



Staffordshire Quaker



July 2007



Stephen Holland puts on a brave face
as he is piloted by Jenny and Adam Orme (p4)



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From the Editor

As I was preparing this edition of SQ a strange feeling struck me. In the late seventies I was a member of 'Friends of the Earth', one of the early groups who saw the need to start taking urgent action to reduce the damage that we, as a human species, are doing to the planet.

At that time a number of churches refused us permission to speak to their members. We were told that what we were doing was 'pagan': "*The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;*" (Psalm 24:1) it is not for us to gainsay what the Lord is doing.

Now, I happen to believe fervently that the, "*The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;*" But that does not mean that I can absolve myself of guilt in the damage that I do day by day to that God-given earth. Rather, I need to recognise the stewardship role clearly spoken of in Scripture for mankind's place on earth.

Mercifully today, that attitude is almost extinguished among religious people. And the scientific community too are slowly coming round to the view that more can - and must - be done to slow climate change and reduce human damage.

As Robert Horton says in his excellent article (p6) "The discussion has moved on from, 'are we causing climate change' to, 'what are we going to do to minimise climate change?' "

So, as I put the material together, I began to see that there is a sea-change taking place in people's attitudes toward the need for conservation of the natural world.

We have quite a few articles on this theme. Also our very good Friend Marian Hussenbux, from Quaker Concern for Animals (<http://www.quaker->

animals.org.uk/) has pointed me toward a London based website of a group that is working in the capital to reduce carbon emissions. See, 'Love London' at <http://lovelondon.london21.org/page/47/show/1121>

Therefore, necessarily, this is a worthy, but rather weighty edition of SQ. So I am pleased that Betty Titley was able to lighten the tone somewhat with her notes on Stone's Day at Woodbrooke. And you will find the pictures from that day on the cover and scattered through the newsletter.

So, my thanks to all who contributed. And I am grateful that all articles were in before the deadline.

Now, this is from my most recent Christian Aid mailing:

"Cut the Carbon in the West Midlands

The longest ever campaign march in UK history will be passing through the West Midlands in August and September. Christian Aid's Cut the Carbon march starts in Northern Ireland on 14 July and ends at the London Stock Exchange on 2 October.

Climate change is not just an environmental crisis - it is a global injustice on a scandalous scale. Christian Aid's campaign aims to influence the government and UK companies to make the urgent carbon-emission cuts necessary to halt climate change.

If you live nearby, join the marchers for the last mile into each day's destination - obviously going to meet them in the most environmentally friendly way possible! The route is outlined overleaf. Contact the West Midlands office for more details."

The section of the march which affects our area is:

"Cut the Carbon march West Midlands route schedule

Join the marchers for the 'last mile' into each destination - they will aim to arrive late afternoon.

24 August: Burton to Lichfield

25 August: Lichfield to Walsall, including lunchtime family picnic at Chasewater Country Park (tbc)

26 August: Walsall to Birmingham, including lunchtime family picnic in Sutton Park

27 August (Bank Holiday Monday): Mass march from Birmingham city centre to rally in Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham

29 August: Birmingham to Halesowen, including evening meeting with local Mps"

My plan is to join them for the Walsall to Birmingham leg, and also Birmingham to Cannon Hill. If anyone is interested I can get all necessary details.

Please remember that SQ is now available online. A number of Friends are taking advantage of this facility, if you wish to receive an electronic instead of a paper copy please let me know. (You receive it before paper

copy readers and it is in colour!)

<http://www.staffs-quakers.org.uk/sq-newsletter.htm>

In Friendship

Keith Wood

Friends' Meeting House, 8 Summerfield Road, Wolverhampton, WV1 4PR

Material for November issue by October 14 please.

Stone goes to Woodbrooke

The Loss Leader

Sometime last autumn a fat letter plopped on to my doormat. It contained £250 in vouchers to be spent on visits to Woodbrooke. Fired with memories of our previous year's successful excursion to Glenthorne, I plotted with Leonora Wilson how to get the best value from this unexpected offer. I felt like an enthusiastic cook who'd been given 51bs of the best Cheddar - free -several recipe books and a family of cheese-addicts.

We decided on a Saturday lunch to Sunday lunch time span with two high spots - a bonfire on the first evening and a session with Prue Weddell-Smith of the Leaveners on Sunday morning.

Betty Tittley



The Verdict By a first-timer at Woodbrooke

As newcomers to Quakers Norman and I were delighted to be invited to Woodbrooke but did not know what to expect. Would the place be comfortable? Would we be bored? Would we feel out of place? We were welcomed warmly, our comfortable bedroom overlooked the lovely garden and we began with a lunch that was delicious and plentiful. The ages of our party ranged from eight to over seventy and I wondered if such a mixed age group would be successful. The children and the more energetic adults were soon occupied with bonfire building. Others visited the library and explored the grounds. After tea we all went into the garden in the dark to attend the ceremonial kindling. We watched the children, bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked and full of joy and in no time we were all children again.

Sunday morning we all gathered in the Art Room to meet Prue. I think we expected to be entertained but we were led firmly into inter-active play,

which required a lot of concentration and the loss of all inhibition. Once again, we all became one age group. I was reminded of village hall parties many years ago. My first impression of Woodbrooke is of a place permeated with love.

Pat

Verdict, by an old hand

Over the years Stone Meeting has had a long weekend at Charney, with all the children in a dormitory in the new barn, and two weekends at Glenthorne where we were snowed in last year; but we have never gone, as a meeting, to Woodbrooke which is "just down the road." Encouraged by the inducement of £250 off the total bill we decided to grasp the nettle. We used the grant to pay for the children and our Sunday morning workshop. Twenty five people arrived on Saturday in beautiful sunshine and we lost not a one although we boated and wandered the grounds in the dark.

We enjoyed it all - each other's company, the food, the grounds, the relaxed atmosphere and, not least, the facilities, including a great display of special Quaker volumes in the library.

We had felt we knew each other well but we made some surprising discoveries on Sunday morning. Who made (and kept) resolutions? Who likes red? Who does not? Why? I had felt cautious about the "getting to know you" games which can be very hackneyed but Prue's approach was original and the pace was fast and furious. We played an interesting role-play game which made us think about power in relationships and about power itself. This is not necessarily authority, of parents over children for example, but may be influence exerted by love and real care for each other.



There was time to wind down and talk before Meeting for Worship.

We recommend that you all use the opportunity to visit or re-visit this great resource. Once in the grounds of Woodbrooke, the everyday world dissolves.

Joan

Stone Children's Meeting 25th February 2007

We have different views on why we come to Friends' Meeting at Stone. I come to socialise, to be with friends, adults and children. We have a stone, looks like a dinosaur egg with blood on it, and while one person holds it and speaks, the others are silent. (Well, that's the theory.)

I felt a bit miserable having to come this morning because I had to get up very early to clean out my rat's cage.

I like the silence when we join the adults in meeting. I can think.

Sometimes I just come for the biscuits.

We like the idea of Woodbrooke being a special Quaker place where you can have social bonfires. We agree to bring kindling to start the bonfire.

We all have Scout and Guide skills so we can build a fire properly and keep it burning.

We need a plan B in case it rains hard or is very cold. We agree to bring wellies and waterproofs and go outside anyway.

Adam, Joe, Jen, Walt

Living Witness Project

There seems to have been a change in tone of news items, articles and programmes about climate change since the latest set of reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in the spring. One conclusion of these reports by 400 of the world's leading scientists was that there is a more than 90% probability that human activities (the burning of fossil fuels) are causing climate change. The change of tone in the media reflects this. The discussion has moved on from, 'are we causing climate change?' to, 'what are we going to do to minimise climate change?'

It is in this area that the Living Witness Project is trying to discern a distinctive Quaker contribution. Whereas Government and business may emphasise technological (which may not come quickly enough) and economic (which may or may not work) approaches, some Quakers have already reduced their own emissions by 60-70% below the UK average, and find that a simpler lifestyle brings great satisfaction, especially when supported within a strong community. Lifestyle changes to reduce emissions are in response to the Quaker testimonies to simplicity and equality. Poor countries with already low emissions cannot be expected to reduce them proportionately, if at all, otherwise they will be further locked into poverty. We, in the UK, therefore need to reduce ours by 85-90% by 2050, not just by the current target of 60%. Surely our personal example is part of the process? Technology and economics have an important role in tackling climate change, but they will not be the only response needed to minimise average temperature rises.

We do not need to live in denial of climate change, thinking that it is too big to tackle. After all, we Quakers do have a precedent and a particular contribution to offer. As in the struggle against slavery, we can show the way forward for the world, based on our shared experience, faith and

practice. It includes a commitment to simplicity and equality, a willingness to question our own habits of thought and action, and - perhaps most distinctively - Quaker processes for developing a collective will for change - in our own lives, in our households and meetings, and in wider society. I believe we need to engage with one another - regarding the science, if necessary, and our mental, emotional and spiritual responses. We also need to support one another to make changes. The Living Witness Project (LWP) can help with any or all of this - and more - with information, advice, workshops and gatherings. So do get in touch. If I cannot point a way forward, I will endeavour to find someone who can.

We thank Nigel Peckett of Stafford Meeting for being the Staffs Area Meeting link person with the LWP. He has now laid this down and I have been entrusted with the baton. Win Sutton of Wolverhampton Meeting ably continues as deputy.

Robert Horton,

Stafford Meeting

(With acknowledgements to Laurie Michaelis and LWP for source material and some of the words.)

Living Witness Project Policy Briefing Draft Climate Change Bill

In March 2007 The UK government published its draft climate change bill, providing for:

1. A target 60% cut in CO2 emissions by 2050, with substantial (26-32%) reductions by 2020. International aviation and shipping are not included. Interim targets would be established based on five-year budgets - i.e. it would be the five year average that mattered rather than the emissions in any one year. There would also be some flexibility - for example allowing emission allowances to be banked if they are not used, or borrowed from future budget periods. The UK could meet targets by "importing" emission allowances from overseas (through emission trading and other mechanisms).
2. A new committee to advise government on the timetable for emission reductions. This would be an expert committee with an analytical role, advising the government on the "optimal" emission reduction path.
3. "Enabling powers" so the government can introduce emission trading schemes. This is the only provision in the bill for new policies to reduce emissions. It would allow the Secretary of State to impose an emission cap on any group of individuals or organisations in Britain and allocate emission allowances which they could trade. They would also be able to buy allowances from elsewhere to enable them to exceed the cap.

4. Annual reports to parliament on progress in reducing emissions. Consultation responses were invited by June 12th but it is still worth taking action (see overleaf for some ideas).

Our Quaker response starts from our testimonies to truth, equality, simplicity and peace, and from our own experience of responding to climate change. The main points are:

The target cut should be deeper

The government says that a 50% reduction in global CO₂ emissions is needed by 2050. In fact, based on the recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a reduction of 50-85% is needed to limit global warming to 2-2.4°C. Meanwhile poorer countries cannot and should not be expected to achieve the same reductions as rich countries. So within this overall goal we believe that the UK should be aiming for much deeper reductions of perhaps 85-90%, that international aviation and shipping should be included, and that there should be much less flexibility in terms of importing, borrowing and banking emission allowances.

Some members of our network have developed lifestyles with GHG emissions 60-70% below the UK average. We find that a simpler lifestyle brings great satisfaction, especially when supported within a strong community. We therefore believe that, with appropriate infrastructure, technology, and economic and social developments, much deeper reductions are both possible and desirable, and could be achieved along with a considerable improvement in the quality of life.

Underlying principle of "optimal path"

We believe that the government's emphasis on adopting an optimal emission reduction path represents excessive confidence in the ability to economic models to predict the future. The truth is, we do not know how climate change will evolve, or how ecosystems and human society will respond. Short term comfort and even moderate changes in economic output are unimportant compared with the potential for catastrophic climate change. Given the risks we seem to face, we should be doing everything possible to reduce our emissions.

Emphasis on emission trading and establishing a globally uniform carbon price

Emitting greenhouse gases causes harm. We are worried that emission trading turns a licence to harm into a desirable asset or commodity. An alternative legal framework might 1) establish the legal liability of the emitter for rectifying any harm caused by greenhouse gas emissions, following the internationally-recognised Polluter Pays Principle; 2) require anyone emitting greenhouse gases to purchase insurance against the risk incurred.

We are also concerned by the emphasis on just one policy mechanism, which seems to reflect the dominance of free-market thinking in the bill. The government has adopted a wide range of climate-relevant policies and is in the midst of numerous consultations - including those on planning, energy, waste. However, these are poorly co-ordinated and include many conflicting elements. For example, how will faster approval of new airport capacity affect our ability to meet the greenhouse gas targets? We would like the bill to empower the Committee on Climate Change to scrutinise, and the Secretary of State to co-ordinate, policies across government that affect greenhouse gas emissions.

We do not agree with the principle of a globally uniform carbon price, which could lead to continued growth in price-inelastic emissions (e.g. air travel by the wealthy) while constraining the world's poorest from meeting basic needs. The UK's emission reduction effort should reflect its historical responsibility and current economic, technological and institutional strength.

What can we do about it as Quakers?

Inform yourself. The consultation documents for the draft bill are available on the DEFRA website - www.defra.gov.uk. For more information on Quaker activities see www.quakergreenaction.org.uk and www.livingwitness.org.uk. For wider information on climate change there are plenty of sources - in particular try www.ipcc.ch and www.coinet.org.uk. Write to your MP, the Prime Minister, or to Hilary Benn (currently Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) at the House of Commons, London SW1. Set out your views on the bill and ask your MP to raise your concerns with the Secretary of State and Prime Minister.

Organise a discussion or worship sharing group in your meeting to explore your responses.

Connect up with other groups; join the Living Witness Project - details at www.livingwitness.org.uk

Summary

Here follows a brief summary, with comments. Much more information is available at www.livingwitness.org.uk.

- A target 60% cut in CO2 emissions by 2050. This will not be enough. Robert Horton has already commented on this. Bearing in mind our wealth and more advanced industrial technologies, we should take more responsibility than the developing countries.
- A new committee to advise government on the timetable for emission reductions. This should move expert advice away from political influence
- "Enabling powers" so that the government can introduce emission trading schemes. This implies that emissions are acceptable. It will be acceptable for wealthier groups and companies to produce a higher level of greenhouse gases and force some smaller companies to spend profits on

emissions rather than on pollution prevention technologies. Is this a suitable subject for the free-market economy?

- Five year targets and annual reports. The committee will report regularly, but not be expected to be constantly changing targets every twelve months.

Links

www.defra.gov.uk (for the bill itself)

www.quakergreenaction.org.uk

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

With thanks to The Living Witness Project and Laurie Michaelis

Win Sutton

Power - Sustainability – Equality

Until earlier this year, Staffordshire Monthly Meeting possessed a venerable library, kept at Leek Meeting House. Then, last February 10th, the library joined our Monthly Meeting at Stoke, now looking much more like a secret cache of books brought to light after the Persecutions. Monthly Meeting agreed to sell the books and that is a lucrative story to be told elsewhere. It is about the book we bought at once at the Monthly Meeting that we are writing now.

It is entitled 'Some Account of the Conduct of the Religious Society of Friends towards the Indian Tribes in the Settlement of the Colonies of East and West Jersey and Pennsylvania, with a brief Narrative of their Labours for the Civilisation and Christian Instruction of the Indians,' published by the Aborigines' Committee of Meeting for Sufferings in 1844.

One of the book's great attractions is a map of the USA, showing where the different tribes of Native Americans had once lived. The Aborigines' Committee was aware at the time of writing that we today would almost certainly be using the past tense: 'If the hand of the destroyer is not speedily arrested, in all human probability, it will be but a few years before this once numerous race will be numbered with the nations that are not' (p.205).

Much of the story of their work among the Aborigines is about the good relations that existed between Friends and the people they were trying to help, each group agreeing not to attack the other, and the Native Americans accepting Friends' religious instruction and their teaching in farming methods, spinning and personal cleanliness. Meanwhile, the Government wished to move the beleaguered tribes westward, leaving their lands to white people, and the tribes entreated Friends to intercede on their behalf. Friends would be as powerless politically to prevent the tragic outcome as were the

Native Americans, but their book helps us today to reflect on the problem of power in human relations throughout the world. A failure to recognise our human equality negates everything we try to do.

After a visit among the tribes on their western frontier, the Committee reported that 'many circumstances were apparent, which, in our opinion, tended to prevent their advancement in civilisation, and to retard their moral and religious improvement. We are aware that much labour and property are expended yearly on their account, and yet it is sad to relate, that these poor, benighted, and almost friendless beings, are daily diminishing in numbers, and in many instances sinking deeper and deeper in misery and woe. There are but few to look into their wants, or to raise a voice against the malpractices of the numerous unprincipled white men who infest their country . . .' (p.205). These high-principled, hard-working people were referring to particular white men, but we today, with our present perspective, have to see the Friends themselves as included among those infesting the Native Americans' country.

Invaders who prove themselves more powerful than the native people see themselves as having full right to the land; the natives just did not deserve it. The possession of this power also prevents the conquerors from learning anything from the conquered or finding out anything about them. The conquered, if they survive, must become more like their conquerors. We discovered in Northern Australia this year that, in 1968, the remaining Aboriginal people had been rounded up and placed on Croker Island, where they were to give up their languages and customs and be like the whites. This policy failed and, in 1981, Aboriginal leaders were able to reclaim some of their land using Commonwealth legislation. The germs of this situation are undeniably present in the report of Pennsylvanian Friends. The education process they describe was always one-way because their being in power led to their not being aware that they had anything to learn from people living a Native American way of life and following their own religions; the Aborigines were simply 'uncivilised' and 'benighted'.

Humanity has always lived in different ways in different areas of the world, adapting to the conditions they found and following some of the many paths open to humanity. The Native Americans did not need the advice of Friends as to how to provide food for their people, and they had not needed the technologies of the invaders. Europeans became aware in the later 20th century that their farming instruction to people in Central Africa had been wrong: while farmers from northern climes expect to plant a single crop in a field, farmers in Africa know that crops even in a small area should be mixed to avoid population explosions of insect pests. In South Western Australia this year, we were horrified to see the extent of the damage done by invaders with so-called advanced technologies. From our plane taking us across Australia to Perth, we saw huge saline wastes created by the removal

of trees: the trees in that ecosystem had kept the saline water table from rising and turning the landscape to salt. Australian Aborigines had lived successfully in their exceptionally fragile land for 50,000 years: they were not practising agriculture there, although their close cousins in Papua New Guinea have been able to do so in their country to good effect. Many white Australians view Aborigines with contempt for not practising agriculture, and meanwhile trees are still being removed in South Western Australia; we met Australians who claim they will solve the saline problem with their superior technology, but it is well-known that it has existed since 1920. Pennsylvanian Friends were deeply concerned, but what would they have said if we told them that what the Native Americans needed was not their paternalism but greater organisation among themselves in the years that followed. Winning was impossible, but there could have been better survival rates. The Maoris are a good example. Australians amazed us by telling us that the Maoris would soon be in power in New Zealand, because they were 'much more intelligent than the Aborigines'. Perhaps this is impossible, but the white invaders found the Maoris were people with whom a formal agreement could be made: they were very much in possession and with organised, structured societies. The Treaty of Waitangi was agreed in 1840, about the time Pennsylvanian Friends were preparing their book. This treaty, giving the chiefs the land and Queen Victoria the sovereignty, made use of concepts hard to define in any language and it was not honoured: twenty years later the land wars broke out and the Maoris lost. But the Maoris have survived and are increasingly assertive. They have been fortunate in being a people Europeans can make some sense of because they are more like them. The victory to look forward to will be the one where the world discovers the wisdom of those whose ways of life did not prepare them to fight aggression armed with ruthless technologies.

Anne Wilson

**"Quakers and the State".
QPSW conference at Swanwick**

Paul Whitehouse.

Paul Whitehouse was the opening speaker for the weekend. Paul had spent 34 years in the police service. He began by putting forward the questions, "what is the state? What are its roles?" "How do we interact with it?" "The state exists mostly to uphold rights" - i.e. rights of the individual, and of organisations and communities. However, rights often come into conflict

with each other, and there is generally no easy answer to resolving any difficulties.

The dilemmas - how do you discover the true opinions of the population in order to develop your policies?

Paul challenged us with questions to ponder over the weekend –

What is the distinctive Quaker voice?

When should we be working from within to promote change? And when do we need to work from the outside?

The second main lecture of the weekend was changed, as the speaker was unable to attend. Instead, the QPSW workers gave an account of their roles within the Society:

Marigold Bentley, Helen Drury, (Secretary for social witness section), Michael Bartlett and Kevin France all spoke on their various roles and work for the Society.

Workshops.

Spirit led non-violent action for peace and justice.

Chris Gwythophier.

Chris has been involved in action at Faslane, and in campaigning for asylum seekers. He previously worked in local government. Chris began with giving us a short history of non-violent action within the Quaker community, going on to describe current action, such as for fair trade. He had recently been involved in campaigning for the rights of an asylum seeker.

The Testimonies - Faith in action

Nick Perks and Jan Arriens

This involved a series of led exercises from the recently published Testimonies Toolkit. Cards, outlining various aspects of the Q process, were placed on the floor.

In the first half of the workshop, we were each asked to stand next to the card describing the process that we felt most comfortable with- in the second half, that which felt least comfortable. A very enjoyable and thought provoking process!!

Energy Efficiency for Llanidloes - Gwen Prince

Gwen was prompted by a talk on climate change, which moved her thinking "from her head to her heart". From this she decided to take action -the process began with a meeting in the town hall, in 2001, to which 30 people originally attended - there are now 150 members, and the project has a lot of support. It is now a community, rather than a Quaker, project, but has raised the profile of QM, and has been good outreach.

Their ultimate goal now is to make Llanidloes a carbon neutral town - and they would like to be able to generate their own energy.

As a spin-off, they now run a local organic vegetable shop selling locally grown produce - this raises consciousness and reduces food miles.

Download leaflets for working out your carbon footprint at:

www.quakergreenaction.org.uk

Workshop: Us the State & Asylum

A workshop led by David Forbes & Elizabeth Coleman.

The workshop leaders outlined the way in which asylum seekers are dealt with by the system, emphasising the inhumanity of their experiences. They were particularly concerned about the new fast tracking procedure, which was capable of delivering a final verdict within as little as fourteen days.

The Refugee Council has criticised this New Asylum Model on the grounds that it does not allow enough time for people to seek legal advice & adequately prepare their claim.

Campaigning is probably the major need. More information on this is available at: Quaker Asylum Network c/o Social Justice Group, Manchester Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS

E-mail elizcola@dialstart.net

Holding Back the Police State

A workshop by Barbara Forbes and Sarah Richards

Barbara and Sarah discussed ways in which various Acts of Parliament have been passed, and the ways in which this has affected our freedom.

Examples include:

Protection from Harassment Act 1997

Although introduced in order to protect women from stalkers, the first three people arrested were peaceful protesters.

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

This empowers the Home Secretary (not a court) to authorise the surveillance of all communications of an individual or a group.

Since 1997 successive Labour governments have also made other changes, including the following:

Given the government increased access to all personal health information (Health and Social Care Act).

Permitted stop and search without suspicion. (SOCPA)

Permitted the indefinite storage of information by police even where people have been found "not guilty" by a court.

Many of these restrictions have been made by ministerial orders rather than by acts of parliament.

Speaking from experience: advocacy of the EAPPI.

A workshop led by Floresca Karanasou & Michael Bartlett.

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the advocacy role of the EAPPI and highlight how successful advocacy can influence government policy.

Accompaniers want to influence Government to pursue peace negotiations and to ensure their compliance with international humanitarian law. They try to influence churches and government in their respective roles.

The full report & oral evidence can be accessed from www.thefriend.org.

Helen Stevens

Helen Stevens closed the weekend, giving an overview of the lectures and workshops. Since 1976 she has spent her life working for peace. Her work has taken her to NATO headquarters in Brussels, to demonstrations at Faslane naval base & occasionally to prison.

It is clear that there is an ever-widening gap between Quaker testimonies and the route of the British Government.

What can we do?

Get into politics: write to MPs and go to their surgeries: be vigilant and clued up: Use our power as consumers through pro-active fair-trade buying. We must not allow any group of people to be marginalised or exploited: We must push our limits in demonstrations.

In response to two questions about the legitimacy of breaking the rules Helen defended our right to break the law in the final analysis.

Linda Skellam

This is an abridged version of Linda's original report. If anyone would like to read the full version, of about eight pages, please let me know and I will supply it. (Editor)

Linda is a self employed Physiotherapist, who is involved in the promotion of Reflexology, and other alternative therapies, within her profession. She has been an attender at Leek meeting since early 1994, and has been a member of Staffordshire monthly meeting for the last two years.

Islam

(A Report by John Nichols from Wolverhampton Meeting)

On Saturday 12 May at Lichfield Friends' Meeting House there was a talk about Islam by David Bone and his wife Amra Rehman. David and Amra

with their family live in Coventry; they are postgraduate students at Warwick and Birmingham universities.

The whole of Staffordshire's May Monthly Meeting was devoted to their talk. In this report the main specific points will be listed and summarised.

Differences between religions

Between Jews, Christians and Muslims, the differences are in their traditions and sacred texts, not the essential nature of their beliefs, Abraham, the common founder, was faithful in seeking and demonstrating truth and mercy.

The Christian and Jewish sacred texts are humanly inspired and are mainly human interpretations of divine inspiration. The Qur'an is divinely inspired and lacks human interpretation.

David came from a Quaker family in Reading. While a student in Bradford he converted to Islam. When he tried to resign from his Monthly Meeting, citing the above reason, his Monthly Meeting would not accept this as an adequate reason. So he regards Quakers as part of his extended family,

Converts to Islam have a duty always to treat their parents kindly regardless of what they feel about their child's conversion.

Faith and reason

Islam is devoted to resolving inconsistencies between faith and reason. It will not ignore these or treat them as mysteries.

Quakers and Sufis

Quakers are to Christianity as Sufis are to Islam, mystics who have added a great deal to the orthodox faith.

Concept of NUR - Arabic for light.

Sura 24:35

GOD is the light of the heavens and the earth. The allegory of His light is that of a concave mirror behind a lamp that is placed inside a glass container. The glass container is like a bright, pearl-like star. The fuel thereof is supplied from a blessed oil-producing tree, that is neither eastern, nor western. Its oil is almost self-radiating; needs no fire to ignite it. Light upon light. GOD guides to His light whoever wills (to be guided). GOD thus cites the parables for the people. GOD is fully aware of all things.

God is the true source of light, mankind should understand as much as possible of the divine. As an analogy, imagine moonlight at night where the moon reflects sunlight but is not its source. Prophets and mystics reflect

and transmit the divine. Perhaps mystics should not be solitary hermits. Instead they should transmit their insights to as many people as possible.

SHARIAH - the path to water

These are the laws by which God wants people to live. Islam started in a very anarchic society in which secular law curbed only the worst excesses. Punishments for crimes were arbitrary and severe.

Before his conversion Mohammed refused to take part in tribal battles. Instead he counselled restraint on those who suffered. After conversion he knew how to use force against tyrants. In the Qur'an the code for using force is stricter than Geneva Conventions.

JIHAD - Striving to do what is right

According to the Qur'an this world is a transient place of testing where people should strive to do what is right despite temptations. God allows suffering to test believers, to stay honest, loving and dignified despite oppression and poverty. Muslims seek to help both the oppressed and the oppressor by stopping the latter from oppressing. For salvation each person is totally accountable at judgement for their deeds.

*Recommended edition of the Qur'an Oxford World's Classics
ISBN 0-19-283193-3.*

Author: Muhammad A S Abdel Haleem (translator)

See also the work of Thomas McElwain an American linguist. Of Baptist origin he is now a Muslim. He is preparing a new translation of the Bible and Qur'an which will remove discrepancies.

(see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_McElwain)

Tyrants

Muslim scholars have developed the belief that unless the reign of a tyrant is completely unbearable his subjects should leave him to die of natural causes. An uprising would cause many more deaths than his oppression. As an example the Muslims acquiesced to being occupied by the army of Genghis Khan, despite their brutalities. Within one generation they converted the Mongol soldiers to Islam.

HALAL - permitted food

Livestock should be allowed to live a natural life, not confined in a restricted space. When slaughtered no animal should witness any other being killed. Each should be spared this distress.

Education of children

"Play for 7 years, educate for 7 years then befriend for 7 years"

Education includes learning chapters of the Qur'an and then reciting these as prayers. When David first became interested in Islam he learnt the 10 shortest chapters from the end of the Qur'an. A primary school girl told him she knew 10 also but the longest from the beginning of the Qur'an.

Some Islamic scholars have performed prodigious acts of memory. A few can recall and quote accurately the entire Qur'an and also the sacred texts of other faiths. From this they feel that different religions are essentially the same.

Amra Rehman explained a few points about the Arabic language. Allah is the God of the whole universe.

Islam means submission and is the root of peace, hence the greeting Salaam.

A Muslim, one who submits, will create peace with God, other people and the rest of the universe.

As we start committed and surrendered to God all people start as Muslims.

Making a conscious submission and surrender the believer will then use their intellect and reason to increase their harmony with God

Amra then explained a few chapters from the Qur'an.

Sura 49:9

If two groups of believers fought with each other, you shall reconcile them. If one group aggresses against the other, you shall fight the aggressing group until they submit to GOD's command. Once they submit, you shall reconcile the two groups equitably. You shall maintain justice; GOD loves those who are just.

Sura 4:135

O you who believe, you shall be absolutely equitable, and observe GOD, when you serve as witnesses, even against yourselves, or your parents, or your relatives. Whether the accused is rich or poor, GOD takes care of both. Therefore, do not be biased by your personal wishes. If you deviate or disregard (this commandment), then GOD is fully Cognizant of everything you do.

This should be strictly impartial. Uphold justice even if it is against yourselves, your parents or your close relatives. Whether they are rich or poor God can best take care of them. Refrain from following your own desire so that you can act justly.

Sura 7: 26

O children of Adam, we have provided you with garments to cover your bodies, as well as for luxury. But the best garment is the garment of righteousness. These are some of GOD's signs, that they may take heed.

Muslims should not read the Qur'an superficially nor learn merely to quote. Instead they should use all their critical facilities.

**Reflections on "Peace Building - What is the role of Europe?"
The Quaker Council for European Affairs, Brussels, 20 - 22
October 2007**

Gaby and Roger Oldfield, (Stafford), Win Sutton (Wolverhampton) and Pam Trueman (Uttoxeter) attended this event. What did we learn from it? Speaking personally, I found that it helped to clarify some of my confusion around trying to uphold the Peace testimony in a complex global culture. The world we live in is not simple. Media advances mean that international information is available to us in unprecedented ways. At the same time, the arts of propaganda and spin become ever more sophisticated, so that it is difficult to locate objective truths in what we hear or read. Equal rights are threatened continually, as nationalistic, sectarian and ethnic conflicts arise and reform.

Roger's response to the Conference's keynote speech on issues around the 'international duty to protect' throws the internal debate I am describing into relief. For me, such a 'duty to protect' puts two of our testimonies in opposition - our belief in equality and our wish for universal peace. As a society and as Friends we share a commitment to exercising discernment in upholding our testimonies through the concerns we express. The conference demonstrated how individual Friends and Quaker bodies and initiatives have striven to do this in the often confusing area of European politics and peacekeeping activities; where peace, we are told by Martina Weitsch, can be defined as a military objective and thus beyond the remit of civilian negotiators like the Network of Christian Peace Organisations to which we belong.

I attended Peter Nias' presentation on the work of the Peace museum, Bradford and also Alan Pleydell's account of his work as a programme manager in post-Yugoslavia and David Gee's of his experience co-managing its disarmament programme for QPSW. Carne Ross' (not a Friend) gave the keynote account of his work as an independent diplomat, trying to give minority groups equal access to diplomatic representation. The third keynote speaker, Karel Kovanda, reflected on the role of the EU in the wider

world and also described the division of responsibilities between the Council and the Commission and some implications of that in policy /implementation terms.

In our closing meeting for worship, spoken contributions reflected delegates' sense of the momentousness of the task facing us - to negotiate between our belief in peace and the complexities of a fast-moving world confronted by terrorism and war. Anna Seifert quoted the words which still resonate with me. 'Let us then try what love can do'. A loving presence cannot eradicate situations of conflict or aggression but it can ameliorate them; as has been the peaceful aim of Quakers throughout the centuries.

Pam Trueman.

03.06.07.

**Roger Oldfield Writes:
A Quaker view of the international 'Responsibility to
Protect'.**

The opening keynote speech, by Alan Pleydell, QPSW Assistant General Secretary, deeply challenged us all. The Cold War may be over, but the failure to prevent massacres in Rwanda, Srebrenica, East Timor and Dafur have shown the institutional inability of the UN to deal with conflicts within individual states. New thinking focuses on the idea of 'The Responsibility to Protect', and there are ongoing attempts to agree criteria for 'humanitarian intervention' (a contradiction to many Quakers if intervention is military). Intervention may take place before, during or after violent conflict. Quakers have traditionally been involved in the first and third of these, Can we stay silent if conflict reaches the second stage and the international community wants to use military force to try and deal with it? Alan Pleydell said that in a lifetime of agonising over the application of our peace testimony to the modern world he had almost reached the pacifist position. In 1994 a UN commander in Rwanda could see genocide coming but could not get the reinforcements he thought would deter it. As Bosnian Serbs cowered in Srebrenica in 1995 a Dutch officer asked for more air cover. What would we do in such situations? In every case Alan Pleydell wants to seek non-violent approaches.

Gaby Oldfield Writes:

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.

This joint programme of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Christian Aid is managed by QPSW and, internationally, the World Council

of Churches. It started in response to a call by the heads of churches in Jerusalem, and aims

- 1 . to offer protection through a non-violent presence of international observers,

2. to show that we stand in solidarity with all Palestinians and Israelis struggling non-violently against the occupation,

3. to help to engage in awareness raising and advocacy.

Anna Seifert, who had herself taken part in the accompaniment programme, talked to us about her experience during her time in Palestine. The words "God is urgent about justice, because upon justice the world depends" were written on the board as we entered, and served as a motto. In her moving account Anna portrayed the deep suffering not just of the Palestinians, but also the Israelis. "This is a tragedy for the Palestinians, but also for you", she said to the Israeli commander at a border crossing, where tensions were building up alarmingly. "Believe me, I know" was his reply. The Israelis do not know how to get out of the spiralling violence and feel very vulnerable themselves; Israel is dominated by the military as a result, though a number of groups and individuals are opposed to the occupation and the degrading treatment of the Palestinians.

These groups desperately need our support. As we were instrumental in creating the problems in the Middle East it is our responsibility to help to find a way out.

"That, which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary. Go learn!" These were the words of one of the Rabbis Anna met during her time in Palestine.

Terry Waite

Our very good friend and regular contributor, Harold Yardley, has sent me a couple of pages from the 'Saga' magazine, April 2007.

Terry Waite, CBE, who was envoy of Archbishop Robert Runcie from 1980 to 1992, was kidnapped in Beirut in 1987 and held captive for five years. In his article he tells us of the way he learned the language of the Prayer Book. This stood him in good stead during his captivity.

He speaks of his deep regrets at the passing of so much that is good in the Anglican Church. For solace he visits the Orthodox Cathedral in London, and increasingly, his local Quaker meeting.

He says:

"At the other end of the scale, so to speak, from time to time I began to share in my local Quaker meeting. At first sight this might seem to be miles away from the Orthodox, and indeed the elaborate ritual and drama is totally absent. You take your place in a simple meeting room and silence reigns until someone or other feels that they have something to share with the group. There is no compulsion on individuals to speak and if they do

they are listened to in respectful silence. At the end of an hour we break for notices and a general chat. I always leave the meeting feeling a sense of inner calm and at the same time possibly challenged by a comment someone might have made during the hour.

For me, both the Orthodox and the Society of Friends provide what I feel is lacking with many Anglican services today, and that is contemplative space. I value the sense of the numinous created within Orthodoxy where I can reflect on, and participate in, the great mystery that lies at the heart of life. For their part, the Friends enable me to face and be nourished by the great silence that lies at the heart of the universe. A silence that may be experienced within."

"In company with an increasing number from my own Church, I also continue to attend Quaker meetings from time to time. I find spiritual strength from participating with others in the silence; I am happy to share with those who, like the Quakers, attempt to apply the teaching of Christ to this world in a determined and quiet manner."

If anyone would like to read the full article I can make it available. (Editor)

Our guest Special Interest Group this issue is

The Quaker Esperanto Society (Kvaker Esperanto-Societo) KES

Well, in the words of George Gershwin, "It ain't necessarily so!" For one thing there are twice as many speakers of Mandarin Chinese as there are English speakers in the world today. And there have been instances of aviation catastrophes as a result of instructions being relayed in English when either the pilots or air traffic controllers were not sufficiently fluent in English to be understood by the other.

However I can also respond to the question from personal experience. I have cycled one thousand miles across Europe, from Switzerland through Liechtenstein and Northern Italy, through Austria and Eastern Germany, and found throughout that my very poor German was actually of greater use to me than my English. I have also travelled and worked in Brazil, and met people there who assumed that everyone all over the world spoke Portuguese! However, in all these places where I visited or worked, I was in touch with Esperanto speakers, which I found very enriching.

I believe that most people who ask the question posed in the title are just too busy (or too lazy?) to learn Esperanto. It seems to be an emotional response, not a logical one. More importantly, English (or American) comes bundled as a package with its own political outlook and dominating culture, crushing minority languages in its wake. Esperanto on the other hand is politically neutral, has a culture of internationalism (including its own

original literature and a tradition of international gatherings), and respects the equal worth of people from different linguistic backgrounds. It also helps people better to understand language as such, which helps when it comes to learning other languages.

Esperanto is easier than other languages because it is entirely phonetic; there is only ever one sound for each letter. It has a regular grammar and a simple system of building additional vocabulary by using affixes. It uses the common roots from Indo-European languages, so that these will be recognisable and familiar to a large number of people already.

The Quaker Esperanto Society was established to encourage Quakers to learn Esperanto, to enable Quakers from different language groups to communicate more easily with each other, and to inform Esperanto speakers about Quakerism. It is as a result of this that there is now a small Quaker group in Poland. A Polish Esperantist began to correspond with an Esperantist in Japan. He enquired about the Japanese religion of Oomoto. The Japanese Esperantist however suggested that he might find Quakerism more to his liking, and provided him with the address of KES. They sent him literature in Esperanto about Quakerism, which helped him to attract some local interest, and so with the support of some Quaker Esperantists from England, the first Quaker Meeting in Poland was established.

Since then KES has organised various meetings and activities in Poland. However there have also been similar events in England: annual residential courses used to be held (on three occasions being at Charney Manor) to encourage Quakers to learn Esperanto and to give students of the language opportunities for using and practising what they had learned. There was also at one time a week-long event in Switzerland, another in France and a five day event in Belgium, all with non- English speaking Quakers present. Quakers also found it good to make contact with Russian Esperantists, particularly during the cold war of course but nowadays as well. And conversely at the Universal Esperanto Congresses, which are attended every year by thousands of Esperanto speakers from over sixty countries around the world, there have been meetings or stalls arranged to inform people about Quakerism.

If you wish to know more about Esperanto you can visit the website of the British Esperanto Society at www.esperanto-gb.org
The Quaker Esperanto Society (KES) has a mailing list which you can join by e-mailing a request to: inform@esperanto.no I will be pleased to receive enquiries and correspondence myself from anyone who may want further information - and yes, I am happy to reply in English!

You may also be interested to know that my local Quaker Meeting at Hastings in Sussex has a website which has "parallel" versions of several of its pages in both English and Esperanto. You can read these by visiting the site at www.hastings-quakers.org.uk

Having lived for many years in Stafford, I would like to send greetings to all those in the MM that I know, as would my father, Brian.

Sally Phillips

The editor has Sally Phillips' address and email address if Friends would like to contact her.

Report from Staffordshire M.M. Elders and Overseers

Elders and Overseers met at Stafford at 10 30 a.m. on Wednesday 7th of March. This was an unusual time as we have been used to meeting prior to Monthly Meeting on a Saturday. The meeting was well attended although those Friends still working were prevented.

We had a thoughtful discussion about the implications of ex offenders attending our Meetings for Worship. It was pointed out that as our Quaker Prison Ministers are very actively involved in their respective prisons the likelihood of ex-offenders coming to Meeting was increased. Elders and Overseers recommend that each Meeting obtains a copy of "Trespass and Trust-Quaker Meetings and Sex Offenders" by Daphne Glazer and that they have a policy for dealing with the situation should it arise.

Peter Holland, Elder of Stone Meeting, has agreed to take responsibility for Eldership of Leek Meeting. This follows the resignation as Elder for Leek of Elizabeth Morris.

Wolverhampton Elders and Overseers were asked to discuss Eldership arrangements for Penn Meeting and report to a future M.M.

The final item on the agenda was "News of Meetings". We feel that it is very important that we share what is going on in our Meetings with each other - Joys and sorrows.

Delia Seagar, Clerk and Elder of Stoke P.M., told us that she felt quite pressurised and in need of more support. We suggest that Stoke P.M. appoint an additional Overseer.

All other Meetings represented are enjoying various activities such as trips to Woodbrooke and Swarthmoor Hall, pub lunches and taking advantage of newly set up plastic recycling facilities!

Joan Gripton

Clerk to Monthly Meeting Es &.Os