

From The Centre

Summer 2011



The Newsletter of Central England Area Meeting

Editorial

Dear Friends, we had hoped to produce a spring 2011 edition of *From the Centre* but I'm afraid that didn't quite happen and since we have now passed the summer solstice then this really must be the summer edition!

By now I expect many of you are beginning to think about Yearly Meeting Gathering in Canterbury in just over a month's time. We are hoping to have lots more coverage of this in the next edition.

You will see on the back cover there is a reader survey. We would really like to hear from you about what you think of *From the Centre* and what we could do to make it better and more attractive to Friends in the area meeting.

Remember, Friends, this magazine is only as good as its contributors so please send us your articles, pictures etc.

Best wishes from

Editors:

John Cockcroft, Michael Eccles and Liam Tully

Further copies of this newsletter are available by arrangement from the AM Office. Articles for possible inclusion in future editions should be sent to the editors, preferably as email attachments, via Area Meeting Office. All articles, which may be edited, are included at the sole discretion of the editors. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Area Meeting or the editors.

From The Centre Summer 2011

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Solution to *From the Centre* Crossword no.8

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From The Centre is published by Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AF, and edited on its behalf by John Cockcroft, Michael Eccles and Liam Tully.

The editors welcome contributions on any subject likely to be of interest to Friends of all ages in Central England Area Meeting. Contributions, which should be signed, may be edited. **We do not guarantee to publish any contribution in the next edition, or at all.** Contributions should be sent via AM Office, preferably as email attachments. Please contact us before submitting photographs.

Testimony and Truth

Before Area Meeting at Kings Heath on Saturday 11th June over 20 Friends joined in a two-hour exploration of Testimony and Truth, organised by AM Peace Committee, and facilitated by Anne Hosking of Quaker Life.

We worked in plenary, small groups and individually on exploring what we mean by "Truth". We were reminded of the definitions of truth produced by the erstwhile committee for Truth and Integrity in Public Affairs (TIPA) which had its origins partly in this Area Meeting. We drew up a flipchart page of ideas from our discussions, and were then challenged by Anne who pointed out that we were using nouns - integrity, fear, truth... rather than thinking more actively of, for example, "truthing", or "doing truth"...

Truth is an interactive process; in counselling, for example, the truth of the listening is as important as the truth of the speaking. We worked in small groups of topics such as sincerity, and had an interesting discussion on coping with cognitive dissonance. Finally, we were invited to make a private note, without feedback, of something which we, individually, would take away from the session.

We will all remember Anne's visual aid, produced towards the end of the session – a plastic bouquet of imitation Honesty, reduced to £2.99 in a local supermarket. Wouldn't we prefer the real thing?

We'd like to remind Friend that Peace Committee has just a small core group, appointed on the recommendation of nominations committee, and relies on co-opting Friends and Attenders to work with us, perhaps on a short term basis, on specific peace related concerns which they bring to us. If you would like to join us in this way, contact our clerk, Barbara Forbes, via AM office.

Peace Committee

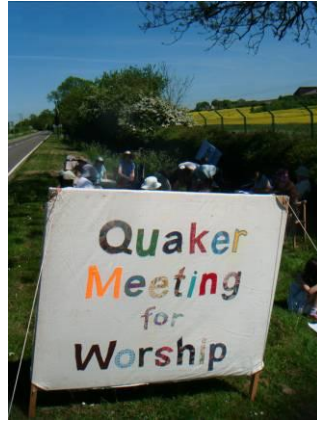
Advices & Queries number 11:

Be honest with yourself. What unpalatable truths might you be evading?

When you recognise your shortcomings, do not let that discourage you.

In worship together we can find the assurance of God's love and the strength to go on with renewed courage.

RAF Croughton May 2011: report, query and advice



Quaker Faith & Practice 2.35 *“Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was”*. George Fox, 1657

RAF Croughton is a United States Air Force communications base in Northamptonshire, England, to the southeast of the village of Croughton. The station is home to the 422nd Air Base Group and operates one of Europe's largest military switchboards and processes approximately a third of all U.S. military communications in Europe. As such it is understood to be a linchpin in the Missile Defense Agency (the renamed Strategic Defense Initiative, colloquially known as *Star Wars*). The signals which direct drones over Afghanistan and Pakistan will be processed there. We understand that it is also involved in monitoring supposed terrorist communications.

A Quaker Meeting for Worship is held there on the 4th Saturday of each month. Seven Friends from Coventry Meeting attended on Saturday 28th May 2011.

The police were there before us – happy to chat.

Approached by a Quaker – “Come for your monthly meeting have you?”

- “Yes, will you join us for a cup of tea at three o’clock?”
- “Sure! I’ll be back then!” (but he wasn’t)

The group of 14 Quakers – from across the midlands – gathered on folding chairs in a small circle on the grass verge. The wind whistled around us and soon dislodged our Quaker banners! Grey and white clouds scudded across the sky, and gloves and scarves were wrapped around us. Following earlier showers, we planned for rain (Quaker Faith and Practice and the Bible inside the tea box) but it didn’t come. Towards the end we even glimpsed the sun!

As we settled down, the noises from outside our little circle predominated – a persistent burbling from an unidentified bird moving from bush to bush; the frequent vehicles passing only a few feet away on the busy B4031; voices from the air base gate; traffic going in and out; the wind in the trees.

Some drivers hooted, eliciting a friendly wave from one or two of us. Did they hoot in support, surprise or derision? They didn’t *sound* angry, though one did shout “get a job!”

Gradually we fell into a deep silence. A small bird chirruped high on the telegraph wire above us. We felt privileged to be there - our small circle felt very special – one might say that we experienced one another in that which is eternal...

We have also engaged in Meetings for Worship outside RAF Fylingdales, and Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment. Unfailingly this has been accompanied with similar, special luminous connection. One might wonder why this would be so. Frankly, we wish to declare our confusion - what makes MFW outside military bases so moving, deep & meaningful (even in snow & wind)? Why does it allow us to tap into the knowledge outlined by George Fox above?

Clearly MFW outside a military base ties in well with our peace testimony. It has a special, particular purpose. This may explain the rarity of vocal ministry in these situations. We could have this sense of purpose in any Quaker meeting. Certainly vocal ministry often directs us to unity of purpose during regular meetings but it rarely has such a profound effect.

It is also worth noting that early Friends often met outdoors (sometimes in beautiful locations like Pendle Hill). RAF Croughton is on a busy commuter road. Despite the cars, it is close to nature - we hear the birds and feel the wind, cold, warmth and occasionally the rain. However it is also close to razor wire, police, traffic and some of the most unholy applications of modern technology.

Possibly it is the rare combination of collective purpose and connection to nature. Ultimately our confusion is perhaps irrelevant - we should be involved in this specialist form of Quaker Worship BECAUSE we get that connection - why else go to any Quaker meeting?

The meeting at RAF Croughton is often small; visitors and more support are always welcome. Coventry meeting has adopted a particular month (May) when our meeting commits to provide such support by boosting the numbers attending. We urge all meetings in striking distance of RAF Croughton to adopt a particular month. Maria Huff of Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting is a contact for the RAF Croughton meeting. Call her with offers of support on 01869 347179 or by maria.t.huff@googlemail.com.

Those close to other MFWs outside military bases might wish to adopt them in a similar style. Area meetings with Military bases close by may also wish to adopt the practice.

Jo Hallett & Pete Duckworth

Bluebells on Hartshill Hayes

Sunday May 1st dawned bright and clear – and by about 12.30, some 15 Friends from Coventry had gathered at Hartshill Friends Meeting House.

Hartshill Quakers had kindly invited us to join them on a walk to Hartshill Hayes at bluebell time.

The walk through the woods was magnificent – the bright green of the new spring leaves, the dappled shadows and carpets of bluebells, all smelling fresh and inviting. The winding path through woodlands led us gently upwards to suddenly reach a wide open space with fantastic views across several counties. But the wind liked that spot too – and we were nearly blown away as we ate our picnic lunch at the top!

A wonderful way to spend a sunny May Day – a hug THANKYOU to Hartshill Quakers for guiding us on the walk and for your excellent Friendly company!

Jo Hallett



NORTHFIELD ECOCENTRE

Working with the community to find practical ways to live better & protect the environment

Groups:

Family Hour:

Thurs 4 – 5pm

Gardening:

Thurs 10 - 12noon

Sewing & Crafts:

Fri 10 - 12noon

Regular Events:

SWAP IT!

2nd Sat of the month

10am – 1pm

Ecocentre

Services:

- Loans Library
- Fact Sheets
- Home Energy Audits
- Free advice service
- Tours of the building
- Free Items
- Seed swap
- Internet access
- Interactive displays

Opening Times:

Thursday 10am – 5pm

Friday 10am – 5pm

Northfield EcoCentre is a Birmingham based charity set up to educate individuals and organisations on sustainable issues. Established in late 2008 in an old book shop our building was completely renovated with all the latest environmentally friendly technologies including an air source heat pump, solar hot water panel, green roof, sun pipes and more.

Activities include a home energy advice service, regular groups (gardening, sewing, family crafts), events highlighting ways to live more sustainably (e.g. food, travel) and courses teaching green living skills.

For more information visit:

www.northfieldecocentre.org

0121 448 0118



Events & Activities:

Friends of Victoria Common



A Big Volunteering Day: help improve our local park!

Saturday 1st October, 11am – 4pm

All welcome. Bulb planting, bird box making, apple picking and much more!

School of Green Living

A series of courses aimed at making sustainable living easier and fun!

Willow Baskets – Sat 18 June (£40).

Autumn Foraging – Tues 20 Sept (£29)

Permaculture – Sat 24 Sept (£20)

www.northfieldecocentre.org/courses

FREE Home Energy Advice

Book a **tailor-made energy audit** with one of our trained Energy Advisors and find new ways to reduce your energy use at home and **save money** on your bills!

Call or drop in to book an appointment

Support our work

Become a Friend of Northfield EcoCentre



www.northfieldecocentre.org/join-us/support-us or call **0121 448 0119**

For more event information visit: www.northfieldecocentre.org/activities/events

Northfield EcoCentre, 53 Church Road, Northfield, B31 2LB (Behind Ousnam's)

enquiries@northfieldecocentre.org Telephone: 0121 448 0119

www.northfieldecocentre.org

Photo page



Coventry Friends on their May Day walk (see page 5)



Margaret Johnson with Jo Hallet and Stuart Morton outside Olton station (see page 8)

Margaret Johnson's peace walk

Tuesday 17th May

Margaret and Graeme (Coventry meeting) set off at 10am from Cocksparrow St in Warwick on our ~10 mile walk to Coventry. Edward (Warwick meeting) accompanied us as far as the Shire Hall where we spent a few minutes contemplating the former site of the old Warwick gaol where Quaker minister William Drewsbury (ca. 1621 – 1688) was held for two decades. The inscription above the gaol door which is set into the side wall of Shire Hall (Barrack's St, Warwick) says - 'Original outer door of a prisoner's cell formerly within the county gaol. Rebuilt on this site 1695 (following destruction of the original building by fire in 1694) and remaining in use until 1861.'

Once out of Warwick we set off through the countryside along the B4115, stopping for a peaceful elevenes alongside a hedge in a wheat field near Hill Wootton. We carried on past the entrance to Stoneleigh Abbey, past fields belonging to the National Agricultural Centre before turning left up to Gibbet Hill where we were joined by Jo and Penny (Coventry meeting) to complete our journey to Coventry.

Wednesday 18th May

After a pleasant social evening with a small group of Coventry Friends, Wednesday 18th dawned dry, if cloudy, and Margaret set off westwards at a steady pace, accompanied by Jo Hallett and also by Mig Kerr (for the first few miles). The countryside between Coventry and Birmingham is surprisingly pleasant, and definitely a rural green belt. A mixture of footpaths and country lanes took us to our coffee break stop near Wootton Green. We strode on through villages and over the M42 motorway, when the heavens opened and we got pretty wet! A welcome lunch break by the canal bridge at Catherine de Barnes was the beginning of a 3-mile walk along a linear green haven in the shape of the Grand Union Canal, through the Birmingham suburbs. We saw no other people - only families of ducks and a friendly heron. Eventually we had to break off from the canal and struck out for Olton railway station, some 14 miles from Coventry, where we were delighted to meet Stuart Morton to guide Margaret on her route through Birmingham to Selly Oak for her next bed.

Not only was it a memorable day's walking but a great privilege to accompany a Quaker of such commitment, warmth and depth as Margaret Johnston. She has reminded us of the principles and commitment shown by John Woolman and Mahatma Gandhi, and we wish her all the very best for the remainder of her challenge.

Jo Hallett and Graeme Leng-Ward,

Another view on Margaret Johnston's Woolman Walk

In December 2007 I had been invited by Bolton Friends to speak about the work of Quaker Peace & Social Witness in South Asia. It was here that I first remember meeting Margaret and her enthusiasm for Ekta Parishad's (Unity Forum) work, firmly in the nonviolence tradition of Gandhi, led to discussion about the possibility of linking John Woolman to these Indian examples of inspired action.

It came to "Life" for me, again, in the Midlands as Jo Hallett, John Cockroft and I liaised to chart the route. Delights included: Margaret's ability to inspire and to come to know her

better as we trod the streets from Olton (near Solihull) to Selly Oak and then the canal paths to Spaghetti Junction the following day; the strong support of Woodbrooke where Margaret has been a student and a Friend in Residence; a further connection to the Leaveners Creative Arts Project as they consider how they might link to Ekta Parishad; renewal of friendships with Cathy Khurana (Sutton Coldfield) and Susan Wright (Coventry) a visit to York on 22nd June to be part of the end of the 500 mile journey where we visited Almerly Garth where John Woolman died, and the burial ground where his body was laid. Amazingly, a robin made a short visit to the Meeting for Worship next to the gravestone and seemed to me to affirm John Woolman's deep respect for all creatures.

Stuart Morton

Quaker Council for European Affairs/Quaker Peace & Social Witness Conference: *Working for peace in the Middle East*

I attended the above conference which was held at the end of October 2010 in Brussels. Over 100 Friends attended from across Europe, although the majority were British. Many of us already knew a lot about the situation in Israel and Palestine but there were others who had come to learn. It was a hard task for the organisers to find a balance in the sessions so everyone got something out of them.

We began with a talk by Christian Berger, the head of the European Union's mission in East Jerusalem, with responsibility for the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The EU is the biggest donor to Palestine – they spend around half a billion euros there every year. A key reason the EU spends so much money there is pragmatic – they want to create an area of stability and prosperity around the EU. However the EU seems to have a genuine concern for the people of Israel and Palestine and would like to help them find a peaceful solution to their current situation. It was interesting to note that the EU has highly favourable trade arrangements with Israel, and although has some arrangements with Palestine, they are much less favourable. The EU is currently helping the Palestinian Authority build the institutions and infrastructure for a future Palestinian state and Christian thought that it is likely that there will be a unilateral declaration of statehood by the Palestinians in 2011. Despite this Christian had grave doubts about whether a two state solution is actually realistic anymore as there are just too many Israeli settlements deep within Palestinian territory.

The second speaker, on Saturday morning, was Jean Zaru. She is the clerk of Ramallah Monthly Meeting in the West Bank. She began by talking of her excitement when invited to the conference and then dread when she thought of her journey to Brussels. As a West Bank Palestinian she has to travel via Jordan which involves a long journey and constant fear that she won't be allowed to leave the West Bank or may not be allowed back in. She believes strongly in active non-violent resistance and believes that faith without action is dead and useless. She told us what life is like in the West Bank on a daily basis; about the problems with drinking water, security and life under occupation. She talked of the hope given to people by the ships trying to go to Gaza. As a West Bank Palestinian she is unable to travel to Gaza – they are effectively two separate territories with no connection at all now.

It was hard not to feel negative by this stage of the conference! We spend the rest of the weekend in small workshops hearing about work going on. I went to three workshops:

1. Firstly hearing about Israeli peace organisations that are working from within Israel to try and find a peaceful solution. These groups are very much a minority within Israel and are often considered to be traitors.
2. The second workshop was about Quaker engagement in Israel and Palestine. Quakers from all over the world fund work in the region, for example, through the Friends International Centre in Ramallah, or by running kindergartens in Gaza and of course Britain YM has the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel which it runs on behalf of the World Council of Churches.
3. Finally I heard about ideas around boycott, divestment and sanctions. A recent document signed by Palestinian Christians calls for the world to boycott, divest from and create sanctions against Israel. Britain YM has a policy of encouraging Friends not to buy goods produced in Israeli settlements in occupied territory. We can all take part in this by looking closely at the country of origin on fruit and vegetables.

I would like to thank Cotteridge meeting for its financial contribution towards my attendance at this conference. If anyone would like to know more about it I would be happy to have a conversation or to hear from you by email or phone.

Michael Eccles

Hungry? Here's a recipe for some Coconut macaroons:

2oz caster sugar

6oz desiccated coconut

1 egg

- Set oven at gas mark 5
- Whisk the egg lightly
- Add sugar to the egg
- Add coconut and mix thoroughly so that the mixture is a soft dough
- Grease a baking tray
- Mould the mixture into small balls about 1" in diameter and place on the baking tray; you can use an egg cup
- Bake for 10-12 minutes in moderate oven

That recipe was taken from 'Sweetness & Light' a book produced by Cotteridge meeting in 2007 to raise money for Action Village India. The recipe was provided by Jeannie Mills.

Lord Mayor of Coventry's Committee for Peace and Reconciliation

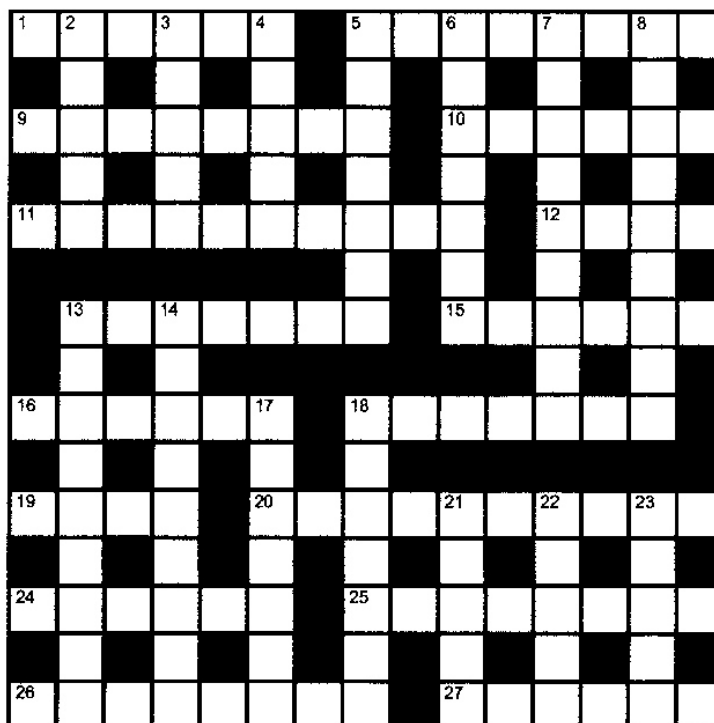
HIROSHIMA DAY 2011

Chapel of Unity
Coventry Cathedral

Saturday 6th August 2010 6-7pm

From The Centre Quaker Crossword Number 9: Summer 2011

Set by Tryfan



Across

- 1 Religious adherents are found in hot river (6)
 5 Out of form - 1 (sic) Man U player? (8)
 9 Christopher Ellwood held in terminus? (4,4)
 10 See 13
 11 Incontinent Erica wafts wretchedly? (4,6)
 12 Superhuman clerk we hear is home to 20 (4)
 13/2/10 27,5d,13d theme: aqua (maturing) vitae? (7,2,3,6)
 15 Catch girl below (6)
 16 Collected Dorset pickle (6)
 18 Miscreant with university record in review (7)
 19 Ring for England 7 and 20 flower (4)
 20 Cathedral book stand in 12 (10)
 24 Everyone's a film director, Michael! (6)
 25 Rocks dated for details (8)
 26 It's needed to forestall a hard-boiled outcome! (3-5)
 27/5D/13D Threateningly grey image arranged for two thousand and eleven Quakers in 20? (6,7,9)

Down

- 2 See 13 Across
 3 Opted out of storehouse (5)
 4 Counter call for quiet brownie (5)
 5 See 27 Across
 6/14 Possible astronauts line up to save Earth. (Part of 13a,2,10) (7,3,6)
 7 Insect queen plays the game (9)
 8 Lamenting order? (9)
 13 See 27 Across
 14 See 6
 17 Mud core processed with dignity (7)
 18 Prisoner's sight seeing trip depicted on map (7)
 21 Guard loses head in passage way (5)
 22 Religious cover-up - not in country of 11? (5)
 23 Force back leper (5)

From The Centre Reader Survey

- | | | |
|---|---|----------|
| 1. How often do you read <i>From The Centre</i> ? | most issues
sometimes
this is the first time I've seen it | |
| 2. How do you read <i>From The Centre</i> ? | online
on paper | |
| 3. How do you obtain your copy? | from your local meeting
from Area Meeting in person
by post
online
from another Friend
other (please state) | |
| 4. Would you like to see more reports of? | events
meetings
conferences | |
| 5. Do you do the crossword? | sometimes
always
never | |
| If yes, do you find the crossword, | too hard
too easy
about right | |
| 6. I would like to see more: | book reviews
discussion type articles
illustrations | |
| 7. Apart from the above what would you like to see more of? | | |
| 8. What would you like to see less of? | | |
| 9. Are there other topics and types of article, not at present included, which you would like to see included? If so, please describe briefly | | |
| 10. Would you like to submit articles for possible inclusion in <i>From The Centre</i> ? | | |
| Yes | no | possibly |
| (Please note: Contributions, which should be signed, may be submitted, typed and preferably on line, via the Area Meeting office. Usual editorial discretion applies) | | |
| 11. How often should <i>From The Centre</i> be published? | as now (normally 12 – 16 pages, 3–4 times per annum)
more frequently, but with fewer pages
less frequently, but with more pages | |

You may photocopy this form, or complete it on line via AM website. Please return to AM office by the end of August 2011.