

## Cyfarfod y Cyfeillion yng Nghymru

### Meeting of Friends in Wales

#### **Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, Friends House, 28 September 2019**

I attended, on behalf of the MFW Clerks, a meeting of the Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee for the residential YM gathering in 2020.

This session is one where representatives of various Quaker groupings are invited to attend and present a paper which would input into the considerations about the Agenda. As well as a brief paper from the MFW Clerks we appended the paper "Thoughts on the Cultural Differences between England and Wales". This paper was well received by other delegates. It was particularly rewarding to extend the contacts previously made between MFW and General Meeting for Scotland.

We had the opportunity to supplement our papers with a 3 minute oral introduction. I used that time to accent the positive pieces of legislation that have benefited Wales since devolution, in particular the "Well being of Future Generations" act which, for example, made it impossible for the Welsh Government to accept the possibility of fracking. Both the Scottish and Welsh devolved administrations do not only advocate system change but practise it. These changes, however, do not appear to be seen or understood by the UK Government. In a similar way there has been a tendency for Friends in England to be unaware of these worthwhile developments. I therefore welcomed the way the the Society of Friends is now devolving some work to the grass-roots, but reminded Friends that such a move has to open channels of communication both ways.

The next section of the meeting was to break into pleasingly small discussion groups to talk about what we had heard and read and to think about how the concerns and action regarding sustainability and diversity could be considered. The school strikes and the impact made by Greta Thunberg underline that the Yearly Meeting gathering has to be all age in a way in which the ages mix and interact fully. How is this to be achieved? It is no longer suitable to consider the term "all age" to be the "children coming in at the end of the meeting to tell us what they have been doing"; this is yearly people possibly introducing sessions, opening up the agenda.

There is still an "elephant in the room" in discussions about diversity. Just as the issue of single sex marriage brought division and hurt, and caused some Friends to leave the Society, the issue of "trans" Friends is causing a rift. Apparently this is particularly obvious on social media Quaker platforms. Our Society must find ways of opening loving discussion of this potentially dangerous difference.

Peter Hussey  
October 2019