



Oakham Friends Newsletter February and March 2010

It is because the learning process is continued throughout life that Friends are seekers as well as finders - not one or the other but both. One only has to think of the need for a continual search for fresh language, unsoiled by use, to know that we must, if we care about truth, continue to be seekers. We may have a firm hold on old truth ourselves, but unless we are eager to find new ways of expressing it we may be unable to speak the word of life to others just when they most need it.

Ruth Fawell 1987

26.18 Quaker Faith and Practice

ALL WE KNOW OF IT

Call it God, call it the universe, all we know of it, extended far beyond our telescopes or even inferences . . . is less than a single cell might be to a man's body, or to his conduct. The day's incidents hide our ignorance from us; yet we know it, beneath our routine. In silence, having swept dust and litter from our minds, we can detect the pulse of God's blood in our veins, more persuasive than words, more demonstrative than a diagram. That is what a Quaker meeting tries to be.

Basil Bunting (1900-1985) (Sent in by Pam Coren)

TOO REAL TO BELIEVE

On several occasions on our recent cruise to South America, the captain arranged the extinguishing of all the deck lights enabling us to see the stars in all their glory.

THE EXPERIENCE

Looking up at the night sky to the star pattern Andromeda, embedded in it is a faint misty patch of light, which can be glimpsed with the naked eye on a clear moonless night. That hazy glow is the Andromeda galaxy - a system containing well over a hundred billion stars. **The light from that galaxy takes two and a half million years to reach us.** (Light travels at 186,000 miles per second). Imagine how far away that makes it. Moreover it is not a single star but a whole star system. Then register the fact that **you are looking at something that is two and a half million years in the past.** Human life on our earth is only two million years old so no human being would have been around when the light from that galaxy started on its way to us. What is happening **now** in that galaxy we won't know for another two and a half million years! Then further compound all that information with the idea that the universe is expanding and what that means to our concept of space.

When we try to grasp the distances and the time scale involved it all becomes almost unreal. It is not only the sheer size of the cosmos that bewilders us but the time gap between what we are now seeing and what is currently happening. That is only half of the story. Try going small. Grapple with sub atomic particles and we are in a world of quarks and electrons with their own version of time and space which is quite different from ours. Our maths can't cope with the job of putting both the very large and the very small into the same picture at the same time.

The whole physical reality in which we live becomes mind blowing. Currently we can only understand a small proportion of the cosmos (the rest is made up of unknown dark matter and dark energy). We are beings on this comparative speck of dust floating around which we call our Earth. We are put in our place. The consequence: I am torn between our own cosmic insignificance and the astonishing reality that it is we humans, after a four and a half billion year history, who have gained some mental grasp of this astonishing picture. **Humans are the astronomers.**

THE PROBLEM

The problem is that the mental pictures we are frequently given of God don't relate to our emerging picture of the cosmos. For many the word 'God' conjures up images of an awesome being 'out there'. Most of the language we hear in Church - the Bible passages we read, the hymns we sing, the formal prayers we hear and the theology we experience - depends on an idea of a God as a sort of super person. Modern Christians are still expected to believe in and worship a God with concepts that have remained unchanged since the middle ages. Our understanding of the universe has grown so dramatically that seeing God as 'someone' outside it all who manages it, and of Jesus as a sort of celestial agent trying to fix things, no longer works as a set of images. It is not that the core faith is wrong but that the imagery which has worked for centuries no longer fits as an expression of that faith.

We are constantly having to re jig all the ideas we are presented with in Church in order to make some sense of them so that they become meaningful. I am coming across numbers of people who feel they cannot sing many of our hymns, are jarred by some expressions of faith and belief, cannot honestly recite creeds and are deeply puzzled when it comes to praying.

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Actually, though we see this as a modern problem, it isn't. The Old Testament Jews realised that you could not make any models, images or pictures of God. Then there is the story of Jesus tangling with a woman by a well. She at one point tried to push Him into some definitions about God and worship. Jesus told her that God is spirit and those who worshiped him must do so in spirit and in truth - His version of art and science! And again there is Paul, confronted with the 'unknown god' of some Greeks, who finds himself talking about the 'One in whom we Live and Move and Have our Being'.

That all sounds to me like a reality that is to be found in the very fabric of the cosmos of which I am a part. I don't believe God 'exists'. That would make Him into a separate being who occupies some location. For me God is 'real'. As a human I am aware that all humans have an intense inner consciousness which is their script of life. It is there that faith ideas reign. It is there that we encounter perceptions that are deeper and a fount for moral actions that transcend normal living. That is not far from saying that religion is fundamental to human life. The Quakers have a phrase 'There is that of God in Everyone.' For me, the extraordinary idea that is gaining more and more meaning is the discovery that I am in God.

A word that is being used more and more to describe this idea is **Panentheism**. Which is defined as the belief that the being of God includes and penetrates the whole universe, so that every part of it exists in Him, but (as against Pantheism) that His Being is more than, and not exhausted by, the universe. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist monk who writes " Discussing God is not the best use of our energy. If we touch the Holy Spirit, we touch God not as a concept but as a living reality."

Suddenly the glimpse of that smudge in the sky - the Andromeda Galaxy - becomes a window on God and the whole experience becomes an act of prayer.

Chris Bamber

OUR MEETING HOUSE LIBRARY

Chris Dawson has agreed to take over from me the responsibility for the meeting house library. Recently we trudged through the snow and met up to go through the materials on the shelves and we removed from the shelves some publications which were duplicated and some which are very 'dated' and some that we suspect are rarely withdrawn or referred to. Chris made a list of those books we removed which is available for Friends to see and the books themselves are still at the meeting house in a box. Chris will be in touch with you about this with suggestions about what to do with these books.

Probably there are still a number of library books sitting on people's shelves at home waiting to be returned. If you have finished with them please return them so that others may have the chance to use them. Perhaps you have some of your own books on your shelves at home which you think might be of interest to other Friends which you would be willing to loan or donate to our meeting house library. Chris would be happy to hear from you.

Chris is trying to think of ways in which the library may become a more actively used resource for the meeting. If you have any suggestions please let him know. He would also welcome views or suggestions about books and other materials which you would like to see added to the library.

Don Amphlett

"Guard well within yourself that treasure; kindness. Know how to give without hesitation, how to lose without regret, how to acquire without meanness."

George Sand



Oakham Quakers Annual Report 2009

Oakham Friends have had a varied and at times challenging year, dominated by our preparation for and participation in four sessions of Quaker Quest in September. There was a good response from the public and lively question times.

With the invaluable help of Leicester Friends the subjects of: 'Worship; Peace; Ideas about God; and Quaker Testimonies', were each presented by three or four people on each of the evenings. It was felt to be a useful and enriching experience to explain who and what we are. We have had a few new attenders which may or may not be co-incidental. It is hoped to follow up some of these themes in discussion groups as well as in the newsletter.

We have held Meeting for Worship every Sunday, often in a deep and gathered silence with valuable personal contributions and readings from 'Quaker Faith and Practice' and 'Advices and Queries' Sadly another year has passed without the attendance of children, though many of us are involved with grandchildren and children and in a voluntary capacity with local schools. Two of our members are CRB checked.

Two of our members, Elizabeth Church and Gerald Johnson are in residential care. Meetings for Worship are held in their rooms.

Elsie Haines, a member for many years, died in residential care in Uppingham. Her green burial on February 24th was followed by a memorial meeting. Elsie's robust, humorous and ironic attitude to life and convinced Quaker values are affectionately remembered.

As a small group we share eldership and oversight, inviting visitors to share coffee and shared lunches with us after meetings. We keep our network of members and attenders in touch with each other, and update this each year.

One of our members represents us at 'Churches Together' in Oakham and this year has joined all of them at their places of worship. We have read of her impressions in our newsletter. One of our members is chair of the Rutland 'Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education'. One of our members has responsibility for prison visiting

Our bi-monthly newsletter contains a good mixture of news and quite varied contributions. The newsletter is made available on the new Leicester Quakers website. Our librarian oversees the care and loan of books as well as adding occasional new titles.

Twelve groups use the Meeting House on a regular basis and there are some occasional bookings. The Meeting House was opened to welcome the 'Rutland Ride and Stride' event as well as the 'Heritage Open Day' which attracted a good number of visitors on September 12th.

At Christmas we arranged a simple programme of music and readings.

Our treasurer and examiner presented the annual accounts on 1st March. It was reported that for the year 2009 we have transferred through our bank account £500 as donations to 'Britain Yearly Meeting' as requested on individual schedules and obtained a further £200 as a proportion of gift aid tax repayment. Donations were made to Quaker Homeless Action, Friends Housing Bursary Trust, and Peace Building UK. Our Christmas collections will go to Wateraid, Loros and Crisis UK.

PRACTICAL MATTERS:

Local Business Meetings have been held six times during the year and representatives have attended Area Meetings when possible.

Premises committee have taken good care of the buildings and the cleaning team from The Lodge Trust continue to do an invaluable job each month.

The architect's report was made on 9th November 2009. He advised that a leak in the store be repaired and to allow some £4,500 for repairs in the next five years.

The last gas inspection was carried out in April 2008, and an electrical inspection on 1st July 2008. These are done every five years.

Mains smoke alarms are now fitted and a notice is displayed clearly for the information of Meeting House users. They have been advised to arrange their own insurance cover to cover their activities. There are also instructions about escape procedures in case of emergency on the notice board.

Marianne Ransome

Events and Dates for your Diaries

February

Tues 2 nd	Candlemass (Christian)
Wed 3 rd	<i>Rissun (Shinto)</i>
Sat 6 th	Coffee Morning at the Meeting House 10am to 12 noon
Sun 7 th	Meeting for Worship 10.30 am
Mon 8 th	<i>Nirvana Day (Buddhist)</i>
Fri 9 th	<i>Mahashivratri (Hindu)</i>
Sun 14 th	Meeting for Worship 10,30 am St Valentines Day (Christian)
Tues 16 th	Shrove Tuesday Pancake Day (Christian)
Wed 17 th	Ash Wednesday (Christian)
Sun 21 st	Meeting for Worship 10.30am
Mon 22 nd	Beginning of Fairtrade Fortnight
Fri 26 th	<i>Milad un Nabi (Muslim)</i>
Sun 28 th	Meeting for Worship 10.30am <i>Purim (Jewish) Holi (Hindu)</i>

March

Mon 1 st	St David's Day (Christian)
Tues 2 nd	<i>Start of Nineteen Day Fast (Bahai)</i>
Wed 3 rd	SACRE meeting at the Meeting House 2.30pm.
Fri 5 th	Women's World Day of Prayer (Christian)
Sat 6 th	Coffee Morning at the Meeting House 10am to 12 noon
Sun 7 th	Meeting for Worship 10.30am Followed by Local Business Meeting
Sun 14 th	Meeting for Worship 10.30am Mothering Sunday (Christian) Area Meeting at Loughborough 1.30 pm.
Wed 17 th	St Patrick's Day (Christian)
Sat 20 th	<i>Spring Equinox 'Easter' (Pagan)</i>
Sun 21 st	Meeting for Worship 10.30am <i>Bahai New Year (Bahai) Shubun-sai (Shinto)</i>
Wed 24 th	<i>Rama Navami (Hindu)</i>
Fri 26 th	<i>Khordad Sal (Zoroastrian)</i>
Sun 28 th	Meeting for Worship 10.30am Palm Sunday (Christian) <i>Mahavira Jayanti (Jain)</i>
Mon 29 th	<i>Fast of the First Born (Jewish)</i>
Tues 30 th	<i>Theravada New Year (Buddhist) First Day of Passover (Jewish)</i>



Quaker House Belfast Final Journal Letter 2010

In the past the Oakham Meeting has made donations to support the work of Quaker House in Belfast. The excellent work of this organisation is to be 'laid down' in May 2010. Marianne has received a final letter from them and she thought that Friends

might be interested to read about their comments about their community and the work they have been doing to encourage tolerance, peace and reconciliation.

" It has been our experience that peace making is a messy business. Reconciliation is about rebuilding a whole people and the process can often seem to take backward steps in order to go forward. Here in the Northern Irish context it almost feels this way. Our peace process is 11 years on its journey and yet we remain in our tribal politics and our segregated communities.

We have a devolved government; as yet no vision for a different future has been agreed. The work on the Shared Future policy has been shelved to gather dust. The Eames/Bradley recommendations for finding a way through our violent past are at risk of gathering dust on another shelf. The process for the devolution of policing and justice powers has reached what would seem like a "deadlock" with both major parties blaming the other for lack of progress. Our streets are witnessing more security alerts. And still with all of this we know and witness great efforts, in many parts of Northern Ireland, and by many courageous people, to keep on working to rebuild a whole people. Life assumes a kind of superficial normality.

There seems to be an urgency to move on and put the past behind us but it is my thinking that the partial stories of past history by different communities may contribute to perpetuating the conflict. On the one side the Unionist community for the most part see themselves as innocent victims of a terrorist campaign while on the other side the Republican community have seen themselves as an oppressed people fighting for justice against an occupying state. How do we marry these so different voices and perceptions? How can we support people to see that no side is completely innocent or completely the perpetrator? Here lies our dilemma.

The Mennonite John Paul Lederach in a speech to a Belfast audience said, " True reconciliation is about rebuilding a whole people. This work is about re-knitting the fabric of broken lives at a deeper level. A journey and a quest. It involves the care of souls and communities. We must create the conditions for truth to be spoken and heard. Justice is embedded in our relationships but the question is how, when and where do we raise injustices? From a spiritual perspective it is about 'encounter'; encountering ourselves, encountering God, encountering the enemy."

In recent years Quaker House Belfast has endeavoured to bring about these kinds of encounters. The 'Omagh Facilitation' was about encountering the pain and in some cases the hope of those who had been impacted by the bomb of 1998. From the stories of the people the Facilitation Team created a narrative by which the atrocity of the past could be remembered and hope for a different future may be given.

Through the making of " Our Shared Vision Quilt", Quaker House Belfast made it possible for groups of women from the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican tradition and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist tradition to come together to share a common project. Many of these women have continued to explore ways of being together with those from the 'other' tradition. Recently Quaker House Belfast had the privilege to witness the growth of three groups of women from these different traditions as they worked through a potentially very divisive issue so that new opportunities could be created.

Working with the organisation " Signs of the Times", Quaker House Belfast has modelled " walking the talk" as Olive worked closely with Father Brian Lennon from the Jesuit community. Here two very different traditions came together to work for the common good and during sessions known as "Dialogue for Diversity" Father Brian and Olive used each other's diversity to demonstrate an appreciation of this.

The work with Glencree Reconciliation Centre has been focussed mainly on those who see themselves as victims of republican violence. This work has taught us much patience. As we lay down the work of Quaker House in May 2010, it is this patience we need as we wait to see whether further work for Quakers in Northern Ireland emerges.

Olive Hobson Quaker Representative

A covering letter from the co-clerks of Quaker House Belfast included the following paragraph "The strength of Quaker work is that it stems from, and is sustained by, a concern, but it is also a strength to recognise when that concern or piece of work has run its course. We value all the work that Quaker House has been involved with over the years. However in recent years we have been struggling to find a specific role or a vision for the project in the changed circumstances in Northern Ireland. We are convinced that there is much peace-building work still to be done in Northern Ireland and that there may be a role for Quakers in that regard. However we feel that Quaker House Belfast is no longer an appropriate vehicle for this work. Accordingly we have resolved that the project be laid down with effect from 31st May 2010." (*QHB Management Committee minute*)



An Afternoon Train From Purley to Victoria
by **James Berry**

(submitted by Kate Wesenraft)

*Hello, she said and startled me,
Nice day. Nice day I agreed.
I am a Quaker she said and Sunday
I was moved in silence
to speak a poem loudly
for racial brotherhood.*

*I was thoughtful, then said
what poem came on like that?
One the moment inspired she said.
I was again thoughtful.*

*Inexplicably I saw
empty city streets lit dimly
in a day's first hours
Alongside in darkness
was my father's big banana field.*

*Where are you from? She said.
Jamaica I said.
What part of Africa is Jamaica? She said
Where Ireland is near Lapland I said.
Hard to see why you leave
such a sunny country she said.
Snow falls everywhere I said.
So sincere she was beautiful
as people sat down around us.*



Mid Week Meetings for Worship

We are now holding mid week Meetings for Worship each month. One is in Whitefriars, where Elizabeth Church lives in Stamford This one is held on the second Tuesday of the month at 10.30 am. Please ring Jo Short (01780 757487) or Sheila Browett (01780 720666) if you would like to join us.

The second is at Crown House in Oakham where Gerald Johnson lives. This one is held on the third Thursday of each month at 11.00 am. Please ring Sheila if you can join us.

Sheila Browett

JUST FARE The Traidcraft outlet at the Methodist Church

The 'Traidcraft' outlet at the Methodist Church in Oakham is starting a "Bag Scheme" From January 2010 they are offering a new service to all their customers:

- They will provide you with your own copy of the latest catalogue
- Every two months they will also provide you with an order form listing the items which they regularly stock. These you may order in any quantities-single or bulk.
- There will also be blank lines on the order form for you to order any other items from the catalogue, but these will be in quantities indicated in the catalogue. (This particularly relates to foodstuffs)
- The following week they will collect the order forms and your Traidcraft bag will be available the next weekend.

Working this way they will provide you with fresh provisions - and having the latest catalogue always available, you may always find items suitable for birthday presents etc.

If you would like an order form and a catalogue, ask Sheila or contact Helen Baggott on 01572 771082 or on line hrbaggott@tiscali.co.uk . The next order will have to be in for March 14th, for collection on March 21st.



FAIRTRADE FORNIGHT

22nd February to 7th March 2010

The theme for this year's Fairtrade fortnight is the 'Bag Swap'. They are focussing on the tea industry and encouraging more people to swap to Fair Trade.

The Methodists are holding a " Big Brew" on the 27th February 2010. They are hoping for a big turnout,

Sheila Browett

Fair cuppa: every day the British public drink more than eight million Fairtrade hot drinks and this figure will jump. The Coop are switching all their hot beverages to Fairtrade and Sainsbury's entire range of tea, roast and ground coffee, and hot chocolate are all Fairtrade, including it's best selling and oldest brand 'Red Label' tea.

A fairer future: more than seven million people in Africa, Asia and Latin America benefit from Fairtrade - farmers, farm workers, and their families.

www.fairtrade.org.uk

SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND

It was just a simple but blessed hall
A few chairs, a fire meditating with a droning buzz;
A table stood proudly in the centre; just an ordinary table;
Placed carefully upon it, were two Bibles sitting side by side peacefully;
There also were two other books about Quakerism, dominated by the Bibles;
In the centre of these significant books,
Was a lovely vase containing a beautiful spray of daffodils;
Their yellow glowing colour blooming over us;
Just like the light of God protecting us.

There was a scattering of men and women, twelve in all;
I was the only youth, yet there was no discrimination;
All of these people, very normal citizens all praying to their God;
For forgiveness, faith, trust, help or just talking to Him;
Maybe one of them, receiving an answer or task;
Their faces showed peace and meditation;
Some closed their eyes, to blank out any distractions;
Opening them when they come up for air.

This meeting to me, went very quickly;
I enjoyed the meeting for I felt trivial worries of the test next week,
and the homework to be done for tomorrow;
Lifted off my shoulders and left in my bedroom awaiting my arrival home;
This then let all my mind concentrate on God
and how I should help others and reform myself

As I was thinking I saw the shadow of the window cast across the floor;
I stared at up at the window and the saying:
"The eye is the window to the soul" came to me
After wondering about this for a while I decided that
that saying was really quite wrong
So I decided to rewrite it as:
"Your actions are the window to your soul".

When seeing that the people all loved their God;
And that they did not need elaborate statues and ceremonies,
I came to realising that whether you are in the smallest dirtiest place;
If you want to talk to God, He will be there to listen.
I felt the walls of that little hall were held up with blessed air;
And it showed that the line that Jesus spoke, recorded in the gospel of Matthew;
"Seek and ye shall find" was so very true.

Written by Jane Robinson (Age 15) an attender at Oakham Quaker Meeting in 1986