

Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

June 2023 (online version)

No. 405

Meetings for Worship

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

Thursday 1st June 7:30pm in the Garden Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street.

Yearly Meeting Epistle

The Epistle was read out at Meeting for Worship on 7th May. We reproduce it here for the benefit of Friends who were not present at the time.

Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting

held in person and online from 28 April to 1 May 2023

We send loving greetings to Friends everywhere.

Cyfleuwn gyfarchion cariadus i Gyfeillion ym mhob man.

Quakers of all ages gathered for Yearly Meeting at Friends House in London, Hemel Hempstead and online. Preparatory sessions took place online in the week before, and Junior Yearly Meeting met earlier in April. An All-together meeting for worship was held with many local meetings and individual Friends joining virtually across Britain and beyond.

We meet at a time when existential issues face us both within our aging and numerically diminishing Society and in the wider world. These require urgent responses. Quakers can show leadership and offer counsel that will help our nations in matters of the degradation of public truth, the climate and ecological crisis, and divisive public commentaries around people's identities and associated rights.

How best can we achieve this? We are a people of faith, always in transition on an exciting path of collective and personal exploration. We seek and follow the eternal Truth of the Spirit, which has many names, remaining open to new leadings and also to the possibility that we are mistaken. Our faith requires us to practise our testimony of truth and integrity in all that we say and do.

Kindness has a powerful impact and we hope to offer caring support to all, including those with whom we may disagree. Speaking from a faith perspective can carry weight. We try to let our lives speak and have a ministry of presence, but can we speak out more as Quakers?

We can be a listening presence, creating a "kinder ground", alongside speaking truth in public places and contexts. We are called to witness truth-telling, accountability,

community-building, and to give messages of hope. Speaking truth to power with love is a ministry, and is vital in a time when truth is often corrupted.

Our Quaker community has many voices, and we are upheld as one by the power of the Spirit. We all have a part to play, need to collaborate and trust those doing work on our behalf. Are we open to all voices, and how can we develop structures to engage all Friends through active listening? Ensuring true access for all in our community is a work of love. This may require us to move outside our own comfort and experience others' frustrations and discomforts.

Yearly Meeting is the all-encompassing body of which we are all a part and where we are most diverse. It takes on the big questions – Who are we as Quakers? Why are we here? What are we led to do? At times we have been mystified, even baffled. However, we discern a need to simplify our structures to make them more transparent, to release energy for practical ministry. We seek intentional change, led by the Spirit, to help our community to thrive as we move into the uncertain futures that dance before us.

Building on our tradition of radical spirituality, we need to be courageous, imaginative, careful, and joyful. We seek corporate structures that are agile, simpler, more inclusive and support equality. Big questions are being asked about how we take the Society forward, with ways of working that meet our practical needs and have spirit-led discernment flowing throughout.

This work will continue into 2024, and ways to involve Friends across Britain Yearly Meeting will be developed, arising from our discernment thus far. As a Society, we must go in whichever direction we are led, so that the Truth may prosper.

Signed in and on behalf of Yearly Meeting,

Adwoa Burnley

Clerk

Support for Ukrainian Victims of the Conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and a Statement on the Peace Testimony and Ukraine

Tim Gee, a member of our Meeting, is General Secretary of the Friends World Committee for Consultation. Tim, together with Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, Director of the Geneva Quaker United Nations Office, and Jeremy Routledge of Southern Africa Yearly Meeting, visited Central Europe in August 2022. They were able to see many of the projects being funded and organised by Friends from the region. Tim subsequently wrote this article for The Australian Friend.

When I close my eyes, whether to sleep, rest or pray I find my mind going to Central Europe, in particular to a ship docked in Estonia's principal port, where 2000 Ukrainians, mostly women and children, wait to work out what's next for them.

It wasn't that the conditions were bad. It was clean, there was a playroom for the children, free food, free medicines and professional support to access the social system and to help find employment and accommodation.

It's more that it brought home to me, powerfully and symbolically, the long, tense wait that millions of people now face as they hope and pray for an end to the war in their home country.

I had spent the last week alongside Friends Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, Director of the Geneva Quaker United Nations Office, and Jeremy Routledge of Southern Africa Yearly Meeting, visiting Central Europe, where upwards of 375,000 soldiers stand 'pre-positioned' for war. This is also a humanitarian frontline, which countless people have escaped to or through.



Tim Gee

Quakers in the region are sparse but spirited, and thanks to the generosity of Friends around the world donating money, a group nominated from the Central European Gathering has been able to distribute funds to places and projects where they know it will make a difference.

As part of a talk requested by Friends in Warsaw, Nozizwe quoted one of her Quaker United Nations Office predecessors, who helpfully summarises Friends' peace testimony as the refusal to kill, relief of suffering and responding to the call to be peacemakers by building the institutions of peace and removing the causes of war. We saw every one of these being manifested in Central Europe.

Firstly, **refusal to kill**. There are not Quakers that we know of engaged in fighting on any side of this war.

The second part is **relief of suffering**. In Warsaw we met Friends who described feeling strengthened by Quaker meetings for worship and community to help with sign-language translation, provide *pro bono* legal support and distribute hand-made toys made by Friends in North America. In Krakow, we met with staff from a charity assisting refugee families with special needs to access the support they need, supported financially by Quakers. In Estonia, Friends have been helping with distributing essentials to newcomers, with providing access to free activities like ice-skating, and helping establish new institutions to welcome people including a school.

We also heard some tragic stories highlighting fixable problems in European governmental systems for welcoming newcomers. Another set of sad stories concerned relations between newly arrived, traumatised Ukrainians, and ethnic Russians living in the bordering countries.

Friends in Tallinn are already working with an established psychotherapeutic drama organisation to organise local-level sessions promoting intercultural understanding, with the hope that this could be replicated elsewhere. On a small scale at least, this is part of **building institutions of peace**.

On a larger scale, our global Quaker peace institutions are oriented towards the UN. At the time of writing, direct negotiations between Russia and Ukraine have broken down. We have been asked though, by grassroots Friends to do what we can to encourage conversations about shared security between the states in the region, leading towards a settlement that meets each country's needs.

There are military routes to an end to the present fighting, but all would result in avoidable death. Quakers may be unusual in how consistently we have held to Jesus' teachings of peace, but we are by no means alone in our concern for a just peace and the negotiated settlement of conflict.

There are about six Friends in Estonia, four in Latvia, even fewer in Lithuania and a few more in Poland and the other Central European states. Proportionate to their size the work the Central European Gathering is supporting is extraordinary.

We went asking questions about our peace testimony, and returned certain that it is needed now as much as ever. How it manifests in this climate is still emerging. What is certain is that our vocation is to make peace, which the world sorely needs right now.

On their return, Tim and his colleagues helped to produce the following statement:

Statement on the Peace Testimony and Ukraine

Quakers are a people who follow after peace, love and unity. Our peace testimony is our witness to the Truth as we experience it.

Our testimony manifests as a cumulative set of actions, continually tested and added to over centuries. These actions are diverse in form, but have been broadly united by:

1. Refusal to kill
2. Relief of suffering,
3. Building the institutions of peace, and
4. Supporting peacebuilding and removing the causes of war.

At the onset of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the Friends World Committee for Consultation issued a Christian Call for Peace, affirming that invasion and occupation are the opposite of Christ's universal call to reconciliation and unity, and echoing church statements in many countries, including Ukraine, calling for an immediate ceasefire replaced by a peace-making dialogue. This call would echo the Golden Rule (treat others as you would want to be treated) which is a foundational value of all major world religions, has the potential to eliminate violence, and helps us to recognize one another.

Almost by definition, peace-making often involves engaging with people making war and understanding the reasons they do so. Nevertheless, our vocation as a peace church is to seek and make real the peaceful alternatives to armed conflict, which with God's help, are possible, and to ensure that the long-lasting human costs of war are not forgotten or neglected.

We continue to uphold the right to refuse to kill. 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 honour 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. We will continue to press for this.

We continue to seek to build the institutions of peace. Justice with peace requires binding frameworks of international law and restorative justice, as well as global investment in violence prevention at the community level. We know that all of these have been insufficient to prevent the injustice in Ukraine, and must be strengthened to win peace.

And we continue to support peace-building measures. We call on the governments of Ukraine, Russia, neighbouring countries, the United States, NATO, and the European Union, to explore all avenues—whether public or private—for a renewed conversation to address the human security needs of all the peoples and countries in the region, to help provide the basis for long term peace.

Whichever way this war ends, we are realistic that healing and sustainable peace-making will in all likelihood take more than a generation, and will only be possible through inclusive and sustainable processes from the international to the local. That process must begin now.

We are ready to play our part.

Signed by,

Timothy Gee

General Secretary, Friends World Committee for Consultation

Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge

Director, Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva

Sarah Clarke

Director, Quaker United Nations Office, New York

Bridget Moix

General Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Joyce Ajlouny

General Secretary, American Friends Service Committee

Jennifer Preston

General Secretary, Canadian Friends Service Committee

Tracey Martin

Director, Quaker Council on European Affairs

Oliver Robertson

General Secretary, Quaker Peace and Social Witness

Abingdon Quaker Matters

Learning Sunday: 11th June

After Meeting for Worship and refreshments, we will gather in the main hall for a session led by our Local Development Worker, Moya, based on healing practices from *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem:

‘Full of wisdom and understanding, Menakem offers a new way to understand racism and, more importantly, to heal it. This book lays out a path to freedom and peace, first for individual readers, then for our culture as a whole.’

The learning session will close at 1pm and will be followed by a Bring and Share Lunch. Just bring whatever food you would like to share, or bring your own if you are unable to share.

Annual Outing: Sunday 9th July

Kate and Rosie are putting their heads together to plan our annual outing on the afternoon of Sunday 9th July. No further details are available yet, but please save the date!



Special Appeal: Quakers Supporting Ukrainian Refugees

From Chris Sewell

As Tim Gee reports in the article on pages 2—4, Friends in some of the countries surrounding Ukraine are working to support Ukrainian people who are suffering as a result of the war. Since the war began many thousands of pounds and euros have been sent to support work by local Friends and to well respected local partner organisations. Projects are being supported in Ukraine itself as well as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Estonia, Romania and Italy. Examples of these projects are given in Tim's article.



The Europe and Middle East section of Friends' World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) is inviting Friends around the world to support this work. They have identified two Quaker bodies to receive donations and distribute grants:

- British Friends of QCEA (Quaker Council for European Affairs) funding projects in Estonia, Hungary, Georgia and Poland, and
- The Central European Gathering of Friends which supports work in Italy, Estonia, Romania, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic.

Further details can be found at <https://fwccemes.org/news/quaker-support-for-ukraine>

You can donate in these ways:

- **Cash** when the appeal is made after Meeting for Worship.
- **Online** by credit card, PayPal or your CAF account through the CAF donation page for the British Friends of QCEA: <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/20251#!/DonationDetails>
- **Direct transfer in sterling** to the British Friends of QCEA's bank account:
Sort code: 40-52-40 (CAF Bank)
Account no. 00089587
Account name: British Friends of QCEA
Please include the reference 'Ukraine'.
- **Direct transfer in euros** to the Central European Gathering bank account:
Fio Bank: Account no. 2601223428
IBAN: CZ73 2010 0000 0026 0122 3428, BIC/SWIFT: FIOBCZPPXXX
Please include the reference 'Support for Ukrainians'.

Thank you.

An Unplanned AI Fresco Meeting

On Sunday 7th May we found ourselves locked out of the Abingdon Community Support Centre for the second time in six months. As a result, we gathered for a half-hour meeting under the entrance canopy to the accompaniment of birdsong and passing traffic. Fortunately, we now have access to an emergency key, so from now on such unplanned outdoor meetings won't happen again.

A Note From the Treasurer

In accordance with the discernment made at Business Meeting on 30th April, cheques for £500 have been sent to the Abingdon Carousel and Oxford Friends' Action on Poverty. Both have been received with thanks.

Around the Area and Region

'The Feeling of Light': An Outreach Event at Sibford School

Thursday 15th June 1:45 for 2pm, Sibford School

OSAM Friends are welcome to attend an afternoon of shared creating with Year 6 pupils at Sibford School on Thursday 15th June. Inspired by the Kendal panels, Friends and children will create panels together that evoke what it feels like to shine one's inner light.

Please contact Julia Dover, Youth Children and Families Development Worker (Thames Valley), if you would like to take part.

Note that you must have a current DBS.



From the Wider Quaker Community

Video Review of Quaker Work in 2022

Britain Yearly Meeting has released a short video in which Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, expresses appreciation for the support given to Quaker work during 2022 by Friends across the UK.

Among other activities, Paul highlights the work of the Local Development Workers; 'Peace at the Heart', a relational approach to education in British schools; and the giant children's Meeting for Worship on Zoom, which brings together families who have no access to a children's Meeting in their locality. He also notes how Quaker values are being brought to the wider world through Friends' involvement in the areas of peace, human rights and climate change.

You can view the video at <https://vimeo.com/803162166/b442a203a6>

How Much Should I Give? A Guide to Quaker Giving

A group of Friends has been working for some time on how to help other Friends decide how much to give to Britain Yearly Meeting and/or their local Meetings. The group is called the Giving Advocates and is facilitated by Beth Follini of the fundraising team at BYM. The group has published *How much should I give to support Quaker work?*, a guide to help Friends discern – either on their own or in a group – how much they should give to support Quaker work. Help is provided in the form of examples and case studies. Beth writes:

'Many Friends find talking about money difficult and yet giving to the work of the Society is grounded in our faith. This guide has been produced by a group of Friends who are committed to talking about Giving. It is hoped that Friends can use this guide as a spark for an Afterword after meeting or it could be circulated amongst Friends as

part of your annual schedule or appeal for contributions. However it is used, it is hoped that it will prompt conversations, reflection and giving.'

A digital copy of the guide in PDF format is being sent out with this issue of the newsletter. You can also find it on the Britain Yearly Meeting website at <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/how-much-should-i-give> (alternatively, go to <https://quaker.org.uk>, type 'advocates' in the Search box and click the item entitled 'Giving Advocates' published on 16th May 2023).

Adderbury Gathering 2023: Reparations for historical injustices (slavery, colonialism...) or responding to current challenges, or both? A Quaker take.

Sunday 18th June 3pm, Adderbury Meeting House.

A talk by Ann Floyd, a member of Jordans Meeting who has longstanding links with Africa. Ann was one of the hosts at the recent meeting of BORM (see the May issue of this newsletter). Ann writes:

'The legacies of slavery, the slave trade and colonialism are topics of current debate in Britain and elsewhere. Quakers are one of many groups thinking about how the current generation ought to respond. Should the focus be on reparations for the past, or on current issues such as loss and damage, health, education, economic inequalities...? Or both? How should we go about whatever we do? How does this look to those we want to support, and whose agenda is it? British Quakers have begun exploring all this both amongst ourselves and with Quakers in Africa. This talk will be a personal take on the journey so far and what the next steps might be.'

For further information, visit <https://banburyeveshamquakers.org.uk/events/>

Woodbrooke Event in Witney: Finding the Hidden World of Early Quakers

Sunday 29th October 10:30—4:30, Witney Masonic Centre, 20 Church Green, Witney, OX28 4AW.

Join Isabella Rosner, Erica Canela and Ben Pink Dandelion for a day event which examines the world and lives of early Quakers and includes an exclusive viewing of an exhibition of early Quaker schoolgirl needlework. The exhibition will include cabinets and caskets, mirror frames, and embroidered accessories made at Shacklewell School and a variety of other nonconforming and Anglican schools in every corner of 17th- and 18th-century England.

Places are very limited, so book early at

<https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/courses/finding-the-hidden-world-of-early-quakers/>

Faith in Action in and around Abingdon

Abingdon Peace Group

The Peace Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month, normally at the Northcourt Centre. Details of the June meeting will follow in due course. Contact abingdonpeace@gmail.com

Abingdon Carbon Cutters

Carbon Cutters meet on the third Wednesday of the month. Details of the June meeting will follow in due course. Visit <https://abingdoncarboncutters.org.uk/> or email carbon.cutters@gmail.com

Among Abingdon Friends

Testimony for Beryl Davidson: A Request for Contributions

Sally Reynolds and Judith Baker have been asked to write a Testimony for Beryl and would be very grateful if any Friends could share their memories. In particular, Sally and Judith would like to have any recollections of Beryl's spoken ministry, which they remember as being pithy and helpful!

Beryl also contributed to a collection of 'spiritual journeys' that were shared in a series of Learning Sundays several years ago. Judith thinks that these 'journeys' were printed and gathered into a black file, but has been unable to locate it in our cupboard in the Abbey Centre. She says Beryl's contribution was beautiful and would be helpful in writing the Testimony.

If you have any memories of Beryl to share and/or you know the whereabouts of the file of 'spiritual journeys', please get in touch with Sally or Judith: contact details in the list of members.

Visiting French Teenagers Seek Opportunities for English Conversation: Can You Help?

Richard Smart writes:

In July I have ten French teenagers and three adults coming over to go cycle/canoe camping. They really want to meet English speakers as well as have fun camping, canoeing and cycling. So I am looking for people who might like to join us either going upstream to Oxford, exploring Oxford, coming downstream to Abingdon, exploring Abingdon or even just having a meal together. They are very pleasant and polite teenagers and good company.

The programme is:

Monday 24th: Arrive.

Tuesday 25th: Paddle and pedal to Oxford campsite via Sandford; set up camp.

Wednesday 26th: Explore Oxford by bike and canoe.

Thursday 27th: Paddle and pedal back to Abingdon lock; set up camp.

Friday 28th: Explore Abingdon by bike and canoe.

Saturday 29th: Pack away.

Sunday 30th: Return home.

If you think you might like to join us in any way then please contact me on 01235 523324 or dickcsmart@gmail.com



News of Friends

Roger Bush had a fall in late April, which resulted in injuries to his face and two fractured cervical vertebrae. He is having to wear a restrictive neck brace for at least six weeks, which means he can only look straight ahead. We send love and best wishes to Roger for a speedy recovery.

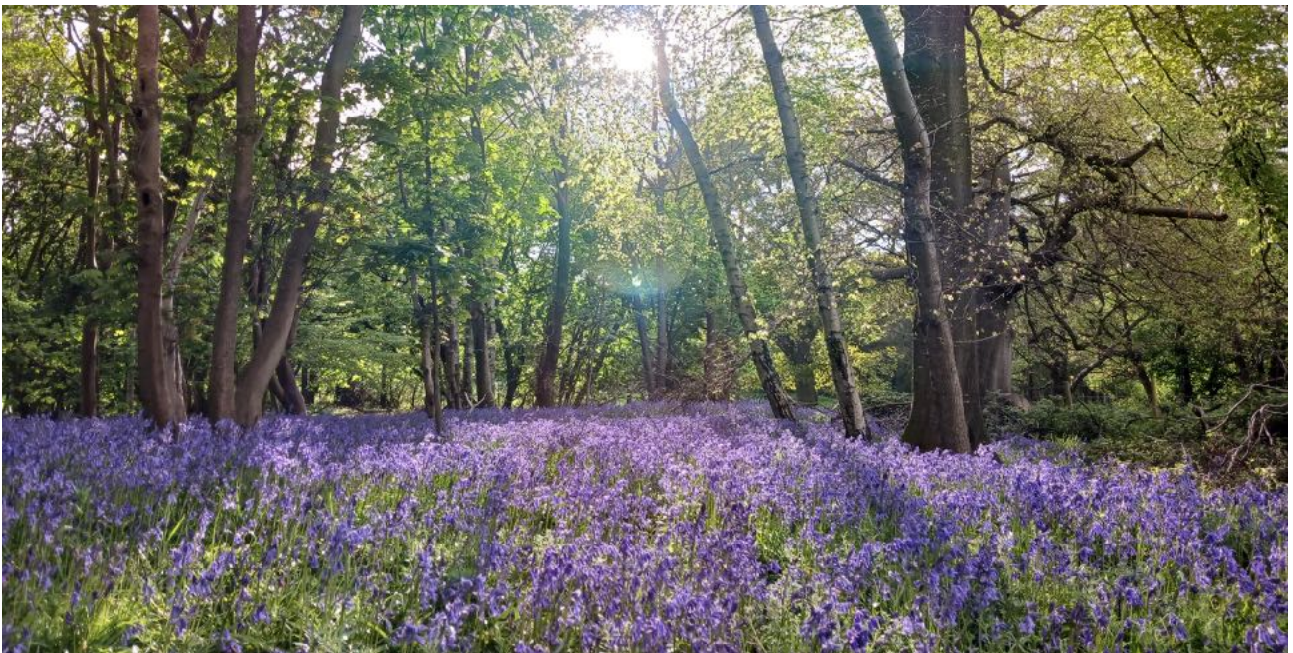
Val James' daughter Kate has informed us that Val is currently in The Close Care Home in Burcot, having had trouble with her knee. We also send Val our love and hope she will soon be able to return home.

Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: June Rota

4th	Alan Pearmain	Rosie Page
11th	Liz Matthews	Sally Reynolds
18th	Adrian Allsop	Auriel Lancashire
25th	Richard Smart	Chris Sewell

Next Month...

Please send your contributions for the July issue (in words and/or pictures) to the editors by **Tuesday 27th June.**



Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting

<https://abingdonquakers.org/>

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