

Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

November 2022 (online version)

No. 398

Meetings for Worship

Every Sunday 10:15am at the Abingdon Community Support Service (Abbey Centre), Crabtree Place, off Audlett Drive.

Thursday 3rd November 7:30pm in the Garden Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street.

Centring Down: Learning Sunday, 27th November

Judith Baker & Kate Sewell write:

We often read about or hear mention of people 'centring down' at the beginning of Meeting for Worship. What does it mean? For this Learning Sunday we invite those who would like to share how they still themselves at the beginning of Meeting and enter into that deep space. Do you have experiences which may help others who find the term difficult to understand? You might like to give some thought to what you could usefully share, or you might like to come with your questions. The learning time will be followed by a bring-&-share lunch.

Liz Matthews recently took part in an online course under the auspices of Woodbrooke College, entitled 'Centring Down with Compassion' and led by Carolyn Baynes of Farnham Meeting. Liz shares some of her notes from the course, as a contribution in advance of the Learning Sunday.

Centring down can be difficult. The brain doesn't do it naturally, and one can (easily) become frustrated. This is where 'compassion' is important in the sense of self-compassion: being kind to oneself, reassuring oneself that 'it's only human to feel this way.'

The approach adopted in the live sessions of the course was to combine reflections on an individual Advice & Query with techniques from Mindfulness meditation – although it was acknowledged at the outset that Quaker worship and meditation are not the same thing. Each session began with a prepared ministry around the A&Q before moving into a meditation that used a specific technique to assist in centring down. I introduce below the two meditation techniques that I have found the most beneficial so far.

In some sessions, elements of the A&Q were interwoven with the meditation, and in others we were invited to hold others (and ourselves) in the Light in a Quaker variation of the 'Loving Kindness' meditation, or to practise an Experiment with the Light¹ as a means to move forward on an issue that might have been occupying our thoughts.

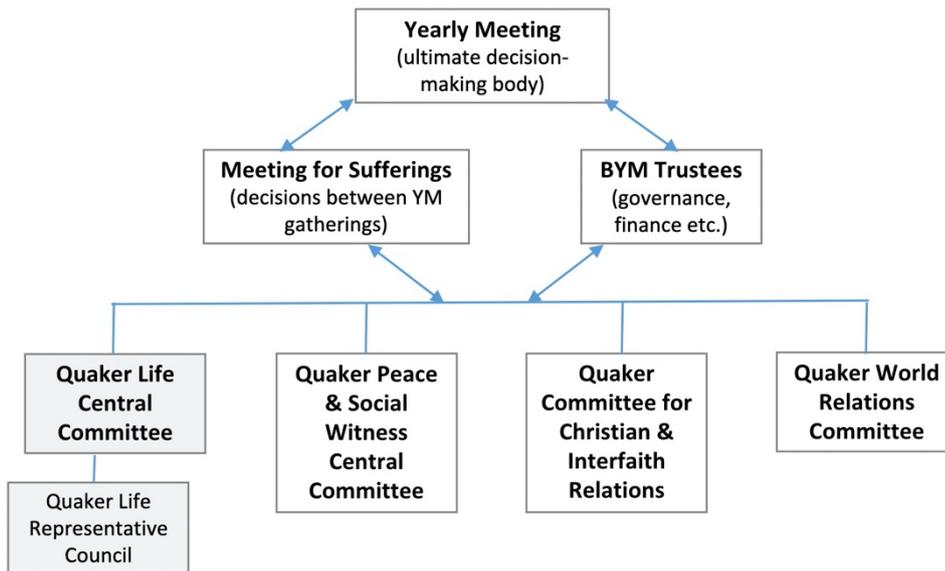
Reading and reflecting on an Advice & Query

This is a simplified form of 'lectio divina':² reading the A&Q, and then focusing on one, or a few, phrases that have come particularly to your awareness during that first reading. The phrase can be as brief as the opening words, such as 'Take heed' (A&Q 1) and 'Take time' (A&Q 5). In some cases, we focused on it independently of the remainder of the A&Q. For example, 'Take heed' enables us to notice our thoughts and perhaps realise that they aren't all who we are. Or, it can be

Quaker Life: A Short Introduction

Alan Pearmain is Clerk to Quaker Life Central Committee, one of Britain Yearly Meeting's four standing committees. His talk at our Learning Sunday on 9th October lifted the lid on the work of Quaker Life and placed in context the roles of the two development workers who now support Local Meetings in the Thames Valley: Moya (Local Development Worker) and Julia Dover (Children & Youth Development Worker).

As the (very simplified) chart shows, Quaker Life sits alongside the other three committees responsible for Quaker activity in Britain: Peace & Social Witness, Christian & Interfaith Relations, and World Relations.



(Adapted from an organisational chart provided by Alan Pearmain)

The Representative Council comprises representatives from the Area Meetings and meets twice a year. It doesn't have decision-making powers; rather, it provides an opportunity for members to engage with issues relating to Quaker Life work.

The role of Quaker Life is to support local meetings to be thriving, deeply spiritual communities. In practical terms, this means:

- Helping Meetings to understand Charity Law and giving advice on how to report their finances
- Giving advice on the buildings owned by Area Meetings
- Helping Area Meetings on employment matters
- Safeguarding
- Supporting the mental health of meetings and helping to resolve conflicts that might arise.

The educational aspects of this work are carried out in conjunction with Woodbrooke.

Specific current tasks and projects include anti-racism, inclusivity for LGBTQI+ people and questions of terminology (e.g. the use of 'elders' and 'overseers' for Friends with spiritual and pastoral responsibilities respectively). In addition, Quaker Life is currently revising its strategy, and Alan provided us with a draft to review and comment on during the Learning Sunday session.

Overall, Quaker Life has a demanding remit, which is carried out by seven staff based centrally in Friends House. They include the Head of Supporting Quaker Communities and five team leaders: Youth, Children & Families; Spiritual Nurture; Quaker Community; Witness & Collaboration; and

LM & AM governance (which also covers safeguarding). Between them, the team leaders manage 15 Local Development Workers (LDWs), 5 officers/workers with responsibility for youth, children and families, a support worker for prison chaplains and an administrator.

The LDWs have been recruited over the past 3–4 years and are based around the country, although they meet together occasionally. Their role is a varied one that calls for listening, communication, research and digital skills, as well as openness to innovation and experimentation. Indeed, Area Meetings have expressed to Alan their appreciation for the amount of support that they have received from their LDWs, especially where they were in place during the pandemic.

Abingdon Quaker Matters

Business Meeting: 6th November

Business Meeting will follow after Meeting for Worship on Sunday 6th. We will discuss – and hopefully approve – the budget for the Meeting’s finances next year. Please send any other items for the agenda to Alan Pearmain by Friday 4th: abingdonquakers@gmail.com

Special Appeal: Turn a Corner (part of Quaker Homeless Action)

From Chris Sewell

As winter’s cold, damp days and nights start to affect our daily activities, our minds are often drawn to the plight of those who are homeless or in temporary shelters and accommodation in the UK. Quaker Homeless Action (QHA), the charity which has provided a focal point for Quaker concerns about homelessness for nearly 20 years, has now merged with Quaker Social Action (QSA). QHA had found it could no longer provide the level of support and safeguarding needed for their annual Open Christmas event. Instead, QSA agreed to maintain and nurture a mobile library service that QHA had offered to homeless people in central London. The project has now developed a stronger identity as Turn a Corner.



Who is Turn a Corner for?

Turn a Corner welcomes anyone who would like to join in for a chat or borrow a book. The project provides a supportive space for people affected by homelessness. This includes but is not limited to people who are sofa surfing, homeless, living in a hostel, night shelter, B&B or living in conditions that affect their health or leave them at risk of violence or abuse at home. We also welcome refugees and asylum seekers.

What Turn a Corner offers

- A friendly mobile community space for people affected by homelessness where they can meet, talk, share and be listened to;
- A free library lending service – no fixed address or membership is required;
- Guidance on connecting with other local services that offer support to people affected by homelessness;
- Takeaway resources and donated items for people experiencing homelessness.

How to donate

Online: Visit www.quakersocialaction.org.uk and make an online donation via Just Giving. Add a message stating that your donation is for Turn a Corner.

Send a bank or CAF cheque made out to Quaker Social Action to: QSA, 17 Old Ford Road, London, E2 9PJ. Enclose a note asking for the money to go to Turn a Corner.

If you have any queries, call the QSA fundraising team on 020 8983 5059.

September's Appeal: A Thank-you

We have received a letter of thanks from Sheila Furlong, CEO of The Archway Foundation, beneficiary of our September appeal. Sheila writes:

We are most grateful for your generosity ... Your gifts will be translated into practical action, bringing meaningful human contact to adults of all ages who are struggling with loneliness, its impact and associated challenges ... We would be pleased to send our quarterly *Newswire* (electronic newsletter) to anyone who would like to receive it. Just email us at office@archwayfoundation.org.uk or visit our website <https://www.archwayfoundation.org.uk>, where you can sign up for the *Newswire*.

Around the Area and Region

Enquirers' Meetings at Oxford Meeting House

As we announced in the September newsletter, Oxford Meeting is running a series of Enquirers' Sessions this autumn. These sessions aim to introduce enquirers to the faith, principles, structures, and practices of the Religious Society of Friends, but everyone is welcome to come along. Two meetings are being held in November; both start at 6pm:

Thursday 3rd November: How our community works

Thursday 24th November: Quaker testimonies

Extended Silent Meeting in Oxford

An extended Meeting for Worship will take place at 43 St Giles on Saturday, 12th November at 10:15 for 10:30 am, finishing about 1:30. We will have use of the garden and a meeting room. All are welcome. Please bring your own lunch.

Area Meeting

The next Area Meeting will be on Saturday 12th November at Swindon Meeting House, starting at 10:30am. The theme of the Spiritual Nurture session after lunch is 'Intimations of Transcendence' and will be facilitated by George Ellis, a theoretical physicist, philosopher and Quaker (Cape Town and Oxford Meetings). George writes:

Even if some are reluctant to use the name 'God', Quakers today believe that there is some kind of meaningful underpinning to the universe for which the adjective 'transcendent' is appropriate. I will first discuss briefly what this might mean from the viewpoint of a cosmologist, where one can indeed defend this idea by the claim that there exist Platonic possibility spaces for what can be done and thought. They transcend the physical universe because they determine what is possible; their existence and nature indicate that meaning underlies the universe. Despite what some claim, the real universe is teeming with purpose and meaning.

Second, I will give examples of what I refer to as ‘intimations of transcendence’ of many kinds – human creations such as art, music, literature; beauty in nature such as mountains, flowers, birds; personal interactions where webs of support and love lift us up out of our individual lives. As Thich Nhat Hanh has emphasized, we take for granted the extraordinary miracle of our own existence; but can make ourselves aware of it by personal reflection.

Finally, maybe the most important part of the event will be asking those who attend to contribute readings, poetry, music, whatever that has such a nature and is meaningful to them in this way.

Area Meeting Dates for 2023

The dates and venues for next year’s Area Meetings are below. With the exception of September, the meetings are on Saturdays, starting at 10:30am and usually with a spiritual nurture session at 1:30pm. Please put the dates in your diaries.

14th January: Faringdon

11th March: Burford

13th May: Charlbury

8th July: Oxford. This meeting will start with the AGM of the OSAM Charity, and there will be a picnic and games in the afternoon.

Sunday 10th September: Abingdon. We will be inviting Friends to join our Meeting for Worship at 10:15am, followed by a bring-&-share lunch. Area Meeting will start at 2pm.

11th November: Swindon

From the Wider Quaker Community...

‘Peace and the War in Ukraine’: Chichester Quakers Annual Peace Lecture

Friday 11th November 6:30pm, online

The speaker will be Oliver Robertson, Head of Witness & Worship, Quakers in Britain. Oliver will probably cover the various peace responses to the outbreak of the war, the options and opportunities for building a more enduring peace afterwards, and some of the militaristic values that lead towards a particular mindset in the UK.

To attend, and to receive the Zoom link, please email eventschiquakers@gmail.com. There is no fee, but donations are welcome to Quakers Supporting Ukrainian Refugees (via <https://www.cafonline.org/>).

We thank Sarah and John Simpson, visitors to our Meeting on 30th October, for drawing our attention to this lecture.

Statement on the Quaker Peace Testimony and Ukraine

Tim Gee, who currently worships at Oxford Meeting, is General Secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). Following Tim’s recent visit to Ukraine, FWCC and several partner Quaker organisations issued a statement on the war on 26th October. Here is an extract:

... We stand with conscientious objectors on all sides of this conflict, with the people in Russia who stand up against their leaders' belligerent actions, and the people in Ukraine employing creative forms of nonviolent civil resistance.

We continue to help relieve suffering, and hold that all nations must radically improve their approach to welcoming refugees, to fully honor the United Nations' Refugee Convention and ensure that all displaced people – no matter their origin – have access to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. ...

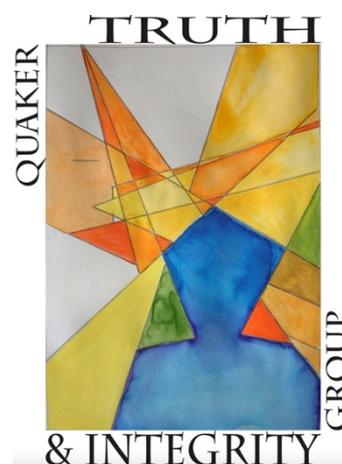
Whichever way this war ends, we are realistic that healing and sustainable peacemaking will in all likelihood take more than a generation, and will only be possible through inclusive and sustainable processes from the national to the local. ...

You can read the full statement on the website of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (USA) at <https://www.fcnl.org/>

Quaker Truth & Integrity Group (QTIG)

QTIG was set up in March 2022 as a national Quaker body in response to the awareness that standards of truth and integrity are being undermined in politics, public and commercial life, and social media. It is committed to:

- Upholding standards of honesty and integrity in our lives and organisations;
- Acknowledging that the majority of those in public life/politics are people of goodwill and finding ways of working respectfully with them on 'kinder ground';
- Helping to ensure that the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership continue to govern public life;
- Working towards a system of truly inclusive, participative democracy;
- Encouraging constitutional reform and strengthening systems of accountability;
- Promoting higher standards of truth within the media, including social media.



The group has issued a powerful declaration on its website which you can find at <https://quakertruth.org/>

Where truth and integrity flourish, so too can personal relationships. Where truth and integrity stand firm, so too can our democracy and our precious traditions (*from the QTIG declaration*).

Truth, Misinformation and War: An Online Course with Woodbrooke

5 weeks: Friday 4th November–Monday 12th December

Misinformation fuels conflict and war and is itself now a weapon of war. It is easily spread through social media and biased news channels. How do we untangle complex stories to find the truth? How can our testimony of Truth help us?

This course focuses on how social media is being used to promote lies and wage war on democracy, and how this is leading to polarisation and violence and the promotion of inequality. The course will demonstrate the strong connection between this problem and current hot wars, such as those in Syria and Ukraine.

<https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/product/truth-misinformation-and-war/>

Faith in Action in and around Abingdon

Abingdon Peace Group

Tuesday 15th November, 8pm, online

A meeting with speaker Rowland Dye, a nuclear physicist and peace campaigner, on the links between nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101?pwd=RmxHLzBQaXlHYjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09>

Meeting ID: 913 1513 4101 Passcode: 015836

Other Events

Weekly Vigil against the War in Ukraine

Every Monday 8.15–8.45am until hostilities end, Abingdon War Memorial

Vigil with banners 'No More War' and 'No to Putin's War, No to NATO expansion'.

'Nuclear Risks in the Light of the Ukraine War': Movement for the Abolition of War Annual Remembrance Lecture

Saturday 12th November 2pm, Welsh Church of Central London and online



Each year, the Movement for the Abolition of War holds a lecture to mark Remembrance Day. This year's lecture will be given by Kate Hudson, General Secretary of CND. Kate writes:

At the start of this year, the hands of the Doomsday Clock were set at 100 seconds to midnight – climate crisis and the risk of nuclear war put us at greater risk of Armageddon than ever before. A few weeks later the situation dramatically worsened as Russia invaded Ukraine; nuclear threats are now common currency, yet our government pursues policies that make nuclear war more, not less, likely. How has this happened and is there a way out for humanity?

To attend in person or online, please register at <https://abolishwar.net/nuclear-risks/>

'Made in the 80s': the anti-nuclear protests

This is a new Channel 4 series reviewing 'a decade that shaped our world'. The first episode, broadcast on 24th October, addresses concerns over the threats posed by the arrival of Cruise missiles and the protests that surrounded them, including the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. You can watch the programme on the Channel 4 website (<https://www.channel4.com/>; search for 'made in the 80s'), but you'll need to register. A short clip featuring one of the Greenham women is available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7-IY1-trMFQ>

Abingdon Carbon Cutters

Wednesday 16th November 7:30pm, online.

A meeting with Simon Eggleston, climate scientist, on the IPCC and COP27: 'Too little, too late?'

Saturday 3rd December 10–4

Sign up for an hour or two to help plant the next batch of trees on Rye Farm Meadow. Details on the Carbon Cutters website shortly: <https://abingdoncarboncutters.org.uk/>.

Events at the Climate Emergency Centre

Located below the County Hall Museum, the Climate Emergency Centre organises a variety of events aimed at building resilience in the face of the threat to the planet. November's calendar includes climate conversations on whether the UK should drill for new oil and gas, 'Knit & Chat',

'Chess & Coffee', repair cafés organised by Abingdon Carbon Cutters and a toy swap. For dates and details, visit <https://oneplanetabingdon.org/events/>

Among the Abingdon Churches

From the newsletter of the Church in Abingdon:

Abingdon Progressive Christianity Network

This group meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30pm via Zoom and welcomes new members. You do not need to be a member of the Progressive Christianity Network, but it is hoped that you will be interested in exploring open and contemporary Christian understanding. For more information or/and to attend meetings, please contact Cliff Marshall:

cliff.marshall@pcnbritain.org.uk

Christian Aid: Task Group Plea

Ever since the establishment of the Church in Abingdon, there has been a local Christian Aid task group which has continued the work of the Christian Aid Committee in the town for well over 50 years. Sadly, this task group is about to lose over half of its members and now needs new volunteers to join to enable the work of Christian Aid in Abingdon to continue as effectively as it has in the past. If you are interested in finding out more about what being part of the task group involves, please contact Doug Bradshaw bradshaw.doug@gmail.com

Among Abingdon Friends

Poem of the Month

From the Poetry Group

'Night' was the theme of our meeting on 26th October, with poems featuring trains, bonfires, bells, fairies, a tyger and a four-poster bed as well as the Moon and stars. The poem that we have chosen to share with you is by Rosalind Baker, sister of Roger:

Night Noises

I scarcely slept at all the whole night through
hour after endless hour awake I lay
listening to night-noises which were few,
and waited for the dark to turn to day.

I heard the trains pass by me through the night
One minute close, then dwindling far away.
A memory came back, the sounds and sight
Of trains roaring in India after their prey.

These great iron beasts with single giant eye
rushed through the dark across the sleeping plain,
and as they passed they howled a lullaby
to those who woke and turned to sleep again.

Beside such monsters English trains are tame,
they do not roar and spit out grits and flame.

Rosalind Baker

We also appreciated 'Antarctica', Derek Mahon's heart-stoppingly poignant depiction of Captain Oates' heroic sacrifice on Scott's ill-fated Polar expedition. You can find it at <https://alastairhumphreys.com/antarctica/>

News of Friends

Roger Baker and **Robert Stocks** have recently undergone hip replacements, and **Roger Bush** has injured his hip in a fall. We were delighted at Robert's return to Meeting on 30th October and look forward to seeing both Rogers again in the near future. Meanwhile, we send good wishes to all three for their ongoing recoveries.

Friends may remember **Rachel Howell**, who attended Abingdon Meeting over several years in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Sadly, Rachel died on 6th September, a few weeks after being diagnosed with cancer. Her full and active life is recounted in an obituary in October's issue of *Forty-Three*, the Oxford Quaker Meeting newsletter, at <https://oxfordquakers.org/>

Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: November Rota

6 th	Chris Sewell	Liz Matthews
13 th	Alan Pearmain	Judy Goodall
20 th	Rosie Page	Auriel Lancashire
27 th	Richard Smart	Sally Reynolds

November Dates for Your Diary

This is a summary of the Quaker-related events announced on the preceding pages.

Date	Time	Event details
Thurs 3 rd	6pm	Enquirers' meeting Oxford Meeting House
Sun 6 th	After MfW	Business Meeting
Fri 11 th	6:30pm	Chichester Quakers Annual Peace Lecture Online
Sat 12 th	10:30am	Area Meeting Swindon Meeting. House
	10:30am	Extended Meeting for Worship Oxford Meeting House
	2pm	Movement for the Abolition of War Remembrance Day Lecture London and online
Tues 15 th	8pm	Abingdon Peace Group Online
Wed 16 th	7:30pm	Abingdon Carbon Cutters Online
Thurs 24 th	6pm	Enquirers' meeting Oxford Meeting House
Sun 27 th	After MfW	Learning Sunday and bring-&-share lunch

Next Month...

The publication date of the newsletter lies between the 28th and the last day of the month. Please send your contributions to the December issue (in words and/or pictures) to the editors by **Friday 25th November**.

Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting

<https://abingdonquakers.org/>

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