



Newsletter – May 2017

Diary: May 2017

Sunday 7 May	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 13 May	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 14 May	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Tuesday 16 May	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 27 May	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House

Quakers Vote

In just over a month's time, there will be another General Election. The next Government will have a major influence on the future of Britain – if only through the way it handles the negotiation of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union. But there are many other issues that will concern Quakers, and Britain Yearly Meeting is setting out how Quakers might think about these on the Quaker Vote website <http://election.quaker.org.uk/>.

The main themes covered by the website, and the topics included within them are as follows. Clicking the main heading will take you to the relevant page on the Quaker Vote website.

[Peace](#)

Israel and Palestine; International conflict and peace; Militarisation in schools; Trident

[Community](#)

Drugs, gambling and alcohol; Education; End of life; Funeral poverty; Housing

[Environment and sustainability](#)

Climate change; Energy justice

[Economic justice](#)

Economic inequality; Social security

[Equality](#)

Discrimination against disability; Prejudice

[Justice](#)

Asylum and detention; Criminal justice; Human rights; Torture

[Democracy](#)

European Union; Representation; Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

No doubt further information and thoughts about the election and its implications for issues of importance to Quakers will emerge over the next few weeks, so expect an update in June's newsletter! If you have any thoughts, why not share them in the newsletter? Send them to roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop.

Speaking Christian about ... being born again

This month, in our series based on theologian Marcus Borg's book *Speaking Christian*, we look at the idea of being *born again* – an idea which, as Borg says, carries a lot of baggage!

For millions of Christians, says Borg, *born again* is a completely positive phrase: "It names the event or process in which they gave themselves to Jesus, which changed their lives and filled them with meaning." But for millions of others – both Christians and non-Christians – the phrase is wholly negative. It means a particular way of being Christian, a way associated primarily with the Christian religious and political right, with what is often called conservative Christianity.



But, says Borg, "the negative associations of *born again* are unfortunate. They eclipse and obscure its rich biblical meaning. ... Being *born again* is a powerful metaphor for the transformation at the centre of the Christian life." The phrase appears in John's Gospel (3:3) when Jesus tells the Pharisee Nicodemus: "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again". Here *born again* is sometimes translated *born anew* or *born from above*. Nicodemus is puzzled by the expression, but Jesus goes on to make clear that *being born again* means being *born of the Spirit*.

Borg says: "The metaphor of rebirth, of being born of the Spirit, is an image of radical transformation. An old life has been left behind, and a new life has begun." This idea, he says, is found elsewhere in the New Testament: for example, in the letters of Paul when he talks about dying and rising with Christ, being crucified with Christ, and becoming a new creation.

"Thus being born again is utterly central to Christianity, one of the main images for the goal and promise of the Christian life," concludes Borg. "It describes our transformation and, ultimately, the transformation of the world, for those who are born of the Spirit of God as known in Jesus share God's passion for a more just and peaceful world."

How close is this to the famous passage from George Fox's Journal, when he says: "Now was I come up in the spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness and innocence and righteousness being renewed up into the image of God by Christ Jesus, so that I say I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell."

Managing our property

A Strategy for the Long Term Management of Banbury & Evesham Area Quaker Meeting's Properties has been circulated for consideration by local meetings ahead of further discussion by Area Meeting. In Stratford we will be discussing the report at Preparative Meeting on Sunday 7 May. This note summarises key points from the report; for a copy of the document, contact Roger Matthews.

The report aims to set out the current state of the various properties owned by Area Meeting, to discuss the issues faced in seeking to maintain the properties, and to propose a way forward for each property, including how Area Meeting might fund this programme of works.

Funding is a key issue. At present, Area Meeting is spending on average £36,000 a year of maintaining the fabric of its buildings – 0.4% of the value of the buildings compared with a recommended level of 1-2% a year. And going forward there are major challenges. One is that new legislation means that properties must be improved if we are to continue to let them. Another is that income from letting properties is currently too low to fund maintenance. A third is that the current process of annual maintenance budgets limits planning and fund raising.



Shipston Library – leased to Warwickshire County Council



Banbury Meeting House – urgent work is needed

The report constructs a possible programme of maintenance works through to 2029. This programme reflects not only minimum repair costs but also the costs of improving buildings to meet new regulatory requirements. The report also looks at how more income can be raised from the letting of properties, noting that a greater use of Quaker buildings by the local community also means increased outreach.

Stratford properties



In Stratford, Quakers own the Meeting House, the Warden's Flat, and the adjacent bungalow (37, 37a and 35 Maidenhead Road respectively). The report says the properties are in generally good condition, but all will need to be refurbished over the next decade. This work will increase the efficiency of the buildings and reduce running costs. After this, provided some other minor defects are also corrected, the buildings should not require major work for some time.

An outline programme

An outline programme of works is presented in the Strategy document. This envisages some substantial spending over the next four years – in total around £230,00 – followed by three years with lower levels of spending – a total of £80,000. This provides some flexibility before there is

further higher levels of spending in the middle of the next decade. Within this programme, the significant spending on refurbishment of Stratford would take place around 2024.

By adopting an outline maintenance and refurbishment programme instead of budgeting on a year-by-year basis, Area Meeting will be better placed to consider options for funding, including seeking external finance, such as grants. At the same time, Area Meeting is asked to consider seeking higher returns from letting its properties – for example, through more active marketing. This is particularly true of those properties which are residential or commercial, where the alternative to retaining and marketing the buildings is to sell them.

The report does not go into any detail about plans to carry out a major upgrade of Banbury Meeting House. The report notes that some £70,000 is needed for urgent works on the building in Banbury, but Banbury Local Meeting is considering a more comprehensive upgrade of the property – potentially costing £350-400,000 - that would allow for greater use of the building.

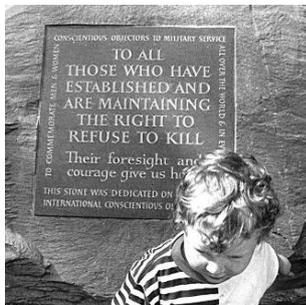
“My soul magnifies the Lord”

Our monthly Study Group meeting in May will continue our reflections on texts from the Bible, looking at Luke Chapter 1 and in particular Mary’s Song of Praise, more commonly known as the Magnificat: *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.*

The Study Group meeting in May will take place on Tuesday 16 May, starting at 7.30 pm. As in previous months, we’ll be looking at the text and exploring together our individual responses to it. There’s no preparatory reading – except to read the Magnificat a few times to become familiar with it, reflecting on its meaning for you. You’ll also find it useful to read through the whole of Luke Chapter 1 in order to place the Magnificat in its context.

International Conscientious Objection Day

International Conscientious Objectors Day is marked around the world each year on 15 May. In London a brief ceremony is held at the Commemorative Stone in Tavistock Square, during which the names of representative people who “maintained the right to refuse to kill” are read out and a white flower was laid on the Stone for each of the people remembered.



International Conscientious Objectors’ Day was initiated by the International Conscientious Objectors' Meeting (ICOM). The ICOM was an annual meeting of Conscientious Objectors and their supporters held throughout the world to exchange ideas and offer solidarity. In 1985, at a time when compulsory conscription was still commonplace, ICOM decided to nominate 15 May each year as International Conscientious Objectors Day in order to develop a sharper focus for action on conscientious objection.

The Conscientious Objectors Stone in Tavistock Square, London (pictured above) was unveiled on 15 May 1994 by Sir Michael Tippett, President of the Peace Pledge Union and a conscientious objector during World War II.