

Among Friends

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The gift of hospitality

Dear Friends,

The Executive Committee of EMES met at the Kingston Quaker Centre in South-West London at the beginning of March. The Meeting House has been built recently, to a very high standard of specifications to make it an eco-friendly building, and it is full of Light and purpose. Choirs rehearsed as we met, and circle dancing took place. Children played, and the sounds of laughter and bustle filled the centre much of the time. Local Friends opened their homes to us, and provided warm hospitality. On Sunday we joined Friends for the Meeting for Worship, and heard inspiring ministry about being a Quaker presence and inviting people in.

Much of our own work and ministry is about maintaining a Quaker presence in many parts of Europe and the Middle East, often in very isolated circumstances. Since 2007 the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT) has been supporting our Ministry and Outreach programme, which has enabled us to offer resources and accompaniment to small Meetings, Quaker communities and isolated Friends in our Section. We have just received confirmation that JRCT, which has financed a diverse range of Quaker projects in the past and has now ceased to operate such a fund directly, has decided to make a further investment in our work, by establishing a Small Grants Fund which EMES will be able to allocate in the next three years.



*Kingston Quaker Centre Meeting Room
Photo: Martin Touwen*

Inside this issue:

Toulouse Quakers Retreat	2
South Belfast Meeting Award	3
Yad Vashem	4-6
Palestinian Children in Israeli Prisons	7
Quaker Voluntary Action	9
Quaker Council for European Affairs	10
Woodbrooke News	11
Diary Dates, QCEA advert	12

This is an opportunity for Quaker communities in Europe and the Middle East (excluding England, Scotland and Wales) wanting to undertake projects which aim at strengthening Quakers' shared identity, Quaker connections and/or bringing Quaker values to the wider community. FWCC Europe and Middle East Section (EMES) is available to fund small projects from a minimum £ 1,000 to a maximum of £ 5,000 per year over a three-year period. We are grateful for the generous support of JRCT, for the encouragement it has given us over so many years, and the trust it has placed in us to expand our work in this way. I hope the Quaker presence will continue to be nurtured in many places, so that people can be invited in.

For further information please visit <http://www.fwccemes.org/emes/emes-small-grants-fund-sgf>

Marisa Johnson, Executive Secretary

Toulouse Quakers Report of Retreat held on 22 –23 November 2014

On Saturday 22nd. November 21 members and attenders of the Toulouse Quaker Group, together with Friends from other parts of France and beyond, met for a two day retreat in the calm and peaceful surroundings of L'Abbaye St. Marie du Desert near Leignac. The theme of the retreat was "Becoming Peacemakers (Les artisans de paix)".

People began arriving from 11.00am. and once we had settled into our rooms, we took lunch in the refectory. For the first meal we were allowed to talk but in accordance with the rules of the house all future meals were taken in silence. This was at first quite difficult because although we Quakers worship in silence, outside of times of worship we have lots to say and like to talk!!

After lunch we spent two hours working individually, in pairs and as a large group reflecting on the Quaker Peace Testimony and, in particular, the written Peace Declaration of 1660 to Charles II. We thought about how the declaration spoke to us and how the wider Peace Testimony relates to us on a personal level. We found the Peace Testimony to be tough and demanding, but felt this was a result of truly engaging with it and facing its challenges.

This was followed by a DVD of "The Wajir Story" - the inspirational story of Dekha Ibrahim Abdi and her work for peace which grew out of the fierce conflict between clans in Wajir (Kenya) over water and livestock. Dekha started a peace initiative with women from other clans. As we watched the film we noticed not just what these women did but how they went about peacemaking in their own local community. We identified how they faced up to the conflicts surrounding them and, with attendant risks to themselves and their families, brought everybody involved in both sides together to listen and talk to one another. We recognized that peace-making is hard

work, takes lots of time and requires perseverance and constant awareness of changing circumstances and the need to change tactics.

Saturday evening presented opportunity for participants to relax a little. We heard the moving but courageous story of "Sadako Sadaki & the Thousand Cranes" followed by much fun and laughter as we attempted to fold origami paper cranes for ourselves. It was quickly proven that Quakers are not at all manipulative and the skills of manual dexterity have not been disproportionately handed out to Quakers. Many of our cranes were decorated with symbols of peace, or written statements outlining our wishes for peace. These cranes would be placed on the floor of the Oratory for our meeting for worship on Sunday morning providing a powerful visual stimulus. The evening concluded with Epilogue.

The first part of Sunday morning saw everybody taking part in a series of exercises aimed at developing a wider awareness and understanding of Non-Violent Communication. We learned how we are responsible for our needs and fears and the fact that others cannot make us angry or hurt because its not what others do but how we think!!

After lunch on Sunday we relaxed a little by watching a documentary film entitled "A Force More Powerful". The film used contemporary newsreel footage to show how nonviolent resistance in 1944 Denmark, and Poland and Chile in the 1980s neutralized repression, advanced the cause of freedom and overturned injustice.

We departed L'Abbaye St. Marie du Desert with minds whirling at the examples of peace-making we had witnessed and equipped with some skills and ideas of how each one of us could bring peace to our homes and communities.

South Belfast Meeting has received an Eco-Congregation Ireland award

Eco-Congregation Ireland (ECI) is an ecumenical initiative which encourages churches to adopt an eco-friendly approach to all aspects of church life, including worship, lifestyle, property management, community outreach & contact with the developing world. Churches whose members feel that they have a record of achievement in these matters – and an aspiration to develop further – are invited to apply for an Eco-Congregation Award.

Last summer, an attender of South Belfast Meeting suggested that we should apply for this award. His suggestion was accepted, and we set up a small working group to prepare the application.

This begins by gathering information for a simple report, which sets out how the standards required are being achieved. How (for example) do we minimise waste (including waste of energy)? Do we encourage the children to know more of the environment and the connectedness of things? Do we foster biodiversity in the grounds of our Meeting House?

The working group started by consulting with the convenors of our various committees: premises, children and young people, library, and others. Completing this audit was, in itself, an encouraging experience. We realised that we were already achieving the Eco-Congregation standards.

The next step was visit from an Eco-Congregation assessor. For us, this was David, a local Church of Ireland minister whose community is a long-time holder of an Eco-Congregation award. We met with him just before lunch at our Meeting House. We talked with him, showed him round, and then enjoyed a simple lunch together.

It was a very pleasant experience. David had little experience of Quaker ways and was deeply impressed. We, for our part, heard something the way his Church has developed eco-friendly aspects of worship, premises management and members' lifestyles.

Two days later we heard from the ECI coordinator: David had reported on his visit and had warmly recommended



*Presentation at South Belfast Meeting
Photo: Tony Weeks*

that South Belfast Meeting be given an Eco-Congregation Award.

We received the Award on Sunday 7th December. Three members of the ECI committee joined us for Meeting for Worship: Gillian Armstrong (Quaker), Sister Catherine Brennan (Roman Catholic) and Joe Furphy (Presbyterian). The ministry reflected the Award we were about to receive, with a very eloquent contribution from Sister Catherine.

The presentation itself took place after Meeting for Worship. Joe Furphy offered us warm compliments on becoming an Eco-Congregation Church, and then made the presentation. Kate Fletcher and Megan Corrigan accepted on behalf of the Meeting.

The Award is a small engraved wooden plaque. It will be displayed in our Meeting House when the renovations now in progress are completed.

The Eco-Congregation Ireland website is <http://ecocongregationireland.com>. It provides information about events, guidance about eco-friendly matters and lists the Churches in Ireland which have received the award.

A Seminar at Yad Vashem, November 2014

Roger Babington Hill, is a Member of Britain Yearly Meeting, and *Jaana Erkkila*, Clerk to Finland Yearly Meeting write:

Introduction

Each year the Council of Christians and Jews organises a seminar on the Holocaust for 20 clergy at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial and research centre in Jerusalem. This year the group was a productive, friendly ecumenical mix of Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and United Reform Church priests, and two of us from the Society of Friends, the Quakers. “Friends”, of course, do not have a priesthood but we were made very welcome by the professionals of the other churches. The excellent record of Quakers may have made our acceptance easier because of Friends’ key role in organising the ‘kinder transport’ in 1938 and 1939 which brought to safety 10,000 children, and because of their much lauded work as ecumenical accompaniers in the current Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Yad Vashem - campus and museum

Yad Vashem is a 45 acre site in central Jerusalem. The first impression it gives is of being a beautifully designed university campus with administrative and research offices, library, art gallery and bookshop. We were based in the International School for Holocaust Studies which hosts many groups from round the world each year. But Yad Vashem is more than just a centre for academic research and learning. It is an active museum divided into many parts each dedicated to preserving the memory of one of the worst examples of man’s inhumanity to man. Every aspect of Jewish life at the time of the Holocaust is recorded by photographs, letters, jewellery, passbooks, discarded shoes, images of ghetto life, prison uniforms, work tools, paintings, shop fronts, and the cattle trucks used to transport the tens of thousands who were murdered in the death camps. One section of the museum with its own independent location is dedicated to the many Jewish communities in Europe which were obliterated, another is the Hall of Names which preserves as much detail about individuals as can be gathered, a third is for the ‘Righteous among Nations’ those Jews and gentiles who risked their lives to help the victims of the Holocaust, a fourth is the art gallery which houses the many thousand works of art produced in the ghettos and death camps.

I found it difficult to keep a sense of the enormity of



Yad Vashem Photo: Roger Hill

the Holocaust, of the numbers killed, 6 million people, 6 times the population of Birmingham. I chanced on a little help to grasp it in the bookshop where there was a very large ‘coffee table’ book with a plain cover. On each page was printed a single word in 9 point type, repeated in many columns so that every one of the several hundred pages was filled. The word was simply: Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew, Jew..... 6 million words, 6 million Jews.

Teaching

In the classroom we were treated to lectures of a very high standard of intellectual rigour and challenge. The Yad Vashem lecturing staff were supported by distinguished scholars from Israeli and foreign universities, expert historians, theologians, sociologists and musicians.

Themes which we explored included: an introduction to Judaism; a history of anti-Semitism; contemporary Jewish belief and practice; the victim, the bystander and the perpetrator; post-war return to Jewish life; life in the ghetto; the very vexed question of the Christian Jewish relationship; the development of the ‘final solution’;



Yad Vashem Photo: Roger Hill

remembering, forgetting and forgiving; music in the Holocaust; and concepts of good and evil - so where was God?

Shabbat

We had the weekend off from class-room study but before it we attended an orthodox service in a synagogue. Men stood on the right, women were screened off on the left. For most of us in the group it was our first attendance at a Friday night service. All of us were moved by the spirit, the commitment of everyone present, and, surprisingly to me, the cheerfulness of it with so much singing and dancing and active, joyful participation.

I had noted that at the end of the synagogue service all members of the congregation of perhaps 200 people were invited to come forward if they expected to be on their own for shabbat supper that evening and that a place would be found for them in someone's home.

Following Christ

On Saturday we were given a coach tour of some of the main Christian sites - the Dead Sea, the River Jordan, the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Tabgha and Nazareth. So many other coaches of pilgrims were undertaking the same journey that everywhere we stopped was full of crowds. But we found an hour's privacy near Nazareth on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. We sat in a circle as a group and shared bread and wine together, each offering communion to his or her neighbour, Anglican to Catholic, Catholic to Reformed Church, Reformed

Church to Methodist, Methodist to Quaker, Quaker to Anglican.

Bethlehem

On Sunday we made the short journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, a journey which is short in miles but overwhelmingly large in cultural, religious and social wellbeing differentiation. Between the two lies the infamous Wall. In Jerusalem we had toured the old city, prayed at the Western Wailing Wall, walked the Via Dolorosa, and visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There in the Old Quarter Jew and Palestinian have evolved a *modus vivendi* which is tolerable for the most part. But compared to the prosperity of Jerusalem Bethlehem is a third world environment with unfinished

buildings, litter covering the streets, poverty in the shops, and battered old cars and buses on the streets. We attended a Lutheran service mostly spoken in Arabic though the hymns were familiar, and were made very welcome. After lunch in a tented restaurant with a menu of arabic food, we went to explore the new Wall, photographing the graffiti which express in words and images the Palestinians' many cries for help. There was no doubting the feeling of oppression which dominates and over shadows the whole environment on the Palestinian side of the Wall.

The Two Walls seemed to symbolise and sum up our journey, one in Jerusalem expressing the deep and sensitive spirituality of Judaism, the other the defensive/aggressive stance of a new nation state under siege.

The seminar gave us an unrepeatably and memorable challenge which will need to be processed over many months to come. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to attend.

Roger Babington Hill is a Member of the Society of Friends, Totnes Local Meeting, and an Associate Tutor at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre.

Jaana Erkkila is Clerk to Finland Yearly Meeting, Professor of Fine Art at the University of Lapland, and an Associate Tutor at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre.

Enquiries may be addressed to Roger at "roger@babingtonhill.co.uk"

In memoriam, Anita Wuyts (1944 – 2015)

Martin Touwen, Netherlands Yearly Meeting, writes:

Anita was truly an internationally minded Friend. She was one of the founders of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) in 1978. While representatives changed, Anita was the constant factor with in QCEA for decades, in her very humble way. For many, Anita was very much linked to Quaker House in Brussels. This is where I first met her in the mid-80's, as an European Young Friend. And many times after. Anita's work concentrated on human rights. One example of her achievements is that she was able to co-write article 13 of the Amsterdam treaty (1999) prohibiting discrimination of minorities on the basis of religion, race, nationality or sexual orientation. In 2004 she published a broad study on 'Human rights in the European Union'.

Anita served as clerk for Friends World Committee of Consultation, Europe and Middle East Section from autumn 2000 to spring 2006. That was with Tony Fitt and later Bronwyn Harwood as executive secretary. For years, she was clerk of Belgium & Luxembourg Monthly Meeting. At many occasions she was the living link between Belgian and Netherlands Friends. In 1995 Anita gave a lecture during Netherlands Yearly Meeting on 'Are we open to new light?' She always tried to keep an open approach to (that of God in) other people. And there was hardly a North West European border meeting without Anita present.

The closing minute of the EMES' Annual Meeting in 2006 notes: 'Frits Renken has reminded us of the thousands of lives Anita has touched during her 30 years of service to Friends in both QCEA and EMES and kissed her on behalf of us all.' A still fitting simple expression of our gratitude for her life.



Anita Wuyts Photo: Martin Touwen

Europe and Middle East Young Friends (EMEYF) – a new style of Annual Report for 2014

This year we've made a new style of report. Annual Reports had previously mainly consisted of role-holders' reports. This gave the document a bureaucratic feel, rather than doing what an annual report is meant to do: inform people about what EMEYF is, as a community, and what it has done in the last year. After not producing an extensive Annual Report in 2012 and 2013, there was an opportunity to change. After not producing an extensive Annual Report in 2012 and 2013, there was an opportunity to change.

So, at Annual Meeting in Bad Pyrmont in November 2014, Friends discerned what they might like to see in a new form of Annual Report. The process brought forth many exciting ideas: questionnaires, extracts from the archives and texts or quotes in multiple languages. The over-riding feeling though was that the annual report should reflect EMEYF as it is: a diverse community of European and Middle Eastern young Quakers with many different experiences, both at EMEYF events, and in

their wider lives. We wanted the Annual Report to reflect the openness of our community, and allow us to share our way with each other, with newcomers and with the wider Quaker family. So we sent out an appeal for texts about young Friends' activities, concerns, thoughts and experiences, both individually and communally.

And the Annual Report is the result of that appeal. It contains, among our Spring Gathering epistles, reports and reflections, a Polish-English bilingual poem, a short story, a reflection on community and trust in Quaker meetings by German young Friends, information about a concern for mental well-being held by Young Friends General Meeting in the UK, an account of Christmas in the West Bank, and much more, presented in a new format with lots of colour and pictures. You can download our Annual Report from www.emeyf.org/ documents. We hope it gives you an intriguing insight into the EMEYF community.

Palestinian Children In Israeli Prisons

Kristin Eskeland, Norway Yearly Meeting and Chair person Quaker Service Norway writes:

The Norwegian Quaker Society and Quaker Service Norway were active participants in organising the campaign and conference on Palestinian Children in Israeli Prisons.

Many organisations, varying from Norwegian People's Aid, Norwegian Church Aid, the Palestinian Solidarity Association, Grandmothers for Peace and several labour organisations, including the Teachers' union were behind the campaign.

Our aim

Most of us are very concerned about the Israeli occupation of Palestine, we agree that the situation is devastating for Israelis as well as for Palestinians. Our overall aim is to see the end of the occupation. But the occupation is such a big and complicated issue, this time we wanted to focus on a limited part of the problem, hoping that it might be easier to achieve positive results.

Children throwing stones

The campaign is based on the UNICEF report *Children in Israeli Military Detention*, published in 2013. The report documents that every year 700 Palestinian children, mostly boys, aged 12 to 17 are arrested, interrogated and detained by Israeli army, police and security agents. During the past 10 years an estimated 7000 Palestinian children have been prosecuted and/or imprisoned within the Israeli military justice system, an average of two children per. day. The most common of the allegations against these children is that they have thrown stones at the separation wall or at military vehicles or cars with settlers in them. Often the children are arrested in the middle of the night, hand cuffed and blind folded before they are taken "away", alone, with no information to the parents as to where, why and for how long. The UNICEF conclusion is clear: *The ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalised.*

The conference

We had invited three very interesting people as keynote speakers at the conference: Lawyer Gerard Horton,



Kristin Eskeland, Gerard Horton and Salwa Duaibis.

Photo: Karen Henriksen

Military Court Watch, Salwa Duaibis, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, and Amira Hass, Israeli journalist working for Haaretz newspaper.

Gerard Horton and Salwa Duaibis called their contribution *Breaking a Generation*, Amira Hass talked around the question: "Is the State of Israel Viable?"

Gerard Horton took as a starting point, Why would the Israeli army feel it necessary to treat children like this? His point was that in order to protect more than 400,000 settlers in the West Bank, the military needs to demonstrate its presence in Palestinian villages, to intimidate and scare the local population to make sure that resistance to the occupation is not even contemplated. Salwa Duaibis told us about the villages, the mothers who stayed up all night worrying about their children, how the activities disrupt the families and the villages, how the children, mostly boys, lose all hope and self confidence.

Amira Hass talked about the Israeli State, discussing its strengths and weaknesses. She was clear that Israel today is an apartheid state, but not in the same way as South Africa. Young people living under occupation has the right to throw stones. But she was also questioning if it is a good strategy by the Palestinian society to allow these children to risk so much for so little gain, which is mostly symbolic. It is obviously the Israeli army which is violent, when they build a separation wall, set up control towers and shoot at demonstrators,



Journalist Trine Lynggaard who chaired the debate, Gerard Horton from Military Court Watch, Salwa Duaibis from Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, Israeli journalist Amira Hass from Haaretz newspaper and Labour Party politician Svein Roald Hansen. Photo: Karen Henriksen

the population has the full right to resist. She would, however, have liked to see a more coordinated and well planned Palestinian resistance. But she was also critical of the tendencies by some Palestinian activists. It is no good forgetting about the past, Palestine/Israel is today a country with two peoples, a one-state without Jews is not a solution. You cannot delete the past. The Israeli Jews need to understand that it is in their own interest to change the politics and find a solution with democracy and justice for all.

How can Norway contribute?

At the end of the conference the three speakers and a Norwegian parliamentarian from the Labour party tried to look into the future and come up with some ideas on how to achieve concrete results. Our main aim is to break the system and contribute to dismantling the occupation. As a stepping stone towards this aim we all want Palestinian children to be treated with respect and care according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The politician promised to raise the issue within his party. And they all agreed that it would be useful to

fight for realistic changes in the way children are being treated: If children are arrested, no torture is allowed, children should not be arrested in the middle of the night, a parent should be allowed to accompany her child, and there should always be a lawyer present during the interrogation. To make sure everything is done correctly the proceedings should be filmed. Unless these demands are adhered to, the child should be released immediately.

How do we follow up?

The challenge to us as organisers of the campaign is how to follow up. This was not to be just another conference, we want it to lead to concrete actions and results. We will keep in touch with Military Court Watch, we will all sign the petition which will be presented to the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs to ask him to use his influence with the Israeli government. We will keep raising the question, pestering our politicians. We, our government (and Israeli authorities) must not be allowed to forget.

We are pleased that so many different organisations wanted to be part of this campaign. May be it would be a good idea for us, European Quakers, to follow up and work together to achieve a better life for Palestinian children.



*The Conference - from Kvekerhjelp's website
Photo: Jon-Magne Jonassen*

QUAKER VOLUNTARY ACTION**FRIENDSHIP CAMP****BALATON, HUNGARY 6th – 13th July 2015**

An opportunity to combine practical & creative activities with time for reflection, fun & fellowship

We shall be staying at a village holiday camp near the shores of Lake Balaton in southern Hungary. The friendship camp is being run by Hungarian Friends for children aged 8–12, bringing together kids from the richly varied ethnic groups living across Hungary. We'll have fun learning from each others' cultural heritage including folk songs, games, dancing, language, stories and food! There will be excursions to and around the lake, swimming, campfire and exploring the beautiful surrounding area. Whilst enjoying our common humanity in diversity, we'll enable the children to have fun together, to get to know one another in joyful holiday activities and to experience an insight into the life of the Spirit listening to where the words come from.

- We are recruiting 6 Young Friends aged 18–30 to help on the team
- There will be around 45 children and 25 adults in total
- Food will be cooked by the adult teams with kids helping
- Accommodation is in simple bunk rooms
- All travel is arranged and paid for by participants
- The QVA link person is Jasmine Piercy

Cost £60

For further details/application form please contact:

QVA Working Retreats Bookings, Swarthmoor Hall, Swarthmoor Lane, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 0JQ
07530 844611 bookings @ qva.org.uk

QUAKER VOLUNTARY ACTION**WORKING RETREAT****CASUBIA, POLAND 8th – 15th August 2015**

An opportunity to combine practical work with time for spiritual reflection, enjoyment and fellowship

We shall be staying on a small farming cooperative about 100km south of Gdansk. Work in the extensive grounds will include developing attractive areas, wood chopping and stone clearing. There will be outing options to explore the region and music-making and games will feature in the social time.

Our theme for reflection will focus on how all our life experiences can be seen in the light of an on-going spiritual quest for truth and transformation. We will draw on inspirational texts and other resources, sharing what we have discovered so far on our journeys. There will be an opportunity to look afresh at Early Friends testimony to truth of the heart and our current dilemmas around living sustainably, with integrity and open to transformational grace.

- The event is open to Friends and those in sympathy with Friends or who wish to learn more about the Quaker way
- Each day has a balance of practical work, reflection sessions, social time, shared meals and some free time
- There are half hour Meetings for Worship each morning and the evenings close with a gathered Epilogue
- Food is vegetarian and volunteers help with cooking
- Accommodation is in simple, shared rooms with options for staying in tents provided for those who would prefer to camp
- Work activities vary to suit abilities and ages 18 to 80+
- The facilitator is Alexander Gorbenko

Cost £190 (or 500 Zloty for East European participants)

For further details/application form please contact: QVA Working Retreats Bookings, Swarthmoor Hall, Swarthmoor Lane, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 0JQ

07530 844611 bookings @ qva.org.uk

QUAKER VOLUNTARY ACTION**WORKING RETREAT****FREIBURG, GERMANY 12th – 19th September 2015**

An opportunity to combine practical learning with time for spiritual reflection, enjoyment and fellowship

We shall be staying at the Youth Hostel in the unofficial green capital of Europe – Freiburg, in southern Germany. We will be engaging with and learning from sustainability success stories across the city including those that the local Quakers are involved with. There will be an option to explore by hire bike and participants are encouraged to travel to the project by train.

Our theme for reflection will focus on how all our life experiences can be seen in the light of an on-going spiritual quest for truth and transformation. We will draw on inspirational texts and other resources, sharing what we have discovered so far on our journeys. There will be an opportunity to look afresh at Early Friends testimony to truth of the heart and our current dilemmas around living sustainably, with integrity and open to transformational grace.

- The event is open to Friends and those in sympathy with Friends or who wish to learn more about the Quaker way
- Each day has a balance of practical learning, reflection sessions, social time, shared meals and some free time
- There are half hour Meetings for Worship each morning and the evenings close with a gathered Epilogue
- Food is vegetarian and cooked communally
- Accommodation is in simple shared hostel rooms
- Activities vary to suit abilities and ages 18 to 80+
- The facilitator is Gordon Matthews

Cost £280

For further details/application form please contact: QVA Working Retreats Bookings, Swarthmoor Hall, Swarthmoor Lane, Ulverston, Cumbria LA12 0JQ

07530 844611 bookings @ qva.org.uk

Quaker Council for European Affairs

January/February 2015

The *Quaker Council for European Affairs* (QCEA) has been working on a number of issues recently. Below, staff members outline their current work.

Sustainability – *George*

I've been focussing particularly on the Circular Economy package which is likely to be withdrawn by the European Commission, who have promised to bring a "more ambitious" package before the end of 2015. Before Christmas, I wrote a blog post expressing QCEA's suspicion that business lobbying had been central in making this decision, a view echoed by many other environmental NGOs - *see the blog below (1)*. Since then, I have sent an action alert asking Friends to write to the Commissioners, trying to emphasise that a more ambitious package could be brought forward without withdrawing it. Instead, we encouraged them to improve the (admittedly imperfect) package through the co-decision process with the European Parliament and Council, highlighting some areas which could be improved - *see below (2)*. We see withdrawal as creating suspicion in the European institutions, and delaying the implementation of the package, rather than increasing trust in the European Union, as Frans Timmermans has stated is their goal.

The Commission has not listened to these warnings, formally announcing the withdrawal on the 7th March, and so I have started working in coalition with a number of environmental and waste-focussed non-governmental organisations to develop a vision for an ideal circular economy package – trying to shape the debate, as the Commission begins work on the new package. If anyone would like more detail on this, or to make comments or ask questions, email me at gthurley@qcea.org.

Peace – *Tim*

I advocate for the EU institutions in Brussels to follow policies that will lead to a more peaceful world. However, like all QCEA staff, I also help out with a number of other things that QCEA does. At the moment my main work is on armed drones (which are remote-controlled flying robots that carry and fire weapons), and more specifically on the EU's policy

on armed drones. I have already done some research into this, and have written an article on this topic for QCEA's regular newsletter *Around Europe*. In my article I describe how some of the EU institutions are pursuing a militaristic policy that encourages the development of armed drones. Now that I have done my initial research, I am planning a meeting with people from other non-governmental organisations who are working on similar issues, so that we can exchange ideas, and then later this year I would hope to lobby the European institutions to change the EU's policy. Apart from my work on this, my schedule for this month (February 2015) includes representing Quakers at a formal EU consultation meeting on the protection of civilians in violent conflict; putting together the latest edition of *Around Europe*; and helping to organise the QCEA study tour, which is an annual week-long event for Friends (and friends of Friends) who are interested in learning about European politics. Find out more about the study tour [here](#).

Other work

Some of the other projects which have been part of QCEA's work recently are hate crime (Andrew), and the role of investment and trade in creating the world we seek (Sasha). This last topic includes conversations with the Commission and the European Investment Bank about business and human rights, transparency, and stakeholder consultation. Sasha is also working with a consortium of NGOs on the investor protections that may be incorporated into the free trade deal with the US (TTIP). You may have also seen Sasha's recent blogs on the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly – do follow our blog at qceablog.wordpress.com/!

We have also welcomed a volunteer, Dora Heath, who is working on the role of the European Union in Israel and Palestine.

(1) <https://qceablog.wordpress.com/2014/12/19/the-circular-economy-and-better-regulation/>

(2) <https://qceablog.wordpress.com/2015/01/the-circular-economy-letter-final/>

Opportunities for European Friends and Meetings to access Woodbrooke's learning

Woodbrooke, in Birmingham, is Europe's only Quaker Study Centre running a huge range of courses exploring Quakerism and themes of interest to Quakers, such as Peace and Reconciliation, Quaker History and personal spirituality.

As well as coming to Woodbrooke, Woodbrooke can come to you. Through our Woodbrooke on-the-road programme we are able to offer meetings and Quaker groups the opportunity to have a workshop on a whole range of Quaker topics all delivered to your meeting by experienced Woodbrooke tutors. We offer meetings a well-structured event of learning and sharing, aiming to provide new insights into Quaker history, theology, spirituality, testimony and community. These events are good for meetings who would like to develop spiritually and as communities, to learn about aspects of the Quaker and Christian traditions and to feel supported to live out Quaker testimony in their lives and localities.

We are aware that for many Friends the costs of travel and the course make it impossible to consider doing this without financial support. There is special funding available for Friends from continental Europe so they can take advantage of what Woodbrooke has to offer.

Corder and Gwen Catchpool worked as Quaker representatives in Berlin prior to World War II. Rudi Schmidt was much influenced by them as a young



The Cadbury Room Photo supplied by Woodbrooke

man and became a Friend; he also greatly valued his post-war experience of coming to Woodbrooke. In later life he established a fund in the Catchpools' memory, with the intention of helping spread Quaker values by enabling others, particularly younger people from Eastern Europe and Germany, to benefit from what Woodbrooke has to offer.

We offer individuals financial support towards the costs of coming on a Woodbrooke course (including travel and course costs) and can also provide funding for meetings so we can visit you.

For more information or if you are meeting and would like to explore the possibilities for you, visit www.woodbrooke.org.uk/pages/catchpool-bursaries.html or contact Simon Best, Head of Learning (email 0121 415 6769 or email simon.best@woodbrooke.org.uk)

Diary Dates 2014 - 2015

More dates for 2014 are available on the website: www.fwccemes.org. Please send items for inclusion in the diary to Marisa Johnson at emes@fwccemes.org.

4-11 April: EMEYF Spring Gathering in Georgia

Contact emeyf@qcea.org

9-12 April: Ireland Yearly Meeting

Contact office@quakers-in-ireland.ie

1 – 4 May: Britain Yearly Meeting, London

Contact ymg@quaker.org.uk

22-25 May: Switzerland Yearly Meeting, Herzberg,

Contact symclerk@swiss-quakers.ch

22-25 May: Central European Gathering, Novi Sad,

Contact varadyv@ceu.hu

29-31 May: Netherlands Yearly Meeting,

Contact secretariaat@dequakers.nl

4 - 7 June: EMES Annual Meeting, Woodbrooke

Contact emes@fwccemes.org

25-28 June: Norway Yearly Meeting,

Contact kveker@kveker.org

25-28 June: Sweden Yearly meeting,

Contact kvakargarden@kvakare.se

6-13 July: Family Camp, Balaton, Hungary,

Contact bookings@qva.org.uk

16-19 July: France Yearly Meeting, Nantes,

Contact assembleedefrance@gmail.com

QCEA/QPSW 2015 conference Castle or community?

Quakers' role in building the new Europe.

Quakers from all European Meetings are invited to gather in Brussels on 4–6 December 2015, to voice their concerns, find out what issues are of concern to Friends and what is being done to affect policies at the European level. How do we act to build the Europe we want, together as Quakers?

More information from <http://www.qcea.org/home/events/conferences/>

Among Friends is the newsletter of Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation. We want Among Friends to reflect the diversity of Quaker life and experience across the Section and welcome articles, photos and news of forthcoming events.

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Deadline for Among Friends 133: 1 July 2015