

Italy, Bologna Worship Group

The Bologna group which started in 1991 meets on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month. At present it is going through a difficult period. The number of people attending regularly has decreased from 10-12 to 5-6. In addition during the year: we have lost Rosalie following a long illness, Cecilia Clementel has moved to London because of her work, and Pier Cesare Bori, founding member and prominent figure in the life of the group, has stopped attending our meetings. We are, probably, at a turning point.

In order to seek and establish closer links with Friends living away from Bologna – people with little chance to meet and share their ideas – we decided to hold a special open weekend. This took place in November at Padenghe sul Garda, Franco and Asma being our hosts. We were 14 in all and returned home with positive feelings. As a result of this event, some of us decided we wanted to resume occasional meetings in Milan. New contacts were also made with sympathizers in Tuscany and elsewhere. As for the Bologna group proper, we have decided to organize three meetings on ‘Le parole del silenzio’ (words of silence), during which we plan to share with others, also through moments of silence and readings, the spiritual experience of the group.

For further information about Friends in Italy, consult our website www.quaker.org/italia

Mauro Bonaiuti

Woodbrooke

During the course of 2004, Woodbrooke saw a continuing increase in the number and range of Friends coming as course participants, visitors, library users and voluntary helpers. International Quakerism was well represented: the Catchpool Fund hosted a consultation event with mainland European Friends in March, and at the end of the year, Quakers working in international affairs – QUNO, QCEA, AFSC and others – came together to discuss the progress of their concerns. Throughout the year we were joined by Friends in Residence from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the US; students on courses came from Russia, Hungary, Austria and Germany.

Our centenary year came to an official end in October, having raised almost £900,000 for projects such as the Ferguson Fellowship and major renovations of our public rooms and residential accommodation. The latest change came in December 2004, when the dining room was completely redecorated and we moved to a self-service catering system; this has been greeted, as have the other physical changes, with great enthusiasm. We know that Quakers continue to love and value Woodbrooke, but our outreach, as one of the largest Quaker enterprises in the UK, is of great significance. Over 120 different conference bookings last year have brought something like 3,000 people to Woodbrooke. It is very pleasant to be able to offer the non-Quakers who use Woodbrooke such good facilities, and for them to enjoy the Quaker atmosphere which we still take pains to maintain.

Many visitors speak of the sense of welcome and hospitality they experience, and the most moving tribute came very recently from a professor of law at Tehran University, who was here to attend an ecumenical conference on marriage. He left a note for the staff which read: ‘In the name of God, I offer my sincere thanks for the director and all who work here. I, as a Muslim, felt here a spiritual space. No doubt it is because of the faith of all who work here. I ask almighty God to help you all. I hope God bless all of us.’ I am glad to feel that this witness of Woodbrooke’s, cherished over the last hundred years, is still alive and open to all who come here.

Jennifer Barraclough, Director

The Corder and Gwen Catchpool Fund

This Fund provides financial assistance to Friends living in mainland Europe who would like to participate in any of Woodbrooke’s courses. Trustees are also willing to assist European meetings who want to undertake work in conjunction with Woodbrooke to further their understanding of Quakerism. Susan Seymour is the European Project Coordinator for the Fund, and can give more detailed advice and support: e-mail via susan@woodbrooke.org.uk or write to her at Woodbrooke, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ, UK.