

Minutes of a meeting of Quakers in Yorkshire held at Leeds on 17 January 2009

Representatives

Brighouse West Yorkshire:

Mike Glover, Doreen Glover, George R Race, Cathy Benson, Gerard Benson, Silvia Sheard.

Central Yorkshire:

Jill Mollitt, Jean Elliott.

Craven and Keighley:

Margaret Hirst, Chris Petrie, Evelyn Shire, Alison Tyas, Alastair Cook.

Leeds:

Rosemary O'Dea, Liz Schweiger, Eileen Fowler, Audrey Acton, Jane Garrett, Edward Starkie, Pam Dale, Margaret Meara, Robert Gibson (prevented), Phil O'Hare.

Pickering and Hull:

Kate White, Michelle Fisher, Erica Rose.

Sheffield and Balby:

Denise Cann, Richard Hoare, Janis Leslie, Maurice Wilson, Chris Love, Roy Love.

York:

Joan Silvester, Anita Thistlethwaite.

Minute 1

We have been warmly welcomed by Quentin Fowler on behalf of Leeds Area Meeting.

Minute 2 Testimony

We have had read to us a testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of our Friend Jean Elizabeth Mortimer. We agree to endorse this testimony and thank the Friends who prepared it.

Minute 3 Quaker Outreach in Yorkshire Report

Arthur Pritchard has introduced a report on the activities of Quaker Outreach in Yorkshire in 2008. This was a busy year. Support has been given to Quaker Quest activities in local meetings, also to a number of theatre projects. The terms of reference, or constitution, has been updated and revised. Alastair Heron's booklet on "Quaker Speak" has been updated and printed. Consideration is being given as to whether the size of Quaker Outreach in

Yorkshire is larger than necessary, but it is currently a nice balance between experienced and newer Friends.

Arthur Pritchard has retired as Clerk of Quaker Outreach in Yorkshire and we are very appreciative of all the work he has done in this role.

Minute 4 Easter Settlement

Judith Ward has reported on Easter Settlement. The theme of the 2008 Settlement was “The World Turned Upside Down” and was attended by about 80 people of all ages. Friends value all the many strands of Easter Settlement which reflect the richness of the Quakers in Yorkshire community. This year’s programme will be led by David Boulton who will speak on the theme of “Faith and Action in Godless Times”. We thank Judith Ward for her report and for all the Friends who contribute to the success of the Settlement.

We note that the organisation of East Settlement needs to be reviewed and we ask the Clerks of Quakers in Yorkshire and Quaker Outreach Yorkshire to take this forward. This includes the procedure for appointing members of the planning group.

Minute 5 Under 19's Groups

Under 19's Coordinating Committee

Jane Spiers has introduced the reports from Junior Holidays, Holiday School and the Link Group. The Under 19's Co-ordinating Committee will this year be clarifying the support and responsibilities of the groups it coordinates. Friends are encouraged to consider service on the Under 19's Co-ordinating Committee which is enjoyable and very worthwhile.

Junior Holidays

Three holidays were arranged in 2008 with each attended by about 15 Young Friends. We have heard stimulating reports on these holidays from Robert Keeble and four Young Friends. We have also heard plans for this year. Robert Keeble has appealed for volunteers to assist with these memorable events. We thank all those involved in the organisation including Robert Keeble and Helen Orme who has retired as Convenor of the planning group.

Link Group

Robert Needham has reported on the activities of the Link Group which runs four meetings each year. Last year’s weekends were very popular and valued by both participants and parents. The team arranging the meetings is relatively new but needs more volunteers. We thank all those who help to make the Link Group a very valuable part of the activities of Quakers in Yorkshire.

Holiday School

Pete and Hil Clayton, joint secretaries of the Holiday School Arrangements Committee, have reported on the 2008 event which was the 75th Holiday School and was attended by a record number of 138 young people and helpers. This included 31 Young Friends from Ireland Yearly Meeting and 5 teenagers from France. The week ran smoothly and all the sessions were enjoyed and appreciated.

Plans for Holiday School 2009 are under way. It will again be held at Queen Ethelberga's College, from 16 to 23 August 2009. This is a good venue. We thank Pete and Hil Clayton and all those who assist with the Holiday School. We also thank all the Local Meetings and Area Meetings who provide donations and bursary help.

Minute 6 Yearly Meeting Gathering 2009

Ros Batchelor has given us an update on preparations for the Yearly Meeting Gathering to be held in York from 25 July to 1 August 2009. There are many opportunities for help. We are encouraged to offer assistance by completing a yellow form, or by contacting Ros Batchelor. Volunteers are particularly needed to assist with for the zero to fifteen age programme.

Minute 7 Finance and Trusts Committee

The merger of the Education Grants Committee into the Finance and Trusts Committee, as agreed at our last meeting, has now taken place. On the recommendation of the Finance and Trusts Committee (Minute 08/13 at their meeting held on 29 November 2008) we agree that Peter Davie, Robert Gibson, Peter Jarman, Elsie Hutchinson and George R Race are appointed Governors of the Rawdon Friends School Trust for the period of their service on the Committee. There are also two co-opted Governors, Colin Henderson (Friargate) until 31 December 2009 and the Clerk of the Finance and Trusts Committee, David Robson.

Minute 8 Appointments

The Nominations Committee brings forward the names of the following Friends for service:

We appoint Alastair Cook (Settle) to serve as Treasurer of Quakers in Yorkshire for a further year to the end of 2009.

We appoint Roderick Ogley (Settle) to serve a second term as our representative on the Yorkshire Historic Churches Trust, until 31 December 2011.

We appoint Sarah Woods (York Friargate) to serve on The Mount School Committee for four years until 31 December 2012.

We appoint Robert Keeble (Leeds) to be a verifier for checks associated with Criminal Record Bureau approval for those working with young people in activities sponsored by Quakers in Yorkshire Under 19's Coordinating Committee.

We appoint Elaine Ross (New Earswick) to the Yearly Meeting Gathering Planning Group in place of John Ling who has been released.

We release Bronte Bedford-Payne as a member of the Glenthorne Management Committee and thank her for her service. She was due to finish at the end of 2009. We ask the Nominations Committee to find a replacement to serve for 2009 and for the next period of service.

Minute 9 Cities of Sanctuary

We have been pleased to welcome Jonathan Darling to speak to us about the City of Sanctuary movement which began in Sheffield in 2005. Jonathan was initially involved through his academic research but soon found himself becoming a supporter and a committee member.

The City of Sanctuary movement started with two individuals, Craig Barnett (a Sheffield Quaker) and a local Methodist minister. Their concern at predominantly negative attitudes to refugees and asylum seekers led them to seek to promote positive attitudes and to try to create a place known to be open to newcomers. They chose the concept of sanctuary because the word had few of the negative connotations commonly associated with asylum and refugee status. They went to talk to communities and organisations, persuading them to display notices that would indicate a welcoming attitude. They encouraged the concept of Sheffield as a multicultural city whose identity depended on the diversity of its population. They challenged hostile myths and celebrated refugees' past and present contributions to many facets of British life. They used such opportunities as Sheffield Refugee Week as a means to gain publicity via concerts, ceilidhs, festivals.

Within two years, 70 groups had signed up to Sanctuary and it was time to lobby the city council. With cross-party support, the council passed a supportive resolution. This accomplished, the sanctuary movement then created a detailed manifesto which would require specific policies and practical action. The council will debate this manifesto in 2009.

The City of Sanctuary movement is still developing and expanding its horizons. How, for instance, is it to get the message heard, and then to get it embedded, in parts of society that are unlikely to be at all sympathetic? It is ambitious to spread its message to other cities, seeking a cultural shift that will not only enable the community to feel positive about newcomers, but will better inform it about a great contribution that is too often unrecognised and wasted.

Our discussion has raised several issues:

- We have been reminded how crucial it is that we as Friends should not be politically naïve about how difficult it is to change embedded attitudes - and about how much easier it is to persuade organisations to agree fine words than to put them into practical effect.
- It has been suggested that 'thinking small' might lead to the idea of aiming for villages, or even electoral wards, of sanctuary.

It is clear that Jonathan's presentation has been very informative and has raised complex questions. We are very grateful for his contribution and shall want to continue to become better informed.

Minute 10 Leeds Friends concern for refugees and asylum seekers

Martin Schweiger introduced Peter Coltman and Edwina Beier, having linked this concern with the previous presentation.

Peter Coltman spoke to us about SOLACE, Surviving Exile and Persecution, an organisation that provides counselling, psychotherapy and advocacy services. He began by reading us two appalling case histories, commenting laconically that one of these had been refused asylum. He continued by describing the asylum process for those who get here as itself a sort of trauma, adding that we cannot take away grief, trauma or despair, but we can sit alongside those who are suffering. Solace's professionally trained counsellors all work voluntarily. The process requires interpreters. The task of translating such stories asks a profoundly painful commitment from them too. Solace came into existence only three years ago. Need far outstrips capacity. The ideal would be to survive entirely on statutory funding, and to expand the work across the whole of Yorkshire and Humberside but the reality is that the present - mainly voluntary - funding will run out before the end of the year.

Edwina Beier too began with a personal story, that of a child in her school class. Together with another member of her Quaker meeting, Edwina tried all she could to support the family's case for remaining here, but the appeal failed and the family was returned to an extremely uncertain future in Algeria. This led Edwina into practical action and she now supports PAFRAS - Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. PAFRAS is at the cutting edge, because government policies mean ever-increasing numbers of destitute asylum seekers in Leeds - it is calculated that well over three thousand are sleeping rough in the city this winter. Leeds churches generously provide food and other support, but financial anxieties continue to increase and PAFRAS will shortly lose its peppercorn rent premises. Edwina ended by saying how much more she feels she gains than gives whenever she meets clients.

We can only thank our speakers wholeheartedly for sharing these profound experiences with us and spurring us to ask ourselves what else we can do.

Concluding Minute

We thank Leeds Friends for their hospitality today and look forward to meeting again in York at Bootham Junior School on Saturday 25 April 2009, God willing.

David Olver
Barbara Windle

