mess or mishap.

To conclude, then, many thanks to Ellen and her fellow Experiment with Lighters, and to the three outside facilitators.



Wildlife Spot

from Valerie Graves

As I have said, wildlife of all sorts seems to be in a muddle, flowering at the wrong time, for instance. My autumn-flowering cherry, for instance, is cheerfully embarking on its third display. I am always afraid that they will exhaust themselves. Then all sorts of things have appeared that I haven't planted, including some particularly pretty miniature daffodils.

The frogs were late: they usually start croaking and dancing round about St Valentine's Day, but this year only one appeared. However, a gang suddenly appeared some weeks later, and now we have lots of tadpoles. Most of the usual spring shrubs like forsythia came out early but have a lot of flowers, so we must take what comes.



Area Meeting Residential Weekend

Jenny Kay & Phyl Reid

From dinner on Friday night to afternoon tea on Sunday, spend time with Friends and friends in beautiful surroundings at High Leigh Conference Centre, 18 - 20 November.

Our Area Meeting gathering will give us the opportuni-

ty to take part in many varied activities, listening to a talk by Sandra Berry who is the Director at Woodbrooke, sharing in small groups enjoying some leisure time. All this, free WI-FI and all rooms are en-suite.

Cost £150 per person or £75 deposit payable now followed by second payment of £75 by September 2016 and bursaries are available.

Twenty Friends have signed up already and we hope that there are more or you planning to come but have not got round to contacting us yet or to making up your minds. We gave 30 April as the suggested time by which to let us know if you plan to come as this was helpful for planning purposes but this is obviously being extended as we are only half way to forming a viable

group and meeting our booking commitment to 40 places.

Please complete an application form, available at meeting houses, online at South East Anглиan Quakers website or ask Phyl Reid, Jenny Kay or Peter Whiteley.

Attenders' Feelings

Anne Watkinson

At a recent attenders' event in Colchester I asked Friends present to put some of their thoughts on post-it notes which were displayed during the event for others to read. At the end, Friends asked that these be typed up and more widely circulated. Les Wood kindly did this and here are the thoughts for wider readership. Thank you Les.

Friends were asked to write the questions they have about Quakers and Quakerism on blue notes:

We don't often mention God. Why?

Are Quakers losing their Biblical foundations?

How do I meet others when they are expressing challenging opinions and views of the world?

Why are Friends so slow at making decisions in non-spiritual matters?

How can I focus on the Light when my head is full of unwanted thoughts?

Are Attenders and members of equal value?

What are Quaker core beliefs?

Should Friends do more to make themselves known to the general public?

How imperative is the God / Christianity belief? Because my faith is rather amorphous and I'm more inclined towards the overall principles of respect, helping others, peace etc.

Why don't we have more fund raising meals?

How is our Area Meeting 'living out our faith in the world'? BYM 2015 said 'we cannot avoid our spiritual loving concerns from being political'.



How is our Area Meeting 'being political'? Why are we not more political?

What do members experience during Meeting?

?Christian? Bible – young people.

Friends were later asked, on yellow post-its, to say why they were a member, or if not a member, why they came to Meeting for Worship.

As a member I come to Meeting ...

For worshipping together. To be given help with my spiritual journey.

To make new friends. To become aware of the projects etc. that further Quaker testimonies.

To learn what silence and stillness can offer my life, my relationship to others and my relationship to a higher being.

Attender – Interested in historical knowledge of Quakers social action in Colchester

and attracted by the commitment of Quakers to radical dissent and social justice.

Makes me pause in the busyness of everyday life.

A feeling of having spiritual freedom.

Seeking a sense of community and inclusion.

My husband and I were encouraged to become members by Derek Crosfield and we felt convinced that it was the right time after several weeks as attenders.

I've been a member since 2004. I took up membership because I believe in God but I don't believe in any of the doctrines or dogmas of the main

religions. If I weren't a Quaker I would be a pagan.

As a member, to share the adventure of a spiritual journey with those I feel in communion with. The journey has so far lasted for over 40 years.

I felt comfortable with Quakers and reached a point where I decided to commit myself to membership.

Attender. For peace, reflection and being with like-minded people who have a similar system of principles and beliefs.

I cannot imagine not being a member. I joined in 1967.

I am not a member. I find here, in group meditation, a dimension that is different from the solo kind.

I am a little bit bi-polar and the friendship here helps a lot in the 'down times'; it makes them pass more quickly.

I come for love of humanity as well as myself. No other reason for being here.

A sense of community. Sharing. Giving.

Attender at Colchester because it represents Quakerism while BYM, for me, does not.

To be in a community of seekers with similar values. Hoping for a transcendent experience.

I am a member because it feels right. If I don't come to Meeting, I miss it. Being a part of the Meeting helps me to feel connected to something bigger.

Oh! Do Let Us Be Kind!

from Valerie Graves

I have been reading a book about a wealthy Czech family and their life from the late '20s till near the present time, called *The Glass Room* by Simon Mawr. It is said to be a true story, though of course all names are changed. The principal character is a well-off, Jewish car manufacturer, who marries and builds an astonishing house all of glass. He and his wife and family live there for some years and the house is greatly admired. But in the middle thirties or so, the Nazi menace begins to appear and the family move first to Switzerland and later to America. It gives a remarkable idea of how the quality of life is gradually eroded and destroyed for all walks of life. Those who can afford to escape, do but others just have to

bear it. The Glass House is taken over as an identity-examining laboratory which sorts people into Aryan, Slav, Mixed, and Undesirable, in immense personal detail, including things like breadth of nostrils and length of ear-lobes. Ordinary people didn't much like it but had to accept being designated in this humiliating way, or else they were just quietly removed to what were then called "work camps" from which they never emerged.

I have to remind you that this is a true story written by a Czech quite recently, possibly by one of the family. The father did die, but by a sailing accident in America. They came back because of some administrative query: the country had not yet settled back into normality and was ruled by what I

can only call a lot of Jacks-in Office who had done very well for themselves! The family did still own the Glass House, which had not been much damaged. The story stops there, leaving you completely in the dark.

You are left with horror that apparently nice, harmless people can live and tolerate such terrible behaviour. I expect it just grows on you and becomes acceptable. Let us promise ourselves that we will be able to spot it happening and stamp on it! And begin by just being a bit nicer in every way.



The Tugendhat House by Mies van der Rohe

A Tricky Job for the Elders

John Hall

Because "it is laid upon elders to care for individual Friends and attenders, entering with sympathy into their needs and to encourage [them] to take responsibility for their rightful part in the life of the community" (*QF&P 12.12 g & k*), I wonder what you would have done if you had been an elder in this case. Would the outcome have been what you expected?

Between 1285 and 1836, it was the law in England that tithes and church tax be paid to legally appointed priests. Quakers objected to this as, according to the Bible (*1 Peter 5:2*), priests should not be paid for ministering to their congregations and that since Old Testament times, taxes were not charged for religious purposes. The Testimony weighed heavily on Friends because their goods were severely distrained to pay the money which the clergy

believed to be part of their stipend. Any Friend who paid tithes was likely to be disowned by his or her Meeting.

Samuel Bownas (1676 – 1753) was a Quaker travelling in the ministry who, like nearly all Friends, refused to pay tithes and who had been in jail because of it. In his biography (published posthumously in 1756), he tells how a well-meaning, non-Quaker relation tried to keep him out of prison.

While Samuel was away visiting various Meetings as a recorded minister, a distant relation called on his wife Joan and asked her to lend him ten pounds [about £2000 in today's money] so that he could buy some sheep and cattle to fatten-up for market. This she did and he gave her a receipt. Later, when Samuel was again away, the relative returned and told Joan that he wished to repay the loan. He asked for the chit but when she gave it to him,

he tore it up and produced from his pocket a receipt for ten pounds from the vicar of Lymington.

"Your husband," he said, "is, we allow, a man of sense, but in this he is a stubborn fool; and I would have paid it out of my own pocket, rather than he should have ruined you and himself, which this Exchequer Suit would soon have done if it had gone on, and you must have paid ten times more if it had gone on, which now I have cleared for ten pounds; I think you are exceedingly well off."

But Joan was far from impressed, saying that she was more concerned with her husband's inward peace, than the legal consequences.

When he returned home, Joan told Samuel about their relative's trick and how, with the receipt destroyed, they had no evidence that they had not breached the

Testimony. They could be in serious trouble with their Meeting.

Samuel decided to explain the whole matter to the Elders who laid no blame on the couple but could not decide how to proceed. One was for suing the relative for the ten pounds but others said that that would do more harm than good. They decided that Joan and Samuel

Clerk's Corner

Alison Parkes

Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting Clerk

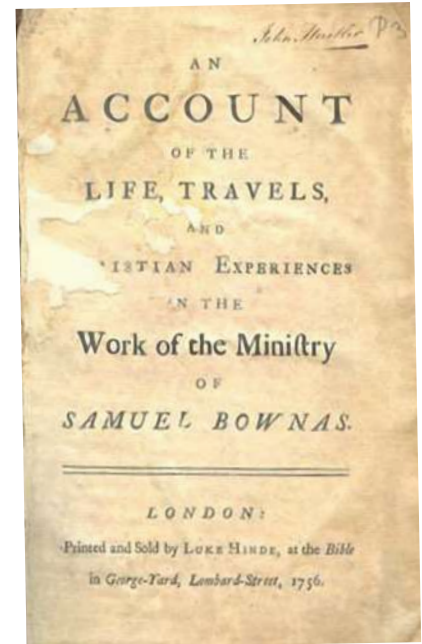
Last night I learned the origin of the word "companion", which is derived from the Latin "com" (meaning 'with') and "pan" (meaning 'bread'). So a companion is someone with whom one breaks bread. I was attending a talk by Richard Wilkinson, author of "The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone". I first heard Richard Wilkinson speak at a Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) event at the launch of the book in 2010. Six years on and people are still learning the truths revealed by "The Spirit Level" about how almost everything - from life expectancy to mental illness, violence to illiteracy - is affected not by how wealthy a society is, but how equal it is; that societies with a bigger gap between rich and poor

should tell the relative how much harm he had done in their eyes. The relative replied that he could not understand why they had taken it amiss as he was only doing what he thought was for their good and anyway, he could only wonder at Friends being so stubbornly opposed to the law that they would allow it to injure them.

are bad for everyone in them, including the well-off.

The talk was organised by the Colchester branch of the Equality Trust and attended by perhaps 60 people, which included Reg Webb and myself. Afterwards there was a Q&A session in which we heard about local instances of prejudice, mistrust, gated communities and blatant inequality but also of steps being taken towards a fairer society. In particular, over the last 5 years, Fairness Commissions and similar bodies have been established in 23 places around the country. Each commission has set out to tackle inequality and poverty at local level in a context of national government spending cuts. Achievements of commissions include raising thousands of people from minimum wage to living wage, exposing and limiting the activities of payday loan companies, boosting membership of credit unions, improving accessibility of advice services, and changing the practices of private landlords on tenancy agreements and housing quality.

It goes without saying that Quakers are walking alongside Fairness Commissions and the Equality Trust, and working towards ways to reduce the gap between rich and poor, whether that is through supporting Quaker Social Action, the Quaker Housing Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, or in some other way, including support for BYM, Area Meeting (AM) or your Local Meeting (LM). As individuals and as Meetings, it is incumbent up-



on

us to be alert to how we might influence the gap between rich and poor. When we look for a new job, do we consider the pay ratio of highest to lowest earner? Do we take every possible opportunity to argue the case for improving local services? Do we speak up for practical support for people on low incomes struggling with funeral costs? Do we recognise the inequalities of gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. that abound around us, even if we are not personally affected?

One measure of an equal society is that it is a place where neighbour breaks bread with neighbour, and where the gap between rich and poor is not so great as to prevent the sharing of a meal. As Quakers, do you think we do that enough with one another, let alone with others? In the breaking of bread together, we can truly become companions.

The next Area Meeting will be held on Sunday May 8, 2.15 pm at Sudbury Quaker Meeting House, 22 Friars Street, Sudbury CO10 2AA. For more details, please see the AM website Business page www.essexsuffolkquakers.org. All are welcome, though if you are an Attender (i.e. not in membership), please ask the Clerk for permission to attend.

