



## Powerful powerlessness?

***“Unless we truly understand this sense of desolation, of complete and utter powerlessness, then we cannot understand how it is that [early] Quakers could be both utterly self-assured and simultaneously have absolutely no desire to impose their own will on the world.”***

Gerald Hewitson

My maternal grandfather was an old-fashioned communist of a kind that probably doesn't exist any more. Warm-hearted and generous, he had an unshakeable belief in humanity's steady progress towards a higher state of being, culturally, economically and even spiritually. No matter how bad the news, to the end of his life he kept asserting that a better time was just around the corner. I'm sure he'd never heard of Julian of Norwich, but "All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well" perfectly sums up his position. Gerald Hewitson's phrase about being both utterly self-assured and simultaneously having absolutely no desire to impose their own will on the world could have been written about him. Only the 'desolation and sense of powerlessness' seemed to have passed him by.

Even if there had ever been a time when I shared his confidence in progress, my optimism would have taken a number of severe knocks in recent years. Far

from getting better, it feels as if things are going backwards. All the last two centuries' gains in the West - security, prosperity and autonomy for ordinary people; the recognition of our social responsibility to care for each other both directly and indirectly via our government; the gradual realisation that our home planet is no more than a pale-blue dot and its resources are not infinite - all this has proved unable to hold its ground against a tsunami of ruthless and destructive appropriation of our common wealth into fewer and fewer hands. Saddest of all, perhaps, is to see how effectively people have been deceived into turning against one another, including our fellow-Europeans, at a time when we most need to stand together if we are not to be swept away. Divide and rule still works like a dream. And that's before we even get to the Middle East, Africa and the seemingly unstoppable razing of the southern hemisphere's forests. The world has been turned upside-down, but not in the way we hoped.

It's true that if you're a 'glass half-full' person, there are plenty of small advances you could point to. The websites of Greenpeace, 10:10, 38 degrees, Avaaz and other campaigning organisations are full of good-news stories – and it is truly heartening to see how effectively those campaigns have called forth and mobilised millions of people's capacity to care. It's enough to push away despair and cynicism. But is it enough to transform the world in the way we would like to see it happen?

The sense of desolation is not hard to come by. Some of you may have seen a letter in The Friend from Susan Holden, a Yorkshire Friend, who quotes approvingly the observation that 'sustainability is a form of denial', a mirage with failure built into it, given that it is now too late to prevent the breakdown of our unsustainable way of living. She prefers to give up 'endlessly struggling to swim against the tide' and feels relieved to stop pretending. She finds paradoxical hope in this message. So perhaps she is not so far from Gerald's early Friends with their paradoxical sense of assurance, having faced the truth of the utter desolation both within themselves and their world.

To quote Gerald again:

*“Most of history, what most people have called ‘reality’ is made up of winners and losers, of us and them, of fear and hierarchy, power, domination and control.*

*Jesus offers a different world view. He had a personal encounter with divine power. He felt this power had such an intimate connection with his own being he referred to it as Father (albeit the Aramaic word Abba translates more as Daddy than father). This man was able to see into his own darkness, and the darkness in the culture around him. He felt called into God’s service, so reached out to the oppressed and the marginalised; as ‘Son of Man’, he journeyed deep into his own humanity, so that we might see what Christ in us looks like at work in the world. Working from this sense of intimacy with the Divine, his life and teaching showed how one might subvert the oppression of a cruel imperial power without resorting to victimhood or violence, or the need to become cruel himself: to go the extra mile was to go beyond what the Roman legionnaire had the legitimated authority to compel, and thus place the legionnaire in the position of illegality; to give him a shirt, after he had legally demanded the cloak, was to stand in near nakedness, exposing the cruelty and injustice inherent in imperial power.”*

However, something troubled me about Susan Holden’s letter; something about its all-or-nothingness, about the proposal that we simply get ready to accommodate ourselves to the coming crash without attempting to mitigate it or subvert or challenge or even seek to expose the existing unjust and destructive order of the world. I sent a response to *The Friend* a couple of weeks later, in which I argued that mitigation is worth aiming for. Among the (probably too many) points I briefly touched on, the one I thought most germane to Friends was this: ‘We don’t have to wait for the icecaps to re-form to start living by values of kindness, co-operation and sharing.’

The fact is, we don’t even have to wait for the icecaps to finish melting – the Light is among us/within us, any time we choose to turn to it. There’s an ancient rabbinical saying: *“You are not expected to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”* It isn’t a question of whether or not sustainability – or peace, or justice – is actually attainable by our efforts; the point is to turn your

whole life over to the Spirit of Love, and try to live by that Light without worrying about how much you will achieve.

Gerald reminds us that

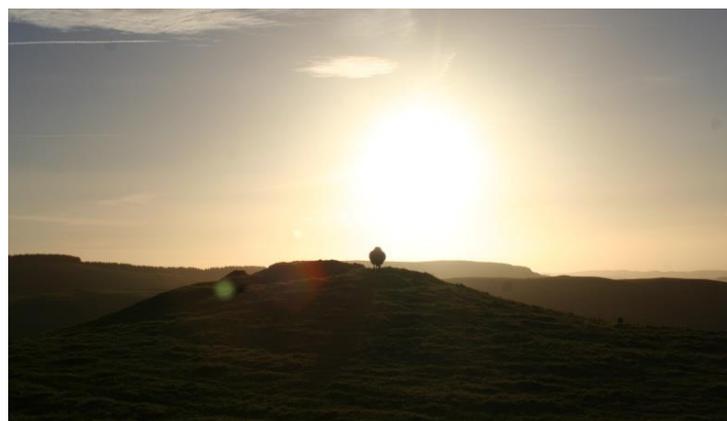
*“Out of the dark and powerless desolation of the cross, in a way we do not understand, new life arose among those who were left behind. For hundreds of years Quakers have seen in this one event the potential for seeing the truth of their lives – not an event locked in history but providing a vocabulary for an internal movement which defined who they were as people. In this process, their personal sense of self was transmuted into lives of alignment with divine power, and serving its ends. This experience and power is available for us today, if we allow ourselves to be opened up to it.”*

As Gerald points out, this is not necessarily easy or quick to attain – don’t I know it! and what’s more, in my experience, not even easy to hold on to after you’ve been there. But he finds comfort in the fact that it wasn’t easy for Jesus’ disciples or the first Friends either. He reminds us that positive change can be centuries in coming – if it comes at all – and disheartenment can only be avoided by trusting in the Spirit. His talk sounded like the authentic voice of prophecy to me; I’m sure I shall be returning to it again and again in the future as a source of challenge, inspiration and encouragement. I commend it to you.

Gerald Hewitson’s talk, **Learning to Stand Fearlessly in Powerful Powerlessness – How we might regard Minute 36 and our Canterbury Commitment** is available in full on the Quakers in Wales website:

[www.quakersinwales.org.uk/pdf\\_files/reports/powerful\\_powerlessness\\_gwtalkoct2014.pdf](http://www.quakersinwales.org.uk/pdf_files/reports/powerful_powerlessness_gwtalkoct2014.pdf)

SLK





## “A sense of unity and belonging”

*Gwyneth Clapham (Bangor Meeting) reports on the Meeting of Friends in Wales held at Aberystwyth on 25 September 2014.*

This was only the second time I've attended Meeting of Friends in Wales so as well as seeing Friends from decades ago, I was also able to put faces to well-known names from other Area Meetings. This adds so much more colour to Quaker life! I hope other people who haven't been will make the decision to attend.

Coming from Hull originally, but having lived in Wales for most of my adult life, to me Wales is a much-loved foster-mother. For people who have not lived here, it must be difficult to imagine what a "small world" Wales is; Friends had come to the meeting from all corners of Wales but the sense of unity and belonging was clear, and the challenges often very specific to Wales.

For example, the dates of Yearly Meeting Gathering and the National Eisteddfod sometimes clash, so painful choices have to be made by Friends; the National Eisteddfod is another expression of the Welsh soul. Events such as the Eisteddfod and the Royal Welsh Show present an opportunity for Quakerism to be seen and heard, not just in the Cytûn / Churches Together in Wales tent, but elsewhere. Wales has a long tradition of peace-making, for example the young people of the Urdd Gobaith Cymru / Welsh League of Youth have been sending out a message of peace to the world every 18th of May since 1925. A new organisation, "Cymru dros Heddwch / Wales for Peace" has recently been set up, joining together the many peace organisations and initiatives.

Because of this emphasis on peace, at the previous Meetings of Friends in Wales there had been much discussion as to whether to send a representative to the National Service of Remembrance on 4th of August at Llandaff Cathedral, where there would be medals and chains of office in profusion. But the Quaker decision-making process proved its worth yet again as a representative was appointed, who, wearing her white poppy, "happened" to sit next to – and talk to – a member of the House of Lords, heard the Archbishop of Wales state quite clearly that war is incompatible with the teachings of Jesus, and was able to network with other people as well.

When Jesus was trying to describe the Kingdom of Heaven to the disciples, the only way he could do it was in the form of parables. In Gerald Hewitson's talk in the afternoon, on "Learning to Stand Fearlessly in Powerful Powerlessness", the magnitude of the challenge of climate change to our beautiful jewel of a planet could only be described in comparison with the effects on early friends of the Civil War, and with the question of slavery for the Friends in America.

The Civil War left England in a state of chaos where all the old values and rules had gone; people were confused; a third of the men who became Quakers had fought as soldiers in the War. But out of this pain and darkness new life arose, because they found the Light, the Seed, God, *within themselves*. From a worldly point of view they were powerless, but they possessed a spiritual power which not only enabled them to deal with any situation but took away the need for earthly power, and they found great joy, simply by taking heed of the promptings of love and truth in their hearts.

The Quakers who went to Pennsylvania set up a state where secular power did not become corrupted and the ideal of liberty and equality was upheld. BUT many owned slaves, like most land-owners. This was the norm. How could they live without them? Who would work in the fields and the houses? It was easy to be seduced by the surrounding culture, and slavery was after all legal. The slave-owners could not see the real situation.

What is it that we today are being prevented from seeing? What is the Canterbury Commitment telling us? It took a century for Quakers to give up slavery completely. We haven't got a century. The early Quakers in England and the American slave owners

found an alternative way. They saw things as they COULD be and manifested that. They allowed the Divine will to take over their own will, and so power and energy flowed into them. The process involved pain; it needed tenderness; a loving heart willing to be broken again and again; gratitude, generosity, compassion, service. But the result was an unassailable inner power, and rising out of the pain, deep joy.

This is what we are called to do now in our own time, to confront our modern equivalent of slavery, knowing that we can learn to stand fearlessly.

**"Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or to be anything, and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is its portion."**

Isaac Penington (Qfp 26.70)

## Deep Time: An Appreciation of Anne Cluysenaar

*Fiona Owen (Holyhead/Caergybi) pays tribute to the late Anne Cluysenaar, poet and member of Caerleon, Newport Local Meeting.*

It is the news you never expect and never want to receive: that a dear and long-term friend has been killed, and not killed by accident but by the hands of another. I heard the BBC Breakfast News that Monday morning (3<sup>rd</sup> November) as I was getting dressed: the body of a woman aged 78 had been found near Usk. I felt my thoughts flick in the direction of Anne – of that age, in that place - but

the thought passed because *it couldn't be her, could it?* But putting on my computer first thing, there it was: the email from my publisher, also Anne's.

Anne Cluysenaar was known and loved by many. She lived in Little Wentwood Farm, near Usk, with her husband of 39 years, Walt Jackson. They had lived there since 1987. Academic, lecturer, editor, smallholder, she was perhaps first and foremost a poet, having written since a child, and it is in her poetry that her 'essence' can be read, heard, felt. The words carry her light and voice, her profundity – because Anne was a poet who never stopped wondering and always wrote from a place of enquiring depth.

Anne and I met in the mid-1990s. She co-founded the Usk Valley Vaughan Association, which was built around the life and work of the Vaughan brothers - poet and doctor, Henry Vaughan, and his twin brother, priest and alchemist Thomas Vaughan. The journal of the Association, *Scintilla*, became an annual literary journal of which Anne was one of the poetry editors until fairly recently. I started attending the annual UVVA weekend colloquia early in the life of the Association and that is how Anne and I became friends. We were in regular email contact in between the colloquia and, in 2011, we discovered that we had something else in common: Quakerism. In an email, she wrote: 'how strange and delightful it is to find the link with Quaker views. I have started to attend a Quaker meeting ... I feel at home there as I can't in Church when I fear that my presence will be interpreted as toeing doctrinal lines I can't make literal sense of. ... Not among Friends though. Silence!' She subsequently applied for membership and her email upon acceptance was simply: 'Ah! I am a Quaker!' - as she had long been, I would suggest, in spirit, if not in name. She wouldn't be confined by doctrine and her bright, curious mind would always go where it needed to, but in her later life she found a spiritual home with Friends.

Anne edited the *Selected Poems* of Henry Vaughan and in her introduction, she writes: 'The spiritual direction taken by Henry Vaughan combines sparkling intellectuality with preparedness to take on the limitations of human understanding and language – a willingness to accept that "Love only can with quick access/Unlock the way", and that it may sometimes be wise "to carry, not search mysteries"'. For me, this describes Anne's work, too.

She published more than a dozen collections of poems, her most recent being *Touching Distances* (2014), a diary sequence of poems starting in December 2010 and finishing December 2012.

Rooted in her small-holding life in Wales, in all its quotidian detail, there is always a sense of something more – a reach for ontological

understanding. The exploration of personal memories, fascinating in themselves, also reveal a curiosity (the word etymologically related to ‘care’) that lies at the heart of the collection about the nature of memory itself - its links with time, imagination, others - and the way lives intersect, inter-relate, inter-connect across time. Synchronicities, dreams and a deeper-down kind of knowing are suggested, with threshold experiences connecting the living with the dead.

Many poems reach for a self-knowledge

that seems always to flicker on the edge of understanding. Anne had great compassion for human and animals lives. In one poem, she speaks of a Jewish friend who escaped Czechoslovakia in WW2, heeding the rumours about the camps. The poem concludes ‘When I hear an immigrant scorned, I remember’ (‘November 5’). In the opening poem, she writes, in response to Polish poetry in translation, ‘Just chance, those of us here, still living’ (‘December 7’). Anne knew life’s contingencies and fragilities yet delight is alive among her poems, as well as a keen interest in ideas, with poems about metamorphosis, unexpected fruiting and flowering along with untimely and stopped lives. One of the key traits

that distinguishes Anne’s work is her abiding fascination with other kinds of lives and with deep time. She can be described as a poet of *wonder*. There is nothing abstract or disembodied about her poems. Part of what makes her so compelling to read is the attention she gives to the particular, so that big themes emerge through the local.

## December 8

*from Touching Distances: Diary Poems*

It’s the cards I can’t send this year. The names crossed out.  
To them, my intensest thoughts. Are they anywhere still?  
Back where we all came from and are all going?  
That babe in his mother’s arms – the future beginning,

beginning again. Generations which always learn  
what we old ones always learned too late or never.  
Well, I lick the envelopes, those I can send. The others,  
immaterial, go too, needing no stamp, no post-box.

In the folds of space, when I join them, I can’t believe  
there’ll be one of my possible selves, impossibly real  
beyond any language, however ancient or new.  
I hope someone may, all the same, send me a card.

For now, let me send my future unself a smile  
and memories of a short, dark day spent writing  
or not writing to friends and lovers still able  
or not able to tear these envelopes open.

Anne Cluysenaar

*reprinted with permission of Cinnamon Press*

In one diary poem in *Touching Distances*, written on the death of her good friend Michael Srigley, Anne dances with his ideas about death and rebirth, imagines his shadow being beside her ‘in the fold/of a different universe’. And the theme of *continuity* suggests itself in the final poem of the collection ‘December 10’, where Anne describes herself sowing wildflower seeds and noticing the way they ‘drift from my fingers/on a breeze I can’t even feel’ so she must step aside to allow them to be taken where they will: ‘It seems my stamping/can do

no more than try/to fix their future down there/somewhere lost sight of’. She casts her seeds to ground for the future, as a ‘flurry of snow’ comes, which she calls – last line of her book - a ‘generative cold’.

Anne’s ending is tragic, shocking and premature. There is solace, at least, in reading her poems, for her voice remains: alive, wise and deeply faithful to life’s processes, its mysteries, its near and far shores.

Anne Cluysenaar was born Brussels 15 March 1936, died Llantrisant, near Usk, Gwent 1 November 2014. She leaves behind her much-loved husband Walter Jackson and her many, many friends.



image courtesy of Ken Price Photography

## Caerleon, Newport Quakers and the Newport NATO Summit

A report from **Val Evans** (Caerleon, Newport Local Meeting)

On 4 and 5 September 2014 Newport's Celtic Manor Resort was the venue for this event. People in both Newport and Cardiff had been feeling the impact of the huge security operation on traffic movement from at least mid- August onwards. However, it was the resorting to military planning and implementation being seen as the answer to the world's undoubted problems by NATO, that made Caerleon, Newport act.

Caerleon, Newport LM along with David Lawrence from Cardiff LM protested against the holding of this Summit by keeping a peace vigil for one hour on the common in Caerleon on Sunday 17 August, following meeting for worship. Several of us had made our own posters and banners and held these up in full view as we occupied one of the corners on Goldcroft Common, near a busy road junction. Initially, as we assembled, we were greeted by a very loud burst of car exhaust from one driver and we took that to be a definite thumbs down! As our hour passed however, we received several thumbs up, waves and a few horn toots from both drivers and their passengers. Some local people also came out from their homes, curious to see what was happening. As we stood on our corner, I think we all felt energised and part of something worthwhile condemning the way of weapons and war-making.

Our Clerk had been in touch with The South Wales Argus newspaper to communicate details about our protest and, as a result, we appeared in that newspaper the day following our protest in an

almost half-page article with an accompanying photo taken by one of Caerleon, Newport's Friends. Brief details about us even appeared on the front page of that edition in a side headline. Surprisingly, there have been no letters appearing in the newspaper's "Your Say" page condemning or supporting our action. Our press release regarding the Summit now appears on our meeting website and we await responses, if any, in the future.

### Meeting for Sufferings (MfS)

#### Summary of purpose

Meeting for Sufferings is the standing representative body entrusted with the care of the business of the Britain Yearly Meeting through the year.

It has a visionary and prophetic role for the whole Society in Britain, deciding the priorities and setting the direction of the Yearly Meeting in the Long Term Framework. It also fosters communication throughout the Yearly Meeting and reviews and tests concerns referred to it by area meetings.

### What has Meeting for Sufferings ever done for us?

*Gillian Oakley (Abergavenny/Y Fenni) went to the Sufferings regional gathering in Cardiff, on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, the second of two held in Wales.*

I have to confess I did not really know what Meeting for Sufferings did for me before attending the workshop. But I was not alone in my ignorance; by the end of the day we were all a lot better informed.

The name Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) may be 'antique' but the meeting itself has metamorphosed over time to suit contemporary needs and is crucial to the running of the Society today. Originating in 1675 to address the problems attending the suffering of Friends who were at the time persecuted and often imprisoned, it was originally made up mostly of London Friends who were on hand to lobby Parliament for changes in the law. Changing circumstances and easier transport altered both business and membership. The current MfS is made up of 106 members representing Area Meetings, central committees, General Meetings for Young People and Wales and Scotland, clerks of Yearly Meeting, Central Nominations Committee, Yearly Meeting Treasurer, BYM Trustees, clerk and

assistant clerk of MfS and BYM staff. It sounds an unwieldy number but all sections of the Society have to be represented for the MfS is a standing body entrusted with the care of business, both within the Society and its outside relationships, between Yearly Meetings. It was a relief to learn that an Arrangements committee made up of MfS clerks and others meets beforehand to attend to the proceedings in hand for greater efficiency as well as arranging the agendas.

So if Meeting for Sufferings is a really important meeting overseeing business and also setting the direction of our Society, why are the reports of our area representatives taken so little notice of? One of the important things I took away from the day was an even greater awareness of the difficulty of overcoming the yawning chasm that appears to exist between the centre and the local meetings out at the periphery. I for one have resolved to make much greater effort to read the reports from Sufferings, encourage others to do so and find ways to support MfS representatives. Do we have concerns in common with distant Friends? We won't know if we don't bother to read the reports.

In considering how concerns go forward to MfS we all participated in an excellent exercise, discussing hypothetical minutes of concern from hypothetical local meetings. This brought home to us just how crucial it is not only to arrive at our discernment leading to the expression of a concern through consultation and investigation of the issue, but to work for the concern ourselves. Good ideas are not necessarily good concerns and if we are not prepared to do something ourselves why should we expect others to do it for us?

MfS also has visionary and prophetic role for the whole Society in Britain and fostering good communication. Hence the appointment of the Long-term framework working group, and our present deliberations on the way ahead. Improving communications between the centre and the localities is emerging, in my local meeting's discussions, as an important issue. I feel that making the effort to attend an event like this builds and reinforces the bonds not only between the centre and the localities but between local meetings. We can all read the relevant sections of Faith and Practice but hearing first-hand accounts of

the business in hand was worth a lot of words on paper, or on the Internet.

MfS does plenty for us in all sorts of ways. Many thanks to those representing MfS, Juliet Prager, Ethel Livermore and Janet Harland, who braved the rugby crowds and miserable November weather to travel to Cardiff to enlighten us and uplift our spirits.

***Here are comments from Friends who attended the regional Sufferings event in Cemmaes Road:***

- Even having read *Becoming Friends* several times, I hadn't fully realised how crucial MfS was in the life of the Society. So little of its activities trickle through to LMs, despite us having such a keen and efficient rep. We need to connect more with MfS; reading their minutes online is something we can do.
- It was very good to meet some of the people from Sufferings, especially Juliet Prager, who are working on our behalf and who often seem pretty remote.
- I found the 'Testing Concerns' exercise especially helpful, revealing the need for LMs and AMs to sharpen up their focus on a concern before expecting MfS to take action.
- I was shocked that Wales has only put forward six concerns in five years. I thought it would have been higher.
- I thought the day was exceptionally good. I came prepared to be bored and found I was gripped by it. It is a meeting for worship for business; I had assumed it was a load of boring business. Somehow the difference is there. What has recurred again and again in my mind is the prophetic role that was mentioned as one of the five things the review body laid on Sufferings. Does Sufferings feel it has moved into that role yet? If not why not? All meetings have that centring in the Spirit so it should be there.



Mid Wales AM summer gathering: Outdoor worship and "bring something to share."

## FOR YOUR DIARY

21<sup>st</sup> February, **Meeting of Friends in Wales**, Hengaer, Brithdir *Dolgellau* from 10.30am.

Speaker: Ben Pink Dandelion – following on from his Swarthmore lecture.

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## 27, 28 February and 1 March 2015



Meeting of Friends in Wales  
Residential weekend at **Centre for Alternative Technology** Machynlleth

### **Taking the next step in fulfilling our commitment to be a sustainable community.**

Facilitators include Maya Williams, Lisa Mundle, Gwen Prince and Gill Westcott.

Sessions will include: reviewing the economic aspects of sustainability, taking action and campaigning, Zero-Carbon Britain, and internalised barriers within ourselves.

**Children and young people** are invited to attend, and access specific activities as well as all-age sessions.

**Accommodation:** CAT has 24 beautiful new ensuite Twin-bedded rooms in their WISE building. These can be booked as singles or as twins. There is also a bunkhouse with five bedrooms, for up to 16 people with shared WCs and showers.

*Please see the booking form for details of price. All costs include full board Friday evening until Sunday afternoon. Day participants - Saturday and Sunday are also welcome.*

**Travel:** If people are able to use public transport, we can make arrangements from Machynlleth to CAT. Please let us know what you will need.

**Please book as soon as possible – the event can only go ahead if we have sufficient number of bookings.**

e-mail me at frances@voelckerarchitects.co.uk or phone at 01766 530657

Frances Voelcker, Pant Glas Uchaf, Pant Glas, Garndolbenmaen, Gwynedd LL51 9DQ  
Please fill this in and return your booking form by post to me together with a cheque for the appropriate amount, made out to **“Meeting of Friends in Wales.”** PLEASE BOOK BEFORE 1<sup>st</sup> Feb.

(Bursary funding is available from some Area Meetings.)

Contact details, and online booking form:

[http://www.quakersinwales.org.uk/pdf\\_files/current\\_mailing/2015\\_residential\\_gathering\\_info.pdf](http://www.quakersinwales.org.uk/pdf_files/current_mailing/2015_residential_gathering_info.pdf)

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The contact number for the Meeting of Friends in Wales administrator is now 01970 880530.

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### **THE DEADLINE FOR NEXT CALON:**

## **Friday 27 March 2015**

This will be a special number focusing on the theme of the residential gathering:

**The next step in fulfilling our commitment to become a sustainable community.**

But contributions on any topic

**We are very keen to receive articles, news, events, poems, pictures, and feedback.**