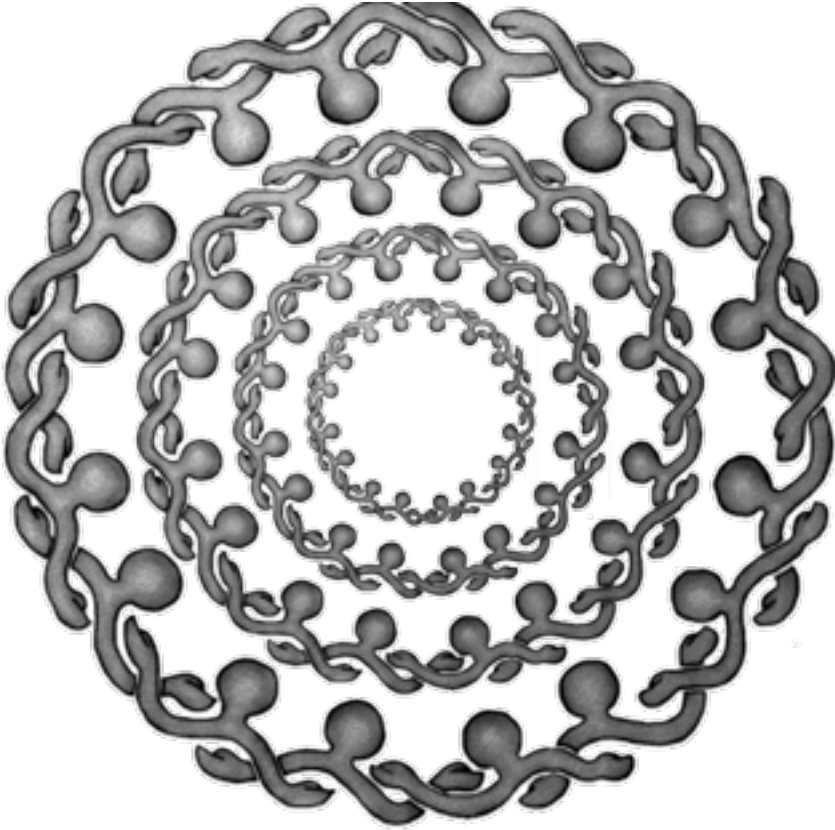


THE YOUNG QUAKER

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the Community issue...



Over the last few months I have been going through the process of applying for membership of our Religious Society of Friends. Beyond the nerves and niceties the focus of my discernment has increasingly turned to what it means to be both within a Quaker community and a Quaker within community. This exploration has led to challenging questions – What does Quaker community mean? How is that community expressed? What are its limits?

Luckily for me as one of the editors of *The Young Quaker* I have a whole community of amazing Young Friends with whom I can explore the complexities of these questions. Be it through dense text, beautiful song or moving pictures. Be it the joys of first contact or the struggle of whether to stay. Be it exploring on our own or finding our place in another. Let us see what our community has to say about community and Young Friends' place in it.

Over 50 people of all ages attended the YFGM fundraising ceilidh on Saturday 24th September, at Westminster Meeting House, London. Much fun was had by all! Read more on p2



Friends, we are called into wholeness and community, women and men alike, sharing the responsibilities God has given us, and assuming the leadership we are called to.

YFGM'S FUNDRAISER

By **Bea Shelley**

Cait Gould is YFGM's new Finance Trustee... and also... now organiser-in-chief of YFGM's ceilidhs! The first one, which took place in September, was a spectacular success and will surely represent the first of many to come in the next few years we can hope. The band *Green Kite Ceilidh Band* played to get all up and dancing, and everyone ate traditional Scottish food [that would be veggie haggis for us! - Ed]. Sophie Loewendahl deserves special credit as chief of Marketing, promoting the event with great enthusiasm from the Cornwall planning office despite not being able to attend herself. Cait says:



"THANK YOU!!! Hello! I just wanted to thank anyone who came, danced, helped, cooked, drove pots etc. around London, manned drinks tables, helped rope people into coming... and was generally involved

in any way, if even in spirit, in making the ceilidh at Westminster Meeting House happen on Saturday and made it a happy one :) You helped raise £360.35. Thank you so very much!!! This will help more young adult friends be able to enjoy Young Friends General Meeting." ■

INTRODUCING RACHEL EVANS – OUR NEW YFGM COORDINATOR

Interview by **Bea Shelley**

I applied for the post because I love YFGM and felt like it would be wonderful to work for it for a year. It seemed like lots of the things I would learn as coordinator were likely to be useful in the future, especially since I'm hoping to eventually pursue a career in education policy which might well require me to have knowledge of administration or finance. I'm hoping to be able to work with some of the staff in QPSW on their work in peace education this year which would be a wonderful opportunity. In terms of what I want to achieve in the role, I think I'll be pretty pleased if I manage to get all the planning weekends and YFGM gatherings to pass

without major mishap so I suppose that's my main aim! If I have some spare capacity, it would be nice to increase YFGM's outreach, particularly to those involved in Quaker youth programmes who then don't necessarily come to YFGM once they turn 18.

Three things the YFGM community might not know about me? When I was little, I went to a hippy primary school where I spent a lot of time running about feral in the forest. Since then, I've always had a particular fondness of wooded areas, especially the New Forest. One of my chief disappointments in life is that Kraft stopped producing Mars Delight bars – does anyone else remember these? ■

LAUNCH OF THE MENTAL WELLBEING REVIEW OF YFGM

By **Mental Wellbeing review group**

At this October's YFGM an important event in the history of our community is happening. In Lancaster meeting house the first comprehensive review of the impact of YFGM on its members will be launched. The focus will be on mental wellbeing or more precisely what past and present YFGMers think YFGM promotes it, and identify areas where they see, as an organisation, YFGM can improve in protecting the mental wellbeing of its members. This will be done through a two part process of a comprehensive survey followed by in-depth case studies constructed after months of hard work by the Mental Wellbeing Working Group. We hope all this work will inspire you, the current and former members of YFGM, to fully embrace this vital research and ensure that our community has the detailed information needed to make YFGM a place that promotes the positive mental wellbeing for all its members. ■

THE 30s-40s POST YFGM GROUP

By **Julian Wood**

Stop Press! Are you 30-ish, nearing it or a bit older?!

We have set up a group for all Quakers (or those interested) who are in their 30s and 40s. We want to be a place for all Quakers who feel too old for YFGM but are not at all old!

The new post-YFGM Network plans to meet in London soon, and get together and build a network of F/friends to complement (rival!?) YFGM. Search for 'postyfgm' in Facebook to find us. Or email me, Julian Wood, at julwood@gmail.com. Please do get in touch, so we can build a home for those who have 'graduated' from YFGM! ■

FRIENDS ON TRIAL FOR BLOCKADING NUCLEAR BASE

By **Hannah Brock**

Protests took place at Burghfield – a nuclear weapons factory in Berkshire – for the whole of June 2016.

The 27th was our day. With other faith groups, we declared that we had 'No Faith in Trident'. Our Quaker (and friends) blockade included John, 88, super gluing himself to Sam, 28, with other Friends using arm tubes to prevent us from being moved. We kept the construction gate into the base closed for over six hours, so no building work could continue. Meanwhile, our friends from the Catholic Worker and Christian affinity group Put Down the Sword kept other entrance roads shut. As we blockaded, around 50 people took part in prayers, workshops and services in a day-long vigil nearby.



We believe that civil resistance is an indispensable part of the struggle for a nuclear weapons-free world. Taking actions like this not only contributes to that struggle, it also creates networks of people whose trust of each other in collaboratively and non-hierarchically organised work acts as the basis for the world we want to see. Ten of us that took action that day are being tried for Aggravated Trespass in the next months. We'll keep you updated! ■

YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS REPORT PUBLISHED

By **Georgina Bailey**

Earlier this year, Quaker Life undertook a consultation into how young adults (aged 18 to 35) relate to their Quaker identity and Quakerism in general. Over 150 people took part and nearly one-fifth of them identified YFGM as being one of their main Quaker communities. The consultation showed that young adults involved in Quakerism care deeply about the Society of Friends and want to be part of the life of the Society. However, many struggle to engage in the life of the Society for a variety of reasons. These reasons, whilst not unique to young adults, do disproportionately impact them. One of these reasons is that young adults tend to have more transient lifestyles which prevent strong links to local meetings. Local

meetings are still the focus of our membership and communications structures, and are expected to be the main provider of spiritual community. Without links to local meetings, it becomes easy for young adults to become excluded from central structures and national communities too. Although local young adult communities exist, these are only in six cities and have varying levels of support. In response to the consultation Quaker Life will be recruiting for a three-year post to develop work on the issues raised. This post will be recruited later in 2016, and the work will be guided by a steering group with a representative from YFGM. If you want to read more about the results of this consultation a full report can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/z6yp9vy> ■

EUROPEAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN YOUNG FRIENDS' ALL-AGE GATHERING

By **Jenny McCarthy**

One hundred and eight Quakers of all ages gathered in Bonn to spend the first week of August together remembering, celebrating the creation of and creating EMEYF. The last thirty years have seen many changes both in EMEYF itself and in the world around us – the recent Brexit-vote and the crisis for refugees being just the latest. This was reflected in the creative display of the EMEYF archive, with old photos, newspaper articles and evidence of the very beginning of email!

Sessions ranging from Quaker theology to crafting to a death café gave us the opportunity to learn from one another, as well as having

fun, and admire the bags, tie-dye t-shirts and woodland weaving we made together. The many children who attended brought their life and energy to worship and games, and it was wonderful to meet so many future EMEYFers as well as the ones who started it all.

We were privileged to welcome Friends from all over Europe, Georgia, Russia and Poland as well as Western Europe, and the linguistic skills of many Friends smoothed over barriers. Deeply moving worship and singing reminded us that there are many ways to know one another in the things that are eternal. We look forward to the next thirty years of EMEYF! ■

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY BUT OVERLOOKING THE ONE ON YOUR DOORSTEP?

By Vicky Tedder

A building site across from my house is currently advertising my area as a 'Vibrant Community' yet despite feeling 'community minded', living in the area for three years and working to support community development in my day job, I question whether I'm a part of this vibrant community. After all, I'm only on small talk terms with neighbours and local shops, and three years doesn't feel long in the life of a community. This makes me question if I should go to more community meetings, start knocking on neighbours' doors or if I'll ever really be part of the community, whilst I don't know if we'll be living here long term.

I've always valued and loved working with communities and have spent the majority of my 'day jobs' either working alongside community groups in research, or empowering communities to access what they need to do their best work. All of this is underpinned by the idea that a community is best placed to understand their own needs and how these should be responded to, and that people often feel a sense of empowerment when they have these meaningful community connections. However, whilst we can tend to think of people living in a particular place as being the most stable and accessible form of a community, already present and ready to be accessed, in reality, many geographical communities are something ever-changing and it's hard feel at home, particularly as a new-comer. However, when communities work together they are powerful and something very relevant to our times.

I grew up in a large village very much feeling part of my local community. For me, this involved knowing the faces and stories of people who were from many backgrounds and ages rather than just those who I would ordinarily socialise with. However, I also recognised that not everyone had the same community as me and that this community had to be worked at. I vividly remember being irritated by my mum stopping and talking to every other person in the village whenever we went somewhere, whilst the same thing didn't always happen when I was with some of my school friends' parents. Upon moving away to university I felt stripped of this community as my own student one felt more transient, limited by the academic cycle and in many ways forced rather than organic. Whilst we mixed with people from around the globe we were all experiencing similar things and at a similar stage in our lives, and so for me this geographic community lacked some of the diversity and stability I was used to growing up.

Despite the positive aspects of community, when conflicts arise (which all communities will have) it is hard to leave the community or have space away. Being part of your local community can at times be suffocating as well as supportive

with nosy neighbours and people who feel you should be behaving in a certain way. It is also important to see that a geographical grouping will not have one viewpoint, you may have several communities and a great many voices within one area causing conflicting opinions and priorities. In this way a local community may have more tensions than a community which is chosen based on ideas, skills or hobbies; you only have the place you live in common rather than something you have chosen which brings you together. This form of community, once engaged with, is hard to leave without moving and feels that it has the added pressure of being the most natural expression of connection.

Despite these strains feeling part of the community on your doorstep is something which people long for, relocating to small villages citing the pull of knowing everyone. However, in seeing a community as something you join rather than build people are perhaps missing the point. Communities are a series of relationships and connections which need to be grown and developed. It takes time and effort to construct trust between people (one outreach worker I recently spoke to suggested you need 8 connections with someone before you can build a meaningful relationship) but most of all a community needs the willingness to engage and take the rough with the smooth. Whilst we can join local activities we cannot expect to find those connections on the day we move in.

However, sometimes these connections need to develop quickly; in my work we often see groups of residents and local businesses coming together over large-scale problems such as threats to local services. Whilst these connections can be powerful it is how they develop and help the group move forward which can be as important as overcoming the problem itself. As one community organiser in South London explained to me, building these bonds is about sharing the good days as well as the bad. It helps for a group to listen to each other, develop a voice that respects its multifaceted nature and to engage different members who may not be the first to come forward. Within these connections communities often find that they have an amazing collection of skills, viewpoints and creativity which they can use to ensure that their voice is heard and empower individuals to use their community in new ways.

In my own area, I need to recognise that whilst I am only slowly gaining these connections they will be links to a multitude of different opinions, backgrounds and understandings but that, however slow, they need to start from a level of engaging and building. ■

MY FINDHORN, MY SINGING AND ME!

By Rachael Harrison

You can find Findhorn on the northeast coast of Scotland. The community was created in 1962 through the vision of Eileen Caddy, Peter Caddy and Dorothy Maclean and the decisions made about the creation, direction and purpose of the Findhorn community came from a space of meditation and a strong emphasis upon their sense of intuition and leadings. The principles and practice of looking inwards, or what is also described as a deep listening; an emphasis on a care and connection to nature and the food they produce; community living and 'Love in Action' are very much still present in Findhorn. 'Love in Action' refers to the ways in which people contribute to the community such as cooking meals, working in the garden or welcoming visitors. My understanding is that people at Findhorn work in a way that is similar to the practice of mindfulness, where they are encouraged and supported to engage in an activity from a deeper sense of presence.

Although it was founded over 50 years ago Findhorn continues to be a place where people are drawn to visit and participate in a wide range of workshops. I went there for a week long singing course, run by teachers from all across the world and had the absolute delight to be taught by Northern Harmony (from the USA), a group called Zulu Tradition, Corrina Hewat, Kate O Connell, Bill Henderson and a group sharing a session in songs for peace in a space called Harmonic Temple. The course was called Earth Sings and we sang from a variety of traditions and languages including songs from Georgia, in Sotho and Xhosa (South African languages), Scottish folk and Gaelic, the shape note traditional music from the USA and Taize. This, along with other singing weeks I have been on felt like a rare gift. For me there is something deeply connecting about singing in harmony with others and this week was no exception.

People visit Findhorn not only to learn new skills or go on retreat but also to have a taste of what it feels like to live there and experience community living. Alongside the wonderful and enriching singing I was also allocated a group, and similarly to YFGM was assigned to a slot helping out in the kitchen. What struck me about the community there is how they integrate the concept of 'Love in Action'. They strive to become more conscious and connected to what they are doing in their daily lives. At the beginning of my shift in the kitchen we stood together in a circle, held hands and 'tuned in'. Then we were assigned tasks and at the end of our shift we came back together again to 'tune out' of this activity. I was invited to imagine all the places that I had been cleaning in the kitchen and to take a moment of



gratitude for our work before departing as a group. This on paper could sound somewhat airy fairy but in practice it slowed me down and made this seemingly menial task something quite extraordinary.

As I reflected on my time in this community, I found myself flicking through our familiar Advices & Queries (A&Q) and reflecting on Findhorn's principles of 'Love in Action' and 'Deep Listening'. There is a wonderful similarity in my mind between how much they link in with my own experience of Quakerism, the interplay we have between a deep listening and ministry in meeting and the ways in which Quakerism is taken into our everyday lives. I am a great believer that the mysticism that underpins different spiritual philosophies and religious beliefs is interlinked in an ever woven interpretation of love and connection, and so it was perhaps no surprise to find the words 'Love in Action' in my beloved A&Q. Equally, in reflecting on the concept of allowing a deep listening to provide a space for insight and guidance, I find myself reading the following advice: 'Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts...'. Language aside, to me there seems something in the essence of all of this to be of the same sense and meaning. I am very grateful for the time spent singing and absorbing some of these ideas in my week up in the Findhorn community. ■

AN ALTERNATIVE TYPE OF QUAKER COMMUNITY

In October 2015 a group of Friends in their 20s and 30s met at Westminster Meeting House to explore setting up a Quaker worship group for those in their peer group. Initially three Sunday evening sessions were planned. They were very well-attended, with a

with the periods of silent worship feeling very 'gathered'. After the third session, in a Meeting for Worship for Business the group discerned to bring into being the Younger Quaker Worship Group (YQWG), which meets on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays each month.

By **Sophie Loewendahl**

singing session in which we learnt several rounds and simple part-songs by ear. The last part of every evening is the cornerstone for building the community: a Bring and Share meal where we chat and get to know each other.

The 5th Sunday is 'Adventure Sunday' when we go beyond the Meeting House. Previous Adventure Sundays have included: a historical tour of non-violent radical hotspots; a picnic and games in a park; meeting together at Britain Yearly Meeting for food and reflection.

I experience YQWG as an incredibly supportive, open, experimental and creative community. I find something particularly nourishing in exploring spiritual themes and worshipping with others at a similar stage of life to myself. By co-facilitating a session I have had the opportunity to take a role of which I don't have much experience, in a space in which skills and gifts are nurtured.

YQWG is very grateful for the continued support of Westminster Quaker Meeting, and of all who have been involved with the group thus far. If you're ever in London on a YQWG evening, you would be most welcome to join in!

To find out more, please peruse the following: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/yqwg.london>; Website: <https://youngerquakerworshipgroplondon.wordpress.com>; Email: yquakers@gmail.com ■



strong sense that many were seeking this kind of space. Rather than having just an unprogrammed Meeting for Worship, each evening had a 'programmed' element primarily involving reflective activities around a theme, and were facilitated by a different pair of Friends each time.

During these sessions there was a deep sense of sharing and listening,

Anyone who attends is welcome and encouraged to co-facilitate a session. There is a different theme and format each time. To give just three examples: a Friend presented her experiences of volunteering with refugees in Lesbos, followed by a group discussion on the refugee crisis; exploring the idea of 'community' through group activities, discussion and personal reflection; a

THE MIXED UP CHORUS

By **Stephen Clement**

On any Tuesday evening, at 7pm in Kentish Town about 40 people from different cultural backgrounds and various age groups come together to sing in the Mixed Up Chorus.

I joined Three Faiths Forum's (3FF) intercultural choir in January 2016 as I have always enjoyed singing and have a big interest in intercultural and interfaith dialogue. The Mixed Up Chorus is an apt name for a group that embraces diversity, not only among the singers but also in what we sing: we practise and regularly perform a variety of sacred and secular music from all over the world, and often in different languages. We've sung everything from Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now* and Sweet Honey in the Rock's *Ella's Song* through to *Adinu*, a Sufi song in Arabic and *Hine ma tov*, a Hebrew piece.

We do more than just learn and perform the music. Our conductor Jeremy Haneman takes time in rehearsal to talk about the background of a particular piece and encourages choir members to share what the words and music mean to them. I've found that singing music from different sacred traditions is a great way to learn more about them.

Singing in this choir is less about hitting the right notes and more about improvising and having fun. After all, the choir's motto is "There are no wrong notes". Even though I've sung in choirs for a while, I would usually avoid doing solo parts because I was afraid of messing it up. In the Mixed Up Chorus, anyone who wants to do a solo is encouraged to have a go, which I've found quite liberating!

We've performed at several venues this year but our Walk, Sing and Talk tour was probably the biggest event. One sunny Sunday in June, people of different beliefs and backgrounds joined us on a walking, singing and talking tour, starting at St Mary's Church in Primrose Hill, then visiting the Liberal Jewish Synagogue before ending up at London Central Mosque. It was a perfect ending to my first few months in the Mixed Up Chorus.

On reflection, I think the chorus gets to the very essence of what community means: when different voices join together to sing, we create something far greater than the sum of the parts, which we then share with others. I think that experience will resonate with many Quakers. ■



Lucas Plan 40

A one day conference with leading speakers from Trade Union, Left, Environment and Peace movements

With the parliamentary approval of Trident renewal those for nuclear disarmament are looking for a new way forward.

Drawing on the inspirational model of the Lucas Plan, this conference will show how normal people can construct a radical, democratic alternative to militarism in all its forms and build a future which embraces our Peace Testimony to its fullest extent.

READ, DRAW, TALK, THINK QUAKER FAITH AND PRACTICE – ALL IN ONE WEEKEND



By **Beatrice Shelley**

It was epic, immense, intense – and there were fizzy drinks! Let's Review Quaker Faith & Practice took place in Nottingham in June and was like no YFGM Free we had seen before. Seven spirituality sessions, three external speakers and many many pads of A1 size paper used up to cover the walls in our ideas. There was certainly no Quaker Business meeting in this meeting of Young Friends but in the activities and varied discussions, we brought out into the open a lot of young Quaker ideas about the future of the Book of Discipline.

Themes to emerge from the weekend included our widely differing reactions to different words for God



used in Quaker Faith and Practice (QF&P) – some of us are uncomfortable

with Christocentric language, others uncomfortable without it. We also hoped that a future QF&P would include more experiences of young Friends, and the transition and uncertainty that is a feature of all of our lives. As is written in the last line of the epistle: "In our exploration into the evolving tradition of Quaker

Faith and Practice we have found eternal truths but also the emergence of new unaddressed concerns."

It could only be the dynamic force of nature, Abi Rowse, behind this event. For Anne Seilly, new Events Coordinator – the event was a big jump in at the deep end, which she dived into with immense organisation and skill. The organisation of it was totally exhausting – "it was like two people trying to organise a YFGM!" says Anne. Most stressful for the two organisers was the supermarket food order not turning up on Friday afternoon. A friend, a car and a last minute trip to ASDA covered that and now, two months on from the event, Abi feels very proud of what 26 young Quakers achieved. The conversation that's been happening in local meetings around the country was kickstarted in YFGM in Nottingham in June. We're the future of Quakerism after all, so we need to get our voice into any new version of the book.



If you were an old-timer at Young Friend meetings, the weekend may have felt slightly different to (Quaker) Business as Usual. We went out for a meal, we drank fizzy drinks and there was just a bit more refined sugar than normal. It was a conscious choice to shake up the usual formula of wholegrains and extended washing up. As one third of YFGM's outreach team, Abi is keen to make YFGM as diverse and welcoming to all as possible. "I wanted this weekend to be as much about fellowship between and among young Friends as spirituality," she told me.

One of the achievements of the weekend is the epistle. Abi was adamant that this must be an outcome of the event and the group managed it. She plans to send it to the Book of Discipline Revision preparation group. Read the epistle on tyq.org.uk. ■



All of us who came to spend an enlightening weekend in Nottingham.

THE B. D. R. P. G.

By **Beatrice Shelley**

The B.D.R.P.G is the Book of Discipline Revision Preparation Group. It sounds like an extremely serious, regimented and tightly controlled organisation – in the manner of a NASA spaceship building unit perhaps – but it is in fact an entirely earthly cooperation of 14 Quakers being thoughtful about our book of guiding principles. It's quakerly, of course, because god knows – we love a committee, but what's important to know is that in addition to NOT revising spacecraft manuals, what this committee is also NOT doing is revising Quaker Faith and Practice (QF&P). The group is tasked with preparing Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) for a possible revision of QF&P. One of the younger members, Rhiannon, explained the why, who & what of the group.

Back in 2013 Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) consulted BYM about a possible revision of QF&P. (The last revision took place in the 1980s.) In 2014, following this latest consultation, MfS discerned two actions: to set up the BDRPG and to recommend to BYM that we do a revision of QF&P. BYM didn't want to get immediately involved in the revision so BDRPG's role became more prominent and rather longer term. Since its inception, the 14 members of the group meet every few months. "We talk about where [Britain Yearly] meeting is at, what the meeting talks about, what are the current issues," says Rhiannon. It is clear that Rhiannon is acutely conscious of how the book steers British Quakerism. "We're aware of trying to build the yearly meeting, to meet its needs".

"What are the issues, what are the needs?" the nosy journalist indiscreetly comes out with. Theism/non-theism is the issue that came top of the list of items drawn up by MfS after their 2013 consultation. What we need, Rhiannon supposes, is for this obviously big issue not to be so divisive. This is one of the tasks of the BDRPG, in fact so important it has its own sub-group. The issue that this theology think-tank group is grappling with is not insignificant and that the revision process may cause divisions worries some members. Rhiannon, however, is not worried, instead being confident in the group's ability to discern the right course of action.

Unlike other central Quaker committees, the majority of the 14 members of the BDRPG were readily willing and able to serve upon being discerned to do so by Central Nominations Committee. That in itself speaks to the timeliness of what the group is trying to do,

Rhiannon notes. Like the other members, it was easy for Rhiannon to say she was willing and able: "I was interested in the topic and decided I'd make time for it somehow."

We love a committee, we love a long timescale, and EVEN more than that, we love a sub-group and BDRPG has a fluctuating number. Some subgroups are task-based and finish once the task does and some, like the Theology think-tank and Reading Programme subgroup, are ongoing.

The Reading Programme subgroup is responsible for the QF&P reading calendar. This is not a literacy initiative but rather the result of BDRPG's discernment that we, British Quakers, should read and get to know our book better before we decide to revise it. YFGM (corporately) was a bit late on the bandwagon with the reading programme [although when we did get on it we did it in style – in Nottingham, see opposite – Ed] but local meetings have been doing this since October 2015.

And the group as a whole? BDRPG is not involved in getting anymore feedback from BYM – that was done by the MfS consultation. A fair amount of its time is spent keeping up with the activities of its own subgroups and considering bigger, theoretical questions: "Could the Book of Discipline be cut down to principles? Could most of the procedural details be moved into handbooks?" Our radical heritage evidently doesn't count for nothing in a potential exercise of lopping bits out of the book I consider. Other actions considered by the group could almost be viewed as mere spring cleaning. Hidden within the layers of procedural text "there's crazy bits of random stuff" Rhiannon says. Old references to data protection on microfilm is perhaps easy to get rid of in what could simply be a bit of a tidy up.

Our corporate discernment of course always underlies the time taken. "The last revision took 10 years" Rhiannon says matter-of-factly again, while I splutter in astonishment down the Skype line. The BDRPG hope to report back to BYM in 2018 and will be keeping MfS updated in the meantime. Then we'll decide if we want to revise it. ■

Rhiannon, after leading her speaker session in Nottingham



The Interview

Tom Harper is director of *Warbook*, the political drama that many of us watched in Liverpool. He is also a Quaker. **Iwona Luszowicz** tracked him down for an interview.

It isn't quite the setting I had in mind. The internet reviews described the café as a 'hidden gem' with the 'best hot chocolate in east London'. What they failed to mention is the blaring rock 'n' roll. I grab a table outside to wait, hoping that Tom Harper has a loud voice and good hearing. Thankfully, he doesn't seem at all fazed by the situation when he arrives – or is at least too polite to say so. Perhaps he's already had his fill of quiet. The son of two Quakers, Harper was brought up attending Hampstead Meeting, with Quakerism 'very much part of family life, all throughout growing up.' While he doesn't go to meeting for worship as often these days, he still has a strong sense of Quaker identity. In particular, he credits Quakerism with setting the tone in his attitudes towards pacifism and non-violence.



Still from *Warbook*

I'm here to talk to Harper about his film *War Book*, a political drama following a group of government officials taking part in a role play exercise. Their task: to practise the British government's response to a nuclear attack by Pakistan on India. At the heart of this exercise, and of the film itself, lies one central question – whether Britain should release its own nuclear weapons. While the idea of using role plays to inform policy may seem far-fetched, it is in fact common practice, with writer Jack Thorne basing the film's script on original government minutes. Civil servants were also consulted during the filming process, including on the plausibility of a nuclear crisis between India and Pakistan in the near future. Luckily – or depressingly – most thought the scenario was plausible.

As we talk about *War Book*'s production, I'm surprised to learn that the film, which was released last summer, was shot over three years ago. When I ask Harper what took so long, he recounts a piece of advice from director Jim Jarmusch:

"Good, cheap, quick – pick two." So you can have good and cheap, but it won't be quick; quick and good, but it won't be cheap.' His hope is that *War Book* was good and cheap, 'but it definitely wasn't quick!' He goes on to explain that he had another, bigger film lined up directly afterwards, with which he was able to offset *War Book*'s smaller budget. Once the second film was done, it was back to editing *War Book*, followed by screenings at film festivals, and then finally the release. I ask what the reactions were like at the screenings. Harper remembers there being lots of questions, more than for any other film he's worked on; and that instead of everything in the Q&A sessions being addressed to the film crew, as is usually the case, people 'suddenly started breaking out and actually arguing with each other.'

There's one topic I return to several times over the course of the interview. Harper has previously spoken against *War Book* as a didactic film, yet given his stance on Trident, I'm intrigued as to why he didn't decide to make the film more anti-nuclear in its tone. He explains that the point of the film is to 'raise issues and make the audience more informed.' The threat of nuclear weapons is something he thinks we are forgetting about as a society: we talk about them 'in terms of budgets and politics rather than what their capability is.' While I'm all for raising issues, I'm still curious about the film's intentions. Is there any sense whatsoever in which it seeks to influence attitudes on nuclear weapons? Harper pauses. 'It's far better,' he says, 'that people come to those decisions as a result of being aware of the issues and their own decision-making than we manipulate or coerce or steer or push people into making decisions. And if they come to it on their own terms, they will be far better at educating and informing others and bringing them along with them.'

The interview is drawing to a close, but I have one final question. In July of this year, the House of Commons voted in favour of the renewal of Britain's nuclear weapons system. If Harper were filming *War Book* today, would it be any different? Not really, is his reply. And that's because, as he puts it, 'the issues remain the same... equally important and pertinent, and the arguments equally so.' ■

DISCERNMENT AND ITS LIMITS: INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE OR COMMUNITY?

By **Laurence Hall**



Loz campaigning for housing justice earlier this year.

One of the few passages in *Faith & Practice* that is attributed to Young Friends (10.25) states that when considering "the criteria for membership, the two greatest factors are community and commitment." Yet, what happens those two factors don't go together? What if your conscience means that you can't commit to your Quaker community any more? I now face just such a dilemma and it has left me questioning everything about my faith.

This began with a thunderstorm. The heavy rain penetrated the roof of our meeting house, drenching some of the walls and causing a little indoor stream to flow.

This led our premises committee to come up with the ambitious solution of not just renovating the roof but building an extension to the meeting house so we can let it as flats.

Immediately an issue arose: should these new flats charge full market or social rent? Some in the meeting argued for the market rate as it would provide a good financial footing for all meeting houses. Yet my meeting is in London in the middle of a housing crisis with millions living in substandard and precarious housing, with tens of thousands more being evicted and with the numbers of homeless rapidly rising. As someone who has lived in London nearly all my life I've seen up close how the housing crisis has ripped apart my community as from my childhood onwards, my friends and their families have been forced out of their community. How can my meeting even consider becoming part of this system of inequality and suffering?

This has led me to a troubling crisis of faith. The possibility of my meeting going against the very fundamentals of my Quakerism has led me to question the very roots of my faith. My Quakerism is, at its core, based on the equality of all, from which everything else flows. That of god in everyone is the governing principle of everything I think and do. Given this you can immediately see why I could not bring myself to support a market rate for the meeting house flats as it goes totally against my understanding of Quaker faith.

Yet, what would happen to my Quaker faith if my meeting discerned that the market rate is the way forward? What if they choose inequality through the egalitarian method of discernment?

If I were to go against this discerned decision would I be going against the idea of Quaker community or even against the spiritual light of my meeting? Does the communal discernment of my meeting define my faith? Or is my own discerned Quaker faith the primary basis on which to act as a Quaker? Does it boil down to individual conscience or community?

There is obviously no easy answer to this dilemma and I am still struggling with all my heart to find even a complex one. I could so easily accept a decision discerned by my meeting and stay silent but I don't think my Quaker faith could allow me to worship in a building of inequality. All I can do now is have faith: in myself, in my meeting and in Quaker discernment to be led not to my answer but the right answer.

Yet the pessimist within me sees that this clash between conscience and community persists. It is something that everyone has to go through, but in this context it becomes even more difficult as I'm dealing with the very foundations of my faith. I cannot and will not provide the answers to this dilemma but ask you to discern its effects on my and your Quaker faith and see where it leads you. Individual conscience and community will inevitably sometimes clash. The question is which does our Quaker faith lead us to choose? ■

What is...**The Young Quaker?**

The Young Quaker is a magazine for young Friends everywhere, produced in print and online. Published by YFGM, TYQ comes out three times a year, to coincide with YFGM weekends, meaning that you can expect a new issue in February, May, and October, full of news, comment, and more.

We're always looking for new material. If you've got an idea for an article you'd like to see in The Young Quaker, get in touch with us at the email address below. If you're able to write it, even better!

The editors would like to thank all those who have contributed to this edition of The Young Quaker. It would be impossible to produce the magazine without the ideas, articles and photographs that you send in.

Please get in touch if you would like to contribute to the next issue, due out in time for the next YFGM in February 2017. We would welcome any submissions for this edition no later than 4th January 2017.

Co-editors for this Issue: Laurence Hall, Alice Crawford and Beatrice Shelley. With special thanks to all the Writers.

Front page illustration credit: Erika Smith.

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www.theyoungquaker.org.uk

For all enquiries, including advertising enquiries, please contact TYQ at theyoungquaker@gmail.com

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www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk

What is...**Young Friends General Meeting?**

Young Friends General Meeting is a community for young adult Quakers aged 18-30ish, in Britain. Our main events are the three General Meetings which take place at Quaker meeting houses around the country in February, May, and October each year.

If you'd like to get involved in YFGM, come along to a YFGM event, or simply find out more, then visit the YFGM website at yfgm.quaker.org.uk or email yfgm@quaker.org.uk. You can also find the YFGM group on Facebook.

Who are...**the Quakers?**

Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends, are a religious group with Christian origins. Quaker worship is mostly silent, with people speaking when called to do so by the 'Inner Light', sometimes called 'that of God within everyone'.

Central to Quakerism are the Testimonies of Peace, Equality, Truth and Simplicity. A commitment to these principles has put Quakers at the forefront of political and social issues; campaigning for the abolition of slavery and more recently for the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

YFGM Catch Up:

We have gathered in Liverpool for a long weekend of community, creativity, conviction and correct financial procedure. Through prologues, epilogues and spirituality sessions, Quintessential have helped us explore our faith in creative ways. Using visual arts, music, drama, dance, walks and worship sharing has allowed us to connect deeply as a community and 'know each other in the things that are eternal' a little better. Jon Courtney presented us with a more pragmatic view, giving an introduction to Ethical Altruism. We found that our assumptions about how effective wellintentioned projects are at actually helping people may not always be accurate, and using evidence could help us to do more good. But our discussions also affirmed our commitment to keep 'that of God in everyone' and human relationships at the heart of our efforts to make the world a better place. Laurie Michaelis and Saskia Kuhlmann led a session on sustainability in which we were asked to consider what we can do to contribute to the Quaker commitment to sustainability on a personal, local, national and international level. We realised the challenge of changing our own lives, while discovering many of us have already taken steps towards a more sustainable life. Following a session led by Conscience at YFGM in February, we continued to remember conscientious objectors during the First World War through a play, 'For Conscience Sake', performed by Arthur Pritchard and Mike Casey from Plain Quakers. The play led us to remember the bravery of those who refused to take up arms one hundred years ago, as well as considering militarisation in society today and how we ourselves can work towards a more peaceful society.

We have also had time to relax and to enjoy the company of friends, whether roaming Liverpool for photos, enjoying the extensive talents of Young Friends in the cabaret, or simply having a cup of tea and a chat. This long weekend has provided a space to deepen friendships and make new connections, a space where we can be ourselves but also be challenged by other perspectives. We are thankful for the welcome we have received in Liverpool and look forward to meeting again in Lancaster for October YFGM. Peter Doubtfire & Brigid Stoney, Co-clerks

Peter Doubtfire & Brigid Stoney, Co-clerks

May 2016, Liverpool