



A Cold Season

It seems a long time ago since Meeting of Friends in Wales met in warm autumn sunshine. There was a good buzz at that meeting, partly because we had a bigger attendance than usual, but also because there was a sense of confidence and excitement about reaching out beyond the 'bubble' of our local meetings.

Christine Trevett in her report below details the plans being discussed for Woodbrooke to bring local meetings together in a series of workshops around Wales focusing on

Quaker 'basics'. We all know how far away all the goodies on offer from Woodbrooke and Quaker Life can seem from us here, with our difficult geography and dire infrastructure. So it's wonderful when 'they' come to 'us' and bring us into contact with each other and the wider Society.

It's not just our own 'Society' with a big S that we need to feel part of. There is one comment above all from the Spiritual Hospitality Report that is engraved on my heart: a former attender noted that Friends tended to 'look over the heads' of their surrounding communities, to the big international issues. Not that we shouldn't attend to those; of course we must. But are we living in a Quaker 'bubble', floating above the concerns of our neighbours, reserving our solidarity and care for people thousands of miles away?

I've just come back from Meeting for Sufferings. The minutes are flooding in from Area Meetings across the country as they look ahead to a long cold spell of welfare cuts, and the inevitable increase in hardship among those who already have least. Our help may soon be urgently needed here at home.



Of the four UK nations, Wales is the one that has least. Even before the cuts begin to bite, there are high levels of poverty, unemployment and housing shortages. A report has just emerged showing that levels of educational attainment in

some key subjects are still lagging behind other nations. We know that poverty is the single most significant predictor of children's academic progress. And yet Wales' budget has been cut more than Scotland's or Northern Ireland's. Although the National Assembly's policies may help to buffer some of the worst effects, the fact is that severe suffering lies ahead for some, not least for children.

Meeting for Sufferings is under pressure to speak out. But here in Wales, we – Meeting of Friends in Wales – are in effect the Yearly Meeting. What do we have to say? MFW is likely to discuss this at its June meeting, when the effects of the spending review will have become clearer – please be there if you can!

SLK

‘The least we can do is be entertaining’

Christine Trevett (*Bridgend/Pen y Bont ar Ogwr LM – and the new assistant clerk of Meeting of Friends in Wales*) - reports on MFW held on 30 October 2010.

During our day in Aberystwyth someone quoted Jennifer Barraclough, outgoing director of Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre: *If God is always watching us, the least we can do is be entertaining.* We were certainly kept busy at MFW, if not ‘entertained’ as such, and we were positive and forward-looking too. There were more than 36 of us, including co-clerk Deborah Rowlands who has served MFW for a number of years and is soon to be leaving the clerkship.

It wasn’t just Jennifer Barraclough’s ‘entertaining’ thought which made us think of Woodbrooke personnel. There had been discussion about MFW working with Woodbrooke and the benefit that might bring to Wales’s many small or isolated meetings. If Friends were in support of the plan, there might be a two year programme of Woodbrooke visits to different parts of Wales. Friends were more than supportive – they were enthusiastic. We thought such visits would energize us and bring spiritual nurture. So in conjunction with Woodbrooke MFW will work towards making this programme a reality.

MFW is a face of Quakerism for the whole of Wales, whether Welsh or English speaking. We heard how the Outreach Resources Group had continued to work on material to meet the needs both of local Meetings and of such annual events as the National Eisteddfod, the Royal Welsh Show and the gathering of the Urdd Gobaith Cymru. Posters in both Welsh and English had been available in time for Quaker Week. There was an ongoing process of reviewing existing material and creating new.

MFW’s administrator, Jules Montgomery, said that a prototype Welsh language website was now emerging. An English language site is established already and Jules spoke of her hope that AMs would make full use of the portions of it which were theirs. These allowed links to the websites of Local Meetings too, where those existed. Now that the Welsh language website is under way it’s

important that Friends indicate what links there should be to institutions and organizations in Wales. At the same time, though, there’s no point in reinventing the wheel, so the websites will also make good use of links to the fund of information which is available already, on www.quaker.org.uk

The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust is offering funding for a new publication. Ben Pink Dandelion’s small book *Celebrating the Quaker Way* is valuable but after some discussion the Meeting felt that translating it into Welsh would make less impact than creating something (in book, DVD form or both) which was distinctive to Wales. It (or they) should tell of the faith, life and experiences of Friends here and be an accessible window for all age groups onto Quakers in Wales. ‘*The Light shines a little differently here in Wales,*’ one Friend observed.

CYTÛN is Wales’s Christian ecumenical umbrella organisation and Catherine James is MFW’s link with it. She told us about CYTÛN’s positive response to the idea that Wales might work towards being the first Nation of Sanctuary. It is already the first Fairtrade nation and if sufficient cities (towns too, perhaps) were to become places of welcome and safety for sanctuary-seekers then the whole nation might claim the title of Nation of Sanctuary. ‘No-one is safe until we are all safe’ we were told. The idea derives from the biblical concept of the Cities of Refuge. An accused person, or those whom violence had trapped into violence, could flee to such a city and be protected from revenge and provided for, while they prepared their case.

Motivating change in people in respect of sustainability was the theme of the final session of the afternoon. Gwen Price, Jeremy Thorp and Gabi Smith reminded us of the humanitarian as well as environmental issues which were going to arise over time. Then we pondered how to influence the thinking and lifestyle of various groups which stayed unmotivated: *Copers* – who have a great deal to contend with already (little time, money or energy) and who resent being made to feel guilty; *Do-gooders* - already involved in alleviating suffering and supporting charitable causes; *Traditionalists* - who are hostile to rapid change in thinking or practice; *Strivers* – ambitious for status, recognition, financial and/or career success. All groups had a way to go as evangelists.



Sorting boxes: Looking back and looking forward

Deborah Rowlands, *outgoing co-clerk of Meeting of Friends in Wales, reflects on her time at the table.*

Coming to the end of six year's service at the clerk's table of Meeting of Friends in Wales is a time for deep thankfulness for the deepening of my spiritual life through this particular service. The highlight of the last six years was the work of the administrator feasibility group and the steering group for Wales and the borders. Working together on a common aim brought us closer together –and more in touch with the Spirit.

I have been sorting through the archives going back even further as part of the process of handing over. One of the pieces of paper I found was the list of clerks' tasks which I made eleven years ago, when I last handed over after being co-clerk from 1997-1999. In some ways the job has not changed – the routine of getting ready for meetings and being in touch with Friends between whiles. But in many ways the landscape has changed markedly (quite apart from email which was only a gleam in our eyes then!)

- Meeting of Friends in Wales has been recognised as a formal part of Britain Yearly Meeting, with its own representatives on Meeting for Sufferings and an annual grant so that we can fulfil the functions required of us.
- On a regular basis we are consulted by Outreach Department about outreach resources in Welsh
- We have an administrator who is the 'face' of Meeting of Friends in Wales within and outside Wales. As well as improving communications with her wonderfully attractive presentation she has taken a lot of the routine matters from the clerks.
- We have formalised our relationships with associated area meetings and fully explored how we work together through a consultation process, conducted through the assistant recording clerk culminating in the Half Yearly Meeting in 2008
- We have become a registered charity (No 1137955) with appointed trustees to take care of the 'business' side of things. We expect to discuss budgets and plan our work

Looking forward there is plenty to celebrate too – as well as all the activities and plans we have come to expect we are drawing up plans:

- To work with Woodbrooke on a series of learning and nurturing activities
- To bring proposals for ways to celebrate the Quaker way in Wales working with the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- Working with Quaker Life Outreach Department on new leaflets, posters and other materials for 2011

Above all it is in working with Friends as individuals and in small groups that I have felt profoundly blessed.

Education in Wales – a Quaker Perspective?

Jane Harries (*Bridgend LM/Pen y Bont ar Ogwr*) writes:

An article for *Calon* about education in Wales seemed at first a fairly straightforward task. Then came the questions and doubts. What could I usefully say to the Quaker community in Wales in a short article? How could I avoid bias? What would a specifically ‘Quaker’ view on education look like?

Having pondered the above issues, I offer the piece below. This is a personal rather than an official viewpoint, based on thirty years experience of working in the education system in Wales. Some statements will inevitably be generalisations. I hope, however, that this article will spark off a further conversation about what we, as Quakers in Wales, have to say about education.

Some Positive Highlights:

There are several reasons why I’m grateful to live in Wales, and one of them is the Welsh education system. So what is there to celebrate?

One thing which I feel differentiates the Welsh approach to education from that of our Anglo-Saxon cousins is an underlying ethos of collaboration rather than competition. An example of this is the School Effectiveness Framework - a major education initiative in Wales. Under this framework, schools are encouraged to work collaboratively on issues identified by themselves, sharing ideas and best practice to improve pupils’ learning and well-being. Collaboration also happens across ‘levels’ – i.e. between schools, local authorities and government. A more collaborative approach is reflected in the lack of flagship schools and academies in Wales. SATS tests have been abolished and replaced by teacher assessments.

There is a concern for good quality education for *all* children and young people.

Some initiatives are worth a special mention. The Foundation Phase is a new approach to learning for children aged 3 – 7 years in Wales. It is based on experiential learning through play and active involvement. Emphasis is given to developing children’s self-esteem, social and emotional wellbeing, creativity, and skills such as problem-solving.

Learning for 14 – 19 year olds is also being transformed in Wales. All 14 – 19 year olds now have access to a wider variety of courses and options, including formal and informal learning. They are supported on their ‘learning pathway’ by a learning coach as well as careers advice and guidance. Schools, colleges and work-based learning providers are being encouraged to work together at the local level to make this a reality.

A third area is the active support and promotion of children and young people’s participation in decision-making on matters that affect their lives, as part of a broader Welsh Assembly Government commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This may sound dry, but its

implications are huge. It means children and young people being listened to and their views taken into account; also that they are increasingly involved as active citizens and respected partners in planning and developing initiatives and policies.

Doubts and Worries:

I in no way wish to indicate that the Welsh education system is without its problems. Some concerns are UK-wide – e.g. the number of young people who are ‘NEET’ (Not in Education Employment or Training), levels of literacy and numeracy, and child poverty – quite apart from the quality of some school buildings. At a national level the ability to carry through some of our best initiatives at a time of growing financial constraints has to be questioned. The success of the



Foundation Phase, for instance, relies heavily on a high ratio of staff to pupils.

At the local level it is probably the quality of leadership and teacher training that most directly determines the ethos of a school and influences the welfare and learning of its pupils. Ultimately, however, schools reflect trends in wider society. Bullying, for instance, is not something that just happens in schools. To what extent can we expect education to counteract negative influences in society and to build self-esteem, resilience and social and emotional skills, as well as being a channel for learning?

A Quaker perspective?

What do Quakers have to say about education today? At the time of writing, QPSW is conducting a consultation about peace education in the UK.*

Friends are being asked three questions:

1. Where should we seek to innovate in this field?
2. What is it that requires substantial development within the field of peace education?
3. What is most effective in the current peace education programme?

We could easily broaden the scope of these questions to include education in general. If we had the opportunity to *really* influence the education system according to Quaker values, what would we retain, what would we seek to change, and how radical would we be?

The answer is not necessarily in another new initiative. Schools suffer from initiative overload, and there are many good models and programmes around which we can support – Rights Respecting Schools (Unicef) and Philosophy for Children, to mention just two. There are, however, radical messages and links that just aren't being made in schools. The link between our extravagant life-style, poverty and sustainability, for instance – or information about the arms trade and a consideration of what a truly peaceful society might look like, at the personal, community and national levels. These messages could be delivered in fun and creative ways, demonstrating different ways of being in the world based on the Testimonies, and empowering children and young people to question and reflect.

Simple. Radical. Contemporary.

What does peace mean to me?

Jane Harries reports on a QPSW all-age conference.

Between 3rd and 6th August over a hundred Quakers of all ages gathered at the Swanwick Conference Centre to consider the question: “What does Peace mean to me?”

This exploration comes at a significant time. Next January marks the 350th anniversary of Quakers’ declaration to Charles II, where they stated: “We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever.” If Quakers were to make a declaration about peace today, what would we say? Who would we make the declaration to, and in what format?

In his keynote speech at the conference David Gee, a former member of staff at QPSW, explored the declaration further. It can partly be seen as a political statement – to assure the new king that the Quakers had no desire to subvert his authority in any way at a time when imprisonment and persecution was a real and present danger. The declaration goes much further than that, however. It is revolutionary, not because it seeks to overthrow the State, but because it sets out a different kind of revolution, based on a vision of a spiritual Kingdom.



As we started to explore the declaration at the beginning of the conference, some important points emerged. Most importantly, the declaration is **not** our peace testimony, but an expression of it. The peace testimony is about deeds not creeds – what we do to bring about the envisioned Kingdom in the messy, beautiful, cruel world we live in. Nor is the testimony about having answers, but rather

about trying 'what love can do' and engaging in a conversation in the world. A present day declaration may say something about living in a right relationship with God, with our fellow human-beings, and with world around us.

The bit about living in right relationship to our fellow human-beings was soon put to the test! We shared the conference centre with two other Christian groups – a Korean and an African church. The African group mostly expressed their faith through exuberant singing, drumming and clapping. We found this exhilarating during the day, but a bit less so when it was still going on at 11 o'clock at night, and starting up again by 7 in the morning!

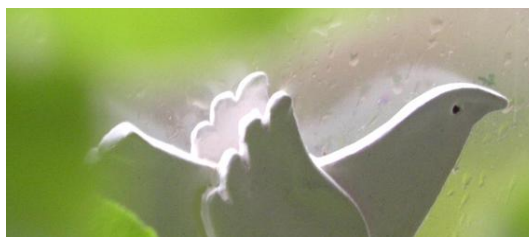
Further explorations about what peace means to us took place in workshops. These varied from helping people to be 'cool and still in thy own mind', to a demonstration of a peace education workshop, sharing experiences of peace activism, and a consideration of sustainability as a peace issue. Further elements of a 21st century peace declaration emerged. Peace has to start with ourselves. For Quakers, true peace is far more than just the absence of war, and involves certain essential preconditions, such as justice (including economic justice), equality, mutual respect and forgiveness.

The conference was designed to take us on a journey from the personal to the national and global levels. Our main speaker on the second day was Rajagopal, Director of an Indian organisation called EktaParishad, described as "a mass-based social organisation dedicated to the Gandhian principle of non-violent action, with the aim of assisting people to gain control over livelihood resources such as land, water and forest." Rajagopal described how poor people in India have been deprived of land and water due to the development of national and international companies. A huge march to Delhi was organised in 2007 to put pressure on the Indian government to make pledges about land reform. Although these pledges were made, they have not all been fulfilled and another bigger march is planned for 2012. Further elements of the peace testimony emerged in relation to EktaParishad, and other situations in the world where there is conflict due to injustice and inequality. We, as privileged Westerners, can stand alongside those who suffer

injustice, accompany them and advocate for them. This 'being alongside' can help to empower those who suffer injustice, although this empowerment must essentially come from the people on the ground themselves. Quakers in the UK are already planning sponsored walks to raise awareness of the 2012 march and to act in solidarity with the marchers.

This was an all-age conference, and many activities were designed to be inclusive and accessible to everyone. At the start of the conference we worked in all-age groups to create posters – representations of what peace meant to us – and these were posted around the walls of the conference room as a visual reminder of our feelings, thoughts and values. An all-age session with Rajagopal included singing, dancing and a game of 'the lion and the goat', where the majority of participants formed a tight circle to protect the (powerless) goat from the (powerful) lion. The social on the final evening included singing, poetry, disco-dancing and a demonstration of the Lindy Hop! Whoever said Quakers were dull! In the final all-age session we returned to the peace declaration and worked in groups to draw up our present-day declarations.

At the end of the conference, we set off with renewed vision and hope, strengthened by one another's stories and with Rajagopal's marching song ringing in our ears - to continue our 'conversation in the world'.



Things that Meetings can do:

1. Order a "Peace 350 years on – what does the peace testimony mean today?" pack or packs for your Meeting, so that you can run a workshop on the 1660 peace declaration and what Quakers can say about peace today. Contact Sam Walton on 020 7663 1067 or at disarm@quaker.org.uk
2. Take action to support EktaParishad – by contacting 'Action Village India', 76 Wentworth Street, London E1 7SA; tel: 020 7247 6406; e-mail: info@actionvillageindia.org.uk

Immigration detention of children

Anne Dickinson of Aberystwyth meeting (currently living in Portsmouth) has sent this harrowing story of one family's experience:

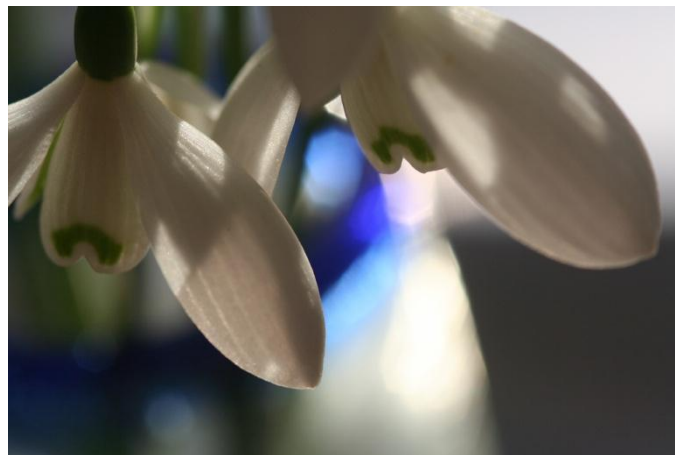
"On 20th April 2009 they came to our place at 6.30am. Baby F was 8 months old. I was very terrified. They told me I should take everything. I was, especially worried about the well being of my little boy. I felt that he shouldn't experience those things at that tender age. The nappies they gave for the baby were not suitable and he came out in a rash all over his body. The staff there didn't want to help solve the problem. The food provided didn't suit him also and he was sick and vomiting very often. When I stopped feeding him that food it got better. I gave him just the milk and he got better. My solicitor was fighting my case that I shouldn't be there because of my baby. One day the staff came to me and asked me my address and the next day I was released. There was no explanation of why I had been in there for a month. They dropped me at the train station without my belongings.

"The second time they came was early morning 23 March 2010. This time my baby knew what was happening and he was crying and saying no, no, no. They couldn't put him in the car; he wouldn't let them put a seat belt on him. They had to change to a larger vehicle. After a couple of days he began vomiting. He was also crying and kept asking me about friends and asking me why we weren't going to see them. I felt so powerless, there was nothing I could do, so I just cried as well.

"To this day, I can't sleep, I have no words to explain the trauma I've been through, I can't sleep peacefully. I am terrified and keep expecting them at any time. My son now whenever he sees the police he shows me. The first time I didn't know what he was pointing at, but now he does it every time, like he is alerting me. The other day there was a burglary nearby. The police came to ask for information and when he saw them at our door he was running and crying."

Ms T is 19 years old, writes Anne, she is barely beyond childhood herself. The immigration case of Ms T is unresolved. She is liable to be detained again.

Friends will recall that the incoming Government undertook to end this practice immediately, but they have not kept their word. Meeting for Sufferings will be sending a letter of protest to Theresa May, the Home Secretary. Copies will be distributed to local meetings with the monthly mailing so that local Friends and meetings can follow up – please look out for this.



Goleuni newydd

Catherine James (Dwyfor) describes how attending the Greenbelt Festival in August for the first time gave a 'boost' to her spiritual life and brought home to her the fact that the Quaker way of worship is not the only route to meeting with the Spirit. (The Greenbelt Festival is described in Wikipedia as a 'festival of arts, faith and justice' with a Christian focus.) She has also been studying the "Becoming Friends" learning pack together with a small group, and has found it a helpful way of revisiting her assumptions about Quakerism. "The group is a blessing to me," she adds.

Mae gwahanol ddigwyddiadau'n effeithio'n taith ysbrydol. Yn ddiweddar, mae sawl peth wedi rhoi hwb ymlaen i mi. Un cam pendant oedd mynd i "Greenbelt" ym Mis Awst, sef y dathliad Cristnogol sydd yn digwydd bob blwyddyn yn Cheltenham.

Dyma'r tro cyntaf i mi fynd yno, a gweld y maes yn debyg iawn i'r Eisteddfod Genedlaethol, pebyll eglwysi gwahanol ym mhob man, pebyll yn gwerthu nwyddau, dillad, bwyd a llyfrau. Ac, yn ogystal, rhaglen faith iawn o wasanaethau gan yr eglwysi a mudiadau eraill, gan gynnwys cyrddau'r Crynwyr, a nifer helaeth o ddarlithoedd gan bobl fyd enwog. Er enghraifft, braf oedd cael y cyfle i wrando ar John Bell o Iona. Siaradodd yn arbennig

o ddoeth am yr angen i roi cymorth i bobl sydd yn teimlo atyniad rhywiol tuag at blant cyn iddynt roi fewn i'r demtasiwn i ddefnyddio plant i'w hanghenion eu hunain.

Un arall gyda'r teitl "Jesus, my Facebook friend", oedd trafodaeth ar effaith y dechnoleg newydd ar ein cysylltiadau â'n gilydd ac â Duw. Es i sawl gwasanaeth gwahanol, un ohonynt yn ôl dull Taize o addoli. Mae'n dda i ni gofio nad ein ffordd ni fel Crynwyr yw'r unig ffordd i gyfarfod â'r Ysbryd. Hefyd, roedd gweld cymaint o bobl mewn cwrdd Crynwyr yn brofiad gwahanol i mi sydd fel arfer yn addoli gyda deg neu ddwsin o bobl ar y tro. Ar ôl i mi ddychwelyd adref cefais oriau o fyfyrion. Mae treulio penwythnos hir yng nghwmni pobl nad ydynt yn addoli yn yr un modd â ni yn llesol ac yn f'atgoffa i mai'r ffordd Crynwrol sydd yn helpu fi i gyffwrdd yr Ysbryd, ond yn bendant nad hon yw'r unig ffordd.

Peth arall pwysig sydd yn rhoi hwb i mi yw astudio "Becoming Friends" efo grŵp bach. Er fy mod yn Grynwraig ers fy mhentyndod, mae'r llyfr wedi gwneud i mi ail feddwl pethau a'r agweddu rwyf wedi eu cymryd yn ganiataol erioed. Mae siarad a thrafod efo pobl ddeallus, sy'n gofyn cwestiynau anodd i mi, yn dyfnhau fy nealltwriaeth o addoli, ac yn symud fi ym mhellach yn fy ymwybyddiaeth o'r ysbrydol. Mae'r grŵp yn fendith i mi.

Translating in a Quaker context

How do you explain apparently simple Quaker words and expressions such as *concern*, *ministry*, *sense of the meeting* to attenders and enquirers whose first language is not English? Over the years Friends in Wales have wrestled with the problem of coming up with serviceable Welsh 'Quakerese' – the *Spiritual Hospitality Report* had to have a glossary!

Fortunately, help is now at hand. Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and the Catchpool Fund have organised several international get-togethers in recent years, and out of this sharing of experience a thirty-page manual has been compiled by Kjeld Renato Lings of Denmark: *Translating among Friends: A Quakerly Guide*. These practical guidelines are available for download from the website of European and Middle East Section: <http://www.fwccemes.org/news/help-with-translating-quaker-texts>

THE KERNEL OF OUR QUAKER FAITH Coming to a venue near you!

Final details are now being put in place for an ambitious three-year programme of events around Wales, enabling Friends to come together to explore our faith and practice. Woodbrooke is organising and facilitating the events in collaboration with Meeting of Friends in Wales - so all you need to do is turn up!
The first gathering is due to be held this May. The full programme will be sent to your meetings soon - watch the MFW website for news!

For your diary

19 January *Human Journeys* Poetry reading with Philip Gross, Stevie Kraye and refugee poets. 7pm Swansea Friends Meeting House. Tickets £5 poetry@swanseaquakers.org tel. 07789 450981

Please note that the Meeting for discernment, in Dolgellau - taking forward [Celebrating the Quaker Way](#) has changed date from 29th to 15th January.

26 February *Meeting of Friends in Wales, Subud Centre, Brecon* 11am – 4.30pm *Topics: 'How Quakers are Perceived' plus Celebrating the Quaker Way in Wales.*

25 June *Meeting of Friends in Wales* at The Pales
22 October *Meeting of Friends in Wales* Llanidloes

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DEADLINE FOR the NEXT CALON is:
25th March 2011

Theme:

**Strengthening Local Communities
(Framework for Action:Priority E)**