



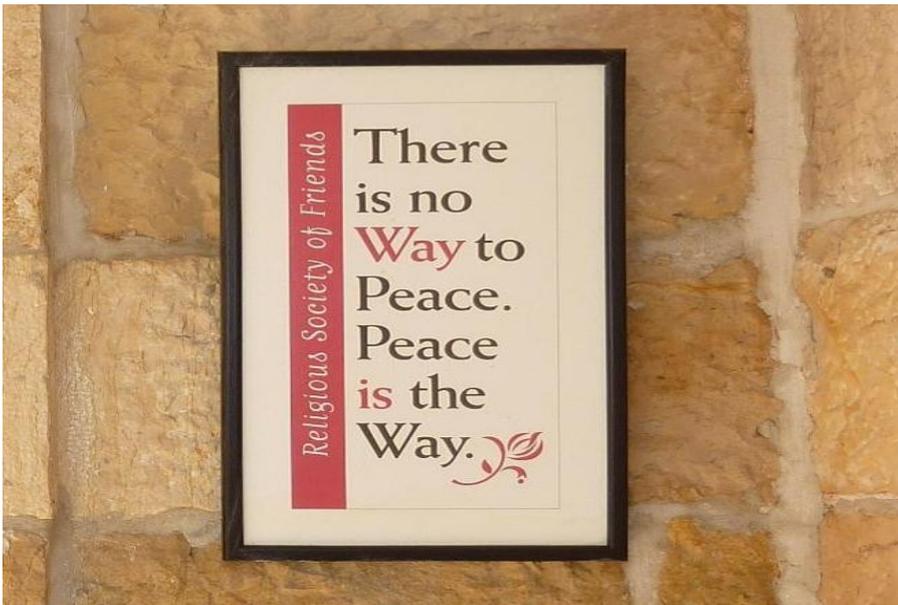
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Winter/Spring 2010

Quaker Voluntary Action News www.qva.org.uk
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QVA WORKING RETREATS 2010: EXPLORING OUR PEACE TESTIMONY

In 2010 we celebrate the 350th anniversary of the declaration of our Quaker Peace Testimony — involving us in looking back over our history and pressing forward. The Programme of Working Retreats builds on our pioneer project in Palestine, heads for Northern Ireland and brings together a joint Meeting Houses event on the Yorkshire/ Lancashire border. Come and be involved as we focus together on personal and global issues of peace in the light of our testimony.



Sign at the door of the Friends Meeting House in Ramallah, Palestine.

INVITATION TO VOLUNTEERS...

Come and spend some time working as part of a team on a practical project, living, cooking and eating together and engaging with others in matters of the spirit.

DAILY PROGRAMME

- Morning Meeting for Worship
- 3 hours Work
- 2 led Reflection Sessions
- Free time & Social time
- Evening Epilogue

COSTS

- Volunteers pay around £10 per day towards food
- Travel costs and arrangements are covered by individuals
- There is a registration fee per event according to length: £30/£50
- Most projects offer free accommodation except where stated
- Bursary help is available – please enquire

APPLICATION DETAILS

Full 2010 Programme details and Application Form from:

Jasmine Piercy, QVA Working Retreats Co-ordinator,
60 Springfield Road, Wellington,
Somerset TA21 8LG

Tel: 00 44 (0)7910 434941
Email: jasmine@qva.org.uk

WORKING RETREATS PROGRAMME 2010

Congenies, France

18th Century Quaker Centre near the South Coast. Varied work tasks in garden & burial ground.
March 20 – 27 £120/€130

Airton & Sawley, UK

Historical Meeting Houses on Yorks/Lancs border. A joint project: indoor & outdoor work.
April 17 – 24 £120/€130

Swarthmoor, Cumbria

Quaker Centre in English Lake District. Varied work tasks in extensive grounds May 10 – 14
£90/€100

Moyallon, Ireland

Quaker Centre in rural area near Belfast. Varied outdoor and indoor work tasks
July 17 – 24 £120/€130

Ashford, UK

Friends Meeting House in Kent. Decorating library & old school-room August 20 – 23 £60/€65

Swarthmoor, Cumbria

17th Century founding place of Quakerism. Tree work and other gardening tasks
October 17 - 22 £125/€135

Ramallah, Palestine

Quaker-Palestinian-Israeli Encounter. Supporting the olive picking harvest October 27 – Nov 5
£280/€310 (inc accommodation)

Going on a working retreat is perhaps, for people choosing this adventure, a purposeful step towards 'things eternal.' At the end of a year in which five retreats were held in four countries it's worth asking where these steps have led for those involved and where it leads us.

Some things are clear – it has led volunteers to experiences that were rich and varied – as expressed by this Ramallah participant: "A series of intense experiences; physically, intellectually and emotionally" as one volunteer put it. Also appreciated, and often commented upon, was the food and good company.

But other – perhaps deeper – themes

WORKING RETREATS 2009 QUALITIES OF ENCOUNTER

I stand alone....in peace
My life hums....to the rhythm of silence
In the bustle I jostle for my place
And find it ...inside
Jasmine Piercy, Sale retreat: June 2009

were mentioned:

- ❑ Learning and gaining new insights: "The event helped put my life in perspective: serving the future with elements of peace, love and hope" said a participant on the retreat at Laren in Holland. "I discovered that everyone has wisdom to share" said another.

- ❑ Growth and change: "An amazing time; I think it will change me forever."
- ❑ The enrichment of doing useful work and seeing it done: "I enjoyed getting my hands dirty and making a difference."

It goes deeper to things that are difficult to grasp and say.

But where does it lead us? Arguably it leads us to question the mediocrity of modern living – why can't life always have some of this flavour? Further, it affirms rather than denies that opening oneself to the divine is, indeed, worthy.

These pages contain brief accounts of most of the Retreats that took place in 2009 – perhaps to offer more light.

Svartbacken, Sweden July 2009

When I applied for the Working Retreat in Sweden in July, I had little idea what to expect, except that we were going to the Svartbäcken Quaker Retreat Centre near Stockholm, run by Julia Ryberg and family.

Weil, it was a wonderful week, surpassing any expectations I may have had, on all levels. The place was amazing; a wooden building in that typical Swedish colour of reddish-brown with white window frames, set in woodland with a lake 2 minutes walk away; the work was enjoyable and extremely satisfying; the group was great and the retreat sessions meant that we all got to know one another "in the things that are eternal; we were entertained to an evening of Swedish folk music and to top it all the weather was superb.

As well as hosting children's activity holidays, retreats and Yearly Meetings, the Retreat Centre had been used for many years to secretly shelter asylum-seekers until their appeals (all successful except the last one) were dealt with.

Julia and her husband Mats have themselves fostered teenage substance-abusers. Whilst running all of this and the farm, Julia works part-time for Sweden Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke and Mats works in Education!

Our days started with a Prologue and finished with an Epilogue; we worked through the morning, had some free time after lunch followed by an afternoon retreat session in which we explored the theme of 'Peace', then fun and games after supper.

We were divided into teams for work and cooking/washing up. For the first couple of days I was in the weeding and clearing group and afterwards we felt a real sense of achievement as we'd cleared a massive area of gravel that could again become a patio, and cleared pathways and even unearthened steps that were so overgrown that no-one knew they were there.

For the next 4 days I was part of a team that started painting the outside of the building. Mats told us that the paint was made of



natural ingredients: linseed oil, iron oxide (which gave it the red brown colour) and rye flour! Afterwards it looked so much better and once again we felt an enormous sense of achievement and satisfaction.

One day I took the bus eastwards to Norrtälje, a working town with a picturesque centre; lots of wooden buildings huddled around the small river in the centre. I walked to the end of a riverside park, across a footbridge and onto a small, wooded island where I was greeted by bird

song. I soon found a beautiful spot where I sat looking out across the deep blue water whilst eating wild blueberries which grew all around.

Never mind the Bahamas, this was paradise and I could have stayed there for hours if I hadn't had to catch the bus back!

Kate Bone

"The work was a meditative practice." Participant, Svartbacken retreat



Swarthmoor Hall UK, October 2009

Spiritually, I found the week challenging and inspiring.

Only one of our group had been to Swarthmoor Hall previously, and the setting and its history had an effect on us all. The experience of forming a little temporary community was fascinating – sometimes it felt as though it needed to be carefully nurtured and balanced; at other times the group felt intensely positive and connected.

I appreciated the effort that every single person made to nurture that sense of community. I found plenty to challenge me spiritually in the retreat sessions, although it was sometimes difficult to find time to reflect deeply when also trying to see to the group's practical needs.

I learned a lot about myself, as a Quaker, a facilitator, a member of a community, a communicator and a listener.

Sue Proudlove, Retreat facilitator

A highlight of the year was the working retreat held at Ramallah in Palestine. Stuart Yates below describes his experience of being involved. It is worth saying that QVA seeks, in what ways it can, to promote peace based on understanding of all perspectives and recognition of all suffering. As we develop our Ramallah project for 2010, we hope to engage voices from a range of Israeli and Palestinian viewpoints that will offer a balanced encounter for participants.

A prison within a prison

"We live in a prison within a prison" said our host, a Christian Palestinian. Travel to and from the outside world is difficult if not impossible for Palestinians and internal movements are strictly controlled, permissions being revoked on a whim. By example, she recounted how the family had obtained permits to go to Jerusalem— a mere twenty miles away - for Easter but at the Qalandia checkpoint the Israeli official decided that their 15 year old son could go no further. The whole family had to turn back and go home.

Palestinian hospitality

Mint tea, coffee, carob were always readily offered and we enjoyed wonderful food and many kindnesses. It was profoundly humbling however to be taken to a refugee camp and within minutes be offered a soft drink. Forty members of one family live in a few rooms. The patriarch, still with a sense of humour amidst his sadness and anger, has been living there for fifty years. His wife, just back from visiting a son in prison, was passionate in her anguish at how life is in the camp. Imprisonment for young males is regarded neither with shame nor as a badge of honour: it happens to so many that it is part of everyday life. The family made us, British citizens, welcome, but were clear in their opposition to the policies and actions of the British government.



Quaker Activities

The Meeting House in Ramallah, together with the adjoining Friends International Center, run by the indefatigable Kathy Bergen, hosts meetings, talks and concerts. The presentation we attended filled the Meeting House, literally standing room only for latecomers. Friends' schools in Ramallah are still run according to Quaker principles and we had another humbling experience hearing teenagers talking of their hopes for the future. Amazingly mature,

there was an absence of a wish for any sort of revenge: 'we shared the land with Jews before and we are willing to share the land with them again'.

Peaceful action

Every Friday there is a peaceful demonstration in Bil'in against the separation wall and most of us took part in this, in the pouring rain. Many international activists attend. In spite of it being non-violent our group was tear-gassed. Earlier in the year a villager, imploring soldiers to stop firing as they had shot an Israeli, was shot and killed by a tear gas bullet aimed directly at his chest. Witnessing the response to peaceful protest was another sobering experience.

Olive picking and other tasks



What we went for and what we did. Hard work! The first site planned for us, Rantis, was not visited because settlers had recently destroyed the olive trees. Our first picking, whilst overlooked by distant settlements, was peaceful and uneventful. Our second site, overlooked on three sides by settlements, was a current 'hot spot'. In the event we were not disturbed but felt the presence of baleful eyes from hundreds of windows at the top of the hill. We also cleared rubbish from an archaeological site and for such a small task were given a (modest) civic reception.

Retreat

We had a morning Meeting for Worship whenever we could and most evenings had a reflective group session. These were refreshing and nourishing times, essential amongst the physical and emotional challenges faced each day. Jasmine Piercy our leader facilitated with great sensitivity and wisdom. Our heartfelt thanks for this and for Jasmine's professional leadership throughout.

Stuart Yates

**Sale UK June 2009
'On the herding of cats.'**



It has been said that getting Friends to act together is like 'herding cats.' I wasn't sure about this until I went on a Working Retreat at Sale.

Unlike many Friends projects, the challenge was plain enough: to dig over and weed a flower bed now grown over with weeds – mainly couch grass. How would a group of Friends – from far and near – go about this? We had no gathered meetings or instructions from on high – from the local equivalent of Friends House – to guide us. This is what actually happened:

1. Each of us set about the task in an entirely different way. The range of action was simply remarkable. There was the 'sitter' who worked the ground from her sitting position on it and the 'cutter' who found a strimmer and cut the tops off some of the weeds – and did nothing more. The 'turner' dug into the ground and turned over the weeds so that their roots would die in the strong Sale sun. How wrong he was. The 'dabbler' came and went. And then there was me, 'proper job.' I fully extracted all weeds, shook off loose soil and thoroughly dug the ground over. My progress was slow.

1. Little conversations developed among us to gently challenge 'wrong approaches.' 'Proper job' went further by going over part of 'turner's' patch to 'put it right.'

2. Then our leader came up with her final master-stroke – she had met this situation before – all the ground was covered by wood chippings and displayed a marvellous unity. How pleased we all were.

With folk like this no wonder it is difficult to get unity in Business Meetings!
Martin Smith

Active Discernment: Looking Ahead

Where is QVA going? QVA trustees have reached some answers but are open to light from any reader – including you.

First, 2010 will see an exciting programme of Working Retreats in the UK, Europe and the Middle East. This will be the third of a three-year pilot programme of Working Retreats.

Further, subject to funding, we shall be appointing a person or group to independently examine our Working Retreats programme as implemented over the past two years. We feel that the programme is working really well and has great potential but also that it is right and wise to get an independent view.

Beyond this, and subject to the outcome of review, we hope to take the Working Retreats model into new areas of activity including local action to promote sustainable living and environmental improvement. This could be exciting.

Our 'head-hunter' initiative – involving search for people to do important Quaker work – has proceeded slowly. But it could be developed further in the coming years.

QVA will also face some internal change as I shall be standing down as Clerk in the Spring of 2011.

Opportunity to give of your time: Don't look away

There are modest and manageable volunteer roles to assist the working of QVA. We are looking for:

- New trustees. This would involve about three telephone conferences a year and a one day meeting in the UK
- An editor for a new email newsletter
- Fund raisers
- An administrative assistant to do admin tasks from home
- Consultants for evaluation and development work

These roles are flexible – capable of being fitted around your commitments and can be undertaken from your home wherever it is located in Europe or beyond. Fun is involved.

Interested? Ring me, Martin Smith, on 0044 (0) 1484 687139

New Initiatives

Part of the QVA mission is to develop new volunteering initiatives 'for our time.' This is challenging.

In the past year we have persisted with Quaker ministry in Forensic Psychiatry in secure hospitals and units. There is a regular Quaker Meeting at Rampton High Security Hospital, which has provided rich encounters for those involved. Patients who are deeply troubled in the mind draw much from the loving silence of a Quaker Meeting.

Also, late last year an opportunity arose for piloting our 'headhunter initiative,' involving search for and recruitment of Friends for important work. An experienced engineer may be required to assist restoration of the Bulawayo sewage system in Zimbabwe. Dirty work – but vital. Cholera lurks there for the system has broken down.

Witness in Europe and the Middle East

More than half of the work of QVA takes place outside of the UK – in continental Europe and the Middle East. This is right. There is work to be done there and Friends available to bring together to do it – in encounter with the spirit.

This involvement is seen in the three working retreats held in the past year in the Netherlands, Sweden and at Ramallah in Palestine. All three were well attended and involved rich encounters for those that took part. This work was assisted financially and in staff support by EMES – the Europe and Middle East Section of the Friends World Committee of Consultation – for which much thanks.

To: QVA, 1 Holt Lane, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, HD9 3BW, UK

Name

Address.....

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E-mail

INFORMATION REQUEST (A5 size SAE please)

Please tell me:

- o about QVA's work and future plans
- o about being a QVA rep to my local meeting
- o about volunteering through QVA
- o about

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Please treat all donations I make to QVA from the date of this declaration as Gift Aid donations

(signed).....

(date)/...../.....

Please sign if you pay tax and remember to notify us if you no longer pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax equal to the tax we reclaim on your donations.

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