SOUTHERN EAST ANGLIA AREA QUAKER MEETING

Diary Dates for June

Friday June 3rd Colchester Farmers' Market
Sunday June 5th Social Sunday gathering at the home of Helen and John Lewis - Coggeshall Open Gardens day-citizenship/water-week
Monday June 20th to Sunday June 26th
Saturday June 11th to Friday June 17th Oxfam Water Week - education awareness campaign Refugee Week
Thursday June 23rd EU referendum
Saturday June 25th Regional Gathering - Colchester - Kindlers Workshop
Sunday July 10th Area Meeting, Earls Colne FMH, 2.15 pm

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
email address:AMClerk@essexsuffolkquakers.org

Web Address:
www.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,

FIRST CONTACT
FOR FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS
CLACTON..........................Carol Holding
COLCHESTER..........................Carol Holding
SUDBURY..........................Peter Whiteley

Meeting for Sufferings

Robert Parkes

Living out our faith in the World - making connections, meeting the challenge.

MfS continues to discern how it can help Quakers in Britain prepare for the challenge of living out our faith in the world (Minute 36 Yearly Meeting 2015) and at this meeting we considered some of the connections we have, or need to develop.

We were again reminded how we are part of a world-wide community of Friends, there are over 70 other Yearly Meetings. This is to be celebrated but is not without challenge. To paraphrase the epistle from the recent world plenary in Peru: we are a diverse collection of Friends, we are challenged by our differences, and this is not always comfortable. Yet the message from Peru is that 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. Through listening deeply and tenderly to each other and to God we can reach 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.

Just as British Quakers are seeking to connect with other Friends around the world, others are looking to connect with Quakers in Britain. This is especially so on the testimony to sustainability. Friends abroad are keen to know what we are doing. We are encouraged to share sustainability stories via the “Quakers in the World” project.

Editorial

Dear Friends,

Spring is here, and I don’t think I have ever seen such a display of flowering trees. I can just hear all my gloomy elderly relations telling me “we shall pay for this”. Let us be optimistic, for once.

Things seem to be going well for our Meeting, with lots of migrants and refugees seemingly happily settled with us. I do think it is important for us to get to know one another and be happy with all that life throws at us. I was looking at some old photos and found one of me sitting on the floor and reading a story to a group of 5-10 year old children and I expect it was a favourite, one of Kipling’s called the Miracle of Purun Bhagat. Not an exciting or eventful story, but I think the children liked it because of the warm and friendly relationship that an old man had with the animals. I am sure that this is much more important than stirring tales of adventure and terror.

I used to do so many things with Friends and often with several roles at the same time! As ever, Friends were diffident and reluctant about taking things on, but now that I am old and forgetful I feel that perhaps I can keep in the background.

But don’t let that stop you, Friends. Have a go at something, and I can promise you that you’ll enjoy it, even if you have some struggles at first. News, please, by the middle of the month, to Valerie Graves.
Another topic explored by MfS was how Area Meetings (AMs) connect with each other, and to Friends House and its centrally managed work, both generally and more specifically to test concerns and actually do Quaker work. In living out our faith we are called to work collaborative-ly. This is seen as a call to connect with others, to non-Quakers, but there is probably a lot more we can do to collaborate between AMs. We are connecting with mid-Essex over the Quaker Tapestry, as an up-to-date example. What else might we do to collaborate across AM boundaries?

In living out our faith we also seek a future where all Friends understand and live by Quaker discipline. To many Friends this might seem rather obvious. Others, however, may struggle with what is meant by testing a concern. This shouldn’t be a mystery, after all it’s all set out in our book of discipline. The challenge is to be better connected with it. It is hoped that the programme of reading QFP, which we have embarked on, should help address this. Meanwhile, we’ve been invited to put into practice our knowledge of testing concerns, and perhaps learn something along the way, in relation to two minutes that came before MfS: the decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs; and a vision for a criminal justice system. Both these minutes are separate agenda items for this Area Meeting.

Finally, how are we connecting with Young Friends (YFs)? The experience of Peru is that YFs have vision, energy and passion (something I witnessed when I was a guest of Cuba’s Yearly Meeting a few years ago). This has left MfS wondering if YFs in Britain are an underused resource. What does that mean for our own meeting?

As usual, a set of the papers, including the minutes, can be found on the Quaker.org website. https://quakers-production.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/store/145263ca3fc832aa043a82ab8449c236fbe5181b289d84f758a399f471db

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**Area Meeting**, 8 May 2016
Ann Webb

We Quakers, eighteen strong, met in Sudbury on an unusually warm day in May to discuss AM matters. People were appointed to roles and an application for membership was recorded. The death of Friend Derek Adams was held in the Light.

Reporting to AM this month was Rosemary Sturgiss concerning the Gathering on Our Sustainability Commitment in March and Rob Parkes with the Meeting for Sufferings concerns. Both reports are in this newsletter and on the Area Meeting website.

Mary Grocock gave a moving poetic report about the Refugee Befriending Group and the efforts made by Friends and the Colchester community to make refugees and asylum seekers feel welcomed, especially the Harra family. The staff of Fresh Beginnings have also been especially helpful in providing translations between groups. The Area Meeting has purchased 20 copies of a visual Arabic-English dictionary for the use of the Befriending group or anyone who would like to become involved as a befriender.

Another issue facing Friends is the future of Regional Gathering for our AM, Mid-Essex, Thaxted, and Ipswich & Diss AMs. Long standing Clerk Susan Garratt as asked for help with discerning how to proceed in the future since attendance
numbers have been declining. Is this the time to lay down the meeting? Other issues under review were whether to run a children’s programme, change the time to perhaps 12:30 with lunch to follow, and how to better promote the meeting with posters and other publications. Jenny Kay offered a good summation of the history of RG and the role it played in Friends’ meeting together three times a year.

The next Regional Gathering will be at Colchester Meeting House 25 June and will be a Kindlers on the Road workshop “What Does Love Require of Us?” Friends are encouraged to attend this gathering and come to September Area Meeting prepared to discuss the suggestions made for the future of Regional Gathering.

Tested concerns are at the heart of Meetings for Worship for Business in the company of Friends. Two such concerns have arisen from Cornwall AM and QPSW Central Committee. The former is concerned with the legalisation of drugs and the latter with the reformation of the criminal justice system. Both AMs have briefing papers on these concerns, which can be found through links on our Southern East Anglia AM website (Business Page, Calling Papers section). Please follow these links and read the briefing papers so that by September AM we may all discuss these issues with a better understanding. Meeting for Sufferings will be considering them in December and we need to inform them if we want to send a Minute of Record.

A lovely tea followed wherein our Assistant Clerk had contributed to her usual clumsiness and broke a mug, hopefully of minimal value. Apologies Sudbury Meeting. Hopefully, Friends can overlook such Bull-in-the-China-shop behaviour and accept our Assistant Clerk’s assistance when we meet again in Earls Colne on 10 July. I promise to try and keep all elbows and knees inside the carriage at all times.

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Refugee Befrienders Group

Mary Grocock

I told you about the first tea-party for refugees, now I am reporting on the second and they differed. In the first there was much goodwill mixed with a deal of uncertainty. There’s verse about that one.

In the interim there has been bread-making with Tim, family shopping, an outing to Castle Park. Hana, our dear and valued translator, has a job and a flat.

The second party was more positively intelligible and we had these com-
prehensive picture dictionaries. We understood more of Syrian joys and sadness. Members of different families talked together, an important step for them.

One young father, beaming all over his face, said, “I am so happy because my wife and daughter arrived yesterday from Germany.” She had been there to visit her bereaved mother whose husband had been safely in Europe for only one month before his death.

This young wife is delighted with their apartment which contains, she said, 4 big safe rooms and a space outdoors.

A bearded gentleman could almost hold a conversation in English, which he has been learning for only 5 months. And other Syrians too had made notable advance in communicating with us.

It was helpful to meet beneficiaries of other families. I’d hoped to find them all but only managed those from Bethel Church.

Of our family, we wish so much that their life in this country will become easier.

Mary wrote this poem too:
Big blind baker
blinded by war
but not his war,
on plastic chair
but not his chair,
needs clean strong wood
to throne his girth
with a drift of flour
on the arm.

Bright beautiful wife
dark fabric swathed
that dims her light.
Both gravely still
and dignified,
both burdened by
their history.
Both beam alive
when we clasp warm hands.
We are honoured by
their smiles.

**AM Residential Gathering**

18 – 20 November 2016

Jenny Kay

The theme is Leadings, How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We are using Quaker Faith and Practice Chapter 29 as our guide to planning the weekend.

From the introduction to the chapter.

*Individually and corporately Friends are seeking new ways of expressing our testimonies to equality and social justice, to the building of peace, to truth and integrity in public affairs, and to simplicity in a lifestyle that reflects our renewed understanding of our relationship with all creation.*

*As we try to respond to new leadings we often cannot discern what will remain important and what will be seen as ephemeral. There will be tensions as we wrestle with our diverse perceptions and convictions, and tensions can be creative. Our hope and our experience is that when be of faithful we shall be rightly led.*

29.01 How can we walk with a smile into the dark? We must learn to put our trust in God and the leadings of the Spirit. How many of us are truly led by the Spirit throughout our daily lives? I have turned to God when I’ve had a difficult decision to make or when I have sought strengths to endure the pain in dark times. But I’m only slowly learning to dwell in the place where leadings come from. That is a place of love and joy and peace, even in the midst of pain. The more I dwell in that place the easier it is to smile because I am no longer afraid.

If we dwell in the presence of God we shall be led by the spirit. We do well to remember that being led by the spirit depends not so much upon God who is always there to lead us, as upon our willingness to be led. We need to be willing to be led into the dark house well as through green pastures and by still waters.

We do not need to be afraid of the dark, because God is there. The future of this earth need not be in the hands of the world’s ‘leaders’. The world is in God’s hands if we are led by God. Let us be led by the spirit. Let us walk with a smile into the dark.

Gordon Matthews, 1987

Rachel Britton in her article in the Friend 20 May ‘Where love and Truth Cohere’ writes about 29.17. Both are recommended as preliminary reading for the weekend.
Quakers and Money

John Lewis

It was a warm day in London last week, mixing the perceived certainties of Quaker concerns with the actual uncertainties of money. For these are not two separate subjects and one should influence the other.

A couple of times a year invitations go out to those interested in our ethical concerns, refugees, human trafficking and modern slavery, inequality, the arms trade and so on. We spend a day struggling to clear our minds and try to work out how we inform ourselves. Usually a prominent charity or NGO leader is the main speaker but as the audience is full of the interested, we learn as much from informal questions and answers.

How do we know what lies behind that cheap shirt I bought? Why are some vegetables cheaper than others? Those frozen prawns, are they really from Bangladesh? And why not get the car cleaned by an cheerful Albanian behind the pub car park? Every part of our day involves our ethical concerns and the money we spend in this well-off country.

If we are relatively well-off we have an even greater duty to make sure that the shops, the pension funds, the power companies, the cleaning companies, the businesses we invest in and spend our money on, share our values. The banks and financial companies are especially important because they have most influence but fortunately, with some help, it is nowadays possible to find out a lot about the ethical standards of most businesses.

There is a continuum, a continuous thread that runs through our shopping activities, our banking and our investing. That thread is our ethical beliefs. Every activity of a committed Friend is influenced by those beliefs, whether he is buying his electricity, paying a gardener, buying a unit trust or contributing to his pension.

So it is rewarding to find a well-known investment adviser acting out those same attitudes and organising a days discussion of the challenges, how we can challenge our own and others’ actions when faced with a world that is not always sympathetic to our ethical beliefs.

Any Friends interested in this should let me know. Space is not unlimited but invitations can be arranged.

Looking Ahead

John Kay

As we all get older we have sometimes to have a proper regard for what happens when we are no longer able to do what we have been doing through ill-health or inevitably death.

With this sobering thought in mind I thought that now would be a good time to ask. Are there any IT capable Friends who might be able to take over the job that I have done for over nearly 30 years, that is producing the Area Meeting Newsletter?

I don’t envisage stopping in the near future but would be a good time to pass on the knowledge that I have acquired to someone willing and able to be a subsequent replacement for me.

A working knowledge of a computer would be good, experience with a desktop publisher would be good but not essential. All expenses are covered by the Area Meeting.

Please contact me if you are interested in this, on email or at 01206 240929.

john@millrind.co.uk
**The Boy and the Starfish**

Una Lawrence

An old man was walking along a deserted beach at sunset. As he walked he could see a young boy walking towards him in the distance and as he drew nearer he noticed that the boy kept bending down, picking something up and throwing it into the water.

Time and again he kept hurling things into the ocean.

As the old man approached even closer, he was able to see that the boy was picking up starfish that had been washed up and stranded on the beach during an exceptionally high tide. Now and then he stopped and threw one back into the water.

The old man asked the boy, “What do you think you’re doing?”

The boy replied, “I am throwing these washed up starfish back into the ocean, or else they will die”.

“But”, said the old man, “You can’t possibly save them all, there are thousands on this beach, and this must be happening on hundreds of beaches along the coast”. He smiled patronisingly and said, “How can you make a difference?”

The boy looked down. He frowned for a moment; then bent down to pick up another starfish. Then he smiled as he threw it back into the sea and said, “I made a huge difference to that one!”

Author Unknown

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**Wildlife Spot**

from Valerie Graves

As I have said, we have an astonishing display of blossom on trees and shrubs, and lots of new things, especially miniature daffodils, which I am delighted to see and claim no responsibility for. But on closer examination I have also found a lot of little shrublets that have quietly died, sad to say, and a big cherry (supposedly autumn-flowering) which was looking very unwell so I hurriedly ran the hose over it. I realised that we had had very little rain, but now we have had quite a lot. I can see that I am painting the picture of a rather slapdash gardener, but I do get tired and breathless these days. My garden is a bit rough and ready, but I like it that way.
**Clerk's Corner**

Alison Parkes  
Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting Clerk

The refugee crisis and our response to it have preoccupied Friends across the Area Meeting over recent months, quite rightly. However, there are other big issues challenging Friends and two of these have been brought to the attention of AMs around the country and our discernment sought. These are matters which could impact the fabric of British society, and it is good for us to lift our sights from our usual preoccupations and see how we might contribute to the discernment about them. The topics for our consideration are as follows:

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) Minute 14 - Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

This is a concern of Cornwall AM, which is asking for help with testing the concern. A briefing paper is available, and Friends from Cornwall would be happy to talk with us. More information is available on the South West Quakers website.

MfS Minute 17 - Vision for a criminal justice system

Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee is considering this paper, which builds on and develops previous work. The Committee hopes Friends will help test the vision expressed in the paper.

Friends, we are all asked to inform ourselves on these topics, which we will revisit at AM in September. There are links to briefing papers on the Business page of the AM website, under “Calling papers”. Friends of each Local Meeting can assist one another with accessing printed copies of the material as needed. Queries can be addressed to LM Clerks and AM Clerk. We plan to invite a Friend from Cornwall AM to speak to us by September AM about the issue on drugs, so please look out for details when arrangements have been made. Reg Webb has offered to prepare an introduction for AM on the topic of a vision for a criminal justice system, which will help our discernment at AM in September.

References to AM in September may suggest that there is no AM before then, not so! At AM in July, we hope to receive the Annual Report and Accounts. You may think this a dry topic but the financial health of our AM helps guide our decision-making about how we “live out our faith in the world”, which is the theme of this year’s Yearly Meeting, held in London at the end of May.

The next Area Meeting will be held on Sunday July 10, 2.15 pm at Earls Colne Quaker Meeting House, 4 Burrows Road, Earls Colne, CO6. 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.

**A Wonderful Book**

from Valerie Graves

Did you realise, I wonder, what a lot of Quakers in the past were great students of plants? Not just because so many avocations were closed to them, but because they liked studying thing in depth and in great detail. I have been re-reading Darwin’s Travels in the Beagle, which shows how much he enjoyed it, though perhaps he paid more attention to the animal kingdom than plants. (He was, for instance, fascinated by earthworms). My new book is The Cabaret of Plants, by Richard Mabey, and tells in great detail of all kinds of complicated activities of plants of which humans had been completely unaware, and which shows that plants do have elaborate lives that show their total unconcern about other creatures. (I am afraid you must regard the Book of Genesis as a flight of fantasy). I was enthralled, and could not put it down, though it is a large and very heavy book. Many of the earlier Quaker plant-fanciers have written fascinating books, too, and there are several in our Meeting House library.