

# Abingdon Quaker Meeting Newsletter

December 2022 (online version)

No. 399

## Meetings for Worship

Every Sunday 10:15am at the Abingdon Community Support Service (Abbey Centre), Crabtree Place, off Audlett Drive.

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December 7:30pm in the Garden Room, St Ethelwold's, 30 East St Helen Street.

## Centring Down: Notes From Learning Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> November

*The Learning Sunday took the form of worship-sharing, an opportunity to listen deeply and be fully heard. Here is an extract from Judith and Kate's introduction:*

Kate: Before we settle into silence we might like to think about what we mean by 'gathered stillness' and by 'centring down'. In a Meeting for Worship we are not alone, we are together, so it is not a meditation. We stop our normal rushing about and become still, outwardly and inwardly. When everyone, or most people, have become still we say that the meeting is gathered. We are 'gathering the good'.

Judith: I like to think of it as someone gathering flowers and laying them lovingly in a flower basket. Each bloom is beautiful alone, but together they are stunning.

Kate: Centring down is the process by which we become inwardly still. It is possibly unique to each of us and will vary from week to week. We could think of it like a spiral – we arrive in Meeting at the outer edge, then gradually find depth within ourselves.



*Judith and Kate then read extracts from two Advices & Queries, which they felt might help to explain the process:*

A&Q 8: When we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our meetings for worship so that all may feel the power of God's love.

A&Q 12: When you are preoccupied and distracted in meeting let wayward and disturbing thoughts give way quietly to your awareness of God's presence among us.

*Liz adds:* As we settled into silence, Kate read from a children's story, *Daniel Goes to Meeting*, in which a small boy attends an adult Meeting for Worship for the first time and finds his way to stillness by watching the pictures in his head. Indeed, as Friends shared their experiences of centring down, images emerged as a powerful approach, including images of water (both still and moving) and the image of a spiral winding its way downwards to the deep part of the soul. Others

spoke of settling themselves physically first of all, sensing rootedness and a connection with their fellow worshippers. Still others, recognising that Meeting is a community activity, start by looking round the circle at the other worshippers present and quietly blessing each person or pondering what his or her individual needs might be.

For me, this Learning Sunday was a profound experience, and one which enabled me to feel more connected with the Meeting. Since I struggle to calm my 'grasshopper' mind, it was reassuring to find that others sometimes find it hard to settle theirs too, and also to learn that some practise the same methods that I've been exploring since the Woodbrooke 'Centring down with compassion' course earlier in the autumn (see the November newsletter).



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## Abingdon Quaker Matters

### Special Business Meeting: 4<sup>th</sup> December

There will be a special short business meeting after Meeting for Worship on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> to consider the list of nominations that Nominations Committee has brought us for people to serve in 2023. The list has already been circulated to the Abingdon Quakers mailing list.

### Christmas Meeting for Worship: 18<sup>th</sup> December

We will follow the normal practice of 30 minutes of Meeting for Worship followed by 30 minutes of all-age worship, when the children will join us for a of programmed readings, singing and music. There will be a small Christmas tree which the children usually decorate. Mince pies will be served afterwards.



The children will have their own activities for 30 minutes before the all-age worship.

Anita Wickens has kindly offered to organise the programmed part this year and is on a quest for help, suggestions and offers around the theme of 'Giving'. In particular, she would appreciate suggestions for carols or songs, volunteers to read poems or short pieces of prose, and ideas (or offers) for a musical accompaniment to the singing.

If you can help Anita, please get in touch with her by 11<sup>th</sup> December (preferably sooner); her contact details are in the list of members.

### On Christmas Day...

We will be holding our usual Meeting for Worship on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> December at 10:15am.

### Special Appeal

In keeping with our Meeting's tradition, the children choose the charity that benefits from our December appeal. Their decision will be revealed in due course.

### Business Meeting: 8<sup>th</sup> January

Our first Meeting for Worship for Business of 2023 will take place after the main Meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> January. If you have any items for the agenda, please let our incoming Clerk, Judy Goodall, know in good time: [abingdonquakers@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonquakers@gmail.com)

## Contributing to Quaker Work During the Cost of Living Crisis

*Liz Matthews writes in her capacity as Treasurer of the Meeting:*

A number of Quaker Meetings are proposing to open their buildings as warm places this winter. Obviously, we can't do likewise, but it would be good to contribute in some way. We are on course to make a surplus of several hundred pounds in our accounts this year and have at least £15,000 in our Lloyds bank accounts. I feel uncomfortable that we are sitting on so much money at a time of need, and other Abingdon Friends may do too. So, I am wondering whether it might be possible to make a substantial donation (maybe up to £2,000) to Quaker work with those in need this winter. Oxford Friends Action on Poverty is an obvious local recipient, but we might also think nationally (e.g. Quaker Social Action).

I hope this proposal can be added to the agenda for discernment at our January Business Meeting.

(It's true we might ourselves one day need to fall back on our funds if our income drops below essential outgoings, but these are difficult times for the country.)

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## Around the Area and Region

### Children, Youth and Families Development Work: An Update

*Julia Dover has been busy across the Thames Valley...*

The best thing about winter darkness is how aware one is of the light: the glow of the hearth, how lamplight within a room spills out into a garden, on a pavement at dusk. It's as if the stars of the firmament have come to Earth to offer their radiance (light is inherently generous). If I walk along a high street after dark, as a game I squint my eyes and behold! shop windows transform into shimmering constellations. Where I'm from in frozen Canada, the snow glows blue at night. So it is I associate these months with illumination.

In this spirit of twinkle, I'll share briefly what I've been up to as your CYF folk.

Since my arrival in September, I've been up to the nose with induction training; I travelled to as many meetings in Thames Valley as possible, learned about Quakerism, listened to friends across the region about your concerns and joys – what I've come to call 'intuitive anthropology'. It's an immense privilege of this post to meet so many magnificent, wise, friendly humans. All these activities have been necessary to prepare the ground to seed new CYF programming. Highlights have included a fascinating visit to Newbury meeting (which included a trip to Greenham Common) and a Woodbrooke-led Restore workshop at Wokingham. The conversations I've had with parents who are passionate about children's provision in Quaker communities inspire and inform the programming I am developing.

I'm excited to meet with Sibford and Leighton Park Schools in early December to discuss innovative outreach ventures which involve communities in new ways. I will be offering series of creative all-aged themed activity days across both Area Meetings in 2023. Stay tuned for Wonder Days, 'Me and my Sock Puppet' and 'To Boldly Go: The Wonders of Outer Space', to name a few. Too, I'm leading five adult workshops in 2023 across the region that invite qualities of joy, play and reverie into daily life of adult friends.

I'm delighted that Abingdon Meeting has invited me to facilitate a distinct session in January.

*Julia has a date for our diaries in December:*

## Movement and Imaginative Play

*Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December 1– 3pm, Oxford Meeting House*

An all-age, in-person session with games and gentle movement activities that inspire imagination and group fun. Hot spiced apple and nibbles on offer at the end. The playful imps amongst us all welcome, whether 9 or 99 years old.

## Enquirers' Meeting: Myths and Truths About Friends and Quaker History

*Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December 6pm, Oxford Meeting House*

The Enquirers' Sessions organised by Oxford Meeting introduce enquirers to the faith, principles, structures and practices of the Religious Society of Friends. Everyone is welcome to come along.

## Friday with Friends at Oxford Meeting House: Oxford Community Land Trust

*Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December 7:15 for 7:30, Garden Room, 43 St Giles' and online via Zoom*

OCLT is doing something about ensuring that Oxfordshire has more sustainable and genuinely affordable homes. Fran Ryan, director and founder member of OCLT is coming to talk to Friends about the project and explain to us how we can get involved.

Link for online participation:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89355942467?pwd=MHZEZmF3UWVwVGtqRnFuMDlqdmwrdz09>  
or Meeting ID: 893 5594 2467 Passcode: oxford

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## Faith in Action in and around Abingdon

Both **Abingdon Peace Group** and **Abingdon Carbon Cutters** are holding Christmas parties this month instead of their usual meetings.

### Other Events

#### Abingdon Carbon Cutters Tree-Planting

*Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 10–4, Rye Farm Meadow*

Carbon Cutters will be planting 420 small 'wild wood' trees, from the Woodland Trust, but they need lots of help! In order to manage the numbers, they ask people to book one (or more) hour-long slots. To sign up, visit <https://abingdoncarboncutters.org.uk/2022/11/06/tree-planting-book-your-slot-now/> (alternatively, go to <https://abingdoncarboncutters.org.uk/>, scroll down to 'Latest News' and click 'Tree planting Sat 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec').

#### 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Encircling of Greenham Common

*Friday 9<sup>th</sup>–Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December, Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp*

See poster on page 5. Sally Reynolds will be driving over to the event on Saturday 10th at lunchtime, returning in the late evening.

#### Weekly Vigil against the War in Ukraine

*Every Monday 8.15–8.45am until hostilities end, Abingdon War Memorial*

Vigil with banners 'No More War' and 'No to Putin's War, No to NATO expansion'.



the spiders and crows  
are gathering



resisting nuclear  
weapons through  
learning connecting  
and creativity



# Anarchic Women Embrace ALDERMASTON

ON THE  
40th ANNIVERSARY  
OF EMBRACE THE BASE



including  
lantern parade

## 9-11 DEC '22

@ Atomic Weapons Establishment  
ALDERMASTON WOMEN'S PEACE CAMP  
PAICES HILL RG7 4PW  
07852 293381

Workshops  
Shadow



puppets

accessible too  
parking, shelter fire  
Slope to camp may  
not be fully accessible

FB: Aldermaston Women's Peace Camp





## Events at the Climate Emergency Centre

Located below the County Hall Museum, the Climate Emergency Centre organises a variety of events aimed at building resilience in the face of the threat to the planet. December's calendar includes climate conversations about whether COP27 has brought us any nearer to phasing out fossil fuels, 'Knit & Chat', 'Chess & Coffee', repair cafés organised by Abingdon Carbon Cutters and Christmas wreath-making workshops.

For dates and details, visit <https://oneplanetabingdon.org/events/>

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## Among the Abingdon Churches

*From the newsletter of the Church in Abingdon:*

### CiA Christmas carol singing

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022 from 10am, Abingdon Market Place.

### Abingdon's International Welcome Café

*Fridays in December, 1–3 pm, The Barn, Christ Church, Northcourt Road.*

This café was set up in response to the Homes for Ukraine scheme and to provide wider support of refugees through a collaborative partnership of Christ Church and Host Abingdon, the main partners, as well as many other churches in Abingdon and local groups and organisations, including the Food Bank. The café offers friendship, support, refreshments, toys and help with English run by a qualified TEFL teacher. For further information, please email Julie Kemp-Harper at [kempharpers@pobox.com](mailto:kempharpers@pobox.com) or contact [hello@hostabingdon.org](mailto:hello@hostabingdon.org)

### Advent Labyrinth Walks

St Michael and All Angels Church in Park Road will be open on Tuesdays 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December 2022 between 11 am and noon, and 7 and 8 pm. There will an opportunity to walk the labyrinth or simply to enjoy the sacred space. Material for reflection will be available on a different Advent theme each week, based on poems by RS Thomas. A short prayer will be said at the beginning and end of each session, but feel free to come and go as you please. Entry will be through the porch on the south side of the church. Parking permits are available for use in Park Road.

### The Abingdon Food Bank

Abingdon Food Bank needs your support more than ever now, with the increasing cost of living adversely affecting those already struggling to make ends meet. A typical food parcel might contain cereal, soup, pasta, rice, tinned tomatoes/pasta sauce, lentils, beans and pulses, tinned meat, tinned vegetables, tea/coffee, tinned fruit, biscuits, UHT milk, fruit juice; also toiletries, nappies and household cleaning items. Food can be taken to either Preston Road Food Bank or Christ Church Food Bank. Some supermarkets also have collection baskets.

### New Year Cup of Life Retreat

This is an ecumenical retreat in everyday life based on Joyce Rupp's book *The Cup of Our Life*. It involves six weekly sessions on Tuesdays from 10am–12 noon for six weeks beginning on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2023, plus a commitment to 15 minutes of personal reflective prayer each day. For further details, contact Sue Sheppy ([susan.sheppy@btinternet.com](mailto:susan.sheppy@btinternet.com)).

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## Among Abingdon Friends



*Rosie Page contributed this colourful seasonal display to brighten up Meeting for Worship on 23<sup>rd</sup> October.*

## Hospital Diary

*The NHS has come to Roger Bush's rescue twice in the space of a year. He recounts his experiences:*

As we slide into winter, I realise with a start that I have lost almost an entire season of this year in hospital. In hospitals there are no seasons. Day follows day, and everything is programmed into the daily schedule. After my broken elbow last November had me in the JR for a fortnight, I thought that was it for a year. But unfortunately, on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, while returning home from an appointment at the Churchill Hospital, which involved an all-body bone scan, I managed to fall over while crossing Stratton Way *en route* to the Ock Street cab rank. This was quite close to the southbound bus stops, and people waiting there helped me to my feet in the bus shelter, only for me to collapse again onto the pavement. Someone among those who aided me had first aid training and realised that this was something serious. She rang my wife, who rang my daughter, who lives nearby, and between them they called an ambulance.

So it was back to the JR, where another scan, my second within twelve hours, showed that my pelvis was fractured in three places. No wonder I couldn't stand!

The difficulty with this sort of injury is that you have to spend so long flat on your back to distribute weight evenly. Even with an operation to insert two pins to hold the back two fractures in place I had only very limited movement from this position during my month-long stay in the JR's Trauma Unit. Once I got a transfer to our Community Hospital in Abingdon, the Physiotherapy team had me learning to walk again with aid of a frame, and on their exercise bike I even managed to record three miles in the allotted 15 minutes. Using a four-wheeled frame, now with me on loan, I was even able to go outdoors and circuit the small hospital garden.

Just as I was beginning to worry about my bed-blocking in a comfortable single room complete with en-suite and television, I got my discharge. Occupational Therapists had already visited our

house and arranged for grab rails to be fitted around the foot of the stairs, a hospital bed to be loaned along with perching stools in the kitchen and bathroom. Together with this package comes five weeks of home care – two carers a day, morning and evening, to help me get washed and dressed and downstairs and upstairs. In all, I am costing the NHS a fortune. Ironic, come to think of it, because during my working life, which included thirty years as a Civil Servant in the late Government Information Service, I paid a considerable sum to the Benenden Healthcare Service, providing private medical care for its members. Unfortunately the use of their first-class surgery and hospital at Benenden in Kent specifically excludes orthopaedic work, and the only occasions when I have needed these facilities have been after breaking bones – ankle once, wrists twice, left shoulder (two operations, first at Croydon and then at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, Stanmore to fit an artificial shoulder), right arm and elbow here in Oxfordshire, and now this, the most serious in terms of treatment and expense.

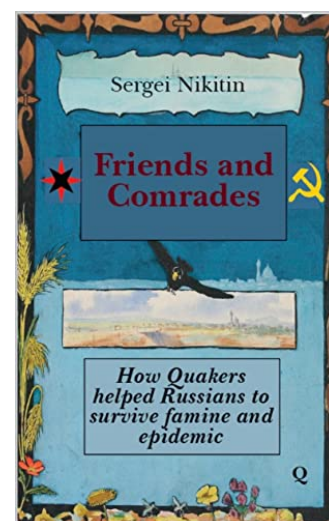
My thanks to all who sent messages of support during this difficult time.

*We wish Roger well in his ongoing recovery and look forward to his return to Meeting in the not-too-distant future.*

### *Friends and Comrades: How Quakers Helped Russians to Survive Famine and Epidemic*

This is the title of a recently published book by Sergei Nikitin, a former director of Amnesty International in Russia and employee of Friends' House, Moscow. Sergei has spent many years researching a little-known area of Quaker – and Russian – history: the relief work carried out by Friends in Russia during the First World War and the early years after the Revolution. It's an extraordinary testament both to Friends' ability to co-operate both with two markedly contrasting regimes, and to 'citizen diplomacy' with people from different countries collaborating productively despite the language barrier and their governments' mutual hostility.

In November Sergei gave a fascinating online talk about his research, abundantly illustrated with photographs, paintings and documents from the period. The talk was hosted by the Department of Russian & East European Studies, University of Manchester.



In 1916 a number of British and American Friends travelled to Buzuluk, deep in European Russia, to work with refugees displaced by the fighting in other parts of the country. Among other activities they opened medical centres and an orphanage. They remained in Buzuluk until 1918, when they lost their sources of income due to the disruptions of the Civil War. Many moved further east, but all had left the new USSR by 1919.

Quakers returned to the USSR in 1921 after the Soviet government gave them permission to carry out humanitarian work among the suffering civilian population, especially children. They initially helped out in Moscow, but also returned to Buzuluk, which was badly affected by famine. They achieved extraordinary success; by June 1922 they had fed 412,000 people. The food was imported through the port of Tallinn (in the Estonian SSR) and then transported to Buzuluk via Moscow. Friends were also once again involved in medical aid and opened new hospitals.

By 1923, with the famine over, the Soviet authorities asked the Quakers to help with reconstruction, and they turned their hands to a wide range of tasks, including road building, professional education and delivering tractors.



The Quakers did not carry out any religious propagandising. When asked by the locals why they came to Russia, the replied was 'simply trying to put into practice the way of living which Jesus taught.' The only Russian Quaker was Olga Tolstaya, who may have been a distant relative of the novelist Lev Tolstoy.

A Quaker office opened in Moscow during the early 1920s, but was closed by the Soviet authorities in September 1931. Almost all Quakers then left the USSR; those who remained included one who had become a Communist. For the next several decades Quakers visited the USSR primarily as tourists or as members of delegations to international gatherings held there.

Sergei's book is available through Amazon. An article by him about the Quaker workers John Rickman and Lydia Lewis, who were married in Buzuluk in 1918, is on the website of Dorking Museum: <https://dorkingmuseum.org.uk/quakers-in-russia/> It's quite short and well worth reading to gain an insight into Quaker activities in this turbulent period of Russian history.

## Poem of the Month

*From the Poetry Group*

It was on an unusually (for this autumn!) quiet and foggy night that we met in person at Anita's house to share poems on the topic 'wind'. Houses were buffeted, ships were tossed and trees were bent. Ted Hughes' powerful and vivid 'Wind' was a popular selection, but it's rivalled in intensity and drama by this poem from Rosalind Baker (Roger's sister):

### *Broken Window*

This solid house fronting the bay shudders in the gale.

The wind thrums and roars in the chimney.

A gust dislodges grey slates.

They slither and crash from the steep-pitched roof

The catch of the attic skylight is broken.

The wind discovers this

And pounces gleefully upon the unanchored window.

Thumping it up and down.

Suddenly a pane bulges; in, out.

Explodes into a web of cracks,

Which pulsates helplessly for a moment.

Then shatters.

Glass scatters

Over the floor

And with a yell the storm is in the house.

*Rosalind Baker*

## Opening Up at the Abbey Centre: December Rota

We thank Auriel for co-ordinating the rota this year – a far from straightforward task!

4<sup>th</sup> Adrian Allsop Liz Matthews

11<sup>th</sup> Auriel Lancashire Sally Reynolds

18<sup>th</sup> Judy Goodall Rosie Page

25<sup>th</sup> Alan Pearmain Sally Reynolds

## December Dates for Your Diary

This is a summary of the Quaker-related events announced on the preceding pages.

Date	Time	Event details
Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup>	10am–4pm	Abingdon Carbon Cutters: tree planting Rye Farm Meadow
Sun 4 <sup>th</sup>	After MfW	Special Business Meeting
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup>	1pm	Movement and Imaginative Play Oxford Meeting House
Thurs 15 <sup>th</sup>	6pm	Enquirers' meeting: Quaker history and myths Oxford Meeting House
Fri 16 <sup>th</sup>	7:30pm	Friday with Friends: Oxford Community Land Trust Oxford Meeting House
Sun 18 <sup>th</sup>	10:15am	Christmas Meeting Abingdon Community Support Centre



*A misty December afternoon on the edge of Cumnor village.*

## Next Month...

The January issue will be published on **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> December**. Please send your contributions to the editors by **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> December**.

***The editors send Abingdon Friends and all our other readers seasonal greetings and good wishes for the New Year.***



### Abingdon Local Quaker Meeting

<https://abingdonquakers.org/>

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