



Tapestry Exhibition, Chelmsford Cathedral

NEWSLETTER

SOUTHERN EAST ANGLIA AREA QUAKER MEETING

October 2016

Diary Dates for October

All of October Black History Month <http://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk>

Friday October 7th Colchester Farmers' Market

Saturday October 8th, 10.00 to 17.00 Time to Stop the War conference, marking 15 years of the "War on Terror" Venue: TUC House, London <http://stopwar.org.uk>

Tuesday 18 October talk by Jenny Kay Fordham Village Hall "Conscientious Objection in WWI"

Saturday October 29th to Sunday 30th Clocks go back one hour overnight

Saturday November 5th Colchester Quaker Annual Sale

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: 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.....Carol Holding COLCHESTER.....Carol Holding SUDBURY.....Peter Whiteley</p>

Area Meeting Notes

by Ann Webb

It was a warm Sunday, 11 September when 20 Friends met at Colchester Meeting house for a Meeting for worship for Church Affairs.

Notice was given of the death of Jack Burfoot recently on 16 August. He was remembered in a moment of silence. A request was made by the Clerk for someone from Colchester meeting to write a Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of Jack Burfoot. I believe these are important records for our Area Meeting to keep. Testimonies, whether included officially in Quaker Faith and Practice or not, are powerful statements to future generations about the faithfulness of Friends past.

Editorial

Dear Friends

October has always been my favourite time of year: a time for getting rid of rubbish, turning the page, starting a new term and perhaps a new school. Indeed it is a much better time than spring for a general clear-out!

We have lots of refugees and migrants in the town, and I would have said that there wasn't much unpleasantness towards them, but since Brexit I believe there has been some. I love to talk to strangers if I meet them, it is always most interesting to hear their views about Eng-

Tea Party

Peggy Lewis

The sky was blue and the sun shone brilliantly and the garden came into its own for our third 'at home' event for the Syrians living now in Colchester.

We invited the two families the Meeting are befriending so there would have the chance of getting to know one another better. The door from the Parnell room wide open, chairs arranged in the garden and good food, including a plate of date pastries made by Khadija.

Faiaa's two children, Salwa and Amed, were soon playing with Ian's two, Daniel

New appointments and the release of others from roles were recorded. Please see the AM September minutes for details.

Next, it was noted that Saffron Walden School has had its last General Meeting in June, therefore, a representative to this meeting will no longer be necessary. The name has been changed to Walden School and newsletters are still available to those who wish to receive it by contacting the school.

Friends then discussed the frequency of the Area Meeting newsletter and the number of copies issued on paper (due to costs). It was suggested that perhaps the newsletter be published six times a year due to content availability and deadlines coinciding with Area Meetings. After some discussion it was agreed to keep the publishing frequency and particulars to the discretion of John Kay, graphic

designer, and Valerie Graves, Editor. The bus stop is a good place, or the bank, last week I was chatting with visitors from Thailand and from Nepal. Of course they do look a bit different, and often people wear head scarves or other dress that makes them stand out, but with the great majority of people you have no clue. One can quote that irritating cliché "if you see someone without a smile, give them one of yours", but lots of people do go round with glum unwelcoming faces.

Talking about rubbish, I hope you enjoy my piece about compost. News, please, by the middle of the month, to Valerie Graves.

and Ella, with the international language of football breaking all barriers. Even some grown-ups showed off their football skills. Skipping was a popular sport which included us all charting the numbers out with each jump, hoping to improve their counting.

Hana was there and was so useful with translating. We had an interesting discussion about prayer times and customs and the two husbands, Mohammed and Mohideen had a lot to say about this.

It really was a very good event, which we all enjoyed.

I volunteered to help John with the production of the newsletter if he needed it and I also offer my assistance to Valerie as Editor if need be.

It was recorded that the Quaker Tapestry exhibition at Chelmsford Cathedral attracted 3,309 visitors! Mid-Essex Friends thanked our Area Meeting for the donation of £3,000 to help defray costs and for those who acted as stewards.

There was an update from the Refugee Befriending group. Many activities have been occurring in Local meetings and in conjunction with the folks at Fresh Beginnings in Colchester. There is a new family that is being supported as well. We continue to support Fresh Beginnings with a monthly donation of £200.

The future of Regional Gatherings was the next topic for discussion. It was brought to our attention by Su-

san Garrett, Clerk of Regional Gathering, and input was requested from Local and Area Meetings. We asked ourselves who would miss not having Regional Gathering or whether it figured prominently in most Quakers lives at this point. We wondered whether it was a matter of attracting more people, providing more activities for children, or if we might find other ways to gather and get to know each other, either by contacting neighbouring Area Meetings ourselves or hosting more events at our Local Meeting houses. We noted that the burden of these events tended to fall on Colchester meeting where rôles and attempts to find members to fill these are already stretched to capacity. Friends present did not reach unity on this matter.

At this point we moved to the request from Meeting for Sufferings for our discernment as an Area Meeting about the decriminalization of the personal use of all drugs. This is from Cornwall Area Meeting. We approached this complicated issue, as Friends do, with a prayerful concern and a variety of questions. After much discussion the Clerk offered an eloquent minute which I feel should be published in its entirety:

We considered a concern brought to Meeting for Sufferings by Cornwall AM. MfS has asked for help with testing the concern. A briefing paper was made available online and in print, and two Friends from Cornwall AM (Voirrey and Tony Faragher) came to Colchester to speak to us in July. John Hall presented a summary of the briefing paper and the questions before us.

Before decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use can be seriously considered, we would need to be satisfied on several issues. We cannot form a view on the basis of what Cornwall Friends have said, as much as we might appreciate the diligence of their research. We cannot form a view unless we know what an informed and experienced response would be to the case that has been made, such as from departments in the police and the Home Office, and from Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs.

We sought clarification about what is meant by “all drugs”, as there are some drugs that are extremely strong and dangerous. The line between possessing drugs and offering drugs to others is very fine. People might not be dealers, but could be sharers. Will it be legal to buy drugs, but not to sell them? Might we be putting others in danger by supporting this issue? We were mindful of Advices and Queries 40:

“In view of the harm done by the use of alcohol, tobacco and other habit-forming drugs, consider whether you should limit your use of them or refrain from using them altogether. Remember that any use of alcohol or drugs may impair judgment and put both the user and others in danger.”

The nub of this matter is that people who take drugs need support, and without that support, decriminalisation would be extremely difficult for our society to effectively support. It therefore raises issues to do with funding of support services for rehabilitation.

There are serious consequences to the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use which must be thoroughly considered. We need to enter into the possibilities with our eyes wide open. We need to know, whatever the decision of BYM might be, what happens next? While we agree that it is not ethical to punish people for their vulnerability, we have serious questions about the consequences of a political decision that supports the decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs.

We ask MfS to consider whether the process of asking AMs to consider issues requiring discernment that reaches so deep and so wide, as this matter does, is appropriate.

We decided to save the discussion about Social Justice and Prison Reform for the November meeting. We retired to the Parnell room for tea and cakes.



Three views on Heritage Day at Colchester FMH photos - John Kay



Southern East Anglia Area Quaker Meeting

Colchester Meeting House
ANNUAL SALE
 Saturday 5th November
WANTED
 Bric-a-Brac, Books, Cakes, Jam,
 Plants, Gifts
 Please bring to the Meeting
 House Friday 4th November

Craft People

John Hall

As promised, here is the next photo for the series on craft people.

Jacky Hall, of Colchester Meeting has been knitting for over seventy years. She is ambidextrous and so does not change the knitting around to do the "other side". Here she is knitting "left-handed". She has knitted gansies from the different fishing villages of North-East of England; Fair Isle; Shetland; Aran; and Sanquar. This photo shows her completing one of the many shawls she has knitted over the years

Thank You

Quaker Tapestry

Colin South

This is just a warm and positively glowing thank you for all your help and willingness to help from the Planning Team; Jenny and Jonathan Hodgkin, Sue Swaffin Smith, Angela Kenny and Colin South. For my part, it has been a privilege to work with you as you 'doodled'..that is if you did doodle, or phoned or emailed to mention your availability and then your willingness to take on more than you expected to do in some instances and your willingness to fill in when misadventure struck. For those of you who could not fulfil all your commitments because of various complications, thank you for letting me know and I know that you were disappointed but we managed to find others able to help. We have been so lucky with volunteers this time and we all pulled together to make this occasion as successful as it could have been. Major contributions to stewarding from many Area Meetings including East Anglian Area Meetings as far flung as Thaxted and from individuals as far North as Inverness and Exeter. Thanks to those other Friends who came from afar and were hosted by Friends from Mid Essex. Many thanks to the hosts... a great opportunity to get know other Friends outside our local meetings.

portunity to get know other Friends outside our local meetings.

We had 3309 visitors according to the 'clickometer' that many of us held and I know some folk might have escaped us and, who knows, there may have been one or two who were double counted but I suspect it all worked out in the wash and 3,309 is a good number.

Sheila Hancock got us off to a good start, she was such a friendly person who embarrassed some of us with her enthusiasm for Friends and her Quaker conviction. Embarrassed because some of the criticism of more established church practice implied by her enthusiasm for Friends seemed to fly a little in the face of the generous hospitality of the Cathedral but if it did, the Cathedral staff did not mention it and rather enjoyed Sheila's enthusiasms too. The Cathedral staff, by the way, were delighted by the extra footfall and by the opportunity for ecumenical cooperation and the general ebullient, cheery group that were the Quaker Staff and Stewards.

So thank you again. Thanks to the £3000 from Southern East Anglia AQM, the £2500 from North East Thames AQM and the £2500 from Mid Essex AM. We gave the Quaker Tapestry £8000 towards their £11500 approx total expense and Mid Essex have set aside



another £500 for expenses such as Sheila's travel to Chelmsford and some of Bridget and Roy's time spent at the Premier Inn. Bridget (QT Manager) and Roy (who acts as property manager and sales manager) were mostly accommodated by the Cathedral. The publicity was shared between the Cathedral and Friends, the Cathedral meeting most of that cost and putting a lot of man(woman)power into the exercise too. We had visits from the WI, Tapestry and other craft Guilds as well as Local and Area Meetings. Some visitors wandered in off the street to see the Cathedral and then, much to their delight, spent time round the exhibition. It was a great opportunity for Quaker Outreach, a



ORDINARY CARYOPTERIS

Wild Spot: A Bee Friendly Plant

from Valerie Graves

I expect, like me, you have all sorts of plants flowering that never did before, or flowering much more extravagantly? I have a narrow border to a bit of grass just outside the back door. Nothing does very well in it, as it doesn't get a lot of sun or attention, just a lot of bulbs and oddments, including a few herbs and, for instance, a small caryopteris. Next to this a small plant appeared, all on its own, and grew quite quickly



GRANDE BLEU

into a medium sized shrub with leaves rather like nettles (but smooth and not stinging), not at all like caryopteris. Then it became covered with round quite large buds, which opened into beautiful blue flowers, in sprays which were grouped in layers with plain stems between the layers, composed of tiny flow-

ers which were identical with those of the caryopteris. I could not find anything at all like it in the books but eventually thought it must be Hyssop, though the match was not good. Its chief characteristic was its tremendous attraction to bees, which crowded round it in hundreds, indeed possibly thousands.

Eventually Charles Bather identified it for me as an unusual variety of caryopteris, Grande Bleu. I have no idea where on earth it came from, but am just happy to welcome it! (hyssop is mentioned in the Bible, I am told, as a "plant beloved of Bees").

A Big Thank You

Bridget & Roy

A big thank you to all those who have helped to make the Roadshow at Chelmsford a huge success. 3,309 visitors in just 14 days and one evening! The launch event on Friday 19 August was a wonderful start to the event and Sheila Hancock certainly gave the exhibition that extra special sparkle. Grateful thanks to Ruth and her team at the Cathedral - from the moment we arrived we were made very welcome by all the staff and volunteers and we feel very privileged to have been part of the Cathedral team for the past few weeks. This beautiful building, full of friendship and light, has been the perfect venue for this community based exhibition.

We were very impressed with the publicity material produced by Clare - from the banner flags in the city, the website, flyers and postcards to all her hard work on the internet and with the local media - it has certainly brought in the crowds! A huge hug to almost 100 volunteers, both in the exhibition and in the Cathedral Cafe who have generously given over 1,000 hours of their time, help and expertise over the last two weeks to ensure that our visitors have had such an enjoyable experience. Roy and I really enjoyed getting to know you during our time at Chelmsford. It seems a long time ago now since Jenny and Jonathan first had the idea to bring the Tapestry to Essex. From our very first meeting together here at the Cathedral we knew this Roadshow would be special.

Jenny's display table and stories of family Quaker history and artefacts within the exhibition was a first for the Roadshow and very much appreciated by all. It certainly enhanced the visitor experience. Grateful thanks go to the Group of Friends who organised and facilitated the Chelmsford side of things. The Group of Quakers have spent many months in the planning and organisation for this event; meeting together; finding the perfect venue; collaborating and communicating with the launch and publicity; and organis-

ing people to sign up to volunteer their time and expertise in stewarding the exhibition, not to mention the fundraising!

We couldn't have done it without you. Listening to the visitors' comments was a pleasure, and now, reading their responses in the visitors' book will continue to be a reminder of the wonderful Chelmsford Roadshow experience....

A few of the many wonderful comments from the visitors' book:

- "What a fantastic exhibition!"
- "Great church and tapestry"
- "Calming and clever"
- "Inspires one to become a Quaker"
- "The social conscience of our nation is writ large here."
- "An incredible history in breath taking embroidery."
- "Par excellence! Too wondrous to behold in one visit."
- "First time in this beautiful place, shall return again with my family"
- "I have seen the Cathedral afresh - the QT has provided the lens for this"
- "Absolutely fascinating and a real insight into a topic I previously knew so little about. Passionate volunteers!"
- "Amazed at the enthusiasm of the volunteers. Really made it come to life."
- "God shines through."
- "Thank you for bringing it south and sharing the Quaker message"
- "A wonderful exhibition. This should be guarded as a 'National Treasure'."
- "Words fail me!"
- "Many thanks to the Cathedral for their hospitality"
- "How a simple pastime can bring so many together"
- "Rich in colours, history, knowledge and wisdom"
- "Gode fun" (Charlotte from Whittle, aged about 7 years)
- "What can I say!!"
- "Beautiful work and philosophy on life"

"Made me feel a lot better"

"As a steward I've been uplifted by the impact on all visitors"

"Just loved it - inspirational - will have to visit Kendal!"

"Great story-telling, a top quality craft"

"Amazing amount the Quakers added to society"

"Breath taking"

"Very moving and still very relevant today"

We hope we will see you in Kendal - and if anyone is missing the volunteering... we are always looking for people to come and stay in the

Tapestry cottage flat for a week or two and steward the exhibition in Kendal, while enjoying the Lake District in your time off!

Until the next time we're together, on behalf of the Quaker Tapestry team in Kendal, with love and friendship Bridget & Roy



Clerk's Corner

~ Alison Parkes, Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting Clerk

In Quaker faith and practice 26.70 Isaac Penington (1661) says "Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee;..."

How difficult it can be to do this, to let go of ourselves, our feelings and our wishes, and to open ourselves to the Spirit. When sitting in Meeting for Worship, I know that I am as prone as the next person to be distracted by my feelings, whether that be anger at the consequences of war or injustice, or compassion for someone in dire need, or anxiety about someone I'm close to. These emotions have a legitimate place in our lives, yet it is by applying Quaker faith and practice, by learning how to give over our own willing, that we learn how to channel our emotions and discover where the promptings of love and truth (Advices and Queries #1) might lead us. In fact, a Friend gently corrected my assertion during MfW that anger serves a purpose and inspires us to action; he reminded me that it is when we let go of our anger and become still that we are open to the guidance of the spirit.

At a recent discussion held after Meeting for Worship at Colchester, an Attender asked how those in membership experienced the difference between being an Attender and being a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Friends expressed this difference in terms of "belonging", "commitment", "identity" and "discipline". There is a whole chapter (Ch. 11) of *Quaker faith and practice* devoted to the topic of membership, and it introduces the notion of membership as "a discipleship, a discipline within a broadly Christian perspective and our Quaker tradition, where the way we live is as important as the beliefs we affirm" (11.01). It goes on to say "Like all discipleships, membership has its elements of commitment and responsibility but it is also about joy and celebration. Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community. Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting, and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God."

I like the idea of membership of the Society as a discipleship, in which we are open to learning from past generations of Friends, through *Quaker faith and practice* and the full library of books in our Meeting Houses, as well as from one

another through study groups and courses at Woodbrooke and Friends House. At AM in September, when considering the issue about decriminalisation of drugs for personal use, we were receptive to the depth of the wisdom in our midst. This is what our Meetings for Worship for Business allow, by creating the conditions for listening and discernment.

The last word, which was also the first (1658), on this theme belongs to George Fox when he wrote:

"Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then though wilt feel the principle of God to turn they mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. That is it which moulds up into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God, with his power." (Qfp 2.18)

The next Area Meeting will be held on Sunday November 27, 2.15 pm at Colchester Quaker Meeting House, 6 Church Street, Colchester CO1 1NF. For more details, and for past AM minutes, 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.

Conscientious Objection in World War I

A talk by Jenny Kay

Fordham Local History
Society

Tuesday 18 October 7.30 pm

Fordham Village Hall

£3bat the door

Fordham Head Teacher Ernest W. Somner was a Conscientious objector who sent to do farm work under the auspices of the F.A.U.

Passion Flowers

John Hall

This year we decided to try to grow passion flowers for the first time. This one, *Passiflora cerulea* is outdoors and producing many flowers of which these are only four, but the edible Passion-fruit *Passiflora edulis*, while growing well indoors has produced not a single bloom.

Can you find the honey bee?



Garden News

Peggy Lewis

Friends will have noticed the new plantings in the front garden. Evonymus, Spiraea, Elaeagnus, Viburnum and Fatsia. All quite small now but they are getting their roots

down so that next spring they will push on. There is a wonderful patch of bright pink cyclamen in the back garden. A number of trees and large shrubs will be pruned back and shaped in the autumn.

2017 Area Meetings

The dates for 2017 Area Meetings are as follows:

January 15 at Colchester (third Sunday due to New Year's Day on the 1st Sunday)

March 12 at Clacton

May 14 at Sudbury

July 9 at Earls Colne

September 10 at Colchester

November 19 at Colchester (third Sunday due to Quaker Sale)

Getting Rid Of Rubbish

from Valerie Graves

You probably have a compost heap in a corner of the garden, important but not very interesting. It used to be a valuable and popular subject for my children's class! I would make up three or four layers from mine, in sturdy cardboard boxes. The first layer was the most unattractive: fruit and vegetable peelings, dirty bits of screwed-up paper (no food or metal or glass or plastic, I hope), eggshells, banana skins, broken or dirty oddments of all kinds. The next layer would not be very different but a bit slimy and obviously a bit rotten, but there were hundreds of tiny little red worms wriggling about. In the next layer

it was difficult to recognise anything, just lots of lumpy bits of nothing in particular. At the bottom was the finished product: beautiful crumbly black compost, such as you might buy quite expensively at the shop. The whole process would take about a year.

You might think the children might find all this revolting, but no such thing! they were absolutely fascinated, and were happy to pick up the little worms which are such an important part of the process. If there were any older children, they might like to think about how important this is for disposing of the remains of animals and people who have died. Indeed, in very hot countries or very dry ones, dead creatures just lie on the ground and gradually dry up and

In Fox's Footsteps

Robin Hart

15th to 19th of August

Twelve Friends gathered at Swarthmoor Hall for a pilgrimage, led by Jenny Foot, from Beccles Meeting and our intrepid volunteer driver and Friend, Richard who drove the minibus with great skill around the winding roads of Cumbria. Not forgetting Jenny's dog Kiri, well used to Quaker Meeting and kept silent throughout!

On Tuesday morning we went to Sawley and met Ben from Sawley Meeting. *Southern East Anglia Area Quaker Meeting*

Jack Burfoot

Helen Lewis

Jack Burfoot died on August 16th aged 91 years. He had requested to have a Quaker Meeting for Worship in Colchester where he and Muriel had lived for very many years.

Jack's funeral was held on September 2nd with many of his large family with him. The music of Rachmaninov Symphony number 2 was played at the start of the meeting.

Muriel had written some very moving notes about their long life together which were read and then members of his family and friends spoke.

Jack had a very full academic career lecturing at Cambridge,

Aberdeen and other universities, also research in electronics and lecturing in America. He wrote a number of books on Electronics. Jack retired in July 1986 after a long and interesting life.

The meeting ended with the music of John Rutters, "The Lord bless you and keep you" sung by the Cambridge Singers.

The family and friends came back to the Meeting House for a light lunch and many Friends were able to meet Muriel.



shrivel away. It is a huge comfort to know that corpses will gradually vanish. Even small children will worry about what happens when you die, and have nightmares about being the last thing left alive in the world.

I don't know where the little red worms come from, but I do know that tiny bits of plastic, which do not rot though they do get rubbed smaller are becoming a real anxiety, as they collect in huge heaps in the sea, acres wide, and are often eaten by living creatures who eventually die.

including very young children. Wonderful scenery looking over a deep valley and high hills in the distance, a truly inspiring place to be there.

We were met at Settle Meeting House by Friends with a much-needed cup of tea having climbed Pendle Hill. The meeting house was built in the 17th century, the gallery is still there and the Elders benches too. The headstones and the burial ground have been removed to the sides and a beautiful garden planted.

On Wednesday we drove to Briggflats F.M.H. 1675. A farmer gave the land to Friends together with some other houses

nearby. One of them is still used by the resident Friend. The meeting house was built by local Labour and rustic in design. During the short meeting for worship I had a great feeling of peace and calmness come to me.

We drove up a long winding road to Fairbank Fell to where Fox preached (it is said) to 1000 people. The Hiring Fair was on Briggflats so there could have been a huge crowd there. It was a lovely sunny day and we had our lunch in front of the rock that Fox stood on to preach. Tiny harebells and Heather all around made it a memorable occasion. Then on to Kendal and the Quaker Tapestry, there were about 72 panels on show, some are out on tour, Chelmsford Cathedral has it now.

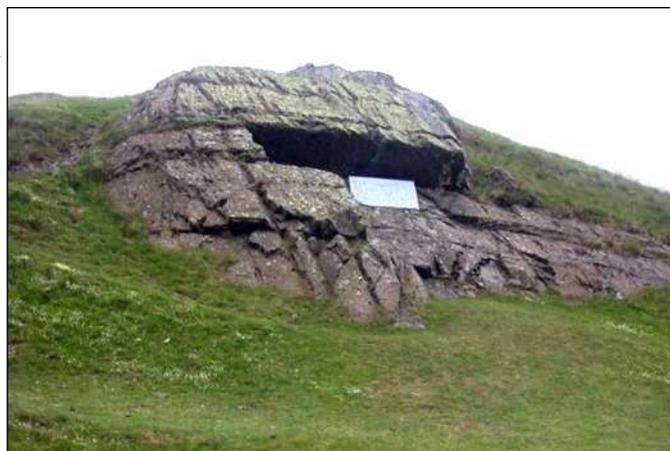
On Thursday morning we visited Sunbrick Burial Ground where Margaret

Fell is buried. There are no headstones, just a small walled area, grass and sheep grazing. As a complete contrast to the simple meeting houses the next step was to Conishead Priory and Buddhist Temple. The intricate carving, colourful statues and gilding on the temple is an amazing site. In the afternoon we drove to Marsh Grange Margaret Fell's birthplace. Now a private house, so we were not able to go around it.

Friday, our last morning, we walked to Ulverston F.M.H. In the rain. The only time it rained! George Fox gave the building to Ulverston

Friends but never preached there.

At all the meeting houses we went to we were met by Friends who gave us informative talks about Fox and the history of their F.M.H. Everyone was so welcoming. I felt inspired by the pilgrimage and so glad I was able to take part.



Firbank Fell, Fox's Pulpit

Theology of Quaker Testimony

A Woodbrooke course review

Ann Webb

Earlier this week I took a course for my last year of Equipping for Ministry, a two-year commitment to course work in order to discover your gifts for ministry and for enhancing your spiritual life as a Quaker. The course was led by Tim Peat Ashworth and Rachel Muers, who has just published a book: *Testimony: Quakers and Theological Ethics*. Tim has also written numerous books about Jesus and the Bible.

The theology behind Quaker testimony, we learned, was the belief that Christ has come to teach his people himself and that we all have Christ within us to teach us how to live our lives. Most don't want to hear about theology, having had a bad experience perhaps with established traditional churches. However, Tim believes that, without these lessons in Christianity and history it is very difficult to form our own beliefs about testimonies. For instance why is it so important to have Testimonies to begin with? Which came first, our faith or our testimonies? Most have a theology that tells others how to live whereas Quakers lived an experience of the Light within and testimony followed from that.

Quakers in Britain have four testimonies: Truth, Simplicity, Equality, and Peace. Each testimony stems from and becomes interconnected with the others through our encounters with the Spirit of God. We looked at the writings of George Fox, John Woolman, and other Quakers to discover how each felt led to witness to the Spirit within themselves through a particular testimony. John Woolman, for instance, owned a tailoring business and agonised over whether or not he should use silverware created through slave labour. George Fox showed his commitment to equality by refusing to respect the education of priests, and believed that all had access to God's Spirit, therefore all could minister. He traveled the country challenging what he called 'priestcraft'. We discussed the refusal to take oaths as an example of Truth-telling and believing that one's word to another was valuable as it stood without the need to swear to it. And we all know that the Peace testimony was tied up with the wars that England has always been engaged in.

I make a personal note here that it would have been good to look at some female Quakers' testimonies most notably Elizabeth Fry, Margaret Fell, and Mary Dyer who lived their testimonies

as much as the men did. However none were offered for this course.

As with all Woodbrooke courses, we were enriched by some very good participation and discussion about where and how we could exhibit our testimonies personally and corporately. Tim and Rachel asked us to ask ourselves; where in our lives does Light break in? Where do we **allow** Light to break in and how can we promote that? And above all, we must *listen* to the Spirit. We listen individually as well as in our meetings for worship. Tim emphasised that we are *not* meditating individually in our meetings! We are listening to the Spirit together, the same Spirit that inspired the writers of the bible, and discerning together and holding each other accountable together.

We are all good with testimony as a group, but I found it valuable to discern my commitment to the testimonies individually. How do I live Peace? How do I live Simplicity? How do I live Equality (or as some put it, Dignity)? And finally, how do I live Truth? Those are good questions we should continue to ask ourselves from time to time. As always the course was enjoyable but was made more enjoyable by the interaction we had with other Quakers from around the country.