

THE YOUNG QUAKER

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Quaker Inclusion Issue

One of the most striking points to come out of the 2017 Yearly Meeting Gathering was a statement made by Tim Gee in the Gorman lecture on the lack of inclusion and diversity within British Quakerism. Tim said that UKIP candidates were more ethnically diverse than British Friends. We asked for the figures he based this statement on. He provided us with academic work from 2013 that showed that our Society of Friends is 99% white, 61% retired and with only 28% placing themselves in the lower income bracket, not due to poverty wages but mostly the fact they are retired. The light of Friendship it seems is not truly open to all within our Society of Friends.

In this issue we will explore both the exclusion and isolation of many Friends or potential Friends due to their race, class, sexuality, age, gender and disability both within meetings and in wider society. We also look at potential ways we can struggle against the exclusionary privileges operating within our Society of Friends and how we can begin to build the truly inclusive Quakerism that our equality testimony demands of all of us.



"Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs?"

Bear witness to the humanity of all people..." Advices and Queries 33

News

YEARLY MEETING GATHERING

By **Laurence Hall**

Yearly Meeting Gathering happens every three years in a week long residential in which Quakers in Britain come together to worship, make decisions and spend time as a community.

This year saw thousands of Friends gather at Warwick University in an exciting week of community and movement-building, worshipping and working together.

Friends from all over the UK and beyond worshipped and discerned together. Sessions on Quaker history, economic justice, sustainability, racial equality, spiritual practices, nontheism and much more, allowed Friends to learn, reflect and critically engage. An unprecedented number of Young Quakers were nominated to Yearly Meeting Nominating Group which nominates to several important positions within British Quakerism.

My personal highlight was the Gorman Lecture. Tim Gee gave an impassioned address urging Friends to challenge their own privileges and use the Quaker tradition to change ourselves and the world in a truly Quakerly direction. Check out our interview with him later in the issue.

THOUGHTS FROM THE PLAZA, YMG

A poem by **Chloe Scaling**

Sitting outside, I sun myself
 People come and go,
 Conversations are had,
 Animated and excited.
 Friends share ideas,
 Blinking back tears
 Caused by sunlight.
 Do we talk about "God"? Or light within us?
 What language do we use? Which words do we
 choose?
 Looking around, I see Friends, young and old,
 Conversing together as community is grown.
 Across the country, we're low in number,
 But each year, Friends gather, sharing together.
 As a new Friend, I feel welcomed
 Meeting people, sharing views.
 Ideas are abundant,

Flowing from workshops and business sessions
 Where we talk, discussing
 How we go forward, encourage participation.
 Maybe it all starts with a simple conversation?

DSEI ARMS FAIR, LONDON

By **Laurence Hall**

DSEI (Defence & Security Equipment International) is the world's largest arms fair. It allows the arms industry to put profit over human life by selling new killing machines. It happens every two years in September within London Docklands. The weapons sold here fuel the death, destruction and injustice perpetrated around the world by repressive regimes. Hundreds of people took part in peaceful direct action over two weeks to disrupt the set-up and processes of the event. So far over a 100 people have been arrested and charged included many Quakers. Powerful meetings for worship blocking access took place on several days as a witness to the peace testimony. Alongside these protests was a brilliant arts fair where artists, including Banksy, created and exhibited works to highlight the crimes of the arms trade and raise funds for campaign groups.

NEW YFGM COORDINATOR

By **Gabriel Martel**

My name is Gabriel and I am very happy to have been chosen to be the Young Friends General Meeting Coordinator for 2017/2018. I have a deep desire of reaching out this year. I have found YFGM to be a tremendously positive influence in my life. It has been a safe place to return to during turbulent times. I want to make it known, available and inclusive for people of many different backgrounds, so they can also enjoy the opportunities and benefits that become available once you learn about us. I am working hard to increase our online presence and appeal as well as listening to the constructive criticism that we have received to make our events and the organisation itself as enjoyable and beneficial as possible. It is a very exciting time to get involved and be part of YFGM.

MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS (MfS)

By **Rosie Clarke**

For the uninitiated, don't be alarmed by the name: MfS is simply the governing body that takes care of business for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). They set the priorities for BYM for the year, discuss concerns raised by Area Meetings, and give guidance on policy issues.

At MfS in June 2017, Tim Rouse attended to represent YFGM, to discuss the concern for Area Meetings to support YFGM and the inclusion of young people in general Quaker events. Tim updated MfS about the purpose of YFGM and its activities over the last year, which was well received.

Other key concerns addressed were: the work of the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR); how many meetings find Our Faith in the Future, a guidance text outlining hopes for Quakerism in the future, helps guide their decisions; and a reminder to support Friends serving on Central Nominations Committee.

ENGAGING YOUNG ADULT QUAKERS PROJECT

By **Chris Venables**

Following the research conducted by Georgina Bailey in 2016, the Engaging Young Adult Quakers (EYAQ) project, funded by Britain Yearly Meeting, has now launched. EYAQ is a three-year project built around a Project Officer who has a small budget to help build community between young adults across BYM. In the first instance, the project is building on the original research by scoping out ways that BYM could become more open, inclusive and welcoming to young adults. This includes everything from how Quakers are using (or not) social media, how the voices of young adults can be better heard within Quaker decision-making, and how local meetings might change to become more inclusive, all-age communities. Given the scale of the challenge, this project is just a small start at bringing new life into British Quakerism, but hopefully we can learn a lot along the way, and make recommendations for the future.

PEACE WITNESS

By **Michelle Dumont**

Two Young Friends are facing trial for being involved in direct action for peace.

On January 21st Sam Walton and Daniel Woodhouse (a Methodist Minister) broke into BAE System's Warton Airbase to try and disarm warplanes they are selling to Saudi Arabia.

Sam said:

"The Saudi regime are using those planes in their bombing campaign that is devastating Yemen. We had to take action to prevent crimes against humanity.

We've been charged with criminal damage and plead not guilty. We were acting to prevent crimes against humanity and the destroying of homes and vital infrastructure in Yemen.

On October 23rd we are scheduled for a trial which is likely to take several days. But it will not be us on trial. BAE Systems and our government's complicity in war crimes in Yemen will be under the microscope and in the news. They desperately want this to go away, so we are going to make as much noise as possible."

Please spread the news and hold Sam and Dan in the light.

Sam Donaldson was one of five arrested for taking action as part of the ongoing Trident Ploughshares Coulport Peace Camp on July 11th. The group blockaded an entrance to the nuclear weapons depot in protest against the UK's nuclear weapons policy and to demand the UK ratify the UN Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty. Sam was also, amongst other Quakers, arrested for action at the DSEI arms fair. Please hold Sam in the light.

Precarious Friends - the reality of being a Quaker in Low Pay Britain

Gabriel Martel calls for us to challenge the harm implicit in precarious employment

I have been in precarious work for the last five years: Agencies without holiday pay, illegal work, contracted by companies that have no regards for your wellbeing or fundamental rights. The experience of being in such situations I can only liken to some form of slavery. You are exhausted, mentally and physically, doing something that you probably don't enjoy or even hate; barely scraping by, often without enough money to get a proper holiday or the simple joys of life. Your spare time is spent filling out very long and demoralising applications that mostly go nowhere. You feel trapped; your self-esteem is low. You know you can do better, but the reality is you are doing something mindless and repetitive. You often feel worthless, and your employers lean on that insecurity to get more work out of you. Your values are always challenged and being understanding and sensitive is seen as a weakness.

Most of my friends are in similar situations. Several suffer from anxiety and panic attacks, something that I suffered myself two years ago for the first time. Precarious work is incredibly common and extremely damaging. The scariest part for me is that I am sure that I haven't even experienced the worst

end of the spectrum.

I found that going to Meeting and spending time with supportive Friends helped, but often due to my tiredness and sadness I didn't have the energy to do that. I finally asked other Quakers to help me get out of my situation. They helped me with the application and filled out references for me. Now I have a job I love and where I am treated with respect and care, five years later.

If you see another Friend that is in precarious work, I urge you not to dismiss it and explicitly and repeatedly offer your help finding job opportunities, filling out their applications and providing a reference. It will make a difference in their life.

I feel there is a real need for a Quaker-led career advice service/employment agency with strong links to ethical companies and organisations, designed to help individuals find ethical work opportunities

And if you are being exploited the only solution is to get out, in my experience. I know it can be hard sometimes, but speak up and ask for help. I am certainly glad I did. Now I'm working hard to help my loved ones exit precarious work. ■

Seeing the Light in everyone

Abigail Rowse challenges British Quakers to reflect on their privilege

Disclaimer: I am a white, university-educated, disabled lesbian woman. I can't claim to be an expert on experiences related to racism and classism.

John Myhill plainly stated about the Religious Society of Friends: "Quakers in Britain are almost wholly white, middle class, educated and over fifty." In fact, UKIP's candidates for election are more ethnically diverse than Quakers.

Many Quakers strive for positive change in society. The Society has a respected history: from abolitionist campaigners to Elizabeth Fry's prison reform work, from Quakers evacuating children

from Nazi Germany to our successful campaign for equal marriage. This is all extremely commendable, but if our community is less racially diverse than a notorious racist political party, are we doing enough from the ground up?

Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel's book, "Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship", discusses how historical American Quakers assisted fugitive slaves and many were involved with civil rights activism. This is something that I'm proud of. However, it's insidious to forget that some Friends were slave-owners, including William Penn. Ultimately, European American Quakers were happy to fight

on behalf of African Americans – but many didn't actually welcome African Americans into their personal lives.

I believe that white British Quakers still suffer from the same problem. Many Friends are involved with supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network is an excellent organisation who are working with these groups. A move towards Sanctuary Meetings, which commit to building a culture of welcome, is an admirable start. However, I think that modern British Quakerism reflects eighteenth-century America – whilst the majority support working towards the 'big' issues many are not actively part of a community with racial diversity. Are we a group dominated by white people living a narrative of "rescuing" people of colour from their plights without elevating their voices either within or outside our Society?

Many British Quakers may also apply the "fit for freedom, not for friendship" rule to people from working class backgrounds. Many Quakers (of all classes) donate to food banks and raise money for various organisations. Yet participation in our processes are aimed at those with a well-paid stable job. We are expected to give up our time on various committees; if you have several jobs to pay the rent, do you have time to serve?

Quaker Disability Equality Group is an informal group that's working towards full inclusion of people with disabilities. British Friends are moving forward on this issue – but slowly. We need to embrace the social model of disability – the idea that it is society that disables people, through designing everything to meet the needs of non-disabled people. We need to ensure that our meeting houses, structure and resources are accessible. Our book, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, is excellent – but full of words and this may exclude some people, for example someone with dyslexia. Our processes can be complicated and full of jargon: Meeting for Sufferings, noms to noms, QLRC just to name a few. Our faith is simple – we can all connect directly with the divine – how have we made it so complicated and inaccessible?

This summer, I attended a workshop at Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) ran by African-American Quaker Vanessa Julye about racism within Quakerism. I heard participant comments that made me feel ashamed to call myself a Quaker. One Friend demanded Vanessa "prove" (and relive) these incidents. Another suggested that when we talk about race, we include white people so that they

don't feel left out. Comments like this can have an unwelcoming – and even dangerous – impact.

Being from a minority group in society can be exhausting and scary. In 2015/16, there are 62,518 recorded hate crimes against people of colour, LGBT people, disabled people, and those from under-represented faith groups (particularly Muslims). There are stories of disabled people who kill themselves after being refused or struggling to access personal independence payments. Trans* people, particularly those of colour, are disproportionately victims of murder. On top of examples such as these, those from non-dominant groups can face microaggressions - subtle but offensive comments or actions occurring daily. For example, asking a person of colour "where they're really from", or infantilising someone with a learning disability.

Fortunately, I also attended two events this summer which helped to elevate diverse voices. At YMG, I went to a session about gender diversity ran by North East Thames Area Meeting. What made it special was that gender diverse people had a large presence and drove most of the conversation. I was hugely moved to hear about the strength and courage that this community have shown and we were all able to learn from their experiences. It is hugely important to listen to people from nondominant groups and learn from their experiences if they wish to speak. However, it is never their responsibility to teach us and we should not expect it. It is the job of the privileged group to learn about oppression. Knowing the basics is the first step to dismantling oppressive structures.



I also attended Greenbelt, a festival of arts, faith and justice aimed at progressive Christians. There was a worship service themed "bring a body". The entire service was led by people with disabilities – music played by people with learning difficulties, songs

written by blind people and those with depression, readings and sermons from people with ME and quadriplegic cerebral palsy. It was one of the most moving and enriching spiritual experiences of my life. Those delivering the service weren't there as a token, but were the entire focus. It is vital that we listen to all people – and never claim to be an expert of the lived experiences of those from nondominant groups, unless you're part of the group yourself.

Where does this leave us? Discrimination can be a matter of life and death. We cannot wait on this issue, we must act. Julie said in an interview said that "The blessed community, for me, would include all the members of the human species... and for Quakerism this is something we strive for in the Religious Society of Friends". After all, if we only see that of God in certain types of people, are we really Quakers? ■

The Beauty of Silence

Sam Donaldson

"All silence is waiting to be broken" (Janet Batsleer)

Silence was part of what attracted me to Quakerism. Ever since watching the BBC documentary 'The Monastery' as a teenager, which awoke my inner monk, I've been drawn to the white habits and bare stone walls of Carthusian Abbeys and to silent, sparse Quaker meeting houses.

Early on in my journey with Quakerism someone shared the phrase "only speak if you can improve upon the beauty of the silence." I instantly fell in love with it. At the time I was starting to meditate regularly and discovering something powerful in the silence. I was also just glad to have left behind the constant standing up and sitting down and endless wordiness of the evangelical Anglicanism I was brought up in. Sitting still in meeting for worship, I found the silence a beautiful thing.

However, nowadays our shared silence is not always so beautiful to me.

As I write this I am staying for a week of silence with an Anglican monastery in Crawley Down. On arrival the deep silence was tangible, hitting me, demanding me to slow down and take notice. While here on retreat I've stumbled across Sara Maitland's fascinating memoir 'A Book of Silence'. In it Maitland highlights that silence is not uniform but is situation specific, its beauty or ugliness depending on the context. For example, the chosen silence of the monk or explorer is not the same thing as the imposed silence of the prisoner held in solitary confinement, the first much more likely to nourish and enlighten, the second to delude and destroy.

In many meetings for worship these days I sit there in the silence and hear absent voices and unspoken words and it is uncomfortable for me. I hear the

absence of the white "underclass" and the black lives that are almost universally "missing" from our meetings, the lives that suffer most from the oppressive white-supremacist, imperialist, capitalist, hetero-patriarchy that we live under. Often I sit in meeting longing for someone to speak up, waiting for a new, angry George Fox to stand up and rant, to take us to task, to break our (un)comfortable silence.

In her interesting article on silence, Maria Popova writes, "the history of breaking silence is the history of insurgent solidarity with the silenced." Solidarity is not a word that I hear often in Quakerism, and yet to me it's the heart of all true spirituality. I am not comfortable any longer with silence which is not grounded in solidarity.

I'm aware it's easy to romanticise solidarity, when the reality of it is tough and brutal. It is to live alongside the oppressed, sharing insecurity, suffering and even death. It is a constant challenge. And yet I think in its company, silence can become truly beautiful. In Helen Steven's Swarthmoore Lecture she mentions holding meeting for worship while living in Vietnam during the Vietnam war. I often wonder about that silence. When I think about my own Quaker journey, I know that the most beautiful shared silences I have experienced have been while protesting against the arms trade in solidarity with all those suffering the horrors of war.

Maybe the true destination of all silence is solidarity and until that is reached, all silence will be waiting to be broken. I long for a shared silence that has no need to be broken. I fear, Friends, that we have a long way to go! ■

Seeds of a new Quakerism

Laurence Hall traces the emergence of a new Quakerism from contemporary social movements.

British Quakerism has historically been at its most spiritually and socially powerful when two factors come together. That Young Adult Friends (YAFs) were the leading force within Quakerism and that those YAFs embodied a wider movement for a new egalitarian culture that challenged the hierarchies within both Quakerism and wider society. The weightiest Friends of the founding generation, the progressive Quaker revival of the 1890s and the WW1 conscientious objector movement were nearly all YAFs. They were able to revive the Society as part of a mass movement for wider social revival that demanded Quaker testimonies were no longer abstractions but social realities.

The contemporary seeds of this have emerged in the last few years as YAFs have created new communities throughout the UK defined by an egalitarian culture which subconsciously mirrors the practices of the new social movements that YAFs are actively involved in. New social movements throughout the world are fundamentally changing the socio-political outlook of so many countries. In essence the emerging New Quakerism is deeply aligned with movements that are now reshaping the world around us.

The movements and New Quakerism are first united by their focus on process before belief. The movements organize within a spirit of plurality, not forcing everybody to sign up to the same program. Against hierarchical forms with predetermined programs, they are creating radical egalitarian paths for a multiplicity of people to create together. The equality of the process is the only end. The same is true of New Quakerism in which YAFs express widely pluralistic beliefs but unite in the radical equality of the new Quaker practices they have created.

Horizontality is the central value underlining the movements. Decision processes are defined by radical equality with everyone having a direct input into all decisions without anyone in hierarchical roles speaking for you. Even when roles are created they are time limited, very limited in power and totally controlled by the community. The same anti-hierarchical desire for equality permeates

deeply into New Quakerism. This can be seen most clearly in their replacement of the top heavy structures of elders, clerks, overseers etc. appointed to roles for years with only very few roles which are only appointed for a few months. Furthermore, consensus decision making dominates the movements as everyone has direct input on all decisions with no one being excluded. So far so Quaker business meeting. But more than this, the movements have a deep participatory ethos in which everyone actively builds the egalitarian community themselves. New Quakerism's participatory ethos is seen in the plurality of different YAFs that facilitate the multitude of activities that are all based on actively engaging everyone.

The movements are not only attempting to create horizontal and directly democratic spaces, but are also new subjectivities. The culture is one based on trust and a growing feeling of care and mutual responsibility for all. Similarly, New Quaker communities are fundamentally held together by the great trust and close friendships that emerge within them and go well beyond the meeting house. This social glue means that communities become safe spaces for participants to openly express themselves.

New Quakerism has so far only unconsciously mirrored the new movements, it must now consciously become part of them both within Quakerism and beyond it. New Quakerism must bring the new radical culture into their local, area and national meetings. It is not enough for it to be the internal expression of the new movements among Friends. It must also be the new radical projection of Quakerism into the movements. New Quakerism must share the ambitions of the movements in becoming a spiritual foundation for the new egalitarian culture now being constructed. This can only be done if YAFs collectively become active members and accomplices in the struggle of these movements to create a new society in which the Quaker testimonies will be fully lived. ■

Quakers: the vanguard of transformation or part of the problem?

Beccy Talmy reflects on how understanding the Social Model of Disability changed her life

My memory of the moment I was told about the social model of disability for the first time is of the world shifting around me. I had been so convinced that disability was a personal tragedy: when a close friend of mine had tried to kill himself in the face of becoming disabled, I was devastated, but it seemed like a logical reaction to me. I found the idea that disability is a social problem rather than a problem with individual minds and bodies utterly transformative.

After the initial wave of excitement, frustration set in. Once you realise that there is no reason for disabled people to be stuck on the margins of society; that we just need to make changes to how we build and do things; it is incredibly frustrating to realise how difficult it is to get those changes made. I thought that everyone just needed to be told that people with impairments were being marginalised by structures we had the power to change, and then everyone would feel the same sense of excitement that I did. That everyone, once they knew, would feel within reach, tantalisingly close, a fully inclusive world, and be raring to do whatever was necessary to create it.

In this tantalisingly realisable world, having an impairment is no more an issue than not having eyes in the back of your head or being able to turn your head 360 degrees – build cars with rear and wing view mirrors as a matter of course, and it's not an

issue; take everyone's limitations and optimal ways of accessing things into account when planning and designing them, and not being able to see at all, or hear, or walk as far as other people comfortably, or learn as quickly, or climb stairs, or any other kind of impairment, wouldn't need to be an issue either. It turns out that disability is a tragedy after all, just not one of cruel fate inflicting disabling impairments on unlucky individuals; one of a cruel society inflicting a disabling world on a group of its citizens.

Quakers have the power to be at the vanguard of the transformation we need to build an inclusive world for all. Not only can we campaign for proper social care provision so that everyone can have the human assistance they need to not just go to the toilet and have a wash once or twice a week, but to live full lives; not only can we campaign for other organisations and institutions to be more accessible and inclusive; we can make our Meetings and our meeting houses fully accessible and inclusive. It will require money and space and forethought, but it takes all of those things to make anything accessible to anyone: why shouldn't disabled people, as the old slogan of the Disabled People's Movement goes, boldly go where all others have gone before? We are asking for nothing more or less than the same freedom and dignity others take for granted. ■

Trans* and non-binary inclusion

Gender diversity is an issue close to the hearts of many young adults and we are pleased to see this statement taken to Meeting for Sufferings from North East Thames Area Meeting:

"Facing turbulent times, Quakers in Britain seek a future where Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age. All are heard, valued and

supported both in our needs and our leadings. Everyone's contribution is accepted and according to their gifts and resources. All are welcomed and included."

Our faith in the future (Quakers in Britain, 2015)

Quakers in North East Thames Area Meeting are aware that our community is a continuing creation in

which we seek to know and love ourselves and one another in all our differences, united at a profound level in our efforts to reach and respond to others in the things that are eternal. We want our Local Meeting to be a safe place where each person can come as their own true self and find a spiritual home.

We recognise that there is a growing awareness in society, and in the Society of Friends, that the terms 'man' and 'woman' prove incomplete when describing the diversity of gender identity and experience that exists.

We hope that we can all grow together in our understanding of gender identity.

We want it to be known that our Area Meeting is a place where all are welcomed and nurtured, including people who are transgender and non-binary.

We hope that we can share a spiritual companionship, creating a place where we can all listen to and connect with one another, and accompany one another with love.

(North East Thames Area Meeting, 18/2/2017)

Engaging Young Quakers

Chris Venables shows how Young Quakers have the potential to change British Quakerism.

Young Adults have always been at the heart of Quakerism, pushing us forward at key points in our history and forging new visions for a dynamic, hopeful and active faith. George Fox was 21 when he left home to 'seek the truth'. Elizabeth Fry was 31 when she began preaching. John Woolman was 26 when he began ministering about the injustice of slavery. Bayard Rustin was 25 when he began attending 15th Street Meeting in New York.

Today, young adult Quakers across Britain are again beginning to push at the boundaries of what it means to be a Quaker. New young adult worship groups like those in Nottingham and Westminster, are breaking the mould of the traditional meeting, building in discussion, 'craftivism, music and laughter aiming to create more dynamic, interactive and hopeful communities often beyond the four walls of the meeting house. Excitingly, Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM) the national organisation for young adult Quakers is also thinking about how to become a more open, inclusive community.

Young adult Quaker groups reflect and build on the many spaces millennials are creating for themselves outside of traditional church structures. From Good Gym to Sunday Assembly, School of Life to Messy Church, young adults are reinventing communities shaped by (and for) the 21st century. Young adult Quakers are organising on new digital platforms, and, while keeping the spirit of the Quaker process, are reinventing roles and decision-making.

For many of us, there's a feeling that our yearly

meeting has lots to learn from millennials like us, and that, over the coming years, British Quakerism has the potential to change and grow into a truly all-age community. That's the vision of the new legacy-funded Engaging Young Adult Quakers Project (EYAQ) that I have the privilege of working on. EYAQ is a three-year initiative that arose as a result of in-depth research from 2016 that identified a need to recognise and support the changing ways young adults want to engage with the Quaker community.

It feels like a real privilege to work alongside YFGM as part of this project – and I'm excited about the plans that are beginning to emerge. At the core of this project is the goal to nurture the next generation of young adults in the Quaker faith – and to ensure that the Quaker community in Britain becomes (in time) a truly welcoming space for all. It's no small challenge, but I hope that, with all of your help, we'll get there.

Abi Rowse, is a YFGMer who helped to found the Nottingham Young Adult Quaker group two years ago, and I'll leave you with her words: "I'm excited about what a more youthful Quaker movement might achieve over the coming years. For many of us, it feels like we're finding our voice, our strength, and, perhaps most importantly, our hope that Quakerism will be alive and kicking in decades to come: a place where young adults, and, well everyone, feels a genuine connection with the light and a community ready to speak truth to power." ■

Movement Building from Stillness

Laurence Hall spoke to Tim Gee about his Gorman Lecture.

The undisputed highlight of 2017's Yearly Meeting Gathering was the Gorman Lecture. I was lucky enough to reflect with the Quaker activist Tim Gee on his talk 'Movement Building from Stillness' which focused on showing how Quakerism can become a social movement for all. Tim's analysis - through its strong balance of the personal, political and spiritual; its subtle and self-aware reflections; its brilliant combination of the radical and the practical - led to a clear choice, which he offers our Society of Friends. Will we choose an unreflective and excluding paternalism in which Quakerism closes itself to the world, or an open Quakerism, which reflects on its failures and is radical in its actions if we are truly to be, what Tim calls, a movement for peace at prayer.

I was struck by how the past emerges within the lecture. It does the usual fare of highlighting the best of Quaker traditions as a movement for radical change. One that doesn't escape the world but lives in it to change it within a wider movement for equality. Yet, uniquely it also highlighted negative episodes of privileged paternalism when Quakers failed to live up to their ideals. When I discussed this with Tim he reflected that the inclusion of both the positive and the negative elements of Quaker tradition in the lecture are all important for the self-reflection of a faith community without theological dogma. Clichéd though it may be, it is through discernment on our past that we can learn to build a better future.

Yet, power within the present was not forgotten. In the lecture, Tim doesn't restrain himself in criticising the negative nature of power within contemporary British Quakerism. He highlights the many privileges, including class, age, race, and disability dominant within Quakerism that too often go unacknowledged and lead to the exclusion of many from full participation in Quaker life. Yet there is hope in the positive potentiality of power - be it the liberating power from below, the solidarity of power between and the spirituality of power within. All of these could act to open us to challenge our privileges and become active allies with others in their social and spiritual struggles.

When we discussed this, our thoughts centred around the idea of a theological perspective in which "Quakerism" is a verb. Some within Quakerism have suggested that the way to revive the society would be to turn to dogmatic theology with strict theological criteria determining who is a Quaker. In effect a theological closing of the Quaker mind. In his lecture, Tim offered the open, pluralistic alternative of Quakerism as praxis. Drawing on radical Christian tradition, our faith becomes a way of living out Quaker values embodied in the testimonies. Not just through activism, but in all aspect of our lives. Quakerism becomes a spiritual way to live and struggle with others to create a more Quakerly world.

It emerged that even when preparing the lecture, Tim embraced his radical logic. The Swarthmore and Salter lectures seemed to me to reproduce the same old paternalism of listing what good they have done for the excluded, without listening to what the excluded themselves have said. Tim explained that he intentionally drew most of his references from women, half from ethnic minorities and a large portion from outside the UK. Even the construction of the practical recommendations for action were done, not by Tim alone, but together with London Young Friends.

These recommendations, listed opposite, offer the first steps in creating the open, participatory Quaker culture which embodies all that is best within our tradition. A radical and reflective Quakerism that tackles the oppressive privileges within itself and wider society. A Quakerism which opens itself to engage in the world and ensures the testimonies aren't abstractions but are living realities for all. ■

If you want to further explore these themes then Tim will be co-facilitating a weekend course, "Building a Diverse and Transformative Movement for Change", at Woodbrooke from 16-18 March 2018 with potential funding for those that need it.

Ideas to help British Quakerism be an inclusive movement

Tim Gee and London Younger Quaker Worship Group

An 'Equality Commission' for the Society of Friends to help us be truly inclusive of people of different backgrounds

We need a plan of action to live out our commitment to true equality. We need an approach that wholeheartedly challenges intersecting inequalities. An 'Equality Commission' for our meetings and our whole Society of Friends will be a start.

How could you and your meeting help enact your own equality commission?

Make our decision-making more representative of society at large

Our decision making process is one of the special things about Quakerism but it is still the case that there are whole groups of people who are chronically under-represented in Quaker decision making. To truly live out our equality testimony this needs to change. If we don't have inclusive governing structures, it will be all the harder to improve things elsewhere.

How can you and your meeting ensure your decision making processes are truly empowering everyone?

Practice being welcoming in our Local Meeting – by using the 'Diversity Welcome'.

We need to make a point that all people of every age, every gender, every sexuality, every ethnic background, every class, every type of ability, every type of (dis)ability and every place of birth is welcome at a Quaker Meeting. A diversity welcome could be a vocal start of constructing a welcoming culture for all.

What do you and your meeting do to ensure people from all backgrounds are welcome?

Provide 'ramps to participation'. Let's embrace micro-volunteering and more fluid & open roles.

Quakers are a fantastic community in which to live adventurously in so many ways. But we also need a culture of 'micro-volunteering' & 'ramps to participation' that ensures all, especially newcomers, can quickly contribute to our movement without needing to be nominated to lengthy, commitment heavy roles.

How can you ensure your meeting is truly participatory for all?

Nurture a culture of conversation and co-learning in every meeting

Newcomers and old hands alike are full of questions at all points along their Quaker journey. A good way to include all is to consciously nurture, in every meeting, a culture of conversation, co-learning, and contemplation together through a plurality of experimental methods.

How can you and your meeting cultivate a culture of inclusive co-learning?

Small is beautiful – let's organise better at the grassroots levels: more affinity groups and digital chats.

Successful bigger groups are formed of successful smaller groups. We need self organised friendship circles who know each other well enough to flourish together. A culture of informal spiritual affinity groups, linked through digital platforms means we can respond quickly and with empathy as true f/Friends.

How can you and your meeting organise friendship circles?

Be open – might we encourage meetings to place a copy of the World Religions Bible on their tables?

We say we are open to the light from wherever it may come. Let's find ways to show it so that our meetings become really open to the light in every person. Maybe we could use a World Religions Bible or something else to begin show the egalitarian openness that should lie at the heart of Quakerism.

How can you and your meeting ensure that it is really open to all light?

Let our light shine in our communities – can our eldership and oversight extend to connecting with the communities where we live?

Our Quaker message must go beyond the meeting house walls. Our meeting can provide spiritual nurture and supportive solidarity within the wider community. The whole meeting facilitated by overseers and elders could do so much to be actively engaged in their local community.

How can you and your meeting ensure the Quaker light shines brightly within your local community? ■

Writers...

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.

We're always looking for new material. If you've got an idea for an article, photo or drawing you'd like to see in The Young Quaker, get in touch with us The next issue, due out in time for the next YFGM in February, will have a submission deadline of 21st January.

Read TYQ online at:
www.theyoungquaker.org.uk

Contact us:
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What is...

The Young Quaker is a magazine for young Friends everywhere, produced in print and online. Published by Young Friends General Meeting, 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.

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 to find out more visit www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk or email yfgm@quaker.org.uk. You can also find the YFGM group on Facebook.

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, Simplicity and Sustainability. 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 (MAY 2017)

Jenny McCarthy and Pete Doubtfire, Co-clerks

We gathered on a hot weekend in Sheffield to get to know one another through worship, listening, games, work and food.

We spent some time together imagining island utopias and thought about what sort of community we would create. How would we eat, learn, worship and look after one another? Would we seek and accept contact with the world beyond ours?

We also took part in world café-style conversations around the topics of community, home, why we come to YFGM and Christianity in Quakerism. The time and space in which we listen to one another's thoughts and experiences is a precious gift for our community. We value the chance to begin conversations we hope to carry on.

We connected across an ocean (via video link) with young Friends from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in the USA. Hearing their stories of creating and working with conflict and change within their yearly meeting was eye-opening and made us think about our own situation within BYM. We hope to further the connection with inspiration and mutual support from the young Friends community we have met.

John Bourton and Michael Elstub from Veterans for Peace shared moving personal stories of their experiences in the military and their journeys to becoming peace activists. As we build our own community, they reminded us of the importance of recognising the humanity of those who choose very different paths, whilst standing firm in what we believe to be right.

In epilogues, prologue and preparation for worship, Quintessential have helped us to stay grounded in our spiritual practice and be thankful for our community. We have made extra space this weekend for simply being together. We have taken the opportunity to explore the city, enjoying rambling walks and rambling conversation. We have taken time to look after ourselves and each other, and our community feels richer for it.

We leave Sheffield grateful for the chance to journey together over this weekend. As we continue on our individual paths, we look forward to the next time they will meet. ■