Coggeshall Meeting House before leasing to the ECC for the Library

photo: John Hall

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS)
Clerk to Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting:
c/o Colchester Quaker Meeting House
6 Church Street, Colchester CO1 1NF;
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
St. Nicholas’ Church Hall,
Stour Road, Bathside CO12 3HS
Contact: Ros/Tony Eaton 01255 880500

COLCHESTER
Sunday 10.30 am
Wednesday 12.30 pm to 1 pm
(No food provided)

EARLS COLNE
Sundays 10.30 am

SUDBURY
Sunday 10.30 am

The Editor

Valerie’s fall has seriously affected her health to the extent that she is no longer able to edit the newsletter. This explains why this edition combines October with the November edition. I hope that readers will accept that

I continue to produce the newsletter myself until a new editor is appointed. I will miss Valerie’s contributions as well as her oversight and attention to detail. We continue to hold Valerie in the Light.

John Kay

Area Meeting

Sunday 8th September 2019 at Harwich

John Lewis

To the thunder of a thousand motorbikes your Area Meeting met for business at Harwich on Sunday 8th September. Our noisy competitors from all over Essex chose our Sunday to gather to raise money for the Essex Air Ambulance, for which we should all be grateful.

Meanwhile 20 Friends of your Meeting prayed for support and ideas how we might fill several vacant appointments. Harwich Friends meet in a small friendly hall owned by the local Anglican church, a hall used regularly by Home Start. Perhaps the basic support work of Home Start volunteers should inspire us, no frills, with a minimum of ceremony. We should perhaps not worry if we cannot fill appointments to the University, to the Greenwood Trust or even to Glebe House, all tasks that might be well done by an interested volunteer. Nominations can focus on roles which are literally essential to the existence of a meeting – clerk, treasurer, registrar and one or two others.

Our complicated nominations system is not bringing forward a flow of clerks and treasurers. It is simply not working as we need it to work and we agreed to think towards a simpler, more useful system. There was emphasis on the need to involve more Friends from the smaller Meetings and reduce the apparent dominance of the bigger meeting at Colchester. And yet again we agreed that we must involve younger Friends in all activities; not just younger but also those who may have been with Quakers only a short time. May youthful energy with new ideas breath life into us all!

After those stressful minutes we swiftly agreed the dates for AMs in 2020. This 2019 year is the second time that the great motorbike rally has coincided with our AM in Harwich so, sadly for some, changes had to be made to our calendars. Pity, after all the full title is Essex Motorcycle Run and Family Fun Day. Subject to approvals and changes, the dates will be 9th Feb at Clacton, 19th April at Sudbury, 14th June at Colchester, 13th Sept at Earls Colne and 8th Nov at Harwich.

Personally it always cheers me when we plan new lists of members and attenders. There is much phoning and struggling with old phone numbers to prepare the list but when complete and published it has the feel of a spring clean. So I look forward to a new list that we
agreed should be published in a few months time.

Anne, Clerk at Colchester, armed with plans and folders of statistics took us slowly and carefully through the ideas for renovations in Colchester of the Meeting House. The flat is now modernized to an acceptable standard. What to do with the rest of the building?

The range of possibilities is wide, from selling and moving house to staying but executing a full-scale renovation costing half a million. Any big works could be split into phases to be spread over several years but there are challenges in coping with the complexity of the current building uses and after all we might still lose half our hirer customers and render the flat unattractive.

To undertake all that work in one huge stage would probably have the building out of use for 2 years and more critically, we simply could not do so without external funding.

Or we could simply do the minimum: modernise the loos and kitchen and renew the heating system. That alone would involve outlay over £100,000. There are several fundamental issues to address and the Local Meeting and Area Meeting will both be struggling with this great set of challenges for many months more.

Finally the Clerk to the Trustees informed the AM by a brief note of the two administrative changes that are planned in Colchester: the former warden’s flat, now renovated, is to be let out separately and independently. It is also planned to engage a professional manager to run the building. There are some issues to be clarified with both matters before the formal authority of the AM will be sought and both will be brought to AM as soon as possible.

A full afternoon of business which was very satisfying. We are grateful to the outnumbered hosts of Harwich and hope we did not leave untoward mess in their pristine hall.

**Clacton News**

Janet Thomas

The Buddhists here are very happy with the extra storage Premises Committee have provided for their growing membership. They are exceptionally pleasant people with whom to share these amenities, as is our upstairs tenant. Martin Rogers has carried out further improvements to the building, including repair and painting of the outside bay window ledge and also the installation of a bike stand (in use by at least two people). The Quaker Meeting road sign which was blown down some time ago now has also been reinstalled.

Monthly Meetings are as follows:

First Wednesday Meeting for Worship with light lunch is as always from 12 midday.

Art Club is on the last Friday, 11am to 3pm. Bring own lunch.

Spiritual Friendship Group for Clacton and Harwich is each first Monday from 11am. Bring one’s own lunch optional.

NEW! Craft Group initiated by Margaret Purrett’s sister, Hilary Clunes, takes place every second Wednesday from 11am to 3pm. Bring own lunch or just come for a part of the that time.

All welcome.
Truth & integrity

John Hall,

In her article in the handbook, *Engaging with Quaker Testimonies*, Linda Pegler says that “From the earliest days Quaker were known for speaking truth as they experienced it inwardly in their meetings for worship. They didn’t make a distinction between belief and action. Truth was almost more a verb than a noun ... So, a testimony to truth developed which, in particular, led Quakers to be known for their honesty, straightforwardness, and integrity.” However, in their commitment to the Testimonies, Friends were not above making use of them to very good effect. For instance, in 1677, Alice Curwen responded to a Massachusetts’ parliament warrant that ordered its agents to bring in “every person found at a Quakers Meeting.” She quick-wittedly answered, “This warrant takes not hold on us; we are the Meeting; this warrant is to bring such persons as are found at a Quaker Meeting.” Of course, not only does this accurately describe the situation, it is a subtle indication of what a Meeting for Worship is to Quakers. However, the niceties of Friends use of language were not always appreciated and they were sometimes regarded as being too self-serving. For example, John Wesley was highly critical of the judgments that Friends made about their clothes:

What multitudes of you are very jealous as to the colour and form of your apparel (the least important of all the circumstances that relate to it), while in the most important, the expense, they are not concerned at all. They will not put on scarlet or crimson stuff, but the richest velvet, so it be black or grave. They will not touch a coloured riband, but will cover themselves with a stiff silk from head to foot. They cannot wear purple; but make no scruple at all in being clothed in fine linen; to such a degree, that the linen of the Quakers is grown almost a proverb. Surely you cannot be ignorant, that the sinfulness of fine apparel lies chiefly in the expensiveness; in that it is robbing God and the poor; it is defrauding the fatherless and the widow; it is wasting the food of the hungry, and withholding his raiment from the naked to consume it on our own lusts.

Nevertheless, truth and integrity have been an integral part of Quaker thinking. In modern times, so concerned were Friends about the general decline in standards of truth and integrity among society in general, that they established a committee to examine the matter: Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs. While it deliberated for a number of years and published a report in 1993, it apparently had no great effect upon the lack of a strict regard for truth among politicians and journalists and the committee was laid down. I think that was a mistake, and developments in social-media trolling and the rise of fake news, suggests to me that attention to truth and integrity should be at the forefront of current thinking. (Preamble to QF&P Ch. 29)

This is an amended version of part of an article in the November 2011 edition of Friends Meeting Houses Issue 7

Geoffrey Durham

Quakers have a reputation for being, well, killjoys, but my experience of them has been the opposite. From the moment I first turned up I’ve been delighted by their open-hearted tolerance, open-minded good humour and passionate commitment to social justice. And, uniquely in my experience, they are a religious group who don’t believe they have all the answers. They never insist they’re right and they have no desire to persuade other people to join them. As a result, they tend to keep themselves to themselves, and that means no one else has much of a clue about who they are or what they do. (from his website)
Quakers in the Colchester Area 1655 - 1725

Jenny Kay

I gave this talk recently to a small but attentive audience at Fordham Local History Society. The information available on this subject is widespread. I limited it to individual Friends. First, the story of James Parnell as told in the video we made in 2006, ‘Quakers, 350 years in Colchester’, available in Colchester QMH Library. Fordham Quakers cited in Stanley Fitch’s book ‘Colchester Quakers’ and in Archdeaconry records to name; John and Thomas Lee, living with ‘wenches as their wives but not lawfully married’ and George White the butcher who prevented almost everyone in the Church from taking communion on Easter Sunday. Giles Barnardistan was living ‘in retirement’ in Wormingford Lodge became convinced in 1661 and later provided funds for the first Meeting House in Sudbury. Benjamin Lay from Copford began his working life on a farm in Fordham, described by Marcus Rediker in his book as a man of ‘strife and contention’ became a pioneer slavery abolitionist. We know a good deal about Earls Colne Quakers from the diary of Ralph Josselin, vicar of Earls Colne at the time. Anne Burton the Earls Colne Quaker midwife was featured in the talk. In addition to the two books mentioned, ‘The Quakers in English Society 1655-1725’ by Adrian Davies featuring Essex Quakers can also be found in Colchester Library.

Earls Colne News

Jenny Kay

For the third year running during Heritage Open Day in September Earls Colne Friends offered hospitality and a small exhibition on this year’s theme ‘Our Quaker Community’. There were few visitors but spending time with those who did arrive proved to be time well spent. First a passing family of a grandmother, her close elderly friend, grandson and niece out for a walk saw refreshments on the notice and came in. The talk was of Sunday worship in Earls Colne, Anglican, Baptist and Quaker. The grandson proved to be our most distant visitor, he was from the north of England. At lunch time we were joined by a Christadelphian and we learned of the similarities and the differences between us. Towards the end of the vicar and member of St Albrights called in on the Essex Churches Annual Ride and Stride fifteen minutes before closing for a quiet time of prayer.
Penn's Holy Experiment in Pennsylvania Part 2

But ironically, Quaker tolerance proved the undoing of Quaker Indian policy. As non-Quaker European immigrants flooded into the welcoming province, they undermined the Quakers’ own benevolent policy toward the Indians. The feisty Scots-Irish were particularly unpersuaded by Quaker idealism.

Penn’s new proprietary regime was unusually liberal and included a representative assembly elected by the landowners. Freedom of worship was guaranteed to all residents, although Penn was forced by London to deny Catholics and Jews the privilege of voting or holding office. The peace-loving Quakers of Pennsylvania made no provision for military defense. No restrictions were placed on immigration, and naturalization was made easy. The humane Quakers early developed a strong dislike of black slavery, and in the genial glow of Pennsylvania some progress was made toward social reform.

With its many liberal features, Pennsylvania attracted a rich mix of ethnic groups. They included numerous religious misfits who were repelled by the harsh practices of neighboring colonies. This Quaker refuge boasted a surprisingly modern atmosphere in an unmodern age, and to an unusual degree it afforded economic opportunity, civil liberty, and religious freedom. Even so, “blue laws” prohibited “ungodly revelers,” stage plays, playing cards, dice, games, and excessive hilarity.

Under such generally happy auspices, Penn’s brainchild grew lustily. The Quakers were shrewd businesspeople, and in a short time the settlers were exporting grain and other foodstuffs. Within two years Philadelphia claimed three hundred houses and twenty-five hundred people. Within nineteen years—by 1700—the colony was surpassed in population and wealth only by long-established Virginia and Massachusetts.

William Penn spent only about four years in the colony and eventually died full of sorrows back in England. But Pennsylvania, his enduring monument, was not only a noble experiment in government but also a new commonwealth. Based on civil and religious liberty and dedicated to freedom of conscience and worship, Pennsylvania held aloft a hopeful torch in a world of semidarkness.

Small Quaker settlements flourished next door to Pennsylvania. New Jersey was started in 1664, when two noble proprietors received the area from the Duke of York. One of the proprietors sold West New Jersey in 1674 to a group of Quakers, and Quakers also acquired East New Jersey a few years later. In 1702, the crown clipped the Quakers’ wings and combined the two Jerseys in a royal colony.

Swedish-tinged Delaware consisted of only three counties—two at high tide, the witticism goes—and was named after Lord De la Warr, the harsh military governor who had arrived in Virginia in 1610. Harboring some Quakers, and closely associated with Penn's flourishing colony, Delaware was granted its own assembly in 1703. But until the American Revolution it remained under the governor of Pennsylvania.

By David M. Kennedy, Lizabeth Cohen, Mel Piehl
Exploring Quaker Spirituality

John Kay

On Saturday 12 October I attended a Woodbrooke-on-the-Road conference at Colchester FMH. It was ably run by Stuart Masters. I was very impressed by it because it gave me a far better understanding of the atmosphere, the impetus and the great sense of mission which must have surrounded early Friends. I thought that Friends would be interested in the substance of the Handout Booklet that he gave us and the first part is reproduced here with Stuart’s kind permission.

A. Foundations of Quaker Spirituality: The Experience of Early Friends

The Experience

1. Seeking: In the Wilderness

The men and women who established the Quaker movement in the mid-17th century were part of a generation who for the first time in many centuries were faced with a genuine choice when it came to their religious affiliations. Many of those who were to become Quakers moved through a number of different groups but remained dissatisfied with all of the options available. This must have felt like a wilderness experience; a period of trial characterised by uncertainty, depression and anxiety. In particular, Calvinism fuelled existential angst with its emphasis on total depravity and the inescapability of sin in this life.

2. Finding: The Quaker Pentecost

A radical and life-changing experience of spiritual transformation acted as the catalyst for the emergence of the Quaker movement. For those involved this appeared to be a replaying of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles establishing a church guided by the presence of the risen Christ (Dobbs 1995, p.2). A dramatic experience of Christ appearing in their midst convinced early Friends that the true church was reappearing after centuries of apostasy (Wilcox 1995, p.3). Everything that is distinctive about the Quaker way developed out of a response to this experience and the efforts of early Friends to make sense of it.

The Experience Interpreted

1. The Inward Pentecost

In his Journal, George Fox describes many openings he claims to have received by direct revelation from God. Two in particular stand out as epiphanies, and both appear to relate to Chapter two of the Book of Joel in the Hebrew Scriptures. The first took place around 1647, when Fox became aware of the real presence of Christ as a living spiritual power:

“And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition’, and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.” (Journal, p11)

This was the beginning of Fox’s Pentecostal experience, which led him to proclaim that ‘Christ is come to teach his people himself’. For early Friends, the second coming had taken place inwardly and spiritually in the fulfillment of Joel’s prophesy at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21):

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your
sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.” (Joel 2:28, KJV)

This passage is often interpreted as the beginning of Quakerism as a distinct tradition. However, the references to the Book of Joel make it clear that Fox’s vision was of a people to be gathered in order to join God in the struggle to defeat darkness and evil within the creation. The ‘day of the Lord’ refers to God’s final and decisive victory over evil and the coming of the kingdom of heaven on earth. This was to be a time of judgment and purification leading to salvation. In the New Testament, it was associated with the second coming of Christ (e.g. 1 Corinthians 1:8).

Joel writes:

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.” (Joel 2:1, KJV)

So, Fox’s epiphanies point to an early Quaker movement that was both Pentecostal and apocalyptic in character. It was Pentecostal in the sense that it was founded on a transformational experience of the Spirit of Christ as inward teacher, priest, prophet and king. It was apocalyptic because this experience convinced early Friends that God was acting decisively in their time to overcome evil and establish the kingdom of heaven.

These Pentecostal and apocalyptic aspects are intimately connected, since it was through the transformative power of the Spirit that darkness and evil would be purged; firstly, inwardly in each person’s heart, and then outwardly in the whole creation. Early Friends witnessed to the universal potential of this Pentecostal experience and apocalyptic hope. They would not accept that the Spirit could be confined in any way because, as Joel had promised, it was poured out on ‘all flesh’, not just on the Christian church. The early Quaker vision was realistic in accepting the active presence of evil in the world. At the same time, however, it was fundamentally optimistic, since it witnessed to an eternal living Spirit with the power to overcome this darkness. George Fox expressed this understanding quite succinctly when he wrote in his Journal “I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness.” (Journal, p 19)

A note to help Friends understand our finances

To be presented to AM on 10.11.19 at Colchester by AM Trustees

Friends, as many know, we have given away large grants regularly over the last few years whilst still running regular deficits. Last year’s operating deficit was approximately £50,000. In this current year it will be close to £100,000. Our financial balancing act was possible because all the time we have had investments and cash in the bank of over half a million pounds.

This month trustees have had to withdraw £40,000 from our investments to enable us to meet our financial commitments. Trustees have also agreed £100,000 could be spent on essential renovations in 2020 subject to AM consent, to support Colchester LM’s decision for a major renovation of their Colchester Meeting House.

Two consequences flow from this decision: firstly, we will no longer be able to give generously to BYM or to other causes. Whatever Friends feel about their concerns or religious obligations, we simply will not have the money.

Secondly, we will be facing bankruptcy within a very short time, potentially in another couple of years, unless we reduce our spending to our income levels. Already it is obvious that we will be unable to spend further money on Colchester Meeting House.

In 2020 we will need to balance the books. Apart from making an allowance for the £100,000 proposed for Colchester our spending needs to be in balance with our income. This not a matter for trustees, treasurers or clerks alone. It is important that every member of the Meeting understand the true state of our finances and applies that understanding whenever decisions are taken relating to the work at Colchester and to other requests for funding.
Gainsborough House

John Kay
On Tuesday I went to Gainsborough House after a gap of some years. This proved to be timely as they were to close at the end of the week for some time for extensive rebuilding. I was able to renew my acquaintanceship with some old favourites and also able to discover some new treasures that I did not remember seeing on my last visit. In the small room on the top floor I was again to relish the exquisite three John Constable drawings that are reproduced here. Principal joy however was the rare experience of discovering a masterly watercolour of Berry Pomeroy Castle by Tom Girtin.

He of whom Turner said. “Poor Tom........If Tom Girtin had lived, I should have starved.”
Meeting for Sufferings

(MfS), Woodbrooke 4-6 October 2019
Robert Parkes

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in

Leonard Cohen

MfS holds oversight of our Yearly Meeting-wide commitment to work towards becoming a low-carbon, sustainable community. This weekend event gave us time for more considered discernment to address the reality of climate breakdown and environmental degradation and its underlying cycle of injustice. We heard how Friends are engaging with climate justice like never before: convening a small group of faith leaders to meet the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth; working with a range of local groups to support anti-fracking resistance; and getting involved in movements like Extinction Rebellion and the Climate Strikes. A highlight was when we worked with the UK Student Climate Network, Greenpeace and the Guardian to host Greta Thunberg in Friends House when she spoke to 100 mostly young activists. Looking ahead to the UN Climate Summit in Glasgow in 2020 we can expect to be working with campaigns groups and faith groups to call for bold action for climate justice. We were reminded that our action is underpinned by the spiritual focus of our concern that is rooted in love. Part of our discipline is the loving testing of concerns, and we felt we must be active in doing this, both personally and in our meetings.

The Court and Prison Register holds the names of Friends who have been before the courts for matters of conscience, i.e. Friends who come into conflict with the law when acting under concern and bearing witness to the truth as revealed to them. This time round we were informed about Friends arrested during the ‘No Faith in War’ day of action held outside the Defence and Security Equipment International arms fair in London in September. And about Friends arrested as part of XR protests. Acting ‘under concern’ requires a degree of discernment. We agreed that the responsibility for establishing that Friends are or were acting under concern and that they wish the matter to be recorded, normally lies with their AM. Given that the Register is a public document AMs should take care therefore to establish the facts, and to assure themselves that the Friend consents to this information being recorded and placed in the public domain, before forwarding details to MfS.

Assisted dying

We were able to have a deep worshipful time, in a spirit of listening and exploring. We focused on the principle ‘what can we, as Quakers, say about this that is different from the debate in the world around us?’ We heard that Friends do want to explore issues further (both assisted dying and dying and death more generally) and there are Friends want to talk about these issues within their meetings but knowing that there are differing and deeply held views. We do not necessarily expect to come to unity: a failure to unite is not a failure. Our own meeting – SEAQM – may wish to discern this further. If there is particular interest we are invited to get in touch with Staffordshire or North West London AMs who have both adopted a concern to work for a change in the law in relation to assisted dying in the UK, although the AMs have slightly different views in relation to the details.

We meet again in London on Saturday 7th December when we will be joined in worship by young friends who are alongside us on the Young People’s Participation Day. It would be great if there is a young friend or two from SEAQM who would like to go along.

As usual, a full report of the meeting and papers can be found on the dedicated MfS pages on the Quaker.org website. MfS also gets reported in The Friend