

Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

December 2023: online version

No. 411

Meetings for Worship

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

Thursday 7th December 7:30pm in the Garden Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street.

Woodbrooke offers online meetings for worship on Zoom at various times during week. For a timetable and the link to the Zoom room, visit <https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/worship/>

Three Months in Hebron

Earlier this year Ian Cave of Charlbury Meeting spent three months in Palestine, working in Hebron on the West Bank as an Ecumenical Accompanier (EA) with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). An international programme, EAPPI is led in the UK by Quakers. On 24th October Ian and one of his fellow EAs, Sherin Shebet, gave an online talk about their experiences to nearly 80 Friends in OSAM. Ian hoped the talk would help us to understand the context of the current situation better. While unequivocally condemning the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7th October as 'utterly against international law', Ian expressed equal concern at the 'collective punishment' being meted out to Palestinian civilians for the actions of Hamas, which is also against international law.

Liz Matthews attended the talk and contributes this summary. She emphasises that 'Any errors in this article are mine.'

About EAPPI

EAPPI has had a presence in the West Bank for 20 years. Volunteer EAs come



from all over the world with a wide range of experiences and skills. They work in teams of five, with six teams on the ground during Ian and Sherin's sojourn. The programme aims to:

- Monitor human rights abuses for the UN and other organisations. The reports are included in the UN's data, and other bodies such as the ICRC offer support to the people who have experienced the abuses.
- Deter human rights abuses through their presence. Ian noted that when the international volunteers are present, the people around them tend to modify their behaviour, knowing that the volunteers are likely to report their experiences after they return home.
- Show solidarity with peace activists, both Palestinian and Israeli, and help to support their work.
- Advocate for an end to military occupation. Ian feels that there is still hope on this score.

The EAs access the West Bank through Israel, which determines whether or not to allow individual volunteers into the country (some are turned back at the airport). They try to work ‘with principled impartiality’: that is, pro-human rights and pro-international law.

Hebron: A City of Two Communities



A view of Old Hebron.

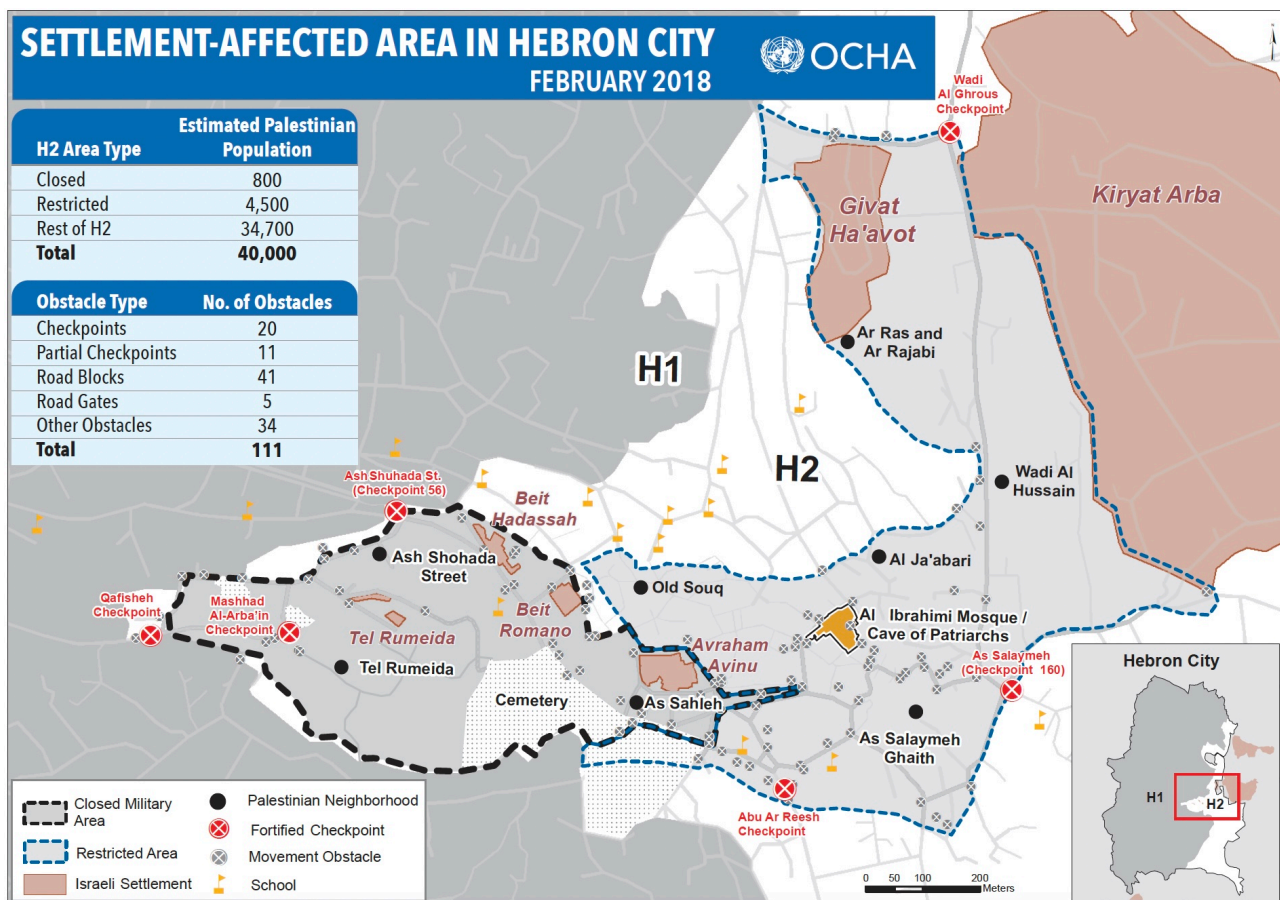
Hebron is a large city located about 18 miles from Jerusalem, with about 220,000 Palestinian residents, the majority of whom live in the Palestinian-controlled zone: H1 on the map on the next page. It is the only major West Bank city that has Israeli settlers living in its heart: zone H2 on the map. They currently number roughly 700 and are protected by Israeli soldiers. In some cases the two communities are separated by only a few feet — even, just the dividing wall of a house. The international community overwhelmingly considers that the Israeli settlements contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention and, therefore, are illegal (see ‘Useful Links’ at the end of this article).

Hebron is of major religious significance to Muslims and Jews alike (also Christians) on account of the building known to them as the Ibrahimi Mosque and the Cave of the Patriarchs respectively. It houses the tomb of Abraham and his family, and Ian commented ‘You can understand why Jews, Christians and Moslems want access to it.’

The map also shows the restricted area within H2 which is under Israeli military control with numerous checkpoints. Palestinians’ freedom of movement in this zone is severely restricted: they are not allowed to drive vehicles or to walk down certain streets, which makes it difficult to get around in their daily lives. An example is Shuhada Street (King David Street) where Palestinian shops were closed and their doors welded shut after an uprising following the 1994 massacre of Muslims in the Cave of Patriarchs. Residents now have to access their homes from the rear or, in some cases, through the roof.

Different legal systems operate in the two zones. In H1, the population is governed by Palestinian civil law; in H2, the Israeli citizens are governed by Israeli civil law and the Palestinians by Israeli

military law. As a result, an under-age Israeli boy and an under-age Palestinian boy caught committing an identical offence are likely to be dealt with very differently. The Israeli boy will be treated as a minor, while the Palestinian boy will be treated as an adult offender.



Map of Hebron showing the two areas referred in this article.

One Israeli peace group with whom the EAs met described the state of affairs in Hebron as a ‘regime of separation and violence, which has made life intolerable and commercial activity impossible for [Palestinians] ... Day after day, year after year, this policy chips away at Palestinian communities in the area.’ Ian confirmed that this is what he witnessed: the ‘slow chipping away, trying to get people to move out.’

The EAs at Work

Ian and Sherin gave illustrated examples of violations of the kinds of human rights that they were tasked with monitoring: freedom of movement, right to education, and freedom of religion.

Freedom of movement. Palestinian construction workers employed in Israel must pass through the Tayba checkpoint on their way to work, and show their work permit and ID. It is only open from 4—6am, during which time 10,000 workers may pass through. On one occasion just one out of the four turnstiles was open, and only 5,000 men got through. The remainder therefore missed out on a day’s work and, hence, a day’s pay.

Right to education. Pupils walking to and from Cordoba School must pass through 1—2 checkpoints each way, which are staffed by heavily armed Israeli soldiers. Sherin showed a video of children queuing up at the checkpoint on their way home, begging the soldier sitting inside to open it up. He refused to do so for some time, without giving a reason; Sherin said that this is a

frequent occurrence. Teachers at the school need to have a permit to pass through the checkpoint, and the EAs spoke to one who had been waiting for her permit for four months. Unable to use the checkpoint, she was obliged to make a 10—15 minute detour each way.

Freedom of religion. To access the Ibrahimi Mosque, the Palestinian Muslims must pass through a checkpoint and soldiers. This causes long lines on Fridays, the wait being exacerbated while the intending worshippers — women and men — are searched for weapons.



The Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

Sherin also showed photos and videos taken by the EAs in the Old Souk and its environs. At ground level it appears like any normal souk. However, looking up you see a wire netting covering it, littered with objects that have been thrown down from the nearby Israeli settlement, ranging from cans and bottles (some filled with urine) to broken plastic chairs. On Saturday afternoons inhabitants of the settlement, accompanied by a large group of heavily armed soldiers, make a tour of the Souk and historical sites in the city. They may be joined by settlers from elsewhere on the West Bank and even overseas visitors. Palestinians are not allowed in the Souk during the tour and may be obliged to close their shops. The EAs endeavour to provide a protective presence for the shopkeepers at this time; their efforts are much appreciated,.

Fear and Hope

There are a number of peace groups active in the region, a substantial number of which are Israeli. However, since 7th October life has become more precarious for the Jewish-run organisations in particular. The EAs themselves have been withdrawn: hopefully, only temporarily. And a small group, the Human Rights Defenders, has trained local people to use video cameras so that they can record human rights abuses and upload them to platforms such as Instagram. Sadly, though, the Palestinian authorities have little or no power to secure justice for these abuses. And the people are even more frightened now; Sherin, whose mother is Palestinian, says her relatives in the West Bank are 'terrified and struggling'.

So, is there any hope? Resilience, determination and non-violent resistance seem to be the watchwords in this respect. A shopkeeper in the Souk, who had been offered 'lots of money' for his shop by settlers, told the EAs: 'Why should I leave? This is where I was brought up, my community.' 'You admire his courage,' was Ian's comment to us. Another man, who had experienced physical violence from the Israeli military, including the loss of an eye, observed: 'Why should I be angry? That's what they want, so they can use it against me as an excuse to attack me.' Ian said that his words 'really echo with me now, because they don't just represent his situation, they represent the situation of all the Palestinian people.'

Useful Links

Liz adds: These are some of the websites that I consulted when reading around Ian's talk.

EAPPI:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/eappi>

<https://eappi.org/en/>

<https://www.eyewitnessblogs.com/> (vivid reports from individual EAs)

International Law relevant to the EAs' work:

IV Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 12 August 1949 Part III, Section I, Article 27. Entitlement of protected persons to respect...

Part III, Section III, Article 49. Prohibition against the Occupying Power transferring parts of its own civilian population to the occupied territory.

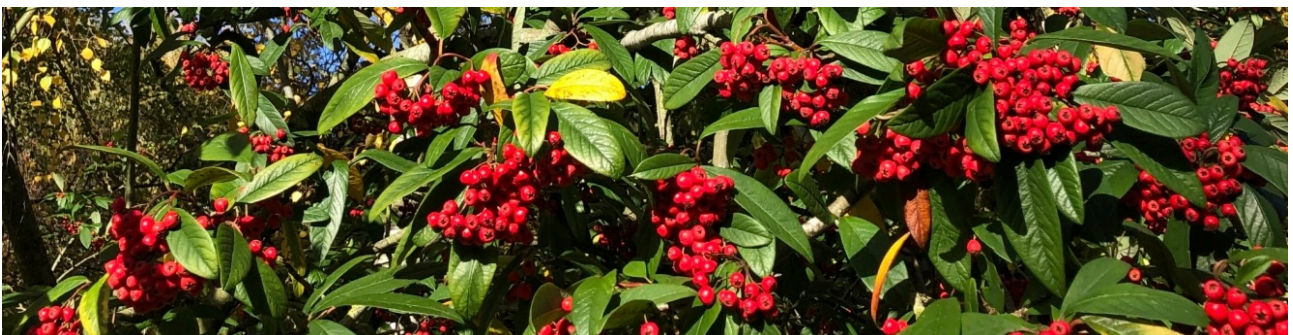
https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, various articles: 'Everyone has the right to education ... freedom of movement ... freedom of thought ... and religion'.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

An Israeli perspective on the legality of the West Bank settlements:

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/facts-about-jewish-settlements-in-the-west-bank>



Abingdon Quaker Matters

Business Meeting: 10th December

We will be holding a short Business Meeting after Meeting for Worship on Sunday 10th December. This will be about an additional contribution to BYM.

Christmas Meeting for Worship: 17th December

We will follow the normal practice of 30 minutes of silent Meeting for Worship, followed by 30 minutes of all-age worship, when the children will join us for programmed readings, singing and music. There will be a small Christmas tree which the children usually decorate. Mince pies will be shared afterwards (contributions, home-made or otherwise, are welcome).

The children will have their own activities for 30 minutes before the all-age worship.

Special Appeal: The Hands Up Project

By tradition, the children speak to our December appeal at Christmas Meeting for Worship. Here is an introduction to this year's chosen charity, the Hands Up Project, with advice on how to donate.

Through its network of volunteers, the Hands Up Project connects children around the world with young people in Palestine via Zoom and Facebook Live. In normal times, it uses online interaction, drama and storytelling activities, to promote mutual understanding, personal growth, creativity and the development of English language skills. Students develop their spoken English naturally in weekly link-ups between Palestinian classes and schools and volunteers around the world. Families also connect from home to talk about their daily lives, providing everyone with rich opportunities to celebrate their differences and rejoice in their commonalities.



Three key areas of activity are:

Remote storytelling. Volunteers around the world and children in Palestine tell their stories to an audience of hundreds, sometimes thousands. Stories for young and older learners are broadcast every day of the week.

Drama. The Hands Up Project has trained teachers to set up and run drama clubs in schools all over Palestine. These spaces enable students to develop their creativity and discover their talents. Short plays created by Palestinian children have been performed live and remotely at schools, conferences, literature festivals, and public events on an international stage.

Teacher development. The Hands Up Project runs free online professional development courses for Palestinian teachers, as well as specialised courses on remote theatre.

Since 7th October, life for Palestinians in Gaza, and also the West Bank, has changed in unimaginable ways and the work of Hands Up Project has been disrupted. Poor, or non-existent, connectivity means that the only way for people in Gaza to communicate with the the Hands Up Project is by text message. Updates are being sent daily, and the messages are read out in 'HUPcasts' by volunteers. You can access these recordings on the charity's home page: <https://>

www.handsupproject.org/ or at <https://www.handsupproject.org/emergency-blog>. This poem, read out in HUPcast 3, is particularly poignant:

Eyes are for Looking
And seeing sun
Tongues are for greeting
And saying fun
Legs are for walking slowly
And also run
Hands are for shaking
with friends
Not for shooting gun

Its author, nine-year-old Fatema Saidam, and her whole family were killed in an air strike on the night of 17th October. On its home page, the Hands Up Project invites us to: 'Ask yourself what kind of a world we live in, where the responsibility to tell us how to live falls on a 9-year-old girl in Gaza.'

Nick Bilbrough, the charity's Artistic Director, is a Quaker from Totnes. On 19th November he was a on BBC Radio Devon's *Have Faith* on Sunday, . You can listen to his interview on BBC Sounds at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0Gpnnf2> (2:05:01–2:23:17).

You can donate to The Hands Up Project in these ways:

- **Cash** when the appeal is made after Meeting for Worshp. 'Generic' Gift Aid forms should be available if you are a UK taxpayer.
- **Online** at <https://www.handsupproject.org/> (click the 'Donate' button on the home page). Donations are handled by CAF but you don't need a CAF account. The donation form includes the option to add Gift Aid.
- **Cheque**. It's not clear from the website how to make donations by cheque. Liz Matthews has contacted the charity for guidance.

The Hands Up Project is a registered charity: no. 1170272. (Note that it is a different organisation from a charity with a similar name which also operates in the Middle East, The Hands Up Foundation.)

A Thank-You from Britain Yearly Meeting

In response to our recent contribution to BYM, we have received the following message from Aleksandra Zawadzka, Donor Care and Fundraising Support Officer:

On behalf of everyone at Britain Yearly Meeting and those who we support, I would like to say a huge thank you for your generous contribution of £2,700.00 from Abingdon LM. Your donation will go a long way to helping us achieve our goals while working for a more just, equal, peaceful and sustainable world.

Below, we have highlighted some areas of Quaker work and some successful stories; we thought you might be interested to hear about.

Our Local Development Workers (LDWs) are helping Quaker communities to develop new ways to worship together, promoting spiritual connection and non-geographical community.

Our Public Advocacy team are working in Westminster and the devolved governments, demanding a culture of integrity and truth, as well as meaningful steps on the climate, cost of living, and peace.

Our Climate Justice team are focusing on interfaith collaboration, especially on the issue of a loss and damage fund to compensate those poor nations who are suffering the most from the climate crisis despite having done the least to cause it.

Our Peace Education team are developing a network of peer mediation training programmes across England and Wales so that more children and young people acquire lifelong skills in conflict resolution.

This contribution from Abingdon LM makes this and much more possible. Do pass on our thanks to Friends in the meeting!

In Friendship,
Aleksandra Zawadzka

The Friends Quarterly, November 2023

The latest issue of The Friends Quarterly is now available on our bookshelf. It is subtitled 'Good Grief', with three of the four articles addressing the subject of death — something that many of us might shy away from, especially as Christmas approaches. Rosie Page is the initial recipient of the Meeting's copy and commends the issue to us. Liz Matthews also has a copy, which she is happy to share once she has finished reading it.

Around the Area and Region

Charney Manor Seeks New Trustees

Charney Manor is seeking additional Trustees with experience in the hospitality, financial, human resources or charity administration sectors. We meet 4 to 6 times a year at Charney Manor and on Zoom. In January 2024 Charney will become a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) with a separate trading company.

If you feel it's time for you to grow with Charney Manor, please contact Deb Arrowsmith, Clerk to the Trustees, for an informal chat: deb@growing-concern.co.uk



Enjoy Gardening at Charney Manor (even if you haven't done any before!)

Come and join in gardening for all skill levels in the beautiful and peaceful gardens at Charney Manor. Lots of tea, coffee and cake to keep us going (bring your own packed lunch). Come for a few hours or a day occasionally or each **Charney Tuesday**.

Or Join a **Mob-Handed Day** where we tackle a big job together to really make a difference.

Interested? Contact Deb Arrowsmith (details above).

Faith in Action in and around Abingdon

Both **Abingdon Peace Group** and **Abingdon Carbon Cutters** are holding Christmas social events this month instead of their usual meetings.

Abingdon Peace Group's Christmas social will take place on Tuesday 19th December at 8pm in the Northcourt Centre. All are welcome.

Details of Abingdon Carbon Cutters' festive celebration were unavailable when we went to press. Email carbon.cutters@gmail.com for information nearer the date.

Among Abingdon Friends

Poem of the Month

From the Poetry Group

Our November theme, 'Lightness', took us in two directions: to poems exploring light in its varying intensities and to poems exploring lightness in the sense of 'lacking weight'. Poets ranged from Shakespeare and Milton, through Wordsworth and much-loved writers of children's poetry such as RL Stevenson and Walter de la Mare, to contemporary poets — including our own Iain Strachan, who has once again penned our poem of the month.

On Listening to 'The Lark Ascending'

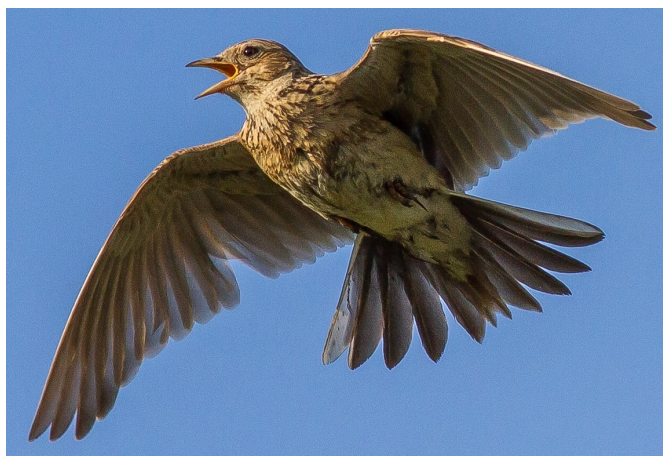
Serene strings
usher in
solo violin
that takes wings.

Like to the Lark
at break of day arising
leaving behind
the sullen world's despising
when on its way
to woeful war,

catches still seconds
of perfect peace,
the sacred state
singing his calm hymns
at heaven's gate.

Listen, give attention
to his whirling curlicues
and trills, till he's alone
cradled in wide sky
high on high
on the cusp of silence,
his final note
pointing upward.

Iain Strachan



Iain has helpfully provided a link to the original poem 'The Lark Ascending', by George Meredith, which inspired Vaughan-Williams' piece: <https://allpoetry.com/The-Lark-Ascending>

News of Friends

We send congratulations and love to **Madeleine and Rob Trivasse** on the birth of their son Cyrus in November. Madeleine writes: '...we are besotted with him. ... we returned home to a lovely card from everyone, thank you so much!'

Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: December Rota

This rota was correct at the time of publication, to the best of the editors' knowledge.

3rd	Auriel	Rosie
10th	Adrian	Alan
17th	Jenny	Richard
24th	Chris	Sally
31st	Adrian	Judy

Next Month...

Please send your contributions for the January issue (in words and/or pictures) to the editors by **Sunday 24th December**.



The editors send Abingdon Friends and all our other readers seasonal greetings and good wishes for the New Year.

Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting

<https://abingdonquakers.org/>

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